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Barren

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FINAL THESIS

TELEVISION PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Student Name: Hannah Herman

Thesis Logline: In the aftermath of their baby's stillbirth, eccentric couple Marlow and Dev clash with overbearing loved ones, outspoken neighbor kids, and each other while trying to reconcile unmet expectations and their newfound reality. Bottling up her emotions, Marlow begins to see inanimate objects speak, spewing out the feelings she hopes to keep suppressed.

Barren

Title

A teleplay written and produced and presented to the faculty of
the Writing and Producing for Television MFA Program in the
School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University of
Los Angeles, California

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

Writing and Producing for Television

By

Hannah Herman

Student Name

A black rectangular box redacting the student's signature.

6 EDT)

Student Signature

APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Writing and Producing for Television:

Hannah Herman

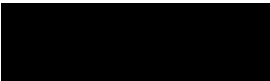
Student Name



SCWR 680 Fall 2020 Instructor Signature



SCWR 681 Spring 2021 Instructor Signature



1:17 PDT)

Graduate Director Signature

Date: May 4, 2021

BARREN
Pilot

Draft Three
4.20.21

Written by
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TEASER

EXT. FARES'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

On a windy Winter day, YOUNG NEIGHBOR KIDS chase after each other SQUEALING.

All but ONE of the suburban yards have long lost the battle against kids, now littered with plastic play sets and an assortment of toys, the hold out being the--

FARES'S HOME

It's picturesque, not a blade of grass out of place.

At the mailbox, pink balloons WHIP violently against the string tethering them to it as a storm BRIMS on the horizon.

INT. FARES'S HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

The MUTED SQUEALS from the kids fill the room and blend with a deep GROAN.

In the throws of labor MARLOW FARES (31), a petite, pregnant, pitbull of a woman in leggings and an oversized sweatshirt, braces herself against the sink.

MARLOW

(yells toward the door)
Promise me our kids will not sound
like that.

DEV (O.S.)

Don't they just sound like kids?

MARLOW

No. Those ones, they sound like...
little fuckers.

INT. FARES'S HOME - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In a feverish hurry, DEV FARES (28), an endearing kind of tightly wound, highlights and itemized list as he triple checks the pre-packed totes. He's on this dad shit.

DEV

You should tell their parents that.

Taking Marlow's silence for serious consideration, he breaks from the list to look at the bathroom door--

DEV (CONT'D)
But not really. That was just a--

Marlow emerges, too absorbed in a contraction to hear anything.

Dev smiles adoringly at her until his eyes catch on the window perfectly framing the THRASHING BALLOONS outside.

DEV (CONT'D)
I should take the balloons in.
They're going to blow away.

Marlow shakes her head, tries to redirect him to the task at hand as she POINTS at her stomach, but he's too fixated on the balloons.

MARLOW
They were... \$2.99.

Dev furrows his brow as he nods his head reluctantly.

DEV
You're right. And I know you're right.
(under his breath)
It's just--

MARLOW
--The principle.

Over Marlow's latest contraction they share one of those 'I have never loved you as much as I do right now,' sappy, but sweet kind of looks, marital bliss in all it's messy glory.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
Next time... we'll just take one of Anne and Tom's kids... People might think we stole them... but they'll be cute.

DEV
Anne might go along with that, but Tom's a softy. Not a chance.

MARLOW
You're one to talk.

Dev makes an unconvincing muscle man pose as he zips up a bag, but a RIDICULOUS JINGLE from his phone disrupts the charade.

DEV
Shit. Mom. Should I--

MARLOW

--No.

Marlow's face CONTORTS with an agonizing contraction and she can only manage to GROAN in further protest.

DEV

I should call Anne though--

Marlow waves him off, trying to communicate with hand signals until she can regain her words.

MARLOW

--Anne's knee deep in baby
bottle... wine coolers right now.
I'll text her... the party's off--

Marlow heaves in and then out with GULPING BREATHS.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

This is our time... And... Do not.
Answer. That.

DEV

I just thought you might've had a
change of--

MARLOW

--No, I still do not want to
listen... to your mom's passive
aggressive insults... while I
push... one of your family's
bowling ball heads... out of my
vagina.

DEV

Right. All for the birth plan. Me
and you till the end baby.

MARLOW

I'm gonna need to see you... Do it.

With one last glance, Dev makes a show of silencing his call from "MOM" for Marlow.

DEV

Yep. Totally get it.
(under his breath)
I'm sure she'll be totally
reasonable about us keeping her in
the dark too.

Scanning the room for last minute additions, Dev dons a corny embroidered hat that says 'Big Daddy.' Marlow swallows a laugh over the ensemble.

Catching her, Dev touches the hat self-consciously, as Marlow waddles toward the door.

DEV (CONT'D)

Does it look stupid?

(a beat)

My mom is already going to kill me.
I don't need Anne up my ass for not
wearing this now too...

MARLOW

Let's just get a move on... Big
Daddy.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. FARES'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Two neighbor kids GIGGLE as they play some semblance of soccer in the yard nearest to Dev and Marlow's home.

The older ringleader, EMERSON (8), really just LAUNCHES soccer SHOTS at the younger one, NORA (5), who narrowly dodges them before chasing the ball down for Emerson.

NEXT DOOR, the Fares's home looks cold by comparison.

Mostly-deflated balloons hang onto the pavement, their tethered strings like tiny nooses.

INT. FARES'S HOME - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sweats at her ankles, sweatshirt looking equally half-washed, Marlow endures a postpartum shit from hell. The phone in her hand plays a welcome distraction as she scrolls.

MARLOW

Bug off Janet. Bug off Dani.

Scrolls and swipes more.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

No I do not want to conference in
Alan, you jackass. Oh bug the fuck
off Janet.

A NERVOUS SHRIEK from Nora, followed by Emerson's LAUGHTER drifts into the bathroom. Marlow steals a quick conflicted glance toward their noise, turns back.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

(under her breath)
Bug off little neighbor fuckers.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FARES'S HOME - BEDROOM - SAME

Again, Dev stands at the window, transfixed on the sad balloons, now with baggy eyes and a furrowed brow.

One especially sad balloon POPS before his eyes. Dev winces then redirects his gaze to an earmarked informational pamphlet in his hands.

ON THE PAMPHLET, there's a corny couple smiling under a tree with the words: "Seven Steps to Seeing Beyond Stillbirth".

Dev redirects his attention to the bathroom.

DEV
Mar... I think we--

ON THE PORCELAIN THRONE, Marlow wipes and reaches under the sink for a maxi pad.

Her hand searches and comes up empty. She's out.

MARLOW
--Shit.

FROM THE BEDROOM, Dev walks up to the door.

DEV
What'd you say?

Nothing from Marlow.

Dev knocks gently on the door.

DEV (CONT'D)
Mar? Can you hear me?

A very annoyed Marlow, emerges from the bathroom.

MARLOW
I said shit, Dev. That's all I said. Shit.

DEV
Oh.

They do an awkward dance trying to figure out where the other one is trying to go, totally out of sync.

DEV (CONT'D)
Did you--

MARLOW
--Stop. Please. Just stop.

As directed, Dev freezes. Marlow steps around him.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
I'm going to the store.

Dev's PHONE starts playing the ridiculous JINGLE again as Marlow moves for the door. He looks down to see the contact "MOM" calling.

DEV

Wait.

Dev declines the call. Again, the JINGLE -- "MOM" immediately calling back.

MARLOW

(sarcastically, over her
shoulder)

You should answer that. I'm sure
she'll have plenty to talk about.

Marlow makes for the door as Dev raises the phone to his ear.

DEV

(calls after her)

If you wait, I can go with you.

INT. FARES'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Marlow does one of those frantic paces, in search of something amidst the discarded tote bag and the Big Daddy hat strewn on the counter.

It looks like she's tossed mail around and dishes are piled by the sink. In short, the space has gone to hell.

Dev leans on the door frame.

MARLOW

Don't say it.

DEV

She's not gonna let up about this
memorial burial thing.

MARLOW

Attention whore.

(a beat)

Have you seen my purse?

Dev looks down at his pamphlet.

DEV

I do think we need to do something.

MARLOW

Fine. You and your mom go blow smoke up each other's asses or make a pilgrimage to Mecca, I really don't care, so long as I find my purse.

DEV

No. Not like that, I mean-- I said I'd go to the store with you, but maybe we can talk first. There are things we need to do. Non mom related stuff.

Awkward beat.

DEV (CONT'D)

I just meant I want to make a plan.

MARLOW

Let me just whip out my agenda then.

DEV

Seriously.

Marlow stops, SIGHS.

MARLOW

And what did you have in mind?

DEV

Well, I thought maybe we could draft some kind of email.

Marlow furrows her brow. Dev clocks it.

DEV (CONT'D)

Does that seem too formal? I just thought we could send it to the guys at the firm and your team at--

MARLOW

--An email?

DEV

I don't think I have everyone's phone number or I'd--

Marlow SCOFFS. Dev looks confused.

MARLOW
Call 'em up, 'Oh, hey partner,
quick womb update.' You don't even
like those people.

DEV
I like them fine.

MARLOW
You said if Jenny gets any further
up your asshole, you're going to
have me surgically remove her.

DEV
I don't think that's how I said it.

MARLOW
Your words. Not mine.

Marlow resumes her search.

DEV
Well, have you called Anne at
least? Cause I could--

MARLOW
(venomous)
--I said I'd call her.
(a beat)
She's just been busy.

Clearly Dev doesn't buy it, but he also doesn't push it.

DEV
I thought a list might help, like a
game plan, we could just start by
taking in the balloons...
(a beat)
We just need to start taking steps.

Marlow stops dead. She sucks on her teeth before letting out
a STRANGLED SIGH.

DEV (CONT'D)
There's some really great stuff in
here if you want to take a look...

Dev gently nudges the pamphlet toward her and--

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

The PAMPHLET WIGGLES it's way closer, as if it were walking. The couple waves at Marlow cheerily. Horrified, Marlow avoids facing the couple head on.

MARLOW

I can't do this, Dev. Not today.

The trusty pamphlet begins to MULTIPLY like mad on the counter, with the original pair, riding the exponential wave toward Marlow.

PAMPHLET GIRL

Of course you can!

PAMPHLET GUY

We're doing it!

MARLOW

(venomous)

I said not fucking today!

All the chipper couples now look scared of Marlow. Marlow's breath quickens and she backs away.

DEV

(pre-lap)

At least just tell me what you want to do.

END FANTASY

BACK IN REALITY, Dev looks frustrated. Marlow looks equally frustrated.

MARLOW

Well, right now...

As if she's doing one of those cheesy reenactments, Marlow extends her palms, like she's holding a basketball in them.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

I just want to go, slam, *slam*,
SLAM!

Dev can only watch in horror, as Marlow pretends to smash the invisible object repeatedly into their kitchen counter.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

'Cause I can't find my fucking purse, and you won't stop going on about steps long enough to help me find it. So, I'm thinking about finding my purse and doing that.

DEV

And that's my skull.

MARLOW

Yes.

DEV

Your purse is right there.

Dev gestures behind Marlow and the disheveled kitchen to the door where, sure enough, her purse hangs in clear sight.

Spirits immediately lifted, Marlow pretends to bonk her head like they're in a silent movie not a nightmare.

MARLOW

Duh.

Marlow steals one last glance at the solitary pamphlet on the counter to ground herself back in reality then grabs her bag.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

Okay. I guess that covers what I wanted. We can do your list. Later. When I'm back. I'm just gonna take some space. Run to the store. Then we'll make a plan.

(a beat)

Do you need anything?

Stunned, Dev watches her uneasily like the pamphlet couples.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

Maybe we can go sit by a tree then. It seems to be working so well for these two.

She raps her knuckles against the cover-couple's faces a little too aggressively before she heads out.

DEV

Where are we going to find a tree?

Marlow's gone, but Dev reaches after her like a phantom limb.

EXT. FARES'S HOME - DAY

In the Fares's driveway, Marlow glances at the house as if ensuring Dev isn't waiting in the wings.

Then, she scrolls her phone back to the first unread voicemail -- dated a few days back -- from her best friend, ANNE. She presses play.

ANNE

(voicemail)

I know you weren't about this whole shower thing, but phoning in the food poisoning card is shady, even for you.

Marlow stares at the neighbor's yard where Emerson continues to pelt younger Nora with her soccer kicks.

Red-cheeked from being sent dodging or chasing after a ball in every direction, Nora finally stops to catch her breath.

NORA

But when is it my turn to be kicker?

EMERSON

You know, I told you. I'm the kicker cause you're a better chaser.

NORA

I don't feel like a very good chaser.

Nora looks to Marlow as if she might back the little girl up, but Marlow just averts her gaze.

As Anne GROANS on the voicemail, Marlow does the same GROAN climbing into her--

CIVIC

Marlow's car DASH INTERFACE, takes over for her phone as she situates herself in the driver's seat.

ANNE

(voicemail)

...No more babies for us. I might snip Tom myself. Tonight.

Little VOICES SCREAM on Anne's end of the phone and blend with Nora's GROANS of protest as she resumes her chasing outside.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 (voicemail)
Mommy is talking.
 (a beat)
 I'm not saying I've ever done it,
 but I think about taping their
 mouths shut upwards of ten times a
 day.

LITTLE VOICE
 (voicemail)
 I want to talk to Aunt Marwoe.

POUTY CRIES echo from the voicemail. Little cracks form in Marlow's calloused exterior for only a second.

ANNE
 (voicemail)
 Not even a day. Ten an hour.
 Something you can look forward to.
 Call me back, whore. I hope Dev
 pukes till he shits.

Click. The next message begins as Marlow absently pulls out of her driveway and turns onto the street.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 (voicemail)
 Okay, I know you are not suddenly
 so maternal you can't leave your
 ailing husband's side. And I'm sure
 Dev's mommy dearest would love to
 take over for you!

Looking down at the dash momentarily, Marlow doesn't see the soccer ball roll in front of her car.

MARLOW
 (to the dash)
 You have no idea.

Nora steps in the path of Marlow's car after it just as Marlow looks up--

As something SHATTERS on Anne's end, Marlow SLAMS on her breaks, narrowly avoiding a massacre.

ANNE	MARLOW (CONT'D)
(voicemail)	Shit! You dumb little fucker.
Shit! I gotta go.	

All Nora's fearlessness drains from her body as a puddle forms on the crotch of her leggings. Click.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

Nora's lip quivers.

Emerson purses her lips disapprovingly. She takes Nora by the shoulders, steers her toward their house.

EMERSON

(over her shoulder)

You know, I'm telling my mom you're
a potty mouth.

Another message starts to play as Marlow puts the car back in drive.

ANNE

(voicemail)

Marlow. I'm worried about you.
Please call me... God I sound--

Marlow angrily jabs at the dash to silence Anne.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. FARES'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Dev makes quick work of the kitchen chaos, happy to have a purpose of his own.

He straightens a pile of mail, checks the oven clock.

Takes out the trash, checks his phone.

Loads the dishwasher, checks the oven clock again, practically willing Marlow home.

Finally, a KNOCK from the front door and Dev rushes to it.

INT. BUYRITE SUPERSTORE - AISLES - DAY

A pack of the needed maxi pads sit in a cart with her purse, but Marlow makes no attempt to head for the cash register.

Instead, she wanders aimlessly through an aisle of overpriced wine with mock interest.

Down the aisle, another shopper, BETTY (34), with absolutely no boundaries locks in on Marlow's postpartum belly -- somewhere murky between unpregnant and pregnant now.

The woman giddily walks towards Marlow, arms out stretched toward her stomach as if she is entitled to touch this complete stranger that is Marlow.

With cat-like reflexes Marlow JERKS her cart between her and Betty to create a physical barricade.

BETTY
(shrill whisper)
Oh my--

MARLOW
(through gritted teeth)
--Lady, I am a volcano and I swear
to God if you try to touch me, I am
going to fucking blow.

As if Marlow's words were venom, Betty snaps her hands back like Marlow might bite and walks away, shaking her head...

Only to stop halfway down the aisle and continue to tail Mar.

Sensing Betty's gaze, Marlow grabs the BIGGEST BOTTLE of wine she can find and shakes it over her head for emphasis before adding it to her cart.

INT./EXT. FARES'S HOME - ENTRYWAY - DAY

Instead of finding Marlow on the other side, it's--

JENNY ALLEN (28), just self aware enough to know she's socially inept and therefore always overcompensating. She looks all too eager to greet Dev. He grimaces.

JENNY

Well, there's my office buddy. I've been missing you this week.

Jenny pinches his cheek like they're old comrades.

JENNY (CONT'D)

And I was just in the neighborhood and thought some chicken noodle soup might do a guy some good.

DEV

You were in the neighborhood with soup?

JENNY

Uh-huh.

Jenny pokes her head into their house as if she's checking the coast.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Is my girl MarMar here?

Something on Dev's face says 'MarMar' could not be less of Jenny's girl.

DEV

Uh, No. She went out.

As if that's all the cue she needs, Jenny weasels her way into their home.

JENNY

Aw shoot. Need me to remind her it's for better *and* worse?

Deadpan Dev just shakes his head.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Oh look at that sad little head of yours just flopping around. Let me heat this up for you quick. You really do look awful.

The pyrex bowl of soup jiggles in her hand as she nudges her way past Dev toward the kitchen with her oversized tote.

JENNY (CONT'D)

And don't let me forget I have the gift from you guys's shower too.

INT. BUYRITE SUPERSTORE - AISLES - DAY

Marlow weaves about, still tailed by Betty, and growing increasingly agitated.

As Betty gets tangled up in an aisle on her left, Mar stakes a sharp right into the--

GREENHOUSE SECTION

A greenhouse clerk, VERDICE (80s), more gray thumb than green, perpetually deadpan, practically apparates, cutting Marlow off.

VERDICE

Can I help you?

MARLOW

(under her breath)

Loaded question.

(a beat)

Uh, no. I'm more of a brown thumb.

VERDICE

Everybody's good at growing something.

MARLOW

Not me.

VERDICE

Odd you'd come in here then.

MARLOW

I just needed some time alone.

Verdice eyes Marlow's oversized coat and bag. Then her cart.

VERDICE

I see.

MARLOW

Oh come on lady--

VERDICE

--Verdice.

MARLOW

Fine. Verdice. You can't honestly believe someone would steal a pack of maxi pads.

VERDICE

You'd be surprised.

INT. FARES'S HOME - ENTRYWAY - DAY

Jenny roams through their neat, but eclectic space, taking it all in.

JENNY

Wow. Your house is gorgeous. Crazy I've never been in here? I could always tell Marlow had good taste.
(only half joking)
Scary people always have the best taste.

She stops in front of a gallery wall of the happiest photos -- drunken nights with two people we'll later know as Anne and Tom, tropical vacations, their wedding day with Dev's mom (she looks super helicopter-y). It's enough to know Marlow and Dev make a dope pair.

Jenny points to a photo of Dev as kid, smiling broadly at the camera.

JENNY (CONT'D)

You guys are going to have such a pretty baby. I mean with those cheekbones.

Dev doesn't even hear her, absorbed in a text on his phone to Marlow: "SOS."

INT. BUYRITE SUPERSTORE - GREENHOUSE - CONDOLENCE AISLE - DAY

Now trailed by Verdice instead of Betty, Marlow stops to SILENCE the BUZZ of her phone in a row of the religious statues and garden crosses that you never ask for, but always get way too many of after a funeral.

Out of the corner of her eye, she catches the waist-height statue beside her and AGGRESSIVELY pantomimes jacking off in the face of a stone cold--

JESUS CHRIST.

Verdice catches up just in time to see it all go down.

In avoiding Verdice's stare, Marlow is forced to look at the statue head on.

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

Jesus raises his brows, tilts his head, purses his lips. Patronizing and practically begging for a reaction from Mar. Marlow refuses to confront the fantasy head on.

END FANTASY

BACK IN REALITY, Marlow sheepishly looks over at Verdice instead of risking a look back at Jesus.

MARLOW

Sorry. I am, well or--

Marlow gestures to the statue of the big man.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

We are working through some...
somethings. I should probably go
now.

Verdice nods and retreats. Marlow pretends to follow until...

She circles back to kick the statue's knees for good measure.

Big man TEETERS and TOTTERS before he SLAMS back into the concrete floor.

Marlow's face twists into equal parts horror and delight as one of his warm and welcoming extended palms is sheared off on impact.

Verdice looks unfazed. She's seen it all.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
I'll obviously pay for that...

Verdice lifts Jesus into Marlow's cart while Marlow wrings out her hands.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
Okay, I think I need to go home
now.

Verdice softens, pats Marlow supportively on the shoulder. It's enough to make Marlow's lip quiver ever so slightly.

INT. FARES'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Jenny pushes a hot bowl of soup to Dev.

DEV
Well, I think I can take it from
here.

Instead of grabbing her coat, Jenny wiggles onto the barstool beside Dev, where the smiling pamphlet couple still stares up expectantly.

JENNY
Nonsense. I can stick around and
keep you company.

Noticing his precious pamphlet now sits directly under the hand of Jenny, Dev waits in silent dread.

JENNY (CONT'D)
It's the enneagram two in me.
Nurturer. Bet Marlow's more of a
four.
(a beat)
See you guys are all set for the
big day?

While Jenny gestures to the tote bag and the hat still left slung on a chair from their hospital visit, Dev takes the bowl of soup and sashes it onto Jenny and the pamphlet.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Oh dear.

Preoccupied with the hot soup all over her blouse, Dev throws a few paper towels at Jenny, before he hurriedly scrunches the pamphlet up under a paper towel of his own.

DEV

I'm so sorry. I was just... feeling
a little lightheaded.

JENNY

With as long as you've been sick,
I'm sure you are a little
lightheaded.

Jenny raises a hand to his forehead, but he swats her away.
With the incriminating evidence in hand, Dev gestures to the
powder room.

DEV

I think I'm gonna go to the
bathroom.

INT. BUYRITE SUPERSTORE - CASH REGISTER - DAY

Out of places to hide, Marlow approaches the cash register
with her newly acquired statue and other essentials.

A very, very stoned CASHIER (18) takes in the contents of
Marlow's cart.

He scans the statue first, but then stops. His head swivels
as he pans his bloodshot eyes between Marlow's postpartum
stomach and the magnum bottle of wine. Does not compute.

MARLOW

I could just be fat you know.

Her words take a minute to wash over Stoney Baloney.

CASHIER

Oh. Totally.

They stand there in an awkward lull.

MARLOW

...So I'll just take this then.

Still nothing. Marlow picks up the bottle and SCANS it
herself as if to remind him how to do his job.

Gears click. Cashier's senses takes over as he punches the
keyboard and scans the maxi pads last.

Beside the cash register sits the ugliest shrubby/plant/tree
known to man.

Giving Charlie Brown Christmas a run for it's money, it doesn't seem like the most formidable opponent, but Marlow refuses to look at it head on like she's scared of what it might do.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
 (under her breath)
 Fuck me.
 (a beat)
 I want the tree.

CASHIER
 Huh?

MARLOW
 The plant thing behind you. I'll take it too.

CASHIER
 Afraid that guy's spoken for.

Cashier FLICKS a branch. The branch doesn't rebound.

Unable to not do something, Mar pats the pot reassuringly.

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

Off Marlow's loving touch, the misfit plant leans into her. Marlow bites her lip, fighting the urge to look at it.

Mar fails, looks at the little plant head on. It immediately perks up, ~*~thriving~*~ under her caring gaze.

Verdice appears, this time literally out of thin air like a fairy godmother. She gives Mar a thumbs up. Holy shit, her thumb is actually a greenish gray.

Cashier starts a slow-clap as people come crawling out of the wood work to cheer on Marlow and her gift for cultivating broken things.

Even Betty joins in as Mar looks around proudly if not a little bit self-consciously.

MARLOW
 (pre-lap)
 I really can't take all the credit.

END FANTASY

BACK IN REALITY, the Cashier looks at her confused. Marlow shakes the thought away, frustrated by her weak willpower.

CASHIER
I mean cash is cool too.

Marlow digs through her wallet, throws down a wad of bills.

MARLOW
Sorry. Here. Just keep the change.

Cashier fumbles over the cash, clearly more than Marlow intended, but too late to take back now.

CASHIER
Sweet. You are one cool broad.
Anybody ever tell you that?

Cashier takes the maxi pads he still holds and uses them like a pointer to direct attention to Marlow with one hand and uses the other to cup around his mouth as if he's talking into a megaphone.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
(megaphone voice)
Cool broad alert on register three.

Embarrassed Marlow tries to reach for the box, but no dice.

Marlow holds herself and the wine, as she jumps and finally snatches up the box.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
No bag?

Marlow stomps for the exit, when she steals one last glance at the dying tree thing.

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

The tree's branches reach out to her like arms.

TREE
(grudge-like voice)
Help me!

END FANTASY

BACK IN REALITY, She abandons the cart in a split second decision, runs back, snatches the potted plant and beelines for the door.

Betty appears with her own cart as if she's going to come at Marlow again, but Marlow just shoves by.

BETTY
Think of the baby!

Miraculously, Marlow manages to free a hand and flip her off, before she disappears behind the closing automatic doors with God's only son and her new plant baby.

INT./EXT. MARLOW'S CIVIC - DAY

Marlow rushes to double buckle her stringy tree into the passenger seat with Jesus, tightening the strap for good measure.

MARLOW
(under her breath)
This doesn't make us friends.

As if expecting a mob to be chasing after her, she stumbles into the driver's seat.

When she starts the car, an INCOMING CALL from ANNE blinks up on her dash, forcing her to pause.

Mar chews her lip, debating. She looks to her new plant child and Jesus for guidance. Nothing.

Only half checking her rearview, Marlow makes her mind up and jabs decline.

Another INCOMING CALL -- this time from DEV. No consult necessary, she immediately declines that one too.

Another CALL from Dev. Frazzled, Marlow whips the car in reverse when--

BAM.

The Civic's REAR END has swallowed the tail of an immaculate VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE, but worst of all...

The impact EJECTED the potted plant from the seatbelt, and it landed plant-first on the floor.

Heart in her throat, Marlow bends to assess the damage. Delicately righting the plant, it's even worse off than it was before.

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

Jesus CLUCKS his tongue admonishingly as the plant WAILS.

MARLOW

It's okay. It's gonna be okay.

END FANTASY

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. BUYRITE SUPERSTORE - GREENHOUSE - ENTRANCE - SAME

Verdice tends to the plants out front of the greenhouse, when we hear the same BAM.

BEHIND HER, Betty charges across the parking lot.

BETTY

My baby!

Verdice turns to watch the commotion as Betty heads right for the damaged VW and Marlow's Civic.

Before Betty can get there, the Civic PEELS OUT of the lot.

Betty shakes her fist after Marlow's car.

BETTY (CONT'D)

You... You... Baby killer!

Verdice quickly returns to tending the plants.

INT. FARES'S HOME - POWDER ROOM - DAY

Dev pulls at his hair with one hand as he clutches his phone to his ear with the other.

No luck, he SLAMS the phone down on the sink vanity.

JENNY (O.S.)

Everything okay in there?

DEV

Never better! I actually think you're good to go Jenny.

JENNY (O.S.)

Oh, don't worry about me. I've got nothing but time.

DEV

Great. Just great.

Dev retrieves his phone, the screen now shattered. He haphazardly dials.

Someone picks up on the first RING--

ANNE
 (on the phone)
 Dev! Hello! Sweet Jesus!

EXT. FARES'S HOME - DAY

Between the cold ground and Marlow's feeble upper body strength, she's only managed to make a small dent in the yard. She looks back over her shoulder to the passenger side of the car.

Marlow waddles to the garden hose at the side of their house, dribbling water into her cupped hands.

When she reaches the Civic, she realizes her mistake. The door is still closed.

MARLOW
 Shit.

Marlow drops the water, yanks the door open, repeats the water retrieval and returns to the now open door to dribble some water on the plant.

Waits for a sign, a response, anything? Nothing.

Surveying the sky, Marlow pulls the tree-thing out and tries to place it in the most direct sunlight she can find.

Alone in the windy weather, it looks defenseless.

With a SIGH, Marlow drags over Jesus too to create a wind barrier.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
 (under her breath)
 Stay with us little guy--

EMERSON (O.S.)
 --How do you know it's a boy?

A hand reflexively going to her stomach, Marlow jerks up to the source of the noise.

From the neighboring yard, Emerson watches. Nora, now clad in new pants, hovers hesitantly behind her older sister.

NORA
 You are having a baby... right?

MARLOW
 Didn't your mom teach you it's rude to ask people that?

EMERSON

You know, our mom *said* you're
having a baby.

MARLOW

Why the hell would I know that?

EMERSON

You know--

MARLOW

--No. I probably don't know if you
have to ask.

That stumps Emerson.

Marlow waves them off, goes back to her own work, while Nora
leans into Emerson.

NORA

(hushed)

She doesn't look like a mom.

Both girls continue to observe Marlow some more.

Marlow, now breaking a sweat, pauses to open the bottle of
wine. Takes a glug.

EMERSON

(under her breath)

You know, but she acts like mom.

Nora nod as if the wine confirmed it.

INT. FARES'S HOME - NURSERY - DAY

The nursery isn't gaudy. Just simple and intentional with
burp rags readily waiting on a rocker and books lining a
shelf well within a child's reach.

DEV (O.S.)

Jenny? Where'd you run off to?

JENNY

Good taste that Marlow. Gotta give
her that.

Jenny meanders around the room, oblivious to the magnitude as
Dev appears frozen in the open doorway.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Thought I'd just leave my present
in here so I could steal a quick
peek.

Jenny turns to Dev, hands him a kid's baseball mitt with a
big bow on it. Dev stares at it, dumbfounded.

DEV
Why-- I mean, how...

JENNY
Cause you said you and your dad
always watched baseball--

Dev shakes his head, as if short circuiting.

DEV
We can't use this.

JENNY
Well, not now--

DEV
--I said we can't fucking use this!

JENNY
But--

DEV
--But what? A baby doesn't need
this. How many babies play
baseball? Want to get it a diamond
necklace while you're at it? A baby
just needs to be happy, and
healthy, and... alive. So we
just... Babies don't need this.
(a beat)
Any of this.

With a SIGH, Dev deflates, like all the tension left his body
with it.

DEV (CONT'D)
Sorry about that. I don't...

Jenny still steps toward the window to create distance
between her and Dev as if he still might throw something.

JENNY
I probably should've asked to see
the nursery.

Her eyes catch on something OUT the WINDOW.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Is that Marlow?

IN the YARD, a Marlow-esque silhouette takes bottle pulls of wine beside the tree-thing.

IN the NURSERY, Dev tries not to lose what little composure he regained, while Jenny squints to get a closer look.

DEV
I'm just going to see you out now,
Jenny. Thanks for the soup.
(a beat)
The mitt too. Mar will love it.

JENNY
But--

DEV
--Thank you.

EXT. FARES'S HOME - DAY

As Jenny's car pulls away in the BACKGROUND, Dev approaches the massacre in his yard. He squeezes the baseball glove in his hand like a stress ball.

DEV
What are you doing, Marlow?

Marlow stops her resumed excavation long enough to wipe sweat from her brow.

MARLOW
What does it look like?

DEV
It looks a lot like--

EMERSON (O.S.)
--bad?

Dev turns to see Marlow's neighbor girl audience.

Dev turns his back to the kids as if it might make them disappear. He takes in the hole.

DEV
It looks a lot like a small hole...
(hushed)
Like a hole you might bury
something small in, Marlow.

MARLOW

Don't be dramatic. It's for the tree.

Marlow gestures toward the tree, now sitting with her wine and the statue.

DEV

You want to bury a dead tree.

MARLOW

No, I don't want to bury anything.
I want to plant it, because it's
not dead.

Dev takes another look at the thing. It looks pretty dead. He then clocks the wine.

DEV

And you're drinking?

EMERSON

You know, I don't think--

MARLOW

(to Emerson)
--Nobody likes a know it all!

DEV

What happened to our plan?

MARLOW

There's been a change of plans.

DEV

I can't take sick days forever. We
need to be working the steps--

MARLOW

--What are you? Moonlighting as an
AA instructor now?

DEV

I'm trying to help.

Dev clenches his fists, losing patience, while Marlow continues to chisel her mini pit in the ground.

DEV (CONT'D)

Will you just stop doing that to
the yard?

MARLOW

You asked where we'd find a tree--

DEV
 --No, no. You don't get to pawn
 this off on me.

Marlow makes a deliberate jab at her hole. Dev kicks the ground in frustration sending a clod of grass into the hole.

Marlow turns to face him head on, livid.

MARLOW
 Really, Dev?

DEV
 At least I've got your undivided
 attention now.

NORA
 Now *he's* a good kicker.

EMERSON
 Shhhh.

DEV
 I suppose you think you can just
 live out here with the "Children of
 the Corn" and nobody's gonna say a
 word? People are going to talk.

Dev gestures to broken Jesus.

DEV (CONT'D)
 And this... this is definitely
 going to raise some questions--

MARLOW
 --Well, I've got some questions of
 my own.

Marlow stares at Jesus, done talking to Dev.

DEV
 By all means. Talk.

Marlow stares at the ground. Dev stares at her.

DEV (CONT'D)
 (pleading now)
 Come on. Talk. Please.

NORA
 Emerson said she's gonna be wasted
 soon so I don't think she's gonna
 do a lot of talking.

Dev snaps around to the girls as if just remembering them.
Emerson elbows Nora. Hard.

NORA (CONT'D)

Ow.

DEV

Maybe it's time you guys go inside.

EMERSON

You know, we're in our yard so you
can't really tell us what to do.

Dev stares incredulously at the little shitheads.

DEV

We really need to handle some grown
up stuff, girls.

Marlow drops her shovel, project half-finished and moves
toward the mailbox with sudden purpose.

MARLOW

Yeah, let's handle some shit.

Wrestling against the half-dead balloons tied to the mailbox,
Marlow resorts to biting them off.

DEV

Wait.

Strings clenched in her fist, Marlow slaps the balloon bundle
into Emerson's grubby little hand.

MARLOW

Don't say I never gave you
anything.

Emerson purses her lips in disgust as Marlow moves toward her
own home now.

MARLOW (CONT'D)

(over her shoulder)

Check it off the list, Dev.

EMERSON

We don't want this.

Dev looks down at the mitt.

DEV

(under his breath)

Beggars can't be choosers.

For the first time, Marlow looks -- like really looks -- at the mess she's made. The heartbroken look on her face is enough to silence everyone...

Marlow lets out a STIFLED NOISE and heads for the door.

DEV (CONT'D)
Marlow. Wait. Maybe I can help?

Dev moves to follow her, but she raises a hand to stop him.

DEV (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

Marlow waves him off.

MARLOW
Me too.

She goes inside a little drunk and a little more downtrodden.

EXT. FARES'S HOME - NIGHT

The house's front floodlights illuminate Dev's handiwork.

Marlow's tree project has been transformed into a mini mulched bed. The weak branches are righted with the support of wooden stakes.

It's as in-place looking as an out-of-place landscaping element can look in the middle of a sloped yard.

A dirty Dev drags his feet, shuffling backwards with the final element...

Handless Jesus.

Dev positions the statue to face the house.

Dev looks back at the lit bedroom window to make sure the coast is clear before he pretends to JACK OFF in the statue's face and puts something unseen on its head before walking inside.

INT. FARES'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A sobered Marlow emerges from the bathroom looking like an exhausted, drowned rat. She takes her phone off the night stand and picks a cuticle as it RINGS.

We hear one of those pre-recorded LEAVE A MESSAGE tones as Marlow stops in front of the window.

MARLOW
(to the phone)
Hey, um, Annie. It's me, Mar... I'm
gonna need you to come down here.

OFF the WINDOW,

Marlow lowers her phone as she breaks into one of those
HYSTERICAL LAUGHS, quickly devolving into a HYSTERICAL SOB.

Between SNORTS and HICCUPS, she ends the call.

OUT the WINDOW,

Handless Jesus now wears Dev's 'Big Daddy' ball cap.

IN the BEDROOM doorway, Dev studies his wife, already
recomposing herself. He casually saddles up beside her while
maintaining a safe distance.

MARLOW (CONT'D)
Your mom's going to kill us.

DEV
You know... She loves attention.

Marlow turns.

MARLOW
Oh I know.

They both chuckle to themselves. Stop short when they hear--
Emerson and Nora's GIGGLES. Still. Outside. Playing.

DEV
Those little fuckers would
definitely get to us first anyways.

Marlow nods in agreement.

DEV (CONT'D)
You don't think we should be saying
something to their parents?

MARLOW
Oh, no. They could still be out
there for hours...

DEV
...Days even.

They stand in a content but pensive silence for a beat.

MARLOW
Was *Jenny* here?

DEV
Don't get me started.

Holding his hand out 70% of the way to hers, Dev waits for Marlow's move.

Without letting her eyes leave the window, Marlow extends her own hand the rest of the way until their hands clasp tightly.

DEV (CONT'D)
Uh, it's not a big deal, but...

Half listening, Marlow looks longingly at the tree, begging for some sign of life--

FLASH TO:

MARLOW'S FANTASY

OUT the WINDOW, Jesus ROLLS his EYES at Marlow, before nudging the plant. As if Jesus woke him up, tree/plant waves his branches excitedly at Marlow.

DEV
(pre-lap)
Well, I mean, I should have asked...

Jesus WINKS at her. Maybe there's hope for everything yet.

END FANTASY

BACK IN REALITY, Marlow, now flooded with relief, turns to Dev. Dev SIGHS.

DEV
I went ahead and called Anne.

RECORD SCRATCH. Marlow goes rigid, drops Dev's hand.

Staring at Dev, Marlow's face is a mix of shame and fury.

Marlow walks out.

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

EXT. FARES'S HOME - DAY

A minivan whips into the driveway and out pops ANNE (32), frazzled but assertive, and also pregnant.

Anne removes her FOUR KIDS from an assortment of carseats and booster seats, before huddling them together.

ANNE

Stop and listen up. None of you are going to act like assholes today. Marlow and Dev need you on your best behavior.

One girl's attention drifts from her mom to the house. This is JOSIE (4), crossing her legs, in clear need of a toilet.

Anne SNAPS her fingers in Josie's face.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Uh-uh-uh, Josie. Eyes up here. Best. Behavior. And if you're not, I will leave you at the rest stop on the way home and tell dad he's not allowed to go back for you.

One of the boys, CLARK (6), scrunches his face skeptically.

CLARK

(under his breath)
I think dad would come back for me.

ANNE

Not if I tell him not to.

Anne turns, eyes the new yard display as a POLICE CRUISER pulls up in front of the house.

ANNE (CONT'D)

(under her breath)
This could be worse than I thought.

Anne tries to tame her messy mom-bun, moving for the door. Without hesitation, Josie follows given her urgent need.

With Anne's threat lingering, but POLICE approaching from behind, the kids reluctantly decide on Anne and form a train of ducklings behind their mom.

END OF TAG