

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - MORNING

Title: December, 1991

The school is tucked away in a blue collar neighborhood of National City, California. This time of year it's chilly and damp under gray, morning coastal cover.

We HEAR the CHATTER of children playing. Most of them are standing around in huddles, waiting for the bell. CONNIE (9) is with her friend JENNY.

JENNY

She thinks she's so cool just 'cause she's got all the My Little Ponies. But she doesn't even have any Barbie stuff.

CONNIE

My Mom says you can never have all the My Little Ponies anyways.

JENNY

I know.

She doesn't.

CONNIE

'Cause as soon as you think you have all of them, they just make more.

JENNY

What are you getting for Christmas?

Connie is saved by the SCHOOL BELL. Students start to move toward the building.

CONNIE

(Hanging her head)  
I don't know.

JENNY

Ask your Mom for a Malibu Barbie...

Connie looks over her shoulder, to a spot at the edge of the playground.

JENNY (CONT'D)

When you take her swimsuit off, she's got these like real tan lines underneath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE CONNIE'S POV, a row of bushes and short trees growing at the edge of the playground. A pair of eyes belonging to JESSICA (11) peers out at the school from deep inside a bush.

ANGLE JESSICA'S POV THE PLAYGROUND, as it clears out.

RESUME JESSICA, as she picks up her lunchbox and moves back into the bush.

EXT. RAVINE

Emerging from a low tree, Jessica runs and leaps down a steep ravine, raising a cloud of dust. The dirt plates her tight pants and pours into her shoes.

Unlike her sister Connie, she tends toward holey jeans and ripped t-shirts with inflammatory slogans and pictures. All this places her with a lower class, which she is all right with her. She works at being noticed and actively disliked.

EXT. CANYON

The ravine runs into a canyon heaped with dead cars and piles of rubbish. At the base of the path, Jessica takes a fork that sends her deeper into the canyon along a dry wash. Now, a safe distance from school, she relaxes, puts her hands in her pockets and bounces along freely.

When one sees her for the first time, they see a strikingly beautiful young girl in early puberty, trying too hard to be mature. Her figure is slim and starting to blossom, but her clothes and cheap make-up class her with the unintelligent, unmotivated stragglers, who hang around in the corners of life, and simply wait for it all to be over. She's a natural leader, but views herself as inconsequential, and life as oppressive.

EXT. CANYON BY JESSICA'S PLACE

Well into the canyon, she stops and checks around. Satisfied she is alone, she pulls up some dried branches, revealing another path running up to the side.

She heads up the fainter path, carefully replacing the branches behind her. The hill is steep and the fine dirt makes it hard to climb. About half-way up, she stops by a boulder and checks behind her.

ANGLE HER POV THE MAIN PATH, far below, masked by the foliage.

RESUME JESSICA, as she crawls through a small entrance under a thick bush by the boulder.

INT. JESSICA'S PLACE - DAY

An irregular ceiling has been scooped out of the lower branches of the bush, sheltering a worn-in comfortable floor of smooth, loose dirt.

In Jessica's place, life can be whatever she wants. As she enters, she becomes softer. Her true innocence and inner child-self are allowed to emerge.

She carefully sets her lunchbox aside and lifts a wood cover, revealing an old baby doll. She tenderly brings the doll up to her chest and kisses it on the bald head.

Then, she opens the lunchbox, unwraps a peanut butter sandwich and lies back against the boulder.

QUICK CUT TO

INT. '66 CADILLAC - DAY

As the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black" SCREAMS over the car's eight-track. The Caddy interior is cherry - thick, white tuck 'n roll seats; shiny-new, chrome everything; and plush, fuzzy carpet.

RON HENDERSON (31) sits in the driver's seat, head down, hoping it will all magically go away with enough loud music and alcohol.

He empties another beer and tosses the can out the window. He sinks back into the plush headrest and closes his eyes.

EXT. ABSCO SHIPYARD PARKING LOT - DAY

Ron's Caddy is parked in a small lot, surrounded by a high fence, adjacent to the shipyard personnel office. The office is a gray wooden structure tacked on to a massive, concrete building. The area is difficult to distinguish from a prison yard.

INT. ABSCO PERSONNEL OFFICE - DAY

One small dying plant sits behind stacks of paper on a chipped, Formica counter. Twenty gray metal desks are jammed together behind the counter, and piled with papers, folders, debris.

Ron stands at the counter, as a large unattractive WOMAN approaches.

WOMAN  
(Not smiling)  
Yes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RON  
(Abrasively)  
Smolinski here?

WOMAN  
Mr. Smolinski is in a meeting at  
the moment. Are you here to apply  
for a job?

RON  
Yeah.

She hands him an application form.

WOMAN  
Fill this out completely and turn  
it in over there.

RON  
Wait a minute. Let me talk to  
Smolinski.

WOMAN  
If you're here to apply for work-

RON  
No, I'm here to get my job back.  
Let me talk to Smolinski.

WOMAN  
Did you work here prior to the  
strike?

RON  
Yeah, seven years.

WOMAN  
Did you participate in the strike?

RON  
You bet your ass I did-

WOMAN  
Unless you returned to work  
voluntarily prior to the deadline  
of December first, you are  
considered terminated and must  
reapply.

RON  
Hey, I just want my job-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

Your former position has probably  
already been filled-

RON

What do you mean filled-

WOMAN

Prior to December first, all  
striking employees-

RON

Yeah, whatever. I just want to talk  
to Smolinski.

WOMAN

You can't.

RON

I worked in this fucking place  
seven years-

WOMAN

Look, do you want an application or  
not. I'm not going to stand here  
and listen to that kind of  
language.

He considers.

RON

Give it to me.

She tosses it down and turns to leave.

RON (CONT'D)

You got a pen?

She hands it to him in a clenched fist.

WOMAN

I want it back.

She's off. Ron glances over the application, moving his lips  
as he reads. It seems as if he might actually try to fill in  
a few items, but quickly loses it.

He wads it up and throws it with the pen across the room, and  
SLAMS the door on his way out.

INT. HENDERSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

FRAN (29) is making scrambled eggs for herself and her two girls, Connie and Jessica. She is still wearing one of her three nice work dresses and some uncomfortable shoes.

The kitchen is small like the rest of the house, which has never been anything but strictly practical in its 40 years of existence.

Connie is quietly eating some toast, while Jessica rests her arms on the table, swinging her legs and fidgeting.

CONNIE  
Mom, Jessica kicked me.

JESSICA  
I did not, you weeny.

She continues.

CONNIE  
Mom!

FRAN  
Jessica stop kicking.

JESSICA  
Connie's a weeny. I barely touched her.

CONNIE  
Hah.

FRAN  
Connie stop complaining.

CONNIE  
But mom!

This time Jessica really does kick her.

CONNIE (CONT'D)  
Mom!!

FRAN  
Connie.

Connie starts crying and rubbing her leg. Jessica grins and continues to swing her legs.

FRAN (CONT'D)  
Can't we ever have a nice quiet dinner?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRAN (CONT'D)  
 (To Jessica)  
 Get your elbows off the table. Now,  
 young lady.

Jessica sits up straight, as Fran walks over with the pan. She wraps Jessica lightly on the head with the spatula, then dishes out the eggs.

FRAN (CONT'D)  
 Connie, knock it off. You're going  
 to live.

CONNIE  
 Tell Jessica to knock it off!

FRAN  
 Jessica.

JESSICA  
 Weeny.

When Fran isn't looking, Connie sticks out her tongue.

INT. DEEP SIX BAR - NIGHT

A working class bar near the shipyards - smoky, old and dirty, with the pervasive odor of working men and cheap booze.

The bartender carries a mug of beer along the bar and sets it in front of Ron, who's sitting next to friends FRED and SAM.

FRED  
 I've been up in the bridge for a  
 couple of weeks.

SAM  
 I wondered where you were. View's  
 nice up there, ain't it?

FRED  
 No shit. Beats sweating your ass  
 off below.

SAM  
 Yeah, I'm still down on the third  
 deck.

ANGLE RON'S POV, as he watches YOUNG WOMAN 1 enter and sashay over to a table by herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

I remember, it was like two or three years ago, back when we were building them littorals...

FRED

Shit, I remember those.

SAM

It was nice to see some sunlight occasionally, you know?

RESUME THE THREE

RON

Hey, can we talk about something else?

SAM

Like what?

RON

Pussy, for one thing.

Sam and Fred give each other a knowing glance.

SAM

Did you ever talk to Smolinski?

RON

Fuck Smolinski.

SAM

(Kidding, sort of)  
Fuck you. Where've you been anyways? I went to all the trouble to put in a good word with the old man, and you don't even bother to show up.

RON

I've been busy.

SAM

Doing what? Those fitting jobs aren't going to be open forever.

RON

I told you I ain't going back to work at a lower scale. You guys can whore yourselves if you want-

SAM

It ain't whoring, it's working.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FRED

Hey Sam, he's got his wife working  
for him. Why should he-

Ron stands.

SAM

Fred, come on. Give us a break.

RON

Hey, it's okay. You guys can say  
whatever you want. But the truth  
is, you're both just feeling guilty  
for crossing the line and fuckin'  
us all over. I'd feel bad too if I  
was you.

FRED

Strike's over, Ron. Gotta work.  
Don't have any choice.

Ron looks hard at the two of them.

ANGLE FOLLOWING RON, as he walks off with his drink in hand.

He stops at the juke box, which just happens to be within  
spitting distance of YOUNG WOMAN 1. Ron pretends to read the  
song titles, as he runs his eye over her.

RON

They ought to get some new records  
in this thing. Same stuff in here  
for a year now.

She smiles, as he makes a selection. Something slow and  
COUNTRY comes on, SCRATCHY and LOUD.

He steps over to her table.

RON (CONT'D)

Like country?

YOUNG WOMAN 1

Some.

RON

Well. We got something in common  
already.

He sits next to her.

INT. HENDERSON KITCHEN

Connie is helping Fran dry dishes. The TV is on in the other room.

CONNIE

I suppose Jessica is going to hog the new TV all night, as usual.

FRAN

Why are you so worried about her?

CONNIE

I never get to watch what I want.

FRAN

You never seem to care.

CONNIE

I do sometimes.

FRAN

It sounds like you just want to pick a fight.

CONNIE

Why do you always take her side?

FRAN

I don't.

CONNIE

She didn't go to school again today, you know.

Just one more thing Fran doesn't need to hear right now. She gives Connie the last item, a glass mixing bowl, then drains the sink.

FRAN

You have to practice tonight anyway.

CONNIE

Ah, come on. Do I have to?

FRAN

Twenty minutes.

CONNIE

But I'm just a kid.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRAN

You're the one that wanted to play that clarinet.

CONNIE

I don't need to practice. I'm good enough for that stupid band at school.

Fran sees Connie trying to slip the bowl into a drawer.

FRAN

You know where that goes. I'm paying six dollars a month for that thing.

CONNIE

Can I watch what I want after I practice?

FRAN

Depends.

Connie pulls a flimsy chair over and stands on it to reach an upper cabinet.

CONNIE

But Jessica always gets to-

FRAN

Quit whining or you're not going to watch TV at all.

CONNIE

This damn thing doesn't fit.

FRAN

Don't talk like that-

In a instant, the chair breaks and Connie falls on the glass bowl. Her arm is bleeding. She tries to lift it and SHRIEKS in pain. Fran rushes over.

FRAN (CONT'D)

It's all right. Calm down.

CONNIE

I'm bleeding to death!

Fran attempts to hold Connie still enough to wrap a dishtowel around her arm.

Jessica comes in. She sees the blood and reacts with casual interest.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Fran gives up with the towel.

FRAN

Damn it! Jessica, run next door and get the Coolies.

JESSICA

They moved.

FRAN

Well, find somebody who has a car.

JESSICA

Who?

FRAN

Just use your goddamn head!

JESSICA

I don't know anybody.

FRAN

Isn't there somebody on the other side?

Jessica shrugs. Fran lowers Connie's arm and gets up.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Useless kid! Stay here and watch your sister. Connie, calm down. I'll be right back.

Fran runs out. Jessica stands over Connie and watches her SCREAM. Then, she steps over her and opens the refrigerator.

CONNIE

Jessica hold me! Jessica hold me!  
My arm! Please! I'm bleeding! Hold me!

Connie's continuous whining seems to fuel Jessica's lack of compassion. She grabs a banana from the refrigerator and sits in a kitchen chair beside Connie, faces her and peels it slowly.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Jessica hold me! Please! Oh God, I'm bleeding to death! Help me!

Jessica watches her, then holds the banana out and raises her eyebrows innocently, as if offering Connie a bite. Connie closes her eyes and SCREAMS all the louder.

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CONTINUED: (3)

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Mom!!