

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION 2013

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

BEST WRITING (ADAPTED SCREENPLAY)

Tracy Letts



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Written by

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AN ENDLESS SKY AT TWILIGHT

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

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

MILES OF STRAIGHT ROAD

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

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

A LAKE IN THE GATHERING DUSK

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

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

AN OLD FARM HOUSE SITTING ATOP A LOW HILL

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

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

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

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

And now, a face fills the screen --

INT. BEVERLY'S DIMLY LIT STUDY - TWILIGHT

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

BEVERLY

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

Stares out the window at the darkening, ominous horizon.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

Not Eliot: after sufficient years of
ecclesiastical guilt, plop her in the
nearest asylum and get on with it.

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

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

God-a-mighty. You have to admire the
purity of the survivor's instinct.

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

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

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

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

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

INT. THE STUDY - TWILIGHT

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

BEVERLY

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - TWILIGHT

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

BEVERLY

The reasons why we partake are
anymore inconsequential.

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

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

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

She makes her way to the stairs starts down.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

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

The light from the study slices across the living room.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

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

She can see a portion of Beverly's desk, a woman's legs.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

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

JOHNNA

Yes, sir.

BEVERLY

May I ask how?

JOHNNA

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

BEVERLY

Wine grapes. In Oklahoma. I'm sorry.

VIOLET

Bev...?!

BEVERLY

Yes?

VIOLET

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

BEVERLY

No...

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

VIOLET

Am I looking through window? A window?

BEVERLY

Can you come here?

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

VIOLET

Oh. Hello.

She's staring at a woman sitting in front of Beverly's desk: JOHNNA. Thirty, Native American, simply dressed.

BEVERLY

Johnna, the young woman I told you about.

VIOLET

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

BEVERLY

That I'm hiring --

VIOLET

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

BEVERLY

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

VIOLET

(over-articulating)

In the int'rest of ...civil action, your par-tic-u-lars way of speaking, I thought you meant you had thought a whoa-man to be HIRED!

BEVERLY

I don't understand you.

VIOLET

(winsome, to Johnna)

Hello.

JOHNNA

Hello.

VIOLET

I'm sorry.

(curtsies)

Like this.

JOHNNA

Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET

You're very pretty.

JOHNNA

Thank you.

VIOLET

Are you an Indian?

JOHNNA
Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET
What kind?

JOHNNA
Cheyenne.

VIOLET
Do you think I'm pretty?

JOHNNA
Yes, ma'am.

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

She stumbles, catches herself.

BEVERLY
Careful...

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

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

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

BEVERLY
All right.

VIOLET
I'm sorry. I'll be sickly sweet. I'm
soooooo sweet. In-el-abrially sweet.

She smiles at Johnna, goes. Beverly watches her disappear
back up the stairs, then --

BEVERLY

We keep unusual hours here. Try not to differentiate between night and day. You won't be able to keep a healthy routine.

JOHNNA

I need the work.

BEVERLY

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

JOHNNA

What kind of cancer?

BEVERLY

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

JOHNNA

What pills does she take?

BEVERLY

Valium. Vicodin. Darvon, Darvocet. Percodan, Percocet. Xanax for fun. OxyContin in a pinch. And of course Diluadid. I can't forget Diluadid.

Beverly wobbles to his feet, explores his bookshelf.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

"By night within that ancient house,
Immense, black, damned, anonymous."

(and)

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

He takes a book from the bookshelf, gives it to her.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

TS Eliot. Read it or not. It isn't
a job requirement, just for your
enjoyment.

(beat)

Here we go, round the prickly pear...
Prickly pear prickly pear...
Here we go round the prickly pear...

OPENING TITLES

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

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

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

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

A SHAPE

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

JEAN (OS)

Mom...?

The phone continues to RING. Still no movement.

JEAN (OS) (CONT'D)

Mom...!

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

JEAN (OS) (CONT'D)

...Mom...?

The hallway door opens, we're in --

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM - DAY

JEAN, fourteen, precocious, sticks her head in.

JEAN

...Mom?

A sound from the body, still no movement.

BARBARA

Mmm...

JEAN

You didn't hear the phone?

BARBARA

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

JEAN

It's Aunt Ivy in Oklahoma.

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

BARBARA

...Ivy? ...what's wrong?

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

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

...When...?

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

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

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

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

INT. WESTON KITCHEN - DAY

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

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE - DAY

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

IVY

Mom...?

(no answer)

Mom?

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

VIOLET

...You've been out there...?

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

...You're going out yourself...?

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Stop that...

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

You call Barb? What'd she say?

IVY

She's on her way.

VIOLET

What'd you tell her?

IVY

I told her Dad was missing.

VIOLET
Did you tell her how long he'd been
missing?

IVY
Five days.

VIOLET
What did she say?

IVY
She said she was on her way.

VIOLET
Goddamn it, Ivy, what did she say?

IVY
She said she was on her way.

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

Ivy follows her mother, returns to tidying up.

IVY
Johnna. Who was on the phone?

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

IVY
I called Karen.

VIOLET
What did she say?

IVY
She said she'd try to get here.

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

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)
 (takes another pill)
 I need Barb.

IVY
 What's Barb going to be able to do?

Ivy moves on to hanging clothes back in the jammed cl

VIOLET
 What did you do to your hair?

IVY
 I had it straightened.

VIOLET
 You had it straightened. Why would anybody do that?

IVY
 I just wanted a change.

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

IVY
 Do I need makeup?

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

IVY
 Mom.

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

Violet takes another pill.

VIOLET (CONT'D)
 You could get a decent man if you spruced up. A bit, that's all I'm saying.

IVY
 I'm not looking for a man.

VIOLET

There are a lot of losers out there, don't think I don't know that. But just because you got a bad one last time doesn't mean --

IVY

Barry wasn't a loser.

VIOLET

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

IVY

It wasn't a turban --

VIOLET

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

IVY

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

VIOLET

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

Violet takes another pill.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

How many was that?

IVY

I wasn't counting.

Violet takes another pill.

IVY (CONT'D)

Is your mouth burning?

VIOLET

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

IVY

Are you supposed to be smoking?

VIOLET

Is anybody supposed to smoke?

IVY

You have cancer of the mouth.

VIOLET

Just leave it alone.

IVY

(after a moment)

Are you scared?

VIOLET

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

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

IVY

Aunt Mattie Fae's here.

VIOLET

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

IVY

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

VIOLET

He smokes a lot of grass.

IVY

He does?

VIOLET

He smokes a lot of grass.

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

MATTIE FAE

I told Vi, "Take all those goddamn books he's so fond of and make a big pile in the front yard and have yourself a bonfire."

MATTIE FAE AIKEN, sixty-one, Violet's baby sister, larger than life, is in the passenger seat. CHARLIE, Mattie Fae's husband, easy-going, is behind the wheel.

CHARLIE

You don't burn a man's books.

MATTIE FAE

You do, if the situation calls for it.

CHARLIE

The man's books didn't do anything.

MATTIE FAE

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

CHARLIE

I'm not going anywhere.

Charlie parks, they climb out into the blinding sunlight.

MATTIE FAE

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

CHARLIE

That bother you?

MATTIE FAE

What's the last book you read?

CHARLIE

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

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

MATTIE FAE

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

Mattie Fae sweeps past Ivy into the --

INT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

Ivy and Charlie follow.

MATTIE FAE
Where's your mother?

IVY
Upstairs.

CHARLIE
They've always had trouble, Ivy.

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

IVY
Kind of like Charles.

CHARLIE
Yes, like Little Charles. Exactly --

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

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

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

The phone begins to RING. Ivy eyes it apprehensively.

CHARLIE
He's an observer.

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

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

MATTIE FAE
You have to be smart to be
complicated.

The phone STOPS. Violet's answered it upstairs.

CHARLIE
Are you saying our boy isn't smart?

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

Ivy steals glances upstairs, concerned about the phone

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

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

MATTIE FAE
Feel my back.

CHARLIE
I don't want to feel your back.

MATTIE FAE
Sweat is just dripping down my back.

CHARLIE
I believe you.

MATTIE FAE
Feel it.

CHARLIE
No.

MATTIE FAE
Come on, put your hand here --

CHARLIE
Goddamn it --

MATTIE FAE
Sweat's just dripping...

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

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

IVY
Been a couple of years now.

Mattie Fae starts peeling off the tape.

MATTIE FAE

Is it that long since we've been here?

CHARLIE

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

IVY

I think that's the purpose.

Ivy goes, Charlie notices Mattie Fae pulling off tape.

CHARLIE

Don't do that. This isn't your place.

MATTIE FAE

The body needs sunlight.

INT/EXT. RENTAL CAR (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

Right, you need a little hindsight.

BILL

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

BARBARA

Please, the Midwest. This is the Plains: a state of mind, right? A spiritual affliction, like the Blues.

BILL
 "You okay?" "I'm fine. Just got the
 Plains."

They laugh. He reaches across, touches her tenderly.

BARBARA
 Don't.

He withdraws quickly.

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM - DAY

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

VIOLET
 They checked the hospitals, no
 Beverly.

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

VIOLET
 No, the sheriff, the Gilbeau boy.

IVY
 What else did he say?

VIOLET
 The boat's missing.

IVY
 Dad's boat?

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

Ivy watches her mother being comforted by Mattie Fae. Wants to go to her. Doesn't.

INT/EXT. RENTAL CAR/WESTON HOUSE - AFTERNOON

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

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

JEAN

I'm gonna grab a smoke.

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

BARBARA

You've encouraged that.

BILL

I haven't encouraged anything.

BARBARA

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

Barbara climbs out. Bill follows.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Goddamn, it's hot.

Bill unlocks the trunk, begins unloading luggage.

BILL

Suppose your mom's turned on the air conditioner?

BARBARA

You kidding? Remember the parakeets?

BILL

The parakeets?

BARBARA

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

(MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

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

BILL

And?

BARBARA

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

BILL

Jesus.

BARBARA

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

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

What, is she smoking a cigar?

BILL

Are you ready for this?

BARBARA

No. No way.

INT. WESTON HOUSE - AFTERNOON

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

CHARLIE

Violet's a Clapton fan?

Johnna passes through, Charlie holds up his empty bottle.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

'Scuse me, dear...could I trouble you for another beer?

MATTIE FAE

Goddam it, she's not a waitress.

CHARLIE

I know that.

MATTIE FAE

Then get your own beer.

JOHNNA

(takes the empty/goes)

I'll get it.

MATTIE FAE

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

CHARLIE

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

MATTIE FAE

I'm having a cocktail.

CHARLIE

You're drinking straight whiskey!

MATTIE FAE

Just... show a little class.

BARBARA

...Mom?

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

MATTIE FAE (CONT'D)

Oh my God, Barbara --! You give me some sugar!

BARBARA

Hi, Aunt Mattie Fae --

MATTIE FAE (CONT'D)

Bill! Look how skinny you are!

BILL

Hi, Mattie Fae.

BILL

Hi, Charlie.

Jean enters behind her parents, stands sheepishly.

MATTIE FAE

Oh my gosh, will you look at this one? Come here and give your Aunt Mattie Fae some sugar!

MATTIE FAE (CONT'D)
 My gosh, you're so big! Look
 at your boobs! Last time I
 saw you, you looked like a
 little boy!

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

BARBARA
 Hi, Uncle Charlie.

CHARLIE
 How was the flight from Denver?

BILL
 Fine...

Violet appears on the stairs, rushes to Barbara.

VIOLET
 Barb...

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

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

BILL
 No word then?

No.

MATTIE FAE
 No, huh-uh.

VIOLET
 What am I going to do?

BARBARA
 It's okay, Mom.

BARBARA
 Did you see Bill and Jean?

Violet takes them in, disoriented.

VIOLET
 Yes. Hi, Bill.

BILL
 Hello, Violet.

VIOLET
 I'm just so scared.

MATTIE FAE
 Of course you are, poor thing.

VIOLET
 (sees Jean)
 Well, look at you.

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

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

MATTIE FAE
 They're just so darn big.

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

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

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

Ivy, still standing above on the stairs.

IVY
 It looked crowded.

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

BILL
 Yes, she does.

BARBARA
 I love your hair, that looks
 great.

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

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

IVY
 I was going to help with --

VIOLET
 No, now that desk of his is such a
 mess and I get confused --

BILL
I'll take care of it, Violet --

BARBARA
(to Charlie)
Which room are you in?

MATTIE FAE
We're gonna head home soon.

VIOLET
You're going back to Tulsa?

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

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

CHARLIE
Well, yeah, I guess he could --

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

MATTIE FAE
We talked about this.

BARBARA
Mom, can Jean stay in the attic?

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

IVY
Johnna.

BARBARA
Who's Johnna?

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

BARBARA
She's the what?

EXT. THE YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

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

JEAN

Hi...

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

JOHNNA

Hello.

JEAN

I'm Jean.

JOHNNA

Johnna.

Johnna keeps working, Jean watches.

JEAN

I like your necklace.

A beaded pouch in the shape of a turtle.

JOHNNA

Thank you.

JEAN

Did you make that?

JOHNNA

My grandma.

JEAN

Is there something in it?

JOHNNA

My umbilical cord.

Jean recoils. Johnna smiles.

JEAN

Ewww, are you serious?

JOHNNA

When a Cheyenne is born, their umbilical cord is dried and sewn into a pouch.

JEAN

You're Cheyenne. Like that movie
Powwow Highway. Did you see that?

JOHNNA

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

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

INT. THE BACK PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

A screened in back porch off the kitchen. Bill and Barb sit
at an old linoleum table.

BILL

This was when?

Violet stands smoking, unhappily watching Charlie and Mattie
Fae climb into the Caddie and disappear down the gravel
drive, heading back to Tulsa.

VIOLET

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

Johnna enters with her mint, crosses into the kitchen.

BARBARA

He just left...?

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

Really.

VILOET

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

BARBARA

Oblivion.

BILL

So Sunday, still no sign of him...

VIOLET

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

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

Because...

BILL

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

VIOLET

Right, that's right --

BARBARA

You're such a fucking cynic.

VIOLET
I knew you would *disapprove* --

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

BARBARA
Okay, what about the safety deposit
box?

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

BARBARA
And you only had Ivy call me today?

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

BARBARA
Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

BILL
Yes.

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

BARBARA
Maybe he needed some time away
from you.

VIOLET
That's nice of you to say.

BARBARA
Good old unfathomable Dad.

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

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INSIDE THE KITCHEN

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

BILL

You can't think of anything unusual --

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

You don't want her here.

VIOLET

She's a stranger in my house. There's an *Indian* in my house.

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

BILL

You have a problem with Indians, Violet?

VIOLET

I don't know what to say to an Indian.

BARBARA

They're called Native Americans now, Mom.

VIOLET

Who makes that decision?

BARBARA

It's what they like to be called.

VIOLET

They aren't any more native than me.

BARBARA

In fact, they are.

VIOLET

What's wrong with Indian?

BARBARA

Why's it so hard to call people --

VIOLET

Let's just call the dinosaurs "Native Americans" while we're at it.

BARBARA

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

Johnna smiles, nods to Ivy. Leaves the kitchen.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

(a warning)

Mom...

VIOLET

When was the last time you were here?

BARBARA

Don't get started on that --

VIOLET

Really, I don't even remember.

BARBARA

I'm very dutiful, Mom, I call, I write, I send presents --

VIOLET

You do not *write* --

BARBARA
Presents on birthdays, Mother's Day --

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

VIOLET
Because you're "dutiful."

BILL
All right, now --

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

BARBARA
Well, you're seeing her now.

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

BARBARA
That is wildly unfair.

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

BILL
Am I going to have to
separate you two?

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

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

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

Violet trails behind them into the kitchen.

VIOLET
I'm sure you'd prefer to think that
Santy Claus brought you presents at
Christmas, too. If you'd had more
than one child, you'd know a parent
always has favorites. Mattie Fae was
my mother's favorite. Big deal. I got
used to it. You were your Daddy's
favorite.

Barbara notices Ivy, standing there, Christ. This isn't a conversation she'd like to be having in front of her sister. Violet sees Ivy too -- could care less.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Broke his heart.

BARBARA

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

BILL

Why are we even getting into this?

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

Daddy gave me his blessing.

VIOLET

'S what he told you.

BARBARA

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

BILL

Hey, enough. Everybody's on edge --

VIOLET

Beverly didn't say terrible things behind your back --

BILL

Vi, come on --

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

Daddy never said anything like that to you. What a load of absolute horseshit.

VIOLET
Oh, horseshit, horseshit, let's all
say horseshit. Say horseshit, Bill.

BILL
Horseshit.

Violet goes. Barb and Bill exchange a look. Barb looks to Ivy, who's blank. Barb takes a beat, follows Violet.

INT. BATHROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Violet is closing the bathroom door. Barb stops her.

BARBARA
Are you high?

VIOLET
Excuse me.

BARBARA
I mean literally. You taking
something?

VIOLET
A muscle relaxer.

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

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

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

VIOLET
Stop yelling at me!

BARBARA
The police, all the rest of it?

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

BARBARA
So now it's okay to get hooked because
you have a reason.

VIOLET

I'm not hooked on anything.

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

I'm not. I'm in pain.

BARBARA

Because of your mouth.

VIOLET

Yes, because my mouth burns from the chemotheeeeahh --

BARBARA

Are you in a lot of pain?

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

I'm not yelling at you.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

I'm sorry... you're right. I'm sorry.

Barbara kneels, takes her mother's hand.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Know where I think he is? I think he got some whiskey, a carton of cigarettes, and a couple of good spy novels... I think he got out on the boat, steered it to a nice spot, close to shore... and he's fishing, and reading, and drinking, maybe even writing a little. I think he'll walk right through that door any time.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/STAIRS/ATTIC ROOM - TWILIGHT

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

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

INT. THE ATTIC BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

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

JEAN

Hi, again... Am I bugging you?

JOHNNA

No, do you need something?

JEAN

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

JOHNNA

No, thank you.

JEAN

Okay. I didn't know.

(beat)

Do you mind if I smoke a bowl?

JOHNNA

I. No, I --

JEAN

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

Johnna is clearly a bit uncomfortable. But:

JOHNNA

Okay.

JEAN

Okay. You sure?

From her pocket, Jean takes a glass pipe and a bud.

JEAN (CONT'D)

I say they don't mind. If they knew I smuggled this on the plane? And sat there sweating like in that movie *Midnight Express*. Did you see that?

JOHNNA

I don't think so.

JEAN

I just mean they don't mind that I smoke pot. Mom kind of does. I think cause Dad smokes pot too, and she wishes he didn't.

(smokes, offers pipe)

You sure?

JOHNNA

Yes. No. I'm fine.

Jean notices a framed photo on the night stand.

JEAN

Wow, are those your parents?

JOHNNA

Mm-hm, their wedding picture.

JEAN

Their costumes are fantastic. Are they still together?

JOHNNA

My father passed away last year.

JEAN

Oh. Sorry.

JOHNNA

That's okay. Thank you.

JEAN

Were you close?

JOHNNA

Yes. Very.

JEAN

My Mom and Dad are separated now.

JOHNNA

I'm sorry.

JEAN

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

(then)

Don't say anything about Mom and Dad; okay? They want to play it low key.

INT. BEVERLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

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

BILL

Ivy leave?

BARBARA

(she nods)

I'd forgotten about the lightning bugs.

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

BILL

Look what I found...

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

BARBARA

We have copies.

BILL

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

BARBARA

It wasn't that big a deal.

BILL

In those circles, it was.

BARBARA

Those are small circles.

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

Jean go to bed?

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

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

BILL

I have great admiration for these poems --

BARBARA

My father didn't write anymore for a lot of reasons, but critical opinion was not one of them, hard as that may be for you to believe.

BILL

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

BARBARA

I'm sure that's what you tell *Sissy*, too, so she can comfort you, reassure you, "No, Billy, you haven't done anything."

BILL

Why are you bringing that up?

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

Psychoanalyze me right now, I skin you.

BILL

You may not agree with my methods, but you know I'm right --

BARBARA

"Your methods." Thank you, Doctor,
but I actually don't need any help
from my mother to feel rage.

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

Barbara heads into the yard to get away from him.

INT. WESTON HOUSE, UPSTAIRS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Bill chases Barbara into the yard.

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

You called me a narcissist!

BARBARA

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

BILL

I'm here, now.

BARBARA

Oh, men always say shit like that,
as if the past and the future don't
exist.

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

It's just horseshit, to avoid
talking about the things they're
afraid to say.

BILL

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

BARBARA

Like what?

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

Bill turns, starts back for the house.

INT. WESTON HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

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

EXT. SKIATOOK LAKE - NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

INT. THE ATTIC - NIGHT

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - NIGHT

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

INT. WESTON HOUSE STAIRWAY - NIGHT

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

Watches the car arrive. The driver's door opens, a sheriff gets out, silhouetted against the police flashers behind him.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

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

BARBARA

Mom?

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Mom, wake up, the sheriff's here.

VIOLET

Did you call them? I dig in call them.

BARBARA

Mom. The sheriff is here.

VIOLET

Inna esther?

BARBARA

What?

VIOLET

Inna esther broke. 'N pays me 'em...sturck...struck.

BILL

Come on. Leave her there.

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

BILL (CONT'D)

Go back to bed, sweetheart....

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

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

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

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE DRIVEWAY - JUST BEFORE DAWN

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

BILL
What happened?

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

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

SHERIFF
Looks it. Yes, sir.

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

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

SHERIFF
There's really no way to tell.

BILL
What's your guess?

SHERIFF
...Suicide.

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

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

INT. WESTON GIRL'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

Barb pulls on clothes, rakes a brush through her hair. Jean appears in the door, watches her. After a moment:

JEAN

What about Aunt Ivy?

BARBARA

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - PRE-DAWN

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

VIOLET

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

SHERIFF

Ma'am?

VIOLET

Gizza cig... some cigezze? Cig-zezz,
cig-zizz... cig-uhzzz...

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

In the archa, archa-tex? I'm in
the bottom. Inna bottom of them.

(and)

Mm, good beat, right?

He nods. Bill comes back in from outside.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Barbara?! Is Barbara here?!

BARBARA

(quietly)

Right here, Mom...

Johnna steps in from the kitchen, pensively observing.

VIOLET

Mm, good beat, right? Idn't it's a
good beat?

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

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

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

And then you're here. And Barbara, and
then you're here, and Beverly, and
then you're here, and then you're
here, and then you're here, and then
you're here, and then you're here...

EXT. SKIATOOK LAKE ROAD - DAWN

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

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

BARBARA (OS)

I used to go out with that boy.
That man.

INT. RENTAL CAR (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

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

JEAN

What man? The Sheriff?

BARBARA

In high school. He was my prom date.

JEAN

You're kidding.

BARBARA

Day of the prom, his father got
drunk and stole his car, stole his
own son's car, went somewhere, Mexico.
Deon showed up at the door. He'd been
crying. Confessed he didn't have a
way to take me to the prom.

The cruiser slows, pulls through a pipe gate and over a cattle-crossing, heads for a small collection of emergency vehicles parked around a brush-strewn cove. Bev's old Chevy pick-up truck sits to one side.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

The cars stop. The Sheriff gets out.

BILL

Let me go first, see what they need.

Bill goes. Barb fixes Jean with a look.

BARBARA

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

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

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

INT. A STERILE ROOM - DAY

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

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

INT. THE STERILE ROOM - DAY

Beverly's sodden shoes are removed, his socks.

His limp, greyish arm is guided into a starched white shirt-sleeve. The buttons carefully buttoned.

INT. BEVERLY'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

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

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

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

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

INT. THE STERILE ROOM - DAY

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

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

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

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

BARBARA
Holy shit, that's Karen.

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

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

JEAN
Kind of...

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

BARBARA
That must be this year's man.

Mattie Fae and Charlie are waiting for them, start over as Violet emerges into the blinding sun. Recoils slightly. Mattie Fae catches her, whispers comforts into her ear, helps her toward the church steps.

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

KAREN (VO)

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

INT. BEVERLY'S LINCOLN (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

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

KAREN

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

BARBARA

-- uh-huh --

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

KAREN

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

BARBARA

No, I remember.

KAREN

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

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

KAREN (CONT'D)

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

BARBARA

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

KAREN

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

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

KAREN (CONT'D)

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

INT. WESTON HOUSE STAIRWAY/UPSTAIRS HALL - AFTERNOON

Barbara leads Karen upstairs, Karen carries her suitcase, Barbara carries Steve's. Karen's still talking.

KAREN

The best thing about him, for me, is that now what I think about is *now*. I live *now*. My focus, my life, my world is *now*. I don't give a care about the past anymore, the mistakes I made, the way I *thought*. And you can't plan the future cause as soon as you do, something happens, some terrible thing happens --

BARBARA

Like your father drowning himself.

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

KAREN

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

(beat)

Do you know what the kicker --?

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

BARBARA

What's the kicker?

KAREN

We're going to Belize on our honeymoon!

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

BARBARA

Sorry. Hot flash.

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM - DAY

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

VIOLET

It won't kill you to try it on --

MATTIE FAE

Oh, this is a sweet one, Vi --

IVY

I find this a tidge morbid, frankly --

MATTIE FAE

Look at this, Ivy --

VIOLET

What's morbid about it?

IVY (CONT'D)

It's not my style, Mom.

VIOLET

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

MATTIE FAE

Where was this taken?

VIOLET

New York. On the first book tour.

IVY

I don't have *your* style, I have a style of my own.

VIOLET

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

IVY

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

VIOLET

You look like a magician's assistant.

MATTIE FAE

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

VIOLET

Don't discourage him now --

MATTIE FAE

He wouldn't last a day in that city. They'd tear him apart.

MATTIE FAE (CONT'D)

I could kill that kid --

IVY

Why do you feel it necessary to insult me?

VIOLET

Stop being so sensitive.

MATTIE FAE

He overslept? For his Uncle's funeral? A *noon* service?

IVY

I'm sure there's more to the story --

MATTIE FAE

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

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

MATTIE FAE (CONT'D)

I've seen a *chimp* drive.

IVY

Why are you giving away your clothes?

VIOLET

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

(holds up spiked heels)

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

INT. THE KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

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

KAREN

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

BARBARA

We said two words to each other --

KAREN

You get a feel, though, don't you?
Did you get a feel?

BARBARA

He seemed very nice, sweetheart --

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

KAREN

He *is*, and --

BARBARA

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

KAREN

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

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

BARBARA

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

KAREN

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

Barbara stares at her, what is she talking about?

BARBARA

Yes. Yes.

Karen wraps her arms around Barbara.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Okay. Yes.

EXT. PAWHUSKA LIQUOR STORE PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

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

JEAN
Hurry, okay?

BILL
I will, sweetheart.

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

STEVE
Is it always this hot?

JEAN
Usually it's hotter.

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

JEAN
Fourteen.

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

JEAN
It doesn't sound good.

STEVE
Slaughterhouse sanitation.

JEAN
That's disgusting.

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

An impatient Jean watches her father comparing wines inside.

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

She sniffs. Doesn't smell much of anything really.

JEAN
Dumpster over there?

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

He sniffs the air, then sniffs her.

JEAN
What are you doing?

STEVE
Do I smell what I think I smell?

JEAN
What do you smell?

STEVE
What do you think I smell?

JEAN
I think you smell that dumpster.

He whiffs, hard, breathing her in.

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

JEAN
No.

STEVE
You can tell me.

JEAN
No.

STEVE
You a little dope smoker?
(beat)
Then you are in luck. Because I
just happen to have some tasty shit.
And I am going to hook you up.

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

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

STEVE
You what?

JEAN

I really need to get fucked up --

STEVE

You need to get what?

JEAN

You're bad --

Bill hustles out of the store, carrying several bags.

BILL

No Pinots, but they had some decent
California Merlots.

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

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM - DAY

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

VIOLET

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

IVY

You're beautiful, Mom.

VIOLET

I was beautiful. Not anymore.

MATTIE FAE

Oh, now --

IVY

You're still beautiful.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

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

MATTIE FAE

I beg your pardon?

VIOLET

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

MATTIE FAE

I'm still very sexy, thank you very much.

VIOLET

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

MATTIE FAE

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

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

VIOLET

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

IVY

I'm sorry, I won't.

VIOLET

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

IVY

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

VIOLET

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

IVY

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

VIOLET

You said you weren't looking for a man --

IVY
 And I'm not. Because I have one.
 Okay? Now will you leave it alone?

VIOLET
 No, I won't leave it alone.

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

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

VIOLET
 Who is it?

IVY
 Nobody. Forget it --

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

IVY
 I'm not telling you anything so --

MATTIE FAE
 You have to tell us *something!*

IVY
 No, I really don't.

VIOLET
 Are you in love, Ivy?

IVY
 I...I don't...I'm...

Ivy bursts into awkward laughter, Vi and Mattie squeal.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - AFTERNOON

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

STEVE
 No, we maintain the accounts off-
 shore, just until we get approvals.

BILL
 To get around approvals?

STEVE

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

BILL

Only what I read and that's --

STEVE

Right, right, this kind of business in particular.

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

BILL

...Charlie?

CHARLIE

Picking up Little Charles.

Charlie climbs in behind the wheel, pulls away.

STEVE

Little Charles?

BILL

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

They start up the porch steps with the wine.

STEVE

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

BILL

Security work. You mean... mercenary?

INT. KITCHEN/WESTON LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

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

BARBARA

Give. Me. The wine.

She pulls a bottle of Merlot from Bill's grocery bag. Hears something, looks into the living room as she passes. Jean has just turned on the TV, LOUD. Barbara stares for a beat.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Is that what you were in such a hurry to get home for? What the hell's on TV that's so important you?

JEAN

Phantom of the Opera, 1925.

BARBARA

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

JEAN

They're showing it with the scene in color restored.

Steve's appeared in the living room archway.

STEVE

Cool.

BARBARA

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

(Jean does)

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

JEAN

I guess.

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

STEVE

Phantom of the Opera, huh?

JEAN

Huh-uh.

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

KAREN

Hi, doodle.

STEVE

(focused on the TV)

Hey, baby.

KAREN
 (in super-baby-voice)
 Hi, doodle!

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

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

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

STEVE
 Hook you up, later.

INT/EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

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

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

LITTLE CHARLES
 I'm sorry, Dad.

CHARLIE
 No need to apologize.

LITTLE CHARLES
 I know Mom's mad at me.

CHARLIE
 Don't worry about her.

LITTLE CHARLES
 What did she say?

CHARLIE
 Your mother, she says what she says.

LITTLE CHARLES
 I set the alarm. I did.

CHARLIE
 I know you did.

LITTLE CHARLES
I loved Uncle Bev, you know that.

CHARLIE
Stop apologizing.

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

CHARLIE
It's okay.

LITTLE CHARLES
I missed his funeral!

CHARLIE
It's a ceremony. It's ceremonial.
It doesn't mean anything compared
to what you have in your heart.
(and, then)
Hold on, comb your hair.

Charlie hands Little Charles his comb.

LITTLE CHARLES
Uncle Bev must be disappointed in me.

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

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

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

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

CHARLIE
How who feels about you? Feels what
about you?

LITTLE CHARLES

All of them. I know what they say.

CHARLIE

They don't say things about you --

LITTLE CHARLES

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

CHARLIE

You haven't let me down. You never let me down. Now listen...you're wrong about these people, they love you. Some of them haven't gotten a chance to see what I see: a fine man, very loving, with a lot to offer. Now take this...

(a handkerchief)

Give me my comb. Stand up straight, look folks in the eye. Stop being so hard on yourself.

LITTLE CHARLES

I love you, Dad.

CHARLIE

Love you too, son.

EXT. WESTON BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Barbara bursts out of the back porch screen and into the yard, heading to the old barn. Bill follows.

BARBARA

Phantom of the Opera --

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

That's a shot across my bow, right? I missed something.

BARBARA
Really? Instilling character: our
burden as parents.

BILL
I got that part.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BILL
Barbara --

BARBARA
Precocious little shit.

BILL
I'm not defending her.

BARBARA
 (voice rising)
 I'm not blaming her, because
 I don't expect her to act any
 differently when her father
 is a selfish son-of-a-bitch.

BILL
 (voice rising)
 I'm on your side. How can we
 fight when I'm on your side?
 Barbara...Barbara, settle
 down!

BARBARA
 Be a father! Help me!

BILL
 I am her father, goddamn it!

BARBARA
 Her father in name only!

BILL
 I have not forsook my
 responsibilities!

Barbara hands dusty battered chairs back to Bill.

BARBARA
 It's "forsaken," big shot!

BILL
 Actually, "forsook" is also an
 acceptable usage --!

BARBARA
 Oh, "*forsook*" you and the horse
 you rode in on --

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

EXT. THE BACK YARD - DAY

And the blinding sunlight. Start back for the house.

BILL
 You don't fight fair.

BARBARA
 I've seen where that gets me! I'm
 sick of the whole notion of the
 enduring female. GROW UP! Cause
 while you're going through your fifth
 puberty, the world is falling apart
 and your kid can't handle it!

BILL

Our kid is just trying to deal with this goddamn madhouse you've dragged her into.

BARBARA

This madhouse is my home.

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

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

BARBARA

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

BILL

You can't resist, can you?

BARBARA

You're a pretty easy mark.

BILL

You're so goddamn self-righteous, you know? You're so --

BARBARA

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

BILL

Maybe I split because of it.

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

BARBARA

Is this your confession, then, when you finally unload all?

BILL

You're thoughtful, Barbara, but you're not open. You're passionate, but you're hard. You're a good, decent, funny, wonderful woman, and I love you, but you're a pain in the ass.

Bill pushes past her up the stairs, disappears inside.

INT. BEVERLY'S STUDY - AFTERNOON

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

VIOLET

August... your month. Locusts are raging, "Summer psalm become summer wrath." 'Course it's only August out there. In here... who knows?

(and then)

All right... okay. "The Carriage held but just Ourselves," dum-de-dum...mm, best I got... Emily Dickenson's all I got... something something, "Horse's Heads Were Toward Eternity..."

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

That's for me. One for me.

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)

For My Violet...

Violet smiles ruefully, takes another pill.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

For the girls, God love 'em.

Surveys the book with something bordering on disgust. Another pill. Sits. Waiting. For what? She's not sure.

BARBARA (OS)

Mom?! Food's on the table!

She takes a final look around, takes one last pill.

INT. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

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

KAREN

This is lovely! You do all this?

JOHNNA

Mm-hmm.

MATTIE FAE

She's a wonder, this one.

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

BILL

Turn that off, it's time to eat.

JEAN

Don't suppose I could eat in here?

BILL

You suppose right.

Ivy comes down the stairs, looking.

IVY

Did I hear Little Charles?

CHARLIE

He went back out to the car.

EXT. BACK YARD - AFTERNOON

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

LITTLE CHARLES

Mom's casserole.

Shuts the door, rests the casserole on the hood.

IVY

They said you overslept.

LITTLE CHARLES

Maybe I purposely accidentally overslept. I don't know. I'm sorry.

IVY

Please.

LITTLE CHARLES

I know you had one of the worst days
of your life and I'm sorry if I --

IVY

We don't have to do that with each
other.

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

LITTLE CHARLES

You're breaking our rule.

IVY

They're on to me. Not us, just me.
I told them I was seeing someone. I
didn't tell them who. I just wanted
you to know, in case it came up.

(he stares at her)

What?

(beat)

Charles...

LITTLE CHARLES

I adore you.

INT. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

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

CHARLIE

Pass the casserole, please?

MATTIE FAE

My casserole's coming.

CHARLIE

I'll eat some of yours, too --

BARBARA

(calling out)

Mom?! Let's eat!

Little Charles and Ivy enter with the casserole.

MATTIE FAE

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

LITTLE CHARLES

Where do you want this?

Ad-lib greetings, hugs, handshakes, Karen's introduction of Steve. Ivy slips in and takes her seat. Little Charles goes to put Mattie Fae's casserole on the table, but drops it.

It lands on the floor with a sickening SPLAT.

LITTLE CHARLES (CONT'D) BILL
Oh Jesus --! Whoops.

MATTIE FAE STEVE
Goddamn it --! O-pah!

MATTIE FAE
You goddamn clumsy goofball!

LITTLE CHARLES CHARLIE
Mom, I'm so sorry -- All right, nobody's hurt.

Little Charles helps Johnna clean up the mess.

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

CHARLIE LITTLE CHARLES
You're not hurt. Mom, Jesus, I'm sorry --

IVY
It's just an accident.

MATTIE FAE
That's *my* casserole!

CHARLIE STEVE
Let it go, Mattie Fae. It's not a party until
someone spills something.

CHARLIE
Jean, you didn't get any chicken.

BARBARA JEAN
No, she won't -- I don't eat meat.

CHARLIE STEVE
You don't eat meat. Good for you.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
"Don't eat meat." Okay. Who wants
chicken? Little Charles, chicken?

MATTIE FAE
Just put it on his plate for him or
he's liable to burn the house down.

CHARLIE
All right, Mattie Fae.

BARBARA
Mom...!

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

VIOLET
Barb... will you put this?

BARBARA
Yeah, sure.

Barbara takes it, places it on the sideboard.

MATTIE FAE
That's nice.

KAREN
That's sweet.

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

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

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

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

CHARLIE
I am? Oh, I guess I am.

VIOLET
By default.

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

All bow their heads.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
We ask that you watch over this family
in this sad time, O Lord...
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 that you bless this good woman and
 keep her in your, in your... grace.

A cell phone RINGS, playing the theme from *Sanford and Son*.
 Steve digs through his pockets, finds the phone, checks it.

STEVE
 I have to take this.

Steve hustles into the kitchen to talk on the phone.

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

Steve reenters from the kitchen, snapping his phone shut.

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

STEVE
 Amen. Sorry folks.

BILL
 Let's eat.

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

VIOLET
 Barb, have any use for that sideboard?

BARBARA
 Hm?

VIOLET
 That sideboard there, you have any
 interest in that?

BARBARA

This? Well... no. I mean, why?

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

KAREN

Really pretty.

VIOLET

Mm. Maybe Ivy'll take it.

IVY

I have something like that, remember --

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

Suit yourself.

STEVE

This food is just spectacular.

KAREN

It's so good --

LITTLE CHARLES

Yes, it is --

IVY

You like your food, Mom?

VIOLET

I haven't tried much of it, yet --

BARBARA

Johnna cooked this whole meal by herself.

VIOLET

'S what she's paid for.

A silent moment.

VIOLET (CONT'D)
Y'all did know she's getting paid,
right?

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

JEAN
Right.

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

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

VIOLET
Ingest what? It's fur?

JEAN
Fear.

VIOLET
I thought she said --

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

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

CHARLIE
Does it?

LITTLE CHARLES
It does.

IVY
Yes.

LITTLE CHARLES
Adrenaline, and, and --

JEAN
Your body goes through a whole
chemical process when it
experiences fear.

LITTLE CHARLES
-- yep, and cortisol --

JEAN
Don't you think an animal
experiences fear?

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIOLET
"Where's the meat?" Isn't that some
TV commercial, the old lady says,
"Where's the meat?"

KAREN
"Beef," "Where's the beef?"

VIOLET
(screeching)
"Where's the meat?!" "Where's the
meat?!" "Where's the meat?!"

BARBARA
That's pleasant.

CHARLIE

I thought the services were lovely.

KAREN

Yes, weren't they --?

STEVE

Preacher did a fine job.

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

VIOLET

Ehhhhh! I give it a...

(repeats gesture)

Ehhhhh!

KAREN

Really? I thought it was --

BARBARA

Great, now we get some dramatic criticism.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Too much talk about poetry, teaching. He hadn't written any poetry to speak of since '65 and he never liked teaching worth a damn. Nobody talked about the good stuff. Man was a world-class alcoholic, more'n fifty years. Nobody told the story about that night he got wrangled into giving a talk at that TU alumni dinner...

(laughs)

Drank a whole bottle of Ron Bocoy White Rum -- don't know why I remember that -- and got up to give this talk, and he fouled himself! Comes back to our table with this huge --

BARBARA

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

STEVE

I don't know much about poetry, but I thought his poems were extraordinary.

(to Bill)

And your reading was very fine.

BILL

Thank you.

VIOLET

(to Steve)

Who are you?

KAREN
Mom, this is my fiance, Steve, I
introduced you at the church.

STEVE
Steve Heidebrecht.

VIOLET
Hide-the-what?

STEVE
Heidebrecht.

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

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

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

BARBARA
Jesus.

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

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

STEVE
Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET
You ever been married before?

KAREN
That's personal.

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

VIOLET
More'n once?

STEVE

Three times, actually, three times
before this --

VIOLET

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

STEVE

(laughs)
Right, right --

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

VIOLET

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

KAREN

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

IVY

That's been gone for years.

KAREN

That made me so sad!

BILL

What is this now?

KAREN

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

IVY

Daddy said rats were getting in there.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

What did you take? What pills?

VIOLET

Lemme alone --

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

CHARLIE

Uh-oh!

MATTIE FAE
What is it?

CHARLIE
UH-OH!

MATTIE FAE
What's the matter?

LITTLE CHARLES
Dad --?

IVY
You okay, Uncle --

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

Laughter. Charlie digs into his plate ravenously.

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

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

JEAN
I do not!

BARBARA
Double cheeseburger, bacon, extra
fear.

JEAN
Mom, you are such a liar!

More laughter. Violet stares at Jean.

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

Silence.

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

BARBARA
Mom...

VIOLET

We took care of it some time back.

BARBARA

Mom, we don't want to talk about this.

VIOLET

I want to talk about it. What about what I want to talk about, that count for anything?

(beat)

Bev made some good investments, believe it or not, and we had money for you girls in his will, but we talked it over after some years passed and decided to change things, leave everything to me. We never got around to taking care of it legally, but you should know he meant to leave the money to me.

BARBARA

Okay.

VIOLET

Okay?

(looks to Ivy, Karen)

Okay?

IVY

Okay.

VIOLET

Karen? Okay?

Uncertain, Karen looks to Steve, then Barbara.

BARBARA

Okay.

KAREN

Okay.

VIOLET

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

MATTIE FAE

Sure, an auction's a fine idea --

VIOLET

Some things, though, like the silver,
that's worth a pretty penny. But if
you like I'll sell it to you,
cheaper'n I might get in an auction.

BARBARA

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

IVY

Barbara...

Beat. Violet coolly studies Barbara.

VIOLET

You might at that.

LITTLE CHARLES

Excuse me, Bill? I'm wondering,
the reading you did, those poems --?

VIOLET

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

BILL

I beg your pardon.

VIOLET

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

BILL

...We're separated.

VIOLET

(to Barbara)

Thought you could slip that one
by me, didn't you?

BARBARA

What is the matter with you?

VIOLET

Nobody slips anything by me. I know
what's what. Your father thought
he's slipping one by me, right? No
way. I'm sorry you two're having
trouble, maybe you can work it out.
Bev'n I separated a few times, course
we didn't call it that.

BARBARA

Help us to benefit from an illustration of your storybook marriage.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

You've said enough on this topic, I think.

BILL

Yes. There's a younger woman.

VIOLET

Y'see? Odds're against you there, babe.

IVY

Mom believes women don't grow more attractive with age.

KAREN

Oh, I disagree, I --

VIOLET

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

CHARLIE

You're in rare form today, Vi.

VIOLET

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

CHARLIE

I just don't understand why you're so adversarial.

VIOLET

I'm just truth-telling.

(to Barbara)

Some people get antagonized by the truth.

CHARLIE

Everyone here loves you, dear.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

Violet rises, her voice booming.

VIOLET

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

MATTIE FAE

Vi, please --

IVY

Settle down, Mom --

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Stop telling me to settle down, goddam
it! I'm not a goddamn invalid! I
don't need to be abided, do I?! Am
I already passed over?!

MATTIE FAE

Honey --

VIOLET

(points to Mattie Fae)

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

You DON'T know! You do NOT know! None
of you know, 'cept this woman right
here and that man we buried today!

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Sweet girl, sweet Barbara, my heart breaks for every time you ever felt pain. I wish I coulda shielded you from it. But if you think for a solitary second you can fathom the pain that man endured in his natural life, you got another think coming. Do you know where your father lived from age four till about ten? Do you?

No one responds.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Do you?!

BARBARA

No.

IVY

No.

VIOLET

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

(jabs a finger at Karen)

Whadda you do?

(jabs a finger at Ivy)

Whadda you do?

(jabs a finger at Barbara)

Who're you? Jesus, you worked as hard as us, you'd all be President. You never had real problems so you got to make all your problems yourselves.

BARBARA

Why are you screaming at us?

VIOLET

Just time we had some truth's told 'round here. Damn fine day, tell the truth.

There's a long pause as everyone gathers themselves, then:

CHARLIE

Well, the truth is... I'm getting full.

STEVE

Amen.

JOHNNA

There's dessert, too.

KAREN

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

Little Charles suddenly stands.

LITTLE CHARLES

I have a truth to tell.

VIOLET

It speaks.

IVY

(softly pleading)
No, no --

CHARLIE

What is it, son?

LITTLE CHARLES

I have a truth.

MATTIE FAE

Little Charles...?

LITTLE CHARLES

I...

IVY

Charles, not like this, please...

LITTLE CHARLES

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

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

VIOLET
Scintillating.

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

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

VIOLET
Poor Ivy. Poor thing.

IVY
Please, Mom...

VIOLET
Poor baby.

IVY
Please...

VIOLET
She always had a feeling for the
underdog.

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

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

IVY
Please, momma.

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

BARBARA
You're a drug addict.

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

She pulls a bottle from her pocket, holds them up.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

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

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

BARBARA

Gimme those goddamn pills --

VIOLET

I'll eat you alive, girl!

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

STEVE

Holy shit --

IVY

Barbara, stop it --!

CHARLIE

Hey, now, c'mon --!

KAREN

Oh God --

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

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

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

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

Shut up!

(silence)

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

(to Ivy)

You remember how to do this, right?

IVY

Yeah...

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

CHARLIE
What should we do?

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

VIOLET
You can't do this! This is *my*
house! This is *my* house!

BARBARA
You don't get it, do you?

She strides to her mother, looms over her.

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

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

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

IVY
That's all we could find.

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

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

IVY
It's not just him. She's got a doctor
in every port.

BARBARA

You knew this was going on again?

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

INT. VIOLET'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

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

KAREN

Now what?

BARBARA

Wine... lots of wine.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE YARD/GAZEBO - NIGHT

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

BARBARA

Think we can goad Mom into giving Burke her "greatest" generation speech tomorrow, tell him about the claw hammer?

IVY

Won't do any good, he's part of the same generation.

BARBARA

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

IVY

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

KAREN

I wasn't there.

BARBARA

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

KAREN

God, I've never heard this story.

IVY
Did you just say "cooch"?

BARBARA
The phrase "Mom's pussy" seems gauche.

IVY
You're a little more comfortable with
"cooch," are you?

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

IVY
I don't know, but --

BARBARA
"Mom's beaver"? "Mother's box"?

Oh God -- IVY Barbara! KAREN

As their laughter slowly dies down --

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

IVY
Karen. He killed himself.

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

IVY
I don't know that I'm comfortable
talking about that.

BARBARA

Because you know he's our first
cousin.

IVY

Give me a break.

KAREN

You know you shouldn't consider
children.

IVY

I can't anyway, I had a hysterectomy
last year.

What? Barbara and Karen stare at Ivy.

KAREN

Why?

IVY

Cervical cancer.

KAREN

I didn't know.

BARBARA

Neither did I.

IVY

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

BARBARA

Why not?

IVY

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

BARBARA

You might have told us.

IVY

You didn't tell us about you and Bill.

BARBARA

That's different.

IVY

Why? Because it's you, and not me?

BARBARA

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

IVY

I don't feel that connection very
keenly.

KAREN

I feel very connected, to both of you.

IVY

We never see you, you're never around,
you haven't been around --

KAREN

I still feel that connection!

IVY

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

BARBARA

When did you get so cynical?

IVY

That's funny, coming from you.

BARBARA

Bitter, sure, but "random selection of cells?"

IVY

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

BARBARA

Don't give me that. I participated --

IVY

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

BARBARA

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

IVY

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

KAREN

I can't believe your world view is this dark.

IVY

You live in Florida.

BARBARA
You're thinking of leaving?

IVY
Charles and I are going to New York.

Barb bursts out in derisive laughter. Karen joins her.

BARBARA
What are you going to do in New York?

IVY
We have plans.

BARBARA
Like what?

IVY
None of your business.

BARBARA
What about Mom?

IVY
What about her?

BARBARA
You feel comfortable leaving Mom here?

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

KAREN
Yes.

Ivy stands, gathers up her wine glass.

IVY

There you go, Barb. You want to know what we're doing about Mom? Karen and I are leaving. You want to stay, that's your decision. But nobody gets to point a finger at me. Nobody.

Ivy starts back for the house.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE YARD - NIGHT

The Weston women head for the house.

VIOLET

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

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

BARBARA
You had a bath?

VIOLET
Uh-huh...

BARBARA
You need something to eat? More coffee?

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

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

KAREN
I get embarrassed just thinking about it.

Karen takes a tube of hand creme from her purse.

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

KAREN
It's apple. You want some?

VIOLET
Yes, please.

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

VIOLET (CONT'D)
I ever tell you the story of Raymond Qualls? Not much story to it. Boy I had a crush on when I was thirteen or so. Rough-looking boy, beat-up Levis, messy hair. Terrible underbite.
(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

But he had these beautiful cowboy boots, shiny chocolate leather. He was so proud of those boots, you could tell, way he'd strut around, all arms and elbows, puffed up and cocksure. I decided I needed to get a girly pair of those same boots and I convinced myself he'd ask me to go steady. He'd see me in those boots and say "Now there's the gal for me."

Violet lights another cigarette.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

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

Silence.

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

Oh, no. That's the end.

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

KAREN

You never got the boots?

VIOLET

No, huh-uh.

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

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

An awkward moment.

KAREN

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

VIOLET

Thank you, sweetheart.

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

INT. GUEST ROOM - EARLY MORNING

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

INT/EXT. BACKYARD - EARLY MORNING

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

BARBARA

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

JOHNNA

Mrs. Fordham, are you going to fire me?

BARBARA

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

JOHNNA

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

BARBARA

Why?

JOHNNA

I need the work.

BARBARA

Johnna, did my father say anything to you?

JOHNNA

He just seemed like maybe he had... he talked about...

(beat)

He talked a lot about his daughters, his three daughters, and his granddaughter. That was his joy.

BARBARA

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

Johnna smiles.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE/WAITING ROOM - DAY

Barbara sits opposite DR. BURKE, a genial, charming and remotely creepy small town doctor. Ivy stands. Violet is visible out in the waiting room, Karen sitting with her.

DR. BURKE

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

BARBARA

-- right --

DR. BURKE

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

BARBARA

Mild Cognitive Impairment?

DR. BURKE

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

BARBARA

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

DR. BURKE

Of course, it's a family decision.

BARBARA

You want us to send her to where, a psychiatric hospital?

DR. BURKE

Well, Beverly's gone.

BARBARA

Right. Not "gone" so much as "dead," but I see your point.

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

DR. BURKE

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

IVY

Leave me out of this, thanks.

BARBARA

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

DR. BURKE

I'm sorry?

BARBARA

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

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

DR. BURKE

All right, I think --

Throws another pill bottle at him.

BARBARA

Know whose name is on these bottles?

She hits him with another pill bottle.

DR. BURKE
Your mother is a very --

She hits him with another pill bottle.

IVY
Barb...

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

She hits him with another pill bottle.

Another pill bottle. And another pill bottle.

She pauses. It seems she's done.

But then, another pill bottle. And another.

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

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

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

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

VIOLET
Pull the car over.

BARBARA
We'll be home in a few minutes.

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

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

We stay with Barbara as she climbs out of the car, stares across the road, waiting for Violet, who can be heard retching. Karen and Ivy still in the car.

The sound fades as Barbara contemplates the prairie and for a long moment... loses herself, back to this land, to her home. Her expression is unreadable, enigmatic.

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

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

BARBARA

Mom?

Violet keeps running.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Mom?! Where are you going?

Barbara watches for another moment.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Goddamn it. Mom!

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

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

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

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Where the fuck are you going, Mom?

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

There's nowhere to go.

INT/EXT. LINCOLN/WESTON HOUSE DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

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

BARBARA
I'm sorry.

VIOLET
Please, honey --

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

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

BARBARA
So... truce?

VIOLET
(laughs)
Truce.

They take a long moment, then --

BARBARA
What now?

VIOLET
How do you mean?

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

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

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

BARBARA
All we could find.

VIOLET
I don't have that many hiding places.

BARBARA
Mom, now, come on.

VIOLET
You wanna search me?

BARBARA

Uh... no.

VIOLET

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

BARBARA

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

VIOLET

I don't need help.

BARBARA

I want to help.

VIOLET

I don't need your help.

BARBARA

Mom.

VIOLET

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

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

INT. WESTON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ivy finds Little Charles watching television.

IVY

Is the coast clear?

LITTLE CHARLES

Never very.

Ivy waits until Karen passes through, heads upstairs.

IVY

What are you watching?

LITTLE CHARLES
Television.

IVY
Can I watch it with you?

LITTLE CHARLES
I wish you would.

She sits beside him on the couch.

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

IVY
Nope.

They hold hands.

LITTLE CHARLES
I was trying to be brave.

IVY
I know.

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

IVY
Hey. Hey.

He turns to look at her.

IVY (CONT'D)
You're my hero.

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

LITTLE CHARLES
Come on, help me push the pedal.

She joins him on the piano bench.

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

He plays, and quietly sings a gentle but quirky love song.
It's charming, touching.

She smiles, he smiles back. Midway through, Mattie Fae enters, watches for a moment. Then breaks the spell.

MATTIE FAE

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

Charlie comes down the stairs with their overnight bag.

CHARLIE

I'm sure the house is fine.

MATTIE FAE

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

LITTLE CHARLES

No, I was just --

MATTIE FAE

This one watches so much television,
it's rotted his brain.

IVY

I'm sure that's not true.

MATTIE FAE

What was it I caught you watching the
other day?

LITTLE CHARLES

I don't remember.

CHARLIE

Mattie Fae --

MATTIE FAE

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

LITTLE CHARLES

I don't remember.

MATTIE FAE

You don't remember.
(to Ivy)
Too bad there isn't a job where they
pay you to sit around watching TV.

CHARLIE
C'mon, Mattie Fae --

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

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

MATTIE FAE
What the hell did you say--?

CHARLIE
You kids go outside, would you please?

Ivy and Little Charles go.

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

MATTIE FAE
Maybe that's because your family --

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

He goes. She takes a moment to collect herself, turns to follow, finds Barbara standing out in the open kitchen door. There's an awkward moment.

BARBARA

I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I froze.

MATTIE FAE

That's -- you have a cigarette, hon?

BARBARA

No, I quit years ago.

MATTIE FAE

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

BARBARA

Oh, this is...I'm not sure what to...

MATTIE FAE

Look, just. Is it true?

BARBARA

Yes. It's true.

MATTIE FAE

Okay. That can't happen.

BARBARA

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

MATTIE FAE

Barb...?

BARBARA

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

MATTIE FAE

Honey --

BARBARA

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

MATTIE FAE

They're not cousins.

BARBARA
 -- but believe it or not, it's not as
 uncommon as you might --

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

BARBARA
 Beg pardon?

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

Karen and Steve enter from outside.

BARBARA
 Go away.

KAREN
 We're just going to --

BARBARA
 Go away! NOW! GO AWAY!

Karen and Steve retreat. Barbara stares at Mattie Fae.

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

MATTIE FAE
 I do. And you do.

BARBARA
 Uncle Charlie doesn't suspect?

MATTIE FAE
 We've never discussed it.

BARBARA
 What?!

MATTIE FAE
 We've never discussed it. Okay?

BARBARA

Did Dad know?

MATTIE FAE

Yes. Y'know, I'm not proud of this.

BARBARA

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

MATTIE FAE

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

BARBARA

If Ivy found out, it would destroy her.

MATTIE FAE

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

EXT. WESTON HOUSE BACKYARD - NIGHT

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

JEAN (OS)

You weren't kidding, this stuff is strong.

STEVE (OS)

Florida, baby. Number one industry.

JEAN

Who cares?

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

STEVE

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

JEAN

I know what a shotgun is.

STEVE

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

JEAN

Okay.

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

STEVE

Hold it. Don't let it out.

She finally gasps, exhales, coughs.

STEVE (CONT'D)

That's a kick, huh?

INT. THE ATTIC ROOM - NIGHT

Johnna wakes. Listens. Sits up.

INT. ATTIC STAIRS/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

INT. MAIN STAIRCASE/HALLWAY

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

STEVE (OS)

...Show 'em to me... I won't look.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Hey, goddamn it, careful!

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

STEVE (CONT'D)
Ow, goddamn --!

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

KAREN
What happened?!

JOHNNA
He was messing with Jean --

KAREN
Honey, you're bleeding, you okay?

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

BARBARA
Jean, what are you doing up?

JEAN
We were, I don't know --

BARBARA
Who was? Are you alright?

BILL
Do I need to call a doctor?

JEAN (CONT'D)
Yeah, I'm fine.

KAREN
I don't know.

BARBARA
Johnna, what's going on?

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

BARBARA
Messing with, what do you mean, messing with?

BILL
What...what's that mean?

JOHNNA (CONT'D)
He was kissing and grabbing her.

BARBARA
That's not the end of the
story.

BILL
That's not the end of the
story.

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

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

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

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

BARBARA
Just tell me what he did!

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

BILL
The big deal, Jean, is that you're
fourteen years old.

JEAN
Which is only a few years younger
than you like 'em.

Barbara SLAPS Jean; Jean bursts into tears.

JEAN (CONT'D)
I hate you!

BARBARA
Yeah, I hate you too, you little
freak!

Jean tries to head into the house. Bill grabs her.

JEAN
Jean--

BILL
Let me go!

Jean pulls free, runs off. Bill gets in Barbara's face.

BILL
What's the matter with you?

CONTINUED:

Bill exits, pursuing Jean. Barbara and Johnna are left standing there, then:

WE FOLLOW Barb into the kitchen and up the stairs to --

INT. THE GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Karen is pulling on a sweatshirt, grabbing their clothes, stuffing them into a suitcase.

KAREN

I can do without a speech.

BARBARA

Where is he?

KAREN

Out at the car. We're leaving.
Back to Florida, tonight, now.
Me and Steve, together. Want to
give me some grief about that?

BARBARA

Now wait just a goddamn --

KAREN

You better find out from Jean exactly
what went on before you start
pointing fingers. Cause I doubt
Jean's blameless in all this. And
I'm not *blaming* her, just cause I
said she's not blameless doesn't mean
I've *blamed* her. I'm saying she
might share in the responsibility.
It's not cut and dried, black and
white, good and bad. It lives where
everything lives: somewhere in the
middle. Where the rest of us live,
everyone but you.

BARBARA

Karen--

KAREN

He's not perfect. Just like the rest
of us, down here in the muck. I'm no
angel myself. I've done some things
I'm not proud of. Things you'll never
know about. I may even have to do
some things I'm not proud of *again.*
Cause sometimes life puts you in a
corner that way.

(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

And I am a human being, after all.
Anyway. You have your own hash to
settle. Before you start making
speeches to the rest of us.

BARBARA

Right...

KAREN

Come January... I'll be in Belize.
Doesn't that sound nice?

Karen pushes past Barb, rolling her suitcase behind her.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE AND DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Karen bursts through the screen door, rushes down the steps
to Steve's waiting Ferrari, it's lights already on, engine
running. Throws her suitcase in the back.

Barb steps out onto the porch as it reverses, SLAMS into gear
and accelerates down the drive, spewing gravel as it goes.

Bill comes out, watches it disappear with Barbara. Then:

BILL

I'm taking Jean with me, heading back
to Colorado in the morning.

But Barb's still focused on the distant Ferrari.

BILL (CONT'D)

She's too much for you right now.

BARBARA

Okay.

BILL

I'm sure you'll find a way to blame
me for all this.

BARBARA

Yeah, well...

(beat)

I can't make it up to Jean right
now. She's just going to have to
wait until I get back to Boulder.

BILL

You and Jean have about forty years
left to fight and make up.

BARBARA
(confused)
Why, what happens in forty years?

BILL
You die.

BARBARA
Oh, right.

BILL
I mean --

BARBARA
No. Right. I fail. As a mother,
as a daughter, as a wife. I fail.

BILL
No, you don't.

BARBARA
I've physically attacked Mom and Jean
in the span of twenty-four hours. You
stick around here and I'll cut off
your penis.

BILL
That's not funny.

He starts back inside.

BARBARA
You're never coming back to me, are
you, Bill?

BILL
Never say never, but...

BARBARA
But no.

BILL
But no.

BARBARA
Even if things don't work out with
you and Marsha.

BILL
Cindy.

BARBARA
Cindy.

BILL

Right. Even if things don't work out.

BARBARA

And I'm never really going to understand why, am I?

Bill struggles... seems he might have more to say, but then:

BILL

Probably not.

Bill goes. She watches him leave. Fights back tears.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

A blistering hot late August day. The Weston house sits in bucolic, heat-weary silence. The driveway no longer crowded with cars. Barb stands nearly where she did the night before, in her sweats and robe. Watching yet another car go.

Their rental, Bill behind the wheel, backing up. Jean in the seat beside him. Jean stares blankly at her mother, as she rolls past. Bill never looks back.

The rental heads down the drive, passing Ivy's Honda arriving. Bill slows for a moment to let Ivy pass. Then continues on it's way back to Tulsa and the airport.

Ivy pulls in next to Bev's big Lincoln. Climbs out. Walks to her sister, looks back to the rental leaving.

IVY

Where are Bill and Jean going?

Barbara doesn't answer, just stands there.

IVY (CONT'D)

Karen, too?

BARBARA

Yeah...

Barb turns, heads for the house, Ivy follows --

IVY

Is she clean?

BARBARA

She's moderately clean.

IVY
Moderately?

BARBARA
You don't like moderately? Then let's
say tolerably.

IVY
Is she clean, or not?

BARBARA
Back off.

IVY
I'm nervous.

BARBARA
Oh Christ, Ivy, not today.

IVY
I have to tell her, don't I? We're
leaving for New York tomorrow.

BARBARA
That's not a good idea. For you and
Charles to take this any further.

IVY
Where is this coming from?

Barbara heads up the porch steps and into --

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

BARBARA
Lot of fish in the sea. Surely you
can rule out the one single man in
the world you're related to.

IVY
I love the man I'm related to--

BARBARA
Fuck love, what a crock of shit.
People can convince themselves they
love a painted rock.

They find Johnna cooking in the kitchen.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Looks great. What is it?

JOHNNA

Catfish.

BARBARA

Bottom feeders, my favorite. You're nearly fifty years old, Ivy, you can't go to New York, you'll break a hip. Eat your catfish.

IVY

I have lived in this town, year in and year out, hoping against hope someone would come into my life--

BARBARA

Don't get all Carson McCullers on me. Now wipe that tragic look off your face and eat some catfish.

They head into the dining room, find Violet smoking, working on her jigsaw puzzle.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Howdy, Mom.

VIOLET

What's howdy about it?

BARBARA

Look, catfish for lunch. Johnna!
(to Violet)
You hungry?

VIOLET

Ivy, you should smile. Like me.

Johnna enters from the kitchen.

BARBARA

Mom needs her lunch, please.

VIOLET

I'm not hungry.

BARBARA

You haven't eaten anything today. You didn't eat anything yesterday.

VIOLET

I'm not hungry.

IVY

Why aren't either of you dressed?

BARBARA
We're dressed. We're not sitting here
naked, are we?

VIOLET
Yeah...

Johnna reenters with plates, then goes.

BARBARA
Eat.

VIOLET
No.

BARBARA
Eat it. Mom? Eat it.

VIOLET
No.

BARBARA
Eat it, you fucker. Eat that catfish.

VIOLET
Go to hell.

BARBARA
That doesn't cut any fucking ice with
me. Now eat that fucking fish.

IVY
Mom, I have something to talk to you--

BARBARA
No you don't.

IVY
Barbara--

BARBARA
No you don't. Shut up. Shut the fuck
up.

IVY
Please--

VIOLET
What's to talk about?

IVY
Mom--

BARBARA
Forget it. Eat that fucking fish.

VIOLET
I'm not hungry.

BARBARA
Eat it.

VIOLET
NO!

IVY
Mom, I need to--!

VIOLET
NO!

IVY
MOM!

BARBARA
EAT THE FISH, BITCH!

IVY
MOM, PLEASE!

VIOLET
Barbara...!

BARBARA
Okay, fuck it, do what you want.

IVY
I have to tell you something.

BARBARA
Ivy's a lesbian.

IVY
Barbara--

VIOLET
No, you're not.

IVY
No, I'm not--

BARBARA
Yes, you are. Did you eat your fish?

IVY
Barbara, stop it!

BARBARA
Eat your fish.

IVY
Barbara!

BARBARA
Eat your fish.

VIOLET
Barbara, quiet now--

IVY
Mom, please, this is important --

BARBARA
Eatyourfisheatyourfisheatyourfish--

Ivy stands, hurls her plate of food, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
What the fuck --

IVY
I have something to say.

BARBARA
Are we breaking shit?

Barbara takes a vase from the sideboard, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
'cause I can break shit --

Violet throws her plate, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
See, we can all break shit.

IVY
Charles and I --

BARBARA
You don't want to break shit with *me*,
muthah-fuckah --

IVY
Charles and I --

BARBARA
Johnna?! Little spill in here!

Ivy gets in Barbara's face.

IVY
 Barbara, stop it!
 (returning to Violet)
 Mom, Charles and I --

BARBARA
 Little Charles --

IVY
 Charles and I --

BARBARA
 Little Charles --

IVY
 Barbara --

BARBARA
 You have to say Little Charles or she
 won't know who you're talking about.

IVY
 Little Charles and I...

Barbara relents. Ivy will finally get to say the words.

IVY (CONT'D)
 Little Charles and I are --

VIOLET
 Little Charles and you are brother
 and sister. I know that.

Freeze. Silence.

BARBARA
 Oh... Mom.

IVY
 What? No, listen, Little Charles --

VIOLET
 I've always known that. I told you,
 no one slips anything by me.

IVY
 Mom --

BARBARA
 Don't listen.

VIOLET

I knew the whole time Bev and Mattie Fae were carrying on. Charlie should have known too, if he wasn't smoking all that grass.

BARBARA

It's the pills talking.

VIOLET

Your father tore himself up over it, thirty some-odd years, but Beverly wouldn't have been Beverly if he didn't have plenty to brood about.

IVY

Mom, what are you...?

BARBARA

Oh honey...

VIOLET

Better you girls know now though, now you're older. Never know when someone might need a kidney.

Ivy looks from Violet to Barbara... suddenly lurches away from the table, knocking over her chair.

IVY

Why in God's name did you tell me this?

VIOLET

Hey, what do you care?

IVY

You're monsters.

VIOLET

Come on now --

IVY

Monsters...

VIOLET

Who's the injured party here?

Ivy flees from the dining room, pursued by Barbara --

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

BARBARA
Ivy, listen --

IVY
Leave me alone.

BARBARA
When Mattie Fae told me, I didn't
know what to do --

Ivy runs from the house.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ivy rushes to her car, still followed by Barbara.

BARBARA
I was trying to protect you --

IVY
We'll go anyway, we'll still go away.

Ivy gets in the car, starts it, revs the engine. Barbara
tries to open the car door.

BARBARA
This is not my fault.

Barbara pounds on the car window.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I didn't tell you, *Mom* told you!
It wasn't me, it was *Mom*!

The car window slides down.

IVY
There's no difference.

Ivy floors the car, roars out of the driveway, leaving Barb
standing there. After a moment, Barb turns, stares up at the
house, angry, resolute. Starts back inside.

INT. WESTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Finds Violet still at the table, lighting a cigarette.

VIOLET

We couldn't let Ivy run off with Little Charles. Just wouldn't be right.

Barbara doesn't respond, keeps her distance.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

She'll be back. She's a sweet girl, Ivy, and I love her to death. But she isn't strong. Not like you. Or me.

BARBARA

You knew about Daddy and Mattie Fae?

VIOLET

Oh sure. I never told them I knew. But your father knew. He knew I knew. But we never talked about it. I chose the higher ground.

(and then)

If I'd had the chance, there at the end, I would've told him, "I hope this isn't about Little Charles, cause you know I know all about that." If I'd reached him at that motel, I would've said, "You'd be better off if you quit sulking about this ancient history."

BARBARA

...what motel?

VIOLET

I called over there on Monday after I got into that safety deposit box. But it was too late, he'd checked out.

BARBARA

How did you know where he was?

Violet is growing agitated with the interrogation.

VIOLET

The note. He said I could call him over at the Country Squire Motel --

BARBARA

He left a note?

VIOLET

And I did, I called him on Monday.

BARBARA

After you got the money out of your safety deposit box...

VIOLET

We had an *arrangement*. You have to understand, for people like your father and me, who never had any money, ever, as kids, people from our generation, that money is important.

BARBARA

If you could've stopped Daddy from killing himself, you wouldn't have *needed* to get into your safety deposit box.

VIOLET

Well, hindsight's always twenty-twenty, isn't it?

Barbara stares at her mother for a long moment. Then --

BARBARA

Did the note say he was going to kill himself?

No response.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Mom?

VIOLET

If I had my wits about me, I might've done it different. But I was, your father and me both, we were...

Barbara looks off, quietly:

BARBARA

You were both fucked-up... You were fucked-up... You are fucked-up.

VIOLET

You'd better understand this, you smug little ingrate. There's only one reason Beverly killed himself and that's you. Think there's any way he would've done what he did if you were still here? No, just him and me, here in this house, in the dark, left to ourselves, abandoned, wasted lifetimes devoted to your care and comfort.

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

So stick that knife of judgment in me, go ahead, but make no mistake, his blood is just as much on your hands as it is on mine.

Barbara is reeling, trying to comprehend.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

He did this though, not us. Can you imagine anything more cruel, to make me responsible? Just to weaken me, make me prove my character? So I waited, to get my hands on that safety deposit box. But I would have waited anyway. You want to show who's stronger, Bev? Nobody's stronger than me, goddamn it. When nothing is left, when everything is gone and disappeared, I'll be here.

Violet YELLS up to the empty house.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Who's stronger now, you son-of-a-bitch?!

Barbara feels sick, the floor giving away beneath her. She takes a moment. Then:

BARBARA

You're right, Mom. You're the strong one.

She goes to her mother, kisses her. Turns, heads into the hall, grabs her purse and Bev's keys from the dish.

Violet only slowly realizes Barbara's gone.

VIOLET

...Barbara?

Hears the sound of the screen door opening and SLAPPING shut.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Barbara?

Violet follows her into the hall, stops at the screen door.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

You and me. We're alike.

Barb doesn't turn around, keeps moving. Quietly:

BARBARA

No...

Sees Barb heading across the yard for Beverly's pick-up.

VIOLET

Barbara, please.

BARBARA

I'm nothing like you...

VIOLET

Please, Barbara.

Watches Barbara climb into the truck, back slowly out, go.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

...Barbara?

Barbara drives off. The driveway now empty again. Violet alone outside on the walkway. She turns back to the house, yelling, moving from empty room to empty room.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Ivy?! Ivy, you here?!

Silence. The dining room, the kitchen.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Barb?! Ivy?!

And into the living room, Bev's study.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Bev?! ...Bev?!

She stumbles to the stereo, puts on her Clapton... stares at the spinning album...

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Johnna?!

She reels to the stairs, crawling up --

INT/EXT. BEVERLY'S PICK-UP (MOVING) - DAY

Barbara is nearly catatonic as she drives, the house receding in the rear window behind her.

A few large rain drops splatter her windshield, the rumble of distant thunder, lightning and towering, ominous clouds in the distance.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/ATTIC STAIRS - DAY

Violet climbs the staircase on all fours.

VIOLET

Johnna... Johnna... Johnna...

Johnna sets down her TS Elliot, goes to Violet, holds Violet's head, smooths her hair, rocks her. Quietly --

VIOLET (CONT'D)

And then you're gone, and Beverly,
and then you're gone, and Barbara,
and then you're gone, and then
you're gone, and then you're gone --

Johnna quietly sings to Violet.

JOHNNA

"This is the way the world
ends..."

VIOLET

--and then you're gone, and
then you're gone --

INT. BEVERLY'S PICK-UP - DAY

ON Barbara as she drives --

JOHNNA (OS)

"...this is the way the world ends,
this is the way the world ends..."

VIOLET (OS)

--and then you're gone, and then
you're gone...

We stay on Barb as she slowly pulls herself back together. Brushes tears from her cheeks. Laughs darkly. Notices her hands are shaking from the adrenaline.

Slows, pulls the pick-up to the side of the road at the top of a small rise. Climbs out, stares out over the miles of prairie. The wind gently ruffles her clothing, her hair.

CLOSE ON her as she settles into exhausted relief, unsure of what comes next, but finally on her way as we --

FADE TO BLACK.

