

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET

Based on the novel by Judy Blume

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OVER BLACK:

The first notes of *Sweet Thing* by Van Morrison. Warm, gentle, easy.

FADE IN TO:

SUMMER CAMP in the CATSKILLS. Sunlit. Glorious. Ten thousand shades of green.

The year is 1970.

It could be any year. Summer camp might be the only thing that never changes.

OPENING CREDITS begin to appear and disappear as we find...

MARGARET SIMON (11), standing on a DOCK in her BATHING SUIT, spindly arms and legs, nose peeling from a sunburn, hair swept up in a jumble of bobby pins, growing out from a bob.

She lets out a GOOFY REBEL-YELL and does a AWKWARD JUMP into the LAKE, arms and legs flailing. A DOZEN 11-YEAR-OLD GIRLS do their own funny lake-jumps after her, one after another, like dominos. They all come up from the water, LAUGHING.

A COLLAGE OF IMAGES: The girls singing CAMP SONGS, firing and misfiring ARROWS, clopping through a stream ON HORSEBACK, whispering in BUNK BEDS, blowing out MARSHMALLOWS by a CAMPFIRE, all squeezed together with their arms around each other by a "CAMP EAGLE LAKE" SIGN.

A BRIGHT LIGHT FLASHES, capturing a PHOTO of it. All of the girls grinning, carefree, unaware yet of their bodies, their crooked teeth, the dorky haircuts they'll soon regret. KIDS.

They break apart. Margaret and the other campers HUG and do stupid handshakes goodbye.

She climbs aboard the NEW YORK-BOUND CAMP BUS among a LINE OF BUSES here to shuttle all the girls back to the cities they came from.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL BUS - SAME

Margaret looks out the bus window at bucolic New Hampshire, saying goodbye to the best summer of her life.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - AFTERNOON

A labyrinth of STEAL AND CONCRETE, swarming with people.

Margaret's BUS lumbers through traffic, making a wide slow turn towards UNION SQUARE, packed with WAITING PARENTS.

EXT. UNION SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Margaret gives more goodbye-hugs as she makes her way out of the bus, scans the sea of faces for her mom.

BARBARA SIMON (30's) -- hair frizzed from the heat, anxious to please, polite to a fault -- weaves through the crowd, brightening as she spots Margaret. She waves both hands, her fingers stained with paint, a wrist coil key chain jammed with too many keys.

Margaret runs over, HUGGING her. Barbara squeezes her hard.

MARGARET

Mom!

BARBARA

Heyyy! You already got taller! How was it?

MARGARET

So good. I almost didn't want to leave.

BARBARA

Good! Come on, let's get your trunk, I double-parked the car, they're already mad at me.

MARGARET

What car?

BARBARA

Oh, we bought a car.

They pull Margaret's CAMP TRUNK out of the BUS'S CARGO HOLD.

MARGARET

We bought a car? What for?

BARBARA

I'll explain later. Right over there, that blue one.

They awkwardly schlep the trunk over to the Simon's new CHRYSLER NEWPORT, a humongous land-yacht idling in the road.

Margaret's Grandma, SYLVIA SIMON (60's), coiffed red hair, a vibrant dominating force, the kind of woman to keep on your good side, climbs out of the passenger seat.

MARGARET
Grandma!

SYLVIA
There's my girl!

Margaret drops the trunk, runs to hug her. Barb watches their love-fest, dragging the trunk the rest of the way herself.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Oh god I missed you.

MARGARET
Me too! You changed your hair color?

SYLVIA
Several times. Here, welcome home gift. Read the label. Aloud.

Margaret reaches inside a GIFT BAG, pulls out A HAND-KNIT SWEATER, reads the LABEL.

MARGARET
"Handmade expressly for you by Grandma." Ah, you made this?

SYLVIA
From scratch. Cashmere. I did everything but kill the goat. Anyway, tell me all about camp! Did you have the best time? Did you meet a new boyfriend?!

MARGARET
(embarrassed)
Grandma...

SYLVIA
Don't worry, you'll be swimming in boys soon. And let's hope they're Jewish!

Barb is hurrying to find the key to the hatch on her massive wrist coil when she overhears this, looks up at Sylvia: *WTF?*

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Never mind, I take it back! Your boyfriend can be anything. Anything at all.

She gives Margaret a secret look: *But between you and me: Jewish.*

A CAR HONKS behind them, TRAFFIC stacking up.

GUY IN CAR
Let's go lady, you can't just stop
in the road!!!

BARBARA
Going! We're going!

Margaret rushes to help Barb hoist the luggage in the trunk.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Sorry! It's our first car, we just
bought it last week!

GUY IN CAR
(softens)
Oh, is that right? Congratulations!
(then lays on horn LOUDER)

INT. SIMONS' WALK-UP APARTMENT BUILDING - A LITTLE LATER

Margaret, Barb, and Sylvia carry the camp trunk up a FLIGHT
OF STAIRS, each holding a corner, sweating.

SYLVIA
How many more steps? What the
heck's in here? Sand?

MARGARET
(switches places with her)
It's 'cause you're at the bottom.
Here.

BARBARA
Hold on, I gotta find the key.

Barb strains to hold her end with one hand, searching through
her big wad of keys again with the free hand. Sylvia rolls
her eyes, knowing this will take a while.

SYLVIA
Oh god, not with those keys again.

INT. SIMONS' APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Tiny, hodge-podge, lovingly cluttered, Barb's CANVASES and
ART SUPPLIES stacked around in piles.

IN THE BEDROOM, HERB SIMON (30's), natural born salesman, can't go anywhere without making 50 new friends -- changes out of his suit from work, bouncing in his socks to the beat of *I Wonder Why* by Dion and The Belmonts.

He hears the FRONT DOOR swing open, and heads into THE LIVING ROOM, sees the women lumber in and drop the trunk, out of breath. He rushes over, feeling guilty.

HERB

Why didn't you come get me for this?! Heyyyy, welcome back, Honeybunch!

He gives Margaret a hug, says hello to Barb and his mom.

HERB (CONT'D)

How was it? It sounded like so much fun in your letters, you were even in the play!

MARGARET

They needed a boy and I could do
(*deep voice*)
the deeeeepest vooooice.

HERB

(*deep voice back*)
Oh! Who are you, sir? What have you done with my little girl?

MARGARET

(*deep voice*)
It's still meeeee. This is acting.

They both laugh.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What are those boxes for?

She points to SOME CARDBOARD BOXES stacked up in the corner.

HERB

We'll get to that in a sec, let's hear more about camp!

SYLVIA

You're moving.

Margaret FREEZES. Looks at Sylvia. *What?*

Barb and Herb exchange a look, can't believe it.

HERB

Mom.

BARBARA

Oh my god.

SYLVIA

What, she saw the boxes, she was putting it together.

Margaret tries to catch up, hoping she's hearing this wrong.

MARGARET

What! We're *moving*?

Barbara scrambles to soften the blow.

BARBARA

Listen, we wanted you to settle in before we sprung the news, but dad got his promotion and we found this great house--

HERB

Great. Much bigger than this one, with grass and trees and kids your age--

Margaret is still disoriented, barely hearing them.

MARGARET

Where?

BARBARA

Well that's the thing, we got lucky and you know how we always--

SYLVIA

(cuts to chase)

New Jersey.

Margaret's eyes bug out of her head. Barb and Herb can't believe Sylvia did it again.

HERB

Mom!

MARGARET

New Jersey?!

Sylvia puts her hands up, guilty.

SYLVIA

I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I'm sitting
over here!

She puts herself in a TIME-OUT across the room.

Margaret begins to spiral, retreats to a chair, trying to
process this. Barb struggles to regain control of things.

MARGARET

We're leaving New York?

BARBARA

Okay, hold on a second--

MARGARET

But why? We're happy here, we don't
need to move.

HERB

We don't need to, we want to.

MARGARET

I don't. I'll have to change
schools, and leave all my friends,
I won't see Grandma anymore...

Sylvia helplessly mimes her commiseration.

BARBARA

That's not true, you'll make new
friends, the schools are great, and
Grandma will come visit us, won't
you Sylvia?

Barb looks to her mother-in-law for help.

SYLVIA

I said I'd stay out of it. But I
don't drive...

Barbara gives up, kneels down in front of Margaret, trying to
get through. Really talk to her.

BARBARA

Look, Margaret, I know. It's a big
thing to digest, but believe me, I
swear to you, it's gonna be good.
We'll have a real house, more
space, our own backyard. And listen
to this:

She takes Margaret's hands in hers, earnest, trying to convey
what's really at the heart of this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna work anymore. Do you know what that means? That means I won't be gone all the time, running to a different class every night. God, you know how bad I've felt about that?

We can see just how bad Barb's felt. Working mother's guilt oozing from her.

MARGARET

But you like teaching art.

BARBARA

Yeah but so what, this our opportunity, I can stay home now. I'll be home everyday with you, we'll have family dinners, I'll learn to cook, get involved at your school...like your friends' moms...

Barbara feels herself get a little emotional at the prospect of finally being the kind of mother she's seen on TV.

HERBS

We promise you, Margaret. This is good. Things are only going to get better.

BARBARA

Just try to believe us, okay? Can you just try?

Margaret manages a nod. No other choice. Barbara draws her in for a hug. Herb joins. They embrace in a little clump. Barb looks over at Sylvia, still in time-out across the room.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Come on. Come over here, Sylvia.

Sylvia heads over, joining their hug. It's a sweet moment.

SYLVIA

Aww honey...
(pats Margaret, emotional)
I'm never gonna see you again.

HERB

Oh good lord!

Their HUG BREAKS APART. We stay on Margaret's face as the adults go at it again.

EXT. NYC - NIGHT

It's late now, the New York skyline twinkling yellow, the streets a relative quiet.

EXT. SIMONS' APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

We take Margaret in from outside her window. She stands near the glass, uneasy, looking out at the city she's leaving.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

She peers around her room, the knot in her stomach tightening, her eyes starting to fill up.

MARGARET

Oh god... are you there God? If you are, it's me, Margaret... I just want to say... well... first, I've heard a lot good things about you... Uh, so, I could use some help? Please, God, I don't wanna move, I've never lived anywhere but the city, New Jersey is...I mean, look, I'm sure you've heard what people say about it, nobody's ever prayed "*God let me live someplace great like Hoboken!*" I'm just...I'm begging you. Please just stop this move from happening.

She looks over at the HANDFUL OF BOXES that have already been packed for her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

And if you can't do that... just somehow... make things turn out okay?

She lets out a deep exhale, desperately hoping somebody heard this prayer.

EXT. SIMONS' APARTMENT BUILDING / STREET CORNER - MORNING

The CHRYSLER is packed up, idling at the curb. Sylvia and Margaret hug each other goodbye, both gutted about this.

SYLVIA

I'll call you everyday after school. 3:30 everyday, okay?

Margaret nods somberly. Herb puts his arm around Sylvia, squeezing her goodbye.

HERB

We'll call you when we get there,
mom.

BARBARA

(hugging her)
Bye, Sylvia.

SYLVIA

You could've just said "you're
dropping in too much, cut it out,"
you didn't have *move*.

BARBARA

This isn't about you, I promise.

Sylvia doesn't quite believe it.

HERB

Alright, all board the Big Blue
Beast!

They pile into the car. Herb looks back at his mother standing alone on the curb, forlorn. Feels badly. He walks over to give her one more hug.

HERB (CONT'D)

It's only an hour by train, mom.

SYLVIA

Yeah, just long enough to pick up a
family of bedbugs.

HERB

We'll hose you off before you come
inside.

Herb smiles, teasing her. She rolls her eyes. He gives her little a kiss on the head, goes back to get behind the wheel. As they pull way, Margaret gives Grandma one last goodbye out the back window. Sylvia gives her an air-kiss, Margaret give one back.

Sylvia stands there watching them head off to their new life without her, their car finally disappearing. She looks around at the city. For the first time, she's alone in it.

EXT. FARBROOK, NEW JERSEY - DAY / VARIOUS

A sprawling SUPERMARKET with parking spaces galore. A GARAGE SALE, junk spread out on a lawn. Kids in bathing suits on BIKES, yelling as they chase an ICE-CREAM TRUCK.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - SAME

A tree-lined street of quaint, almost identical homes baking under the summer sun.

EXT. SIMONS' HOUSE - SAME

The Simons' new residence is a CHARMING BRICK 2-STORY, the shutters and front door freshly painted black.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

Margaret arranges LITTLE HOMEMADE CERAMIC ANIMAL FIGURINES she made with Barb, trying to build a new life for herself here. She looks around the room -- it's filled with all the same stuff from her old room, but it doesn't feel like home.

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A disaster of BOXES and PACKING PAPER. Barb finishes unpacking a CRATE OF BOOKS into a BUILT-IN BOOKSHELF, looks around the room to see what's next. It's overwhelming, she's barely made a dent. She wipes away some SWEAT, SNIFFS her armpit to see if she stinks.

MARGARET
Do they smell bad?

Margaret comes down the stairs, catching her in the act.

BARBARA
Well I can't say they smell *good*.

Margaret makes a face.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Pretty soon you'll know the feeling...

Margaret raises an eyebrow, not looking forward to that.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
We have so much *stuff*. I don't even like half this stuff.

She pulls an OLD CRUSTY MODEL SAIL BOAT out of a box. Why did they even pack this? The DOOR BELL rings.

MARGARET

I'll get it.

Margaret crosses the FOYER, opens the FRONT DOOR to find a girl in a swimsuit with her hands on her hips. This NANCY WHEELER, 11 going on 17, overflowing with confidence.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Hi...

NANCY

I already know your name's Margaret and you're in 6th grade. The real estate agent sent a sheet out on you.

MARGARET

Oh... Okay.

NANCY

I'm Nancy. I'm in 6th too.
(points to her house across
the street)
You wanna come over and go under
the sprinklers with me?

MARGARET

Uh, I don't know.

NANCY

You don't *know*?

MARGARET

I mean I have to ask. Just a sec.

Margaret goes back inside to Barb.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

There's a girl from across the street who asked if I can run through her sprinklers.

Barb brightens a little, glad Margaret's already making friends, their move working out as planned.

BARBARA

Oh. Good. Sure, fine by me.

MARGARET

I need my bathing suit.

Barb looks at the big mess, no clue where one would be.

BARBARA
Oh boy... Good luck finding it in here.

NANCY
(appearing)
It's alright, she can borrow one of mine.

They turn to see Nancy has let herself inside.

BARBARA
Oh. Hello. Nice to meet you...

NANCY
Nancy. I live in the bigger house across the street.

Nancy points through the window at her better house. Barbara smiles crookedly. Interesting kid.

EXT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Nancy and Margaret head across the street. Nancy notices Margaret's bad posture.

NANCY
You want a trick to stop slouching like that?

Margaret looks over, not sure what to say.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Walk with your thumbs forward. It's impossible to slouch when you do that, see.

Nancy demonstrates her forward-thumb, chest-out posture.

MARGARET
Oh...

Margaret tries it, walking stiffly upright next to Nancy.

NANCY
So whose class are you in at Delano?

MARGARET
The letter said "room 18"...

NANCY

I'm in 18 too! We were supposed to have Miss Phipps, but she ran off with some guy to California, so we're getting a new teacher now.

They step into--

INT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It's full of EXPENSIVE ORNATE FURNITURE WITH CLAWED FEET.

NANCY

Anyway, just pray for a good one.
Come on, my room's upstairs.

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

POSTERS OF HEART THROBS peppered with Nancy's lipstick kisses, a DRESSER loaded with BOTTLES OF NAIL POLISH and TANGLED COSTUME JEWELRY, a HEART-SHAPED MIRROR with "Nancy Wheeler" scrawled a million times on the glass. A stark contrast to Margaret's patchwork childlike bedroom. *

Nancy gets a BATHING SUIT out of a drawer, tosses it to Margaret.

NANCY

Here. It's clean.

MARGARET

Thanks. Where should I change?

NANCY

What's wrong with here?

Margaret pauses, a little self-conscious.

MARGARET

Nothing... I don't mind if you don't mind?

NANCY

Why would I mind?

MARGARET

I don't know...

Margaret starts to change into the suit. Nancy sits on the edge of her bed, staring right at her as she does.

Margaret turns around, carefully pretzeling herself so as not to reveal her body.

NANCY
(laughs)
Oh, you're still flat.

Margaret's cheeks flush. She yanks up the suit.

MARGARET
Not exactly, I'm just small boned.

NANCY
I'm already growing, see?

Nancy sticks her chest out to demonstrate.

NANCY (CONT'D)
In a few years, I'm gonna have a pretty big chest. My mom's are huge.

Margaret raises an eyebrow.

MARGARET
Oh...

NANCY
I thought you'd be a lot more grown up coming from New York. Have you ever kissed a boy?

MARGARET
You mean...really kiss? Like on the lips?

NANCY
Yeah. Have you?

MARGARET
(beat, reluctantly)
Not really...

Nancy looks relieved.

NANCY
Neither have I... But I practice a lot. Wanna see?

Nancy picks up her pillow, opens her mouth wide and gives it a LONG KISS, gently stroking the pillow's "hair" and "back". It goes on for uncomfortably long.

Margaret can't help but laugh. Nancy frowns, embarrassed.

NANCY (CONT'D)
You have to practice, or you won't
be a good kisser.
(then)
You wanna see something else?

Margaret's not sure she does. Nancy opens a DRESSER DRAWER
with a MILLION COSMETICS inside.

NANCY (CONT'D)
It's another one of my experiments.
I put on different kinds to see how
I look best so when 8th grade rolls
around, I'll be ready.

She runs a HAIRBRUSH through her long hair.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Do you always wear your hair like
that?

Margaret touches her mess of bobby pins, self-conscious.

MARGARET
It's in an in-between stage right
now. I'm trying to grow it longer
so it covers my ears. They stick
out a little.

NANCY
I noticed.

Apparently Nancy notices everything.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Ready to go?

MARGARET
Sure...

EXT. NANCY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

MRS. WHEELER (30's), tan with big breasts and curled hair,
WASHES a LITTLE DOG in a TUB. The girls come out with their
towels.

NANCY
This is the girl who just moved
from New York. Margaret Simon.

MRS. WHEELER
Hi Margaret. Nice to meet you. How
do you like Farbook so far?

MARGARET

It's fine...

MRS. WHEELER

Tell your mother I'm looking forward to meeting her. We have a bowling team on Mondays, and a bridge game Thursday afternoons.

MARGARET

Oh...

Mrs. Wheeler cocks her head, waiting for more.

MRS. WHEELER

Oh?

MARGARET

No, I just don't think my mom's ever played Bridge and I don't think she bowls either...

MRS. WHEELER

Ahh. Well, tell her she can call me about carpooling to Sunday School then.

MARGARET

I don't go to Sunday school.

Mrs. Wheeler stops scrubbing the dog, surprised.

MRS. WHEELER

You don't go to Sunday School?

Margaret feels a little put on the spot.

MARGARET

Uh...

NANCY

Lucky you.

MRS. WHEELER

Nancy. Please.

NANCY

(tugs Margaret away)

Mom, she came to be with me, not you. Come on, let's go.

MRS. WHEELER
(calling after them)
30 minutes, no more or it drowns
the grass!

EXT. NANCY'S YARD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Nancy cranks on the SPRINKLER.

NANCY
Follow the leader!

She dances through the water. Jumps, spins, cartwheels.
Margaret copies her move for move, trying to keep up.

Nancy pretends to run in sexy slow-motion like a girl from a
movie.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Look at me, I'm a model.

She pouts her lips, runs her fingers through her wet hair.
Just then, A BIG HARD BLAST OF WATER nails her in the face.

NANCY (CONT'D)
AAAAHHH!!!

Nancy's brother EVAN (14), pudgy and freckled, holds the
HOSE, laughing with his friend, MOOSE FREED (14) handsome
with big brown eyes, a foot taller thanks to a recent growth
spurt.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Evan you idiot!

MARGARET
Who are they?

NANCY
My stupid brother and his friend.
They're 14 and disgusting, all they
think about is naked girls!
(screams)
Mommmmm!!!

Nancy runs off to tattle. Both boys look at Margaret. She
quickly grabs the TOWEL, covering herself, thinking about the
naked girls comment.

EVAN
Who're you?

MARGARET

Um...Margaret? We just moved in across the street.

MOOSE

You're the new people? Ask your dad if he wants me to cut your lawn. Five bucks and I trim too.

MARGARET

Uh... alright.

She smiles, trying to seem normal.

MRS. WHEELER (O.S.)

Evan! Get over here right now!

Evan rolls his eyes, leaving Margaret with Moose.

Moose lifts up his arm to wipe some sweat, revealing a TINY TUFT OF ARMPIT HAIR. Margaret stares at it a sec.

She shifts her weight, feeling nervous around him.

Moose bends down, picks up the Wheeler's FALLEN BIRD FEEDER, carefully hangs it back on its HOOK. Margaret watches, transfixed.

MOOSE

Gotta get 'em more birdseed.

She nods. There's a tiny flutter in her belly.

MOOSE (CONT'D)

My name's Moose Freed. Don't forget to ask your dad about the lawn.

MARGARET

I definitely won't.

She grins at him. Then worries the grin is too much, tries for something more casual. It's not great either.

EXT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

Nancy walks Margaret back home.

NANCY

Sorry you got stuck with Moose.

MARGARET

Oh. That's okay...

Margaret decides she better not say how she really felt about him. They stop in front of her HOUSE.

NANCY

Anyway, listen Margaret, on the first day of school you have to wear loafers, but no socks.

MARGARET

How come?

NANCY

Because I decided I want you to join my secret club. There's 3 of us, and I'm letting in one more. Just don't wear socks or the other kids might not want you.

Margaret swallows, already feeling rejected.

MARGARET

Okay...

Nancy waves and skips off, leaving Margaret with that. Margaret stands there a moment, feeling her anxiety rise.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret organizes her SCHOOL SUPPLIES, thinking. Then--

MARGARET

(whispers)

Are you there God? It's me... Margaret again. It's the first day of school tomorrow. Sometimes when I'm nervous, if I get my pens and pencils all facing the right direction, I feel a little better.

She looks at her METICULOUS DESK. It's not helping at all. She gets up from the chair, starts to pace a little.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Also... today I met this girl Nancy. She knew about a lot of stuff, I don't know if she liked me, I think she expected me to be older or something? Anyway....it got me thinking, maybe it's time... you know...

(how does she put it?)

...things started happening... around here...

She draws a quick little circle around her flat chest. Feels a little embarrassed putting it so bluntly to God. Then suddenly: The SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS coming down the hall.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
(lowers voice)
My parents might think it's weird
we're talking, so I'm just gonna do
it without moving my lips.

Barb hurries in, carrying a bunch of RANDOM JUNK in her arms, still getting through the unpacking.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
Hey it's me, I'm still here.

Barb tosses MARGARET'S BATHING SUIT onto her bed.

BARBARA
It was in with the bathroom stuff.

MARGARET
(V.O.)
*Anyway, just think about, you know,
what I mentioned...*

Margaret's eyes dart quickly at her chest again.

BARBARA
And found this if you want it.

Barb puts an OLD ELECTRIC PENCIL SHARPENER on her desk.

MARGARET
Thanks God.
(then)
Thanks mom.

Barb nods, exiting again.

EXT. SIMON'S HOUSE - MORNING

MORNING LIGHT streaks across the Simons' front lawn,
GLISTENING WITH DEW. A perfect image.

A DIGITAL ALARM CLOCK goes off, wrecking it a little.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

BARE FEET wriggle into a PAIR OF BROWN LOAFERS.

Margaret steps in front of the mirror for a look at herself.
Takes a deep breath, anxious.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Barb has the kitchen almost in order, down to the last items.
Herb hurries to gobble some TOAST, running late. Margaret
walks in, hunched in her new blue jumper, her toes pointed
self-consciously inward.

BARBARA

Heyyyy! There she is. You look
great. All ready for the first day?

HERB

Look at you. A 6th grade vision in
blue!

(kisses her head)

Can't wait to hear all about it.

Herb gives Barb a squeeze before rushing out. Barb pours
Margaret some cornflakes, senses her anxiety.

BARBARA

How do you feel? You look nervous.
Don't be. Just don't. I mean, it's
fine if you are, I still get
nervous sometimes. It doesn't go
away cause you're older. In fact,
it might actually get worse...

Barbara realizes her pep talk is going the wrong way. Then--

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Wait, you forgot your socks.

MARGARET

I don't want socks.

BARBARA

You do. Trust me, you'll get
blisters without them.

Margaret rolls her eyes a little, not in the mood to be
lectured. A LAWN MOWER ENGINE starts up next door, suddenly
JOGGING MARGARET'S MEMORY.

MARGARET

Oh, wait! Dad!

She leaps up from her seat. Barb turns around, not sure what
the commotion is. Margaret runs to catch him.

EXT. SIMONS' DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Herb is already in the car, backing out of the driveway.

MARGARET

Dad!

He sees her racing towards him, rolls down the window.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

A boy named Moose asked if you want
him to cut our grass for 5 dollars.

HERB

Tell him thanks but no thanks. Just
bought a power-mower. Top of the
line.

Shit.

MARGARET

Uh...he also trims.

HERB

Got a trimmer too. Two kinds. Might
turn that shrub into a penguin.
Gotta go honey, knock em dead
today!

Herb starts to back out again. Margaret starts back towards
the house, finds Barbara waiting for her in the doorway.

BARBARA

I just feel like I need to warn you
one more time about the socks.

Margaret sighs, annoyed. Barbara puts up her hands, not
wanting to be a nagging mother.

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

First day chaos. Tons of TRAFFIC and WANDERING KIDS.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL - SAME

Margaret limps up the front steps through the MAIN ENTRANCE,
her sockless feet throbbing. She pulls down the heel of her
shoe to see a HOT RED BLISTER FORMING. She sucks it up, puts
her thumbs forward, trying to walk the way Nancy showed her.
She spots ROOM 18 up ahead.

INT. 6TH GRADE CLASS - CONTINUOUS

Margaret enters, peers around for Nancy. Her eyes scan everyone's FEET. Socks, socks, socks. Then finally: NO SOCKS. She pans to see the feet belong to Nancy.

NANCY
Hey! Over here!

Margaret hurries over, relieved. Nancy checks her feet.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Good. I thought you'd forget.
(then)
This is Margaret, she's the one I
told you about.

GRETCHEN POTTER (11), Jewish, chubby, opinionated-- waves.
JANIE LOOMIS (11), skinny, soft-spoken, African American, smiles.

GRETCHEN
So you're the fourth.

JANIE
Nice to meet you...

MARGARET
You too...

NANCY
You're lucky we saved you a seat,
otherwise you'd be over there next
to Norman Fisher.

NORMAN FISHER (11), ill-fitting button-down, bed-head, thick glasses with a string, sits off by himself.

GRETCHEN
Oh my god, oh my god, don't look,
Philip Leroy just walked in.

NANCY
Yessss. I was praying so hard he'd
be in our class!

MARGARET
Who's Philip Leroy?

NANCY
Take a guess.

Margaret looks over at a CLUSTER OF BOYS entering the room. PHILIP LEROY (11) instantly stands out, casually great-looking, sun-kissed from a summer of waterskiing.

MARGARET

Oh. Got it.

Philip takes a seat next to his friend, FREDDY BARNETT (11), a SHORT REDHEAD with an EXTREMELY BAD SUNBURN.

Margaret notices a TALL ATTRACTIVE WOMAN entering the room.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Is that our teacher?

They all turn to look.

NANCY

Her? That's Laura Danker! She's in our class!

Margaret looks again, feeling dumb.

MARGARET

She's in 6th grade?

LAURA DANKER (11), looks at least 16 thanks to her HEIGHT and HUGE EARLY BOOBS.

NANCY

Stay away from her if you're smart. My brother says she goes behind the A&P with him and Moose and let's them feel her up...

Margaret reacts to "feel her up," not used to peers talking like this. She watches Laura take a seat by herself in the back row.

A THROAT CLEARS. They turn to see their new teacher, MILES J BENEDICT (20's) -- starched shirt, neatly combed hair. They all quiet down, sit up straighter as he walks to the front of the class.

MR. BENEDICT

Uh, good morning class...

(clears throat)

Um, uh, first I'd just like to introduce myself... My name is Mr. Benedict and I will be your new 6th grade teacher.

He writes "MR. BENEDICT" on the chalkboard.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
That's *Benedict*, like the eggs. And
because it's *eggcellent* to meet
you.

He chuckles at his joke. They all just stare at him.

He clears his throat again. Looks down at a SWEATY SCRAP OF PAPER tucked inside his palm, his INTRODUCTION speech written on it.

"Benedict. Like the eggs. And because it's egg-cellent to meet you. (Pause for laughter.)"

He looks back up at their blank faces. Holds in an ocean of nervous diarrhea.

NANCY
(whispers to Margaret)
Can you believe this guy?

Margaret feels a little sorry for him.

MR. BENEDICT
Uh, now, if you'll please complete
the following sentences so we can
get to know each other a little
better...

He writes on the chalkboard: *"I love..." "I hate..." "I'm looking forward to..."*

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
I'll begin. *I love...*that I'm
finally getting to be a teacher for
the first time.
(smiles sincerely)
*I hate...*self-doubt, feeling tongue
tied, upset stomachs, and staring
at the ceiling all night instead of
sleeping at all.
(smiles again)
*I'm looking forward to...*the year
with you. Okay, now your turn.

They all take out paper and get busy writing. Nancy slides a NOTE to Margaret: *"Secret club meeting today. 3pm, my house. NO SOCKS!!!"*

NANCY
Pass it on.

Margaret nods dutifully, passing it to Janie.

INT. SYLVIA'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - DAY

Sylvia finishes watering TWO LITTLE BAMBOO PLANTS sitting in her window sill, then sits at the kitchen table, not sure what to do next. She looks at the phone, then looks at her watch. Margaret's not home for several hours.

INT. SIMONS' HOUSE / VARIOUS - THAT AFTERNOON

The KITCHEN is done now. Barb finishes wiping the counters, goes into THE LIVING ROOM to see what's left to do.

Just one BIG STACK OF BOXES remain, carrying all her ART STUFF. PAINT BRUSHES, PAINTS, CANVASES, HER OLD ARTWORK. She pulls out a few of her PAINTINGS. Eyeing some of the older ones, she's surprised by her reaction to them: She likes her own work. She's talented. Two endorsements she always hesitates to give herself. She leans a few of them against the walls to be hung up later.

Then glances around the room, trying to figure out where to put all of her art supplies. She opens the HALL CLOSET: already stuffed. Peaks in the LAUNDRY ROOM: Too small.

INT. SIMONS GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

She slides the ART BOXES into a CORNER next to a RUSTY FAN and a BOX OF YEARBOOKS. Something about putting this stuff here makes her a little sad. The end of a long-held part of herself. But she brushes off the feeling, goes back into --

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Barb comes into the room, she suddenly notices something hadn't until this moment, FROWNS.

The TATTERED LIVING ROOM SET from their New York apartment has seen better days, and also looks RIDICULOUSLY SMALL in their vast new suburban den. Just comically out of proportion. Hmmm. This will definitely not work.

The PHONE RINGS. Barb crosses get it.

BARBARA

Hello?

SYLVIA

Guess who.

INTERCUT with Sylvia at her apartment, dusting her furniture to pass the time.

BARBARA

Hello Sylvia. Margaret's not home
from school yet.

SYLVIA

It's 3:32.

BARBARA

I know.

SYLVIA

You said she's out at 3:15 and the
walk is 10 minutes.

BARBARA

Yes, she'll probably be here any
minute.

SYLVIA

Okay... I'll... just wait I guess.

A beat as Sylvia waits for the few minutes to pass. Then she
realizes she should probably small-talk with Barbara.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Um, so, how are you?

BARBARA

Good. I'm good. How are you?

SYLVIA

Oh fine... Today I read that when
you don't have any loved ones
around your life expectancy drops
drastically. But, you know, I've
had a good run...

Barb can't help but laugh at her guilt trip.

BARBARA

(laughing)

Oh Sylvia, come on.

Sylvia's not kidding. The door opens behind Barb and Margaret
hurries in. *

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Oh, here she is, she's home.

(holds out the phone)

Grandma's on the phone for you.

Margaret instantly perks up, drops her bag, runs to grab it.

MARGARET

Grandma!

SYLVIA

(lighting up)

Honey!!! How's New Jersey? Are you okay? You can tell me the truth.

MARGARET

It's actually not as bad as I thought...

SYLVIA

Really? That's wonderful news...

Sylvia looks crestfallen, secretly hoping it'd be bad enough they'd all move back.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Well, anyway, I was thinking you could come visit the weekend after next, I'll get us tickets to a show, you can spend the night, we'll do a little slumber party, that'd be so fun, right?

MARGARET

Oooh yeah, I'd love that!

SYLVIA

I knew you would. Great. I'll tell your mother it was your idea, okay? I'll call you tomorrow.

Margaret agrees, hangs up.

MARGARET

Can I go to Nancy's right now?

BARBARA

You just got home, I haven't even heard about your day.

MARGARET

I know, can I?

BARBARA

Well just at least give me one word first.

MARGARET

(thinks a beat)

"Eghh?"

A sound indicating *"I don't know, maybe it'll be okay, maybe it'll be a truly hellish nightmare, we have to see."* Barbara gets her meaning.

BARBARA

Fair enough. Okay, go ahead.

Margaret hurries for the door.

INT. NANCY WHEELERS BACK PORCH - A LITTLE LATER

Nancy, Gretchen and Janie sit around the patio table eating Oreos, LAUGHING. Margaret arrives through the back door, wishing she weren't the last one to get here.

MARGARET

Hi...

She finds a seat at the table, reticent.

NANCY

We were just talking about Laura Danker again.

GRETCHEN

Yeah, how she got even bigger over the summer.

Gretchen cups her hands to show the size of Laura's chest. Margaret quickly nods in agreement, trying to catch up to where they are in the conversation.

MARGARET

Oh. Yeah, she looks so grown up...

Margaret crosses her legs, trying to seem cool. Her SHOE falls off. She quickly leans down and puts it back on.

NANCY

She's worn a bra since 4th grade.
I bet you a dollar she already gets her period too.

Margaret gets a little uncomfortable at the word "period". Janie does too. They share a look.

GRETCHEN

Well I know for sure somebody in our school does.

JANIE

How...?

GRETCHEN
I always check the bins.

Margaret's never even thought of checking the bins.

NANCY
Did you get it yet, Margaret?

Suddenly they're all looking at her, waiting for a response.

MARGARET
(beat)
Uh... not yet. Have you?

NANCY
No, none of us have yet.

She couldn't be more relieved. Nancy bangs her COKE CAN on the table like a gavel.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Alright, let's get down to business. First, this secret club is a secret. You can't tell anyone what happens here. Ever.

GRETCHEN
Duh.

NANCY
Second, if you want to be in it, you have to follow the club's rules.

JANIE
What kind of rules?

NANCY
I don't know, I haven't thought of them yet. Oh, I just got one.
(twiddles eyebrows)
If you're in the club, you have to wear a bra.

The energy in the room immediately shifts. Margaret crosses her arms over her non-existent chest.

GRETCHEN
I have one. If you get your period, you have to tell us about it.

NANCY
Oooh, yes. Every detail. Especially how it feels.

JANIE

Mine is... what if we all keep a notebook of the boys we like?

They all love that idea too.

MARGARET

(piggy-backing)

Yeah, and, and we have to show it to each other at each meeting and we can't ever lie.

The room tingles with excitement at the prospect of this kind of sharing. Margaret smiles, starting to feel like part of the group. She's at the beginning of a whole new chapter.

EXT. FARBROOK - EARLY EVENING

RAINBIRDS spray a GRASSY PARK.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Herb organizes his RECORDS in a COOL RECORD STAND now that he has enough room to showcase his collection, Peggy Lee's *Fever* playing, absently singing along.

HERB

Fever when you kiss me, fever when you hold me tight. Feva! You know her real name was Norma? Then a guy looks at her and goes "you don't look like a Norma, you look like a Peggy" and she goes "Okay."

But Margaret's not listening. She's studying something, her BROW FURROWED, chewing her fingernails.

REVEAL: THE JC PENNEY CATALOGUE, opened to the BRA SECTION. She has it tucked inside her HISTORY BOOK, angled so nobody but her can see it.

How is she going to broach this? She looks over at her mom.

Barb is in THE KITCHEN looking at a PHOTO in a RECIPE BOOK: A JUICY GOLDEN BROWN CHICKEN nestled in a clump of crispy potatoes. She looks over at HER OWN VERSION: A LIMP GRAY WATERY CARCASS floating next to BURNT BLACK POTATOES. It's somehow both overcooked and under-cooked.

BARBARA

How is that even possible?

She puts a PIECE OF PARSLEY on top of it, trying to make it look more like the picture.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret climbs in bed, her mind still on the bra, Barb dropping off some FOLDED LAUNDRY from a basket on her hip.

BARBARA

Turns out I don't hate laundry, I
just hated going to the laundromat.
Thank you, New Jersey.
(walks over to kiss her)
Goodnight, hon. See ya in the
morning.

MARGARET

Um...

Barb looks back at her. Margaret tries to bring up the bra.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(chickens out)
Yeah, g'night.

Barb makes her way to the door, SHUTS OFF THE LIGHT. Margaret regrets not having the guts. Just before the door closes--

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(blurts)
I WANT TO GET A BRA!

Barb freezes. Margaret covers her face, mortified. Barb turns the LIGHT BACK ON, a little dumbstruck. Unprepared for this conversation. She treads lightly.

BARBARA

Okay... Uh, you...you think you
need one?

Margaret shoots her a mom hurt look. Barb realizes.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

No, no, I just mean, you know,
they're kind of a pain, so no need
to start sooner than you have to.
But if you want one, we'll get one.

Margaret chews her lip, feeling so weird about this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

So you want one?

MARGARET
Yes, I already said that!

She can't stand to keep talking about it.

BARBARA
Okay, okay. We'll get one then.
We'll get one this weekend.

Margaret nods, just wanting this conversation to be over.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Alright. Well, g'night again.

MARGARET
Night.

Barb walks out, pulls the door shut behind her, just stands there a moment, realizing she's just entered a whole new phase of motherhood. Is she ready for it?

INSIDE, Margaret still cringes.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
So weird. So weird. That was so
weird, God. Why do I feel so weird?

She drums her face, trying to knock the feeling out of her head.

EXT./INT. DELANO SCHOOL - MORNING

School in session, kids in class. Barb hurries inside, running a little late. Pokes her head into the PTA ROOM, making sure she's in the right place.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL P.T.A ROOM - SAME

A FEW DOZEN WOMEN mill around.

MRS. WHEELER
Here for the PTA meeting?

BARBARA
Oh hi, yes, I'm Barbara Simon.

MRS. WHEELER
Oh! Barbara! I'm Jan Wheeler,
Nancy's mother. I met Margaret.
I've heard a lot about you.

Hard to tell whether she means it in a good way.

BARBARA

Oh... great to meet you too.

MRS. WHEELER

We're just about to get started.
Please, have a seat.

Barb finds a chair. Mrs. Wheeler gets up behind the PODIUM, quiets everyone down.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Thank you all for coming today.
Delano is nothing without our
dedicated parents. So, let's dive
right in and start the year like we
always do, by forming our
committees. First... Our *Campus
Improvement Committee*. Any
volunteers?

Barb RAISES HER HAND. A few other women do too. Mrs. Wheeler nods, grateful.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Thank you. Okay...*Delano Social
Committee*. Dances, luncheons,
parent-teacher night...

Barb RAISES HER HAND AGAIN. Why not.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Great. *Restroom Sanitation
Committee*...

Nobody volunteers for that one. Barb RAISES HER HAND A 3rd TIME. Mrs. Wheeler gives her an approving little nod.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Good for you, Barbara.

Barb smiles, feeling good about this.

INT. ROOM 18 / 6TH GRADE CLASS - LATER THAT DAY

The class finishes a MATH WORKSHEET. A stop watch BEEPS. Mr. Benedict clicks it off.

MR. BENEDICT

Alright, pencils down and kindly
pass your worksheets forward...
(gathering them up)
(MORE)

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Now, uh, before the bell rings, I'd like to share some news that I think will make you all very happy.

The class perks up, paying attention.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Now that you're all in 6th grade... you'll each get to do a full, year-long research project.

The whole class GROANS. This is the good news?

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Wait, wait. Let me get to the good part. And these research projects will be about...*anything you want. You decide. 100% your choice.*

He waits for their expressions to brighten at the prospect of such autonomy.

FREDDY BARNETT
Are you kidding me?

They all complain even louder. Mr. Benedict sputters, not expecting this.

MR. BENEDICT
I... uh... well...

Freddy flicks a PAPER FOOTBALL at him.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
What was that? Uh, please don't do that again please?

THE BELL RINGS, thank god. They all pack up to leave. Mr. Benedict gestures to Margaret.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Excuse me, Margaret, may I talk to you for a moment after class?

Margaret looks taken aback. Did she do something wrong?

NANCY
(teasing)
Uh oh, what'd you do, Margaret?

Margaret swallows. Janie gives her a concerned look. As the kids clear out, Margaret approaches Mr. Benedict's desk.

MARGARET

Hi...

MR. BENEDICT

Please, have a seat.

She reluctantly sits. Mr. Benedict shuffles through papers.

MARGARET

Did I... do something wrong?

He looks up, suddenly seeing how nervous she is.

MR. BENEDICT

Oh! No. No-no-no-no. Sorry, did I give that impression? Rookie mistake. Please, relax. Would you like anything? Water? Candy Corn?

He offers her his little JAR OF CANDY CORN.

MARGARET

No...thank you.

Margaret loosens a little. He takes a piece of CANDY CORN for himself. She watches him chew it for a moment.

MR. BENEDICT

I'm just having little chats with each student in advance of your research projects to answer questions, perhaps guide you towards a topic of your choice...

MARGARET

Oh.

MR. BENEDICT

I read your getting-to-know you paper, and noticed under the "I hate" section, you wrote "religious holidays"? Which I found curious...

Margaret shifts in her seat, put on the spot.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

If you don't want to share why, you don't have to.

MARGARET

No, I, uh... I guess I just don't like those holidays because I don't celebrate any of them...

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

My dad is Jewish and my mom is Christian, so instead of picking which religion I am, they just decided I wouldn't have one, and I'll choose when I grow up...

MR. BENEDICT

Ah, I see. And have you given that much thought?

MARGARET

Not really... My grandma wants me to be Jewish...

MR. BENEDICT

And your other grandparents want you to be Christian I imagine?

MARGARET

I've never seen my other grandparents. They live in Ohio.

MR. BENEDICT

You just talk to them on the phone.

MARGARET

No, I've never met them at all.

Mr. Benedict absorbs this with curiosity.

MR. BENEDICT

Interesting...

His curiosity begins to pique her own. That is pretty interesting now that she thinks about it.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Well, if I may suggest it, religion could make a very compelling research topic for you...

Margaret nods, still thinking about her grandparents.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

A SALVATION ARMY TRUCK idling out front.

INT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

Barbara tries to wrap up a phone call with Sylvia while THE SALVATION ARMY GUYS carry out their OLD FURNITURE. Sylvia's in her APARTMENT, standing next to a PORTRAIT OF HERSELF.

SYLVIA (O.S.)
Mezzanine tickets, dead center.
Tell her that.

BARBARA
I will.

SYLVIA (O.S.)
Is she excited?

Barbara's losing patience.

BARBARA
Yes. She's excited.

One of the GUYS hands Barb the DONATION RECEIPT.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Really gotta go now, call you later
Sylvia.
(takes receipt)
Thanks.

SALVATION ARMY GUY
God bless you.

Margaret walks in just as they're leaving.

MARGARET
What happened to the couch?

BARBARA
Oh it was old and too small for the
room. Time to turn a new leaf.
Maybe something modern? I don't
know, I need to think about it...

The men exit and she closes the door, crosses to the
SECRETARY DESK to file it.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
How was school? You're later than
normal.

MARGARET
Fine. How come I've never talked to
your mom or dad?

Barb's posture changes, caught off guard.

BARBARA
Uh...what made you think of that?

MARGARET
(beat)
Just wondering.

Barb slides the receipt into a FILE FOLDER, thrown off-balance by the question.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I know we don't see them because
they're far away, but why don't we
even call them?

Barb's not sure how to handle this. She steadies herself, weighing it.

BARBARA
Because...we just don't. It's a
long story.

MARGARET
What do you mean.

BARBARA
I mean I'll tell you some other
time.

MARGARET
Why can't you just tell me now?

Margaret looks at her, really wanting to know. Barb can tell she's not getting out of this.

BARBARA
Look, I just don't want you to be
burdened by anything... But maybe,
I don't know, maybe you're old
enough to hear this now...

Now Margaret is even more interested. Barb releases a breath, has out with it.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
The truth is... we don't see my
parents because they don't want to
see us.

Margaret furrows her brow, not getting it. Barb tries to explain.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

My mom and dad are very, very devout Christians, and before you were born, when your dad and I first fell in love, they told me they would never accept a Jewish son-in-law, and that if I wanted to marry him and ruin my life, that was my business...but I wouldn't be their daughter any longer.

Retelling this story, Barb can't help but feel those old emotions rising up in her.

MARGARET

But...you are their daughter.

Margaret doesn't understand. Barb realizes she has to phrase this more clearly.

BARBARA

What I mean is that they... they decided they didn't want me in their life anymore.

It's difficult to say it so plainly.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

And so... I'm not. It's been that way going on 14 years.

Margaret is pinned to her chair. Heartbroken for her mom.

MARGARET

Mom...

She moves towards Barb, wrapping her arms around her to comfort her. Barb feels herself choke up a little, then wills it back, not wanting Margaret to take this on, uncomfortable feeling their parent-child dynamic reversed.

Barb gives her a little pat, reassuring Margaret she's okay.

BARBARA

It was a long time ago, Margaret.

Barb smiles resiliently, determined to lift the mood.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Come on. I took dad to the train station so we'd have the car. We had a plan to go shopping, remember?

Barb stands to find her purse and keys. Margaret's head is still whirling.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you there God, It's me,
Margaret. I can't believe this.*

INT. SIMONS CHRYSLER - A LITTLE LATER

They drive to the mall.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*How could they be so mean? Just
because of a dumb religion?*

EXT. LORD & TAYLOR PARKING LOT - A LITTLE LATER

They near the entrance of the store.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*My mom doesn't deserve this. She's
a good person, she's nice to
everyone.*

Barb holds the door open for an absurdly long time, letting a whole parade of people go into the store before her.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Even when she doesn't need to be!

INT. LORD & TAYLOR DEPARTMENT STORE - A LITTLE LATER

They float up the ESCALATOR.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*I mean, what the heck, God? How
could you let this happen? Religion
is supposed to bring people
together and make them love each
other more, isn't that right there
in all your books and stuff?!*

BARBARA
The bras are over there.

At the word "BRAS," Margaret instantly SNAPS INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT, abandoning her conversation with God. She eyes the MANNEQUINS IN LINGERIE, suddenly very uncomfortable.

Barb leads them through THE UNDERWEAR DEPARTMENT up to a SALES LADY (60's), cat eye-glasses, built like a baked potato.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Excuse me, we're looking for a bra
for my daughter.

Margaret immediately stares at her shoes, pretending to know nothing about this. The lady sizes up Margaret's chest.

SALES LADY
Hmmm. Well we don't have many that
small...

Margaret just about dies.

SALES LADY (CONT'D)
Come're, dear, let me measure you.

Margaret reluctantly follows her to the REGISTER. The lady loops a TAPE MEASURE around her chest, puts a 2ND PAIR OF GLASSES over her cat-glasses to see the number.

SALES LADY (CONT'D)
(clicks tongue, bad news)
Barely 28. Not even a Double-A.

Margaret's really starting to resent this lady.

SALES LADY (CONT'D)
Your best bet is one these Gro-bras
here. So one day when you do grow,
it'll grow with you.

BARBARA
Thank you. We'll go try it on.

INT. LORD & TAYLOR DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret and Barb step into a STALL.

BARBARA
(takes bra off hanger)
You know how to put it on?

MARGARET
(not at all)
Yes.

Margaret quickly takes the bra, turns around the opposite way to slip off her shirt, awkwardly fumbles with it, getting hung up in the straps.

BARBARA
Here, I'll help you out.

Barb adjusts the straps, clasps the back.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
There you go.

Margaret slowly turns around, feeling extremely exposed.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
What do you think?

MARGARET
I don't know.

BARBARA
Well does it feel too tight?

MARGARET
I don't think so.

BARBARA
Too loose?

MARGARET
No.

BARBARA
Try moving around a little.

Margaret wiggles her shoulders, pumps her arms.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
How's it feel now?

MARGARET
Fine but I'll be glad to take it off.

BARBARA
Yep. Welcome to womanhood.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - SATURDAY / DAY

The weekend in full swing. Neighbors weeding their yards, washing their cars, kids playing freeze tag.

EXT. SIMONS FRONT YARD - SAME

Barb gets the MAIL, sees her FURNITURE CATALOGUE has arrived. Flips through it a bit at the curb. Then looks up to see Herb rolling his NEW POWER LAWN MOWER onto the grass.

BARBARA

Look at you. Working the land...
Heavy machinery...

HERB

Is it too much if I take my shirt
off?

She laughs. Herb unbuttons one of his shirt buttons, starts the motor with extra manly flair. She bites her lip, pretending to be turned on. He pushes it across the lawn like a stud, popping a wheely.

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - SAME

Just out of the shower in a BATHROBE, Margaret heads into--

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She closes her curtains and gets some UNDERWEAR out of her drawer, pulls it on, then pauses, suddenly noticing something different. She bends over, looking closer. Her eyes widen. *Hairs*. She pretzels her head down closer, squinting at them.

MARGARET

1 2 3... 4 5 6 7.
(impressed)
Seven.

Not bad. She pulls the GRO-BRA out of LORD AND TAYLOR BAG, rips the tags off, wriggles into it with much effort.

Then turns to study herself in the mirror. Flat as a board. She turns sideways, pulls her shoulders all the way back, pushing her chest out as far as she can. It makes no difference. She sighs, frustrated.

Thinking, she gets two BALLED UP PAIRS OF SOCKS out of her top drawer, stuffs them into each cup. They're ridiculous and misshapen. It doesn't matter. She absolutely loves them.

She walks cat-like around the room, feeling them out.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
 (sexy voice)
 My name's Laura Danker, what's
 yours?

She puts on one of her RECORDS: *Chica Chica Boom Chic*, by Carmen Miranda. Begins to DANCE around the room, swinging her sock-boobs back and forth, playing the bongos on them, her and her boobs becoming the star of their own music video.

Suddenly, there's a SCREAM from the front yard.

HERB (O.S.)
 AHHHHHH!! DAMMIT!!!

Margaret startles, yanked back into reality. She runs to the WINDOW, looks out it to see Herb next to the lawnmower with a VERY BLOODY HAND.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Herb's hand is BANDAGED UP now, embarrassed by his blunder after making so much fanfare. Barbara reads the LAWNMOWER DIRECTIONS to find out what went wrong.

BARBARA
 "Always turn mower off before
 clearing grass clippings from the
 bag..."

HERB
 Pssh. In sales we call that a
 design flaw.

Margaret squeezes past them carrying a GLASS OF WATER and a NOTEBOOK towards the backdoor, already excited about the silver lining: MOOSE IS CUTTING THE REST OF THEIR GRASS NOW.

EXT. SIMONS BACKYARD - SAME

MARGARET
 Hi...

She puts the water down for him. He waves thanks. She takes a seat on a LAWN CHAIR, opens the LITTLE NOTEBOOK, where the words *Boys I like* are written & underlined at the top.

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The four girls sit in a circle on the floor.

NANCY
Veronica?

GRETCHEN
I'm here.

NANCY
Kimberly?

GRETCHEN
Here.

NANCY
Mavis?

MARGARET
Here.

NANCY
And so am I...Alexandra.

JANIE
Why do we have to have these names
again?

NANCY
Because it's boring using our
normal ones. Okay, time for boy
books.... Everyone get them out.

Margaret opens her LITTLE NOTEBOOK, where she's listed just
one boy: Moose Freed. A LITTLE HEART by his name.

NANCY (CONT'D)
So who wants to go first?

GRETCHEN
Like it matters. We already know
who everyone put down.

NANCY
Philip Leroy!

JANIE
Of course...

GRETCHEN
It's been the same since 2nd grade!

NANCY
What about you, Margaret? Who'd you
put?

MARGARET
(closes her book)
Oh... yeah, I put him too. Philip
Leroy. He's so cute.

NANCY
Well, that was quick. Alright, time
to check for bras.

Nancy walks behind each girl, feeling their backs for a bra strap.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Gretchen has a bra, Janie has a
bra, Margaret has a bra...and
(snaps her own) I have bra. Good.
Now we have to go around and say
what size it is.

MARGARET
(eyes dart around, nervous)
What? That wasn't a rule.

NANCY
It's a new one, I just made it up.

GRETCHEN
Well mine doesn't have a size, it's
a Gro-Bra.

JANIE
Yeah, that's what I have too!

Margaret is so relieved she's not the only one.

MARGARET
Same here.

NANCY
Not me. Mine's a 32 Double-A.

Nancy puts her shoulders back, proud. They all look at her, impressed.

NANCY (CONT'D)
If you ever want to get out of
those baby bras, you have to
exercise like I do.

MARGARET
(suddenly very interested)
What kind of exercise?

Nancy stands, demonstrating.

NANCY

Hold your arms out like this, and
then you do this motion over and
over.

Nancy pumps her arms back and forth, flexing her pecks.

NANCY (CONT'D)

*I must, I must, I must increase my
bust!*

JANIE

That really works?

Margaret and Janie exchange a look, hoping so.

NANCY

Try it. You'll see.

They all stand up, pumping their arms along with her.

ALL TOGETHER

*I must, I must, I must increase my
bust!*

NANCY

Now squeeze real hard when you say
it.

They all squeeze. Margaret squeezes harder than anyone.

ALL TOGETHER

*We must, we must, we must increase
our bust! We must, we must, we must
increase our bust!*

Suddenly, the BEDROOM DOOR SWINGS OPEN. Evan and Moose burst
in, LAUGHING HYSTERICALLY.

NANCY

What are you doing?! Get out of my
room!

EVAN

WE MUST, WE MUST, WE MUST INCREASE
OUR BUST!

(groping his chest)

Oooh I can feel it working, Moose!

Margaret is mortified.

NANCY

Shut up!!! Get out! Get out! Get
out! Mommmmmmmmm!!!

Nancy chases them out of the room, slapping at Evan.

EXT. NEW JERSEY BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Margaret is still cringing about what happened with Moose as she hurries with her parents to catch the BUS to NYC.

BARBARA

Grandma said she'll meet you at the information desk. When you get on the bus, do not talk to anyone. Especially men. Either sit alone or pick out a nice lady.

MARGARET

I will.

HERB

If you don't see Grandma when you get there, ask someone to help you.

BARBARA

But make sure it's a lady, not a man.

MARGARET

Okay, you told me 20 times!

BARBARA

(to bus driver)

Excuse me, this little girl is traveling alone, can you please keep an eye on her?

MARGARET

Mommmmm.

BARBARA

Okay okay, g'bye.

Margaret gets on the bus, the doors closing behind her. Barb suddenly regrets this, second-guessing her parenting.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I hope this wasn't a mistake.

Just then, a CRAZY HOMELESS LOOKING PASSENGER bangs on the side of the bus through his open window, yelling for the bus to MOVE. He flicks his CIGAR *BUTT* onto the tarmac. Herb smiles at Barb.

HERB

Nah.

INT. NY BOUND BUS - SAME

Margaret takes a WINDOW SEAT BY HERSELF in the back, staying away from the WEIRD GUY.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you there God? It's me,
Margaret. I'm a little nervous
being alone so can you just not let
anything really horrible happen?*

Margaret looks over to notice TWO NUNS sitting across the aisle from her.

MARGARET
Oh good. That makes me feel better.

She breathes a sigh of relief. Then considers--

MARGARET (V.O.)
*You know, maybe Mr. Benedict had a
good idea -- if I made my research
project about religion, then I
could finally pick one. Don't
worry, I won't make any decisions
without asking you first. What do
you think, God?*

Margaret waits a sec, as if for an answer. Something inside her responds in the affirmative. She shakes her head.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Okay. We'll do it.

She looks out the window, feeling resolved.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

Ten times more crowded than New Jersey's terminal. Margaret stands on her toes, looking for her grandma, finally spots Sylvia, who's a BLONDE now.

MARGARET
Grandma!

SYLVIA
You made it!!!

Sylvia sprays her with a CAN OF DISINFECTANT.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
It's just Lysol, don't worry about
it. Just gettin' the bus off. You
look beautiful!

MARGARET
So do you. Your hair's blonde!

SYLVIA
Everyone thinks I'm a show-girl!
Come on, we don't want to miss
anything.

Sylvia whisks her away.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - MAGIC HOUR

Sylvia and Margaret climb out of a CAB, head up the steps
towards THE ICONIC FOUNTAIN and MASSIVE COLUMNS all lit up.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA PIT - A LITTLE LATER

A COUPLE VIOLINISTS playing *Dance of the Little Swans*.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER AUDITORIUM - LATER

20 BALLERINAS spin in unison, performing SWAN LAKE.

Sylvia and Margaret watch them, in awe.

Margaret slips out of her flats to stretch her feet. Sylvia
slides her high-heels off too, wiggles her stocking feet over
to Margaret's to give them a "kiss." They smile at each
other.

EXT. NYC - NIGHT

Margaret and Sylvia stroll through NYC after the show,
goofing around pretending to be ballerinas.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - LATER

The WAITER sets TWO COMICALLY HUGE CHOCOLATE PARFAITS and a
couple SPOONS in front of Margaret and Sylvia.

SYLVIA
Spoons? How about a shovel? Thank
god I did 10 minutes of aerobics
two weeks ago.

Margaret laughs. They dig in.

MARGARET
Grandma...I have to tell you a
secret.

SYLVIA
Oooh. I'm listening.

MARGARET
(leans in, whispers)
I'm wearing a bra tonight, could
you tell?

SYLVIA
(smiles, conspiratorial)
I didn't want to say anything, but
bosoms run in the family...

Sylvia makes a little gesture at her own good-sized bosoms.
Margaret grins a mile wide.

INT. SYLVIA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Sylvia and Margaret are in nightgowns now, crawling into BED,
Sylvia rubbing her face and hands with a MENAGERIE OF CREAMS
lined up on her nightstand.

SYLVIA
I had a fabulous time tonight. You
make a great date.

MARGARET
You too.

They crawl under the covers.

SYLVIA
Goodnight, honey. If I snore or
pass gas, that's not me, you're
just dreaming it.

MARGARET
(laughs)
Okay.

Sylvia switches off the LAMP. They lay in the dark for a sec.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Hey Grandma?

SYLVIA
Yes, Sugar?

MARGARET

Do you think I could go to Temple
with you some time?

Sylvia's EYES SNAP OPEN, she SITS UP, flips the LIGHT BACK
ON, wide awake suddenly.

SYLVIA

YOU BET YOU CAN!

(jumps out of bed)

We're going in the morning, I gotta
iron my suit!

EXT. NEW YORK SYNAGOGUE - NEXT DAY

TONS OF PEOPLE dressed to the nines. Sylvia leads Margaret
towards the entrance, still ecstatic about this surprise
twist of fate.

As they pass the GREETER--

SYLVIA

I have my granddaughter with me
today.

The GREETER nods politely, not caring at all.

INT. NEW YORK SYNAGOGUE - CONTINUOUS

They find their seats. Sylvia waves to more people.

SYLVIA

This is my granddaughter.
(looks at another group,
points at Margaret)
Granddaughter.

Margaret smiles hello at everyone, not quite sure how to act.
Sylvia spots THE RABBI walking up to the PODIUM.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

There he is, that's the Rabbi.
Isn't he handsome? He looks like
Robert Redford. If Robert Redford
had a large black beard and
glasses.

The MUSIC BEGINS, signaling the service is starting. Sylvia
squeezes Margaret's arm.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Here we go, it's starting.

Margaret sits up straighter, a little anxious.

RABBI

Welcome dear friends. So good to be
here with all of you this morning.
Shabbat shalom.

SYLVIA

(whispers)

Shabbat shalom means hello. And
goodbye. And peace and harmony and
other stuff.

Sylvia hands her a PRAYER BOOK. Margaret opens it backwards.
Sylvia flips it around for her. Margaret already feels lost.

RABBI

So let us lift our voices in thanks
to God this morning. We begin on
page 124 of our prayer books--
(reading)
*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh
ha`olam....*

He keeps going in Hebrew. Margaret glances at Grandma for a
translation, but Sylvia's Hebrew ends at "Shabbat Shalom."
Margaret tries to follow but her eyes glaze over. She starts
to glance around the room and COUNT HATS.

MARGARET (V.O.)

1, 2, 3...4, 5, 6 brown ones.

(then)

1, 2, 3--

(realizes)

God, why am I counting hats?

Margaret tries to focus again. The CANTOR sings, there are
more prayers, more rituals, more Hebrew. Her posture begins
to sags.

TIME CUT: Margaret JOLTS, as if woken from sleep. Everyone
stands up, the service over. Sylvia smiles.

SYLVIA

Wasn't that lovely? Oh honey,
congratulations.

Sylvia hugs her as if she's officially jewish now.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*I don't know, God. The Rabbi seemed
nice and I liked the music, but I
guess I thought I'd feel something
else. Like, you know --*

(MORE)

MARGARET (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(spiritual epiphany sound)
"Laaaaaaaaaaaaa!".

Margaret's a little disappointed. But Sylvia puts her arm around her, thrilled.

SYLVIA
And now we go to the deli and
kvetch!

INT. SIMON'S KITCHEN - NEXT EVENING

Barb unloads the DISHWASHER, upset. Margaret puts away the silverware. Herb pulls a TV DINNER out of the oven.

BARBARA
I can't believe she'd just take you
to Temple without even asking us.

HERB
I can't believe it took her this
long.

MARGARET
I told you it was my idea. I just
wanted to try it out, I'm gonna try
church too, don't worry mom.

BARBARA
Church is not the point. You don't
need to bother yourself with this
stuff right now.

MARGARET
You said I can pick my religion
when I grow up.

BARBARA
Yeah, when you grow up. When you're
an adult.

MARGARET
I'm almost 12. That *is* an adult.

Barb LAUGHS. Margaret feels mocked, shuts the silverware drawer, leaving the room.

BARBARA
Margaret...

HERB
Hey, I just turned on Fats Domino.
Don't leave, its groovin' time.

He does a little jig to *Aint That A Shame* by Fats Domino, trying to change the mood. But Margaret keeps walking. Herb shrugs at Barb. He tried. She sighs, worried maybe she handled that badly.

Herb sits down with his TV DINNER on a LAWN CHAIR he's set up in front of the TV since they still don't have furniture. Barb looks at him, feels like she's failing as a wife too.

BARBARA

Sorry, I swear I'm gonna order the furniture soon, I just want to pick the right stuff, you know, so everything goes together, like how people have it.

Herb waves it away. No big deal.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

And I was gonna cook dinner, I was going to, but the meat didn't thaw and--

HERB

Hey hey hey, didn't you hear what I said about "groovin' time"? It's all good, baby. Look at me, I'm leaned back to 3. I'm solid gold.

He gestures to his lawn chair, reclined to the 3rd notch. Barb laughs. This is why she gave up everything for him.

EXT. THE WHEELERS HOUSE - DAY

Moose rakes FALL LEAVES off the Wheelers' grass.

INT. THE WHEELER'S HOUSE / DEN - DAY

Mrs. Wheeler sets a TRAY OF ICED TEA on the COFFEE TABLE. Barb and THREE OTHER MOTHERS ON THE CAMPUS IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE sit in the den.

MRS. WHEELER

Here we are, ladies.

BARBARA

Thank you, Jan.

Barb takes a sip. A LEMON SEED gets in her mouth. She awkwardly spits it in her hand, embarrassed. She looks around, not sure where to throw it away.

MRS. WHEELER
I'll take it.

Mrs. Wheeler reaches out a hand. Barb drops it into her palm, feeling like a child. Mrs. Wheeler takes it to the trash, comes back.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
So, last year we replaced the school marquee... and this year, I had an idea to do something even more meaningful.

She smiles, very pleased with herself. The women wait in suspense.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
You know how ugly the ceiling in our Gymnasium is? We'll have it refinished, painted completely black, and then we'll hang little stars from it, with each Delano child's name on them...

Mrs. Wheeler holds up a FELT STAR she cut out as an example.

PTA MOTHER
Awww. Our own night sky filled with our own little stars...

They all coo at that adorable image.

BARBARA
That's so cute. How many stars do we need, how many kids are there?

MRS. WHEELER
Twenty three hundred and two.

Mrs. Wheeler puts SEVERAL BOLTS OF LIGHT BLUE FELT and FOUR PAIRS OF SCISSORS in front of them. Barb blinks.

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL - DAY

ON THE BLACK TOP, WESTERN MUSIC plays, all the kids awkwardly SQUARE DANCING for P.E. Mr. Benedict reads the dance calls, way out of his comfort zone.

MR. BENEDICT
(stiffly, from a Xerox)
And one and two and dosey-doe, all the way around the ring you go.
(MORE)

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Now boys rock right, now girls go
low, now all the way around and
dosey-doe.

The kids are clumsy and terrible at it. Norman Fisher keeps stepping on Margaret's feet.

NORMAN
Sorry.
(does it again)
Sorry again.

Margaret gives Janie a look expressing her annoyance with Norman. Janie rolls her eyes, commiserating. The BELL RINGS, thank god. As the kids disperse, Nancy hurries over with Gretchen in a tow. She has a shit-eating grin on her face.

NANCY
(whispers)
Gretchen stole it.

JANIE
Stole what?

Nancy nods for Gretchen to show them. Gretchen slyly unzips her bag, giving them a peek: A HUMAN ANATOMY TEXT BOOK.

GRETCHEN
My dad's book I told you about.

All the girls' eyes get big. Margaret fidgets, nervous, feeling like an accomplice to a crime.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

C.U.: A DETAILED DRAWING OF THE MALE BODY, INCLUDING PENIS.

The girls hover over it silently, taking it in.

JANIE
Whoa.

GRETCHEN
Do you think Philip Leroy looks
like that?

NANCY
He's male, isn't he?

Margaret swallows. Checks the door again just to make sure no one can come in. HER DESK CHAIR is shoved in front of it.

JANIE
Veins. Uggckk...

GRETCHEN
That's what everyone looks like
inside their body.

JANIE
I don't like it. It's disturbing.

NANCY
Turn the page.

Gretchen flips the page to the book's real gold: A CLOSE-UP
DRAWING OF A PENIS AND TESTICLES.

They all get very quiet again.

MARGARET
(whispers)
Oh my god...

Nancy grins. She was waiting for that reaction.

NANCY
My brother's looks like that.

JANIE
Ew, how do you know?

NANCY
He walks around naked. I see it.

Margaret shakes off a visual of naked Evan.

GRETCHEN
My dad used walk around naked when
I was little. His looked like that
too. And really red. Like a bad
sunburn.

JANIE
Oh god. Ew. I never want to see
anyone naked or have anyone see me
naked.

NANCY
What about when you get married?

JANIE
Especially then.

NANCY

Trust me, you'll change your mind
once you grow a little. Then you'll
want the whole world to see you,
like the girls in Playboy.

JANIE

What girls in Playboy?

NANCY

You've never seen Playboy?

JANIE

Where would I see it?

MARGARET

My dad gets Playboy...

NANCY

Wait, so you have a copy here in
this house? Go get it!

Margaret suddenly regrets revealing that.

MARGARET

I...I don't know if I....

NANCY

Come on, Gretchen stole her dad's
anatomy book, it's only fair you
steal us the Playboy!

All of the girls look at her. Margaret feels the pressure.

INT. HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Margaret tip-toes down the hallway, glances downstairs to
check the coast is clear, sees Barb busy cutting out FELT
STARS, a STRIP OF MUSTACHE BLEACH on her lip, standing by the
TV watching a COOKING PROGRAM, hoping to learn something.

Margaret continues down the hall to--

INT. BARBARA AND HERB'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She slips inside, surveys the room. Tries the MAGAZINE RACK.
Then Herb's NIGHTSTAND. No dice. She kneels down, looks under
his side of the bed. Bingo... The WHOLE STACK. She takes one,
quickly stuffs it under her shirt.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

The girls are all huddled behind Nancy as she opens the magazine, turning it long-ways so the CENTER FOLD UNFURLS.

Their eyes adjust to the image.

JANIE

That isn't like the science book...

GRETCHEN

Look how round they are...

(disappointed)

Mine look like little wizard hats.

Margaret laughs. Gretchen gives her a look.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Hey, at least I have something.

Margaret zips her lips.

NANCY

"Hillary Brite is 19 years old and loves waterskiing, horses, and going to the mall for an Orange Julius."

GRETCHEN

Do you think any of us will look like that at 19?

They all look at each other, desperately hoping so. CUT TO:

ALL THE GIRLS

*WE MUST, WE MUST, WE MUST INCREASE
OUR BUST! WE MUST WE MUST WE MUST
INCREASE OUR BUST!*

Off their PUMPING ARMS--

INT. JANIE'S CHURCH - DAY

ANOTHER SET OF PUMPING ARMS, clapping rhythmically. A GOSPEL CHOIR, harmonizing with a A BADASS 80-YEAR-OLD LEAD SINGER/PASTOR, tearing it up with his killer pipes.

Margaret stands with Janie and her FAMILY, clapping along. Margaret looks around, trying to feel out if this is "it." It's great, but she's not so sure. JANIE'S MOM smiles over at her, making sure she's having a good time.

MARGARET
 (nods)
 Thanks for having me.

She gives Margaret a little shoulder squeeze. Janie elbows Margaret, nods at an OLD WOMAN a few seats over, DEAD ASLEEP IN THE PEW despite all the action. They both laugh.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - DECEMBER / EARLY EVENING

The street is BURIED UNDER A FOOT OF SNOW now, all lit up for the holidays. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS, NATIVITY SCENES, PLUG-IN MENORAHS glowing in windows.

The Simons is the only dark house on the block. Out front, Moose finishes SHOVELING THEIR WALKWAY before he loses the light, the last house on his route.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

Margaret watches from her bedroom window as he clears the last bit of snow, then slings the SHOVEL over his shoulder to begin his walk home.

INT. SIMONS DINING ROOM - SAME

Barb sits at the table in her sweats and slippers, filling out "HAPPY NEW YEAR" CARDS. She looks at her ADDRESS BOOK for the next name on the list: "PAUL AND MARY HUTCHINS," an OHIO ADDRESS... HER PARENTS.

She pauses seeing it. Can't help feeling a prick of sadness. Then, on an IMPULSE she can't explain, she reaches for a BLANK CARD and scrawls out: "*Dear Mom and Dad, I hope you're both well. Love, Barbara.*" She stuffs it into an ENVELOPE, licks and seals it before she can change her mind.

Margaret comes up behind her.

MARGARET
 What are you doing?

Barb turns around, startled. Then notices out the window behind Margaret--

BARBARA
 Oh! The mailman. You've got your shoes on, will you run these out to him?

Barb scoops up the stack. Margaret takes it, hurries out the door.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She rushes down the walkway, the MAILMAN already leaving.

MARGARET
Just a second.

He turns around, waiting for her. She sprints down to hand him the cards. Just as she does, she catches the name on the top envelope: PAUL AND MARY HUTCHINS.

She freezes. Blinks.

MAILMAN
(taking them)
Thanks.

The mailman hands her the day's MAIL in exchange.

MARGARET
Thank you.

Margaret's mind is still on card, until something even more unusual catches her eye: A PIECE OF MAIL ADDRESSED TO HER. Who in the world would send her a letter? She tears it open.

Come on over for a PARTY!

Norman Fisher's 12th Birthday

Saturday December 20th, 5-7pm

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Norman Fisher?

She rolls her eyes. What a let down.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

Barbara is reading the invitation now, Margaret scrounging in the fridge, eating DELI MEAT from the package.

BARBARA
Who's Norman Fisher?

MARGARET
No one. This weird kid in my class.
I don't why even he invited me, I
barely know him.

The PHONE RINGS. Margaret picks it up.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Hello?

NANCY (O.S.)
Did you get invited?

MARGARET
Yeah, to Norman's? You did too?

NANCY
Everyone did. Janie and Gretchen
and the whole class, even Philip
Leroy.

MARGARET
Even Laura Danker?

NANCY
The whole class I said. My mom just
talked to Norman's mom who said
it's a big-deal dinner party, we
have to dress up really nice.

MARGARET
Really?

Margaret's expression is somewhere between panicked and
thrilled. Her view of this party just changed dramatically.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret frantically scours her closet, searching for
something to wear, scared nothing is good enough.

In QUICK CUTS, we see EACH OF THE GIRLS GETTING READY:

They paint their fingernails, untangle costume JEWELRY,
squeeze into TIGHTS, spritz perfume, shampoo, blow-dry,
straighten, curl. They're ON THE PHONE WITH EACH OTHER THE
ENTIRE TIME, anxiously comparing notes. *(The images are in
direct contrast to the summer camp ones only months ago.
Female self-consciousness has arrived in its full shitty
glory.)*

INT. BARBARA AND HERB'S MASTER BATHROOM - SAME

Margaret sits on the closed toilet seat in a BLUE VELVET
DRESS, her knee bouncing nervously as Barb curls her hair.

MARGARET
(looking in the mirror)
This piece looks weird.

She points at a jagged curl sticking sideways. Barb tries to flatten it down. It doesn't work.

BARBARA
There.

MARGARET
It's still doing it.

BARBARA
Try licking your fingers and
pushing it down, they're gonna be
here, you gotta put your shoes on.

Margaret scurries out of the bathroom, licking her fingers and trying to fix the curl. Herb passes her in THE HALLWAY.

HERB
Whoa whoa, who's that showstopper?!

Margaret just rushes past him to her room, too nervous to hear a compliment. He shrugs it off, knowing he's superfluous right now.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She hurries through the door, finds her KITTEN HEELS in the closet, slips them on and crosses to the FULL LENGTH MIRROR for a last look. She likes her hair. Likes her shoes. Likes the dress. Then she looks at her chest. Frowns.

MARGARET
God? Really? It's already December
and still nothing? Please, come on,
I'm not even asking for that much,
just something.

Just as she says that, an IDEA begins to form.

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret closes the door behind her, a little scared about what she's about to do. She opens the medicine cabinet, gets out the BOX OF COTTON BALLS... Then stuffs 3 into each side of her bra.

She turns to see herself in the mirror. Her eyes light up, absolutely blown away by the improvement.

MARGARET

See. Three cotton balls. That's all
we're even talking about.

SFX: Mrs. Wheeler's CAR HORN. Nancy screaming *Maaaargaret!*
Margaret realizes it's time to go. Reaches in her bra to take
out the cotton balls. Then...an IDEA. A radical one. She acts
on it: Walks out the door, taking the cotton balls with her.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Barb and Herb wave goodbye from the front door.

BARBARA

Thanks Jan!

HERB

Have fun tonight! Go easy on the
whiskey and cigars!

Margaret climbs into MRS WHEELER'S STATION WAGON, squeezing
in next to the GIRLS. She still can't believe what she did.

EXT. NORMAN FISHER'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

A large, modern home.

INT. NORMAN FISHER'S HOUSE - SAME

MRS. FISHER (30's) sequined party blouse, opens the door.

MRS. FISHER

Girls, you look so pretty! Come in,
come in, they're all downstairs.

NANCY

(laying it on)
Lovely house, Mrs. Fisher.

They all follow Mrs. Fisher inside. Janie squeezes Margaret's
arm, nervous for their big entrance.

INT. NORMAN FISHER'S CONVERTED BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

They clomp down the stairs to the PARTY. Streamers tacked up.
MUSIC playing. The boys have congregated one side of the
room, girls on the other.

Janie and Margaret exchange another look, not sure what
they're supposed to do with themselves.

MRS. FISHER
Alright, that makes everyone,
Norman.

Seeing this is his cue, Norman picks up a spoon, TAPS IT ON HIS PUNCH GLASS. It's too full and the punch sloshes out, dribbling down his pants.

NORMAN
Oops, uh, whoops.

He tries to sop it up with some cocktail napkins. His mother gestures for him to forget the stain and focus on the speech.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Uh, I just wanted to say thank you
all for coming tonight and I hope
you enjoy the evening. My mom made
beanie weenies. Please, help
yourself.

Norman lifts the SERVING LID from A FANCY SILVER PLATTER to reveal the BEANIE-WEENIES (CUT UP HOTDOGS FLOATING IN BAKED BEANS). The kids peer at it wearily. Norman senses it.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Uh, there are sandwiches too... and
nuts if, uh, you like nuts.

He points to the SANDWICHES and NUTS. Freddy Barnett grabs a plate, goes for the beanie weenies. The rest of the kids start to follow.

LATER--

Margaret, Janie, Gretchen and Nancy eat at a card table.

Margaret's eyes are on Laura Danker, standing on the other side of the room, the BOYS side, alone with her arms crossed. Margaret can't help feeling oddly fascinated by her.

JANIE
(sees Margaret staring)
I didn't think she'd come, did you?

MARGARET
How come she never talks to
anybody...?

JANIE
I don't know...

NANCY
(butting in)
'Cause she's too busy doing *other*
stuff, that's why.

Gretchen laughs. Good one.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Whatever, all I care about is
Philip Leroy came...

They all turn to look at Philip Leroy. He's bent over,
sucking **MUSTARD** off his plate with a straw.

PHILIP LEROY
(taps Freddy)
Hey, watch this.

He aims the straw upwards, blows hard, making a **BIG YELLOW**
SPLITCH on the ceiling. They both crack up. Nancy grins.

NANCY
He's hilarious.

Norman TAPS HIS PUNCH GLASS again.

NORMAN
Okay, now if everyone's had enough
to eat, we can start the games.

GRETCHEN
The games?

Everyone looks around. *What kind of games?*

CUT TO: An **EMPTY BOTTLE LAID SIDEWAYS** on the floor.

FREDDY
Are you kidding Norman? This is the
stupidest game ever.

NORMAN
But it's a classic.

NANCY
Just play. Who spins first?

NORMAN
I'll go first since it's my
birthday. And my bottle.

Norman spins. All the girls get nervous, hoping it doesn't
land on them. It lands on Janie.

JANIE
(sotto)
No...

Margaret shoots her a sympathetic look.

FREDDY
Ha ha! Norman and Janie have to
kiss!!!

Janie swallows. Norman walks over, gives her a peck on the cheek. Except he misses her face, gets her hair instead.

FREDDY (CONT'D)
That doesn't count, you kissed her
hair!

MARGARET
Oh it's fine, it counts.

NORMAN
No he's right, I'll do it again.

Janie looks sick. Norman does it again, connecting this time.

NANCY
Okay, now Janie's turn to spin.

Janie spins. It twirls and twirls. Then lands on...Norman Fisher again. Everyone LAUGHS.

NORMAN
This is a great party.

MARGARET
Do we have to play this game?

FREDDY
I said that from the beginning!

NANCY
Fine, let's play a different game.
I have one. It's called *Two Minutes
in the Closet*.

MARGARET
What's that?

NANCY
We all get a number, and then
somebody calls, like, "number six"
and then those two go in the closet
and...you know...

All the kids get a little nervous imagining this. Margaret and Janie eye each other: *Should we be doing this?*

CUT TO: Nancy holds a BASKET OF LITTLE NUMBERED PAPERS, the room tense with anticipation.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Alright...

She holds the basket out to Freddy. He pulls one out.

FREDDY

Number 3.

Everyone looks around to see who 3 is.

GRETCHEN

Who's number 3?

No one responds.

NANCY

Hellooo? Somebody's gotta be three.

Laura Danker slowly stands up. She towers over Freddy, her chest at his eyeballs. Freddy turns bright red. Margaret can't believe it. Philip grins, slapping him on the back.

PHILIP

Go ahead! Into the bathroom!

NANCY

Hey somebody get Freddy a step stool!

Everyone LAUGHS. Margaret can't take her eyes off Laura as the two of them go into the BATHROOM. They close the door. The whole room goes SILENT, listening.

GRETCHEN

What do you think they're--

EVERYONE

SHHHHHH!!!!!!

Gretchen shuts up. A few seconds pass. Finally, the door opens. Laura comes out, arms folded tightly over her chest, flustered, Freddy behind her. Everyone HOOTS and CLAPS. Freddy hands the basket to Philip, traumatized.

FREDDY

You're next.

All the girls sit up, hoping Philip picks their number. Nancy prays so hard she could burst.

PHILIP
I pick number...
(*oh the suspense*)
12.

Nancy's shoulders fall. Everyone looks around to see who 12 is. Margaret stares down at her number: 12.

MARGARET
Oh my god.

NANCY
What. You're 12 Margaret?!

Margaret is still frozen. Philip does a crooked little smile at her. All the girls burn with envy. Margaret slowly stands, heart banging in her chest. The whole room watching intensely as they head towards--

INT. NORMAN'S BASEMENT BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Philip goes in first. Margaret follows, hardly able to breathe. She slides the ACCORDIAN DOOR shut, all the kids eyes on her until the last inch of it closes.

She's about to turn around and face Philip when suddenly it dawns on her: *The cotton balls*. Her eyes widen, her hands reflexively fly up to her chest.

PHILIP
Margaret, turn around.

She realizes where her hands are, quickly drops them. Nothing she can do about it. She swallows, slowly turns around.

MARGARET
Hey...

PHILIP
Hey.

She gulps a gallon of saliva.

MARGARET
Um, so, do we--

Before she can finish, his LIPS ARE ON HERS. She's stunned, completely unready. He pulls away, looks at her. Margaret can't move.

Then he leans in again, kisses her a second time. This one is LONGER and SLOWER. When he finishes, he grins, proud of that one. Margaret is frozen in her spot. He walks past her OUT OF THE BATHROOM.

Standing there alone, a shocked little smile forms on her face. She looks down at her COTTON BALL BOOBS, then up at God, grateful. The bathroom fills with PRE-LAPPED CHURCH ORGAN MUSIC.

INT. NANCY'S PROTESTANT CHURCH - CHRISTMAS EVE

A LADY (90's), thick glasses and puffed hair, hunches over the CHURCH ORGAN, playing. Margaret watches from a pew, the same goofy smile still on her face. Nancy is next to her, sick with jealousy.

NANCY

So he was a good kisser? Like really good?

MARGARET

Each of 'em were pretty good, yeah.

NANCY

Each of them? So he kissed you more than once? Like how many times?

MARGARET

Uh...about 5, I think? I kinda lost count...

Nancy looks miserable. Margaret can't help but gloat.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I know, God. I know. I shouldn't be rubbing it in, especially here. But Nancy Wheeler is jealous of me. You gotta admit, it's just too good.

Margaret shakes her head, amazed by her good fortune.

EXT. NEW JERSEY - FEBRUARY / DAY

Winter is fading. Just dirty patches of ICE now.

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - SAME

Barb is still cutting out FELT STARS, starting to get really sick of this task. She's on the PHONE, trying to fundraise.

BARBARA

All donations are tax deductible
and always go towards the school's--
(gets cut off)
Oh. Uh, yeah. Okay, g'bye.

She hangs up. Cold-calling is not her strong suit.

Then, something OUTSIDE THE WINDOW catches her eye.

It's A GOLDFINCH perched on a twig, yellow feathers catching the light just so. The image is so beautiful it breaks through something, reaches a place deep down inside her. On instinct, she drops the scissors, hurries out to--

INT. SIMONS' GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Barb runs to her BOXES OF ART STUFF, rushes to get a CANVAS, EASEL, PAINT, PAINTBRUSH.

INT. SIMONS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She rushes back into the house. By the grace of God, the bird is still there. She sets up the canvas as quickly as she can, squeezes out a blob of PAINT, begins to make the first delicate strokes, when--

DING DONG! The doorbell rings. The goldfinch startles, FLYING OFF. Barb's shoulders drop, genuinely disappointed. She sets down her paint brush, crosses through the DEN, opens the front door. Mrs. Wheeler is outside.

MRS. WHEELER

Hi Barbara! I just popped by to
pick up your stars.

Mrs. Wheeler scans Barb's appearance: undone hair, grubby house clothes. Barb feels it, reflexively smooths her hair.

BARBARA

Sorry, I've just been cleaning, uh,
yeah I've almost finished them,
please come in, sit down.

Mrs. Wheeler follows Barb into the DEN, looks for a place to sit. But HERB'S LAWN CHAIR is still the only seat, now joined by other make-shift furniture: an OVER-TURNED BUCKET as a side-table, an UPSIDE-DOWN CRATE as a footstool.

MRS. WHEELER

Uh...

BARBARA

(dying)

Oh, pssh, would you believe it, I ordered new furniture 6 months ago, and they still haven't sent it...

MRS. WHEELER

It's alright, I can't stay long.

BARBARA

I'll get the stars.

Barb gets the HUMONGOUS BOX from the dining room.

MRS. WHEELER

Thanks... Oh, and don't say anything, but Deb's stars came out a teensy bit lopsided. Yours are so good, do you think you could do her allotment too, our little secret?

BARBARA

Oh... Uh, Sure.

MRS. WHEELER

You're a doll, thanks. Well, gotta run, meeting the girls for Bridge.

Barb nods, walking Mrs. Wheeler out. She closes the door, rolls her eyes at herself: *God, what's wrong with me, why can't I get it together?*

INT. DELANO AUDITORIUM - DAY

ALL THE 6th GRADE GIRLS are gathered in the auditorium.

ON STAGE IN THE WING, MRS. WEBSTER (50's) in a boxy gray suit and orthopedic shoes, vigorously cleans her nostrils with a handkerchief. Then stuffs it in her pocket, clears away some throat phlegm, walks out ON STAGE.

MRS. WEBSTER

Hello, girls, my name is Ms. Webster, and today I'm here to speak to you about your changing bodies...

A few GIGGLES in the crowd. Margaret and the girls look at each other.

NANCY

(whispers)

Toldja this was the big sex movie.

MRS. WEBSTER

Some of you may have already begun
to experience these changes.

Everyone looks at Laura Danker. She lowers her head.

MRS. WEBSTER (CONT'D)

While some others of you... still
haven't experienced a single change
at all.

Margaret sinks down in her chair, sure all eyes are on her
now.

MRS. WEBSTER (CONT'D)

We're going to watch a short film
to learn a little more.

The LIGHTS GO DOWN and THE FILM begins: Images of GIRLS
flashing on screen, all shapes, sizes, and colors. THE TITLE
CARD comes up: "*What Every Girl Should Know*"

NARRATOR (O.S.)

All girls are different. But every
girl has something in common.
Between the ages of 9 and 16, her
hips begin to fill out, her breasts
become rounder and fuller, a soft
growth of hair forms in her pubic
area, and it is now that she begins
to *menstroo-ate*.

An animated UTERUS and OVARIES appear.

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

Every month, a lining of blood
forms in the uterus to prepare for
pregnancy. If a baby is not
conceived, the lining is released,
flowing out of the body through the
vagina.

The REACTIONS to the film vary dramatically: thrilled,
fascinated, grossed-out terror-stricken, exhilarated,
genuinely bereft.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This...is *menstroo-ation*.

MARGARET

(to Janie, imitating)
Menstrooooooooooooo-ation.

Janie laughs.

GRETCHEN
(whispers)
Who do you think'll get it first?

NANCY
Who do you know'll get it last?

Nancy eyes Margaret, laughing. Margaret folds her arms, embarrassed and stung.

INT. MODERN FURNITURE STORE - LATER

Margaret follows Barb through ROWS OF MODERN JETSONS-LIKE FURNITURE, still thinking about Nancy's joke.

BARBARA
It's just I've wanted the house to look perfect and I've been so busy with the committees, and the stars, and trying to cook meals with all five food groups, which nobody tells you takes so long and is so boring, and you've gotta do it every...single...day...
(sits in a CHAIR)
Do you like this egg-chair? I feel like I'm on a space ship.

MARGARET
When did you get your period?

Barb stops. *Whoa. Left field.*

BARBARA
Oh... Uh...

She gets up from the chair, trying to transition herself into a conversation she didn't anticipate at this moment.

MARGARET
Just tell me how old you were.

BARBARA
I... 14?

MARGARET
14?! That late?!

BARBARA
That's not that late, I had a cousin who was 16.

MARGARET

Oh my god, I'd kill myself! I'm
definitely not waiting til I'm 16!

BARBARA

(laughs)

Afraid you don't have much say in
the matter.

Margaret doesn't see the humor. Barb glances around the
store, giving up the "modern" look. Just too weird for her.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL - MORNING

Margaret, Nancy, and Janie huddle over their MATH HOMEWORK,
cross-checking answers.

NANCY

My mom's taking me to The Rockettes
next month 'cause I got straight
A's, anyone wanna go? Only bad
thing is my brother will be there
with Moose.

MARGARET

(immediately)

I'll go.

Nancy nods. Okay then. Gretchen runs up, breathless.

GRETCHEN

I got it!

They all just look at her, confused.

MARGARET

Got what?

GRETCHEN

(lowers her voice)

It. My period.

They all freeze. *Holy shit.*

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - LATER

*

An emergency meeting to discuss this development.

NANCY

I can't believe you got it first
when I've got more than you.

Nancy gestures to her Double A's, feeling gypped.

GRETCHEN

Well that doesn't mean anything.

MARGARET

Just tell us how it happened.

JANIE

Yeah, start from the beginning.

GRETCHEN

Well I was sitting there at dinner and I felt something dripping from me. So I went to the bathroom, and pulled down my pants, and that's when I saw the blood. So I called my mom and showed her. But she only had tampons, no pads, so she had to run to the store.

JANIE

What'd you do in the meantime?

GRETCHEN

I stuck a washcloth in my pants.

NANCY

Ew, no you didn't!

GRETCHEN

An old wash cloth. Not like one we use all the time.

MARGARET

(moving this along)

Okay, so go on, then what.

GRETCHEN

So then my mom came home with the pads and I put one on, and, well...that was the whole thing.

NANCY

The whole thing? You haven't even told us the good stuff yet!

GRETCHEN

I've told you everything.

NANCY

But, like, what does it *feel* like?

GRETCHEN

It feels like... nothing. Sometimes like leaking? It doesn't hurt. I had some cramps last night, not too bad. My cousin said it kinda has a smell, but I haven't noticed it yet.

MARGARET

It does? Like what?

GRETCHEN

She said it kinda smells like the monkey bars.

NANCY

The *monkey bars*?

They all look around, trying to remember that smell. Janie looks suddenly grief-stricken.

JANIE

(memory tainted forever)
I used to love the monkey bars...

Margaret is mesmerized.

MARGARET

Do you feel older now? Like more mature?

GRETCHEN

(utterly sincere)
Oh yeah. I don't know how to explain it, and you won't understand until you get it, but I feel like everything has changed for me. I just feel different.
(wistful)
Yeah...

Margaret's insides twist with envy, wishing so badly she could feel that feeling.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Margaret kneels at her bedside, hands clasped in prayer-pose, vomiting out a prayer, top-speed.

MARGARET

(rapid-fire in one breath)

*Are you there God it's me Margaret,
I've never been so jealous in my
life, I hate myself for being so
jealous, I'm a decent person,
please! Please let me grow, please
let me get my period, please make
me regular and normal and like
everyone else, please please please
please please please PLEASE!!!*

(finally exhales)

Amen.

She lays back on her carpet, exhausted. Something in the room catches her eye: THE LITTLE HANDMADE ANIMAL FIGURINES her dresser. Their childishness suddenly make her sick. She stands up, scoops them all up, drops them into a junk drawer, slams it shut.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

ANGLE ON: A SHELF FULL OF MAXI PADS, TAMPONS, PANTY LINERS.
Reverse to see: Margaret and Janie stare intensely at it.

JANIE

I don't know if I want to do this.

MARGARET

It's not a big deal. It's just so
we're ready, just in case.

But Margaret is extremely nervous too. She gathers her courage, plucks a BOX off the shelf. Janie wills herself to take one too.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Okay. Come on.

They hurry towards THE REGISTERS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Please god let it be a lady...

They see the CASHIER: a SWEET LOOKING LADY (50's). They breathe a sigh of relief. Just then, a PIMPLY 17-YEAR-OLD BOY changes shifts with her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Nooo.

JANIE

We can just put 'em back.

Margaret pulls Janie towards the register, determined.

MARGARET

No. We're doing it.

They walk up, set their TWO BOXES OF PADS on the CONVEYER BELT as casually as possible. The TEENAGE CLERK looks down at the pads, then up at them. They fold their arms, look away.

He presses the button to roll the pads closer to him. It's THE SLOWEST CONVEYER BELT IN HISTORY.

Margaret and Janie watch, sweating, as the pads inch slowly by. Margaret finally can't take it, grabs some TIC TACS, tosses them down with the pads so they aren't alone.

EXT. DRUG STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret and Janie burst out of the store, RUNNING AS FAST AS THEY CAN AWAY FROM IT. It's SNOWING outside.

They stop at the corner, out of breath. Look at each other, traumatized. Janie suddenly begins to LAUGH.

JANIE

The Tic Tacs...

Margaret shakes her head, LAUGHS too. It's all so ridiculous. They loop their arms around each other, heading home, SNOWFLAKES floating down around them.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

CLOSE UP ON: A MAXI PAD.

Margaret turns it over in her hands. Squishes it. Smells it.

REVEAL: She's crouched INSIDE HER CLOSET with the door closed.

She peels off the paper strip, touches the sticky part a couple times. Then stands up, yanking down her pants. She hunches over, carefully sticking the pad in place. Then pulls up her pants again, WALKS OUT OF THE CLOSET.

She moves around the ROOM, feeling it out. Stretches, kicks, squats. It feels like wearing a small diaper.

Suddenly there's KNOCK and the DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

BARBARA

You got a post-card from someone.
Who's in D.C.?

Margaret stiffens in an awkward pose.

MARGARET

Oh. Uh, Nancy. Must be from her.
They went for Lincoln's birthday.

Barb cocks her head a little, sensing something's off with Margaret. She lets it go, hands her the post card, exits.

When the door closes, Margaret flips it over. Nancy's written just 3 words: I GOT IT!

Margaret's mouth drops open. Her mood plummets. In one spontaneous flurry, she tears up the card, hurls the pieces into the trash can, KICKS it over.

EXT. SYLVIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sylvia is in her nightgown, digging in her closet, a half-packed SUITCASE open on her bed, along with BROCHURES for a FLORIDA VACATION. The PHONE rings. She goes to get it.

SYLVIA

(utterly elegant)
Hello, Simon residence. Sylvia
speaking.

MARGARET

Grandma...?

She immediately knows something off in Margaret's voice.

SYLVIA

Margaret? What's wrong?

Margaret is crouched on the floor of the BATHROOM, the door shut, the PHONE CORD stretched as far as it will go.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Honey...are you okay, what's the
matter?

It's too hard to explain.

MARGARET

I...I just miss you.

Sylvia clutches her heart. Then does a silent fist pump.

SYLVIA

Aw honey, me too...

MARGARET

I'm coming to the city next week to see the Rockettes, do you think maybe I could come over after and stay the night like I did?

SYLVIA

Oh sweetheart... I wish, but I'll be in Florida then. I heard about this hotel... there's a lot of people my age, and you know...

Sylvia doesn't quite want to say she's going on a vacation to find friends, but she is. Margaret's expression falls.

MARGARET

Okay...

Sylvia feels rotten, hating to let her down.

SYLVIA

Wait a minute, wait, what if you fly down to Florida and meet me for a few days? Isn't your spring vacation soon?

MARGARET

The end of the March.

SYLVIA

Perfect! I'll still be there!

Margaret perks up a little.

MARGARET

I'll ask my mom and dad.

SYLVIA

Great, and--

MARGARET

And I'll tell them it was my idea.

SYLVIA

(grins, touched)
You're my girl.

Margaret feels her spirits lifted a little.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - EARLY EVENING

The sky is a pretty purple.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

The Wheeler's STATION WAGON idles out front.

Margaret opens the door to get in. She's dressed up, her hair curled. MR. WHEELER (40's) is behind the wheel in a suit, Mrs. Wheeler is all dolled up in the passenger seat.

NANCY

Hurry! Come on! Front row tickets!

Margaret scoots in. Looks back to see Moose sitting with Evan in the THIRD ROW, which FACES BACKWARDS out the rear window.

MARGARET

Hi...

Moose turns around, waves.

MOOSE

Hey.

Margaret buckles in, the back of her head an inch from the back of Moose's. Physically closer than they've ever been, but facing complete opposite directions. Their proximity makes her feel a little tingly.

EXT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

A SOLD OUT SHOW packed with TOURISTS.

INT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - SAME

The LIGHTS GO DOWN as they find their seats in the FRONT ROW. Margaret looks to see where Moose is sitting. He's in the FARTHEST SEAT AWAY. Bummer.

The CURTAIN OPENS. They all face forward as THE ROCKETTES run out, burst into their BIG OPENING DANCE NUMBER. Margaret and The Wheelers tilt their heads way back, the front row too close to the stage. HIGH-HEELED LEGS swish past them, almost too close for comfort, a view right up their skirts. Nancy squeezes Margaret's arm, giddy.

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" RESTAURANT - LATER

An upscale place. MAHOGANY and GREEN BANKER'S LAMPS. The HOSTESS shows them to their seats, Nancy and Margaret still singing the music from the show.

NANCY

I'll bet you a dollar I can kick
that high.

MR. WHEELER

(as she starts to try)
Uh-uh. Not in the restaurant.

Nancy makes a face. He's such a stick in the mud.

They come to a LARGE ROUND TABLE. Margaret is smarter this time, strategically maneuvering into THE SEAT NEXT TO MOOSE. He puts his napkin on his lap. She does too.

LATER-- The group is half-way through dinner. As Moose cuts his steak, his hand bumps Margaret's.

MOOSE

Sorry.

MARGARET

That's okay.

He drinks the last sip from his WATER GLASS.

MOOSE

(looks around)
Is the waiter anywhere.

MARGARET

Oh you can have mine, I didn't
drink out of it.

She scoots her WATER towards him. He thanks her, takes a big drink, then looks at her a moment, realizing something.

MOOSE

Hey, you know something I've always
liked about you Margaret?

MARGARET

No...?

Whatever it is, she cannot wait to hear it.

NANCY
(interrupts)
Come with me, I gotta go the
bathroom.

She tugs Margaret away, killing their moment.

NANCY (CONT'D)
We'll be right back.
(to Evan)
Don't touch my food.

Margaret reluctantly follows Nancy, frustrated.

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

The SOUND of Nancy peeing in the stall. Margaret waits at the sink, annoyed.

NANCY (O.S.)
I've had to go bad since we got
here and then I drank two Cokes.

MARGARET
Uh huh.

Margaret folds her arms, impatient. Then--

NANCY
Oh no. Oh *no*.

MARGARET
What?

Nancy's tone is panicked.

NANCY
Oh please... Oh no...

MARGARET
Nancy? Are you okay? What's the
matter?

Margaret walks over to the stall.

NANCY
Get my mom. Please, quick!

Margaret tries to open the stall door, worried. It's locked.

MARGARET
Let me in.

NANCY
No, please, just get my mom.

MARGARET
What's wrong?

NANCY
(starting to cry)
PLEASE! Just go get my mom, please!

Margaret can tell this is something really serious.

MARGARET
Okay, don't worry, I'll be right
back with her!

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Margaret races over to Mrs. Wheeler.

MARGARET
Something's wrong. Nancy's crying,
she needs you!

Mrs. Wheeler drops her fork, stands, alarmed. Evan, Moose,
and Mr. Wheeler look at each other. *WTF?*

Evan shrugs it off, reaches over and forks Nancy's REMAINING
STEAK, moving it to his own plate.

INT. STEAK HOUSE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret and Mrs. Wheeler stand outside Nancy's stall.

MRS. WHEELER
Nancy?

NANCY
Oh please mom, help me! Please.

MRS. WHEELER
The door's locked, Nancy, I can't
get in. You have to unlock it.

NANCY
(crying)
I can't-- I can't--

MARGARET
You want me to crawl under and open
it from the other side?

Mrs. Wheeler nods. Margaret gathers her skirt up, crawls under.

INSIDE, Nancy sits on the toilet, her face buried in her hands. Margaret unhooks the lock, pushes the door open.

MRS. WHEELER

Thank you.

Margaret goes over to wait by the sinks, worried.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Nancy, calm down. I can't help you
if you don't stop crying and talk
to me.

Nancy chokes back her tears, finally WHISPERS SOMETHING.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

(understands)

Ahh...

After a moment, Mrs. Wheeler cracks open the stall door.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Margaret? Would you get Nancy a pad
please?

(hands her a COIN)

From that dispenser on the wall?

Margaret just stands there, confused.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Nancy got her period, honey.

MARGARET

Does she always act like that?

MRS WHEELER

It's her first time. She's just a
little scared.

Margaret suddenly realizes Nancy was lying about her period.

She gets the PAD from the dispenser, gives it to Mrs.
Wheeler.

MRS. WHEELER

Thank you, sweetie.

After a moment, Nancy and Mrs. Wheeler come out of the stall.

MRS WHEELER

You wash up girls, I'm going to go
tell the others not to worry. Don't
be long, okay?

She leaves. Nancy looks at Margaret, not sure what to say.
They wash their hands in silence.

NANCY

Margaret, please don't tell.

MARGARET

Oh Nancy...

NANCY

I'll die if you tell Gretchen and
Janie. Just please don't tell them.
I'll... I'll do something for you
back. What do you want? I'll do it.

MARGARET

Ugh, Nancy... I won't tell them.

NANCY

Really, you won't?

MARGARET

No... Don't worry.

Nancy exhales, relieved. Margaret doesn't know how to feel.

INT. THE WHEELERS' STATION WAGON - LATER THAT NIGHT

Margaret and Nancy ride back, sitting far apart.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*Are you there God? It's me,
Margaret.*

Margaret glances over at Nancy, then stares out her window,
lets out a SIGH.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I don't even know what to say.

The station wagon gets on the TURNPIKE back to New Jersey.

EXT. NEW JERSEY - MARCH / MORNING

SPRING now. Grass and flowers fighting their way back.

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - SAME

Margaret raises her arm, sniffing her armpit. She doesn't smell anything. She's almost a little disappointed. She yanks the LID off a NEW STICK OF DEODORANT, applying it anyway.

BARBARA (PRE-LAP)
Happy Birthday.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - SAME

Barb and Herb watch as Margaret opens her GIFT: A PLANE TICKET TO FLORIDA.

MARGARET
No way, I'm going to Florida?
(they nod)
Thank-you-thank-you-thank-you.

She hugs them both, so relieved to finally have something good happen in her life. She needs this trip, bad.

INT. MR. BENEDICT'S CLASS - LATER THAT MORNING

Margaret walks into class, sees ALL THE DESKS HAVE BEEN REARRANGED.

MARGARET
What...? Why do we have new seats?

She looks over at Janie, who's holding a BALLOON and RECORD ALBUM wrapped in a BOW.

JANIE
He said we're in groups now. To study different countries.

They look traumatized to be separated.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Well, happy Birthday.

Janie hands her a RECORD ALBUM, trying to lift the mood.

MARGARET
Aw, thanks...

They hug, but it still feels like a somber occasion. Margaret looks around to find her new seat. Sees her name in the "BELGIUM" group. Right beside Norman Fisher. She rolls eyes. Of course. She sits down next to him. He smiles. He inches her chair away.

Just then, Laura Danker takes the seat across from her. Margaret can't believe her bad luck. *Seriously, God?*

There's one seat left. Who will it be? She sees Philip Leroy stroll up. She perks up, everything suddenly better.

PHILIP
(sees the present)
Happy Birthday.

MARGARET
Oh. Thanks.

She smiles. Philip PINCHES her hard on the arm.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Ouch!

PHILIP
That's a pinch to grow an inch. And
you know where you need that inch.

He gestures at her flat chest. Margaret blinks, shocked, stung, pissed. Philip grins at Laura, checking out her boobs.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

Margaret bursts into her room, hurls down her backpack.

MARGARET
*Are you there God, it's me,
Margaret! I hate Philip Leroy! I
hate him! I hate Laura Danker, too,
with her great big chest "oooh look
at me everyone, I'm wearing a
sweater!" I hate Nancy, that liar,
and Mr. Benedict with his dumb
ideas, and Norman Fisher, the way
he reads with his lips flapping all
around!*
(imitates Norman's silent
reading, his lips moving
like crazy)
*Please, please, just hurry up and
get me to Florida!*

She crumbles onto her bed, spent.

EXT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

A cloudy day, the sky threatening to rain.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Margaret and Laura are surrounded by BOOKS ON BELGIUM.
Margaret is in a truly awful mood.

MARGARET

Philip and Norman should be here.
They make us do all the work.

Laura doesn't say anything, just keeps working.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What time's your mom picking you
up?

LAURA

Not 'til later. I have to go to St.
Thomas for Confession first.

MARGARET

Confession?

Laura regrets telling her that.

LAURA

It's just something you have to do
when you're Catholic.

MARGARET

What do you confess?

LAURA

Things.

MARGARET

What kinds of things?

Laura gives her a look.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Never mind.

Margaret jots down some more info on Belgium. Laura sees what
she's writing.

LAURA

You're just copying that straight
out of the *World Book*.

MARGARET

I only copied four words.

LAURA

So. You can't do that. We're supposed to write it in our own words.

MARGARET

It's four words. "Germany" "invaded" "Belgium" "when"...

LAURA

You're still cheating. Mr. Benedict will know if you're cheating.

MARGARET

I'm not cheating! Jeez, quit acting like you know everything and are so great!

LAURA

This has nothing to do with being great.

MARGARET

Whatever. I know all about the stuff you do...

LAURA

What's that supposed to mean?

The LIBRARIAN (70's) looks up from her post.

LIBRARIAN

Quiet, girls.

MARGARET

(whispers)

I heard about you and Moose Freed.

LAURA

What about me and Moose Freed?

MARGARET

Oh about how you and Evan and Moose go behind the A&P.

LAURA

Why would I do that?

MARGARET

I don't know why you do it, but I know why they do it -- so they can feel you or something and you let them!

Laura slams her book shut, stands up.

LAURA
You're a liar! You're lying!

MARGARET
I'm not lying.

LAURA
You're just like Nancy. All you do
is pick on people and make up
stories! You think I don't know
about you and your friends?!

Laura grabs her backpack, hurries towards the exit. It suddenly hits Margaret that Nancy might've lied about Laura too. She gathers her stuff up.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

MARGARET
Laura, wait. Wait up.

Laura won't turn around, just keeps walking.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Please.

Margaret finally catches up with her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Laura, listen---

LAURA
You think I don't know you all make
fun of me like it's some kind of
game?!

Margaret doesn't know what to say.

LAURA (CONT'D)
You think I want to be the biggest
kid in class?

MARGARET
I don't know...

LAURA
How would you feel if you had to
wear a bra in 4th grade and
everybody called you names just
because of how you look?!

MARGARET
I'm sorry, Laura...

Laura's throat tightens.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
If you want the truth, I wish I
looked more like you than me.

Laura turns away, walking off again, not wanting Margaret to see her cry.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Laura, wait. I really am sorry.

Laura runs up the steps of the CATHOLIC CHURCH, disappears inside, leaving Margaret alone on the sidewalk. Margaret stands there a moment, feeling awful. Not sure what to do. She heads up the steps, following Laura into the church.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

It's dim, with towering stain glass windows. Margaret looks around. No sign of Laura. She slowly makes her way down the aisle, peering up at the ceiling, a mile high, feeling very, very small in this place.

Her eyes wander to the BURNING PRAYER CANDLES. Then to a STATUE OF MOTHER MARY, staring down at her, arms outstretched, as if to gently scoop her up.

The SOUND of a DOOR CREAKING OPEN. She spins around to see Laura coming out of the CONFESSION BOOTH. Margaret ducks behind a pew, watching Laura cross the sanctuary and leave.

She stands again, stares for a moment at the small door Laura came out of. She begins to move towards it, step by step, until she's right there in front of it. Then slowly, anxiously, she opens it to see what's inside.

A dark, empty space the size of a phone booth. Margaret debates a moment, then decides to go in. She sits on the small stool, pulls the door shut. She looks around the tiny space, her breath held tight in her chest. Is this where God is? In here?

MARGARET
(whispers)
God...?

She waits for something to happen. A Presence to arrive. Or a feeling. Something real and true and unmistakable.

VOICE (O.S.)
Yes, my child.

Margaret STARTLES, not expecting that.

A SHADOW shifts beyond the screen beside her and she realizes a PRIEST is there. Her eyes dart around, not sure what to do.

PRIEST
Do you have something you'd like to confess?

Margaret has no idea how to bare her soul to another person the way she does to God.

MARGARET
Um, I... I... I did something awful...
(then)
I...I'm sorry...

She can't do it. Flings open the confessional door, runs out.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Margaret hurries down the church steps, spilling her heart, confessing. It's beginning to LIGHTLY RAIN.

MARGARET
I'm the worst person who ever lived, God. I picked on Laura Danker just because I felt mean. Why did I do that? I've been looking for you, God. I looked for you in Temple, I looked for you in Church, and I looked for you just now when I went to confess. You weren't there. I didn't feel you at all. Why God? Why do I only feel you when I'm alone?

She sighs, defeated by herself.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

Barb runs to get the MAIL in the RAIN.

INT. SIMON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As she steps into the foyer, she sees the RETURN ADDRESS on one of the letters: PAUL AND MARY HUTCHINS, Ohio.

She stops. Her spirit melts right out of her body. She opens the letter, shaking as she reads it.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Barbara waits as Herb READS the letter.

HERB

"Dear Barbara, your card felt like an answer to prayer. Your father and I have been thinking about you a lot. We're getting older, and suddenly, more than anything, we'd like to see our only daughter and finally get to know our granddaughter, Margaret Ann. We're flying east next week, April 20th. We sincerely hope you'll let us visit. Love, your mother Mary Hutchins."

Herb sets it down, slowly peels off a pair of reading glasses. Barb waits, breath held, for his response. For the first time, he is not his jovial self.

HERB (CONT'D)

You sent them a card.

She lowers her voice, a little embarrassed.

BARBARA

I...I don't know why.

She really doesn't. Herb gets to his feet, begins to pace, trying to keep a lid the swell of emotions rising up.

HERB

Do you remember that first year after they "cast" you out? What that was like for you? The way you felt?

BARBARA

I know... And the way they treated you... I'm sorry.

HERB

You really want to open that door again? We have a good life, we're happy, is it worth it?

Barbara genuinely considers this question.

BARBARA
(quietly, simply)
They're my parents.

Herb slowly inhales and exhales, accepting it even though he doesn't like it. Barb reaches for his hand, knowing this can't be easy for him.

Margaret walks through the FRONT DOOR, registers the energy in the room.

MARGARET
What's going on?

Barb and Herb exchange a look about how to handle this. Herb makes a decision--

HERB
Margaret should know.

MARGARET
Know what? What is this?

HERB
(hands her the letter)
It's from your mom's parents. It concerns you.

Margaret looks at Barb, she takes the letter, quietly reads through it as Herb and Barb wait. Then:

MARGARET
They're coming here next week?

Barbara nods.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I won't be here, I'll be in Florida.

Barb doesn't say anything. Herb looks down.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What? I'm still going to Florida, aren't I?

BARBARA
Margaret, look...

MARGARET
I can't go to Florida now?! But I don't even want to see them! I want to see Grandma!

HERB
We promise you'll go to Florida
another time...

MARGARET
I don't want to go another time!
Does Grandma know about this?!

BARBARA
No, we need to call her.

MARGARET
I'm not calling her, you can do it
yourselves!

Barbara tries to calm her down, defuse this.

BARBARA
(softly)
Alright. Alright. I'll call her
now.

Barb goes over to the PHONE, dials. Margaret cannot believe
this is really happening. Herb rubs his forehead, wishing it
wasn't.

INT./EXT. SYLVIA'S FLORIDA CONDOMINIUM - SAME

Sylvia wears a BATHING SUIT and SARONG. She carries a CHEESE
PLATE out to her VERANDA, setting it down in front of MORRIS
BINAMIN (70's) a good-looking white-haired gentleman pouring
them each a GLASS OF WHITE WINE.

She's uncharacteristically nervous. Yanks at her bathing suit
top a little, worried about her cleavage.

SYLVIA
(trying to be elegant)
Here we are...

Mr. Binamin smiles, he raises his glass, toasting to their
little date.

MR. BINAMIN
This looks wonderful.

The PHONE RINGS inside.

SYLVIA
One moment...
(before she goes in)
Don't eat all the cheese without
me.

(MORE)

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Just kidding, eat at much as you want! Depending on your cholesterol! I'm just being funny I'm not asking what it is! But I'm sure it's low!

She laughs nervously, then turns around, making a face at herself for being insane around him. She answers the phone.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Simon Residence.

BARBARA

Sylvia, it's Barb. Look, um...

Barb struggles for how to begin. Margaret can't take it, goes over and yanks the phone away.

MARGARET

Just give it to me, I'll tell her.
Hello Grandma?

SYLVIA

Tell me what.

MARGARET

That I... that I can't come to Florida.

Margaret hates hearing herself say those words. Sylvia's expression falls.

SYLVIA

What. What do you mean?

MARGARET

We got a letter that my other grandparents are coming.

Sylvia's posture changes.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(getting choked up)
I just really wanted to see you...

SYLVIA

Put your mother back on the line.

Margaret hands the phone to Barb.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Barbara, what the hell's going on?

BARBARA
I'll explain later Sylvia, it's
just one of those things, I hope
you can understand. I've gotta go.

Barb hangs up before Sylvia can protest.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Margaret, I'm sorry...

Margaret heads up the stairs, upset. Barb looks at Herb,
feeling bad for him too.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry...

He puts up his hands. It is what it is. She looks at their
EMPTY DEN, suddenly realizing she's also completely
unprepared for having her parents.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Oh god. And this.

EXT. TRADITIONAL STYLE FURNITURE STORE - DAY

Barb heads up the sidewalk, Margaret reluctantly following.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you there God? It's Me,
Margaret. I'm absolutely miserable.
Everything is just going to crap.
Maybe this is my punishment for
being a horrible person to Laura
Danker.*

On their way into the store, Barb notices A GOOD-LOOKING
COUPLE staring at a FANCY FURNITURE SET IN THE STORE WINDOW.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Please, right now, just do this one
thing for me, I'm begging you: make
something happen so they don't come
and I can still go to Florida.*

EXT. NEW JERSEY AIRPORT - DAY

The PLANE lands, her grandparents arriving.

EXT. NEW JERSEY AIRPORT TARMAC - A LITTLE LATER

Margaret has a bitter, cheerless expression as she and Barb wait for her grandparents to de-board a PARKED PLANE. Barb wears a stiff tailored dress unlike anything else she owns, her stomach in knots. She looks over at Margaret.

BARBARA

Please Margaret. Even if it's fake,
can you just try to *look* happy? Or
least not so unhappy?

MARGARET

Why do you even want to see them?
After what they did to you?

BARBARA

Because I...I want them to see how
great we turned out. How proud I am
of our family...

Margaret just looks away. Every bit of this is unfair. Barb suddenly spots her parents. Her stomach drops.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

That's them.

Margaret looks over to see them coming down the PLANE'S STAIRS. MARY HUTCHINS (70's), soft white hair, ruffled blouse, black orthopedic shoes. PAUL HUTCHINS (70's), plaid shirt, suspenders, the identical shoes as Mary.

Barb feels a jolt of emotion seeing how much they've aged. She breathes it away.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

(waving them over)

HERE WE ARE, OVER HERE.

The Hutchins look up, coming over towards them.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Hi...

PAUL

Hello...

Barb doesn't know whether to hug them. The moment to decide passes.

BARBARA

It's good to see you.

MARY
You too, Barbara. And this must be
Margaret Ann...?

Margaret pastes on a smile, trying to be polite.

MARGARET
Hi.

MARY
We're very glad to meet you.

Mary gives her a stiff kiss on the forehead. Margaret tenses
as she does. Paul just sticks with a pat on the back.

PAUL
Yes we are.

Barb tries to act breezy.

BARBARA
Well, should we get the bags?
Herb's got the car running.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT / LOADING ZONE - A LITTLE LATER

Herb waits by their idling Chrysler in a shirt and slacks, a
fresh haircut. He sees them approaching.

HERB
Hi there.

Herb smiles, anxious but trying to be his affable self.

BARBARA
Hey. Mom, dad, you remember Herb...

PAUL
Hello, Herb.

Paul puts out his hand. Herb shakes it.

HERB
Hi Paul. Mary, how are you?

MARY
Just fine, thank you for having us.

HERB
(nods politely)
Well, welcome to scenic New Jersey.

Herb gestures to their SHITTY SURROUNDINGS, making a joke. Paul and Mary take him as sincere, look around to take in the scenery, nodding. Herb gives Barb a look. Margaret cringes a little.

INT. SIMON'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

They all come through the front door, Herb carrying Paul and Mary's bags.

BARBARA
Here we are, make yourselves
comfortable...

She leads them into the LIVING ROOM, now furnished with the SET FROM THE STORE WINDOW. Mary nods in approval.

MARY
Lovely home.

Barb smiles, relieved.

BARBARA
Margaret can show you to your room.
I'll just start getting dinner
ready.

Barbara looks at Margaret to take them upstairs. She doesn't want to, but goes along.

MARGARET
Up this way...

MARY
Thank you. Gosh, you look like your
mom when she was your age.

PAUL
Yes you do. And I'll bet you're
smart just like her too.

They're being so nice, it's hard to be mad at them. She softens a little.

MARGARET
Oh. Uh. Thanks.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - SAME

Barb opens a CAN OF CAMPBELL'S CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP, dumping the grey gelatinous blob onto a RAW CHUCK ROAST.

She checks the RECIPE. That's it, just one ingredient. She can't mess it up. Herb comes up behind her, checking on her.

HERB

How are you doing?

BARBARA

How are *you* doing?

HERB

I make small talk for a living and I'm already out of material. Help. Sports teams? TV shows they used to like?

BARBARA

I don't know. Game shows mostly?

Herb files it away. Then: DING DONG, the DOORBELL rings. They both look at each other. *Who could that be?*

INT. SIMONS LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Herb opens the door. SYLVIA AND MR. BINAMIN are on the porch.

HERB

Mom?

SYLVIA

This plant is dying from too much water.

She points to a YELLOWING PLANT on their front step. Barbara comes around, freezes.

BARBARA

Sylvia? What's going on?

SYLVIA

Margaret said she needed to see me, so we flew here from Florida. Are your parents here yet? This is Morris Binamin.

MORRIS BINAMIN

Rhymes with cinnamon.

Sylvia smiles casually, as if this isn't the slightest bit nuts. Barb is speechless. So is Herb.

Margaret comes downstairs with her grandparents, sees Sylvia.

MARGARET

Grandma?

SYLVIA

There's my girl!

Margaret runs down to hug her. Sylvia makes a big show of it for Barbara's parents' benefit. Paul and Mary aren't sure what's going on.

MARY

Uh...

Barb just throws up her hands.

BARBARA

Mom and Dad: Sylvia. Sylvia: Paul and Mary.

INT. SIMONS' DINING ROOM - LATER

They all sit around the dinner table. Sylvia is on one side of Margaret, Mary on the other. Everyone is trying to be on their best behavior.

SYLVIA

Dinner is delicious. What is it made of?

BARBARA

Soup.

SYLVIA

Ah.

MARY

(nodding)

Very nice.

Everyone agrees it's great. Margaret nods too.

BARBARA

Well, I'll admit it was a bit of a jolt, but...it's nice to have us all together. The whole family.

(then)

And Mr. Binamin.

They all look at Mr. Binamin. He smiles.

SYLVIA

(Raises her glass to that)

L'chaim.

Barb and Herb both react to the Hebrew.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
(toasts everyone 1-by-1)
L'chaim. L'chaim. L'chaim. L'chaim.

Sylvia puts the glass down and nobody can think of what to say for a second. Herb turns to Paul and Mary.

HERB
See that young kid on Jeopardy?

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Barb and Herb clean up from dinner, relieved to have a break from the group.

INT. SIMONS LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret sits on the couch opposite Paul and Mary. Sylvia and Morris are on the other side of the room, helping themselves to some ICE TEA and a TRAY OF DESSERT COOKIES.

MARY
There's just so much we want to get
to know about you, Margaret...

PAUL
12 years is a lot to catch up on.

They look at her with a genuine longing for the years they missed. Margaret can feel their sincerity.

MARGARET
Yeah... Long time...

PAUL
We were wondering if you go to
Sunday School? Or have ever thought
about it?

Margaret's smile falters, not expecting that. Sylvia overhears it, interjects.

SYLVIA
Nope. Never. Not once.

Mary smiles tersely at Sylvia, staking her own territory now.

MARY
We asked Margaret the question.
Margaret?

Margaret couldn't look more uncomfortable.

SYLVIA

You're wasting your time, Margaret
already went to Temple. She's
Jewish.

Margaret looks over at Sylvia. Herb and Barb walk in from the
kitchen to hear this. Can't believe their ears.

BARBARA

Excuse me?

HERB

(sternly)

Mom, that's it. Cut it out. You're
done here.

SYLVIA

I'm done? You left the room and
they're trying to convert her!

PAUL

Margaret has a right to be baptized
if she wants to be.

BARBARA

Baptized?

Barbara can't believe they're doing this. Margaret sinks down
in her seat, desperately wanting out of this room. Herb
finally has enough, seizes control.

HERB

This discussion is over. No more.
We are her parents and Margaret
will pick her own religion when she
grows up, if she even wants one.

SYLVIA

Except she already did and she's
Jewish.

MARY

Well she's Christian in our eyes.

HERB

MARGARET IS NOTHING. MARGARET IS NO
RELIGION UNTIL MARGARET DECIDES
THAT MARGARET--

As they argue, we push in on Margaret's face. Finally,
something vital inside her BREAKS.

MARGARET
(bursts to her feet)
Stop it! Stop it! I don't care
anymore! I don't care! I don't want
a religion anyway! It's all stupid,
I hate it! I don't even believe in
God!

All the adults shut up, stunned.

Margaret rushes out of the room, hurries UP THE STAIRS.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She throws her DOOR shut, about to give God a piece of her mind. Then stops, realizing it's useless anyway. He's not even there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The adults just stand there, regretting how that went, no one sure what to say now.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dark now. The glow of street lights.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Dear Mr. Benedict...

Barb and Herb see Sylvia and Mr. Binamin off in one TAXI, her parents off in another. Everyone seems exhausted. Sylvia looks apologetically at Mr. Binamin, worried her family drama turned him off. He pats her reassuringly.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*I finished my year-long study of
religion.*

Barb and Herb watch both cabs drive off down the street. Barb sighs. Herb loops an arm around her: *Well, just us again.*

MARGARET (V.O.)
*I went to a Jewish Temple, a
Presbyterian church, a Protestant
church, and a Catholic church.*

INT. MARGARET'S ROOM - NIGHT

Margaret switches on a SMALL DESK LIGHT, pulls some PAPER and a PEN out of her DRAWER, begins to write.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*What I learned about religion is
that it makes people fight. And
that every religion says the same
thing: If you pray to God, he'll
listen to you, and help you, and
make things better. But I've prayed
and prayed, and everything just
gets worse. I don't know anymore,
but I think--*

She hesitates, scared of what she's about to write next.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*That maybe the truth is...
There's nobody even up there.
There's nobody listening.*

Something empties out of her eyes.

MARGARET (V.O.)

There's only just me.

INT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Margaret walks to school by herself. She looks tiny. A tuft of dust blowing down the road.

INT. MR. BENEDICT'S CLASS - DAY

Students drop BOUND BOOKLETS into Mr. Benedict's INBOX. Margaret waits at the edge of his desk as he finishes reading her LETTER. He looks up at her, worried for her.

MR. BENEDICT

Margaret...

A knot forms in her throat. She tries to swallow it away, but can't. She rushes out of the room before anyone see her cry.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Margaret barrels down the hallway, trying to outpace her emotions. A TEAR escapes. Then another. And another. She starts to RUN, makes a turn into--

INT. DELANO GIRLS BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She races by a GIRL AT THE SINK WASHING HER HANDS, ducks into the last stall, shuts the door, crouches down next to the toilet, THE TEARS COMING HARDER AND FASTER NOW.

She clamps a hand over her mouth, trying not to make a sound. She SOBS -- a SILENT, shaking little heap.

The GIRL exits, the SOUND of the door shutting behind her.

Finally in private, Margaret unclamps her hand, lets herself cry. She finishes and the bathroom becomes VERY STILL.

She pulls in a long, slow breath, steadying herself. Presses her scrunch sleeves against her eyes to sop them up.

Finally, she rises to her feet, exiting to--

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As she comes out the door, the LUNCH BELL RINGS. HUNDREDS of KIDS rush in from all directions. Margaret watches them for a moment. Then folds in with the crowd, CARRYING ON.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - LATER THAT DAY

Sun sinking behind the trees.

INT. SIMONS' DINING ROOM - SAME

CLOSE UP: The LATCH on the UNDERSIDE OF THE DINING ROOM TABLE that holds in the EXTRA LEAF. Two FINGERS reach into frame, popping it open.

Barb struggles to lift the HEAVY WOOD PIECE from the center of the table, drags it across the carpet, leans it against the wall.

She pushes the two side pieces back together to turn it back into a SMALL ROUND TABLE. She stares at it a beat. Her own family seemed to expand and contract just that fast.

She takes a slow breath, trying to be okay with that.

Behind her, the DOOR OPENS. Margaret walks in from school with a tired, far-off expression. Barb can relate.

BARBARA

Hi...

Margaret nods hello, heads for the stairs.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Hey. Wait... Come're.

MARGARET
I don't feel like talking.

BARBARA
I know. I don't either.

They just stand there.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry for how things went.
And... I know this past year has
not been easy.

Margaret doesn't make eye contact. *You got that right.*

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Wanna just sit for a minute?

Barbara gestures to the couch. Margaret isn't sure. Barb takes a seat, hoping she'll follow. Margaret hesitates, then joins her.

They sit quietly beside each other a moment. Barb looks over at Margaret, Margaret looks over at her. The moment is ripe.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I want to say something encouraging
right now, but nothing's coming to
me.

Margaret cracks a tiny smile. Looks down. Barb's heart aches seeing her like this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
(lovingly)
It gets tiring trying so hard all
the time, doesn't it.

Margaret nods. *Yes. Yes, it does.* Barb nods back, knowing the feeling well. She loops her arm around her. Their heads tip together ever-so-slightly.

EXT. NEW JERSEY - JUNE / EARLY EVENING

Summer again. Trees swaying in a warm breeze. Emerald green grass. Sprinkler mist sparkling in the sun.

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL / 6TH GRADE FAREWELL CARNIVAL - SAME

GLOWING PAPER LANTERNS strung up over the blacktop. BOOTHS set up with FOOD and GAMES.

Margaret leans together with Janie, Nancy, and Gretchen in front of a "CONGRATS GRADUATES" PHOTO BACKDROP. She's a little better now, but something is missing from her smile.

MR. BENEDICT snaps their PICTURE.

NANCY
Junior high, woo!!!
(then)
Ooh the fish bowl game is open!
Let's go, come on, I'm going first!

Nancy breaks their huddle, takes off running. Gretchen and Janie run after her. Margaret almost falls in with them, then decides against it. She just can't go along with Nancy's ever whim anymore.

MR. BENEDICT
Doing ok, Margaret?

She looks over at Mr. Benedict. He's checking in with her after what happened.

MARGARET
Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Benedict. You
were a good 6th grade teacher.

MR. BENEDICT
Oh, I don't know about that. Still
ironing out a lotta kinks...

But Margaret smiles, meaning it. Mr. Benedict bows his head, the compliment getting in.

Someone TURNS UP the MUSIC on the stereo system. A BUNCH OF KIDS make a run for the chalk-drawn DANCE FLOOR. Margaret watches them dance for a moment.

Then something just beyond them catches her eye: LAURA DANKER, standing by herself as always.

Margaret leaves Mr. Benedict, walks up to her.

MARGARET
Hey.

Laura looks over, surprised someone's talking to her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
You wanna come dance?

Laura hesitates, not sure if she's for real. Margaret looks at her, earnest. Laura weighs whether to trust it. She takes the leap. They head over to the dance floor, start to dance together.

OVER AT THE FISH BOWL GAME --

Nancy hogs the game, Gretchen nagging for a turn. Janie looks around for Margaret. Spots her across the way, dancing with Laura. Surprised, she watches them a sec. They look like they're having more fun than she is. She looks over at Nancy and Gretchen bickering, decides to join Margaret and Laura.

The 3 of them DANCE in a little circle, at the beginning of something...

EXT. SMALL ART SCHOOL - SAME

A small BRICK BUILDING nestled on MAIN STREET.

INT. SMALL ART SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE UP: A PAINTING OF A BOWL OF FRUIT, still in progress. A YOUNG GUY adds a shadow under a pear.

BARBARA
Nice job on the shading, you might
try a wash to blend this area here.

The guy nods, grateful. Barb moves on to the next student.

EXT. SMALL ART SCHOOL / MAIN STREET - LATER

Barb walks to her car after work. Mrs. Wheeler comes down the sidewalk with some shopping bags.

MRS. WHEELER
Oh hey Barbara!

BARBARA
Oh, hi Jan.

MRS. WHEELER
I was just gonna call you! Could
you believe it about the stars?
Jeez, I guess everything's a "fire
hazard" these days.

Mrs. Wheeler shakes her head at the dumb rule.

BARBARA

Yeah...

MRS. WHEELER

Anyway, listen, we're already forming committees at the junior high and I can think of at least three you'd be perfect for if you'll sign up?

Barb smiles, nods.

BARBARA

Oh, yeah, that sounds great and I'd love to, but...

Beat. *How does she put this?*

BARBARA (CONT'D)

(shrugs, warmly)

...I don't want to.

Barb smiles again, apologetic. Mrs. Wheeler blinks, taken aback by the honesty.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I'll see you later though, okay Jan?

Barb slides into her car, waving goodbye. As she spins around to back out, she has a private moment celebrating her tiny victory on the road to self-acceptance.

INT. SIMON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Margaret is on the PHONE with Sylvia (in her APARTMENT).

SYLVIA (O.S.)

I'm gonna write you so many letters. So many letters the mailman says, that's it, too many letters.

MARGARET

Good. Great.

SYLVIA

Have the best time, Sugar, we'll see you when you get back.

Sylvia looks over at Mr. Binamin sitting drinking coffee in his pajamas. He MOVED IN with her.

MARGARET

'kay, bye Grandma.

Margaret hangs up, goes into the LIVING ROOM, where Barb some last items into her CAMP TRUNK, filled to the brim. (Behind her, we see the living room now includes a DEDICATED CORNER for her painting stuff).

BARBARA

Alright, think that's everything.
Now let's see if we can close it.

Barb swings the lid down. Margaret climbs on top of it, using all her weight to push it. Barb secures the latches. They high-five.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Almost like we've done this before.

Margaret hears the LAWN MOWER START UP, looks out the front window. Barb's figured out she likes Moose.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

We owe him for the month. You wanna give it to him?

Margaret turns to Barb, her face lit up, thankful for the excuse.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Margaret finds Moose making laps with the mower, singing *Erie Canal* to himself.

MARGARET

Hey Moose...

Moose waves. She holds up the BILLS. He turns the mower off. They walk towards each other.

MOOSE

(taking the money)
Thanks.

MARGARET

Sure...

She just nods and smiles for a moment.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Well, have a good summer since I
won't see you for a while.

MOOSE
Oh? When are you going?

MARGARET
Camp. New Hampshire. Leaving later
today...

MOOSE
Oh. Well. Have fun.

MARGARET
Yeah.

MOOSE
And... send me a post card maybe.

A dumb grin forms on Margaret's face, not expecting that.

MARGARET
Really? Okay. Yeah. Yeah, I will.

Moose smiles, walks back over to this mower. Margaret turns
around and heads back towards the house, glowing.

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret climbs the stairs two-by-two, grinning to herself.
She skips down the hall, ducks into--

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She pulls down her shorts, sits down to pee, still smiling,
replaying what he said. She gets up front the toilet,
suddenly FREEZES, seeing something. Her eyes get as big as
dinner plates. For a second, she can't breathe. Then--

MARGARET
Mom! MOMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!

BARB is DOWN THE HALL, putting some TOWELS into the LINEN
CLOSET. She startles, rushes down the hall, worried. Sticks
her head into the BATHROOM.

BARBARA
What is it? What's wrong?

Margaret looks up at her, can't believe what she's about to
say.

MARGARET

I got it.

Barbara doesn't know what she means for a se.

BARBARA

What?

MARGARET

My period, I got my period!

As she says the words aloud, she starts to LAUGH AND CRY AT THE SAME TIME, short-circuiting from all the emotions. *This is wonderful! This is awful! It's such a relief! I'm so scared! I'm finally growing up! Oh god I'm not a kid anymore.*

BARBARA

Oh my god.

Barb starts to choke up too, then LAUGHS, feeling silly about all these emotions.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Here, wait a minute, I'll get the pads, I got you some just in case, I was going to sneak 'em in your camp trunk when you weren't looking!

Margaret laughs. Barb hurries to get the BOX from a HALL CABINET, comes back with the PAD for Margaret.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Here. Okay, so this is how you do it, you pull this thing off and there's a sticky part that goes--

Margaret grabs the pad away.

MARGARET

I already know! I've been practicing for two months!

They both start laughing again.

BARBARA

Okay. I guess I'll wait outside then.

Barb closes the door, steps into the HALLWAY to give Margaret privacy.

INSIDE THE BATHROOM--

Margaret peels the paper off the pad, presses it against her underwear, pulls up her shorts. She can't believe she's doing this for real.

She turns to look at herself in the mirror. Thrilled and a little scared by the new person staring back at her.

She draws in a breath, letting it all settle in.

Then, a tiny little thought arrives.

It hovers there, crumb-sized.

Her eyes tick up to the ceiling.

THE SCREEN GOES BLACK.

We hang for a moment in the darkness.

Then:

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you still there God? It's me,
Margaret.*

END CREDIT MUSIC BEGINS.

THE END.