

Otter

Shana Aparicio

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

MINA, a cherubic and curious four-year-old, marches down the sterile hallway beside Poppy a once beautiful woman in her late sixties, hand in hand. Mina grips a worn-down stuffed otter toy in her free hand, dressed in an immaculate gray and blue uniform.

POPPY

I am important.

MINA

(carefully repeats)

I am important.

POPPY

I am loved.

MINA

I am loved.

POPPY

I am whole.

MINA

I am whole.

POPPY

I am unique and I am special.

MINA

I am unique and I am special.

POPPY

I am safe with my Friends.

MINA

I am safe with my Friends.

They stop in front of a desk, Poppy leans down. She kisses Mina's forehead.

POPPY

I'll see you later for dance, all right, baby? Have a good day. I love you.

MINA

Bye-bye, Mama. I love you!

POPPY

I love you more, Mina girl!

Mina walks into the classroom. She turns around, and blows a kiss. Poppy smiles. THE RECEPTIONIST, a bubbly woman in her early thirties, nods at Poppy. A vase of roses sits on her desk. Poppy nods back.

EXT. POPPY'S HOME - EARLY AFTERNOON

Poppy shuffles into the house and carries grocery bags.

Although stuck in the 80s, the house is well maintained. Above the kitchen table are two picture frames on either side of a marked map. Both photos are covered with decorative dish towels, embroidered with roses.

POPPY

(loudly)

I did the shopping, Jessa. I got some stuff to bake Mina's cake, I figure we can start teaching her how to make some little stuff since she's so fascinated with watching you cook and all that-and I'm not going to tell you again about leaving this damn door open when you go out to the garage, either-

Poppy comes to a halt, her breath hitches.

JESSA, a man in his early seventies riddled with age spots and good stories, sits at the kitchen table next to CARLA, early 20s and handsome, wearing her military chef uniform. Carla smiles, timid.

JESSA

I was going to call ya but she said she wanted it to be a surprise.

CARLA

(rising from the table)

Hi, Mama.

A heavy, still silence.

JESSA

(with a chuckle)

Poppy? She send you into shock that bad?

(to Carla)

I told you she still don't take surprises well.

Carla walks to her mother and embraces her. It is stiff and awkward, but Poppy hugs back. It lacks warmth.

CARLA
(into her shoulder)
I missed you, Mama.

POPPY
(finally)
We missed you around here too, girl.

CARLA
(pulls away)
Daddy told me you were dropping Mina off at school. I was trying to catch you before you left but the cab took a little while longer than I thought it would.

POPPY
That's alright. She doesn't like being late to school, anyhow.
(softly)
Well, I wish you had told us you were coming instead of just showing up.

CARLA
I thought you and daddy were in for a good surprise. And Mina-

POPPY
And a surprise it is! The house is a mess, the guest bed ain't even set up, and Mina won't know what to do with herself with company we're not prepared for.

CARLA
We can do all that later tonight. I hate to make you go right back but...do you think we could sign Mina out of school early?

POPPY
Oh, I don't think so. She's got a good attendance record going on right now and I think she'd be upset if she missed her science class. She really

likes that science class, real good at it, too.

JESSA

The girl's mother is home, Poppy, I don't think one day will hurt.

POPPY

You won't deal with the whining about it, Jessa, I will.

JESSA

She'll only miss but a couple hours.

CARLA

Please, Ma? I can't wait.

POPPY

(hesitating relents)

I'll...Okay. I'll drive us. Jessa put the groceries away. I got frozens in there. Make us some lunch, too, will you please? The baby's going to be hungry and you know how temperamental she gets on an empty stomach. That attitude will talk her into trouble and we don't need all that right before her party.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Poppy signs in a book. She takes a seat before the receptionist's desk. Receptionist arrives with Mina trailing along, still holding the Otter.

RECEPTIONIST

(to Mina)

I told you! Mama's here!

(to Poppy)

She didn't believe me! It took her a minute to pack her stuff up. She kept saying "Mama's here?" She really is a sweet little thing.

Mina rushes to Poppy's side and clutches her hand. Poppy smooths her hand over Mina's braids.

POPPY

Thank you.

RECEPTIONIST

I'll see you Sunday, Mina!

POPPY

Right, we'll see you Sunday. Sub rosa laborat.

RECEPTIONIST

(politely, returning)

Sub rosa laborat.

POPPY

(she tugs Mina's hand)

Come on, girl. We gotta go.

Poppy ambles down the same hallway as the morning, much slower.

POPPY

I have a friend with me, Mina. There's someone sitting in the car. Do you remember Otter?

MINA

Yes.

POPPY

What was that?

MINA

Yes, mama.

POPPY

She's a friend we haven't seen in a while. Do you know what she did?

Just before the double doors, they stop. Poppy leans down the best she can.

POPPY

She gave you that.

(she tugs the toy away)

Mister Otter was her present to you when the Lord first gave you to me. Did you know that?

MINA

(her eyes on the toy)

No?

POPPY

She did. She said that's for Mama's baby, to have and to hold to keep away the bad people.

MINA

(fearful)

Is she going to take Mister Otter!?
Are the bad people going to come?

POPPY

No, baby girl, I won't let her do that. But you'll have to be nice and respectful to her, okay? And stay nice and quiet, as you do with all the strangers, the ones who don't know what to say. She's going to be staying at home with us tonight. For a little while, maybe. But not very long.

MINA

Okay...okay.

POPPY

Are you ready, baby?

Mina nods.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

A well-to-do private school, "SAINT ANTHONY'S ACADEMY" printed on the front.

Mina sticks to Poppy's side as they approach the car. Carla gets down on her knees on the sidewalk, beaming.

MINA

(nervous)

Mama-

POPPY

That's her, baby. That's her.

Carla opens her arms. Mina does not move. Mina stands stiffly between them. Poppy frowns.

POPPY

She's nervous around strangers. You'll have to give her a minute to warm up to you. Mina, say hello.

CARLA
 (on the verge of tears)
 Hi, baby.

MINA
 (stiffly, mumbling)
 Hello.

POPPY
 (nudged Mina)
 Girl, speak up.

MINA
 (louder)
 Hello.

CARLA
 Do you remember me, baby girl?

MINA
 (nods)
 Otter.

CARLA
 (reaching out to touch the toy)
 I see him, baby. Did you miss Mama?

Mina turns to look at Poppy. She looks back at Carla.

MINA
 Hi, Otter.

Poppy nods once.

POPPY
 I think it's the low blood sugar that
 got her all messed up just like her
 daddy. Girl needs her lunch.

INT. POPPY'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy pulls into the driveway and turns the music down.

POPPY
 Mina girl, you can go inside while we
 have a little talk. Tell Pop we'll be
 in there in a minute. Set the table
 for us.

Poppy twists herself to unlock Mina's car seat. Mina hops
 out, takes one last look at Carla, runs off to the front

door.

Poppy and Carla sit in heavy silence.

POPPY

(indifferent)

I told you she's not good around new people. You gotta give her a minute to warm up.

Carla snuffles.

POPPY

She doesn't remember much.

CARLA

(deflated)

I don't know why I expected anything.

POPPY

You got overexcited. It happens.

CARLA

I thought the video messages and recording the bedtime books would all...it would make her feel like I was here.

POPPY

Well, She needs someone to really read them to her. It's helped her reading so much, cause she's not trying to rush her way through the thing. She's got questions she needs to ask, too, that thing is so damn curious!

Carla opens her mouth to speak, closes it.

Beat.

CARLA

I'm going to start having her call you Grannie, Mama.

POPPY

(abruptly)

I think we should leave the way she's talking alone.

CARLA

We can still correct her-

POPPY

Exactly. She's only four. There's still plenty of time to make sure she stays right.

CARLA

I know, Mama, but we can start with baby steps.

POPPY

She's not going to get it. She's so small, and it'll just confuse her. I don't want her confused and telling people things, telling the Friends-
(she stops herself)
She can keep up with Mama and Otter for now.

CARLA

I just-I hate that she doesn't know who I am.

POPPY

Well, you weren't here for very long. Babies don't start remembering that early.

Carla hugs herself and squeezes her eyes shut. Poppy looks forward.

POPPY

She's a smart girl. She'll figure you out soon enough.

Poppy turns off the car. She looks at Carla and raises her eyebrows. Carla wipes her face, and gets out of the car. Poppy observes her walk to the house.

INT. POPPY'S KITCHEN - EVENING

The family and Carla sit to eat dinner. Mina sits between Jessa and Poppy, facing away from the photos on the wall. Poppy closely watches Mina eat.

JESSA

You gotta chew the food, baby. You'll choke on it.

MINA

I am!

POPPY

Watch the tone at my table, girl.

Carla looks at Poppy. Poppy pays her no mind.

MINA

Sorry, Mama.

CARLA

I missed your cooking, daddy.

JESSA

Must be nice having someone cook for you again. How many people did you feed a night, superstar? Four hundred? Five hundred?

CARLA

(nods)

Sometimes. It was all so much when I first got there, it wasn't like fast food. These people needed real food and they needed it to be-

JESSA

Good?

CARLA

Edible. Good wasn't the goal until I managed to stop crying before every shift. It wasn't real cooking, though. Only for holidays, and even all that was canned and frozen and...gray.

Jessa and Carla laugh.

JESSA

A cook-out will do you good. We're going the whole nine yards for Mimi girl's party. A big celebration for our girl's Rose Party, ain't that right, Poppy?

POPPY

Well, you only turn five once.

CARLA

What's a Rose-

POPPY

Church thing.

JESSA

Ooh, you just wait. Big old bash.
Pastor's coming, too. He'll fix us on
up with the-

Poppy taps Mina's plate with her fork, sharply. Carla
flinches. Jessa stops talking.

POPPY

(clears her throat)
It's almost bath and bedtime. Get a
move on.

Poppy stands and collects their plates. She goes to the sink
and turns the water on.

JESSA

Our girl is a good eater, baby. Don't
fuss about the greens or the fruit the
way you used to.

(recalling a memory)

Mmm, you used to cut up over them
greens, girl. Your mother had you at
this table for hours trying to get you
to eat them. Mina puts away some
veggies, though. Prefers them to
chicken sometimes, I think. Right,
Mina girl?

Mina nods at Jessa.

CARLA

Yeah? You like vegetables, Mina?

Mina nods, slides out of her chair, and bounces to Poppy's
side, grips her dress.

POPPY

(orderly)

Stop all that playing, you're going to
make yourself sick.

CARLA

You still make your cup of coffee and
something sweet every night, daddy?

JESSA

You know it.

(leans to her, hushed)

After little miss goes to bed, so she
doesn't see the sweets. She ain't got

a sweet tooth yet but it can't be far off going off how you were.

POPPY

The doctor told him to cut that mess out before he messes up his sugar, but he's hard-headed.

JESSA

I stopped taking so much sugar in my coffee. I get a little extra from my lovely ladies, sweet as they are.

He kisses Poppy, leans down, and taps Mina on the nose.

POPPY

Mina, go get some pajamas out for after your bath.

Mina starts to run down the hallway.

POPPY

(shouting after her)

Don't run in my house! You know better!

JESSA

Aw, don't shout at her. She's just excited, a lot happening for her.

POPPY

She better not be too excited to go to bed. Visitors don't change what she's going to do. Bath, braids, bed.

Carla brings her plate to the sink. Poppy grabs it from her, scraping the leftovers into the garbage.

CARLA

You know, I'm an expert at dishes now. Fast and clean.

POPPY

I like em my way. Go find yourself a seat while your father makes coffee.

Carla sits at the table again, and leans over the back of the chair to face her parents.

CARLA

I can do Mina's hair tonight.

POPPY
She won't like that.

CARLA
Well, I can ask-

JESSA
(at the coffee maker)
Oh, no, no. That girl is very particular about her hair. Poppy done went and got her fixed on her braids and now she won't let anyone else touch it. Threw a whole fit when I tried to comb it for her after a bath.

Silence. Poppy turns the screeching tap, water stops flowing.

MINA
(offscreen)
Mama!

Carla moves to stand.

POPPY
I'm coming, girl!

Poppy walks down the hallway.

INT. BATHROOM - A WHILE LATER

Mina stands on a stool in front of the bathroom vanity and brushes her teeth clumsily. Poppy looms behind her. Carla hovers in the doorframe.

MINA
Done yet?

POPPY
What was that?

MINA
Can I be done yet?

POPPY
Think about it, girl.

Mina looks at their reflection in the mirror, Poppy stands behind her.

MINA
Mama may I be done?

POPPY

(nods)

Rinse out and go get the brush and conditioner, I'll be with you in a second.

Mina spits, Poppy spots Carla in the doorway.

POPPY

I would've thought you were a ghost standing there all quiet.

CARLA

I thought she'd be doing it alone by now. A little bit of independence for her.

POPPY

Well, she's only little and I don't wanna have to deal with cavities already. She's very proud of how good she does it.

CARLA

I'm surprised she didn't cry when you wash her hair.

POPPY

Outgrown it. She loves being clean.
(begins to walk down the hall)
Did you and your daddy have coffee yet?

CARLA

Oh, no, I told him to hold off so I can tuck her in.

POPPY

I'm sure he's heated up some of that lemon poundcake he thinks he's hiding from me in the freezer. You shouldn't let it get cold again, go on.

CARLA

I'll eat cold cake to finally tuck my baby in.

POPPY

(stiffly)

I have to do her hair, so it'll be a minute anyway.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A small room doused in pink and early 2000s decor. Stacks of books, child-sized instruments, and trophies with scratched-out nameplates litter the shelves.

Poppy is perched on the edge of Mina's bed, Mina sits on a pillow on the floor between her knees. Poppy combs her hair and distributes products into it section by section; ritualistic. Carla sits on the floor in front of Mina. Mina clutches a beginner's bible in her hands.

CARLA

Do you always read before bed, baby?

Mina nods, eyes on the book.

POPPY

Otter asked you a question, Mina girl.

MINA

Yes.

POPPY

The Bible keeps our bad dreams away.
 (she leans down, presses a kiss on
 Mina's head)
 You wanna tell Otter what the story is
 about?

MINA

(carefully, with Poppy's
 encouragement)
 A shep-herd has sheep. A lot of them!
 When one of them ran away, he looked
 and looked for it.

POPPY

Come on, you know a bigger word than
 "looked", think about it.

MINA

S...searched?

POPPY

(encouraging)
 Good! He searched for it. When one
 sheep strayed from Jesus' light-

MINA

He lo-

POPPY
Ah, what did we say?

MINA
He searched for it?

POPPY
That's right. To do what?

MINA
(speaks simultaneously with Poppy)
To bring it home?

POPPY
That's right. There you go. To bring
him home.

Carla smiles, almost sad.

CARLA
Grannie used to make me sit up and
pray away the nightmares just like
that.

Mina looks to Poppy, then at the book.

POPPY
(to Mina, an order)
Stop moving.
(to Carla, a hint of condescension)
Well, it worked, didn't it?

CARLA
For a little while, then I grew up. I
started thinking.

POPPY
Well, let's not start thinking about
the bigger picture right before bed,
Mina. You'll scare yourself.

She taps Mina and she stands, clutches Poppy's nightgown.

POPPY
Now tell Otter goodnight.

CARLA
(shifts toward the girl's bed, on
her knees)
I want to tuck her in.

POPPY
You'll disturb her routine and get her
all messed up for the week.

CARLA
Mama, you're right here. I can't be
throwing her off that bad.

POPPY
(sternly)
Mina, tell Otter goodnight.

MINA
(climbs into bed, picks up stuffed
otter, speaks to it)
Goodnight, Otter.

POPPY
(ushering Carla out)
Let us finish her tuck in-

CARLA
I want to be here!

POPPY
(snatches the toy, sharply)
Mina. Tell Otter goodnight so she can
go to bed, too.

A stand-off silence.

POPPY
(quietly)
Step out of my baby's room.

CARLA
No.

POPPY
Say goodnight. Step out.

A moment, daughter yields to mother.

CARLA
(kneels beside Mina, whispers)
Mama loves you, Mimi.

Carla leans in to kiss Mina's head. Mina pulls away and
whines.

MINA

Mama!

POPPY

Step out.

Carla looks her mother in the eyes. Steps out of the room.

Poppy pushes the creaky door closed, and Carla watches through the crack. Poppy struggles to kneel beside Mina's bed, and speaks softly to the child.

MINA

(desperately)

Mama-

POPPY

Don't you worry about her, baby.
Otter's a little cooky sometimes. I'm
not gonna let her do anything to you.

The door creaks. Poppy turns, spots Carla, sighs and shakes her head.

MINA

Mama, stay-

POPPY

No, we talked about this, Mina. You're
too big to be scared of your big girl
bed. What numbers have to be on the
clock for you to call Mama?

MINA

One-one-zero-zero.

POPPY

And what time is that?

MINA

Eleven on the clock.

POPPY

On the dot.

(she kisses Mina's head again,
tucks the stuffed toy under her
arm)

Let me hear your prayer.

Mina crosses her arms over her chest and recites with no trouble.

MINA

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to
the Lord my soul to keep. If I should
like another day, I pray the Friends
to guide my way. Sub...Sub rose-

POPPY

(helping her along, whispers)
Sub rosa laborat.

MINA

(whispers)
Sub rosa laborat.

POPPY

Goodnight, baby girl. I'll see you in
the morning.

MINA

(softly)
Goodnight, Mama.

Poppy smiles at Mina. The smile disappears when she turns to
walk out of the room, blocking Carla's view. Carla stumbles
back slightly, braces herself when her mother shuts the door.

POPPY

You will not use such a tone in front
of my baby. I won't allow it.

CARLA

My baby.

Poppy scoffs, begins to walk down the hallway away from
Mina's room. Carla follows two steps behind.

POPPY

Your baby, is she?

CARLA

I carried her.

POPPY

Do you feed her? Change the wet
sheets, did the diapers and the
bottles and all that in the middle of
the night?

CARLA

You can't put that on me, Mama.

POPPY
And why the hell not?

CARLA
I needed a job. I was too young and
Francesca-

POPPY
Hush up. Before she hears you.

CARLA
We had to do what we had to do.

POPPY
I didn't know you *had* to abandon your
child.

CARLA
(firing back)
I was scared and broke and I wanted to
provide.

Poppy laughs and shakes her head.

POPPY
Do you hear yourself, girl? Provide?

CARLA
I came home and every photo of me on
the wall, on the mantle, was gone.

POPPY
Well, we had to make room for the
baby. I wanted to show her off, and
they're all good photos.

CARLA
Mama-

POPPY
(bulldozing her)
It's not about you anymore. I told
your fast ass that when you got
pregnant. It is not about you anymore.
There is someone bigger in the
picture.

CARLA
It's not about me, is that why I'm a
total stranger to her? Just cause
left?

POPPY

You broke into her routine, the girl's got something about how things need to go every day. We gotta build up. Baby steps.

CARLA

Oh, please, Mama. You know that's bullshit-

POPPY

I will not have you use that language in my house!

CARLA

Why does she call you Mama!

POPPY

What else is she supposed to do? Tell all the kids at school the other woman is off feeding criminals?

CARLA

You can explain things! Kids aren't stupid!

POPPY

(leans close to Carla's face)
She can call me Grannie when you turn back time.

CARLA

This Otter bullshit ends tomorrow. Tomorrow.

POPPY

You use that word one more time in my house and your ass is out on the street tonight. Don't think I won't do it again.

CARLA

It wouldn't surprise me.

POPPY

You don't remember who's in charge here yet, do you? Things are different at home than out in the sand dunes, girl. It will do you well here to remember that sooner rather than later. We got the order here, and the

discipline.

Standoff.

CARLA

I'm not a fucking *girl*.

SLAP.

Carla's face is turned away from Poppy. Her eyes sting with tears. Poppy stands before her, unwilting.

POPPY

I warned you once. I won't warn you again.

Jessa stands at the end of the hallway, coffee cups in hand.

JESSA

Hey now, what've you got going on?

POPPY

She needed a reminder of who she was talking to in this house.

Poppy shuffles off to a room. Carla stands, gathering herself.

JESSA

C'mon down, Carla. Let your mama cool off. Y'know how she is.

CARLA

(softly)

I know.

INT. POPPY'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Jessa sits across the table from Carla. The picture frames observe the portrait.

JESSA

She kick up a fuss?

CARLA

No.

JESSA

I'm surprised. She lets that temper of hers run bedtime sometimes.

Beat.

CARLA

Daddy?

JESSA

(sipping his coffee)

Hmm.

CARLA

What do you tell her about us?

Jessa takes a long sip. Taps on the table.

JESSA

About who?

CARLA

About me.

JESSA

She...we uh...we tell her bits and pieces when she asks.

CARLA

What? What does that mean?

JESSA

You know...not all about you in one go. I'll answer some questions, but not everything at one time. We have to keep things simple for a little thing like her.

CARLA

But she knows what happened, why we went away?

JESSA

We're still trying to figure out how to get her there, baby, I promise we ain't just letting her be led astray.

CARLA

But if you've been telling her bits and pieces and you haven't told her where we went away-

JESSA

So she doesn't get any... off-color ideas, baby.

CARLA
(head in her hands)
She's four.

JESSA
Your mother is just worried is all.
You can't blame her. Things are hard,
aren't they?

A moment. Carla lacks a response, Jessa continues.

JESSA
Look, we got people looking in on us,
asking the baby questions at church.
The Friends still don't know what
exactly went down, but they seem to
love Mina.

CARLA
Christ-she's worried about your
friends?

JESSA
No, no. A while back, Poppy had us
saved. Worked real hard for it, too,
thankfully Pastor's the forgiving
type, he has a community of Friends
following him. Your Mama had us saved,
now we got Friends, too.

CARLA
I didn't realize Mama was willing to
join another church.

JESSA
Yeah, real tight-knight type. I think
it's good for Mimi, she's got other
kids to play with after sessions, and
she's back in Sunday School.

Carla nods slowly, eyes on the table.

CARLA
Sounds familiar.

JESSA
She's worried Mina might go a little
different than the others. Pastor's
strict with the kids now and weeds
them out quick.

Carla raises her head and stares at him. A wondering pause.

CARLA
Does Mina know about us?

JESSA
Sure Mina knows about you.

CARLA
Daddy.
(no line to toe here)
Does Mina know about her mothers?

The floor creaks behind them, slippers shuffle against the linoleum. Poppy clears her throat and emerges from the shadowy hall.

POPPY
You take your medicine, Jessa?

JESSA
(almost relieved)
Yeah, Poppy. Took it after dinner.

POPPY
Did you take your sugar too?

JESSA
(confessing)
160.

POPPY
Well, if I'd've known that, I'd've been waiting on you to keel over and die at dinner.

JESSA
I feel fine, sweetpea.

POPPY
You have that cake tonight anyway?

JESSA
One slice won't kill me, Poppy.

POPPY
You're lucky it didn't take tonight.
Go get your rest. Take some water.

Jessa rises and shuffles to Carla. He leans down to kiss her head but she remains still.

JESSA

It's good to have all my girls in one place. Good on my heart.

He looks between Carla and Poppy, smiles softly, taps his chest. Carla twists her mouth into a small smile. Poppy remains stone-faced. Jessa ambles down the hall.

Poppy stands and stares at Carla's back.

POPPY

Goodnight.

Poppy flicks the light off.

Carla stews. The over oven light dimly shines on the portraits over the table. Carla stares at them. She takes a deep breath, and releases it.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Carla holds her breath and slowly turns a doorknob.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mina rests peacefully in her bed. The stuffed otter lies on the floor beside her.

Carla tiptoes into the room and lifts the toy. She places it beside Mina in the bed. She leans down and presses a careful, feather-light kiss to Mina's head.

CARLA

(whispers)

Goodnight, sweet girl.

Carla makes her way back to the door, silent.

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessa snores in the dark beside Poppy. Poppy lies stiffly on her back, fists clenched. She listens to the creaking, the soft footsteps down the hall away from her. A door closes in the distance. She rises to sit up. She digs around in her bedside drawer, shoving around an open but empty glasses case and miscellaneous junk. Her fingers brush over an empty shotgun shell. She pulls out a small key. Disregards her slippers.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Barefeet pad against the floor. Poppy stands in front of Mina's door. She peeks into the room and mutters to herself. She pulls the door shut, uses the key in her hand, and locks it. She jiggles the knob, nods. Shuffles back down the hallway.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING - NEXT DAY

Poppy lays out Mina's clothes for church, a puffy dress, ruffled socks. Jessa and Mina's voices can be heard down the hallway. Carla enters, well dressed in pants and a blouse. Poppy looks over her briefly.

POPPY

You don't have anything different?

CARLA

(feels over her outfit)
What's the matter with this?

POPPY

We don't wear pants to church.

CARLA

Since when are pants trouble?

POPPY

They get the little ones running around, causing a ruckus, you know. It mixes up the little girls. I can find you something to wear.

Carla nods.

CARLA

I was hoping I could take Mina out for ice cream after service ends? I don't know if you have special rules for sweets on Sundays anymore.

POPPY

That sounds nice. We'll all head to Split's after service when Sunday school lets out.

CARLA

Church and Sunday school? Feels like a

hat on a hat, doesn't it?

POPPY

She needs to listen and learn. Can't just sit there in service daydreaming, it needs to stick this time.

Carla reaches out to pick up the small dress on the bed. Poppy moves first, holds it up.

POPPY

(calling down the hallway)

Mina, come on, we need to get out of here soon, girl!

Mina rushes down the hallway, her hair freshly braided, still in her pajamas. She edges past Carla, hugging Poppy's legs. Carla moves to take the dress again, Poppy pulls away.

CARLA

I can-

POPPY

I'm sure I have something in my closet for you. I need to get her dressed.

CARLA

Mama, I want to help.

POPPY

Mina's not comfortable with strangers in her room while she changes. Ain't that right Mina girl?

Mina nods.

MINA

Stranger danger! Can't touch, can't look!

Carla smiles, a hint of pride.

CARLA

Good girl! Good you know that. I'll be-I'm going to see if Grannie has anything for Mama to wear in her closet.

Poppy nods and Mina watch Carla leave.

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla stands in Poppy's room, changed into a loosely hanging dress of a more mature style. The door creaks behind her, Poppy enters.

POPPY

Well, don't you look nice now?

CARLA

It feels like I'm wearing someone's curtains.

POPPY

They're pretty curtains, don't you think? Keeping in what they need to.

CARLA

I don't think my shoes will go with it, though.

POPPY

Well, let's get you some shoes then.

Poppy bends over and shifts through the closet. A cardboard box sits at the top shelf, the gray of a shotgun barely visible. Carla sits on the edge of the bed, stares at it.

CARLA

That's not safe storage, Mama.

POPPY

(in the closet)

Huh?

CARLA

You got daddy's gun and the ammo just there. It's supposed to be in a safe so kids can't get to it.

Poppy emerges, a pair of shoes in her hand.

POPPY

It's supposed to be for protection. Can't protect us if Jessa's got to remember numbers to get to it. Try these.

She hands them to Carla. Carla struggles to put them on.

CARLA

I don't know if Mina's going to be going to church as much when we leave. These are too tight.

She takes the shoes off and hands them back.

POPPY

Nonsense, I'm sure she'll miss it. They're too tight because you got your daddy's wide feet. Pity about that.

Poppy goes back into the closet.

CARLA

I just don't want half her weekend wrapped up in a stuffy old building. I don't remember a lot of weekends that weren't that.

POPPY

She'll have plenty to remember this time. different church, different people. They engage with the kids to keep them on their paths.

CARLA

(huffs a laugh)

Will they drive the distance to come to take her?

Poppy stands, holding aged Mary Jane heels in her hands. There is a small 'C' embroidered over the strap, roses beside it.

POPPY

See if these still fit.

CARLA

Mama-

POPPY

I don't think anyone will have to drive any distance anywhere. I think Mina's going to stay here.

CARLA

For a little while longer, yes, but I'll be back on my feet soon.

POPPY

Well, Mina's not going to be knocked off her feet if I have anything to do with it. Change is drastic for a kid her age.

CARLA

She's four, she's not going to have any long-standing opinions on moving, I think I'm safe.

POPPY

She'll have those opinions on me and her daddy letting you take her away, I know that. She likes what she has here.

CARLA

Does she know anything else?

POPPY

She knows what a good girl her age needs to know, that's all.

CARLA

Can you tell me what that is?

POPPY

All things appropriate.

Carla rolls her eyes.

POPPY

Curious how you caught an attitude under my roof, of all places.

CARLA

Sorry for being annoyed at your fucking vague answers-

POPPY

Do not swear at me! Not ever, especially not on a Sunday!

Poppy throws the shoes to the floor.

CARLA

Mina and I will be out of your hair soon enough, but, you just-

POPPY
She is going to stay.

Silence. They look at each other, Carla stands rigid.

POPPY
You're real good at doing for
yourself, girl. Do it again, and leave
Mina out of it.

JESSA
(O.S)
Poppy! Carla, come on, girl, we're
going to be late! People to see,
Pastors to talk to!

Poppy looks over Carla's outfit. She nods once.

POPPY
Get those shoes on and get a move on.

INT. CHURCH

In a packed church, sunlight pours in from the large glass windows. Stuffy, the children are restless. Service has been going on for a *minute*. PASTOR, (70s) a fat balding man with a wife half his age, stands at the front of the congregation, preaching.

PASTOR
(absolutely howling)
and it DOES NOT DISHONOR OTHERS, IT
DOES NOT DELIGHT IN THESE NEW EVILS,
IT DOES NOT BACK DOWN AT PROTESTS AND
DOES NOT LET OUR CHILDREN STRAY

Mina wiggles in her seat between Jessa and Poppy, Poppy taps her leg, the girl stills.

POPPY
Pay attention.

PASTOR
AND IT DOES NOT BETRAY US IN TIMES OF
NEED. IN TIMES OF DESPERATION, IN
TIMES OF HOPELESSNESS. LOVE IS THE
THING THAT STANDS STRONG, STANDS AMONG
THE FALLEN, STANDS RIGHT BESIDE HOPE,
AND CLUTCHES ONTO FAITH.

Carla looks around at the crowd; a few overzealous

congregants, squirming children, stiff husbands, and yawning teenagers. One young white man sits at the very front, dressed in his army uniform, ALI.

CARLA
(leans over, whispers)
Mama who's that boy?

POPPY
(fussed, sharply)
Who?

CARLA
In the fatigues, up in front.

POPPY
That's uh...
(she leans over Mina)
Jessa, what's that boy's name? Up in
the front?

JESSA
(struggling to recall)
Hmm? Oh, that's the Clair's boy. Ali
is that one's name, I think. They got
a few girls, that might be one of
their names.

POPPY
That's Ali Clairs. There you go. Now
hush up.

Pastor heaves, patting his shining forehead with a handkerchief.

PASTOR
Now I'll only keep you a few minutes
more, Friends, just a few minutes
more. The first lady of the church got
her announcements for us.

He hobbles off to his chair. FIRST LADY (30s), a well-dressed woman with a husband twice her age, saunters over to the podium.

FIRST LADY
Good afternoon.

The congregation hums a response.

FIRST LADY
I'll be quick y'all, I promise.

Mina taps Poppy.

MINA
Mama-

POPPY
(sharply)
Shh!

Mina recoils. First Lady reads off of a paper in front of her.

FIRST LADY
First up, we have a bake sale, for the
Sunday School's upcoming care boxes
for those refugee children.

Carla leans over and whispers.

CARLA
How long was Ali gone?

Poppy frowns and bats at both Mina and Carla with the rolled-up program in her hand.

POPPY
Both of you hush up.

First Lady continues, grins.

FIRST LADY
And we are lucky and so incredibly
thankful to welcome back one of our
own from overseas. Ali Clair, if you
would just stand up, young man, and
let us see that smiling face again.

ALI (30s) exhausted and stiff stands up, and forces a smile.
He waves to the clapping crowd.

FIRST LADY
I'm sure there is not a woman more
thankful than your mother, to see her
baby home and safe after fighting for
this country.

PASTOR
Mhmm! Fighting for the freedom for us

to meet in here, every week, as a family, taking out all those devils that may try and come at us first.

Ali's parents weep, his father clutches his mother.

Carla's shoulders slump. Poppy smiles at the reunited family.

CARLA

Did you not put my name in?

Poppy leans over, speaks to Jessa.

POPPY

I know Oona missed her son something bad, she'd walk around the market like a ghost waiting for that boy to get home.

CARLA

Mama-

POPPY

(she rolls her eyes)
You're worse than the baby, really.

CARLA

I wanted to know if I should be prepared to stand up.

POPPY

Do you want a ticker-tape parade for shoveling slop onto some plates?

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - LATER

The basement is sterile white, tables with donuts and coffee dot the room, Carla hovers in a corner. Jessa and Poppy talk with Friends, mostly white people of varying ages having lively conversations. They glance over at Carla who pretends not to see them.

PASTOR

Friends, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Our Friend, Ali. Our good Friend brought this man to the hopeless, to the lost souls across the seas committing atrocities, and kept him safe.

They clap. OONA, a frail woman around Poppy's age, presents

Pastor with a woven rose. It's browned blood, the yarn at one point had been white. Pastor takes it, and holds it up above his head, a holy grail.

PASTOR

We have our Chord to thank for this man's safe return.

He looks around the room, his eyes avoiding Carla.

PASTOR

To keep our children safe, to keep our children here, under our watch, where we can aid the Lord in his mission. And will we falter as guardians?

FRIENDS

(as a chorus)

No.

PASTOR

And will we allow ourselves to stray? To lose sight of who it is we are and what we love?

FRIENDS

No.

PASTOR

And will we allow our children to stumble blindly in the darkness, away from all of our helping hands?

Poppy grabs Mina's hand in one and Jessa's hand in her other. Jessa pulls away, and drinks his coffee. The Friends respond in various degrees of forcefulness.

PASTOR

And I won't start preaching to y'all again, I know the little ones get antsy. But I want to remind you all how important these things are. How they are our guiding light in and out of darkness, things we need to fix. In times like Ali's loss and return. Tell me, son, did you keep your cord on you?

ALI

Yes, sir.

RECEPTIONIST appears beside Carla, bright-faced but cautious. Carla startles.

RECEPTIONIST

I didn't mean to scare you-I just-we're in a room full of people.

CARLA

Right. Sorry, I must've zoned out.

RECEPTIONIST

It's nice to see you.

CARLA

Likewise.

RECEPTIONIST

I havent seen you around here before, did you enjoy your first service?

CARLA

It was a little long. Pastor likes to talk, I guess.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sure, he can just drone on and on sometimes. I don't think we've met properly before I'm-

Pastor continues to talk and Carla's attention is being pulled away.

PASTOR

I know we have another Cord Cutting coming up. A special one, one close to my heart.

The Receptionist clears her throat.

RECEPTIONIST

I deal with a million names at work, I'm sorry. Remind me of your name?

CARLA

Sorry. Carla. Mina's mom.

RECEPTIONIST

Mina's mom. Mina's mom who got back from where?

Pastor tugs Mina up into his arms. Poppy claps her hands

together, delighted.

PASTOR

Little Miss Mina's got her birthday coming up, and her mother's made the decision to get this done early, to seal her bond with the Lord and the Friends as soon as possible.

Carla's eyes do not stray from the crowd and her daughter.

CARLA

Uh...Tunisia.

RECEPTIONIST

I've never been.

She inches closer, Carla stands firm in her spot.

PASTOR

Now Poppy's informed me this is a special case. Our girl here is special, she needs extra guiding light at her celebration. She needs all hands on deck, so to speak.

RECEPTIONIST

Does everyone else know you're home?

CARLA

I don't think so. I'm not even sure if they know me.

RECEPTIONIST

I'll make a note for next week to introduce you!

CARLA

Thank you. This is all uh...new.

RECEPTIONIST

Poppy didn't have you up in church as a kid?

CARLA

(she laughs, edging on bitter)
I used to be in this building from seven to two every Saturday and Sunday. Different congregation, though. *This* is all new to me.

RECEPTIONIST

Ahh, I see. Pastor's new. Some kind of traveling man, brought these people from one town to the next and picks them up as he goes.

CARLA

(sarcastic)

Any good pastor flees town as soon as he can.

RECEPTIONIST

It's not like that. He's got an army, kind of. Forged in the image of God first, fine-tuned to the image of Pastor.

CARLA

Somehow Mama skipped telling me all that.

RECEPTIONIST

(tinged with admiration)

Your mother's a sweet woman. A real guiding light for the little ones.

CARLA

So I've heard.

RECEPTIONIST

She really loves that little girl. It's a shame she stopped doing Sunday school, though.

CARLA

(a little bit of bite)

I'm just as surprised.

RECEPTIONIST

Well, you'd be surprised at what some parents do to get as far away from their kids as possible. She walks her to the door every day, wants every second she can get with her.

Carla rubs her face.

RECEPTIONIST

(unfazed)

I'm guessing you have her dress all picked out for her Cord Cutting.

CARLA

We're working on it. Something special, right? Does she have to wear any special color or something?

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, well, I'm sure Poppy's got that handled.

CARLA

I'm hearing all of this through the grapevine.

RECEPTIONIST

Through the grape..cords

She laughs at her terrible humor. Carla observes her family, Mina squeezed between Poppy and Pastor, everyone's heads bowed in prayer.

CARLA

I need a smoke.

EXT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Carla sits behind the church, at a picnic table some distance away. She smokes, and looks over the playground and in the distance, the small cemetery. Children filter out of the backdoors, racing over to the monkey bars and seesaws. An older teenager walks behind them. Mina chases after another child, shrieking. Carla smiles.

Carla walks over, puts her cigarette out on the trash can.

CARLA

Mina! Come here!

Mina looks up from playing, eyes wide.

Carla extends a hand.

CARLA

Come here! We'll be right back, you can go right back to playing.

Mina walks over slowly, takes her hand.

CARLA

I want to take you to meet someone special. Is that okay?

Mina nods, walks beside Carla.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The yard is lush, overrun with flowers and bees buzzing from place to place. Roses line every grave.

Mina and Carla walk to the furthest grave, a worn-down headstone greets them, letters and dates scratched out. A ratty bouquet of flowers sits in front of the headstone. Carla stares for a moment. She sits down, brave-face.

CARLA

C'mere.

Mina sits in her lap, looking at the flowers and bees around them.

CARLA

Do you know who this is?

Mina shakes her head.

CARLA

This is your mother.

Mina looks at Carla, shakes her head.

MINA

Mama's in the church.

CARLA

(she speaks slowly, carefully)
Grannie's in church. Mama's right here, and right here

(she rubs her fingers over the grass, waits for Mina to do the same)

And here.

Carla taps Mina's chest lightly, over her heart.

CARLA

I'm your Mama, Mina. And I know that's a little confusing. Are you confused?

Mina nods, her eyes remain on the grave.

CARLA

Your other Mama died a while ago, when you were really small. She was really

sick. You know what that means?

MINA

That she's in heaven if she was good or in hell if she was bad, like Pastor says.

CARLA

Not necessarily. Sometimes, people aren't good or bad. Sometimes people can't help the way they are, so they hurt a lot. That changes where they go.

Mina shifts and slides out of Carla's lap. On her hands and knees, she feels chubby hands over mutilated lettering.

CARLA

She loves you so, so much, Mina girl. Even if you can't remember her. Her name was Francesca, but people like your Grandma, her Mama, called her Chess.

MINA

Was she a Friend?

CARLA

She was a Friend to me, yes.

MINA

Did Mama like her?

Carla hesitates, Mina turns to look, expectant.

CARLA

She liked her sometimes. She liked me sometimes, too.

MINA

Was she pretty?

CARLA

(laughs)

She was very pretty. She was my very pretty wife, and your very pretty Mama.

MINA

(confusion seeps in)

Mama said girls can't be married oto

girls because then they go to hell.
 And pastor says hell is the place
 where *all* the bad people go, because
 they can't be here.

Carla opens her mouth to speak. Poppy hollers from the church steps. The teenager who was watching the children stands next to her.

POPPY
 Mina! GET OVER HERE!

Mina stands up, runs over to Poppy. Carla watches her run, follows her as she gets closer to Poppy.

EXT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

POPPY
 Now you KNOW you're not allowed outt
 here with the graves. What makes you
 think you could go out there today?

MINA
 Otter said-

POPPY
 I don't give a damn what that girl
 said! You know where you're allowed
 and where you're not allowed. You
 ain't stupid, you ain't a baby!

Pastor pushes his way to the front, his hand rests on Poppy's shoulder.

PASTOR
 Poppy, I doubt any harm has been done
 to the girl. She's so small, any
 malice imparted on her can be
 reversed.

He puts his hand over Mina's head, bows his own head. He begins a quiet prayer as Carla walks up to them.

Poppy tugs Mina close as soon as the prayer ends, lifting her into her arms.

POPPY
 We're not staying. We're going home.
 Jessa-Jessa open the car!

Poppy rushes into the rows of parked cars, way from the

congregation. Jessa follows her, nods for Carla to do so. Carla turns to look at the wall of people. They whisper and stare at her, she turns and walks away.

EXT. CHURCH PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

The park is old, colors faded, hinges creak and scream where rusted. Mina pushes a merry-go-round clumsily, giggles happily. She squeezes the stuffed Otter under her arm. Carla and Jessa sit on a bench, Carla clutches a coffee cup in her hand, Jessa reclines beside her.

CARLA

I can't believe this park still makes it through hurricanes.

JESSA

It's all attached to bedrock, those swings aren't going anywhere any time soon.

CARLA

Yeah, but everything's busted. Creaked up a storm yesterday.

Jessa does not take the bait.

JESSA

Don't make no difference to her.

They sit in silence. Carla sips her coffee, and flexes her fingers.

CARLA

It's just strange to see her on the same swings I was on. I broke my arm on that one.

Jessa laughs, looks over to Carla.

JESSA

You busted your ass so bad jumping off after your mother said not to.

CARLA

(amused)

Everyone else was doing it, and you told me to follow the big kids. I didn't know what else to do.

JESSA

Not make a scene during a coffee with the congregation is what to do. Man,

you came in there bawling-"Daddy!
Daddy, it hurts!" in front of the
whole church.

CARLA

And Pastor Delcan started praying over
me like I was possessed like I didn't
have a bone sticking out of my arm.

JESSA

Well, you know how he was. Pastor Hyde
means well. He's not good with kids,
but they got their little match
friend, so he's happy about that.
she'd always been better with the
little ones.

CARLA

Match friend?

JESSA

(backtracking)

You know, their little friends they
spend time with just like you had.

They watch Mina. She puts the stuffed otter in the baby
swing, starts to push it back and forth.

JESSA

(calls out to the child)

Careful, Mina girl. Don't hit your
head.

Carla focuses intently on Mina.

CARLA

Daddy?

JESSA

Hmm.

CARLA

I need your help with something.

JESSA

And what's that?

CARLA

I need you to trust me.

JESSA
(looks at her)
Well, what do you have cooking that
you're asking all of that, huh?

CARLA
I filed a petition for full legal and
physical custody of Mina.

They sit with it for a moment. Jessa inspects Carla's face.

JESSA
I'll be damned.

CARLA
I appreciate what you and Mama have
done for me for Mina while I've been
gone but it's time. Mina's little, she
requires running around and attention,
and I don't know if you and Mama have
the energy-

JESSA
Your mother loves being a mother,
Carla.

CARLA
You know what, I don't think that's
true anymore, I think she loves
control.

JESSA
Don't go making accusations, girl.
Your mother would move mountains for
you.

Carla heaves a sigh. She watches Mina.

CARLA
I'm not trying to get a one-up on
anybody.

JESSA
I didn't say that.

CARLA
I'm going to get Mina back, and I'm
going to move closer to Odessa. For
us.

JESSA

So you'll take the baby and break your mother's heart?

CARLA

I'll take my baby and make myself a new life, with me and her and Odessa and you.

JESSA

Where does your mother fall into all of this? Where do I?

Carla fiddles with her coffee cup.

CARLA

I'm still deciding on how much she gets to be a part of this.

JESSA

(with disbelief)
Still deciding?

CARLA

Mama said and-and did things that I can't just get over, daddy, as much as I'd like to be civil, sometimes things still whisper in my ear. And now I now for a fact they whisper in Mina's ears. You should've heard the things she said yesterday, it was words from a grown woman coming out of a little girl's mouth.

JESSA

The devil in you, is that what you're upset about? That thing rearing its head again? You put us in a hard place.

CARLA

There is no devil.

JESSA

Pastor-

CARLA

The devil reared its head in our house when Mama told me I was as good as dead to her.

JESSA

You know she was just scared for what people would make you out to be.

CARLA

She spends a lot of her energy telling me what I'm not. I think if she were a mother she'd put her own before others.

JESSA

Don't say that.

CARLA

They never wanted me there, and now, these new people won't even know who I am, will they?

They sit with it a moment. Mina rushes over, the otter left in the swing.

JESSA

What's wrong?

MINA

Water, please!

JESSA

Right, alright.

Mina clambers onto the bench between her mother and grandfather and leans into Jessa's side. She sips from the bottle of water handed to her. Carla pets her hair.

CARLA

What do you think about having a baby to push in that swing, Mimi?

Jessa looks up at Carla, brows raised.

JESSA

Carla-

CARLA

Not any time soon, daddy, just a thought.

JESSA

You're going to settle down for real?

CARLA'S
(eyes on her daughter)
Yep.

JESSA
You'll have another baby?

CARLA
I'm thinking about it.

JESSA
The right way this time?

CARLA
I'm just thinking about it. A little
one for me-I won't miss so many
diapers and late-night feeds this
time.

JESSA
Carla, the right way? The god-fearing
way? No...no drinking and-and a-uh-
turkey baster from a friend-

CARLA
Maybe.

Jessa lights up and faces her excitedly.

JESSA
You'll have yourself a real wedding
and husband and the Friends-

CARLA
No.

Jessa shifts Mina toward him subtly, the girl climbs into his
lap and rests against him. Carla looks up at him, stung.

CARLA
I don't know about the wedding and all
that, but I know I want another baby.

JESSA
I...I uh feel like I've heard this all
before.

CARLA
I know. I know.

JESSA

Don't leave us like this again, girl.
(he taps his chest)
I don't think my heart could take it.

CARLA

I'll have support. And I'll have
somewhere else to be, to stretch my
legs, you know? And you'll be welcome
to visit us, I'll make sure we have
enough space for visitors.

JESSA

What do you mean, support, what
support?

Carla rubs her face, her patience weaning. She takes a deep
breath.

CARLA

Odessa.

JESSA

(he laughs briefly)
She ain't all that good-

CARLA

My alternative is teaching my daughter
phrases straight out of a 1950s
political pamphlet.

JESSA

Oh, don't-

CARLA

She's trapped you in that house,
daddy. Anyone that would look in could
see *that*. The way she talks to you,
tells you what to do-Daddy you'd tell
me to run if I were in that position.

JESSA

Carla. I love your mother.

CARLA

And I love Mina. I won't let her get
stuck in there too.

They sit in silence, Mina snores softly in Jessa's lap.

JESSA

I think we need to take sweet girl
home for a nap.

Jessa stands, and grunts. Carla moves to help him up, he waves her off. He scoops Mina up, and hands Carla the keys.

JESSA

You just go get the car opened up.

They walk down the stone-paved road, and Jessa takes a turn. Carla puts her hand on his arm and guides him the other way.

INT. JESSA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

The car rattles along the road. The brakes screech as Carla drives. Mina sits behind the passenger's seat, still asleep.

JESSA

I have no problems with that woman, I
just don't think she's much of
a...lady.

CARLA

(looking at the dash, absently)
That is having a problem with her,
daddy.

JESSA

I mean the woman's got a reputation,
Carla. Men in and out, she would smell
like red wine when she made it to
church. Even then she's only there
once, twice a year. What's that
called? A laced-a uh...lazy-

CARLA

(eyes flick between the road and
the dash)
Lapsed Christian.

JESSA

Right, right. One of those Poinsettia
and Lily people.

He laughs at the nickname.

CARLA

What's that clicking when I stop?

JESSA
(not hearing her)
Mina needs to be around god-fearing people, she needs that stability. She needs her Friends to keep her straight.

CARLA
Daddy, you been working on this car?

JESSA
(unhearing)
She needs that strict schedule and purity to make sure she does not stray from what God's got her on, and after the party, my girl will be all right. She'll be set.

CARLA
Daddy!

JESSA
(snaps to attention, warning)
Watch that tone.

CARLA
How old are these brakes?

He stammers, and thinks for a moment.

JESSA
I've been meaning to replace them, hadn't gotten around to it. Been trying to get that thing to stop shaking the house when I start the car.

Carla shakes her head and slows the car down. The brakes screech. She continues driving, pickup truck races by.

EXT. POPPY'S GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Carla pulls into the garage. She lifts Mina from her car seat. Jessa opens his arms to take her, and Carla shakes her head.

CARLA
I got her. Can you check those brakes, please? You know you can't trust people down here with bad brakes.

JESSA

I'll get to it, let me put that thing
to bed.

INT. POPPY'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy sits at the kitchen table, stuffing rosaries and
miniature bibles into small paper bags, singing to herself.

JESSA

We made it back, baby. One trooper
down.

POPPY

I figured she'd be all tuckered out by
now. The sun and all that running
takes her down like nobody's business.

Poppy stands. Carla steps toward the hallway.

CARLA

I'm going to put her down, I got it.

Carla leaves. Poppy watches him make a cup of coffee. They
speak in hushed tones.

POPPY

What did she tell you?

JESSA

Hmm?

POPPY

You know that girl always has a plan
she doesn't talk about.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Carla sits on the edge of Mina's bed. She pulls back the
covers. Mina stirs, holds onto Carla tighter, mumbles.

CARLA

It's comfier to nap in bed, baby.
Where's your bonnet-

Mina starts to fuss, mumbles.

CARLA

Mimi, come on-

MINA

No! Mama, no.

Carla freezes. Mina mumbles and makes herself comfortable in Carla's lap. Carla squeezes her and buries her face in Mina's hair.

INT. POPPY'S HOME - SAME TIME

POPPY

What did she tell you at that park, Jessa?

JESSA

We just talked about the baby. Talked a little about what she did while she was gone, too.

He stirs his coffee, Poppy stands at attention behind him.

POPPY

You lying to me under my roof?

Jessa faces Poppy and sips his coffee.

JESSA

I got nothing new for you.

POPPY

(moves back to her bags)
Well, we'll have to have our talk with her, then, about moving on out. Can't squat here anymore.

JESSA

She can't be squatting at home, Poppy.

Poppy looks at him. She scoffs.

POPPY

If you're getting bold and lying to your wife, I hope you'll talk to Pastor tomorrow. I'm sure he can squeeze in a confession before the cutting.

JESSA

I don't think it's that important. It can wait a moment.

POPPY

Everything with you can wait a moment,
huh. Everything just waits with Jessa.

JESSA

Don't go getting into that, sweetpea.

POPPY

One moment to the next moment to the
next moment till he's all laid up in
the bathtub, clutching his chest
trying to call 911, can't hardly
breathe.

JESSA

I held too much in my heart. It got to
me.

POPPY

And that girl got that, too. That's
why she is the way she is, so...so
irrational all the time. Balancing on
a knife's edge in my own house, trying
to make sure my baby stays well and my
husband stays alive.

JESSA

If you got the pain in your chest,
you'd try to run away from it too.

Poppy scoffs.

POPPY

That pain in your chest...you know
what Pastor says about pain like that?
That those like you, who got that
pain, can't be trusted to keep up his
mission. It means the spirit you got
in there

(she pokes his chest)

That spirit knows it ain't good for
much but dying. The little ones can't
feel all that yet, so Mina's getting
matched at her ceremony.

Jessa braces himself on the counter. He looks at Poppy, in
disbelief.

JESSA

Matched? Don't they have to bleed for
that?

POPPY
Special cases ask for special
consideration, and I was called to ask
for it.

CUT TO:

INT. JESSA'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Carla's shoulders rise and fall as she deep breathes, her
hands tremble as she smokes.

CARLA
(desperately)
Don't do it. Please, please, please.
Don't do it.

She rubs her face roughly and sniffs. She counts her breaths,
murmuring. She looks at Mina's school building.

CARLA
Your baby needs you.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Carla stands before the receptionist's desk, shoulders
slouched. She clears her throat, and tries a small smile.

CARLA
Hi.

RECEPTIONIST
(turning from her chair)
Oh-hi!

CARLA
Hi. I'm-I'm Mina's mother?.

The receptionist's eyebrows shoot upward.

RECEPTIONIST
Mina who?

CARLA
...Mina Overton.

She nods slowly, Carla forces her smile to stay put.

RECEPTIONIST
Do you mind showing me a form of ID?

Carla's smile drops for a split second.

CARLA

We just-

Decides against it. She shuffles things in her bag, pulls out her wallet, and hands over her ID. The receptionist pulls out a large book, opens a page, and scans it.

RECEPTIONIST

Right. Miss Overton. You're not on the pick-up list.

Her smile falls.

CARLA

I'm sorry?

RECEPTIONIST

You are not on the pick-up list. You are not registered under a child's name with permission for her to be released into your care.

Beat.

CARLA

Is Poppy Overton?

RECEPTIONIST

I'm afraid I can't give out that information-

CARLA

(overlapping)

-That's my mother-

RECEPTIONIST

-ma'am, I'm sorry-

CARLA

-If you can just give her a call, I'm sure she'll be able to clear things up and release Mina into my care.

Beat. Carla folds her hands on the table.

CARLA

Right. We, you and I, *just* met at church. Mina's my daughter. I've just gotten back from deployment and I want

to have a mommy-daughter day with her
so if you could just...

Carla motions to the phone. The receptionist looks at Carla closely.

RECEPTIONIST
Deployment. Right.
(she hesitates briefly, takes in
Carla's appearance)
Thank you for your service.

They sit in a brief pause, Carla takes a deep breath.

CARLA
Please.

She relents, and sighs.

RECEPTIONIST
Take a seat.

Carla sits on the edge of the chair in the hallway, knee bouncing.

INT. POPPY'S WORK - SAME

Poppy sits at the reception desk in an old school salon, finishing up with a client. BRRRING! The phone on the desk trills.

POPPY
(waving off customer)
Ciara will have you shampooed down
there, honey. Amanda's doing your
coloring.

She lifts the ancient landline to her face to answer.

POPPY
Hello?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

RECEPTIONIST
Hi Miss Overton! I'm calling from
Saint Anthony's on behalf of Mina
Overton-

POPPY

(urgent)

Did something happen? Is Mina alright?

RECEPTIONIST

Mina is just fine, ma'am. I have...

(she lifts the ID)

Carla Overton-Dumaine here.

POPPY

Oh...what does she want? Did Mina forget something?

RECEPTIONIST

No, ma'am. She's asking to sign Mina out of school.

Poppy brow furrows, her fingers curl into a fist around the phone.

POPPY

For what.

RECEPTIONIST

A-um-(she glances at Carla, lowers her voice) A mother-daughter day, she said, ma'am?

Poppy holds her breath.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

I know it's none of my business but an unfamiliar face rings alarms here and I wanted to make sure this was authorized by you before I took any action, especially since I know we're so close to Mina's match and how things may look to outsiders-

POPPY

It ain't.

RECEPTIONIST

Would you like me to call the authorities?

POPPY

No.

(recovering her manners)

No, thank you. I'll be there in a minute to handle it.

END PHONE CALL

Poppy slams the phone down and leaves the salon.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

The receptionist hangs up the phone, and Carla hurries back to the counter.

RECEPTIONIST
(to Carla)
Miss Overton is on her way, ma'am.

Carla's face falls.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy bustles down the hallway, a firm frown on her face. Carla looks up when the shuffling of soles on the floor nears and sits up straight. Poppy bypasses her to counter.

POPPY
Thank you so much for calling first, I appreciate you.

RECEPTIONIST
Of course, ma'am. I'm just doing my job, keeping our little ones safe.

POPPY
I appreciate it, you keeping my baby safe. If you could just give me and her a moment...

The receptionist's eyes widen 'oh', she nods, plasters on a faux smile.

RECEPTIONIST
Coffee break, ladies!

Receptionist exits.

Poppy rounds on Carla, still seated.

POPPY
The hell is this?

CARLA
Mama I'm just trying to sign her out.

POPPY

I don't pay for a goddamn private school for a child to take vacation days. You made me leave work for what, to get her up to some nonsense? I do go to work to pay for all of this, you understand that, right?

CARLA

I thought-I didn't think-

POPPY

You never grew into it, did you? Smart of mouth, not a lick of common sense behind those eyes.

CARLA

I should be able to sign my baby out of school, Mama.

POPPY

Well, it's a lot of paperwork to get you on that list, so, we'll just have to do it this way.

CARLA

Just get me the forms and I'll do it right now.

POPPY

Taking a child home ain't that easy, fool. It's a lot of paperwork to sign and pass on, and a lot of time to have wasted.

CARLA

It won't be wasted! I'll be able to get to her when need to.

POPPY

You won't need to, I know you won't.

CARLA

Mama, I told you I'm staying-

POPPY

I know what you "told" me, and I'm waiting to see it. I'm not going to be squinting at the fine print for an hour just for you to skip town in a week, absolutely not. I am not the one

you got that foolishness from and I
will not be the one to take it.

CARLA

Mama!

POPPY

What the hell do you want her so bad
for now, anyway?

Carla hesitates and Poppy pounces.

POPPY

Girl, you better spit it out after you
wasted mine and that lady's time
coming down here.

CARLA

I'm going apartment looking today.

Poppy scoffs. She inspects Carla's face.

POPPY

You're not serious.

CARLA

I want to see if she likes any of them
and Dess-

Poppy's brows pinch together.

POPPY

You bringing my baby to that woman?

CARLA

Odessa is Mina's grandmother.

Poppy takes a breath to bite back. A delicate feminine cough
from behind interrupts them. They turn.

The receptionist stands behind her desk, a mug of coffee in
one hand and Mina's hand holding her other.

CARLA

Hi baby.

RECEPTIONIST

I went and got her for you two while I
was over there.

MINA
Mama, I'm in science!

POPPY
(sharply)
Cut that whining out.

Mina pouts, looks down.

CARLA
Come on, baby.

RECEPTIONIST
Well, she still needs to be signed
out.

She hands Carla her ID. Carla lifts the pen, she tugs the book to her.

RECEPTIONIST
I'm sorry, signed out by someone on
the pick-up list.

Poppy snatches the pen away, scribbles on the book, and slides it back to the receptionist.

POPPY
(quietly)
Sub rosa laborat.

RECEPTIONIST
(brightly, still quiet)
Sub rosa laborat.

MINA
(a little too loud)
Sub ros-

POPPY
Come on, girl.

Mina trudges over to Poppy, head down. Poppy yanks her hand and she huffs, walking along. Carla walks beside them, a step behind.

INT. POPPY'S CAR - LATER

Carla sits in the passenger seat scrolling on her phone, Poppy drives.

POPPY
You'll ruin your eyes on that.

CARLA
I'm making sure I have the right
address for the place, Ma.

POPPY
It's a one-bedroom in Summerville, how
much help do you need?

Carla clears her throat.

CARLA
Charleston, Mama.

POPPY
What about it?

CARLA
I think Charleston would be a good fit
for me and Mina to move to. It's
a...younger city.

Poppy white knuckle grips the wheel, eyes stay ahead.

POPPY
That woman lives there, don't she?

CARLA
Yeah.

A beat.

CARLA
Dessa agreed, it would be good for
both me and Mina.

POPPY
She don't give anyone who can't give
her something the time of day, and I'm
supposed to pay *her* mind?

CARLA
Grandmothers come in pairs.

POPPY
I don't trust her.

Carla scoffs.

CARLA

You and daddy...you have no reason to not trust her!

POPPY

The Friends don't trust her, and I don't like how she raised that child of hers.

CARLA

Mina's mother.

POPPY

I won't call her that! I won't do it.

Poppy speeds up the car.

CARLA

She's her mother, mama, you have to get over it.

POPPY

She didn't do shit but turn you fast and leave! You can't just give and take these titles!

CARLA

She's her mother! Francesca and I-

POPPY

Don't say her name!

CARLA

FRANCESCA and I are Mina's mothers, and Odessa is her GRANDMOTHER and that's that-

POPPY

I won't have you tainting what it means to be a mother, Carla, I won't have you smearing *those letters* on it!

CARLA

Mama-

POPPY

No! You can't just run off and take my baby from me because all of-just-you can't just decide to be a mother! You can't do it, you're not good! The Friends say so!

Poppy blows through a stop sign. A pickup truck narrowly misses them, the horn blares as it drives past.

Poppy pulls over.

Carla pants, stunned. Poppy takes easy, deep breaths, staring at the wheel. Standoff silence.

POPPY

You can look for your little apartment, but that woman will not take my baby from me. You hear?

Carla nods, stunned, her breathing erratic.

POPPY

You better cut that out and tell me where we're going before I drive us right on home from here.

Carla points, her hand trembles.

POPPY

Fix your face. You have that look just like your father, it makes me sick.

Poppy drives.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CITY OF CHARLESTON

The three sit parked in front of an Italianate-styled building, bright blue paint crackled from weather and charm. Carla gets out of the car, stiff and still slightly trembling.

ODESSA, in her early seventies and Southern old money, sits on the porch swing in front of the apartment, smokes a cigarette. She beams as they arrive, takes off her sunglasses, and puts out the cigarette.

ODESSA

Hi, ladies!

Mina clutches Poppy's pocket. Stranger danger.

CARLA

Hi, Dess.

ODESSA

Oh, honey, my God, am I just so happy you're here.

They embrace, and Odessa clutches Carla in the hug. She pulls back and looks at her face with teary eyes.

ODESSA

(with a watery laugh)

And now you're home! And-and you're trembling? Why are you-

CARLA

I'm just excited about a new place. It already looks promising.

Poppy watches this moment. She bends down, lifts Mina up into her arms and Mina hides her face in her neck.

ODESSA

(cordially)

Hello, Poppy.

POPPY

(stiffly)

Hello.

Poppy and Mina walk toward the pair, Poppy stops several feet away.

ODESSA

Is that big girl my Mimi?

(to the girl)

Oh, hi, honey!

Mina looks at Odessa, a small, shy smile on her face.

MINA

Hi.

Poppy looks at the girl's face and frowns.

ODESSA

Are you ready to pick out your room?
This place has a nice one where you
can fit all your toys!

CARLA

You'll have a big girl bed and
everything, Mimi!

Odessa and Carla walk up the stairs to the house. Poppy waits, her eyes scan over the front of the house. No roses in the withering garden, two stark white lilies. She follows the women up.

INT. NEW HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Odessa, Carla, and Poppy stand in an empty living room of a charming home. Mina rests in Poppy's arms.

ODESSA

It's right in the middle of town, and there are great schools nearby.

CARLA

We saw them letting out while we were getting here. They look really diverse, it wasn't what I was expecting. Or what any of us are used to, really?

ODESSA

Oh, yeah, hon. The neighborhoods are changing. People are realizing we're not all gun-toting, bible-thumping lunatics.

Poppy tuts, Odessa moves past it seamlessly.

ODESSA

If anything happens, I'm right here to run to, and your work won't be too far away.

CARLA

We hope.

ODESSA

Oh, all these hip restaurants are always hiring. Busy bars need tenders, kitchens need chefs, schools need lunch ladies! Wouldn't that be something, you in a hairnet serving the little tykes applesauce?

CARLA

I'll go wherever they have mercy on a vet with a baby. This one's just a survival job.

ODESSA

I don't think she's still a baby. Come on, let me see you, Mimi.

Poppy hesitates but places Mina down. Mina stands but leans back against Poppy's legs. Odessa squats in front of her.

ODESSA

What do you say about Grandma getting you a puppy, huh?

CARLA

(surprised)

You'll have a dog in the house?

ODESSA

Sure! Someone to keep this little one company when she stays with Grandma!

POPPY

She'll be staying with me, actually, we decided.

Odessa looks to Carla, then back at Poppy. Carla opens her mouth to speak.

POPPY

(insistent, trying to regain control)

Mina is staying with me while she gives all of this a try.

CARLA

Well, I haven't decided anything yet.

They stand in still silence, and cicadas hum outside.

ODESSA

Mimi, why don't you and mommy go check out the other room?

Carla offers her hand to Mina. Mina looks up at Poppy. Poppy nods curtly. Mina and Carla exit.

Poppy stares at Odessa, stone-faced.

ODESSA

It's nice to see you again, Poppy.

POPPY

Mmm.

ODESSA

We should see each other more, not just for weddings and funerals. We're a family now.

POPPY

I'd barely call that a wedding.

Odessa takes it in stride.

ODESSA

What our daughters have is special,
Poppy, and even if Chess isn't here.

POPPY

What your daughter had was illness.

ODESSA

What they had was to make do. Look, I
know we're both tough women, but this
baby doesn't belong to just one person
now, does she?

POPPY

Mina is perfectly comfortable at home
with me and her daddy, and the Friends
are all the family she needs.

ODESSA

The Friends...

POPPY

Yes. Our church. The new one.

ODESSA

I always admired your faith, Poppy.

POPPY

Thank you. It's what kept my marriage
strong. I would hope you decide to
join us one day. The Friends are very
welcoming people when they see someone
has noticed the evildoing of their
ways.

ODESSA

I'm sure you'd vouch for me.

(she laughs, Poppy does not)

How is Jessa doing? Thrilled to have
his baby girl home, isn't he?

POPPY

She's only four, she can't get much
farther than school on her own, now
can she?

ODESSA

I don't mean my granddaughter, I meant
Carla.

POPPY

Your?

(she laughs)

Your granddaughter?

ODESSA

Now, Poppy, you know that's not
something to fight about anymore.

POPPY

All she did was manipulate that girl,
and convince her simple-minded self to
go along with it.

ODESSA

Poppy that's not-

POPPY

She put all these plans into that
girl's head, got her barefoot and
pregnant then convinced her to run off
and fight someone else's battles,
which mine couldn't even do! Had the
nerve to blow her own brains out
instead of towing a half-ounce of
responsibility.

ODESSA

You were kicking her out!

POPPY

Because she needed to go to church and
ask for some guidance and beg for the
forgiveness they need! Not have a baby
in an unnatural way and just abandon
her!

ODESSA

They hardly abandoned the baby,
abandoning her would have been leaving
her on the stairs of your church. They
grew up-

POPPY

Well one of them sure didn't make much
of an attempt at it.

ODESSA

How dare you!

POPPY

You putting all these ideas into that girl's head, that she can make it on her own, that she's a mother now. Please. As soon as things get hard she's going to hightail it out of here again, and leave my baby confused and scared.

ODESSA

Have a little faith in something else, Poppy. Have a little faith in what you made.

POPPY

I did. I also know when to give up the act. Maybe if you did, your child would be standing here with you.

ODESSA

Well, who do you blame for the way Carla turned out since you don't want any responsibility for her.

POPPY

She spent all that time at your house, which explains the lack of home training. I'm raising Mina right, and I'm not going to let a fool like her or a snake-like you ruin all of that. My girl's special. She will be different.

ODESSA

I want to help, you're not the only one who sees how special Mina is.

POPPY

No. Your girls were stupid and filthy. Don't talk about my Mina like you talk about them.

ODESSA

Them?

POPPY

She was almost normal before she met your daughter. She was...she was

regular. She was almost good. She could have been corrected.

The floorboard creaks behind them. Carla stands in the doorway, Mina on her hip, no sign she heard. Poppy looks between the two of them frantically.

POPPY

Put her down, she don't like to be carried like that.

CARLA

(softly, rocking Mina)
She got tired.

POPPY

I said put her down, dammit, she don't need to be carried by you!

The cicadas buzz outside. Carla bends down and attempts to put Mina down. Mina whines, gripping Carla's shirt.

Poppy bustles over and snatches Mina up with her hands like a rag-doll.

POPPY

Enough of that whining today. She's tired, we are going home.

Poppy turns to Odessa. They share a look. Poppy strides out, Mina in her arms.

INT. POPPY'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy speeds down the highway, stone-faced and staring straight ahead, iron grip on the wheel. Carla sits beside her in the passenger seat, chewing her lip.

CARLA

I can provide for my child.

Her words fall on deaf ears.

CARLA

I'm using what I learned.

Poppy does not acknowledge her.

CARLA

Dess said those places in the city always need chefs, so I'll have work.

We'll have a roof over our heads.

POPPY

Mmmh.

CARLA

And it's not fair that you think you know what's best for Mina exclusively when you should be the second opinion, at most.

POPPY

I don't see you coming up with any solid solutions.

CARLA

I just told you-

POPPY

That is a game you are trying to get me to play! That's a fairytale that works for one, something you tell a child when you can't think of anything else!

CARLA

Give me the chance, then!

POPPY

You can try everything you want to, but try it on your own! Try it by your damn self, where you won't put *my* child at risk!

CARLA

She is NOT YOUR CHILD!

POPPY

She sure as hell ain't yours!

Poppy stomps on the break. Carla grips the handle and console. Mina's car seat jerks and slides forward, teeters on the edge of the seat. She begins to cry, startled awake.

She presses the gas, and pulls off of the road to the shoulder.

CARLA

For fuck's sake, Mama!
(she turns to Mina)
Her seat isn't even in right!

POPPY

She don't usually sit there because
the belt doesn't always hold it. I got
to remind Jessa to change it again.

Carla clumsily exits her side of the car. In the split second
she's out, Poppy clicks the lock button on her side. Carla
attempts to pull open the door.

CARLA

(from outside)

Mama, open it up!

Poppy stares forward and briefly takes her fingers off the
lock button. She taps the gas. Carla knocks on the window,
Poppy clicks the button again. The door opens, she crawls
into the car and unbuckles Mina from the seat.

POPPY

Just put her back, let her get herself
settled.

CARLA

(indignant)

No!

She holds Mina close, draped across her lap. Her cries die
down. Poppy begins to drive, much slower than before.

POPPY

Listen to me.

Carla does not acknowledge her and pets Mina's hair.

POPPY

She has a good life here. She's got
me, she's got her daddy, she's got
Friends, she'll have a match, she
don't need nothing else. Nobody else.

CARLA

She needs her family.

Poppy sighs.

POPPY

Those people have no claim to her.

CARLA

Dessa said you've been lying about
seeing her.

Poppy visibly stiffens again. Briefly, the car speeds up. The brakes squeal. The car slows down.

POPPY

They got no claim to Mina.

CARLA

Those people are Mina's family, Mama, and you can't pretend that a church is what's telling you to stop. Has this Pastor even ever said a word to Odessa?

POPPY

She's not seeing them because I've seen them, in dreams. In visions. I won't put anyone else up to that. Not a prayer in the world can save that whore.

Carla rolls her tearful eyes. She looks out the window.

POPPY

Those people don't need to ruin her. What do they have that we don't? The money?

CARLA

It's not about money.

POPPY

It's about them teaching my baby to give up. To throw in her towel at the first sign of trouble and make a mess for everyone else.

CARLA

(fighting tears, she covers Mina's ears with one hand)

Chess was sick, Mama. That's not fair.

POPPY

Yeah, well, so is your daddy! Jessa's sick too! You don't see him hanging from the shower when things don't go his way! You don't see his brains on my carpet after a bad day, do you?! Worst you see of him is him lying down on the floor!

Carla bows her head. Her tears fall into the sleeping girl's

hair.

POPPY

Maybe you can't be saved anymore, or you don't want to be. You're grown. Do what you will, I don't care. Do not drag my girl into your mess. I won't allow it.

CARLA

Odessa wanted to call Family Services.

POPPY

I should have called family services on her when I had the chance.

CARLA

I begged her not to, and said you were just keeping the baby busy.

POPPY

I'm keeping her safe. House full of a men—a revolving door of them, really, does that seem safe for the girl? All the woman does is drink and smoke and sin.

CARLA

She just lives a little different than you, and that's got you ready to call the police? How do you hear that and not be sick of yourself?

POPPY

Because sometimes it takes a mother to realize that some people are just hopeless, and not worth the struggle.

Poppy looks at her daughter through the rearview mirror, she sleeps on Carla's chest peacefully.

POPPY

That girl you're holding is not.

CARLA

You willing to just give her up?

Poppy lifts her chin, continues driving.

INT. POPPY'S HOME, DOORWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy walks into the house behind Carla and Mina. She closes the door behind them, turns, and reaches out to Carla. Carla starts to move into her embrace, Poppy moves her hands and tries to pull Mina from her arms.

POPPY

If she's going to sleep it's going to be in bed.

CARLA

I'll put her down.

POPPY

No. Let me.

CARLA

I am putting her down.

Carla walks into the kitchen, Poppy watches closely.

INT. POPPY'S KITCHEN - SAME

Jessa sits in the kitchen, glasses perched on the tip of his nose. His eyes scan over a newspaper. He looks up at their entrance.

POPPY

Jessa, take the girl to bed.

Jessa coos at the sight of Mina asleep and frowns when he notices Carla's expression.

JESSA

Apartment hunting go bad?

POPPY

She found a house.

JESSA

(hopeful)
Really?

CARLA

(brave face)
Yeah, yeah. Odessa's friend is renting it out. It's nice, really nice. Cheap, too, won't be so hard on me as soon as I get there.

JESSA

Good! Good.

Poppy glares at him. Jessa carefully extracts Mina from Carla's hold.

CARLA

You have to fix her car seat in Mama's car.

JESSA

Why now?

CARLA

Mama stopped short for a rabbit and she fell off. The seatbelt's too weak.

POPPY

Don't lie in my house.

CARLA

Okay. Mama stopped short, and Mina almost slammed into the back of my seat.

JESSA

That brake foot of yours acting up again, Poppy?

POPPY

Mhmm. Still makes me nervous driving on that service road, with all those pickups rushing by.

JESSA

(shakes his head)

Driving in the South for forty-some years and you still get spooked.

Jessa walks off with Mina in his arms. Poppy follows down the hallway a moment later, abandoning Carla in the kitchen.

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM

Jessa sits on the end of the bed, his back to Poppy, undressing. Poppy shuffles things around in her bedside drawer, placing a glasses case from the table into the drawer.

JESSA

No wonder you're so scary driving. You

can't see worth a damn.

Jessa drops his shirt, a rose is burnt into his skin, mangled and scarred. He pulls on a different shirt, fresh.

POPPY

Mmh.

She pulls out the key for Mina's room, gripping it in her palm.

INT. HALLWAY

She walks down the hallway and peeks into Mina's room. She shuts the door, and locks it with the key. Jiggles for good measure.

CARLA

Since when do you lock her in?

POPPY

Since I needed to.

CARLA

Mama that's crazy-

POPPY

Make one more accusation, use one more foul word, I'll slap the taste out of your mouth. Do you hear me?

CARLA

In an emergency, she'll be stuck and nobody will be able to get to her.

POPPY

She won't need you in an emergency. I got mine, don't you worry.

CARLA

You got mine.

Jessa peers down the hallway from the bedroom. Poppy drops her hand.

JESSA

Poppy.

POPPY

I got it.

JESSA
Poppy, she's a grown woman!

POPPY
Who forgets where she is. She don't live here anymore. Been disrespecting me the whole time she's been home, and all you've done is sit by and watch it happen.

JESSA
Now you know-

POPPY
Showed her ass today, though. Didn't you?

Carla takes a deep breath and flexes her fingers at her sides.

CARLA
No ma'am.

Poppy raises her hand again, Jessa shouts.

JESSA
Enough of that, now!

POPPY
You show your ass like that again, you disrespect me, you will never see that girl again. Whatever that lady got into your head, you need to get it out of my house.

Poppy walks off. Carla rubs her face tenderly.

JESSA
What lady is she talking about?

CARLA
We saw Odessa today.

Jessa nods slowly and rubs his hand over his own face.

JESSA
(feigning interest)
How's she?

CARLA
Said she hasn't heard from Mina in a

minute.

Jessa heaves a sigh. He glances over his shoulder. The coast is clear.

JESSA
Your Mama still doesn't like her, or
her daughter.

CARLA
She made it more than clear.

JESSA
Thinks she's sick, for letting
Francesca be how she was with you and
convincing you to...go through
with...conception.

CARLA
(drops her voice to a whisper)
Daddy.

JESSA
(whispers)
Hmm?

CARLA
If I make a call...about Mama and
Mina, would you be willing to talk to
some people?

JESSA
Some people like who, Car?

CARLA
Not police. Just...CPS people. People
who can get me Mina back. I can't wait
for the state to do its job, I don't
want to.

Jessa steps back and looks at Carla. Her eyes are wide,
pleading.

JESSA
That's my wife.

CARLA
That's my daughter.

JESSA
Carla-

CARLA

Daddy, she's lost it. The state...the court will take too much time.

JESSA

She cooks and cleans for the girl, takes her to school-

CARLA

And I will do all of that.

JESSA

She's just a little strict.

CARLA

She's controlling who she sees, who sees her. And now, I don't know if I'll ever get another chance.

JESSA

It's all in due time, Carla, you just-

Carla's breathing shallows, Jessa sighs.

JESSA

Don't you let Poppy see you doing that.

CARLA

She said she's given up on me, and I don't know what she'll do to Mina if Mina acts up, and I am scared.

Jessa nods, rubbing her shoulders.

JESSA

I got you.

He embraces her and squeezes her. Carla begins to weep.

INT. POPPY'S KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING - THE NEXT DAY

Mina sits at the table, her head resting on her arms as she watches Carla flit from place to place in the kitchen.

Carla chops sautés and dices. She tosses things into a pan, humming softly as she does so.

CARLA

Did you sleep good, Mina?

MINA

Yes.

CARLA

That's good. Did you have any dreams?

MINA

No.

CARLA

No? No dreams?

MINA

No.

Carla looks back at her. Mina sits on her knees in the chair, trying to get a better view.

CARLA

You want to come help?

Mina hesitates. She nods. Carla nods her over. She hands the girl a butter knife, a kiwi half, and a plate.

CARLA

Cut nice and easy, slow like this
okay?

Carla demonstrates how to cut, Mina watches intently.

CARLA

(softly)
Here, you try.

She moves her hands, Mina attempt to cut the berry for herself. She mimes Carla perfectly, and grins.

CARLA

Good job, baby!

Carla feeds Mina a piece of kiwi and Mina giggles. Carla plates the fruit, shoos Mina back to the table.

CARLA

I hope you like pancakes.

Mina nods, excited.

CARLA

I've been waiting to make you
breakfast, did you know that? I used

to love making breakfast with daddy.
We'd wake up really early on Sundays,
before service, and he'd made pancakes
and let me cut up the fruit and add
the chocolate chips and stuff.

MINA

Mama makes me eggs sometimes.

CARLA

Yeah? Do you like eggs?

Mina hesitates, and goes quiet for a moment.

MINA

No.

CARLA

No? You never asked for something
different? Cereal or toast or
something?

MINA

Mama said I need the eggs and the milk
to grow up smart and strong.

CARLA

But you can ask for something else,
you don't have to eat the same thing
all the time.

Mina starts to rub at her face as Carla talks.

CARLA

When we move, I'll make you any
breakfast you want on the weekends.
How does that sound?

MINA

Good.

CARLA

Good.

POPPY

Good morning, Mina.

MINA

Good morning!

Carla does not look at Poppy. Poppy inspects the situation

and lifts Mina onto her hip.

POPPY

What are you making for breakfast?

CARLA

I made her some pancakes, and some fruit.

Mina coughs.

POPPY

That's real sugary.

CARLA

Once doesn't hurt.

POPPY

Maybe not.

MINA

Mama, I don't feel good.

Carla plates the pancakes. Mina scratches at her arms and throat, she wheezes.

POPPY

What's wrong with you?

MINA

I'm really itchy.

POPPY

You bit by a bug or something?

Poppy looks over Mina. Carla plates the fruit. Poppy spots the kiwi, lets out a shout. Carla drops the plate she's holding, it shatters. Shard spread between her and Poppy's feet.

POPPY

Have you lost your mind?!

CARLA

What? What happened!

POPPY

(motions wildly to the food on the counter)

She's allergic!

Poppy throws open a kitchen drawer, throws things aside, notably a used shotgun shell. She pulls out an EpiPen and stabs Mina, who wails.

CARLA
I-I didn't know-

POPPY
I got to get her to the hospital!

Carla stands frozen, Mina continues to wail.

CARLA
I didn't-I didn't know I thought it was just avocados she can't-

POPPY
(shouting)
And kiwi! The girl can't have kiwi!

Poppy shoves her feet into some shoes, lifts Mina up and grabs the keys by the front door. Carla jerks into action, and steps forward. She steps on the shards, continues rushing after her mother and Mina.

INT. HOSPITAL - A WHILE LATER

A hospital room in the pediatric wing, decorated in bright colors and characters. Mina sits curled up on the stark white bed in a hospital gown, wires and oxygen attached to her, she watches a cartoon on the TV. Poppy sits in a chair beside the bed, as close to her as possible. Carla stands at the end of Mina's bed, she'd been crying.

CARLA
(looking at the ground)
I didn't know.

Poppy ignores her, pets Mina's hair.

CARLA
I thought it was just avocados.

POPPY
It's both. She's got those linked allergies.

CARLA
I didn't-

POPPY

Yeah, I get it, you don't know jackshit. You wouldn't know shit if it hit you in the face, and you wouldn't have known shit if she choked out at that table. Would you?

Carla rubs her face, does not respond. Poppy stands up, waddles over to Carla. She stands in front of her, face to face.

POPPY

(firmly, eerily calm)
If you had killed my child, that would've been the end of your born days.

CARLA

I know.

POPPY

Glad we have that understanding.

Poppy smiles tightly. Carla turns her face away.

POPPY

I'm going to make a call. Mina?

Mina looks at Poppy, and abruptly stops tugging on one of the tubes leading into her robe.

POPPY

Don't eat anything she gives you, alright?

Mina nods, goes back to tugging the tube. Poppy leaves the room.

CARLA

Mina, leave it alone.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy leans against a nearly empty hallway, a door creaks shut behind her. She pulls out her phone, taps a bit. The phone begins to ring.

INT. PASTOR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

PASTOR sits in his dark office, pictures of children line the wall on one side in neat rows. On the other side are photos

of adults, the children grown up. The men are noticeably older than their wives. A thin branding iron sits on his desk, a rose resembling Poppy and Jessa's scars on the end. A credit card and white powder sits besides it. His phone screen lights up, begins to buzz. His background is a photo of him and Poppy, oddly close.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

POPPY

PASTOR?

PASTOR

Yes, dear, how are you?

POPPY

There's been an incident with Mina.

PASTOR

(intrigued)

Well, is she alright?

POPPY

It was just food allergies, I caught it in time. That stupid girl gave her something she can't have, and the fool didn't think twice about it.

PASTOR

(nodding)

I've noticed she doesn't seem too...bright.

POPPY

She plays that way so she can go undetected. I'm telling you she's got a plan.

PASTOR

You're awfully suspicious.

POPPY

I want to save my daughter before it's too late.

PASTOR

What do you suggest?

POPPY

I need to move the Match up. The match, the devotion, all of it in one

go.

PASTOR
That's a lot for one day.

POPPY
I need her to be safe, PASTOR, I need her to be kept and to have herself a future.

PASTOR
When do you suggest?

POPPY
Today. Soon as we get back. They said they can release her around two, we can do it at two thirty. Whatever I got to do, Pastor, I'll do it. She almost killed the girl.

Pastor begins lining up the white powder, nodding to himself.

PASTOR
I'll make the arrangement for two thirty.

POPPY
The spare key is under the stone in front of the house.

PASTOR
Sub rosa laborat, Poppy.

POPPY
Sub rosa laborat.

END OF PHONE CONVERSATION

INT. PASTOR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Pastor leans down, and snorts the line. He stands, tucks his phone into his pocket. He grabs the branding iron, walks out of his office. Roses line the door frame, photos of him with women of differing ages beside them.

POPPY'S HOUSE - EARLY AFTERNOON

The backyard is intensely decorated for a wedding, with white balloons and lawn chairs scattered about.

INT. POPPY'S KITCHEN - SAME TIME

The inside of the home is well decorated, and a large cake sits in the center of the kitchen counter. "Mina" is written on it in frosting, and lilies and roses line the cake.

A pristine, white woven rose lies on the right side of the cake. The portraits over the dining table have been taken down, there is no map but shadows remain on the walls.

INT. POPPY'S BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Mina stands on a stool before a mirror, Poppy applies beads to her braids.

POPPY

Almost done.

Mina nods, Poppy continues.

POPPY

As soon as we're done today, you'll be a big girl. It'll be me and you, and your Match. Otter's going to go where Otter goes, and you'll be a wife, Mimi. How does that sound?

MINA

Can we give Mama a party too?

Poppy tugs Mina's braid, Mina winces.

POPPY

I wasn't done talking.

MINA

I'm sorry.

POPPY

We'll get you right. That girl's had too much of an influence on you already.

MINA

Can we give Mama a party too?

POPPY

No, no. No more parties for a little while.

Mina pouts.

POPPY

I think we'll send you Up with Pastor this weekend, too. Make sure the lessons really sink in. I'd like that. You gotta know what to do when you bleed.

MINA

Mama said we can go to the park!

POPPY

Did I?

MINA

No, mama said-

POPPY

No I didn't.

MINA

Mama said-

Poppy yanks Mina to face her, gripping her arms in her hands.

POPPY

What did I tell you? Because I don't remember saying a damn thing. What did I tell you, huh?

Mina whimpers. Poppy softens, drops her arms.

POPPY

I don't know why you chose today of all days to start acting up, but that is not going to stand, no ma'am. I'm not doing that with you. We're stopping that right here, right now this time. Do you hear me?

MINA

Yes.

POPPY

Soon as that cord is cut, Otter's got to go. She'll get it then, nearly killed you now she's filling your head with ideas-

MINA

I like Otter.

Poppy halts, stunned. She gathers herself quickly.

POPPY

Otter is no good for you.

MINA

She said-

Poppy drops the hair. She closes the bathroom door, sits Mina on the counter.

POPPY

Otter does not like you.

Mina stares.

POPPY

Otter thinks you were a mistake, and almost everyone thinks you are a sin. That's why she fed you that kiwi this morning, she knew it could kill you. I am trying to help you. Do you remember what hell is?

MINA

The bad place.

POPPY

That's right. The bad place. The place where people like Carla and Odessa go, because they drink and smoke and commit...

Poppy stares at Mina, wide-eyed.

POPPY

I'm trying to save you. Otter is trying to take you down with her. Is that what you want? To go to hell with Carla?

Mina shakes her head.

POPPY

Then you're going to listen, right? And let Pastor Match you, and have you Marked?

Mina nods.

POPPY

And you know what I can keep you safe?
There's nothing I want more in this
world, Mina, than to make sure you're
safe.

Mina nods again. Poppy smiles, slowly.

POPPY

Then you need to let me do it. You
need to forget about C-about Otter.

MINA

I'm sorry, Mama.

Poppy pulls Mina into a hug, and lifts her up.

POPPY

You ain't done nothing wrong, sweet
girl. You're not the one in the wrong.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Carla stands at the end of the hallway. Her eyes shine with
tears.

Mina and Poppy exit the bathroom, Carla ducks backward into
Poppy's room.

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla pushes the door shut silently. She rubs at her face
roughly, wipes away tears. She leans over her mother's
dresser and grips the sides, white knuckles. She begins
counting her breaths. In the mirror she looks up, takes in
her appearance; disheveled, pale, eyes red from crying. Her
eyes are drawn to the closet.

Carla shuffles over to the closet, and creaks the door open.
She stands on her toes, her fingers wrap around the barrel of
Jessa's shotgun. She fumbles with the ammo box, shoving four
rounds into her pocket, and loads the gun. She yanks a duffel
bag from under a stack of boxes and sends them tumbling down.
She tucks the gun in the bag, and zips it shut.

INT. HALLWAY

Carla peeks out the door, looks both ways before quickly,
silently making it down the hallway.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla places the bag down, opens her drawers, and begins shoving clothes inside. Other than the shuffling of fabric, she moves in near silence. Voices can be heard from outside, humming a hymn. She peaks through the blinds.

EXT. POPPY'S HOME - SAME TIME

Poppy and Mina are dressed in all white, seated on a lawn chair in the front yard. Jessa stands off to the side. Mina holds two white, woven roses in her hands. Each friend approaches and lets blood drip from their hand onto one rose in Mina's hand. Jessa looks toward the house.

JESSA

I'll be right back, baby. Think Carla needs some help with something.

Jessa begins walking toward the house. Behind him, Pastor lines the branding rod up to the fire pit, a young boy stands besides him dressed in a well fitting suit, he holds a bloodied rose in his hand. Mina looks at it, confused. Poppy turns her back toward the Friends.

INT. MINA'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Carla ducks out of the window view. She pauses, listening intently. A door creaks open.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Jessa stumbles down the hallway, Carla comes out of Mina's room, bag over her shoulder.

JESSA

What do you think you're doing?

CARLA

I heard Mama and Mina, Mama's got this...I don't know. She's talking about a match and her bleeding-Mama's not going to let me get away with Mina, daddy, you know that.

JESSA

You're right, she's not, but what are you doing?

CARLA

Asking you to help me this time.

Pause. Carla looks at Jessa, pleading.

CARLA

I can't let her keep her, you know that, right? That this only gets worse from here? Match for a five-year-old?

JESSA

(softly)

That's my wife, Carla.

CARLA

And I am trying to get your granddaughter somewhere safe. I am trying to get Mina a home, and a family, and a life, daddy, and she won't let me do that and now this is where I lose her to those people. For good.

They go quiet. The humming outside continues.

JESSA

I can get her out of Poppy's sight but only for a minute, you need to take that chance.

Carla hugs him, tightly. He squeezes her. The humming ceases, unnoticed.

CARLA

I know you don't think my ideas are good, not after dropping everything here, but I can't do it again.

JESSA

I know. I trust you. I lost a child.

Carla gathers herself and walks down the hallway behind her father.

EXT. POPPY'S HOME - SAME TIME

Deafening silence. Poppy stands in front of Friends, Mina is seated on the chair in front of her. She's surrounded by Friends, dressed in white, one of their hands bleeding. Mina snuffles, holding her hand, dewy with blood.

POPPY

Now?

CARLA

Now what?

POPPY

What's left for you to do but go?

Poppy turns to the Friends and speaks to the Receptionist.

POPPY

This is why she's not good to pick her up. You see her? She's shaking like a leaf. Just looking at her.

PASTOR

Shall we pray for her?

POPPY

No. What good will that do for her? She's gone already.

CARLA

(voice trembling)

Mina, come here.

Mina looks around, and stands from the chair. Poppy puts a hand out in front of her to stop her.

PASTOR

I think it's time to get going, Carla.

CARLA

Mina, come on. Come here, baby.

Mina runs Carla, clutches onto her. She shows Carla her palm, a small cut on her hand.

MINA

M-mama, they-it hurts!

CARLA

I know, baby, we can get you cleaned up.

The Friends observe the scene, Pastor steps forward to stand beside Poppy.

POPPY

It's time to get going, Carla.

Carla looks at her, baffled. She looks to Jessa, who raises his hands.

POPPY

You wanted a chance, take it.

Poppy extends a hand to Carla, holding a burned cord. Carla walks backward, Mina clutched to her. She bumps into Jessa's car, and opens the trunk. She shoves the duffel bag in, and places Mina in the back of the car in a hurry.

Carla climbs into the driver's side, the car takes off like a bat out of hell.

Jessa stands before the Friends and his wife. The Pastor reaches into his suit pocket and pulls out a pistol.

POPPY

You helped her.

JESSA

I ain't know what she was-

Pastor shoots Jessa in the foot. He collapses, shouting in pain. Poppy looks almost bored, looks between Pastor and Jessa.

POPPY

I got to go get her now, boy.

JESSA

Poppy-

POPPY

I'm gonna take Pastor and I'm gonna take care of that girl, and go get my baby.

(she looks to the Friends)

Y'all can do with this one what you see fit.

Pastor takes Poppy's hand, they walk toward Poppy's car. He sits in the driver's seat, and she goes around to the passenger's side, the gun in hand. She settles, reloads the gun.

PASTOR

Hurry on, now. I want that cake before it's all gone. Lemon pound cake from Stacey's...she really did pull it together, huh?

INT. JESSA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Carla scrambles around in the car, one hand on the steering wheel. She speeds down the country road and leaves the outskirts behind her. Mina jerks around in the back, trying to climb into her car seat.

MINA

Mama! I can't-

CARLA

Okay, okay. Just sit down, baby. Just sit down.

Carla races down the road, a single car follows her in the rearview mirror. She takes a harsh turn, and iron grips the steering wheel. Roses dot the roadside grass.

CARLA (CONT'D)

We're gonna go see family, okay? We're going to see family, and we'll get an apartment

Carla starts muttering to herself and veers onto the road.

CARLA (CONT'D)

We'll get a puppy, and we'll be able to see Mama Odessa, and you can make friends and see your cousins and-and-

A car tries to merge onto the road in front of them.

Carla's foot slams on the break. They keep hurtling forward, down their path.

The car does not stop, the merging car creeps forward. Carla jerks the wheel to the right, Mina goes flying into the other side of the car but sits back up.

Mina begins to wail.

CARLA

Mina get in your seat!

She tries to climb into the seat.

Carla keeps speeding, doing her best to dodge cars and trucks on the road. They pass the town's 'WELCOME' sign. Lilies line the roadside. The car following them begins to catch up.

BANG!

They move in slow motion. Carla's car skids, slams headfirst into the back of a larger truck, the stuffed otter flops onto the dashboard, falls under the passenger's seat.

The crying has stopped.

INT. POPPY'S CAR - SAME TIME

Pastor drives toward Carla's car.

PASTOR

I didn't know you were that good of a
shot, girl, I would've had you on
these chases long ago!

Poppy does not respond. For the first time, she is scared.

EXT. JESSA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Silence.

Carla drags her body out of the car, bleeding from her skull. She looks back in the car, and reaches in. Carla drags Mina's body from the car, lifeless and silent. She tucks her against her, and buries her face in her hair for a brief moment.

She walks to the back of the car, wrenches the trunk open. She fumbles. She pulls the shotgun from the trunk, turns around.

Carla limps back toward town and cradles her daughter in her arms.

The car that was following her does not slow down, but swerves onto the grass to avoid her. Poppy gets out of the car, gun raised.

Carla stops, takes two shots.

Carla continues walking on her warpath, blood drips onto the lilies beside Poppy's car.

END