

STILLWATER

Written by

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**ACT ONE**

EXT. STILLWATER LAND PRESERVATION - DAY

It's late summer and the forest is overgrown. Trees in the Northeast are full and low. From above, the flora resembles thick mold in a petri dish.

The trails haven't been well maintained. Some are crossed by fallen branches. A POSTER warns against entering the woods after dark. A RUSTED SIGN forbids hunting on the preserved land.

We follow a trail down, toward the SOUND OF CARS. We're led to a narrow road and a small, empty BUS STOP.

A LARGE SIGN welcomes us to the town of STILLWATER, MASSACHUSETTS.

INT. SHERIFF BRANCH'S PATROL CAR - DAY

SHERIFF ROBERT BRANCH, 50, drives through the small town with a bakery bag riding shotgun. He yells toward his dashboard-mounted cellphone, an active call on speaker.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Kelly pick Steve up from the drunk tank yet?

INTERCUT AS NEEDED WITH

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - SAME TIME

Secretary LAURA GRIFF, 40's, sits at her desk, sorting through papers as she talks to her boss.

LAURA

Not yet. She sounded real angry on the phone. Not sure she's coming this time, Sheriff.

INT. SHERIFF BRANCH'S PATROL CAR - CONTINUOUS

SHERIFF BRANCH  
She has to come get him, Laura. I  
want him out of my station.

LAURA (O.S.)  
I told her to make him wait.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
You did what?

Branch loses focus, NOTICING something out the window. He  
PULLS OVER, suddenly in a panic.

LAURA (O.S.)  
He needs to think about what his  
drinking is doing to that woman.

Laura keeps talking, as Branch JUMPS out of the car.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
This is the second time this month  
that he's been brought in...

EXT. RIVER ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Now we see what has Branch so freaked out: A MISSING PERSONS  
POSTER, stapled to a pine tree. With a frantic mix of anger  
and anxiety, Branch RIPS it down. We catch a glimpse of a  
girl's face before Branch TEARS the poster to pieces.

INT. SHERIFF BRANCH'S PATROL CAR

Branch gets back into the car.

LAURA (O.S.)  
Sheriff? You there? Robert?

Branch begins to drive, glad that's done with.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Listen to me, Laura. You call Kelly  
and tell her that if she doesn't  
come get her husband, we're  
charging him...

Branch turns his head, seeing something out the window again.

LAURA (O.S.)  
Sheriff?

SHERIFF BRANCH  
(distracted)  
I have to go.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff's car SCREECHES to a complete stop on the shoulder. Branch jumps out of his car and tears down a poster, and then another, and another.

PULL BACK to reveal the trees lining the road are plastered with HUNDRED OF POSTERS.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Branch sets the bakery bag from his car on the island. He's shaken, but stuffing it down.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Branch walks past crooked picture frames and dusty walls. He KNOCKS on a closed door. No answer. He OPENS THE DOOR, standing at the top of a FLIGHT OF STAIRS.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Tess?

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The basement is a teenage girl fantasy den. Fabric covers the walls, art sits unfinished on an easel, clothes everywhere.

Annoyed, TESS BRANCH, sits up in bed.

TESS  
Yeah?

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Fed up, Branch begins to WALK DOWNSTAIRS.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Tess can see her father's feet, then his ankles, his calves.

TESS

What are you doing? I'm naked.

She's not, but her father's legs STOP just where they are and then RECEDE A STEP.

SHERIFF BRANCH (O.S.)

I don't want you sleeping all day.  
School starts tomorrow. Time you  
got back on a real schedule.

Tess frowns at this, doesn't bother responding.

SHERIFF BRANCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I'm going to work.

Tess examines her cuticles.

SHERIFF BRANCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

There's a muffin in the kitchen for  
you.

TESS

Okay. Cool. Bye!

Tess watches as her father's ankles disappear from view. She waits until she hears the basement door close before she pulls back the sheet, revealing the nervous, shirtless RICH PALMER, 16.

TESS (CONT'D)

Rich, pull it together.

RICH

That was close!

TESS

I don't know if you're more scared  
of him or if he's more scared of  
me.

RICH

What are you scared of?

TESS

Sharks?

RICH

I'm serious.

TESS  
A world wide shortage of birth  
control?

Tess leans over Rich, finding her backpack on the floor. She pulls it onto the bed and retrieves her birth control.

RICH  
There must be more. You have to be  
scared of something.

Tess pops a BIRTH CONTROL PILL into her mouth.

TESS  
(too sharp)  
No. I don't. And I'm not.

Tess leans in and kisses Rich. He kisses her back. Suddenly, Rich pulls back, spitting the WET PILL onto her sheet.

RICH  
Jesus!

Tess laughs, pleased with herself.

RICH (CONT'D)  
It's not funny!

TESS  
Oh my god. It's just one of the  
sugar pills. Calm down.

She reaches for him. Strokes him. He calms down.

RICH  
You're not funny.

TESS  
Yes I am.

Tess checks the time on her iPhone.

TESS (CONT'D)  
I have stuff to do.

RICH  
Like what?

TESS  
(none of your business)  
We'll meet up later.

RICH  
(please)  
Tell me where you're going.

TESS  
I don't want to.

Rich gets the message loud and clear, but doesn't like it.

EXT. STILLWATER LAND PRESERVATION - DAY

A WOMAN, 25, walks through the woods. We stay on her back as she slowly makes her way down a path.

Her bare legs brush against branches and vines. Sensing something, the woman stops. She leans down and lifts the hem of her dress. A TICK crawls up her skin, not yet having burrowed in. She PINCHES it between her fingernails and FLICKS it to the side.

As she walks, she runs her hand across a tree on which is stapled A MISSING POSTER. Her hand covers the face of the girl on the poster, leaving only the word "MISSING" in view.

INT. TESS'S CAR - DAY

Tess is alone in her car with the windows down and a soda in the cup holder, along with a half-eaten muffin.

She DUCKS a little as a car passes her, not wanting to be recognized.

Google Maps is open on Tess's iPhone, on her lap. It DIRECTS her onto the parkway. Tess follows the directions and nervously TAPS the steering wheel.

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY

Laura carries two mugs of coffee to her desk.

A very upset woman, KELLY, 30, is waiting. Laura places a mug in front of Kelly and sits down.

LAURA  
There ya go. And here.

Laura pushes a box of tissues toward Kelly, who takes one.

KELLY

He was friends with Mark Knotts.  
When Mark crashed his truck and  
died, I thought Steve would dry out  
a bit. Be more careful.

LAURA

What's so hard about not getting  
wasted?

KELLY

We have a baby now. I thought  
things would be different.

LAURA

Nothing bad improves with marriage.

Laura leans in, rubbing Kelly's shoulder. The women are  
STARTLED by Sheriff Branch as he SLAMS A STACK OF MISSING  
POSTERS down on Laura's desk.

THE FULL POSTER IS REVEALED: A black and white photo of a  
pretty, 10-YEAR OLD GIRL WITH A MOLE ON HER LEFT CHEEK. Her  
name, ALLISON SWIFT, is printed below the photo. From her  
clothes, we can tell that the girl has been gone a long time.

SHERIFF BRANCH

(holding up a poster)

Who knows something about this?

In addition to the seated women, there are THREE OFFICERS in  
the office. No one responds.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

(to Laura)

This is the original poster. Who  
would even have this?

LAURA

I don't... It's been years...

The youngest officer, HARRISON SCOTT, 28, steps forward and  
picks up a poster from the desk.

HARRISON

Where were these?

SHERIFF BRANCH

All along River Road. All over. All  
over town. I want them taken down.

(to the room)

I want them all down!

LAURA

Why would someone do this?

HARRISON

It's the anniversary.  
 (off the Sheriff's look)  
 Allie went missing fifteen years  
 ago today.

Harrison looks down at the poster. He chews the inside of his cheek, a bad taste in his mouth.

INT. NORTH CENTRAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION - DAY

Cold, concrete walls and scuffed floors. Bolted-down tables are hosting inmates, visiting with loved ones and lawyers. Among them, Tess waits, her knees bouncing and her hands squeezed between her thighs.

An OFFICER stands by the door.

OFFICER

Hands on the table, Miss.

Tess slowly puts her palms flat on the table.

TOM BLODGETT, 60, tired but healthy, enters wearing a prisoner's uniform. He's pointed to Tess's table by the Officer. Tom sizes up Tess as he walks over.

TESS

Tom?

He NODS and SITS DOWN.

TESS (CONT'D)

I wasn't sure you'd see me. You never wrote back. I figured because my father--

TOM

Does he know you're here?

TESS

No. No way.  
 (a beat)  
 He doesn't like thinking about any  
 of it.

TOM

What a luxury that would be.

Tess doesn't know what to say.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY

Branch is smoking a cigarette with the shame of someone who's quit too many times.

Kelly walks out of the building, with her husband STEVE, 30, trailing behind her. There's something miserable and dark in Steve and when he smiles, it's even worse. Branch watches as Kelly gets into her car, upset. Steve NOTICES Branch smoking and stops walking.

STEVE  
Nasty habit.

BRANCH  
Never gotten me a drunk and  
disorderly.

STEVE  
You got me there.

BRANCH  
Til next time.

Steve flicks a WAVE and then WALKS AWAY, toward his wife, watching him from inside her car.

BRANCH (CONT'D)  
(sotto)  
Asshole.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Steve gets in.

KELLY  
You apologize? He's just doing his  
job.

STEVE  
He's shit at his job. If he wasn't,  
my dad wouldn't be in prison.

INT. NORTH CENTRAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION - DAY

Tess is sitting stick straight, while Tom looks comfortable.

TOM

Is there a reason you came all this way?

TESS

My mother--I don't know if you remember her--Cheryl Branch?

TOM

How could I forget?

Tess hesitates, she's in over her head.

TESS

She left when I was a baby and I hadn't heard from her. But she wrote to me--she's living in New Mexico--and she talked about the case and the trial.

TOM

She say something about me?

TESS

She never thought you were guilty. She said she couldn't forgive my father for ruining your life. For never catching who really did it. It made her sick.

TOM

If your father's such a monster, why'd she leave you with him?

TESS

Why would you take his side?

TOM

I'm not taking his side. That man locked me up--life without parole--and I'll never forgive that. I couldn't. I just wouldn't go making an angel out of your mother either.

TESS

She defended you.

TOM

Sounds more like she's defending herself.

TESS

I thought you'd want to know that someone believed you. It made me believe you.

TOM

You think that's a comfort? It's not. I'm in here and all the regret in the world won't get me out. I bet anything your dad knows perfectly well I didn't do it.

TESS

Why would he do that?

TOM

He needed to make it go away. Wanted to make me go away while he was at it.

Tess tries to process everything Tom is saying. She is starting to think this was a mistake.

TOM (CONT'D)

Did it work? Did Stillwater go back to being charming and idyllic? The way it had been?

He's being sarcastic, but Tess considers it. Before she can respond, she's startled by a LOUD BUZZ.

OFFICER

(loud)

Visiting hours are over.

Tess is out of time, but has more questions than ever.

TESS

Was something going on between you and my mom? Did my dad know?

TOM

(standing)

You seem like a smart kid. Maybe you'll figure everything out.

**END ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**

EXT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY - DAY

The Woman From the Woods walks up the front steps of Stillwater Elementary School.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

We stay on her back as she walks past classrooms and bulletin boards. She seems to know where she's going.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, MAIN OFFICE - DAY

The young officer, Harrison, is seated across from ZABBY SWIFT, 55, elementary school principal and mother to our missing girl, Allison. Harrison is uncomfortable, but sits up straight, alert. He's not just a cop, but also a veteran.

ZABBY

Branch sent you. To check on me?

HARRISON

Didn't quite put it like that.

ZABBY

Good ol' Branch. Still trying to fix the unfixable.

Harrison doesn't know what to say.

ZABBY (CONT'D)

Don't mind me. It's what men do, mostly. I don't think anything made my husband happier than when I had headache and he could find the Tylenol. Problem, solution. Simple.

HARRISON

How is Mr. Swift?

ZABBY

Bob's fine. Vermont suits him.

HARRISON

I don't want to keep you, back to school and all, I just wanted to check in.

ZABBY

I saw the posters, if that's what Branch is worried about.

HARRISON

We have people pulling them down right now, Principal Swift, we--

ZABBY

Fifteen years and you think I'll lose it over a poster? It's nice seeing her face, actually. Don't you think so?

Harrison can't answer.

HARRISON

Sheriff is going to find out who put them up.

ZABBY

See? Problem, solution. Probably a good day for all of you.

Unsure of what else to say, Harrison STANDS.

ZABBY (CONT'D)

Harrison, before you go, Oscar needs a hand in the auditorium, setting up the stage for the assembly tomorrow.

HARRISON

I should be getting back to--

ZABBY

It's a two person job, really, and with budget cuts I only have Oscar. Have a little school spirit, Harrison. I'm sure it won't take long. You'll be back on poster duty in no time.

HARRISON

(weakly)  
Go Hornets.

ZABBY

Thanks, Soldier.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, HALLWAY - DAY

Harrison makes his way toward the auditorium. The halls are empty, but expectant--tomorrow they'll be filled with children.

Hearing FOOTSTEPS, Harrison looks up and sees the Woman From the Woods (NAOMI) walking toward him. For the first time, we see her face--an adult version of the face on the missing posters. Same hair. Same nose. No mole, but the similarity is still striking. Harrison STARES, unable to process what he's seeing.

They continue to walk toward each other. Naomi notices Harrison staring. She doesn't look away. Just as they're about to pass each other, Naomi SMILES.

NAOMI

Hi!

Her greeting has a teasing edge to it. Harrison can't pull himself together enough to respond at all.

They pass each other.

Harrison looks as though he's seen a ghost. He stops and turns in time to watch Naomi open the door and let herself into the main office.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, MAIN OFFICE - DAY

The office administrator, MS. MCCALLISTER, 60's, works at her desk, covered in decades worth of mementos. She's been working here as long as Zabby has. This is their school. The woman looks up as Naomi ENTERS.

NAOMI

Hi. Naomi Reed. I'm the new hire.  
Fourth grade.

Ms. McCallister FUMBLES as she begins reaching for papers.

MS. MCCALLISTER

Yes. Hi. Welcome. I'm Mary  
McCallister. Administrator,  
payroll, office supplies, field  
trips--that's all me.

(searching)

There are just a couple of forms  
left for you to fill out. As soon  
as I find them.

Naomi smiles, patient. She looks around the office. One wall is lined with rows and rows of graduating 5th grade students.

MS. MCCALLISTER (CONT'D)

Here we go!

Ms. McCallister hands Naomi paperwork and a pen.

MS. MCCALLISTER (CONT'D)

Fill that out and we can settle you into your classroom.

Naomi nods, accepting the forms. She sits on a bench and begins filling them out. As Naomi writes, Ms. McCallister watches her, trying to place whatever it is that's making her uneasy. Before she can figure it out, the interior door to the Principal's office opens. Zabby emerges, already mid-sentence.

ZABBY

Mary, I'm trying to pull up the updated emergency contact information--

Ms. McCallister STANDS abruptly, interrupting.

MS. MCCALLISTER

Zabby. This is Naomi Reed. Our new fourth grade teacher.

Naomi STANDS, smiling. Zabby turns slightly, facing Naomi. Her face freezes as she takes in Naomi's. She's staring into the face of her daughter. Safe and grown.

Zabby, trying to recover, extends her hand to Naomi, who EMBRACES Zabby instead.

NAOMI

Thank you so much for the job! I'm excited to start.

OFF ZABBY--shaken and hugging Naomi harder than is appropriate.

EXT. STILLWATER LAND PRESERVATION - DAY

Tess and her best friend, BETH ADAMS, 16, walk through the woods. Tess throws sticks at trees while Beth complains.

BETH

Junior year is going to suck. Summer was way short.

TESS

It was the exact same as always.

BETH

It felt short. Ugh. If I get Crane for history again, I'm gonna kill myself.

(an apology)

You know what I mean.

Beth sits on a tree log that looks like it fell over in a storm.

BETH (CONT'D)

Gym! I would do anything to never have to go to gym again.

Tess lays down on the log, stretching out.

TESS

I don't know.

BETH

You don't know? Since when? You hate school.

TESS

Sure. But I hate this place more. The sooner school starts, the sooner it ends. Then one more year and we're outta here.

BETH

Where do you see yourself going? Maybe going away for college. I get that. But after that? You're just gonna move to some random place where you don't know anyone? That seems dramatic.

TESS

Oh my god. You really do just want to stay here forever. I bet you just can't wait to have babies and go shopping at the Big Bunny and take your kids to the 4th of July picnic and dunk the fire chief in the dunking tank every year until he retires or you die from boredom. That's your plan. Admit it.

BETH

Right, right. I forgot that you're too cool for anything normal like county fairs or, I don't know, hooking up with the boy next door.

TESS

Shut up.

BETH

Because that would be such a cliché.

TESS

Shut. Up.

Tess nods to the side where the girls are being approached by Rich and his buddy, JAKE, 16. The boys cut in front of each other on the narrow path, SHOVING each other, LAUGHING.

Beth takes the hint and drops the conversation.

JAKE

Hey! Found you.

RICH

(to Tess)

Check it out.

Rich drops half a dozen colorful SHOTGUN SHELLS into Tess's open hands. Tess looks down at them, critical.

TESS

They smell.

RICH

Gunpowder. They're fresh.

Tess tips them back into Rich's hand.

TESS

Fresh? Gross.

Rich pockets the shells.

RICH

Whatever. I think they're cool. How'd your mystery errand go this morning?

TESS

(teasing)

Whoa. Get off my dick, Palmer.

JAKE

Yeah, Palmer! Off that D! Have some self-respect.

The four teenagers all start walking. Girls in front, with the boys behind.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(singing)

*I came in like a wreckkkking  
balllll. I never hit so hard  
beforrre.*

BETH

Jake! Shut up.

JAKE

Naw, you gotta make noise. So the hunters know you're not a deer or whatever.

Tess shakes her head, laughing. She turns and makes eye contact with Rich. They SMILE at each other.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, 4TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Alone in her new classroom, Naomi is setting up. MUSIC plays off of her cellphone, on the desk. As she writes "Ms. Reed" at the top of the dry erase board, something changes on her face. Feeling that she's being watched, she TURNS and finds Harrison standing in the doorway.

They make eye contact, but Harrison doesn't introduce himself. Instead, he looks at her. It isn't leering precisely, but it's uncomfortable.

HARRISON

You're the new teacher?

Naomi looks around the classroom--her name on the board. She smiles a little: Of course she's the new teacher.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

When did you--How did you get here?

NAOMI

(excuse me?)

I walked.

HARRISON

Where did you come from?

NAOMI  
Am I in trouble?

Harrison shakes his head no, but is undeterred--

HARRISON  
What are you doing? How did you...

Naomi takes a breath, annoyed. She stands up straight.

NAOMI  
I'm sorry, have I done something?  
You should be careful asking all  
these friendly questions in that  
uniform.

She approaches him and TAPS her fingernail against his badge.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
It's designed to be intimidating.

HARRISON  
Then it's not working.

NAOMI  
I know better.  
(a beat)  
Not that you asked, but my name is  
Naomi. Officer...  
(reading his uniform)  
Scott.

HARRISON  
(remember?)  
Harrison. Harrison Scott.

He waits for her to recognize him, but she doesn't.

NAOMI  
I have to get back to work now.

Harrison stays put.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Well?

He becomes self-conscious, unable to think of anything.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Bye, Harrison.

Like a child, he lets himself be dismissed.

**END ACT TWO**

**ACT THREE**

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

LOUD MUSIC plays while Tess sorts through piles of photographs--the kind from cheap, disposable cameras.

Along one wall, Tess is taping up the photos--mostly of her friends and herself. The photos along the floor are the darkest--night shots, underexposed, someone sitting on the hood of a black car. The photos blend into lighter ones as they move toward the ceiling. There's a green section--mostly her friends in the woods, the field at school, in a tree.

One photo stops Tess. She doesn't tape it onto the wall. Instead, she takes it to her night stand and OPENS the drawer. From inside, she retrieves a WORN LETTER postmarked SANTA FE, NM sent by her mother, Cheryl Branch. Tess has read the letter dozens of times, but after holding it for a moment she replaces the letter into the drawer, along with the photograph. She closes the drawer, shaking the memories.

Tess digs in her closet and finds some old school supplies--a couple tattered notebooks. She isn't ready for school tomorrow. She grabs her backpack and her keys.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT, PARKING LOT - DAY

Tess locks her car and walks toward the door--as familiar as walking into her own house.

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT, OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Branch is pissed off. Harrison sits obediently, but something's on his mind and he doesn't know how to say it.

BRANCH

No way that someone got all over town without being seen.

HARRISON

Jackson saw some kids, stoners, coming out of the woods, but there are always kids in the woods. Wasn't much to go on.

Branch GRUNTS.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
It's not really illegal, though, is  
it? What are you gonna do if you  
catch them?

SHERIFF BRANCH  
When we catch them.

HARRISON  
Yes, Sir.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
How was Zabby?

HARRISON  
She was fine. Still hates me  
though.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Zabby doesn't hate you. No one's  
ever been as hard on you as you  
are. Your old man, maybe. But he  
was a sonofabitch.

Harrison knows he shouldn't bring it up, but he can't not--

HARRISON  
I met the new teacher when I was at  
the school. Said her name was  
Naomi.

Branch raises his eyebrows and waits.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
She looks just like her. Like  
Allison.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Well that's strange.

HARRISON  
I think it's her.

Out loud, this sounds insane. A beat passes.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
You sleeping? Been feeling alright?

HARRISON  
(lying)  
Yes, Sir.

SHERIFF BRANCH

(softening)

How's it going with Jennifer? Maybe you two should get out of town for a weekend. The mountains, maybe. Or the coast. Eat some lobster. I could give you the time if you want it. Take a breather.

Harrison realizes what Branch is implying--he's unstable. He needs time off. Harrison straightens himself and puts on a convincing, steady face.

HARRISON

(standing)

Thanks, Boss, but I'm fine. Just got distracted. I'll go find you those kids.

Sheriff NODS, uncertainly.

Harrison EXITS the Sheriff's office and Tess ENTERS.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Look who's outta bed.

TESS

I need school supplies.

Tess holds out her hand.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Right. Of course.

He takes out his wallet and forks over some CASH.

TESS

Your walls are thin.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Whatever you heard--

TESS

Harrison thinks Allison Swift is alive?

SHERIFF BRANCH

No, he--

TESS

That's basically what he said.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Go buy pencils.

TESS

Fine.

EXT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, PARKING LOT - DAY

Zabby stands at her car. The trunk is open, full of files. She picks up a box and heads toward the school, slowly.

As Zabby approaches the front doors, Naomi EMERGES, leaving for the day.

ZABBY

Oh, hi.

NAOMI

Naomi.

ZABBY

Yes. Naomi.

NAOMI

(reaching)

Let me take that.

Before Zabby can protest, Naomi takes the box from Zabby's arms.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

To your office?

ZABBY

You don't need to--

NAOMI

It's no problem! It'll go faster.

Naomi does an about-face with the box and heads inside. Zabby watches her go for a moment before returning to her car to grab another box.

TIME CUT

Naomi crosses to Zabby as she closes the trunk, finished.

ZABBY

Thank you for the help.

NAOMI

Thanks for the job.

Zabby looks around the nearly empty lot.

ZABBY  
Do you have a car?

NAOMI  
(un-self-conscious)  
I don't. Not yet.

ZABBY  
A place?

NAOMI  
The motel. I have a couple of boxes  
in storage at the post office until  
I find a place.

ZABBY  
How will you get to the motel?

NAOMI  
The walk isn't too bad. Just until  
I get a car.

ZABBY  
(impulsively)  
I have a place. It's a cabin, on my  
property. I rent it to summer folks  
sometimes. Kayakers. People like  
that. You could rent it.

NAOMI  
I'm not sure--

Zabby doesn't want to let Naomi out of her sight.

ZABBY  
Just try it. C'mon. Get in. I'll  
show it to you. Better than a  
motel. And I can give you a ride to  
work in the mornings.

Before Naomi can answer they're interrupted by Tess, getting  
out of her car.

TESS  
(walking over)  
Hi, Principal Swift!

ZABBY  
Tess. What are you doing here?

TESS  
I'm on my way to get school  
supplies. I got nostalgic. Wanted  
to say hi.

Zabby smiles and motions to Naomi.

ZABBY

Naomi, this is a former student,  
Tess Branch. She is going into...  
11th grade?

Tess NODS yes, and SMILES.

ZABBY (CONT'D)

And Tess, this is Naomi Reed. She's  
a new teacher here.

Tess stares at Naomi.

TESS

Can I take your pictures?  
(off their hesitation)  
It's a project I'm doing.  
Photographing people in town.

Tess eagerly takes a disposable camera out of her bag.

NAOMI

Your phone has to be better than  
that thing.

TESS

Yeah, but I like these more.

Tess SNAPS a quick photo of the two women and then points it  
at Naomi, alone, who doesn't reflexively smile.

TESS (CONT'D)

Do you mind?

NAOMI

(slowly)  
No. It's fine.

Tess snaps two photos, quickly, and puts the camera down.

TESS

Thanks!

She heads back to her car, leaving Zabby and Naomi a little  
confused.

INT. ZABBY'S CAR - DAY

Zabby steals a glance at Naomi, completely at ease, her arm out the window. There's a grace to Naomi's movements. It's hard to not watch her.

NAOMI

It's beautiful here.

ZABBY

It's a good time of year. Mild.  
It's tough what you're doing--  
picking up and moving somewhere  
new. On your own.

NAOMI

You've turned out to be a real  
guardian angel. A job. A place to  
stay.

(pointing)

Deer.

Zabby notices a DEER at the edge of the road and SLAMS THE BRAKES.

Zabby instinctively SHOOTS AN ARM across Naomi's chest, stopping her from rocking forward.

Both women take a moment to recover.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

See?

(off Zabby's look)

You're taking care of me.

Zabby is made uneasy by this and Naomi uses it as an opening.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Do people here not trust newcomers?

ZABBY

That isn't it.

(a beat)

You look like someone. My daughter,  
Allison. She disappeared years ago.

Zabby waits curiously for a reaction.

NAOMI

I'm sorry. That's... something. Is  
the similarity really that strong?

ZABBY

Yes. Although Allison had a mole,  
here--

Zabby points to Naomi's cheek and notices a SMALL SCAR.

NAOMI

A dog bit me on the cheek when I  
was little. I don't remember it,  
but apparently I deserved it--  
pulled his tail or something.

Zabby just listens.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

That police officer? Did he know  
your daughter?

Zabby pulls the car into a long driveway. Zabby's house is  
set back from the road--old, but well maintained.

A small cabin (the rental property) is set off to one side.

ZABBY

Harrison. They were friends. He  
blames himself.

Zabby turns off the engine.

Naomi TWISTS A PIECE OF HAIR around her finger until her  
fingertip is purple. She notices Zabby watching her and  
stops, lets the hair fall.

NAOMI

Who do you blame?

Zabby thinks about it.

ZABBY

Everyone. No one. Myself. It  
changes.

(a beat)

There's a man in jail. They didn't  
have much, just circumstantial  
evidence. He never confessed. Never  
gave a single clue as to what  
happened to her. Where she was. And  
so whether or not he was involved,  
it just never seemed of  
consequence. He still denies it.  
There's no peace in that.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

A CLOSE UP of Naomi's face.

We PULL BACK and reveal Tess centering the photo on a blank canvas. She stares at it, considering. She props a copy of the Allison Swift missing poster next to it and looks at them next to one another.

Tess crosses to the wall of photos and peels one down--a memorial photo of a vibrant redhead with the dates "2000-2015" printed at the bottom.

Tess adds the photo to the canvas and considers the three next to one another, wondering if they're connected.

**END ACT THREE**

**ACT FOUR**

EXT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Harrison walks up the front steps of a small house. He KNOCKS and waits. It's been a long day. He's exhausted.

The door OPENS, revealing JENNIFER KNOTTS, early 30's, recently widowed. She's pretty, but exhausted.

She steps aside, letting Harrison in. They've done this before.

INT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jennifer and Harrison are in bed, recovering from sex. They're not in love. They're two broken people, staying busy.

HARRISON  
(pointing)  
Paint's bubbling.

Jennifer squints at the wall, where he's pointing.

Harrison puts his boxers on and gets out of bed.

He pulls over the desk chair in the corner and stands on it. He begins picking at the paint. A large strip of it comes off.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
Walls weren't primed right. That's why this happens. Good news is, it isn't water damage. Bad news is the whole room's gonna need to get scraped down.

JENNIFER  
Wasn't primed right? That fucker.

Harrison keeps picking at the paint, letting strips curl to the floor.

HARRISON  
Mark did it himself?

JENNIFER  
Of course he did. I have all these nice memories of him. He was still handsome.

(MORE)

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

He kissed me every morning, before I brushed my teeth. That would have stopped eventually. But it hadn't yet. So now I'm stuck with this memory of a guy who I might have divorced one day. But I don't really believe that. So this--  
 (gesturing to the paint)  
 This is good. Now I can say, That fucker, Mark. He couldn't even prime a wall.

HARRISON

He was kind of a dick, if that helps.

JENNIFER

It doesn't. But nice of you to try.

HARRISON

He drove drunk into the reservoir. So at least you have that.

Harrison has done all that he can with his hands. He gets down off the chair and replaces it where it was.

He walks over and takes a long drink from a GLASS OF WATER on the night stand. Jennifer watches him.

JENNIFER

Mark's body was in the water for two days before they were able to get it out.

Harrison looks at his glass of water and sets it back onto the night stand, grossed out.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I know, right?

EXT. STILLWATER COMMONS - NIGHT

Rich and Jake practice ollieing on their skateboards. A few other TEENAGE GUYS are hanging out, eating chips, flicking lighters (BRETT, TONY and JUSTIN.) These kids look like troublemakers, but they aren't so bad--they just don't know what to do with themselves.

Quietly, Brett NUDGES Tony and the two guys QUICKLY WALK AWAY. Rich notices them leaving.

RICH

Dudes?

Rich hears an ENGINE behind him and turns around just as Sheriff Branch is pulling into the parking lot.

RICH (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Dammit.

Rich, Jake and Justin don't move as Sheriff Branch gets out of his patrol car and walks over. They're used to getting hassled by the cops. Jake puffs out his chest as Branch walks up to them, proud of his t-shirt that reads "SKATEBOARDING IS NOT A CRIME."

JAKE

Check the shirt, Man.

Rich shakes his head--*Idiot*.

SHERIFF BRANCH

You think 'cause they sold you that  
crap at the mall that's the law?  
You're an idiot and I'm sorry for  
your mother because she's a nice  
woman and she deserved better.

Justin LAUGHS and the Sheriff turns toward him.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

What's your name?

JUSTIN

(uh oh)

Justin Jankus.

Branch takes out a notepad and flips through it, searching. Justin isn't on his list.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Get out of here.

Justin obliges, happily.

Branch stares at Rich and Jake who shift their weight uncomfortably.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

You two were spotted coming out of  
the woods earlier today, near where  
some posters had been put up.

JAKE  
Those posters were all over town.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
(indicating skateboards)  
Well you certainly can get around.

Rich stays quiet, but Jake's a loud mouth.

JAKE  
That wasn't us. I don't know why--

RICH  
(warning)  
Jake.

JAKE  
It wasn't us, alright? You can bust us for a lot of stuff, but chilling at Kinko's isn't one of them.

Branch can't stand this kid, but knows this isn't their style. He points Rich toward his patrol car.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Come on.

Rich knows the drill. He skateboards over to the car.

JAKE  
(indignant)  
I told you we didn't do anything!  
Rich! This is bullshit.

RICH  
Dude. Just shut up.

The Sheriff OPENS the back door and Rich GETS IN. The Sheriff CLOSES the door and tosses Rich's skateboard into the trunk.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
(to Jake)  
Go home before I break your skateboard.

The Sheriff gets into his car and turns on the engine.

INT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jennifer is assembling a sandwich.

Harrison is UNDER THE SINK, working on something.

JENNIFER

You don't need to be doing that.

HARRISON

It's just gonna keep leaking and you're not gonna hire a plumber.

JENNIFER

Things need to stop breaking. I can't afford it. Between this place and the storage unit and the car payments. It's too much.

Harrison stands up, WIPES HIS HANDS on a towel. He turns the faucet ON and OFF, testing for drips. Fixed.

HARRISON

You're throwing your money away. That truck's never gonna run. What are you saving it for?

Jennifer doesn't answer.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

How much does storing it cost you? Have it towed here. Put it in your driveway. At least that's free.

JENNIFER

I can't look at it every morning.

HARRISON

That would be too much? But losing your house over a broken thing the guy killed himself in--that's normal?

Angry, Jennifer opens a cabinet and pulls down a bottle of WHISKEY and a bag of DORITOS. She shoves both things in a PAPER BAG and hands the bag and the sandwich that she just finished making to Harrison.

JENNIFER

All your stuff.

HARRISON

Jennifer--

JENNIFER

Go away, please.

## INT. NAOMI'S CABIN - NIGHT

Naomi is settling into her new home. The cabin has an open floor plan. In the bedroom area, she finishes putting clothes into a dresser and continues unpacking her things--small treasures wrapped in paper. She places each item (perfume bottle, bud vase, bleached animal bone) on top of the dresser with care and ceremony. She's moved before and these are the things that she carries with her.

Moving into the kitchen area, she peers into the cabinets. It's a small space, but it has everything she needs: a few plates, a few glasses, a tea kettle.

She takes a glass and fills it with water from the sink, which sputters at first. Naomi hears a NOISE outside and stops.

She turns off the faucet, listens. Nothing. She takes a drink and sets the glass on the counter. She listens again, but still nothing.

The heavy door leading outside is open. The screen door isn't latched--it knocks itself open and shut in the wind.

Leaving the kitchen, Naomi walks to the bathroom and TURNS ON the shower. She UNDRESSES and gets into the shower.

## INT. SHERIFF'S CAR - NIGHT

Sheriff Branch and Rich have been riding in silence.

RICH  
Station's the other way

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Is it? Thanks.

A beat passes.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)  
How've things been at home?

Rich becomes uncomfortable.

RICH  
Fine.

Whatever the situation is, it isn't good and it embarrasses Rich. Branch lets it go.

## SHERIFF BRANCH

The girl on the posters--Allison Swift--her disappearing broke this town's heart. Made people suspicious and mean and sad. Broke up Principal Swift's marriage. Changed everything. And it hasn't ever gone back to the way it was before. And those signs go up all over town and it's a reminder of every turn this town's made. It's hard on people. And you were barely alive for it, so I don't expect you to understand that, but it's cruel to the people who do remember.

Branch makes eye contact with a conflicted looking Rich in the rear view mirror.

## SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

It's not a crime and whoever's responsible isn't going to get charged with anything. I just need to talk to them--explain what it is exactly that they're doing. Principal Swift was always good to you. I don't believe that you'd be messing with her like this.

Rich is touched by all of this, but he won't narc.

## RICH

(lying)

I don't know anything about it.

Branch shakes his head and LAUGHS as he drives past his own house and into the following driveway.

## SHERIFF BRANCH

Who knew you were such a loyal sonofabitch?

Rich isn't loyal. He's in love.

Branch kills the engine and leans forward, checking out the front of the house--a dark, broken down thing with detritus piled on the porch.

## SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

That stuff needs to get cleared. Fire Chief's gonna say it's a hazard.

The Sheriff gets out of the car and opens the door for Rich.

RICH  
I need my board.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Right.

Branch opens the trunk and retrieves the skateboard. He hands it to Rich, but doesn't let go as Rich tries to take it.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)  
Whoever it is, you can tell them  
that I'm gonna figure it out.  
(releasing the board)  
Get that porch cleaned up.

Rich nods and heads toward the dark house. Branch watches him go with a mix of frustration and pity.

INT. NAOMI'S CABIN - NIGHT

Wrapped in a towel, Naomi lays out an outfit for work the next day.

From her purse, she removes a FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER. She carefully unfolds and flattens the paper, revealing it to be one of the MISSING posters of Allison Swift. She studies it for a moment. Her mind wanders in directions we can't follow until she's snapped back by a NOISE from outside.

Slowly, she walks toward the screen door. Just as Naomi approaches, Harrison appears on the other side of the screen. He looks worse for wear, drunk.

She steps back as he pushes in, staring at her. He's unnerved by her wearing only a towel, but she makes no move to change.

NAOMI  
Slow day?

Harrison doesn't answer.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
(taking a leap)  
Are you here to find out if I'm  
her?

HARRISON  
You look just like her. Almost  
exactly.

NAOMI

Is it better if I am or if I'm not?  
Are you hoping that I am so that I  
can forgive you? What if I don't  
forgive you? What then?

Harrison doesn't know the answer, but he wants to talk and Naomi can sense that.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

What happened that day?

Harrison slowly paces the small cabin, observing Naomi's things, touching the bone on her dresser.

HARRISON

You--Allie was mad because I  
wouldn't play the game she wanted  
me to play. We used to go into the  
woods and play survivor. I liked  
it. Just the two of us out there.  
But I was older and I'd gotten  
embarrassed about playing with a  
ten-year old girl. I said I  
wouldn't go and she stormed off. I  
was so pissed at her for making me  
feel like I was being a jerk. She  
walked into the woods and she never  
came out. Not that anyone knows  
anyway. And then I hear that you  
were walking around the woods...  
What if you were just waiting--  
really giving me hell, ya know?  
What if you were that good at  
survivor and you waited all this  
time, just to rub it in? What if  
you were okay?

Harrison is angry when he says the word "okay"--thinking how unbelievably mad he would be to find out he'd suffered all these years for nothing.

Harrison picks up the missing poster from Naomi's dresser and holds it up to her face. She lets him look for a beat before she picks up a BUS TICKET STUB and hands it to Harrison.

NAOMI

I went for a walk in the woods this  
morning. But I arrived on a bus.  
Because that's how people get  
around. And I'm a person--not a  
vision come to life to absolve you  
of a goddamn thing.

Naomi takes the poster and the ticket stub from Harrison and replaces them on her dresser.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Please leave.

HARRISON

Women kicking me out. This is becoming a theme.

NAOMI

I wonder.

Harrison doesn't move for a moment. He doesn't want to leave. He doesn't like how this went. But he can't fix it either.

HARRISON

I'm--I'm sorry.

NAOMI

Sure are. Bye.

Harrison leaves.

Naomi watches him go, shaking her head.

**END ACT FOUR**

**ACT FIVE**

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, 4TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

It's the first day of school. The class is filled with 18 4th GRADE BOYS AND GIRLS, trying to sit still while Naomi calls roll. She lingers on each student, matching faces and names.

NAOMI  
Miles Braverman?

A small boy (MILES) raises his hand.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Hi, Miles. What do you like to do  
on the weekends?

MILES  
Umm. I play with my dog. And  
Minecraft on my iPad.

NAOMI  
Alright. Sounds fun. How many of  
you play Minecraft?

More than half the students RAISE THEIR HANDS.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Well. Maybe you can teach me,  
Miles.

Miles grins, happy with his new teacher.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Samantha Costello?

Naomi scans the room as a very reluctant child, SAMANTHA, raises her hand--boy's clothes, male posture and incongruent long blond hair. Naomi quickly makes an assessment.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
I never liked the name Samantha.  
May I call you Sam instead?

Sam NODS, relieved.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Excellent, Sam. Thank you. Okay.  
(back to calling roll)  
Charlie Finn?

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Branch LATCHES his buckle and CHECKS his pockets for wallet, keys and phone. He's ready to leave for work, but pauses outside the basement door. He HESITATES for a moment and then KNOCKS. No answer. He KNOCKS again.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
(loud)  
Tess?

He opens the door and leans forward.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)  
(louder)  
Tess?

No answer. Slowly, Branch makes his way down the stairs.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Branch looks mystified by the evidence of his daughter's life. He examines the wall of photos, NOTICES a smiling Rich.

Even among all the proof of her having moved away from him, there's still evidence of his little girl. He picks up a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of the two of them in a pumpkin patch.

He spots an old SOCCER TROPHY and begins to feel better about their relationship: She's distant, but not lost to him.

His expression changes when he notices the EASEL with the photographs of the three women/girls. It gets worse when he spots the STAPLE GUN, sitting next to Tess's PRINTER.

EXT. STILLWATER HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Rich skates up to Tess, sitting on the grass with her backpack. When no one's looking, he KISSES her quickly.

TESS  
Very stealthy.

RICH  
Just playing by your rules.

TESS  
I don't have rules.

RICH  
Sure you do. Because if it were up  
to me, people would know about us.

TESS  
Guys always want everyone to know  
they're getting laid.

That's not what he meant and she knows it.

RICH  
Your dad gave me a ride home in the  
back of his cop car last night.

TESS  
Oh, shit. What were you doing?

RICH  
Nothing. He was asking about the  
posters. I didn't tell him  
anything. But I think he's gonna  
figure it out. He seemed pretty  
determined.

Tess shrugs, *Whatever*.

RICH (CONT'D)  
You're not worried?

TESS  
Why should I be?

RICH  
You don't care if he finds out?  
What he's gonna think?

TESS  
I don't give a fuck what he thinks.

RICH  
Yes you do. That's why you won't  
tell him I'm your boyfriend.

TESS  
You're not my boyfriend. Boyfriends  
get instagrammed and blowjobs on  
their birthdays and, like, cards  
and shit. This isn't that.

RICH  
Well...

TESS  
Well, what?

RICH  
I mean, I'm not not your boyfriend.

Tess smiles, despite herself.

RICH (CONT'D)  
Gotchya.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Naomi watches as a dozen girls spill into the room, all wearing tights and leotards.

Naomi looks around, doing a quick head count. Just as she's realizing that a girl is missing, Sam walks in, still wearing her regular clothes--a t-shirt and athletic shorts. A precocious girl (Katie, 10) tries to be helpful:

KATIE  
Sam doesn't like wearing girl clothes. Not even on picture day.

NAOMI  
Alright, Katie. That's fine. I want everyone to hold onto the barre with their right hand and then lift their left leg as high as they can.

Naomi DEMONSTRATES and the other girls immediately begin imitating.

Naomi gestures for an awkward Sam to follow her.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

SAM  
(looking down)  
I'm sorry I didn't change.

NAOMI  
You can wear whatever you want, as long as you're comfortable.

SAM  
Okay.

NAOMI  
Are your parents making you take this class?

Sam nods her head, yes.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Listen. Dance isn't about the clothes. It's about discipline and getting really strong.

Sam looks up, skeptical.

Naomi rolls up the sleeve of her shirt and FLEXES her biceps. She encourages Sam to touch the muscle.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

See? Not bad, right?

SAM

I wanted to take karate.

Naomi considers this.

NAOMI

I know some karate. Self-defense too. Here's the deal--come to the class. Wear what you want. Do the dance stuff and the last ten minutes of every class, I'll teach you karate.

SAM

The girls won't like that.

NAOMI

Good thing I'm the teacher. C'mon. Back inside. You have to stretch.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

Tess is sprawled on her bed, doing the first homework of the year. Beth sits at Tess's desk, working on Tess's laptop, MUSIC plays quietly.

TESS

Who gives this much homework the first day?

BETH

(distracted)

Yeah.

Tess digs into her backpack, searching. She touches something and reacts, confused.

From the bag, she pulls out the SHOTGUN SHELLS that Rich had offered her earlier. Tess SMILES, realizing that Rich must have snuck them into her bag.

BETH (CONT'D)

Oh my god. Look at this one.

Beth PICKS UP THE LAPTOP and joins Tess on the bed. Together, they stare at the website "GirlsGoingGone.com"--a collection of missing girl posters. Beth scrolls past posters, including the one of Allison Swift. She scrolls past Allison, to a poster of a 2-year old in pigtails and a retro sweater.

BETH (CONT'D)

(reading)

Isabelle was last seen playing in her front yard on June 28th, 1968. She was wearing purple corduroys, a pink long-sleeved shirt and purple ribbons in her hair.

(commenting)

What the fuck? She was a toddler.

Beth scrolls down and we see poster after poster, spanning decades. This is someone's archive.

TESS

There are so many. The guy posts new ones every week.

BETH

How do you know it's a guy?

TESS

The person collecting old missing posters of little dead girls and putting them on the internet? Just a wild guess.

BETH

Right.

Tess GROANS, pushes her palm into her stomach.

TESS

This cramp is killing me. If I'm not getting my period, I might just be dying.

Tess rolls off the bed and walks into the adjacent bathroom, leaving the door ajar.

Beth stops scrolling and stares at a poster for a dark haired little girl, about two years old.

TESS (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 (triumphant)  
 Ha! I'm not pregnant!

Beth is distracted. She glances up at the bathroom door and listens as Tess opens a box of tampons.

TESS (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 I was actually starting to worry  
 this time.

Quick as she can, Beth is PRINTING out a photo of the missing child. Beth TURNS UP THE MUSIC as the printer begins to WHIR.

Beth stands, replaces Tess's laptop onto the desk, closes the browser window for "GirlsGoingGone.com" and pulls the poster from the printer.

Beth slides the poster INTO HER BACKPACK just as Tess returns from the bathroom.

TESS (CONT'D)  
 Jeez. I thought you'd be a little  
 more enthusiastic about me not  
 having a baby.

Beth forces a smile.

BETH  
 Congratulations, Tess. You're not  
 an idiot.

Tess swoons, HUGS Beth.

TESS  
 Gee, Beth. Thanks. That's all I  
 ever wanted to hear.

The girls LAUGH, but Beth has something else on her mind.

INT. STILLWATER ELEMENTARY, DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Naomi has her ballerinas lined up, PUNCHING the air in front of them.

Naomi walks down the row of girls, correcting their form as she goes--turning wrists. Sam is participating happily.

Naomi stops by Katie, taking the girl's hand in hers.

NAOMI  
 Never keep your thumb inside your  
 fist. Never. You'll break it.

Katie re-closes her fist, thumb correctly tucked around her other fingers.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
 Good.  
 (to the class)  
 Great job!

Naomi looks at the door and sees the FACES OF EAGER PARENTS, peeking in, signaling the end of class.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
 Alright, class. That's it for  
 today. Congratulations. Good work.

The students gather their backpacks from the corner of the classroom as Naomi OPENS THE CLASSROOM DOOR, letting in a stream of PARENTS.

Naomi AD LIBS introductions to some of the parents as they pair up with their children.

Naomi notices a man (PAUL COSTELLO, 50's) heading toward Sam. She continues SAYING GOODBYE to the students as they leave. When she turns around, she sees Paul pulling the BALLET OUTFIT that Sam never changed into out of her backpack. He looks pissed off.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
 Hi. My name is Naomi Reed. I'm  
 Sam's teacher.

PAUL  
 Samantha.

NAOMI  
 You're her dad?

PAUL  
 Paul.

Samantha quietly puts her sneakers on, embarrassed.

Naomi looks at Paul and shows a FLICKER OF RECOGNITION.

NAOMI  
 (slowly)  
 Paul.

PAUL  
Paul Costello.

NAOMI  
Hi Paul. It's nice to meet you. I  
told Sam--

PAUL  
(curt)  
We named her Samantha.

A beat.

NAOMI  
I told her that she could wear  
whatever she's comfortable in for  
our class. It's supposed to be fun.

PAUL  
That's nice, but this is part of a  
bigger rebellion. Some phase we're  
trying to nip in the bud.

NAOMI  
I'd love to talk to you about it.  
Might be helpful for you.

Paul SNORTS.

PAUL  
For me?

Naomi just stares at him, trying to place him. Paul becomes  
visibly uncomfortable. Paul takes Sam's hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
We should get going.

NAOMI  
Great job, Sam. I'll see you  
tomorrow.

Paul GRIMACES when Naomi says "Sam". As she's led out of the  
classroom, Sam turns and WAVES to her new favorite teacher.

INT. NORTH CENTRAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, CELL- DAY

Tom is reading on his bed. An officer, JOSH, appears outside  
the cell.

JOSH  
Letter for ya, Tom.

Tom is uninterested, but stands, not wanting to be rude.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
 (holding out the letter)  
 Gonna read this one?

TOM  
 (taking it)  
 I doubt it. Thanks, Josh.

Josh NODS and keeps walking.

Tom turns the letter over in his hands. Postmark reads SANTA FE, NM. He HESITATES over the seal and then decides against it. He adds the letter to a PILE OF UNOPENED LETTERS, all with the same return address: CHERYL BRANCH.

EXT. STONE & SONS STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Jennifer stands outside a STORAGE UNIT holding a cup of coffee and a key. She agonizes for a beat before she UNLOCKS THE PADLOCK and pushes open the doors.

INT. STONE & SONS STORAGE FACILITY, STORAGE UNIT - CONTINUOUS

It's musty and under-lit but the OLD MODEL PICKUP TRUCK is impossible to miss. The front of the truck is accordian-ed and the windshield is broken. Jennifer hasn't been here before. Looking at the car her husband died in isn't easy.

Avoiding the driver side, Jennifer walks around the truck. She has to use all of her strength to OPEN the passenger side door. She opens the glove compartment and carefully prods the contents. Papers have deteriorated. She removes a FLASHLIGHT but DROPS IT ON THE SEAT when she notices the batteries inside have begun leaking out a toxic-looking sludge.

Jennifer walks around and POPS THE HOOD. The truck is never going to run again, but it's as though she needs to remind herself of that. She UNSCREWS the oil cap and tosses it onto the floor. She POURS in some of her coffee.

Jennifer runs her fingers along the battery, tracing the intercrossing wires. Suddenly, she STOPS. She pushes her finger up to one of the wires and it separates into two perfect halves.

The brakes were cut.

**END ACT FIVE**

**ACT SIX**

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, BASEMENT - NIGHT

Tess and Beth lay together on Tess's bed, with their feet up on the wall. There's a dirty patch of paint, from a long summer of their bare feet.

Tess reaches into her night stand and pulls out the photo that we saw her tuck away earlier: TESS, BETH AND A REDHEADED GIRL (MARISSA,) all 15 years old and smiling. The redhead has a lip piercing and arms around both of the other girls.

Beth takes the picture with a sad smile.

BETH

That was right after she got her lip pierced. She almost fainted.

TESS

The guy totally knew we were underage, remember? He felt so bad, he kept trying to give her juice and crackers.

BETH

Oh my god. I forgot. He was totally scared that we were gonna call Marissa's parents or something.

TESS

We should go see them.

BETH

It just feels mean. I mean, I know they said they want to see us, but I feel like we're bragging just by being there.

TESS

I went over there and dropped off some photos a couple of weeks ago, but I kept this one. They didn't like the ring anyway.

BETH

Did you hang out at all?

TESS

Yeah. Her mom made me tea and started talking about how she felt like the cops had really dropped the ball and then there was this horrible awkward moment and I was like yeah, I completely agree, but it was still totally weird.

The girls are interrupted by a LOUD KNOCK from the top of the stairs.

TESS (CONT'D)

Dad, we're working.

Paying no mind, Sheriff Branch MARCHES downstairs. Both girls sit up--not used to seeing him down here.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Hi Beth.

BETH

Hey, Mr. Branch. Sheriff.

SHERIFF BRANCH

It's late. I think you outta be heading home.

TESS

(pissed)

Dad.

SHERIFF BRANCH

It's a school night.

Beth doesn't want to leave, but doesn't see an alternative. She KISSES Tess on the cheek.

BETH

Drive me to school tomorrow?

TESS

Yeah. Of course.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Tell your folks I say hi.

Beth NODS and LEAVES.

Tess and her father are alone, just staring at each other.

TESS

What?

SHERIFF BRANCH  
Was it really you? Putting up the  
posters?

She doesn't answer, but certainly isn't denying it.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)  
What would possibly compel you to  
do something so mean? So fucked up?

TESS  
Did you hate seeing them?

Branch NODS, slowly.

TESS (CONT'D)  
That is what compelled me.

Branch takes this in.

TESS (CONT'D)  
(upset)  
You keep trying to make things go  
away, but they're not finished.  
Everyone is trying to wrap things  
up, but they aren't answered. And  
you just hope everyone will forget,  
but we don't.

Tess starts to CRY. Branch is completely ill-equipped to deal  
with this, but he puts his own anger and hurt aside and sits  
next to his daughter.

He wraps his arm around her and Tess SOBS.

SHERIFF BRANCH  
(whispering)  
Tess, c'mon.

Branch looks past his daughter's shoulder and sees the  
PHOTOGRAPH of the three friends.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)  
I'm so sorry.

Tess lets herself cry into her father's chest.

EXT. COSTELLO HOUSE - NIGHT

Naomi rings the doorbell of a nice, middle-class home.

Paul answers the door. He's unhappy to see Naomi.

NAOMI

Hi Paul! I got your address from the school directory, and it wasn't far so I thought that I'd walk over and say hello, talk more about Sam.

PAUL

Samantha.

NAOMI

We could start with that.

PAUL

This isn't a good time.

NAOMI

Another time then? Like I said, we're neighbors, so just let me know when would be good.

PAUL

Uh huh.

NAOMI

Have you lived here awhile?

PAUL

Long time.

NAOMI

But not forever.

It should be a question, but it isn't. It feels more like an accusation. Paul TENSES.

PAUL

Like I said, not a good time.

NAOMI

Is Sam's mother around? Maybe she--

PAUL

You're new so I'm just gonna spell this out for you: People leave each other alone here.

NAOMI

That's why you moved here? No one digs?

(beat)

Have a good night. Tell Sam I'll see her in class.

Paul watches as Naomi LEAVES, something dark stirring.

INT. BRANCH HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tess and her father are eating cereal for dinner at the breakfast nook.

Branch looks up from his bowl and stares at Tess. She notices, but tries to ignore it.

SHERIFF BRANCH

Why was Richard Palmer covering for you?

Tess SHRUGS.

SHERIFF BRANCH (CONT'D)

I could tell that he knew who it was. I assumed it was those idiot friends of his. Why was he trying to protect you?

TESS

Dad. I don't know. Because I'm kind of popular?

Branch shakes his head, smiles.

SHERIFF BRANCH

You must think I'm a real fucking idiot, don't you?

TESS

(shrugs, smirks)  
You act like one enough of the time.

Branch accepts this. They go back to eating their cereal.

INT. ZABBY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Zabby sits at a table with a mug of tea and an open file-- Naomi's job application and resume--an empty spot where a passport-size photo could have been attached. HEADLIGHTS shine through the kitchen windows. They TURN OFF along with a CAR ENGINE. Zabby STANDS.

EXT. ZABBY'S HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

She watches as her ex-husband, BOB SWIFT, 50's, gets out of a practical car with Vermont plates. He walks toward Zabby who stands still, arms crossed.

BOB  
Hi there, Zabby.

ZABBY  
What do you think you're doing,  
Bob?

BOB  
Decided to come down for a visit.

He's on the porch now. He KISSES her cheek hello.

ZABBY  
Tell me that no one called you.

BOB  
Can't lie to you. Never have.

ZABBY  
It isn't her, Bob. There's a  
similarity, but it isn't her.

BOB  
I couldn't not come. Mary said the  
resemblance was uncanny. I had to  
come. You know that.

ZABBY  
Mary can't help herself can she?

BOB  
Who can?

ZABBY  
That's true, I suppose.  
(a beat)  
She's staying in the cabin, but I  
think she's out now. Besides, I  
won't have you harassing her  
tonight. You can try to sneak a  
peek at her tomorrow. Like a real  
creep.

BOB  
Fair deal.

ZABBY  
Alright. Well. Get your bag, I  
guess.

Bob nods and smiles. Whatever went wrong between them,  
there's no lack of affection.

EXT. ADAMS HOUSE - NIGHT

Beth hesitates at the front door, before letting herself in.

INT. ADAMS HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Beth quietly shuts the door behind her. She sees lights on in the living room, but heads straight for the stairs. She pauses, hearing the kind voices of her parents.

MR. ADAMS (O.S.)  
Beth? That you?

MRS. ADAMS (O.S.)  
Dinner's almost ready!

BETH  
I'm gonna go lay down.

MRS. ADAMS (O.S.)  
You're not hungry?

BETH  
No. I'm fine. Tired.

MRS. ADAMS (O.S.)  
Okay, Honey.

Beth looks relieved until her big sister, MIMI, 18, fair complexion, appears.

MIMI  
'Sup Beth?

BETH  
Why aren't you on campus?

MIMI  
I was waiting to say goodbye to you, brat.

BETH  
Oh. Okay. Bye.

MIMI  
(fuck you)  
Cool. See you at Thanksgiving.

Beth goes upstairs.

INT. ADAMS HOUSE, BETH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Beth closes the door to her bedroom behind her.

She sets her backpack on her bed and unzips it, removing the missing poster that she printed at Tess's.

She carefully reads over the information on the poster:  
Fiona, two years old, wearing a black and white checked dress when she went missing at a mall in Connecticut.

Beth studies the face on the poster and then studies her own, in a mirror. Beth is the missing girl.

EXT. RICH'S HOUSE

Tess paces in the driveway. Her iPhone DINGS with a new message from Rich: "Coming".

A moment later, the door opens and Rich closes it behind him. He walks toward Tess who meets him halfway.

RICH  
Hey. Everything okay?

She kisses him.

TESS  
I'm sorry I'm mean and weird.

RICH  
You're not really.

TESS  
(combative)  
Yes I am, Rich. I'm not gonna swoon just 'cause you pretend I'm not a bitch.

RICH  
(laughing)  
Oh my god. You're not a bitch. You're clearly out for a fight, but you're not a bitch.

TESS  
(quiet)  
Thanks.

RICH  
Is everything okay?

TESS

Umm. No? I don't know. My friend's dead. And she can't be undead. And, like, I know she'd take it back if she could. It's like when you're driving and you think, I could just let myself drive right into the guardrail. And I think everyone thinks that sometimes, but you don't do it. And I think she just had a moment like that--she was having more moments like that because of all the harassment--but it would have blown over eventually.

RICH

(hugging Tess)

Marissa was cool and I'm so sorry about what happened. I'm so, so sorry about it.

Something about the sincerity and depth of this hits Tess.

TESS

Why are you sorry?

RICH

I just mean that--

TESS

Tell me you weren't part of it.

RICH

Tess--

TESS

(slowly)

Oh my god.

RICH

Tess--

TESS

I'm gonna vomit.

RICH

You can vomit. You can totally vomit. Here, let me--

He reaches for Tess but she recoils.

TESS

Oh my god. You're just all  
assholes. Like, every single one of  
you.

She turns and leaves a distraught Rich, hating himself.

INT. NAOMI'S CABIN - NIGHT

Naomi is reading in bed when she's interrupted by a KNOCK at the door. She lays down the book and crosses to the door, opens it, revealing Harrison with a six-pack of beer and a clean face.

HARRISON

You don't have to let me in.

She steps aside, welcoming him.

NAOMI

I don't have to do anything.

Harrison sets the beer on the table.

HARRISON

I didn't know what you drank, so I  
just got beer. And, here--

Harrison removes a MAP from his back pocket and unfolds it.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

It's a map of the town. I know  
you're new and this will give you a  
lay of the land.

(pointing)

This is Zabby's property, right  
here.

NAOMI

Thank you.  
(indicating the beer)  
Want one?

HARRISON

If you don't mind me sticking  
around while I drink it.

In lieu of a response, she simply OPENS two beers and hands him one.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about last night. Sometimes I don't say the right things. It's not an excuse exactly, but I did a couple tours in Iraq and it, umm, it didn't help.

NAOMI

Army?

HARRISON

Marines.

NAOMI

(dryly)

Ooo-Rah.

HARRISON

(smiling)

That's right. You've got military in your family?

NAOMI

No. Not that I know of. My ex. He was military. I'll bet anything he was a mess beforehand too, but he came out of it all twisted.

HARRISON

He still in the picture?

Naomi looks around her new digs and raises her beer.

NAOMI

Here's hoping he's not.

She drinks. Harrison looks concerned.

HARRISON

It messes with people. Being over there.

NAOMI

Listen--this might not sound kind, but I don't have any more pity left in me for broken little soldiers. Maybe I should, but I don't.

HARRISON

(impressed)

Whoa. Alright.

NAOMI

Yeah. I just can't--the thanks-for-your-service bit? I can't do it. We're here. Figure out a way to be a person. Everyone's been through shit. Unlike soldiers, most people don't sign up for it.

HARRISON

That's a good point.

NAOMI

(studying the map)  
We're close to Town Hall?

HARRISON

A mile maybe?

NAOMI

Let's go. A walk. Can we bring the beer? I've heard the cops here can be real assholes.

HARRISON

We should be okay.

Naomi smiles.

NAOMI

Perfect.

EXT. STILLWATER LAND PRESERVATION - NIGHT

Alone in the woods, Tess traces the path with an industrial-looking flashlight. She's trying to make herself feel better, she's trying to do the right thing. One by one, she RIPS DOWN the missing posters. She's deep in the woods. These are the last of them--the ones the cops haven't already taken down.

It's hard work--retracing her steps in the dark.

She stands still, scanning the trees with the flashlight. The light lands on a poster, 20 yards out, but Tess doesn't move, noticing A SWAYING BRANCH on the tree that it's stapled to.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Naomi and Harrison each have a beer in hand. They walk along the shoulder of the road. Harrison carries the six pack, which only has two beers left in it.

HARRISON  
So you walk a lot?

NAOMI  
You don't mind do you?

Harrison looks at her--beautiful, strange, a little tipsy. Of course he doesn't mind. He SMILES.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
Good.

Harrison's smile breaks as he watches Naomi wrap a few strands of hair tightly around one finger. She catches him watching.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
What?

HARRISON  
Nothing. Deja vu.

It's more than that, but they're getting along now. He doesn't want to ruin it.

NAOMI  
(pointing)  
Look.

Up ahead, a plume of smoke is rising fast.

HARRISON  
Oh my god.

Harrison leaves the beer at the side of the road and the two of them RUN toward the fire.

EXT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Breathlessly, Naomi and Harrison arrive in front of the old building which is irrevocably ON FIRE.

Immediately, Harrison has his phone out, calling it in. He's trained in crisis and handles it quickly and efficiently.

HARRISON  
(into phone)  
Stillwater Town Hall is on fire. We need fire trucks. Possible ambulance. I don't know if anyone was inside. Flames have reached the roof. Nothing else has caught.

Meanwhile Naomi just watches as a piece of the ROOF COLLAPSES. There's no saving the building, or anything inside, and she knows it.

EXT. STILLWATER LAND PRESERVATION - NIGHT

Tess is nervous but pushing through. She looks around.

TESS

Hello?

She scans the trees around her with her flashlight, but doesn't see anything.

She walks toward the poster, cautiously.

As she's about to reach the last poster, she hears TWIGS SNAP. She SPINS around and GASPS, spotting Steve, 30, practically next to her, with a shotgun at his side.

TESS (CONT'D)

Jesus. You scared me.

Steve lifts the gun, pointing it toward the poster, which happens to be next to Tess's head. The gun WAVERS in Steven's hand. He's shitfaced drunk.

STEVE

I was wondering who was doing that.

TESS

I'm taking them down.

STEVE

(placing her)

You were friends with that girl Marissa.

TESS

Yeah. I'm Tess Branch.

STEVE

Right. Sheriff's daughter. Your dad put my dad in prison.

Tess wants to change the subject.

TESS

You knew Marissa?

STEVE

Girl like that? Guys know about her.

TESS

I should go.

STEVE

You're even prettier than she was. Probably not as fun, though.

Tess REACHES for the poster. Steve GRABS HER ARM.

STEVE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

TESS

I'm just taking it down.

Steve LETS GO of Tess's arm, but SHAKES HIS HEAD, no. He PUSHES her aside with the barrel of his gun and uses his free hand to REACH into his pocket. He takes out a black SHARPIE and BITES off the cap.

He angles himself in front of the poster. Tess can't see what he's doing.

Steve takes a step back and considers his work: Thick, black X's over each of Allison's eyes.

STEVE

There. That's better.

Tess is scared, but also angry. The anger makes her brave.

TESS

Why did you do that?

STEVE

It's been fifteen years. It's time everyone forgot about her.

FADE OUT.

**END OF PILOT**

\*

**SERIES PROPOSAL**

Tragedy and trauma can be contagious. There was a horrific case in 1989 ("The Glen Ridge Rape") in which several high school boys molested a mentally disabled girl. Something that made the case even more disturbing was that it came out that even though it took months for the police to find out about what had happened, several adults (coaches and parents) had known about the incident within days and had covered it up, protecting their boys. It was not one disgusting anomaly, but instead the failing of an entire community.

STILLWATER centers around the Sheriff's 16-year old daughter, Tess. She has grown up in a town that was infected with something. When she was a baby, a girl named Allison Swift went missing and the crime was never solved. In the series, we will find out that a group of teenage boys hurt Allison and were then protected by adults in their life. Allison was never found. The crime was never solved. The boys who had done this terrible thing stayed and became men and carried on, but it's never gone away. Instead it seeped in. And spread. Jennifer's husband drunkenly drove himself off a bridge. We find out later that he was one of the boys who attacked the girl, fifteen years ago. He felt remorse. The other men didn't trust him to stay quiet and one of them cut his brakes. One of the men never really stopped-kept going after young girls. Tess's best friend, Marissa, killed herself last year after being harassed for her promiscuity. We find out that she'd been molested by one of the same group of men.

Without consciously realizing it, Tess has been marinating in this environment her entire life. She's fascinated by the case of Allison Swift at first because it's the thing on which she blames the dissolution of her parents' marriage, but it becomes bigger than that as she ties in other members of the community, including her best friend's suicide. The arc of the show is a sort of town-wide exorcism. Tess's digging and pushing leads to painful things being brought to the surface and old secrets being discovered, but ultimately it ends the cycle of pain that has lasted nearly two decades-a cycle that her father was unable to end as Sheriff.

**SEASON ONE**

In the first season of STILLWATER we'll get a lot of answers.

**NAOMI REED**

The question of whether Naomi is the missing girl (Allison Swift) is a question throughout the season. We ultimately discover that Naomi is NOT Allison Swift and, eventually, Allison's remains are discovered in the woods.

While it is settled that Naomi is not Allison, she becomes suspicious of the men in town who look at her like a ghost. Her arrival is a catalyst for some of the behavior that leads to Tess discovering the attackers' identities.

Naomi carries her own traumatic history—abuse and the murder of one of her abusers. She moves through the world without the fear that we expect women to carry. This makes her intimidating to most and inspiring to Tess who will gravitate toward her, curious to know more about her and also desperate for female attention that she never got from her mother.

### **TESS BRANCH**

Tess digs deeper into everything surrounding the case of Allison Swift, at times even suspecting her father. After discovering that the man serving a life sentence for Allison's death was having an affair with her mother, Tess suspects her father of botching the investigation for reasons of personal vengeance. Convinced that he never took the case seriously, she continues to investigate different leads with the fearless abandon of a teenager, blind to the real dangers of what she's getting involved in. She is driven by the arrogance of youth and the freedom of having already experienced pain. She has lost her mother and best friend and her suspicions cost her relationships with her father and boyfriend.

Tess begins with the man who confronts her in the woods at the end of the pilot—Steve Blodgett (the son of the man serving a life sentence for Allison's murder.) Tess wonders about the X's that Steve drew over Allison's eyes: Does he know for sure that she's dead? Did he kill her? Did his father? Is he just sick of the case? (After all, it tore his family apart, even more than it tore apart Tess's.)

Tess eventually connects several townspeople to Allison's disappearance, and realizes that it's bigger than she thought. The group of men who attacked Allison are linked to other crimes as well: the murder of one of their own (Jennifer's husband, Mark Knotts, whose brakes were cut after he was no longer trusted to keep his mouth shut,) and the molestation of other young girls (including Tess's best friend Marissa who, as a result, became promiscuous, depressed and eventually killed herself.)

### **RICH PALMER**

Tess's love interest (and neighbor) attempts to win back Tess, after she breaks up with him (suspecting him of being involved in the harassment that led to Marissa's suicide.) Eventually, we learn that Rich was not directly involved in the harassment, but feels culpable, having failed to help Marissa when he feels he could have.

He comes to Tess's aid (if not rescue) multiple times. She's eventually able to forgive him, although she remains guarded and their relationship suffers because of it.

#### **HARRISON SCOTT / JENNIFER KNOTTS**

Harrison cannot let go of the idea that Naomi might be Allison. He wants so badly to be blameless. He feels drawn to Naomi, but also beholden to the young widow, Jennifer, who he's been sleeping with. After discovering that her husband might have been murdered, Jennifer reaches out to Harrison, asking for his help. Harrison spends the season linked to both of these women—a dark, fucked-up love triangle.

#### **ZABBY SWIFT**

Zabby continues her confused relationship with Naomi. While she doesn't believe Naomi is her daughter, she allows herself to bond with the young woman, filling a part of herself that's sat empty for years. After Allison's remains are discovered, Zabby decides to move to Vermont to be with her semi-estranged husband and figure out whether they can move on, together. She leaves Naomi the house—happy to be able to take care of someone.

#### **PAUL COSTELLO/TOWN HALL**

Naomi recognizes her student Sam's father, Paul. We learn that Naomi spent a summer at an internship in NYC when she was in college. Every day, she walked into the office and the first thing she saw was a framed photograph—a memorial of an employee who had died on September 11th. Naomi never knew the man but he was always spoken of reverently, except for once, at the end of the summer, when an older employee admitted that the guy had been a real asshole—always thought he deserved more. “But you can't say that about anyone who died that day. It just isn't right. So we call him a hero. What else can you say about the dead?”

But he wasn't a hero. He was a coward. He was a man, unhappy with his life, looking for a do-over. So when the opportunity presented itself, he took it. He didn't die on September 11th. He made it to the West Side Highway and walked away like so many others. Only difference was that he didn't stop. He kept going. He started a new life. A new family. He's a town councilman, remarried and trying to live the life that he feels he's always deserved. He resents his queer child because this life was supposed to be easier.

Sensing that Naomi might recognize him, Paul panics and sets city hall on fire—if it burns, with all of his paperwork inside, it will be harder to prove his real identity. The more cornered he feels, the further he'll go to keep his secret.

The more volatile he becomes, the more protective Naomi becomes of Sam. (While this story isn't directly linked to the bigger mystery, it feeds into the concept that this town is a place where people with secrets go to HIDE, much like the story with Beth--)

#### **BETH**

Beth keeps her discovery that she is a missing child a secret. In the meantime, her suspicion of her lovely and loving parents grows. She asks for baby photos, other family members, friends who knew her as a toddler. She looks for proof that she's wrong about having been kidnapped, but she isn't wrong. The season ends with her running away from home and physically tracking down her birth parents.

#### **FUTURE SEASONS**

The show is a town-wide exorcism. It's not over until every wrong is righted and every dark bit is brought to light.

#### **BETH**

Beth discovers the truth about her abduction. Her "parents" had two daughters—Mimi was 4 and Beth was 2 when, in a fit, Mimi killed Beth. The parents, heartbroken and terrified of losing BOTH of their children, decide to cover up Beth's death. They abduct a 2-year old girl (our Beth) from a mall and move away. Mimi represses the memory (which is easy because she is sedated for years, on behavioral meds.) While Beth was a replacement, in order to protect their first born, the parents become devoted to their new Beth-being as good to her as they can. (Meanwhile, Mimi will go off her meds while away at college and recover memories of her childhood and her murdered little sister.)

#### **SHERIFF BRANCH**

After everyone finds out what really happened to Allison Swift, the Sheriff is forced to resign.

#### **CHERYL BRANCH**

Tess's mother reappears. Tess bonds to her quickly, feeling deeply betrayed by her father's shortcomings in the Allison Swift case. Tess quickly realizes that her mother is not the woman she's been hoping for. Not only did her mother cheat on the Sheriff with Tom Blodgett and then abandon Tess as a baby, but Cheryl may have known about what really happened to Allison. She has her own part to play in the town's descent. Tess will end up realizing that while her father has made mistakes, he's had good intentions all along.

**TESS BRANCH**

Ultimately, Tess is able to put her demons to rest. Having answered her burning questions about what really happened to Allison Swift, what really caused her best friend to kill herself, what kind of person her mother is, she's able to transform Stillwater into a town that she actually wants to live in. The show is about reclaiming the town and ending the cycle of violence and destruction that she was born into.