

DUE

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INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - 90S ERA KITCHEN - DAY

A calm, spacious kitchen -- bright and airy -- with the distant CHATTER of wild birds drifting in through an open window.

On the long, clean countertop rests an almost-empty glass of water.

NINA MILLER(17) sits lifeless on the floor below, her back propped against the laminate cabinetry. Strands of her dyed black hair hang loosely in front of her pale face.

A WHISPERING VOICE rises from beneath the ambient sounds of nature, slowly overtaking them.

Nina's eyes roll back, revealing only the whites.

Her mouth moves, faintly muttering -- She is the source of the whispering.

Her murmurs cease and the peaceful atmosphere returns.

One clear word falls from Nina's lips, as her body remains limp.

NINA

Deal.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The UNOCCUPIED family room boasts cozy, middle-class furnishings, including an armchair by the window and a pair of bookshelf speakers on either side of the family television.

The television TURNS ON, its screen displaying a band rocking out on stage, as SCREAMO METAL MUSIC plays at a low volume.

The television's volume bar overlays the action on screen, rapidly filling up to the maximum level, pushing the bookshelf speakers to their limits.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - TELEVISION SCREEN

The stage is a riot of energy, with each band member thrashing about to the driving beat.

Graphics of GREEN SKULLS adorn the stage-banners and the band's kick-drum skin.

Three giant letters: "MSP", appear as the backdrop, a focal point that adds to the electrifying display.

The FRONTMAN grips the microphone to his chin, emitting a raw, guttural sound that adds to the chaos.

He delivers a barrage of rapid-fire vocals, alternating between abrasive, high-energy SCREECHES and deep, demonic GROWLS.

FRONTMAN

As darkness spreads and hope seems
lost, help arrives, but you bear
the cost. A guiding hand, a
neighbor's call. He'll save you now
before you fall.

Throughout the sequence, a strip of text at the bottom of the screen reads: "MINT SKULL PRIEST / Here To Save You".

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - DAY

The pounding DOUBLE-KICK BEATS travel through the walls of the single story, red-brick house, across the manicured front lawn and out into the street.

There are no cars parked at the residence or driving through the sleepy, suburban neighborhood.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FRONT GARDEN BED - DAY

The BEES crawling on the blossoming lavender are undisturbed by the SCREECHING VOCALS.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FROM ABOVE - DAY

The side window of the neighboring house SLAMS shut.

A FLOCK OF BIRDS takes flight, vacating a large tree that stands tall in the grassy backyard. They share the sky with a high and bright sun.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT (NINE YEARS LATER)

The bright bathroom light clings to the ceiling above Nina's reflection in the mirror. Her hair is now a natural shade of dark brown, as she stands in front of the vanity, made up, in a tight fitting dress.

Beside the sink sits a small handbag with a long strap.

Nina applies a layer of pink to her lips, then drops the lipstick into her handbag.

She opens a drawer and pulls out a condom, which she tucks into an internal pocket of the bag.

Her heels CLOP as she walks out of the room, leaving the bag behind.

CASEY(24) enters the bathroom and approaches the vanity, her thin waist accentuated by a cropped tee and low-rise jeans.

She lifts the condom out of Nina's bag and slides a thin sewing needle through its center, before returning it to the bag and closing the zipper.

NINA (O.C.)

Ready?

Casey isn't startled by Nina's sudden appearance in the doorway.

Nina pokes an earring through her earlobe. The other is already in place.

CASEY

(smiling)

Ready.

Casey lifts the bag by its strap and holds it out for Nina to take.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Thumping TECHNO MUSIC dominates the soundscape as Nina exits the bathroom with the strap of her crossbody handbag cutting across the front of her dress.

She confidently struts down the hallway, without looking back.

Behind her, Casey emerges from a doorway that stands opposite the bathroom. She is now wearing a glittery black dress.

Casey follows close behind Nina as they both make their way down the hallway, toward the front door.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The thumping TECHNO MUSIC becomes oppressively loud.

The club is full.

Casey is dancing with a RANDOM GUY, her shimmering black dress catching the lights.

Nina dances within view of Casey, in a sea of moving bodies, on her own.

The bass pulses and a rhythmic TAPPING weaves itself into the beat.

EXT. DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES - DAY

A NORTHERN CARDINAL repeatedly TAPS its beak on the glass window, ATTACKING its own reflection.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES - WAITING AREA - DAY

Nina, watches the bird from her seat in the waiting area, amid the background hum of frustrated grumbles and shuffling feet. Her striking brown eyes are sharp and focused. She isn't wearing any make-up.

A CLERK at one of the many service windows stands and calls out.

CLERK
Rachel... Rachel Benyon?

Nina doesn't react.

The man in the next chair interrupts her daydreaming; he leans in close and speaks with casual confidence.

ADAM
Hey, are you Rachel?

ADAM(28) has a sturdy, athletic build. He's dressed in a blue polo shirt with a company logo, and khaki pants. His warm, easy smile and neat appearance give him an approachable and charming presence.

Nina's cold reaction contrasts Adam's friendly demeanor. She shakes her head.

NINA
Nina.

ADAM
Sorry. I thought your license was ready.

Adam, relaxed, points to the clerk, who is still scanning the room for "Rachel".

NINA
(tense)
I have to pass my test first.

ADAM
Oh right! I guess I thought -- I
just figured you were here to get a
new photo... because you look so
nice.

Adam is being genuine and the compliment is unintentional.

Nina suppresses a smile. She studies Adam's face with newfound interest, visibly enjoying his company for the first time.

Adam acknowledges Nina's increased attention with a cheeky smile and a subtle, upward flick of his head.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES - WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE
RESTROOM - DAY

Nina and Adam are mid-makeout, surrounded by clean tiles and reflective metal fixtures.

Adam breaks away from the heated kiss to speak.

ADAM
(confident)
We should go on a date.

Nina hears his suggestion but ignores it.

NINA
Do you have a condom?

Adam is caught off guard, a half-laugh escaping him.

ADAM
Wow, you don't mess around.

The air shifts -- Adam's smile falters as he catches Nina withdrawing. He adjusts his tone.

ADAM CONT'D
(sincere)
I like it.

Nina pulls Adam's head in close, her lips back on his.

She manages to say a few words as she transitions to his neck, her mouth lightly brushing his skin.

NINA
So, do you?

ADAM
Maybe in the car.

Nina emerges from beneath Adam's collar and twists at the waist to dig through her crossbody handbag. She pulls out the pierced condom and slips it into the front pocket of Adam's pants, unaware of the damage.

Without delay, her fingers find his belt buckle and get to work.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Can I at least have your number?

Nina responds immediately, without looking up.

NINA
No.

ADAM
You're not married are you?

The belt buckle comes loose with a soft CLINK.

There's a visible shift in Adam's demeanor as he gives in to Nina's advances and his own appetites.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Okay.

He yanks her hips close to his.

ADAM (CONT'D)
You win.

His hands grip Nina's thighs, lifting her effortlessly and pressing her against the wall.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

The positive line on a pregnancy test begins to emerge -- the red dye soaking through the strip with deliberate inevitability, forming a clear, unambiguous result.

Nina leans over the vanity, gazing down at the test window, devoid of emotion.

Two toothbrushes stand in separate cups either side of her.

She intentionally slams her knee into the cabinet doors below, then locks eyes with her own reflection.

There's a distant KNOCK at the front door.

It hooks her attention.

INT. APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - MORNING

Nina appears in the compact entryway that separates her living room and kitchen.

She opens the front door, revealing the ground-level exterior of her low-rise apartment building.

GARY(60s) is standing on the other side of the door. He wears a pair of paint-stained work shorts and a button-up, collared shirt. There's a heavy bunch of keys hanging from his belt loop.

NINA
Everything okay?

GARY
I've come to see you both.

NINA
Casey's not home.

Gary clicks his tongue.

GARY
You've forgotten.

Gary's eyes linger on Nina, a hint of something unspoken in his gaze.

NINA
Forgotten what?

GARY
Don't worry. When the time comes...

Gary leans in.

GARY (CONT'D)
I'll remind you.

Nina recoils from Gary's putrid morning-breath.

NINA
You know we always pay the rent on time, right?

GARY

And so you should.

She notices that his rough hands are covered in soil.

NINA

Still looking for the leak, huh?

Nina's eyes follow Gary as he walks away without warning or apology, her expression conveying her growing doubts about his sanity.

She peers both ways out her front door, searching for some explanation -- or a witness to share in her confusion.

Still baffled, Nina watches Gary stroll a few doors down and slip through a doorway marked "Shared Laundry".

With Gary gone, her intrigue shifts to Casey and NICK(27) who are approaching an old, beat-up HONDA CIVIC at the far end of the parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Nick is only slightly out of shape, but his relaxed posture and stretched black t-shirt exaggerate it.

Casey's thin legs show through the shredded knees of her ripped jeans, and her makeup is smudged, having been applied the night before.

Casey manually unlocks the car from the driver's side and the two get in.

EXT. BUILDING EXTERIOR - NINA'S FRONT DOOR - MORNING

Nina's curiosity fades as the Civic drives away.

She lets out an extended breath, then swings her front door closed.

The door is labeled with the number 3.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Nina's living room has mismatched furniture and the odd ornament. It's sparse and impersonal.

She drops down onto the couch and arches uncomfortably to pull the pregnancy test out of her back pocket.

With a keen focus, she quietly inspects it.

When she's had enough, Nina flicks the test onto the coffee table. It lands beside her cell phone.

She picks up the phone and types a message to Casey.

ON SCREEN:

NINA: "When will you be back?"

Nina lowers the phone and stares at the pregnancy test on the tabletop in front of her.

SFX: Cell phone dings

Nina reads the message.

ON SCREEN:

CASEY: "I'm in the laundry"

Nina springs up and scoots around the arm of the couch, snatching up a dirty article of clothing on her way to the hallway.

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - CONSULTATION ROOM - DAY
(FLASHBACK)

The wall clock has stopped, deepening the uncomfortable silence.

Nina(17) sits up tall in a lone chair, her ink-black hair tied back into a basic ponytail. She presses her thumbs into a ball of clay, wearing a nervous but hopeful expression.

A TEAM LEADER(early 40s), sits on the other side of a cluttered desk, casually flipping through the pages of a binder. Her short, blond, practical hair compliments a simple shirt and slacks.

TEAM LEADER

I'm sorry, Nina... but the whole team agrees that you're not ready to leave.

Nina looks physically pained by the news. She stops working the clay.

TEAM LEADER (CONT'D)

Everyone's so proud of you, you've made great progress, but we had to take into account the risks, given the circumstances that brought you here.

PRELAP: Loud knocking on timber, over muffled screamo metal music

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - DAY

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

A POLICE CAR is parked on the street in front of the brick house.

A POLICE OFFICER bangs on the timber front door and attempts to yell over the loud MUSIC coming from within.

OFFICER 1

Police!

A SECOND POLICE OFFICER lets himself through a side gate that leads to the backyard.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The MUSIC is louder inside the house.

Officer 1's KNOCKING and YELLING is now muted and distant.

Nina is still lifeless on the floor, her eyes and mouth closed and relaxed.

END FLASHBACK

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - CONSULTATION ROOM - DAY

NINA

(resentful)

Progress? I'm not some addict.

TEAM LEADER

Your mother thinks you were trying to hurt yourself.

NINA

What would she know?!

TEAM LEADER

Unfortunately it's all any of us know -- unless you remember what happened?

Nina continues to frown, unable to remember.

TEAM LEADER (CONT'D)

Nina, we're here to help you get home, but you have to be ready.

The team leader's sympathetic expression doesn't comfort Nina.

NINA

I don't want to go home. I just don't want to stay here.

Nina bends forward in her chair, gripping the ball of clay in her right hand, while driving both her fists into her brow.

Her ankles bounce with excessive intensity, a sign of her agitation building.

She stands and hurls the clay at the wall, then strides out of the room.

A framed accreditation falls from its wall mount.

The glass CRACKS as it hits the floor.

PRELAP: Pleasant department store music

END FLASHBACK

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Nina rises from the bottom shelf of a promotional display with a box of wine glasses tucked under her arm.

She crosses to the other side of the main walkway, arriving at a rack of baby clothes.

With her free hand, she lifts a tiny outfit from the rack, frowning her brow as a show of her reluctance to enjoy the experience.

Her fingers fumble and the garment slips from its hanger and crumples at her feet.

A CHILD'S CRY rings out through the store.

Nina eyes pinpoint the source of the wailing.

A TODDLER has tripped on the glossy tile floor and fallen onto his hands and knees. His FEMALE GUARDIAN lifts him up tenderly, then carries him out of sight and earshot.

A nearby SHOPPER adds their two cents.

SHOPPER
They're very fragile.

NINA
Excuse me?

SHOPPER
The wine glasses. I bought a box last week, and I've already broken two -- probably why they're on special.

NINA
Thanks for the tip. Maybe I'll give them a miss.

SHOPPER
That might be wise.

The shopper continues browsing.

Nina picks up the dropped outfit and returns it to the rack.

After releasing her grip on the hanger, her expression becomes very serious. She leans in close to the garment with her ear almost touching the fabric.

There's a faint BABY'S HEARTBEAT coming from the clothing.

The beating dissipates and Nina straightens up -- spooked.

Her gaze lingers on the outfit for a moment, until she manages to break her attention away.

She dumps the box of wine glasses onto the first convenient shelf and continues walking down the main aisle of the department store.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Nina is alone, on her knees, in front of her toilet.

As she leans in closer to the bowl, her reflection becomes visible in the toilet water, however the ripples on the surface obscure the view.

For a brief moment, the reflection shows a SHADOWY FIGURE standing behind her.

Nina dry-reaches, her face contorting with discomfort. She heaves again and just before the moment of evacuation, the scene transitions.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

Nina, still slumped against the kitchen cabinets, lurches forward out of her lifeless state to vomit.

There's no music playing in the house, and two paramedics are by Nina's side, accompanied by Officer 1.

PARAMEDIC 1 pulls an auto-injector out of Nina's thigh and disposes of it in a sharps container, as PARAMEDIC 2 passes a small, zip-top bag to Officer 1, who wears a pair of disposable gloves.

The resealable bag contains several oxycodone pills.

Nina begins convulsing.

Both paramedics work to move her into the recovery position.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - DAY

An AMBULANCE is parked in the driveway of the residence, while the police car remains in its original location on the street.

Officer 2 is stationed by the open front door, looking out toward the road.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY BAY - DAY

An ambulance pulls into the hospital's emergency bay.

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY

An ORDERLY pushes an intubated PATIENT down a corridor lined with doors. One door is marked: "ROOM 3".

There is no one else in the lonely, lengthy corridor.

INT. HOSPITAL - ROOM 3 - CONTINUOUS

A male DOCTOR enters through the door signed: "ROOM 3". He is wearing a clip-on ID card that reads: "Dr. Alex Tracassin", a minor detail, not meant to be noticed.

Nina is waiting patiently on the edge of a raised hospital gurney, wearing a patient gown. She is now visibly pregnant, but not heavily.

DOCTOR
The baby is fine.

Nina's reaction doesn't convey much relief, just a hollow, detached acceptance. She musters a response.

NINA
Great.

DOCTOR
But I'll still need to do an
internal exam.

NINA
Right now?

DOCTOR
Right now.

Nina's face shows her anxiety as she awkwardly shifts herself around to lay down onto her back.

The doctor wheels his office chair over to the end of the gurney.

He flicks on a bright, overhead procedural lamp and repositions it by pulling on the adjustable arm.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Knees up.

Nina bends her legs and spreads her knees, placing both hands on top of her small baby bump.

The doctor disappears behind Nina's hospital gown, which acts as a screen.

Nina lays still and silent, her eyes tracing the ceiling.

She winces.

It takes a moment for Nina's post-wince frown to fade, before she winces again, with increased intensity.

NINA
That's a little painful.

She waits for a response but the doctor doesn't speak.

Nina stretches out her neck to peer over her gown. When she can't lay eyes on the doctor, she drops her knees and gets up on one elbow to confirm his disappearance.

Suddenly the room door opens and the same doctor walks in, holding a paper report. The doctor's ID card now reads: "Dr. Alex Toussaint".

Surprised, Nina looks to the door. Her bemusement deepens when she sees the doctor.

DOCTOR
Alrighty. Sorry that took so long.
I usually have a printer in here
but we had to move it to another
office.

Nina sits up with a small amount of difficulty, her outrage evident in her tense posture.

NINA
What the hell is wrong with you?!

Nina hops down from the gurney and snatches her clothes off a nearby chair.

DOCTOR
It took a little longer than
expected but I don't think...

NINA
Get fucked.

Nina swings the door open and storms out.

The doctor is left alone in the room -- STUNNED -- as the door slowly closes itself.

He wanders over to the procedural lamp, confused as to why it's turned on. He switches it off.

INT. APARTMENT - SEWING DESK - DAY

Nina flicks on the light of a sewing machine that sits in a corner of the apartment dedicated to clothing alteration.

She carefully removes the machine's needle and places it into an antique tin labeled: "DENIM".

She scribbles "SONIA" on a sticky note and affixes it to a pair of neatly folded blue jeans.

After briefly searching the sewing desk for her next job, she finds a quilted baby blanket and inspects a small rip in the fabric.

Nina gently touches the letters of her own name, which have been embroidered into the bottom corner.

After reminiscing with the blanket, she pulls out her cell phone and contemplates making a call.

Eventually, she bites the bullet.

NINA

Hey -- it's me. Look, I didn't call to have some long conversation. I just thought you should know that I'm pregnant. 30 weeks. No. That's not going to happen. Sorry, I don't have time to go through all this with you again. I have to go, Mom. Bye.

Nina ends the call, then sits in silence.

She makes another call, her tone more upbeat than before.

NINA (CONT'D)

Hi Sonia. It's Nina Miller from Split Seam Alterations. Sorry I missed you. Just calling to let you know that your jeans are ready for pick up. I think you'll be really happy with the result. I've managed to give them a second life. I'll talk to you soon.

Nina ends the call.

INT. BUS - DAY

Nina is seated in one of the accessibility seats on a moving bus.

She gives up on trying to read a book titled: "10,000 NAMES FOR BOYS" and stuffs it into her handbag, as the CHATTY WOMAN beside her chews her ear off.

CHATTY WOMAN

Sleep when they sleep -- That's just code for 'good luck ever sleeping again!' My husband still talks about our first year with Lucas. He says it was like living with a zombie, and since I don't remember a thing, that's probably very accurate!

The chatty woman laughs loudly at her own story.

Nina doesn't laugh.

CHATTY WOMAN (CONT'D)

Oop -- this is my stop.

The chatty woman readies her walking stick as the bus pulls over. She heaves on a nearby rail to pull herself up to standing.

CHATTY WOMAN (CONT'D)

Good luck, dear.

The chatty woman uses her cane to limp off the bus.

Nina remains seated.

A MALE TEENAGER steps onto the bus; he chooses the seat beside Nina.

Muffled MUSIC can be heard coming from his HEADPHONES. It is the song: "Here To Save You".

As Nina gazes out the bus window, the teenager slowly and robotically turns his head ninety degrees to stare at her; he does not blink.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - BUS STOP - DAY

A bus pulls away from a busy stop that services the stand-alone grocery store behind it.

INT. GROCERY STORE - CHECKOUT - DAY

Nina hands the CASHIER a fifty-dollar bill.

ELIZABETH (O.C)

Nina?

Nina turns to find her mother standing nearby, with a half-filled shopping cart.

ELIZABETH is a slightly round woman in her early 50s, with plain, shoulder-length mousey-blond hair covering her ears. She wears a loose-fitting, pastel pink t-shirt and a pair of white, elastic-waist pants.

The cashier fishes Nina's change out of the till as Elizabeth pushes her cart closer.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Nina, I had no idea.

NINA
About?

ELIZABETH
You're expecting!

NINA
I did tell you.

Elizabeth draws a blank.

NINA (CONT'D)
On the phone.

The cashier waits patiently with Nina's change.

ELIZABETH
I don't know who you called Nina,
but you definitely didn't call me.
I can't believe it! Look at you!
You must be due soon.

The cashier interrupts.

CASHIER
Your change Ma'am.

Nina takes her change.

NINA
(to the cashier)
Thanks.
(to Elizabeth)
I can't believe you'd forget
something like that.

Nina collects her two bags of groceries and heads for the exit.

CASHIER
Would you like your receipt?

Nina ignores the cashier, who she has already left behind.

ELIZABETH
(calling out)
Nina! You didn't call me!

Nina doesn't look back as she leaves the store.

The automatic doors close behind her.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Nina is partway through unpacking her shopping bags, which are already up on the counter.

Casey hovers nearby, sucking on the straw of an oversized soda.

Nina lifts out a carton of eggs and places it onto the countertop.

Casey detaches herself from her straw.

CASEY
Should we egg her house?

NINA
(jokingly)
How old are you?

Casey smiles with the straw already back in her mouth.

Nina removes a bottle of red wine from one of the bags, followed by a jar of cherry jam.

She sighs, contemplating the weight of her responsibilities.

NINA (CONT'D)
I really have to get this right.

CASEY
Are you kidding?! You're already nailing it. If it'd happened to me, I probably would have -- you know.

Casey draws a long slurp from the straw, eyeballing Nina, with her eyebrows lifted.

CASEY (CONT'D)
'Cause I do not want kids -- like, ever. I can barely take care of myself.

Casey peers down into her drink as she clears out the remaining liquid from the bottom of the cup.

NINA

What's Nick think about that?

Nina puts the eggs in the fridge and shuts the door.

CASEY

Nothing. I haven't mentioned it.
We're not that serious.

NINA

(almost bitter)

Really? You two seem inseparable.

Casey shrugs.

NINA (CONT'D)

You know, I thought I sensed a bit
of envy when I told you I was
pregnant.

Casey lets out a "pfft" amid a reserved chuckle.

CASEY

Your instincts are off.

NINA

Probably.

CASEY

And here I was about to tell you to
just go with the flow.

NINA

Mmm. Straight over a waterfall.

Nina folds one of the empty shopping bags flat.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

The bath has been left unattended with the faucet running.

Casey, seen from behind, enters in her bathrobe.

She approaches the tub, dragging a hefty tree branch along
the tile floor, while her other hand clutches a small cloth
bundle, tied at the top with a simple string.

Stretching her arm out over the bathtub, she squeezes the
bundle, which drips an unknown liquid into the bathwater.

With otherworldly balance, Casey perches on the edge of the
bath in a deep squat, using both hands to swirl the tree
branch through the water -- stirring her concoction.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

Nina's bedroom door opens.

Casey slinks across the hallway, from the bathroom to her own bedroom.

Nina enters the hallway via her open bedroom door. She is heavily pregnant, staring down at her phone.

She walks straight into the bathroom without looking up.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Nina eases into the bathwater.

She closes her eyes and sinks in deeper.

The steady sound of RUNNING WATER turns into a THUNDEROUS BATTERING as her ears go below the surface.

INT. APARTMENT - CASEY'S ROOM - DAY

POSTLAP: Thunderous rolling of water continues

Casey's hand upends an HOURGLASS that rests on a shelf, starting its countdown.

She has black grime trapped beneath her short fingernails.

INT. APARTMENT - CASEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Quiet.

The room is dark.

Casey's bed is neatly made and empty.

The last grain of sand falls through the hourglass.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nina is in her bed, laying on her side.

She MOANS -- twisting and writhing with labor pain.

She grabs her cell phone from the nightstand. The dim glow of the screen illuminates her features. She makes a call, placing it on speaker phone.

CASEY (V.O)
Yo.

NINA
Are you still at Nick's?

CASEY (V.O)
Sure am.

NINA
I'm having contractions!

CASEY (V.O)
Are you serious?!

NINA
Every few minutes...

CASEY (V.O)
Holy hell! Alright, I'm coming
down! Be there soon!

Nina ends the call and slides herself off the bed.

She turns on the beside lamp, then shuffles over to an
already-packed duffel bag, tucking her phone into one of the
side pockets.

Hunching over in pain, Nina lets out a loud GROAN.

From a distant room, an unusual, TWISTED VOICE mimics her.

Nina lifts her head -- listening.

She continues to endure the contraction.

NINA
(whispering)
Casey?
(yelling)
Casey?!

CASEY
Yep, yep. I'm here!

Casey flies into the room. She's flustered and in a hurry to
collect Nina's overnight bag.

NINA
Was that you?

CASEY
I'm taking you to the hospital.
Let's go.

NINA
I heard something.

CASEY
Nina, you're about to push out a baby! Where's your phone?

NINA
It's already in the bag.

CASEY
Alright, let's do it.

NINA
Casey. Something's not right.

CASEY
Nina -- You've got this.

Nina stares into the ominous, pitch-black hallway as Casey supportively guides her toward it.

INT. MATERNITY WARD - NINA'S ROOM - DAY

Sunlight fills the room.

There are 4 patient bays; 3 of them empty.

Nina wakes in her hospital bed, with an oximeter on her finger, compression sleeves on her legs and a catheter bag hanging from the bed frame.

A generous bouquet of YELLOW TULIPS have been left at her bedside.

A NURSE is present, gently rolling a transparent bassinet toward the door, softly humming a lullaby. She has her back to Nina.

The bassinet contains a sleeping BABY.

Nina interrupts the nurse.

NINA
(sleepily)
Where are you taking him?

The nurse stops rolling the bassinet.

NINA (CONT'D)
Sorry, could you tell me where you're taking him?

The nurse doesn't speak or move.

NINA (CONT'D)
Nurse?

With her shoulders up by her ears, arms bent and wrists limp, the nurse SCURRIES out the door, leaving the bassinet and baby behind.

Nina's eyes widen as she clutches the bed sheet.

She barely has time to process what she's seen before Casey bursts into the room, her voice brimming with energy.

CASEY
The slumber queen is awake! What a wild night! I'm still shaking!

Casey stands over the abandoned bassinet, her expression turning sheepish when she realizes the baby is asleep. She raises a finger to her pursed lips then gently wheels the bassinet to Nina's bedside.

NINA
Casey, what the fuck was that?!

CASEY
Shhhhh...

Casey points down at the sleeping baby.

NINA
Did you see the nurse?!

Casey acts shocked and worried.

CASEY
A nurse! In a hospital! Someone call the cops!

Casey's feigned concern melts away into a grin as she beams, clearly proud of her own joke.

NINA
She was trying to take him somewhere!

CASEY
(teasing)
Aww. How cute. You're one of those paranoid mothers.

Nina's gaze wanders as she questions the legitimacy of her concerns.

Her baby starts fussing.

Nina attempts to sit up but can't and WINCES.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Here.

Casey uses the bed controls to raise Nina into an upright position.

CASEY (CONT'D)

It's a shame they had to cut you up.

Casey puts her hands deep into the bassinet.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Can I?

Nina approves with a quick nod.

Casey carefully passes the swaddled baby to Nina, while tipping her head in the direction of the tulips.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Who got you the flowers?

Nina awkwardly adjusts the baby, struggling to position him properly for breastfeeding.

NINA

I thought they were from you.

Nina looks over at the flowers, still fumbling.

A logo on the wrapping reads: "MR TINKLES' TULIPS".

Her attention returns to her baby, who has finally settled and begun feeding, before quickly shifting to the open doorway, her mind still on the nurse.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

A vase of healthy, yellow tulips stands proudly on the coffee table.

In a distant corner of the apartment, Nina sits hunched at her sewing desk, furiously unpicking the stitching of an unseen project that rests in her lap. Her movements are sharp and intense.

INT. APARTMENT - SEWING DESK - CONTINUOUS

Nina has the top button of her pants undone and is violently unpicking the stitches that are holding her caesarean wound closed -- repeatedly jabbing a seam-ripper into the incision, then yanking with quick, rough motions to break the stitches.

PRELAP: Baby crying

INT. APARTMENT - SEWING DESK - LATE AFTERNOON

Nina wakes from her unplanned nap, sitting at her sewing desk.

She has a red floral dress in her lap, as well as the seam-ripper from her nightmare.

She sets both items aside and walks to a nearby bassinet, gently rubbing her caesarean scar.

NINA
(to baby)
That was almost a good nap.

Nina lifts her crying baby out of the bassinet.

NINA (CONT'D)
Time for milk?

Nina soothes her baby while slowly making her way to the couch.

The tulips on the coffee table are drooping and discolored from age.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

A carton of milk rests on the countertop as Nina prepares a bowl of cereal with her baby in the nook of her arm.

The red floral dress is now hanging in a protective plastic sleeve on a rack by the sewing desk.

Casey is completing a crossword puzzle at the dining table, while spooning cherry jam straight from the jar, into her mouth.

She observes Nina struggling to open the milk carton single-handedly.

CASEY
I can hold him for you.

NINA

That's okay. I've got it.

Nina gets it open and pours milk into her bowl. A little splashes over the side, onto the countertop.

CASEY

You look tired.

Nina carries her breakfast to the dining table and places it down, opposite Casey.

NINA

So, that's where all the jam goes.

Casey ignores Nina's comment and continues digging out spoonfuls of jam.

NINA (CONT'D)

Weren't you meeting Nick at nine?

Casey doesn't look up.

NINA (CONT'D)

That's now.

Casey slams the near-empty jam jar onto the tabletop.

Nina flinches.

Casey smiles at Nina, her teeth covered in cherry jam.

Nina isn't impressed.

Casey shoots the chair out behind her as she stands. She points to the baby, who is oblivious to her presence.

CASEY

I'll catch YOU later.

NINA

(dubious)

Have fun.

Casey exits out the front door.

Nina sits and spins the magazine around to view the crossword.

The puzzle has "MINE" written in every answer space, even where it doesn't fit.

Nina -- disturbed by what she has seen -- flips the magazine closed and pushes it back to the other side of the table.

Restricted by the baby in her arms, she balances some cereal on her spoon and takes an awkward bite. The cereal CRUNCHES as she chews.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - DAY

Autumn leaves CRUNCH under Nina's shoes as she pushes her stroller along a popular foreshore path.

A wide tidal river flows on one side of the path and grassy, tree-filled parklands stretch out across the other.

A fit female JOGGER approaches Nina on the path, heading in the opposite direction. She stares into Nina's stroller as she runs toward it and the two women share an awkward sideways glance as they pass each other.

A short distance ahead, a dilapidated timber pier juts out from the shoreline; its wooden planks clearly in disrepair.

A thick rusty chain blocks public access to the pier, yet midway along its weathered expanse stands a STRANGE GIRL(10), perfectly still, with her arms resting loosely at her sides.

She's small against the open water behind her, gazing steadily in Nina's direction, wearing a pair of orange shorts over her swimsuit.

Her dark brown hair frames a face that is fluid and distorted, her features gently pulling and stretching in different directions.

Her brown eyes appear large, almost ghostly, widening unnaturally as her brow and cheekbones warp.

Nina is consumed by the sight of the girl, though not alarmed. She squints, trying to sharpen her vision, as if that's why the girl's face remains unclear.

EXT. TIMBER PIER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A FISHERMAN in a faded brimmed hat casts his line into the river. The timber boards beneath him are smooth and well-maintained, free of any major wear or weathering.

The same strange girl sits in her orange shorts on the opposite side of the pier, her legs casually dangling over the side. Her face now appears completely normal, free of any distortion.

In the water's reflection, the girl's head leans out between the guardrails.

She gazes down at her own image, which warps and twists with each ripple, giving her a dreamlike, almost haunting appearance.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - DAY

Nina still has her eyes on the distant girl with the distorted face, but is quickly distracted by the sound of DOGS FIGHTING further up the path.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - FURTHER UP - CONTINUOUS

The OWNER of the larger, more aggressive DOG yanks on its lead, separating the two animals, before continuing down the narrow path, toward Nina.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - DAY

The dog reaches out its nose to smell Nina's stroller as it approaches.

Nina veers off the path to avoid the dog, making her way to a picnic table, as if that had been her intention all along.

EXT. RIVERFRONT PARK - DAY

Nina sits down at the picnic table and swivels the stroller around to face her.

She immediately jumps up and raises the sunshade on the stroller.

NINA

No, no, no, no, no, no, no!

Her baby is not in the stroller.

Nina's eyes dart FRANTICALLY around the park, her face full of dread.

She has a wide-eyed moment of realization.

NINA (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

I didn't put him in.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - DAY

Nina starts sprinting back along the path, leaving the stroller behind.

As she runs, she pulls out her cell phone and makes a call.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick's apartment is the same floor plan as Nina's but the décor is very different.

His coffee table boasts a collection of discarded food wrappers, empty energy drink cans, and a bong, among other things.

Nick and a MALE FRIEND are playing a World War Two themed video game, as Casey and another YOUNG WOMAN watch the action.

The room is alive with LAUGHTER, LOUD MUSIC and VIDEO GAME SOUND EFFECTS.

NICK

Dude, heaps of Germans came to
America after World War Two -- how
do you think we got the pretzel?

Casey draws on a joint, then blows a cloud of smoke into the air.

A musical cell phone RINGTONE plays amid the other loud noises but no one reacts.

EXT. BUILDING EXTERIOR - NINA'S FRONT DOOR - DAY

A parcel rests on the concrete by Nina's front door.

She ignores it, focused only on getting inside.

Once she manages to get the door unlocked, she barges through it.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

A new timber crib stands in Nina's bedroom and above it hangs an infant mobile shaped like a golden, spoked wheel. Intricately carved birds dangle from each spoke.

Nina rushes to the crib, flushed and breathless.

NINA
(exhaling)
Oh my God.

She scoops up her sleeping baby, holding him close to her chest.

The baby WHIMPERS.

Nina collapses next to the crib, her head dropping in relief as she cradles the baby.

EXT. RIVERFRONT PARK - DAY

Seen from behind, the strange girl from the pier lowers herself onto the picnic bench, her face out of view as she sits stiff and upright in front of the empty stroller.

INT. APARTMENT - SEWING DESK - NIGHT

Nina hunches over her sewing desk, her striking brown eyes focused on her work.

She gently guides a piece of fabric under the machine's presser foot, meticulously tracing the edges of a tiny outfit.

The foot hammers up and down with mechanical precision.

Casey, dressed in winter pajamas, crosses the room behind Nina and disappears down the hallway.

Nina is unaware of her presence.

SFX (O.S): Baby crying

Nina releases the machine's pedal and lifts her head.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nina's baby continues crying as she enters the room.

Nina bends over the crib to pick up her baby, revealing Casey standing rigid in the doorway behind her, still dressed in pajamas.

As Nina straightens up, the view of Casey is lost.

When Nina finally turns around, Casey is again in the doorway, but is now dressed in daytime clothes, with her backpack slung over one shoulder and her house keys in her hand.

Nina isn't alarmed to find Casey behind her.

CASEY
Everything alright in here?

NINA
(confused)
Yeah... why?

CASEY
You left the front door open.

NINA
You sure?

Nina sways and bounces her baby.

CASEY
Yup.

NINA
God. Sorry. I thought I locked it.

CASEY
It's not a big deal. I just don't want to wake up with some creep standing over my bed.

NINA
(deep in thought)
Mmm... neither.

Casey seems to sense Nina's hidden distress.

CASEY
Make sure you let me know if you need any help. I'm usually just hanging out upstairs.

Nina's baby has gone back to sleep in her arms.

NINA
Thanks. I will.

CASEY
Or if you need a ride somewhere --
That baby seat's going to waste.

NINA

Sure.

There's a moment of silence.

CASEY

Alright, well... goodnight.

NINA

Goodnight.

Casey leaves in the direction of her own bedroom.

Something on the crib catches Nina's eye. She moves in for a closer look.

SFX (O.S): Casey's bedroom door closes.

Nina's expression is a mixture of confusion and concern as she stares at four deep vertical lines that have been scratched into the crib's timber post.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM/ KITCHEN/ HALLWAY - NIGHT

All the lights are off in the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nina lies wide awake in bed, staring at the ceiling.

Something RATTLES near the crib.

Nina turns her head toward the sound.

It RATTLES again.

Nina's eyes widen in the darkness.

She timidly switches on the bedside lamp and its warm light reveals the room.

Her baby is asleep in the crib, his tiny chest rising and falling with each restful breath.

Nina spots a toy rattle laying on the floor underneath the crib; she creeps toward it.

Nina gets down low to reach for the toy and with the tips of her fingers -- as if grabbing a snake by the tail -- flicks it toward the hallway.

The toy stops short of the door, so Nina taps it into the hallway with her foot.

She returns to her bed, leaving the lamp on, and curls up on her side, blanket pulled up to her chin. She stares into the dark, open doorway.

The toy RATTLES once more, from out in the hallway.

INT. COMMUNITY HALL - PLAYMAT - DAY

SFX: Baby toys loudly clanging & rattling

Nina lets out a gaping yawn. There are deep bags under her eyes and she hasn't made much of an effort with her makeup.

Many TODDLERS and BABIES are playing with noisy toys on the communal playmat in front of her. Their MOTHERS are also present.

Everyone is enjoying the event and chatting among themselves, except for Nina. She is sitting alone on a short stool, half-heartedly engaging with her baby, in an attempt to disguise the fact that she is listening to a nearby conversation.

MOTHER 1

We're finally at the stage where she's happy to take a bottle from Lewis, so I've booked myself a sneaky weekend away.

MOTHER 2

I'm jealous. The most time I've had to myself this year was Kylie's wedding.

MOTHER 1

You have to do things for yourself and by yourself -- or you won't be the best mom you can be.

Nina's eyes fix onto MOTHER 1 but she breaks eye-contact when the woman catches her staring.

The GROUP HOST addresses the room with a BOOMING VOICE.

GROUP HOST

It pains me to interrupt all this wonderful, healthy, conversation but there are some snacks in the back corner. So, please -- when you're ready -- come over and grab a bite to eat.

(MORE)

GROUP HOST (CONT'D)

For anyone new to our group, you'll have a chance to introduce yourself shortly, when we do our "mother's circle". We'll come back together in 15 minutes. In the meantime... enjoy the spread!

Most of the mothers are quick to mobilize, drifting toward the back corner of the hall as they continue chatting.

Nina rises from her stool but doesn't follow the crowd. Instead she waits until everyone has left the mat, then takes a few steps forward, stopping over the top of Mother 1's handbag, which has been left behind.

She peers down into the open bag, her eyes catching on a small bottle of prescription medication, nestled among the other contents.

Nina's thoughts are interrupted by someone approaching the mat.

A LITTLE GIRL(6) appears in front of Nina, frowning and holding a doll by its hair.

NINA

That's a nice dolly. What's her name?

LITTLE GIRL

It's not mine. I just found it with the other toys.

NINA

Oh.

LITTLE GIRL

I don't want you to talk to me.

NINA

Okay. I can stop.

Nina tries to smile through the rejection.

The little girl runs to the crowded snack table.

Nina and her baby are alone once again, watching the bustling group from afar.

NINA (CONT'D)

We've got some leftovers at home that we need to eat.

INT. COMMUNITY HALL - SNACK TABLE - CONTINUOUS

The group host is holding a muffin, surrounded by the other women at the snack table.

She looks back toward the playmat just in time to see Nina slip out the exit.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN/ FRONT DOOR - DAY

Nina's chair at the dining table is angled to face her baby's high chair.

He opens his mouth like a little bird as she brings a spoonful of mashed potato to his lips.

NINA
(to baby)
We don't have to go back there.

SFX (O.S): Tapping on wall

PATRICK
Knock knock.

PATRICK(early 30s) is standing at the front door, poking his head into the apartment. He is slim and almost frail-looking, with a shy, reserved posture.

NINA
Patrick?

Patrick nervously raises a hand.

PATRICK
Hi. Sorry. I should have called --
You got a package.

Patrick holds up a parcel box and steps into the apartment to place it down on the floor inside, as though it's some kind of peace offering.

NINA
(confused)
Do you still have a key?

PATRICK
It was open.

Nina is quietly alarmed.

She resumes feeding her baby, turning her back on Patrick.

NINA

(blunt)

I'm sorry, but you need to leave. I don't have the energy for this today.

Patrick steps toward Nina and the baby, excitement in his voice.

PATRICK

Is this him?

Nina stands to face Patrick, blocking the high chair with her body.

NINA

Did you hear what I said?

PATRICK

Nina, he's incredible.

Nina's tone softens and she speaks with a quiet vulnerability that makes her words sound more like a request for space, rather than a harsh dismissal.

NINA

Patrick, I really don't want to see you right now.

PATRICK

(begging)

Come on. Don't be like that. Let me meet him. I'm not here to cause any trouble.

NINA

He's not yours, Patrick!

There is an awkward, extended period of silence.

PATRICK

I didn't think he was.

Patrick looks hurt. He shakes his head and walks to the door.

Nina lifts her baby from the high chair and holds him on her hip.

Before Patrick exits, he looks back at Nina.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

What's got into you, Nina? Seems like motherhood isn't treating you well.

NINA
(roaring)
GEEETTTTT OUUUUUTTT!

Despite his measured demeanor, Patrick SLAMS the front door on his way out.

Nina carries her baby to the door and firmly locks it.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, trying to calm herself.

When her eyes open, they lock on the parcel. She picks it up with one hand, searching its sides for a postage label; there isn't one.

INT. UPMARKET OFFICE - DAY

The room is meticulously arranged.

Nina sits on a leather couch, flanked by tall, filled bookshelves. She looks painfully tired, her eyes bloodshot.

Her baby is on her lap, bouncing up and down energetically.

A potted plant in the corner looks vibrant and well cared-for, but on close inspection, is made of plastic.

LINDA(early 50s) sits across from Nina on a plush high-backed chair, wearing a crisp, professional blouse. Her hair is neatly styled, her expression welcoming and attentive.

LINDA
How have the nights been?

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

The hallway is cloaked in darkness.

Nina slips out of her bedroom, easing the door shut with careful, silent precision.

She sneaks to the bathroom door and grips the knob but doesn't follow through, her head turning as she hears something.

SFX (O.S): Distant sound of a glass jar sliding along the dining table

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN/ DINING - NIGHT

SFX: Faint grunts, wet squelching sounds

As Nina rounds the corner, her tired posture quickly stiffens and she freezes in place.

Casey sits at the table, in the darkness, hunched over a jar of jam.

She scoops out large globs with her fingers, shoveling them into her mouth like a ravenous animal, her eyes wide and unblinking.

Terror ignites in Nina's eyes and she backs away slowly, making sure she remains unseen, until she disappears into the hallway.

Casey pauses mid-bite and a grin creeps across her face, as though she knew all along that she was being watched.

END FLASHBACK

INT. UPMARKET OFFICE - DAY

NINA

The nights aren't great.

Amused by her own response, Nina lets out a short laugh through her nose and plops her baby down beside her on the couch.

She pulls a few toys from under the stroller and places them in her baby's lap, settling in for a lengthy chat.

LINDA

It's such a hard gig -- especially when you're on your own.

Nina looks down at a roughly constructed fabric doll that her baby has picked up.

It's a male figure, with tattered woolen hair and an autumn colored patchwork jacket.

Her expression indicates she doesn't recognize the toy.

LINDA (CONT'D)

I know someone who would love to help you.

Nina looks up at Linda, interested.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Your mom.

Nina reacts as though Linda's suggestion is redundant.

NINA

She keeps sending toys in the mail.

LINDA

That's nice.

Linda is preoccupied, her eyes scanning something off in the distance.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Sorry Nina, I have to get back to work. I've already pushed the friendship asking to leave early today.

Linda stands and flattens the creases on the front of her pants, then flashes a smile at a CUSTOMER who is walking past the mock office which her and Nina have been sitting in.

The display office is located within a large furniture store that is brightly lit and not overly busy.

NINA

Oh. Yeah. Of course.

Nina transfers the toys back into her stroller, except for the crudely-sewn figure, which is still in her baby's hands.

NINA (CONT'D)

Casey said she'll be at yours tonight.

Nina lifts her heavy baby onto her hip.

LINDA

Yeh, how's that? She organizes a family dinner, then tells me I have to cook it. Do me a favor? If she hasn't left home by five, tell her to get a move on -- You know how she is.

As their conversation wraps up, both women leave the confines of the faux office and move into the wide-open store, Nina casually pushing her empty stroller with one hand.

NINA

Sure -- if I see her.

Linda points at Nina as she strides away toward a COUPLE testing out a new sofa.

LINDA
Go see your mom!

Nina nods, reluctantly agreeing.

Instead of leaving the store, Nina stands like a pillar, holding her baby, watching Linda work.

INT. BUS - DAY

Nina rides on a moving bus. She has two of the accessibility seats lifted to accommodate her stroller and is sitting in the third.

Further down the bus, a group of TEENAGERS have spread themselves across both sides of the aisle. Their laughter echoes as they shout and joke with each other.

Among them is the teenage boy from Nina's previous bus ride. He is now acting like a typical youth. He flings a banana skin at his friends.

The BUS DRIVER(60s) reacts, his beige baseball cap barely covering his sun-damaged forehead as his skin wrinkles with anger.

BUS DRIVER
No food on the bus!

The teenagers ignore the driver.

Nina types a message to Patrick on her cell phone.

ON SCREEN:

NINA: "Sorry about the other day"

Nina presses send and a new message instantly appears.

ON SCREEN:

PATRICK: "Can I come over?"

Nina is surprised by the speed of Patrick's reply.

ON SCREEN:

She types "Sure", hesitates, then deletes it.

Starting over: "I'm not home today"

Again, Patrick's reply arrives instantly.

ON SCREEN:

PATRICK: "Tonight. 7pm"

Nina lowers her cell phone into her lap, fighting the urge to accept Patrick's offer.

She sighs, raising her phone to reply.

INT. LINDA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The second hand ticks around the face of a man's cheap watch:
7:05pm.

LINDA (O.C)
So, Nick. How long have you lived
in Casey's building?

Nick looks up from his wrist; he's dressed in smart-casual attire, sitting at the dining table with Casey and three others: Linda, CASEY'S FATHER and CASEY'S BROTHER.

The dining table is scattered with half-empty dishes and partially filled wine glasses -- signs of a feast already well underway.

NICK
Must be a year now.

Nick looks at Casey for confirmation.

CASEY
Something like that.

LINDA
(mid-chew)
Nina dropped into the store today.

CASEY
What? -- Why?

Nick removes his cell phone from his pocket, keeping it in his lap so he can look at it discreetly.

LINDA
I think she just needed someone to talk to. She should probably see a professional.

Nick pipes in without looking up from his lap.

NICK
You've got that right.

ON SCREEN:

Nick is playing the game "SNAKE" on his phone.

CASEY
She won't go near a therapist --
trust me.

CASEY'S FATHER
What is it that you do, Nick?

Nick lifts his gaze.

Casey jumps in before Nick has a chance to respond.

CASEY
He's about to start a course in
graphic design.

CASEY'S BROTHER
Oh cool. Like, drawing logos?

NICK
I want to make video games.

Casey's father doesn't look impressed by Nick's goals.

LINDA
How creative! When Casey and Nina
were little they use to make these
quirky homemade board games.
(to Casey's father)
Remember that? We had a cupboard
full of them.

Linda looks at Nick to see his reaction.

His attention is back on his phone.

Linda abandons her story and picks up a bottle of wine.

LINDA (CONT'D)
More wine anyone?

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM / FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

There's an open bottle of wine on Nina's coffee table,
accompanied by one used wine glass and four empty beer
bottles.

The television dimly lights the room, its screen displaying the closing credits of a movie.

Nina has fallen asleep sitting up on the couch, with her head flopped to one side.

It seems as though she's alone, until Patrick kisses her exposed neck.

Nina stirs gently but doesn't wake.

Patrick lowers his face down to Nina's chest and nuzzles his way inside her loose button-up shirt.

He starts suckling on her breast like an infant would while breastfeeding.

Nina wakes to the view of Patrick, well-suctioned onto her breast.

Patrick stares back at Nina with unnaturally wide eyes and no emotion, still rhythmically sucking.

He grins, breaking the seal, letting a dribble of milk run from the corner of his mouth.

Nina's face twists in a moment of pure disgust.

She pushes on Patrick, attempting to pry him off.

NINA
GET OFF ME!

Patrick opens his mouth robotically and rolls off Nina's lap, onto the floor.

He quickly scurries away with the same unusual form the nurse exhibited at the hospital.

Nina sends the empty beer bottles flying as she falls over herself and the coffee table, trying to distance herself from Patrick.

Her SCREAMS are unrestrained as he shuffles out the open front door.

INT. CASEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Casey drives while Nick relaxes with his foot up on the glove box. They are dressed in the same clothes they were wearing at Linda's.

CASEY
You know he was in the army...

Nick feigns interest, then turns up the volume on the car radio.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Civic pulls into the parking lot with the radio blaring.

Casey and Nick step out without saying a word to each other.

Casey turns her key in the driver's side door to lock the car.

SFX (O.S): Nina screaming in the distance

They exchange a quick glance, then sprint toward Nina's apartment.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nina backs up to the wall and slides down until she's sitting on the floor, her head buried in her knees.

SFX (O.S): Baby crying

Casey and Nick run in through the open front door.

Casey kneels in front of Nina.

CASEY
What's going on?! Is someone here?!

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nick rushes down the hallway, glancing into each room without entering.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick returns to the living room.

NINA
(into her knees)
Patrick was here. There was something wrong with him.

Nick's body relaxes, a mix of relief and annoyance on his face.

NICK
Patrick? -- Casey, let's go. She's
lost it.

Casey tilts her head toward Nina, prompting Nick to consider her feelings.

NICK (CONT'D)
There's no way he was here.

Nina lifts her head from her knees.

Casey looks at Nina with sympathetic eyes.

CASEY
Could it be another dream? We spoke
to Patrick yesterday. He'd just
landed in London.

NINA
(adamant)
I saw him. He was here. I felt him.

Nick surveys the empty alcohol bottles scattered across the coffee table and floor.

NICK
It looks like you might need to lay
off the beers, Nina.

CASEY
(to Nick)
If you want to head upstairs, I can
sort this out.

Nina notices Nick's clothing.

NINA
(to Casey, bitter)
Did you take Nick to your family
dinner?

Nick cuts in before Casey can respond.

NICK
I can see why you're so keen to
move in with me, but I don't think
it's a good idea to leave her alone
with that baby.

Nina's eyes snap to Casey, her expression fueled by the betrayal she feels.

The baby's CRIES intensify.

Nina stands, rejecting Casey's help. She walks to her bedroom, not looking back.

CASEY
(calling out)
Nina, nothing's decided yet.

SFX (O.S): Nina's bedroom door slams.

Casey and Nick look into each other's eyes. Casey's expression carries a hint of accusation, while Nick remains indifferent.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nina faces her baby, who is STANDING in the crib, tearful and reaching out to be held.

NINA
(harsh)
I don't want to hold you.

She glares at her baby, blaming him for her situation.

The baby WAILS.

BABY
(mid-cry)
Mama!

Nina's resentment instantly fades.

NINA
(disbelief)
Did you just say "Mama"?

Nina is on the verge of tears, moved and remorseful. She lifts her baby out of the crib and embraces him tightly.

He continues to cry.

Nina kisses him on the forehead and whispers softly against his skin.

NINA (CONT'D)
It's okay, Mama's here.

Nina continues to hold her baby close.

EXT. BUILDING EXTERIOR - NINA'S FRONT DOOR - DAY

Nina, exhausted but determined, carries her baby on her hip, the worn strap of her diaper bag biting into her other shoulder as she steps outside.

She scans the vicinity, every shadow a potential threat.

She pulls the door closed and locks it.

SFX: The door lock engages.

Nina turns to leave but CLICK, the door unlocks itself and opens a fraction, revealing a sliver of the apartment's interior.

Nina pauses and turns back to the door, almost too afraid to look.

With deliberate slowness, she reaches for the handle.

She jerks it closed and locks it again, as her own twisted reflection looms on the door's metallic hardware.

A second silhouette appears in the reflection.

GARY
(unenthusiastic)
Boo.

Startled, Nina spins around.

She exhales dramatically, relieved to see Gary.

NINA
You scared me.

Nina takes a step back, trying to create space between herself and Gary, who stands uncomfortably close.

Unfazed, Gary mirrors her movement, closing the gap with an intentional, unyielding stride.

GARY
I can see that.

Nina's demeanor shifts from alarm to an awkward attempt at casualness.

NINA
Actually, maybe you can help me --
I'm having trouble with my lock.

Nina gestures nervously toward the keyhole with her trembling hand still clutching the key.

Gary's eyes narrow on Nina, his tone growing pointed.

GARY
You haven't paid.

NINA
What?

Driven by suspicion and instinct, Nina slowly lowers her gaze and finds Gary's hand gripping her baby's leg.

Her eyes snap back to Gary's face, where his features twist into a malevolent grin.

Nina quickly places her hand over Gary's and forcefully pries it from her baby's skin.

She jumps back, her eyes locked on Gary in terror.

NINA (CONT'D)
I know you're not Gary! So, who are you?!

Gary speaks with a juvenile tone and a snicker.

GARY
You'll never guess.

Nina is disturbed by his response. She turns and walks briskly toward the busy street, glancing over her shoulder repeatedly. Her movements are sharp and jittery, as if she's expecting Gary to catch up at any moment.

Gary remains stationary, his eyes and smile fixed on Nina and the baby as they flee.

Nina looks back one last time before rounding the corner of the building.

Gary is gone.

EXT. BUSY STREET - BUS STOP - DAY

As Nina arrives on foot, a bus waits at the stop with its doors already open.

An ELDERLY GENTLEMAN sitting on the bus stop bench calls out to her.

ELDERLY GENTLEMAN

That one's full. We gotta wait for
the next one.

Nina ignores him and rushes onto the bus.

INT. BUS - DAY

The driver's seat is empty and there are no passengers on board.

Nina stiffens when she sees the BUS DRIVER sitting in the back row, his beige cap pulled down low, hiding his eyes.

She edges backward, hoping to make it out the bus doors without being noticed.

Her shoes make a SQUELCHING sound as she moves.

Looking down, she discovers the bus floor is thick with mud.

BUS DRIVER

If you really care to know my
name...

The bus driver lifts his head as clumps of wet earth drop from the now mud-covered ceiling, landing on Nina and her baby.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

...it's in your book.

The bus driver stands.

EXT. BUSY STREET - BUS STOP - DAY

Nina plunges out the bus doors and hits the ground running, clutching her baby.

The doors close, and the bus, with the number "3" displayed on its front, takes off in her direction.

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

Nina is still jogging along the footpath as the bus slowly passes her.

She turns her head and sees that the bus is now filled with PASSENGERS, some staring out the window at her -- ordinary people, interested in the commotion.

The bus moves on, turning at the next intersection.
Nina slows to a stop, out of breath and distressed.
A GOOD SAMARITAN approaches to offer assistance.

GOOD SAMARITAN
Are you okay? Do you need me to
call someone?

NINA
(screaming like a maniac)
GET AWAY FROM ME!

The Good Samaritan immediately backs away.
Nina's screams attract the attention of OTHERS in the area.
One ONLOOKER pulls out their cell phone and dials, keeping
their eyes on Nina.
Nina hurries off with her baby, heading away from home.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

Nina approaches her mother's front door by walking along the
concrete path, avoiding the overgrown lawn.

The garden is choked with weeds, swamping the dead, dried-out
lavender plants.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

The mat at the front door reads "HOME, SWEET HOME".

Nina's muddy shoes come to a stop on top of it.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - FROM ABOVE - DAY

The front door opens and Elizabeth ushers Nina and her baby
into the residence.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth closes the door and turns to face Nina, who remains
in the entryway.

ELIZABETH
(holding back tears)
Nina... he's beautiful.

Nina remains silent.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 (lovingly to the baby)
 Hello precious.
 (to Nina)
 What's his name?

NINA
 Isaac.

ELIZABETH
 (to Isaac)
 Hello, Isaac. I'm your grandma.
 (to Nina)
 Do you think he'll come to me?

Elizabeth reaches out to take Isaac from Nina.

Nina subtly retracts, shielding her baby.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 Nina. Please...

There's a sadness in Elizabeth's voice.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 I've already missed out on so much.

Nina stares into her mother's pleading eyes. Her stance softens and she lowers her guard. She hands over baby Isaac.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 (happily surprised)
 He's so heavy!

Isaac inspects his grandmother's face, as she does the same to him.

ELIZABETH CONT'D
 Look at your perfect little face.
 Where did you get that face? Was it
 from your old grandma?

Nina watches as Isaac enjoys the attention from his grandmother.

ELIZABETH
 (to Nina)
 Go shower and get yourself cleaned
 up.

Elizabeth returns her focus to Isaac, making funny faces at him.

Nina remains where she is, looking uneasy.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Go! You can't stay like that. We'll
be right here waiting for you when
you get back.

Reluctant, Nina heads for the bathroom.

She stops and turns back to her mother.

NINA
(uncompromising)
Mom... don't let anybody in the
house.

Elizabeth continues interacting with Isaac, playfully
pretending to bite his fingers as he brings them near her
mouth.

His little laugh is pure and joyful.

NINA (CONT'D)
(growling)
MOM!

Elizabeth looks at Nina.

NINA (CONT'D)
Don't let anyone in.

ELIZABETH
Are you in some kind of trouble
Nina?

NINA
Something like that.

Nina carries on walking to the bathroom.

ELIZABETH
(calling out)
The towels are where they've always
been.

SFX (O.S): The bathroom door closes.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Nina stretches her shirt up over her head, revealing her back
and the straps of her maternity bra.

She bundles the shirt into a ball and throws it across the room.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A child's long-sleeved pajama top lands on a laundry basket.

END FLASHBACK

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Nina opens the top button on her pants and begins to lower them.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A pair of pajama pants drop around a little girl's ankles and her small, bare feet kick the pants aside.

END FLASHBACK

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Nina's bare, adult feet step into the shower.

The clear water in the tray becomes discolored with the mud that washes down her legs.

As her body is cleansed, Nina finally cries, breaking into a quiet sob.

Water cascades over her face, merging with her tears, her dark brown hair clinging to her skin.

PRELAP (O.S): Banging on door

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The strange girl from the pier is in the shower, under the running water, her face unremarkable, youthful.

Her dark hair mirrors Nina's -- her older self.

She stares blankly at the tile wall in front of her.

ELIZABETH (O.S)
(yelling through the door)
Nina! Breakfast!

Young Nina doesn't respond. She continues to stare ahead, numb and silent.

END FLASHBACK

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Nina enters, drying her damp hair with a towel, dressed in clean clothes that are a departure from her usual style.

She scans the room, looking for her mother and baby.

On the wall behind her hangs a photograph of her father. He wears a faded brimmed hat and a utility vest, equipped with hooks and lures. He is fishing from the same pier that Nina passed on her walk.

SFX (O.S): Splashing water

Nina lets the towel fall to the floor and approaches the kitchen, anxiety evident in her steps.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth stands at the water-filled sink, her body blocking the view of whatever is happening in front of her. She no longer has baby Isaac in her arms and it appears as though she is using force to hold something down under the water.

Elizabeth looks over at Nina, who has appeared in the doorway.

ELIZABETH

I remember when you fit in this sink.

Baby Isaac can now be seen, having a bath in the kitchen sink.

Elizabeth repeatedly scoops up water with a plastic pitcher and pours it over his back.

Nina's posture relaxes with relief.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Now you're big enough to wear my clothes.

NINA

I figured you wouldn't mind.

ELIZABETH

I don't. You can borrow whatever you like. And you can stay as long as you'd like. I can make up your old bed.

NINA

I can't sleep in there.

ELIZABETH

Oh, don't be dramatic.

Nina expression sours and she looks deeply offended.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

At least stay a night or two -- to get some rest.

Elizabeth tenderly washes Isaac, her movements careful and nurturing.

Nina watches and her eyes show a flicker of longing in between the exhaustion and resentment.

NINA

We'll stay tonight -- I didn't bring enough diapers to stay longer.

A victorious smile appears on Nina's mother's face as she continues to bathe baby Isaac.

INT. NINA'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Beams of moonlight cut through the blinds and create a blue glow in the room.

Nina and Isaac share a single bed.

Isaac is dressed warmly, sprawled out between his mother and the wall -- fast asleep.

Nina is wrapped in a blanket, with her back to the door -- wide awake.

INT. NINA'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The door creaks open and a tall silhouette enters and walks to Nina's bedside.

Nina can be heard taking very quick, short breaths, out of fear.

NINA'S FATHER

Don't be scared, Nina. It's just
Daddy.

NINA'S FATHER(40s) switches on a teddy bear nightlight that sits on the nightstand. It barely lights the room.

Nina is bundled in her bedding and a circular, orange plaid blanket has been lovingly draped on top for extra warmth.

Young Nina hesitantly rolls over to face her father, clutching a RAG DOLL.

Her father takes the rag doll and places it on the nightstand.

Nina is only ten years old but her face conveys an anguish that is raw and ageless.

Her father slides into the bed beside her.

The rag doll is the only witness of what follows.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

A sunny morning.

Nina and Isaac relax outside, on the orange plaid blanket which now serves as a picnic rug on the untrimmed grass.

Nina is now wearing her own clothes.

The back door, a few paces away, has a window in its top half, offering a partial view into the mudroom.

Something stirs in the tall tree that shares the backyard with them.

Nina is intrigued. She walks to the base of the tree, leaving Isaac alone on the blanket.

As Nina looks up into the tree's lofty branches, the back door silently opens on its own.

Unable to determine the cause of the disturbance, Nina turns back to her baby.

A dense ring of white mushrooms has formed around the picnic blanket in the time that Nina was distracted.

Isaac reaches for the mushroom closest to him.

NINA

No!

Nina rushes to stop him, crushing and splitting mushrooms as she steps through the ring.

She scoops Isaac up off the ground and hops onto the back door's concrete stoop, leaving the picnic blanket behind.

After taking in the spectacle of the unusual ring of mushrooms, Nina retreats into the house through the open back door.

INT. MUDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nina fails to notice a strange jacket hanging by the door as she closes it behind her.

The jacket is a brown patchwork with hints of red, orange, and yellow. It has a textured, almost jagged surface, with uneven edges.

As Nina passes by the jacket, it disintegrates into a flurry of autumn leaves that drift to the floor.

She spins around at the sound of the jacket unraveling but sees only the pile of leaves.

A light draft slips under the back door and stirs the leaves.

They swirl up and rush toward Nina, taking the form of a figure reaching for her baby.

She instinctively raises an arm to shield herself and Isaac, but it's unnecessary -- the leaves simply float back to the floor.

SFX (O.S): Car pulling into driveway

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - DAY

A utility vehicle idles in the driveway with a trailer attached.

The side door reads: "Adam's Garden Care" and the back tray is full of gardening equipment.

INT. MUDROOM - DAY

SFX (O.S): Muffled lawn mower

Nina, holding Isaac, moves cautiously toward the back door and peers out its window.

Her face goes still and she steps back, pressing herself against the wall to hide from view.

She silently mouths: "What the fuck" then peeks out the window again, double-checking.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Adam, the man Nina met at the DMV, competently pushes a lawn mower through the grass, pulverizing the patch of mushrooms.

INT. MUDROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Nina watches him intently, she leans her hand on the timber door frame.

Her hand snaps back and her face tightens in pain.

A tiny splinter has embedded itself in her fingertip.

She inspects it briefly, then looks back out the window.

Nina pulls the small curtain across, covering the window, in one quick motion.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Adam is now on his knees packing straw mulch into the front garden bed.

A sedan pulls into the driveway and parks next to Adam's utility vehicle.

Elizabeth steps out of the sedan, juggling shopping bags and a large pack of diapers. She manages to close the car door and lock it remotely.

Elizabeth walks over to Adam.

He stands to have a chat, dusting his hands off on his pants.

INT. NINA'S OLD ROOM - DAY

The large pack of diapers sits open on the bed next to Isaac, who is laying on his back while Nina pulls his pants back on.

Elizabeth stands nearby, staring into Nina's bag, which rests on top of a chest of drawers.

NINA

You spoke to him?! -- What did he say?

ELIZABETH

He didn't mention any mushrooms.

Nina puts Isaac down to crawl about freely on the carpeted floor.

NINA

Well, he wasn't there when they appeared out of nowhere.

ELIZABETH

You didn't eat any, did you?

NINA

Mom.

ELIZABETH

Is it really that ridiculous? I mean, look at what you have in your bag.

Elizabeth lifts a small bottle of prescription medication from Nina's diaper bag -- it's the same one Nina saw in Mother 1's bag at the Community Hall.

Nina snatches the bottle out of her mother's hand.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Let me guess: they're not yours.

Nina inspects the label on the bottle.

NINA

They aren't mine.

ELIZABETH

Maybe not officially -- I thought you were off that junk.

NINA

(perplexed)

How did you get these?

Nina looks up from the label and scans the room, searching for any other inconsistencies.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?! I just pulled them out
of your bag! You watched me do it!

Nina seems distracted. She is looking past her mother, at the corner of the room.

NINA

What is that? Is that a doll?

Someone of short stature, about the size of a ten-year-old, sits on the floor, hidden under the circular, orange plaid blanket. No part of their body is visible.

Isaac plays innocently within arms reach of the intruder.

When Elizabeth sees what Nina is referring to, she staggers backward, inhaling dramatically, one hand grabbing at her heart.

Nina drops to her knees, overcome with fear and despair, realizing it isn't a doll.

Her hand releases the bottle of pills onto the carpet.

Isaac reacts to his mother's change in position and crawls blissfully toward her.

Nina reaches out her arms, ready to catch her approaching baby.

The intruder, still under the blanket, crawls swiftly at Isaac, attempting to reach him before Nina does.

As the entity moves, it progressively sinks into the floor.

The room erupts with SCREAMS from the two women.

Nina scoops Isaac up from the carpet just as the entity is about to make contact.

In that same moment, the entity completes its descent into the floor, vanishing completely, leaving the blanket lying empty on the carpet.

Nina and her mother stare at the blanket in shock, fearing it might move again.

It doesn't.

ELIZABETH

(panicking)

We have to get out of this house!
We need to call the police!

Nina continues to stare at the blanket.

NINA

It doesn't matter where we go.

ELIZABETH

What have you done to me? Have you
poisoned me?!

NINA

(snapping)

Can you stop?! I'm not some
mastermind behind everything you
don't want to believe.

The two women look at each other intensely.

ELIZABETH

(still shaken)

What are you talking about?

NINA

You know what I'm talking about.

Nina's mother takes some time to formulate a response.

ELIZABETH

Your father was a good man.

NINA

He was a monster. And you fed me to
him.

ELIZABETH

You weren't right in the head,
Nina. You didn't know what was
real, and you still don't!

NINA

Are you really that blind? It was
all real.

Nina finishes her thought as if she's only just now realizing
the weight of it.

NINA (CONT'D)

...and so is this.

Nina squats down to pick up the bottle of medication.

Elizabeth's eyes well up with tears as she trembles,
struggling to reconcile the horrors of her new reality.

NINA (CONT'D)
You wanna call the cops? Go ahead.
You can be the lunatic for once.

Nina drops the bottle into her diaper bag.

ELIZABETH
What else can we do?

NINA
"We" won't be doing anything.

Nina heaves the bag onto her shoulder.

INT. ENTRYWAY - DAY

Nina approaches the front door with Isaac and the diaper bag.
Her mother follows close behind.

ELIZABETH
Don't leave Nina -- It's not safe
to be alone!

Nina yanks the front door open, then freezes.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

A woman in her late 70s is standing by the letterbox,
blocking the path out of the yard. Her stance is firm and
unwavering, exuding power.

She stares straight ahead at the front door -- at Nina.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

ELIZABETH
It's the neighbor. She's harmless.

Nina takes a step back inside the house and closes the door.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
If she hadn't made that noise
complaint, you'd have died right
here in this house.

NINA
I remember June, Mom. But that's
not her. Even if it looks like it
is.

ELIZABETH
 (skeptical)
 What do you mean it's not her?

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth approaches the front window to study June.

June hasn't moved from her post, her posture unchanged.

ELIZABETH
 If it isn't June... then who is it?

Elizabeth stares out the window, her perception of the world shifting.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

A warm lamp casts a soothing, fireside glow in the quiet family room.

Nina sits on the couch, sifting through a shoebox of miscellaneous sewing items.

Isaac is bedside her, scrunching and unfolding a piece of paper; a list of names starting with the letter "R", a page from the "10,000 NAMES FOR BOYS" book.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

June is still in the same position, out in the darkness.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth walks to the front window with a cup of tea.

ELIZABETH
 Poor old Juney. She's still out there.

NINA
 Are you even listening? It's not June. It's a trick.

Nina pulls a handful of vintage sewing patterns out of the box. She flips through the stack apathetically but lingers on one that's for making a rag doll.

ELIZABETH
 Must be cold out there.

NINA

Can you get away from the window?

Elizabeth carefully lowers herself into the armchair with her tea.

Nina sets the box of odd bits aside, having found the needle she was looking for.

She stares at her finger, then cleans the needle on her shirt, before attempting to dig out the splinter.

ELIZABETH

Oh good, you found one. I thought I gave all that to you when you left.

Isaac's eyes are half-closed, struggling to staying open.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

(gesturing at Isaac)

He looks like he's about to doze off.

Elizabeth takes a sip of her tea and gazes out the window.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I don't think I'll be getting any sleep tonight.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

June's wrinkled face is vacant and unblinking.

EXT. FRONT YARD - MORNING

June's face hasn't changed but the bright morning sun is now on it.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The tea has barely been touched. It rests on a side table next to Elizabeth, who is asleep in the armchair, bathed in warm sunlight.

Nina is asleep on the couch, unaware that Isaac is awake beside her, playing with her house keys, the diaper bag wide open in his lap.

June approaches the front window and spends a moment there, staring inside.

As she walks away, her shadow sweeps over Elizabeth, gently waking her.

When Elizabeth comes to her senses, she checks whether June is still at the end of the path.

She relaxes when she sees that June is gone and her focus shifts to Nina and Isaac.

ELIZABETH
(smiling at Isaac)
You're still here.

Her words wake Nina.

NINA
(drowsy)
Is it gone?

ELIZABETH
Seems to be.

NINA
Then so are we.

Nina sits up and crams her belongings back into the diaper bag.

ELIZABETH
Nina, please stay. I can help you protect him.

NINA
Like you protected me?

Elizabeth stares at Nina but doesn't reply.

Nina's tone softens.

NINA (CONT'D)
I have a plan and I need to go home to make it work.

ELIZABETH
Then leave Isaac here. You could go and get what you need and come back with it.

NINA
No.

ELIZABETH
It doesn't make sense to do it all with Isaac on your hip.

NINA

And what does make sense? Leaving him with you? What about when that thing comes back? What will you do? Just hand him over?

ELIZABETH

Nina. I'd never.

NINA

You probably would have invited old Juney in for a tea if I hadn't been here to stop you.

ELIZABETH

Nina, that's not fair. How was I to know?

NINA

You use your eyes, and your instinct -- You pay attention.

ELIZABETH

Is that what you think happened to our family? You think I wasn't paying attention? All I ever wanted was to be a mother!

NINA

Well, you messed that up, didn't you?

ELIZABETH

Not for lack of love or effort.

NINA

Then what was it?

Elizabeth thinks on it for a moment.

ELIZABETH

I guess a mother just can't be everywhere at once.

Nina has no comeback.

The two remain silent.

Nina is close to tears after hearing her mother's subtle admission. Finally, she gives in.

NINA

I'll be one hour -- Do NOT take your eyes off him.

ELIZABETH

I won't.

Nina bends down and kisses Isaac on the forehead as if for the last time.

She selects a few items from her bag, shoving them into her pockets -- her phone, house keys and the bottle of prescription medication.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

NINA

I'm gunna kill it.

Nina walks to the door.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nina looks back at Isaac and her mother.

NINA

(to Elizabeth)

When I get back, ask me how my day was. And if I don't say it was "Golden"...

(PAUSE)

RUN.

Nina exits.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth carries Isaac to the front window.

Together they watch Nina jog away.

INT. APARTMENT - SEWING DESK - DAY

Nina grabs her old baby blanket from the sewing desk and stuffs it into an empty backpack.

INT. APARTMENT - INSIDE FRIDGE - DAY

The fridge door opens.

Nina's hand grabs a jar of cherry jam off the top shelf.

As the door closes, the light turns off.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Nina tips the contents of the medication bottle onto the countertop. There are only seven small white pills.

She picks one up and slides it into her back pocket.

Nina wrenches open a drawer, retrieves a spoon, then begins crushing the six remaining pills against the countertop.

The sound is unnaturally sharp, like breaking brittle shells. Despite this discrepancy, Nina remains focused, her hands steady but urgent.

With meticulous care, she scrapes the white powder into the jam jar, then mixes it thoroughly, almost frantic.

As she hurries to screw the lid on, the jar slips from her grasp and crashes to the floor, shattering.

A mixture of jam and glass splatters across the tiles below.

Nina freezes, her hands trembling, still suspended in the air, as if her mistake isn't real until she lowers them.

Caught between shock and denial, her whole body shakes, her breath shallow and uneven.

Her eyes lower to lock onto the dark red disaster at her feet.

In the midst of the mess, something tiny twitches, gently drawing Nina out of her catatonic state of disappointment and grief.

She crouches down and her fingers find a moving black beetle leg in the sticky jam.

She holds it up, as though she's uncovered something significant, but not in a hopeful way.

The beetle's leg kicks for the last time.

Nina's gaze slowly expands; there are more black beetle parts dispersed throughout the jam, some eerily shifting, others lying motionless.

A spark in Nina's eyes suggests a theory has just developed.

She releases the severed leg and reaches into her back pocket, pulling out a live black beetle.

As it starts crawling between her fingers, she quickly tosses it away.

Nina's face hardens with the realization that she's been deceived.

A door CREAKS in the distant hallway.

She turns her head to the sound, looking determined once more.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Casey's bedroom door is slightly ajar.

Nina pushes it open.

Two large moving boxes sit on the floor beside Casey's bed, which has been stripped of its bedding.

The wardrobe is empty, and the rest of the room is devoid of Casey's belongings.

Nina half-closes the door, leaving it as she found it.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nina's sense of urgency has returned. She rips various items of clothing out of the tallboy and shoves them into her backpack.

Once the backpack is full, she puts it on, then notices something in the bottom of a drawer.

Nina lifts out the "10,000 NAMES FOR BOYS" book -- The discovery jogs her memory.

She flips through the pages randomly, shaking her head, overwhelmed by the magnitude of names before her, until she sees something of interest.

One of the pages has been torn out, the page that sits between the name "Ronald" and "Rupert".

Nina coughs as if choking on the air.

She turns to find the crib ABLAZE, and the missing page from the book hanging from the baby mobile.

The flames intensify and the page burns, destroying all trace of the entity's name.

Nina waves her hand in front of her face, trying to clear the smoke, coughing uncontrollably.

She can barely open her eyes as she tries the bedroom door -- it won't budge.

Nina attempts to barge the door while turning the knob. She fails many times but her final attempt is successful and she falls out into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

No smoke follows Nina out of the bedroom.

She lies on the floor, struggling to catch her breath.

Eventually she drags herself up to standing, her symptoms easing.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Nina reenters the bedroom, timid, expecting danger.

The crib is untouched and there's no sign of the flames or smoke that threatened her moments earlier.

The carved wooden birds are hanging from the baby mobile, unscathed.

There are now eight grooves etched into the crib's timber post, with the fifth striking through the first four -- tally marks.

Nina reaches her hand out to the crib, expecting it to be hot to the touch; her fingertips linger on the timber -- it's cool.

SFX (O.S): The distant rumbling of thunder

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - DAY

Overcast -- storm clouds.

Nina stops jogging when she reaches the letterbox.

A few raindrops hit the pavement.

EXT - RED BRICK HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Nina knocks on the front door, her backpack almost bursting along the zipper-line as the raindrops escalate into a steady shower.

She's impatient. She turns to check the driveway; her mother's car is gone.

Nina tries the door. It swings open with ease -- unlocked. She steps inside.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nina quietly closes the door behind her.

She calls out cautiously, her voice echoing through the empty house.

NINA

Mom?

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Nina finds a note taped to the television screen. She pulls it off to read it.

NOTE: "I'm taking Isaac somewhere safe while you sort all this out. I'll call you in the morning. Mom"

Nina's fist tightens around the note as she closes her eyes, struggling to keep her composure.

She quickly removes her backpack and tips it upside-down, spilling clothes and toiletries onto her mother's couch.

Nina digs through the pile to find her cell phone, then attempts to call her mother -- no answer.

Nina SCREAMS with frustration and throws her phone back onto the couch, before sitting down and putting her head in her hands.

As she drags her fingertips down her face, pulling on her own skin, her eyes settle on the shoebox of sewing items which is still on the coffee table from the night before.

Nina stares at the box -- deep in thought.

SFX: Cell phone dings

She scrambles to check her phone.

ON SCREEN:

CASEY: "Are you okay? Why is Isaac at my mom's house? They won't tell me anything."

Nina immediately calls Casey, springing up from the couch, spurred by anticipation.

Casey answers.

NINA

Are you there with him now?!

Nina's energy fades.

NINA (CONT'D)

Oh, right.

She looks down at the shoebox.

NINA (CONT'D)

I need you to do me a favor.

Nina snatches a pair of scissors from the shoebox.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

The soft glow of the lamp creates long shadows that stretch across the family room.

Rain pelts down outside.

Nina paces near the front window. She looks down at her phone to check the time, then peeks through the floral curtains.

Tired of waiting, she removes her heavy backpack, hugging it to her chest as she drops into the armchair. She leans her head back, reluctantly idle.

Elizabeth emerges from the hallway.

Nina's stands apprehensively, clutching her backpack.

Elizabeth's eyes search the room.

ELIZABETH

Where's Isaac?

Elizabeth takes off her jacket and drapes it over the back of the couch, which is still occupied by a mound of Nina's belongings.

NINA

(scared)

He'll be here any minute.

Elizabeth looks mildly surprised by Nina's response.

Nina's voice slows as she speaks with a secret intent.

NINA (CONT'D)
(rehearsed)
How was your day?

ELIZABETH
Busy.

Nina's eyes widen as her suspicions are confirmed. She takes a few slow, sideways steps toward the front door and her voice becomes tight, as if she's biting back something sharper.

NINA
I guess there's no rest for the
wicked.

Elizabeth's head tilts, then both women freeze, locked in a stalemate, waiting for the other's next move.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - STREET FRONT - NIGHT

Casey's car pulls up in front of the brick house, with the wipers set on high.

The front garden bed has been disturbed, leaving straw and mud strewn across the path that leads to the house.

INT. CASEY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Casey's view of the yard and house is obscured by the raindrops on her window.

She gathers up some used tissues from the passenger seat and shoves them into the glove box.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SFX (O.S): Car horn beeps twice

Elizabeth looks toward the sound of the horn.

Nina uses the opportunity to make a dash for the door, flinging it open and bounding through it.

Elizabeth doesn't give pursuit.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Nina ignores the mess of mud and straw, sprinting down the wet concrete path, toward Casey's car.

INT. CASEY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Nina jumps into the passenger seat, holding her backpack on her lap, her hair and clothes drenched.

She slams the car door shut.

NINA

Let's go!

Casey squints, struggling to see through the raindrop-covered passenger window.

Elizabeth is barely visible, standing in the dimly lit doorway of the brick house.

CASEY

(puzzled)

How did she beat me here?

NINA

Just go!

Casey starts driving.

NINA (CONT'D)

Is Isaac okay?

Nina looks over her shoulder at the rearward-facing baby car restraint in the back row, then places her heavy backpack on the seat beside it.

CASEY

He's asleep now... but Mom said he cried all afternoon.

Casey takes a deep breath.

CASEY (CONT'D)

And so did I, actually.

As Casey steers around the first corner, Nina stares out the passenger window. Her gaze stretches down the street to where Casey's car was parked moments before.

June now stands on the glistening, rain-soaked road, in front of the brick house, watching them drive away.

The streetlights catch the thin lines of rain that cut across her silhouette, until she is out of sight.

NINA
Wait. YOU cried?

Casey looks at Nina, her eyes swollen and reddened from hours of crying.

CASEY
Just some stuff with Nick. But it's
all sorted now.

Nina notices a few autumn leaves scattered on the car mat, under her feet. She appears uneasy and attempts to brush them aside with her shoe.

EXT. RIVERFRONT PARK - ROAD PARKING - NIGHT

Casey's car slows to a stop beside the empty park.

The rain has eased to a light drizzle.

INT. CASEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Casey engages the parking brake.

CASEY
Why do I feel like I might regret
helping you tonight?

NINA
Casey... it's all going to be okay.
You won't regret anything.

Nina steps out of the car.

EXT. RIVERFRONT PARK - ROAD PARKING - NIGHT

Nina opens the back door and leans her body into the car.

With deliberate, tender movements, she emerges with her baby, wrapped snugly in the quilted baby blanket.

She carefully adjusts the blanket to shield her baby's head, then gently closes the car door.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - NIGHT

Nina approaches the derelict pier with her bundled baby.

Under the veil of darkness the pier has an ominous vibe, its wiry supports reminiscent of black insect legs -- skeletal and fragile.

EXT. DILAPIDATED PIER - NIGHT

Nina steps over the rusty chain, gently bumping the "DANGER - NO ACCESS" sign that hangs from its middle.

A strong wind swirls her hair violently around her face as she carries her baby to the end of the pier, while small fragments of decaying wood sprinkle into the choppy waters below.

When she can go no further, Nina turns to face the shore and is shocked to find her father walking towards her on the opposite end of the pier; he wears the same brimmed hat and utility vest depicted in the photograph on her mother's wall.

She fights to hide her fear, blinking back tears, while her gaze remains locked on her father, radiating tense, silent fury.

He notices the cracks in her confidence.

NINA'S FATHER

Don't be scared, Nina. It's just
Daddy.

Nina's father continues to approach, the bridge creaking and groaning under his weight.

NINA

My dad's dead.

NINA'S FATHER

How unfortunate.

NINA

No, it's not.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WALKING PATH - NIGHT

From the shore, Nina can be seen standing alone at the end of the pier, cradling her wrapped baby, her eyes rolled back into her head, her lips whispering unintelligible words.

EXT. DILAPIDATED PIER - NIGHT

Nina's father stops walking.

NINA'S FATHER
I've waited long enough.

His voice transforms into an intimidating growl.

NINA'S FATHER (CONT'D)
Give me the child.

NINA
(convincing)
I'd rather throw him in the river!

Nina gestures as if she's going to drop the baby into the swollen, storm-whipped river.

Her father laughs.

NINA'S FATHER
I can swim.

NINA
(tearful)
Why are you doing this to me?

NINA'S FATHER
I heard you call out in the darkness, begging for someone to save your life. You traded your firstborn in a fair exchange.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Nina's colorless lips say the word: "DEAL".

END FLASHBACK

EXT. DILAPIDATED PIER - NIGHT

Nina frowns, still struggling to remember.

NINA
I take it back.

NINA'S FATHER
(offended)
My deals forge new fates! They cannot be undone. Now, surrender the child, or I'll chew him out of your arms.

The aggressive dog from the walking path replaces Nina's father on the pier. It corners her, barking viciously, gnashing its teeth and lunging at her.

Nina screams and recoils in fear.

NINA
(breaking down)
Please! Just leave me alone!

The entity appears as Nina's father once more.

NINA'S FATHER
It's simple, Nina. Give me that
child...

He points to the baby in her arms.

NINA'S FATHER (CONT'D)
...and your debt will be repaid.
Then I'll be gone.

Nina's eyes light up and her tears cease.

NINA
(under her breath)
Deal.

Nina's father touches his hand to his ear, signaling that he needs her to speak up.

NINA (CONT'D)
(loud, clear and
confident)

DEAL.

The entity's victorious grin stretches her father's mouth a little further than it would normally go.

Nina looks down at the baby in her arms, then holds it out for the entity to take.

NINA
You can have this child.

Her father snatches the baby out of her hands and stands at the end of the pier, fixated on his prize.

Nina retreats a few paces toward the shore, walking backwards, idling to watch the next events unfold.

The entity, appearing as Nina's father, unwraps the baby.

NINA (CONT'D)
But Isaac is mine.

Nina's father snorts and involuntarily twitches, lifting the baby up by one of its ankles.

The baby isn't Isaac, it's a hand-sewn rag doll, made with fabric cut from the circular, orange plaid blanket.

Nina's father's face overloads with rage. His skin turns red and his eyes bulge. He roars and saliva sprays off his teeth, into the night air.

At the end of his roar, the entity no longer resembles Nina's father. He has stopped shape-shifting and appears as his true self -- a thin, short statured man, with tattered hair, wearing the unusual autumn coat from the mudroom.

With a mighty backswing, he slams the weighty, soil-filled doll down onto the rotting planks of the pier.

Over and over again, he winds up his arm and whips the doll down, as Nina watches from a distance.

Garden soil and straw fly from the doll's ripped seams, littering the pier.

Nina turns her face away, to avoid the debris, as the heavy doll crashes down one last time, fracturing the frail timber joists beneath it.

A large section of the pier collapses, and the entity drops through, still gripping the doll by its leg. It doesn't make a splash.

The atmosphere on the pier is suddenly tranquil, with the soothing sound of WATER LAPPING, blending with Nina's soft, steady breaths.

She slowly opens her eyes, bracing for whatever remains.

There is nothing but a gaping hole in the pier.

Nina approaches it cautiously and peers down into it.

Only a few autumn leaves float on the surface of the water.

The doll and the entity have vanished.

The distant trees in the park beckon Nina back to shore, their leaves softly HISSING in the wind.

She picks up her old baby blanket and dusts it off as she walks back along the crumbling pier.

Nina steps over the rusty chain -- this time, alone.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

A few CHILDREN climb and hang from the silver chains of a newly-installed swing set, while their PARENTS mingle nearby.

The grassy backyard is bustling with PARTY GUESTS.

Hand-made, crepe paper garlands drape along the fence line, interspersed with colorful balloons.

A piñata shaped to resemble the number one, hangs from the tall tree, which is also providing shade over a trestle table laden with party food.

At the center of the table sits a large, round, dark brown cake, crowned with glossy, chocolate-dipped orbs and one small candle.

EXT. BACKYARD - CAKE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Nina and Elizabeth are busy attaching homemade fabric bunting to the front of the cake table, their hands working in tandem -- both women looking well-rested and polished.

NINA

I can't believe it's been a year.

ELIZABETH

I know. It feels like yesterday we were all waiting for him to arrive.

Adam walks over holding a ONE-YEAR-OLD child.

ADAM

Looking good, ladies.

Nina and Elizabeth step back from the cake table, their task complete.

Adam and Nina share a quick kiss on the lips.

ELIZABETH

Come to Grandma, Birthday Boy.
Let's give your daddy a break.

Adam hands the toddler to Elizabeth, then wraps his arm around Nina.

A YOUNG BOY(5) runs up to the cake table.

ISAAC
Mom, can we eat the cake now?

NINA
Sorry honey. Not until everyone
arrives.

Isaac is quickly distracted by the other party food laid out
in front of him.

ADAM
Who are we waiting on?

NINA
Take a guess.

ELIZABETH
She's here.

Elizabeth nods toward the side of the house.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Casey has entered the backyard through the side gate, with
Nick by her side.

She is visibly pregnant, wearing a full-length dress that
drapes elegantly over her baby bump.

EXT. BACKYARD - CAKE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

ELIZABETH
I think you have enough cheese
there Isaac.

Isaac is attempting to slide a fifth cube of cheese onto a
toothpick.

NINA
(to Adam, referring to
Isaac)
Do you want to show him the piñata?

Nina breaks away from Adam's embrace, her sights set on
greeting Casey.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Nina gives Nick a friendly wave as he passes by, on his way
to join the others at the piñata.

NINA
 (greeting Casey)
 For someone who wasn't keen on
 kids, the bump really suits you.

Nina welcomes Casey with a hug.

Casey doesn't return the hug. She seems stiff and troubled.

EXT. BACKYARD - PIÑATA - CONTINUOUS

A blind-fold hangs from Adam's back pocket as he gives Isaac some hand-on-hand instruction, showing him how to swing the piñata stick.

Elizabeth stands at a safe distance with the toddler, watching the action.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

CASEY
 (tense and forlorn)
 I was so stupid. How could I think
 I wouldn't want this?

Casey places her hands on her baby bump, looking down at it wistfully.

Nina speaks with a reassuring tone.

NINA
 Hey! None of that matters now. We
 all change.

CASEY
 It matters.

Nina studies Casey's face, trying to decipher the cause of her unrest.

Casey stares vacantly in the direction of the cake table.

CASEY (CONT'D)
 Nick called it off.

NINA
 What?! When?!

Nina looks at Nick.

EXT. BACKYARD - PIÑATA - CONTINUOUS

Nick laughs as Isaac almost hits Adam with the stick.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

CASEY

The day you asked me to drive you
to the pier. I had no choice, Nina.
I had to help him love me again.

NINA

Casey -- What are you saying?

CASEY

Look.

Nina follows Casey's gaze and is horrified by what she sees.

EXT. BACKYARD - CAKE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Linda is bent over the cake table, scooping fistfuls of
chocolate cake into her mouth.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Nina's face conveys a moment of terrifying realization.

CASEY

What kind of cake is that?

Nina is in a state of shock, her gaze fixed on Linda.

NINA

Black Forest.

EXT. BACKYARD - CAKE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Linda's teeth slice through one of the chocolate orbs,
revealing the red cherry within.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Nina and Casey stand together with their eyes glued on Linda
as the party continues around them.

Nina reaches out to hold Casey's hand.

She gives it a supportive squeeze.

EXT. BACKYARD - CAKE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Linda continues to devour the birthday cake.

A bouquet of RED TULIPS lies abandoned on the cake table beside her.

The logo on the wrapping reads: "MR TINKLES' TULIPS".

The letters on the wrapping slowly rearrange, until they spell the word: "RUMPELSTILTSKIN".

The name remains on screen as everything else fades to black.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

"RUMPELSTILTSKIN"

END.

*In the credits, the letters in "MINT SKULL PRIEST" (the fictional band name) can also rearrange to spell "RUMPELSTILTSKIN".