

the devil you don't

written by

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INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

A small-town grocery store, glowing blue under harsh fluorescents. The rattle of a cart as off-brand products pass. In the cart: tampons, aspirin, disinfectant wipes.

The cart rounds the corner to the baby aisle. Stops.

Pushing the cart is ASTER ADAMS (30), who stares at a shelf of baby formula. Tired eyes, sallow skin. Perpetually high-strung. It's been a long night. Or two.

She picks one up, reads the label. "Organic Toddler."

The light above her head FLICKERS.

MOM (O.S.)
Don't get that. It's shit.

There's a MOM (30s) at the end of the aisle, a GIRL (4) watching warily behind her legs. Awkwardly -

ASTER
Oh, I don't have a baby.

Mom frowns. Aster replaces the formula. She stares at the happy, toothy kid on the labels. He stares back.

Aster squeezes her eyes shut against a memory. Then - the little girl is right beside her.

GIRL
I don't like your friend.

Aster looks confused. The girl points -

To the EMPTINESS of the aisle behind them. *The fuck?*

But Aster looks just a beat too long.

ASTER
You don't see anything. Go back to your mom, please.

GIRL
I do! It looks like this.

The girl pulls a GROTESQUE FACE. The empty aisle looms.

ASTER
No, it doesn't.

GIRL
It does!

ASTER
It does not! I think I'd know –

GIRL
Mommy, I don't like it!

Now Mom and Aster lock eyes. Mom frowns and comes over.

MOM
You say something to my kid?

ASTER
No. Nothing.

MOM
Why is she upset, then?

ASTER
I think she's seeing things. You're
seeing things, look –

Aster approaches the spot in the aisle. Delicately reaches a
hand out – waves it in the empty space. Nothing.

Was she holding her breath?

But the girl is suddenly there too, reaching in the same
space –

Aster grabs her hand. Shakes her head slowly. *You don't want
to do that.*

The girl –

SCREAMS.

MOM
Let go of my kid right now!

ASTER
I barely touched –

At that moment, everything on every shelf within five feet of
them comes FLYING OFF as if magnetized toward Aster,
clattering to the linoleum.

Aster FEIGNS SHOCK.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Whoa. Was that an earthquake?

The formula cans EXPLODE. Beige milk powder dusts them all.

The girl SCREAMS some more.

The lights overhead FLICKER, insistently. With a tone like *not again* –

ASTER (CONT'D)
Perfect. Just perfect.

Mom and girl hustle out of the aisle, both appropriately freaked out.

Aster wheels away the other directions. Products left and right are somehow DRAGGED off shelves behind her.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Jesus fucking Christ, you made a mess!

Aster leaves without paying. On her way out she catches Mom across the store with a security guard, pointing.

Aster waves – *sorry, sorry* –

The girl WAILS.

INT. ASTER'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Armful of groceries hits the passenger seat, the door slams. Formula powders the dash.

Aster grips the steering wheel. The car is empty, but all the same –

ASTER
That was so embarrassing! Now I can never come back here again.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - CONTINUOUS

Her car speeds out of the parking lot.

TITLES UP: THE DEVIL YOU DON'T

INT. ASTER'S CAR - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The radio POPS ON. Suddenly blaring "Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows" by Lesley Gore.

ASTER
Very funny.

Aster turns the radio off. It turns RIGHT BACK ON. Aster grinds her teeth.

The song continues –

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING

The car is parked on a desolate dirt road, windows down.

INT. ASTER'S CAR - STATIONARY - DAWN

A better look at Aster's car in the morning light. Backseat full of self-help books. Grocery bags floating around like ghosts.

Outside, the sun cuts across OPEN PRAIRIE.

You might think, hey, this lady's currently living out of her car. And you'd be right.

In the front seat, Aster jolts awake from an open-mouthed nap. Still covered in baby formula.

She squints. Fishes through pockets. Gets a KEY –

Unlocks the CUFFS securing her wrist to the steering wheel.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - BATHROOM - LATER

A running faucet in a dirty sink. The single light FLICKERING.

Aster's face in the mirror, really fucking fed up with it.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - LATER

An oversized shirt pulled from a rack. Hawaiian print. Aster grimaces. Not really her style.

-- **AT FRIDGE:** Wearing the Hawaiian shirt now, Aster pulls bottled water from a fridge shelf.

As the door shuts, for a second there's the reflection of a strange, skinny FIGURE watching her from down the aisle.

Aster turns. It's just an OLD LADY perusing Hostess snacks.

EXT. DRIVE-THRU - LATER

Aster in a fast-food drive-thru. The voice coming through the speaker is garbled, DEMONIC.

On the monitor – pixelated text. ASTER KILL ASTER KILL ASTER
Aster, nonplussed.

INT. SMALL-TOWN LIBRARY - LATER

Aster sits at a public computer in a small library, fast-food
fries next to her.

LIBRARIAN (O.S.)
Excuse me!

Aster turns to the short-haired LIBRARIAN (60s).

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)
You can't eat in here.

Aster nods with a polite smile. Enters a Google search – "GET
RID OF GHOST." Some generic Reddit results. A listing for an
OCCULT SHOP nearby.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey.

On edge, Aster closes the window, gathers her things. There's
a DARK SHAPE behind her now. She doesn't look.

VOICE (CONT'D)
Hey.

ASTER
I'm leaving –

She turns –

But it's not the librarian. It's a SHADOW, barely visible
between the shelves.

VOICE
Did you bring some for me?

Aster startles. Squeezes her eyes shut.

When she opens her eyes, the shape is GONE. Was never really
there to begin with.

EXT. LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

Aster, outside the library. She checks her cellphone. Ten or
so missed calls from MOM, DAD, HOME.

She tries a call of her own. Phone to her ear.

Aster scans the lonely parking lot outside the library. There's an OIL SLICK near one car. Rainbow colors swirl.

She frowns, turns away. In her ear, the line CLICKS.

ASTER

Oh, thank goodness you picked up.

Fuzzy static. Aster listens.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Hello?

VOICE (ON PHONE)

... kill.

The voice is clearly trying to be terrifying, otherworldly – but Aster's face just hardens in annoyance.

ASTER

I can't have one second without this bullshit? Are you kidding me? Get off the line.

VOICE (ON PHONE)

Kill.

ASTER

Fine, after this. Okay?

VOICE (ON PHONE)

(lilt of hope)

Kill?

Aster huddles over the phone as A KID passes behind her.

ASTER

Yes, yes, kill and maim. Put me through.

The phone RINGS again in her ear, properly this time.

INT. ASTER'S CAR - MOVING - LATER

Aster drives. Highway cutting through badlands. We hear her leave a voicemail –

ASTER (V.O.)

It's me. Can we talk? I miss you. I feel like – well, I know you wanted time to process everything.

(MORE)

ASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I'm out of town for today but I'd
love to -- move on from this. Talk.
Before the funeral.

She pulls into a CVS. As she parks --

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ASTER'S CAR - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Aster climbs out of her car, looking more refreshed and better-rested. This is a few days ago, in the parking lot of a medical building.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Hey!

Smiling, Aster turns to LAUREL (30), who's coming out and already sticking a cigarette between her lips. She's a beautiful blonde, and knows it.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
There she is!

Aster lifts a pizza box, and at the same time snags the cigarette from Laurel's mouth, tosses it aside.

ASTER
For you both.

LAUREL
What would we do without you?

ASTER
Perish, I'm sure.

-- **LATER:** Aster and Laurel sit on the steps of the building, eating pizza. The building's red-lighted sign above.
NORTHEAST HOLDINGS.

LAUREL
It reminds me of college. So busy
we forgot to eat. Those all-
nighters before tests. You saving
us with takeout.

ASTER
The only all-nighters you pulled
were at frat houses.

LAUREL
Hell yeah, graduated summa cum
laude, didn't I?

Laurel giggles charmingly and throws her pizza crust into the parking lot.

There's an OIL SLICK near their feet, its surface iridescent.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
(re: oil slick)
It's so pretty. I always wanted to
play in them when I was little.

Suddenly, a MAN (30s) appears behind them and throws his arms around the women. Aster SCREAMS, while Laurel just SQUEALS.

LAUREL (CONT'D) ASTER

You bastard! Don't do that!

DEVIN (30s) is good-looking, mop-haired, with the intense energy of a puppy. Gold-rimmed glasses, blue scrubs. He plants a diligent kiss on Aster's mouth.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Good day?

DEVIN
Yeah, dozen patients or so.

ASTER
That's a lot of vaginas.

LAUREL

He can't help he's never had trouble getting into girls' panties. Remember that party at Mimi's? I caught you with Kristin. Something in your technique told me, yeah, this guy's gonna be a great doctor.

ASTER
I'd rather not talk about past
conquests.

DEVIN
Well, a few minutes later, I met
the love of my life, didn't I?

He means Aster. She pushes his hair out of his eyes, familiar.

LAUREL
(saccharine)
Aww!

Laurel lights another cigarette. Aster plucks it from her mouth and puts it out on the concrete.

ASTER

I don't miss college. I have the determination to keep moving ahead in life, because you can't let where you came from define where you're going.

DEVIN

Easy, Tony Robbins.

LAUREL

We get it, trailer park girl makes good.

Laurel and Devin share a laugh, but there's something conspiratorial about it. A joke at Aster's expense.

ASTER

Hey, um, I'm moving into the office tomorrow, and I thought you -

LAUREL

(low)

Do it.

Aster stops. Realizes both Laurel and Devin are staring at her, still as stone, dead in the eyes. Aster frowns.

ASTER

What?

LAUREL

Do it for me.

Suddenly, Devin LUNGES at Aster -

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ASTER'S CAR - MORNING

Aster wakes, jerking back, tumbling out of her car. One wrist still snagged in the handcuffs. Back to her present-day, exhausted self.

She sits there, arm raised, hand dangling. She looks SICK.

She squints. Fishes through pockets. Gets a KEY, unlocks the cuffs. Ouch.

ASTER

Christ.

SELINDA (O.S.)

Goodness. You okay?

-- **ON THE SIDEWALK:** A Latina woman, SELINDA (30s), wears a sweet smile and casual shirt dress -- which happens to be hitched over her butt. Striped undies.

She's in front of a small store with crystals and dreamcatchers in the window.

Aster looks at her. Nods.

Selinda turns away, catches her reflection, fixes her dress. Unlocks the shop door with a ring of keys.

Aster jumps up.

ASTER

Excuse me --

Selinda enters. Shuts the door behind her. A "sorry" face through the pane. She taps her watch. *Not open yet.*

INT. EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, a cramped occult shop. Crystals, tarot decks, incense, dreamcatchers. You know it smells like patchouli.

Aster, at the glass, knocks. Selinda, cheerful.

SELINDA

Hello again!

ASTER

(muffled)

Can I come in? It's an emergency.

Selinda holds a hand to her ear. *Can't hear you.*

ASTER (CONT'D)

(muffled)

I think I'm, um. Dying?

EXT. EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Selinda swings the door open.

SELINDA
Did you say dying? You poor thing!
Please, come in.

INT. EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Aster fidgets, follows Selinda in. Shaky and pale. Selinda picks up a tarot deck, shuffles.

SELINDA
So are we talking spiritual death,
death of the self? Lay it on me.

ASTER
You know, it's kind of — hard to
explain.

SELINDA
Spit it out, sweetie.

One of the lights above them suddenly POPS, explodes, showers sparks. Selinda barely blinks.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Sorry. Old building. Probably
haunted, too.

ASTER
You believe in that?

Selinda looks around them like, *duh?* Puts the cards down, picks up a box. Aster trails, tripping often, wringing her hands.

ASTER (CONT'D)
And what if that happened with,
well, a person?

Selinda is taking stock off shelves and putting them in the box. Behind her, the tarot cards are FLOATING. Fanned out dramatically around her head. Aster tries not to look.

SELINDA
Oh, I think that's called
possession, sweetie.

She moves away. Aster snatches the cards out of midair. Face like a beleaguered parent with a toddler.

ASTER
Well, is there, um, medicine one
could take, or a manual —

Selinda looks. Aster hides the cards behind her back.

SELINDA
How long are we going to do this?

ASTER
Do what?

SELINDA
Pretend we don't know each other.

Aster, confused.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Aster Adams. Selinda Santos.
Skelton Catholic.

Sudden recognition.

ASTER
Oh! Jesus!

SELINDA
Yes!

ASTER
Selinda, with the yoga, and the,
the -

SELINDA
The deep and abiding hatred for
you, yes!

ASTER
(face falls)
I - now, look. I - I'm a different
person now.

Hard stare. Selinda steps away. Aster follows.

ASTER (CONT'D)
It was years ago! I was stupid.

A lock of Aster's hair rises, held in an invisible hand. It's
YANKED back ferociously.

Aster stumbles, her arm sweeping a shelf of porcelain skulls
clean. CRASH. Selinda rushes over in dismay.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry, it was an accident -

Aster tries to help clean. She finally sees Selinda is removing product, not putting it out.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Are you moving?

SELINDA
Please. Get out.

Selinda grabs her and drags her toward the exit.

ASTER
I don't know where else to go.
Something is wrong with me, like
really wrong -

SELINDA
If you came here just to ruin
something for me again, I swear -

From somewhere in the back of the shop - "You Should Be Ashamed" by Emitt Rhodes starts playing.

They both pause. Aster's eyes wide.

ASTER
You hear it?

SELINDA
Where the hell is it coming from?

She turns, too quickly, knocking over a box of crystals. Tries to pick them up, only scatters more. Music louder.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Stop! Those are twenty bucks each!

Suddenly, Aster goes ramrod straight.

And TILTS BACKWARD as if held in midair by invisible arms. Selinda drops the crystals.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Oh my God.

ASTER
Listen - I can explain.

She SHOOTS UPWARD into the glass, face first. CLONK.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Ow, Jesus! Just give me a second to
think. I can fix this.

SELINDA
Okay. Okay. Hold on.

She hurries off to get something. Aster's nose is BLEEDING. She only has a second to register the pain before noticing –

A DELIVERY GUY (20s) with a clipboard pulling up in a van outside. He glances through the window, confused.

She's still held in midair. Closes her eyes. And as her body starts moving upright –

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. FIASCO OBGYN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

– Aster is lifted from a dip while dancing with Devin in their empty OBGYN office, after hours. "You Should Be Ashamed" plays from the computer. Another past night.

He spins her, all easy charm and confidence. She's too self-conscious to be good. They laugh.

ASTER
How can you dance to this? It's terrible.

DEVIN
Says you.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Right? I. Love. This. Song!

Laurel emerges from a back hallway, wiggling her hips with the same breezy self-assurance. Nursing scrubs.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Is this the playlist I made you?

Devin dances his way over to her – and just like that, he's switched partners. Like they've choreographed it.

Aster plops in the receptionist chair. Conflicted emotions playing over her face.

SMASH TO:

INT. EMPORIUM - SAME TIME

In the shop – Aster, body stiff and floating a little. Eyes rolled back in her head.

Nearby, shaken, Selinda signs for a package from the DELIVERY GUY, who stares.

SELINDA
It's fine, we're trying something.
Thank you.

BACK TO:

INT. FIASCO OBGYN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Back in the office. Devin and Laurel dancing, Aster sitting.

ASTER
Did we work on our affirmations?

DEVIN
"I am confident my wife will stop bugging me about this."

ASTER
Dev, come on. It's to focus your positive energy. You were so depressed yesterday about joining the practice -

DEVIN
That's the motivation granted by student loans, baby!

ASTER
We agreed it was the best choice for our future. Right?

They ignore her. Laurel spins and FALLS crookedly, giggling, into Devin's arms. He catches her.

LAUREL
Shit. I almost died!

DEVIN
Good thing we've got the suicide pact in place already.

They laugh. Aster finds a green STRESS BALL on the desk. "FIASCO OBGYN" printed on it. Gives it a squeeze.

The music SKIPS. Aster looks. They're suddenly not dancing anymore. Staring at her. Rigid as boards.

LAUREL
Don't we?

Beat.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Don't we?

Laurel marches over and SHOVES Aster – she tips over, chair and all –

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS

– in the present, she lands on her back. Selinda over her.

SELINDA

I don't think I'm the kind of help
you need, bestie.

ASTER

I'm not sick, I'm haunted, there's
a difference.

A heavy beat.

ASTER (CONT'D)

It's trying to kill me.

SELINDA

What is?

ASTER

It's dead.

SELINDA

Vague. Why?

ASTER

I don't know. I never did anything
wrong, ever.

SELINDA

Really?

ASTER

I help people.

Aster rolls over and PUKES. Black bile and bits of GREEN
STRESS BALL. The lights flicker. Aster grabs onto Selinda's
ankle, pathetic.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I need to get rid of it by
tomorrow. Tell me how, please.

Long moment. Selinda just walks off, in shock.

Aster sits up. Scattered crystals on the floor, arranged into letters: L-I-A-R.

SELINDA (O.S.)
Buy me breakfast and we'll see.

INT. JIMMY'S EGG - MORNING

Inside a greasy diner, Aster and Selinda sit at a corner table, talking in fast whispers. OLDIES on tinny speakers.

ASTER
I tried to tell you.

SELINDA
No, no, no. "Hi, there's a demon inside me." You lead with that.

ASTER
Sure, the sane thing to say!

A NAPKIN pulls itself out of the dispenser on the table and drifts between them. Aster uses it to wipe her bleeding nose.

SELINDA
So what the hell was that?

ASTER
(re: napkin)
That? Nothing.

SELINDA
Not that bullshit. Before.

A MAN passes. They go silent for a second.

ASTER
The first time it happened was right after the accident. I heard a voice, and the next thing I remember, I was in my car.

Server drops off plates. Aster got eggs with a side of beans. Sprinkled with GREEN STRESS BALL. She pushes the plate away.

SELINDA
What accident?

ASTER
Someone died, right in front of me. Now it makes me relive things.

SELINDA
(meaningful)
Oh. Wow.

ASTER
Can we not?

SELINDA
No, but you were always so – “Oh,
what’s next, what’s next? I’ll be
in the city by May 19, 2012.”

ASTER
That’s called having goals. How do
you even remember that?

SELINDA
The past informs the present, my
love. That’s how I deal with what’s
in front of me, like you floating
into my shop window.

A SHRIEK of feedback in the diner speakers. A few people
flinch. But the music continues.

ASTER
Just tell me how to get it out,
please. I’ll pay you.

Selinda wavers.

ASTER (CONT'D)
A lot. Not that you need it.

SELINDA
Well. I kinda do.

ASTER
But I thought your parents –

SELINDA
I still work at their firm. They
think this whole thing is stupid.
But you’d be surprised how often
supernatural incidents come up in
depositions. People just don’t call
them that.

ASTER
But the shop...

SELINDA
Is my real work. I open on
weekends. Or I did.

ASTER
So, what, are you even a real
spiritual – whatever?

SELINDA
I took an online program at the
Institute for Spiritual Studies.
Three weekends.
(off Aster's look)
It's accredited.

Aster dry-washes her face. Okay.

ASTER
Look, give me the steps to a
ritual, or the right rock, or
whatever. I have places to be.

SELINDA
You can't Amazon Prime your way out
of possession.

ASTER
Why not?

SELINDA
If you want to do this, you have to
do it correctly.

ASTER
Please. Help me. Prove your parents
wrong, if anything.

Aster stares at her, begging. The light above them FIZZLES.

SELINDA
How much is "a lot"?

EXT. EMPORIUM - LATER

Selinda hurries out of her truck, Aster following as they
head back to the shop. Keys jangle.

SELINDA
You sure you're telling me
everything? Because I've had other
cases where secrets muddled the
ceremony.

ASTER
Other cases?

SELINDA
Well. I read about them.

Aster slows. Through the window, she sees a SHAPE at the back of the store, standing in shadow.

ASTER
Yeah, no, that's it. That's all.

INT. EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS

The door swings shut behind them. The shop feels different. Darker. Air thicker.

SELINDA
Right. Okay.

She grabs a box from behind the counter, pulls out sage and salt with theatrical confidence.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Salt circle. Sage cleansing. Very basic. You go there, sweetie.

Aster sits where indicated. Selinda opens a book, skims.

ASTER
How long have you had this place?

SELINDA
Shh.
(beat)
About a year.

ASTER
And you've done this before?

SELINDA
Please. I didn't spend last summer studying metaphysical healing just to wing it.

ASTER
Should I be doing anything?

SELINDA
Sit still.

She lights the sage bundle. Thick smoke. Pours salt in a circle around Aster. Poses with her arms out.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Be gone, unclean spirit! Return to
the light and leave us in peace!

Aster waits. Selinda drops her arms, smiles.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Okay. I take card or Venmo.

-- **THE DOOR:** Closes on Aster and Selinda flips the shop sign
to "Closed."

That's it.

EXT. ASTER'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MOMENTS LATER

The front door of a humble old split-level home.

Opening on ASTER'S PARENTS. DAD (60s) is a skinny postal
worker, MOM (60s) a former grade school teacher. They've
never been anywhere but that's fine.

MOM
Well, look what the cat dragged in!

ASTER
Hi, Mom. Charlie.

MOM
Oh, you look awful.

ASTER
Can I crash for the night?

INT. ASTER'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - LATER

Aster sits on a twin bed. Floral coverlet, stuffed animals.
Nothing has changed in here since she left for college.

She looks small and uncomfortable. Phone to her ear.

ASTER
Hello. Me again. Uh. I'm just
sitting here, practicing gratitude
for our relationship and
visualizing positive outcomes.
Would you let me know where you
are?
(belated)
Miss you. See you tomorrow?

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Lunch. Homey decor but nothing special. Aster sits in the same chair she sat every day as a child. Parents putter.

MOM

... can't believe you drove through the night by yourself. Y'know, honey, it's okay to admit you're on the wrong path. Would you consider moving home?

To one side, Dad GRUNTS. He's not for it.

MOM (CONT'D)

What about that nice boy? Hank. From Greenberg. He always was sweet on you, honey, I could tell. He runs an insurance office now. You were quite the little competitors, but maybe he would hire you.

ASTER

Mom, I have a business I'm trying to open?

MOM

Still?

Aster stands abruptly -

INT. ASTER'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

- and sits on the toilet in the half-bath. Head in her hands.

This is the worst.

She gets up, glances in the mirror. Dark circles. She does look awful. She speaks to her reflection.

ASTER

It's just one night. Get to the funeral.

She straightens, tries a smile.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I'm affirming my truth. I'm affirming my truth.

Aster reaches for the bathroom door -

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL BUILDING - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

— and opens the door to the medical building instead.

She's back, quiet night around her. Slips inside, spring in her step.

The door shuts behind Aster as she walks toward an elevator, carrying a bag of to-go food. Passing the directory — FIASCO OBGYN listed.

She presses the elevator button. Idly scrolls on her phone, Googling "life coach business name generator."

Switches to the voice memo app. Starts recording herself.

ASTER

Hi. Welcome to Psych Up.

(no)

We'll help you at Purpose and Progress Coaching. Morning, this is Strategic Life Solutions.

She grimaces, thinks.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Trailer park. "Double Wide to Dreams"?

The elevator hasn't come. Button unresponsive. Ugh.

INT. FIASCO OBGYN - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

The quiet medical practice. Waiting room tidy and empty. Brochures for fertility treatments and IUDs.

Baby formula samples. A familiar grinning CHERUB on one formula label. "Organic Toddler."

Lights off, but music still plays from somewhere. Muzak version of some oldies song.

The stairwell door into the clinic opens. Aster, still on her phone. She hears something. Stops. Sees —

LAUREL. Wearing pink scrubs.

At that moment, she's sitting on top of the receptionist's desk, lost in apparent throes of ecstasy.

Someone with a MOP OF CURLY HAIR down between her legs.

Gold-rimmed glasses on the counter.

It takes Aster a second to process this.

She backs into the stairway without a sound.

INT. MEDICAL BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Aster comes out of the stairwell slowly, looking down.
Turning back, deciding against it.

ASTER
What the fuck.

Almost goes back upstairs again. But again, decides not to.
Still not sure what she saw.

That was her husband going down on her best friend, right?
She turns quickly –

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

– and is now turning toward her PARENTS. Too fast.

A BIG KNIFE gripped in one hand instead of the to-go bag.
Tears in her eyes at the memory she just relived.

Her parents stare at her, bug-eyed.

MOM
Honey, are you on drugs?

ASTER
I'm... have to go.

EXT. SELINDA'S TRUCK - LATER

At her shop, Selinda puts boxes inside her truck. Behind her,
Aster comes up in a whirlwind of sobs.

ASTER
It didn't work. It's worse!

SELINDA
Whoa. Slow down.

ASTER
Why did I think coming here was a
good idea?

SELINDA
How the hell should I know?

ASTER
I just wanted to get out of the
city for a little bit. Away from
this whole mess.

SELINDA
It's almost like wherever you go,
the past is still there, huh?

ASTER
That's not what's supposed to
happen. I move with purpose, and
momentum follows.

SELINDA
I don't know what that means.

ASTER
I'm the mess. The mess is me.

Aster stands there, sick and crying.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I have to drive back home tomorrow.
I can't go if I'm crazy.

SELINDA
This is maybe more serious than we
thought.

ASTER
Or you don't know what the fuck
you're doing.

SELINDA
Or that. But I might have someone
who can help us.

EXT. PRAIRIE - AFTERNOON

Shimmering heat on a flat horizon. Empty plains.

Selinda's truck moves across a distant road, kicking up dust.

INT. SELINDA'S TRUCK - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Selinda drives. Aster slumps in the passenger seat.

On the radio – Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass. "Tijuana Taxi" or something equally and awfully bouncy.

SELINDA
It's always like this?

ASTER
It likes oldies. I don't.

SELINDA
That's funny.
(to car)
Nice one.

The song skips, starts over. Selinda tosses Aster a granola bar.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Hungry?

Aster takes a bite. In her mouth, it turns into a wad of DRY PINK SCRUBS FABRIC. Aster spits it out as Selinda watches.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Oh, wow. Never seen that before.

ASTER
I haven't eaten anything in two days.

SELINDA
My ex-girlfriend, sophomore year, she was a sleepwalker. Are you doing that?

ASTER
Yes, whenever I close my eyes.

Aster searches her pockets, comes up with a pair of ASPIRIN. She takes them dry, gags.

SELINDA
She would talk in this creepy voice, too. Her parents thought she was having a breakdown.
(beat)
I spent weeks trying everything.

ASTER
And that's how you got into this, I get it.

SELINDA

We broke up and she was never cured. But I saw that the real work is about helping people with their baggage.

ASTER

Is that why you're helping?

SELINDA

My parents think I'm wasting my time with mystical garbage while I could be building a career. They gave me a loan for the shop, but...

(beat)

I'm three months behind on rent. They're waiting for me to give up. I need to show them this actually helps people. That what I do matters.

ASTER

Oh. Yikes.

SELINDA

That, and... I always wanted to be your friend. You had your shit together.

ASTER

I thought I was your nemesis.

SELINDA

Oh, I was just playing. So what's your baggage?

The radio abruptly fuzzes static. A gravelly voice comes up through the sound.

VOICE (ON RADIO)

Tell her. Tell her.

SELINDA

What's that about?

ASTER

Nothing.

SELINDA

Doesn't sound like nothing.

ASTER

What do you want me to say?

SELINDA
The truth would be nice.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
TELL HER. TELL HER.

Selinda hits the brakes, excited.

SELINDA
Oh, shit. That's it. It's using
your guilt and pulling you back
into trauma, get it?

The radio screams louder.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
(to the radio)
What do you want from her?

The truck JOLTS forward on its own. Selinda grabs the wheel.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
She knows. She knows.

Aster clutches her head.

ASTER
Stop it!

The radio crackles with what sounds like laughter.

Aster grabs her stuff. She doesn't want to do this.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

They're in the middle of nowhere. Aster kicks the door of the truck open and starts walking down the road in the hot afternoon.

SELINDA
What does it use, your memories?

Selinda follows, determined.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
Ghost, listen to this. In school, I
was running a whole operation.
Forging absentee slips, notes from
parents.

Aster trips a little.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
This working?

ASTER
No! Stop!

Aster, in visible distress, crossing the asphalt to put distance between them.

SELINDA
Aster caught me selling one to Penny Hays and could have minded her own business, but no, she went straight to Sister Walsh.

ASTER
Shut up!

SELINDA
And I got suspended for "operating a fraudulent enterprise."
Northwestern pulled my scholarship the same week.

Aster EXPLODES.

ASTER
I am a bad person! Okay? I hate myself. Sometimes thinking about all the ways I've fucked up makes my chest hurt. I think I'd die if I didn't keep moving forward.

Beat. Selinda stares -

Behind Aster, way, way down the road.

A dark FIGURE standing in the middle of the country highway.
Aster sees too.

She screws her eyes shut.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Is it still there?

SELINDA
Oh. Yes.

The shadowy figure looks at them, unmoving.

Aster smacks both sides of her face like she's trying to stay awake.

-- **QUICK FLASH:** Devin, a little younger, smiling at us under string lights.

Aster gasps. She slaps herself, harder --

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - LATER (FLASHBACK)

-- and slaps herself again, holding the greasy takeout bag. Outside the medical building at night.

A new text from Devin on her phone screen: "Late delivery, see you at home soon 😊 "

The door to the building behind her opens. Out walks --

Laurel. Cigarette already in her mouth. Tossing a STRESS BALL from hand to hand.

Aster turns. Devin emerges behind her, pleased as punch. Until he sees Aster. Something in his expression shifts.

LAUREL
Hey, you! Whatcha doing here?

Aster lifts the bag.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Oh, sucky. Devin already ate.

Aster catches the innuendo. She looks at him. He shrugs with a crooked smile.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
What is it, tacos? I'll take one.

Aster's gaze is potent. Laurel, blithe and clueless.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
... please?

Disgusted with herself, Aster hands her the bag. Laurel unwraps a taco and takes a sloppy bite.

Laurel MOANS. Conjuring some too-fresh imagery for Aster.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Want some, Dev?

Aster glances down. Laurel is standing in an OIL SLICK. Rainbows swirling around her sneakers. So pretty.

Back up. Devin averts his eyes quickly. Aster hears a huge, rushing roar in her ears –

INT. SELINDA'S TRUCK - MOVING - LATER

Aster's eyes open, back in Selinda's truck.

Buckled in – a couple times, actually, straps crisscrossing her chest.

SELINDA (O.S.)
Oh, shit, finally.

Selinda drives. Aster unbuckles, or tries to.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
(re: seatbelt)
Sorry about that. You should see yourself, Linda Blair. Not pleasant company at all.

ASTER
Stop, I need to throw up.

SELINDA
We're here.

EXT. ELLISON'S HOUSE - LATER

Tucked behind a windbreak of spruce trees is a big country house with a wraparound porch. Single sulphuric porch light. Cicadas BUZZ like chainsaws.

The house is at the corner of a four-way stop. Red stoplight blinking over empty road.

Selinda's truck pulls in.

INT. ELLISON'S HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

The front door opens on Aster and Selinda, standing on the porch wearing approximations of happy expressions.

Facing them is a prim little MAN (70) in round glasses. Small smile, sweater vest. Meet –

SELINDA
Mr. P.

ELLISON
Miss Santos.

SELINDA
(to Aster)
You remember Mr. Pitts. From
school.

Off Aster, who's gone very pale -

ELLISON
Ellison Pitts, English department.
Of course, it was "father" back
then. Come in, come in.

INT. ELLISON'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

She steps inside. It's a 100-year-old farmhouse, but well-kept and tidy. Flowered wallpaper. Boots and dress shoes lined up at the entry.

Ellison shuts the door. Aster notices the other wall is absolutely covered in CRUCIFIXES. They tremble slightly.

ASTER
Wow. Nice.

ELLISON
My wife's. Right this way.

Selinda shoots Aster a warning look.

INT. ELLISON'S DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The dining room is an odd space. TV on casters like the kind you'd find in a '90s classroom. Mounted BUTTERFLIES. Taxidermy BIRDS.

Aster takes this in, standing at the dining room table, pale.

Ellison moves some classics (Homer, Keats) off the table. Selinda drops into a chair. A plaque on top of a shelf - GREAT PLAINS TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2001. Overturned picture frame next to it.

On its own, the frame FLOATS right-side up. A picture of Ellison with a pretty Midwestern LADY, face not quite clear.

Again, sharp look from Selinda. Aster's mouth thins to an innocent line.

ELLISON
I put some tea on. Back in a
moment.

He toddles out. Aster hurries over to the picture and slaps it face-down again.

ASTER
This is your solution?

SELINDA
He's helped me before. Small stuff.
Blessing houses after break-ins,
healing sessions.

ASTER
But he's not a priest anymore! And
you know why?

SELINDA
Why?

ASTER
Because I reported his girlfriend
to the diocese.

SELINDA
You got him defrocked?

ASTER
She was a parishioner, there were
weird power dynamics, damn it –

SELINDA
Christ. Is there anyone you haven't
fucked over here?

ASTER
He seems a little off.

SELINDA
He lost everything to marry her,
then she up and died. Give him a
little fucking grace.

Ellison is there again with a tray of cups, hors d'oeuvres.
Aster and Selinda sit, avoiding eye contact.

ELLISON
I don't often have company. Bonnie
was quite the epicure. I was always
playing catch-up. Still am.
(then)
Are you familiar with the tradition
of ashed cheese?

Aster and Selinda shake their heads. Why would they be?

ELLISON (CONT'D)
Centuries ago, cheesemongers found
that sprinkling ash from a fire was
an excellent preservative.

He turns a block of Morbier cheese toward them. Thin line of
gray ASH in its center. Feeling obligated, Aster tries some.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
My wife used to joke that I could
use her cremains in my own
cheesemaking.

Aster stops chewing.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
(to Aster)
I remember you, you know. Smart,
but insufferable.

She attempts a smile, cheese in cheek.

ASTER
I've changed.

ELLISON
"We know what we are, but not what
we may be." Shakespeare. Life
coaching now, I hear?

She nods.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
How noble. Always looking out for
others' best interests.

The cheese tips off its plate and slides toward the edge of
the desk. Aster SLAMS a hand into the tabletop to stop it
from falling.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
So what brings my former students
to my home?

SELINDA
She needs an exorcism.

Ellison stares between them, expression unreadable.

-- **MOMENTS LATER:** Ellison blusters back in from the kitchen
with a bottle of wine, on edge.

ASTER
Look, I know this is awkward --

ELLISON

Awkward is a word for it. Torturous is another.

ASTER

I was trying to do the right thing back then.

ELLISON

You always were so concerned with propriety. Make no mistake I am ultimately grateful but it doesn't change my opinion of you.

SELINDA

My loves, can we focus on the ghost thing first?

Through the doorway – Aster sees A SHAPE by the stove. Huddled form. The swinging door shuts.

ELLISON

Oh, I think Ms. Adams' past and present problems might be more connected than she realizes.

She realizes all the TAXIDERMY ANIMALS on their display shelf have been rearranged in various sexual positions. Aster tries to put them back.

A box on the shelf tips over on its own. A bunch of GLASS TAXIDERMY EYES tumble out onto the table and floor.

Just then, the TV in the corner fizzles ON. A picture starts to form on the screen. It's the door to Devin's practice.

Aster hurries over, snaps the TV off.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Interesting. Tell me, do you think this spirit is here because of something you did or something you failed to do?

The TV comes right back on. Same image. Aster yanks the cord to kill it. Grips it in both hands.

ASTER

Could you absolve me, and we'll get out of your hair?

ELLISON
I'm not sure I have that authority
anymore, thanks to you. I wish I
could help.

Selinda and Ellison are reflected in the blank TV. Aster
hears a voice -

LAUREL (O.S.)
Hey!

The TV crackles back to life. Aster bathed in blue static.
Selinda sees the blank look start to grow on Aster's face.

LAUREL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey!

Nausea hits. Aster doubles over and RETCHES. Out comes the
cheese, along with a big puff of dry beige BABY FORMULA
POWDER.

She stares at the mess, horrified. Ellison balks.

INT. ELLISON'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bathroom sink. Aster washes her hands and face. Stupid
Hawaiian shirt reflected in the mirror. Selinda and Ellison
crowded in the doorway.

She digs through her pockets. Finds an aspirin. CRUNCH.
Ellison's eyes shift to a spot over Aster's shoulder.

ELLISON
What is that?

They all look. There's a dark human SHAPE visible behind the
shower curtain. Motionless.

ASTER
You can see it?

The three of them stare at each other a moment. Back to the
ominous shadow.

INT. FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Aster and Selinda back into the front hall. Ellison unsteady,
but thinking fast.

ELLISON
I didn't realize the manifestation
was gaining corporeal strength.
(MORE)

ELLISON (CONT'D)

When multiple witnesses can see the same apparition, it means -

SELINDA

Where's your little kit for this?
The office?

She goes.

ASTER

What? It means what?

ELLISON

(to Aster)

How long have you been hosting?

ASTER

Two days. I think?

ELLISON

Dear God. I don't know how you're still alive and enduring this level of spiritual interference. We need to attempt expulsion immediately, or -

ASTER

What?

ELLISON

It will keep getting stronger. And kill you.

INT. ELLISON'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The furniture is all covered in floral doilies and antimacassars. Everything preserved, untouched. A shrine.

Ellison rushes to a cabinet, pulls out a wooden box. Inside: holy water, a rosary.

ELLISON

The longer a spirit remains attached, the stronger the bond. Have you been blacking out?

ASTER

Yes?

Ellison lights candles, ritual precision.

ELLISON
Speaking in the voice of the
damned?

ASTER
No?

Suddenly – THUMP.

They look toward – more CRUCIFIXES hanging on one wall. All of them tipping almost UPSIDE DOWN, then falling to hang right-side up.

The crucifixes turn again, somehow more like a bunch of middle fingers. They drop back.

ASTER (CONT'D)
That's not me. I mean, I'm not
directly responsible.

Selinda reappears with a BIBLE. She pulls one of the spinning crucifixes from the wall and offers it all to Ellison.

Ellison pushes Aster into a nearby armchair.

ELLISON
Yes. All right.

ASTER
All right, what?

He stands in front of Aster, folds his slightly trembling hands and bows his head. Aster and Selinda share a glance.

SELINDA
Oh, we're starting.

ASTER
Should I be doing anything?

Selinda motions for clasped hands. They both do it.

ELLISON
(talking over them)
– though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death –

SELINDA
I could walk through that valley.
Enjoy it, even.

Ellison finishes under his breath, crosses himself. Aster and Selinda do too, a step behind.

He moves behind Aster and raises his hands.

ELLISON

"One sits in the cabinet in the darkness, waiting, and the darkness is terrible. For it is the darkness of emptiness, of nothingness. Deliberately one gives oneself up to be lost in it."

ASTER

I don't know those verses.

ELLISON

Agatha Christie. "The Last Séance."
(then)
Spiritus immundus -

Aster GASPS, head thrown back -

SMASH TO:

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - LATER (FLASHBACK)

- to Laurel and Devin. The medical office. The half-finished taco. Devin avoiding her gaze. Laurel yapping.

LAUREL

... God, you're a lifesaver. It's been a helluva long day, huh, Dev? This one girl fainted in reception after her IUD. Just, BAM! My bowl of Tootsie Rolls went everywhere, and then I spent an hour helping her drink one orange juice while she told me about her hairless cat. It was like, are you sure you need an IUD? For sex? Then we stayed late to -

DEVIN

We should probably get going.
Right, babe?

Devin puts his arm around Aster, but she steps away suddenly.

ASTER

I was studying some research about regret earlier.

Laurel shares a look with Devin: *Here she goes again.*

LAUREL
Okay?

ASTER
Time passing is linked to levels of
regret you experience.

LAUREL
Yeah. Wow.

ASTER
So if you do something rash, you
feel bad immediately, and less as
time passes. But if you don't do
something you should, and time
passes, you feel more regret.

Laurel squints, lost. Devin clears his throat.

LAUREL
Confusing. Anyway, I don't think
about regret.

ASTER
You never feel guilty for anything?

LAUREL
What's the point? Past, future,
whatever. We're all floating.

Aster looks at Laurel. Laurel's expression very purposefully
blank.

Several seconds of heavy silence. A million different
arguments unsaid.

Laurel raises her cigarette. Strikes a match.

Aster grabs her hand before she can light the cigarette.

Their eyes meet over the flame. Understanding.

Laurel knows. Aster knows.

But all Laurel says is —

LAUREL (CONT'D)
You're being super weird. Ow!

The match BURNS down to her thumb. She drops it.

The flame —

Ignites the OIL SLICK. A flash of FIRE around their feet.

ASTER

Shit!

Aster PUSHES Laurel.

Laurel TRIPS.

The taco goes flying. Laurel's limbs pinwheel. Her head –
CRACKS against the curb.

She goes immediately STILL. Aster, hands up in horror. The
flames already burning out.

The regret? Instant.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Laurel?

She bends. Pool of BLOOD spreading under Laurel's head.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

DEVIN (O.S.)

What did you do?

Looming over them. She almost forgot he was there.

ASTER

Me?

DEVIN

You pushed her.

ASTER

I didn't! You –

DEVIN

Is she –

Aster waves her hand in front of Laurel's eyes. Feels for a
pulse. Steadying herself with one hand in the pool of blood.

ASTER

Do something. Help her!

Devin stands motionless. In shock.

Behind him –

A STRANGE WOMAN (60s) suddenly leans over to look. Warm face,
sharp eyes.

STRANGE WOMAN
Oh. That's real terrible.

ASTER
Who the fuck are you?!

There's a POP above. The building sign. Letters going out until only "H E L" is lit. RED LIGHT, blinking on and off –

INT. ELLISON'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellison shines a red pen light in Aster's eyes. Her pupils finally respond.

Aster shoots up. Paces. Panicked.

The room is a disaster. Books flung from shelves, pages torn. Ellison's hair mussed, his glasses askew.

ASTER
Something's wrong. What did you do?

ELLISON
Everything went as planned. More or less.

ASTER
No. Something changed, there was –

SELINDA (O.S.)
So you killed your friend?

Aster freezes. Selinda, arms crossed on the other side of the room. She nods to a tumble of books on the ground nearby.

"SHE" by H. Rider Haggard. "The Murderer Lives at Number 21" by Stanislas-André Steeman, the latter part conveniently covered. "SHE THE MURDERER."

ASTER
Are you serious. It's not even proper grammar!

Aster picks up one of the books. Underneath –

A framed photo. Ellison with his pretty wife BONNIE (60) – the woman who just appeared in Aster's memory.

Stunned, she points at Bonnie in the picture. Then to Ellison.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Oh my God.

Ellison straightens, cleans his glasses. Hands shaking.

ASTER (CONT'D)

You —

ELLISON

What?

Aster goes to him, grabs his sweater vest, horrified. He flinches, sad and tiny.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

It was an accident!

ASTER

What did you do?!

ELLISON

It was an accident!

SELINDA

What did I miss?

ELLISON

"Memory is the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled." Jean Paul Richter.

ASTER

Jean Paul fuck me!

ELLISON

Ms. Adams!

ASTER

Oh, my God. I can't believe this.

SELINDA

What did I miss?

Aster's head cocks sharply, uncomfortably, unnaturally.

ASTER

His fucking wife is in here too! He channeled her, or something —

ELLISON

It was an accident! She just came to me, unbidden —

In her pocket, Aster's PHONE RINGS. She jumps. Ellison SCREAMS in fright.

EXT. BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Aster, blinking hard to clear her head, finds privacy on the back porch. Phone to her ear.

ASTER
Hey. I've been trying -

DEVIN (ON PHONE)
Is this some kind of sick fucking
joke?

ASTER
What? What is?

DEVIN (ON PHONE)
I don't know how you're doing it.
But I don't want any more
voicemails from you in your stupid
Laurel voice.

ASTER
What?

DEVIN (ON PHONE)
"Visualizing positive outcomes,"
what even is that? She would never
say that.

ASTER
I didn't -

DEVIN (ON PHONE)
You're right, I'd rather hear her
right now, and not you. But it's
sick. You're sick, Aster.

A slap of honesty she didn't ask for.

ASTER
Dev -

DEVIN (ON PHONE)
Don't call me.

The line clicks. Aster holds the phone, frozen.

Hazy night falls around the farmhouse. Cicadas SCREAM.

INT. ELLISON'S DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aster staggers back inside. Ellison is already TEARING mirrors off walls, his movements frantic. Selinda catches a falling picture frame.

ASTER

You're going to fix this. I have to get home.

ELLISON

Quite right. I have something else. Mirrors hold images - so we draw them out.

A floor-length mirror nearly topples as he wrestles it into position at the table. His hands shake violently.

SELINDA

Mr. P, you're kind of -

ELLISON

(to Aster)

Bonnie's weighing on my mind, per usual. That's the problem. It must be.

He gulps from his glass of wine. Aster grabs the glass from his trembling hand and throws it into the wall, splashing purple.

ASTER

Now.

ELLISON

Very well. You. There.

Ellison angles one mirror against dining table with manic precision. Aster stands where he indicates.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

"Through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Corinthians.

ASTER

Cool. Let's go.

Looks at her, sudden intensity.

ELLISON

Did you know, by canon law, there are parts of the priesthood I can never escape? Even 10 years later. If asked, I must hear confessions.

ASTER

That doesn't seem like a healthy relationship with the past. Or a thing that makes sense.

ELLISON

Well. You know, old habits... if you need to talk.

Selinda lights candles at each corner of the dining table. Ellison pulls the curtains. It's dark.

ASTER

(to Selinda)

You know what you're doing?

SELINDA

Oh, sure! I've read tons about this.

ELLISON

Look into the center mirror. Do not turn away, no matter what you see.

She does. Candlelight flickers across her face. Aster stares into her own drawn reflection. At first, nothing.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Let the veils between the worlds grown thin.

In her periphery, she thinks she sees movement in another mirror. She glances over.

Her reflection there is GROTESQUE. A CORPSE with her movements, skin purple and distended.

She recoils in shock.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

The center glass!

Shaken, she turns back. Her reflection is a bit slower, delayed.

Then — a brief glimpse of Laurel and Bonnie standing behind her. Her eyes move to them.

Her reflection SMILES.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Is Bonnie there?

Aster leans forward, looking in the edges of the mirror. There's a RED LIGHT glinting somewhere inside.

Her head suddenly slams forward into the glass. CRACK.

Her body goes rigid against the glass, lines webbing out from her head.

Her voice, odd and smashed against the mirror –

ASTER
He was lyin' earlier.

Selinda stares. Ellison has a beatific look on his face.

ELLISON
She's channeling beautifully!

Aster reels back, her head smashing the mirror again –

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Aster jolts back, now sitting in an unfamiliar car.

BONNIE in the driver's seat next to her.

Aster doesn't move, unsure what the hell is happening. RED LIGHT blinking over them at the crossroads near Ellison's house.

BONNIE
He was lyin' earlier.

Aster. Side-eye. *What the fuck?*

Bonnie looks right at her. Smiling warmly.

BONNIE (CONT'D)
We did go to Galveston. It was wonderful. He wore a shirt like that one, in fact.

Nods to Aster, her stupid shirt.

BONNIE (CONT'D)
And his good pants. Ruined 'em while we were looking for seashells, but he didn't complain once.

ASTER

Um. I don't -

BONNIE

But that's not what he was thinkin'
when he messed this up for you.

Through the windshield, down the road in the dark, Aster can see LAUREL, her body twisting in a weird dance. The car radio comes on. Garbled oldies song.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

He was thinkin' of this night right
here.

The CRUNCH of footsteps on gravel. Another shadowy form coming up to the car now.

It's Ellison. He bends to the open window.

ELLISON

Darling, are you coming in?

But the Bonnie of this memory is now DEAD. Eyes milky and face slack.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Darling? Bonnie?

A bit of panic. He reaches in, touches her cold body.

Beat. With calm urgency now -

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Bonnie, my love, are you all right?

Aster leans around to look at him. Ellison glances from Bonnie to her. She's surprised by the eye contact.

A hot line of BLOOD trails down Aster's face.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Bonnie, I need you to stay in her.
Just a bit longer. I'll figure out
how to communicate properly, I
promise.

A second of confusion. Then - outrage. Aster launches herself across Bonnie toward him -

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ELLISON'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

— and wakes with her hands around the neck of the real, present Ellison, her head bleeding from the mirror.

Selinda is there with a paper towel for Aster, shocked.

ASTER

"Stay in her a bit longer" you son
of a bitch?!

ELLISON

(choking)

Ms. Adams, please —

SELINDA

Okay, sweetie, maybe don't strangle
the guy —

Selinda tries to pull Aster away from him. She holds on.

ASTER

You've been lying through your
fucking teeth!

ELLISON

I just need more time with her —

ASTER

More time?

ELLISON

There are things I never got to say
to —

ASTER

You're killing me! For what?!

ELLISON

I miss her.

She lets him go.

ASTER

What about the other one?

ELLISON

(shaking his head)

Your friend won't rest until her
business is finished. She's angrier
than my wife.

ASTER
That's a dumb rule. So I'm stuck
like this?

ELLISON
Give her what she wants or convince
her she doesn't need it. It's the
only way to get rid of her.

Aster stares at him. The full weight of her situation sinking
in. Then she turns and sprints out of the room.

Ellison and Selinda look at each other.

A second later, Aster runs back in. She grabs the WINE BOTTLE
Ellison left on the table.

Suddenly cracks it on the edge of the table, takes the jagged
edge, and SLITS HER WRISTS.

Ellison and Selinda jump up in horror.

SELINDA
What the hell?!

ELLISON
Mother of God!

Aster watches the blood run from the cuts.

ASTER
That was a little brash maybe.

INT. ELLISON'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Frantic. Aster allowing herself to be hustled around, Selinda
pressing a towel to her arm. She and Ellison talking at the
same time.

EXT. PLAINS - NIGHT

Black night on the plains. A blip of Selinda's headlights on
the horizon, moving fast.

Other distant lights blink on and off - irrigation
sprinklers, radio towers, faraway towns.

EXT. RURAL HOSPITAL - LATER

Selinda's truck speeds up to a small-town hospital. The only car in the lot. Acid-blue light in the hospital windows, fizzling red sign. EMERGENCY ROOM.

INT. RURAL HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Gray lighting and carpet inside. And when Ellison and Selinda burst in carrying Aster, she's gray too.

The NURSE at the reception stands in shock behind his glass partition. Chewing a tongue depressor.

Everyone rushes through the doors to the operating suite.

Aster looks back. In the waiting room, she SEES HERSELF, sitting in one of the chairs, her hands covered in blood -

SLAM TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Quiet. Later. Aster sleeps in a hospital bed. Wrists bandaged. Bloody clothes in a pile on a chair.

The room is otherwise empty. Beep of equipment.

Her eyes flutter open. The beeping, staccato. She sits up, groggy. Checks her bandages.

Eyes catch an iridescent OIL SLICK spreading across the floor.

She swings her legs over the bed, avoiding the puddle. Hospital gown ridiculous and open in the back.

An IV POLE starts to wheel itself toward her.

ASTER

(stern)

Stay.

The nurse pokes his head in. Seems surprised she's awake.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Hi. I'm ready to go.

He holds up a finger, rushes off.

Aster looks at the slick again, rainbow swirls dancing in the fluorescent light.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Okay. I'm listening.

LAUREL steps out from behind the IV pole, which of course isn't wide enough to hide a person. Pink scrubs, bright smile.

LAUREL
Well, this is awkward.

ASTER
You goddamn motherfuck.

LAUREL
Oh, Aster. Be nice. Unless you want to replay the whole night again.

Laurel sits in the visitor's chair, crosses her legs. The oil slick spreads toward Aster's feet.

ASTER
You look good. For being -

LAUREL
Dead? I know. You, on the other hand, look like total garbage.

ASTER
Had a rough couple of days.

LAUREL
Try being murdered. That'll fuck your week right up.

ASTER
About that -

LAUREL
Oh, you wanna talk? Great.

Aster's body feels lighter. Her feet lift slightly off the floor.

ASTER
Don't -

LAUREL
Why? Are you embarrassed?

Aster attempts to close her gown.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Take me to Devin.

ASTER
I'd rather die.

Laurel rolls her eyes: *no duh*.

ASTER (CONT'D)
You could have had anyone.

LAUREL
I wanted him.

ASTER
He was never yours.

LAUREL
You made it easy.

ASTER
How long?

LAUREL
College, babygirl.

Aster's eyes fill with tears but she remains venomous.

ASTER
Put me down you goddamn piece of
shit or kill me.

LAUREL
Aww. You know I won't let you off
that easy. Neither will that old
man, as long as his wife is in here
with me.

Laurel moves to stand beside her now.

She pokes a finger to Aster's TUMMY. Meaningfully –

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Does Dev know about this?

Shocked, Aster slaps her hand away.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
I'm wearing your skin, you can't
hide anything from me.

ASTER
You can't have him.

LAUREL
He doesn't love you. Don't die for
that, okay?

Aster suddenly, dramatically, rips off her EKG. She pulls herself to the ground using its cords. The monitor flatlines.

The nurse returns, chart in hand, and stops dead seeing Aster levitating slightly still, gown flapping open. Laurel gone.

ASTER

I feel great now, thank you.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Aster has her bloody clothes on again, hospital gown over them. She scurries to the big doors to the waiting room.

ELLISON (O.S.)

This is no hyperbole, sir. She has perhaps hours left -

Ellison's voice at the reception window. Aster freezes at the doors, listening. Murmur of voices.

ELLISON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Well, the issue, you see, is more an otherworldly one. Her possessions number two -

SELINDA (O.S.)

Did she ask for us?

Suddenly, both Laurel and Bonnie are standing beside Aster in the hallway.

LAUREL

Hours left. Hear that?

BONNIE

He always did want to do right by his kids.

Bonnie reaches for the door. Aster grabs her wrist.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

ASTER

Excuse me.

BONNIE

Still think you know what's best for everyone, don't you, darlin'? I just wanna say hi.

ASTER

How do you think that will go?

Aster moves in the opposite direction, taking out her cellphone. The battery is on its last legs.

LAUREL

What are you going to do?

She dials DEVIN. It goes immediately to voicemail. She tries again.

This time, the line connects. Aster perks up, evading another distracted nurse behind a curtain. It whips open, supernaturally, the second the nurse is past.

ASTER (ON PHONE)

Dev?

There's no response.

ASTER (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Look, I don't know if you're there, but I just need to tell you. I think I'm about to be, well, kind of dead. And, I'm sorry, I accept your anger, but I don't want to leave things this way. This might be my last chance to make it right.

She waits.

ASTER (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Will you talk to me?

DEVIN (ON PHONE)

This is your problem, Aster, you never respected my boundaries -

Laurel quickly appears and leans over to the phone.

LAUREL (ON PHONE)

I'm coming for you, Pinky.

DEVIN (ON PHONE)

Huh?!

Aster pushes her away, deadly look. The call drops. Her cell is dead.

ASTER

Right. Well, great. Pinky?!

LAUREL
(re: herself)
The Brain.

ASTER
(jealous shock)
That's the stupidest thing I've
ever fucking heard.

LAUREL
Imagine how scared he is, because
of you. Are you really going to
leave it like that? He has no one.
He's probably pacing back and
forth. He probably wants to kill
himself.

ASTER
(uncertain)
No.

LAUREL
He's talked about it before. He
hates his life. He was so miserable
when he wasn't with me. You made
him miserable.

ASTER
Stop it.

LAUREL
The least you can do is look him in
the eye when you apologize.

ASTER
Sure. That's exactly what you want.

LAUREL
That's what he wants. He and I, we
got along so well because we were
always honest with each other. On
each other's level. You, he always
felt like he was disappointing or
something because your standards
were so, like, impossible to meet.

Aster paces a little. Lost.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Whatever. Like. I can't go anywhere
so you're going to die or you can
face him. One honest conversation
before you go, y'know?

Aster's face contorts as she weighs all the terrible options.

-- **DOWN THE HALL:** Bonnie is still back by the waiting room entrance. Her hand phases through the handle, no grip.

BONNIE

Dang. I can't seem to -

Aster grabs her and hauls her the other direction.

EXT. RURAL HOSPITAL - BACK DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Aster pushes Bonnie out the back and follows, Laurel on their heels.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

A wide look at the dark hospital parking lot. Aster by herself now, sans ghosts.

She glances toward the hospital entrance. The red sign over the door no longer says EMERGENCY ROOM.

It's the sign for Devin's medical building. NORTHEAST HOLDINGS. Blinking out until it's just "H E L."

Just then, a POLICE OFFICER pulls into a spot nearby. K9 unit. The German shepherd in the back HOWLS. Officer looking her way -

I/E. SELINDA'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Aster hops into Selinda's truck. The keys are in the cupholder.

She grabs them, starts the car. The radio turns on. "What Kind of Girl Are You," Everly Brothers.

She turns off the radio. It flips back on. *Fine.*

She flicks the switch for headlights, revealing Selinda standing in front of the car.

SELINDA

What are you doing?

Aster stares. Rolls down the window to hear her.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

That's my truck.

ASTER
I'm borrowing it.

SELINDA
Without asking.

ASTER
I'm asking now. Can I borrow your truck?

SELINDA
No.

ASTER
Well, I tried.

Aster shifts gears.

SELINDA
Stop!

ASTER
I have to see him and apologize. I don't expect you to understand because I know it doesn't make much sense.

SELINDA
You can't go if you're crazy, you said yourself.

ASTER
I embrace my authentic journey.

She puts it in reverse. Selinda grabs the door handle.

SELINDA
This is insane!

ASTER
Probably!

She backs up. Selinda has to let go.

SELINDA
Do you even know where he is?

ASTER
(out the window)
There's still time to make the funeral! I'll figure it out.

She speeds away with the confidence of someone who has never figured anything out, or driven a large truck before.

EXT. CROSSROADS - LATER

Flat lands under a black slab of sky. Some stars. Crickets. Selinda's truck stops at a crossroads.

INT. SELINDA'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Aster consults an old-fashioned paper map, unsure where they are without a working phone. Radio cycling through songs.

She drops the map, grips the wheel, decides on a direction. Turns hard to the right. The truck lurches.

BONNIE (O.S.)
You're gonna get us killed.

Bonnie sits in the passenger seat, looking concerned.

ASTER
So? You're already dead. And I
thought you hated me.

BONNIE
Hatred really ain't my thing. But I
never did understand why you felt
the need to stick your nose in our
business.

ASTER
I thought I was helping.

BONNIE
Honey, I was nearly forty. I didn't
need help from a seventeen-year-old
know-it-all.

Aster wipes sweat from her brow. Bonnie looks at her pointedly.

BONNIE (CONT'D)
You're not doing so good.

ASTER
Says the ghost.

BONNIE
Dead don't mean wrong. Your dying
ain't gonna help me get back to my
husband, so slow down.

The radio blares static, then settles on something calmer, maybe The Turtles.

LAUREL (O.S.)
(from backseat)
Need me to drive?

Aster swerves slightly, checking the mirror. Laurel leans forward between the seats.

ASTER
Don't.

LAUREL
(to Bonnie)
You wanna see something sweet? How
we met him?

ASTER
No.

LAUREL
You were so awkward. So desperate
to belong somewhere. Remember?

The song on the radio seems to slow and morph around her voice. Fog creeps across the windshield.

BONNIE
(careful)
Honey -

Through the mist on the windshield, Aster sees the sparkle of lights on the horizon -

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

String lights criss-crossing above. The back deck of a college house, mid-party. Voices and music.

Aster, a bit younger, exits the house, closing a sliding door against the noise and heat inside. She carries a psychology book, highlighter wedged inside.

At the edge of the porch, DEVIN has the same idea. Hair even floppier, glasses glinting gold. Chemistry book under his elbow as he leans on the porch railing.

It's just the two of them. He smiles at her over one shoulder.

ASTER
Hi.

DEVIN

Hey.

She sits on the porch steps, opens her textbook. Devin glances over, curious.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Studying at a party? That's either very dedicated or very antisocial.

ASTER

Probably both.

He holds up his chemistry book.

DEVIN

Pre-med. You?

ASTER

Psych.

DEVIN

Question. What condition leads to people like us, coming to parties to read?

She smiles – the first genuine happiness we've seen from her.

ASTER

I haven't learned that yet.

He moves closer, sits beside her. Nods to the book.

DEVIN

It must be fascinating. What's the most terrible decision you think people make?

ASTER

Staying in situations that aren't good for them because they're afraid of change.

DEVIN

Wow, you were ready with that one. Really specific.

ASTER

Is it?

DEVIN

(shrugs)

I've been with the same girl since senior year of high school.

(MORE)

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Sometimes I wonder if I'm just
comfortable.

Aster looks at him. An intimacy to this moment that feels a
little electric.

ASTER
What would not-comfortable look
like?

DEVIN
I don't know. Taking risks. Talking
to strangers about psychology.

Their eyes meet.

ASTER
I'm Aster.

DEVIN
Devin. You write a lot of notes.

ASTER
I'm trying to understand how things
work.
(vulnerable)
My parents have been married twenty-
five years and they barely speak. I
want to do better than that.

Then Laurel steps up right behind them both, a dark shape.

LAUREL
There you are! I've been looking
everywhere for you.

The spell breaks. Aster turns, startled.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
(dazzling smile)
Hi there. I'm Laurel, her roommate.

She's drunk, confident, everything Aster isn't.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
What are you two talking about so
seriously?

DEVIN
(still looking at Aster)
Life choices.

LAUREL

Oh God, don't let her psychoanalyze you. She'll have you convinced you're damaged by morning.

She plops down between them, effectively cutting Aster off.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Hey! I'm pre-med too. What's your specialty going to be?

Devin hesitates, glances at Aster around Laurel.

DEVIN

Obstetrics, I hope. My dad has a practice.

LAUREL

I love that! Babies mean new beginnings, fresh starts. That's so beautiful.

Aster watches as Laurel infects him with her enthusiasm. Her connection feels fragile suddenly, easily overshadowed.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Aster's all about seeing what's wrong with people. I'm more interested in what's right.

Devin looks between them. Laurel's energy magnetic, uncomplicated. Aster stands.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Party not doing it for you either?

ASTER

Not really. Ten minutes, then I turn into a pumpkin.

DEVIN

Pumpkin?

ASTER

(embarrassed)

I mean... I should probably go.

DEVIN

That's too bad. Why don't I -

But Laurel grabs his arm.

LAUREL

Stay! I was just about to suggest
we raid the kitchen for decent
food. This party has terrible
snacks.

Devin hesitates, looking at Aster. She smiles.

ASTER

See you around.

She heads for the door.

LAUREL

Come on, she'll be fine. She's
always fine.

Aster glances back as Devin lets Laurel lead him away. He
pauses to smile at her.

Then ghost-Laurel is beside Aster again, too close. Murmurs
in her ear.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

You left. Five minutes later, I
gave him a blowjob in the bathroom.
That's how it went - imagine what
could have been different if you
stayed.

He's still smiling, the most adorable person she's ever seen.
But the smile seems to go a little stiff and strained.

Aster turns suddenly, grabs ghost-Laurel, and pitches her
over the rail of the deck. She lands with a distant THUD -

SMASH TO:

I/E. SELINDA'S TRUCK - LATER

Aster sits dazed in the driver's seat. Her hands still grip
the steering wheel, which is turned violently to the left.

BONNIE (O.S.)

That was real pretty.

LAUREL (O.S.)

Too bad it didn't last.

ASTER

Shut up, shut up a second!

The truck is UPSIDE-DOWN. She's crashed it in the ditch.

She unbuckles and kicks the driver's side door open. Crawls out. Takes off the hospital gown and tosses it back inside.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Selinda's gonna kill us.

LAUREL (O.S.)
That was all you.

Aster, covered in dried blood, bandaged wrists, in the middle of nowhere in the glare of the headlights. Throws a tiny tantrum.

ASTER
Fuck shit fuck!

She can see a slightly brighter glow in the distance that promises civilization. Starts that way.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Aster limps along the empty road, favoring one ankle. Her breath huffs, cicadas buzz.

BONNIE (O.S.)
You're gonna bleed to death before
you get there.

Bonnie slides in beside her.

ASTER
I'm fine.

LAUREL (O.S.)
He won't recognize you.

Laurel hovers along behind, still upside down for some reason.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
But just think how relieved he'll
be to see you. Even like this.

Aster can't answer.

In the distance, headlights. Aster waves for help. The car slows, then speeds up when the driver sees her clearly.

BONNIE
(re: car)
Can't say I blame 'em.

Aster stops walking. Stares down the empty road ahead.

ASTER
What's it like?

BONNIE
What?

ASTER
You know.

Death.

BONNIE
Oh, it sneaks up on ya. Same as the
regret.

ASTER
How am I supposed to be okay with
knowing this just...

BONNIE
What?

ASTER
Keeps going?

The weight of this settles. No one answers.

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - LATER

The 7-Eleven Aster already visited once. Neon lights in the
night. Lonely gas pumps.

She toddles up out of a field and across the lot to the
entrance.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - CONTINUOUS

DING DONG. An attendant too distracted to notice her, walking
in with her bloody clothes.

-- **AT A CLOTHING RACK:** Another too-large novelty T-shirt on a
hanger.

-- **AT THE COUNTER:** Aster, covered in blood and dirt, across
from the distracted clerk. Aster sniffs, looks around. Could
be a normal night, if not for -- well, everything.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - BATHROOM - LATER

The same bathroom as before. The same light, flickering in the same way. Aster's face in the mirror, really fucking fed up with it.

ASTER
Do you mind?

Laurel, to one side, flicking the light switch as Bonnie watches.

LAUREL
You focus really hard on the memory
of what it felt like. Am I making
sense? I don't know if I am.

BONNIE
Reckon I could try?

They trade places. Bonnie's fingers slowly grapple around the switch. She manages to turn the light off.

BONNIE (CONT'D)
I did it!

Bonnie and Laurel clap happily. At the sink, Aster sighs. The light comes on again.

She takes an aspirin, her hands trembling.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - MOMENTS LATER

Aster exits the bathroom in the oversized shirt, as cleaned up as she can manage.

She approaches the counter, grabbing a bottle of aspirin and fishing for money. The CLERK barely glances up.

LAUREL (O.S.)
We need to get moving.

BONNIE (O.S.)
Honey, you should wait for Ellison.
He'll know what to do.

ASTER
(to clerk)
Do you have a payphone?

CLERK
(not looking at her)
What's a payphone?

BONNIE (O.S.)
E. can drive you proper.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Call Dev.

Aster sways slightly, gripping the counter.

ASTER
Never mind.

She slides a few bills toward the clerk.

LAUREL (O.S.)
What's your plan, then?

BONNIE (O.S.)
Let's wait for help, sugar.

The clerk bags the aspirin, distracted. She attempts a smile.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Think of Devin.

She heads toward the exit.

ASTER
Can you two argue somewhere else?

She freezes mid-step.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Don't tell me what to do.

Aster's body goes rigid. She veers to the left, then is yanked to the right.

ASTER
Stop it.

The clerk – doesn't notice at all.

Aster's body jerks forward, then back, invisible hands fighting over her.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Let me!

She reaches for the door. Her hand misses once, twice.

The clerk is watching TikToks. No bother.

LAUREL (O.S.)
I'm not waiting for an old man.

BONNIE (O.S.)
That old man's my husband, trollop.

Finally, she grabs the handle. She marches through the door.

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - CONTINUOUS

Aster stumbles outside, her body moving erratically. She slams into a parked car.

ASTER
Enough!

She waits for her body to relax. The car alarm SCREAMS as she limps away into the darkness.

EXT. WIND FARM - NIGHT

Aster walks alone on the dark road, wind turbine beacons flashing red above like a constellation of warnings.

She stops, exhausted. Behind her, headlights approach. The car is on her before she can step off the road, and maybe she doesn't care anyway.

It's a big white van. It stops. A long moment. Then -

ELLISON (O.S.)
"Remorse is cureless - the disease
Not even God can heal - "

ASTER
Oh my God.

ELLISON (O.S.)
"For 't is His institution -
The complement of hell."

Selinda hops out of the passenger side and beelines for Aster. She loops her arms around her.

ASTER
How'd you find me?

Selinda pulls back and punches Aster in the arm, hard.

SELINDA
We followed my truck, you little
monster.

INT. ELLISON'S VAN - MOVING - LATER

Aster lies in the backseat, Selinda and Ellison in front.
Aster's phone recharges in a cupholder.

Dark prairie passes the windows.

SELINDA

All good?

She isn't. After a second -

ASTER

Why are you doing this?

SELINDA

What do you mean?

ASTER

You could have stayed at the
hospital. Called someone. Let me
figure this out myself.

SELINDA

And miss all this fun?

ASTER

I'm serious.

SELINDA

Sweetie, I know you are. You're
always serious.

(then)

I remember, after senior prom -

ASTER

(bleary)

Enchantment under the sea.

SELINDA

Yes, but the afterparty was out at
GG's. My date bailed on me. I was
stranded, remember? But you made
sure I got home.

She turns. Their gazes meet.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

You had your moments.

Aster smiles. From the driver's seat -

ELLISON

Ladies. I'm wondering if we might consider alternative arrangements for our current surplus passengers.

SELINDA

Oh boy. He's been rambling about -

ELLISON

Different hosts. A more suitable distribution.

ASTER

What does that mean?

ELLISON

I'm still formulating the particulars.

His knuckles whiten on the wheel.

SELINDA

Laurel wants Devin. And Bonnie -

ELLISON

Bonnie needs to come home where she belongs.

ASTER

Which is where?

ELLISON

With me.

Aster and Selinda exchange another look.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Sometimes doing the right thing requires considerable sacrifice. I've an idea, for an unconventional ceremony -

SELINDA

But it's basic extraction. Right?

Ellison's eyes in the rearview mirror, round glasses catching light. He doesn't answer.

ASTER

(re: Laurel)

Could you take her too?

ELLISON

I doubt she would allow it with the fixation she has on your beloved.

SELINDA

Your husband, he must have been some catch, huh? Really handsome or something?

ASTER

Yes, or something.

SELINDA

How'd he propose? Was it fancy?

ASTER

You know I can't answer that without -

Aster crosses her eyes.

SELINDA

Girl, no, it's more like -

She rolls her eyes back in her head.

Aster mimics the look, only the whites of her eyes showing.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

That's it.

Aster stays that way, a long, long beat. Suddenly -

-- **THE MORNING:** Harsh dawn slams across Aster's face, her eyes still rolled back.

INT. ELLISON'S VAN - STATIONARY - MORNING

Aster rolls up from the backseat. They've parked in a wheat field in the middle of nowhere, engine ticking.

SELINDA (O.S.)

You really think this will work?

ELLISON (O.S.)

It must, Miss Santos. She's too weak to fight it now.

She peers through the windshield. Ellison has spread a blanket on the ground. A cardboard box nearby.

She tries the door. Locked.

Aster reaches up, beeps the horn, startling them.

ASTER
Little help?

They look at her but don't move. Selinda takes a hit from her vape. Ellison quickly puts on a necktie, crookedly.

ASTER (CONT'D)
What are you doing? Let me out.

Ellison lifts a garment bag. Unzips it. A WEDDING DRESS spills out, ivory silk yellowed with age.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Oh, fuck me.

She flings herself at the door.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Selinda opens the van. Aster tumbles out, catching herself.

SELINDA
I had a feeling you wouldn't like this one.

ASTER
What is this?

SELINDA
So it's a more advanced technique than I'm used to. But Mr. P knows what he's doing. I think.

ELLISON (O.S.)
Ms. Adams, you've nothing to worry about. I'm simply remarrying Bonnie through you.

ASTER
There has to be something less creepy? Selinda?

They come around the van. He pulls out an old prayer book. Hands it to Selinda.

ELLISON
If you would assist by reading the responses.

ASTER
(to Selinda)
Hold on.

ELLISON
Please. Take your place.

ASTER
The funeral. It starts in an hour.
We could be there by now.

ELLISON
What death has parted, love shall
unite. Please. Bonnie, if you will?

Aster stiffens, her eyes wide. Her jaw almost locked.

ASTER
I don't -

Then, like a limp puppet, she is walked over to stand beside Ellison. He produces a knife.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Wait.

ELLISON
Ms. Adams -

ASTER
Wait, I want to confess.

SELINDA
To murder?!

ASTER
No, just confess.

SELINDA
(almost disappointed)
Oh.

ASTER
(to Ellison)
You said you had to.

He hesitates, the knife glinting.

ELLISON
Yes. Very well.

EXT. ELLISON'S VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Aster sits in the van with Ellison standing just outside the sliding door. Makeshift confession booth.

ELLISON

(formal)

In the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ASTER

Bless me, Father, for I have
sinned. It's been... I don't know.
Years.

ELLISON

What brings you to confession?

ASTER

Um. Well. Things have been very
weird lately.

ELLISON

Yes.

ASTER

I feel like I'm being punished, but
I don't feel like it's all my
fault.

ELLISON

Hardly a confession, then, is it?

ASTER

(quickly)

I had a hysterectomy. Two years
ago. I never told Devin.

The first time she's said it out loud.

ASTER (CONT'D)

He wants kids and I - I let him
think we were trying. Until he
stopped trying with me.

At the front of the van, Selinda is too close not to
overhear. She shifts uncomfortably. Ellison still holds the
knife.

ELLISON

Is that all?

ASTER

I know I'm never present. I'm always planning the next thing, the next move. I missed my whole life because I was too busy organizing everyone else's. Trying to control what I never could.

ELLISON

Do you repent of these sins?

ASTER

I repent of... Yeah. I repent.

ELLISON

Then in the name of -

Aster suddenly jumps out and LUNGES for the knife.

But her body jerks backward, yanked by invisible hands. Ellison dodges.

BONNIE (O.S.)

Not yet, sugar. He's got more to do.

Aster struggles against the ghostly grip, reaching desperately for the blade just out of reach.

ASTER

Let me go!

Ellison recovers, straightening his glasses.

ELLISON

A commendable try, Ms. Adams. Go in peace, your sins are forgiven. And may God have mercy on your soul.

(then)

Now, let us begin the ceremony proper.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Back to Ellison's little ceremonial area. Aster is shivering, joints stiff. The wedding dress arms are tied oddly around her shoulders, like a cape.

Ellison takes a breath, steeling himself.

ELLISON

What was separated by flesh shall be united in spirit.

He comes toward the frozen Aster with his hands out, lips pursed. Like he wants a kiss.

ASTER
(horrified)
What are you doing?

He comes closer.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Stop.

But she can't move. Ellison closes his eyes, leans in.

ELLISON
My darling wife. I promise to
shield your spirit until the end.

He KISSES her.

Aster's eyes are wide with disgust over his shoulder. It's maybe a second or two longer than it should be. Selinda can't hide her discomfort.

SELINDA
Mr. P.

He pulls back, eyes still closed. Aster spits.

ASTER
Get away from me!

ELLISON
Now we proceed to communion.

From his box he retrieves a loaf of bread and wine bottle.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
The body of my beloved, broken by
this world, but made whole again in
mine.

He breaks the bread, stuffs some in Aster's mouth. It turns into GREEN STRESS BALL bits.

Ellison lifts the wine bottle.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
The blood of my beloved, shed in
loneliness, but welcomed into new
flesh.

He pours the wine into a glass. It's black as motor oil.

SELINDA

Oh. It's my turn.
 (reading stiffly from the
 book)
 "What was separated shall dwell
 together in one vessel."

Finally, Ellison brings an URN out of the box. Aster's eyes follow it.

ASTER

Hold on. Is that —

ELLISON

And the essence of my beloved,
 preserved through love. Ready to
 find a new home.

SELINDA

"Let no living soul put asunder
 what death has joined."

ASTER

Selinda —

He sprinkles gray ASH into the wine.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I'm not about to —

ELLISON

Now I drink, and we are united
 forever. Across every realm, every
 existence, every possible world.

SELINDA

"From dust you came, to flesh you
 shall return."

He offers the cup. Aster gags and turns her face to the side. He blinks, watching her stoically.

ELLISON

Someone has to give the bride away.

He grabs Aster by the hair and forces her to drink. In her mouth, it's viscous as blood, running down her cheeks. She sputters.

ASTER

Gag a fucking maggot —

She looks up. Ellison has the KNIFE again.

ELLISON

Do you willingly part with the
deceased and allow her to come into
my body?

ASTER

What are you doing?

ELLISON

Do you?

ASTER

It depends what you're about to do.

He shrugs.

ELLISON

It works either way.

SELINDA (O.S.)

Wait —

LAUREL (O.S.)

You fucker —

He lifts the knife for a blow and SHOVES Aster down —

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

— right into a chair.

Not in the present, but back on that night. Aster now in a
cold hospital waiting room. Bloody hands, alone.

She meets the stare of the desk clerk. Empty eyes. Aster
smiles thinly.

Then, through the front entrance, Aster sees Devin pass
outside with an EMT.

Aster stands, surprised. Where is he going?

He reaches his parked car. Turns tearfully to the EMT, who
says something comforting. Devin's lips tremble.

He suddenly breaks into a SOB and drops his head to the EMT's
shoulder. An awkward pat.

He controls himself. Lifts his face. Catches sight of Aster
through the glass.

A long, cloudy look that seems to go through her. Aster stares back. He sniffs.

And he looks away, reaching for the car door.

ASTER

Wait.

He gets into his car. Starts it.

Aster realizes she's being abandoned.

She heads for the exit to chase him down, but he's gone. She stops near the front desk, helpless, SECURITY GUARD watching her.

VOICE (O.S.)

Kill him.

Aster frowns. She heard something. A whisper.

ASTER

Did you hear that?

The security guard frowns at her darkly. *Another one*, the look says.

There's a camera above the security desk, RED LIGHT blinking on her like an eye.

That light seems to BRIGHTEN with each blink. Aster stares up at it, dull and unresponsive.

The sliding front door opens in front of her.

VOICE (O.S.)

Kill him.

She looks around. She definitely heard it that time. Through the open door –

The ROAR of an approaching truck.

SMASH TO:

I/E. ASTER'S CAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

HOOOONK!

Aster jolts. Still bathed in RED, but suddenly somehow in her car. Half in an intersection under a RED STOPLIGHT.

Hands still bloody. Still that night.

An angry driver in a truck speeds around her.

She looks around, confused.

But after a moment, puts the car in drive and continues through the stoplight.

EXT. SUBURBS – LATER (FLASHBACK)

Aster speeds through the city, passing a darkened theme park, rollercoaster track like a ribcage against the evening sky.

Touristy barbecue joints, bright neon signs. Open country.

EXT. FIELD – LATER (FLASHBACK)

Middle-of-nowhere interstate. Black sky, black horizon.

Aster's car, alone on the two-lane road. It pulls over.

INT. ASTER'S CAR – LATER (FLASHBACK)

Inside, Aster cries. Huge choking sobs. She doesn't know what the hell is going on or what to do. Worst night of her life.

Then – "Maybe Tomorrow" by the Everly Brothers. Absolutely BLASTING through her car stereo.

Aster screams and covers her ears.

That's when a pair of HANDS reach around from the backseat and clamp over Aster's eyes and mouth.

Aster keeps screaming. She scrabbles at the ghostly attacker, punching, gasping –

SMASH TO:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD – MORNING

The present. Morning on the prairie, wind whispering through the wheat.

Aster's FEET land on the ground. She opens her eyes.

Her entire front is covered in BLOOD SPRAY.

She looks down into her hands.

Something PINK and SLIMY slides through her fingers. The consistency of soft TOFU. She frowns, turns –

Ellison sits in the ditch above her. Head cocked. His mouth open.

Aster stares at him. He doesn't move.

Selinda nowhere to be found. She climbs up out of the ditch. That's when she sees –

The back of Ellison's skull has been CRACKED OPEN like an egg. His BRAINS slipping out like soft yolk. That same pink stuff.

ASTER
What did you do?

Aster looks back at her hands.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Selinda!

Selinda's face – pressed to a window of Ellison's van. Eyes wide with horror and disgust.

I/E. ELLISON'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Aster limps up to her. The door is locked.

ASTER
Let me in. Let's go.

Selinda shakes her head.

ASTER (CONT'D)
You saw what she just did. I have to get to that funeral, before –

SELINDA
What she did? That was you!

ASTER
I wasn't – I couldn't stop –

SELINDA
Could Jeffrey Dahmer?! Could Ted Bundy?!

ASTER
Those are –

SELINDA

People who murdered someone and
blamed it on the voices!

ASTER

Did they?

Inside, Selinda fumbles for her phone.

SELINDA

I should call my parents. They'll
know what to do. They always know
what to do.

She starts dialing. Aster bangs on the window.

ASTER

Don't!

She tries the back door. It's unlocked. Aster dives in and
grabs for the phone.

SELINDA

Let go of me!

They struggle. Selinda opens her door and slides out
backwards. The phone tumbles to the dirt.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

This is exactly what they said
would happen! "Selinda, this black
magic will get you in trouble.
Selinda, you're wasting your time
with delusional people."

ASTER

I'm not delusional! I'm just
possessed!

SELINDA

Or you're having a psychotic break
and I've been enabling you!

Aster sits back, hurt.

ASTER

You felt it. You saw it.

SELINDA

Maybe I wanted to see it. Maybe I
convinced myself because I needed
this to work so badly.

Selinda slides down the side of the van, sits in the dirt.
Head in her hands.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
My mom is in the hospital with a
broken hip. And I keep making
excuses not to see her because I'm
playing ghost hunter with a
murderer.

ASTER
I am not a —

SELINDA
Then explain that.

Points, Ellison's body. Aster has no answer.

ASTER
I'll drive myself.

SELINDA
Car thief, too.

ASTER
That wasn't —

SELINDA
Stop saying it wasn't you!

Selinda stands, brushes dirt off her pants.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
I'm done. With all of this.

ASTER
I'll die if you leave me here.

SELINDA
Maybe the problem isn't ghosts.
Maybe it's just you.

Long beat. Aster stares at her.

ASTER
You're right.

SELINDA
What?

ASTER
You're absolutely right. I ruin
everything I touch.
(MORE)

ASTER (CONT'D)
I've been ruining things since high
school. I deserve this.

Aster sits heavily.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Go. Call whoever you want. I'll
wait here. To die.

Selinda hesitates, thrown by the sudden surrender.

SELINDA
What do you mean?

ASTER
For it to finish. I'm tired of
fighting.

SELINDA
Girl -

ASTER
Go take care of your mom. I'm
sorry.

Selinda stares at her for a long moment.

Gets in the van.

INT. ELLISON'S VAN - MOVING - LATER

Selinda drives. Aster riding alongside.

SELINDA
It was just like -

ASTER
Don't.

SELINDA
It's messing me up that a person
can be alive one second -

ASTER
I know.

SELINDA
What did the brains feel like?

ASTER
Jell-O.

The landscape passes. Long beat.

SELINDA
What about the other thing?

ASTER
What?

But she knows. Aster turns away.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I think I could already tell things
were bad. Why the fuck would I
bring a baby into it?

The RADIO in the van fires up. Malvina Reynolds, a little
garbled. "The Devil's Baptizin'."

Aster and Selinda look at each other.

ASTER (CONT'D)
She's still in there.

SELINDA
How do you feel?

ASTER
Not to be dramatic, but if we can't
wash these brains off my hands, I
will die.

INT. ANOTHER FIELD - LATER

The blue sky reflected in murky water. Aster's shape hobbles
up.

It's a cow tank and the water is brown and silty. It'll have
to do. She dunks her whole head and scrubs gore from her face
and hands.

She comes up sputtering and doesn't see the indistinct SHADOW
behind her in the water's surface.

Aster pushes stringy blood-soaked hair out of her face.
Staring at her reflection. No shadow now.

She freezes. She's stricken with sudden, horrible pain. She
doubles over. Grabbing at her eye.

She cries out. Selinda runs over.

SELINDA
What? What?

Aster claws at her eye. The pain is unbelievable.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

Did you get something in it? Open,
let me see.

Both of them manage to pry her eyelid up. Out pops -

A SINGLE GLASS TAXIDERMY EYE.

Aster's real eye, behind it, is red with burst vessels.

She stares. The pieces mentally clicking into place.

Oh, no.

ASTER

Oh, shit.

SELINDA

What the fuck?

Aster walks crookedly back toward the van, moving like she's carrying someone on her back. Face pale. She collapses.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

Up. Let's go.

INT. ELLISON'S VAN - MOVING - LATER

On the move again, Selinda speeds through countryside while Aster tucks her head between her knees.

SELINDA

What?

ASTER

He's inside me too.

SELINDA

No way. No way. This would be kinky
if it weren't so damn annoying.

ASTER

He's wreaking havoc.

SELINDA

You're like a ghost Greyhound.
Spiritual Zoom meeting.

Aster spits a GLASS EYE onto her palm. Selinda frowns.

ASTER

He's not agreeing with me.

SELINDA
Let's go back to the hospital.

ASTER
No. Funeral.

SMASH TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

The city cemetery. A limestone mausoleum dominates the grounds, all sharp angles and carved geometric flourishes. Blue sky, hot summer day like an oven.

Ellison's van squeals up to the curb.

As Aster steps down, her legs give out. She drops to her knees. Selinda is at her side a second later.

ASTER
They're knocking my brain back and forth until it disconnects.

Aster glances down the drive.

She sees THREE SHAPES watching. Her vision starts to tunnel.

Just then - SQUEAK. A small sound of something on glass.

They turn. On the dirty windows and side of the van, words appear as if written by a finger.

"Kindle a little hope in hopeless Hell"

SELINDA
Shit. It is him.

ASTER
I told you.

Aster pulls herself to the curb.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I went to college with Devin and Laurel. They were the only reason I had a social life. Everybody loved Laurel. We both met Devin at a keg party half a mile from here.

SELINDA
My love, I don't think now is the time for reminiscing, with your condition and all.

Aster reaches for Selinda's arm, holds it in gratitude.

ASTER
I don't know how to thank you –

SELINDA
You'll pay me. A lot.

ASTER
Right. I remember. Venmo.

Aster pulls out her phone. Taps through a few screens.
Selinda's eyes widen –

The words continue on the side of the car.

"And sow among the damned doubts of damnation"

SELINDA
I was going to tell you, I wasn't
planning on staying at my parents'
that long, either. I wanted to open
a new place here, if I could make
it the year.

ASTER
That sounds really nice.

"Since here someone could live, and live well?"

SELINDA
Damn, honestly, still going?
Pretentious as hell, Mr. P. Which
dead white bastard are you quoting
now?

A sudden gust of wind – a roar across the cemetery grounds,
emerging through Aster's lips in ELLISON'S VOICE –

ASTER
(as Ellison)
Edwin Muir!

Aster covers her mouth in shock.

SELINDA
Holy balls.

ASTER
That's new.

She BURPS. This forces out another word in Ellison's voice –

ASTER (CONT'D)
(as Ellison)
Rites.

Selinda has a little vial of HOLY WATER in her pocket. She takes it out, DUMPS it onto Aster's head. She sputters.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Okay.

SELINDA
Focus. What are you feeling?

She blinks her eyes. Licks her lips. Her vision clears.

ASTER
I think it's fury.

EXT. MAUSOLEUM - MOMENTS LATER

Aster practically crawls up the steps toward the mausoleum. At the top just in front of her, Ellison materializes, his glasses filled with morning light.

ELLISON
The rites.

ASTER
Not now, you fucking idiot!

She goes straight THROUGH him. Selinda just behind.

INT. MAUSOLEUM - MOMENTS LATER

A marble interior lined with wall crypts, each marked by bronze plaques and wilted floral arrangements.

Aster hobbles through, footsteps echoing. Sickly bright colors catching her from the stained glass windows.

VOICES from somewhere -

BONNIE (O.S.)
Oh, this is lovely.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Kill.

ASTER
Just leave me alone for one fucking second, all of you!

Suddenly, her feet are YANKED out from under her.

Her leg lifts in Ellison's hands, pulling her back across the marble floor. His skull is open, brains floating out like black fog in his wake.

Selinda meets them, coming up. She stands back from Ellison's ghost, wide-eyed.

ELLISON

We need... eternal rest.

Aster's losing it. She grips her head. A splitting migraine.

ASTER

Get out. Get out!

She scrabbles for a hold on the crypts, pulling flowers free. Her good ankle -

CRACKS and twists in Ellison's grip. As she's dragged past, Selinda steps on her hand.

Aster screams, and with the pain, Ellison dissipates into thin air.

EXT. GRAVESIDE - LATER

A MINISTER (60s) at the lectern, MOURNERS in chairs and standing around an open grave. Closed casket and flower arrangements. Quiet and peaceful.

Devin sits near the back, wet eyes.

MINISTER

Laurel Sterling was taken from us
far too soon. But we must remember
that God works in mysterious
ways...

Aster comes up through the headstones, looking near death - bandaged wrists, dirty clothes, gray skin. One disturbingly red eye.

Selinda stops another row back, watching nervously.

Aster stumbles slightly. She catches herself on a chair.

MINISTER (CONT'D)

... and even in our darkest hour,
we can find comfort...

Devin, hearing the bump, turns. Goes white seeing Aster approach. She sits behind him. In frantic whispers –

DEVIN
What are you doing here?

ASTER
I had to see you.

DEVIN
You can't be here. Not today. You
look like shit.

ASTER
I'm dying, Dev.

DEVIN
I don't care. Go away.

ASTER
(desperate)
Listen – I know about you and her.

DEVIN
(surprised)
Keep your voice down –

ASTER
I killed her. But it was an
accident.

Bonnie suddenly leans in from her other side.

BONNIE
You are disruptin' a lovely
service.

ASTER
Shh.

Devin can't see the other woman.

DEVIN
What is that? Stop it. You're sick.

ASTER
She's inside me now. She won't let
go.

DEVIN
(standing slightly)
I don't have to listen to this –

ASTER
(grabbing his arm)
She wants to talk to you. She says
there are things you need to hear.

DEVIN
Let me go –

ASTER
She's going to take over anyway.
There's nothing I can do to stop
it.

DEVIN
Aster. You're insane –

She suddenly CONVULSES. Her eyes roll back. Her body goes
rigid.

MINISTER (O.S.)
... knowing that she is in a better
place, now...

DEVIN
What are you doing?

Selinda hurries up and sits next to Aster.

SELINDA
Hi.

DEVIN
Who the hell are you?

SELINDA
Selinda. Friend from high school.
Don't freak out, okay?

DEVIN
What? Who are you?

Aster's head snaps forward. When she looks at him, she's
smiling. Confident. Casual. Happy.

Maybe a little melodramatic. Something slightly off about it
all.

ASTER/LAUREL
Calm down, Pinky.

Devin looks shocked at the nickname. She slides around the
row to sit beside him.

ASTER/LAUREL (CONT'D)
It's me. It's really me. God, I've
been trying so hard to reach you.

DEVIN
What's going on? You're, you're -

ASTER/LAUREL
I'm dead. It's fine.

She reaches for his face. He recoils.

DEVIN
Aster, stop it -

ASTER/LAUREL
I don't have much time before she
fights back. I need you to know
everything I never got to tell you.

Her thumb brushes his cheek. Something about her voice is
different. He leans into it despite himself.

MINISTER (O.S.)
... and though we may not
understand why she was called
home...

ASTER/LAUREL
I was going to tell her about us.
That night.

DEVIN
You what?

ASTER/LAUREL
But she figured it out. That's why
she pushed me, the bitch. She
couldn't stand that her perfect
husband chose me.

DEVIN
... Laurel?

Aster's eyes light up. Devin takes a ragged breath.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
(breaking down)
You were?

ASTER/LAUREL
I'm so sorry you had to watch me
die. She made you carry that and
it's, like, super messed up.

MINISTER (O.S.)
... let us pray for sweet Laurel's
soul.

Everyone bows their heads except for them.

ASTER/LAUREL
I'm trapped for some reason, I
can't move on. But maybe you can
help me.

DEVIN
How?

ASTER/LAUREL
I think we need to clear the air. I
need to say I'm sorry for ruining
your marriage.

DEVIN
You didn't do anything.

ASTER/LAUREL
Well, I kind of did, right? Like,
we were fucking around for a long
time, right?

DEVIN
Well, yes –

ASTER/LAUREL
And you stayed with her even though
you didn't love her, right?

DEVIN
Babe, we talked about that. It's
not so simple. I did love her. She
was my safety net.

ASTER/LAUREL
Okay.

DEVIN
You knew that.

ASTER/LAUREL
Sure.

DEVIN
I liked being married. She was
constant. But you – you were so
carefree –

He reaches for Aster's face, but it's her turn to pull away.

ASTER/LAUREL
She wanted me to tell you
something, because she's not brave
enough to do it herself.

DEVIN
What, about the hysterectomy?

Aster stops, shocked. The mask slips.

ASTER/LAUREL
What?

DEVIN
I knew. I always did.

ASTER/LAUREL
You did.

DEVIN
Of course.

ASTER/LAUREL
How?

DEVIN
I'm a doctor. She never
menstruated. I'm not an idiot.

Aster makes a disgusted face.

SELINDA (O.S.)
Oh, wow.

DEVIN
Do you mind?

ASTER/LAUREL
Why didn't you ever talk to me –
her – about this?

DEVIN
I thought she'd mention it
eventually. She didn't. She should
know that kind of betrayal can doom
a marriage.

ASTER/LAUREL
But you were fucking her – I mean
me – the whole time.

DEVIN
This is different.

ASTER/LAUREL

How? How?

DEVIN

It just is. But what really hurts –
I thought it was meant to be – when
you told me about...

He pauses meaningfully. Aster makes a face: *what?*

He still says nothing.

ASTER/LAUREL

About fucking what?

DEVIN

(mouthing)

The baby.

Aster's eyes go wide. Face pale. She wobbles. *The baby?*

Laurel was pregnant.

Bends over. Head between her knees.

ASTER

Oh, God. Oh, fuck.

If it hasn't been clear before, now it should be obvious –
Aster has been pretending to be Laurel. And she had no idea.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Are you serious?

He looks at her. Aster isn't faking anymore – the expression
she wears is all hers, and it's devastated.

MINISTER (O.S.)

Amen.

MOURNERS

Amen.

LAUREL (O.S.)

My turn, bitch.

Aster suddenly pitches sideways, the horizon line spinning.
As she hits the ground –

SLAM TO:

INT. ASTER'S OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A business office in the midst of unpacking. Past Aster sitting at a messy desk. Business card proofs, laptop.

A TEXT open on her phone screen from Devin.

"Sorry Laurel and I can't help! Swamped with patients."

Aster shakes a pill into her palm. Takes the aspirin dry. Examines the bottle.

SLAM TO:

EXT. GRAVESIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Aster is still on the ground. Twitching a little as she – because it's still her – fights with everything she has.

Around them, mourners are getting up to pay last respects. Our group at the back hasn't been spotted yet.

ASTER

No.

LAUREL (O.S.)

Aster.

SELINDA

Aster!

ASTER

Be quiet.

Aster gets to her feet. Face murderous. She starts to LEVITATE a little, a SHADOW behind her deepening in form –

Selinda whacks her across the face.

SELINDA

Hey! Get a grip.

Aster's feet stay on the ground. She squeezes her eyes shut.

ASTER

I'm trying. This is what you get.

SELINDA

Okay, hon, but I already witnessed one brain omelette, so no more.

ASTER

That wasn't my fault!

DEVIN

Hey. I don't know what's going on,
but lately I've been living through
horrors beyond comprehension, so -

ASTER

Maybe beyond your comprehension. I
comprehend fully.

On some speakers near the lectern, a song starts. "Girls Just
Want to Have Fun" by Cyndi Lauper. Playback slightly fuzzy.

Back with Aster, who looks dismayed. Laurel, Bonnie, and
Ellison are standing with her now.

ASTER (CONT'D)

What the fuck is this?

DEVIN

Her favorite song.

ASTER

It was not.

LAUREL

It was not!

Ellison steps in front of Aster.

ELLISON

The rites!

ASTER

Shut up about last rites! Shut up
about last rites!

Suddenly, Aster is pushed back, toes dragging. Bonnie's hand
on her sternum.

BONNIE

You need to calm it down, missy.

Aster talks around Bonnie to Devin.

ASTER

I wanted a life with you!

DEVIN

What life? You hate living.

Aster scoffs, then GAGS. Bonnie frees her.

ASTER

(Ellison's voice)
Our rites.

DEVIN

What?

ASTER

Laurel wouldn't have gotten half as far in life without me stopping her from drowning in toilets. Did you know that? So many parties ended with me holding her hair back. Helping her pick up the pieces.

SELINDA

Can we take some calming breaths?

DEVIN

She was smarter than you give her credit for.

ASTER

Sure. Ignorance is bliss. Pie in the fucking sky. No regrets.

DEVIN

Maybe you should try it, because your whole bright future thing? How's that working?

Devin backs away from her. Bumps into Selinda.

ASTER

I wasted so much time loving you both. And the whole time – the whole time –

DEVIN

Aster. Get over it. Move on. It's what you're good at.

Aster seethes, a dangerous look in her eyes, darkness swirling around her.

Her new bottle of ASPIRIN in one hand.

SELINDA

Enough! All of you!

Everyone freezes. Even the ghosts.

SELINDA (CONT'D)

(to Bonnie)

You don't want Ellison back. You want to be remembered.

(the Laurel)

You don't love Devin.

(MORE)

SELINDA (CONT'D)
You just hate losing. And you –
(to Ellison)
You don't want Bonnie back. You
want to be God again.
(to Aster)
And you don't want forgiveness, my
love. You want to be right.

Beat. Everyone stares at her.

SELINDA (CONT'D)
There. Now you can all shut up
instead of this ridiculous soap
opera bullshit.

DEVIN
Okay, what is going on?

Aster looks at Devin. The rage is still there.

She throws herself at him, knocking them both to the grass
and taking a few chairs with them. Selinda jumps out of the
way.

BONNIE (O.S.)
Well, I never!

Aster pries Devin's mouth open.

SELINDA
Aster!

He FLAILS against Aster as dozens of pills pour down his
throat. He chokes.

Foaming mouth held shut. Bulging eyes. Jerking legs.

-- **AT THE FRONT:** Laurel's casket suddenly moves, something
inside bumping the lid. The mourners startle.

-- **AT THE BACK:** Aster sitting on Devin's chest. Laurel
smiling, helping her hold his head in a vice-like grip.

Aster looks at Laurel.

ASTER
I'm realizing you're perfect for
each other. You can have him.

Squeezing Devin's jaw hard. Harder. His legs kick.

Until – he stops. Twitches.

Dead.

Laurel's ghost draws away, PULLING Devin's spirit right out of his body like paper from a printer.

She claps as he stands, looking around in bewildered confusion.

She kisses him. And with a POP, they both vanish.

Aster releases a relieved breath. Part of her mind returned to her. She pushes to her feet.

Selinda looks at the scene, throws up her hands. Ellison and Bonnie's ghosts stand stiffly over Devin's body, watching.

SELINDA

Now why the fuck did you do that?

Aster goes over to her. Plants a kiss on her cheek.

ASTER

You really suck at spiritual guidance. But you're a beautiful person. Maybe you should be a therapist instead.

Selinda considers being offended for a second. But then smiles.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I've got a really great office here, take it.
(to Ellison)
One second.

That's when someone finally notices Devin, the mess at the back of the gathering.

And SCREAMS.

Aster looks at Selinda.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.
(seriously)
I'm really sorry.

She looks at Ellison and Bonnie's ghosts too. She is. She's sorry. They stare back. Bonnie gives a little nod.

Guests push toward the hubbub, a few bend to Devin's body.

Aster walks through them to the dumbstruck minister at Laurel's casket. It's a little crooked, jostled in its lowering mechanism.

She plops into a seat beside it as it starts to descend into Laurel's grave. Cyndi Lauper still playing.

Aster sighs, turns to the minister.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I'm interested in some last rites
for a couple of friends.

She takes out her phone. Connects to the speaker next to the grave.

Enough Cyndi.

At last, she plays something that's not an oldies song – something crunchy and grimy, maybe "Apology" by Dana Dentata.

She leans back, smiling.

SLAM TO BLACK.

the end