

# Synchronicity

a play

by

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## Characters [5F, 1M]

MAL: 16. Intelligent, but reckless, frightened by her burgeoning philosophical outlook.

SARAH/ALISON: 15. Burned on all visible parts of her body—no hair, no nose, no ears. She's got a sharp tongue to protect her thin skin.

JENNIFER : 40s. Married to Jim, mother of Mal. Funny and fun, but she hums with eternal anxiety.

KAREN : 40s. Sarah/Alison's mother. An American female Job, but with a waning faith. Exhausted by her quiet grief.

NICOLE : 16. Mal's longtime friend. Academic super star.

JIM : 40s. Married to Jennifer, father of Mal. Steady by nature and through faith. Practiced in handling his wife's fears.

## Setting

Mostly present-day. A rural town just on the fringe of the suburbs of St. Louis County in Missouri.

## Notes

A / indicates when the next line begins.

Any words within [ ] are unspoken.

LIGHTS UP.

#1 - The Bad Road.

Lights up on the living rooms.

In one: Spring 2014. After midnight. JENNIFER waits.

In the other: Spring 2013. Early evening. KAREN waits.

KAREN

(on her cell)

Pick up the phone...

JENNIFER

(on her cell)

Goddammit!

**They hang up.** Wait some more.

JIM enters JENNIFER's living room from their bedroom.

JIM

Come back to bed.

JENNIFER

I'm not gonna be able to sleep.

JIM

You don't need to wait up for her.

JENNIFER

I want to drive out and find her, but I know you don't want a scene.

JIM

I don't want you to get in an accident.

JENNIFER

Which is exactly--

JIM

She probably decided to stay at the party.

JENNIFER

I don't think it was a sleepover, Jim. I shouldn't have let her go out.

JIM

What're you gonna do, lock her in her room every Friday night? She's a good driver.

JENNIFER

She's a new driver. And it's not her I'm worried about. I'm worried about Shirley Olson's little asshole, who wrapped a car around a pole and got a new pickup truck out of it. I bet he's at that party, if he's not out drag racing on I-44.

JIM

You're making this up.

JENNIFER

Those police officers who come into Driver's Ed? The drunk driving speakers? They check in at my desk. I don't remember whose parents are throwing this week's backwoods bonfire, and I don't know if they're the type to stock up on Jager to impress a bunch of teenagers.

JIM

They wouldn't get them Jager. They might get Bud Light. Kidding. Don't spin out, babe.

JENNIFER

This is reasonable spinout! It's the Devil's hour and our daughter is flying through the woods in a flimsy Sedan and on *this road*--

JIM

(it's a familiar argument)

Which you've driven on for ten years--

JENNIFER

I can't take it anymore. I can't. I can't keep passing those white crosses and deflated balloons and muddy teddy bears.

Every time she's out there I can't think about anything else.

JIM

That's not because of the road.

JENNIFER

It is. It is. Can't we just move?

JIM

I'm not conscious enough to talk about this.

JENNIFER

I want to drive on streets that aren't littered with Hallmark cards.

JIM

You'd find some other boogeyman.

JENNIFER

Maybe, but that boogeyman wouldn't already have twenty victims all lined up in a row greeting me on my way to work.

When she's out there, when I try to close my eyes, I see those crosses, one after another, and then--a fresh one--with her yearbook picture propped up in front...

JIM

Jenny. Hey. She'll be right back to us. OK? Breathe. She's probably worn out from a fun night, drooling on someone's couch, curled up safe like a little bean. How does Dr. Wilson say to ride this out? Huh?

Jenn.

In KAREN's kitchen:

KAREN

(on the phone)

Hi, did Sarah...? Okay she left already. Okay. No it's fine, I'm sure she...Uh huh. I'll let you know.

JIM

Jenn!

JENNIFER

What if I just went for a walk out there? With a flashlight? I don't have to take the car--

JIM

Sometimes you have to live with uncertainty! We can't keep--

JENNIFER

This time, Jim, I feel something, this time it could be--

Two sudden knocks at both doors.

KAREN hurries to one.

JENNIFER bolts for the other, half-yelling, as JIM follows.

**MAL staggers into JENNIFER. Drunk, limping, bloody.**  
JENNIFER seizes her in crazily mingled fury and relief.

JENNIFER

Mal! Oh god--!

**Blue and red police lights spin across KAREN's window.**

KAREN sees the police lights through her front windows.

KAREN

Oh no. Please no.

A person appears, a hood over her head, between both spaces. She watches both, until:

Blackout.

#2 - The Morning After.

**MAL** sleeps on the couch. **JENNIFER** listens to her breathing as **JIM** enters from the bedroom.

**JENNIFER**

I don't think she should be sleeping.

**JIM**

She doesn't have a concussion. They ran all the tests--

**JENNIFER**

I don't understand--they must've missed something. There's no way...

**JIM**

She's fine to sleep. You should too.

**JENNIFER**

I might never sleep again.  
She still smells like booze.

**JIM**

I'm gonna search her room before she gets up.

**JENNIFER**

Her cell phone's cracked, right?

**JIM**

I say we don't replace it...ever.

**JENNIFER**

Can you change the wifi password?

**JIM**

Yep.

**JENNIFER**

And we'll take the TV out of her room?

**JIM**

Exactly. For fun, she gets a set of playing cards and a Bible.

JENNIFER

I wanna figure out whose dumbass parents went out of town and let that party happen.

JIM

I'd like to myself, but we can't--

JENNIFER

What?

JIM

This--we have to keep it quiet. If you go interrogating kids, it'll get back to the police--

MAL stirs in her sleep.

MAL

Ow...

A total switch in demeanor: Sick Kid mode.

JENNIFER

Mally baby, are you ok? Is it your head?

MAL

My leg hurts.

JIM

I'll get more ice.

**A knock on the door.** JENNIFER and JIM share an alarmed look. **JENNIFER opens the door to find NICOLE waiting.**

NICOLE

Is she OK?

JENNIFER

What, she--Mal is grounded...

NICOLE

Thank God! I was so scared when I heard--

JENNIFER

What did you hear?

NICOLE

She left me a voicemail last night. Here--

NICOLE pulls out her iPhone. JENNIFER flinches.

JENNIFER

Don't--I don't want to hear that!

NICOLE

She got home okay?

JENNIFER

No, she flipped my car end over end.

NICOLE

No no no no no--

JIM

No more crying. Everyone has cried enough for today. Come in, see, she's fine. Maybe you can watch her while I deal with the car.

(to JENNIFER)

and you can get some sleep?

NICOLE

I can do that! Let me do that.

JENNIFER

I told you I'm not going to be able to sleep.

JIM starts shepherding JENNIFER to their bedroom.

JIM

(in an undertone to JENNIFER)

Before she leaves, you can drill her for details.

JENNIFER

There's ibuprofen on the coffee table, and ice packs in the fridge--

JIM

(to NICOLE)

You'll take good care of her, right?

(to JENNIFER)

I'll call you.

(to MAL)

Get some more rest, okay Mally?

JIM exits. JENNIFER exits.

**NICOLE punches MAL's arm.**

MAL

OW! Could you not?

Okay I'm sorry, I'm really sorry Nicole, I know I did the dumbest worst stupidfuck thing ever and I will never never never never do it again, okay? But I was napping. Can I go back to napping? My head hurts.

NICOLE

Oh? Your head hurts? I'm sorry you have a HANGOVER from your DRUNK DRIVING ACCIDENT!

MAL

I'm sorry! I deserve it, I know, I know all the things you're gonna say, but I have to tell you--

NICOLE

You know what I'm gonna say?

MAL

Just...

NICOLE

That you're stupid?

MAL

Yes.

NICOLE

That you scared me so bad I threw up?

MAL

Um--

NICOLE

You crashed on the same road where Sarah Nelson died last year! A year ago *yesterday*.

If she could die like that, I thought, when I head your voicemail, there was no way you were OK--I mean, do you remember what you said? The first time you called me?

MAL

I called you?

NICOLE

I said, "You're gonna kill yourself," and you said, "Who cares."

MAL

I'm sorry.

NICOLE

I cared. I care.

MAL

I know...

NICOLE

Were you *trying* to--?

MAL

...? No! No! I don't think--

NICOLE

You don't think?!

MAL

No I'm sure I was just joking--

NICOLE

Very funny. Hilarious.

MAL

I was really drunk.

NICOLE

You've just been all...

MAL

What?

NICOLE

Since we studied existentialism in AP Lit you've been.

MAL

Yeah.

NICOLE

Just like...

MAL

I know.

NICOLE

I don't understand why but you've been just...sad. Or mad. I don't get it.

MAL

I don't really either.

NICOLE

Don't you miss youth group?

MAL

Sort of...

NICOLE

At church, they ask where you've been and I don't know what to tell them.

MAL

I don't either.

NICOLE

Why are you going to Philosophy Club and hanging out with the trench coat kids?

MAL

Because sometimes they think like I do. They hear the same things in those books...

NICOLE

What, like, life is pointless, we're so bored, let's die already?

MAL

See I didn't want to talk to you about this.

NICOLE

Why not?

MAL

Because you don't see anything the way I do, you just laugh at me.

NICOLE

I'm not laughing. I don't think it's funny that you think life is pointless. We got *baptized* together. Didn't that mean something to you?

MAL

I thought I'd believe in it if I did it, but.

NICOLE

No! No, you believed in it!

MAL

I thought I was supposed to but then I realized other people feel the way I feel--

NICOLE

Like that hacky sack guy with the ponytail?

MAL

Eli is really smart.

NICOLE

You weren't like this...before.

MAL

I kinda was.

NICOLE

Not in middle school! In third grade!

MAL

When I had that panic attack at the planetarium?

NICOLE

Okay, but what about...Camp Timberlee? Or your birthday sleepover at the Holiday Inn? Or when Dan Lang got your phone number?

MAL

What about that...?

NICOLE

You were happy then!

MAL

It's not that I'm never happy, it's that--since we read that stuff in class, like *Myth of Sisyphus*, I felt like maybe that is all life is--just rolling a rock up a hill, over and over, every day same rock, same hill, til we die.

NICOLE

Why would you think that?

MAL

I don't want to but it just feels kind of true--

NICOLE

No it doesn't--

MAL

You don't understand, I know you don't but that's how I felt, and I couldn't talk to you about it, and it's been like...it fucked me up. To think there isn't like...purpose behind anything.

NICOLE

Yeah because that's a stupid way to live.

MAL

Would you just--

NICOLE

I really thought you were **dead**. You left a voicemail, after the first call, after you crashed.

MAL

I did?

NICOLE

And you were crying and begging for someone to help you. Then it just cut out.

MAL

(remembering)

Someone did help me.

NICOLE

What?



MAL

Maybe. My parents keep saying it's kind of a miracle--it felt like when I used to be alone in my room, and I'd feel like someone was watching me? But not in a bad way. Like watching *over* me.

NICOLE

You're sure you don't have head trauma?

MAL

Yes--?

NICOLE

You're not hallucinating? Or hearing voices?

MAL

No!

NICOLE

That's just. Really. Crazy.

MAL

You're the one who still believes in--

NICOLE

In what?

MAL

I don't know.

NICOLE

I believe in God but like this is. This is.

I mean.

I did pray for you. I was so freaked out after you called the first time, that I threw up, and then I prayed and prayed and promised God I would do devotionals every day and witness to you and...

MAL

You think that's why...? I mean that...sucks for Sarah Nelson.

NICOLE

What are you talking about?

MAL

Like, did no one pray for her? She burned to death and that accident wasn't even her fault.

NICOLE

I don't--I mean--*you* saw the--this is all YOUR idea--can't you just be happy you're alive?!?

MAL

Yeah. Yeah. I dunno, see I feel fucked up still but, I am kinda...happy. Like I'm so mad at myself for what I did, and I'm sorry and everything, but...I feel like I was supposed to keep...living...?

JENNIFER re-enters.

JENNIFER

Time's up. Visiting hours have ended.

(nudging NICOLE towards the front door)

Come on.

**JENNIFER herds NICOLE away from where MAL can hear her. MAL curls up on the couch.**

JENNIFER

Nicole.

NICOLE

...Mrs. Roth.

JENNIFER

How long has she been doing this? Getting wasted in the woods?

NICOLE

I don't know...

JENNIFER

I get that it's not cool to tattle, but I need an idea of how bad it is.

NICOLE

I've been really busy with National Honors Society--

JENNIFER

How much is she drinking, is she doing other drugs, is she--active--

NICOLE

This is weird, Mrs. Roth.

JENNIFER

Look at her. Please help me out here. I'm gonna talk to her myself, but at this point I don't know what I can trust.

NICOLE

All I know is, she goes to parties sometimes, and she drinks there.

JENNIFER

Any pot or pills or--

NICOLE

I don't know, I'm not invited.

JENNIFER

(with pity)

I'm sorry.

(recalibrating clunkily back into  
Responsible Mom mode)

I mean, that's a good thing, you don't want to risk it.

NICOLE

She's really sad.

JENNIFER

About what?

NICOLE

She should probably be screened for a mood disorder.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry?

NICOLE

The substance abuse. Sometimes she twitches and taps her foot, she complains about random stomachaches. Classic anxiety/depression symptoms. And those disorders are hereditary, so....

She's clearly referring to JENNIFER. It's not a flattering implication.

JENNIFER

I'm aware. You don't think it's normal teen angst?

NICOLE

I don't have angst.

JENNIFER

You don't worry about anything?

NICOLE

No. I always remember, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

JENNIFER

Mark?

NICOLE

Matthew. The chemicals in her brain might be unbalanced, like yours. So maybe all she needs is medication, maybe some faith-based counseling, and she'll be better.

JENNIFER

Well. OK. Thank you, Nicole.

NICOLE

If it makes you feel better, I'm in charge of the Drunk Driving Drama next month--you know the presentation before prom?--and I'm gonna make her help. It could just keep her busy? And I'll be with her.  
I'll see you on Monday.

JENI

Drive safe.

They share a look: the phrase has sharper meaning now. NICOLE exits.

**JENNIFER** crosses back to **MAL**, snuggled into the couch. **JENNIFER** notices **NICOLE**'s phone, left on the cushion, and picks it up. She can't resist— she goes to the voicemail and starts to listen to it, fighting panic as it continues. She sinks to the floor beside **MAL**, drops the phone, and reaches a hand out to touch her daughter.

MAL

(sleepy)

Mom?

JENNIFER

I could kill you.

Through the window, we catch a glimpse of SARAH  
staring in.

#3 - GHOST.

Later that night. MAL's bedroom. MAL carefully opens the door, listening to see if anyone's awake. She shuts it again, then grabs a flashlight, opens the window, and climbs out.

She walks to the crash site--where there's a white cross and framed yearbook picture, surrounded by bundles of wilted flowers and muddied teddy bears, constituting a makeshift roadside shrine.

MAL's flashlight beam catches a person, crouching there, picking through the offerings.

MAL approaches, trying not to make a sound. She watches the crouching person, for a long time, deciding whether or not to speak. She notices her track jacket. Finally:

...Hello?

MAL

The person jolts up and faces MAL. Her hood falls down: moonlight illuminates the patchwork of raw flesh clinging to her bones--pale and fishlike, stretched and gathered in haphazard bulges, reflecting an alien glow. She's burned everywhere.

Shit!

MAL

The person flees.

Please, don't go!  
Oh God.  
Fuck, fuck fuck.

MAL

**MAL remains, frozen,** unsure of what she's seen.

## #4 - THE HEIST.

The next day. JENNIFER's desk, in the attendance office at a high school. KAREN waits beside the desk, holding a bulging plastic bag, as JENNIFER finishes a phone call.

JENNIFER

(distracted)

Who are you here to see?

KAREN

Coach Clark.

JENNIFER

(still looking at her computer)

And what's your name?

KAREN

Karen. Nelson.

JENNIFER

(looking up; recognizing her)

Oh.

KAREN

We're neighbors.

JENNIFER

We are. I'll call Coach Clark--

(on the phone)

Yes, can I talk to--oh. Another one? Okay well have him call the front office back. Ok.

(hanging up)

You should probably wait a minute, Coach Clark is disposing of a dead possum on the track. Possum or opossum?

KAREN

Either is disgusting.

JENNIFER

You can have a seat.

KAREN does not sit.

KAREN

What do you think of the memorial?

JENNIFER

Hmm?

KAREN

Sarah's memorial. In the hallway.

Jennifer

I...um...

Karen

Do you think it looks like her?

JENNIFER

I didn't know her very well.

KAREN

I hate it.

Those kind of memorials--so formal. Makes her look like part of a PSA. People always remember dead teenagers as school portraits, or prom photos for God's sake. It makes them all look the same, like they were never alive, like Sarah was always an eight-by-ten waiting to get pasted onto a Driver's Ed poster. I'm being crazy, I realize that, but it's been a year now, a whole year, and I *hate* that photo. And the frame. And the poem and the *dove*.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry the school didn't ask you before--

KAREN

They asked Dale. My ex-husband, the activist, he handles the PR. It didn't seem worth arguing about at the time, but I can't...I'm still thinking about it.

JENNIFER

I understand.

KAREN

He doesn't remember but she *hated* that picture. She wouldn't want this to be her *legacy* in the school.

The thing is, the whole memorial, it's in a glass case which is locked so I can't--do you know where I could get keys?

You know what, please forget I said anything, this is ridiculous.

JENNIFER

I have keys.

KAREN

You do?

JENNIFER

I have all the keys. My daughter calls me the Hagrid of this school.

KAREN

Would you--

JENNIFER

I absolutely would.

**KAREN and JENNIFER exit. NICOLE enters and helps herself to JENNIFER's candy bowl. She makes herself at home on one of the sturdy, blocky waiting chairs.**

**After a moment, KAREN and JENNIFER hurry back into the office. They don't notice NICOLE right away. They're almost laughing.**

KAREN

I feel like a burglar.

JENNIFER

You're only stealing from yourself.  
Nicole!

NICOLE

I came to get my phone?

JENNIFER goes to her desk to retrieve NICOLE's phone. It's tense; JENNIFER and KAREN both anxious about what NICOLE has seen and might say.

NICOLE

What's the secret?

JENNIFER

We're just reframing something. Some things. For the hallway.

NICOLE

Are you Sarah Nelson's mom?

KAREN

I guess everybody knows the dead girl's mom.

JENNIFER hands over the phone to NICOLE. NICOLE notices KAREN carrying the old framed photo.

NICOLE

Are you redoing the memorial?

KAREN

...Yes.

NICOLE

That's good. It was pretty cliché.

JENNIFER

Nicole--!

KAREN

Exactly! All the doves and roses, and the *poem*. I appreciate the...effort... But aesthetically it was just--this PHOTO especially--

NICOLE

She looks orange.

JENNIFER

*Nicole!*

KAREN

She got a spray tan right before picture day. She was so embarrassed she called *herself* Snookie.

NICOLE

I wouldn't want people to remember me by my yearbook picture. I had corn in my braces.

KAREN

I used one from track practice. That's her--*alive*. Dale didn't think it was "appropriate." Not serious enough for him.

JENNIFER

I like it.

KAREN

I realize this is beyond passive aggressibe. It's been eating my brain. Part of it is all the grief literature? The brochures for bereaved parents?

(gesturing to the old frame and poem)

It all looks like this. Cursive font and pastel florals. It's sad enough that she died. Her memorial shouldn't be...

NICOLE

Lame.

With her mission accomplished, KAREN takes in her surroundings and becomes more self-conscious, a little winded.

JENNIFER

(to NICOLE)

Don't you have class?

NICOLE

I have a 98%.

JENNIFER

(to NICOLE)

Go, before they give *me* detention.

NICOLE

It was nice to meet you, Mrs. Nelson.  
Sarah was always really nice to me.  
So.

There's nothing else to say. NICOLE exits. **KAREN** considers the bag of old memorial materials.

KAREN

What should I do with--the evidence?

JENNIFER

(mock-conspiratorial)

I'll bury it.

KAREN

Thank you.

JENNIFER

Sorry I haven't been such a good neighbor. I could've made a casserole, or something. I don't know.

KAREN

Did you come to the wake?

JENNIFER

I did.

KAREN

You were sobbing.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry--

KAREN

No you were discreet enough, I just remember you let Dale squeeze the life out of you.

JENNIFER

I'm sure he needed to squeeze someone.

KAREN

He's always been a squeezer.

(It's a weird word. They laugh at it.)

**The phone rings.** JENNIFER answers it.

JENNIFER

Uh huh. I'll send her over.

(hanging up)

Coach Clark is ready for you.

KAREN

Thank you for this. I really...I thought I might end up getting escorted out of here, but I had to--

JENNIFER

Of course. I'm glad I could do something.

KAREN

Well. I'll go, now, let you do your actual job.

JENNIFER

Could I--would you like to get coffee, or lunch, or something, sometime?

KAREN

I'm sorry?

JENNIFER

I'd like to take you to lunch. I'd like to be a better neighbor.

#5 - Not Normal.

**JENNIFER and MAL enter the kitchen, just home from school** after a silent car ride. JIM enters. Attempts to break the awful silence.

JIM

Hey guys! What's the scoop at Jefferson High? What's the hot goss? I don't wanna be out of the loop.

(to MAL)

Any more hookups in the handicapped bathroom? Sexting scandals?

(to JENNIFER)

What about the admins, huh? Is Principal Davis still wrecking the faculty bathroom?

JENNIFER

I can't pretend like everything is normal right now.

JIM

What d'you mean?

JENNIFER

She's not grounded for breaking curfew.

MAL

I know that.

JIM

Is there something you wanna talk about--

JENNIFER

Yes. Mal, go to your room.

MAL

What am I supposed to do in there?

JIM

Mal--

MAL

There's literally nothing in there.

JIM

Because you're being punished.

MAL

I know but--

JIM

This was your doing, kid. You're not gonna get any sympathy from me.

MAL

I don't wanna be by myself.

JENNIFER

Maybe she should be a part of this conversation.

JIM

Which one?

JENNIFER

The one where we decide to call the police.

MAL

What?

JIM

Why?!

JENNIFER

To report that you wrecked that car because you were driving drunk.

MAL

Mom!

JIM

I know you're not thrilled about lying to the insurance company--

JENNIFER

And anyone else who asks about the accident--

JIM

But no one suspects anything.

JENNIFER

Exactly. We should tell the truth.

MAL

You want me to go to jail?!

JIM

She's grounded indefinitely. She doesn't have the Internet, or a phone. She can't communicate with the outside world when she's not at school, *with you*.

JENNIFER

It's not enough.

JIM

(to MAL)

Go to your room for a minute and let me--

MAL

No! I want to know why Mom wants to turn me in!

JIM

Pause for a second and think about what you're suggesting--

JENNIFER

I've been thinking about it all day, I can't stop thinking about it.

MAL

You want me to have a criminal record?

JENNIFER

I don't *want* that, but you have to face what you did.

MAL

Oh my God!

JIM

You are not turning our daughter over to the police.

JENNIFER

We didn't do the right thing.

JIM

This happened once. And she's never gonna do it again, right?

MAL

No! I said I'm sorry a million times!

JENNIFER

It's not as simple as sorry!

JIM

She didn't hurt anybody but herself. You told me about Shirely Olson's kid--

JENNIFER

I don't want to be Shirley Olson. I don't want to raise an asshole.

MAL

You think I'm an asshole?

JENNIFER

I don't want you to become one!

MAL

What am I supposed to do? Just hate myself all the time? Because I already do!

JIM

Mal--

JENNIFER

That's not--

JIM

Do you see? You don't have to drive home the point--

JENNIFER

It's not about driving home the point, it's--when you do something like this, there's a price, and you haven't paid it.

MAL

What is it?

JENNIFER

We have to make it right. There has to be a cost. Maybe if we turn her in, then--

JIM

The police will think we're crazy assholes for tattling on our own kid? When there's no evidence and no one else was involved?

JENNIFER

If we don't pay now, what happens later?

MAL

I'm not even allowed to drive anymore--

JENNIFER

It's not about your driving.

JIM

You've lost me, Jen.

JENNIFER

For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction.

JIM

What?

MAL

What?

JENNIFER

So the action is, Mal flips a car. Yet she gets home safe. Alive, no concussion, barely a bruise on her.

JIM

*Thank God!*

JENNIFER

Yes, but--what's the *reaction*?

JIM

A smashed-up car?

JENNIFER

Not the same! Not equal! Nothing permanent, no DUI, insurance is covering everything so we're probably going to get a better car out of it, for God's sake. What's the pushback? Where is the cost?

JIM

Are you talking about karma? You think if we call the cops we can fix her karma?

JENNIFER

Equal and opposite reaction! It's science!

JIM

It sounds like karma. And I don't believe in karma.

JENNIFER

She cheated death!

JIM

This isn't fucking Final Destination!

MAL

I hope not.

JENNIFER

Do not make fun of me.

JIM

I'm not, Jenn!

When I saw what was left of that car...I could go crazy playing what-if. It was a close call, yeah, and I never want to get that close again, but it's in the past. You've gotta accept the good stuff and stop looking for the bad. We're all here, we're whole. Now can we make some dinner?

MAL

I'm not hungry.

JIM

Mal--

MAL

Sorry I didn't get as injured as I deserve.

JENNIFER

That isn't what I'm--

MAL

Sorry I'm such a fuckup that the *police* need to be alerted!

JIM

You know she's not--

MAL

I'll just be in my room waiting for DEATH to come back for me!

MAL stomps off.

JIM

You could never just let good things happen to you.

JENNIFER

Karen Nelson came to the school today.

JIM

Ahhhhh.

JENNIFER

This close, Jim. I was almost just like her.

JIM

We can't think like that.

JENNIFER

You mean me. / can't think like that. You never do.

JIM

Jenn...

JENNIFER

How do you not think like that.

JIM

I turn it off. Dismiss it.

JENNIFER

It doesn't go away. Just pulses in my head. I felt so guilty I asked her to lunch.

JIM

What did she say?

JENNIFER

We're going to lunch.

JIM

Maybe we could think about all this in a different way. Let's say you bumped into Karen Nelson for a reason. There's that highway improvement project her husband started. They're trying to get the curve smoothed out, get more signs, more awareness.

JENNIFER

It's her ex-husband.

JIM

It's still her cause if it was her kid.

JENNIFER

She would hate me if she knew about Mal.

JIM

She doesn't have to know. Maybe, you know, maybe she just needs a friend.

## #6 - CRASH SITE.

MAL sits in her room, spiraling down. She paces, starting to breathe faster and faster, clenching her hands, until she decides to grab her flashlight and climb out of her window again.

She approaches the crash site. No one is there, but she sits down near the shrine, and waits.

Eventually, the person--the one she saw before--approaches. And spots MAL. They both freeze.

MAL

Don't leave!  
 You're real. You're really here.  
 I remember you. I don't remember everything, but I know you helped me.  
 Can you say...anything?  
 Are you my guardian angel?

ALISON

Do I look like a fucking angel?

MAL

I don't know. I've never seen anything like...you before.  
 I wanted to thank you. For protecting me. For saving me.  
 It's a miracle I'm alive, and it's because of you!

(a slow realization)

You're burned, aren't you?  
 Everywhere.  
 Are you--are you Sarah?  
 You helped me.  
 I keep finding you *here*.  
 I get it.

ALISON

Sarah's dead.

MAL

So you're a...ghost.

ALISON

I didn't save you. You just didn't die. I don't know why. You should have.

MAL

Don't say that.

ALISON

Why did you come back?

MAL

I had to know if I was--what you were.

There has to be a reason you're here and not...Passed On.

I think I survived for a reason, too, like there's something I'm supposed to do, and I think you can help me find out what it is.

ALISON

Like Jacob Marley? Or Obi-Wan Kenobi, pushing you towards your destiny?

You think God picked you to live, and me to die--to burn alive?

MAL

I don't / know

ALISON

You think I died to help you stop driving drunk and like, go to college?

I was gonna be a social worker. I was gonna learn Spanish and help kids and single moms and homeless people. Are you gonna top that?

MAL

No--

ALISON

When I heard you crash, I thought I'd find pieces of a person.

Your bones should have punched through your skin and your spine should have splintered and your brain should've splashed all over the dashboard.

It's not fair. I deserved to live, and you deserved to die.

I wish you had.

MAL is starting to panic.

MAL

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

ALISON  
What's wrong with you? Don't...

MAL  
Once it starts I can't...

**She puts a hand on MAL's shoulder.**

A long beat as MAL's panic attack winds down.

MAL  
You can touch me.

ALISON  
...Yeah.

MAL  
Can I touch you?

ALISON  
Why?

**MAL reaches up and touches her face.**

MAL  
Can you feel me?

ALISON  
Yes.

MAL  
Does it hurt?

ALISON  
Not anymore.  
Why do you...freak out like that.

MAL  
I don't know. My mom does it too.

ALISON  
Are you sick?

MAL

I guess. When I crashed I think maybe I was *trying* to.

ALISON

Why would you try / to crash?

MAL

I don't know exactly but--everything seems like chaos. And most of the time I feel bad. Or I don't feel anything at all. So why bother? And I know that sounds like dumb teenage bullshit--

ALISON

No. It doesn't.

MAL

Really?

ALISON

No. That sounds true.

MAL

But I didn't die, and you helped me, even if you didn't want to, and I felt differently. I want to keep that feeling.

ALISON

The chaos thing sounds more accurate.

MAL

Maybe...maybe I'm supposed to help *you*. You're stuck here, maybe there's something I could help fix, so you can...cross over! I could give people messages for you! Your mom or dad--

ALISON

NO!

MAL

Why not?

ALISON

They'd be scared.

ALISON

They're Christians. They think I'm in heaven. I can't ruin that for them.

But maybe--

MAL

No way.

ALISON

I could--

MAL

PROMISE you won't say anything.

ALISON

Ok...

MAL

To anyone. You can't tell people you're seeing ghosts. They'll...lock you up in a hospital.

ALISON

Wouldn't you kind of like that?

MAL

Then I wouldn't have anyone to talk to.

ALISON

But you hate me.

MAL

I think you're stupid for drunk driving, and you're selfish, and it's not fair that you're alive--But I don't hate you.

ALISON

What else could I do for you? I mean, do you really just sit here all day? I could bring you--I don't know if you eat, or whatever.

MAL

You could...

ALISON

What?

MAL

Keep coming here.

ALISON

Okay. MAL

To talk. ALISON

Yeah. Yeah, I can do that. MAL

Beat.

It's cold out here. MAL

You could share my jacket. ALISON

Okay. MAL

MAL sits cautiously beside SARAH. They huddle under the jacket.

Weird. MAL

What? SARAH

You're warm. MAL

#7 - Lunch Date.

**KAREN's office at a local church. She sits at her desk, staring at her computer. JENNIFER enters hesitantly, attempting to announce herself with an awkward little noise or gesture. KAREN jumps.**

JENNIFER

Sorry to startle you--

KAREN

Is it already noon?

JENNIFER

I know, that desktop tunnel-vision. I click on some quiz and next thing I know, it's been two hours and I've watched fifteen videos of horses falling down.

**JENNIFER begins talking a packed lunch out of her purse.**

KAREN

You brought--?

JENNIFER

It's such a short break, I thought I'd pack lunch for both of us! I have tuna or ham, and Sun Chips--you're not gluten-free are you?

KAREN

No.

JENNIFER

I'm not much of a cook but I assumed sandwiches are a safe bet? Do you like fish or pig better?

KAREN stares at the sandwiches.

KAREN

Why are we doing this again?

JENNIFER

Is this a bad time?

KAREN

This seems like a lot of effort.

JENNIFER

I'm...sorry?

KAREN

You said you wanted to be a better neighbor, but...you could just loan me some eggs.

JENNIFER

If I caught you at a bad time--

KAREN

I'm sorry, you seem very nice. I just. I thought I'd be up for this today, but already I can tell I'm not going to be an ideal lunch companion.

JENNIFER

I don't mind.

KAREN takes in JENNIFER's anxious, persistent enthusiasm. She still doesn't trust it.

KAREN

She wasn't drunk.

JENNIFER

I'm...sorry?

KAREN

Sarah wasn't drunk. She wasn't texting. She wasn't speeding. She skidded a couple inches for a split second, it was that simple, that's the whole story, so, if that's what you want to know, now you do.

JENNIFER

...I had heard that...

KAREN

But you wondered. There had to be a reason, the mistake she made. But, I'm sorry, I can't help you, there was no reason, it doesn't make sense.

JENNIFER

That's not why I wanted to have lunch.

KAREN

I'm not available for conversion, obviously.

JENNIFER

I'm, um, I'm agnostic.

I just...I like you?

Fixing up that memorial, everything you said was very...true. I'm a mom, and moms, motherhood, can be so cheesy. And you're not cheesy. And I like that.

**JENNIFER holds out a sandwich. KAREN takes it.**

JENNIFER

Trouble with ambulance chasers?

KAREN

Hearse chasers. They don't realize they're doing it, usually. It's other parents. Under all the sympathy, they're playing detective.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry about that.

KAREN

This woman at the wake, she asked me if Sarah was wearing sunglasses.

JENNIFER

What? Why?

KAREN

It's like she expected me to realize, it was the glare that killed Sarah—if only she'd been wearing her sunglasses she could've been saved. So then this woman could feel she'd solved it, case closed, and she'd go home and tell her kid to always wear his sunglasses and she'd sleep peacefully knowing her child wouldn't end up dead in a car wreck because she taught him better. She'd breathe easy thinking Sarah's death was avoidable and not the actual blameless, unforeseeable hell it really was.

JENNIFER

What a smug bitch.

KAREN

I used to be smug too. You always want to think you taught your kid better.

JENNIFER

I hear the horror stories, up at the schools--street racing, can huffing, girls soaking tampons in vodka--

No!  
KAREN

Oh, yeah.  
JENNIFER

Why?  
KAREN

Apparently it gets you drunker faster. Especially when you put a second one in the back door.  
JENNIFER

You're kidding.  
KAREN

Sometimes I catch myself thinking, "Mal would never do something that stupid." Then I remember all the fucked-up shit I got away with. Sorry for swearing, in a church--  
JENNIFER

Don't worry about it, Pastor Carl's a potty mouth.  
KAREN

Really? I don't feel so bad then--you'd think after ten years of working for a high school I'd have kicked it.  
JENNIFER

I tried to be so careful when Sarah was little, but once, she couldn't have been older than five, she dropped a chicken nugget on the kitchen floor, looked up at me and said: "Jesus H. Christ."  
Sorry. I can't help bringing her up.  
KAREN

That's all right.  
JENNIFER

It'll get old quickly.  
KAREN

It's like you said, she didn't just exist as a yearbook picture. People should know her as more than a memorial.  
JENNIFER

JENNIFER

That sounds nice, but...

JENNIFER

And I assume it makes you feel better than not talking about her.

KAREN

It's like scratching an itch. Or when you're sixteen with a new boyfriend and you're always waiting for any excuse to bring him up. Someone will make some nothing comment, some remark about...the dogwood blossoms out on the front walkway, and I can't resist, I'll say, "Sarah was allergic to dogwood trees." I mean, who cares? I wouldn't care. And, you know, it's like dropping a brick on a conversation. Going from gardening to dead daughter. But I can't help it.

JENNIFER

The kids call it word vomit.

KAREN

That's it exactly. Word vomit. That's how it feels.

JENNIFER

I tend to barf up worries. Boring nonsense fears. I fret about mercury poisoning and ibuprofen overdose. And I'm completely aware of how absurd it is to—to cancel dinner plans a week in advance because there's a sixty percent chance of rain, but I'm a runaway train of neuroses. Choo-choo.

JENNIFER is embarrassed, but KAREN laughs a little.

JENNIFER

My husband—my very patient husband—he had the idea that I could re-route some of that energy. I wanted to ask you about helping out with your highway safety initiative—

KAREN

(curt)

That's Dale's project.

JENNIFER

The ex-husband? The activist?

KAREN

Yes.

JENNIFER

You're not involved?

KAREN

Not in the least.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry.

KAREN

It's not your fault it's a sore subject. I shouldn't be so...

JENNIFER

You can be however you want.

KAREN

I only got the latest email about the "initiative" before you walked in. I opened up my inbox and there's Sarah, that awful Oompa Loompa picture. It knocks the breath out of me every time.

JENNIFER

Doesn't he ask you about it--or, warn you?

KAREN

He resigned himself to my lack of interest a long time ago. I think it makes him feel better, to see her everywhere, but I'll just be running errands and suddenly there's a flier with her face and I have to try not to lose it in the grocery store.

JENNIFER

You're entitled to lose it sometimes.  
So you don't do the charity, scholarship...?

KAREN

That day I met you, when I met with Coach Clark. He tried to get me involved with that Drunk Driving Drama. He seemed to think anything to do with driving should involve me, even though Sarah wasn't drunk, no one was.

JENNIFER

You want your own cause, not someone else's.

KAREN grows suspicious again.

KAREN

Are you here to try to rope me into some project?

JENNIFER

No! No, I just assumed you had something, since it always seemed like the only thing a parent can do to...get through...everything.

KAREN

Based on talk shows, and Lifetime--

JENNIFER

I'm really not trying to recommend anything, I have no idea what it's like--my parents haven't even died yet, so I'm just in awe of you because you're sitting upright and employable and you're not sobbing this very minute.

KAREN

Those mothers--the charity moms, the activists--they think their kid's death can mean something. That it could make other kids safe. But I don't--it doesn't make me feel better to make roads safer for other drivers. If Dale fixed that highway and we saved a hundred people, I'd trade all of them for Sarah. You don't want to be my friend.

JENNIFER

I do. I'd do the same for Mal. I'm not like the talk show moms, I'm like you.

#8 - Crash Site Again.

At the crash site. The roadside shrine looks more ragged than ever. MAL is attempting to spruce it up-- she rearranges soggy stuffed animals, straightens the white cross, and wipes rain and mud off a framed photo of Sarah. From a bag brought from home, she pulls a vase containing wildflowers, and some tealights. As she lights the wicks, SARAH approaches.

ALISON

What are you doing?

MAL

(startled)

FUCK!

ALISON

(not very sincere)

Sorry.

MAL

Whoa. Okay. You're still here.

ALISON

Did you bring these?

MAL

I thought I could keep it nice for you.

At school, on the anniversary, they did a big chalk mural. All over the front walkway, did you see--? It was really beautiful. The track team, NHS, they all worked on it. It was even bigger than the one for Taylor Coleman.

...He was a sophomore...he was on the basketball team I think? He had a brain aneurysm.

ALISON

Why was mine bigger?

MAL

Maybe because he transferred from another school?

I'm not drinking anymore. Since last time.

ALISON

Why do you even like it? Doesn't it make you feel stupid?

MAL

It makes everything easy. It washes my brain out, so I can have fun.

ALISON

It brainwashes you?

MAL

No! It's more like...it rinses out the scary thoughts. Usually.

ALISON

(genuinely curious but trying to hide it)

What was the party like?

MAL

It wasn't much of a party. There were only like fifteen people there.

ALISON

That sounds like a party...

MAL

I guess. I went to one after Homecoming with like *all* of the upperclassmen, and there were Jello shots, and a huge bonfire, and Andy Wallace set up a DJ booth, and so many people were in line for the bathroom that I had to pee with a bunch of cheerleaders in the woods.

ALISON is riveted.

ALISON

You peed in the woods? In front of people?

MAL

That stuff doesn't feel weird when you're drunk. Everyone is happy and nice and wants to be your friend, even stuck-up bitches like Haley Durst.

ALISON

So, you're popular.

MAL

I don't think so.

ALISON

You get invited to parties. I didn't go to parties.

MAL

You didn't?

ALISON

Not party-parties. I went to Steak 'N' Shake and watched Zac Efron movies at sleepovers.

MAL

I'm more into Ansel Elgort.

ALISON

He's the BEST! Most teen stars are fake, but he's an *actor*.

MAL

I just like his mole. His teeth. Even though his name sounds like a burp.

(as a burp)

Ansel Elgort.

ALISON

(as a burp)

Ansel Elgort.

(trying on slang)

Do you like...mack on guys? At the parties?

MAL

You sound like my dad. Nobody says "mack on." You say, like, make out. Or hook up.

ALISON

I never even got kissed.

MAL

Really?

This depresses both of them.

MAL

The guy I really like? Really, really? His name's Eli--at the party, I was sitting right next to him, and he started making out with Emery Asher.

ALISON

Is that a person?

MAL

She says she's a bookworm because she's read the whole Gossip Girl series.

ALISON

Ew.

MAL

Seriously.

ALISON

Why did he make out with her?

MAL

She smells nice? She's really skinny? I don't know, he just doesn't like me, and I want to get over it but he's in FOUR of my classes and in two he sits really close to me and breathes so loud--he's a total mouth breather--and he drums on his desk like: BUH duh duh duh BUH duh duh duh--

(heavy loud mouth breathing)

BUH duh duh duh BUH duh duh duh--

(heavy loud mouth breathing)

ALISON

He sounds annoying.

MAL

No those are just the annoying things he does that make it impossible to forget that he is near me and does not want to kiss me.

ALISON

Is he hot?

MAL

(mad about it)

Yeah.

ALISON

Is that why you like him?

MAL

No. He's the smartest guy I know. We studied existentialism in AP Lit--we read *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*--and I had to leave class sometimes because I would, you know, panic, like before. And Eli noticed. And he told me it scared him too, to think about life like that--to think that we just make up meaning for ourselves, and we're all pretty much alone with our own meaning...in a meaningless tiny unimportant universe...

MAL clenches, just a little.

ALISON

Don't freak out again.

MAL

He said, it's hard to be as smart as we are because other people just live, but we spend so much time thinking about living. He gets it, you know? He gets me. But he doesn't want to kiss me. So.

ALISON

He sounds not smart, if he doesn't want to kiss you but he'll kiss the Gossip Girl.

MAL

Emery Asher's a dancer, and I can't do a push up.

ALISON

What does that have to do with...love? Are you in love with him?

MAL

I don't know if it counts, since I'm only 16. And we're not friends outside of class.

ALISON

(realizing)

I never got to fall in love.

MAL

Maybe you could!

ALISON

With who?

Another ghost!

MAL

So like Casper.

ALISON

Noooooo...

MAL

Even the undead aren't desperate enough to kiss a girl without lips.

ALISON

You don't know that. Maybe that's why we're here! I can help you get a--ghost boyfriend!

MAL

I don't see any ghost guys around.

ALISON

Maybe I have but I didn't realize!

MAL

So you're gonna ask random guys if they're dead, then ask if they want to date Jabba the Hut's anorexic albino sister?

ALISON

Are you sad about your face?

MAL

There's nothing I can do about it so why be sad.

ALISON

Can I ask you--what it was like? Being on fire?

MAL

It happened really fast. Everything looked wavy, like asphalt in the summer. There were these popping noises all around, like firecrackers—it was all the sweat evaporating from my skin. It didn't hurt after a while. I didn't even feel when my ear fell off.

ALISON

Do you feel like a badass, at least? You should. You look kind of like Deadpool.

MAL

ALISON

I don't know what that is.

MAL

I'll show you! When I get my phone back. I've been thinking about what I can do, to be better. To make...something out of this. And Nicole, my friend Nicole, she's the president of National Honors Society--she's organizing the Drunk Driving Drama, and I thought I could help.

ALISON

What's a Drunk Driving Drama?

MAL

Don't you remember? They do it right before prom, to remind everyone to not screw up—like I did. The police bring in some wrecked cars and sets them up like an accident happened, and theatre kids dress up like it's prom and do all this bloody makeup, and a real ambulance comes.

And there's always someone who was like thrown from the vehicle, they pretend to be dead.

Then usually there's just a big speech from the police—but this year Nicole had the idea to add a fake funeral. So there could be a coffin and everything. And that's how we'll do the speech on not drunk driving, so we don't ever have to admit that it's all fake!

ALISON

You won't have to break the fourth wall.

MAL

What's that?

ALISON

It's what separates the audience from actors? It lets the audience pretend everything they're seeing is real life.

MAL

Yeah! That's exactly what she wants. It's a good idea, right? I don't know what I'm gonna do, exactly, but Nicole saw me after the accident so she can use it to make everything realistic, especially the makeup. So maybe people will learn from my mistake.

ALISON

You're a bad example though. You didn't get hurt, and you didn't get arrested. So people could hear what happened and think, even if they crash, they could be fine, like you. And usually people aren't fine.

MAL

Shit. I thought this could be *something*--I mean it's not like being a social worker, but I thought it could be a start.

ALISON

It's probably good to help out.

MAL

But it's not enough.

ALISON

You're not being so stupid anymore, so you're probably not going to die soon. You can figure out what to do.

MAL

I just feel like I have you and this second chance and I'm not really doing anything but finishing my homework and moping about Eli.

ALISON

You're my friend.  
That's a start.

#9 - Caught.

**MAL** attempts to sneak back into the house, but **JIM** catches her.

**JIM**

You're dead.

**MAL**

I just went for a walk! Really! Smell my breath!

**JIM**

You should've asked.

**MAL**

You would've said no!

**JIM**

Because you're *grounded*.

**MAL**

I know but I can't be alone in there all the time!

**JIM**

It's a punishment, it's not supposed to be fun.

**MAL**

I know but I'm--don't tell Mom. She hates me enough already.

**JIM**

Don't say that.

**MAL**

She doesn't even talk to me.

**JIM**

You scared her.

**MAL**

I KNOW--

**JIM**

Because she loves you that much.

MAL

Because she feels guilty that I didn't get hurt or get arrested or die.

JIM

Bullshit. You don't see her when she's--she puts a good face on it, but she is electric with fear, especially when it comes to you. She had a panic attack when I proposed.

MAL

That's romantic.

JIM

That's your mom.

MAL

She didn't want to get married?

JIM

That's what I assumed when she was hyperventilating on the floor of the bowling alley--

MAL

Really Dad? A bowling alley?

JIM

It was a special place for us! When she could talk again, she told me: she was afraid of being happy.

MAL

What.

JIM

She was so in love, she was so excited to get married, that she was sure it was going to end badly somehow. It's like that thing she said...equal and opposite reaction? She said the way she feels about me, that love runs so deep, there has to be a bad feeling just as strong coming for her, someday. She'll have to pay for being that happy.

MAL

Like if you die first.

JIM

I guess.

MAL

I'll lay in bed, sometimes I'll start to think about stars, and how far they go on, and whether God is real and if He's actually nice and how small I am, and I feel like I'm falling down an elevator without a bottom and that feeling twists up my body and punches all the air out of me—  
I'm just like her! She gave that shit to me!

JIM

Mally--

MAL

It's her fault! I'm going to spend my whole life scared and sad and stuck thinking all the time--

JIM

Hey, you can't--you've got some of my genes too.

MAL

You're normal, you're calm, you sleep through the night, you believe in a nice God who helps people, and I ended up with mom's psycho DNA.

JIM

Mal.

MAL

I hate her for that.

JIM

That's not fair.

There's a plus side, you know. Your mom, she gets scared because she sees all the possible ways things could go wrong. But she sees a lot of other things too. She listens. She feels other peoples' feelings almost as much as her own. That's why I love her, that's why I don't mind talking her down at 4 a.m. Usually. If you inherited that, you're lucky. And the people who love you are luckier.

#10 - House Call.

**JENNIFER is unexpectedly at KAREN's front door, with a plate of cookies,** humming with her usual nervous energy.

JENNIFER

Better late than never?  
I just came to drop these off, you don't have to--

KAREN

No, I...thank you. I'm just not used to house guests.

JENNIFER

Oh. Then I'll...

KAREN

Come in.

JENNIFER comes in and takes a look around.  
Attempting boring small talk:

JENNIFER

The layout looks like ours. Two bedrooms?

KAREN

Three.

JENNIFER

Nice.

KAREN

More than I need now.

JENNIFER

I guess it's hard to sell in this market.

KAREN

I haven't tried. The mortgage was mostly paid off, so, why not stay.

JENNIFER

Dale didn't want it?

KAREN

Dale has a new condo and a new girlfriend in Wildwood.

JENNIFER

Wildwood's snobby. I've been by their high school parking lot, it's full of brand-new cars. Buying a seventeen-year-old a Camaro is begging for an insurance hike. Oh-- sorry, I--

A beat as JENNIFER realizes: cars, teens, sensitive subject.

KAREN

(a joke)

Sarah drove a Camry.

JENNIFER

So, how's the church?

KAREN

Well, there was a mutiny among the childcare staff, but other than that it's been boring.

JENNIFER

I know I said I'm agnostic, but it seems like a great place. My husband is religious.

KAREN

You're on the fence?

JENNIFER

I'm noncommittal.

KAREN

Is it women's rights? Gay issues? Evolution maybe?

JENNIFER

It's more the unexplained reasoning behind human suffering.

KAREN laughs with unexpected force. It's not a very humorous laugh.

JENNIFER

I don't usually get that reaction from church staff.

KAREN

I do payroll and invoices. They haven't exactly asked for my testimony lately.

JENNIFER

Oh, I shouldn't have assumed...

KAREN

I started working there a decade ago. As far as they know, my faith has carried me through.

JENNIFER

But it hasn't.

KAREN

A few weeks ago a church member came up to me and told me I inspired her, how I worship the Lord after all I've lost. That I'm a female, American Job. I wanted to laugh in her face. But I didn't want to see what she'd feel when she realized how unlike Job I am.

I don't tell anyone any of this.

A bedroom door opens slowly. KAREN is facing away from it; JENNIFER watches, spooked. SARAH enters through it cautiously, sizing up JENNIFER. JENNIFER takes in ALISON's spectral features.

JENNIFER

Oh my god!!!

(instantly regretful)

I'm so sorry--

KAREN

Alison, don't just lurk there. This is my friend Jennifer. Jennifer, this is my daughter Alison.

\*\*\*This should be the first moment the audience starts to realize that the ghost of Sarah was not a ghost after all, but her living, breathing, burned little sister.\*\*\*

JENNIFER

Hi Alison.

ALISON merely stares.

KAREN

Jennifer works up at the high school.

JENNIFER

Would I have seen you--?

KAREN

She's home-schooled. Or more Internet-schooled, these days.

ALISON

(abruptly)

I got burned. In case you were wondering.

KAREN

Alison...

JENNIFER

No, I'm sorry, I stared--

ALISON

(to KAREN)

You didn't warn her you have a daughter made out of other peoples' skin.

KAREN

You always find the most disturbing way to phrase it.

JENNIFER

It sounds...kind of....poetic. What are you learning about? In Internet school?

ALISON

The Reformation. Trig. *Huckleberry Finn*.

KAREN

My expertise ran out, so we found the program online, but she's ahead of it.

ALISON

I'll pass my GED.

KAREN

Real classes might actually challenge you.

ALISON

No thanks.

JENNIFER

What do you want to do when you grad--when you get your GED?

ALISON

I want to be an actor, but that's kind of impossible unless they're casting another Freddy Kreuger.

KAREN

Please, Alison.

JENNIFER

You could be Franny Krueger. I'd watch that movie.

This almost makes ALISON smile.

JENNIFER

I see all kinds of actors lately. Transgender people, people in wheelchairs. I just saw a rerun of *Law & Order* starring a deaf woman.

ALISON

They all have faces though.

JENNIFER

Not their original ones.

KAREN

Jennifer could show you around the high school sometime? Tell you about some of the clubs, AP classes?

JENNIFER takes the hint to pitch the school.

JENNIFER

It's a great school. We have all these national rankings, I can't keep track.

ALISON

I know you want me out of here--

KAREN

That's not true--

ALISON

I'm not going there. I'm not gonna watch the pretty kids do all the stuff I can't do.

KAREN

You can do that stuff--

ALISON

I'm not gonna run for student council or be in a musical or get asked to Prom, unless someone feels like dumping pigs' blood. You'll have to find another way to get me out.

KAREN

*I want you to get an education--*

ALISON

Far away from you.

KAREN

(to JENNIFER)

I'm sorry...

ALISON

I'll go to my room so I don't embarrass you.

KAREN

I didn't say--!

ALISON

They'd all look at me like she did. I'm not gonna be their freak show.

ALISON retreats to her room and slams the door.

JENNIFER

I didn't know you had another daughter.

KAREN

You should probably go.

JENNIFER

What did I--

KAREN

I don't need your opinion on how I'm raising Alison.  
I don't bring her up because it's one more killjoy thing about me: my youngest daughter, the reclusive, afflicted one.

JENNIFER

(pointing to herself)

Fellow killjoy.

KAREN

I'm not comfortable having someone see the failures of my life up-close.

JENNIFER

Your daughter is not a failure, she seems funny and smart--

KAREN

NO. I'm failing her.  
She almost liked you. That's surprising.

JENNIFER

(a joke)

Because my anxiety is off-putting?

KAREN

Because she doesn't like anyone. She doesn't meet anyone. She only leaves the house to visit the crash site.

JENNIFER

How old is she?

KAREN

Fifteen.

JENNIFER

Do you mind if I ask--?

KAREN

She was seven. She fell in a bonfire. It's been eight years and so many skin grafts I can't remember. And they're not over, she's still growing. If you knew anything about plastic surgery, you'd know she looks great, for a child burned on sixty percent of her body.

JENNIFER

You really do have a lot in common with Job.

KAREN

No, Alison does. Sarah...Sarah treated Alison like a sister instead of a medical specimen. She got her to come out of hiding once in a while. She was her anchor. Sarah could've gotten her to go to public school, but.

JENNIFER

The kids bully her?

KAREN

No. She went to second grade, and they didn't know how to talk to her, they didn't think she could play. They were afraid of her.

JENNIFER

I'm sure they'd be better now.

KAREN

You are?

JENNIFER

They'd talk to her at least. Most of them aren't as bad as you think.

KAREN

But she is separate. And she knows it. And she pushes it. When she's self-deprecating, it's too raw. She gets mean. She wants to hit before she gets hit. I love her. But it's hard.

JENNIFER

God...I just...

KAREN

What?

JENNIFER

When I was maybe ten, I went to summer camp, and there was a blind girl in my cabin. I was scared of her.

KAREN

When you're a kid, what can you do.

JENNIFER

When we went swimming, in the lake, she'd take out her glass eyes—they were really convincing, actually—and underneath, just red sockets. At first they scared me, but then, you know... I wasn't afraid of the sockets. I was afraid of going blind. She had a helper who asked her every morning what clothes she wanted to wear—pink or green, stripes or polka dots, and I thought, what does it matter? She's never seen any of that.

And that's what made me afraid. That she hadn't ever seen colors, how sad that must be for her.

And maybe one day I wouldn't be able to see them either.

KAREN

Why aren't you afraid of me? My grief. People think they can catch it. You aren't afraid of it? Anything that's happened to me could happen to anyone, and that's why the people who don't flock to me for the solution, they steer clear.

JENNIFER

I am afraid. But I'm trying to be braver.

#11 - Collision.

Late at night at the crash site. MAL reads the eulogy for Drunk Driving Drama to ALISON.

MAL

"...And I know she would have given this world so much if she hadn't made that big mistake on prom night."

MAL clears her throat, folds the paper back up, and looks hopefully to ALISON for feedback.

ALISON

Are you giving the eulogy?

MAL

No, Nicole will.

ALISON

Okay.

MAL

Why?

ALISON

Your delivery was kind of unnatural.

MAL

I was just reading it.

ALISON

Right, so, if you actually knew her, like the girl you're pretending is dead, it would all be harder to say.

MAL

(writing it down)

That's a good point. I'll tell Nicole.

ALISON

But she shouldn't overdo it. Like, she shouldn't try to cry. That's bad acting. She should try *not* to cry. I've read a lot of acting books.

MAL

Why weren't you in drama club?

ALISON

I got more interested in sociology and Spanish. More important stuff. Who's playing the dead girl?

MAL

Jamie Hutchens. She's the drama club secretary and she's really popular.

ALISON

She'll get to be in the casket?

MAL

No, we couldn't afford like a real casket, so it's just a box with a lid. Plus Jamie will still have all the bloody makeup from lying on the road by the crash. Nicole is trying to get the principal to let us use fake intestines too!

ALISON

Cool.

MAL

So what did you think of the eulogy? Like, the writing? What?

ALISON

It's just kind of...fake.

MAL

I wasn't acting it, so...

ALISON

Or cliché. The words didn't mean anything.

MAL looks back over her paper.

MAL

What would you say?

I have to get the eulogy right. We want it to feel real. Just try.

ALISON

You'd be really sad a lot, especially at first, and it wouldn't seem like it would get better.

But then it would, and sometimes you'd be a little happy, but then you would find their old jacket or think of something to tell them, and remember, and then you'd be sad and feel bad for letting yourself be happy. It would hurt to look at their picture, or watch videos of them, like picking a scab, but you'd keep doing it because forgetting them might feel even worse. You want the scar because it's better than nothing. You'd wonder why it had to be them out of anyone—everyone—how they got so unlucky. You'd start to hate people who are alive for having such a great thing and not using it right, but then you'd hate yourself because you're alive and miserable and what kind of a waste is that.

MAL

It's okay if you're still mad at me.

ALISON

That wasn't about you.

MAL

If you think I'm wasting my life. I agree, mostly.

ALISON

I was talking about...my mom. How she seems since I died.

MAL

I'm not as miserable now. I haven't had a panic attack in a while. Not even when I went to philosophy club and Eli brought up The Myth of Sisyphus again.

ALISON

The Missus--?

MAL

The Myth of Sisyphus. It's Roman or Greek or something. It's this guy who gets cursed: he has to roll a rock up a cliff, and every time it falls off the edge, he just starts over. Over and over. Forever. And this philosopher wrote about how that's all life is.

ALISON

That sucks.

MAL

Before I would've started twitching and maybe had to leave to lay on the bathroom floor, because I would've thought that's true. That we're all Sisyphuses. But now I know it's not true! We're not Sisyphuses!

ALISON

How do you know that?

MAL

(duh)

You! We don't just suffer until we die! Yeah, we suffer. And we die. But that's not the end! You're still here, and we're gonna figure out why.

ALISON

You still think we're gonna figure it out?

MAL

I get why you'd doubt it, probably because you're more lonely and...dead. This sucks more for you but I'm going to help you. Somehow. I feel it. I'm not so scared anymore.

ALISON

Meeting a ghost made you less scared.

MAL

I know! Whenever I start freaking out, I'm like, nope, it's gonna be OK, you and me, we're gonna figure this whole thing out.

ALISON

I'm glad you feel better.

MAL

I'm sorry, you seem sad and it's still really unfair.

ALISON

It's okay.

MAL

I brought you my old iPod? My parents took it after I got grounded, but I stole it back because I thought you'd like to listen to it, when you're alone here.

ALISON is genuinely excited, and kind of moved.

ALISON

Thank you.

MAL

Oh I didn't think--can you use earbuds?

ALISON and MAL share the earbuds. They listen. They sing along.

Simultaneously, JENNIFER and KAREN fret, separately, in their living rooms.

KAREN knocks on ALISON's door, just as JENNIFER knocks on MAL's door. They open the doors to find empty bedrooms.

JENNIFER panics; KAREN simply goes for her purse.

They leave to search for their daughters.

As ALISON and MAL listen to the iPod, a squeal of tires startles them. The sound of a car door slamming open and shut. JENNIFER runs to the crash site.

JENNIFER

MAL!

MAL

I'm okay--how did you know where--?

JENNIFER

What are you doing? I cannot fucking believe--

MAL

I'm sorry Mom--

JENNIFER

Do you see what this does to me? Do you see?!

JENNIFER notices ALISON.

JENNIFER

(to ALISON)

What are you doing out here?

MAL

You can see her?

The sound of a car parking, another door opening and closing. Footsteps.

JENNIFER

It's three in the morning, what is going on?

MAL

She can see you too! Say something, she can probably hear--

ALISON won't speak. **KAREN appears, unseen by MAL and ALISON.**

MAL

Mom, it's Sarah! Sarah Nelson! We're friends! We're helping each other! I'm gonna make it right!

**KAREN comes closer, unable to see ALISON's face.**

KAREN

Sarah?

**ALISON turns. Her face obliterates the fantasy.** She watches disappointment crash down on KAREN.

JENNIFER

Mal, that's not...

ALISON

Momma...

JENNIFER

What the fuck is going on?

KAREN

Alison, what did you tell her?

ALISON

I'm sorry...

MAL

Alison?

JENNIFER

She's Sarah's little sister.

No... MAL

Yes. KAREN

MAL

(to ALISON)

Sarah?

ALISON shakes her head: no.

Wait... MAL

Why would you tell her--? KAREN

I didn't mean to-- ALISON

You're not dead? MAL

JENNIFER

No she's not dead! What have you been telling her?

ALISON

She asked if I was Sarah and I just said yes because--

JENNIFER

Why would you think--

MAL

She saved me from the car right after the accident! She was just waiting out here, and she brought me home, and her face--

KAREN

What accident?

MAL

You're not a ghost?

A *ghost*?!

JENNIFER

ALISON

(to MAL)

I'm so sorry.

MAL

No. No no no...

KAREN

What accident?

MAL

I was drunk and I wrecked my car and--she helped me--I thought--

KAREN

Wrecked her car. Here.

JENNIFER

She helped you?

MAL

I thought she was Sarah. Sarah's dead? Sarah's really dead?

MAL begins hyperventilating. **JENNIFER reaches for MAL.**

MAL

No! No don't touch me!

**MAL crumples to the ground** and folds into herself, shaking.

MAL

You made me like this! Don't!

KAREN

(to JENNIFER)

So this is why?

JENNIFER

I'm sorry, please--

KAREN

God, I get you now.

JENNIFER

Karen--

KAREN

I'm your penance. And your research.

JENNIFER

That's not true, I was--

KAREN

You chased me down to be your charity project, because you feel so bad that your kid deserved to die, but mine didn't. And you wanna know why.

JENNIFER

I'm your friend.

KAREN

No. No. You're just like everyone else. Only you're more in-depth! You haven't found the secret yet to ensuring your family doesn't end up like mine, so you're still digging!

JENNIFER

I know it wasn't Sarah's fault! It was just--fate! Just mean fucking blind chaos theory in action.

KAREN

Exactly. When it should be kids like yours who end up dead on the road.

ALISON

Mom, don't!

JENNIFER

I know I was selfish, and it isn't fair. There is nothing--NOTHING--that separates Mal from Sarah. No reason for my daughter being here and yours being dead. If God exists, he let it all play out and shrugged.

I wanted to know you because I wanted to--brace myself. Because I know it could happen to me.

I feel it, I don't know how far away, but I could lose my daughter thanks to the same asshole God who took yours. And I want to be ready, I want to know how to survive.

KAREN

You do?

You want to know the trick to grief?

You can't prepare for it. No matter how close you get, you can't swallow it. You probably think you've got a good idea of how deep it goes, but your mind isn't capable. It's infinity. People say they can't imagine because they can't. The brochures and talk shows and poems--they boil it down to a precious metaphor, a heartache that fits into a memory box you can store under the bed with your dead kid's baby shoes.

You cannot fathom it.

I do not even describe it because the words do not exist. If it comes—When it comes for you— You will be powerless.

**JENNIFER reaches for MAL, and guides her to the car.  
They drive away.**

ALISON

Momma.

KAREN is still. Hollowed out. She stares down at the soiled leftovers of the roadside memorial for the first time.

ALISON

I'm sorry.

KAREN

Be quiet.

ALISON

I'm sorry you thought I was her.

KAREN

I said *be quiet*.

ALISON

It should've been me.

She was better and nicer and smarter and she was gonna be so good, she was gonna help kids and make people happy and do so much more—I'm sorry, Mom. It should've been me who burned up all the way.

KAREN turns to ALISON, stricken. She grips ALISON's naked face between her hands.

KAREN

No! Baby, no!

KAREN grabs her second daughter and holds her, tight.

#12 - Cursed.

**JENNIFER's house.** She is taking off MAL's shoes.

JENNIFER

It's gonna be okay, Mally.

MAL

No it's not. I thought I had proof that it would be but it's really not ever going to be okay.

JENNIFER

Whatever she had you thinking--

MAL

That things have meaning! That I could help!

JENNIFER

There is meaning--

MAL

Chaos! Asshole God! You said it.

JENNIFER

I didn't mean life is pointless.

MAL curls up on the couch and wraps her arms around herself, depleted.

JENNIFER

Mal. I don't.

None of this is fair.

I'm sorry I passed down this part of myself.

You know what makes me feel better? I've never told anyone this, I figured no one would understand, but you might--

Sometimes I think of it like magic. Like I was cursed, to feel more sad and scared than some other people so *they* don't have to. As if when I can't breathe in the aisle of Wal-Mart because I think you've been kidnapped, someone else is spared that feeling. I can take it on so other people can be happy

MAL

Nobody's actually happy.

JENNIFER

You think they're faking? I used to think that too, baby. But you're wrong. I was wrong. This curse tries to trick us into forgetting the feeling, but I have *felt* it. I don't know about God or ghosts or heaven, but since the day you were born I know happiness is real.

#13 - Eulogy.

Two weeks later.

Offstage of the high school gymnasium. NICOLE and MAL, dressed in funeral garb, speak in hushed tones, waiting for the Drunk Driving Drama eulogy.

NICOLE prays silently.

MAL

Are you praying?

NICOLE

Yes! I'm--I think I'm getting sick. I feel kind of shaky? And nauseous?

MAL

You're nervous. I feel like that all the time. Just do the thing you have to do and you'll feel better.

NICOLE

Is there anything on my butt? Check my zipper. Do you think the coffin looks fake?

MAL

Kinda. But the intestines looked legit.

NICOLE

I almost barfed! Principal Davis is gonna be so mad, but it's worth it, if people pay attention.

(looking down at her paper)

I should have memorized this thing.

MAL

You don't memorize a eulogy.

NICOLE

Principal Davis isn't even close to crying. I hope I can cry.

MAL

No--don't try to cry. Try *not* to cry. That's what people really do.

NICOLE

That's good.

The background noise stops. It's NICOLE's cue.

MAL

I think that's your cue--

NICOLE

Oh!

**NICOLE stumbles out onto the stage and then attempts to walk to the downstage mic stand with gravitas. MAL watches, only vaguely invested. Upstage, the fake coffin sits, with the obligatory yearbook photo and flowers arranged on tops.**

**The assembled students murmur restlessly as NICOLE noisily unfurls the eulogy and begins intoning it.**

NICOLE

(reading)

I can't believe Jamie is really gone. None of this feels real.

DOUCHE BOY (OFF)

Because it isn't!

NICOLE

(rattled, trying to push through)

L-last week we were so ex...excited. Jamie was going to apply to Mizzou.

ANOTHER TEEN ASSWIPE (OFF)

Go Tigers!

The murmuring rises.

NICOLE

Sh-she had so much she was going...to do. I forget that she's gone sometimes and I wait for her to, um, to walk into AP Chem--

**Suddenly, the casket lid blows open; the framed photo and flowers explode in all directions.**

**ALISON rises nimbly from the casket and surveys the audience before climbing out.** She's once again a pale, glowing, goddamn avenging angel.

**She walks to NICOLE, who flinches away from her, and snatches the mic. NICOLE flees backstage, where MAL watches in wonder.**

ALISON delivers the following in an even fury; not pleading but combative; this shit is real, and she's daring anyone to fuck with her.

ALISON

This is real. This isn't a mask. This is what used to be my face. Some of you want to laugh at me because you think this couldn't happen to you, and you're wrong. Some of you want to look away, because you know this could happen to you, and you're scared. You should be. Since I was burned, people like you laugh at me or ignore me hoping that you won't catch my bad luck, meanwhile you get wasted and drive around basically begging for the same fate. So look at my face. Is driving drunk worth peeling off your own lips? Watching maggots eat your infections? Getting strangers' skin sewn on every two years? Think about that before you ruin somebody's prom.

**ALISON takes her final beat. The gym is utterly silent.**

#14 - Reckoning

**JENNIFER's office.** NICOLE argues with JENNIFER, who's on the phone, as ALISON waits patiently in a chair.

NICOLE

She shouldn't be in trouble!

NICOLE

That was the most powerful Drunk Driving Drama *ever*. I bet all the kids who party felt so bad. Haley Durst was *sobbing*. That'll keep her from sneaking water bottles full of vodka into the Marriott.

JENNIFER hangs up the phone.

JENNIFER

(to ALISON)

Do you have your mom's work number?

ALISON

She's already here.

NICOLE

You are so brave! National Honors Society should give you an award. We could plan a whole lecture, like a TED talk--

JENNIFER

Enough, Nicole! Your mom's already--?

KAREN enters.

ALISON

(to KAREN)

I did it.

KAREN hugs her tight.

KAREN

I saw. I am proud of you. Sarah would be proud of you. They were scared shitless.

NICOLE

No one will ever forget this assembly.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry, you knew about this?

KAREN

Alison wanted to help.

NICOLE

Her story probably saved peoples' lives.

JENNIFER

Alison, you weren't burned in a drunk driving accident.

NICOLE

You weren't?

ALISON

I didn't say I got burned by a drunk driver, I just said they *could* be, which is true. Anyway, I wasn't being me. I was acting.

KAREN

So we can leave now?

JENNIFER

She's not a student so the school won't do anything.

NICOLE

You should enroll. Seriously. You're gonna be everyone's hero now.

ALISON

I'm not actually a hero. I wanted to scare everyone because I hate them.

NICOLE

Oh. Well, still. We all think you're a badass now.

JENNIFER

It's true.

ALISON

Will you tell Mal I'm really sorry?

JENNIFER

I will. And Alison--you really should enroll.

NICOLE

Yeah!

ALISON takes in the people, the office, the afternoon.

ALISON

I'll think about it.

ALISON begins to exit. JENNIFER looks at KAREN.  
KAREN follows ALISON out.

#15 - Watcher

MAL's bedroom. MAL holds a bottle of pills. She stares at the label, then begins taking out the pills, one at a time, and laying them on her palm, staring at each. She puts one in her mouth and swallows it, slowly.

ALISON appears, banging against the window. MAL jumps, scattering pills, and slams open the window.

MAL

What the fuck!

ALISON

I'm not letting you do this!

MAL

You can't just come in here--!

ALISON grabs the pills and starts throwing them out the window.

MAL

What are you / doing?

ALISON

I'm sorry I made it worse but I won't let you kill yourself!

MAL

I'm not trying to--stop! Stop! I'm not killing myself!

ALISON

What's with all the pills?

MAL

They're my new antidepressants.

ALISON

Oh.

MAL

And you just threw most of them out the window.

ALISON

Why were you holding--

MAL

I was gonna put them in this day-of-the-week box.

ALISON

I was scared you were...

MAL

You can't just watch me--!

It's creepy and you're not dead so you don't have an excuse anymore.

ALISON

I was worried! I waited for you, and you never came back, so I thought maybe. You're not gonna...?

MAL

No. Not right now anyway.

Why did you make it all up? To scare me?

ALISON

At first...

MAL

Like you scared everyone at school? They'll probably keep drinking and driving, you know. They all think you're cool and want to be your Facebook friend, but they'll forget and fuck up and anyway people will keep driving sober and wrecking on this dumb road so why bother.

ALISON

I don't care about them. I did it for you.

MAL

For me.

ALISON

You worked so hard. When I started, yeah, I just wanted to scare you because I was mad. And it felt like having my sister back, a little. But then you were my friend and you were happier, I didn't want to ruin it. I'm sorry. I forgave you, so maybe--

MAL

I'm not mad at YOU, I can't be mad at--

It's shitty that this happened to you, and your sister died, and it's shitty that you had to find me, and I thought it was all a good thing, like a Sign for both of us, but it's all bad.

ALISON

No it isn't. I still think we were supposed to meet.

MAL

Why? So we could realize how fucked up everything is?

ALISON

Sarah was my only friend. She was the only person who wasn't even a little afraid of me, and she didn't let me feel bad for myself, and she didn't let me make mean jokes about my face, and she made me go to Wal-Mart with her sometimes and wouldn't let me wear sunglasses or a hat, just to try to show me that I could be normal.

I couldn't go to her funeral, or the wake, or anything. I couldn't leave the house because she wasn't there to make me feel safe. When she died I thought I'd never have a friend again.

But I was out there the night you crashed, at the exact time you crashed, and later you found me there again, and you wanted to be friends. So maybe the...universe did that, or Sarah did it, or God. Or nobody. Maybe it didn't happen on purpose. But I really needed it. I really needed you.

#16 - Crash Site Forever

ALISON and MAL sit at the crash site, putting up fresh flowers, then sharing a set of headphones to listen to the iPod.

Simultaneously, in KAREN and JENNIFER's living rooms, both mothers check their daughters' bedrooms and find them empty.

JENNIFER dials her phone.

KAREN dials her phone.

	JENNIFER		KAREN
Shit.		Shit.	

JENNIFER dials her phone again.

Is she out too?	JENNIFER
-----------------	----------

Yeah.	KAREN
-------	-------

Good.	JENNIFER
-------	----------

They both hang up.

They both exhale the smallest sigh of relief.

End of play.