

THE NOBLES

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ACT I

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HIDDEN ROOM - DAY

A decadent, old fashioned sitting room. Beautiful bookcases, lush carpeting. Old money as hell.

The letter "N" is all over -- if you're paying attention.

Footsteps APPROACHING. A door SLAMS.

Two TEENAGERS hurl themselves into--

INT. HAWLEY PREP - CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

They both dive towards the back and curl up, breathing hard.

They listen as a GROUP angrily enters the room they were just in.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)
I can't find anything...

VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Something set off the alarm, Mud.
Find what it was, or you'll pay.

One of the hidden teens -- NORA RIMMER, 16 -- takes a deep, shaky breath. Trapped. Terrified.

VOICE #3 (O.S.)
Mud! Check the closet!

SMASH TO BLACK:

NORA (V.O.)
Tucked along the golden coast of Connecticut, Hawley Preparatory School is one of the most elite high schools in the country... and we won't let you forget it for a goddamn second.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - EARLIER THAT WEEK

SUPERIMPOSE: A WEEK EARLIER

Every detail of the school is perfectly curated enough to pass for a Kiel James Patrick catalog spread.

The students are equally drenched in the New England of it all: popped collars, boat shoes, sun-kissed (fake) tans, and an undercurrent of tension that never fully dissipates.

Ever.

NORA (V.O.)

At Hawley, flawlessness is expected -- and therefore, ordinary. In a student body of future presidents, CEOs, world-changers and taste-makers -- you made a name for yourself by any means necessary.

MOLLY HIROTA, 16, Japanese-American, pushes through the passing period bustle to her locker. She's normally a high-strung, well-intentioned gossip -- but something is off today.

NORA (V.O.)

Molly Hirota's tactics were unorthodox, but effective.

Molly opens her locker. A note falls out.

Her eyes widen as she picks it up: a thick envelope fastened with a red wax seal. It's engraved with one letter: "N." Her full name is written in elaborate cursive on the front. The ink is still wet.

She glances around to see if anyone is watching. Holds her breath as she opens it...

We can't see what's on the note inside, but it makes Molly's eyes fill with angry tears.

She crumples the paper and flings it deep into her locker.

She spins out to face the hall, expression slowly shifting into something on the edge of fury.

She gazes out at her classmates as they pass. Their pristine uniforms. Their mindless chatter.

Molly closes her eyes and lets out a

MASSIVE.

PRIMAL.

SHRIEK.

It goes on forever.

The hallway slows in an instant.

Molly runs out of air and gasps, but keeps going--

MOLLY

You're all idiots. You're letting
it happen. Right under your fucking
noses.

SLAM TO BLACK:

THE NOBLES

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A TEACHER drags Molly to the end of the hall. You can still hear her screaming after the door slams.

A long moment of silence before everything snaps back to normal, humming along like nothing ever happened.

Except: an undercurrent of hushed whispers as the gossip mill creaks back to life.

Nora, who we know, stands by her locker. She's Hawley as they come: cutthroat, all ambition, fearless.

Her gaze is still trained on the spot where Molly just was.

NORA (V.O.)

Molly's episode rattled me more
than I cared to admit.

Nora spots something on the ground next to Molly's locker.

She pushes through the crowd and picks it up: the envelope with a now-torn "N" seal. Nora studies it.

NORA (V.O.)

Maybe it was because I somehow felt
it coming, before I even knew what
it was -- the cosmic shift. The
destruction the Nobles would bring.
The start of the beginning of the
end.

The bell RINGS, jerking Nora back to reality. She shoves the envelope into her pocket.

She walks briskly through the crowd. Her peers give her a wide, intimidated berth. Nora is at the top of every class.

Fucking untouchable -- and always alone.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HOMEROOM - DAY

Nora plops into her seat for homeroom.

NORA (V.O.)

I had bigger concerns. That was the day we'd find out who had been selected to be the next Editor-in-Chief of our school newspaper, the Hawley Torch Press. Tradition dictated that you were chosen as a junior and spent the year training. The position came with a full scholarship to a journalism program of one's choosing.

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DREW HADDAD, 16, Middle Eastern, passes Nora en route to his desk in the back. Charming golden boy, which is all he wants you to see.

He and Nora lock eyes. Dramatically.

NORA (V.O.)

It was down to me and Drew Haddad. Basic jock prototype #3.

Nora watches as Drew descends into a SEA OF BROS.

Back-clapping abounds.

NORA (V.O.)

I thought I had it in the bag. It wasn't the last thing I would be completely wrong about.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - TORCH PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Desktops and folding chairs. The walls are lined with front pages of every issue for decades.

MR. CRESWICK, 39, leans against the computer table. The sort of hyper-casual and super pretentious English teacher who fancies himself a Jonathan Franzen in the making. He's the staff advisor.

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MARIAH BARNES, 18, sits at a table nearby. Current reigning Editor-in-Chief. Warm, welcoming, and sensible in a decidedly un-Hawley-like manner.

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Nora sits at a table in front. She beams up at them.

*

NORA

I think we both know why I'm here,
so we can just breeze past the
formalities.

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MARIAH

Just a few more minutes...

*
*

Drew flies in. His arrival confuses Nora, but he hasn't
noticed her just yet...

DREW

So sorry to be late, Mr. Creswick,
I was trapped in a French
presentation that refused to end--

He spots Nora. *What the fuck?*

DREW (CONT'D)

Why are you here?

NORA

I was here first. Why are you
here?!

DREW

My group wouldn't shut up about
Cote D'Ivoire, like I said. Why are
you--

MR. CRESWICK

Have a seat next to Nora, Drew.
What Mariah and I have to say
concerns you both.

*

Drew does as he's told.

MARIAH

I never expected that picking my
successor would be this
challenging. You're both
exceptional candidates.

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MR. CRESWICK

Indeed, we agonized over this
decision. The conclusion we
ultimately reached was: why? Why
face it now, when there remains an
entire year left for you both to
further prove yourselves? So, we're
bucking tradition to accommodate.

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MARIAH

For the first time, we'll have two junior Editor-in-Chief candidates. One of you will be chosen to transition fully into the position later this year.

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Nora and Drew stare blankly at Creswick and Mariah. Both refusing to fully comprehend.

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NORA

So... no one won?

MR. CRESWICK

No one lost!

NORA

(under her breath)

Yeah, not yet.

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DREW

What does that mean for the scholarship? I was counting on knowing if I had it by the time I started seriously looking at colleges...

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MR. CRESWICK

We'll have to figure out some of the logistics as we go along. Just relax for now, okay? Enjoy the victory. This is a high school paper, not the Spotlight team.

The two students avoid looking at each other.

NORA (V.O.)

Mr. Creswick clearly didn't get it. "Relax" was essentially a swear word for us both.

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Nora quickly gathers her things.

NORA

I've got to, um, go prep for a calculus test--

The door slams behind her as she leaves. Drew forces a polite smile. Tension thick.

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DREW

So... What are the next steps?

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MARIAH

Headmaster Bonney will want to meet you both. I can start training in the day-to-day operations of the paper...

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DREW

Together. With Nora.

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CRESWICK

I really thought this would go over better.

DREW

This school teaches us a lot of things -- but disappointment isn't one of them.

Drew shrugs sadly at Creswick.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - GIRLS' BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Nora hurls herself into a stall, jams the lock shut, and screams.

There's tears. It's messy.

She pulls up her sleeve. There's a rubber band on her wrist.

She snaps it against her skin a few times, breathing deeply.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - LIBRARY - A FEW PERIODS LATER

High vaulted ceilings, literal chandeliers, and thousands of books. Nora sits alone at a table, working. Drew approaches, already grimacing.

She's so focused that she doesn't realize he's there until he's seated across from her. She narrows her eyes.

NORA

Some of us have a ton of work to do.

DREW

It's Hawley. All of us always have a ton of work to do. Listen, I know spending junior year competing all over again for Editor-in-Chief wasn't what either of us wanted, but if we're going to spend all year working together, we should...

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NORA

Not happening. I work alone.

DREW

But Creswick literally just said...

NORA

Oh, I'm not worried about that. You won't last the week.

DREW

What? How?

NORA

I don't know yet. Or maybe I do and I'm just not telling you.

DREW

That's not--

NORA

What? Fair? Nothing is ever fair, Haddad. The world isn't built that way.

DREW

I was going to say humane.

NORA

I got a "Needs Improvement" in sharing on my first kindergarten report card. It's the only bad mark I've ever received -- and little's changed.

Nora turns back to her work, effectively dismissing Drew. He retreats, a steely look in his eye.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - DAY

Drew walks down the hallway with CHARLOTTE WIGGINS, 15. Black, star athlete, hopeless romantic, and his girlfriend.

CHARLOTTE

I mean, it's not exactly a surprise that Nora Rimmer is a sociopath. No friends, stalks around like she owns the place, which I guess she sort of does--

DREW

I hate legacy kids. Like she even needs the money.

(MORE)

DREW (CONT'D)

My parents are never going to pay for their oldest son to study journalism...

CHARLOTTE

She claims she's fighting dirty. That means you should, too.

Drew frowns at this.

DREW

I don't know how to do that. Be dirty.

CHARLOTTE

I can give you a few lessons...

She leans in for a kiss. Flirty. He gives her an obligatory peck.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Wow. Passionate.

DREW

Sorry. I'm really zonked out by this whole newspaper mess.

CHARLOTTE

As long as you don't pull a Molly Hirota...

DREW

What does that mean? What has Molly Hirota ever done? Join drama club?

CHARLOTTE

She screamed bloody murder at her locker this morning! Got dragged off and no one has seen her since.

DREW

Does anyone know why?

CHARLOTTE

Not that I've heard.

DREW

Hmm. The answer's bound to be pretty dark, right? Gritty.

CHARLOTTE

You can't turn the nosiness off, can you?

DREW
Reporters aren't nosy. We're...
vigilant.

CHARLOTTE
Whatever. Sure. But maybe this is
less a newspaper article and more
just a thing that happened to
someone we sort of know.

Off Drew, contemplating this...

INT. HAWLEY PREP - BATHROOM - DAY

Drew unzips his fly at a urinal. His gaze mindlessly wanders
as he pees. His eyes widen when he sees it, scribbled in
black sharpie close to the floor:

MH DESERVED IT. CROSS US & DIE. -N

Drew turns to the SOPHOMORE peeing next to him.

DREW
Can you see that graffiti? What do
you think--

SOPHOMORE
Dude, what the hell? I'm holding my
dick right now.

DREW
Right. Fair. Sorry.

The sophomore flushes, cleans up, and glares at Drew on his
way out.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - AP CHEMISTRY - DAY

Drew and GAVIN FROST, 17, an overly neurotic strain of
preppy, work together on an experiment.

GAVIN
So we dip the wood sticks into
water...
(Drew dunks his)
Maybe a little more gently than
that, though.

The station next to them is two GOSSIPY JUNIORS. Drew is
mostly focused on them. He leans closer to listen...

FIRST GOSSIP

No, Molly's totally taking a stand against, like, the man. She was yelling about how messed up the patriarchy is. It was amazing. Allegedly.

SECOND GOSSIP

So you weren't there?

FIRST GOSSIP

No, but my pickleball partner in gym this morning was. She heard everything.

SECOND GOSSIP

I heard she's, like, bipolar, or something. That's why she did it. She was having visions.

FIRST GOSSIP

Bipolar people don't see things, Heather. Don't be problematic.

Drew knocks a vial over. All over an increasingly frustrated Gavin.

GAVIN

Get your head in the game, man! We're in AP now. This shit actually matters.

DREW

Sorry. Always been more of a biology man, myself.

GAVIN

Thrilled the fates brought us together in chemistry, then.

DREW

Have you heard anything about what happened to Molly Hirota? Since--

GAVIN

I don't exactly make a habit of interacting with psycho sophomores.

Drew sighs.

ACROSS THE ROOM: Nora sits along at a lab station, miming whatever experiment this class -- that she is absolutely not in -- is doing. Giant protective goggles obscure her face. Watching Drew's every move.

EXT. HAWLEY PREP - DAY

Nora exits the school alongside the masses. A scattered few line up for the bus, but most flock to the parking lot lined with expensive cars.

NORA (V.O.)

I'd grown adept at keeping my school and home lives separate. But there was no faking anything in a parking lot worth millions, so I was forced to get creative.

The edge of the parking lot is lined with elaborate bushes, at least ten feet high. Nora reaches them and checks to make sure no one is looking her way...

And PLUNGES straight into them--

EXT. FAIRFIELD - DAY

--and emerges onto the suburban street on the other side.

She brushes some leaves from her hair as she heads down the sidewalk.

Gaze trained straight ahead. Cool as a motherfucking cucumber.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MINUTES LATER

Nora walks briskly, still scanning for familiar faces.

She reaches a piece of shit masquerading as a car. Scratches and dents everywhere. Missing half a bumper.

Nora glares at it. Pulls out her keys and unlocks it.

INT./EXT. NORA'S CAR - DAY

Nora drives from Fairfield to Black Rock. The majestic McMansions and sweeping lawns fade into seedy package stores and shoddy apartments.

NORA (V.O.)

I only lived twenty minutes from school, but those five miles meant everything. Hawley administration knew that my circumstances had changed, at least vaguely. But they were discreet.

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EXT. THE RED WHARF - DAY

A deserted strip mall parking lot. A dirty light up sign reads: "THE RED WHARF -- DRINKS -- DARTS -- POOL." At least half the letters have gone dark.

Nora grabs a bag from her trunk. She takes off her Hawley sweater, stylish jewelry, and heeled shoes. She shoves them into the bag and pulls out a ratty flannel, Converse, and an apron.

NORA (V.O.)

Cinderella could only stay at the ball until midnight, remember? After that, the magic faded and she had to go home as if that's how it had always been. It was the same for me, every day.

She allows herself one small, defeated sigh before she walks inside.

INT. THE RED WHARF - CONTINUOUS

Not a lot to see here. Old jukebox, low lighting, stained and sticky carpet.

LOLA WHITE, 50s, crass but kind, the owner, waves from behind the bar as Nora walks in.

LOLA

Hey, hon! Your sister is in the back.

A small frown from Nora as she walks into--

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INT. THE RED WHARF - BREAK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nora shoves her stuff into a dusty locker. Her sister, GRACE RIMMER, 23, is sprawled out in the corner, a secondhand textbook open in her lap. Grace is all hard lines and intense glares. It's easy to see where Nora gets it from -- not that Grace would ever admit that out loud.

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The air between the sisters is perpetually hostile.

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NORA

Did you have class today?

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Grace pointedly doesn't answer. Turns a page in her book.

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NORA (CONT'D)

Cool. My day was fine, thanks.

GRACE

(doesn't look up)

I'm on break. That means a break
from everything -- including
pointless small talk.

Nora flinches and tries to hide it. She heads back out into
the restaurant.

Grace finally looks up.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh, and Nora?

Nora stops. Lets herself feel a little hopeful.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Your smelly shampoo leaked and now
it's all over the shower. Make sure
you clean it up tonight. The
bathroom already smells like old
mold, I don't want to add any
floral notes to the stench.

NORA

Got it.

INT. THE RED WHARF - A WHILE LATER

Nora -- the under-the-counter, entirely illegal bar-
back/dishwasher -- loads a crate with dirty dishes.

NORA (V.O.)

Friends were a luxury I couldn't
afford with my pathetic dishwashing
paychecks. A single person figuring
out my zip code would ruin
everything I'd spent high school
working for.

EXT. NORA AND GRACE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ramshackle apartment complex on the outer fringes of
Bridgeport, one of Connecticut's poorest cities.

Nora and Grace cross from the car to their door. Grace checks
her phone and gasps.

GRACE

Oh, my God. Dad called. I can't believe I missed it!

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NORA

Great...

Grace races inside, excited. Nora lags behind, less enthused.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW HOURS LATER

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Dark outside, now. Nora does homework at the kitchen table. Grace passes by, grabs ramen from the cabinet.

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GRACE

Got ahold of Dad. He's coming back home for a visit. He'll be here tomorrow.

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NORA

He hasn't been back in months. Did he get fired?

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GRACE

People get breaks from their jobs, you know. And they generally want to spend them with family.

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NORA

Where is he going to sleep? Three people in a one bedroom apartment is too much.

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GRACE

He can crash in the living room with you.

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NORA

A sleepover with Dad? That's not weird at all. What if he's snoring when I have to study?

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GRACE

You can have the bedroom back if you want to trade...

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NORA

But I need the car to get to school.

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GRACE
And I love taking the bus to
community college. Everything is
amazing for everyone.

NORA
You never used to be like this.

GRACE
Like what?

NORA
Mean.

GRACE
Yeah, well. My life used to be
perfectly fine, and now it's all
gone to hell. No parents, no
prospects, just...

NORA
Me.

GRACE
Yeah. Just you.

A long moment, then the door closes behind Grace. Nora waits
a beat and pulls a HAWLEY PREP schedule out of her bag and
studies it.

Upon closer look -- it's Drew's.

She narrows her eyes at it.

NORA (V.O.)
Everyone has a crack in their armor
-- even the golden boy. All I had
to do was find it, exploit it, and
destroy him.

END OF ACT I

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ACT II

INT. NORA AND GRACE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Nora methodically fills her backpack and brushes her hair at the same time. Quickly and instinctively sculpting herself into Hawley Nora.

Grace follows her in ratty pajamas, wiping down every surface the second her sister vacates it.

NORA

Is this really necessary?

GRACE

I want to prove to Dad that we've been doing good without him.

NORA

We're not, though. It's all gone to hell. Right?

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Nora zips up her backpack and marches towards the door.

NORA (CONT'D)

See you both tonight, I guess.

EXT. HAWLEY PREP - DAY

Lush greenery, brick buildings. STUDENTS stroll down well-kept cobblestone pathways. Could pass for Ivy League, if you squint.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - FOYER - DAY

Nora enters the school through the front doors.

She passes a wall lined with plaques, trophies, and other notable moments in Hawley history.

She slows almost imperceptibly as she passes one plaque in particular:

STUDENT OF THE YEAR. 1991: ALICE M. CAMPBELL

FOR UNPRECEDENTED & SELFLESS SERVICE TO OUR SCHOOL

She gazes at it for a few seconds.

NORA (V.O.)

I'd gotten into Hawley entirely
because I was my mother's daughter.
That school was the greatest gift
she had ever given me. Wherever she
was.

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She shakes it off. Keeps going.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - AP US HISTORY - LATER

Drew taps his pencil compulsively in the second row. He eyes
PRESCOTT ROSALES, 16, one seat over. Prescott contains
multitudes -- he loves partying and physics in equal amounts.

Their TEACHER passes back tests. Prescott gets his and
punches the air in triumph.

PRESCOTT

Against all odds! Take that, Cotton
Mather!

Drew leans over.

DREW

Yo. P.

PRESCOTT

What's up... D? Is this a thing
now? Did I miss this becoming a
thing?

DREW

How'd you do?

PRESCOTT

94 percent, playaaaa!

Prescott flashes his grade as Drew's test lands on his desk.

82%. Hawley F. He groans.

DREW

How is this possible? I am so much
better at history than you.

PRESCOTT

Your boy P has a resolution to
become more well-rounded this year.

The bell RINGS. The two boys gather up their backpacks. Drew
tries very hard to be nonchalant.

DREW

You heard about that sophomore
meltdown yesterday, right?

PRESCOTT

Totally. I heard it live all the
way from the fricking science wing.

DREW

Didn't you date her? Molly?

PRESCOTT

I wouldn't call one drunk hookup at
homecoming dating, but she did let
me round third, so... I have only
fond memories of our time together.

DREW

Do you have any idea... why? She
freaked out like that?

PRESCOTT

Dude. We haven't talked since. I'm
hardly a scholar on Molly Hirota's
struggle with mental health.

PRE-LAP: BELL RINGING...

NORA (V.O.)

I tracked Drew's every class, step,
thought -- all of it.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - A WHILE LATER

Nora watches Drew leave class. Drew checks his watch, ruffles
his hair, and heads for his locker.

Nora rolls her eyes.

NORA (V.O.)

And all I'd managed to discover was
that he was incredibly studious and
completely boring. Until...

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Drew switches some books out of his backpack and closes the
locker. He walks off.

The bell rings and the crowd dissipates. Nora checks that the
coast is clear and walks to Drew's locker.

She removes a bobby pin from her hair and picks the lock with
surprising skill.

She opens it and delicately examines the contents. She pries out an old planner and thumbs through it. Every Thursday is marked with a vague:

NORA (V.O.)
MTG: 5:30PM.

No other details.

Nora closes the locker and slips away.

INT./EXT. NORA'S CAR - RIGHT OUTSIDE HAWLEY - DAY

Nora wears a pair of massive sunglasses and sits slouched low in the driver's seat. Watching as kids pour out of the school.

NORA (V.O.)
I subverted my maniacal aversion to truancy and faked severe cramps to get out of last period early that day. I wanted a head start. Desperate times.

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Nora's phone buzzes with a call from Grace. She silences it.

A text pops up:

Dad will be here by dinner.

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Nora spots Drew nearing his car with Charlotte. He kisses her goodbye and gets in. As he turns out of the parking lot, Nora switches gears and pulls onto the road behind him.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. NORA'S CAR - A WHILE LATER

Nora drives on the highway a few cars behind Drew's.

EXT. PARK/INT. NORA'S CAR -- A WHILE LATER

A park with scattered picnic tables and a nice playground. A few scattered PEOPLE, but mostly deserted.

Drew's car pulls in next to the only other car in the lot.

Nora parks on the opposite end of the lot, peering at Drew's car through her rear window.

She watches as Drew gets out of his car, checks to see who's around, and slides into the passenger seat of the car next to him.

And that's... it. All Nora can see from her vantage point.

She stares at the two cars for a long beat. With a frustrated groan, she digs around in her backseat for a hoodie, tugging it on over her uniform.

NORA

(under her breath)

You don't drive halfway across the state to sit in a random car unless you're carting around baggage too big to check at La Guardia.

EXT. PARK -- MINUTES LATER

Hood up, Nora skulks her way across the park.

She passes Drew -- he's sitting and talking with a MYSTERY BOY. Very boring. Nora rolls her eyes.

Until--

Drew leans forward and KISSES HIM! It quickly heats up into a full-fledged make-out.

Nora gasps, punches the air, realizes that's way too obvious, and ducks behind a tree. She fumbles for her phone and leans back into view. She takes so. Many. Pictures.

Until a stream of texts from Grace interrupts:

"so are you planning on showing up, or"

*

"he's running late, FYI, not that you care"

*

Nora checks the time, rolls her eyes, and takes off towards her car.

EXT. NORA AND GRACE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nora approaches the front door, mindlessly flipping through the kissing photos and saving the good ones.

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She slides her key into the lock, but before she opens it--

The door flies open. Grace stands there, eyes rimmed red.

*

GRACE
Something came up. He's not coming.

*

INT. NORA AND GRACE'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Grace angrily starts making dinner. Wiping away tears as she goes.

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Nora hangs by the doorway, completely unmoved.

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NORA
What did he say?

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GRACE
Something came up with work, and we need the money.

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NORA
I mean. We do. So.

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GRACE
I gave up my shift at the Wharf to be here tonight, so this household is at a net loss from this evening.

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NORA
Why did you bother getting excited? Dad was never known for his reliability. Even... before.

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GRACE
He tries, okay? Dad's trying. Do you think he wants to not be here with us?

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NORA
He could have gotten a job that was closer.

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GRACE
And mom could have not abandoned this family and disappeared into thin air!

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NORA
Mom left *Dad*. She didn't leave *us*.

*
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GRACE
You don't know that. You don't know anything.

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*

Grace pours some pasta into the boiling water and storms towards the living room.

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*

NORA
What does that mean?!

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GRACE
Set a timer for twelve minutes.

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Grace is gone. Moments later, Nora hears her bedroom door slam shut.

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*

NORA (V.O.)
Everything at home was a mess. Just like always. The Torch Press wasn't going to be like that.

*

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - THE NEXT DAY

Drew opens his locker and pulls out a manilla envelope. It's labeled in impossibly neat handwriting:

YOU HAVE 24 HOURS TO FORMALLY QUIT THE TORCH PRESS, OR THESE GO PUBLIC. -- NR

Drew's brow furrows as he opens it up: glossy, full-size color prints of the kissing photos.

He drops them in shock and dives to grab them before anyone else sees.

NORA (V.O.)
I was going to get exactly what I wanted. No matter what it took -- or who it hurt.

Drew's blinking back tears as he crams the photos back in. Breathing heavily. On the verge of a freak out, but the hallway is as bustling as ever, so: he shoves it back down.

END OF ACT II

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ACT III

INT. HAWLEY PREP - TORCH PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Nora is working at one of the desktop computers when Drew storms in. Flustered and furious. He throws the envelope at Nora. It hits her chair with a crack and sinks to the floor.

DREW

You're a genuine sociopath. Did you seriously stalk me?!

NORA

I warned you, Haddad. I don't play well with others.

DREW

I got that.

NORA

Just quit the Torch Press and the pictures will disappear.

DREW

Are you hearing yourself right now? This isn't some made-up game of Spy vs. Spy. This is my actual life in your hands.

Drew is very close to losing it altogether.

Nora avoids eye contact, cheeks red, maybe realizing that she's in way over her head. Maybe.

But she refuses to admit it.

NORA

I obviously don't care if you're gay.

He flinches visibly at the word. Barely recovers.

DREW

Wow, thanks, I'll call GLAAD and get you a medal--

NORA

But it's Hawley. We're all hiding something. I wanted to find the crack in your armor... And I did.

DREW

Just to make these stakes clear: if my parents find out, they'll disown me. No one at school will treat me the same. Charlotte will...

(voice cracks)

She'll hate me. You're willing to set all of that into motion -- drop a nuclear bomb onto my entire existence -- to be the only one in charge of a high school newspaper?

NORA

(weakly)

It's... all I have.

DREW

Fuck you, Nora.

He scoffs at her and slams his way out of the room.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - LIBRARY - DAY

Drew sits alone at a corner table. White knuckling a history textbook and trying really, really hard to act like everything's fine.

When Charlotte enters, she's surprised to see him.

CHARLOTTE

Babe! Don't you have French this period?

DREW

Yeah, probably. I just... didn't go.

She joins him, concerned.

CHARLOTTE

Everything okay?

Drew blinks rapidly as he attempts to gather anything resembling some bearings.

DREW

Yeah, just... stressed. All my teachers seem to be, uh, getting off on assigning term papers the same week.

CHARLOTTE

God, I know. Let's plan a date this weekend to celebrate the end of the misery. Cheesecake Factory? My treat.

DREW

You spoil me.

CHARLOTTE

I'm a modern woman.

DREW

Yeah, and Nora also isn't... the easiest to work with.

CHARLOTTE

Good thing you are. That Drew friendliness and charm has defeated far greater enemies. You'll get her on your side, because that's where everyone ends up.

(beat, she shrugs)

Or... If she's that bad, screw it: fight fire with fire. Beat her at her own game. Whatever you've got to do. You've worked too hard for this.

Drew takes this in, an idea sparking. His phone buzzes with a text from a contact saved only as, "TJ." He reads it under the table:

Sorry about the shitty day. Kiss to make it better? <3

He shuts his phone off, ignoring it entirely. Back to Charlotte. Giving himself whiplash.

DREW

You're my best friend. You know that, right?

He says it with an unexpected, but genuine, intensity. She smiles at him.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah. You're mine, too.

They're smiling at each other, but Drew's expression is clouded.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - FRONT OFFICE - DAY

Prescott sorts files behind the main desk when Drew, just as stressed as before, walks in.

PRESCOTT

Yo, bro.

*

DREW

So, uh, how's being an office aide?
I'm... looking into it for next
semester.

*

PRESCOTT

I spend forty minutes a day
stapling crap and get community
service for National Honor Society
without actually having to do any
community service. It's the perfect
crime!

Drew laughs a little too loudly and leans closer to Prescott.
Conspiratorially. Only not super good at it.

DREW

You've really found the keys to the
kingdom.

PRESCOTT

If your idea of a reigning populace
is some filing cabinets? Totally,
my dude.

DREW

Question. If I needed a student's
home address, would you be able
to... pass it along?

PRESCOTT

If I may, a follow-up inquiry: who?

DREW

Nora Rimmer.

PRESCOTT

Your newspaper chick? Couldn't you
just... ask her? I know she's ice-
cold, but--

DREW

It's sort of a... surprise.

PRESCOTT

Interesting.

*

*

DREW *
Is it actually, though? *

PRESCOTT *
Are you trying to, like, get with *
her? *

DREW *
I have a girlfriend! *

PRESCOTT *
Valid counterpoint. I'm just *
saying, she's cute. And, you *
know... scary. *

Prescott darts off and returns a moment later, passing Drew a *
slip of paper with Nora's address scribbled on it. Drew skims *
it and cocks his head, confused. *

DREW
She lives in Bridgeport?

PRESCOTT
Yeah, I noticed that, too. Niche
choice, Rimmer fam.

EXT. NORA AND GRACE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Drew sits on the stoop, scrolling through his phone. Waiting.

Nora pulls into the driveway and, seeing him, leaps out of
her car in a panic.

She's in her work uniform. Drew snaps a few pictures as she
approaches. Realizing this, Nora tries to hide her face.

NORA
What the hell?

DREW
I stalked you back. It's not that
hard.

NORA
How did you get my address?

DREW
Easily. Is this what you're hiding?
Black Rock? Who cares?

NORA
I could say the same about you.

Drew stands up. Jaw hard.

DREW

I'm not quitting the Torch Press.
You tried to scare me? It didn't
work.

(deep breath)

I am lying to everyone in my life.
I am a fucking mess. I'm two
different people, and it's getting
more and more impossible to...
exist. And that's all mine. Outing
me is the kind of fucked up thing
you couldn't come back from. You're
cold and you're mean but you're not
evil.

This hits Nora. Hard.

NORA

What are you doing? Why are you
here?

DREW

I'm betting on you, Rimmer. I'm
choosing to believe we could
actually be friends by the end of
all of this.

NORA

I don't do friends.

DREW

And I don't usually do friendships
with heartless sociopaths, so it
looks like we'll both be making
exceptions.

Nora smiles bitterly at this.

NORA

So we're stuck with each other?

Drew crosses her front lawn, already unlocking his car.

DREW

Looks like it. See you tomorrow.

He gets in and drives off. Nora stands alone on her lawn.

INT. NORA AND GRACE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Clearly still very rattled, Nora does homework at the kitchen table.

Grace enters, loud and bumbling. Clearly a little drunk.

NORA

I thought your shift ended two hours ago.

GRACE

I stayed to have a drink with Nate after.

NORA

(ew)

Nate the bartender?

GRACE

Well, it's not like I'm swimming in options.

Nora watches Grace as she gets herself water. Grace plops down across from Nora.

NORA

What do you remember about the night that Mom left?

GRACE

Nothing particularly interesting. It was just another night. You and I were buried in homework, Mom was holed up in her office, too busy with work to pay attention to the rest of us...

NORA

Yeah, and Dad was a little too tipsy for a weeknight. Like usual.

FLASHES OF:

The Rimmer's old house -- much nicer, well taken care of, in Fairfield proper.

A sleek BLACK TOWN CAR pulls up in front.

ALICE CAMPBELL passes through the dining room -- we don't see her face.

Nora does homework at the table, head down. Alice kisses the top of her head, then flits out the door--

RETURN TO SCENE. *

Nora looks sadly at Grace. *

NORA (CONT'D) *
And then she was gone. *

GRACE *
And then she was gone. *

NORA *
Do you think she'll ever come back? *

GRACE *
No. I don't. *

Grace gets up to put her empty glass in the sink and heads *
into the living room. More confused and freaked out than *
before, Nora lets her head drop onto her books with a loud *
groan. *

Plucking at the rubber bands on her wrist under the table.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - TORCH PRESS OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Nora sits at one of the computers. Drew bursts in. Tense.

DREW
Um. Hey.

NORA
Hey.

He settles in next to her.

DREW
What did you do with the pictures
you took?

NORA
What did you do with the pictures
you took?

They stare at each other.

NORA (CONT'D)
Mutually assured destruction...

DREW
I won't tell if you won't.

NORA
Do I have a choice?

DREW
Doesn't look like it.

A long beat. The tense silence is interrupted by Mariah, bustling in, overloaded with textbooks and tote bags.

MARIAH
Great, you both are here! It's like you read my mind. We're already on the exact same wavelength, which is just so special.

As she settles in, Nora widens her eyes at Drew, ever so slightly. He rolls his eyes back. They both grin at each other. Their first genuine moment of... friendship?

MARIAH (CONT'D)
I want to hear your pitches for the first issue's theme.

NORA
I want to go big. Memorable.

DREW
Me, too. It's like... Hawley puts so much pressure on us to be perfect students that it forgets we're people. I want the Torch Press to demand better. Actually -- I've got a lead for a Hawley expose that might... I don't know.

NORA
Way to sell it, Haddad.

DREW
Well, maybe "lead" is stretching it. A concept. An idea. A notion.

MARIAH
We're all ears, Drew!

DREW
It started when I saw this graffiti that said--

The speaker crackles with an announcement.

PRESCOTT (O.S.)
Would D Haddad and Nora Rimmer
please report to the main office.
Headmaster Bonney wants to see you.

Nora and Drew widen their eyes at each other.

END OF ACT III

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ACT IV

INT. HAWLEY PREP - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

Dark wood with gold-plated accents. Nora and Drew sit tensely in plush armchairs across from HEADMASTER JAMES BONNEY, 60s. So old. So white. Privilege personified. Hard to please and impossible to impress.

HEADMASTER BONNEY

My new two Editors-in-Training.
Your service to the school has not
gone unnoticed.

*

NORA/DREW

Thank you, sir.

HEADMASTER BONNEY

I brought you here because you now
share one of the most prestigious
titles at Hawley. You'll be looked
at as leaders, examples. This new-
fangled set-up was hardly ideal,
but Mr. Creswick and Miss Barnes
were both remarkably insistent that
you two are worth it.

*
*
*
*
*

A long pause. Nora and Drew are both squirming.

HEADMASTER BONNEY (CONT'D)

Don't mess it up.

NORA/DREW

Of course, sir! We would never...

They nod. Uncomfortable. Bright red.

*

HEADMASTER BONNEY

Now that the formalities are out of
the way... This year mark's
Hawley's bicentennial anniversary.
That'll be the theme of your first
issue, of course. You'll have
access to whatever school records
you need.

Drew shoots Nora a panicked look. She shakes her head slightly and flashes Bonney a wide smile.

NORA

We're very excited to get started,
sir.

Drew's eyes widen in shock.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - BASEMENT RECORDS ROOM - DAY

A mostly forgotten corner room in the school's basement.

Stuffed with old yearbooks, Hawley relics, and ancient filing cabinets.

Drew and Nora half-heartedly poke around. Nora flips through a yearbook as Drew tugs on a cabinet that won't open. He jerks it a little too hard and one of the hinges slips off.

He sheepishly attempts to fix it.

It's labeled "N." He gives up and grabs another yearbook.

DREW

I can't believe that Bonney is
insisting on such a lame theme.

*
*

NORA

He's a traditionalist who got stuck
with a girl from Black Rock and the
only Muslim kid at Hawley as the
potential future heads of his
propaganda machine.

*
*
*

DREW

Calm down. He's just old and hates
change. That's the reason.

*
*

NORA

If you're not this emotionally
invested in the Torch Press, you're
free to step down at any time.

DREW

Not happening. Move on.

NORA

Bonney would love any excuse to get
rid of us -- including excess
cheek. We need to color inside the
lines to ever get what we want.
Eyes on the prize, Haddad.

DREW

We can still try to leave this place better off than when we found it.

NORA

Very adorable. Love the enthusiasm. Anyway: what was that lead-shaped thing you mentioned about earlier?

DREW

Did you hear about the Molly Hirota incident?

NORA

I witnessed it, actually.

DREW

Even better! There was graffiti by the urinals in the fourth floor bathroom that she deserved it. Signed by N...

He raises an eyebrow at her.

DREW (CONT'D)

Which isn't you, right? You *did* blackmail me.

NORA

As if I have the spare time to elaborately harass a sophomore I barely know. Anyway--

She digs around in her backpack and pulls out the smushed-up "N" envelope from the beginning. Passes it to a stunned Drew.

NORA (CONT'D)

I found it outside her locker, right after.

DREW

So whatever was in this fancy envelope made Molly go crazy.

NORA

Don't say crazy. It's sexist.

DREW

I've been asking around about Molly to try and get some more intel, but I haven't gotten anything good yet.

NORA

So you're saying your strategy of
gossiping isn't working out well
for you?

DREW

It's preliminary research!
Gathering sources!
(Nora rolls her eyes)
Whoever N is, they harassed Molly
until she broke. Who knows where
they'll hit next...

Drew flips a page in the yearbook in his lap. His eyes widen.
He holds the page out to Nora.

CLOSE IN ON:

Early 90s Hawley. A DUDE has his arm slung around a GIRL.

His Hawley blazer has a garish patch messily sewn on over his
heart: "N" in fancy cursive. Same font as the seal.

The caption reads: "Juniors ABRAHAM GOLDEN and ALICE CAMPBELL
relax on the quad in between classes."

RETURN TO SCENE.

Nora's eyes widen at the photo. She snaps a picture with her
phone.

DREW (CONT'D)

See?! The N means *something*. We
just need to figure out what.

NORA

That girl, Alice Campbell? Is, uh,
my mom. So...

DREW

Holy crap. That's perfect! You can
ask her directly!

NORA

I, um, can't. Actually.

DREW

Listen, I get it. The whole point
of parents is to be, like, brick
walls with ridiculous expectations.
But this is--

NORA

Not like that. She left on a work trip two years ago and... never came back.

*

DREW

Crap. Sorry. You don't even, like, talk on the phone? Email?

Nora shakes her head, gaze averted.

DREW (CONT'D)

When did she graduate Hawley?

NORA

Early 90s.

DREW

So N has been around at least that long.

NORA

And maybe she... was N. Whatever that means.

Drew turns his attention back to the yearbook.

Nora scrolls through her contacts until she hits "Mom." Opens a text window and attaches the yearbook picture:

Explain this. What's N?

Jaw hard, she clicks SEND. The text doesn't go through, but Drew jabs her arm with the yearbook, so she doesn't notice.

*

*

DREW

The other last name is Golden. Like... Cassidy Golden? That creepy sophomore?

Nora grimaces.

NORA

Oh, god. Probably.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - DINING HALL - DAY

Drew and Nora enter the crowded dining hall. Drew spots him first: CASSIDY GOLDEN, 15. Sweaty, angry nerd. Eating alone.

DREW

Spotted. By the trash cans.

NORA

Because he is a trash can...

They approach and plop down across from Cassidy. He looks up. Narrows his eyes.

CASSIDY

To what do I owe the great honor of the future heads of the Hawley press gracing me with their presence?

*

DREW

News travels fast.

CASSIDY

A change in regime is a noteworthy thing.

NORA

We're actually researching an article for the Torch Press now, and thought you might be able to help.

CASSIDY

Color me flattered.

NORA

We're looking into the increasing amount of graffiti at school. Most of it signed with just a letter -- N.

Cassidy unmistakably stiffens, but tries to play it off.

Nora sees this and presses harder. Gleefully.

NORA (CONT'D)

We have reason to believe it may have some connection to Molly Hirota's... incident.

Cassidy is getting even sweatier. If that's possible.

CASSIDY

I don't see yet why I'm relevant regarding--

DREW

We know your father is somehow involved.

NORA

Makes sense. He's the only reason
you're ever relevant to anything --
right, Cassidy?

*

Cassidy stands up, hurriedly gathering his stuff.

CASSIDY

Christ. I didn't sign up to get
harassed by two intrepid busybody
wannabes over my cafeteria sushi.
Catch you both never, if I can help
it.

NORA

So is the N something your father
knows about that he never bothered
to--

Cassidy slams his chair into the table. Teeth gritted.

CASSIDY

Listen. They're a myth, okay?
They're. Not. Real.

Cassidy stomps off.

NORA

"They?"

DREW

There's a "they" to find. We're
headed in the right direction.

Nora raises her eyebrows at Drew.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

INT. HAWLEY PREP - TORCH PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Drew and Nora stand in front of a chalkboard with all of the pertinent clues and information scribbled on it. A photocopy of the yearbook page, pictures of Molly and Cassidy and the graffiti, the envelope...

DREW

So I need to know everything about what happened with Molly. Her exact cadence and grammar. Maybe you should just reenact the whole thing. Listen, I'm you--

He strikes an overly dramatic and hammy impression of Nora. Her gaze doesn't waver from the chalkboard.

NORA

I don't look like that.

DREW

No, because I'm too pure of heart to accurately replicate your demon glare.

NORA

I've told you all I know. She wasn't exactly generous with the particulars.

Nora grabs the picture of Molly.

NORA (CONT'D)

It'd be so much simpler to talk to Molly directly. Maybe we should try figuring out where she lives...

DREW

We were paired up as Zimbabwe together on a Model UN project for Global Civ last year.

*

NORA

So...?

DREW

We always studied at her house. I know where she lives.

NORA

And you've just been sitting on that? This whole time?

DREW

I obviously tried texting her already. I'm not stupid.

NORA

And...?

DREW

And... she never responded and I wanted to respect her boundaries!

NORA

You are the worst journalist that I have ever met.

DREW

Oh, like you know a million--

NORA

One: where does she live? Two: what are you doing after school?

Drew groans.

EXT. MOLLY HIROTA'S HOUSE - DAY

An extensive McMansion. Bordering on tacky.

Drew and Nora tentatively approach. Nora's holding a stack of books and folders. Drew pushes the doorbell.

NORA

(under her breath)
Be cool, Haddad. Okay?

DREW

What? I am cool--

The door opens. It's ELIZABETH HIROTA, 40s, hyper-protective under the best circumstances -- and these are not that. *

She sees their Hawley uniforms and is immediately wary.

DREW (CONT'D)

Mrs. Hirota? Hello!

MRS. HIROTA

What do you want?

NORA

We're just, um, two friends of Molly's. We have some of her assignments and wanted to see how she was doing. After... everything.

MRS. HIROTA

Why should I believe that? How am I supposed to know you're not here to torture her, like the others?

Nora blinks, completely thrown off her game. Drew leaps in--

DREW

I don't know if you remember me, Mrs. Hirota, but I worked on a project last year with Molly for Lake's honors Global Civ. I was over every day for like a month. I think I ate all of your Girl Scout cookies single-handedly.

Mrs. Hirota nods in recognition, but doesn't move to let them in.

DREW (CONT'D)

Molly and I don't talk all the time -- we're both pretty busy, and don't have any classes together this semester -- but I always really liked her. She's smart and she knows who she is. What happened... There's some fundamental flaws in how Hawley is run and what we're all taught and... I'm sorry. Molly didn't deserve this.

Mrs. Hirota finally steps aside. Gestures the two forward.

MRS. HIROTA

She's upstairs in her room. You have 15 minutes.

INT. MOLLY HIROTA'S HOUSE - STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

They race up the stairs.

NORA

That was a stroke of brilliance.

DREW

It was also the truth. You should try it sometime.

INT. MOLLY'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Girly and one-percent-y: a silk canopy bed, giant framed vanity photos of Molly as a toddler, everything in shades of teal and rose.

Molly sits on her bed with a book. Her phone buzzes with a text from her mom:

I sent some friends up with homework. Text if you want them to leave. xoxo

There's a KNOCK. Molly leaps up. Looks down at her Tinkerbell PJs. Panics, but it's too late to do anything about that. She smooths her hair down and arranges herself pseudo-casually at her desk.

MOLLY

Come in!

Enter Drew and Nora. Molly cackles.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

My mom said friends, but sure.

NORA

Hi, Molly! It's Nora and Drew. From school. Here to bring you--

Nora passes off the stack of books. Molly sifts through them skeptically.

MOLLY

These are just random textbooks that have been checked out from the library.

NORA

Yeah, and if you could make sure to return them in a timely fashion, they're under my name, so...

MOLLY

What are you doing here?

DREW

We were worried!

MOLLY

About me?

NORA

Everyone is.

DREW

I'm not going to lie. You're all
anyone can talk about.

MOLLY

I always thought my legacy would be
placing in the science fair or
perfect attendance. Not becoming
Hawley's Zelda Fitzgerald.

Molly looks at them, expecting laughter. Weird silence
instead.

DREW

So does the Zelda reference signify
a mental health thing, or a piece
of writing you're not getting
credit for...?

*
*
*
*
*

Nora rolls her eyes at Drew's nervous joke and cuts him off.

*

NORA

What does the N stand for?

MOLLY

N?

NORA

I found the envelope, right after.
My locker is right across from
yours.

MOLLY

You wouldn't believe me if I told
you.

DREW

Try us.

MOLLY

I... can't.

DREW

We talked to Cassidy Golden and he
said--

Molly is genuinely laughing now.

MOLLY

Wow. Cassidy fucking Golden. You really don't know anything, do you? Oh, my God. They'll eat you alive if you keep digging.

NORA

Who will, Molly?

MOLLY

The Nobles.
(deep breath)
There. Now you know that.

DREW

What does that mean?

MOLLY

Everything. And nothing. Depends on who you ask.

NORA

We're asking you, but you're being a fortune cookie about it, so--

MOLLY

One: that's super racist.

NORA

Oh! Um! That's not why I said -- it's because you were being so evasive --

MOLLY

Two: my life as I know it is over. Hawley suspended me for being a disturbance. So that's a black mark on my record that I'll never be able to fully explain. When I go back to school... I don't get to be Molly Hirota anymore. I'm that crazy breakdown girl until I graduate. Maybe even after. And that's exactly what the Nobles wanted.

She takes a deep, shaky breath. Tears spilling over now.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

But even after everything... I'm still trying to protect them. I still want them to like me.

DREW

What is... a Noble? You know,
exactly?

MOLLY

It's a secret... club. Society.
Whatever.

NORA

Are you a member?

MOLLY

(tearing up)
I almost was.

NORA

What stopped you?

MOLLY

They'd tell you it's my fault.

DREW

Is it?

MOLLY

The truth has nothing to do with...
anything.

NORA

What exactly do the Nobles even
want?

MOLLY

Control, mostly. For things to stay
like they've always been. Probably
more that I don't even know about.
It's not like I made it very far.

*
*
*

DREW

So they're... evil?

Molly bursts into laughter while she's still crying.

MOLLY

It's all a game to them. They get
off on the cat-and-mouse of it all.
The code words, the rituals, the
fucking N's everywhere, the secret
passageways at Hawley...

NORA

(condescending snort)
You can't be serious.

MOLLY

Sure, don't believe me. That's probably better for all of us.

Drew jerks up, struck with an idea.

DREW

Wait! When we were researching in the basement, we found...

MOLLY

Just stop, okay? Get off the train here, before you lose control entirely. I swear it's not worth it.

NORA

It's too late for that. I think my Mom might be connected to all of this, somehow. She left a few years ago, and my family... withered up, ruined. So if the Nobles know where to find her... I'm going to keep digging.

A long silence as Molly sits with this.

MOLLY

Damn. Tangled-ass web. This isn't going to end well for anybody.

END OF ACT V

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ACT VI

INT. HAWLEY PREP - BASEMENT RECORDS ROOM - MONDAY

Drew races straight for the N cabinet, Nora at his heels.

DREW

It was weird and stuck the other day, and I thought I broke it -- but maybe it was already broken and that's the point!

NORA

That can't be possible. This is Hawley, not Hogwarts.

DREW

Spoken like a true Slytherin. Cunning but too practical.

He shoves his shoulder against it. Hard. Nothing.

NORA

And sometimes, a cabinet is just a cabinet.

Drew removes both hinges and the cabinet door slides off. He peers inside: a dark and cramped hallway.

DREW

And sometimes I'm right about everything. Actually, that's all the time.

He ducks inside, but she stops him, fumbling for her phone.

NORA

We need photographic evidence of everything.

She clicks, but the room is too dark for the picture to come out. She switches on the flash and takes another.

Drew is still recovering from the light as they both head down into...

INT. UNDER THE SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

A long hallway. Exposed concrete. Little light. No windows.

Nora and Drew tentatively make their way forward.

NORA

Wow. We are absolutely about to be murdered.

DREW

This ambiance doesn't exactly scream elite anything.

NORA

But isn't that the whole point? In order to stay secret, they've got to be... You know. A secret.

DREW

Whoa.

NORA

Oh, shut up.

Nearby: FOOTSTEPS! People APPROACHING. Nora and Drew freeze.

DREW

We just tell them we got lost and have no idea how we ended up--

Nora yanks Drew towards the closest door.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - NOT SURE YET - CONTINUOUS

Nora shuts the door. Her and Drew are breathing hard as they listen with every fiber of their being.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)

We're running late. And I don't think the sub bought it.

*

VOICE #2 (O.S.)

It's the same hall pass we've been using for decades. It's legit. Stop being a baby about every little thing, Cloth.

The voices and footsteps fade. Nora and Drew finally turn and see where they've ended up:

A decadent, old fashioned sitting room. Beautiful bookcases, lush carpeting. Old money as hell.

The letter "N" is all over -- if you're paying attention.

Their investigation begins immediately. Drew examines the bookshelf. He grabs a slim binder labeled, "JACOBINS DEFEATED."

He opens it -- a handwritten list of names and dates. He skims until he recognizes one:

DAVID RIMMER. 5/18/2016.

*

His eyes widen.

DREW

Um, Nora? You really need to--

But Nora's not listening. She's wedged herself into the corner. Holds up her phone to take a picture.

The camera flashes--

A LOUD, SCREECHY ALARM SOUNDS.

Nora and Drew slide right back into panic.

DREW (CONT'D)

You left the flash on? Are you joking?

NORA

How was I supposed to know--

Drew grabs Nora and pulls her into the only other door in the room--

INT. HAWLEY PREP - CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Now we're right back where we left off.

They both dive towards the back and curl up, breathing hard.

They listen as a GROUP angrily enters the room they were just in.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)

I can't find anything...

VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Something set off the alarm, Mud.
Find what it was, or you'll pay.

Nora takes a deep, shaky breath. Trapped. Terrified.

VOICE #3 (O.S.)

Mud! Check the closet!

Drew closes his eyes and waits for the inevitable. He almost yelps with surprise when Nora shoves him deeper into the closet -- behind a rack of robes and blazers.

She dives behind a stack of boxes, curling up and pulling more in the way. Just in time for--

A CRACK OF LIGHT as the door opens. A silhouette looms: the MUD. Whatever that means.

MUD
Sir, I think--

ROBE (O.S.)
When have I ever cared what you think?

The Mud sighs.

MUD
All clear.

The door slams shut. Everything goes dark. All you can hear is Drew's frantic panting.

DREW
We have to get out of here. Like. Yesterday.

NORA
We need to give them time to go away, first.

Nora opens the box in front of her and rifles through it. Drew is deeply flabbergasted by her nonchalance.

DREW
If you set off another alarm, I'm leaving you behind.

Nora fans out a few of the files. They're each labeled with classes and teachers.

NORA
Answer keys. For every test in every class Hawley offers. Going back years.

Drew grabs the AP US HISTORY folder. Opens it and right on top--

DREW
I took this test last week.

Nora grabs the folder from him and tucks it into her bag.

NORA
We should go.

DREW
Oh, you think?!

INT. HAWLEY PREP - HALLWAY - THE NEXT MORNING

Nora and Drew sprint down the hallway.

DREW
We have to tell someone. This has
all shot way above our pay grade--

NORA
Shhh! Not here!

INT. HAWLEY PREP - CRESWICK'S CLASSROOM - MINUTES LATER

Freshman English. Knee-deep into a class discussion on "To Kill A Mockingbird." Creswick is the only one fully awake.

Nora and Drew bust in. Flustered and shameless.

DREW
We're here on newspaper business!
Uh, sir!

NORA
It's urgent. We promise.

INT. UNDER THE SCHOOL - A WHILE LATER

Nora and Drew lead a deeply confused Creswick through the dark basement hallway.

MR. CRESWICK
This doesn't feel like a wing of
Hawley that students have any
business in...

DREW
Oh, we're aware!

NORA
You need to see what we found to
believe it.

DREW
They've got a whole creepy gilded
age sitting room down here, it's
insane--

CRESWICK

Who?

NORA

The Nobles.

Nora reaches the door first. She opens it slowly, leaning into the dramatic reveal--

INT. THE ROOM FROM BEFORE - CONTINUOUS

Nora bursts in, Drew and Creswick right behind her.

NORA

See, it's--

She halts when she realizes:

It's a sparse, grimy storage room. Shelves of cleaning supplies. Boxes of moth-eaten textbooks.

Everything from before is gone.

DREW

What the...

CRESWICK

As much as I admire your investigative enthusiasm, I'm still... very lost.

Nora is too stunned to form words. Drew's overcompensating by rambling into forever.

DREW

We were just down here yesterday... It was -- it was a secret lair! I know this sounds crazy, but what would we get from making up something about this creepy secret hallway? Why is there a creepy secret hallway, in the first place?!

CRESWICK

This building is centuries old. Renovating this wing up to code would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Guys, if this is some Torch Press hazing thing...

DREW

We wouldn't! We didn't! This has to be-- is this the wrong door, Nora?

NORA

It's not. We're exactly where we were.

Nora takes a step further into the room, studying it intently. Her gaze lands on a BRASS KEY on the floor. It's the only thing that gleams amongst the dust and grime. *

She crouches down to grab it, but freezes at the harsh tone in Creswick's voice-- *

CRESWICK

I need to get back to class. Please just-- focus on the paper. Stay above ground. I don't want you two to have been a... lapse in judgement, on my end. No more pranks.

DREW

Sir, it wasn't--

Creswick gestures expectantly towards the door. Nora and Drew follow him out, sheepishly. Nora leans towards Drew, voice low-- *

NORA

It was a prank. On us.

They share a wide-eyed look as they leave. *

INT. HAWLEY PREP - NEWSPAPER OFFICE - LATER

Drew paces nervously. Nora twitches in a computer chair. The answer keys Nora stole have been added to the clue board.

DREW

We saw it. We were both there. Unless we are experiencing a simultaneous, identical psychotic break--

NORA

It was there. And now it's... not.

DREW

What's that term we learned in health about, like, abuse, and a bird, and being tricked -- gaslighting. We're being gaslighted!

(beat, unsure)

Gaslit?

NORA

Let's start with a list, of what we know so far. One: The Nobles are absolutely a thing. Two--

DREW

They're shady. The weird codenames, the answer keys, the disappearing headquarters, whatever is going on with your family... Speaking of: is your dad David Rimmer?

(off her nod)

I saw his name in some book down there. It was, like, a list of people who have been... "defeated." I obviously don't know a lot about you or your parents, but... I think you're right, that they're tangled up in all of this. We just have to figure out how.

Drew offers her a small smile. Nora sits with this for a long moment -- the unearned empathy and generosity. Then clears her throat self-consciously.

NORA

So I've been reading a lot of message boards. Online.

DREW

Oh...kay?

NORA

About, like, you know.

(whispers)

Gay teens.

Drew would rather die than get into this. Cheeks flushed.

DREW

This really isn't necessary.

NORA

It's hard in a way that... I've never even had to think about.

(MORE)

NORA (CONT'D)

I don't make it a habit of being wrong very often, so I'm not too adept at admitting it, but -- you were right. Threatening you with those pictures was... beyond not okay. I wasn't thinking about the bigger picture, just winning. And...

(pained breath)

I'm sorry.

Drew processes this.

DREW

What did you just say?

NORA

Did you seriously not hear all that?

DREW

Oh, I heard. I just want to hear it again, so I can really commit it to memory. The part where you admit you were wrong was my favorite--

Nora bursts into relieved laughter and turns back to the board.

NORA

Okay, enough feelings. Lots of work to do, Haddad.

DREW

Yeah. And-- thanks.

NORA

Yeah. Me, too.

They gaze at the board, wide-eyed, swimming in all the things they still don't know.

DREW

Where do we even begin? We blew it with Creswick.

NORA

We only know one almost-Noble.

EXT. MOLLY HIROTA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Drew parks his car on Molly's street. He and Nora fling themselves out and jog towards Molly's.

NORA

She has to talk. We'll make her.

DREW

Love the energy, but we can't make anyone do anything, unless you have plans to go full-on Benghazi--

(Nora raises an eyebrow)

Oh, my God!

As they near the house, Nora clocks the first weird detail: no cars in the Hirota's driveway. But it's Drew who first sees the "FOR SALE" signing swinging next to the mailbox.

DREW (CONT'D)

Wait. What the--

Nora digs around in her bag, but can't find her phone.

NORA

Crap, I must have left my phone at school-- call her. Call her!

Nora sprints to the front door and bangs loudly. Nothing. Drew stands by the street, phone to his ear, panic building.

DREW

Her number's been disconnected!

NORA

We were here two days ago. She was here two days ago. We talked to her fucking mother--

DREW

(scrolling through his phone)

Social media's been purged, too. Facebook, Insta -- it's like she never existed at all. Like we made her up.

Nora walks back towards Drew in a daze.

NORA

They got to her before we could. Which means -- they're watching. All of us. You, me, Molly, my mom and dad--

DREW

When your mom left, was it-- like this? Like evaporating into nothing?

A long moment of silence as Nora contemplates this.

NORA

Let's get out of here. Before this gets any worse.

They slowly make their way back to Drew's car.

NORA (V.O.)

That was only the start of the rest. I had no idea how bad it would get -- or how fast.

As they near the car, Nora freezes.

There's a thick envelope tucked into the windshield wipers.

It's fastened with a red seal.

Drew spots it, too. His expression darkens. Nora grabs it. It's addressed to "Nora & Drew." The ink is still wet.

Drew watches nervously as she opens it.

On a sheet of expensive and cream-colored paper, someone has written in perfect cursive:

NORA

(reading)

"We ruined Alice, and we'll ruin you, too."

*
*

She and Drew look to each other fearfully.

Nora clears her throat. Rips up the note. Raises her voice, but her hands are shaking. Throws her arms out and screams:

NORA (CONT'D)

You still out there, Nobles?! Are you listening? You can send all the dramatic notes you want -- we're not scared! Whoever you are, whatever you're doing -- we'll find you! We'll ruin you first!

*

Drew is unable to hide his shock as Nora slams her way into his car. Buzzing with panic, he follows her, calling out weakly--

DREW

Yeah! What she said!

He locks the car twice, to be sure, before he starts it.

NORA (V.O.)

I was lying, obviously. I'd never
been more terrified. But if the
target was already on my family's
back, I wasn't going to go down
without a fight.

*

Drew zooms off.

INT. HAWLEY PREP - BASEMENT RECORDS ROOM - SAME TIME

*

Lights are off. School has emptied for the day.

*

CRESWICK enters the darkened room, shrouded in shadows.
Expression one of grim determination.

*

*

He has a phone in one hand. It lights up with a text from
Grace -- Nora's phone. He slips it into his pocket.

*

*

There's a power drill tucked under his other arm.

*

He kneels down in front of the N cabinet.

*

Methodically drills it closed. Permanently sealing the
entrance.

*

*

So Nora and Drew will have to start from the beginning...

*

SLAM TO BLACK!

END OF PILOT.