Emma enters her room and sees her. Her hatred is immediate. As if her stupid mom sending her to rehab wasn’t enough, God (or a lack thereof) chooses to put her up with this- this ... Emma doesn't know what to call her. The best word she can come up with is Strumpet.

This Strumpet is pink; pink lips, pink nails, pink sweater, and pants high and tight enough to make Emma want to wince. Her hair is so big, so shiny, and so aggressively blond it beggars belief. She has ​*massive*​ cans. The troglodyte looks at Emma, and she has a million-megawatt smile.

“My names Joleen. Joleen Du Pont,” she shakes Emma’s hand, “formally Martinez. Nice to meet you”. Her hand is hard, which is a surprise. She speaks with one of those cloudy, apple sweet, Carolina accents that you don’t hear much anymore.

Later, when they’re getting ready for bed, Emma thinks she’s like something out of a movie. Worse, Emma thinks to herself, watching Jolene twist her wet hair into heatless curlers, naked as a baby bird. Joleen never wore clothes after 8:00 pm, which is when they are required to be in their rooms.

“It’s bad for the skin” she explains, her massive cans exposed for all to see, “to have clothes on all the time. At the end of the day you need to air out, so you shouldn’t coop up, you know what I mean?”.

It makes Emma uncomfortable, but Joleen hardly seems to notice. She has never met someone so casual about being naked. Emma can see all of her tattoos. Her tattoos are flowers, hieroglyphs, skulls, stars, pinups, something that might be Aztec, battleships, handguns. She has the name ‘Jamie’, tattooed over her heart.

Emma isn't comfortable with things like guns and battleships, although she pretends to be. She is 18, small, milquetoast, with thin wrists, and she wears her hair to make people mad. Emma’s mom says she would be pretty, if she’d stop shaving off her eyebrows, and fiddling with her lip ring, mumbling things, and being - heart and soul - worthless in the extreme.

On the fourth night, Joleen starts asking questions that Emma doesn't care for. She opens with her daybreak smile.

“So, you got a man?” “No.”
“Is it for lack of trying, or?” “No.”

“you gay or somthin’?” Joleen interprets the extra sour look on her face correctly, so she adds, “not that I mind or anything. My old boss was gayer than anything, and he was the best friend I ever had”.

Emma was going to let the conversation die, but she remembered all the times her mother said things like ‘what, you too good to talk to me?’ or ‘what's it like to only care about yourself?... must be nice’.

“What did you do?”

“I stripped.”

Emma's almost laughs. She the kind of person who chortles at lowness in others. The part of her that's tickled to see the menial, the tyrannized, and the trapped is the same part that makes her snort Valium. It's a rarefied callousness you sometimes see in rich girls: the ones that think suffering looks like a boring town or a bogus parent. She doesn't know what it's like to be 16, and in every way, forsaken. She doesn't know what it's like to grow up knowing what your body can do, and what can be done to your body. She doesn’t know suffering. She doesn't know Joleen.

So, she almost laughs. “You’re a stripper?”

“I was. I've been retired for a minute now. I don't need to do that anymore” says Joleen, her face is glacial, but calm.

“I slung a lot of coke too”.

“Is this, like, a plea deal, or...?”

“No, I’m here for sex and booze -I never got caught with blow.”

“Huh,” says Emma, sounding unimpressed on purpose “good for you, I guess.”

Joleen appraises Emma, rather accurately. “I'm good at getting away with things,” says Joleen, “really good”. She looks into Emma's eyes with a ferocity that does not blink.

If Emma had any experience with real violence, she would have realized Joleen’s stillness is a warning, recognized the way her skin radiated violence like steam; but , Emma doesn't, so she says, with all the disdain in the world, “cool”.

“I don't need to do that anymore either, but at the time, it kept the wolf from the door”. Joleen flits an eye over her expensive shoes, the designer distress of her clothing, the soaps and face washes on the counter she knows are designer.

“It's a tough thing, keeping the wolves away ​*all by yourself*​, isn't it?” Emma feels poison in the question, but she’s been talking long enough.

“I’m tired, good night”.
She turns over and switches off her light. She allows herself a brief chuckle.

“By the by, rich girl” Joleen says over her shoulder as she rolls over to sleep, “you ever laugh at me again, I will cut you deep”.

She flicks off her light, and her sleep is peaceful. Emma’s is not.
“Oh, come on now” says Joleen, to Dr. Carbrite’s in group the next morning “ya’ll are being silly”.

“This is serious” says Dr. Carbrite “you can't threaten the other patients”.

“What's that you always say? Threats are a ‘part of my recovery process’ .”

“And your recovery process does not come over anyone else here,” says Dr. Carbrite. “How about we open this up to the group- what are all of your thoughts on this?”

“If I can be real,” says a man named Terrance, who is sitting two seats over from Joleen, “I kinda get it. Emma was being hostile, and Joleen chest flexed her. With what you've been through, I understand why you don’t have a lot of patience”.

Emma can't help but snort, and mutters
“yeah, putting women back a couple generations is a burden to bear”

Dr. Carbrite snaps his head over, “hey, none of that. We’re respectful, and Emma, if you have something to say, you say it to everyone. What can Emma and you do to better interact in the future? How can these two better understand each other?”

“She can get close” Joleen screams through her teeth. She's fighting tears and losing.

“I hope you find what happiness is, and I hope you get close. I hope you almost have what will save you and I hope you have to watch it burn. What's what she can do. Get close.”

She loses, and tears flood. Joleen asks to go to the bathroom, which isn’t usually allowed, but Dr. Carbrite nods at the orderly. The orderly walks Joleen to the bathroom with an arm around her shoulder.

At lunch Terrance explains why Emma is a terrible person.

“She lost her husband and kid, you know that right?”. He talks about on the straight and narrow, about car crashes, about the failures of hope.

Emma thinks, for once, she’s not the only person in a game that's not fair. She gets what ‘close’ means.

Joleen is sitting in the courtyard, rummaging in her pockets. Emma walks up to her.

“Better step rich girl”, Joleen says without looking up “cause if I find my light, and you’re still here, God’s witness I’m gonna fu-…”

Emma holds out her lighter. Joleen takes it, and Emma thinks about Prometheus. She understands.