FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY – EARLY EVENING.

The bus is driving down a highway. They are the only car in sight for miles.

INT. THE BUS – SAME TIME.

Allegra is sleeping in a makeshift bed in the corner. Really it’s just a pile of blankets and jackets lumped together. North and Micah are sitting at the little card table talking amongst themselves. Koda is in the back, sleeping on the bed, and Pru is huddled in another corner, writing in a journal. Lennon is sitting in the passenger seat with Fern driving.

INT. THE FRONT OF THE BUS.

Lennon has his knees pulled to his chest and fern has one leg tucked under her. Fern is nursing a giant Arizona Iced Tea while Lennon messes with a cut on his knee. Neither of them have their seatbelts buckled.

FERN

(Quietly speaking)

Well, do you love her?

LENNON

I don’t know. I mean, we’ve been together for so long.

FERN

How’d you guys meet?

LENNON

We grew up together. Lived next door. She was basically family. I don’t know when it changed but it did. One day she was just… the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

FERN

And now?

LENNON

Now I’m worried we only stayed together because we left together.

They sit in silence for a while.

FERN

Maybe you need to take a break, then.

LENNON

She’d never agree to that. Plus, we’re all stuck here together.

FERN

Is everything always her decision?

LENNON

Have you met her before?

FERN

I think that you need to have this conversation with her, not me. I mean…

LENNON

No, I-I know. It’s just hard.

FERN

Well of course it is. It certainly doesn’t help that you’re cooped up with us.

LENNON

Honestly this is the best thing that’s ever happened to us. I don’t know what our lives would be like if we’d stayed in Chicago.

FERN

Maybe that’s the solution.

LENNON

What do you mean?

FERN

Have you ever thought about going back?

LENNON

Koda wouldn’t want to.

FERN

That’s my point. You need to start making decisions for yourself… It’s like—

Police sirens are heard in the background. A bullhorn calls for her to pull to the side of the road. She does and they both quickly buckle their seatbelts. Lennon quickly starts gathering all the beer cans on the ground.

FERN (CONTD)

Hide those. Get in the back.

LENNON

Why?

FERN

I don’t have a permit to drive all you guys. Just, trust me, get in the back. Tell everyone to get down.

He quickly jumps behind the seat into the back of the van and everyone crouches down.

Fern keeps her hands firmly on the wheel and looks straight ahead. They wait in silence until a white officer stalks up to the window and Fern rolls it down. The officer doesn’t look up initially.

OFFICER

Do you know why I—

He notices Fern is black.

Please step out of the car.

FERN

Excuse me? I don’t understand. Let me get my license-

As she says this she reaches over to grab her license and registration out of the glove compartment. Her hand is half way in the box.

OFFICER

(Hostile. Yelling.)

I said step out of the vehicle!

He unsheathes a gun and cocks it. Fern stops moving, her hand still in the glove box. She is shaking.

FERN

Please, I don’t—

OFFICER

Drop your weapon. Now!

FERN

I don’t have a weapon.

She pulls her hand out slowly to show her license and registration. He raises his gun. Switch to the back of the bus where Lennon is holding Micah back and they’re cowering in the corner but they can still peak out of the shades that cover the window.

OFFICER

I’m not going to say it again. Get out of the vehicle.

She gets out of the car slowly, holding her license and registration above her head.

OFFICER

Give me those.

She goes to give them to him but she’s shaking so badly that she drops them.

FERN

Oh god, I’m sorry.

He bends down to grab them but she bends down at the exact same time and her arm touches his. He whips around and takes her down. She’s now on her stomach on the side of the road. He has his knee pressed between her shoulder blades. Her face is crushed in the dirt and hot asphalt.

OFFICER

What did I say? I said no sudden movements! I meant it!

He’s yelling. Fern is crying.

FERN

Please, please, I was just trying to hand it to you.

OFFICER

Don’t talk back to me!

FERN

I’m sorry, please.

OFFICER

Is there anyone else with you? Hey! Look at me! Are you alone?

Fern nods her head almost imperceptibly.

OFFICER

You answer me when I’m speaking to you!

FERN

Yes.

She’s whispering through her tears. He grabs her hair in a handful, the gun still pressed against her neck.

OFFICER

What’re you doing with a bus out here? Did you steal it?

FERN

No! I’m driving to Nevada. I’m going to a festival! Please.

OFFICER

You say sir when speaking to an officer.

She nods. He yanks her hair tighter.

FERN

Yes, sir.

Her voice is guttural now from not being able to breathe under his weight.

FERN

Please. I can’t breathe. Your knee.

He digs his knee deeper into her back.

OFFICER

Shut up. I think we’re going to take a little trip to the station. Assaulting an officer is a pretty serious charge.

FERN

What? No!

OFFICER

The boys down here don’t appreciate niggers gettin’ outta line.

FERN

But I didn’t even…

OFFICER

Didn’t what? Point a gun at me? It’s your word against mine. Who you think they’re gonna believe?

When he says this he presses the barrel of the gun into the base of her skull. He cuffs her hands as tight as he can. Fern is now bawling.

FERN

Please just let me go, please, I won’t say anything, I promise. Please. I’ve got a-a husband, and a baby! I need to get home. Just let me go, I won’t tell anyone anything!

OFFICER

Assaulting an officer, resisting arrest, I wouldn’t even get put on trial for killing you. You’d just disappear.

He cocks the gun ever so slowly and Fern cries as she hears the click.

At this Micah bursts out of the bus, followed by everyone else. He has a murderous look in his eye. The officer hasn’t seen him yet since he got out on the other side of the bus.

He walks up behind the officer and taps him on the shoulder. The officer stands quickly and turns towards Micah just as he clocks the officer square in the nose. The officer goes down.

OFFICER

What the hell? Oh my god, my nose!

Micah stands over him and grabs him by his collar.

MICAH

If you don’t get out of here right now... I swear to god. You have 30 seconds to get in your car and leave.

The girls go and help Fern up. Koda walks up to Micah and mutters to him.

KODA

She’s cuffed.

MICAH

Give me the keys. Now.

OFFICER

(His hand is covering his nose and blood is seeping between his fingers. His eyes are already swelling.)

I could have you all arrested for this.

MICAH

You won’t even make it to your gun before I snap your neck.

The officer looks at his gun on the ground a foot away. He thinks better of it and hands Koda the keys. Lennon is standing next to Micah.

LENNON

You’re lucky we’re here. Otherwise I’m pretty sure he’d’ve killed you by now.

MICAH

You now have 5 seconds.

OFFICER

You can’t do this, I am an officer!

ALLEGRA

No, you don’t deserve that title.

KODA

Scum.

MICAH

You don’t deserve to be called anything.

NORTH

You should be ashamed of yourself.

PRU

I would get in the car if I were you.

The officer stands and reaches for his gun. Micah slams his foot down on the officer’s hand. The officer cries out at the sound of crunching bone.

MICAH

No.

The officer stands and Lennon spits on him as he walks by. The officer gets in his car and drives off as quickly as he can.

Micah is still standing there, his muscles are shaking he’s clenching so hard. He bends down, grabs the gun, and tucks it in his waistband. Lennon walks over and places his hands on Micah’s shoulders and leads him over to Fern.

LENNON

He’s gone, man. It’s ok.

Micah finally breaks out of his anger and rushes over to Fern who is sitting on the ground, shaking. Her knees are bloody and her face is scratched from the ground. She’s covered in dirt. She has darkening bruises from where the cuffs sat on her wrists.

Micah leans down gently and hugs her. She collapses in his arms and begins to cry again. Not just crying but body-wracking sobs.

They sit like this for a while. Her sobs calm down. Micah picks her up and carries her into the bus. He leans into Lennon and says something. Lennon nods and gets in the driver’s seat.

EXT. A RATTY MOTEL 6 IN LOUISIANA— LATE NIGHT.

INT. HOTEL ROOM.

Fern and Pru and Allegra and Koda are all sharing a room. Their stuff is divided into different corners. It has 2 beds. Pru is asleep in one of them, snoring lightly. Koda is in the other room with Lennon. In the other bed, Fern is asleep.

Allegra is curled up in a chair by the window, the VACANCY sign illuminating her face a burnt orange. She leans her head against the window pane. She suddenly sneezes and covers her face. She looks to the two sleeping people, holding her breath. They don’t wake up. She sighs and laughs at herself.

Just as she’s dozing off, she feels a hand on her shoulder. Allegra jumps furiously. She turns to see fern. She exhales really hard and puts a hand over her heart. Fern laughs silently and motions for Allegra to scoot over and proceeds to squish into the chair with her. They sit in silence for a while, just enjoying each other’s company.

FERN

(Whispering)

Sorry I scared you. You ok?

ALLEGRA

Yeah. I’m ok. Sorry I woke you.

FERN

It wasn’t you. I can never sleep through her snoring.

FERN (CONTD)

Why’re you up?

Allegra shrugs but doesn’t say anything. Fern suddenly stands up and grabs Allegra’s hand. Her wrists are still bruised.

FERN (CONTD)

Come on.

Allegra lets Fern pull her up and they tiptoe past Pru and out of the room. Once they shut the door Fern starts walking down the hallway, looking for something.

ALLEGRA

(Whispering)

What’re you doing?

FERN

(Whispering)

Why’re you whispering?

ALLEGRA

(Still whispering)

I dunno I’m whispering because you’re whispering!

Fern laughs and finds a directory on the wall. Her finger moves down the page but Allegra can’t see as she’s still at the other end of the hallway. Fern runs back down the hallway to Allegra, grabs her arm, and drags her down the hall.

INT. THE POOL ROOM.

Fern and Allegra are standing beside the hot tub. Fern turns on the bubbles and waggles her eyebrows at Allegra. Allegra shakes her head. Fern then proceeds to strip down to her underwear and gets in the water. She sucks her teeth at the heat, but soon relaxes.

FERN

My bones hurt.

She rubs at her bruises as she sinks in the water. She is careful not to get her dreads wet so she piles them on her head and wraps a hairband around them. She beckons Allegra into the water.

ALLEGRA

Absolutely not.

Fern sighs, exasperated, and slaps her hands into the water like a child having a tantrum.

FERN

(Whiny)

Why?

Allegra crosses her arms.

ALLEGRA

I just took a shower.

Fern stands in the tub and crosses her arms too.

FERN

Look. I brought you out here because you’re sad. I can fix sad. Just get in the water. Trust me.

Fern cocks her head.

FERN (CONTD)

Do you trust me?

Allegra sighs, defeated, and starts to strip. Allegra slowly undoes the string on her shorts, letting them slide to the floor and pulls her sweatshirt over her head.

She doesn’t notice but Fern is looking at her body. Fern tries to hide it and clears her throat, splashing her face with water. Allegra smiles slightly; she knew exactly what she was doing.

Allegra inhales sharply as her abdomen hits the water. She sighs eventually, letting herself relax. They look at each other, and burst out laughing.

INT. POOL ROOM.

Fern is lying on her back next to the hot tub and Allegra is sitting on the bench in the hot tub. Fern has one arm draped over her eyes. They’re both quiet.

ALLEGRA

I miss my mom.

Fern doesn’t move.

FERN

Me too.

ALLEGRA

She died a year ago. That’s why my dad and I aren’t so close.

(BEAT)

We used to be best friends.

(BEAT)

When did your mom die?

Fern moves her arm off of her eyes and it’s obvious she’s been crying. Allegra pretends not to notice. Fern sits up cross-legged at the edge of the hot tub.

FERN

She uh… she hasn’t.

Allegra looks at her inquisitively.

FERN (CONTD)

When they found out I was dating a girl, they gave me two choices: break it off and go to a reform camp, or leave…

(BEAT)

FERN (CONTD)

I left. Micah came with me. I’m thankful every day that he did. I’d be dead if not for him. I sometimes forget we’re not related. But, yeah, so no…she’s not dead. But she might as well be. It’s been 2 years and she hasn’t called once.

ALLEGRA

Neither have you…

FERN

Damn.

ALLEGRA

I’m sorry. That wasn’t my place.

FERN

No, it’s ok. That’s exactly what I’m too afraid to say out loud.

More silence ensues. Allegra gets out of the water and sits next to her on the edge. She sits cross-legged and hunched so they look the same. Fern has her head bowed. Allegra does too, but she turns her head to look at Fern.

She looks at Fern’s hand lying palm up on the ground. The bruises on her wrists have turned a greenish-yellow. Allegra rubs the bruises on her wrists with her finger tenderly. She gently slides her hand into Fern’s. Fern turns her head to look at Allegra.

She gradually leans close, so slowly, and kisses her lips. It’s so innocent. Neither of them move. Fern is the first to break apart. She leans her forehead against Allegra’s.

ALLEGRA

Come on.

She stands, trying to pull Fern up with her. Fern doesn’t move.

FERN

No I don’t want to get up. Can’t we just sit here for another minute?

ALLEGRA

Nope. Come on. It’s your turn to trust me. Get up!

Fern sighs and stands slowly. Allegra is still holding her hand. She walks Fern over to the edge of the swimming pool. Fern stops with her toes curled over the edge.

FERN

Absolutely not.

ALLEGRA

You don’t really have a choice.

Just as she says this she pushes Fern into the pool. Allegra laughs, her hands on her knees. Fern bursts up from the surface.

FERN

Mistake. Huge mistake.

She lunges at the side of the pool and gets out of the water. Before Allegra can figure out what’s going on Fern picks her up and cannon-balls into the pool. The two laugh and splash each other.

They get closer and closer as they’re splashing until they’re practically in each other’s arms. Allegra out of nowhere grabs Fern’s face and presses her lips to Fern’s.

They both smile under the kiss. They continue to tread water and splash each other and dunk each other, stealing playful kisses in between.

FADE OUT.