



HOUSEWIFE

Written by

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Based on the character "HOUSEWIFE" by Miranda Parkin

OVER BLACK

A cacophony of hungry CHIRPS. CR-THUNK. CR-THUNK. CR-THUNK. A reliable axe finds purchase in the distance.

As OPENING TITLES begin...

EXT. FOREST - DAY - 1950S [ANIMATED]

CR-THUNK.

Three BABY BLUE BIRD CHICKS scream at each other in a nest in the crook of a young tree. They gnaw at the empty air, alone.

CR-THUNK.

The chirps crescendo -- MAMA BIRD has returned, worms wriggling in her beak. One by one, she feeds her babies. As she gets to the last, open beak eagerly awaiting--

CR-THUNK.

The tree is felled. The chirping has stopped.

A liver-spotted, calloused hand grips the wood handle of an axe, lodging its blade in the dirt.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY - 1950S [ANIMATED]

The owner of the hand drags the tree through the grass.

Blood coats the bark and oozes between its cracks, seeping into the wood.

A lone feather unsticks and floats off on the wind.

The axe is raised high into the air, preparing to swing--

INT. SHED - DAY - 1950S [ANIMATED]

A door opens. Blinding sunlight as a figure steps in and closes the door behind them.

Click!

A naked overhead bulb flickers then pops on, revealing the overwhelming, but orderly work station.

Wood, now cut into workable pieces, are set ceremoniously on the table. A *prominent stain of red* seeped into one.

Two cans of paint are dropped with a double THUNK-UNK.

Pink and blue.

Then, the hands get to work.

This is not gruff work. This is art -- perhaps even a higher calling as the wizened hands begin to shape and craft.

POP!

A paint can opener pries the lid off of the blue.

A brush glides over a large, thin strip of wood.

Once dried, they're cut into individual one-inch squares.

The can opener sinks its fang into the pink can.

POP!

The hand coats the large structure with broad strokes, easily covering the *red stain*.

Another coat.

Then one more.

The blue wood slats are glued on, row after row until a roof takes shape.

Long, exaggerated windows painted on each side.

A golden clasp affixed between what's become an entrance: a set of double doors, straddled by two long windows.

The hands run over their handiwork. A unique (some may say unconventional) take on a dollhouse.

One of a kind.

Inside the house is an uncompromising darkness. Even through the open double doors, it feels like light stops at the dollhouse's threshold.

Two eyes, magnified by a pair of coke bottle glasses, stare into the depths for just a moment before closing the double front doors. The clasp locks with a muted *click*.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY / STAIRCASE - NIGHT - 1990S

A THUNDERSTORM rattles a quaint, two-story house, lightning briefly illuminating family photos along the wall.

From somewhere below, the sounds of a historic FIGHT threaten to challenge the anger of the storm outside.

Around the corner, a set of stairs leads to the first floor. A light casts a long shadow on the wall of the staircase as the distorted shapes of a MAN and WOMAN swirl.

Their words are muted but violent, their shadows encircling each other, demanding the other to relent.

Suddenly, the pitter patter of little feet behind us.

We whip around to face the hallway once more just as the figure of a LITTLE GIRL (6) in her PJs disappears into the darkness of her bedroom at the end of the hallway.

We follow...

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S

Rain splatters against the window as A LIGHTNING STRIKE illuminates an every-girl's bedroom.

Stuffed animals cover the bed and litter the floor. A CRASH OF THUNDER follows.

A sob.

From somewhere in the darkness the girl cowers, willing her parents to STOP. She looks up from her tears.

Across the room, the familiar outline of a dollhouse sits in the dim light, jutting out from a shelf.

The shadow continues past the base of the house, almost forming the shape of a woman's figure in a shirtwaist dress...

We linger for a moment until--

Another LIGHTNING STRIKE!

The rest of the shadow is gone (if it was ever there to begin with), leaving behind only the handcrafted dollhouse.

The girl wipes a mixture of snot and tears on her sleeve before crawling across her floor as--

--Thunder BOOMS again!

She pulls it from her shelf and slides back to the floor, holding it close.

Undoing the golden clasp with a muted *click*, she opens the double front doors and stares inside.

LIGHTNING STRIKES, yet the darkness inside remains absolute.

CRASH-OOM!

A plate shatters against the wall below as the fighting intensifies, melding with the thunder outside.

The girl steels herself, then leans in to the house's opening and *whispers into the darkness*.

She slams the doors quickly, trapping her secret inside.

She sets the dollhouse next to her and curls into a ball as the sounds of the storm continue to battle the fight below.

We creep to the unattended dollhouse.

Closer and closer as competing storms fade into nothing.

It's almost peaceful.

CLICK!

The clasp pops apart as one of the doors opens slightly.

A strange, slightly modulated woman's voice from within. Like a mother lulling their child.

HOUSEWIFE
Shhhhhhhhhhh...

TITLE: HOUSEWIFE

INT. BEN & ANN'S APARTMENT - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

A cramped but well-loved studio, full-sized mattress in the corner.

Ann (early 30s) sits on a couch and stares unblinkingly at a laptop propped eye level by a collection of coffee table books and beach reads.

A scheduled GRAPHIC DESIGN POSITION VIDEO CALL INTERVIEW is on the screen. Her eyes focus on the LAUNCH button.

BEN (mid 30s) crosses behind the computer several times as he finishes tying his tie, dropping things into a messenger bag as he goes.

BEN
Ann.

ANN
(not looking away)
Hm.

BEN
Ann. Babe. Baby. Ann Ann Ann Ann.

He's so annoying it works. She looks up.

ANN
What, Ben? What?

BEN
You need to chill.

ANN
Don't tell me to chill! What I need
is for this to go well. *We* need
this to go well.

BEN
We are fine. You need to chill.
They want chill!

ANN
I can pretend to be chill.

BEN
Or you can just...

ANN
Leave! It's starting in a few
minutes and you're really not
helping.

BEN
Fine.

He kisses her on the forehead, then backs toward the door.

ANN
(shaking her head)
Mm-mm.

She points to her lips. Ben smirks.

BEN
I thought I was leaving?

She gives him a look. He comes crawling back and delivers a proper kiss before grabbing his messenger bag and throwing it over his shoulder in one seamless motion. They share a gaze.

ANN
Pretty eyes.

He scoffs, but loves it.

BEN
Text me after, yeah?

ANN
I will text you if and only if it goes well. If I don't, assume I'm depressed and/or dead so bring a treat.

Ben gives an exaggerated salute.

BEN
At your service, ma'am.

Ann returns the salute.

ANN
At ease, soldier.

He exits, the door closing after him with a resounding *click*.

Back to Ann, somehow dwarfed by her tiny studio apartment. Alone and very much feeling it, she starts the call. It trills to life.

ANN (CONT'D)
Hello!

An excruciating beat before a semi-robotic woman's voice responds.

INTERVIEWER CHATBOT
Hi. Thank you so much for joining the interview today.

ANN
Thank you so much for having me, I'm really looking forward to--

INTERVIEWER CHATBOT
--I am so excited to talk to you and get to know more about you.

ANN

I--

The realization settles in.

INTERVIEWER CHATBOT

For our first question, tell me about a time when you team player. Let's circle back. --consider your greatest weakness? Let's circle back. Tell me about a time when. DESERT ISLAND. Why do you want to work at --greatest weakness? See yourself in 5 years, weakness? Let's when when when circle back.

The chatbot continues its endless loop. Ann ends the call, the woman's voice mercifully silenced. She stares off into the middle distance, her smile wavers but never falls.

She opens her phone quickly sends a text.

Then, back to staring.

LATER - NIGHT

Ann sits slumped in the same spot, asleep, illuminated by her still-open laptop.

The front door opens behind her and light pools in.

BEN

Hellooo!

He flips on the lights and Ann jolts to attention. She panic-slams her laptop shut.

Ben crosses the room, kissing her on the head and pulling something from behind his back.

A CHOCOLATE CUPCAKE is placed on top of Ann's laptop. She stares at it while her cheeks turn red -- does he know?

ANN

But I texted --

BEN

Celebration treat. Not a consolation treat.

A near-imperceptible sigh of relief. She scoops off some icing with her finger and licks it -- she's touched. Ben heads to the kitchen.

ANN
Where did you get it?

BEN (O.S.)
Oh, the office. Intern's birthday,
I think.

She holds her smile, but her eyes fall.

ANN
Thanks, babe.

She stares at the cupcake, still unmoving.

ANN (CONT'D)
But there's nothing to celebrate
yet. I said it went well, not that
I have a job.

Ben opens the bare bones fridge.

BEN
Fair enough.
(knowing the answer)
Is there dinner?

ANN
Oh... No. Sorry. I lost track of
time. I don't know what happened.

He sighs into the fridge. They both feel it but ignore it.

BEN
That's okay. I grabbed a slice on
my way home. Do you need something?

ANN
No, no. I'm okay. Work good?

He shuts the fridge and turns back to her, undressing as he
crosses the apartment.

BEN
Work's work. Jimmy thinks they'll
officially offer him the promotion
tomorrow. Lucky asshole.

ANN
Doesn't he have to relocate to,
like, the middle of nowhere?

He balls up his tie and Kobe's it onto their unmade bed.

BEN

Just because it's the suburbs
doesn't automatically mean it's the
middle of nowhere.

(then)

But yes. And it's also enough money
to not care.

ANN

I don't know. I think I'd care.

Ben stops, leering over her. Mid shirt unbuttoning. About to say what he's really thinking, then pulls back.

BEN

Well, I guess it doesn't matter
since it's not something we have to
worry about.

ANN

I guess not.

He walks past her.

BEN

When's the next round?

ANN

Of what?

BEN

Uh, your interviews?

She looks away, face red hot.

ANN

Oh!... Tomorrow.

BEN

Great!

Down to his boxers, he crashes onto the bed.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Ann walks alone, a foldable wagon in tow, soaking up the sun bleeding through the trees and the calm of the sparse morning crowd. She pulls up to an empty spot and gets to work.

Two foldable stools, a collapsible easel, and a large drawing pad are pulled from the cart and quickly set up.

One stool behind the easel and one in front, yearning for a model to sit on it. From the drawing pad she pulls a worn poster board and props it against the front of the easel.

It reads:

**RAITS! NO CATCH!
O DO IS TELL US
OU LIKE MORE
we promise you
our feelings.
is many times :)**

ANN

The drawing consists of two rows of vertical lines. The top row has three groups of three vertical lines each, with a jagged, irregular line connecting the tops of the lines. The bottom row has three groups of three vertical lines each, with a jagged, irregular line connecting the tops of the lines. The overall appearance is that of a hand-drawn scribble or a message that is difficult to decipher.

A jagged line down one side and the gibberish message suggests a missing half.

A throat clears behind Ann before a woman's voice pitched down like a man with a fake Mid-Atlantic spin calls to her.

DANI (O.S.)

Why, my stars. Did your husband paint that for you? You know us womenfolk ain't allowed to express ourselves by our lonesomes?

Ann smiles and turns to face DANI (early 30s), her own foldable wagon in tow.

ANN

Between all that lithium for my jitters and my irradiated Jello molds he may as well have!

DANI

Well I never!

They giggle, then hug.

ANN

Good to see you.

DANI

You too.

Dani sets up her half just as fast. She slips a CIGARETTE in her mouth, and pats her empty pockets, looking for something.

Ann reaches across into Dani's bag, pulling out a PINK LIGHTER, with a "DON'T STEAL MY FUCKING LIGHTER" sticker.

With a knowing smirk, she lights Dani's cigarette for her like they've done this a hundred times. Because they have.

The two sit at their respective easels, a second piece of poster board combined with Ann's to complete the message.

It now reads:

**TWO FREE PORTRAITS! NO CATCH!
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TELL US
WHICH ONE YOU LIKE MORE
Don't worry, we promise you
won't hurt our feelings.
We've done this many times :)**

<u>DANI</u>	<u>ANN</u>
### ### ###	### ### ###
### ### ###	### ###

MOMENTS LATER

A gruff looking TEAMSTER TYPE (60s) sits on the stool as the two women sketch, Dani looking significantly more relaxed than a hunched over, intense Ann.

DANI
You gotta relax. Fix your posture,
you look like Igor.
(then)
And NOT the hot one.

ANN
Huh?

Dani ignores her.

Ann obliges, then very quickly hunches over again, eyes flitting between Teamster and the drawing pad. Dani clocks her insane energy.

DANI
I'm guessing the interview didn't
go well?

ANN
What? It went fine. Great! I have a
second round today. Later today.

Dani and Teamster share a look and a wry smile. Ann catches the look in between her flitting.

ANN (CONT'D)

Oh, now you're conspiring with our models?

DANI

I didn't say anything!

TEAMSTER

I plead the fifth.

The two laugh. Ann rolls her eyes.

ANN

No playing favorites when it's time to judge, sir!

The man puts up his hands.

TEAMSTER

No problemo.

A moment of silent sketching.

ANN

I just... I just really need to find a job. Ben doesn't say anything but it's there. I can feel it. It's been all on him for so long, it's not fair.

DANI

I know, I know! But it went well yesterday! That's good news. Maybe this is the one.

Ann buries her nose in the drawing.

ANN

Maybe.

TEAMSTER

My daughter's in the same boat. About a year into every job she's had the company restructures or downsizes or whatever they call it.

DANI

I'm sorry. That must be hard for her.

TEAMSTER

Yeah. She does good work, too. She wants to do good work. But you play the hand you're dealt, right?

(MORE)

TEAMSTER (CONT'D)

It was a different world when I was coming up. "Part of the family" meant something. They wanted you to stick around. Good people doing the hard stuff for good pay.

(shaking his head)

Fire 'em then hire 'em back part time with no benefits and hope a computer can do the rest. Can't even get someone on the phone anymore 'cause there's no one to answer it.

A somber silence between the three, the sounds of the park and the city beyond it fill the cracks.

TEAMSTER (CONT'D)

(nervous laughing)

Boy, you two are good! I can barely talk to my wife about this stuff. You sure this is about drawings?

The three share a laugh. Ann and Dani's eyes catch and a smile passes between the two of them.

BRIIIING! BRIIIING!

Ann's phone interrupts the moment with a CALL FROM BEN. She hastily picks it up and steps away. Dani throws up her hands.

DANI

Hey! What happened to no phones at the easel?

ANN

(over her shoulder)

No drawing!

(to Teamster)

Sorry sir, I'll just be a second.

TEAMSTER

Take your time. I'm in no rush.

She smiles at him, then turns. Out of their earshot, she answers the phone and puts on a new smile for no one.

ANN

Hey, what's up--?

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

--Ann. Babe. Ann! ANN!

ANN

What! Is everything okay?

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
They offered me the promotion, Ann.

ANN
The what?! I don't understand--

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
--Jimmy's promotion! Well, I guess
it wasn't his. That smug asshole.
It was mine! They promoted ME, Ann!

ANN
Wait, wait, wait. Slow down I can't
keep up.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
They said that they've noticed my
work ethic. I keep my head down,
that I'm the type of person they
see "climbing the ranks." They
wanna reward my loyalty. That's
what they said!

ANN
The -- is this the relocation
promotion?

A long, static silence on the other end.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
Don't do this, Ann.

ANN
What do you mean don't do this! We
literally just talked yesterday
about this. About how money doesn't
change that we'd have to move to
the middle of nowhere--

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
--It's not the middle of nowhere!

ANN
Our life is here. Shouldn't we at
least talk about this?

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)
Ann, MY life is only here because
of work. And because you're here.
And your life is only here because
you've never tried to be anywhere
else!

ANN

I... I'm so close to getting a job here. The interview, remember?

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

Ann, forget that bullshit. I know you hate the jobs you're applying for and you're just doing it out of guilt.

(then)

Please listen to me when I say that this money will change our lives. It'll change *your* life. It's enough to make it all worth it for me. And you can do--

Ann puts her head in her hand, steeling herself from the world spinning around her. Gulping, she tries in vain to catch her breath.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

--whatever you want to do.

ANN

It... it's such a big decision... Do we need to decide... now? I'm, like... my head's still spinning... I need to sit down.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

Sure. I understand. I know it's a lot. They don't need an answer until tomorrow.

She takes a breath. She's okay. She'll be okay.

ANN

Okay. Tomorrow. Okay.

(then)

Okay.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

Okay. Give it a real good think. We'll talk tonight.

ANN

Okay.

Click. He hangs up. The phone lingers at her ear, somehow held up by her feeble hand, arm, body. All feel like jell-o.

She closes her eyes. Breaths deeply.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S - VISION

LIGHTNING STRIKES, yet the darkness inside the strange dollhouse remains absolute.

In place of the girl is Ann, staring into the depths and white knuckling the house.

She leans in to the opening and *whispers into the darkness*. She slams the doors quickly, trapping her secret inside.

EXT. PARK - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Ann opens her eyes calmly, as if coming out of a trance.

MOMENTS LATER

Ann slides back onto her stool and picks up her pencil, casually returning to her sketch.

DANI

All good?

ANN

(not looking away)

Yep.

DANI

Ben wishing you luck?

ANN

I don't need luck to beat you.

DANI

What? No, the interview, stupid.

ANN

Oh, yeah. I mean, yeah, of course.

DANI

Oh. Nice. What time's it at?

Ann suddenly goes pencils down a little too hard.

ANN

I actually think I'm just about done. You?

Dani's briefly taken aback, then cocks her head back and forth, inspecting her portrait from every angle, taking an inquisitive drag of her cigarette.

DANI

Yeah. I think so too.
 (to the Teamster)
 Thank you for your patience, sir.
 Are you ready to make your choice?

TEAMSTER

Are you sure I have to choose?

ANN

Unfortunately yes, those are the
 rules. Corporate mandate.

DANI

Our hands are tied.

TEAMSTER

(chuckling)
 Normally I'd stick it to the man
 but I guess I don't want you ladies
 to get in any trouble.

The two portraits are presented to him, but still hidden from us. He inspects carefully, genuinely weighing the decision.

The Teamster looks up, a decision made. He opens his mouth--

INT. BEN & ANN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The front door opens and Ben steps in, feet heavy. Not ready for the long conversation. This is *his* day after all, right?

BEN

Ann?

We see her, standing in front of him. A glass of champagne in each hand. She holds one out to him, beckoning with a smile.

ANN

Okay.

A flash of confusion, then realization.

BEN

Yeah? Okay?

ANN

(nodding)
 Okay.

He drops his bag and embraces her. She remains rigid, refusing to melt into him. He either doesn't notice or doesn't care. She forces her smile to stay.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. DOLL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - DAY - DREAM SEQUENCE

From the BLACK, we turn in someone's POV, revealing a NEIGHBORHOOD STREET outside of a doorframe.

We step up to the frame and look down the road. A planned community of familiar DOLLHOUSES stretching infinitely.

Far, far off in the distance is a PLUME OF SMOKE.

Now we're in the smoke. A cacophony of confusion and terror, screams and wails of pain surrounds us. All-consuming.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ann wakes with a start, gulping for air. She fights for control and steadies her breath quickly, aware of the unmoving mound next to her that is Ben.

The bedroom is fully furnished but currently without character. A mound of unopened boxes stacked near the door.

Ann rolls on her side, makes a weak attempt to go back to sleep, then shoots out of bed, exiting quickly.

INT. BEN & ANN'S HOUSE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Ann wanders, familiarizing herself with her new home.

- She looks around the modest foyer, turning down the hall.

- She steps into the similarly bland main living area, with the living room to the right and the kitchen to the left.

On both sides are mounds of cardboard boxes -- the last remnants of her previous life.

- Ann opens a few closets in rapid succession, all empty.

- A first floor millennial grey half bath.

- A light pops on, illuminating a long dark staircase. She takes the first step with hesitation.

- She stands in an empty, unfinished basement. A lone, long chest freezer sits up against the wall.

- Ann opens the freezer. Empty. She puts a hand inside for a moment, then presses it against her forehead and the back of her neck. She shuts it again.

END MONTAGE

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ann sits on the floor, back against a couch. In front of her is her half of the art sign propped against the mound of cardboard boxes. A new tally mark etched at the end.

Ann looks at her phone, a MAP APP highlighting the location of something. She zooms in... in... in.... on a hole in the wall pizza place.

She switches to FaceTime and calls Dani. It rings a few times before she picks up with a droopy smile, swaying and drunk.

DANI

Heyyyyyyy.

ANN

What kind are you getting?

She takes the slice from the guy behind the counter and steps into the night.

DANI

Pepper. RONI!

ANN

Is it from that place under Marcy?

DANI

Mhm.

She takes a bite. FUCK! It burns.

DANI (CONT'D)

FUCK! HOT!

ANN

Blow on it.

DANI

Don't tell me what to do!

ANN
 You're right. My bad.
 (then)
 Fun night?

DANI
 Yeahhhhh it was alright. How's the
 'burbs?

ANN
 Big. Too big.

DANI
 You just got there. It maybe might
 get better?

ANN
 That was your big pep talk? I have
 even less pep now!

DANI
 Just how I'm feeling at this very
 moment.

The sounds of two girls pass by Dani, her attention
 momentarily diverting to them.

GIRL #1 (O.S.)	GIRL #2 (O.S.)
Waittttt where did you get that??	I'm soooooo hungry!

DANI
 (mouth full of food,
 pointing behind her)
 Izoverthere.

GIRL #1 (O.S.)	GIRL #2 (O.S.)
THANK YOU I LOVE YOU!!!	I will NEVER forget you!!

Dani blows them a kiss and turns back to her pizza and phone.

DANI
 Sorry. What did you say?

Ann hesitates on the other end.

ANN
 I didn't-- I forget. Doesn't matter
 anyway. I'm gonna try and go back
 to sleep if I can.

DANI
 Okay. I come visit soon and see
 your little white picket fence?
 (MORE)

DANI (CONT'D)

Check out the little white picket fence you got going on?

ANN

Ew. Maybe. Or you'll show up and Ben will be like "sorry she can't come out and play she's really busy" but I'm actually--

DANI

--actually buried in the backyard. I know the drill! Nighty night.

Ann, dwarfed by her sterile new home.

ANN

Nighty night.

The phone call ends and--

LATER - THE NEXT MORNING

Ann, still leaning against the couch. Slightly slumped. In the background Ben crosses in and out of the KITCHEN, gathering his things for work.

He stops for a moment, looking at *something* on the kitchen table hidden by the couch. With his back to us he picks it up and inspects it further, still hidden from view.

BEN

Did you start unpacking last night after I went to bed?

Ann, still asleep. Ben sets whatever-it-is down and comes around the couch to stand over her, wearing a stupid tie with penguins on it. Eyes her half of the portrait sign.

He nudges her leg. Nothing. He sighs, then reaches down and pinches her nostrils.

She shoots awake with a cough, fighting to get her bearings in a confused panic. Ben towers over her.

BEN (CONT'D)

Morning! Late night?

ANN

Mmm. Yeah. Couldn't sleep.

BEN

Sorry, babe. But you started unpacking? That's great.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

I maybe would've started with the important stuff, like our toaster or any of our clothes, but it's a start.

ANN

I... What?

Ben leans down and kisses the top of her head, hand on her cheek. His smart watch pings and he pulls away quickly.

BEN

Ah shit, I gotta run.

(then)

DAY ONE, BABY!

He turns to exit, Ann's still grasping at consciousness. He turns back to her.

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

I know this is overwhelming. But, we'll figure it out. I love you.

He exits as Ann calls after him.

ANN

Love... you... Have a good... first day!

BEN (O.S)

Can't wait to see all of the progress on the house! You're gonna do such a great job.

The front door opens and closes. Ann lets out an exasperated sigh and drops her head on the couch before shooting back up, grabbing at her neck and wincing in pain.

With great effort she claws her way onto the couch. We move up with her, peering over the couch to the kitchen table.

A pink and blue blob rests on the table, obscured by the deep background. Ann holds herself up momentarily, then collapses into the cushions.

HOURS LATER - LATE MORNING

The sun is higher in the sky as Ann rests at an awkward angle. *The kitchen table is empty.* Instead, a shadow is positioned between us and her.

Maybe it's just something near the window blocking sunlight--

It *moves*.

Click clack.

We can't see it anymore.

Click clack.

It's moving toward Ann.

Click. Clack.

A hand, feminine, with perfectly manicured, blood red fingernails, reaches for Ann's face and pinches her nostrils. Once again, she wakes with a start.

The hand quickly retracts, Ann none the wiser. With a begrudging stretch, she finally stands, body aching. Apparently alone.

The endless boxes look almost pretty in this light.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Boxes still litter the counter. Honeyed afternoon light drowns the kitchen. Ann muscles open the nearest box.

On top sits a small AM/FM radio. She yanks the antenna and clicks on a LATE 90s ADULT CONTEMPORARY POP SONG (a la "Torn" by Natalie Imbruglia).

Down to business. A box is emptied, spilling cups of every shape and size onto the dwindling counter space.

Another box, this one filled with pots and pans.

Another box, cookbooks.

Another, another, another. She's in the groove.

Bobbing along, she picks up one more. Tearing it open, she relaxes and unearths paints, pencils, brushes -- the works. She smiles fondly, greeting her old friends.

At the bottom is a CANVAS in a WOOD FRAME. On the back is a stylized signature reading ANN, but that's all we get as she takes it in.

An ease we haven't seen yet settles on Ann's face. Relief.

She moves the empty box to the side to set the painting down, accidentally knocking a mug off the counter. The *CRASH!* jolts her back to reality as the POP SONG fades out.

Ann stares in agitation at the pieces.

RADIO DJ #1 (O.S.)
It's The Bigger Bambino on 93.2
bringing you the best throwbacks to
your desk, commute, or any lucky
stay-at-home sons-of-Bs out there--

Ann clicks off the radio and takes in her surroundings. The kitchen is worse than when she started.

She wordlessly grabs a set of keys off the (*empty*) kitchen table and heads for the front door.

EXT. BEN & ANN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ann steps outside, pulling the door closed behind her and locking it without looking up. In the tempered glass, a funhouse mirror version of a FIGURE leers.

The figure waits a little too long before clearing their throat. Ann jumps out of her skin before turning.

ANN	JOHN
Holy SHIT!	I'M SORRY! I'M SORRY! I'M SORRY!

Ann recomposes herself, turning to face the figure -- a heavier man who looks to have just rolled out of bed.

Bathrobe open, comfy shoes on, rocking a sleep shirt that reads "I left my beach bod in Cape Cod" riddled with stains. This is JOHN (mid 30s) in all his glory.

A covered tray in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other.

ANN (CONT'D)
Hi, hello. Can I help you?

He presents them both sheepishly.

JOHN
Name's John Hornberger. Welcome to the neighborhood! Sorry for the scare. I was walking up when you came out and, situationally, I wasn't sure the best course of action. Seems like I chose poorly.

ANN
A little, but, that's okay.

John extends the covered tray further.

ANN (CONT'D)

What're we workin' with?

JOHN

Eight layer bean dip. Old family recipe. I know what you're thinking, it's usually seven. That's what makes it makes it a Hornberger family recipe.

He winks. Ann's still reeling just a bit.

ANN

Wow, this is... ah, shit.

He's taken aback. She covers her mouth.

JOHN

Not a bean dip fan?

ANN

No, no! That's so nice! I just... I don't even know where the grocery store is yet. Or how to get to it. I don't even have any chips. Sorry, you caught me at a bad time, I'm a little overwhelmed but... this is so nice.

She takes the items from him.

JOHN

Most people don't like to do the whole neighbor-y thing. Feels like it's sort of dying out, right? I like it. I think it's important to know your neighbors. Cuppa sugar and all that, right? Happened to me once or twice. That's why it's good to know your neighbors. Barely know any of the other spouses on the street. Not for lack of trying.

They both glance down the street. Most curtains are drawn. The street is still.

ANN

Well, I really appreciate it.

JOHN

Ah, don't mention it.

An awkward moment between them.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, nice to meet you. Have a nice rest of the day!

With a bit of disappointment, John shuffles to leave. Ann holds up the wine bottle weakly.

ANN

Unless, you want to come in for a glass?

He turns back, overjoyed.

JOHN

What a thoughtful offer!
(squeezing past her)
Pardon me!

He bounds inside with the authority of a man who's lived there his entire life.

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

You mind if I check out the furniture they gave you?

Ann watches him go, stunned, before stepping back into the eye of the storm.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - DAY

John ping-pongs around the minimal furniture, lifting cushions, running a hand along the table surfaces. Precise.

Ann looks on, back to the kitchen.

ANN

Sorry about the mess.

JOHN

(ignoring her)
I've been gathering intel from my, excuse me, our neighbors. When they'll talk to me.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Our housing company, PropRes, LLC, says that everything's brand new but I've noticed minor imperfections that lead me, and others, to believe that they actually retained all of this in bulk from a second hand source in what I can only assume was some sort of shrewd business venture and now they're trying to pawn it off on us, the consumer, as new. Can you believe that?

ANN

No! They'd never take advantage of the consumer!

John stares, not catching her sarcasm, then roars with laughter, collapsing on a leather recliner and popping it up.

JOHN

I like you. Where did you move from?

ANN

New York.

JOHN

City?

Ann nods.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, that explains it. Nothing those bastard landlords of yours won't do to save a buck. I guess you're right, we're lucky to have furniture at all!

ANN

I don't know. I prefer my own things.

John's lip curls in a devilish smile.

JOHN

As you should. And, if I may, what did you do in the greatest city on earth? Before you were so brutally uprooted for a life of luxurious corporate housing?

ANN

I'm an artist.

JOHN

An artist! What a relief, for
chrissakes. Need a little bit of
culture in this wasteland.

His eyes look past her and into the the kitchen behind her.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I can see why you like your own
things! One of your pieces?

He thrusts up, the recliner collapsing with a spring-loaded
THUNK. Ann's gaze follows as he hustles around the couch and
up to the kitchen table.

His body shrouds what caught his eye as Ann dances around his
large figure to get a view of--

It can't be.

It can't be.

Time slows as John's body gives way to the unmistakable
sight of a PINK DOLLHOUSE. Blue individual shingled roof.

Impossible two-floor spanning faux-ornate windows with red
curtains.

And a set of double front doors, closed with a golden clasp.

ANN

But... that's not possible...

John ignores her, inspecting the dollhouse.

JOHN

Incredible craftsmanship! Truly
bizarre...

(looking over his
shoulder)

You have some talent!

Ann approaches with trepidation, as if the house might take
off out the front door if she moves too quickly.

ANN

I don't... this isn't mine.

JOHN

Oh. I see. Well, remarkable, still.
You have some taste!

He reaches toward the clasp. Something... *primal*... bubbles
up inside of Ann.

ANN

STOP!

John freezes in shock.

ANN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I mean, I didn't make it. It's... My grandma made it for my mom when she was a kid. I... thought I lost it.

He softens. Ann sets John's welcome tray down on the table and reaches out, hands shaking. She gingerly picks it up and holds it close, running a hand across the craftsmanship.

ANN (CONT'D)

I never met my grandma, and my mom never talked about her. She regifted this to me one year for my birthday instead of buying me something. I asked my mom about her then, and she said--

INT. ANN'S FAMILY LIVING ROOM - 1990S - FLASHBACK

On her mother's face, the rest of the room obscured and unimportant. Eyes cold. When she moves her mouth, Ann talks.

ANN (V.O.)

"I once asked my mother how long it took her to make this. She told me she would've spent less time on it if she knew how much of a waste I'd be."

BACK TO SCENE

John looks at her, mortified. Ann laughs.

ANN

That's who they were.

She runs a finger across the individual roof tiles, her finger catching with a tiny *thud thud thud* as it goes.

ANN (CONT'D)

But, still. I loved it.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S - FLASHBACK

The same scene as before. The young girl -- Young Ann -- grips the dollhouse tightly.

CRASH-OOM! A plate shatters against the wall below as the fighting intensifies, melding with the thunder outside.

ANN (V.O.)

When I was a kid, I used to whisper my secrets into it.

(laughing)

I thought it would "keep them safe," which is definitely something a kid with a strong support system and lots of friends would do!

Young Ann steels herself, then leans in to the house's opening and *whispers into the darkness*. She slams the doors quickly, trapping her secret inside.

BACK TO SCENE

Click!

Ann's finger pops open the clasp, gently peeling open the two double doors.

Inside, only darkness. Darkness Ann loses herself in...

JOHN

Jeez Louise!

Ann snaps out of it, then pulls back, embarrassed.

ANN

I'm sorry, Jack--

JOHN

Oh, it's John.

ANN

John -- I don't even know your name and I've already dumped all my shit on you.

(suddenly cordial)

Thank you for the dip and the warm welcome. That was really nice. I'm still adjusting and I'm clearly not doing a good job of it--

JOHN

--When I was little I thought I could solve the trolley problem.

She chokes out a laugh of surprise.

ANN

What?

JOHN

You know, the old question -- do you let the trolley hit five people or make it switch tracks so it only hits one?

ANN

No, yeah, I know what it is. I took some Applied Ethics classes in college and I've also been on the internet before.

JOHN

(theatrical eye-roll)
Okay, no need to brag.

ANN

Why would a kid even know about that?

JOHN

My older brother, that rat, thought it would be "funny" to explain it to me using my old train set.

INT. LITTLE JOHN'S BEDROOM - DAY - 1990S - FLASHBACK

A cherub-cheeked YOUNG JOHN (10) sits in a perfect stereotype of a nerd's bedroom. In front of him, a classic bully OLDER BROTHER (15).

Surrounding them is a WOODEN TRAIN SET, arranged to resemble the trolley problem -- two sets of tracks, one WOODEN DOLL on one, five on the other.

John's Older Brother points at a little Switchman figure, then to Young John.

JOHN (V.O.)

After that I was convinced, and I mean *convinced* I could solve it. Everyone lives, everyone's happy.

(MORE)

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But it usually ended with little
 Hornberger just taking the train
 clean off the tracks.

LATER - FLASHBACK

Now alone, LITTLE JOHN drives the train car down the track,
 but lifts it before it can crash into its wooden victims,
 triumphant.

JOHN (V.O.)
 But that's not how it works.

DAYS LATER - FLASHBACK

Little John rushes into his room, black eye already formed as
 he wipes tears from his face. He turns to the train set, the
 figures still laid out in permanent peril.

He grabs the lone figure on the other side of the problem and
 gets to work, gathering materials in a fury. Arms full of
 markers, pipe cleaners, glue, and more.

He works and works, until he finally sets the figure back
 down on the tracks. It looks startlingly like his brother.

CRASH! Little John's hand grasps the train car as it
 brutalizes the figurine, prone on the tracks.

END FLASHBACK

John looks off, then back to Ann with a smirk.

ANN
 Did you solve it?

JOHN
 For years I thought so. But,
 eventually, reality revealed itself
 to me.
 (then)
 Kids are weird.

ANN
 Kids are weird.

JOHN
 All I'm saying is, if it was those
 sick bastards from PropRes on those
 tracks? It would be the trolley
solution to me. HA!

ANN
It sounds like they really deserve
it.

JOHN
Well, I think so, at least.

Ann holds the dollhouse to him. He looks at it, confused.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What's this?

ANN
You don't have yours anymore. Give
mine a spin. Take a load off.

John hesitates, then takes it with reverence.

We're inside the dollhouse. Darkness except for the two open
doors, outside of which John breathes heavy and close.

JOHN
I wish that someone from PropRes
would pay for their various levels
of deception in defrauding the good
people of Country Heights,
including our newest neighbor...
Ann.

He steps back. Through the doors, we see Ann and John,
looking straight at us.

JOHN (CONT'D)
How was that?

ANN
Perfect!

JOHN
Perfect.

He slams the doors shut, swallowing us in darkness.

We stay in the darkness. Losing all sense of direction as it
suffocates us. Pressure mounting, until...

A... breath? A long, ragged, creaking, breath. Something
stirring in the darkness. The TAP, TAP, TAP of fingernails...

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The front door opens and a tired Ben enters, stupid penguin tie already undone. He drops his messenger bag and kicks off his shoes, calling out into the house.

BEN

Ann? I'm back!

No response. Already annoyed, we follow him.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Empty except for the mound of boxes. A few are open, their guts spilled across the floor in disarray.

Ben looks around, the room functionally the same as he left it. Or worse. The dollhouse still sits on the kitchen counter. Next to it sits a mostly eaten tray of BEAN DIP and a fork.

The sliding glass door is partially open, screen door closed and backyard light on.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Ann sits on a plastic lawn chair. In front of her is an easel with an empty page staring at her. She ignores it.

Instead, she ignites Dani's PINK LIGHTER, then extinguishes it. With a *click-hiss*, she repeats the cycle, over and over.

Her other hand holds John's now-open wine bottle loosely by the neck. She brings it to her lips and gulps, then burps.

Ben lingers at the screen door, watching her, before sliding it open and stepping outside.

Ann's head snaps around. The two stare at each other.

ANN

How was your first day?

Ben doesn't respond. He just stares. Eventually, Ann offers him the wine. He takes it wordlessly, takes a swig, and turns back inside, leaving the screen door open.

Leaving Ann alone with her thoughts and her empty easel.

Click-hiss, click-hiss, click-hiss.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

A legion of cubicles, all dark save one. A sigh, then the light turns off and a WOMAN (late 30s) makes her way through the darkness to the exit. Deep bags under her eyes.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A SECURITY GUARD plays a game on their phone as the shadow of the woman passes the front desk.

SECURITY GUARD
Night, miss. Get some sleep.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Yeah, you know. I'll try.

The door closes with a *click*.

INT. WOMAN'S CAR - NIGHT - MONTAGE

- A messenger bag is tossed on the passenger seat, followed shortly by an ID badge that she tucks into a pocket.

- Car turns on.

- Radio plays the same LATE 90s ADULT CONTEMPORARY POP SONG (a la "Torn" by Natalie Imbruglia) on the radio, the woman taps the steering wheel to the beat.

- Now the woman sings along at the top of her lungs.

- She pulls into a driveway and kills the radio before exiting the car.

END MONTAGE**INT. WOMAN'S FOYER / KITCHEN - NIGHT**

The woman drags herself inside and shuts the door, kicking her shoes off and dropping her bag at her feet.

Her ID badge slips out, but we can't see what it says. She bends down to put it back when, a *light off the main hallway clicks on*. She freezes.

WOMAN
Kev? I thought I told you not to wait up for me?

No response. She furrows her brow--

A shadow passes through the light. It makes her jump just a little. She shakes her head in annoyance.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

(louder)

Kev? Are you wearing your headphones again? I don't want to scare you!

She reaches out and knocks on the wall leading to the source of the light. Gentle but firm.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Nothing, then--

KNOCK!

KNOCK!

KNOCK!

--in response. The woman smiles and drops her shoulders. She makes her way toward the light.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm a little tired for games, but I appreciate the effort...

She *knocks* as she walks, three times again. And again, a three knock reply.

Smiling, she stops just short of the entryway, resting her head against the wall. She knocks, much gentler this time.

...knock... knock... knock...

They're returned just the same. Almost... intimately. She reaches a hand around the doorframe, searching until she finds purchase. She smiles.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I missed you.

Silence. Then, voice. Distorted. Like it's still figuring out how to replicate being human. It starts as a man, then glitches female.

VOICE (O.S.)

I missed... you. Too.

Confused, she steps into the light, and immediately *screams bloody murder!*

We stay on her, unable to see what she sees. Until she remembers her *still outstretched hand*.

Shaking uncontrollably, she follows the length of her arm to her hand. Her fingers interlocked with another. Perfectly manicured, red fingernails, each sharpened to a point.

Flecks of blood splatter the back of the hand.

We follow the woman's gaze as she looks up... up... up...

Horror gives way to a flash of utter confusion. And then back to horror. Pure, mind-bending horror.

From down the hall, we watch as she's dragged into the kitchen, screams and the dance of shadows.

We turn away, back to her discarded messenger bag by the front door. And the ID badge that slipped out.

Closer... closer...

A logo.

PropRes, LLC.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. DOLL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - DAY - DREAM SEQUENCE

From the BLACK, we once again turn to reveal the neighborhood street of dollhouses stretching infinitely.

In the distance, the plume of smoke has grown and spread closer to us.

We jump to the smoke for barely a second. A nerve-shredding second of the same cacophony of screams and pain.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Ann shoots up in bed, gasping. Ben, mid getting ready, nearly jumps out of his skin.

BEN

Jesus, Ann! Are you okay?

Ann's eyes focus on him through the fog.

ANN

Mmhm.

She crashes back onto her pillow.

BEN
(sotto)
Okayyyy.

He finishes tying his tie -- a normal one, this time.

BEN (CONT'D)
Thanks for digging this tie out.
I'll see you later.

Ann doesn't stir. Ben exits. We stay with Ann but hear him as he clomps down the stairs and (presumably) into the living room and kitchen area, quieter and quieter.

The steps stop. Then, very suddenly, louder and louder. Faster. Coming for us. Coming for Ann.

He comes back into the bedroom with purpose, crossing to the bed and crouching at Ann's level. She's fast asleep -- or, at least, pretending to do so.

BEN (CONT'D)
I don't even know what to say, Ann.
Amazing work. It looks great. I
don't know how you did it. It looks
like a real home.

He kisses her forehead.

BEN (CONT'D)
Sorry I woke you while I was
getting ready. You're probably
exhausted. Get some sleep.

He stands and exits for good. Thuds down the stairs. Front door opens and closes--

Ann's eyes pop open. She slips out of bed quickly.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

Ann pads cautiously into the living room, scanning.

The boxes are gone.

It's all gone.

No, not gone.

Put away.

The living room and kitchen. Dressed and stocked and... designed? Somehow making something out of the corporate housing furniture. The throw pillows are *karate-chopped*.

Ben wasn't kidding -- it looks like a home. A little generic, a little old-fashioned, but a home.

She stumbles aimlessly through the alien setup.

INT. BASEMENT - MORNING

Ann stands in front of the previously-empty lower level. The boxes that plagued her are stacked neatly in a corner. Some have been emptied and broken down.

Propped against the boxes are a set of Ben's golf clubs. She pulls a club and gives a half-hearted swing, before walking the length of the boxes and continuing to the freezer.

Ann puts a hand on the handle, but *something* gives her pause.

In the darkness behind her, *the red-nailed hand appears from behind the boxes*, pushing the bag of clubs to the floor.

THU-CLINK!

She jumps and yelps, turning to the sound, then crosses to righten them and heads for the stairs. The freezer unopened.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

On the kitchen table, the dollhouse sits patiently. Its two long, multi-floor-spanning windows stare as she takes it in. She passes in front of it on her way to the kitchen.

As if searching for the answer, she starts opening cabinets. Cups. Plates. Bowls. Mugs. Wine glasses--

Wait. Back to mugs. Hesitating, she reaches in and takes one out. Turns it over in her hand. Then holds it up to the morning light bleeding through the window.

Faint CRACK LINES spiderweb the mug. Someone delicately repaired it after she broke it the day before.

ANN

What is going on...

IN RAPID SUCCESSION:

- Ann splashing cold water on her face at the kitchen sink.

- Ann aggressively pinching her arm.
- Ann slapping her cheeks. Growls in frustration.

She drops into a chair at the kitchen table with a thousand yard stare that wanders to the dollhouse, still staring her down (wait, wasn't it turned toward the living room?)

Ann leans in, looking over it fondly. She runs a finger over the individual roof tiles.

A tiny *thud, thud, thud* as her finger catches each tile.

She stops, noticing something on one of the tiles. A little glob of... something. She picks at it with her fingernail. Then holds it to the light.

Little flecks of deep red on her finger.

Almost like dried blood.

She looks back to the dollhouse. Brow furrowed.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Ann jumps and yelps *again*, then growls in frustration *again*. She wipes the... "residue"... off on her pants and--

I/E. FOYER / PORCH - MORNING

Ann rips open the door to, once again, find John as sloppy as before. He vibrates with nervous energy.

ANN
Welcome back--

JOHN
May I enter? Thank you.

He squeezes past her before even finishing his own sentence. Ann watches, incredulous, as he nearly sprints inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

Ann steps into the living room to find John already on his knees, looking under pieces of furniture.

ANN
What the hell are you doing?!

He ignores her. He stands to investigate the light fixture.

ANN (CONT'D)

JOHN.

He unscrews, investigates, then replaces the lightbulbs.

JOHN

Do you have any reason to believe
this place is bugged?

ANN

What the hell are you talking
about?

John whips his head around, frantically scanning the room,
eyes landing on the dollhouse. A horrible realization sets
in, eyes wide. He scampers over to pick it up.

JOHN

Is it real?

ANN

What? Is what real?! Give it to me,
it's not a toy!

JOHN

So you admit it!

ANN

What?! No--

She crosses quickly and pries it from his grasp.

ANN (CONT'D)

What is wrong with you? You can't
just barge into someone's house
like that!

John shrinks, then sinks into the chair she'd been sitting in
moments before. He can't look her in the eye.

JOHN

I'm sorry. I don't know what came
over me.

ANN

Me neither! You wanna explain
yourself just a *little* bit?

He finally looks at her.

JOHN

You didn't see?

ANN

See what?

JOHN

An employee at PropRes and her husband are missing. A neighbor saw their front door wide open and went in and apparently there was a lot of blood. The powers that be aren't saying much, but they're asking the public to report any suspicious behaviors.

ANN

Jesus, that's terrifying.

JOHN

I know.

ANN

But also like... not to be insensitive... but why are you destroying my house because of it?

John shifts uncomfortably. Ann looks at him funny, then down to the dollhouse, then back up at him.

ANN (CONT'D)

You're joking.

JOHN

I just--

She holds up a hand.

ANN

John. I know we just met. I think you're a cool guy. Helluva eight layer bean dip--

JOHN

Thank you, it really is the eighth layer that brings it all together--

She holds up her hand more emphatically.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Sorry.

ANN

...But you gotta know this is one of the craziest leaps a person could make. Right?

John looks up at her with puppy dog eyes.

JOHN

I know... It's just... something like this? Here? Not likely. No one feels much of anything around here, let alone enough rage to do something like this.

ANN

Well, you did.

JOHN

I know! That's why I'm in such distress! I know I got ahead of myself, barging in like that, but I asked your not-a-toy for someone to pay and it looks like they did. But I didn't actually mean it!

Ann looks down at the dollhouse, and for a second she considers it. Could it be possible? A lot of crazy shit already happened today and she hasn't even had...

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S - FLASHBACK

Ann's ripped back to the past. Young Ann, having just whispered her secret, is curled in a ball facing away from her dollhouse.

Behind her, the dollhouse starts to rise. Is something attached to the bottom of it--?

BACK TO PRESENT

ANN

Breakfast!

Now John looks at her funny. Ann shakes it off, plasters on a smile, and sets the dollhouse back on the table.

ANN (CONT'D)

This is a lot. For both of us. I haven't eaten yet. Have you?

JOHN

...I could eat. Might calm my nerves.

ANN

Great. You got a car to get us somewhere? I'm stranded on this rock and the fridge is still empty.

JOHN

Sure. No problem.

ANN

Great. Let's roll.

She heads toward the front door and John stands with a grunt. He does a once over of the space, finally recognizing its magical transformation.

JOHN

When did you have time to do all of this?

INT. CRANKY'S - LATE MORNING

A classic burger joint, untouched since the 90s.

A GUM-POPPING CRANKY'S EMPLOYEE (late teens) in a primary-colored fast food get-up takes orders while Ann and John wait in line. Ann squints at the menu.

ANN

I thought we were doing breakfast?

JOHN

What do you mean? This is breakfast!

He points to a small sliver of the menu, which includes a breakfast burger and something called a--

ANN

"Cranky Mary?"

JOHN

Great choice!

John steps up to the employee.

ANN

Wait, John, I don't even know--

JOHN

Two Cranky Marys, please!

CRANKY'S EMPLOYEE
Do you want that Cranky Style
today?

ANN JOHN (O.S.)
Excu- what? Yeah, go ahead and Crank
those up for us.

CRANKY'S EMPLOYEE
And would you like to add our
Souvenir Cranky Cup for \$4.99? Free
refills and all proceeds this month
go to Coast Guard research.

JOHN ANN
Yeah. Not today.

They look at each other.

ANN (CONT'D)
John, we live in a landlocked
state.

JOHN
You GOTTA get the Cranky Cup! Free
refills for the Coast Guard!

She looks to the employee.

ANN
What could they possibly be
researching?

The employee shrugs with a pop of their gum.

ANN (CONT'D)
No cup.

CRANKY'S EMPLOYEE
(to the back)
TWO CRANKY MARY, NO CUP!
(to John)
Wife's always right, amirite?

JOHN
(stammering, blushing)
Oh, that's not-- we're not--

CRANKY'S EMPLOYEE
Girlfriend. Whatever. Total's
\$32.76.

John's paralyzed by the situation. Ann rolls her eyes and
reaches in to swipes her card.

Instantly another Cranky's employee drops two of the craziest fucking Bloody Marys on the counter in front of her.

Skewers overflowing with... burger ingredients... there's not even an attack point to drink it from... it's too busy with the various... toppings... served in a red soda cup.

Her smirk falls as she tries to hide her utter revulsion. John picks his up without a second thought and departs for a seat. Ann turns into the restaurant.

ANN

Ah, shit.

Every table in the restaurant is dotted with a Souvenir Cranky Cup. Some patrons glare at the duo disapprovingly.

MOMENTS LATER

Ann struggles with where to begin attacking her Cranky Mary. John has no such problem.

JOHN

I feel bad I even said anything. I don't want to hurt anyone. Not really. Even the ghouls over at PropRes. I know you don't know me well, but I feel like you know me enough to believe that.

ANN

John, you didn't have anything to do with that. It was a freak coincidence.

JOHN

I just feel wrong about the whole ordeal--

SMACK SMACK! Ann whips her head up. Behind John the slack-jawed employee is now hitting a mounted and static-filled CRT TV with a broom. Eventually the picture comes back.

News footage of the employee's house, now cordoned off with caution tape. A lower third reads:

KIDNAPPING OR LOVERS' QUARREL GONE TOO FAR? PREDICTION MARKETS ARE DIVIDED

Ann looks down at her "drink," then around the restaurant.

ANN

So this is it?

JOHN

It's a little rundown, but its got charm.

ANN

I mean... this town. The 'burbs. My new reality.

JOHN

I guess that's all perspective.

ANN

What's another perspective?

JOHN

A safety net. A partner that provides. A roof over your head.
(then, with a smile)
Good company. Haven't had that in a long time. Outside of Julia.

That gets to Ann. Maybe he's right.

ANN

Ask me a question.

JOHN

About what?

ANN

Anything. I don't know. We live in a corporate neighborhood so corporate rules. Rapid fire ice breaker to get to know each other better.

JOHN

Okay. I'm game.
(then)
How long have you and your fella been together? And what's his name?

ANN

Four years. Ben. Any kids?

JOHN

Not yet. We're trying though.

ANN

That's great, congratulations!

JOHN

Thank you. I'm terrified. Do you want kids?

ANN

I have recurring nightmares about being pregnant.

JOHN

That's never stopped anyone.

ANN

You're not wrong! Employment history?

JOHN

Nothing of note. Putzed around doing odd jobs until Julia got the promotion. Never really figured out where I fit in. You?

ANN

Graphic design. Hated it. Didn't really pay the bills either. Kind of a huge waste of time and energy. So you don't miss working?

JOHN

Do you?

ANN

Hey, my question! But no.

JOHN

I feel like I should. Breadwinner wife working while I'm at home. She likes it, though. She'd go insane if she wasn't working. She's not built like me. She can't sit still.

ANN

What do you like?

JOHN

Ah ah! My turn. Why an artist?

ANN

Why anything else?

He gives a thumbs down and makes a raspberry with his mouth.

ANN (CONT'D)

What do you like?

JOHN

Nature. A good cup of coffee. Something else too, probably. Your parents, are they nearby?

The temperature in the room drops. On a dime, Ann's not having fun anymore.

ANN

No.

JOHN

Oh, I'm sorry, are they--

ANN

What's the deal with the cups?

JOHN

What do you mean?

ANN

Like, why does everyone get the special cup?

JOHN

I don't know. You just get a cup. It's just what you do.

Ann stands from the booth abruptly.

ANN

Will you take me home?

John looks up at her, confused and a little sad.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John drives as Ann stares out the window. Music drifts from the radio (maybe "Larry David" by Ok Cowgirl) and over the scene as we finally see glimpses of the town...

DRIVING MONTAGE

- MOTHERS with strollers walking on the sidewalk
- A humble yet inviting shopping center
- Houses with out-of-season patriotic bunting
- Various lawn signs a la "DRIVE LIKE YOU HAVE KIDS"
- A FRIENDLY MAILMAN gives them a wave
- A glass-windowed yoga studio filled with WOMEN
- And finally, a town green punctuated by a string-lit gazebo

END MONTAGE**I/E. JOHN'S CAR / NEIGHBORHOOD ENTRANCE - DAY**

The car pulls onto a gated road with a faux-grand entrance sign: **COUNTRY HEIGHTS**. The song returns to playing from the radio as it fades out.

RADIO DJ #2 (V.O.)

It's time for your favorite midday
talk show with me, The Baby
Bambino, and the story still on
everyone's mind is the terrifying
disappearance of two local--

Ann nearly punches the radio off. John tosses a look her way.

ANN

Sorry.

JOHN

(shaking his head)
Just a weird day.

ANN

(nodding)
Just a weird day.

I/E. JOHN'S CAR / NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

They take a series of incomprehensible turns. Every street looks the same.

ANN

How the hell do you ever get out of
this place?

JOHN

Julia and I always say, once you
find your way home without a U-
Turn, you're finally a local. Heh.

Turn, and turn, and turn. Ann spots something in the distance.

ANN

Wait, do you see that?

JOHN

Hm?

ANN
John, can you speed up?

JOHN
I don't feel comfortable doing
that. I'm supposed to Drive Like I
Have Kids--

ANN
Do you seriously not see that?

He briefly follows her eyes, and shrugs.

We finally see what she sees -- a PLUME OF BLACK SMOKE in the
distance.

ANN (CONT'D)
John, please!

JOHN
All right, jeez!

They turn the corner and up to--

EXT. BEN & ANN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ann jumps out of the car, running a few steps before slowing
to a stop.

It's her house. It's fine. No smoke.

She stands staring at the house, hands on her hips. John
gives it an awkward moment before yelling through the still
open car door.

JOHN
Everything... okay?

She's still dazed. She pinches the bridge of her nose before
turning back, "silly me" all over her face.

ANN
Ahh... you know. Recurring
nightmare that I left the burner
on. Normal stuff.

JOHN
Sounds like you have a lot of
recurring nightmares.

ANN
Yeah...

She crosses back to the open car door and leans down.

ANN (CONT'D)

Everything's fine. Sorry for the scare.

JOHN

Heart's racing. Feel like I could run a marathon.

She smiles, then gestures to the car door.

ANN

Open or closed?

John laughs.

JOHN

Mmmm... you can close it.

ANN

You sure? Beautiful day out.

JOHN

You're so right, but I do think we're going to go with closed at this time unfortunately.

ANN

(shrugging)
Suit yourself.

Ann swings the door shut, but not before--

JOHN

See you at your shindig this weekend!

ANN

Sounds good. Thanks, John.

SLAM! He drives off, and then his words click. She faux calls after him.

ANN (CONT'D)

Wait... What shindig?

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - NIGHT

We watch from the dollhouse's a POV as Ann and Ben argue. We can only see a sliver of the room through the open double doors, but it's enough.

ANN
How many people, Ben?

BEN
... I don't know exactly.

ANN
How many, Ben!

BEN (CONT'D)
20... ish.

ANN (CONT'D)
20... ish. That's awesome. And when
were you planning on telling me
about this?

BEN
I wasn't keeping it from you! We
didn't talk last night. This is
ridiculous, it's just a barbecue.
It's not even a big deal, it's just
a little tradition the company has
that the newbie hosts. And look at
all of the progress you've made on
the house!

ANN
Not even a big deal. So true.
Everyone has to host their own
welcome party. That's definitely
not insane.

BEN
I don't get it either. But we only
have to do it once, right?

ANN
Can you maybe leave our only car
with me so that I can go buy some
groceries?

BEN
Fine! Fine. Whatever you need. I'll
take an Uber to work.

ANN
How generous. Anything else I need
to know about this nightmare
scenario or is that good enough?

BEN
... No, that's it.

ANN
You hesitated.

BEN
No I didn't! I was thinking.

ANN
About what?

BEN
If there was anything else.

ANN
It seems like there is.

BEN
I just... I want to make a good
impression.

ANN
You will, Ben. You got the job.
That means something.

BEN
No I mean, like, I want *us* to make
a good impression.

ANN
Okayyyy... so I'll buy the *nice*
ground beef?
(then)
Are you worried I won't make a good
impression?

BEN
Jesus, Ann, I didn't say that!

ANN
Well, now's the right time to deny
it.

BEN
... Of course not!

ANN
Oh my GOD, Ben. Message received.
Loud and clear. I'll get out the
Jello mold and the ice pick for my
lobotomy.

BEN
That's not--
(then)
I didn't say anything.

ANN
Okay.

BEN

I just want it to go smoothly. For both of us.

ANN

Me too. Obviously. I just... I don't know. I'm sorry.

BEN

It's fine. Is everything okay? You look tired.

ANN

I haven't been sleeping well since we moved.

BEN

We'll adjust. Eventually. Together.

ANN

I just wish it didn't have to be like this.

BEN

No one is saying it has to. It's just one party.

They stand there, a chasm building between them. The dollhouse watches, a fly on the wall.

LATER

Still in the dollhouse's POV, Ann sits on a chair in the living room, scribbling on her drawing pad in frustration. She throws the pad in anger, hitting the dollhouse.

She rushes to it and checks it for damage, then breathes a sigh of relief and sits down in front of it, bending to pick up the discarded drawing pad from the floor.

ANN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

She smooths out the damaged edges, then looks to us.

ANN (CONT'D)

Both of you.

Ann holds the drawing pad up to the dollhouse sheepishly. It's on a blank page.

ANN (CONT'D)

Any ideas?

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

Ann walks with her phone nestled between her shoulder and ear, holding the dollhouse with both hands.

ANN

I don't know, for fun?

She sets it down on the kitchen table on top of her drawing pad, placing the broken shingles in a pile next to it.

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

"For fun?"

She inspects the dollhouse, noticing imperfections and chipped paint she hadn't seen before.

ANN

Obviously, not what I meant, just who else could have--

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

(to the side)

Yep, tell him I'm on my way!

(back to Ann)

Babe, I have to run. Maybe you're sleepwalking. How late were you up drawing?

She turns and paces the living room.

ANN

Not late, I gave up after awhile--

BEN (V.O., ON PHONE)

Uh huh. That's great. It's some of your best work. I think you should frame it.

(to the side)

I've got the report right here, staple on the bottom left like you asked!

(whisper)

I gotta go.

Click.

ANN

Bye.

She lowers her phone. She sits with his words a moment.

Wait...

Her eyes dragging across the room back to the kitchen table. They land on the drawing pad, smothered by the dollhouse.

She approaches with trepidation, slowly lifting the dollhouse off of the drawing pad. Her eyes widen.

It's PENCIL SKETCH of a familiar young boy looking out at the neighborhood, ball at his feet. Their neighborhood, not the Doll Housing Development.

It's not particularly interesting. It's precise, it's clean, controlled pencil strokes right where they should be. It's just soulless. Devoid of heart or emotion.

But where did it come from?

Could this really have been her?

She'd remember it, right?

It was her dream, so it must be hers.

Right?

She continues to ogle, eyes falling to the lower right corner. An EMPTY SPACE and a pencil angled directly at the spot, waiting, enticing.

She picks up the pencil. A sick kind of wonder sets in. She looks to the dollhouse. It passes no judgement.

She puts the pencil and the drawing pad to the side.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Ann pulls a box labeled ART SUPPLIES from the stack.

She passes the unassuming chest freezer. We stay with it as she heads up the steps and flips off the light, throwing the basement into darkness.

A long pause, and then, almost imperceptibly...

...Knock... knock... knock... from inside the freezer.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - MONTAGE

- Ann throws NEWSPAPER over the kitchen table.
- A box of ACRYLIC PAINTS and BRUSHES is puked on the table.
- The dollhouse is set gingerly in the middle of the mess.

- A HOT GLUE GUN fires up.
- Ann gets to work. She painstakingly reattaches the broken shingles.
- A spot of STILL-DRYING BLOOD on a jagged shingle, left by her scraped knee. She licks her thumb and scrubs in vain.
- PINK and BLUE TUBES OF PAINT burst onto a PALETTE.
- She wets a brush in a MUG OF WATER -- the same mug from earlier.
- Delicately, she paints over the blood, new and old.
- All the while, murky, paint-mixed water seeps slowly from the cracks in the mug, soaking the newspaper.

END MONTAGE

She finds herself back at the drawing pad. She looks it up and down. Flips through the rest of the pad (we don't see her other drawings). Lands back at the new sketch.

MOMENTS LATER

She's on her computer, typing "sleepwalking but for drawing" and skims the AI Overview that generates above the search results before closing her laptop.

I/E. BEN'S CAR / NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

Ann navigates the confusing neighborhood, GPS directing her to her destination.

GPS (V.O.)
In 100 feet, turn right.

She turns right.

GPS (V.O.)
In 100 feet, turn left.

She turns left.

GPS (V.O.)
Rerouting. Rerouting.

ANN
That doesn't make any sense!!

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Ann meanders down the condiments aisle, dropping items in the shopping cart seemingly at random.

As she passes the various items, the digital price tags update. It makes no difference to her.

I/E. BEN'S CAR / NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - LATE AFTERNOON

The GPS antagonizes her once more.

GPS (V.O.)
In 100 feet, turn right.

She focuses back on the road.

ANN
I don't believe you.

As soon as she turns right--

GPS
Rerouting. Rerouting.

She screams in frustration.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Ann wheels her wagon (previously for her art supplies) into the living room, now full of groceries.

She lets the cart go and plops down next to her drawing pad (was it there before?). She rolls her head toward the pad, the obnoxious sketch staring back at her.

Almost like a knee-jerk reaction, she pulls out her phone and -- CLICK! -- takes a photo. Looks the photo over, opens up a new text to Dani, and selects the photo.

Ann hesitates for just a second, then hits send. She looks around as if someone might've seen. It's just her.

Has the house gotten bigger somehow? She looks so small, so lost, so unsure of herself. She looks back to her phone--

HOURS LATER - NIGHT

It's pitch black except for her phone screen. The wagon of groceries sits untouched as she scrolls endlessly.

From down the hall, the sounds of a key turning in a lock.

Ann snaps her head that direction before shooting up, turning on whatever lights are within reach before sprinting with the wagon into the kitchen.

She busies herself putting things away as Ben enters the house, dropping his bag and kicking off his shoes.

BEN (O.S.)
Ann? I'm home!

ANN
In the kitchen!

Ben enters, all smiles.

BEN
Finally, we're fully stocked! I
love it!

Ann forces a smile back.

ANN
Should have everything we need for
the barbecue. Are you hungry?
Sorry, I just got back not that
long ago so I didn't have time to
make anything...

BEN
Oh, no. That's okay, I had a big
lunch. Company's treat for a great
Q3, which I guess is a little
stolen valor since I just got here
but I think it's alright. Now I
know what's at *steak* for Q4.
(he winks)
It was steak. They got us steaks.

Ann laughs too much. Ben joins her.

BEN (CONT'D)
Let me help you!

ANN
Oh, no, you don't have to do that--

He dips into one of the bags and pulls out some raw meat. He puts a hand on different spots of the packaging.

BEN
Weird. Little warm. Was the fridge
working okay at the grocery store?

Ann takes it from him.

ANN

It was cold when I got it! The grocery store's probably just a little further away than we're used to. Not down the block anymore!

(then)

I'm serious, I got this. You worked all day. Go relax on the couch.

Ben relents and steps back, hands up.

BEN

I won't say no to the master of the house.

He crosses to the living room and drops onto the couch next to the drawing pad. He picks it up, eyes bouncing around the sketch. Soaking it all in. He runs a hand over the boy.

Ann notices Ben doing this and stops unpacking. Conflicted.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben's fast asleep. Ann stares at the ceiling next to him, wide awake. She snaps up and slips out of bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ann walks into the living room, stopping to eye the dollhouse sitting on the kitchen table. She crosses and sits on the couch, closes her eyes and takes a long, deep breath.

ANN

You can come out now. I know you're there.

Nothing...

Nothing...

Then--

The dollhouse *rises* from the table. Attached at the neck to a woman's figure in a shirtwaist dress, a white pinafore apron over top.

The dollhouse faces forward, but the body is backwards, revealing the apron cinched tightly in the back.

Her hands, red nails filed to a point, firmly grasp the dollhouse and *SNAP* it around, facing away from Ann.

Ann jumps at the sound -- maybe she wasn't as confident as she appeared. She lets out a shuddering breath as--

--*CLICK CLACK*--

This... *thing*... turns around to face her once more. What looks like two rows of teeth are suspended in the inky darkness within the dollhouse.

Ann steadies herself, still looking forward. Refusing to face the absurd incarnation of a children's plaything.

--*CLICK CLACK*--

She (we'll go with that) reaches Ann, leering over her. We can no longer see the dollhouse "head," only her torso.

ANN (CONT'D)

Hello?

Just as the night before, the sound is female but distorted. Like it's still figuring out how to replicate being human.

HOUSEWIFE

It's nice to be with you again,
Ann. It's been so long.

Ann fights to keep a calm tone as they converse.

ANN

I... I...

HOUSEWIFE

You what?

ANN

Nothing.

HOUSEWIFE

You started to think I was all in
your little head. Is that right?

Ann doesn't answer.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

And if I'm real... then what else
might be real?--

ANN
 --I don't--
 (catching herself)
 ... want to talk about that.

Ann holds her breath. Housewife says nothing, then runs a hand through Ann's hair.

HOUSEWIFE
 Isn't that silly.

Ann nods slowly.

ANN
 Why are you here?

Housewife laughs, sending a chill up Ann's spine.

HOUSEWIFE
 That's funny. That's a funny question.

ANN
 Why is it funny?

HOUSEWIFE
 It's quite funny. I'm here because you asked!

ANN
 I... I did?

Housewife's hand stops mid-stroke in Ann's hair.

HOUSEWIFE
 Are we playing a game? It's not a very fun one.

ANN
 What? It's not a game-- ahhh ahhh!

Ann squirms as Housewife digs into a clump of her hair, pulling at her roots.

HOUSEWIFE
 If it's not a game then why are you pretending?

ANN
 I don't know! I don't know!

As Housewife's anger grows, her voice distorts, almost like it's becoming unstable.

HOUSEWIFE

It would be impolite to ask for my help if you didn't need it. I don't tolerate lies, Ann. You know that.

Ann whimpers in pain and squeezes her eyes tightly, hiding from the pain as *flesh tears*.

EXT. PARK - MORNING - FLASHBACK

Ann holds the phone up to her ear after Ben just told her about the promotion. Knees weak.

She closes her eyes. Breathes deeply.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S - VISION

Ann white knuckles the dollhouse. She leans in to the opening and *whispers into the darkness*.

BACK TO PRESENT

Ann opens her eyes, a look of clarity on her face. No pain when she speaks. Almost surprised by her own realization.

ANN

I meant it.

Housewife releases the tension on her hair. And just like that, she's gone. The dollhouse tumbles behind Ann and crashes to the ground, falling on its side.

It doesn't affect Ann.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990S - VISION

Ann slams the doors quickly, trapping her secret inside and swallowing us in darkness.

When Housewife talks, it sounds like we're *inside* the dollhouse.

HOUSEWIFE (V.O.)

Then let's play.

EXT. JOHN & JULIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

John, rocking a stained "Cranky's" shirt and his bathrobe, trots down to the mailbox at the end of the driveway with a whistle. He pops it open and sifts through the mail.

A blood-red card at the bottom of the stack catches his eye. He flips it over and tears it open, quickly reading the note.

It's written in generic, all caps handwriting. Almost like a typeface, but somehow in pen.

DEAR JOHN,

THANK YOU FOR MAKING ME FEEL WELCOME IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THE TRUTH IS, I'M STILL FIGURING MYSELF OUT. AND YOU? YOU'RE A GREAT GUY — THAT MUCH I KNOW. YOU'RE NOT JUST A NEIGHBOR, YOU'RE A FRIEND.

FROM,

ANN

John looks off toward Ben & Ann's house, brow furrowed.

EXT. BEN & ANN'S HOUSE - MORNING

The front of the house is clean, plants and lawn manicured. Several BALLOONS are tied to the mailbox. A cheerful lawn sign reads "Welcome!"

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

Ann opens the oven and slips a tray in. She's still dressed in sleep clothes, but looks well rested.

Ben thuds down the stairs as Ann turns around to meet him with her arm outstretched, perfectly timing delivering piping hot cup of coffee into his unsuspecting hand.

Their eyes meet and they share a smile.

BEN

Thank you.

ANN

Sure.

BEN

Good morning.

ANN
Good morning.

BEN
You been up for long?

ANN
A little. Getting a jump on things
for later. Wanna see?

BEN
Sure.

EXT. BACKYARD - MORNING

Ben and Ann stand at the open sliding glass door, the former's mouth agape.

The backyard is tastefully decorated: several more balloon bouquets, fresh cut flowers dot garden tables covered in red and white checkered tablecloths.

Coolers stocked, the grill sparkling and prepped for Ben. It's not overdone, but definitely more effort than needed to be put into it.

Some might see it as the American Dream.

ANN
Everything look okay?

Ben responds by pulling Ann in for a deep, passionate kiss. As long as we've known them, nothing's ever felt like this.

BEN
Thank you.

ANN
I just did what you asked.

BEN
I know. But... thank you.
(shaking his head)
I feel like the two of us aren't
living the same 24 hours. I don't
know how you've been getting all
the stuff around the house done.

ANN
Perks of being a trophy wife.

She punches him in the arm playfully.

BEN
Is that how you see yourself?

ANN
Is that how you see me?

He smiles and walks over to his grill, running a hand along the meticulously laid out utensils. Lingers on the BBQ Fork.

BEN
I've been worried that you weren't going to see this as the gift it really is.

Ann's smile wavers for just a second.

ANN
I just needed some time, that's all.

Ben nods, then looks around the idyllic backyard once more.

BEN
It's like there's two of you. When do you sleep!

ANN
I figure it out.
(then)
I'm gonna go get ready. You good to hold down the fort while I'm gone?

Ben gives an exaggerated salute.

BEN
At your service, ma'am.

Ann returns the salute.

ANN
At ease, soldier.

She re-enters the house, leaving Ben to marvel.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Ann sits at her vanity. She can't stop looking at herself, entranced as she brushes her hair until--

Ann grimaces, flinching. She reaches back with both hands, gently parts her hair to reveal the sore spot, dried blood caked around it.

She pokes at it gently, wincing with each prod, before laying her hair back to cover the spot as best she can.

She runs the brush through the spot in a few fast-but-gentle strokes that clearly hurt.

MOMENTS LATER

Ann's finger, nail now meticulously painted a gentle pink, runs along a line of clothes in the closet. She stops at an option, and grabs the hanger to pull it out.

A similarly manicured hand snakes up her wrist in a half caress, half scold. Red nails sharpened to a point.

It pulls Ann's hand back a few options, directing her toward a different dress. Ann grabs it, and the hand retreats.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

Ben inspects a living room wall now *covered* in drawings. Smack in the middle proudly hangs the DRAWING OF THE BOY.

Ann appears in the background, out of focus until she gets close to him. We catch the hint of a pastel dress. Even as Ben talks to Ann, he can't take his eyes off of the drawing.

BEN

You finally signed it.

Ann approaches. Sure enough, her signature fills the empty space at the bottom. A deal struck, signed in ink.

ANN

I did.

BEN

Were you waiting for something?

ANN

I don't know.

Ben turns, finally giving Ann a true up and down, as if he's seeing her for the first time.

She's wearing a PASTEL A-LINE DRESS and tasteful WEDGES. A department store mannequin come to life.

He pulls her into a TWIRL. Ann giggles like a teenager. After a few spins, he hugs her from behind. They look at the wall of art again together.

A closer look reveals the rest are in the same generic, inauthentic style. A lot of them feature the boy.

BEN

I bet he would be happy here.

Ann doesn't know what to say, but is mercifully saved by--

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

They both turn, startled, as the smoke detector wails in response to a PLUME OF SMOKE from the oven.

ANN

Shit!!!

She swings into action, yanking on an oven mitt and pulling a tray out of the oven. If at some point its contents resembled food, the resemblance is long gone.

Ben stands on a chair, fruitlessly fanning a dishcloth at the detector, before yanking it from the ceiling to silence it.

ANN (CONT'D)

Shit!!!

With a huff, he sits down on the chair.

BEN

Jesus. Hope that's not how the rest of the food is gonna turn out.

ANN

I'm so sorry, I must've forgotten to set a timer.

BEN

What were you even trying to make?

ANN

Doesn't matter now. We're down a dish. Do you think people will bring things?

BEN

They aren't supposed to, or, at least, they're not told to. But maybe someone will bring something.

He fails to hide an exasperated huff. Ann opens a window to air out the room when--

DING DONG!

Ann and Ben look at each other, both deer in headlights.

ANN
Who?

BEN
I don't know!

ANN
Ben! Why are people here *early*!!

BEN
I know! I don't know!

They both stare at each other.

BEN (CONT'D)
Should I--

ANN
YES! Obviously!

Ben tosses the dishcloth and smoke detector to Ann and rushes out to the front door. Ann drops the smoke detector on the counter and swats the swirling smoke toward the window.

The front door opens and Ann hears the muffled sounds of a greeting as she clocks the disfigured dish on the counter.

She crosses quickly, dropping it in the sink and shaking out her fingertips.

ANN (CONT'D)
Ow! Fuck! Ow!

She starts to rinse, the blackened mush bubbling over and funneling into the drain. It clogs almost immediately. She shoves the mush down and flips the switch by the sink on.

GRRRRRRRRRRRR!

The garbage disposal fires to life, unclogging the mess just as more takes its place. She flips it off.

The voices grow louder down the hall as--

Ann shoves again, hand down the drain and submerged in black gunk. She goes to pull her hand out when--

Housewife's hand grabs her arm at the wrist, forcing it to stay in the drain.

Ann freezes and looks up. Housewife's other hand is at the garbage disposal switch, finger hovering hungrily underneath.

Time stops. Ann breath shakes, as does her submerged arm, fighting against Housewife's supernatural grip. The voices down the hall vanish. It's just the two of them.

ANN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Please... I'm sorry...

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)
It took me a lot of time to make
that. My time is valuable, Ann.

Housewife's horrible, jagged teeth are so close to Ann's ear. A long string of thick saliva dangles from... somewhere within the darkness.

ANN
I know... I know... It won't happen
again. Please... I'm scared.

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)
I know you are. That's why I'm
doing it.

GRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!

The garbage disposal grinds to life and Ann yelps, then looks down to see her hand is out of the drain, safe.

A quick glance around. No Housewife. The voices from down the hall come back into focus as Ann hurries to steady herself and clean her filthy hands.

Ben steps in from the hall, trailed by John and a slender woman we can only assume is Julia (40). She owns any room she walks into, and this one is no exception.

Ben and Julia are mid-convo, with John dutifully behind, another covered tray in hand.

BEN
... Ann's done an amazing job
putting the house together while
I'm at work.
(calling out to her)
Ann! Come say hi!

Ann finishes scrubbing, tears mixing into the blackened, soapy water pooling in the drain. Right hand bright red from the hot water and vicious scrubbing.

ANN
One second!

Ann dries her hands, dabs her face quickly, and suddenly she's back on, turning with an award-winning smile plastered onto her face. She crosses to meet them.

BEN

Ann, I'd like you to meet my project manager, Julia Horn--

JULIA

Ann! I've heard so much about you, I feel like I already know you.

She pulls Ann in for a hug. Ben looks on, clearly thrown off.

ANN

You too! Excited to finally meet the legend herself.

They separate and Ann steps to John, pointing at the tray.

ANN (CONT'D)

Is that what I think it is?

John shrugs.

JOHN

You got me. I'm a bit of a one trick pony.

John looks to Ben, sheepish. Ben still confused. He doesn't like being the one out of the loop.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's the famous Hornberger eight layer bean dip. It's really the eighth layer that brings it all together.

ANN

It's really the eighth layer that brings it all together.

Silence, then...

BEN

Well, okay! Sounds like I shouldn't be the one making the introductions!

ANN

John's the only neighbor who came to introduce himself after we moved in. And inspect our furniture.

Ann and John share a smile.

BEN

Very kind, John. Very kind. Hey,
I've got two beers with our names
on 'em in the cooler outside. Yeah?

Ben takes the bean dip from John's hand and passes it
thoughtlessly to Ann, who receives it awkwardly.

ANN

Oh, yeah, sure.

JOHN

Mmm, yeah. I think that's something
I might be able to help you with.

Ann and Julia to watch them as they go.

BEN

Is something wrong with our
furniture?

JOHN

We're both going to need a drink
before I open that particular can
of worms...

They step outside and their conversation fades out. The two
stand awkwardly for a moment.

DING DONG! DING DONG!

They both look to the front hallway, then at each other.

JULIA

You ready?

ANN

I don't think I have a choice--

LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - LATER

We crash into full on party mode. It's just a lot of FINANCE
BROS in quarter zips and their FINANCE WIVES (all late 20s to
late 30s) in sundresses and rompers.

Maybe "full on party mode" is generous.

We stay in the POV of a DRINK TRAY being carried by a
feminine arm, dipping in and out of conversations. None of
them acknowledge the tray or holder when they take drinks.

FINANCE BRO #1
 You hear Guy Ritchie and Jason
 Statham are doing another movie
 together?

FINANCE BRO #2
 No way dude. "Wrath of Man" is so
 fucking good.

Then:

JULIA
 How old is your daughter?

FINANCE WIFE #1
 Three and a half. Her new thing is
 begging us to go to Chili's every
 time a commercial comes on.

Then:

FINANCE BRO #3
 My car's seat warmers are broken.

FINANCE WIFE #2
 Oh, that's not that big of a deal.

FINANCE BRO #3
 Well, I'd like them to work.

We pass by the bathroom as FINANCE BRO #4 exits with FINANCE
 BRO #5 waiting. They fist bump.

FINANCE BRO #4
 (laughing)
 We're all in the rotation.

FINANCE BRO #5
 The rotation is happening.

Then, to GAVIN (late 20s):

GAVIN
 I made 3k on Kalshi last night
 because they still haven't found
 the bodies.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

We continue outside into the classic Norman Rockwell/Stepford
 Wives adjacent barbecue.

FINANCE WIFE #3 holds up her phone with the front facing camera on, beckoning FINANCE WIFE #4 over.

FINANCE WIFE #3
Come over here and look sad with me!

Then, to JOSH (late 20s) talking to a Finance Wife:

JOSH
My grandpa has so much shit in his basement.

FINANCE WIFE #5
Aw, cute!

JOSH
He's gonna fucking die and were gonna have to go through all of it.

Then:

FINANCE WIFE #6
In January the school participated in something called a "simulation..."

The tray passes John in conversation. He smiles at the holder as he takes a drink.

JOHN
McCartney put out a new single off his album. Unbelievable.

We end with one drink left on the tray at a group of BROS and WIVES, including Ben. BRETT, the Finance Bro Final Boss, stands with his arm around his wife, HEATHER (both late 30s).

BRETT
(gesturing to Ben)
...You'll love this one, Happy Feet.

BEN
Alright, Brett, you got me.

The group laughs and Ben joins in, loud enough to hide how annoyed the comment made him.

BRETT

Heather was out of town for the weekend visiting her sister in Franklin, so it was me alone babysitting the kids for the weekend.

BEN

Oh boy here we go!

BRETT

I know. I know. But you gotta do it for family!

Heather gives him a rehearsed eye roll and a smile.

BRETT (CONT'D)

We made it work, we had some fun, shot some hoops, but these kids... they were just hanging on me the whole time. Just touching me nonstop. And I'm not like that, you know, my old man shipped me off to boarding school the second he could.

It draws a huge laugh.

BRETT (CONT'D)

So, anyway, she *finally* gets back from her sister's on Sunday and, you know, we're in bed that night and she leans over to give me a kiss--

Some "Ooo's" and laughter in the group. A larger group has gathered to listen as Heather covers her face in embarrassment.

FINANCE BRO #4 (O.S.)

Get it!

FINANCE WIFE #3

Yeah Heather!

BRETT

--Buttttt! But! I still feel like I got fire ants all over me from the kids climbing on me for two days straight and I *freak*! I don't know what came over me but I shoot up out of bed, like, out of breath.

(MORE)

BRETT (CONT'D)

And Heather looks at me like I just shot someone in front of her and goes...

He gestures to a giggly, embarrassed Heather. She waves him off. He turns back to the crowd.

BRETT (CONT'D)

"You've never said no before!"

It brings the house down. We see now that pretty much everyone has gathered to catch the end.

He reaches over and grabs the last drink off the tray and takes a huge swig.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Shit!

We swing around and see Ann holding the tray, eyes wide. We swing back around -- all eyes are on Ann, with baited breath.

Brett forcefully swallows with a huge *GULP*.

He puts an arm around Ann and immediately BELCHES.

BRETT (CONT'D)

You make a *mean* cocktail. Where the hell've you been hiding her, Ben!

The tension is snapped, the crowd heartily laughing. Ann exhales with a weak smile. He gives her a few playful shakes before releasing her.

JOHN

AND she's an artiste!

BRETT

No shit!

FINANCE WIFE #6

Ben, you didn't tell us your wife was an artist!

BEN

And a helluva one at that. I think the move and the new space has been good for the creativity, and all that. Gave her some time to focus on the things that matter.

Ann and Ben lock eyes for just a second. You'd swear his eyes twinkled. He addresses the captive crowd -- it's his turn with the spotlight.

BEN (CONT'D)

Honestly, between putting the house together and her art, I'm just lucky she has time for me at all!

BRETT

You'll have to show us some of her pieces, man.

BEN

I'll give you the whole tour when you and Heather come over for dinner.

HEATHER

What other little secrets are you hiding from us, Ben?

FINANCE BRO #3

Ben, what's it like being married to an artist? Are you *deep* enough for her? HEH.

Guffaws all around, Finance Wife #3 elbows her respective Bro in the side.

The conversation devolves into unintelligible chatter as Ann's physically edged out of the group.

She stands outside of the revelry as the writhing mass of upper middle class chugs on.

She slips the tray under her arm and backs away from the crowd, slinking to the back door. Something resembling pride settles on her face. If this was all a test, she passed.

She's about to step inside when Josh exits and IMMEDIATELY slams into her, drink in hand upending entirely onto the front of her dress.

ANN

Oh my God!

JOSH

My G&T!!

Ann stands there, soaking wet. She looks to the party, everyone now looking their way. A fake smile quickly pops back on Ann's face.

ANN (CONT'D)

So sorry about that, let me throw something dry on and I'll refresh that for you!

She takes the empty glass from him and steps inside. We stay with Josh as he snakes through the chattering crowd to Ben.

JOSH

Bro.

BEN

Hey, Josh. Sorry about that.

JOSH

Ah, all good. Managed to stay dry so we're chillin'.

BEN

Good, good.

JOSH

You said something last week about have a set of clubs...

BEN

Oh, hell yeah! They're in the basement, I'll grab them for you--

JOSH

Bro, don't even sweat it. Enjoy your party, I can run and grab 'em.

BEN

You sure?

JOSH

Totally, bro. Gotta christen the new house!

He dips back toward the house as Ben watches him go.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The basement light POPS on as Josh thuds down the steps and straight to the clubs.

JOSH

That's what I'm *talkin'* about.

He picks the bag up and looks up. For a split second we see the DOLLHOUSE sitting on top of the freezer, staring at him. *Lines of red* run down the side of the freezer.

The overhead bulb flickers and then dies, throwing us into darkness.

He sets the clubs back down, stepping cautiously in the dark toward the faint outline of the dollhouse. The plastic tarp swishes underfoot until the last two steps to the freezer--

SQUELCH! SQUELCH!

JOSH (CONT'D)
What the hell?

He lifts up a shoe up but can't make anything out.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Damn... that's *not* what I'm talkin'
about...

He sighs, then turns his attention to the dollhouse. Running a hand along the one-of-a-kind craftsmanship...

GAVIN (O.S.)
Bro! You find the clubs?

Josh picks up the dollhouse and calls over his shoulder.

JOSH
Yeah, bro! I'm about to go sicko
mode on my short game.

GAVIN (O.S.)
Yessir!

JOSH
Yessir!

He turns and takes it with him, one handing it as he swings the clubs over his shoulder and thuds back up the stairs.

In the soft light from the first floor that manages to reach the stairs we catch the glint of deep red shoe prints...

The shoe prints are swallowed in darkness as the basement door closes with a TH--

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

--UD.

Ann leans against the now closed bedroom door in her soaked dress. Deep breath. She crosses to window, blinds open, and looks out over the party.

Subconsciously, she pulls out and starts to fiddle with the Dani's lighter, absentmindedly sparking it over and over. Watching her new life play out in front of her eyes.

In the deep background behind her the door *slowly cracks open*. A figure slips in, soundlessly closing it behind them.

DANI
Yellow Wallpaper time already?

ANN
AH oh my GOD!

Ann whips around, anger immediately melting into excitement.

ANN (CONT'D)
Dani! What the hell are you doing
here?

She puts her hands behind her back, obscuring the lighter.

DANI
Ben invited me. Thought it might
help you get through this--

Dani steps up to the window next to her, surveying the scene.

DANI (CONT'D)
--shit show. What kind of sickos
make someone host their own welcome
party.

ANN
I know. It's a whole thing. Someone
spilled their drink on me so I came
up to change but now I think I'm
just hiding.
(then)
Ben really did that?

Dani nods.

DANI
Not such a bad guy.

ANN
There's probably worse.

Dani procures a joint from her pocket. Ann holds up the lighter and sparks it. They both giggle.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Ben mans the grill while John keeps him company.

JOHN

... There's just some pretty noticeable wear and tear on basically every piece of furniture they've passed off to us as "new." It's an epidemic.

(then)

But I wish no harm on the employees. Just to be clear.

BEN

Mhmm. I see. I see. How do you want your burger?

JOHN

Oh, medium please.

BEN

Cool.

They stand together awkwardly for a moment.

JOHN

Where are your folks? Are they close by?

BEN

Nah. Florida. Classic sold the house off and flew south a few years ago once they were empty nesters.

JOHN

Mine did the same. Arizona.

BEN

Oh, yeah. Sure. You see them often?

JOHN

Holidays and all that.

BEN

Same.

JOHN

What about Ann's parents?

Ben makes a face, focusing hard on the grill.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What? Something wrong?

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - DAY*THUNK!*

A golf ball **RICOCHETS** off of the front of the dollhouse, chipping away at some of the paint.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben thinks, then looks to John.

BEN

Ann's parents died. When she was a kid.

JOHN

Oh my God, that's horrible. I had no idea.

BEN

She doesn't talk about it. Ever.

JOHN

Do you know what happened?

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - DAY*THUNK!*

Another puts a dent in one of the faux windows. The wood snapping with a tiny *POP!*

BACK TO SCENE

Ben shakes his head.

BEN

She was asleep in her room when it happened. Apparently her mom had a screw loose and they were having a blowout argument, so the police just assumed she killed him and herself when things got too heated. Ann bounced around foster care until she was 18.

(then)

Don't talk to her about it, though. I think it's one of those things that can't be fixed. You know?

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - DAY

THUNK!

Another takes out a couple shingles.

We see that they've set up the now beat up dollhouse in the living room. Around it lays a dozen-odd golf balls.

JOSH

Damn. Must be a par 4. Maybe I'd do better if we bet on it?

GAVIN

Nowwww we're talkin'!

The sliding glass door slides open and in comes John, a little shellshocked and surprised to not be alone.

JOSH

Sup, soccer mom. You wanna get in on this?

John smiles weakly.

JOHN

Oh, hey Josh. Gavin. No, I'm good. Just came in for the little boy's room. I'm not much of a golfer.

GAVIN

Neither are we, apparently.

The two dudes snicker. John puts his head down and continues on. Then stops and turns as Gavin lines up a shot.

JOHN

Did Ann say it was okay to use that?

JOSH

Who's Ann?

JOHN

Ben's... wife.

JOSH

Ohhhh right. Right. Yeah, totally. Ben said it was chill to try out his clubs.

Gavin SINKS ONE, straight down the dollhouse's gullet.

GAVIN
BOOYAH!

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Muffled whoops and cheers continue from downstairs. Ann and Dani lay on the bed, passing the joint back and forth.

DANI
What was that?

ANN
One of them probably found out they don't have to pay child support for some bastard child they had in high school.

DANI (V.O., ON PHONE)
I didn't know my dad got a new job! Good for him.

ANN
Yeah, he's always not-asking about you. It's cute.

DANI
I'll have to say hi. Hope he remembers me!

They both laugh.

ANN
I missed you.

DANI
I missed you too.
(then)
Hey, what's up with this new art style you got going on?

ANN
Do you like it?

DANI
Do you?

Ann smiles, then pads her dress.

ANN
Pretty dry. I probably don't have to change. We should get back.

She slips off the bed toward the door. Dani rolls her eyes.

DANI
You're not slick. You know that,
right?

ANN
What?

DANI
Do you actually think I don't
notice when you just completely
change the subject and bail mid-
conversation?

ANN
That's not what I'm doing...

DANI
Okay. Then do you like what you're
drawing?

ANN
Are you really hung up on this?
That's so stupid. I'm going
downstairs--

DANI
You just did it again!

ANN
Did *what!*

DANI
Bail! You bail when things get
hard! It's why you agreed to move
here instead of toughing it out,
right?

Ann stares her down, then heel turns, throws open the door,
and leaves.

DANI (CONT'D)
(yelling after her)
This is continuing to prove my
point!

I/E. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN / BACKYARD - DAY

Gavin crouches at the dollhouse's entrance. He reaches inside
and searches superficially, no dice.

He plops onto his stomach, eye level with the complete
darkness inside.

His hand goes in. No luck. Then his elbow. Then his bicep. He's almost up to his shoulder in the house. Which shouldn't be physically possible. No ball to be found.

GAVIN

What the fuck...

JOHN

Uhm, I think something's wrong...

He continues wiggling around, arm fully inside, as Ann walks into the living room in a huff. She immediately clocks the scene in full-blown terror.

JOSH

Yo, bro, quit messing around it's my turn--

ANN

STOP! TAKE YOUR HAND OUT OF THERE NOW--

SQUELCH.

We watch Ann's face react to the inevitable.

A pained groan from Gavin, but he doesn't scream.

We bounce between Ann, John, and Josh as their eyes track something growing taller and taller. Horror and wonder on their faces. But mostly horror.

Housewife, in all of her glory. Gavin dangles in the air by his arm, still submerged in the never-ending dark.

Blood dribbles onto the floor, pooling at their feet. For a moment, no one moves. No one speaks. No one breathes.

SQUELCH.

CRUNCH.

THUD.

The body drops to the floor, arm severed below the shoulder.

The rest of the arm is lost to the darkness. Housewife's jagged teeth stained red.

Blood spreads fast and furious, quickly reaching Josh's shoes.

His singular brain cell kicks in as he looks at the blood, then the basement door, then his newly amputated friend, and finally Housewife.

As if woken from a trance, he turns heel and sprints for the door to the backyard.

He's almost made it. He's at the glass--

THWOOM-ACK!

Something SHOOTs across the room. Josh is still for just a moment before crumpling clumsily into the door, collapsing.

A perfect hole straight through his skull.

Lodged into the glass door is the GOLF BALL. Glass fractals branch through the splatter of blood.

Ann and John dare not move a muscle.

Through the cracks of the door, all eyes are on Josh's now folded body. Also stunned and unmoving.

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)

Hole in one!

Ann whips around to face her. Housewife stands playfully with a club over her shoulder. She glances down at her now blood-splattered apron.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

Oh well. Nothing a little peroxide and elbow grease won't fix!

She takes a step toward Ann. Ann takes a step back, slipping on the blood pooling around her feet.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

I've been cleaning up a lot of your messes, Ann. Something must be done about that.

Ann fights to keep calm amidst the carnage.

ANN

I... I'm trying my best. That's all I can do. Right?

HOUSEWIFE

I'm not sure that's true, Ann--

The faint sound of the sliding glass door opening draws Ann and Housewife's attention.

John, caught in the act, stands half in and half out.

ANN

John. Please.

His gaze moves frantically between the two halves. Ann on one side, the party full of people, his wife included, on the other. Back and forth, back and forth. Agonizingly.

It's a moral dilemma.

Some might call it... the trolley problem.

ANN (CONT'D)

John?

His eyes focus on Julia. The lever has been pulled.

In an instant, John slams the door shut, grabs a chair and blockades the door, trapping Ann inside. Several of the partygoers join the cause, piling everything they can.

JOHN

I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY,
I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY!

Ann, runs to the glass and yanks the handle in vain as John steps backward, overtaken by partygoers setting up defenses.

ANN

YOU'RE DEAD, JOHN
HORNBERGER.

Ann bangs fruitlessly on the door as Ben fights and shoves the sea of people to get to Ann. It's futile. The fight drains from Ann. Arms dropped, breathing labored.

Housewife leers behind her, impatient.

HOUSEWIFE

Mm. That's no way to treat your
host.

(sighs)

Our guests have overstayed their
welcome, Ann. I'll take care of it.

ANN

Wait, no, don't!

Ann whips around to an empty room as the golf club clatters to the floor.

John stands in the center of the mob. He takes one more step back, directly into the waiting bloody apron of Housewife.

In one slick motion, she reaches over his shoulder, and with her pointer finger nail, cuts his throat.

CUT TO BLACK.

I.E. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN / BACKYARD - DAY - MASSACRE MONTAGE

We can't see much, but what we do see is soundtracked by all-consuming, nerve-shredding SCREAMS. In between stark silence. The same sounds of suffering from her dreams.

- Ann watching in horror through the barricaded glass, blood splatters in wet thuds.
- Julia holds John's body as he bleeds out.
- Housewife pulls the severed arm from the darkness within her and uses it to whack Brett's knee out.
- A Finance Wife is stabbed in the abdomen by Housewife with a feminine and delicate flourish.
- A Finance Bro is strangled by his tie. His neck snaps -- Housewife kindly fixes his tie after she's done with him.
- Ann vomits.
- Chaos of bodies pushing, bleeding, falling, dying.
- A pointed leather pump is lifted up, up, up, and brought down with terrifying force directly into Heather's eye.
- Ann falls to her knees, screaming, helpless inside.
- Ben picks up a BBQ Fork from the grill, giving a warning jab at Housewife.
- Housewife has Ben's face pressed onto the grill.
- Ann screams, but all we hear is RINGING.
- Dazed, she takes a step back and slips on the thick coat of blood on the floor, slamming her head. She's out cold.

END MONTAGE

LATER

We see the aftermath in 35mm photo closeups, cycling through an OLD-FASHIONED SLIDE PROJECTOR.

I/E. DANI'S CAR / BEN & ANN'S HOUSE / NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Dani throws herself into her car, turns the key, and guns it.

DANI

What the fuck what the fuck what
the fuck what the fuck what the
fuck what the fuck what the fuck...

She makes a few turns and is immediately lost.

DANI (CONT'D)

How the FUCK do you get out of
here!!!

She digs her phone out of her pocket for directions. Dead.

DANI (CONT'D)

This is so CLICHÉ!!!

Throwing her phone down in anger, she makes a few more turns and, in the darkness, nearly crashes into *Housewife standing in the middle of the street!*

Dani screams and swerves instinctually, crashing into a car parked... in front of... Ben and Ann's house...

DANI (CONT'D)

Fuck. Shit. Fuck. Shit.

Dani stumbles out of the car, wincing as she drags herself back into the house. Housewife follows casually.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dani stumbles into the foyer, slamming and locking the door before turning deeper into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dani surveys what little of the massacre she can see in the moonlight. From the foyer, the front door opens.

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)

Do you really think I don't have a
key to my own home? That's so
silly!

Dani panics, looking wildly for somewhere to go. Eyes landing on the basement door.

She shuffles as quietly as she can, slipping into the--

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Dani winces with every creak the steps make. She steps into the basement proper in complete darkness. Pads her pockets.

DANI
 (sotto)
 Fuck. Dead. Fuck.
 (then)
 Wait!

A spark! The trusty lighter ignites. She surveys the boxes... the freezer... the blood... running from the freezer and onto the floor... her look of horror mounting...

CLICK!

The basement door opens.

Then, the *CLICK CLACK* of Housewife's heels.

No other choice. Dani kills the lighter and slips the freezer open, lowering herself in and closing the lid just as--

CLICK CLACK.

Housewife's appears on the steps.

Inside the freezer, Dani shivers as--

CLICK CLACK.

CLICK CLACK.

Dani sparks the lighter, surveying. Her breath comes out in a cloud of vapor.

She moves the lighter around, bringing into the light behind her the *gaunt, nearly dead visage of the PropRes employee!*

WOMAN
 Ughhghhgh...

Dani immediately covers her mouth to stifle a scream, turning slowly to come face to face with the poor employee.

MAN (O.S.)
 Ugggghh...

ANOTHER?? This one from the other end of the freezer. Dani struggles to not lose her shit as she holds the lighter out.

Sure enough, her poor husband, caught in the crossfire of corporate cost cutting, is nestled at the other end. His mouth and jaw completely removed from his head.

CLICK CLACK.

Much closer now. Dani kills the lighter.

CLICK CLACK.

We're in total darkness now.

CLICK CLACK.

Then, nothing. For a painfully long time.

ANN

Why are you hiding from me?

It almost sounds like Ann. But something's not right... When the voice talks again they meld together.

ANN/HOUSEWIFE

Was it something I said?

The freezer rips open.

Dani whimpers. From somewhere in the darkness...

HOUSEWIFE

Hello, Dani.

DANI

How... How do you know my name?

HOUSEWIFE

You almost ruined the surprise.
This won't do.

Dani SCREAMS.

Then, silence.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - MORNING

The scene as we left it. The bodies of Finance Bros #6 and #7 strewn across the floor, submerged in a thick mix of their blood. Golf ball lodged in the screen door, barricade intact.

Bodies rotting in the backyard.

The quiet sound of running water as, in the kitchen, Housewife, elbow high rubber gloves on, finishes cleaning the grime off of the tray Ann burned the day before.

She sets the tray next to the sink to dry next to the unplugged smoke detector.

Then, as if in a trance, she watches as the rest of the blackened mush swirls down the drain. It's hypnotic, soothing, calming...

Housewife pulls herself away, looking into the living room. Much work to be done. She kills the sink.

Housewife clicks on the small AM/FM radio.

RADIO DJ #3

Happy Sunday folks. It's your pal,
The Betwixt Bambino playing you
songs of yesteryear every Sunday
from now until forever. Here's
another classic. Who am I kidding,
they're all classics!

A Doo-wop like "Yakety Yak" by The Coasters kicks in.

CLEANUP MONTAGE

- Housewife open the door to the backyard, the poorly made barricade of folding chairs and tables toppling.
- She effortlessly picks up one of the bodies by the ankle and tosses it into the yard, landing with a *THUD*.
- The second body flies outside just as easily.
- A scrub brush is dunked into a bucket of soapy water.
- Housewife, on her hands and knees, scrubs and scrubs. The brush instantly stained red.
- Dunked back in the bucket.
- Bucket of bloody water dumped outside.
- Rinse and repeat.
- Peels the bloody golf ball from the sliding door.
- Drops the putter and the ball back into Ben's golf bag.

- From the basement, we see light as the door opens. The golf bag is CHUCKED down the stairs, landing carelessly at the base. The door shuts again.

END MONTAGE

If you weren't looking hard, you'd say everything was back to normal. Except for the bloody, golf ball sized hole in the glass door. And a neighborhood's worth of bodies outside.

The Doo-wop song fades as we find Housewife standing in the millennial grey bathroom off of the living room.

She inspects herself in the vanity mirror, running a hand over the damage wrought to her by Gavin and Josh.

She finds a partially broken broken shingle and finishes the job, tossing it in the trash can. Then back to the mirror.

Her other hand rests at her side, absentmindedly sparking Dani's lighter.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Outside, Housewife crouches in the sea of corpses. Ben looks up at her, unmoving. Grill marks pressed into half his face.

HOUSEWIFE

You won't mind if I borrow these,
will you, sweetie? How pretty they
are!

She digs *under his eye sockets*, methodically removing both eyes from his head with a horrifying SQUELCH.

Lifting her dollhouse head to the sky, she carefully slots the eyeballs in. As if putting in a pair of contacts.

We don't see what she looks like as she turns, surveying the rest of the carnage.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

The final drone of Housewife's white noise rings out.

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)

...Shhhhhhhhhh...

A red-nailed hand pinches a sleeping Ann's nose. Ann wakes with a deep breath and a cough.

Despite it all, she looks well-rested. Hair curled, makeup perfect. A porcelain sheen. Like a doll.

She sits up quickly, taking in her surroundings. She's alone. All is as it was. The blinds are still drawn.

Ann slips out of bed, revealing she's fully dressed in a 1950's vintage children's Sunday best dress.

She clocks it, picking at the light fabric and letting it fall delicately back against her body.

She looks to the window, then steps to it, fiddling with the lift cord. Knowing what's on the other side.

She lets the lift cord go, heel turning and exiting.

I/E. FOYER / ~~BEN~~ & ANN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ann steps up to the wide open front door, a pair of work boots set neatly just inside.

On the front porch sits an abandoned mail cart, some of its contents puked onto the ground. The wind carries a few letters past a postal worker's abandoned hat.

Down the hall behind her, a flash of color as Housewife crosses from the living room to the kitchen.

Ann turns and just misses her. She pads toward the inevitable.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

We stay on Ann as she steps in. She gasps and covers her mouth in surprise and horror.

HOUSEWIFE (O.S.)

Good morning, Ann. You're looking very well rested. I'm sure you're hungry.

And then we see it. Front and center, arranged carefully on the dressed kitchen table, is the MISSING COUPLE -- our PropRes employee and her husband.

Still alive, intentionally, cruelly.

Their stomachs are carved out, excavated to the core. Their organs, still pulsing defiantly with life, intertwine in a grotesque mosaic.

The emptied nooks where their organs used to be, are filled with bunches of grapes and olives. A selection of crackers is tastefully splayed around their figures.

A bottle of expensive olive oil begs to be poured. A jam-of-sorts lay waiting with a mother of pearl spoon. A slick, clean kitchen knife stabbed into the middle of the display.

Their jagged breaths pierce the silence.

A feast.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

I know it's a lot, but we'll have plenty of leftovers to get us through the rest of the week!

Ann finally looks to Housewife, standing proudly over her magnum opus. She yelps, blinking back involuntary tears.

Housewife stares back with her two new eyes suspended in the inky darkness within the dollhouse. She blinks Ben's eyes. When she talks, the two rows of teeth move cartoonishly.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

Oh, yes. I thought it might help us... see eye-to-eye. I'm always trying to better myself, to better help *you!*

Ann's head is swimming as she scans the rest of the room. All of the blinds are drawn, white curtains pulls across the sliding glass door.

Outside, unnatural darkness mixes with a blend of oranges and reds. *Snapping* and *popping* comes into focus. A fire.

Housewife steps in front of the curtains, walking around to the living room and pulling Ann's attention.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

Once your tummy's full, I thought we could play your favorite game.

Housewife steps into a makeshift setup of Ann and Dani's art project. An empty stool in front of Ann's easel.

A terrified Dani sits at another, gagged and bound to a kitchen chair. She looks to Ann, pleading in her eyes.

In front of the easels sits a MAILMAN (50s), equally terrified and confused beyond words. His uniform bloody, and also bound to a kitchen chair.

Ann's half of the sign sits paired to another, wrong makeshift half of Dani's sign.

It reads:

**WE DRAW PORTRAITS! NO CATCH!
ALL TO DO IS TELL US
WHO YOU LIKE MORE
And then after we promise you
hurt our feelings.
So it is many times :)**

DANI

ANN

###

Ann's stunned into silence. Housewife narrows her eyes.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)
I worked very hard putting all of
this together. Where are your
manners, Ann?

Ann chokes on her words.

ANN
... Sorry. Yes. Thank you.

Smoke seeps under the sliding glass door.

HOUSEWIFE
Excellent. I just want to make your
life as easy as possible. I always
have. And I always will.

**INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM / UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - 1990S -
FLASHBACK**

Young Ann pulls the dollhouse from her shelf and slides to the floor. Undoes the golden clasp and opens the front doors.

LIGHTNING STRIKES, then... CRASH-OOM! A plate shatters against the wall as thunder booms. Fearful, Young Ann leans in to the house's opening.

YOUNG ANN
(whispering)
I wish they would stop fighting.

She slams the doors quickly, trapping her secret inside, before setting the dollhouse aside and curling into a ball. The sounds of the storm continue to battle the fight below.

Behind her, the dollhouse starts to rise. Housewife stands to her full height, stepping over Young Ann and exiting.

From the bedroom we see Housewife *CLICK CLACK* down the hall and stairs until she disappears. The storm and her parents' fight rage on. The argument comes into focus just as--

ANN'S FATHER

What the fuck?--

Housewife dispatches him quickly. He sputters, then collapses with a *THUD*. Then, a woman's piercing scream is cut short. A second *THUD*.

We turn back to the bedroom and Young Ann still in a ball. Her eyes open, frozen in fear. She heard it all.

A BLOODIED Housewife steps back over her, then descends back into just a simple, handcrafted dollhouse.

The clasp on the double doors latches with a quiet *click*.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN - DAY

The unplugged smoke detector still sits on the kitchen counter. In the background, the employee and her husband are finally dead. It looks like someone's taken a few bites...

Ann sits at her easel in a daze. Dried blood cakes the outside of her mouth.

HOUSEWIFE

You'll never have to worry about anything ever again. Not while I'm here.

Behind her, Housewife stands over one shoulder. Over the other, smoke actively pours into the house from outside.

Ann stares at the blank easel. Then to her right. A helpless Dani looks back, tears streaming down her face.

Behind Ann, Housewife bends to ear-level. Her eyes bulging. Teeth clicking. Weight heavy on Ann's shoulder.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)

I'm so excited to see what you
create, darling.

Housewife gingerly picks up Ann's hand, slots a pencil into
it, and guides Ann's hand across the drawing pad.

Smoke continues to pour into the house. Then, a tiny spark on
the curtain. It catches on fire and starts to spread--

CUT TO BLACK.

"Sunset for the Dead" by Tommy Newport over credits.

THE END