

I'M A TIGER!

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INT. CAROL'S BEDROOM. FEBRUARY. 6:00 IN THE MORNING.

CAROL CLAY opens her eyes.

She lies on her bed in her house in New Jersey. It's an old brick and stucco house in a town that isn't that great.

Her bedroom is painted pink except for one wall, the wall behind her bed, which is covered with flowered wallpaper. The curtains on her windows, which overlook the backyard, are flowered, too, and the dresser is also pink.

It's a little girl's room but Carol is no longer little. She is turning 12 today but she looks more like 17. She's 5'7", 121 and very, very shapely.

Maybe if Carol wore braces, like a lot of the other kids in the sixth grade, it would help her look more adolescent but her teeth, like her skin and lips, are perfect. And her breathy feline voice would be a killer, if anyone were to listen.

CUT TO:

EXT. SKY ABOVE NEWARK AIRPORT. SAME TIME.

An airplane has just taken off. It rises slowly, heavily, over the Turnpike and its overpasses, the railroad tracks, the bridges and the shipping ports of northern New Jersey.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE COCKPIT. SAME TIME.

The captain, first officer and navigator are at their posts in the cockpit, in sunglasses, headsets, white shirts. Their jackets are off. They are making adjustments at their controls, looking out at the morning sky. The dark-haired navigator is reconfirming their position and progress with the tower, routinely.

CUT TO:

INT. CAROL'S BEDROOM. SAME TIME.

Carol rolls onto her stomach in bed and opens her night-table drawer. She pulls out a calendar. February. The first six days have been crossed off. Today is the 7th. Her birthday.

She reaches out to the table again, grabs a pen and crosses out the day like the others, before it has even begun.

CUT TO:

INT. JAY'S BEDROOM. SOON AFTER. 6:15 IN THE MORNING.

JAY CLAY is Carol's half-brother. His room is bigger than Carol's. It was added later, above the garage, so it has a roomy 'home improvement' look to it.

The walls are paneled, the floor is speckled, the bookshelves are cluttered with artifacts of Jay: shrunken heads, old pictures of navy destroyers, leather straps of uncertain purpose, homemade tile ashtrays.

Jay is still asleep in his bed, his face near the wall, his mouth open slightly. Jay is 10, but he looks like he's 8.

Carol looks in to wake him up for school like she does every morning.

CAROL

Jay. Get up.

JAY

Yeah.

His eyes stay closed. His thin arms are over his head, outside of the covers. His fingers twitch but he doesn't move.

CAROL

It's after 6.

JAY

Yeah.

CAROL

Are you getting up?

JAY

(still in a haze)

Thanks everybody.

CAROL

It's not everybody. It's Carol.

JAY

(still half-dreaming)

It's great to be here.

CAROL

Is toast okay?

He wipes some spit away from his mouth. His eyes stay closed.

JAY
I don't want toast.

CAROL
What?

JAY
I'm not eating toast.

CAROL
I'm not making waffles.

JAY
But that's what I want.

CAROL
Too bad.

He finally rolls toward her now and pushes the heels of his hands against his eyes to turn them back on. He moves his hands away from his face and he's staring at her.

JAY
What did you say?

CAROL
I said I don't feel like spending the morning making you waffles again.

JAY throws off his blanket. He gets out of bed. He starts to pull on his jeans, over his underwear, little white underwear.

CAROL (CONT'D)
You plan on taking a shower?

JAY
No. I don't even plan on brushing my teeth.

CAROL
Oh that will be nice for your teacher, I'm sure.

JAY
I don't plan on getting that close to my teacher.

He pulls on a T-shirt. He has a leather necklace around his neck, with a dangling amethyst.

CAROL

Why don't you lose the necklace, Jay. You look like an 8-year-old sailing instructor.

JAY

Shut up. Guess what.

CAROL

'What'? I give up.

JAY

Just guess. It's something Mom did for me.

CAROL

I don't want to guess. You mean something *your* mom did for you.

Jay sits back on his bed and he looks at her. They don't look alike.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You're talking about your *own* mom, right? So say '*your* mom,' if you mean your mom.

JAY

Yeah, who else's mom would I mean? This has nothing to do with your mom--

CAROL

Okay, but your mom isn't '*Mom.*' She's '*your mom.*'

JAY

Alright! *My mom* is taking me--

CAROL

Where?

JAY

To Orlando for--

CAROL

Why? What for? When are you going?

JAY

Well that's what I'm trying to tell you if you'd let me finish a sentence! Bitch.

CAROL

Asshole.

JAY

Do you want me to tell you or not?

CAROL

Yes.

JAY

Okay, then listen! *My mom* is taking *me* to Orlando for President's weekend --

CAROL

What do you mean?

JAY

-- because --

CAROL

Why?

JAY

Carol!

CAROL

What?

JAY

Will you let me just talk?

CAROL

Well I don't believe you get to go to Orlando without me.

JAY

You want to go with us?

CAROL

No!

JAY

So shut up.

CAROL

But I've always wanted to go there.

JAY

Well you're not invited this time.

CAROL

Fine.

JAY

Good.

CAROL

Thanks for telling me this on my birthday.

JAY

You're welcome. Happy birthday.

CAROL

You have any more surprises for me?

JAY

Yes. Try to guess why we're going.

CAROL

I can't 'guess,' I don't want to guess. Why are you going? Just tell me. I hope it's not to impress me with how much your mother loves you.

JAY

Well, we're going because she submitted a picture of me to 'Go-Teen' for an open call that they had in the fall. And I won.

CAROL

(after a moment)

Wait. What?

JAY

'Go-Teen Magazine.'

CAROL

I know the magazine, but what are you talking about?

JAY

They picked me to be in a photo spread! This fashion guy is coming down to take pictures of me and four other kids at this big golf course in Orlando.

CAROL

But you don't know how to play golf.

JAY

So what? That's got nothing to do with it! They don't care about playing golf! I just put on the clothes and run around and shit and they take my picture. You get it? It's just how I look that they want.

She looks at Jay sitting there on his bed, dressed now in jeans, shirt, boots, no socks, his T-shirt kind of hanging on him. She can hardly stand him right now.

JAY (CONT'D)

What? It's about the clothes. They just picked a golf course because it looks cool.

CAROL

Well I don't think a golf course looks cool.

JAY

How the hell would you know? You've never even been to a golf course!

CAROL

I guess I don't think any picture of you would look especially cool.

JAY

Well, they do! Because they just picked me and they called *my mom* last night to tell her.

CAROL

This is ridiculous!

JAY

What is?

CAROL

They picked a picture of *you* out of all of the 9-year-olds in--

JAY

Well, I'm 10, but yes, that's right. Out of all the 9- to 12-year-olds in the whole fuckin country, they went with me.

CAROL

But you look 7.

JAY

Shut up. You look 20.

CAROL

I do not.

JAY

Well you don't look 11.

CAROL

Because I am not 11! I'm 12! It's my birthday today, remember?

JAY

You don't look 12 either.

CAROL

Why didn't she send in my picture, too.

JAY

I don't know. How do I know? Maybe because you're not really her kid, and it would have been like a big fat bummer if you, of all people, were picked for this thing *instead* of me! Don't you think? And anyway, you couldn't have done it, because you've got this whole womanly body for 12, which I don't really think would have worked too well in a photo spread about normal kids!

They stare at each other.

CAROL

I don't believe you just said that.

JAY

Which part.

CAROL

I don't believe this whole stupid story!

JAY

Well, guess what! You don't have to. You can just go buy the magazine when it comes out, like everyone else.

CAROL

Thanks a lot. And what am I supposed to be doing while you two are down in Orlando?

JAY

I don't know. It's President's weekend. I guess you can do whatever you want.

CAROL

No, I mean who am I staying with?

JAY

I have no idea. Ask mom.

CAROL

I'm starting your toast.

JAY

Carol!

CAROL

What.

JAY

I think I said I wanted waffles.

Carol leaves the room and she slams the door behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN AT CAROL'S HOUSE. 7:00 IN THE MORNING.

Carol is mixing waffle batter at the counter. The kitchen is blue. The waffle maker is heating up.

LINDA CLAY, Jay's mom and not Carol's, comes down the stairs and into the kitchen in her nightgown and a robe. She looks at Carol.

LINDA

Don't you *ever* slam his door again at 6:00 in the morning or you are out of here, lady.

Linda leaves the room and Carol pours the batter into the waffle maker. She shuts the top and waves of steam seep out the sides and float up to her face.

CUT TO: