

BLACK

1 **INT. PARIS HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - DAY** 1

A KNOCK ON A DOOR. Then--

 VOICE
 Mademoiselle?

A SPLASH. Someone stirs in a bathtub. MORE KNOCKING.

 VOICE (CONT'D)
 Mademoiselle Harmon? Etes-vous La?

We can just make out a A FACE in the dark. Breathing. Watching. *FRANTIC POUNDING ON THE DOOR*. Followed by--

 VOICE (CONT'D)
 Mademoiselle! Ils vous attendent!

Finally, from the darkness--

 BETH
 I'm coming...

MORE SPLASHES and SPILLING WATER as she hoists herself out of the tub. A BOTTLE GETS KICKED OVER--

 BETH (CONT'D)
 Shit--

2 **INT. PARIS HOTEL ROOM - DOOR/HALLWAY - NEXT** 2

She stumbles through the dark room. THE DOOR IS CRACKED OPEN and over her shoulder is the face of a MAN in a suit, out in the hallway, clearly mortified at the sight of her.

 BETH
 Je descend tout-de-suite.

She shuts the door, taking us to black again. More stumbling.

3 **INT. PARIS HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NEXT** 3

THE BATHROOM LIGHT IS TURNED ON and there she is, staring at herself in the mirror-- BETH HARMON. All of 20. In the same dress she wore the night before, but now soaking wet.

 BETH
 Fuck.

Yeah, *fuck*. She looks awful. Well, she looks like what she is: *still drunk, high, whatever*. Her hair, stringy and wet. She starts to pull the soggy dress over her head--

4 **INT/EXT. PARIS HOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER** 4

She comes back into the room and opens the curtains to reveal a grey PARIS morning outside. Having changed into a different dress, she steps into one shoe, hunts for the other...

She shakes A GREEN PILL from a vial, spots a mini bar-sized bottle of Vodka on the dresser with a bit still left inside, puts the little bottle to her lips when--

SOMEONE STIRS ON THE BED.

She turns, sees a shape under the covers. She stares, clearly trying to do the math as to just who the fuck is in her bed.

She pops the pill. Drains the bottle. Grabs her shoes...

5 **INT. PARIS HOTEL - HALLWAY - SAME** 5

FOLLOW HER DOWN THE HALL to a grand staircase. She holds her shoes in one hand, runs the other over her dress, smoothing the wrinkles the best she can.

Beth hurries down the stairs, passing a MAN holding the hand of a LITTLE GIRL on the way up. The little girl stares up at Beth as they pass...

Beth crosses the ornate lobby, heads for another hallway--

6 **INT. PARIS HOTEL - ANOTHER HALLWAY - SAME** 6

As Beth hurries along the quiet hallway, pauses in front of large pair of doors and pulls on her shoes. She then pushes through the doors into--

7 **A GIANT BALLROOM** 7

As a hundred heads turn towards her. While the room is packed with people, it's dead silent. They've been waiting. For her.

And now we hear *one* sound: THE WHIR OF CAMERAS. A DOZEN PHOTOGRAPHERS gathered at the entrance snap her picture.

The crowd parts to reveal A TABLE at the very center of the room. A CHESSBOARD sits on top. TV CAMERAS have been set up. The size/look hinting that it's sometime in the **mid sixties**.

Seated at the table waiting for her is VASILY BORGOV, forty. A frightening figure in a dark suit, Borgov is all eyebrows and frown. Beth approaches, quickly shakes his hand and sits down across from him.

BETH

I'm sorry.

He nods, says nothing. A few more photos and then SILENCE. Beth watches Borgov make his first move. PUSH IN ON HER--

8

EXT. KENTUCKY HIGHWAY - DAY

8

VOICE

What are we supposed to do with
her?

AND NOW BETH AT 20 BECOMES BETH AT 9

The little girl staring at Camera.

ANOTHER VOICE

They're sending someone.

BEGIN PANNING AWAY FROM BETH...

TO LOOK DOWN a ribbon of empty Kentucky Highway, hung with
low fog, as the PAN CONTINUES ACROSS THE HIGHWAY--

VOICE

Not a scratch on her.

--to A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT. Car versus Truck. *Head on*. The car
flattened, is wedged deep under the front end of the bigger
vehicle. The TRUCK DRIVER stands away from it smoking, eyes
on A BODY that lies on the asphalt covered in a sheet. Now--

CONTINUE PANNING TO LOOK UP THE HIGHWAY...

TO FIND A COUPLE OF COPS standing there holding a LONG LINE
OF TRAFFIC, the makes of the cars put us in the **late fifties**.
SIRENS and FLASHING LIGHTS of rescue vehicles in the distance
driving up the shoulder...

COP #1

It's a miracle.

The other cop looks back down as CAMERA COMPLETES ITS CIRCLE
and once again FINDS BETH, in a cotton dress, staring at the
body on the ground.

COP #2

I doubt she'll see it that way.

AS THE SIRENS GET LOUDER--

9

INT. CAR - DAY

9

Beth stares at the mole on the face of the chatty MATRON from
Social Services behind the wheel.

MATRON

You understand, dear, your mother's
passed on? You know what that
means, do you, *passed on*?

(Beth nods)

(MORE)

MATRON (CONT'D)

Well, I'm sure she's gone on to a better place and, someday, you'll get to see her again.

BETH

When?

The woman looks at Beth, smiles, then looks ahead as they pull up to a trailer in the woods--

MATRON

I imagine it must be very quiet living way out here.
(more to herself)
Very quiet...

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

The door opens and Beth follows the woman into the ragged and tired space. Dirty dishes are piled up around a small sink.

MATRON

Oh, my...

The woman stays soft in the doorway as Beth enters, stares at a nearly empty glass of milk on the table sitting across from a coffee cup, LIPSTICK visible on the rim. From the b.g...

MATRON (CONT'D)

The funeral will be in a few days...

Beth puts the cup to her lips as...

MATRON (CONT'D)

Of course, given the... *scope* of her injuries, the casket will be closed.

The woman steps forward, puts a meaty hand on her shoulder.

MATRON (CONT'D)

Have you got a suitcase?

EXT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Beth exits with a paper grocery sack full of her belongings. The Woman droning on as they walk to a dusty sedan, "KNOX COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES" stenciled on the door--

MAN'S VOICE

Elizabeth?

She looks to where A MAN gets out of a car, a CAMERA around his neck. A REPORTER-- He snaps her picture...

11 CONTINUED: 5.
11

MRS. DEARDORFF (V.O.)
*Orphaned by yesterday's collision
on New Circle Road...*

FREEZE - A NEWSPAPER PHOTO - BETH HARMON

On the image of Beth looking out the window of the car...

MRS. DEARDORFF (V.O.)
*Elizabeth Harmon surveys a troubled
future.*

12 INT. MRS. DEARDORFF'S OFFICE - SAME 12

MRS. DEARDORFF -- a tall statue of a woman in horn rims --
reads the paper at her desk. A FILE open in front of her.

MRS. DEARDORFF
*Elizabeth, nine, was left without
family by the crash...*

13 EXT. KENTUCKY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 13

As the sedan moves through the Kentucky countryside, Beth
rests her head on the door, letting the wind hit her face.

MRS. DEARDORFF (V.O.)
*Her mother, Alice Harmon, was
pronounced dead at the scene.*

14 INT. MRS. DEARDORFF'S OFFICE - DAY 14

Mrs. Deardorff looks through a file... Not much in it outside
of the paper. A photo of ALICE, a school photo of Beth.

15 EXT. KENTUCKY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 15

As the sedan passes under a sign for MT. STERLING.

FERGUSSEN (V.O.)
And the father?

16 INT. MRS. DEARDORFF'S OFFICE - DAY 16

FERGUSSEN, a young black orderly (24) stands in front of the
desk as Mrs. Deardorff peers at the file...

MRS. DEARDORFF
Doesn't say. I would guess, though,
that, like most men who live around
there, he was yet another victim of
a carefree life.

A HORN HONKS OS and Mrs. Deardorff looks up.

The girl hurries off as Mrs. Deardorff opens the drawers under the bed...

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
You can put your clothes down here.
And there's a shelf for your tooth
brush and any other personal items
there.

She watches as Beth unpacks her few things from the bag.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
I know that, at this moment, all
you're feeling is loss. But after
grief brings you low, prayer and
faith will lift you high... high
enough for you to see a new path
for yourself.

Beth just keep unpacking, doesn't look at her.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
I think, Elizabeth, you're going to
find a much different life here, a
better one than you might have had.

Mrs. Deardorff puts a hand on Beth's shoulder.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
And I'm certain that you and I are
going to be good friends.

Now Beth turns around and looks up at her.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
Now about that hair...

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Mrs. Deardorff watches MRS. LONSDALE cut Beth's hair.

INT. LINEN SUPPLY ROOM - DAY

Shelves full of clothing arranged by color. Mrs. Deardorff turns to the newly shorn Beth and holds up a plain shift to the girl's body.

MRS. DEARDORFF
That should do nicely.

She nods to Beth's dress.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
Off with that rag.

Beth pulls her old dress over her head, looks at her name hand embroidered in the shape of a heart. Mrs. Deardorff takes it from her, holds it out away from herself.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
I think we'll burn this one.

Beth looks at her, is about to react when she hears LAUGHTER, turns to see a couple of girls watching her from the doorway--

A few GIRLS peek in as Beth hugs her skinny self.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
Shoo.

A BELL SOUNDS and Mrs. Deardorff smiles at Beth.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
One more stop.

CUT TO A LARGE JAR OF GREEN PILLS

BOOM UP to reveal CHILDREN LINED UP beyond a window where now Fergusson passes out pills and cups of water. NOW TRACK DOWN TO THE END OF THE LINE TO BETH as Mrs. Deardorff rests a hand on her shoulder--

MRS. DEARDORFF
Mr. Fergusson will take good care of you. I'll see you at Dinner.

She moves off and Beth watches as each kid is given one green pill and another brown pill. Mr. Fergusson watching, making sure they swallow both..

VOICE
The green ones are the best.

Beth sees a girl, black, taller than the others, 14, looking back at her. JOLENE. Another girl stands beside her.

BETH
What are they?

JOLENE
(winks at the other girl)
Vitamins.

OTHER GIRL
Magic vitamins.

For some reason that cracks up the two of them.

JOLENE
What's your name, girl?

BETH

Beth.

JOLENE

Jolene.

(lowers her voice)

I were you, Beth, I'd save the green ones up for the nighttime. Otherwise they turn off just when you need 'em to turn on. If you know what I mean.

Jolene watches as Beth looks around THE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM where the pharmacy is located. At the books, the religious magazines and posters.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Your mother and daddy dead?

(as Beth nods)

What's the last thing they ever said to you?

(leans close)

I ask everybody that one. You get some really fun answers.

BETH

I don't remember.

JOLENE

Well, someday you might. You let me know if you do.

She then turns away, leaving Beth to stare at the back of her hair.

ON THE WINDOW

As Beth gets to the front of the line and Fergusen hands her the two pills and a cup of water. Beth looks at them...

FERGUSSEN

Green is to even your disposition. Orange and brown's for building a strong body.

(holds them out)

Take them both.

(as she hesitates)

Go on.

Beth does as she's told.

Beth walks back to the Girls' Ward. She's unsteady, reaches out for the wall. She's never had "vitamins" quite like these...

BETH'S POV AS SHE WALKS

The world seems more vibrant, the colors, the sounds. The other kids. All of them looking at her.

Beth moves on, a dreamy expression on her face.

Up ahead a JANITOR, heavysset, his back to us, mops the floor. He turns to watch her a moment. He's BLURRY. No face. KEYS at his waist JINGLE.

She stares at him, fascinated by the action of the mop in the bucket, the sound of the keys. The Janitor turns and looks at her and she moves on.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

As Beth stares as her tray is filled, mesmerized by the food. She turns to face the room. Doesn't know where to sit. After a moment, she realizes Jolene is waving her over...

AS BETH SITS DOWN

Jolene takes one look at Beth's dreamy face and laughs.

BETH
I feel funny...

JOLENE
You *look* funny. Thought I told you to *wait*, and take them vitamins at bedtime?

Beth stares at her plate. Pokes at it with her fork...

BETH
What is this?

ANOTHER GIRL
Fish.

JOLENE
Far as we know.

ANOTHER GIRL
We eat it every Friday.

The "fish" comes in squares and is covered in a thick orange sauce, like French Dressing. Beth gags on her first bite.

ANOTHER GIRL (CONT'D)
You gotta eat every bite or they'll tell Mrs. Deardorff about you, and you won't get adopted.

Beth looks at her. Sees Mrs. Deardorff eating with other teachers, staff at another table. She looks at Beth.

24 **INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT**

24

Everyone in bed. Beth is the only one awake. She lies there listening to the girls in the other beds, coughing, turning and muttering. A SHADOW crosses her bed as the NIGHT ORDERLY walks past. A DISTANT PHONE RINGS, A TOILET FLUSHES. VOICES DOWN THE HALL.

She looks up at the ceiling. BRANCHES from the trees outside the window form eerie, CRISSCROSSING SHADOWS on the ceiling.

She sees Jolene, a few beds over, taking her pill NOW. Jolene looks back at Beth, shakes her head and lays down.

Beth rolls over on her side and curls up tight.

25 **INT. GIRLS' WARD - MORNING**

25

As Beth wakes up, doesn't feel so good. Mrs. Deardorff walks into the ward and everybody straightens up. *Good Morning Mrs. Deardorff.*

MRS. DEARDORFF
Good morning, Girls. This is Mr.
and Mrs. Spellman.

A YOUNG COUPLE shyly enters behind her, apparently "shopping" for a kid. Beth watches as the girls all quickly put delicate HEADBANDS in their hair. Beth doesn't have one.

She turns as the couple comes her way. But Beth looks awful. They take one look at her and turn away.

26 **EXT. EXERCISE YARD - DAY**

26

The girls are all doing various forms of exercise. Beth watches Jolene and some other girls on a jump rope. She invites Beth over.

BETH
I've never done it.

JOLENE
Never?

BETH
No.

JOLENE
Try it.

Beth tries to jump in with Jolene, but catches the rope with her foot. Beth feels like an idiot. Jolene smiles and takes her hand--

JOLENE (CONT'D)
Hang onto me and jump when I
jump...

Beth does and misses.

JOLENE (CONT'D)
Try again.

Beth does and soon she's doing it in rhythm with the older
girl.

JOLENE (CONT'D)
Now you're getting it.

INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - DAY

As Beth receives her pills, turns to go without taking them--

FERGUSSEN
Hey-- Harmon!

She turns back. He points to the cup.

FERGUSSEN (CONT'D)
Take your pill.

She has no choice. Takes the pills.

INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT

Another night of no sleep. Movement and voices down the hall.
The shadows from the trees on the ceiling more menacing than
ever. Beth curls up, knows it's going to be a long night.

KNOCKING ON A DOOR OVER...

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A younger Beth lying on the couch, awake, listening to the
hushed conversation.

MAN'S VOICE
Alice, come on. Open the door. It's
taken me a whole month to find you.

ALICE/BETH'S MOTHER
For good reason.

Beth slips out off the couch...

ALICE
You shouldn't be here.

MAN'S VOICE
I could say the same to you.

Beth looks to the doorway of the mobile home, it's ajar, her mother ALICE stands there calmly talking through the crack to a MAN we can't quite see.

ALICE
I'm living my truth.

MAN
Your *truth*? You went to Cornell.

ALICE
That was a mistake. One of many.

Beth creeps closer, tries to see who's out there.

MAN
Alice. Sweetheart. Whatever you're doing, whatever *this* is, it's nuts, even for you.

ALICE
I don't expect you to understand. I don't expect anyone to understand.

MAN
What I *understand* is that you're not taking care of yourself.

And with that, Beth watches as he drops a VIAL OF PILLS THROUGH THE CRACK. Alice ignores them.

MAN (CONT'D)
Just let me come in and talk to Lizzy. Make sure she's okay.

ALICE
You think I'd *hurt* her? She's happy here. She's where she belongs.

MAN
Do you honestly think our daughter *belongs* in a trailer, the middle of nowhere.

ALICE
Who says she's "our" daughter?

MAN
Alice, don't do that--

ALICE
And she doesn't like being called *Lizzy*.

And she closes the door. Listens. Then--

ALICE (CONT'D)
Are you still there?

Then from outside--

MAN'S VOICE
Alright, Alice, you win. I can't
fight you anymore. And I can't keep
chasing after you just to have you
run away again. But I also can't
keep on lying awake every night
worrying about the two of you.

ALICE
You don't have to. We're fine.

MAN'S VOICE
Once I drive away, I'm not coming
back. So... I'm just gonna ask one
last time, is that what you really
want? For me to disappear?

Alice closes her eyes, leans against the door, presses one
hand against it. Finally--

ALICE
You need to go live your life.

MAN'S VOICE
What does that mean?

ALICE
I'm sorry, Paul.

She turns, sees Beth looking at her. Then moves away into the
dark. Beth bends down PICKS UP THE VIAL OF PILLS. FOOTSTEPS.

She moves to a window, sees a FIGURE get into a car. The dome
light enough to glimpse her Beth's Father's face. He looks at
the trailer a moment. Then starts the car...

30

OMITTED

30

31

INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - DAY

31

Jolene gets her cup of pills. And pops them in her mouth for
Fergussen to see. Then she turns around, faces--

--Beth waiting behind her and opens/closes her mouth, giving
Beth a flash of the GREEN PILL still on her tongue. Beth
turns, watches as Jolene casually spits the pill into her
palm on her way out the door.

FERGUSSEN
Harmon?

31 CONTINUED: 15.
31

Beth steps up and receives her vitamins. She walks away from the line, then does as Jolene demonstrated and spits out the GREEN PILL and puts it into her pocket.

32 INT. GIRLS' WARD - DAY 32

As Beth hides the green pill in her TOOTHBRUSH HOLDER.

33 INT. MATH CLASS - DAY 33

The kids take a test. MISS GRAHAM patrols the rows of desks, stopping when she finds Beth staring out the window.

MISS GRAHAM
Miss Harmon?
(Beth turns to her)
Finished already?

Beth nods, hands her the paper. Miss Graham looks at it.

MISS GRAHAM (CONT'D)
Hmm.

She looks at Beth, seems to see her differently now. She glances at the clock, then--

MISS GRAHAM (CONT'D)
Why don't you take the erasers down
to the basement and clean them...

34 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY 34

As Beth moves down a quiet corridor, tosses one of the dusty blackboard erasers in the air. She looks off as she hears--

JOLENE
...they're all fucking cocksuckers.
And you're the biggest fucking
cocksucker of them all...

She pauses as Fergusen passes in the other direction, dragging Jolene down the hall by the ear...

FERGUSSEN
I never met someone, liked the
taste of soap much as you do...

Mr. Fergusen gives Beth a look--

FERGUSSEN (CONT'D)
Where you going, Harmon?

She holds up the erasers, keeps her eyes on Jolene who winks at her as Fergusen drags her to a door marked SUPPLIES.

Beth carries on down the hall, gets to a staircase in the back, goes through a door marked BASEMENT.

35 **INT. BASEMENT - SAME**

35

Beth comes down the stairs, comes around the corner, and THE BACK OF THE JANITOR comes into view. He sits on a metal stool near the furnace, a single bare bulb overhead, scowling at the green and white board in front of him.

Beth looks at the board. The funny-shaped pieces on the green and white squares. He glances at her, then back to the board.

Beth moves to the far side of the basement and clops the erasers together, watching the janitor the entire time.

She stares at the man through the billowing cloud of chalk dust growing all around her--

The janitor is in his fifties, heavysset, nothing particularly friendly about him. MR. SHAIBEL.

She finishes the job and starts to leave, this time crossing closer to the game, getting a good look at THE BOARD as she passes. Fascinated by it. It almost seems to *move*.

He looks up at her and she bolts up the stairs...

36 **INT. CORRIDOR - DAY**

36

As Beth runs up the corridor with the erasers...

37 **INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT**

37

Beth lies awake, listening to the noises of the night, but this time, instead of gutting it out, she reaches down and dumps the PILL from her toothbrush holder into her palm and swallows it. She lies back and stares up at the CEILING...

...The CRISSCROSSED SHADOWS FROM THE TREES OUTSIDE begin to SLOWLY STRAIGHTEN OUT AND FORM SQUARES. Beth stares at them, watches as the ceiling becomes a GIANT CHESSBOARD.

The door opens, the shaft of light from the hall ruining the chessboard on the ceiling as Mr. Fergusen checks in on the girls, then backs out again.

Beth looks up at the ceiling as the board reappears...

38 **INT. GIRLS' WARD - MORNING**

38

Beth wakes up, refreshed, feeling better than she has.

MRS. DEARDORFF
Good morning, girls.

She turns to see Mrs. Deardorff enter the ward.

EVERYONE
Good morning, Mrs. Deardorff.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Mary-Sue?

She walks over to A LITTLE BLOND GIRL who listens to the head mistress. Mrs. Deardorff turns to go, but turns back with one more thought-- she snaps her fingers and points to the little girl's head. Clears her throat.

The little girl quickly puts on her little headband.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

Don't dawdle.

And she walks out. Beth watches as the little girl starts quickly collecting her things.

JOLENE

Not fair.

Beth turns to see Jolene now standing beside her.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

She came here after you.

(turns to Beth)

Most of us are lifers. Been here a long time. Nobody's gonna come for us now. We're too old.

(then)

Or too black.

Beth takes that in, watches as Mrs. Deardorff helps her pack up her things.

INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - MORNING

As Beth receives her "vitamins," turns away, walks around the corner and then pockets the green one. She looks up and sees Mr. Shaibel far down the corridor go into the basement. HEAR THE GIRLS SINGING OVER...

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

Miss. Lonsdale leads the girls in singing *Bringing in the Sheaves*. Beth, bored out of her skull, slips out of her seat, motions to MISS. LONSDALE that she "has to go."

Miss Lonsdale frowns. Beth indicates "really bad."

INT. CORRIDOR - MORNING

The singing in the b.g. as Beth hurries to the stairs--

42

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

42

Beth slowly comes up behind Mr. Shaibel. He reaches out and touches one of the knights... thinking... She comes closer, the shadow of her head falling on the board--

MR. SHAIBEL

What do you *want*, child?

She stands still. He turns to her.

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)

You should be in *chapel*.

Saying the word like he bit into something rotten.

BETH

What's that game called?

MR. SHAIBEL

You should be upstairs with the others.

BETH

I don't want to be with the others.
I want to know what game you're playing.

He looks up at her a moment, then shrugs.

MR. SHAIBEL

It's called chess.

She takes a step back and he resumes his game. Beth watches as he stares at the pieces. Motionless. As if he hates them.

She watches him reach out and pick a piece up by its top with his fingertips, hold it for a moment as though holding a dead mouse by the tail and then set it on another square.

BETH

Will you teach me?

Mr. Shaibel says nothing, doesn't even register the question. All we get are the DISTANT SINGING VOICES. She tries again...

BETH (CONT'D)

I want to learn to play chess.

Mr. Shaibel reaches out a fat hand to one of the larger black pieces, picks it up deftly by its head and sets it down on a square on the other side of the board. Not looking at her--

MR. SHAIBEL

I don't play strangers.

19.
42 CONTINUED: 42

The flat voice is like a slap in the face. She stands there a moment, then turns and runs back upstairs.

A43 INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT A43

As the girls all jump into their beds. Beth sneaks a pill and lies back just as Fergusson turns off the lights.

FERGUSSEN
Sweet dreams, ladies.

And shuts the door. Beth concentrates on the ceiling, watches as it once more forms squares...

43 EXT. EXERCISE YARD - DAY 43

Jolene plays dodge ball. Beth steps up beside her, watches as the older girl catches the ball one handed, and sends it back like a bullet, knocking over the girl who threw it.

BETH
You were right, the vitamins work better at night.

JOLENE
How many you take?

BETH
I don't know-- Sometimes I skip a day, or a bunch of days, then take two or three. I like the way it feels.

JOLENE
I bet you do.

And now Jolene lifts a cigarette she'd been keeping at her side to her lips, takes a quick hit. Jolene sees Fergusson looking her way, smiles, shows him some leg as she says to Beth--

JOLENE (CONT'D)
You just be careful you don't get too used to that feeling.

44 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY 44

As Beth runs up the corridor with the erasers...

45 INT. BASEMENT - DAY 45

Beth cleans the erasers, watching Mr. Shaibel at the chess board. He doesn't look up. Finally she walks over. Takes a breath. Then--

BETH
I'm not a stranger.
(then)
I live here.
(no answer)
I already know some of it, from
watching.

MR. SHAIBEL
(finally)
Girls don't play chess.

Beth takes a step closer, points at, but doesn't touch, one
of the rooks--

BETH
That one moves up and down or back
and forth. All the way, if there's
space to move in. But that one can
only go up. That tall one can go
any way it wants.

Mr. Shaibel remains quiet. She's turning to go when--

MR. SHAIBEL
And this one?

And her heart leaps as he points to a bishop.

BETH
On the diagonals.

He points to a knight.

BETH (CONT'D)
One square diagonal plus one square
straight.

He looks up at her. Considers. Then--

MR. SHAIBEL
Let's play a game...
(turns to the board)
I play white.

BETH
I don't have much time.

MR. SHAIBEL
Now or never.

BETH
I have Geography in ten minutes.

MR. SHAIBEL
Now or never.

She drops the erasers, drags an old milk crate from behind the furnace to the other side of the board--

BETH

Okay.

And they begin to play. He beats her in four moves. She stares at the board.

MR. SHAIBEL

That's called Scholar's Mate.

BETH

How do you do it?

MR. SHAIBEL

Not today.

BETH

Show me.

MR. SHAIBEL

Not today.

Beth bursts out of the basement and runs for class. STAY WITH HER as she rounds a corner, runs smack into MRS. DEARDORFF.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Elizabeth--

The Head Mistress brushes stray chalk off herself as if she's just bumped into a drooling, shedding dog.

BETH

I'm sorry, Mrs. Deardorff--

MRS. DEARDORFF

Why are we in such a hurry?

BETH

I'm late for class.

MRS. DEARDORFF

And why is that?

Beth holds up the erasers.

BETH

I clean them for Mrs. Graham.

MRS. DEARDORFF

(brushing at herself)

Apparently not enough.

(then)

(MORE)

46 CONTINUED:

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
Here, at Methuen, we don't run in
the halls. It's unseemly.

BETH
Yes, Mrs. Deardorff.

MRS. DEARDORFF
Exercise is for the outdoors.

BETH
Yes, Mrs. Deardorff.

MRS. DEARDORFF
Go on.

She watches as Beth walks off. Briskly.

47 INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT

47

Beth takes ONE PILL and lies back in bed. Stares up at the ceiling. The usual noises down the hall. Tonight, however, she hears none of them, watches the board appear above her.

REVERSE - FROM THE CEILING DOWN TO BETH

Beth concentrating. Now A DARK SHAPE MOVES ALONG THE CEILING ABOVE BETH. And then ANOTHER, LIGHTER SHAPE MOVES INTO FRAME.

REVERSE - FROM BETH UP TO THE CEILING

CHESS PIECES HANG UPSIDE DOWN FROM SQUARES FORMED BY THE CRISSCROSSED CEILING. The pieces are shadowy, like LARGE BATS.

Beth looks at an eerie-looking BISHOP. It starts to slide along the diagonal...

MOVING BISHOP POV - FROM THE CEILING DOWN TO BETH

CAMERA TRACKS at the same angle as the bishop moves over the beds towards Beth. VOICES SINGING A HYMN OVER...

48 INT. CHAPEL - DAY

48

As Beth sneaks out of the back...

49 INT. BASEMENT - DAY

49

Beth and Mr. Shaibel move their pieces in silence until he corners and then takes her queen. She's clearly angry.

BOOM DOWN TO HER LEGS UNDER THE TABLE as they tightly cross over twice.

Beth stares at the board, is about to play on despite the mortal loss when he reaches out and stops her hand--

MR. SHAIBEL
You resign now.

BETH
Resign?

MR. SHAIBEL
That's right, child. When you lose
the queen that way, you resign.

She stares at him. Not comprehending. He lets go of her hand, picks up her black king and sets it on its side on the board. It rolls back and forth a moment, finally lays still.

BETH
No.

MR. SHAIBEL
Yes. You have resigned the game.

BETH
You didn't tell me that in the
rules.

MR. SHAIBEL
It's not a rule. It's
sportsmanship.

BETH
I want to finish.

She picks up the king and sets it back on its square.

MR. SHAIBEL
No.

BETH
You've got to finish.

MR. SHAIBEL
No.

He stands up, has to stoop to keep his head from hitting the rafters.

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)
You lost.

BETH
Please.

MR. SHAIBEL
The game is over.

49 CONTINUED: (2)

BETH
You greedy cocksucker!

He looks at her, then--

MR. SHAIBEL
Get out.

She gets up from the board and walks out. He watches her in silence, then turns back to the board and says quietly...

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)
The game's over.

50 INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - DAY 50

Beth moves away from the pharmacy window. Pockets her pill. Sees Jolene on one of the couches wink at her.

MISS LONSDALE (V.O.)
Dancing *looks* like fun...

51 INT. LIBRARY - DAY 51

MISS LONSDALE, the chapel teacher, intones breathlessly--

MISS LONSDALE
The music is loud and has a pumping *rhythm* which makes one want to move one's young *body* right along with it. But we all know, don't we, that dancing isn't safe. It isn't an evil thing in itself, but we know it can lead to evil things, don't we?

Jolene watches as Beth slips out the back.

52 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY 52

Beth walks to the basement door, finds it LOCKED. She's devastated. Sits down on the floor right there. Lost.

53 INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - DAY 53

As Beth receives her "vitamins."

54 INT. GIRLS' WARD - FROM THE CEILING - NIGHT 54

As Beth takes a pill, lies back-- waits for the pieces to appear. THEY DO... and she begins to play...

55 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY 55

As Beth again tries the door. And again finds it LOCKED.

61 CONTINUED:

61

Beth nods and Jolene then flings the sheet back over her and quietly slips back into her own bed.

62 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

62

Beth walks to the basement door. Half-heartedly reaches for the door, but this time-- IT'S UNLOCKED. She stands there a moment, caught off guard. Then--

63 INT. BASEMENT - DAY

63

She goes down the stairs, comes around the corner to see Mr. Shaibel sitting at the chessboard, the pieces ready. Beth begins cleaning the erasers. Risks glancing at him--

Mr. Shaibel nods to the board. As if nothing happened.

She hesitates, then comes over and sits down across from him. He's already made the first move. They begin to play.

They say nothing to each other, but respond quickly to the other's moves. Beth glances up at him, can see tension and *likes it*. She begins to push a pawn toward the sixth rank.

He responds. Moves his knight. She moves the pawn. He moves his knight back. She smiles at the wasted move, trades her bishop for the knight. Soon, her pawn is one move away from becoming a queen.

He looks at it sitting there. Reaches out and angrily topples his king. Neither of them says anything. But it's her first win and we see on her face that it feels pretty damn good.

MR. SHAIBEL

You're gloating.

BETH

I'm not.

MR. SHAIBEL

It was close.

BETH

I still beat you.

MR. SHAIBEL

You could have beat me sooner.

(then)

You should learn the Sicilian Defense.

BETH

What's that?

He reaches for the board--

MR. SHAIBEL
When white moves to king four,
black does this.

He moves the pieces on the board into position.

BETH
Then what?

He moves the knight as--

MR. SHAIBEL
Knight to KB 3.

BETH
What's KB 3?

MR. SHAIBEL
King's bishop 3. Where I just put
the knight.

BETH
The squares have names?

MR. SHAIBEL
If you play well, they have names.

BETH
Show me.

MR. SHAIBEL
Not now.
(then)
Let's play again.

64 **A SEQUENCE OF SHOTS**

64

Beth running up the corridor with the erasers. Beth in line for her pills. Beth playing with Mr. Shaibel. Beth stashing the pills. Beth watching the boy and girl from town making out at the fence. His hand up her shirt. Beth's desk empty. Beth slamming down her queen and--

65 **INT. BASEMENT - DAY**

65

BETH
--Checkmate.

Mr. Shaibel sits back, looks at her.

MR. SHAIBEL
There's other strategies you'll
need to learn down the road.

As he shows her the different variations:

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)
The Levenfish Variation...
(then)
The Najdorf Variation...

She watches, taking in every single move. He sits back.

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)
Show me.

And now she starts moving the pieces as he did--

BETH
Levenfish...
(then)
Najdorff...

She looks at him, pleased with herself. He gives her nothing.

MR. SHAIBEL
Let's play again.

He makes a move. She stares at the board.

BETH
That isn't one you taught me.

MR. SHAIBEL
So?

BETH
Don't you want me to practice?

MR. SHAIBEL
I want you to play.

BETH
But is that one of those things,
like the Sicilian Defense?

MR. SHAIBEL
Those things are called *Openings*.

BETH
Is that one of them?

MR. SHAIBEL
Yes.
(then)
The Queen's Gambit.

As Beth carries her tray. Jolene comes up behind her--

66 CONTINUED:

JOLENE

You are the ugliest white girl
ever. Your nose is ugly and your
face is ugly and your skin is like
sandpaper. You white trash cracker
bitch.

Jolene moves on and sits down with the others, leaving Beth
standing there, saying nothing. Willing herself not to cry.

67 INT. GIRL'S WARD - NIGHT

67

Beth exits the bathroom and gets into her bed. Watches the
parade of girls exiting, the TOILET FLUSHING OVER AND OVER
O.S. Can feel Jolene's eyes on her as she passes.

MR. FERGUSSEN

*Good night, good night! Parting is
such sweet sorrow, that I shall say
good night till it be morrow.*

And out go the lights.

68 OMITTED

68

69 INT. BASEMENT - DAY

69

Mr. Shaibel watches as a now tired Beth sits down.

MR. SHAIBEL

You're late.

She looks at the board, the WHITE PIECES in front of HER.

BETH

I'm playing white?

MR. SHAIBEL

From now on we take turns. It's the
way the game should be played.

BETH

Then how come I couldn't go first
before?

He doesn't answer, nods to the board. *Move.* She moves the
king's pawn. Her eyes remain fixed on the board as they play.
Whatever she'd been feeling only a few moments earlier is
gone: she's all killer now.

He looks up at her, the barest glance, then back down at the
board. It's not long before--

BETH (CONT'D)

Check.

Another glance. He moves. And then--

BETH (CONT'D)

Mate.

He looks up at her, but doesn't scowl like he usually does when she beats him. Instead, he reaches to the floor for a nearly empty pint bottle. Tilts his head back and drinks.

BETH (CONT'D)

Is that whiskey?

MR. SHAIBEL

Yes, child. And don't tell.

BETH

I won't.

She follows the bottle as he sets it back down on the floor, now grabs a heavy PAPERBACK off a shelf and hands it to her.

BETH (CONT'D)

Modern Chess Openings.

MR. SHAIBEL

It's the best book for you. It will tell you what you want to know.

Beth begins turning the pages and we glimpse headings such as *QUEEN'S PAWN OPENINGS* and *INDIAN DEFENSE SYSTEMS*.

MR. SHAIBEL (CONT'D)

You'll need to know chess notation before you read it.

(off her look)

The names of the squares.

(then)

I'll teach you now.

BETH

(looks up from the book)

Am I good enough now?

He starts to say something, then stops.

MR. SHAIBEL

How old are you?

BETH

Nine.

MR. SHAIBEL

Nine-years-old.

BETH

I'll be ten in November.

He leans forward as much as his paunch will allow.

69 CONTINUED: (2)

MR. SHAIBEL
To tell you the truth of it, child,
you are astounding.

70 **INT. ENGLISH CLASS - DAY** 70

MR. ESPERO, the English teacher, a tweedy aesthete in his thirties, paces and reads at the front of the room...

MR. ESPERO
*Nobody heard him, the dead man,
but still he lay moaning...*

TRACKING BACK PAST JOLENE who glances back TO WHERE Beth sits at her desk, staring down at her lap...

BOOM DOWN TO REVEAL

Modern Chess Openings open under her desk.

MR. ESPERO (CONT'D)
*I was much further out than you
thought/not waving but drowning.*

71 **INT. CORRIDOR - LATER** 71

As the class exits the room. Jolene hisses at Beth...

JOLENE
Cracker.

BETH
Whore.

JOLENE
Bitch.

BETH
Nigger.

Jolene stops, turns and stares after Beth as she walks away.

72 **INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT** 72

As Beth looks at the SIX GREEN PILLS in her hand and takes THEM ALL. She lies back, rolls onto her side. PUSHING IN--

ALICE (V.O.)
The dark's nothing to be afraid of.

73 **INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)** 73

Beth and her mother lie on the couch in the dark.

ALICE

In fact, I'd go as far as saying
there's nothing to be afraid of,
anywhere. Fear is just a phantom.
(suddenly thoughtful)
Huh--

She sits up, turns on the light, grabs a pen and writes that
on the wall of the trailer. Beth watches her, looks about at
the other scribbles on the walls...

ALICE (CONT'D)

Fear is just a phantom...

She shuts off the light and lies back down with Beth. Rambles
on--

ALICE (CONT'D)

Strongest person is the person who
isn't scared to be alone. See, it's
other people you gotta worry about.
It's other people that tell you
what to do, how to feel. And before
you know it you're pouring your
life out in search of things other
people told you to go look for.
College is a waste of time. Only
relationship between college and
knowledge is that they rhyme. Hey--

She turns the light *back on* and starts to scribble that last
bon mot on the wall. Beth watches her a moment, then--

BETH

I thought you met papa in college.

ALICE

That's how I know. Listen--

And as she once more shuts off the light, we--

Beth rolls onto her back.

ALICE (V.O.)

Someday you're going to be all
alone. And you'll need to figure
out how to take care of *yourself*.

Beth stares up at A LONE QUEEN hanging above her.

As Beth changes. No one else around. Until--

JOLENE
Morning, Cracker.

Her voice is easy. No anger in it. She moves on--

BETH
Jolene.

Jolene pauses, steps over to her.

JOLENE
What do you want?

BETH
I want to know what a cocksucker
is.

Jolene stares at her a moment, then laughs.

JOLENE
Shit. Okay...
(then)
You know what a cock is?

BETH
I don't think so.

JOLENE
That's what boys have. In the back
of the health book. Like a thumb.
(Beth nods)
Well, honey, there's girls likes to
suck on that thumb.

BETH
Do you?

JOLENE
Haven't tried one yet.

Beth thinks about that, then--

BETH
Isn't that where they pee?

JOLENE
I expect it wipes clean.

And she walks off, stranding Beth with her thoughts.

FOLLOW BETH down the stairs to where a nice looking MAN --
striped suit, tie, stands in the basement with Mr. Shaibel.

MR. SHAIBEL
This is Mr. Ganz, from the chess club.

BETH
Chess club?

MR. SHAIBEL
We play at a club.

MR. GANZ
I'm also coach of the high school team. Duncan High?

She shakes her head, doesn't know it.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Would you like to play me a game?

In answer, Beth sits down on the milk crate. Mr. Shaibel eases himself into a folding chair beside the board as Mr. Ganz takes the janitor's usual stool across from her.

He reaches forward in a quick nervous movement and picks up one black and one white pawn. He cups his hand around them, shakes them together, then extends both arms towards Beth, his fists clenched. She just looks at him.

MR. SHAIBEL
You play the color you choose.

She reaches out and barely touches Mr. Ganz's left hand.

BETH
This one.

He opens it to reveal the black pawn. Smiles--

MR. GANZ
Sorry.

Mr. Ganz puts the pawns back and rotates the board. He makes a move. She calmly responds. PAN AWAY NOW TO MR. SHAIBEL WHO watches intently, almost nervously. His glances alternating between the board and Beth. PAN PAST MR. GANZ who no longer smiles. After a few more moves, he lays down his King.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Well...
(quick glance at Mr. Shaibel, then)
You certainly know the game, young lady. Do you have a team here?

She looks at him uncomprehending.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
The other girls. Do they have a
chess club?

BETH
No.

MR. GANZ
Then where do you play?

BETH
Down here.

MR. GANZ
Mr. Shaibel said you play a few
games every Sunday. What do you do
in between?

BETH
Nothing.

MR. GANZ
But how do you keep up?

BETH
I play in my head.

MR. GANZ
In your head.

BETH
On the ceiling.

He doesn't know how to respond to that, glances up.

BETH (CONT'D)
Do you want to play another?

He hesitates. Mr. Shaibel looks at him.

MR. SHAIBEL
Now or never, Mr. Ganz. Beth has
class.

MR. GANZ
Alright. It's your turn to play
white.

They start again. After the first few moves, he nods.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
The Reti Opening.

Again, Mr. Shaibel watches the board, watches Beth. After a
shorter period than last time--

BETH
Mate in three.

Mr. Ganz stares at the board. She demonstrates. Looks up at him. As does Mr. Shaibel. Mr. Ganz topples his king, shakes his head in disbelief.

MR. GANZ
I've never seen anything like it.

He stands up and walks to the furnace where Beth now sees a SMALL SHOPPING BAG hanging.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
I have to go now. But I brought you a present.

He hands her the shopping bag. She looks inside, no doubt hoping to see another chess book. Something is wrapped in pink tissue paper.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Unwrap it.

She lifts it out, pulls away the loosely wrapped paper to reveal A PINK DOLL in a blue print dress with blond hair, puckered up mouth. Beth holds it by the arm a moment and looks at it.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Well?

She sees Mr. Shaibel giving her a look.

BETH
Thank you very much.
(then)
Do you want another game?

MR. GANZ
I really have to go. Maybe I'll come back next week.

77 INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

77

Beth emerges from the basement with the doll. TRACKING BACK with her as a trash can comes into f.g. She drops the doll into it as she passes.

78 INT. HEALTH CLASS - DAY

78

MR. HUME at the front of the room writes the name of various vegetables on the board...

MR. HUME

You should have green leafy vegetables at least once a day, legumes a few times a week, and stay away from tobacco and any and all forms of alcohol. They will counter all the good effects and vitamins you get from greens. I also like to inspect my stool at least three times a week. It should appear firm, but not hard, a clear sign of dehydration...

GIGGLES. Beth stares at the HEALTH BOOK on her desk, has flipped to the back. One page is a woman and the facing page is a man. Line drawings with shadings. Beth stares at the two.

She looks out the window as Mr. Hume drones on. The pink Japonicas are blooming. She looks at the trees a moment. Trying to make sense of the pictures she's just seen.

EXT. METHUEN HOME - DAY

The kids are all out in the sunshine. Beth is off by herself, staring off at the fence. The local kids are there, watching the Methuen kids. One waves. She's walking toward them, when--

MRS. DEARDORFF

Hooligans.

She turns and sees Mrs. Deardorff standing there. The other children already heading back inside behind her.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

There's only trouble on that side of the fence.

The town kids melt into the woods. Mrs. Deardorff looks down at Beth.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

But on this side... there's love. Friendships. Family. All you need is right here, with us.

(then)

Unless, of course, we're not enough for you.

And with that, she turns and heads back inside. Over her shoulder...

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

Come along now.

She still hasn't looked at the board. The bush and its pink blossoms outside the high window has her attention.

MR. SHAIBEL
Knight to queen's bishop three.

BETH
Bishop to knight five.

As opposed to Mr. Shaibel's gruff tone, Mr. Ganz's voice now has a strange softness...

MR. GANZ
Pawn to knight three.

BETH
Queen to rook four check.

Behind her, JUST OUT OF FOCUS, Mr. Ganz inhales sharply. A moment, then--

MR. GANZ
King to bishop one.

BETH
(still not turning)
That's mate in three. First check is with the knight. The king has the two dark squares, and the bishop checks it. Then the knight mates.

MR. GANZ
Sweet Jesus.

He shakes his head, checks his watch.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
I have to go now.

He stands, grabs his satchel, remembers something, pulls out a CAMERA... looks at Beth...

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Would you mind, Beth, if I took your picture? I'd love to tell the kids in the chess club about you.

She's not sure. Looks at Mr. Shaibel.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
How about you stand beside Mr. Shaibel?

She gets up, moves to Mr. Shaibel's side. Both are awkward. She rests her hand on his shoulder. Startling him.

81 CONTINUED: (2)

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)
Say... Queen!

Mr. Shaibel says nothing, but--

BETH
(flat)
Queen.

A FLASH AND--

82 INT. COMMON ROOM - DAY

82

The kids are all watching a movie called "*HOW TO ACT AT DINNER TIME.*"

ON BETH

Watching the movie with a bored detachment as now behind her Fergusson makes his way into the room and scans their faces. He spots Beth, sitting with Jolene. He leans over the older girl and taps Beth on the shoulder.

Jolene notes the closeness of his lean, gives him a look, as Beth gets up and follows Fergusson out of the room--

83 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

83

A frightened Beth follows a silent as usual Fergusson, her thick brown shoes squeaking on the linoleum behind him.

He leads her to the door with the frosted glass window, *HELEN DEARDORFF. SUPERINTENDANT.* Beth takes a breath--

84 INT. MRS. DEARDORFF'S OFFICE - SAME

84

Beth walks in and sees Mr. Ganz -- in a brown suit -- smile self-consciously and half rise from a red armchair, but sit back down as--

MRS. DEARDORFF
Close the door, please, Elizabeth.

Beth closes the door, looks at Mrs. Deardorff, seated at the desk, peering at her over tortoise shell glasses.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
Mr. Ganz tells me that you are a--
(adjusts her glasses)
--gifted child.

Mrs. Deardorff looks at her as if she expects her to deny it.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
He has an unusual request to make.
He would like you to be taken to
the high school on...

She looks at Mr. Ganz.

MR. GANZ
On Thursday.

MRS. DEARDORFF
On Thursday. In the afternoon. He maintains that you are a phenomenal chess player. He would like you to perform for the chess club.

Beth says nothing, still frightened.

MR. GANZ
We have a dozen members, and I was suggesting to Mrs. Deardorff that you come and play all of them in a simultaneous.

BETH
In a what?

MR. GANZ
At the same time.

MRS. DEARDORFF
We like to give our girls a chance for experience outside whenever we can.

Beth looks at her. *Really?*

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
But... I am a bit wary of letting Elizabeth go off to the local high school.

MR. GANZ
I would chaperone. I'd pick her up and bring her to the school, then bring her straight back here.

MRS. DEARDORFF
I was thinking a young lady might also accompany her.

MR. GANZ
I assumed that you would come. As my guest.

Beth watches as Mrs. Deardorff blushes at that one.

MRS. DEARDORFF
Oh, no... I couldn't possibly abandon my duties here.

MR. GANZ

Well then what if Shirley Munson,
club treasurer and one of my best
students, comes along?

Mrs. Deardorff processes that a moment--

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)

I'm sure I could get someone from
the local paper to be there, write
it up. I imagine that it could be a
very good thing, fund raising wise,
to have a story like this.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Yes, I'm sure it would be.

He gives her a warm smile.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

What do you say Elizabeth? Do you
want to go play chess at the high
school?

BETH

Yes. I'd like to.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Okay. It's settled, then. Mr. Ganz
and-- Charlotte, did you say?

MR. GANZ

Shirley.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Shirley yes. They will pick you up,
let's say, after lunch on Thursday?

MR. GANZ

Perfect.

He gets up to go. Smiles at Beth.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)

See you then.

He leaves and Beth is turning to follow when--

MRS. DEARDORFF

Elizabeth.

Beth turns back, now alone with Mrs. Deardorff.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

I'm told that you've been playing
chess with our custodian.

Beth isn't sure what to say

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
With Mr. Shaibel.

BETH
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. DEARDORFF
This is very irregular, Elizabeth.
Have you gone to the basement?

BETH
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. DEARDORFF
Well, we can't have that. As much
as Methuen believes in excellence,
we can't have you playing chess in
the basement.

Beth looks crestfallen as a PHONE BEGINS RINGING IN THE OUTER OFFICE.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
I believe we have chess sets in the
game closet. I'll have Fergusen
look into it.

And now a LIGHT BEGINS TO FLASH on the phone on her desk. She reaches for the phone as--

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)
That will be all, Elizabeth. Mind
your manners at the high school and
be sure your nails are clean.

Beth opens a dictionary, rifles the pages until she finds what she's looking for--

INSERT - DEFINITION

...of the word "phenomenal." Beth's finger runs under the
descriptives: *extraordinary... outstanding... remarkable...*

BETH

Looks up, thoughtful.

87

INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - MORNING

87

As Fergusen hands Beth the little paper cup. She turns to go, looks down into it, sees TWO ORANGE VITAMIN TABLETS and turns back to him.

BETH

There's one missing.

FERGUSSEN

That's it. Next.

Beth doesn't move as the girl behind her pushes against her.

GIRL BEHIND HER

It's my turn, Harmon.

BETH

Where are the green ones?

FERGUSSEN

You don't get them anymore.

Beth stands on tiptoe, looks behind Fergusen to the BIG GLASS JAR FULL OF GREEN PILLS. Still there and still nearly a third full. She points at it--

BETH

There they are. Right behind you.

FERGUSSEN

I know where they are, Harmon. But I'm not giving you any. It's a new State law-- No more tranquilizers for kids. Go figure.

GIRL BEHIND HER

Harmon. It's my turn.

Fergusen waves at her.

FERGUSSEN

Go thou further off; bid me farewell and let me hear thee going.

BETH

What?

FERGUSSEN

Beat it.

88

INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT

88

Beth tries to sleep, but can't. She leans over, peers into her toothbrush holder. ONLY ONE PILL LEFT. She hesitates, then takes it.

91 CONTINUED:

JOLENE
No, honey. I wish he would. But they got the whole state after 'em for what they been doing with those pills.

BETH
They're still there. In the big jar.

JOLENE
That a fact? I ain't noticed.
(keeps looking at Beth)
You having withdraw symptoms?

BETH
I don't know. What are those?

JOLENE
You getting edgy?
(then)
Yeah, you are.

Jolene finishes drying her hair. Beth stares up at her, the light coming behind her frizzy hair, her big wide eyes. Beth looks at herself in the mirror, far less impressed.

JOLENE (CONT'D)
You look around, they'll be some jumpy orphans around here the next few days.

92 INT. GIRLS' WARD - DAWN 92

Beth lies in bed, wide awake. Staring at an empty ceiling.

93 EXT. METHUEN HOME - DAY 93

As a car pulls up. And now Mr. Ganz gets out followed by a big, sweet-faced girl -- SHIRLEY MUNSON.

94 INT. GIRLS' WARD - DAY 94

Beth sits on her bed, her face in her hands when Fergusen appears in the doorway--

FERGUSSEN
Harmon?
(she looks up at him)
You alright?

She nods, gets up.

95 INT. METHUEN HOME - CORRIDOR - DAY 95

As a pale Beth walks behind Mr. Ganz and Shirley. The big girl looks back--

95 CONTINUED:

SHIRLEY
Do you play the King's Gambit?

BETH
No.

SHIRLEY
It's my favorite.

Beth nods distractedly.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Did you know Chess is older than
Checkers?

BETH
No.

SHIRLEY
By like four hundred years.

They're at the front door when--

JOLENE (V.O.)
Wait!

They all turn to see Jolene come running up to them. She gives Mr. Ganz one of her sly smiles...

JOLENE
Is it okay if I talk to Beth for
just a second? Wish her luck?

MR. GANZ
(checks his watch, then)
Sure. Go ahead.

Jolene takes Beth hastily aside and puts something in Beth's hand. Kisses her on the forehead.

JOLENE
Good luck.

She then waves at Mr. Ganz, and skips off to class. Beth looks at her hand, sees THREE GREEN PILLS.

96 INT. DUNCAN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

96

Quiet as Beth now follows Shirley and Mr. Ganz through the school. She takes in the posters and banners that line the walls. The trophy cases. Another world. All of this--

97 INT. DUNCAN HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

97

A SERIES OF SHOTS-- Desks stacked in a corner. Three folding tables set up in the shape of a U in the center of the room.

On each table are four green and beige paper chessboards with plastic pieces. Metal chairs sit inside the U, facing the black pieces. And finally, "WELCOME BETH HARMON" written on the blackboard.

Beth stands in the room, taking it all in. A BELL RINGS and now the hallway echoes with FOOTSTEPS and SHOUTS. Students, mostly boys, begin to come into the classroom. Some big as men.

Beth is half the size of these easy, insolent students with their loud voices and their bright sweaters. The room fills until Beth is blocked by their bodies and she disappears.

MR. GANZ

Take your seats and be quiet,
please.

As they all begin to sit and REVEAL HER ONCE MORE.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)

Charles Levy will take Board Number
One since he's our top player.

Beth looks at CHARLES LEVY as he takes his proper seat.

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)

The rest can sit where they want to.
There will be no talking during play.

And like that, everyone is quiet and looking at Beth. She looks back at them, something rising in her face. *Hatred.*

BETH

Do I start now?

MR. GANZ

With board number one.

BETH

And then I go to the next one?

MR. GANZ

That's right.

She steps over to the first board where Charles Levy sits, picks up the king's pawn and moves it to the fourth rank.

She goes from board to board making the same move. At one point she hesitates as she sees no one is responding. She looks at Mr. Ganz--

MR. GANZ (CONT'D)

They can't respond until you've
opened at every board.

49.

97 CONTINUED: (2) 97

Oh. She continues making her opening move on each board. She gets to the last board, moves, then turns and watches as everyone responds at once. She starts going around again...

BETH (V.O.)
What surprised me was how bad they played...

98 INT. BASEMENT - DAY 98

Beth sits across from Mr. Shaibel eating a box of chocolate--

BETH
They left backward pawns all over the place, and their pieces were wide open for forks.

99 INT. DUNCAN HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY 99

As Beth moves from board to board. Boys wander in from the hallway and line up along the back wall to watch the girl from the orphanage...

BETH (V.O.)
A few of them tried stupid mating attacks...

100 INT. BASEMENT - DAY 100

Beth shrugs, eats another chocolate--

BETH
...but I took care of them.
(chews a moment, then)
This boy, Charles Levy? He was supposed to be the best...

101 INT. DUNCAN HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY 101

As Beth calmly takes apart the Chess Club Number One...

BETH (V.O.)
I had his pieces tied up in fifteen moves. I mated him in six more with a knight-rook combination.

As Beth moves from board to board, the energy of her amazing mind crackles in the room for everyone bearing witness. She beats the last player, steps back and looks around her--

BETH (V.O.)
Mr. Ganz told me that I beat them all in an hour and twenty minutes.

Captured pieces sit in clusters beside each board. A few students stare at her, but most avoid her eyes. They're afraid of her. SCATTERED APPLAUSE and--

101 CONTINUED: 50.
101

BETH (V.O.)
It felt good.

102 INT. BASEMENT - DAY 102

Beth reaches for another chocolate, looks at the box.

BETH
I've never won anything before.

REVERSE ON MR. SHAIBEL

Quietly watching her. What's that on his face? Concern?
Admiration? Both? Hard to say. Finally--

MR. SHAIBEL
You should get back.

She gets up, slides the box his way.

BETH
You can have the rest.

She leaves. He stares at the box. Lost in thought.

103 INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - DAY 103

Looking out over Fergussen as Beth slowly approaches the
window. Takes in the pills in the jar, but now RACK FOCUS TO
THE PADLOCK on the window. She studies the hinges and hasps.

104 INT. CAFETERIA - DAY 104

Beth sees Jolene at a table talking with another girl her age
and heads over.

BETH
Jolene--

JOLENE
Hey--

BETH
Have you got any more vitamins?

JOLENE
Don't be rude. This is Samantha.
She just got here.

BETH
Haven't you got even just one?

Jolene studies Beth a moment--

JOLENE
How'd the exhibit go? You do okay?

BETH
Fine. But I need--

JOLENE
--I don't want to hear about it.

She turns away. Beth stands there, looks at the girl--

BETH
Hello, Samantha.

...and then walks out.

105 **INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT** 105

Dark. THE LIGHT COMES ON to reveal Beth coming down the stairs. Mr. Shaibel isn't here. She looks at the board, around the room, sees the TOOLS hanging on the pegboard opposite the furnace.

106 **INT. LIBRARY - DAY** 106

The Saturday movie, *The Robe*, plays for the entirety of the Methuen Home. The staff sit in a row of chairs at the back.

Beth slouches in her chair, can barely focus on the movie. Her legs crossed angrily in that double cross over...

She glances back at the faculty and staff, spies Fergusen near the door, proctoring. She gets up and edges her way to him and whispers...

BETH
Bathroom.

He nods, his eyes, along with everyone else's, on Victor Mature, bare-chested in the arena.

107 **INT. CORRIDOR - SAME** 107

She hurries down the hallway, slips into--

108 **INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - SAME** 108

She moves past the racks of *Christian Endeavour* magazines and the *Readers Digest* Condensed Books to the far wall and the pad-locked window that says *PHARMACY*.

She grabs one of the wooden stools from the room and drags it to the window. She climbs onto it so her face is level with a HASP and PADLOCK.

There's no one in the room, so the only sounds are the gladiatorial shouts from the movie in the library.

The window up close is made of frosted glass with chicken wire in it and framed in painted wood. Beth examines the screws that hold the painted hasp.

The shouts from the film arena rises to a roar, and the volume of the frenetic music rises with it.

She puts the blade of the screwdriver in the slit of the screw and twists it as hard as she can. Nothing happens.

She grips the screwdriver in both hands, hunches her shoulders together and twists with all she has.

SOMETHING SQUEAKS and the screw loosens. She keeps twisting until she can take it out the rest of the way and put it in her blouse pocket.

Now she goes to work on the other screw. She gets that one out and puts it in her pocket. The end of the hasp comes loose by itself with the padlock still hanging there, the other end supported by the two screws that hold it to the window frame.

She pulls open the window, leaning back so it can go by her, and puts her head inside. The light's off, but she can see the outline of the big jar. She puts her arms inside the opening, stands on tiptoe, pushes herself as far forward as she can, until her belly is on the sill.

She begins to wriggle and her feet come away from the stool. She keeps on wriggling forward, feels and hears her blouse ripping on the sharp edge of the sill, but keeps going.

Her hands finally reach the narrow metal table just below the window. She inches forward again and her weight comes down on her hands. She pushes a few boxes aside and makes a place for herself on the table.

She lets her weight come forward until she's able to flop onto the table, twisting at the last moment so that she doesn't fall off it.

She takes a couple of deep breaths and climbs down. There's enough light for her to see alright. She walks to the far wall and faces the dimly visible JAR.

She lifts the glass cover and sits it silently on the table under the window. She then slowly reaches inside with both hands, burying them up to the wrists. She takes a deep breath and removes her right hand with a fistful of pills.

She doesn't count them, but simply puts them in her mouth and swallows them ALL.

She stuffs three handfuls of pills into her skirt pocket. She looks around.

On the wall beside the window is a DIXIE CUP DISPENSER. She's able to reach it on tiptoe and pulls down four paper cups.

She fills them one at a time. Then steps back and looks at the jar. The level is now half of what it was. Whatever.

She moves to the door, to go out that way, but can't open it. It's locked in some serious way and she's now a bit unsteady. She looks at the four Dixie cups, and then at the window. How can she climb out with them?

She grips the doorknob. Controls her breathing. Carries the cups two at a time to the table under the window. She looks back at the jar. At the remaining pills. And thinks.

She takes the jar to the table and pours the contents of the Dixie cups back inside. She climbs onto the table and puts her head out the window into the empty multi purpose room...

The jar of pills is only inches from her knee. She wriggles her way through the window and onto the stool. Standing up high there, she leans forward and dreamily grabs the jar by the rim in both hands.

She goes limp, stares down at the green pills in the jar, STATELY MUSIC now coming from the library. She lies there over the sill like a rag doll.

As her eyes lose focus, the green in the jar becomes a bright luminous blur--

WOMAN'S VOICE

Elizabeth!

BETH

Mama?

WOMAN'S VOICE

Elizabeth!

She hoists the jar in a kind of slow motion, lifting it with both hands as she turns, the bottom of the jar hitting the window ledge with a dull ringing sound and coming loose from her hands and--

IN HER STONED POV

--exploding on the edge of the stool at her feet. The fragments, mixed with hundreds of green pellets, cascading to the linoleum floor. Bits of glass caught like rhinestones and lay in place while the green pills roll outward like a bright waterfall toward Mrs. Deardorff.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Elizabeth!

Behind her stands Fergusson in his white pants and T-shirt. Next to him stands the other teachers, and behind them, crowding to see what had happened, are the other children.

All of them staring at her, high on the miniature stage of her stool with her hands a foot apart as though she's still holding the jar.

Beth wakes up. She's alone in the Girl's Ward. The only one in bed. Fergusson comes to the door--

FERGUSSEN
Welcome back.

She blinks at him, looks around. Swallows, winces--

BETH
My throat hurts.

FERGUSSEN
I bet it does. They put a tube down it. Pumped your stomach.

She looks at her stomach.

FERGUSSEN (CONT'D)
I guess you don't remember me driving you to the hospital either?

BETH
No.

FERGUSSEN
Jesus, kid. I thought Deardorff would *explode*.

Beth just sits there, tries to get her bearings.

FERGUSSEN (CONT'D)
How many did you take? Twenty?

BETH
I didn't count.

FERGUSSEN
Well, I hope you enjoyed 'em. It'll be cold turkey tomorrow.

Beth sees her clothes at the foot of the bed. She's putting them on when she reaches into her pocket and makes a discovery: TWENTY-SOME PILLS STILL INSIDE. So many she has to take her toothbrush out of the holder to get them all in.

MRS. DEARDORFF (V.O.)
I pray you've learned your lesson.

110

INT. MRS. DEARDORFF'S OFFICE - DAY

110

Beth stands facing Mrs. Deardorff. Several of her teachers ring the room.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Your behavior has come as a profound shock to all of us. Nothing-- *nothing*-- in the history of the Methuen Home has been so deplorable. It must not happen again.

BETH

I can't sleep without the pills.

MRS. DEARDORFF

All the more reason why you should not have them.

BETH

You shouldn't have given them to us in the first place.

MRS. DEARDORFF

I will not have back talk from a child.

(stands, leans forward)

If you speak to me like that again, you will regret it.

Beth already regrets it, takes a step back. Mrs. Deardorff adjusts her glasses.

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

Your library and playground privileges have been suspended. You will not attend the Saturday movies and you will be in bed promptly at eight o'clock in the evenings. Do you understand.

(Beth nods)

Answer me.

BETH

Yes.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Furthermore, you will be in chapel thirty minutes early and will be responsible for setting up the chairs and then putting them away once chapel has finished. If you are in any way remiss in this duty, Miss Lonsdale has been instructed to report to me.

(MORE)

110 CONTINUED:

110

MRS. DEARDORFF (CONT'D)

If you are seen whispering to another child in chapel or in any class, you will automatically be given ten demerits. You understand the meaning of ten demerits, Elizabeth?

(Beth nods)

Answer me.

BETH

Yes.

MRS. DEARDORFF

Miss Lonsdale informs me that you have often left chapel for long periods. That will end. You will remain in chapel for the full ninety minutes on Sundays. You will write a summary of each Sunday talk and have it on my desk by Monday morning. And Elizabeth...

BETH

Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Deardorff now sits back down.

MRS. DEARDORFF

No more chess.

111 **INT. MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - "VITAMIN LINE" - MORNING**

111

As Beth gets to the front, the hasp has been replaced with a much stronger one. Four screws each. Fergussen looks at her and opens his arms to the pharmacy...

FERGUSSEN

Wanna help yourself?

She shakes her head and holds out her hand. He hands the vitamin to her, watches her swallow it and move off.

112 **INT. CHAPEL - MORNING**

112

Beth sets up the heavy wooden folding chairs under the uncomfortable eye of Miss Lonsdale.

MISS LONSDALE (V.O.)

It's like a disease, something we can become infected with...

113 **INT. CHAPEL - LATER**

113

As Beth tries to stay awake listening to Miss Lonsdale...

MISS LONSDALE

...which is why we all have to be vigilant against the threat of a godless communism spreading like plague here in the United States. Senator McCarthy is anything but the fear monger a few in the press would have us think. All one has to look at are photos of Russia to see what it could be like *right here...*

114 INT. MULTI PURPOSE ROOM - DAY

114

Beth walks in, stands there looking at the "scene of the crime" when Jolene comes up behind her.

JOLENE

You should've seen yourself. Up on that stool. Just floating around up there... and Deardorff hollering at you.

BETH

It felt funny.

JOLENE

Shit, I bet it felt *good*.
(then)
What you gonna do at night?

BETH

I'm gonna stay awake as long as I can reading my book, learning the Sicilian Defense.

Jolene just looks at her. *What?*

BETH (CONT'D)

There's fifty-seven pages about it in the book with a hundred and seventy lines stemming from P-QB4. I'm gonna memorize them and play through them all in my mind.

JOLENE

Poor mind.

BETH

When I'm done with that, I'm gonna go on to the Pirc and the Ruy Lopez and the Nimzovich.
(then)
It's a big book. I'll be all right.

FERGUSSEN

Thank *you*.

He nods towards Jolene. *For keeping quiet*. He walks out. Beth sits down on the bed and stares out the window at the falling snow.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

The kids all come out of class. Beth looks down the corridor and sees Mr. Shaibel at the end of the long hallway mopping.

While the kids go the other way, towards the door that leads to the yard for recess, she starts down the hallway to him...

She stops where the floor is wet and stands for a good long while before he finally looks up at her.

BETH

They won't let me play anymore. I'm sorry.

(he says nothing)

I'm being punished. I--

She looks at his face. It registers nothing.

BETH (CONT'D)

Please... Mr. Shaibel...

She touches his arm. He freezes.

BETH (CONT'D)

Can you help me?

He looks at her for a moment as if he's going to speak. But instead, he resumes mopping. Beth watches him, then--

BETH (CONT'D)

I wish I could play more with you.

She then turns and walks back down the hall. She watches as he mops his way to the end, then, glances once her way, and then drops the mop in the bucket and opens a door--

Beth stands there in the hallway watching as he rolls the bucket inside, the door shutting behind him. She stares at the door another moment, then turns and runs away.

INT. GIRLS' WARD - NIGHT

As Mr. Fergussen sticks his head in the ward and shuts off the lights...

MR. FERGUSSEN

*The darkest night is the bridge to
the brightest tomorrow.*

Beth reaches under the mattress and takes one of her stashed green pills. She sees Jolene slip into bed, the two share a look, then lie back on their respective beds.

ON BETH FROM ABOVE

As she looks up at the ceiling. And now... slowly... THE UPSIDE DOWN PIECES LINE UP IN OUR PERIPHERAL--

FROM BETH UP TO THE CEILING

As she begins to play a game. The pieces move faster and faster. Before long, she's playing two games. Now three. Four. Five... and so on. The light in the room changing, going from dark to slowly lighter and... THE PIECES FADE.

BOOM DOWN as Fergusson sticks his head in the doorway of the Girls' Ward, now wearing a beard.

FERGUSSEN

For crying out loud-- get up you two! You're gonna miss breakfast.

INT. GIRLS' WARD - SEVERAL YEARS LATER - DAY

He moves off. And now JOLENE sits up in the b.g. and yawns. SHE'S SEVERAL YEARS OLDER. She pulls a pack of cigarettes from a spot behind her bed, lights up, looks towards CAMERA.

JOLENE

Hey. Cracker.

And now A TEENAGE BETH sits up in the f.g. Hair in her face. Jolene opens the window by her bed, lights up and tosses the pack to Beth--

JOLENE (CONT'D)

You don't wanna miss another delicious breakfast, do you?

BETH

(shakes out a smoke)
I've been dreaming about it.

She opens her own window, lights up and they both smile.

EXT. METHUEN HOME - DAY

PULLING AWAY FROM THE WINDOW as the two of them sit there smoking, looking out at their uncertain futures. A SEDAN PULLS INTO IMMEDIATE F.G.

FROM THE WINDOW

As Beth and Jolene watch as a MAN in a grey suit gets out of the driver's side. And now a WOMAN in blue dress and sweater gets out of the passenger side.

JOLENE

Who do we think *they* come for?

The woman pauses, looks right up at the window, right up at *Beth*. There's a moment between the two of them, broken by--

MAN

Alma? Are you coming?

The woman smiles at *Beth*, then follows the man into the building and we then--

CUT TO BLACK