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ANDALUSIA

by

JULIA CLARE PETEET

Under the Direction of Jack Boozer

ABSTRACT

This is a creative thesis in the form of a screenplay titled “Andalusia” in which a woman, Katherine, searches for meaning in her life. After suffering through a childhood wrought with tragedy, disappointment, and chaos, Katherine strives to create a healthy reality in which she can thrive. After failing miserably at this once, she takes a different path and finds herself hidden away in her dead father’s house writing about the Mississippi Delta town of Andalusia.

INDEX WORDS: Female friendship film, Screenplay, Creative thesis, Women’s Studies, Feminism, Mississippi Delta, Deep South, Southern Gothic

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by

JULIA CLARE PETEET

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

2006

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2006

ANDALUSIA

by

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Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
June 2006

This entire project is dedicated to my mother, Julia Clare Cockrell Peteet. *Andalusia* is dedicated to Kelly Whittington, who is three for three – funerals that is. And last but not least, I would like to dedicate *Andalusia* to Louisa McConnell, who somehow made death tolerable in 2005. I will never forget our time in palliative care. Thanks for the ride, Louisa, among other things. I will remember the things you did for Daddy and me for the rest of my life.

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I. INTRODUCTION

My thesis consists of two parts. The first part is the screenplay, *Andalusia*, located in the Appendix of this document, which tells the story of Katherine, a woman on a rocky journey to finding her voice. The second part of my thesis is the following academic paper, intended to provide a context within which to view my screenplay. The context examines both the nature of the feminist academic /social activist split and the state of mainstream screenwriting and it analyzes my screenplay in light of those contexts. That this is a creative thesis dictates to a large degree the structure of the following contextualization. To the extent that it made sense, I attempted to adhere to the guiding principles of the academic research thesis.

When 'female studies' was first institutionalized in the West, a split developed in the feminist movement between academics and social activists. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a model for bridging the divide between feminist academia and feminist social activism by creating a mainstream screenplay informed by the knowledge and skills gained through the academic pursuit of Women's Studies. Screenwriting can be an effective form of feminist social activism because, if the screenplay is made into a film, the messages in the screenplay can reach a broad audience and have powerful impact on culture. Film narratives in which well-drawn female protagonists seek and find personal empowerment give rise to constructive dialogues in our culture and they have the power to form powerful mythologies. Such stories have the potential, through dramatization, to introduce new possibilities and validate common struggles.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of screenwriters who are female feminists writing for Western mainstream film.

II. THE ACADEMIC / SOCIAL ACTIVIST RIFT

Messer-Davidow (2002) remembers when the big question surrounding the creation of Women's Studies was, "can Women's Studies be primarily academic or are they sure to become militant and tied to women's liberation?" (p.88) It was a 1970s question asked at formal gatherings for higher education professionals and at conferences. Messer-Davidow posits that fears of mixing feminism and institutionalized knowledge might still be present in the academy. Her theory is that this attitude intimidated academics into initiating a divide between themselves and activists in the movement so that they could keep their place among professionals in the higher education institutions. She contends that this attitude keeps a division between the two. I agree with Davidow-Messer, and it is as a partial solution to this problem – at least in my own pursuit of a feminist existence - that I executed my thesis project. Davidow-Messer sums up the problem by cleverly quoting a fortune cookie: "Knowing and not doing are equal to not knowing at all." (p.1) I have employed skills and techniques learned as a graduate student in screenwriting with the knowledge I learned as an academic student of Women's Studies in order to create activist art.

Before examining in greater depth the rift between academic feminists and social activists, it is important to first establish the meaning of the word "feminism." According to Freedman (2002):

> Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies. (p.7)

A feminist, for the purposes of this paper, therefore, is a person of any gender who operates from a consciousness informed by feminism. In other words, a feminist would approach life and work keeping the aforementioned ideas of feminism in mind. A feminist would ideally maintain the intentions of promoting the evolution of women's status in all that they do. (Hollinger, 1998). It is, however, important to keep in mind that the modus operandi of any particular feminist may differ greatly from that of another.

It might help broaden the understanding of how complex the feminist movement of the West actually is by looking at the history of feminism and highlighting the time the split between the feminist academics and the social activists occurred. Freedman explores the history of the feminist movement starting with the first wave, dating back to the 1800s when women fought for education and property rights as well as rights associated with motherhood. Around 1910, motherhood was rejected by women within the movement who were presenting a "common human identity with men" (p.4) as a basis for equal rights. The 1920s suffrage movement, still considered part of the first wave, won women the right to vote and it is not until the 1960s that what has come to be known as the second wave of feminism begins.

The complicated beauty of second wave feminism is that it "championed both women's equality with men and … women's difference from men." (p.5) That is to say, second wave feminists demanded political and economic rights equal to men's, but they simultaneously asserted the need to be recognized for their specific needs in reproductive and sexual matters. Second wave feminists put forth much needed critiques of interpersonal relationships as well. However, it is during this time that the split explored by Messer-Davidow occurs – between feminist social activists and feminist academics. It was in the 1970s during the second wave when strong feminist organizers got together to create Women's Studies. However, once organized, according to Messer-Davidow, feminist academics went the way of the institution and organizers went the way of activism.

Freedman describes equality in a way relevant to Messer-Davidow's argument when she writes, "I use *equal worth* rather than equality because the latter term often assumes that men's historical experience – whether economic, political or sexual – is the standard to which women should aspire." (p.7) This concept is what Messer-Davidow is referring when she criticizes feminists for acclimating into the patriarchal educational institution and losing grip of the original activist mission of the women's movement. Messer-Davidow contends Women's Studies scholars should have created a unique point of departure and structure based on the movement's activist roots.

The third wave of feminism – 1990s to present – completes the picture of a now mature and finally formally diverse women's movement. Many third wave feminists proudly bear the name 'feminist', a word historically a cause for argument and heated

debates. A potent aspect of third wave feminism is that women of color, who experience a layered set of oppressive forces far more complicated than that of many white women, are now a loud and strong voice in this movement. The third wave strives to give power to every feminist, while historically the women's movement privileged already privileged white middle-class women. Now, writes Freedman, "black feminists, Asian American feminists, Third World feminists, lesbian feminists, and male feminists" (p.6) are all part of the movement. Third wave feminism seems to "point insistently to difference while simultaneously unsettling every definition of woman arrived at." (Hershorn 1987, p.6)

III. FEMINISM IN MAINSTREAM FILM

A. Avant-Garde versus Mainstream Film

The maturation of the feminist movement into the third wave makes this an opportune time to bridge the gap between activists and academics because feminism is beginning to soften to the use of popular culture. In the past feminists utilized avant-garde film. It is important to understand the difference between mainstream film and so-called avant-garde film and why I have chosen to focus on mainstream film as a vehicle for feminism. Defined as "films that receive commercial theatrical distribution in the United States" (p. 10), mainstream film differs from avant-garde film, which is experimental. (Hollinger 1998) Avant-garde cinema, heralded by some feminist critics and idealized as *the* outlet for pure feminist film engagement, is structured and imaged in ways that confront what feminist film critics deem the misogyny of mainstream cinema plot lines and camera techniques. (Heck-Rabi 1984) However, according to McCabe (2004) "too few cinema goers actually experience pleasure watching avant-garde films."

(p.20) I remember watching my first feminist avant-garde film twelve years ago. It was disturbing and shocking and I could not finish the film. Only now, as a candidate for a Master's degree in feminism am I able to appreciate the message and format of the film. Because of its limited distribution, limited audiences, and the inability of people who have not been educated in feminist theory to understand the messages, avant-garde film risks marginalizing feminist screenwriting and preaching only to the converted. A mainstream film screenplay, on the other hand, has the potential to open a dialogue about feminism between the converted and the *non*-converted that will lead to social change. An avant-garde style project would not fit those needs, although it indeed might be considered by feminist film theorists and critics as more of a purely feminist endeavor than my screenplay, which is aimed at a broader audience.

B. Feminism in Screenwriting

Acker (1991) gives an historical overview of women in film and reveals that before the 1920s there were more female screenwriters than there are today. Why? Acker postulates that back then film was experimental. It was not a business yet. She feels that as filmmaking became increasingly more lucrative that women disappeared from the picture. Acker explores the careers of various female screenwriters during and before the 1920s. Some of these women fall into the category of feminist and some do not: Francis Marion produced over 200 of her screenplays and moved effortlessly from silent films to motion pictures with sound. Not only was Marion economically successful in her career, but she "gave her female characters intelligence and humanity." (p.50) Virginia Van Opp, on the other hand, wrote screenplays in which women started out with careers but then

they saw the proverbial light, settled down, and lived a life composed solely of domestic activities. Louise Weber, Acker continues, wrote screenplays about abortion and birth control. Some of her films were even banned, which of course only made audiences want to see them more. Weber made over three million dollars for Universal Studios but became so political and dogmatic with her writing that audiences were turned off and ceased to get pleasure from her films. In 2004, women accounted for twelve percent of writers working on the 250 top grossing domestic films. 80 percent of the top grossing domestic films had no female writers at all. (Martin 2005)

Moreover, it is important to remember that just being a female screenwriter does not necessarily mean the writer is interested in using her art to advance the cause of women. *Piano*, written and directed by Jane Campion is constructed around the protagonist, Ada (Holly Hunter) and her lover Baines (Harvey Keitel). Feminists criticize sketches of female characters in mainstream cinema for lacking a strong, clear voice. This is a metaphor, of course, for a larger lack, but in Campion's story Ada is a literal mute. The primary means by which Ada expresses herself is through her piano, yet throughout the story Ada has no control over her piano – it is always a man who controls her access to this piano. Ada's husband sells the piano at one point in the story to Baines, who blackmails Ada into performing sexual favors in return for the piano. By the end of the story, Ada falls in love with Baines – the very man who psychologically abused her to gratify his sexual needs. (Petro 2004)

Although the statistics point to a dearth of female screenwriters and, as demonstrated by *Piano*, some of the stories written by female screenwriters are

potentially destructive to women's progress, what has come to be known as a renaissance in women's literature is taking place. (Freedman 2002) Women are writing their coming of age stories in a field traditionally male-dominated, and they are doing it for a huge audience eager for characters and stories to identify with. This phenomenon is intriguingly correlated to film because so many of these popular women's books are being adapted to film: Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), Rebecca Welle's Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood (2001), and The Color Purple (1982) are a few. Judging by the reception of the adaptations of these books to film – *The Color Purple* (1985) was nominated for eleven Oscars – one can conclude that the *industry* of film keeps women out, not their inability to tell a good story and certainly not the lack of an audience eager to listen.

The literature exploring the link between feminism and film frequently summarizes, utilizes, or points directly to Mulvey (1975), considered by some as the canonical reference for feminist film analysis. Mulvey, a feminist psychoanalytic film critic, considers film a spectator event of sorts where men are the lookers, the camera a male set of eyes, and women the object being stared at. It is Mulvey's contention that Freud's theories regarding human beings looking at each other's bodies and the pleasure derived from such looking is replicated in the act of viewing a movie. She posits that an anonymous dark cinema with a viewer setting is the perfect place to participate in this pleasurable act. It is the "objectification of female characters and the narcissistic process of identification with the 'ideal ego' seen on screen" (p.10) that automatically takes place, regardless of whether the spectator is a woman or a man. Her theory elaborates on

this by explaining that women actually become men in this process of what she calls assuming the 'gaze'. This term is widely accepted and used by some feminist film critics, while others have criticized Mulvey's use of a school of thought as patriarchal as Freudian psychoanalysis on which to rest her theory. (McCabe 2004)

Further criticism of Mulvey's theories, like McCabe's, accuse her of isolating the text in a way that precludes more complex, hence more accurate analyses:

> Too much attention has been given over to the primacy of the film text; and to studying it in isolation to understand how the internal textual mechanisms produce meaning … text-based criticism offers little scope for dealing with questions related to the specific cultural and socio-historic context in which films are produced and consumed … producing a gap between feminism and real women, between political ideology and personal experience, between how actual women audiences make use of films. (p. 38)

I created an example of the more complex way of looking at a film that McCabe seems to call for:

The Hours (2002) explores the emotional landscape of three women: Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman), an author who drowns herself; Clarissa (Meryl Streep), a literary editor planning a party for an ex-lover dying of AIDS; and Mrs. Dalloway (Julianne Moore), a dangerously unfulfilled wife and mother who escapes her misery to become a librarian in Canada. I watched *The Hours* with my friend Lydia, notorious for her inability to remain engaged throughout an entire film. Raised on the idea that it would

provide eternal bliss, Lydia married and had three children. She divorced when her spouse came out as gay and she was essentially left to raise the three children alone. Two of her children committed suicide and her ex-husband died slowly and painfully from complications due to a sexually transmitted disease.

When watching *The Hours,* Lydia remained transfixed. The film spoke to her so deeply that when it ended, Lydia suggested we rent the film again some time. Lydia has no college degree and scoffs at what she calls 'silly fiction books'. *The Hours*, however, resonated with her. Lydia later reported relating to Mrs. Dalloway as if she had found a new friend with whom to share her deepest secrets about not finding eternal bliss in matrimony and motherhood. She said that before the film, she never imagined that another women could be betrayed the way she had been by her husband – only to be left to care for him as he died slowly and painfully from a sexually transmitted disease. Lydia said that as she watched Virginia Woolf's walk into the river to her death that for that moment, she imagined that perhaps her children's choices to die by their own hands were not so much an affront to her, their mother, but maybe an experience that creative people confront as part of their gift of intense perception, for they were artists, like Virginia Woolf. I will remember the conversation I had with Lydia after *The Hours* for the rest of my life. Lydia described how during the film she felt that her pain was shared - and therefore lifted from her being - if only temporarily.

This style of reviewing is a deep, honest and reflective reporting of two women's experiences of consuming *The Hours*. With a refreshing omission of the male/female binary, this review considers the "specific culture and socio-historic context" to which

McCabe gives deserved attention. There is value in both Mulvey's and McCabe's styles of analyzing film, but it is important to consider both, for neither stands alone.

The following is a discussion of the mainstream film screenplays that are most frequently examined in feminist film literature. The first three films are viewed negatively by feminist critics based on storyline and female protagonists' antagonistic characterizations, and feminist critics' opinions are divided on the fourth film.

Pretty Woman (1984) is cited by feminists as cultural proof of the 1980s male backlash against women's progress because of its premise and its absurdly sketched main character. The premise is that Vivian (Julia Roberts), a streetwalker, is rescued from her bad life by a rich corporate raider, Edward (Richard Gere), who picks her up for a night of fun. After putting her through a series of tests of her femininity and class, Edward falls in love with Vivian when she passes them all, promoting the myth that women do not need jobs or an education. They need to be pretty and act a certain way so that a man – who is educated and has a job – will provide for them. (Humm 1997) Another feminist critique points to Vivian, saying that she is characterized as a "sick and impossible male fantasy of Madonna and whore all conveniently wrapped into one woman who behaves as an innocent child." (Greenburg 1991, p.20) Most disturbing to me is how flippantly *Pretty Woman* treats sex work. It almost glorifies it as a fun, viable option to education and career. Considering that "for all the pop-culture platitudes surrounding it, prostitution is no fun, no victimless crime, and is rather a humiliating, often deadly enterprise" (p.12) it is disappointing that Hollywood could create a romantic comedy

around a woman involved in the profession and harrowing that such a film was so well-received.

Fatal Attraction (1987) is also cited by feminist film critics as a backlash film. The main female character, Alex (Glen Close), has a weekend affair with the married Dan (Michael Douglas) and when he says it is over, she has a psychotic break. Alex cuts her arms up in an attempt to win Dan back; she kidnaps his daughter; she boils the daughter's pet rabbit; and she eventually tries to kill Dan's wife. Feminists point to Alex as having an androgynous name, being childless and being financially independent. They see her characterization as a psycho as an expression of the patriarchy's fear of such women. (Humm 1997) Another important thing to note about Alex and women like her is that they are "free to express and act on their desire." (p.58) This could be a serious threat to the control system in place in which it is men who are free to be active while women must remain passive. The most disturbing scene of the film reveals Alex's true problem. She literally vomits when she sees peers through the window of Dan's home and sees him with his wife and child, laughing. Alex is not just a scorned woman, we are shown. She is psychotic because she is a professional instead of a homemaker.

Disclosure (1994), yet another backlash film, situates Meredith (Demi Moore) and Tom (Michael Douglas) in a sexual harassment suit – Meredith as the accused, Tom as the accuser. Feminists lamented *Disclosure*'s release. Although there were no major motion pictures based on the subject of sexual harassment in the workplace at that time, *Disclosure,* like *Fatal Attraction*, focused on demonizing a powerful sexual woman – not the real experience of sexual harassment. (Humm 1997) Feminists, who have fought for

everything, including education, career opportunities, and laws against sexual harassment are left – after films like *Disclosure* – to fight again. They must fight against the cultural misrepresentation of strong decisive women and the fallout such misrepresentations incur. (Humm 1997)

Thelma and Louise (1991) is the quintessential feminist film. Or is it? Feminist critics are divided. Protagonists, Thelma (Gina Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon), go out of town for the weekend and end up committing suicide together after being wronged by men time after time. Some feminists claim the film works for women because of the way the two women respond to the injustices that surround them based on their gender. (Petro 2002) For example, Louise rescues Thelma from a violent rape when she happens upon the act in the parking lot. "We's just having a little fun," claims the rapist. Louise replies, "In the future, when a woman's crying like that, she isn't having any fun." When the two women walk off the rapist yells, "I should have gone ahead and fucked her!" Louise shoots him. (Glittlin 1991) To some feminist film critics a stance against rape is being taken. Some feminist critics object to the resolution of the film. They perceive a negative message in Thelma and Louise's suicide. They see this: Standing up against rape will lead to deathly repercussions and a hopeless existence. They fear this is a prescription to tolerate abuse in silence. (Humm 1997) Other feminist critics have illuminated a possibly more complex reading of the film. In their view, the ending is constructed as dire because the situation is really dire. The message of the film is that the law and media play will not assist you or treat you fairly. The law puts rape victims on the stand and re-rapes them. (Hollinger 1998)

Some of the literature on *Thelma and Louise* posits that that men react so viciously to the film because they identify with the wrong character. Men were not able to assume the spectator position of the female protagonists because they, Thelma and Louise, are women. (McCabe 2002) Instead, they identify with the men who throughout the movie are often portrayed as bullying, thieving, raping or moronic. These critics point to classic cinema as being so drawn from a male perspective, that men do not feel comfortable slipping into the identity of a woman – even for two hours. This is surprising to imagine considering that women have been slipping into a male spectator viewpoint for years (Hollinger 1998).

IV. DOCUMENTED ESSAY

According to Freedman (2002), "addressing female consciousness in writing has been critical to the process of breaking the silence and undermining patriarchy." (p. 312) Similar to consciousness raising groups from the 1960s and 1970s, published and shared writing by women about women has the potential to create what Luce Irigaray calls the "female imaginary" (p. 312). This new way of imagining discovered through writing creates a female language for speaking, seeing, and perceiving to replace the phallocentric order in the world. This is the approach I took when writing my screenplay. I focused on creating this new language and imaginary in a film storyline. Hollinger (1998) suggests that "women's films give female audiences the pleasure of identifying with a positive female character as well as with a narrative resolution that constitutes a female victory." (p. 4) My main character, Katherine is a positive figure in that she

experiences pain and betrayal but she chooses to overcome that and find her voice as a path to success and independence.

My screenplay is constructed on Field's (2005) hugely popular and strictly adhered to structure. Some producers will not even read a story if it in any way deviates from or adds to this paradigm. I have briefly summarized some of my story below, paying particular attention to Katherine's journey to the discovery of her unique voice.

A. Act 1

The first act introduces protagonist, Katherine, and her struggle with whether to sell her family home. This dilemma symbolizes her struggle with her transition into adulthood. As a young girl in Mississippi her life is wrought with tragedy. In her family she gets no love or support. Instead, she is stuck caring for her self-indulgent alcoholic father. Katherine finds solidarity and happiness in her girlfriends. A central conflict with her friendships, however, is that because Katherine depends so heavily on other women, she struggles with self-reliance. Katherine wins a writing scholarship, which is her dream come true. The problem is, Katherine does not win on her own; a friend submits her work to a contest. Katherine is not sure if she wants to use the scholarship or care for her alcoholic father for the rest of his life. When instead of showing up for her scholarship awards ceremony, he falls drunkenly from the balcony of their home, her mind is made up. Katherine sees him, nearly dead, and coolly vows to utilize her scholarship and never, ever return home again. This decision puts into motion another stage of Katherine's journey.

B. Act 2

This act begins by showing Katherine as a full-fledged drug addict in New Orleans, unable to make the deadline with her publisher. Involved in a project with her life-time best friend, Mary Garett, Katherine is still apparently unable to depend on herself for guidance in life. She does not approve of the project she is working on but she continues with it because Mary Garett is involved. Katherine is also mixed up with an abusive boyfriend whom she aims to help, obviously replacing her father with a younger version. She is overworked and broke. Her father takes ill and is near death so she sets out on a journey home to tell him she is sorry for abandoning him. Katherine is risking her job and her writing to help her father who has so frequently hurt her.

On her journey home, Katherine gets a flat tire but is unable to change it successfully. During this trial, Katherine realizes that although she is educated she is not self-reliant. Katherine's tire is changed by a woman much less educated than she is, but one who exudes a confident spirit of responsible self-reliance. Katherine's realization of her inadequacies changes her deeply. After the tire fiasco, her abusive boyfriend angers her and she is then strong enough to break up with him. She is also strong enough now to say to her father, "I came here to say I was sorry … until I realized that what I should say is that I forgive you." Katherine also finds the strength to quit using drugs.

C. Act 3

The last part of the story begins with Katherine's father's funeral. Katherine is fully in charge of this funeral, and such responsibility symbolizes that she is taking charge of putting her pain and familial chaos to rest. She further removes herself from the

chaos of her family by telling her abusive aunt, Maggie Maxine, to leave and never come back. Katherine and her life-time best friend, Mary Garett, sever ties at this time because Katherine needs space to grow in her own direction. Also, she is strong enough to quit the documentary project she did not want to be involved in. This sets the stage for her to write her book, symbolic of her finding her own voice as a strong independent woman.

By the end of this act, Carson disappears and leaves Katherine a note asking her to raise her child, Lili Belle. Katherine accepts this responsibility after her book is published and proceeds to fall in love with a kind man who respects her and adores children. It is then that she has grown enough as her own person that she and Mary Garett return to their friendship. With Carson missing, however, Katherine still cannot reconcile selling her family home. In other words, the mystery of Carson attaches her to the past, preventing her from fully becoming an adult. When she sees Carson sneak up and peer at her from afar, it is obvious that Carson has not changed and that she is immature and selfish. Katherine is now evolved enough not to enter into another codependent relationship and so she shuns Carson in order to protect herself, and in order to protect her child from experiencing the same traumas she experienced. It is when the mystery of Carson is solved that Katherine is free to sell her family home. In other words, she is free to move into adulthood.

D. Turning Points

1. Set Up

The set up is when Katherine is shown debating upon whether to sell her family home. The dramatization of Katherine's relationship with her father as destructive to her evolution as a woman is also part of the set up.

2. Plot Point 1

Plot point one is when Katherine decides to abandon her plan of caring for her father until he dies. This puts her in motion to grow as a human being instead of remaining stuck and demoralized by her father for the rest of her life.

3. Confrontation

The confrontation occurs when Katherine tells her father that she has nothing to apologize for and that instead, she should be forgiving him. Katherine is no longer apologizing for existence. She is taking a stand in her life, being responsible, and holding others responsible for their actions, as well.

4. Plot Point 2

Plot point two occurs at Katherine's father's funeral when she makes it clear she will be writing her book and that she wants no distractions. She is focusing herself and no one else. She is going to find her voice and direction.

5. Resolution

The resolution occurs at Katherine's reading at the bookstore. She has found her voice and she is sharing it with others.

The theory behind my project is that films create mythologies in our society when they are widely distributed and consumed. McCabe (2004) writes:

> Cinema has the potential to construct ideological images of women … woman can be analyzed as a structure, a code or convention … the important theoretical shift here is from an understanding of cinema as reflecting reality, to a view of cinema as constructing a particular view of reality. Cinema never shows its means of production and is hence characterized by veiling over its ideological construction. Thus, classical film narrative can present the constructed images of 'woman' as natural, realistic and attractive. This is the illusionism of classical cinema. (p.80)

There are several feminist concepts treated in the work. Rejecting motherhood is explored by Carson who shamelessly says out loud, “I never wanted to be a mother.” She makes a choice to leave her child but at the end we see her questioning that choice. Hollinger (1998) refers to this as an “ideologically-implicated ambiguity” (p.6) or a device that is used by screenwriters who cannot predict what an audience might prefer so they offer ambiguities, leaving the possibility of multiple readings.

Sex work is explored ambiguously as well in my screenplay by illustrating three positions on prostitution. Katherine sees it as selling intimacy and she argues that intimacy should not be a commodity. Katherine feels that sex work is a perversion of capitalism and not a feminist issue. The erotic masseuse is a prostitute waiting for her prince to rescue her, who sees sex work as an easy way out. Her view is very dangerous.

Mary Garett sees sex work as cool and artistic and she sees it as a feminist venture and a personal adventure.

The most important feminist concept in the screenplay is treated very unambiguously. That concept is the importance of a woman finding her voice. Throughout this text, I have drawn from the literature to emphasize how and why women's voices are so important. Katherine writing her book symbolizes a woman finding her voice. This is a dramatization of the fundamental concept on which this entire thesis is based.

My screenplay falls into a context of other similar art referred to as female friendship films. (Hollinger 1998) These pieces are "attempts to assimilate into mainstream cultural representations ideas from the women's movement such as female autonomy and sisterhood." (p.6) Specifically, the women in my story exhibit what she refers to as a 'sentimental friendship.' Hollinger (1998):

> [These friendships are] close, emotionally effusive, dyadic same-sex unions that exhibit a fervent passion reminiscent of heterosexual romantic love. [These friends] cry and confide, protest and embrace … They are often portrayed as stimulating personal psychological growth in each other. (p. 7)

Although the women in my story may superficially appear to be a loose group of friends, a closer look reveals the loyalty to Katherine. The friendships are two dyadic ones: Katherine and Carson are best friends and Katherine and Mary Garett are best friends.

In conclusion, I would like to address the strong picture of internal feminist oppositions presented within the problem segment of this paper. I create an oversimplified binary between feminist academics and feminist activists, but I only do so to emphasize a point. I know that no such formal divide exists and that academia is itself an activist endeavor in that the spread of knowledge propels immeasurable change in women's lives. I recognize that academics are researchers, teachers and often social activists. It is not my intention to suggest otherwise.

As a comment on the creative component to this thesis, I would like to share with the reader how shocked I was when writing the end of my screenplay. It was very difficult to break through the mentality of the simplistic Hollywood formulaic ending. So many times, I had Katherine and Otto ride off into the sunset together to live happily ever after, so to speak. This experience is impressive evidence that story structures invade our minds not unlike propaganda. When I finally created the current ending, I stuck with it because its ambiguity forces the reader to think for herself; conclusions mean more to us and resonate more deeply when we arrive at them ourselves. By ambiguous, I mean that we do not know how Carson's return will effect Katherine's life. We also are left to wonder whether Carson will wreak havoc on the apparently peaceful and stable existence Katherine and Otto are providing for Lili Belle.

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Appendix

ANDALUSIA

by

JULIA CLARE PETEET

ANDALUSIA

FADE IN:

EXT. ANDALUSIA, MISSISSIPPI – DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Deep in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, the oppressive sun cooks the earth and beckons flowers from their buds.

EXT. RURAL HOME – DAY

KATHERINE DULANEY rushes through the carved front door of her charmingly updated rural home. Slim and elegant in her late thirties, Katherine's beauty is classic.

She picks flowers and looks back over her shoulder as she speaks.

KATHERINE
But the real estate agent's at Bellehaven already. Meet us at the cemetery, okay?

A sedan blinks in the sun and LILI BELLE, eight years old, slides into the passenger's seat. Katherine hops in and zooms, too quickly, down the gravel road.

EXT. VAN – DAY – SAME TIME

A dodgy old van takes a wide left off a scenic highway down a gravel road and comes to an abrupt halt.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Wedding photo of a young Katherine as bride with groom and Lili Belle withers on the dashboard. Through the windshield cotton fields compose the landscape along with a majestic plantation home.

EXT. CEMETERY – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine reaches down and pulls off her high heels as she apprehensively approaches graves marked "Cecil Dulaney" and "Carson Sumner". She pauses then tosses flowers over each grave. She kneels and sighs.

INT. VAN – GRAVEL ROAD - SAME TIME

The tattooed arm of the female driver reaches under the seat and pulls out a belt and a syringe. She grabs from her purse another more candid picture of Lili Belle and runs a finger across it gently.

EXT. CEMETERY – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine, still kneeling, drops her head and nods.

LILI BELLE (O.S.)
Mommy? Why do we have to sell Bellehaven?

INT. UNFURNISHED APARTMENT – NIGHT

A Man, 19, lies motionless on tattered blanket with eyes open and overturned pill bottle at his side.

SUPER: "1981"

OWNER jiggles a key in the lock outside.

OWNER (O.S.)
I'll admit. The lock sticks. I'd be willing to replace it if you decide to rent.

Renter and Owner enter. Renter sees the Man on the floor and runs out.

OWNER (CONT'D)
It's post-depression era as you can tell by the --

Owner sees the Man. He turns away.

OWNER (CONT'D)
Oh, God.

Owner looks back, recognizes the Man, then walks over to him and tenderly closes the Man's eyes.

OWNER (CONT'D)
Oh, no.

EXT. PLANTATION HOME – DAY – TWO DAYS LATER

The stunning antebellum structure stands grandly surrounded by cotton fields. Vines grow artfully up the massive columns. Parked cars line the gravel driveway. A hearse waits by the front door.

Two beautiful, energetic children, KATHERINE and WILLIAM, ages six and nine, jump out of a pick-up truck driven by SALLY, a Black woman. Her daughter, RAYNA hangs out of the window.

SALLY
(stepping out of truck)
I don’t know when we’ll ever see you two again. So, you take care. Take care of each other. Promise me that. Okay?

KATHERINE
Why won’t you say why you’re leaving? Rayna!

Rayna runs out to Katherine and hugs her. Sally wipes tears away and pulls her daughter back towards the truck. She looks at the plantation home ruefully.

She and Rayna wave through the windows as the truck drives off.

WILLIAM
Bye, Sally! Bye, Rayna!

The two race each other past a carriage block that reads “Bellehaven Plantation,” then through the front door.

INT. BELLEHAVEN - CONTINUOUS

Mourners stuff their faces. Katherine and William grab plates and pile on the green bean casserole. They push each other and William kicks Katherine in the shin.

Katherine chases him past a closed casket in the library. William stops short and seems unable to move, his eyes quickly fill with tears. Katherine hugs him but he still doesn’t move, then he runs away playfully.

ELDERLY MOURNERS accost them both.

ELDERLY MOURNER 1
You two must be so sad about your brother. But you know, these things happen.

ELDERLY MOURNER 2
William, how’s your little school?

WILLIAM
Fun. Get out at noon every day.

KATHERINE
(whispering)
Cuz you’re retarded.

William escapes the Elderly Mourners.

ELDERLY MOURNER 1
How was summer camp, honey?

KATHERINE
Fun.

William sneaks up behind Katherine and pops her plate into the air. It rains green beans on the Elderly Mourners.

Katherine fetches their father, CECIL, a hotheaded little man.

KATHERINE
Daddy! Will threw green beans all over those old people!

Cecil grimaces and effeminately runs his hands through his perfectly coiffed strawberry blonde hair.

CECIL
Shh! This is a goddamned funeral. What will people think of us?

WILLIAM
They'll think we're lame because you let our brother die. Sally doesn't even work for us anymore because of you!

Katherine tugs Cecil's arm.

KATHERINE
That means Rayna's not my sister anymore. I want a sister!

William casually eats and watches Cecil become irate.

CECIL
Can't you two have a little mercy on me? Just a little?

William speaks to his father in a mocking medical expert voice apparently used to push his father's many buttons.

WILLIAM
(expert voice)
I doubt it, Cecil. It's not looking good. Prognosis negative.

Katherine giggles and Cecil reaches for them both. William and Katherine run out the front door.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Flowers are in bloom everywhere and the children glow like the gardens that surround them. An ugly old dog approaches Katherine.

KATHERINE
Come here, doggie. Sit. Sit, doggie!

She places a green bean from William's plate between the dog's ears and laughs as it tries to find it. They walk into the cotton field.

WILLIAM
Look at that huge squirrel!

Katherine looks and William sticks a green bean in her hair.

KATHERINE
Where?

She searches.

WILLIAM
Guess it ran off.

They walk deeper into the cotton field.

KATHERINE
What do you think O.D. means?

WILLIAM
You're too stupid, Katty. It means overdose.

KATHERINE
I know that. Forget it. I hate druggies.

WILLIAM
I know. They're so dumb.

KATHERINE
Our big brother wasn't dumb!

WILLIAM
I know but he's dead.

KATHERINE
I know that. I'm not stupid.

William pulls the green bean from her hair and displays it for her.

WILLIAM
(expert voice)
Yes, Katherine. You are stupid. You wear green beans in your hair. Prognosis is?

William types up a medical report on an invisible typewriter.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
That you're a fart monger and a stupid druggie!

KATHERINE
I am not a druggie!

She sneaks through a row of cotton, cutting him off. He scrapes past her.

WILLIAM
I'm the doctor and it looks like you have a dual diagnosis from your prognosis!

He runs past pulling her hair.

WILLAIM (CONT'D)
And I believe you've O.D.ed on farts!

KATHERINE
I did not O.D. on farts!

She chases him until they're both exhausted. William sits. They pant for a while, then breathe normally.

WILLIAM
Dead's forever Katty. He's gone forever.

William cries with his head between his knees. Katherine tries to comfort him but he rises and rushes away embarrassed. He climbs a huge magnolia tree in front of the house.

Katherine climbs the tree. William climbs higher. She looses her grip and slides down the tree. She stops, caught between the branches.

KATHERINE
I love you. Please don't cry.

WILLIAM
Don't move!

William drops down toward her.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Listen to me! I'm serious!

It's too late. She slips again and falls to the ground fifteen feet below landing with her arm twisted behind her. William drops down and touches her face. She doesn't move.

William leaves and soon returns with Cecil.

CECIL
Katty?

Katherine rolls onto her back. Mourners creep onto the scene.

KATHERINE
Mamma?

WILLIAM
Katty, Mamma's dead.

CECIL
Somebody! Call a damned ambulance. Her arm looks broken. She's talking nonsense. Tell them that. All of it!

A mourner heads to the house apparently to place the call.

CECIL (CONT'D)
You two just have to be the center of attention, huh? All eyes on you. Your brother was the same way and look where it got him.

William runs his fingers through Katherine's hair and Cecil paces back and forth. Mourners leave the family alone.

WILLIAM
(to Cecil)
I know what you are.

Cecil pretends not to hear but his eyes dart around nervously, refusing to meet those of his son. William continues to comfort Katherine.

WILLIAM
(louder)
Murderer.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY (1991)

Cars line the driveway, including a hearse waiting by the front door.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine, now seventeen, carries a heavy potted plant. Teary-eyed and pale Katherine's hair is dyed a rebellious black. She puts the pot down only to pick up another.

MARY GARETT, waist-length blonde hair and bloodshot eyes, rests her bare feet on the balcony handrail, smokes a joint and hums along with MUSIC on stereo.

MARY GARETT
You simply must stop rearranging that shit. It's not going to bring anyone back to life … Smoke this.

Katherine sets down the potted plant only to pick up another even heavier one. She backs into the joint dangling from Mary Garett's outstretched arm.

KATHERINE
Ouch! You burned a fucking hole in my dress. Besides. I'm doing this for Daddy. I want to make them perfect. He likes that.

Mary Garett ignores Katherine and focuses her stoned gaze instead on the tattered Mercedes ambling up the drive.

MARY GARETT
Keep it together. For everybody. Carson's looking like hell down there.

Mary Garrett stands and waves to the Mercedes that sits in the driveway, engine running.

INT. MERCEDES – DAY

The driver, CARSON, sexy white trash, sits behind the wheel staring ahead, motor still running. A haggard burnout at eighteen, her long hair desperately needs to be washed.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine takes the joint from Mary Garett's hand and stubs it out in a fancy ashtray.

KATHERINE
Let's go get her before she runs out of gas down there and blocks the darned hearse.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mary Garett and Katherine descend the stairs and they're accosted by MAGGIE MAXINE, garishly attired, face made up for anything but a funeral.

MAGGIE MAXINE
I know you're crushed but these things happen, Katty. They just do.

Katherine opens her mouth to say something but her jaw hangs motionless. Maggie Maxine nods vacantly and sips wine, as if Katherine isn't even standing there.

KATHERINE
Why, Aunt Maggie Maxine. I don't think these --

Mary Garrett pulls Katherine away and closes her mouth for her and pats her on the head.

MARY GARRETT
She's astounding. Ignore her.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Carson steps out as Katherine approaches the Mercedes and the car rolls forward out of control. Mary Garett, after a struggle, jumps in and steers it into a parking spot.

CARSON
I don't think I've ever had sex with someone who died. Will's really dead.

Mary Garett approaches and slips the keys in Carson's pocket.

MARY GARETT
You slept with your own cousin?

Katherine nods wearily.

KATHERINE
Let’s not make it front page news.
Dead people trump incest.

MARY GARETT
Katherine!

KATHERINE
What?

MARY GARETT
A bitter jaded woman at seventeen.
Very sexy.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Carson, Katherine and Mary Garett make their way through MOURNERS.

MOURNER 1
Leave it to Katherine to be
barefoot in a velvet dress at a
funeral. Talk about trashy.

MOURNER 2
(whispering)
This family is cursed.

Mary Garett turns around and walks slowly toward Mourner 1.

MARY GARETT
This is a funeral and you’re
worried about her shoes?

Katherine pulls Mary Garett back. Mary Garett resists and stays in Mourner 2’s face.

KATHERINE
Remember. They’re astounding.
Ignore them.

Maggie Maxine strolls over with a gait meant to be regal. She grabs a lock of Carson’s hair.

MAGGIE MAXINE
My own flesh and blood. Who would
guess?

INT. KATHERINE’S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carson throws shoes through a window at mourners below.

CARSON
Here's some shoes for you! Ass holes!

Katherine throws a pair, too, and Mary Garett follows suit. They all duck down momentarily but when a shoe flies through and hits Mary Garett in the head, they all look out the window for the culprit.

Katherine retreats with an exhausted sigh. She speaks to no one in particular.

KATHERINE
You know he wanted to be a scientist.

The girls all look at each other. Mary Garett signals she'll handle it. She puts an arm around Katherine.

MARY GARETT
Your brother did want to be a scientist.

She looks to the other girls for encouragement.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
What do you want to be, baby?

KATHERINE
Nothing. I'll take care of Daddy. It's my duty. Till he dies.

Katherine lies on the bed. Mary Garrett sits next to her.

MARY GARETT
Come on. Everybody has dreams, honey. Aspirations.

KATHERINE
No. I'll take care of my dad. Guess I'm not like everybody else.

Katherine buries her head into her pillow.

MARY GARETT
But surely you must dream.

Carson places her hand over Mary Garett's mouth kindly.

CARSON
MG, really. In case it's eluded you, she's having a bad day.

Mary Garett flips Carson the bird behind Katherine's back. Carson sticks her tongue out at Mary Garett.

EXT. BELLEHAVEN – NIGHT

Cecil lies on his side in the garden next to a fancy silver goblet and an empty bottle of gin. Katherine puts a wet rag to his head.

KATHERINE
Daddy? It's Katherine. Talk to me. Should I call an ambulance? Daddy, please.

CECIL
(speech slurred)
Just get away.

He pushes her hand off his face.

CECIL (CONT'D)
I want my sons back. Little bitch. Just like your mother.

Katherine holds the rag back to his face.

KATHERINE
Oh, you don't mean that. You're just drunk, Daddy. You're just drunk.

INT. CLASSROOM – NEXT DAY

Silence rules the room interrupted only by the scribbling of pencils and random nervous SQUEAKING of students' tennis shoes on the floor. MATH TEACHER, too serious for someone so young, paces the aisles.

CARSON
Mother of friggin' god.

Students snicker. Math Teacher turns to Carson and without a word, points to the hallway. Carson slams her pencil down and leaves in a huff. Math Teacher goes into hallway.

Katherine, looking disheveled and very tired, discreetly copies answers from Carson's paper.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

MATH TEACHER
There's no way her answers could coincidentally be wrong where her

cousin’s are. On every test! Carson causes a scene, Katty cheats.

Math Teacher walks over to Katherine and puts his face in hers.

MATH TEACHER (CONT’D)
Fess up, Katty!

PRINCIPAL
Easy there with the hostile tone. Give us a second. Alone.

Math Teacher doesn’t budge.

PRINCIPAL (CONT’D)
Please, my friend. Get lost.

Math Teacher struts out, indignant.

PRINCIPAL (CONT’D)
What’s the story, Katty? Math’s not your deal? No repercussions if you’re honest with me.

KATHERINE
It’s really not what it looks like.

Principal gets up and sits on the edge of her desk and stares Katherine down.

PRINCIPAL
I hate math. I hate geometry, algebra and all that other bull crap. But I’m not a liar. And I’m not a cheat. I won’t stand for my students cheating their ways through school.

KATHERINE
It’s not what it looks like.

PRINCIPAL
One more time and you’re out. Expelled. Not suspended. Last warning.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Katherine and Carson share a joint and watch a group of birds fly over in formation while Mary Garett mindlessly scans a textbook. The blue cloudless sky and a light breeze through the girls' hair lend airiness to the scene.

MARY GARETT
Why didn't you just study for the test? It wasn't hard.

Carson shoots Mary Garett a look but she doesn't notice.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
I think I looked over that stuff like once. Maybe twice.

Carson kicks Mary Garett in the leg.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Ouch!

Katherine gets up and slowly walks away.

CARSON
For someone so fucking smart, you sure say the stupidest shit. Katty has some issues.

MARY GARETT
What the? Oh, god. Is she retarded?

Mary Garett throws her book aside and chases after Katherine.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
My mom knows doctors. She's the best psychiatrist in the state!

CARSON
(pushing Mary Garett)
Just shut up, man. She's not a retard, okay?

The three girls all walk through the cotton field, each registering a pensive look on her face as if deep in thought.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Katherine, Mary Garett and Carson sit in the audience while a typical high school awards assembly is in progress.

Carson taunts a shy STUDENT in the row ahead by rubbing her foot in her hair. This elicits no response so she does it harder.

STUDENT
(whispering)
Come on. That's just mean!

Katherine fondles one of five earrings in her ear then reapplies some dramatic lip color, studying her face in a compact mirror. Her face registers intrigue by what she sees in the tiny mirror.

PATTI, a peppy student in a cheerleading uniform on crutches, accepts an award.

PATTI
I, um.

The microphone placement causes FEEDBACK. Katherine covers her ears. Audience WINCES.

CARSON
I could be in my car sniffing Scotch Guard for these sound effects.

A staff member adjusts the microphone and gives it back to Patti apologetically.

PATTI
Writing's how I deal with the devastation in my life … As everyone knows I couldn't cheer this year because I hurt my ankle. The only way I got through this trauma was … was to write about it. And, well. There's one other thing that got me through … I still get to wear my uniform!

Confused APPLAUSE from the audience and raucous NOISE from the male members of the crowd, even a standing ovation from overeager guys in letterman's jackets.

PATTI (CONT'D)
My parents' divorce. My car accident. I write mainly about loss. Painful debilitating loss.

Katherine suddenly looks intrigued. Her focus settles on the podium and Patti.

CARSON
Let's blow this popsicle stand.

Mary Garett and Carson rise. Katherine remains focused on the podium intently.

PATTI
There were times I didn't think I'd last another day. Nights I cried myself to sleep. Writing rescues me from that pain.

CARSON
Katty. Stop paying attention to Labia Girl. Stupidity's contagious. Let's bail.

MARY GARETT
Why do we call her Labia Girl, anyway?

CARSON
Dude, that cheerleading outfit is a mere display case for her beefy little meat flaps. The girl needs to wear a cup.

STUDENT
Sh!

CARSON
Shush me again and I'll cut out your liver and eat it with fava beans.

Katherine gets up and moves a few rows over and concentrates on Patti.

PATTI
This writing competition scholarship money will finance my education and I owe it all …

EXT. BARN - DAY

Katherine writes furiously in a notebook, exuding an intense spirit of focus and determination when Carson

approaches on a three-wheeler and hands her an envelope. Katherine opens it and reads the contents.

KATHERINE
Damn it!

She rips the pages into tiny pieces and casts them aside. She gives Carson a dirty look then resumes writing.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
I came out here so I could con-
centrate.

CARSON
What-the-fuck-ever.

Carson rolls back on the three-wheeler and fiddles with the key. She eyes Katherine curiously then slowly places the keys in the ignition of the three-wheeler.

KATHERINE
You know. Will made them open the
casket that night?

Carson feigns being unable to start the three-wheeler.

CARSON
What made you think about that?

KATHERINE
He couldn't believe it. Told Daddy
to prove his big brother was dead.

Carson peers into the gas tank of the three-wheeler then jiggles the keys a little more.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Need some help with that?

CARSON
Uh, sure.

KATHERINE
Twenty bucks says if I walk over
there it starts on the first try.

Carson abandons the act and saunters over and lies down in the grass next to Katherine. She eyes the ripped-up papers and scoots closer to them for a better view.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
What do you wanna major in? At college?

CARSON
Law. Like my dad.

Katherine writes faster. She scowls and turns the page in her notebook brusquely.

CARSON (CONT'D)
What about you?

Katherine throws the notebook at Carson. She looks as surprised as Carson at her own actions but she's started something and she's determined to go through with it.

KATHERIRNE
Why are you so nosey, Car?

CARSON
Don't throw stuff at me, dude. Please.

Katherine races towards the house. Carson grabs the papers she left ripped up on the ground along with Katherine's notebook. She hops on the three-wheeler.

Carson rides alongside Katherine for a few moments as if contemplating whether to give her the papers and notebook.

CARSON
You left your notebook … and garbage.

KATHERINE
Well, throw it away, Smokey the Bear.

Katherine continues into the house refusing to look at Carson. The screen door SLAMS behind her.

CARSON
(yelling)
He's the forest fire guy by the way!

Katherine pokes her head out the door.

KATHERINE
(yelling)

Actually, he handles litterbugs, too!

Screen door SLAMS. Carson looks at her newly acquired items with satisfaction and zooms off down the driveway.

INT. BARN – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Carson takes Katherine's torn up papers from a bag. She pieces together a letter beneath a dimming bulb.

INSERT - PIECE OF LETTER, which reads, "Mississippi Literary Review's Memoir Contest."

CARSON
(muttering to herself)
It's Woodsy Owl, dipshit.

Carson arranges and rearranges but can't get the tiny scraps to match up. She pulls Katherine's notebook from the bag. She moves closer to the light and reads.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - NIGHT

Thirteen year old William, shivering, waits at a bus station in pouring rain. He looks at his watch periodically. PARAMEDIC talks calmly to him.

PARAMEDIC
Your name's William. No one's gonna hurt you.

WILLIAM
I'm not William. My family. The news said they're across the ocean. My sister. She's there. She's been fishing.

PARAMEDIC
They miss you at home. Your little sister Katty's in the car. Over there. See?

Paramedic walks William back to the car. William continues to check his watch then the empty street then his watch again.

Katherine sits inside a car, tears streaming down her face. She steps out when Paramedic approaches with William and

she guides her brother into the backseat, her arm over his shoulder.

CUT TO:

BACK TO SCENE

INT. BARN - DAY

Carson reads beneath the dim bulb. She slams the notebook shut and puts it back in the bag with the ripped up papers. She turns off the light.

INT. BELLEHAVEN – NIGHT

Katherine reads a textbook on the couch in the living room. She consults her spiral notebook and makes a change on a printed handout. She resumes reading the textbook.

Cecil staggers in the front door without closing it behind him. Katherine looks out the window.

KATHERINE
Where’s your car? Daddy?

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cecil fumbles in the refrigerator and a container falls out dumping food all over the floor as Katherine watches from the doorway. Cecil laughs. Katherine rushes to clean it up.

KATHERINE
Want me to fix some dinner? You hungry?

Cecil throws a container of food across the room.

CECIL
Shut up!

The container explodes against the wall. Katherine cleans incessantly. Her father falls to the ground pouting. He’s there for several moments before he finally looks up at Katherine. He starts to cry.

KATHERINE
(going to him)
Daddy, what is it?

She sits on the floor next to her father and hands him a glass of milk.

CECIL
Do you know what it feels like to lose your babies? Your family?

KATHERINE
You've still got me, Daddy. I'm here. I'll always be here. You know that.

Cecil looks at her with disappointment. He shakes his head and gets up and staggers out of the room. Katherine resumes cleaning as if her life depends on it.

INT. STUDY HALL - DAY

Katherine makes out with FEMALE STUDENT in the back of the room behind a couch out of the teacher's view while the a group of students watching them giggles.

FEMALE STUDENT
Who's next?

Carson walks back and sees the group.

KATHERINE
Carson. Truth or dare?

Carson sits down. She rubs her chin sarcastically.

CARSON
Uh, duh. Dare, dude. Who picks truth anyway?

FEMALE STUDENT
I dare you to line us all up a bunch of blow. Right here in study hall.

Carson hesitates and looks over at the teacher. She then produces an envelope filled with cocaine. She lines it up, one for each girl.

FEMALE STUDENT
I was kind of kidding but, hey.

Female Student does a line and tries to kiss Katherine again but she pushes her away.

KATHERINE
I'm not wasting this buzz.

Katherine trots off. The group peers around the couch curiously and there Katherine sits, furiously doing homework at her desk.

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM – DAY (SEVERAL MONTHS LATER)

Katherine hits a joint. Carson holds a breathy conversation on the phone, one hand between her legs.

CARSON
(on phone)
And then what would you do?

A KNOCK on the door.

CECIL (O.S.)
The awards ceremony is in half an hour.

Katherine hands the joint to Carson. She hits it and stubs it out in an ashtray. Katherine sprays perfume around the room.

KATHERINE
'K, Daddy! Be down in a sec!

Carson hangs up the phone.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
I can't believe Daddy's going. There's no way we can skip. What's gotten into him?

CARSON
Can't imagine, babe.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM – NIGHT

Carson and Mary Garett pay ridiculously close attention to the awards ceremony while Katherine looks around the room.

KATHERINE
Daddy never showed up. Let's get out of here.

EMCEE
And the winner of this year's writing college scholarship is … Ms. Katherine Dulaney!

Carson screams at the top of her lungs and does a wild dance. Mary Garett's eyes tear up as she gives Carson a

high five. Katherine rolls her eyes as the audience applauds. She remains seated.

KATHERINE
It's a mistake. I didn't enter. How stupid are they?

CARSON
I entered your story about Will. The rejected one. From the memoir contest?

EMCEE (O.S.)
Is Ms. Dulaney here tonight?

KATHERINE
You what?!

Katherine stands. She walks toward the stage with a lack of certainty then returns to Carson and gives her a high five.

KATHERINE
Guess I owe you one.

CARSON
What-the-fuck-ever.

Katherine heads toward the podium with certainty.

EXT. BELLEHAVEN BALCONY – NIGHT – SAME TIME

Cecil and the GARDENER who is in his twenties and less than classy, sip mint juleps. Cecil unbuttons his crisp pink oxford cloth shirt and leans over Gardener, his drunken speech slurred and sloppy.

CECIL
Let me tell you something about planting bulbs, my little gardener friendly friend.

GARDENER
(mock accent)
Why yes, Mistah Dulaney. Teach me all about it. Here's a toast to gardening lessons from Mistuh Cecil Dulaney himself!

Gardener plants a kiss on Cecil's lips and raises his drink to toast.

CECIL
To your health. Or, a votre sante, mon plus cher.

Cecil's drink slips from his hand and falls over the balcony.

INSERT - glass SHATTERING on brick stairs below.

BACK TO BALCONY

The Gardener shakes a finger in Cecil's face.

GARDENER
Look what you gone and done, Mister Fancy Britches! Shame on you for talking sexy!

CECIL
Tell me you'll fetch me another?

Gardener rolls his eyes in mock belligerence and disappears through the French doors.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

A VISITOR cruises cautiously up the gravel drive and parks in front of the house.

EXT. PORCH - CONTIUOUS

Visitor sidesteps the broken glass and RINGS doorbell.

CECIL (O.S.)
Who is it?

Visitor looks up at the balcony but sees no one. The Gardener answers door with a huge smile and a fresh cocktail in his hand. Visitor eyes the broken glass on the stairs.

GARDENER
Just don't even ask! He's had a few too many if you know what I mean, honey.

CECIL (O.S.)
(slurred speech)
Who is it, god damn it?

VISITOR
Get me up there to that drunk old queen before he gets his panties

in a wad. You've done wonders with the garden. Wonders!

GARDENER
Don't get me to blushing now. It don't look that good.

CECIL (O.S.)
Who the hell's down there?

GARDENER
Shush, Cecil! We're coming up! Don't get your danged britches in a wad!

Gardener and Visitor are barely through the front door when behind them Cecil's body tumbles from above and lands on the brick stairs.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Mary Garett, Carson and Katherine jam to loud music as they approach the Bellehaven driveway. Katherine clutches her award.

KATHERINE
I can't wait to hear why Daddy didn't show up. I'm sure he's drunk as a --

Katherine turns down the music as they glide up the driveway, approaching an ambulance surrounded by paramedics in front of the house.

Katherine stays stiff in her seat as Carson gets out and disappears for a moment. She returns to the car with a look of utter horror.

CARSON
It's Uncle Cecil, y'all.

Katherine, still holding her award, gets out of the car and Carson tries to hold her back.

CARSON (CONT'D)
He's a mess, Katty.

Katherine practically throws Carson aside. She sees her father's body and emotionlessly turns to the Gardener and Visitor. She just stares at them as they fidget like nervous school children caught doing something naughty.

KATHERINE
(vacantly, softly)
I'm going away to college. And never coming back. Ever.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DAY (1999)

Life in the Big Easy bustles around Katherine as she waits outside an office. Katherine is post-college but ragged and tired. She looks beyond burned out. She tugs at loose threads on her baggy pants as she paces around a fountain.

PROJECT MANAGER approaches, glancing frequently at her watch like she would rather be somewhere else.

PROJECT MANAGER
The answer is no.

KATHERINE
No?

PROJECT MANAGER
You had an extension. Six months ago.

KATHERINE
But I've got two other jobs and --

PROJECT MANAGER
No … No, no, no, no, no. No.

KATHERINE
Come on!

PROJECT MANAGER
<u>You</u> come on, Dulaney. You've got a week.

Project Manager looks at her watch.

PROJECT MANAGER
And get some sleep. For real.

Project Manager waltzes off full of self-importance and pretense. She looks back over her shoulder as she's walking away.

PROJECT MANAGER (CONT'D)
By the way, you would have been our youngest published author had you finished this. Oh, well.

Katherine hurls her purse against the bricks of the courtyard fountain and kicks it. Passersby look on. Katherine shields her face in embarrassment.

KATHERINE
Mature, Katherine. Real mature.

Project Manager disappears into the building and Katherine glances around and desperately pulls out her cell phone.

KATHERINE
(on phone)
Timmy? I need to meet up … Two hundred bucks worth … And don't tell Stephen … You know how he gets.

Katherine takes out a piece of glass. She pulls her sleeve up and gashes a long thin cut next to a series of other fresh cuts across her forearm. She looks relieved. She walks to the --

PARK

Towering oak trees with low, winding branches provide much needed shade to joggers.

Mary Garett, holding on to her beauty far better than Katherine, lies on a blanket scanning a series of photos. A granola girl, she wears no make-up, her long blond hair in braids.

MARY GARETT
You look perturbed. Perch and tell Mommy all about it.

KATHERINE
I'm not a writer. I'm a waitress with a sophisticated hobby. There aren't enough hours in the day.

Mary Garett opens a plastic container.

MARY GARETT
Hmm. A little tofu might cheer you up. You really should eat something.

She takes a huge bite and extends a forkful to Katherine. Katherine looks repulsed by the sight of food.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
(mouth full)
You could swallow your pride and get some money from your daddy.

KATHERINE
Uh-uh.

MARY GARETT
I got you this job. Don't screw this up for me, too.

Katherine walks off.

MARY GARETT
Are you coming by after work?

Katherine doesn't answer.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Katherine?

KATHERINE
After work!

INT. CAJUN ASIAN CAFÉ - NIGHT

In the bathroom Katherine's BOSS, a straight talking Korean woman in a chef's outfit, fusses with her girdle as Katherine folds her apron, then covers the circles under her eyes with make-up.

BOSS
I'm trying to be your friend. Some of the customers. They say you're being short with them.

KATHERINE
But I can't afford the days off.

BOSS
One more complaint and we have to … you know. And I don't like your friend Tim at my restaurant.

EXT. CAJUN ASIAN CAFÉ - CONTINUOUS

Katherine walks out and as she crosses the street she takes drug paraphernalia from her purse and snorts some powder.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT – NIGHT

Deep red walls accentuated by white crown molding illuminate historic New Orleans beauty. A leaking air-conditioner illuminates Katherine's dire financial situation. The unit SPUTTERS and SQUEAKS.

BATHROOM

Katherine, still in her work clothes, draws a bath.

BEDROOM

Two cats lounge. Katherine enters and indulges each with a tummy scratch. Katherine sits and apparently resumes typing. She laughs at the screen after she's typed a bit.

KATHERINE
Enough sex work for the evening.

She shuts her laptop and lines some white powder up and snorts it. It looks like it burns. Her eyes water but for a burnout she looks suddenly invigorated.

BATHROOM

Katherine turns water off and takes some items from the medicine cabinet. She sits on the toilet and pulls her sleeve up and touches at the cuts on her arms with ointment.

LIVING ROOM

Phone RINGS O.S. Katherine ignores it and undresses and steps into the bath as the answering machine picks up.

SALLY (V.O.)
It's Sally. Your daddy's getting worse. Honey, are you there?

Katherine grabs a towel and runs for the phone but Sally hangs up before she gets there. Katherine dials a number.

KATHERINE
(on phone)
Sally?

Katherine reaches into her purse and pulls her drugs out. She snorts a bump.

KATHERINE
(on phone)
Nothing. Just my allergies.

BATHROOM - LATER

Katherine washes herself vacantly in the tub humming along with a SOUNDS of a sultry blues singer on the stereo. She turns up her shampoo but produces nothing. She tosses it and it bounces off the wall into her face, leaving a cut.

KATHERINE
God damn him!

She knocks everything off of the edge of the bathtub. She pulls her knees to her chest.

A BUZZER sounds through the intercom O.S.

LIVING ROOM

Male VOICE yells indiscernible NOISES O.S. Katherine rushes out of the bathroom naked.

KATHERINE
(into intercom)
We don’t want any.

VOICE (V.O.)
I don’t believe that, ma’am. You haven’t even seen what I’ve got to offer.

KATHERINE
(into intercom)
If you put it like that. I guess you can come up. But only to show me what you’ve got.

O.S. a gate SLAMS, followed by FOOTSTEPS.

Katherine opens the door for STEPHEN, a pale guy who’s too thin with creepy hollow eyes. He holds scraggily flowers. Katherine takes them and wraps her legs around his waist. He points at the cut on her face.

STEPHEN
What the?

He carries her to the couch and lays her down. He kisses the cut then reclaims the flowers and tickles Katherine’s naked body with them.

KATHERINE
Baby, I need to talk.

Stephen doesn’t listen. Katherine gives in. Her eyes roll back and flutter as he kisses her neck. Katherine pulls Stephen’s hair until his face is in hers. She gives him a curt peck on the lips.

KATHERINE
I have to go to Mississippi.

STEPHEN
You haven’t been there in years. Is everything --

Katherine doesn’t speak. She nods her head. Tears well in her eyes and Stephen pulls her to him.

INT. KATHERINE’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Katherine packs a suitcase. Stephen smokes a cigarette.

STEPHEN
How close are you to sleeping with one of these guys at the massage parlor?

KATHERINE
It’s work, Stephen. Please smoke next to a window.

Katherine playfully pulls a shirt from underneath Stephen. She bops him on the head with it then tosses it into her suitcase and closes it.

STEPHEN
I don’t like dating a whore.

Katherine kisses his cheek then opens the door. She’s half way out when Stephen walks to the door and pulls her back in then slams it shut with her inside.

STEPHEN (CONT’D)
I need you Katherine. You promised you’d help me. You’re just hurting me.

KATHERINE
But it’s just work.

Stephen exhales smoke right in Katherine's face. She coughs and clears the air with her hand.

STEPHEN
You spend more time with that dyke, Mary Garett, than you do with me.

Katherine walks out and slams the door in his face. He comes into the hallway and slams her against the wall.

STEPHEN
I need you. And if you aren't there for me, I don't know what will happen. You never can tell.

Katherine's mouth hangs agape unable to form the right words.

KATHERINE
She's not a dyke. She's my best friend. Don't say that about her.

Katherine softens and touches Stephen's face tenderly.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Besides, our project will be over soon. And you'll have me all to yourself.

He grabs her suitcase and throws it down the stairs.

STEPHEN
You're a little meth freak by the way. A lying drug addict lesbian whore. That's what I'm dating.

Katherine goes underneath his arm and down the stairs.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
I know you saw Timmy! You can't hide anything from me!

EXT. MASSAGE PARLOR — LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine's old BMW ascends the driveway of the stylishly renovated New Orleans shotgun shanty. She pulls around back and parks.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

She walks through a gate into a fenced-in paradise where a mossy vine-laden fence surrounds a fountain. Ornate cement angels pass water to each other then into a pool where brightly colored fish swim impatiently.

Mary Garett feeds the fish, trying to touch one with her toe as it swims by. Hardly recognizable as the granola girl from earlier, she wears dramatic makeup and an elegant gown.

KATHERINE
I'm going to Mississippi.

MARY GARETT
(one foot in fountain)
For money? From you dad?

KATHERINE
Have you ever thought that these women need an out? Not more attention for making screwy life decisions?

A man walks through the garden looking guilty. He shoots the women a dirty look then tries to open the back door. It's locked. He forces a grin at the women.

KATHERINE
(without moving her mouth)
How can you jerk these guys off all night and not be affected? They're so sickening.

MARY GARETT
(without moving her mouth)
It does affect me. It reaffirms my assertion that men are lice.

Mary Garett saunters over to the man. His left hand, complete with wedding ring, rests familiarly on her ass as she unlocks the door and walks him inside.

LATER

The garden is now set up with a mirror and dressing table. A fleshy erotic MASSEUSE, late teens at most, primps. Katherine types away as she observes the girl.

MARY GARETT
Why do you choose sex work?

Mary Garett films Masseuse with a professional level camera elaborately set up on the other side of the fountain.

MASSEUSE
I'm gorgeous. Some day one of these rich guys will get me out of here. It's just a matter of time.

MARY GARETT
But why sex work?

MASSEUSE
I like being in control. The power I have. Nothing beats dominating some total stranger. You know?

Masseuse coyly brushes her hair as she admires herself in the mirror. Katherine frowns as she types.

KATHERINE
Have you ever been assaulted? While working?

MASSEUSE
Oh, sure. Like three times. But who hasn't?

Katherine looks at Mary Garett who peers earnestly through her camera at the girl.

KATHERINE
I haven't been.

Mary Garret peers around the camera at Katherine with an exasperated look but Katherine's too busy typing to notice.

MASSEUSE
I mean prostitutes, dummy. I'm lucky though. Three times in three years is not bad. Not compared to some people who --

Doorbell RINGS. Masseuse rises and flashes her breasts at Mary Garett's camera then giggles vapidly.

MASSEUSE
Show time!

Masseuse gives a parting wink to the camera then saunters away and answers door O.S.

Mary Garett grabs some grapes and offers a few to Katherine. Katherine declines and fumbles around on her laptop looking distressed.

KATHERINE
What a pitiful illusion.

The headlights of a car shine through the fence. Katherine walks over and peeks through.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Isn't that the madam?

Mary Garett looks. She and Katherine scramble inside leaving the equipment in the garden.

INT. MASSAGE PARLOR – NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The women clean up food containers and clothing lying on the floor.

KATHERINE
I thought she was resting up from surgery.

MADAM, 60s, wearing leather pants and spiked heels, bursts through the door running one hand through her mass of red hair and covering her mouth with the other. Tiny chunks of hair fall to the ground.

MADAM
Why does life have to be so hard, girls? Why?

Madam continues pulling her hair and it continues to litter the floor. Masseuse lets man out O.S. then glides in and picks up a handful of hair and offers it to Madam. Mary Garett clears her throat in disapproval and Masseuse recoils in fear, dropping hair to the ground.

MASSEUSE
What's wrong?

MADAM
Nothing your simple mind could comprehend. If youth weren't such an easy sell, I'd dump you like yesterday's garbage.

Madam takes Masseuse's face in her hand, roughly squeezing it.

MADAM (CONT'D)
I've told you to keep your mouth shut.

Madam steps away from Masseuse and dramatically removes her hand from her mouth exposing her freakishly swollen lips.

MADAM (CONT'D)
My lips are double what I wanted. Do you have any idea how long it takes collagen to wear off?!

Madam storms into her office, slams the door then bursts into the room again.

MARY GARRETT
Are you, um?

MADAM
Going to greet clients in my massage parlor with my face looking like a … baboon's ass?

Madam storms out then bursts back in with a handkerchief wrapped around her face. The women unsuccessfully attempt to stifle giggles.

Madam clomps toward the back door.

MADAM (O.S.)
Katherine, this does not go in the book!

Back door SLAMS. Mary Garett rolls her eyes and collapses on an antique couch. Masseuse watches Madam speed off through the window.

MASSEUSE
That Louisiana swamp bitch is an old hag. I found another voodoo doll in the freezer. With pins in its head!

She jerks the drapes closed.

MASSEUSE (CONT'D)
I'll never end up like that.

KATHERINE
And, well. What are you planning to do differently?

MASSUESE
Any day now, one of these guys is going to fall for me. But if not …

Katherine rises. She rubs her temples.

KATHERINE
You'll what?

Masseuse rolls her eyes and collapses next to Mary Garett. She shrugs her shoulders. Mary Garrett grabs more grapes and attempts to toss them, often unsuccessfully, over her head and into her mouth.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
I'm not going to Mississippi for money. I want to tell him I'm sorry for abandoning him.

Katherine's phone rings.

KATHERINE
(on phone)
Hey. Hello?

She pokes a few buttons then slams the phone shut.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
And there goes my battery.

Katherine packs her laptop away. Mary Garett throws a grape at Katherine, hitting her square between the eyes. Katherine picks the grape up and eats it.

She brushes a piece of hair from her face and winces when she brushes the cut under her eye.

MARY GARETT
Why do you date that guy? Did he do that to your face?

KATHERINE
I'm helping him get his life together. Besides, I'm too old to be single.

MARY GARETT
You're not. No way you're marrying that guy.

KATHERINE
The redheaded swamp-bitch-madam will be here when I get back, right?

Katherine kneels down next to Mary Garett and plays with her hair flirtatiously.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Does Pelican know you're actually jerking these guys off?

Mary Garett looks vacantly in the opposite direction of Katherine. Katherine stares at her and tosses her cell phone from one hand to the other.

KATHERINE
Does Pelican know?

MARY GARETT
No!

Mary Garett rises and starts cleaning suddenly and furiously.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Go on to Mississippi. Voodoo-swamp-bitch-madam will be here. And get some sleep! And something to eat for god's sake!

Katherine goes to kiss Mary Garett on the cheek but is rebuffed.

KATHERINE
About sleep. Do you have any, um, anything to help out? Anything at all?

EXT. KATHERINE'S CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

The old BMW swerves and starts CLUNKING. Katherine pulls to the emergency lane and gets out and observes the flat tire. She attempts a phone call. Dead battery. She looks up at the full moon.

KATHERINE
(to moon)
Is this a test?

She pops the trunk and surveys the spare tire equipment blankly.

LATER

Katherine eyes her jacked up car with trepidation. She removes the last lug nut and the car falls off the jack, narrowly missing her foot.

She walks down the dark highway until a car full of drunk guys pulls over.

KATHERINE
Flat tire. My husband’s taking a piss.

She points to the empty field. Guys speed off. She continues walking.

A few more cars pass and Katherine sprints into the field in hiding.

Finally an old Buick slams on breaks and speeds madly towards Katherine backwards. Katherine runs. The DRIVER, loud and proud, steps out.

DRIVER
(yelling into field)
Ain’t nothing to be scared of. I’m just a old woman. Hey, you!

Katherine makes her way slowly and cautiously from the field to the road.

DRIVER (CONT’D)
That your flat back there?

Katherine nods and crosses her arms. She plays with the dirt on the ground with her shoe.

DRIVER (CONT’D)
Get in. I’ll fix it.

INT. OLD BUICK – LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine grips the door handle in fear. Driver zooms down the highway recklessly passing cars in her way. Katherine fumbles nervously for a seat belt.

DRIVER
They’re broke. All of 'em broke.

Driver pats Katherine's shoulder reassuringly and peers over the huge old steering wheel with determination.

KATHERINE
I really appreciate you taking me to get a new spare. I had no idea mine was even flat.

DRIVER
Shh!

A fuzzy AM station offers loud annoying commentaries out of one speaker.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Manzora, sentenced for shooting his wife eight times then shooting their two children, spoke out against the injustice of his sentence.

Katherine listens with a furrowed brow.

DRIVER
Who knows what that gal done to deserve that one.

KATHERINE
Deserve?

DRIVER
Probably screwing every Tom, Dick and Harry in the state for all we know.

Katherine rubs her eyes then her temples.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Don't get married and act a fool. You'll get what's coming. Watch TV any night. You'll see. Femi-nazis are getting their due!

Katherine stares out the car window intently as if by staring hard enough she will be transported out of the car. Driver does not notice.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Baby killing whores what I say.

Driver's ear-to-ear grin indicates the joy her perceived camaraderie of hate brings as she barrels down the road with increasingly dangerous speed.

EXT. KATHERINE'S CAR – LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine looks on as Driver fixes the tire.

KATHERINE
And you're raising them all on your own?

DRIVER
Yeah. What about you?

KATHERINE
College. Grad school. I'm a writer.

Driver looks at Katherine, stunned.

DRIVER
You've been to college and can't change a tire?

Driver motions for Katherine to come over and take a close look at her placement of the jack.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
What do you write about?

There's a long silence. Katherine scowls as she looks over Driver's shoulder, studying her tire changing. Driver looks back at her expecting an answer.

KATHERINE
I write about sex work.

Driver continues her tire changing more quickly and gives Katherine a dirty look. She tightens the last lug nut and gives Katherine a look of pity.

DRIVER
You're one confused little girl.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL - NIGHT

Katherine enters. ATTENDANT greets her with unprecedented pep.

ATTENDANT
A single?

KATHERINE
This may seem strange but can I ask you something?

ATTENDANT
Oh I've seen it all honey. Twice. Nothing I ain't heard neither.

KATHERINE
Do you think that if a woman, say, sleeps with every Tom, Dick and Harry that she and her children, um, deserve to be shot?

Attendant slowly tightens and retightens each of her three bleached-blonde ponytails. She gives Katherine the evil eye.

ATTENDANT
I told my husband that if he ever brought a gun near my home or our children I'd cut his dick off with a dull, rusty knife.

Silence. Katherine stares at Attendant with fear.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
Just you?

KATHERINE
Excuse me?

ATTENDANT
Just you in the room? Need a wake up call?

KATHERINE
Just me. Seven o'clock.

Attendant hands her a receipt to sign.

ATTENDANT
Anyway. If some poor gal's screwing Tom, Dick <u>and</u> Harry. She's sad. And lonely. Don't nobody deserve to be shot for that. They need to be loved.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Katherine lies uncomfortably in her bed, trying to avoid the yellow and brown patterning on the sheets. Her cell phone, resting on its charger, rings.

CUT TO:

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT – SAME

Stephen lies on the couch with his feet on the coffee table. He smokes a cigarette and flicks his ashes in a plant.

INTERCUT – TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

STEPHEN
I know two fat cats who miss Mommy.

KATHERINE
I was thinking. Maybe we ought to call it quits, Stephen.

STEPHEN
Is my baby leaving me again?

KATHERINE
It isn't working.

STEPHEN
I was calling to apologize, sugar pie.

KATHERINE
Really? That's so sweet. You know, I think I'm ready to say I'm sorry to Daddy. I pretend to be strong and, really, I'm not. I'm scared but I think I'm ready. Stephen?

STEPHEN
Yawn, yawn.

KATHERINE
What?

STEPHEN
I'm still horny baby. Why'd you up and leave me?

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katherine places the phone on its charger as if has a communicable disease. She takes a couple of pills from her purse and gulps them down with water.

Katherine tries to turn off the bedside lamp but the knob just spins ineffectually.

KATHERINE
Fuck.

Katherine collapses back onto the bed, eyes firmly fixed on the cracks on the ceiling.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY

Katherine runs through the yard onto porch past William's body, dangling from the balcony on a noose.

The old dog barks at his swaying feet. She observes the body in her peripheral but keeps running to

FRONT DOOR

Katherine pushes on the door but it won't open. She twists the knob and finally it gives. She pushes the door open with her shoulder and SLAMS it behind her.

HALLWAY

Katherine bolts up the stairs, her FOOTSTEPS echoing loudly. The staircase grows longer until the end is barely visible. Startled by the CREAKING of a door behind her she turns but her face registers confusion and she runs even faster to the --

BEDROOM

Katherine's room expands into a gray pit sucking her violently in. She floats around helplessly when suddenly William and Cecil float menacingly towards her, cackling.

Katherine propels herself through the air with her arms to escape them. She shrieks and flails her arms until -- a phone RINGS.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Katherine wakes up screaming and gasping for air. She stares forward, fright in her eyes.

KATHERINE
What the!

Katherine rolls over and sighs. Motel phone RINGS again. Clock reads nine. She picks the phone up and slams it down.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Katherine loads her car, checks the tires and drives away. Attendant, in the same clothes as last night, waves, futilely doing her best to display last night's pep. Katherine waves back.

INT. CAR - DAY

The old BMW heats beneath the relentless Mississippi sun. The air conditioner stops blowing. Katherine negotiates the steering wheel with her knee and puts her sweaty hair into a ponytail then rolls her window down.

MONTAGE – KATHERINE DRIVES TO MISSISSIPPI

-- Beat up cars cruise down a country road running parallel to the highway. An elderly couple with tan, leathery skin fans themselves at a produce stand.

-- Katherine looks at the elderly couple as she drives by. They look back, lazily but knowingly.

-- A road sign reading "Andalusia" points left and Katherine's car heads left.

-- She drives past a filling station where young people prepare a ski boat for a day on the lake.

-- The road narrows and she cruises through the town square where folks mill about.

-- Katherine picks up speed as she heads out of the south side of town. She slows and studies intently an old Jeep chained to a mobile home.

-- She crosses an aging rickety bridge over a muddy river. A sign reads "Yazoo County".

-- Acres of cotton fields line the road and Katherine drives smoothly along, wind in her hair.

-- She slows and stares aghast at her childhood home.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BELLEHAVEN PLANTATION – DAY - CONTINUOUS

The old BMW pauses for a moment at the top of the driveway.

Vines have taken over the landscape. The roof looks in need of repair. The flower bushes are unkempt and blooming wildly out of control. Nothing about the premises seems contained or cared for.

While unloading the car, Katherine pauses a moment and gazes up at the magnolia tree rubbing her arm.

The front door of the house swings open and Sally, heavier, hair totally gray now, comes down to the car. The women embrace.

SALLY
Just look at you.

INT. KITCHEN – LATER THAT DAY

A picture window displays the crazed overgrowth of the once perfectly pruned gardens. Katherine stares outside as Sally calculates bills on an adding machine and writes checks at the breakfast table.

SALLY
He was behind on all these. I tell you. I've got my own life. This isn't exactly what I'd like to be doing with my time. You know?

Katherine jumps down and starts putting clean dishes away.

KATHERINE
What all have they diagnosed him with?

Katherine clinks two liquor bottles together, looking at Sally out of the corner of her eye.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Besides alcoholism.

SALLY
Put those awful bottles down. The hospital isn't saying. It's all hush-hush.

Katherine's phone rings and she answers it while picking sprigs of fresh mint from a window box of spices. She laces Sally's iced tea with the mint.

KATHERINE
(on phone)

I hung up because you wanted … you wanted to talk about sex instead of my dying father!

She listens.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
It's over. For real this time!

Katherine looks into the yard and doesn't listen to a word being said on the phone. Stephen still speaks AD LIB as she closes the phone and places it back in her purse.

SALLY
(whispering)
You need to discover yourself, Katherine. Don't settle for a man that has no heart.

Katherine looks at Sally from the corner of her eye, obviously considering what Sally is saying.

EXT. HOSPITAL – LATER THAT DAY

Katherine walks casually towards the hospital, purse over her shoulder.

INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Cecil lies with his eyes open, a breathing tube down his throat and several tubes running through his arms and neck. Katherine stares in shock.

NURSE
He's sedated.

Katherine slips on rubber gloves the nurse hands her. She approaches her father, tears rolling down her cheeks. She circles his bed noticing his expression doesn't change, no matter where she stands.

KATHERINE
(touching his face)
Why are his eyes open like that? Can he see us? Or hear us?

NURSE
(removing a tube from his arm)
He may hear us. The sedation muddles his perception. His

reflexes don’t function under sedation. So his eyes remain open.

KATHERINE
Why don’t the doctors do something?

Nurse touches Katherine soothingly on her arm as she departs. Katherine doesn’t notice, much less respond, to the kind act.

KATHERINE (CONT’D)
(with conviction)
I came here to say I’m sorry, Daddy. But I think I should say … I should say forgive you. What have I ever done to be sorry about anyway?

The DOCTOR, very young looking, almost too young, KNOCKS then enters politely.

DOCTOR
Ms. Dulaney. How are you?

KATHERINE
Spare me. What the hell’s going on here?

Katherine walks around her father’s bed yet again. She takes his extremely swollen hand in hers and studies it. She shakes her head in disbelief.

KATHERINE
Daddy?

She waves her hand in front of his face and he doesn’t react. She crosses her arms and walks to the window.

KATHERINE (CONT’D)
Why’s he bloated like that?

CHAPLAIN’S CONFERENCE ROOM

Katherine stands defiantly while the Doctor sits patiently. Katherine paces still apparently in disbelief.

DOCTOR
Please. Won’t you have a seat?

KATHERINE
No. You tell me why my father looks like that.

DOCTOR
Your father maintained his active lifestyle after being confined to that wheelchair after the fall.

KATHERINE
I'm glad he was carrying on.

DOCTOR
Katherine. When I say lifestyle I mean that your father continued unsafe … promiscuous sexual practices.

She urges the doctor to continue with an annoyed nod and hand gesture indicating impatience.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
He gave me permission to tell you sensitive information. If you're not ready or if you'd rather wait?

Katherine looks confused now.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
The AIDS stage of the HIV infection is where your father is now.

Katherine grabs her purse and leaves. The Doctor gives chase down the hall.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
This is not something to speak of to others. You're the only one who knows!

She says nothing back to the Doctor and lets the elevator door close in his face.

INT. KITCHEN – LATER THAT DAY

Katherine fingers the writing of one of many newspaper clippings stuck to the refrigerator.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER PHOTO of Cecil and Sally buckled over in laughter.

KATHERINE (V.O.)
"Cecil and Sally voted unofficial mayors of Andalusia by group of friends in a wacky mock ceremony."

BACK TO KITCHEN

Katherine continues to survey the many photos and write-ups.

SALLY
Have you decided to make peace with him? After all these years?

KATHERINE
I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

Katherine paces the room.

KATHERINE
Why'd you leave? Back then?

Sally puts her glasses on and inspects Katherine closely.

SALLY
What happened to your face?

Katherine smiles guiltily.

KATHERINE
A shampoo bottle.

Sally looks perplexed.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
It bounced off the shower wall.

SALLY
Always throwing stuff. When you gonna grow up? Huh?

Sally and Katherine put groceries away. Katherine is distracted by a photo album. She thumbs through and stops and stares sentimentally at a particular picture.

INSERT - PHOTO of Katherine on the front steps of Bellehaven flanked by Sally, soaking wet, and her daughter, Rayna.

SALLY (O.S.)
Y'all could play in that old sprinkler all day!

KATHERINE (O.S.)
You're drenched in that picture, too!

Katherine points to Rayna.

BACK TO KITCHEN

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
So, how is Rayna?

SALLY
Trying to get Kirby into an autistic program. There's not one in the whole Mississippi Delta!

INSERT – PHOTO, Katherine's big brother, the Man who was dead in beginning of story.

KATHERINE (O.S.)
You know what happened. It's why you quit isn't it?

BACK TO KITCHEN

Sally rubs her hand across her forehead in genuine discomfort and closes the photo album. Katherine senses her distress and places an arm around her.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
What the heck's Rayna going to do with no autistic program?

Doorbell RINGS.

Carson bursts in, eyes huge and manic. Her look is still pure white trash. Her energy may or may not be drug induced. Nobody knows anymore.

CARSON
Katty, my man! What's up? What is up?

Carson embraces Katherine, then jumps back and punches her playfully in the arm. Carson takes a drag from her cigarette.

SALLY
Nothing I hate like cigarette smoke and you know that, Carson. Outside. Now!

Sally fans her way toward Carson with an ashtray.

EXT. BACK PATIO – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Carson hop scotches across the bricks, then stands on a piece of patio furniture and surveys the garden.

There's an awkward silence as Katherine surveys, with slight disdain, how peculiar Carson acts.

KATHERINE
Want some tea? Or a Coke?

CARSON
Sure. I'd kill for a little whisky in my Coke. The better to assuage me of my woes, if you know what I mean.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sally watches Carson through the window as Katherine briskly enters and joins her.

SALLY
You know she's robbed people.

Katherine leaves the window and mixes a drink.

KATHERINE
Your Jesus would want you to be nice. But I'll admit. She's off her rocker.

SALLY
My Jesus? I love Carson but she doesn't know the difference between right and wrong.

Sally and Katherine watch Carson as she continues to hop scotch and talk to herself.

EXT. PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Katherine delivers Carson's drink.

CARSON
Sweet! You're not going to join me?

KATHERINE
I'm trying to get straight. What with Daddy and all.

Carson downs half her drink in one sip. Katherine looks mildly disgusted.

CARSON
That, my friend, is what I'm talking about.

Carson starts nervously picking through an enormous overgrown gardenia bush.

CARSON (CONT'D)
You just never looked back, did you? After graduation?

Katherine stares into the gardens sadly, lost in thought.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Hey! Remember how mad Uncle Cecil would get when we picked his gardenias. And he'd chase us all over the yard with that crazy old yardman?

KATHERINE
Reverend Hall! And we'd run out to the barn. He'd scream at us about how the Lord was watching!

Carson hands a tiny bouquet of gardenias to Katherine.

CARSON
Welcome back, cousin. Missed you.

Katherine takes the bouquet, smells it, and starts laughing. Carson pulls out a picture.

CARSON (CONT'D)
My little girl. An angel.

KATHERINE
What's her name?

Carson puts the photo back and looks at her watch.

CARSON
That there is Miss Lili Belle. Shit. My ride'll be here any minute.

Carson downs her drink and hands the empty glass to Katherine, rattling the ice.

INT. KITHCEN - CONTINUOUS

The two sit in the kitchen with Carson swigging eagerly on a halfway finished drink, her speech erratic.

CARSON
So, I'm cruising with this dude in his Camaro, complete with t-tops. Got an Eagle on the hood. Dude swears he can get me meth. Next thing I know we're hitting a hundred and twenty on the highway.

Carson chugs more of her drink.

CARSON (CONT'D)
And we stop at this trailer. No trees. Just this hideous old doublewide.

Katherine looks increasingly irritated.

KATHERINE
When was this, Carson?

Katherine takes Carson by the arm and walks her out the kitchen into the --

LIVING ROOM

Carson absently picks up an antique vase and examines it, maybe estimating its street value.

She sets it down on the very edge of the mantle. Katherine catches it before it hits the ground.

CARSON
Just listen! All the windows are broken. And this woman's outside raking the yard with a broom. And there's blood oozing from her nose.

EXT. PORCH – DAY - CONTINUOUS

The two walk onto the porch, Carson raking the air with an imaginary broom.

KATHERINE
Like she's been beaten?

CARSON
From too much meth! She's furtively glancing around.

KATHERINE
Furtively?

Carson's second drink is gone in one last gulp.

CARSON
Furtively, man! No other word to describe it!

Katherine sits on the brick stairs and watches Carson who's still raking the air with her imaginary broom.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Crusty black scabs all over her arms and she was steady raking.

Carson stops raking for long enough to rattle the ice in her glass nervously.

KATHERINE
You know Daddy's …

Carson sets her drink down and does cartwheels in the driveway.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Thought I saw your old Jeep chained to a mobile home outside of town. You sell it?

Carson does another cartwheel then a pirouette.

CARSON
That's my Jeep. Only one like it in town.

An old sports car with smoke coming from the exhaust turns into the driveway with MUSIC blaring.

KATHERINE
Why's your Jeep chained up?

CARSON
Whoo-hoo!

A dust cloud arrives with the car as it fishtails through the gravel. Carson jumps into the passenger's seat. With a trail of smoke and dust Carson is gone as abruptly as she arrived.

Sally comes outside and plops down next to Katherine on the stairs and breathes a sigh of relief.

SALLY
What was that all about?

KATHERINE
A real wakeup call.

EXT. BALCONY – LATER THAT DAY

A train chugs smoothly along the track beyond the cotton fields HONKING its warning loudly as it passes through.

Katherine types on her laptop. She pauses and looks into the cotton fields for inspiration.

Katherine sets her laptop aside and digs a baggy from her purse. It’s practically empty but she lines up what’s left. She’s eyes the white line then raises the mirror into the breeze. She watches as the powder blows away.

She looks back into the cotton field and apparently newly inspired and with a look of uncharacteristic deviousness, she resumes typing.

EXT. BALCONY – THAT NIGHT

Katherine, same clothes as earlier, is awakened by a car HORN. As she scrambles to her feet, her computer almost falls to the ground but she catches it.

DRIVEWAY

Mary Garett steps gracefully from her well-maintained antique convertible. She places her hands on her hips in a sassy gesture.

MARY GARETT
You thought I’d let you face this alone?

EXT. BALCONY – LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary Garett, apparently buzzed from the empty bottle of wine before her, tosses her hair flirtatiously as she speaks.

MARY GARETT
I called Louisa to alert her of our arrival. I vote she’s blowing us off.

KATHERINE
Well if I had some hot rock star boyfriend I’d blow us off too!

Mary Garett jumps up and wildly wraps her legs around Katherine. The two fall to the floor laughing.

MARY GARETT
I'd never blow us off! Not for any dude!

She plants a kiss on Katherine that's almost too friendly. Katherine looks mildly shocked. She backs away a little.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
(mocking drunk voice)
I love you, man! I love you!

Carson steps onto the balcony.

CARSON
Evince your homosexuality nebulously lesbian women. Before I puke on you!

Carson sits on top of them and bounces up and down.

MARY GARETT
Ow! Where the hell did you come from? I need another drink!

Carson abandons the pile of women.

CARSON
A drink sounds divine.

Carson darts off. Katherine and Mary Garett stand.

MARY GARETT
Fix me one?

KATHERINE
(whispering)
Did you see Carson's Jeep chained to that mobile home?

Mary Garett lifts her skirt and examines her stockings. She slowly reattaches a thigh high to a garter belt.

MARY GARETT
Damn it. I ripped my stocking.

KATHERINE
(whispering)
Mary Garett, answer me!

MARY GARETT
What?

KATHERINE
(whispering)
Why's Carson's Jeep chained to a mobile home?

MARY GARETT
Maybe she owes someone money.

KATHERINE
You should do a documentary on her.

Carson peeks around the corner.

CARSON
Hello, assholes. Planning my mockumentary?

MARY GARETT
Don't tempt her. Desperate writers can be ruthless in their portrayal of the grotesque.

Mary Garett exits. Carson pours from a fresh bottle of wine.

MARY GARETT (O.S.)
Gotta pee.

Carson grabs Mary Garett's bag and begins deviously rummaging through it.

CARSON
What's this I see?

KATHERINE
Hey. Can you get me a little Christina? Maybe fifty bucks worth?

Carson goes through the bag. Katherine reaches for it.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
What do you say?

They struggle over the bag.

CARSON
When we were kids I promised you I'd never score for you. So, let's see. Um, no fucking way?

Carson pulls several packages of laxatives from Mary Garett's bag.

CARSON (CONT'D)
And her newest weight loss plan I presume.

Carson jiggles the laxatives in the air.

CARSON (CONT'D)
No more binging and purging. Just a whole bunch a crapping.

Carson drops the laxatives back in the bag as Mary Garett enters.

MARY GARETT
Ah. Much better. Hey! What the hell are you doing near my bag, Carson?

Carson grins and saunters off the balcony swigging straight from the bottle of wine.

CARSON (O.S.)
Mary Garett, your toilet's looking for you!

Mary Garett rolls her eyes.

MARY GARETT
My toilet? What are we, five years old?

Katherine hands Mary Garett the fresh drink Carson poured for her.

KATHERINE
She won't get me any speed. And I've got work to do. Do we know anyone in this town anymore?

MARY GARETT
What's up with your daddy?

Katherine paces and doesn't answer.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Don't you want to at least tell me what the doctor said?

KATHERINE
If I wanted to, I would.

Katherine pulls her sleeve up and looks at the cuts on her arms. She starts to pick at one of the scabs.

MARY GARETT
Why do you do that to yourself? Why won't you see somebody about that?

Katherine continues pacing and touching the cuts on her arm.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Hey. I know! Let's go get the tractor. It'll take our minds off cuts and fathers. And junkie cousins, for that matter. Carson's annoying the shit out of me.

Katherine laughs.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

KATHERINE
Nothing.

EXT. COTTON FIELD – NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Mary Garett and Katherine walk through rows of cotton toward the dilapidated barn, flashlights in hand. Katherine picks cotton from a plant and studies it as if it might hold a secret.

KATHERINE
They had to induce a coma.

She plays with cotton as she speaks.

MARY GARETT
Have you made peace with him? In your heart at least?

KATHERINE
There's a lot I never told you. It wasn't just the award's ceremony or his drinking.

She throws the cotton aside. Mary Garett passes her the wine bottle. She refuses it.

MARY GARETT
I always told you everything.

Katherine rolls her eyes.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Almost everything … You found out the rest eventually right?

Mary Garett punches Katherine in the arm.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
You know you did!

The two sit on the wood bench outside the barn.

KATHERINE
There were legal reasons I couldn't tell you certain things.

Silence. Mary Garett grimaces.

MARY GARETT
Okay. What exactly are you talking about, my dear? This sounds serious.

Katherine looks afraid.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
This is scaring me. Having known you for all these years. To think … there's something you're hiding.

KATHERINE
The night my big brother O.D.ed. Daddy gave him the pills.

MARY GARETT
He what?

KATHERINE
Then he wandered down to that house. Where they found him. He

died in that empty house all by
himself … because of my father.

Mary Garett grabs the wine bottle and takes a huge swig. She gets up and paces around a little and throws her head back and starts laughing.

MARY GARETT
This is an elaborate hoax, right? A little writer's trick to get a reaction out of me? You're evil.

KATHERINE
Will wrote me a letter, MG. I found it a few weeks after his funeral.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY

Katherine, age seventeen, rushes through the front door, snowflakes on her shoulders. She throws off her coat and scarf and collapses on the couch laughing.

Wind blows the front door open and she runs and SLAMS it shut, shivering in the chill of the cold air.

Through the window she peers at a tiny snowman with a huge stick for a penis and two rocks to complete the anatomy. She bursts into laughter again.

Katherine turns the stereo on and goes through a stack of records, pulling one out of a bright yellow casing. A note falls out. She sits on the floor and reads it.

WILLIAM (V.O.)
"Dear Katty. I can't live with the voices in my head. I want you to have a normal life. You're the only one left. There are things you should know … about Dad … "

CUT TO:

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Mary Garett looks comforted somehow. She's smiling at Katherine, who looks confused by her reaction.

KATHERINE
Daddy handed his own son a bottle of pills.

MARY GARETT
I know this must be hard for you.

KATHERINE
Shut up! Hard for me!

Mary Garett grabs Katherine by the shoulders and stares her in the face.

MARY GARETT
Listen. It sounds like an accident. A lapse -- a serious lapse -- in judgment. Spare yourself the melodrama. You weren't there and you will never know the truth.

MUSIC blares suddenly from Bellehaven. Mary Garett and Katherine shoot each other a look and walk to the barn.

KATHERINE
You should have been a psycho-analyst like your mother.

MARY GARETT
I prefer just being a psycho with a camera.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Katherine looks at Mary Garett with uncharacteristic seriousness as she opens the barn door.

KATHERINE
I brought you here for a reason.

Mary Garett walks into the barn and spins around, overacting nervousness. Katherine picks up a rusty machete and approaches Mary Garett with it menacingly.

MARY GARETT
To chop me into pieces?!

Mary Garett belts out a mock horror-movie scream. Katherine laughs and tosses the machete aside and grabs the tractor keys.

KATHERINE
Can you believe how much mileage we got out of that machete in high school?

Mary Garett hops on the tractor.

MARY GARETT
What do you expect when you put five girls and a bag of weed in an old barn?

Mary Garett turns the ignition. Katherine swings open the barn door as the tractor approaches then she hops into the passenger's seat.

The whole routine is so smooth it must have been done many times before.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - CONTINUOUS

KATHERINE
I wanna drive!

They swap seats and lose control of the tractor and it plows through a row of cotton, squashing it flat.

Katherine gains control and Mary Garett settles into the passenger's seat and props her feet on the tiny dashboard. They cruise along until they hit a bump. The wine bottle flies into the air and lands on Katherine.

MARY GARETT
Oopsie!

When they're almost to Bellehaven, Katherine pulls over and turns off the tractor.

KATHERINE
I see a real story here. In my life. I started writing it today.

MARY GARETT
Our story's in Louisiana. Mississippi's all gloom and doom.

KATHERINE
And a teen sex worker who's waiting for a john to fall in love with her isn't gloomy?

MARY GARETT
"Swamp Bitch Madam" promotes feminism.

KATHERINE
Since when? Sex work is a moronic self-defeating perversion of capitalism, MG. Get a grip.

Mary Garett pulls her skirt up flirtatiously and displays her beautiful stockings and long legs.

MARY GARETT
Prostitution is a woman doing what she wants with her body and getting paid for it.

Mary Garett spreads her legs wide arches her back and emits a screeching mock-porno moan.

KATHERINE
She's selling intimacy, MG. But intimacy shouldn't be a commodity That's when she's not getting raped. Your project is not feminist. It's capitalist.

Katherine reaches over and flirtatiously strokes Mary Garett's perfectly shaped leg then gruffly pulls her skirt down to cover it up.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Put your legs together and get a new ideology.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The tractor ambles towards the house with a soft PURR of the engine wobbling to and fro with each dip in the road.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Katherine and Mary Garett stop outside the library door when they hear Maggie Maxine's shrill voice inside as she and Carson yell over the MUSIC.

MAGGIE MAXINE (O.S.)
What's the big idea? With the music? I want the money you owe me!

CARSON (O.S)
Blood from a turnip!

MAGGIE MAXINE (O.S)
What?

The MUSIC stops. There is a short pause.

CARSON (O.S)
You can’t squeeze blood from a turnip. Analogously, I’m the turnip and money is the blood.

MAGGIE MAXINE (O.S)
What’d you do? Smoke it?

CARSON (O.S)
I shot it up, Mamma. Wanna pick the scabs off my track marks?

There’s a SCUFFLE O.S. Mary Garett pushes the door but Katherine stops it from opening. They continue listening through the door.

MAGGIE MAXINE (O.S)
One step away from finishing law school. Now look at you.

CARSON (O.S)
Actually, Mamma. Don’t look. Your facelift creeps me out. You look like a scared turkey.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine and Mary Garett bust into the room.

MARY GARETT
(throwing her arms in the air)
Tractor ride!

There’s a long silence. Katherine fidgets and Maggie Maxine straightens her skirt and smoothes her hair down. Carson turns the MUSIC back on, loud. Maggie Maxine turns it off.

CARSON
Oh, come on, dude.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Stop with that 'dude' stuff. And hello, Katherine. How nice of you to visit my dying brother.

KATHERINE
Aunt Maggie Maxine.

Maggie Maxine swaggers out dramatically with her many dangling bracelets jingling with her every step of the way.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
Ted's on his way. With absinthe. No word from Louisa.

Carson turns the MUSIC back on and Katherine lowers the volume. Carson concedes with a respectful nod.

Maggie Maxine jingles back in.

MAGGIE MAXINE
What time are you visiting your daddy tomorrow?

KATHERINE
There's a six AM visit.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Don't bother. Sit around here and smoke your crack. He won't exactly miss you.

KATHERINE
I'm his daughter, Aunt Mag. And I don't smoke crack.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Were his daughter. You left.

Maggie Maxine struts out of the room annoyed and then peeks her hair-sprayed head back in.

MAGGIE MAXINE (CONT'D)
I'm gone, y'all. Ta-ta.

EXT. PORCH – NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

KATHERINE
It was great seeing you.

Maggie Maxine waves Katherine away like a fly. She snarls at her as she speaks.

MAGGIE MAXINE
You abandoned my brother. I'll never forgive you. Real women care for their sick parents.

Maggie Maxine throws her designer purse over her shoulder and clomps closer to Katherine. She peeks over her bifocals.

MAGGIE MAXINE (CONT'D)
You look horrible. And not married, I see? Those ovaries will dry up before you know it, honey.

Maggie Maxine starts down the brick stairs. Something falls into her hair from above. She feels around for it and looks up.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Carson looks down over the railing at Maggie Maxine, wiping a hand across her mouth.

CARSON
Birds these days. The places they choose to shit never cease to amaze me.

MAGGIE MAXINE (O.S.)
What was that? You're foul, Carson. And no one loves you! We never have!

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINOUS

Maggie Maxine speeds off in her oversized urban assault vehicle passing the old sports car Carson climbed into earlier. The car cruises the driveway but doesn't stop.

KATHERINE
Carson? Carson!

CARSON (O.S.)
Yeah?

Another car comes into the driveway.

Carson gallops onto the porch with a cigarette in one hand and a joint in the other. She offers Katherine the joint. Katherine contemplates but declines.

CARSON
Ted! My sweetie.

KATHERINE
The black car from earlier just drove through here. Without even stopping.

TED, your typical preppie stoner, struts toward the porch carrying a bottle of foggy juice.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
That's just some dude. Keep it on the DL.

KATHERINE
DL. Is that his name? Where's your husband?

INT. LIBRARY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine types on her computer and Mary Garett goes through CDs, sipping more wine. Mary Garrett, apparently indecisive, places several CDs in the stereo, switching them out before they even get a chance to begin playing.

MARY GARETT
How many men is she involved with?

Ted and Carson LAUGH O.S. Glasses clink. General racket of dishes and pots and pans being used continues to filter through to the library.

KATHERINE
I guess Ted. And the dude, as she refers to him, who's stalking her tonight, and her husband. No wonder she has no idea who Lili Belle's father is?

Mary Garett finally presses play on the stereo, delivering her MUSIC choice. She peers over Katherine's shoulder at the computer screen.

MARY GARETT
Read me what you've got.

KATHERINE
Let me finish this.

Mary Garett snatches the laptop and reads along for a while. She then sets the computer aside.

MARY GARETT
Wow. Very, um. Uh.

Katherine takes the computer and closes it and sets it aside, ruefully.

KATHERINE
It's satirical. Does that come across?

Mary Garett looks around in an animated search for the right words.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Forget I asked. I'll leave it up to an editor to judge. You stick to your cameras, love.

Mary Garett grimaces and rests her head on Katherine's shoulder until there's a CRASH O.S. Katherine jumps for the door but Mary Garett blocks her.

MARY GARETT
Go easy on them.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ted and Carson pour water on a grease fire. Mary Garett fills a pot and joins them.

KATHERINE (O.S.)
Not water! Salt! Anything but water!

Everyone gets out of Katherine's way when she comes in wielding a fire extinguisher.

EXT. PORCH – LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine joins the group on the porch, pissed off and wiping sweat from her brow. She sets the fire extinguisher down.

TED
Car got the urge to fry okra when that absinthe kicked in. I think that for a second … for a second there we like, forgot we were cooking or something.

KATHERINE
You can’t just forget you’re frying okra!

The group mills about on the porch, Carson running her hands through the air and watching them. Katherine watches her and walks over to her. She starts to say something but decides against it. Carson looks very high.

Katherine turns and locks the house and looks back at the group. She jingles the keys in her hand.

KATHERINE
I’m going to the cemetery. Everybody. Please just leave.

TED
(chasing her)
You can’t, Katty.

KATHERINE
I don’t need your chivalry, Ted.

Katherine walks to her car. Ted runs after her and gently takes her by the arm.

TED
Literally. You can’t. The road’s blocked off. Construction, man. Sorry.

Katherine eyes the tractor, then her group of friends.

MARY GARETT
Now you’re scaring me. Not in the middle of the night.

Katherine gets on the tractor, cranks it, and drives off. Carson runs behind and jumps on the back. Mary Garett and Ted jog along and after some time, they jump on, too.

EXT. CEMETARY – LATER THAT NIGHT

Moonlight bathes the scene. Katherine fingers the engraved writing on her mother’s headstone.

Mary Garett sits down next to her and produces a bouquet of flowers from behind her back.

KATHERINE
You didn’t!

MARY GARETT
No! There's a hydrangea bush back there. I stopped stealing flowers from graves when we got caught!

Katherine puts a few flowers on her mother's grave. Mary Garett sticks the last flower in Katherine's ponytail.

EXT. DIRT TRAIL BEHIND CEMETARY - NIGHT

The tractor ambles along roughly, everyone bobbling around on board. Ted actually falls off but runs along side and hops back on, giggling a stoner laugh.

EXT. PAVED ROAD - NIGHT

The tractor cruises smoothly along the pavement.

CARSON
My Jeep, y'all. Look at her.

It sits in a sparsely populated trailer park. An old wood-paneled Jeep, chained to a doublewide trailer home.

TED
I hate that little redneck Earl Mims.

KATHERINE
What if we --

Carson's face lights up.

EXT. FIELD BEHIND TRAILER PARK - NIGHT

The group climbs off the tractor and approaches the trailer park cautiously on foot. It rains lightly.

KATHERINE
Maybe old Earl will sell me a little speed.

Mary Garett rolls her eyes and grabs Katherine's arm.

MARY GARETT
Getting clean is not a joke.

KATHERINE
(in a whisper)
Mary Garett and I are going to be the lookouts? Okay? Okay!

MARY GARETT
(in a whisper)

We'll cry out like hoot owls if Earl or any little Earls stir inside.

Carson nods.

TED
Hoo-hoo. Hoo-hoo?

The women nod. Oak leaves CRUNCH loudly beneath their shoes. Everyone stops and they take turns moving forward so it's a quieter, less crunchy process.

Carson holds her head between her knees and laughs. She and Ted briefly make out. Rain continues to fall lightly.

CARSON
(whispering to everyone)
If it starts to pour rain, abort mission.

Carson points to a tree and then points to Mary Garett and Katherine. The two dash over to the tree, one at a time.

TED
I'll pick the lock after you get in. Be ready to drive. Fast.

Carson opens the driver's side door. It SQUEAKS loudly. A light comes on in the trailer.

MARY GARETT AND KATHERINE
Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!

The cacophony is loud, unnatural.

MOBILE HOME PORCH

EARL comes out followed by the sound of the trailer door SLAMMING. A Danny DeVito shaped man, Earl sports only saggy distinctly off-white briefs.

EARL
What the fuck, fuckers?!

Silence.

JEEP

Carson lies low.

BUMPER

Ted lies still, the lock in one hand and a screwdriver in the other.

TREE

Mary Garett and Katherine stay glued to the trunk.

MARY GARETT
(in a whisper)
What's gotten into you? Why would you suggest such a thing?

KATHERINE
I'm getting a fix with no drugs. Not bad, huh?

PORCH

Earl retreats into the trailer and turns off the light. Rain falls harder.

JEEP

Carson rolls the window down and crawls through. She falls to the ground with a THUD.

LAWN

Mary Garett and Katherine run from behind the tree, creating long eerie shadows across the yard.

BUMPER

Carson crawls to Ted under the Jeep.

CARSON
We have to crawl across this yard. And then run for it.

They kiss long and deep then crawl through the yard toward the road. The trailer door SLAMS O.S.

GUNSHOT.

EARL (O.S.)
I knew that was you, little thief! Where's my money?

EXT. ROAD – NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Ted and Carson clamber to their feet and run. The whole group meets and runs through the rain together.

GUNSHOT. Mary Garett falls.

TED
Ow! Oh, goddamn it!

CARSON
Ted! MG! They've been shot!

Ted grabs Mary Garett from the ground and runs along with his arm around her, practically dragging her. He holds his side with his free hand and a tiny spot of blood oozes through his white shirt.

The group dives into a ditch, one by one.

MARY GARETT
My knee, y'all!

TED
That little Danny DeVito fucker shot me with a b-b gun! Did he get you?

MARY GARETT
No. I just slipped!

Katherine crawls from the ditch and makes her way across the yard on her stomach. She looks back and motions for the others to join.

KATHERINE
We'll have to get the tractor tomorrow. Let's go this way.

Katherine leads them. Everyone on all fours, they bypass a block and end up on a busy road behind a gas station. They rise to their feet in relief.

EXT. ROAD – LATER THAT NIGHT

The group wearily trudges along, led by Katherine. Mary Garett limps. Ted clutches his side.

KATHERINE
It's only two more miles back to town.

A rickety Volvo sputters up beside them and slows, revealing the driver's side tire as a tiny spare. The car stops and a woman steps out, her crystal blue eyes held in mock surprise.

LOUISA
I'd be gosh fucking damned.

TED
Louisa?

LOUISA
Y'all look like the losers of some cracker gang war. Get in the car!

Carson climbs into the car hesitatingly.

LOUISA (CONT'D)
I shouldn't even let your crazy thieving ass in my car Carson, but under the circumstances.

Ted dives into the car and the rest of the group piles in behind him. Louisa scratches off with a sputter.

CARSON
I need a beer. Who else could use a beer?

No one answers. Ted studies the pathetically small hole in his side.

KATHERINE
Well, how was that for a sober thrill?

There's a beautiful calm in the car. Mary Garett picks mud from between her toes and tosses it out the window. The wind blows a strand of Carson's hair into her mouth. Katherine fixes it for her but Carson doesn't notice.

MARY GARETT
I need stitches. Like, now.

TED
I could stand a tetanus shot myself.

KATHERINE
Stop whining you two. Nothing a little peroxide won't fix.

EXT. HOSPITAL – LATER THAT NIGHT

Maggie Maxine intercepts the group at the front door. Mary Garett and Louisa nod wearily as they pass her.

Everyone goes inside the hospital except Katherine. Maggie Maxine fondles the flower in Katherine's hair.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Festive.

KATHERINE
How's Daddy?

MAGGIE MAXINE
(sniffing her)
You smell like booze.

KATHERINE
My father, Aunt Mag. What's the status?

Maggie Maxine pokes a finger on a red wine stain on Katherine's shirt.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Judging by the mud all over y'all I presume you've been getting your kicks in a ditch?

Maggie Maxine circles Katherine. Her heels make high pitched clicking noises each time they hit the concrete.

MAGGIE MAXINE (CONT'D)
(mockingly)
Hi, Maggie Maxine. Daddy's dying in the hospital and I'm getting drunk with my friends. In a ditch!

KATHERINE
Come on. How is he?

Maggie Maxine smiles at Katherine.

MAGGIE MAXINE
Not so good. This could be your big night.

INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - NIGHT

Katherine, muddy clothes wet and wine stained, pleads with the NURSE. The flower in her hair gives her madwoman look a touch of color.

NURSE
Ms. Dulaney. You smell drunk. We don't usually let anyone in who's, you know, intoxicated.

Katherine drops her head in frustration and looks back up at the Nurse. The Nurse just nods.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM WAITING AREA - NIGHT

In one corner Louisa sits with Ted, nodding in disbelief as he apparently explains the evening's events AD LIB, hands gesticulating wildly. Ted wears only shorts, proudly exposing his patched wound and perfect body.

Katherine's eyes are only half open. Mary Garett sits with her pant leg rolled up exposing a bandaged knee.

KATHERINE
She says I can see him when I've sobered up.

MARY GARETT
Oh, the irony is priceless.

KATHERINE
They're about to move him to palliative care anyway.

MARY GARETT
Which is?

Katherine buries her head in her lap. Mary Garett pulls the flower from her ponytail and smells it.

KATHERINE
Where people go to die. Family comes in to spend their last moments with their loved one. Even dogs are allowed.

MARY GARETT
God. Tell me they're not going to let that asshole Maggie Maxine in there. Please.

Katherine starts to cry.

MARY GARETT
I'm sorry, baby. This isn't the time. I'm so sorry.

A NURSE approaches.

NURSE
You can go up.

INT. PALLIATIVE CARE ROOM – LATER THAT NIGHT

Katherine lies on a couch next to Cecil's bed. Maggie Maxine stands.

MAGGIE MAXINE
You know how deep denial runs?

KATHERINE
What?

MAGGIE MAXINE
Denial. You know how much damage it can do?

KATHERINE
I don't think I do, Aunt Mag. Why?

MAGGIE MAXINE
I don't care that Cecil's gay. Never really did.

Katherine sits up on the couch. She wraps herself snuggly in her blanket.

MAGGIE MAXINE (CONT'D)
Everybody else had accepted it. Cecil could never accept that about himself. And that's why we're here.

KATHERINE
I still don't see how denial gives one HIV.

MAGGIE MAXINE
He wouldn't have been so reckless. So risky. He wouldn't have been a drunk.

Maggie Maxine nervously applies some lip gloss.

MAGGIE MAXINE (CONT'D)
He could have fallen in love. Had a normal life with another man. He never let himself. Screwing hustlers, white trash. Street people! Anything to keep him from being alone at night.

Maggie Maxine leaves the room, eyes misty, human.

LATER

Katherine, same stained, muddy clothes, writes in a legal pad for a bit and sets it aside. She looks at her father with resolve. She presses the nurse call button.

KATHERINE
(to Nurse)
It's time. Remove him from life support. All of it.

LATER

Katherine's father breathes deeply at her side then starts to choke. She holds his hand and brushes his hair back with a comb. He gasps for air then stops breathing.

Katherine watches as her father lies motionless. The heart monitor BEEPS wildly, indicating Cecil's passing. The sounds fill the room and a NURSE walks in and puts her arm around Katherine. The two stand watching over Cecil.

NURSE
It's okay to cry.

Katherine places her hand across Cecil's forehead tenderly then closes his eyes. She pulls his sheet over his face.

KATHERINE
Please call my aunt.

INT. BELLEHAVEN KITCHEN - DAY

Wind blows the back door open, knocking over a planter and smashing it to pieces. Louisa can't clean the mess up fast enough. Mary Garett eats chips and reads. A hurricane could blow through and she wouldn't notice.

MARY GARETT
I had no idea there were two hundred hybrids of roses. Good gracious alive.

Louisa shuffles huge chunks of dirt from the floor to the garbage. She follows up with chunks of the concrete planter.

LOUISA
Could you possibly, um.

Katherine sneaks into the doorway and watches the scene.

MARY GARETT
What?

LOUISA
Oh, I dunno. Maybe get off your ass and help me?

MARY GARETT
But you're so efficient. I wouldn't want to interfere.

Louisa continues to shuffle dirt clods across the kitchen to the garbage. Mary Garett observes critically.

MARY GARETT
(pointing)
I think you missed a spot.

Louisa pegs Mary Garett in the head with a dirt clod. It crumbles all over her. Another gust of wind violently blows the back door open. Louisa hustles to shut it and notices Katherine laughing in the doorway.

LOUISA
Maybe you'll help me?

Mary Garett peeks over her shoulder at Katherine, who looks stunning in her black dress. She even looks well-rested for the first time in a long time. Louisa assaults Katherine with a bear hug.

LOUISA (CONT'D)
Come on, MG. Get off your lazy butt. Group hug.

KATHERINE
(voice muffled by hugs)
What would I do without y'all?

There's an extended moment of silence. Each woman tears up and Katherine bursts from the group hug.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Funeral time. We'll cry later.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Mary Garett walks by Katherine's room in a robe, cosmetics bag in hand.

KATHERINE (O.S.)
(on phone)

No … I quit, actually … The whole thing is repulsive anyway. You don't --

The sound of the phone SLAMMING onto the receiver echoes in the hallway. Katherine bursts from the room. Mary Garett stands there dumbfounded.

MARY GARETT
Oh, hey, you.

KATHERINE
Hey. I'm, uh, headed down. The caterers should be here any minute.

MARY GARETT
M'kay.

KATHERINE
M'kay.

MARY GARETT
Uh, well. I'm headed for a shower.

KATHERINE
Okay, then.

Katherine bolts down the stairs. At the bottom, she turns and sees Mary Garett's watching her.

EXT. GRAVESIDE FUNERAL – LATER THAT DAY

Katherine, Louisa, Mary Garett and Carson, all dressed in black, sit together on the front row next to the coffin while Maggie Maxine, Lili Belle, and other family sit behind them. Carson has a black eye and a busted lip. And, she's drunk.

PREACHER
Cecil wasn't the type of person to look down upon his fellow man.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
Perhaps because he was in a wheelchair? He was always looking up.

MARY GARETT
(in a whisper)
Shut up, already!

PREACHER
He gave and he gave and he gave.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
A bunch of head. Probably a few S.T.D.s.

Maggie Maxine clears her throat and nudges Carson in the shoulder from behind.

MAGGIE MAXINE
(in a whisper)
Enough. Are you drunk?

PREACHER
And everyone knew what lay deep in the heart of our brother Cecil Dulaney.

KATHERINE
(in a whisper)
The secret that he killed his own son yet never confessed to the crime.

MARY GARETT
(in a whisper)
Not you, too. When are y'all gonna grow up?

Carson takes a swig from a flask and offers Katherine one. She nods.

KATHERINE
(in a whisper)
I quit.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
Today?

KATHERINE
(in a whisper)
A few days ago.

CARSON
(in a whisper)
Good luck with that.

She takes a giant swig.

PREACHER
Cecil Dulaney. May he rest in peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Mary Garett crosses herself Catholic style. Preacher spreads dirt ceremoniously across the casket as it's lowered into the ground. Mourners disperse. A TEENAGER awkwardly stops Katherine.

TEENAGER
Your daddy was a cool guy. But Katherine, we all know that these things happen.

Katherine laughs out loud. The teenager stammers, red-faced.

KATHERINE
No, it's true. They do happen. They really do. Every day. To lots of people.

As the Teenager departs, she looks at Carson a moment too long.

CARSON
What? Never seen spousal battery? Cheers! Party at Club Cecil's!

LOUISA
It's not a party. It's a visit-ation, Carson.

CARSON
Is there booze?

LOUISA
Well, yeah.

CARSON
Then it's a fucking party.

Carson raises her flask for another swig. Louisa yanks it away and drags her to the car by the arm.

LOUISA
Get your trashy ass in the car before I knock you right down into that grave with Cecil!

EXT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY

Family members and friends congregate at Cecil's visitation. Carson, apparently still inebriated, holds Lili Belle's hand and waves at anyone passing by with it. Maggie Maxine takes the baby from Carson.

MAGGIE MAXINE
So how much was the casket?

KATHERINE
Why?

MAGGIE MAXINE
It looked like something poor white trash might be buried in.

KATHERINE
You. Hand me that baby.

Maggie Maxine hesitatingly hands Katherine Lili Belle.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Now get off my property. And don't ever come back. Ever.

MAGGIE MAXINE
You wouldn't. You couldn't?

KATHERINE
Right now.

Maggie Maxine scurries away. Carson sobers slightly.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Daddy left everything to Sally and me. I'll live here while I finish my book.

The two make their way to the magnolia tree, Carson still looking at Katherine in disbelief.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
And here's the infamous magnolia tree. Shall I climb up and do a swan dive?

Katherine flings her arms around in a silly way to show dexterity.

CARSON
You're in high spirits.

KATHERINE
I'm just glad it's all over. I'm free to write what I want to write.

Carson lights a cigarette. Katherine holds Lili Belle away from the smoke.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
He can't get you here. Move in. And try and clean up.

Mary Garett walks up. Carson staggers off.

MARY GARETT
Hey. I didn't mean to break up the party but I overheard.

Mary Garett peers scornfully at Carson who drunkenly speaks with a group of mourners under the magnolia tree.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
You just dragged the town pariah into your home?

Sally passes by and Katherine hands Lili Belle to her.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
You are clean, Katty. Finally. She's the worst thing you could possibly --

Mary Garett walks into the house then returns with her purse over her shoulder.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
I've got a job to get back to. When were you planning to tell me you got fired? From the job I secured for you, no less.

Mary Garett walks towards her car. Katherine walks behind her.

KATHERINE
You resent me! You hate I'm not obsessed with sex workers. I'm sorry but I don't think they're on some grand feminist adventure!

Mary Garett stops dead in her tracks.

MARY GARETT
You're a prude. Afraid to get your hands dirty for a story. Now, you're shacking up with a junkie in your dead father's house?

Mary Garett looks at Katherine with pity.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
You're going to end up dead before your time like everyone else in your family.

Katherine slaps Mary Garett's face.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
And by the way. I'm in love with you, Katherine. In case that slipped under your radar. You can't say you never knew that.

Katherine walks slowly and deliberately towards the house then stops dead in her tracks.

KATHERINE
You call involving me in something as emotionally destructive as sex work love? I'd hate to be your enemy.

INT. KITCHEN – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine fills the sink with soap and water.

SALLY
Everything went smooth. I'm so darned proud of you. Just so proud.

Katherine washes the dishes frantically. Sally gives her a kiss on the forehead, then pours soup from a pot on the stove into a bowl.

SALLY (CONT'D)
I'm gonna run this upstairs to Carson.

Katherine accidentally breaks a wine goblet. Sally picks glass out of the sink.

KATHERINE
How's her eye?

SALLY
It's her teeth I'm worried about.

KATHERINE
Her own husband. I'm moving her in here. First thing tomorrow.

Sally throws broken glass into the garbage.

SALLY
Don't break any more dishes.

She winks at Katherine playfully and leaves, but when Sally is out of earshot, Katherine flings a plate against the wall SMASHING it to bits. Rayna and her five year old autistic son, Kirby, walk in.

KIRBY
Where's grandma going with the soup!

RAYNA
Kirby. Remember what Mamma said. Funeral is sad. Inside voice.

Rayna looks at the broken plate on the ground and shoots Katherine a look. She picks a piece of the plate up and sets it on the counter in front of Katherine.

RAYNA
You know, Katty. Mamma and I have an idea. About the house. Maybe we could talk later this week? Over lunch?

KATHERINE
Why wait?

Katherine sweeps the broken plate into a dustpan and empties it into the garbage.

RAYNA
Let's wait, actually. Your daddy's funeral isn't the place.

Katherine cuts herself accidentally on broken glass in the sink. She watches morbidly as blood oozes out. She smiles a Cheshire cat grin and quickly puts a paper towel on the wound.

KATHERINE
Apparently, Daddy's funeral is an anything goes affair. Ask away.

Katherine throws the remaining broken glass in the garbage as Rayna exits with Kirby.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
All this after I decided to get sober. If ever there were a time to get high.

Rayna comes back in without Kirby and takes Katherine by the arm and sits her at the table. She turns the running water off and returns to the table.

RAYNA
The dishes can wait. Look. Kirby starts first grade this year and with his autism …

KATHERINE
Yes?

RAYNA
Well.

Rayna pours two cups of coffee and sits down. Katherine pushes her coffee away.

KATHERINE
I switched to tea. Decided to go all the way.

Rayna fills the teakettle and places it on the stove. She walks nervously to the window and looks out at Sally who monitors Kirby as he plays with Lili Belle.

RAYNA
How would you feel about us running our startup program for autistic kids downstairs? During the day? We'd have more money to spend on staff with no rent bills.

Katherine rises from the table and resumes washing dishes frantically.

KATHERINE
What hours? How many kids?

RAYNA
Look. This really isn't a good time to do this.

KATHERINE
Knock it off, Rayna. You're like a sister to me.

RAYNA
Ten kids, honey. Eight in the morning to two in the afternoon. There's no program in the Mississippi Delta public schools.

KATHERINE
Rayna. Y'all can do anything you want. It sounds loud and chaotic, but --

Katherine turns and smiles at Rayna with sincerity.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
This house is Sally's, too. That means it is yours by extension.

Rayna jumps up and hugs Katherine.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
I'm finishing a book here, Rayna. I don't want to be disturbed. At all. Is that clear?

RAYNA
Crystal.

EXT. KATHERINE'S CAR - DAY

Katherine drives, windows down, hair blowing in the breeze. Deer eat grass dangerously close to the road. Katherine HONKS but they don't budge so she stops and gets out.

She CLAPS her hands at the deer and two of them run into the woods. A fawn freezes, staring at Katherine. She approaches her CLAPPING and finally the fawn runs into the woods.

Katherine gets back into her car and drives further down the road.

EXT. EARL'S TRAILER – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Through the screen door, Katherine spots a creepy stuffed squirrel smoking an unlit cigarette atop a BLARING television.

WOMAN (O.S.)
(on television)
Judge, he don't perform in bed. He ain't got no mojo!

JUDGE (O.S.)
(on television)
But marriage is for life. You signed on for sicker or poorer, girlfriend.

Katherine hears someone SNICKERING so she knocks.

KATHERINE
Mims?

Earl comes to the door rubbing his hairy, round belly. He opens the screen door.

EARL
Well, well, honey. You don't know how to call? Phone's working. Used it this morning.

Earl cleans a nostril out with his thumb and wipes it on his shorts. He tickles one of his nipples as his focus settles on Katherine's breasts.

KATHERINE
So, anyway. I, uh.

Katherine adjusts herself trying to move her breasts out of Earl's focus to no avail.

KATHERINE
Look, Mims. I want the Jeep.

EARL
Aw. I thought you was from Social Services, baby. Come on in.

Earl motions that she come in through the screen door.

EARL (CONT'D)
Let's talk us some business. We'll make this real easy for ya, okay?

KATHERINE
Carson needs her car.

Earl comes out onto the porch. He digs in his ass crack while he eyes the Jeep and thinks.

EARL
Let's see here.

Earl turns around slyly and faces Katherine, Katherine's breasts actually.

EARL (CONT'D)
What do you say you show me them titties and I'll give you the Jeep for fifty bucks. Hell. I'll give it to ya for twenty if you let me play with them nipples.

Katherine stares at Earl unfazed.

KATHERINE
Unlock the Jeep, Mims.

EARL
Who the hell you think you're talking to, cunt? You think you got balls or something?

Earl comes at Katherine and she pulls out a rusty, serrated hunting knife. She's as emotionless as stone.

KATHERINE
Get in the trailer. Or I'll have your balls.

Carson appears from inside the trailer, gun in hand.

CARSON
Where'd you get a knife? Put that thing up before he kills you with it.

KATHERINE
Where have you been?

Earl runs into the trailer.

EARL
Y'all some crazy bitches. Take the keys. They're on the TV. Take my money. Just get on outta here.

Carson grabs the keys off the television and the cigarette from the stuffed squirrel. The two women walk casually out. Katherine looks back at Earl in disbelief. Carson lights her cigarette.

KATHERINE
Play with my nipples?

Carson pokes her arm back into the trailer and flicks ashes on Earl.

EXT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY

Autistic CHILDREN play a game led by OTTO, a handsome, dark-haired counselor whose sincerity with the children gives him the air of a child himself. Otto glows with health and a purity of intention.

OTTO
What is a magnolia?

CHILD 1
A magnolia is a flower.

OTTO
Excellent! Your turn.

CHILD 1
What is a rabbit?

Rayna comes onto the porch.

RAYNA
Lunchtime! Everybody to the dining room!

Some children run in while others stand there, staring at Otto.

CHILD 2
But it’s almost my turn. Why can’t I just go?

OTTO
Okay. Everybody else inside. Time out, buddy. Time out.

Child 2 falls to the ground on his knees and weeps, screaming as loudly as he can. The last few kids walk to the house unaffected.

OTTO (CONT'D)
It's your turn after lunch. Can you say that? Can you say it's my turn after lunch?

Child 2 cries louder. Otto sits next to him and takes him in his arms.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Katherine watches the scene below, computer in her lap.

EXT. FRONT YARD – DAY - CONTINUOUS

Child 2 cries until exhausted and Otto lifts him up and carries him to the house.

As he approaches the porch, Otto looks up at the balcony to see Katherine looking right at him. He smiles and she quickly pretends to type, without acknowledging him.

INT. BELLEHAVEN - NIGHT

Carson lies on the bed. Lili Belle is next to her rolling around and cooing.

CARSON
It isn't like that, man. Things are way different.

SALLY
You just can't smoke pot when there are children present. End of discussion.

Sally walks out of the room and shuts the door. Carson picks Lili Belle up above her head and the baby coos sleepily. Carson swings Lili Belle around, eliciting a sleepy giggle from the child.

CARSON
I never should have done this thing. Huh? I never wanted to be a mother.

INT. BELLEHAVEN LIVING ROOM - DAY

Toys are scattered all over the floor. A thunderstorm shakes the house as pouring rain pounds the roof. The screen doors FLAP rhythmically in the wind.

Otto holds a letter.

OTTO
I found it in the living room when I came in this morning.

Katherine runs down the stairs.

SALLY
Otto, this is Katherine. Her Daddy owned this house and he was Carson's uncle. She's the crazy writer in the attic.

OTTO
Hi. I've seen you.

KATHERINE
Let me see the note again. Lili Belle's still sleeping but Carson's not up there. This has to be a joke.

SALLY
Katherine, I, uh, got pretty hotheaded with Carson for smoking pot when kids were over for the program.

KATHERINE
She smoked pot with those children here?

SALLY
In the backyard. Yesterday. It wasn't the first time. Lili Belle was right there with her, too.

Rayna walks in with Kirby. Kirby grabs Otto's hand.

KIRBY
Let's go practice. Come on.

Otto and Kirby head to the back of the house. Sally hands Rayna the letter.

RAYNA
(reading)
She's essentially giving you her child? She even says here that you owe her one? What does that mean?

KATHERINE
What kind of name is Otto?

Rayna balls the letter up in her hand but Sally takes it from her and unfolds it. She studies it.

RAYNA
Just thrown her baby in your lap.

KATHERINE
I'm writing a book, Rayna. Not becoming a parent. In case you forgot.

SALLY
You said you were almost finished. If you don't take that child, the state will give it to Maggie Maxine.

Katherine walks over and looks out the window at Otto, who's rushing across the yard in the rain.

KATHERINE
That's not my concern.

She continues to watch Otto as he retrieves a rubber ball and runs back towards the house with it.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Otto. Sounds like otter.

SALLY
Call the police. There's an abandoned baby in this house!

Sally wrings her hands and wipes sweat from her brow with a handkerchief.

SALLY (CONT'D)
We've got little children showing up in an hour for their school. And this place is a … damned crime scene!

Rayna and Katherine gasp.

RAYNA
Mamma? I've never heard you swear.

Sally storms out.

SALLY (O.S.)
That crazy woman would make anyone swear.

Otto walks in with Kirby on his back.

KATHERINE
What kind of name is Otto?

OTTO
What?

KATHERINE
Nothing. I need to call the police.

KIRBY
What kind of name is Otto? Is that like lotto? Or otter?

KATHERINE
Exactly! It sounds like otter. Excuse me. I've got to … call the police.

EXT. BELLEHAVEN - DAY

The sun is relentless. Otto leads the autistic kids in a game beneath the magnolia tree and Katherine and Lili Belle look on. Everyone sweats.

RAYNA (O.S.)
Lunch is ready!

Kids runs into the house and Otto, Katherine, and Lili Belle are left alone together. Otto walks over and Lili Belle takes a few steps towards him.

OTTO
Hey. So it's a book, right?

Lili Belle falls onto her bottom.

KATHERINE
Yeah. I have two offers already.

OTTO
You asked about my name the other day. I'm Ottawan. It's an American Indian tribe from southern Ontario.

He places Lili Belle back onto her feet and she giggles and grabs at the air only to fall on her bottom again.

OTTO (CONT'D)
Why haven't you been downstairs since the program began?

KATHERINE
I didn't want any distractions. Couldn't afford any.

Katherine stands and beckons Lili Belle towards her. The child smiles and stomps with excitement. She stumbles then falls and crawls toward Katherine.

OTTO
Are you keeping Libs?

Katherine doesn't answer. She just stares into Lili Belle's eyes. She pinches the baby's cheeks and kisses her on the forehead.

OTTO (CONT'D)
Funny how easily you fall in love with kids, huh?

Otto walks toward the house.

KATHERINE
Hey, Otto.

OTTO
Yes?

KATHERINE
Nothing.

Otto walks into the house, screen door SLAMMING behind him. Moments later he pokes his head out the door.

OTTO
Hey, Katherine!

Katherine, caught up in teaching Lili Belle to walk, doesn't hear him.

OTTO (CONT'D)
Hey, Katherine!

KATHERINE
Yes?

OTTO
Oh, nothing.

The screen door slams behind Otto as he disappears into the house. Katherine smiles. She takes Lili Belle in her arms and kisses her nose.

KATHERINE
Can you say cute boy? Otto is a cute boy? Can you say that?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Otto and Charlie are in the bathroom outside Katherine's room.

CHILD 1 (O.S.)
I can potty by myself!

OTTO (O.S.)
Okay, but call out if you need me.

Otto walks out and shuts the door. He trips over Katherine's black cats as they run past.

The cats tumble over each other wrestling, finally pushing open Katherine's bedroom door, exposing her as she dresses. Otto observes a private moment but looks away quickly and respectfully.

KATHERINE
Oh, hey there kitties. And Mr. Otto.

Otto ignores Katherine.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Hello? Otto?

Otto looks back at Katherine, who's now standing in the doorway with her back to him holding the zipper to her sundress.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Can you get this? Pretty please?

He walks over to her and puts his hand on her waist and zips her dress up the back. There's a moment of sensuality between them.

CHILD 1 (O.S.)
I need help! Otto?

Otto doesn't budge. He remains next to Katherine with his hand on her waist.

CHILD 1 (O.S.)
Help!

KATHERINE
Go. He needs you.

Otto walks away slowly to the bathroom. Katherine closes her bedroom door.

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katherine lies down on her bed and puts one hand inside her dress and touches her breast. There's a knock on the door and she scrambles to her feet.

OTTO (O.S)
Do you like picnics? Cuz we've got one today.

Katherine opens the door.

KATHERINE
Lili Belle and I are in.

OTTO
Bring some of your book. I'd love to read it.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

It's the school picnic. Rayna and Sally assist a FARMER who takes the kids on a tour of his tractor.

FARMER
See, kids. A cotton picker's less dangerous than a field plow because it lacks the many sharp blades.

The kids listen in absolute awe. Lili Belle crawls around on a blanket as Katherine and Otto spread a cloth over the picnic table and organize place settings for each child.

OTTO
That should do it.

Otto collapses on the blanket next to Lili Belle. Katherine slaps a few pages of her manuscript next to him. He reads from the pages.

KATHERINE
Do you think the Deep South's mysterious? Haunted?

OTTO
Rayna's told me a little about your family. So I could see how you'd perceive it that way.

Katherine just looks at Otto as she doesn't quite know how to respond.

Katherine and Otto are rescued from an uncomfortable moment when they are suddenly attacked by the kids as Sally and Rayna stand back, laughing.

OTTO (CONT'D)
Oh, no! We're being ransacked!

Otto fights off the children, as do Katherine and Lili Belle, who are being tickled to death.

SALLY
Enough, kids. Line up for lunch. Come on. Everybody.

Otto and Katherine sneak away into the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Katherine lies on her back on a precariously placed wood shelf. Otto views the shelf nervously from all its angles while she talks.

KATHERINE
Carson won me a scholarship. Long story. But that's what she meant in her departure letter by you owe me one.

Otto continues to survey the shelf.

OTTO
Do you think that shelf's strong enough?

KATHERINE
I realized when I came back home that I was following someone else's dream in New Orleans. I

realized expressing myself was the most important thing. And so I wrote my book.

Otto continues to monitor the shelf.

OTTO
Are you sure you should be lying on that?

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Thanks for listening. You have the most beautiful eyes and you really are --

The shelf gives, dumping Katherine on the floor. She laughs so hard tears roll down her cheeks. Otto embraces her tenderly until he realizes she's laughing. He pushes her away playfully.

OTTTO
I saw that coming.

He wipes a tear from her eye. There's a moment between them when each looks unsure of whether to kiss or not. They kiss eagerly, then Katherine resumes her laughter.

OTTO
You're not like other people are you?

KATHERINE
I think I'm pretty normal.

Katherine kisses Otto but he pushes her away and looks deep into her eyes.

OTTO
No. You're not normal and that's why I love you.

KATHERINE
What?

Otto blushes and falters.

OTTO
I mean like you. Like you. Not that other word. And I don't mean you're not normal.

Otto leaves the barn embarrassed. Katherine walks over to the machete and fondles the handle.

EXT. NEW YORK – NIGHT

Taxis line the street outside the bookstore, HONKING and skyscrapers line the sky, glittering.

INT. BOOKSTORE - CONTINUOUS

Katherine steps to the podium, audience applauds. A stack of books is piled high before her.

KATHERINE
Thank you for coming.

Katherine puts on her glasses and looks into the audience. All eyes are on her.

She turns to the first page then suddenly looks back into the audience at a woman in a floppy hat. The blonde hair cascading across the woman's shoulders gives her away. It's Mary Garett.

Katherine looks back to her book.

KATHERINE
(reading)
"For Carson, without whose cunning
I'd be gosh knows where."

Katherine turns the page.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

As Katherine places her notes into a bag and stacks her note cards neatly a FAN approaches with an open book. Katherine grabs her pen.

FAN
I'm from Mississippi and my gosh, how you've hit the nail on the head, honey. Andalusia's a hotbed of crazy folks.

Katherine, pen in hand but distracted, stands and looks over Fan's shoulder into the dispersing audience.

FAN
What? Something wrong, honey?

Katherine signs Fan's book and Mary Garrett slips out the door, unseen by Katherine. Another fan approaches holding

an open book and Katherine abandons her search for Mary Garett.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Through the windows of the bookstore, employees can be seen sweeping and straightening books. One lets Katherine out and locks the door behind her.

Katherine walks a few paces down the street and hails a cab. As she climbs in, Mary Garett jumps in beside her unannounced.

MARY GARETT
(to driver)
Fifteenth and Broadway please, dear sir.

The DRIVER takes off swiftly.

MARY GARRETT (CONT'D)
Fine debut novel. Original to some of the audience. Not to me.

The two stare at each other the way long time friends do after a separation then they embrace, at first awkwardly, but eventually with much warmth.

MARY GARETT (CONT'D)
Ms. Dulaney. I'm so very, very proud.

KATHERINE
I read about "Swamp Bitch Madam." A cult classic already?

Mary Garett looks at her watch.

MARY GARETT
I'm sorry, okay? For the things I said back then. I was just worried about you. That's all.

Katherine's face is blank, registering neither anger nor forgiveness. The cab stops. Mary Garett jumps out and after a last long look at Katherine she dashes off down the street. Katherine waves.

Lost in thought, Katherine just sits in the back of the cab.

DRIVER
Excuse me. Lady? Where to?

EXT. ANDALUSIA, MISSISSIPPI – DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Back to the first scene of the story in the Mississippi Delta. Katherine rises to her bare feet and brushes off her knees. Shoes in hand, she walks toward Otto, who waits patiently with Lili Belle.

KATHERINE
I can't sell Bellehaven. I just can't do it. I'm not ready.

INT. VAN – DAY - SAME TIME

The driver, Carson, taps her tattooed arm for a vein and locates a good one. She surveys Bellehaven in the distance then the liquid in the syringe. She pauses with the needle in her hand.

INT. SEDAN – DAY - CONTINUOUS

The sedan travels down the scenic highway. Katherine picks away at her elegantly polished nails. Lili Belle sticks her head out the window rebelliously relishing the breeze in her hair.

OTTO
Head in the window. We'll be arrested for child abuse, missy.

LILI BELLE
And neglect. I'm not wearing a seat belt.

OTTO
Seat belt on. Head in the window. Or we'll legally change your name to Hortence Lucile.

LILI BELLE
Daddy, yuck!

Lili Belle hastily clicks her seat belt across her shoulder when suddenly Carson's van pulls out in front of them, almost causing a collision.

KATHERINE
What a complete jerk!

Otto passes the sputtering van with a HONK of the horn and then the sedan cruises into the driveway of Bellehaven, without recognizing the driver.

Katherine continues to pick at the polish on her nails.

EXT. BELLHAVEN – DAY - CONTINUOUS

The AGENT bounces over to greet the arriving sedan.

AGENT
Just in time to meet the buyers!

Buyers, a young COUPLE and their little GIRL, walk out of Bellehaven grinning ear-to-ear and holding hands tightly. The little GIRL rushes to greet Lili Belle and the two run into the house giggling like long lost friends.

LILI BELLE (O.S)
You have to let me show you everything!

Otto manages to lure the Couple into the house, leaving Katherine outside with the Agent. In the background, Carson parks her van discreetly at the top of the driveway.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Carson takes the bandana from around her head and stares at Katherine who stands on the porch talking with the Agent. She smoothes her hair down.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Katherine and the real estate agent stand alone.

AGENT
What is it you want to tell me, Katherine?

Katherine opens her mouth to speak but notices the van.

KATHERINE
I just don’t think I’m --

Katherine squints as she eyes the van at the head of the driveway.

KATHERINE (CONT’D)
Do you know who that is? Whose van that is?

The Agent eyes the van incredulously.

AGENT
Just some dirty old hippy. See him around here sometimes.

Katherine takes a few steps in the direction of the van.

KATHERINE
Well, I'd be darned.

The Agent looks out to the van then back at Katherine.

AGENT
What? Do you know that old guy?

Katherine, with vigor, and a look of resolve, hooks her arm through Agent's and leads her towards the house.

KATHERINE
I think I've had enough chaos in my life. What do you say we sell ourselves a house?

FADE OUT.

THE END