

THE SACRED LIES

"CHAPTER ONE"

by  
Raelle Tucker

*Based on the novel "The Sacred Lies of Minnow Bly"  
by Stephanie Oakes*

*Inspired by the fairy tale "the Handless Maiden"  
By the Brothers Grimm*

EXT. BRIDGE UNDERPASS - DAWN

TIGHT ON: A BLOOD-SOAKED GIRL. She's 17, pale and small for her age. A long, tangled BRAID drags down her back. She's wearing tattered men's work clothes, streaked with blood, hanging loosely from her thin limbs. Her name is MINNOW BLY.

She's standing in the SNOW, her breath melting the frosty air. Beneath a graffiti-covered metal BRIDGE that shudders violently under the ROAR OF OVERHEAD TRAFFIC.

Crumpled in a dirty puddle by her feet is a YOUNG MAN'S BODY. BEATEN SAVAGELY INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS. Pulped. Her worn-out men's boots and the surrounding snow are SPATTERED WITH HIS BLOOD.

Minnow stares down at him. Not remorseful or afraid. She looks lost. Like she's woken from a dream to an unfamiliar world.

OVER HER SHOULDER: A WAIL OF A SIREN. A POLICE CRUISER screeches to a stop, LIGHTS FLASHING. TWO UNIFORMED MALE OFFICERS leap out. Hands on holsters.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Back away from him! Hands in the air!

The girl blankly turns to look at them. Does not raise her hands. An officer draws his weapon, moves closer -

POLICE OFFICER #2

Lemme see your hands!

Minnow slowly raises her arms above her head...

ON THE POLICE OFFICERS. Squinting into the dim glow of the yellow street lamps. It takes them a moment to wrap their heads around what they're seeing, to process the horror of it.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: SHE HAS NO HANDS. At the end of her wrists are RAW, painful-looking STUMPS, the flesh crudely STITCHED TOGETHER with black embroidery thread.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - LATER - MORNING

Wood walls. Stained ceiling tiles. Coffee burning in a sticky pot.

Minnow stands awkwardly by a cluttered desk. The blood drying on her face. Her ELBOWS above her stumps HANDCUFFED painfully behind her back.

Nearby, the arresting POLICE OFFICERS discuss the situation with a tired, frizzy-haired FEMALE OFFICER. The woman glances pityingly at the girl.

FEMALE OFFICER

Did you really have to cuff her?

POLICE OFFICER #1

You should've seen what she did to this kid. Looked like he'd been run over.

Minnow doesn't react to this. The female officer approaches. She gently unlocks the tight cuffs. As the metal scrapes her open wounds, Minnow flinches. Tries not to make a sound. The female officer stares down at Minnow's stumps, works to hide her disgust.

FEMALE OFFICER

What happened to your hands?

Minnow doesn't answer. One of the cops shrugs -

POLICE OFFICER #1

She won't talk.

The Female Officer shoots him a look, then faces Minnow -

FEMALE OFFICER

Can you tell me your name?

Minnow's voice is a parched whisper -

MINNOW

Minnow Bly.

Nearby, the other officer flips through a heavy manual -

POLICE OFFICER #2

How do we get her prints without... you know, fingers?

INT. POLICE STATION - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

A Police Officer approaches Minnow, holding out a SQUARE OF COTTON.

POLICE OFFICER #2

We're gonna need a DNA sample.

Off Minnow's blank look -

POLICE OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)

Spit.

Minnow tries to gather all the moisture she can. Lets a small drop of spit fall from her mouth onto the cotton square. The police officer closes it in a PLASTIC BOX.

INT. POLICE STATION - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Minnow poses for a MUG SHOT. When the FLASH goes off she WINCES, COWERS, blinded. Expecting to be hurt.

She's never had her photo taken before.

INT. POLICE STATION - EXAMINATION ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Minnow is led into a room with a tight-sheeted BED with attached stirrups. Beside the bed, a TRAY with tongs and other sterile tools. At the sight of the bed, Minnow tries to squirm away from the Female Officer.

FEMALE OFFICER

(soothingly)

It's okay. It's procedure in abuse cases.

MINNOW

I-- I don't need that. Nothing like that happened to me.

FEMALE OFFICER

Are you sure?

Minnow nods. The woman slides on a pair of latex gloves.

FEMALE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Okay. I will need to take some pictures though. Of your injuries.

The Female officer reaches into a plastic bin. Takes out a beige pair of UNDERPANTS and a mismatched BRA.

FEMALE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Undress and put these on.

She holds the garments out to Minnow. Minnow doesn't move. It takes the woman a moment to realize: Minnow can't take the garments. Or undress herself. She glances at Minnow's stumps -

FEMALE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Oh. I'll help you.

The woman kneels and unbuttons Minnow's heavy men's trousers. As she starts to pull them off her thin hips, an OBJECT drops from the trouser pocket to the tile floor with a SOFT CLATTER -

A SKELETAL HAND, held together at the joints with GOLD WIRE. The Female Officer's eyes flare with alarm -

FEMALE OFFICER (CONT'D)

What is that?

Minnow wordlessly holds up a stump.

A beat. The Officer struggles to work her face back to normal. Then she carefully reaches into the other pocket - lifts out a SECOND WITHERED HAND. She places both hands side by side on the silver tray.

Minnow eyes her severed hands. Suddenly exposed, anxious.

MINNOW

When will I get them back?

The Officer averts her eyes.

FEMALE OFFICER

That won't be possible. They are human remains. There are laws about things like that.

MINNOW

What will happen to them?

FEMALE OFFICER

They'll be held as evidence, and when they're no longer needed, they'll be incinerated.

Minnow's eyes grow wide with horror. She chokes -

MINNOW

They're mine! Give them back!

Minnow desperately tries to LUNGE for the tray - but the Officer BLOCKS HER with a solid arm across her chest -

FEMALE OFFICER

If you force me, I *will* subdue you.

Minnow's shoulders slowly sag in surrender. Her eyes go flat.

OFF MINNOW'S HANDS, being carried out of the room on a silver tray.

INT. HOSPITAL - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

OVERHEAD ANGLE: looking down on Minnow, bathed in white light, wrapped in a hospital gown, attached to a drip and softly BEEPING machines. Weaving in and out of consciousness, as blue-clad DOCTORS and NURSES work on her arms, prepping her for surgery. She mutters softly, deliriously -

MINNOW

Are you making me new hands?

A DOCTOR smiles sadly down at her -

DOCTOR

I'm sorry. We're not able to do that. Maybe someday.

Minnow turns to stare back into the light. A tear slips from the corner of her eye.

TIGHT ON: MINNOW'S STUMP - a MONTAGE OF QUICK CUTS AS - Tiny scissors slice through the primitive black stitches. The bone is shaved. The wound is packed. A piece of skin from Minnow's thigh is carefully sewn in place.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY - FLASHBACK

TIGHT ON: A FRAME of lush, green wilderness. Bright and incredibly vibrant. A pale, delicate FEMALE HAND moves in front of it. Slender pink FINGERS reaching for something...

A BOY'S HAND. Dark skin the color of burned sugar. Strong. Reaching towards hers.

The hands CONNECT, fingers interlacing. Fitting together, like they were built to do this.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - MINNOW'S ROOM - DAY

Minnow's swollen eyes slowly open. The sunlight is blinding. She's in a hospital bed. Her arms wrapped in layers of white BANDAGES.

An AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN in a wrinkled suit is standing at the end of her bed. She blinks up at him, delirious -

MINNOW

Where's Jude?

GETTENS

Miss Bly, I'm Detective Gettens --

MINNOW

(insistent, panicked)

Where is Jude?

The Detective pulls out a note pad.

GETTENS

Who is *Jude*?

Minnow hesitates... closes her mouth. Slowly becoming aware of her surroundings.

GETTENS (CONT'D)

There's been a fire. At the place you called the 'Community'.

Minnow winces in pain as she pulls herself upright, fully awake now.

GETTENS (CONT'D)

We believe someone may have started it. On purpose. Do you know anything about that?

She looks away. Shakes her head, no.

GETTENS (CONT'D)

Minnow, do you remember where you were the night of December 27th?

MINNOW

(hesitates)

Under the bridge.

GETTENS

In Missoula? All night?

(off her nod)

Do you know where your father is?  
Or your mother? Your siblings?

Minnow shakes her head, no.

GETTENS (CONT'D)

We've discovered two bodies so far.

Minnow flinches subtly but perceptibly.

GETTENS (CONT'D)

Any idea who they might be? What happened to them?

(no answer)

If you help us, maybe we can help you. You're in a lot of trouble --

Suddenly, Minnow opens her mouth, starts to SING. It's an old Peggy Lee song from the late 50's. Her voice is a high-pitched, trembling croak -

MINNOW

*Every morning, every evening,  
ain't we got fun?*

The Detective stares at her, confused, disturbed. Minnow's voice grows louder and louder, broken with TEARS-

MINNOW (CONT'D)

*Not much money, oh but honey,  
ain't we got fun? The rent's  
unpaid dear, we haven't a bus, but  
smiles are made dear, for people  
like us...*

A LARGE MALE NURSE hurries in, followed by a smaller FEMALE NURSE who shoots the Detective a dirty look. As they approach the bed, Minnow tries to crawl away -

MINNOW (CONT'D)

Stay away from me...

The female nurse takes out a SYRINGE.

NURSE

You need to rest --

MINNOW

No! I don't want it! I said NO!

Minnow STRUGGLES, SOBS, flailing her bandaged arms. But the male nurse grabs her shoulders, easily PINS HER to the mattress. The other nurse slides the loaded SYRINGE into the crook of Minnow's elbow.



As Minnow's sobs die down, Detective Gettens shakes his head pityingly. He turns and exits.

OFF MINNOW, her heavy eyelids fluttering closed.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

A dirt lot, back-dropped by towering mountains, crowded with a rickety patchwork of TRAILERS. In the middle, CHILDREN in stained clothes and sagging diapers play on a rusty swing set and dented slide. The only spot of green is a lone APPLE TREE in the center of the dirt lot.

TIGHT ON: The apples still unripened GREEN BUDS. A SMALL, PALE HAND enters frame... stretching to reach the lowest hanging fruit. The hand belongs to -

FIVE YEAR-OLD MINNOW. Her hair a wild mess. Her cheeks smeared with dirt and food. She caresses the unripe fruit delicately, wondrously, with tiny fingers.

Suddenly, a SHADOW falls over her. A HUGE HAIRY FIST reaches out and WRENCHES the apple from the branch, violently shaking the tree. Startled, little Minnow peers up at -

A TALL MAN in his early 50's, with thick, yellowed GLASSES and a heavy grey beard. He has a powerful presence, radiating a CHARISMA that makes you want to hang on his every word. His name is KEVIN BILSON. But we will come to know him as THE PROPHET. He holds the apple out by the stem -

THE PROPHET

Here you go.

He places the tiny fruit in Minnow's outstretched palm. She stares down at it hesitantly.

THE PROPHET (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to eat it?

LITTLE MINNOW

(shyly)

It's not ripe. They don't taste good yet.

The Prophet plucks the apple back from her hand. Stuffs it into his mouth whole. A grin softens his face as he chews and swallows.

*The SCREECH OF A SCREEN DOOR opening behind them -*

*SAMUEL (O.S.)*

*Minnow!*

*Minnow turns to see her father, SAMUEL BLY, 30's, dark haired, ruggedly handsome, dressed in dirty construction gear, stepping out of his trailer. His eyes lighting up when he sees The Prophet.*

*SAMUEL (CONT'D)*

*Minnow, do you know who this man is?*

*Minnow shakes her head, no. Samuel kneels beside her, taking her tiny shoulders in his hands. Looking deeply into her eyes.*

*SAMUEL (CONT'D)*

*He is holy beyond understanding.  
He talks to God.*

*Minnow peers up at the towering stranger, intrigued and a little afraid.*

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - MINNOW'S ROOM - MORNING

LOOKING OUT A LARGE PLASTIC-PANED WINDOW: the city of Missoula, Montana, blanketed in snow. And way in the distance, rising from a deep green expanse of NATIONAL FOREST, is a DIRTY CLOUD OF SMOKE. GREY ASH hovering in the air - like a heaven no one would want to go to.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Minnow. Wearing the tattered, bloody T-shirt she was arrested in under her hospital gown. Leaning weakly on the wall for support. Staring out the window at the ominous cloud.

*JUANITA (O.S.)*

*Fire's out. But they say it'll take a month for the smoke to completely clear.*

Minnow turns to see a WOMAN in a tight-fitting skirt suit and bright red lipstick, dropping her briefcase onto the bed. She's Latina, in her early 40's. A straight shooter with zero bedside manner.

*JUANITA (CONT'D)*

*My name's Juanita. And you must be the famous Minnow Bly?*

Minnow eyes her warily. Fixating on the stranger's HANDS, tipped with brightly painted red fingernails. JUANITA plops into the edge of the hospital bed. Pops open her briefcase with those hands.

JUANITA (CONT'D)

I'm an attorney. I'm here to provide you with defense counsel during your trial, and answer any questions you may have --

MINNOW

Will I go to jail?

JUANITA

Well, I won't lie to you - that's a possibility. Philip Lancaster's injuries are pretty serious -  
(consulting a file)  
A ripped spleen. A fractured mandible. Three broken ribs --

MINNOW

(startled)

That's his name? *Philip Lancaster?*

JUANITA

What did you think it was?

Minnow opens her mouth to answer... changes her mind. Juanita eyes her levelly.

JUANITA (CONT'D)

They're trying you as an adult. For aggravated assault. If there's anything you can tell me that might help your defense, you better spit it out.

Minnow turns to look at her, suddenly vulnerable.

MINNOW

I thought he was God.

OFF JUANITA, raising a structured eyebrow.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

TIGHT ON: SCOTT MACKENZIE, 35, clean cut, approachable - the all-American good looks of a sitcom dad. He smiles as he tells this story -

SCOTT

I prayed. A lot. I said: "God, use me. Use me as a vessel to enact your will, whatever that may be. Let me defend the innocent, or let me lay down my life trying." I showered. I got dressed. I ate breakfast.

WILSON (O.C.)

What did you eat for breakfast?

SCOTT

(grins)

My wife made me pancakes. And bacon. Then I loaded the car. I had the semi-automatic shotgun. My 22. 10 rounds of ammo. I drove to the clinic. Parked in the drive-thru next door. I must've waited an hour? Maybe more.

PULL WIDER TO REVEAL: Scott is HANDCUFFED to the table. In a windowless room under harsh fluorescent lighting. He's wearing institutional grey sweats.

WILSON (O.C.)

Did you consider backing out?

SCOTT

Of course. I'm human.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: The MAN asking the questions. He's in his 40's. Glasses, herringbone suit. A softness to his eyes that makes him seem more handsome than he is. We will come to know him as DR. WILSON. He's scrawls notes on a yellow legal pad.

WILSON

What made you go through with it?

Scott's face lights up as he remembers -

SCOTT

It was real cloudy. Like rain was coming. But whenever I sat there the sky just opened up...

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
and the sun came down right on me,  
right in my truck. And then, in  
that exact minute, he pulled in.  
The abortionist. And his wife.  
It was a sign. I knew the Lord  
was with me - that I was  
sanctified. I shot her first.  
Twice in the chest.

OFF WILSON. Not reacting. Taking notes.

INT. WILSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Wilson sits in a small, dated-looking office, lined with books. Behind a cluttered desk, two-finger-typing his notes into a computer. There's a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of an athletic middle aged woman - presumably his WIFE - with her arm around a TEENAGE BOY in a football uniform - prominently displayed.

There's a RAP on his door and his assistant, MARCIA, 60's, perpetually put-upon and disapproving in a charming, grandmotherly way, pops her head in.

MARCIA  
I got an Agent Ciegelski from  
Missoula for you.

WILSON  
(perplexed)  
Montana?

MARCIA  
(shrugs)  
Guess so.

WILSON  
Thanks.

He waits for her to shut the door, then picks up the phone.

WILSON (CONT'D)  
Dr. Wilson?

EXT. WILSON'S HOUSE - LATER - DAY

A modest brick house in a middle-class suburb of Washington DC.

It used to be "quaint" but now the flower beds are all dead, the lawn covered in a blanket of leaves and debris, junk mail and old newspapers piled up by the door.

Wilson's sedan pulls into the driveway. He gets out, carrying an old leather messenger bag. He steps over the junk by the door without looking at it.

INT. WILSON'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

The blinds are all shut. The heating on high. Wilson removes his jacket and shoes, neatly tucks them away.

WILSON

Carol?

No answer. He heads up some carpeted stairs to a bedroom. Through the open door we see a WOMAN in an unmade bed - facing away from him. Watching TV. She doesn't turn to greet Wilson, but she MUTES the volume on the television when she hears him approaching.

WILSON (CONT'D)

It's hot in here. Can I turn the thermostat down? Open a window?

CAROL

(without looking at  
him)

No thanks.

Wilson sits on the other side of the bed. A beat. Then -

WILSON

There's a case in Montana...

CAROL

Go.

WILSON

I don't feel comfortable leaving you right now.

CAROL

I don't need you here.

WILSON

But I *want* to be here.

He reaches out to touch her. She turns to face him. She's the same woman from the photo on his desk but her hair is greasy. Her face puffy from crying. There's a steeliness in her eyes.

CAROL

I don't want you here.

This stings. She meant it to. She turns away from him, back to the TV.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Go. Please.

Wilson sits there awkwardly for a moment. Then he gets up and walks out.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSOULA COURTHOUSE - DAY

A REPORTER stands on the snowy steps of the courthouse, surrounded by his CREW. He is mid-taping:

REPORTER

The Kevinian Cult, whose population is estimated at over a hundred, existed in total isolation and self-sufficiency for more than a decade. The world only became aware of the group when a fire burned down the primitive settlement in the Montana wilderness they dubbed 'The Community', killing at least two of its members. The identities of the deceased have not yet been released. The young woman on trial today, for an unrelated assault, was raised in the cult - her name is being withheld as she is still a minor...

WE PUSH PAST THE REPORTER, THROUGH THE HEAVY DOORS...

INT. MISSOULA COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

FIND MINNOW. Wearing the same stained black T-shirt over an ill-fitting ankle-length skirt, sitting beside Juanita in the CROWDED courtroom. The bandages are gone. The flesh of her wounds pink and HEALING.

The PROSECUTOR, a thick, self-assured man in his 40's stands at the front of the courtroom, finishing his opening statement.

He gestures to a cork board, tacked with PHOTOGRAPHS of purple bruises, X-RAYS of fractured bones, ripped organs.

PROSECUTOR

The evidence will show that Miss Bly attacked her victim for absolutely *no* reason. That she brutally and viciously *beat* Mr. Lancaster - kicking him repeatedly, until he lost consciousness. And then she kept kicking. And kicking. Until she believed he was dead. An act for which, Miss Bly has shown absolutely *no* remorse...

The Prosecutor's VOICE FADES AWAY as Minnow glances over her shoulder across the aisle...

PHILIP LANCASTER - who we'll recognize as the young man we saw bleeding in the snow - sits beside his PARENTS. He's in his early 20's. Skinny, unassuming. His teeth bow outward where his mouth was WIRED SHUT.

He slowly turns to meet Minnow's gaze. HIS EYES ARE LIGHT GREEN.

ON MINNOW. She seems inexplicably mesmerized by these eyes. She can't look away. Until Juanita gives her a soft nudge in the ribs. The Lawyer rises from her seat to face the JURY.

JUANITA

The facts in this case are undeniable. A mentally disturbed young man made threats to a girl who had, within the previous twelve hours, survived the destruction of her home. A girl who endured years of traumatizing fear no one in this courtroom can *begin* to imagine. My client's actions were entirely in self-defense, and the testimony and evidence will prove her innocence.

OFF MINNOW, turning to stare with open curiosity at Philip Lancaster again. This time he looks away.

INT. MISSOULA COURTHOUSE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

A small room with a vending machine and a few worn leather-upholstered chairs.



Where Minnow and Juanita wait. Minnow is now wearing a long flowered DRESS, but the tattered, black T-shirt still pokes out from underneath the collar.

MINNOW

What happens now?

JUANITA

Now we wait. And pray - if that's your thing.

Minnow ponders this for a moment: *is that her thing?*

MINNOW

The Prophet said jail is full of angel murderers and God-deniers, and some of them can kill you with a single touch.

JUANITA

(shaking her head)  
That man's a fucking lunatic.  
Excuse my French.

Minnow stares at Juanita, alarmed. Half expecting the lawyer to be struck by lightning. But nothing happens.

Minnow is startled by the playful RINGTONE of Juanita's CELLPHONE. The lawyer digs in her briefcase to answer it.

JUANITA (CONT'D)

Yeah? Uh huh.  
(to Minnow)  
I'll be right back.

Juanita exits to take her call. Minnow turns to stare out the narrow window, at a strange world she doesn't understand.

The door opens. Wilson enters. He nods to Minnow. Beelines for the vending machine. Scans the contents behind the glass for a long beat. Minnow studies him, intrigued. Her eyes flit to his HANDS. Well-manicured, with a GOLD WEDDING BAND.

He inserts quarters. And pulls out a bright yellow-wrapped RECTANGLE. *The WORDS on the package look like GIBBERISH - symbols and mismatched illegible letters. (Note: this is a visual translation of how Minnow sees the world. We will come to understand it over the course of the series.)*

WILSON

Starburst?

He holds a pink wrapped square between his thumb and forefinger. Minnow shrugs. Lifts her stumps -

MINNOW

Can't unwrap it, can I?

Wilson smiles. He places the candy on the table in front of her.

WILSON

You might be more capable than you think.

As he heads for the door, Wilson unwraps a Starburst, pops it in his mouth.

WILSON (CONT'D)

See you later.

It sounds like a promise. The door closes behind him.

Minnow glares at the square of pink on the table. Her mouth watering. She swallows hard. Then leans forward... picking up the candy with her teeth. She closes her lips around the pink square... and after a moment spits the EMPTY WRAPPER onto the table.

She leans back, closing her eyes. It's the most wondrous thing she's ever tasted.

JUDGE (V.O.) (PRELAP)

Six years.

INT. MISSOULA COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Minnow stands beside Juanita. Still savoring the last of the candy. As a silver-haired JUDGE finishes issuing his sentence -

JUDGE

The first of which to be served at Missoula county juvenile detention center. With the possibility of parole on the defendant's eighteenth birthday. Miss Bly?

Minnow stops sucking on the candy, as if awoken from a trance.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

While the court empathizes with your *ordeal*, we cannot ignore the severity of your crime. You are a wicked fornicating whore and God hates you.

Minnow squints up at the judge -

MINNOW

W-- what?  
(to Juanita)  
What did he just say?

The judge patiently repeats himself, but this time what Minnow hears is different -

JUDGE

I said your rights of appeal are a condition of your case and your attorney may review them with you. Is there something you don't understand, Miss Bly?

Minnow shakes her head, no. She numbly scans the crowded courtroom full of unfamiliar gawking faces. Her eyes find Dr. Wilson, sitting across the aisle, chewing. He gives her a nod, somehow it's strangely reassuring.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DRIVING - DAY

THROUGH THE WINDOW: The world speeds by. Moving incredibly, unnaturally FAST. A wash of impossible color and THUNDEROUS NOISE. PEOPLE of all shapes and skin tones. Garbage. Flashing lights. GIBBERISH-FILLED BILLBOARDS featuring half-naked men and women. Towering buildings that reflect the sky.

REVERSE ON: Minnow, in the back of the police car, pressing her forehead against the window. Her senses on overload. She can't drink the world in fast enough.

A LOUD POP! Minnow almost leaps out of her seat. Until she realizes it's just one of the UNIFORMED COPS in the front, tearing open A BAG OF CHEETOS. Minnow wrinkles her nose at the intense, unfamiliar smell wafting from the bag. Studies the cop's HANDS as he dips into the bag, drops a few cheesy puffs into his mouth, then licks the unnatural orange dust from his thick fingers.

The world is gross. And fascinating.

EXT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A large, WHITE CINDER-BLOCK BUILDING surrounded by a tall barbed-wire fence and guard tower. It's a re-purposed alternative high school, purchased by the county to house every underage criminal within 500 miles. Most of the windows have been bricked up, those remaining are lined with thick bars. If it looks uninviting and intimidating, it's designed to.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - PROCESSING - DAY

A small, pastel-walled room with tiled floors and a stainless steel counter.

Minnow, her long hair now un-braided and hanging all the way past her hips, stands across from BENNY, a curvy African-American GUARD in her 30's, with a short, elaborate hairdo.

BENNY

We'll make two piles. A keep pile and a trash pile. Things like jewelry and keepsakes usually go in the keep pile.

Benny slides Minnow's feet out of her clogs. Unbuttons Minnow's dress.

MINNOW

Trash.

Benny drops all of it into a trash pile. But as she reaches for the tattered black T-shirt, Minnow's tries to resist. Benny eyes her evenly, warning her to cooperate -

BENNY

It all has to come off.

Minnow reluctantly lets Benny lift the T-shirt over her head. But her eyes follow it longingly.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Trash?

MINNOW

Keep.

BENNY

You sure?

MINNOW

Keep.

Benny raises an eyebrow, but drops the T-shirt into a separate pile. From a nearby bin, she shakes out a stiff ORANGE JUMPSUIT. Lays out a pair of VELCRO SHOES. Then she glances back at Minnow, at her veil of cascading hair.

BENNY

That hair could be a liability in here. You should cut it.

MINNOW

We never cut our hair in the Community.

BENNY

Doesn't look like you're in the Community anymore.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - CELL HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

What used to be a high school gymnasium has been scaffolded into three stories of metal cells. The CACOPHONY of GIRL'S VOICES, LAUGHTER, YELLING, METAL BANGING ON METAL, is overpowering.

Benny leads Minnow, now clad in the orange jumpsuit and Velcro shoes - her elbows held together with a white plastic ZIP TIE - down a grated pathway on the third floor. GIRLS of all shapes and colors, all clad in the same violent orange, stare at Minnow and her stumps as she goes past. Minnow stares back openly, even more curious about them than they are about her.

BENNY

We're the only mixed-offender facility in the state. All the girls are under 18. But some were tried as juveniles and some as adults - like you. There are girls here who've killed, who would kill again.

Benny glances to Minnow's stumps. Then back to her pale, elfin face.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Watch yourself. I don't wanna be scraping you off any floors, you hear?

They stop in front of a particular CELL. Benny unclips her WALKIE from her belt.

BENNY (CONT'D)

You'll be in what we call Angel-town.

MINNOW

What's that?

Benny doesn't answer. She barks into the walkie -

BENNY

Prosser, 3-18 please.

The CELL door BUZZES loudly, then swings OPEN. With a flat hand, Benny pushes Minnow inside. Spins her around like a mannequin to clip the zip tie off Minnow's elbows.

BENNY (CONT'D)

If I were you I'd try and get on her good side. That's assuming she has one.

ANGEL (O.C.)

I can hear you, Benny.

Minnow turns to see a GIRL reclining on the top bunk, her eyes glued to a THICK BOOK with STARS on the cover.

ANGEL is 17, with freckles, dirty blonde cornrows and a perpetual scowl. She ignores Minnow as the CELL DOOR SHUDDERS CLOSED with a terrifying finality. Benny disappears down the grated hall.

Minnow takes in her new home: a stainless steel toilet, a metal shelf, a bare mattress, a rough brown blanket. And a roommate who's now fixing her with a hard gaze over the edge of her book.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Lemme guess, petty theft?

MINNOW

What?

ANGEL

Stealing. Food probably, by the look of you. You got all your teeth so I doubt it's drugs.

Minnow finally understands the question -

MINNOW

Aggravated assault.

ANGEL

(scoffs)  
Yeah, right. My leg weighs more  
than you.

MINNOW

Anyone can hurt someone.

Now Angel takes real interest. She swings her legs over  
the edge of the bunk to get a better look.

ANGEL

What about your hands or whatever?

MINNOW

(challenging)  
What about them?

ANGEL

I'm just saying you don't look  
like a murderer. Sheesh, take it  
as a compliment.

Minnow relaxes a little. Angel switches gears -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

What school do you go to?

MINNOW

I don't. Go to school.

ANGEL

Home-schooled?

MINNOW

No. Just... not schooled. I was  
raised out in the national forest.  
Past Alberton. South of  
Cinderella Rock.

ANGEL

Nobody lives out there. Except  
grizzlies. And religious  
fanatics.

Minnow looks away. Angel's eyes widen as she puts it  
together -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Wait - that was *you*? That *cult*?  
Dang, I saw that on the news!

Suddenly, an ELECTRONIC TONE pulses from the intercom.  
Angel jumps down from the bunk with a startling THUD.

MINNOW

(panicked)  
What's going on?

ANGEL

Prison riot.  
(then)  
Kidding. Dinner. I'm Angel.

MINNOW

Minnow.

Angel flashes a disarming, child-like grin that softens her entire face.

ANGEL

Cool.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CTR - CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

A pilgrimage of orange-clad GIRLS file NOISILY into the pastel-walled cafeteria, Minnow and Angel among them. As they form a messy line in front of the unappetizing buffet...

Minnow's eyes travel across the other INMATES. Their grizzled faces, their charcoal-lined eyes, their rainbow of skin colors. So many HANDS - grabbing trays and each other, exchanging pinkie shakes, fist bumps and contraband. Minnow feels small and helpless among them.

She looks for Angel but she is lost in the sea of orange. Suddenly, all alone, her heart pounding, Minnow struggles to balance a PLASTIC TRAY onto her forearms, when -

A TALL GIRL pushes in front of her in line, knocking Minnow's tray to the floor.

MINNOW

Hey!

Without looking, the girl JERKS HER ELBOW BACK and connects with the side of Minnow's face. Stumbling backwards, startled, Minnow glances around for a GUARD. None of them are looking her way.

The tall girl moves on without looking back at her once. Minnow's eyes fill with tears as she crouches to awkwardly collect the tray with her stumps. Angel slides up beside her -



ANGEL

Calm down, crazy. You weren't gonna get shanked with this many guards around.

Minnow shakily manages to join the line with her tray. Angel nods to a GIRL in a HAIRNET behind the counter -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

What's the vegetable?

HAIR-NET GIRL

Mashed potato.

Angel rolls her eyes. Hair-net is clearly intimidated by Angel -

HAIR-NET GIRL (CONT'D)

We got pineapple slices too.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CTR - CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Minnow sits across from Angel at a red plastic picnic table. The thundering disharmony of overlapping DINNER CONVERSATION, SHRIEKS of LAUGHTER and YELLING overwhelms her. She can't decide where to look first. Angel shakes her head at Minnow, her mouth full of food.

ANGEL

God, you are greener than green. Stop looking around at everyone. Keep your eyes down.

Minnow quickly looks down at her plate. Angel sweeps her plastic spoon across the room, dismissive -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Most of these girls are pancakes. They're pumped so full of Adderall they can hardly walk - let alone shank you. The real crazies aren't allowed in gen-pop. They live up in the hospital most of the time.

Minnow quietly admits -

MINNOW

I never saw so many different kinds of people. The Prophet said it was unnatural - mingling together like this.

Angel shrugs, unfazed.

ANGEL

Yeah. Lots of idiots think that way. Wouldn't be the first time I got a roommate who had a problem with it.

MINNOW

(sharply)

I don't have a problem with it.

ANGEL

Whatever.

Angel shoves a heaping spoonful of mashed potatoes into her mouth. As she talks, we PAN ACROSS the room, lingering on GROUPS OF INMATES as Angel clocks them -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

The Mexicans are okay. If you got nail polish to trade they'll be your best friend. Don't mess with the meth girls - they scratch. The lezzes can be all right - mostly just stick to themselves. Sometimes I talk to the smart ones - who always go to class and study and stuff? But they can be so damn serious.

MINNOW

What group are you in?

ANGEL

I don't have one. Don't want one neither. I'm a solitary animal. Like a praying mantis.

MINNOW

So why are you helping me?

ANGEL

It saves me a headache later on. If you get in trouble, you'll look over at me with those pathetic eyes and expect me to save you. Well, it ain't happening, so you better learn to take care of yourself in here.

Angel glances at Minnow's untouched tray of food -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Aren't you gonna eat?

Minnow looks down at her food. At her unused utensils. She's embarrassed. But she's starving. She forces herself to lean forward... and lap the mash potatoes with her tongue. Angel acts like this is perfectly ordinary.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

If anyone ever holds up their hand like this --

(fingers in a circle)

That means they're asking if you're gay...

MINNOW

What?

ANGEL

And if they want to know if you have a friend on the outs named Britney, they're trying to claim you, 'cause a *Britney's* the name for someone's bitch. A *Candy* is a coward and a *Tricia* is someone with something to trade.

Minnow ponders all this as she swallows a mouthful of mashed potatoes. Then -

MINNOW

Guess I can never ask someone if they like girls.

ANGEL

Huh?

Minnow holds up a stump -

MINNOW

No fingers.  
(no reaction)  
That was a joke.

ANGEL

I'm not gonna laugh just to make you feel better about yourself.

Minnow's faint smile fades. Angel continues -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

You'll be deciding what gang you wanna join. I 'spect you'll be with the Christian girls.

MINNOW

I'm not Christian.

ANGEL

(rolling her eyes)

Trust me, by next week you'll be quoting what Jesus said about this and that. You've got religion in your blood. I can tell.

Minnow looks stung. *Is that true?*

Angel's lesson concludes. She goes back to stuffing her face and ignoring Minnow.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MINNOW'S CELL - DAY

Minnow arrives back at her cell to find Wilson sitting on a stool across from her bunk. Scribbling rows of *mismatched symbols* on a YELLOW LEGAL PAD. When he looks up, Minnow recognizes him -

MINNOW

Starburst.

Wilson gestures to an ID BADGE attached to his sweater -

WILSON

My name's Doctor Wilson.

Minnow presses herself against the wall, studying him.

MINNOW

You're not a real doctor.

WILSON

Forensic psychologist.

MINNOW

What's that?

WILSON

Usually I talk to people.

MINNOW

Like a counselor?

WILSON

Kind of.

MINNOW

They tried to make me talk to a counselor at the hospital. I don't need a counselor.

WILSON

Good thing I'm not here to be your counselor then.

(re: her bunk)

Take a seat.

Minnow slowly sits across from him. Warily -

MINNOW

I don't like talking about feelings.

WILSON

Me neither. Anything but feelings.

It's a joke, but Minnow doesn't smile. Wilson goes back to business -

WILSON (CONT'D)

The local police are no longer handling the investigation into the events at the Community. That's been passed off to the FBI. That's who I work for.

MINNOW

(stiffening)

So you're investigating me?

WILSON

The warden and my bosses discussed it and they decided you warrant special attention. I've been appointed as your mental health coordinator while you're in juvenile detention.

MINNOW

I'm not stupid. I've been through a trial. You're not here to help - you're here to collect evidence about me. Try and figure me out.

WILSON

(amused)

I knew everything about you the minute you walked into the courtroom with that candy in your mouth.

Minnow looks away, embarrassed.

WILSON (CONT'D)

I am here to help. You don't have to believe me though.

MINNOW

Good. 'Cause I don't. You just want to find out who killed the Prophet.

Wilson's eyebrows raise -

WILSON

What makes you think there was a killer?

Minnow struggles to keep her face still. She doesn't answer.

WILSON (CONT'D)

You were nowhere near the Community when the fire started. That's what you said to the police anyway.

MINNOW

If that's what I said then it must be true.

Wilson leans back against the pastel brick wall. Weary. A beat, then -

WILSON

Do you know what I really do every day? For my job? I spend most of my time sitting *this* close to the vilest people on the planet. I sort out whether they're lying, what questions I can ask that'll produce a confession, what part of their minds can be turned against them. I do puzzles all day. That's what my job has become. Turning people into puzzles because I can't stand to think of them as human.

MINNOW

So that's what I am - a puzzle for you to solve?

WILSON

No. You're my vacation from all that. I volunteered to be here. Because I believed I could help you. I wanted to try.

MINNOW

Huh.

WILSON

What?

MINNOW

It's just... how do you know you're not sitting across from someone a lot worse than any of those people?

WILSON

I don't believe that.

MINNOW

That's all right. No one ever believes me.

Wilson surveys her for a moment, weighing something. Then he rummages through his messenger bag, pulls out a sheaf of PAPER.

WILSON

You were right. The Prophet's dead. How does that make you feel?

MINNOW

You said no feelings.

WILSON

Of course. I forgot.  
(re: the paper)  
This is his autopsy report. It's basically not worth the paper it's printed on.

He holds the paper out to her. Minnow doesn't take it. So he reads it aloud -

WILSON (CONT'D)

*"The deceased was badly burned. Inadequate lung tissue remains to confirm smoke inhalation. As a result it is unknown whether the deceased died before or after the fire. Yadda yadda yadda."*

MINNOW

So you're not even sure if he was murdered?

WILSON

I am. Everyone escaped the fire - old men, infants. Everyone except The Prophet. They must have had plenty of warning. So why didn't he? I think he was already dead when the fire started.

He watches for a reaction. Minnow doesn't bite. She stares abstractedly at the floor.

MINNOW

Do you believe in God?

WILSON

Some days. Other days I'm not so sure.

There's a sadness to this. A hint of a buried pain. Then Wilson remembers himself -

WILSON (CONT'D)

What about you?

Minnow contemplates this, as we -

FADE TO:

INT. MINNOW'S TRAILER - DAY - FLASHBACK

*A neat but cramped metal-walled space. It has a cozy simplicity to it - landscapes on the walls, a colorful threadbare carpet on the floor. And a few floral thrift-store couches, where a DOZEN PEOPLE are gathered: FORKLIFT DRIVERS and FOREMEN, WAITRESSES and harried HOUSEWIVES. Simple, hard-working, small town people.*

*Among them is Minnow's father, Samuel, and her mother, OLIVIA, blonde, willowy, with a distant look in her eye - like she's never fully paying attention to anything.*



*Olivia pours milk into plastic cups and quietly serves them to their guests as The Prophet holds court.*

*Little Minnow sits on the floor, her CHUBBY FINGERS rearranging ALPHABET BLOCKS into nonsensical words.*

*Across the trailer, the Prophet stands facing his audience. Looking directly into each person's eyes, connecting -*

*THE PROPHET*

*When the world looks at you they see trailer trash... breaking your backs to buy your babies toxic toys made in China... put garbage food on your hand-me-down tables... and watch the idiot box until you drop dead, too poor and Godless for a funeral. You built this country. But you've been left behind by it. Discounted. Discarded.*

*PANNING SLOWLY across the faces of Minnow's neighbors and family. The Prophet's words hitting home. There's a lot of anger here... exhaustion... hopelessness... but also pride. They hang on the Prophet's every word -*

*THE PROPHET (CONT'D)*

*But you know what I see? I see The Chosen. Each and every one of you was brought here today for a reason... you can feel it in your guts, can't you? You've read the signs. You know you were meant for something greater than this.*

*Almost on cue, rain starts to fall outside - pitter-pattering on the metal roof, as the Prophet continues, his voice booming, powerful as a storm -*

*THE PROPHET (CONT'D)*

*You were meant to know God. Not just to meet Him but to live with him, in His garden. You will dine at His table every night. He will bathe you and heal you. He will touch you with His unknowable green eyes, and you will be saved. For you aren't the lost! You are the found. You are the sanctified Prophets of Heaven. And I have come to bring you home.*

*The Prophet's eyes land on Minnow's. The wrinkles around his eyes softening into a gentle smile.*

THE PROPHET (CONT'D)

*All you have to do is take my hand... take my hand.*

*ON THE PROPHET'S HAND, extending toward Minnow.*

*Minnow feels everyone's eyes on her. Her father's expectant. Her mother's nervous, as she wrings a cocktail napkin in her pale hands.*

*Minnow glances between them... then gets up... and takes the Prophet's big hairy hand in her tiny one.*

*And one after another the inhabitants of the trailer park follow suit - they stand to take that hand, to embrace The Prophet and each other.*

*OFF LITTLE MINNOW. Lit up with purpose. The exhilaration of being chosen.*

WILSON (V.O.) (PRELAP)

Minnow? Do you believe in God?

FADE TO:

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MINNOW'S CELL - DAY

Back on Minnow. Her eyes on her stumps. Quietly -

MINNOW

Before the Community... when we lived at the trailer park, my father used to gamble. At the greyhound track in Missoula? He used to take me with him - tell my mom we were just going out for ice cream. They had these big lamps outside. I used to watch moths - hundreds of them - flying right into the light... falling down dead 'cause they were confused.

WILSON

They thought it was the sun.

Minnow looks up to meet his eyes.

MINNOW

I don't want to be like those  
moths.

Wilson studies her, surprised. They are interrupted by a  
clatter as -

Angel enters the cell carrying her school books. Wilson  
greeted her politely -

WILSON

You must be Angel? I'm Dr.  
Wilson.

Angel just scowls at Wilson. Throws her school books  
down on the dresser loudly. Wilson gets the message. He  
gets up. Collects his things.

WILSON (CONT'D)

We'll pick this up another day.  
It was good talking to you,  
Minnow.

Minnow nods. Wilson picks up his stool. Walks out. As  
he disappears down the sky way - Angel spins to Minnow,  
suddenly angry -

ANGEL

You didn't say anything to him,  
did you?

Before Minnow can answer, Angel shakes her head  
despairingly. There's an urgency, an intensity to this -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Listen to me. There ain't no  
reasoning with cops. Not with  
detectives or lawyers or judges  
neither. They see what they want.  
And what they want's an easy  
target. Crazy girl who's been  
messed with her whole life?  
That's the *easiest* target. Why do  
you think I'm here? Why do you  
think any of us are here?  
(sharp, scary)  
Next time he shows up, you turn  
your back on that fucker and you  
don't say a word. Not a word,  
understand?

Minnow nods solemnly. Wondering if it's too late. If  
she's already said too much.

Angel climbs on to her bunk, calming down, her voice almost a whisper -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Don't let them do to you what they did to me.

EXT. REST STOP - MORNING

A remote public rest stop at the edge of the Montana National Forest. Wilderness looms all around, majestic and intimidating. Coated with a thick layer of SNOW and ICE. It's empty, deserted, until -

A RENTAL CAR pulls up in front. Parks. Dr. Wilson gets out. Wrapped in snow pants, a heavy down coat. He scans the area. Spins slowly in a circle.

He pulls out a CAMERA - snaps a picture.

EXT. NATIONAL FOREST - LATER - DAY

Wilson snow-shoes, up to his knees, through stunning but unforgiving wilderness. His breath freezing the minute it leaves his chapped lips. He stumbles, almost falls. He's clearly a city boy, vastly out of his element here.

Suddenly, he nears an area where the TREES ARE ALL BLACK SKELETONS, CHARRED by the recent fire. But there are no structures in sight.

Wilson pulls a folded piece of PAPER out of his pocket. Consults it with gloved hands. It's a forestry MAP, with a spot circled in red ink. He turns in a circle, his eyes watering from the cold. Then he spots -

A FLASH OF YELLOW through the burnt trees up ahead - POLICE TAPE.

EXT. THE COMMUNITY - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Wilson ducks under a large circle of yellow police tape. Steps into a clearing. The area has been scorched by fire, then swallowed by so much snow it takes a moment for the SHAPES beneath to reveal themselves -

A LARGE TRIANGLE that was once a ROOF. Blackened PIECES OF FALLEN HOUSES. A DOZEN OF THEM, in a RING. HOLES have been dug by investigators throughout the clearing - marked with multicolored flags. But little else remains.

It's hard to imagine a hundred people lived here for more than a decade and this is all they left behind.

Wilson takes out his camera. Carefully walks the area, silently recording all of it.

His eyes land on a FROZEN POND nearby. And beside it, a BEAUTIFUL OLD WILLOW TREE, somehow untouched by the fire. As he moves toward it, Wilson notices something - a THICK ROPE caught up in its branches - something the investigators missed. With a gloved hand, he tugs the rope free. And as it swings down -

WE WIDEN TO REVEAL: The ROPE is actually a NOOSE. Dangling from the branch. Drifting lazily in the wind. Wilson stares at it. He raises his camera. Clicks.

EXT. MISSOULA WOMEN'S SHELTER - DAY

Wilson's rental car pulls up in front. Wilson gets out, carrying his old leather messenger bag.

INT. MISSOULA WOMEN'S SHELTER - RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

Wilson stands at a desk in a waiting room, arguing with a tired-looking SHELTER NURSE -

SHELTER NURSE

I'm sorry, she doesn't want to see you.

WILSON

Did you tell her who I was? That I'm a doctor - I'm working with her daughter, Minnow? Who's in *juvenile detention* --

SHELTER NURSE

Yes. I told her. Olivia hasn't taken any visitors since she's been at the shelter. I'm sorry. She won't talk to you.

VIVIENNE (O.C.)

I will.

Wilson turns to see a pale, dark-haired woman in her 20's standing behind him. She's dressed in a light blue shift and house slippers. Not a stitch of makeup or vanity to her.

VIVIENNE (CONT'D)

I'll talk to you.

WILSON

I'm sorry - you are --?

VIVIENNE

Samuel's third wife, according to God.

WILSON

You're married to Minnow's father?

VIVIENNE

I raised that girl up from the time she was five. And lemme tell you something - it was clear as day to all of us - even her own flesh and blood: she had the devil inside her.

The Shelter Nurse gets up from behind her desk -

SHELTER NURSE

Okay, Vivienne, let's go back inside --

Vivienne pulls away - her eyes blazing -

VIVIENNE

She's a killer, you know that right? She murdered The Prophet in cold blood -- she burned our lives to the ground! She's going to hell... and anyone who touches her will go down with her. Mark my words.

SHELTER NURSE

(to Wilson)

You need to leave now.

The Shelter Nurse leads Vivienne through some doors into the shelter.

OFF WILSON, watching her go, unnerved.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - CAFETERIA - MORNING

Minnow and Angel walk into the cafeteria for breakfast. Girls quickly look away, clear a path for them.

MINNOW

Why is everyone so scared of you?

ANGEL

They all know this is "Angel town". I'm one of four lifers in this whole place. And I been here the longest - since I was twelve.

As Minnow digests this, Angel nods to Minnow's shoes -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

But don't be so sure it's me they're scared of. You're the one with the psycho shoes.

MINNOW

What?

ANGEL

Velcro. They only give those to girls who're so nuts they can't even be trusted with shoelaces. Anybody fucks with you in here, just show 'em the shoes.

Minnow processes the advice. She's learning fast. They reach the front of the food line - this time Minnow easily lifts the tray with her stumps onto her forearms.

But when she reaches the buffet, HAIRNET GIRL slides a different tray of food across the counter to Minnow.

MINNOW

What's that?

HAIRNET GIRL

We got a pamphlet from some 'association for disabilities', or whatever. You get special food from now on.

Angel peers over Minnow's shoulder at the tray -

ANGEL

Look, it's all shit you can suck through a straw. Cool. You got soup! I want soup.

Hairnet just shakes her head - only for Minnow. Angel pouts, stalks off. Minnow lifts the new tray onto her arms. Empowered by the special treatment.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CTR - CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Minnow sets her tray down beside Angel. Who is sneering across the table at an ASIAN GIRL with thick bangs. This is TRACY, 15. She smiles up at Minnow, flashing perfect teeth.

TRACY

Hi, Minnow! I'm Tracy. I wanted to make sure I introduced myself. I know how scary this place can be the first week --

RASHIDA (O.S.)

What'd I miss?

An AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRL with braces and fluffy pigtails, RASHIDA, 16, slides in beside Tracy.

TRACY

Minnow, this is Rashida.

Rashida's eyes are glued to Minnow's stumps.

RASHIDA

What happened to your hands?

TRACY

Rashida, don't ask stuff like that!

RASHIDA

Why not? Something happened to 'em. They're saying you got chopped by a serial killer - but I told 'em naw, she definitely a farm girl, probably got sliced by a combine.

Minnow stares at her for a beat. Then -

MINNOW

My father cut them off with a hatchet.

Tracy's breath catches in her throat. Angel stops chewing her fried chicken. But Rashida throws her head back and LAUGHS.

RASHIDA

For real? I'd be telling that to everybody if it happened to me! With a *hatchet*? That's way better than a combine any day.



Suddenly, unexpectedly, Minnow finds herself smiling. It feels good to smile. Minnow's response lets the other girls relax. Tracy leans across the table -

TRACY

Rashida and I are in Youth Group. You should come some time. We talk through things that are bothering us and read from the Bible--

ANGEL

(scoffs)

And you think Minnow wants to talk through the fact that her father chopped off her hands with *you and Rashida*? Now *that's* funny.

TRACY

(tightly)

Someday, Angel, you're going to realize God is real, and he loves you. No matter *what* you've done. That's a precious gift --

ANGEL

Yeah, well you can keep it. I don't need forgiveness from some six-thousand year-old pervert who sticks it to virgins when they're not looking.

Scandalized, Minnow laughs into her soup. Tracy glares between her and Angel, then angrily slides her tray to the opposite end of the table. Rashida reluctantly follows.

Angel and Minnow lock eyes, amused. The bond growing between them.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MINNOW'S CELL - NIGHT

It's after lights-out but the dormitory is alive with the WHISPERS, SOBS and SIGHS of hundreds of lonely, wayward girls.

Minnow lies in her bunk, listening to it all. Angel shifts overhead. Minnow whispers into the dark -

MINNOW

Why don't you believe in God?

ANGEL

Because I don't need to.

MINNOW

What's that mean?

ANGEL

Some people need cancer medication. I don't, so I don't take it.

Angel props herself up in bed, sighs -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

I get why people used to believe in God. Maybe I would've too. They wanted to understand the world better - to explain why things happen. And God was pretty good for that. But we don't need Him anymore.

MINNOW

'Cause of those books you read?

ANGEL

'Cause of *science*. And logic. And the internet. There are answers to everything these days, you just have to look for them.

Minnow thinks on this. Angel hangs her head over the edge of her bunk to peer down at her.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

You don't still believe in all that, do you?

Minnow doesn't answer. WE PUSH SLOWLY IN ON HER FACE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MINNOW'S TRAILER - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

*Little Minnow lies in a cot in the dark. Light spills through a crack in the folding doors onto Minnow's face. She can see and hear her parents arguing in heated whispers from the other room.*

OLIVIA

*Last month you're out blowing our rent check at the races and the bars - now you're "Deacon Samuel"?*  
(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

*And we're supposed to just follow  
you into the woods --*

SAMUEL

*Not me. God. He's called us -  
he's sent us signs, a Prophet --*

OLIVIA

*You hardly know this man!*

*Samuel's voice raises, desperate -*

SAMUEL

*I know the way we are living isn't  
natural! I know this isn't the  
life I want for my children! I  
know there has to be more than  
this...*

*Samuel drops to his knees in front of his wife. He wraps  
his arms around her waist. Buries his face in her belly.*

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

*Olivia, please... I'm begging you.  
Please. Don't tear our family  
apart... I want us to be saved.  
All of us.*

*A tense, painful beat. Then Olivia's body melts against  
her husband's. She reaches down and runs her fingers  
through his scruffy hair.*

*Little Minnow steps out of the shadows of her room.*

LITTLE MINNOW

*I wanna go. I wanna be saved.  
Momma, please?*

*Olivia and Samuel turn to look at their tiny, hopeful  
daughter. The resistance fades from Olivia's face... she  
knows she's already lost. She nods in surrender. Samuel  
grins at Minnow. Little Minnow grins back - with no idea  
that after this moment her life will never be the same.*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MINNOW'S CELL - NIGHT

*BACK ON MINNOW. In Juvie. On her bunk. Staring into  
the dark.*

MINNOW

If I don't believe... if none of  
it was real, then all of this...  
it happened for nothing.

ANGEL

Not for nothing. You survived.

MINNOW

(quietly)  
What if I didn't deserve to?

ANGEL

Don't you dare. Don't you dare  
feel guilty. Whatever you did -  
you were fighting back. There's  
no shame in that.

It's clear Angel is actually talking about herself -  
reliving her own painful history.

MINNOW

I used to think I was special, you  
know?

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - SHOWERS - MORNING

WIDE ANGLE: a long line of open shower cubicles without  
curtains or doors. Where a dozen naked TEENAGE GIRLS of  
all shapes and colors shower with no regard for privacy.

Among them, we find Minnow under the water, soaping her  
body with her stumps. For the first time we see her BACK  
- LACED with faded WHIP MARKS. Her ANKLES - cuffed with  
thick RED SCAR TISSUE.

Under the steaming shower, Minnow glances around at the  
other naked girls. Her eyes travel across their skin,  
clocking -

CIGARETTE BURNS. KNIFE WOUNDS. WHITE SLICES ACROSS  
FOREARMS. C-SECTION SCARS.

MINNOW (V.O.)

But in here... it seems like every  
girl has her own personal Prophet.

INT. JUVENILE DET CTR - OUTSIDE NURSE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Minnow and Angel, hair wet from the shower, stand at the front of a LONG LINE outside the nurse's office - a Plexiglas window where an unsmiling NURSE sits, sliding white paper cups of pills through a metal slot.

ANGEL

Angel Johnston.

The nurse slides a cup heavy with multicolored pills into Angel's waiting hands. Angel upturns it in her mouth and chews loudly. To Minnow -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Makes them work faster. Plus the Adderall tastes like Skittles.

Angel shows the nurse her empty mouth. Minnow approaches the window.

MINNOW

Minnow Bly.

The nurse pushes a cup with a SINGLE LARGE PILL across the threshold to Minnow's stumps. Angel inspects it over her shoulder -

ANGEL

It's not Ritalin. Or Xanax. Thorazine maybe, but why would they be giving you that?

JUVIE NURSE

Just a multivitamin. Nothing to get excited about.

(to Minnow)

Down the shoot please.

Minnow swallows the large pill. Shows her mouth. As they walk away, Angel laughs -

ANGEL

A vitamin! You are such a lightweight.

MINNOW

(embarrassed)

They say I have malnutrition. Whatever that means. My bones hurt, in my legs and my chest.

ANGEL

You're probably still growing.  
You're not the first girl to put a  
few pounds on in juvie. Most of  
us aren't used to getting three  
meals a day.

As Angel and Minnow head down the pastel hall, Officer  
Benny approaches -

BENNY

Bly!

Benny holds out a colored piece of PAPER until Minnow can  
grab it with her stumps. Minnow stares down at it. *To  
her it's a grid of illegible symbols and shapes.*

MINNOW

What is this?

BENNY

A class schedule. Make sure  
you're on time, okay?

Benny takes off down the hall. Angel snatches the paper  
out of Minnow's stumps.

ANGEL

They're finally making you go to  
school. Just one class though -  
*"Reading is Power"*. They all have  
lame-ass names like that: *"Math is  
Fun!" "Coping Mechanisms Are for  
Rock Stars!"* That was a group  
therapy class - I'm serious.

Minnow looks nervous. Angel nudges her in the rib -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Don't freak out, school's not that  
bad. It's a lot like church, but  
actually useful.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - CLASS ROOM - DAY

A small room lined with desks and outdated COMPUTER  
EQUIPMENT. A fresh-faced TEACHER in a violet cardigan,  
MISS BAILEY, 20's, stands in the doorway, SHAKING THE  
HANDS of each student and looking them in the eye as they  
enter.

MISS BAILEY

Sharon, Egypt, Mariah, hello  
Cheyenne.

When she sees Minnow, Miss Bailey slides her hands behind her back. Smiling genuinely -

MISS BAILEY (CONT'D)

Minnow? I'm Miss Bailey. You'll  
be at computer number one today.  
Everyone takes a reading  
assessment when they first arrive.  
For goal-setting.

Miss Bailey gestures to the back of the classroom - to a grey cube of a COMPUTER.

Minnow anxiously weaves her way toward it, past the other STUDENTS, who all seem to know what to do and where to go. Minnow slowly sits in front of the computer. Stares at the grey screen.

*MINNOW'S POV: A jumble of illegible symbols and foreign letters that seem to dance and re-arrange themselves before her eyes.*

ON MINNOW. Staring at the screen until her eyes start to water. Then she raises her arm. Miss Bailey approaches -

MISS BAILEY (CONT'D)

Yes?

MINNOW

I don't know what to do.

MISS BAILEY

Just click the answer you think is correct.

MINNOW

Click?

MISS BAILEY

With the mouse.

Minnow shakes her head. Miss Bailey crouches beside her.

MISS BAILEY (CONT'D)

Here. You tell me the answer you want and I'll click it for you. The question is: "Which word best describes the tone of Mercutio's speech?" What do you think the answer is - a, b, c, or d?

MINNOW

(reddening)

I don't know.

MISS BAILEY

Have you read the passage?

MINNOW

No.

(then, quietly)

I don't know how.

Miss Bailey's hands fall to her lap. She nods, as she digests this. Then a smile softens her lips.

MISS BAILEY

Well, you've come to the right place.

Minnow turns to look at Miss Bailey. The teacher's expression is warm, non judgemental. Minnow wants to trust her... but there's fear in her eyes. Something haunting her. She scoots her chair away.

MINNOW

I can't.

MISS BAILEY

(gently)

Minnow, it's okay--

Miss Bailey reaches for her -

MINNOW

Leave me alone!

Minnow leaps out of her chair, runs out of the room. The other girls barely look up.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MRS. NEW'S OFFICE - DAY

Minnow sits stoically, across from a round woman with pursed lips and big apple cheeks, MRS. NEW, 40's. She's trying hard not to stare at Minnow's stumps.

MRS. NEW

Minnow, I'm Mrs. New. I'm the assistant warden. I'm sorry we haven't had a chance to meet until now.

Minnow doesn't react. She stares at the wall.



MRS. NEW (CONT'D)

Can you tell me what happened today?

MINNOW

I just didn't feel like being in there any more.

MRS. NEW

Miss Bailey said you had trouble with the reading assessment?

Minnow turns to look at her, defiant -

MINNOW

Yeah. I can't read.

MRS. NEW

I understand that. And that's what Miss Bailey is here for, to teach you --

MINNOW

I'm not allowed to read. It's forbidden.

Mrs. New looks at her, taken off guard by this. Not sure how to respond.

MRS. NEW

Well... not in here it's not. And while you are in here, you are my responsibility. And it's my responsibility to make sure you receive an education.

This doesn't seem to be getting anywhere with Minnow. Mrs. New tries a different tactic -

MRS. NEW (CONT'D)

Minnow, has anyone explained how your sentence works?

(no response)

Unless you maintain a spotless record in juvenile detention and receive a character recommendation from a staff member, your chances of earning parole are slim to none.

MINNOW

Angel says I'm not getting paroled. Violent offenders like us never get paroled.

MRS. NEW

You're not Angel. And you shouldn't aim to be.

MINNOW

Angel's the best person in here.

MRS. NEW

Angel is a convicted murderer.

MINNOW

It was self-defense.

MRS. NEW

That's not what her file says.

MINNOW

I don't care what her file says.  
I can't read it anyways.

Mrs. New shakes her head, tired of the sass.

MRS. NEW

However you feel about being here, this is Disneyworld compared to prison. Which is where you will certainly be going if you don't start taking an active interest in your own rehabilitation. Do you understand?

Minnow turns back to stare at the wall. Nods.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - TV ROOM - DAY

Minnow and Angel sit on a tattered couch in front of a large, outdated TELEVISION set. Angel is braiding cornrows into Minnow's long hair, the REMOTE in her lap. They are surrounded by other GIRLS, including Rashida. *Discovery channel is on. We're looking at the blue orb of the Earth from space.*

Rashida leans over and snatches the remote about of Angel's lap.

RASHIDA

All right, Angel, enough science shit. I'm switching it to my show.

ANGEL

Don't even try, Rashida.

RASHIDA

You ain't gonna beat me up. You like me too much.

ANGEL

Oh, really?

RASHIDA

Yeah, really. I see you admiring my fine body day after day.

ANGEL

Please. You look like a pile of chopsticks tied together.

Angel laughs and reaches for the remote -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Give that back.

RASHIDA

Why don't you come get it?

Angel playfully tackles Rashida, grappling for the remote.

The TV starts FLICKING THROUGH CHANNELS: *AN IMPOSSIBLY PERFECT FAMILY, TANNED GIRLS WORKING OUT, A CAR RACING THROUGH THE DESERT, A BEARDED MAN IN A KHAKI JUMPSUIT...*

MINNOW

Stop!

Angel and Rashida freeze.

MINNOW (CONT'D)

Go back.

Rashida clicks a few channels.

MINNOW (CONT'D)

There.

Minnow slides off the couch, until she is kneeling on the tattered rug in front of the TV.

ON THE SCREEN: *Her father, SAMUEL, in a KHAKI JUMPSUIT, shuffles slowly into a courtroom, his hands and ankles fastened to a chain around his waist. Over the image, a NEWSCASTER NARRATES -*

FEMALE NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

*Samuel Bly will be the first of the leaders of the Kevinian cult to stand trial. The case against Bly includes charges of statutory rape, endangering a minor, assault, and manslaughter. Bly was reportedly second in command to church leader Kevin Bilson, a self-described prophet who led the group into the woods twelve years ago.*

*The image switches to a slick-lipped WOMAN standing in front of a WEATHER MAP, talking too fast.*

As Minnow tries to digest what she's just seen...

KRYSTAL (O.S.)

You all right?

Minnow turns to see a PAIR OF VELCRO SHOES standing behind her. Her eyes travel up the orange jumpsuit to a girl's face she doesn't recognize. She's tall with thin eyebrows. Her name is KRYSTAL.

MINNOW

I'm fine.

KRYSTAL

Your name Britney?

MINNOW

My name's Minnow.

KRYSTAL

(laughs)

My name's Krystal. I think you and I should hang out.

Minnow looks for Angel. Angel and Rashida are both staring at the TV screen. Purposefully ignoring them. Krystal runs her fingers through Minnow's long hair.

KRYSTAL (CONT'D)

You got pretty hair.

MINNOW

Don't touch me.

But Krystal's fingers just push further into Minnows hair, grabbing hold of it by the roots.

ANGEL (O.C.)

Krystal!

Krystal spins to see Angel getting out of her seat.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

We've missed you in gen-pop. Next time I suggest you drink the *whole* bottle of bleach.

Krystal releases Minnow. Turns to face Angel with a dark chuckle -

KRYSTAL

I like your new toy, Angel. I didn't think gimps were your thing-

SUDDENLY, Angel SLUGS Krystal in the stomach before she can react. When the taller girl is doubled over, Angel FORCES her to the ground. One hand pushing her forehead into the floor, the other poised to strike -

ANGEL

You don't get to hurt people. Not in here.

Krystal twists her head to the side and SCREAMS but Angel silences her with PUNCH to the temple, then ANOTHER and ANOTHER. Angel's jaw is set, but otherwise her face is relaxed. Her eyes far away. *This is the face of someone who has killed. Who would do it again.*

Minnow glances around: the room is quiet, except for Krystal's GRUNTS. No one moves to stop the brutal, relentless beating.

Finally, Angel climbs off of Krystal, shaking out her bloodied wrist. Krystal is dazed, MOANING, her nose BLEEDING, her face blown up and PURPLE. Angel walks over to the metal door and knocks twice.

Benny's face appears behind the meshed glass window. She opens the door. Takes in the scene. Angel shrugs to Krystal's writhing body -

ANGEL (CONT'D)

She tripped.

But Benny shoots her a look. Angel doesn't try to argue with her - she turns her back, crosses her wrists so she can be HANDCUFFED.

Minnow watches, shaken, as Angel is led off to solitary. She's just seen a new side of her new friend - and it scares the hell out of her.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - MINNOW'S CELL - DAY

Minnow sits cross-legged on her bunk. Her back to Dr. Wilson. Who watches quietly from his stool across the cell, taking notes on his yellow legal pad.

WILSON

I heard your roommate got into a fight?

Minnow tries not to talk to him, but she can't help herself -

MINNOW

She was protecting me.

WILSON

Mrs. New thinks Angel may be a negative influence on you.

MINNOW

Maybe I'm a negative influence on her? How about that? I'm not some helpless victim, you know?

WILSON

I know.

(then)

It was a victim who killed the Prophet, wasn't it?

MINNOW

How should I know?

Wilson keeps writing. Minnow looks anxious. Without turning to face him -

MINNOW (CONT'D)

What are you writing?

WILSON

About my visit to the Community.

She waits for him to offer more. But he just keeps writing.

MINNOW

So?

WILSON

I brought you some pictures.

MINNOW

I've seen it all before.

Wilson reaches in the messenger bag, retrieves a manila folder. He takes out a series of PHOTOGRAPHS. Shots of the snow-drenched, abandoned Rest Stop and Community. As he lays them on the floor between his stool and her bunk. Minnow can't help herself - she wants to see those pictures.

MINNOW (CONT'D)

You really went all the way out there?

WILSON

Uh huh. There's not much left of it. What the fire spared, investigators have dug up. It was interesting though, to imagine what it must have been like - a hundred of you living out there. Do you miss it?

MINNOW

Yeah, right. I ran away from there.

WILSON

That doesn't mean you can't miss it.

Minnow doesn't answer. But we see her eyes soften.

MINNOW

If you're really here to help me, why're you so desperate to find out what happened? It won't change anything.

WILSON

Because I believe nobody benefits when the truth is buried. Lies have a way of turning poisonous over time. I believe in justice.

Something lands with Minnow. She slowly turns around to face him. Her eyes drift to the pictures. An idea forming.

MINNOW

What would you trade for the truth?

WILSON

(carefully)

What are you offering?

MINNOW

My parole meeting comes up in a few months - when I turn eighteen. I need someone to recommend my release.

WILSON

And you want me to be that person?

Minnow shrugs, acting like she could take it or leave it.

WILSON (CONT'D)

What happens if no one speaks up for you?

MINNOW

I get transferred to an adult facility. For five years.

WILSON

Sounds like you have a lot to lose.

MINNOW

Sounds like you really want answers.

Wilson thinks this over for a beat. Finally -

WILSON

Fine. You have a deal.

Minnow slowly grins. Surprised.

MINNOW

I'd shake on it, but...

She holds up a stump. Wilson smiles. Then, trying to catch her off guard -

WILSON

So tell me about losing your hands.



MINNOW

(shrugs)

That? I barely remember it.

Wilson just stares at her and waits.

MINNOW (CONT'D)

Where do you want me to start?

WILSON

The beginning.

Minnow looks down at one of the PHOTOGRAPHS on the floor in front of her. Of the REST STOP at the base of the National Forest. As she stares at it, we -

FADE TO:

EXT. REST STOP - MORNING - FLASHBACK

*A same public rest stop from the photo. But now it's Spring. Flowers are in bloom. The towering mountains look less ominous in the sunshine. A PUBLIC BUS pulls up in front. The doors SIGH open. One after another MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN descend. The men all wearing identical handmade janitorial-BLUE JUMPSUITS, the women in matching stiff, ankle-length BLUE DRESSES. Many of them we recognize from the trailer park. Including The Prophet and a younger Vivienne. Along with FIVE YEAR-OLD MINNOW behind both her parents.*

*They cheerfully unload suitcases, camping packs, coolers, live chickens in a crate. The bare essentials for survival. The BUS DRIVER shakes his head at them - "weirdos" - as he pulls away.*

*Little Minnow watches the BUS disappear down the grey ribbon of asphalt, toward the smoggy haze of the DISTANT CITY. Until her father GRABS HER HAND, and pulls her to join the others - a long line of BLUE CLAD BELIEVERS, marching bravely and optimistically into the wilderness.*

*Minnow searches for her mother. Olivia is following her husband silently. She is now VISIBLY PREGNANT. She tries to give Minnow a reassuring smile. But it doesn't quite hide the worry in her eyes.*

*WIDE ANGLE of the rest stop. As Minnow and her family - the last of the blue-clad pilgrimage - VANISH into the forest. Hold here. On the emptiness.*

END OF CHAPTER ONE