

HARDSHIPS
Screenplay By
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FADE IN:

EXT. PARKING LOT-HIGH SCHOOL-MORNING

An unoccupied parking lot and not a person in sight but GANG MEMBERS #1 & #2, late teens. Members of the Quetzals Gang.

Gang Members #1 and #2 stand by both sides of a braided raven-haired, ponytailed girl, who has her head leaned down. Arms crossed. A green plaid shirt. The sleeves rolled up to her elbows. DRE LOPEZ, 17. A short-sized and quick-tempered high school dropout. Her crucifix pressed against her neck.

A HOMELESS WOMAN, late 50s, approaches Dre. Dre looks at the Homeless Woman.

DRE
What do you need?

HOMELESS WOMAN
A dime of the horse.

DRE
It's a hundred even.

Dre reaches into her pocket and pulls out a small zip lock bag of heroin. The Homeless Woman pulls up her arm and shows Dre a badge.

HOMELESS WOMAN
You're under arrest!

POLICE OFFICERS #1 and #2, late 40s. On the job for 20 years.

Dre runs -- The Homeless Woman runs after her -- The Gang Members run from Police Officer #1 and #2.

EXT. ALLEY-MORNING

Dre runs towards a dumpster, flips the lid open. She climbs in and pulls the lid shut.

INT. DUMPSTER-MORNING

Dre sits in the dark dumpster.

EXT. ALLEY-CONTINUOUS

The Homeless Woman runs into the alley. She stops running and looks around.

The Homeless Woman steps towards the dumpster and raises the lid up over her head. A fist to the face from Dre -- The Homeless Woman falls to the ground -- Dre jumps out of the dumpster --

Police Officer #1 grabs ahold of Dre and pushes her to the ground. He holds Dre's arms down, handcuffing her.

INT. COURTROOM-MORNING

DRE'S PUBLIC DEFENDER, 28. A defender for 3 years.

Dre sits. Her fingers balled into the palm of her other hand.

JUDGE, 50. A judge for over 30 years.

JUDGE

May the defendant please stand!

Dre stands up. Dre's Public Defender stands along with her.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Adrianna Lopez, I hereby sentence you to serve a time of six months at the Anderson Detention Center. The court is adjourned.

INT. CAMPSITE-AFTERNOON

QUETZAL, 25. A tall-sized woman, muscular built. Green eyes, and dark brown hair. A spiteful and mean-spirited woman with anger towards society. Leader of the Quetzals Gang.

GANG MEMBER #1 and #2 run towards Quetzal.

GANG MEMBER #2

Quetzal!

Quetzal looks at Gang Member #2.

QUETZAL

What!

GANG MEMBER #1

Dre got arrested!

QUETZAL

Someone tipped them off! Is it one of you?

GANG MEMBER #2

We're here, aren't we?

QUETZAL
We'll see how loyal the both of you
are.

Quetzal reaches for the knife holster. She grabs the knife
and throws it at the tree log.

QUETZAL (CONT'D)
Time to see who gets the knife
first!

INT. TRANSPORT VAN-AFTERNOON

Dre sits in the back of the transport van. She looks at the
scenery. The transport van stops.

INT. ANDERSON DETENTION CENTER-OFFICE-AFTERNOON

OAKLEY ANDERSON, 25. A Correctional Counselor. Tall, and thin
built. Humble, and kind.

Her presence gives off a strong feeling that she is the one
to want on your side if needed.

GUARD, early 20s. On the force for 5 years.

Oakley takes the clipboard from the Guard. She signs her name
and hands it back. The Guard takes the clipboard and looks at
Dre.

GUARD
Good luck.

The door opens and closes. Dre looks at Oakley. Oakley
approaches the blankets sitting on a table. She picks up a
blanket and tosses it at Dre. Dre catches it.

OAKLEY
Lights are out by 10. You will be
given chores and you have to make
your own bed. No drugs, drinking,
weapons of any kind. You fail any
of these rules, I will have you
shipped back to the judge hall that
you won't be laughing.

DRE
Anything else?

OAKLEY
Yeah, no fighting.

DRE
What do I call you?

OAKLEY
O. Now come on, let me show you to
your room.

Oakley steps towards the door and pulls it open. Dre follows Oakley as she walks towards the girl's building.

INT. GIRL'S DORM ROOM-AFTERNOON

Oakley pushes the door open. 4 girls sit in the middle of the room, playing cards. SUZIE, 15. Short, small built. Sweet and kind. DARLA, 16. tall and thin built. Not friendly and intimidating. HEATHER, 14. A mid-size tall. Has a moody side but is kind sometimes.

Oakley touches Dre on her shoulder. Dre looks at her hand.

OAKLEY
Girls?

SUZIE
Ladies?

OAKLEY
Yes, sorry about that Suzie. This
is Adrianna?

DRE
Dre.

OAKLEY
What?

DRE
My name is Dre. I hate being called
Adrianna!

OAKLEY
Fine. This is Dre. Please help make
her feel welcomed. I mean, don't be
cruel. Thanks. I'll see all of you
at dinner.

Oakley turns around and walks out of the room. Dre looks at the girls, then slowly walks towards an empty bed. Darla turns and looks at Dre.

DARLA
(laugh)
That's my bed.

Dre walks across the room to another bed. She puts her blanket down.

DARLA (CONT'D)
That's my bed too.

Dre looks at Darla, starts to pick up her blanket. She holds it in her hands and drops it back down to the bed.

DRE
Whoops! Mine now!

Darla drops her playing cards to the table and rushes towards Dre. She raises her hands up, ready to smack Dre across the face. Heather gets in between Darla and Dre, facing Darla.

HEATHER
Cool down, now. She's new. Let's go back and play?

Darla points her finger at Dre.

DARLA
You're lucky.

Darla walks towards the table, sits down, and looks at Dre. Dre sits down and unfolds her blanket. Heather sits across from Dre.

HEATHER
You might want to stay on her cool side. Darla doesn't take too kindly to newbies.

DRE
I don't take intimidation from other girls like her.

HEATHER
It's Heather by the way. Welcome!

DRE
Thanks.

Heather gets up and walks towards the table. She sits down, grabs her cards, and looks at Darla.

HEATHER
She's cool.

Darla looks at Dre. Dre looks at Darla at the corner of her eye.

EXT. CAMPSITE-AFTERNOON

Bikers of the Owl Gang ride through on their motorcycles. A biker in the front row of the motorcycles with his sunglasses on. A clean shave. A baby face and the leader of the gang.

His long sandy blonde hair blows in the wind as he comes to a yield of slowing down. JACOB, 30. Tall, muscular built. An intimidating and takes no-nonsense.

Gang Member #2 sits on her knees. Blood all over her chin.

Jacob stops his motorcycle beside Gang Member #2. The knife stuck in her chest of Gang Member #1. Jacob gets off the motorcycle and walks towards the trailer.

JACOB

What the hell is this all about?

GANG MEMBER #2

Ask Quetzal.

INT. TRAILER-LIVING ROOM-AFTERNOON

Jacob walks into the living room. He looks around and sniffs the air. Jacob smells the aroma of the steak cooking on the stove.

INT. KITCHEN-TRAILER-AFTERNOON

Quetzal stands over the stove. She flips the steak onto a plate. Jacob steps towards Quetzal, he grabs her. She jumps.

Jacob leans his head on her shoulder.

JACOB

Question? Why is one of your members dead?

QUETZAL

Loyalty. All I want is some loyalty around here.

Quetzal picks up the plate with the steak, she holds it close to Jacob. Jacob knocks the plate out of Quetzal's hands.

Jacob grabs Quetzal by her jeans and pulls her close. He lifts her up.

Quetzal grips her hands tightly around his shoulder --

kissing him -- He unbuckles her belt -- She rips his shirt open -- then proceeds to unbuckle his belt -- Jacob rips Quetzal's jeans with his bare hands -- Jacob's pants fall to the floor. His hands touching the panties on her buttocks --

He pulls them down with a lot of force --

INT. BATHROOM-EVENING

Dre stands in front of the bathroom mirror. She combs her hair. Darla's hand reaches around Dre's neck and pulls her head back. She presses a homemade shank against Dre's throat.

DARLA

You thought you were funny huh,
smartass?

DRE

If I said yeah, would you still cut
my throat?

DARLA

Why do you think I'm here?

DRE

Did you steal something?

DARLA

I went to my little sister's school
and kicked the girl that was
bullying my little sister in the
mouth. I broke her jaw. I will not
hesitate with you either.

DRE

That what you want to do to me?

DARLA

No. This is just a heads up.

Darla lets go of Dre and pushes her into the sink.

DRE

(cough)

Dre looks back and no Darla insight.

Tires screech from the outside.

EXT. ANDERSON DETENTION CENTER-EVENING

ERNIE, 17. Tall, thin built. A black teen with a quick temper. Supersensitive and sometimes harsh when expressing his feelings.

POLICE OFFICER, early 30s. On the force for 5 years.

Police Officer pushes Ernie towards the front door of the office. Oakley steps towards Ernie. Police Officer stops walking and looks at Oakley. He pushes Ernie towards Oakley.

POLICE OFFICER

This is just a warning! Keep that gang banger out of my town or you're gonna have to visit him in the hospital!

OAKLEY

Don't worry, I will.

Police Officer turns and walks to his patrol car. He gets in, starts the car, and shuts the door. Ernie looks at Oakley.

ERNIE

See, the dude isn't even wearing his seatbelt!

OAKLEY

Shut up, please!

The patrol car drives off. Oakley walks towards the office door. Ernie steps towards Oakley.

ERNIE

It wasn't my fault. I was minding my own business and he stopped me.

OAKLEY

I don't have time for your shit! I have other kids here that need help. I can't bail you out all the time.

ERNIE

I was walking to the store, honestly?

Oakley looks at Ernie.

OAKLEY

I believe you. You can't leave like that whenever you want. You better get to bed now. Good night.

ERNIE

Good night.

Oakley walks into the office, locks the door, and shuts off the lights. Ernie walks to the door to the boys' dorm room.

The girls' dorm door opens. Dre looks and watches Ernie. Ernie walks into his dorm room and shuts the door.

INT. CAFETERIA-MORNING

Ernie sits at an empty table. Behind Ernie, Dre sits with Heather. Heather looks at Dre, and then she looks at Ernie.

Dre looks at Heather.

DRE

What?

HEATHER

Do you like Ernie?

DRE

That's his name?

HEATHER

That's who you've been looking at for the last 20 minutes.

DRE

Sorry.

HEATHER

No. It's cute. He's cute. You should go talk to him?

Darla sits behind Dre and Heather. She raises her head, looks at Ernie, and gets up. Darla walks towards Ernie. She sits down across the table from him.

DARLA

Hey, Ernie!

ERNIE

Hi, Darla. What's up?

DARLA
Nothing much, just wondered if you
could help me study?

Darla looks at Dre, then she returns her attention to Ernie.

ERNIE
I can't, sorry.

DARLA
That's fine. Maybe another time.

ERNIE
Yeah, maybe.

Darla gets up from the table and walks back towards her table. Ernie watches Darla. He looks at Dre and smiles. Dre looks down and glances back at Ernie.

INT. CLASSROOM-MORNING

Oakley looks through the written essays on her desk. She checks the spelling on each essay. Oakley smiles as she reads one of them. She looks at an old book on her shelf. **"How To Spot A Butterfly."**

OAKLEY
I got it!

Oakley grabs the pile of essays, stands up, and walks out of the classroom.

INT. TRAILER-BEDROOM-MORNING

Jacob lays in bed. Quetzal sits up. A Quetzal Tattoo on her back. She pulls her green robe over herself. Jacob touches her.

JACOB
Where's Dre?

QUETZAL
I don't know.

Jacob gets up from the bed, grabs his pants, and quickly puts them on.

JACOB
Why didn't you tell me!

QUETZAL
I tried!

JACOB
You tried by serving me a steak!

Jacob grabs his jacket, boots and rushes out of the bedroom.

INT. OFFICE-AFTERNOON

Oakley sits at her desk. She's using her computer.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Oakley types in **PEOPLE SERVING THE COMMUNITY** and clicks on **WRITER SENTENCED TO SERVE 100 HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE.**

CONTACT AGENT BELOW.

BACK TO SCENE

She writes the phone number on a post-it. Oakley picks up the receiver and dials the number.

INT. OFFICE-AFTERNOON

In the office of a literary agent. Walls covered with one of his client's past works. MARK TYLERMAN, early 40s. A literary agent for over 20 years.

Mark's cell phone rings. He answers.

MARK
Hello?

OAKLEY (V.O.)
Hello? Yes, this is Oakley Anderson
from the Anderson Detention Center.
I'm calling about Shelly Owens?

MARK
What about her?

OAKLEY (V.O.)
I understand she has to perform 100
hours of community service.

MARK
Yes, that is right. What is it you
are asking her to do?

OAKLEY (V.O.)
To help my kids with their writing
skills.

MARK
That actually doesn't sound like a
bad idea. Let me get back to you.

INT. LIVING ROOM-AFTERNOON

Asleep on a sofa. A woman's hand hangs over the edge. Silver grey blonde hair covers her forehead and face. SHELLY OWENS, 53. A successful book author. A down-to-earth woman wrestling with her current status as a person who must serve in the community or spend time in jail.

Shelly's cell phone rings. She reaches for it and answers.

SHELLY
Yeah!!

MARK (V.O.)
Hello, Shelly! I have some news for
you?

SHELLY
What is it?

MARK (V.O.)
You're going to teach teens how to
write.

SHELLY
Do you want to bet?

MARK (V.O.)
Do you want to go to jail?

SHELLY
Hell no!

MARK (V.O.)
Do the community service. Teach
these kids what you know and be
done with it!

SHELLY
You know me and kids, my patience
is worn thin.

MARK (V.O.)
You use to be one. Just do it!

The call ends. Shelly sits up.

SHELLY
Goodbye to you too.

INT. BATHROOM-MORNING

Shelly looks at herself in the mirror.

SHELLY
Nobody likes you.

Shelly steps away from the mirror.

INT. TRANSPORT VAN-MORNING

Oakley sits in the front seat, watching the sights. Dre sits in the back, holding her notebook open. She writes her daily thoughts. Darla turns around, leans over, and grabs Dre's notebook from her.

DARLA
What's this! Your period days?

Dre reaches for her notebook. Darla pulls away from the grip of Dre's grasp.

DARLA (CONT'D)
It must be personal, look at how
fast you want it back!

Ernie gets up from his seat, walks towards Darla, and takes the notebook from her. He hands it to Dre.

ERNIE
Leave her alone! Got it!

DARLA
Yeah.

ERNIE
Move over there!

Darla steps towards the front seat and sits. Ernie looks at Dre. He hands her notebook to her. Dre takes it from Ernie's hand.

DRE
Thank you.

ERNIE

Your welcome. Is it alright if I
sit with you?

DRE

Sure.

Dre moves over towards the window. Ernie sits.

ERNIE

What's a nice girl like you doing
around thugs like us?

DRE

Got busted for selling heroin. You?

ERNIE

Being black.

DRE

That can't be right.

ERNIE

No, it's not.

DRE

What have you heard about this new
instructor? She isn't a stuck-up
rich woman, is she?

ERNIE

Your guess is as good as mine.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-MORNING

Shelly sits at the desk right in front of the empty rows. She lifts a mug of coffee and pours it into her mouth. Not tasting a drop. Oakley walks into the classroom. She looks at Shelly. Shelly spits out the coffee from being startled by Oakley's presence.

OAKLEY

Good morning.

Shelly sets the mug down on the desk and looks at Oakley.

SHELLY

Good morning! Sorry about that.

OAKLEY

It's good to meet you, Mrs. Owens.

SHELLY
Actually, it's Ms. Owens.

OAKLEY
Oh, I'm sorry about that.

SHELLY
You must be the counselor?

OAKLEY
I'm the manager. I watch over them
and make sure they get the best
care.

SHELLY
Where are the children?

OAKLEY
Hey, kids!

Darla walks into the room. She looks at Shelly. Heather walks down the steps, smiles at Shelly, and sits in the middle of the row. Ernie and Dre walk to the middle row and sit beside each other. Shelly looks at the four.

SHELLY
This is it?

OAKLEY
There is one girl but she couldn't
make it due to the flu.

SHELLY
That sucks. Tell her I wish her a
speedy recovery.

OAKLEY
I will.

SHELLY
Good morning to you all. My name is
Shelly Owens. I'm the author of two
books. Both are from my life
experiences.

Heather raises her hand. Shelly looks at Heather.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Yes?

HEATHER
Is what happened to your friend the
real reason why you drank yourself
into serving community service?

SHELLY

Someone does their questions ready.
That is a real personal question
and I want to answer it but we're
not here to talk about me.

DARLA

Come on! We're here to spill our
guts to you but you can't tell us
one thing about yourself. It makes
us question whether we can trust
you.

SHELLY

Yes, I got drunk and I drove my car
into my best friend's house. I
don't encourage that kind of
behavior.

HEATHER

Why did you do it?

SHELLY

Because, I was drunk and I wanted
to drive myself home. Point is, you
all have something to share. It's
better for you to write them down
than hold them in.

Dre holds her pencil close to her mouth and moves it
underneath her chin. Shelly sits down, opens her notebook,
and looks at her new students. She glances at Oakley.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

You can sit down if you want? I can
move over?

Shelly moves to her right and takes another chair by the
desk.

OAKLEY

Thank you.

Oakley sits. Shelly sits closer to the desk.

INT. DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD-AFTERNOON

Dre's Public Defender steps outside of her office. She locks
the door. Jacob walks up to her. Dre's Public Defender gets a
jump scare as she turns to Jacob.

DRE'S PUBLIC DEFENDER

You scared me, sir!

JACOB
Where is she?

DRE'S PUBLIC DEFENDER
Who are you looking for?

JACOB
My sister, Dre Lopez?

DRE'S PUBLIC DEFENDER
She's in a detention center for six months.

JACOB
Where?

DRE'S PUBLIC DEFENDER
It's the Anderson Detention Center!

JACOB
Thanks.

Jacob leans down and kisses Dre's Public Defender on her lips. He turns and walks away.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-CONTINUOUS

Dre writes her thoughts.

DRE (V.O.)
The day my world changed was when
my parents died in a fire. My
brother got me out of the house.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD-EVENING-FLASHBACK

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB, a senior high school student. He's the oldest child and brightest.

17-Year-Old Jacob runs outside the front door of the house. A big explosion from inside the house. He falls to the ground, holding onto someone underneath a blanket. 17-Year-Old Jacob lifts the blanket and looks at 4-YEAR-OLD DRE. Practically a toddler.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
I got you!

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-AFTERNOON-BACK TO PRESENT

DRE (V.O.)

From that day on, Jacob became my guardian. He became the only man I trusted with my life.

Shelly looks at the watch on her wrist. She stands up.

SHELLY

Times up!

Dre looks at Shelly, puts her pencil down, and tears out her written essay from her notebook.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Please write your name down on your paper and leave it on your desk. I will collect it. Have a nice day and see you next week.

Oakley stands up. She looks at Shelly.

OAKLEY

Thank you. It was a pleasure meeting you.

SHELLY

You too. Can you sign my community service log sheet?

Oakley takes the sheet from Shelly. She signs and writes the useful information down on the sheet. Oakley hands it back to Shelly.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Thanks.

OAKLEY

Alright everyone, line up! See you next week.

Oakley walks towards the steps. Dre looks at Shelly and steps towards the exit. Shelly looks at Dre. By herself in the classroom, Shelly steps towards the steps. She grabs the papers from the desks. Shelly comes across Dre's paper and flips it over.

Her eyes amazed at the words on the paper. Shelly sits down and reads the words to herself. Shelly looks back as if Dre is still in the room. She gets up and walks towards her desk.

Shelly grabs her belongings.

INT. CAR-EVENING

Shelly sits in the back of the car. She reads Dre's paper to herself over and over. The words jump at Shelly as she reads them.

DRIVER, early 20s. Driver for over 2 years.

DRIVER
We're here, Ms. Owens?

SHELLY
Thank you. See you next week.

DRIVER
See you next week and have a good night.

Shelly opens her door and gets out.

SHELLY
You too.

Shelly shuts the door.

EXT. SHELLY'S HOUSE-EVENING

Shelly walks towards her house. She pulls out her house key.

Her car parked on her driveway. Shelly looks at the caved-in hood of the car. The shattered windshield and front tire laying beside it.

INT. LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

Shelly lays back on her sofa and holds Dre's paper in both her hands.

INT. GIRL'S DORM ROOM-NIGHT

Dre lays in her bed. She stares off into space like she is looking into her own dreamland. Heather sits on her bed. A teddy bear in her hands.

HEATHER
How nice was that lady.

DARLA
Kind of a snob to me.

DRE
She wasn't like that.

Darla looks at Dre.

DARLA
Yeah well, who asked you?

DRE
Not everyone's a snob. Like it is
said, don't judge a book by its
cover.

HEATHER
What do you know about her? By the
way, she looks I mean?

INT. OFFICE-NIGHT

Shelly sits in front of her computer, typing.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Shelly runs the **CURSOR** and **clicks** on **WRITING SCHOLARSHIPS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS**.

DRE (V.O.)
She experienced more stuff than us.
Maybe we should give her a break.

BACK TO SCENE

Shelly raises her arms in excitement.

INT. GIRL'S DORM ROOM-CONTINUOUS

HEATHER
True.

DARLA
You actually make sense, Lopez.

DRE
Thanks.

DARLA
Don't get used to it.

Darla throws a pillow at Dre. Dre picks it up and throws it back.

DRE
(laugh)

Oakley opens the door, peeks her head, and reaches for the light switch.

OAKLEY
Good night, ladies! Go to sleep!

Oakley turns the light off and shuts the door.

HEATHER
(laugh)

Heather lays her head down on her pillow and pulls her blanket over herself.

EXT. PLAYGROUND-AFTERNOON

Dre sits on the bleachers. Ernie walks towards her. He sits down.

ERNIE
What's up?

DRE
Nothing much. Are you getting any visitors today?

ERNIE
My mom probably. Not sure about any others.

DRE
Brothers, sisters?

ERNIE
Brother.

DRE
Are you and him close?

ERNIE
No, not anymore.

DRE
What happened?

Ernie looks at Dre.

ERNIE
I was a runner. I had a girlfriend
at the time who was a cheerleader.
(MORE)

ERNIE (CONT'D)

My brother was a football player.
She of course got to see him play.
One day when I was going home, I
had the house all to myself. My
brother was gonna be at practice
all day. So I thought.

INT. BEDROOM-AFTERNOON-FLASHBACK

Ernie walks into the bedroom.

CRAIG, 18. A senior in high school and a football player.

LAURA, 17. A junior in high school and a cheerleader.

Craig and Laura lay under the blanket. He's on top of her.

Ernie looks and turns around. A disgusted look on Ernie's face.

INT. GARAGE-AFTERNOON

The door opens to the garage. Ernie walks in. He looks down and grabs a sledgehammer.

INT. BEDROOM-CONTINUOUS

Ernie walks into the bedroom. He lifts the hammer over his head and brings it down.

CRAIG
(moan)

LAURA
(scream)

EXT. PLAYGROUND-AFTERNOON-BACK TO PRESENT

ERNIE
I lost it. I put both of them in a
coma.

DRE
I'm sorry.

Dre grabs Ernie by his hand, squeezes on tight. He looks at her. Ernie brushes her hair back with the palm of his hand.

He leans in and kisses Dre. Dre grabs the back of Ernie's neck and kisses him back. Ernie stops and backs away. He smiles.

ERNIE

I'm sorry.

DRE

What are you sorry about?

ERNIE

Nothing.

DRE

Good.

Dre pulls Ernie closer. Oakley walks towards Ernie and Dre. She leans down.

OAKLEY

Hey, stop doing that!

DRE

He was helping me with something.

OAKLEY

It's not CPR day yet. Yeah, but there is a call for you, Dre?

Dre gets up from the bleachers and rushes towards the office.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

You do have a visitor, Ernie?

ERNIE

Can you just tell her I don't feel well?

Oakley walks towards the entrance door. She looks at Ernie.

OAKLEY

I would but you know I don't lie.

ERNIE

Yeah, yeah. I got you.

OAKLEY

Don't yeah yeah me.

INT. OFFICE-AFTERNOON

Dre walks up to the phone and picks up the receiver from the desk.

DRE
Hello?

JACOB (V.O.)
Dre?

DRE
Jacob! Hi! Where are you?

JACOB (V.O.)
I'm at a payphone. What happened?

DRE
I hit a cop.

JACOB (V.O.)
Why did you do that?

DRE
I lost train of thought. I was
selling and got caught by the cop
who was undercover. They gave me
six months, Jacob?

JACOB (V.O.)
I know. Just sit tight, stay out of
trouble and you'll be out in no
time.

DRE
No problem.

JACOB (V.O.)
Quick question? Who gave you the
drugs to sell?

DRE
Quetzal.

JACOB (V.O.)
Okay. That explains a lot.

EXT. CONVENIENT STORE-AFTERNOON

Jacob holds the receiver close to his mouth.

DRE (V.O.)
What does that mean?

JACOB
Nothing. Just be good.

DRE (V.O.)
I will.

JACOB
I love you.

DRE (V.O.)
Love you too.

INT. OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

Dre hangs up the receiver.

ERNIE (O.S.)
Is that why you came here!! To make
me feel guilty!! Get out of here!!

INT. VISITING AREA-AFTERNOON

ERNIE'S MOTHER, early 40s. A nurse for over 10 years.

Ernie's Mother covers her face.

ERNIE'S MOTHER
(sob)

Ernie rushes out of the room. Dre looks through the window.
Oakley steps towards Ernie's Mother.

OAKLEY
I'm sorry but visiting hours are
over.

Ernie's Mother nods her head. Dre looks away.

INT. CAFETERIA-MORNING

Heather and Dre sit together. Dre looks at Ernie.

HEATHER
Just give him some time.

DRE
That's all we have.

Ernie gets up from his table, grabs his tray, and walks
towards the garbage can.

He dumps the food off the tray and slams the tray to the steal table. Ernie rushes out of the cafeteria. Dre stands up.

INT. TRANSPORT VAN-MORNING

Dre sits up in the front seat alongside Oakley. Dre looks at Oakley.

DRE
Where's Ernie?

OAKLEY
He had court.

DRE
What happened?

OAKLEY
Something about his case.

DRE
He didn't tell me anything?

OAKLEY
It wasn't planned, Dre. It never is.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-AFTERNOON

Dre steps towards a desk. She sits, puts her hand underneath her chin, and stares into the abyss. Shelly looks at Dre. She holds all the papers in her hands. Darla sits close to Dre.

Oakley walks towards Shelly's desk and sits. Shelly looks around and notices Ernie is missing.

SHELLY
We're a person short? Where is he?

OAKLEY
Court.

SHELLY
Too bad.

Shelly walks towards the rows of desks. She looks at Dre, Darla, and Heather.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
It was a pleasure reading what you wrote.

(MORE)

SHELLY (CONT'D)
You should be so proud of
yourselves. How many of you want to
go to college?

Dre looks at Heather. Darla looks at Dre and then at Oakley.

DARLA
College? Nobody wants me to go to
college!

HEATHER
Me either. I'm expected to get
pregnant and get married.

SHELLY
That's what people want you to
believe because they didn't follow
their own dreams. You can.

DRE
Do I look like college material?

SHELLY
Yes. You all do. If you don't
believe me, go look in the mirror
before you go to sleep tonight.

Oakley looks at Shelly and listens to everything she is
saying.

DRE
What's in this for you?

SHELLY
Nothing.

INT. GIRL'S DORM ROOM-NIGHT

Heather lays on her bed, writing in her notebook.

HEATHER (V.O.)
Boys always tell me I'm pretty but
do they really know me or do they
just want me to have sex with them
so they can brag to their friends.
My mom always told me I would end
up like her. Two kids and become a
chain-smoker. I can tell my mom now
to keep her cancer sticks and her
unplanned pregnancies to herself.
I'm going to college!

Heather closes her notebook and sets it down on her nightstand. She tosses her pencil on top, switches off her lamp, and lays her head on her pillow.

INT. LIBRARY-AFTERNOON

At a table, Dre writes in her notebook.

DRE (V.O.)

I'm 4 years old and my brother Jacob is all I have left. He goes from Varsity football player to leader of a new gang. I sleep in a camper well he is building his group of men. That was the night that he met 12-year-old Quetzal

EXT. CAMPSITE-NIGHT-FLASHBACK

Jacob stands in the midst of the group of teenage boys. BIKER KID, 16. Gang member for 5 years.

Van shoes on her feet. A red plaid long-sleeved shirt wrapped around her waist, and khaki pants. 12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL. A young but strong gang leader. Her walk shows she's on a mission to make everyone's life miserable. The torn wife-beater tank top reveals a small tattoo of a Quetzal bird.

BIKER KID

Hey, Jacob! This little girl here wants to talk to you?

Jacob turns and looks at 12-Year-Old Quetzal.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB

Isn't it past your bedtime little girl?

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL

It's Quetzal. Aren't you supposed to be at home playing with yourself?

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB

You really got a lot of balls talking to me like that!

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL

I got bigger balls than you anyway.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
What are you twelve? I could take
you over my knee right now.

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Yeah, try it!

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
No. I'll let him do it for me.

17-Year-Old Jacob points at Biker Kid. 12-Year-Old Quetzal
looks at Biker Kid.

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Him? Alright.

12-Year-Old Quetzal turns to Biker Kid. He walks towards her.
12-Year-Old Quetzal kicks Biker Kid in the groin.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Wow!

Biker Kid drops to his knees.

BIKER KID
She kicked me in my good &
plenty's!

12-Year-Old Quetzal looks at 17-Year-Old Jacob.

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Anyone else?

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Okay. You got heart. What do you
want from me?

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
You're on my turf but maybe if we
work together, I can let it go.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Don't you have parents?

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Foster parents. Their pricks. I'm
just another paycheck to them.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Alright. I'll let you in but you
have to do me little favor?

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
What?

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
My sister, Dre. I need someone to
watch over her. Babysit her from
time to time.

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
You want me to do what?

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB
You said this is your turf, and I
can take care of it. You can't take
care of her, go home and play with
your Barbie's.

INT. TRAILER-NIGHT

4-Year-Old Dre looks through the window of the camper at the
top bunk.

12-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL (O.S.)
Fine, I'll do it.

17-YEAR-OLD JACOB (O.S.)
Be here tomorrow at 9:30.

INT. LIBRARY-AFTERNOON-BACK TO PRESENT

Dre writes every word she thinks of.

DRE (V.O.)
From that day on, Quetzal became my
big sister. What lied ahead of us,
came with a consequence.

Oakley walks towards the table. She sits across from Dre. Dre
looks at Oakley.

DRE
Something wrong?

OAKLEY
It's Ernie. He's not coming back.

DRE
Why?

OAKLEY
His brother died. His mother wants
to bring charges against him.

DRE
Can I go see him?

OAKLEY

I don't think that's such a good idea.

Dre drops her pencil into her notebook.

DRE

I thought you were supposed to help people, not help put them away!

Dre grabs her notebook and pencil. She gets up from the table and walks out of the library. Oakley looks at Dre. A saddened look on her face.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-AFTERNOON

Shelly stands in the midst of the classroom. She holds paperwork in her hands.

SHELLY

I like to say I'm sorry about Ernie. He is a skilled writer and I know some of you are friends with him. He asked me to read his letter.

Shelly raises the paper close for her to read. She looks down and reads.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

What's up girls? As you all know, I can't be with you any longer. I have to serve time for taking my brother out of the game. Was it worth it? No. A person's life is not worth taking. I learned that the week before when we met Ms. Owens. She gets it better than any of our parent's will.

INT. CELL-NIGHT

ERNIE (V.O.)

Some of you I've grown close to. Most of you have calmed down and become friends. One day we'll see each other again. See you later, Ernie.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-CONTINUOUS

Shelly lowers the paper to her side. Dre gets up and walks up the steps. She walks out of the classroom. Oakley gets up.

Shelly raises her hand.

SHELLY

I'll go.

Shelly walks up the steps.

INT. HALLWAY-AFTERNOON

Dre sits on the steps of a stairwell. Shelly approaches Dre.

SHELLY

Can I sit down with you?

Dre moves to her right. Shelly sits down. She looks around.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

You know, when I was your age, I had nobody, no family. I had a public defender on speed dial. She was my only friend.

DRE

What happened to your family?

SHELLY

My dad left me at a gas station.

DRE

Why did he do that?

SHELLY

I don't know.

DRE

What happened to you after that?

SHELLY

I stayed in abandoned buildings. Homeless people helped me. They taught me how to survive and not be a victim.

Dre looks around. Shelly grabs ahold of Dre's hand. Dre looks at Shelly.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Come on.

DRE

Okay.

Dre and Shelly stand up.

EXT. CAMPSITE-AFTERNOON

Jacob drives up to the trailer on his motorcycle. He parks it and gets off. He looks around.

JACOB

Quetzal!!

QUETZAL

Yes.

Jacob turns and looks at Quetzal.

JACOB

What are you trying to prove by giving my sister drugs to sell?

QUETZAL

You forget that this is my turf. It always has been and it always will be. I did you a favor by taking care of that weak sister of yours!

Jacob rushes towards Quetzal. He grabs her by her throat and squeezes. A gun is pointed at the back of Jacob's head. Jacob turns and looks. NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1, 25. A ruthless biker and outlaw.

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1

Get your hands off her!!

JACOB

Are you serious? Do you need a reminder of who brought you into this gang?

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1

She pays me. You don't.

JACOB

So you take orders from her now?

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1

Whatever she says, I do.

Jacob smacks the gun out of Night Owl Member #1 hand, and punches him across the face -- He falls to the ground --

JACOB

-- What are you gonna do!!

Quetzal smacks Jacob across the back of his head with a bat -
- Jacob falls to the ground, unconscious --

QUETZAL

-- Now you know. Get up and help
me? Now!!

Night Owl Member #1 gets up and helps Quetzal lift Jacob off
the ground and carry him to the trees.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB-AFTERNOON

At a country club, sitting near the golf course, Shelly
drinks a tall glass of iced tea. She puts the glass down. A
pregnant woman in a flower dress sits. ANGELICA, 23. A kind
and sociable woman to be around.

ANGELICA

So, how are things with you?

SHELLY

Pretty good. I'm staying busy.

ANGELICA

Really? With what?

SHELLY

I'm helping teenagers with writing.

ANGELICA

That's awesome.

SHELLY

Their good kids too.

ANGELICA

I'm sure they are.

A woman in a red flower dress, red sandals, and holding a
small purse to match. A knee brace covers her right knee and
a walking stick in her hand. LOLA, 47. A retired police detective.
Strong, smart, and stubborn.

Lola walks towards the table. She looks at Shelly. Lola leans
down, hugs Angelica, and walks to an empty chair to sit down.

LOLA

What did I miss?

ANGELICA

Shelly was just telling me --

SHELLY

-- We were just talking about names
for the baby. We should call the
baby Gilda!

ANGELICA

Eww! I hate that name.

LOLA

So, what's it like teaching
teenagers?

SHELLY

How'd you find out?

LOLA

I am a detective. Oh, oops! Not
anymore! After you drove your car
into my house and broke my knee
doing it!

SHELLY

You knew I was drunk too, so don't
play the blame game with me!

ANGELICA

Could you two keep your voices
down?

Angelica raises her hand at Shelly and then at Lola.

SHELLY

See, you upset her!!

LOLA

I did not, you did!!

ANGELICA

Hey!! I'm talking here!!!

Shelly looks at Angelica, crosses her arms, and looks away.

Lola looks at Shelly, then at Angelica.

ANGELICA (CONT'D)

Don't let the past come between
your friendship. All you have is
each other.

Angelica stands up.

ANGELICA (CONT'D)
Now if you excuse me, I have a
husband that needs me.

Angelica walks away from the table. Lola looks at Shelly and smiles.

LOLA
I'm proud of you. For what you're
doing for those kids.

SHELLY
I'm sorry about your knee.

LOLA
Sorry about your car.

SHELLY
Want to get something to eat?

LOLA
Yeah, the food here sucks!

Lola gets up from her chair and walks towards Shelly. Shelly stands up, looks down at Lola's knee.

SHELLY
Does it hurt?

LOLA
Nah! It's a good way to get Barry
to do stuff for me. He does give a
hell of a foot rub.

Lola and Shelly walk away and leave the country club.

EXT. CAMPSITE-CONTINUOUS

Jacob stands leaned against a tree, his arms tied, bloodied, and bruised. Night Owl Member #1 slugs Jacob across the face -- Quetzal stands with her arms crossed.

JACOB
You can have it all! Is that what
you want!!

QUETZAL
You just don't get it!

Quetzal pulls out her knife from her belt holster. She points it towards him and drives into his side -- She leans against him --

QUETZAL (CONT'D)

-- I want to be number one --

-- Quetzal drives it harder --

JACOB

(breath)

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1

What do we do with him?

QUETZAL

Leave him!

Night Owl Member #1 walks towards his bike. He looks at Jacob, sits on his motorcycle, and starts the engine. Quetzal gets on the back of Night Owl Member #1 motorcycle. The motorcycle drives away. All the other members drive away and run from the slaughter they have left behind.

INT. LIBRARY-AFTERNOON

At the table, Dre writes in her notebook.

DRE (V.O.)

I remember being seven years old
and Quetzal teaching me how to
wrestle on the ground.

EXT. CAMPSITE-AFTERNOON-FLASHBACK

7-YEAR-OLD DRE, a bright little girl.

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL, leader of the Quetzals. Ruthless and dangerous.

QUETZAL MEMBER #2, early teens. Member of the Quetzals for over a year.

7-Year-Old Dre stands across from 15-Year-Old Quetzal as she has Quetzal Member #2 in a headlock.

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL

See, what you want to do, Dre is to
bring her head down like this.
That's how you take all the breath
out of her --

-- 15-Year-Old Quetzal drops Quetzal Member #2 down to her head -- She knocks her unconscious -- 7-Year-Old Dre looks at the damage done.

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL (CONT'D)
Now, get over here!

7-YEAR-OLD DRE
No!

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Get over here and man up!!

7-YEAR-OLD DRE
No --

-- 7-Year-Old Dre runs -- She runs into a 20-YEAR-OLD JACOB -
- The leader of the Night Owls. 15-Year-Old Quetzal runs --
and is stopped by 20-Year-Old Jacob -- He lifts 7-Year-Old
Dre from the ground.

20-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Didn't I ask you to take care of
Dre, not scare her!

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
Not my fault she's a chicken!

7-YEAR-OLD DRE
You're mean!

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
You're a pain in the ass!

20-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Enough you two! Children, oh my
gosh! That's all I'm surrounded by.
Grow up, Quetzal!

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
I will when you take that little
runt and put her in a home!

20-Year-Old Jacob puts 7-Year-Old Dre down on the ground. She
runs and sticks her tongue out at 15-Year-Old Quetzal.

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL (CONT'D)
I know where you sleep you little
shit!

7-Year-Old Dre runs off. 20-Year-Old Jacob walks up to 15-
Year-Old Quetzal.

20-YEAR-OLD JACOB
Just remember, I know where you
sleep if any happens to her.

15-YEAR-OLD QUETZAL
If you don't like how I run things,
take her with you and leave my turf
to me.

20-YEAR-OLD JACOB
I just might.

INT. LIBRARY-AFTERNOON-BACK TO PRESENT

DRE (V.O.)
Jacob always stood up for me and
somehow he has forgotten to visit
me today and it's visiting time. I
hope he gets here before Oakley
tells me times up.

Oakley walks towards Dre.

OAKLEY
Dre, you have a phone call?

Dre closes her notebook, stands up, and rushes out of the
room.

INT. OFFICE-AFTERNOON

Dre picks up the receiver and puts it to her ear.

DRE
I sure hope you're on your way to
see me!

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1 (V.O.)
(whisper)
Listen!

DRE
Who is this?

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1 (V.O.)
If you're smart as your brother
said you are, you'll listen and
disappear when you get out.

DRE
Where is Jacob?!!

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1 (V.O.)
Just stay away!

INT. MOTEL ROOM #3-AFTERNOON

Night Owl Member #1 hangs up the phone. Quetzal holds a towel over her chest.

QUETZAL
Who was that?!!

Night Owl Member #1 turns to Quetzal. His eyes grow with fright, feeling intimidated and scared.

NIGHT OWL MEMBER #1
Nobody!

Quetzal looks at Night Owl Member #1. A cold and dark stare directed at him, like daggers.

INT. OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

Dre puts down the receiver. Oakley walks in, and looks at Dre. Dre looks at Oakley.

DRE
Wrong number.

Oakley steps out of the office. Oakley watches Dre as she walks towards the library.

EXT. PLAYGROUND-GROUP HOME-AFTERNOON

At the bleachers, Dre sits and thinks. Her hand under her chin. Heather sits close to her. She pushes Dre on the side.

HEATHER
What's on your mind?

DRE
I have to find out what happened to my brother. I have to go to the campsite.

DARLA
You better get real because they're not gonna let you out of here.

Dre looks at Darla.

DRE
What do you expect me to do?

DARLA
Follow me?

Darla walks towards a SECURITY GUARD. A man in his early 20s. Working security for a year.

Darla looks at Dre.

DARLA (CONT'D)
(whisper)
When I get him distracted, run?

DRE
(whisper)
What!

DARLA
(whisper)
Run!

Darla steps in front of the Security Guard.

DARLA (CONT'D)
How are you doing?

SECURITY GUARD
What do you want?

DARLA
Just curious. You look lonely
standing here with no one to talk
to.

Darla looks at Dre. Dre ducks down underneath the bushes. Dre looks at Darla's fingers. Darla points her fingers for Dre to go -- Dre runs to the edge and jumps over the ledge -- She rushes towards the road at the bottom --

DARLA (CONT'D)
Why don't I go get you a water? It
is hot out here.

SECURITY GUARD
No thank you. Carry on so I can do
my job.

DARLA
No problem.

Darla steps away and walks towards the bleachers. Heather stands up, with a confused look on her face.

HEATHER
You actually did it?

DARLA
She would do the same thing for me.

EXT. HIGHWAY-AFTERNOON

Dre stands on the side of the road. She sticks her thumb up.

Trucks bypass her. A big blue truck pulls over to the side of the road. The passenger door opens. THE DRIVER, 45. A construction worker. Dre walks towards the doorway.

THE DRIVER

Where do you want to go?

DRE

The nearest campsite?

THE DRIVER

Hop in!

Dre pulls herself in and sits in the seat. She buckles up and shuts the door. The Driver hits on the gas peddle and The Driver makes way for Dre's destination.

INT. OFFICE-EVENING

Oakley stands across from Darla and Heather. Oakley's arms folded and crossed over her chest.

OAKLEY

I'm gonna ask you this one more time, where did she say she was going?

DARLA

I told you, I don't know!

OAKLEY

Heather?

HEATHER

Why are you asking me?!

OAKLEY

Heather, do you want her to get hurt?

HEATHER

She said a campsite. Her brother lives someplace on a campsite. That's all I know.

OAKLEY

That's fifty miles away from here. I got to call someone.

EXT. CAMPSITE-NIGHT

The campsite is left with nothing but a trailer. Dre looks around and walks towards a tree. She looks hard and sees Jacob hanging. Dre runs towards him. She touches him on his side --

JACOB
(yell)

DRE
Who did this to you?

JACOB
Quetzal.

Dre pounds her fist on the tree --

DRE
-- She's dead!!

JACOB
No! No more! You can't do this gang stuff anymore! You have your whole life ahead of you. I should have known better. It's my fault kiddo.

Dre looks down at Jacob's belt and grabs his knife. She reaches for the rope and cuts it. Jacob slides down the tree.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Ahh!

Dre crouches down and sits beside Jacob. Jacob wraps his arm around Dre --

JACOB (CONT'D)
-- Life's funny if you think about it. It's such a pain...literally.

Jacob turns his head to his left.

JACOB (CONT'D)
(breath)
Isn't it...Dre.

Jacob's eyes stare off into the sky. Dre sits up on her knees. She shakes him to come alive.

DRE
Jacob!!

Dre falls into him, hugging him.

DRE (CONT'D)
(sob)

INT. CAR-NIGHT

Lola sits in the driver's seat and drives the car. Oakley sits in the passenger seat, holding her phone for the GPS directions. Shelly sits in the backseat.

OAKLEY
Thank you so much for doing this.

LOLA
It's fine. Any friend of Shelly's
is a friend of mine too.

OAKLEY
So, how long have you two known
each other?

LOLA
For as long as I can remember.

OAKLEY
I'm sorry, I just didn't know who
else to call or who to trust.

LOLA
It's fine.

SHELLY
She better be alright.

LOLA
I'm sure she is. Look who she has
as her teacher.

SHELLY
True.

EXT. CAMPSITE-CONTINUOUS

Dre lays on top of Jacob. Headlights pull up and shine bright on her. Dre jumps up fast, arming herself with Jacob's knife.

DRE
Come on if you dare!! Come on,
Quetzal!

The passenger door opens. Oakley walks towards Dre.

OAKLEY

Dre put down the knife, please? We can go and have a nice meal somewhere?

DRE

No! I can't leave him again. He's dead because of me!

OAKLEY

No, he's not. You had nothing to do with it, sweetie.

DRE

How do you know? Do you know what it's like to have someone you care about die right in front of you?

OAKLEY

Actually, I do. I am the one running a detention center for a reason. You know why?

DRE

Why?

OAKLEY

Because I was trying to protect someone and I ended up where you are.

Shelly and Lola lean towards the windows.

Dre lowers the knife. Oakley walks slowly towards Dre. Dre lowers the knife into Oakley's hand. Dre hugs Oakley. Oakley wraps her arm around Dre. She slides the knife into her pants pocket.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

It's alright.

INT. CAR-CONTINUOUS

Dre sits in the back passenger seat. Shelly sits with her. She looks at Dre. Shelly looks outside.

DRE

Do you really think I can make it to college with a scholarship?

Shelly looks at Dre.

SHELLY
I know you can.

INT. GIRLS' DORM-NIGHT

Into the girls' dorm room. Dre walks towards her bed and walks right past Darla and Heather. Darla looks at Dre. Dre lays down on her bed and turns to face the other way. She shuts her eyes. Oakley steps into the girls' dorm room and looks at Darla. Oakley motions her hand to keep the noise down.

INT. TRANSPORT VAN-AFTERNOON

Dre sits in the front seat. Oakley sits up next to her. Oakley looks at Dre and then out the window.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-AFTERNOON

At her desk, Shelly looks at Dre. She gathers all the paperwork. Shelly stands up and walks towards the desk. She hands an application to Heather, and then to Darla. She walks another one to Dre.

HEATHER
What are these for?

SHELLY
You are going to go and fill these out for your scholarships. You're going to finish high school first but you're going to do it because I believe in you.

DARLA
No one's ever believed in me.

SHELLY
I do, Darla. I'll be here until you get there and move forward.

Darla smiles. Dre fills out her application.

INT. GIRL'S DORM ROOM-NIGHT

Heather sits on her bed and writes in her notebook.

HEATHER (V.O.)
Nobody in my entire life has cared
if I make it out.
(MORE)

HEATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My mom told me I was destined to
live a miserable life. I get to do
something that she could never do,
move forward, and not look back.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #3-AFTERNOON

Her clothes on. Quetzal sits on the edge of the bed and looks
at Night Owl Member #1.

QUETZAL
You know, loyalty is coming to be
cut short. It's a good thing I have
my way around this one.

Quetzal reaches her arm towards him and pulls her knife from
his midsection. Night Owl Member #1 lays dead on the bed. His
eyes stare up at the ceiling.

INT. LOBBY-MORNING

Oakley sits in a chair. She reads a book to herself. Shelly
steps into the lobby and sits across from Oakley. She closes
her book and sets it down on the table.

OAKLEY
Do you want to see Dre?

SHELLY
Actually, I'm here to see you. I
heard everything you told Dre. What
happened?

OAKLEY
It happened when I was twelve. My
mother was trying to get her
boyfriend to calm down because he
was hammered drunk. I came down the
stairs and caught him trying to
rape her right there.

INT. LIVING ROOM-CABIN-FLASHBACK

12-YEAR-OLD OAKLEY, shy young girl.

OAKLEY'S MOTHER, 39. A homemaker. Light brown eyes and raven
hair.

MOTHER'S BOYFRIEND, 44. A mechanic. Abusive man. Sandy blonde
hair and blue eyes.

12-Year-Old Oakley runs to the top of the stairs and grabs the two barrel shotgun from the wall. She loads it and tries to aim it. Mother's Boyfriend turns Oakley's Mother towards 12-Year-Old Oakley. The shotgun goes off and hits Oakley's Mother. 12-Year-Old Oakley drops to her knees. Oakley's Mother lies on the floor dead.

12-YEAR-OLD OAKLEY
(scream)

Mother's Boyfriend opens the front door and runs.

OAKLEY (V.O.)
After that, I was placed in a place like this because of my mental state. I started this place on my own and the rest is history.

INT. LOBBY-MORNING-BACK TO PRESENT

SHELLY
Thank you for sharing.

OAKLEY
Thank you for listening.

SHELLY
No problem.

INT. CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLEGE-MORNING

INSTRUCTOR, late 40s. A member of the college faculty for over 20 years.

Dre sits at the top row desk. The Instructor lays her test on her desk. To Darla, he hands her her test booklet. Heather looks at the Instructor with a smile on her face. The Instructor hands Heather her booklet. He walks down the steps and looks back at them.

INSTRUCTOR
You have two hours to complete the test. Begin!

Dre, Darla, and Heather open their booklets. Dre moves down the rows of bubbles and marks them swiftly. Darla looks around and marks her answers. Heather looks at the questions, feeling nervous. She marks the bubbles.

Dre looks at the clock. Darla stops and puts her pencil down.

Heather moves quickly, marking the rest of the bubbles fast before the time ends.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
Times up. Pencils down!

INT. LIBRARY-AFTERNOON

In the library, Dre sits at the table, her hands in a tight grasp. Shelly walks into the library. Dre jumps out of her chair.

DRE
Finally!

Shelly hands the envelope to Dre. Dre hands it back. A nervous look on her face.

DRE (CONT'D)
You open it, please?

Shelly tears the envelope open and pulls the paper out. She reads the results. Shelly turns her back to Dre.

DRE (CONT'D)
Did I fail?

Shelly looks at Dre.

SHELLY
You passed!

Dre hugs Shelly.

DRE
(sob)
Thank you!

SHELLY
You don't have to thank me,
sweetie.

Shelly backs up, touches Dre on her face.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
You did this on your own.

DRE
What about Darla and Heather?

SHELLY
They passed too.

DRE
Really?

SHELLY
You're a college girl now!

DRE
What about us? I'm not gonna see
you anymore?

SHELLY
We can keep in touch.

Shelly wipes away Dre's tears.

INT. GIRLS' DORM-MORNING

All her stuff in her suitcase. Dre closes it. She zips it closed shut and drops the suitcase down to the floor. Dre walks and wheels her suitcase out of the room. She looks back, having one last glance at the room.

EXT. ANDERSON DETENTION CENTER-MORNING

On the curb of the sidewalk, Dre stands in front of Oakley.

DRE
I'm gonna miss you most of all.
Thank you.

Oakley hugs Dre. Dre backs away.

OAKLEY
Take care.

DRE
You too.

The Transport Van pulls up to the curb.

INT. TRANSPORT VAN-MORNING

DRE
(sob)

Dre sits in the transport van. It drives past Oakley. Oakley waves. Dre wipes her eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM-APARTMENT-AFTERNOON

A clean refurbished apartment. Dre looks around. She lets go of her suitcase and walks through the apartment.

INT. BEDROOM-MORNING

In her bedroom, Dre lies on one mattress. One blanket barely able to cover her. An alarm goes off. Dre hits the snooze button.

DRE

Shut up!

INT. CREATIVE WRITING CLASS-AFTERNOON

Dozens of students sit in the creative writing class. Dre sits and listens to the WRITING PROFESSOR, late 30s. A professor for 10 years.

WRITING PROFESSOR

To gain full access to your audience, think of what gets their attention. The protagonist is always out to save the day. The antagonist is always out to prove how smart he or she is.

The bell rings. The students stand and scatter out of the classroom. Dre waits for the crowd to die down. She gets up, grabs her backpack, and walks to the exit door. The Writing Professor looks and sees Dre.

WRITING PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Hello!! Could I speak with you for a couple of minutes?

Dre turns and walks down the steps. She stops and stands in front of the Writing Professor.

WRITING PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

I'm always looking for new faces miss?

DRE

Dre Lopez.

WRITING PROFESSOR

Good to meet you.

The Writing Professor reaches his hand out. Dre reaches out and shakes his hand.

DRE
Good to meet you too.

WRITING PROFESSOR
You're the scholarship student I've
heard so much about. Impressive! I
look forward to seeing some of your
work.

DRE
I look forward to sharing.

WRITING PROFESSOR
Enjoy the rest of your day.

DRE
You too.

Dre turns and walks up the steps.

INT. COFFEE SHOP-AFTERNOON

Dre stands at the cash register. Dre looks down at the
register, her green work cap over her head. Shelly walks up
to the counter and stands in front of Dre.

DRE
Hi, what can I get for you?

SHELLY
Catch up!

Dre looks up and smiles.

DRE
Hi!

SHELLY
I saw you through the window.

DRE
You were checking on me?

SHELLY
I guess I was. It's been almost a
week and I thought I take you out
to lunch. When do you get off?

DRE
In thirty minutes.

SHELLY
I'll wait for you.

DRE

Thank you.

Shelly walks towards a free table. She pulls out a chair and sits down.

EXT. PORCH-ITALIAN RESTAURANT-AFTERNOON

On the porch of an Italian restaurant, Dre sits across from Shelly at a table. Spaghetti for Dre and Lasagna for Shelly.

SHELLY

How is school going?

DRE

I'm loving it. Best experience I'm having.

EXT. PARKING LOT-AFTERNOON

A motorcycle pulls into the parking lot and parks near the restaurant. Quetzal stands up and gets off. Her sunglasses on. She looks at Dre, then at Shelly. Quetzal takes off the sunglasses and stares deeply at Dre.

QUETZAL

Dre bird.

Quetzal puts the sunglasses back on. She gets back on the motorcycle. Quetzal continues to watch Dre.

EXT. PORCH-ITALIAN RESTAURANT-CONTINUOUS

DRE

How is Darla?

SHELLY

She's doing good. She got a job and has a boyfriend.

DRE

That's great. Heather?

SHELLY

She's moved away.

DRE

Really?

SHELLY

She found out she was pregnant,
gathered enough money to get on a
bus, and left before her mother
found out.

DRE

What about Ernie?

SHELLY

He doing good. Reading, and earning
his high school diploma.

DRE

Good for him.

SHELLY

He wants to see you.

DRE

I want to see him but I don't want
to make him depressed.

SHELLY

It would help him.

DRE

I hope it does.

EXT. PARKING LOT-CONTINUOUS

Quetzal starts the motorcycle and drives off.

EXT. PORCH-ITALIAN RESTAURANT-CONTINUOUS

Dre looks through the window. She sees the long hair on the
biker.

SHELLY

Everything alright?

Dre looks at Shelly.

DRE

Fine. Old ghost coming back to
haunt me.

SHELLY

Do you want a ride home?

DRE

I'll be fine.

EXT. COLLEGE NEIGHBORHOOD-EVENING

Dre walks down the streets, and her backpack over her shoulder.

Dre looks in the corner of her eye. She sees a motorcycle come close to her. Dre stops and turns.

DRE
Leave me alone!!

A BIKER, late 30s. A long blonde-haired man, long beard, and dressed in leather.

The Biker stops.

BIKER
I'm sorry if I scared you miss.

DRE
I thought you were someone else.
Sorry.

Dre rushes off.

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

The bedroom is dimmed with light. Dre lays on her bed. She writes in her notebook.

DRE (V.O.)
Today was a good day. I feel like I accomplished a lot. The writing class was a lot better than Shelly told me it would be. Now that I'm working, I can save enough for a car and more.

Dre closes her notebook and puts the pencil away in her backpack. She moves all her schoolwork to the floor and lays on her stomach.

EXT. ANDERSON DETENTION CENTER-NIGHT

Oakley stands outside, smoking a cigarette. Her eyes look down, looking at her shoes. Oakley looks up, sees Quetzal's reflection in the glass door.

OAKLEY
Hi?

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

In her bedroom, asleep, Shelly lies on her back. In a peaceful sleep. A hand reaches over Shelly's mouth. Shelly wakes up, a scared look on her face. Quetzal leans her face towards Shelly.

QUETZAL

Boo!

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

Dre lies asleep. Her cell phone rings. Dre pushes herself up and grabs her cell phone from the nightstand. She answers it and puts it to her ear.

DRE

Hello?

QUETZAL (V.O.)

Dre bird!

DRE

Quetzal?

QUETZAL (V.O.)

I have two friends of yours here that want to say hi to you? What do you say, ladies?

OAKLEY (V.O.)

Dre!!

SHELLY (V.O.)

Don't listen to her!!

QUETZAL (V.O.)

Shut up!!

DRE

Where?

QUETZAL (V.O.)

Where Jacob died. And Dre?

DRE

What!

QUETZAL (V.O.)

Don't test me! I have no patience for waiting.

Dre ends the call. She rushes to her shoes and puts them on quickly. Dre grabs her jacket and puts it on. Dre rushes to her front door, unlocks it, opens it, and slams it shut.

EXT. COLLEGE NEIGHBORHOOD-NIGHT

Out on the dark streets, Dre looks around and walks. She walks into a parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT-NIGHT

Bikers surround an entrance to the bar just up ahead. Dre walks towards the motorcycles parked in front of the bar. She notices keys to one of motorcycle are still in the keyhole. Dre gets on the motorcycle and turns the key to start it. She turns and drives out of the parking lot.

EXT. HIGHWAY-NIGHT

Dre drives the motorcycle down the interstate and comes to the exit she needs to take. Dre gets off on the ramp and drives towards the campsite.

EXT. CAMPSITE-NIGHT

The motorcycle drives into the campsite. Dre aims the headlight towards the tree that Jacob died at. She spots Shelly and Oakley. Sitting, gagged, and arms tied together.

Dre rushes towards Shelly and Oakley. She pulls out Jacob's knife and cuts the rope tied to Shelly. The end of a gun is pressed up against Dre's head. Dre looks at Quetzal.

QUETZAL

Not so fast!

DRE

What happened to the others?

QUETZAL

Dead with rat poison!

INT. BAR-EVENING-FLASHBACK

Quetzal walks the pitchers to the back table. She looks back at her gang and the rest of the Night Owls. She takes a bottle of rat poison from her pants pocket pours it into the pitchers. Quetzal walks them back towards the gang.

EXT. CAMPSITE-NIGHT-BACK TO PRESENT

Quetzal smiles.

QUETZAL

Loyalty is something everyone
doesn't have for me. Now, you're
all that's left. Let's see what you
got!

Dre stands up. She looks at Quetzal.

QUETZAL (CONT'D)

I have been waiting for this for a
long time!

DRE

You don't have to wait anymore,
Quetzal!

Quetzal rushes towards Dre -- Dre arms herself -- getting
ready to block every attack -- Quetzal runs towards Dre --
Dre slices Quetzal as she rushes past -- Quetzal looks down
at her side. Her hand touches the cut -- Blood on her
fingertips -- Quetzal licks the blood and looks at Dre --

QUETZAL

-- Someone's been practicing!

DRE

More than you think.

QUETZAL

Not good enough.

Quetzal jumps her foot at Dre -- a kick across Dre's face --
Dre falls to the ground -- Quetzal jumps towards her -- Dre
lifts Quetzal over her -- Quetzal falls to her back -- Dre
flips herself over Quetzal -- She forces her knife towards
Quetzal's face -- Quetzal lifts her leg and pushes her away --
- Dre falls back -- Quetzal stands to her feet -- and runs
towards Dre -- Dre kicks Quetzal across the face -- Quetzal
falls towards Oakley --

DRE

-- Had enough!

Quetzal grabs Oakley -- stands up, using Oakley as a shield -
- Quetzal presses her knife underneath Oakley's chin --

QUETZAL

See who's playing now! Don't you!

DRE
I wasn't much of a game player,
Quetzal. You always wanted to be
number one and that's your problem.

Dre reaches to her belt -- throws a dagger -- and hits
Quetzal on her forehead -- Oakley covers her face in shock --

DRE (CONT'D)
-- And that has always been the
result --

Quetzal falls to the ground, dead. Oakley runs towards Dre
and hugs her.

OAKLEY
Are you alright?

Oakley backs away, checks Dre's arms.

DRE
I'm fine.

Shelly walks towards Oakley and Dre. She pulls the ropes off
her wrist.

SHELLY
Thank you.

DRE
You probably would've done the same
thing for me.

Oakley looks at Quetzal's body, then looks at Dre.

OAKLEY
Who taught you to fight like that?

DRE
My brother.

SHELLY
Let's get out of here.

Sirens sound. A police cruiser drives towards them. Shelly
holds her arms up and waves them to stop driving.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Hey!

EXT. HIGHWAY-DAWN

Down the highway, the police cruiser travels at the required speed. Dre rides by the cruiser on the motorcycle.

INT. POLICE CRUISER-DAWN

Shelly looks at Dre drive by. Shelly looks at Oakley.

SHELLY

I don't have to worry about her.

OAKLEY

Nope.

EXT. PARKING LOT-DAWN

Dre drives the motorcycle to the parking spot she took it from. She looks at the Biker. The same one she had seen the day before. A surprised look on her face. Dre gets off and leaves it the way she found it.

DRE

You?

BIKER

Hi?

DRE

I'm sorry I took your motorcycle
but I had my reasons.

BIKER

It's fine. At least you brought it
back.

DRE

Later!

Dre walks away. The Biker looks at the motorcycle, then at Dre.

BIKER

Not even a scratch.

INT. CREATIVE WRITING CLASS-MORNING

The Writing Professor stands up, giving his lecture.

WRITING PROFESSOR
What is the number one thing people
want to be in this world? Can
anyone give me a guess? No one?

Dre raises her hand. The Writing Professor looks at Dre.

WRITING PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
Yes, you?

Dre lowers her arm.

DRE
Number one.

WRITING PROFESSOR
Correct. Everyone wants to be
number one. Your villain in your
stories wants to be the last one
standing in the end.

EXT. COURTYARD-COLLEGE-AFTERNOON

Dre sits on a bench. She reads a book. The Writing Professor
walks towards her. Dre looks at the Writing Professor and
lowers her book to her lap.

WRITING PROFESSOR
I just wanted to take the time of
saying I really enjoyed reading
your paper and wanted to deliver it
with your final grade personally.

An **A+** marked in **red ink**. Fueled with excitement, Dre's eyes
filled with the emotion of accomplishment. Dre stands to her
feet and hugs the Writing Professor. She backs away from him.

DRE
Thank you!

WRITING PROFESSOR
Your welcome. I'll see you in
class.

DRE
Definitely.

Dre looks at the grade to confirm it's real and that she's
not dreaming.

DRE (CONT'D)
Yes!

INT. LIVING ROOM-AFTERNOON

In her living room, Shelly looks through her mail and comes to one envelope sent from Ernie. She opens the envelope and unfolds the letter.

ERNIE (V.O.)

Dear Ms. Owens, how is everything?
I know it's been a while since we
last talked. I miss the time we had
together in class. Guess what? I
finally have my high school diploma
and am taking online courses. I've
been attending church here and
based on my good behavior, I am
going before the parole board next
week. I could be out soon. Please
tell Dre I want to see her as soon
as she is able to. You're friend,
Ernie.

Shelly folds the letter back into the envelope.

INT. CELL-STATE PRISON-AFTERNOON

Objects are being thrown in a prison cell. Ernie pushes his books off his desk, along with pencils and notebooks. He sits down on his bed, covers his face.

ERNIE

(sob)

INT. COFFEE SHOP-AFTERNOON

At the counter, putting out orders to the customers. Dre smiles at the customers, feeling confident well doing her job. Shelly steps towards the counter.

SHELLY

Can we talk for a minute?

DRE

Sure, what is it?

SHELLY

It's Ernie? He's not doing too
good.

DRE

What do you want me to do about it?

SHELLY
He wants to see you!

DRE
Shh!

SHELLY
(whisper)
He needs to see you.

DRE
I have class. I thought this is
what you wanted for me?

SHELLY
Not to turn your back on someone
that cares about you.

DRE
Like you never did it.

SHELLY
No, I didn't. Do the right thing.

Shelly walks away from the counter and walks towards the exit door. Dre looks down, feeling shame as she looks away from the customers.

INT. VISITING AREA-MORNING

In the visiting area of the state prison, Dre sits. The entrance door slams shut. Dre turns and sees Ernie. Ernie walks towards her. He hugs Dre. Dre backs away and pulls out a seat out for him.

PRISON GUARD, mid-30s. Guard for 6 years.

DRE
Let's sit and catch up.

Ernie sits.

ERNIE
There's so much I want to say to
you, I just didn't get a chance to.

DRE
Like what?

ERNIE
It seems crazy, I know but I really
like to marry you.

DRE
It doesn't. It's just so --

ERNIE
-- Sudden? I know.

DRE
Why do you want to marry me?

ERNIE
Because I love you. I have since
before I got locked up.

DRE
I want this to work. I don't want
you to wake up and say I made a
mistake after we say I do?

ERNIE
I won't. Come on, what do you say?!

Dre looks down at the ground and thinks to herself, her eyes
look back at Ernie.

DRE
Okay.

Ernie leans down and hugs Dre.

PRISON GUARD
Hey, no hugging!

ERNIE
Sue me!

INT. DRESS SHOP-NIGHT

Dre stands in front of a mirror. A white gown made of lace
and cloth she wears.

SHOP OWNER, early 30s. Shop owner for 5 years.

Dre smiles at how she looks in the dress. The Shop Owner
steps towards Dre.

SHOP OWNER
It does look gorgeous on you.

DRE
Around how much does a dress like
this cost?

SHOP OWNER
Three-hundred dollars.

DRE
Hello!

Dre steps towards the dressing room. Shelly steps in front of her. She reaches her arm out to the Shop Owner. A credit card at Shelly's fingertips.

SHELLY
You can charge this card.

The Shop Owner takes the credit card from Shelly and walks towards the cash register.

DRE
Shelly?!

SHELLY
What? I want you to have something
to remember your wedding day.

DRE
He told you, didn't he?

SHELLY
He told me. He also wants you to
have the best dress you could ask
for.

DRE
Thank you. I'll pay you back.

SHELLY
How about I come to the wedding and
that'll be good enough.

DRE
Deal.

INT. CHAPEL-STATE PRISON-AFTERNOON

PASTOR, mid-40s. A pastor for 25 years.

The Prison Guard helps Ernie with his tie, tucking it under his tuxedo. The music sounds from the PASTOR'S WIFE, early 40s. Ernie looks straight down the aisle. Dre steps towards him. A veil covering her face. She reaches her hand out for his. He grabs ahold. Ernie flips the veil over her head.

Ernie looks at the Pastor.

Shelly stands in the pews with Oakley and Darla.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #6-EVENING

Ernie sits in bed, blankets cover his lap.

ERNIE

Are you coming out yet?

DRE (O.S.)

Hold on a minute!

The bathroom door opens. Dre steps into the room in a white silk nightgown. She steps towards the bed. Dre climbs onto the bed and moves towards Ernie. Ernie wraps his arms around Dre's waist. He kisses her on the lips and kisses her down to her neck.

DRE (CONT'D)

(groan)

Ernie reaches his hands underneath the nightgown and pulls it over Dre's head. He tosses it to the floor. She pulls the blanket over her and him.

EXT. MOTEL-NIGHT

PRISON GUARD #1 and #2. Both in their early 30s. Prison Guards for 2 and 3 years.

Prison Guard #2 leans his ear towards the door. He knocks.

PRISON GUARD #2

Times up! Let's get moving!!

ERNIE (O.S.)

Give me a minute!!

PRISON GUARD #1

Now!

INT. MOTEL ROOM #6-CONTINUOUS

Dre lays on Ernie's chest. He touches her face.

ERNIE

Dre, I got to go?

Dre looks at Ernie. She leans towards Ernie and kisses him. Ernie moves the blanket off him and gets up.

EXT. MOTEL-CONTINUOUS

The door opens, and Ernie steps out. His feet hit the sidewalk. Ernie holds out his hands, allowing himself to be handcuffed.

PRISON GUARD #1
Have a good time?

ERNIE
That's none of your business. Just
take me back.

Prison Guard #1 walks Ernie towards the Transport Van.

INT. BEDROOM-AFTERNOON

She sits on her bed, writing a paper that's due in the morning. Dre covers her mouth. She feels the need to throw up. Dre fights the urges but can't any longer. She rushes towards the toilet, crawling on the carpet.

INT. BATHROOM-AFTERNOON

Dre holds her head over the toilet and throws up.

INT. PATIENT ROOM-HOSPITAL-MORNING

In a patient room, Dre sits on a treatment table. Shelly sits across from her in a chair.

DOCTOR, mid-50s. A doctor for 30 years.

The Doctor looks at Dre's test results. Dre looks at him.

DRE
Well, Doctor?

DOCTOR
Congratulations!

DRE
What!

DOCTOR
You're pregnant.

Shelly stands up and sits beside Dre. She wraps her arm around her. Dre looks at Shelly. The Doctor steps out of the room.

DRE
Seriously?

SHELLY
What's wrong?

DRE
I'm by myself.

SHELLY
No your not. You have Ernie and me.

DRE
Ernie's in prison. You, you do
enough.

SHELLY
Come on, it'll work.

DRE
How do you know?

SHELLY
I have been where you are now.

DRE
How did you deal with it?

SHELLY
I had a support system. I had
friends.

DRE
Like you and me?

SHELLY
Exactly.

DRE
You never told me you had kids?

SHELLY
I have a daughter.

DRE
What's her name?

SHELLY
Sara.

DRE
Where is she?

SHELLY
She lives in Las Vegas with her
husband.

DRE
Do you think I'll be a good mother?

SHELLY
You'll be a great mother! Now, come
on? We got shopping to do?

Dre stands to her feet. Shelly walks Dre towards the doorway.

INT. HALLWAY-MORNING

Dre and Shelly walk through the hallway.

DRE
Wait, I still owe you for the
wedding dress?

SHELLY
You don't owe me anything.

INT. BEDROOM-AFTERNOON

In front of her bedroom mirror, Dre feels her stomach.

MONTAGE

-- Dre's stomach at 2 inches.
-- Dre's stomach at 4 inches.
-- Dre's stomach at 20 inches.

BACK TO SCENE

DRE
Getting big baby.

Dre steps towards a rocking chair and sits down. She rocks
herself to sleep and rubs on her stomach.

DRE (CONT'D)
Argh!!

Dre tries to sit up.

DRE (CONT'D)
(breath)

Dre reaches for her cell phone.

INT. HALLWAY-HOSPITAL-AFTERNOON

Against the wall, banging the back of her head. Shelly loses her patience. The Doctor walks towards Shelly. His delivery scrubs on. Shelly turns to him.

SHELLY
Well, Doctor?

DOCTOR
It's a girl.

SHELLY
A girl. Can I see them?

DOCTOR
Follow me?

INT. PATIENT ROOM-HOSPITAL-AFTERNOON

The newborn lays in Dre's arms. Shelly steps into the room.

SHELLY
Hi!

DRE
Hello.

Shelly steps towards Dre. She touches the infant on the top of her head and gently rubs through the newborn's hair.

SHELLY
She's beautiful like her mama.

DRE
Do you want to hold her?

SHELLY
It's been a while since I have.

Shelly takes the newborn.

DRE
There you go!

Dre touches the newborn on her cheeks. Shelly gently rocks her.

SHELLY
Do you have a name for her?

DRE
Ella.

SHELLY
Beautiful name.

DRE
She is.

INT. NURSERY-MORNING

In the nursery, Dre sits in the rocking chair. She nurses her newborn daughter.

DRE
You're a little aggressive, aren't you?

INT. PRISON CELL-AFTERNOON

A piece of a scotch pad to the back of a photograph. Ernie puts the photo above his bed. Within arms reach, he could caress it as if he's really touching Dre's face. The cell door opens.

SERGIO MARTINEZ, 22. A former gang member of the East Siders'.

A tall and muscular man. Joker tattoos up and down his arms.

A blanket under his arm. Sergio looks at Ernie.

SERGIO
Do you mind if I take the top, ese?

ERNIE
No, go ahead.

Sergio tosses his blanket to the bunk. He looks at the photo of Dre.

SERGIO
Beautiful woman.

ERNIE
Thanks.

SERGIO
Little girl too.

ERNIE
She's a month old almost.

SERGIO
You're a lucky man.

Sergio hops to the bunk and sits up at the top. He grabs his pillow, puts it behind his head, and lays back.

SERGIO (CONT'D)
Good night. What's your name?

ERNIE
Ernie. Yours?

SERGIO
Sergio.

ERNIE
Good night, Sergio.

SERGIO
Night.

PRISON GUARD (O.S.)
Lights out!

The light goes out. Ernie pulls his blanket over his lap. He shuts his eyes.

INT. LIBRARY-STATE PRISON-MORNING

Sergio sits at a table by himself. He looks around. Ernie walks in and sits across from Sergio. Ernie looks at the book Sergio is reading. The Count Of Monte Cristo.

ERNIE
The Count of Monte Cristo. Is That good?

SERGIO
You can read it after I'm done.

ERNIE
That's cool of you. Thanks.

SERGIO
No problem.

GANG LEADER, 36. The male gang leader of the Quetzals and second in command. Quetzal's loyal soldier serving a life sentence for murder.

Sergio and the Gang Leader look at each other. A glare of coldness comes off like a ghost from the both of them. Ernie looks at Sergio, then at the Gang Leader.

ERNIE

You two know each other or something?

SERGIO

Something like that. He brought my sister into the gang life.

ERNIE

Are you in a gang?

SERGIO

Not anymore. I decided to go straight. I have a son and I want him to be proud of me.

ERNIE

Married?

SERGIO

No. We were both young and dumb. We made each other miserable.

ERNIE

You looking for a girlfriend now? I know a couple of girls if you want?

SERGIO

Absolutely not.

ERNIE

Well, if you change your mind.

Ernie gets up and walks away from the table. The Gang Leader looks at the corner of his eye, watching Ernie leave the library. PRISONER #1 and #2 lean their ears down towards the Gang Leader's mouth. Sergio reads lips say **kill him!** Sergio closes the book in his hands, stands up, and walks towards the Gang Leader's table.

GANG LEADER

Where are you going, ese?

SERGIO

What's it to you?

GANG LEADER

That punk's wife killed your sister!

SERGIO

She wasn't my sister. She was just another casualty of your gang family.

GANG LEADER

You disloyal punk!

SERGIO

They really do mean it when they say knowledge comes from a book.

Sergio throws the book from his hand -- and hits the Gang Leader in the face -- Sergio rushes into the Gang Leader's midsection -- and knocks him to the floor -- Sergio stands over him -- and punches him across the face --knocking his two front teeth out -- Blood on Sergio's fist --

SERGIO (CONT'D)

-- Ernie!

INT. HALLWAY-STATE PRISON-MORNING

Ernie walks down the hallway. Prisoner #1 walks alongside Ernie. Prisoner #2 walks behind him. Prisoner #1 pushes Ernie into the wall. Pinning him -- Prisoner #1 pulls out his shank -- Thrusting the blade into the side of Ernie --

ERNIE

-- Argh!!

Sergio runs towards Prisoner #1 -- he slugs him across the face -- knocking him into the wall --

PRISONER #2

-- Hey!

Sergio kicks Prisoner #2 in the groin -- Prisoner #2 grabs ahold of his manhood for dear life --

PRISONER #2 (CONT'D)

-- You're dead!

-- Sergio roundhouse kicks Prisoner #2 on the back of his head-- Sergio rushes to Ernie -- he presses down on the wound --

SERGIO

-- Don't look at this!

Sergio grabs Ernie by his face -- Ernie's eyes start to drift away -- Prison Guard rushes towards Sergio -- He pushes Sergio out of the way --

PRISON GUARD
What happened!!

SERGIO
What do you mean what happened?! He
got shanked!!

PRISON GUARD
You didn't have anything to do with
this?!

SERGIO
Are you trying to blame me!!

Ernie's head turns and he dies.

SERGIO (CONT'D)
Ernie?

PRISON GUARD
He's gone.

Sadness falls upon Sergio's face. He steps away.

INT. CELL-STATE PRISON-AFTERNOON

Prison Guard grabs all Ernie's belongings and the photo's from his wall. Sergio sits at the steel desk. Not looking, he keeps his head turned. The Prison Guard takes the photo of Dre and Ella from the wall. Sergio looks at the photo, remembering their faces in his mind. The Prison Guard walks out of the cell and the door shuts.

EXT. CEMETERY-AFTERNOON

Dre stands over Ernie's casket. Ernie's Mother stands across from Dre.

ERNIE'S MOTHER
(sob)

DRE
Shut up!

Oakley steps towards Dre.

OAKLEY
Dre!

DRE

What! She's crying over him as if she cared about him! Some mothers don't send their sons to prison!

Oakley walks Dre away from Ernie's Mother and the casket.

INT. DINING ROOM-AFTERNOON

Shelly walks towards the dinner table and sets a cup of tea by Dre. She sits down.

SHELLY

Did the warden tell you anything?

DRE

Nothing. The warden's not gonna tell me much. He just told me I'm sorry for your loss.

EXT. STATE PRISON-MORNING

At the gates of the prison, Sergio walks out to the outside. He looks back at the prison and walks towards the taxi parked at the curb.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #101-NIGHT

Sergio lays on a queen-size bed. His bare feet dangle off the edge. A bottle of beer in Sergio's hand. He sips and watches television.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE-GROCERY STORE-MORNING

STORE MANAGER, early 40s. Manager for 10 years.

Sergio sits across from the Store Manager's desk. He looks at Sergio and his application.

STORE MANAGER

It says here that you have a year of experience?

SERGIO

Yes.

STORE MANAGER

I will say you got a lot of positive feedback from your references. Can you start tomorrow?

SERGIO

Yes.

INT. GROCERY STORE-AFTERNOON

At the end of the bagging area, Sergio bags groceries for customer after customer. In a white collared shirt and black khaki pants. Sergio wipes his forehead with a paper towel in his hand.

INT. LIVING ROOM-APARTMENT-AFTERNOON

LANDLORD, 30. the landlord for 5 years.

Sergio looks at the living room and takes a look down the hallway. He nods his head.

LANDLORD

I hope that's a good nod?

SERGIO

I'll take it.

LANDLORD

Great.

Dre walks past the open door to the apartment. The Landlord looks at Dre.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

Dre!

Dre steps towards the doorway.

DRE

Yeah?

LANDLORD

I like you meet your new neighbor?

Sergio steps towards Dre and reaches out to shake her hand. Dre shakes his hand.

DRE

Welcome.

SERGIO

Thank you.

LANDLORD

Maybe you and Sergio can catch up sometime?

DRE
Are you trying to hook us up? I'm pretty sure he has a girlfriend already.

SERGIO
Actually, I don't.

DRE
Oh, I'm sorry. Well, look at you. You're a handsome guy.

SERGIO
I didn't think anything of it.

DRE
I'm pretty sure you don't like women with babies.

SERGIO
I have a son.

DRE
I apologize for what I said.

The Landlord hands Sergio his keys.

LANDLORD
Rents due before the 6th of the month. No noise and no dogs. Have a nice day you two.

The Landlord walks out of the apartment. Dre looks at Sergio.

DRE
I'm sorry for saying all that?

SERGIO
No, it's all good.

DRE
Again, welcome.

SERGIO
Maybe we can go out sometime?

DRE
Maybe this Friday?

SERGIO
That works.

Dre steps out of the apartment. She smiles at him and walks away from the doorway.

INT. LIVING ROOM-AFTERNOON

Dre steps into her apartment shuts the door and leans against the door with her back.

EXT. PORCH-MEXICAN RESTAURANT-EVENING

Sergio walks with Dre towards the tables on the back porch.

The WAITRESS, early 20s. A waitress for a year.

The Waitress sets the menus down on the table well Sergio pulls out a chair for Dre.

DRE

Thank you.

Sergio steps towards the other chair and sits across from Dre at the table.

DRE (CONT'D)

We didn't get to know each other that much the other day. What do you do?

SERGIO

Promise me you won't laugh?

DRE

What would you tell me that's gonna make me laugh? Are you a stripper?

SERGIO

No.

DRE

A DJ?

SERGIO

No way.

DRE

Go ahead and tell me?

SERGIO

I work at a grocery store.

DRE

That's nothing to be ashamed of.

SERGIO

What do you do?

DRE

I go to college on a full scholarship and I work at a coffee shop. I am a mother of an infant baby girl.

SERGIO

What happened to her --

DRE

-- Her father died in prison. She's all I have to remember him by. I'm sorry. You don't want to hear this.

SERGIO

No, it's fine. We all have to vent and let it out sometimes.

DRE

True. Thanks.

Sergio looks at the people dancing on the dance floor. He motions to Dre to look at the dance floor. Dre shakes her head. Sergio nods his head.

SERGIO

Yes!

Sergio stands up and reaches for Dre's hand.

DRE

What if I make a mistake?

SERGIO

I'll catch you.

Dre grabs a hold of his hand. Sergio pulls Dre up and walks her towards the dance floor. She faces him. Sergio puts his hands around her waist and puts her hand on his shoulder. He holds her other hand and slows dances with her. Dre looks at Sergio, then leans her head on his shoulder. She closes her eyes.

EXT. APARTMENT-NIGHT

Dre walks to her front door and looks at Sergio.

DRE

I invite you in but I got a busy day tomorrow.

SERGIO

I do too.

Sergio steps close to Dre. He kisses her. His hand around the back of her neck. He backs away.

 SERGIO (CONT'D)
Talk to you soon. Good night.

 DRE
Good night.

Dre grabs her doorknob and turns it. Sergio turns and walks away.

INT. OFFICE-AFTERNOON

Dre sits by Oakley's desk. Oakley looks through the internet.

 DRE
I like Sergio...a lot. The first
man that ever treated me like a
woman and not a piece of meat.

 OAKLEY
What's his last name?

 DRE
Martinez. Why? What are you doing?

Dre turns and looks at the computer monitor.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Oakley clicks the **CURSOR** on Sergio's record and it brings up all his arrests and warrants. His photo along with his records.

It reads: Sergio Martinez, arrested for assault. Served six months and released for good behavior.

A photo of Sergio and Ernie.

BACK TO SCENE

 OAKLEY
Dre?

 DRE
Yeah?

 OAKLEY
You may want to see this?

Dre stands up and looks at the computer screen. Her eyes in disbelief.

DRE
He was his cellmate.

OAKLEY
Under relatives, it has Quetzal
listed under sibling.

DRE
He came to finish the job. Fine!

OAKLEY
Do you want to stay with me?

DRE
No, it's cool. It's gonna be really
cool!

INT. LIVING ROOM-EVENING

Dre steps towards the front door and opens it for Sergio.

SERGIO
Hi, beautiful!

DRE
Hey?

SERGIO
I'm glad you called.

Dre steps out of the doorway and motions for Sergio to walk in. Sergio walks in and looks at the kitchen table. A candlelight dinner. Sergio looks at Dre.

SERGIO (CONT'D)
What's the special occasion?

DRE
Just us. Being together for a
dinner date.

INT. KITCHEN-EVENING

Sergio sits down. Dre stands behind him and pushes him down. He looks at her. Dre digs her fingers into his skin just above his collar bone.

SERGIO
Rough day?

DRE

No, why?

SERGIO

I feel your roughness.

DRE

Do you care if I get you in the mood with some music?

SERGIO

No, go ahead.

Dre steps towards the **IPOD** speaker sitting on the counter. She hits the play button. Dre turns up the volume. "Sweet but Psycho" by Ava Max plays. Sergio looks at Dre.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

This isn't romantic. What's this?

DRE

How about this?

"The Stranger" by Billy Joel plays.

SERGIO

What's this about, Dre?

Dre steps towards the stove and grabs a cast-iron skillet. She spins it around in her hand and walks behind Sergio. He turns, gets up and looks at Dre. A frightened look on Sergio's face. He waves his hands at Dre.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Stop, please!!

DRE

Did you help kill Ernie?!

SERGIO

No!

DRE

Why'd you come here? Was it to kill me?

SERGIO

No. It was a coincidence!

DRE

Was it really? You turn out to be Quetzal's little brother and we fall for each other like that!

Dre snaps her fingers --

 SERGIO

 -- Look --

-- Sergio rushes towards the front door -- He grabs a hold of the doorknob -- Dre throws the skillet at Sergio -- Sergio moves out of the way -- the skillet hits the door -- He grabs the door doorknob again and pulls the door open -- Sergio runs down the steps --

 DRE

 -- You can run all you want --

-- Dre rushes towards the stairs --

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX-EVENING

Dre runs towards Sergio -- Sergio holds his hands up --

 SERGIO

 -- If you stay cool, I'll explain
 what happened!

Dre stops walking.

 DRE

 Go ahead and explain? I'm waiting!!

 SERGIO

 I had no idea you lived here. I'm
 not out for revenge. As far as
 Quetzal goes, we were not close.

 DRE

 What about Ernie?

 SERGIO

 I was his cellmate. He was so down
 to earth. I tried to help him but I
 was too late.

 DRE

 After you saw me, why didn't you
 tell me who you were?

 SERGIO

 I got caught up in the moment. I
 saw you and I didn't want to let
 you go.

Dre looks at Sergio. Sergio gets closer to Dre. The neighbors stand outside and watch.

Dre reaches her hand out, touching him on his cheek. Sergio kisses Dre. "Numb" by Alexis Jordan Verel plays.

EXT. PORCH-MORNING

Shelly sits on the front porch on a lounge chair. A glass of tea in her hand. Dre steps towards Shelly. Shelly looks at Dre.

SHELLY
Hey, how are you?

DRE
Good.

SHELLY
I see you brought the love of your
life and your man.

Dre looks at Sergio, pushing the stroller on the sidewalk.

DRE
(laugh)
Why don't you go take her for a
walk and come back in five minutes?

SHELLY
No, come over here? You can go
inside and watch television if you
want.

Sergio steps towards the front door. Shelly turns the doorknob and pushes the door open. He wheels the stroller into the house.

SERGIO
Thank you, miss.

SHELLY
Your welcome.

Sergio walks into the house. He takes the infant from the stroller. Shelly gets up and shuts the door. Shelly looks at Dre.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
(whisper)
He's so humble.

DRE
Yeah, he is.

SHELLY
Have a seat.

Dre sits alongside Shelly. She leans back.

DRE
Ahh!

Shelly looks at Dre.

SHELLY
Anything new?

DRE
My manuscript is being published.

SHELLY
That's great! What's it called?

DRE
Hardships.

SHELLY
What do you say we go inside and
have a barbeque. Today is the
perfect day to do it.

Shelly pushes herself to stand up from the chair. Dre stands
to her feet and helps her up.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Thanks.

DRE
Anything new with you?

SHELLY
Daughter's pregnant.

DRE
Another reason to celebrate.

SHELLY
You haven't seen anything yet!

Dre and Shelly walk into the house. Shelly shuts the door.

SHELLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Who wants a drink!

DRE (O.S.)
Oh no.

FADE OUT:

THE END