

INT. FINN APARTMENT - MADISON'S ROOM - DAY

A pokey room. Early morning sunlight filters in through the windows. MADISON FINN (8) is asleep in bed. ALICE FINN (Mid 30s) kneels beside her. Leaning in, she brushes her daughter's dark hair from her forehead. Madison stirs.

MADISON
It's today already?

ALICE
That's right baby, your special day.

Yawning, Madison sits up, her eyes brightening as:

MADISON
I get to wear the--

ALICE
You get to wear the dress!

MADISON
Bows and everything?

Alice embraces Madison, kissing her.

ALICE
Bows and everything!

INT. FINN APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A dingy bathroom. Its fixtures rusty. Its tiles scuffed.

Still in her pajamas, Madison kneels on a chair, her back to the sink, her head tilted down as Alice soaks her hair in water. Alice opens the medicine cabinet.

MADISON
The good shampoo.

Alice pulls a PLASTIC BOTTLE from the cabinet, the liquid inside is a BRIGHT GLOSSY RED.

ALICE
Only the best for my baby on her special day.

Alice squirts the good shampoo into the palm of her hand. She starts working it into Madison's hair. Her movements slow, her fingers gentle.

Then picking up a plastic cup, Alice fills it with water and pours it over Madison's sudsy hair.

The red-tinged water swirls down the drain.

INT. FINN APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

A grubby kitchen. The counters grimy with some sticky substance. The front of the fridge dented smack in the middle as though someone threw something at it.

In her underwear, Madison sits on the kitchen counter, paper towels spread out beneath her, protecting her from the counter's grime.

Madison's face is made up: Dark eyeliner. Mascara. Pink lipgloss.

MADISON

Is he gonna bring me ice-cream?

Beside her is a METAL HAIR CURLER heating atop a hot plate.

ALICE

Sure.

One side of Madison's hair is already pigtailed, fat black curls spiraling through PALE PINK RIBBONS.

MADISON

Cuz he wants to treat me.

ALICE

That's right.

Alice picks up the other length of ribbon and ties up the rest of Madison's hair in a bow. Madison looks up at her.

MADISON

If he's my uncle, how come I never met him before?

Gripping her chin, Alice eases Madison's head back forward. Then grabbing the hair curler, she begins curling the other half of her hair.

ALICE

Quit chattering. Makes your head jerk about.

She picks up a can of HAIRSPRAY.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Nose.

Madison presses her small hands over her nose.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Eyes.

Madison squeezes her eyes shut.

Then a rushing sound as Alice pushes down. Madison's face is soon obscured in a thick white haze of hair spray.

INT. FINN APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Madison is sitting on a hardback chair. Kneeling at her feet, Alice rifles through a BAG OF NAIL POLISH.

MADISON

Do the blue. Arctic Ice. Or the green!

Alice pulls out a bottle of RED NAIL POLISH.

MADISON (CONT'D)

I thought I got to choose the--

ALICE

It's more grown up. You don't want your uncle to think you're a silly little girl, do you?

(Madison pauses, uncertain)

I didn't think so.

Alice paints Madison's baby toe a deep red.

ALICE (CONT'D)

See! Look at that.

(beat)

It's sexy.

INT. FINN APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alice zips up the back of Madison's dress. It's a poufy white confection of a dress.

Madison stares at herself, entranced.

MADISON

I love it, Mommy! I love it. Thank you so much!

Alice smiles but it doesn't reach her eyes.

ALICE

Don't thank me. Thank your uncle when he gets here. It was a gift from him.

MADISON

Really?

ALICE

He wanted you to have it. You remember that when he gets here. And you do everything he says. Understand?

The doorbell RINGS. Both Alice and Madison's attention snap to it. Alice swallows, her entire body tense.

Her eyes flicker to the beat-up wooden table in the center of the room, atop which sits a bottle of JACK and a CHIPPED WHITE MUG.

Taking a deep breath, Alice decants a healthy serving of Jack into the mug.

Then she hands it to Madison.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Why don't you try a little?

Madison shakes her head: "No." The doorbell RINGS again.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Go on. You wanna be big girl don't you? Well, this is what big girls do.

Unsure, Madison takes a small sip. Her face crumples into a grimace of disgust. She tries to hand the mug back but Alice forces it further into her grip.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Go on. All of it.

MADISON

It's nasty.

ALICE

Stop acting like a baby! I'm trying to help you. Drink it. Now.

Under her mother's unwavering gaze, Madison forces the whiskey down. After, Alice strokes her cheek.

ALICE (CONT'D)

There, now was that so bad?

She kisses Madison on the forehead before climbing to her feet, and heading to the door. Her hand on the handle, she pauses, her face conflicted.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Remember baby, no matter what happ...just remember: Mommy loves y--

A BANGING ON THE DOOR. Alice wrenches it open. She stops in shock at the person on the other side.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Cynthia, w-what are you do--

CYNTHIA (professional, Late-40s) muscles past Alice into the apartment. The door hangs slightly ajar behind her.

CYNTHIA
Two random drop-ins a month. Those are the terms of your probation.

She comes to an abrupt halt at the sight of Madison, her garish makeup, the open bottle of Jack Daniels on the table.

But before she can speak, a MAN (50s) in an immaculate grey suit, enters.

MAN
Hey, it was open so I--

He breaks off, taking in the scene. Madison smiles.

MADISON
T-thank you for my dress, uncle. I-I love it.

The Man's eyes flicker from Madison to Alice to Cynthia. His body hovers, caught, half inside, half outside the room.

CYNTHIA
(unyielding)
What is going on?

MADISON
Today's my special day.

Then Madison VOMITS unto the rug and the smell of Jack Daniels permeates the small, grimy room.

FADE OUT.