

Soothing Binds

By

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EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX- EARLY MORNING

Run down, low income housing.

Silence fills the air then suddenly a-

LOUD ALARM CLOCK SOUNDS.

INT. APARTMENT- JENINE'S BEDROOM

An ALARM continues to blast in a small, nearly empty room. The walls are covered with taped up flowers in varying states of decay.

JENINE, 13, tosses on her mattress, to the sound of the 6am wake-up call.

A BANGING on her thin wall as an ANNOYED NEIGHBOR screams.

ANNOYED NEIGHBOR

Turn that shit off!

Jenine's eyes open, and turn to the wall. She reaches her arm over to the alarm clock, pressing a button. The alarm gets LOUDER.

The banging persists.

ANNOYED NEIGHBOR

Are you fucking deaf?!

Jenine keeps tapping the alarm but it won't shut off. She quickly sits up and starts banging the alarm clock on the nightstand.

ANNOYED NEIGHBOR

I'm gonna fucking kill you!

The alarm finally breaks, and the alarm stops, along with the shouting.

Jenine takes a breath then notices a rose sitting on top of the night stand. A post-it attached reads "A beauty for my beauty."

Jenine stares at the flower, unresponsive, then grabs it. She rises out of bed, opens a drawer, and grabs a roll of tape.

She climbs on the bed and tapes the flower on the wall.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT- SAME TIME

"SWEET DREAMS BABY" by Roy Orbison plays.

The face of a beautiful porcelain doll with glowing long brown hair. The camera creeps away from the dolls face and pans along a row of picture perfect porcelain faces.

Up the wall, a row of various toys that pre-teens and older children would have in their closets.

A stack of toy plans on the corner of a desk. A MAN'S elbow barely brushing the stack.

A computer screen with emails dinging consistently. Next to the screen a photo of a young boy and his father. The father's arm wrapped around the boys shoulder.

Finally, BEN (early 40s), a handsome and tame man, is sitting on a stool, painting the face of a porcelain doll. He's applying red lipstick.

INT. APARTMENT- BATHROOM

JENINE'S MOUTH full of toothpaste. A toothbrush scrubbing hard again her enamel.

SHOWER running.

Jenine spits mouthwash into the sink.

She grabs a towel off of the door and jumps in the shower.

She quickly begins SINGING some modern pop song in a terribly out of tune voice.

INT. BEDROOM

Jenine stands in front of her closet in her towel staring at a pathetic display of worn down, unfashionable clothing. She sighs, closes her eyes, and grabs a random item.

INT. HALLWAY

Jenine, now dressed, walks through the hallway brushing her hair. She pushes through a bunch of junk.

Jenine kicks a box out of the way. Toys fall out of the box onto the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM- CONTINUOUS

Jenine tosses the hair brush onto the couch. She picks up the remote and turns the small television on.

*7th Heaven* plays.

Jenine walks out the front door.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT

The unfinished doll stands alone in the room. The sun shining and illuminating her beauty as the song continues to play.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT- BEDROOM

Ben, turned towards the wall, sits on his bed surrounded by magazines.

A pair of scissors in one hand, and a magazine in the other. He is cutting a picture off of the page. A happy family having a picnic.

His finger runs along the little girl's face.

In his lap, a scrapbook filled with images of young girls.

He places the most recent cutout in the corner of the page. He looks at his work. His eyes focused.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX- CLUSTER MAILBOXES

Jenine shimmy's a key into a mailbox. JAMMED. Jenine BANGS hard on the metal. It swings open and mail pours out, spilling on the ground. She bends down to pick it up.

BINNY, creepy, balding loser, in his early 30s, exits his apartment in his robe, holding a beer and a pack of cigarettes. He lights a cigarette and stares at Jenine too closely.

BINNY

Good morning Jenine!

Jenine turns her head quickly towards Binny then slowly rises.

Binny looks her up and down.

(CONTINUED)

BINNY

You're just as pretty as your  
momma, you know that? Is she  
around? I'd love to stop by. We can  
have a little family breakfast.

Jenine flips Binny the bird and runs back towards her  
apartment.

Binny laughs.

INT. APARTMENT

Jenine shuts the door behind her and locks it.

7th heaven continues to play in the background. Eric Camden  
is kissing his daughter, Ruthie on the forehead.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

A plate of eggs on the counter. Bacon sizzling on the stove  
top. Two pieces of bread sticking out of the toaster.

Jenine sits at the table looking through the mail. Bills.  
Bills.

AN INVITATION to "Rosenauer's Father Daughter Dance." Jenine  
holds on this for a while then puts it in her backpack.

A SMALL BOX. A note taped on says "Happy Birthday Jenine."  
Jenine tears the box open and it's a small jack in the box.  
She winds it and it pops! She smiles.

A LETTER from JOANNA PETERSON. Jenine opens it. A check made  
out for \$1,000. A note attached: "For RENT and FOOD ONLY.  
Love you. Give Jenine hugs and kisses for me!"

INT. JENINE'S BEDROOM

Jenine has her hand in a slit in her mattress. Bill notices  
lay on her mattress. She pulls out an envelope from the  
slit. In the envelope a wad of cash.

Jenine kneels next to the bed. She sorts out different piles  
of cash. She wraps each pile in black construction paper and  
puts them in each bill notice. She seals them up.

INT. HALLWAY

Jenine is standing outside of a door, holding a tray with two plates of breakfast, and cups of ice. She kneels down a little to look through a small hole in the door.

JENINE'S POV

Her MOTHER lies asleep.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM

The door swings open. Jenine stares at her mother knocked out. She then looks at the needles, spoons, and heroin on the nightstand.

Jenine walks to the bed, places the tray on the edge. She picks up a plate and places it next to the needles.

Jenine looks at her mother.

She opens the drawer under the nightstand and brushes the needles into it, slamming the drawer after they have been dropped.

JENINE

Mom!

Jenine nudges her mother.

JENINE

Mom! Breakfast.

Jenine grabs a pillow and slams her mom in the face.

A GRUNT from mother.

Jenine waves bacon under her mother's nose. No response.

She shakes her more viciously.

JENINE

(increasingly frustrated)

Mom! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

Another GRUNT from her Mother.

Jenine climbs on the bed and starts jumping up and down. No response.

Jenine grabs the cup of ice and dumps the ice into her mom's pants. Still nothing.

(CONTINUED)

Jenine plops down. She grabs her plate.

Jenine starts eating by herself.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM- MINUTES LATER

Jenine is putting a rag under her mother's head. Using her feet, Jenine flips her mother on her side.

She jumps off of the bed and places a post-it on the plate of food on the nightstand: "Eat."

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT- BEDROOM

HEAVY BREATHING. BED SLIGHTLY CREAKING.

Ben masturbating, the scrapbook still in his lap. He struggles to look at the images of the girls, closing his eyes frequently to escape into his mind.

The BREATHING gets HEAVIER. HEAVIER. HEAVIER! HEAVIER! A GASP releases as Ben finishes.

As he tries to catch his breath his slightly crumbles into hands.

WHIMPERING. BREATHING. CRYING.

Ben continues to cry as the scrapbook slips and falls to the ground.

INT. SCHOOL- CLASSROOM

Students sit quietly writing. MISS MACKENZIE, late 20s, a well put together, typical language arts and reading teacher walks around the classroom handing out papers to students.

Miss Mackenzie stops in front of Jenine's desk.

MISS MACKENZIE

Jenine.

Jenine looks up.

JENINE

Cheryl.

Jenine corrects herself.

JENINE  
(respectfully)  
Miss Mackenzie.

Miss Mackenzie hands Jenine a paper back with a big "A+" on it.

MISS MACKENZIE  
Good job.

Miss Mackenzie continues down the aisle as Jenine stares at her paper.

INT. SCHOOL- HALLWAY- LATER

Students exit the classroom. Jenine walks out in the mix.

LARRY, wearing a school soccer jersey walks up to Jenine.

LARRY  
B+.

JENINE  
B+ is seventy five.

LARRY  
You're kidding.

JENINE  
Seventy five. That's the price.  
Don't act like you don't have it.  
Your mom picks you up from school  
in a Porsche. Plus, thanks to your  
miraculous turn around in grades,  
you can still play on the soccer  
team.

Larry is quiet.

JENINE  
(more forcefully)  
So I think what you meant to say is  
"thank you, Jenine, for all of your  
hard work. Here's your seventy five  
dollars you asked for. I'm so glad  
to give it to you."

Jenine smiles and puts her hand out.

Larry takes the money out of his pocket and places it in Jenine's palm.

(CONTINUED)



JENINE

Thank you and have a great day.

Jenine walks further down the hallway and arrives at her locker.

SARAH, 12, a vibrant red head opens the locker next to Jenine.

JENINE

Hershey's chocolate bar or peanut M&M's?

Sarah gives Jenine a friendly smile.

SARAH

Peanut M&Ms.

Jenine opens her locker wider to reveal a stash of candy, chips, and other snacks. She hands Sarah a bag of peanut M&M's. Sarah exchanges the bag with money.

SARAH

Did your mom remember?

JENINE

She always remembers, she's just never conscious for it.

Jenine is getting ready to leave.

SARAH

Well we could celebrate tonight if you want. At my place.

Jenine is obviously not used to being asked to hang out and retracts.

JENINE

My mom promised to celebrate with me, so I should stay home.

The BELL RINGS.

Jenine rushes away.

SARAH

(shouting)

Another time!

Sarah looks on as Jenine rushes away.

EXT. ATM

Jenine pulls out her mother's card and inserts it in the ATM.

She opens her backpack and removes the check from her aunt. She deposit's it.

Cash dispenses from the ATM. Jenine adds the money to her previous profits.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT- BATHROOM

Ben is showering, scrubbing his body as hard as he can with soap.

He rinses off and shuts the shower off. He opens the shower curtain and steps with one foot out of the tub, the other slips, gets caught on the edge and he falls and hits his head hard on the toilet.

He is knocked out laying on the floor.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX

Jenine is walking towards the apartment complex, eating a candy bar.

She turns a corner towards her building. Multiple police cars, and an ambulance are parked outside.

Jenine stops. Two EMTs carry a body bag out of her apartment.

Jenine drops her candy bar.

JENINE

Mom!

Jenine runs as fast as she can to her mother, ducking and diving through people and police officers.

JENINE

Mom!

Jenine is almost at her mother.

JENINE

Mom!

Jenine is stopped by a LARGE POLICE OFFICER. She struggles hard against him as she grieves.

(CONTINUED)

LARGE POLICE OFFICER  
Woah! Woah! Woah!

JENINE  
Let go! That's my mom!

Jenine bites the Police Officer's hand. He drops her.

She runs to the bag. She wraps her arms around her mother as the EMTs struggle to keep the bag up. The EMT's lower the bag. Jenine unzips the bag. The EMTs try to stop her.

The Police Officer walks up and gives them the signal to stop.

The face of a lifeless mother, her eyes staring straight into the eyes of the child she left behind.

Jenine takes in this horrible image then weeps over the body.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX

Jenine is sitting on a bench, her eyes swollen. The Police Officer stands over her, a notepad in hand.

POLICEMAN  
What's your name?

Jenine is staring off in another direction.

POLICEMAN  
(louder)  
What's your name?

JENINE  
(faintly)  
Jenine.

POLICEMAN  
What's your last name?

JENINE  
Parker.

POLICEMAN  
Do you have your father's number so we can call him?

JENINE  
I don't have one.

(CONTINUED)

POLICEMAN

A number?

Jenine looks at the Police Officer.

JENINE

A father.

The Police Officer puts away the notepad and takes a seat next to Jenine.

POLICEMAN

Jenine, is there anyone we can contact for you?

JENINE

Joanna Peterson. I think she's my aunt. She sends letters to my mom from California.

POLICEMAN

Okay, that's good. Anyone else? Anyone closer.

JENINE

I might have an uncle. He lives in town. I don't know where.

POLICEMAN

You don't know his name?

Jenine shakes her head no.

JENINE

His name starts with a B I think. He sends me toys so it's probably on the packages.

POLICEMAN

That's great.

Jenine is staring off.

POLICEMAN

I can tell you're a strong girl.

JENINE

I am. Always had to be.

The policeman gives Jenine a hug.

EXT. LUXURY APARTMENT- LATER

The Policeman is standing outside of Ben's door banging.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT- BATHROOM

Ben is still knocked out on the floor.

EXT. LUXURY APARTMENT

The Policeman bangs harder.

No response.

Into his walkie.

POLICEMAN

This is officer Palamrio. The  
girl's uncle isn't home. Contact  
the aunt if you haven't already.

The Policeman stands then bang on the door one more time.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM

A large living room filled with family photos, expensive nic  
nacs, and those annoyingly adorable cozy pillows that say  
things such as "LOVE", "FAMILY", "PEACE", and so on.

Jenine and Sarah sit on opposite ends of the couch watching  
television.

The pillow next to Jenine reads "No Place Like Home."

In the background JANELLE, late 30s, the ideal stay at home  
mother, is in the kitchen wearing an apron and mittens  
taking out a chicken from the oven. She blows on it thinking  
it will somehow cool it down.

JANELLE

Ow. Ow. Ow.

Sarah looks over at Jenine, who is curled up in a blanket  
and focused on the television.

SARAH

So your aunt is coming from  
California?

(CONTINUED)

JENINE

That's what the officer said. But I'll stay with my uncle once he calls the police department back.

SARAH

I didn't know you had an uncle.

JENINE

I don't really know him.

SARAH

Oh. Ok.

Sarah focuses back on the television.

CRAIG, early 40s, the working dad, sits at the table in the background reading on his laptop. Janelle continues to run back and forth getting the food prepared.

CRAIG

Babe, do you need any help?

Janelle's eyes peak up from behind the chicken.

JANELLE

I'm alright love. Do you wanna set the table for me though? Then we can get these girls some food.

Craig is still looking in his laptop.

CRAIG

Sarah, set the table!

Janelle laughs. Sarah looks at Jenine. They both chuckle.

SARAH

Coming!

Sarah joins her mother in the kitchen. Jenine's eyes follow Sarah. She watches mother and daughter.

JANELLE

Just set the table sweetie. I got the rest.

Janelle kisses Sarah on the forehead.

Jenine gets up and walks towards the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN- CONTINUOUS

JENINE  
I'll help too.

SARAH  
Jenine, you don't have to-

Jenine jumps in.

JENINE  
I'd like to help.

Janelle hands Jenine a stack of plates.

JANELLE  
Ok. Thank you.

Sarah grabs utensils and napkins.

CRAIG  
Jenine, I hope you love love love  
chicken because Janelle makes the  
best stuffed chicken in the entire  
world.

Sarah comes towards the table.

SARAH  
Dad. I don't think she wants to  
make small talk about chicken.

Craig closes his laptop.

CRAIG  
Let Jenine decide if she wants to  
make small talk about chicken or  
not.

Janelle putting extra glaze on the chicken.

JANELLE  
Craig.

Jenine is putting plates down.

JENINE  
No. It's okay. I don't mind.

Jenine piles the plates in the middle of the table. She stands, still. Sarah looks at her. Jenine quickly grabs the plates and puts them in front of each chair. Sarah places utensils and napkins next to them.

(CONTINUED)

JENINE

Do you guys eat together every night?

Sarah neatens up the arrangements.

JANELLE

Most nights yes. Gets us to talk to each other. Check in.

CRAIG

Torture each other.

They all laugh.

JENINE

That's nice that you do that.

JANELLE

Did you and your mom eat together?

Jenine brings up a new topic.

JENINE

I like your sweater Sarah.

Sarah looks at her sweater.

SARAH

Oh! Thanks! My parents got it for me for Christmas last year.

Sarah grabs the silverware and places them on the napkins.

Jenine watches, then does the same.

Janelle starts putting the food on the table.

JANELLE

Honey, help me put the food down too.

SARAH

Okay mom.

Janelle points to Craig.

JANELLE

Help.

CRAIG

(playing around)  
Yes my dear.



Craig gets up and kisses Janelle.

The family working together to set the table.

Jenine slowly walks into the kitchen and grabs a dish as she's surrounded by this swarming family.

Janelle, Craig, and Sarah are finishing up setting the table together. Jenine watches from in the kitchen.

JANELLE  
(to Sarah)  
Thank you sweetie.

Jenine continues to watch. Still holding a dish.

CRAIG  
Jenine? You wanna bring that over  
and then we can sit down and eat?

Jenine looks down at the dish.

JENINE  
Uhh, yeah.

Jenine starts to walk over as the family takes their seats.

Jenine looks at Janelle. One step. Craig. One step. Sarah.

She arrives at the table. Still staring at Sarah. Then the sweater.

Sarah notices.

SARAH  
Is there something on my shirt?

Jenine doesn't hear Sarah, still staring.

SARAH  
Are you okay Jenine?

Jenine breaks from her stare, quickly places the dish down and rushes away.

JENINE  
I have to go to the bathroom.

The family watches Jenine's exit, still sitting with a meal in front of them just waiting to be eaten.

INT. SARAH'S BATHROOM

Jenine rushes in and closes the door. She is breathing heavily.

She turns and faces the mirror, looking at herself unraveling.

JENINE

Stop.

Breathing.

JENINE

Stop!

Tears swell up in Jenine's eyelids.

JENINE

(commanding herself)

No.

Jenine stares and clenches the sink harder.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT- BATHROOM

Ben laying on the ground. A little twitch in his face. He slowly opens his eyes, then puts his hand to his head indicating a headache.

He slowly gets up. He walks-

INT. HALLWAY

into the hallway, then turns and disappears into a room.

INT. HALLWAY- SHORTLY AFTER

Ben returns dressed in pajamas. He heads down into-

INT. KITCHEN-CONTINUOUS

the kitchen. Ben opens the freezer and grabs a smart one. He throws it in the microwave.

Ben moseys over to his phone. "8 missed calls." Ben picks up the phone and listens to a message.

His face instantly wakes up. He begins dialing a number.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Joanna?

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE- DINING ROOM

The family is sitting with the dishes in front of them but nothing on their plates. There is silence.

DOOR CLOSING.

Jenine returns and sits down at the table. Like nothing ever happened, she looks at the family, waiting for the go ahead.

CRAIG

Let's dig in.

Everyone grabs food.

INT. BEDROOM- EARLY MORNING

Jenine is asleep, lying next to Sarah.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

Janelle slides into the room.

JANELLE

Jenine?

Jenine slowly wakes up.

JANELLE

Your aunt is here.

Jenine sits up.

JANELLE

Just come out whenever you're ready.

Jenine stands up and stretches. She bends down and grabs her bag next to the bed. She unzips it, pulling out a black dress.

As Jenine looks up, Sarah's sweater is right in front of her face on the chair. Jenine looks at Sarah, who is sound asleep.

Jenine grabs the sweater and shoves it in her bag then zips it up.

(CONTINUED)

SARAH  
(groggy)  
You leaving?

Jenine, surprised, swings around to face Sarah.

JENINE  
Yeah.

The two looking at each other.

JENINE  
Thank you.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH  
Just have a fresh bag of peanut  
M&M's waiting for me on Monday.

The two girls laugh. Jenine exits the room as Sarah goes back to sleep.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jenine walks into the living room wearing all black. Ready for a funeral, and finds AUNT JOANNA, a tall, well put together woman in her early 40, standing in the doorway.

Aunt Joanna smiles. Jenine stands staring.

AUNT JOANNA  
Hi Jenine. You look so beautiful.

Jenine walks up to Aunt Joanna.

JENINE  
Can we go now please?

Aunt Joanna opens the door. Jenine exits and Joanna follows.

INT. CAR

Silence in the car as Jenine and Aunt Joanna speed down the road.

AUNT JOANNA  
I haven't seen you in years.  
Doesn't it feel strange?

Jenine is staring out of the window.

(CONTINUED)

JENINE

That is a fact.

Aunt Joanna looks at Jenine.

AUNT JOANNA

Do you have any questions? About anything?

JENINE

If I start asking questions, I'll never stop so I'd rather wait until after.

AUNT JOANNA

That's completely fine... I wanted to wait to tell you, but you're going to come live with me in California.

JENINE

Do I have cousins?

AUNT JOANNA

I don't have any kids. I can't have kids.

Jenine looks at her Aunt.

JENINE

Sorry.

Aunt Joanna smiles at Jenine. More silence.

JENINE

I miss my mom. Even though I really didn't like her. I still miss her.

AUNT JOANNA

I miss her too. I promise you she really loved you though.

JENINE

You can't promise anything... My mom promised she'd get clean.

Aunt Joanna stays quiet and just keeps driving.

EXT. GRAVEYARD

Jenine and Aunt Joanna stand over the grave of Jenine's mother. The coffin sits atop the ground. Jenine holds the bundle of withering roses in her hands.

Jenine walks up to the coffin and places the bundle on top.

BEN walks up and joins Jenine and Aunt Joanna.

He stands next to Aunt Joanna.

AUNT JOANNA  
You're late.

BEN  
You weren't very specific with the location. I got lost.

Jenine looks over at Ben. Ben notices Jenine. Jenine looks back at the coffin. Ben continues to admire Jenine.

The three watch as the coffin is lowered into the ground.

A PHONE RINGS.

Aunt Joanna takes her cell phone out of her pocket. She checks the screen and starts to walk away. She takes the call.

AUNT JOANNA  
(into the phone)  
Hello?... Wait? What?... Slow down...

Ben looking at Jenine as the coffin is almost fully in the ground.

EXT. PARKING LOT- CARS

Jenine is standing alone near her aunt's car and looking over at her Aunt and Uncle talking near Ben's car.

AUNT JOANNA	Ben
Ben- Ben-	No! No!

JOANNA  
Please I need you to do this. It will only be for a couple of weeks max.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

A couple weeks? Joanna I have a job. No experience with kids.

JOANNA

It's not like she's a baby. She has basically been taking care of herself for years. You barely have to do anything. And you're a freaking toy maker. Your job is to provide fun for kids! So-just do it!

BEN

You're supposed to take her.

JOANNA

The house flooded. I don't even have a place to stay yet. You have space. I should just move in with you too.

BEN

No!

Ben looks over at Jenine who is now kicking rocks.

JENINE

She needs her family Ben.

Ben looks back at Joanna.

BEN

Fine.

Joanna hugs Ben.

AUNT JOANNA

Thank you!

Ben pulls out of the hug.

BEN

But only for a few weeks. Then she has to leave.

AUNT JOANNA

A couple of weeks is all I'll need.

The two look back at Jenine.

She stares back as she continues to kick rocks.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT- THE FRONT DOOR- LATER

The door swings open, light shining through into the hallway.

Jenine steps through the door, looking around.

Ben follows, carrying bags.

Jenine continues to walk down the hall as Ben closes the door.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT- KITCHEN

Jenine walks past the kitchen, looking at the expensive decor.

JENINE

You're rich?

Ben struggling to carry the bags.

BEN

I do well for myself. I wouldn't say rich.

JENINE

You have money?

BEN

Well, yes.

JENINE

You're rich.

Jenine walks into the hallway leaving Ben trailing behind.

BEN

I guess if you say so.

Ben follows.

INT. HALLWAY

Jenine looks at all the photos on the walls. Pictures of toys. Also, frames with store photos.

BEN

You're room is right to the left.



INT. GUEST ROOM

Jenine opens the door and looks inside. A plain, bland guest room with some uninteresting paintings scattered about the walls.

Ben moves past her, bringing her things into the room.

Ben puts Jenine's things down.

BEN

You can get yourself settled then I  
can show you the rest of the  
apartment.

Jenine walks further into the room.

JENINE

This is big.

BEN

I wouldn't say bi-

JENINE

It's big.

Ben shuts up.

Ben starts towards the door.

BEN

Come get me when you're ready.

Ben stands in the doorway. Jenine looking around the room. Ben looks on for a beat the exits. Jenine is left alone. She sits on the bed. Her hands rubbing the soft blankets.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Ben is sitting on the couch watching television.

A FRIDGE OPENING.

Ben mutes the television and gets up.

INT. KITCHEN-CONTINUOUS

Jenine is scrounging through the freezer.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Hey.

Jenine pulls out a smart one.

JENINE

You only have frozen dinners.

Ben goes and grabs the box from Jenine..

BEN

It's usually just me and I eat frozen dinners.

JENINE

Why?

Ben is putting the food back in the freezer.

BEN

My work keeps me busy. If you wanted food you could've asked.

JENINE

I figured you'd say yeah so I just skipped the question part. Do you make the toys or just design them?

BEN

Both.

JENINE

Toys?

BEN

Yeah, toys. For kids and young teens.

JENINE

Like me?

BEN

Yeah, like you.

JENINE

I don't like toys.

BEN

Well that's-That's great.

Jenine is looking through the fridge.

(CONTINUED)

JENINE  
What can I eat?

Ben closes the fridge.

BEN  
I'll order us a pizza.

JENINE  
I can help pay for it. I have money.

BEN  
What? No. I'll pay.

JENINE  
Why?

BEN  
You're my niece.

JENINE  
We're basically strangers.

BEN  
Okay, you're right. We barely know each other but it doesn't mean we're not family. I'm paying for the pizza.

JENINE  
Okay.

INT. LIVING ROOM- LATER

A pizza box lays on the coffee table, nearly empty.

Jenine is sitting on the couch watching television, eating a slice of pizza.

Jenine looks at the empty room around her, then at the pizza box.

Jenine grabs another slice and pops up from the couch.

INT. WORK SPACE

Ben is painting the nails of the porcelain doll.

(CONTINUED)

The door behind him swings open. Jenine stands in the doorway, still holding a slice of pizza, with another one on a plate. She looks around at all of the toys then focuses in on Ben.

JENINE

You didn't eat any pizza.

Ben slightly turns around to acknowledge Jenine, and the pizza.

BEN

I'm okay with my frozen dinners.  
Plus I'm not much of a pizza  
person.

Jenine takes a step in to Ben's space.

JENINE

You're not much of a pizza person,  
but you ordered pizza?

BEN

Teenagers like pizza, so I got you  
pizza.

Jenine walks closer.

JENINE

Eat with me.

Jenine extends the pizza to Ben.

Ben focused on the doll.

BEN

No thank you.

Jenine pushing harder.

JENINE

I brought you a slice of pizza, and  
you're gonna refuse to eat it?  
Seems a bit rude, don't you think?

Ben sighs and turns to Jenine. He puts down his brush and grabs the plate from Jenine.

He holds the plate as Jenine continues to stare at him waiting.

He raises the plate.

BEN

Thank you.

Jenine satisfied.

JENINE

You're welcome.

Jenine wonders around the room, examining the toys.

JENINE

You're not used to being around people, are you?

BEN

Somethin like that.

JENINE

What do you mean?

BEN

Never really around kids.

JENINE

But you make toys? Doesn't that mean you have to be around kids?

Ben is focused on the doll.

BEN

Around them. Observe them, but never really interact with them.

Jenine staring at the row of porcelain dolls. She is only inches away from Ben

JENINE

Seems creepy.

Ben moving slightly away from Jenine.

BEN

You're not used to being around people either it seems.

JENINE

Older men. Obviously. No dada or papa.

Jenine notices one doll in particular. She points to it.

JENINE

This one looks like my mom.

Ben turns to see the doll.

BEN

It's supposed to. I made it for her.

Jenine grabs the doll, examining it more closely.

BEN

I was going to give it to her-

Ben now solely focused on Jenine.

BEN

-when she got clean.

Jenine looks at Ben, then back at the doll, staring.

JENINE

Now what are you going to do with it?

BEN

You can have it if you want.

Jenine smiles and grabs the doll off of the shelf.

JENINE

Yes.

Ben smirks.

INT. GUEST ROOM

Jenine is laying down under the covers. The porcelain doll lays on the other side of the bed. Jenine cries as she looks at the doll.

INT. HALLWAY

THE FLUSH of a toilet.

Ben walks down the hallway, barely awake.

JENINE (O.S.)

Uncle Ben?

Ben stops. He looks through the crack of Jenine's door.

His fragile niece sitting slightly up from under the covers.

INT. GUEST ROOM

Ben opens the door.

Jenine is looking at him, with swollen eyes. She sits up further, wiping her nose with her sleeve.

Ben hesitantly walks further into the room, not used to dealing with these situations, therefore, not knowing how to proceed.

He takes a seat on the bed next to Jenine, leaving some space between them.

Ben looks at Jenine, while she tries to hold back tears. Jenine looks at her uncle, longing for some type of comfort.

The two sit in silence with space between them.

Moments pass, then Jenine quickly crumbles, and wraps her arms around Ben.

Ben still has his arms off of her body, not sure of what to do with them, or Jenine.

Jenine squeezes tighter and digs her face deeper into Ben's chest.

Ben gives in and holds Jenine. He relaxes into it and caresses her arm, comforting her.

INT. GUEST ROOM- THE NEXT MORNING

Ben and Jenine are still in bed, asleep, wrapped up in one another.

The sun shines through the blinds, flaring on Ben's face. It catches his eye, waking him up.

Ben comes to, seeing Jenine on his chest.

He stares at her face, brushing a strand of hair from her eye. His eyes travel down her body, stopping at the end of her shirt. He stares at the bare skin of her legs.

Ben catches himself and quickly gets out of the bed.

He exits the room, leaving Jenine asleep.

INT. KITCHEN- HOURS LATER

Ben is preparing breakfast.

It's the kind of breakfast one throws together when they have no idea what they are doing.

Things are tossed all around the counters. Batter dripping. Egg yolk all over. Pans dirtied.

Ben stands with a spatula in each hand, flipping something in one pan, and pushing something in another pan.

Jenine walks in on the tragic display.

She watches her uncle try to flip a pancake, it falls to the ground, she chuckles.

Ben reacts and turns around.

BEN

Good morning Jenine.

Ben puts the spatulas down.

BEN

Teenagers tend to skip breakfast.  
It's not very healthy. You should  
eat this breakfast.

Jenine amused.

JENINE

Okay.

Jenine sits at the counter while Ben slides some food her way.

BEN

Breakfast then we'll stop by your  
house to pick up the rest of your  
things.

Jenine tenses up a bit.

JENINE

Today?

BEN

Yeah, the landlord has been calling  
your aunt wanting us to clear it  
out so he can move someone else in.

(CONTINUED)



JENINE

To an apartment where someone died?

BEN

Insensitive bastard yes.

Jenine giggles.

JENINE

Alright, that's fine.

Jenine takes a bite of her food. It is obviously not good, but she hides that from Ben.

BEN

How is it?

Through the displeasure.

JENINE

Great.

BEN

I guess I really should cook more often.

Ben turns around and Jenine quickly spits her food into a napkin and hides it under the table.

Ben turns back and smiles at her, not noticing her sneaky move. Jenine smiles back.

INT. CAR

Jenine and Ben sit, looking over at Jenine's old apartment from the street.

BEN

I could go in for you if you want.

JENINE

It's just the place where my mom overdosed and died. Piece of cake.

Ben shocked. Jenine notices.

JENINE

I make terrible jokes when I'm uncomfortable.

Jenine opens her door.

(CONTINUED)

JENINE

Let's go.

Jenine walks out.

INT. APARTMENT

Jenine walks through the door, followed by Ben.

There is an uncomfortable silence in the air, spread throughout the empty apartment.

Jenine pauses then quickly walks towards the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY- CONTINUOUS

Jenine rushes through the hallway and dips into her room. Ben is left trailing behind. He accidentally kicks the box of toys.

He leans down and puts the toys back in the box, closing it up. He picks up the box.

INT. JENINE'S BEDROOM

Jenine is grabbing things from her closet and putting them in a shopping bag.

Ben walks in holding the box of toys.

BEN

I guess you really don't like toys.

JENINE

Yeah, sorry. I appreciated the gifts but I just never had time to use them. My mom kept me busy.

Ben puts the box down.

BEN

She definitely knew how to occupy others time.

Jenine still stuffing things.

JENINE

Were you ever close?

Ben starts to help Jenine.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Oh yeah, especially when we were  
younger.