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# Anything You Might Do

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ANYTHING YOU MIGHT DO

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ANYTHING YOU MIGHT DO

By

ELENA CHRISTINE BITNER, BA

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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for the Degree of

MFA

Department of Creative Writing

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iii
PREFACE.....	iii
ANYTHING YOU MIGHT DO.....	1
CURRICULUM VITA .....	105

## PREFACE

The Creative Final Project that I have completed for this program is one that demonstrates the expansive education that I have earned in this master's program. I have chosen a format that takes all of the techniques and theories that I have learned over the course of my studies and presents them in a comfortable marriage of forms. The creative project I have written is called *Anything You Might Do*, and it is a speculative screenplay. I chose this format for many reasons, which I will go into throughout this paper, but mostly because it is a format that I have learned to enjoy writing in. Learning how to write a speculative screenplay has also had a lasting effect on my writing in other forms.

*Anything You Might Do* tells the story of three young girls who come from households in varying degrees of poverty. These three girls have decided to run away from home to escape their current situation in hopes of finding something better, something more than what they know. It also tells a story that asks the audience to look a little closer at issues affecting an unpopular sub-culture of American society. Through an examination of the techniques that informed the creation of this project, as well as the narrative theory and poetics that I have accrued over the course of my time in this program, I will present a comprehensive look at my final, creative project.

### **Scope and History of the Project**

#### **Putting it to Paper**

As many creative projects often begin, this one was sparked by a personal memory. As a child, I had a best friend who lived in circumstances very similar to that of the character Hannah: a mostly ignored child of alcoholics whose major concern was partying or drinking every night. To try and help her escape this situation, a friend joined the two of us in running away from

home for a day. We were on foot and only made it about 15 miles before we were caught, but the memory has stayed with me. Rather than staying true to the memory and writing something more in the realm of creative non-fiction, I decided to let the memory spark a new story.

As Billy Collins says in “My Grandfather’s Tackle Box: The Limits of Memory-Driven Poetry,” when writing about recollection, “the trouble often is that the memory itself can exert so strong a grip on the poet that the poem never leaves the confines of the past, never achieves the kind of escape velocity that would propel it into another, more capacious dimension” (281-282). Collins also discusses Richard Hugo’s idea of how to approach autobiographical poetry in that it requires “a triggering subject that gets it going and a generated subject that the poem discovers along the way” (281). This is very much the way that a screenplay works. A screenplay must reveal an inciting action to the audience within the first five minutes of the film, and it must be something that will trigger the unfolding of events to come. This is why, with the simple trigger of “three young girls run away from home,” I was able to let go of the autobiographical connections that I had and allow it to develop into a story all on its own.

Even though Collins speaks specifically about poetry, much of what he wrote resonated with what I wanted to present for this creative project. There is a sense of immediacy to poetry that translates well into the writing of a screenplay. Russin and Downs, in *Screenplay: Writing the Picture*, write that one of the many differences between novels and screenplays is that:

A novelist can linger on a moment or a physical detail and devote paragraphs or pages to full-blown descriptions. This is death in a screenplay, the equivalent of stopping the film projector on a single frame. There simply isn’t the time or luxury. A screenplay’s narrative must manage to convey a vivid sense of location,

a hint of character and mood, and a lively account of the action, all with the fewest possible words. (Kindle Locations 5523-5526)

This is what makes poetry a great reference for writing a screenplay. The classes that I have taken have taught me that there is an urgent immediacy to poetry, a need to reach out and pull the audience into an unfolding moment through imagery and raw feeling. Collins claims that “Even a poem based on a past event can give off a feeling of immediacy if it manages to convey an awareness that it exists in the present tense of its own unfolding – an awareness, ultimately, of its own language” (283). This was the exact feeling that I looked for when I approached writing this screenplay. A screenplay literally exists in the moment, with the scenes unfolding before the eyes of the audience.

In looking at the influences of fiction on this project, I examined *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* by Nick Lowe. Lowe discusses the intricacies of storytelling and a “need for a view of the process we call ‘plot’ that can make graspable sense of what increasingly looks like a complex, multi-tiered, and as yet imperfectly understood cognitive phenomenon” (16). Lowe breaks down the plot into the “narrative universe” and into four categories that work like the pieces of a game: the clock (the time period – story time and text time), the board (the location/setting of the narrative), the players (the characters, specifically ones who are named and have a point of view, as opposed to just “extras”), and the rules/endgame. Using this system, I was able to approach the writing of this screenplay with a little more freedom than with the original forms of narration that I had grown accustomed to.

The narrative universe of *Anything You Might Do* is simple, but it carries the characters through the elements efficiently. The “clock” in this case is in present society. The story stays within the span of four days then, toward the end, takes a few forward lurches in time as the girls

reach their destination and their new life unfolds. The “board” in this case is the American South, and more specifically the *road* between little town Texas and Nashville Tennessee. The road as a storyboard is one of the most important aspects of the story, as it is the means through which the characters change from the people they started out as. The major “players” are the three major characters: Hannah, an abused young woman who wants desperately to escape her home life; Payton, an intelligent young woman who longs for a life that can offer her more than drugs and partying; Marisol, a bereaved young woman who seeks temporary escape from her pain. Characters who play a smaller role on screen, though their presence has a great effect on the story, are: Jon, a paranoid drug trafficker; Aaron, a drunk and constant reminder to Hannah and Payton of the life they left behind; and Tammy, a major catalyst in the girls’ lives. The “rules” of the game change the further away from home the girls travel, and become increasingly criminal: they begin by following the rules of runaways, ditching their phones and stealing food to make what they have lost; as information is revealed, they become drug traffickers in order to continue their trip; and eventually they fall into the life of drug dealing and using.

There are so many different elements to every story that it is difficult to lay them all out. Being able to view the complexities of a storyline from a macro and micro level as the story came alive on the page was very helpful in overcoming some of the misgivings that I had about writing in this format. Thankfully I was able to get the major plot points and create characters that were able to carry the story. As Russin and Downs say: “while it may be advantageous, it is not always necessary to know your theme in advance. Interesting characters and/ or a good plot are enough to begin writing” (Kindle Locations 989-990).

## Poetics and Theory

### The Poetics of Historical Experience

For the longest time, I believed a “poet” was only considered to be a person who writes and reads poetry. In Aristotle’s *Poetics* he discusses “poetry” as the telling of stories that imitate man – either at his best or at his worst – and “therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal” (Part IX). Poetry, or artistic writing, is almost more important than history. One of the things I loved the most about my literature classes as an undergrad was that I was able to read firsthand accounts of events that I had merely been told about when I was younger. In post-colonial literature, I learned how horribly oppressed the conquered people were. In American Literature, I was able to see the mind of the country develop from Protestant ideals, to the Enlightenment, to reformation and the birth of the New Woman. This was not only a result of studying history and the humanities, but from studying the experiences of people who lived in that time, through their writing.

In the vein of the poetics of imparting an experience of history, I realized that some of the experiences in my life were part of a story that not many people know about. Poverty stricken, East Texan, white America is often portrayed satirically (like in the TV show *My Name is Earl*), or as a setting that characters must pass through, like a hitch in the plot. Other Southern cultures, especially those in Louisiana or Mississippi, are often explored because of their rich, cultural heritage. It is significantly less popular to discuss the experiences of the predominantly culture-less and undereducated “trailer park trash,” unless it is to show a character’s perseverance over this situation. However, it is more often the case that the vicious cycle of poverty that exists in this Southern sub-culture is nearly impossible to overcome. The people who are most affected by this are, of course, the children. I hoped, with this screenplay, to generate some sympathy for the

young people affected by this cycle of poverty and abuse. Not everyone may be sympathetic to the situation of these people but, as Russin and Downs say: “Great movies stand the test of time not only because they mean something to the screenwriter, but also because they touch upon lasting and meaningful ideas that say something about our common humanity” (Kindle Locations 879-881). I don’t necessarily hope or expect to see this turned into a great movie, but I hope to say something about our common experience that will reach people who otherwise feel unmoved toward sympathy for the children of “white trash” America.

In an article titled “Social Structure and Child Poverty,” Abbott L. Ferris explores different sociological theories on social structure and how they apply to different counties in the state of Georgia. In the beginning of the study, she states that, “In 2000 ... 37.9% of black children and ... 13.3% of white children” lived with families whose income was below the poverty threshold. This difference in percentages varies across the world, but the gap is wide enough that it is most certainly a bigger problem faced by black and other minority cultures. However, this does not mean that the children living in poverty in white sub-cultures is not worth examining. The major concept that people in this particular social group share is their social structure, or “the framework for interaction with others in the process of satisfying needs and achieving goals. Processes ‘such as influence, cooperation, and victimization’ (Rytina, 2000, 2824) are involved” (Ferris, 454). It is through these three processes that the situation of the characters in *Anything You Might Do* is explored.

Each individual character participates in all three of these processes during the course of events that take place. The two characters that are most affected, Payton and Hannah, pull the character who is not a part of their sub-culture along for the ride. This poor white culture has powerful influence on Payton and Hannah, and they have each been victims in their home life.

Payton's social structure at home is that of a drug culture. Her mother is a drug dealer and brings her business into the house, which exposes Payton to the inner workings of the profession and ultimately leads her down that path as well. Hannah lives in a trailer that is falling apart and that is always filled with drunks. She is exposed to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse on a regular basis, which demonstrates victimization. The experience of each of these characters reflect their place within this sub-culture as a result of regional development based on historical influences.

Generally, people who live in this culture perpetuate the situation by creating strong bonds of cooperation. They survive together, they stand up for themselves in the face of ridicule together, they experience everything together; which, in turn, creates strong feelings of loyalty to their culture, regardless of how degraded their lives become. I have witnessed it and experienced it first hand and was only barely lucky enough to have escaped that world. This is why I feel it is important to share this story, to maybe give someone who is experiencing this life a reason to try harder to escape it.

### **Poetics of Telling it True**

Real life, the real world, is filled with social, political, economic, and moral issues. A story that does not deal with at least one of these issues is a story that is unrealistic. However, telling a "true" story, in this sense, does not mean that it should contain a purposeful "lesson" for the reader. Horace says it perfectly in *Ars Poetica* when he says that a writer "Who can blend usefulness and sweetness wins every Vote, at once delighting and teaching the reader" (AP333-365). Art, whether demonstrated through language, imagery, or music, should be aesthetically pleasing – "delighting" – first and foremost. What this also means is that for a believable, delightful story and characters to exist, they must deal with real life issues. People are awed by

paintings that portray life so realistically that it is difficult to distinguish between the artwork and reality; readers like to experience an event that feels so real that, for the time that they exist between the pages of a story, they forget about the reality around them.

Walter Besant speaks to these poetics in “The Art of Fiction” when he discusses the “powers” of writing. Besant states:

That world which exists not, but is an invention or an imitation – that world in which the shadows and shapes of men move about before our eyes as real as if they were actually living and speaking among us, is like a great theatre accessible to all of every sort, on whose stage are enacted, at our own sweet will, whenever we please to command them, the most beautiful plays: it is, as every theatre should be, the school in which manners are learned: here the majority of reading mankind learn nearly all that they know of life and manners, of philosophy and art; even of science and religion (Besant, 9).

Again, the importance is in the idea of learning through an experience that is enjoyable, instead of being lectured about it. More importantly is the idea that stories are a handheld theatre that can be accessed by *anyone*. Just as humanity once sat around the fire and shared stories that were passed down through generations, it is the job of the writer to give people the chance to experience and learn things, that they otherwise may not have access to, by creating amazing stories. The strongest influence of poetics on *Anything You Might Do* was this telling of a story that communicates a “real” experience and teaches something to the reader about the culture of people within these events. There are many different realities in this sub-culture that I attempted to touch upon so that the reader would gain a better understanding of what perpetuates this social construct of poor white “trash.”

To return to Ferriss' discussion of the factors of child poverty, the "model for white child poverty shows unemployment and a low education level of the population to be associated with white child poverty" (457). In current society, with technological and educational advancements, education has a direct effect on the employment of a family. The education level of an entire family then has a direct effect on the education of the individual. In some cases, for instance my own personal experience, an individual is able to break this generational dismissal of education as an important part of success. However, the social constructs of the family all too often drag the individual into an educational status quo. In an article titled "Education, Poverty and Development – Mapping Their Interconnections," Christopher Colclough explores the interdependent cultural behaviors of an individual's social constructions and how these affect their education and employment levels. In terms of the effect of education on employment, Colclough believes that individual education is affected by community reinforcement (or a lack thereof) external environmental factors, and the quality of the education offered itself. Each of these three things are demonstrated within this story.

The original setting of the story takes place in a small town in the middle of the desert. There is one highway that brings traffic into (and usually right on through) the town and the other roads in the town literally lead to nowhere. The state of the town gives indication that most of the public facilities are not in the best shape. This fictional town was based on Pecos, Texas, a town which shows the weight of years of carrying a population that is only concerned with getting by. In a report to the Secretary of Education, The Equity and Excellence Commission state that:

those who attend schools in high poverty neighborhoods are getting an education that more closely approximates school in developing nations. In reading, for

example, although U.S. children in low-poverty schools rank at the top of the world, those in our highest-poverty schools are performing on a par with children in the world's lowest-achieving countries. (9)

Because of the economic disparity of these small towns versus the larger, more successful towns, many of these families continue to consider education as less important than finding “money” however they can.

In *Anything You Might Do*, Payton's mother Lily is so clueless of her daughter's educational system that she isn't even aware that her daughter is on summer vacation. There is an implication, when Lily tells Payton to leave the house because she has “people” coming over, that Lily uses the time when Payton is gone to sell drugs out of the house. They argue over how to buy food and Lily offers a credit card to pay for food until their food stamps card is renewed the following month. It is clear that whatever money comes into the house belongs to Lily, as can be seen in the bottle of whiskey and her hungover state. Getting her hands on the “money” is more important than being a parent and is very obviously fueling her addictions. Payton is very used to this, as can be seen by her nonchalance at dealing with household maintenance and trying to be a parent to her own mother.

On the other hand, Hannah's parents (who are never even seen on screen) have literally no idea what is going on with their daughter until she is standing in front of them, and it is implied that she is abused and sexually harassed by their party friends as well. Both of these families reflect experiences that I have witnessed in people that I have known my entire life. Parents that live in this sub-culture are interested in working to “party” while their children's education, at least that I have seen, is only important enough to brag about the good grades or

punish their children for the bad ones. All the while, they perpetuate the idea that “hard work” is better than any education and that getting out of school as soon as possible is preferable.

While it is easy to believe that an individual could learn to think for themselves in this situation – and many times, children start out this way – there are so many factors involved that lead children down a path that ultimately traps them in this lifestyle. As Colclough points out in his exploration of factors effecting education levels:

Mapping the pathways through which education influences transitions to adulthood – successful and not so successful – must take account of this complex inheritance of expectations, attitudes, abilities and experiences, which comprise the formation of schooled individuals; yet, conventional views about ‘pathways’ from school to adulthood tend to take little account of the constraints imposed by poverty, and of those imposed by social relations within traditional rural cultures, which may strongly affect the life outcomes for schooled youth. (140)

The plot of *Anything You Might Do* revolves around the desire of these two main characters to get out of the life that has them feeling trapped, which leads Hannah and Payton to eventually decide to run away forever. From the outset, Payton is too afraid of failure to fully commit to the idea. At one point in the story, she even seems to be confident in her grades in school to make a difference in her life, although Hannah makes a snide remark about “an A in geometry” making a difference “out there” in the real world. As the girls become more incensed in the very life they are trying to avoid, the cycle of poverty and their need to make money becomes more important than their original goal. This is just one of many issues that this screenplay seeks to bring attention to in an attempt to spark discourse.

## The Poetics of Inclusion

In response to Besant's "The Art of Fiction," Henry James counters an argument made by Besant that a writer should not write outside of his or her own experiences. In this aspect, Besant's work comes across as a bit controlling in the way that stories should be written and James believes that the writer should have just as much creative freedom as the artists that Besant compares them to. He speaks directly to the writers when he states that:

All life belongs to you, and don't listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air and turning the art of fiction away her head from the truth of things. (63-64)

This is in response to Besant's idea that a writer should not write outside of their own experience and that fiction should only be written to be considered a high art. This is something that I wholeheartedly agree with James on. While it is important for some to create fiction and poetry that is good enough to be recognized by the educated elite, I do not believe that all "artistic" fiction should be reserved only for those who are considered educated enough to participate in intellectual debate about the contents of the work. It doesn't take a degree to appreciate a powerful message.

One of the ways that morals and ideals have been passed along is through the telling of stories. Putting a theme or important idealism into the format of a narrative is a way to make it easier to relate to. It goes back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*:

There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to

understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions-that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited. (para 13)

All of these things that Aristotle describes are demonstrated in the telling of a story, and they are all needed to reach an audience in order to communicate a message. As an example, I like to use the recent trilogy series and its adapted films: *The Hunger Games*. The story from this series is aimed at young adults, which generally aren't included as an audience for more literary works, and it carries with it a lot of weight. It contains all three of the elements that Aristotle asks for, yet does not try to present itself as anything greater than just a story. The very fact that the series got so popular shows that it was relatable enough to reach a much broader audience which, in turn, broadens the author's chances for her message to reach a greater amount of people.

Unfortunately, one of the drawbacks of an undereducated population is that they are not all taught how to properly read. This is one of the biggest divides between economically successful and poverty stricken populations. This does not mean that these same people completely lack the ability to think critically about an experience or a story being told. This is one of the reasons that I finally decided on a screenplay as the format that I wanted to tell the story of these three girls. I come from a family of these same undereducated, poor white "trash" Americans. Both of my parents dropped out during ninth grade and each of them struggle with basic literacy. With this format, I can share my story with my family and not be afraid of them misunderstanding or becoming frustrated because they want to read it, but can't. By making a movie, a pastime that has become part of American culture, I am hoping for a better chance to reach an audience beyond the literary world.

## **Adaptation: from writing fiction to writing in pictures**

One of the biggest challenges I faced with this project was finding the right format to share this story. Fiction writing is where I am most comfortable, but this story felt like it needed more. Poetry would have lent the story more raw emotion, but I felt that it was a story that needed to be witnessed. It was during my Screenplay Writing class with Mr. Bush that I realized that a Screenplay was the perfect marriage between poetry and fiction that I was looking for. Just like poetry, a screenplay demands immediacy and powerful imagery to pull readers into the story. Like fiction, it is plot and character driven with a need for clear progression (in some cases). In *Screenplay: Writing the Picture*, there was one line in particular that really stood out to me and solidified my decision:

all drama is about power. And movies, more than any other medium, empower their audiences because when people enter the dark dream-world of the theater, they can enter other worlds and vicariously experience the struggles and eventual successes or failures of the characters. They can come away unharmed, yet still filled with the emotional power of the experience. (Kindle Locations 4455-4457)

I have always been an immersive reader when it comes to stories and I have found that I enjoy creating the same experience for others.

In “Discourse: Nonnarrated Stories,” Seymour Chatman discusses the use of a narrator so distanced as to almost be non-existent. In a spec screenplay, the composition of the action sequences requires an extremely objective narrative approach to tell a story without telling the actors or director how to do their jobs. Even with this limitation, there is still so much that can be utilized to set the scene for each moment in the story. Chatman explains that “Films endow narrative with interesting new possibilities of point of view manipulation, since they have not

one but two, cotemporal information channels, visual and auditory (and in the auditory, not only voices but music and noises)” (158). While I may not be the one who eventually gets to direct the movie, it is possible to use narration directed at providing a more audiovisual experience.

After deciding to go with a screenplay for this project, I spent the summer studying film adaptations in Literature and Film. The research we completed in that class explored the differences between written and visually composed fiction which helped me to see that certain methods of plot or exposition delivery that work in fiction would not necessarily work with a screenplay. For example, the novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was almost a completely different story than the film of the same name because of the decisions that the director had to make regarding the plot and characters to make the story work in an audiovisual storytelling device. What I learned at the core of that class can be summed up in the words of Seymour Chatman in “What Novels Can do That Films Can’t (and Vice Versa),” a chapter of his book on *Film, Theater, and Literature*:

A salient property of narrative is double time structuring. That is, all narratives, in whatever medium, combine the sequence of plot events, the time of the *historie* (‘story-time’) with the time of the presentation of those events in the text, which we call ‘discourse-time’ ... Thus, in theory at least, any narrative can be actualized by any medium which can communicate the two time orders. (404)

In embracing the form of the screenplay, I was able to translate the ideas of this story as they had existed in the form of fiction by analyzing adaptations of novels to film. Film is a powerful medium for communication and one that should continue to grow as a presence in the literary world.

## **In Conclusion**

I have learned a lot about myself as a writer over the course of this program, and even more over the course of this final thesis project. Writing a screenplay has taught me how to use tighter, more potent language and imagery in my fiction and how to create an experience for an audience, rather than just tell a story. I feel like this project is a great culmination of the techniques I have practiced and the theoretical knowledge I have learned. This story is one I have been wanting to tell for a very long time, though I didn't really have the means before. The format and guidance from other sources has led me to a place where I can continue to build on these things for future projects. During my journey as a writer, I plan to continue as a scholar and contribute to the world of critical inquiry and textual commentary. As Audrey Lorde once said: "Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before."

As someone who has survived the lifestyle that these characters are unable to escape from, I feel a great need to share this story with others. My own journey has taken me from a high school dropout, to a wage-earner working twelve hours a day, to a college student, and now to a graduate student. I can only hope that, as a success story, I can help to inspire other young people to find their own way out of that lifestyle and into a world where they can truly understand their worth as human beings. Poverty is a vicious cycle for many and I plan to work toward battling it, one story at a time.

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ANYTHING YOU MIGHT DO

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FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL DESERT TOWN - MORNING

The morning sun shines on a small West Texas town with a squat grocery store surrounded by a cluster of small houses. Three cars line the parking spaces closest to the building, a sea of cracked pavement and weeds surrounding them.

A small town juts around it like branches on a sage bush with roads that end going nowhere. A two lane highway drifts right through the center, a narrow life line to the rest of the world.

Near the end of a road that dead ends in an endless sea of desert, a small house clings to the edge of the block. Years have worn away the white paint, leaving gouges of weathered wood beneath.

A battered Honda Civic sits in the shade of a massive, dying oak tree. Cracks split the paved driveway. A flower bed overgrown with weeds and choked bushes lines the dirt walkway to the door.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

Worn wooden floors spread across a small kitchen, covered by a tattered rug near the sink. Ancient country counters line the walls and a cheap white stove juts away from them, leaving a crack between the counter top and the range.

The refrigerator looks like it was installed during World War II and has a pronounced death rattle. An almost empty bottle of Jack Daniels sits on the counter near an ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts.

PAYTON HARDY, sixteen with a lanky, boyish frame and limp blonde hair, shuffles into the kitchen. Her pajamas hover a few inches above her ankles and her T-shirt billows around her thin frame.

Her bare feet HISS across the dusty floor as she SIGHS and screws the cap back on the bottle before sliding it into an empty cabinet above. She dumps the ashtray into the garbage under the sink.

A large bucket sits under the rusted pipe, filled nearly to the top with water.

Payton GRUNTS and grabs an empty bucket from a cabinet nearby. She switches the buckets and dumps the water back into the sink.

In the meantime, LILY HARDY, a short woman in her early forties with frizzy blonde curls, wanders into the kitchen and starts making coffee.

LILY  
What are you doing home?

PAYTON  
Mom, it's summer.

LILY  
Oh.

Lily sways on her feet, then stumbles into a chair, dropping her head into her hands. Payton watches while filling a glass of water then sets it down on the table.

Lily grunts and pushes the glass away.

LILY (CONT'D)  
Can you finish the coffee?

Payton nods and turns to the coffee pot. Lily GROANS and lays her head down on the table. After she finishes, Payton opens the refrigerator.

A half gallon of milk, a jar of horseradish and a carton of eggs sit isolated from each other inside. Payton grabs the carton and opens it to find two eggs inside.

Payton SIGHS and sets the carton on the counter.

PAYTON  
We need food.

Lily GROANS again and lifts her head. Payton pulls a frying pan out of a cabinet and sets it on the stove top.

LILY  
I thought you went.

PAYTON  
No, I was at Mari's 'til yesterday.

LILY  
Ugh. Why do you spend so much time with that snooty little Mexican?

Lily holds her head with her hand while she speaks. Payton cracks the eggs into the pan, tosses the shells into the carton and the whole thing into the trash.

LILY (CONT'D)  
She too good to come over here?

PAYTON  
So can I have the Lonestar card?

LILY  
Got it from that stuck up bitch of  
a mom.

PAYTON  
Mrs. Elizondo is dead, mom.

Lily looks up at Payton, who concentrates on the eggs in the pan.

LILY  
Since when?

Payton clenches her jaw and lets out a slow breath.

PAYTON  
Since last month. Remember? You  
dropped me off at the funeral.

Lily waves a dismissive hand then cradles her head again.

LILY  
There's nothing left on the card.

Payton gives a dramatic SIGH and watches her mother out of the corner of her eye while she flips the eggs.

LILY (CONT'D)  
Oh just take the fucking credit  
card. It's in my purse.

Payton smirks and retrieves her mother's purse from a table near the kitchen door. She sets it down in front of Lily.

PAYTON  
This month is almost over, so I'll  
just get a little.

Lily GRUNTS and looks back at the coffee pot. Payton hurries to pour her a cup.

LILY  
I need you out of the house today,  
Pay.

PAYTON  
You told me last night. I'm going  
to Hannah's after I pack. We're  
leaving for camp tomorrow,  
remember?

Lily frowns into her cup.

LILY  
Well I got people coming over. What do you mean, camp?

PAYTON  
That lady from Hannah's church got us in to a youth group summer camp.

LILY  
Is it going to cost money?

Payton gives another dramatic SIGH.

PAYTON  
No mom, the church had that fund raiser weeks ago, I sold cookies?

Lily waves her hand again and takes a sip of the coffee. She makes a happy noise.

LILY  
That is some good coffee baby girl.

Lily reaches into the purse, pulls out a thin plastic wallet, and holds up the credit card.

LILY (CONT'D)  
I'll get it back from you at the party tonight. When are you girls coming back?

PAYTON  
Next Sunday. It's a ten day camp.

Lily smiles and nods as she takes another drink of coffee. Payton sets the eggs in front of her mother and heads out of the kitchen, talking over her shoulder.

PAYTON (CONT'D)  
I'm going to go pack and then I'll go get some groceries.

Once around the refrigerator, Payton pulls out her phone and sends a text to HANNAH that reads: "She bought it."

EXT. CATTLE RANCH - MORNING

A small herd of cattle clusters around a water trough filled with clean, clear water. Flies BUZZ lazily around them and the occasional tail swishes through the air to shoo them away.

A small cottage squats in the middle of a labyrinth of wind-blown fencing. One cow grazes in a field near the house. RANCHERO MUSIC echoes in the empty air.

INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

Light chases dust motes through shafts of sun that escape the patterned curtains in a darkened living room. Floral patterned sofas covered in clear plastic face each other over a pristine oak coffee table. A glistening porcelain tea set rests on a polished tray on top of it.

A small shrine sits off to one side, pictures of a middle aged woman with a round face and long hair, candles, shriveled flower petals, and a scattering of Mexican candies rest all around the surface.

The woman smiles in every picture.

COOKING SOUNDS and RANCHERO MUSIC come from behind a closed door.

INT. COTTAGE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Oil SIZZLES in a skillet on a cast iron stove. MARISOL ELIZONDO, 17 though her short stature and round face make her seem younger, stands near it. She lifts an egg-battered chile, holding a bowl under it, and turns to lay it carefully into the skillet. The oil SIZZLES louder. She picks up a second chile and dips it into the bowl of batter.

She moves with solemn care, meticulous in the way she lays them.

The kitchen door opens and RIGOBERTO ELIZONDO, a tall Mexican man with thick, chestnut hair under his white cowboy hat and a bushy black mustache, walks into the kitchen. His boots RING against the wood floor.

Marisol sets down the bowl, wipes her hand on her apron, and lowers the volume of the music.

They speak only Spanish to one another.

RIGO  
Good morning, sweetheart.

MARISOL  
Good morning, Papa.

Rigo kisses the top of Marisol's head and she gives a quick smile before turning around to drop another chile into the oil.

MARISOL (CONT'D)  
Coffee is in the pot.

Rigo reaches for a cup and sets it on the counter next to the bowl of batter. He watches her while he pours coffee.

RIGO  
No need to make any for 'Tonio. He left early this morning.

MARISOL  
Okay, Papa.

Marisol begins to batter another chile.

Rigo stares at her, begins to say something, then gathers his coffee cup and sits down at the table.

The kitchen door opens again and MARCOS ELIZONDO, 25 with a round face like Marisol's and bright brown eyes, enters the room. He grabs a cup of coffee quickly, keeping his eyes on the cup and the coffee press.

Marisol lays another chile in the oil and picks up the spatula. She clenches her eyes shut and tears glisten when she opens them again.

Rigo watches Marcos a beat, takes a drink of his coffee, then raises his voice over the SIZZLE of the oil.

RIGO  
We will be back by Monday, Mari.

Marisol nods as she flips the chiles.

RIGO (CONT'D)  
You are going to be with that girl?

Marisol swallows hard, sets the spatula down, and turns to nod at Rigo, wiping her hands on her apron again.

MARISOL  
Payton, yes.

Rigo nods. Marcos stares at the table, clenching his jaw.

RIGO  
I do not want you to stay here alone, mi hija.  
(MORE)

RIGO (CONT'D)

We may be back later than Monday,  
is it okay with her parents that  
you stay?

MARISOL

Yes, Papa. Her mother is at work  
most of the time.

Rigo frowns, but nods and takes another drink of his coffee.  
Marisol turns back to her cooking.

INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Marisol moves around the living room, reverently dusting  
every surface, smoothing every wrinkle of fabric. She picks  
up one of the pictures to dust it and the tears return.

Rigo enters the room and leans against the door frame. His  
voice is tight as he speaks.

RIGO

Mari.

Marisol jumps and drops the picture, shattering the glass.  
She gives a strangled CRY and falls to her knees, gathering  
the pieces in the hem of her shirt, held out like an apron.

Rigo hurries toward her, picks up the picture, and sets it  
down on the altar as though it had bit him. He watches  
Marisol, reaches his hand toward her head, then disappears  
into the kitchen.

Marisol's sobs are silent, but the tears fall fast. She  
reaches for a piece of glass and yanks her hand back with a  
gasp. She watches a thick stream of blood gush down her hand.

Rigo enters carrying a broom.

RIGO (CONT'D)

Mari! Go! Put it in cold water!

Mari lifts her hand and stares the blood trickling down her  
arm in thin rivers.

Marcos bursts into the room, sees his sister, and immediately  
scoops her up and carries her through the door to the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Marcos bursts through the door with Marisol in his arms and  
sets her on the counter near the sink.

He shoves her hand under a stream of cold water and she watches the blood disappear, then looks up at Marcos, searches his face.

MARISOL

I broke it, Marcos. It was the one with her favorite dress.

MARCOS

It was just the frame, Mari. We can get a new one.

Marisol cringes away from him, her face twisted in rage.

MARISOL

No we can't!

Marcos looks up at her, grimacing in pain and watches her for a beat. His voice breaks when he speaks.

MARCOS

I know, Mari. I know

EXT. WEST TEXAS DESERT - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

The sun peeks over the horizon and spins the grama grass into gold. Grasshoppers leap from between the thin reeds and ride the breeze in spontaneous bounds. A few birds join the chirping insects in song.

EXT. RURAL TRAILER PARK - CONTINUOUS

Mobile homes, in various states of decomposition, line either side of a blinding, white caliche road. Switchgrass and wild ryes spring from the ground along the undersides of trailers and crawl across the patchy red dirt between them.

One trailer stands out for its faded, once-pink bubble gum paint. White trim lines the side facing the road, but the other side looks like someone tried to rip it off, starting near the back door.

A line of cars starts at one side of the trailer and wraps around to the shoulder of the caliche road. A Chrysler and an old Cadillac, closest to the house, shelter tall grass underneath and a wall of dirt piles against the tires. Oxidation and rust bruise what's left of their paint jobs.

## INT. PINK TRAILER LIVING ROOM - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

Sunlight pierces through holes in blackout curtains that smother the windows. Liquor bottles and beer cans fight for ownership of every available surface. Cigarette butts jut from ashtrays or from the tops of cans.

Bodies sprawl all over the room. A MAN and WOMAN curl around each other on the stained and torn sofa, three YOUNG MEN pillow their heads on a couch pillow, pair of sneakers, and one of the others' ankles, forming a flesh wall around the battered coffee table.

Lily huddles beneath a thin blanket, her body folded into a worn, overstuffed recliner, only her curly blonde hair peeking out.

## INT. PINK TRAILER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Warm light fills the room and reflects off the wood paneling, making it glow. Mounds of threadbare clothing, worn shoes, and a few ancient toys pile around the edges of the room and pour out from under the twin bed.

Payton stretches her lanky body along one side of the bed.

HANNAH MORRIS, 16 with short-cropped black hair and tanned skin, lies curled up, taking up most of the space on the bed.

They huddle beneath the same thin blanket facing each other. Payton opens her eyes and watches Hannah for a beat. Hannah stirs and stretches, nearly knocking Payton from the bed.

Payton smiles and moves hair out of Hannah's face.

PAYTON

Hey.

Hannah GROWLS.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Wake up.

HANNAH

No.

Payton LAUGHS as Hannah curls up again and snuggles closer.

PAYTON

Fine. I'll just leave without you.

Hannah opens her eyes and stares at Payton's face. She blinks a couple of times, then grins.

HANNAH

Do you think she'll come?

Payton nods and continues to watch Hannah.

PAYTON

I watched her pack her bag. She's scared, but she's ready.

HANNAH

What's there to be scared of? It's just a long drive.

PAYTON

It's not the drive that's scary.

Hannah rolls her eyes and stretches.

HANNAH

I told you both, I know someone with a friend in New York that's gonna hook us up.

Payton frowns and gets out of bed. She reaches beside a stack of beer cans for a cigarette, lights it, and blows the smoke out in a SIGH.

PAYTON

It would help if you'd tell me who. I don't want to shack up with some crack head.

It's Hannah's turn to SIGH as she scoots over to sit on the edge of the bed. She runs a hand through her hair and gestures for the cigarette. Payton takes another drag, then hands it to her.

HANNAH

I told you, he's a friend of Aaron's.

Payton narrows her eyes at Hannah, who stares at the floor, then lights another cigarette. She lets it hang from her lips as she pulls a backpack out of the door-less closet.

PAYTON

So is Aaron coming with us?

HANNAH

No, he has some shit to take care of first.

PAYTON

Ah.

HANNAH

He's getting some money together  
and will bus after us.

Payton pulls another backpack out of the closet and drops it  
at Hannah's feet.

PAYTON

Whatever, let's just go.

HANNAH

What?

PAYTON

Nothing. Let's go before everyone  
wakes up.

HANNAH

Payton, it's not like that. He just  
wants to make sure we're safe.

Payton shrugs and takes a deep drag off her cigarette, then  
reaches into her bag for a brush.

PAYTON

He's nothing but a drunk. I don't  
get why you hang out with him. I  
thought the whole fucking point was  
to get away from this bullshit.

Payton gestures at the wall with her brush.

HANNAH

You drink more than he does when we  
party.

PAYTON

Yeah, but I can function in life.

HANNAH

You really think getting an A in  
geometry is gonna make a shit out  
there?

Hannah stands and shakes her head, sneering at Payton.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

You know it ain't or you wouldn't  
be coming with me.

Payton continues to glare at her, but drops her shoulders in  
defeat.

PAYTON

Well your *boyfriend* better not  
flake out, or we're fucked.

HANNAH

Stop.

PAYTON

Can we just go?

Hannah watches Payton as she drags the brush through her hair and opens her mouth as if to say something, snaps it shut, then speaks off-hand as she walks by.

HANNAH

Yeah. This part of the trip is  
supposed to be about us anyway.  
We'll figure everything else out as  
we go.

Payton gives a sarcastic little laugh, but shrugs and nods.

PAYTON

Sure. Let's just do this.

INT. PINK TRAILER LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dishes with days old food pile in and around the sink among a sea of more empty beer cans in the kitchen. A paneled half wall separates it from the living room where the others sleep.

Payton and Hannah sneak into the kitchen and rummage through the cupboards, stuffing dry noodles and other canned foods into the space that's left in their bags.

Payton grabs a block of cheese from the fridge and accidentally drops it. Both girls freeze and whip their heads toward the pile of sleeping adults several feet away.

Lily shifts in her chair, blinks, and looks in their direction.

Hannah shoots a look at Payton, who hurries over to her mom.

LILY

What the hell are you girls doing?

PAYTON

We're just getting some breakfast.  
Cindy's on her way.

Lily blinks up at Payton, her eyes bloodshot and so heavy she can barely keep them open.

LILY  
Well keep it down. Shit.

Payton smiles at her mom and nods. She pulls the covers up around Lily's shoulders and stares down at her for a beat, then leans forward and kisses her cheek.

Lily bats her away.

Payton watches her a beat more then frowns and hurries back into the kitchen. They finish filling their packs and head for the door. Hannah slaps a note on the edge of a sticky counter, it reads: "Came for the girls, see you soon. Call me if you need anything. 432-983-2312. Cindy."

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATE MORNING

A squat building with peeling white paint and partially boarded windows juts out of the flat, mesquite dotted landscape of a highway access road.

Payton and Hannah emerge from the crooked glass door with a strawberry Fanta and a package of powdered donuts. They sit on a backless bench and Payton opens the donut package while Hannah takes a drink of the soda.

Payton holds out the package and leans on her knees, staring at the ground between her hands as Hannah grabs one. Hannah pulls her feet under her on the bench and licks at the powdered sugar.

HANNAH  
Did she text you back?

Payton nods and takes a drink from the soda.

PAYTON  
Yeah. She'll be here.

Hannah tugs at the unraveled fabric of a hole in her jeans.

A beater car drives by, stops at the stop sign, then pulls away. The girls continue to eat in silence a few beats before a small, battered red Toyota stops in front of them, billowing dust all around.

Payton grins at Hannah and both girls grab their bags from under the bench, throw them in the back of the truck, and squeeze into the small cab beside Marisol.

EXT. INTERSTATE 20 - LATE MORNING

The Toyota rolls down the highway, nothing but endless desert in all directions.

INT. TOYOTA - CONTINUOUS

The girls ride in tense silence. Payton chews the inside of her mouth, pressing her knuckle hard against her cheek. Marisol grips the steering wheel tight and glances in the rearview mirror every few seconds.

Hannah, squeezed between the two of them, fiddles with the stereo then sighs and throws herself back against the seat.

Payton looks over at her, leans forward to peer at Marisol, then sits back and grins.

PAYTON

We fucking did it.

Hannah looks over at Payton, then trades glances with Marisol. Hannah smirks, but shakes her head.

HANNAH

We haven't even left town. Get excited when we've got some miles between us and that shit hole.

Marisol gives a slight smile and turns the station to rock.

MARISOL

We took the first step, Hannah. That's more than most people do.

Marisol turns up the volume and settles back against her seat, relaxing her grip on the steering wheel a little.

Payton rolls her window down and pokes her head out. Her blond hair flies back and whips around the side of the truck.

Hannah kicks off her shoes and props her feet on the dusty dashboard.

HANNAH

Just get us out of here, Mari.

Hannah pronounces Marisol's name "Mary."

EXT. INTERSTATE 20 REST STOP - THAT AFTERNOON

A squat, brick building with a flat roof sits in the middle of a continuous sea of desert and nothing.

Payton sits in the Toyota, sandwich ingredients spread all over her lap and a napkin on the dash of the truck. Marisol stands near the open door, watching her. She winces as Payton slaps meat down without bothering to spread the mayonnaise.

MARISOL

I can do that.

PAYTON

It's cool, I got it.

Payton closes a sandwich and hands it to Marisol, then closes one for herself and takes a huge bite out of it. She chews a few times then SIGHS and sits back against the seat. Marisol smiles at her before taking a small bite of a corner of her own.

Hannah emerges from the rest room, drying her hands on her jeans. Payton slaps another sandwich together and hands it to Marisol who passes it on.

MARISOL

We're going to need gas soon.

Hannah answers by shoving half of the sandwich into her mouth at once and nodding.

PAYTON

We probably shouldn't all go. We're supposed to be heading south, remember? Better if they don't see three girls traveling together.

Hannah shrugs and speaks with her mouth still stuffed with sandwich.

HANNAH

Who cares? Nobody's looking for us for at least a week.

Marisol stares at her sandwich and bites her lip.

MARISOL

My family expects me back Monday.

Both Payton and Hannah jerk their heads in her direction.

HANNAH

What the hell, Mari?

Marisol continues to stare at her sandwich.

MARISOL

My father would never consent to me leaving for a week. Especially not to a Christian camp.

Hannah stalks closer to Marisol, staring at her hard.

HANNAH

Who cares if he *consents*? You were supposed to buy us time!

Marisol turns to glare at Hannah.

MARISOL

And I gave you four days. More if I say I want to stay at Payton's house longer.

HANNAH

Oh hell no, you're not talking to your dad.

PAYTON

I told you guys to ditch your phones before we left. They can track us really easy.

Payton shoves more sandwich into her mouth. Hannah looks over at her and sighs.

HANNAH

But if we don't answer when they call, then they're going to get suspicious.

Payton takes another bite and pulls her phone out of her pocket. She ticks off a few things with her thumb then looks up at Hannah. Hannah pulls her phone out and stares at it.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

How the hell? That's my number!

PAYTON

It's an app.

MARISOL

But how?

Payton shrugs and swallows her food.

PAYTON

You set your outgoing message to something like, we're not allowed to use our phones until after six or something, then we call them.

Marisol stares at Payton in wonder that fades to apprehension.

MARISOL

I can't use that excuse.

PAYTON

So you call your dad more often.

HANNAH

Oh hell no. She obviously can't lie for shit.

PAYTON

Hannah, just stop. Mari had a hard enough time leaving in the first place.

Hannah, completely ignoring her sandwich now, glares at Marisol.

HANNAH

Then why did you?

Marisol's eyes fill with tears and she swallows hard.

MARISOL

Because that place is so empty without her.

Hannah has the decency to look apologetic, but turns to Payton.

HANNAH

So what should she do?

PAYTON

Your dad is busy most of the day, right?

Marisol nods.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Then just leave him a couple of messages during the day, then call him when we call our parents.

Marisol nods again but Hannah gestures at Payton's phone.

HANNAH

What about your phone? Can't they trace it?

PAYTON

Mine's a burner.

They both frown at her in confusion.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

My mom doesn't even know I have it. Got it from Walmart. My cell phone is in my room.

MARISOL

What if she finds it?

PAYTON

She'll find my stash before she gets to the phone.

Hannah smiles and shakes her head.

MARISOL

Won't you get in trouble for having drugs?

Payton shrugs and looks at her phone.

PAYTON

Only for not sharing. And I don't plan to be around to get in trouble anyway.

Payton gives Marisol a pointed look as Hannah returns to devouring her sandwich. Marisol nods quickly and takes another small bite of her own.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Moonlight bathes the desert in eerie white light. The Toyota, parked on the shoulder of a silver river of caliche, lies quiet, the paint dulled by a layer of dust.

Payton and Marisol sprawl in the bed of the truck on a pile of thin blankets, their heads pillowed on their packs, staring up at the stars.

Hannah sits on the hood of the truck, smoking a cigarette.

PAYTON

So do you think your dad bought it?

Marisol nods, even though Payton can't see her.

MARISOL

I do. He doesn't ask many questions. Antonio is going to be the hard one to convince.

Payton glances over at her and shrugs then gives a quick smile as she reaches into her pocket for a smoke. She projects her voice a bit when she speaks again.

PAYTON

At this rate, we'll still be in Texas by the end of the week.

She lights the cigarette and takes a deep drag, then rolls her head over to look at Marisol.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

And we're going to run out of money before that.

MARISOL

Then what?

Payton glances over her head as though she can see through the cab of the truck, and lowers her voice.

PAYTON

Then we see how stubborn that girl really is.

Marisol glances up toward the cab and lowers her voice as well.

MARISOL

Do you really think she'll give up?

PAYTON

When we're sitting on the side of the road in the middle of the desert with no money for food or gas. Yeah.

MARISOL

So how are we supposed to get home without any money?

PAYTON

I got mom's credit card.

Marisol gives her a relieved smile and curls up on her side.

MARISOL

I guess we can just try to have some fun.

PAYTON

Epic road trip to nowhere.

Hannah, at the front of the truck, glances over her shoulder then pulls out a cheap cell phone. She stares at a text that reads: "good. see you soon."

She blows out a puff of smoke, looks over her shoulder again, then texts back: "I brought friends."

Hannah bites her lip and stares hard at the phone. A beat later, a new text pops up: "bad idea. we'll talk later." She frowns at her phone, then hops off the hood.

She bangs her palm on the side of the truck which makes Payton and Marisol jump.

HANNAH

You two get to sleep! We're leaving bright and early.

The truck door groans in protest as she yanks it open and slides into the cab.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - THE NEXT MORNING

Neat rows of prepackaged products cram Marisol and Hannah together as they huddle over travel brochures near the coffee station.

Hannah smacks the brochure she's looking at.

HANNAH

Here! I told you there was one on the way!

Hannah shoves the booklet at Marisol who smiles and scans the page.

MARISOL

But we don't have enough money to go.

HANNAH

So we'll break in! What's the worst they can do? Throw us out? We'll rob some little rich turds and take their bracelets too.

Marisol laughs, but looks apprehensive when Hannah turns back to the brochure.

MARISOL

I would be willing to try! I've always wanted to go.

Payton emerges from another aisle and leans against the coffee station. She speaks louder than usual.

PAYTON

You guys ready yet?

Then lowers her voice.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

I didn't see any cameras.

Hannah glances toward the counter, without moving her head, then back at Payton. They share a long look then Hannah nods and closes the brochure.

HANNAH

This is the one. We're going to Six Flags.

Payton grins at them as Hannah heads toward the counter to pay.

TOMMY, in his early thirties with a boyish haircut and a soul patch in a sea of two-day beard, puts a little swagger in his step as the girls approach. He eyes Hannah for a good beat, but his smile widens when he sees Marisol.

Hannah bumps Marisol with her hip, making her stumble, and they giggle.

CASHIER

What can I do for you ladies?

Hannah pushes Marisol forward and hands her the brochure.

HANNAH

Just this.

The cashier flips it around and smirks.

CASHIER

That's it? You ladies planning a trip?

HANNAH

We're on a trip!

Marisol shoves Hannah.

MARISOL  
Shut up!

HANNAH  
A secret trip!

While Marisol and Hannah try to keep the cashier distracted, Payton stuffs food into a purple slouchy purse.

MARISOL  
We're going to surprise my aunt in  
Fort Worth!

HANNAH  
Then we're going to Six Flags!

The cashier smiles at Marisol as he takes her money. She blushes. Hannah looks at her and grins, nudging her again.

The cashier hands Marisol the change.

CASHIER  
Well you girls be safe.

Payton slips out the door while he's still focused on Marisol and Hannah. Hannah calls over her shoulder as they walk away.

HANNAH  
Safe is boring.

He grins and Marisol and Hannah rush out the door.

EXT. INTERSTATE 20 REST AREA - LATE MORNING

The girls sit at a picnic table with their backs to the table, munching on deli sandwiches and packaged muffins.

Hannah watches Marisol a few beats, then speaks around a mouthful of food.

HANNAH  
You're not a bad liar. I didn't  
think you had it in you.

MARISOL  
I have two brothers who are always  
in my business.

Marisol looks away.

MARISOL (CONT'D)  
Never could lie to mom, though. She  
always saw right through it.

Hannah and Payton share a look then Hannah throws an arm over Marisol's shoulder gently.

HANNAH  
Your mom was like a psychic or some  
shit.

PAYTON  
Wasn't she a curandera or whatever?

She butchers the word which makes Marisol smile.

MARISOL  
No, Abuela Marisela was.

Payton suddenly LAUGHS and Hannah and Marisol look over at her.

PAYTON  
Remember that time Mrs. Elizondo  
caught Marcos dipping behind the  
barn?

Marisol's eyes go wide and Hannah frowns in confusion.

PAYTON (CONT'D)  
We were all there, Mrs. E was  
showing us how to make those  
Mexican donuts -

MARISOL  
Pan dulce.

PAYTON  
- yeah, that! And she just suddenly  
stands up and walks out the door.

Hannah frowns some more.

HANNAH  
Was I there?

MARISOL  
You were, because Mama told you  
eating raw dough would give you  
worms and you almost threw up  
because you'd just eaten some.

Hannah LAUGHS and Payton talks louder to be heard above her.

HANNAH

That's right!

PAYTON

It was freaky! She just stood up and walked out the door, came back like two minutes later practically dragging Marcos by the ear.

HANNAH

I don't remember that part.

MARISOL

Papa made him scrub stalls for two weeks. Though I'm pretty sure he's the one that gave it to him.

Payton and Hannah LAUGH and Marisol smiles though she looks on the verge of tears.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

I miss her so much.

Payton wraps her arms around Marisol and Hannah wraps her arms around them both. Tears roll down Marisol's cheeks, but she smiles and leans her head against Payton's shoulder.

PAYTON

I miss her too.

INT. TOYOTA - A FEW HOURS LATER

Payton sleeps against the door of the truck, her head pillowed on an old sweatshirt.

Marisol drives with one hand on the wheel, the other hanging out the side of the truck, her eyes a little teary.

Hannah sits between them, doing a circle-a-word.

Marisol suddenly sits up straight and stares in the rearview mirror.

MARISOL

Shit!

Hannah jumps and looks up.

HANNAH

What?

Hannah looks behind her and her eyes go wide.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Oh god. Oh god. Shit. Shit!

A police cruiser coasts behind them, lights flashing on the dome.

MARISOL

Calm down, we haven't done anything wrong.

HANNAH

Oh god, oh shit.

Hannah spins back around and pulls her seat belt across her lap. She looks terrified.

Payton stirs as the truck slows and looks around.

MARISOL

We're just driving to Six Flags, remember?

HANNAH

And your aunt's house! We got a lot of shit in the back for a trip to Six Flags.

The OFFICER, mid forties and a little on the chunky side, looks at the back of the truck for a beat before approaching the cab. He bends down to see inside.

OFFICER

Afternoon ma'am - ladies.

Marisol smiles at him and Payton offers her own sleepy smile. Hannah slumps down in her seat and gnaws at her lip.

MARISOL

Hello officer.

OFFICER

License and registration, proof of insurance?

MARISOL

Sure.

Marisol reaches into her back pocket and Payton opens the glove compartment and hands some documents over.

OFFICER

You got a tail light out, young lady.

Marisol frowns at him, then looks through what Payton gave her and hands everything to the officer.

He stares at the documents a couple of beats.

OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Are you aware that your  
registration is expired?

MARISOL  
I - uh - no, sir.

He narrows his eyes at her.

OFFICER  
It's been expired for six months.

Mari shrugs, though she begins to look nervous.

MARISOL  
It's an old ranch truck. I guess my  
dad forgot.

OFFICER  
Where you ladies headed?

MARISOL  
Up to Arlington.

Hannah leans forward, her hands shaking. Her voice sounds strained, manic.

HANNAH  
We're going to Six Flags!

The officer bends down so he can see inside the cab better.

OFFICER  
Just the three of you?

Marisol shoots a look at Hannah, then turns back to the officer.

MARISOL  
We're staying with my aunt for the  
week.

The officer stands up straight and nods, then waves the papers idly.

OFFICER  
Sit tight.

As soon as he is out of earshot, Payton leans forward and glares at Hannah.

PAYTON  
What the hell, Hannah?

Marisol stares at the rearview mirror for a few beats.

MARISOL  
They can't put us in jail for  
expired registration.

Payton glances over her shoulder.

PAYTON  
But they can impound the car  
because it's not legal to be on the  
road.

HANNAH  
Shit! Fuck! Mari, you have to go!

Hannah shoves at Marisol's knee, but her foot isn't on the pedal.

Payton smacks Hannah's arm.

PAYTON  
What the fuck, Hannah? Sit back.

HANNAH  
Oh god, oh god.

Payton grabs Hannah's hand and twines their fingers together.

PAYTON  
We're not going back. It's okay.

HANNAH  
No. No it's not.

Marisol's body goes rigid and she snaps at them.

MARISOL  
Shut up, he's coming back.

Hannah GROANS and clenches Payton's hand tighter. Payton frowns at her, then relaxes her face as the officer steps up to the window again.

OFFICER

I'm going to give you a ticket. All you have to do is fix that light and update the registration and take the paperwork in with you.

MARISOL

Okay.

OFFICER

Make sure you get that done as soon as you get to your aunt's house. You don't want to get another one of these.

The officer hands the ticket to Marisol, leans forward, and tips his hat to all three of them.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You girls be careful.

He pats the inside of the door and heads back to his car. Marisol lets her breath out in a slow HISS. Payton squeezes Hannah's hand as Hannah begins to PANT.

PAYTON

Go. Just drive slow.

Marisol starts the car and they pull away from the shoulder slowly. The patrol car remains where it is, but the lights no longer flash.

Marisol glances in the rearview again as they start down the highway.

Once they have some distance between the Toyota and the patrol car, Hannah begins SOBBING.

Payton and Marisol share frightened glances over her head.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATER

The girls sit on the tailgate of the truck, chewing on convenience store chimichangas, and share a pile of crinkle fries between them.

Payton nibbles at her food, but keeps glancing at Hannah. Marisol grimaces at her food as she chews.

Payton looks up at Hannah again and watches her closely.

PAYTON

Are you okay?

Hannah shakes her head and shoves food into her mouth.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

We didn't get caught. You don't  
have to go back.

Hannah shakes her head again. Her hands tremble as she takes another bite.

MARISOL

Then what's wrong, Hannah?

Payton raises her eyebrows and looks at Marisol. Hannah heaves a deep SIGH, sets her chimichanga down, and looks straight ahead. She keeps her voice low.

HANNAH

I freaked out ... because I've got  
a pound of coke in my bag.

Marisol and Payton both whirl on her. Marisol's eyes blaze and gives Hannah a fierce scowl.

Payton drops her chimichanga on the brown bag between her and Hannah and hops off the tailgate.

MARISOL

What do you mean? You're carrying  
drugs?

HANNAH

Yes.

Payton, in the middle of storming off, whirls around and stalks toward Hannah.

PAYTON

Are you fucking stupid?

Payton glares at Hannah then storms off again. Marisol stares at Hannah, watches her begin to shake, then sets her chimichanga down as well.

MARISOL

Where did you even get it?

Hannah shakes her head.

HANNAH

I can't tell you.

MARISOL

How much do you have? What the hell  
are you supposed to do with it?

Hannah swallows hard and looks up, her eyes following Payton as she walks toward the store.

HANNAH

I just have to take it to some RV park outside Fort Worth.

Marisol gapes at her.

MARISOL

Some RV park?

Hannah rolls her eyes and breathes a small SIGH.

HANNAH

I saw it on a map. It's just barely off the interstate. Look, I'm not a moron. I know the guy.

MARISOL

You could have got us all thrown in jail.

HANNAH

I know! Why do you think I freaked out?

Payton steps out from the edge of the building and both Hannah and Marisol jump. She glares at Hannah.

PAYTON

Let's go. I can hear you guys from the front of the store.

Marisol throws their food into a greasy paper bag as Hannah hops off the tailgate.

The three of them pile into the truck and Marisol turns the key in the ignition. Nothing happens.

Hannah and Payton stare at Marisol. She tries again - a faint click, but nothing else.

HANNAH

Dead battery. Fucking wonderful.

Payton twists around and looks out the back window.

PAYTON

Stay here.

She slams open the door and walks toward the gas pumps. Hannah and Marisol turn to watch her approach an older MAN standing next to a beater car.

She gestures toward the truck as they speak and he nods and gestures back.

MARISOL

I told you to stop leaving the radio on when it's not running.

HANNAH

Oh please, that battery died years ago.

Payton walks over and stands in front of the truck. Marisol pops the hood.

INT. TOYOTA - AFTERNOON

Hannah drives while Marisol and Payton sleep, Payton with her sweatshirt pillowed against the door and Marisol resting her head against Payton's shoulder.

Hannah pulls out the cheap cell and sends a text: "about 200 miles from Fort Worth.

She puts the phone between her legs when Payton stirs to scratch her nose.

When she picks it up again, a new text reads: "Good. Come alone."

When Hannah lowers the phone and sees Payton staring at her.

PAYTON

Who is it? Who gave you the coke, Hannah?

Hannah looks back at the road.

HANNAH

I'm not involving you in this, Pay.

PAYTON

Bullshit. You involved both of us as soon as you threw your bag in the truck.

HANNAH

It's just a friend of Aaron's.

Payton scowls.

PAYTON

So you went to Fort Davis when you said you were at your grandma's.

Hannah glances over at her and shrugs.

HANNAH

You're always up my ass. I just wanted a break, alright?

Payton nods and drops her head back against the door. Her voice drips with venom.

PAYTON

Alright.

HANNAH

Don't.

Marisol stirs and Payton gnaws on the inside of her cheek, glaring forward. Hanna watches Payton for a beat, then turns back to the road.

Marisol sits up and looks around, pulling her hair into a quick bun.

MARISOL

Where are we?

HANNAH

About two hundred miles outside Fort Worth.

PAYTON

And how far to the drop?

HANNAH

Hundred and seventy or so?

Marisol looks from Hannah to Payton.

MARISOL

What happened?

PAYTON

Nothing. So how much are you getting paid to do this?

Hannah looks over at Payton, who pointedly stares forward.

HANNAH

Three thousand.

Payton whips her head around at that. Marisol's mouth falls open and she gives Payton a fearful glance.

PAYTON

How much are you carrying?

HANNAH

A pound, maybe more.

PAYTON

You're muling a brick of cocaine  
and you're only getting three  
thousand?

HANNAH

What do you mean, only?

Marisol stares at Payton, who leans forward to glare at Hannah.

PAYTON

Well, depending on how pure it is,  
that shit is worth 30k a pop.

MARISOL

How do you know this?

Payton glances at her, but ignores the question.

PAYTON

You got had, Hannah. Why the fuck  
didn't you just tell me?

HANNAH

Oh shut up. You think you're so  
fucking bad because your mom's a  
dealer.

Marisol's eyebrows shoot up and she searches Payton's face.

MARISOL

You never told me that.

PAYTON

It's not something I'm proud of.  
And fuck you, Hannah. You got us  
into this bullshit for three  
thousand? You're a fucking idiot.

Hannah slams on the brakes and yanks the wheel. The truck slides to a stop on the shoulder, kicking up a cloud of dust. Marisol braces herself against the dashboard.

INT/EXT. TOYOTA/HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

As soon as the truck stops, Payton yanks the door open, slips out onto the dirt and sagebrush and slams the door behind her.

Marisol looks over at Hannah. Hannah slams the palm of her hand against the steering wheel. Her voice cracks as she yells.

HANNAH

I did this for us, god damn it! How the hell did you plan to get to New York, huh? How are we supposed to survive when we do?

Payton stalks around the truck to Hannah's side while she's talking. Her voice is low, but lethal.

PAYTON

By getting jobs! Panhandling! Hell, maybe going somewhere besides the most expensive city in the fucking country!

Marisol shifts uncomfortably.

HANNAH

The plan was to go to New York.

PAYTON

The *plan* was to get the hell out of Pecos! Let the wind take us! You and me - and Mari - for fucking ever!

MARISOL

We weren't supposed to leave Texas.

Payton jerks her head over at Marisol. Hannah notices the look and frowns.

HANNAH

What?

MARISOL

Payton said you'd never have the guts to leave Texas. That we couldn't get the money and we'd just go back home.

Payton steps away from the window and shakes her head at Marisol. Hanna glares at Payton for a few beats.

HANNAH

Seriously? Well we got the money... you still gonna chicken out?

MARISOL

I can't.

Both Hannah and Payton ignore her.

HANNAH

Well? Are you? Should I just fucking hitchhike the rest of the way? Let you little pussies go running back home?

PAYTON

What exactly did you expect to happen, Hannah? New York is thousands of miles away with nothing waiting for us at the end.

Payton flips her hand at the unending road with a sarcastic smile.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Except some *friend* of Aaron's.

HANNAH

Then why the fuck did you even bother?

PAYTON

Because this was supposed to be a road trip! Our trip! Something to get us the fuck out of that place for a while.

HANNAH

Yeah, well, that's not what I wanted.

PAYTON

You seriously think New York is going to be any better than that shit hole?

Hannah's eyes well up with tears.

HANNAH

Yeah, I do. Cause it's on *my* terms! No fighting off drunk pieces of shit trying to feel me up in front of my own fucking parents.

She slams her hand into the steering wheel again.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

No going to school smelling like stale beer and dog shit! My life! My decisions! I don't care what I have to do to get out!

Payton grimaces as tears stream down Hannah's face. Marisol's eyes tear up as well.

MARISOL

I can't leave my family, Hannah.

HANNAH

Who the fuck asked you to?

Payton looks from Hannah to Marisol, then back and her shoulders slump.

PAYTON

I did. Because she needed to get away. Because it wasn't supposed to be forever. Just til the money ran out.

Hannah bares her teeth in a bitter smile and nods, wiping the tears from her eyes.

HANNAH

I got three thousand dollars coming in a couple of hours, so screw both of you. Go home then, I'll take a fucking bus if I have to.

The three of them get quiet for a few beats. Marisol stares at her hands while Hannah glares straight ahead. Payton steps away from the truck, standing in the highway.

Payton stares at Hannah and works her jaw. She looks up as headlights approach, then walks up to Hannah's window.

PAYTON

Did you fuck him?

Hannah whips her head around to glare at Payton.

HANNAH

What?

PAYTON

Aaron. Fort Davis. Did you fuck him, Hannah?

Hannah looks away and Payton clenches her jaw.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Yeah. I'm going home.

Payton pushes away from the door and stalks to the back of the truck. The car flies past her, dangerously close.

EXT. RV PARK - LATE AFTERNOON - ESTABLISHING

The Toyota creeps down a short gravel road between sparse rows of RV's. Most of the RV's sit ready to hit the road at any moment.

One RV rests in the middle of the RV park with no clear intention of ever leaving again. The weight of the trailer has sunk it into the earth and dust and weeds fight for control underneath it.

A twisted mesquite tree speckles the red hood with shade as Hannah pulls up next to it and slides the truck into park. Gravel CRUNCHES under the tires.

Hannah stares at the RV, takes a deep breath, and lets it out slow. A faint TV BUZZ drifts on the air, but the place otherwise looks uninhabited.

Hannah opens the truck door softly, grabs a purple slouchy purse from the seat, and slings it over her shoulder. She presses it closed and approaches the trailer.

She knocks softly and JON TYLER'S VOICE is heard off screen.

JON (O.S.)

It's open.

Hannah takes another deep breath and enters the RV.

INT. RV - CONTINUOUS

The door sits in the middle of a miniature living room with two recliners and a flat screen TV. Thick blackout curtains hang over the small windows. Otherwise, the RV is completely bare.

Jon Tyler, 27 and just barely losing his lean physique, swivels the chair around to look at Hannah. He has gold-blond hair that sticks out all over his head and face like peach fuzz.

He mutes the TV and turns in his chair. He eyes Hannah up and down, a slight smile hovering around his lips, then clicks his tongue.

JON

Well shit, Aaron didn't say  
anything about you being a looker.  
Come on in.

Hannah grimaces as she pulls the door closed behind her. Jon grins.

JON (CONT'D)  
Sit down, sweetheart, you're not  
going anywhere for a while.

Jon walks into the bare kitchen and opens the mini fridge.

JON (CONT'D)  
What are you? Fifteen?

HANNAH  
I - I'm sixteen.

Jon pulls out two beers and hands her one. Hannah takes the beer and moves her weight from one foot to the other.

He gestures at the other recliner and pops open his beer as he sits down in his.

JON  
So you're Aaron's girl, huh?

Hannah pops open her beer and takes a big, nervous drink.

HANNAH  
Um, kinda.

JON  
Kinda?

HANNAH  
It's complicated.

Jon smiles at her again, then turns back to the TV and points the remote control at it. VOICES argue on the screen and Jon raises his own voice over it.

JON  
You can go ahead and put it on the  
counter.

He waves the remote at Hannah who blinks at him and reaches into her purse. She pulls out a large brick of cocaine and walks over to set it down on the counter.

JON (CONT'D)  
I'll check it out in a minute.

Jon waits until Hannah sits back down, then turns to level a stare at her.

JON (CONT'D)  
So those people you brought with  
you.

Hannah cringes, but hides it behind a drink of her beer.

JON (CONT'D)  
Do they know what you're doing  
here?

Hannah starts to say something, then SIGHS and nods.

HANNAH  
Yeah. They know.

Jon smiles at her, but his eyes go hard.

JON  
Not smart, sweetheart. Not smart at  
all.

Hannah takes another big swig off the beer.

HANNAH  
They're cool, though. I trust them  
with my life, you know?

JON  
Can't say that matters much to me,  
kid.

Hannah nods and swallows hard.

JON (CONT'D)  
So here's my problem. There's some  
other people out there who know  
where this place is.

HANNAH  
They don't -

Jon holds up his hand and shakes his head at her.

JON  
- This place is a weigh station.  
People bring goods in, they bring  
'em out. Nobody comes or goes  
without carrying.

Jon looks over at her and smiles, though his eyes still have that edge.

JON (CONT'D)  
Get what I'm saying?

Hannah nods and takes another drink.

HANNAH

You want me to take more.

Jon chugs his beer while she's talking, then shakes his head again and grins.

JON

They came in with you, they go out with you. And I don't work with anybody I haven't met.

Hannah swallows hard again and her eyes widen slightly.

JON (CONT'D)

Now you're gettin' it. So we're going to sit here and watch some Family Guy, then you're going to bring your friends over for dinner.

INT. RV - NIGHT

A pot of water and pasta noodles BUBBLES on the stove and a pan of hamburger meat SIZZLES in a skillet. Jon pops open a bottle of red pasta sauce and sloshes it into the skillet as a KNOCK sounds at the door.

He wipes his hands on his torn jeans and opens the door. He steps back to let Hannah, Marisol, and Payton cram themselves inside. Payton's head nearly brushes the ceiling.

JON

Well I'll be damned. A whole bunch of good lookin' girls just walked into my house. And it ain't even my birthday.

Jon stares at the three of them with a crooked grin that fades slightly as his gaze finds Marisol. She cringes away from him and into the room. Hannah follows after her.

Payton scowls at Jon.

PAYTON

Do you actually expect us to eat that shit?

Jon meets Payton's gaze and his grin widens a bit. Hannah gapes at her.

JON

Well ain't you a feisty one?

His eyes go hard when she continues to scowl, then he turns back to the food and stirs the meat and sauce with a wooden spoon.

JON (CONT'D)

Here I am, slaving over a stove, so you poor girls don't have to eat gas station food again.

Payton shoots Hannah a look, but Hannah ignores it.

PAYTON

I'm a vegetarian.

Jon gives a wry LAUGH then turns a scowl of his own on Payton.

JON

I don't really give a shit. You ladies sit down and make yourselves comfortable.

Hannah immediately drops herself into one of the recliners. Marisol moves to sit in the other one, but Payton remains standing.

PAYTON

It's been a long trip, I prefer to -

JON

- I said sit the fuck down.

Jon continues to stir the sauce as Payton moves to sit down on the floor near the recliners.

JON (CONT'D)

Come sit by me, sweetheart. I won't have a guest sittin' on the floor.

Payton freezes and clenches her jaw, then squeezes past Jon to sit at the cramped kitchen table. Jon turns around and holds the wooden spoon out in front of him and blows on it.

He puts the spoon to his lips for a taste, then MOANS in exaggerated pleasure. He locks his steel gaze on Payton and moves toward her. She clenches her jaw again and holds her breath as he gets closer.

Marisol watches in open fear and Hannah scoots to the edge of her seat, eyes wide.

Jon holds the spoon out to Payton, his expression unreadable. She licks a bit of the sauce off of the spoon and he breaks out in a smile.

JON (CONT'D)  
See! Good enough to convert a  
vegetarian!

He gives the sauce another stir, then lifts the pot of pasta and pours it into a strainer in the sink. Marisol bites her lip as Jon turns to look at her and Hannah.

JON (CONT'D)  
Well don't be so shy, girls. You're  
gonna be here a while. I know  
Hannah here. What about you two?

Marisol and Payton share a look and Payton starts to open her mouth.

MARISOL  
Mi nombre es Marianne. Como es tu  
nombre?

Jon whips his head toward her and scowls.

JON  
Don't you speak English?

Before Marisol can respond, Payton speaks up.

PAYTON  
No, she doesn't.

JON  
So you guys speak Spanish?

PAYTON  
Si. No entiendo Espanol?

JON  
No I don't fucking speak Spanish.

Payton smirks until he whirls around to face her.

JON (CONT'D)  
You are trying my patience, you  
little twit. Y'all are gonna speak  
English in my house.

Hannah stares hard at Payton.

HANNAH  
Payton, just shut the fuck up.

Payton narrows her eyes and works her jaw.

JON

There we go. Well, Payton, I think you want to listen to your friend. Let's all just have a nice meal, then we can talk business.

The girls remain silent as Jon fills four bowls with noodles and sauce and pokes a fork into each of them.

He hands Hannah and Marisol each a bowl, then plops one in front of Payton before grabbing the other and sliding onto the narrow bench across from her.

Jon shoves a huge bite into his mouth and sucks up the noodles in loud slurps. Payton curls her lip in disgust. Jon jabs his fork at her.

JON (CONT'D)

You better eat every fucking bite. I don't waste food in this house.

Payton slowly picks up her fork and swirls it around in the noodles. Hannah sits forward in her seat again.

HANNAH

It's pretty damned good.

Jon turns and slides in the seat until his back is to the wall, giving him a good view of all three of them.

JON

Eat up!

The three of them pick at their food while Jon scarfs his.

INT. RV - LATER

Marisol and Payton now sit at the cramped table and Hannah sits across from Jon in the recliner. He lights a cigarette, takes a deep drag, and blows it out in a contented SIGH.

JON

You girls smoke?

Hannah nods. Marisol shakes her head. He reaches into his pack and throws one to Hannah and Payton. He takes another deep drag and stares hard at Payton.

JON (CONT'D)

You don't like dudes, huh? Is that it? You a dyke?

He turns to Hannah and grins.

JON (CONT'D)  
She gives off the dyke vibe.

Payton glares at him in the middle of lighting her cigarette.

HANNAH  
Nah, she likes guys. She just likes  
being an asshole more.

Hannah gives a weak smile as he LAUGHS. Marisol jumps and shrinks in on herself a little more.

JON  
I can respect a girl with an  
attitude. My ex had that same  
problem. Liked being an asshole.

He turns to give Payton a good long look.

JON (CONT'D)  
I guess it's good we ain't fuckin'.

Hannah cringes a little as Jon gets to his feet suddenly.

JON (CONT'D)  
Cause if we was fuckin', I'd put  
your head through that wall.

He lets his cigarette dangle between his lips as he opens a cabinet under the sink and squats in front of it. He grunts and squints as cigarette smoke goes into his eye and shoves his hand into the cabinet.

He rummages around for a beat, then pulls two tightly wrapped bricks of marijuana and slaps them down on the table between Marisol and Payton. The table wobbles with the force of it.

JON (CONT'D)  
Here's how this is going to work.

He snags the cigarette from his mouth with two fingers and stares down at Payton.

JON (CONT'D)  
Miss Hannah gets one and you get  
the other. Two grand a piece.

He throws a long, disgusted glance at Marisol. She stares forward and gives no indication that she understands him.

JON (CONT'D)  
I don't work with Mexicans.

Payton opens her mouth to say something, but snaps it shut as he leans toward her. The table groans in protest.

JON (CONT'D)  
Go ahead, sweetheart. Say your  
piece.

Payton cringes slightly.

PAYTON  
Where are we taking it?

Jon searches her face, then looks the rest of her over.

JON  
Shame you're so fuckin' skinny,  
Payton. You sure got a pretty face.

Payton stares him down, though she swallows hard and the cigarette trembles between her fingers.

JON (CONT'D)  
This shit needs to go to Nashville,  
girls.

He leans away again and Payton lets her breath out slow. Marisol shrinks away as Jon stands up and turns his gaze on her.

JON (CONT'D)  
I'll text you with a location if  
you make it that far.

All traces of humor leave his face as he glowers down at Marisol. His hand clenches into a fist and Payton tenses, her hand gripping the table like she's ready to leap out of her seat.

JON (CONT'D)  
Make sure you tell your little spic  
friend that if she blabs, I'll cut  
her fucking throat. Goes for the  
rest of you, too.

Marisol bites her lip as he jerks toward her before crossing the room to throw himself on the recliner.

JON (CONT'D)  
Now get the fuck out of my house.

INT. TOYOTA - NIGHT

The girls ride in silence. Payton chews the inside of her cheek and Marisol drives, her knuckles white on the steering wheel.

Hannah stares out the windshield, holding her body rigid between them.

Marisol takes a deep breath and speaks without looking at either of them.

MARISOL

Thank you, Payton.

Payton looks over at her, then out the window, bending her elbow against the door. They get quiet again for a few beats, then Hannah SIGHS.

HANNAH

I'm sorry. For what it's worth.

Marisol continues to stare forward. Payton gives a wry smirk and picks at her tooth with a nail.

EXT. HIGHWAY ACCESS ROAD. NIGHT

The Toyota creeps along the access road and makes its way onto the main highway. A cloud of white smoke billows out of the exhaust pipe beneath the darkened tail light.

INT. TOYOTA - NIGHT

Payton sleeps pillowed against her sweatshirt again. Marisol drives, one hand cradling the side of her head with her elbow propped on the door. Hannah stares out the windshield between them.

MARISOL

She would do anything for you, you know.

Hannah glances at Marisol.

HANNAH

What?

MARISOL

Payton. You know how she feels about all this. You promised things would be different. Life would be better.

HANNAH

What the hell do you care? You didn't even want to leave.

Marisol nods slowly, then glances over at Payton.

MARISOL

But she did.

Hannah shakes her head and gives a wry smile.

HANNAH

No she didn't. Y'all only planned on staying til the money ran out.

MARISOL

She didn't lie to you. She lied to me.

HANNAH

Whatever. I should have known when she left her stash at home.

Marisol shakes her head and she gives a sad smile.

MARISOL

You don't deserve her, you know.

Hannah's eyes narrow and she looks over at Marisol.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

She left her stash at home because she doesn't need it out here. Because we were supposed to get away from all of that.

Hannah frowns and turns back to the road.

HANNAH

I don't buy it. Payton will be on the first bus home once we dump this shit. I'd bet money on it.

MARISOL

And you're just going to let her?

HANNAH

Payton does whatever the hell she wants to.

Marisol glances at Payton over Hannah's head and frowns.

MARISOL

I hope you're right.

EXT. CITY - EARLY MORNING

Morning sunlight bounces around the city, reflecting off shining paint jobs and massive glass buildings. The Toyota creeps among them, covered in dust and dents.

INT. TOYOTA - CONTINUOUS

Payton continues to sleep and Hannah's head rests against her shoulder.

Marisol leans forward to look out the windshield at the massive buildings and her foot taps the brake on accident. Hannah's head rolls forward and Payton's eyes pop open.

PAYTON

What's wrong? What happened?

Hannah looks around and Marisol leans back so she can look out the driver window instead. Payton sits up.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Where are we?

MARISOL

Little Rock.

PAYTON

What?

HANNAH

Are you serious? How long were we asleep?

Hannah looks over at Marisol in surprise and Payton scowls at her.

PAYTON

What the hell are you doing? You have to go home.

Marisol shakes her head.

MARISOL

Not yet I don't.

PAYTON

You're not going with us.

MARISOL

Yes I am.

PAYTON

You saw how that guy was, Mari. You do not want to get mixed up with these people.

Marisol sits back in her seat and concentrates on the road again.

MARISOL

I'm not going to. But I'm also not going to just abandon you two.

Hannah shakes her head.

HANNAH

Mari, you can't come with us. They don't like Mexicans. They're paranoid.

MARISOL

So I'll just stay out of the way. But I'm going with you until this is done.

Payton shakes her head.

PAYTON

It may never be done, Mari.

Hannah looks over at Payton.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

If we're dealing with another paranoid psycho like Jon, we could be doing this shit for a while.

MARISOL

You don't know that and I'm not leaving until we find out. My dad isn't going to be home until Monday. I can wait that long.

Payton opens her mouth to argue, but Hannah beats her to it.

HANNAH

Mari. You don't have to do this. I got us into this mess, I'll get us out.

MARISOL

Yes you will. And I'll be there to help as long as I can.

Payton SIGHS.

PAYTON

Mari -

MARISOL

- I'm not going home, so just drop it.

INT. TRUCKSTOP CAFE - MIDDAY

The cafe has seen a few decades without a remodel. Thin wood-colored paneling covers the walls of the main dining room. Huge windows provide a view of the caliche truck lot and the highway beyond.

The tables cram as close together as possible, with mismatched chairs and ripped vinyl booths filling in what space is left. Black and white linoleum covers the floor.

Marisol and Payton sit across from each other in a booth, sharing a plate of french fries. Payton has her back to the window, her feet stretched out on the seat in front of her.

PAYTON

My legs hurt so bad. That truck is tiny.

Marisol takes a sip from a glass of soda near her arm.

MARISOL

No, you're just an Amazon.

Payton shoves a few fries into her mouth and pulls her feet up as Hannah slides onto the bench next to her. Hannah grabs a couple of fries and munches on them, throwing Payton a nervous glance. She speaks with her mouth full.

HANNAH

I just got off the phone with Aaron.

Payton turns to sit right and takes a drink of her soda.

PAYTON

So?

HANNAH

He just got to Texarcana. Wants us to wait for him here.

PAYTON

Why the hell should we? We're making good time thanks to Mari.

Marisol nods and eats a couple of fries. Hannah takes a drink and gives a nervous shrug.

HANNAH

Because he knows these people. If anyone can help us get out of this bullshit, it's him.

Payton turns to level a glare at her.

PAYTON

He's the idiot who got us into this.

HANNAH

He was just trying to help us get some money.

Payton shakes her head and shoves a handful of fries into her mouth.

MARISOL

So how long are we going to have to wait?

Hannah turns to look at Marisol.

HANNAH

Few hours, tops.

Payton takes a huge swig of soda and wipes her hands on her pants.

PAYTON

If he's on the bus, it'll take longer than that.

HANNAH

So we take a break from driving for a bit. It's no big deal.

Payton snorts.

PAYTON

We're sitting in the middle of fucking nowhere with four pounds of pot. But by all means, let's wait for your fucking boyfriend.

Hannah scowls at Payton then peers around the room.

HANNAH

Sh! He's not my boyfriend, damn it.

Marisol leans back in her seat and shrugs.

MARISOL  
I wouldn't mind a break from the  
road.

She slides across the bench and holds her hand out to Payton.

MARISOL (CONT'D)  
I need to call my Papa.

Payton hands over the phone and nods. Marisol exits the diner, the tinkle of a small bell ringing after her.

PAYTON  
Fine. Let's rent a room and get  
showers. Sleep in a bed, maybe.

Hannah tries to catch Payton's eye, but is pointedly ignored. She slides across to where Marisol was sitting and Payton finally looks up at her.

HANNAH  
He's going to help us get out of  
this, Pay.

Payton eats a french fry.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
What the hell do you want from me?  
I said I was sorry.

Payton stares at her and chews.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
Grow up.

Hannah slides out of the booth, leaving Payton to finish the fries.

EXT. TRUCKSTOP CAFE - MIDDAY

Marisol steps through the door into blinding sunlight. She squints and walks around the side of the building, away from the windows.

Three trucks lounge in the dirt parking lot behind the cafe, their cabs empty and dark. Marisol leans against the side of the building as she pulls out her own phone and dials.

The RINGTONE echoes from inside the phone and Mari bites her lip.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Bueno.

MARISOL  
Bueno, Tonio.

The entire conversation is in Spanish.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Hey. Where are you?

MARISOL  
Little Rock.

A SIGH comes from the phone.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Mari. It is time to come home.

Mari nods, even though he can't see.

MARISOL  
I know, I just. I can't right now.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Why?

MARISOL  
I just can't.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
I won't keep covering for you. Papa  
is upset that you don't answer your  
phone when he calls.

Marisol SIGHS and slides down the wall a little.

MARISOL  
I just need a little more time.

Antonio goes silent for a couple of beats.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Mari, are you in trouble? Why can't  
you tell me?

Marisol bites her lip, then shakes her head.

MARISOL  
I'm not. They are.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Then it is time to come home! This  
has gone far enough.

MARISOL  
Not yet! Just a few more days!

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
Days?! Papa wants you home  
tomorrow!

Marisol's eyes well up with tears and she shakes her head.

MARISOL  
I can't, Tonio. I can't leave them  
like this.

ANTONIO  
Like what?! Marisol, if you're in  
trouble, you need to tell me. I  
will come get you.

MARISOL  
I'm fine. Just stop covering for  
me. I don't want Papa mad at you.

ANTONIO (V.O.)  
I don't like this at all. You were  
supposed to be gone three days! You  
were supposed to turn around after  
Dallas.

Marisol nods and pushes away from the wall.

MARISOL  
I know. I will be home as soon as I  
know they are okay.

Marisol hangs up on him in mid-sentence. She stares at the  
phone and lets her breath out in a shaky SIGH.

INT. MOTEL 6 ROOM - AFTERNOON

Two beds lie next to each other in the cramped room, light  
from a small lamp in the corner competes with the blinding  
sunlight pouring through the windows.

Payton leans against the headboard of one bed, flicking her  
finger across her phone. Hannah sits at the foot of the  
other, staring at the muted TV.

RUNNING WATER can be heard from the bathroom.

Hannah looks over at Payton and sighs.

HANNAH  
Will you please just say something.

Payton continues to stare at her phone.

PAYTON

As soon as this deal goes down.  
Mari and I are going home.

Hannah's face falls, but she narrows her eyes.

HANNAH

So how the fuck am I supposed to  
get to New York.

PAYTON

I thought you were taking a bus.

HANNAH

And I thought you said they could  
find us easier that way.

Payton gives a sarcastic laugh.

PAYTON

I just used mom's credit card for  
the room. If they wanted to find  
us, they could. You really think  
anyone's looking?

Hannah looks down at her hands in her lap.

HANNAH

Well your mom might since you stole  
her card.

Payton shakes her head and hops off the bed.

PAYTON

Nope. She'll cancel the card so I  
can't use it anymore, but she won't  
come after me. She told me that  
last time, remember?

Hannah nods and watches Payton open the door and light a  
cigarette.

HANNAH

So that's it? You're just going to  
leave?

Payton watches Hannah while she takes a drag and blows it out  
the door, then shrugs.

PAYTON

You could come back with us.

HANNAH  
No. I can't.

Payton watches Hannah's face for a beat, then shrugs.

PAYTON  
At least you'll have Aaron.

HANNAH  
Will you just stop?

Payton walks out the door.

PAYTON  
I'm going to find something to eat.

The RUNNING WATER stops as Payton closes the door behind her. Hannah SIGHS and glares at the TV while she turns up the volume.

INT. MOTEL 6 ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The curtains lie heavy against the window, blocking all but a few lines of bright light from outside. The single lamp does its best to illuminate the room.

Payton and Marisol sit on the edge of one bed, playing Rummy. The purple purse lies on the floor near Payton's feet.

Marisol growls as Payton lays down a set.

MARISOL  
Ugh! I needed that.

Payton grins at her and throws a card on the discard pile. Marisol watches her a beat, then looks down at her cards.

MARISOL (CONT'D)  
Are you really coming back with me?

Payton responds before she's finished asking.

PAYTON  
Yes.

MARISOL  
You're just going to leave her out here on her own.

PAYTON  
No. She's got Aaron.

MARISOL  
You don't really think she?

Payton shrugs and clenches her jaw.

PAYTON  
Why wouldn't she? She's had a crush  
on him forever.

MARISOL  
But I thought you -

PAYTON  
- no. She ain't a *dyke*.

Payton swallows hard. Marisol frowns at that and tries to catch Payton's gaze.

MARISOL  
Pay, she just said that because  
Tommy and the guys were picking on  
you two.

PAYTON  
Yeah, well, she made her choice. So  
that's that. Can we please just  
drop it?

MARISOL  
I just don't think she slept with -

PAYTON  
- Mari, please?

Marisol nods and bites her lip.

MARISOL  
So is there anything fun to see in  
Nashville?

PAYTON  
No idea. We could hang out a bit  
and see. If everything goes right.

Marisol nods then looks up at Payton again.

MARISOL  
Do you think Aaron can help us?

Payton shakes her head hard.

PAYTON

No. He's a useless drunk and a user. These people don't have patience for idiots like him.

MARISOL

Couldn't we just get him to take it?

Payton shakes her head again.

PAYTON

No. Jon will have told them to expect two - or even three - girls. Though I wouldn't count on him mentioning you.

She looks up at Marisol and gives a wry smile.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

These people are scared shitless of the cartels, so they're assholes to every Mexican they see.

Marisol shrugs.

MARISOL

Not like I care. He was a worthless shit.

Payton looks up at her and grins.

PAYTON

Now don't you go back home talking like that.

Marisol grins back at her, then suddenly frowns.

MARISOL

I hope they don't get pulled over.

Payton shrugs.

PAYTON

At least they aren't carrying the pot.

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - EVENING

Fluorescent lights cast the waiting passengers in grisly yellow-white. People lounge on the plastic chairs, twisting their bodies this way and that, trying to get comfortable.

Hannah leans against one wall, her hands behind her back, palms against the grimy drywall.

AARON MARKS, early twenties with a receding red hairline disguised by combing it forward, saunters through a terminal door near Hannah, a duffel bag hanging from one hand.

He swings his thin body in a bow-legged strut, his bony arms jutting out at the joints under his white tank top. His mouth opens in a wide grin when he sees Hannah, revealing a tooth or two missing in the back. His Texas accent makes him hard to understand at times.

AARON

Well ain't you a sight?

Hannah smiles back at him and pushes away from the wall. He tugs her into a hug that she returns with a slight grimace.

AARON (CONT'D)

Where's your little stalker?

Hannah shoots him a dirty look.

HANNAH

Don't. They're at the motel.

AARON

They? Little Mary made it?

HANNAH

Mari - and yes.

Hannah starts toward the door, leaving Aaron to hurry after her.

AARON

Wait up! My legs ain't used to walkin' that fast yet.

Hannah ignores him and pushes through the door to the parking lot.

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Cars park in sparse clumps along one side of the station. A few buses idle in the terminal and a handful of people stand nearby, smoking or flipping through their phones.

Hannah hurries toward the Toyota and yanks the door open. Aaron tosses his bag in the back of the truck and holds his hands out, palms up.

AARON

Hey now, what's the rush? I've been stuck on that bus for almost two days. Let me stretch my legs.

Hannah slides into the truck, so Aaron is forced to open the passenger door.

AARON (CONT'D)

Seriously, Hannah.

HANNAH

Payton and Mari are waiting.

AARON

So let 'em fucking wait.

Hannah shakes her head and shoves the keys in the ignition.

HANNAH

We can relax when we get to the motel.

Aaron SIGHS and slides into the truck. Hannah turns the key in the ignition and nothing happens. She tries again, and again nothing happens. She sags against the steering wheel.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Oh god damn it!

Aaron kicks his door open again.

AARON

Pop it.

Hannah fumbles with the handle, then pops the hood. Aaron unlocks it and lifts the hood to stare down at the engine. He wiggles the battery cables and lowers the hood to look at Hannah over it.

AARON (CONT'D)

Try it?

Hannah turns it over and only a slight click sounds.

AARON (CONT'D)

Yup, battery's dead.

Aaron looks around at the parking lot as he lowers the hood. Hannah gets out of the truck and looks around as well.

HANNAH

Should we just buy a new one?

Aaron shrugs and lights a cigarette.

AARON

You got that money from Jon, didn't you? Should just buy a new fucking car. This junker ain't gonna fit four people.

Hannah bites her lip and shakes her head.

HANNAH

This is Mari's dad's truck. We can't just get rid of it.

Aaron takes a drag and blows it out in a hard stream.

AARON

That truck ain't gonna make it much further, Hannah. It's got a slow radiator leak and the hoses are shot.

He leans against the truck and takes another drag.

AARON (CONT'D)

This truck has obviously been sitting for a while and y'all just put over six hundred miles on it. You're lucky it got this far.

Hannah spins around, scanning the parking lot, then takes off at a jog. She approaches a middle class family loading suitcases into their car. She gestures toward the truck.

The man looks over at the truck and shakes his head. The woman follows his gaze and they hurry into their car. Hannah turns back to the truck and SIGHS to see Aaron leaned against it, smoking a cigarette.

INT. MOTEL 6 ROOM - NIGHT

Marisol stands near the window and peeks through the curtains.

MARISOL

Where the hell are they?

Payton, playing solitaire on the bed, shrugs, though she holds her body tight with unease.

PAYTON

They can't be in any trouble. We have the drugs.

MARISOL

I just have a bad feeling it's the truck.

PAYTON

Then they'll have a long walk ahead of them. Nothing we can really do about it.

Marisol hugs herself and sits on the edge of the bed, staring at the TV.

MARISOL

How can you just sit there like that?

PAYTON

Nothing to do but wait.

MARISOL

What do we do if they never show up? How long are we supposed to wait?

PAYTON

We wait a day or two. If they don't show, then they probably ditched us and we can just go home.

Marisol turns around to frown at Payton.

MARISOL

You really think they would do that, don't you?

Payton shrugs and gathers up the cards. Just as she starts dealing a fresh hand, a KNOCK sounds at the door. Marisol jumps up and looks through the peep hole.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

It's them!

Payton continues to deal the cards.

Marisol throws the door open and Hannah and Aaron hurry inside. Aaron walks to the back of the room to throw his bag down. Hannah sits on the bed opposite Payton's.

HANNAH

So the battery died in the truck. Took us a fucking hour to find someone to give us a jump.

AARON

And you got a radiator leak. She been running hot?

Marisol nods.

MARISOL

A little, but I thought it was because the hoses were a little cracked.

AARON

Nope. It's gonna need fluid before we go anywhere else, but I give it a few hundred miles before it just blows.

Payton continues to deal cards. Marisol nods and throws her hands out in frustration.

MARISOL

Can you fix it?

Aaron nods and rests his hands on top of his head, his elbows bent.

AARON

Sure can, but I can already tell you there's gonna be more wrong with it. It's got an oil leak somewhere.

Marisol narrows her eyes at Aaron.

MARISOL

My dad has kept all our trucks running for years. I'm sure it's fine.

Aaron shrugs and lets his arms drop.

AARON

If you say so. It's still over twenty years old and you ain't gonna fit all four of us in that cab.

Payton continues to stare at her cards.

PAYTON

Who said we're taking you.

HANNAH

Payton.

PAYTON

What? This is our trip, it's our job. Why the hell should we bring a tag along.

AARON

Y'all need me, baby girl. I hate to break it to you.

Payton's head snaps up so fast her ponytail bounces.

PAYTON

Don't fucking call me that.

Aaron holds his hands up in surrender and leans back against the rickety dresser.

AARON

Look. No need to get all psycho on me. Y'all are in trouble and I know how to get you out. First thing you gotta do is ditch that truck.

MARISOL

I'm not ditching my dad's truck.

Hannah leans forward, resting her elbows on her knees.

HANNAH

She's going back home after all this, Aaron. She's going to need the truck.

Aaron gives a little LAUGH and shrugs.

AARON

Suit yourself. Don't see how we're going to fit.

PAYTON

I'll ride in back, cover up with blankets or something.

Marisol nods and Aaron shrugs. Hannah stares at her hands and Payton continues to play solitaire. Nobody speaks for a few beats, then Aaron SIGHS and pushes away from the dresser.

AARON

Well it's been a long ass trip. I'm going to kick it for the night. We should start out tomorrow.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bag of weed. He tosses it on the bed and Payton looks up from her cards.

AARON (CONT'D)

I think it's time we all smoke a little and relax. We got a bit of a trip ahead of us.

Aaron sits down on the edge of the bed and pulls a metal pipe out of his sock.

Payton nods, though she still glares at him, and Hannah gives Marisol a pointed look over Payton's head.

INT. MOTEL 6 ROOM - LATER

Payton and Marisol sit on the bed closest to the door, their backs against the headboard. Hannah leans against the headboard on the other side, one leg hanging off the edge of the bed.

Aaron stands at the foot of both of them, in the space between, swinging his arms and wagging his hips around in exaggeration.

Marisol and Hannah burst out laughing and even Payton smiles.

AARON

I'm serious! She was dancing like that against Tommy!

Aaron looks over at Marisol, his movements dragging.

AARON (CONT'D)

This is her brother, mind you!  
Nobody could stop laughing long enough to tell her to turn around!

Aaron plops down on the edge of Hannah's bed, grinning at them as they continue to giggle. He watches Marisol, then shakes his head and brings out the bag of weed again.

AARON (CONT'D)

Girl, you gotta hit this.

Payton shakes her head, though a lazy smile lingers around her lips.

PAYTON

She said she didn't want to.

Marisol, still giggling, shrugs at Aaron.

AARON

That was an hour ago. I'm asking her now.

Payton looks back at Marisol and draws her eyebrows together.

MARISOL

I don't think it's a big deal, Pay.  
We're supposed to be having fun,  
right?

PAYTON

But you said -

MARISOL

- This might be the last time I get  
to hang out with you guys.

Payton stares at her for a beat, then SIGHS.

PAYTON

If you say so.

AARON

Awesome!

Aaron stuffs a thick pinch of weed into the bowl and slides over to their bed.

AARON (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll hit it first. Watch what  
I do.

Aaron rolls the flame from a Bic across the green leaves and takes a big, deep draw from the pipe. Hannah scoots in front of him as he holds his breath and passes Payton the pipe.

Payton stares at the pipe, then back at Marisol.

PAYTON

You sure?

Aaron gives a half cough, then leans forward and blows the smoke from his lungs into Hannah's mouth.

Payton notices Marisol watching them and gestures with the pipe.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

You want to try it that way?

MARISOL

Yeah, I think that would be better.

Payton smiles and puts the pipe to her lips. Marisol leans forward to watch Payton as she pulls so hard on the pipe that she sucks the flame deep into the leaves.

Payton breathes deep, leans back to give her lungs more room to expand, and closes her eyes, smiling. She motions for Marisol to come closer.

Aaron and Hannah turn to watch as Payton leans forward until her and Marisol's lips are almost touching.

AARON  
Breathe in slow.

Payton glances up at Marisol's eyes, then focuses on their lips. She releases a slow stream of smoke, watching Marisol's face as she breathes it all in.

HANNAH  
Now hold your breath!

Marisol puffs her cheeks out, but can only hold her breath for a couple beats before a coughing fit hits her so hard that she gags. Hannah and Aaron laugh and Payton snickers as she hands Marisol a soda from the table between the beds.

PAYTON  
You okay?

Marisol nods though she continues to cough. She unscrews the cap and takes a big drink from the soda as Payton passes the pipe to Hannah.

Hannah stands while lighting the bowl and sits on the bed in front of Marisol and Payton. She raises her eyebrows at Marisol who shakes her head and cringes back a little.

Hannah turns to Payton who smiles and leans forward. Hannah's lips brush against Payton's as they share the hit, and linger.

Payton closes her eyes as she holds her breath and Hannah moves away, scanning Payton's face.

MARISOL  
So how do I know when it's ... Oh.

Payton opens her eyes and she, Hannah, and Aaron turn to look at Marisol. Payton grins as Marisol blinks a few times, then opens her eyes wide.

PAYTON  
Don't fight it. Just sit back,  
breathe, and watch the world. Smell  
it, listen to it, just ... let it  
happen.

Payton leans back against the headboard and pats the bed next to her. Marisol joins her in halting movements. She opens her eyes, though it seems to take effort, and looks around the room.

HANNAH

There you go.

Hannah moves back to the other bed and Aaron pulls a phone out of his pocket.

AARON

We need some music. That'll help.

Aaron sets the phone on the table between them. The Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Dosed" fills the room in a thin stream from the phone speaker.

Payton eyes Hannah and Aaron, then slowly turns to face Marisol.

Marisol rests with her head back against the headboard, her eyes closed again. Payton grins.

PAYTON

You alright there?

Marisol nods slowly and smiles a big, lazy smile.

MARISOL

Yeah ... I'm good.

Hannah laughs, which makes Marisol's eyes shoot open.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

Your laugh is like ... echoing.

Payton laughs and slaps her hand over her mouth. Aaron grins.

AARON

Yep, she's good.

INT. MOTEL 6 ROOM - NEAR DAWN

Marisol sleeps with her head buried under the covers and her back to the door, quiet snores escaping now and again. Aaron sprawls across the second bed, face down, snoring much louder.

Payton and Hannah sit near the open door, passing a cigarette between them. Hannah's eyes linger on Payton's face as she takes a drag and turns her head to blow it out the door.

HANNAH

I didn't sleep with him, Payton. We didn't go all the way.

Payton lets her head roll back to glare at Hannah.

PAYTON

Well that makes it better, then.

Hannah starts to glare back, then SIGHS.

HANNAH

I stopped him before anything happened. We kissed a little, but I pushed him away to go get a drink or something. I couldn't do it.

PAYTON

I really don't want to talk about this with him laying in your bed. You brought him, you can have him.

HANNAH

Why are you being like this? It's not like I'm going to marry him.

Payton lets the sarcastic mask crumble.

PAYTON

Why did you bring him? It was supposed to just be us.

HANNAH

I didn't bring him. He's going to Nashville with us then heading back with more.

Payton narrows her eyes at Hannah, who gives her a small smile.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I couldn't really tell you that without telling you why he's going to just up and leave.

PAYTON

You could've after we found out about the coke.

Hannah shrugs and takes the cigarette back.

HANNAH

You should have told me you didn't actually plan on finishing the trip.

Payton glances over at Marisol, closes her eyes, and opens them again to look at Hannah.

PAYTON

You know me better than that.

Hannah nods and glances over at Marisol too.

HANNAH

You should have just left her behind, Payton.

Payton shakes her head.

PAYTON

No. She needed to get out of that house, Hannah. You haven't been there since Mrs. E died.

Hannah frowns and nods.

HANNAH

Well, we'll get her home as soon as possible. She doesn't need to be in the middle of all this.

Payton nods and pushes to her feet. Beyond the open doorway, the sky begins to lighten with the coming morning.

PAYTON

We should get some sleep.

Hannah finishes off the cigarette and throws it out into the parking lot. Payton helps her to her feet and they stand in the doorway for a moment, staring into each other's eyes.

HANNAH

I'm not sleeping in that bed. Can I sleep next to you?

Payton swallows hard, then nods and steps into the room. Hannah closes the door softly and they creep over to the side of the bed without a Marisol-shaped lump.

Payton lies down and scoots back, holding the blanket open. Hannah slides onto the bed and lies down facing her. Hannah lays her cheek on her hands and smiles at Payton who just watches her. They speak in barely audible whispers.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I can't stand it when you're mad at me, you know.

PAYTON

Could have fooled me.

HANNAH

I was mad at you, too.

PAYTON

Are you still?

Hannah looks up at her and shakes her head.

HANNAH

Not really. Not if you're coming with me.

PAYTON

Of course I am. Even if you get hung up on some douchebag. I'd never leave ... you know that.

Hannah smiles and scoots closer. Payton watches her for a beat, then closes her eyes with a smile of her own.

INT. TOYOTA - MORNING

MUSIC blares through the cab, battling the ROAR of wind through the open windows. Payton and Hannah SING at the top of their lungs while Marisol drives with a half smile.

They drive like that for a few beats, then Marisol suddenly reaches over and turns down the music.

MARISOL

Shit! No.

Marisol brakes hard and pulls the truck onto the shoulder, continuing to curse as white smoke pours out from under the hood.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

No, damn it!

Hannah SIGHS and glances in the back of the truck where Aaron sits up and peers inside. He makes a very clear "I told you so" face and Payton flips him off.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER - CONTINUOUS

The morning sun glares off of every surface but the black asphalt of the highway. The four of them stand around the open hood of the Toyota squinting down at the engine as puffs of white smoke billow around them.

AARON

Yup. It's the head gasket. I told you there was more going on under there.

Payton rolls her eyes and Hannah looks over at Marisol, who looks like she's ready to cry.

HANNAH

What do we do?

AARON

We're going to have to get it towed off. You can't just leave shit on the side of the road. Cops will track you down.

HANNAH

Shit.

Payton watches Marisol, who stares at the engine then nods.

MARISOL

Okay, so we tow it. Then what?

AARON

We do like I said from the start. We buy a car, pay cash. You don't want a fucking credit trail with this shit.

PAYTON

I'll check Craigslist. One of you call a tow.

AARON

Might as well have em tow it to a junk yard.

Payton frowns at Marisol.

PAYTON

You okay?

Marisol gives a sardonic smile and an exaggerated shrug.

MARISOL

Papa is going to ground me for the rest of my life, but sure. I'm good.

Payton gives her an apologetic smile then scrolls through her phone.

Hannah frowns and looks around, nervous.

HANNAH

So what do we do with ... ?

She looks at Aaron, but he holds up a finger and turns around to talk to the tow company. Payton shrugs.

PAYTON

I'll carry it. Anything happens, you guys didn't know I had it.

HANNAH

Bull shit.

She looks over at Aaron, who has walked a ways away.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Let Aaron carry it.

Payton looks over at him and snickers.

PAYTON

See what he says, sure.

The girls lean against the truck, their backs to the highway, and huddle over Payton's phone as she scrolls through Craigslist entries.

HANNAH

There!

She points and Payton taps an image of an older, electric blue Volkswagen camper van.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

How much?

Payton looks closer at her phone.

PAYTON

Twelve hundred. Good condition, engine runs great. It's even got a bed.

Payton holds the phone so that Hannah can see, then holds it out for Marisol. They look over the pictures as Aaron rejoins them.

AARON  
What did you find?

Payton holds the phone up to him and he grimaces, which just makes her smile even bigger.

PAYTON  
Oh yeah. We're getting it.

HANNAH  
It has a bed, so no more motel rooms.

Aaron shrugs and throws his hands out.

AARON  
Why the hell not? Ain't never rode in one before.

Payton types out a reply to the owner and glances up at Aaron.

PAYTON  
So who's going to carry the stuff?  
Or should we stash it?

AARON  
Somebody's gonna need to carry it.  
Better to get busted than lose it.

Hannah pushes away from the truck and dusts off the back of her pants.

HANNAH  
So I'll carry it.

Aaron laughs and shakes his head.

AARON  
Girl, you ever walked around with thirty k worth of drugs on your back? Try talking to a cop like that?

Hannah's eyes go wide and Aaron laughs again.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Thought so.

PAYTON

You're the pro, why don't you carry it?

Aaron turns to give Payton a sarcastic smile.

AARON

Cause if I get busted with *your* drugs, you're as fucked as I am.

Payton turns to give Hannah a pointed smile.

PAYTON

Sure. Makes sense.

Payton reaches over the side of the truck, hefts one of the bags onto her back, and slings the purple purse over her shoulder.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Let's do this.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - A FEW HOURS LATER

Aaron stands in the covered parking lot of a large apartment complex, talking to an OLD MAN with long white hair and a protruding stomach under his faded black t-shirt.

Marisol, Hannah, and Payton huddle around the corner of one of the buildings near the exit to the complex. Payton leans out to peek and grins.

PAYTON

He's giving him the money.

Hannah leans out as Payton walks back and smiles as well.

HANNAH

I can't believe we actually found one of those!

Marisol gives a weak smile, but bites her lip and turns away.

MARISOL

Papa is going to kill me.

Payton frowns and throws an arm over Marisol's shoulder.

PAYTON

That truck was old and you said he never used it.

Marisol shakes her head, though she leans into Payton's arm.

MARISOL

It doesn't matter. I'll have to tell him where it is and everything that happened.

Payton starts to say something, but Marisol cuts her off.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

Not everything, of course. Just about leaving and where we've been.

Payton nods and lets her arm fall away from Marisol's shoulders.

PAYTON

He loves you, Mari. You know it's not going to be too bad.

MARISOL

He's never going to let me see you again, that's for sure.

Payton and Hannah share a look over Marisol's head and Payton LAUGHS.

PAYTON

After this bullshit, I can't say I blame him.

Marisol LAUGHS a little with her, but heaves a heavy SIGH at the end of it.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN VAN - NIGHT

Payton drives with both hands resting on the large steering wheel, a cigarette resting between her first and second fingers.

Marisol sleeps against the passenger side, a pillow plopped against the glass and a blanket pulled up over her shoulders.

Hannah lies on the unfolded bench in the back of the van, staring out the two square windows in the door.

Aaron sprawls on the floor, his feet protruding between the bucket seats in the front, his head pillowed on one of the backpacks.

Aaron reaches up and tugs at Hannah's shirt. She hangs her head over the edge and looks down at him.

AARON

You sleepy?

Hannah shakes her head and glances up at Payton.

HANNAH

You?

AARON

Nope. You wanna make out?

Hannah rolls her eyes and rolls onto her back again.

AARON (CONT'D)

Oh come on! I was kidding.

Aaron pushes himself into a sitting position and turns toward her.

AARON (CONT'D)

So what happened, anyway? You're acting weird.

HANNAH

I'm not acting weird.

AARON

You've been pissy with me since I got here.

HANNAH

I'm not pissy. There's just a lot going on.

Aaron tries to take Hannah's hand but she pulls it away. He scowls at her, but she continues to watch the ceiling.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I have a lot on my mind, Aaron.

Aaron pulls himself up to sit on the bench next to her.

AARON

So let me distract you for a bit.

Hannah shakes her head and pulls away from him.

HANNAH

We should try to sleep. One of us is going to have to drive next.

AARON

That's not for a few hours, though. I promise I'll only distract you for like one.

Hannah grimaces and shoots him a look.

HANNAH

I want to try and get some sleep.

Aaron heaves an annoyed SIGH and slides back down onto the floor of the van.

AARON

Fucking cock tease.

Hannah glares in his direction but turns over to face the back windows again.

INT/EXT. VOLKSWAGEN VAN/RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - LATE MORNING

Hannah sits in the driver's seat, her feet up on the dashboard. Aaron stands in the open sliding door, his hands against the roof. He leans forward between them and tosses words at Hannah.

AARON

So you gonna tell me what the hell is up with you? A few days ago, you were practically throwing yourself at me, now I get the cold shoulder?

Hannah turns around to shoot him a dirty look.

HANNAH

I never threw myself at you.

AARON

Bull shit. You were the one that kissed me, princess.

HANNAH

I was drunk and on E. I would have made out with a couch cushion.

AARON

Whatever.

Aaron pulls himself out of the van and looks over the top of it as Payton and Marisol exit the restaurant with bags of food.

AARON (CONT'D)

So that's it, huh? You just gonna blow me off after that night?

Hannah watches Payton walk toward them and smiles.

HANNAH

Nothing happened and you know it.

AARON

Don't mean it won't happen.

HANNAH

Yeah well, don't hold your breath.

Aaron scowls at her, then gives Marisol a big smile as she hands him a paper bag spotted with grease. He says her name "mah-ree" instead of Mary, for once.

AARON

Thank you, Mari.

Payton slides into the passenger seat and hands Hannah another greasy bag, balancing a tray of drinks in the other. She hands out drinks and food to everyone and they sit around the van, eating in silence.

In the middle of a drink, Hannah suddenly jumps and shoves her hand into her pocket. She pulls out the old phone, looks at it then up at Payton.

HANNAH

It's Jon. He texted me an address.

Aaron reaches his hand toward her and Hannah drops the phone into his palm. He looks at the address, screws up his face and hands the phone back to Hannah.

AARON

I had a feeling that's where we'd be going.

Payton and Hannah turn around to look at him.

AARON (CONT'D)

Just some old hag I can't stand working with.

MARISOL

Why? What's wrong with her?

Aaron sits back and shrugs, shoving fries into his mouth. He speaks without any regard to the food falling out.

AARON

She's a fucking psycho. Runs a whole neighborhood in the burbs. Moves more drugs than anyone this side of the Appalachians.

He swallows his food mostly whole and washes it down with a swig of soda.

PAYTON

Well maybe she'll be more professional than that asshat.

Aaron nods emphatically in the middle of another bite. Hannah's phone goes off again and she looks down at the screen.

HANNAH

Shit.

She hands Payton the phone. Payton looks at it while taking a drink of her soda. The text reads: "bring your friends along. She's got a bone to pick with Aaron."

Payton frowns at the screen and Hannah spins around to face Aaron.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Did you tell Jon you were with us?

Aaron nods again and swallows his bite.

AARON

Honestly? Y'all are so fucking green you freaked him out. I had to tell him I was meeting up with you so he didn't hunt you down.

Payton whirls around to scowl at him.

PAYTON

And you didn't think you should tell us that a paranoid psychopath might hunt us down and kill us?

AARON

I took care of it.

Marisol watches the exchange, her eyes wide.

MARISOL

I thought they didn't want to work with Mexicans.

Aaron turns to grimace at her.

AARON

Tammy don't give a shit about Mexicans. Hell, half the ones that come through Nashville are scared shitless of her.

HANNAH

Just great.

Payton turns around to face them and gives Marisol a reassuring smile.

PAYTON

People in this business tend to be paranoid.

AARON

With good reason.

PAYTON

But if things went bad all the time, it wouldn't be worth doing business.

AARON

Yeah, she's got a point. Bodies piling up tend to leave a trail.

Payton glares at Aaron. Marisol CHUCKLES nervously and takes another bite of her burger. Hannah turns around and gives Marisol a half-hearted smile.

HANNAH

I'm sure it'll turn out fine.

Everyone returns to eating in silence.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD NASHVILLE - AFTERNOON

Fresh washed cars line the rows of meticulous landscaped homes with similar paint jobs. Basketball backboards hover over paved driveways or stand off to one side of yards. An open garage door shows different sized bicycles lined along one wall.

The camper van rumbles down the street, a puff of black smoke dissipating almost as soon as it leaves the tailpipe.

A man standing over his lawn mower looks up as they drive past and quickly looks down again. The curtains jerk closed over a window in another house.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN VAN - CONTINUOUS

Hannah and Payton ride in the front of the van and Marisol and Aaron ride in back. The four of them try to appear natural as they stare around the neighborhood in awe.

PAYTON

Are you sure you got the right place?

HANNAH

Yeah.

AARON

This looks like about right. It's been a while since I been here, but it looks familiar.

MARISOL

This is not at all what I was expecting.

Hannah glances back at her and nods.

HANNAH

Seriously. This is scary.

PAYTON

Like we just drove into a Stephen King movie or some shit.

AARON

Worse.

Aaron turns to watch a woman jogging.

AARON (CONT'D)

These people know exactly what's going on. Some of them work for Tammy and they're all too scared to do anything to stop her.

Hannah stares at her phone, then up at the addresses.

HANNAH

Here. Where that black car is.

A black Lexus sits alone in the driveway of a two story, pastel pink house. The lawn, perfect green in a sea of varying shades of yellow and brownish green, leads to a well-kept front porch.

Flower pots and bird baths sprawl around the sides of the house and line the walkway from the driveway to the door.

PAYTON

Huh. Are you serious?

HANNAH

Yep, fifteen eighty Poplar.

They all look around another beat or so.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Wow.

AARON

Well, we need to get inside.

Aaron pulls the van door open and the girls share terrified glances.

EXT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE - ESTABLISHING

The four of them walk up the driveway, avoiding the grass. Hannah clutches the purple purse tight against her side as they pile onto the porch and Aaron knocks on the large, white wooden door.

The door swings open and TAMMY PARKER, for all appearances a portly, middle aged housewife with greying blonde hair and bright blue eyes, stands in the open doorway.

Her eyes dance with amusement as she sees Aaron.

TAMMY

Well hell, I didn't realize we were having a party.

Aaron smiles, though his nervousness shows in the way he gives Tammy a wide berth when she stands aside to let them in. Marisol hangs back a beat until Tammy flashes her a warm smile.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Don't be scared sweetheart. I don't bite.

Marisol offers her a polite smile in return and follows the others inside.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tammy closes the door behind the group and walks into the kitchen. The four of them stand in the entry way staring. The house is everything one would expect based on the exterior.

A large mirror hangs on the wall opposite the door with a long accent table beneath it. A vase filled with fresh flowers shares space with a ceramic bowl that holds a set of keys and a pile of unopened mail.

A rose-patterned rug hugs the floor beneath their feet with a line of shoes hovering just at the edge of it. Payton stares at the shoes while the others look around.

A pair of house shoes, men's tennis shoes, men's dress shoes, men's sketchers, and another pair of tennis shoes belie the empty silence of the house.

TAMMY

Please take your shoes off. I don't like people trackin' shit on my carpets. And don't hide out by the door. Makes me nervous.

Aaron is the first one to kick off his shoes and line them up next to the others. Payton follows, with Hannah and Marisol hurrying after.

Aaron leads them into the dining area with a view of the kitchen. A pristine dining table and chairs sits beneath a large, modern chandelier. The mauve curtains and table runner match in color and pattern.

Tammy stands in the kitchen and waves them to sit down as she pours iced tea into tall glasses. Aaron takes a seat at one end of the table and the girls follow suit, shuffling their feet and sharing terrified glances.

Tammy looks up at them and LAUGHS.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

I see Aaron has been telling stories. He got you poor girls all scared of old Tammy, don't he?

Marisol stares at her hands and Hannah offers a weak smile, but Payton just keeps watching Tammy.

AARON

I didn't say much, Miss Tammy. Just told them you wasn't someone to mess around with.

Tammy grins at that and picks up three of the glasses - one in each hand with the third held between them with her middle fingers. She sets them down on the table and hands them out to the girls.

TAMMY

I don't think these girls would be here if they were into messin' around. Ain't that right? So go ahead, introduce yourselves.

Marisol and Hannah smile and even Payton cracks a small one as they introduce themselves.

HANNAH

Hannah, ma'am.

MARISOL

Marisol - you can call me Mary.

PAYTON

Payton.

Tammy smiles and heads back toward the kitchen as they talk. She grabs the last two glasses and walks back around the counter to plop them down on the table. She settles into the chair at the head of the table with a heavy SIGH.

AARON

Thank you, ma'am.

Hannah, Marisol, and Payton all talk over each other.

HANNAH

Yes, thank you.

MARISOL

Thank you.

PAYTON

Thanks.

Tammy smiles at them and nods.

TAMMY

Sure thing. I know it's been a long trip.

Tammy lifts a small black leather handbag off the floor and roots around for a matching cigarette case. She puts a Virginia Slim between her lips and lights it with a lighter cased in a gold and gem encrusted cover.

She takes a deep drag and blows the smoke above her head.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

You can smoke in here if you want to.

Tammy gets up to grab an ashtray while Payton and Hannah both light a cigarette. Marisol sits quietly at the end, watching her hands.

AARON

Can I get one of those?

He holds his hand out to Hannah who tosses him one. Tammy watches the exchange as she sits down and shakes her head.

TAMMY

As much money as you make and you can't even afford your own smokes. Boy, you gotta stop sampling the product.

Aaron smiles as he lights up and Tammy narrows her eyes before turning back to the girls.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Alright, let's go ahead and get the business out of the way. You got two pounds of the green shit, right?

Hannah nods and hurries to pick the purse up off the floor near her feet. She sets it on the table and looks up at Tammy.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Now that is a gorgeous bag!

HANNAH

Thank you.

Hannah opens the bag, then hesitates. Tammy waves her on, so she pulls the two bricks out and sets them on the table. Marisol's eyes lock on the drugs and get a little wider. Tammy watches her with a quick frown before turning to the bricks.

She gets to her feet and pulls a scale out of a cabinet, her cigarette dangling between her lips, one eye squinted against the smoke. She weighs the drugs then nods and shouts, the sudden raised voice making everyone jump.

TAMMY

Charlie! Get your ass up here! Lazy son of a bitch. I told him y'all were comin'.

Everyone waits in silence until CHARLIE, a thin, well-dressed teenaged boy with sandy blonde hair shuffles into the room.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Boy, you ever make me yell like that in front of company again ...

Charlie cringes.

CHARLIE  
 Sorry, ma'am. We were ...

Tammy's scowl melts away and she nods.

TAMMY  
 Alright, well take this down with  
 the rest. Tell the boys to hurry it  
 up. I want that shit moved out of  
 here before tonight.

Charlie nods and hesitates as he looks up at the group  
 sitting at the table.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
 Chop chop!

Charlie hurries off and Tammy turns to the others at the  
 table.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
 There. Now that that mess is out of  
 the way. Let's get to know each  
 other, shall we?

She gestures for the four of them to follow her through  
 another door.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tammy leads them into a large living room with matching  
 couches lining three walls and fashionable coffee tables  
 resting in front of them. A large open space gapes in the  
 center of the room, accented by a crocheted rag rug.

Tammy makes her way to a well-worn couch in one corner and  
 settles against the arm with a soft grunt. She stubs her  
 cigarette out in an ashtray and lights another, gesturing for  
 them to sit down.

TAMMY  
 Aaron, why don't you go see if  
 Charlie and the boys need some  
 help? I'd like to chat with the  
 girls, here.

Aaron frowns and stops in the middle of lowering himself onto  
 a couch near Hannah. Tammy gives him a quick, cheeky smile  
 that fades as soon as he shrugs and heads back through the  
 door they came from.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Finally! That boy gets on my nerves just by being in the room! How does he not drive you girls bat shit?

Payton barks out a LAUGH, then slaps her hand over her mouth and her eyes go wide. Tammy CHUCKLES.

HANNAH

He's just around cause we need him.

Tammy frowns at that and blows a puff of smoke out in a huff.

TAMMY

The hell you do. You seem like smart girls, you don't need no worthless shit hangin' around.

She ashes her cigarette in the ashtray and Payton pulls out another. Marisol, sitting at the opposite end of the couch, continues to stare at her hands. Tammy glances over at her, then leans back.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Jon told me a little about you girls already.

Payton frowns at that, but Theresa waves a dismissive hand.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

It's his job to inform on everyone who comes into this little family. Tell me why you left home, ladies.

HANNAH

We uh ...

Hannah looks over at Payton who stares hard at Tammy a moment then leans forward, her elbows on her knees.

PAYTON

Because we ain't got shit back home worth stickin' around for.

TAMMY

Don't you got families?

Payton looks at Hannah then at Marisol.

PAYTON

This is my family. But Mari here, she wants to get back home. We were just trying to get some money to buy her a bus ticket.

Tammy nods and looks over at Marisol.

TAMMY

Baby girl, I ain't met a person who didn't belong in this life more than you don't. You got a good family back home?

Marisol swallows hard and nods, tears filling her eyes.

MARISOL

Yes ma'am. My Papa and two brothers look after me.

TAMMY

And your ma?

Marisol smiles slightly and shakes her head.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Damn girl, I'm sorry.

MARISOL

It's okay. Thank you.

TAMMY

Recent too, huh?

Marisol nods and bites her lip. Tammy watches her a beat then ashes her cigarette again, regarding the girls. Hannah and Payton share a relieved look and Marisol settles back, a little more comfortable.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

We'll get you headed back that way today, then. Don't take this the wrong way, but you just don't got the chops for this line of work.

MARISOL

No ma'am, I sure don't.

Tammy nods again and gives her a warm smile.

TAMMY

So I'm guessing miss Hannah here didn't clue you two in ahead of time, did she?

Payton frowns and Marisol looks away. Tammy's eyes stare straight into Hannah.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

What made you decide you wanted to run drugs with a useless git like Aaron, then?

Hannah blinks and swallows hard.

HANNAH

I just wanted to get the hell out of that place, to be honest, ma'am. He was offering me a means to an end, the way I saw it.

Tammy nods and takes another drag, holds it a beat, then blows it out in a stream above her head.

TAMMY

You fuckin' that boy?

Hannah scowls and shakes her head quickly.

HANNAH

No ma'am, I'm not. We made out at a party once. That's all.

Tammy nods slowly.

TAMMY

So you're runaways. You got folks gonna be looking for you, then?

Payton clenches her jaw and Hannah looks at her hands.

PAYTON

No ma'am. My mom deals for Kenny out in West Texas. She wouldn't want the cops crawling all over.

Tammy's eyebrows shoot up into her hairline.

TAMMY

No shit. No wonder you look comfortable in the middle of all this.

Payton shrugs and sits back against the couch, ashing into the palm of her hand and rubbing it into her jeans.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

And you?

Hannah looks up at her and shrugs.

HANNAH

Not likely. They got two younger boys to look after and they barely know when I'm not home anyway.

PAYTON

They're fuckin' drunks. Her dad beats the shit out of her all the time, so they're used to her running off.

Tammy regards them in silence for a couple beats.

TAMMY

So you girls are bent on the east coast, then?

Hannah and Payton nod, though Payton gives a little shrug.

PAYTON

Can't be worse than some of the shit we've already dealt with.

Tammy watches her for a moment then takes a last drag off her cigarette and stubs it out.

TAMMY

Well let me tell you, girls. Cost a livin' out there is about double what it is round here. You got jobs lined up?

Hannah looks to Payton who sits up straight and nods. Marisol shifts in her seat and glances up at them, then immediately back at her hands.

PAYTON

We've got some work lined up.

Tammy raises an eyebrow.

TAMMY

That so? Anybody I know?

Payton shakes her head and ashes into her hand again.

PAYTON

Nah, it's legit work. Shit pay, but it'll keep us off the streets.

Tammy's eyebrow stays raised and she settles back against the cushions again.

TAMMY

You're a horrible liar, little girl. But I get what you're trying to say.

Hannah shoots Payton a look, but Payton ignores it. She accepts the ashtray from Tammy and stubs her butt out.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

It's a shame, though. I could use girls like you around here. I've got some clientele you'd be perfect for.

PAYTON

We ain't dealin'. This was a one-time thing.

Payton speaks so vehemently that both of Tammy's eyebrows shoot up again.

TAMMY

Alright. No need to get rude, kiddo. Just wanted to make sure we understand each other.

Payton's scowl gradually fades and she nods.

HANNAH

Payton's just cranky cause it's been a long trip.

PAYTON

Hannah.

HANNAH

What? You're being an asshole.

Tammy LAUGHS, her belly bouncing a bit.

TAMMY

She's fine. You're both fine. I'll get you your money for running for Jon. I'm also going to say this.

She sits forward a bit and gathers all their gazes with a long look at each of them.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Once you walk out of this house for good, you're going to forget all about it. I trust you girls aren't going to go flapping your lips.

She reaches for her cigarette case again.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
However. If you do.

She lights a cigarette.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
I can promise you I'll hear it. I  
got pets like Jon all over.  
Consider this your once in a  
lifetime opportunity.

She sets her cigarette case down and settles back again.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
You girls want to stay out of the  
business, I'll give you that  
chance, but only the one.

Payton and Hannah nod emphatically and Marisol lets her  
breath out slow.

TAMMY (CONT'D)  
Now. I want you girls to stay here  
for the night. We're having a party  
and y'all have had a long trip  
already.

Hannah, Payton, and Marisol share glances. Payton's gaze  
lingers on Marisol as she turns back to Tammy.

PAYTON  
I think I'd like to get Mari on a  
bus, ma'am. As soon as possible,  
even.

Marisol watches Tammy's face, biting her lip. Tammy looks at  
each of them for a long beat, her warm face suddenly hard,  
then nods.

TAMMY  
Take her down to the station, but  
miss Hannah's going to stay with  
me. You bring the receipt back with  
you.

Payton nods and breathes a SIGH of relief. She turns to smile  
at Marisol who looks over at Hannah worried.

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

A few buses sit at the terminal, doors open, ready for passengers to load. People gather in bunches around the front doors, smoking or just clutching their luggage close.

Payton and Marisol sit on a couple of plastic yellow chairs with Marisol's bag on the seat next to her. Payton smokes, leaning forward, her elbows against her knees.

Marisol stares at the buses and tears suddenly fill her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

MARISOL

I can't believe you aren't coming with me.

Payton looks between her feet.

MARISOL (CONT'D)

I mean I knew you wouldn't leave Hannah. I just thought -

PAYTON

- Mari, we can't go back now. We're almost free. After this run, we'll have enough money to last us until we find some work.

She takes a drag and drops the cigarette so she can stomp it out.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

You don't know what it's like for her. We gotta at least try. You know?

Marisol shakes her head and wipes at her eyes.

MARISOL

No. I really don't. This trip has been a nightmare. You said it was going to be fun - an epic road trip.

PAYTON

I know. I'm so sorry. I had no idea it was going to be like this.

MARISOL

Are you guys really going to be okay? I mean really? You don't know anybody there. You don't have anywhere to stay.

Payton looks back at her and smiles.

PAYTON

We'll be fine, Mari. Hell, for all I know we'll get out there, run out of money, and come running back anyway.

Marisol searches her face then shakes her head with a sad smile.

MARISOL

No you won't.

Payton shrugs and sits back so she can reach into her pocket. She pulls out the burner phone and hands it to Marisol.

PAYTON

Here. This way, if we get in trouble, we can let you know. And because I know your dad isn't going to let you talk to me anymore.

They share a smile and Marisol cradles the phone in her open hands on her lap.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

I'll call you everyday to let you know how we are, alright?

Marisol nods and a few more tears escape to fall on her hands.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A CROWD of fifteen or so people sit or stand around the living room, in various states of advanced partying. No matter how drunk or high they appear, each of them shows utmost respect for their surroundings.

Beer cans sit on coasters and fill several waste bins stationed beneath the accent tables around the room. Ashtrays filled with cigarette butts get emptied regularly.

Payton and Hannah take up half of one sofa in the living room, each with a tallboy in hand. Tammy sits nearby, nursing her own can, watching the partiers and talking to those who come near.

MUSIC plays - but not too loud - in the background, moving some of the partiers to dance. Aaron dances near a small group of WOMEN, younger and older, though they seem to have no interest in him.

Hanna stands, leaving her drink with Payton, and heads toward the door. Aaron catches sight of her and waits a few beats after she leaves to follow.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Hannah disappears into the rest room and closes the door. Aaron stumbles down the hallway to lean against the wall nearby.

A few beats later, Hannah emerges from the rest room and Aaron steps in front of her. She cringes backward and yelps.

AARON

Boo!

Aaron laughs and Hannah slaps his shoulder.

HANNAH

You fucking scared me, asshole.

Aaron grins and pushes her back into the rest room.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

More pastel pink covers most surfaces in the rest room. Fuzzy pink rugs hug the floor, and even the toilet has a soft little rug to keep it warm. Roses and lilacs adorn everything else in the room.

Hannah backs into the sink to get out of Aaron's way and he pushes the door closed, stumbling a bit in the process. Hannah scowls and tries to open it again.

AARON

Just wait a second, would ya? I wanna talk to you.

HANNAH

So talk to me out there.

Aaron shakes his head and shoves Hannah away from the door. She knocks into the sink and scowls at him.

AARON

No. That dyke bitch is always up your ass. Can't have a decent conversation with her always lookin' at me like that.

Aaron steps closer to her, the smile making its way back to his face.

AARON (CONT'D)

I've missed you, you know. After the party, you just bolted. Didn't even stay for breakfast.

Hannah slides away from him, her hand reaching for the door.

HANNAH

I had to go to school. I had to get back home.

Aaron presses his palm against the door and leans toward her. He sways a little as he brings his face closer.

AARON

Well you ain't got nowhere to be now.

He tries to kiss her and she shrinks away, into the corner.

HANNAH

Aaron, stop it.

Aaron grabs her by the shoulders and pushes her against the wall. He presses his body against her and she cringes, trying to keep her face away from his.

AARON

What's the matter, baby? You were all over me before. You turn dyke on me?

Hannah tries to push him away, but he just grips her tighter. His smile fades into an angry grimace.

HANNAH

Aaron, stop it!

When he presses his body against her again, she opens her mouth and tries to scream. Aaron punches her in the throat, a quick jab, and she chokes on the scream and begins to cough.

Aaron grinds against her, smashing his cheek against hers as he growls in her face.

AARON

You better not try that again, you hear me?

Hannah continues to cough and begins to struggle harder. Aaron shoves his hand up her shirt and squeezes her breast hard, then spins her around and forces her to bend over the sink, smashing her face into the mirror.

He holds her by the hair and sways on his feet as he pulls a pocketknife and presses it against her throat. He stares into her eyes in the mirror.

AARON (CONT'D)

One fucking sound and I'll do it.

Hannah begins to sob as Aaron struggles with the button on her jeans. He gets her pants down over her hips when the door suddenly bursts open and slams into his back.

Aaron CRIES out in pain and slides down the wall. Hannah SOBS and sinks to the floor, scrambling away from him toward the bathtub.

Tammy's VOICE can be heard off screen.

TAMMY (O.S.)

Go get her.

Payton hurries into the room and helps Hannah to her feet. Aaron scrambles to his feet as well, but one of the MEN from the party slams the door against his groin. Aaron doubles over in pain as Payton helps Hannah out of the rest room.

Tammy saunters in and stares hard at Aaron, who GROANS and rolls around on the floor, clutching his groin.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

I had a feeling you'd try something like this again, you piece of shit.

She holds a pistol with a silencer in her hand and levels it between Aaron's eyes.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Payton leads Hannah down the hallway, holding her up as she stumbles a bit. Tammy's VOICE drifts from the rest room.

TAMMY (O.S.)

Did you think I'd forget about Elizabeth? ... Good, you remember her too.

A SILENCED GUNSHOT ricochets through the air, accompanied by a flash of light coming from behind Payton and Hannah. Payton cringes away and drops Hannah in the process.

Hannah SOBS uncontrollably and Payton picks her back up and helps her through the living room door.

TAMMY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Stupid piece of shit.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

Marisol slumps against the window, her feet resting on her backpack, her head pillowed against Payton's sweatshirt. She stares out the window, watching the endless desert roll by.

A VIBRATING PHONE rattles against the side of the bus and Marisol reaches into her pocket to pull out Payton's burner phone.

The screen reads: "Hey. We got on a bus this morning. Tammy says she knows a guy we can work for. Legit work, so don't worry. Have a good trip and text us when you get home, k?"

Marisol closes her eyes a beat and smiles before texting back: "I'm glad. You do the same."

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - MIDDAY

Payton and Hannah lean against a glimmering Ford Focus, sharing a cigarette. The Focus sits next to a chain-link fence with a sprawling soccer field beyond it.

Payton wears a pair of designer jeans and a new band t-shirt. Hannah wears a dress, her hair styled and make-up perfect.

A group of TEENAGE GIRLS approaches Payton and Hannah, enveloping them in a swarm of hugs and noisy EXCLAMATIONS of reunion.

During the exchange, one girl slips Payton a wad of bills and Payton slides a rolled up baggy into the girl's purse. They stand around and talk, but the conversation is drowned out by Payton's VOICE over a phone call.

PAYTON (V.O.)  
It's pretty great, actually.  
Tammy's friend got us hooked up  
with a cheap apartment.

INT. MARISOL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Everything in Marisol's room lies in its proper place, her clothes hang neatly in the closet, her toiletries lined up beneath the mirror.

Marisol lies on her bed wearing pajamas, her hair in fresh-washed braids. She lies on her stomach, talking low into the phone, one leg bent and swaying back and forth.

PAYTON (V.O.)

Hannah got a hostess job at this place down the street.

MARISOL

That's amazing, Pay. I'm really happy things are working out.

PAYTON (V.O.)

I mean the apartment is kind of shit, but it's ours, you know?

MARISOL

It's too bad dad would never let me visit.

Payton's voice changes, becomes a bit manic. Marisol frowns.

PAYTON (V.O.)

I think it's better if you don't right now. We ain't got much room and this neighborhood is kinda freaky at night.

MARISOL

Okay.

PAYTON

Hey, I gotta go. Hannah's bringing dinner home.

MARISOL

Alright, I'll talk to you later.

They hang up and Marisol frowns at the phone.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Payton rests on a bed with an oversized floral comforter and white wicker headboard. Similar patterns dress the curtains, rugs, and match the silk flowers all over the room.

Payton picks up a glass pipe on a white table nearby, rolls a lighter across the bowl and breathes deep.

The door bursts open letting MUSIC and VOICES in from the dark beyond, and Hannah stumbles into the room. She LAUGHS as she falls to the floor then crawls her way onto the bed.

Hannah buries her face in a pillow and mumbles something incoherent. Payton strokes her hair, her eyes opening and closing in slow blinks.

PAYTON

What?

Hannah lifts her head and faces Payton, though her eyes stay closed.

HANNAH

Tammy has a job ... She wants you  
... down there.

She drops her head again and Payton SIGHS.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

Marisol sits in a sea of HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, staring out the school bus window. She pulls Payton's phone out of her pocket and stares at an old message that reads: "I got a job! I'll call you later and catch you up."

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Payton sits in the driver's side of the Ford Focus smoking a cigarette and chewing the inside of her cheek. Charlie sits in the passenger seat, scrolling through his phone, his leg bouncing up and down.

CHARLIE

So you and Hannah ... you're like a  
thing?

Payton nods and takes a drag off her cigarette without turning to look at him.

PAYTON

Something like that.

Charlie, still looking at his phone, nods.

CHARLIE

That's cool. I got a couple of gay  
friends.

Payton glances at him as a pair of headlights turn toward them. She throws her cigarette out the window in a shower of sparks.

PAYTON

Here we go.

A white SUV pulls up alongside the car, facing the other direction. An OLDER MAN with dark hair greying at the temples rolls the window down and flashes Payton a smile.

MAN

So you're Tammy's new girl, huh?

Payton gives a twitch of the lips reminiscent of a smile.

PAYTON

Sure. You got what she asked for?

The man winks at her and reaches onto the seat beside him.

MAN

I do. But I'm afraid thirty just isn't going to cut it.

Payton scowls.

PAYTON

Bullshit. You told Tammy thirty, that's what you're getting.

MAN

Then you might want to get Tammy on the phone, princess. Cause I ain't handing this over for less than fifty.

Payton cringes as Charlie's arm reaches across her chest, a matte black Glock clutched in his hand.

CHARLIE

That's cute. Try again.

The man's smile disappears as he stares down the barrel of Charlie's gun.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You're new, so I'll give you five seconds before I give your detail man a job worth talking about.

Payton swallows hard and turns to the man.

PAYTON

You told Tammy thirty, that's what you get, man.

The man holds up a black duffel bag and Charlie pulls his arm back. Payton takes the bag and shoves it to the floorboard at Charlie's feet.

As soon as Payton hands over a brown paper bag wrapped in a rubber band, the back doors to the SUV swing open and two police officers slide into the parking lot with guns leveled at Payton and Charlie.

CHARLIE

Shit!

Charlie drops his gun and he and Payton both throw their hands up.

The cops drag Charlie and Payton from the car, slam them onto the hood and arrest them.

INT. MARISOL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marisol, in her pajamas again, holds Payton's phone up to her ear.

PAYTON (V.O.)

Can't answer right now. I'll get back to you.

Marisol lowers the phone and SIGHS.

INT. PASTEL PINK HOUSE LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

Hannah sits between a YOUNG WOMAN and a YOUNG MAN on one of Tammy's couches. Another YOUNG MAN sits on the floor in front of them, loading white crystal rocks into the bulb of a glass pipe.

Hannah shakes her head and bites her lip as the man holds the flame of his lighter under the glass, swirling the pipe back and forth. Once it begins to smoke, he puts his lips to the other end and creates a small white cloud inside.

YOUNG WOMAN

Nothing like it in the world, girl.

Hannah looks around at the others, looks toward the door, then back at the man who takes his hit and passes the pipe to her.

FADE OUT.

## CURRICULUM VITA

Elena Bitner was born in Eastland, Texas. The first daughter of Lola Neal and only child of Brian Bitner, she achieved her GED from Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon, Washington in 2001. Five years later, she entered The University of Texas at El Paso. In the spring of 2012, she graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in English and American Literature with a minor in Humanities. During this time, she worked as a writing tutor helping students to become more successful in many different forms of writing. In the fall of 2012, she was accepted into the MFA Online program for Creative Writing, during which time she has had one story accepted for publication into *The Sonder Review* and has pursued a Teaching Assistantship in the Rhetoric and Writing Program where she contributed content and helped edit the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the Guide to First Year Composition.

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