

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET

Based on the novel by Judy Blume

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OVER BLACK:

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

FADE IN TO:

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

The year is 1970.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT./EXT. SCHOOL BUS - SAME

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

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - AFTERNOON

A labyrinth of STEAL AND CONCRETE, swarming with people.

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

EXT. UNION SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

MARGARET

Mom!

BARBARA

Heyyy! You already got taller! How was it?

MARGARET

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

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

What car?

BARBARA

Oh, we bought a car.

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

MARGARET

We bought a car? What for?

BARBARA

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

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

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

MARGARET

Grandma!

SYLVIA

There's my girl!

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

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Oh god I missed you.

MARGARET

Me too! You changed your hair color?

SYLVIA

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

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

MARGARET

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

SYLVIA

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

MARGARET

(embarrassed)
Grandma...

SYLVIA

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

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

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Never mind, I take it back! Your boyfriend can be anything. Anything at all.

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

A CAR HONKS behind them, TRAFFIC stacking up.

GUY IN CAR

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

BARBARA

Going! We're going!

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Sorry! It's our first car, we just
bought it last week!

GUY IN CAR

Congratulations!
(then lays on horn LOUDER)

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

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

SYLVIA

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

MARGARET

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

BARBARA

Hold on, I gotta find the key.

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

SYLVIA

Oh god, not with those keys again.

INT. SIMONS' APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

HERB

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

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

HERB (CONT'D)

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

MARGARET

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

HERB

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

MARGARET

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

They both laugh.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What are those boxes for?

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

HERB

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

SYLVIA

You're moving.

Margaret FREEZES. Looks at Sylvia. *What?*

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

HERB

Mom.

BARBARA

Oh my god.

SYLVIA

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

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

MARGARET

What! We're *moving*?

Barbara scrambles to soften the blow.

BARBARA

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

HERB

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

Margaret is still disoriented, barely hearing them.

MARGARET

Where?

BARBARA

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

SYLVIA

(cuts to chase)

New Jersey.

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

HERB

Mom!

MARGARET

New Jersey?!

Sylvia puts her hands up, guilty.

SYLVIA

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

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

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

MARGARET
We're leaving New York?

BARBARA
Okay, hold on a second--

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

HERB
We don't need to, we want to.

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

Sylvia helplessly mimes her commiseration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MARGARET

But you like teaching art.

BARBARA

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

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

HERBS

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

BARBARA

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

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Come on. Come over here, Sylvia.

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

SYLVIA

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

HERB

Oh good lord!

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

EXT. NYC - NIGHT

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

EXT. SIMONS' APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

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

MARGARET

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

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

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

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

EXT. SIMONS' APARTMENT BUILDING / STREET CORNER - MORNING

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

SYLVIA

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

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

HERB

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

BARBARA
 (hugging her)
 Bye, Sylvia.

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

BARBARA
 This isn't about you, I promise.

Sylvia doesn't quite believe it.

HERB
 Alright, all board the Big Blue
 Beast!

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

HERB (CONT'D)
 It's only an hour by train, mom.

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

HERB
 We'll hose you off before you come
 inside.

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

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

EXT. FARBROOK, NEW JERSEY - DAY / VARIOUS

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

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - SAME

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

EXT. SIMONS' HOUSE - SAME

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

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

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

MARGARET

Do they smell bad?

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

BARBARA

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

Margaret makes a face.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Pretty soon you'll know the feeling...

Margaret raises an eyebrow, not looking forward to that.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

We have so much *stuff*. I don't even like half this stuff.

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

MARGARET

I'll get it.

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Hi...

NANCY

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

MARGARET

Oh... Okay.

NANCY

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

MARGARET

Uh, I don't know.

NANCY

You don't *know*?

MARGARET

I mean I have to ask. Just a sec.

Margaret goes back inside to Barb.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

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

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

BARBARA

Oh. Good. Sure, fine by me.

MARGARET

I need my bathing suit.

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

BARBARA

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

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

They turn to see Nancy has let herself inside.

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

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

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

EXT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

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

NANCY
You want a trick to stop slouching like that?

Margaret looks over, not sure what to say.

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

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

MARGARET
Oh...

Margaret tries it, walking stiffly upright next to Nancy.

NANCY
So whose class are you in at Delano?

MARGARET
The letter said "room 18"...

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

They step into--

INT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

NANCY

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

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

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

NANCY

Here. It's clean.

MARGARET

Thanks. Where should I change?

NANCY

What's wrong with here?

Margaret pauses, a little self-conscious.

MARGARET

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

NANCY

Why would I mind?

MARGARET

I don't know...

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

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

NANCY

(laughs)
Oh, you're still flat.

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

MARGARET
Not exactly, I'm just small boned.

NANCY
I'm already growing, see?

Nancy sticks her chest out to demonstrate.

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

Margaret raises an eyebrow.

MARGARET
Oh...

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

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

NANCY
Yeah. Have you?

MARGARET
(beat, reluctantly)
Not really...

Nancy looks relieved.

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

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

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

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

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

NANCY (CONT'D)

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

She runs a HAIRBRUSH through her long hair.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Do you always wear your hair like that?

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

MARGARET

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

NANCY

I noticed.

Apparently Nancy notices everything.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Ready to go?

MARGARET

Sure...

EXT. NANCY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

MRS. WHEELER (30's), tan with BIG BREASTS and curled hair, WASHES a LITTLE DOG in a TUB, her copious cleavage jiggling as she scrubs. The girls come out with their towels.

NANCY

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

MRS. WHEELER

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

Margaret quickly looks up from Mrs. Wheeler's breasts.

MARGARET

It's fine...

MRS. WHEELER

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

MARGARET

Oh...

Mrs. Wheeler cocks her head, waiting for more.

MRS. WHEELER

Oh?

MARGARET

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

MRS. WHEELER

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

MARGARET

I don't go to Sunday school.

Mrs. Wheeler stops scrubbing the dog, surprised.

MRS. WHEELER

You don't go to Sunday School?

Margaret feels a little put on the spot.

MARGARET

Uh...

NANCY

Lucky you.

MRS. WHEELER

Nancy. Please.

NANCY

(tugs Margaret away)
Mom, she came to be with me, not you. Come on, let's go.

MRS. WHEELER

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

EXT. NANCY'S YARD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Nancy cranks on the SPRINKLER.

NANCY
Follow the leader!

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

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

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

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

NANCY (CONT'D)
AAAAHHH!!!

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

NANCY (CONT'D)
Evan you idiot!

MARGARET
Who are they?

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

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

EVAN
Who're you?

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

MOOSE

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

MARGARET

Uh... alright.

She smiles, trying to seem normal.

MRS. WHEELER (O.S.)

Evan! Get over here right now!

Evan rolls his eyes, leaving Margaret with Moose.

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

She shifts her weight, feeling nervous around him.

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

MOOSE

Gotta get 'em more birdseed.

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

MOOSE (CONT'D)

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

MARGARET

I definitely won't.

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

EXT. NANCY WHEELER'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

Nancy walks Margaret back home.

NANCY

Sorry you got stuck with Moose.

MARGARET

Oh. That's okay...

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

NANCY

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

MARGARET

How come?

NANCY

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

Margaret swallows, already feeling rejected.

MARGARET

Okay...

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret organizes her SCHOOL SUPPLIES, thinking. Then--

MARGARET

(whispers)

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

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

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

(how does she put it?)

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

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

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

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

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

Barb tosses MARGARET'S BATHING SUIT onto her bed.

BARBARA
 It was in with the bathroom stuff.

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

Margaret's eyes dart quickly at her chest again.

BARBARA
 And found this if you want it.

Barb puts an OLD ELECTRIC PENCIL SHARPENER on her desk.

MARGARET
Thanks God.
 (then)
 Thanks mom.

Barb nods, exiting again.

EXT. SIMON'S HOUSE - MORNING

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

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

BARE FEET wriggle into a PAIR OF BROWN LOAFERS.

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

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

BARBARA

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

HERB

Look at you, a 6th grade vision in blue!

BARBARA

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

HERB

Your mom's really helping you relax, isn't she?

Barb realizes her pep talk is going the wrong way, slugs Herb playfully for calling her out.

HERB (CONT'D)

Don't worry it'll be great, can't wait to hear all about it when I get home!

He kisses them goodbye before hurrying off. Barbara gets the MILK for Margaret's cornflakes.

BARBARA

Here you go, want juice too? I bought juice.

(suddenly notices)

Hey, you forgot your socks.

MARGARET

I don't want socks.

BARBARA

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

Margaret rolls her eyes, not in the mood to be lectured. A LAWN MOWER ENGINE starts up next door. It suddenly JOGS HER MEMORY.

MARGARET
Oh! Wait! Dad!

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

EXT. SIMONS' DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

MARGARET
Dad!

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)
A boy named Moose asked if you want him to cut our grass for 5 dollars.

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

Shit.

MARGARET
Uh...he also trims.

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

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

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

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

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

First day chaos. Tons of TRAFFIC and WANDERING KIDS.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL - SAME

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

INT. 6TH GRADE CLASS - CONTINUOUS

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

NANCY
Hey! Over here!

Margaret hurries over, relieved. Nancy checks her feet.

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

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

GRETCHEN
So you're the fourth.

JANIE
Nice to meet you...

MARGARET
You too...

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

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

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

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

MARGARET
Who's Philip Leroy?

NANCY
Take a guess.

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

MARGARET
Oh. Got it.

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

Margaret notices a TALL ATTRACTIVE WOMAN entering the room.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Is that our teacher?

They all turn to look.

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

Margaret looks again, feeling dumb.

MARGARET
She's in 6th grade?

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

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

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

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

MR. BENEDICT
Uh, good morning class...
(clears throat)
(MORE)

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

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

He writes "MR. BENEDICT" on the chalkboard.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

That's *Benedict*, like the eggs. And because it's *eggcellent* to meet you.

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

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

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

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

NANCY

(whispers to Margaret)

Can you believe this guy?

Margaret feels a little sorry for him.

MR. BENEDICT

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

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

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

I'll begin. *I love...*that I'm finally getting to be a teacher for the first time.

(smiles sincerely)

*I hate...*self-doubt, feeling tongue tied, upset stomachs, and staring at the ceiling all night instead of sleeping at all.

(smiles again)

*I'm looking forward to...*the year with you. Okay, now your turn.

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

NANCY

Pass it on.

Margaret nods dutifully, passing it to Janie.

INT. SYLVIA'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - DAY

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

INT. SIMONS' HOUSE / VARIOUS - THAT AFTERNOON

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

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

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

INT. SIMONS GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

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

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

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

The PHONE RINGS. Barb crosses get it.

BARBARA
Hello?

SYLVIA
Guess who.

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

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

SYLVIA
It's 3:32.

BARBARA
I know.

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

BARBARA
Yes, she'll probably be here any minute.

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

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

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Um, so, how are you?

BARBARA
Good. I'm good. How are you?

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

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

BARBARA
(laughing)
Oh Sylvia, come on.

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Oh, here she is, she's home.
(holds out the phone)
Grandma's on the phone for you.

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

MARGARET
Grandma!

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

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

SYLVIA
Really? That's wonderful news...

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

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

MARGARET
Oooh yeah, I'd love that!

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

Margaret agrees, hangs up.

MARGARET
Can I go to Nancy's right now?

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

MARGARET
I know, can I?

BARBARA

Well just at least give me one word first.

MARGARET

(thinks a beat)

"Eghh?"

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

BARBARA

Fair enough. Okay, go ahead.

Margaret hurries for the door.

INT. NANCY WHEELERS BACK PORCH - A LITTLE LATER

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

MARGARET

Hi...

She finds a seat at the table, reticent.

NANCY

We were just talking about Laura Danker again.

GRETCHEN

Yeah, how she got even bigger over the summer.

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

MARGARET

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

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

NANCY

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

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

GRETCHEN

Well I know for sure somebody in our school does.

JANIE

How...?

GRETCHEN

I always check the bins.

Margaret's never even thought of checking the bins.

NANCY

Did you get it yet, Margaret?

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

MARGARET

(beat)

Uh... not yet. Have you?

NANCY

No, none of us have yet.

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

NANCY (CONT'D)

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

GRETCHEN

Duh.

NANCY

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

JANIE

What kind of rules?

NANCY

I don't know, I haven't thought of them yet. Oh, I just got one.

(twiddles eyebrows)

If you're in the club, you have to wear a bra.

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

GRETCHEN

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

NANCY

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

JANIE

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

They all love that idea too.

MARGARET

(piggy-backing)

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

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

EXT. FARBROOK - EARLY EVENING / A COUPLE DAYS LATER

RAINBIRDS spray a GRASSY PARK.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Herb organizes his RECORDS in a COOL RECORD STAND now that he
has enough room to showcase his collection, The Meters
"Darling Darling Darling" playing as he absently sings along.

HERB

Listen to the bridge. Listen. Are
you listening?

Margaret's not listening. She's studying something, her BROW
FURROWED, chewing her fingernails. REVEAL: THE JC PENNEY
CATALOGUE, opened to the BRA SECTION. She has it tucked
inside her HISTORY BOOK, angled so nobody but her can see it.

Herb senses her tension.

HERB (CONT'D)

What are you doing over there?

MARGARET

(immediately)

Nothing, I'm fine.

He's not buying it, but lets it go.

HERB

Okay I'll listen for both of us.

Margaret looks over at her mom, thinking. How is she going to broach the bra topic?

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

BARBARA

How is that even possible?

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

BARBARA

Turns out I don't hate laundry, I just hated the laundromat. Thank you, New Jersey.

(walks over to kiss her)

Goodnight, honey. See ya in the morning.

MARGARET

Um...

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(chickens out)

Yeah, g'night.

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(blurts)

I WANT TO GET A BRA!

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

BARBARA

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

Margaret shoots her a mom hurt look. Barb realizes.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

Margaret chews her lip, feeling so weird about this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

So you want one?

MARGARET

Yes, I already said that!

She can't stand to keep talking about it.

BARBARA

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

Margaret nods, just wanting this conversation to be over.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Alright. Well, g'night again.

MARGARET

Night.

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

INSIDE, Margaret still cringes.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

So weird. So weird. That was so
weird, God. Why do I feel so weird?

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

EXT./INT. DELANO SCHOOL - MORNING

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

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

A FEW DOZEN WOMEN mill around.

MRS. WHEELER
Here for the PTA meeting?

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

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

BARBARA
Oh... great to meet you too.

Barb can't help noticing Mrs. Wheeler's huge breasts.

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

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

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

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

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
Thank you. Okay...*Delano Social
Committee*. Dances, luncheons,
parent-teacher night...

Barb RAISES HER HAND AGAIN. Why not.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
Great. *Fundraising Committee*...

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

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
 Good for you, Barbara.

Barb smiles, feeling good about this.

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

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

MR. BENEDICT
 Alright, pencils down and kindly
 pass your worksheets forward...
 (gathering them up)
 Now, uh, before the bell rings, I'd
 like to share some news that I
 think will make you all very happy.

The class perks up, paying attention.

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

The whole class GROANS. This is the good news?

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

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

FREDDY BARNETT
 Are you kidding me?

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

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

Freddy flicks a PAPER FOOTBALL at him.

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

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

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

Margaret looks taken aback. Did she do something wrong?

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

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

MARGARET
Hi...

MR. BENEDICT
Please, have a seat.

She reluctantly sits. Mr. Benedict shuffles through papers.

MARGARET
Did I... do something wrong?

He looks up, suddenly seeing how nervous she is.

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

He offers her his little JAR OF CANDY CORN.

MARGARET
No...thank you.

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

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

MARGARET
Oh.

MR. BENEDICT

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

Margaret shifts in her seat, put on the spot.

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)

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

MARGARET

No, I, uh... I guess I just don't like those holidays because I don't celebrate any of them... My dad is Jewish and my mom is Christian, so instead of picking which religion I am, they just decided I wouldn't have one, and I'll choose when I grow up...

MR. BENEDICT

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

MARGARET

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

MR. BENEDICT

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

MARGARET

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

MR. BENEDICT

You just talk to them on the phone.

MARGARET

No, I've never met them at all.

Mr. Benedict absorbs this with curiosity.

MR. BENEDICT

Interesting...

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

MR. BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Well, if I may suggest it, religion
could make a very compelling
research topic for you...

Margaret nods, still thinking about her grandparents.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

A SALVATION ARMY TRUCK idling out front.

INT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

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

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

BARBARA
I will.

SYLVIA (O.S.)
Is she excited?

Barbara's losing patience.

BARBARA
Yes. She's excited.

One of the GUYS hands Barb the DONATION RECEIPT.

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

SALVATION ARMY GUY
God bless you.

Margaret walks in just as they're leaving.

MARGARET
What happened to the couch?

BARBARA
Oh it was old and too small for the
room. Time to turn a new leaf.
(MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Maybe something modern? I don't
know, I need to think about it...

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

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

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

Barb's posture changes, caught off guard.

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

MARGARET
(beat)
Just wondering.

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

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

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

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

MARGARET
What do you mean.

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

MARGARET
Why can't you just tell me now?

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

BARBARA
Look, I just don't want you to be
burdened by anything...
(MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

But maybe, I don't know, maybe
you're old enough to hear this
now...

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

The truth is... we don't see my
parents because they don't want to
see us.

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

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

MARGARET

But...you are their daughter.

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

BARBARA

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

It's difficult to say it so plainly.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

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

MARGARET

Mom...

She moves towards Barb, wrapping her arms around her to
comfort her.

Barb feels herself choke up a little, then wills it back, not wanting Margaret to take this on, uncomfortable feeling their parent-child dynamic reversed.

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

BARBARA

It was a long time ago, Margaret.

Barb smiles resiliently, determined to lift the mood.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

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

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

MARGARET (V.O.)

Are you there God, It's me, Margaret. I can't believe this.

INT. SIMONS CHRYSLER - A LITTLE LATER

They drive to the mall.

MARGARET (V.O.)

How could they be so mean? Just because of religion?

EXT. LORD & TAYLOR PARKING LOT - A LITTLE LATER

They near the entrance of the store.

MARGARET (V.O.)

My mom doesn't deserve this. She's a good person, she's nice to everyone.

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

MARGARET (V.O.)

Even when she doesn't need to be!

INT. LORD & TAYLOR DEPARTMENT STORE - A LITTLE LATER

They float up the ESCALATOR.

MARGARET (V.O.)

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

BARBARA

The bras are over there.

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

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Excuse me, we're looking for a bra for my daughter.

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

SALES LADY

Hmmmm. Well we don't have many that small...

Margaret just about dies.

SALES LADY (CONT'D)

Come're, dear, let me measure you.

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

SALES LADY (CONT'D)

(clicks tongue, bad news)
Barely 28. Not even a Double-A.

Margaret's really starting to resent this lady.

SALES LADY (CONT'D)

Your best bet is one these Gro-bras here. So one day when you do grow, it'll grow with you.

BARBARA

Thank you. We'll go try it on.

INT. LORD & TAYLOR DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret and Barb step into a STALL.

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

MARGARET
(not at all)
Yes.

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

BARBARA
Here, I'll help you out.

Barb adjusts the straps, clasps the back.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
There you go.

Margaret slowly turns around, feeling extremely exposed.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
What do you think?

MARGARET
I don't know.

BARBARA
Well does it feel too tight?

MARGARET
I don't think so.

BARBARA
Too loose?

MARGARET
No.

BARBARA
Try moving around a little.

Margaret wiggles her shoulders, pumps her arms.

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

MARGARET

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

BARBARA

Yep. Welcome to womanhood.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - SATURDAY / DAY

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

EXT. SIMONS FRONT YARD - SAME

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

BARBARA

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

HERB

Is it too much if I take my shirt off?

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

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - SAME

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

MARGARET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

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

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

HERB
 What? You know what we call that in sales? A design flaw. The kind begging for a lawsuit!

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

EXT. SIMONS BACKYARD - SAME

MARGARET

Hi...

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

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The four girls sit in a circle on the floor.

NANCY

Veronica?

GRETCHEN

I'm here.

NANCY

Kimberly?

GRETCHEN

Here.

NANCY

Mavis?

MARGARET

Here.

NANCY

And so am I...Alexandra.

JANIE

Why do we have to have these names again?

NANCY

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

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

NANCY (CONT'D)

So who wants to go first?

GRETCHEN

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

NANCY
Philip Leroy!

JANIE
Of course...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JANIE
Yeah, that's what I have too!

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

MARGARET
Same here.

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

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

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

MARGARET
(suddenly very interested)
What kind of exercise?

Nancy stands, demonstrating.

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

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

NANCY (CONT'D)
I must, I must, I must increase my bust!

JANIE
That really works?

Margaret and Janie exchange a look, hoping so.

NANCY
Try it. You'll see.

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

ALL TOGETHER
I must, I must, I must increase my bust!

NANCY
Now squeeze real hard when you say it.

They all squeeze. Margaret squeezes harder than anyone.

ALL TOGETHER
We must, we must, we must increase our bust! We must, we must, we must increase our bust!

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

NANCY

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

EVAN

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

(groping his chest)

Oooh I can feel it working, Moose!

Margaret is mortified.

NANCY

Shut up!!! Get out! Get out! Get out! Mommomomomom!!!

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

EXT. NEW JERSEY BUS TERMINAL - DAY

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

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

I will.

HERB

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

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

Okay, you told me 20 times!

BARBARA

(to bus driver)

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

MARGARET

Mommomomom.

BARBARA
Okay okay, g'bye.

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

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I hope this wasn't a mistake.

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

HERB
Nah.

INT. NY BOUND BUS - SAME

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

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

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

MARGARET (V.O.)
Oh good. That makes me feel better.

She breathes a sigh of relief. Then considers--

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

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

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

She looks out the window, feeling resolved.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

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

MARGARET

Grandma!

SYLVIA

You made it!!!

Sylvia sprays her with a CAN OF DISINFECTANT.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

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

MARGARET

So do you. Your hair's blonde!

SYLVIA

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

Sylvia whisks her away.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - MAGIC HOUR

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

INT. LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA PIT - A LITTLE LATER

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

INT. LINCOLN CENTER AUDITORIUM - LATER

20 BALLERINAS spin in unison, performing SWAN LAKE.

Sylvia and Margaret watch them, in awe.

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

EXT. NYC - NIGHT

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

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - LATER

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

SYLVIA

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

Margaret laughs. They dig in.

MARGARET

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

SYLVIA

Oooh. I'm listening.

MARGARET

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

SYLVIA

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

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

INT. SYLVIA'S BEDROOM - LATER

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

SYLVIA

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

MARGARET

You too.

They crawl under the covers.

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

MARGARET
 (laughs)
 Okay.

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)
 Hey Grandma?

SYLVIA
 Yes, Sugar?

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

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

SYLVIA
 YOU BET YOU CAN!
 (jumps out of bed)
 We're going in the morning, I gotta
 iron my suit!

EXT. NEW YORK SYNAGOGUE - NEXT DAY

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

As they pass the GREETER--

SYLVIA
 I have my granddaughter with me
 today.

The GREETER nods politely, not caring at all.

INT. NEW YORK SYNAGOGUE - CONTINUOUS

They find their seats. Sylvia waves to more people.

SYLVIA

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

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

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

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

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

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Here we go, it's starting.

Margaret sits up straighter, a little anxious.

RABBI

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

SYLVIA

(whispers)

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

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

RABBI

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

He keeps going in Hebrew. Margaret glances at Grandma for a
 translation, but Sylvia's Hebrew ends at "Shabbat Shalom."
 Margaret tries to follow but her eyes glaze over. The CANTOR
 sings, there are more prayers, more rituals, more Hebrew. Her
 posture begins to sag.

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

SYLVIA

Wasn't that lovely? Oh sweetheart,
congratulations.

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

MARGARET (V.O.)

*I don't know, God. The Rabbi seems
nice and I like the music, but I
don't feel the way I thought I
would. You know, like --*
(spiritual epiphany sound)
"Laaaaaaaaaaaaa".

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

SYLVIA

And now we go to the deli and
kvetch!

INT. SIMON'S KITCHEN - NEXT EVENING

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

BARBARA

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

HERB

I can't believe it took her this
long.

MARGARET

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

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

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

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

I'm almost 12. That's almost an adult.

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

BARBARA

Margaret...

Barb sighs, worrying maybe she handled that badly.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have laughed.

HERB

She's fine. And what's the harm?
She goes to a couple endless services--

Herb steps out THE BACK SLIDER, gets a LAWN CHAIR, brings it inside the house--

HERB (CONT'D)

--and realizes she should've thanked us more.

He carries into the LIVING ROOM, sets it in front of the TV and sits down with his FROZEN DINNER. Barb takes in this sight, suddenly feels like she's failing as a wife too.

BARBARA

Oh god, I'm sorry, I swear I'm gonna order the furniture soon, I've just wanted to pick the right stuff, and I was gonna cook dinner, but the meat didn't thaw, and--

Herb waves it away. No big deal.

HERB

Hey do I look unhappy? Got my beer, got my steak, I'm leaned back to 3, I'm living the good life baby.

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

EXT. THE WHEELERS HOUSE - DAY

Moose rakes FALL LEAVES off the Wheelers' grass.

INT. THE WHEELER'S HOUSE / DEN - DAY

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

MRS. WHEELER
Here we are, ladies.

BARBARA
Thank you, Jan.

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

MRS. WHEELER
I'll take it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

They all coo at that adorable image.

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

MRS. WHEELER
Twenty three hundred and two.

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

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL - DAY

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

MR. BENEDICT

(stiffly, from a Xerox)

And one and two and dosey-doe, all
the way around the ring you go. Now
boys rock right, now girls go low,
now all the way around and dosey-
doe.

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

NORMAN

Sorry.

(does it again)

Sorry again.

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

NANCY

(whispers)

Gretchen stole it.

JANIE

Stole what?

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

GRETCHEN

My dad's book I told you about.

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

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

The girls hover over it silently, taking it in.

JANIE

Whoa.

GRETCHEN

Do you think Philip Leroy looks like that?

NANCY

He's male, isn't he?

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

JANIE

Veins. Uggckk...

GRETCHEN

That's what everyone looks like inside their body.

JANIE

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

NANCY

Turn the page.

Gretchen flips the page. They all get very quiet again.
REVEAL:A CLOSE-UP DRAWING OF A PENIS AND TESTICLES.

MARGARET

(whispers)

Oh my god...

Nancy grins. She was waiting for that reaction.

NANCY

My brother's looks like that.

JANIE

Ew, how do you know?

NANCY

He walks around naked. I see it.

Margaret shakes off a visual of naked Evan.

GRETCHEN

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

JANIE

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

NANCY

What about when you get married?

JANIE

Especially then.

NANCY

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

JANIE

What girls in Playboy?

NANCY

You've never seen Playboy?

JANIE

Where would I see it?

MARGARET

My dad gets Playboy...

NANCY

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

Margaret suddenly regrets revealing that.

MARGARET

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

NANCY

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

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

INT. HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

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

Margaret continues down the hall to--

INT. BARBARA AND HERB'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

Their eyes adjust to the image.

JANIE

That isn't like the science book...

GRETCHEN

Look how round they are...

(disappointed)

Mine look like little wizard hats.

Margaret laughs. Gretchen gives her a look.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Hey, at least I have something.

Margaret zips her lips.

NANCY

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

GRETCHEN

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

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

ALL THE GIRLS

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

Off their PUMPING ARMS--

INT. JANIE'S CHURCH - DAY

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

Margaret stands with Janie and her FAMILY, clapping along. She looks around, feeling it out.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*I don't know if I have "the
 feeling" God, but I'm sure in a
 good mood...*

JANIE'S MOM gives Margaret a little shoulder-squeeze, making sure she's okay. Margaret smiles. Janie elbows her, nods at an OLD WOMAN a few seats over, DEAD ASLEEP IN THE PEW despite all the action. They both laugh.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - DECEMBER / EARLY EVENING

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

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

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

INT. SIMONS DINING ROOM - SAME

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

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

Margaret comes up behind her.

MARGARET
What are you doing?

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

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

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

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She rushes down the walkway, the MAILMAN already leaving.

MARGARET
Just a second.

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

She freezes. Blinks.

MAILMAN
(taking them)
Thanks.

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

MARGARET
Thank you.

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

Come on over for a PARTY!

Norman Fisher's 12th Birthday

Saturday December 20th, 5-7pm

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Norman Fisher?

She rolls her eyes. What a let down.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

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

BARBARA
Who's Norman Fisher?

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

The PHONE RINGS. Margaret picks it up.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Hello?

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

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

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

MARGARET
Even Laura Danker?

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

MARGARET
Really?

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

INT. BARBARA AND HERB'S MASTER BATHROOM - SAME

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

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

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

BARBARA
There.

MARGARET
It's still doing it.

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

Margaret scurries out of the bathroom, licking her fingers and trying to fix the curl. She passes Herb, who's digging in the HALL CLOSET.

HERB
Hey, what a showstopper! I was just getting the camera to take your picture.

But Margaret just rushes past him into her room, shuts the door behind her. Herb is left alone in the hall with his camera in hand. He looks over at Barbara, feeling a little hurt.

BARBARA
It's just this age...

Herb registers what's happening: She's entered a new phase in which he's largely extraneous. He wasn't ready for this.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

MARGARET

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

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

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

MARGARET

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

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

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Barb and Herb wave goodbye from the front door.

BARBARA

Thanks Jan!

HERB

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

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

EXT. NORMAN FISHER'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

A large, modern home.

INT. NORMAN FISHER'S HOUSE - SAME

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

MRS. FISHER

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

NANCY

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

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

INT. NORMAN FISHER'S CONVERTED BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

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

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

MRS. FISHER

Alright, that makes everyone,
Norman.

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

NORMAN

Oops, uh, whoops.

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

NORMAN (CONT'D)

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

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

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Uh, there are sandwiches too... and
nuts if, uh, you like nuts.

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

LATER--

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

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

JANIE

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

MARGARET

How come she never talks to anybody...?

JANIE

I don't know...

NANCY

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

Gretchen laughs. Good one.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Whatever, all I care about is Philip Leroy came...

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

PHILIP LEROY

(taps Freddy)
Hey, watch this.

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

NANCY

He's hilarious.

Norman TAPS HIS PUNCH GLASS again.

NORMAN

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

GRETCHEN

The games?

Everyone looks around. *What kind of games?*

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

FREDDY

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

NORMAN

But it's a classic.

NANCY

Just play. Who spins first?

NORMAN

I'll go first since...well since I said so.

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

JANIE

(sotto)

No...

Margaret shoots her a sympathetic look.

FREDDY

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

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

FREDDY (CONT'D)

That doesn't count, you kissed her hair!

MARGARET

Oh it's fine, it counts.

NORMAN

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

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

NANCY

Okay, now Janie's turn to spin.

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

NORMAN

This is a great party.

MARGARET

Do we have to play this game?

FREDDY

I said that from the beginning!

NANCY

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

MARGARET

What's that?

NANCY

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

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

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

NANCY (CONT'D)

Alright...

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

FREDDY

Number 3.

Everyone looks around to see who 3 is.

GRETCHEN

Who's number 3?

No one responds.

NANCY

Hellooo? Somebody's gotta be three.

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

PHILIP

Go ahead! Into the bathroom!

NANCY

Hey somebody get Freddy a step stool!

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

GRETCHEN

What do you think they're--

EVERYONE

SHHHHHH!!!!!!

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

FREDDY

You're next.

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

PHILIP

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

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

MARGARET

Oh my god.

NANCY

What. You're 12 Margaret?!

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

INT. NORMAN'S BASEMENT BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

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

PHILIP
Margaret, turn around.

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

MARGARET
Hey...

PHILIP
Hey.

She gulps a gallon of saliva.

MARGARET
Um, so, do we--

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

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

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

EXT. NANCY'S FANCY PROTESTANT CHURCH - CHRISTMAS EVE

All decked-out for Christmas. Margaret and Nancy climb the front steps towards the church's huge open front doors. Nancy is sick with jealousy.

NANCY
So he was a good kisser? The kiss was really good?

MARGARET
They were pretty good kisses, yeah.

NANCY
Kisses? He kissed you more than once?! Like how many times?

MARGARET
Uh...I don't know, about 5, I think? I kinda lost count...

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

MARGARET (V.O.)
*I know I shouldn't be enjoying this
 God, but it's just too good: Nancy
 Wheeler, jealous of me.*

Margaret can't believe this turn of fate.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Okay, okay, I'm gonna focus.

She puts on a serious face as they ENTER THE CHURCH,
 remembering why she's here.

INT. NANCY'S PROTESTANT CHURCH - A LITTLE LATER

High school kids perform the CHRISTMAS PAGEANT as the
 MINISTER reads a passage from ISIAH. Margaret watches from a
 pew, trying to get into it, but thrown off by the bad
 homemade costumes and props, and crummy acting.

EXT. NEW JERSEY - FEBRUARY / DAY

Winter is fading. Just dirty patches of ICE now.

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - SAME

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

BARBARA
 All donations are tax deductible
 and always go towards the school's--
 (gets cut off)
 Oh. Uh, yeah. I'm sorry, I didn't
 realize it was dinner hour.

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

Then, something OUTSIDE THE WINDOW catches her eye.

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

INT. SIMONS' GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. SIMONS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

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

MRS. WHEELER

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

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

BARBARA

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

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

MRS. WHEELER

Uh...

BARBARA

(dying)

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

MRS. WHEELER

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

BARBARA

I'll get the stars.

Barb gets the HUMONGOUS BOX from the dining room.

MRS. WHEELER

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

BARBARA

Oh... Uh, Sure.

MRS. WHEELER

You're a doll, thanks. Well, I
better dash off, lots to do still.

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

INT. DELANO AUDITORIUM - DAY

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

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

MRS. WEBSTER

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

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

NANCY

(whispers)

Toldja this was the big sex movie.

MRS. WEBSTER

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

Everyone looks at Laura Danker. She lowers her head.

MRS. WEBSTER (CONT'D)

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

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

MRS. WEBSTER (CONT'D)

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

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

NARRATOR (O.S.)

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

An animated UTERUS and OVARIES appear.

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

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

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

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This...is *menstroo-ation*.

MARGARET

(to Janie, imitating)
Menstrooooooooooooo-ation.

Janie laughs.

GRETCHEN

(whispers)

Who do you think'll get it first?

NANCY

Who do you know'll get it last?

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

INT. MODERN FURNITURE STORE - LATER

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

BARBARA

It's just I've wanted the house to look perfect and I've been so busy with the committees, and the stars, and trying to cook meals with all five food groups, which nobody tells you takes so long and is so boring, and you've gotta do it every...single...day...

(sits in a CHAIR)

Do you like this egg-chair? I feel like I'm on a space ship.

MARGARET

When did you get your period?

Barb stops. *Whoa. Left field.*

BARBARA

Oh... Uh...

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

MARGARET

Just tell me how old you were.

BARBARA

I... 14?

MARGARET

14?! That late?!

BARBARA

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

MARGARET

Oh my god. I'd die if I didn't get it 'til I was 16!

BARBARA

(laughs)

Plenty of people would call that a blessing.

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

INT. DELANO SCHOOL - MORNING

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

NANCY

I get to go to the Rockettes next month 'cause I earned straight A's, anyone wanna go? Only bad thing is my brother will be there with Moose.

MARGARET

(immediately)

I'll go.

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

GRETCHEN

I got it!

They all just look at her, confused.

MARGARET

Got what?

GRETCHEN

(lowers her voice)

It. My period.

They all freeze. *Holy shit.*

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - LATER

An emergency meeting to discuss this development.

NANCY

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

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

GRETCHEN

Well that doesn't mean anything.

MARGARET

Just tell us how it happened.

JANIE

Yeah, start from the beginning.

GRETCHEN

Well I was sitting there at dinner and I felt something dripping from me. So I went to the bathroom, and pulled down my pants, and that's when I saw the blood. So I called my mom and showed her.

(MORE)

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

But she only had tampons, no pads,
so she had to run to the store.

JANIE

What'd you do in the meantime?

GRETCHEN

I just stuck a big giant wad of
toilet paper in my pants.

NANCY

Ew, no you didn't!

GRETCHEN

Well what else was I supposed to
do?

MARGARET

(moving this along)

Okay, so go on, then what.

GRETCHEN

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

NANCY

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

GRETCHEN

I've told you everything.

NANCY

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

GRETCHEN

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

MARGARET

It does? Like what?

GRETCHEN

She said it kinda smells like the
monkey bars.

NANCY

The *monkey bars*?

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

JANIE

(memory tainted forever)

I used to love the monkey bars...

Margaret is mesmerized.

MARGARET

Do you feel older now? Like more mature?

GRETCHEN

(utterly sincere)

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

(wistful)

Yeah...

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

EXT./INT. - VARIOUS / DAY

Margaret barrels DOWN THE STREET, through the FRONT DOOR, up the STAIRS, into her bedroom--

MARGARET

(rapid-fire in one breath)

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

(finally exhales)

Amen.

She falls face down on her bed, exhausted. Something across the room catches her eye: THE LITTLE HANDMADE ANIMAL FIGURINES on her dresser. Their childishness suddenly make her sick. She gets up, goes over and scoops them all up, drops them into a bottom junk drawer, slams it shut.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

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

JANIE

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

MARGARET

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

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Okay. Come on.

They hurry towards THE REGISTERS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Please god let it be a lady...

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Nooo.

JANIE

We can just put 'em back.

Margaret pulls Janie towards the register, determined.

MARGARET

No. We're doing it.

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

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

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

EXT. DRUG STORE - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

JANIE

The Tic Tacs...

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

CLOSE UP ON: A MAXI PAD.

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

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

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

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

Suddenly there's KNOCK and the DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

BARBARA

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

Margaret stiffens in an awkward pose.

MARGARET

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

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

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

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

EXT. SYLVIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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

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

MARGARET
Grandma...?

She immediately knows something off in Margaret's voice.

SYLVIA
Margaret? What's wrong?

Margaret sits on the floor of her PARENTS' BEDROOM, the door shut, using their PHONE.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Honey...are you okay, what's the
matter?

It's too hard to explain.

MARGARET
I...I just miss you.

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

SYLVIA
Aw honey, me too...

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

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

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

MARGARET
Okay...

Sylvia feels rotten, hating to let her down.

SYLVIA

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

MARGARET

The end of the March.

SYLVIA

Perfect! I'll still be there!

Margaret perks up a little.

MARGARET

I'll ask my mom and dad.

SYLVIA

Great, and--

MARGARET

And I'll tell them it was my idea.

SYLVIA

(grins, touched)
You're my girl.

Margaret feels her spirits lifted a little.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - EARLY EVENING

The sky is a pretty purple.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

The Wheeler's STATION WAGON idles out front.

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

NANCY

Hurry! Come on! Front row tickets!

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

MARGARET

Hi...

Moose turns around, waves.

MOOSE

Hey.

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

EXT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

A SOLD OUT SHOW packed with TOURISTS.

INT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - SAME

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

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

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" RESTAURANT - LATER

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

NANCY

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

MR. WHEELER

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

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

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

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

MOOSE

Sorry.

MARGARET

That's okay.

He drinks the last sip from his WATER GLASS.

MOOSE

(looks around)

Is the waiter anywhere.

MARGARET

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

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

MOOSE

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

MARGARET

No...?

Whatever it is, she cannot wait to hear it.

NANCY

(interrupts)

Come with me, I gotta go the
bathroom.

She tugs Margaret away, killing their moment.

NANCY (CONT'D)

We'll be right back.

(to Evan)

Don't touch my food.

Margaret reluctantly follows Nancy, frustrated.

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

NANCY (O.S.)

I've had to go since we got here
and then I drank two Cokes.

MARGARET

Uh huh.

Margaret folds her arms, impatient. Then--

NANCY
Oh no. Oh *no*.

MARGARET
What?

Nancy's tone is panicked.

NANCY
Oh please... Oh no...

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

Margaret walks over to the stall.

NANCY
Get my mom. Please, quick!

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

MARGARET
Let me in.

NANCY
No, please, just get my mom.

MARGARET
What's wrong?

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

Margaret can tell this is something really serious.

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

INT. "THE STEAK PLACE" RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Margaret races over to Mrs. Wheeler.

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

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

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

INT. STEAK HOUSE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

MRS. WHEELER

Nancy?

NANCY

Oh please mom, help me! Please.

MRS. WHEELER

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

NANCY

(crying)

I can't-- I can't--

MARGARET

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

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

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

MRS. WHEELER

Thank you.

Margaret goes over to wait by the sinks, worried.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

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

Nancy chokes back her tears, finally WHISPERS SOMETHING.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

(understands)

Ahh...

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

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)

Margaret? Would you get Nancy a pad please?

(MORE)

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
(hands her a COIN)
From that dispenser on the wall?

Margaret just stands there, confused.

MRS. WHEELER (CONT'D)
Nancy got her period, honey.

MARGARET
Does she always act like that?

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

Margaret suddenly realizes Nancy was lying about her period.

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

MRS. WHEELER
Thank you, sweetie.

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

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

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

NANCY
Margaret, please don't tell.

MARGARET
Oh Nancy...

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

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

NANCY
Really, you won't?

MARGARET
No... Don't worry.

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

INT. THE WHEELERS' STATION WAGON - LATER THAT NIGHT

Margaret and Nancy ride back, sitting far apart.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you there God? It's me,
 Margaret.*

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

MARGARET (V.O.)
I don't even know what to say.

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

EXT. NEW JERSEY - MARCH / MORNING

SPRING now. Grass and flowers fighting their way back.

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - SAME

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

BARBARA (PRE-LAP)
 Happy Birthday.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - SAME

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

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

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

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

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

MARGARET

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

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

JANIE

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

They look traumatized to be separated.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Well, happy Birthday.

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

MARGARET

Aw, thanks...

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

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

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

PHILIP

(sees the present)
Happy Birthday.

MARGARET

Oh. Thanks.

She smiles. Philip PINCHES her hard on the arm.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Ouch!

PHILIP

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

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

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

Margaret bursts into her room, hurls down her backpack.

MARGARET

*Are you there God, it's me,
Margaret! I hate Philip Leroy! I
hate him! I hate Laura Danker, too,
with her great big chest "oooh look
at me everyone, I'm wearing a
sweater!" I hate Nancy, that liar,
and Mr. Benedict with his dumb
ideas, and Norman Fisher, the way
he reads with his lips flapping all
around!*

*(imitates Norman's silent
reading, his lips moving
like crazy)*

*Please, please, just hurry up and
get me to Florida!*

She crumbles onto her bed, spent.

EXT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

A cloudy day, the sky threatening to rain.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

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

MARGARET

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

Laura doesn't say anything, just keeps working.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What time's your mom picking you
up?

LAURA

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

MARGARET

Confession?

Laura regrets telling her that.

LAURA

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

MARGARET

What do you confess?

LAURA

Things.

MARGARET

What kinds of things?

Laura gives her a look.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Never mind.

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

LAURA

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

MARGARET

I only copied four words.

LAURA

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

MARGARET

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

LAURA

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

MARGARET

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

LAURA

This has nothing to do with being
great.

MARGARET

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

LAURA

What's that supposed to mean?

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

LIBRARIAN

Quiet, girls.

MARGARET

(whispers)

I heard about you and Moose Freed.

LAURA

What about me and Moose Freed?

MARGARET

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

LAURA

Why would I do that?

MARGARET

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

Laura slams her book shut, stands up.

LAURA

You're a liar! You're lying!

MARGARET

I'm not lying.

LAURA

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

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

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

MARGARET

Laura, wait. Wait up.

Laura won't turn around, just keeps walking.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Please.

Margaret finally catches up with her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Laura, listen---

LAURA

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

Margaret doesn't know what to say.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You think I want to be the biggest kid in class?

MARGARET

I don't know...

LAURA

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

MARGARET

I'm sorry, Laura...

Laura's throat tightens.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

If you want the truth, I wish I looked more like you than me.

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

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Laura, wait. I really am sorry.

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

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

It's dim, with towering stain glass windows. Margaret looks around. No sign of Laura.

She slowly makes her way down the aisle, peering up at the ceiling, a mile high, feeling very, very small in this place.

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

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

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

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

MARGARET
(whispers)

God...?

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

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

Margaret STARTLES, not expecting that.

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

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

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

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

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

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Margaret hurries down the church steps. It's beginning to RAIN now. She finds a little SHELTER from it, spills her heart out, confessing.

MARGARET

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

She sighs, defeated by herself.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - SAME

Barb runs to get the MAIL in the RAIN.

INT. SIMON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

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

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Barbara waits as Herb READS the letter.

HERB

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

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

HERB (CONT'D)

You sent them a card.

She lowers her voice, a little embarrassed.

BARBARA

I...I don't know why.

She really doesn't. Herb gets to his feet, begins to pace, trying to keep a lid the swell of emotions rising up.

HERB

Do you remember that first year after they "cast" you out? What that was like for you? The way you felt?

BARBARA

I know... And the way they treated you... I'm sorry.

HERB

They think you're going to hell because you married a Jew.

She agrees how awful that is, isn't sure what to say.

HERB (CONT'D)

You really want to open that door again? We have a good life, we're happy, is it worth it?

Barbara genuinely considers this question.

BARBARA

(quietly, simply)

They're my parents.

Herb slowly inhales and exhales, accepting it even though he doesn't like it. Barb reaches for his hand, knowing this can't be easy for him.

Margaret walks through the FRONT DOOR, registers the energy in the room.

MARGARET

What's going on?

Barb and Herb exchange a look about how to handle this. Herb makes a decision--

HERB
Margaret should know.

MARGARET
Know what? What is this?

HERB
(hands her the letter)
It's from your mom's parents. It
concerns you.

Margaret looks at Barb, she takes the letter, quietly reads
through it as Herb and Barb wait. Then:

MARGARET
They're coming here next week?

Barbara nods.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I won't be here, I'll be in
Florida.

Barb doesn't say anything. Herb looks down.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What? I'm still going to Florida,
aren't I?

BARBARA
Margaret, look...

MARGARET
I can't go to Florida now?! But I
don't even want to see them! I want
to see Grandma!

HERB
We promise you'll go to Florida
another time...

MARGARET
I don't want to go another time!
Does Grandma know about this?!

BARBARA
No, we need to call her.

MARGARET
I'm not calling her, you can do it
yourselves!

Barbara tries to calm her down, defuse this.

BARBARA
 (softly)
 Alright. I'll call her now.

HERB
 No, I'll take care of it.

Herb goes over to the PHONE, dials his mother. Margaret cannot believe this is really happening.

INT./EXT. SYLVIA'S FLORIDA CONDOMINIUM - SAME

Sylvia wears a BATHING SUIT and SARONG. She carries a CHEESE PLATE out to her VERANDA, setting it down in front of MORRIS BINAMIN (70's) a good-looking white-haired gentleman pouring them each a GLASS OF WHITE WINE.

She's uncharacteristically nervous. Yanks at her bathing suit top a little, worried about her cleavage.

SYLVIA
 (trying to be elegant)
 Here we are...

Mr. Binamin smiles, he raises his glass, toasting to their little date.

MR. BINAMIN
 This looks wonderful.

The PHONE RINGS inside.

SYLVIA
 One moment...
 (before she goes in)
 Don't eat all the cheese without me. Just kidding, eat at much as you want! Depending on your cholesterol! I'm just being funny I'm not asking what it is! But I'm sure it's low!

She laughs nervously, then turns around, making a face at herself for being insane around him. She answers the phone.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
 Simon Residence.

HERB
 Listen, Margaret's Florida trip isn't gonna work out, I'm sorry.

Sylvia freezes, her expression falling. Margaret can't take it, goes over and yanks the phone away.

MARGARET
Just give it to me, I'll talk to her. Hello Grandma?

SYLVIA
Margaret. What happened, what's going on?

MARGARET
We...we got a letter that my other grandparents are coming.

Sylvia's posture suddenly changes.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
(getting choked up)
I just really wanted to see you...

SYLVIA
Put your mother on the line right now.

Margaret hears the sternness in her voice, holds out the phone to Barb. Herb reaches to take it instead, but Barbara doesn't want to duck this.

BARBARA
Hello.

SYLVIA
What the hell's going on Barbara?

BARBARA
I'll explain later Sylvia, it's just one of those things, I hope you can understand. I've gotta go now.

Barb hangs up before Sylvia can protest.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Margaret, I'm sorry...

Margaret heads up the stairs, upset. Barb looks at Herb, feeling bad for him too.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry...

He puts up his hands: *It is what it is.* Then walks away too. Barb stands alone in the living room a moment, looks over at their EMPTY DEN, realizing she's also completely unprepared for having her parents.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Oh god.

EXT. TRADITIONAL STYLE FURNITURE STORE - DAY

Barb heads up the sidewalk, Margaret reluctantly following.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you there God? It's Me,
Margaret. I'm absolutely miserable.
Everything is just going to crap.
Maybe this is my punishment for
being a horrible person to Laura
Danker.*

On their way into the store, Barb notices A GOOD-LOOKING COUPLE staring at a FANCY FURNITURE SET IN THE STORE WINDOW.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Please, right now, just do this one
thing for me, I'm begging you: make
something happen so they don't come
and I can still go to Florida.*

EXT. NEW JERSEY AIRPORT - DAY

The PLANE lands, her grandparents arriving.

EXT. NEW JERSEY AIRPORT TARMAC - A LITTLE LATER

Margaret has a bitter, cheerless expression as she and Barb wait for her grandparents to de-board a PARKED PLANE. Barb wears a stiff tailored dress unlike anything else she owns, her stomach in knots. She looks over at Margaret.

BARBARA
Please Margaret. Even if it's fake,
can you just try to *look* happy? Or
least not so unhappy?

MARGARET
Why do you even want to see them?
After what they did to you?

BARBARA

Because I...I want them to see how great we turned out. How proud I am of our family...

Margaret just looks away. Every bit of this is unfair. Barb suddenly spots her parents. Her stomach drops.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

That's them.

Margaret looks over to see them coming down the PLANE'S STAIRS. MARY HUTCHINS (70's), soft white hair, ruffled blouse, black orthopedic shoes. PAUL HUTCHINS (70's), plaid shirt, suspenders, the identical shoes as Mary.

Barb feels a jolt of emotion seeing how much they've aged. She breathes it away.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

(waving them over)

HERE WE ARE, OVER HERE.

The Hutchins look up, coming over towards them.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Hi...

PAUL

Hello...

Barb doesn't know whether to hug them. The moment to decide passes.

BARBARA

It's good to see you.

MARY

You too, Barbara. And this must be Margaret Ann...?

Margaret pastes on a smile, trying to be polite.

MARGARET

Hi.

MARY

We're very glad to meet you.

Mary gives her a stiff kiss on the forehead. Margaret tenses as she does. Paul just sticks with a pat on the back.

PAUL

Yes we are.

Barb tries to act breezy.

BARBARA

Well, should we get the bags?
Herb's got the car running.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT / LOADING ZONE - A LITTLE LATER

Herb waits by their idling Chrysler in a shirt and slacks, a fresh haircut. He sees them approaching.

HERB

Hi there.

Herb smiles, anxious but trying to be his affable self.

BARBARA

Hey. Mom, dad, you remember Herb...

PAUL

Hello, Herb.

Paul puts out his hand. Herb shakes it.

HERB

Hi Paul. Mary, how are you?

MARY

Just fine, thank you for having us.

HERB

Well, welcome to scenic New Jersey.

Herb gestures to their SHITTY SURROUNDINGS, making a joke. Paul and Mary take him as sincere, nodding pleasantly as they look around. Herb gives Barb a look. Margaret cringes a little.

INT. SIMON'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

They all come through the front door, Herb carrying Paul and Mary's bags.

BARBARA

Here we are, make yourselves
comfortable...

She leads them into the LIVING ROOM, now furnished with the SET FROM THE STORE WINDOW. Mary nods in approval.

MARY

Lovely home.

Barb smiles, relieved.

BARBARA

Margaret can show you to your room.
I'll just start getting dinner
ready.

Barbara looks at Margaret to take them upstairs. She doesn't want to, but goes along.

MARGARET

Up this way...

MARY

Thank you. Gosh, you look like your
mom when she was your age.

PAUL

Yes you do. And I'll bet you're
smart just like her too.

They're being so nice, it's hard to be mad at them. She softens a little.

MARGARET

Oh. Uh. Thanks.

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - SAME

Barb opens a CAN OF CAMPBELL'S CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP, dumping the grey gelatinous blob onto a RAW CHUCK ROAST. She checks the RECIPE. That's it, just one ingredient. She can't mess it up. Herb comes up behind her, checking on her.

HERB

How are you doing?

BARBARA

How are *you* doing?

HERB

I make small talk for a living and
I'm already out of material. Help.
Sports teams? TV shows they like?

BARBARA

I don't know. They used to watch
game shows mostly?

Herb files it away. Then: DING DONG, the DOORBELL rings. They both look at each other. *Who could that be?*

INT. SIMONS LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Herb opens the door. SYLVIA AND MR. BINAMIN are on the porch.

HERB

Mom?

SYLVIA

This plant is dying from too much water.

She points to a YELLOWING PLANT on their front step. Barbara comes around, freezes.

BARBARA

Sylvia? What's going on?

SYLVIA

Margaret said she needed to see me, so we flew here from Florida. Are your parents here yet? This is Morris Binamin.

MORRIS BINAMIN

Rhymes with cinnamon.

Sylvia smiles casually, as if this isn't the slightest bit nuts. Barb is speechless. So is Herb.

Margaret comes downstairs with her grandparents, sees Sylvia.

MARGARET

Grandma?

SYLVIA

There's my Margaret!

Margaret runs down to hug her. Sylvia makes a big show of it for Barbara's parents' benefit. Paul and Mary aren't sure what's going on.

MARY

Uh...

Barb just throws up her hands.

BARBARA

Mom and Dad: Sylvia. Sylvia: Paul and Mary.

INT. SIMONS' DINING ROOM - LATER

They all sit around the dinner table. Sylvia is on one side of Margaret, Mary on the other. Everyone is trying to be on their best behavior.

SYLVIA
Dinner is delicious. What is it
made of?

BARBARA
Soup.

SYLVIA
Ah.

MARY
(nodding)
Very nice.

Everyone agrees it's great. Margaret nods too.

BARBARA
Well, I'll admit it was a bit of a
jolt, but...it's nice to have us
all together. The whole family.
(then)
And Mr. Binamin.

They all look at Mr. Binamin. He smiles.

SYLVIA
(Raises her glass to that)
L'chaim.

Barb and Herb both react to the Hebrew.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
(toasts everyone 1-by-1)
L'chaim. L'chaim. L'chaim. L'chaim.
L'chaim. L'chaim. L'chaim.

Sylvia puts the glass down and nobody can think of what to say for a second. Herb turns to Paul and Mary.

HERB
So do you guys like Jeopardy?

INT. SIMONS KITCHEN - LATER

Barb and Herb clean up from dinner, relieved to have a break from the group.

INT. SIMONS LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret sits on the couch opposite Paul and Mary. Sylvia and Morris are on the other side of the room, helping themselves to some ICE TEA and a TRAY OF DESSERT COOKIES.

MARY

There's just so much we want to get to know about you, Margaret...

PAUL

12 years is a lot to catch up on.

They look at her with a genuine longing for the years they missed. Margaret can feel their sincerity.

MARGARET

Yeah... Long time...

PAUL

We were wondering if you go to Sunday School? Or have ever thought about it?

Margaret's smile falters, not expecting that. Sylvia overhears it, interjects.

SYLVIA

Nope. Never. Not once.

Mary smiles tersely at Sylvia, staking her own territory now.

MARY

We asked Margaret the question. Margaret?

Margaret couldn't look more uncomfortable.

SYLVIA

You're wasting your time, Margaret already went to Temple. She's Jewish.

Margaret looks over at Sylvia. Herb and Barb walk in from the kitchen to hear this. Can't believe their ears.

BARBARA

Excuse me?

HERB

(sternly)

Mom, that's it. Cut it out. You're done here.

SYLVIA

I'm done? You left the room and they're trying to convert her!

PAUL

Margaret has a right to be baptized if she wants to be.

BARBARA

Baptized?

Barbara can't believe they're doing this. Margaret sinks down in her seat, desperately wanting out of this room. Herb finally has enough, seizes control.

HERB

This discussion is over. No more. We are her parents and Margaret will pick her own religion when she grows up, if she even wants one.

SYLVIA

Except she already did and she's Jewish.

MARY

Well she's Christian in our eyes.

HERB

MARGARET IS NOTHING. MARGARET IS NO RELIGION UNTIL MARGARET DECIDES THAT MARGARET--

As they argue, we push in on Margaret's face. Finally, something vital inside her BREAKS.

MARGARET

(bursts to her feet)

Stop it! Stop it! I don't care anymore! I don't care! I don't want a religion anyway! It's all stupid, I hate it! I don't even believe in God!

All the adults are stunned.

SYLVIA

Margaret don't say that about God!

Paul and Mary second that. At least they can agree on one thing.

Margaret rushes out of the room, hurries UP THE STAIRS.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She throws her DOOR shut, about to give God a piece of her mind. Then stops, realizing it's useless anyway. He's not even there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The adults just stand there, regretting how that went, no one sure what to say now.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dark now. The glow of street lights.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Dear Mr. Benedict...

Barb and Herb see Sylvia and Mr. Binamin off in one TAXI, her parents off in another. Everyone seems exhausted. Sylvia looks apologetically at Mr. Binamin, worried her family drama turned him off. He pats her reassuringly.

MARGARET (V.O.)
I finished my year-long study of religion.

Barb and Herb watch both cabs drive off down the street. Barb sighs. Herb loops an arm around her: *Well, just us again.*

MARGARET (V.O.)
I went to a Jewish Temple, a Presbyterian church, a Protestant church, and a Catholic church.

INT. MARGARET'S ROOM - NIGHT

Margaret switches on a SMALL DESK LIGHT, pulls some PAPER and a PEN out of her DRAWER, begins to write.

MARGARET (V.O.)
What I learned about religion is that it makes people fight. And that every religion says the same thing: If you pray to God, he'll listen to you, and help you, and make things better. But I've prayed and prayed, and everything just gets worse. I don't know anymore, but I think--

She hesitates, scared of what she's about to write next.

MARGARET (V.O.)
*That maybe the truth is...
 There's nobody even up there.
 There's nobody listening.*

Something empties out of her eyes.

MARGARET (V.O.)
There's only just me.

INT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Margaret walks to school by herself. She looks tiny. A tuft of dust blowing down the road.

INT. MR. BENEDICT'S CLASS - DAY

Students drop BOUND BOOKLETS into Mr. Benedict's INBOX. Margaret waits at the edge of his desk as he finishes reading her LETTER. He looks up at her, worried for her.

MR. BENEDICT
 Margaret...

A knot forms in her throat. She tries to swallow it away, but can't. She rushes out of the room before anyone see her cry.

INT. DELANO SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Margaret barrels down the hallway, trying to outpace her emotions. A TEAR escapes. Then another. And another. She starts to RUN, makes a turn into--

INT. DELANO GIRLS BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She races by a GIRL AT THE SINK WASHING HER HANDS, ducks into the last stall, shuts the door, crouches down next to the toilet, THE TEARS COMING HARDER AND FASTER NOW.

She clamps a hand over her mouth, trying not to make a sound. She SOBS -- a SILENT, shaking little heap.

The GIRL exits, the SOUND of the door shutting behind her.

Finally in private, Margaret unclamps her hand, lets herself cry. She finishes and the bathroom becomes VERY STILL.

She pulls in a long, slow breath, steadying herself. Presses her scrunch sleeves against her eyes to sop them up.

Finally, she rises to her feet, exiting to--

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As she comes out the door, the LUNCH BELL RINGS. HUNDREDS of KIDS rush in from all directions. Margaret watches them for a moment. Then folds in with the crowd, CARRYING ON.

EXT. MORNINGBIRD LANE - LATER THAT DAY

Sun sinking behind the trees.

INT. SIMONS' DINING ROOM - SAME

CLOSE UP: The LATCH on the UNDERSIDE OF THE DINING ROOM TABLE that holds in the EXTRA LEAF. Two FINGERS reach into frame, popping it open.

Barb struggles to lift the HEAVY WOOD PIECE from the center of the table, drags it across the carpet, leans it against the wall.

She pushes the two side pieces back together to turn it back into a SMALL ROUND TABLE. She stares at it a beat. Her own family seemed to expand and contract just that fast.

She takes a slow breath, trying to be okay with that.

Behind her, the DOOR OPENS. Margaret walks in from school with a tired, far-off expression. Barb can relate.

BARBARA

Hi...

Margaret nods hello, heads for the stairs.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Hey. Wait... Come're.

MARGARET

I don't feel like talking.

BARBARA

I know. I don't either.

They just stand there.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry for how things went.
 And... I know this past year has
 not been easy.

Margaret doesn't make eye contact. *You got that right.*

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 Wanna just sit for a minute?

Barbara gestures to the couch. Margaret isn't sure. Barb takes a seat, hoping she'll follow. Margaret hesitates, then joins her.

They sit quietly beside each other a moment. Barb looks over at Margaret, Margaret looks over at her. The moment is ripe.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 I want to say something encouraging
 right now, but nothing's coming to
 me.

Margaret cracks a tiny smile. Looks down. Barb's heart aches seeing her like this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 (lovingly)
 It gets tiring trying so hard all
 the time, doesn't it.

Margaret nods. *Yes. Yes, it does.* Barb nods back, knowing the feeling well. She loops her arm around her. Their heads tip together ever-so-slightly.

EXT. NEW JERSEY - JUNE / EARLY EVENING

Summer again. Trees swaying in a warm breeze. Emerald green grass. Sprinkler mist sparkling in the sun.

EXT. DELANO SCHOOL / 6TH GRADE FAREWELL CARNIVAL - SAME

GLOWING PAPER LANTERNS strung up over the blacktop. BOOTHS set up with FOOD and GAMES.

Margaret leans together with Janie, Nancy, and Gretchen in front of a "CONGRATS GRADUATES" PHOTO BACKDROP. She's a little better now, but something is missing from her smile.

MR. BENEDICT snaps their PICTURE.

NANCY
 Junior high, woo!!!
 (then)
 Ooh the fish bowl game is open!
 Let's go, come on, I'm going first!

Nancy breaks their huddle, takes off running. Gretchen and Janie run after her. Margaret almost falls in with them, then decides against it. She just can't go along with Nancy's ever whim anymore.

MR. BENEDICT
 Doing ok, Margaret?

She looks over at Mr. Benedict. He's checking in with her after what happened.

MARGARET
 Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Benedict. You were a good 6th grade teacher.

MR. BENEDICT
 Oh, I don't know about that. Still ironing out a lotta kinks...

But Margaret smiles, meaning it. Mr. Benedict bows his head, the compliment getting in.

Someone TURNS UP the MUSIC on the stereo system. A BUNCH OF KIDS make a run for the chalk-drawn DANCE FLOOR. Margaret watches them dance for a moment.

Then something just beyond them catches her eye: LAURA DANKER, standing by herself as always.

Margaret leaves Mr. Benedict, walks up to her.

MARGARET
 Hey.

Laura looks over, surprised someone's talking to her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
 You wanna come dance?

Laura hesitates, not sure if she's for real. Margaret looks at her, earnest. Laura weighs whether to trust it. She takes the leap. They head over to the dance floor, start to dance together.

OVER AT THE FISH BOWL GAME --

Nancy hogs the game, Gretchen nagging for a turn. Janie looks around for Margaret.

Spots her across the way, dancing with Laura. Surprised, she watches them a sec. They look like they're having more fun than she is. She looks over at Nancy and Gretchen bickering, decides to join Margaret and Laura.

The 3 of them DANCE in a little circle, at the beginning of something...

EXT. SMALL ART SCHOOL - SAME

A small BRICK BUILDING nestled on MAIN STREET.

INT. SMALL ART SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE UP: A PAINTING OF A BOWL OF FRUIT, still in progress. A YOUNG GUY adds a shadow under a pear.

BARBARA

Nice job on the shading, you might try a wash to blend this area here.

The guy nods, grateful. Barb moves on to the next student.

EXT. SMALL ART SCHOOL / MAIN STREET - LATER

Barb walks to her car after work. Mrs. Wheeler comes down the sidewalk with some shopping bags.

MRS. WHEELER

Oh hey Barbara!

BARBARA

Oh, hi Jan.

MRS. WHEELER

I was just gonna call you! Could you believe it about the stars? Jeez, I guess everything's a "fire hazard" these days.

Mrs. Wheeler shakes her head at the dumb rule.

BARBARA

Yeah...

MRS. WHEELER

Anyway, listen, we're already forming committees at the junior high and I can think of at least three you'd be perfect for if you'll sign up?

Barb smiles, nods.

BARBARA
Oh, yeah, that sounds great and I'd
love to, but...

Beat. *How does she put this?*

BARBARA (CONT'D)
(shrugs, warmly)
...I don't want to.

Barb smiles again, apologetic. Mrs. Wheeler blinks, taken
aback by the honesty.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
I'll see you later though, okay
Jan?

Barb slides into her car, waving goodbye. As she spins around
to back out, she has a private moment celebrating her tiny
victory on the road to self-acceptance.

INT. SIMON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Margaret is on the PHONE with Sylvia (in her APARTMENT).

SYLVIA (O.S.)
I'm gonna write you so many
letters. So many letters the
mailman says, that's it, too many
letters, no more!

MARGARET
Good. Great.

SYLVIA
Have the best time, Sugar, we'll
see you when you get back.

Sylvia looks over at Mr. Binamin sitting drinking coffee in
his pajamas. He MOVED IN with her.

MARGARET
'kay, bye Grandma.

Margaret hangs up, goes into the LIVING ROOM, where Barb
packs some last items into her CAMP TRUNK, filled to the
brim. Herb comes around the corner with the CAMERA AND A FEW
ROLLS OF FILM, tucks into her luggage. (Behind them, we see
the living room now includes a DEDICATED CORNER for Barb's
painting stuff).

BARBARA

Alright, think that's everything.
Now let's see if we can close it.

Barb swings the lid down, Herb pushes it down, Margaret climbs on top of it, using all her weight to close it the last inch. Barb secures the latches. They high-five.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Almost like we've done this before.

Margaret hears the LAWN MOWER START UP, looks out the front window. Herb and Barb have figured out she likes Moose.

HERB

We owe him for the month. You wanna
give it to him?

Margaret's face lights up, thankful for the excuse.

EXT. SIMONS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Margaret finds Moose making laps with the mower, singing *Erie Canal* to himself.

MARGARET

Hey Moose...

Moose waves. She holds up the BILLS. He turns the mower off. They walk towards each other.

MOOSE

(taking the money)
Thanks.

MARGARET

Sure...

She just nods and smiles for a moment.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Well, have a good summer since I
won't see you for a while.

MOOSE

Oh? When are you going?

MARGARET

Camp. New Hampshire. Leaving later
today...

MOOSE

Oh. Well. Have fun.

MARGARET

Yeah.

MOOSE

And... send me a post card maybe.

A dumb grin forms on Margaret's face, not expecting that.

MARGARET

Really? Okay. Yeah. Yeah, I will.

Moose smiles, walks back over to this mower. Margaret turns around and heads back towards the house, glowing.

INT. SIMONS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret climbs the stairs two-by-two, grinning to herself. She skips down the hall, ducks into--

INT. MARGARET'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She pulls down her shorts, sits down to pee, still smiling, replaying what he said. She gets up front the toilet, suddenly FREEZES, seeing something. Her eyes get as big as dinner plates. For a second, she can't breathe. Then--

MARGARET

Mom! MOMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!

BARB is DOWN THE HALL, putting some TOWELS into the LINEN CLOSET. She startles, rushes down the hall, worried. Sticks her head into the BATHROOM.

BARBARA

What is it? What's wrong?

Margaret looks up at her, can't believe what she's about to say.

MARGARET

I got it.

Barbara doesn't know what she means for a se.

BARBARA

What?

MARGARET

My period, I got my period!

As she says the words aloud, she starts to LAUGH AND CRY AT THE SAME TIME, short-circuiting from all the emotions.

This is wonderful! This is awful! It's such a relief! I'm so scared! I'm finally growing up! Oh god I'm not a kid anymore.

BARBARA

Oh my god.

Barb starts to choke up too, then LAUGHS, feeling silly about all these emotions.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Here, wait a minute, I'll get the pads, I got you some just in case, I was going to sneak 'em in your camp trunk when you weren't looking!

Margaret laughs. Barb hurries to get the BOX from a HALL CABINET, comes back with the PAD for Margaret.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Here. Okay, so this is how you do it, you pull this thing off and there's a sticky part that goes--

Margaret grabs the pad away.

MARGARET

I already know! I've been practicing for two months!

They both start laughing again.

BARBARA

Okay. I guess I'll wait outside then.

Barb closes the door, steps into the HALLWAY to give Margaret privacy.

INSIDE THE BATHROOM--

Margaret peels the paper off the pad, presses it against her underwear, pulls up her shorts. She can't believe she's doing this for real.

She turns to look at herself in the mirror. Thrilled and a little scared by the new person staring back at her.

She draws in a breath, letting it all settle in.

Then, a tiny little thought arrives.

It hovers there, crumb-sized.

Her eyes tick up to the ceiling.

THE SCREEN GOES BLACK.

We hang for a moment in the darkness.

Then:

MARGARET (V.O.)
*Are you still there God? It's me,
Margaret.*

END CREDIT MUSIC BEGINS.

THE END.