

DECEIT

By

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Half unpacked moving boxes litter the open plan living area.

In the kitchen, CARL LOCKHART (32), opens the fridge and stares at the empty shelves. Although he's a good looking guy, he's a lost soul, not entirely comfortable in his own skin.

He sighs with resignation, grabs his keys and leaves.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

At the check-out, Carl dumps a basket of essentials on the conveyor belt. Head down, he follows it to the cash register as he pulls out his wallet.

With all the confidence of a mouse, the attractive check-out operator, JESSICA CLEARY (32), scans Carl's items.

Carl watches the tally on the register.

Jessica places the last item in a bag, glances up.

JESSICA
That'll be-- Carl?

For the first time, Carl looks at her. His eyes widen.

CARL
Jess.

Jessica's face lights up as she hurries out from behind the register and hugs him.

Taken aback, Carl gives her a feeble hug in return, releases her.

CARL
It's good to see--

She socks him hard in the arm, glares at him.

JESSICA
Bastard. You never called. Nothing.

The male STORE MANAGER hurries over.

STORE MANAGER
Jess? What're you doing?

CARL
It's fine. We're old friends.

STORE MANAGER

You've got a line-up here, Jess.

Jessica glances behind Carl, sees one lone customer waiting. She leans in close.

JESSICA

Meet me at the cafe around the corner in five. And don't you dare disappear on me again.

INT. CAFE BATHROOM - DAY

Carl paces back and forth, his brow speckled with sweat. He wrenches paper towels from a dispenser, blots his face, takes a deep breath.

INT. CAFE - DAY

As Carl waits at a table, his leg vibrates nervously. The bell over the door jingles. He stills.

Jessica hurries toward him, takes a seat opposite as a waitress sets down two cappuccinos.

Carl gives her a sheepish look.

CARL

I ordered for you. Hope that's--

JESSICA

Fifteen years, Carl. What sort of person just leaves without ever getting in contact again? We were supposed to be best friends.

His eyes shift down to the table.

CARL

For me, that wasn't enough.

JESSICA

I couldn't help how I felt.

CARL

I know. Neither could I.

They glance awkwardly at each other.

JESSICA

So... what're you doing here?

CARL

I just moved back. Scored a contract with a large company. I'm an engineer.

JESSICA

Engineer? What happened to the cop thing? Upholding the law and all that?

Carl shrugs, glances away.

CARL

Things change. What happened to you becoming a teacher?

JESSICA

Things change.

CARL

Such as?

She grabs her purse, takes out a photo, hands it to Carl.

JESSICA

My daughter. Rianna.

INSERT PHOTO: A pretty teenager wearing glasses.

Captivated, Carl stares at the photo.

JESSICA

She's almost fifteen.

He glances at Jessica with curiosity.

JESSICA

Just after you left, I had this thing with--

CARL

Please tell me it wasn't Brad.

JESSICA

It wasn't. This guy, he was only around for the summer. By the time I found out I was pregnant... he was gone. It was a stupid mistake.

Carl reaches out and places his hand over hers.

CARL

Gotta be the most beautiful mistake I've ever seen. She looks just like you.

Jessica lets out a small laugh, slips her hand out from under his.

JESSICA

You're so full of it.

Carl hands the photo back, notices her bare hand.

CARL

But you're married now, right?

She tucks the photo away, avoids his gaze.

JESSICA

You know, I really miss having a good friend around.

Carl gives her a warm smile.

CARL

So do I.

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. LOWER CLASS SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

High school students mill about on the sidewalk in front of a run-down block of apartments.

In the distance, a school bus lumbers toward them.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

RIANNA CLEARY (15) stands in front of an open fridge. An unexplored sexuality simmers beneath her out-of-date glasses, unstyled hair and well-worn high school uniform.

The fridge contains a bottle of tomato sauce, jug of water, an old lettuce.

RIANNA

Thank you, Mom.

The rumble of the bus grows loud. Rianna rushes to the window, peers out, smiles as the bus lumbers past.

She picks up a phone, dials.

RIANNA

Hey. Any chance of a lift?

As she listens to the answer, her face lights up.

EXT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

A V8 pickup truck pulls into the cracked concrete parking lot. The horn toots.

All smiles, Rianna exits her apartment.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - CONTINUOUS

As Rianna climbs in, Carl puts the pickup in reverse.

CARL
This's becoming quite a habit.

RIANNA
Do you mind?

He places his arm behind her seat, looks over his shoulder as he reverses.

CARL
Would I be here if I did?

Rianna stares at the "BARNET CONSTRUCTIONS" company logo on his shirt. Her eyes drift to his throat, his jaw, the side of his face. As he faces front, he catches her.

CARL
What?

She reaches out, brushes his cheek.

RIANNA
Just some fluff.

A little unsettled, Carl puts the pickup in gear.

EXT. LOWER CLASS SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

As the pickup accelerates down the road, it passes a long construction site fence displaying the company logo: "BARNET CONSTRUCTIONS".

EXT. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Carl's pickup pulls up outside the high school gates.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - CONTINUOUS

Carl grabs his wallet from the center console, removes ten dollars, offers it to her.

RIANNA
What's the point of a V8 when you drive like an old woman?

CARL
The point is, you're in the car.

Flattered, she glances from him to the money.

RIANNA
Mom said I shouldn't.

CARL
How will she know?

She takes the money, opens her door.

RIANNA
Thanks.

CARL
Hey. I'll pick you up this
afternoon.

She gives him a coy smile, gets out with her school bag.

Carl watches her through the passenger window until she disappears into the horde of students.

He smiles to himself as he pulls away.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Clear blue sky. Metal clangs. Engines rumble. Compressed air hisses. Men shout.

Labourers crawl over a high-rise steel frame as a crane lowers a beam to a group of men on the top floor.

On the ground, the foreman, TOM CHESSER, late 50's, pot bellied and red faced under his hard hat, watches. The radio on his shoulder crackles.

Tom glances toward a row of portable on-site offices.

TOM
(into radio)
Yeah?

INT. CARL'S ON-SITE OFFICE - DAY

Carl studies blueprint plans spread out on the desk as Tom enters.

CARL
Have a look at this.

Tom removes his hard hat, joins Carl at the desk. Carl circles his finger around a small area on the plan.

TOM
What am I lookin' at?

CARL
You can't see it?

Tom leans closer, squints at the plans.

TOM

Nope.

CARL

Yeah. Neither did I the first few times.

INT. STEPHEN'S CITY OFFICE - BARNET CONSTRUCTIONS - DAY

STEPHEN BARNET (33) sits at his desk, a cookie in one hand, its wrapper in the other. This guy looks like he's stepped from the page of a fashion magazine... and he knows it.

STEPHEN

What did I tell you?

A female SECRETARY (20's) stands on the other side of his desk. She looks like she'd rather be in hell right now.

SECRETARY

Not to open any packaging. But I thought it'd be nice if--

Stephen tosses the cookie and wrapper in the waste basket.

STEPHEN

Nice? Nice that my food's been exposed unnecessarily to who-knows-what?

SECRETARY

No, Mr. Barnet. I'm sorry.

He basks in her humiliation.

STEPHEN

Unless the seal is in place, it ceases to be clean. But it appears that's too difficult for you to understand.

She stares at the floor.

SECRETARY

I'm sorry. It won't happen--

STEPHEN

No, it won't. Pack your things immediately. And don't expect a reference.

With great satisfaction, Stephen watches her scuttle out.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

The skeletal frame stands bare, the site eerily quiet.

Labourers sit around on pallets and bricks. Some sip from thermos cups as they chat amongst themselves.

Nearby, Carl leans against a stack of metal beams. Tom smokes a cigarette as he paces in front of Carl.

TOM

You're breakin' the news.

CARL

Think I'd let you take the credit?

Tom scoffs, shakes his head.

A sleek Mercedes SL550 Roadster roars through the gates and stops in front of the on-site offices.

Stephen climbs out. As he shrugs on a tailored jacket, the silence dawns on him. He glances around.

Labourers relax amongst the site materials.

Stephen checks his Rolex, frowns.

Tom crushes the cigarette beneath his boot.

TOM

Tellin' Barnet he's wrong, ain't somethin' to aspire to.

CARL

I'm saving his ass, not kicking it.

Stephen rounds the stack of beams.

STEPHEN

What the fuck's going on?

Startled, Tom whirls around. Carl straightens up.

STEPHEN

It's an hour past their break.

Labourers watch the outburst with interest.

CARL

I ordered a shut down.

STEPHEN

You're in no position to shut down anything.

CARL
Actually... I am. Why don't we take
this inside?

STEPHEN
Just tell me what's going on.

Uncomfortable, Carl crosses his arms.

CARL
There's a flaw in the next stage
plans.

Stephen's jaw clenches. He glances to the side.
The curious labourers quickly avert their eyes.

STEPHEN
My office. Now.

INT. STEPHEN'S ON-SITE OFFICE - DAY

Stephen sits at an immaculate desk, the plans spread out in front of him. He leans back, sighs, removes a pack of antiseptic-wipes from his pocket and cleans his hands.

STEPHEN
Fuck.

Carl stands on the other side of the desk.

CARL
Yeah, exactly.

STEPHEN
I'll have the changes on your desk
first thing tomorrow. Send them
home. You can go too.

Carl nods, strides to the door.

STEPHEN
Lockhart.

Carl stops, dread on his face.

STEPHEN
Nice catch.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - LATER

Carl and Tom head toward the almost empty parking area.

TOM
--and he thanked you?

CARL

What's your problem with him,
anyway?

TOM

You wouldn't wanna know.

Tom's breath catches in his throat. As he comes to a abrupt stop, he clutches his arm. His face contorts with pain.

CARL

Tom? Shit. You okay?

TOM

Don't... think so.

Tom collapses. Carl drops to his knees beside him. Checks Tom's airway, his breathing. Starts CPR.

EXT. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Rianna leans against the fence, the school behind her deserted. Upset, she stares down the street.

EXT. LOWER-CLASS SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Rianna dawdles along the sidewalk. As she passes a house with a wood paling fence, a dog barks, snarls.

Hand over her heart, she stops.

RIANNA

Asshole.

She gives the fence a frustrated kick.

From the other side, the dog's barks grow ferocious.

Rianna backs away, hurries down the street. She glances over her shoulder.

A snout appears in a hole beneath the fence. A moment later, a Pit Bull's head pushes into the hole. The fence paling cracks.

Terrified, Rianna breaks into a sprint.

The dog squeezes free of the fence, takes off after her.

Rianna dashes past the construction site, looks over her shoulder.

Stephen's Mercedes emerges from the construction site driveway.

Rianna slams into the car. Her head bounces off the hood, glasses fly off. Out cold, she slides to the ground.

Stephen stares through his window in shock.

Gaining fast, the Pit Bull rockets along the street.

Stephen waits... waits... shoves open the car door, slams it into the dog. The dog tumbles over, gets to its feet, shakes its head... leaps at Rianna.

Just as its teeth catch hold of Rianna's shirt, Stephen grabs the dog's collar, yanks it up off the ground. Rianna's shirt rips open.

Stephen twists the dog's collar tight... tighter. It thrashes, twitches erratically... stills.

Stephen carries the dog into the construction site, drops it behind the fence.

He returns to Rianna. As he stares down at her, he pulls a disinfectant-wipe from his pocket, cleans his hands.

Rianna remains unconscious, a cut on her forehead. Her torn shirt reveals a bra-clad breast.

Stephen kneels beside her.

STEPHEN
Hey. Hey? Wake up.

No response.

Transfixed, Stephen stares at her breast. He reaches out, brushes his fingers over her nipple.

Her eyes flicker as she lets out a groan.

Stephen casually pulls her shirt closed, smiles.

Rianna squints up at him.

STEPHEN
Welcome back.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Tom lies in bed, hooked up to a monitor. Tom's daughter, TRACY, late twenties, heavily pregnant, holds Tom's hand. A knock comes from the door.

Carl enters, concern etched on his face.

TOM
Lockhart. My hero.

CARL
Give it rest.

TOM
Have to now, right?

CARL
The doc said you'll be fine.

Tracy scoffs as she taps Tom's belly.

TRACY
Only if he gets rid of this
ridiculous sympathy pregnancy.

TOM
Hey. I'm just tryin' to make you
feel better.

TRACY
Since I was ten?

They both laugh. Tom plants a kiss on the back of her hand.

Carl watches their interaction with interest.

INT. STEPHEN'S ON-SITE OFFICE - DAY

Seated in an expensive leather chair, Rianna clutches her torn shirt together with one hand, holds a wad of tissues to her forehead with the other.

At her side, Stephen pours Peroxide on a cotton ball. An open first-aid kit rests on the desk.

Uneasy, Rianna watches. He moves in close, brushes his thigh against her knee. She leans away a little.

STEPHEN
I'll try to make this as painless
as possible.

He gently eases her hand from her forehead. A shallow cut bleeds just below her hairline.

Tenderly, he places his fingers under her chin, raises her face, dabs at the cut.

Her breath hisses in, she flinches. Stephen cradles her head, leans over her in an intimate gesture.

RIANNA
(blurting)
I know Carl Lockhart. He works
here.

STEPHEN

That's right. I hired him.

He releases her, tosses the cotton ball in the waste basket, picks up a band-aid.

RIANNA

He's a good guy... except when he forgets to pick me up.

Deep in thought, Stephen secures a butterfly band-aid over her cut. He picks up another.

STEPHEN

How do you know him?

RIANNA

He's a friend of Mom's... I'm sorry for denting your car.

STEPHEN

Never mind that. If I'd been a few seconds later, I might have run you down.

A little more at ease, Rianna lets out a slow breath as Stephen places a second band-aid over her cut.

RIANNA

Well, thanks.

STEPHEN

For almost running you over?

RIANNA

For being early.

Stephen smiles, walks across the room, removes a jacket from a closet. He returns to Rianna, holds it up.

STEPHEN

Here. You'll be more comfortable.

Rianna keeps a tight hold on her torn shirt as she stands and lets Stephen help her into the jacket.

Stephen tidies up the mess on his desk.

STEPHEN

I'd better get you home. I'm sure your mother's worried about you.

RIANNA

Yeah, right.

Stephen pauses in his clean-up, smiles to himself.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Carl closes Tom's door behind him. As he saunters down the corridor, he glances at his watch.

CARL

Shit.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

The phone rings as Jessica, in her supermarket uniform, dumps grocery bags on the kitchen counter. As she reaches for the phone, it stops mid-ring.

The front door opens. Rianna enters.

JESSICA

Can you give me a hand--

Stephen follows Rianna inside.

Jessica's eyes flick to Rianna, take in her injury.

JESSICA

What happened?

RIANNA

This dog tried to--

Jessica rounds the bench, hurries over to her.

JESSICA

Are you okay? Does it hurt? Do you want some aspirin?

Rianna frowns at her mother's concern.

RIANNA

Yeah... to everything.

Jessica glances at Stephen. He extends his hand. She accepts it.

STEPHEN

Stephen Barnet.

RIANNA

He saved my life.

JESSICA

What?

STEPHEN

It was nothing.

JESSICA
It doesn't sound like nothing.
Please, sit. Tell me all about it.

EXT. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Carl's pick-up cruises past the empty school.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

Jessica sits on the couch with Stephen. Behind them, Rianna gets her own aspirin in the kitchen.

Carl barges through the front door without knocking.

CARL
I'm sorry. I--

He notices Rianna's injury.

CARL
Jesus. What happened?

Upset, tears well in Rianna's eyes.

RIANNA
Where were you?

CARL
I had to--

Stephen rises, an empty mug in his hand.

Surprised, Carl stares at him.

JESSICA
Don't panic. She's fine.

Stephen gives Carl a quick smile.

CARL
Why're you here?

RIANNA
He saved me from getting my throat
ripped open... since someone forgot
to pick me up.

Rianna storms off to her room. A door slams.

Carl sheepishly glances at Stephen.

CARL
Thanks, I guess.

STEPHEN
I'm just glad she's okay. Anyway,
I'd better get going.

Jessica touches Stephen lightly on the arm.

JESSICA
So soon?

Carl watches the exchange, not liking it one bit.

STEPHEN
I'm afraid so. You may want to keep
an eye on her. She passed out for a
few seconds.

CARL
We will. Thanks again.

Carl opens the door, happy to shut it again with Stephen on
the other side. Disappointed, he turns to Jessica.

JESSICA
(innocent)
What?

CARL
Nothing.

JESSICA
You're still taking her out for
movie night, right? I've got a
date.

Carl looks at her with disbelief.

CARL
Has it occurred to you that maybe
you should stay home with her?

JESSICA
What difference does it make if
it's you or me? Besides, it's your
little ritual with her, not mine.

CARL
She's pissed at me.

JESSICA
She'll get over it. She thinks
you're Mister Wonderful.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Stephen grabs the dead dog's collar, drags it a few feet,
stops as something catches his eye. He releases the dog,
strides toward the sidewalk.

On the grassy area beside the road, he stoops down, picks up a pair of glasses with one cracked lens.

He slips them into his pocket, hurries to the dead dog, and drags it deeper into the construction site.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rianna sits on the couch, sporting an old pair of glasses. She stares blankly at the TV. A knock sounds on the door.

She stomps over, opens it, crosses her arms over her chest.

Carl stands on the doorstep.

CARL

Are you going to let me explain?

RIANNA

What do I care?

CARL

Well, in case you do, one of the guys at work had a heart attack. I was with him when it happened.

Ashamed, Rianna avoids his eyes.

CARL

I'm surprised Stephen didn't mentioned it.

RIANNA

I'm sorry.

Carl smiles.

CARL

Well, since we're both sorry...

Relieved, Rianna breaks into a grin, lets him inside.

EXT. CINEMA - NIGHT

Carl carries a large popcorn as he and Rianna emerge with other movie-goers.

As they head toward Carl's pick-up, Rianna moves closer to him, says something. He laughs, grabs her in a playful headlock, almost spills the popcorn.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl and Rianna sit on the couch. TV light flickers over their faces. Now in a large bowl, the popcorn rests between them.

Carl glances at her, frowns.

CARL
What are those things, anyway?

Confused, Rianna looks at him.

RIANNA
Huh?

He reaches out, takes off her glasses.

CARL
These are truly awful.

RIANNA
(defensive)
They're all I've got.

CARL
I think it's time for something more suitable.

RIANNA
Like Mom'll spring for that.

Carl studies her a moment, aware of her pain.

CARL
I'll take you shopping on the weekend, get you something trendy.

RIANNA
You don't have to.

CARL
I know. But I want to.

She gives him a shy smile. From the TV, the theme music for True Blood begins.

Carl picks up the remote, changes the channel.

RIANNA
Hey! I'm watching that.

CARL
I'm not.

RIANNA
It's my favorite show!

CARL
Girlie crap, is what it is.

RIANNA
You're just jealous of all the
hunky guys.

Carl suppresses a smile, scoffs.

CARL
Those pretty boys?

Rianna makes a sudden grab for the remote. Too quick for her, Carl holds it out of reach.

CARL
Not a chance.

Thwarted, she picks up a piece of popcorn, tosses it at him. It bounces off his cheek.

CARL
You'd better quit it.

She tosses another piece, hits his nose. In a flash, he flicks his hand into the bowl, scatters popcorn over her.

She gapes at him, makes a grab for the bowl. Carl has a firm grip. Rianna yanks it toward her. He lets go.

The bowl flips. Popcorn explodes everywhere.

RIANNA
You're cleaning it up!

CARL
I didn't spill it.

She picks up a few pieces.

RIANNA
But you're gonna eat it.

She leaps at him, shoves popcorn at his mouth. Laughing, he tickles her. She squeals, flops back on the couch. He leans over her in a relentless tickle attack.

CARL
Give up?

RIANNA
Yes! Yes!

Carl sits back, stares at the TV. Rianna lies there a moment, watches him with longing.

CARL
You really ask for it sometimes.

She picks up a piece of popcorn, places it on her flat palm, flicks it at him.

CARL

Now you've done it.

As he reaches for her, she leans in, kisses him square on the mouth. He freezes. She pulls back a little.

CARL

Rianna...

She leans in again. Carl grips her shoulders, stops her.

Confused, she searches his eyes.

RIANNA

I thought you... felt something.

Carl stares at her, not sure what to say.

RIANNA

You don't?

He opens his mouth to deny it. Nothing comes out.

A spark of hope lights up in her eyes.

Dismayed, Carl releases her, gets to his feet.

CARL

You're too young.

RIANNA

I'm almost sixteen.

CARL

Exactly my point.

Hurt, Rianna stares at the floor.

RIANNA

I'm an idiot.

CARL

No. Let's just... It never happened, okay?

She nods, gives him a embarrassed glance and hurries down the hallway.

In a state of shock, Carl stares after her.

LATER

Jessica, wearing heels and a nice dress, flops down on the now clean couch beside Carl.

JESSICA
Why do I bother?

CARL
Beats me. Especially since you
never give a guy a second chance.

She frowns, looks at him.

JESSICA
Sorry?

CARL
You think I haven't noticed? All
these dates... they've all been
first dates. Every one of them.

Jessica fixes her gaze on the TV.

CARL
Why is that?

JESSICA
You're one to talk.

CARL
We're not talking about me.

JESSICA
Maybe we should. Why don't I ever
hear about you dating? Not once
since you came back have you ever
mentioned going on a date. At least
I'm out there trying to find
someone. Why aren't you?

Carl gazes at her until she finally looks at him.

CARL
You know why.

His intense gaze lingers, his attraction obvious. Taken in by
it, her face softens.

Carl gently places his hand over hers.

Jessica glances down, watches as his thumb caresses her
little finger in a tiny, intimate gesture. Sudden fear grips
her. Her whole body stiffens.

She snatches her hand away, stares at the TV, swallows.

JESSICA
I'm really tired, Carl.

Disappointed, he gets the message and leaves.

As the door closes, Jessica stares after him with regret.

EXT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

A noisy old car pulls into the driveway, parks. As Jessica climbs out, Stephen's Mercedes pulls up beside her.

Jessica gives him a flimsy smile, opens the trunk. Inside, department store bags abound.

STEPHEN

Here, let me help with those.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

Rianna sits on the floor at the coffee table, homework spread out in front of her.

Jessica enters. Stephen carries the bags.

Rianna looks up, surprised to see Stephen. He places the bags on the couch behind her.

STEPHEN

How are you feeling?

RIANNA

Fine. What's all this?

In the kitchen, Jessica turns on the kettle.

STEPHEN

I think someone's been on a shopping spree.

Rianna immediately searches through the bags.

JESSICA

I needed a bit of a pick-me-up...
You know, I'd feel even better if I
could offer you something for
yesterday, Stephen. Maybe dinner?

Rianna finds nothing in the bags for her. Stephen catches the disappointment on her face.

STEPHEN

Actually, that'd be nice.

INT. CARL'S ON-SITE OFFICE - NIGHT

Carl leans over the site plans, yawns.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Upset, Jessica gathers food from the fridge.

In front of the kitchen counter, Stephen sits on the couch, Rianna on the floor in front of him. He leans over her, watches as she writes in her text book. She breaks into a smile.

STEPHEN

See?

RIANNA

Oh my God.

STEPHEN

I knew you'd get it.

RIANNA

Finally.

STEPHEN

It's pretty complicated stuff.

A loud crash comes from behind them. Rianna flinches. Stephen hurries into the kitchen.

Jessica picks up pieces of a broken plate.

STEPHEN

Here. Let me.

She stands, wipes at her eyes, turns her back to Stephen.

STEPHEN

Is everything all right?

JESSICA

Sure.

He moves closer.

STEPHEN

Come on. What is it?

Her chin trembles.

JESSICA

Just a shit of a day.

STEPHEN

We all have those.

JESSICA

I know. It's just... I was up for a promotion and they went and gave it to some guy who hasn't even worked there ten minutes. I'm sorry...

Embarrassed, she bolts from the room, disappears down the hallway.

Rianna stares after her with a frown.

A little stunned, Stephen stands in the kitchen. He looks over the counter at Rianna.

STEPHEN
I guess I didn't handle that too well.

RIANNA
She's not that easy to handle.

He pats his jacket, reaches inside and pulls out a rectangular box wrapped in pretty paper.

STEPHEN
Listen, the reason I came by was to give you this.

Rianna's eyes widen at the sight of the gift. He sits on the couch, offers it to her.

RIANNA
I shouldn't...

STEPHEN
Yes you should. Go on.

She tentatively takes the gift, tears off the paper, opens the box. Her face lights up.

RIANNA
They're perfect.

Stephen tenderly removes her old glasses and replaces them with a pair of designer glasses from the box. He touches her under the chin.

STEPHEN
Much better.

Self-conscious, Rianna smiles, not sure what to say.

STEPHEN
You know, we could make dinner for your mother. Give her a break after the day she's had?

Rianna shrugs. He gets up, walks into the kitchen, stops in front of the chopping board and looks around.

STEPHEN
Okay. Where're the knives?

EXT. CLEARY APARTMENT - LATER

Carl's pick-up pulls into the parking lot, jerks to a stop behind Stephen's Mercedes. He backs up, finds another spot.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jessica, now much happier, eats dinner with Rianna and Stephen at the small dining table.

JESSICA
This is wonderful.

STEPHEN
Rianna did most of it.

He glances over at Rianna, winks.

As she smiles politely, a knock comes from the door.

JESSICA
(to Rianna)
If it's Carl, I'm busy.

Rianna remains seated. The knock comes again.

JESSICA
Rianna...

Curious, Stephen watches Rianna.

With great reluctance, she gets up, heads for the door.

EXT. CLEARY APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A low wattage globe lights up above Carl's head. Rianna steps out, closes the door. Carl points a thumb at the Mercedes.

CARL
What's he doing--

Carl stares at her, lost for words.

RIANNA
What?

CARL
They suit you.

Rianna adjusts her new glasses.

RIANNA
Oh, right. At least somebody noticed.

CARL
You look--

RIANNA
More mature?

Carl laughs.

CARL
I was going to say, you look
pretty. But you always do.

With a seductive smile, Rianna tucks her hair behind her ear.

Uncomfortable, Carl glances toward the Mercedes.

CARL
What's he doing here?

RIANNA
Mom invited him to dinner. Then she
started crying over some promotion
she didn't get.

CARL
Promotion?

RIANNA
She didn't even tell me, but she's
got no problem telling someone she
hardly knows. Now she's flirting
with him. It's disgusting.

Disappointed, Carl shakes his head.

CARL
Guess I'm not coming in then.

He turns away, strides toward his car.

RIANNA
Carl?

He stops, looks back at her.

RIANNA
Pick me up in the morning?

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jessica washes dishes. Stephen stands beside her, a tea-towel in hand.

STEPHEN
Does Rianna always go to bed so
early?

JESSICA

Only when she wants to get out of helping with the dishes.

Jessica places a glass on the dish rack. Stephen picks it up, dries it.

STEPHEN

You seem to be feeling better.

JESSICA

A bit. Thanks to the good company.

STEPHEN

So, do you think you'll keep working there?

JESSICA

I'd love to quit. But... I don't really have a choice.

Stephen picks up a plate, dries it, thinks.

STEPHEN

I'd like to offer you one.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - DAY

Excited, Rianna sits sideways in the passenger seat.

Carl drives, his expression dark.

CARL

You're kidding.

RIANNA

And you know how I've always wanted to go to a private school? She said there's one in the area.

Carl gives her a troubled glance.

RIANNA

But that's the only thing I like about the idea.

CARL

She can't be serious.

RIANNA

She called in sick at work. That's serious.

Carl's grip tightens on the wheel, his whole body tense.

RIANNA

The most amazing thing is, she actually told me about it.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Carl strides along a busy sidewalk, turns into a high-rise office building.

INT. STEPHEN'S OFFICE - DAY

From behind his desk, Stephen watches his new secretary (50's) set down a cup of coffee and a cookie, still in its sealed wrapper.

Behind the secretary, Carl appears at the open door.

STEPHEN

Carl. Come on in.
(to secretary)
Thank you, Margaret.

She hurries past Carl as he strides toward Stephen, his face set with determination.

Stephen smiles politely.

STEPHEN

No need to come all this way to thank me.

Taken aback, Carl stops.

CARL

Thank you?

STEPHEN

For offering Jessica the job. I'm sure you're happy for them both.

CARL

I don't think--

STEPHEN

Don't worry. I know they'll be a little further away, but you're welcome to visit.

Carl frowns.

CARL

Did I ask for your permission?

Stephen leans back in his chair with utter confidence.

STEPHEN

Well, they will be on my property. I wouldn't want you turning up at all hours of the night... But that shouldn't be a problem. Jessica explained you're nothing more than friends.

Stephen removes a metal nail file from his pocket, uses its tip to scrape under his nails.

CARL

Why would you hire someone you barely know to be your live-in maid?

STEPHEN

Come on, Carl. That sounds like you don't want a better life for the people you care about. Surely that can't be right?

Carl tries to hold back his frustration.

CARL

Of course I want what's best for them, but I--

STEPHEN

Then we don't have a problem, do we?

At a loss for words, Carl stares at him.

The phone buzzes.

SECRETARY

(over speaker)

Ah, Mr. Barnet. Mr. O'Neill's on line one.

STEPHEN

Right.

(to Carl)

Was there anything else?

Carl breaks eye contact, heads for the door.

A slow smile curves Stephen's lips.

EXT. COMMUNITY CLOTHES LINE - DAY

Carl helps Jessica unpeg clothes from the line.

CARL

Why didn't you tell me you'd put in for a promotion?

JESSICA

It wasn't a big deal.

Carl unpegs a pair of tattered jeans, and finds himself face to face with Tweety Bird panties. He quickly moves along.

CARL

Of course it's a big deal. That's the sort of thing you share with friends.

Jessica takes down the Tweety Bird panties.

JESSICA

Why? So when I fail you can do your whole sympathy bit?

CARL

What? The bit where I care?

She picks up the basket, tries to suppress a smile.

JESSICA

Yeah, that bit.

Carl tosses in a T-shirt, grins at her.

INT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

Jessica tips the washing onto the couch.

CARL

Just because you missed out on a promotion, doesn't mean being some trumped up servant for that... Barnet is your only option.

JESSICA

Why is it Rianna can't keep her mouth shut when it comes to you?

CARL

Maybe it's my abundant charm.

She scoffs as she sorts the clothes.

Serious, Carl sits on the arm of the couch.

CARL

Come on, Jess. I've offered to help you out financially a thousand times.

JESSICA

I'm no charity case. Besides, the job might not be great, but the money is. There's no rent;

JESSICA (cont'd)
the hours are flexible. I can start
studying again and--

CARL
You've already decided.

JESSICA
It's perfect, Carl.

Carl stands, moves closer to her.

CARL
Yeah. Too damn good to be true.

JESSICA
Why? Because it doesn't suit you?
For God's sake, get a life.

Stung, he stares at her.

She bites her lip with regret.

JESSICA
I didn't mean--

CARL
I like this life. I like it a lot.

He moves in... gently kisses her. Surprised, she stands
motionless. And then she responds.

Encouraged, he cups her face, deepens the kiss. Her body
stiffens. She shoves him away.

JESSICA
You promised you wouldn't.

CARL
I know what I promised, but--

The front door opens. Rianna enters, happy to see Carl.

JESSICA
(to Carl)
Get out.

Rianna drops her school bag as her smile fades.

Carl throws a hurt glance at Jessica.

CARL
You don't mean that.

JESSICA
Just go.

RIANNA
Mom!

Carl strides toward the door.

RIANNA
Carl, don't--

The door closes softly behind him.

Rianna glares at Jessica.

RIANNA
What's wrong with you?

Jessica turns away.

RIANNA
I hate you!

Rianna rushes down the hallway, slams her bedroom door.

JESSICA
Join the queue.

Determined not to cry, she snatches up the laundry.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Four empty beer bottles sit on the coffee table.

On the couch, Carl takes a long drink from another bottle. A photo album rests on his lap.

INSERT PHOTO: Carl and Rianna ride a roller coaster as they laugh with sheer joy.

Carl smiles, flicks to the front of the album.

INSERT PHOTO: Jessica (17), wearing a party dress, stands beside Carl in jeans and a T-shirt. Both smile at the camera.

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

An open suitcase rests on a bed. Clothes land inside. A few boxes litter the floor.

Carl (17), dressed in old jeans and a T-shirt, snatches a camera from the top of a tallboy, tosses it into the suitcase. A doorbell chimes.

CARL'S MOM (O.S.)
Carl? Can you get that?

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The front door opens. Jessica (17) waits on the other side in a party dress, hair freshly styled, make-up perfect.

Carl stares at her, totally captivated.

Oblivious, Jessica slips inside, twirls around, holds her hands out to her sides.

JESSICA
What do you think?

Carl sighs as he leans against the door.

CARL
That you're way too good for Brad.

JESSICA
Ha-dee-ha. Well?

CARL
You look just like you always do.

JESSICA
I'm supposed to look better.

CARL
That's impossible.

Jessica eyes sparkle.

JESSICA
You're so full of it.

Carl grins, shrugs. Jessica notices his clothes.

JESSICA
Hey, you're not even ready.

She turns, heads down the hallway.

CARL
Jess...

Carl hurries after her.

JESSICA (O.S.)
I told Brad to pick me up here.
He'll be by any--

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dismayed, Jessica stands on the threshold. As she slowly walks into the room, Carl appears behind her.

JESSICA
What's going on?

CARL
Dad got that job. We fly out first
thing in the morning.

JESSICA
Well, that sucks.

Her shoulders drop. As she glances around the room, her eyes
lock onto the closet.

Carl watches her stride over, open the doors.

JESSICA
So that means you have to come
tonight. It can be your going away
party.

Carl edges over to her as she aimlessly searches through the
few shirts that remain on hangers.

CARL
I can't.

JESSICA
Are you nuts? We've been waiting
for this party all summer. You have
to come.

CARL
I have to pack.

She stops her search. Turns to him.

JESSICA
Well... shit.

Carl takes a hesitant step closer. Outside, a car horn toots.
Irritated, Carl quickly turns away.

CARL
I guess that's lover-boy.

Jessica spots the camera in the suitcase. Grabs it.

JESSICA
Here. Take a picture of us.

CARL
What for?

JESSICA
Because I'll miss you like crazy,
you jerk. Send me a copy.

Carl takes the camera, places it on a bookshelf, lines it up, presses the timer.

When he reaches her side, she throws an arm across his shoulders, beams. He does the same. The flash illuminates their faces. The car horn beeps.

Jessica releases him. Carl gazes at her with an intensity that leaves no doubt he's head-over-heals for her.

Jessica's smile fades.

JESSICA

Don't.

Insistent, the horn blares. Jessica backs toward the doorway, her eyes full of compassion. She spins around and leaves.

Crushed, Carl stares at the empty doorway.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl snaps the photo album shut, drains his beer.

INT. CARL'S ON-SITE OFFICE - DAY

Carl sits at his desk. His cellphone beeps. He picks it up, checks the screen.

INSERT CELLPHONE: Message from Jess - "I NEED U"

EXT. CLEARY APARTMENT - DAY

Rianna emerges from her apartment with an old duffle bag straining at the seams. Carl's pick-up pulls into the parking lot, stops beside her. He gets out.

RIANNA

Jeez, you look like crap.

CARL

Thanks. Where's Jess? She sent me a message.

Rianna puts down the duffle bag.

RIANNA

No she didn't.

CARL

But I... It was you?

RIANNA
Who else? She's still pissed at
you.

Carl notices the bag at her feet.

CARL
What's going on?

RIANNA
It's why I sent you the message...
We're moving today.

CARL
(deadpan)
Great.

Concerned, Rianna studies him.

RIANNA
Nothing's gonna change, right?
We'll still see each other?

Carl softens, gives her a weak smile.

CARL
You bet.

RIANNA
You won't forget about movie night?

CARL
Never.

Relieved, Rianna pulls a piece of paper from her pocket.

RIANNA
Here's the address.

Jessica's car turns into the parking lot, stops abruptly.

CARL
Can you tell her I'm sorry?

RIANNA
I'll try.

Jessica blasts the car horn. Rianna picks up the duffle bag.

RIANNA
I'd better go.

She steps around him. Carl catches her arm. Awkwardly, he pulls her into a hug. Rianna gladly sinks into his embrace. The car horn blares again.

Carl releases her, avoids her gaze.

RIANNA
Anyone'd think I was leaving the
country.

He grins, tilts his head toward Jessica's car.

CARL
Go on.

Rianna reluctantly heads toward the car.

Carl waves at Jessica.

She ignores him. As Rianna climbs in, the car reverses.

Miserable, Carl watches them leave.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Jessica's car pulls into a large, circular driveway
surrounded by manicured gardens.

Stephen emerges from the impressive, double story house. He
gives them a wave as he walks along the front veranda to
the attached guest house.

INT. GUEST HOUSE CORRIDOR - DAY

Rianna slides a box in front of two identical doors, opens
it and removes a stack of towels.

She grips a door handle, rattles it. It won't budge.

Puzzled, she tries the other door. It swings open to reveal
a linen closet.

STEPHEN (O.S.)
Let me help.

Rianna places the towels on a shelf, turns back to the box.

RIANNA
That's okay.

Stephen's hands brush against hers as he takes some sheets
from her. She gives him an embarrassed smile.

RIANNA
Thanks.

She stands back, leans against the locked door.

RIANNA
So... what's in here?

STEPHEN

That connects to the main house.
The previous owners lost the key
and I never saw any point in
replacing the locks.

Stephen places the last of the linen in the closet.

STEPHEN

Since your mother's busy unpacking,
I thought we could go shopping for
your new uniform. What do you
think?

EXT. BARNET MANSION - MAIN HOUSE - DAY

Carl rings the doorbell. No response.

Further along the veranda, Jessica opens the guest house
door, sighs.

JESSICA

Down here.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Carl follows Jessica into the neat, modern space.

CARL

Nice place.

In the kitchen, Jessica organizes the cutlery drawer.

CARL

I imagined you living in the same
house with him.

JESSICA

Well we don't, so you can stop
imagining.

Pleased, Carl takes a seat at the breakfast bar.

CARL

I wanted to say sorry, for the way
I behaved.

Jessica softens a little.

JESSICA

I might've over reacted.

CARL

I deserved it.

JESSICA
Pretty much.

He gives her a warm smile.

CARL
Looks like it's all working out for
you. Where's Rianna?

JESSICA
Stephen took her shopping.

Troubled, Carl frowns.

CARL
You think she should be out with
some guy you barely know?

Unconcerned, Jessica opens another box.

JESSICA
He's not some guy I barely know.
He's been your boss for over a
year. Not to mention he's a
thoughtful, generous guy.

CARL
That's why you're interested in
him?

Jessica scoffs.

JESSICA
I'd like to hold onto this job, not
get fired because some stupid
relationship didn't work out.

Thoughtful, Carl watches her stack plates into a cupboard.

CARL
Relationships are stupid?

JESSICA
They never seem to work.

CARL
How would you know? You've never
had one.

Jessica pauses as she reaches into a box.

JESSICA
I really need to get on with this,
so if you don't mind...

Realizing he's hit a nerve, Carl moves around the counter
toward her.

Her whole body tenses.

JESSICA

Don't.

He stops, studies her face with compassion.

CARL

Okay, okay. Still friends?

Jessica gives him a faint nod.

Satisfied, Carl leaves. Jessica leans against the counter. On the verge of losing it, she tamps down on her emotions.

INT. UPMARKET CAFE - DAY

Stephen hands a menu to a waitress as he looks across the table with appreciation.

Rianna smiles politely. She sports a new haircut, new clothes and contact lenses. A stunning transformation. Beside her, numerous shopping bags occupy the seat.

STEPHEN

What else can we get you?

RIANNA

Are you crazy? This's way too much.

STEPHEN

Who says? I'm having a great time.

She gives him a forced smile.

RIANNA

Me too.

Stephen frowns.

STEPHEN

You're worried.

RIANNA

It's just school... having to make new friends.

STEPHEN

Come on, who wouldn't want to be friends with you?

Rianna shrugs as the waitress brings an extravagant dessert to the table.

Rianna picks up her fork, takes a bite. Delighted by the taste, she closes her eyes.

Engrossed, Stephen watches.

RIANNA
This's heaven.

STEPHEN
I couldn't agree more.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl sits on the couch, a half eaten carton of Thai noodles beside him. He stares blankly at the TV.

INT. STEPHEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Stephen opens a cupboard under the sink, reveals an array of neatly arranged cleaning products.

Jessica bends down, looks inside.

STEPHEN
You don't have to cook. I like to prepare my own meals. But I expect the kitchen to be cleaned every day, including my bathroom, the carpets vacuumed, floors mopped. Everything else, every second day.

Overwhelmed, Jessica stares at him.

JESSICA
It's a big house.

STEPHEN
True. But it's a clean house. Stay on top of it, and it won't be hard to keep it that way.

EXT. PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The school bell rings. A torrent of high school kids push through the doors. Rianna emerges amongst the crowd, walks to the front gate with AIDEN (16), a good looking guy, and waves goodbye.

She stands on the sidewalk, searches the street.

Across the road, Carl gets out of his pick-up, scans the crowd. He spots Rianna, crosses over to her.

She playfully punches his arm.

RIANNA
Hey.

Amazed, Carl stares at the girl in front of him.

CARL
Hey. Look at you.

She turns in a slow circle for him.

RIANNA
You like?

CARL
Sure... I, ah... I made up with
Jess.

RIANNA
(couldn't care less)
Great.

CARL
Let's go.

RIANNA
I can't. Stephen's picking me up.

Concerned, Carl shakes his head.

CARL
I don't like the idea of you being
alone with him.

She gives him a lazy, seductive smile.

RIANNA
Really? Why?

CARL
I just... don't like him.

RIANNA
Well, he's my friend.

Carl puts a hand on her shoulder, leans in close.

CARL
Rianna, trust me on this. Guys his
age aren't friends with fifteen
year old girls.

Rianna searches his eyes.

RIANNA
Then what does that make you?

Caught off guard, he stares at her.

CARL
That's completely different.

RIANNA
(hopeful)
How?

CARL
Jess and I grew up together. She
knows me.

Disappointed, Rianna shrugs his hand off her shoulder.

Stephen's Mercedes pulls up on the other side of the road.
He gets out, heads toward them.

RIANNA
Stephen's here.

She walks past Carl. He grabs her arm.

CARL
Rianna...

She pulls free as Stephen appears beside her.

STEPHEN
Is there a problem?

CARL
Aren't you a little busy to be
picking up schoolgirls?

RIANNA
Carl!

Stephen simply shrugs.

STEPHEN
Jessica agreed to it.

CARL
I didn't.

Stephen gives Carl a condescending smile.

STEPHEN
And just what say do you have?

Carl's anger simmers.

Rianna glances from one to the other with intrigue. She
smiles, quickly bites her lip. Her eyes lock onto Carl.

RIANNA
I'm going with Stephen.

She head off toward the Mercedes.

Carl stares after her.

Stephen follows his gaze, looks back at Carl. A knowing smile creeps across his face.

Carl catches Stephen's look.

Stephen gives him a suggestive wink, saunters away.

Carl remains on the sidewalk, hands fisted.

INT. STEPHEN'S MERCEDES - DAY

Rianna sits in the passenger seat as the car pulls away from the curb.

Stephen glances at her.

STEPHEN
What was that all about?

RIANNA
I've never seen him so angry.

STEPHEN
Forget about him. How was your day?

Rianna's mood lightens.

RIANNA
Aiden asked me to a school dance in a few weeks. I thought I might go. You know, to fit in.

Stephen's hands grip the wheel a little tighter.

STEPHEN
Aiden? Is he boyfriend material?

RIANNA
As if I'd know.

Stephen glances at her. His hands relax on the wheel.

STEPHEN
Well, I'll drive you if you like.

INT. CARL'S OFFICE - CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Carl sits in his chair, back to the desk, and stares sightlessly through a grimy window.

Tom enters, takes off his construction hat as he approaches.

Lost in thought, Carl hasn't heard him. Tom clears his throat. Carl sighs, swivels around, faces him.

TOM

Jesus. Anyone'd think you had the heart attack. What's up?

Carl shakes his head, stares blankly at the plans spread out on his desk.

CARL

It's nothing. What do you--

TOM

That high school sweetheart of yours again?

CARL

Something like that.

Tom nods in sympathy.

TOM

If she ain't into you after all this time, move on. It's gonna do your head in.

Carl leans back in his chair, looks at Tom.

CARL

What's the dirt you've got on Barnet? You said something just before your heart--

A knock comes from the door. A construction worker pokes his head in, looks at Tom.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

We need ya out here, boss.

CARL

Tom?

Tom nods to the construction worker, turns back to Carl.

TOM

Can't stand round here gossipin' like a bunch of women. But it's nothin' you need to worry 'bout.

As Tom hurries out, Carl stares after him.

INT. RIANNA'S EN-SUITE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Rianna studies her reflection in a large mirror over the basin. She wears fashionable jeans and a low-cut top.

She examines her cleavage, presses her breasts together... cracks up.

RIANNA
I don't think so.

She takes off the top, hurries into the

BEDROOM

Clothes litter the bed. She searches for something else, finds a more appropriate, modest top. Hurries back to the

EN-SUITE BATHROOM

Checks herself out. Satisfied, she gives her hair a quick brush, grabs a large can of hairspray and lets loose.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jessica reads a textbook at the dining table. Rianna walks in, turns around in a slow circle.

RIANNA
Is this okay?

Jessica concentrates on her textbook.

JESSICA
Sure.

Wounded, Rianna stares at her mother until she finally looks up.

JESSICA
What?

Rianna flops into an armchair.

RIANNA
I wish Carl was here.

Jessica focuses on her textbook.

A car horn toots. Rianna hurries out.

Jessica stares at the closed door, regret in her eyes.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

As Carl removes a frozen dinner from the microwave, he glances at a calendar on the wall.

INSERT CALENDAR: Previous days are crossed off. The next day in line reads: "RIANNA'S B'DAY".

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Aiden leads Rianna inside. Music blasts from speakers. Lights flash and rotate around the dance floor.

Aiden finds a table, pulls Rianna into the seat next to him. He quickly slips his arm around her shoulders.

Uncomfortable, Rianna glances around the room.

A couple make out in a dark corner.

A large group of girls dance on the dance floor.

On the outskirts, a bunch of girls huddle together, deep in conversation. One turns, gives Rianna a filthy look.

Aiden's arm tightens around Rianna. She turns to him. He stares at the girl across the room.

RIANNA

Who's that?

He remains focused on the other girl.

AIDEN

What?

He leans in, kisses the side of her neck.

Surprised, Rianna looks back at the girl across the room, and realizes what's going on.

INT. STEPHEN'S LAUNDRY - NIGHT

Stephen enters, a damp towel in hand. He opens the dryer, frowns as a few clothes spill out.

Annoyed, he grabs a basket, empties the dryer of female clothes. A pair of Tweety Bird panties catch his eye.

He picks them up, smiles, pockets them.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jessica indicates for Carl to take a seat on the couch.

CARL

That's not a smile I see, is it?

Her grin widens as she sits in an armchair.

JESSICA

I came top of the class in my first exam. I just feel so...

JESSICA (cont'd)
I don't know. Like maybe I'm not a total disaster.

CARL
The last time you looked this happy, we were kids.

JESSICA
Yeah, well, it feels that long ago. You want something to eat? Drink? Wine maybe?

CARL
Sure.

Carl follows her to the kitchen area.

CARL
I've been thinking about my little theory.

Jessica opens the well-stocked fridge, reaches for a bottle of wine.

JESSICA
What theory?

CARL
I've figured out why you only go on first dates.

She hesitates, slowly closes the fridge door.

JESSICA
Carl, don't--

CARL
(teasing)
It's because you're looking for someone better than me. And of course, he doesn't exist, so you're doomed to a life of fruitless searching.

Jessica lets out a relieved laugh.

CARL
It's not that funny.

Her laughter suddenly turns into tears.

Thrown, Carl places a tentative hand on her back.

CARL
Hey, hey, hey. I was kidding.

Jessica turns into him, rests her forehead on his chest. Cautious, Carl holds her.

CARL
Me and my stupid mouth.

JESSICA
There is a reason I never get past
a first date.

Carl tries to pull back to see her face, but she holds him tighter.

JESSICA
Just... getting close to someone...
it scares me to death.

Carl closes his eyes, waits.

JESSICA
At that party... I think some of
the drinks were spiked. The last
thing I remember...

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

INT. HOUSE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A full blown party in progress.

Jessica (17) stumbles up the stairs. She steps around a pimply, passed out teenager. His FRIEND slaps his cheek.

FRIEND
Wake up, doofus.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Someone bangs on the other side of the door. The handle rattles.

Jessica lies asleep on the bed in her party dress.

BRAD (O.S.)
Hey! Open the door!

Her eyes squint open, flinch with each bang on the door. Groggy, she sits up.

JESSICA
Stop...

BRAD (O.S.)
Jess?

She groans as she eases herself off the bed... sways slightly... takes a step... winces. She frowns, turns and stares at the bed.

A small patch of blood stains the comforter.

Aghast, she pulls at her skirt until she can see the back. More blood.

BRAD (O.S.)

Jess?

Horrified, she grabs a jacket from the floor, ties it around her waist. On the verge of tears, she hurries to the door, unlocks it.

BRAD (17), a total jock, stands on the other side.

BRAD

Why'd you lock the door? We were supposed to do it last night.

JESSICA

But, we did, didn't we?

BRAD

You locked the fucking door!

JESSICA

But...

The truth dawns on her. She pushes past Brad, flees.

INT. LOWER CLASS APARTMENT - DAY

Jessica's overweight MOM sits on the couch, watches TV.

Jessica bursts in, races down a hallway. Her Mom's eyes never leave the TV.

MOM

Did you have a good time?

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Hot water gushes into the bath tub.

Still in her party dress, Jessica dry retches into the toilet. After a moment, she heaves herself up, turns off the bath's faucets.

She steps into the tub, dress and all. As she lowers herself into the hot water, the tears finally come.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jessica clings to Carl. His hand shakes as he strokes her hair.

CARL
Jess... I'm so sorry.

JESSICA
All I wanted was my best friend.
But you'd gone. And when I found
out I was pregnant... I needed you.

Carl closes his eyes, holds her tighter.

CARL
I'm sorry.

She gently pulls away, grabs some tissues.

JESSICA
It's not your fault. I'm pathetic.
I can't even remember being...
raped, but the thought of sex... I
just can't.

Carl watches her with empathy.

CARL
So there's never a second date.

She wipes her eyes, shakes her head.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Stephen drives. Rianna sits quietly beside him.

STEPHEN
What happened?

Rianna opens her mouth, bursts into tears, buries her face in her hands.

Surprised, Stephen pulls the car over to the curb.

STEPHEN
Come on. Tell me.

Rianna shakes her head.

RIANNA
It's stupid.

STEPHEN
If it's upsetting you this much,
I'm sure it's not.

RIANNA
Aiden was just trying to make
someone else jealous.

Stephen chuckles.

Rianna takes her hands away from her face, looks at him.

RIANNA
It's not funny!

STEPHEN
Of course it's not. You're just so
innocent. And you're looking at it
all wrong. You should be flattered.

She gives him a skeptical look.

He reaches out, gently brushes away a tear with his thumb.

STEPHEN
There's a reason he picked you.

RIANNA
Yeah. 'Cause I'm an idiot.

STEPHEN
Because you'd make anyone jealous.
You're lovely.

Embarrassed, she looks away.

RIANNA
Yeah, right.

Stephen touches her under the chin, forces her to face him.

STEPHEN
It's true.

Uncomfortable, she eases back in her seat, stares out the
windscreen.

RIANNA
I knew boys my own age were a waste
of time.

STEPHEN
Listen, I want you to know you can
tell me anything. No matter how
trivial it might seem. I'm
interested.

Thoughtful, she glances at him, nods.

Stephen pulls onto the road.

STEPHEN
You're right about one thing,
though. Boys your own age are a
waste of time.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - SAME

Carl fills two glasses of wine as Jessica wanders back into the room, dabs her eyes with tissues.

CARL
You okay?

She gives him a tentative smile.

JESSICA
It's a relief to finally tell
someone. Just... don't tell Rianna.
I'd rather she kept believing she's
the product of a summer fling
than...

Carl nods in agreement.

CARL
Where is she, anyway?

JESSICA
At some dance. I think she might
have a boyfriend.

CARL
Since when?

Jessica takes a long drink from her glass, shrugs

JESSICA
Must be those new glasses Stephen
got her.

Carl's face hardens.

CARL
I thought you bought them.

JESSICA
I wish I had.

Carl glances at his watch.

CARL
It's late. Don't you have to pick
her up?

JESSICA
Stephen offered.

Carl throws her a disgusted look.

CARL

And you just accept? Why? Because it's more convenient?

JESSICA

Would you give it a rest? He's done nothing but be helpful. What's with all the tension?

Apologetic, Carl sighs.

CARL

I don't trust the guy. How do I know she's safe with him?

JESSICA

You're being paranoid.

CARL

Someone has to be.

INT. GUEST HOUSE CORRIDOR - LATER

Darkness. Silence. A small click. The connecting door between the guest house and main house eases open.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight streams through the window, glints off the brass bed-head. Rianna sleeps.

At the end of her bed, Stephen stares down at her, his face tortured with indecision and longing.

EXT. PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Carl leans against the school fence.

Head down, Rianna steps off the bus, walks toward the gate.

CARL

Rianna?

She looks up, trudges toward him.

Carl gives her a warm smile.

Rianna crosses her arms.

CARL

I'm sorry about the other day.

Rianna remains silent. Carl moves a little closer.

CARL
Forgive me?

RIANNA
I don't know...

He reaches into his pocket, produces a small present, holds it out to her.

CARL
Happy birthday.

Her face lights up. She eagerly rips off the wrapping, opens the small box, reveals a gold locket on a chain.

She looks up at Carl with adoration.

RIANNA
It's beautiful.

CARL
Here.

He takes the locket, fastens the chain around her neck.

Rianna grins.

RIANNA
Thanks. I think Mom forgot.

Carl's smile falters slightly.

CARL
Day's not over yet. I bet she surprises you when you get home.

RIANNA
(doubtful)
Maybe.

The first warning bell rings. Rianna ignores it as she fingers the locket.

CARL
So... it's movie night tonight. You still want to go?

RIANNA
Absolutely.

She gives him a seductive little smile.

Uneasy, Carl glances away.

CARL
So, sixteen, huh?

RIANNA
Yeah. Sixteen...

Rianna wraps her arms around his neck. He holds her, smiles. She presses her lips to his ear.

RIANNA
The age of consent.

The final bell rings. Rianna hurries through the gate. Completely thrown, Carl stares after her.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Rianna sits at a desk, stares out the window.

TEACHER (O.S.)
Open your textbooks to page one-oh-three and read through to one-ten.

Rianna fiddles with the latch on the locket until it opens.

INSERT LOCKET: A small photo of Carl and Rianna riding a roller coaster.

Touched, Rianna smiles, closes the locket, presses it to her heart.

EXT. STEPHEN'S GARAGE - DAY

Stephen stands behind Rianna, his hands over her eyes.

STEPHEN
Ready?

RIANNA
Yeah...

He removes his hands. Rianna's eyes widen in surprise.

A brand new VW Beetle convertible, with a huge bow tied around it, sits in the garage beside the Mercedes.

STEPHEN
It's yours.

Rianna shakes her head as she stares at the car.

RIANNA
I don't think I can--

STEPHEN
You've missed out most of your life. I want you to have it. It'd mean a lot to me.

Overwhelmed with excitement, Rianna leans in to plant a kiss on his cheek. At the last moment, he turns his head... and their lips meet. The kiss lingers a moment too long.

A little stunned, Rianna steps back.

As if nothing has happened, Stephen touches her back.

STEPHEN
Go on. Have a look.

As she hurries to the car and climbs in, a slow, sly grin creeps across Stephen's face.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

The VW bunny hops in the circular driveway, stalls.

INT. RIANNA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Rianna rests her head against the wheel.

RIANNA
I'm hopeless!

In the passenger seat, Stephen places a hand on her back.

STEPHEN
You're just learning. Now come on.
Snap out of it.

Rianna straightens up, her face set with determination.

STEPHEN
Okay. Put it in neutral, then start
it up.

She does as he says.

STEPHEN
Foot on the clutch and into first.

She depresses the clutch, moves the gear stick into first.

STEPHEN
Now accelerate a little and ease
off the clutch.

The engine revs a little too fast. She lets the clutch out slowly. As the car moves, the clutch pops out. The car jerks forward, stalls again.

RIANNA
Fuck it!

Surprised, Stephen laughs. Rianna glares at him for a moment, cracks up.

RIANNA
I'm the worst driver ever.

STEPHEN
You could be right.

She playfully slaps his leg.

RIANNA
Thanks a lot!

STEPHEN
Alright, alright. Try it again.

She puts the car in neutral, starts it up, presses the clutch in, moves the gear stick into first.

STEPHEN
This might help.

Stephen reaches across her, places his hand on her thigh, just above her knee.

STEPHEN
Okay.

She eases off the clutch. As the car moves forward, Stephen keeps a steady pressure on her thigh. Her leg comes up slowly. The car glides forward.

She breaks into a huge grin.

RIANNA
I did it!

Stephen takes her hand, guides it to the gear stick.

STEPHEN
Okay, into second. Clutch.

Rianna presses the clutch in, and with Stephen's hand over hers, changes into second.

STEPHEN
Perfect.

Rianna glances down at his hand.

His fingers lightly brush over hers.

She looks at his face.

Stephen stares straight ahead as if nothing is happening.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl paces, a cordless phone in his hand.

CARL
(rehearsing)
Look, I'm sorry, but something's
come up at work.
(croaky)
I think I've got the flu. Maybe
next--

A knock comes from the front door. Carl freezes. Checks his watch. He sneaks over to the door, peers through the peep hole. Dismayed, he tenses. The knock comes again.

CARL
(whispering)
Shit. Shit. Shit.

Hesitant, he runs a hand through his hair, grasps the door handle, plasters on a smile and opens the door.

Rianna breezes in, a total knock-out in a short skirt and the revealing top she rejected for the dance.

RIANNA
Took your time.

Awestruck, Carl stares at her.

CARL
I said I'd pick you up.

Rianna sits on the couch, smiles at him.

RIANNA
Like I can rely on that.

CARL
Oh, that's nice.

RIANNA
Mom was on the way to her course,
so I convinced her to drop me off
to save you the trip. The least she
could do since she forgot my
birthday.

Carl continues to stare at her.

CARL
That's very thoughtful.

RIANNA
That she forgot my birthday?

CARL
(flustered)
No. That you saved me the trip.

Rianna gives him a curious look.

RIANNA
Why are you acting so weird?

CARL
I'm not.

RIANNA
Right... So, since I'm early,
should we grab dinner as well?

CARL
I don't know if--

RIANNA
Or maybe we could just rent a DVD
and stay in?

Carl springs into action, grabs his jacket and keys.

CARL
Dinner it is.

A little disappointed, Rianna gets up, walks to the door.
She stops in front of Carl, clutches the gold locket.

RIANNA
I didn't know you bought a photo
that day. I like that you did.

As she passes through the doorway, Carl lets out a long
breath.

INT. CINEMA - NIGHT

Rianna sits beside Carl. He stares at the screen, engrossed
in the movie as he munches on popcorn.

Rianna steels sideways glances at him. Ever so slowly, she
eases closer.

Carl senses it immediately. Stops chewing.

Her hand inches along the seat toward Carl's leg. Her pinky
reaches out, brushes his thigh.

Carl leaps to his feet.

CARL
Bathroom break.

INT. MENS RESTROOMS - CINEMA - NIGHT

Carl bursts in, heads straight for the basins, turns on the water too hard, splashes his face. He slowly looks up at the mirror. Before he meets his own gaze, he turns his back on himself.

CARL

Idiot.

INT. CINEMA LOBBY - NIGHT

Rianna waits in the empty lobby.

Carl emerges from the restrooms, spots her.

She smiles as he approaches. He grips her upper arm, ushers her toward the exit.

RIANNA

What're you doing?

CARL

Time to go home.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Carl marches Rianna toward his pick-up parked at the curb. She wrenches out of his grip.

RIANNA

What's wrong with you?

Carl opens the passenger door.

CARL

Just get in.

RIANNA

Not until you tell me why you're being an asshole.

CARL

Because that's what I am. Now get in.

Rianna stares at him with defiance.

RIANNA

No you're not. You're wonderful.

CARL

(dismayed)
Don't... say that.

RIANNA

Why not? You said I wasn't old enough, and I understood. You didn't want to break the law. But I'm sixteen now. It's okay.

CARL

Jesus Christ. It's got nothing to do with that.

RIANNA

But that's what you said! I know you feel something. I see it every time you look at me. I'm not imagining it.

CARL

Yes, you are.

Rianna stares at him with disbelief. She grasps the locket around her neck, holds it out for him to see.

RIANNA

Then what's this about?

Carl stares at the locket. Guilt clouds his face.

CARL

It's a gift. That's all.

RIANNA

With a picture of us! Of the first time we went out together, just the two of us. That means something.

He swallows hard.

CARL

Don't you get it? I'm in love with your mother. I always have been.

Rianna shakes her head.

RIANNA

No. It's me. We're the ones who get along so well--

CARL

I'm only nice to you so I can get closer to Jess!

Hurt to the core, Rianna yanks the locket from her neck, hurls it at him. It bounces off his chest, drops to the sidewalk.

RIANNA

Take your stupid junk. It's crap compared to the new car Stephen gave me.

Stunned, Carl face tightens with anger.

CARL

He what?

RIANNA

You think I don't why? And if you don't want me--

Furious, Carl grabs her by the arms.

CARL

Don't say another word. Just get in the fucking car.

RIANNA

Fuck you!

She twists out of his grasp, runs back into the cinema.

Carl gets in the pick-up, slams the door so hard it rocks with the force. He accelerates away. Further down the street, he stops, hangs a U-turn.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

With a smug smile, Stephen hangs up the phone, grabs his car keys.

INT. CINEMA LOBBY - NIGHT

Rianna's red, swollen eyes watch the road through the glass doors.

Outside, Stephen's Mercedes pulls up.

She hurries out, climbs into his car.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - CONTINUOUS

Carl watches, his anger ready to explode.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - NIGHT

The Mercedes pulls into the garage and the roller door descends.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rianna sits on the edge of a leather couch. Stephen joins her, hands her a tumbler filled with an inch of scotch.

The glass trembles in her hand.

RIANNA
I shouldn't.

STEPHEN
Probably not. But it'll make you
feel better.

She takes a tentative sip, screws up her face.

RIANNA
It was just a stupid crush. I'm so
over it now.

He tries to catch her eye. She stares at the floor.

STEPHEN
That's good to hear.

RIANNA
I just... I thought he really cared
about me.

STEPHEN
There are people who actually do.
People who don't just pretend.

She scoffs.

RIANNA
The only person Mom cares about is
herself.

STEPHEN
I'm not talking about her.

Rianna finally looks at him. He gazes back, gently touches the side of her face.

STEPHEN
You know who I'm talking about.

She gives him a shaky smile, gulps down the scotch. Her eyes water as she swallows. Stephen takes the glass away, places it on the coffee table.

STEPHEN
Maybe you should go home.

She meets his eyes.

RIANNA
I don't want to.

STEPHEN
Then what do you want?

RIANNA
To stay here... with you.

He brushes loose strands of hair behind her ear.

STEPHEN
Are you sure?

She nods.

His eyes fill with hope. He leans close. She waits. He kisses her softly... eases back, looks into her eyes.

STEPHEN
Are you still sure?

Rianna places her hand tentatively on his shoulder. Encouraged, Stephen kisses her again.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - SAME

Propped up in bed, Jessica reads a textbook.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Stephen fumbles like an inexperienced teenager as he eases Rianna back on the couch. He covers her with his body, awkwardly reaches beneath her top.

She stiffens. Stephen instantly removes his hand.

STEPHEN
I'm sorry. I'm going too fast.

RIANNA
Maybe a little.

He sits up, takes her hand, smiles.

STEPHEN
You're right. There's no rush. Come on, I'll walk you home.

With a mixture of relief and disappointment, Rianna stands.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen holds Rianna's hand as he leads her along the veranda to the guest house.

As she inserts a key into the lock, Stephen turns her around, presses her up against the door.

He traps her between his hands, gives her a long, intense kiss. Slowly, he eases away.

STEPHEN
Anticipation is a wonderful thing.

Breathless, Rianna gazes up at him.

Stephen turns the key in the lock, swings the door open. He places the keys in her hand, steps back.

Rianna gives him a worried look.

RIANNA
Carl might come around tomorrow. He was pretty mad.

STEPHEN
No one says you have to see him. Spend the day with me.

She smiles, slips inside.

Stephen walks along the veranda with a spring in his step.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carl wrenches off his shirt, his trousers. As he kicks them across the room, the locket falls out.

He picks it up, opens it and sinks onto the bed. He stares at the photo with regret.

INT. STEPHEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

At the sink, Stephen cleans under his nails with his metal nail file. He stops. Listens. Hears the faint sound of a shower running. He grins, slips the nail file into a pocket.

INT. RIANNA'S EN-SUITE BATHROOM - SAME

Rianna stares in the mirror. The shower runs behind her as she slips out of her clothes.

INT. STEPHEN'S KITCHEN - SAME

A key unlocks a door. As it swings open, the shower grows louder. Stephen steps into a corridor -- the corridor that connects the main house to the guest house.

INT. CONNECTING CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Light floods the small space, spills over Stephen from what appears to be a window in the opposite wall. Stephen leans closer, his gaze intense as he stares into...

Rianna's bathroom. Her silhouette moves behind the frosted shower stall's glass.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carl holds a phone in one hand, the locket in the other.

JESSICA (V.O.)
(groggy)
Yeah?

CARL
It's me.

JESSICA (V.O.)
Jesus, Carl. It's the middle of the night.

CARL
I just need to know if Rianna's home.

JESSICA (V.O.)
You dropped her off, didn't you?

Carl closes the locket.

CARL
No. We had a fight. Can you check?

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - SAME

Annoyed, Jessica tosses off the blanket, gets out of bed with the phone in her hand.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jessica eases open Rianna's bedroom door, hears the shower running in the bathroom. Satisfied, she closes the door.

JESSICA
She's here.

CARL (V.O.)
Okay. Listen, she said Stephen bought her a car.

JESSICA
What?

CARL (V.O.)

Did he?

JESSICA

No. I mean, she would've said something, right?

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carl grips the phone tighter.

CARL

Maybe you could try asking her.

He hangs up, lays back on the bed, his mind racing.

INT. RIANNA'S EN-SUITE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Rianna turns off the shower, grabs a towel. A knock comes from the door.

JESSICA (O.S.)

I need to talk to you. Now.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica waits by the bed. Rianna emerges, towel wrapped around her.

RIANNA

Well?

JESSICA

Did Stephen give you a car?

Rianna crosses her arms over her chest.

RIANNA

So?

JESSICA

So? So you're giving it back.

Rianna gives her a smug look.

RIANNA

Make me.

JESSICA

What did you say?

RIANNA

Why don't you just do what you always do? Leave me alone!

Rianna slips back into the bathroom, shuts the door in Jessica's face.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica snaps up the phone. Dials.

JESSICA
You were right.

CARL (V.O.)
What're you going to do about it?

JESSICA
I've got exams tomorrow, Carl. I can't deal with this. She won't listen to me anyway... Maybe you could talk to her?

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Carl's pick-up pulls into the driveway, comes to an abrupt stop behind Stephen's Mercedes.

He climbs out. As he passes by the rear of the Mercedes, he stops, turns back.

Scrunched up against the rear window, are a pair of Tweety Bird panties.

As his rage builds, Carl stares at them for a long moment.

He storms up the steps to the main house. Jabs at the doorbell. No response. After a moment, he hears faint music from the rear of the property.

EXT. BARNET SWIMMING POOL AREA - DAY

Carl steps through a gate into the courtyard. He heads toward the source of the music. Stops.

INT. BARNET BILLIARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rianna awkwardly tries to line up a shot. Stephen leans into her from behind, kisses her neck.

She laughs, turns in his arms. He kisses her, lets his hands slide down to her bottom, pulls her intimately close.

EXT. BARNET SWIMMING POOL AREA - CONTINUOUS

In a blind rage, Carl barrels toward the French glass doors. Finds them locked. He punches the glass square next to the handle, fumbles for the lock.

The door swings outward, forces Carl back. Stephen steps out. Rianna remains inside, rooted to the spot.

STEPHEN
Get off my property.

CARL
You think you can get away with
this?

Stephen shrugs innocently, his demeanor calm.

STEPHEN
Get away with what?

CARL
I saw you! Had your hands all over
her!

Stephen takes a step closer, smiles.

STEPHEN
She wants my hands all over her.

Carl grabs Stephen's shirt, pulls back to hit him.

Rianna grabs Carl's arm.

RIANNA
Stop it!

Carl releases Stephen, takes a step back, looks at Rianna with anguish.

CARL
How can you behave like this? This
isn't who you are.

Upset, she glares back at him.

RIANNA
What do you care?

CARL
I know you, Rianna.

RIANNA
Yeah. You know me so well, you
don't want me! At least he does.

CARL
You can't be serious.

RIANNA
I fucked him and it was great! Is
that serious enough?

Devastated, unable to look at her, Carl glances at Stephen.

Stephen gives him a suggestive little smile.

Carl shoves Stephen hard. Stephen lets himself trip on the
pavers, falls. Shocked, Rianna kneels down beside him.

STEPHEN
You're fired, Lockhart. Not to
mention the matter of trespassing,
breaking and entering. And assault.

CARL
Rianna. Please, don't stay here.

RIANNA
Just go away!

CARL
Not without you.

Rianna looks up at him, tears in her eyes.

RIANNA
Give me one good reason why I
should.

CARL
Because I said so!

Rianna turns her back on him, helps Stephen to his feet,
puts her arm around him and walks back into the house.

Crushed, Carl stands there, utterly lost.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - DAY

Carl pulls to the side of the road. His hand on the wheel
oozes blood.

After a moment, his body hitches. He desperately tries to
hold back the sobs, but fails.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rianna follows Stephen into the room.

RIANNA
I'm so sorry.

He captures her hands in his.

Ashamed, Rianna avoids his gaze. Tears fill her eyes. He embraces her. She buries her face against his chest.

STEPHEN
It's alright. I'm here.

RIANNA
I shouldn't have lied to him.

He touches her chin, waits for her to look at him.

STEPHEN
It doesn't have to be a lie.

RIANNA
I... I don't know if I'm ready.

He gives her a loving, gentle kiss.

STEPHEN
Then you're not.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jessica places her purse and keys on the kitchen counter.
A light blinks on the answering machine. She presses play.

CARL (V.O.)
Just wondering if you had any idea
that your generous employer is
fucking your daughter!

Jessica stares at the machine in shock.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl sits on the couch, head in his hands. A loud knock comes from the door.

Hopeful, he hurries to the door, opens it. His shoulders slump in defeat.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Deep in thought, Rianna lies on her bed.

Jessica flings open the door, stands over Rianna.

JESSICA
Are you sleeping with him?

RIANNA
Who?

JESSICA
Don't be a smartass.

Rianna sits up, glares at her.

RIANNA
What do you expect? You don't suddenly get to care.

JESSICA
Answer me!

RIANNA
No, okay! I'm not sleeping with anyone.

JESSICA
Don't lie.

Vulnerable, Rianna stares at her.

RIANNA
As if you'd have a clue if I was lying or not. You don't know me!

Jessica flinches at the truth, calms down a little.

JESSICA
Then why does Carl think you are?

With what seems like a great effort, Jessica places her hands on Rianna's shoulders. Rianna freezes.

JESSICA
Please. Just tell me.

RIANNA
I said it to make Carl jealous. But all he cares about is you.

INT. OFFICE - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Senior Sergeant JOHN MARTIN (50's), bald and tired, leans back in his chair.

Carl sits on the other side.

CARL
I was provoked.

MARTIN
I see. You entered his property uninvited. You smashed his door and, when he asked you to leave, you assaulted him. That's being provoked?

CARL
He left out the fact that he's
having sex with a child.

Martin leans forward.

MARTIN
How old's the child?

CARL
Sixteen.

Martin considers this for a moment.

MARTIN
Sixteen is the age of consent. He's
not breaking any laws.

CARL
That's crazy! She's not old enough
to drink, but some pervert in his
thirties can have sex with her?

MARTIN
That's right.

Carl stewes on the injustice of it all.

MARTIN
Listen. I suggest you go home, cool
off and be grateful he's decided
not to press charges. This time.
You set foot on his property again,
and he assured me, he will.

EXT. UPPERCLASS STREET - DAY

Carl's pick-up rests at the curb.

Down the street, Stephen's Mercedes pulls out of his
driveway and travels in the opposite direction.

INT. BARNET LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jessica walks into the room with a can of furniture polish
and a cloth. Carl follows.

JESSICA
She denied it, Carl. What am I
supposed to do? Accuse him without
any proof?

CARL
She flat out told me.

Jessica furiously cleans the coffee table.

JESSICA

Apparently she was trying to make you jealous.

Carl remains silent. Jessica faces him.

JESSICA

Did you know she had a crush on you?

CARL

All I need to know is what you're going to do about this mess.

JESSICA

There's nothing I can do.

CARL

You can leave.

JESSICA

Look, I'm sorry you got fired, but I don't see the point in throwing away my job.

Carl stares at her in disbelief.

CARL

Not even to protect your daughter?

JESSICA

There's nothing to protect her from.

CARL

I saw him with his tongue down her throat; his hands on her!

As Jessica finishes the coffee table, it dawns on her.

JESSICA

You certainly sound jealous.

CARL

Don't be bloody ridiculous.

JESSICA

Then why're you acting like--

CARL

Someone has to do the job you seem incapable of. If you won't--

Jessica slaps him hard. Carl grabs her.

CARL

You can hurt me all you want. I deserve it. But she doesn't.

She tries to wrench out of his grasp. He refuses to let go.

JESSICA

You're hurting--

CARL

For fuck's sake, Jess. She's playing a dangerous game... and you'd better do something about it before she ends up like you.

He releases her, storms out.

Jessica crumples onto the couch, bursts into tears.

INT. HOSPITAL MATERNITY WARD - DAY

Tom and Tracy look through the nursery window with pride. Carl approaches, shakes Tom's hand, gives Tracy a gift.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - DAY

Carl places a glass of orange juice in front of Tom. Takes a seat at the table with him.

Tom takes a long sip of his juice as he contemplates.

CARL

Jesus, Tom. What the hell is it?

TOM

It's not gonna help 'cause you can't use it against him. I shouldn't even know.

Carl waits.

Tom rubs his belly, thinks.

TOM

You've gotta promise never to repeat it. Tracy told me, but she wasn't 'sposed to. If it gets out, her career's over.

CARL

I'm not following you.

TOM

She's a shrink. Specializes in teenagers.

CARL

What's that got to do with Barnett?

Tom leans forward, waits for Carl to do the same.

TOM
(hushed)
He had sex with one of Tracy's
clients... She was fourteen at the
time.

Stunned, Carl lets this information sink in for a moment.

CARL
He raped her?

TOM
Not accordin' to the girl.
Apparently she was willing. But
it's still statutory rape.

CARL
How the fuck did he get away with
it?

Tom sighs.

TOM
Barnet paid her parents off. There
was no report, no record of it ever
happenin'.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Carl's pick-up kicks up a plume of dust as it skids to a
stop behind Stephen's Mercedes.

INT. STEPHEN'S ON-SITE OFFICE - SAME

Stephen sits at a large drawing table going over a set of
blueprints with two foremen.

Carl flings the door open.

Stephen and the foremen look up.

STEPHEN
(to foremen)
Give us a minute.

Carl waits for them to leave.

STEPHEN
I believe you've been warned to
stay away from me. Yet, here you
are.

CARL
Why the fuck are you chasing a
sixteen year old girl?

Stephen gives him a smug smile.

STEPHEN

You should know the answer to that.

CARL

What's wrong with you? Can't have a normal relationship with a woman your own age?

STEPHEN

(friendly)

I understand. You want her for yourself. I know. Man to man, I'm living every guy's fantasy. Well, I haven't had her in her school uniform, but that's only a matter of time.

Carl's hands clench at his sides.

CARL

Shut. Up.

STEPHEN

You're so jealous, you can't even see straight.

CARL

I know what you are.

STEPHEN

Like looking in a mirror, isn't it?

Stephen casually leans an elbow on his desk, curls his fingers under his nose. He takes a deep breath, sighs with appreciation.

STEPHEN

You know what I love? Coming to work with her sweet scent on my fingers.

CARL

You sick cunt!

Carl launches across the desk, rams into Stephen. They crash to the floor.

Carl hauls back, slams a fist into Stephen's face. Stephen shoves Carl off, scrambles away. Carl gives chase.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - SAME

The foremen smoke beside the site office.

A loud bang startles them as a section of the office wall crumples outward from the impact inside.

The foremen race to the door.

INT. STEPHEN'S ON-SITE OFFICE - SAME

Carl pins Stephen against a wall, a forearm across his throat. He pounds his fist into Stephen's stomach. Suddenly, hands grab Carl, yank him away.

The foremen wrestle Carl to the floor, hold him there.

Stephen gasps for breath, his face red, cheek bloody. He lurches toward his desk, grabs the phone, dials.

STEPHEN
(into phone)
Police.

Carl struggles. The foreman holding Carl's arm behind his back forces it up higher. Carl stills.

With the phone pressed to his ear, Stephen stoops down beside Carl.

STEPHEN
She's mine.

INT. BARNET KITCHEN - DAY

Tears streak down Jessica's face as she viciously cleans the sink.

A phone rings. She ignores it, wipes her face. The ringing stops. A moment later, it starts again, insistent.

Jessica pulls the phone from her pocket, looks at the screen, presses a button.

JESSICA
You're right, okay! You're--
(listens)
What?!

INT. HOLDING CELL - POLICE STATION - DAY

Carl sits alone, head in his hands, defeated.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Jessica waits on a bench seat.

A buzzer sounds. A door opens. A Police Officer escorts Carl to the front desk.

Jessica clutches her purse, stands.

Carl signs a few papers. An Officer slides a zip-lock bag across the counter. Carl removes his wallet, keys and cell phone. With great reluctance, he faces Jessica.

She takes in his desolate face, hurries to him, throws her arms around his neck, holds him tight.

JESSICA

I'm sorry. You were right. About everything.

Surprised, Carl hugs her back, closes his eyes, takes comfort in her arms.

EXT. PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

High school students mill about the grounds as they eat lunch and socialize. Rianna sits alone on the grass, a book in her hands. A horn toots. She looks up.

Stephen's Mercedes pulls up in the bus zone.

Rianna glances around, heads toward him.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Carl tosses his keys and wallet on the counter.

CARL

You'll pick her up?

Slightly on edge, Jessica stands beside the couch.

JESSICA

Right after school.

CARL

You two can take my room.

He glances at her, notices how uncomfortable she seems.

CARL

No funny business. I promise.

She gives him a nervous smile, shakes her head.

JESSICA

It's not that.

CARL

You believe me, about what Tom said, right?

She nods, swallows.

JESSICA

I'm so stupid. I thought I was doing the right thing by taking that job. I'm the worst parent...

Carl joins her, looks at her with tenderness.

CARL

You're not that bad.

JESSICA

Don't start lying to me now.

CARL

I know I was rough on you.

JESSICA

You don't know how many times I've wanted to tell her how pretty she looks or how much I love her...

Carl reaches out, wipes the tear from her cheek.

JESSICA

But the words... I open my mouth, and they jam in my throat. Carl, she's the best thing to ever happen to me. But sometimes, a lot of the time, she reminds of what happened... where she came from. And I feel myself pulling away.

She cautiously touches his arm.

JESSICA

The worst thing is, she doesn't even know why I am the way I am with her... But I'm going to try and do better. Really try.

CARL

That'll mean the world to her.

Jessica moves a little closer.

JESSICA

I've made so many mistakes. I don't want to make the same mistake with you.

She leans in, kisses him softly on the lips. He freezes in surprise. Confused, she pulls back.

He cups her face, looks into her eyes with restrained passion.

CARL

Jess...

She kisses him hard. He responds with hunger. Breathless, she breaks away, takes his hand, pulls him toward the

BEDROOM

They collapse on the bed. In a ravenous frenzy, they pull at each others clothes. Jessica reaches down, unbuckles Carl's belt.

He freezes, pulls away, sits on the edge of the bed.

Jessica watches him with confusion.

JESSICA

Carl?

CARL

I can't.

She reaches out, takes his hand.

JESSICA

I've been so afraid, for so long,
but I know I love you... trust you.

He snatches his hand back.

CARL

I'm the last person you should
trust.

JESSICA

What's that supposed to mean?

He can't look at her.

As she watches him, her face darkens.

JESSICA

It's her... you're in love with
her.

Ashamed, Carl looks at her.

JESSICA

It all makes sense. It's not
Stephen I should be worried about.
It's you.

CARL

No!

She scrambles off the bed. He blocks the doorway.

CARL
You're wrong.

JESSICA
Get the fuck out of my way.

CARL
But Rianna, she needs--

JESSICA
You stay away from her. And stay
the hell away from me!

She violently pushes past him, flees.

Carl stands there, unable to move.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - DAY

Rianna sits in the passenger seat, Stephen's fingers interlocked with hers as the garage door ascends.

Rianna stares at the jagged cut on his cheek.

RIANNA
I can't believe he did that.

STEPHEN
You've seen him in action.

As the car drives into the garage, Stephen brings her hand up to his lips.

STEPHEN
Come in. I know you can make me
feel better.

EXT. CARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

A taxi pulls up, toots. Carl emerges, gets in.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rianna enters, heads toward the couch.

Stephen touches the injury on his cheek.

STEPHEN
I thought you might like to help me
clean this up... upstairs.

He holds his hand out, waits for her to take it.

Hesitant, she places her hand in his.

EXT. PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Jessica pulls up at the curb. Buses wait in the bus bay. School's not out yet.

INT. JESSICA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jessica stares through the windscreen, her expression blank, eyes red.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stephen sits on the bed. Rianna stands between his legs, dabs at the cut on his cheek with a cotton ball.

STEPHEN

This reminds me of the first time
we met.

Rianna gives him a guilty little glance.

RIANNA

I'm so sorry. It's all my fault.

STEPHEN

I'm happy to fight, as long as it's
over you.

She gives him a shy, uncertain smile. Stephen plucks a tissue from the bedside table, wraps it around the cotton ball as he takes it from her hand.

He pulls her down on top of him, kisses her gently, slowly.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

The taxi pulls away. Carl checks his watch as he hurries toward his pick-up.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stephen lies on top of Rianna. He brushes her hair back from her face, looks into her eyes.

STEPHEN

You have no idea how special you
are.

RIANNA

That's because I'm not.

STEPHEN

The fact that you don't see it,
just makes you more so.

He kisses her, trails his fingers over her throat, down over her breast. Her fingers tremble as she undoes his shirt buttons.

As he shrugs out of his shirt, her eyes widen.

Bruises mark his torso.

RIANNA

Oh God. He did that too?

Stephen takes her hand, kisses her fingertips, touches them to his bruises. Guides her hand... lower... lower... until her fingers rest on his belt.

Unsure, she looks up at him.

STEPHEN

It's okay. I won't hurt you.

INT. JESSICA'S CAR - DAY

Jessica stares through the windscreen as students pour through the gates.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Now in only boxer shorts, Stephen holds Rianna close, his kisses more passionate, more insistent. His hand reaches beneath her school skirt, tugs at her underwear.

She stiffens, stops his hand. Starts to cry.

STEPHEN

Hey. What's wrong?

Stephen cradles her in his arms.

RIANNA

I don't think I--

STEPHEN

Shh. Don't think. This is right.
You have no idea how much I need
you. You're so clean, so pure. So
perfect.

Rianna shakes her head.

RIANNA

Nobody's perfect.

STEPHEN
I love you, Rianna.

RIANNA
Don't say that.

Surprised, Stephen studies her tear streaked face.

STEPHEN
Isn't that what you want to hear?

Rianna avoids his gaze.

Stephen's eyes harden.

STEPHEN
Just not from me.

RIANNA
I'm sorry... I thought... I thought
I could forget about him.

STEPHEN
He doesn't love you. He doesn't
need you the way I need you.

RIANNA
(a whisper)
But I need him.

She sits up, eases toward the edge of the bed. Stephen
grabs her wrist.

STEPHEN
Even after what he did to me, you
still want him?

RIANNA
I think... maybe he did it because
he really loves me.

STEPHEN
No. He's the type of guy who can't
bring himself to take what he
wants, but won't let anyone else
have it either.

Rianna twists out of his grasp, scrambles off the bed.

Stephen climbs off the bed on the other side, makes his way
toward her, his face dark with anger.

Alarmed at the change in him, Rianna bolts toward the open
bedroom door.

As she reaches it, Stephen grabs her, slams her up against
the wall.

STEPHEN
This isn't a game.

RIANNA
I didn't mean--

STEPHEN
To what? Fuck with my head? Be a
little cock tease?

Frozen with fear, Rianna stares at him.

STEPHEN
Well let me tell you, sweetheart.
The teasing's officially over.

With a burst of energy, Rianna pounds her knee into his groin.

His eyes widen with surprise, his legs buckle.

Rianna takes off.

He grabs her ankle.

She falls, kicks at him, wrenches away.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Rianna bolts out the front door, sprints along the veranda toward the guest house.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stephen hobbles to the bed, grabs his trousers.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Rianna bursts through the front door, slams it shut, engages the lock, tries to catch her breath.

She spots the phone on the kitchen counter, makes a dash for it.

INT. STEPHEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Enraged, Stephen marches into the kitchen, grabs a knife from the knife block as he heads straight to the connecting door to the guest house.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - DAY

Carl drives. His cell phone rings. He snatches it up.

CARL
Yeah?... Rianna?... What?... I
can't... calm down.

His face darkens with rage as he listens. He accelerates,
overtakes a car. A horn blares.

CARL
I'm five minutes away. Call the
cops! Lock yourself in your room!

INT. GUEST HOUSE - SAME

Tears streak Rianna's face as she holds the phone to her
ear and hurries into her

BEDROOM

Shuts the door. No lock. She rests her forehead against the
door.

RIANNA
Carl? Don't hate me.

INT. CARL'S PICK-UP - SAME

Carl wrestles with the wheel, takes a corner. Tires
screech.

CARL
Never. Now call the cops!

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - SAME

Rianna lets out a sob as she hangs up. She races to her
dressing table, grabs a chair, drags it over to the door
and wedges it under the handle.

On the other side of the bed, the venetian blinds sway
slightly, their long cords severed.

Rianna wipes at her tears, sits on the bed, presses the
talk button on the phone.

Behind her, from the other side of the bed, Stephen
silently rises from the floor, clutches the knife.

Rianna senses him, turns.

He grabs her, wraps his arm around her throat, holds the
knife to her cheek.

Her eyes bulge, the phone slips from her hand.

EXT. PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The last of the students dwindle away. Jessica rushes up to a girl, says something. The girl shakes her head. Jessica stares at the empty school with alarm.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Carl's pick-up speeds into the driveway, screeches to a stop. He climbs out, sprints to the guest house...

Hammers on the door. Tries the locked handle.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stephen ties Rianna's wrist to the brass bed-head, her other hand already secured. Rianna struggles against the restraints, cries.

CARL (O.S.)
Rianna! It's me! Rianna!

Stephen grins.

STEPHEN
Looks like we'll have an audience.

Horrified, Rianna stares at him. Loud thumps come from the front door.

Stephen taps the tip of the knife against his lips, thinks. Outside the room, wood splinters.

CARL (O.S.)
(closer)
Rianna!

Stephen turns, hurries into the...

EN-SUITE BATHROOM

Looks around. Grabs a large can of hairspray.

INT. GUEST HOUSE CORRIDOR - SAME

Carl grips Rianna's door knob. It turns, but won't budge.

RIANNA (O.S.)
No!

He steps back, kicks it.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stephen strides up beside the door, hairspray in one hand, knife in the other. A thump. The door rattles in its frame. Thump. Stephen kicks the chair out from under the door knob. Thump.

The door flies open. Carl bursts in. Turns.

Stephen swings the hairspray can, smashes Carl in the temple. Knocked out, Carl goes down.

RIANNA

Carl!

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Jessica's car pulls into the driveway.

INT. JESSICA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

She stomps on the brakes. Stares through the windscreen at...

Carl's pick-up.

Her face sets with determination. She grabs her cell phone. Dials.

JESSICA

Police... Someone's broken into my house. He's still in there.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Unconscious, Carl slumps in a chair, each wrist tied to a chair leg with cord from the venetian blinds. Blood dribbles down one side of his face.

Stephen sits beside Rianna. He waits, watches Carl.

CARL'S POV: The room swims into view. Stephen grins, places his hand on Rianna's knee, slides it up her inner thigh.

Rianna tries to pull away, but there's nowhere to go.

Carl struggles furiously against his restraints.

CARL

Get your fucking hands off her!

Stephen leans forward, his face close to Carl's.

STEPHEN

I suggest you relax. Enjoy the show.

Carl's lips tighten. He spits in Stephen's face.

Repulsed and enraged, Stephen punches Carl. Blood flies. The chair topples sideways. Thumps to the floor.

Stephen holds the knife, bends over Carl, presses the blade to his neck.

RIANNA

No!

EXT. BARNET MANSION - SAME

Jessica strides along the veranda toward the guest house.

RIANNA (O.S.)

(screaming)

No! Don't! Don't!

Jessica breaks into a run.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The point of the knife sinks into Carl's neck. Blood seeps out. Carl glares at Stephen in defiance.

Stephen chuckles, eases the knife away. He shoves his hand in his trouser pocket, removes an antiseptic-wipe, cleans the saliva from his face.

Satisfied, Stephen hauls Carl's chair upright.

Jessica bursts into the room. Freezes in shock.

Stephen rushes at her, slams her backward. Her head cracks against the door frame. She flops to the floor.

RIANNA

Mom!

Stephen roughly drags Jessica into the room, dumps her beside Carl's chair.

Carl strains against the cords to no avail.

STEPHEN

Now. Where were we?

Petrified, Rianna cries as Stephen approaches.

Stephen sits beside her, edges the knife up her torso... slices off the top button of her school shirt... the next... and the next.

Helpless, tears slide down Carl's face.

Rianna trembles as Stephen slowly opens her shirt. Her stomach hitches below her bra-clad breasts.

Mortified, Carl turns his face away.

Stephen looks at Carl with disappointment.

STEPHEN

Now, Carl. If you don't look, I'll have to cut her until you do. That would be such a shame.

Carl shakes his head, refuses to watch.

On the floor, Jessica opens her eyes.

STEPHEN

Carl!

Carl's head snaps up. He looks.

Stephen grins, slips the blade beneath a bra strap, slices.

Jessica inches closer to Carl's chair.

CARL

How the fuck do you think you'll get away with this?

Stephen laughs.

STEPHEN

Carl, Carl, Carl. You broke in. Attacked this sweet girl. I tried to stop you. Things got out of hand. There were casualties. Of course, I was the only survivor.

Stephen leans over Rianna. She arches away as he trails soft kisses over her throat.

Careful not to let Stephen see her, Jessica reaches up to Carl's left wrist, fumbles with the tight knot.

Carl feels it. Tries not to react.

Stephen slices through Rianna's other bra strap. He turns to Carl.

STEPHEN

Look at her. So innocent. Pure.
Money can't buy this untouched
ecstasy.

Carl swallows, glares at Stephen with hatred.

STEPHEN

You want her. I know.

CARL

No, no...

STEPHEN

Oh, I see it in you, Carl. Only
difference is, you're in denial.
Why don't you admit you love her?
Why keep hurting her?

Stephen moves down the bed, rests the knife on her thigh.

STEPHEN

Come on, Carl. Admit you love her.

Carl watches in horror.

Stephen slides the knife beneath Rianna's skirt.

Jessica takes her chance, works on Carl's bound wrist.

STEPHEN

Better hurry.

Carl's eyes lock with Rianna's.

CARL

Okay. I love her. I love her...
because she's my daughter.

Jessica's fingers freeze on the knot. She goes limp.

Confused, Stephen faces Carl.

Astounded, Rianna stares at Carl. Fresh tears spill from
her eyes.

STEPHEN

I guess you'd say anything, right?

He turns back to Rianna, reaches beneath her skirt, rips
off her underwear.

Jessica tugs at the knots, they loosen...

Stephen turns his back on Carl, unbuckles his belt.

Carl frees his left hand, grips the chair leg with his
bound right hand. He rises. Picks up the chair.

Swings it down on Stephen's back.

Stephen collapses on Rianna. She screams. Carl swings the chair down on Stephen again.

Carl grabs the knife, cuts through the cord on his wrist.

He tosses the knife toward Jessica. She grabs it.

Carl hauls Stephen off Rianna, dumps him on the floor. In a blind rage, he smashes Stephen's face with his fist.

Jessica stumbles over to Rianna, cuts through her cords, drops the knife on the bed. Both crying, they hug each other as sirens grow louder.

Stephen groans in agony, curls into a fetal position, his face a bloody mess.

Carl moves toward Rianna and Jessica. Stops.

Jessica throws him a death stare as she helps Rianna up.

Carl stares back at her, desolate, remorseful.

With an arm around Rianna, Jessica ushers her toward the doorway.

CARL

Rianna...

She glances over her shoulder. Her eyes widen.

Stephen rises behind Carl, sways. He grips his nail file.

RIANNA

Carl!

Stephen throws his arm around Carl's neck, sinks the file deep into his back... pulls it out... stabs it in again.

Carl's eyes widen. As he struggles to escape, they turn.

Rianna breaks free of Jessica, lunges at the bed.

As Carl falls to his knees, Stephen jerks. His breath catches as his legs turn to jelly and he crumples.

Rianna stands behind him, stares down at them both in horror.

The kitchen knife protrudes from Stephen's spine.

Jessica stands in the doorway, frozen. Outside, sirens draw closer.

Rianna kneels beside Carl, clutches at his hand, squeezes it as she cries.

Carl stares back at her, his face white.

CARL
You're... okay?

Unable to speak, she nods.

Blood pools into the carpet at his side. He looks at her with pure love, gives her a weak smile, closes his eyes.

EXT. BARNET MANSION - DAY

Two ambulances speed away. A squad car follows.

With a protective arm wrapped around Rianna, Jessica leads her to another squad car. They climb in.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Tom walks in.

Despondent, Carl watches him from a bed.

TOM
Hey. You gotta snap outta this. You only lost your appendix and a kidney. You can live without 'em.

CARL
Yeah... what a shame.

Tom sighs.

TOM
Still no word?

Carl shakes his head.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Stephen sits in a wheelchair at the defendant's table, his lawyer stands beside him.

A FEMALE JUROR stands in the jury box, paper in hand.

FEMALE JUROR
--find the defendant guilty.

Seated behind the prosecutor's table, Jessica squeezes Rianna's hand.

Miserable and alone, Carl sits at the back of the room. The Judge bangs his gavel.

BAILIFF (O.S.)

All rise.

Carl remains seated, watches the crowd drift past him.

Rianna and Jessica approach the exit.

Carl stands, steps in behind Rianna. He reaches out, takes her hand.

She turns, looks at him with surprise, becomes upset.

He looks back at her with regret and guilt.

Realizing Rianna's no longer with her, Jessica turns, sees Carl. Her face hardens.

Carl forces something into Rianna's hand just as Jessica drags her away.

Morose, Carl watches them disappear into the crowd.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Rianna opens her hand. The locket rests on her palm. She bites her lip, slips it into her pocket with sadness.

INT. OFFICE - POLICE STATION - DAY

John Martin sits behind his desk, phone to his ear.

MARTIN

(into phone)

Are you sure about that?

Resigned, Carl sits on the other side of the desk.

MARTIN

(into phone)

Okay. As long as you're aware you can press charges at any time... Good. Thank you for your time Miss Cleary.

Martin hangs up, gives Carl a hard, penetrating stare.

MARTIN

You're free to go.

Carl blinks in surprise, frowns.

CARL

What're you talking about? I'm turning myself in.

MARTIN

While that may be the case, the victim does not wish to press charges. So, unfortunately, my hands are tied.

CARL

But I--

Martin points to the door.

MARTIN

Out.

Like a dog with its tail tucked between its legs, Carl exits.

INT. RIANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rianna reads a book on her bed.

Jessica enters, cautiously takes a seat beside her.

JESSICA

How was school?

Rianna stares at her book.

RIANNA

Typical.

Jessica's eyes find the locket around Rianna's neck. She reaches out, touches it.

JESSICA

What's inside?

Rianna wraps her hand protectively around the locket.

RIANNA

You don't want to see.

JESSICA

It's obviously important to you.
I'd love it if you'd show me.

A little uncertain, Rianna undoes the locket, opens it.

Jessica studies the photo. A slow smile forms on her lips.

JESSICA

Look how happy you are.

RIANNA

The roller coaster was fun. That's all.

JESSICA
That's not true.

RIANNA
Whatever. It doesn't matter.

JESSICA
I think it does.

Rianna frowns, shakes her head.

RIANNA
What he did to you...

JESSICA
I know. For me, it's unforgivable.
But it doesn't have to be that way
for you.

Jessica touches her arm, gives it a comforting rub.

JESSICA
You know, it's no wonder you had a
crush on him. Everything he did for
you... he's been a good father.

Rianna gives Jessica a pained look.

RIANNA
Mom. I can't--

JESSICA
Yes, you can. He was a stupid
teenager who made a huge mistake.
You know what that's like, don't
you? Just... think about it.

Jessica gives Rianna's arm a small squeeze and exits.

Deep in thought, Rianna stares at the locket.

INT. CARL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Carl stands side-on in front of the mirror, tries to get a good look at his healing scars.

Finally, he looks into his reflection's eyes. Although he's less than impressed with what he sees, he doesn't look away.

A faint knock on his front door catches his attention. He slips on a T-shirt.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Carl hurries through, opens the front door.

Rianna pushes past him, walks over to the couch.

Stunned, he watches her.

She glances at an empty frozen dinner container on the coffee table, turns and looks at him. The locket rests against her chest.

He swallows hard over the lump in his throat.

RIANNA

You've already eaten? It's movie night.

Carl stares at her, lost for words.

RIANNA

What? You don't want to go?

CARL

I thought... after what I did...

She stares back at him.

RIANNA

Yeah, I know. I still want to kick you. Punch you. Hate you.

Carl lets his arms fall loosely to his sides.

CARL

Go ahead.

Her face set with determination, she strides across the room toward him.

He steels himself.

She reaches him, looks him in the eye... embraces him.

Stunned, Carl stands motionless. Overwhelmed with relief, he slowly wraps his arms around her.

CARL

I don't deserve you.

RIANNA

I know... but I deserve a dad. And too bad for me, you're the only one I've got.

FADE OUT.