

MASQUERADE

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FADE IN

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB NORTH - EVENING

Posh neighborhood. Large homes. Fancy cars. A neighborhood that is generally peaceful and quiet is ABUZZ with activity.

EXT. STEWART HOME - SAME NIGHT

CRANE DOWN to reveal a beautiful two story home. This scene would be picture perfect for "Parade of Homes" magazine if it weren't for the sea of emergency vehicles surrounding it.

An ambulance and several police cars crowd the front of the house - lights flashing. Curious NEIGHBORS gather near the sidewalk.

OFFICERS and EMT workers scurry around performing their various duties. And over all of this activity, the sweet voice of ASHLEY STEWART.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

This is my home. The Stewart Mansion, as it's known to anyone who knows anyone. I wish I could say I have fond memories of growing up here, but I can't. I can only remember pain, suffering and in the end, relief.

INT. STEWART HOME - SAME TIME

An OFFICER moves through the foyer and hallway. Some destructive force has moved through the house. A brawl, perhaps.

Pictures are strewn everywhere. Among them, a cheer photo of Ashley behind a pane of glass, smashed to bits.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

My name is Ashley Stewart. I'm 18 years old, and I died today.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. KENWOOD - HARTLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

The Hartley House is a simple home, by contrast. In a pretty, low-key neighborhood. The "For Sale: SOLD" sign still sits in the middle of the lawn.

GRAPHIC INSERT: "3 Weeks Earlier"

A JUNKER of a car sits in the driveway beside the Impala. There are no blinds or window treatments as the Hartley's are in the process of moving in.

REBECCA HARTLEY, 40s, walks through the empty living room and calls upstairs.

REBECCA

Jaime! The game is starting now.
You're gonna be late if you don't
hurry.

INT. JAIME'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

JAIME HARTLEY, 17, wears too many dark colors too be "perky popular" but is way too pretty and sweet to be "goth outcast". She sits on her "bed" in the middle of the room. The bed is a sleeping bag, since none of the furniture has arrived yet.

She's totally ready to go. She's got a ticket on the floor in front of her along with a man's watch, her car keys and a stick of gum. She's wearing her coat, has her backpack on and her knit hat.

JAIME

(to Mom)

I just gotta get my coat and stuff!

The clock she's been watching clicks "7:05" and suddenly she springs to life. She grabs the ticket, pops the gum in her mouth, gets the keys and slides the watch over her wrist.

She clicks off a bedside lamp on the floor and walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Rebecca places shelf liner in the drawers. TOM BRADLEY, 40s, assists. Jaime walks past, kissing Rebecca on the cheek.

JAIME

Bye Mom.

She can't squeeze by Tom without some contact so she pats his arm awkwardly as she goes by.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Oh, and...later, uh, Tom.

Tom knows not to push.

TOM
Uh, okay...have fun, sweet heart.

Jaime is gone in a breeze and out the door. Tom turns back to Rebecca.

TOM (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Why do you get 'mom'? When do I
get 'dad'? Or 'father'...or 'Poppy'
or --

Rebecca pulls him close, kissing his shoulder.

REBECCA
Just give her some time, honey.
She's come so far--

Gestures to the window.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
--when's the last time she ever
wanted to go...be social?

TOM
Should I follow her?
(off her look)
No, you know, make sure she's safe!

REBECCA
I think someone's trying to get out
of some manual labor.

She hands him another roll of liner paper.

EXT. HARTLEY HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Jaime climbs into the junker...through the passenger door, that is. Has to slam the door twice before it takes. She crawls into the driver seat and CRANKS it up.

"Crank" is a relative word, too. The car SPUTTERS and CLANKS and GURGLES and finally catches, blowing a PLUME of smoke out.

OPENING TITLE: "MASQUERADE"

EXT. FAYETTEVILLE - SAME NIGHT - TRAVELLING

OPENING CREDITS FADE IN/OUT as we:

Follow Jaime's Junker as it winds through the neighborhood and out the back to:

EXT. BRADLY HILL HIGH - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The parking lot is jam packed full of cars. But there's not a soul in sight. Jaime's junker smokes it's way up one row and pulls into a space.

The CROWD ROARS inside the gym as a goal is scored.

Jaime climbs out of the passenger side and slams it shut, adding a little hip bump for good measure, she hurries to the gym.

INT. BRADLY HILL HIGH GYMNASIUM - EVENING

JASON HALL, number 34, tears down the court and brings the crowd to their feet with an effortless slam dunk. He throws a million watt smile and a wink toward:

THE CHEERLEADERS

who, on cue, start their chant, some typical overused CHEER, with ASHLEY, the Captain, leading them. Never far from her side is Co-Captain MARY PEARCE. Together, it's almost like the BRATZ dolls have come to life.

MARY

Ashley, I think that wink had your name allllllllll over it! Beep, Beep, special delivery for Ashley Stewart!

ASHLEY

Please, Mary. Why would Jason Hall be doing winking at me? He's with Amy, remember?

MARY

Because you're drop dead gorgeous, you're Bradley Hill High's most eligible bachelorette. Who wouldn't wink at you? Shoot, I'd wink at you.

Mary winks at Ashley as they turn to go back to their cheer bench.

ASHLEY

(laughing)

Oh, baby! Stop it! You know I don't care about Jason. He's just a number. 34.

MARY

You may not care about number 34, but I do. The least you can do is hook a girl up.

The girls laugh with each other as attention shifts to:

BASKETBALL HUDDLE

On the side-court with COACH MCLAMB.

COACH

Alright, we're in reach of winning this game. We're two down. I don't want to take any chances. Mike you get in there and drive to the basket and give me a good solid lay up and we'll win this in overtime.

JASON

Coach, let me have the ball. I'll hit a three and we can all be at Cook-out by 9:30!

COACH

You've been missing your outside shots all night Jason. Now do what I told you. Alright, win on three. One, two, three...

TEAM

WIN!!

The team takes it back to the court. Ten seconds left on the clock. TERRENCE makes a long pass to MIKE - who is open under the basket - but Jason swoops in and snatches the ball in flight before it reaches him.

ASHLEY

What is he doing?

MARY

What he does best. Showin' off. And winning.

Jason fakes out his DEFENDER and lets the ball fly as the buzzer sounds.

SWISH! Three points! The Bradley Hill Knights win by one point!

The CROWD goes crazy! Jason jogs back to the bench to celebrate with the rest of the team.

JASON

(with a smirk)

I told you I had this one. I gotcher back, Coach.

COACH

You're giving me a heart attack is what you're doing. I'm just glad we're on our way to championship. Good job, son.

JASON

Thanks coach.

The crowd has stormed the court and is shoulder to shoulder in effort to congratulate the team. The celebration slowly fades as people go home, and all that's left is an empty gym.

EXT. BRADLY HILL HIGH PARKING LOT - LATER

The parking lot crowd has totally thinned. We see Ashley walking up to her parents' waiting SUV. Her dad, HENRY STEWART, stands by the car impatiently.

HENRY

You sure took your precious time getting out here. What took you so long? Your mother and I have been waiting for fifteen minutes!

ASHLEY

Sorry, I was...

HENRY

Rhetorical question, Ashley. Get in the car!

Henry opens the back seat door and snatches Ashley's bag from her and throws it in.

ASHLEY

Hey! Stop it.

Ashley make no movement toward the car.

HENRY

What are you doing? I said get in
the car.

Ashley refuses to be bossed around in "her" world. She glares at her dad defiantly, but there's also something else there. Fear?

Henry looms closer.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Are you sure you want to push me
tonight?

She shifts from her dad's eyes to her mom's, REBECCA STEWART, sitting in the front passenger seat. Rebecca turns her head to avoid Ashley's eyes.

Henry closes in and JERKS Ashley's arm.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Get in the car. Now!

ASHLEY

(hoarse)
I'll find another way home.

HENRY

What?

Struggling.

ASHLEY

Ow, I said I'll get a ride with
Mary.

HENRY

Yeah you do that.

Henry pushes her loose and gets into the car.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That's right, your little slut club
has to stick together doesn't it?

Henry SLAMS his car door shut and speeds off. Ashley stands there alone in the parking lot. At least, she thinks she is until she notices Jaime, standing by her beat up junker.

Previously blocked by the SUV, now the two share an awkward silence.

JAIME

You ok?

Ashley recovers quickly.

ASHLEY
Mind your own business.

Ashley pulls her cell phone from her pocket, SPEEDDIALS and puts it to her ear.

JAIME
You need a ride?

ASHLEY
Pssht. In that thing? Thanks, but I don't think so.

Jaime waits there as Ashley hangs up and dials another number.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
(to herself)
C'mon, Mary, pick up!

JAIME
Look, I don't live far from --

Ashley turns on her now.

ASHLEY
Who are you and how do you know where I live?

JAIME
I'm Jaime. And, uh, everyone knows where you live. You're Ashley Stewart, Henry Stewart's daughter.

ASHLEY
Ugh, don't remind me.

JAIME
What?

ASHLEY
Nothing, and why aren't any of my friends answering their phone!?

Ashley SLAMS her cell phone shut in aggravation and looks around in annoyance at the empty parking lot.

JAIME
Like I said, I can drop you off. It's not a problem. I guess you could walk. Not a lot of options.

Ashley looks from Jaime to her wreck of a car. She makes a GAGGING sound.

JAIME (CONT'D)

I know, right? It's not going to win "Best of Show" or anything, but...

(imitating Tom)

..."it'll get you from point A to point b and back again!"

Jaime moves over to the passenger door.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Come on, I'll get the door for you.

ASHLEY

(rolling her eyes)

How sweet.

JAIME

Uh, yeah, actually, it's the only way in. Driver's door's been broken for a year now.

ASHLEY

Great.

Ashley notices the "JESUS SAVES" bumper sticker.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Why is it that it's always the junkie cars with the Jesus bumper stickers?

Ashley climbs in the car behind Jaime. It starts up with a CHOKE and a COUGH and SHUTTERS out of the parking lot.

Ashley covers her face with her hand and slides low into the seat.

INT. JAIME'S CAR - SAME NIGHT - TRAVELLING

Ashley rides along obviously annoyed. The two are quiet for a moment.

JAIME

You know, your dad...is he always --

ASHLEY

A little nosey aren't you?

JAIME
I'm sorry I just --

ASHLEY
Just what?

JAIME
-- just thought I could help.
Sometimes it helps to talk, you
know, to someone about it.

ASHLEY
Listen, Julie --

JAIME
Jaime.

ASHLEY
Whatever. I really appreciate what
you're trying to do. I appreciate
the ride home, but let's get one
thing straight. I don't need your
help, and most importantly, none of
this--
(gesturing wildly)
-- Ever. Happened.

Jaime's junker pulls up in front of the beautiful Stewart
Mansion.

JAIME
What never happened? Your dad
treating you like an animal?

ASHLEY
Listen, bitch --

She grabs Jaime's arm, much like Henry had grabbed her
earlier. And Jaime flinches. It scares them both. Ashley
softens a bit.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
It's just...none of your business.
So lay off. And stay away from me.

JAIME
Ah, yes. Gotta protect the
reputation.

ASHLEY
(sighs)
I've lived with it all my life. I'm
use to it. You wouldn't
understand.

JAIME

We have more in common than you
think, Ashley.

The softness is gone again. She's all business again.

ASHLEY

God, I hope not.

Ashley gets out of the car and walks up to her house and through the front door. Jaime sits for a minute staring at the house, wondering, praying. Then she drives off.

INT. STEWART HOME - FOYER - SAME TIME

Ashley ever so carefully closes the door and turns the lock. Careful not to make a sound, she tip-toes across the floor to the staircase and quietly makes her way up to her bedroom.

INT. OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

Henry stirs from his office chair, almost dropping his scotch glass. He gets up and walks to his

MASTER BEDROOM

and checks in on his wife. She's sleeping.

Henry pulls the bedroom door shut easily and walks to the

FOYER

at the base of the stairs, he waits a moment, then climbs the stairs.

EXT. HARTLEY HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Jaime pulls her car up into the driveway of their very meek, but proudly kept house. She turns the key to bring her rambling car to a GURGLING stop.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Sarah and Tom are doing finances on a card table with folding chairs.

SARAH

Sounds like Jaime's home.

TOM

I know she has to hate that car.

SARAH

Oh, Tom. She loves you for even giving her something to get from point A to B. She knows your heart.

TOM

I just wish we could afford --

He cuts himself off as Jaime OPENS the front door and makes her way into the kitchen.

JAIME

Well, I made a new friend.

SARAH

That's great, dear. Who is she?

JAIME

Her name's Ashley. We really hit it off.

SARAH

Well, good for you.

JAIME

Yeah.

TOM

Okay, but who won the game?

JAIME

Well, we won of course.

TOM

Of course?

JAIME

It was close. Jason Hall came through with a last minute shot that won the game.

TOM

I guess that means the boys will be headed off to the state tournament. Good for them.

JAIME

I guess. If you ask me they could stand to lose a few games.

SARAH
Why do you say that?

JAIME
Well, most of them are jerks. All they care about is basketball and showing off. Bunch of jock heads.

TOM
Easy now, I used to be a Jock Head, you know. Johnston County's star...

Sara chimes in on this very familiar chorus.

TOM (CONT'D)	SARAH
...wide receiver. Used to run like the wind.	...wide receiver. Used to run like the wind.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Never heard that before. Thanks, Jaime. He'll be going on about that for the next two hours.

JAIME
Well, I've got homework to do. He's all yours, mom.

Jaime heads out to her bedroom. Tom snuggles up to Sarah.

TOM
You hear that, 'Mom'? I'm all yours.

SARAH
Oh no you don't. You've got homework, too, young man.

She pushes a stack of bills his way.

SARAH (CONT'D)
These bills aren't gonna pay themselves. And that toilet is still running upstairs and --

TOM
-- and, and, and you're just lucky you married a financial wizard and master handyman. I'm pretty much all around awesome.

SARAH

Luck ain't got nothin' to do with
it, Captain Awesome. Now quit
stallin'.

TOM

I love you.

SARAH

Get out of here.

They give each other one of those "You're crazy, but I love
you more than words can say" kinda smiles.

EXT. STEWART HOME - MORNING

Henry climbs into the limousine which then pulls away from
the beautiful Stewart Mansion.

INT. STEWART HOME - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Ashley watches out the window as the LIMO pulls away. She
SIGHS in relief when it's gone. She finishes her bowl of
cereal with a last bite and places it into the sink

Rebecca sits across from her finishing her coffee and reading
the paper. The room is silent. It would appear that two
strangers are sitting across from each other and not a mother
and daughter.

ASHLEY

Reading that article about Dad?
Makes him sound like some sorta
flippin' national hero.

No reply.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Belongs in the cartoon section with
the rest of the funnies.

No reply.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

No answer, huh? Why do you do
that?

Rebecca folds the paper and gets up from the table, she
places her own stuff in the dishwasher.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You know, why do you sit there and do nothing? It's just as bad as --

She gestures out the window to where the Limo was. Rebecca straightens her chair and walks out silently.

HALLWAY

Ashley follows her.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

I know you don't wanna upset him and all. I get it. But I'm your daughter for crying out loud! Why don't you ever take up for me?

FOYER

Rebecca still doesn't respond. Ashley grabs her and spins her around.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Fine, just ignore the problems and they'll magically disappear. That's what you do best isn't it? Mom, you need help. I need help. We need to....I dunno...but you gotta do something.

REBECCA

Don't forget to put your bowl in the dishwasher.

Rebecca enters her bedroom and closes the door. Ashley lets out an exasperated SOUND and walks away.

INT. LIMOUSINE - MORNING

Henry sits in the back of the limousine, silently. He feels safe behind his dark sunglasses and his \$1600 suit. The Limo pulls up to a huge office building where a SMALL CROWD can be seen outside.

HENRY

Showtime.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - LIMOUSINE - SAME TIME

Parked in front of a high rise, Henry climbs from the Limo. The small crowd includes a couple of CAMERAMEN and REPORTERS as well as some other SUITS.

JILL, a well-put together assistant with a headset steps forward and takes his briefcase for him.

JILL
Good Morning, Mr. Stewart.

HENRY
Good Morning, Jill.

REPORTER 1
Mr. Stewart. Do you have any
comment about the newly released
safety ratings of your Apex Plant?

It's not an attack. These reporters are all smiles. Henry has them eating out of his hand.

HENRY
Yes I do actually, Bill. Who have
you all been talking to, my
competitors?

Polite laughter.

HENRY (CONT'D)
We're looking into it, Bill. The
EPA has had it in for our little
Mom & Pop shop for years now.
We've got nothing to hide. We're
arranging a tour, as we speak, to
give them full access to anything
they care to see. Except my
closet.

More laughter.

REPORTER 1
Too many skeletons?

HENRY
Far too many skeletons, Bill.

REPORTER 1
Have a good day, Mr. Stewart,

HENRY
You all do the same.
(to Jill)
Jill, make sure these guys get some
breakfast down at Cooper's on me.

REPORTERS
Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

He waves them off with a toothy grin and continues up the sidewalk.

HENRY

Remember, Jill, if the press ain't happy, nobody's happy.

JILL

Yes, sir.

They continue on into the building.

EXT. BRADLY HILL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

We see a few late STRAGGLERS run in to the school building as the tardy bell RINGS.

INT. MRS. EMILY PHILLIPS' OFFICE

PRINCIPAL EMILY PHILLIPS sits at her desk, not too happy about the pushy Basketball Coach in front of her. From the scowl on his face, he's not too happy about it either.

EMILY

I'm sorry, Coach McLamb. Jason is failing science and math. He will not be playing in the tournament.

COACH

Mrs. Phillips...Emily, isn't there something we can do here? Jason is our key player. We won't get through the first game without him.

EMILY

Well which do you think is more important? His academics or sports?

The coach thinks this is some kind of trick question.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Anyway, school policy is he has to maintain a passing average, and that he is not doing.

COACH

A lot of people are going to be let down when they hear this. For the first time in Bradley Hill history we have a chance at winning State, but not without Jason.

EMILY

I'm sorry, Coach. Academics first.

Coach, fuming, gathers his things.

COACH

When angry parents come to me about
this I'm sending them to your door.
Let me know when you change your
mind.

Coach storms out of the office. Emily's tough exterior fades away and we see that underneath, she is a worn and tired woman.

INT. CLASSROOM - LITERATURE CLASS - DAY

Lit class and all the cliques are present. Ashley sits with Mary and the rest of her cheer buddies. Jason is with his basketball CREW. Jaime sits by herself in the back.

LIT TEACHER

I would advise you pick your
project partners carefully. This
represents 30% of your final grade.

Ashley and her girls GIGGLE with each other.

MARY

Just do it. If not for you, for me.

ASHLEY

Alright, alright.

Ashley gets up and walks towards Jason's area. Jaime stands up as Ashley passes.

JAIME

Hey Ashley, you wanna be --

Ashley walks by without even acknowledging her. She stops right in front of Jason.

JASON

(sarcastic)

Well, what brings little Miss
Ashley over to the cool side of the
room?

ASHLEY

(flirty)

Just thought one of you boys would
like to be my project partner, but
maybe I was wrong.

Ashley turns to walk back.

JASON
Wait, wait!

ASHLEY
Yes?

JASON
I think Mike here wants to
'partner' with you.

ASHLEY
Hmph. Maybe next time.

She turns again.

JASON
(laughing)
No, no I'm just kidding. Who'd you
have in mind?

ASHLEY
Well I was hoping big bad number 34
might be up to it.

JASON
Number 34 thinks that sounds like a
good idea.

ASHLEY
Alrighty then. Sorry, Mikey.

Mike shrugs. Ashley returns to her side of the classroom.

JASON
Sorry dude, I tried.

MIKE
That's all I ask. That's all I ask.

The guys erupt in LAUGHTER as Ashley non-chalantly takes her
seat.

MARY
Well?

ASHLEY
What do you think?

MARY
Did he even ask about me?

ASHLEY
Yeah, Mare, that's all we talked
about. You.

There's a KNOCK on the classroom door. Coach peeks his head in.

COACH

Can I see Jason Hall for a minute?

LIT TEACHER

Sure. Jason.

Jason stands.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Jason heads into the hallway to talk to Coach.

JASON

What's up, coach?

COACH

Look, Jason. I just got done talking to Mrs. Phillips. She's not going to let you play in the tournament.

JASON

What?! Why not!?

COACH

She says you're failing two classes.

JASON

That's bull! Coach, you know it. She's out to get me. She's been riding my back all year.

COACH

I know. I'm going to talk to your Mom and have her come in with me and maybe we can work this out. Don't worry son, I'll fix this.

JASON

Thanks coach.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Jaime walks through the crowded lunch room, tray in hand, searching for a seat. She walks up to the cheer table and starts to set her stuff down.

They all look at her like she is lost and/or crazy. Mary gives a contemptuous SNORT.

MARY

Are you kidding me?

JAIME

All the other tables are full, and you have three empty --

ASHLEY

Listen, Julie --

JAIME

Jaime!

ASHLEY

Whatever! I don't know what's gotten into that smug little head of yours, but you thought wrong. Okay? This table is off limits to you, so forget it!

Jaime is hurt, but knows better than to show it. She walks off to find another place to sit.

MARY

Can you believe that? What is going on in this school? People should know their place.

ASHLEY

It's your fault.

MARY

How is it my fault?

ASHLEY

The other night after the game I needed a ride home. I was stranded, and did any of my close friends answer their phone?

MARY

I'm sorry girl. I left my phone in the locker room. You know I would have had your back had I known. Did you have a run-in with that girl?

ASHLEY

Yeah, I had to ride home in her junk wagon.

MARY

What were you thinking, Ash? I hope no one saw you.

ASHLEY

I don't know. I was irritated and not thinking straight. And it didn't help that she was all into my business.

MARY

Well forget her! I'm there whenever you need me.

The bell RINGS signaling the end of lunch. The girls gather their various bags, but leave their trays.

ASHLEY

You still coming over tonight?

MARY

Yeah, I'll be there about seven.

ASHLEY

See you then. Muah!

They do the kissy-kiss cheek thing and walk on.

INT. HALLWAY - JAIME'S LOCKER

Jaime grabs some books from her locker for her next class. Ashley walk up beside her, slamming the door closed.

ASHLEY

I don't know what you're thinking. Maybe that we had a little bonding time and now we're b-f-f, but get over it. I told you to forget about the other night. By the way, Mary told me that Jennifer told her that Sarah saw you at church the other night. Well, guess what Churchie? I know your type. You freaks think that just because you go to Sunday school and stuff that you can make me your little pet project and 'make me all better because God loves me'. You have no idea what I go through everyday. So back off. And next time, I will walk home. I don't need your help.

(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

In fact, if you pass by me and I'm
laying there dead in the gutter?
Keep. Walking.

Ashley storms off. Jaime exhales deeply.

JAIME

God does love you, Ash.

EXT. BRADLY HILL HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

School has let out and kids are hanging out in front of the building doing their after school thing. There's a storm brewing. A storm named THERESA HALL walking up to the school.

Every step she takes comes down like a ton of bricks. She's not angry, she's livid.

INT. HALLWAY

Theresa marches down the hall and towards the main office. The smart students move out of her way. The slow ones, get moved by force.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE

Theresa comes through the door like a whirlwind, walks up to the Principal's door and lets herself in. The SCHOOL SECRETARY starts to say something, but thinks better of it and sits back down.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Emily is startled by the sudden intrusion, but she knows that's only the calm before the storm when she realizes who it is. Jason's mother.

EMILY

Can I help you?

THERESA

Can you help me? Do you know what it takes for a single mother, like myself, to put a boy through a private Christian school such as Bradley Hill?

EMILY

Mrs. Hall, I understand that you're upset --

THERESA

Upset?! I slave day and night to keep Jason in this school, because it's what's best for him. It keeps him from doing drugs, shootin' people and livin' on the streets. At least I thought that's what a Christian school would do for my boy.

EMILY

Mrs. Hall, just because we're a Christian school doesn't mean that our students don't face the same problems and pressures that a public school student would. We've had our fair share of problems here.

THERESA

And you're about to get a fair share more if you don't let my boy play in the tournament.

EMILY

Your son is failing two classes. Without passing these classes Jason will not graduate and will not be able to enter college.

THERESA

Mrs. Phillips, I know my son is not an honor roll student, but I also know that the only chance for my boy to get into college is to play ball. And you and I both know he can make more of his life with basketball than I could ever provide for him.

EMILY

I want the best for Jason just like you do Mrs. Hall...

THERESA

No, don't you even pretend to love my boy like I love him. You aren't the one that has to keep things together, or at least have an appearance of keeping things together, so that your own son doesn't go off the deep end.

EMILY

Mrs. Hall, I'm going to be just as forward with you as you are being with me. I'm sorry that life isn't fair. I'm sorry your husband left you and your son got the raw end of the deal...but all of that is not up to you. Where you go from here? That is up to you. Now, God has given Jason an opportunity here to excel in both sports and academics. It's up to him to--

THERESA

God? God has given Jason an opportunity? With all due respect ma'am, God has never taken interest in Jason's life. God doesn't pay tuition, Mrs. Phillips. I do.

Theresa turns to the door.

THERESA (CONT'D)

Either put my son back on the team, or I'm pulling him out of here and taking him to a school that will benefit him.

Theresa SLAMS the door, leaving Emily stunned. She SIGHS heavily and rubs her temples.

EMILY

I love my job. I love my job. I love my job. Things just don't get better than this.

EXT. HARTLEY HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A giant moving truck is backed up to the house. MOVERS carry in random boxes and assorted furniture.

Heads turn curiously as Jaime pulls into the driveway and we hear the familiar POPS and GROANS of a dying car held together by faith and duct tape.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN

It's a sea of boxes. In the middle of what is probably the kitchen, Sarah pulls some Chinese food from a delivery bag. The aroma fills the house.

JAIME

Wow, Mom that smells so good!

SARAH

Thank you dear. I'd prefer home cooked, but I can't even find the silverware. We can eat as soon as the movers are done. Should be any time now. Could you go ahead and clear some room at the table for me?

JAIME

Yes ma'am. It sure is going to be weird eating this early every night.

SARAH

Well, your dad's new night shift down at the plant kind of cuts into our normal dinner time, but we'll make do.

JAIME

Yeah, I'd rather eat early, too. It's more fun together, anyway.

Tom enters with a proud look on his face. Sweat stains all over his raggedy t-shirt.

TOM

Well, that's the last of it! Annnnd thanks to Captain Awesome, we can now have fresh, clean clothes.

JAIME

Captain Stinky more like it.

TOM

No respect in this house. How can a guy get some respect.

SARAH

Oh, honey we're so proud of you and your powers of awesomeness. Us ladies couldn't do half of what you men do.

This last with a wink to Jaime, who takes the setup.

JAIME

What she means is, we couldn't stand leaving things half done.

(MORE)

JAIME (CONT'D)

We'd actually finish what we started.

The two girls LAUGH. Tom washes up at the sink. Sarah and Jaime finish transferring the food over to the table.

TOM

Alright, alright. I can tell when I'm outnumbered and outgunned.

SARAH

Sorry, it's just so easy.

The only chairs they have to pull around are bar stools so they all take their seats.

JAIME

Yeah, try not to take it too personally, dad.

Jaime is busy with the food already, not even noticing the 'dad' slip. But Tom and Sarah exchange a knowing smile.

TOM

Well, this meal looks just fine. Here's some sweet 'n sour chicken, who wants some?

SARAH

I do. And there's General Tso's chicken, extra spicey and I'm forgetting something --

JAIME

Chopsticks.

Sarah goes back to the delivery bag and pulls some out triumphantly.

SARAH

Chopsticks!

TOM

Alright. Let's pray.

The Hartley family holds hands around the table as they enter into prayer.

TOM (CONT'D)

Lord, we love you and praise you for all the blessings you provide for us. Thank you for my new job and the favor you showed me with the boss.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

I thank you for my family and this meal that has been prepared. We give you all the glory. Amen.

JAIME

Amen pass the duck sauce!

Sarah tosses some sauce at Jaime.

INT. STEWART HOME - DINING ROOM

The Stewart family is sitting around a beautiful dining table. It's quite the opposite of the Hartley house. Fine china, crystal glass, heavy silverware, silence, heads are down, no one looking at anyone. Cold.

Henry SLAMS his fork down, spraying food across the table.

HENRY

How many times do I have to tell you, Rebecca, that your cooking tastes like crap? I thought I told you to hire a cook!

REBECCA

I'm sorry dear. I just thought I would try out a new recipe that --

HENRY

Really? Because, it's not like we're trying to save money, here! And God knows you are no Martha Stewart. The least you could when I tell you to do something is do it! I'm working my butt off out there while you two sit around the house doing absolutely nothing.

REBECCA

You know what I do, honey. I clean the house. I wash clothes. I cook dinner. I take care of Ashley...

HENRY

Stop! Stop! Stop! All I hear you do is complain about all the things you have to do! That's all I hear out of your mouth. I've got my own problems. I don't need yours.

(to Ashley)

What's your problem? Why are you so quiet tonight?

ASHLEY

Because you're yelling, and drunk.

Henry grabs the salt shaker and throws it at Ashley, missing her by just a little. She stands to leave.

HENRY

Don't you even --

Henry stands up, knocking his chair over, and stomps over to cut her off. He jerks her against the wall and slams her violently.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I don't appreciate your ugly mouth.
Look me in the eye when I'm talking
to you!

Ashley glares at him. Eyes burning with hate. And tears.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You have a lot of nerve, young
lady. You want a piece of me?

Henry SLAPS Ashley across the face. Rebecca picks up her plate and moves quickly into the kitchen.

It's her signature move when she's scared. Just walking away from the pain. As if it's not really happening as long as she doesn't see it. She's weak.

ASHLEY

I hate you.

HENRY

Good, because --

Whatever Henry was about to say or do, is interrupted by the doorbell CHIMES.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Clean yourself up. You're a mess.

INT. STEWART HOME - FOYER

Rebecca answers the door with a plastic smile glued on to her face.

REBECCA

Hi Mary. It's good to see you.

MARY

You too Mrs. Stewart. How have you been?

REBECCA

I've been doing very well thank you. Come on in and I'll get Ashley for you.

ASHLEY

I'm here, Mom.

Rebecca goes to her bedroom. Her fortress of solitude.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I told you not to ring the doorbell, but to call when you got here.

MARY

Sorry, I forgot. What's the big deal?

ASHLEY

I didn't want my dad to know you were coming over.

MARY

Well, I'll be quiet.

HENRY (O.S.)

Ashley, who's at the door?

ASHLEY

Nobody.

MARY

Excuse me? Nobody? You think --

ASHLEY

Just be quiet and come in.

Henry steps in a few feet behind Ashley. He's metamorphosed from the Hulk, back to Bruce Banner. Sweet. Side hugs Ashley. He's all eyes on Mary.

HENRY

Is this one of your cheerleading buddies?

Henry drinks her in. A little too long, but Mary is more flattered than anything.

MARY
Hi, Mr. Stewart. How are you
doing?

HENRY
Just fine. Just fine. You girls
have fun tonight with your little
sleep over.

ASHLEY
Yes sir.

Ashley tugs at Mary's arm and pulls her to the staircase.

HENRY
You girls let me know if you need
anything.

MARY
We will Mr. Stewart.

ASHLEY
(under breath)
Would you shut up and come
upstairs.

MARY
Alright, geez. What's the hurry?

INT. STEWART HOME - EVENING

Sarah, Jaime and Tom are cleaning up dinner. Sarah hands a
garbage bag to Tom.

SARAH
Here you go, dear. Last bag.
(to Jaime)
How was school today?

JAIME
Not too bad.

TOM
...but not too good either?

Jaime's silence is deafening. Tom takes the hint.

TOM (CONT'D)
Hey, I'm gonna take this garbage
out back and then start unpacking
the den.

Jaime smiles politely as Tom exits.

SARAH

Rough day?

JAIME

Sorta. Well, I told you about my new friend, Ashley Stewart...

SARAH

Oh. Henry Stewart's daughter?

JAIME

Yes. I know, right? But, believe me, he's no Captain Awesome, no matter what you read in the papers. I guess when you're that rich, you can pay the press to paint whatever picture you want.

SARAH

What do you mean, Jaime? You can't really tell a person by what you see on TV.

JAIME

I met him, Mom. I mean, I saw he and Ashley after the game the other night. He doesn't know that I saw them.

SARAH

Saw them what?

JAIME

He was yelling at her and jerking her around. Definitely not nice.

SARAH

Aw, angel, I'm sorry you had to see that. Was he...did he hit her?

JAIME

No. Not that I saw. Anyway, he left Ashley there. Just left her and she didn't have a way home so I gave her a ride.

SARAH

Goodness, Jaime. That's clear across town. I'm sure Ashley was grateful you were around.

JAIME

No, not really.

SARAH

I thought you said you two hit it off? Why do I get the feeling there's more to the story than that?

JAIME

I dunno, Mom. I just don't know where to start with her. I've been thinking lately that as Christians we should be open to share our problems and struggles with others. You know?

SARAH

Of course. That's the whole purpose of the church isn't it? To build a body of believers to support one another and grow and learn.

JAIME

Well, yeah, but nobody ever has the guts to be that real. All I see is everyone hiding behind a mask. Pretending everything's hunky dory and peachy keen.

SARAH

Some people are so hurt, so wounded that they have lost all hope. They believe nothing can help them, no one can save them and in that moment of sad desperation, friendship is the last thing they want, but the first thing they need.

JAIME

Why does the world have to be one big...it's like a masquerade ball, is what it is! There are so many people that look like they are the king of the world, but on the inside they are dying.

SARAH

You know, your job is not to rescue Ashley.

JAIME

It's not?

SARAH

Your job is just to love her. I don't think it was just happenstance that led you to give her a ride that night. You have unique experiences and that gives you a unique voice in her life. Maybe you should talk with her.

JAIME

I'm pretty sure she never wants to be in the same room with me much less talk to me again.

SARAH

I'm just saying, don't give up on her.

JAIME

Well can I punch her in the face next time?

SARAH

Oh totally! In love of course.

JAIME

Yeah, in love of course.

Sarah hugs Jaime close and kisses her forehead.

INT. STEWART HOUSE - ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Mary drops her bags on the floor as Ashley shuts her bedroom door.

MARY

Your dad is so sweet.

ASHLEY

Yeah.

MARY

What's wrong with you? Why's your face so red?

ASHLEY

It's nothing. Did you bring the drinks?

MARY

You're just anxious to get this party started!

ASHLEY

Let's hurry up and change clothes
so we can get out of here.

MARY

What's the rush? The party doesn't
start for another two hours.

ASHLEY

I'm just ready to get out of the
house is all.

MARY

You're just ready to see Jason!

ASHLEY

I told you. I don't even like him.
I'm just messin' with his head.
What else is there for a girl to
do?

MARY

I know what I'd do!

ASHLEY

That's because you're not as
refined and dignified as me.

MARY

Yeah, that's it.

ASHLEY

Get changed. We'll wait about
thirty minutes. My dad should be,
uh, working in his office by then
and mom's already in bed. Then
we'll sneak out of here.

MARY

Mm-hm, refined and dignified.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - JAIME'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jaime unpacks some knick knacks and sets them atop her
dresser. She pulls out a doll that looks a hundred years
old. It's missing a button eye and the clothes are tattered.
It's perfect.

Tom knocks gently on the door and pokes his head in.

JAIME

Look! I found Miss Mollybottom.

TOM
I'm sorry, Miss whom?

JAIME
Miss Mollybottom. My oldest friend
in the whole wide world.

TOM
I see, Miss Molly...uh...bottom
could use some reconstructive
surgery.

JAIME
She's perfect.

TOM
Yes. She is that. Well I hate to
break up the reunion but your
mother absolutely must have garbage
bags. Or the world as we know it
may end.

JAIME
Sure. If you gots the money
honey...I gots the time.

TOM
Are you sure, cause I don't wanna
mess anything up with Miss
Mollybutt --

JAIME
Mollybottom!

TOM
Yeah, Miss Mollycheeks, whatever.
Here's \$20. Go for the big box.

Jaime kisses Miss Mollybottom and rests her gingerly on her
dresser.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

The bass is pumpin. The kegs are flowing. Every room is jam
packed with high school KIDS. Ashley and Mary squeeze their
way through the crowd to where Jason sits.

JASON
This party just got a lot hotter.
Hey, Partner! I was wondering when
you would get here.

ASHLEY

Looking this good takes time.

Jason stands and heads to the door.

JASON

Shoot girl. You so fine as it is.
Hey come in here. I want to tell
you something.

Ashley looks at Mary and Mary gives her a wink. Jason and Ashley head outside.

EXT. JASON'S FRONT YARD

Jason pulls Ashley away from the crowd so they can be alone.

ASHLEY

Why are you bringing me all the way
out here?

JASON

I need your help with something.

ASHLEY

Does this usually work on all the
girls or --

JASON

It's dangerous.

ASHLEY

I'm listening.

JASON

You have to tell me now. You in or
you out?

ASHLEY

I don't even know what it is yet.

JASON

Trust me.
(beat)
You in or out?

ASHLEY

(beat)
In.

JASON

Good. See that Tahoe across the
street.

ASHLEY

Yeah.

JASON

We're about to take it for a spin.

ASHLEY

Why? Is that your new car?

JASON

It's about to be.

Jason starts to walk towards the Tahoe. Ashley doesn't move.

JASON (CONT'D)

You comin'?

ASHLEY

I don't know. Why don't we just stay at the party?

JASON

You said you were in.

ASHLEY

Yeah, but that was before I knew you were stupid.

JASON

(laughing)

Come on. I thought you trusted me.

Ashley looks back at the house. Trying to decide. She's fighting her better judgement, and ultimately stupidity wins.

ASHLEY

Why not?

JASON

That's my girl.

The two run over to the Tahoe. Jason pulls out a slim jim.

ASHLEY

What if it has an alarm?

JASON

It doesn't. I've been watching this guy for the past few days.

Jason takes the slim jim and shoves it between the glass and door. In a moment, the locks are popped open.

ASHLEY
Smooth. You've done this before.

JASON
Ya think? Climb in genius!

As Ashley walks around to the passengers seat Jason hot wires the car. They pull out of the drive way and drive down the street.

EXT. CONVENIENT STORE - NIGHT

Jason and Ashley sit in the Tahoe outside a C-store.

INT. TAHOE

Ashley seems slightly confused.

ASHLEY
What are we doing here?

JASON
The dangerous part.

ASHLEY
I thought we just did that.

Jason hands her a \$20.

JASON
I need you to go buy me a pack of Winstons.

ASHLEY
Psht, you don't even smoke. Plus you gotta be 18 or something.

JASON
Winstons. And no, boys have to be 18, cute girls get away with murder.

They sit staring each other down. Finally Ashley grabs the money.

ASHLEY
Whatever.

She climbs out of the car and heads inside. Jason pulls a black cap from his pocket and pulls a gun from the back of his pants.

JASON
That's a good girl.

He pulls on the cap, waits a beat and climbs out.

INT. CONVENIENT STORE

Ashley stands in line at the cash register. The DEADHEAD GUY in front of her pays for his six pack and leaves. Jason passes him and pulls the ski mask down over his face as he enters.

Ashley makes it up to the counter about the time Jason busts in flashing his gun.

JASON
Everybody shut up and sit down!

The two other C-STORE PATRONS in line are so startled they barely react. Jason grabs Ashley and puts the gun to her head.

JASON (CONT'D)
I said sit down!

They comply. Ashley is genuinely terrified.

JASON (CONT'D)
You, open the register and give me the cash.

The clerk stuffs the money in a bag.

JASON (CONT'D)
Give it to the girl.

The clerk hands the bag to Ashley and Jason pulls her out the door.

EXT. CONVENIENT STORE - SAME TIME

Jason and Ashley run to the Tahoe and climb in.

JASON
Come on, come on, let's go! Move it!

The Tahoe peels out and races down the road.

INT. TAHOE - TRAVELLING

Jason twists and turns through some back alleys and finally SLIDES to a stop.

ASHLEY
What the HELL, Jason!?!

She punches his arm.

JASON
I blew all my money on beer for the party. I needed to restock my stash.

Ashley fumbles with the door lock and exits the vehicle.

JASON (CONT'D)
Wait, Ashley --

EXT. STREET - BESIDE TAHOE - SAME TIME

Jason follows Ashley out of the SUV.

JASON
Ashley, wait! It's okay. It's cool. You're okay.

Ashley wheels on him.

ASHLEY
You held a gun to my -- you made me rob a -- you forced me Jason. You should have...

She doesn't know what.

JASON
Would you have done it if I had?

ASHLEY
Of course not!

JASON
We already stole a car. What's the big deal?

ASHLEY
Are you insane?

JASON
I'm telling you, you did great! It came off totally real.

ASHLEY

That's because it was real.

She walks up and punches him again.

JASON

Ow, stop it! You make a great Partner. You're a natural.

He tries to put an arm around her.

ASHLEY

Leave me alone, Jason. Get away from me.

JASON

Are you serious?

ASHLEY

I said get away! Get outta here.

JASON

What and leave you out here all alone?

ASHLEY

I'm not -- you're not --

She's so worked up she can't even complete a sentence. He steps over to her and stuffs a wad of cash in her hand.

JASON

Fine. Well, here's your cut. I just thought you'd be interested.

She stares at the money. He starts toward the car and then turns back.

JASON (CONT'D)

I was hoping you were different, you know. Not all judgemental and hypocritical like the others.

She's not turning around, not moving. He's just yelling at her back.

JASON (CONT'D)

What? Are you so scared about what people think? About what God thinks? Here's a clue. God don't care, Ashley. He's like a father, all right. A father that walked out a long time ago and never came back.

(MORE)

JASON (CONT'D)

Stop listening to what everyone else tells you. They're looking out for themselves. You've got to be the one to look out for you. Ashley. Ah forget it!

He climbs back into the car, GUNS the engine and SQUEALS away, leaving Ashley all alone on the street. She stands there sniffing softly, then pulls out her phone, speed-dialing.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE PARTY

Mary stands with a group of BOYS laughing and talking. In the foreground, her phone begins to RING, but there's no way it will be heard over the party MUSIC.

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME

Ashley stands there on the phone on the side of the street.

ASHLEY

Not again, Mary! Please pickup!

But there is no answer. Ashley hangs up the phone, staring into the darkness. Feeling very alone and very sorry for herself.

And then she hears it.

A RUMBLING COUGH BANG clunker of a car approaches around the corner.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You have got to be kidding me.

Jaime's Junker pulls up a few feet away and stops. Jaime's shocked face peers through the windshield.

Ashley takes a deep exasperated breath and then heads over to the passenger door.

INT. JAIME'S CAR - SAME TIME

Ashley slides into the passenger seat. Livid. Jaime stares at her. Hoping for an explanation or something. Ashley is silent.

Jaime thinks for a second and opens her mouth to speak but then --

ASHLEY
Drive.

JAIME
Okay.

And Jaime shifts the car back in gear and it COUGH SPUTTERS its way up the road.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE PARTY

Mary sits on the couch talking to a couple other girls. Jason returns and Mary stands to meet him.

MARY
Dude, where have you all been?!
And where's Ashley?

JASON
Ashley wanted some time alone.

MARY
What? Is she okay?

JASON
Yeah, you know, whatever. I could
use a beer.

Mary's concern fades and she's now the flavor of the moment.

MARY
Well, I'll go get you one. Just a
sec.

JASON
I'll be right here.

He sits on the couch between the other girls as Mary shuffles away to fetch drinks.

EXT. STEWART HOME - NIGHT

Jaime's car pulls up to the house. The car stalls out. The silence is pretty thick. Again, Jaime musters up some nerve to talk and inhales, but --

ASHLEY
Uh-uh.

JAIME
But --

ASHLEY
 No. No. Uh-uh.

A beat.

 JAIME
 You --

 ASHLEY
 Shhh.

 JAIME
 But --

 ASHLEY
 Churchie, I'm warning you.

They sit there again in silence. Although Ashley obviously doesn't want to talk, she's not in a hurry to leave either.

She just stares up at that big magnificent house. Jaime watches her watch the house.

POV STEWART HOUSE

It's completely dark. No one is moving inside.

Ashley steels herself for what she has to do. She finally turns to Jaime and their eyes meet. And they have a moment of connection. Sharing space. Sharing more than words could have ever accomplished.

Another deep breath from Ashley.

 ASHLEY (CONT'D)
 Okay.

 JAIME
 Okay.

Ashley POPS the door open and climbs out, SLAMMING it hard after her. Putting a hip into it just for good measure. She's quite the pro actually.

Then, she moves quickly up and into the house. Jaime watches her go and notices only too late a wad of money in the seat. She puts it back where she found it, CRANKS the car and SPUTTER COUGHS her way up the road.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - JAIME'S ROOM

Jaime enters her room and flips on a lamp. She pulls open a drawer and dumps the wad of cash into it, covering it with some socks and underwear.

She scoops up Miss Mollybottom and sits down on the edge of her bed, staring at the ancient, worn toy. Her thoughts are a million miles away.

Sliding down to the floor, she gets on her knees, assuming prayer position. Her eyes begin to well up with tears. Tears for Ashley.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Ashley lays in the bed, staring up at the ceiling. She reaches up and turns the lamp off beside her bed. Moonlight fills the room.

The sound of the door CREAKING open pierces the silence. Ashley's eyes shoot open; not in surprise, but fear.

Henry's silhouette crosses the room to Ashley's bed. He sits down on the side of the bed by Ashley's knees.

HENRY

Ashley, I wanted to tell you I'm
sorry for messing up dinner.
I...lose control sometimes.

Silence.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I hope you can forgive me.

Ashley turns away from him to block him out. But in turning away, she accidentally uncovers her leg, which lay there in the moonlight.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I love you Ashley.

ASHLEY

(soft and scared)
Please don't.

Henry lays his hand on Ashley's leg, slowly rubbing it.

HENRY

I'm not going to hurt you.

The room is silent save Ashley's racing HEARTBEAT. Tears streak down her face as her father looks over her, slowly pulling back the covers.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - JAIME'S ROOM

Jaime is curled on the floor SCREAMING. Tom and Sarah rush in and flip on the lights.

She sees Tom and freaks out even more.

JAIME

Get away from me! You get away
from me. I'll kill you!

Sarah pushes Tom back out the door.

SARAH

Go get her medicine and a glass of
water.

She moves over quickly to Jaime.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Jaime, it's me. It's Sarah. Are
you having another nightmare?

JAIME

Get away from me! Don't touch me.

SARAH

Jaime! You need to wake up, Jaime.
You're with Tom and Sarah. You're
safe now. Shhhh shh shh.

JAIME

(weaker)

Don't touch me. I'll kill you.

SARAH

It's me, Sarah Hartley. Nobody is
gonna hurt you. You're safe.
You're safe with Sarah and Tom.
Shhhh shh shhhh...

Jaime allows Sarah to move close. Sarah wraps her arms around Jaime who sobs violently, still mumbling.

JAIME

I'll kill you. I'll kill you.
Hold still or I'll kill you.

SARAH
Shhhhhhh, baby, shhhhhhhh. It's
okay, relax. Shhhhhhh.

Sarah starts HUMMING to her. Tom returns with the water and medicine, but waits at the door. Sarah nods and he comes over and hands a tablet to Sarah.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Here you go, Jaime. Take this,
sweetie. This is gonna help you.
This will help you feel better.

Jaime allows Sarah to feed her the pill. Sarah puts the cup to her lips and she drinks down some water, too.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Shhhhhh, shhhhhhhh. That's right,
baby doll. You're safe here.

She hands the cup back to Tom who looks rather relieved. He smiles at Sarah and then leaves the two of them alone.

JAIME
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I
shouldn't have --

SARAH
Shhhhhhhh. Just relax, Jaime.
Just breathe in, breathe out. Just
relax. You're here with us.
Mommy's got you. You're safe.
Everything's okay. It's ooookay.

Sarah continues rocking Jaime and HUMMING as she does. The sobbing subsides. Jaime is soon calm.

INT. STEWART HOME - KITCHEN

Tom sits at the table stirring sugar into some cups of tea. Sarah enters behind him and rubs his shoulders.

SARAH
The medicine has kicked in. She's
sleeping again.

TOM
We haven't had an episode like that
in a long time.

Sarah sits and cradles her tea in her hands.

SARAH

I know. Poor girl. So much change happening all at once. It's a lot to process. New town, new home, new high school, new friends.

TOM

I'm worried about some of those so-called friends of hers. I think that Ashley kid is to blame. You know, for a Christian school, it sure is a mess.

SARAH

Yeah, but still...

TOM

I know. I know.

They both take a sip.

SARAH

Are you gonna go back to bed?

TOM

Well, at this rate, I might as well stay up. I'll have a chat with the big guy upstairs. See what he has to say about all of this.

SARAH

Well, tell him I said hello.

TOM

Hmm. You're amazing.

SARAH

Scared to death, more like it.

TOM

You did great.

SARAH

Thanks for the tea, dear.

TOM

Any time.

They continue on sipping in silence.

INT. STEWART HOME - NIGHT

Henry sits alone in his office. He drains the last of the scotch into his glass and gulps it down. He is obviously very drunk. He can barely hold his head up.

His hair and clothes are ruffled. He's looking over a family photo. Only, in this photo there are 4 people...including Ashley's LITTLE BROTHER.

Henry catches a sudden glimpse of Rebecca walking by the door with a suitcase in hand.

HENRY

Rebecca! What do you think you're doing?

Rebecca steps back into the doorway. Obviously surprised that Henry is still conscious. She has a nervous but sturdy stance.

REBECCA

I'm leaving, Henry.

HENRY

For the grocery story?

REBECCA

For good.

HENRY

Don't joke with me, woman. I'm not in the mood. Put that stuff away and go to bed. I need you now. I need you here with me.

REBECCA

(beat)

Goodbye Henry.

Rebecca walks towards the front door.

INT. STEWART HOME - FOYER

Henry comes stumbling out of the office and grabs the suitcase of Rebecca's hand and BACKHANDS her across the face.

HENRY

When I tell you to do something you do it!

REBECCA

(angry)

I'm leaving you Henry!

HENRY

When did that idea come into your stupid head!? When did you start thinking for yourself?

REBECCA

You're a monster! An animal!

HENRY

If you want me to be an animal I'll be an animal!

Henry grabs Rebecca and throws her into a side table knocking it and it's contents over. Rebecca falls to the ground.

Henry stalks towards her. She tries to scramble away and get out the back door, but Henry jumps on top of her and starts to strangle her. His hands wrap tight around her neck. Her face changes color as tears stream down her face.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(through his teeth)

I should have done this a long time ago!

Ashley rushes in and kicks her dad in the stomach. Henry rolls over gasping for breath. Ashley helps her mom to her feet.

ASHLEY

Come on mom! He's out of control. We need to get out of here.

Rebecca pushes Ashley away.

REBECCA

Don't touch me you dirty little slut! Don't you think I know the things you do with him up there?

Ashley is stricken.

ASHLEY

What? Mom, I...

REBECCA

Get out of my way!

Henry stumbles into Rebecca, knocking her down again, and grabs Ashley by the hair.

HENRY

I always knew God took the wrong child...left us with you! Now I'm gonna fix his mistake.

Ashley SCREAMS and claws his face. He lets her go and she runs to the kitchen. He chases after her, knocking over furniture in the process.

INT. STEWART HOME - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Ashley opens a drawer and pulls out a knife. Just as she has it in her hand Henry runs into her from behind, the knife goes spinning across the counter.

HENRY

What were you going to do with that? You think you can get rid of me that easy?

ASHLEY

Let go! Somebody help me! Oh God.

HENRY

(laughing)
God? I am god in this house!

Ashley KNEES Henry in the crotch and breaks from his grip. He doubles over on the counter and grabs the knife.

He turns around to find Ashley and she's right there, with a vase in her hand. She smashes it over his head sending him to the ground on his butt.

Henry is dazed but manages to scramble after Ashley down the hall.

INT. STEWART HOME - HALLWAY

Ashley scrambles down the hall, tripping, falling against the wall and knocking pictures frames down. She's breathing hard. She's terrified. She enters the foyer.

INT. STEWART HOME - FOYER

Ashley stops in the foyer. The front door is wide open and there's no sign of her mother.

HENRY POV

He's taken some damage, moving a little slowly and definitely seeing double.

ON ASHLEY

who sees her father charging down the hall towards her. She has the front door in her hand. When he gets close enough she swings it towards him.

The heavy wood door knocks Henry out cold. He falls to the ground in a lump.

Ashley falls back against the wall and slides to the floor. She is panting. She is covered in blood and sweat.

She stares at her dad. Lying helpless on the floor.

She crawls towards him ever so slowly. She's afraid he might come to any second.

His breathing is slow and soft.

Her heart is POUNDING.

She reaches for the knife and lifts herself to her knees.

Hatred burns in her eyes. She grips the knife tight and holds it above her dad.

Her breathing intensifies as she fights with herself. She lets out a SCREAM and drops the knife to the ground.

She WAILS, letting all her grief pour out.

ASHLEY

Help me! Is there anyone who even
cares!?!

Ashley turns back to the knife. She picks it up and holds it to her wrist.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

No one would care.

Silence. Stillness. Her heartbeat POUNDS in her ears. And just barely audible, so low most would miss it, we hear a whisper.

VOICE

Ashley

Ashley snaps out of her trance and drops the knife back to the floor. She gets up and runs out the door.

EXT. STEWART HOME - NIGHT

Ashley gets in her car and SPEED DIALS her cell phone.

ASHLEY
(sniffing)
Mary, where are you?

MARY (V.O.)
(on phone)
Dude, it's so early! What is your deal?

ASHLEY
I - I just...where are you?

MARY
You are not going to believe it,
but I'm still over here at Mike's!

ASHLEY
(beat)
I'm scared, Mary. I can't take it anymore. I don't know what to do. Everything in my life is a lie.
(beat)
I feel like I've been walking around for years pretending to be someone I'm not.
(beat)
I can't live like this anymore.
(beat)
You're my only friend. I need someone here to talk to. Will you meet me?

MARY (V.O.)
(on phone)
Um, yeah, I missed most of what you just said. I'm kinda busy here with Mike. Can this maybe wait till tomorrow?

ASHLEY
Oh.
(beat)
Yeah. Sure.

MARY (V.O.)
(on phone)
Alright girl, I'll holla at...

Ashley SNAPS her cell phone shut. She starts crying again.

ASHLEY
 (softly)
 I have no one.

She turns on the car which PURRS to life and pulls out of the driveway.

EXT. HARTLEY HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Dawn is breaking. Light has begun to color the sky. Ashley pulls into the driveway and climbs out of the car.

Moving to the front door, she KNOCKS softly. A very surprised Tom answers.

TOM
 Hi, you must be Ashley.

ASHLEY
 Yeah, I'm really sorry about this, Mr. Hartley. I really need to talk with Jaime.

TOM
 Mm. Is everything okay? Would you like to come inside?

ASHLEY
 No. No thanks. Just, you know --

TOM
 Sure. Uh, I'll go get her.

He closes the door. A few moments later, Jaime appears.

JAIME
 Ashley, is everything okay?

ASHLEY
 Could we maybe go for a ride?

JAIME
 Sure. Why not.

They both walk to the car and slide inside.

EXT. SKYLER'S ROCK - SUNRISE

Ashley and Jaime take a seat on Skyler's rock overlooking the beautiful sunrise. They both stare out over the town. Silent.

ASHLEY

I bet you're wondering why I showed up on your doorstep in my pajamas.

JAIME

I am a little curious.

Ashley turns her head to look at Jaime. From this side, she notices some dried blood.

JAIME (CONT'D)

What happened, Ashley? Are you okay? We should get home and take care of that.

Jaime starts to climb back down the rock.

ASHLEY

No! I'm not going back there.

JAIME

Did your dad do this?

ASHLEY

It's not the first time, but it will be the last.

JAIME

Ashley what did you do?

She looks back at Jaime.

ASHLEY

I almost killed him, Jaime. I wanted to. It would have been easy.

She looks back to the sunrise.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

When I was kneeling over him with the knife I thought, God is finally serving justice.

(beat)

But then I heard a voice. It whispered my name.

She looks to Jaime, who is listening intently.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

No one has ever spoken my name the way I heard it last night. I almost didn't recognize it. I almost didn't hear it.

(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

(beat)

It wasn't really until I had the knife to my wrist that I even realized what it was.

JAIME

Oh, Ashley.

ASHLEY

After all these years. After everything I've been through, why now? Why does He speak now?

JAIME

(beat)

God is the only one that knows the whole plan. I don't even pretend to understand it all. I guess that's why He's God and I'm not. And that's where faith comes in.

ASHLEY

What I don't understand is -- how can this God, whom you say loves me, how can He stand on the sideline and watch as I am beaten and molested by my own father? How do you answer that one?

JAIME

I don't know.

A long beat.

JAIME (CONT'D)

I don't know...what God thinks watching his little girl hide under the bed, hoping her drunk father doesn't have sense enough to look under there. I don't know why he stands by, night after night, while she's raped and abused.

Jaime is crying now. Ashley is watching her closely because she's gone from Christian textbook answers to something that is very real and personal all of a sudden.

JAIME (CONT'D)

And I don't know where he is the next day when his little girl lays there wanting to die, thinking that somehow, somehow it must be her fault somehow because she must have done something bad to deserve all of this. I don't know because I'm not God. But he's there, Ashley. He's always there. Loving us, healing us. He is the light in the darkest night and he has promised never...NEVER to leave us nor forsake us.

Jaime wipes the tears from her eyes and turns to Ashley.

JAIME (CONT'D)

He's here right now, Ashley.

ASHLEY

I can't see Him.

JAIME

You mean you won't see Him. You want to talk to Him so badly? So talk! God's not a wuss, Ashley. He can take it. Let it out.

ASHLEY

No. He doesn't get off the hook that easily.

JAIME

Just because you don't believe in Him doesn't mean He doesn't believe in you.

It's Ashley's turn to vent. She stands and faces the sunrise.

ASHLEY

No. Uh-uh. Never in my life have I seen evidence that God loves me. Not once has He shown his face to me.

(to the Sun)

Not once, you hear me? I've tried to be good. I've tried to do the right thing. I'm working my butt off in school to get out of this hell hole.

(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

I prayed every time my dad came into my room in the middle of the night, and what did I get in return? A slap in the face! So you know what I say God? I say forget you! I hate you! I. HATE. YOU. I hate you.

Ashley drops to her knees, sobbing. Jaime moves over beside her with an arm around her.

JAIME

I'm sorry, Ashley. I am soooooooo sorry.

ASHLEY

Does the pain ever go away?

JAIME

I'm not gonna lie to you. It's hard. It's a daily choice to trust God instead of to doubt Him. And you have your good days and your bad days. But yeah. Slowly. It does start to get better. With time. Some days I search in vain for some visible evidence of God. But then I remember, that's not the way it works. It's a faith walk. Even when I can't hear Him.

ASHLEY

Yeah? And it's the silence that frightens me.

JAIME

Call to Him, Ashley. Call to Him and He will answer you.

ASHLEY

I want to believe, Jaime. But I just can't. Not right now. Not today.

They both sit there, silhouetted against a beautiful sunrise.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Listen, thank you. For coming out here. I'm sorry for the things I've said to you in the past.

(beat)

I guess you know who your real friends are when...

(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

(beat)
...well...

JAIME

Yeah.

INT. EMILY PHILLIPS' BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Principal Emily sleeps in her bed buried in blankets and quilts and pillows. A loud mechanical NOISE startles her awake. She gets out of bed to investigate the noise.

INT. EMILY PHILLIPS' LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Emily walks in to the living room and the NOISE level grows. The sound is coming from her driveway. She peeks out the window and sees a TOW TRUCK DRIVER hooking her car up to his truck.

EMILY

Oh no!

Emily runs out the door to the driveway.

EXT. EMILY PHILLIPS' HOUSE - SAME TIME

Emily pulls her robe around her as she moves quickly to the truck.

EMILY

What are you doing? This is my car!

The man ignores her presence and continues his work.

EMILY (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Please!

TRUCK DRIVER

Sorry lady. Just doing my job.

EMILY

Taking my car is not your job!

TRUCK DRIVER

It is if you're a repo man.

EMILY

Repo?

This sinks in like a load of bricks.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Can't you give me a break? It's hard to make ends meet on the kind of money I make.

TRUCK DRIVER

Yeah, tell me about it lady.

EMILY

I'm a poor widow all by myself; you just going to take my only mode of transportation?

TRUCK DRIVER

Like I said, I'm real sorry lady, but it's not my call.

He brushes by her and hops in his truck. He pulls away with Emily's car in tow. Emily stands stunned in the driveway.

EMILY

What next God; a lawsuit?

EXT. STEWART HOME - MORNING

A Limo pulls away from the estate. When it clears the corner, Ashley's car pulls quickly into the driveway. Ashley and Jaime exit the car and go inside.

INT. STEWART HOME - FOYER

Ashley moves quickly up the stairs towards her room. Jaime picks her way a little more carefully. Not sure what happened, but not wanting to get too far behind Ashley either.

ASHLEY

Hurry up, Churchie. This place gives me the creeps.

JAIME

Seriously.

Jaime rushes to catch up.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - HIGH RISE OFFICES

The same CROWD with Jill and the Reporters are there waiting as the Limo pulls up again. This time, Henry doesn't even wait for the DRIVER to come around. He just jumps out and walks past the whole crowd.

REPORTER 1

Good Morning, Mr. Stewart, have you
got time for a couple --

Henry blows right past without a word. The crowd is
wondering about the bandage over his eye.

REPORTER 1 (CONT'D)

Is he okay?

JILL

Um...no comment?

Jill hurries after him, leaving the Reporters scratching
their heads.

INT. STEWART HOME - ASHLEY'S ROOM - MORNING

Ashley tosses the last of some clothes into a duffel bag
while Jaime stands watch at the window.

ASHLEY

Anything?

JAIME

No, no, a thousand times, no.
Nothing. Nada. Bupkiss. I'll let
you know.

ASHLEY

I'm just -- okay -- I'm a little
stressed out here --

JAIME

I don't know if this is the right
answer.

ASHLEY

I'm absolutely sure it's not the
right answer. But, Jaime, if I
stay, someone is going to die.

Jaime swallows hard.

JAIME

We better get outta here.

Ashley zips the bag and they're out.

INT. BRADLY HILL BOYS LOCKER ROOM

The basketball team is getting ready. Jason walks through the door with a gym bag over his shoulder.

MIKE

What are you doing here?

JASON

Old girl Phillips realized what's best for this school. Besides, I couldn't stand watching you guys get beat.

MIKE

It's good to have you back.

Coach enters locker room.

COACH

Let's go. Time to take the court. Jason, hurry up and get your uniform on. It's time to win a game.

JASON

That's why I'm here, Coach.

Jason and Mike do a celebratory chest BUMP.

INT. BRADLY HILL HIGH GYMNASIUM

The game has two minutes left in the first half. The Bradley Hill Knights are up by fifteen. Jason is doing laps around this game. The other team calls a time out.

The Knights huddle around Coach.

COACH

You boys are doing great. I'm going to start sitting some of you guys out to let some of our second string get some play time.

JASON

I'm just getting warmed up coach. You want to keep that lead you keep me in.

COACH

Fine, but if the lead gets to thirty then I'm taking you all out.

JASON
 (with a smirk)
 Well then I'll keep it right at
 twenty-nine.

ON THE CHEER SQUAD

cheering on the side lines. The BUZZER sounds and their cheer ends. Mary picks up her story, amazingly, right where she left off...

MARY
 ...and then he called and asked me
 to come over. He said his parents
 were out of town. I mean, I never
 really noticed him before, but he's
 not as big a brute as he seems.
 When I got there he had dinner made
 and everything.
 (lewdly)
 And guess what we had for dessert?

Ashley doesn't respond. She's still in her own world.

MARY (CONT'D)
 Ashley! What's your problem?

ASHLEY
 What? Oh, nothing. Just caught up
 in --

MARY
 -- the game? Sweetheart, out of
 all these years of cheerleading
 when have we ever been caught up in
 a game? I think running into that
 door did a whole lot more damage
 than that scratch on your head. You
 haven't been yourself all night.

Mary tries to touch the spot, but Ashley ducks it.

ASHLEY
 I'm sorry. I'm just distracted I
 guess. I'm sorry --

Ashley shakes the cobwebs from her head.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
 -- see, I'm better. So finish
 telling me about Mike.

MARY

I'm not sure I want to. I think I'd rather hear about you and Jason since you're so distracted. There's got to be more to that story than you've told me.

Ashley looks to the court and watches Jason dribble the ball through the opposing team.

ON JASON

as he blows past the defense with one move after the other.

He fakes the last guy out and lets out a smug LAUGH. Time seems to SLOW as he goes up for a slam dunk.

He pushes off the ground with all his might. His balance is off. SNAP! Jason's knee bends too far in one direction, snapping his ACL.

He crumples to the ground.

Still seemingly stuck in a time warp, Jason lies on his back with eyes wide. He INHALES slow and deliberate.

JASON

(whisper)

God, no.

Time snaps back into its fast, unfaltering speed with the sound of the grating BUZZER.

The crowd is on their feet in shock and PANDEMONIUM at the upset. Coach's pounding FOOTSTEPS cross the court and echo throughout the gym. He reaches Jason and kneels down and begins to check him out.

COACH

What happened?

JASON

My knee. I heard it snap.

Coach checks his knee and realizes the problem. He looks horrified.

JASON (CONT'D)

It's over, isn't it?

COACH

We need to get you some x-rays, Son. First we need to get you off this court.

Coach and Mike help him off the floor and they take him towards the locker room.

FROM THE STANDS

Jaime shares a look from the front row with Ashley, who appears more numb than anything. Not like the other CHEER GIRLS who are freaking out.

ON THERESA

who runs down from the bleachers to catch up with her son. They pass by Emily who has stepped forward.

THERESA

This is your fault! I'll be talking to my lawyer!

Theresa storms off after Jason. Doesn't seem like Emily can get a break.

EXT. BRADLY HILL HIGH GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Everyone exits the game. All the foot traffic flows in a single direction, except for a lone figure in the crowd. It's Henry. He's waiting for someone he knows will be there.

Ashley emerges surrounded by her CHEER BUDS. She stops suddenly when she sees him and grabs Mary's arm.

MARY

Ow, what are you -- oh hey, look!
It's your dad.
(to Henry)
Evening, Mr. Stewart.

HENRY

Ashley, can I talk to you alone.

ASHLEY

Not likely.

She holds Mary even closer, but Mary pushes away.

MARY

Dude, it's cool. We'll go get the car. You two chat, and we'll pick you up right here.

She leaves Ashley alone. Again. Henry steps forward, Ashley takes a step back, weighing her flight options should running become a necessity.

But Henry doesn't seem his normal self. He looks pained.

HENRY
Your Mom is gone.

He waits for an answer to that, but Ashley stands there, arms crossed. More and more people push past.

HENRY (CONT'D)
When will you be coming home?

ASHLEY
I won't be coming home, dad.

HENRY
What do you mean? Where will you be?

ASHLEY
I dunno. I've still got a few details to work out.

Jaime exits the Gym and stops cold when she sees the two talking. She begins to PRAY silently.

HENRY
Things will be changing, Ashley.

ASHLEY
Dad, it's a little too late --

HENRY
There was a chemical fire --

He checks himself. Too many people around. He lowers his voice.

HENRY (CONT'D)
-- at the Apex plant today.
They're shutting it down.

Ashley's confused. Where is he going with this?

HENRY (CONT'D)
They're gonna come after me,
Ashley. There will be trials and
lawsuits. In the end, there won't
be much left. If anything.

ASHLEY
I gotta go, dad.

Henry steps to block her path. Some of the old fire is coming back. She stops, not even sure that all these witnesses would stop him from doing something stupid.

HENRY

Ashley? I'm warning you --

And suddenly Jaime is upon them.

JAIME

Oh there you are, Ash! Come on, everyone's waiting!

Pulling Ashley safely away.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Oh hi, Mr. Stewart, bye Mr. Stewart! We'll have her home by midnight.

Henry stares after them dumbstruck, but it all happens too fast and before he knows it, there's a sea of people separating them.

Jaime continues holding Ashley's arm. Ashley squeezes it close. Her heart is racing.

ASHLEY

It's never gonna end. It's never gonna be over.

JAIME

What?

Jaime checks over her shoulder to make sure they're not being followed.

ASHLEY

He's just gonna keep finding me.

JAIME

No, Ashley --

Honk! Honk! Mary and the others pull right in front of them.

MARY

Come on, Ashley! Let's go! Move it!

JAIME

Ashley, please --

Ashley pulls away and steps into the vehicle. Mary scowls back at Jaime. Then the door SLAMS and the car SPEEDS away.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Jason sits on the table with his mom standing to the side. The DOCTOR flips through his charts.

DOCTOR

You did some fine work on this ACL.
I see here that the ligaments --

JASON

How long till I'm healed?

DOCTOR

Well Jason, you're going to need some surgery. Then you'll need to rehabilitate that leg and knee. This isn't going to be a short and easy process. You're going to have to stay off that leg for a while.

JASON

What about basketball? I graduate this year. I need basketball to get in school.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, Son. Basketball is out for a while. But don't worry. We'll fix you up as fast as we can.

JASON

But not this season.

DOCTOR

But not this season.

(a beat)

Now I need to go grab some more paper work and we'll get the both of you out of here.

The Doctor leaves Jason and Theresa alone.

THERESA

It's going to be okay, Honey. I'm gonna fix this.

JASON

You can't fix this mom.

THERESA

Don't underestimate your--

JASON

No! Mom, its over! There's nothing...nothing left for me.

THERESA

Jason, you'll get through this. You're a fighter. Give your knee time to heal, and you'll be back on the court before you know it, stronger than ever.

JASON

Stop, Mom! Stop with the lies. That's all you've ever done.

THERESA

I'm protecting you, Son. I know what's best for --

JASON

I said, Stop! Who knows what's best for me other than me!?

Jason struggles up from his chair and heads for the door. He loses balance and falls, but his Mom catches him.

He pushes her off and falls against the wall.

THERESA

Jason?

JASON

I don't need you, Mom. I need my game back. Basketball made me who I am. It was my only ticket outta here. Who am I without it? Who?!

THERESA

You're Jason. My son.

JASON

I'm a nobody.

Jason hobbles out the door leaving his mother behind. Theresa falls back in the chair; tears streaming from her eyes.

EXT. HARTLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah works on some birthday invitations when Jaime returns home. The home is remarkably well put together for the short amount of time they've been moving in.

JAIME

Wow, I'm impressed, Mom. The place is looking good. What are you working on?

SARAH

Oh, yeah. Well, it's your dad's 50th birthday, so I'm sending out invitations, getting everything ready for company and --

JAIME

Company? Who's...uh...who is company?

SARAH

Not sure yet. It's gonna be a big surprise party, though. I can't wait to see the look on Tom's face.

JAIME

Yeah, but the company part, back up to that.

SARAH

Gosh, I dunno, Jaime, Aunt Libby and Uncle Mark will probably be coming and Mimi --

Jaime falls dramatically back on the couch.

JAIME

Oh come on now. Mimi hates me.

SARAH

Jaime! Mimi doesn't hate you.

JAIME

Ever since the, you know, fire thing.

SARAH

Now that's just ridiculous. Mimi doesn't have a mean bone in her whole body. Now, Tom is turning fifty so we have to do it up big.

JAIME

I burned down her trash can. The big one out back. She's never forgiven me.

SARAH

Now, that is just silly. She has never even brought that up since then --

JAIME

To you! But I can see it in her beady little eyes. She remembers. What do you mean Fifty? He's that old?

SARAH

Come on now. Fifty's not old. Fifty's the new thirty.

JAIME

Still, it's a long time. A long time to live. A long time to trust.

Jaime makes her way over to the table full of invites.

SARAH

Trust? What do you mean?

JAIME

I don't know. I guess I just wonder how you're supposed to trust that long without a direct message from God.

SARAH

Well, that's why He gave us the Bible. His word to us. So we will remember.

JAIME

I know, but sometimes it's not enough. Ashley says she heard an audible voice the other day. Why don't I get an audible voice? If I heard an audible voice, I'd be set for life!

SARAH

You know, but God also speaks to our hearts. In that still small voice.

JAIME

That's what I mean, but how do you know that it's Him and not you just thinking up random crazy things?

SARAH

Honey, do you think God's speaking to you?

Jaime's a little uncomfortable with the question. She picks up some return address labels and begins sticking them to the envelopes.

JAIME

Maybe. Like, I feel like I'm suppose to call Ashley, but I just saw her. What am I supposed to say? God told me to call you? She's already freaked out enough.

SARAH

Alright, remember the verse about "He will give you the desires of your heart?"

JAIME

Yeah. I guess.

SARAH

What does that mean to you?

JAIME

Whatever you want, he'll give it to you?

SARAH

Sometimes. Maybe. But there's another way to look at it. Sometimes, He places a desire, a want, inside of us.

JAIME

Like, we want something because He wants us to want it?

SARAH

Exactly.

JAIME

Exactly? I don't even know what I'm talking about! I just don't want to do something unless I know 110% that God is telling me to do it.

SARAH

If you wait that long it might be too late.

(a beat)

And, I'll take that.

JAIME

What?

SARAH

Mimi's invitation you just put in your pocket. I'll take it.

JAIME

(a la Mimi)

"Ack! Look it's an invitation from the fire girl! Blaaaaaah! Run for your lives!"

She reluctantly takes it back out and hands it over.

INT. ASHLEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Ashley is curled up in the backseat of her car. You can see her breath in the cold. Her cell phone RINGS.

ASHLEY

Hello?

MARY (V.O.)

(on phone)

Hey, me and Mike are going over to see Jason. You wanna go?

ASHLEY

You know what? I do wanna go. Yeah, sure. I'll meet you guys there.

Ashley hangs up the phone and climbs up to the driver's seat. She sits for a moment; staring into space. She looks down at the passenger seat where the newspaper with "APEX FIRE" splashed across the front page.

She grabs the paper, balls it up and throws it out the window. Cranking the car, she drives off.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jason sits in a recliner with his leg propped up. Mary and Mike sit intertwined on the couch. Ashley walks in from the kitchen with a couple of beer bottles in hand.

ASHLEY
Here you go, Babe.

JASON
If I knew better I would think you
were trying to get me drunk.

She flashes a mischievous smile.

ASHLEY
I am.

MIKE
Dude, Jace, we're really going to
miss you tomorrow at the game.

Mary elbows Mike.

MIKE (CONT'D)
What? We are!

JASON
Yeah, duh, because you guys suck
without me.

Mike and Mary look at each other, both are uneasy. Jason is
drunk and angry.

MARY
We know this sucks, Jason, but you
don't have to be mean.

JASON
Shut up, Mary! I didn't ask you to
come over here!

MARY
Look, we just came over to see if
you needed anything since your
Mom's on double shift again, but
apparently you're fine by yourself.
Come on Mike let's get out of here.

They start to get up.

JASON
No, don't leave! You want to party?
Come on we'll party.
(to Ashley)
What do you want to do, Babe?

ASHLEY
Let's go for a drive. Maybe stop
off and pick up a pack of Winstons?

Dawning light on Jason's face.

JASON

Awww, I get it. Sounds great!
Get my keys. I can still drive
with one leg.

Ashley claps and stands to her feet.

ASHLEY

All right! Move 'em out.

MARY

Are you crazy? You're drunk out of
your mind! I'm not letting you
drive me anywhere. Mike and I are
getting out of here.

JASON

Mike? You gonna let your girl boss
you around like that. Now get
yours and her butt in the car.
Let's go. I'm good. I got it.

Ashley helps Jason hobble out the door and to the car. Mary
and Mike are left starrng at each other.

MIKE

What? Come on. It's just around
the block. If he gets out of hand
we can stop and I'll drive.

MARY

(hesitant)

Whatever. I don't know why I listen
to you.

They head out the door after Jason and Ashley.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Jason's car speeds by with a ROAR.

INT. JASON'S CAR - TRAVELLING

Jason and Ashley sit up front with Mike and Mary in the back.

MARY

Slow down Jason. You're going to
get us all killed.

No response. Mike leans in.

MIKE

Hey man, why don't you slow down a little. We're not in a rush to get anywhere.

JASON

Why don't you stop being a backseat whiner, and get your hand off my shoulder!

Jason jerks his shoulder from Mike's hand causing the car to swerve.

MARY

Oh my God, we're gonna die!

Ashley looks back at Mary with glaring, cold eyes. She leans over to Jason's ear.

ASHLEY

(whisper)

I thought you said this thing was fast.

JASON

You want to go where I'm going?
You know what that means?

ASHLEY

(whisper)

You said if it feels right, then it is right.

Ashley leans back to her side of the seat with an evil grin. Jason smiles back at her and pushes the peddle to the floor.

EXT. ROAD - SAME TIME

They're in a busier area and they are dodging traffic left and right. Flying through intersections.

INT. JASON'S CAR - TRAVELLING

Jason and Ashley ride along calmly and almost vacant. Mary and Mike are panicked.

MIKE

Jason, this isn't funny man! Pull over and let us out!

MARY

Ashley! Snap out of it! Make
Jason stop! I want outta here!

Ashley turns on Mary.

ASHLEY

(coldly)

Where were you when I needed you,
huh? Do unto others, I always say.

Mary's eyes are wide with fear. The world has gone crazy on her. Ashley turns back in her seat. She looks over at Jason.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

I love you, Jason.

JASON

I love you, too.

Jason looks at Ashley and to his left, through the driver's window, the front of an SUV only feet away and CRASH!

The SUV smashes into the driver's side of the car sending broken glass everywhere, spinning everything round and round and we...

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN

INT. WILLIAM'S CAR - TRAVELLING

WILLIAM is an average shmoe on his way home from work. Just happily driving down the road, radio playing. His fingers tap along with the beat. He enters a turn in the road and...SCREEECH!!

William slams on his brakes to avoid hitting the girl standing in the middle of the road.

His car stops just inches from Ashley.

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Ashley stands in the middle of the road. Dazed.

Jason's car is smashed and broken in the middle of the intersection. There is wreckage everywhere.

Ashley has blood running down the side of her face. William climbs quickly from his car.

WILLIAM

Are you okay? Ma'am! Are you okay?

ASHLEY

What? Uh, yeah...I'm fine.

WILLIAM

Don't worry. An ambulance is on its way. I'm going to check on your friends. Stay right here.

INT. JASON'S CAR

Jason is slumped over on the steering wheel. He is covered in blood. Mary is on top of Mike with the top part of her body hanging out of the window.

Finally, SIRENS approach in the background. Voices SHOUTING.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN

INT. BRADLY HILL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Classes continue as normal. SLO-MO shots of students walking to class. In their midst is Ashley. Numb to the world.

INT. BRADLY HILL HIGH - LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Life must go on. The students are engrossed in the lecture; all save for Ashley. She sits in the back and looks over to the empty seat beside her.

Then her gaze goes to the window. Behind her, Jaime watches. The bell RINGS and Ashley's up and gone in a flash.

INT. BRADLY HILL HIGH - LOCKERS

Ashley pulls some books out of her locker. Going through the motions. Jaime walks up to her, very gingerly.

She RAPS lightly on the locker door.

JAIME

Knock, knock. It's me. How are you doing?

Ashley doesn't respond. She's methodically straightening her locker.

JAIME (CONT'D)

I just -- I haven't heard from you since the other morning.

(beat)

Have you been staying at home?

ASHLEY

(coldly)

I told you I'm done with that place.

JAIME

If you need a place to stay you can...

ASHLEY

I'm fine.

Jaime puts a hand on her arm.

JAIME

I'm so sorry about Mary and Jason. They were so young and so full of --

ASHLEY

Crap. Full of Crap, Jaime.

She turns directly to Jaime now.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You wanna know the biggest shame? It's a shame I didn't die with them.

JAIME

Ashley, you can't mean --

ASHLEY

I'm tired, Churchie. I'm tired of everyone telling me they're sorry. Sorry that my friends are dead. Well I'm sorry, too. Sorry, that I walked away from that accident.

JAIME

Jason and Mary...

ASHLEY

Jason and Mary are the lucky ones, don't you get it? They finally escaped this hell hole of a life. Sorry? No, I don't think so. I'm jealous. It should be me six feet in the ground.

JAIME

But what about the things we talked about? What about the voice?

ASHLEY

Sooner or later Jaime, you will find there is no God.

JAIME

But the wreck...?

ASHLEY

The wreck? That only proved what I believed. If there was a God, he would have given me what I deserved that night.

Ashley pushes past Jaime and walks down the hall.

JAIME

What do I do God? This is impossible.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily types on her computer when she hears the KNOCK at her door. As usual these days, she braces herself for the worst.

EMILY

Come in.

TOM

Hi, Mrs. Phillips. Hope I'm not disturbing you too much.

EMILY

Oh no, Mr. Hartley, come on in. It's never "disturbing" to see a smiling face for a change. What can I do for you?

TOM

Actually, Sarah and I want to do something for you.

EMILY

What do you mean?

TOM

Well, our family is just so blessed to have brought Jaime here. It hasn't been easy you know.

EMILY

I can imagine.

TOM

When we adopted her six years ago we thought at first --

He adjusts uncomfortably.

TO

-- that we had made a mistake. But thank God she's surrounded with a good church, a great school. Bradley Hill makes all the difference in the world for her. She's told us that herself.

EMILY

I appreciate that, Mr. Hartley. And we appreciate you trusting us with her. She's got so much going on inside. It's hard to read her sometimes. But you and Sarah have provided a loving home and her life has been changed dramatically. We only wish we had more involved family's like yours at Bradley Hill.

TOM

We do what we can, but we do appreciate the firm foundation in God that this school has provided. And we wanted to show our appreciation in some way, so, we wanted to make this donation as a scholarship for a family who may need it.

Tom passes an envelope to Emily. Emily's eyes begin to tear up a little, she's so touched.

EMILY

Oh, wow! Thank you so much! This is, this is...totally unexpected!

TOM

Now don't get too excited. It's not much, but we just wanted to do something. Needed to do something.

A tear falls down Emily's cheek.

TOM (CONT'D)

You okay Mrs. Phillips?

EMILY

Yes. I am now. Thank you Mr. Hartley. God's using you, to tell me, that everything's gonna be all right.

Tom nods, smiling.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

Ashley walks down the aisle and stops in front of the Tylenol. She looks around then grabs a bottle and sticks it in her jacket and walks out.

INT. STEWART HOME - DAY

The house is just how Ashley saw it last. The furniture is still knocked over and there's broken glass on the floor.

Ashley takes a delicate step up into the foyer. She's quiet. Alert. She looks down to where she last left her father. There's a stain on the floor.

She slowly creeps down the hall towards his office.

INT. STEWART HOME - OFFICE

The door is cracked, but she can see her father passed out on his desk. Scotch glass turned over and draining on the table. The office looks like an angry bear tore through just moments before. Paper and books are thrown everywhere. The furniture has been knocked around.

Ashley pushes the door open with a creak. Henry doesn't move.

ASHLEY

Stupid drunk.

Ashley moves to the side table and picks up the prescription bottle. Sleeping pills. She takes the bottle and exits.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

She walks in and locks the door behind her. She throws the bottle of Tylenol and the sleeping pills on the bed and turns to her closet.

She searches through her clothes looking for an outfit to wear.

After much deliberation she finally picks the perfect one and lays it out on the bed; all neat and proper.

She walks into her bathroom and turns on the shower.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - DAY

Sarah and Jaime fold laundry in the living room.

SARAH

If you still have that feeling then you should just do it.

JAIME

I don't know why I'm so nervous about it.

SARAH

I don't know either. What's the worst that could happen? Pretend it is just your imagination playing tricks on you. Then all that will happen is you'll have a nice conversation with Ashley.

JAIME

That's actually not helping.

SARAH

But, if it is God speaking and you don't call, well, I just wouldn't want to be disobedient.

JAIME

Ahhh, guilt trip's not helping either. Alright, alright. I know when you're saying to do something but not really saying it. Why do moms do that?

Jaime walks over to the phone and Sarah smiles to herself.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Ashley walks out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her head. She walks over to the bed and picks up her cell phone and powers it off.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE

Jaime has the phone to her ear.

JAIME

That's weird. She must have her cell phone off. She's a cheerleader. They don't turn their cell phones off. Ever.

SARAH

Well, what do you think that means?

JAIME

That it's all just my imagination and I shouldn't be butting in to other people's business which, by the way, is a thing with this family, I've noticed.

SARAH

Maybe.

JAIME

Her cell phone is off. What am I supposed to do?

SARAH

You'll figure it out. In the meanwhile, you can help me put these clothes away.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Ashley sits at her mirror putting her makeup on. She applies it slowly and deliberately, taking more care than she usually does. She's doing the works.

INT. HARTLEY HOUSE - BEDROOM

Sarah and Jaime are stuffing clothes into the dresser.

JAIME

I don't know, Mom. Maybe I just need to talk to her.

(MORE)

JAIME (CONT'D)

Make sure she's okay. I mean, that feeling is getting more and more intense. Look, it's making me shake.

She holds up her hand and sure enough, it's trembling.

SARAH

For crying out loud, Jaime, just drive over to her house.

JAIME

She won't be there. There's no telling where she's at.

SARAH

Well you're not gonna stay around here driving me crazy. I think you should just start at her house and go from there. Dinner's at 7. Go. Shoo.

Jaime struggles with this for a minute. Then decides.

JAIME

I'll call you when I find her.

Jaime darts out the door.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Ashley stands in front of her mirror wearing the outfit she picked out earlier. She's examining herself making sure everything is just right and no hair is out of place. She is truly beautiful.

She turns from the mirror and looks over her room. It's full of pictures of her and her friends, cheerleading trophies, etc.

ASHLEY

Seriously? What a farce.

She walks over and sits at the end of her bed. She picks up the bottle of Tylenol, dumps it into the bottle of sleeping pills.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Bottom's up.

She chugs the whole thing down. Coughing and sputtering a bit in the process.

INT. JAIME'S CAR - TRAVELLING

Jaime drives her junker top-speed through traffic. Which isn't saying much. She is worried and scared.

INT. ASHLEY'S BEDROOM

Ashley looks strangely peaceful as she lies back on her bed. She closes her eyes and the empty bottle rolls out of her hand.

INT. JAIME'S CAR

Stuck at traffic light. Jaime DRUMS her fingers on the steering wheel in impatience.

JAIME

Come on, come on, come oooooon!

Green. Go.

EXT. STEWART HOME - NIGHT

The Stewart House is still and quiet. Not a leaf is blowing, nor any dog barking. Death is here.

SCREEECH!!

Jaime's car comes to a sliding halt in front of the house. She jumps out when she sees Ashley's car there. She races to the front door.

The front door being unlocked, she just lets herself in.

JAIME

Hello? Anyone home.

INT. STEWART HOME

She sees the mess and it stuns her.

BLACK:

She runs down the hall and into the office. She recoils at the sight of Henry who is still out cold.

BLACK:

Jaime turns and runs up the stairs.

BLACK:

Jaime bangs on Ashley's door.

BLACK:

Jaime takes a running charge at the door and KNOCKS it open. She sees Ashley unconscious on the bed.

BLACK:

Jaime uses all her might to pull Ashley off the bed and carry her to the bathroom.

BLACK:

Jaime struggles with getting Ashley across the room and into the bathroom.

BLACK:

She drops Ashley down by the toilet and forces her to vomit.

BLACK:

Ashley begins throwing up the poison in her body.

BLACK:

FADE IN

INT. ASHLEY'S BATHROOM

Jaime holds Ashley close. Both of them sit on the bathroom floor by the toilet. It's a degrading place to be. Tears and mascara stream down Ashley's face.

Jaime has also been crying.

ASHLEY

How did you -- how did you find me,
Churchie?

JAIME

I dunno. I guess God knew right
where you were.

ASHLEY

God hates me.

JAIME

No, Ashley. He loves you. He
always has loved you.

ASHLEY

But how can I know?

JAIME

Shhhhh shhh shhh. You just do.

Ashley rests in Jaime's arms. Both thanking God in their hearts.

INT/EXT. STEWART HOME - NIGHT

The same scene as the beginning. Starting with the picture of Ashley in the smashed up frame. Outside, an ambulance and a few police cars have arrived. Lights flash. Neighbors gawk. People are running around doing their jobs.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

So, like I said. I died today.

(beat)

I died to the things of my past. I
died to my sin, and now I can live
life without the mask.

(beat)

Sure, things are still hard. Life
didn't get any easier. But now, at
least, I have hope. Now I have
God.

Shot of Ashley being wheeled out on a gurney. Jaime stays by her side the whole time.

FADE TO BLACK.