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THE PRINCIPAL'S ASSEMBLY

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JANE MARINO is reading over an IMPORTANT SPEECH.

JANE
(to herself)
*...this will be a difficult first
few weeks for some of you...*

She's seated at her desk, dressed in a nice suit, in her MID-FIFTIES and has understood that's her age. It makes her seem even more confident. Everything about this woman's appearance says *together* and that's why she's the perfect leader... or so it says on the her COFFEE MUG: **BEST PRINCIPAL**.

She crosses out a line in her speech and circles the word **CASSANDRA**. Her desk is cluttered in paperwork and flyers, one of which is for an upcoming MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) event. She reads over a few more lines again of her speech, to herself. She then puts the piece of paper down.

She opens the TOP DRAWER of her desk and locates an ORANGE PILL BOTTLE. She opens it and takes out one pill... then a SECOND ONE.

She leans back in her office chair, as she takes them both with her coffee. A poster reading "DRIVE AWARE. NOT IMPAIRED" mounted on the wall. She stares forward at a bunch of FRAMED High School SPORTS TEAM PHOTOS on the wall.

The DOOR TO HER OFFICE opens and ANGIE, 52, enters. Jane looks up and gives her a slight smile.

ANGIE
You ready for another year?

JANE
Do we have a choice?

Angie chuckles. She is a friend "in school" and "out of school" to Jane. She looks just as put together as her. She wears her SCHOOL ID BADGE proud attached to a lace hanging around her neck.

ANGIE
Perhaps an Irish Coffee?

JANE
I'll take the Jameson... hold the coffee.

They both laugh.

2

INT. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Several TEACHERS and STAFF MEMBERS hold paper plates in one hand, with MINI BAGELS and pieces of FRUIT, and a CUP OF COFFEE in the other. They stand together catching up on their summer break. The room features a few belly laughs, one or two sarcastic eye rolls, and many agreeable nods.

JANE ENTERS.

JANE

Good morning everyone.

They all turn to her and smile. Angie follows. Jane goes over to the head of the table as the teachers start to take their seats.

JANE (CONT'D)

We have one hundred things to discuss and zero time to do it. Nothing new about that.

The room CHUCKLES.

JANE (CONT'D)

Let's dive right in, shall we? First off, welcome back. I hope you all had a pleasant summer and are looking forward to another fun and productive school year.

The staff members in the room slightly nod to each other.

JANE (CONT'D)

Okay...

She pauses for a moment, putting both her hands out in front of her -- *a sudden tone shift*. Angie watches intently from the corner of the room.

JANE (CONT'D)

This was a tough summer for the students and for us. Cassandra was friends with everyone, participated in multiple clubs, was student council president and one of our soccer captains. Her passing made an impact on our school's community.

Jane clears her throat.

JANE (CONT'D)

So, tomorrow morning, during second period, I have decided we will have a whole school assembly during which I will make a few remarks and use this occasion to remind the students of our drug & alcohol policy. I believe this will be the best response. Any questions on that?

The staff members smile and nod in agreement.

JANE (CONT'D)

Excellent.

Jane grabs her glasses and puts them on.

JANE (CONT'D)

Now, let's talk about plans for the welcome back dance.

3

INT. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

3

Jane leaves the conference room followed by Angie.

ANGIE

Hey, did you and Dave end up going away, last week, to celebrate your 20th anniversary?

JANE

No, we decided to cancel that.

ANGIE

Oh.

JANE

Too much work to do.

The hallways are filled with random flyers advertising clubs, event, and also posters with drug prevention statements like: "DON'T HUFF, DON'T PUFF, STAY AWAY FROM THAT STUFF", "DON'T LET YOUR LIFE GO UP IN SMOKE", and "DON'T LET DRUGS KEEP YOU FROM YOUR DREAMS" mounted to the walls.

ANGIE

Jane...

(BEAT)

Are you sure about holding this assembly tomorrow?

JANE
Yes, I'm sure.

She suddenly heads for the exit.

JANE (CONT'D)
Thanks, Angie. I'll see you
tomorrow.

ANGIE
Where are you going in such a rush?

Jane continues on, only quickly looking back.

JANE
Just late for another meeting. And
you know how I feel about
tardiness.

4

INT. THE ADMIRAL PUB - BAR AREA - HOURS LATER

4

Jane enters into the pub with her expensive leather SATCHEL
around her shoulder.

SANDY (O.S.)
(from behind the bar)
Jane!

SANDY, early twenties, pretty without knowing it. She's
disheveled from a long shift and a longer life, but brightens
when she sees a "regular" that she likes. Jane walks over to
the corner stool at the almost empty bar.

SANDY (CONT'D)
Just in time, someone almost took
your stool. But I swatted them
away.

JANE
Thank you. That would've been a
disaster.

SANDY
I've got your back, girl.

Jane opens her satchel and takes a BUNCH OF PAPERWORK out and
puts it onto the bar. She then takes ORANGE PILL BOTTLE,
opens it, and takes two pills out... and then a THIRD. She
puts them in her mouth and takes a drink of water.

Sandy approaches. She puts an EMPTY WINE GLASS down in front
of Jane and starts pouring a Pinot into the glass. Jane
reaches for her CHARCOAL WALLET and takes out a CREDIT CARD.

SANDY (CONT'D)
How was your day?

JANE
Okay.

SANDY
Tomorrow is the first day of
school, right?

JANE
It sure is.

SANDY
You got this.

Jane smiles. Sandy stops pouring, takes her CREDIT CARD, and walks away.

CUT TO:

5 INT. THE ADMIRAL - BAR AREA - LATER

5

Jane now with an EMPTY GLASS in front of her, looks over her typed up SPEECH. She crosses out a word with her pen and reads it over to herself again. Sandy walks over and refills her glass with more Pinot.

Jane looks up.

JANE
Oh wait.

Sandy stops pouring.

SANDY
No second?

JANE
I just... I have to give a big
speech tomorrow.

SANDY
Ah, sorry. Hey, drink it or don't.
It's on the house.

Jane looks at the half-filled wine glass.

SANDY (CONT'D)
Wow, so much work you got there.

JANE

Lots to prep. Beginning of a new year... always inundated.

SANDY

(feigning anguish)

I can tell. You didn't even notice the new look.

Jane glances up and gives Sandy a weird look. Sandy motions to her hair.

JANE

Oh my god, I'm so sorry, you chopped it all off!

SANDY

Eight inches.

JANE

You actually decided to do it!

SANDY

I needed a little change. Plus I got to donate it to Locks of Love.

JANE

Nice!

Jane reaches for second glass of wine and takes a sip.

SANDY

Well, I won't distract you from your work.

Sandy starts to walk away.

JANE

Actually... maybe you can help me.

She looks back at her.

JANE (CONT'D)

If you were still in high school, how would this sound to you: "If it is determined that you are under the influence, your parent or guardian will be contacted. You may also be subject to school discipline and arrest."

SANDY

Woah, a little harsh there Jane.

JANE
It's our school's zero tolerance
policy.

She sees a MAN at the bar motion for her.

SANDY
Another?

He nods. Sandy reaches for a COCKTAIL SHAKER and starts
making a MARTINI for someone.

SANDY (CONT'D)
But, do you have to sound so scary?

JANE
Yes!

Jane looks back down at her speech.

JANE (CONT'D)
I do say later in the speech that
students who...

Sandy starts shaking the COCKTAIL SHAKER. Jane watches her.
Jane chuckles to herself.

JANE (CONT'D)
I'll wait.

SANDY
Sorry.

Sandy finishes shaking and pours the concoction into the
martini glass with a strainer.

SANDY (CONT'D)
Go on.

JANE
I do say...
(READING)
That students who recognize that
they may have a problem with drug,
alcohol, or tobacco use are
encouraged to refer themselves to
counselors, teachers, or other
staff members for assistance.

SANDY

(shrugging)

I mean, after how you just scared me with the whole: "subject to school discipline and arrest" hammer... why would I trust that coming to you with a problem wouldn't end in discipline too?

JANE

(groans)

Is that really what they'll think?

SANDY

Can you make this sound any nicer? I think teenagers respond more to positivity.

JANE

I can't be their principal and their friend.

SANDY

Sure you can. You're my friend but you also had no problem going all "principal" on me to get me to finally sign up for that community college art class.

Sandy puts an olive into the glass and takes the martini over to the man.

JANE

(silently)

Good point.

Jane looks over her speech again, feeling more confident. She eyes the empty wine glass in front of her. She looks back over at Sandy.

JANE (CONT'D)

You know what, I'll actually take another, but let's switch it up.

Sandy looks up at her and smiles.

SANDY

You name it.

JANE

How about... an Irish coffee... but hold the coffee.

Sandy laughs.

CUT TO:

6 INT. THE ADMIRAL - BAR AREA - LATER

6

Jane leans back in her chair -- she's looser, cheery. The glass of Jameson almost empty in front of her.

JANE

...I am only saying that if people like Nicki Minaj or Cardi B stopped bragging about how fun it is to be high or drunk... less people would do it.

Sandy leans against the bar.

SANDY

Well it's a double-edge sword. They have artistic freedom to rap about their life experiences.

JANE

Artistic freedom?
(She LAUGHS)
Rap is not art.

SANDY

It is to some. And their music is meant for adult audiences. It's unfortunate that it trickles down to teenagers too.

JANE

And when kids hear songs like "Pills and Potions" they get stupid ideas.

Sandy laughs. Jane takes a last big sip of her drink.

SANDY

Pills N Potions?

Jane nearly spits into her glass from embarrassment.

JANE

Is that not one of her songs?

SANDY

Yeah. I'm just impressed you know it, that's all.

JANE

Well, I sometimes listen to the music you listen to, Cassie.

Sandy gives her an odd look.

SANDY

Cassie?

Jane looks at her, confused.

SANDY (CONT'D)

You called me Cassie.

Jane *realizes what she said*. She stiffens up as a chill runs down her spine. It feels as if the oxygen has been sucked out of the room.

JANE

Sorry about that. Sandy. I um...

She looks around at the empty Jameson and wine glass in front of her.

Jane grabs her speech off the bar and opens her satchel to quickly stuff the paper inside.

JANE (CONT'D)

I... I really should get going.

SANDY

Are you okay?

JANE

Yeah. I'm fine.

She grabs her satchel off the stool and quickly walks out of the pub.

7

EXT. THE ADMIRAL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

7

Jane approaches her car. She's suddenly on-edge and starting to uncontrollably shiver. She reaches for her car door, not thinking, and of course it's locked.

JANE

Shit.

She takes her CAR KEYS out of satchel and unlocks the car.

8

INT. JANE'S CAR - THE ADMIRAL - NIGHT

8

Jane gets inside and puts her satchel down in the seat next to her. She grips the steering wheel tightly with both her hands, trying hard to calm down.

She looks over at the open satchel on the passenger seat and sees the PILL BOTTLE staring back at her. She reaches for it, opens the top, and pours THREE...then FOUR...then **SEVEN** onto her palm.

She looks at them, she thinks about it, and then SNAPS BACK INTO REALITY. She puts them all back into the bottle... She instead reaches for her iPhone and dials a number while pacing nervously.

ANGIE (V.O.)
(through phone)
Hey, what's up?

Jane starts hyperventilating. She tries to steady herself.

CUT TO:

9

EXT. THE ADMIRAL - BENCH - LATER

9

Jane sits on the bench staring at THE RIVER, lost in a relaxing trance.

SANDY (O.S.)
Jane?

Jane snaps out of it and looks over at Sandy holding a large trash bag.

SANDY (CONT'D)
I can't believe you're still here.
Are you okay?

JANE
Called a friend to pick me up.

She puts the trash bag down and digs into her waitress apron around her waist. She takes out a receipt, a pen, and Jane's credit card.

SANDY
You left before I could get this
back to you. I just noticed it now.

JANE
Oh my god. I'm so sorry. Thank you.

She walks over and hands her the credit card and her receipt to sign. Jane notices the CIGARETTE BOX in Sandy's apron. Sandy looks down at what Jane is looking at. She looks back up at Jane.

SANDY
You want one?

CUT TO:

10 EXT. THE ADMIRAL - BENCH - MOMENTS LATER 10

Jane takes a drag from her cigarette as Sandy sits next to her holding hers.

SANDY
Hey, I'm sorry if I said something earlier that upset you.

Jane takes another drag and then throws it on the ground, puts it out with her foot, avoiding eye contact with Sandy.

JANE
Oh no, no, it wasn't your fault.
It's not you, it's me.

SANDY
Are you sure?

JANE
Of course, of course.

SANDY
Why did you call me Cassie?

Jane freezes. She then puts her hand on Sandy's knee.

JANE
You remind me so much of her, you know that. You could actually be her twin.

Jane finally looks at Sandy.

SANDY
Whose twin?

Jane looks down.

JANE
Never mind.

Sandy looks her over.

SANDY

You look like you might need a hug,
Jane. Would that make you feel
better?

Jane nods. Sandy leans in and gives Jane a nice big hug.

SANDY (CONT'D)

How's that?

Jane starts to cry. Sandy gives her a weird look as Jane grips Sandy tightly.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Jane?

Jane bursts into tears.

SANDY (CONT'D)

(mixed up)

Oh my god.

Just then, a BLUE SEDAN pulls up in front of them. Angie gets out of the car.

ANGIE

Jane?

Sandy tries to pull away. Angie walks over to them.

SANDY

Something is wrong.

ANGIE

Jane! It's okay. Let her go.

Jane exhales, trying to pull herself together, and finally lets go of Sandy. Sandy slowly stands up.

ANGIE (CONT'D)

(to Sandy)

Thank you, I got it from here. You
can go.

SANDY

I'm sorry, Jane.

Jane turns away from her. Sandy awkwardly walks away. Jane wipes her nose and wipes mascara from under her eyes.

ANGIE

What were you doing all the way out
here?

She sits down on the bench next to Jane.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
What's going on? Are you okay?

Jane snuffles, gripping the bench tightly.

JANE
No. ...I'm not okay.

FADE TO BLACK.

11 INT. JANE'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT 11

Jane sits in her blue robe on her bed. She looks withdrawn, exhausted -- her face make-up less, her hair still wet from a warm shower. She sits staring at a long line on her wooden floor trying, taking slow breathes.

ANGIE (O.S.)
She was going to some bar, in the middle of nowhere, because she thought the bartender was Cassandra.

DAVE (O.S.)
I didn't know. I thought she was doing better. How could I have missed this?

ANGIE (O.S.)
She's supposed to speak to the students tomorrow.

11A HALLWAY 11A

DAVE MARINO (55) stands with Angie. He's in his late fifties, he looks also exhausted, baggy eyes from a few too many sleepless nights, but still tries to keep up his handsome appearance.

DAVE
Really? A speech?

Angie hands Dave the typed up SPEECH.

ANGIE
Obviously that's not happening.

11B MASTER BEDROOM

11B

Jane snaps back into reality. She looks up at them, standing in the hallway outside her bedroom.

JANE

No!

11C HALLWAY

11C

Angie and Dave look at her, confused.

JANE

I have to give that speech.

Dave gives Angie a sad look as he approaches Jane.

DAVE

Are you still taking your meds?

JANE

Yes, Dave! I'm taking my meds. I made a mistake today.

DAVE

It sounds like you were making mistakes all summer. Taking your meds while drinking— What am I supposed to think?

Jane exhales, then turns her back away from them.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Jane... I'm just trying to understand. *Talk to me!*

Silence.

Angie steps into the

ANGIE

I don't think you're ready to go back. Vice Principal Martin can address the students instead and then maybe in a few months---

JANE

No, I have to do this.

Jane quickly turns back to them!

JANE (CONT'D)

I have to give this speech.

Angie and Dave exchange looks. Then Dave looks back at Jane. He takes a gentle step toward her.

DAVE

Okay, Jane, why don't you try it out on us first?

Jane gives him an odd look.

ANGIE

Yeah, let's hear it, Jane. If you think you can do it for the students, then you can certainly do it for us first.

Jane looks at the speech in Dave's hand. She gets up and takes the paper from him.

JANE

Good morning, students. A new school year signals a fresh start. For freshmen, today you begin your high school career.

She glances up at the bookcase against the wall. She eyes a soccer trophy.

JANE (CONT'D)

Seniors - your last year before officially becoming adults and starting the next chapter in your life. Juniors, you'll start driving and get your license. And sophomores, you'll no longer be the youngest in the school.

Jane eyes the framed photo of a YOUNG CASSANDRA... her DAUGHTER... with her soccer ball.

CUT TO:

12

INT. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - STAGE - DAY

12

Jane looks up at the audience full of high school teenagers.

JANE NOW STANDS at a podium, dressed in her nicest gray suit - - put together -- polished and confident. She faces the crowded room full of students.

BEAT.

JANE

These are such exciting times for all of you; new freedoms and challenges, particularly after the difficult summer our community faced with Cassandra's passing. I know Cassie meant a lot to many of you. Me, too. She was my daughter - my world. We're all grieving her death together. But let's face facts: Cassie abused drugs.

Angie and Dave watch from the side of the stage.

JANE (CONT'D)

Drug and alcohol abuse is a silent epidemic for many people, especially for those your age. It's like a vortex - it pulls you in and sucks you down, and can drain the life out of you until there's nothing left. By the time I realized what Cassie was involved with, it was too late. I didn't see it because she hid it well and because I was so wrapped up in my work. She didn't come to me because she thought I would react badly - freak out. After all, how could the daughter of a high school principal become involved with drugs, right? I will live the rest of my life feeling unbearable remorse that Cassie couldn't trust me with her problem. And I want to prevent you from thinking that way.

She exhales.

JANE (CONT'D)

In memory of my daughter, your friend, your classmate, I want you to say "no" to drugs and alcohol. I know, I know... it's so cliché. Just don't do it. Don't. Be responsible. Be safe. Make positive choices in your life.

Dave takes a deep breath, his eyes starting to tear up.

JANE (CONT'D)

As I said earlier, a new school year signals a fresh start - for our faculty and me, too. We have the chance to make a difference in your lives; to guide you through what can be pretty tumultuous years - that word will be on your first vocabulary test.

BEAT.

JANE (CONT'D)

So, here's the deal: I'm keeping the door open to my office wide open. Come talk to me. Trust me, your teachers, and our faculty. If you need help, let us help you. And, I promise, I won't freak out. Jane looks out at the students staring back at her -- a hesitation in her face.

BEAT.

JANE (CONT'D)

(tears in her eyes)

I can be your principal... and also your friend. Let's work together to meet whatever challenges you may face, and make this a safe and successful year. We're here for you. I'm here for you. Thank you.

Jane grabs her speech and walks off the stage as the students start to applaud. She eyes Dave and Angie standing in the wings.

13 INT. STAGE WINGS - CONTINUOUS

13

Angie reaches out and gently puts her hand on Jane's shoulder.

Jane gives her a slight nod. Dave leans in closer to her.

DAVE

(softly)

I'm so proud of you. And I'm here for you. What happened to Cassie... that's on me too.

Jane stares at him. She the slightly nods.

JANE
We'll talk tonight.

He nods back Jane glances back at the stage, sorrow still in her eyes. She then exits through the stage doors into the brightly lit hall.

14 INT. JANE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - HOURS LATER 14

Jane, sitting at the counter in her kitchen, opens a bottle of Jameson and pours it into a glass. She then reaches for all the paperwork in her satchel and places it onto the counter next to her.

She then sees the ORANGE PILL BOTTLE. She grabs it, opens it, and pours three pills into her hand. She then stops, and puts the other two back in, only putting one in her mouth.

She then reaches for the glass of Jameson to wash down the pill and stops. She eyes the alcohol in the glass. She then puts the glass down and dry swallows her pill.

She then sits silently in the kitchen, lost in thought. She then reaches for her iPhone and call a number.

SANDY (V.O.)
(on phone)
The Admiral Pub, this is Sandy.

Jane opens her mouth, but doesn't say anything.

SANDY (V.O.)
...hello? Hello?

Jane disconnects the call. She puts her phone down on the counter and looks around the room. She slowly lands her eyes on the door to Cassie's room.

She stares at the door, then gets up.

15 INT. JANE'S HOUSE - CASSIE'S ROOM - DAY 15

Jane slowly opens the door and looks around at the purple walls of her daughter's room. The room looks untouched except for some dust on the desk and the top of the wardrobe.

She enters the room and looks around, picking assorted items up, looking at them, and putting them back down. A soft smiles slowly appears on her face.

She then turns and eyes the perfectly made bed. She walks over and picks up her daughter's pillow and holds it close to her nose and then tears up.

After a few moments, she rubs her eyes with her hands. She takes a deep breath, composes herself, lets go of the pillow, and then stands up.

She glances at herself in a mirror, a black and white PHOTOBOOTH STRIP of Cassie and Jane, tucked into the edge. She reaches for it slightly, as if almost to touch it.

JANE
(whispering)
I'm so sorry.

Jane exhales, pulls herself together, and stares at herself for a moment. She then nods.

She heads for the door, walks out into the hallway, and closes Cassie's door behind her to reveal a large photo of CASSIE (who looks similar to **SANDY**... *DOWN TO THE SAME HAIR CUT*) and her SOCCER TEAM taped to the back of the door and a silver medal hanging from a door hook.

THE END