

TIES

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January 11, 2025

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INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The sound of a school bus SCREECHING away from the curb, as DAHLIA, 36, dressed in a simple blouse and jeans, waves goodbye from a cozy, slightly messy living room.

She SHUTS the door gently. ANDY, 38, dressed in work slacks and a button up, rushes in while struggling to put on his other shoe.

He sees the closed door and pauses. Dahlia is smiling at him, playing with two hair ties covered in tangled, ripped-out hair.

DAHLIA

Gigi was complaining about her pig tails so I just took them out and pinned her hair back instead. I told you they were too tight.

Andy is looking at her, but his mind is elsewhere.

DAHLIA (CONT'D)

What?

ANDY

Sorry, uhm... No one has called Gianna that since... Doesn't matter. Gi just has a sensitive scalp. Took me an hour just to put them in her hair.

Dahlia crosses Andy to sit on the couch. His eyes stay on the door.

ANDY (CONT'D)

And why didn't you come and get me before she left? You just sent her off yourself again?

DAHLIA

Andy, I'm perfectly capable of making sure Gianna gets on a bus safely.

ANDY

Of course you are! I just... I would like to say goodbye to my daughter before she leaves for school.

He makes his way to the couch.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Plus, you haven't known each other that long yet. I think she's still getting used to you.

DAHLIA

She called me Mom today.

Andy tenses.

ANDY

That's cute and all, but remember, we have to correct her when she does that. I don't want Gi forgetting her real mom.

DAHLIA

She won't.

ANDY

I know, I know. I'm being paranoid. It's just... her mom loved her so much.

Dahlia turns to looks up at Andy with crazed eyes and a too-wide-for-comfort smile.

DAHLIA

Of course I do.

ANDY

What?

DAHLIA

I am Gianna's real mother.

She opens her computer and turns it to show him the lock screen. It's a classic family photo with her and Andy, both slightly younger, and a little two-year-old girl.

ANDY

What is wrong with you!?

He scrambles over to the mantle under the TV and grabs the framed version of the photo on the lock screen and stops in his tracks.

A barely-visible line traces the outline of Dahlia's head, and the edges of her neck are curling up.

Andy peels Dahlia's picture back, revealing the original photo containing Mary, Gianna's real mom. Immediately he runs around the living room, frame in hand, searching for all of the photos that Dahlia tampered with.

DAHLIA

I don't really understand what the big deal is. Mary's gone. Six feet under.

Andy opens a cabinet and spots his wedding photo. He stops. Dahlia's face is glued on to Mary's.

ANDY

You had no authority to destroy photos of my family.

Dahlia gets up, still holding her laptop.

DAHLIA

She's not family. I'm your family.

She tries to step closer to him, but he recoils.

ANDY

I need you to leave. You need to leave. Right now.

CLICK. An audio clip sounds from Dahlia's computer. The sound of HAIR RIPPING is followed by Andy cursing under his breath.

ANDY (O.C.)

Gianna just hold still! Just let me tear it out, okay!?

CLICK. The audio stops. Dahlia stands there smugly, showing the two hair-covered ties from before. Andy snatches them.

DAHLIA

One click away. Then this *mishap* will go straight to CPS.

ANDY

I've never once hurt Gianna. You don't have a case.

DAHLIA

Sure I do. All it takes is a couple more videos, maybe a forged marriage license if absolutely necessary. But as far as I'm concerned, if I'm not Gianna's mom... then you can't be her dad.

Andy stands there, speechless. He looks at the framed photo in his hand and uses a finger to smooth Dahlia's photo over Mary's face again.

CUT TO BLACK.