

SHADES OF DEFIANCE

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - DAY

We hear the NARRATIONS of a British soccer game.

Hanging throughout the room are wooden crucifixes, decorative signs with inspirational biblical quotes, rosaries, and an oil painting of "THE LAST SUPPER".

Above the nonexistent flame of a brick fireplace, sits a crowded mantle filled with knickknacks, and antique Ansonia Clocks. Smack dab in the center is a framed certificate "HONORARY FOSTER PARENTS OF THE YEAR".

Three kids sit on couches, and stare at a TV.

DOMINIC, 17, African American, and queer as a three dollar bill. He's dressed normally, but his mannerisms scream feminine. LYDIA, 8, an all American beauty. DEREK 11, Mediterranean with olive skin, and freckles.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - SAME

We see DAPHNE VOTILARO, 39, clean cut, modest, and fit as a fiddle. She dumps a teaspoon of olive oil into a mixing bowl, grabs a whisk, and stirs.

Next to an open box of store bought cake mix is a stack of egg shells, and dirty measuring cups.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Moving down a long, dark, and narrow hall we see five doors. Two at the front of the hall (one on each side), two at the end of the hall (one on each side), and one (bathroom) in the middle.

The last door on the left swings open, and out emerges IRIS FISCHER, 17, unconventional beauty, pale, and Gothic. She's intimidating. A tough girl with a sour attitude.

She speedily marches down the hallway, popping bubbles with her chewing gum.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris darts past the kitchen doorway, but not before Daphne catches sight of her out of the corner of her eye.

DAPHNE
Be back by eight!

EXT. SHOPPING COMPLEX SIDEWALK - LATER

Iris, and TWO TEENAGE GIRLS casually walk, and smoke fags.

HOLLAND, 17, semi attractive, and dressed in provocative attire. REYNA, 17, punk with an athletic build, and poorly dyed maroon highlights.

HOLLAND
No, but they caught him on video.

REYNA
Who the fuck jerks off inside of a McDonald's bathroom?

HOLLAND
Uncontrollably horny people.

REYNA
Yeah, but what turns you on inside of a McDonalds?

IRIS
Isn't that the real question.

HOLLAND
I don't know, but if you hand me a free order of salted fries, and a cookie dough McFlurry... shit I might get a little hot, and bothered myself. Ain't even going to lie.

REYNA
(giggles)
What the...?

IRIS
You've got a real problem if food has that kind of an effect on you.

Laughter.

INT. RUNDOWN CONVENIENT/ LIQUOR STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Our trio walks down a candy/cosmetic aisle.

REYNA

My Aunt Barb's got this log cabin in West Brooke. I mean its got rats, and shit, but I'm sure we can splurge for a can of Raid.

HOLLAND

I'm not fuckin' sleeping in your aunt's shack. The place doesn't even have running water, and it's mandatory that I have my daily shower.

REYNA

You're pretty picky for someone with zero connections.

HOLLAND

Listen, we can go, but if I start to smell like cottage cheese two days in, it ain't my problem.

REYNA

You're nasty.

HOLLAND

I try my best, and by the way, Raid doesn't kill rats.

REYNA

Yes, it so does.

HOLLAND

No, it definitely doesn't.

REYNA

You're retarded. That's what it's for.

HOLLAND

Iris, does Raid kill them?

IRIS

No, only insects.

HOLLAND

See what I mean?

Reyna leans against an unstable shelf of nail polish, and watches the CASHIER, a Muslim male in his mid fifties. He's too preoccupied playing on his cellphone to notice the sketchy teens.

REYNA

Oh, now that Iris agrees with you
it's fuckin' law?

HOLLAND

I'd take her word over yours.

REYNA

And why is that?

Iris, and Holland begin to discretely stuff their jacket pockets with various makeup products, and candies. This seems to be routine.

HOLLAND

You're really going to ask me why?

REYNA

Yeah.

HOLLAND

For starters, you're an idiot. Last week you asked me if Turkey, the country, was spelled the same as the fuckin' meat.

REYNA

That's a valid question.

IRIS

What about the time when you rode your brother's Iron Man tricycle down route twelve because you said it was less embarrassing than riding the county bus?

HOLLAND

I have an idea. Let's have a bonfire, and burn that tricycle to ash. Symbolically put a fuckin' end to that memory.

REYNA

Oh, blow me.

HOLLAND

No thanks, but I'll take a rain check.

Reyna gives Holland the finger.

Iris, and Holland zip up their jacket pockets. Their short lived, pathetic robbery has come to an end.

REYNA
You get my Swedish Fish?

HOLLAND
Yeah, don't worry. We got your
pussy candy.

REYNA
(hands up, defensively)
That's all I ask.

One by one they make their way back up the aisle. Jokingly shoving, and nudging each other like close friends do.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Iris quietly slides through the front door, and is immediately greeted by SOFT WHISPERS, and GIGGLES.

Oddly enough, no one is in sight, and the only source of light is a dim flicker coming from the kitchen.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The entire family is huddled close together. An arrangement of finger foods, and sodas are neatly set on the counter. The center piece is a carrot cake. One massive candle in the shape of the number seventeen is lit.

They SING HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

Iris registers completely blank.

For the first time we see LEO VOTILARO, 40, mildly handsome, broad shoulders, and strong Italian features. He's still dressed in his suit, and tie after a long, hard day at work.

DEREK
Happy birthday, Iris.

LEO
Happy birthday, honey.

DAPHNE
Come over, and blow out your
candle!

Iris walks forward, licks her fingers, places them around the wick, and puts out the flame. Voicing no explanation for her actions, Iris then turns, and heads for the doorway.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Wait, wait!

Daphne rushes after her.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Iris speed walks. Daphne follows closely behind.

DAPHNE

(sympathetic)

Iris, come back. What's wrong?

IRIS

Maybe I'm not a fan of carrot cake.

Iris opens her bedroom door, and shuts it in Daphne's face.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room contains only the essential furnishings. No personal touches whatsoever. White walls, white pillow cases, and white sheets.

Four duffle bags lay in a corner. Clothes spill out of them, and onto the floor. It looks like Iris has just moved in or at least never fully unpacked.

Iris sits on her window bench, and smokes a cigarette.

CLOSE ON her face. She's deep in thought.

SANDRA (V.O.)

It's quite ironic really.

INT. SANDRA'S CAR - DAY - FLASHBACK

SANDRA, a middle aged social worker, drives down Draper Street.

Iris sits in the passenger seat. We only see her left profile as she stares out the rolled down window.

SANDRA

There are some antiquated stone cottages from the Civil War era, but, on the other hand, there are multiple modern properties in the midst of construction as we speak. It's a very diverse community.

(beat)

(MORE)

SANDRA (CONT'D)

I mean there are a lot of trailers too, but nothing we can't look past.

Sandra tries her best to talk up the new neighborhood. It's not working.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

Fun Fact! There are active train tracks just a walking distance away. Headed up to the Big Apple, I suppose. Probably carrying something along the lines of coal or lumber, but don't hold me to that.

Iris isn't listening.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

There's a local park, too. Not that you'll benefit from it much. It's mainly for toddlers, but I did some research, and a lot of teenagers from these parts go swimming in the creek down Prairie's Corner. Now, I did hear that there used to be a bit of a leech problem back in the day, but I'm sure it's safe by now. You can skip some rocks, mingle... the possibilities are endless.

(beat)

There's even a shopping complex a few miles out. Kohls, and Pacsun are the big hot spots there. One hundred percent affordable. You'll love it.

(beat)

I'm sure you'll like this place better than the last.

Iris turns her head away from the window, revealing a tennis ball sized bruise above her right eyebrow, and an unhealed gash on the bottom right corner of her lip. She's listening.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

I mean really... what's not to like?

EXT. LOCAL PARK - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Little children run around the playground. Some sway upside down on the monkey bars, while others play an innocent game of tag.

Lydia rides up, and down on the teeter-totter.

Every piece of playground equipment is being occupied except for a rusty swing set. It's isolated a few yards away next to a rarely used port-a-potty.

Daphne, and TWO OTHER MOTHERS sit at a picnic table. This is the popular place to catch up on the hot, new local gossip.

JOY, 42, messy bun, and oversized overalls. She's the definition of a frumpy stay at home mom. KIM, 38, takes better care of herself, but is sorely overdressed for a day at the park.

They're in the middle of a conversation.

KIM

So, it looks like I'm waving
goodbye to my trip to Cabo.

JOY

Oh, Lord.

DAPHNE

He didn't get the bonus, did he?

KIM

Nope. They handed it to some newbie
fresh out of grad school. Twenty-
three years of loyalty to that
company, and they screw him over.
It's ridiculous.

JOY

You know what it is?

KIM

What?

JOY

It's a political thing.

KIM

What do you mean?

JOY

You always tell us that Jack's boss
is a democrat.

KIM

And?

JOY

Well, this generation's college graduates are all liberals. Every single one of them. The gay rights movement, the abortion business, the health care plans, everything. Jack's boss was probably bias, and kicked him out of the running.

KIM

Maybe... or maybe Jack's just balding, and this college kid has youth on his side, which certainly makes it easier to sell lighting fixtures.

Playful SCREAMS come from the playground.

KIM (CONT'D)

Dear God, look at these kids. It's like someone spiked their sippy cups with Red Bull.

Laughter.

JOY

They're just hyper because it's the beginning of summer break. They'll only last like this for another week, tops. Then they'll crash from boredom. Happens with mine every year.

KIM

I wish I could say the same. Trent, and Blake have me running in circles day in, and day out. Last night I had to guzzle three glasses of Chardonnay, and a Prozac just to get some sleep.

JOY

That's unhealthy Kim.

KIM

Don't worry. I'm well aware.

JOY

I mean mixing alcohol, and drugs is toxic. Just toxic.

KIM

You're right. You're right.

(beat)

(MORE)

KIM (CONT'D)

Well, God only knows how you do it
Daphne.

Daphne doesn't reply. She stares off at the playground,
completely zoned out from the conversation. Something
troubling is on her mind.

JOY

Daphne?

Nothing.

KIM

Daphne?

Kim pokes Daphne in the arm.

DAPHNE

Oh...

(coughs to clear her
throat)

I'm sorry. I just had a moment
there.

Uncomfortably laughs.

JOY

Oh, it's okay.

KIM

We were beginning to worry about
you for a second.

DAPHNE

Sorry.

KIM

I was just saying that God only
knows how you're able to handle
that household of yours.

DAPHNE

It's not without difficulty.

JOY

So, how are those kids? Are they...
good?

Daphne ponders the question.

DAPHNE

Yeah, yeah for the most part.

INT. DUNCAN'S DINER - EVENING

This place is family owned, and rarely vacuumed. The food looks less than appetizing, and the STAFF MEMBERS who serve it are overweight.

Iris, and Dominic enter. They're regulars.

IRIS

Aye Pablo!

She nods at PABLO, 45, a Latino worker behind the counter.

PABLO

Hey!

He nods back.

DOMINIC

You know, if we would have come yesterday I would have picked up the tab, but you missed your chance.

IRIS

What's that supposed to mean?

DOMINIC

It means I only have forty-eight cents, and a bottle cap in my wallet, and it's no longer your birthday. That's what it means.

IRIS

Fine, fine I'll pay. Christ.

DOMINIC

Thanks boo, you're a life saver.

IRIS

Don't call me boo.

They sit down in a booth.

DOMINIC

Actually, I'm trying to save up for this used motorcycle I want.

IRIS

I hope so because forty-eight cents isn't getting you any closer.

DOMINIC

Hey, I'm staying positive.

IRIS
Good for you.

DOMINIC
Thanks, but you should see this
baby. I found it on Craigslist.

IRIS
(sarcastic)
Did you?

DOMINIC
It's got a new paint job, chrome
handle bars, and the owner just
replaced the tires with Dunlop
Signature ones. They're almost a
hundred each.

IRIS
That's pretty cheap for tires.

DOMINIC
It's impressive to me.

IRIS
How much is the bike all together?

DOMINIC
Like... eleven grand.

Iris laughs.

IRIS
Have fun pick pocketing for that
cash.

DOMINIC
I'm not going to steal the money.

IRIS
Whatever you say.
(beat)
You know what I want?

DOMINIC
What?

IRIS
A Halloween mask.

DOMINIC
What the hell are you going to do
with a Halloween mask in the middle
of June?

IRIS

I figure we could take a ride down to the rich part of town, and fuck up some private school kids.

DOMINIC

I'd pay to see that.

IRIS

We could egg some houses, toilet paper some lawns, knock down some mail boxes. Make a night of it.

DOMINIC

No, let's wait till mischief night.

IRIS

Why? It's like, half a year away, and they'll all be expecting it.

DOMINIC

Exactly. I'm a gay, black, foster kid. I don't need to give the cops any more of a reason to shoot.

Their laughter catches the attention of nearby tables.

BOY 1 (O.S.)

Faggot!

Iris turns, and scans the room.

Two tables away sit FOUR TRASHY TEENAGERS. Two boys, and two girls. They're on a double date, and possibly a wee bit drunk. They wickedly cackle, and although they don't make eye contact with Iris, she knows they're the culprits.

DOMINIC

Just ignore them.

Iris bites her tongue, trying to keep her cool.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

It's not a big deal. I'm used to it by now.

IRIS

Well, I'm not.

A beat.

DOMINIC

What are you going to order?

IRIS

Not sure. I usually get that three dollar Sloppy Joe, but I'm not feeling it today.

DOMINIC

How many calories are in that thing?

IRIS

What are you, a fuckin' dietitian?

DOMINIC

No, it's just anything with that much brown sauce can't be nutritious.

IRIS

Yeah, it really gets in the way of my P90X ab workouts.

DOMINIC

Good one.

IRIS

What are you going to order?

DOMINIC

Like a turkey burger or--

BOY 2 (O.S.)

Faggot!

IRIS

Are you kidding me?

DOMINIC

Calm down.

BOY 1 (O.S.)

Faggot!

BOY 2 (O.S.)

Faggot!

And with that, Iris springs up out of the booth, and makes a mad dash for the table of anonymous bullies.

They see her approaching, and erupt into obnoxious laughter.

IRIS

Is there a problem?

She's not intimidated.

BOY 2
What? Who is this chick?

GIRL 1
(sarcastic)
Nice outfit.

IRIS
I'm going to ask again. Is there a problem?

BOY 2
(sarcastic)
Not that I know of?

IRIS
Really? Nothing you want to mull over? Maybe a problem you have with my friend over there.

BOY 1
Oh shit!

BOY 2
We're caught.

GIRL 2
Doesn't your fuckin' curfew end soon or something? Won't you get whipped in the ass with a wooden spoon if you're late?

IRIS
What?

GIRL 1
She's trying to say that you, and the cock sucker over there should head on back to the orphanage where you belong. Faggots aren't welcome.

IRIS
You think your homophobic beliefs offend me? Do I look like the type that's raddled easily?

GIRL 1
(smirks)
Maybe.

IRIS
You're right.

Within a split second, Iris grabs a glass off the table, and SMASHES it over Girl 1's head.

She then drags Girl 1 out of the booth by her greasy hair, and pops her square in the nose with two solid blows. With so much power behind her punches, it's easy to tell that this isn't her first fight.

The two duel it out on the filthy floor. These girls don't scratch, slap or push like wimps; they hit hard.

Girl 1's nose breaks out into a nasty river of blood. It looks like Iris is winning.

Before too long, Girl 2 jumps into the mix for back up. She heaves her fist at Iris. It blind sides her, knocking her into a momentary blur. Girl 2 takes full advantage of Iris's brief daze, and pins her down.

CUSTOMERS, and staff members start to form a circle around the tussling girls.

Boy 1, and Boy 2 remain seated in the booth laughing, and filming the entire brawl on their camera phones.

Iris is now overrun, outnumbered, bloody, and helpless. The two girls show no mercy. She's being beaten to a pulp.

Dominic intervenes, and attempts to break up the fight. He doesn't do a very good job.

INT. COUNTY JAIL HALLWAY - NIGHT

High heels CLICK against a tile floor.

Rising up the body we see that it's Daphne. She speed walks down the hallway, clutching her purse like a stress ball.

INT. COUNTY JAIL FRONT DESK - MOMENTS LATER

A POLICEWOMAN, bored out of her gourd, looks up from a computer screen.

DAPHNE

Hello.

POLICEWOMAN

What can I do for you?

DAPHNE

I'm Daphne Votilaro. I'm here to pick up Iris Fischer.

INT. COUNTY JAIL IRIS'S CELL - MOMENTS LATER

We're looking down at a steel bed from overhead:

Iris's lays flat on her back with her hands folded across her mid section like a mummy. A dark shadow covers a good portion of her body. She WHISTLES A TUNE to pass time.

A physically fit POLICEMAN opens the cell door.

POLICEMAN

Come on out.

Still WHISTLING, Iris slowly rises off the bed, and walks towards the open door.

As she moves into the light, we can clearly make out her battle scars. There are multiple untreated cuts. Some still crusted with hardened blood. Swollen bruises cover her cheeks, and neck.

IRIS

(meaningless)

Thanks.

INT. COUNTY JAIL CELL BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

The policeman escorts Iris down the cell block.

INT. VOTILARO CAR - LATER

Daphne is driving, and parenting at the same time.

DAPHNE

I mean look at your face Iris. Was it really worth it?

Daphne takes a deep, calming breath.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

I understand that you love Dominic, and I'm proud of the fact that you wanted to defend him, but in life you are going to have disagreements with people, and violence is not the way to go about solving your problems.

A beat.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
I mean really... how did you think
it was even the slightest bit okay
to smash a glass over another
girl's head?

Iris stares at the dashboard.

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
Could you please say something?

Iris says nothing.

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
I do a lot for you, and all I ask
is that you talk to me.

In an effort to dismiss the conversation, Iris reaches
forward, turns on the radio, and CRANKS UP THE VOLUME.

Daphne is emotionally drained at this point. She endures the
music.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - LATER

Iris creeps down the hallway on her tip toes, trying her best
not to wake anyone up.

Just inches away from her room...

 DOMINIC (O.S.)
 (whispers)
Iris?

Dominic's bedroom door is ajar.

INT. DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris's shadow hovers half way inside the room, half way out.

 IRIS
What?

Dominic lies half asleep in his bed.

 DOMINIC
Looks like you made bail.

 IRIS
Looks like I did.

A beat.

DOMINIC
Thanks for taking a beating on my
behalf, you dumb ass.

IRIS
(smiling)
Good night.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

A young male PITCHER, dressed in a pin striped uniform, pitches a curve ball to the BATTER. With one stroke of his bat, the ball goes soaring. The batter sprints for first base.

The ball hits the field wall, bounces off the grass, and into the mitt of an OUTFIELDER. The outfielder heaves the ball to the SECOND BASEMAN, but it's too late. The batter slides safely into second.

UMPIRE (O.S.)
SAFE!

A mixture of CHEERS, and SIGHS come from the team dugouts.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD BLEACHERS - SAME

Some male fans lean on the field fence, and spit the discharge from their chewing tobacco out onto the grass. Other fans linger in the first few rows of the bleachers, holding foam fingers, and glittery posters.

Iris, Holland, and Reyna sit at the top of the bleachers in pure isolation. They have a panoramic view of the field.

Holland, and Reyna pass a silver flask back, and forth. They're buzzed off of cheap liquor.

REYNA
Do either of their faces look like
yours?

IRIS
I like to think so.

HOLLAND
Yeah, well I watched the video on
Youtube, and it kind of looked like
you got your ass handed to you.

IRIS
Can't argue there.

REYNA
(jokingly)
I thought it was pretty fuckin'
even.

Laughter.

HOLLAND
On the bright side, it hit three
thousand views already.

IRIS
My claim to fame.

CHANTING from the field.

HOLLAND
Yes, Tommy!

Holland thrusts her fist high into the air.

REYNA
Hit those balls, boys!

They chuckle at the immature banter.

IRIS
(to Holland)
Your brother's got a nice follow
through.

REYNA
Yeah, it's pretty smooth. I got to
give it to him.

HOLLAND
Of course he does. That athletic
shit runs in the family. I told you
my great-grandfather was a third
basemen for the Pirates.

IRIS
Yeah, and my long lost twin brother
wore jersey number twenty-eight for
the Wizards.

Laughter.

HOLLAND
All right, smart ass.

Extends flask to Iris.

HOLLAND (CONT'D)

Sip?

IRIS

I'm good.

HOLLAND

Suit yourself.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - SAME

Daphne stands in front of a wall phone. Holding a dead stare, and scratching her chin, she contemplates making a call.

After a beat she grabs the receiver, and dials.

DAPHNE

(into phone)

Hello Sandra, it's Daphne.

(nods her head)

Uh-huh, nice to hear from you, too.

I know this is out of the blue, but

I was just wondering if there was

anyway I could get a therapist for

one of my kids.

She twiddles with the phone cord, impatience rising.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Iris... Iris Fischer.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD CONCESSION STAND - SAME

Our three trouble makers arrive at the stand to buy snacks.

A moldy sign in the shape of a sword dangles above the window "HOME OF THE BUCCANEERS".

A WORKER stands behind a cash register, waiting to take their order.

REYNA

AY BARB!

Reyna leans over the counter, and yells inside to one of the EMPLOYEES named BARB, a toothless old woman.

BARB

WHAT?

REYNA
We get a student discount?

BARB
Nice try!

REYNA
(whispers)
Fuckin' stingy around here.

IRIS
(to worker)
I'll have a cherry cola.

HOLLAND
Hit me up with one of those
blueberry ring pops.

REYNA
I'll have the nachos. Extra cheese.
(to Barb)
And I mean extra, Barb! You better
fill up that ladle!

BARB
Cry me a river.

WORKER
Ten even.

Reyna hands over a twenty.

HOLLAND
Christ, prices are steep these
days.

IRIS
It is a recession.

The girls grab their goodies, and walk off.

REYNA
You really got a ring pop?

HOLLAND
Uh... yeah? This is my childhood in
a candy.

Holland presents the slobber covered ring.

REYNA
Whatever, just don't fuck with me
next time I want my Swedish Fish.
That's all I'm saying.

Iris laughs.

EXT. VOTILARO HOUSE - EVENING

Holland's car, a dented, raspberry red Honda Accord, pulls into the driveway.

Iris hops out of the passenger seat door, releasing a thick, foggy cloud of smoke. She COUGHS violently as Holland tosses a lit blunt out the window onto the dry grass.

REYNA
Peace out, bitch!

HOLLAND
Later.

IRIS
Bye.

Holland blows Iris a kiss, and drives off.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

From a distance, we spot Daphne, and Leo standing at the sink. From their twisted facial expressions, it's easy to tell that they're arguing. Nothing too heated, but there is an unknown disagreement. Their voices are too low for us to make out words. All we hear are SHARP WHISPERS.

Iris has been standing at the threshold watching them for a while now. Leo finally notices her. He backs away from his wife, a little embarrassed.

LEO
Hey, how was the game?

IRIS
Okay.

LEO
Good. That's good.

Daphne, and Leo exchange looks.

DAPHNE
We need to talk.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Daphne, and Leo sit on one couch, Iris on another.

DAPHNE

We know that you've only been here for ten months, and we get that you're going to need more time to warm up to us, but--

LEO

What we have seen so far... the aggression, the violence, the profane language... is all a bit unnerving. The way you ignore us, and constantly disrespect authority is not okay.

DAPHNE

We're worried about you, and--

IRIS

Can you cut to the point?

An anticipating beat.

DAPHNE

You're going to see a therapist two times a week from now on.

Iris is in shell shock, wide eyed.

LEO

You obviously don't feel comfortable opening up to us, so we figure therapy could be a good thing for you.

IRIS

This is bull shit.

LEO

Stop cussing.

IRIS

No, you know what? It's my turn to talk.

Pent up anger can be heard in her deepening voice.

IRIS (CONT'D)

I put up with the fact that you two are the typical bible thumping Christian couple who worship a bearded man in the clouds. I put up with your clean cut American family image.

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

I put up with the Sunday sermons,
the nutritious meal plans, the
abstinence packs. I put up with the
censored TV channels, and how I
have to type in a seven digit pass
code every time I want to watch
something other than Nickelodeon. I
put up with your choir chart, and
the cuss jar, and the no snacks
past midnight policy...

Dominic appears out of the front hallway, and elongates his neck into the living room just enough to listen, but not enough to be noticed.

IRIS (CONT'D)

But you've got another thing coming
if you think I'm going to visit
some shrink.

She stands up.

IRIS (CONT'D)

How about you leave me the fuck
alone until I'm eighteen. Then you
can kick my ass out onto the
street, and you'll never have to
talk to me again.

DAPHNE

Sweetie, that's not what we want.

IRIS

(walking away)

I don't give a fuck about what you
want.

Iris zooms past Dominic, and disappears down the front hallway.

Dominic makes awkward eye contact with Daphne, and Leo. He doesn't know whether to comfort them or leave them alone.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Iris sits crisscrossed on the floor, tossing a bouncy ball at the wall. PING, PING, PING. A three second rhythm.

INT. DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - SAME

Dominic lies on his side in bed, reading a Nicholas Sparks romance novel. His focus is frequently being interrupted by Iris's game of catch.

DOMINIC
Do you wanna stop?

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

Iris holds the ball.

IRIS
What's up your ass?

INT. DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - SAME

Dominic ignores her, and continues to read.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

Iris stands up, and drops the ball.

INT. DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris enters uninvited.

IRIS
What's wrong?

DOMINIC
Take a guess.

Totally baffled, yet concerned, Iris just stares.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)
You were rude.

IRIS
To whom exactly?

DOMINIC
Who do you think?
(beat)
They're good people, and the best foster parents I've ever had by a long shot. You didn't have to be so blunt.

IRIS
I was being too blunt?

DOMINIC
Yeah. You said some offensive shit.

IRIS
Go buy them a box of Kleenex if you're so concerned.

DAPHNE
You should apologize, Iris.

IRIS
And you should stop reading shit from Oprah's book club. You're really starting to show your sexuality.

DOMINIC
Fuck you.

He tosses his book aside, gets up, shoos her out of the room, and shuts the door in her face.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Iris throws her head back, and SIGHS, immediately regretting what she has said.

IRIS
Dominic, I'm sorry.

INT. VOTILARO BATHROOM - DAY

OUTSIDE OF SHOWER

The shower runs, and steam seeps over the foggy glass door. We can make out a body inside.

INSIDE OF SHOWER

The water beats down on Iris's back. A lit cigarette betwixt her fingers. The stress of last night's argument haunts her conscience.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Daphne, dressed nicer than usual, walks to the bathroom door, and KNOCKS THREE TIMES.

DAPHNE
Iris?

 IRIS (O.S.)
What?

 DAPHNE
How much longer will you be?

 IRIS (O.S.)
I don't know. A while.

 DAPHNE
Well, you need to hurry up. There's
someone out here waiting to speak
with you.

INT. VOTILARO BATHROOM - SAME

INSIDE SHOWER

Iris rolls her eyes.

 IRIS
Okay.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Daphne leans closer to the door, and SNIFFS.

 DAPHNE
Are you smoking?

INT. VOTILARO BATHROOM - SAME

INSIDE SHOWER

Iris takes a drag.

 IRIS
How can I smoke when I'm in the
shower?

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Daphne's confused, but has no answer.

 DAPHNE
Never mind... just be out soon.

INT. VOTILARO BATHROOM - SAME

INSIDE SHOWER

Iris smirks, and continues to smoke in spite.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Now fully clothed, Iris casually trots into the room expecting to find nothing out of the ordinary. She freezes. An anxious look registers.

Daphne, Lydia, and Sandra sit side by side on the couch. Connect Four is set up on the coffee table. They don't initially notice Iris. They're too caught up the elementary level game.

IRIS
(re: Sandra)
What is she doing here?

They finally recognize Iris's presence.

DAPHNE
Hey? That was fast.

IRIS
What is she doing here?

DAPHNE
She wants to talk to you.

Sandra stands up.

IRIS
(defensively)
About what?

SANDRA
Iris... let's go for a walk.

EXT. DRAPER STREET SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Sandra, and Iris walk.

SANDRA
How have things been?

IRIS
Just peachy.

SANDRA
Are you getting along with
everybody?

IRIS
For the most part.

A beat.

SANDRA
So, I heard from a little birdie
that you're refusing to attend
therapy. Is that true?

Iris shrugs.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Would you like to tell me why
you're so opposed to the idea?

IRIS
It's just not my thing.

SANDRA
It's not your thing?

IRIS
(loaded with attitude)
Yep.

A beat.

SANDRA
Here's the problem, Iris. You have
a lengthy history of rebellious
behavior. Now that you have been
arrested, the courts, your foster
parents, and I think it's necessary
for you to get some help before you
turn eighteen, and enter the work
force.

IRIS
And if I refuse?

SANDRA
It wasn't a choice. You're lucky
you're not a legal adult. You would
have been facing jail time for
aggravated assault.

INT. VOTILARO DINING ROOM - EVENING

The entire family is gathered around an elegantly set dining room table. It's whole grain pasta night, and everybody is diving into their dishes except Iris. She plays with her fork, and pokes holes in her glazed asparagus.

LYDIA

The news man said an earthquake's coming tonight.

DEREK

It's a weatherman, and no he didn't.

LYDIA

Yes he did, Derek.

DEREK

You can't predict earthquakes, stupid. They just happen.

LEO

Don't call her stupid, Derek.

DEREK

We don't even get them around here.

LYDIA

Why not?

LEO

We do get them here. It's just rare. It's much more common on the West Coast.

LYDIA

But, why?

DEREK

Oh my gosh Lydia, would you stop badgering everyone with your questions?

DAPHNE

Derek, leave her alone.

DEREK

Sorry.

Leo wipes his mouth with a napkin.

LEO

Okay, everyone listen up.

(beat)

Dominic has an announcement to make.

Dominic finishes chewing his bite of food.

DOMINIC

Yeah uh... since my eighteenth birthday is next week, I have recently been looking around for a job.

LYDIA

Why would you get a job?

DAPHNE

Let him finish, honey.

DOMINIC

Anyway, I applied for a job at the auto shop downtown a few months ago. They finally called me earlier today, and told me that I got the position.

DEREK

Congratulations, bro.

LYDIA

Yeah! Good job!

DEREK

You've got to be the first gay guy to ever land a job there.

DOMINIC

Uh... thanks?

(giggles)

I'm also going to be renting an apartment near my work, so I'll be moving out on Sunday.

Iris stares down at her plate.

LYDIA

You're moving out... like forever?

DOMINIC

Yep.

DEREK

You just graduated high school. You don't have to leave already.

LEO

Dominic has talked to Daphne, and I in private, and this is what he wants. He's going to legally be an adult soon, and we can no longer tell him what he can, and can't do.

DOMINIC

Yeah, but I'll miss you guys, and you can come visit whenever you want.

LYDIA

You'll let us visit?

DOMINIC

Of course. You're my family.

IRIS

How can you afford it?

This is the first time Iris has spoken all night. All eyes turn to her.

DOMINIC

Afford what?

IRIS

The apartment... how can you afford it? The last time we went out you told me that you only had forty-eight cents, and a bottle cap in your wallet.

LEO

We're going to pay his rent for the first few months just until he gets on his feet.

IRIS

Couldn't he just stay here, and save up until he has enough money to rent the place on his own? Wouldn't that make more sense?

DOMINIC

Iris, it's a thirty-five minutes commute from here to the auto shop. I'd rather just move out.

A little defeated, Iris looks back down at her plate.

IRIS

Okay.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Iris sits on her window bench, smoking a cigarette. The moonlight bounces off of her pale complexion. Her dark eyes stare straight at us.

In the b.g we see the door crack open. Iris doesn't turn around to see who's there, she knows it's Dominic.

DOMINIC

Iris?

IRIS

(staring out the window)

Yeah?

DOMINIC

You all right?

IRIS

Why wouldn't I be all right?

DOMINIC

I don't know, but you only smoke late at night when something's wrong.

Iris lowers the cigarette away from her mouth in shame.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

You know you can come, and visit me whenever. It's not that far away.

IRIS

Why would I visit you?

DOMINIC

(baffled)

What do you mean?

IRIS

You're entering the real world, while I suffer through the rest of summer. You'll make new friends, while I'll keep the same ones. You'll have freedom, while I'll have rules. You'll move on, and I won't.

DOMINIC
What are you saying?

IRIS
I'm saying that even blood
relatives drift apart. Don't act
like we're going to stay in touch.

DOMINIC
I'm not acting like anything. I'm
not moving to Switzerland, Iris. I
think you're just--

IRIS
Dominic, I don't fuckin' want to
stay in touch!

Dominic is caught off guard by her hateful words.

DOMINIC
You know, despite it all... you're
still the greatest friend that I've
ever had. I just need you to know
that...
(thinking)
I guess... I guess that's all. Good
night.

Iris's eyes spark a glimmer of guilt as she watches him leave
out of the corner of her eye.

INT. VOTILARO FAMILY CAR - DAY

Daphne drives Iris to her first therapy session.

DAPHNE
She's supposed to be top notch. One
of the best in the district. I read
her biography online, and it said
that she graduated seventh in her
class at Cornell.

Iris looks unimpressed.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
Now, if that's not impressive then
I don't know what is.

Daphne pulls over, and parks next to a curb.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
Here we are.

Iris's POV: Through the window we see a beautiful Victorian house: Chocolate brown with white trim, stained glass windows, a perfectly manicured landscape, and a steel mailbox with the name "PALMER" painted down the side.

IRIS
Can I drive next time?

DAPHNE
Yeah, I just wanted to walk you in
for your first session.

Daphne opens her door.

IRIS
Whoa, whoa... you don't have to.

DAPHNE
Why not?

IRIS
Because I'm not an infant. I can
make it across the street without
you holding my hand.

Iris quickly exits the car. Daphne watches her go.

EXT. PALMER FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Iris ascends the steps, and walks onto the porch.

The front door is propped open by a large stone with the initials "A.P" engraved on the side. The only thing separating Iris from the inside is a thin screen door.

She RINGS the doorbell.

AVA (O.S.)
(echoing)
Come on inside!

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - SAME

A hand lifts a pitcher of lemonade from a silver tray, and pours the lemonade into two crystal glasses. With miniature tongs, the hand then plops a few ice cubes into each glass.

INT. PALMER HOUSE FOYER - SAME

CLOSE ON Iris's face. Eyes wander aimlessly, in awe of her surroundings.

IRIS
(to self)
Great... she's loaded.

Looking at this room is like looking at a breathtaking centerfold in Life & Style magazine. Old fashion Victorian furniture, abstract artwork, circular gold mirrors, and a monstrous chandelier.

AVA (O.S.)
I'm in here.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris walks into the room, and freezes at the sight of...

AVA PALMER, 63, an extremely attractive older woman, bleach blonde locks, a slim physique, poised posture, and dressed to the nines in designer apparel. She places a glass of lemonade at each end of the dining room table.

AVA
You must be Iris Fischer.

Smitten by her therapist's beauty, Iris is speechless.

AVA (CONT'D)
Hello, I'm Ava Palmer your new shrink for all intents, and purposes. I've heard a lot about you. It's nice to finally put a face to the name.

Ava walks closer to Iris, and extends her hand.

IRIS
Hmm.

Ignoring the hand shake, Iris purposefully brushes up against Ava's shoulder, crosses over to the dining room table, and plops down in the nearest seat as if she owns the joint.

Ava's hand drops to her side. She doesn't seem to be fazed by Iris's lack of manners.

CLOSE ON Iris's finger tip circling around the rim of her glass.

AVA
It's freshly squeezed lemonade. I made it this afternoon. Help yourself to more if you'd like. I made plenty.

Tucked away in the corner of the room is a polished black grand piano. The silver tray is set on top.

Ava crosses over to the dining room table, and sits down in the seat across from Iris.

AVA (CONT'D)

Before we begin, I would like to give you the mandatory speech about how everything you say here is confidential, and will not be shared with anyone unless you are causing direct harm to yourself or others. Is that clear?

Iris doesn't respond.

AVA (CONT'D)

Do you have any questions regarding my background or qualifications?

Iris doesn't respond.

AVA (CONT'D)

Taking that as a no... why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself. Your hobbies, talents, favorite musicians, aspirations, anything.

Iris doesn't respond.

AVA (CONT'D)

Are you a woman of few words or does the silence serve a purpose?

IRIS

I see you're into name brands.

AVA

(taken aback)

Yes, yes I am.

Iris licks her lips almost seductively.

IRIS

From your accessories alone I can tell that you make some real bank off of these little sessions.

AVA

Can you?

IRIS

Yeah.

(examining her up, and
down)

A pair of your red bottomed
Louboutin's are approximately a
thousand give or take. That heart
tag Tiffany bracelet around your
wrist is almost three hundred crisp
George Washington's, but that's
only if it's authentic of course.

AVA

You really know your stuff.

IRIS

I know a lot about how people waste
their money on overpriced
materialistic bull shit. Plus I
have a gay foster brother so...

AVA

I see.

IRIS

You're not wearing a wedding ring.

AVA

Good observation.

IRIS

Thanks.

(looking around the room)
I don't see any family photos.

AVA

Neither do I.

IRIS

You were a private school kid,
weren't you?

AVA

Actually--

IRIS

You're college educated, right?

AVA

That's right.

IRIS

Cornel, too... isn't that Ivy
League?

AVA
That would be correct.

IRIS
Interesting.

Ava takes a large gulp of her lemonade.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Your skin's wrinkle free.

AVA
Yes, it is.

IRIS
(smirks)
I guess that's just good genes,
right?

Ava isn't offended by any of this, but instead thoroughly entertained.

AVA
I see what you're trying to do
here.

IRIS
And what is that?

AVA
You're trying to figure me out.

IRIS
Trying? I already have.

AVA
Oh really? How?

IRIS
You're an open book.

AVA
Well, by all means, proceed. The
floor is yours.

CLOSE ON Ava's half empty glass of lemonade.

IRIS
How about a refill first?

Iris jumps out of her chair, and snatches Ava's glass.

Ava doesn't say a word or move a muscle. It's as if she were expecting this kind of spastic behavior.

Iris refills Ava's glass with one hand, and with the other she reaches into her back pocket, and pulls out a cigarette. She sets the pitcher down, places the unlit cigarette between her lips, and walks the drink back over to its rightful owner.

IRIS (CONT'D)

You know what...

Iris lights the cigarette, and takes a long drag. She tries to look slick, and cocky. It's working.

IRIS (CONT'D)

I bet back in high school you were the holy grail. The platinum blonde trust fund baby with a nice rack, and petite body. All the boys flocked over you like hungry seagulls. Probably even tugged their four inchers under the shower head thinking about you braless. If you played any sports, it was probably... what? Cheerleading? Am I close? Go, go, fight, fight oh my God my hair's not right! You defiantly never drank a cold one or smoked a joint. Too corrupt for you to handle, but maybe you went to one party. Just one banger, and you met a boy. A fucking heartthrob. Probably some meat head jock with a full ride to Rochester for football. He told you your skin was silky smooth, and that you were his one, and only forever, and ever, and you believed him because women are oblivious. Now, since men lead with sexual instinct, this guy probably lured you into the back of his Chevy Pickup, swiped your v card, bailed, and broke your itty-bitty heart. Later you end up crying in your room listening to Carol King. Maybe you needed some answers. Maybe you wanted some closure. Maybe that breakup is what kick started your passion for therapy. Now, after that whole fiasco, you're a self proclaimed feminist who doesn't need a man, and all you focus on is bringing up that GPA. Gotta go to college to gain a little knowledge, am I right?

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

A few months pass, and your grades skyrocket. Fuckin' shoot up to the top of your class. Now, you're valedictorian material, and every college is sending you pamphlets, and informational packets about tour dates. Years pass, and you become a full blown career woman who's got cash spilling out of her ass. You buy a condo in Prague, and a beach house in Belize. But wait... fifteen years go by, and you start to realize that you're not loving the cold, vacant space next to your pillow at night. You need some testosterone, a man. I mean how far can a vibrator go anyway? Sadly you're over the hill, not getting any prettier, and all you have to work with is a receding hairline, and forehead wrinkles, but you figure "hey I still got it" so, you head downtown to the local clubs. Maybe the bouncers let you in, maybe they laugh, and send you on your way to the Grant's Street Elderly Home to finish crocheting with the other cast members of the Golden Girls, but let's say for argument's sake they do let you past the red ropes. You sit in the bar, sip on your Cosmos, and stalk your prey. Soon enough you come to realize the only men your age are either leaning back in a recliner with a beer belly, watching seven o'clock Jeopardy reruns or they're rolling around in dough with some twenty-three year old blonde bimbo sucking on them like a mosquito. And none of those guys are going to leave their wives or sluts for a financially stable doctor who hasn't had the cobwebs cleaned out of her crotch in a decade. They've either lost their game entirely or are perfectly happy humping the young, tight college whores. So, you're shit out of luck.

(laughs)

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

So, now you're older, years have flown by, and you've come to terms with the fact that you're alone and the only company you have are lilac scented fabric softeners, Persian doilies, collagen infused lips, and four hours of General Hospital on DVR. I mean I'm probably the highlight of your entire fuckin' year.

Ava breaks out into a hysterical laughter, WHEEZING for air as she struggles to catch her breath.

AVA

(rising from chair)

Oh you're going to be fun. You're going to be really, really fun.

Iris is puzzled by her reaction.

AVA (CONT'D)

I have to take a bathroom break. While I'm gone... why don't you step down from your imaginary soap box.

Ava exits the room, laughing all the while.

INT. DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dominic flips through a middle school yearbook as Daphne folds clothes, and lays them in piles on the bed.

The closets, drawers, and dressers have been emptied. Cardboard boxes line the walls.

DAPHNE

Just remind me to wash the rest of the clothes in the hamper tomorrow.

DOMINIC

What's left?

DAPHNE

Just some boxers, and a few pairs of socks.

DOMINIC

Okay.

DAPHNE

And you have that gas card we gave you, right? Has two hundred on it.

DOMINIC

Yeah, it's in my wallet.

DAPHNE

Speaking of gas, is your tank full?

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Iris leans against the wall outside the room, eavesdropping.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD BLEACHERS - DAY

The sun is high, and the baseball game is in full swing.

Iris, Reyna, and Holland sit in their usual spot on the bleachers.

REYNA

So... is she like, actually helping you?

IRIS

Uh-huh. All my internal wounds have magically fuckin' healed.

REYNA

Smart ass.

HOLLAND

Hey, maybe I need a therapist. I have daddy problems, too.

REYNA

We all have daddy problems.

IRIS

Go get one. They only cost two hundred an hour.

REYNA

Two hundred?

IRIS

At least.

HOLLAND

Shit, it looks like I just found my new college major.

Laughter.

HOLLAND (CONT'D)

Oh, I almost forgot! Dax invited us to his party.

REYNA

When is it?

HOLLAND

Not till the end of the month.

IRIS

Dax the construction worker?

HOLLAND

Yeah.

IRIS

Isn't he thirty?

HOLLAND

Age is but a number, baby.

REYNA

I'm not sure if I can go.

IRIS

Why?

REYNA

Johnny's comin' down at the end of the month.

HOLLAND

Fuckin' Christ, Reyna, don't mention Johnny boy again.

REYNA

What's wrong with Johnny?

IRIS

He's your second cousin.

REYNA

Yeah, but he's considered, like a... a distant relative.

IRIS

Oh my God.

HOLLAND

Reyna, you're fuckin' disgusting. That's inbreeding.

(MORE)

HOLLAND (CONT'D)
 You'll have a kid with Cerebral
 Palsy or something.

REYNA
 I'm not trying to marry him!

HOLLAND
 But you want to!

REYNA
 Whatever. Have you seen his back
 muscles?

IRIS
 No.

HOLLAND
 No?

REYNA
 Well, until you do... shut the fuck
 up.

Laughter.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - LATER

Iris sits at the dining room table in silence for a beat. A
 manila folder slides across the table into frame. It comes to
 a stop just centimeters away from falling off the edge.

AVA (O.S.)
 Open it.

The folder opens, revealing a sheet of paper. "CRIMINAL
 HISTORY REPORT" in bold letters at the top. Underneath "NAME:
 AVA BRIE PALMER".

Iris looks up.

AVA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Why don't you read the underlined
 section out loud.

Iris looks down.

IRIS
 (from paper)
 May 65' misdemeanor for reckless
 driving. December 65' petty theft,
 and public intoxication. August 66'
 misdemeanor for disorderly conduct,
 trespassing, and reckless driving.
 (MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)
January 67' vandalism, failure to
appear in court, and--

AVA (O.S.)
That's enough.

A beat.

AVA (CONT'D)
When I was sixteen, I was shipped
off to a juvenile hall for fourteen
months. While I was there, I also
attended a rehab center for drug
addicted minors. Years later when I
turned twenty-one, I had my record
expunged, and soon after that, I
started attending Anne Arundel
Community College until I had
enough credits to transfer to
Cornell. That's where I received my
degree in behavioral therapy.

IRIS
How did you get this if it was
expunged?

AVA
I went searching online. Low, and
behold there it was. Nothing ever
truly disappears when it comes to
the law. It's simply hidden from
plain sight.

Iris closes the folder.

AVA (CONT'D)
I'm not finished. Take another look
inside.

Iris reopens the folder.

Pushing aside the criminal history report, we find that a
Polaroid photo was hidden underneath. It's a wedding picture
of a young bride, and groom. Both undeniably attractive--
flips over to the back-- A date is written in cursive
"OCTOBER 13, 1976".

AVA (CONT'D)
It took place inside of a quaint
Presbyterian church. The flowers
were burgundy hydrangeas, very
tasteful. There was an eight
layered red velvet cake with cream
cheese frosting.
(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

My gown was pure lace with pearls embroidered on the bodice. The photo doesn't do it justice.

Iris's usual smug attitude has vanished.

AVA (CONT'D)

We were married close to forty years.

IRIS

What happened to him?

AVA

He passed away about a year ago.

IRIS

How?

AVA

(nonchalant)

A noose. Well, I would hardly call it that. He used a leather belt I bought him from Sax Fifth Avenue. I suppose he made use of what he had on hand.

IRIS

He... committed suicide?

AVA

Yes, yes he did. In the basement's laundry room to be specific. To this day I can't wash my linens in peace.

IRIS

I'm so sorry.

AVA

Don't be. He had a bipolar disorder, some social problems, too. I was always working. He was always alone. One day the demons were playing tag around his moral compass, and I lost him.

(beat)

I was always attracted to the basket cases. I guess that was the reasoning behind my interest in therapy.

Ava places her elbows on the table, and leans forward as if she's ready to share a secret.

AVA (CONT'D)

Little life lesson kid, never judge someone. I may seem established, and clean cut now, but appearances have nothing to do with one's past. I mean hell... we may have more in common than you think.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Iris's POV: Through a window we watch Dominic say farewell to his family. All family members present, aside from Iris. It's a bitter sweet sight. Tears are shed, and hugs are exchanged. His car is packed, and loaded with the engine running.

Iris abruptly closes the drapes. She's unable to watch the rest of his departure.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

A bouncy ball rolls out of Iris's room, across the hall, and into Dominic's.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

Iris's POV: We look into Dominic's room which is now vacant. The bouncy ball sits alone in the middle of the carpeted floor.

Cigarette in hand, Iris lies across her window bench. She looks tired, but unable to fall asleep. She misses Dominic.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lydia, and Derek play a game of Connect Four on the coffee table. Bowls of Fruit Loops rest in their laps. As always, they are BICKERING.

Iris enters in her pajamas. Her hair, and makeup a mess. She has just woken up, and it shows.

DEREK

You just wake up?

IRIS

Yep.

DEREK

It's one o'clock.

IRIS
It's summer.

Derek picks up the TV's remote control.

DEREK
Can you ask Daphne where the
batteries for the remote are?

IRIS
You can.

DEREK
PLEASE, Iris! If I get up Lydia is
going to cheat.

LYDIA
No I won't!

DEREK
Please!

IRIS
Whatever. Where is she?

DEREK
In the dining room.

IRIS
(to self)
The dining room?

INT. VOTILARO BACK HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

We follow behind Iris as she leads us down the back hallway to the dining room door. MUFFLED VOICES can be heard from inside.

CLOSE ON her hand turning the doorknob clockwise.

INT. VOTILARO DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris opens the door.

IRIS
Hey Daph--

Iris's POV: Daphne, Leo, and Sandra are seated around the dining room table. They stop talking mid sentence, and look up. Stacks of documents, pens, and glasses of water surround them. The space has been transformed into a messy office.

IRIS (CONT'D)
What's going on?

Daphne removes her reading glasses.

DAPHNE
Hey... uh... nothing really. Just
some business we have to take care
of.

Iris isn't buying her response, but doesn't care enough to
question further.

IRIS
Where are the batteries for the TV
remote?

DAPHNE
The junk drawer in the kitchen.
They're in the purple bag.

A beat.

IRIS
Cool.

She turns, and darts for the door.

LEO
(after her)
Shut the door on your way out.

Filled with suspicion, Iris stares at them for a beat before
exiting the room, and slowly shutting the door behind her.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON a woman's hand writing on paper in cursive. Heading:
"SESSION THREE".

Iris makes CLACKING noises by smacking her tongue against the
roof of her mouth, and sucking. CLACK, CLACK, CLACK.

After a beat, Iris grabs a pack of cigarettes from her back
pocket.

AVA
(staring at notepad)
No more smoking.

Ava closes her notepad, and pushes it aside.

IRIS
You're kidding?

AVA
Afraid not.

Iris places the pack of cigarettes back into her pocket.

AVA (CONT'D)
When did you begin to smoke?

IRIS
Middle school.

AVA
Why did you start?

IRIS
I was stressed.

AVA
About what exactly?

IRIS
I don't remember.

They stare at one another, both trying to read the others body language.

AVA
You know, I used to smoke.

IRIS
You did?

AVA
Yeah, big time.

IRIS
Why did you start?

AVA
As a child, Rebel Without a Cause was my favorite flick. I was just dying to be the female version of James Dean. So, by the time I hit puberty, I was already an avid chain smoker.

IRIS
Didn't everyone from your generation smoke? Didn't the doctors prescribe it or some shit?

AVA

No, that was before my time. I knew cigarettes were detrimental to my body. I just didn't know how unhealthy they really were until later in life.

IRIS

You trying to tell me I should quit?

AVA

I'm not trying to tell you. I am.

IRIS

Well, what the hell stopped your addiction?

AVA

An assortment of things.

IRIS

Was it because you found out that every cigarette you smoke takes approximately six minutes off of your life?

AVA

Something like that.

IRIS

Maybe you didn't want those six minutes.

AVA

What do you mean?

IRIS

Those six minutes could have been filled with regret, pain, sorrow, heartbreak. Maybe you did yourself a favor.

AVA

As twisted as that sounds, maybe those six minutes are taken away from making love with your spouse or Christmas morning with the grand kids. We can always assume. Stop trying to justify your mistakes.

A long beat.

AVA (CONT'D)

Daphne, and I spoke over the phone not too long ago. She told me that your foster brother moved out recently.

IRIS

Yeah. He got a job downtown.

AVA

I heard you two are close.

IRIS

Yeah, we were.

AVA

Were?

IRIS

Were, as in used to be.

AVA

Why aren't you any longer?

Iris shrugs carelessly.

AVA (CONT'D)

Use your words, please.

IRIS

(aggravated)

I don't know.

AVA

Daphne also mentioned that you weren't particularly nice to him once you found out that he was moving out. Would you like to explain that to me?

Iris looks away.

AVA (CONT'D)

Listen, if you say nothing, you learn nothing, and if you learn nothing, then what the hell is the point of showing up?

IRIS

I don't have anything to say.

AVA

If I had to guess... I would say that you have a compulsive need for consistency.

IRIS

What?

AVA

All your life you have been a candle in the wind, drifting from place to place never fully recognizing any address as your own... until now. Now you've finally found a home that you've grown an attachment to, but there's just one problem.

(beat)

You've been living there for a little under a year, right?

IRIS

Yeah?

AVA

And this is the longest you've ever stayed in a single home, correct?

IRIS

Yeah?

AVA

For the first time since you've moved in... there has been a change. A shift in the atmosphere. A piece missing from the puzzle. A scratch in the record. Call it whatever you want. When your foster brother left, instead of confronting this change with open arms, you swept it under the rug because it's your defense mechanism. You were afraid he would forget about you once he flew the coop, so you severed the friendship then, and there.

IRIS

My defense mechanism?

AVA

Yes. You push people away before they have a chance to disappoint you. You're not a rare case.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

People of all age groups submit to this tactic. Infants to elders, and everything in between.

(beat)

From the looks of it, I bet you've been doing this for a good portion of your life. Probably so long, you don't even realize you're doing it anymore.

INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

It's Pepto-Bismol pink, and about the size of a walk in closet. Barely enough room to squeeze in a twin size bed. Daphne, and Lydia sit in a tight space on the floor, playing with doll babies.

DAPHNE

Want her to wear this?

Daphne holds up a plaid sundress fit for the doll.

LYDIA

No, I don't like those colors.

Daphne picks up another dress.

DAPHNE

This one?

LYDIA

I want to go to the park.

DAPHNE

Are you hungry? Do you want me to make you a grilled cheese sandwich?

LYDIA

Can we go to the park now?

DAPHNE

You haven't eaten all day. Are you sure you're not--

LYDIA

(jumping up, and down)
PARK! PARK! PARK!

Iris passes by the bedroom doorway.

DAPHNE

Oh, Iris! Iris, can you come here?

Iris enters.

IRIS
What?

DAPHNE
Could you take Lydia to the park? I
still have some cleaning to do
before Leo gets home.

IRIS
Seriously?

DAPHNE
Please.

LYDIA
Please! Please! Please!

IRIS
Whatever. Fine.

LYDIA
Yay!

Lydia army-crawls over to the closet, grabs her shoes, and
begins untying the knotted laces.

Daphne mouths the words "Thank you".

Iris flashes her a fake smile.

EXT. DRAPER STREET SIDEWALK - LATER

Lydia skips joyfully, trying her best to avoid the cracks in
the concrete.

LYDIA
Don't step on the crack.
You'll break your mother's back.
You'll break your mother's back.

Iris lags a ways behind.

IRIS
Slow down.

Lydia stops, and waits for Iris to catch up.

LYDIA
Sorry.

Iris lights a cigarette.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Is that a cigarette?

IRIS
No, it's a magical wand for grown
ups.

LYDIA
No, it's not.

IRIS
Yes, it is.

LYDIA
What does it do?

IRIS
It gives you the power of
relaxation and weight loss.

LYDIA
That's no fun.

IRIS
Don't try one then.

EXT. LOCAL PARK - MOMENTS LATER

The two walk through the entrance gates.

The park is more populated than usual. Kids run about all
over the place, and the amount of mothers at the picnic table
have noticeably tripled. Some familiar faces, some new.

Lydia sprints towards the teeter-totters.

Iris sits down on a nearby bench, smoking her fag as she
watches over Lydia.

JOY
(re: Iris)
Look at her.

CAROL
Who would let their child leave the
house looking like that. It's
sacrilegious.

CAROL, mid forties.

MONICA
(sarcastic)
She's smoking, too. What a
surprise.

MONICA, early thirties.

KIM
Trailer park trash at its best.

JOY
No wonder her real parents got rid
of her.

Laughter.

Iris sees that the woman are looking, and laughing her way.
She recognizes the signs of gossip, and returns their stare.

INT. VOTILARO DINING ROOM - EVENING

It's another daily, nutritious family meal. Only this time
there's a stiffness in the air. Only the sounds of silverware
CLINKING against china.

After a beat...

DAPHNE
Leo, and I have something to tell
you all.

IRIS
Did someone die?

DAPHNE
No, no one died.

Daphne takes a deep breath, smiles.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
We are going to be adding a new
member to our family.

LYDIA
What?

LEO
His name is Samuel Groff. He's six
years old, and he's from Crafton.

DEREK
How long is he staying?

LEO
As long as he needs to.

LYDIA
When is he coming?

DAPHNE
In two days.

DEREK
Two days?

DAPHNE
I know it's short notice, but this
boy needs a new home, and who are
we to turn him away?

LEO
Especially now that we have a spare
room again. It just seems perfect.

DEREK
Cool. I could use another dude
around the house to play Xbox Live.

Daphne, and Leo shoot each other a concerned look.

LEO
Samuel is different.

DEREK
We're all different.

LEO
Although that is true, I'm speaking
medically.

LYDIA
What's wrong with him?

DAPHNE
He has Asperger's.

DEREK
What's that?

LEO
It's a mild form of autism.

DAPHNE
It's extremely mild. It's more of
a... a social problem.
(MORE)

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

He has trouble reading body language, and verbally communicating with other kids his age.

LEO

He's very well behaved. You wouldn't even notice anything was wrong with him.

LYDIA

You met him?

LEO

We did a few weeks back.

IRIS

Why tell us?

LEO

Why tell you what?

IRIS

If his Asperger's isn't noticeable, why tell us?

DAPHNE

We thought you deserved to know.

LEO

Especially since he'll be staying in the room across from yours.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - DAY

Ava, and Iris in session.

AVA

Anything interesting happen over the past few days?

IRIS

Not really.

AVA

Go anywhere? See anyone?

IRIS

I took Lydia to a park. It's like, a three minute walk from the house, but that's about all I did.

AVA
That was sweet of you.

IRIS
Call me a saint.

AVA
I wouldn't take it that far.

Iris breaks down, and give her a half smile.

IRIS
Actually there was this group of about... six or seven Betty Crocker housewives at the park. Middle aged, of course. Premenopausal probably. The worst kind.

AVA
Know any of them?

IRIS
I've seen a few around town, but they're mostly just Daphne's friends.

AVA
Are they nice?

IRIS
On the contrary, they were making fun of me.

AVA
Really?

IRIS
Uh-huh.

AVA
How do you know that?

IRIS
They were laughing at me.

AVA
They could have been laughing at something else.

IRIS
I could literally feel their judgment from half a mile away. At this point in my life, I'm pretty good at calling that shit out.

AVA

I wouldn't think too much by it, kid. Those women probably have little to no excitement in their daily lives so, to build self esteem, they'll pounce at any given chance to make fun of an abnormality.

IRIS

What, and I'm the abnormality?

AVA

I mean look at the way you dress.

IRIS

You have a problem with the way I dress?

AVA

No. Not at all. It's your anatomy. Cover it with whatever garments, and fabrics you desire. Personally, I think it's rather refreshing.

IRIS

You do?

AVA

Yes. I mean it certainly fits in with the whole nonconformist thing you have going on.

IRIS

Holy shit, you just complimented me.

AVA

I never said I liked the way you dress. I said it was refreshing. You still look like a grave robber.

They both laugh.

IRIS

Thanks for clarifying.

A beat.

AVA

If you don't mind me asking, why do you dress so dark?

IRIS

I'm not homicidal, I'm not
depressed, I'm not satanic. I'm a
realist. The world's no cake walk,
people aren't inherently good, and
neither am I. Why ignore the facts?
I dress the way most people feel
inside.

EXT. VOTILARO HOUSE - EVENING

Daphne, and Leo stand at the end of the driveway. Anxiously,
they stare at the deserted road in front of them. No cars
come from either direction.

DAPHNE

They should have been here twenty
minutes ago.

She checks her watch.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

It's thirty after. They should have
been here thirty minutes ago.

LEO

It's rush hour. Stop worrying so
much.

DAPHNE

That's impossible for me to do.

LEO

(amused)
I know it is.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - SAME

Derek holds the drapes open, and stares out the window.

Lydia stands on her tip toes, breathing down his neck. She
too, is trying to sneak a peek outside.

Iris lies on the couch with a pillow over her face. She could
care less about what's going on around her.

LYDIA

Move! I can't see.

She jumps up, and down impatiently.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Is he here yet?

DEREK
Chill out, short stack.

EXT. VOTILARO HOUSE - SAME

A silver Mini Cooper pulls into the driveway, and parks.

DAPHNE
Finally.

Sandra emerges out of the driver's seat door. She wipes her neck with a tissue. The non air-conditioned car, plus the summer humidity is causing her to sweat bullets.

SANDRA
Hey guys! Long time no see.

LEO
Nice to see you, Sandra.

SANDRA
How have you guys been?

LEO
Oh, just fine.

DAPHNE
We're more than fine. We're great.
How are you?

SANDRA
Aside from this unbearable
humidity, I'm fantastic. Thanks for
asking. By the way, sorry we're
late.

DAPHNE
(lying)
Oh, we didn't even notice.

SANDRA
The traffic on route twelve was
unbearable.

Leo shoots Daphne an "I told you so" look.

Sandra opens the backseat door.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
(to Samuel)
Come on out.

Light up Sketchers land firmly on the pavement.

SAMUEL, 6, scrawny with emerald green eyes, chunky cheeks, and a baby face to die for. He carries a small stuffed alligator, and nibbles on the tops of his knuckles. He refuses to make eye contact with his new guardians.

Sandra gently pushes him forward, and shuts the car door behind him.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Can you look up, Samuel?

He looks up.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
You met Daphne, and Leo a little while back. Do you remember?

Daphne walks up to him, and kneels down to his eye level.

DAPHNE
Hey Samuel.
(smiles warmly)
Do you want to come inside, and meet everyone?

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - SAME

Derek at window.

DEREK
They're coming. They're coming.
Move!

Derek, and Lydia scurry away from the window like sewer rats.

Daphne, Leo, and Samuel walk through the front door. Shortly followed by Sandra.

SANDRA
Samuel, take your fingers out of your mouth.

Samuel lowers his hand.

DAPHNE
Everyone, this is Samuel. Samuel, this is everyone.

Derek immediately approaches him.

DEREK
Hey, Samuel, I'm Derek. The second
man of the house. Nice to meet you.

Derek shakes Samuel's hand roughly, jolting his pencil thin
body around like a cooked noodle.

DAPHNE
Not so rough.

LEO
Great introduction, Derek.

DEREK
Thanks.
(hand on Samuel's
shoulder)
Welcome to the family.

Lydia comes forward.

DAPHNE
This is Lydia.
(to Lydia)
Say hi, honey.

LYDIA
Hi. I like your shoes.

Samuel blushes.

LEO
Lydia is only two years older than
you, Samuel. You both should get
along great.

DAPHNE
That's right.

After procrastinating her introduction, Iris finally gets up
from her comfy spot on the sofa.

IRIS
I'm Iris.

Samuel, and Iris shake hands.

SAMUEL
(softly)
Hi.

SANDRA

Leo, would you mind giving me a hand with the luggage?

LEO

Of course.

They exit.

DAPHNE

Okay, I'm going to show Samuel around the rest of the house. You guys can resume with whatever it was you were doing. Just be ready for dinner by seven. I don't want to have to remind you all.

LYDIA

Yes, ma'am.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Bye, Samuel!

Daphne takes Samuel by the hand. They disappear down the front hallway.

Iris smacks Derek on the back of the head.

DEREK

Hey!?

IRIS

Second man of the house? You don't even have pubic hair yet.

DEREK

Yes I do.

Iris lays back down on the couch.

IRIS

No you don't.

DEREK

Yes I do!

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's well into the night, and as usual Iris's night owl tendencies keep her wide awake. She sits on the floor, tossing a bouncy ball against the wall to a three second rhythm. PING, PING, PING.

A sort of WHIMPERING can be heard over the PINGS. She holds the ball, and attentively listens.

INT. SAMUEL/DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Samuel is curled up in the fetal position with his back facing the door. He's tucked underneath a Spider Man blanket, snuggling his stuffed alligator, crying.

Iris enters, and sits down on the edge of the bed. Samuel doesn't react to her presence.

IRIS

Samuel?

Iris tugs on the blanket, grabbing a hold of his attention.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Hey.

He looks up at her with puffy eyes in search of some kind of help.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Are you--

Without warning, he sits up, wraps his paper thin arms around her waist, and cries louder than ever before.

At first Iris doesn't know how to react to this. She holds her arms above her head, and stares.

Soon enough, she understands the kind of pain that he's going through. Trying to calm him down, she rubs his back.

IRIS (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - DAY

Daphne talks on the wall phone.

DAPHNE

(into phone)

You know how to balance a check book, don't you?

(wide eyed)

Just making sure.

Iris walks into the kitchen, leans on the fridge, and stares at Daphne.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
In the stove? Already? Honey,
that's not good. Call an
exterminator before those things
lay eggs or whatever it is that
they do.

Iris FAKE COUGHS.

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
Okay, just use UPS. They're
cheaper. Don't forget to call me
Tuesday.
 (smiles)
Love you too. Bye, bye.

Daphne hangs up the phone.

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
Good morning.

 IRIS
Who was that?

 DAPHNE
That was Dominic. He's still
settling into the apartment. He
called because he had a few
questions, and what not.

A beat.

 IRIS
Can I ask you something?

 DAPHNE
Sure.

 IRIS
What happened to Samuel? You never
really gave us his background.

 DAPHNE
Why the curiosity?

 IRIS
Does it matter?

Daphne moves to the sink, runs the water, and begins rinsing
off dirty dishes.

DAPHNE

He was the result of an unplanned pregnancy. His parents weren't fit to be parents to say the least. They were local drug lords who rarely took proper care of him. Even left him home alone for weeks at a time to fend for himself.

IRIS

Where are his parents now?

DAPHNE

Incarcerated. They have a trial coming up in September.

(shaking her head)

People like that shouldn't be allowed to have children.

IRIS

A lot of people shouldn't be allowed to have children.

Daphne looks up at Iris, but Iris just stares at the floor.

DAPHNE

Don't tell Derek or Lydia about any of this, okay? They don't need to know.

IRIS

I wasn't planning on it.

A beat.

DAPHNE

Why don't you take Samuel to the park. Try to bond with him. I'm sure he'd have a ball. You can take Lydia, too.

Iris mulls over the proposal.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

(off her look)

It would be good for him. Remember when you first moved in?

EXT. LOCAL PARK - LATER

Samuel stands near the entrance, staring straight at us, mesmerized, but subtly horrified by what he sees.

Iris stands behind him in the b.g, head tilted, hands on hips, and eyes squinted in a questionable confusion.

IRIS
Go on, go play.

He doesn't move.

IRIS (CONT'D)
You going to stand there forever?

Samuel finally conjures up enough courage to take baby steps towards the playground. Iris watches him go, but quickly loses interest, and looks away.

Iris's POV: The picnic table. No recognizable mothers.

Iris sits down at the nearby bench. Her eyes wander for a beat, until something catches her attention...

Iris's POV: Samuel's bum is planted on one of the rubber swing seats. He kicks his chicken legs back, and forth, pushing himself. He's isolated away from all the other children, and something tells us that's what he wants.

Iris laughs to herself.

EXT. PALMER FRONT PORCH - EVENING

Iris ascends the steps, but before she has a chance to reach the porch, Ava opens the front door.

AVA
We're going out.

IRIS
Where?

Ava shuts the front door behind her, and descends the steps, walking right past Iris.

AVA
You'll see.

INT. CAFE SADO DINING AREA - LATER

A high end sushi restaurant. Although the interior design is impeccable, there's a snobby atmosphere.

Iris, and Ava follow a HOSTESS. Iris sticks out like a sore thumb wearing her everyday cheap, Gothic attire. She receives dirty, contemptuous looks from fellow CUSTOMERS.

This doesn't faze her. She licks her lips, and winks at them as she passes by.

HOSTESS
Here we are, ladies.

AVA
Thank you, dear.

Iris, and Ava sit down at a corner table near an indoor fountain. The sound of the TRICKLING water could put you right to sleep.

HOSTESS
The waitress will be with you momentarily.

The hostess walks off.

Ava picks up a turquoise menu.

AVA
The crab rolls are to die for.
Beluga caviar and lemon juice. How
can you go wrong with that?

Iris picks up a menu.

IRIS
Is this a split bill?

AVA
Oh, God no. It's my treat.

Iris lets out a SIGH OF RELIEF.

IRIS
So... why did you take me here?

AVA
I can only lock myself inside of
that dank dining room for so long
until I start to go a little loopy.
I thought going out for a nice bite
to eat would be a healthy change of
pace.

IRIS
This is... nice for sure.

AVA
Ever come here?

IRIS

No. I'm more of a dollar menu drive thru type. The portions are considerably larger, and the prices are considerably smaller.

AVA

I don't blame you. I think the last time I ate here was... what? 1974.

IRIS

Really?

AVA

Uh-huh. My husband, and I's first date.

(vaguely points)

These waiters weren't even born yet.

IRIS

Was it love at first sight?

AVA

No. Not at all. Not whatsoever.

Iris is taken aback by her answer.

IRIS

Why not? From the wedding photo he looked to be a dashing young lad.

AVA

He was, but there's no such thing as love at first sight, sweetheart. Don't get it confused with lust.

(beat)

Anyway, love is bound by two souls. Not two sets of eyes. There are millions of pretty faces in the world; you've got to have something to set yourself apart.

(thinking)

Plus my husband used to spit when he spoke so...

Laughter.

IRIS

Gross.

AVA

It seemed like it then, too, but those hiccups of imperfection make for the best memories.

IRIS

How?

AVA

Because embarrassment is a part of human nature. When you first start dating someone, everything's for show, but after a while the flaws start to come to the forefront, and once you can accept those... then you know it's real.

IRIS

Good to know.

AVA

Remember that one day when you find a man.

A beat.

IRIS

I've never had a boyfriend.

AVA

Why is that?

IRIS

I mean I've had offers. Very few, but I've had some. Mostly from those alternative guys who wear gages, and "I love boobies" bracelets.

AVA

What went wrong with them?

IRIS

Nothing. I just never thought it was worthwhile to pursue anything.

AVA

Why?

IRIS

Because my entire life was packed inside of a fuckin' duffle bag. I could either--

AVA
You could either form
relationships, and lose them within
the drop of a hat, or you could
seclude yourself which made your
departures painless.

IRIS
Shit. You hit the nail on the head.

AVA
Always do.

A WAITRESS approaches the table.

WAITRESS
Have you ladies decided on any
beverages?

AVA
I'll have a Rusty Nail. Two lime
wedges, please.

WAITRESS
Okay.

IRIS
Do you have cherry cola?

WAITRESS
No, I'm sorry. We don't.

IRIS
A water's fine.

WAITRESS
They'll be right out.

The waitress smiles, and walks off.

AVA
Don't worry. I'm not an
irresponsible drinker. It takes at
least three of those puppies to
really throw me off balance. I'll
be able to drive home just fine.

Iris isn't listening. She stares off in another direction.

Iris's POV: A family is seated a few tables away. A mother,
father, and young daughter.

AVA (CONT'D)
What are you thinking about right now?

Iris turns her attention back to Ava.

IRIS
Why are you being so nice to me?

AVA
Why not?

INT. SAMUEL/DOMINIC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Samuel lies in bed, holding his stuffed alligator. He's drifting off to sleep. Iris sits on the edge of the bed, reading him a bedtime story.

IRIS
(from book)
And the moon will rise when the sun goes to sleep. The kids go downstairs again, but not so fast. It's time for bed at last. The day has ended, and their teeth are brushed. Mother says bye, bye, and turns off the light. She kisses their foreheads. Good night, good night, good night.

She closes the book.

Samuel is fast asleep.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Iris walks out of Samuel's room to find Daphne standing outside the door.

DAPHNE
(awkwardly)
Hey.

IRIS
Hi?

DAPHNE
That was really sweet of you to read him a bedtime story.

IRIS
Yeah well, you didn't.

DAPHNE
I know. I was... busy.

A beat.

 DAPHNE (CONT'D)
So how are things going with the
therapist? You hardly ever talk to
me.

 IRIS
It's going.

 DAPHNE
Good, good. Yeah that's great, but
uh... you know I'm still here if
you ever need to talk.

 IRIS
I know.

 DAPHNE
Just thought I'd remind you.

 IRIS
I'm going to bed now.

Iris walks into her bedroom.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - DAY

Samuel sucks on a popsicle, while Iris ties his shoes laces.

 IRIS
Is cherry your favorite?

He nods, and smiles.

 IRIS (CONT'D)
Same. It's my favorite kind of
soda, too.

EXT. LOCAL PARK - LATER

There are more kids than ever before, and more mothers at the
picnic table than ever before. Joy, and Kim included.

Smiling heartily, Samuel abandons Iris's side, and sprints
off towards the swing set. Suddenly, he stops dead in his
tracks. His face falls into a frown.

Iris walks up behind him, and taps his shoulder.

IRIS
What's wrong?

Samuel points in front of him.

Samuel's POV: The rusty swing set is occupied by other children. Every rubber seat taken.

IRIS (CONT'D)
You want to go on the swings?
(rushing past Samuel)
Fine.

The children on the swings stop their playful antics, and look up. Iris marches towards them wearing a menacing scowl. Terrified, the children SCREAM, and run to their mothers.

Iris laughs to herself. How easy was that.

IRIS (CONT'D)
(waving to Samuel)
Come on!

Samuel's smile reappears as he sprints over, and jumps excitedly onto one of the swings. Iris starts to push him.

TRENT, 8, frantically mouths words in Kim's ear. Kim looks up at Iris, giving her the type of glare that only a protective mother could give. She rises from the picnic table, and hauls ass for the swing set.

Iris rolls her eyes, and stops pushing Samuel. She knows a confrontation is heading her way, literally.

KIM
Excuse me.

IRIS
What?

KIM
Your name?

IRIS
Satan.

Kim GASPS in disgust.

KIM
Well, young lady, I would like to inform you that you can't just waltz up to our children, and scare them away at your pleasure.
(MORE)

KIM (CONT'D)

I don't know what kind of upbringing you've had, but around here we have manners, and we don't petrify the innocent for fun.

IRIS

My upbringing?

(hocks a loogie, spits it out)

Do you want to know what else my "upbringing" has taught me?

KIM

What?

Iris walks up to Kim.

IRIS

(smirks)

To carry a blade wherever I go.

Kim is freaking out internally, but trying her best not to show it on the outside. Iris is aware of the power she has over this pampered suburban mother.

KIM

(backing away)

I'm watching you.

IRIS

Likewise.

Kim storms off as Samuel naively waves farewell.

SAMUEL

Bye.

EXT. TRAILER HOME - EVENING

Holland's Honda Accord is parked in the driveway.

INT. HOLLAND'S CAR - SAME

The inside of the car is trashed with gum wrappers, Bud Light cans, and half a wardrobe. It's a typical teenage mess.

Iris sits in the passenger seat, while Reyna lies down across the backseat.

Iris' POV: Through the front window we see Holland, and TWO GHETTO MEN conversing on the front lawn. JEROME, 27, wears a wife beater, and gold chains.

He's tattooed from the neck down, and his reputation precedes him to be a stoner who divides his time between selling dope, and sleeping around. JOHN-JOHN, 29, African American, and dressed like a gangster. He holds a large brown paper bag.

IRIS
How much is it all?

REYNA
Seventy five flat.

IRIS
That's a little steep.

REYNA
Fireball's hard to get a hold of during the summer. That shit is in high demand. Especially from all the other fuckin' white girls around here. It's the only shit they can handle without a chaser.

A beat.

IRIS
She's coming back.

Holland opens the driver seat door, and tosses the brown paper bag in the back. It hits Reyna square in the groin.

REYNA
OW!

HOLLAND
We hit the mother lode, bitches!

REYNA
Literally.

IRIS
For seventy-five, I would hope so.

Holland gets inside the car, and closes the door.

HOLLAND
We're stocked on shit for at least a month. I got four handles, and three grams.

REYNA
(singing)
Hell to the yes!

Reyna opens the bag, and peeks inside.

HOLLAND
Jerome's kind of sexy.

REYNA
The wannabe Mac Miller? Yeah... no.
I'd screw Paul Giamatti before I'd
come within spitting distance of
Jerome's dirty ass goatee.

HOLLAND
Whatever, Debbie Downer. Don't be
such a bitch just because Johnny
boy couldn't make it down.

REYNA
Leave Johnny out of it.

Reyna throws an empty chip bag at Holland. Holland deflects
it. They both laugh.

HOLLAND
He's going to be there tonight.

REYNA
Wear a rubber!

HOLLAND
Fuck off.

IRIS
Can we go? I have to piss.

HOLLAND
You just went.

IRIS
And I have to go again.

REYNA
Your bladder the size of a fuckin'
ball bearing or something?

IRIS
Guess so.

HOLLAND
There's a Texaco up the road.

IRIS
Perfect.

REYNA

I'll go in, too. I need some
smokes, and I'm craving a Slurpee
right about now.

HOLLAND

Fat ass.

REYNA

Don't worry Holland, I'll grab you
some extra large Magnum's. God
knows you'll need em' tonight.

Iris laughs.

HOLLAND

Real funny. Real fuckin' funny,
Reyna.

IRIS

I thought it was funny.

HOLLAND

See! She thinks I'm funny!

Holland starts the car.

INT. PARTY HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's one story, and as unsanitary as a pay phone in the
center of New York City. It's solely used for partying
purposes.

Mingling drunk people stumble around everywhere. This is not
a high school party. All these people are in their twenties
or thirties.

There's a glass coffee table covered with bongos, pipes, ash
trays, and lines of cocaine.

RAP MUSIC BLASTS from an amateur DJ station in the far corner
of the room.

INT. PARTY HOUSE KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Holland is getting comfortable in Jerome's arms, holding a
red cup of beer.

JEROME

You smell like vanilla.

He wipes his runny nose. Obviously high.

HOLLAND

It's this french perfume I bought
from Target.

JEROME

I fuckin' love vanilla.

HOLLAND

Do you?

They sway back, and forth from drunkenness.

JEROME

Oh, I do. I really do.

He plants one on her, while sexually rubbing her hips.
Holland enjoys the attention.

Iris stands at a distance away from the flirtatious duo. She
watches them intensely as if she knows something is bound to
go wrong.

A few other party people pile into the dusty kitchen.

John-John walks up to Iris.

JOHN-JOHN

Hey, baby.

IRIS

Don't call me that.

JOHN-JOHN

Well, what should I call you?

(beat)

You can call me John-John.

IRIS

Hello, John-John. I'm illegal.

JOHN-JOHN

Just how illegal?

IRIS

(sarcastic)

I'm twelve.

JOHN-JOHN

I can work with that.

Disturbed, Iris cringes, and scoots away from him.

INT. PARTY HOUSE BATHROOM - LATER

Reyna fixes her hair in the cracked, toothpaste stained mirror.

Iris sits on the closed toilet seat, waiting for Reyna to finish.

REYNA
Having any fun?

IRIS
(sarcastic)
Time of my life.

REYNA
You're such a drag. Be positive.
You know... maybe this will be the
night when you finally pop that
forbidden cherry of yours.

IRIS
Stop talking.

REYNA
What? You can't keep a barb wire
fence around that thing forever.

IRIS
I can lock away my virtue as long
as I please. Plus I don't feel like
conjuring up "The Clap" before I
even finish losing all of my baby
fat.

REYNA
Here's your solution. Stop going to
white trash parties, and join a
Monastery.

A beat.

IRIS
Do you know any of these people?

REYNA
Not a fuckin' soul.

IRIS
Same. I don't recognize anyone.

A beat.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Maybe we should leave.

REYNA
You can.

IRIS
That's not what I meant.

REYNA
I know what you meant, but I don't want to, and I doubt Holland will be letting go of her boy toy anytime--

IRIS
Great.

Reyna makes a kissy face in the mirror.

REYNA
You like my hair?

IRIS
Sure.

REYNA
Listen, have a drink... take a shot... flirt. It's summer time. Stop moping around like the fuckin' Grim Reaper.

IRIS
I'll do my best.

INT. PARTY HOUSE LIVING ROOM - LATER

A dance off takes place by the amateur DJ station. All eyes are on a severely intoxicated WHITE GIRL. She pops, locks, and boogies like no one is watching. Her audience is thoroughly entertained by her blatant lack of rhythm. They begin to CLAP along to the BEAT OF THE SONG in unison.

Iris leans on the wall across from the kitchen doorway.

Iris's POV: Looking into the kitchen, we see Holland, and Jerome hard-core lip locking. After a moment, Jerome reaches into his back pocket, and pulls out four small, white pills. He drops them into Holland's drink. Holland's too caught up in the kissing to even notice.

Iris on the other hand, does notice. She runs to the rescue.

INT. PARTY HOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Iris rips the cup from Holland's grasp, pries the lovers apart, and heaves the beer in Jerome's face.

JEROME

What the fuck!

Iris grabs Jerome by his wife beater, and violently shoves him up against the fridge.

HOLLAND

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

IRIS

(in Jerome's face)

I saw that, you fucking creep! What the hell is wrong with you?

JEROME

Get off me!

Holland yanks Iris's hair, pulling her off of Jerome.

HOLLAND

What the hell is your problem?

Iris rubs her tender scalp.

IRIS

I just watched this fucker slip date rape pills in your drink.

Holland looks at Jerome.

JEROME

No I didn't! She's fucking psycho! How could I? I've been making out with you for the past ten minutes.

IRIS

(sarcastic)

Nice cover up. Real convincing.

HOLLAND

You jealous bitch.

Iris's jaw drops.

IRIS

You don't believe me?

HOLLAND

Why the hell should I? You've been eyeing him the entire night.

IRIS

What? I was watching out for you because I knew from the jump this fucker would try to take advantage of you. He's like... twenty six. Do you really think he just wants to cuddle?

HOLLAND

You don't even know him.

IRIS

Neither do you!

HOLLAND

Just because he's older doesn't mean he's a pedophile, and just because you can't pick up guys doesn't give you the right to fuck up my night.

IRIS

HOLLAND, ARE YOU KIDDING ME? I'm your best friend. Why would I fuckin' accuse someone of trying to drug you if it weren't true?

HOLLAND

I don't know, and I don't give a shit, but news flash you're not my best friend.

(laughs)

You never were.

JEROME

You should go.

IRIS

FUCK OFF, CHILD MOLEST--

Holland lunges forward, and SLAMS IRIS UP AGAINST THE WALL. They both breathe heavily for a beat.

HOLLAND

GO HOME! NO ONE WANTS YOU HERE!

Holland removes her hands from Iris's shoulders, and shuffles backwards. Jerome pulls Holland close, and tucks her underneath his armpit.

They walk out the kitchen, but not before Jerome glances back over his shoulder, and shoots Iris a sadistic smirk. He knows what he just got away with.

Iris is frozen, taking in what has just happened.

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - LATER

Iris walks to the end of the driveway, stops, and looks up, and down the street. Nothing. Only a flickering street light with bugs HUMMING around its glow.

Iris takes out a cigarette, lights it, closes her eyes, and inhales a deep, long drag.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - LATER

Sitting crisscrossed on her window bench, Iris opens her eyes, and exhales a deep, long drag.

SAMUEL (O.S.)

Iris?

Practically jumping out of her skin, Iris jerks her head around to see who's there. It's Samuel. He stands in the middle of the room.

IRIS

Why are you up?

SAMUEL

I can't fall asleep.

Cigarette in mouth, Iris hops off the bench.

IRIS

You need to go to bed.

Iris takes his hand, leading him towards the door.

SAMUEL

Why doesn't anyone want me?

Iris pauses, and looks down at him like a concerned mother.

IRIS

Who told you they didn't want you?

Samuel looks away. Iris knows the answer to her own question.

She kneels down, and WHISPERS something in his ear. We can't hear what she says.

SAMUEL
Do they love me?

IRIS
Of course they do.

They pull each other close, and hug.

INT. VOTILARO KITCHEN - DAY

Iris is seated at the kitchen table, chomping down on a bowl of Corn Flakes.

Daphne enters a little out of breath.

DAPHNE
Iris, Leo won't be home tonight. He has a conference in Pittsburgh. I have to run Derek, and Lydia over to a birthday party around four so Alex, that baby-sitter we used a couple months back, will be here watching Samuel until you get back from therapy. Then you'll have to keep an eye on him for a few hours. Okay?

IRIS
Uh-huh.

DAPHNE
There's some left over rigatoni in the fridge. You can heat it up for dinner if you'd like.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - LATER

Iris slumps low in her chair with her arms crossed, CLACKING her tongue against the roof of her mouth.

AVA
I just brewed up a kettle of chamomile tea. Would you like a cup?

IRIS
No.

AVA
No, what?

Ava waits for an ounce of gratitude.

IRIS
No, thanks.

AVA
There we go.

A beat.

AVA (CONT'D)
Everything okay? You seem a tad
under the weather.

IRIS
I'm fine.

AVA
Nothing has happened recently that
you'd like to talk about?

IRIS
Nope.

Ava grabs her notepad from underneath her chair.

CLOSE ON Ava's hand writing in cursive. Heading: "SESSION
SIX".

IRIS (CONT'D)
No more writing.

AVA
Do I dare to ask why?

IRIS
I feel like a fuckin' zoo exhibit.
You're literally studying me, and
taking notes on my behavior.

AVA
I sense that I'm striking a nerve?

IRIS
Basically.

AVA
Good.

Ava continues to take notes.

AVA (CONT'D)
So, how's life in the Votilaro
house?

IRIS
It's fine.

AVA
Just fine?

IRIS
That's what I said.

AVA
How are the siblings?

IRIS
Fine.

AVA
And the parents?

IRIS
Don't know.

AVA
Don't know or you just don't want
to share?

IRIS
Don't know, and don't care.

Ava's irritability is building up quickly.

AVA
You should really learn to
appreciate your foster parents
more.

IRIS
Appreciate? Really?

AVA
Yes.

IRIS
Why? Why should I?
(beat)
Because Leo was shooting blanks?
Because they couldn't conceive kids
on their own? Because adoption was
well past their affordable price
point? Should I really be honored
that I was their third choice?

AVA

You should be appreciative because they treat you as if you were their own. You, and I both know that's hard to find anywhere in the foster care system.

IRIS

You know what they say, thirteenth house is a charm.

AVA

You're not the only one who hasn't had an ideal adolescence. Some never come across a loving home, but you have.

Iris looks away.

AVA (CONT'D)

There are people pounding on the front door begging to be let into your life, yet you deny them solely based upon prior disappointment.

IRIS

Maybe I like being alone.

AVA

Don't bullshit me. Loneliness is something someone reverts to when dealt a crappy hand. Not something chosen.

IRIS

You wanted me to be fuckin' honest. I'm being honest.

AVA

Oh, you are, are you? Well, since you're being so honest, why don't I return the favor.

IRIS

Please do.

AVA

Let me inform you that this whole mentality of "I don't give a fuck" seems idyllic at the time, but one day reality is going to hit you like a brick wall, knocking you flat on your tail bone.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

That's a promise, sweetheart, not a prediction. Keep turning your back on the ones who care the most, and eventually that pounding on the door will dwindle into a few knocks, then a single tap, then nothing... pure, ear defending silence. Everyone has a breaking point. Once they come to the harsh conclusion that there's no getting through to you, they'll drop out of your life like dead flies. And I dare you to say that you're prepared for that.

A beat.

AVA (CONT'D)

You're a smart girl. Well beyond your years. Do not stand by, and willingly allow your future to plummet into the abyss of hell just because you can't let go of the past.

(beat)

Rebellion leads you down a rocky road. I figured that out in rehab at sixteen when I was already strung out on drugs. I'm trying to enlighten you before you learn the hard way like I did. Don't be the product of your environment. You have too much to offer.

A beat.

AVA (CONT'D)

God looks all over the world in search for people who he can give his problems to. He only gives them to people who can handle them.

Iris leans forward.

IRIS

I could handle it? Is that what you're saying?

Iris stand up.

IRIS (CONT'D)

So, God allowed my biological father to choke the fuckin' shit out of me until my face turned black, and blue, and I was teetering in and out of consciousness because he "knew" I could handle it, right? And I guess God also allowed my third foster father to molest me in the shower every day for months because he "knew" I could handle that, too. Or what about the time when one of my foster mothers threw a pan of scalding, hot oil down my shirt because I forgot to clean the dishes one night. Or what about the time when I was sent to the emergency room with a broken collar bone, four cracked ribs, and a severe concussion because one of my latest foster fathers decided to take the stress of his unemployment out on me.

(shaking)

Oh yeah... I fuckin' forgot, "God" thought I could handle all of that. What a great guy! I'll make sure to thank him next time I go to church!

Iris knocks over her chair, and bolts for the door.

AVA

Where are you going? Iris come back!

Ava rushes after her.

INT. PALMER HOUSE FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Ava rounds the corner into the room.

AVA

Iris wait!

It's too late. The front door SLAMS shut. The floorboards vibrate, and the chandelier shakes.

INT. RUNDOWN CONVENIENT/ LIQUOR STORE - LATER

Iris extends a fake ID across the checkout counter. Her hand shakes so uncontrollably you would think she had Parkinson's disease.

CASHIER
Where are your friends?

Iris stares at the whiskey bottle in his hand, making it abundantly clear that she's not in the mood for small talk. He punches some numbers into the cash register.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
Forty-seven.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - EVENING

CRASH, BOOM, BANG!

Samuel stands in the middle of the hallway, staring at Iris's bedroom door.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

A lamp has been smashed into smithereens. It lies scattered in a million microscopic pieces all over the floor.

A small amount of blood drips down Iris's hand. She has accidentally cut herself while on her destructive rampage just moments ago.

Iris moves to the mirror, and stares at her reflection. Beads of sweat run down her forehead, and her eyes blink erratically. Twitching on occasion, it almost looks like she's losing control of her own body.

The bottle of whiskey sits on top of the dresser, unopened.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Samuel walks closer to Iris's bedroom door.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

Hand still shaking, Iris peels off the clear tape surrounding the cap.

Samuel cracks open the bedroom door.

SAMUEL

Iris, can we go to the park?

IRIS

Go away.

She unscrewed the cap.

SAMUEL

Please?

Iris ignores him. She's now lost in her own little world as she raises the bottle of whiskey to her lips. Her hands shake too much, and she spills the alcohol down her neck, and on her T-shirt.

IRIS

Shit.

Samuel walks further inside the room.

Iris takes a deep breath, composing herself. She, once again, raises the whiskey bottle to her lips, and sips cautiously. Her hands are steady. No spills.

Samuel is now less than five feet away from her backside, yet Iris has no idea he's still in the room.

SAMUEL

Iris can we go!

His high pitched voice startles her half to death. She bumps into the dresser, knocking the whiskey bottle out of her hand. It falls to the floor, and SHATTERS, spilling everywhere.

In the heat of the moment, she turns to Samuel.

IRIS

LEAVE ME ALONE! GO AWAY!

Terrified, Samuel sprints out the room.

Iris BANGS her fists against the top of her dresser.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Fuck.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - LATER

Iris sits on the floor besides a mini, man-made puddle of whiskey, and shards of glass.

She's completely checked out of reality, poking the open wound on her hand. Blood trickles out from between the two slices of flesh.

A SIREN WAILS from outside, snapping Iris back to reality. It gets louder, and louder as time passes.

She stands up.

INT. VOTILARO FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Iris walks out of her room, and peeks into Samuel's room.

IRIS
Samuel?

She speed walks down the hall.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Samuel?

No answer.

INT. VOTILARO LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Iris enters.

IRIS
Samuel?

The front door is wide open.

Her shoulders drop. Her heart sinks into her stomach. She runs out of the house.

EXT. VOTILARO HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Iris runs off the porch, and across the lawn.

Flashing lights flutter above a group of pine trees in the distance. The SIREN is now louder than ever.

In a panic, Iris takes off running down the street.

EXT. DRAPER STREET - CONTINUOUS

Iris's run has sped up into a full out sprint.

Dead ahead is an ambulance, three stopped vehicles, and a police car.

A group of BYSTANDERS circle around something in the middle of the road. We can't see what it is, but we do see that this all takes place directly in front of the local park's entrance gates.

Iris pushes through the crowd of bystanders, trying to get a closer view.

A couple of EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS are fast at work loading a stretcher into the back of the ambulance. There's a small body strapped to the bed. It's Samuel, motionless with his eyes closed, and a breathing mask over his mouth.

Iris runs towards the ambulance, but a COP jumps in her way.

COP
Stop it right there, kid.

Iris dodges his grasp.

IRIS
Wait, WAIT!

The back doors close, and the ambulance drives away. The SIREN WAILS again.

Iris briefly chases after.

COP
What did I just tell you?

IRIS
What happened to him?

The cop grabs her arm.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Get off me! GET OFF ME!

She rips her arm away.

COP
Calm down. Just listen to--

IRIS
Tell me what happened?

COP
A boy was hit by a car. About six or seven years old. We're not sure. He was walking alone--

IRIS

But he's... he's all right? I mean
he's okay, right?

COP

I don't know. They're taking him to
the emergency room right--

Iris doesn't even let the cop finish, before she takes off
running down the road.

COP (CONT'D)

(after her)

Hey!

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Votilaro car recklessly speeds through the lot, causing
it's tires to make a high pitch SCREECHING noise. A few
people jump out of its way as it swerves into a parking
space, and parks.

Iris hops out of the car, and runs to the entrance.

INT. HOSPITAL FRONT DESK - MOMENTS LATER

Still running, Iris reaches the counter, and rudely cuts
ahead of a few people waiting in line.

RECEPTIONIST

Can I help you?

IRIS

If I have a family member who has
just been sent in an ambulance,
where would I find them?

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATER

On one side of the room sits a MOTHER bouncing a baby boy on
her knee, and an OLD MAN reading Time magazine.

Iris sits alone on the other side of the room, elbows resting
on her thighs, and hands covering her mouth. A million
thoughts race through her mind.

A DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR

Iris Fischer?

She stands up.

IRIS

Yeah?

The anticipation's eating her alive.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The doctor leads Iris down the hall. Nurses pass carrying bed pans. Patients rest on hospital beds outside of overcrowded rooms. It's a busy night.

The doctor stops at room "679", and opens the door.

DOCTOR

Here we are.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM 679 - CONTINUOUS

Iris, and the doctor enter.

Samuel lies on the hospital bed, wearing a hospital gown. There's an IV lodged in his left arm, and his right arm is supported by a sling that's wrapped around his neck. The right side of his face is more beat up than the left.

DOCTOR

Hello, Samuel. How are you feeling?

SAMUEL

Better.

Iris stares at Samuel in disbelief. He's okay.

IRIS

So, he's... he's all right?

DOCTOR

He's about eighty percent all right. He has a broken arm, and a mild concussion, but nothing major. There's no swelling in the brain.

Iris walks around the bed, and sits on a stool besides Samuel.

IRIS

Do you know when my parents will be here?

DOCTOR

We called them about a half hour ago. They should be here shortly.

IRIS

Okay. Thank you.

(beat)

Do you mind if... uh... do you mind if we have a minute.

DOCTOR

Of course.

The doctor smiles, and exits.

Iris places her hand in Samuel's, and rubs his bony fingers.

IRIS

Are you in pain?

SAMUEL

No. I mean, I was when the car hit me, but I'm okay now.

IRIS

Good.

Iris pulls his hand up to her face, and presses it against her lips. Soon enough, she begins to sob.

Samuel props himself up, pulls Iris close to his chest, and begins to rub her back the same way she rubbed his the very first night at the house.

SAMUEL

It's okay. It's okay.

What was once a quiet sobbing has now turned into an uncontrollable one.

Moments later, Daphne, and Leo barge through the door in slow motion. Everything goes silent except...

IRIS (V.O.)

What if... they don't like me?

Daphne, and Leo rush bedside to comfort their physically injured son, and emotionally torn apart daughter.

INT. SANDRA'S CAR - DAY - FLASHBACK

This is the same flashback as in the beginning. We pick up where we left off.

Iris looks at Sandra with her banged up face.

SANDRA

Don't you worry about that. The woman is a proper homemaker with a heart of gold. She was born to nurture. And the man is this straight laced suit, and tie type, but he's also as accepting as they come. Their church even awarded them Honorary Foster Parents of the Year. That's got to be saying something, right?

Sandra looks over at Iris for a laugh, but Iris holds a straight face. This isn't something she's in the mood to joke about.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

It's a clean slate. It's a do-over.
(nodding to herself)
It's a new beginning for you, Iris.
God knows you deserve one.

Iris giggles.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

What's funny?

IRIS

Thirteenth house is a charm.

Sandra joins in on her giggling.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM 679 - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Leo is sleeping sitting up on the couch, and Daphne is asleep with her head resting in his lap.

SANDRA (V.O.)

A bond that links a family isn't always one of blood, but of faith. If you put forth your best efforts, so will they.

Iris lies in the hospital bed with Samuel, who's out cold. His head is tucked underneath her chin.

SANDRA (V.O.)

One day you'll discover what it's like to be apart of a family, Iris.
(MORE)

SANDRA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Whether it be with this new one or
not. One day, I assure you, you
will.

INT. SANDRA'S CAR - DAY - FLASHBACK

Iris stares down at her feet, thinking. Slowly, a smile registers. Not a fake one, not a forced one, but a genuine one.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Leo, and the doctor are in the middle of an informative conversation.

DOCTOR
His appointment has already been
scheduled for August fifteenth.
He'll come in, and we'll remove the
cast. It'll take all of... five
minutes. Easy.

LEO
But about his concussion--

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM 679 - SAME

Daphne shoves toiletries into her purse.

Samuel sits on the bed eating jelly toast, watching cartoons. The black, and blues on the right side of his face have faded, and he no longer wears his hospital gown. Instead, he sport a navy blue arm cast.

INT. HOSPITAL BATHROOM - SAME

Iris sits on top of the closed toilet seat. She stares down at something in her hands. We can't see what.

DAPHNE (O.S.)
Iris, we're ready to go when you
are.

IRIS
Be right out.

She gets up, tosses a full pack of cigarettes in the trash, turns off the lights, and exits the bathroom.

INT. VOTILARO DINING ROOM - EVENING

Family dinner has just begun. Bodies settle into chairs.

LEO
Before we eat I would like to
propose a toast.

Leo raises his glass of water high in the air. Everyone follows.

LEO (CONT'D)
To Samuel for making it out of the
hospital in one piece.
(beat)
To Samuel.

Everyone takes a gulp of their water.

DAPHNE
Okay, time to say grace.

Everybody bows their heads.

LEO
Bless us, oh Lord, and these your
gifts, which we are about to
receive for your bounty, through
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Heads lift back up.

DAPHNE
How was Alex while we were gone?

LYDIA
She was fun.

DEREK
Yeah! She took us to get ice cream
last night.

DAPHNE
Did she?

INT. VOTILARO LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Daphne is unloading the whites from the dryer, folding them, and placing them into a hamper.

Iris pops into the doorway.

IRIS

Hey.

DAPHNE

Hey, good morning.

IRIS

I was wondering if I could go out
for a little while?

DAPHNE

Where are you going?

IRIS

To visit a friend.

DAPHNE

Sure, just don't be late for
dinner.

IRIS

I won't.

DAPHNE

And Iris...

IRIS

What?

DAPHNE

Thanks for asking.

IRIS

No problem.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX STAIRCASE - LATER

Iris ascends the steps.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Every apartment door is painted an unflattering mustard yellow. The concrete walls have turned into a grand canvas for local graffiti artists to practice on. There's one ceiling fan, but it sways as it spins.

Iris walks up to door "249".

She fixes her hair, picks her teeth clean, pops a mint in her mouth, and brushes some fuzz balls off her shirt.

Finally, she KNOCKS on the door, and takes a step back.

DOMINIC (O.S.)

Coming!

FOOTSTEPS. The door opens. It's Dominic.

They stare at each other for an awkward beat. Neither knowing what to say or how to react.

IRIS

Hey uh... I just... uh.

She struggles for the right words.

Dominic smiles, opens the door all the way, and signals for her to go inside.

DOMINIC

Come on inside.

Iris smiles, and walks inside.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

It's about damn time. I told you my
ass didn't move to Switzerland.

Laughter.

He shuts the door behind her.

INT. IRIS'S BEDROOM - SAME

Daphne is scrubbing a stain out of Iris's pillow case, when suddenly a NOISE comes from underneath the bed. Her foot has accidentally kicked something.

She bends down, and reaches underneath the bed to see what it could be. She pulls out Iris's duffle bags. They're empty.

Daphne pushes them back under the bed, crosses over to Iris's dresser, and opens the top drawer.

Daphne's POV: Inside, Iris's clothes are color coded, and folded neatly.

Daphne smiles.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Iris hops the field fence like a pro, and walks out to the pitcher's mound.

IRIS

Hello!?

No one answers. Only the sounds of CHIRPING CRICKETS can be heard.

Iris lies down on the grass, and gazes up at the starry night sky as if she's never seen something more beautiful.

INT. PALMER DINING ROOM - DAY

Ava and Iris in session.

AVA

I'm sorry to hear about what happened to your brother.

IRIS

Me too.

AVA

When does his cast come off?

IRIS

Three weeks.

AVA

That's good news.

IRIS

I guess.

A beat.

AVA

So... how have you been?

IRIS

I'm doing better. I think so at least.

(beat)

I visited Dominic.

AVA

Good for you. Was he happy to see you?

Iris nods.

AVA (CONT'D)

Iris, since I do happen to be a veteran in this occupation, there are a few lessons I have picked up on over my career. One, is that there's a reason for everything. Two, is that men have just as many emotions as women. They just won't admit to it unless there's a polygraph test involved. And number three... is that in life everyone has a sob story. Every one has experienced some form of tragedy. You can either use this as an excuse to fail or an incentive to succeed, but it's all in your hands.

(beat)

That's the best advice I could ever give you.

IRIS

I never thought of it that way.

A beat.

AVA

All of this is just a blip in your time line. You're going to be okay, Iris. I have a feeling about you. You're stronger than the average teenager.

EXT. PALMER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Iris walks to the Votilaro car, and opens the driver seat door. Before she hops inside, she turns, and waves to Ava who stands on the porch.

AVA

See you next week.

Iris smiles graciously.

EXT. VOTILARO HOUSE - EVENING

Iris, and Samuel walk out the front door, and make their way down the driveway.

IRIS

Maybe you can try playing on something else this time around.

SAMUEL

But, I like the swings.

IRIS

I beg to differ. You like how no one is ever on the swings.

SAMUEL

Maybe you can swing with me this time?

IRIS

Maybe I will.

EXT. DRAPER STREET SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Iris, and Samuel walk, backs facing us.

Samuel walks on the side closest to the road. Iris places one hand around his shoulder, and switches places with him like a protective older sibling.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

