

FADE IN:

EXT. LOPANE HOUSE - DOVER PLAINS, NY - MORNING

Sunrise. A rural community. Upstate, New York. The sun rises over the Lopane house which has enough junk in the front yard to qualify for landfill status.

INT. LORI LOPANE'S BEDROOM - SAME

Cramped bedroom. Twin beds. LORI LOPANE, 18, long-haired, pretty, if she tried, stares at a poster on the wall of Jennie Finch, the blonde bombshell USA Softball Olympic Gold Medalist.

LORI
(reciting aloud)
"Softball is a game of failure.
You can fail seven out of ten times
up at the plate and you're still
considered a good hitter. It's a
game about -- learning from your
mistakes and making adjustments."

We see these words on the bottom of the poster. Lori's eyes survey the glossy blonde image smiling back at her.

SQUEAKY BED NOISE SOUND. There is no mistaking what that sound is. Lori hears her mother having sex in the next room. From the look on Lori's face, this isn't the first time. Lori looks over at --

-- her kid sister, CHELSEA LOPANE, 14, sleeping in the bed beside her. Lori flips on the RADIO to drown out the MOANS.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Lori heads to the bathroom. RICK, 40, pony-tailed, her mother's latest bring-home, pees with the door open. Lori shoots him a dirty look and pulls it shut.

INT. LORI'S BEDROOM - SAME

Lori flips on a LIGHT and wakes her sister.

LORI
Chelsea, time for school.

Chelsea stirs, reaching for her eyeglasses on the stand.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Lori, now dressed in jeans and T-shirt, makes peanut butter sandwiches. She sees Rick through the window. He tries to kick-start his old Harley.

Lori's MOTHER, 37 but looks 47, drags on a Virginia Slims and sips a Diet Coke before 7a.m. She watches Rachael Ray on TV.

Chelsea eats cereal, sitting at the table.

LORI
(to mother)
Does this one have a job?

The mother ignores the question.

MOTHER
I swear this girl can whip up a meal out of next to nothin'.

Lori hands Chelsea her book bag.

LORI
Come on, Squirt. Let's go.

EXT. DOVER PLAINS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Lori pulls her '98 Jeep to the curb.

LORI
Chell -- don't forget your lunch.

CHELSEA
What time will you...

LORI
Take the bus home. I'm working late.

Chelsea kisses Lori and heads off toward school.

EXT. "THE BAT CAVE" BATTING CAGES - DAY

Lori parks outside a sports establishment. She walks in carrying a bat bag.

INT. THE BAT CAVE - LATER

Lori works the counter. MALE CUSTOMER, with bad teeth, hands her cash.

CUSTOMER

Tokens. And the men's toilet is
broke again.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lori plunges a clogged, overflowing toilet bowl.

INT. BATTING CAGE - LATER

Lori takes swings at balls pitched from a machine. MALE
CUSTOMER #2 sticks his face to the cage.

CUSTOMER #2

Cage three just stole my money.

LORI

Find the...
(swings for the fences)
... manager.

CUSTOMER #2

He said to find you.

Lori takes one last swing -- sends the ball rocketing. She
drops the aluminum bat on the ground making a racket.

EXT. LOPANE HOUSE - SAME DAY

Chelsea exits a school bus and walks up the driveway. Rick
tinkers on his bike, eyeballing her.

INT. LOPANE KITCHEN - EVENING

Lori and Chelsea sit at the table. Their mother serves up
two microwave dinners.

MOTHER

We'll eat later.

Mother joins Rick in the living room. He plays video games.
Lori and Chelsea survey their processed meal.

LORI

So much for Rachael Ray.

Chelsea laughs between bites.

EXT. LOPANE HOUSE - EVENING

Lori picks up a bucket of softballs. Chelsea draws a chalked batter's box on the side of the garage.

LORI
Hurry. It's getting dark, Squirt.

CHELSEA
So? You can pitch with your eyes closed.

Lori smiles, gripping a softball.

LORI
Move out the way.

CHELSEA
Why? I trust you.

Lori whips her arm into a windmill motion and releases the ball... it WHISTLES... striking the target.

CHELSEA
Up and in!

Lori blasts in another pitch. A fastball sinker.

CHELSEA
Down and out!

Lori rips in another. Faster.

CHELSEA
Up and out! Z O N E. What's *that* spell?

LORI
(wistful)
Freedom.

DISSOLVE TO:

The front porch LIGHT burns. Chelsea sits on the Jeep and watches Lori throw a softball against the wall. BAM... BAM... BAM!

RICK (O.S.)
HEY! STOP BANGIN' THAT GODDAMN BALL AGAINST THE HOUSE!

The girls freeze. Chelsea slides off the Jeep.

CHELSEA

We better call it a night.

Lori fires one last ball -- with all her might -- against the wall. It rattles the house on its foundation.

RICK (O.S.)

WHAT THE HELL DID I JUST SAY?!

Lori and Chelsea muffle laughter.

LORI

Go do your homework, Squirt.

Chelsea runs inside. Screen door SLAMS behind her. Lori retrieves softballs, dropping them into the bucket.

RICK (O.S.)

Why you girls makin' so much damn noise? Throwin' balls... slammin' doors!

VOICES bicker inside the house. Lori ignores them, until she hears Chelsea's plea:

CHELSEA (O.S.)

No. Rick, get off me. Stop!

Lori drops the bucket of balls. They spill out on the lawn. She charges the house -- as Chelsea darts out.

CHELSEA

Don't go in there -- he's drunk.

Lori pushes by her sister --

INT. LOPANE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Lori enters. Rick's has Lori's mother pinned on the kitchen table, choking her. Lori jumps on his back.

LORI

HEY! GET OFF! LET GO!

INTERCUT - OUTSIDE

Chelsea paces. She hears YELLING, then a PUNCH. Lori comes flying through the screen door backwards and lands flat on the ground.

CHELSEA

Oh God.

Chelsea rushes to her sister. Lori sits up, dazed.

CHELSEA

Lori, are you okay? Are you okay?

Lori has a bloody lip. Her breathing shallow... unsure of what just happened. Chelsea hugs her.

CHELSEA

I told you... not to go in there.

INT. LOPANE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Lori rips the Jennie Finch poster off the wall. She quickly rolls it and grabs clothes out of her closet, stuffing them into a bag. Chelsea cries, watching her sister at the door.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lori grabs her toothbrush. Her mother enters.

MOTHER

Honey. He didn't mean it.

LORI

I planned on leaving here next week. He made me pack sooner.

MOTHER

Take Chelsea... with you.

LORI

What? I can't. I don't even have housing... on campus yet.

MOTHER

Please. You can protect her.

LORI

Isn't that your job, Mom? To protect us?

MOTHER

How good a job I do with you?

INT. LORI'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chelsea sits on her bed. Lori rushes in.

LORI

Pack your things, Squirt. Fast.

Chelsea grabs anything she can get her hands on. Their mother steps into the room. She watches them pack.

LORI

We need some money to --

Mother lowers her eyes, ashamed.

LORI

Forget it.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lori grabs her softball mitt, aluminum bat, and bucket of balls. Flings them all into the Jeep. Chelsea comes out, carrying an armful of books. Off Lori's look --

CHELSEA

I read a lot when I'm nervous.

Lori jumps behind the wheel. Chelsea sits shotgun. Lori looks in the rearview mirror. Her lip is swollen twice it's normal size. Blood stains her shirt. She reaches inside her mouth... and her side tooth comes loose.

CHELSEA

Eww! Gross.

Chelsea hands her sister a bottle of water. Lori rinses her mouth, spits, rinses and spits again. She washes off the tooth and sticks it under the sun visor.

LORI

A reminder for us never to come back here.

Lori speeds out of the driveway. Their mother stands at the screen door, watching.

RICK (O.S.)

Shut the damn door.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Jeep speeds down a country road. The Jennie Finch poster flies out of the Jeep.

EXT. BANK DRIVE-THRU - LATER

Lori inserts an ATM card into the machine -- enters her pin.

LORI
I got fifty or so in my account.

Machine BEEPS. Lori pushes buttons. Then frantic --

LORI
It just... oh no... just ate my
card. Shit!

Lori pounds on the ATM machine. Desperate --

CHELSEA
I think assaulting a cash machine
is a federal offense. What's the
screen say? What's it say?!

LORI
"Contact the bank manager on the
next business day." DAMMIT!

Chelsea reaches into the backseat and hands Lori a book.

CHELSEA
Here. This might help.

LORI
Do I look like I want to read?

CHELSEA
Look inside. Open it --

A beat -- Lori takes the book.

CHELSEA
I saved up a few hundred dollars
for a rainy day. It's beginning to
look like a downpour if you ask me.

Lori opens the faux book and finds it... empty.

CHELSEA
There was money in *there* yesterday!

LORI
Who else knew about this?

CHELSEA
Mommy.

Lori tosses the book into the back seat. The sisters sit stranded at the ATM. Neither says a word as reality settles in on their young faces.

EXT. ROUTE 22 - LATER

Lori pulls into a small town gas station.

LORI
Search inside the seats.

CHELSEA
For what?

LORI
Change. Gas money.

STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Lori counts bills and coins on the hood. The GAS ATTENDANT, 18, lanky, recognizes her.

GAS ATTENDANT
Hey you. Didn't you go to Dover High?

LORI
I did before I dropped out.

GAS ATTENDANT
Me too. Dropped out too, I mean.

LORI
Five dollars and twenty-eight cents and not a penny more please.

Gas attendant notices her fat lip. He sees their belongings in the backseat. Chelsea eyes him in the mirror.

GAS ATTENDANT
So, where you headed?

LORI
To Albany -- going to college.

GAS ATTENDANT
Thought you said you dropped --

LORI
Got my GED. Five dollars and twenty-eight cents and --

GAS ATTENDANT
Not a penny more. Heard ya.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS -

Lori studies herself in the filthy mirror. Straggly hair, swollen lip, dry blood stains. After a moment, Lori cries... trembles. Her cries turn to scared sobs. She splashes cold water on her face, washing the blood and tears away. She peeks outside and sees her sister waiting by the Jeep.

GAS ISLAND - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Lori approaches Chelsea.

LORI

Listen up. Come morning -- I'm taking you on back.

Lori notices the gas pump CLICKING off numbers.

LORI

Whoa! Whoa! Stop! I said... not a penny over five dollars...

Gas attendant removes the nozzle and replaces gas cap.

GAS ATTENDANT

Anybody *smart* enough to get out of this town -- deserves a *full* tank of gas to do it on.

He smiles at her. An omen. Chelsea smiles at Lori.

EXT. ROUTE 22 - LATER

Lori and Chelsea speed off. Lori waves to the attendant and looks over at Chelsea. She reads her book by flashlight.

LORI

It's an adventure, Squirt, right? Two hot chicks on the open road. Just like that movie "Thelma & Louise".

CHELSEA

(jiggles flashlight)
Great. Didn't they get raped and drive off a cliff in that movie?

Off Lori's reaction --

INT. MCDONALD'S - NIGHT

Lori brings hamburger meal and soda to Chelsea.

LORI
A Happy Meal for a happy girl.

CHELSEA
How'd you get this without money?

LORI
My good looks.

CHELSEA
What's the matter? You're not good-
looking enough to get two meals?

LORI
(touches sore mouth)
I can't chew. Save your ice, okay?

CHELSEA
Can you suck on a French fry?

EXT. INTERSTATE - ALBANY, NY - NIGHT

Jeep passes through a toll booth. Heads toward Albany.

EXT. GREENWAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE - ALBANY CAMPUS - NIGHT

Lori and Chelsea drive onto an urban college campus.

EXT. ATHLETIC CENTER PARKING LOT - SAME

The Jeep is parked under a STREET LAMP in an empty parking lot. Lori stares at the athletic fields. Lawn sprinklers water the turf.

INT. JEEP - NIGHT

Lori covers Chelsea up with a blanket.

LORI
Lock your door.

CHELSEA
Why?

LORI
Because we're alone in a parking
lot in the middle of the night
that's why.

CHELSEA
(removes glasses)
But there's no roof. The killer
could just reach in and...

LORI
Chelsea. Lock it and zip it.

Chelsea locks the door. Lori closes her eyes. Exhausted.

CHELSEA
Don't worry. When they see you
pitch tomorrow, we'll be sitting
pretty. College athletes get
treated like rock stars on college
campuses. I read about that in
Newsweek magazine.

LORI
I haven't made the team yet.

Chelsea shares a blanket with Lori.

CHELSEA
You will. I'm not worried.

Lori is --

LORI
Go to sleep.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

The Lopane sisters sleep under the night sky.

EXT. GREENWAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE - MORNING

The campus is active with STUDENTS arriving for a new
semester, unloading cars, kissing parents goodbye.

INT. REGISTRAR'S OFFICE - MORNING

REGISTRAR hands Lori paperwork.

REGISTRAR
You qualify for aid. Afraid you're
too late for campus housing.

EXT. CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Lori and Chelsea walk across the college campus.

CHELSEA
Can I take a course?

LORI
You're fourteen.

CHELSEA
So? I'm advanced for my age.

Lori pulls her sister in a headlock.

LORI
Your mouth sure is.

INT. COLLEGE LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Lori and Chelsea take showers in an empty locker room.

INT. COLLEGE CAFETERIA - DAY

Lori and Chelsea pick leftovers off a tray, removing a banana, orange, yogurt and other untouched food.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Lori applies for a campus credit card at a Visa table set up outside the book store. Chelsea points to a "Now Hiring" sign on the door.

CHELSEA
To pay off all that debt you're
about to accumulate.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MOMENTS LATER

Lori hands the MANAGER her job application.

EXT. CAMPUS - SAME DAY

Activities Center. COACH PATTY FLORES, 30, Latin, very pregnant, walks toward the administration building. She spots VIOLA JAMERSON, 45, former housewife, now a returning college student, looking over the activities board.

COACH FLORES

Wow lady, look at you -- taking my advice and returning to school?

VIOLA

I feel as *outdated* as a typewriter on this campus.

COACH FLORES

Stop. You don't look a day over thirty. Come join my softball team and recapture your youth, Viola.

VIOLA

Over my *middle-aged* body.

COACH FLORES

You're still young at heart.

VIOLA

That's the only part.

COACH FLORES

It's good to see you. How's Ryan?

VIOLA

We're not together anymore.

INT. ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT MEETING - DAY

Coach Flores sits in a staff meeting. DEAN MURRAY, 60, addresses his athletic STAFF.

DEAN MURRAY

We can't lose sight of our educational mission. That's priority. The NCAA could lose its federal tax exemption status unless colleges comply now. That means pushing education and dialing back on sports spending.

The athletic director, COACH FRANK SIMMONS, late 40s, physically intimidating, arrogant, stands.

COACH SIMMONS

I just axed softball from the program. How's that for dialing back? Meeting over.

Flores sits forward as Simmons gathers up his papers.

DEAN MURRAY

Frank, softball is a drop in the bucket. The House Ways and Means Committee...

COACH SIMMONS

Screw politicians.

DEAN MURRAY

... is worried about profit-seeking and winning-at-any cost.

COACH SIMMONS

Tell Congress to clean up its *own* house before they condemn mine.

Simmons exits. Flores chases after him.

COACH FLORES

Coach Simmons?! Coach? Frank!

They walk. Simmons glances at her bulging belly.

COACH SIMMONS

Ready to pop that kid any day?

COACH FLORES

Don't cut softball.

COACH SIMMONS

What do you care, Patty? You'll be gone on Mommy leave.

COACH FLORES

It's still my team, Frank.

COACH SIMMONS

A team that came in last place the past five years. One that may cost us our Division II standing. A team with no tournament play or revenue. Is that *the team* you're championing, honey?

INT. CAMPUS GYMNASIUM - DAY

Softball tryouts. TWENTY YOUNG WOMEN stretch and play catch. Lori and Chelsea rush into the gym. Lori carries her glove.

LORI

Wait by the bleachers.

Coach Flores and a MALE ASSISTANT approach the tryouts.

ASSISTANT

Just post a notice. You don't have to do this, Patty.

Coach Flores blows a WHISTLE. Softball players gather.

COACH FLORES

Ladies. Thanks for turning out today. I have some bad news. Softball's been dropped from the program.

Lori and Chelsea react. KELLY MILLER, 19, a pretty tomboy, steps out from the group.

KELLY

No way. Why?

COACH FLORES

A team needs to justify its existence in these tough times. Softball hasn't.

Lori steps forward --

LORI

I can help you win games.

COACH FLORES

Takes more than one person to make a team.

LORI

It starts with pitching, right?

COACH FLORES

I'm sorry. It's too late.

Coach Flores and her assistant walk away.

LORI

Who can catch here?

LINDA MYERS, 18, pimply faced and all legs, raises her mitt.

LINDA

I can.

Linda squats and pounds her mitt. Flores and her assistant look back... and see Lori calculating her steps.

LORI

43 feet is regulation play --

Players look on, intrigued. Chelsea settles on the stands. Lori grabs a softball. Flores continues to depart.

COACH FLORES
Shut the lights off when they're done.

Lori winds up and hurls in one motherblastin' fast pitch. It WHISTLES and SMACKS into the leather mitt.

LINDA
Damnnnnnnnnnn.

Flores stops in her tracks, a frozen beat --

COACH FLORES
Was that as *fast* as it sounded?

ASSISTANT
Faster.

Flores returns to Lori.

COACH FLORES
What high school did you play for?

LORI
I didn't.

COACH FLORES
Pitch another ball.

Linda, the catcher, braces herself. The players step closer. Chelsea watches with amusement.

KELLY
She's got a canon arm.

Lori winds up and releases a thunderbolt-hurling riser... it WHIZZES with such velocity that Linda ducks. The ball SMASHES through a pane of glass in the gymnasium door. The look on Flores' face says it all.

COACH FLORES
You -- Come with me.

LORI
I didn't mean to break your window.

EXT. ATHLETIC FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Flores, Lori, Chelsea, and the SOFTBALL PLAYERS march over the hillside, armed with bats and gloves.

EXT. MEN'S BASEBALL FIELD - SAME

Din of bats hitting baseballs. A lavish field. BASEBALL PLAYERS warming up. Flores leads the women to the men's practice field. A baseball careens foul. The BASEBALL CATCHER slides and grabs the ball... at Lori's feet.

LORI

Nice snag.

TEEN GIRLS watch practice from the bleachers.

TEEN GIRLS

Way to go, Treyyyyy!

Catcher lifts his mask. TREY TAYLOR, 20, with Boy Band good looks, smiles at Lori. He takes her breath away.

TREY

Thanks.

Lori gawks at him. Trey looks at Kelly.

TREY

Yo, Kell. What's up?

KELLY

Hey, Trey.

There is an unspoken tension between them.

COACH FLORES

There's Simmons. Come on.

Coach Simmons talks on his cell phone.

COACH SIMMONS

(to caller)

Send a reporter to cover the games. Home and away. I don't give a shit about your cutbacks. Send an intern.

Simmons shuts his cell phone. Lori and her entourage approach. He eyes the gaggle of young women.

COACH SIMMONS

Selling Girl Scout cookies?

Coach Flores pulls Lori closer.

COACH FLORES

Frank, you gotta see her pitch.

COACH SIMMONS
I'm running practice here, Patty.

COACH FLORES
You'll reinstate softball.

COACH SIMMONS
Not gonna happen.

COACH FLORES
Solid pitching wins games.

COACH SIMMONS
In your case, games that nobody
comes to watch, except for some fat-
ass mothers in lawn chairs.

Lori steps forward, challenging him.

LORI
I bet I can strike out... your best
batter.

Simmons looks at Lori. Chelsea steps forward, boastful.

CHELSEA
Blindfolded.

Lori shoots Chelsea a look. Simmons approaches.

COACH SIMMONS
You can strike out my best batter
blindfolded? You got the balls to
try, sweetheart?

All eyes land on Lori.

LORI
I got fastballs, dropballs and
curveballs. Which do you want to
see first?

COACH SIMMONS
Trey Taylor, grab a bat.

BASEBALL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Trey Taylor steps up to bat. Chelsea squats behind home
plate. Flores and the softball players watch from the
sidelines.

Lori stands blindfolded on the pitcher's mound.

TREY

I'll bat lefty to go easy on you.

Trey cocks the bat. Lori concentrates.

CHELSEA

Z O N E. What's that spell?

LORI

Crazy.

Lori winds up and unleashes a fast ball that comes across the plate dead on. Trey swings and comes up with air.

CHELSEA

Strike! Got us a *spinner*.

Trey looks stunned. So does Simmons. Flores grins.

TREY

What's a spinner?

CHELSEA

Someone who swings and misses so bad that they spin around in the batter's box.

Lori picks up another ball at her feet.

TREY

The sun was in my eyes. Ready!

Lori fires in a riser that climbs a ladder at the last second. Trey swings... and misses.

CHELSEA

Strikkkke two!

Trey immediately changes his stance back.

CHELSEA

Got us a rightie at the plate!

LORI

What happened to lefty?

KELLY

My little bro's not going easy on you anymore, girl.

The softball players laugh.

COACH SIMMONS

Taylor, find your stones and swing.