

RAY'S NOT COMING BACK

Written by

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INT. AL'S HOUSE - JUSTINE'S ROOM - DAY

JUSTINE is asleep in bed.

O.S. A truck engine turns over a couple times, and starts up. The truck drives away, fading into the distance.

TITLE CARD: Ray's Not Coming Back

EXT. AL'S HOUSE - DAY - 3 MONTHS LATER

A small, rundown old house in rural upstate NY, a mile from town. It's now spring. The neglected lawn is overgrown with weeds. In the fields behind, a group of vultures are startled and fly off.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Noelle stands on a chair to retrieve a box of frosted cereal from the cabinet. She washes a bowl and spoon from the pile of dirty dishes in the sink. She squeezes out a big gob of soap as the sink fills with bubbles. She pours cereal into the bowl and adds extra sugar she finds in the cupboard. She opens the fridge, takes out the milk. She takes a whiff, makes a face, pours it down the drain. Pours a can of soda over her cereal.

She stares at the empty chair at the head of the table. She opens another soda and places it there. Sits alone next to the empty chair, eats.

INT. LIVING ROOM

AL, Noelle's grandpa, is asleep in an armchair, the TV still on. O.S. Sound of a phone wake-up alarm going off.

Noelle sits on the sofa. Coat and backpack on.

EXT. MEDICAL CLINIC - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Justine parks in a screech of brakes, hurries to the back door. Doubles back, unlocks the car, grabs her purse.

INT. CLINIC

Justine passes an ajar office door, with the nameplate DONNA LEWISON, CLINIC MANAGER. DONNA is on the phone, turned away from the door. Justine sneaks past. Donna catches her out of the corner of her eye, keeps talking on phone.

Justine walks down the hall, passes LORRAINE, a nurse. The women do a low five as they pass each other.

LORRAINE
Clocked you in.

JUSTINE
I seriously love you.

EXT. CLINIC - BACK DOOR

Justine furtively smokes a cigarette. Rubs her eyes.

INT. CLINIC - FILE ROOM

Justine is filing patient charts, dropping a couple files onto the ground in the process. Papers spill out from them. Annoyed, she jams the papers back in the files.

DONNA (O.S.)
Justine.

Justine looks up, startled. Donna is standing in the doorway.

O.S. A phone rings...

INT. DONNA'S OFFICE

Donna is seated at her desk, peering at her computer, on the phone.

Justine is sitting across from her. She takes in a wrinkle on Donna's blouse, Donna's efficient fingers typing on the keyboard. A photograph on her desk of a nice house with a sulky teenaged girl standing in front.

Justine's eyes focus on a wall clock to the right of Donna's desk.

CLOSE-UP on the second hand of the clock, ticking crisply and repetitively. The sound starts to drown out Donna's voice on the phone.

Donna hangs up the phone.

DONNA
Excuse me for that.

JUSTINE
Do you ever just want to throw
something at that clock?
(MORE)

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(pause)

I mean...

Justine twists her hands together in her lap. Her gaze wanders to the photo of the surly teen on Donna's desk.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(smiling, tentative)

That your daughter?

DONNA

Yes.

JUSTINE

She looks...nice.

DONNA

Justine. I saw you sneak past me this morning...

JUSTINE

I didn't sneak--

DONNA

And you're smoking by the back door... Don't say anything, I saw you. We have sick people coming in and out of here. I don't know if you realize this, but what we do here matters. We provide a real service for the community. It's important that everyone who works here is committed to being here and doing their best.

JUSTINE

I get it. I'm just trying to handle a lot of stuff right now.

DONNA

Life doesn't give us what we can handle, Justine. It gives us what we get.

Silence. The clock continues ticking away.

Justine opens the office door. Over her shoulder, Donna picks up the phone, about to dial.

DONNA (CONT'D)

(to Justine)

I don't want to call you in here again.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Al, Justine and Noelle are eating at the table.

NOELLE
Why are we eating cereal for
dinner?

Al frowns at Justine.

AL
Good question.

JUSTINE
(retorts)
At least I remembered to pick up
milk.

Noelle tilts her cereal bowl and drinks the milk.

AL
Quit that. Or you can go live on a
farm with the other animals.

NOELLE
My dad grew up on a farm.

AL
I know. *My* farm.

NOELLE
He said you lost it.

AL
(sharply)
What?

NOELLE
How do you lose a farm? Where did
it go?

AL
Oh. Well--

NOELLE
Is it because grandma died and you
drank too much?

AL
(to Justine)
What the hell are you telling her?

JUSTINE
Nothing.

NOELLE
 (to Justine)
 You told me--

JUSTINE
 Noelle cut it out.

NOELLE
 I won't! I hate you.

She runs out of the room.

O.S. Her bedroom door slams.

JUSTINE
 Don't talk to me like that, go to
 your room!

NOELLE (O.S.)
 I'm in my room!

Justine gets up, starts to clean angrily with a dish towel,
 but throws it across the counter. Pours a shot of whiskey,
 downs it.

AL
 Justine.

JUSTINE
 Save it.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Noelle reads a comic book. She hears raised voices, Al and
 Justine arguing.

She peers around her door as Al storms past, keys in hand.

Noelle, sniffing, sits back on her bed. She scrunches up her
 eyes and tries to steady her breathing.

NOELLE
 (whispers to herself)
 Fall...

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Al drives down a back road.

NOELLE (V.O.)
 (whispers)
 ...to fly...

Al slows down as he approaches a left turn up a long dirt driveway, a large industrial farm looming at the top. His eyes are hard glitter in the night.

EXT. ROAD/HILLTOP TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Justine walks down the side of the dark road. Crickets chirp.

Up ahead, a scruffy roadhouse bar comes into view. Flickering neon sign: "Hilltop Tavern"

NOELLE (V.O.)
(whispers)
You gotta fall...

EXT. CLINIC - BACK DOOR - DAY

Justine quietly exits the clinic, closing the door softly. Outside, a landscaper, JACK, surveys a garden area against the wall.

Justine lights a cigarette, offers Jack one. He shakes his head.

JACK
I quit. You know, those things will
kill you.

Justine takes a big drag.

JUSTINE
Too late.
That tree doesn't really work
there.

JACK
What's that?

JUSTINE
You should put one of those pretty
trees instead, the ones with the
red leaves.

JACK
Uh... Japanese maple?

JUSTINE
The color would go better with the
crappy paint job whoever did on
this building.

She goes back inside. Jack raises his eyebrows, looking at the tree...

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Justine rounds the corner. She runs right into a furious Donna.

JUSTINE
Donna, listen, I---

CUT TO:

INT. DONNA'S OFFICE

Donna is standing against her desk, stony-faced with anger. She holds up a couple of patient files, hands them to Justine.

DONNA
See these? Notice anything unusual?

JUSTINE
No. What?

DONNA
If Dr. O'Neill hadn't seen that the prescriptions in these charts were mixed up-- that you mixed them up-- Annelle Murphy would have gotten a medication which could have killed her.

JUSTINE
Well good thing doctors double-check their work.
(off Donna's look)
What?

EXT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Justine, balancing a box of her things, wrenches open the passenger door and tosses it in with her purse.

She puts her hands on the car, steadies herself, takes a breath.

JUSTINE
Shit. Shit. Okay.. okay.

INT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Justine opens a banking app on her phone. Stares in disbelief at the zero balance.

She hits the steering wheel.

JUSTINE
SHIT!

INT. RAY'S TRUCK

Country music playing low on the radio. A phone, tossed on the passenger seat, starts vibrating.

INT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Justine, on her phone, waits and waits, hears a click on the other end... An automated voicemail greeting starts. She tosses her phone on the seat in disgust.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK STEPS - EVENING

Justine sits on the back steps, smoking. She looks over at the driveway.

CLOSE-UP on a few weeds growing through empty tire tracks.

Al comes outside, sits next to Justine.

AL
I hear Trinity's hiring.

JUSTINE
Forget it.

AL
I can make a call to Dave, his
cousin--

JUSTINE
I'm not working in a damn hospital.

AL
No different than that clinic.

JUSTINE
Hospitals are full of dead people.

AL
Justine--

JUSTINE

I swear Al, if you don't give me
breathing room, I'm gonna freakin
die and then you can park me at the
hospital with goddam bells on.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Noelle hears them arguing. Colors harder in her sketchbook as
Justine storms past, grabbing her purse and slamming the
front door behind her.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN - NIGHT

Justine and Lorraine are sitting at the bar. Justine is
turning her nearly empty glass of whiskey around in a circle.

LORRAINE

...I can't believe Donna-- Christ.
Maybe just talk to her, she'll give
you another chance, I know it.

The scene in front of Justine's eyes gets blurry. Music and
lights get louder, building in a dull roar.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

(scans crowd)
Where the hell is Matty?
How's Noelle doing?

JUSTINE

I have to pee.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN - BATHROOM

Justine is in a small cramped bathroom, trying to catch her
breath.

INT. BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

Ray and Justine lean against the sink, kissing, causing her
to hit her head on the mirror. She laughs it off.

O.S. Loud pounding on the door. They ignore it.

INT. BATHROOM - BACK TO SCENE

O.S. Loud pounding continues.

Justine stares at her solo reflection in the mirror.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN - BAR

MATTY, an overweight, good-natured biker, is talking in hushed, concerned tones with Lorraine.

They both look up as Justine sits back reluctantly on her bar stool. Twists her hands in her lap.

MATTY

Oh J baby, well. You know what I always say. When the wind blows, it opens a new door.

LORRAINE

You do not say that.

MATTY

(to Justine)
I do.

LORRAINE

(overlapping)
What does that even *mean*?

MATTY

You obviously don't listen, woman.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN - LATER

Justine sits hunched on a bar stool, drinking, on her own.

Across the room, Justine sees Matty and Lorraine exchange a kiss. She looks away.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Justine pauses in Noelle's doorway. Her door is slightly ajar. Justine hesitates, then knocks awkwardly.

NOELLE (O.S.)

What's the password?

JUSTINE

Um... Please?

NOELLE (O.S.)

No that's dumb.

JUSTINE
I don't know, Noelle.

NOELLE (O.S.)
Well you can't come in without the
password.

JUSTINE
Fine. I don't care.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM

Noelle is lying on the floor, drawing.

JUSTINE (O.S.)
What are you doing?

NOELLE
Drawing a picture.

JUSTINE (O.S.)
Can I see?

NOELLE
No. Go away.

Another pause. Then she hears Justine walk back down the
hall. She hesitates.

INT. DIETZ'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CUE MUSIC: Grateful Dead live (or similar)

Camera follows down the hallway of a dimly lit house. People
mill around, drinking, smoking joints.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Justine is hanging out with DIETZ, 50s-60's, a drug dealer,
and a group of guys, all lounging on the floor, a beat up
sofa, etc. They are drunk, high, laughing.

A tall, GRUNGY GUY, 30's, sitting next to Justine, watches
her.

Justine softly rubs the ears of Dietz's dog, a mangy German
Shepherd mix.

DIETZ
 (to the guys)
 Found him running down 46 by the
 Smoke Shop. Dude at the counter
 said he's part coyote.

Dietz howls like a wolf, the guys laugh.

JUSTINE
 Come on Dietz, it's getting real
 tight. You've gotta know somebody
 who is hiring, for something.

DIETZ
 Do I look like a fucking
 headhunter?
 (to dog)
 How bout we go hunting, huh?

He plays rough with the dog, who growls. A couple guys
 hovering laugh nervously.

Dietz mimes pumping a shotgun with his hands, "points" it at
 Justine.

DIETZ (CONT'D)
 Justine I'll give you a 10 second
 running start just so we can watch
 your ass.

JUSTINE
 Don't be an idiot.

DIETZ
 Hey, I got a job for you. Why don't
 you go whore yourself?

The guys laugh. Justine gets up to leave in a huff.

DIETZ (CONT'D)
 It's a valued service.

JUSTINE
 You're such a fuckin douche.

He smirks and offers her the joint. Justine hesitates.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
 I'm going sober.

DIETZ
 Yeah. Right.

INT. AL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Noelle walks into the empty living room, clutching her sketchpad.

She tears out a page, and places it on the coffee table. It's a drawing on which she has scrawled the words "For mom".

INT. DIETZ'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Justine flops onto her back on the bed, stoned, breezily waving a joint in the air like a conductor's baton.

She sings along to a Grateful Dead song "Althea" playing...

JUSTINE

(sings)

"I told Althea that treachery was
tearin me limb from limb..."

She sits up slowly, mood souring.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(to Dietz)

Turn this shit off, man.

Dietz watches her with hard eyes.

DIETZ

Princess, you forget something?

Justine opens her purse, sorts through a few dollar bills and coins.

DIETZ (CONT'D)

This ain't a fucking church
donation plate.

JUSTINE

I was thinking... money's kinda
hard to come by. Right now. And I
know Ray's done you favors before.
So-

Dietz gets right up in her face. Backs her into the wall. She involuntary shrinks but tries to hold her ground.

DIETZ

Careful what you wish for,
beautiful.

Justine reaches around and seductively moves her hand down... he is thrown off guard.. then she grabs a baggie of coke from his back pocket.

As she hurries out of the room, Dietz laughs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Justine looks in the fridge. Ketchup, mustard, ends of a loaf of bread. That's it. Looks in the fridge -- just a few canned goods languishing on the shelf.

She grabs the whiskey bottle then sees it's empty. She looks in all the cupboards, the freezer, behind the fridge and microwave.

INT. BASEMENT

Justine switches on the light. The basement is musty, cramped, with shelves full of boxes and old broken furniture pushed along the wall.

She searches through the shelves and pulls out a dusty, unopened bottle of whiskey, behind one box. She peers at Al's faded handwriting scrawled on the label: "Don't open". She shakes her head. Puts it back.

She ignores a box labeled "Justine stuff". Another box catches her eye, labeled "private".

INT. BASEMENT

Justine opens the box and flips through random stuff, all covered in dust. She pulls out some photographs: a man (Al) with a dark-haired woman, standing at the entrance to a barn, both smiling. The same woman and a young boy (Ray), bending to look at a small garden, the woman's hand on his shoulder.

She starts to put everything back in the box, when she sees a small hardcover book at the bottom. Justine dusts off the book. Title: "Medicinal Plants: Healing with Nature's Cure".

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN

Justine tentatively approaches Dietz at the bar. He ignores her, walks away as if she's not even there.

Across the bar, the grungy man from Dietz's house eyes her.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A VW van sits parked in the middle of a field.

INT. VAN

Justine and the grungy man sit in his parked van, Justine in the passenger seat. He hands her a small paper bag.

JUSTINE
(eyes him warily)
How much? I'm a little low on cash.

GRUNGY GUY
Who said anything about cash?

CLOSE-UP on Justine as she takes this in.

He starts to undo his belt. She wrenches open the door, jumps out.

GRUNGY GUY (CONT'D)
(angry)
Hey!

EXT. FIELD

Justine looks around for an escape, starts running deep into the dark field. The guy lets out a low chuckle.

GRUNGY GUY (O.S.)
Run, slut, run!...

She stumbles through the tall weeds, keeps going, running as if for her life.

GRUNGY GUY (O.S) (CONT'D)
I know where you live.

O.S. the van starts up, drives away. As the sound fades, Justine slows, and comes to a stop in the middle of the field. Panting. Disoriented. She looks at her phone, it's dead. She looks up at the moon, almost full.

She walks through the field, pushing weeds aside until she sees a tractor path on the edge of the field.

EXT. PATH

Justine walks along the path, just able to see her way through the moonlight.

Up ahead she sees a small house through the trees on the edge of the field. As she passes by, the back door opens and a man steps out, lighting a cigarette. Justine stops, squints at him.

The man looks up at the moon. The moonlight falls on his face. He takes a big drag.

JUSTINE
Thought you quit.

The man jumps, turns around. It's Jack, the landscaper from the clinic.

JACK
Jesus...

JUSTINE
Sorry.

Jack peers at her through the darkness.

JACK
You work at the clinic.

JUSTINE
Not anymore. I got canned.

JACK
Sorry to hear that.
(pause)
I'm Jack.

JUSTINE
Justine.

JACK
So what are you doing out here--?

JUSTINE
I was just-- taking a walk. And I got.. Lost.

JACK
Lost.

JUSTINE
Yeah.
(pause)
You live here?
Can I bum one of those?

He shrugs. Lights her a cigarette. Silence.

JACK
Old habits.

JUSTINE
What?
(re: cigarette)
Oh. Yeah.

Justine peers at a county road up ahead.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Is that the 20? I just live across
the hill. I guess I took a wrong
turn. You know how the moon is
like bright, and you can see by it,
but not really? Like it has
secrets.
Anyway... thanks for this.

She starts off toward the road.

JACK
Hey.
Come on, I'll give you a lift.

JUSTINE
Oh no, I'm good.

JACK
I'm sure you are, but it don't mean
you have to be walking down the
side of the road in the middle of
the night.

JUSTINE
I don't mind.

Justine keeps walking toward the road. She stops, hesitates.

INT. JACK'S TRUCK

They drive for a while in silence. Radio plays quietly.
Justine twists her hands, looks out the window.

JUSTINE
I'm right up here.

They pull up to Al's house. Jack kills the engine. Turns to
Justine, smiles slowly.

JACK
So... I was thinking...

Justine looks at him warily, thinking she knows where this is headed...

JACK (CONT'D)
You know much about landscaping?

JUSTINE
(surprised)
About what?

JACK
Plants, gardening. Landscaping, specifically.
(off her blank look)
You had a good opinion, turns out, about the Japanese maple.

JUSTINE
The what?

JACK
At the clinic. Look, one of my guys up and quit last week. We've been pretty short-handed. Could use the help. If you're still lookin for work.

JUSTINE
For real? No, I don't-- I think my thumb is probably pretty black.

JACK
What?

JUSTINE
(lame)
You know-- opposite of a green thumb...
(pause)
I'll find something. Thanks.

Justine opens the truck door.

JACK
No problem. Hey--

Jack fishes in his pocket and hands her a business card.

JACK (CONT'D)
Just in case you change your mind.
Or your thumb changes color.

JUSTINE
No really, I'm--

But he's backing down the driveway, drives off.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Justine lays out a line of coke on the coffee table, then she bends her head to snort. The coffee table is cluttered with a full ashtray, cups, crumpled napkins, as well as Noelle's drawing she left there.

Unnoticing, she slides the open "Medicinal Plants" book right on top of Noelle's drawing, although part of it - a flower - is visible peeking out underneath the book.

Justine thumbs through the book, accidentally spilling some coke onto a photograph on one of the pages.

JUSTINE

Shit.

She carefully brushes it off the face of the woman in the photo. It's a 1900's black and white photo, the woman in a long dress, standing in front of a garden, hair askew and with a triumphant grin. She reads:

"Gardening taken up as a hobby when all the laborious work can be done by a man is delightful, but as a life's work (for a woman), it is almost an impossible thing."

At the age of 19, I set out for myself to gain employment in the field I knew best and using the only skills I had: gardening, with an emphasis on cultivating wild plants for medicinal use. Little did I know I would become a vocal advocate for the rights of all women to work in the gardening profession, and to exercise our God-given right to the vote. My path led me to defy the conventions of the day, spurned on by none other than Sir Joseph Hooker, who uttered the above scathing words. It was the very "impossibility" of such a task which called to me in the recesses of my being.

Justine looks up from the book. Grabs her purse and searches in it, takes out Jack's business card. Hesitates.

EXT. JACK'S LANDSCAPING - DAY

Jack's truck is parked out front.

Several WORKERS, men 20s-40's, and 1 woman, MARY, 30's, load it up with bags of mulch, rakes, etc.

Justine stands to the side, looking a little lost.

Jack hands her a pair of work gloves.

JACK
You'll need these.

Justine slowly puts on the gloves like she's preparing for surgery. Looks like she wants to make a run for it.

EXT. CLIENT HOUSE - FRONT/BACKYARD

MONTAGE: VARIOUS

- A) Jack directs workers as they unload large bags of compost, potting soil, and supplies.
- B) Justine grabs a potting soil bag and tries to lift it, struggles. She drags it on the ground instead.
- C) Justine watches Mary grab a bag and hoist it up with no difficulty.
- D) Justine digs in the ground with a shovel, wiping her brow and streaking mud across it. Her hair is falling out of her ponytail, around her face in sweaty strands.
- E) Justine drags a tray of plant starts into a shed, almost tipping the tray over. A few plants topple out. She hastily scoops them up, cursing under her breath.
- F) Justine and Mary are sneaking a cigarette behind a house they're working at. The client arrives home; they stub out the cig quickly and get back to work.

INT. HEALTH FOOD STORE - DAY

Justine walks in. Wind chimes announce her presence. She scornfully eyes a pile of tie-dyed tapestries and a psychedelic poster.

Sees an aisle of medicinal herbal formulas, various bottles and jars. Browses. Mesmerized.

She catches sight of store sign: "Organic greens! Good source of iron and folate for your healthy diet"

CLOSE-UP on her handwritten grocery list: "Healthy food"

She gingerly selects a wild-looking bunch of kale and eyes it suspiciously as if it might attack her. Reluctantly puts the kale in her cart.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Justine is unpacking groceries. Noelle walks in. Justine gives her a bright hopeful smile.

NOELLE
(incredulous)
You're cooking dinner?

Noelle, peers in the grocery bag at a box of granola.

NOELLE (CONT'D)
I like Frosty Bites.

JUSTINE
This one's on sale. And it's healthier.

NOELLE
Looks like what our gerbil eats at school.

Justine puts the bunch of kale into the fridge.

NOELLE (CONT'D)
WHAT is that?

JUSTINE
It's... Noelle, just go play.

Justine googles on her phone: "How to cook kale."

She puts the kale in a boiling pot of water. Almost burns herself.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justine, Al, and Noelle are seated around the table. They have TV dinner-type chicken on their plates, flanked by a pile of kale. No one has touched the kale.

A few beats pass.

AL
So did you bring your yard clippings home from work or is this dinner?

JUSTINE
Don't be a smart ass. Didn't you grow this stuff for a living?

AL

Don't mean I gotta eat it.

Noelle pushes her plate away.

NOELLE

I'm not hungry.

JUSTINE

Noelle. Please eat it?

NOELLE

You first.

Justine rubs her sore neck and shoulders from working. Al eyes her, frowning.

AL

Of all places in town, I don't know why you're working for a frou frou one.

JUSTINE

It's a job. Thought you'd be thrilled.

AL

If he wants to work the land, he should work the land. Not fiddle around with tree trimmers.

JUSTINE

You know, Al, the work Jack does is really amazing. Landscape design is like.. an art.

AL

My point exactly.

EXT. CLIENT HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

CLOSE-UP on an organic potting soil bag that Justine is lugging across the yard.

She rubs her brow and stretches her back. Notices Jack and EARL, the lead designer, standing by the house, looking at her. Earl says something to Jack, they laugh.

Justine looks away.

Mary, another worker, sees her from across the lawn and waves her arms.

MARY
 (calling out)
 No no no!

JUSTINE
 No no no?

MARY
 Other side. Put it on the other
 side of the house.

JUSTINE
 (mutters)
 You've got to be fuckin kidding me.

She starts dragging the bag to the front of the house, knocks over a garden gnome statue.

Camera focuses on the gnome face-planted in the dirt as Justine drags the bag away.

INT. CLINIC - EXAM ROOM - DAY

Justine is sitting on an exam table as Lorraine tends to a deep cut on her arm.

LORRAINE
 You in the gardening mafia or something?

JUSTINE
 This was from a leaf blower.

LORRAINE
 I don't even want to know.

Lorraine goes into an adjoining room to look for something.

Justine looks distractedly around the room. Her eyes fall on a cart with a tray of painkiller bottles, waiting to be put into storage.

LORRAINE (CONT'D) (O.S.)
 So... Guess who was in here the other day. Chester Harris.

JUSTINE
 Marla kick him out again?

Justine quietly puts one of the bottles in her purse.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

No, worse. He was at the casino again last weekend and when he finally comes home, she throws a jar of canned tomatoes at his head. Knocked him right out. Concussion.

JUSTINE

Jesus.

(ruefully)

Maybe me and Marla should talk.

Lorraine comes back into the room holding gauze and a box of bandages.

LORRAINE

I swear, if Ray ever shows his face again, you just let me know. *I'll* be the one swingin' a jar. Let's get you patched up before Donna comes back from lunch. Don't want any more concussions.

As Lorraine grabs Justine's purse to put it on a chair, the painkiller bottle rolls out. Lorraine picks it up, reading the label....

JUSTINE

Lorraine, I---

Lorraine puts the bottle back with the others on the cart. Slowly starts unwrapping the bandage.

LORRAINE

I'm not an idiot Justine. Don't treat me like one.

JUSTINE

I wasn't trying to-

LORRAINE

You know what really pisses me off, about all this? People in your life just want the best for you, and all you want is to throw it away.

Lorraine, silent with anger, patches up Justine's arm.

INT. DIETZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Justine walks in the door. She heads to a back room. The air is hazy and heavy. A group of people are hanging out on couches. Drugs on the table.

She watches the familiar scene for a few beats. Hesitates.

Abruptly she turns to leave. Heads down the hall. Someone comes up behind her. A hand grabs her arm and pulls her into a dark empty room.

INT. ROOM

The grungy man pushes Justine up against the wall. Starts running his hands up her body.

JUSTINE

Hey! Quit it--

She tries to get away, but is pinned to the wall. He roughly knocks her head into the wall and pins her hands over her head.

Justine manages to knee him in the groin, he drops her and bends over, in pain.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - JUSTINE'S ROOM

Justine opens her desk drawers and closet. She finds one remaining packet of coke.

INT. BATHROOM

Justine hovers over the toilet, holding the opened packet of coke above it, poised to pour it out. Hesitates.

EXT. BATHROOM

CLOSE-UP on the closed bathroom door.

O.S. The toilet flushes.

EXT. CLIENT HOUSE - TRUCK

Justine is sitting on the end of Jack's truck's bed, on a break, looking pretty beat. She takes the medicinal plants book from her purse and flips through.

Jack walks over, drinking a soda. Hands Justine one.

JACK

How's it going?

JUSTINE

(shrugs)
Oh, you know...
(pause)
I've been wondering something.

JACK

What's that.

JUSTINE

Wondering what on this God-forsaken earth compelled you to offer me this job. I show up at your house, middle of the night, and I'm like, all bitter and pissed off, and you saw some part of me that just screamed out... landscaper?...

Justine gestures to her bruised, muddy, out of place self.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Which part?

JACK

Well, definitely not your thumb.

JUSTINE

Seriously, why?

JACK

Intuition.

JUSTINE

Yeah, right.

JACK

It's true.

JUSTINE

Okay...I just assumed you felt sorry for me.

JACK

I'm not that nice.

He notices Justine's book, open to a botanical drawing.

JACK (CONT'D)

Plantain weed.

JUSTINE

What?

He points to the picture.

JACK

Grows like wildfire. It's a good one. Heals all kinds of things.

JUSTINE

Does it heal concussion, like if a man gets something thrown at his head?

JACK

No...

JUSTINE

Good.

She brings her attention back at the book. He glances at his phone and stands to leave.

JACK

Break's up...
(pause)
Motherwort.

JUSTINE

Excuse me?

JACK

(nodding at book)
Look it up. For a woman dealing with a man she wants to throw stuff at.

Justine gives him a sarcastic look. He smiles. As soon as he's gone she quickly flips to that page.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Somewhere off a lonesome highway, Ray is at the register, buying a pack of cigarettes and a soda.

A car pulls up and parks in front of a gas pump. A girl, around Noelle's age, jumps out of the car and runs around to the pump as her father starts to pump gas, watching in fascination. Her father smiles at her. Ray watches all this take place.

CASHIER

Sir?

Ray looks back to him.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
I said, will that be all?

RAY
Yeah, thanks.

He grabs his purchases and turns to exit.

EXT. HEALTH FOOD STORE - DAY

Justine walks across the parking lot toward the entrance, purse slung over her shoulder.

She opens the door and enters.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Ray opens the door and exits, pulling a cigarette from the pack with his mouth.

INTERCUT RAY AND JUSTINE

Justine walks into the health food store, looking around.

Ray slowly walks back to his truck and gets in.

Justine heads toward the back of the store.

Ray starts the engine, backs out, and drives away.

INT. HEALTH FOOD STORE

Justine examines bottles and jars of herbal remedies. She selects a few tinctures, then more, and more, filling her basket.

She brings everything to the cash register.

A CLERK, 20's, with dreads, tattoos, and an ironic T-shirt, looks at the pile of bottles and back at Justine.

INT. HOUSE - JUSTINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Justine sits in the center of her bed, next to the pile of herbal bottles. She opens one.

CLOSE-UP on label: "Motherwort". She drinks it, makes a face. Opens the next one, drinks it...

Frustrated, she flips through the Medicinal Plants book, as if looking for answers.

She downs a couple more bottles...

CUT TO:

Justine is lying in bed, staring at the ceiling blankly, smoking. Surrounded by a sea of empty herbal tincture bottles.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Al and Noelle are eating breakfast. Justine pours a cup of coffee. She grabs the milk from the fridge as Al catches a glimpse of spinach and carrots.

AL

Still don't know when you became such a health nut.

NOELLE

A health... *nut*?

JUSTINE

I was thinking... we could grow some vegetables and things out back. Looks like you could have a nice garden out there.

AL

No one's touchin' my yard. You hear? I'm not sayin another word about it.

JUSTINE

I don't understand--

AL

I said THAT'S ENOUGH.

Noelle and Justine both jump.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Jack pulls a mulch bag off the back of his truck. Justine stands off to the side, a little awkwardly.

JACK

I just don't get all the secrecy.
You're growing a garden, not
breaking the law.

JUSTINE

My father-in-law, sorta, is kind of
anti-gardening. But he's got his
poker game tonight, so--

JACK

Who the hell is anti-gardening?...

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Al grimaces, puts his cards down in resignation.

AL

I'm out.

Al, DAVE and MORRIS, 60's-70s, as well as Martha, 50's, sit
at her kitchen table, concentrating on their hand of cards.

MORRIS

Nice kitchen, Martha.

MARTHA

Thanks.

MORRIS

You ever need any plumbing or
electrical done, you just call me
right up, I'll make you a nice
deal.

MARTHA

(eyes on her cards)
I appreciate that.

DAVE

Now Morris, try to distract her all
you want, but Martha here is a mean
poker player and ain't fallin' for
any old trick in the book. She'll
put us old farts to shame,
guarantee it.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Justine and Jack survey a scabby patch of dirt in the field
behind the house.

JACK
So what are you going to plant?

JUSTINE
No idea.

JACK
Some lettuce or
carrots'd be pretty easy.

Jack notices Noelle's bike against the house.

JACK (CONT'D)
Whose bike?

JUSTINE
My son's.

JACK
Nice. Classic model. Alright, you
run out, I'll make you a good deal.
Does your husband have a truck,
or...?

JUSTINE
(hesitates)
Um. No.

JACK
Ok well. Good luck.

JUSTINE
Yeah. Thanks for this.

Jack drives off.

Justine looks at the bags of mulch, frowning.

EXT. BACKYARD - EVENING

Justine is on hands and knees, dirt on her jeans. She pours the mulch over the patch of earth, struggling with the effort.

She wipes her brow, accidently streaking some dirt against it.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

Justine sits on the ground, smoking a cigarette.

O.S. She hears a car pull up the drive and cut the engine.

She swears, hurriedly throws the empty mulch bags in the garbage pail. Hides them with a couple handfuls of leaves.

She's suddenly grabbed from behind. The grungy man clasps a hand over her mouth.

He knocks her into the side of the house, pushing up against her. She struggles as he tightens his grip.

A rifle barrel presses hard against his temple.

AL (O.S.)
Get in the house Justine.

The grungy man releases her, holds his hands up as Al keeps the rifle on him.

INT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

O.S. The grungy guy's van drives off with a squeal of tires.

Justine looks at Al with silent acknowledgment. He meets her eyes levelly. Walks into the house without a word.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - EVENING

A small, well-cared for house. Trees and neatly trimmed bushes out front.

Noelle and Justine walk up to the front door.

NOELLE
I want to go home.

JUSTINE
We'll just stay for dinner, ok?

NOELLE
This blows.

Justine opens her mouth to respond but the door is opened by a tall girl, DAWN, around Noelle's age.

Jack appears behind her.

JACK
You must be Noelle.

Noelle doesn't respond. Justine nudges her sharply. Noelle glares at her.

JACK (CONT'D)
This is my niece, Dawn.

DAWN
(to Noelle)
Want to play a game?

NOELLE
(thinks)
Yeah. Ok.

The kids go off. Justine and Jack smile at each other, a little tentatively.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Justine helps bring dishes to the table, shyly, awkwardly. Noelle cautiously carries a large serving platter of vegetables to the table, biting her lip in concentration.

Jack helps his GRANDMOTHER, frail, in her 90's, to the table. A large group of his family- sisters, cousins, in-laws, kids are all there, talking and laughing rambunctiously.

Justine and Noelle take in the lively family commotion with fascination, wonder and discomfort.

CUT TO:

The table is deserted, plates cleared.

O.S. Voices chatting and kids shouting, laughing.

Justine is still at the table, feeling out of place. Jack's grandmother sits there too. Justine glances at her. The grandmother reaches into a small crocheted purse and pulls out her smartphone. She starts playing a noisy game, all blips and beeps. Justine looks around, anxious to leave. She starts to get up. The grandmother reaches again into her purse. She hands Justine an old silver necklace with a small charm. Justine hesitates. Grandmother indicates for Justine to have it.

JUSTINE
(in shock)
For me?

The grandmother nods.

Justine examines the necklace.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
It's beautiful. Where did you get
it?

Justine accidentally drops the necklace and the fragile charm
cracks in half as it hits the floor.

Justine is mortified, horrified.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Shit! Oh my God - oh I'm so sorry.
I--

She picks up the pieces and tries to fit them together.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Oh Christ...I can fix this-

The grandmother fastens the necklace around Justine's neck.
Then picks up her phone and resumes her game.

Justine puts her fingers around the broken charm, hand
trembling.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH

Jack is chatting with a group of people sitting around on old
chairs.

On the lawn, Noelle, Dawn and other kids kick a soccer ball
around.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Justine is sitting on the couch, alone. She examines her
broken necklace.

O.S. sound of children playing, adults talking, from outside.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE

A small office, with a desk, computer and chair. Small
bookshelves and a few potted plants.

Justine peeks in. Looks behind her. Wanders inside.

She discovers a small shelf of dried herbs and small bottles.
Examines them.

EXT. BACKYARD

Noelle and Dawn kick the soccer ball back and forth.

NOELLE

..And secret agents have like
genius powers.

DAWN

Really? Like what.

NOELLE

They can walk through walls, they
can and have special sensing of
evil.

DAWN

Cool.

Jack and the adults overhear, look at each other in
amusement.

NOELLE

My dad's a secret agent.

DAWN

Yeah right.

NOELLE

He is!

DAWN

Prove it.

NOELLE

(boasting)

He has a special mission. I heard
my mom tell my grandpa he
disappeared. She said he vanished
into thin air. Only secret agents
can do that.

Noelle kicks the ball hard, it bounces off a tree.

JUSTINE (O.S.)

Noelle, time to go.

Justine stands by the door, purse in hand.

NOELLE

(to Justine)

You did say that! Tell--

JUSTINE
Come on, we're leaving, let's go.

NOELLE
You're a liar!

JUSTINE
I'm not gonna tell you again.

Noelle kicks the ball harder, it sails through the yard and into the woods behind.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
(voice raising)
You go bring that back, and then meet me in the car.

NOELLE
I don't--

JUSTINE
NOW.

Noelle angrily runs after the ball. Justine strides off towards her car.

JACK
Hey. Wait up.

Justine ignores him, keeps walking.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Jack catches up with Justine as she reaches her car.

JACK
Don't be too hard on her, she--

JUSTINE
Don't tell me how to raise my kid.
Just-- don't do me any favors, ok?

They hear voices and commotion, and turn to see Jack's SISTER helping Noelle, who's limping, walk to the house. Kids cluster around them.

NOELLE
(teary)
I couldn't find the ball, and my foot just fell in this hole and I twisted my knee and--

JUSTINE
Noelle, I don't have time for this.

Noelle glares at her.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Come on, it's late. Let's go.

NOELLE
It hurts!--
(to Dawn and kids)
It was a really big hole, like
infinity size.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Noelle sits on the kitchen counter, drinking a glass of juice. Kicks a drumbeat against the counter with her non-hurt leg.

JUSTINE
Quit it.

Jack enters with first aid cream and a band-aid. He patches up Noelle's knee. Noelle inspects the band aid with interest.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
What do you say.

NOELLE
(mumbles)
Thank you.

She hops down and wanders into the living room where Dawn is watching TV with her mom, Jack's sister. Justine glances at his sister, who looks at her coolly, then away.

JUSTINE
How did you get into all this?
Landscaping and stuff.

JACK
I just picked it up over time. I
felt more kinship to plants than
most people. My grandmother was to
blame I guess. She'd always take me
on these nature walks in the woods,
foraging for herbs, that kind of
thing.

JUSTINE
That's so cool.

JACK

(shrugs)

It helped take my mind off things.
My parents really struggled with
mental health stuff, depression. My
grandmother pretty much raised me
and my siblings.

A few beats of silence.

JUSTINE

My parents chose to follow some
hippie band for a living. Left me
here when I was 10. With my uncle.
For what that was worth.

JACK

Where are they now?

JUSTINE

I have no idea. Friggin' "peace and
love." Can't stand that shit.

JACK

Noelle seems like a good kid.

JUSTINE

(pause)

He's pretty close with Ray. His
father. Or, I guess was close...

JACK

What happened?

JUSTINE

He... left.

JACK

I'm sorry.

Justine shrugs.

JUSTINE

You ever been married?

JACK

No.

JUSTINE

I find that hard to believe.

JACK

Why's that?

JUSTINE
You seem like, the marrying kind.

JACK
Maybe. Maybe not. Came pretty close
once.

JUSTINE
Why didn't you..?

JACK
Just wasn't the right thing. At the
time.

Jack's sister abruptly enters.

SISTER
(to Jack)
We're heading home.

JUSTINE
I should go too.
(to Sister)
It was nice meeting--

SISTER
(curtly)
Yes.

Jack walks his sister out. Justine watches them go.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Noelle is on her bike, practicing.

She pushes on the bike pedals and goes forward a foot or two,
before almost falling over, catching herself just in time.
She rubs her sore knee, picks at the band aid.

RAY (V.O.)
That's it, Nono.

Noelle looks towards the house. Squints.

A blurred figure, Ray, is sitting on the steps by the back
door, elbows on his knees, smoking.

RAY
You got it.

Noelle determinedly wobbles forward on the bike, then loses
her balance and topples to the ground.

RAY (CONT'D)
 (laughs)
 Whoa there killer...

NOELLE
 I can't do it!

RAY
 Sure you can. You got this.

NOELLE
 Didn't you see me fall?

RAY
 Well you gotta fall to fly, Nono
 girl.

NOELLE
 (frowning)
 That doesn't make any sense.

RAY
 You'll see. Hey come over here...
 You heard me.

Noelle slowly walks towards Ray and sits down next to him.
 She looks up at him.

CLOSE-UP on Ray's hair curling over his frayed shirt collar.

RAY (CONT'D)
 You gotta ease up, Nono. Be strong.
 Bike ridin's easy.

NOELLE
 No it's not. I can't do it.

RAY
 Yeah, well...you just got to get
 the rhythm of the bike. Gotta trust
 it. One thing a person's got to
 learn is what to trust, and what to
 hold off from. Sometimes the
 difference between the two is just
 a thin crack of light.

With his cigarette, Ray gestures to the sunset, now just a
 small sliver of light behind the trees.

He watches a flock of birds, high up, flying toward the
 sunset.

RAY (CONT'D)
 You know what I'm sayin'?

NOELLE

Kind of.

RAY

See, birds always know. Know it's
in their nature to fly. That's
trust. C'mon, kid...

Ray stands up, walks over to the bike lying on the ground,
and props it up. He lightly bangs his fist on the bike's
seat.

RAY (CONT'D)

...Give 'er another shot.

Noelle stands up and gingerly brushes some grass off her
jeans. She walks reluctantly over to the bike and gets on it.

Ray stands back, then slowly ambles back to the house. He
takes a quick look at the fading sunset, and climbs the steps
till he's at the door.

RAY (CONT'D)

You'll see, Noelle. One day you'll
take off on that bike.
You'll fly.

Noelle looks towards the back steps. They're empty.

She pushes off on her bike again, rides for a couple paces,
then falls over. She slumps on the ground, dejected.

A flock of birds soar overhead. Noelle looks up at them.

INT. DINER

Al takes a sip of his coffee.

He's sitting in the back booth, alone.

The waitress comes by and refills his mug. She hovers,
picking at her faded nail polish, fishing.

WAITRESS

Thick as thieves.

AL

What was that?

WAITRESS

It's what I call you two. You and
your son. Always sitting in this
booth every week...

(MORE)

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Making those plans for your farm.
Haven't seen him in here in
forever.

Her voice is trailing off as Al stares out the window. Suddenly a man walks by, pulling his baseball cap down over his eyes as he passes Al.

AL

(cuts her off)

Excuse me--

EXT. DINER

Al stumbles out of the diner and watches the man walk over to a truck and get in the passenger side.

As the truck drives away, the man glances at Al. It's not Ray.

Al watches the truck drive away.

EXT. CAR

Al starts the car, sits there with the engine running, staring into space.

He drives. Heads deeper into the countryside. The dirt driveway he'd driven by before comes into view. This time, flanked by an expensive new sign "Eden Valley Farms, Inc." Al swears and jams on the brakes. Stares at the sign. Slowly advances the car.

He flicks on his turn signal as he approaches. But then speeds up and drives right by the turn.

INT. BASEMENT

Al is standing near the shelves, breathing hard.

He pulls out the unopened whiskey bottle. Holds it in his trembling hands. Puts it back.

INT. BACK DOOR - EARLY MORNING

Justine pauses at back door, listening. Sound of TV blaring from living room. The coast is clear. She slips out the door.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUING

Justine works on her hands and knees in her garden, carefully putting in some plant starts, stopping to refer to "gardening 101"-type printouts.

She works, a small smile of contentment stealing across her face.

NOELLE (O.S.)
What are you doing?

Justine whips around as if caught.

Noelle stands on the back steps, wearing her backpack.

JUSTINE
Don't you have school?

NOELLE
Grandpa said he doesn't want anyone messing with his yard.

JUSTINE
Well, we live here, too.
Unfortunately. And it was already a mess when we got here. He doesn't always get the last word around here.

(pause)
But maybe let's not tell him.

NOELLE
Is it a secret?

JUSTINE
Umm. Yes. I can trust you, right?

NOELLE
Duh.

The school bus pulls up front and beeps. Noelle runs off towards it.

INT. BANK - DAY

Al enters and approaches the reception desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Do you have an appointment?

AL
No.

INT. BANK - MRS. JOHANSEN'S OFFICE

MRS. JOHANSEN, bank manager, 40's, pushes a few papers to the side of her desk, and sighs, shaking her head.

MRS. JOHANSEN

I'm sorry, Mr... Winston, but there's nothing more we can do for you.

AL

But--

MRS. JOHANSEN

Like I told you over the phone. Says here that East Amalgamated Farms, Inc. made you an offer to consolidate years ago before signing your property over to Eden Valley Farms, Inc, just last month.

AL

It was a shady deal and I've never been compensated fair for it. I told you that. Anyway how could I've done that? Consolidated. I woulda lost all control over my own farm... start farming some genetic-whatever seeds.

(faltering)

Lose touch with the land. My son-- was going to.. he was supposed to take it over from me. But he... It was my father's land. My land.

MRS. JOHANSEN

Like I said. Nothing we can do. You could try legal action. But I wouldn't advise it. You'd probably be wasting your time.

(pause)

You worked your farm a long time. Go home. Enjoy your retirement.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justine piles the plates next to the sink. The doorbell rings. Justine looks up.

NOELLE (O.S.)
 I'll get it!
 (pause)
 Hey mom!

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP on red wine being poured into two glasses. Lorraine hands a glass to Justine.

JUSTINE
 (to Lorraine)
 You are a lifesaver.

LORRAINE
 I know. I'm a nurse. But it comes
 with a catch.

Lorraine brandishes a weathered set of tarot cards.

JUSTINE
 Are you for real.

LORRAINE
 It's completely scientific. Where's
 Gramps?

JUSTINE
 Poker. His ride never showed so I
 had to drive his grumpy ass there.

LORRAINE
 Well, cheers anyway.

They click glasses.

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Al follows Martha into the kitchen.

MARTHA
 I'm so sorry, Al, I thought Dave
 had called everyone. Said he's sick
 as a dog so maybe he overdid the
 cough syrup and fell asleep while
 dialing your number...
 (laughs pleasantly)

AL
 It's alright. Well Justine's got
 the car so I'll give her a call--

MARTHA

...Of course it could also be my place isn't so much the hot ticket for playing poker, anymore.

AL

Well now, I don't know 'bout..

MARTHA

Here, let me grab my purse and I'll run you home.

Martha heads over to the living room, looking for her purse.

Al waits. His gaze falls on a vase of flowers, daffodils, on the table.

MARTHA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where's my darn purse. Oh here it is.

Al makes no move to leave. Martha waits, then...

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I am so rude. Can I get you a cup of coffee?

Al sits right down.

AL

Sure.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The wine bottle is half empty.

Lorraine and Justine sit in front of a spread of tarot cards on the coffee table.

LORRAINE

(intently)

Now this card... stands for your past. 2 of Cups. Two souls connected as one. Like your higher self. You will always be connected to your higher self, no matter how far away it seems. And this is the present, it's the Strength card-- Oh I like this. Speaks for itself. You have all this inner strength you can rely on. And this is your future. The Tower.

(MORE)

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

It stands for a great reckoning, an upheaval, an upset.

(off Justine's look)

But it's a good thing.

JUSTINE

It's someone falling out of a tower and landing on his face.

LORRAINE

It's like a baby bird, falling out of his nest before he can fly.

JUSTINE

It's like he broke his neck.

LORRAINE

It means you'll have the chance to dust yourself off, get grounded, and look at things in a new way. Start over.

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

CLOSE-UP on daffodil bouquet, then on Al looking at them.

Al and Martha sit at the table with cups of coffee.

AL

Nice flowers.

MARTHA

(smiles)

Thank you.

AL

My wife always hated daffodils. Said they was a goofy excuse for a flower. After she died I couldn't look at em.

MARTHA

Oh.

Awkward pause.

AL

I always liked em though. Cheerful.

MARTHA

I'm sorry about your wife.

AL
She's been gone goin' on 20 years
now.

MARTHA
My husband passed last December.

AL
Rough.

MARTHA
It is what it is.

INT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Lorraine puts on her coat as Justine carries the rest of the wine into the kitchen.

JUSTINE (O.S.)
You don't have to run off already.

LORRAINE
If Matty tries to cook dinner it'll
burn the house down.

O.S. A car pulls up outside.

JUSTINE
Oh Christ, he's not back already is
he. Alright, see you later.

LORRAINE
Don't be a stranger.

She opens the door to see Jack getting out of his truck.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)
It's not Al. Definitely not.

JUSTINE
Oh. It's my boss.

LORRAINE
At the gardening job?

JUSTINE
Landscaping.

LORRAINE
Quite an improvement over Donna.

JUSTINE
Would you stop.

Jack comes up to the door, hesitates when he sees Lorraine.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Hi...

JACK

Hey. Sorry to spring up on you, I was headed this way and had some extra mulch in the back, and thought maybe you could use it.

LORRAINE

Nice.

(to Justine)

Mulch.

JACK

Sorry. I didn't realize you had company.

LORRAINE

(to Jack)

I'm just leavin'.

(to Justine, winks)

Your Tower awaits.

Justine glares at her.

Lorraine heads to her car, turns around and mouths "Strength!" to Justine, then drives off.

Justine looks at Jack, smiles awkwardly.

INT. MARTHA'S CAR - CONTINUING

Al and Martha drive down the road in silence for a while.

AL

You always speak your mind, like that?

MARTHA

(laughs a little)

Drove my family crazy. But it's why my husband said he married me. I was studying to be a political science professor. But we wanted kids, so... Though it turned out, that part didn't-- work out. As planned. Sometimes I wonder...

(pause)

What about you, you have kids?

AL
(pause)
My son. Well, he's way past being a
kid.

MARTHA
Of course.

AL
He got a boy of his own now.

MARTHA
Oh that's nice. It always seems
like a special relationship.
Fathers and sons.

Al doesn't respond.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Anyway, short answer is yes. I do
believe in speaking your mind,
standing up for what you believe
in. It's all we have.

Al takes this in, stares out the window at the passing
farmland.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM

Noelle is reading her secret agent comic. Her gaze falls on a
letter sticking out of her backpack.

CLOSE-UP on letter: An announcement about a costume party
being held at her school next month.

Noelle looks back at her comic, then suddenly jumps up
excitedly.

INT. HALLWAY

Noelle heads down towards the hall.

NOELLE
Hey Mom!

She hears voices coming from outside.

INT. BACK DOOR

Noelle cautiously opens the back door and sees Justine and
Jack by the garden, talking.

She backs away from the door, shutting it behind him.

EXT. BACKYARD

Jack and Justine stand in front of her garden. Baby medicinal herbs and vegetable plant starts are peeking out from the dirt, interlaced with decorative stones in an intricate pattern.

JACK

Looks good. Really good. Where'd you get the idea for the design?

JUSTINE

I just.. thought of it.

JACK

You can harvest what you have in a couple weeks and dry them for teas.

JUSTINE

Or, what are they called--
tinctures. Bottling anything with alcohol sounds like a good idea.

(pause)

Joke.

JACK

Well you do have a point...

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

Martha's car pulls up and lets Al out. He sees Jack's truck parked out front and gives it a long look.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUING

As Al enters, he hears voices. Jack and Justine are hanging out in the kitchen, talking, drinking beers.

They catch sight of Al and conversation stops.

AL

(to Jack, unwelcoming)
Who are you?

JACK

Jack Scott.

Jack extends his hand, which Al refuses.

JUSTINE

Jack is my boss. From work.

AL

Uh huh.

JACK

Well I better get going. Thanks for
the beer, Justine.

(nods at Al)

Nice to meet you.

Jack leaves.

JUSTINE

What is your--?

AL

(contained fury)

You got some nerve.

EXT. CAR - EVENING

Al drives. Country music plays low on the car radio.

Al looks out the window, as he passes a small farm with a
foreclosure sign. Right next door to an abandoned farm in
disarray and neglect.

He passes scattered mobile homes, rundown and in need of
repairs.

Behind that, miles of open land.

Al keeps driving, until the sign for Eden Valley Farms, Inc
comes into view. This time he slows and jots down the 1-800
number on the sign.

INT. AL'S ROOM

Al picks up his phone and dials. A voice recording tone is
heard.

He hangs up. Stares at the phone.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Al and Noelle are watching TV. Al in his armchair, Noelle
sprawled on the floor with her sketchbook. Noelle's eyes are
glued to the TV.

They're watching an old black and white documentary about World War II special operations.

TV NARRATOR (V.O.)

...When Lieutenant Peterson's fighter plane disappeared, the Sergeant and task force had no choice but to launch an investigation to find the missing pilot. As America watched and waited, hoping to bring him back home.

The TV cuts to a commercial break. Noelle's eyes return to her sketchbook. Erases, draws, erases... throws her pencil down in frustration.

Al glances at her, and at her drawing: a single mountain against a setting sun. For an 8 year old, it's pretty good.

AL

(grudgingly)
That's not bad.

NOELLE

It's the tallest mountain in the world.

AL

You wanna see some tall mountains, you gotta go west.

NOELLE

Where's that?

AL

(nods head toward west)
That way. Gotta drive for a while.

NOELLE

Have you been there?

AL

No. But your Dad was for a time. He tell you about that?

NOELLE

No.

AL

Well... the way he described it is, you get on little back roads out there, you can go whole stretches of time not seeing another soul.

(MORE)

AL (CONT'D)

(in a memory)

He told me he met this man there,
old guy, 80 years old. He was
working for a trucker and made a
delivery to his car garage,
somethin' like that. Old guy'd been
living alone in some 2-room shack
off the edge of the Flathead
National Forest, total wilderness.
Sounds lonely, but Ray said he
never saw such... peace in him. In
someone.

(beat)

Guy sounds like a nut job.

Noelle turns back to the TV, brow furrowed, thinking.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM - LATER

Noelle writes "SPECIAL MISSION" on a page in her notebook.

She looks in his closet, and finds an old cowboy hat. She
puts it on.

She peers at a map of New York state on the wall. With her
finger she traces the distance from her hometown to the word
West.

INT. AL'S ROOM

Al sits at his desk, addressing a letter to a law firm in
Albany, NY. Satisfied look on his face.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Justine is getting ready to leave. Noelle and Al are at the
kitchen table. Al reads the newspaper.

NOELLE

Hey mom, guess what? I'm a Cowboy
Sergeant.

JUSTINE

(uninterested)
Ok, Sarge.

Justine leaves. Noelle looks crestfallen.

AL

I was a Sergeant once, you know.
Back when I was in the Army.

NOELLE

You were? Like those guys in the
show?

AL

What show?

NOELLE

The one we were watching with the
pilot guy.

AL

Oh yeah.

NOELLE

Did they ever find him?

AL

Find who?

NOELLE

The pilot.

AL

Oh. I don't think they ever did.

NOELLE

Oh...That's cause they didn't have
a good plan. For their mission. I
have a really great plan Grandpa.

AL

(eyes on paper)
Is that right.

NOELLE

Yeah for my special mission!

Noelle triumphantly drinks her milk from the cereal bowl.

AL

Hey, knock that off!

INT. JACK'S LANDSCAPING - OFFICE - DAY

Jack and Earl are bent over design diagrams on a work table,
stressed.

Justine walks in. She watches them with interest as she makes her coffee.

JACK
I don't know, man.

EARL
Well you could move the planters there. To the north side.

JACK
Yeah but then you run into the siding here.

JUSTINE
Is this the Trumbull place?

JACK
(rubs his eyes)
Yeah.

JUSTINE
Well, why don't you put the rock garden over here? That way it really opens up the space. And you get like, this nice flow.

EARL
Flow?

JUSTINE
From the back gate to the arbor. See. Right there.

JACK
Maybe...

EARL
(points)
But, the plantings are already fit to be in here.

JUSTINE
Well... if we moved the arbor just a few feet. Like... there?

EARL
Don't you just-- hoe the garden, or something?

JUSTINE

Yes, well, while I was out back, you know, "hoeing," I happened to look around, which is how I know it would fit in this space.

JACK

I don't know. It'll be tight.

EARL

(gritting teeth)
Real tight.

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE - BACKYARD

Justine gestures to Jack, explaining her design ideas, as they walk through the yard. Jack nods, taking it in.

Earl stands to the side, looking peeved.

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Noelle is in the backyard, throwing a tennis ball against the side of the house. She sees Jack's truck pull up. She throws the ball harder, angrily.

Justine gets out of the car, talking to Jack energetically.

Jack's eyes settle on Noelle.

JACK

You know, I could really use some ice cream. How bout you, Noelle?

Noelle stops throwing the ball, looks at him with grudging interest.

JUSTINE

(shrugs)
Alright.

Noelle walks up to the truck, opens the backseat door.

JACK

(to Noelle)
What are you doin'? You're driving.

Noelle looks at him incredulously.

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm not kidding.

They all get in, drive off.

EXT. PARK

Justine, Jack, and Noelle eat their ice cream at a picnic table.

JACK
(to Noelle)
Good?

NOELLE
It's ok I guess.

JUSTINE
Jack. I've been thinking.
(pause)
I want to be put on the next job.
As a designer. Wait, let me finish--

JACK
Okay...

JUSTINE
You saw what I did with the
Trumbull job. I know I'm really new
at this, but I've got some ideas,
here, look--

She pulls her notebook from her purse, starts rifling through some designs.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
I mean, they're just sketches
now... I'd have to, you know,
tailor them to the place. But I
really think I can, I can do this.

Jack studies her for a moment. A smile flickers across his eyes and he nods.

JACK
Alright.

JUSTINE
Yeah?

JACK
We'll test drive it. Monday I'm
meeting a new client, you come with
me.

Justine smiles wide.

JUSTINE
You will not regret this--

EXT. STREAM

Noelle wanders into the trees surrounding a small stream. She finds a few stones and examines them, puts them into her pocket.

Through the trees, she watches Justine carefully walking on a sodden log across the water. Justine does a graceful spin, arms in the air.

She watches Jack looking at Justine.

Suddenly Justine loses her footing and tumbles into the shallow water.

Noelle gasps, alarmed.

JACK
You're insane.

JUSTINE
I'm a river goddess!

JACK
Oh yeah? A clumsy one.

He picks a leaf from her hair.

JACK (CONT'D)
You're my clumsy goddess of the wild.

JUSTINE
Shut up.

Justine flicks water at Jack as he ducks, laughing.

Noelle watches all this, frowning. Feeling confused and not sure why.

INT. JACK'S TRUCK

Justine and Jack banter playfully and a little flirtatiously. Justine dances in her seat along to a song on the radio. Jack smiles at her.

NOELLE
Mom? If Dad was here he would have caught you.

The mood instantly cools. Justine glances sharply at Noelle.

NOELLE (CONT'D)
When you fell in the river.

JUSTINE
I don't need anyone to catch me,
Noelle.

They all drive the rest of the way in silence, radio playing low.

INT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

The same song plays softly.

CLOSE-UP on a man's hand puts a beer down on the counter.

It's Ray, sitting at the end of a half-empty bar off the highway somewhere, nursing a beer.

WOMAN (O.S.)
You waiting for someone?

Ray turns his head. A woman, 20's, is standing next to him at the bar. She is attractive, wearing heavy makeup, gold dangly earrings, tight jeans & a lacy top.

RAY
Oh, uh. No.

WOMAN
(smiles)
Well, lucky for me, then.

She slides onto the stool next to him and looks toward the bartender.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Vodka martini.

She turns back to Ray, and extends her hand.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
I'm Allison.

RAY
Ray.

ALLISON

So, Ray.
What's your story?

RAY

I don't have a story.

ALLISON

Man like you alone in a place
like this has to have a story.

RAY

None you want to hear.

ALLISON

Try me.

She leans close.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I can make you forget her...

She puts her hand on his leg.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

(whispering, mouth close
to his ear)

...the woman living in your
eyes.

Ray looks at her, startled. She smiles alluringly. CLOSE-UP
on her smile, her cleavage, the curve of her waist.

Ray's eyes then move to her hand on his leg.

CLOSE-UP on her hand, wearing a wedding ring.

She notices him looking at her hand, and withdraws it
sharply. She takes a large sip of her drink, and turns angry
eyes on him, standing up quickly.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

You're judging me?

She starts to walk away, then looks back at him.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

You're the one who left her.

She turns on her heel, and struts away from him indignantly.
Ray grabs his beer, shaking his head, then turns back as if
to follow her. But to his disbelief the bar is empty.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM - EVENING

Noelle opens to her Special Mission notebook page.

She writes: "Emergency!!"

INT. JUSTINE'S ROOM

Justine is making notes and sketching in a notebook, brow furrowed, deep in contented concentration.

EXT. CLIENT HOUSE

Jack's truck pulls up the driveway of a stately white house with an expansive lawn, outside of town.

Justine and Jack get out of the truck. Justine gapes.

JUSTINE

What do you have to do to own a place like this?

JACK

(shrugs)
Husband's a surgeon.

JUSTINE

Figures.

She heads back to the truck but stops when she sees Jack ring the doorbell.

JACK

(wryly)
Let's at least meet with the client. Considering we drove all the way out here.

The door is opened by a surly teenage girl. Justine squints, trying to figure out where she recognizes her from.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hi there. Your mom home?

INT. CLIENT HOUSE - KITCHEN

Donna, Justine's former boss, sits across the table from Jack and Justine. She looks none too happy to have Justine there.

Justine, mortified, takes notes, trying to act nonchalant.

Jack, oblivious, is explaining the landscaping plans to Donna. She nods coolly, ignoring Justine.

INT. JACK'S TRUCK

Jack and Justine pull away from Donna's house. They drive for a while in silence.

Jack glances at Justine.

JACK

You seen a ghost? You're all pale.

JUSTINE

What? Oh I'm fine..

JACK

Don't worry, you'll do great.

JUSTINE

Oh totally.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - EVENING

Noelle is practicing riding his bike. It's not going well.

RAY (V.O.)

...I used to ride all the backroads, trails and shit.

MATTY (V.O.)

Right on, man. Talk about a rush.

RAY (V.O.)

...You don't know if you're gonna live or die up the next turn in the road...

Noelle takes a hard turn and falls off his bike. He lies there, shuts his eyes, breathing hard in frustration.

EXT. MATTY'S GARAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Noelle waits in Ray's truck. Ray and Matty, smoking, check out a new motorcycle parked out front.

RAY

That was freedom, man. Fuckin A.
Vultures circlin' over your head
like they knew it was just a matter
of when.

MATTY

Shit, man.

RAY

Like I said, another time.

MATTY

What happened to your ride?

RAY

Sold it. Justine got...
(lowers voice)
...with Noelle, and it, you know.
Changes things.

Noelle frowns, looks down.

Ray gets into truck and starts the engine.

INTERCUT BETWEEN
FLASHBACK AND
PRESENT:

PRESENT: Noelle gets back on her bike.

FLASHBACK: CLOSE-UP on Ray's hands gripping the steering wheel, his ring, his hair curling over his shirt collar.

PRESENT: Noelle takes a deep breath and steadies herself.

FLASHBACK: Noelle looks back at the motorcycle, Matty still standing beside it, as they drive away.

THE HARLEY'S POV:

MATTY

(nods at Noelle)
Later, kid.

Matty looks down at the motorcycle, smoking. He pulls a tarp over it.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

EXT. HIGHWAY - EVENING (PRESENT DAY)

CLOSE UP on two bikers, riding down the highway, red tail lights glowing against the sunset.

Ray drives behind the bikers, his face in shadow.

NOELLE (V.O.)
Can you teach me to ride a
motorcycle like you did?

RAY (V.O.)
They're not really for girls, Nono.
Anyways you're not old enough.

One of the bikers lets go of the handlebars, stretching his arms straight out from his sides, like a bird in flight.

NOELLE (V.O.)
Almost.

Ray shakes his head and rubs his eyes; when he looks again the biker is riding normally.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

On her bike, Noelle looks down, frowning in determination. She wobbles forward, stops. Goes forward, stops...

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Jack and Donna converse over the design of a patio garden. They stand next to an extravagant rose garden. Justine looks around at the property, taking notes.

Justine admires the roses, forgetting her nerves for the moment.

JUSTINE
These are beautiful.

DONNA
(beams)
My prize-winning babies.
(MORE)

DONNA (CONT'D)

Won first place in the gardener's club competition three years in a row.

(to Jack)

It's crucial that your-- laborers-- take extra care and precautions around them.

JACK

Absolutely.

Justine's hand accidentally brushes a thorny rosebush. She jerks her hand away, wincing.

CLOSE-UP on her finger, a pinprick of blood.

INT. HEALTH FOOD STORE

Justine and Lorraine are browsing in the medicinal herb aisle.

LORRAINE

What a shit pickle.

JUSTINE

I know.

LORRAINE

Though it's also a great opportunity.

Justine stares at her.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

You can show her you've changed. You're not a file clerk with a bad attitude anymore.

JUSTINE

Thanks.

Lorraine picks up a formula bottle, frowns as she reads the label.

LORRAINE

Is this stuff even regulated?

JUSTINE

Says Miss... Tarot Cards.

LORRAINE

Male Potency formula. I'd buy it for Matty but he totally doesn't need it... What about you? Anything *interesting* going on lately?

Justine busies herself looking at the shelves.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

Your boss seems into you. I could tell. It's kind of hot.

(pause)

You can't wait around forever, Justine.

INT. AL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Al and Justine sit in the living room. Al watches TV. Justine is absently sketching out a garden design plan in her notebook.

AL

(shakes head)

These talk show hosts, all they do is talk.

CLOSE-UP on Justine's drawing: Labeled "DONNA LEWISON'S GARDEN of EDEN." She has drawn all of the rose bushes having been uprooted and strewn on the ground. A gaping hole in the earth remains.

The phone rings. Justine and Al both are startled. The landline doesn't ring too much, in these days of cell phones.

Noelle races into the room.

NOELLE

I got it!

(on phone)

Hold on.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Noelle has shut her bedroom door. Justine stands outside it and presses her ear to the door.

NOELLE (O.S.)

(on phone)

Hi Dustin. I don't know. I might not do the costume party this year. It's kinda stupid.

Something in her voice makes Justine's face fall.

EXT. PARTY STORE - DAY

Justine walks across the parking lot toward the entrance, purse slung over her shoulder.

She opens the door and enters.

INT. PARTY STORE - CONTINUING

Justine stands in the costumes section of the store, examining them intently.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Ma'am?

Justine turns around, startled. A SALES CLERK, 50s, is standing behind her.

CLERK

I said, you need any help?

JUSTINE

Oh no, I'm good.

The clerk looks at the 2 costumes Justine is deciding between: an action hero and a ninja. She points to the ninja.

CLERK

This one's real popular, sells out every year. You're smart to be gettin' an early jump on Halloween like this.

JUSTINE

Oh--

CLERK

(laughs)

Course when my boys were little, all we had for costumes were firemen, policemen, things like that. That was in the stone ages. How old is yours?

JUSTINE

She's eight.

CLERK

That's a good age. She like princesses?... Let's see here.

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

What do we got. How 'bout this
bumblebee? A witch?

JUSTINE

I...I don't know.

CLERK

Did she tell you what she might
want to be?...

No answer. The clerk keeps browsing through the costumes.

CLERK (CONT'D)

...Well, what books or TV shows
does she like?

She looks over at Justine, to see her trembling. Tears
threaten to slide down Justine's cheeks.

CLERK (CONT'D)

(concerned)

Oh, honey. It's alright. I'm sure
she'll like whatever you get her.

Justine doesn't respond.

The clerk gives her a look, and selects the princess costume
and presses it into Justine's hands.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Get this one, honey. Never fails.

JUSTINE

(almost inaudibly)

Thank you.

She walks over to the register, holding the costume.

The clerk watches her. Then she starts straightening up the
costumes.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Noelle is talking with a couple friends, waiting for the bus.
Justine's car pulls up. Noelle stares at it.

EXT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Noelle approaches but doesn't get in. Justine smiles at her.

NOELLE

Why are you here?

JUSTINE
(tries to joke)
Well, "Nice to see you, too."

NOELLE
You never pick me up from school.

JUSTINE
I got off early today, so I just
thought, it'd be nice.

NOELLE
Okay...

INT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Noelle and Justine drive home.

NOELLE
I wish you worked at the grocery
store.

JUSTINE
Why?

NOELLE
Yeah cause if you work at the
grocery store we get all the free
food we want.

JUSTINE
(smiles)
Well not exactly.

They pass a dairy farm, with calves outside in small hutches.

NOELLE
Why do they put the baby cows in
those little houses?

JUSTINE
What?

NOELLE
The houses are really small.

JUSTINE
They're just in there cause the
moms are being milked.

NOELLE
Why?

JUSTINE

Why what?

NOELLE

Don't the mothers want them?

Justine glances at Noelle.

JUSTINE

It's what the farmers... it's how
you run a farm.

NOELLE

They look sad.

JUSTINE

They're just cows.

Justine keeps driving.

She glances back at the farm. A young calf looks her straight
in the eye.

She quickly looks away.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Noelle and Al are eating breakfast. Al sips his coffee.
Noelle finishes her cereal, and then starts to tip the bowl
to drink the remaining milk from it. Remembers and stops.

AL

Surprised you're not beggin' me to
go out back and watch you on your
bike today.

Noelle glances through the window where her bike is parked
near Justine's little garden.

NOELLE

(quickly)

I don't feel like it. Let's just
stay in here. So guess what. I have
comic club after school. It's at
some friend of Dawn's house so I
have to deal with Dawn, which
sucks, but her friends are cool.
Then mom said she'll pick me up
when it's over and take me for ice
cream!

O.S. School bus honks horn.

Noelle grabs her backpack and runs towards door.

NOELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Bye Grandpa!

Al belatedly puts his hand up and waves. He stands in the kitchen, alone, lost in thought.

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Al checks the mail. Only credit card offers. He frowns.

EXT. KID'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Kids in a circle surround Dawn and Noelle, egging them on, as they eye each other.

DAWN
You're such a liar. A baby and a liar.

NOELLE
No I'm not. My dad is too a secret agent.

DAWN
My Uncle Jack said your Dad left you.

Noelle freezes.

DAWN (CONT'D)
He said your Dad's a total loser.

She smirks and turns away.

Noelle runs up and shoves her, barely causing her to flinch. Dawn throws a punch at Noelle, who goes down, as all goes blurry.

She's on her back, breathing. She sees a vulture circling high overhead.

She stumbles up and advances towards Dawn.

EXT. ROAD

Noelle, backpack on, heads quickly down the road, looking over her shoulder.

She walks jerkily, looking at her scraped, bloody knuckles. Closes her other hand in a fist around that hand.

INT. JACK'S SHOP - OFFICE

Justine and Jack are signing off on plans for Donna's project.

Justine stands up to get a glass of water. She turns around as Jack gets up and they are suddenly standing face to face. They both freeze. He lightly puts his hand on her waist, their lips meet, gently but hungry.

Startled, they look over. Noelle is standing in the doorway. Her eyes wide and wounded.

JUSTINE

Noelle?--

Noelle turns and runs out of the room.

Justine, flustered, hastily gathers up the plans and stuffs them in her purse.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Shit--

JACK

Justine--

JUSTINE

Just give me a minute--

EXT. JACK'S SHOP

Justine rushes past a couple workers, hanging outside Jack's truck. She slows down, rifles through her purse and grabs some papers marked "DONNA LEWISON"

JUSTINE

Here, Earl-- you guys get started on this. I'll be over soon as I can.

EARL

Jack seen these? This is the final plan?

JUSTINE

(irritated)

Yes Earl. It's the final.

Justine heads to her car to go after Noelle, who has taken off down the road.

JACK (O.S.)
Justine?

She turns. Jack is standing in the doorway, on the phone, looking concerned.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Noelle sullenly goes to turn on the TV. Justine follows her in.

JUSTINE
No TV. You're in big trouble.

NOELLE
But--

JUSTINE
But nothing! You--

Al enters the room, coffee cup in hand.

AL
What the hell's goin' on?

JUSTINE
Noelle got in a fight.

NOELLE
Dad says it's ok if I'm defending myself, like against a big kid!

JUSTINE
But you're not supposed to start a fight!

AL
(to Noelle)
You started it?

NOELLE
(to Justine)
But she's huge!

JUSTINE
Noelle.

AL
(to Noelle)
Did you win?

JUSTINE

Al!

(to Noelle)

Jack says that Dawn's mom is really upset. What were you thinking?

NOELLE

You're only mad cause it's Dawn I got in a fight with. Cause you and her uncle Jack are--

AL

Are what?

JUSTINE

Ok, that's enough Noelle.

NOELLE

Dawn is a big jerk! She said--

JUSTINE

I don't care what she said! I gotta get back to work--

NOELLE

I'll just watch TV.

JUSTINE

No TV!

NOELLE

Why can't I watch TV?!?

JUSTINE

Fine! You wanna watch TV? We'll all watch TV. Like some great big goddamn happy family.

Justine marches over to the TV and switches it on. Turns back to Al and Noelle defiantly. Noelle glares at her.

NOELLE

I don't want to anymore!

Noelle goes off to her room. Justine heads out the front door, slamming it behind her.

Al is left alone in the room. The TV is blaring, a sitcom with canned laughter.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM

Noelle angrily brushes back tears. She folds up the map on her wall, packs it in her backpack with her notebook, some clothes, her comics, and a flashlight. Hides the backpack under her bed.

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Justine comes around to the backyard. The workers are putting down shovels, wiping their brows. Justine stops, in shock.

All of Donna's prized rosebushes have been uprooted and are laying in a heap on the ground.

JUSTINE

What the--

EARL

You gave me the plans, you said
they was final--

JUSTINE

Are you out of your fucking mind!

Justine snatches the plans out of Earl's hands, looks at them in horror, then starts shaking her head and looking in her purse. Pulls out another set of plans-- the right ones.

O.S. A car pulls up.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(staring at plans)

Oh God, oh no--

Donna comes around to the back. She stops in her tracks.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Donna--

Donna can't speak, stands there with her hands over her mouth. Looks like she's going to be sick.

Her HUSBAND, 50's, joins her, staring at the scene in confusion.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(frantic)

This was just--- a
misunderstanding. We can fix this--

Justine starts towards roses as if to try to re-plant them. Donna, red-faced with anger, roughly grabs her arm--

DONNA

Don't touch them! Get off my property!

HUSBAND

(trying to calm Donna)
Honey--

DONNA

Or I'll call the police!--

JUSTINE

Donna I am so sorry!

Earl can barely contain his smirk. Justine, shaking, walks to her car, her face frozen.

EXT. HOUSE

Al walks up to the mailbox, gets the mail. Justine pulls up the driveway, nearly sideswiping him.

AL

What the- Hey!
(mutters)
Goddam woman drivers...

Justine gets out.

AL (CONT'D)

You treat my car like that, you don't drive it.

JUSTINE

Fine, fuck it.

Justine throws him the keys and heads down the driveway toward the road.

Al shakes his head and glances at the mail in his hand. An envelope from a law firm, addressed to him, catches his attention.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN

Justine hovers at the end of the bar. She downs a shot, then another.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Al sits in front of the TV, face hardened. He gets up and dumps the mail into the trash.

CLOSE-UP on letter in trash: "We regret to inform you we will not be undertaking any litigation on your behalf....The dispute you described concerning Eden Valley Farms, Inc...does not appear to be sufficiently promising to warrant a lawsuit."

INT/EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jack opens the front door to see Justine on his doorstep.

JACK
(surprised)
Hey...

INT. JACK'S HOUSE

Justine sways slightly as she enters. Jack peers at his phone.

JACK
I have a bunch of missed calls from
the Lewisons. How'd it go?

His phone vibrates...

JACK (CONT'D)
That's her again--

Panicking, Justine intercepts his phone and starts to kiss him.

JACK (CONT'D)
Wait--

She kisses him again. He responds, things get heated.

He breaks away.

JACK (CONT'D)
No, no wait a minute.

She stumbles drunkenly towards him, he gently grabs her shoulders to steady her.

JUSTINE
What?--

JACK
We can't do this.

JUSTINE
I thought you wanted--

JACK
Not if you're... Not like this.
(off her rejected look)
Justine, listen, I--

JUSTINE
(cuts in)
Fuck you, Jack.

Justine runs out of the house as Jack follows.

JACK
Justine, wait... let me take you
home.

JUSTINE
Just leave me the fuck alone! DON'T
follow me.

She takes off down the road. Jack watches her, helpless.

INT. HOUSE - NOELLE'S ROOM

O.S. Front door slams, Al's car driving away.

Noelle peeks her head out of his room.

NOELLE
Hello?

Silence. She grabs her backpack.

INT. AL'S CAR

Al drives fast down the road, a set expression on his face.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Noelle wheels her bike out, gets on it. The brakes seize up and she gets off, kicking it. She drops it and takes off on foot.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Justine comes home to an empty house.

INT. KITCHEN

Justine looks in all the cabinets, finds the half empty bottle of red wine Lorraine had left. She drinks from the bottle.

EXT. ROAD

Noelle trudges along the road, holding her thumb out the way she's seen hitchhikers do. A truck wheels by and beeps loudly at her. She jumps.

EXT. BACKYARD

Justine is on her hands and knees in her garden, furiously yanking out the plants by their roots.

EXT. EDEN VALLEY FARMS - NIGHT

Al pulls up the long gravel driveway. Parks the car off to the side. Up ahead, new construction barns, buildings, and sheds, all in gleaming new steel. Floodlights light up the fields.

He gets out, goes around to the passenger side and grabs a bag from the seat, filled with an assortment of tools: a wrench, wire cutters, a small axe.

He advances towards the main gate, cuts through the padlock, and slips through.

He moves through the fields, breathing heavily, heart racing.

INT. BASEMENT

Justine grabs another bottle of whiskey.

Her gaze falls on the box labeled Justine Stuff. She sorts through pictures of herself as a teenager in the 90's: at a prom, with friends, standing miserably in front of the tin trailer next to a shadowy figure of an older, frowning man.

She lifts out her old prom dress; it's sexy, short and red. Then sees a mixtape in the bottom of the box.

EXT. EDEN VALLEY FARMS

Al is halfway through the field when he stops. Stares at the industrialized spectre of the farm, looming over him.

INT. JUSTINE'S ROOM

BEGIN MUSIC: an upbeat 90's pop song

Justine puts on her prom dress and high-heeled boots, posing and scrutinizing her reflection in the mirror.

Drinks whiskey from the bottle.

EXT. EDEN VALLEY FARMS

Al approaches the main building and gathers his breath. He takes his axe, swings at the windows. It doesn't make a dent. He swings harder. Nothing. In fury he throws his axe directly at the window, it cracks through the window as the glass shatters, and lands inside.

A security alarm starts wailing at top volume.

Al freezes. Then he picks up rocks and throws them at the other windows furiously, in vain, then stops, out of breath. Puts his hands on his knees, panting.

INT. HILLTOP TAVERN

Justine is drinking and flirting with a couple of guys at the bar.

INTERCUT HOUSE AND BAR

HOUSE: She puts on makeup and fixes her hair, singing to the pop song playing.

BAR: She does shots of tequila with one of the guys, who is getting closer to her.

Images of Ray enter her mind: him smiling at her, his hands around her waist.

HOUSE: She glances at the bed and sees flashbacks of Ray and herself in bed, kissing, making love.

BAR: She does a shot and throws her head back in flirtatious laughter.

HOUSE: In a rage she pulls all the covers and blankets off the bed, throws the pillows at the wall.

BAR: She dances with the guy as if she's in her own world, in drunken intense bliss.

HOUSE: She takes the photos of her, Ray, and Noelle and hurtles them against the wall, the glass smashes.

BAR: Close up on her face thrown up to the lights, eyes closed.

HOUSE: She storms through the house, grabs the framed picture of Ray from the mantel, throws it on the floor, causing the glass to shatter.

BAR: She laughs and takes the man by the hand, weaving him through the crowd.

INT. MAN'S HOUSE - PRE-DAWN

Justine is sitting up, half-dressed, in the bed of the man from the bar. He is asleep, turned away from her.

INT. CAR

Al slowly opens his eyes in the pre-dawn darkness, his head leaning back against the car seat. Squints, looks around. He's parked in a deserted field.

EXT. HOUSE

Justine stumbles outside, looks around to get her bearings.

She's still wearing her tiny dress. Feels insecure. Looks hesitantly at the road. She locates where she is and takes a shortcut through the back of his property.

EXT. DAIRY FARM

Justine crosses a road, approaching the back of the dairy farm seen before.

MUSIC cuts out as the wind starts blowing.

Way up ahead, calves are sleeping in their hutches.

Suddenly she sees something in the grass, at the edge of the property. A black and white furry shape.

She moves closer, hesitantly. It's a small calf lying in the grass near a trash dumpster, barely alive. Rail thin, heaving breaths.

Justine draws in a breath. He looks at Justine with a bloodshot, frightened eye.

Justine looks around and sees two other dumped calves, dead and stiff in a heap.

She puts her hand up to her mouth. She looks back at the calf. He closes his eyes and dies.

JUSTINE
(shakes head)
No no no no--

She reels forward, falling to her knees by the calf, sobbing, shaking uncontrollably.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

O.S. the front door opens. Sound of footsteps as Al walks into the empty house. Surveys the damage and chaos in disbelief.

He bends down, picks up a shattered picture frame.

INT. JUSTINE'S ROOM

Clothes whirled around and broken photos on the floor. Empty bottle of whiskey overturned. The bed littered with herbal tincture bottles.

His eyes alight on the Medicinal Plants book. He opens it slowly. The page is bookmarked by the photograph of Wendy and Ray as a child in the garden. A few pages of notes, Justine's handwriting, garden drawings for the backyard, etc. fall out of the book. He picks them up. Looks toward the window.

EXT. DAIRY FARM

Justine wakes up, curled up next to the dead calf. She blinks and looks around, disoriented.

She gets to her feet and stumbles away. As she rounds the corner of the barn, she sees that all of the calf hutches are empty.

No sounds of life. The wind blows.

She takes in the desolate scene. Then she is suddenly hit with panic and breaks into a run.

In the distance, a cattle transport truck drives down the road, away from the farm.

EXT. HOUSE

Justine hurries up the driveway, dirty, out of breath.

INT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Justine rushes in, leaving the front door open, trying to catch her breath.

JUSTINE
Noelle?!....

The house is silent.

INT. NOELLE'S ROOM

She runs into her room. It's empty.

JUSTINE
NOELLE?!?

She hears a sound coming from outside.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUING

Al is in Justine's garden, furiously dumping the uprooted plants and mess of dirt into trash bags.

JUSTINE
Hey-- That's my--!

AL
What the hell is this? I told you
not to touch my yard!--

JUSTINE
Stop it--

Al roughly flings her away.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Al just stop! Where's Noelle?

AL
I thought he was with you.

JUSTINE
Why would he be with me?

AL
That's a damn good question!

Justine panics, runs off to the car.

AL (CONT'D)
What the hell is going on here?--

Justine starts the car and pulls away, squeal of tires.

AL (CONT'D)
Hey!--

INT. CAR

Justine drives, swearing under her breath and anxiously looking up and down the empty road.

She drives on, getting frantic.

Up ahead she sees a small huddled figure, sitting by the side of the road.

EXT. ROAD

The car slows to a stop. Justine gets out.

Noelle, sitting with her arms wrapped around her knees, looks up, tears staining her grimy cheeks.

INT. JUSTINE'S CAR

Justine and Noelle drive home in silence. Noelle, sniffing, looks down at her lap.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Al holds a shattered picture frame, glass broken, turning it around in his hands. The photograph is of teenage Ray, standing in front of Al's farm, next to fields and gardens.

Sits on the back steps, lights a cigarette.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Justine's car pulls up. She and Noelle get out. Noelle looks timidly at Al, goes into the house, head down.

EXT. BACK STEPS

Justine sits down next to Al. Lights a cigarette.

They smoke, wordlessly taking in the sight of the destroyed garden.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK STEPS - EVENING

Noelle stands in the doorway, watching Justine as she tries to re-plant the garden.

As Justine works, she glances over and notices Noelle.

JUSTINE

You gonna stand there staring? Or you want to help me?

NOELLE

It looks like someone broke it.

JUSTINE

Yeah...pretty much.

She carefully puts in a small plant.

NOELLE

What is that?

JUSTINE

Motherwort.

NOELLE

Mother's.. warts?

JUSTINE

It's a medicinal herb.

NOELLE

Gross.

JUSTINE

Here. If you could take this...

She presses a trowel into Noelle's hand, points to a row of newly re-planted plants.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
And help cover these up.

Noelle carefully and diligently smooths the soil around the plants.

NOELLE
I was going to find Dad.

Silence.

NOELLE (CONT'D)
Aren't you gonna yell at me?

JUSTINE
(pause)
No.

NOELLE
I was gonna come home.

JUSTINE
I know things have been really hard on you. But you can't do that again. Ok? ...Noelle?

NOELLE
Ok.

JUSTINE
Hey. Got you something.

She grabs a plastic bag and holds it out to her.

NOELLE
What is it?

JUSTINE
Why don't you open it and see?

Noelle opens the bag and pulls out the princess costume.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
(a little shyly)
Well? What do you think?

NOELLE
It's ok I guess.

JUSTINE
For your party. A... a nice lady at the store helped me pick it out. She said it's a really popular costume and that--

NOELLE

I was gonna be a secret agent. From my favorite comic.

JUSTINE

Oh. I didn't... I didn't realize.

NOELLE

(lower lip trembling)
No cause all you care about is yourself!

JUSTINE

Noelle, that's not true. That's no way to...

NOELLE

It is true! Even Dad saw it.

JUSTINE

...What?

NOELLE

That's why he left!

JUSTINE

(stung)
Noelle--

Noelle turns away from Justine and buries her head in her arms, sobbing.

Justine sits there for a little while, her head bowed. Then she looks at Noelle, and gingerly rubs her back.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Sshh.. shh. It's ok.

NOELLE

(muffled)
Why did he leave? Is it 'cause of me?

JUSTINE

Now why would you think that. Your dad... I don't know. He's just got some things he needs to figure out, ok? It has nothing to do with you.

Noelle slowly stops crying and sits up, rubs her eyes and looks at the garden.

NOELLE

Which one am I?

JUSTINE

What?

Noelle points to the uprooted, twisted remains of plants in the garden.

NOELLE

Grandpa can be this one. That one's you. I want to be this one. This is the one that grows really tall. As tall as a skyscraper or mountain... Ok?.. Ok, mom?

EXT. HOUSE

A flock of birds fly overhead. Heading west.

INT. HOUSE - JUSTINE'S ROOM

Justine fixes her hair in the mirror. Stares at her reflection.

Picks up her phone, sees 2 missed calls and a text from Jack. Reads the text (unseen to us), smiles softly, her eyes full of hope.

NOELLE (O.S.)

(urgently)

MOM!!

Justine drops her phone on the dresser and races out of the room, panicked.

NOELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

HURRY!!

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Noelle is riding her bike, weaving it unsteadily around the dirt backyard, smiling excitedly.

NOELLE

Look!

She lifts her hands off the handlebars and crookedly holds her arms outstretched, like a bird about to take off.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ray is standing in front of his truck, parked on the side of a road somewhere in front of an amazing view. He stretches his arms out like Noelle, a look of freedom on his face.

His face changes as he realizes something...

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Noelle, delighted and proud of herself, wobbles around as she rides, testing herself by taking her hands on and off the handlebars.

Al is leaning against the side of the house, watching Noelle, amused. He looks at Justine and a grudging half-smile turns up his mouth. Something unspoken passes between them.

Justine joins him as they watch Noelle. Her expression shows both resignation and grief, then a quiet acceptance, as finally she smiles at her daughter.

INT. AL'S HOUSE - JUSTINE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE-UP on Justine's phone on the dresser. It starts vibrating, Ray's name on the caller ID.

Then the unanswered phone's screen goes dark, and we shift focus to the family outside, through the open window.

THE END