

THE CALM BEFORE A STORM

Written by

Sherry L. Peterson

ANNIE (V.O.)

I suppose in every young girls life, they dream about meeting the one guy that will make their world complete. You know that one guy who you swear hung the moon up in the sky? The one person who can look at you and make you feel beautiful, like a field of crimson wildflowers. I was twenty-one, and the moment our eyes met, I knew we were destined to make beautiful music together.

FADE IN.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

ANNIE MARTIN (21) stocks new arrivals on the shelves. Young handsome JOHN TAYLOR (21) enters the store and takes inventory of the female variety. Annie with a big radiant smile, catches his eye.

SUPER: Kansas City, KS - 1974, Summer

ANNIE

Hi there. Is there something I can help you with?

JOHN

I sure hope so. I'm looking for a vinyl, by a group called "Tend the Heart."

ANNIE

Tend the Heart? Boy that doesn't sound familiar. Are they a new group?

JOHN

You haven't heard of them? They're slamming. The lead singer really has it going on.

Annie checks a list CD's and records in the store.

ANNIE

I don't see that group on the inventory lists. Sorry. I can probably order it from the record company though.

Annie's co-worker BETH ROMERO (19) walks up and hands her more records to put on the shelves in alphabetical order.

John smiles and stares at Annie, while Beth smiles and stares at John.

JOHN
Naw, it's cool.

They stand in silence, while Beth inserts herself between them.

ANNIE
Is there something else I can help you with?

JOHN
Maybe. I know this may seem kind of weird, but there's a new band playing tonight at The Corral. They start at 8 o'clock. Care to go?

Annie looks around to make sure he's talking to her. She's not usually first choice with the guys. It's obvious John is smitten with her. Beth's smile turns to a frown and she storms off. Annie gets nervous and bites her lip.

ANNIE
Who me? With you?

JOHN
Ouch!

ANNIE
Oh, I didn't mean that in a bad way. It's just well, I don't know you.

JOHN
This might be a good way to get to know each other. C'mon what do you say?

ANNIE
Well, I might say yes, but I don't even know your name.

JOHN
John. My name is John Taylor,--
Annie.

ANNIE
John Taylor. Hey, how'd you know my name?

JOHN
Just a lucky guess.

They both look down at her name tag and laugh.

ANNIE
Okay, John Taylor. I know where The Corral is. How about if I meet you there, out front at about seven thirty?

JOHN
Cool. Ah, what was your name again?

ANNIE
Really?

He breaks into a big grin.

JOHN
See you at seven thirty Annie and bring your smile.

John exits. Annie's more than a little flustered yet excited. She lays a stack of records on a shelf, in no particular order and walks to the employee lounge.

INT. ANNIE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Annie's ancient radio is turned up to an oldies station. She primps her hair while singing into a hair brush and grooving with "I Feel the Earth" by Carole King.

ANNIE
(Singing)
I feel the earth move under my feet, I feel the sky tumbling down. I feel my heart start to trembling, whenever you're around. Oh, baby when I see you're face. Mellow as the month of May. Oh, darling I can't stand it, when you look at me that way.

Annie looks into the bathroom mirror and has a chat with herself.

ANNIE
I can't believe I said yes. What if he's a weirdo? Okay... I've got this. It isn't a big deal. Besides, he is really cute!

She turns the radio off and the lights and heads to The Corral.

EXT. THE CORRAL - MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

"The Corral" is in big red letters with a rope that lassos steer horns.

Annie walks up and John is standing out front impatiently, checking his watch.

JOHN

I'm glad you made it. I thought for a minute you were standing me up!

ANNIE

Do I look like the kind of girl that would do that?

Annie flashes John a big smile. As they walk into the Corral, she and a man bump into each other.

John grabs the guy and demands that he apologizes to Annie.

JOHN

Excuse me man. I think you owe the lady an apology.

MAN

Kiss my ass. I don't owe the bitch anything.

Annie see's the rage on John's face.

ANNIE

It's okay, John. It was an accident. Let's go in.

JOHN

Maybe you didn't understand what I said? (John raises his fist) Catch my drift?

John grabs the guy by the throat and cuts off his air supply. The bouncers pull John off of him, so he won't kill him. His grip loosens as the man gasps for air.

MAN

I,--(coughing) apologize.

The man and his friend go outside. In the background the man is yelling.

MAN

You're nuts man! You need to be
locked up!

John guides Annie into The Corral. They are greeted by a
waitress named ARLENE (23).

ARLENE

Hey big John. What brings you in
here? Did They give you some time
off for good behavior?

Arlene Starts laughing. John doesn't find Arlene's humor to
be as funny as she does. She takes them to their table up
front.

ARLENE

Now, what can I get for the two of
you?

JOHN

Well, Arlene first you can meet a
friend of mine. This is Annie
Martin. Be nice.

ARLENE

It's a pleasure to meet you Annie
Martin. You sure you want to hang
out with my little brother here?

ANNIE

Oh, you're his sister?

ARLENE

I try not to let too many people
know we're related. It's bad for my
image.

JOHN

C'mon Arlene. Enough of the chit
chat. Bring me a brew and Annie
will have a--

ANNIE

I'll just have a coke please.

Annie is still appalled at how John attacked the man.

ANNIE

John, that guy really didn't need
to apologize. I kind of ran into
him.

John instantly gets ruffled.

JOHN

That guy was an asshole and he's not gonna disrespect you or me.

ANNIE

I don't think he was.

JOHN

Let's forget about him. I want to hear all about you.

ANNIE

Like what? What do you want to know? I think I'm pretty boring.

JOHN

Well, like maybe what's your favorite flower? What kind of music do you like? What makes you laugh? You know the regular kind of stuff.

ANNIE

Really? You call that regular kind of stuff? Most guys wouldn't be interested in all of that.

JOHN

I'm not most guys. I really want to get to know you.

ANNIE

That's sweet.

JOHN

Besides, knowing that stuff might give me an advantage and then you'd really be impressed.

ANNIE

I don't want this to go to your head or anything, but I'm already kind of impressed.

JOHN

Really? Kind of? In that case, maybe I don't need to know the answers to my questions.

ANNIE

You're not getting off that easy! My favorite flowers are wildflowers. I don't like anchovies, that's an extra answer.

I love old music like Carol King,
Barbra Streisand, and Chicago. My
favorite ice-cream is strawberry. I
also threw that one in for free.

JOHN

God, you said all of that without
taking a breath. You're good.

ANNIE

What about you?

JOHN

I don't do anything special. I'm
just your basic kind of guy.

BIG JIM (60) the announcer at The Corral, is ready to start
the entertainment.

BIG JIM

All right ladies and gents. Let's
give it up for John Taylor and Tend
the Heart.

The crowd applauds and cheers and looks towards their table.
It takes Annie a few seconds to catch on that John is in the
band. His band. John downs a bottle of beer.

ANNIE

Your basic kind of guy, huh?

The band starts to play. John kisses Annie and goes up on the
stage. He sings an original song of his called, "Till You
Catch Me." (© S.L.Peterson)

JOHN

What good is a heart if it can't
share love, from it everything
grows. And what good is a mind if
it can't see the signs of love and
wanting you so. If you'd only take
the time to see, the everlasting
love that's going on in me. Listen
careful and I'll tell you what I
mean.

CHORUS: Well the world would start
spinning, the emptiness would fade.
And every touch would mean so much
we'd toss the past away.
Now, I don't know what you're
thinkin' but you're gonna be told.

I'm gonna love you till you catch
me then I'll never let go.
I said the world will start
spinning everyday.

Tell me why can't you see, beyond
what you know. You're gonna stifle
the chance, the flames of love
won't grow. See I promise you
truth, my devotion is clear. With
you in my life, it makes the motion
so sure.

CHORUS: Well, the world would start
spinning. The emptiness would fade.
And every touch would mean so much,
we'd toss the past away.
Now, I don't know what you're
thinkin' but you're gonna be told.
I'm gonna love you till you catch
me then I'll never let go.
I said the world would start
spinning, every day.

Let go, take a chance. I'll show
you the way. The road to my love is
just a heartbeat away.
Beware little darlin' I'm playing
for keeps. With you in my life, the
emotions so sweet.

CHORUS: Well, the world would start
spinning. The emptiness would fade.
And every touch would mean so much,
we'd toss the past away.
Now, I don't know what you're
thinkin' but you're gonna be told.
I'm gonna love you till you catch
me then I'll never let go.
I said, the world would start
spinning every day.

You see the world would start
spinning. You know the world won't
stop spinning. I said the world
will start spinning every day.

The crowd goes wild and Annie can see why. He's super
talented. John just may be the guy who hung the moon up in
the sky, except for a couple of concerns. She's never felt
this way about anyone before. Now she knows the reason, he
wasn't kicked out of the bar when he assaulted that guy.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

John and Annie walk back to her apartment holding hands.

ANNIE

Johnny, tonight was wonderful.
You're filled with all sorts of
surprises aren't you, "Mr. Tend the
Heart."

JOHN

Johnny? Did you call me Johnny?
You're the first person I've
allowed to call me that and live.
It's just you know, so cute,
Annabelle!

John kisses Annie with gentle and sincere emotion.

JOHN

Annie, I would really like to see
you again. What do you say?

ANNIE

I say --I would really like that
too.

John kisses her again on the cheek and walks down the street.
He is illuminated by a big, full moon.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

John brings Annie a bouquet of wildflowers and a strawberry
ice-cream cone.

JOHN

Hey Annie. I wanted to say thanks
for last night.

He hands her the flowers and the ice-cream cone.

Beth, Annie's co-worker is eavesdropping and John decides to
have some fun.

JOHN

You were amazing, but maybe next
time it will last longer. Are you
willing to try something different?
I've got some new moves to show
you.

Annie blushes and giggles.

ANNIE

Okay, but no guitar this time.

Beth looks on with her mouth wide open.

BETH

That's disgusting! You guys are perverted.

Beth leaves in a huff and John and Annie laugh. The ice-cream starts to melt. Annie licks one side and John licks the other. They meet for a kiss in the middle.

JOHN

How do you feel about picnics?

ANNIE

I love them!

JOHN

Me too! See ya.

John begins to walk away.

ANNIE

See ya? What a minute is that it?

He turns around and walks back to Annie.

JOHN

Oh yeah, how about I pick you up tomorrow at noon and we'll head out with a stuffed picnic basket, a blanket and some great music.

ANNIE

That works for me. It's my day off. What do you want me to bring?

JOHN

Just your beautiful smile, darlin.

EXT. ANNIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

John pulls up in his old truck and Annie hops in. The music is turned up and the picnic basket is full.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - JOHN'S TRUCK - DAY

Johns truck barrels down the country road. The country side is alive with color, smells and activity.

"I Just Can't Help Believing" by B.J. Thomas plays on the radio.

Annie sings along with heart, giving it her all. She cranks it up.

ANNIE

I love this song. "I just can't help believing when she slips her hand in my hand. And it feels so small and helpless, that my fingers fold around it like a glove. This time the girl is gonna stay. This time the girl is gonna stay. For more than just a day."

John turns the radio down, and her off key voice, so they can talk.

JOHN

Wow. That was something.

ANNIE

I know. There's more where that came from.

JOHN

No, please...

Annie tickles him while he drives.

INT. COUNTRY ROAD - JOHN'S TRUCK - DAY

ANNIE

So you never really told me about yourself. I know you're in a band, you have a sister named Arlene, you...

JOHN

Wait minute? You're not trying to get the advantage so you can impress me are you?

ANNIE

Not at all. I've already done that!

Annie laughs.

JOHN
You're pretty sure of
yourself.(pause) Alright what do
you want to know about me?

ANNIE
What's your favorite food?

JOHN
Fried chicken.

ANNIE
Who's your favorite singer?

JOHN
James Taylor, no relation.

ANNIE
What's your favorite color?

JOHN
The color of your blue eyes.

ANNIE
You're so full of it! Alright this
is a tough question. What makes you
laugh?

The truck comes to a halt.

JOHN
Your singing makes me laugh!

ANNIE
Hey now! I'll have you know--

John leans over and kisses her a passionate kiss.

JOHN
Get prepared for the best fried
chicken you've ever tasted.

ANNIE
Oh, do you want me to sing to you
while we eat?

JOHN
That's okay. I'm good.

John grabs the picnic basket, and a blanket. He finds a great spot under a huge oak tree, spreads the food out, and turns the radio he brought on.

The aroma from the fried chicken is intoxicating Annie's taste buds. It's acting like an aphrodisiac.

She looks at him with admiration and desire.

ANNIE

You're amazing John Taylor.

JOHN

This is true, but I'll let you taste the fried chicken before you make any decisions.

They listen to music, feast on food and then lay down under the big tree.

ANNIE

I have to admit this fried chicken was pretty good.

JOHN

Pretty good? It's my prize winning recipe!

ANNIE

Okay, what's wrong with you? There has to be something. You can cook, you sing, you're kind of funny, you're sorta cute.

JOHN

Just sorta cute? Annabelle, face it. I am the man of your dreams.

ANNIE

You know, I think you just may be.

This time Annie initiates the kiss. They both get caught up in the passion of the moment.

JOHN

Annie, maybe we better stop. I don't want you to do something you might regret later.

ANNIE

This feels like the most right thing I've done my whole life. I'll regret it if I let you get away.

They make lingering love under the big oak tree, surrounded by crimson colored wildflowers.

ANNIE

Johnny, I want you to know, this was my first time. I've never done this before.

JOHN

I didn't hurt you did I?

ANNIE

No! I just don't want you to think I'm the kind of girl that gets around. Do you know what I'm saying?

JOHN

Annie, I knew you were special the minute I saw you. You're different than most girls. You're sincere and I guess real.

ANNIE

I don't come from the best background. My Dad left when I was little and my Mom had a drinking problem. I left home at sixteen and been on my own ever since.

JOHN

That's harsh.

ANNIE

My Mom never cared enough to look for me.

Annie's eyes fill up with tears. John tenderly wipes her cheek.

JOHN

We have a lot in common then. My douche bag Dad had the drinking problem. He used to beat the shit out of us and tell us what losers we were. My Mom wouldn't do anything about it.

ANNIE

I'm sorry.

JOHN

I guess she was afraid it would be worse if she did. I left home at seventeen and haven't seen them since.

ANNIE

What about Arlene?

JOHN

The truth is I'm not that close with my Sister. She's just as dumb as my Mom. She always made excuses for him.

ANNIE

He was wrong. You're not a loser. You're a great guy and one of the nicest people I've ever met.

JOHN

This may sound stupid, but I feel like I've known you for a long time.

ANNIE

Me too.

JOHN

I've never really told anyone about my family. I was kind of afraid that people might think I was like my old man.

ANNIE

You're so sweet and thoughtful. I can't imagine you wanting to hurt anyone, except maybe for that asshole at The Corral.

Annie winks at John. They gaze into each others eyes and kiss passionately.

They fall asleep wrapped in each others arms, basking in the warmth of the sunny day, and the wildflowers all around them. The comfort of their closeness, surprises both of them.

The radio plays "If" by Bread.

EXT. VARIOUS SHOTS - FLASHBACK

Radio plays "If. Moments from the next several months flash by.

Scenes from the amusement park, the zoo, fishing, singing dancing, laughing and making love.

EXT. FIELD - SPRINGTIME - BACK TO PRESENT

SUPER: Several months later

A very pregnant Annie holds a bouquet of wildflowers. This is the same spot they first made love in. Annie and John exchange vows with a minister in attendance. The field is a kaleidoscope of colors.

They shake hands with the minister as he leaves. They are now Mr. and Mrs. John Taylor. Annie's dreams have finally come true.

JOHN

I love you Mrs. Taylor (jokingly)
even if you are bigger than me.

ANNIE

How sweet! How do you feel about
making your own dinner tonight
daddy?

John and Annie embrace and laugh with sheer joy as they feel their baby kick between them.

JOHN

I promise you Annie, I'll always
love and protect you and our baby.
I have everything I ever wanted and
will ever need. I have a real
family.

EXT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

John carries his bride over the threshold. He acts as if he is carrying a heavy load of bricks.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Huffing and puffing, John kicks the door open.

JOHN

I don't know if I can make it. I'm
worn out.

He kicks the door shut.

ANNIE

I guess that means you're too tired
for me to light some candles, put
James Taylor on and rub your body
with scented oil?

JOHN
I feel better!

John carries Annie to the bedroom. The door shuts. Mr. and Mrs. Taylor settle down into domestic bliss.

INT. FAIRPLEX BOWLING LANES - NIGHT

SUPER: 2 months later

John and Annie have a night out, bowling. John plays in a league and Annie cheers him on. Her round belly jiggles with every yell.

He just bowled another strike and is on a winning streak.

Their neighbors MR. and MRS. DANIELS (60's) also play on the league.

ANNIE
Way to go Johnny! You're on fire baby.

Annie goes up and gives John a congratulations hug.

JOHN
I think we're gonna take this one.
Make your fat self useful and get me a beer.

John has already had 5 beers. He's getting obnoxious and people are staring at him.

ANNIE
Johnny, maybe you should slow down.
You've already had a few.

John grabs Annie by the arm and pins her against a wall.

JOHN
What do you think you're doing, bitch? You're such a fucking loser.
Don't tell me what to do!

INT. JOHN'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

John is 6 years old. His dad Paul (26) is having a poker party. The guys are sitting around the table drinking beer and laughing. John sits in the hallway, quietly watching them play. His mom NORMA (26) is in good spirits and the evening has been a lot of fun. A pile of money sits on the table.

PAUL

Norma, get me another beer. I'm gonna beat these losers with this next hand. That pile of bills is mine.

Norma looks over his shoulders at the hand he is about to play. She hands him a beer and starts laughing.

NORMA

Maybe you've had enough to drink
Cool Hand Luke!

Paul spins around, slaps her across the face, grabs her by the arm and shoves her into the hallway.

PAUL

What do you think you're doing, bitch! Don't you ever embarrass me in front of my friends again, or I'll kill you.

John has been watching his Dad's temper erupt. Panicked for his Mom's safety, he runs up and hugs her legs.

JOHN

Don't hurt my Momma!

Paul grabs John and kicks him in the butt, forcing him down the hall. He points a warning finger at Norma.

PAUL

Don't you dare say a word. Not a fucking word. And you (speaking to John) you little piss ant, get to bed. I'll deal with you later.

INT. FAIRPLEX BOWLING LANES - BACK TO PRESENT

John looks at Annie with hate in his eyes.

JOHN

Now, I said to get me another beer.
I mean it Annie.

Annie is horrified by John's temper. It's almost like it came out of another person.

ANNIE

Johnny you're hurting me. All I meant was that you've been bowling so great, maybe another beer would throw you off or something.

Mrs. Daniels has been in earshot and view of Johns outburst. John releases Annie and her arm is red. It's his turn to bowl and the game depends on it.

JOHN

I'm up now. We're not done with this conversation, --Mommy.

John rolls the ball and only knocks 3 pins down.

JOHN

Damn it! Well, that's just great Annie. We lost the game thanks to you. You always have to open your fucking mouth and upset me.

Annie hands John the beer he asked for and he slaps it out of her hand. As she tries to clean it up he grabs her hair and pulls her up.

JOHN

Get up and let's get outta here.

By now the whole bowling alley has witnessed his outburst.

JOHN

Hey what's everybody looking at? My little wifey doesn't feel too well so I have to take her home.

Everyone is shocked by what they've witnessed.

Mrs. Daniels shares her thoughts with her husband.

MRS. DANIELS

I'm telling you something is very wrong with that John Taylor. Annie is such a sweet girl. She doesn't deserve to be treated like that. No one does.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Annie sits at the night stand with her back to John.

JOHN

Annie what the hell is wrong with you? What do you do all day? I ask you to do one thing, just one thing and you can't manage to do it.

Annie turns around to face John. He thrusts his fist into her face. Her eye bleeds profusely and immediately swells up. Her heart is broken.

ANNIE

You bastard. I can't believe you did that.

John has a moment of conscience. He goes to hug Annie and she pushes him away.

JOHN

I'm sorry baby. I don't know what got into me. You embarrassed me at the bowling alley. Everything is piling up on me.

Annie rubs her stomach and wipes blood dripping down her face with a Kleenex.

ANNIE

I know you have more stress on you with the baby coming. But still --

He cuts her off.

JOHN

I've been working so hard to get extra money for the baby and I miss the band and singing.

ANNIE

I know you do.

JOHN

Is it too much to expect to have my dinner ready and some beer here for me when I get home?

ANNIE

No.

JOHN

If I want to have a couple of drinks to unwind, whenever, wherever is that too much to ask for?

Annie just want to diffuse the situation.

ANNIE

You're right. I haven't been feeling too well lately.

I'll make sure dinner's ready and
there's beer here for you tomorrow.

John kisses Annie on the forehead.

JOHN

This won't happen again. You know I
love you. You just have to try
harder. Now, why don't you take
your butt into the kitchen and fry
me up some chicken?

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hurt, bewildered and bruised, Annie does what she's told and
makes John some dinner and goes to bed.

INT. CITY MARKET - DAY

Annie shops at the local market. She loads the cart up with
beer and groceries. She see's Mrs. Daniels but does her best
to avoid her. Mrs. Daniels however, zero's in on her.

MRS. DANIELS

Annie, you who, Annie Taylor.

Annie knows there's no escape from Mrs. Daniels. She stops
and turns around.

ANNIE

Oh, hi Mrs. Daniels. I didn't see
you. How are you?

Mrs. Daniels is startled when she sees Annie's battered face.

MRS. DANIELS

I'm fine dear, but how are you?
What in the world happened to your
face?

ANNIE

I just had a little accident. I was
wall papering the baby's room and
fell off the ladder. I hit my face
on the crib.

MRS. DANIELS

Do you need to see the Doctor?

ANNIE

No. I'm fine. Just so clumsy these
days. Must be this extra weight.

Claire rubs her growing belly. Mrs. Daniels isn't buying it.

MRS. DANIELS

Really? You're pretty bruised. Is the baby alright?

ANNIE

The baby's fine thank goodness. Listen, I hate to go but I've been running late all day. Nice seeing you.

Annie takes off with her cart. Mrs. Daniels yells after her.

MRS. DANIELS

You take care. I'd love to come and see the baby's room. I'm thinking about doing some wall papering myself.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

John and Annie eat dinner while he downs a few beers. She did everything right today. John is full and content. He relieves himself with a loud burp.

JOHN

Now this is more like it. I've got my old Annie back.

John takes another swig of beer.

JOHN

I'm gonna go turn the tube on. It's been a long day.

John goes to the living room and turns the TV on. He yells to Annie.

JOHN (O.S.)

Bring me another brewski baby.

Annie cleans the dishes. She stops what she's doing and immediately grabs another beer for John.

A cramp in her stomach stops her in her tracks.

JOHN

Annie, where's my beer?

ANNIE

Just a minute. I'm having a cramp or contraction or something.

John walks into the kitchen.

JOHN
Should I call the Doctor?

ANNIE
No, it's getting better. Maybe the baby just moved funny or something.

JOHN
That's my boy in there playing the electric guitar. Why don't you go lay down and I'll finish cleaning up.

ANNIE
Really? Are you sure?

JOHN
Sure I'm sure. Go get some rest.

Annie walks to the bedroom as John finishes up in the kitchen. In between swigs of beer he's singing and feeling pretty good.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SUPER: 1 month later

A very pregnant Annie makes dinner. She's stirs stew in a pot while listening to country music on her old radio. John lays on the couch.

JOHN
Turn off the country horse crap and get me a beer woman. Where's my food? What the hell is taking you so long?

ANNIE
Your dinner is ready and there's no more beer. You drank all of it.

JOHN
What? What did you say?

ANNIE
There is no more beer Johnny. You finished it.

JOHN
I thought I told you to get me some more?

ANNIE

I did. You're not listening to me.
You drank it all.

JOHN

I work so hard and what do you do?

ANNIE

Please stop.

JOHN

Stop? You get knocked up and look
like shit. You're fat,
unattractive, lazy and ungrateful.

ANNIE

I can't do this tonight.

JOHN

Too bad. I've had it with you.
You're a little bitch. I'm gonna
teach you a lesson you'll never
forget.

He moves forward. Annie's eyes are filled with terror. The
cycle continues.

She reaches for her purse and keys.

ANNIE

Johnny don't do this. You said you
wouldn't do this again. I'll go and
get more beer right now. You just
sit down and enjoy your dinner.

As she starts to leave, he grabs her arm.

JOHN

How can I enjoy my dinner? You
always upset me. Who do you think
you're talking to anyway? When are
you going to learn?

ANNIE

Johnny, no...

John throws the plate of food she has made for him on the
floor. He back hands her throwing her against the wall.

JOHN

The next time I tell you to do
something, I don't want any back
talk. Now clean this shit up.

Annie cleans the floor and clutches her belly. Tears stream down her face.

John slams the screen door and heads for the local bar.

Annie slips out the back door and heads for an abandoned shack, she calls the "Shady Place." It's her sanctuary. The only place she feels safe.

EXT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - NIGHT

Annie enters the Shady Place an abandoned wood shack. It has dirt floors, and a huge oak tree hovers over it like the protective arms of an angel.

INT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - NIGHT

Annie turns on a lantern and tries to calm herself down. She rubs her bruised face and caresses her growing belly.

ANNIE

Your daddy loves you little one.
He's just stressed about his job.
It's my fault. He works hard all
day and I should have had more beer
for him. (pause) He's been getting
so mean lately, but I'm gonna try
harder because I know he loves us.
My daddy left when I was a little
girl and I don't want you brought
up that way.

Annie clutches her stomach as she feels a contraction.

ANNIE

You're not due for another three
weeks. Maybe I just need to calm
down.

Another contraction hits hard and Annie knows this is the real thing. She makes her way back to the house and yells for John. He's still out romancing a bar stool, so she calls Mr. and Mrs. Daniels on the phone.

INT. DANIEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mrs. Daniel's answers the phone to hear a terrified Annie on the other end.

PHONE CONVERSATION INTERCUT

MRS. DANIELS

Hello.

ANNIE

Hi Mrs. Daniels, this is Annie Taylor. I hate to bother you at this hour, but John's working overtime at the mill and I'm pretty sure the baby is ready to come. I don't know what to do?

MRS. DANIELS

Annie, stay calm and Mr. Daniels will be right there. I'll leave word for John at the mill. Breathe. It's all about the breathing.

Mrs. Daniels hangs up the phone. She doesn't like John and here's another reason not to.

End OF CALL.

INT. DANIEL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

MRS. DANIELS

Walter, Annie's having the baby and that no good husband of hers isn't home. Go take her to the hospital and I'll try to find John.

EXT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Mr. Daniels pulls up and leaps from the car. Annie is ready to go and as he helps her into the car he can't help but notice her bruised and battered face.

Annie knows Mr. Daniels is on to what happened to her face. Not a word is said about it as they head to the hospital.

ANNIE

Thanks so much Mr. Daniels. John had to work late at the mill.

MR. DANIELS

Annie, didn't they let John go from the mill last week?

He realizes too late he shouldn't have said anything. Annie looks shocked.

MR. DANIELS

I guess I must've heard wrong. My hearings not what it used to be. Mrs. Daniels keeps telling me to get a hearing aid.

Another strong contraction begins.

ANNIE

Oh my gosh, I didn't know this would hurt so bad. Ohhh --

MR. DANIELS

Take it easy. You're doing just fine. Mrs. Daniels and I have been through this four times. She says the key is to concentrate on your breathing.

INT. PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: 1975

A baby's cry can be heard. Annie has just delivered a baby girl. John is nowhere to be found. The nurse hands Annie her new daughter.

NURSE

You have a beautiful baby girl Mrs. Taylor. Would you like me to call your husband?

Annie hormonal and emotional becomes defensive. She feel's like she needs to cover up for John.

ANNIE

What do you mean by that? My husband would have been here, but they're short of help at the mill. He loves us very much!

The baby starts to cry and so does Annie.

The nurse is bewildered at the outburst.

NURSE

I'm sure he does. I didn't mean anything by that. I just thought that since this happened so quickly, maybe you didn't have time to call him.

ANNIE

I'm sorry. I'm sure he'll be here any minute. Our neighbor was going to tell him I went to the hospital.

Annie is wheeled to her room, cradling her daughter.

NURSE

Why don't I take the baby to the nursery, clean her up and I'll bring her back?

ANNIE

That sounds like a good idea. Thank you.

From the window in Annie's room, she see's a big, full, beautiful moon.

As she sits alone, she wonders what happened to her Mr. Wonderful. What happened to the guy she thought hung the moon up in the sky.

ANNIE

Damn it Johnny. Where are you? What happened to us?

Tears fall down her face.

EXT. RUBY'S PLACE - BAR - NIGHT

John stumbles out of the bar. Too drunk to walk, he falls on the ground and sleeps it off in the still of the night.

EXT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

A taxi pulls up with Annie and her new baby girl. They arrive to an empty house.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Annie puts the baby down to sleep. Through the bedroom window she see's John staggering up the road.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Annie lowers her body slowly onto the couch.

JOHN

Where the hell have you been? I've been out all night looking for you. Were you out whoring around you worthless bitch.

Annie's rage is greater than her fear of John. This time she won't be silenced.

ANNIE

Shut up you son-of-a-bitch! While you were out getting drunk and acting like the big, bad John Taylor, I gave birth to our daughter. Alone. Maybe your dad was right. You are a loser!

John stares at Annie surprised at her strength. He knows this time he really messed up.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

John leans over the crib and see's his beautiful daughter for the first time. He strokes her soft, small hand.

JOHN

I'm sorry little one. Daddy's been working all night. If your momma would've told me you were making your entrance into this world, I would have been there.

Annie enters the room. She announces they she's named the baby CLAIRE.

ANNIE

I've named her Claire. She looks like you, but hopefully she won't act like you. Hopefully, she won't become an abusive drunk, who cares about no one but himself.

John tries to hug Annie, but she pushes him away and looks out the window.

ANNIE

Don't touch me.

JOHN

I'm sorry Annie. I was so nervous about having a kid. Maybe I was acting like my dad. I didn't know what to do.

ANNIE

More excuses.

JOHN

I promise you no more drinking and I'll watch my temper. I'll prove to you that I'm not a loser. I love you and Claire. You're my real family.

John walks up behind Annie and puts his arms around her swollen post-delivery waist. Tears stream down her face.

EXT. FIELD - SPRINGTIME - 4 YEARS LATER

They're having a picnic in the same field they were married in and first made love in.

John plays the guitar and sings, "Turn Around" by the Kingston Trio.

JOHN

"Where are going my little one?
Where are you going, my baby, my
own? Turn around and you're two.
Turn around and you're four. Turn
around and you're a young girl
going of the door. Turn around.
Turn around Turn around and you're
a young girl going out of the
door."

INSERT: As he sings time elapsed memories of Clair's life from birth up to her current age of 4 roll by.

EXT. FIELD - SPRINGTIME - DAY

Claire falls asleep on a small patch of grass where she's having a tea party with her doll. Annie gave her a tea set and a locket for her very special 4th birthday.

ANNIE

Johnny I'm so proud of you. You said you would stop drinking and you did. You don't get angry like you used to, you're doing great at your job. I must be the luckiest woman alive.

John kisses her neck.

JOHN

You are the most beautiful woman in
the whole wide world.

ANNIE

Are you trying to sweet talk me Mr.
Taylor, 'cause if you are it's
working. If you're not careful I
might take advantage of you.

JOHN

Do I look like the kind of guy that
would sweet talk you just to get
lucky?

ANNIE

You do, but what do you say?

John unbuttons her shirt.

JOHN

Please?

ANNIE

No.

JOHN

Give it to me woman?

ANNIE

Try again.

JOHN

I love you.

ANNIE

Bingo!

While Claire sleeps, John and Annie make love in the spot
they first made love and conceived Claire. They are
surrounded by beautiful crimson wildflowers.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Annie and John lay side by side.

ANNIE

I've got a surprise for you.

JOHN

What kind of surprise?

ANNIE

Well, you know how hard you've been working to save up for a new pickup truck? You can get it sooner now.

JOHN

How's that possible?

ANNIE

I got a part-time job at the music store. Isn't that great?

John ignores her and what she just said.

ANNIE

Johnny, did you hear me?

JOHN

And who's going to watch Claire?

ANNIE

I'll work on the weekends, when you can be home with her. That way we won't have to pay a baby sitter and you can get your truck sooner.

There is silence in the room. John is working on an attitude.

ANNIE

Johnny, I thought you would be happy about this? You can get your truck sooner and spend some time with your daughter.

JOHN

Annie, the band and I are gonna try and get together again. How can I work, practice and take care of Claire too?

ANNIE

We'll just have to figure it out that's all. I know you love your music. I promise this won't interfere.

Annie kisses John good-night.

INT. JUBILEE - BAR - 4 MONTHS LATER

John and his band, still have a bad reputation, from a few years ago.

He and the guys have been practicing, but he doesn't quite have the confidence or the voice that he used to have.

JOHN

I sure hope we can pull this off. I think I need a beer.

John orders a shot and a beer. He guzzles them in record time. It's show time. The announcer is ready to introduce them.

ANNOUNCER

For your entertainment at the Jubilee Bar and Grill, the one, the only, John Taylor and Tend the Heart.

A drunk in the room yells.

DRUNK

Bring on the girls. Not those losers!

The music starts and John attempts to sing. He's off key and forgets the song. The drunk starts booing. John leaps off the stage to confront him.

JOHN

That's it Buddy. Let's see how loud you are with a fist in your mouth.

John hits the guy and he falls to the ground. John repeatedly slams his head into the ground.

JOHN

You're the loser man. Nothing but a loser!

The bar owner yells to DESIREE (21) the waitress.

BAR OWNER

Desiree, call the sheriff.

He grabs a bat to break up the fight. Desiree stands frozen.

BAR OWNER

Move it woman!

He tries to pull John off the man who has been beaten to a pulp. The band members also help.

BAR OWNER

We don't need your kind of trouble
around here. Grab your equipment
and get out.

BAND MEMBERS

Come on man. You're gonna kill him!
We better get outta here before the
sheriff comes.

The band gathers their equipment and John.

The sound of sirens blare in the distance.

EXT. JUBILEE BAR - OUT BACK - NIGHT

BAND MEMBER 1

What happened to you man? You lost
your mind?

JOHN

That asshole was disrespecting me
and you guys. I'm not a fucking
loser. I'm not.

BAND MEMBER 2

We'll catch up with you later. The
sheriff is on his way. You better
hope that guy doesn't press
charges.

JOHN

Fuck him!

They leave in different directions. John sits in his truck as
flashing lights pull up in front of the bar.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

John lays on the couch watching TV. His knuckles are all torn
up and empty beer cans surround him. Claire sings and plays
on the floor. She stands up and walks over to her daddy.

CLAIRE

Daddy do you want to have a tea
party with me? Momma gave me this
pretty tea set for my birthday.

John pushes her aside and reaches for his beer.

CLAIRE

Here Daddy. I made you some tea.
This will make you feel better.

JOHN

You sound like that worthless momma
of yours. Now, shut up and get
outta my way. I can't see the TV.

John slaps the tray of tea. Claire's china tea cups go flying, breaking on the ground. Only one is left intact. Claire begins to cry.

JOHN

Now look at the mess you made.
Clean it up little lady and quit
the crying or I'll give you
something to really cry about.

He raises his fist to Claire.

EXT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Annie hears screaming and crying and frantically tries to open the door with her keys.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE-DAY

Annie see's John's hand cocked back, and ready to hit Claire.

ANNIE

What the hell is going on in here?
John have you lost your mind?

She grabs Claire and pulls her close.

JOHN

Shut the fuck up!

ANNIE

What are these empty beer cans
doing here? Oh my God. It was just
too good to be true, wasn't it
Johnny? You just have to screw
things up. You are a loser just
like your dad!

CLAIRE

Daddy broke my pretty tea cups
Momma.

Claire is crying and also terrified.

JOHN

Oh you clumsy little bitch. Trying
to blame it on me?

He reaches for Claire.

JOHN

You're gonna get it now!

Annie steps in and feels the blow of Johns fist crunch her
face. Claire screams. Annie grabs Claire who clutches the
only surviving tea cup. They leave the house.

EXT. ABANDONED SHACK - THE SHADY PLACE - EVENING

Annie takes 4 year old Claire to the Shady Place.

INT. SHADY PLACE - NIGHT

Annie lights the lantern. Over the years she's put a blanket,
bug spray and some books in there.

She spreads the blanket on the floor and sits down.

CLAIRE

Are there bad guys here?

Claire moves to her mother and sits on her lap. She holds the
little teacup.

ANNIE

No, there aren't bad guys here.
We're safe.

Clair turns her teacup over and sees some little letters,
etched on the bottom of it.

CLAIRE

Momma what do the letters say?

ANNIE

The letters say --To Clairabelle,
My Sweet Wildflower. Love, Momma

CLAIRE

Maybe a cookie would make you feel
better?

Claire strokes her Momma's swollen face.

ANNIE

We don't have cookies here, but
I'll be fine honey girl.

CLAIRE

I'm scared.

ANNIE

Don't be scared. Do you know that I
used to come here when you were in
my tummy? It made me feel happy.

CLAIRE

Then it makes me feel happy too.
Even when my Daddy breaks my
teacups.

ANNIE

This is our secret place. I call it
the Shady Place. The big branches
of the tree, cover it like the
wings of an angel.

CLAIRE

Nice angels, like the picture in my
room?

ANNIE

Yes. Nice angels like your picture.
I want you to know that I love you
more than anything in this world.
You're my precious Clairabelle.

CLAIRE

Mommy, why does Daddy be mean?

ANNIE

I know you probably won't
understand this, but your daddy has
a deep pain inside him. It's been
inside him since he was a little
boy.

CLAIRE

Maybe the Doctor could fix him.

ANNIE

Just remember that he loves us the
best he knows how to.

Annie hugs a sleepy little Clairabelle.

CLAIRE

Mommy will you rub my back?

ANNIE

Oh sweet girl, sure I will.

Annie knows that if they wait a little longer, John will be asleep on the couch. Then they can go back home. Claire holds on tightly to the teacup.

Annie sees the moon thru the majestic arms of the tree. At this moment she feels safe.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

After putting Claire to bed, Annie enters her bedroom looking forward to the silence and the darkness. It's been a long exhausting day.

Out of the darkness a fist connects to the side of her face.

INT. JOHN'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

John at seventeen walks into his dark and silent bedroom after working all day cleaning at a restaurant.

His dad Paul is waiting in his room for him. His T-shirt is dirty, his belly is hanging out. He smells like whiskey and is mean and drunk.

He pounces on John like a rabid animal.

Over and over his fist connects to John's face. John falls on the bed in pain and dazed.

PAUL

You no good for nothing piece of
shit. You got a job cleaning dirty
toilets. Here's one more toilet to
clean.

Paul unzips his pants and urinates all over John and his bed.

PAUL

You're such a loser.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

John storms into the bedroom.

JOHN

You're such a loser!

Again and again Annie feels and hears bones breaking in her face. Her mouth fills with blood and she falls on the floor.

John goes to bed and passes out.

Annie crawls out the door and quietly goes to the bathroom to rinse her mouth out.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

She flips the night light on and looks in the mirror. Her nose is laying on the side of her face and she can only see out of one eye.

Seeing how mangled she is, amplifies the pain she feels physically and emotionally.

ANNIE

Why Johnny? Why? Maybe Arlene will
let me stay there for awhile.

Annie grabs a towel and puts it over her face.

While holding on to the wall she finds her way down the hall to Claire's room, too weak to wake her up and barely able to see.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - CLAIRE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Claire sleeps peacefully.

An almost unrecognizable Annie enters. She kneels on the side of the bed, grateful that Claire is asleep and can't see the grotesque features that have altered her face.

She speaks in a low whisper to Claire.

ANNIE

Momma isn't feeling too well. I'm
going to stay at Aunt Arlene's for
the night. I'll see you early
tomorrow. I love you.

Tears start rolling down, stinging her battered face.

As she glances at the picture of Angels above Claire's bed, she says a quick prayer.

ANNIE

Please God, keep her safe.

She puts a kiss on her hand and puts it on Claire's face. She picks up the little teacup, to give her strength, grabs her purse on the way out and leaves the house.

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Annie dials Arlene's phone number from her cell.

PHONE CONVERSATION INTERCUT

ARLENE

(In a barely audible tone) Hello.

ANNIE

Arlene this is Annie. I'm sorry to call you so late and I know we haven't seen you in awhile, but John and I had a fight. I need some place to stay for the night.

INT. ARLENE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arlene talks in a low voice and in the background her husband CARL MERKLE(40's) yells. Arlene's face is bruised and her robe is torn.

CARL

Who's that on the phone, your boyfriend?

ARLENE

Annie this isn't a good time. Carl and I are having our own problems and it just wouldn't work. I gotta go.

ANNIE

Wait Arlene. I don't have anyplace to go. Oh God.

END OF CALL

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Bloodied and battered, Annie has nowhere to go. She's afraid of what will happen if she goes to the hospital. She gets in the car and heads down a dark dirt road.

Annie finds some electrical tape in her car. She puts the towel over her nose and yanks it back to the place it originally was. She puts electrical tape over it, to hold it in place.

She finishes her look with a pair of sunglasses she has in her purse.

EXT. GAS STATION - NEXT DAY

Annie stays in her car until early morning. She pulls into a gas station and calls John.

PHONE CONVERSATION INTERCUT

ANNIE

Johnny.

JOHN

Who is this?

ANNIE

It's me. How's Claire?

JOHN

Why the hell do you want to know?
You ran off in the middle of the
night for no reason.

ANNIE

No reason?

JOHN

You must be with your boyfriend.
You're never gonna see Claire
again.

ANNIE

What do you mean? I didn't leave
for no reason. If she would have
seen what you did to my face, she
would have been terrified.

JOHN

I didn't touch you, you lousy
whore! You ran off with your
boyfriend.

ANNIE

What are you talking about? That's
not true. You know that's not true.

JOHN

I know that I'm the one here with Claire, right? You abandoned us. No judge will ever give you the kid.

ANNIE

Judge? I'm calling because I'm on the way home.

JOHN

The locks are already changed Annie. You blew it and now you're gonna pay.

Click. John takes the phone off of the hook.

ANNIE

Johnny wait! You can't take my baby. (Annie SCREAMS) You bastard, no ...

END OF CALL

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Claire walks up to her dad.

CLAIRE

Where's my Momma? I want to see her.

JOHN

Your momma left you. She isn't coming home. Now, go get in your room.

Four year old Claire is having a hard time understanding why her momma left her. She begins to cry.

CLAIRE

I want my Momma.

JOHN

Shut up or I'll give you something to cry about. Get in your room you little piss ant.

John grabs Claire by the arm, shoves her into her bedroom and slams the door.

INT. CLAIR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Little Claire is shattered in emotional pieces and cries herself to sleep. Her little body looks so tiny, curled up in the fetal position, on her bed.

EXT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Annie drives up and walks to the front door. She puts her key in the lock and it won't open. Annie beats on the door.

ANNIE

Johnny open the door. You can't do this. Claire needs me.

She runs around the house to the back door. John is standing there. Annie tries to maneuver around him to get to Claire.

JOHN

Whoa. Where do you think you're going? You don't live here anymore. You left, now you're out.

ANNIE

John this isn't funny. I want to see Claire.

JOHN

You're never gonna see her again. Once the judge finds out that you ran away with your boyfriend--

ANNIE

What boyfriend?

JOHN

--who beat you up, he'll never let you see her.

ANNIE

C'mon Johnny. You're not funny. You did this to me last night.

Annie takes her sunglasses off to reveal John's work.

JOHN

Well, it looks like somebody finally gave you what you deserve.

John grabs Annie by the arm and throws her off the porch.

ANNIE

Stop John. You're hurting me.

John keeps bullying her.

JOHN

Get off my property, or I'll call
the sheriff.

ANNIE

This is my house too!

JOHN

Not anymore sunshine. You abandoned
us. Possession is 9/10 of the law.

John opens the car door and shoves Annie into it. She screams
back at him thru tears, pain and fear.

ANNIE

I'll be back. You can't do this!

John flips Annie off.

EXT. ANNIE'S CAR - DAY

The only other people Annie can think to call is Mr. and Mrs.
Daniels. She looks their phone number up on her cell phone
and dials through the blurred vision.

MRS. DANIELS

Hello.

ANNIE

Mrs. Daniels, hi this is Annie
Taylor. How are you doing?

MRS. DANIELS

Not too good Annie. Mr. Daniels
suffered a stroke and is in
intensive care. Our kids are flying
in. We're pretty worried about him.

ANNIE

I'm sorry to hear it. I won't take
anymore of your time. I just wanted
to say hello. If there's anything I
can do, please call me.

MRS. DANIELS

That's sweet of you Annie. Thanks
for calling and tell Claire hello.

ANNIE

I will. Take care. Bye.

Annie hangs up.

She can't intrude on Mrs. Daniels with her problems. Arlene has made it clear that it's not an option for her to stay at her house.

On her cell she looks up Attorneys. Don Albers is at the top of the list. She dials the number.

SECRETARY

Hello, Mr. Albers office.

ANNIE

Hello, I need to speak with somebody about getting my little girl.

SECRETARY

Is this a custody issue or a divorce case?

ANNIE

At this point, I guess maybe both.

SECRETARY

Mr. Albers has a retainer fee of \$800.00. That has to be paid up front before he'll start any legal processes. Would you like to make an appointment?

ANNIE

\$800.00 up front? I don't have that kind of money and I need to get my little girl now. My husband won't let me in the house and he roughed me up a bit.

SECRETARY

I'm sorry, it's his policy and he won't work without the retainer fee.

ANNIE

I don't know what I'm gonna do. He's not fit to be with my Daughter.

SECRETARY

It sounds like maybe you need to contact the sheriff's department. Did you file a report with them?

ANNIE

No, I planned on going home and thought it would get better. Things just got out of hand last night.

SECRETARY

I see. So was this was the first time he hit you?

Annie is silent.

SECRETARY

That's what I thought. You might try the Women's Battered Crisis Center. They have pretty good resources.

ANNIE

Oh, I don't think I need to call there, but thanks.

SECRETARY

You're welcome. Good luck.

Donna hangs up and calls another Attorney.

RECEPTIONIST

Calhoun, Smith and Devonshire. May I help you?

ANNIE

Hello, I need to make an appointment today to speak with an Attorney.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry all of the partners are booked solid for the next four weeks. I can make an appointment for you then.

ANNIE

Four weeks? That won't work. I need to see someone now!

RECEPTIONIST

Four weeks is the best I can do.

ANNIE

Thanks.

Annie hangs up feeling like she doesn't have any options.

She looks up the number for the Battered Women's Crises Center. She can't find it.

Annie crumbles into an endless stream of tears.

INT. MULTIPLE SHOTS - FLASHBACK

A succession of years flash by of Annie making phone calls, sitting in Attorneys offices, visiting legal aid and being frustrated.

Intertwined in those moments are flashes of Claire sitting in her bedroom looking at the moon, feeling lonely, missing her momma and growing into a young lady.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

Claire now sixteen sleeps in her bed. She awakens by her dad standing over her, yelling.

JOHN

Where the hell is my breakfast? You expect me to work on an empty stomach. I swear you're as lazy as your mother was.

CLAIRE

Give me a second.

JOHN

Don't forget to go to the market and get me some beer.

CLAIRE

I told you they won't give it to me. I'm underage.

JOHN

You've got a problem then. Figure it out sunshine.

Claire crawls from under the covers and realizes that this day will be no different than any of the others.

Rage, fear and bruises are all part of the normal routine around there.

CLAIRE

They won't do it.

JOHN

Listen missy, I'm telling you that there better be some beer here when I get home. Now get off your butt and cook me my breakfast.

John exits.

Claire slowly gets up and picks up the only thing she has to remember her mother by. It's a gold locket that contains a picture of her and her Momma. She got it when she was four years old, along with her tea set. She puts it around her neck.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

The telephone rings and John answers it.

PHONE CONVERSATION INTERCUT

JOHN

Hello. (pause) Listen bitch, I told you no. It's not going to happen. Now quit calling here.

END OF CALL

He slams the phone down and is in an agitated state.

CLAIRE

Was it that psycho lady you dated calling again?

JOHN

Psycho is right. She doesn't seem to understand what no means. And you don't seem to understand what get my breakfast means.

CLAIRE

How does she keep getting our new phone number? It's kinda creepy, like she's stalking you or something.

JOHN

I'm not afraid of her. She's just a crazy bitch.

Claire pulls pans out of the cupboard. She hides the necklace inside her shirt, so her Dad won't take it away.

INT. CITY MARKET - DAY

Claire is in the checkout lane talking with Mr. Daniels. He works part-time there. He is noticeably slower since his stroke years earlier.

MR. DANIELS

You know, I remember the night you were born. I was so nervous driving your momma to the hospital. I think I was more afraid than she was.

Claire laughs and fidgets impatiently. She knows she has to get the beer.

CLAIRE

Yeah. I'll bet that was quite a night.

Claire is nervous and sweating.

CLAIRE

Mr. Daniels, I really hate to ask again, but my Dad's been working really long hours, and wants me to get him some beer. I promise it's for him.

MR. DANIELS

Claire, I believe you, but it's like I've said before. There's a law that says I can't sell liquor to minors.

CLAIRE

I know, but if its not there when he gets home, it's going to be my fault and he'll...

Tears swell up in Claire's eyes. He notices a bruise on the side of her face.

MR. DANIELS

Okay, look I'll do it this one time. I can get into a lot of trouble doing this.

CLAIRE

Thank you, Mr. Daniels. I owe you.

MR. DANIELS

Take care of yourself and remember that Mrs. Daniels and I are real close by if you need anything.

CLAIRE

Thank you. This helps me more than you know.

MR. DANIELS

Claire, one more thing. I don't know why your momma left, it's none of my business.

CLAIRE

I don't really know why she left me either.

MR. DANIELS

I'll tell you that she loved you more than anything in this world. For her to leave you, it must have been awfully bad.

CLAIRE

Thanks for telling me that.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

John sits glued to the TV. Claire enters holding a plate of food and a six pack of beer. She sets them down in front of him, feeling pretty proud of herself.

JOHN

Well, it's about time. I shouldn't have to wait this long for my dinner, you ungrateful little bitch!

Claire knows not to argue when he's working up to a fight.

CLAIRE

Sorry Dad. I just wanted it to be special, since you've been working so hard.

JOHN.

Save the bullshit. Go to your room.

CLAIRE

Okay. I'm just gonna get something to eat first. I'll take it in my room.

JOHN

Did I stutter?

JOHN

I said go to your room. Maybe next time you won't be such an ingrate and you'll have my dinner ready on time. Now go.

Claire stands silent and still. She knows the cycle. She's lived with it for years.

JOHN

Move your ass girl!

Claire retreats to her room. She can hear him screaming.

JOHN

This food tastes like shit. This isn't the kind of beer I like. You're trash just like your momma. You did this on purpose to get me upset.

He polishes off the six pack and heads towards Claire's room.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She sits on the floor listening to music and holding her locket and rubbing her hungry, gurgling stomach. John bursts into the room in a rage.

JOHN

Turn that garbage off.

Claire leaps up and does what he says. John provokes further.

JOHN

Can't you do anything right? You did this on purpose. Why do you always start trouble?

CLAIRE

Did what? I've been sitting in here listening to music. Weren't you happy with your dinner or beer?

JOHN

Don't talk back to me. When are you gonna learn?

John back hands Claire, cutting her lip and throwing her against her momma's old radio. It breaks and so does the table it's on. He again lunges for her, but loses his balance, hits his head, and ends up in a drunken heap on the floor. He's out... for awhile.

Claire with little strength and a split lip, grabs her locket, puts some things in her backpack and heads out to the living room. She's in search of money.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Claire rummages through a desk filled with unpaid bills and beer caps.

As she digs through debris she finds a shoe box that contains a hundred dollars and unopened letters addressed to her. They go back to 2008. She grabs a few of them and scans them for the most current postmark and address. It's only a few towns away. She grabs some of the letters.

Her dad groans in the next room and she knows this is the time to leave.

EXT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - NIGHT

The glow from the moon guides her in the dark to the wooden shack.

INT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - NIGHT

Claire's swollen, bloodied face is exaggerated by her reddened eyes and pale skin.

She holds her locket, looking at the picture inside, and talks to her momma, hoping God will direct her prayers.

CLAIRE

I'm scared Momma. I'm afraid to go to sleep tonight and I'm afraid to be awake. I never know what's going to make him mad. I know you love me. I have to find you. I just have to...

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MORNING

Claire limps down the same dark dirt road, battered just as her momma had done years before. Wearing a backpack, she clutches the locket, letters and money.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

A tired old bus pulls away, heading for Emporia, Kansas.

There are empty seats and a few weary travelers.

Claire is bunched up in one of the seats. Her lip is cut and she has dried blood and bruises on her face. Her lifeless eyes match her empty expression.

She falls asleep shortly before the BUS DRIVER (50's) announces the final stop.

BUS DRIVER

This is our last stop, Emporia,
Kansas.

Claire wakes up. Surprisingly, she feels more rested than she has in a long while. Her lip aches and she is hungry. She stops before she exits the bus.

CLAIRE

Would you happen to know if there's
a place to eat, that's not too
expensive?

BUS DRIVER

Down around the corner, near the
gas station, there's a place called
Elmo's. It's not the best food, but
it's cheap. Gotta go kid. You
should get that lip looked at.

The bus pulls away and Claire limps towards Elmo's.

EXT. EMPORIA KANSAS - ELMO'S DINER - DAY

Claire walks up to a very old looking diner. Out front a tall Paul Bunyan type figure, holds a fishing pole that has a cheeseburger hanging from it.

INT. ELMO'S DINER - DAY

Claire sits alone nibbling on fries and a coke. Her lip hurts so she eats very slowly.

The waitress LOTTIE HARRINGTON (60's) (Whoopi Goldberg type) is wearing a scarf wrapped around her head. She notices Claire's battered face.

LOTTIE

Here's your check kid. Hey, you
feeling alright? You don't look so
good.

Claire doesn't respond.

LOTTIE
Where ya headed?

CLAIRE
I'm going to live with my Mom. Her house is on Gury Lane. You wouldn't happen to know where that is would you?

LOTTIE
Not off hand, but it shouldn't be that hard to find. Why don't you call her and get directions?

CLAIRE
I was so excited to see her, that I forgot to grab her phone number.

Judging from Claire's battered face, Lottie isn't buying her story. They get interrupted by an indignant customer who's yelling.

CUSTOMER
Excuse me moron. This isn't what I ordered.

Lottie smiles at Claire. She has a little bit of an attitude in her grin.

LOTTIE
Excuse me. I'll be right back.

Lottie strides over to the man.

CUSTOMER
It's about time.

LOTTIE
I'm not sure who you think you're talking to. But, what the fuck do you want?

CUSTOMER
I ordered this burger with no onions on it. My doctor says I can't eat anything with onions or spices 'cause if I do my ulcer flares up.

LOTTIE
That's more information than I need to know. Let me take care of the onion situation for you.

Lottie grabs his burger and scraps the onions into his lap.

LOTTIE

There you go. The moron took care
of the onions for you.

The man throws a ten down and leaves in a huff.

Lottie walks back to Claire and they both laugh.

LOTTIE

I'll tell you girl, you wouldn't
believe some of the things these
fools say to me. Tell you what. My
tour of duty is over in fifteen
minutes and then I'll take you to
your momma's. By the way what
should I call you?

CLAIRE

Claire. My name is Claire.

LOTTIE

People call me Lottie, except for
the ones that call me moron, or
momma, or granny.

Lottie just cracks up in laughter. Claire doesn't quite get
the humor, but she smiles anyway.

LOTTIE

People just don't get me and I
think I'm hysterical.

She can tell Claire isn't in the mood to joke around.

Lottie walks away and Claire isn't sure what to think of her.

INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Lottie and Claire get into her beat up station wagon. She
puts on "Respect" by Aretha Franklin. Lottie can't help but
sing along with the familiar tune.

LOTTIE

R-E-S-P-E-C-T, hey, hey, hey, hey,
just a little respect, hey baby...
My girlfriend Aretha sure has some
pipes.

Lottie tries to engage Claire in a conversation. She turns
the music down so it is faintly heard.

LOTTIE

So where'd you come from anyway?

CLAIRE

Kansas City.

LOTTIE

(singing) I'm going to Kansas City,
Kansas City here I come. I just
love that song too. Forgive me
child. Sometimes I just get filled
with the spirit. So who'd you live
with out there?

CLAIRE

My Aunt Arlene. My Mom and Dad had
to move 'cause of my Dads job. I
had to stay there till summer break
to finish the school year. My Aunt
Mary is really cool!

LOTTIE

Whoa girl! Which aunt did you stay
with, Arlene or Mary?

CLAIRE

Like I said, my Aunt Mary.

LOTTIE

Baby, I might not be the smartest
woman around, otherwise I wouldn't
be working at Elmo's. I do know
when someone might not be telling
me the truth.

Lottie pulls the car over to the side of the road and turns
it off. It smokes and rattles.

LOTTIE

I had one child, who died, and have
three grandchildren I'm raising.
I'm pretty good at knowing a line
when I hear it.

CLAIRE

I'm telling you the truth.

LOTTIE

This car's not going anywhere,
until you tell me what's really
going on. Now, spill your guts
baby.

Emotion suddenly overcomes Claire.

CLAIRE

I lived with my Dad. My Mom had to go away and now I'm going to live with her. That's the truth. There's nothing else to tell.

Tears swell in Clair's eyes but she tries to hold them in.

Lottie puts her hand on Claire's leg and pats it in a compassionate, loving manner. She starts the old station wagon up and it back fires. They pass fields of beautiful wildflowers.

LOTTIE

Let's go find her. What's her address?

Claire pulls one of the envelopes out.

CLAIRE

1713 Gury Lane.

LOTTIE

I'll have to look for directions in my phone book. I've never heard of Gury Lane.

Lottie grabs a battered, used phone book in her back seat.

CLAIRE

Lottie, do you think I could pull some of those wildflowers over there to take to her? She used to call me her sweet wildflower, Clairabelle.

Lottie pulls over. Claire jumps out of the station wagon and pulls a big bunch of wildflowers.

Lottie can't find the address in the phone book.

They start up again, and the car does it's trademark chugging and jerking, as they continue down the road. Up and down the streets they go. There doesn't seem to be a Gury Lane.

LOTTIE

I couldn't find that address.

CLAIRE

We have to keep looking. It has to be here, somewhere.

LOTTIE

Baby, we've been up and down these streets so many times, I'm getting motion sickness! (Lottie laughs)

CLAIRE

I have to find her!

LOTTIE

Maybe your momma was so excited you were coming that she wrote the wrong return address down?

She pulls over to the side of the road and stops the car once again, to call her grandkids. No one answers.

CLAIRE

Those grandkids of mine drive me nuts.

Claire is into her feelings, disappointed, teary eyed and has a bit of an attitude.

CLAIRE

She wouldn't write the wrong address down. I'll find it on my own.

Claire leaps out of the car, taking the flowers, her backpack and slams the door. Lottie realizes that this isn't the time for her Elmo's brand of humor.

Lottie yells out the window.

LOTTIE

I'm sorry. Sometimes my mouth speaks before my brain catches up. Of course she wrote the right address.

CLAIRE

I have to find her.

LOTTIE

It's getting late and my grandkids are home alone. At least they should be. You never know. Why don't you come home with me tonight and tomorrow we'll figure this all out?

Claire knows this is a generous offer. She also really likes Lottie.

CLAIRE

Well, okay but just for tonight.
You've already done so much for me.

She gets back into the station wagon, this time respecting Lottie and dropping the attitude. Lottie cranks up the radio and off they go.

They pull up to a small yet beautiful little house. It has a tire swing in the front yard and a big oak tree, with out stretched branches. It looks like angel wings, just like the tree at the Shady Place.

INT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - FLASHBACK

A four year old Claire and her Momma sit inside the Shady Place. Claire gently touches her momma's bruised face. In her other little hand she clutches her China teacup.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

Lottie waves her arms in front of Claire's face.

LOTTIE

Claire are you alright girl?
Where'd you go. You kinda just left
somewhere for a minute?

CLAIRE

What? Oh, I'm sorry. I'm just a
little tired.

Lottie shows Claire around her house and introduces her grandkids. CLARENCE (13), BRANDY (10) and DERRICK (9).

LOTTIE

Guys, meet Claire.

Brandy waves.

DERRICK

Hi.

Clarence says nothing.

LOTTIE

This is Clarence he's thirteen, and
thinks he knows it all. Where's
your manners?

Lottie gives Clarence the look that he understands.

CLARENCE

Hello.

LOTTIE

Alright, troops, Claire is a guest
in our home, so everyone eat off
your own plate tonight.

Lottie laughs.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lottie, Claire and the kids laugh and enjoy a nice dinner.

Claire has no memory of sitting down as a family, where they
enjoyed each others company and it felt calm.

She takes a drink of cold milk. She can't remember the last
time she ate, where her stomach wasn't in knots.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1979

Claire age 4, Annie and John sit at the dinner table. Claire
starts singing and knocks over her glass of milk. Annie leaps
up to clean it and John starts his verbal assault.

JOHN

What the hell is wrong with her?
She's more trouble than she's
worth. That goes for the both of
you. I'm going to get some fresh
air.

John slams the door.

CLAIRE

Sorry Momma. I'm a bad girl.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

Lottie nudges Claire.

LOTTIE

Claire, Claire? Is it my jokes or
what? You just checked out on me
again. We better put you to bed.

Lottie puts a clean blanket and pillow on the couch for Claire. In no time flat Claire is sound asleep but she tosses and turns as more memories fill her dreams.

EXT. PARK - AUTUMN - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1981

Claire age 6 and her dad go to the park. Annie has been following them. This might be her only chance to see Claire if it's out in the open.

Annie runs up and hugs her. Her dad pulls her from her momma's arms and a loud argument ensues.

JOHN

I told you you'd pay bitch! You're never going to see her again. Never. Now get the fuck outta here.

ANNIE

My baby. John just let me see her. Let me hold her.

Claire is distraught and hysterical. She reaches for her momma. John slaps her out stretched little arms.

CLAIRE

Momma, Momma. I want my Momma.

John scoops Claire up. She continues to cry and he slaps her face.

Annie falls to the ground sobbing.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

Claire screams out in her sleep. Her arms are out stretched. Lottie runs to her and comforts her.

CLAIRE

Momma, Momma! I want my Momma!

LOTTIE

Shhh. Shhh, baby. I got you. It was just a dream.

Lottie holds her until she falls asleep. She gently gets up and covers Claire with the blanket.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Lottie joyfully sings to the radio. Claire wakes up to the smell of flapjacks, bacon and fresh coffee.

LOTTIE

Good morning. How did that couch
feel on your backside?

Claire stretches a bit. She's still sore from the last assault from her dad before she escaped.

CLAIRE

The couch was fine. I had a dream
about my Mom. My Dad wouldn't let
me see her and I was crying and
reaching for her.

Claire starts to cry.

CLAIRE

My Mom left when I was 4 years old.
My Dad always said that she ran
away with another man. It's been
really hard because my Dad drinks a
lot and sometimes can't control his
temper. I couldn't take anymore.

LOTTIE

I'm sorry baby.

CLAIRE

When I decided to leave I found
some letters from my Mom that he
never told me about. 1713 Gury Lane
was on the most current letter. I
grabbed it and hoped maybe she was
still there.

Lottie embraces Claire and gives her some TLC that she desperately needs.

LOTTIE

Look, I don't have all of the
answers in life, but I do know how
powerful the love is between a
momma and her child. I'm sure your
daddy loves you too. He may have
had a harder time showing it.

Lottie seems to be getting thru to Claire.

LOTTIE

How about we eat a nice breakfast and get my "little Grand Angels" out the door. Then we'll sit down and go through those letters and see what else we can find out about your momma.

CLAIRE

Lottie, no one has ever been as kind to me as you've been. Thank you.

LOTTIE

You don't have to thank me, but you do have to sit down and eat my flapjacks. You also have to tell me they are the best you've ever had.

Lottie laughs and so does Claire. She's finally getting used to Lottie's humor and feels a lot better today.

LOTTIE

So, in the car you said, she called you her wildflower, Clairabelle.

CLAIRE

She did. I do remember that.

LOTTIE

I knew I liked you. I once had a cow named Clairabelle. She understood my jokes just about as much as you do!

Lottie yells to her grandkids.

LOTTIE

You know you light up my life, but move your butts and get outta my face! You belong to your lucky teachers for the next couple of days, till summer break begins.

CLAIRE

I can tell you really love your grandkids.

LOTTIE

Look, my Grandkids live with me, because their momma died. But... sometimes they work my last nerve.

The grandkids bounce down the stairs ready for school.
CLARENCE (13) the oldest, heard what she just said.

CLARENCE

Granny, were you talking shit about
us?

LOTTIE

Hey now. I was talking shit about
you, but watch your mouth.

Lottie's only granddaughter, BRANDY (10) bounds down the
stairs with her skirt jacked up high and lipstick on.

LOTTIE

Oh hell no. Girl, have you lost
your mind?

Lottie grabs Brandy's skirt and yanks it down. She then takes
the back of her apron and wipes the lipstick off of her face.

LOTTIE

I may be old, but I pay the bills.

BRANDY

Oh Granny. Everyone makes fun of
me. I look like a baby.

LOTTIE

You are my baby, a minor, and this
is my house -- my rules.

Lottie's youngest Grandson Derrick (10) smiles with glee.

LOTTIE

What you got going on, Mr. Smiley?

DERRICK

You're funny, Granny.

LOTTIE

He's my only child that gets my
sense of humor.

Lottie kisses each grandkid and sends them out the door. It's
apparent how much they love each other and how much they
respect their granny. This is the kind of family that Claire
has always longed for.

Lottie and Claire clear the dishes off the table and spread
the letters out.

CLAIRE

Lottie, do you think you could read them to me? I'm not a good reader. I missed more school than I was in over the years.

LOTTIE

Really? Are you sure you want me to read the letters? They might be too private for you to share.

Claire nods yes.

LOTTIE

Not that I wasn't gonna ask what they said anyway! Alright, lets put this puzzle together.

Claire hands her the oldest letter. There is no return address.

LOTTIE

My sweet wildflower, Clairabelle
...

INT. MOTEL - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1980

Annie sits in a rundown motel room, no heat, no phone and a family of cockroaches for company.

Neon lights from the strip club across the street, illuminate her room, and her frame as she is writes this letter.

ANNIE

I'm hoping that your daddy will read this letter to you, so you will know that I love you and miss you every single minute of every day. I will call again as soon as I can. Remember every time you look at the moon, I am thinking of you.
Love, Momma.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

Lottie and Claire both wonder why Annie left.

CLAIRE

That's it? Why did she leave me, if she loved me so much, and what did she mean when she said she would call me again?

LOTTIE

Baby, it sounds like she was calling you.

CLAIRE

But, my Dad never said she called. Maybe she did run off with another man and didn't want me to be part of her new life.

LOTTIE

That letter didn't sound like a momma who didn't want you to be part of her life. I'm sure she had good reason for leaving and thought you'd be alright with your daddy.

Claire hopes that Lottie's right.

CLAIRE

I want to believe that, but why didn't she fight harder for me?

LOTTIE

Maybe we should read the other letters before you make any conclusions. Besides, I'm real curious now. I want to know what happened.

Claire looks so sad.

LOTTIE

You okay. Should we continue?

CLAIRE

You're right. It didn't sound like she didn't want me to be part of her life.

LOTTIE

No, like I said. It didn't.

CLAIRE

I'm sure she had good reasons for leaving. I'm pretty sure it had something to do with my Dad.

LOTTIE

Maybe these other letters will tell us more.

Lottie taps her nails on the table. She's excited to read the rest of the letters, but is trying to be patient for Claire.

Light heartedly, Claire teases Lottie.

CLAIRE

Well, Lottie, what are you waiting for? Read!

Lottie smiles.

LOTTIE

I guess I was just waiting for an invitation Ms. Clairabelle. I think I need a cup of coffee, how about you?

Claire mocks the man that was in Elmo's and giving Lottie a hard time.

CLAIRE

No thanks. (teasingly) My doctor says I can't drink coffee because my ulcer flares up.

They both laugh.

LOTTIE

Can you believe that fool thought I was a moron!

Lottie pours herself a cup of coffee and Claire hands her the next letter, postmarked April 2010. No return address.

Lottie begins to read.

LOTTIE

My Sweet Wildflower Clairabelle--

INT. EMPORIA KANSAS - HOSTESS FACTORY - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1986

It's six years later than the last letter. Annie sits in the lunchroom at the factory she works at. Her hair is pulled back in a pony tail and she's wearing coveralls. She's writing to Claire.

ANNIE

So much time has gone by since I saw you. I had asked your daddy to send me some pictures of you, but he must have forgot. I've called many times, but you have been out playing or unable to talk. I'm sorry it hasn't worked for your daddy to meet me, so that I could see you. Know that I love you and remember that whenever you are looking at the moon, I am thinking of you. P.S. - I hope you've liked the birthday gifts I've sent and also the gifts I've sent at Christmas. Love, Momma

Annie's boss approaches her and tells her that her break is over.

BOSS

Breaks over Taylor. Get back on the line.

Annie seals the envelope and drops it in her pocket.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

Lottie and Claire think about the letter they just read. Claire is deep in thought and talks out loud without taking a breath.

CLAIRE

I do remember strange phone calls. Our phone number was changed several times because my Dad said some crazy lady he dated kept calling. (pause) I never knew she wanted to see me and what birthday and Christmas gifts is she talking about? Now that I think about it, any of the gifts I ever got were probably from her. My Dad said they were from him. I thought they were wrapped too pretty for him.

Clair just stares.

LOTTIE

Baby, breathe. Are you alright?

CLAIRE

Lottie, she did try to stay in touch with me. She did love me.

LOTTIE

Of course she did. She still does.

CLAIRE

My dream last night was real. It happened. I remember now. How could my Dad take her out of my life? What kind of a father would want their kid to feel like their momma didn't love them?

The emotions in the room are raw, and Lottie is getting a little choked up.

LOTTIE

It happened to Erica Kane, in Pine Valley.

Lottie loves old soap operas.

CLAIRE

I remember that show.

LOTTIE

I'm thinking I'm in need of some cookies right now. I'm feeling kinda anxious and nervous. Just like I'm snooping in someone's diary. Not that I would know what that felt like!

Lottie shuffles to the cookie jar.

LOTTIE

How about you? Do you need a break or should we move on to the next envelope?

CLAIRE

I feel better now, just knowing she did try to keep in touch with me.

Lottie nervously shoves one cookie after another in her mouth. She coughs a bit.

CLAIRE

Lottie, are you okay?

Lottie takes a big gulp of coffee to wash the dry mounds of cookies down her throat.

LOTTIE

Oh yeah, baby. I just feel like I'm peeping in someone's window or something.

CLAIRE

We can stop. I don't want this to mess you up.

LOTTIE

Are you kidding? I can't wait to see what happens next. Give me that letter.

Clair hands Lottie the next letter. This one is post marked May . The return address says General Delivery, Ottawa, Kansas.

CLAIRE

She moved around a lot. Well, at least there's some kind of return address. Where's Ottawa, Kansas? I've never heard of it before.

Lottie shrugs her shoulders and begins to read.

LOTTIE

My Dearest Clairabelle.

INT. BUS STOP - DAY - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1988

Annie sits on a bench writing this letter. She's feeling especially melancholy because Claire's 13th birthday is approaching.

ANNIE

May 28th is a very big day for you! You officially turn 13 and are a teenager now. There are so many things I want to tell you about life, but not being able to have contact with you makes it kind of hard. How can I protect you from the kind of mistakes I've made, if I can't speak with you? I hope you enjoy the gift I sent. Have a wonderful birthday. Whenever you see the moon, know that I am thinking of you. Love, Momma

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

Pressed inside the envelope are crimson wildflowers. Tears stream down Claire and Lottie's faces.

CLAIRE

I remember my 13th birthday. I wanted to go to a movie, but my Dad said that he was too tired. I didn't have any friends to go with. He didn't let me have friends. He drank his six pack of beer and passed out on the couch. No card, no Happy Birthday, no anything that day. I went to the Shady Place, a place my Momma took me to when I was very young.

INT. ABANDONED SHACK - SHADY PLACE - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1988

Claire is a teenager, 13 years old. She sits all alone in the Shady Place, crying.

CLAIRE

Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday dear Claire. Happy Birthday to me.

She stares at the moon and hopes her momma still loves her.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

CLAIRE

Some birthday that was. I remember crying myself to sleep. The good thing was that I knew he couldn't find me there. I knew there wouldn't be any fighting that night. That was my gift.

LOTTIE

Oh sweet child.

CLAIRE

Lottie, what if all I can look forward to... is what I've already had?

Lottie has tears rolling down her face. She lights up a cigarette, only she hasn't smoked in years. She's speechless which is rare for her.

CLAIRE

Lottie? Lottie? Hey you don't look so good. You look pale.

Lottie is sick from smoking a stale cigarette, and her mind is racing. She's talking pretty fast.

LOTTIE

What am I doing? I didn't even remember where I had this cigarette hidden until it was lit and in my mouth. I quit a couple of years ago. I think maybe I, we need a break.

CLAIRE

Okay.

LOTTIE

I'm about ready for a drink. I also gave that up a couple of years ago.(pause) Anyway baby, why don't you go out and sit on that old tire swing and I'll get us some lemonade. I also need to call the market.

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - TIRE SWING - DAY

Claire swings. The old majestic tree comforts her.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Lottie's on the phone, pouring lemonade and takes a swig out of an old bottle of whiskey.

LOTTIE

Lord O Mercy! That will be a few more Hail Mary's for me.

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - TIRE SWING - DAY

Claire enjoys the calm motion of the swing. Lottie brings the lemonade out.

LOTTIE

Pale huh? I never heard of a black woman looking pale. That's a good one! You do have a sense of humor.

CLAIRE

Lottie, I wasn't being disrespectful. You looked pale. I'm sorry.

LOTTIE

Relax child. You need to lighten up. Here drink some of this fine lemonade. Course, it's been known to take polish off a floor from all of the lemons.

Lottie cracks up. Clair once again is slow at getting the joke.

LOTTIE

Get it, polish off the floor? Never mind. Cheers!

Lottie pours a little tiny bit of whiskey in hers.

Clair takes a drink and puckers up like a Cabbage Patch doll.

CLAIRE

Hmmmmmm. Boy oh boy. This is a little sour. I think maybe it needs just whew, some more sugar.

LOTTIE

On my goodness! I knew I forgot something. Come inside and we'll put the sugar in it. I'm usually so together. I don't know what's going on with me. Maybe there's a full moon coming!

Lottie adds the sugar and they sit back down at the table. Claire hands her the last letter. It is postmarked February 1987 and the return address is in Emporia, Kansas.

INT. EMPORIA - CHURCH - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1990

Lottie begins to read.

LOTTIE

My Dearest Claire --

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Annie lights a candle in a church that has beautiful stained glass windows. She sits in a pew and writes this long, emotional letter to Claire.

ANNIE

Your daddy told me that you have chosen not to accept my calls, letters and gifts because your momma is dead. I guess that's not far from the truth, because that's how I feel inside. Now that you're almost sixteen, I would like to explain why I left and how hard I've tried to be with you. The night I left, your daddy and I got into a fight and I ended up with a broken nose and couldn't see out of one eye. I knew I had to leave or someone would have ended up dead. I planned on coming home the next day, but he changed the locks and wouldn't let me in. I tried to get legal help, but there seemed to be road blocks I couldn't get around. What your daddy didn't know was that I was carrying another baby. His baby. His anger would have been worse I'm sure if he had known. I wasn't sure where I was headed and had little money. I thought it was best to leave you where you had food and a roof over your head. I rented a room in a rundown motel, while my face healed and the baby inside me grew. You need to know that I thought of you everyday and wrote and called often. Your daddy always had a reason why I couldn't see you. Your little sister LILLY was born in 1980. Her hair is much lighter than yours and so is her complexion. She does have the same big blue eyes that you have. I call her my Fair Lilly Maiden and I know she would love her big sister, my sweet wildflower, Clairabelle. I took a job at a factory where the days were long and the job was hard. At least I didn't live in fear everyday of getting your daddy upset. I never knew what would set him off.

He could be really nice and then all of a sudden would get really mean, like *the calm before a storm*. Lilly and I moved around more times than I can remember. Eventually, we ended up in Emporia, Kansas. Your daddy says you and he, get along really well together and are very close. I'm glad. It eases the pain knowing that you are happy. I hope in your heart, you can find a spot of forgiveness for me. I tried the best I knew how, to be part of your life, to be your momma. I guess the fight was bigger than I was. I never stopped loving you or fighting to be with you. I hope that every time you gaze at the moon you know I'm thinking of you. Love, Your Momma 1713 Drury Lane, Emporia, Kansas

INT. LOTTIE'S KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT

Lottie is now drinking straight from the whiskey bottle and drying her eyes with a dish towel. Claire holds the letter as if it is the Holy Grail.

CLAIRE

I have a sister! Momma didn't run away with another man. She ran away from my Daddy. Even though I was really little, I do remember hearing noises in their room the night she left. But then it got quiet. In the morning she was gone.

LOTTIE

See baby. Your momma has loved you and fought for you all along.

CLAIRE

Why didn't Daddy let me see her or talk to her? (pause) He told her we were close? I took her place as his punching bag. It was like she said, *the calm before a storm*. I've always lived in fear, because I knew what was coming.

Lottie fans herself and shakes her head in disbelief.

LOTTIE

I don't mean to take away from this moment, but this is more and more like a daytime soap opera.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, Lottie.

Lottie scans the return address on all the letters.

LOTTIE

No, don't be sorry baby, but look at the return address, It doesn't say 1713 Gury Lane, it says 1713 Drury Lane. Just a hunch, but I'll bet that's why we couldn't find it.

CLAIRE

Oh my gosh! You're right.

Claire gives Lottie the biggest hug.

LOTTIE

Oh girl ...I say we have a nice dinner, I sober up a little and in the morning we'll look for 1713 Drury Lane.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lottie's grandkids run in and tell her there's a delivery boy out front that needs money. Lottie gives each child their orders till dinner time and proceeds out front.

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Lottie takes a box from the delivery boy and hands him the money.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lottie, Claire, Clarence, Brandy and Derrick finish eating dinner. Lottie turns out the lights and marches in with a birthday cake lit with candles. Claire doesn't know who's birthday it is. She sings along anyway. Lottie is way off key.

LOTTIE/KIDS

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Claire. Happy birthday to you.

Claire is stunned.

LOTTIE
Now blow out those candles baby
girl and make a wish.

CLAIRE
But Lottie, it isn't my birthday.

LOTTIE
This is happy birthday for that
13th birthday that was missed by
your momma and any other one too!

Claire sits stunned with tears in her eyes.

CLAIRE
This is for me?

LOTTIE
Well, make a wish and blow out your
candles. The frosting is starting
to melt. I need me a piece of cake.
I just love frosting.

Claire closes her eyes and makes a wish. She blows out the
candles and has a real, happy smile on her face.

CLAIRE
This is the best birthday I've ever
had. It was worth the wait!

LOTTIE
I wish I could celebrate my
birthday and not actually get a
year older. Oh well, I lie about my
age anyway!

They all dig into the pink cake with strawberry frosting.
They eat until their bellies are stuffed. Apparently, Lottie
drank more from the bottle earlier, and she's feeling a
little blitzed.

CLAIRE
Lottie, why don't I do the dishes
with the kids, and you go take a
warm bath. You look like you need
to kick back.

Lottie gives the kids the look. They know what their supposed
to do.

LOTTIE

I won't argue. I'm feeling a little worn out. Too much partying for me today.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Lottie retreats to her date with the bathtub. She's belting out a Patti LaBelle tune but scrambles the lyrics. Claire and the kids do the dishes and manage to have some fun.

Thru the bathroom window there is a big full moon shining.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Claire makes breakfast in the kitchen. The kids eat fast and are out the door by the time Lottie comes down. She slept in and has a slight hangover. She walks into the kitchen and Claire is humming.

LOTTIE

Hey little Ms. Sunshine. What's all of this?

Claire made pancakes, eggs and bacon and fresh hot coffee.

LOTTIE

Are the kids gone or are they hiding?

CLAIRE

Sit down. Here's some coffee. The kids ate and left. Can I get you a cigarette and something to drink?

Claire laughs.

LOTTIE

Don't go there! (she waves her hand in the air) Are you ready to find Drury Lane?

CLAIRE

I guess. Ready as I'm gonna be.

LOTTIE

Let me put my face on and we'll head out. Get it? Face on, head out.

Lottie cracks herself up.

Claire is stoic, not a smile.

LOTTIE

Doesn't anyone have a sense of humor?

Lottie gets up to leave, rubbing her hung over head. Claire has something to say to her.

CLAIRE

Lottie, wait. No matter what we find out, I just want to say thank you for your help.

LOTTIE

You're welcome, baby.

CLAIRE

Also that was the best birthday I've ever had. I'm also glad you were here with me when I found out about my Momma.

Lottie and Claire a sincere embrace.

EXT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Lottie's station wagon pulls away from the house. It jugs along and they are on their way to 1713 Gury Lane.

EXT. STATION WAGON - DAY

The station wagon pulls off to the side of the road and Claire picks some more wildflowers. They start back down the road.

EXT. DRURY LANE - DAY

Claire takes a deep breath and gets out of the car. She goes to the front door and RINGS the bell. A blond haired young girl answers.

CLAIRE

Hi, is your mom here?

GIRL

No she's not.

The stare at each other.

CLAIRE

Do you know when she'll be back?

GIRL

She should be back in about fifteen minutes.

CLAIRE

I'm a, well I used to know her a while ago and wanted to say hello. I guess I'll come back later.

GIRL

You can come in and wait if you want?

CLAIRE

Really? Okay, let me tell my friend.

Claire runs to the station wagon and jumps in.

INT. DRURY LANE - STATION WAGON - DAY

CLAIRE

Lottie, this is where she lives. I think maybe the girl is Lilly. I'm shaking. What if my Momma doesn't want to see me?

Lottie grabs her hands.

LOTTIE

You've waited a life time for this moment. Don't run away from it.

Claire looks like she's going to throw up.

CLAIRE

I feel sick.

LOTTIE

You'll be fine. I have to go to work for a few hours. You have my number.

CLAIRE

Okay.

LOTTIE

You better let me know how this reunion turns out. I'm feel like I'm part of the family now.

CLAIRE

Lottie, I really want to thank --

LOTTIE

I know child. I know and no thanks are necessary. Besides this is the most um, well I would say fun, but instead I'll say interesting time I've had in awhile. I'm outta her Ms. Clairabelle.

The station wagon chugs, clangs and heads off down the road. Claire turns around and heads towards the front door. As she is walking the mailman stops her.

MAILMAN

Here you go. Have a real nice day.

Claire looks down and reads the name on the mail.

CLAIRE

Beatrice Rooney? And this one says B. Rooney! Oh my Gosh, I made a big mistake. This isn't my Momma's house.

She puts the mail and the flowers in the mailbox and runs down the street.

Out of breathe, she finds herself at Elmo's Diner.

INT. ELMO'S DINER - DAY

LOTTIE

Didn't I just drop you off? I haven't even had time to put my apron on.

Claire starts crying.

CLAIRE

Lottie, I made a big mistake. That wasn't my Momma's house and that wasn't Lilly. They don't live there.

LOTTIE

Really? What about that blond haired girl? Did her mom come home? Do they know where your momma moved to?

CLAIRE

No, I mean I don't think so. I didn't really ask because I didn't speak to anyone.

LOTTIE

Hold on baby. Back it up girl. If you didn't speak to anyone, how do you know you were at the wrong address. How do you know your momma doesn't live there?

CLAIRE

The mailman handed me the mail. They were addressed to a Beatrice Rooney and a B. Rooney.

LOTTIE

So...

CLAIRE

None of them said Annie Taylor. I can't believe how stupid I am. I thought I could march into her life and we could be a family.

Lottie hugs Claire, holding on to her tightly.

LOTTIE

Listen to me. I've never been on a scavenger hunt like this before, but we're not gonna give up until we have some answers.

CLAIRE

I just can't go back with my Daddy. One of us is going to end up dead.

LOTTIE

Baby, you're not going anywhere, but back to my house. If the kids aren't there, get the key under the planter on the porch.

CLAIRE

What if all I can look forward to, is what I've already had?

LOTTIE

Don't go soft on me now girl. I'm feeling the James Bond in me come out. Now go to my house, and I'll see you later.

Lottie walks Claire to the front door.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

SUPER: Emporia, KS

Claire walks down the highway to Lottie's house. The same bus she came to town in drives by.

INT. ELMO'S DINER - DAY

Back inside the diner, Lottie is visibly affected by Claire's disappointment. She approaches ELMO (60's) and hands him her apron.

LOTTIE

Elmo, man I need to leave early today.

ELMO

How early? You just got here.

LOTTIE

Now early. I'm on a mission of mercy that can't wait.

Elmo laughs.

ELMO

Again? What is it this time? A lost squirrel, a cat up a tree?

LOTTIE

Hey, you better watch it. Not only am I the most experienced help you've got, I'm the only help you've got.

Lottie exits and heads towards the Post Office.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Lottie pulls up to the post office. Once again the station wagon chugs and rattles.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Ray Anderson(40's) the mail clerk prides himself in knowing everyone in the town and Lottie thinks he might be able to fill in some blanks for Claire.

RAY

Hi Lottie, how you doing? We haven't seen you in a while.

LOTTIE

I'm fine. Staying busy at the diner, raising kids and paying taxes. You know how that goes.

RAY

Sure do. We have 3 kids and 1 on the way. I'm too old for this.

LOTTIE

Congratulations! Another deduction. Ray, I need to get some information for a friend of mine and I'm hoping you can help.

RAY

Well, I'll try. What is it?

LOTTIE

You wouldn't happen to know who lives at 1713 Drury Lane would you?

RAY

Sure I do. It's Beatrice Rooney and her daughter Barbara. A big stack of mail just went out for them.

LOTTIE

Do you happen to remember an Annie Taylor that used to live at that address?

RAY

Annie Taylor, I do remember her. She and her daughter moved to Hamilton, just recently.

LOTTIE

Hamilton? Where's that?

RAY

You don't know Hamilton? It really isn't that far. Maybe 25 miles east of Emporia.

LOTTIE

Ray, I owe you one.

RECEPTIONIST

I hope you find Annie Taylor for
your friend.

LOTTIE

Thank you.

EXT. STATION WAGON - LATE AFTERNOON

Lottie exits and heads towards Hamilton, Kansas.

She stops off at a church on the way for a little chat with
the Lord.

INT. HAMILTON - CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

LOTTIE

Lord, I know I don't have to tell
you that I've missed a few Sundays.
I've always had my faith and I try
to do what's right. I'm not asking
anything for myself, but for the
most wonderful child that has come
into my life. She is looking for
her momma and deserves a break.
Please help me find her so that
they both can have some peace and
love in their lives. Amen. Oh one
more thing. Maybe next time we can
talk about me getting a new car
that's not so loud. It could wake
up the dead! Amen.

Lottie cracks herself up again. She's just so funny.

She walks down the aisle of the church and looks at all the
stained glass windows.

LOTTIE

My goodness. All of this stained
glass is so beautiful. (beat) I
sure am glad it's not my job to
clean them!

Lottie drives to the post office in Hamilton.

INT. HAMILTON - POST OFFICE - DAY

Lottie walks up to the POSTAL CLERK (45) looking for some
answers.

POSTAL CLERK

May I help you?

LOTTIE

I sure hope so, you see my dear friend Annie Taylor and her beautiful daughter Lilly live in Hamilton. I didn't bring their address with me and I wanted to surprise them.

POSTAL CLERK

You're in luck. I know the flower lady. Annie Taylor did the flowers for my daughter's wedding. She runs the flower shop called "Wildflowers" on Maine Street. You can check there.

LOTTIE

Thanks for your help. She'll be so surprised to meet me, uhh, I mean to see me. Bye.

EXT. WILDFLOWERS - DAY

Lottie watches as a woman waters some beautiful wildflowers in a pot. As she turns around, she can't help but notice that one of her eyes is drooping.

ANNIE

Hello. Can I help you?

LOTTIE

I sure hope so. I can't help but notice how beautiful these flowers are. What delightful crimson colors.

ANNIE

They're my favorite. I've always loved them. What kind of flowers are you looking for?

LOTTIE

Actually, I'm looking for an old friend. Her name is Annie Taylor. Is she in today?

ANNIE

I'm Annie Taylor, but I'm sorry I don't recognize you. My mind's not as good as it used to be.

LOTTIE

Don't worry about that. I've got the same problem and it's called grandkids. This is kind of hard to explain, so I'll just say it. My name is Lottie Harrington, and I'm a friend of your daughter.

ANNIE

Lilly? Why didn't you say so? She's always sending customers my way. She's a great little PR person for our store.

LOTTIE

I'm a friend of your other daughter, Claire.

Annie shakes and tears well up in her eyes. She turns the water off and asks Lottie to sit down. They sit on a bench and Annie tries to compose herself.

ANNIE

Is she alright? I can't believe this. I've tried to contact her for so many years, but she doesn't want to see me. I don't blame her. She's not sick is she?

LOTTIE

No, physically she's fine, but she'll be much better emotionally when she gets to see her momma. That child sure has missed you.

ANNIE

I didn't think she wanted to have anything to do with me? It's a long story but I never stopped thinking about her, contacting her, and I never stopped loving her.

LOTTIE

I know. Claire and I read some of your letters together. I feel like I know you and believe me I'm not judging. I know just how strong a momma's love is.

ANNIE

Lottie, is Claire here with you. Can I see her?

LOTTIE

No, she's not here. She's back at my house in Emporia. Claire doesn't know that I was able to find you. I didn't want to disappoint her, if this led to a dead end.

ANNIE

Claire has a sister named Lilly. I haven't told Lilly about Claire or about her daddy. It never seemed to be the right time.

LOTTIE

Maybe now is the right time.

ANNIE

I can't get away right now, but would it be alright to see her tomorrow? I'll meet whenever and wherever you want.

LOTTIE

It would be more than alright. I was sure hoping you'd say that. Here's my address.

Lottie hands her a paper with her address and phone number.

ANNIE

Wow. I can't believe this.

LOTTIE

I won't say anything to Claire, 'cause I know the girl would be beside herself all night. How about if you come over tomorrow morning, around eleven o'clock?

ANNIE

I'll be there. Lottie, thank you so much. Claire is lucky to have a friend like you.

She gives Lottie a big heartfelt hug.

LOTTIE

I'm so glad this story has a happy ending. Now, I don't have to take up smoking and drinking again.

Annie looks confused at Lottie.

LOTTIE

Don't mind me. My humor is slightly off. See you tomorrow.

EXT. STATION WAGON - DAY

As Lottie cranks up the car it rattles. She turns the music up on the old radio and heads back to Emporia. As she drives past the church she looks up to the sky and gives thanks.

LOTTIE

I have to say thanks, Lord. I couldn't have done it without you! I'm thinking about a career change. What do you think about me becoming a private detective?

The car backfires 3 times.

LOTTIE

Alright, calm down. I was just kidding. Elmo couldn't manage without me. Doesn't anyone have a sense of humor?

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - EVENING

Derrick swings on the tire swing. Clarence is kicking a ball around and Claire is braiding Brandy's hair.

DERRICK

Hey Claire will you push me?

BRANDY

Derrick, what's wrong with you? Can't you see she's busy?

CLARENCE

Oh, she's trying to make you beautiful.

Clarence throws the ball at Brandy and Claire catches it in mid air.

Claire throws the ball back and Derrick intercepts it. Brandy squeals with delight.

BRANDY

Hey, what about me? I want to play.

The kids laugh and run around playing nicely. Claire finally feels like a kid.

Lottie drives up and gets out of the car.

LOTTIE

Hey, hey. What's this? You all are having a good time without me? Throw me that ball.

Clarence throws the ball at his Granny.

LOTTIE

You all think you're so bad. Learn from the master. Just try and get this ball.

All of the kids rush Lottie and end up in a heap on the ground. Everyone's laughing.

LOTTIE

Like I said. Try and get the ball.

Lottie throws the ball and Clarence, Brandy and Derrick scramble for it. She and Claire sit on the thinning, well traveled grass.

LOTTIE

So, are you doing any better now? I wish I could have been here today, but Elmo is helpless without me.

CLAIRE

It's alright. You've already done enough for me and yes I'm doing better. Lottie, you have some great grandkids.

The ball is thrown in Lottie and Claire's direction and narrowly misses them.

LOTTIE

You spoke too soon. Somebody is going to be in big trouble if they hit their Granny.

She yells at the kids.

LOTTIE

You fools better move it on outta here.

CLARENCE

Granny, I'm hungry!

DERRICK/BRANDY

Me too!

LOTTIE

Do I look like the maid? Claire don't ever have kids. They expect you to buy the food and cook it too!

She laughs.

CLAIRE

C'mon Lottie, I'll help you with dinner.

LOTTIE

This is one offer I'm going to accept. Now, could you help an old lady up.

Claire offers her hand to Lottie and helps her up.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Claire sets the table and Lottie takes a casserole out of the oven. The kids come running.

LOTTIE

You know the routine. Go scrub your paws first.

The kids wash their hands and they all sit down to eat.

LOTTIE

Before we dig in, I would like to give thanks.

Everyone holds hands.

LOTTIE

Dear Lord, we give you thanks for our many blessings. Thank you for bringing a new friend into our lives. Give her the strength to seek answers and to know that she is deserving of all the good times to come. AMEN. Let's eat!

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The kids grab their books and head out the door for school.

LOTTIE

Alright gang. It's time for you to get outta my hair.

Derrick I better not be getting a call from your teacher today. Do you hear me?

DERRICK

Yes ma'am.

Claire grabs her backpack and is ready to leave too.

CLAIRE

I guess I probably should be going too. I think maybe I've ran my welcome out. Thank you--

Lottie cuts her off.

LOTTIE

Wait a minute, baby...

Claire jumps in and has to say what she's feeling.

CLAIRE

Lottie, I know that I might not find my Momma. If I don't, I want you to know that I'm so lucky you came into my life. I will never forget you.

She hugs Lottie.

LOTTIE

Claire, I'm the lucky one that you came into my life. You will always be welcome here.

CLAIRE

Thank you.

LOTTIE

But, I would really like you to stay until we find out more about your momma's whereabouts. I really feel it's just a matter of time. We'll find her.

Lottie and Claire hug again.

CLAIRE

Lottie, where do you get all of your strength from? You always seem to be so together. (beat) Except for that lemonade thing!

LOTTIE

You're getting to have quite a sense of humor. I like it! Tell you what. A friend of mine is coming by around eleven o'clock.

CLAIRE

Oh, that's nice.

LOTTIE

Our kids used to go to school together and we're just catching up. I would love for you to meet her. I'm sure she'll love you the minute she sees you.

CLAIRE

Hey, what's not to love!

LOTTIE

That's my girl! Now, how would you feel about helping me tackle those dirty dishes?

CLAIRE

I'd like that.

LOTTIE

I haven't seen this friend in awhile and I want her to think I have it together.

CLAIRE

Absolutely.

LOTTIE

Under control you know?

CLAIRE

I get it.

LOTTIE

Of course, it's too late to do anything about this weight. Lord have mercy!

Claire giggles and leads the way into the kitchen.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

As Claire and Lottie do dishes, the doorbell rings.

LOTTIE

I'll get that. I think she's here.
Does my hair look alright?

CLAIRE

You look like a million bucks!

LOTTIE

Only a million? I was feeling so
much better than that!

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lottie walks to the front door, smoothing her dress down.
Annie stands holding a gift.

LOTTIE

Come in. It's so nice to see you.
It's been quite awhile hasn't it?

Annie doesn't answer. Lottie can tell she's nervous. She
winks at Annie and knows that she will have to pretty much
control the conversation. She hands Lottie some wildflowers.
Claire walks into the room.

LOTTIE

We have so much to catch up on.
Claire, I want you to meet my dear
friend Flo. Everyone calls her the
flower lady.

CLAIRE

Pleased to meet you, Flo.

Annie and Claire shake hands.

Claire can't help but to notice Annie's drooping eye and
wonders what happened to her. Their shake feels comfortable
and something seems familiar about her.

LOTTIE

Have a seat ladies. Everyone make
yourselves at home.

They all sit down, and Annie hands Lottie a gift.

LOTTIE

Now, what have you gone and done,
Flo? You shouldn't have, but I sure
am glad you did!

Lottie unwraps the gift and pulls out a lovely China teacup.

LOTTIE

This is just beautiful. Claire look
how pretty this is!

CLAIRE

It's beautiful. May I hold it?

LOTTIE

Sure, baby.

She hands the teacup to Claire.

Claire stares at it, like she's a million miles away.

INT. JOHN AND ANNIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

SUPER: 1979

Claire opens the gifts her momma gave her for her 4th birthday. She got a locket, and a China tea set with a floral pattern on it. An inscription is on the bottom of the cup.

INT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

LOTTIE

Claire, are you alright?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. I just was thinking
about a China set my Momma gave me
for my birthday when I was a little
girl. I'm surprised I remember.
They had the same flowers on them.
On the bottom of the cups, my Momma
wrote something special for me.

Claire automatically turns the cup over. She reads out loud very slowly.

CLAIRE

To Clairabelle, My Sweet
Wildflower. Love, Momma.
That's funny my China cups said the
same thing.

Claire looks up at Lottie who just now, realizes herself how symbolic the cup is. She tears up and so does Claire. Claire is afraid to turn around and look at Flo.

Lottie gives her a loving nod and gestures her to turn around.

CLAIRE

Momma? Momma is it really you?

Annie reaches out to Claire, not trying to rush her. Tears are rolling down her cheeks and her hands are trembling.

Lottie is completely overwhelmed.

ANNIE

My precious Clairabelle. You're so beautiful. I've been so empty without you. I have so much to tell you.

CLAIRE

Momma, right now can you just hold me?

Lottie looks at mother and daughter. There's not a dry eye in the house.

LOTTIE

This is the sweetest reunion I've ever been to. I'm gonna let you two get reacquainted with each other. I'll go get us something to drink.

CLAIRE

Momma, I have something for you too.

Claire takes the locket off and hands it to her.

CLAIRE

Do you remember this locket?

ANNIE

Yes I do. I gave it to you for your fourth birthday. Sometimes you had nightmares, and I told you that as long as you had the locket and you could see the moon, you would feel me right there with you. You went fast to sleep.

CLAIRE

I do remember Momma. I want you to have it. It's been so special to me all these years, but I don't need it anymore. I've got the real thing ...you.

Annie opens the locket and sees the picture of her and Claire.

ANNIE

My goodness. Look how little you were. Are you sure that's me in the picture? My face looks so much different.

Annie puts her hand over her drooping eye and crooked nose.

ANNIE

Your daddy told me he'd teach me a lesson, I'd never forget. He did.

Claire gently touches her Momma's face and understands. Her dad used to say the same thing to her.

CLAIRE

Momma, I think you are beautiful.

ANNIE

Listen Claire, I do have one more surprise for you. There's somebody I'd like you to meet.

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

In the front yard, eleven year old Lilly is sitting on the tire swing.

ANNIE

Claire, this is your --

CLAIRE

Little Sister, Lilly.

The girls stare at each other.

CLAIRE

Momma she's so beautiful. She looks just like me!

They all start laughing. The girls hug and warm up to each other just like sisters do.

Annie didn't think, Claire ever read her letters, so she's surprised she knows who Lilly is.

Lottie comes out carrying a tray of lemonade. A vase with wildflowers is on the tray.

LOTTIE

I thought you might like some lemonade.

Lottie didn't know Lilly was outside.

LOTTIE

Now, who might this pretty little girl be?

CLAIRE

Lottie, this is my little Sister, Lilly.

LOTTIE

How nice to meet you, Lilly. You're just as pretty as your sister is.

LILLY

Thank you!

CLAIRE

Lottie, did you put the sugar in the lemonade this time?

Lottie bursts into laughter. Claire has found her joy.

LOTTIE

I make one mistake, one time and the girl won't let me live it down! And to think I even have a present for her in spite of the abuse.

CLAIRE

A present? Lottie you shouldn't have, but I sure am glad you did!

Claire opens the gift.

CLAIRE

Stationary. I love it! Thank you.

LOTTIE

Hey, it's purely selfish on my part. I want to make sure you keep in touch with me!

Everyone laughs and takes a glass of lemonade. They toast their glasses together.

LOTTIE

To family!

Claire and Lilly head for the tire swing.

ANNIE

Lottie, I don't know how I can thank you for bringing us all together? You're like a guardian angel or something.

LOTTIE

I've been called a lot of things in my life baby, but never an angel.

They both laugh.

ANNIE

If there's anything I can do for you, please let me know.

LOTTIE

You know there is something you can do. Excuse me I'll be right back.

Annie sits on the porch looking at her two daughters laughing and enjoying each other.

Lottie returns with her camera and the wildflowers.

LOTTIE

This reunion is better than anything that ever happened in Pine Valley. I want some pictures. Claire, Lilly come over and stand next to your Momma.

Lottie hands the wildflowers to Claire.

LOTTIE

Perfect. This is one picture I'll never forget.

Annie, Lilly and Claire ham it up. They cross their eyes, making funny faces and Lottie snaps the picture.

The MAIL CARRIER (60's a Susan Lucci look alike) walks up with the mail.

CLAIRE

Can you please take a picture for us?

MAIL CARRIER

Of course!

Lottie jumps into frame. They all hug each other tightly and she snaps the picture.

CLAIRE
We're family.

LOTTIE
Yes, I'm their African Aunt. Don't
we look alike?

The mail carrier laughs.

MAIL CARRIER
I do see a similar beauty!

The mail carrier walks off and they continue to talk. Lottie promises to send them copies of the pictures.

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - ONE YEAR LATER

Lottie sits on the porch singing and drinking lemonade. The mailman walks up and hands her the mail.

MAILMAN
Good morning, Lottie. How are
things?

LOTTIE
Just great! My grandkids are at
school and I'm enjoying the peace
and quiet.

MAILMAN
Here you go. Enjoy your day.

He hands her the mail and drops one of the letters.

MAILMAN
Sorry about that. Here you go.

Lottie takes the letter.

LOTTIE
If it's another bill could you
please take it back? If it's
publishers clearing house, I'm
keeping it. It's my year to win!

The mailman cracks up. He always appreciates Lottie's humor.

Lottie looks at the name and return address on the envelope.

She tears it open and pulls the letter out.

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Claire is thriving. Her bedroom looks like a typical teenage room. It's covered with posters on the walls and clothes are thrown on the bed. She listens to Aretha while she writes the letter.

CLAIRE

Dear Auntie Lottie, It's time for a soap opera update. Lilly and I are making our mark in Pine Valley. Just kidding! I love Hamilton. I'm teaching her everything I know about being a teenager, which isn't much and we are driving momma wild! I'm having a lot of fun hanging out with my friends, listening to music and talking about guys. This past year I've worked really hard on *reeding and ryting*. (kiddingly) I hope you can tell!

EXT. LOTTIE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Lottie reads the letter out loud.

LOTTIE

I met this really great boy. His name is Norman.

Lottie reacts.

LOTTIE

Norman? What kind of name is that? That was the cow's name in "CITY SLICKERS."

She continues reading.

LOTTIE

He's a college student, loves music, and also thinks I'm pretty great! I've sure fooled him, right? I joined the track team at my school, and I'm on student council. I've had to be tutored, and take many extra classes, because I was so far behind. Guess what? I actually like reading now. I didn't even know I was smart, till I started doing so good in school. Momma put me in therapy and I think it's helping.

Lilly and I do homework together,
so we're really supporting each
other. I can't believe how blonde
her hair is, and how dark mine is.

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Claire finishes writing the letter to Lottie.

CLAIRE

Momma opened another flower shop,
called, "The Fair Lilly." We spend
a lot of time talking and making up
for lost time. She took Lilly and I
to see our Dad. He quit drinking
this past year, and wrote a new
country song. It's actually
streaming and it's called "Rearview
Memories" by John Taylor and Tend
the Heart. It felt kind of weird
for all of us to be together, but
it's a beginning. There's no more
secrets, lies, or abuse. I've
learned a great lesson. I can't
forget the past, but I can forgive
it. I no longer live in fear of,
"the calm before a storm." I just
live. Love, Claire.

Lottie wipes a few tears from her face.

She looks for John Taylor's song on her cell, and finds it.

LOTTIE

Well, if this isn't something.

She hits play.

"Rearview Memories, By John Taylor and Tend the Heart play.
(©S.L.Peterson)

REARVIEW MEMORIES

In this season of my life, after
all these traveled years. Did I pay
too big a price, for fame, and
lights, and mirrors.
I thought that I had time, for love
to find its way. But missed my ride
or die, and signs along the way.

CHORUS: Forever and tomorrow, my
heart will skip a beat.

You own the space inside of me, no matter who I meet. I wish for you the very best, as sad as it may be. To live my life alone, with rearview memories.

I'm sorry that I hurt you. Can't take my choices back. You truly were a gift, the kind that surely lasts. Deep inside my soulful yearning, for a time that's gone away. I can't help myself but wonder, what would have made you stay.

CHORUS: Forever and tomorrow, my heart will skip a beat. You own the space inside of me, no matter who I meet. I wish for you the very best, as sad as it may be. To live my life alone, with rearview memories.

In the comfort of your eyes, I knew that I was safe. There never was a doubt, I'd lose your sweet embrace. The thing I took for granted, was that you'd always care. Even though I broke your loving heart, I trusted you'd be there.

CHORUS: Forever and tomorrow, my heart will skip a beat. You own the space inside of me, no matter who I meet. I wish for you the very best, as sad as it may be. To live my life alone, with rearview memories.

Regret it has no future, it keeps you on my mind. Maybe the price for losing you, is love I'll never find. I heard a song the other day, it made me think of you. And the look upon your face, when you told me we were through.

CHORUS: Forever and tomorrow, my heart will skip a beat. You own the space inside of me, no matter who I meet. I wish for you the very best, as sad as it may be. To live my life alone, with rearview memories.

I wish for you the very best, as
sad as it may be. To live my life
alone, with rearview memories.

Lottie turns her cell phone off.

As she stands up she drops the envelope, and beautiful dried
wildflowers, fall from it.

LOTTIE

That's right, baby ...You no longer
live in fear of, the *calm before a*
storm. You just live, girl. You
just live.