

Sponge Painting

by

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INTERCUT: INT. ALBIE'S BEDROOM/BIRDIE'S BEDROOM-MORNING

Sunlight sifts through baby blue curtains onto a green shag rug.

The bedroom is meager, but cluttered.

We see brown shelves filled with books, action figures, and picture frames. In one of the frames, a family photo: four young children and a mother and father, all making funny faces. One of the children is held upside down in her mother's arms.

ALBIE(12), sits on the bottom bed of a bunk, tying her shoelaces. Her kinky, brown hair keeps falling in her face. She tucks it back each time.

Her younger sister PIPER(10), runs into the room, startling Albie.

PIPER

We gotta go! Dad's already started the car.

ALBIE

(still focused on her shoes)  
Tell him I'll be there.

PIPER

Hurry up...you know how mom gets.

Albie nods and Piper leaves the room.

She finally ties her shoes and straightens her posture, still sitting on her bed.

We hear faint shouting: the parents.

Albie's shoulders slump, and the screen SPLITS in half, revealing BIRDIE(17).

She sits in the same position as Albie, though her background is bland cinderblock.

Albie and Birdie reluctantly get up, and the screen gives way to Birdie.

Birdie, a slight teen with thinning brown hair turns to make her bed.

Sunlight trickles through the cheap plastic blinds on her window.

A KNOCK on her door.

(CONTINUED)

BIRDIE  
(while tucking her sheets in)  
Come in!

The door opens, revealing NURSE JACKI. She is tall, and proudly wearing Mickey Mouse scrubs. Her hair is wound in a tight bun.

NURSE JACKI  
You almost done? We've got weigh ins.

BIRDIE  
(while fluffing pillows)  
Just about...

Birdie finishes and faces Nurse Jacki.

Nurse Jacki smiles and exits the room, Birdie following her into an empty hallway.

The screen SPLITS and we see from behind both Birdie and Albie.

Albie walks through a crowded grade school hallway, a heavy-looking backpack thrown over her right shoulder. She turns her head to look into bustling classrooms, just as Birdie stares at mostly closed doors decorated with construction paper and sticky tack.

Albie enters a loud classroom as Birdie enters a small, empty room with cat posters on the walls.

Birdie stares at one with a kitten hanging from a rope toy that reads: "When life leaves you hanging...DON'T QUIT." She smiles uncomfortably.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT: INT. CLASSROOM/INT. SMALL ROOM IN WARD

We see flashes of Birdie slowly taking her clothes off between scenes of Albie greeting friends. Everything is muted.

Albie laughs with her friends.

Birdie takes her shirt off.

Albie shows her friends something on her phone.

Birdie slips out of her pajama pants.

Albie is looking at somebody else's phone, smiling.

(CONTINUED)

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3.

Nurse Jacki quickly pats down Birdie's bra.

Albie heads to her seat.

Birdie steps onto the scale.

Albie is smiling and talking with her friend, ERICA(12) sitting next to her.

We watch as her smile fades when Erica asks a question.

CUT TO:

INT. ALBIE'S HOUSE

We see Albie weeks earlier. She stands away from her mother MARY, frozen.

MARY  
(screaming)  
CALL 9-1-1, ALBIE! GET A PHONE.

Albie doesn't do anything.

Mary's yelling fades as we are brought back to present day.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Albie "wakes" from her daze and smiles at Erica.

ALBIE  
Oh she's just been sick...A cold or something.

Erica looks unconvinced but doesn't say anything.

Class begins and we watch as the students all straighten up in their seats.

Albie's smile twists, her brows furrowing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SMALL ROOM IN WARD-DAY

Birdie is still standing on the scale.

NURSE JACKI  
(while jotting some notes  
down)  
A pound and a half, Birdie...That's good.

(CONTINUED)

Birdie sucks in her cheeks and steps off the scale.  
She pulls on her pants and throws her shirt on.  
She's about to exit the room when Nurse Jacki turns to her.

NURSE JACKI (CONT'D)  
You gonna be at group today?

BIRDIE  
(shrugging)  
Kinda have to.

Nurse Jacki watches as Birdie walks into the hallway.

NURSE JACKI  
Oh and Birdie! Remember you've got  
a blood test after dinner, alright?

Birdie turns to give her a thumbs up.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT: INT. ROOM IN WARD/INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Birdie sits on a pale plastic chair in a circle of people of various ages and backgrounds. She is still wearing her pajama pants, though she now sports a light blue hoodie.

The room is bleak, with gray carpeting and more cat posters on the walls. She stares at one that says "Hang In There" with a kitten hanging off a tree branch.

The screen SPLITS and we see Albie sitting in the same place we last left her. The screen completely gives way to her.

She's staring at the projection of Mrs. Cueller's desktop: two small kittens playing in grass. The classroom explodes with noises of excitement.

MRS. CUELLERS  
Just got 'em a week ago. Aren't  
they just the cutest?

Albie is unamused, and stares down at her notebook.

MRS. CUELLERS (CONT'D)  
Alright, alright. We gotta take  
some notes.

The screen SPLITS in half and we see Birdie watching a middle-aged woman clad in a pantsuit sit across from her. This is MS. SMITH.

(CONTINUED)

The screen gives way to Birdie.

The other patients sit up in their chairs as Ms. Smith crosses her legs and steadies a clipboard in her lap.

MS. SMITH

So...

Ms. Smith eyes each of the patients.

MS. SMITH(CONT'D)

How are we doing today?

Nobody answers. Ms. Smith turns to PATTY(35), who sits next to her. Patty wears tight jeans and a flowery blouse. Her hair, however, is matted and unwashed.

MS. SMITH(CONT'D)

Patty? I know you've recently reconnected with your father.

PATTY

(nodding)

Yeah...been ten years.

Patty avoids eye contact with Ms. Smith.

Birdie appears uninterested.

MS. SMITH

Would you like to tell us what it was like seeing him after all that time?

Patty rolls her eyes and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear.

PATTY

(reluctantly)

Hi. My name is Patty.

EVERYONE

(in response)

Hi, Patty.

PATTY

And I'm here for depression and anxiety...and...

Patty slowly scratches her arms. PETER(33), sitting next to her, gently places his hand on hers. Patty stops scratching and takes his hand.

(CONTINUED)

PATTY(CONT'D)

And I thought I'd be angry at him for all those years. But people...well, I'm not sure they change, but...

Peter squeezes Patty's hand.

PATTY(CONT'D)

But, I think they get better. Which, I guess, is what I'm trying to do here.

MS. SMITH

That's very understanding of you, Patty. I know how hard it is to adjust. Speaking of which...

Ms. Smith turns to face Birdie.

MS. SMITH(CONT'D)

Birdie. You've been here a few weeks. And you're one of our youngest. How has it been for you?

Birdie shrugs.

MS. SMITH(CONT'D)

I know it's frustrating. To sit here while the rest of the world moves on without you. But you've gotta think of it differently. If you were out there-

BIRDIE

(cutting Smith off)

I'd probably die. But this is terrible. Being stuck here away from my friends. Family.

The screen SPLITS, and we see Albie taking notes as Birdie speaks.

BIRDIE(CONT'D)

(quickly)

I missed my graduation. And I've got three younger siblings who think I've got a chance. Parents who won't admit their failing marriage. I lost my running career. Out the window cause I had to come here.

Birdie takes a breath. The screen gives way to her.

(CONTINUED)

BIRDIE(CONT'D)

I have a right to be fucking angry.

Patty shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE-LATE AFTERNOON

Piper and WILLA(8) walk out of the backseats of a parked silver highlander, backpacks on their shoulders.

Albie is about to leave from the front seat when her father JOHN, stops her. John is a stout, but muscular man with fading brown hair.

JOHN

Albie could you stay back a sec?

Albie nods and sits back in her seat.

ALBIE

Yeah?

John takes the key out of the ignition and looks at it in his hand, turning it over and over as he starts to talk.

JOHN

I know this has been hard. After everything that happened...

CUT TO:

INT. ALBIE'S HOUSE

Weeks earlier.

Albie stands away from her mother.

MARY

GET A PHONE!

John walks up from behind Mary, carrying a limp, unconscious Birdie.

Mary quickly rushes past Albie and grabs a phone.

The scene fades as she dials. We are brought back to present day.

DISSOLVE TO:



INTERCUT: INT. GARAGE/INT. WARD-LATE AFTERNOON

JOHN

I wanted to make sure you were  
alright.

John looks at Albie, who seems entranced.

JOHN(CONT'D)

Al?

Albie recovers and quickly smiles.

ALBIE

Sorry. Been a long day.

John seems concerned but doesn't address it.

JOHN

And your mom and I were wondering  
if you'd like to see your sister.

The screen SPLITS and we see Birdie sitting at a table with  
scattered craft supplies.

The screen gives way to her.

Around her, other patients including Patty and Peter. They  
sit next to each other.

Peter looks up at Birdie, who is struggling with a  
friendship bracelet.

PETER

Need help?

Birdie groans and hands it to him, not making eye contact.

Peter ties it while still looking at her, curious.

PETER(CONT'D)

I know you from somewhere.

BIRDIE

(sarcastically)

That's so strange. It's like we  
live in the same psych ward.

PETER

No, no. I mean like, I've seen you  
outside of these walls. You famous  
or something?

Birdie shakes her head.

(CONTINUED)

PETER(CONT'D)  
But you were a runner...OH! You  
broke all those records.

BIRDIE  
(mockingly)  
"Birdie takes the lead!" "Birdie is  
unstoppable!"

Birdie sighs as Peter quickly finishes the bracelet. He  
hands it to her.

PETER  
Can't believe I get to be in the  
same ward as a famous person.

Peter smiles and Birdie laughs, turning the bracelet over in  
her hand.

BIRDIE  
Oh, shit. I forgot about the beads.

Birdie picks up three wooden beads with letters on them.

BIRDIE(CONT'D)  
How do I put em on?

PETER  
(reaching out)  
Give them here.

Peter begins to untie the bracelet.

PETER(CONT'D)  
(shaking his head)  
You may have been a champion  
runner, but goddamn. You're almost  
shameful when it comes to  
friendship bracelets.

Birdie smiles.

The screen SPLITS and we see Albie still sitting in the car.  
She is at a loss for words.

JOHN  
It would be brief. After the  
concert on Sunday. And you guys  
will be out of school then.

ALBIE  
(unsure)  
I wouldn't mind.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Okay. Your mom is gonna tell Piper and Willa tonight. Thought I'd give you a heads up.

ALBIE

You don't think they're too young?

JOHN

They've gotta see their sister, Al. See that she's doing alright after everything that happened.

Albie nods and turns to leave.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT: INT. ALBIE'S HOUSE/INT. CAFETERIA IN WARD-NIGHT

Albie sits between Willa and Piper at a granite kitchen counter, on which sit plates with heaps of noodles and peas.

Their mother, Mary, stands on the other side of the counter, watching them. She is almost as slight as Birdie, though shorter. Her brown hair is in a barely contained ponytail, and she sports purple bags beneath her eyes. She takes small sips from a glass of red wine.

Willa and Piper are already in their pajamas, and Willa attacks his dinner as if it were his last.

Albie stares at her plate, pondering.

MARY

(to Willa)

You have a good day, sweetheart?

Willa responds by aggressively nodding, his mouth full of spaghetti.

MARY(CONT'D)

(smiling)

I see. Piper? You finish that math homework?

PIPER

Yup!

MARY

(turning to Albie)

Al? You making sure these two stay out of trouble?

Albie nods, still facing her plate.

(CONTINUED)

The screen SPLITS and we see Birdie staring at her own plate. Patty and Peter sit on either side of her. Before her, a tray overflowing with spaghetti and meatballs, lima beans, garlic bread, and a chocolate pudding cup.

She uses her plastic fork to move the food around. Nurse Jacki walks up from behind her. Birdie flinches when she speaks.

NURSE JACKI

Finish it all. Remember you've got  
a blood test.

Birdie rolls her eyes and smirks at Peter and Patty.

The screen SPLITS and we see Albie looking up at her mother. The screen gives way to her.

ALBIE

What else would I do?

Mary smiles and quickly changes the subject.

MARY

You guys wanna visit your sister  
Birdie?

Willa and Piper appear excited. Albie doesn't react to this question, and instead pushes her peas around.

MARY(CONT'D)

She's probably missing some things  
from home. Piper, Willa? You wanna  
help me bake some pumpkin cake  
tomorrow?

PIPER/WILLA

(together)

Yeah!

MARY

And Albie? You mind grabbing that  
blanket from her bed? The one  
Grandpa made for her?

Albie nods.

MARY

(smiling)

Good.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BIRDIE'S OLD BEDROOM-NIGHT

Albie creeps into Birdie's old room.

She hesitates in the doorway, eyes fixed on a half open closet at the back of the room.

Albie tiptoes into the room and towards the bed, still glancing at the closet.

She picks up a small, worn quilt sitting at the end of the unmade bed and quickly exits the room, shutting the door behind her.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT: INT. ALBIE'S BATHROOM/INT. ROOM IN WARD

Albie sits shirtless on a fake granite table in the bathroom, examining the rolls of her stomach.

The screen SPLITS and we see Birdie sitting in a chair, Nurse Jacki looming over her.

Albie slides off the table, now observing what her stomach looks like standing up.

Nurse Jacki rolls up Birdie's sleeve, looking for a vein.

Albie opens a drawer and pulls out small scissors decorated with painted pink flowers.

The screen gives way to her as we shakily watch her hover them above her stomach.

She swiftly brings them to her skin and

we CUT to Birdie wincing as Nurse Jacki inserts the needle.

BIRDIE  
Jesus, Jacki.

Nurse Jacki remains unfazed.

NURSE JACKI  
You know, your family is allowed to visit..You keeping in contact?

BIRDIE  
With the cellphone I don't have?

(CONTINUED)

NURSE JACKI  
We have phones, Birdie.

BIRDIE  
(rolling her eyes)  
They're visiting Sunday.

NURSE JACKI  
(smiling)  
That's good!

Birdie looks unsure.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR-DAY

It's Sunday, and Albie sits wedged between Piper and Willa in the highlander. She inspects the small piano trophy in her hands. Mary drives, and John stares ahead, a picnic basket in his lap.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PSYCH WARD

The family stands outside a heavy door. Albie still holds the trophy. Nurse Jacki opens the door and welcomes them in. Mary and John go to the front desk to check in.

Albie leads the kids to a sort of common room full of empty couches with outdated floral patterns and vinyl curtains covering the windows. The walls are mostly white except for around the desk, which is covered with paintings of pink flowers and bees.

They sit at a wooden table with four chairs.

A table with a water heater, coffee mix, and an ice machine, sits behind it.

Albie drags two chairs from another table to make room for her parents.

She sits between Piper and Willa.

The next few shots are fast-forwarded and silent.

We see Birdie emerge and greet her parents.

She waves at the kids and walks over with her parents.

She sits between them, across from Albie.

(CONTINUED)

Willa pulls out an 'Apples to Apples' game from the picnic basket and they deal cards.

They play a few rounds.

Everything slows and we can hear the surrounding noise:

Willa yelling about how Piper stole one of his green cards,  
the opening and closing of the door to the psych ward,  
Piper standing up and getting ice from the machine.

Mary clears her throat.

MARY

Who's turn is it?

WILLA

Mom! She stole my card!

Mary ignores this.

PIPER

Did not. Mom! Tell him I didn't  
steal his card.

MARY

She didn't steal your card, honey.  
Now why don't we have some cake.

Mary bends down and pulls a small, frosted, cake from the basket.

She sets it on the table and uses a plastic knife to cut large squares into the orange flesh.

MARY(CONT'D)

(to Birdie)

Piper and Willa helped with this.

Birdie half smiles and nods.

PIPER

I call not cleaning up!

WILLA

Me, too!

Albie rolls her eyes and sets the trophy on the table. She reaches for a pile of discarded red cards.

ALBIE

Got it.

JOHN

(turning to Birdie)

You see Albie got an award today?

BIRDIE

(pointing to the trophy)

It's right there, dad.

JOHN

Well...That's pretty great, isn't it?

Birdie scoffs.

Mary hands slices to Piper and Willa. They greedily stick their forks in.

MARY

(to Birdie)

You want a piece, honey?

BIRDIE

(waving it away)

Think I'm good for now.

Mary's shoulder's slump in defeat. She's trying.

MARY

Okay...well I got some cans of tuna in that basket for you, too,...and some uh...

Mary puts the plastic knife down.

MARY(CONT'D)

Some carrots and those delicious crackers...you know, the ones with the cranberries and rosemary? Your favorite.

BIRDIE

(nodding)

Thanks, mom.

Mary nods, looking unsure.

Albie fits the last of the cards into the box and places the cover on.

Mary notices this.

(CONTINUED)



MARY  
(to Albie)  
Oh! Did you want some cake, Al?

ALBIE  
(shaking her head)  
Thanks, though.

Nobody says anything for a few seconds.

We hear only Piper and her cup of ice:

The cubes stumbling over each other as they slide from the plastic cup and into her mouth.

The sharp crunch of frozen water.

PIPER  
You got a nice view from your room?

BIRDIE  
If you like parking lots and sad,  
shrunken trees.

JOHN  
Heard you got activities.

BIRDIE  
Yeah. Arts and crafts and stuff.  
Like...friendship bracelets and  
sponge painting.

JOHN  
Sponge painting?

WILLA  
Like Mrs. Wilson has us do!

PIPER  
You have all these little sponges  
and--

ALBIE  
You soak them in paint and then  
like--

Albie moves her hand in the air as if painting with a sponge.

JOHN  
(nodding)  
I see.

John runs a hand through his hair. There's a brief silence.

(CONTINUED)

BIRDIE

So graduation happened, huh?

JOHN

Uh, kids. Why don't you go into the tv room over there.

Albie shuffles Piper and Willa away.

CUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION ROOM

A small, slanted, room with red, shaggy, carpeting. A television is stuck in a high corner, "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" playing.

An old man sits on a brown couch, staring up at the tv. He has pink circles burned into his temples.

Piper and Willa hesitate in the doorway.

ALBIE

C'mon, guys.

Piper and Willa slowly make their way to the couch and sit down next to him. The man doesn't seem to notice.

Albie stays in the doorway, looking out, watching her parents comfort her crying older sister.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. COMMON ROOM IN WARD

JOHN

It's okay, honey. You're getting better here. That's more important.

BIRDIE

I don't feel like I'm getting better.

Mary puts an arm around Birdie.

MARY

You've only been here a few weeks, sweetheart.

BIRDIE

It's terrible here! We don't get to go outside. We don't have our own cellphones. There are people here who-

(CONTINUED)

Birdie looks up at her parents.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

You know they still do shock therapy? There's a guy who reintroduces himself to me after every session. They don't care about us here.

MARY

There's a place up in St. Louis. We could--

BIRDIE

I just feel stuck. Everyone else is moving forward.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION ROOM

Albie continues to watch them. Music from "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" plays in the background as Birdie sobs.

Both parents are now hugging her.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRDIE'S OLD BEDROOM-NIGHT

The day Birdie was taken to the hospital.

Albie creeps towards Birdie's room, hesitating in the doorway. On the half open closet, a rope. One end tied to the handle on the inside of the closet, the other end tied into a noose hanging over the front.

We can only see her small shape in the doorway.

CUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION ROOM

Albie is standing in the same position she was standing in in Birdie's doorway.

She looks back at Piper and Willa, who, instead of watching the movie, are transfixed with the man sitting next to them.

Albie returns her gaze to Birdie and her parents, and watches as Peter and Patty walk up to them, both in penguin pajama pants.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. COMMON ROOM IN WARD

Birdie is crying in her parent's arms when Peter and Patty walk up to them.

PETER  
Sorry to bother you, but are you  
Birdie's parents?

Birdie appears embarrassed and dries her face with the sleeve of her sweatshirt.

JOHN  
You know us from somewhere?

PATTY  
(smiling)  
I used to go to your church! Sat in  
the back with my three boys.

Peter looks at Patty, surprised.

JOHN  
Oh yeah! Mary, you remember her?  
The kids who always wore their ties  
wrong.

Mary nods and stands. She holds out her hand. Nancy shakes it.

MARY  
(laughing)  
Small world.

John and Birdie stand.

PETER  
We also know her from the papers.  
And well, here I guess.

Birdie smiles.

JOHN  
(looking down at Birdie)  
Yeah. She's taking a break for now.

PETER  
Totally get it...Anyway, Just  
thought I'd let you know how great  
your daughter is.

Patty looks at Birdie.

(CONTINUED)

PATTY

She's really trying her best.

Birdie tears up again and Mary pulls her into a side hug.

MARY

We're thinking about that place in St. Louis. They're a little stricter, but the environment's better. Or so we've heard.

PETER

Heard good things. Probably best she gets out of here, anyway.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION ROOM

Albie watches as Peter and Patty walk away. She furrows her brows and walks toward them.

INT. COMMON ROOM IN WARD

Albie approaches her parents and sister.

ALBIE

Everything okay?

Albie touches Birdie's arm. Birdie pulls away.

BIRDIE

I gotta get something from my room. I'll be back.

ALBIE

(whispering to her parents)  
What happened?

MARY

Nothing, sweetie. The kids in the tv room?

Albie nods.

MARY(CONT'D)

Okay. Well I'm gonna go check on them. Wait for your sister.

Mary walks towards the tv room.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN  
Where's the restroom?

Albie points to a door a few feet away.

JOHN(CONT'D)  
Be right back.

Birdie enters the room just as John walks into the bathroom.  
She has something in her hands. She holds it out to Albie.

BIRDIE  
Made this for you. Well, actually  
Peter did but, you know.

Albie examines it.

BIRDIE(CONT'D)  
(pointing to the beads)  
I wrote your initials on the beads.  
I know it's kinda lame, but...I  
don't know. Thought you might like  
it more than a sponge painting.

Albie picks up the bracelet, holding it as if it were glass.

BIRDIE(CONT'D)  
Look, I wanted to say I'm sorry. I  
know I put you through--

Albie hugs her, startling Birdie who quickly reciprocates.

BIRDIE  
(whispering)  
I'll be outta here soon so I can be  
the big sister, alright?

Albie nods, still tightly embracing her sister.

FADE OUT