

FADE IN:

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

ERICA, college junior, sits on a plush sofa, shredding a tissue. We see her school books beside her.

She drops the tissue shreds in her lap and tugs at the hem of her collegiate T-shirt.

ERICA

I'm late.

The COUNSELOR, as bohemian and laid back as her office's beach motif, stares at Erica intently.

COUNSELOR

How late?

ERICA

Almost three weeks.

COUNSELOR

Have you been late before?

Tears slip from Erica's eyes. She nods.

ERICA

(whispers)

Few times.

(attitudinal)

You've read the folder.

Erica's attitude doesn't faze Counselor.

COUNSELOR

Could it be stress?

Erica laughs - no humor in the sound.

ERICA

I am going through stress, ain't I?

Counselor glances at the note pad on her lap.

COUNSELOR

Your father is up for parole in a few weeks.

(Flips through pages)

I see your last counselor talked to you about him, about the rape.

Erica sits up and lifts a hand toward the counselor.

ERICA

Yeah, we talked about it. It's over with. She helped me. It's done.

COUNSELOR

Is it? You have been talking to me for almost a month, and we just mentioned your father last session.

ERICA

(defensive)

I know.

Counselor sighs.

COUNSELOR

You and Ms. Tara talked about the connection between your actions and the rape, and...

Erica stands.

ERICA

I don't want to talk about that right now. I will leave if you bring it up again.

COUNSELOR

(sighs)

Have you talked to your mother about being late?

Slowly, Erica reclaims her seat and nods.

ERICA

I'm meeting her after this session.

Counselor smiles, slightly.

COUNSELOR

Nice to see that you and she are making progress in your relationship. In the notes, I read of your hostility toward her.

Erica smiles briefly.

ERICA

Sometimes, we have to recreate our images of people. I had to do that for my mother, or I would have lost it a long time ago.

INT. BOOKSTORE CAFE - DAY

NOEL MONTE, late-thirties/early-forties, stares at her laptop while sipping her coffee. Every few seconds, she glances out to the sidewalk.

She frowns, rubs her forehead, and takes a deep breath.

NOEL  
(under breath)  
She's your daughter, Noel. Don't  
be angry.

She watches Erica enter the bookstore and spot her.

Erica offers a small smile and wave before walking over.

NOEL (CONT'D)  
(under breath)  
God, don't let me be too angry.

Noel stands and pulls Erica into a long, hard hug.

ERICA  
Hey Mama.

NOEL  
Hey Sweetie.

Noel looks into Erica's eyes. She pats Erica's cheek a few times.

NOEL (CONT'D)  
I have no idea what I'm going to do  
with you.

Erica drops her backpack on the floor, and the two sit. Erica grabs Noel's cup and sips. Noel playfully smacks her hand.

ERICA  
You're going to keep loving me.

NOEL  
And you're going to go get your own  
drink.

Erica pouts.

Noel sighs and rolls her eyes.

NOEL (CONT'D)  
Go ahead.  
(hands cup to Erica)  
(MORE)

NOEL (CONT'D)

Isn't it the child's role to suck  
the nutrients from its parents?

Erica laughs.

ERICA

No. I think it's the other way  
around.

Silence follows as Noel watches Erica sip, and Erica watches  
Noel over the brim of the cup.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Sorry I was late. You know how the  
buses in small towns run.

NOEL

If they run at all.

ERICA

Right.

NOEL

Right.

(tilts head)

OK, enough with the pleasantries.  
How was counseling?

ERICA

(shakes head)

Not going back.

NOEL

And why not?

ERICA

OK, Mama, check it, this woman  
hasn't really gotten to know me  
since Ms. Tara left for private  
practice. Every week, she asking  
how was your day like she's my  
friend.

NOEL

(closes laptop)

Did she ask about your father?

Erica lowers her gaze.