

BLACK

The voice of SARA.

SARA (V.O.)
My father believes that the human race is sloppy. Uncaring. And stupid. It's no longer a survival of the fittest. He thinks it his purpose to preach order in the chaos...

FADE IN

White light coming from the end of a long tunnel. A woman hums a "womb song," a soft voice muted as if through very thick walls.

The light becomes very bright, flickering onto other parts of the screen.

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Before I was born, he read many psychology journals to create the foundation of my childhood.

The lights twinkle in bursting stars like sunlight beneath water. As the details become clearer, we realize we are underwater, on a pool bottom looking up.

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
When I was three months old...

SPLASH! A baby shoots down into the water.

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... He threw me into a pool fifteen feet deep.

The baby remains there for a second, suspended in water. She looks around curiously.

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He had just read an article in the New England Journal of Medicine that said babies have a natural inclination to swim.

Outside the water, JIM BUCHANAN, a dark haired man with one long eyebrow, leans over the edge, peering into the water. The slight waves make his face distorted and he leans directly into the sun, creating a halo around his head.

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CLOSE ON

the baby, looking through the underwater world.

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Survive, adapt, prevail." That's his motto. And it's my job to live up to it.

FADE OUT

We hear POOL SOUNDS - splashing, the shrieks of children, a lifeguard whistle. A man yells.

MAN'S VOICE

Follow through, push the water! Come on Sara, let's go!!!

FADE IN:

EXT. MUNICIPAL OUTDOOR POOL - SUMMER, 1975

It's lap swim at the pool... and that means business. Fast swimmers moves in a circular motion in between colorful lanes.

Forty year-old Jim Buchanan, his long eyebrow furrowed, stands on deck squinting at a stopwatch.

JIM

Twenty-eight... twenty-nine... twenty-nine point five...

SARA BUCHANAN, 14 years old, struggles to maintain a butterfly stroke in the middle lane. She stops at the end of the pool, hanging limp on the lane line, recovering. Jim crouches to the water's edge.

JIM (CONT'D)

Twenty-nine point nine. Good. But you've done faster. We'll go again in ten seconds.

SARA

Dad... I can't... do... any more.

JIM

I never saw Diana Niad stop after four laps.

Jim cups his hands and gestures to Sara.

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JIM (CONT'D)

There is more surface area if you keep your fingers slightly apart.

SARA

Dad... When can I stop?

Jim cocks one side of his unibrow.

JIM

When you're perfect!

He beams down at Sara, not entirely serious. But serious enough.

JIM (CONT'D)

Ready to go in...

His brow furrows.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hold on.

ANGLE ON

the other end of the pool. Three delicate ladies glowing with sweat dip their toes gingerly into the water.

The women shove off the edge at the other end of Sara's lane, swimming sidestroke so as not to get their hair wet.

JIM (CONT'D)

Lollygaggers.

Jim strips off his sweat suit, his long limbs covered only by a red racing Speedo. He fits his goggles into place, shakes his deltoids and bends into a racing dive.

SARA

Dad...

He ignores her and plunges into the water, disappearing for many seconds. Sara shades her eyes, afraid of what he'll do next.

Suddenly he surfaces, a mountain of arms and torso fly up in front of the first woman. He swoops out of the water straight in front of her, his one long eyebrow furrowed for the kill. The woman, scared out of her wits, moves to let him pass. With the grace of a dolphin, he slips back into the water.

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Jim continues a ferocious butterfly - his wing span stretching over the entire width of the lane. As he approaches the end of the lane, the other women scramble to get out of the way.

He emerges suddenly at the end of the lane and SCOWLS at them.

JIM

If you are here to lollygag, kindly stay out of our goddamned lane.

He vanishes back into the pool depths.

INT. POOL LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Naked bodies surround Sara. Still dressed in her racing suit, she stands still under the stream of the shower, a steady downpour smacking her head.

Women SCREAM and grab towels to cover themselves. Sara opens her eyes as Jim strolls into the locker room, mostly unaware of the reaction. He thrusts a plastic bottle into Sara's hands.

JIM

I forgot your power shake. Take it now for maximum absorption.

He leaves. Sara shoves all her hair forward, hiding her face.

EXT. COLESVILLE, MARYLAND - DAY

From above, it's your average middle class suburbs - half acre yards with a variation of three different basic house types. Individuality appears expressed through exterior paint color only - white or almond.

But two houses next to each other stand out like grossly inflamed thumbs.

As we come closer to the houses side by side, one is an enclosed car part graveyard - a fenced in yard inhabited by chickens, geese, goats, and three Rottweilers roaming among the weeds.

EUGENE HUMPHRIES, a shriveled old man with a finger-in-the-electric-socket hairdo, nails tiles in a motley pattern on his roof.

But the yard that stands out even more than Humphries' is the Buchanan residence.

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Flawlessly maintained Japanese BONSAI line the edges of the yard. Solar panels cross the top of the roof and between the panels, a mill cranks heated water down copper pipes into the house. And for heating purposes, the house is painted... banana yellow.

INT. SARA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

PAN OVER THE WALLS

Every available surface in the room is covered with cutouts: photos, drawings and paintings of BUTTERFLIES.

Sara grabs the cloth of her shirt from the back and scrutinizes her blossoming chest.

JIM (O.S.)

Sara! Dinner!

INT. DINING ROOM/BUCHANAN HOUSE - EVENING

Jim stacks a piece of tough looking meat onto his fork and cautiously places it on his tongue. He chews, glancing at his wife, HELEN BUCHANAN, a woman who looks older than her thirty five years.

Jim's whole face works away at the leathery substance.

He clears his throat, lifts his fork, ready to speak. Helen and Sara lean in.

But, still not quite around the chewy morsel, Jim continues to get it into a swallowable chunk. Finally, he gulps some milk and the bite at long last is gone.

JIM

Well then. Very excellent. Yes. I'd give it... an A minus.

Sara mouths the words "A minus" at the same time Jim says them. She knows the routine.

JIM

Yes. Absolutely A minus material. Excellent.

Sara raises her eyebrows as she stares at the slab of meat on her plate.

Jim smiles at his wife, but Helen looks away.

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JIM (CONT'D)

Helen, I've got good news. Doctor Fabian's wife needs some help down at the YWCA. Some filing and light typing. I thought it'd be just the thing for you. Get you out of the house and among your peers, so to speak. What do you say?

HELEN

It's been a long time since I typed, Jim. Since before Sara was born.

JIM

I don't get the impression she's expecting much.

Helen gnaws on her fingernail.

JIM (CONT'D)

We'll tell her you'll start on Monday.

EXT. BUCHANAN YARD - EVENING

Sara waves across the street to MISTER LANE, a neatly pressed man wearing a starched white shirt and expensive tie. Mr. Lane gives Sara a sympathetic smile as he brings the trash can to the curb.

MR. LANE

Ninth grade this year, Sara?

SARA

Ninth grade.

Sara brings a plate to Humphries side of the yard. Three menacing rottweilers GROWL behind the fence. They lick their chops and pad closer as Sara scrapes the leathery meat from dinner under a hole in the fence.

But then - right in front of her, one of the Humphries' CHICKENS flies the coop and hops the fence into the Buchanan yard. The chicken gleefully jogs over to a garden full of flawlessly maintained Japanese BONSAI.

It perches on a small tree and dutifully begins DEFECATING.

SARA

Dear God. Not the bonsai.

She hurries over, knocking the chicken off the tree and stomps her feet, moving it away from the garden.

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MR. LANE
What math are you in now?

SARA
I placed into Trig.

MR. LANE
Well how about that. Congratulations.

The chicken, confused, hops onto another tree and squats. Sara smacks the chicken off the tree and again attempts to hustle it out of the garden.

SARA
Move, damn bird.

She waves to Mr. Lane, hoping he'll leave. But he doesn't.

SARA
(to chicken)
Please...

Too late. Jim flies outside, a box in one hand.

JIM
Sara, grab that bird! We're going to have chicken soup tomorrow!

Jim hurdles the little bushes, chasing the chicken. Humphries scurries over to the fence, a BB gun in hand.

HUMPHRIES
Don't you touch my animal, Buchanan!

JIM
Your damn animal's defecating on my lawn again! I won't tolerate it, Humphries! This'll make good eating.

Humphries aims the gun at Jim and shoots. Misses.

SARA
Dad, please...

HUMPHRIES
That's God's animal. Don't touch her!

The chicken flies up nervously and Jim gets close enough to slam the box on top of it. Humphries goes ballistic.

HUMPHRIES
You're going to burn in hell for this!

(CONTINUED)

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JIM

Humphries... You can take your God and shove him right up your ass!

Humphries gasps. Mr. Lane gasps. Sara is utterly humiliated.

Jim scrunches down the lid of the box and hands it to Sara.

JIM (CONT'D)

What is it with these people? Damn monkey people parading in front of our research facility. Now my neighbor thinks chickens have rights.

(to Sara)

Take this down to the basement. If you need to reach me, call the mainframe lab.

Sara begrudgingly obeys.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Helen fiddles with a knob of a cedar door. A perky SCHNAUZER turns a circle and BARKS.

HELEN

Shhh Simon. How long did he say he'd be gone?

SARA

He didn't say. Here lemme try it.

Sara brings a PLASTIC CREDIT CARD through the crack in the door several times. CLICK. Helen squeezes her.

HELEN

The magic touch!

A TV pops on and bathes them in blue light. Simon settles down on the sofa.

SARA (V.O.)

The TV was stolen when I was two. Dad said it was the best thing to happen to our family. He said the ultra violet rays inhibit your growth.

Helen positions a MIRROR to face the window of the driveway. She settles back onto the couch beside Sara.

SARA

Make a fish bone.

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Helen combs through Sara's long wet hair, working the hair into a braid.

SARA (V.O.)

Mom convinced him to buy a TV after a few years. Dad only lets me watch one half hour a week. Mom is allowed one whole hour.

Helen leans over to the table and jots a line in a spiral notebook. She smiles.

SARA

Can I hear it?

HELEN

I'm not finished.

SARA

Please?

HELEN

It's not good.

Sara crawls closer.

SARA

Then sing me my womb song.

HELEN

You know it.

Softly, Helen sings a folk song. Sara joins in for a few words but likes the sound of Helen's voice a Capella.

HELEN

What I'll give you since you've asked/ Is
all my time together/ Take my rugged
sunny days/ My warm and rocky weather...

Helen brings Sara's hand up to touch her face as the image of Lucy eating chocolates flashes on the TV in front of them.

Outside, the sky has grown dark. Droplets of rain plunk against the window.

EXT. BUCHANAN YARD - EVENING

The rain pours down so hard now that when it hits the ground, it bounces up like little rubber pellets.

Helen bounds out into the downpour, laughing.

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