| FlUORESENCE  By  Ariel Yisrael |
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KITCHEN-NIGHT

Sparse. Rattling fridge. Gas stove. A tiny metal sink. cabinets with chipped brown paint. A plastic table and chairs sit in the middle of the room. Harsh blue light comes from a lamp mounted in the ceiling.

A young woman around 17 crouches at the sink. PEARL.

Pearl holds her head under the sink. Her right hand curls around the faucet. Her left hand clenches the sink’s edge. Water rushes down her forehead into her ear then down the drain. She huffs out shallow breaths.

A child around 10 enters. She is JANISSE. Janisse fiddles with her fingers and sways on the balls of her feet.

The sound of rushing water fills Pearl’s ears. Janisse walks up to her. She puts a hand on the back of Pearl’s leg. Pearl jumps. She pulls her head from the sink and stares down at Janisse at an awkward angle. Water runs down her face and neck.

PEARL

What?

Water drips onto Pearl’s face.

PEARL (CONT’D)

Why aren’t you asleep?

JANISSA

I was.

Pearl pulls a towel hanging from the stove. She cradles the towel in her hands, then lets her face fall into it.

PEARL

What happened?

JANISSE

I want something to eat.

pearl

Brian didn’t make dinner?

Janisse shakes her head no.

JANISSE

No. He came home late.

Pearl lets out a shaky sigh. She lifts her head from the nest made from a worn dish towel. Her eyes are wet. She wipes at them.

PEARL

Okay.

JANISSE

Your head hurt?

PEARL

Yeah it's the lights at the bar. I had to cover for this girl instead of serving. I felt like a mosquito in one of those big zappers. My eyes were watering and everything. I looked crazy.

JANISSE

I’m sorry.

PEARL

It’s fine.

Janisse goes to Pearl. She embraces her in a one arm hug. They walk to the oven. There’s an exposed bulb above the stove. Above that a switch. Pearl hits it. They walk to a light switch on the wall. It’s turned up. Janisse switches it off. Now the room is lit by the single light above the stove. The light is warm. And flickers like a fireplace.

PEARL

Go sit.

Janisse sits in one of the plastic chairs. Pearl goes to the fridge. She peers inside.

PEARL (CONT’D)

Did you have juice today?

JANISSE

No. Ma forgot to pack it.

PEARL

Shit. There’s only a little bit left. I wanted some too.

Janisse looks down. She swings her feet.

PEARL(CONT’D)

She’ll probably get more this weekend.

Pearl pulls out a bottle of apple juice, a loaf of white bread and a pack of sliced cheese. She goes to a cabinet above the stove and rummages around blindly until she pauses and pulls out a can of tomato soup. She walks to the stove.

Pearl’s pupils dilate. She flinches and lays a hand on her forehead. A tear falls down her cheek. She tucks her head so Janisse can’t see her.

She wipes her cheek. She turns on the front burner.

Janisse crosses her arms on the table in front of her. She tucks her chin in her arms and stares at Pearl. The gold beams from the light bulb make Pearl look like an angel.

INT. KITCHEN-MOMENTS LATER

Pearl sits across from Janisse. She pulls her leg onto the chair and leans against it. She peers at Janisse. In front of Janisse is a bowl of tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich on a colorful plastic plate. A glass is half full of apple juice.

PEARL

Don’t say sorry.

Janisse hums around the food in her mouth.

PEARL(CONT’D)

Don’t say sorry anymore. Unless you do something wrong. It’s not a word you say just to be nice. It’s contrition. You know what that means?

Janisse nods. She talks around the food in her mouth.

JANISSE

When you do something wrong.

PEARL

Right. It messes you up eventually to say sorry for stuff for no reason. To say sorry for eating or being sick. Brian’s the one should be sorry. Or ma.

Janisse looks down. Nods.

Pearl lays her head against her leg. Closes her eyes.

PEARL

I like making dinner for you.

Janisse pushes the glass of apple juice towards Pearl. The glass hits her leg. Pearl opens her eyes. She looks down at the juice. She smiles.

PEARL

I’ll drink some and you can have the rest.

JANISSE

You always say that, then you drink the whole thing.

Pearl laughs. She lifts the glass to her lips.

PEARL

I won’t this time.

JANISSE

Sure.

FADE OUT:

THE END