

CHOKER

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

At a private school, TILDA (16), in school uniform and wearing a hair net and apron, washes dishes.

GRACE (17), and VIRGINIA, a girl the same age, stand in the cafeteria line nearby. Virginia sports a nasty smile as she SHOUTS in Tilda's direction.

VIRGINIA

And when you're finished there,
Cinderella, I have a few undies
that need washing!

Virginia's giggle is cut off by a PUNCH from Grace. Virginia glares at her and marches off, nose in the air.

Grace appears at Tilda's shoulder.

GRACE

Forget that bitch, Tildy. You're
the one with class, doing what you
have to do. Spoiled brats like that
don't have a clue.

Grace picks up on Tilda's look of cautious incredulity.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I mean it! Don't you make any
excuses or apologies. Real class
takes character, not money.

Tilda answers with a smile of gratitude.

GRACE (CONT'D)

That's more like it. Let's study
later, OK?

Tilda's smile broadens.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - DAY

It's Tilda's 18th birthday. Casually dressed, she stands at the sink, just finishing washing dishes as she had 2 years ago.

Tilda's mother, ELAINE, mid-40's, paces around the kitchen as she talks on the phone.

ELAINE

That's right... valedictorian!...
Of course, I'm proud of her...

She squeezes Tilda's shoulder with affection as she passes.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

I might be a little late for bingo
tonight... but I'm bringing spice
cake... OK, see you then!

She snaps the phone shut and pockets it, walks over to Tilda
and gives her a hug.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Happy 18th, honey! Let's go
celebrate!

TILDA

Can't. Got an extra shift today.

ELAINE

Oh, come on! Today's special! Have
some fun!

TILDA

I don't have anything to wear.
Besides from the Discount Mart, I
mean.

(looks at wall clock.)

Oops! My shift starts in half an
hour. I'll miss the bus.

She gives Elaine a quick kiss and rushes out of the room.

ELAINE

Don't be a snob! Discount Mart's
been good to you, what with the
employee discount.

She walks to the door and calls into the hallway.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

How about a ride?

TILDA (O.S.)

Thanks, I'll manage. I'm all grown
up now, remember?

ELAINE

You'll be happy to remind me, I'm
sure!

(pause)

Love you!

TILDA (O.S.)
Likewise!

The door SLAMS.

INT. JONES LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tilda slumps into a chair. Her cell phone RINGS.

TILDA
Hello?

INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Grace, fashionably dressed, unpacks. The decor is tasteful and understated.

GRACE
Tilda? Salut, sweetie!

TILDA (V.O.)
Gracie! Back from Capri already?
How are you?

GRACE
Exhausted! And positively sick!

TILDA (V.O.)
What's wrong?

GRACE
I'm shattered, that's what! You
didn't take my offer and come
along! All the fun you missed!

TILDA (V.O.)
My scholarship is on the line.

GRACE
Like you ever had a problem with
grades! But I have a smashing idea
to make it up. Isn't today your
birthday?

INT. JONES LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tilda's eye pop in surprise.

TILDA
You remembered!... I couldn't!
...That's sweet, but...
(MORE)

TILDA (CONT'D)
Yes, I promise to think it over...
Love you too... Bye.

She snaps the phone shut, staring into space as she muses.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - MORNING

Elaine stands her ground, as does Tilda.

ELAINE
And what about your job?

TILDA
Someone will cover. It's just for
the weekend.

ELAINE
Four days!

TILDA
OK, a long weekend.
(bucking up)
You said I should have some fun,
right?

ELAINE
But in the city? Alone?

TILDA
I'll be with Grace.

Elaine assumes a snooty expression, pointing a pinky to the sky.

ELAINE
Oh, yes! Her royal highness!

TILDA
Don't talk about Grace that way!
She's my best friend!

ELAINE
You're staying here and that's
final!

TILDA
(steely)
What's final is that I'm going!

ELAINE
Over my dead body!

TILDA

That won't be necessary. I'm 18
now... Remember?

This stumps Elaine; through her quiet rage she's still determined.

ELAINE

Fine. Go have your fun with your
friend. But listen up, little miss.
You're out of your league. Don't
say I didn't warn you.

She takes out a small bottle, takes a pill from it and puts it under her tongue. Tilda takes her phone and dials.

TILDA

Hello, Grace?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Tilda, shouldering a knapsack, reaches for the door.

ELAINE (O.S.)

Want a ride?

Elaine walks in, sheepish, keys in hand.

TILDA

Thanks, but I'll take the bus.

ELAINE

Save your money. You'll need it.

TILDA

You'll be late for work.

ELAINE

Screw it. They'll survive.

Tilda tries a black look but weakens.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

C'mon. Truce?

A moment's hesitation, then Tilda grins. Truce.

INT. BUS STATION - LATER

Standing in line, Elaine frets and hovers, trying Tilda's patience.

ELAINE
You have everything? Where's your
ticket?

Tilda counts to 10.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Where is it? Did you lose it? I
have money--

Tilda turns on Elaine, fierce.

TILDA
I didn't lose it! The ticket agent
has it.

ELAINE
How come?

TILDA
It's prepaid. I just need to pick
it up.

ELAINE
I thought grown-ups paid their own
way.

Tilda challenges her with an expression; Elaine backs off.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
OK, OK. Truce.

The customer moves off. Tilda moves up to the counter. The
bored TICKET AGENT looks through her.

TILDA
Prepaid ticket for Tilda Jones?

TICKET AGENT
ID, please.

She proudly produces it.

TILDA
It's my birthday today. Going to
the city to celebrate!

TICKET AGENT
Swell.

TILDA
Yeah! See, the date's right there.

She points to a place on the ID.

TICKET AGENT
(fake polite)
So it is! And may I say, madam, you
don't look a day over 18!

Elaine chuckles; Tilda glares at her.

INT. GRACE'S FOYER - LATER

Grace throws open the door. Tilda stands there in simple garb, made shabbier by contrast to Grace's stylish coif and lounging suit.

They squeal with delight as they embrace. Grace leads Tilda into the

LIVING ROOM

Tilda takes in the room's opulence, speechless.

GRACE
OK, sweetie, what's your poison?

Words fail Tilda. Grace's face lights up.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I know just the thing!

She leaves the room. Tilda makes a slow tour, a gentle touch now and then to make sure it's real.

Grace returns with a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

LATER

Both lounge on the couch, tipsy and laughing.

The doorbell RINGS.

Grace goes into the foyer to answer it. Some mumbling, the door CLOSES. Grace returns, mincing with delight, a FANCY ENVELOPE in her hand.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Have I got a surprise for you!

TILDA
What do you mean?

GRACE
No questions. Up, my girl!

Grade pulls Tilda to her feet.

TILDA
Where are we going?

GRACE
You'll see. Come on!

INT. UPSCALE BOUTIQUE - LATER

Tilda stands before a mirror, dressed for a night on the town. Grace sits close by, scrutinizing.

GRACE
Lookin' good! What do you think?

TILDA
Gorgeous! I'll wow them at the tractor pull in Fishkill.

She turns to Grace with a no-nonsense look.

TILDA (CONT'D)
Alright, Grace. Now tell me what this is all about.

GRACE
Here's what.

She strolls over and hands Tilda the FANCY ENVELOPE. Tilda questions her with a look.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Go ahead, open it.

Tilda pulls out the invitation. Her eyes WIDEN in disbelief as she reads.

TILDA
You have tickets to a "Bare Necessities" concert?

GRACE
No, darlin'. We do. The after-party too.

INT. GRACE'S DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Grace sits on the bed as Tilda, gussied up, preens in front of the mirror.

GRACE

Dirty! I knew those shoes would be perfect!

Her eyes squint as she purses her lips, all serious.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Something's missing.

Tilda looks down at her frock, clueless.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I have it!

She marches over to a bureau and pulls open the top drawer. She waves Tilda over, who joins her friend.

The drawer contains a vast array of jewelry.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It don't got no zing if you don't got no bling.

The sight of the gems dazzles Tilda.

Grace holds a pretty necklace against Tilda's throat.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Perfect!

Tilda seems less than pleased.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Don't you think so?

Tilda shrugs and offers a wry smile. Grace, surprised and curious, opens a closet door with a flourish to a shelf with necklaces draped on stands.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Help yourself.

A beautiful CHOKER on a velvet stand boasting "Cartier" catches Tilda's eye.

Tilda, enraptured, gently removes it from the stand.

TILDA

What do you think?

Grace tries to hide her incredulity.

TILDA (CONT'D)

No?

Grace abruptly smiles.

GRACE
Sure, why not? Wicked!

She strokes the choker. Her eyes go blank in a reverie.

GRACE (CONT'D)
We go back a long way, this piece
and me. Really something special.

TILDA
Well, then, maybe I should pick
something else?

Grace gently smacks Tilda's hand, admonishing, then affirms with a nod, to Tilda's joy.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

At the after-party, the choker sparkling around her neck, Tilda stands out in the crowd.

Up comes a lovely woman, CAROLINE, late 20's, wife of the strapping band leader, ROCK RAYMOND, also late 20's, who comes over and gives Carolyn a hug and a kiss.

Grace stands nearby, fighting back her fatigue.

ROCK
How 'bout we thrown down in the
city?

GRACE
You guys go without me.

ROCK
No way!

CAROLINE
But it's been ages! You'll get your
second wind!

GRACE
Rome time is catching up with me.
Dead on my feet.

TILDA
I'll go with you.

GRACE

The hell you will! I wouldn't sleep
a wink knowing I deprived you a
night of well-deserved debauchery.

CAROLINE

Go ahead, Gracie, rest up. We'll
take care of Tilda, no sweat.

Rock puts his arms around Caroline and Tilda.

ROCK

Damn right we will!

Grace hugs Tilda from the other side, low voice in her ear.

GRACE

Have a blast. Happy 18th, honey.

Band member, KENNY, 20's, comes over. He stares at Tilda with
naked interest. Doesn't take his eyes off her.

KENNY

The manager wants a word with you,
Rock.

ROCK

(to the women)
'Scuse me, ladies. Duty calls.

CAROLINE

Kenny, why don't you escort Grace
and hail her a cab.

Kenny hasn't wavered from Tilda's face once, nor she from
his. His response is laden with meaning.

KENNY

A pleasure!

Grace and Caroline exchange a meaningful glance.

GRACE

A-hem!

Kenny pulls his gaze away from Tilda with some difficulty
over to Grace, who offers an over-bright smile. He bows with
exaggerated chivalry.

KENNY

Shall we?

They depart, Kenny looking back at Tilda. Gives her a little
wink.

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

Tilda and Caroline walk together, not far behind Kenny and Rock, who are deep in discussion about music.

Caroline pulls Tilda in a close hug, confidential.

CAROLINE

You're every bit as nice as Grace says you are.

Tilda modestly waves her off.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Seriously. And she's such a sweetheart. You should see some of the skeves that hand on her tail...

She shakes her head in disgust.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Lucky she has you. Calls you her touchstone.

TILDA

Really?

CAROLINE

No lie! Dependable, that's what she says. And I see what she means.

She halts and faces Tilda; she has a bright idea.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Hey, we're playing State College next month. Don't you live near there?

TILDA

About an hour away.

CAROLINE

Cool. Come join us backstage one night. We'll hang out. Your turn to play host.

Tilda nods in unadulterated surprise.

Rock and Kenny stand some distance ahead. Rock shouts to them with playful annoyance.

ROCK

Are we interrupting something?

They laugh and join them.

SERIES OF SHOTS - NIGHT LIFE

- Dancing at a nightclub, paired off: Rock and Caroline; Tilda and Kenny, obviously hitting it off.

- At a restaurant, Rock signs autographs.

- At a store, Rock signs for a purchase; the CASHIER pockets the sales slip on the sly. Caroline and Rock walk

OUTSIDE

They notice Kenny and Tilda getting passionate.

ROCK (CONT'D)

Get a room!

Caroline puts an arm around Tilda, concern on her face.

CAROLINE

You OK? You want to go home?

A split-second of wavering, then Tilda sets her jaw with a smile, then nods.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

If you're sure. Kenny's a nice guy,
but he's kind of a... you know.

TILDA

Sure. But I'm fine. Really. I can
handle it.

Caroline nods in her turn, mostly -- but not totally -- relieved. She leaves, pulling Rock with her. Rock gives them the thumbs-up.

INT. KENNY'S ROOM - LATER

Tilda sits on the edge of the bed, covered with a sheet, snuffling back her tears.

KENNY

I'm really sorry. I didn't know it
would be so... painful for you.

TILDA

(surprised)
You didn't?

His open expression betrays his genuine perplexity.

KENNY

Hell, no! And I never thought it
would be so...

(looks under the sheet)

...messy.

She turns toward him, anger barely covering shame. She BOLTS
to standing and shoots another mean stare.

He counters with concern.

KENNY (CONT'D)

You really are 18... right?

She RUSHES to the bathroom and SLAMS the door.

EXT. KENNY'S ROOM - LATER

The door opens and out MARCHES Tilda, fully dressed. She
STRIDES down the hall.

Kenny, perplexed, appears at the door in his shorts. He
starts to speak, then thinks better of it, shrugs and closes
the door.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Elaine waits, anxious, and breaks into a broad smile when she
sees Tilda, who carries a single red rose and a secretive
smile of her own.

She hugs her daughter as though she'd been gone a month,
pulls back and studies her.

ELAINE

You look different. You OK?

TILDA

Oh yeah.

ELAINE

Have a good time?

TILDA

The best.

Elaine points to the rose.

ELAINE

Pretty. Where'd you get it?

TILDA

A guy.

ELAINE

Does this guy have a name?

Tilda's smile broadens.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - LATER

Elaine places the rose in a bud vase. Tilda drinks coffee.

ELAINE

Tildy... I want to apologize.

Tilda's cell phone RINGS. She goes to answer it, but---

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Don't answer that. I want to say something, and if don't say it now I might lose my nerve.

Tilda waits, curious. Elaine announces:

ELAINE (CONT'D)

I shouldn't be treating you like a child anymore. But it's so hard to let go.

TILDA

I understand, Mom.

ELAINE

(wry chuckle.)

I swore I'd never say this. But now...

(apologetic grin)

You'll always be my little girl.

Tilda returns the smile, mixing love and embarrassment. She takes out her cellphone, presses some buttons and listens.

GRACE (V.O.)

Hello, sweetie. Hope you made it home alright. Listen, I can't find that choker anywhere. You must have taken it with you. Be a love and send it back when you get a chance. I always wear it with the same outfit, sort of a tradition, you know? Great seeing you. Call me soon, OK? Love you!

SERIES OF SHOTS - TILDA SEARCHING

With growing frustration:

- She rummages through her open bag. No choker.
- She empties her purse on the bed and sifts through the contents. No choker here either.
- She searches through pockets in her clothes. No luck.
- Searches through her knapsack. Comes up cold.

INT. BUS STATION - LATER

Tilda stares at the Ticket Agent, near tears.

TICKET AGENT

Honey, I'm positive. Nobody's
turned in a choker.

She trudges away, racking her brain.

INT. TILDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tilda holds her cellphone.

TILDA

Lost and found, please... I was
wondering if someone turned in a
choker... it's like a necklace...
No?... Thank you.

She hangs up, dials again.

TILDA (CONT'D)

Kenny? It's Tilda... How ya
doin'?... I'm fine... Yes, I am
really... Listen, did I leave
anything behind in your room?...
Other than that... Are you sure?

LATER

Tilda sits before her computer, deep in concentration. She types on the keyboard.

INSERT: Computer screen showing Cartier website.

She clicks the mouse several times. Recognition dawn on her face.

TILDA (CONT'D)
That's it!

She clicks the mouse.

INSERT: Computer screen showing price: \$8900!

TILDA (CONT'D)
Oh, no!

ELAINE (O.S.)
"Oh, no," what?

Tilda turns to see her mother at the door. She stammers out an answer.

TILDA
I'm late.

Elaine's eyes pop in alarm.

TILDA (CONT'D)
For work, I mean.

ELAINE
I thought today was your day off.

TILDA
I'm taking an extra shift.

She looks at the screen.

TILDA (CONT'D)
Lots of them.

INT. BANK - LATER

The CSR looks at Tilda with regret.

CSR
I'm sorry, Ms. Jones, but the bank cannot extend a loan to you at this time. Insufficient credit.

TILDA
But I've been banking here for years.

CSR
And we do appreciate your business. However, a \$9000 loan requires more collateral than the \$1700 in your savings account.

(MORE)

CSR (CONT'D)

(pause)

Do you have any other assets? Some jewelry, perhaps?

The question brings Tilda close to tears as the CSR watches, sympathetic.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - LATER

Tilda and Elaine put away dishes. Determined, Tilda turns to her mother, clean cup in hand.

TILDA

Mom?

ELAINE

Hmmm?

TILDA

I have a situation. See, I lost this really expensive choker, and--

Elaine's face twists with anger. She SPOUTS her response like a spitting cobra.

ELAINE

I knew this would happen! Thought you were so grown up, didn't you?

TILDA

But Mom--

Elaine grabs Tilda by the shoulders and shakes them for emphasis.

ELAINE

Heaven knows what else you did! Slept around, too, probably! How many times? Tell me!

TILDA

Mom--

ELAINE

And the drugs! I heard of those parties -- "rages" or whatever they're called! Let me see your arms!

She yanks out Tilda's arm and searches for track marks.

TILDA

Mom!

END OF REVERIE

Elaine, calm, smiles at Tilda, still holding the coffee cup.

ELAINE

You wanted to ask me something?

Tilda reorients herself.

TILDA

Uh, yes. Want some tea?

INT. TILDA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Tilda sits at her computer, typing away.

INSERT: On-line credit card application.

INT./EXT. POST OFFICE/STREET - DAY

Tilda unlocks a PO box and pulls out some envelopes.

INSERT: Envelope from credit card company.

She feels inside for a card, EXCITED to find one. She rushes out into the

STREET

Her cellphone RINGS.

TILDA

Hello?... Grace!

She stammers, cheer masking guilt.

TILDA (CONT'D)

Just heading home. Stocked shelves
all night... Glamorous, yeah... Oh,
sorry! I forgot! With all the
jobs... I'll send it right off...
No, I understand... No, just
tired... Sure... Love you too.

She SNAPS the phone shut and hurries off.

INT. TILDA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Back at her computer, a stack of credit cards before her, the Cartier website on the screen. She takes out her phone and dials.

TILDA
I'd like to place an order using
more than one payment source?

INT. GRACE'S DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Grace, in vampire costume, has a cellphone to her ear. She has the choker in her hand.

GRACE
Yes, darling, I got it... Yes, in
plenty of time, don't worry. You're
so busy, I just didn't want you to
forget. But why all that insurance?

The doorbell RINGS.

GRACE (CONT'D)
My ride's here, love, gotta go...
And don't think I forgot about
Kenny. I want every delicious
detail... Love you too... Ciao!

INT. TILDA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tilda snaps her phone shut and heaves a sigh of relief.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - MORNING

Tilda trudges in, clearly short on sleep.

Elaine takes a pill from a bottle and puts it under her tongue. She picks up a sheet of paper, dead keen on Tilda, who gets a cup of coffee.

TILDA
Morning.

She goes to the table, noticing her mother's cool gaze.

TILDA (CONT'D)
Something wrong?

ELAINE
I don't know. Is there?

TILDA
What do you mean?

Elaine holds out the paper - a credit card bill.

ELAINE

You left this on the coffee table.

Tilda tries to snatch it, but Elaine is too quick.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

What the hell cost 1500 dollars
that you couldn't do without?

TILDA

None of your business!

ELAINE

And at 21 percent interest? What
were you thinking?

Tilda's face cracks with shame. Elaine softens and feels a
little guilty.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Wanna tell me about it?

TILDA

(morose)

I wish were only 1500 dollars.

Elaine, alarmed, sees there more to the tale.

ELAINE

Maybe you better start from the
beginning.

LATER

Elaine tries with some difficulty to digest what she's heard.
Her anger has dissipated into disbelief.

TILDA

It's taking everything I have just
to stay even.

ELAINE

You're not even paying it down?

Tilda shakes her head, mournful. Elaine considers a moment,
then with determination:

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Simple. I'll get a second job.

TILDA

Mom! You know what the doctor said!

ELAINE

Relax. Not for long. Just until we
get this... thing... under control.

EXT. FACTORY - NIGHT

Elaine walks to her car, exhausted. Her phone RINGS.

ELAINE

Hey... I'm on my way. My shift ran
a little over... Be there in a few.

She snaps the phone shut.

She drops it as a BOLT OF PAIN streaks across her chest, and
she doubles over.

She takes out her pill bottle, but drops that also as she
grabs her left arm, GRIMACES and sinks to the ground.

EXT. DISCOUNT STORE - LATER

Tilda paces back and forth, looks at her watch. She takes out
her phone and dials.

TILDA

Hello, Mom, it's me. Just wondering
where you are. Call me when you get
this.

A police cruiser drives up, lights flashing. OFFICER REX gets
out and comes over to her, his face grim.

REX

Hey, Tildy.

TILDA

(fearing the worst)
Rex. What's up?

REX

Afraid I have some bad news.

He looks away as fear spreads on Tilda's face.

INT. TILDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tilda stands at her mirror, dressed in black, awash in grief.

Grace knocks, enters, also dressed in black, hands behind her
back.

GRACE

Ready to go? We don't want to be late.

Tilda nods, then puts her hands to her face. Grace rushes over immediately and puts a hand on her shoulder.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hey, it's OK. Really. I'm here.

TILDA

Yes. I'm so glad you are. I don't know what I'd do if you weren't.

GRACE

Well, here's something to remind you that I'm always there.

She produces the CHOKER from behind her back and holds it out to her. Tilda pulls back in shock.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I remember how much you liked it.

TILDA

I couldn't! Your favorite piece?

GRACE

Exactly why I want you to have it. Like I said, a reminder. Please? For me?

She places the choker in Tilda's hand. Tilda lightens up a little.

TILDA

If it makes you feel better.

GRACE

(distant, musing)
Sure brings back memories. And the wonderfully tacky vampire dress I always wear it with!

She chuckles in recollection; Tilda joins her.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Can you believe I've worn that same dumb outfit at every costume party since I was 12?

She gazes at Tilda with deep affection.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Until now, that is.

Tilda strokes the choker.

TILDA
Thanks, Grace. I'll always treasure
it. I promise never to pawn it.

GRACE
(chuckling again)
Oh, right! What's the depreciation
on ten-ninety-eight plus tax?

Tilda's face goes DEADPAN. She STAMMERS out the next words.

TILDA
Ten-ninety-eight?

GRACE
Something like that. It came with
the costume.

She gives Tilda a hug and a peck.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'll get the car. Meet you
downstairs.

She leaves the room.

Tilda, open-mouthed, stares into space, choker in hand.

FADE OUT.