

OUR BETTER ANGELS

Written by

Steven E. Michael

Smichael4@cox.net
(602) 820-6942

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A semi-rural three acre farm. A vegetable garden hugs the edge of the farmhouse.

A barn with adjoining chicken coop sits several yards from the house. Corn rows cover the land beyond the barn.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

A sparse, neatly kept room. A chest of drawers, double bed, one mirror above the dresser.

A framed photo of a plain, smiling woman in her mid-40's sits alone on the dresser.

ROLAND DALE, 61 and fit, with weathered face and gray beard stubble, sleeps.

His face contorts, his arms jerk. One leg juts from under the covers. He moans.

Roland jolts from his pillow.

ROLAND

Aaahhh!

Wide-eyed, he surveys his surroundings. He looks at the clock: 4:10. He sits and rubs his head.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Roland, then 25, sleeps on his back. GUARD #1's black nightstick pushes hard against Roland's chin.

GUARD #1

Get up.

Roland covers his head. He rises and grabs prison pants.

GUARD #1 (CONT'D)

No. Walk.

Roland exits his cell in underwear. Guard #1 follows.

GUARD #1 (CONT'D)

Close sixteen!

The cell door slides shut.

INT. WALKWAY - NIGHT

Prisoners look through the bars as Guard #1 and Roland pass.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dimly lit long hallway with doors at each end.

Guard #1 unlocks the door at one end. Roland walks through.

Guard #1 closes the door and locks it.

Roland spins to see Guard #1 smirk through the door glass.

GUARD #2 keys and opens the opposite end door. Three prisoners walk in: CLAY, PRISONERS #1, and #2.

GUARD #2 peers down the hallway.

The three walk toward Roland. He stands his ground.

CLAY walks faster and stops in front of Roland.

CLAY

So you like young girls. Huh?

Roland eyes all three.

CLAY (CONT'D)

That true? 'Course it is.

Prisoners #1 and #2 surround Roland. Roland whirls and punches Prisoner #1 on the nose, knocks him against the wall.

Roland kicks Clay's groin and elbows Prisoner #2 in the head.

Prisoner #2 swings at Roland, misses. Clay pulls a shank and slashes Roland's neck near his collarbone.

Prisoner #1 grabs Roland and locks his arms behind him.

CLAY (CONT'D)

Gonna enjoy this. How 'bout you?

Clay smashes Roland's jaw. Prisoner #2 pounds Roland's ribs.

Clay flashes the blade in Roland's face. He gives an evil laugh. Clay plunges the blade into Roland's stomach.

END FLASHBACK

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roland wipes his face with both hands. His eyes stare.

INT. BARN - DAY

Roland spears a bale of hay with a pitchfork. He wipes the hay layer into a feed trough.

BUSTER, his roan male horse, munches. He hugs Buster's neck.

ROLAND
Gotta busy day, old friend.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Roland spreads chicken feed pellets. He clucks with his tongue. The hens follow him.

The hens peck the food. His goat, GLADYS, butts against him.

ROLAND
Didn't forget you.

He removes several carrots from his pocket - a stained and well-worn denim coat. Gladys devours the offerings.

The sun peeks over the horizon. Roland sees his neighbor, MARIBELL MUNCIE 35, exit her house. She glares at him.

Roland shakes his head and walks to the farmhouse.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roland washes his plate, fork and coffee mug in the sink. He towels them off and places them in the small cupboard.

He walks to the back door. He thrusts his feet into his boots and retrieves his jacket from a nail hook.

INT. BARN - DAY

Two weathered wooden sawhorses support five square feet of plywood, painted white.

Roland swipes a finger on one corner. He looks at his finger.

He opens a can of paint, picks up a five-inch brush, and dips the brush in the can. He slops large letters in black paint.

EXT. DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE - DAY

Roland carries the heavy plywood sign and two metal stakes to the end of the driveway. A hammer swings from his pants loop.

The weathered mailbox tilts on its post.

He picks up a stake and pounds it into the ground with the hammer. He pounds a second stake three feet away.

He leans the plywood against the two stakes.

School children huddle together just up the road. A parked car idles nearby.

A MAN in his early 30's stands guard by the kids. The Man stares at Roland.

They lock eyes.

Roland starts back toward the barn. The sign reads "WELDING HERE".

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Roland stoically waits in the checkout line.

A YOUNG MOTHER with 5-year old FEMALE CHILD stands in front of him.

The Female Child waves at him. Roland shows a grin.

The Young Mother pulls the child closer to her.

She moves between Roland and the Female Child.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Roland tills the rows of his garden.

A tractor pulls a corn picker implement into the driveway.

Roland leans the hoe against the house.

FRANK DIETZ rides the tractor. He lowers the tractor's RPM's.

FRANK
That sign true?

ROLAND

Yep.

FRANK

You ever worked on something this big?

Roland looks at the farm implement, back at Frank.

ROLAND

Yep.

FRANK

What I mean is are you any good?

ROLAND

I can weld anything but the crack of dawn.

Frank nods. He gets down from the tractor and walks to the tongue of the implement.

FRANK

Startin' to crack right here.

Roland inspects the area. Frank goes to the implement's axle.

FRANK (CONT'D)

And the housing here is startin'.

Roland runs his hand over the cracked axle housing.

FRANK (CONT'D)

So how you figure on welding that?

ROLAND

Prep it and weld it. Axle will have to come out first.

Frank nods.

FRANK

How much and when can I have it?

Roland looks at his cornfield.

ROLAND

Pick my two acres and we'll call it even.

Frank looks at the cornfield.

FRANK

Fair enough.

They exchange a long look at each other.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Didn't know you were a welder.

Roland shrugs.

ROLAND

Hoping to keep busy is all. May be a long wait after you.

FRANK

Yeah, I remember. Sent up to prison, then proved innocent. Seems folks remember one thing but not the other.

ROLAND

Can't help what they think.

FRANK

Yeah well, I'd rather have my picker ready for season than worry 'bout what folks think.

ROLAND

It'll be ready by tomorrow sundown.

Frank extends his hand. Roland looks at it, then into Frank's eyes. He shakes his hand.

EXT. BARN - DAY

The sun sets low.

The farm implement rests at the door opening. Roland works an electric grinder on the farm implement.

Sparks shoot off the tool.

A tan late-model sedan pulls into the driveway. The state seal adorns the car's doors. Roland stops the grinder.

AKISHA ONABE, a black woman, 35, exits the car. She carries a manila folder stuffed with papers.

MALLORY WURLEY, 14, sits in the passenger seat. She glances up from her iPhone.

Roland removes his leather gloves.

AKISHA

Mr. Dale?

ROLAND
Who wants to know?

AKISHA
I'm Akisha Onabe from Child Welfare
Services.

Roland stands unaffected.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
I'm here as follow-up.

ROLAND
To what?

AKISHA
To the Superior Court's letter.

ROLAND
Got no business with any court.

Roland steps toward Akisha. She scans a document from the folder.

AKISHA
The notice was delivered to you
last month. You signed for it.
Here.

Roland reads the document. He furrows his brow.

ROLAND
Never opened it.

AKISHA
I see. The response period is past.
But it's enough that the delivery
is valid. Now, you have a niece
named...

She leafs through folder documents.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
...LIZBETH WURLEY? Is that correct
sir?

ROLAND
My brother's girl.

AKISHA
Do you know she died in a traffic
accident?

ROLAND

When?

AKISHA

Four months ago.

ROLAND

Never heard. She's at peace with her parents now, so-

AKISHA

Mr. Dale, the state has a problem we're hoping you can help us with.

Roland shows agitation.

ROLAND

I don't owe the state nothin'.

AKISHA

May I speak with Mrs. Dale then?

ROLAND

Dead. Cancer a year ago.

Akisha scribbles. She hurries to stand in front of Roland.

AKISHA

I'm sorry for your loss. But you see that little girl?

She points to Mallory. Roland eyes Mallory, her face buried in her iPhone. Mallory glances back at him.

AKISHA (CONT'D)

That's LizBeth's daughter, Mallory. She's had it rough, Mr. Dale. Her father left early. Her mother was an alcoholic and drug abuser. She's never known stability.

Roland eyes her with intensity.

AKISHA (CONT'D)

The court assigned her custody to the closest living relative. You, Mr. Dale.

Roland strides toward his work. Akisha follows quickly.

ROLAND

Find somebody else.

Mallory flashes a grin.

AKISHA

She's scared and alone, Mr. Dale.
She's a teenage girl who needs
help.

ROLAND

I don't know nothin' about 'em.

AKISHA

You can petition the court to
change custody, but for now, she
stays here.

Roland whirls to face her.

ROLAND

You know about me? You got that in
them papers?

AKISHA

Yes, we know your record. It's
clean.

ROLAND

Just leave me be.

AKISHA

She has to stay, Mr. Dale.

Roland stares at Akisha. He looks off in the distance.

ROLAND

She's from the big city, I suppose.

AKISHA

Yes. She's been registered at the
local high school and she must
attend, starting this Monday.

Akisha moves closer.

AKISHA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

She has been a light drug user, but
she's clean now.

Akisha moves even closer.

AKISHA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

And she has run away from three
foster homes, so you'll need to
keep an eye on her.

Roland looks dumbfounded.

Akisha walks to the car and opens the door.

Mallory gets out. She wears baggy clothes in the style of teenage girls. A backpack hangs from her shoulder.

Akisha opens the rear door and removes a suitcase.

Mallory's holds her iPhone, looks at Roland.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
I'll come by once a week to check
on you.

Akisha whispers to Mallory. She hugs her. Akisha backs the car out and leaves.

Roland dons leather gloves. He grinds the metal.

Mallory scans the road. She looks back at Roland. She picks up her suitcase.

She heads down the driveway.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The sun's orb sinks halfway down the horizon.

Mallory walks. She stops a hundred yards from the farmhouse. She looks back at Roland's farm, then up and down the road.

She sits on her suitcase, out of breath.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Roland stops the grinder.

ROLAND
You own a coat?

He looks back. No one there.

He walks to the edge of the road and spots Mallory.

INT. BARN - DAY

Roland saddles Buster and cinches the belly strap. He leads Buster out of the barn and mounts him.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Roland closes in on Mallory. She grabs her suitcase and staggers down the road.

She stops just as Roland meets up with her.

Roland dismounts.

ROLAND
There's a chill coming on.

He clasps his hands together near the saddle's stirrup.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Buster will take you back.

Mallory approaches with caution, stops.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
He's gentle.

Mallory lifts one foot.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Other foot.

Mallory changes feet as Roland lifts her up.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Throw your other leg over him. Hang
on to the horn.

Her brow furrows. Roland taps the saddle horn.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Here.

He picks up the suitcase, grabs Buster's reins, and they walk down the road toward the farmhouse.

She reaches and strokes Buster's neck. She smiles.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Dim light illuminates the barn from one central fixture.

Roland leads Buster into the main area.

ROLAND
Foot in the stirrup.

Mallory swings her leg over. She stumbles.

Roland releases the saddle and sets it on a sawhorse. He removes the blanket, bit and reins.

Buster walks into his stall.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Sorry to hear about LizBeth. She was a spirited child when I knew her.

MALLORY

She was a drunk.

ROLAND

That so?

MALLORY

What do you care?

Roland looks at her a long time.

ROLAND

Hand me that pitchfork.

Mallory looks around and doesn't move.

Roland strides to the pitchfork, pulls it off its hook, and plunges it into a bale of hay.

He wipes the hay off into Buster's trough. Two more loads and he hangs up the pitchfork.

Gladys walks up behind Mallory.

Mallory looks down, reaches out and pats the goat's head.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

That's Gladys. You like animals?

MALLORY

I don't know.

Roland pulls a curry brush from a shelf. He briskly brushes Buster. He stops and extends the brush at Mallory.

ROLAND

Here.

She shakes her head.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Nothin' to it. Brush his coat down grain.

MALLORY
Maybe I don't want to.

Roland eyes her. He puts the brush away and walks out of the barn.

Mallory walks to Buster and strokes his nose.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roland cooks two hamburgers at the stove. He removes a bowl of salad from the refrigerator and sets it on the table.

Mallory sits at the table, sullen, keys her iPhone.

ROLAND
You like hamburgers?

Mallory does not look up. Roland stares at her.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Missy, I asked you a question.

MALLORY
My name's not Missy.

Roland dishes up the burgers. He puts vegetables on the plates from the steamer pot.

He sets the plates on the table.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
I'm not hungry.

They exchange looks at each other. Roland forks his food. He looks at her untouched plate.

ROLAND
Don't all kids like hamburgers?

Mallory shows impatience.

MALLORY
Where do I sleep?

Roland wipes his mouth with a napkin. He grabs her suitcase and walks down the hallway.

Mallory follows.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roland enters and sets down the suitcase.

A spartan room. A mattress with clean sheets and blanket lay on the floor, no bed frame or box spring.

Mallory stops at the door. She heaves a sigh.

Mallory drops her backpack. She opens her suitcase. Roland watches. She snaps the suitcase closed.

MALLORY

Excuse me!

Roland backs out and closes the door. Mallory removes her phone charger from the backpack.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits in an old cloth-covered lounge chair. A lamp on an end table lights him and the chair. He reads a book.

He looks at his watch, switches off the light.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

He stops in front of Mallory's room. The hallway ceiling light streams through her cracked door.

He sees Mallory curled into a ball and fast asleep. He stares a long time. He closes the door.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Morning sunlight streaks through old curtains.

Mallory wakes to the searing sound of grinding metal. She goes to the window.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Roland lies under the corn picker implement. He grinds the picker's tongue.

Chickens dot the fenced barnyard. Gladys taunts CYRUS, the rooster.

Roland removes gloves. He enters the fenced barnyard.

The chickens gather around him.

Roland CLUCKS several times. The chickens move as a group and enter the coop next to the barn.

One hen stands in the barnyard.

ROLAND
You comin' or not?

The hen struts into the coop. Roland closes the coop door.

He opens the barnyard door. Buster walks out. Buster drinks from a water trough.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Mallory yawns and stretches. She looks at Buster out the window again. She yanks clothes from her suitcase.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Roland positions his stick welder near the implement tongue. He nods and the welding helmet swivels down to cover his face.

A fierce light erupts from the welder tip.

Mallory walks up next to him.

MALLORY
Umm -

Roland stops welding. He removes the welding helmet.

ROLAND
Don't ever watch this!

MALLORY
Well excuse me, Farmer John.

She stomps off.

Roland slumps. He switches off the welder. He removes his gloves and follows her.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Mallory throws clothes into her suitcase. She pulls at her phone charger. It won't release from the wall socket.

She slumps on the floor.

Roland knocks on the open door. He enters.

ROLAND

The light from the welder makes you
go blind. You're too young to go
blind.

MALLORY

Yeah, well, I didn't know that.

Mallory pulls at the phone charger again. It releases from
the outlet.

ROLAND

You gotta be hungry.

He exits the room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roland retrieves her full dinner plate from the refrigerator.
He places it in the microwave and turns it on.

Mallory plops down at the table.

Mallory side glances at him. Roland looks a long time at her.

The microwave DINGS. He removes the plate and places it on
the table.

ROLAND

The plate is hot.

MALLORY

I'm not hungry.

ROLAND

We don't waste food around here.

Mallory sits still, looks down at the plate.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

It's already mid-day. Eat.

He exits the back door.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Roland pauses, looks back at the door. He sits on the bench.
He removes his hat and rubs his eyes.

The TING-TING of utensil and plate are heard from the kitchen. He replaces his cap and walks toward the barn.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Mallory walks to the edge of the fence. A few feet away, Roland re-attaches the farm implement's wheel.

Buster plods to Mallory. He lifts his head over the wire and holds it there next to Mallory.

ROLAND

He wants you to pet him.

Mallory strokes Buster's face, from eyes to snout.

Roland walks to Mallory and Buster.

He removes two halves of an apple from his denim jacket.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Give him one.

Buster leans to snatch the delicacy. Roland pulls it back.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(to Buster)

Here now!

Mallory takes one apple halve.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Don't show him your fingers. He don't have a sense for that.

Mallory holds the apple piece in the palm of her hand and offers it to Buster.

The horse gobbles it up. Mallory caresses Buster's nose.

MALLORY

His nose is soft.

Gladys butts Mallory hard from behind.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Hey!

ROLAND

Gladys, behave.

He takes two carrots from his pocket and hands them to Mallory.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Here. She likes these.

She holds one down to Gladys. The goat pulls the carrot away.
Mallory cracks a small grin. She pats the goat's head.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roland slides dishes into the sink. He hears MUSIC from Mallory's room.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mallory sits on the mattress. MUSIC blares from her iPhone.
A KNOCK at the door.

MALLORY
What?

The door opens. Roland stands in the doorway.

ROLAND
Kinda loud, ain't it?

Mallory rolls her eyes. She adjusts the volume down.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Better.

He closes the door.

MALLORY
Kinda loud, ain't it? Learn some
English.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Long shadows from the morning sun.

Roland leads a saddled Buster out. He closes the door.

Frank Dietz rides his tractor in the cornfield. The tractor pulls the repaired implement as it harvests.

Frank waves at Roland and gives him a thumbs up sign. Roland nods and mounts Buster.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Mallory awakens to the loudness of the harvest. She looks out the window. Roland rides Buster down the driveway.

MALLORY

Yes!

She throws clothes and phone charger into her suitcase.

She pauses. She looks at the window.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Mallory bolts out the back door. She runs to the end of the driveway. She peers at Roland and Buster down the road.

She runs back to the farmhouse.

Moments later, she emerges wearing a jacket.

EXT. NEIGHBOR HOUSE - DAY

Maribell stands in her yard. She watches Mallory run. She pulls her cell phone.

MARIBELL

I need to speak with the sheriff.
There's something going on at the
Dale place.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Mallory walks quickly. She sees Roland and Buster turn off the road ahead of her.

She picks up her pace, then breaks into a trot. More pace until she sprints, then turns to follow Roland.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Buster eats grass near a large tree. Roland stands over a headstone.

Mallory sneaks closer. She hides behind a nearby headstone.

Roland kneels facing the headstone. He places a wildflower bunch next to the headstone.

The headstone reads:

THERESA DALE
1964 - 2018
BELOVED WIFE AND ANGEL OF MERCY

ROLAND

...put up a sign for work. Dietz brought his picker over. Picking our corn today. We got the better of it. Easy welds.

He sits down on the grass.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Maribell still shootin' daggers at me. You'd make me talk to her, wouldn't you? No use. She's made up her mind. I expect they all have.

He plucks a blade of grass. He tosses it away.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Saw a new bank teller, but it's the same.

He shifts his weight.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Aww, hell.

His face turns serious.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

You remember my brother's daughter LizBeth? She died in a car crash.

He removes his cap. Tosses it down.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Her daughter's here. State says I gotta keep her. Name is Mallory.

He winces.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

They say the court can take her somewhere else but I gotta ask them. Don't know how to do that.

He runs a hand over his scalp.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Don't know if I wanna try either.

He looks down.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
God, I wish you were here.

He scrunches his face in anguish.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
All I ever did was lean on you.
Don't know how you took it for so
long.

Roland grabs two fists of grass and squeezes.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
I gotta ask again, Tess. Show me
what to do. Give me your strength
one more time.

He lies down.

Buster's ears perk up at the sight of Mallory. He snorts.

Mallory retreats and runs away.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Mallory sits on the bench. Music blares from her iPhone.

Buster ambles up the driveway with Roland aboard. A sheriff's squad car turns into the driveway from the other direction.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Sheriff TOM BOZEMAN, 32, exits the squad car. He walks over to Roland. Roland dismounts.

SHERIFF TOM
Hello, Roland. It's been a long
time.

ROLAND
Yep. Long time.

SHERIFF TOM
How are you getting along since
your wife passed?

Roland's brow furrows. He ignores the question.

Sheriff Tom strikes a serious stance.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
Stay here a minute.

Sheriff Tom walks to the edge of the back porch.

Neighbor Maribell watches from her back door.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
What's your name, sweetie?

MALLORY
It's not sweetie, it's Mallory.

SHERIFF TOM
Mallory what?

MALLORY
Wurley.

SHERIFF TOM
Have you been accosted in any way?

MALLORY
Accosted?

SHERIFF TOM
Has this man made bad advances
toward you?

MALLORY
No.

SHERIFF TOM
Do you feel safe here?

MALLORY
It's okay.

Tom walks to Roland. Roland stands holding Buster's reins.

SHERIFF TOM
Who's the girl?

ROLAND
My grand niece.

SHERIFF TOM
Just visiting?

ROLAND
The state dropped her here.

SHERIFF TOM
What's that mean?

ROLAND

Her mother died. Somehow the state thinks she needs to be here.

SHERIFF TOM

Okay. I wasn't notified. Does she have a handler?

Roland shows confusion.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

You know, Child Services?

ROLAND

Well Tommy, it's a woman named Akisha. The girl has a card.

Sheriff Tom smiles.

SHERIFF TOM

You used to call me that, didn't you? We got a call. Said you and her were in some sort of argument.

ROLAND

Maribell.

SHERIFF TOM

You didn't hear it from me.

Sheriff Tom walks toward Mallory. Roland leads Buster toward the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Roland removes the saddle and blanket from Buster. Sheriff Tom's car leaves the driveway.

Mallory enters the barn.

MALLORY

Why did he want that lady's number?

ROLAND

Just checkin' on ya.

MALLORY

You were gone a long time.

Roland grabs the brush and wipes Buster. He looks at her iPhone as it blares music.

ROLAND
Turn that damn thing off.

Mallory taps the screen. The music stops.

MALLORY
I could have run away you know.

ROLAND
I suppose.

MALLORY
You'd be in big trouble.

Roland stops brushing the horse. He faces her.

ROLAND
There's a hundred ways you could
leave.

He gestures toward Buster.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
He could bolt. Plenty of chances.
But he doesn't.

Mallory looks at Buster.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
He decides.

Roland sets the brush down. He looks her up and down.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
You own good clothes for tomorrow?

She looks at her clothes.

MALLORY
What?

Roland pauses.

ROLAND
Finish off Buster.

He extends the brush to Mallory. She grabs it and brushes the horse.

She looks back at Roland. He nods.

Her brush strokes get more confident. She smiles.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Sunlight peaks through the window.

Mallory sleeps. A knock at the door.

ROLAND (O.S.)
Time to get up.

Mallory turns over.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Roland knocks on the bedroom door.

ROLAND
Let's go. You'll miss the bus.

MALLORY (O.C.)
I'm not going.

Roland walks down the hallway.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Roland bursts into the room. A hammer swings from a loop on his pants. He clenches long nails in his teeth.

He grabs the mattress and yanks it from under Mallory. She spills out onto the bare floor.

She scurries to a corner.

He lifts the mattress and presses one corner against the wall. He pulls a nail and his hammer.

He pounds a nail through the mattress.

He lifts the opposite end and does the same. The mattress hangs limply.

ROLAND
Clean up and get dressed.

Mallory scampers out the door. The bathroom door SLAMS shut.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Roland drives. Mallory sits with a scowl.

MALLORY

I'm telling that woman what you did. You had no right.

Roland fixes his eyes on the road.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

I'm telling her your food stinks, the room stinks, the bed stinks. It's worse than prison.

ROLAND

You don't know nothin' about prison.

MALLORY

Oh, sure. And you do?

They sit in silence.

The truck stops at the curb in front of the high school.

ROLAND

The bus will bring you back.

Mallory shakes her head.

MALLORY

Duh, you have to come in to admit me.

Roland drives into the school parking lot.

EXT. SCHOOL COMMON AREA - DAY

Mallory and Roland walk toward the administration office.

Roland looks up at the school's flagpole. A jock strap, brassiere, and a large pair of pants hang where a flag should be.

An unseen person lowers the garments.

ROLAND

What the...?

Mallory glances upward.

MALLORY

Ha! That's tight!

Roland shakes his head. They walk.

EXT. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

Roland and Mallory exit the administration office.

ROLAND
Learn somethin' today.

MALLORY
I need money.

ROLAND
School don't cost nothin'.

MALLORY
Lunch. I need money to buy lunch.

Roland pulls out his wallet.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Hallway bustles with teen students.

Mallory surveys locker numbers. She stops, looks at a piece of paper, and spins the combination lock.

Her backpack sags over her shoulder.

A tall older boy, JAG (EDWIN) JONES 16, saunters down the hallway.

DEREK and JUSTIN, both 15, obediently walk behind Jag. Two 14 year-old girls also follow, SADIE and OLYMPIA.

A MALE STUDENT #1 extends his fist to Jag. They bump fists.

MALE STUDENT #1
Nice!

MALE STUDENT #2
Whose bra was that?

JAG
Your sister's.

They both laugh.

Jag spots Mallory. He opens the flap on Mallory's backpack.

JAG (CONT'D)
Whatcha got in here?

Mallory spins, her back against the locker.

She and Jag exchange a long look.

JAG (CONT'D)
Ooh, a newbie. And lookin' good
too.

Mallory looks stunned and pleased. Jag leans in to her.

JAG (CONT'D)
How'd you get here? I mean, like
this place is nowhere.

DEREK
Maybe she can't talk.

SADIE
Shut up.

Jag leans closer to Mallory.

JAG
Maybe you should hang with us.

He turns to address the others.

JAG (CONT'D)
She should, right?

SADIE
Yeah!

DEREK
Uh-huh.

JUSTIN
Cool.

OLYMPIA
Yeah.

Jag turns back to Mallory.

JAG
Unanimous.

Mallory closes the locker and walks down the hall.

DEREK
I told you she can't talk.

Sadie slaps Derek's arm.

INT. SCHOOL SNACK BAR - DAY

Mallory gathers her purchased food, snatches her backpack.

INT SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Mallory sits at an empty cafeteria table.

Students eye her. She places her backpack next to her.

Jag and the gang enter the cafeteria. WHOOPS, APPLAUSE, and WHISTLES emanate from students.

Jag takes a bow.

Jag takes french fries from a male student's plate. He smirks and stuffs them in his mouth.

Jag sits on top of the table next to Mallory's. The gang sits on the seats.

They all stare at Mallory.

The school principal, MRS. LANGHORNE 56, walks up to Jag.

MRS. LANGHORNE

Mr. Jones, tables are for eating,
not sitting.

Jag does not move.

JAG

Maybe I'll tell my father that
you're harassing me. You know, the
school board president?

Mrs. Langhorne walks past, stops.

MRS. LANGHORNE

I'm sure your father would agree
with me. Off the table Edwin.

Snickers from the gang and surrounding students fill the air.

Jag slowly gets up and stands to face Mrs. Langhorne.

JAG

The name is Jag.

MRS. LANGHORNE

According to the registrar, you're
Edwin.

Jag steps toward Mrs. Langhorne.

JAG
It's Jag. Use it.

Mrs. Langhorne backs off and continues out the door. Jag sits on the table again.

Jag whispers to Sadie and Olympia. The girls walk toward Mallory, Sadie in the lead.

Sadie plops down on the opposite side of Mallory.

SADIE
Hi!

MALLORY
Hi.

Olympia reaches to grab Mallory's backpack.

Eyes on Sadie, Mallory slams her hand on the backpack.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
Uh-uh.

Olympia awkwardly retracts her reach.

Mallory glances at Jag, then turns back to Sadie.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
Is that all you got?

Sadie frowns and walks back to Jag's table. Olympia follows.

Mallory gathers her food and backpack. She exits the door.

EXT. SCHOOL COMMON AREA - DAY

Mallory sits on the grass.

Sadie emerges from the cafeteria door. She walks to Mallory.

SADIE
I'm Sadie.

Mallory sits unaffected.

SADIE (CONT'D)
We were just playing. No disrespect.

MALLORY

I know.

SADIE

What's your name?

MALLORY

Mallory.

SADIE

Hi! So your first day huh? Like where were you before?

MALLORY

From all over.

Sadie sits next to Mallory.

SADIE

You're cool. Wanna hang out with our fam?

MALLORY

Who's the tall guy?

SADIE

That's Jag. He's like G-O-A-T.

Mallory thinks a second.

MALLORY

I'm down.

The school bell RINGS.

SADIE

Gotta skurt. Meet us in the parking lot after last period.

Sadie walks away.

MALLORY

Sure.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Roland sits at the table with paper and pencil. He writes. He looks at another sheet of paper.

The heading reads, "Current Corn Prices".

He erases a line. He jots again. He slashes a line.

ROLAND
Carry the four.

He finishes the calculation.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Not bad.

A vehicle's brakes SQUEAL outside. He looks out the window.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A yellow school bus stops, warning lights on.

A small number of children and teens exit the bus.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Roland exits the back door.

Jag's new high-performance pickup careens into the driveway from the other direction. The school bus children jump back.

Derek and Justin WHOOP from the bed of the truck. The truck skids to a stop.

Jag drives. Mallory, Sadie, and Olympia sit in the cab.

Roland bounds off the porch toward the truck.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Mallory exits the passenger door.

ROLAND
(to Jag)
Too fast, son. There's kids around here.

JAG
Sip tea BOF.

Jag slams the truck in reverse and spins it around. Tires spin on the driveway and CHIRP when they reach the pavement.

DEREK
(yells)
You totally roasted him, man!

Mallory glares at Roland and marches toward the house.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mallory whirls to face Roland.

Roland sits at the kitchen table.

MALLORY
Why can't you just leave me alone!?

ROLAND
Tryin' to help.

MALLORY
I don't need your help.

Mallory stomps down the hallway.

ROLAND
(to himself)
We all need help, kiddo.

MALLORY (O.S.)
Hey! What's this?

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Mallory sits on a new mattress and box spring supported by a new wooden bed frame. She bounces.

She pounces to the floor and pulls out two ground level drawers from the wooden frame.

MALLORY
Where did this come from?

ROLAND
Better than the other, I suppose.

Mallory bounces on the bed and lies back. Her head hits a new fluffy pillow.

Roland grins and exits.

INT. BARN - DAY

Roland sweeps sawdust from the small area of boarded floor.

He grabs a saw and places it on a shelf above a workbench.

Mallory appears in the doorway. She watches Roland.

MALLORY
Thanks for buying it.

ROLAND
Didn't. Made it.

Mallory surveys the aftermath of his work.

Roland stops and peers at her.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Who'd you get a ride with?

MALLORY
Just some people I met.

ROLAND
That driver old enough?

Mallory shakes her head and walks away.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Mallory stands at the fence. Buster plods to her. She strokes Buster's neck.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - NIGHT

The living room clock TICKS. Mallory lies awake.

ROLAND (O.S.)
Ahh!

More garbled cries reach Mallory's ears.

Mallory rises and listens at the door. She opens it.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mallory steps across the hallway to look into the master bedroom.

Roland's arms and face twitch. He thrashes the covers.

He wakes as his torso bolts upright.

ROLAND
Bastards!

Mallory darts back into the hallway.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - NIGHT

She retreats behind the door. She listens.

Footsteps walk to the bathroom. Running water SPLASHES.

She cracks the door open. Roland wears undershorts and carries a glass of water.

Multiple scars and stitches marks cover Roland's torso. He enters the master bedroom.

Mallory closes the door and lies on the bed. Eyes wide open, she hugs the pillow.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Cyrus CROWS at the sun, which peaks over the horizon.

Roland spreads chicken feed. Buster snorts from inside the barn.

Mallory walks to the barnyard fence.

MALLORY

Has Buster eaten yet?

Roland jerks slightly. He shows a surprised look.

ROLAND

Go ahead. Three forks.

MALLORY

I know.

She walks toward the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mallory sticks the pitchfork into a hay bale. She places the hay in Buster's trough. She hangs the pitchfork on the wall.

Cyrus walks toward her from the shadows.

MALLORY

Hello there.

She walks outside the barn door.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

MALLORY

Can I have some of that?

Roland pulls a handful of chicken feed and gives it to her. She marches back to the barn.

ROLAND

Ain't no hens in there.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mallory CLUCKS. Cyrus struts to her. She holds out a handful of feed.

The rooster hesitates. He flaps his wings and pecks at her. She screams and runs out the door.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Mallory emerges from the barn with Cyrus close behind. Roland dives under the barbed wire fence.

He beelines toward Cyrus. The rooster stops his pursuit and sprints away.

Roland eyes Mallory.

ROLAND

You okay? What'd you do to him?

MALLORY

I didn't do anything!

She runs to the farmhouse door. Roland's brow furrows.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roland flips bacon in a pan on the stove. Mallory emerges from the hallway.

ROLAND

Hungry?

Mallory sits at the table.

Roland forks the bacon on to two plates. He cracks two eggs and mixes them in the pan.

MALLORY
I don't eat breakfast.

ROLAND
Didn't your momma make you
breakfast?

MALLORY
Seriously?

Roland turns off the stove. He sits with plate.

ROLAND
Need to go into town tomorrow.
Saturday shopping. Wanna tag along?

MALLORY
What else is there to do.

The phone RINGS. Roland strides toward the living room.

ROLAND (O.C.)
Hello?
(pause)
Yep.

Roland enters the kitchen.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Lady from the state wants to talk
to you.

Mallory exits toward the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mallory picks up the receiver.

MALLORY
Hello?

The back door SHUTS. Mallory peers around the corner to see
Roland exit.

AKISHA
(on phone)
Hi Mallory. This will have to be my
Friday check. My schedule prevents
me from driving to your place
today.

Silence.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
(on phone)
Mallory, are you there?

Mallory puts a hand on her hip.

MALLORY
Yes.

AKISHA
(on phone)
How are you getting along? Any
problems?

MALLORY
I'm fine.

AKISHA
(on phone)
You're being treated okay?

MALLORY
I said, I'm fine.

AKISHA
Listen, Mallory, dear. If you even
think about running again, please
call me first. Okay?

Mallory looks toward the kitchen.

MALLORY
Yeah, okay, whatever.

AKISHA
(on phone)
Did you keep the card I gave you?
You need to call me if you don't
feel safe. And if it's an
emergency, call 9-1-1.

MALLORY
I gave the local cop your number.

AKISHA
(on phone)
That's okay.

MALLORY
I have to get ready for school.
Bye.

She hangs up.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Students mill around. Mallory walks behind Jag and the other members of the gang.

Jag stops.

JAG
It's lake time. We're down, right?

The gang replies affirmative, in unison.

JAG (CONT'D)
(to Mallory)
You're coming, right?

MALLORY
Yeah, sure. Umm, I probably should call my uncle.

JAG
Chester the molester?

Derek and Justin laugh.

MALLORY
What?

JAG
The old guy. He spent a long time in prison for doing it to a little girl.

SADIE
He's really sick, Mal.

OLYMPIA
Watch your back girl. Put the SOS on the "i".

Jag looks for approval from the gang. He turns back to Mallory.

JAG
So, just going to check-in, huh?

SADIE
C'mon. It'll be fun. We can get crazy.

OLYMPIA
She ain't comin'.

MALLORY

No, I'll go.

Jag smiles. He puts his arm around Mallory. She smiles big. They all walk out of the building.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Mallory sifts through a search engine.

A newspaper article pops up on screen.

The article title, "Local Released From Prison". A photo of a young Roland sits next to the headline.

Mallory reads near the end of the article.

MALLORY

He was innocent.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Jag's truck sits in front of the store. Derek and Justin stand outside the drivers' window.

Jag and the three girls sit in the cab.

JAG

Ready?

Derek and Justin nod. Jag looks at Mallory.

JAG (CONT'D)

Time to prove it, newbie.

Jag exits the truck and walks into the store.

Mallory exits the passenger side. Derek and Justin follow her to the store's door.

Derek shoves Justin and Justin BANGS into the door glass. Derek grabs Mallory's arm.

DEREK

She's my girl!

Justin charges Derek and pushes him against the glass door.

MALLORY

Stop it! Help! Somebody help!

The two boys continue to shove each other. They wrestle standing up.

The STORE OWNER exits the store.

STORE OWNER
What the hell is going on?

Derek and Justin scuffle but move away from the front door. Justin throws Derek against the store's glass window.

MALLORY
Stop it! Make them stop!

The Store Owner grabs both boys by their arms. Jag exits the store. He holds something under his shirt.

STORE OWNER
Here now, stop this.

Jag pulls two bottles of whiskey from under his shirt and hands them to Olympia in the truck.

Derek and Justin stop wrestling each other.

STORE OWNER (CONT'D)
You two shake hands and forget this thing.

Mallory jumps back in the truck cab. Derek and Justin shake hands. They climb in the bed of the truck.

The Store Owner stands and waves as Jag slams the truck in reverse and speeds away. Justin and Derek WHOOP.

EXT. LAKESIDE - NIGHT

Moonlight shimmers off the lake. Mallory sits alone.

Derek, Justin, and Olympia race out of the lake. The boys wear jockey shorts. Olympia sports no top, just bra.

The three grab towels to dry off.

DEREK
Hey, throw me that bottle.

Mallory grabs the bottle of whiskey, takes a long swig, and walks it to Derek.

Jag's truck is parked nearby. He sits in the drivers' seat. He breathes deeply.

Mallory stumbles toward the truck.

Jag looks at Mallory, then says something not heard.

Sadie's head pops up from below the window. She sports a sexy grin at Jag.

Jag smiles at Mallory. He pushes Sadie's head back down.

Mallory freezes. She whirls and weaves back to the others.

She grabs the whiskey bottle from Derek.

After several gulps, she drops the bottle. Derek moves next to her.

Derek puts his hands on her shoulders and spins her around to face him. He leans in to kiss her.

Mallory pushes him.

Derek grabs her harder. He kisses her.

MALLORY

No!

Mallory squirms free and pushes Derek backward.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Leave me alone!

She runs to the water.

DEREK

What's the deal with you?

Mallory bounds into the water up to her neck. She weeps.

Justin kisses Olympia on shore.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sleeps in the easy chair. He wakes to thunderous SOUNDS from a vehicle exhaust.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Jag's truck skids to a stop. The passenger door opens.

Mallory stumbles out of the truck and falls limp on the ground.

The truck spins a donut, and SCREECHES down the country road.

Roland runs to Mallory. He turns her over. She laughs.

MALLORY

(slurs)

You look like Buster! Ha!

Roland picks her up and carries her to the farmhouse.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roland kicks the door open and flips the light on.

He sits Mallory on the bed. He slides her shoes off.

He taps Mallory's cheeks.

ROLAND

Get out of those wet clothes.

He lifts Mallory to her feet.

MALLORY

(slurs)

You gonna get me, Chester?

Roland yanks the blanket from the bed. He holds it up in front of him.

ROLAND

Off with the wet clothes.

Mallory starts to crumple back down to the bed. Roland grabs her before she sits.

MALLORY

(slurs)

Don't touch me, perv.

Roland drops the blanket. He pulls her shirt off over her head.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Hey!

ROLAND

Take your pants off. Do it!

Mallory fumbles with the snap and finally gets it unclasped.

Roland holds up the blanket again. Mallory awkwardly removes her pants.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Now go to bed.

Mallory falls onto the mattress. She curls up and snuggles the pillow. Roland places the blanket on her.

He walks to the door, stops, looks back at her. He shakes his head.

INT. BARN - DAY

Roland fills a cut-in-half plastic gallon milk carton with oats from a large pail. He pours them in to Buster's side trough.

Buster munches the treat.

Roland forks three layers of hay, each one placed in Buster's trough. He pets the horse's neck.

ROLAND
What'ya think, old friend?

Buster raises his head munching. He bobs his head.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
I think so, too.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

Roland bursts open the door.

ROLAND
Rise and shine!

He slams the door shut. Mallory squirms under the covers.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roland removes a blender from a lower cabinet and sets it on the counter. He places hands on his hips.

ROLAND
How did she make that?

He cracks an egg and empties it into the blender. He pours in milk and vegetable oil.

He opens an upper cabinet. He searches. He pulls out two small bottles.

He thrusts three dashes each of Worcestershire and Tabasco sauces in the blender.

He raises one hand at the elbow with his index finger extended.

He pulls a tomato from the refrigerator and drops it into the blender.

He picks up the blender and a glass.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - DAY

The door BANGS against the wall. Roland enters and plugs the blender into the wall socket.

ROLAND

Can't expect to soar with the
eagles, when you hoot with the
owls!

He presses a button on the blender. It ROARS.

Mallory sits up with a start.

MALLORY

What are you doing?

The concoction blends. He shuts off the blender.

ROLAND

Daylight's burnin'. Time to get up.

Mallory puts both hands on the sides of her head.

MALLORY

O-M-G.

ROLAND

Got something here to cure that.

MALLORY

Oh my God.

ROLAND

Come on out here first.

He unplugs the blender and carries it out the door.

She rises, slips a T-shirt on, and shuffles out the door.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Roland extends the glass. Mallory takes it. She scrunches her face as she looks down at it.

MALLORY
What is this?

ROLAND
Good for ya. Give it a try.

Mallory takes a sip.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Gotta drink it all.

She gulps and swallows. The glass is empty.

She hands the glass back to Roland.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Feel better?

Mallory smiles. Her smile quickly turns to panic.

She races to the edge of the porch, leans over, and vomits. She drops to her knees and spews twice more.

Roland cracks a slight smile. He enters the back door.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mallory enters the back door. Roland cooks on the stove.

MALLORY
That's child abuse.

ROLAND
Not so much fun the next day, is
it?

Mallory sits at the table with a vacant look.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
I was a big drinker once. Almost
killed me.

MALLORY
It should have.

Roland pours a glass of water.

ROLAND

Here. Your head hurts 'cause you're dehydrated. Drink as much as you can.

Mallory gulps the water.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

My wife saved me. More than once.

He sits with his plate.

MALLORY

How?

ROLAND

Made me stop.

MALLORY

That's it? You said 'more than once'.

ROLAND

I used to get rowdy when I drank.

He takes a bite of food.

MALLORY

Like what?

ROLAND

The last time, I was drunk in this tavern. My wife was there too.

MALLORY

Tess.

Roland eyes her.

ROLAND

Yeah, Tess.

MALLORY

I followed you last Sunday.

He nods.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Dark and seedy crowded bar. The jukebox song ends. Another song begins.

TESS, then 39, walks from the dance floor to a table. Roland, 40, stumbles his way back.

Roland looks at a YOUNG MAN, 25. The Young Man eyes Tess.

Roland charges the Young Man and shoves him backward.

ROLAND
(slurs)
What'ya staring at? Huh?

Roland shoves the Young Man again. Pure rage radiates from Roland's face.

Roland shoves the Young Man again. The Young Man stumbles.

Tess jumps up.

TESS
Honey, it's all right.

The Young Man pulls a pistol from behind his back. He points it at Roland.

ROLAND
C'mon then!

The Young Man steps closer to Roland, malice on his face.

Tess moves in front of the gun. She stares at the Young Man.

Her hand lowers the gun's barrel.

The Young Man drops his arm to his side.

She turns to face Roland. His eyes pierce the Young Man.

She caresses his cheek.

TESS
It's okay. I'm here. Roland, I'm here.

Roland blinks several times. He breaks his maniacal gaze from the Young Man.

He looks down at Tess. She continues to touch his cheek.

TESS (CONT'D)
You're okay. I love you. You're
okay.

Roland raises his hand to her wrist.

TESS (CONT'D)
I love you.

Tess puts her arms around Roland's torso. She walks him
toward the tavern door.

END FLASHBACK

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roland sits back in the chair.

ROLAND
Angry at the world.

Mallory straightens her back.

MALLORY
Why?

ROLAND
Drinkin' was my way of escaping.

MALLORY
I don't get it. Escape from what?

ROLAND
Ten years of fightin', and
survivin'.

His eyes search to find hers.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
You thinkin' about your mother?

She nods.

He picks up his plate and walks to the sink.

MALLORY
So you're not angry anymore?

ROLAND
Can't be mad at things you ignore.

Mallory scrunches her brow.

MALLORY
How did I get in my bed?

ROLAND
Carried you.

Mallory looks at Roland as he washes dishes.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Bright and sterile.

Roland pushes a shopping cart down an aisle. Mallory slouches and walks behind him.

ROLAND
See anything you like?

MALLORY
I'll be right back. I need to find something.

ROLAND
What is it?

MALLORY
It's private.

ROLAND
I'll go with you.

MALLORY
No.

ROLAND
Well then, what is it?

MALLORY
I need feminine napkins, okay?

Roland stops walking. He turns.

A TEEN BAG BOY walks near them. Roland taps his arm.

ROLAND
Where are the feminine napkins?

MALLORY
Oh my God.

Mallory hides her face in the pasta sauce shelf.

The Teen Bag Boy shifts his eyes to Roland, then Mallory, then back to Roland.

TEEN BAG BOY
They're in aisle four.

MALLORY
Oh my God.

ROLAND
Good. Let's go.

Roland pushes the cart forward. Mallory sidles away, her face glued to the shelves. The Teen Bag Boy watches her pass by.

INT. GROCERY CHECKOUT - DAY

Roland's finger punches the kiosk. It DINGS. He removes his debit card.

The Teen Bag Boy bags items. He glances at Mallory after each item is bagged.

Mallory stands with head down on the exit side.

Roland's face scrunches into a concerned panic.

His head lurches backward, his eyes flutter. His arms extend rigidly. He falls to the floor writhing and shaking.

Mallory jumps down to him.

MALLORY
Are you okay? Uncle Roland!

She looks around at several people. Stoic faces reply to her.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
He needs help!

Roland's legs shake with occasional gyrations. His face contorts into an ugly mask.

Mallory caresses Roland's forehead. He calms.

She puts both hands on his arm and gently rubs. She looks up at the people. They stand and stare.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
Somebody call 9-1-1!

The cashier dials her courtesy phone.

Roland stops twitching. His eyes open. He looks at Mallory.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

Roland's eyes flutter. He sits up.

A MANAGER arrives at the scene.

Mallory and the Manager help Roland to his feet.

ROLAND
I'm okay. Hope that didn't scare no
one.

Roland grabs the shopping cart handle. He pushes it toward the door. Mallory grabs the handle and walks beside him.

The people go about their business. The Teen Bag Boy watches Roland and Mallory walk away.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Roland's truck sets in the grocery store parking lot.

Roland slumps, head down, eyes open, shallow breaths.

Mallory loads groceries in the bed of the truck. Roland looks through the back window.

ROLAND
Use the cargo net, honey.

Mallory secures the netting. She enters the passenger side.

MALLORY
What was that?

ROLAND
Just need a minute.

She watches Roland, his head down low.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
They come on once in a while.

Mallory removes the keys from the ignition.

MALLORY
I'll drive.

Roland looks at her in admiration.

ROLAND

Show me.

He slides over to the passenger side. Mallory bounces around the front of the truck and hops in the drivers' side door.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The back door unlocks and Roland steps through. Mallory enters behind him.

ROLAND

Gotta lay down for a bit.

He starts for the hallway. He turns back to Mallory.

MALLORY

I'll get the groceries.

Roland meanders toward the hallway.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mallory puts her dish and glass in the sink. She pulls her cellphone from her pocket.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mallory sits on the couch. She wears headphones.

A reading lamp dimly lights the room.

She punches a finger on the phone's screen. Hip-hop music TINS from the headphones.

She notices a half-open bureau door. She unplugs and goes to the bureau.

She kneels and slides the door open. A stationery box without lid rests on the top shelf. She pulls it out.

The box overflows with handwritten letters. She looks back at the hallway. She retrieves the top letter.

MALLORY

(reading)

Hello, Roland. This is Theresa
Bailey.

TESS (V.O.)

Everyone calls me Tess. I hope you remember me from Jefferson High. It's okay if you don't. I certainly remember you.

A CREAK from the hallway startles Mallory. She holds her breath.

She continues reading.

TESS (V.O.)

I always wanted to talk to you in class, or the hallway. I just chickened out every time. After graduation, I lost track of you for a few years. But, I constantly wondered where you were.

Mallory crosses her legs and sits. She reads.

TESS (V.O.)

Then later when I read about your arrest, I just had to see you. So I attended every day of the court trial. Even though we have never spoken, I know you could never have done that awful thing.

She skips down to the end of the letter.

TESS (V.O.)

If it's okay, I'd like to keep writing to you. I believe with all my heart that you are innocent. Please take care of yourself. Warmest regards, Tess.

Roland's bedroom door SQUEAKS. Mallory stashes the letters back in the bureau.

She leaps to the couch and slaps on her headphones.

Roland peeks into the living room. Mallory looks up at him.

INT. BARN - DAY

The morning is bright and calm.

Roland leads Buster out of the stall.

ROLAND

Whoa, easy.

He places the saddle blanket on Buster, then the saddle.

Mallory appears at the barn door. She looks at her iPhone.

MALLORY
What? No. No way!

Roland peeks at her over the top of Buster.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
They cancelled my phone. It says
non-payment.

She charges into the barn toward Roland.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
You have to call them. You have to
pay them, you know, switch the
account.

Roland cinches the belly strap on Buster.

ROLAND
There ain't no money for that.

MALLORY
You have to!

ROLAND
Nope.

Her eyes blaze.

MALLORY
You're just like everybody else.
You say you want to help me but
it's just an act. I'm sick of it.
I'm sick of all of you.

Roland faces her.

ROLAND
Whatever happened to you was long
before me and this place.

MALLORY
This place? You mean boring-ville.
You like - like, just sit here and
do nothing.

ROLAND
So getting drunk and God knows what
else helps you somehow?

MALLORY

What do you know? Nothing, like
just nothing!

Roland's eyes soften.

ROLAND

Who are you really mad at?

MALLORY

All you ever do is talk to your
dead wife. No wonder everybody
hates you.

Roland looks at Mallory's hurting and hurtful expression.

ROLAND

You can blame me or anyone else,
but you will never use that tone
about Tess.

Mallory's face scrunches. She fights off tears.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

It's time to put it away.

Roland puts out his hand. Mallory recoils.

Mallory runs out of the barn. Roland hugs Buster's neck.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Roland picks wild flowers near the driveway. Buster eats
other flowers nearby.

Roland holds the bunch, pulls a long, thin weed and wraps it
around the flower stems.

He mounts Buster.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mallory grabs the pot of coffee. She pulls a mug from the
cabinet.

She pours half a mug. She sips, then scrunches her face. She
pours the coffee down the sink drain.

She turns toward the living room, hesitates. She looks out
the window at the country road.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mallory opens the bureau door. She removes Tess' letters. She leafs through several, stops and reads.

MALLORY

(reading)

Your letter was very sad.

TESS (V.O.)

I know you're angry and hurting.
But you can't give in to it. I'm
frightened for you my darling. I
worry about the attacks and the
fights. But you must know deep down
that is not the way. I hope you
hear these words. I pray for your
safety. I'm hopeful this nightmare
ends for you. I'm hopeful.

MALLORY

(reading)

Be hopeful my love.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Headstones cast shadows from the morning sun.

Roland bends to lay the flowers next to Tess' headstone.

ROLAND

Had a seizure yesterday. The girl
helped me. My night visions keep
coming. Like re-living the past.

He bends down to one knee.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Know now how you're world was. You
put up with my drinking and my
temper. I'm a better man 'cause of
you. Hope I gave some of it back.

He tosses down his cap.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

The girl, Mallory. She's livin'
with anger.

He sits.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
She's headed for trouble - and I
need your help.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mallory reads. A BANG at the back door. Another BANG.
She walks toward the kitchen.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Mallory opens the door. Gladys looks up at her.

MALLORY
You knocked?

She giggles and walks outside.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
How are you today?

Mallory walks off the porch toward the barn. Gladys follows.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Gladys jumps, circles. Gladys bumps Mallory from behind.
Mallory spins and reaches for the goat, then runs backward.
Gladys bounds toward Mallory, bounces and spars.

MALLORY
Can't catch me!

They run together around the yard.

Mallory runs away from Gladys. Cyrus stands in front of her.

Mallory freezes.

She walks around Cyrus. She grabs a handful of chicken feed
from the bag, which hangs on a barnyard post.

Cyrus watches her. He struts closer.

Mallory CLUCKS. She extends her palm with one pellet in it.
She CLUCKS again.

Cyrus walks toward her. Mallory shuts her eyes and turns her
head.

Cyrus plucks the pellet from her hand.

She opens her eyes and beams a smile.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
All right!

EXT. JAG'S TRUCK - DAY

Jag speeds down the country road. He glances out the passenger window at the graveyard.

He slams on the brakes, backs up and stops.

He smiles. Roland sits next to a headstone, Buster tied to a tall tree.

Jag punches the accelerator and tears off.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mallory WHISTLES twice. Cyrus circles her.

Cyrus returns to face Mallory. She holds out a food pellet. Cyrus pecks her palm to take the food.

She raises her other fist skyward.

MALLORY
Yes!

The ROAR of a vehicle splits the silence. Mallory drops the pellets. Cyrus pecks the dropped pellets.

She bounds to the barn door and peers out.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Jag's truck idles. He motions for her to approach. Mallory runs to the driver's door.

MALLORY
What are you doing here?

JAG
So you're alive.

MALLORY
Where's Sadie?

JAG
 She's chillin'. Let's go for a
 ride. I've got big plans today.

Mallory demurs.

JAG (CONT'D)
 Look, last night got crazy alright?
 Nothing to it. Now hop in.

She walks around the truck and plops in the seat.

Jag spins the truck around and speeds down the paved road.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Buster gently eats at a stand of weeds. Roland lies on his
 back next to Tess' grave.

ROLAND
 She's running with the Jones boy.
 Bad influence that one.
 (beat)
 My brother didn't know what to do
 about LizBeth either. She was one
 wild little girl.

He rolls over on his side and props his head with his hand.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 I guess she got to drinkin' later
 on. The kid must've felt pretty
 alone.

His brow furrows.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 I guess you felt awful abandoned,
 too, for a spell.

He stands. He puts on his cap.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 If you could give yourself to a
 broken man like me,...

He chokes up a little.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 ...I can do for her.

He kisses his fingers and places them on the headstone.

INT. JAG'S TRUCK - DAY

Jag drives fast then jams on the brakes. The truck rolls through a stop sign and nearly hits a crossing car. The car HONKS.

Jag holds his arm out the window, middle finger extended.

MALLORY
Where are we going?

JAG
You gotta see this.

He steers the truck in front of a large granary business. He parks and shuts off the truck.

Several huge silos stand behind an extensive office building.

The office building door reads, "Jones & Son".

MALLORY
So?

JAG
I own it.

Mallory looks at the granary again.

MALLORY
You do not.

JAG
Jones and Son. It's mine in a few years.

Jag gets out of the truck.

JAG (CONT'D)
C'mon.

EXT. GRANARY PARKING LOT - DAY

Mallory exits her side. Jag walks toward the office door.

Mallory follows. Jag opens the door. It closes. Mallory opens it and enters the building.

EXT. GRAIN SILO - DAY

Mallory stares amazed at the size of the first silo.

JAG
What do you think?

Mallory nods and smiles. Jag leers at her.

She runs toward the silo. She laughs as she sprints around its wide berth.

Jag pursues her.

She runs to a small steel staircase connected to the base of the silo.

She climbs the six steps to the platform. Jag arrives at the base of the stairs.

MALLORY
You're not allowed on my stairs.

JAG
I own the stairs.

He starts ascending the stairway.

MALLORY
I'm warning you.

She wags a finger at him. He grins with anticipation.

Jag grabs her. He pulls her in close.

JAG
Remember that first day?

MALLORY
I remember.

JAG
Pretty girl jerking around with her
locker combination. Remember the
excitement?

He pulls her close and kisses her firmly. She neither resists or embraces it.

Mallory wriggles, gains more separation between them.

She pushes him back. His clutch releases.

MALLORY
Don't. I can't. You're with Sadie.

JAG
She understands.

He grabs her again. She resists but he kisses her hard again.

MALLORY

Stop it!

He steps back. His face turns to a devil-may-care attitude.

JAG

Hey, like whatever.

She relaxes.

JAG (CONT'D)

Let's roll.

They walk toward the office building. Jag pulls his cell phone from his pocket. He punches keys.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Storefronts line the street with few parked or moving cars.

Sadie stands on a corner.

Jag's truck pulls up next to Sadie. Mallory exits the passenger side.

SADIE

Hi! Just slide over.

MALLORY

No, it's okay.

INT. JAG'S TRUCK - DAY

Sadie happily climbs in the truck. She grabs Jag's arm. He stares out the windshield.

Mallory looks at him. She sits and closes the door.

Jag punches the accelerator.

The truck stops on a secluded street next to the high school fence.

Jag stops the truck.

JAG

Stay here.

MALLORY

What are we doing here?

He grins sarcastically at the girls.

JAG

Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

He exits the truck.

EXT. SCHOOL FENCE - DAY

Jag looks around the street and into the school grounds. He climbs the chain link fence and plops on the inside.

He runs and disappears around a school building.

INT. JAG'S TRUCK - DAY

MALLORY

What's he doing?

SADIE

I don't know. It's gotta be cool.

Mallory looks down, then up at Sadie.

MALLORY

Are you and him tight?

SADIE

Sure. I mean like he's awesome.
He's popular and like, everybody
likes him.

MALLORY

So you go on dates?

SADIE

He doesn't do dates. He says it's
for losers.

Sadie looks deeper at Mallory.

SADIE (CONT'D)

What's the deal with the questions?

MALLORY

He kissed me before we got you.

Sadie laughs.

SADIE

Oh, is that it? He does that all the time. He's just not - what's the word?

MALLORY

Conventional? Monogamous?

SADIE

Bourgeois.

MALLORY

It doesn't bother you?

SADIE

No. Like, he's hot. Everyone looks at me when I'm with him.

Mallory looks deeply at Sadie, a note of sadness on her face.

MALLORY

He throws shade on you.

Sadie shows agitation.

SADIE

If it doesn't bother me, why should it bother you?

Jag appears at the driver's window.

JAG

It's good. The guard's watching porn in the library.

MALLORY

What?

He points at Sadie.

JAG

Stay here. Honk if there's a problem.

He points at Mallory.

JAG (CONT'D)

C'mon. Me and you gonna have some fun.

MALLORY

It's Sunday, school is closed.

SADIE
Go ahead, Mal.

JAG
C'mon.

MALLORY
No, I think Sadie should go.

JAG
You want to be with us or not?

Sadie nudges Mallory.

SADIE
Go on. It's okay. Have some fun.

Mallory exits the truck. Sadie sees Jag boosts Mallory up the chain link fence. He expertly follows.

EXT. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

Jag and Mallory hurriedly sneak to the door. Jag pulls a key from his pocket and unlocks the door. Mallory's mouth agape.

JAG
Got it from my father. Let's go.

They enter the building.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - DAY

Jag bursts into the room. Mallory follows.

Jag moves to the server array.

JAG
Watch this.

He unsnaps and pulls out several server drives. Each one dropped on the floor and smashed with his heel.

MALLORY
Oh, my God.

He gives an evil grin.

JAG
C'mon. One more thing.

They exit the computer room.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Jag stands in front of an office door. The nameplate reads, "Principle Iris Langhorne".

He opens the door and enters. Mallory stands in the hallway.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jag picks up a small chair.

JAG

This is for you, Iris.

He smashes the chair into a computer monitor twice. Another crash on the keyboard. He hurls the chair to a corner.

Mallory enters the office.

MALLORY

Stop it. They'll hear us!

Jag laughs at the carnage.

JAG

The guard knows. The library server was the first to go.

He opens drawers of a filing cabinet. Files are pulled and thrown around the office.

JAG (CONT'D)

Let's go girl. Do some damage.

Mallory flees the office.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Mallory runs to the door.

Jag catches up to her and grabs her arm.

MALLORY

They're going to catch us.

JAG

So what? My father owns this town.

Mallory's face is panicked.

JAG (CONT'D)

You're cool, right?

Mallory nods. He looks out the window panes to the school common area.

JAG (CONT'D)

Listen, we gotta split up. You go around the gym. I'll pick you up at the fence.

Jag bolts out the door. Mallory watches him run away.

EXT. FENCE NEAR GYM - DAY

Mallory lands on her feet and tumbles to the ground. She dusts herself off as she walks to the street.

The SCHOOL GUARD and DEPUTY #1 run up to the fence from the inside. The Guard points at Mallory.

She speed-walks down the street.

A squad car, turret lights twirling, pulls in front of her. She stands frozen.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Roland stands at the entrance to the living room.

The letters from Tess scatter the floor.

The phone RINGS. He picks up the receiver.

ROLAND

(on phone)

Hello.

(pause)

This is him.

(pause)

Is she okay?

(pause)

I'll be right down.

He hangs up and lowers his head.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A low sun streaks through the window blinds.

Sheriff Tom sits behind his desk. Akisha Onabe sits opposite.

SHERIFF TOM
Says she doesn't know anything
about it. I don't buy it.

AKISHA
What now?

SHERIFF TOM
We can't book her. I got no eye
witness and she wasn't on school
grounds. So for now, she's your
problem.

Akisha looks out the office window to the waiting room.
Roland sits alone, cap in hand.

AKISHA
I need to interview him.

Sheriff Tom walks to the door and opens it.

SHERIFF TOM
Step in here.

Roland enters the office.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
Have a seat.

Roland sits. Akisha pulls a note pad from her briefcase.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
Where were you earlier?

ROLAND
Out.

AKISHA
Mr. Dale, do you understand that we
can remove Mallory because of this?

Roland eyes her.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
That unless you can provide
substantial evidence of non-neglect
of the child, she can be relocated?

ROLAND
Where?

AKISHA
Either another foster home or a
state sanctioned facility.

Roland looks at Akisha.

ROLAND
Like a prison.

Akisha's face cracks slightly with sadness.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
How much damage?

SHERIFF TOM
Two, maybe three thousand.

Roland eyes Sheriff Tom.

ROLAND
I was at my wife's grave. Go there every Sunday.

SHERIFF TOM
How did she get to the school?

Roland shakes his head.

AKISHA
How is your relationship?

The question puts a concerned look on Roland's face.

ROLAND
I made her a bed. A proper bed.

AKISHA
No, I mean -

ROLAND
I know what you mean.

Roland stands. He walks to the office window.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
She don't trust nobody. She's hurtin'.

AKISHA
Do you spend time with her?

ROLAND
We eat together. She helps with the animals. Her and Buster get along good.

Sheriff Tom perks up.

SHERIFF TOM
Who's this Buster?

ROLAND
My horse.

Sheriff Tom relaxes.

AKISHA
Mr. Dale, you resisted keeping her
when I dropped her off. What about
now?

Roland turns to face both of them.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
I need proof that she is
sufficiently monitored.

Roland walks closer to Akisha.

ROLAND
I have a goat, hens, my horse, and
a gamy rooster. I straighten them
when their bad, and love 'em up the
rest of the time. They're taken
care of. And they trust it.

AKISHA
Mr. Dale --

ROLAND
People ain't that much different.

Akisha shows exasperation. Her shoulders slump. She returns
the note pad to her briefcase.

AKISHA
I'm going to petition the court for
removal. You can provide a written
response to the judge if you so
desire.

She rises and walks to the door.

AKISHA (CONT'D)
The judge's ruling usually takes
two weeks.

She opens the door and walks out.

Roland puts his cap on.

SHERIFF TOM

We'll release the girl. See if you can get her to talk. She didn't do this alone.

Sheriff Tom comes around his desk. He sits on the edge.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

This is a good thing, right?

Roland looks sideways at him.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

You can go back to the way it was. Nobody fussin' with you.

ROLAND

Nope Tommy. It changes everything.

Roland walks to the open door.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

I got some corn money. Tell the school I'll make good on the damages.

Roland walks out of the office. Sheriff Tom follows.

INT. DEPUTY'S DESK - DAY

Roland walks past and out the front door.

Deputy #1 looks up at Sheriff Tom.

SHERIFF TOM

Release the girl.

Deputy #1 stands. Sheriff Tom turns to walk to his office.

He stops.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

Tell her that her uncle offered to pay the damages. Maybe that'll get her talking.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Roland's truck sets behind the sheriff's building. Roland sits behind the wheel.

A door to the building opens. Mallory steps out of the doorway. She sees Roland and walks to the truck.

She hesitates at the passenger door. They lock eyes.

He motions with his chin to enter. Mallory enters.

Roland drives away from the parking lot.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

The sun nearly sets.

Roland drives. Mallory leans against the open window.

ROLAND
Make any friends?

MALLORY
Ha-ha.

Roland turns serious.

ROLAND
Seems like you might need new
friends.

MALLORY
Look, I'm sorry, okay? I didn't
know that would happen. I'll pay
you back.

ROLAND
Pay me back?

MALLORY
They told me what you said.

Mallory sits staring out the window. Wind blows her hair.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Roland's truck stops near the farmhouse. They exit the truck.

Mallory jerks upright with a look of panic.

MALLORY
Let me go in first.

ROLAND
Why?

MALLORY

Please?

ROLAND

Go ahead then.

Mallory scoots quickly to the back door. Roland follows just out of Mallory's sight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mallory bursts into the room. A look of panic on her face.

She quickly starts to gather Tess' letters.

Roland watches from the kitchen entrance. Mallory sees him, stops collecting the letters.

MALLORY

I'm sorry, I --

ROLAND

She was a gift.

He sits in his chair. He motions for her to sit. She finds the couch.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

A force of nature. I don't know how to explain it any better. I loved her more than I know how to say.

Mallory's eyes widen.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

That woman trusted before there was trust. She loved before any was returned. She gave me life when I had none.

He looks at the strewn letters. Mallory notices.

MALLORY

Her letters are beautiful.

He nods.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

How did you get out?

ROLAND

She proved I didn't do it. She just wouldn't stop.

She pleads for more with her eyes.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

DNA. Became acceptable as proof.
She badgered the state to run
tests. Turns out the boyfriend of
the girl's mother did it. She
didn't want him to go to jail.

Roland shakes his head.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

That poor little girl. So, they
picked me.

MALLORY

Why?

ROLAND

I was kickin' around as a handyman.
Fixed their back fence.

Mallory's face turns to compassion.

MALLORY

Tess was your Angel of Mercy.

He nods.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

You still have nightmares. I hear
you.

ROLAND

Nightmares are made-up visions.
Mine are real.

MALLORY

Real?

ROLAND

They all happened just like I see
'em. My head can't get rid of 'em.

Roland straightens in the chair.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Tell me about your mother.

Mallory's brow furrows.

MALLORY

She had problems. Sometimes I wouldn't see her for a couple days in a row.

Roland leans forward.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

She couldn't hold a job. When things were going good, she'd find a way to mess it up.

She wipes a tear.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Sometimes it was great. We'd talk, you know? One time we spent all day shopping. We had lunch at this little cafe.

Her face turns to focused.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

But then she just had to have a drink. I fell asleep in the car. We got home just before dawn.

ROLAND

But you couldn't stay mad at her.

MALLORY

She was my mother.

Roland leans back in his chair.

ROLAND

Time for you to decide.

MALLORY

Decide what? What am I supposed to do?

ROLAND

How did you feel after she died?

Tears run down her face.

MALLORY

I wanted us to be normal. I wanted her to be happy.

Her shoulders relax.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
I loved her. She needed help.

She looks at him with wet cheeks.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
I couldn't save her.

Roland stands. Mallory steps to him and collapses in his arms. She weeps.

ROLAND
Let it go. That's right, let it go.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Mallory and Roland walk toward the barn. She looks up at him, then grabs his arm and holds it.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Roland spears a hunk of hay. He scrapes it off into Buster's trough.

Mallory sits on an adjacent bale.

MALLORY
Aren't you going to ask me about today?

He spears another layer of hay.

ROLAND
Figure you'll tell me when it fits you.

A long silence as Buster munches his dinner.

MALLORY
I didn't know he would go crazy.

He replaces the pitchfork on the wall.

ROLAND
Maybe you should have.

Roland sits next to her. Her brow creases.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Some people just take and give nothing back.

She nods.

MALLORY

It was Jag. But I can't say that.
Please don't say anything.

He nods.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

I'm just a mess I guess.

He looks at her. She finally responds with her eyes.

ROLAND

You go with people like Jag to
punish yourself. You're all jumbled
up 'cause your mother betrayed you.

She starts to rebut, but he cuts her off.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Yes, she did. But you loved her. So
you blame yourself. It's your only
way to make sense of it.

She is rapt.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

I forgave myself for the hell I put
my Tess through. Time for you to
let the guilt go.

She lays her head on his shoulder.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roland sleeps fitfully. He MUMBLES, then BARKS unintelligible words as his limbs jerk.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. PRISON HALLWAY - NIGHT

Clay stands at one end, a shank in hand. Prisoners #1 and #2 stand at his side.

Roland enters through the door at the opposite end.

CLAY

Out of the infirmary, I see. We'll
have to take care of that.

Clay trots down the hallway with shank in hand. Prisoners #1 and #2 follow at each side.

Roland strides toward the attackers. He breaks into a sprint. His eyes sear with anger.

Roland leaps and hits Clay's chest with both feet. Clay sprawls backward, his head hits the floor.

The shank skitters across the floor.

Roland lands upright. He ducks a punch from Prisoner #1, lands a kidney punch followed by a knockout blow to the jaw.

Prisoner #2 swings wildly at Roland's head. Roland grabs Prisoner #2 by the throat and slams him against the wall.

Roland head butts him breaking his nose. Prisoner #2 falls.

Roland picks up the shank. Clay sits up but Roland knocks him back down.

Roland steps on his throat. Clay gasps for air.

Roland sticks the shank's point to Clay's cheek. The blade pricks a spot of blood.

ROLAND

No more.

Roland stands, his foot still on Clay's neck.

Roland thrusts his head upward.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

You hear me! No more!

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sunlight beams between the curtains.

Roland sips coffee at the table.

Mallory enters from the hallway, fully dressed.

ROLAND

Well look at you. Cleaned and pressed before breakfast. On a Monday, too.

Mallory does a curtsey.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Eggs?

MALLORY

Yes, please.

Roland breaks eggs into the hot pan. He stirs them.

Mallory pulls a glass from the cupboard. She fills it with milk. She sits at the table.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Umm, do you really have to pay the school? I mean, you don't have that much money, do you?

ROLAND

Got a pension and Social Security to run the place. Corn money is extra.

She looks down.

MALLORY

I feel so bad.

ROLAND

Good. Young people need to feel shameful now and again.

He sits.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

That lady from the state was there yesterday.

Mallory stiffens.

MALLORY

What did she want?

ROLAND

Wanted me to prove you're all right.

MALLORY

What? I told her -

ROLAND

They're gonna take you away.

MALLORY

They can't do that! I don't want to go.

ROLAND

Said a judge would order it in a couple weeks.

Mallory's eyes dart back and forth. She rises fast and the chair falls backwards.

She exits to the hallway.

She returns with Akisha's business card in hand. She scurries to the living room entrance.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mallory snaps the phone receiver from the cradle. She dials frantically.

MALLORY

(on phone)

Ms. Onabe, this is Mallory -
Mallory Wurley. You can't take me
away. I don't want to leave. I
won't leave.

She replaces the receiver. Roland stands next to her. Their eyes lock. A tear runs down her cheek.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Mallory puts a school book in her locker. She pulls another book from it.

Sadie shuffles up to Mallory.

SADIE

Was that the bomb or what?

MALLORY

The bomb? I was arrested. Where
were you? Why didn't you pick me
up?

SADIE

Geez, Mal. Chill.

Jag comes up from behind Mallory.

JAG
We'll make it right.

Mallory spins to face him. Her eyes never waver from his.

MALLORY
Yeah, how? They're taking me away -
again! Make that "right".

Mallory gestures quotation marks with her hands.

JAG
My father knows people -

MALLORY
That's right, sure, run to daddy.

Mallory looks back at Sadie, then faces Jag.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
I'm done with you. I'm done with
all of you.

She slams her locker closed. She looks closely at Sadie.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
(whispers to Sadie)
Run away.

Mallory spins and marches down the hallway.

JAG
(loudly)
It's impossible girl. Nobody leaves
the fam. Got that? Nobody!

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Akisha Onabe sits in her state vehicle. She watches students stream from the school grounds.

Mallory walks to the bus loading area.

Akisha HONKS the horn. Mallory spies Akisha.

Akisha gestures for Mallory to come over. Mallory arrives at the car window.

MALLORY
I'm not going.

AKISHA
Let's talk in the car.

MALLORY

No.

Akisha exits the car.

AKISHA

This is for your own good.

MALLORY

You have no idea what's good for me. Not one person you have ever put me with has ever done for me what he has.

AKISHA

Mallory, honey, you're not properly monitored. We have an obligation to make sure you're safe.

MALLORY

Are you obligated to make me happy?

AKISHA

Of course.

MALLORY

Then stop this.

Akisha peers at Mallory.

AKISHA

What about --

MALLORY

I made a mistake. It's my fault, not his.

AKISHA

But listen to me. He is not properly caring for you.

MALLORY

Says who? Were you there when he made me go to school? Did you ever see him cook for me? Have you seen the new bed he made me?

Akisha is rapt. Her face reflects an epiphany.

Mallory begins to choke up.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

He showed me how to care for animals. He helped me understand - me.

Akisha steps forward. Akisha and Mallory hug each other.

AKISHA

Okay. I'll stop it.

Akisha gestures toward the bus.

AKISHA (CONT'D)

Hurry up. You'll miss your bus.

INT. BARN - DAY

Late afternoon sun streams through the open door.

Roland at his workbench. He wears welding gloves and face shield.

The welding iron bursts with bright light. Wisps of smoke rise from the welder.

Mallory enters the barn. She shields her eyes from the wise area.

Roland stops, raises the face shield.

MALLORY

The chickens are fed and put away.

Roland turns.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

And Gladys had her dinner too.

Roland cracks a smile.

Mallory walks to Buster's stall. She strokes the horse's face, hugs his huge neck.

ROLAND

You like animals, don't you?

MALLORY

Uh-huh. They're always the same. I mean, they're simple, pure almost.

ROLAND

They are that.

MALLORY

Do you think I could ride him?

ROLAND

If you can saddle him.

Mallory opens Buster's stall door. The horse steps out. She retrieves a step stool and places it next to Buster. She gets the bit and reins, secures them on Buster's head. She struggles to remove the nearby saddle from the sawhorse.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Here. Get the blanket.

Mallory lays the blanket on the horse. Roland grabs the saddle and places it on Buster.

Mallory reaches under Buster's belly, pulls the strap and cinches it.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

A little tighter.

Mallory pulls, Roland nods.

She puts one foot in the stirrup and climbs into the saddle.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Not too far. Be sundown soon.

Mallory hugs Buster's neck. She boasts a broad grin.

MALLORY

Okay.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Mallory rides Buster as the sun sits low. She leads Buster to the ditch beside the road.

A ROAR of a vehicle engine pierces the air from behind her.

Buster spooks and jolts into a trot away from the road.

Jag's truck races toward them. He jams on the brakes and skids to a halt beside them.

JAG

Hey girl! You still mad?

Mallory dismounts Buster.

Jag revs the engine. Buster's head jerks backward.

MALLORY

Stop it. You're scaring him.

She stares at Jag. He emits a toothy smile.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Why did you do that to me?

Jag exits the truck. It continues to run.

JAG

Listen, I'm sorry. Alright?

Mallory seethes.

JAG (CONT'D)

You had the shorter path to the fence. I gave it to you. You're welcome.

MALLORY

Unbelievable.

Jag strikes a defense posture.

JAG

What?

MALLORY

You're a liar.

JAG

Hey, you know what? You're out.

MALLORY

Good!

He spins back to the truck, enters, and slams the door. Buster's head jerks at the sound.

JAG

Your horse looks fast. I wonder how fast he is? Look! I think he wants to run.

Jag guns the engine. The ROAR spooks Buster. Mallory loses control of the reins.

Buster bolts and gallops down the road.

Jag slams the truck in drive and SCREECHES his tires.

The truck races toward Buster.

MALLORY
Jag, no! Stop it!

Mallory sprints after the truck. The horse veers side to side on the road.

Jag guns his engine and HONKS the horn several times. He cuts off Buster as the horse tries to change lanes.

Jag accelerates closer to Buster. He HONKS his horn once more.

Buster cuts sharply left. The horse stumbles into the ditch.

Buster SHRIEKS, falls, and skids to a stop in the ditch.

Jag pushes his truck into a higher gear. The truck races off down the road.

Mallory runs up to Buster. He BREATHEs heavily and writhes on the ground.

SHRIEKS from Buster pierce the evening air.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
No! Please no.

She sits next to Buster's head. She strokes Buster's neck. The horse calms.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

She lays her head on to Buster's head.

Mallory sobs.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Roland switches on the barn light. He peers out the barn door. He looks at his watch.

He removes his gloves and helmet. He runs out the door.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Mallory strokes Buster's head and neck.

Headlights approach from the road. Mallory runs to the road. She waves her arms.

Roland stops his truck, exits, and runs to Mallory.

ROLAND

Are you hurt? What happened?

Mallory nods between her tears.

A strained snort comes from Buster. Roland kneels at the horse's side.

Roland places both hands on Buster's right foreleg. He moves his hands down until Buster jerks his leg away. A WHINNY comes from the horse.

Roland sits back.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Broke.

MALLORY

You can fix it, right?

ROLAND

He don't mend like we do.

Roland and Mallory look at each other.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

He's gotta be put down.

MALLORY

No! You can't. He'll get better.

ROLAND

He means too much to see him suffer.

Mallory kneels. They hug each other. Mallory weeps. A tear slides down Roland's cheek.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Need you to go to the phone.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Roland's truck blasts into the driveway and skids to a stop.

Mallory flies out the door. She runs to the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mallory runs to the phone. She picks up a note pad. Her finger slides down the note pad.

MALLORY

Doc Brown.

She quickly dials. She fights back her tears.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Doctor Brown? We need your help.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

An animal control truck pulls away with Buster in the bed. The horse lies lifeless.

Flashing turret lights from a squad car illuminate the roadway. The squad car halts. Sheriff Tom exits the car.

Mallory and Roland watch the animal control truck pull away. Sheriff Tom approaches them.

SHERIFF TOM

What happened?

Roland looks at Mallory.

ROLAND

Broke leg. Had to be put down.

Sheriff Tom looks at Mallory.

SHERIFF TOM

Were you involved - again?

Roland steps toward Sheriff Tom.

ROLAND

I told her she could ride.

Roland looks back at Mallory. His eyes plead. His head nods toward Sheriff Tom.

MALLORY

It was Jag.

SHERIFF TOM

And?

MALLORY

He chased him in his truck. He ran him into the ditch.

SHERIFF TOM

And you can prove this?

ROLAND

The girl is telling the truth.

SHERIFF TOM

I see. Like earlier today?

Roland and Mallory look at each other. Mallory nods.

ROLAND

It's the truth.

Sheriff Tom turns away. He walks to the road and crouches over tire marks.

He looks up at Mallory.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Students pour out of the school buildings.

Mallory exits the school building. She walks toward the bus loading area.

She spies a sheriff's squad car parked at the curb.

She scans the area. Sheriff Tom walks toward Jag, Sadie, Justin and Derek.

Sheriff Tom talks directly to Jag. He points a finger at Jag's chest.

Jag feigns coolness, looks away. He spots Mallory. His face turns to a near boil.

Sheriff Tom talks to Sadie, Justin and Derek. They all shake their heads.

Jag's glare never leaves Mallory.

Mallory looks away. She enters the bus.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mallory places dishes in the sudsy sink. She begins to wash.

Roland drops utensils in the water.

ROLAND
Wanna talk about it?

Mallory shakes her head.

MALLORY
I'm fine.

A farm truck pulls up to the house. Frank Dietz exits the truck.

Roland exits the back door.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Frank walks up to Roland. He extends his hand and they shake.

FRANK
Wonder if you could take a look at
my hay baler. Damn thing is jammed.
One of the runners is cracked.

ROLAND
Never heard of them wearing out.

FRANK
Didn't. That Jones kid. Always
racing around. Almost ran me and
the baler in the ditch the other
day.

Roland nods agreement.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Saw him just now, too. Passed me
like I was in reverse.

ROLAND
Let me load up. I'll follow you.

Roland walks to the back door of the house and cracks the door open.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roland's head peeks around the door. Mallory washes dishes.

ROLAND

Headed over to Dietz's. Won't be long.

Mallory turns to face Roland.

MALLORY

Bye.

INT. JAG'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Jag drives fast and erratic. He pulls a bottle of whiskey from the seat and takes a gulp.

His face exudes menace.

He spots a break between corn fields. He slams on the brakes, then backs into the hidden spot.

He exits the truck, takes another swig, and throws the bottle on the ground.

He walks low through the harvested corn stalks toward the farm house in the distance.

Frank's and Roland's trucks pass by on the road.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mallory puts a plate in the cupboard. She sits at the kitchen table.

Her shoulders slump.

She rises and exits the back door.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Mallory enters the barn and switches on the light. She walks to Buster's halter. She runs her hand over the thick leather.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Roland's headlights follow Frank's truck. Frank turns into his driveway.

ROLAND

(to himself)

Passed him. To my house.

Roland's face turns to panic.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
My little girl.

Roland turns into Frank's driveway. He whirls the truck around. Frank waves his arms as the headlights flash on him.

Roland's truck speeds down the road.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Mallory runs her hand over Buster's saddle. She takes the pitchfork off its hook and sticks it in a bale of hay.

She walks to Roland's welder. She toggles the on switch. The unit WHIRS.

Jag appears in the doorway.

JAG
Still pissed, huh?

Mallory spins. Jag enters the barn. He scans the barn up and down.

JAG (CONT'D)
Kind of a piece of crap, isn't it?

MALLORY
You have to leave.

Jag moves closer.

JAG
See, I know you're still mad. Why else would you narc on me to that cop?

MALLORY
My uncle's coming back any time now.

Jag slowly walks to her.

JAG
I mean, like, you're totally shading me.

Mallory grabs the pitchfork. Jag closes in.

JAG (CONT'D)
 And now, my old man's pissed. He's
 pissed! At me!

Mallory thrusts the pitchfork. Jag evades the tines and grabs the handle. Jag snatches a shock of her hair. She drops the pitchfork.

JAG (CONT'D)
 Sadie gets it. She was just like
 you once. Why don't you get it?

MALLORY
 You killed his horse.

Mallory grabs the welding wand, steps on the pedal, and flashes the wand in Jag's face.

The bright light stuns Jag. He releases her hair. She dashes for the door.

Jag recovers and picks her up around the waist.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
 (screaming)
 Help! Help me!

He marches her backward into the stall. He thrusts her against the back wall. She hits her head hard. She stands dazed.

Jag throws her down into the straw.

He pounces on her.

JAG
 You'll get it after this.

Mallory's eyes are half-mast. She spits in Jag's face.

Jag's eyes blaze.

He slams her head on the floor.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Roland's truck skids to a stop. He flies out of the cab.

ROLAND
 Mallory! Mallory!

He runs to the farmhouse door. Opens it.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Mallory!

He runs to the barn.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Roland enters. He frantically scans the barn.

ROLAND

Mallory!

He strides to the stall. Mallory lies unconscious. He kneels next to her.

Jag emerges from the corner. He holds a hammer.

Roland turns as Jag swings the hammer. Roland blocks Jag's arm. The hammer spins out of Jag's grip.

Jag connects with a left fist to Roland's jaw. Then a kick to his face. Roland reels. He falls on his back.

Jag retrieves the hammer. He steps toward Roland. Roland blinks his eyes, shakes his head.

FLASHCUT

Roland, then 25 and in prison, sees Clay approaching with a shank in hand. Roland blinks again, shakes his head.

Clay slices at Roland's midsection. Roland evades the blade.

Clay slashes again and slices Roland's shirt and skin at the chest.

Clay parries but misses. Roland grabs his arm and twists it behind him.

Roland pushes Clay's head hard to the wall. Clay stands dazed.

Roland lands a kidney punch. Then another to Clay's ear.

Clay's elbow smashes into Roland's jaw.

Roland clamps Clay's throat and hurls him to the floor.

Roland pounces and unleashes a flurry of punches to Clay's face.

END FLASHCUT

Roland lands a last punch to Jag's face. He peers down at Jag.

Roland closes his eyes for seconds. He opens them. He blinks three times.

Frank Dietz enters the barn. He races to Roland.

FRANK

Roland!

Frank pulls Roland off of Jag.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Enough.

Maribell appears in the doorway. She gasps.

She frantically dials her cellphone.

MARIBELL

(on phone)

We need the sheriff.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Two squad cars set as their turret lights spin and sweep the area.

Two EMT's load a gurney into the back of an ambulance. Mallory lies still on the gurney.

Sheriff Tom talks to Frank. Roland stands handcuffed next to Sheriff Tom's squad car. Roland watches Mallory.

Sheriff Tom walks to a second gurney where Jag lies. Blood spatters Jag's face.

SHERIFF TOM

What happened?

JAG

Look what he did to me.

SHERIFF TOM

Back up. What did you see?

Jag points at Roland.

JAG

He was on top of her. He was ripping her clothes off.

SHERIFF TOM

Then what?

JAG

I kicked him. Then he just went Old Testament on me.

Sheriff Tom looks hard at Jag. Jag looks away.

Sheriff Tom turns his gaze to Roland. He walks to him.

Roland watches the ambulance drive away. Sheriff Tom opens the back door to his squad car.

SHERIFF TOM

The Jones kid says you attacked her.

Roland looks at the ground.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

C'mon Roland. Give yourself a break for once. Say something.

ROLAND

How is she?

SHERIFF TOM

They don't know yet. Get in.

Roland sits in the car. Sheriff Tom pauses to look at Roland.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

Talk to me.

Roland stares straight ahead. Sheriff Tom closes the door.

Deputy #1 walks up to Sheriff Tom. He hands him a plastic bag.

DEPUTY #1

Here's the kid's belongings.

Sheriff Tom takes the bag. He glances at the contents.

The squad car's turret lights flash intermittently on the bag.

A key glints in the bag. Sheriff Tom walks to the car's headlights. He holds the bag in the beam.

The key shows stamped words: PROPERTY OF JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL.

SHERIFF TOM
This is from the girl?

DEPUTY #1
No, the Jones boy.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mallory lies unconscious. A hospital gown wrinkles below her chin.

Her eyes flutter. She opens her eyes. She looks around.

The door opens. Sadie enters. She hesitates just inside the doorway.

Sadie walks slowly to the bedside.

SADIE
Hi, Mal.

She puts her hand on Mallory's.

MALLORY
Where am I? What happened?

SADIE
They got him. He can't ever get you again. Don't even, like, think about it. He's just an old perv.

Mallory sits up.

MALLORY
Where is he?

SADIE
He's just down the hall. He's getting out in a few.

MALLORY
Uncle Roland?

SADIE
No, Jag.

MALLORY
Where's my uncle?

SADIE
He's like in jail, Mal. They locked him up 'cause of what he did to you.

Mallory flashes the look of remembering. She throws off the covers.

She stands. She wavers. Sadie holds her arm.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Are you sure you should, like, be doing this?

MALLORY

I'm okay. Just let me walk around. Guard the door.

Sadie walks to the door. She cracks it open and looks out.

Mallory walks with better stability. She opens the closet, grabs her clothes, and throws them on the bed.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

Mallory stealthily walks out of the hospital. She glances back.

Out of view of any hospital staff, she runs down the street.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

Mallory runs to the corner. She looks up and down the streets.

She spies a blue municipal sign that reads, "Sheriff's Office".

She sprints in that direction.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Tom sits at his desk, door closed.

He twiddles the key in his fingers.

He hears a commotion outside his office. He bolts for the door and opens it.

Deputy #1 stands between Mallory and Sheriff Tom's office.

DEPUTY #1

What's this about?

MALLORY

I have to see him!

SHERIFF TOM
It's okay, let her in.

Mallory bolts past Deputy #1 and into Sheriff Tom's office.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
(to Deputy #1)
Release Roland. Bring him here.

Sheriff Tom turns and stands in his office doorway. Mallory breathes heavy. Sheriff Tom holds up the key.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
Let's start with this.

He enters the office and closes the door.

Deputy #1 looks back through Sheriff Tom's office windows. Mallory speaks quickly and animated. Sheriff Tom nods.

Sheriff Tom opens the door.

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)
(to Deputy #1)
Find the Jones kid. Bring his old man, too.

SUPER: FOUR YEARS LATER

INT. CAR - DAY

The morning sun heats the autumn air.

Sadie drives as Mallory fidgets in the passenger seat.

MALLORY
Hurry. He'll be back any minute.

Sadie accelerates the car.

SADIE
Does he know? Did he like, guess it yet?

MALLORY
I don't think so.

The car turns into the farmhouse driveway.

MALLORY (CONT'D)
Great! He's not here yet.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Roland sits next to Tess' grave marker.

ROLAND

You'd be so proud of her. She's a lot like you, Tess.

He picks a blade of grass.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

And she's tough. Made me go see a Doc for the seizures. Must have done the trick 'cause there ain't no more. And no more bad visions since the night she was attacked. My head must have made peace with it. Aww hell. I told you all this before. I'm gettin' old darlin'.

He stands.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Gotta go angel. Mallory's off to college today.

He kisses his fingers and places them on the headstone.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

See you next week.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Roland's truck enters the driveway and parks. Mallory pets Gladys. Sadie's arm drapes over Mallory's shoulders.

Mallory smiles as Roland exits the truck.

Maribell walks from the side of the farmhouse. She carries a pie.

MARIBELL

Yoo-hoo!

ROLAND

Hey there, Maribell. How are you this Sunday?

MARIBELL

I just had to bring this over for you.

She extends the pie to Roland. He takes it and smells the top.

ROLAND

Well isn't that just the best.
Would you put it in the kitchen for me?

MARIBELL

Glad to.

Maribell retrieves the pie. She smiles at him, turns and walks to the back door.

Mallory rises as Gladys butts her backside.

MALLORY

(to Gladys)
I know.

Roland walks up to them.

ROLAND

Hey, Sadie. Come to see her off?

SADIE

Yeah. Skype on Sundays?

Sadie points a finger at Mallory.

MALLORY

Absolutely.

Sadie and Mallory hug. Sadie's eyes well up.

SADIE

Okay, like I have to go. I'll totally fall out if I see you drive off.

Sadie hugs Mallory once more. Sadie enters her car, backs out, and drives down the road. Roland and Mallory wave.

MALLORY

You remember how to text me, right?

Roland pulls an iPhone from his pocket. He holds it up to her. He pockets it.

ROLAND

Well, we best get on the road.

MALLORY

I have to show you something.

ROLAND

We gotta get goin', sweetie. Can't learn to be a veterinarian standing here.

MALLORY

It'll only take a minute. C'mon.

She gestures to the barn. She walks several paces, then turns.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Well, c'mon.

Roland follows her.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mallory stops Roland at the doorway.

MALLORY

Close your eyes.

Roland looks deadpan at her.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

Close 'em.

He shuts his eyes. She leads Roland by the arm into the barn.

A horse snorts.

Roland pops his eyes open.

In Buster's old stall stands a tall, roan male horse.

Roland's gaze never leaves the horse as he slowly walks up to it. He reaches and strokes the horse's nose.

ROLAND

How did you --

MALLORY

I saved up. You know, my after school and summer jobs. Do you like him?

Roland's eyes shine glassy.

MALLORY (CONT'D)

I named him Prince. After you.

Roland leans down and they hug each other. Roland walks to the horse. He hugs its neck.

ROLAND
Saved me again.

Roland and Mallory look at each other. His eyes glisten.

MALLORY
Okay, now stop that. You're going
to make me cry, too.

Roland wipes his eyes. He leans down and kisses her forehead.

ROLAND
You're gonna make a great doctor.

They walk out of the barn. Her arm around his waist; his arm over her shoulder.

FADE OUT.