

FADE IN:

PRESCHOOL - GARAGE-PLAYROOM - DAY

Light from an open door spots colorful 1986 kids posters covering scarred walls. A "Time Out" SIGN marks one lonely corner. Beneath it is LITTLE JENNA BECK (4) dark-eyed innocence wrapped in a wool coat. She sits on a worn-out Naugahyde 50's kitchen CHAIR, back straight, hands folded on her knees.

OFF SCREEN a TEACHER consoles a CRYING KID.

A door SLAMS. The playroom plunges into BLACK. In the resulting SILENCE, Little Jenna begins to SCREAM.

NEW JERSEY HOME - EVENING

Trees, ablaze in fall colors, tower above a two story colonial nestled in an upscale neighborhood. DROP CLOTHS, LADDERS and PAINTING EQUIPMENT litter one side of the PORCH. A low dog FENCE encloses the yard. RAY BECK (35) a computer nerd driving a new '94 Jeep (sticker still on the window) bumps up the driveway, parks and piles out. Lugging his briefcase, he pushes his way through the gate, tearing his suit pants.

RAY

Crap.

He climbs the porch.

COZY FOYER

Antique Colonial everything. Scrubbed clean. Pin neat. Ray swings open the door and plows inside.

RAY

(yells)

Somebody needs to fix the gate. Ripped my pants again.

He lays his briefcase on an old umbrella stand.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

(yells)

And that somebody would be?

Ray doesn't answer as he picks up a newspaper lying on a sideboard.

RAY

(yells)

And when's he going to get his crap
off the porch?

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

(yells)

He'll be back tomorrow morning to
touch-up.

DINING ROOM

On one side of a large table, seated strategically between
Cub Scout terrors, BENJAMIN (8) and DAVID (7) is MURIAL (35)
Ray's trophy wife. Her placid pond is rippled by an emotional
volcano lurking beneath. MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA (13) vulnerable
Daddy's girl dressed in a shirt proclaiming her a '94 soccer
champ, sits up straight, a forced smile plastered on her
face. Ray steps into the doorway and watches his wife and
boys gorge without him.

RAY

Thanks for waiting.

MURIAL

You're welcome.

JENNA

I waited.

RAY

Hi, Jenna...

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

Hi, Dad. How was your...

He turns to salute his boys with two fingers.

RAY

Ben, Dave.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

...day?

BOYS

Hi, dad.

RAY

(to Murial)

I'll have plenty of time to fix it.

MURIAL

Why?

RAY

Laid me off.

MURIAL

Oh, Ray, no. I don't think I can stand moving again!

Murial chokes a little as she sobs into her hanky. Ray and the boys try to hold her, but their awkwardness aggravates her aversion to being comforted. Middle School Jenna is an emotional mess as she watches her dad and the boys wrestle mom.

KITCHEN - DAY

Slouched at the table, Middle School Jenna dunks a cookie into milk. Her hand shakes and it crumbles before it reaches her mouth. Embarrassed, she wipes up the spill with her napkin. Ray studies the employment section. Murial cleans.

RAY

About time he got his crap off the porch.

MURIAL

So, Jenna, where do you want to go? Denver, Phoenix...

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

Phoenix. I read it's a bird. What's a Denver?

MURIAL

I don't know. Phoenix it is then.

Ray snaps his paper--pissed.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

(worried)

I don't care. Really. But anyway, can I tell you guys something?

Lost in their own thoughts, her parents ignore her.

DISSOLVE TO:

PHOENIX HOME - DAY

Desert trees shade a sun-scorched, adobe ranch house sitting on a manicured lot. Ray pilots a new '95 CONVERTIBLE up the drive and squeals to a stop. He throws open the door, steps out, whips it shut, then slouches his way to the house.

DINING ROOM

Cowboy theme. Murial helps Middle School Jenna (14) with homework. They hear Ray SLAM the door and drop his briefcase with a THUD. He ENTERS annoyed with the world.

RAY

I can't get arrested in this town. I may as well be invisible.

MURIAL

What?

RAY

Invisible.

MURIAL

Oh.

RAY

Damn cowboys are so...

The phone's RING cuts his rant. He picks up the handset.

RAY

Hello?

Ray listens intently. Reluctant, he offers the phone to Murial. She raises it fearfully to her ear. Her eyes search the ceiling as she listens.

MURIAL

Oh, God no.

The handset slips from her grasp. She moans and writhes like she's being devoured by a primordial beast. Ray grabs her so she won't hurt herself. They struggle around the room.

MURIAL

Don't touch me! You're the one who took me away!

Ben and David, watching their parents scuffle, ENTER fearfully. Middle School Jenna wraps the boys in her arms and comforts them.

DISSOLVE TO:

PHOENIX HOME - DAY

Overgrown. A new '96 high-end SUV idles out front.

FOYER

Middle School Jenna (still 14) dressed modestly in jeans, a Sirocco Middle School class of '96 T-shirt and flip-flops, draws a sharp contrast to friend SASHAH MITCHELL (15) with her piercings, tattoos, giant clogs and micro outfit. They hear SASHA'S MOM'S SUV'S insistent HORN. Sasha pulls Jenna towards the door.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
(shouting)
I'm going to Eden, mom!

Jenna snags a baseball cap from the closet.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
As if she gives a shit. Ever since my
grandma died, she lives in her fuckin'
room.
(loud over shoulder)
Bye, mom! Love you!
(under)
Fuck you.
(to Sashah)
We are out of here, dude!

They high five and EXIT.

MALL - LATER

Fancy-schmancy Southwestern stores surrounded by vast parking lots. Big sign reads: EDEN HILLS MALL. The SUV sails up to a posh entrance. Middle School Jenna and Sashah burst out of the back door. A bombshell in Spandex, SASHAH'S MOM (35) opens her window.

SASHAH'S MOM
Got money, pager...?

Sashah holds up her CREDIT CARD and tiny pager.

SASHAH'S MOM
Good. Gotta run. Don't forget to call
when you're done, okay? Don't forget!

Sashah's mom leaves in a cloud of exhaust and expectation.

SASHAH

Do you believe her? As if I don't know she's late to fuck her yoga teacher. Guess they're good for something!

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

Moms, boy toys or credit cards?

Sashah thinks about it, then holds up her credit card. The girls slap hands, then glide sexily towards the mall entrance.

MALL HALLWAY

FOOTSTEPS reverberate down the quiet corridor. Sign on DOOR reads: MALL SECURITY OFFICE. SECURITY OFFICER (40) loaded with paperwork, blasts through the door.

MALL SECURITY OFFICE

Bright, tiny space. "No" posters taped to walls. Middle School Jenna, and Sashah, sit sniffing into Kleenex. Their make-up is runny and smeared.

SECURITY OFFICER

Which one is, uh, Sashah Mitchell?

SASHAH

Me, I guess.

SECURITY OFFICER

You're free to go. Your mom is outside.

Checks her clipboard, turns to Jenna.

SECURITY OFFICER

Miss Beck, your mother refuses to take custody. Said, 'send her to jail.'

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

The fuck! What is wrong with her?

SECURITY OFFICER

She'll fetch you tomorrow.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

Fuck!

SECURITY OFFICER

There's nothing anyone can do tonight.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA

Fuck you, too.

SECURITY OFFICER
 (to Sashah)
 Let's go. Now.

Security Officer shoves Sashah through the door. Left alone, Middle School Jenna picks up her chair, then slams a leg through the drywall creating a small hole. Venting her anger, she rips the little hole into a big one. The door opens. Security stares in disbelief. Sheepish, Jenna drops the chair.

BUTTES JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

Downtown. Beneath soaring palms, pink halogen street lights surround "Juvie Hall." A sign reads: BUTTES JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER.

BUTTES CELL

Bare. Dim lights. Dead SILENCE intensifies claustrophobia. Middle School Jenna hugs her knees, cringing on a cement "bed" somewhat softened by a thin mattress pad. Hair done in standard braids, she wears a county issue detention uniform of blue cotton pants, slip-on laceless shoes, and a GRAY T-SHIRT. Her panicked eyes probe the room. She shakes like the last leaf on a winter tree. SUDDENLY she begins to scream.

BUTTES DETENTION CENTER - FOLLOWING EVENING

Murial waits in an old but expensive IMPORT. She drums her fingernails on the steering wheel. Middle School Jenna slinks out of the "release" door.

MURIAL'S CAR - MOVING

Sitting ram-rod straight, Murial is livid. She drives fast. Middle School Jenna sticks her whole torso out the open window to blast air through her newly unbraided hair. Murial glances at Jenna in horror.

MURIAL
 Get the hell in here! Are you nuts?

PHOENIX HOME - LATER

Murial's car charges up the driveway.

HALL

Mom hangs her purse in the closet. Middle School Jenna bounces past.

MURIAL
 Just where do you think you're going,
 young lady?

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
Chill, okay dude? My room--duh.

MURIAL
I will not allow jailhouse jargon in
this house!

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
Jailhouse jargon? Give me a break.
Watch some TV. Where are the boys?

MURIAL
Aunt Jill's. Where is your father?

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
How would I know, mom?

She skips toward her room, enters and closes the door.

KITCHEN

Glum, Murial slumps on a chair holding a LETTER. Middle School Jenna ENTERS full of energy, but seeing her mom, stops dead. Murial looks up at her and flutters the letter in the air.

MURIAL
He felt he couldn't make it here. He
went to Canada to be with family.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JENNA
(shrugs)
You've been riding his ass for months.

MURIAL
(ignoring her)
He wants to be alone, but he said you
can go if you want. The boys are too
much trouble.

Murial hauls herself up and weaves down the hall to her bedroom. Middle School Jenna ponders her options. She jumps when she hears her mom's door SLAM and LOCK.

DISSOLVE TO:

CANADIAN WOODS - DAY

Early summer sunlight dapples a large rustic lean-to set under tall MAPLES. Mattresses are scattered over an earthen floor. JENNA (now 15) needing attention like a puppy, smokes from a bong with her new Canadian friend TOM (15) a lumberjack.

JENNA

You know I gotta go back. My mom.

TOM

I know you have bedroom eyes, eh?

JENNA

And amazingly, here we are in your
bedroom--eh?

They topple into in a sloppy kiss.

DISSOLVE TO:

PHOENIX HOME - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Jenna's SUITCASE leans against a wall, a "Canada" sticker peeps from under a thick leather BELT ending in a heavy brass buckle. A huge chicken and biscuits dinner sits on the table. Murial is annoyed with herself for making way too much food and seems jittery as she reaches for a biscuit.

JENNA

It's okay, ma. We'll have leftovers.
Butter, please.

Murial passes the butter. Jenna butters her biscuit and begins to take a bite.

MURIAL

Don't you dare eat that biscuit! I
don't know what your father does in
his house, but here we don't leave
things out! Put the butter away!

Calmly, Jenna looks into her mom's eyes.

JENNA

I'll put the butter away when I'm
done with it, okay?

MURIAL

Now, Jenna!

JENNA

(laughs)
Bullshit--mom.

Murial storms over to Jenna's suitcase and strips the belt out of its loops. Like a cowboy twirling a rope, she spins the belt around her head in a slow, ponderous arc.

MURIAL

You will do as I say!

Murial slams the buckle into Jenna's back. Jenna catapults from her perch like a bird smacked with a sling-shot rock. Her response is one enraged fluid move to the BREAKFRONT drawer. She whirls around clutching a large carving knife. Lunging forward, Jenna holds the blade's razor edge to her mother's throat. Murial sucks in a breath--holds it--looks down at the blade.

JENNA

Don't you ever fucking hit me again!
You hear me? Are you nuts? How could
you do that to your own kid? I fucking
hate you, do you know that?

Jenna throws the knife to the floor. Stomping off toward her room, she reaches for the sore spot on her back.

JENNA

Ow! Fuck!

Murial plops down in a chair breathing hard.

HALL - LATER

Jenna tip-toes out of her room.

JENNA

Mom?

Realizing her mom is out she dances to where the phone usually sits--it's missing. She follows the cord snaking under a locked CLOSET DOOR. Without a moment's hesitation, she KICKS THE DOOR IN. Grabbing the phone, she dances back to her bedroom.

JENNA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Jenna sleeps peacefully. Loud KNOCKING bolts her awake. Staggering to the door, she flings it open. She's shocked by two UNIFORMED COPS.

COP 1

Get dressed and come with us, Miss.

Jenna turns and slowly pushes the DOOR shut behind her, hoping it's all a dream. The door flies open again, slamming the wall.

COURTROOM

Modern--back in the seventies. An ancient KINDLY JUDGE presides. His BAILIFF stands by. Exhausted, Jenna stands next to PUBLIC DEFENDER 1. Murial hides in the last row of spectators.

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