

DID YOU FORGET YOUR NAME?

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Based on the novel by

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EXT. CEMETERY - DUSK

The decrepit gravestone angels of a cemetery, downhill from a church social. Next to the cemetery, a playground.

In the background, the faint SOUND OF CHILDREN play-fighting and play-dying on this playground.

We see flickering images of differently shaped gravestones, some newer than others, landing on a couple's stone reading, "Jerome Henderson / 1918-2003" and "Jennifer Henderson / 1922 - ___."

The death date waits to be filled in.

RED CHILDREN'S SNEAKERS step in front of the stone.

CHARLENE (O.S.)

(mumbling)

"You n-n-never know when the G-G-Good Lord'll swoop in..."

MARTIN WILSON (O.S.)

You one of the Henderson girls?

CHARLENE, 13, scrawny, looks up to see MARTIN WILSON, 45. He's drunk, eating a corn dog.

She recognizes this man. Unafraid, she nods.

MARTIN WILSON (O.S.)

What's your name?

CHARLENE

Ch-Ch-Ch -

She tries to say "Charlene," but gets stuck.

She takes a breath and tries again.

MARTIN WILSON

(dryly)

Did you forget your name?

She stares at him.

EXT. WOODS - DUSK

SUPERIMPOSE: FUGITIVE

Charlene tramples through the woods. Her red shoes pop through the dry leaves.

As she walks, she recites the following exercise, sotto voce:

CHARLENE

Th-th-there o-o-o-once was a w-w-
w-woodch-ch-ch-chopper
who uh who uh br-broke his b-b-
blade ch-ch-chopping -

Her stutter makes it difficult - this exercise has all the hardest letters.

She steps toward the edge of the woods, like a deer with perked ears.

She peers at Mary Anne through the trees.

Mary Anne spreads mulch in the yard.

In the distance, Mary Anne's cell phone rings in the grass.

She takes off her gloves, swipes her sweaty forehead, and answers it.

MARY ANNE

Hello?

A long pause.

Mary Anne turns toward the woods.

MARY ANNE

(confused)

She's where?

INT. 1988 PONTIAC GRAND AM - DUSK

Mary Anne and Charlene drive together in a green 1988 Pontiac Grand Am.

TRIX, 4, sits silently in a car seat in the back, holding a little tiger doll, observing.

Mary Anne glances at her daughter, who stares out the window and clicks the door lock back and forth with her thumb and forefinger.

Charlene has had a lifelong stutter, so when speaking, she struggles most with the letters C,B,D,G,K,P,T, and M. On these letters, her lips tend to freeze in position of the letter.

MARY ANNE

Is somebody mean?

CHARLENE

No.

Mary Anne examines her.

MARY ANNE

You coulda got picked up by any creep on the highway. That's how little girls go missing all the time, picked up by some weirdo with a car. Or hit by a car. Bad things happen with cars.

CHARLENE

Thirteen years old isn't little.

MARY ANNE

What is it, then?

A pause. Mary Anne glances over at Charlene.

MARY ANNE (CONT'D)

There was this big lady at the social last night. Did you see? (*Charlene shakes her head.*) She ordered a piece of bundt cake. Martin Wilson asked her which hip she was gonna put it on.

Charlene laughs, a bit nervous.

CHARLENE

It's not... m-m-meanness. I wanted to ch- I wanted to um ch- I wanted to um ch- I wanted to um ch-ch-check on you.

MARY ANNE

Check on me? What for?

CHARLENE

The G-, thee um G-, thee um G-G-
Good Lord.

MARY ANNE

The who?

CHARLENE

Lord. Swooping in, to, you know.

MARY ANNE

To... pluck me up like Grandpa?

Charlene nods.

MARY ANNE

Are you afraid for me?

Charlene nods.

MARY ANNE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be.

A long pause.

MARY ANNE (CONT'D)

I think fear is God inside.
Telling you what to do. But you
shouldn't be afraid for me.

Charlene goes back to clicking the door lock.

MARY ANNE

Daddy would be afraid for you.
Running like that.

Charlene shoots her a look - *you're not going to tell him,
are you?*

CHARLENE

Wh-what I w-w-wouldn't give not to
c-c-c-circumlocute.

MARY ANNE

To what?

CHARLENE

I wanted to say pl- um the word
pl- um the word pl- um the word
pl- um the word pl-pl-pl-pluck...
Like the Lord. The Lord takes. B-
b-but I made a word circle.

MARY ANNE

(sympathetic)

Hmm.

CHARLENE

C-c-circumlocuted.

Mary Anne continues to stare at the road.

CHARLENE

I think heaven would be um b-b-
beautiful conversations all day
long.

They pass a series of harvest-time cornfields, woods, with
the occasional little house.

Mary Anne turns the radio up.

Merle Haggard's "The Fugitive" plays.

A desolately beautiful Midwestern landscape.

Then, they approach

THE SCHOOL

where HANNAH, 13, GABE, 10, and GEORGE, 7, wait by the
sidewalk in front of the adjacent church.

The three kids climb into the backseat.

HANNAH

What's the matter, fat twin,
aren't you hungry?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A methodically cleaned kitchen. Knickknacks passed down
from relatives. At the counter, Mary Anne wraps peanut
butter sandwiches in plastic wrap - school lunch.

Hannah keeps her CELL PHONE beside her on the counter.

Charlene, walking on eggshells as she waits for her father to come home, folds a fitted sheet at the counter.

CHARLENE
Hannah, come help.

HANNAH
I am expecting a call.

CHARLENE
From Jackass?

HANNAH
From Jack *Schmidt*.

Trix pads into the kitchen holding the tiger doll. She lifts the doll to Charlene's face - *kiss it*. Charlene complies.

CHARLENE
Muah.

HANNAH
If I had runned off from the church social without giving rhyme nor reason as to why, I would not have the nerve to make *demands* of people.

Trix approaches Mary Anne the same way.

MARY ANNE
Trix, help your mama?

CHARLENE
(to Hannah)
Help me.

HANNAH
Have you been fatally injured?

CHARLENE
No.

HANNAH
Seeing as you are not fatally injured, I don't see why you

HANNAH (CONT'D)
cannot fold it yourself.

MARY ANNE
(to Hannah)
Hannah, help Charlene.

Hannah, in a huff, complies and helps fold the sheet.

CHARLENE
(whispering)
Jackass.

Trix approaches Hannah with the doll, offering.

Hannah ignores her and helps fold.

Trix doesn't relent.

HANNAH
(giving in)
Muah.

Gabe enters the kitchen, trailed by George.

GABE
That peanut butter looks *decadent*.

MARY ANNE
How was school, boys?

GABE
The educational system is robbing
my childhood.

GEORGE
Decadently.

GABE
You didn't say it right.

Gabe pulls a liturgical calendar from his backpack.

I made up a calendar for the next
six months, Mom. Yesterday was
gumption, today is decadent, and
you will just have to *wait and see*
about tomorrow.

CHARLENE

What for?

GABE

It's all in my Dementia Prevention
Strategy.

The sound of keys in the door as RUSS, Charlene's father,
gets home from work.

Hannah shoots a look at Charlene.

Charlene looks away.

GEORGE

(To Mary Anne)

Can I have a decadent sandwich
without jelly?

In the hall, the sound of Russ taking off his shoes, in the
same little corner he does every evening.

He enters the kitchen, slowly as usual.

GABE

Dad, doesn't this sandwich look
decadent?

Extremely measured in his words, Russ takes a borderline-
frustrating amount of time to respond to anything.

RUSS

(snickering)

Don't say that.

He drops the change from his pockets in a cereal bowl on
the counter.

GABE

Decadent?

RUSS

Food - it's good or it's bad.

GABE

I'm fortifying this brain against
my cursed genes.

MARY ANNE
(mumbles)
Fortify.

Russ ignores Gabe and looks to Charlene.

Charlene freezes.

He takes a couple slow steps toward her.

RUSS
(speaking privately)
Did Hannah catch you running off
from school today?

Charlene stares at him, tense. She nods.

He takes a couple steps closer.

He leans in.

Then tickles her sides.

She busts up laughing.

He whispers, smiling:

RUSS
You shoulda run faster.

QUICK CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

A black screen.

SUPERIMPOSE: MURDERER

The sound of a train whistle blowing. The sound of the
train hurtling down ancient tracks.

The sound of a collision.

Abruptly, we see Charlene sprinting across a field - facing
us - as though running from something horrific.

CUT TO:

The back of Charlene as she sprints toward the train.

We realize that she is running *toward* the horrific thing.

She slows as she approaches the scene of the wreck.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DUSK

The battered remains of a truck scatter the field, a steaming mass of metal.

Charlene stands at the edge of the wreckage, evaluating.

As the train slows, Charlene paces through the wreckage and comes across the body of Martin Wilson, 45, covered in blood.

She stares, then carefully approaches his body.

She notices his chest rising and falling, labored.

She pulls a CELL PHONE out of her pocket.

She opens it and rehearses for the phone call:

CHARLENE

(rehearsing)

There's a tr- um a tr-tr- um a tr-
tr-trainwr- wr- um wr-wreck on
Elmwood Road. There's a tr- um a
tr- um a tr-tr-trainwr-wr-wr um a
wreck on Elmwood Road.

She dials 9, then 1.

Then hangs up.

CHARLENE

(muttering to herself)

It's a sin to leave a m-m-man for
dead.

She stares at Martin Wilson.

Then turns to sprint back across the field toward home.

As she starts running, a moaning sound from Wilson.

She keeps running.

Halfway across the field, she slows down.

Then turns back.

When she gets back to Wilson, she dials 9-1-1.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
9-1-1, what's your emergency?

Charlene tries to say, "There's a trainwreck on Elmwood Road."

Her mouth freezes in position. Her lips start shaking and her face grows red hot.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Hello?

Then, she tries to say, "Martin Wilson is dying." It's like a snake has coiled around her neck.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Hello?

Charlene hangs up.

She breathes.

She tries to dial again, but her hands are shaking so badly she can hardly dial.

She waits.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
9-1-1, what's your emergency?

She can't get a word out.

Martin Wilson, breathing in and out on the ground like he's full of toxic fumes, opens his eyes. He stares at Charlene.

MARTIN WILSON
Give me the phone.

Charlene recoils.

Carefully, she kneels down and props the phone under his chin.

When she pulls out her hands, they're covered in blood.

She stares at the blood.

MARTIN WILSON

Get help. There's a... Elmwood.
Wreck.

CHARLENE

(apologizing)

I'm-I'm-I'm-

Martin looks at her. He's struggling for air, too.

MARTIN WILSON

(wheezing)

Man, kid...
Take care of that stutter.

He stops moving.

Charlene paces back. She is horrified and furious.

She wipes the blood from her hands onto her pant legs.

TRAIN MAN (O.S.)

Are you hurt, kid? Are you hurt,
kid?

A man approaches through the rubble of the wreck.

He doesn't yet notice Martin Wilson on the ground, focused instead on the girl shivering in a bloody t-shirt.

TRAIN MAN

Kid, are you okay?

She doesn't speak. She starts backing away as he takes gaping steps toward her.

TRAIN MAN

You alright?

Now he is standing in front of her.

She tries to say yes, but her lips freeze in position again.

TRAIN MAN

Cat got your tongue, kid?

She kicks his shoe.

She takes off running back across the field.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

The man tries to follow her, but she runs faster. She doesn't look back.

Eventually, the man gives up, hunched over and panting for breath.

As she runs, THREE OTHER TRAIN MEN can be seen approaching the accident.

In the distance, a car parks on the side of the road. We can see a woman - whom we will later recognize as MRS. REESE - getting out to see the wreck.

Charlene doesn't look back or stop running until she makes it home.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Gabe and George sit at the counter, next to a blaring radio.

They loudly sing along to "Pickup Man" by Joe Diffie, competing to mimic Joe Diffie's accent.

GEORGE

THERE'S SOMETHING WOMEN LIKE -

GABE

THERE'S SOMETHING WOMEN LIKE ABOUT
A PICKUP MAN.

Charlene, looking for Hannah, slips past them into

THE LIVING ROOM

where Hannah sits on the couch, legs propped up.

The boys can still be heard competing off-screen.

Hannah blabs with Jackass on her cell phone like it's nothing.

This makes Charlene furious.

Charlene tries to tell Hannah she needs help.

Nothing comes out.

Hannah tries to ignore her.

GABE (O.S.)
YOU CAN SET MY TRUCK ON FIRE AND
ROLL IT DOWN THE HILL
BUT I STILL WOULDN'T TRADE IT FOR
A COUPE DE VILLE

Charlene gestures for Hannah to get up.

Hannah holds up her index finger - *I'm talking!*

Hannah laughs flirtatiously on the phone, avoiding Charlene.

Charlene tries to pull the phone out of Hannah's hands.

The sound of the singing fades.

Hannah resists, still trying to listen on the phone.

HANNAH
(whispering)
Charlene, what on earth?

Hannah notices Charlene's bloody hands.

HANNAH
What happened to you??

Charlene rips the phone out of Hannah's hands.

Hannah tries to grab it back.

HANNAH
What's going on?

Charlene tries to explain. She can't.

HANNAH

What the hell is wrong with you?

CHARLENE

HELP ME.

Charlene grabs Hannah's arm and tries to drag her to the kitchen door, where she came in.

Hannah smacks her hand away.

HANNAH

Don't touch me!! I don't want any gross blood all over me!

Hannah heads straight to

THE KITCHEN

to wash her hands in the sink. The boys have disappeared upstairs.

On the counter, the radio plays obnoxious ads.

Hannah spots the accident out the kitchen window.

The wreck is at the other end of the field, which spans about the length of three football fields end to end.

Hannah stares.

HANNAH

(upset)

Wow... Wow... Wow... Wow...

CHARLENE

Yeah.

HANNAH

Did you call for help?

CHARLENE

I - I... just couldn't.

HANNAH

What's wrong with you?

Hannah swipes the cell phone out of Charlene's hand.

Charlene moves past her into the sink to wash the blood off her hands.

Suddenly, Charlene realizes she left her own phone with Martin Wilson.

She clenches her EMPTY HANDS in the water.

Hannah runs out the kitchen door.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

Hannah runs through the yard toward the accident.

She calls 9-1-1 on her phone. The blood on the phone doesn't seem to bother her anymore.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Gabe and George, still singing, return downstairs with pickle jars. Trix trails behind, also carrying a pickle jar.

The radio ads babble.

They make for the kitchen door.

GABE

I MET ALL MY WIVES IN TRAFFIC JAMS

GEORGE

THERE'S JUST SOMETHING WOMEN LIKE
ABOUT A PICKUP MAN -

Trix slips on the tile floor.

The jar shatters.

A lizard scurries into the corner of the room.

The boys turn around, but Charlene hollers like her mother.

Anger is an exception to Charlene's stuttering - on the rare occasion she's mad, she'll spit words out like fire.

CHARLENE

Watch your feet - you'll step in
the glass! Get outside!

The boys linger in the doorway.

Charlene pulls out the radio plug.

Trix, stunned as young children tend to be in the initial moments of hurting themselves, remains on the floor.

She pulls her little hands up from the floor, which have landed in the broken glass.

Suddenly, she starts to scream-cry.

CHARLENE
(to the boys)
GET OUTSIDE.

They obey.

Charlene picks Trix up carefully out of the glass and carries her to the sink.

CHARLENE
(to the boys)
And put those jars down, somebody
else'll fall!

Trix continues to cry as Charlene turns the water on and picks the little pieces of glass out of her hands.

CHARLENE
Trixie, Trixie.

Charlene sits her on the counter with her hands under the water.

She quickly wets a rag and sweeps up the blood and broken glass left on the floor.

She throws the glass in the trash and returns to tending Trix's hands.

She stares out the window, watching Hannah on the phone with 9-1-1.

Without pulling her eyes from the window, she kisses Trix's little hands.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

Charlene carries Trix on her hip down the hill, the marker of the field's edge closest to their house.

Trix's hands are wrapped in washrags, which are contained inside two ziplock bags, like sloppy boxing mitts.

George and Gabe follow eagerly.

They pass Hannah, who slams the door as she goes back inside the house.

They all perch at the base of the hill, watching paramedics arrive at the wreck. Charlene positions Trix on her lap.

A long silence as they observe the scene in the distance.

GABE

How'd it happen?

CHARLENE

Who knows.

GABE

You do.

A pause.

GABE

I saw you. You came running in with the blood on you.

CHARLENE

No I d-d-didn't.

GABE

You're a liar, Charlene.

CHARLENE

I do not enjoy being called a liar by my own br-br-brother, Gabe.

A pause.

GABE

I read a body language book. You can tell when people's lying if they don't look you in the eye.

Charlene looks at him.

She makes crazy eye contact with him.

He laughs.

GABE
Did he die?

A pause.

We watch the kids from behind as paramedics circle Martin Wilson and perform CPR.

CHARLENE
Maybe it'll happen like Lazarus.
Maybe a m-m-miracle will come and
b-b-bring him back.

Charlene watches intently, so wanting a miracle to happen.

GABE
Did you see him die?

She fixes Trix's makeshift bandage.

CHARLENE
D-d-don't tell. Okay? Both of you.

GABE
What was it like?

Charlene inhales.

GABE
Charlene?

CHARLENE
Two m-m-months ago when Grandpa died, I heard M-m-mom say his eyes opened w-w-wide and he just stared, like there was something hanging on a string in front of him. He cried. She said he saw the light. (Beat.) When M-M-Martin Wilson died, I saw no such thing.

GABE
Probably because he's a drunk.

CHARLENE

P-p-probably.

GABE

Wonder if Judd Wilson will inherit
his booze.

CHARLENE

Let's not talk about J-J-Judd
Wilson.

The paramedics cover the body, place it on a gurney, pack
it into an ambulance.

The kids watch silently.

GABE

Guess he wasn't no Lazarus.

CHARLENE

I didn't have much hope for that.
He wasn't anybody special.

GABE

What were his last words?

GEORGE

I thought that was for gunfights -

GABE

No -

GEORGE

- but they're never really the
last because they always get saved
in time.

They all stare at the ambulance.

GABE

What did Wilson say, then?

A pause.

CHARLENE

I think that's b-b-between him and
me, and God.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Later that night, Mary Anne folds a load of wash.

Charlene helps her mother fold. She is wearing a clean outfit, blood-free. O.S. in the living room, Trix plays with toys.

Russ gets home from work.

MARY ANNE
Russ... You drove by?

He nods, emptying his pockets into the bowl on the table.

MARY ANNE
How bad's it look?

A frustrating pause. She waits for an answer.

RUSS
(dryly)
There's still a few good parts I
can get off that truck.

She slaps him lightly on the face, mad that she's laughing.

She storms into the laundry room.

Russ winks at Charlene and goes to the fridge.

Hannah enters, packing her backpack for school tomorrow.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
(yelling)
Charlene?

CHARLENE
Yeah?

Charlene continues to fold laundry as Mary Anne returns, carrying Charlene's dirty pants and shirt.

It is clear that Charlene had tried to scrub them of blood, unsuccessfully.

MARY ANNE
(to Charlene)
Did you bury these in the wash?

CHARLENE
I-I-I- uh- I-I-I - uh-

MARY ANNE
God, what happened?

Hannah watches Charlene.

CHARLENE
Trix b-b-broke a jar. (Beat.) She
cut her hands up, but I cleaned
it.

MARY ANNE
(to the offscreen Trix)
Dolly, your hand?

Mary Anne goes to the living room.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
Oh oh oh! Why don't you show your
mother your hand?

Russ follows Mary Anne.

HANNAH
(to Charlene, under her
breath)
You better not say a word about
this at school.

CHARLENE
I know.

HANNAH
Not that you talk to anyone,
anyway.

Charlene gives her a bitter look.

Russ reenters, carrying Trix to the counter.

She still has the bags with washrags on her hands.

Mary Anne pulls real bandages from a kitchen cabinet.

MARY ANNE
 (cooing to Trix)
 Dolly, dolly, why don't you show
 your mother your hand?

Mary Anne bandages Trix's hands for real on the counter.

MARY ANNE
 Thank you for looking after her,
 Charlene.

CHARLENE
 I try.

Hannah mouths to Charlene - *yeah, you try, don't you?*

Suddenly, Mary Anne screams.

She climbs up onto the counter with Trix.

A lizard slithers out from around the counter.

Charlene and Hannah both scream.

Russ, unruffled, casually trails the lizard's path across
 the floor.

MARY ANNE
 Did you see it? Did you see it?

In the excitement, Gabe and George come running into the
 kitchen.

MARY ANNE
 Did you see it?

Russ catches the lizard's tail with the toe of his shoe.

He picks the lizard up between a thumb and finger.

He smirks at the boys, holding the lizard.

RUSS
 Bless us oh Lord and these thy
 gifts -

Everyone but Russ screams.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - MORNING

The next morning at St. Boniface Catholic School.

It is a tiny school for a homogeneous rural community, with maybe 20 students in each grade from K-8.

SISTER JULITA, 55, stout and soft-spoken, stands at the front of her seventh-grade class, reading a student's paper aloud.

She is crying.

SISTER JULITA

(reading)

"When I saw the Eiffel Tower... I saw God." (She *inhales*.) Thank you, Jack.

Hannah and Charlene exchange amused looks.

The class gives lukewarm applause.

Hannah spins around in her seat to JACK, 13, who sits behind her.

HANNAH

You've never been past Kentucky.

Jack gestures with a finger - *Hush up*.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

Charlene walks down the hallway toward her locker.

She focuses on the floor, afraid to make eye contact with any passing students.

Her best friend, RUBY GRIES - a.k.a. TAXI - flanks her.

TAXI

So I've been thinking more about my restaurant, with the Best Food You Ever Ate. You can be a cook, if you want.

CHARLENE

Okay.

TAXI

I keep calling about it but you
don't pick up.

Charlene tries to ignore her.

TAXI

I wanted you to know I wouldn't
make you a waitress if you didn't
want to talk to people.

A group of boys walk by Charlene and Taxi.

BOY 1

Charlene, I just wanted to let you
know, you've got a really nice
caboose.

BOY 2

Charlene, this paper hit me like a
freight train.

They bust up laughing and continue walking.

TAXI

(to Charlene)

What's that about?

Though they've passed, they whoop train noises.

BOYS (O.S.)

Hey! Hey, Charlene! It's the *end*
of the line! It's the end of the
line, Charlene!

Charlene arrives at her locker and opens the door like a
shield.

She hides her head behind the door as she unpacks her
stuff.

TAXI

Well... if I can get called Taxi
for my ears, I'm sure it can't be
worse.

She swings her hands out from her the sides of her face,
like taxi doors. Charlene shrugs. Taxi, getting no further
response, heads toward her own locker.

JACK (O.S.)
 (privately)
 Judd Wilson ain't at school today.

Charlene closes the locker door and turns to see Jack, Judd Wilson's best friend, standing behind her in the hall.

He looks Charlene over with a straight, even menacing, face. He speaks in a low voice.

JACK
 Finish him off, too?

Charlene, horrified, tries to ask, *Where did you hear that?*, but her mouth freezes.

Hannah has stopped midway through the hall. She witnessed the interaction, not close enough to hear.

She shoots Charlene a fierce look - *What did you say to him?*

He turns to see Hannah there, and they walk away together.

Charlene exhales, mutters to herself:

CHARLENE
 Jackass.

INT. REESE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

An upscale-looking kitchen with granite and steel.

Charlene unloads the dishwasher as MRS. REESE lays a dress out for Mary Anne on the kitchen counter.

MRS. REESE
 I can't imagine what got into her head, marrying a man from out there. Ohio is the ugliest state that ever was. *(To Charlene)*
 Charlene, if a man ever offers to take you to Ohio, you tell him NO.

MARY ANNE
 I appreciate this, Darla, not a thing in my closet fits anymore -

MRS. REESE
Glad to help a woman in need.

MARY ANNE
I'll get to the ironing tonight.

MRS. REESE
Good. My boys are hurting for it.

Mary Anne tries the dress on, smoothing it out over her pregnant belly.

MRS. REESE
You need shoes, too?

MARY ANNE
She's the sixth - I hope to God not.

MRS. REESE
Hah, right, yes. I just recall my feet swelling up like absolute watermelons. And the boys pushed my ribs completely out of place, I am willing to bet on purpose.

MARY ANNE
Small price to pay for somebody who gets to enjoy the next eighty years.

MRS. REESE
Well, I forget babies are old hat for you.

Mary Anne glances up at her, a little insulted.

She holds a shoe up against her dress, deciding.

MARY ANNE
Shoe sizes - they're just approximations anyway. I can wear two sizes up or down depending how much I like the shoe.

MRS. REESE
(laughing)
You are such a hoot!

She zips Mary Anne up.

Mary Anne exits to looks at herself in the bathroom mirror.

Out the window, the sound of a train lumbering across the railroad tracks.

Mrs. Reese peers out the window.

MRS. REESE
 (calling to Mary Anne)
 Can you believe something of a
 violent nature would happen in our
 own front yard? In a very
proximity to us?

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
 A little too close to home for my
 taste.

MRS. REESE
 Closer to some than others.

She shoots Charlene a sly look.

Charlene quickly looks away, loading the dishwasher.

MRS. REESE
 (to Charlene)
 For goodness sakes, didn't anybody
 teach you how to load a
 dishwasher?

Mrs. Reese rips the forks Charlene has loaded out of the dishwasher and turns them prong-side up.

CHARLENE
 We d-d-don't have a -

Mary Anne returns and undresses.

MARY ANNE
 Just perfect. Thank -

MRS. REESE
 Mary Anne, listen to this child.
Listen to that blubbering. Don't
 you think it's time something's
 done about her problem?

MARY ANNE

What are you talking about?

MRS. REESE

The poor girl needs treatment for her speech impediment.

Charlene looks up from the dishwasher with a mix of horror and excitement.

MARY ANNE

Where did this come from?

MRS. REESE

Mary Anne, I've seen something you're missing -

MARY ANNE

Besides, we tried it once. She started stuttering at five, we put her in a program when she was seven - didn't do her any good.

MRS. REESE

That's two years you wasted.

MARY ANNE

Why are you so hung up on this, all of a sudden?

MRS. REESE

Every year you do nothing, that's years you're wasting. You're wasting her life.

MARY ANNE

That's none of your business.

Charlene fiddles in the dishwasher.

Mary Anne shuts the dishwasher and takes the dress from the table.

MARY ANNE

Thank you for the dress.

Charlene follows Mary Anne out the door, eyeing Mrs. Reese.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: CELEBRITY

Charlene, Hannah, and their parents arrive at the church for the funeral.

Mary Anne wears Mrs. Reese's dress.

The church is semi-busy - the kind of busy expected of unexpected deaths and deaths of young people.

As people file past the church, they pass the closed casket of Martin Wilson at the entrance.

Russ whispers into Charlene's ear:

RUSS
(dryly)
He's never looked better.

LINDA WILSON, the widow, stands just removed from the side of the casket, talking to visitors.

Mary Anne hugs Linda.

MARY ANNE
Oh honey, I'm so sorry.

Linda glances at Charlene as she hugs Mary Anne, then quickly averts her gaze.

LINDA WILSON
(to Mary Anne)
Thank you for dinner, by the way.

MARY ANNE
Oh it's nothing at all.

LINDA WILSON
It was delicious.

JUDD (O.S.)
No it wasn't. It tasted like shit.

They turn to see JUDD WILSON in the corner, leaning against his father's casket. He wears a gray suit which is a little too small for him.

He glares at Charlene through steel-colored eyes.

LINDA WILSON
 Judd! You loved it. Tell her. Tell
 her you ate it for two nights.

Judd continues to glare at Charlene.

LINDA WILSON
 (to Mary Anne)
 He ate it two whole nights.

MARY ANNE
 Oh, Linda, it's a hard time for -

JUDD
 No it ain't. I didn't do it. Why
 should I feel sorry?

LINDA WILSON
 Judd, your nose is all snotty. Go
 get some Kleenexes and wipe your
 sorry, sorry nose, will you?

Judd glares at his mother.

Then exits out the back of the church.

LINDA WILSON
 (confiding)
 I hear him howling in his bed at
 night, like a dog. He don't let
 anybody touch him.

Charlene looks down, pretending not to hear this personal
 information.

MARY ANNE
 Kids, they pull through terrible
 things. They got... resistance.

LINDA WILSON
 I think that's the problem.

The two women continue to talk as Charlene wanders back out
 the door to

THE CHURCH STEPS

where she finds Judd sitting, silently staring at the parking lot.

Charlene paces carefully toward him, as if approaching a rabid dog.

CHARLENE
(quietly)
Are you okay?

Judd turns around and stares at her.

She freezes.

CHARLENE
Judd?

JUDD
(in a mock stutter)
M-m-murderer.

He turns back around.

Charlene stares at him, furious. Should she kick him?

She swerves around and storms back through the church doors.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mary Anne paces into the kitchen, dropping her purse on the table.

The children follow as Russ shuts the door.

Russ notices something out the window.

A sheriff's car pulls into the driveway.

RUSS
Sheriff. That's odd.

MARY ANNE
Outside?

RUSS
Pulling in.

Russ opens the door and looks outside.

MARY ANNE

You think there's a problem?

Without responding, Russ walks into the driveway toward the car.

Mary Anne, Charlene, and Hannah crowd to watch through the window as Russ talks to the SHERIFF.

Russ and the sheriff stand talking in the driveway for a moment, while the sheriff pulls a CELL PHONE in a plastic bag from the console.

He hands it to Russ.

The two men continue to talk.

CHARLENE

(mumbling)

Oh my god.

MARY ANNE

What's that he's got?

HANNAH

It's in a bag.

Charlene turns from the window and walks toward the counter, where Hannah has left her phone.

She looks at the phone.

HANNAH (O.S.)

What do you think he wants?

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

No clue.

HANNAH (O.S.)

You think it's a body part?

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

No!

Hannah gasps.

HANNAH (O.S.)
From Martin Wilson...

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
No... How would -

Charlene moves like a ghost toward
THE LIVING ROOM.

She sits on the couch in horror.

HANNAH (O.S.)
Hound dogs can sniff things out
like that, in fields -

MARY ANNE
No, God, he's putting it in his
pocket -

HANNAH (O.S.)
Dad, gross!!

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
Hush, he's coming.

The sound of the door opening.

Then slowly shutting.

HANNAH (O.S.)
What's going on, Dad?

A silence.

The sound of careful footsteps.

The footsteps grow closer.

Russ appears, in the living room.

Mary Anne and Hannah follow, at a distance.

Russ looks at Charlene.

He hands her the cell phone.

CUT TO:

Mary Anne storms into

THE BATHROOM,

with Charlene following

Mary Anne slams the door. Charlene remains outside.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

Nobody tell me anything that'll
upset me now.

CHARLENE

M-m-mom -

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

Nothing. I've heard enough.

Hannah walks right up to the bathroom door.

HANNAH

I was there when Mrs. Wilson came.
To the accident, I mean.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

WHAT?

Mary Anne's head pops out from behind the bathroom door.

HANNAH

Yeah. After she did all her
crying, they put him in an
ambulance. You should've seen her.
She just took her baby back and
got in the car.

MARY ANNE

That's what she had to do.

Mary Anne shuts the door again.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

What in the hell else was she
going to do?

Mary Anne pops out from the door again.

MARY ANNE

(to Hannah)

What were you doing there?

HANNAH

Well somebody had to call the
police.

Mary Anne stares at Hannah coldly, then glances at
Charlene.

She shuts the door again.

Hannah shrugs and exits.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

What a fine mess this is.
Absolutely.

CHARLENE

M-m-mom?

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

Obviously it isn't your fault, I
mean nobody would think it's your
fault. A little girl. I just can't
believe -

CHARLENE

Mom?

MARY ANNE (O.S.)

Yeah.

CHARLENE

Can I go b-b-back to speech
therapy?

A pause.

Mary Anne comes out of the bathroom, changed into her sweat
clothes.

MARY ANNE

What?

CHARLENE

Speech therapy.

Mary Anne stops to look at her. Then continues walking.

MARY ANNE

Charlene, it's a waste of time and

MARY ANNE (CONT'D)
money, you know that.

CHARLENE
But-but-but I think it might work
this time.

Charlene follows Mary Anne into

THE KITCHEN

as Mary Anne starts folding laundry.

MARY ANNE
Your brain is good, Charlene. Your
mouth just isn't so good at
translating -

CHARLENE
Someone can t-t-teach me -

MARY ANNE
This is your cross to carry. You
just have to carry it and not ask
why.

CHARLENE
But-but-but if I can fix it -

MARY ANNE
How could you see a thing like
that and not tell your mother?
You're just a little girl. You're
not supposed to keep things like
that to yourself.

CHARLENE
I'm sorry.

Mary Anne continues to fold.

MARY ANNE
It sickens me.

CHARLENE
Then help me get therapy.

MARY ANNE
Charlene.

CHARLENE

Mom, I can get b-b-better if amb-
b-b-bition can do it.

A hammering sound from outside.

MARY ANNE

It's just the way God made you,
Charlene.

CHARLENE

But-but-but people change.
Conversions.

MARY ANNE

Not in this kind of way.

The hammering sound.

CHARLENE

J-J-Jesus healed bigger problems
than this. He cured lepers even -

MARY ANNE

Well, they have vaccines for that
now.

The hammering sound.

MARY ANNE

What on earth is that noise?

She looks out the window. She squints.

She gasps.

MARY ANNE

Oh my God.

Charlene runs to look out the window, into

THE FIELD

where a few men in the distance have erected an enormous
WOODEN CROSS, Jesus-sized, at the site of Martin Wilson's
death.

Charlene and her mother stare out the window in disbelief.

Charlene looks at her mother - *my cross*.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: LEPER

During recess, middle school kids play kickball in a field.

CHARLENE (O.S.)

Somebody m-m-made it out of - out
of logs or something. I swear, six
foot.

Charlene and Taxi sit at the edge of the field, watching
the other kids play.

TAXI

That's so weird.

CHARLENE

Like he was J-J-Jesus or
something.

TAXI

Who?

CHARLENE

J-J-Jesus.

TAXI

No, I mean, who did it?

CHARLENE

Oh. I d-d-don't know. It was far.
They left quick.

TAXI

Do you think it was Judd?

CHARLENE

(not wanting to believe
so)

I d-d-don't know.

Taxi gasps.

TAXI

(confidentially)

Jackass.

CHARLENE

What? Why?

TAXI

I don't know. Psychic torture.

From the field, Jack approaches the girls.

TAXI

Is he coming toward us?

He walks directly up to the two girls.

Taxi shoots Charlene a look. She taps her head meaning "psychic," then mimes taking an electric shock.

Jack reaches the girls. He waits until they stand up.

TAXI

What do you want, Jackass?

Jack kicks Charlene, hard, in the shin.

JACK

Judd's coming back to school on Wednesday. He says hey.

She crumples over in pain.

Jack turns and walks away.

TAXI

JACK SCHMIDT! JACK SCHMIDT you ugly, hateful boy! (*Turning back*)
Oh Charlene...

Taxi hunches over Charlene, who cries in the dirt.

TAXI

Maybe not psychic.

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE - DAY

In the nurse's office, SISTER JULITA ices a big, round bruise on Charlene's leg.

SISTER JULITA
 (coaxingly)
 You're sure you *fell*?

Charlene starts to say *absolutely*, gets stuck, tries to substitute, *of course*, but gets stuck on that, too. Eventually she settles on -

CHARLENE
 Yes.

Sister Julita interprets all the hesitation as lying. She leans close to Charlene's face.

SISTER JULITA
 You know that's sin, to lie?

Charlene recognizes the suspicion in her face.

CHARLENE
 I d-d-do not enjoy being called a sinner by my own teacher.

SISTER JULITA
 Everybody sins, Charlene.

CHARLENE
 (dryly)
 You're not all that bad.

Sister Julita cocks her head.

SISTER JULITA
 Is there a problem we can talk about?

CHARLENE
 I can't talk. That's the problem.

A pause.

SISTER JULITA
 I see. (Beat.) Listen, Charlene. I've been praying about you. Yes. I've been praying about you after I heard about all your... concerns.

Charlene looks away.

SISTER JULITA (CONT'D)

I realized you might not approach me yourself, having a difficulty of speaking and all. Which is why I think it's a miracle I find you here today.

Charlene looks at her, ironically.

SISTER JULITA (CONT'D)

I heard in my heart the answer to your problems. Anointing of the Sick, Charlene! The sacrament of healing! Has no one thought of this? Every first Tuesday of the month Father does the sacrament, and *wouldn't you know that is tomorrow to the day?* Miracles happen every day, you know, not just for saints. Jesus healed the blind and the lame and the lepers, and you're right up there with 'em, Charlene, don't you think?

Charlene stares at her, somewhat offended to be lumped into this category.

SISTER JULITA (CONT'D)

I can call your mother this minute. Yeah? Don't you think you could use some healing?

CHARLENE

(hopeful)

You think it really would w-w-work?

Sister Julita grasps Charlene's hands, a little too hard.

SISTER JULITA

Charlene, we are going to get you healed.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Charlene stands in the center aisle of church, in a circle of elderly people, some in wheelchairs.

A CHURCH LADY stands beside an ANCIENT MAN in a wheelchair, whose head has fallen nearly to his lap.

Charlene gawks - *Is he dead?*

Sister Julita stands on one side of her, with her mother on the other.

The PRIEST moves Charlene's hair and marks her forehead with oil, in the shape of a cross.

Then, he marks her hands.

As he marks her, we see his lips move, without hearing the audio. Instead, Charlene imagines George Jones' "He Stopped Loving Her Today:"

GEORGE JONES
HE STOPPED LOVING HER TODAY
THEY PLACED A WREATH UPON HIS DOOR
AND SOON THEY'LL CARRY HIM AWAY
HE STOPPED LOVING HER TODAY

The priest moves down the line of people.

After a moment, Charlene turns her attention from the dying man and watches, strangely inspired by the ritual.

Hopeful, she waits for the priest to finish.

CUT TO:

After Mass, Charlene sits between her mother and Sister Julita in a church pew.

SISTER JULITA
How does it feel, Charlene?

Charlene opens her mouth.

She tries to speak.

Even with the effort, she can't get a word out.

She remains sitting there, speechless.

SISTER JULITA

Now remember, just because it
doesn't work right away doesn't
mean that it's not going to. The
Spirit works in mysterious ways...
Do you feel like a burden's been
lifted?

Charlene looks at her.

CHARLENE

(lying)

Yeah.

Beside them, Church Lady rolls the Ancient Man toward the
exit. His head still dangles.

Charlene observes him, alarmed.

INT. 1988 PONTIAC GRAND AM - AFTERNOON

Charlene and her mother drive home from church in silence.

They pass the giant WOODEN CROSS.

Charlene looks away. She sighs.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Charlene enters the bathroom.

She locks the door.

She turns on a hot bath.

In the tub, she examines the giant bruise on her leg,
propped up on the ledge of the tub.

From outside, Hannah jiggles the old door handle and easily
opens it.

Charlene quickly hides her bruise with a washrag.

CHARLENE

Hey! Privacy!

HANNAH

Oh hush.

Hannah shuts the door.

CHARLENE

At least lock it again.

Hannah locks the door.

Hannah sits on the toilet seat lid.

HANNAH

Are you gonna leave that oil stuff
on your forehead?

CHARLENE

For a little bit. (Beat.) I w-w-
wondered why he didn't p-p-put it
on my throat - that's where the
real p-p-uh p-problem is.

HANNAH

Did he do anything else?

CHARLENE

Absolve my sins, I g-g-guess.

HANNAH

Oh.

CHARLENE

It felt sort of g-g-good, after
all the lying I did this week and
letting M-M-Martin Wilson die.

Through the door, they hear:

GEORGE (O.S.)

Hey, can I get my toothbrush?

HANNAH

(calling to Gabe)

Yeah.

CHARLENE

(calling to Gabe)

No!

GEORGE (O.S.)
What if I'm agile like a raptor?

CHARLENE
(surrendering)
Whatever.

HANNAH
What kind of a sick word is that?

George jiggles the handle and bursts in, screeching a raptor call.

His hand covering his eyes, he runs to the sink and fumbles blindly around for the drawer with his toothbrush.

As he does, Charlene moves the washrag to cover her chest.

Eyes still masked, he takes a toothbrush and runs out.

Hannah notices the exposed bruise.

HANNAH
Oh God - what happened to you??

CHARLENE
I-I-I don't know. Lock the door.

HANNAH
What do you mean, you don't know?

CHARLENE
Lock it.

Hannah locks the door.

HANNAH
How do you get a bruise like that
and not know it?

CHARLENE
I'm telling you, I d-d-don't -

HANNAH
Is what I want to know.

CHARLENE
You know, if I-I-I had to guess
why G-G-God made people stutter,

CHARLENE (CONT'D)

it's be-be-because too many people
talk and not enough listen.

Hannah opens her mouth to speak.

Without knocking, Mary Anne jiggles the handle, walks in
the bathroom, and gathers Charlene's dirty clothes from the
corner.

Charlene quickly hides her leg.

MARY ANNE

Hannah, you getting in next?

HANNAH

Yeah.

CHARLENE

Mom - privacy!

MARY ANNE

Privacy? Privacy? Privacy? (*She
laughs.*) Who in hell do you think
we are - rich? Privacy. Jesus
Christ.

(to Hannah)

I'm putting in a load of whites -
can you give me your shirt?

HANNAH

I'm getting in next.

MARY ANNE

Grandmother is coming tomorrow.
She's visiting for a little while.

HANNAH

Visiting?

MARY ANNE

She wants to help with the baby
coming. She's by herself, you
know, with Grandpa gone.

HANNAH

Grandmother, help?

MARY ANNE

Sometimes you have to help people
by letting them help you. Know
what I mean?

CHARLENE

About tonight, M-M-Mom.

I still think -

MARY ANNE

Charlene, you heard what Sister
Julita said. You've gotta give
Jesus time to... to, I don't
know... ferment.

CHARLENE

Ferment?

HANNAH

Like prison moonshine.

MARY ANNE

What?

HANNAH

Like when prison people pour
orange juice down the toilet and
leave it there for a long time.
And then get drunk on it.

MARY ANNE

(confused)

Where did you learn this?

HANNAH

I saw a documentary.

Through the door, they hear:

GEORGE (O.S.)

Hey, uh, Mom?

MARY ANNE

Yeah?

GEORGE (O.S.)

I grabbed the wrong toothbrush.

MARY ANNE

Well come on in.

Hesitantly, George walks in, holding his hands on his cheeks like horse blinders.

He switches toothbrushes.

He exits.

HANNAH

How long's she staying?

MARY ANNE

Not long.

HANNAH

But where's she gonna sleep?

MARY ANNE

You girls' bed. One of you stays on the couch, the other shares the bed with Grandmother.

CHARLENE

I call couch.

HANNAH

I do!

MARY ANNE

Hey! You both used to love sleeping with Grandmother when you were little.

CHARLENE

But now she's-she's-she's just -

HANNAH

Ancient.

Mary Anne takes the clothes and leaves the room.

Hannah and Charlene sit for a moment together, in silence.

Then, Hannah grabs a glass of water from the sink and pours it down the toilet. She pretends to stir, à la prison moonshine.

Charlene laughs.

HANNAH

Do you think Mom's having a boy or
a girl?

Charlene considers.

CHARLENE

B-b-boy. Even though I want a g-g-
girl. Whenever I want one thing, I
always g-g-get the opposite.

INT. KITCHEN - LATE NIGHT

In the quiet kitchen, Russ takes his billfold from the
cereal bowl of change on the kitchen counter.

Charlene, in pajamas, approaches.

CHARLENE

Dad?

Without turning around, he answers:

RUSS

(in a lilt)

Chaaaarleeene.

CHARLENE

(copying his tone)

Daaaaddy.

Listen. Dad.

W-w-will you help me get speech th-th-therapy?

She waits for an answer.

He pauses. Then continues to sift through his change.

CHARLENE

I asked M-m-mom, and she d-d-
doesn't want to help. She d-d-
doesn't think I can fix it, but
she uh she uh doesn't un-un-
understand how amb-b-bitious I am.
W-w-won't you help? Please?

A long pause.

RUSS

You know what, Charlene? Sometimes
God cripples people for a reason.

For a moment, she stares at him in disbelief, as though
winded.

She notices the radio on the kitchen table.

She swipes the radio and runs out

THE KITCHEN DOOR.

On the front steps, she plugs the
radio in.

For a moment, she sits on the steps, listening. It's George
Jones:

GEORGE JONES

THEY PLACED A WREATH UPON HIS DOOR

-

She flips it off.

Then, she steps into the yard, barely lit by the house's
yellow windows.

She walks to the field's edge and stops.

She stares across the field, at the black silhouette of the
cross.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

SUPERIMPOSE: ANOINTED ONE

Charlene and Taxi sit next to each other in school desks.

Sister Julita holds up pair of rusty railroad spikes to the
class.

SISTER JULITA

This is what the put in Jesus.

She passes the other two railroad spikes around.

SISTER JULITA

The historians think the Romans
stuck 'em through the wrists, that
way they can hold some weight.
Through the hands, it would've
just ripped right through the
bone. See?

She demonstrates the spikes going into the wrist versus the
hand.

Charlene receives a spike.

Judd glares at Charlene from across the room.

Charlene senses his gaze, but pretends to examine the
spike.

SISTER JULITA

You can think about that next time
you see your everyday crucifix.

She passes the other two spikes down the row, then turns to
the chalkboard.

Charlene passes the spike to Taxi.

SISTER JULITA

And after you've gotten a look,
we'll start your test.

Judd raises his hand.

JUDD

Sister, I was just wondering if we
could take a day for prayer.
Because prayer is more important
than work.

She examines Judd for a moment.

He seems completely serious.

SISTER JULITA

(moved)

I am so glad you all are learning
the value of prayer.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sister Julita and her students sit in the empty pews of their church.

Most of them sit with their eyes closed, napping.

A couple pews behind Charlene, Judd sits, again glaring intensely at her.

Charlene peers into her periphery to see Judd, glaring.

She swerves her head back around and squeezes her eyes shut.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Hannah heads toward the parking lot with Jack.

Charlene leads Gabe and George home from school.

A few yards off, Judd trails behind them.

GABE

It's not my fault school was
designed for girls. Girls can sit
still and learn. Boys can't.

CHARLENE

And you don't.

Unaware of Judd, Charlene practices her speech exercise:

CHARLENE

(mumbling)

Th-th-there o-o-o-once was a w-w-
w-woodch-ch-ch-chopper
who uh br-broke his b-b-blade ch-
ch-chopping -

GABE

Yet again bound by the chains of
the educational system -

JUDD

CHARLENE.

They all stop, and turn to see Judd.

Charlene stiffens.

CHARLENE

...Yeah?

He walks up beside her.

JUDD

Heading home?

CHARLENE

Yeah.

JUDD

Me too.

She evaluates him for a second, then looks away.

They all continue to walk in silence.

As they leave the school grounds, they enter

THE WOODS.

Judd lights a cigarette and smokes as they walk.

The rest of them watch with stifled curiosity.

Finally, Gabe breaks the silence:

GABE

(to George)

Did you know it's supposed to be
haunted in here?

GEORGE

Where?

GABE

Here. I don't know what bad thing
happened, but AJ told me today.

A pause.

JUDD

It's haunted all right.

They all look toward Judd, surprised.

GABE

Really?

JUDD

Oh yeah.

GEORGE

How do you know?

JUDD

You walk this way every day and don't hear nothing?

GABE

No.

JUDD

Mmm.

They continue to walk.

GABE

Well what? You saying *you* hear things?

Judd continues walking.

Gabe and George stare at him in shock.

Charlene eyes him, suspiciously.

JUDD

Sometimes... Well.

GEORGE

What.

JUDD

I hear... a chop.

GABE

A woodpecker?

JUDD

Nah, like a tree ready to come down. A woodchop.

Charlene shoots him a look.

A thump. Thump. Thump. Creeaaaak.

GABE

So... somebody's chopping trees?

JUDD

That's the thing. Month ago, I heard it again and followed the sound. Got just as close as you and me, standing. Thump. Thump. Didn't see nothing. (Beat.) You know how they built this town?

GABE

How?

JUDD

Barrelmakers. That's a dangerous job without your... modern sophistication. You cut the wrong angle... Creeeaaaaaak.

CHARLENE

That's not true -

GABE

Ghosts?

JUDD

I don't know about *ghosts*... but something's there alright. Somebody.

Judd demonstrates with a puff of smoke.

They all continue to walk through the woods, but slower, more aware of their surroundings.

CHARLENE

What do you mean?

JUDD

You can feel it... In the air.

CHARLENE

What?

JUDD

The anger. From the last second. It stayed.

GABE

How?

JUDD

Life took from him. Stolen. And
all that angry leaves his body and
goes into the air, like a stain.
And the angry stain stays there,
in the air, till it sticks to
somebody - waiting to stick to
somebody - to whoever's around to
catch it.

Judd stops walking. He looks around the woods as though
sensing something strange.

They all stop.

A tense silence.

A crackling sound from the woods.

They all swerve around to see it.

After a second, Gabe faints.

CHARLENE

Gabe!

Charlene rushes to his side.

CHARLENE

Gabe, wake up! (*To Judd*) Look what
you did, Judd!

A deer bounds off into the woods.

George and Judd watch the deer run.

Judd stomps out his cigarette.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Judd carries Gabe across the field, past the WOODEN CROSS.
Charlene and George follow close behind.

As they pass the cross, Judd glares at Charlene.

She avoids eye contact.

They walk on.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The kids emerge from the field, and Judd carries a limp Gabe to Charlene's front steps.

He sits Gabe down on the steps. Gabe still hasn't woken up.

CHARLENE

(to Judd)

What do we do?

Without responding, Judd unwinds the garden hose from beside the porch and turns the valve.

He sprays Gabe in the face with the hose.

Gabe sputters back to life.

GABE

Aahhhh!

He coughs.

Judd hands her the hose, winks, then turns to walk back across the field.

Charlene watches him go, frustrated but charmed at the same time.

She helps Gabe up.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Through the window, Charlene stares at the GIANT CROSS.

At the counter, Gabe and George eat vanilla ice cream.

Trix approaches them.

TRIX

Can I have ice cream?

GABE

It's not good. It tastes bad. It's
our white-amins.

GEORGE

They're vitamins, they just look
like ice cream.

TRIX

No it's not.

GABE

I guess I have to -

Gabe and George both take bites of the ice cream, letting
it drip out of their mouths like it's disgusting.

They gag.

CHARLENE

Let's take it down.

The boys look up at her.

INT. GARAGE - DUSK

Charlene leads the boys through the garage

GABE

But it's not ours. Isn't that
damaging property? Isn't that a
law?

CHARLENE

It's p-p-public property. Anybody
can do whatever they want with it.

GABE

Where do you hide a thing that
big?

CHARLENE

Tr-tr-trust me.

Gabe looks her over for a moment.

He nods.

Gabe retrieves a HAMMER, then they march into the field.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

As the kids trek, Charlene notices Gabe's blackened hands.

CHARLENE

Gabe - what happened to your
hands?

GABE

Oh, toolbox...

He wipes his blackened hands on his khaki pants.

CHARLENE

Oh my god. Hurry up.

They all increase their pace until they reach

THE WOODEN CROSS by the railroad tracks.

George and Gabe reach for the base. Charlene helps.

GABE

Use your upper body strength.

Upper body strength does not work. It won't budge.

Gabe takes the hammer and swings at the base, over and
over.

CHARLENE

Watch your fingers! Mom will kill
us if you lose a finger.

Finally, the wooden base cracks.

The cross is so tall that when it falls to the side, it
almost knocks Gabe over.

He loses his balance, leaving Charlene to hold the cross by
herself.

Gabe scrambles up.

George and Gabe both reach for the cross.

GEORGE

I want to carry it!

GABE

Nope -

CHARLENE

Stop fighting! One of you gets crushed and that's the second person I killed this month.

George tries to run with the cross over his shoulder, but it's too heavy.

Charlene and Gabe help him by picking up the other end of it.

The image of the children crossing the field looks like a bizarre take on Stations of the Cross.

They don't stop running until they reach

THE EDGE OF THE WOODS, where there is a ditch.

They all pant for a moment, staring at the ditch.

GABE

Since I didn't get to carry the cross by myself, I should at least get to chuck it into the abyss.

George starts to contest, but he's too tired.

CHARLENE

Go on. Are you going to throw it or not?

Gabe tries to pick up the cross.

He fumbles.

GABE

Stand back. I'm gonna throw it.

He tries again.

Charlene sighs, then helps him.

George joins in.

Together, they all heave the cross into the ditch.

They sigh in exhaustion.

Charlene collapses onto the ground in relief.

EXT. REESE HOUSE - DAY

Charlene knocks on Mrs. Reese's door.

MRS. REESE (O.S.)
It's open!

Charlene opens the door and tentatively walks in.

Mrs. Reese stands at the sink, washing TRAVIS, 4.

Travis is naked, facing the window, and he holds a BB gun, which is propped on the window ledge above the sink.

A SHOT.

Mrs. Reese is surprised to notice Charlene.

MRS. REESE
Where's your mother?

Charlene tries to answer, unable to get a word out.

MRS. REESE
(about the boy)
It's the only way I can get him to
keep still. Plus it gets rid of
them ugly blackbirds.

CHARLENE
I think they're pretty.

MRS. REESE
If you think them eating my
songbirds is pretty, I guess so.
They're just like people. Can't be
pretty and good, too.

She holds the gun and pulls his grubby fingers between a wet washcloth.

MRS. REESE
How many weeks till your mama has
that baby?

CHARLENE
Ten, I think.

MRS. REESE
She send you over to cover?

CHARLENE
To save her legs, she says.

Mrs. Reese nods.

MRS. REESE
You real busy over there?

CHARLENE
...What do you mean?

MRS. REESE
Your big family's a lot of work,
isn't it?

CHARLENE
N-n-not really.

Mrs. Reese examines her, not appearing to buy this answer.

Then, she dries off the little boy in the sink.

MRS. REESE
You're a good girl, Charlene.

Charlene pauses, questioning her implication here.

Mrs. Reese lets the boy down. He scampers off in his towel.

MRS. REESE (CONT'D)
The good twin. Did you know I had
a twin, Charlene?

Charlene shakes her head.

MRS. REESE (CONT'D)
My hair always looked exactly like
this - like dead straw - and she
had curls. She sang in contests.

MRS. REESE (CONT'D)

She's sweeter than me but only because of her good fortune. It is what you call an *un-fair* distribution that makes people how they are, and it's the twins like us, the misbegotten twins like us 't work for the little we got.

She fetches Charlene the wash and the ironing board from the laundry room.

Charlene stands in the living room, admiring all the leather.

Mrs. Reese returns with the ironing board and wash.

MRS. REESE (CONT'D)

I'm glad it's you here today, Charlene. (Beat.) I have a little proposal for you.

Charlene begins to iron.

CHARLENE

Pr-pr-pr a what?

MRS. REESE

I'm looking into speech therapy for you.

Charlene looks up.

She tries to continue ironing.

Mrs. Reese digs into a kitchen drawer and returns with a catalogue envelope.

She pulls out a pamphlet from inside.

MRS. REESE

There's a group class - a night class - in the high school. People come from all over the tristate. There's some therapist here...

Mrs. Reese shows Charlene the pamphlet.

MRS. REESE

See here, they call it uh
integrated approach program.
(Beat.) Would you like that?

CHARLENE

I've n-n-never met another st-st-
st-stutterer be- uh be- uh be- uh
fore.

MRS. REESE

Then you'll go.

CHARLENE

My uh my uh my m-m-mother
wouldn't-

MRS. REESE

I'll pay for it.

Charlene stops ironing.

CHARLENE

No.

MRS. REESE

Yes, yes I will and I'll be
pleased as punch to do it.

CHARLENE

Why?

MRS. REESE

We've got to come up with a plan,
to get your mother to let me
sponsor you. We need parental
consent.

She pulls out a form to show Charlene.

CHARLENE

She w-w-wouldn't let me in a m-m-m
in a m-m-m in a ton of years.

MRS. REESE

She will. I just have to teach you
a few lessons in persuasion.

Mrs. Reese settles in on the couch next to Charlene.

Charlene picks the iron back up, distraught.

MRS. REESE

Now the first thing you need to know about making a case is you have to have logical arguments. You have to have logical arguments, and you have to make people believe them. If you can do that, you're halfway to winning your case.

Charlene squints, continues to iron.

MRS. REESE

If that doesn't work, you have to appeal to the *pathos*, which is just the Greek word for making people feel bad.

CHARLENE

I'm not g-g-guiltying my mother.

MRS. REESE

Charlene, this is *your* life we're talking about. Not your mother's. If your mother cares more about her pride than your well-being, then, whose fault is that?

Charlene pauses for a second. This point oddly makes sense.

Mrs. Reese watches her for a moment, then gets up and moves toward the kitchen.

MRS. REESE (CONT'D)

Once you get her on board, I'm sending the check. Deal?

Charlene glances at Mrs. Reese, then quickly returns her focus to the ironing.

CHARLENE

D-d-d uh d-d-deal.

Mrs. Reese smiles at her.

While Charlene continues working, Mrs. Reese lays a 20 down on the kitchen table.

MRS. REESE

I'm paying in cash because I'm never sure if your parents have a bank account.

CHARLENE

(somewhat offended)

They do.

MRS. REESE

Well, you hate to ask those kinds of things. Some people around here - they're still hiding their money under mattresses.

Charlene finishes ironing a shirt.

Reflectively, she hangs it up and starts another.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

SUPERIMPOSE: SHANNON.

Charlene returns home from the Reeses'.

MARY ANNE

Charlene, that you?

CHARLENE (O.S.)

Yeah.

MARY ANNE

Took you long enough. I was about to call over there.

Charlene enters the kitchen to find her GRANDMOTHER hanging up a sign on the kitchen wall.

The sign reads, *No assholes in Jenny's kitchen.*

Mary Anne fixes dinner.

CHARLENE

Gr-gr-grandmother, I d-d-didn't know -

GRANDMOTHER

Hey, skinny-ninny! You'll never

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
get boobs if you stay so skinny.
Fix yourself a snack, Shannon.

CHARLENE
It's Ch-Ch-Ch -

GRANDMOTHER
(screaming)
Gabey! Gabey-boy!

Gabe runs down the stairs into the kitchen. George follows.

GRANDMOTHER
Gabey, does your daddy have any
cigarettes you can round me up?

GABE
He's trying to quit, Grandmother.
He don't smoke them no more.

GRANDMOTHER
He what? That's crazy.

CHARLENE
M-M-Mom, I have s-s-something to
t-t-tell y-y-y-

The grandmother dumps her purse upside down on the counter.

Gabe and Charlene watch a pile of pens, gum wrappers, empty
cigarette packs, and shotgun shells rattle onto the
counter.

GRANDMOTHER
Don't you got any around here?

GEORGE
We got some, Grandmother, they
just ain't any use. We buried 'em
in the woods.

CHARLENE
Listen, M-M-Mom -

MARY ANNE
Yeah?

GRANDMOTHER

What do you mean, you buried them
in the woods?

GEORGE

To make him quit. Mom tells us we
shouldn't, but she doesn't stop
us.

GRANDMOTHER

It is immoral to waste like that.
Go out there and dig me some up.

GABE

But -

Mary Anne turns to the boys.

MARY ANNE

(at her last straw)

Oh, go on out and dig her up some
cigarettes.

The boys exit into the backyard.

CHARLENE

(to Mary Anne)

Mrs. Reese w-w-wants to send me to
th-th- to uh th-therapy.

Mary Anne pauses over the stove.

MARY ANNE

She what?

CHARLENE

She wants to p-p-pay to send me.

GRANDMOTHER

What's all this about?

Mary Anne stares at Charlene, in a look of surprise and
outrage.

The grandmother sifts awkwardly through her purse.

MARY ANNE

That's what she's been up to over
there?

CHARLENE

She wants to p-p-pay. I can go.
The high school -

MARY ANNE

Absolutely not.

CHARLENE

What?

MARY ANNE

No. No! We are not Mrs. Reese's
charity case. (Beat.) The nerve of
that woman. It burns me up.

CHARLENE

But, that's not fair.

MARY ANNE

Well, it's already decided.

CHARLENE

You d-d-didn't even listen -

MARY ANNE

You're not going.

CHARLENE

It's n-n-not about her. It's n-n-
not about y-y-you either -

MARY ANNE

Charlene -

CHARLENE

It isn't fair.

MARY ANNE

Listen -

CHARLENE

You're selfish.

Mary Anne grabs her wrist.

MARY ANNE

(in a low voice)

Hey. I take good care of you,
don't I? Don't I look after you?

MARY ANNE (CONT'D)

Huh? How do you think it makes me feel? your daddy feel? to not be able to give you what you want? Don't we give you what you need, most of what you want?

She lets go of her wrist.

MARY ANNE

Mrs. Reese wants to feel like some...philanthropist. Like she's above everybody else. I will not allow it.

CHARLENE

What for?

MARY ANNE

We are not her charity.

CHARLENE

At my expense.

MARY ANNE

What?

CHARLENE

You can't take her charity at my expense. (Beat.) She was right. You're w-w-wasting my life.

The boys return from the woods.

Gabe hands the grandmother a wet Kentucky's Best carton.

The grandmother pulls out a cigarette and tastes it.

GRANDMOTHER

(mumbling to herself)

Ain't that wet. Woulda been a shame.

She lights up.

Charlene runs upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hannah and Charlene surround Russ as he lays a coin on his fist.

CHARLENE
What if she d-d-dies in bed with me?

RUSS
She's not going to die.

CHARLENE
She might die.

HANNAH
She *is* old.

RUSS
Alright - heads, Hannah wins.
Tails, Hannah sleeps with Grandma
and acts like she likes it.

Hannah and Charlene look at each other. Then give in.

Russ flips the coin.

He covers it with his palm.

Then lifts it.

Charlene's face falls. Hannah celebrates.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charlene in bed with her grandmother.

Charlene lies tensely at the far, far edge of the bed,
almost hanging off.

The grandmother reaches for her and rubs her back.

GRANDMOTHER
Shannon.

CHARLENE
It's Ch-Ch-Ch-Charlene.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, that's right. I remember now,
Charlene. (Beat.) I'm glad I get
to sleep with you in your room
tonight.

CHARLENE

(lying)
Me too.

GRANDMOTHER

Close your eyes. I'll do your
makeup.

Charlene closes her eyes.

The grandmother traces the outline of her face, then her
eyes, then her nose.

GRANDMOTHER

You have such a soft little face.

She traces over Charlene's eyelids.

GRANDMOTHER

I'm giving you blue eyeshadow. For
blue eyes crying... (*She sings*)
Blue eyes crying in the rain.

She traces her fingers on Charlene's lips, pretending to
put lipstick on her.

GRANDMOTHER

Goodnight, Shannon.

Then she falls asleep, her cold fingers resting there on
Charlene's cheek.

Charlene freezes.

She scoots slowly out from under her grandmother's hands,
then watches her chest rise and fall.

Charlene sighs in relief.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Charlene wakes up to the sound of Mary Anne hanging clothes in her closet.

The grandmother has disappeared.

Mary Anne notices Charlene wake up, but continues to hang clothes.

MARY ANNE
(into the closet)
Alright. You can go.

Charlene springs up.

MARY ANNE
But I won't have anything to do
with it.

CHARLENE
Mom!

Mary Anne raises a finger in warning.

MARY ANNE
If it's a complete waste of time
and money, just remember I warned
you. Remember that.

Charlene nods, trying to contain her excitement.

MARY ANNE
And if it's another disappointment
-

CHARLENE
Thank you, Mom.

MARY ANNE
I'm washing my hands of it.

Mary Anne turns into the closet, picking through the hangers.

MARY ANNE
I found you this sweater of mine
to wear to therapy. It's coming
back in style - I think it'd fit
you now.

She shows Charlene the sweater.

MARY ANNE
Sort of cute, don't you think?

Charlene nods, biting her lips.

Mary Anne glances at her.

MARY ANNE
Alright.

Mary Anne turns and exits, awkwardly.

Charlene stares at the ceiling.

She flops back down into her bed, covering her face with the blankets for a silent scream.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: REVOLUTIONARY

In an empty Spanish classroom, MARILYN - the speech therapist - has set up a video camera by the blackboard.

Charlene adjusts herself in a desk.

MARILYN
Are you ready?

Charlene nods.

Marilyn sits beside the video camera and clicks start.

MARILYN
Why don't you say for me your name
and today's date?

CHARLENE
O-o-okay. It's-it's-it's Ch-Ch-
Ch...

She runs out of breath.

She starts over.

CHARLENE
Ch-Ch-Ch-Charlene, and-and-and

CHARLENE (CONT'D)

it's Oct-Oct-Oct um-um Oct-Oct-Oct-October second.

MARILYN

Good. And what does it feel like when you stutter?

CHARLENE

Um. I run out of breath. And... it feels like I-I-I'll never get anything out. It's like I can't do anything about it.

MARILYN

It sounds like you're saying... trapped. Is that the right word?

Charlene fiddles with her fingers. She nods.

MARILYN

What do you hope to gain from speech therapy?

CHARLENE

I d-d-don't want to stutter anymore. I hate stuttering.

MARILYN

What if you could be happy and still stutter?

CHARLENE

That won't happen.

MARILYN

Why couldn't you?

CHARLENE

I d-d-don't like stuttering. It's emb-b-barrassing.

MARILYN

It doesn't have to be. You can choose how you react to your stuttering. We'll get to that later. But right now, we've got to move on.

Marilyn hands Charlene a piece of paper.

MARILYN

Can you read that for me?

Charlene looks, immediately recognizing the exercise.

Marilyn nods, encouragingly.

Charlene takes a breath.

CHARLENE

Th-th-there o-o-once was a w-w-
wood ch-ch-ch-chopper -

She runs out of breath,

CHARLENE

This is going to take forever. Can
I quit?

MARILYN

(smiling)

Nope, I need you to finish it. We
need it for our statistics.

Charlene, frustrated, looks back down at the paper.

A sharp intake of breath.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - NIGHT

A few people sit at cafeteria tables with tiny water
bottles and snacks.

Charlene takes a seat across from a plain-looking boy,
PETE, 17.

PETE

B-b-brutal for you, too?

CHARLENE

(smiling)

Yes.

PETE

It took me eight m-m-minutes to
finish that paragraph.

CHARLENE
T-t-took me nine.

PETE
I'm P-P-Pete.

CHARLENE
Ch-Ch-Ch-

PETE
Names are hard, I know -

CHARLENE
(interrupting)
Charlene.

She looks at him, a little cocky at having interrupted him.

He nods, grinning.

PETE
I t-t-teach a g-g-guitar class.
For little kids.

She gives an exaggerated impressed nod.

He laughs.

CHARLENE
What about it?

PETE
I want to teach, when I'm older,
so I'm tr-tr-trying to get better.

CHARLENE
(trying)
Wh-wh-what a coincidence, I go to
school.

He looks at her, confused.

(recovering)
Uh is it hard? T-t-teaching?

He nods.

PETE
It... feels kinda like acting. (*He
smiles.*) If a kid asks a question
and the answer is too uh d-d-d-

PETE (CONT'D)

difficult to say, like if I'm gonna st-st-stutter all over myself, I ask them questions until they come up with the answer. I feel like uh d- like uh d- like uh d-

CHARLENE

An asshole?

PETE

Yup! That'll do it.

They laugh.

He looks at her, admiring.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Charlene switches books from her locker.

Judd approaches Charlene's locker.

JUDD

Meet me in the graveyard.

CHARLENE

What?

JUDD

Tomorrow. After lunch.

CHARLENE

You m-m-made my brother faint.

JUDD

You made my father die.

CHARLENE

That's not funny.

JUDD

I know.

CHARLENE

And not tr-tr-true.

JUDD

Please?

She examines him for a moment.

He stares at her, his eyes that fanatic steel color.

She nods.

He nods in return. Then walks off.

Taxi slides up to the locker beside her.

TAXI

Two boys? Such a skank.

CHARLENE

I d-d-do not *have two boys* -

TAXI

It's exciting about your therapy.
Now it won't take you forever to
say things. You don't know how
nice it would be to have a
conversation with you. Our
conversations are so one-sided.

CHARLENE

They are n-n-not -

Jack passes.

JACK

(mock stutter)

G-g-go home, T-T-Taxi.

TAXI

(to Jack)

WHY DON'T YOU MAKE ME?

(to Charlene)

Anyway. You think I talk this much
because I want to? No. It would
just be awkward if neither of us
said anything.

Charlene stares at her.

Then shuts her locker.

CHARLENE

I do not enjoy being called a
skank by my own friend.

INT. REESE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Charlene irons Mrs. Reese's laundry in her living room.

Mrs. Reese sits at the kitchen table, eating ham salad on
crackers.

MRS. REESE

So you liked the first couple
classes, did you?

CHARLENE

Y-y-yes.

Mrs. Reese frowns.

MRS. REESE

I'm surprised after eight hours
they haven't done something more
with you.

CHARLENE

We-we-we've done a lot so far.
Speech tools.

MRS. REESE

Why don't you try to use what you
were taught you last night?

CHARLENE

I am.

MRS. REESE

Doesn't sound like it. (Beat.) I
just don't want you wasting this
opportunity. It's once in a
lifetime, really.

A pause.

CHARLENE

Mrs. Reese -

MRS. REESE

Oh for goodness sakes, call me Mom. Or, if that doesn't sound right, call me Mama Reese. (*Thinks it over*) I like that sound of that. Mama Reese.

Charlene hesitates.

CHARLENE

I don't really need another m-m-mother.

MRS. REESE

Of course you don't. This is different - Mrs. Reese is just so formal.

Charlene looks at her.

CHARLENE

All- all- all right... (*awkwardly*) Mama Reese. (Beat.) Why are you d-d-doing this for me? The school?

Mrs. Reese stares at her, kindly.

MRS. REESE

Charlene, you're like me. But troubled.

Charlene hangs up Mrs. Reese's ironing.

CHARLENE

Your ir-r-r-ironing's done.

Mrs. Reese points a figure at her.

MRS. REESE

(sternly)
Concentrate.

Charlene nods, frustrated.

She swipes her money from the counter and exits.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

The speech therapy group exits a van and approaches the entrance of Buehler's Buy Low.

Marilyn leads the group into the store. She speaks to them all as she walks.

Pete follows at Charlene's side.

MARILYN

Now remember, no changing any words. No avoidance. Hold your sheets above them, so they can't read them. If you want to get into a conversation with them, that's fine. But don't forget your techniques. As slow as you need to maintain that feeling of control.

PETE

(whispering to Charlene)
Like marching into battle...

They march inside

THE BUY LOW

where everyone surveys for potential shoppers to speak to.

Charlene notices an OLDER MAN with glasses, looking through the meat fridge.

Pete leans over in Charlene's ear.

PETE

KMAG YOYO.

CHARLENE

What?

PETE

Means, *Kiss M-M-My Ass Guys* -

Charlene laughs.

Y-Y-You're on Your Own.

Pete makes for the produce section.

Charlene watches him go, then approaches the older man.

CHARLENE

Hi, m-m-my name is Ch-

The man swivels toward her, confused.

OLDER MAN

What?

CHARLENE

Ch-Ch-Charlene. My name is
Charlene. W-w-would you m-m-mind
answering a few q-q-questions
about st-st-stuttering?

Confused, he gives a quick survey of the store around him.

He turns back to her and nods his head, vigorously.

CHARLENE

Wh-wh-what do you think causes
stuttering?

CUT TO:

D-d-do you know anyone who
stutters?

CUT TO:

Wh-wh-what w-w-would you do if
your child stuttered?

CUT TO:

Wh-wh-what do you think a p-p-
person should d-d-do to overcome
his or her stuttering?

Older Man looks at her and sighs.

OLDER MAN

You are spreading patience around
the world.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Charlene and Pete sit together in the back of the dark van.
Charlene sits in the middle. FRANK, 55, sits to the other
side of her.

Charlene glances between the window and Pete.

She and Pete listen quietly to the conversation around them:

ANGELA

I read o-o-once that in the uh the uh 1600s th-th-they cut the t-t-tongue out.

QUINN

Wh-wh-what about alcohol?

ANGELA

It m-m-makes m-m-m uh m-m-my speech b-b-better.

QUINN

It m-m-makes m-m-mine w-w-w uh w-w-worse. I r-r-r-really lose control. B-b-bartenders always w-w-walk away anyway. They think I'm dr-dr-dr um that I'm dr-dr-dr um that I'm drunk, and I haven't even o-o-ordered a dr-dr-drink yet.

Pete looks over at Charlene, smirking.

He brushes his hand against hers.

She quickly looks away.

RODNEY

Last w-w-week, I w-w-went up to a g-g-girl at a b-b-bar. I said hello and tried to say m-m-my name, but it um it um w-w-wouldn't come out, so she-she um thought I was a creep. She-she-she called her friend over and th-th-they left.

FRANK

I-I-I was at a r-r-restaurant the other n-n-night, and I-I-I was saying um-um-um... Can I have a um... And she-she-she said we d-d-don't serve ums.

Everyone laughs.

Pete slides his hand onto Charlene's knee. Frank doesn't notice.

Charlene glances down, unsure what to do.

She tries to play it cool, but it scares her a little.

ANGELA

I'm afr-r-raid my kids w-w-will
stutter.

QUINN

I knew a g-g-guy in my other
program who didn't take a pro-pro-
promotion because he'd have to t-
t-talk too much.

Charlene looks at Pete.

RENEE

Once somebody called 9-1-1 on me
because they-they-they thought I
was having a s-s-seizure.

He slips his hand between her knees, slightly up her thigh.

QUINN

Somebody asked me if I had um If I
had Tourette's once.

FRANK

When I was a k-k-kid, my father
used t-t-t-to t-t-tell me to go in
my room and not c-c-c-come out
till I was ready to t-t-talk.

The car goes quiet. They all stare ahead.

After a moment, Pete slowly pulls his hand off Charlene.

She exhales, relaxing.

Renee flips the radio on.

The ads' mindless babble.

INT. 2003 SUV - NIGHT

Mindless ads in Mrs. Reese's car as she drives Charlene home.

The car is newer but messier than Mary Anne's car.

Mrs. Reese plays with the stations.

MRS. REESE
You learn anything?

CHARLENE
Y-y-yes.

MRS. REESE
(fishing)
Yes...?

She glances at Mrs. Reese. She takes a breath.

CHARLENE
I'm s-s-sick of g-g-g uh g-g-
getting my hopes up for stupid uh
r-r-reasons. I'm s-s-sick of
feeling stupid.

MRS. REESE
(fishing)
Feeling stupid...

CHARLENE
(realizing)
Mama Reese.

Mrs. Reese pinches her lips together in approval.

Charlene pushes the door lock back and forth between her thumb and forefinger.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlene enters the living room to find Mary Anne asleep on the couch, waiting up for her.

Charlene watches her sleep for a moment. Then, she sits beside her large belly, gently.

She pets her mother's head.

Mary Anne stirs.

MARY ANNE
Charlene? I'm so glad you're home.

Charlene continues to pet her head.

MARY ANNE
Was your class good?

CHARLENE
Are you r-r-ready to go to bed?

MARY ANNE
Your little feet are always cold.
Here.

Mary Anne tries to grab Charlene's feet, but they're too far over her belly.

She pulls the blanket over Charlene's feet instead.

She can barely keep her eyes open.

Charlene watches her rest.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

SUPERIMPOSE: DRUNK

In the cemetery, Charlene looks around the stones for Judd.

After a moment, she finds him, sitting on top of a gravestone, swinging his legs against it.

Carefully, she approaches.

JUDD
Sit down, kid.

She examines him for a moment. Then sits beside him.

He stares ahead of him.

JUDD
I hear they put you in that therapy shit.

CHARLENE

Well I- um I- um I- um w-w-wanted
-

JUDD

It ain't doing you any good.

He pulls a flask out of his pants pocket and hands it to her.

JUDD

Here. Here's the answer to your problems.

CHARLENE

Wh-wh-what is that?

JUDD

It's uh relaxant... Make you talk smoother. Drink up, we don't got long.

She looks at him, considering.

Then takes a big gulp.

She quivers.

JUDD

(laughing)
You like that?

She smiles at him.

He stares.

JUDD

Have another.

CHARLENE

Uh wh-wh-where'd you get this?

JUDD

The yard.

CHARLENE

What?

JUDD
I used to bury things. Bottles.

CHARLENE
Bury?

JUDD
To hide from my dad. But he always
found the holes 'cause they looked
like little graves.

Charlene drinks.

CHARLENE
I hide my dad's smokes. He knows
he'll die.

JUDD
He wasn't mad. He laughed. I tried
and I couldn't stop him.

CHARLENE
Were *you* m-m-mad?

Judd laughs.

JUDD
You could say so.

He moves closer to her.

When he shifts, Charlene is able to see the stone's
engraving.

It reads: MARTIN WILSON.

CHARLENE
Y-y-your d-d-dad?

JUDD
Yep.

She stares at Judd, disgusted. Then turns to the stone.

CHARLENE
(To Martin Wilson)
Nice to make your acquaintance.

JUDD
Just finish it up.

She finishes off the flask.

Judd puts a hand on her shoulder, intently.

JUDD
Charlene, I need you to tell me something.

She erupts into laughter again.

JUDD
Now listen...

She can't stop laughing.

Suddenly, Judd grabs her face and kisses her.

She stares at him, in a daze.

CHARLENE
I'm just g-g-going to lay down a minute.

She sinks down onto her back.

JUDD
Charlene, are you drunk?

He hovers over her.

You sure as hell better not be drunk.

She closes her eyes on the grass.

He pulls the flask out of her hand.

JUDD
I didn't want you to get drunk.
Charlene?

CHARLENE
I ain't dr-dr-drunk.

JUDD
Get up!

CHARLENE

I'm just g-g-going to lay down a minute.

She giggles.

I'm laying on top of your daddy.

In the distance, Sister Julita approaches.

JUDD

Shit. Oh shit. You gotta get up.
I'll help you -

He tries to pull her up.

CHARLENE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I couldn't help him -

He pauses, surprised.

JUDD

My dad?

Judd tries to prop her up.

JUDD

What about him?

Sister Julita finds them at the grave.

Judd shifts himself to hide Charlene's face.

SISTER JULITA

What are you two doing down here?

She notices the engravement.

SISTER JULITA

Oh... I'm sorry...

She notices Charlene drunk on the ground.

SISTER JULITA

She's... oh my Lord. She is intoxicated. Help me get her up.

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Sister Julita tends to an extremely drunk Charlene.

Charlene lies on the cot, nearly asleep.

SISTER JULITA
Now it's all come up, you'll feel

SISTER JULITA (CONT'D)
better in a hurry.

CHARLENE
(barely audible)
I'm dying.

SISTER JULITA
No you're not.

CHARLENE
I'll die...

SISTER JULITA
No.

CHARLENE
Help me.

SISTER JULITA
You rest now.

CHARLENE
I'm...

She falls silent.

Sister Julita watches Charlene.

SISTER JULITA
Your dad called. Your mother's
having the baby. (Beat.) Did you
hear that?

Charlene has already fallen asleep.

SISTER JULITA
You'll feel better soon. Poor
thing...

She places a damp rag on Charlene's head.

She's out of it.

Sister Julita brushes Charlene's hair.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hannah is fixing eggs in the kitchen, while Gabe, George, and Charlene eat.

Gabe eats with his left hand, awkwardly.

HANNAH

Gabe - are you doing the left hand thing again?

GABE

Yes I am.

Hannah gives an exasperated sigh.

GABE

If you want to fortify your brain against dementia, you have to work the right side of your brain, too, Hannah.

CHARLENE

Y-y-you oughta try that Hannah. Y-y-your brain could use it.

HANNAH

My brain? You're the one in therapy.

CHARLENE

I'm n-n-not the one dating Jackass.

HANNAH

His name is *Jack Schmidt*. And who are you to talk? Getting drunk with Judd Wilson.

CHARLENE

Hey, d-d-don't you -

HANNAH

I'm so sick of you treating Jack like trash. You hate him and you don't even *know* him.

CHARLENE

Tr-tr-treated him like trash? Do you hear what he says to me?

Hannah pauses, thrown off-guard.

HANNAH

Says what?

Charlene stares at her, baffled and furious.

CHARLENE

You don't know? (A pause.) You really don't know? You really don't know?

The door knob opens.

All the kids jump up.

Grandmother enters.

The kids all approach her in anticipation.

She goes straight upstairs.

They hear the door shut.

Russ enters, looking tired.

They all circle him.

HANNAH

Dad! Is it a boy or a girl?

Russ drops his change in the bowl on the counter.

A long pause.

RUSS

Hannah, could you get me a change of clothes?

He sifts through his change.

They wait.

RUSS

Girl.

He turns to the kids, not looking at them.

RUSS

But she didn't make it.

RUSS (CONT'D)

The baby.

He pauses.

It's very sad.

In confusion, they all continue to stare.

RUSS (CONT'D)

She wanted to ask you what her
name should be.

The boys run upstairs.

Hannah and Charlene stare at him.

HANNAH

I like Molly.

CHARLENE

I like Louise.

He sighs.

He pulls out a coin.

Then reconsiders.

RUSS

Molly Louise. She can have both.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Russ smokes reflectively in a lawn chair in the yard.

He listens for cars.

Charlene approaches from inside the house.

She sits in a nearby lawn chair.

They listen.

CHARLENE

What's the reason?

Russ sits for a moment, in silence.

Then, he turns to look at her.

CHARLENE

I get why s-s-sunlight passes. Wh-
wh-why the earth moves. The
science reasons for it. But what's
the reason night should be b-b-
beautiful?

Russ looks at her. Then turns away.

They both listen for cars to pass.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT

Later in the week. The family walks toward the church.

Mary Anne, at the back of the pack, wears Mrs. Reese's dress.

GRANDMOTHER

(consoling)

You won't get to see her grow up,
Mary Anne, but you've had enough
kids to imagine what it might've
been like.

Mary Anne pinches her mouth into a tight crescent shape.

They enter

THE CHURCH

CUT TO:

A number of people offer condolences to Mary Anne and Russ,
who stand by the casket.

In the corner, Charlene, Hannah, Gabe, and George all sit on the church steps.

They watch the grievers, bored.

HANNAH

I broke up with Jack Schmidt.

Charlene glances at her, surprised, then looks back to funeral-goers.

CHARLENE

Yeah?

HANNAH

Yeah... I asked Taxi, about -

She cuts herself off.

Charlene sits in silence, moved.

CHARLENE

I'm s-s-sorry for that time you kissed him and I told M-M-Mom. I o-o-only did it because I was jealous. I w-w-woulda done the same thing.

HANNAH

Thanks.

CHARLENE

Wh-wh-why'd you do it?

HANNAH

You're my sister.

They all stare ahead.

GABE

I wish I could park my body here and do something more fun in my head.

HANNAH

I read about this woman who did meditation and her soul flew out of her.

Linda and Judd Wilson enter the church.

Charlene watches them enter, in her periphery.

GABE (O.S.)
What's meditation?

HANNAH (O.S.)
It's like... praying without
words.

GABE (O.S.)
Like singing?

HANNAH
Yeah.

GABE
She should try putting the words
back in.

Judd catches Charlene's eye.

Abruptly, Mrs. Reese grabs Charlene by the arm.

MRS. REESE
Honey, I'm sorry for you.

CHARLENE
Thanks Mama Reese.

MARY ANNE (O.S.)
What did you call her?

Mary Anne turns and grabs Charlene's shoulder.

MRS. REESE
She was just being friendly -

MARY ANNE
Mama? Is that what she said?
(Beat.) Whose idea was that?

MRS. REESE
It was both of ours.

Mary Anne opens her mouth. Then shuts it.

MRS. REESE
I'm just trying to help -

MARY ANNE
Charlene, don't you ever let me
hear you call her that again.
(to Mrs. Reese)
I'm grateful to you, Darla, but I
will not share her.

MRS. REESE
Now Mary Anne -

MARY ANNE
I WILL NOT share her.

Suddenly, Mrs. Reese and Charlene watch with horror as the grandmother reaches into the casket and picks up the baby.

She cradles it in her arms and pats it.

Mary Anne watches their expressions change, then turns to notice her mother.

MARY ANNE
(horrified)
Lay her back down, Mother.

The grandmother draws Molly to her chest.

GRANDMOTHER
I want to hold her one last time.

MARY ANNE
Give that child to me.

GRANDMOTHER
I'm her grandmother. Leave me
alone.

She rocks Molly back and forth.

MARY ANNE
Mother, I can't believe you. Give
her here.

GRANDMOTHER
I want to hold her.

MARY ANNE

You can't. Now give her back.

GRANDMOTHER

NO.

Mary Anne backs away, trying to preserve a sense of calm.

The grandmother coos to the baby.

After a moment, Mary Anne approaches her slowly.

MARY ANNE

Can I hold her a minute?

The grandmother looks at the baby. Then nods.

Carefully, as if not to wake a sleeping child, she passes the baby back to Mary Anne.

Mary Anne stares at her mother, then places the baby gently back into the casket.

The grandmother sings softly to the baby.

Judd stares at Charlene.

He turns away, stepping outside the church door.

Charlene watches him leave.

Then takes a breath.

She follows him onto

THE CHURCH STEPS

where he sits.

She stands, staring at him like she had at his father's funeral.

JUDD

I'm sorry.

Charlene doesn't respond.

Instead, she sits beside him.

They stare into the parking lot.

CHARLENE

Yeah.

They continue to stare in silence.

JUDD

Somebody took the cross down.

She looks at him. Then glances away.

CHARLENE

Yeah?

JUDD

Yeah. (Beat.) It's like his razor in the shower. I was shaving with it. When I was at school, my mom threw it out. When I wasn't there. (Beat.) Pretty soon everything will start to feel ordinary, all the smoke will lift up. That's sort of sick.

Charlene watches him.

JUDD

Meet me at the edge of the woods. Tuesday, after school. Okay?

Before she can respond, he steps off into the parking lot.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charlene lies in bed with her grandmother.

Again, she rests at the far edge of the mattress.

GRANDMOTHER

Shannon?

CHARLENE

Y-y-yeah?

GRANDMOTHER

Hi, Shannon. (Beat.) I couldn't see you but I could tell it was you by that stutter in your voice.

She pulls Charlene closer and starts drawing circles on Charlene's back with her fingers.

GRANDMOTHER
Guess what I'm drawing.

Charlene considers.

CHARLENE
A rabbit.

GRANDMOTHER
That feels like a rabbit to you?
(She laughs.) I'm not much of an
artist I guess.

CHARLENE
W-w-what is it?

GRANDMOTHER
Guess again.

CHARLENE
Hmm. (Beat.) Draw it one more
time.

The grandmother swashes her hand across Charlene's back -
erasing.

She draws it again.

CHARLENE
I don't know.

GRANDMOTHER
Take a guess.

CHARLENE
A ch-ch-checkerboard?

GRANDMOTHER
I better quit while I'm ahead.
(She laughs.) I'll do your makeup
instead.

Charlene turns. The grandmother draws her eyeshadow.

GRANDMOTHER
It's blue. (Beat.) You're a

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
beautiful girl, Charlene.

Charlene laughs.

CHARLENE
So are you, Grandmother.

The grandmother smiles.

GRANDMOTHER
That poor little girl.

CHARLENE
What?

GRANDMOTHER
(whispering)
Do you hear her? (Beat.)
She's crying.

Charlene stares.

The Grandmother falls asleep.

Charlene watches her, afraid.

CHARLENE (V.O.)
She hung up.

MARILYN (V.O.)
You got a hang-up? Charlene got a
hang-up over here!

The sound of applause.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Marilyn leads the speech therapy group in clapping for Charlene, who holds her cell phone.

The group is paired off at cafeteria tables. Charlene is paired with Pete. On each table lies an open phone book.

Charlene stares at Marilyn, confused.

CHARLENE
W-w-why are we happy?

MARILYN

You did what you needed to. You didn't go back to using fillers like ums and uhs or repeating yourself. You stuck through that block until they hung up.

Charlene nods.

Marilyn crosses to another table.

MARILYN (O.S.)

They hang up on you? Darn, not yet?

CHARLENE

(to Pete)

Can I g-g-go again?

He nods.

She flips through the phone book, lands on a number she likes, and dials.

CHARLENE

(on the phone)

M-m-my n-n-name is Charlene, and I st-st-stutter sometimes. Can you tell me wh-wh-what time you close?

She listens into the phone.

A moment.

CHARLENE

Thanks.

She hangs up. She gawks at Pete.

CHARLENE

They didn't hang up.

PETE

They didn't hang up.

She beams and automatically hugs him.

Then, abruptly, she pulls away.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The sounds of celebration from inside the cafeteria. We hear various farewells - "Keep in touch!" and "Don't forget to call..."

Charlene slips out the door into the parking lot.

PETE (O.S.)
I'll c-c-call to check on you.

Charlene turns.

Pete trails behind her.

CHARLENE
You know wh-wh-what I decided?

He stops.
We-we-we're g-g-going to be
stuttering from r-r-rocking
chairs.

He looks at her.

PETE
KMAG YOYO.

She grins.

He comes closer.

She steps away.

He examines her.

She spots Mrs. Reese pulling into the parking lot.

Pete raises the hand to wave at Mrs. Reese.

For a moment, they look at each other.

Then, Charlene turns and walks into Mrs. Reese's headlights.

CHARLENE
(calling out)
KMAG YOYO.

He raises one hand in a wave.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlene arrives home and crosses into the living room.

Mary Anne lies on the couch, asleep.

For a quiet moment, Charlene watches her.

She feels suddenly on the brink of tears.

She swallows the surge of emotion, then carefully sits beside her mother.

She pets her head. Mary Anne stirs.

MARY ANNE

Give me your cold little feet.

Charlene squeezes onto the couch beside her mother.

Mary Anne squeezes Charlene's cold feet between her legs to warm them up.

Charlene strokes her hair.

For a moment, they are silent.

CHARLENE

I'll do your makeup.

She draws eyeshadow on her mother's eyelids.

CHARLENE

This is blue.

She draws beneath the eyebrow.

CHARLENE

This is gold.

Mary Anne rests, peacefully, with her eyes closed.

MARY ANNE

All my children home again. I'm so
lucky to have all my children
home.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

SUPERIMPOSE: CHARLENE

Charlene meets Judd at the edge of the woods, as promised.

When she arrives, he is leaning against a tree.

CHARLENE

Where are we g-g-going?

JUDD

Come on.

Confused, she follows him through

THE WOODS

for a little while. They trample on.

CHARLENE

Judd -

JUDD

Just keep walking.

CHARLENE

Where are we going?

Judd doesn't answer.

They cross a path of brush, step over a pile of bricks. He appears to know the way, the parts to avoid.

Then, abruptly, he stops.

He pulls Charlene by the hand so that she stops, too.

Then, he leads her forward, carefully, as though approaching sacred ground.

Charlene realizes that they are standing a few feet from

THE TRAIN TRACKS.

Judd climbs onto the tracks and does a little balance walk, one foot in front of the other.

CHARLENE

D-d-don't d-d-do that. Get off

CHARLENE (CONT'D)

there.

He steps further along the tracks.

CHARLENE

Get off there!

He steps down from the rail onto the wooden planks between them.

CHARLENE

You're going to get stuck.

Judd looks at her.

He lights a cigarette, which flickers over his face in the dying light.

CHARLENE

Please. Please get off.

His eyes glint over her like an animal's in the dark.

JUDD

I will. (A pause.) If you tell me what happened.

CHARLENE

What do you mean?

JUDD

Tell me what happened the day my dad died.

Charlene stares at him in disbelief.

CHARLENE

Please. Get off the tracks.

JUDD

Not until you tell me.

She begins to cry.

CHARLENE

You know what happened. You heard it already.

JUDD

I want to hear it from you. I
haven't heard it from you.

Charlene reaches out her hand to him.

He stares at it.

Then he grabs it forcefully.

He pulls her face very close to his.

Charlene gasps.

JUDD

Tell me. What. Happened.

Charlene fights to make eye contact.

CHARLENE

I-I-I was across the f-f-field, I-
I-I was looking for d-d-ditch
lilies. My m-m-mom likes d-d-d-

JUDD

And then what.

CHARLENE

And a tr-tr-tr um a tr-train was
coming. (Beat.) Get off the
tracks.

JUDD

Did you see it?

CHARLENE

I heard a crash.

In the distance, the sound of a train approaching.

They turn toward the sound.

Charlene looks at him, panicked.

CHARLENE

You hear that? Get off.

JUDD

Hear it? I timed it.

CHARLENE
(horrified)
W-w-what?

He smiles at her.

JUDD
I checked the schedules.

CHARLENE
What?

JUDD
To make the train. To make you
talk.

CHARLENE
To -

JUDD
I need to know everything.

Charlene pulls at him frantically.

JUDD
Then what?

CHARLENE
Get off there now.

JUDD
And then what.

CHARLENE
NOW -

Judd clutches her chin in his palm.

JUDD
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.

Charlene stares at him.

The sound of the train grows louder.

CHARLENE
I-I-I ran to the train and there
was your d-d-d

JUDD
Dad.

CHARLENE
Please -

JUDD
And?

CHARLENE
H-h-he was lying there, all-all-
all b-b-b-

JUDD
Bloody.

CHARLENE
He was bre-bre-breathing -

Through the woods, they glimpse the movement of the train.
Charlene gasps.

JUDD
For Godsakes, spit it out -

CHARLENE
I tried to call 9-1-1 but I
couldn't t- I couldn't t- I
couldn't t-t-talk -

The train approaches.

Charlene tries fiercely to pull him, but he is too powerful
for her.

JUDD
And then what.

CHARLENE
I'LL TELL YOU -

JUDD
NOW.

CHARLENE
THEY HUNG UP.

JUDD

AND THEN WHAT.

CHARLENE
I GAVE THE PHONE TO YOUR DAD -

The train's whistle blows, about two football fields away.

JUDD
AND THEN WHAT.

CHARLENE
AND HE TRIED TO TALK -

JUDD
AND THEN WHAT.

CHARLENE
HE WAS DEAD.

The train's brakes screech.

Judd jumps onto Charlene and knocks them both off the track, moments before impact.

As they fall, Judd shrieks in pain.

They lie in the grass beside the tracks for a moment, breathing heavily.

They hold onto the solid ground, catching their breath.

Judd rolls over and pulls his right hand out from his side.

The hand is covered in blood.

Charlene notices the hand and gasps.

Judd pulls at the side of his shorts, which have been torn.

From his right pocket, he pulls out a RAILROAD NAIL.

CHARLENE
Oh my God, what is that?

Judd doesn't respond.

He swipes his bloody hand on his pants and examines the wound.

CHARLENE

Judd?

He licks the wound.

CHARLENE

Don't -

JUDD

I took it from class. When we left
for Church. Sweet Sister. She
don't count right.

Judd rubs the spit from his palm to reveal a long, diagonal
gash.

He stares at it. Then looks down the field along the
railroad.

He laughs.

JUDD

Hell with a cross.

He twists the railroad nail into the wound in his hand.

Charlene gasps in horror.

He holds up his hand to Charlene like priest gives a
blessing, showing off the perfectly round mark.

JUDD

Look. I'm Jesus.

CHARLENE

Stop it.

JUDD

'Cept how many's Jesus got? Five?
Five marks. Two hands, two feet -

Charlene fights him for the nail.

They struggle.

CHARLENE

STOP THAT.

JUDD
Now I'm Jesus -

CHARLENE
Please -

JUDD
I'm Jesus -

CHARLENE
JUDD -

JUDD
- coming for the judgement.

CHARLENE
DON'T -

He turns toward her.

JUDD
You wanna be Jesus, Charlene?

CHARLENE
Please stop -

JUDD
Do you wanna be -

CHARLENE
I TOOK YOUR CROSS.

He freezes.

Charlene rips the bloody nail out of his hand.

He looks at her.

CHARLENE
I took your cross.

JUDD
Where -

CHARLENE
I t-t-took it to -

JUDD
Your house?

CHARLENE
Um I t-t-took it to -

JUDD
The woods?

CHARLENE
Um I t-t-took -

JUDD
Took it -

CHARLENE
DON'T INTERRUPT ME.

He hesitates.

He shuts up.

CHARLENE
You w-w-want your stupid cross?
You scare me. You *can't* scare me.
You have to tr-tr-treat me like a
person.

He waits for his cue to speak.

JUDD
As opposed to...

CHARLENE
What?

JUDD
As opposed to...

CHARLENE
Uh... a dog.

JUDD
I'm a dog.

CHARLENE
You are not.

JUDD
I'm a dog.

CHARLENE
Well I'm a person.

JUDD
Okay.

Charlene looks him over, suspiciously.

JUDD
(gently)
Okay.

They stare at each other, a silent pact.

EXT. WOODS - DUSK

Charlene and Judd stand next to the ditch, where the WOODEN CROSS lies.

Judd circles around the edge, examining.

JUDD
It's rotting now. Figures.

She nods.

Judd jumps down into the ditch and attempts to hoist the cross up himself.

He struggles. He rubs his wounded hand.

The cross arm bends into a strange, contorted angle.

For a moment, Charlene watches him struggle.

CHARLENE
(sharply)
Why do you have to do that?

He swipes his forehead and sighs.

He looks at her.

JUDD
What?

CHARLENE
The cr-cr-cross. The nail.

A pause.

Wh-wh-why?

Judd fingers the wound in his palm.

A long pause.

JUDD

It isn't right, about the crook next to Jesus. The crook's cross next to Jesus. The crook was being punished and Jesus turned it all backwards... He was being punished and Jesus took the sin away, and now the justice is all mixed up. No one can figure what he owes or don't, because now pain and forgiveness is confused. The crook didn't ask for forgiveness. "Remember me." He just asked Jesus to remember.

CHARLENE

He d-d-did.

A pause.

JUDD

I'm bleeding.

Charlene hesitates.

Then, she climbs into the ditch.

She approaches Judd, cautiously, and takes his hand.

CHARLENE

You cut it b-b-bad.

JUDD

Yeah.

She carefully touches the mark. She looks at him.

CHARLENE

You really d-d-do look like a d-d-dog.

She drops his hand.

CHARLENE

You w-w-wouldn't have to. It's the hair.

With his bloody hand, he wipes a strand of hair off her face.

His fingers leaves a weak trail of blood on her forehead.

After a moment, Charlene pulls the railroad nail out from her pocket.

She examines it.

Then, she hands it to Judd. An agreement. He holds it in his palm.

Abruptly, He lunges the nail into the center of the cross, at the place where the beams meet.

Judd backs away from the cross, standing next to Charlene. They observe.

The nail's shadow down the rotting wood makes the nail mark seem to bleed.

They stand, admiring the mark together.

After a moment, they collapse onto the ground.

They lean against the base of the cross in the ditch's center, Judd with one bloody palm outstretched, Charlene with the faint red line on her head.

They sit together, sweaty, breathing in the stillness.

Somewhere, in the distance, the SOUND OF WOODCHOPPING.

They look.

THE END