

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - DAY

DELIA JANE (18) a sullen, pretty girl, sits in a boxy institutional room. The walls are painted a pacifying color.

Her eyes dart out the window. A single bird rests on a power line. It's completely still.

THERESA (60's) an affable, harried woman with a little bit of extra weight, talks across the table.

THERESA

Mister Jane -

DEVON JANE (44) a stern, intense man, cuts her off.

DEVON

Doctor Jane.

Theresa lets him have a second of importance before she continues. Delia pulls her hoodie tighter around her head.

THERESA

Doctor Jane. I have to be honest. I'm not entirely sure that Raleigh is the best place for your daughter.

ELIZABETH JANE (40) a nervous, slight woman, leans forward. Her eyes shoot to Delia before she speaks.

Delia looks away.

ELIZABETH

We've tried everything. Therapists. Family counseling. Medication.

THERESA

Medication?

DEVON

I wrote her a prescription for Xanax and an anti-depressant.

Theresa turns her face to hide a scowl. Delia notices.

THERESA

When someone chases a half a bottle of aspirin with vodka like that, it's not usually a -

DEVON

She did it at my office Christmas Party. All of my partners were there.

Theresa clears her throat.

THERESA
It's a cry for attention.

Devon stands.

DEVON
Well she got it. She got exactly the kind of attention she wanted. She's eighteen now. Old enough to be in a place that deals with that kind of attention.

He walks out. Calmly. Detached. Delia reaches over and squeezes her mothers hands.

DELIA
It's OK, mom. I want to stay.

She looks at Theresa.

DELIA
If I can. I need more than they can give me right now. Honest.

Theresa makes eye contact with her. It's a look. Delia can't keep up her end of it. She looks away.

The bird flies off the power line.

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

A bigger, bleaker version of the office BUZZES with the kind of dulled mania that only medication can create.

Delia sits by herself in the corner. Her sleeves cover her hands. Her hood is pulled tight so her head is just a face.

A MEDICAL WRIST BAND pokes out of her sleeve. Her pants are institute-issue. She's been there a few days.

She scans the room. TWO PATIENTS play an invented game with chess pieces. An ELDERLY WOMAN hums to herself.

It feels more sad than dangerous. Her eyes land on JACKSON (30's) a big, hard-living kind of guy.

He sits at the window and runs his fingers over a line of short, jagged scars on his arm.

He catches her watching and smiles. She stares back and chews her thumbnail.

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Long slats of light push through bars on the windows of a small, single room. Delia lies in bed.

She's awake. She pulls at her medical bracelet. She kicks the sheets off and pulls them back on.

The faint sound of a match SPARKING sounds from outside. She moves to the window and peeks out.

Jackson stands by a side door. He smokes a cigarette. She watches as he hides the pack and the matches.

The smoke pours. The expression on his face is pure ecstasy. FOOTSTEPS sound outside the room.

Delia runs and jumps back into bed, almost giddy. She pulls the sheets up and pretends to be asleep.

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Delia leans in a doorway. Jackson sits by a window across the room. Her eyes are glued to the back of his head.

It takes what feels like forever but finally he turns and sees her. She mimes smoking a cigarette at him.

He grins and looks around. A NURSE'S AID sits behind a counter reading. Jackson mouths "five minutes."

EXT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - SIDE DOOR - DAY

The side door opens underneath a flight of stairs. Jackson takes a drag off a cigarette and hands it to her.

Delia chatterboxes away.

DELIA

- and so I told him I wasn't really in to Sonic Youth, but Goo is still one of the best albums of all time. I made him a mix where every other song was off that album. He never listened to it. I don't think.

Jackson reaches for the cigarette. His sleeve slides up to reveal his scars. Delia stares at them.

DELIA
Do those hurt?

CLICK-CLACK. Footsteps sound on the stairs above them. She freezes. Jackson calmly steps out the cigarette.

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Delia and Jackson sit by the window playing chess. Jackson has his head in his hands, studying the board.

Delia's eyes dart around the room.

DELIA
It's all such bunk, you know? Who wants to live in a world where all people do is stare at screens all day. That's what a book about my generation should be called. "Staring at Screens." It's all so lame.

Jackson makes his move. Delia eyes the board for a second and makes hers.

DELIA
Checkmate. You want to play again?

Her eyes dart around the room again. Jackson sits back to look at her. He's impressed. No one ever beats him at chess.

INT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - CLASSROOM - DAY

Half a dozen patients sit in a circle. Theresa sits between two of them. Delia and Jackson sit across from each other.

It's a group therapy session.

THERESA
Delia. Do you think you'd be comfortable sharing today?

Delia points her head at the ground. Her eyes - and just her eyes - lift to Jackson's. He nods. She nods.

THERESA
OK. Why don't we start with you telling us why you're here. Does that sound OK?

She plays with her hands the whole time she talks.

DELIA

I don't know, you know? I guess, if I'm being honest, it's just because of how screwed up everything is. I mean, high school? Please. A girl in my class made fun of me for reading *The Bell Jar*. Who makes fun of someone for reading a book? I even asked my English Teacher if I could do a report on it, and he said the schoolboard or something wouldn't be "too keen" on it because it deals with suicide. I don't even get it. What's wrong with suicide? People do it. People should be allowed to do it. Shouldn't they? It's your life. It's dumb that anyone else can say you can't end it. You should be able to do anything you want with your own life. I think, anyway.

She stops talking abruptly. Theresa scoots her chair forward a little. Delia still won't look up.

THERESA

Why don't you tell us about the day of the Christmas Party.

DELIA

The day I tried to kill myself, you mean?

THERESA

Is that what you were trying to do?

A silence inflates in the room. It's as though everyone holds their breath. They only release it when Delia speaks.

DELIA

So my dad's practice took a hit a while back, and we had to move to a smaller house. It didn't bother me but you could tell it really ate my parents up. They don't even spend enough time together to fight, you know? They used to bicker. They don't anymore. Everything is just quiet. Anyway, the only thing I don't like about the new house is the birds.

(MORE)

DELIA

I think they're mockingbirds or something, and it's mating season or whatever, because they make these crazy noises all night long. Sometimes it sounds like a car alarm, sometime it sounds like a tea kettle. It's never the same and my brain can't find any melody to it. If it was only the same sound every time I'd be able to sleep. But just when I'm about to drift off it changes to a different sound and I try to follow through with the old sound and my eyes shoot open and I just can't sleep. I lay there until dawn when they finally shut up and then it's time to get up.

She gets overcome with emotion and has to stop.

THERESA

It's OK. Take your time.

DELIA

I went out the night before the Christmas party to see if I could find them but there was no moon and it was really dark so I decided to go out first thing in the morning. I'm supposed to feed our dog before I go to school anyway.

Her hands stop moving.

DELIA

My dad won't let him in the new house so we keep him in the backyard. I went out that morning and there's this kid who lives next door. I think he's like eleven or twelve. Young enough that he's still too scared to swear in front of his folks, but old enough that he says "shit" every other word when they're not around. So I go out there, right, and this kid is in our yard. I don't even know his name. Is that weird? He's in our yard and he's pissing on our dog. Just. Full stream pissing on our fucking dog. Like it didn't mean anything. I said something and he turned and looked at me and gave me the finger and just kept pissing.

(MORE)

DELIA

He didn't care that I caught him. Well, I went inside and shoved the bottle of vodka in my bag and grabbed the aspirin because I didn't think I wanted to live in a world where someone takes a leak on a dog. That's a crappy world, isn't it?

THERESA

Why do you think you waited until later on that night?

She plays with her hands again.

DELIA

I had somethings I needed to do at school. There's this guy. I like this guy and I thought if I wasn't going to be around I might as well tell him. So I did.

THERESA

And?

DELIA

He said he liked me too.

It's oddly the most painful thing for her to admit so far. She clasps her hands together and shrinks in her chair.

DELIA

I don't want to talk anymore.

A MURMUR of reassuring statements and gestures pushes around the circle. Jackson rests his elbows on his knees.

THERESA

Jackson, do you think you'd like to contribute something? She asks full well knowing the answer.

A bit of LAUGHTER. Jackson looks up. Delia stares at him. He shifts his weight and leans forward.

JACKSON

No, I'll go.

The silences is immediate. He's not such a chatty chap, our Jackson. It's clear he hasn't spoken before.

His voice is deep and even.

JACKSON

I feel you on the birds, kid. There was a parrot in the next apartment over from my Ma's when she was sick. The damn thing wouldn't shut up. It didn't know any words. It just made these sound effects all day and night, too, if someone forgot to cover it's cage. I was drinking a lot back then and every other time I was there my Ma had to talk me out of breaking into the apartment to strangle the damn thing. It stuck with me after she died. For a long time after I'd go to the park and throw rocks at pigeons. This would be back when all I was doing was drinking. I got in trouble for it a couple of times, but if you think about it, who likes pigeons? It wasn't until I lost this -

He taps his left foot. It's wooden.

JACKSON

- to the diabetes and had to stop drinking that I felt bad about it. I felt bad about wanting to strangle the parrot too.

He takes a second to really think about this.

JACKSON

Anyway, that's not why I'm in here. It just struck me funny, is all. Her with her birds and me with mine. I'm in here because I know if I cut up my arm or make a fuss about how I'm going to do myself in, they'll throw me in the back of a cop car and drop me off here. I get a bed with clean sheets and three squares a day. Maybe some meds if I cut myself deep enough, but I don't do that so much no more. They have books in the day room and a nice window to look out.

THERESA

Jackson.

JACKSON

I know, I know. It's just. If this kid feels all that because some shit-brat took a leak on her dog, what right do I have to take up space? If I'm on the street I'm on the street. That ain't no ones fault but mine. Anyway. That's how it is.

He sits back, completely calm. Delia wears a mortified look. Tears slide down her cheeks.

She moves to the free chair next to Jackson and takes his hand. He past hers reassuringly.

EXT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - DAY

Delia stands on the steps in the clothes she wore her first day. Her cheeks have some color. She looks...calm.

Theresa stands next to her. They look at a BMW parked off a ways. Her parents sit in it. They make no move to greet her.

THERESA

They're kind of pricks, aren't they?

DELIA

Yeah.

She looks at Theresa.

DELIA

Thanks. For making me realize how full of shit I am. And for making me feel OK about it.

THERESA

I didn't tell you anything you wouldn't have figured out yourself.

She motions her head at a bus stop. Jackson stands there in dirty clothes and a tattered coat.

EXT. THE RALEIGH INSTITUTE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Theresa watches Delia from the steps. Delia runs to her parents car and motions for her mom to roll the window down.

She grabs her moms purse. Her mom is none to pleased about it. Delia takes out a pack of cigarettes.

She jogs across the lot to the bus stop and taps Jackson on the shoulder. She presses the cigarettes into his hands.

He tries to refuse them but she insists. He finally relents and they hug. HONK HONK.

Devon taps the BMW horn in rapid bursts. Delia ignores it. Devon lights two cigarettes at once.

He passes one to Delia. They stand there and smoke.

CUT TO BLACK: