

BY A THREAD

A bereaved girl uses a homemade puppet to process her mother's death.

FADE IN:

INT. CHAPEL, MEMORIAL SERVICE - DAY

Light shines through stained glass windows onto a congregation dressed in couture. A MALE VOICE drones off screen from the pulpit.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Jen was an explosion of talent.
And...I loved it.

Sitting in the front pew is a bereaved girl, MIA RICHARD (12, highly gifted, articulate). She wears a dress. It's trendy, classic, and clearly made for her. We pan down and see she's kneading her funeral program into a paper ball.

MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She'd singe your eyebrows with her
phosphorus hot designs.
And snark.

The congregation laughs.

MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She believed you could—she could—
change the world with a needle and
thread—a mission she had well
before I met her. And I was happy
to be along for the ride.

Mia makes the ball tighter, hyper focused with each squeeze.

GRAMMA (O.S.)
(whispering)
Psst, Mia.

Mia breaks her focus. Her attention is drawn toward her GRAMMA (65, warm, worn face).

MIA
Sorry, Gramma.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
We were all riding shotgun. And,
honestly, it was the best seat.

Gramma shakes her head lovingly and turns her arms into a hoop. She looks to Mia like *"C'mon shoot."* Mia, looking a bit confused, shoots anyway and they silently giggle together.

We now see the source of the male voice at the pulpit, Mia's DAD (40s, kind voice, dressed in a perfectly tailored suit).

DAD

But it wasn't always easy. Being married to the perfect woman. You know, when she was diagnosed, it changed her. She became—
(welling up)

He covers his mouth with his fist to collect himself.

MAN

In the hospital. She was so—
(crying)
Sweet to me.

Gramma uncrinkles the paper ball to reveal the program:

"IN LOVING MEMORY OF JENNIFER LAURA RICHARD. 1979 - 2023."

LATER

Mia stands next to the open casket, blankly staring at JEN's corpse. Jen is prepped in a remarkable suit. Jen and Mia share the same platinum hair, pale face, and icy-blue eyes. The only thing telling them apart is age.

Mia continues to stare at their resemblance.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY SUV (MOVING) - DAY

Mia stares out the backseat window of a luxury SUV, now teary-eyed. Dad is driving.

DAD

Love you, sweetie.

Mia's too lost in her thoughts to answer.

DAD (CONT'D)

Sweetie?

MIA

Some guy at the service told me I looked exactly like mom.

DAD (CONT'D)

You're gonna hear that all your life now.

A beat. Mia thinks on his words, looking conflicted.

MIA

Love you, Dad.

EXT. RICHARD HOME - NIGHT

Dad enters the house through the garage and walks between two rows of mannequins and boxes that read: "OVERSTOCK." He checks his watch.

CUT TO:

INT. RICHARD HOME KITCHEN - NIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

Dad throws the car keys on the kitchen island which is covered in sympathy flowers and cards.

DAD

So what sounds good for dinner?

He looks around the kitchen. Mia is nowhere to be found.

DAD (CONT'D)

Spaghetti it is.

He moves the flowers and cards out of the way and places a cutting board in their place.

MOMENTS LATER

He's chopping an onion aggressively. We cut back and forth between his furrowed brow and decimated onion. He's manically focused, like Mia was with her funeral program.

Then, a sudden whirring sound startles him. He cuts his hand.

DAD (CONT'D)

Shit. God damnit!

His index finger begins to bleed out. As he searches for a towel, the whir grows into the sound of a sewing machine feeding thread into a needle and fabric.

Dad finds a towel and applies pressure. Instead of looking for a bandaid, he continues chopping. This time louder in an attempt to overpower the sewing machine. Crying, he wipes his nose with the bloody tea towel.

Hard cut to chopped onion glistening in a sauté pan, but instead of a sizzle, all we hear is a running sewing machine.

MOMENTS LATER

Dad sips on a glass of wine and scrolls past dozens of unread text messages until he reaches one that's been read.

"Hey Glen, you called? Whenever you're ready, I'm ready. Take your time."

It's from "Paul ADVISOR." Dad locks his phone.

DAD (CONT'D)
Dinner's ready!

The sewing machine whir comes back.

DAD (CONT'D)
Mia?

It stops.

Mia comes down the stairs, now in PJs, to find her dish of spaghetti on the island. She scoops it up and heads back toward the stairs.

MIA
Sorry, working. This looks good.

Dad gives a disappointed look at first, but it's nothing he's not used to.

INT. MIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

We see Mia's foot on a sewing pedal. That familiar sewing machine sound is back.

Mia examines her sewing creation that's just off screen. Based off her look, something's not right about it. So she puts it back under the needle and keeps sewing.

INT. RICHARD HOME STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Dad approaches Mia's bedroom door and knocks.

DAD
Hey, can I grab your plate?

MIA (O.S.)
One sec!

INT. MIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mia grabs her creation and takes it with her to bed. She gets under the covers and hides it.

MIA (CONT'D)
Come in!

Dad eagerly walks through the door.

DAD
Hey! Whatcha been working on?

MIA
Just sewing stuff.

DAD
Nice. Can I see? Or, I know you
don't like sharing when it's not-

MIA
No, it's fine. She's done.

DAD
(intrigued)
She? Alright, well, let's see her.

Mia pulls a stitched puppet from under her covers. It's got platinum hair, a pale face, and icy-blue eyes. It's wearing a remarkable suit.

It's Jen. Dad's stunned, but quickly covers his shock.

DAD (CONT'D)
Is she...mom?

MIA
You can ask her.

Mia slips her hand into the puppet, doing her best impression of her breathy, very calculated mother.

JEN PUPPET
Hey Glen. You okay?

DAD
(chuckling)
That's a good impression.

Mia makes Jen Puppet tilt her head, confused. Mia continues doing an impression.

JEN PUPPET
You avoided my question.

DAD
(to Mia)
Mom did say stuff like that.

Mia makes the puppet tilt her head the other way. Dad decides to play along.

DAD (CONT'D)
How am I? Not good, obviously.

JEN PUPPET
Oh, wanna talk about it?

Jen Puppet waits for an answer. Dad mulls it over and looks toward the ground. When he looks back up, he sees Jennifer's prepped corpse laying next to Mia in the bed. Mia strokes her slicked back hair like a doll.

PRE-LAP: Moaning. Bed rattling.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

We see Jen writhing in pain in a hospital bed.

BACK TO:

INT. MIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dad suddenly regrets playing along. He shakes his head and Jennifer is back to puppet form.

DAD
Um, why'd you sew this?

MIA
Remember when mom made me a stuffy
after Gus died?

DAD
Yeah, yeah, that was helpful.

MIA
She said she got the idea from Mr.
Rogers and his puppets. They helped
him cope. Daniel Tiger. King
Friday. Those two knew how to cope
the shit out of anything.

Mia does an impression with the puppet.

JEN PUPPET
Language!

The dad coughs up a surprised laugh.

DAD
(to Jen Puppet)
Language? Mia's talking how you
talked!

Dad gives Mia a kiss, grabs the empty spaghetti plate and heads for the door.

MIA
Doesn't mom get a hug?

DAD
Ah, sweetie. We weren't really, you
know, on hugging terms.

Mia looks to her Jen Puppet.

DAD (CONT'D)
Night.

INT. MIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Light from the window seeps in and wakes up Mia. She immediately looks for her puppet which is on the floor, sitting up, staring back at her. Mia rolls out of bed and places her hand inside the puppet.

MIA
(yawning)
What do you want to do today?

JEN PUPPET
Maybe go through my old things. See
if there's anything you like?

Mia gives the proposition a genuine think and then gets to it.

BEGIN MONTAGE

- Mia and her Jen Puppet marvel over suits from Jen's closet.
- They're finding old tchotchkes, pictures of Jen posing with celebrities in a massive craft room.
- Now they're in the garage, removing "OVERSTOCK" boxes from a shelf.

END MONTAGE

INT. RICHARD HOME GARAGE - DAY

Mia steps on a stool and reaches for a shelf high above her eyeline. We see her hand fishing around for anything she can find. Finally, she grabs hold of a stiff packaged good in the shadows and brings it down.

Mia hops off the stool, props the Jen Puppet on it, and looks at her find with both hands.

It reads: *RAT AND MOUSE KILLER*

Grossed out, Mia quickly steps back on the stool to put it back and squishes Jen Puppet under her foot.

A quiet human moan echoes off screen. Then louder. Louder. Mia shudders. It's growing below Mia and it's the one Dad heard before. Mia reluctantly looks down.

JEN PUPPET
(Jen's real voice)
Can you get off me, sweetie?

Mia drops the rat poison, spilling it all over the floor.

JEN DOLL
Please?

Mia's paralyzed, but does her best to lift up her foot.

JEN PUPPET
Much better. You should ask dad how
he liked to use the rat poison.

Mia tilts her head and her breath quakes. The puppet tilts her head on her own, mirroring Mia.

CUT TO:

INT. RICHARD HOME KITCHEN - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Dad is cooking an omelette. He hears shuffling.

DAD
Heyo!

Mia emerges slowly from the dark garage and drags herself into the kitchen.

DAD (CONT'D)
(distracted, joyful)
What is up, my Mia?

MIA
(quaking)
Uh, do...do we have rats inside, like
in our house?

Dad stops beating the eggs. He takes a moment to reflect, frozen. Then he starts beating the eggs again, less joyfully.

DAD
Yeah, like, last year?

MIA
Oh. I feel like I'd remember that.

DAD
Didn't wanna freak you out. They
died, though.

Dad gives a reassuring smile while he cooks. Mia stealthily puts her hand in the puppet.

JEN PUPPET
(whispering)
Liar.

Mia shoots a death stare at the puppet, though Mia said it.

DAD
Hey, so I have an important call in
like five minutes with our estate
finance guy. So I won't be any fun
for a bit. You could eat this, then
play outside while I'm on the call?

CUT TO:

INT. RICHARD HOME LIVING ROOM - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Mia stares out her living room window at friends playing.

She stabs a piece of omelette and examines all its details.
She gives it a good sniff, but is ultimately distrusting.
Behind her fork, she spots a Mom with a tray of lemonade.

MIA
Mrs. Hawkins is outside with
lemonade. I'm gonna go get some!

Mia walks to the front door, nervously. She puts on sneakers, opens the door, walks outside, takes her shoes off, then walks back inside silently and slams the door. Mia tiptoes toward the garage, Jen Puppet in tow. Then she hears Dad's muffled voice coming from the office.

DAD (O.S.)
Hey Paul, it's Glen. Thanks for
being available on a Saturday.

Before Mia can make it into the garage, she has to get past the open office door. She peeks and sees Dad looking out his blinds toward Mrs. Hawkins.

DAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey, thanks. It's—you know—I'm
taking it day by day.

This is her chance. Mia gets a running start and slides on her socks across the hallway safely into the garage door.

INT. RICHARD HOME GARAGE - DAY

Mia leaves the door cracked and listens ardently to every word while looking at the scattered rat poison from before.

DAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I know this is odd, but could we
review our prenuptial agreement—my
ownership of Stitches LLC. This
feels uncomfortable to say out
loud, but I think a percentage of
rights are given to me in the case
of Jen's unexpected passing. It's
been 15 years since I signed the
paperwork.

Mia looks to her puppet and puts her hand inside, but when Mia does an impression, Jen's voice comes out her mouth.

JEN PUPPET
(sardonically)
If you can't trust dad, you can
always trust Google.

Jen Puppet laughs. Mia opens Google on her phone and searches: *"What is prenuptial in case of spouse death."*

She reads. Her eyes blink, hyper focused.

DAD (O.S.)
Okay, so in case of death, 50% to
me, 50% to Mia. Got it.

Mia types up another search: *"Do rats give people cancer?"*

DAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm thinking of selling off my
shares. This is helpful. Thanks.

Mia keeps reading, scrolling. Now shaking her head.

DAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You too, enjoy your weekend.

Mia types again: *"Is leukemia bubonic plague?"*

She reads, and then sits down near the rat poison in a defeated slump. She gives the rat poison another good look. And in a moment of stillness, something clicks for her.

Mia types: *"Can rat poison give you leukemia?"*

The search populates: *"Rodenticide poisoning can mimic fatal leukemia or infectious diseases such as..."*

Mia quickly clicks the link and scrolls. She sees a side by side comparison of rodenticide poisoning and leukemia. The medical diagrams and symptoms look exactly the same. She keeps reading: *"Toxicologists should suspect rodenticides when confronted with cases of unexplained bleeding."* Mia cries, squeezing her phone like she's trying to choke it.

A silhouette stands in the open door frame. It's Dad. He sees Mia by the poison.

DAD (CONT'D)
(sternly)
Hey! Get away from that.

JEN PUPPET
(Jen's voice)
What. Is it dangerous?

Dad's eyes dart to the puppet. It glitches to Jen with her arm around Mia. She's a reanimated corpse dressed in her remarkable suit. Mia is still holding the puppet. From Dad's perspective, the physical attributes and voices of Mia, the Jen Puppet, and Jen's corpse begin to blur.

MIA
(through tears)
Did you hurt mom?

DAD
Mom died. Of fatal leukemia.

JEN CORPSE
It *looked* that way.

DAD
(to Corpse, stammering)
Don't.

MIA
What? "Don't" what?
(pause)
Did you poison her?

Mia hurls rat poison at her Dad. She's hysterical. Dad's petrified.

MIA (CONT'D)
Dad, what did you do?

MIA, PUPPET, CORPSE
(in unison)
Just say you didn't do it.

Shut up! DAD

JEN CORPSE	JEN PUPPET
YOU KILLED ME!	YOU KILLED ME!

Dad throws a mannequin down on the ground.

DAD
You're dead. You're FUCKING dead!

MIA
(cowering)
DAD STOP! I'M SORRY.

Mia curls up in the poison. She's crying so hard she can't breathe properly. She holds onto the Jen Puppet.

JEN CORPSE
Is this what you wanted?

Dad throws another mannequin. It slams right next to Mia.

DAD
(crying)
Stop talking to me.

JEN CORPSE
You avoided my question.

Mia puts her hand in the Jen Puppet and speaks through it, scared.

JEN PUPPET
I'm sorry. It's just me, Dad. I
made it up. Please stop.

Dad looks down to Mia, but doesn't see her. He sees Jen, alive. Mia, the puppet, and the corpse are now one. Jen looks at him with her icy-blue eyes, sweetly.

DAD
I killed you.

FADE OUT.