

The Eyes in the Vanity

by

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Based on

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

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1 INT. MOORDEB S'YENAJ - (DREAM)

1

A CACOPHONY OF SOUNDS accompanies the image of TV static. Coupled with the distinctive BUZZ of frequency. Muffled humming of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" plays discordantly as distant pounding gets louder and more frequent. BLACK HANDS materialize from the static and join in the rhythmic banging. The hands seem to be trying to escape. A crack tears across the image as the cursed symphony reaches a crescendo.

2 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAWN

2

PEARL, MISSISSIPPI. SPRING 1970.

JANEY (14), a shy Black girl with dark, observant eyes and a face that's constantly hiding, feels a rush of warmth between her legs, causing her eyes to shoot open.

The newly 14-year-old moves her hand to her soiled pajama pants. She rises from her bed and noiselessly crosses the bedroom, heading for the door.

The room looks entirely average for a girl of her age, if not for its abundance of mirrors. She has a large chestnut VANITY mirror in the center of her room, which has a slight warp. Other mirrors include a wall mirror opposite her door, a circular silver handheld mirror, a decorative mirror next to her window, an oval GILDED MIRROR on the vanity, and a bright sapphire COMPACT mirror.

Janey slinks strangely through the room, seemingly avoiding the gaze of its mirrors.

She removes the small drawer in the VANITY and retrieves a small fabric PACKAGE hidden behind. She carefully unwraps the package, revealing three BLUE tampons, made of dyed cotton and string. She slips one in her sleeve, before securing the package and tucking it away, replacing the drawer where it was.

3 INT. BATHROOM - DAWN

3

Janey enters her bathroom and turns on the light. The room is cramped and cluttered. Mounted on the wall above the sink is a foggy mirror. Upon entering, she catches the eye of her reflection.

She takes the tampon from her frilly pajama sleeve. She inspects the tampon with her finger, running her nail up and down its length. Her brows tighten. It's time. The girl puts

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the wrapped tampon between her teeth and rips it open. She spits the wrapper scrap into the toilet.

Taking a slow, shaky breath, Janey lowers herself onto the toilet seat. Cold sweat beads on her forehead. She spreads her thighs and cocks her neck in between, trying to make some sense of the darkness within. She holds her breath.

With one hand holding her thighs open and the other holding the tampon. She slowly pushes the tampon in. She shivers in discomfort. Her thumb presses the applicator free. It drops into the toilet. Janey raises her head and exhales. Her gaze shifts to her blood-stained fingers. Disgust washes over her expression. She wipes furiously and flushes the toilet.

She meticulously cleans her hands, removing any traces of blood. When finished, she gazes strangely up to her reflection before turning off the light.

4 INT. BEDROOM/HALLWAY - DAWN/CONTINUOUS

4

Tired brown HANDS iron clean, light blue fabric.

The same hands fold the garment in a neat square. They carefully pick it up.

FOLLOW the hands holding the garment out of the bedroom, into a dark hallway, to JANEY'S BEDROOM.

5 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

5

Janey quietly closes the door to her bedroom, so as not to alert Mama of her presence. The girl didn't want to share what had happened, though she was certain Mama already knew.

Her eyes close on POLOMA, 33, a beautiful woman whose eyes shine with paranoid curiosity and devotion, in the corner of the room. She is standing on the old couch, removing a mirror from the wall. Reveal several mirrors of different sizes scattered about the floor.

JANEY

Mama.

The woman turns briefly and offers Janey a proud smile, before returning to her task.

POLOMA

Congratulations, baby.

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JANEY

Huh?

POLOMA

I know, baby. When I was a girl, they sent me out to Pearl River for the entire month!

She chuckles softly to herself. Remembering for a moment.

POLOMA (CONT'D)

But none of our people are out there no more, so this will have to do.

JANEY

Mama, what-

The woman's warm facade melts away to sudden seriousness.

POLOMA

I know, baby. Just come home as soon as the bell rings.

JANEY

Mama, I don't understand...

Poloma drops the MIRROR in her hand. It doesn't break, but clatters flat onto the rug. She turns to face Janey completely.

POLOMA

I said right away, Janey. Those people.

Her tone returns to its default pleasantness.

POLOMA (CONT'D)

Now go on, I picked something out for you.

Poloma musters a soft smile and calmly moves to pick up the fallen mirror. She places it carefully on top of another. Janey nods silently and turns back for her bedroom.

6 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

6

Ironed and folded neatly on Janey's VANITY is a BLUE DRESS decorated with white frills and ribbon. They decorate the dress like whipped cream, draping over the hem and exploding from the sleeves. Janey grimaces at the sight. It's much too much for her taste. Too pretty. Too girly.

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Already dressed in a crisp pageboy collared WHITE SHIRT and embroidered navy OVERALLS, Janey stands with her hands on her hips. A look of defeat colors her face.

Janey tugs off her overalls. She carefully unbuttons her shirt before tossing it onto the bed. Now she stands in a white undershirt and underwear, frowning deeply at the frilly mountain of dress in front of her.

She picks up the dress by its sleeve, pinching at the fabric with two fingers. She holds the dress at a distance, like it's a creature to inspect. Janey cocks her head to the side once more, this time trying to make sense of the clothing.

7 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

7

Janey's eyes trace her figure up and down in the long WALL MIRROR on her door. She runs her hands down her chest, trying to smoothen and flatten both the frills and her body.

8 EXT. STREET, PEARL, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

8

Wearing the frilly baby blue dress that Poloma picked out for Janey's "special day", the 14 year old walks her short trip to school alone.

She walks with her thumbs looped around her backpack straps. Her feet kick up the dirt and gravel with each step. She eyes a particularly unremarkable stone and gives it a strong kick, sending the stone flying in front of a moving cherry red pick up truck. Whose vanity plate reads: **GODSAVES**

Her route takes her past a maze of strip malls, churches, and intersections that make up what is left of Pearl, Mississippi. She passes by an abandoned church, her favorite one. In bright red graffiti the words "I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE" are plastered across the church's windows.

She's read this phrase everyday, but she still doesn't understand it. Yet the words read like electricity. Her eyes glow as they trace the words.

JANEY (V.O)

I am the way. I am the truth. And I am
the life.

She soaks in the words before continuing to walk. CLOSE on Janey's face, troubled, counting her steps under her breath.

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JANEY (V.O)

Every eleven years, my birthday is on
Friday the 13th. Bad luck, Mama says.

She arrives at her destination, Pearl Junior High School. She
adjusts her backpack straps.

JANEY (V.O)

This past Friday I turned 14. But,
last night I became a woman.

9 INT. HEALTH CLASS - DAY/CONTINUOUS

9

The classroom is cramped with too many students. White.
They're all stacked neatly on top of each other in rickety
desk/chair contraptions. There's more students than
textbooks. But lucky for Janey, no one wanted to pair with
her so she has a textbook to herself.

It's not just her abundance of frills that sets Janey apart,
but the dark brown of her face and eyes that contrast against
the beiges and blues of her classmates.

The teacher waits patiently in front of a CHALKBOARD that
reads "FEMALE MENSTRUATION"

MRS. ADAMS

Mornin' everybody. Today we'll be
learnin' about menstra-shun. If y'all
could open up your books to
page..uh..69, please.

Giggles emerge from the crowd of chairs

MRS. ADAMS

Ha. Ha. Very funny. We'll get to
sexual intercourse next week.

The giggles promptly stop as a girl dressed in a pretty red
dress knocks softly against the open door frame. Mrs. Adams
turns and gently waves the girl in.

MRS. ADAMS

Oh! And how could I forget, we have a
new student joinin' us today. Miss
Michaelena, would you come introduce
yourself?

MICHAELENA, 14, already beautiful, with hair made of gold and
eyes of sky, crosses confidently to the front of the
classroom. In a small-town Georgia lilt, she greets the room

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with each white face plastered in awe.

MICHAELENA

Hi, y'all. I'm Michaelena Blair and I
just moved here from Blue Ridge. I
hope you'll be sweet to me.

She flashes the sweetest smile Janey has ever seen. Color
rushes to Janey's face. She sinks in her chair.

MRS. ADAMS

Alright, Michaelena, today you'll work
with. . .

The teacher's eyes scan the classroom. They arrive on Janey,
the only student working alone, but quickly move past her and
settle on a pair of brown-haired white girls.

MRS. ADAMS

. . . Miss Lana and Lily over there.

Janey watches Michealena closely as she moves to her new
seat. Her gaze fixed on the girl's beautiful blue eyes. A
twinge of discomfort arises in her stomach. Just cramps,
probably. She smooths a stray ribbon on her chest.

She catches her reflection in the metal of her pencil eraser.
A warped brown eye, Janey's brown eye. She makes eye contact
with herself. She wishes she had eyes like Michealena.

CUT TO:

10 INT. HEALTH CLASS - DAY/CONTINUOUS - DAYDREAM

10

Blue eyes that glitter like water. Serious. Then smiling.

JANEY (V.O)

Neat. Clean. Beautiful. Flat. Dark

Then a tear wells up in one of the bluest eyes. The tears
gloss over the blue eye making it shine like a mirror.

JANEY (V.O)

What horrible big black eyes.

All at once, the tears spill over the blue eye's delicate
golden lashes. FOLLOW the tears as they fall down the rosy
white cheek.

REVEAL Michealena in a dress matching Janey's. Her cheeks are
a soft pink as she weeps quietly.

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JANEY (V.O)
Not like Nanny's. Not like
Michealena's. Perfect blue.

She wipes away her tears and looks up. As if amused, she lets out a jovial laugh.

JANEY (V.O)
Perfect white.

11 INT. HEALTH CLASS - DAY/CONTINUOUS

11

Janey gazes intently as Michealena laughs quietly with her classmates.

Janey shifts uncomfortably in her seat, when she feels another flow of warmth rush between her legs. Instinctually, she squeezes her thighs together in discomfort.

Child-like WHISPERS seem to arise from the crowd around her. Quiet, at first, then all consuming. Janey's eyes dart over her shoulder, but there's nothing there, just a classmate folding a paper fortune teller. Mrs. Adams begins to lecture about hormones.

Janey's eyes search the classroom, but no one seems to be doing anything out of the ordinary. Yet the whispers continue, now intelligible. They hiss like a snake.

WHISPER
We all know.

We can smell it on you.

Janey shrinks into the frills on her collar. In a disturbing sing-song, the whispers continue.

WHISPER
Jaaaaaneyyyyy

The voices seem to be those of her classmates, but they've been warped into something no human could make. The whispers loop and hiss over each other, continually growing in volume. Janey's eyes dart around her surroundings, still, no one seems to be aware of the auditory assault.

She covers her ears and shrinks further, which gains some glances from her classmates. Then, as quickly as they began, the whispers fall silent.

Janey looks down at her lap, where the white frills on the

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hemline have begun to turn pink. Her hand shoots up, but before the words "May I use the bathroom?" can leave her mouth, she runs out of the classroom. Each white head watching her exit.

MRS. ADAMS

Janey!

12 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY/CONTINUOUS 12

Stifling tears, Janey bounds down the hallway to the girl's bathroom. Her dress makes her look like a stark white cloud.

13 INT. GIRL'S BATHROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS 13

She thunders into the pink-tiled bathroom, running past her reflection in the mirrors that line the wall. She throws open the stall door. Quickly fastening the lock, and pulling down her stained underwear, she sits on the toilet.

CUT TO:

14 INT. BATHROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS 14

Still in her frilly dress, now stained pink, Janey sits on the toilet unwrapping another blue TAMPON.

JANEY (V.O)

I don't usually have a lot to say, and
I don't know who will hear this, but I
want you to know who I am.

I am Janey Marlais Brownbird and every
eleven years my birthday is on Friday
the 13th. I am from Pearl River,
Mississippi.

Not Pearl, but Pearl River.

15 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 15

The kitchen is small and cramped. Not much more than a counter, oven, stove, and sink. Though, it boasts a marvelous old cherry wood CHINA CABINET.

Inside the cabinet are stacks of CRYSTAL CHINA. Shiny. Clean. Brilliant. Decorated with intricate patterns. The focal point of the cabinet is an ALTAR, decorated with unlit, half-melted candles of blue, red, and yellow. Bouquets of dead and dying flowers are arranged meticulously around a framed BLACK AND WHITE PORTRAIT of an old fair-skinned Chahta woman dressed in

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traditional regalia. Twisting around the frame like a snake is a living KUDZU branch.

Poloma stands at the stove, humming. She is heating a hot straightening comb on the eye. She taps her foot as she hums. Finishing up her tune, she relaxes her lips and turns her head towards the door.

16 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

16

POLOMA (O.S)

Janey!

Janey lays on her bed staring at the ceiling, counting. This time all of the world's countries with four letters, in alphabetical order. She mutters them quietly to herself.

JANEY

One. Chad. Two. Cuba.

In a monotone voice she enunciates each syllable.

POLOMA (O.S)

Janey Marlais!

She just keeps counting.

JANEY

Three. Fiji. Four. Iran. Fi. . .

Janey does not stir. But her counting falters.

POLOMA (O.S)

I can count, too! ONEEEEEEEE...

Immediately, Janey hurls herself out of bed and hurries out the door.

17 INT. HALLWAY - DAY/CONTINUOUS

17

JANEY

Comin', Mama!

The hallway walls are now suspiciously empty. Formerly decked in vintage mirrors collected by Poloma, pale OUTLINES in various shapes now stain the old yellow wallpaper.

Janey shuffles down the hallway towards the kitchen. She turns to check her reflection in the mirror, only to be met with wallpaper. She smooths down her hair and dress as she walks.

18 INT. KITCHEN - DAY/CONTINUOUS

18

Poloma stands leaned against the counter, arms folded across her chest. She wears an annoyed frown.

The SUNLIGHT from the window illuminates her figure, highlighting her soft curls like a halo.

Her face shifts back into its permanent pleased smile when Janey enters the room.

POLOMA

Mhm, there you are.

She motions to a BLACK FOLDING CHAIR.

POLOMA

Drag that ova' here. Im'a do your hair, remember?

Janey does as she's told. She sets up the chair in front of Poloma and sits down. Poloma places her hands on Janey's scalp and begins to run through her dark hair with her nails, detangling slowly. Janey winces occasionally, despite Poloma's best attempts to be gentle.

She brings a thin wooden COMB to the girl's head, creating neat sections.

POLOMA

Always gotta make sure you look pretty? Especially now.

The woman smiles softly as she combs through Janey's hair. She looks almost proud. She takes the hot comb from the stove and presses it to Janey's hair. A low SIZZLE and soft gray SMOKE rise from her head.

POLOMA

I'm thinking we'll have a little party. To celebrate. Maybe next weekend?

JANEY

Who's "we"?

Janey stretches her neck to look upwards at her Mama.

POLOMA

You know. You, me, your Nanny.

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Janey's eyes swell with sadness. Then concern.

JANEY

Mama...

Poloma makes eye contact with Janey and frowns. She pulls tightly as she braids a section. Janey winces and looks back down.

POLOMA

I know. I'm sorry, you're right.

JANEY

It's okay, Mama.

Janey stretches her neck up again to look at her Mama. Poloma meets Janey's gaze. The two share a smile. Linger. Understanding. But rare. Poloma pats Janey's head lovingly before moving to wipe her eye.

POLOMA

I know, baby. Thank you, my Marley.

Janey smiles again, this time to herself. *My Marley*. Janey's face reddens and she settles comfortably into her position. Poloma begins to straighten Janey's hair.

JANEY

Mama, why the mirrors?

Poloma freezes. A beat.

JANEY

Mama. What's with the mirrors?

Poloma takes a heavy breath.

POLOMA

There's a presence. I feel it.

Janey gulps. Her disposition changes. What was once warm and soft, is now hard and cold. Her back stiffens against the chair and Poloma's touch. She lowers her head, not intending to speak anymore. She's said enough. Her voice hushes, as if *something* is listening.

POLOMA

I just woke up and I knew. And I'm sure you do too.

Poloma continues straightening Janey's hair. More and more

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smoke rises from the girl's head. Poloma raises the hot comb, but Janey instinctually jerks away. Poloma grips Janey's shoulders and pulls her back in the chair.

JANEY

Sorry! It's hot. I'm sorry.

POLOMA

Just stay still. It's fine.

Poloma continues straightening Janey's hair. She doesn't adjust the temperature on the stove. One hand remains firm against Janey's shoulder.

POLOMA

It'll all be fine. Take extra care this week, you hear?

She kisses Janey's forehead, almost mechanically.

POLOMA

Just stay inside, Marley.

Janey recoils.

JANEY

Mama, I don't-

Poloma raises her voice.

POLOMA

Can you just listen to what I say for once?

Janey crosses her arms and mutters under her breath.

JANEY

Okay, Mama.

A beat.

POLOMA

Just trust me. It's because I love you from the river to the trees. . .

JANEY

And across the mountain, carried by the breeze.

Poloma smiles and begins to hum "Tonight You Belong to Me" as she styles Janey's hair.

19 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

19

LATER

Silently, dressed in a pink NIGHTGOWN and two BRAIDS straight down her back, Janey creeps quietly through the living room. She steps carefully between each MIRROR on the floor. There's at least thirty of different sizes and shapes strewn along the brown carpet.

As she navigates the maze, her REFLECTION dances along with her. It's warped and disjointed as it expands beyond the width of each frame. It looks almost shattered.

Janey hurries silently towards the door. She reaches for her WHITE SHOES with one hand, and opens the door with the other.

The door swings open quietly, despite the various bells and whistles fastened to it. She's done this before.

20 EXT. STREET, PEARL, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

20

Once outside, Janey slips on her shoes and starts to run down the street in the opposite direction of school.

MUSIC CUE: "SINNERMAN" NINA SIMONE

"Well, I run to the river/It was boilin' I run to the sea. .
 . So I ran to the Lord/ I said Lord, hide me. . . But the
 Lord said/Go to the Devil. . "

The moonlight casts a shadow on her as she runs. It stretches and stretches.

21 EXT. RIVER BANK, PEARL, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

21

JANEY (V.O)

My people are the Choctaw and Kongo.
 Our lands are both here and there,
 mountains and sea. But I, I, am Janey.

Dark. Green. Hungry. Alive. The river banks of Pearl, Mississippi are completely overtaken by green KUDZU VINES. They hug the rocks and trees like blankets, and cover the ground like snow. Under the light of the moon they glow strangely. As Janey walks through the trees, she swears she can see the Kudzu growing.

The girl wanders freely, though she is not lost. She looks out of place in the overgrowth, the pink of her gown contrasting with the greens, blues, and browns. However, her

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face looks calm, as if she's walked these paths for millennia.

JANEY (V.O)

My favorite color is blue. The blue of the river by my grandmother's old house.

She strolls further into the greenery. Her eyes appear as if they're looking for something.

JANEY (V.O)

I remember when the river dried up, that was right when her eyes turned blue. I swear the Kudzu that ate her house was the same color.

After walking for a bit more, Janey arrives at her destination. Its the ruined foundation of a house. Like everything else, it has been consumed by the Kudzu.

Janey sits atop the foundation for a moment before lounging backwards. She nearly sinks into the vines. They're like a blanket. She rests her hands at her side and gazes up at the full moon. Soon, she dozes off...

JANEY (V.O)

Then she lost her mind. And my grandmother became a blue-eyed angel. So, of course, my favorite color is blue.

22 EXT. STREET, PEARL, MISSISSIPPI - DAWN/CONTINUOUS

22

LATER

Janey walks down her street, looking almost deflated in the twilight.

23 EXT. BACKYARD - DAWN/CONTINUOUS

23

Janey stands with her hands in her nightgown pocket in the middle of the overgrown backyard.

She fishes around in her right pocket for something, and her eyebrows furrow when she's found it. She pulls out a BLOODIED napkin wrapped tightly around something.

Janey kneels in a spot of soil, her pink nightgown staining brown at the knees. Janey carefully removes her shoes and socks.

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Now barefoot. She sets the bloodied napkin beside her and begins digging a hole in the soft dirt with her hands

Janey digs furiously. She adjusts to all-fours.

Once the hole is a few inches deep, she buries the bloodied napkin. Janey smoothes the soil evenly over the bloodied napkin and places a bundle of KUDZU branches atop.

Janey returns to her knees and holds her hands together, as if praying. She bows her head and mutters:

JANEY

No one comes to the Father. Except
through me.

24 INT. LIVING ROOM/HALLWAY/BEDROOM - DAWN/CONTINUOUS

24

Janey silently closes the door behind her. She kicks off her shoes, then bends down to put them back where they were before she left.

She steps through the mirrors once more, repeating the same path she previously took.

Janey walks as quietly as possible through the hallway to her bedroom. She counts the steps under her breath.

JANEY

One. Heel. Two. Toe.

At last, the girl makes it to her bedroom. She steps over the threshold and immediately removes her nightgown. Janey pinches the gown and carries it to her HAMPER.

She opens her CLOSET and puts on another identical nightgown.

Then, she moves to the VANITY mirror in the center point of her room. It's a wide oval with delicately carved patterns, ornamental frames, and an aged patina finish of white and blue against its natural cherry wood. A slight distortion in the mirror creates a warp over Janey's eyes.

Janey sits in front of the mirror, and begins her routine. Mechanically, she retrieves her COMB, BRUSH, and GILDED MIRROR from a drawer. Next, she pulls a blue scarf and ribbon from a BOX on the vanity.

With little emotion on her face, the girl unbraids her hair. Delicately, she combs through each tress. She then takes to the burgeoning waves with a brush. Brushing her hair into

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submission. It's straight once more.

She parts her hair into two sections and begins to braid. Despite the simplicity of her style: two neat plaits on each side, Janey braids and re-braids her hair. Often giving up on a braid halfway and starting over.

Behind her, the sun rises.

END MUSIC CUE

25 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM/LIVING ROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

25

Sunlight shines on Janey's relaxed brown face. Her face resting in her palm. She's still seated at the vanity. Not entirely asleep. Not entirely awake.

POLOMA (O.S)

Janeyyyyy!

Her eyes shoot open. Realization paints her face. Poloma begins to scream her name hysterically. She sounds at the brink of tears.

POLOMA (O.S)

JANEY! COME HERE RIGHT NOW!

Janey jumps up and scurries to the living room. Poloma stands among the mirrors with hands planted firmly at her hips. Her face is red and angry, yet tears are streaming down her cheeks.

POLOMA

JANEY! How could you do this to me?

She sobs between yelling.

JANEY

Do what, Mama?

POLOMA

Don't lie to ME! PLEASE!

POLOMA

You make me hysterical, you know that?

Dejected, Poloma sits on the couch with a HUMPH like a child. She puts her face in her hands and lets out a few more wails.

Carefully, Janey crosses the room and sits next to her crying mother. Poloma wilts into the girl's shoulder. For a moment they seem like two sisters, not a mother and daughter.

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JANEY

I'm sorry, Mama. I just missed Nanny.
I won't do it again. I'm so sorry.

As Janey strokes Poloma's hair, she eyes her white shoes by the door. They're perfectly in place, but stained green and brown.

Poloma rises from Janey's chest and wipes her eyes. She lets out a sigh and looks at Janey in the eyes.

POLOMA

You are never leaving again.

A chill runs down Janey's spine, her eyes widen and begin to water.

MATCH CUT TO:

26 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

26

Janey's eyes reflected in the VANITY mirror. They open wide, then squint shut. A finger pulls down the lower lid, revealing a fierce reddish pink contrasting against the white.

Next, her fingers move to the upper lids. She pries both her eyes wide open, then manually blinks. Janey's attention moves to her left eye. It twitches.

Janey stares herself in the eye. Her hand outstretches towards her reflection. She touches her thumb, painted BLUE, against her left eye. She presses her thumb into her eye, but she winces and cries out. Her hand falls from her face. Dejected.

JANEY

NO!

She faces herself again in the mirror, maintaining fierce eye contact with her reflection. Tears fall only from her left eye, now red and irritated.

Janey begins to wipe away her tears. She rubs furiously at the reddish skin around her eyes. Her rubbing gets more aggressive as she appears to wiping something off her face. But she only rubs fruitlessly at her brown skin.

As if suddenly brought back to reality, Janey breaks eye contact with herself and stops rubbing at her skin. She inspects her hands and fingernails, scraping schmutz from

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underneath her painted nails.

She crouches her neck to inspect the vanity drawer. She jiggles it just the right way and it comes loose. She searches for her tampon packages and retrieves it. She opens it to reveal no tampons left. Only crumpled tissue and fabric stained with blood droplets.

JANEY

NO! NO! Noooo...

Janey lets out an exaggerated sigh and lets her head fall repeatedly against the vanity desk.

27 INT. BATHROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

27

Janey sits on the toilet, legs spread, trying to manufacture a tampon out of a cardboard toilet PAPER ROLL and mounds of fluffy white TOILET PAPER.

She rips the paper roll at its seam. Then she re-rolls the cardboard paper roll into a thinner, tube. About the circumference of her finger. She stuffs toilet paper inside the tube, then wraps the remaining toilet paper around the cardboard.

She holds the completed "tampon" up to her eyes, carefully inspecting her craftsmanship.

She, then, braces her teeth and grips her thigh. With her free hand, she inserts the tampon. Smoother than the last time.

Janey winces in pain as the tampon enters. She grits her teeth for a few moments. But ultimately pulls it slowly out. A gasp of pain escapes her mouth, and she clamps a hand over her face instinctively.

She wraps the bloodied makeshift tampon in more toilet paper and shoves it deep into the trash can. Frustrated, Janey wraps toilet paper around her underwear and pulls it up.

28 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY/CONTINUOUS

28

The mirrors that once decorated the floor in a maze are gone. In storage or broken? Janey isn't sure.

Poloma sits on the couch in front of the Zenith TELEVISION, watching the news and crocheting a pair of royal purple GLOVES. She hums sweetly to herself, as her hands weave and fold the fabric.

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The curtains are drawn shut, blocking out the natural light. The TV LIGHT shines across her face, but covers her eyes with SHADOW. She watches a white female NEWS REPORTER speak rapidly in front of a college dorm.

NEWS REPORTER (O.S)

Thursday night all hell broke loose. The Jackson city police and a special unit of Highway Patrolmen went out to the Jackson State campus and shot without warning into the west wing of the women's dormitory breaking all the front windows - killing two students and wounding eleven others - four critically. They then proceeded by cutting the telephone wires - shooting into the building where all the wounded girls were shot - splattering the place with pools of blood and leaving the bullet holes to prove where the ricocheted bullets of great magnitude had torn the walls.

Janey enters the room. She's dressed in pleated red knee length dress, with RED RIBBONS weaved through her braids. She adjusts the bow at the tail of her braid and hoists her backpack on her shoulders.

Janey crosses the room towards Poloma.

JANEY

Morning, Mama. How you sleep?

Poloma sits unstirred. She continues her purple gloves with concentration. She finishes a thumb. Poloma hums louder.

JANEY

Mama? I said Good morning.

Janey stands in front of Poloma, blocking her

JANEY

Mama?

Janey gazes at unfinished gloves in Poloma's lap. She sighs and musters a sad smile.

JANEY

Well, that's gonna be real pretty.

Poloma's left eye twitches. But otherwise she remains

(CONTINUED)

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unchanged.

Janey walks to the front door, ties her shoes, and leaves.

29 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY/CONTINUOUS

29

**MUSIC CUE: "ANYONE WHO KNOWS WHAT LOVE IS (WILL UNDERSTAND)"
IRMA THOMAS**

FOLLOW Janey as she walks through the school hallway. Her braids bounce against her shoulders with each step.

The hallway is lined with RED LOCKERS, where the majority of Pearl Junior High School's students bustle about before class.

As Janey passes the lockers, immediately each student turns their focus to her. Each face stares at Janey, some with a look of confusion, some disgust, and some intrigue. Janey stares curiously back at them before her expression shifts to discomfort.

Whispers arise from the crowd, but their mouths remain unmoving. Instead the whispers ECHO in Janey's ears. They squeal and cry like excited children.

WHISPER 1

Look! Look!

WHISPER 2

Oh my, look at Miss Janey!

Janey walks faster down the hallway. No matter how fast she walks, the hallway only grows in length. She fiddles with her braid and chews her lip.

WHISPER 3

How fresh.

WHISPER 1

And how soft.

The whispers turn from sweet to sour.

WHISPER 2

How vile.

WHISPER 3

We'll get you.

Janey hurries. Her pace between a run and a walk.

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As Janey approaches the end of the hallway, she begins to make out a FIGURE leaning against a locker.

The whispers cackle and hurl insults back and forth.

WHISPER 1

We'll get you, babygirl!

WHISPER 2

Tar baby! Babygirl dark like tar!

WHISPER 1,2 AND 3

Tar baby! Babygirl sweet as tar! Sweet as tar. Run, Tar baby, run, but you won't get too far!

The whispers repeat the phrase in a round, singing sourly over and over each other.

Reveal Michaelena. She reads a worn copy of "Island of the Blue Dolphins". Michaelena looks up and smiles at Janey when she passes. Her blue eyes sparkle.

In shocking unison the whispers give a final command:

WHISPER 1,2 AND 3

RUN!

Michaelena's lips move to form a greeting. Before she can speak, Janey runs past her unlooking.

END MUSIC CUE

30 INT. GIRL'S BATHROOM - DAY - LATER

30

Janey sits with her knees pulled close to her chest on the baby pink bathroom countertop. She's leaned against the mirror as she eats her cheese and white bread sandwich.

She starts by taking clean, orderly bites. She chews thirty times between taking another. But she succumbs to her hunger, finishing the sandwich in two big bites. She plucks an RED APPLE from her LUNCH BAG.

As she opens her mouth to take a bite, two girls from class, LANA and LILY enter the bathroom. They make eye contact with Janey, whisper to each other, and then back out of the bathroom.

Defiantly, Janey bites into the apple, chews, and swallows hard.

31 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

31

Poloma sits on the couch in the same position as before, only she has a finished GLOVE in her lap.

The TV light casts a sickly glow on her face in the dim light. The flashing light makes her eyes sparkle.

This time on the TV is a sobbing BLACK MOTHER, being interviewed by the white female news reporter from earlier.

BLACK MOTHER (O.S)
MY BABY! They killed him! They killed
my Phillip!

NEWS REPORTER (O.S)
Could you look to the camera when you
say that, ma'am?

Janey opens the front door and removes her shoes. She enters the living room and notices her mother in the same spot as before. She frowns and crosses the room to Poloma.

JANEY
Hi, Mama, how's the TV?

Poloma's eyes don't move from the TV screen.

JANEY
Alright. Well. I had an OK day.

No response.

JANEY
Can I watch with you?

No response.

Janey sits down next to Poloma, tucking her knees underneath her weight.

Janey's eyes widen as the Black Mother's CRIES get louder and louder.

32 INT. MOORDEB S'YENAJ - TV SCREEN

32

The TV Screen cuts suddenly from the news program, filling the screen with static and the distinctive BUZZ of frequency. BLUE and WHITE STATIC flicker ominously. The Black Mother's CRIES cut in and out, distorted and looping

(CONTINUED)

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The static cracks and fizzles. Silence. A hazy FIGURE materializes from the static, which glitches in and out.

The Figure REVEALS to be a BLACK SILHOUETTE OF A GIRL. A crack tears across the TV Static, transitioning to: A blinking sapphire blue eye. The eye stares wide for a split second.

The news program returns. The news reporter holds a microphone close to the Black Mother's mouth. CLOSE UP on Black Mother's black eyes filled with tears.

33 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

33

Janey sits on her bed, criss-cross applesauce, in a pink nightgown. She neatly folds a pair of clean WHITE UNDERWEAR with blue lace trim. There are SIX identical pairs of underwear folded in a line in front of her.

After finishing the seventh pair, she lays it next to the other pairs of underwear. She counts.

JANEY

One. Alabaster.

Janey picks up the underwear and stacks it in a small tower. Carefully, she moves to her dresser and opens it. She places a pair in the drawer.

JANEY

Two. Ivory.

She places another, then another.

JANEY

Three. Cream. Four. As snow.

She places another pair of underwear neatly in the drawer.

JANEY

Five. Porcelain. Six. Fair

She squeezes the last pair of underwear into the now full drawer. She closes it with force.

JANEY

Seven. Pearl.

Janey crosses the room to the vanity mirror and sits in front of it. She stares intently at herself for a few moments.

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CONTINUED:

Janey adjusts her small gilded mirror to an angle at which she can see herself, catching her own dark eyes. Janey begins unbraiding her hair. It's no longer smooth and straight from the hot comb, but frizzy and puffy in places.

Once her hair is free from the braids, Janey takes a PADDLE brush and brushes her hair meticulously. She takes the puffy sections first and brushes, and brushes. She pulls the brush through her hair. Once. Twice. Too many times to keep track.

She repeats this process on her entire head, paying special attention to the puffy hairs in the back and around her scalp.

34 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

34

Hours pass.

She pulls a fluff of BLACK HAIR out of the brush, and reaches for a fine-toothed COMB. Janey sections her hair into many pieces and begins braiding.

She weaves braids of many sizes into her hair. Some thick and large. Some almost too small to see.

35 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

35

Hours pass.

Janey's created about fifty braids of different sizes throughout her hair. Finally, she weaves the braids into two large intricate knots on each side of her head.

Janey traces her fingers along her sore scalp, admiring her precision.

JANEY

How perfect. How neat.

She lets out a soft, pleased smile and watches herself in the reflection.

JANEY

How clean. How beautiful. Good job,
Miss Janey.

Janey moves her head around, showcasing different angles of her braids in the mirror.

Janey's reflection begins to **transform**. It's cheeks grow fuller. It's skin smoother, it's color warmer. It's black

(CONTINUED)

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hair shines like obsidian. It's eyes fade from a deep brown to a glimmering sapphire blue. The mirror's warp disappears.

The blue eyes are what alert Janey to the discrepancy in her reflection. She freezes, locking eyes with her "reflection". Janey brings her face close to the mirror. She pries her eyes open wide and inspects the mirror, blinking repeatedly.

MIRROR ME (14), a reflection of Janey with fearsome sapphire eyes and a desire to better herself, carefully mimics each of Janey's movements. She looks exactly like Janey, but if God paid more attention when creating her. Feminine but masculine in the same breath.

Janey raises an arm. Mirror Me copies this movement. Janey slaps her arm down, holding it tightly. Mirror Me does this too.

Mirror Me entertains Janey in this pantomime before flashing Janey her signature blank smile.

Janey lets out the beginnings of a scream, before slapping her hands over her mouth. Silencing herself. The force causes Janey to fall backwards out of her chair and onto the floor. Terrified, Janey scurries as far from the mirror as possible.

She retreats to her bed, directly across from the vanity. Janey curls up into herself as she stares at her "reflection". Mirror Me smiles blankly back at her. Her only movement, slow steady blinks of her big blue eyes.

Suddenly, Janey jumps to her feet and pulls a BLUE BLANKET off the bed. She hastily drapes it over the vanity mirror, paces a few times in front of the mirror, turns out the light, and returns to her bed.

Janey buries herself under the remaining blankets and lays with her body caved in on itself.

She counts nervously to herself until she falls asleep...

JANEY

One. Two. Three. Chad. Cuba. Fiji. . .

36 INT. MOORDEB S'YENAJ - (DREAM)

36

A girl's soft unintelligible SINGING accompanies the image of TV static. Coupled with the distinctive BUZZ of frequency, it becomes clear the singing is of "Dream a Little Dream of Me" by The Mamas & The Papas.

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CONTINUED:

GIRL SINGING

While I'm alone and blue as can be/
Dream a little dream of me...

The girl's voice cuts in and out between another girl's LAUGHTER. Michaelena's laughter. A hazy FIGURE materializes from the static, it's Mirror Me.

She smiles and laughs along with the disembodied Michaelena

MIRROR ME

I am the way and the truth and the
life. For even Satan disguises himself
as an angel of light.

A crack tears across the image, it shatters.

37 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

37

Janey's eyes shoot open. In one swift movement, she gets out of bed, removes the blanket from the vanity, and begins getting ready for the day.

As she moves about the bedroom, she's careful to avoid the gaze of the vanity mirror.

She leaves the bedroom.

38 INT. JANEY'S BEDROOM - DAY - LATER

38

Janey enters her bedroom, head first. She peeks her head over the threshold and her eyes scan the room. Then, she steps fully into the room and picks up the fallen stool. She replaces it upright and sits firmly in front of the vanity.

Mirror Me smiles blankly at Janey in a greeting.

MIRROR ME

How are you doing, Janey? I missed you
so much! Tell me everything that's
been going on.

Janey doesn't respond. Instead she watches Mirror Me suspiciously.

MIRROR ME

Come on, Janey, don't be a stranger!

Janey crosses her arms over her chest and frowns deeply.

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CONTINUED:

JANEY

This is just a dream.

MIRROR ME

A waking dream? How could that even
be?

Janey begins shaking her head in disagreement.

JANEY

This isn't real. It can't be.

Mirror Me looks to Janey with big, pleading eyes.

JANEY

No. No. NO! This ISN'T REAL! I'm NOT
crazy!

Growing frightened, Janey's voice raises in volume.

MIRROR ME

But *she* is. The apple doesn't fall too
far.

Janey's face contorts into horror at the comparison.

JANEY

No! NO! It can't be. I'm not like her!

Mirror Me's expression relaxes into laughter.

MIRROR ME

No, Janey, of course not.

JANEY

So, this is real?

MIRROR ME

Yes. You're real, so I'm real.

JANEY

So, I'm not crazy. This is real.

MIRROR ME

This is real.

Beat.

JANEY

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

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Janey pauses for a moment to consider. Mirror Me watches Janey closely, her eyes trace Janey's figure. The curve of her neck. The roundness of her cheeks. Her almond shaped black eyes framed in stubby dark lashes.

JANEY

Well, who are you?

MIRROR ME

Why, I'm you!

JANEY

Is your name Janey too?

Mirror Me pauses. She looks genuinely puzzled by the question.

MIRROR ME

I'm actually not sure. I'm just you.

Janey narrows her eyes at Mirror Me.

JANEY

Well, Mirror Me, I guess it's nice to meet you. Seems like you'll be sticking around.

Janey gestures to the frame of the vanity mirror.

MIRROR ME

Oh, but we've met before, Janey...

Janey's face contorts into a suspecting frown. Then melts away to curiosity.

JANEY

I think I would remember that.

MIRROR ME

People don't usually remember their dreams.

Janey's gaze inspects Mirror Me. She stares intently at Mirror Me's blue eyes.

JANEY

Hmm. Can I ask you something?

Mirror Me's eyes light up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIRROR ME

Please! That's what I'm here for.

Janey's face completely relaxes. Her eyes widen with curiosity.

JANEY

Are those my eyes?

Janey traces Mirror Me's blue eyes with her finger.

JANEY

If you're me. If I've dreamt of you.
Then I've dreamt of those eyes. They
must be mine. I knew it. I always knew
I was supposed to have the bluest
eyes.

MIRROR ME

You like them?

Mirror Me beams with pride.

JANEY

I love them.

MIRROR ME

I knew you would.

Janey nods quietly as Mirror Me smiles lovingly at her.

MIRROR ME

You know, you really are pretty Janey.
You could be, at least.

Janey perks up.

JANEY

You really think so?

MIRROR ME

Yeah. If only you had the bluest eyes.
Like mine.

Janey's big brown eyes swell with emotion, a mixture of sadness and hope. Her lip trembles into a shaky smile.

JANEY

Really?

Mirror Me's once loving smile transitions to a sly grin. She

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lets out another laugh before **disappearing**. The mirror's original warp returns. Mirror Me is gone.

JANEY

Really? Really!?

Her plead is met with silence.

JANEY

Mirror Me?

Janey's eyes widen again. She begins searching the mirror. Inspecting its reflection with her hands. Her hands move to her face, touching her cheeks, her nose, covering her eyes.

JANEY

Where did you go? Mirror Me, come back!

ZOOM IN on Janey as she continues touching her face and neck, in a confused daze.