

Wildfire

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1

EXT. PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FAÇADE - MORNING

1

Tulare County, California.

The sky is grey and ashy. You can almost smell the fire nearby.

All of Tulare County is dry with barely any green to be seen. People are scorched by the sun, walking with umbrellas from their cars into a nearby store to protect themselves. Everyone walks with sun protecting clothing or large hats. Dust settles on cars which have chipped paint or discoloration. The sun almost always has a sheath of grey smog from fires recently past or present.

MANY CHILDREN run into school, saying goodbye to their PARENTS or CARETAKERS. Cars drive off. Kids shriek or giggle. These people don't have tons of money but there is love in the air...as well as ash.

A bell rings. All the kids enter the school.

The final bus drives off.

The façade is empty and suddenly peaceful as all the commotion from the morning drop-offs has dissipated.

Stillness.

2

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - SAME DAY

2

Two little legs running. Running. Running.

LU (seven years old, sweet, observant, mute) runs along the side of a busy road. The sun is hot despite the ashy air. Her heavy backpack hops up and down on her back as she runs to school.

3

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

3

MUSIC UP: Opposites Attract by Paula Abdul.

MERRIBELLE (Trans Latin Woman, thirty, heart of gold, head of steel) is sweating over the smoking engine of her old, maroon, Toyota Camry. She's singing (*very well*) to "Opposites Attract" as she looks slightly bewildered at this engine.

Merribelle hasn't gone through any surgeries yet and still might be misgendered at first glance--but she has very long, black hair and is always wearing a pop of lipstick. She's in a very short skirt and wedge sneaker.

She's doing a little dance, regardless of this engine problem before her.

Merribelle looks over her shoulder.

MERRIBELLE

Where the hell are you!? Imma be
late for work!
(to her car)
Damn you car! I hate you.

Merribelle considers her words.

MERRIBELLE

(to her car)
I'm playin'. I love you, please
don't die.

She looks around again for her assistance when she sees a little girl running towards her.

MERRIBELLE

What the--

Lu gets closer and closer.

Merribelle squints to see this small person running toward her.

Lu stops right in front of Merribelle, hunches over, hands on her knees, sweating, panting.

Lu finally stands up and for the first time notices Merribelle. They stare at each other a moment.

MERRIBELLE

You know how to fix a engine?

Lu does not respond.

Lu suddenly and all at once sprints again in the same direction she's been going. Merribelle jumps a little and follows Lu with her eyes.

MERRIBELLE

Too bad, I coulda given your
sweaty, little ass a ride.

Merribelle lights a cigarette in front of her smoking car under a smoky sky and smokes.

Camera follows Merribelle's smoke into the ashy sky.

Title displays:

WILDFIRE

4

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL CAFETERIA - LUNCH

4

LU stands in line for lunch. KIDS talk all around her but no one talks to her. Her tray is empty. She stares at all the hot food; the wrapped sandwiches, the basket of tater tots...the desserts. STUDENT behind her nudges her.

Lu takes a string cheese and a Capri-Sun. When it comes time to pay, she does so in change.

LUNCH LADY ABRIL (heavy set, Latin, kind, fifties or sixties) frowns at the pitiful tray.

ABRIL

You wanna grow up to be a princesa
you gotta eat more than that,
mami.

Lu does not respond. She pays and walks away.

She sits alone at the back of the cafeteria and peels apart her string cheese, slowly, piece by piece. The sound of the chatter of the other kids envelops her.

The lunch bell rings and the kids all file out, tossing their half eaten lunches in the trash.

Lu is the last to leave. She pretends to tie her shoe as the LAST TEACHER exits the cafeteria. Lu, alone now, walks over to the garbage, looking over her shoulder. Lu sifts through a paper bag with the name *Tessa* beautifully written on it, and finds two uneaten clementines! Lu stuffs the clementines into her pockets. She observes the bag they came from for a moment, underneath the name *Tessa* is a little note that reads "Mommy loves you!" Lu tears this message from the bag and looks at it a moment, smiling softly as she traces her fingers over the message.

"Mommy loves you!"

Lu is startled by the sudden appearance of MRS. CONSUELOS (thirties or forties, kind but can be firm, Latina.)

MRS. CONSUELOS
Everything alright, Lu?

Lu jumps and then runs off with her treasures. Mrs. Consuelos looks on, concerned.

5

INT. MRS. CONSUELO'S THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM - LATER

5

About FIFTEEN CHILDREN are listening to FIREMAN JOSH (thirties, nice looking fireman) speak about fire safety. He is in his uniform.

The chalkboard reads: **MAY 8th, 2028.**

FIREMAN JOSH
The major cause of wildfires in
the United States is what?

Some kids raise their hands. Josh chooses a BOY upfront.

BOY
Stuff catching on fire.

Josh laughs, lightheartedly.

FIREMAN JOSH
That's right, but what causes that
stuff to catch on fire?

More kids raise their hands. Josh selects a little GIRL mid room.

GIRL
My daddy said the *grovement*
starts the fires to cause a
discratchshon from *corption*.

FIREMAN JOSH
Huh...well that's an opinion--which
I don't agree with--Anyone else?

The kids all raise their hands again and this time Josh selects Lu, despite the fact that her hand wasn't raised.

FIREMAN JOSH
How about you, little lady?

Everyone bends their necks around to stare at the silent child.

FIREMAN JOSH
What do you think is the leading
cause of--

MRS. CONSUELOS
--Lu doesn't...she doesn't speak.

FIREMAN JOSH
(confused)
Oh...

The kids giggle and sneer.

MRS. CONSUELOS
That's enough.

6 CONTINUED: (2)

6

FIREMAN JOSH
It's us. We are the leading cause
of wildfires. Things we do, often
by accident, like leaving an open
campfire burning or tossing a
cigarette out a car window.

LITTLE GIRL raises her hand. Josh points to her.

LITTLE GIRL
Can you go to jail for starting a
wildfire?

FIREMAN JOSH
Oh yes. The laws are becoming more
and more severe for people who
start these fires, accident or
not, you can go to prison for up
to ten years. And for good cause.
The more our trees burn the lower
the air quality which--

CUT TO:

7 EXT. OUTSIDE SCHOOL PICK UP - CONTINUOUS

7

Kids all exit school and jump into their PARENTS' arms
and cars. BABYSITTERS take kids' school projects from
them; moms hand out snacks; playdates are arranged.

Meanwhile Lu walks past this love fest and heads to the
street to walk herself home.

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA STREETS - LATER

- Lu walks on the side of the highway.
- Lu walks by a strip mall.

8

INT. PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

8

Merribelle stocks tampons by the front window. She wears a white pharmacy jacket with a name tag that says Kyle-- but there is masking tape over the name Kyle. Written in sharpie on the masking tape is the name *MERRIBELLE*.

Lu walks by this pharmacy. Merribelle squints out the window as she is stocking the tampons and sees it is the same little girl from earlier.

MERRIBELLE

Damn that baby's probly got the best calves.

A WOMAN reaches in front of Merribelle for tampons without saying excuse me.

MERRIBELLE

Excuse me.

The woman walks away, ignoring Merribelle. Merribelle rolls her eyes. Her phone buzzes. She looks at the text. It's from someone in her phone labeled "LOVER BOY" with many emojis. Her cell phone is slightly futuristic looking. Skinnier and sleeker.

Merribelle leans against the water fridge -- further away and a little hidden from the register where the manager, ROGER (white dude, bit of a dud, fifties or sixties) rings up the woman buying tampons.

LOVER BOY TEXT

My shirt smells like you.

LOVER BOY TEXT

I like it.

LOVER BOY TEXT

I'm never gonna wash this shirt.

Merribelle laughs.

MERRIBELLE TEXT

Don't pretend your broke ass got a washing machine.

LOVER BOY TEXT

Lol. You free tonight?

MERRIBELLE TEXT

Maybe.

LOVER BOY TEXT
Don't make me beg.

Merribelle smiles and types a reply. Roger stands by her.

MERRIBELLE
Am I in your way?

ROGER
No phones on the floor.

MERRIBELLE
It's an emergency...my sister's
sick.

ROGER
You've been working here for six
years. I've never heard you
mention a single family member.

MERRIBELLE
I'm private.

ROGER
Well we both know that's not true.

Roger walks away.

ROGER
Back to work.

Merribelle rolls her eyes. Roger heads back to the front.
She looks back at her phone and types.

Suddenly Lu stands right in front of her. Merribelle
looks at Lu. Lu stares straight up at Merribelle. It's a
moment.

MERRIBELLE
You need help?

Lu considers this a moment then points to the waters in
the cooler behind Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE
Oh. My bad.

Merribelle moves.

MERRIBELLE
Everybody forgot how to say
"Excuse me"?

Lu opens the water door and sticks her head inside of the cooler, enjoying the temperature shift. Lu, recognizing she's being observed, grabs a small water and walks up to the register.

At the register, Lu pops the small water and a very small sunscreen on the tall counter. Roger rings her up. Merribelle continues to stock tampons nearby.

ROGER
Thirty one oh five.

Lu counts her pennies. She only has five or so dollars.

ROGER
That's not enough. The sunscreen's twenty seven bucks, little lady.

Merribelle watches the interaction.

ROGER
You got enough for the water.

Lu pays for the water. She leaves the sunscreen behind.

9 EXT. STRIPMALL PARKINGLOT - CONTINUOUS 9

Lu stares up at the glaring sun. She sweats a lot and takes a little sip of the water she bought. A car pulls up to her. A MAN with glasses rolls down the window.

MAN
Hey there.

Lu stares at him.

MAN
You need a ride, sweetheart?

Lu shakes her head no.

MAN
Come on, where you headed?

Lu walks.

The car follows her.

MAN
You don't have to be afraid of me.
I'm just tryin' to help--

Lu walks a little faster.

MAN

Hey! It's rude not to respond when someone's talkin' to ya--hey--

Suddenly, he stops his car at a jolt, right as he's about to hit Merribelle from the pharmacy, who is blocking his car from driving forward.

Lu stops to watch this interaction between the man in the car and Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

Oh, I'm sorry, am I in the way of something?

She shoots a glance over to Lu who bolts for the woods and runs away.

MAN

I coulda hit you!

MERRIBELLE

You may have! Let me see? Wait right there and I'll call my lawyer. I could really use the cash I'll get in court for this. Oh! Look, a bruise!

Lu has disappeared.

MAN

Bitch.

He drives off.

Merribelle looks back and sees Lu is gone. Her job here is done.

10

EXT. LU'S WALK HOME

10

-Lu has been running. She looks behind her. She breathes a moment. Believing the man is gone.

-She walks down an old, winding, dusty road kicking a rock as she does so.

-She looks at a beautiful patch of grass filled with dandelions. She picks one and admires it.

-She walks to a very small, run-down house inset from the highway. There are about twelve houses within a few feet of each other. Each house is in desperate need of maintenance;

broken windows, dried, yellow grass, garbage piling in front of them. The neighborhood (if you could call it that) is full of filth and hoarders. They are seemingly tucked away and in the middle of nowhere.

-Lu opens her squeaky door.

11

INT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

11

Her home is broken down and dilapidated. Brown, cruddy carpet is ripped at the seams. There's garbage and fast food bags from Smiley's everywhere. The entire house is a living room with a kitchen, one bedroom, and a bathroom. Practically a trailer.

Lu puts the dandelion she picked in a paper cup full of wild flowers and beautiful weeds. Her little collection.

Lu's Grandmother VIRGINIA (stroke victim, late sixties, kind eyes) sits in a large reclining chair watching *Price is Right*.

Lu takes off her backpack and takes out the little, ripped piece of paper that says "Mommy loves you!" on it. She walks to a cabinet which holds the TV. She reaches into this cabinet and pulls out a small, rusty box with stickers on it. Inside this box are lots of little trinkets and things. A very old, unusable lipstick. A broken bracelet. A picture from a magazine of a smiling family. A couple of coins. A photo of a beautiful house. Some candy wrappers. A cute photo-booth strip from maybe two years earlier with her and her grandmother making silly faces. She places the little message into the box and closes it. Hiding it back inside the cabinet.

Lu gets up and goes back to her backpack to retrieve the clementines. Her grandmother's eyes are closed. She climbs onto her grandmother's lap and nudges her grandmother a bit. Her grandmother's eyes don't open.

Is she dead? Lu leans in real close when suddenly her grandmother opens her eyes wide, startling Lu!

VIRGINIA

Bah!

Virginia has a very raspy, effected voice. One of someone who is very unwell. But her love and fervor for this child gives her strength.

Virginia laughs her wide, toothless laugh at this prank and so does Lu.

Lu playfully hides the clementines behind her back.

VIRGINIA

Neither.

Lu rolls her eyes.

VIRGINIA

Ok fine, both!

Lu moves her right hand out to show a clementine in her hand! She then reveals she has two clementines and her grandmother smiles. Lu opens the clementines and feeds herself and her grandmother, who has no mobility whatsoever. They giggle as they slurp and munch on the juicy fruit together. Lu wipes her grandmother's sweet and sticky face as the nectar from the clementines drips and dribbles.

VIRGINIA

Hey! What's that?

Lu looks behind her.

VIRGINIA

No it's over there.

Lu looks to her right.

VIRGINIA

And it's there--and there!

Lu looks all over the room.

VIRGINIA

A little love bug! Quick catch it!

Lu hops off her grandmother's lap and pretends to catch the love bug.

VIRGINIA

Get your wings, you're gonna have to get to the ceiling!

Lu pulls tattered fairy wings from her cabinet and pretends to fly.

VIRGINIA

You almost got it! Closer--closer!

Lu grabs the phantom bug from the air.

VIRGINIA

Ha! Now swallow it!

Lu swallows the phantom bug. Virginia smiles.

VIRGINIA

Now that love is inside of
you...and you know what that
means?

Lu cocks her head, quizzically.

VIRGINIA

It means you're gonna poop love
for a whole week!

Lu and Virginia laugh and laugh.

CUT TO:

12 INT. LU'S HOME - LATER/DUSK

12

-Lu makes herself a cheese quesadilla in the microwave as the machine precariously pops and sparks. She simultaneously crushes two pills and puts them into a yogurt, which she feeds to her grandmother.

VIRGINIA

Move your head you're blocking
Ryan Seacrest!

Lu obeys her while still feeding her.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. LU'S HOME - LATER/EVENING

13

A car is heard pulling up to the house. Lu runs to the window and spots her mother, VICKY (twenty something, nothing formal about her, spitfire), and her mother's boyfriend, AJ (late forties, total trash), get out of the car. They are both a bit drunk.

Vicky wears a very short cut *Smiley's* uniform. It is a canary yellow, candy striped uniform for the fast food restaurant she works at. AJ grabs Vicky's ass and they make out furiously.

VIRGINIA

Get your armor on, kid.

Lu looks at her grandmother.

14

INT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

14

Vicky and AJ enter, smoking. Lu sits in front of her grandmother doing her homework, avoiding eye contact.

VICKY

It's a God damn mess in here!

She throws some trash around from one side of the house to the other.

VICKY

What do I look like, a maid??

VIRGINIA

No, a maid cleans.

VICKY

Shut it, mom. Why you gotta play this trash 24/7 for? Gonna rot her brains out!

VIRGINIA

Nice to see you taking an interest in your daughter's brain. Maybe her health can come next?

VICKY

I don't need this shit right when I get home from slavin' away just to take care of all you ungrateful assholes!

AJ grabs two beers from the fridge and walks towards the bedroom with Vicky. Vicky kicks Lu on her way to the bedroom.

VICKY

Clean this shit up!

VIRGINIA

Don't you kick her!

Vicky walks slowly up to her mother.

VICKY

Keep talkin' like that you're goin back to the shed.

VIRGINIA opens her mouth to speak but spots Lu who shakes her head no, aggressively, behind Vicky's back.

VICKY

Fuckin' invalid.

Vicky enters her bedroom and slams the door shut. Lu gets up and starts to clean.

Vicky and AJ begin to have sex. Loudly.

Virginia is paralyzed in disgust and disappointment.

15 EXT. LU'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

15

Lu walks down the long driveway with a garbage can as large as she is, which she drags out to the street. A car with loud music passes her. She stops and watches the car park outside of her home.

16 EXT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

16

Lu approaches her home slowly, worried. She hears yelling and shouting. Lu looks in through the window at her mother in a very tight fitted dress, looking like she's about to go out, yelling at her drunken brother, RAY (forties, no stranger to prison), who is yelling back.

VICKY

Oh, fuck you, Ray! Why don't you take her then!?

RAY

You just want that money she gets from the government, Vicky! I know you think I don't--

VICKY

Money!??--we barely get a fuckin'--

RAY

--I'm her kid, too, you--

VICKY

--Kid--ha! You're forty!

RAY

We oughta split it!

VICKY

Split it!? So I'll do all the work and you go ahead and take half the check!? Fuck off! I've gotta pay for mamma and all her medicines, gotta pay for my kid--

RAY

Don't act like you're spendin' a dime on Lu -- look at her, skinny as shit!

VICKY

Don't come in here and insult my parenting skills--

RAY

--Ha! You ain't got no skills!--

VICKY

Fuck you--

RAY

--Fuck you--

VIRGINIA

You two knock it off!

Vicky and Ray get into a physical altercation. She hits him on the head with a small pot and he punches her in the face. She runs into the bedroom and slams the door shut. Ray, holding his bloody head, follows her in there. When he kicks open the door, Vicky walks out with a shot gun. Ray flees out of the house and gets into his car.

RAY

I'm callin' the cops!

VICKY

Yeah go ahead I hear they're lookin' for you anyway! You shit-head!

Ray screeches off.

Lu walks in and collects her homework, which now has some blood on it, as Vicky chases Ray's car down the dirt road, screaming and cursing at him. Lu puts her homework on the table and enters the bathroom.

AJ follows her in there. He leers at her as she stops herself from actually using the toilet.

AJ

(quietly)

Oh hey there, cutie. Come give Uncle AJ a hug.

Lu tries to back away as AJ comes closer and closer.

AJ
You don't gotta be afraid of me.
Come here.

Lu smacks her back against the wall, no where to go.

AJ
I got a little somethin' here in
my pocket for ya...

Aj reaches for Lu when Vicky enters and AJ shoots straight up, reaches into his pocket and throws a wrapped candy at Lu then exits. Lu doesn't pick up the candy. She closes her eyes a moment, collecting herself.

AJ O.S.
You kill him?

VICKY O.S.
Not yet.

18 INT. LIVING ROOM

18

Lu walks into the living room. Vicky and AJ smoke in the house.

VICKY
You better talk to that son of a
bitch.

AJ
Me? He's your brother.

VICKY
He's your best friend. Piece of
shit.

Vicky cleans her bleeding face in the kitchen sink. AJ follows her. Lu puts her books and papers away in her cabinet under the TV. Vicky exits the bathroom with a hand towel on her bleeding lip.

VICKY
Give Virginia a cleaning, Lu.
She's startin' to smell.

VIRGINIA
I can hear you.

Vicky smells her mother, making a sour face.

VICKY

And don't use too much of that lotion! That shit's \$13 a bottle! Fuckin' Ray thinks he can steal from me--got shit to pay for...

Vicky lifts her mother's nightgown and exposes hideously dried skin and sores, embarrassing Virginia.

VICKY

Jesus.

VIRGINIA

He ain't here...never was.

Lu's grandmother stares at Vicky who stares back. AJ approaches Vicky who pushes him away and then AJ pulls Vicky in tighter. Rough and playful banter. Vicky and AJ leave their burning cigarettes on the table and kiss as they make their way out to the car.

VICKY

Talk to Ray--

AJ

Or what?

The two exit.

VICKY O.S.

(calling back to the house)

We're goin out, don't stay up too late! Both a ya!

Virginia and Lu take a moment. Lu smells something bad.

VIRGINIA

Alright you don't have to rub it in.

Suddenly Lu runs over to the table where the cigarettes are and puts them out with her mother's bloody hand towel. Crisis averted.

VIRGINIA

Good catch.

Lu shrugs.

VIRGINIA

Hey--come here.

Lu climbs on her grandmother's lap.

VIRGINIA

You go get me that phone...it'll
all be over.

Lu scowls.

VIRGINIA

Oh don't talk to me like that!

Lu scowls more.

VIRGINIA

I mean it! Go get me that phone
and you can have a better life! I
bet some of those families got
real nice mamma's with a daddy and
maybe even some ice cream in a
working freezer! How about that!?

Lu hugs her grandmother who kisses the top of Lu's head.

VIRGINIA

You deserve so much better than
this, hear me? You deserve the
whole world.

Lu looks up and smiles, brightly at her grandmother.

VIRGINIA

(as if responding to
"I love you")
Me too, kid. Me too.

19

INT. LU'S HOUSE - FOLLOWING EARLY MORNING

19

Lu wakes up. She sleeps in a sleeping bag on the floor.
Her grandmother asleep in her recliner.

Lu spots a note and picks up a twenty dollar bill which
lays beneath it. The note reads:

Away with AJ for the week. Cash should be good.

Don't let grandma watch TV all day, it'll rot her eyes
out! Water's out again. -V

Lu tries to turn on the shower...nothing comes out.

20

INT. LU'S HOME - LATER

20

-Lu is dressed and ready for school.

-Lu finishes feeding Virginia.

-Lu applies lotion to her grandmother's sores, which relieves Virginia, greatly.

-Lu looks at the time and rushes to leave, kissing her grandmother quickly on the head before dashing out the door!

21 EXT. - OUTSIDE LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

21

Lu is running up her driveway then suddenly stops herself in her tracks. She rushes back into her house.

22 INT. LU'S HOME

22

Virginia is sitting alone in the living room looking out the window.

Lu turns on the television before she dashes out the door.

VIRGINIA

Guess what!

Lu turns around.

VIRGINIA

I love you.

Lu smiles and runs out the door. Leaving Virginia to her programs.

23 EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - MORNING

23

Early morning dusty air as Lu walks the same way to school in reverse:

-Dusty road

-Highway

-The Pharmacy strip mall where she plays hopscotch on a forgotten set as Merribelle smokes outside of her car in her uniform, watching Lu walk to school.

-School

24

INT. MRS. CONSUELO'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

24

A bell rings and the kids all jump from their seats. They all line up in front of Mrs. Consuelos who watches them meticulously as they lather themselves in sunscreen.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Come on, make sure you get it everywhere. Don't forget the ears-- Asher, I'm looking at you.

Mrs. Consuelos continues to march down the aisle as she monitors her students.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Don't roll your eyes at me. It's California law. All children under the age of 18 are required to put on sunscreen. You want me to get arrested for negligence? Don't answer that, Mr. Sazinski.

The kids giggle. Mrs. Consuelos reaches Lu in the line, who isn't putting any sunscreen on.

MRS. CONSUELOS

No sunscreen again, Lu?

Lu looks down.

MRS. CONSUELOS

I wish I could, but I just can't lend you anymore. All kids are required to bring their own, like notebooks and pencils. Do you want me to call your Mom again?

All the students stare at Mrs. Consuelos and Lu, who hasn't looked up.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Does anyone want to share their sunscreen with Lu so she can play outside today?

No one shares.

25

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

25

The students are outside playing Red Rover, having so much fun despite the scorching heat. They absentmindedly wipe the sweat from their faces.

The sweaty fun can be seen from a window, where little Lu is sitting in the classroom with Mrs. Consuelos, who corrects papers.

The radio drones on about record high temperatures.

Lu can see the children playing in the yard, laughing and sliding. It hurts her that she's excluded.

26 EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - AFTERNOON

26

Lu walks home from school on the same route. She glares at the sun, which glares back at her.

27 EXT. PATH TO SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

27

Lu walks home from school on the same path as always.

Lu enters the pharmacy.

28 INT. PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

28

Lu approaches the medical counter in the back and waits behind a PREGNANT WOMAN on the phone. Her TWO YEAR OLD DAUGHTER holds her hand.

PREGNANT WOMAN

--Oh you didn't have to send a gift. I understand you can't come...We are--we're so excited to meet her! We decorated her nursery with little fairies, Greg applied all the little decals himself, it was so sweet--

The woman retrieves her prescription and nods a thank you at the PHARMACIST and leaves, lifting her little daughter, almost bumping into Lu.

PREGNANT WOMAN

Oh! I'm sorry, sweetie.

She pats Lu's head. Lu smiles longingly at this mother who keeps walking and talking on the phone, kissing her toddler, never making eye contact with Lu. Lu turns and watches her leave, wishing she could have a mother like that.

Merribelle watches Lu do this.

CUT TO:

Lu walks up to the counter and hands the pharmacist the empty bottle of her grandmother's lotion. The pharmacist looks at Lu a long, hard moment and then retrieves the bottle for her.

CUT TO:

Lu puts four yogurts, her grandmother's lotion and a big bottle of water on the counter. She looks over at the sunscreens but doesn't get one. Merribelle runs the items through, putting them into Lu's backpack.

Merribelle slips sunscreen into her backpack without Lu seeing or having to pay for it.

MERRIBELLE

Nineteen ninety seven. Hey that's when I was born! Same day Lady Di died. I'm probably her, reincarnated. That's what my gramami always said.

Lu put's the twenty dollar bill on the counter. Merribelle takes it then reaches her hand out with the change but quickly withholds it, playfully.

MERRIBELLE

I'm Merribelle.

Lu stares at her. Merribelle points at her name tag.

MERRIBELLE

What's your name?

Lu blinks.

MERRIBELLE

You're shy, huh?

Lu doesn't respond.

MERRIBELLE

You want a lollipop?...They'r free.

(pause)

Well...they're free if you gave blood. But I won't tell. I'm good at secret keeping. My gramami had two husbands her whole life, neither of them ever knew. I learned from her.

Lu picks a lollipop.

Merribelle gives Lu her change. Lu exits with her VERY full and heavy backpack. Merribelle watches her lug the thing onto her back walking towards the exit.

MERRIBELLE
Have a good weekend!

Lu stops and smiles at Merribelle. Merribelle is delighted by the little smile.

29 INT. LU'S HOUSE - LATER

29

Lu enters the house and opens her backpack. She shows her grandmother the cream but her grandmother is asleep. She attempts to wake her up but she remains asleep.

Lu continues to empty the backpack when she feels something she didn't buy. She pulls out the sunscreen. Lu smiles.

She can play at recess now.

CUT TO:

INT. LU'S HOME - LATER

Lu tries to feed her grandmother. Her grandmother does not wake up...

CUT TO:

30 INT. LU'S HOME - LATER

30

Lu watches TV with her sleeping grandmother, sitting beside her on the ground. She notices a smell. Lu tries to wake her grandmother up but she remains asleep. Lu puts the lotion on her grandmother's sores. Her grandmother doesn't wake up. Lu reclines her grandmother's chair so she's laying back and kisses her on the forehead.

31 INT. LU'S HOUSE - MORNING

31

Lu reclines her grandmother back up to a seated position.

Her grandmother's head flops.

Lu turns on the TV for her to watch, despite the fact that she's still "sleeping."

She tries to feed her grandmother the yogurt but her grandmother won't eat it.

Virginia has died.

Lu keeps trying to feed her. She tries and tries and eventually starts to tickle her. Smiling.

Her grandmother doesn't wake up.

This isn't a prank.

Lu shakes her grandmother until...Lu understands what has happened. She holds her grandmother as she cries in her lap.

32

INT. LU'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

32

Lu wakes up in her sleeping bag. The smell is out of control. Virginia looks very dead. Flies are starting to acquire. Lu can't quite stand it.

Lu walks to the kitchen and pours herself the last bit of water from the big bottle she bought a couple of days ago.

Her stomach growls. The fridge is empty besides a moldy bag of cheese. Lu digs for cheese without mold and puts it on the last tortilla. The microwave begins to spark as it always does.

Lu sniffs. The smell is so bad. She walks up to her grandmother who reeks.

Lu runs outside of her house and vomits. She vomits again. She leans over, dizzy.

33

INT. LU'S HOME - MEANWHILE

33

The microwave is popping and cracking. It begins to ignite. The kitchen goes up in flames quite quick.

34

EXT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

34

Lu stares at her vomit and the contents. She sits a moment. It's a hot day. She feels hot and quite lost. She looks up to the sky.

A small hallucination: Lu sees a cloud that looks like an angel with wings. She stares at it.

Lu gets up slowly and re-enters her home.

35 INT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

35

Lu enters the house and immediately notices the kitchen is blazing! She runs to the water bottle to get the last of the water, but there is barely any left.

She runs to the toilet and puts the feces filled water in a mug and tries to put the fire out with that.

It doesn't work.

Lu grabs her paper cup full of flowers and tosses the entire contents of this cup onto the blazing fire. The flowers burn up in a heartbeat but the water didn't help.

She is filled with terror as she looks at her dead grandmother in her recliner.

Lu tries to pull her grandmother out of the house. She's too heavy. The fire inside is getting bigger and bigger.

She cries and kisses her grandmother, hugging her tight.

Lu looks at the sunscreen and grabs it, running out the door.

36 EXT. LU'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

36

She exits the house, and watches the fire eat her home alive.

She is stunned a moment. She closes her eyes. Opens them. This is real.

Lu runs up her driveway, sunscreen in hand.

37 EXT. PHARMACY PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

37

Lu sits in the parking lot of the pharmacy, applying the sunscreen in the heat of the day. She waits, watching people enter and exit the pharmacy.

Day turns to dusk.

38 EXT. PHARMACY PARKING LOT - EARLY EVENING

38

Lu remains seated, waiting outside the pharmacy.

Merribelle exits, she's not wearing her work vest. Roger is behind her locking up.

Other businesses are closing down as well.

The sky is now grey from a fire.

ROGER

You got a safe place to go, Kyle?

MERRIBELLE

My name is Merribelle!

ROGER

I can't quite remember that since I met you as Kyle. It's hard...

MERRIBELLE

Rocket fucking science is hard, Roger.

Roger enters his car.

ROGER

I'd go west if I were you.

MERRIBELLE

I live towards the desert, no trees to burn near me.

ROGER

Is your house made of wood?

MERRIBELLE

House!? You think you pay me enough to afford a house!? Ha!

Merribelle walks to her car as other cars drive off and firetrucks rush by.

As Merribelle opens her car door the site of Lu standing very close to her startles her.

MERRIBELLE

Shit! You fuckin' scared me. Lookin' like a little demon, damn.

Lu stares at her, holding the sunscreen.

MERRIBELLE

I don't know where that came from you can't prove shit.

Merribelle enters her car and puts on lipgloss, but can't quite help avoiding the reality that this little girl, with black smudge on her face, is staring at her.

She rolls down her window.

MERRIBELLE

Look. This ain't some underground sunscreen operation. It was a one-time thing -- you're welcome. Now go home! Smell that?

Lu's eyes are big and hopeless.

Merribelle starts to drive away. She can't stop staring at this child who's just standing there. She backs up. She stops her car and rolls down her window.

MERRIBELLE

Where's your mamma?

Merribelle recognizes a lost soul when she sees one.

MERRIBELLE

Well you can't just stand here -- there's a wildfire -- get in!

Lu does so. They drive off.

39

EXT. SMILEY'S FAST FOOD DRIVE-THRU - LATER

39

They wait in the drive-thru line. Merribelle looks behind her.

MERRIBELLE

Fire's behind us now. Gotta wait it out. Surprised there's still trees left to burn.

Merribelle drives up and orders food at the drive-thru.

MERRIBELLE

One cheeseburg--you a vegetarian?

Lu doesn't respond, probably doesn't know what a vegetarian is.

MERRIBELLE

Yeah--one cheeseburger and large fry and two cokes--diet.

DRIVE-THRU GUY

That be all?

MERRIBELLE
And a shake, cookies 'n cream.

Lu smiles.

DRIVE-THRU GUY
That'll be eleven seventy two.

MERRIBELLE
(to Lu)
You owe me eleven seventy two.

40

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

40

They drive up to the window and the drive-thru guy wearing a name tag that says MARCO on it passes the girls their food. He looks long and hard at them both. Merribelle is uncomfortable with his stare.

MERRIBELLE
You cold? Cuz your face froze.

Merribelle drives off.

MERRIBELLE
Men are fools. You can quote me.
(she laughs)
You not gonna quote shit though
cuz you don't say nothin. 'Lil
mute. That's your rapper name. A
mute rapper. Stupid.
(she laughs more at
herself)

Merribelle parks her car in the parking lot. She hands Lu the cheeseburger and keeps the fries. Distributes the cokes and shake.

Merribelle's phone rings. The screen displays the name: Mom. Merribelle ignores it. Lu notices.

MERRIBELLE
I know you don't talk 'lil mute,
but soon you gonna have to start
pointin' the way back to your
house.

They eat. Lu is tearing through her burger.

MERRIBELLE
Whoa there, don't choke--how's it
gonna look when I bring you home
and you're dead?
(MORE)

MERRIBELLE (CONT'D)
 Not good, no thanks. I would not
 thrive in prison. Look at me--too
 cute. Slow down.

Merribelle eats a french fry and observes Lu, devouring her burger. She stops eating.

MERRIBELLE
 They feed you at home?

Merribelle looks worried.

MERRIBELLE
 Here, have my fries. Gettin' a
 muffin top anyway.

MERRIBELLE
 (she laughs)
 No I'm not, I'm perfect.

Lu takes them and eats them. Merribelle is concerned.

41 A SERIES OF FIRETRUCKS BLOW PAST THEM, ROARING THEIR
 SIRENS.

41

Merribelle pulls out her inhaler and sucks on it. She offers it to Lu who shakes her head "no," face full of fries.

MERRIBELLE
 You the only person in California
 ain't got asthma? Lucky you.

Merribelle pops the inhaler back into the center console and lights a cigarette. Lu gives the cigarette a nasty look.

MERRIBELLE
 What? It's good for me.

Lu doesn't understand this logic.

MERRIBELLE
 You know what the number one
 killer in the whole world is
 probably? Stress. One day you'll
 understand what stress is and
 you'll reconsider your tone.

More fire trucks blow by.

42

INT. SMILEY'S - LATER

42

Lu and Merribelle walk into the establishment. The same drive-thru guy, Marco, stares at them as they both walk into the women's bathroom.

INT. SMILEY'S WOMEN'S BATHROOM

They each take a stall.

Shot of their feet from outside the bathroom doors as they both sit down to pee.

MERRIBELLE (O.C.)
Damn!...Hey, you got TP?

Same shot of their feet as they pee. Lu's feet dangle. The sound of Lu pulling toilet paper and handing it under the divider. Merribelle takes the toilet paper.

MERRIBELLE
Thanks boo.

The legs of a man appear in this shot as the girls flush on the other side of the doors.

Both Merribelle and Lu exit the bathroom stalls, shocked to see Marco standing there.

Merribelle takes Lu's hand, protectively, feeling fearful of this man in the ladies room.

MERRIBELLE
You gotta problem?

He blocks their path. It's a sinister moment. Suddenly this man, who's been scowling at them the entire time, beams a wide, kind smile.

MARCO
Kyle??

MERRIBELLE
My name's Merribelle--

MARCO
(points to his name tag)
Marco! We went to High School together!

Marco hugs Merribelle without permission. He's still smiling.

MARCO
How are you!? I thought it was
you!

Merribelle is a bit confused. Marco finally lets her go.

MARCO
Awe, I bet you don't remember me,
you were so cool--

MERRIBELLE
...No I--I do. I do remember you.
Marco! Of course.

MARCO
Mary--Mary what?

MERRIBELLE
Merribelle.

MARCO
(to Lu)
Merribelle was the only person in
P.E. who would partner with me. He-
-she made me feel like a person,
you know?

Lu smiles. Merribelle smiles.

MARCO
This your kid?

MERRIBELLE
God no!
(to Lu)
No offense.

MARCO
That's cool. Hey you guys want
some free food? It's a little old
but it's still good--I mean it's
just as good as the new food
considering none of it is actually
good for you.

Marco laughs.

Merribelle and Lu smile at each other.

The back seat is filled with Smiley's bags. Merribelle drives.

They come to a stop light.

MERRIBELLE
Left? Nod if it's left.

Lu continues to stare at her lap.

MERRIBELLE
Ok...so, right?

Lu doesn't respond.

MERRIBELLE
We're runnin' outta directions
here.

The light turns green and Merribelle drives, pulling over to the side of the road. She puts the car in park.

MERRIBELLE
Listen to me. I cannot just take you back to my place! You're like what, six? I'm a grown woman! I can't just roll around with some toddler! It's weird.

Lu won't look up.

MERRIBELLE
You a orphan? If you won't tell me who you are or where you live then I gotta take you to the police--

Lu looks at her, dramatically.

MERRIBELLE
You don't like the sound of that?
Then tell me where you live.

Lu points in a direction and Merribelle puts the car into drive.

MERRIBELLE
More like it.

Merribelle drives.

Merribelle drives slowly in a neighborhood with larger houses than she's used to.

MERRIBELLE

Oh shit. Dinner definitely on you,
damn.

Lu points to a nice looking house.

Merribelle stops the car.

MERRIBELLE

Alright, well...bye.

Lu waits a moment.

MERRIBELLE

You need help with the door,
princesa?

Lu opens the door and slowly gets out, sunscreen in hand.
Merribelle hands her a Smiley's bag.

MERRIBELLE

This never happened, hear me?

Lu shuts the door and Merribelle begins to drive away.

Lu stands in the street watching Merribelle drive off.

Merribelle watches her stand there through the rearview mirror.

MERRIBELLE

(yells)
*Get out the road it's dark you
gonna get hit!*

Lu can't hear her. Merribelle keeps driving. She loses sight of Lu so she loops around and re-enters where they had come from originally. She looks for Lu. Lu is gone.

MERRIBELLE

Ok, good.

Merribelle keeps driving and sees Lu walking along the side of the road.

MERRIBELLE

What the--

Merribelle rolls down her window and drives slowly besides Lu.

MERRIBELLE

This ain't your 'hood, is it?

Lu keeps walking.

MERRIBELLE
Do you have a home?

Lu doesn't look up.

MERRIBELLE
Alright, get in.

Lu does not.

MERRIBELLE
I won't take you to the police.

Lu continues to ignore Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE
I promise.

Lu stops and enters the car.

45

EXT. POLICE STATION - LITTLE LATER

45

They pull into the police station. Merribelle parks. Lu grabs Merribelle's hands.

MERRIBELLE
I can't help you, little girl.
Look, you gotta go to school and
shit. You gotta be with your mamma
or dad or whoever takes care of
you. Now go, get out, go on in
there and let the professionals do
their thing. Don't tell 'em about
the sunscreen.

Lu doesn't move. Merribelle gets out of the car.

MERRIBELLE
You wanna do this the hard way?
That's a very familiar way for me
little girl. Only way I know.

Merribelle opens Lu's door and unbuckles her seat belt for her. Lu starts to kick and squirm. Merribelle pulls Lu by her lower half trying to rip her from the car.

MERRIBELLE
Let go, get out of my damn
car! Jesus, you strong little
freak child!

Lu kicks Merribelle and slams the door shut, automatically locking all the doors.

MERRIBELLE

Ow! Shit! Are you kidding me!?

Merribelle tries to open the doors.

MERRIBELLE

Fine, I'll just go in there and have them come to you! Think you're so smart.

Lu presses her head in her hands and begins to rock in anxiety. Merribelle starts to walk away.

MERRIBELLE

You're not smart you just...
(she looks at this
terrified child in
her car)
...desperate.

Merribelle stops at this thought and turns around. She walks back to the car.

MERRIBELLE

Hey. Hey! Stop--stop cryin' a second, shit. Just stop! Stop!

Lu stops.

MERRIBELLE

Damn no good deed goes unpunished.

Merribelle puts both hands on the roof of the car and gets her face in close to the closed window.

MERRIBELLE

Look at me.

Lu looks at her.

MERRIBELLE

Are you in trouble?

Lu nods, aggressively.

MERRIBELLE

If you go in there, if I bring you to the police...are you gonna be in more trouble?

Lu nods even more aggressively.

Merribelle waits a moment and then walks around to the driver's side of her car.

MERRIBELLE

Well? Open up.

Lu hesitates.

MERRIBELLE

You wanna sleep in this parking lot tonight?

Lu unlocks the car. Merribelle enters and slams her hands on the wheel a moment.

MERRIBELLE

Shit!

Merribelle drives away from the police station. A fire roars in the distance.

46

EXT. RUN DOWN APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

46

Merribelle pulls into a very budget-looking, California apartment complex. The complex looks like a low end motel.

They exit the car holding all the bags of food.

An old woman, MRS. HIRSHFIELD (nineties, frail, spirited, caucasian) sits outside her apartment with a radio talking about the wildfire. Her feet are in a kiddie pool and she sips what looks like a piña colada. Merribelle hands her a Smiley's bag.

MERRIBELLE

Hey Mrs. Hirshfield. Why don't you play some music for a change?

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

Hi Merribelle, you want some pie later?

MERRIBELLE

Not tonight baby, thanks!

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

Tell me when.

MERRIBELLE

Don't let your feet prune!

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

Why not?

MERRIBELLE

I don't know--it's not good for you?

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

That's a lie. It's all a lie.

MERRIBELLE

Goodnight Mrs. Hirshfield!

Merribelle and Lu enter her apartment.

47

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

47

Lu enters behind Merribelle and stands awkwardly in the living room. Looking around.

Merribelle's apartment isn't so bad. It's fun and youthful.

Merribelle obviously doesn't have much money but she's making it work. A variety of fans all around the apartment (clearly no A/C).

There are some religious photos on the wall. A very large painting of a beautiful, older woman. Lu admires it.

MERRIBELLE

That's my abuelita. A K A my idol...died when I was in high school. I painted that. Like it?

Lu smiles. She sits on the couch. Merribelle puts a glass of water down in front of her.

MERRIBELLE

Here, drink some water. I feel like you're a pet. Small, cute, don't talk, not gonna pay rent that's for damn sure. Drink the water.

Merribelle goes to her kitchen and pulls out a pen and an envelope. She tosses them in front of Lu. Lu looks up at Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

First thing's first. What's your name? Go on. Write it down.

(MORE)

MERRIBELLE (CONT'D)
You're grown enough to write.
Write your name.

Lu doesn't.

MERRIBELLE
Can't spell?

Lu backs away from the pen and paper, sinking into the couch.

MERRIBELLE
Ok...lemme guess. It start with
the letter A?

Nothing.

MERRIBELLE
B?

Nothing.

MERRIBELLE
Well shit there's a lot of fucking
letters. I'm just gonna call you
B. You fine with that?

Lu nods and shrugs.

MERRIBELLE
Ok, B. We gotta figure out what
to do with you, but first I got
shit to do so you sit here and
watch T.V. Don't disturb me, ok?
Bathroom's over there, you can
figure it out, apartment's not
that big.

Merribelle opens the fridge, takes a large carrot out of
the crisper and enters her bedroom, shutting the door
behind her.

Lu gets up to use the bathroom. She does so. Flushes. She
turns the sink on and washes her hands. Admiring the
water.

Lu exits the bathroom and passes Merribelle's room. Lu
puts her ear to the door. She listens.

MERRIBELLE (O.S.)

Yeah baby--you like that? You want
me to turn around? Want a little
tail? Want me to bounce for you?

Lu is confused.

She walks into the kitchen and opens the fridge. This is no millionaire here, but considering what Lu was working with before, she is very impressed with the amount of food there is in the fridge. She opens the crisper. There are loads of carrots. She looks around the kitchen and notices a jar that says *Cookies*. She pulls a chair over and stands on it to reach for the jar. She opens the jar and there is tons of cash in there. She pulls some of the money out and looks at it, stunned.

MERRIBELLE

Hey!

Lu drops the money and falls off the chair.

MERRIBELLE

Serves you right for sneakin'
around.

Merribelle cleans up the cash and puts it back in the jar.

MERRIBELLE

You not a thief are you? Am I
bein' hustled??

Merribelle opens her front door and looks around. No cars or anyone around.

She slams her door shut and grabs Lu by the shirt collar.

MERRIBELLE

If you're some sorta bait in some
sorta scheme you better tell me
now!

Lu looks very afraid. Merribelle lets her go. Lu runs to the couch.

MERRIBELLE

My bad. Sorry, B. My hormones are
all over the place. Forgive me.

She goes to the freezer and pulls out a popsicle.

MERRIBELLE

I don't got cookies but I got
these, you like grape?

She hands Lu a popsicle who does not accept.

MERRIBELLE

We good. I forgave you, now you
gotta forgive me, then we move on
and never talk about it again.
That's how we do things here, k?

Lu accepts the popsicle. Merribelle opens hers and begins to eat it.

MERRIBELLE

You heard me through the door
while I was working?

Lu opens her popsicle and also eats it.

MERRIBELLE

Listen, don't you judge me. A
girl's gotta do what a girl's
gotta do. And I got a lot a shit
to do that's expensive! It's not
so bad, kinda fun sometimes. Don't
you look at me like that -- plenty
of bankers and lawyers out there
jumpin off of buildings. How bout
that? At least I got goals. Got my
eyes on the prize. Got a friend
who did her surgeries at a real
good doctor in LA. He's expensive
but worth it.

She looks at herself in the mirror.

MERRIBELLE

I'm a singer, you know.

Lu perks up.

MERRIBELLE

Doesn't pay the rent...or anything
else. But...it's what I always
loved. My abuela and me used to
sing together. Pretend we were
famous and shit. She made me
promise her before she passed that
I'd follow my dreams.

Merribelle smiles at this memory then becomes a little sad.

MERRIBELLE

You ever felt like you were meant
for something? Something else I
mean. Something more.

Lu nods a little.

MERRIBELLE

Me too.

Merribelle fixes her hair in the mirror.

MERRIBELLE

(casually)

You wanna hear a song I wrote?

Lu smiles and nods.

MERRIBELLE

I never sung this one for anyone
before.

Lu is at full attention.

MERRIBELLE

I dunno...

Lu blinks.

MERRIBELLE

Ok, fine, but don't fuckin' laugh
at me, ok!?

Lu focuses, intently. Merribelle appreciates this.

Merribelle goes on to sing a song reminiscent to "Be That As It May" Featuring Herizen Guardiola.

Lu is truly moved by this wildly talented woman. Her popsicle drips onto her hands.

Merribelle finishes her song. She notices Lu has popsicle juice all over her little hand and gets a paper towel to clean off the sticky liquid for Lu. As Merribelle does this Lu hugs her. Merribelle lets her.

Merribelle and Lu watch a documentary. Merribelle cries.

MERRIBELLE (CRYING)

That octopus is so fucking smart.
How a octopus smarter than me?

Merribelle blows her nose and looks over at Lu who is fast asleep. She gets up and pulls a blanket from her bed and puts it on Lu. She stares at Lu a moment.

MERRIBELLE

What the hell am I doing?

Merribelle turns off the lights and exits to her bedroom.

Lu opens her eyes. She is in a slight panic and checks herself, making sure she hasn't wet the bed. She is relieved at being dry. Lu lies back down and stares at the painting of Merribelle's abuela. The painting comes to life and Abuela's face lowers and winks at Lu. Lu smiles, feeling safe.

More fire trucks can be heard in the far away distance.

50

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

50

Lu wakes up to the sound of singing in the shower. She walks towards the bathroom and smiles as she enjoys the sound of Merribelle singing.

She looks into Merribelle's bedroom. There's a photo on her nightstand of a beautiful woman who looks a lot like Merribelle.

Merribelle enters her bedroom, all wrapped in towels, and is startled by Lu who is looking at this photo on her nightstand.

MERRIBELLE

Shit! You can't sneak around like
that I might wack you outta
instinct--arrested for child
abuse! That what you want?

Merribelle snatches the photo.

MERRIBELLE

That's my abuela. Maria Isabelle.
I took her name a couple years
ago. You know, to honor her.

She puts it back on the nightstand as her phone, which is next to Lu starts to ring again. Lu looks at the phone and then to Merribelle, ignoring her mother's call.

MERRIBELLE

Ignore that.

Lu is curious.

MERRIBELLE

I can't talk to her right now. She just gonna tell me to move home and go back to school so I can go work behind a desk like they done all their lives. Think that's safe. Ha! Nothin safe about fluorescent lighting with my skin tone. No thanks. I got plans. They wanna cut me off, suffocate me til I agree to be what they want me to be. They'll see. Ain't nobody I'm interested in bein' but me. And I'll be her all by myself thank you very much. They'll see.

Lu is listening intently to Merribelle, who is lost in her memories.

MERRIBELLE

See, kid? Life's no cake walk for nobody. We all got wildfires we runnin' from. You not special. Now get outta here, you ask too many questions.

Lu obeys, skipping to the bathroom and shuts the door.

MERRIBELLE

(calls to Lu)
Imma make pancakes, you like pancakes?
 (considers this)
 'Course you do you're a child.
 (to herself)
 You gonna eat what I fuckin' cook, shit.

51

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATER

51

Merribelle and Lu eat their pancakes at her little coffee table. Lu is enjoying these pancakes very much.

MERRIBELLE

You think if you chewed up a pancake and then spit it back in the pan, it would just make another pancake?

They both look at their pancakes.

MERRIBELLE

It's a good question. Admit it.

They continue to eat.

MERRIBELLE
You ever learn how to sign?

Lu furrows her brow, not understanding.

MERRIBELLE
Like sign language -- talkin with
your hands...it's a whole thing.
Nobody every taught you shit, huh?

Lu shrugs. Merribelle pulls her phone out.

MERRIBELLE
Here look at this.

A WOMAN in a video is teaching basics in sign language.

MERRIBELLE
She looks nice. Maybe she can
teach us something.

ASL WOMAN
(signing as she
speaks)
Thank you. Thank you. Your hand is
coming out from your chin. Thank
you.

MERRIBELLE
Yeah. That's a good one for you to
learn.

Lu and Merribelle both copy the sign for "Thank You" with
the woman, three times.

ASL WOMAN
Want. Want. Bend your ten fingers
and pull it in, towards yourself.
Want. Want.

MERRIBELLE
Kinda fun. Talkin with your hands.

Lu giggles a little.

MERRIBELLE
Alright you better not get used to
this one.

ASL WOMAN
Want. Want.

They practice together more.

ASL WOMAN

The why hand comes to the chin.
Wrong. Wrong. Do it with me.
Wrong.

MERRIBELLE

Wrong. Wrong.

Lu does so as well.

ASL WOMAN

I love you. Take the thumb,
pointer finger and baby finger,
make this sign, it's the
combination of the letters I, L
and Y. I love you. I love you.

Merribelle and Lu practice the sign. They look at each other as they do it. They smile. Merribelle shuts it off, feeling a little too many feelings suddenly.

MERRIBELLE

Alright, that's enough for today.
Listen, today's my day off and I
got stuff I gotta do so don't
expect me to hang out with you.

Lu takes her and Merribelle's plate to the sink and scrubs them.

MERRIBELLE

(a little surprised)
Oh...um...thank you. Yeah--good.
Do your part.

She looks around the apartment. It was quite messy before and now it's very tidy.

MERRIBELLE

Oh shit, you a little cleaning lady, huh?

Lu makes the thank you sign. Merribelle smiles.

MERRIBELLE

You're welcome.

Merribelle gets her purse. Lu stands in the living room and stares at her as she goes to leave.

MERRIBELLE

Alright well, like I said I'm gonna go do things, got things to do so....you just stay here and...

Lu looks up at Merribelle as she prepares to exit.

MERRIBELLE

...You just watch TV or whatever and I'll see you later. Don't mess with my shit, ok?

Lu stands, looking up at Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

I know exactly how much cash I got too, so...if a dime's gone I'll throw your ass out on the street, got it?

Lu has a little half smile on.

MERRIBELLE

Ok. Well. Bye. Don't turn on the oven. Bye.

Merribelle exits the apartment and shuts the door. Lu stands alone.

52 EXT. PHARMACY PARKING LOT - LATER

52

The sky is still smoggy but the fire has not reached the pharmacy.

53 INT. - PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

53

Merribelle is in her place of employment looking at Children's Tylenol. She has a basket with a toothbrush and some Johnson & Johnson shampoo. A rubber ducky. Bubble gum flavored toothpaste. Sunscreen.

Roger walks up the aisle.

ROGER

It's your day off.

MERRIBELLE

I'm usin' my discount. Roger, you got kids, right?

ROGER

No.

MERRIBELLE

For real?

ROGER

For real.

MERRIBELLE

But you grown, you old, why not?

ROGER

I just never met the one, I guess.

MERRIBELLE

What kinda stuff kids need, you think?

ROGER

In what sense?

MERRIBELLE

Like to live -- to stay alive.
They need somethin' extra?
Somethin' more then just food and water?

ROGER

Love, I suppose.

MERRIBELLE

We sell that?

Roger laughs a little.

54

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR

54

Merribelle sits in her car and lights a cigarette. Her phone buzzes. She looks at it. There have been several unanswered texts.

MERRIBELLE

Shit.

She reads.

LOVER BOY TEXT

Hello?

LOVER BOY TEXT

Where you been at?

LOVER BOY TEXT

Bell?

LOVER BOY TEXT
I do something??

LOVER BOY TEXT
Hey! What the fuck!??

MERRIBELLE
Hey sorry been slammed at work.

LOVER BOY TEXT
...

LOVER BOY TEXT
I'm coming over tonight.

MERRIBELLE
I can't tonight.

LOVER BOY TEXT
You got a man??

MERRIBELLE
No, stupid.

LOVER BOY TEXT
I'll see you tonight.

Merribelle pulls a cigarette out of her purse and stares at it a moment. She puts it back onto the cigarette box...but then immediately changes her mind and lights it. She drives off smoking.

55

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

55

Lu sits on the couch and watches the news. A FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR discusses the devastation.

NEWS ANCHOR
Hundreds of miles in Tulare County have been devastated by a wildfire which broke out. At least eight people are missing and two presumed dead. The fire seems to have been manmade. A crime punishable by California State Law. The authorities are looking for the presumed culprits now.

She turns the TV off right as Fireman Josh comes onto the screen. She looks worried and concerned.

A car door is heard slamming shut. Lu turns around and looks out the living room window.

56

EXT. MERRIBELLE APT COMPLEX - LATER

56

Merribelle helps Mrs. Hirshfield out of the car.

MERRIBELLE

Ay Dios Mio, Mrs. Hirshfield, you
 have to be careful. You can't just
 go walkin' on the side of the
 highway like that! You're lucky I
 saw you!

She helps her up the stairs.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

I needed pickles. You can't have a
 turkey sandwich without pickles.

MERRIBELLE

Where's your nurse at?

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

Insurance won't cover that
 anymore. Didn't expect I'd live
 this long.

MERRIBELLE

You gotta wear shoes when you go
 out, Mrs. Hirshfield.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

Aren't I?

Her feet are bare.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

I could have sworn I put them on--

57

INT. MRS. HIRSHFIELD'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

57

Merribelle walks Mrs. Hirshfield into her apartment. It's
 filthy.

MERRIBELLE

Aye Aye Aye.

58

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

58

Merribelle opens her door and spots Lu.

MERRIBELLE

Hey, B. Wanna make five bucks?

Lu perks up and does the sign for "Want." Merribelle laughs a little.

MERRIBELLE

Come on then!

59 INT. MRS. HIRSHFIELD'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

59

Lu and Merribelle clean Mrs. Hirshfield's apartment together. They're a good team.

60 INT. MRS. HIRSHFIELD'S APARTMENT - LATER

60

The apartment is clean. They all eat pie together.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

And then he pinched my ass and said, "Call me, sweet cheeks."

MERRIBELLE

You telling me John F. Kennedy Jr. Pinched your ass??

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

He wasn't my type.

MERRIBELLE

Ha! Who was your type??

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

I liked dark and mysterious men. Tried to date a negro once but my father put a quick stop to that.

MERRIBELLE

Shit, Mrs. Hirshfield, you can't say that word! Get you in a lot of trouble!

(to Lu)

You hear me? Don't use that word.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD

He was a cop, my father. A real mother fucker. I didn't even cry at his funeral. Fuck the po po.

MERRIBELLE

(laughs)

Hell yeah.

Mrs. Hirshfield looks at Lu.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD
She doesn't say much, does she?

MERRIBELLE
She the silent type.

MRS. HIRSHFIELD
She's your niece, you said?

MERRIBELLE
Uh-huh.

Merribelle washes her plate.

MERRIBELLE
Alright, Mrs. Hirshfield. Time for
us to go. Let's go little B.
Thanks for the pie, Mami. If you
need anything you know where I
live.

They exit Mrs. Hirshfield's apartment. Merribelle hands a five dollar bill to Lu.

MERRIBELLE
Here you go, that's yours. You can
spend it however you want. Just
not on drugs. Well...not yet,
anyway.

61

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT EVENING

61

Lu watches cartoons, admiring her new five dollar bill. She spots a bag on the kitchen counter. She opens the bag and sees a child's toothbrush and some sunscreen. She opens the bubblegum toothpaste and smells it...Lu smiles. She's closer to Merribelle's room and can hear Merribelle making strange noises. She walks a little closer to the door.

MERRIBELLE(O.S.)
Bouncy Bounce! You like that baby?
You wanna watch me eat it?

Lu is confused by these remarks.

62

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATER

62

Merribelle comes out of her room looking very dressed up. Lu is making herself a peanut butter sandwich.

MERRIBELLE

Look, I got a friend coming over later so you gotta go. I asked Mrs. Hirshfield if you could hang out there tonight. I'll come get you when my friend leaves, ok?

Lu keeps making her sandwich.

MERRIBELLE

Go on. Take your sandwich and get outta here.

Lu goes to exit.

MERRIBELLE

Wait, gimme a bite.

Merribelle takes a bite of the sandwich.

MERRIBELLE

Oh, look at you chef! Yum. Ok go, see you later.

Lu exits the apartment, smiling.

63

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATER

63

Merribelle puts on lipgloss and winks at herself in the mirror. There is a knock at the door.

Merribelle walks to the door and shortens her skirt a little bit. She opens the door.

Ray, Lu's Uncle, stands on the other side.

MERRIBELLE

Hey, lover.

They kiss passionately and Ray moves his way into the apartment.

64

INT. MERRIBELLE'S BEDROOM - LITTLE LATER

64

They both lay in bed. Ray is completely naked. Merribelle has her panties and a lace bra on. Ray steals Merribelle's cigarette.

MERRIBELLE

Hey! Get your own, these are twenty-five bucks a pack!

RAY
Aren't you quittin' anyway? I'm
being helpful!

Ray gives back the cigarette then playfully withholds it,
kissing Merribelle. Ray returns the cigarette.

RAY
You got any beer?

MERRIBELLE
You know I don't drink.

RAY
You could keep some fuckin' beer
here for me.

MERRIBELLE
Ok. Bring beer and I'll keep it
here for you.

Ray rolls his eyes.

MERRIBELLE
We could go out...

Ray gets out of bed and starts to dress.

MERRIBELLE
The idea of going on a date with
me that revolting, huh?

RAY
I got shit to do.

MERRIBELLE
Why don't you take me out?

RAY
Because I prefer you indoors,
naked.

MERRIBELLE
You could buy me dinner for once.

RAY
I bring dinner all the fuckin'
time, shut up.

MERRIBELLE
Don't tell me to shut up!

RAY

I got enough goin' on I don't need
you bitchin' at me like my fuckin'
sister--

MERRIBELLE

--I'm not bitchin'. I'm asking you
to take me on a fuckin' civilized
ass date. Is that too much to ask?

RAY

Yes!

MERRIBELLE

Why!?

RAY

Because I don't wanna be seen with
you--

Merribelle stops a moment. She takes his shit.

MERRIBELLE

Get out--

RAY

Bell, I didn't--

MERRIBELLE

Get the fuck out!

She slaps him repeatedly.

RAY

Fine!

MERRIBELLE

Get the fuck outta my life! And
don't come fuckin' back!

Lu pours herself a glass of water as Mrs. Hirshfield
sleeps in a chair in front of the TV. Lu walks slowly up
to Mrs. Hirshfield who looks dead.

FLASH BACK:

To the fire.

To her grandmother dead in the chair.

FLASH BACK OVER.

Mrs. Hirshfield jolts and snores. Lu, startled, drops her water. She runs to go get a towel to clean it and hears a scream through the wall. Lu hears a thud and another scream. A door slams.

Lu runs to the window and sees her Uncle Ray walking out of the apartment and getting into his truck. He drives away. Lu is confused and scared.

66

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

66

Lu runs into the apartment. Merribelle sits on the floor, half dressed, crying.

Lu walks to her and hugs her. Merribelle hugs her back. They let go and sit together a moment.

Lu does the sign for "Wrong" twice.

MERRIBELLE

Nothin's wrong.

Pause.

MERRIBELLE

Or maybe everything's been wrong
for so long I can't tell the
difference anymore.

Lu holds Merribelle's hand.

MERRIBELLE

You're very pretty. Anybody ever
told you that before?

Lu reaches for some tissues and gives one to Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

I bet people tell you that all
the time. Moms these days try to
make that some sorta insult. "No!
She's smart, she's brave, she's
tough." Like bein' told you're
pretty is gonna send the wrong
message. Like it's wrong to wanna
be pretty. You wanna know a
secret? Nobody's ever told me I
was pretty before. It's all I want
in the whole world. What's that
say about me?

Merribelle sits on the floor with Lu.

MERRIBELLE

Should we go shoppin'? Nothin'
makes me feel prettier than a new
outfit. Tomorrow. You wanna come
shoppin' with me?

Lu looks like she's not really sure.

MERRIBELLE

You ever been shoppin'?

Lu shakes her head.

MERRIBELLE

Oh honey what!? Oh...oh we're goin
shoppin'! We gonna buy ourselves
some pretty ass things! And if
that's wrong

(Merribelle does the
sign for "wrong")
then I don't wanna be right!

67

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - DAY

67

They drive to go shopping and drink slushies. Their tongues are bright purple and bright blue.

MUSIC UP: "Straight Up" by Paula Abdul plays on the radio. Merribelle sings along and Lu dances.

MERRIBELLE

*--Or am I caught in a hit and run--
straight up now tell me is it
gonna be you and me forever, oh oh
oh, or are you just havin' fun??*

They have fun.

68

INT. - WALMART - CONTINUOUS

68

"Straight Up" By Paula Abdul continues to play as they shop. Merribelle and Lu strut into a Walmart type store. They scan the racks and help each other choose cute stuff. They go into the dressing rooms and try on matching outfits. They laugh and dance and pose in the mirror.

A walmart employee, DANIELLE (simple woman, 20's/30's), looks on, she doesn't like the look of Merribelle.

The girls try on silly costumes and dresses. It's fun.

DANIELLE
 Excuse me.

The girls laugh and look in the mirror, more posing.

DANIELLE
 Excuse me!

Merribelle turns around, annoyed.

MERRIBELLE
 You talkin' to me?

DANIELLE
 One person per dressing room--

MERRIBELLE
 Oh we're just having some fun--

DANIELLE
 --I said one person per room--

MERRIBELLE
 --*My niece is underaged! I am accompanying her for her health and safety! I will not subject this child to any danger! How dare you suggest I abandon this small, innocent, child in such a dangerous world!*

Danielle rolls her eyes and walks away.

MERRIBELLE
 That's right, bitch.

Another high five between the two. Merribelle observes Lu's outfit.

MERRIBELLE
 Shit you fine, girl, look at that top. Gimme a spin.

Lu spins. It's fun.

Merribelle has a pile of clothes in her hands. They pass the TV section on their way to the register.

MERRIBELLE
 Hang on, I wanna get some candy.

Merribelle skips off to the candy area, while Lu stands staring at her own face on the TV.

TV NEWS ANCHOR
 ...after finding only the remains of her grandmother in the house, which is said to be the cause of the wildfire that spread over nearly fifty acres. If you have any information on Lucy Webber please call the authorities immediately.

Her Uncle Ray goes up to a stand with many microphones. Vicky fake-cries, dramatically, beside him.

RAY
 We just hope she's ok. Wherever she is. We're just prayin' every day for her safe return home.

Lu stares in fear at the site of her Uncle. She looks over her shoulder at Danielle who leers at Merribelle, keeping an eye on her. Lu quickly shuts off this TV.

70 INT. WALMART - CONTINUOUS

70

Merribelle is checking out as Lu runs by her towards the exit.

MERRIBELLE
 Hey, B! Over here! You a fruit or a chocolate girl?--hey! Where you goin'?

She finishes checking out quickly and runs after her.

Danielle looks on, concerned and suspicious.

71 EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

71

Lu runs towards the car and tries to open the door. She pulls at the handle, pulling and pulling.

MERRIBELLE
 Wait up! Why you runnin'? Calm down I gotta unlock the--stop doin that it won't unlock if you keep--
STOP IT, SHIT!

A COUPLE walk by and see Merribelle scream at little Lu. They whisper to each other. Merribelle gives them a nervous smile. She unlocks the car.

72

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

72

They both enter the car as it starts to rain. They sit in silence a moment. Merribelle is confused by Lu's sudden outburst.

MERRIBELLE

Good. Rain is good. Makes the air cleaner. Did you know that? I don't actually know if that's true. Someone told me that once. Could be misinformation. But it feels true, you know?

Lu looks at Merribelle and hugs her, so tight.

MERRIBELLE

Hey...you're ok little B. Everything is gonna be ok. I promise.

Lu stops crying and takes a deep breathe. Lu reaches into her pocket and pulls out the five dollar bill Merribelle gave her.

MERRIBELLE

What's that for?

Lu looks at the bag of clothes they just bought.

MERRIBELLE

Nah, that's my gift to you.

Lu smiles.

MERRIBELLE

Keep it. Really.

Lu puts the money back in her pocket signing "Thank you."

MERRIBELLE

You're welcome. What's the sign for "I'm a dramatic 'lil bitch?" That's a phrase you should know, shit.

Merribelle and Lu laugh as she drives off.

73

EXT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - LATER

73

Merribelle and Lu run up to the apartment in the rain.

74

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LATER

74

Merribelle opens bills and overdue statements at the little dining table. Stressed, she looks up and sighs, spotting her cookie jar filled with the money she is saving for her surgery. She looks back at her bills, knowing she must dip into her savings to afford her life.

75

INT. MERRIBELLE'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

75

Lu brushes her teeth in the bathroom with her bubblegum toothpaste and the fully running water. Lu is wearing cute, new pajamas, nothing she's ever had before. She admires herself in the mirror after she's done brushing her teeth. She smiles and puts her hair in front of her face like Merribelle does. She opens the medicine cabinet and sees some lipstick. She puts a little on. Merribelle stands at the door now and watches her.

MERRIBELLE

Red's not your color.

Merribelle goes into her room and brings a box full of make up into the bathroom.

MERRIBELLE

Here -- peach matches your skin tone.

She puts a little blush on her.

MERRIBELLE

Some blush. You got great skin.

She puts some eyeshadow on her.

MERRIBELLE

And voila. You don't need none of this stuff. You were already perfect. But it's fun, right? No harm in havin' a little fun.

Lu looks at herself in the mirror. Merribelle sets her head on Lu's shoulder and they look in the mirror together. Merribelle gets her polaroid camera and they take a selfie. She hands the picture to Lu. Lu takes the photo and stares at it a long time.

Merribelle exits the bathroom and grabs a carrot from the fridge.

MERRIBELLE

Gotta work. You know the drill.

Merribelle enters her bedroom but the door doesn't shut entirely.

76

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LITTLE LATER

76

The T.V. is on Sesame Street as they teach children words in sign language. Lu watches intently, copying the puppets as they sign "I LOVE YOU."

Lu then gets up and walks to the kitchen and gets herself a popsicle on this hot night. She walks by the dining table and sees the bills on the table. She glances at them and realizes some are overdue. Lu reaches into her pocket and takes out her five dollar bill. She walks to the cookie jar, gets the stool, opens the jar and puts the money in the jar. She smiles at this deed.

As she walks back to the TV she notices Merribelle's door is slightly ajar. She walks closer.

MERRIBELLE (O.S.)

You want me to wag my little tail,
baby? Like that? You naughty!

Lu puts her eye at the crack of the door.

Merribelle is dressed in a large purple bunny costume. Lu is very intrigued by this. She watches on as Merribelle bounces around in front of her computer.

MERRIBELLE

You want this? Huh?

She holds up the carrot.

MERRIBELLE

You want me to put it in my mouth,
you naughty boy?

Merribelle shoves the carrot down her throat. Lu lets out a little laugh. Merribelle looks at the door and sees Lu standing there. She chokes on the carrot.

Lu runs to the couch and hides under her blanket!

Merribelle slams her computer shut.

MERRIBELLE

Shit!

77

INT. MERRIBELLE'S LIVING ROOM - LITTLE LATER

77

Merribelle, still in her very elaborate bunny costume, sits on the couch with Lu. They sit on opposite ends of the couch. Not speaking. Staring straight ahead.

MERRIBELLE

I don't expect you to understand this.

Lu stares straight ahead.

MERRIBELLE

But what you should understand is I ain't hurtin' nobody and never have.

Lu stares straight ahead.

MERRIBELLE

I got stuff to pay for. I seen people do a lot worse for a lot less, ok?

Lu continues to stare straight ahead.

MERRIBELLE

You know what!?

Merribelle stands up.

MERRIBELLE

I don't owe you an explanation! I don't owe you or anybody jack shit! And I don't take shit from nobody neither--everything I got I earned! My mom and dad won't help me unless I go back to college to become some robot workin' in a cubicle like them? Fuck that! I know who I am and I know what I want! I got a gift and my grandmami said you always gotta be grateful for your gifts. How grateful is it for me to waste it? Look, all my life people look at me for being different! But I'm not different! I'm the same as everybody else!

(MORE)

MERRIBELLE (CONT'D)

I got blood and bones and a better ass than most people so why not flaunt it for a few bucks? I pull crazy money -- don't touch nobody, nobody touches me. It's safe and I make these guys whole fuckin' week! All so I can pay for my tits. Win/win if you ask me! Which you should not do. From now on you better mind your business while I conduct my business. Got it?

Silence.

MERRIBELLE

Don't look at me like that.

Lu starts to laugh.

MERRIBELLE

You think it's fuckin' funny? My life's a joke to you?

Lu laughs so hard she falls off the couch. Merribelle joins in. They both laugh.

MERRIBELLE

I guess it's a little weird, huh?
I'm a fuckin' bunny.

They both laugh so hard they cry.

MERRIBELLE

People like this shit, I dunno!

They keep laughing. Suddenly a knock on the door. They both look at each other, confused. More knocking.

MERRIBELLE

Hang on!

She runs into her room and shoves her bunny costume into her closet and throws on a dress.

More knocking. Lu runs into the bathroom.

MERRIBELLE

I said hang on!! Damn!

Merribelle opens the door slightly.

CARLA, FIONA and SASHA (all in their 20's and 30's, all different races, all dressed up cute) barge in carrying wine coolers and beer. One is smoking a joint.

FIONA
Hey girl, hey!

SASHA
Move out the way, shit!

MERRIBELLE
What you bitches doin' here?

CARLA
It's girl's night, what you mean??

They all spread out around the apartment and light cigarettes and put booze in the fridge. Laughing and chatting.

CARLA
You been hard to get a hold of lately--

FIONA
Hangin' with that fuckin' redneck, probly--

MERRIBELLE
I can't hang tonight, I--

SASHA
Can't tonight my ass, it's girl's night!

MERRIBELLE
No but I got a fever--chills--

FIONA
Which is it? You hot or cold?

SASHA
She hot, she knows it!

Carla runs to the bathroom.

CARLA
I gotta pee--

MERRIBELLE
Carla wait I--

Lu stands in the bathroom. Carla drags Lu out to the living room.

SASHA
(pointing at Lu)
What's that?

MERRIBELLE

Oh--this is my...she's my niece.
She's staying with me--

FIONA

You ain't got no siblings--what
niece!?

MERRIBELLE

She's like a niece, my best friend-- it's her daughter. I call her my
niece--

CARLA

--I thought I was your best
friend?

MERRIBELLE

A different best friend, shit! Why
you grillin' me!? This is B, B
this is a bunch a ho's.

FIONA

Who's the ho?

MERRIBELLE

She's only with me for a little
while. She'll be gone by next
week.

Lu looks up at this statement, displeased.

CARLA

Well why didn't you tell us, I got
all done the fuck up.

SASHA

Come on let's go to Tawney's. I
wanna make out with a stranger
anyways. Bored makin' out with you
bitches.

They all leave.

FIONA

Bye ho! Bye little ho!

The women all begin to exit. Carla lingers, looking at
Lu.

CARLA

(to Lu)

Have we met?

MERRIBELLE

No, this is the first time she stayed with me, her mom's in rehab.

CARLA

Who's her mom?

MERRIBELLE

...Trisha. You haven't met her neither.

Carla looks closely at Lu.

CARLA

You sure I never met you?

SASHA O.S.

Carla come on! You're drivin'!

Carla shrugs and leaves. The door shuts.

Merribelle turns and looks at Lu who runs into the bathroom and slams the door shut.

MERRIBELLE

B--come on...

She knocks on the bathroom door.

MERRIBELLE

Look if it were up to me I'd keep you forever--you're cute and you clean. But we gotta figure somethin' out. You knew this couldn't last forever! You knew that.

Lu sits on the toilet. Angry.

MERRIBELLE

I promise you're not gonna end up like me. I'll find you something better.

Lu exits the bathroom.

MERRIBELLE

I already told you everything's gonna be ok. I promised, remember? And I don't break a fuckin' promise.

Lu raises her eyebrows and signs the word "Wrong."

MERRIBELLE

Ok...I break *some* promises but not this one. Promise. That's a double promise.

Lu smiles.

78 INT. PHARMACY - DAY

78

Merribelle stocks the shelves.

AJ approaches Merribelle.

AJ

Uh hey--hey...

Merribelle doesn't respond.

AJ

Ma' am?

Merribelle turns.

MERRIBELLE

How can I help you?

AJ flirts a little.

AJ

You all got skoal?

Likes the way he's looking at her.

MERRIBELLE

Behind the counter.

AJ

Well, I asked the potato brain behind the counter and he said to ask you.

MERRIBELLE

Well, I guess I'll check in the back for you.

AJ

Well thank you very much.

MERRIBELLE

Well you're welcome.

They laugh.

Vicky storms down the aisle and jumps on AJ in front of Merribelle.

VICKY

Guess what!

AJ

What?

VICKY

Guess!

AJ

I dunno Vicky, shit--

VICKY

I got my period!!

AJ twirls Vicky around, elated.

AJ

Thank the lord!!

Vicky looks at Merribelle.

VICKY

Where you keep your tampons?

Merribelle points to the front of the store. AJ carries Vicky to the front of the store as she kisses his neck.

79

INT. PHARMACY BATHROOM - LATER

79

Merribelle pees. She then washes her hands and looks long and hard at her face. She touches her face, messes with her hair a bit and puts on some lip gloss. She throws the lip gloss at the mirror, aggressively.

80

INT. PHARMACY - LATER

80

Roger is up at the register helping A CUSTOMER. An item won't ring up, the bar code isn't working.

ROGER

Sorry ma'am, I'll just--

He spots Merribelle.

ROGER

Oh, he can help--

Merribelle whips around in fury.

MERRIBELLE

He who?

ROGER

You--

MERRIBELLE

I AM A WOMAN GODDAMNIT!

The few customers in the store stop, stunned, staring at her. Roger is shocked and slightly ashamed. Merribelle storms out.

81 INT. TAWNEY'S BAR - NIGHT

81

It's a packed dive bar. MANY PEOPLE sit in scattered and roughed up wooden chairs, drinking their drinks and chit chatting as A DRUNK WOMAN sings "Dancing Queen" by ABBA.

The bartender SHAWN (thirties, slender, attractive, white guy) rolls his eyes at this subpar performance.

Merribelle storms in and Shawn immediately stands at attention, running to the karaoke machine anticipating her performance.

"Dancing Queen" stops abruptly with a screech.

Merribelle walks up onto the stage and grabs the microphone from this disgruntled, drunk woman.

Merribelle winks at Shawn who pushes play.

MUSIC UP: An Original Score written by Merribelle.

Merribelle sings and sings. The entire crowd, (including that disgruntled drunk woman), dance their asses off.

When Merribelle is done everyone applauds. It's magic.

82 EXT. BAR ALLEY - LATER

82

Shawn and Merribelle smoke in the back alley. Shawn drinks a bud.

SHAWN

You seen much a Deija lately?

MERRIBELLE

Nah, that bitch got her titties
and moved to the city, where the
grass is green and the girls are
pretty...prettier than her.

Shawn laughs.

SHAWN

I dunno. She's pretty pretty to
me.

MERRIBELLE

Because you're a tit man.

SHAWN

You'd think if all I wanted were
some tits I wouldn'ta cut mine
off.

They laugh.

MERRIBELLE

You shoulda given them to me.

SHAWN

Not sure that's how that works...

MERRIBELLE

Wasted perfectly good Double D's.

SHAWN

That what you want? Double D's?
They'll hurt your back.

MERRIBELLE

What do you think?

SHAWN

I think you'd look great with a
solid B.

MERRIBELLE

Ha! Gonna spend 30k for a B!? Ha!

Shawn walks up to Merribelle.

SHAWN

Do what makes you happy,
Merribelle.

Merribelle smiles and finishes her cigarette.

MERRIBELLE
I quit.

SHAWN
Smoking?

MERRIBELLE
My job.

SHAWN
Again?

MERRIBELLE
My boss was a fuckin'-- he fuckin--

SHAWN
He touch you?

MERRIBELLE
No! God no. I don't think that man
has a sexual bone in his pale ass
body.

SHAWN
Did he speak to you
inappropriately?

MERRIBELLE
...technically.

Shawn sits down on the curb next to Merribelle.

SHAWN
I see.

MERRIBELLE
Don't lecture me. He calls me by
my dead name! How would you like
it if people kept callin' you
Shawna!?

SHAWN
Firstly, my name was Brielle, not
Shawna. And two...I understand.

MERRIBELLE
You do?

SHAWN
Of course I fucking do. I went
through the same shit before my
surgery. These morons don't get
it.

(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)
You can't hate them for not
understanding but fuck them for
not trying. That's on them.

MERRIBELLE
I'm so close, Shawn. I'm so
fucking close to my life. My real
life...

SHAWN
You're life is real. It always
was.

Merribelle smiles.

MERRIBELLE
Then why does it feel like a
nightmare?

SHAWN
Life's a nightmare no matter what
gender you are.

They both laugh. Merribelle lights another smoke.

MERRIBELLE
I need a job.

SHAWN
I support you fully in everything
you do but don't ask me for a job
you're a terrible bartender.

MERRIBELLE
I am not!

SHAWN
You're mean to people.

MERRIBELLE
I'm mean to *shitty* people.

SHAWN
You think all people are shitty
people.

MERRIBELLE
They are!

Shawn glares at her.

SHAWN
You'll find something.

WHITNEY (20's, cool, cis woman) walks out of the bar's back door into the alley.

WHITNEY

There you are.

She walks up to Shawn and kisses him.

WHITNEY

They're about to start pouring for themselves in there.

SHAWN

Merribelle quit her job.

WHITNEY

Good for you! Your boss was a fucking cis-tard.

They laugh.

MERRIBELLE

Shawn's gonna give me a job.

Shawn and Whitney re-enter the bar, holding hands.

SHAWN

Not ever in one million years.

MERRIBELLE

Some friend!

Shawn stops before closing the bar door.

SHAWN

Why don't you call your mom, Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

I'm not asking them for money! They don't support my dreams they--

SHAWN

You don't have to ask for anything. You can just...talk.

He shuts the door. Merribelle sits alone in the alley. She pulls out another cigarette but doesn't smoke it.

Shawn is bartending and Whitney is choosing music from the jukebox.

Merribelle walks over to the bathrooms. The sign on the bathroom reads: WE DON'T CARE WHERE YOU PEE AS LONG AS IT'S NOT THE FLOOR. Merribelle smiles and enters the bathroom.

Merribelle exits the bathroom and observes Shawn and Whitney flirting. Above them a small TV plays the local news. On the TV, Vicky and AJ are being hauled off by police in handcuffs.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Victoria Webber and Anthony Carter are under arrest for possession of large quantities of methamphetamine, heroin, fentanyl and over thirty unregistered weapons. They are now primary suspects in the abduction and possible murder of Victoria's seven year old daughter, Lucy Webber--

A photo of Lu pops onto the screen. Merribelle squeals in shock.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

--who has been missing since last week's wildfire that killed six people, including the suspect's mother and Lucy's grandmother, Virginia--

MERRIBELLE

Fuck me.

Merribelle storms out.

84

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - LATER

84

She is smoking a cigarette, furiously.

MERRIBELLE

Fuckin' A. What'd you think was gonna happen? You stupid. You so stupid!

She hits herself as she cries a little.

MERRIBELLE

Stupid stupid stupid!

As she approaches her building and parks the car. She pauses a moment as her mother calls her. She looks at the phone and picks up.

MERRIBELLE

Mom?

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Merribelle! Merribelle come home!
Come for dinner, stop this
nonsense my love. We miss you!

MERRIBELLE

I miss you, too. Mom I'm in--

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)

--What? I didn't hear you. Are you
ok?

Merribelle holds back her tears.

MERRIBELLE

Yeah...I have to go.

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)

What's wrong?

MERRIBELLE

No nothing, nothing. I just have
to go but I will call you soon.

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)

We love you so much, Merribelle.
So much.

MERRIBELLE

I love you, too.

Merribelle hangs up the phone and takes a deep breathe.

Merribelle opens the door and sees Lu and Carla sitting at the little kitchen table. Lu is eating a grilled cheese, innocently. Carla stares, aggressively, at Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

Carla.

CARLA

Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

What you--

Carla stands up and points to Merribelle's purse.

CARLA

That's nice, lemme see it.

Merribelle hands the purse to Carla. Carla starts hitting Merribelle with it, aggressively. Lu's eyes widen.

CARLA

Why you stupid!? What's the matter with you--

MERRIBELLE

I can explain!

CARLA

Why'd you do this!?--

MERRIBELLE

It's not what it looks like!

CARLA

So you did not kidnap this child?

MERRIBELLE

No! I mean...technically...yes.
But--

CARLA

Why!? You gonna ask for a ransom!?
There are other ways to pay for
this surgery!

Carla keeps hitting Merribelle with her purse.

MERRIBELLE

No! That's not...I just -- Quit
hittin' me and lemme explain!

Carla stops.

MERRIBELLE

I took her to the police station.
I swear I did. First place I took
her was to--I mean after we got
burgers. Second place I took her--
well then she took me to a phantom
location--third place I took her--

Carla hits her with the purse again--

MERRIBELLE

*I took her to the police the day I
picked her up ok!?*

CARLA

She still here!

MERRIBELLE

Well we didn't actually make it
inside--

Carla hits her again, Merribelle snaps the purse back!

MERRIBELLE

There was that fire and she was
just standing there all sad and
abandoned--she needed help!

CARLA

And so you took her home and kept
her like a fuckin' chihuahua??

MERRIBELLE

I'm telling you I tried to take
her to the police but I could see
in her eyes that she was in
trouble! And look at her parents,
they on the news--her mom and that
fuckin' drug dealer! I was right!
She was in trouble!

CARLA

And now *you* in trouble and if we
don't bring her to the cops, RIGHT
NOW, I'm gonna be in trouble for
collaboratin' or whatever.

MERRIBELLE

They're gonna put her in the
system. She don't talk. She'll
never survive!

CARLA

Merribelle, look what you're doing
to yourself. How many people saw
you two together? Probably
hundreds--maybe this whole damn
town! People here talk! And one of
them is gonna be like..."huh, you
know what? I saw that baby with
that loud mouth biatch at Ralph's
last night! Lemme call the cops!"
And then you *both* in the system!
Is that what you want?

Merribelle takes a moment. Lu is sitting at the kitchen table, no longer eating, but watching the drama. Merribelle sits down at the table with her.

MERRIBELLE

No.

CARLA

We have to bring her to the police, Merribelle. It's the only way to save yourself at this point. There's nothing you can do for her...there never was.

Merribelle reaches her hand out to touch Lu's. Lu retracts her hand.

MERRIBELLE

She's right, B.

Lu gets up and runs into the bathroom and slams the door shut.

MERRIBELLE

Great.

CARLA

Don't think about that. Think about what you gonna say to the fuckin' detectives when you return the child you kidnapped.

A knock at the door. Both Carla and Merribelle jump.

MERRIBELLE

(frantic whisper)
Who's that??

CARLA

(frantic whisper)
Why you askin' me for it's your damn house!

MERRIBELLE

Did you call the cops!?

CARLA

No!

MERRIBELLE

What did you do??

CARLA
 What did I do!? You stole a kid!
 Look at yourself!

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

MERRIBELLE
 Shh! Don't talk, maybe they'll
 leave.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

RAY (O.S.)
 (slurring drunk)
 Merribelle, open up!

Carla rolls her eyes.

CARLA
 I thought you weren't seeing this
 asshole anymore.

RAY (O.S.)
 Please, baby! I miss you so
 fucking much! Please open the
 door! MERRIBELLE!

MERRIBELLE
 Alright, Jesus--

Merribelle opens the door a little.

MERRIBELLE
 Ray I can't--

RAY
 (slurring)
 Baby, I miss you so much, you
 won't answer my fuckin' calls--

MERRIBELLE
 Can you come back another time I
 got a friend over--

RAY
 Who!? Who you got in there!?

He tries to look in the door.

MERRIBELLE
 Carla's here, we havin' a
 discussion.

RAY

Well tell her to go the fuck home.

CARLA

Hi Ray, nice to see you, too.

MERRIBELLE

(to Ray)
I'll call you later--

RAY

Come on, I can't live without you--

CARLA

Find someone else to suck your
dick, we busy!

MERRIBELLE

Ray, I really can't--

RAY

But I drove all the way here.

MERRIBELLE

I didn't know you were comin'--

Ray punches the door, which flies open.

86

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

86

Lu is watching this interaction through a little crack in
the door.

87

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

87

Ray grabs Merribelle by the neck as he undoes his jeans.

RAY

You can't fuckin' dump ME! Who the
fuck you think you are!?

Carla jumps on him, Ray hits her in the face, she goes
down.

RAY

Relax, Carla, you can watch.

88 INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

88

Lu continues to watch the scene. Merribelle squeals in pain and Carla moans, holding her face. Nothing can be seen but Lu's eyes, watching this moment.

89 INT. MERRIBELLE'S LIVING ROOM

89

Merribelle bites! Ray recoils! Carla hits him in the back of the head with a lamp! Ray squirms to pull his pants back up as he runs away from these two strong ass women!

MERRIBELLE

Run away you piece of shit!

RAY

Fucking crazy bitches!

CARLA

Don't you forget it!

MERRIBELLE

Ray exits, running with his ass out!

CARLA

(to Merribelle)

You got terrible taste in men.

Lu exits the bathroom. She sits next to Merribelle who is on the floor and holds her hand. Carla looks at them from the couch.

CARLA

You have until tomorrow. If you don't go to the police by then, I will.

Carla gets up and exits.

Lu and Merribelle stay seated on the floor, holding hands.

90 INT. MERRIBELLE'S LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

90

Lu is fast asleep on the couch.

INT. MERRIBELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Merribelle lays in her bed, eyes wide open. She gets up and takes out a suitcase. She fills it.

91

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - LITTLE LATER

91

Merribelle finishes writing a note and leaves a \$20 bill on top of the note.

She stands and stares at sleeping Lu.

Merribelle gently exits the apartment.

Lu remains asleep.

92

EXT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

92

Merribelle pops her suitcase in her trunk. She shuts her trunk and looks up at her apartment window. She enters her car. She starts the engine.

Merribelle pulls her phone out, about to call her mother when--

BAM BAM BAM

Carla, with a busted face from last night, stands at the driver's side window of her car. Merribelle rolls down her window.

MERRIBELLE

You wanna give me a heart attack!?

CARLA

(suspicious)

Where you goin'?

MERRIBELLE

I was...goin' to get Bacon Egg and Cheeses...for our last meal or whatever.

Carla looks suspicious.

CARLA

Come inside, I got somethin' to show you.

Carla proceeds to walk up the stairs. Merribelle takes a moment, then follows her.

93

INT. MERRIBELLE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

93

Carla walks directly to the TV and turns it on, waking Lu up.

CARLA
Mornin, move over.

Carla sits on the couch as Lu moves over. Merribelle quickly grabs the note and crumples it up, hiding it.

CARLA
Look.

On the television RAY is speaking to the press.

RAY
I am so worried for Lucy. If anyone has any information whatsoever, please. The state has offered a ten thousand dollar reward if my niece is returned home safely. She's like a daughter. She's the only family I have left. I still have hope that she's out there and--

Merribelle and Carla whip their necks at Lu, who is watching her Uncle on T.V.

MERRIBELLE
Holy shit.

CARLA
Holy fucking shit.

MERRIBELLE
Ray your Uncle!?

Lu blinks as the TV goes on and on about Lu's case in the background.

MERRIBELLE
Hey.

Merribelle kneels down and takes Lu's shoulders.

MERRIBELLE
He ever hurt you?

Lu stares right at Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE

That motherfucker. How you say
"Fucking motherfucker" in sign
language?

CARLA

This is some unbelievable shit
right here.

MERRIBELLE

If I take her to the police he's
gonna be her fuckin' guardian!

Carla lights one of Merribelle's cigarettes.

CARLA

Fuck.

MERRIBELLE

You see? You see how complex this
shit is??

Merribelle lights a cigarette and sits on the couch. Lu
is between them. Merribelle hands her the box of
cigarettes. Lu takes one and lights it. She coughs. They
all sit and smoke, watching the television.

CARLA

He's the one who belongs in jail.

They all stare at the TV.

MERRIBELLE

What did you say?

CARLA

I said he's the one who deserves
to go to fuckin' jail.

Merribelle looks at Lu.

MERRIBELLE

You want him to go to jail, too?

Lu does the sign for "Want."

CARLA

He's fucking scum.

MERRIBELLE

Yeah, he is.

CARLA

Worse than scum.

MERRIBELLE

You're right.

CARLA

It should be him behind fuckin'
bars.

MERRIBELLE

It should.

Merribelle stands up. She paces with a smile on her face.

CARLA

What's this? What are you doing?

MERRIBELLE

I'm thinkin'.

CARLA

Stop thinking. I don't like when
you start thinking.

MERRIBELLE

I think I figured this out.

CARLA

There wouldn't be anything TO
figure out if you just minded your
damn business in the first place!

MERRIBELLE

If I had minded my own business
she'd probly be livin' with Ray
right now!

CARLA

You're no angel! Don't act like
you be doin' good deeds on
purpose. You gotta return her,
Merribelle--

MERRIBELLE

To him!?

CARLA

Well you can't keep her!

MERRIBELLE

This is a blessing. Jesus lookin'
down on us right now!

CARLA

Lookin' down AT you, more like it.

MERRIBELLE

We gotta come up with somethin'--

CARLA

--You just want that reward money
for your surgery--

MERRIBELLE

Do you trust me?

Carla looks hard at Merribelle.

CARLA

No. But you're my best friend, and
I love you.

Carla goes to exit.

CARLA

And I don't wanna lose you. So
don't do anything stupid--er.

Carla mumbles as she exits.

CARLA

Do the right fuckin' thing---

Carla exits.

MERRIBELLE

There ain't no right thing.

Lu pulls something out from the couch cushions.

MERRIBELLE

What's that?

Lu hands it to Merribelle. Merribelle is stunned.

94

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

94

Merribelle and Lu drive silently in the car. They pull into the police station and sit there a moment. Lu looks solemnly out the window.

MERRIBELLE

I wish there were another way. I
really do.

Lu looks at Merribelle and hugs her, tight.

MERRIBELLE

I don't know what's gonna happen after this, B. I'm not gonna lie to you. We just gotta hope it works out. Maybe this time...maybe this time the good things can happen to the good people and the bad things can happen to the bad people. All we can do now is hope.

95

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

95

Merribelle and Lu walk into the police station holding hands. MANY POLICE OFFICERS are getting work done or standing around drinking coffee. They walk up to a tall desk with two officers behind it.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Hello, how can we help you?

MERRIBELLE

Uh, yeah, hi. Can we--can I talk to someone about...about--

OFFICER HARRING (Caucasian man, 60's, mean looking) approaches the front desk.

OFFICER HARRING
You can talk to me.

Merribelle and Lu don't look very pleased that this is going to be the officer assisting them.

MERRIBELLE
Um, hello, I'm Merribelle. And this is--

OFFICER HARRING
--I know who this is.

Officer Harring pulls Lu from Merribelle.

MERRIBELLE
Hey--don't drag her like that.

Officer Harring turns and speaks sharply to Merribelle.

OFFICER HARRING
Listen to me. I'm the one giving orders here, this is my house. You say one more word out of turn, I can send you to jail for fifteen years, disorderly conduct.

Merribelle takes a step toward Officer Herring.

OFFICER HARRING
Step back, Sir!

POLICE CAPTAIN JEAN LEE (Asian woman, 40's, serious) enters the building and looks at the scene before her.

CAPTAIN LEE
Is there a problem? Ma'am,
everything ok here?

Lee and Herring stare at each other a moment. Herring looks at Merribelle.

CAPTAIN LEE
I'll take it from here, Herring.

OFFICER HARRING
But you're off duty--

CAPTAIN LEE
I said I will take it from here.

Officer Herring stomps off, disgruntled. Merribelle and Lucy follow Captain Lee to a room. Relieved.

96

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

96

Merribelle, Lu and Captain Lee sit at a tin colored table.

MERRIBELLE
It's cold in here--

CAPTAIN LEE
You want some water?

MERRIBELLE
Sure.

She pours them both water.

MERRIBELLE
This is B--

CAPTAIN LEE
Lucy Webber.

MERRIBELLE
Right.

CAPTAIN LEE
What happened?

Merribelle and Lu look at each other.

MERRIBELLE
It's a funny story...actually.

97 INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

97

FIVE MALE POLICE OFFICERS (any race/age) stand around eating donuts and drinking coffee. Officer Harring tells a story to the rest of them, with his mouth full of donut.

As he tells the story of what happened clips of the story are shown and the voices of the officers can be heard as voice overs for what the characters are saying.

OFFICER HARRING
And so he rapes him...her...and
then beats the shit outta the
friend there.

POLICE OFFICER 2
At his house?

POLICE OFFICER 3
His whose house?

POLICE OFFICER 4
His his or his hers?

OFFICER HARRING
Merribelle's. So he cracks the
friend in the face, she's
bleeding, and he's raping the
other one and it's a mess.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Yikes.

OFFICER HARRING
Exactly.

POLICE OFFICER 4
So then what happened?

OFFICER HARRING
So she decides to go get revenge.
Give him a piece of her mind.

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Merribelle pulls onto Ray's lawn and gets out of the car, furious. Walks straight up to his door and kicks it open.*

POLICE OFFICER 3

She who?

POLICE OFFICER 4

She he or she she?

OFFICER HARRING

Merribelle.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Then what happened?

OFFICER HARRING

Well if you'd let me fuckin'
finish you would know.

POLICE OFFICER 3

Go on..

OFFICER HARRING

So she goes over there to give him
a piece of her mind, right? She
knocks down the door and starts
yellin' and screamin' when out the
corner of her eye she sees a kid.

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Merribelle screaming and breaking things in Ray's home. She see's Lu hiding behind the wall and stops. Merribelle suddenly has a "missing person's flier" in her hand.*

POLICE OFFICER 4

Who's kid?

POLICE OFFICER 3

His kid?

OFFICER HARRING

No the fuckin'...the kid, the
missing kid.

POLICE OFFICER 2,3 & 4

(mumble in unison)

Oh right, yeah, sure sure, right--

OFFICER HARRING

And so he immediately recognizes
her--

POLICE OFFICER 4
Who does?

OFFICER HARRING
I swear to fuckin' god--

POLICE OFFICER 3
Merribelle.

OFFICER HARRING
Yes. And she escapes with the kid--
runs her immediately over here.

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Merribelle kicks Ray in the nuts and dramatically picks Lu up and carries her to her car. Ray looks on, desperate! Merribelle drives away, flipping Ray off.*

POLICE OFFICER 4
I dunno. This sounds fishy.

OFFICER HARRING
So we go cuff this guy Ray, he's
screamin', "liar liar, it wasn't
me, I never seen that bitch in my
life, never once in my whole life,
I don't know who you're even
talkin' about!" We bring him in
and we say, "you never seen this
person? Never once in your life?
Not once ever?" He's screamin' and
shoutin', "I don't know who that
is, I ain't never seen her in my
whole life!"

DRAMATIZED CLIP: Ray screaming, silently. (When he talks it's Officer Harring's voice coming out of his mouth.) Ray is slamming around the police car. The officers take him out of the police car and bring him into the station. Merribelle sits in the interrogation room. They enter this room with Ray who's yelling and denying he knows her etc.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Had he? Ever met her? Was she
lyin'?

Officer Harring holds out a polaroid picture of Ray with his pants down and Merribelle on her knees giving him a blowjob. Carla on the floor holding her face in the background.

The police all holler.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Oh shit!

POLICE OFFICER 3
Caught him with his pants down!

POLICE OFFICER 4
That sick son of a bitch.

OFFICER HARRING
That's the friend there, bleeding
from the face.

POLICE OFFICER 2
What a shot.

POLICE OFFICER 3
Holy hell.

POLICE OFFICER 2
That's his house?

OFFICER HARRING
No it's her house.

POLICE OFFICER 4
Who's house?

OFFICER HARRING
(points)
Her house.

POLICE OFFICER 3
Damn.

OFFICER HARRING
Apparently got pretty violent with
the kid, too.

POLICE OFFICER 2,3 & 4
(all mumble in
unison)
That motherfucker, that scum,
fuckin' asshole.

OFFICER HARRING
So now this kid's whole family's
in prison. Mom's gettin' even more
time for negligence and startin'
that big fire few weeks back. Her
grandma's dead...she's got nowhere
to go.

POLICE OFFICER 2
 And what about the...the...you
 know--

POLICE OFFICER 4
 --Merribelle.

OFFICER HARRING
 She's free to go. Called her
 friend, the one who got hit, she
 corroborated the whole thing.

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Carla talking to the police, pointing to her bruise on her face.*

OFFICER HARRING
 Called her boss, said "Merribelle
 is a very good person. Wouldn't
 harm a soul yada yada..."

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Roger saying "Merribelle is a very good person. Wouldn't harm a soul yada yada..." but in Officer Herring's voice as he tells the story to the police.*

OFFICER HARRING
 Talked to the wacko old lady lives
 next door who told us she loved
 Merribelle and fuckin' hates cops.

DRAMATIZED CLIP: *Mrs. Hirshfield speaking to the cops, frustrated and displeased with their presence. Saying in Officer Herring's voice "I love Merribelle and hate cops."*

OFFICER HARRING
 So that's that.

POLICE OFFICER 3
 Probably helped him kidnap her in
 the first place so she could cash
 out on the deal. She probably
 collected that cash and split.
 Fuckin' fa--

Captain Lee is suddenly standing there.

CAPTAIN LEE
 She didn't take the reward money.

As Captain Lee walks away.

CAPTAIN LEE
 Get back to work. You sound like a
 bunch of idiots. No offense to
 idiots.

The police men all split up and go back to their desks.
 Police Officer 4 stops...

POLICE OFFICER 4
 (to himself)
 Wait a minute...who took the
 picture?

Captain Lee is standing right behind him, he jumps when
 he hears her.

CAPTAIN LEE
 The case is closed, Officer. I
 suggest you focus on the many on
 your desk that are not.

She walks away. Officer 4 shrugs his shoulders and gets
 to work.

A FEW YEARS LATER.....

98

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - A FEW YEARS LATER

98

Merribelle sits in her car, she pops open a pack of gum.
 She looks much more polished than before. She's on the
 phone with her mom.

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 ...when Santos came over screaming
 "She's eating the dog treats!"

Merribelle laughs.

MERRIBELLE
 Aye aye aye, what are we gonna do
 with her.

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 To be honest they looked like
 cookies to me I would have
 probably eaten them.

MERRIBELLE
 How many did she eat? They can't
 taste like cookies!

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 You looked so beautiful at the
 wedding last weekend.

Merribelle looks at her instagram of photos from Shawn and Whitney's wedding as she talks to her mother. Merribelle is officiating in the photos. They dance in other photos. She likes the pictures.

MERRIBELLE
 Thanks mamma. Hey look I have to
 go--

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 Ok we will see you for the
 holidays, no?

MERRIBELLE
 Yes, love you.

MERRIBELLE'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 I'm proud of you.

MERRIBELLE
 Thanks mom.

Merribelle hangs up.

99 INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

99

Merribelle shops. She pops some candy and popcorn and magazines into her cart.

As she walks down the aisle TWO YOUNG MEN oggle her and comment on her looks. She likes it.

MERRIBELLE
 That's right. I'm beautiful, I
 know.

Her phone rings.

MERRIBELLE
 Hey ho--

The chatter is loud and fun on the other end.

CARLA'S VOICE
 Where you at?

MERRIBELLE
 I'm gettin supplies!

CARLA'S VOICE
You couldn't buy supplies in L.A.?

MERRIBELLE
I'm on my way!

CARLA'S VOICE
Fiona wants Marlboro lights!

MERRIBELLE
She gotta quit--

CARLA'S VOICE
--Don't start! We're not the ones
with a residency in Holly-fucking-
wood, shut up! You sing all you
want, buy your broke ass friends
some smokes. Shit.

Carla has hung up the phone. Merribelle laughs and puts her phone back in her pocket. Suddenly the alarms go off and a voice is heard over the loud speaker.

LOUDSPEAKER
*Good Evening shoppers. We have
just been informed that a wildfire
is approaching our store. We ask
you all to calmly but quickly exit
the store immediately and avoid
route 3. Head west or go high.
Thank you for understanding,
please stay safe.*

Merribelle rolls her eyes and walks to the cash register where DANIELLE (same woman from Walmart, she works here now) is closing up.

MERRIBELLE
Can I get some Marlboro lights?

DANIELLE
Sorry ma'am, we're closing
immediately because--

Danielle suddenly stops, trying to place Merribelle.

DANIELLE
...do I know you?

They both lock eyes a moment. Merribelle knows who this is.

MERRIBELLE
I guess I got one of those faces.

Merribelle sets her cart down and winks at Danielle as she exits. Danielle watches her walk away. Clueless.

100 EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT

100

Merribelle walks casually up to her car and unlocks it, looking up at the amber colored smoke in the sky.

MERRIBELLE

What'd I do to deserve this drama?

As she is about to enter her car she stops and stares at someone who has caught her eye.

A family with FOUR KIDS (between 6 and 12) are running playfully to a minivan. The kids jump in and tease each other. Mrs. Consuelos (Lu's teacher) is telling them all to stop. Lu, a little older, clean and fresh, is one of the four children. She's laughing and playing tag with one of the other children.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Kids come on, stop it, please. Get into the car--your father is going to be very upset when he hears about this. No ice cream!

Mrs. Consuelos enters the front seat.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Lu, in the car--stop chasing your sister! In, now!

Lu whips around and turns to enter the car when she spots Merribelle watching her.

They stare long and hard at each other.

Merribelle gives a little nod, Lu smiles a little smile.

MRS. CONSUELOS

Lu, let's go, there's a wildfire!

Lu starts to enter the car...

FLASHBACK:

101

INT. MERRIBELLE'S CAR - FROM THE NIGHT AT THE POLICE
STATION

101

Merribelle and Lu are hugging exactly as they had been doing, the scene picks up at the exact moment of their embrace. They let go of each other and prepare to exit the car.

MERRIBELLE

Wait. B.

Lu stops opening the car door.

MERRIBELLE

Look. We can't...we can't be friends. If this is how we do this. If this is what we do--frame your scum bag uncle...then that's it for us. I can't come hangin' around, it'll be suspicious, you know? People might wonder if I was involved or knew you better than I let on.

Lu stares at Merribelle, frowning a little.

MERRIBELLE

Everything is gonna be ok.
(convincing herself)
I don't know how. Just gotta pray for some rain in the fire, you know?

Lu makes the sign for "I love you" but hides it a little so Merribelle can't really see it. Merribelle spots her little hand, hiding the sign for I love you. Merribelle makes the sign for "I love you" and places her hand on Lu's leg. Lu pulls her hand up so it's not hidden anymore. They're "I love you" hands sit next to each other. They sit there a moment together in silence.

102

EXT. POLICE STATION PARKING LOT

102

Captain Lee stands at her car, she places a duffle bag in the back seat. Merribelle and Lu are talking in their car a little out of site from her. She cranks her neck and observes them. Lu and Merribelle hug and cry. Lu wipes Merribelle's tears. Captain Lee is touched by this moment.

Merribelle and Lu exit the car and walk towards the police station together. Captain Lee recognizes Lu.

Out of site, she thinks to herself as she watches them enter the building.

FLASHBACK CONTINUES...

103 INT. POLICE STATION - LATER

103

Lee and Harring stare at each other a moment. Harring looks at Merribelle.

OFFICER HARRING
Excuse me, Ma'am.

CAPTAIN LEE
I'll take it from here, Harring.

OFFICER HARRING
But you're off duty--

CAPTAIN LEE
I said I will take it from here.

Officer Harring stomps off, disgruntled.

Merribelle and Lucy follow Captain Lee to a room. Relieved.

104 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

104

Merribelle sits alone in a room with an empty cup of water. She fidgets a little. Yells to no one.

MERRIBELLE
Hello? Can I pee!??

No one responds, since she is alone. Merribelle fidgets some more. She looks at the cup, considers peeing in it when the door opens and Captain Lee walks in.

CAPTAIN LEE
Ok...Merribelle--
(hands her papers)
--Here's your I.D. and your personal belongings back. We made some calls, seems like your story checked out.

MERRIBELLE
So...it worked?

CAPTAIN LEE
Excuse me?

MERRIBELLE

I mean...he's...Ray's goin' to
jail?

CAPTAIN LEE

Looking like it.

Merribelle cries a little. Captain Lee smiles warmly.

MERRIBELLE

I gotta pee so bad but I'm just so
happy right now I can't even move.

CAPTAIN LEE

You did the right thing. After you
finish filling out those papers I
gave you I can get you the reward
money. You've earned it.

Captain Lee goes to leave.

MERRIBELLE

Wait. Officer Lee?

Captain Lee stops.

CAPTAIN LEE

Captain.

MERRIBELLE

Captain.

Lee enters and shuts the door.

MERRIBELLE

What about B--Lucy...what's gonna
happen to her?

CAPTAIN LEE

It's hard to say, she doesn't have
any family to care for her. We've
already called CPS and--

MERRIBELLE

She gonna go into foster care?

CAPTAIN LEE

Likely.

MERRIBELLE

Isn't there anyone we can call?
Anyone who can help her?

CAPTAIN LEE

Taking in a child can be
expensive, and she hasn't got a
thing to her name. We have to let
the state sort this out.

MERRIBELLE

How much am I getting--how much is
this reward again?

CAPTAIN LEE

Ten thousand dollars.

MERRIBELLE

What if I gave it to her?

CAPTAIN LEE

You barely know her.

MERRIBELLE

It's the right thing.

Captain Lee smiles.

FLASHBACK OVER

105

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - PRESENT DAY - EVENING

105

Merribelle stands outside her car as Lu stops entering
her car and turns around. Lu signs "Thank you" to
Merribelle. Merribelle signs "Thank you" back.

Lu then hops into the car as she gets swept away by her
loving family. The sky is still glowing yellow and ashy.

Suddenly it rains. HARD. Merribelle looks up and smiles.

She enters her car and turns it on.

MUSIC UP: "Straight Up" by Paula Abdul plays on the
radio.

Merribelle lowers her sun visor and puts her lipstick on
in the mirror. The polaroid of her and Lu from when they
did their make up is taped in that sun visor. She winks
at herself then kisses her hand, touching the picture.

Merribelle smiles. She laughs. She drives. The wildfire
slowly dies behind her.

The End.