

THE VILLE

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TEASER

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - SYDNEY'S ROOM - DAY

A small room with faded purple walls. It's bare. Almost empty.

Brown boxes full of TOYS and CLOTHES are stacked along the corners.

A young girl stands in front of an elongated wooden dresser. We catch her reflection in the mirror.

She's black, thin, and awkwardly adolescent, with a mess of braids atop her head and dark brown eyes enlarged by a pair of black-rimmed glasses.

This is SYDNEY MARS (13). She's headstrong. Bold. Perhaps a bit mischievous.

Sydney carefully reaches into one of the tightly packed boxes and unearths a tiny model of the CHICAGO BEAN--an iconic Chicago landmark.

Sydney sits it atop her dresser alongside a neat row of OTHER TRINKETS. She stares at the Bean. Her eyes shift and twist in the warped metal.

She steps back and admires her work.

All of her trinkets are aligned in a tidy row. Almost perfect.

She makes a small adjustment to the Bean before she notices--
--a kid on a bike ZIP past her window.

She watches him go.

Ever curious, Sydney wanders into the...

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

..Where she stares through the front window, following the boy's trajectory. He slips past this window as well. Off towards somewhere else.

Sydney leans forward and SQUINTS her eyes, trying to see where he went just as--

--her mother BRUSHES past her, arms wrapped around a large brown box. This is SHAY MARS (30s), a tall black woman with piercing eyes and a glorious Afro.

SHAY
You alright baby?

Sydney shrugs.

Shay hands her box off to LEONARD "LEE" MARS (40s), a tall man with dark skin and a quiet, thoughtful gaze.

He sits the box on the kitchen table and carefully PEELS a strip of packing tape from along its edge.

Shay turns her attention back to Sydney.

SHAY (CONT'D)
How's your room looking?

SYDNEY
Alright.

Sydney shrugs again.

Lee looks up at her with kind eyes.

LEE
What's wrong Syd?

Sydney hesitates. Shifts her feet around.

SYDNEY
I miss home.

Lee and Shay share a glance.

Shay wraps her arms around Sydney and runs her fingers along the ends of her braids.

SHAY
I know this is different for you.
But it'll start to feel like home
soon enough.

Sydney continues to stare through the window. Shay shoots another glance at Lee.

Lee reaches into his box and pulls out several items: a bottle of cologne, a few hair brushes, and a POLICE BADGE.

The words CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT are peppered neatly across the top.

Lee puts the badge back in the box. Turns to Sydney.

LEE
You know what, Syd?

SYDNEY
What?

LEE
I'll bet the person who created the
door knocker won the Nobel Prize.

Several beats. Shay gets it. She LAUGHS.

Sydney narrows her eyes.

SYDNEY
Seriously?

SHAY
(through laughter)
You're gonna make her more upset.

Lee shrugs.

LEE
Why don't you go outside for
awhile? You got all that space out
there.

SYDNEY
It's like the middle of nowhere.

SHAY
Just give it a try.

Shay gives Sydney a soft smile. Sydney nods.

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - DAY

We're on the outskirts of Louisville, KY. No city in sight.

The neighborhood is rural. Wide open spaces.

A plethora of big ranch-style houses are organized in a
large, round cul de sac. A deep dark forest of trees sits
behind it all, surrounding the area.

Sydney wanders around, taking it all in.

Some NEIGHBORS peek through their windows, giving the new
black girl odd looks.

Sydney couldn't care less. She STARES BACK. Blinds close.

Then, LAUGHTER. Sydney turns to its source.

A group of BOYS are gathered at the far end of the street, horsing around. Preparing for something.

Sydney hesitantly makes her way over to them.

We recognize the boy on the bike. This is TYLER "TY" ROBINSON (13), a tall, lanky boy with lightning blonde hair.

Next to him are MILL WATTS (12) and JONATHAN WATTS (10)-- brothers with ripped jeans and dark brown hair.

The Watts brothers could almost be twins, save for Jonathan's smaller stature and a red rash of FRECKLES that trek their way across his cheeks.

The boys quickly PIPE DOWN as Sydney grows nearer.

They STARE at her. Sydney STARES back.

SYDNEY

Hey.

Silence. Ty leans his bike against the kickstand.

JONATHAN

Hey.

Mill NUDGES Jonathan.

SYDNEY

What are you guys doing?

MILL

Playin. What are you doin?

SYDNEY

Just looking around.

An uncomfortable silence settles. Ty runs his hands through his hair.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

What are you playing?

The boys look at each other.

TY

We're just--

JONATHAN
 We're goin down to the creek to
 play creek monster!

Mill NUDGES Jonathan again. Pretty hard this time.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
 Stop it!

MILL
 Quit blurtin!

SYDNEY
 What's that?

TY
 A game.

SYDNEY
 Can I play?

MILL
 No.

SYDNEY
 Why?

JONATHAN
 We ain't supposed to play with you.

SYDNEY
 Why not?

Silence. Jonathan turns beet red.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
 Cause I'm a girl?

MILL
 No.

All three boys stare at Sydney.

Ty takes a deep breath.

TY
 You gotta get dirty to play.

MILL
 Yeah. You gotta get *dirty*.

Mill brushes up against her shoulder.

SYDNEY
I don't care.

 TY
Really?

 SYDNEY
I wanna play.

Ty turns to his friends.

 TY
Let her come.

 MILL
Ty--

 TY
Let her come, Mill. It'll be more
fun with four.

 JONATHAN
We ain't supposed to--

 TY
Nobody'll know.
 (to Sydney)
You'll keep it secret, right?

 SYDNEY
 (beat)
Right.

Mill shrugs.

 MILL
Alright then.

Ty KICKS his kickstand and hops on his bike. He nods at
Sydney.

 TY
You'll ride on my pegs.

Sydney smiles and hops on.

EXT. THE KENTUCKY FIELDS - DAY

The kids BREEZE through a vast, green field.

Their wheels PLOW over dirt and rocks, flatten ants and
worms.

Sydney grips Ty's shoulders, balancing on his pegs. She breathes deeply, taking in the air.

Slowly the group approaches...

EXT. THE CREEK - DAY

The creek is deep and muddy. Clouds hang grey overhead, giving the water a similar tint.

The boys drop their bikes and gather around the water. They take off their shoes and SINK their toes into the fresh muck.

Sydney follows suit. She takes off her shoes. Her toenails are BRIGHT BLUE. She quickly covers them in mud.

Ty turns to Sydney.

TY
We're playin creek monster.

SYDNEY
How do you play?

Mill LAUGHS and nudges Ty.

MILL
(mocking)
"Let her come!"

Ty narrows his eyes.

All four kids approach the edge of the creek.

TY
You gotta jump in, sink to the bottom, and get as much mud on you as possible.
(beat)
Whoever comes up the dirtiest is the monster, and they gotta tag everybody else.

Sydney nods and GAZES into the water. It's cloudy and opaque.

MILL
There's lots of stuff in that creek. Bugs and crabs...*piranhas*.

JONATHAN
Stop it! You'll scare her.

SYDNEY

I'm not scared.

She rolls up her sleeves and turns to the boys.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I'll go first if ya'll are chicken.

Immediately the boys SPRING into action. They sink their feet into the creek water.

TY

Watch us first.

Sydney chuckles to herself as the boys JUMP into the water.

They disappear into the grey waves. Stray bubbles collect at the surface, noting their presence.

A few beats pass and--

All three EMERGE.

Ty and Mill are moderately muddy. Muck COATS Ty's bright hair, turning it brown.

Jonathan is completely COVERED. Mud soaked to his bones.

They climb carefully out of the water.

JONATHAN

(to Sydney)

Beat that!

Sydney smirks and WADES out into the middle of the creek.

Water soaks through her pants. Comes up to her elbows. Her chest. Her neck.

The boys watch as she submerges herself. Mill's eyes TRACE her body.

Finally, Sydney closes her eyes, leans backwards and...

SINKS UNDERWATER.

It's dark and murky down here.

Sydney swims to the creek bed and COVERS HERSELF in as much mud as possible. Runs it through the neat strands of her braids.

She flips over and FLOATS on her back, staring up at the creek's glistening surface.

The sun peeks through the clouds, causing the water to shimmer and sparkle.

Suddenly, a shadow CROSSES the surface, blocking the light.

Sydney narrows her eyes, annoyed at the boys--

--but no. The shadow was too large. They didn't do it.

It grows LARGER STILL, descending further into the water. Sydney turns to face it, to see where it's coming from.

It floats near the middle of the creek. Cold. Unmoving.

Sydney looks up at it, and it stares back at her.

It's the corpse of a YOUNG GIRL.

END TEASER.

ACT ONE

EXT. THE CREEK - DAY

Sydney stands at the edge of the creek. She watches as the world moves in SLOW MOTION.

EMS and POLICE OFFICERS swarm the field.

Sydney's eyes land on a group of DOCTORS. They expertly pull the blonde, curly-haired girl from the mud and begin CPR as other emergency workers ready a stretcher.

MRS. BROOKS (40s), the girl's mother, stands stoically off to the side, gazing at her daughter's limp body.

Lee walks swiftly through the grass, talking with a group of officers. His mouth moves, but we can't hear what he's saying.

JOEL ROBINSON (40s), a tall, gruff man with dark hair, GRABS Ty and YELLS something to Lee.

Again, we can't hear him, but his tirade of words are loud and clear. He points at Sydney and SPITS:

"Keep her away from my son!"

Sydney can't tear her gaze away from the dead girl. She takes in every detail: the curl of her hair. The paleness of her skin. The jagged RIP down the center of violet dress.

A dark bruise on her thigh.

Sydney closes her eyes. Willing herself to forget it all...

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sydney sits in a heap in the living room, covered in dried mud from head to toe.

Her parents sit next to her. Shay absentmindedly picks mud flakes out of her hair.

A POLICE OFFICER towers over the family. He stares at Sydney, pen and pad in hand.

OFFICER

What were ya'll doing down there?

SYDNEY
Playing creek monster.

The officer writes something down on his pad.

OFFICER
What's that?

SYDNEY
(beat)
A game.

OFFICER
Don't get smart with me--

LEE
Is this really necessary?

OFFICER
Yes it is. We found a girl in the
creek--

Lee reaches into his pocket and FLASHES his badge.

LEE
With all due respect sir, I'm a
detective from the CPD set to join
the local force. I can question my
own daughter--

OFFICER
I know who you are.

A tense beat. The officer stares daggers at Lee.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
That ain't how things work around
here.
(beat)
You're lucky I don't take her down
to the station.

LEE
She hasn't done anything--

OFFICER
That's my call to make.
(to Sydney)
Now girl, I'm gonna ask you again--

SYDNEY
I jumped into the creek and I saw
her. I didn't see anything before
or after.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(beat)

I just saw the girl floating. She was looking at me.

The officer narrows his eyes. Writes something else down.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - SYDNEY'S ROOM - LATER

Sydney is fresh out of the shower, mud washed away.

She sits on the edge of her bed as Shay combs through her nappy, wet hair.

SHAY

You gotta be more careful.

(beat)

Why in God's name would you jump into a creek after some white kids?

SYDNEY

You told me to play outside.

SHAY

Play, Sydney!

SYDNEY

That's what everyone else was playing! I was trying to make friends.

SHAY

You'll make friends, Sydney! Eventually friends will come. But your real friends wouldn't pressure you into doing something like that.

SYDNEY

My real friends are back in Chicago.

Silence.

Shay's comb get caught in a kink. She pulls it free. Sydney WINCES.

SHAY

I know you're trying, alright? I know you are.

(beat)

One day, you'll love it here. I did when I was a little girl.

Another beat. Sydney stares out of her window. The trees SWAY in a soft breeze.

SYDNEY

Was that girl dead? Definitely?
Nobody could save her?

Shay stops combing and rubs Sydney's shoulders.

SHAY

She was long dead, baby. Nothing
anyone could do.

Sydney nods, transfixed on the trees moving back and forth.

INT. VALLEY STATION POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Lee follows an OFFICER down a hallway in the middle of the Valley Station Police Headquarters.

Though phones RING and piles of handwritten files are stacked atop various desks and drawers, the place is QUIET. Calm even.

Lee takes it all in. This small town has a much different vibe than a busy Chicago Police Station.

The officer leads Lee into...

INT. VALLEY STATION POLICE DEPARTMENT - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Lee sits in a chair on the end of a rectangular, metal table.

Across from him is CHIEF WILLIAMSON (50s), with quickly greying hair and green eyes that possess both an intensity and a kindness.

Chief Williamson shakes Lee's hand and takes his own seat.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

Good to have you here, Officer
Mars.

LEE

Happy to be here.

Chief Williamson pulls out a MANILA FOLDER. He rifles through a stack of papers inside.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

So, you're from Chicago.

LEE

I am.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

What district?

LEE

33rd.

Williamson's eyes widen.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

Tough town.

(beat)

Our department'll probably feel boring by comparison.

LEE

No...seems like you guys have your own brand of excitement.

Williamson nods.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

I heard about what happened earlier. I'm so sorry about that.

LEE

It's all good. Can't really help where a body shows up.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

But my officers shouldn't have picked on your daughter. I'll talk with them about that.

LEE

I appreciate it.

Chief Williamson hands Lee a NEW BADGE, as well as a uniform and other essentials.

The uniform reads: LOUISVILLE METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT.

LEE (CONT'D)

Is there anything I can do to help with the case?

Chief Williamson leans back in his seat.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

Well, there isn't really much to be done.

Lee narrows his eyes.

LEE

What do you mean?

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

That girl your daughter found goes by the name of Taylor Brooks.

(beat)

Her mother's been off the rocks since her husband left, and Taylor hasn't been too far behind. Poor girl. Went missing on July 4th with her dog. She probably killed herself.

Lee nods, processing.

LEE

That's horrible.

(beat)

But you can't be sure, right?

Williamson smiles.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

An autopsy is in the works as we speak. We just gotta wait for the docs to finish.

LEE

So...that's it then? We're just waiting.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

To be honest, there ain't much else going on here in terms of cases. Unless you wanna start filing through traffic tickets.

He laughs again. Lee smirks.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

It'd be in your best interest to take this time and settle in. Acquaint yourself with the city.

Williamson PATS Lee on the shoulder and gets up, loudly sliding his chair back underneath the table.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

Welcome to Louisville, Lee Mars. I promise, it ain't normally this crazy around here.

A WINK, and he's gone. Through the door and down the hallway.
Lee runs his finger along his shiny new badge.

EXT. VALLEY STATION HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The school is large, about three stories high. The whole structure is shaped like an "M."

An old timey WATCH TOWER sits atop the structure. It almost looks like a castle.

Shay makes her way along a newly paved concrete entranceway. She stares up at the watch tower. Heads for the front door.

INT. VALLEY STATION HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The hallways are bare.

Teachers work to arrange their classrooms, preparing for the upcoming school year. Half-finished decorations adorn the windows and lockers.

Shay walks through the halls, taking it all in. She makes a beeline for--

INT. VALLEY STATION HIGH SCHOOL - OFFICE - AFTERNOON

A large WELCOME banner stretches across the front desk.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS set up their working stations.

They all STARE strangely at Shay as she makes her entrance.

Then, suddenly--

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Is that Shay Mars?

Shay turns to the source of the voice.

A tall woman with sharp features, long brunette hair, and a twinkling diamond bracelet SMILES WIDELY at her. This is PRINCIPAL CATHY YATES (40s).

SHAY
Cath?

Cathy RUSHES over and wraps Shay in a warm hug. Both women giggle like children.

CATHY

Oh my god, is this really you?

The women separate. Cathy looks Shay up and now.

SHAY

It's me.

CATHY

You ain't aged a day.

SHAY

(playful)

Well, you certainly have.

Cathy NUDGES Shay.

CATHY

Shut up! You and your shenanigans.

But Cathy is still smiling.

Shay looks around.

CATHY (CONT'D)

What are you doing here? You shouldn't be here till at least Wednesday.

SHAY

I just wanted to, you know, see it. See you.

CATHY

(beat)

Well, your office is down the hall. C'mon, lemme show you real quick.

Cathy leads Shay past the front desk and down the hall to the...

INT. VALLEY STATION HIGH SCHOOL - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE -
AFTERNOON

The office is small, but homey.

Colorful curtains lie draped across a square, brown window. Books about health and teenage psychology are stacked atop the desk.

A baby evergreen sits in the corner. It needs watering.

Shay smiles. Runs her hands along the desk.

CATHY
So...what do you think?

SHAY
It's great. Really. I love it.

CATHY
I know it's probably not as fancy
as your big city Chicago office--

SHAY
It's perfect. It's home.

CATHY
We're so happy to have you home,
Counselor Shay.

Cathy smiles. She gazes at Shay, her eyes neverending.

SHAY
What?

CATHY
What?

SHAY
You're just looking at me!

CATHY
I'm sorry I just...I miss you. You
know? I miss us. Our friendship.
All that "you and me against the
world" stuff.

SHAY
That was kid stuff.

CATHY
I know, but it's hard to find
friends around here.

Suddenly--

Cathy's ASSISTANT (20s) BURSTS through the door. She whispers
something in Cathy's ear.

CATHY (CONT'D)
(to assistant)
I'll be there in just a minute.

Cathy turns to Shay and pats her back.

CATHY (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what: drinks tomorrow
at my place. No husbands. Alright?

SHAY

Sure.

CATHY

And *don't* be late. I know how you
are.

SHAY

I'll be there.

CATHY

See you then!

Cathy smiles and waves, then heads off back down the hallway.

Shay watches her go. Breathes in her new office.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shay pours FRESH TEA from a pitcher into a small glass.

She decoratively perches a lemon wedge on the side and hands
it over to Lee, who sits at the kitchen table.

He takes a sip.

She waits patiently for his response.

LEE

Damn girl!

Shay laughs.

SHAY

I take it you like it?

Lee takes another sip.

LEE

I'm speechless to be honest. Ten
years of drinking your tea, and it
ain't never been this good!

Shay takes a deep breath and sits next to Lee.

SHAY

The southern air is sweet. Gets all
up in the tea.

Shay smiles at him. He smiles back.

LEE

Look at you. Settling right in.
Making tea almost as amazing as you
are. You happy?

SHAY

I feel warm.
(beat)
Went down to the school today. Just
to see it.

LEE

How was it, Counselor Mars?

SHAY

Nice. The office is real nice.
(beat)
I ran into a friend from when I was
a kid. We grew up in the same
neighborhood. Did everything
together.

Shay runs her hands through her hair.

SHAY (CONT'D)

I just can't believe I'm home. I
mean, everything's different,
everything's changed but...it's the
same.

Lee nods.

LEE

Imma be honest--this town is a
little weird to me.

SHAY

(sarcastic)
What happened to you today? Other
than finding a body in the creek...

LEE

The police are doing everything *but*
investigating that girl's death.

SHAY

What'd they say?

LEE

They said her mom was crazy and
that she probably committed
suicide.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

Basically told me to sit back and settle in while they do nothing--

SHAY

And that's exactly what you *should* do.

LEE

Shay--

SHAY

I know, Lee. I know. You always wanna be the hero. But we just got here. We should settle in and try to get used to it all.

(beat)

Besides, why give the neighbors another reason to hate us?

LEE

Another reason? What reason have we given them?

SHAY

You know exactly what I'm talking about.

LEE

(beat)

This town is insane.

SHAY

The whole country's insane. At least the south's up front about it.

Lee drains the rest of his tea. Shay clasps his hand in hers.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - SYDNEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sydney lies in bed, wide awake. Unable to sleep.

She stares through her bedroom window towards the front yard, the houses outside, and the forest surrounding them.

Suddenly, she SQUINTS.

We can't tell for sure, but it looks like SOMEONE'S OUT THERE. Near the mailbox.

She sits up to get a better look--

--but too late. They're GONE.

Sydney looks around.

Soft CHATTER filters in from the living room. Her parents are still talking. Distracted.

Sydney slips out of bed, slides her feet through a pair of flip flops, and makes her way to her bedroom window.

She carefully CLIMBS outside...

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - NIGHT

Crickets chirp. A chilly southern breeze rattles the trees.

Sydney hugs herself against the wind and quickly makes her way towards the mailbox.

There's nobody there, but something is definitely off.

The mailbox is WIDE OPEN.

Sydney walks over and peers inside.

Stuffed near the outer end of the box is a dead, bloody RAT. A word is haphazardly carved into its skin: WELCOME.

Sydney takes a deep breath and picks up the rat. She wraps her fingers around its torso and carries it to the...

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Sydney gets down on hands and knees and digs a small GRAVE for the rat near the gutter vent.

Mud soaks through her pajama pants. Sydney pays it no mind.

As she digs, the trees RUSTLE. But this time, not from the breeze. Sydney looks up towards the forest, which looms menacingly over her.

There's definitely somebody there. Someone with BRIGHT RED HAIR.

But before Sydney can investigate, the person RUNS AWAY.

END ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - DAY

It's cloudy. Overcast. And still, the southern humidity fills the air, turning everything hot and sticky.

Sydney stands in her front yard, swimming in the air.

Ty, Jonathan, and Mill play KICKBALL in the center of the cul de sac.

Sydney makes a BEELINE for them.

They stop playing as she approaches. Mill holds the ball.

MILL

Hey! We ain't allowed to play with you anymore.

SYDNEY

I don't wanna play.

Sydney SNATCHES the ball away.

Mill tries to get it back, but she TOSSES it into the trees.

MILL

What the hell--

SYDNEY

It's important.

Ty walks over to Sydney.

TY

What then?

He looks around, cautiously, for the eyes of adults.

TY (CONT'D)

Make it quick.

SYDNEY

I saw something last night. Someone in the woods behind my house.

(beat)

Is that normal?

The boys share a look.

JONATHAN

It mighta been a ghost.

MILL

There's all kinds of things in that forest. That ain't important!

SYDNEY

It is. *Somebody* killed that girl yesterday.

MILL

It was probably you.

Sydney shoots a GLARE at Mill.

TY

What did they look like?

SYDNEY

I dunno. The only thing I saw was red hair.

TY

(beat)

It was probably Mara.

SYDNEY

Who's that?

The other boys SNICKER.

TY

My weird ass sister. She's always running away. Guess now she plays around in the forest.

JONATHAN

She didn't kill Taylor. She liked her. They were friends.

MILL

That don't mean nothing.

(beat)

Everyone liked her.

TY

Mara couldn't kill nobody.

Sydney takes a deep breath.

SYDNEY

Why does Mara run away?

TY

She--

SQUEAK.

A door CREAKS open.

The kids turn to the source of the noise.

MRS. BROOKS, Taylor's mother, makes her way outside. We recognize her from the crime scene, but this time, we get a better look.

She sports straight blonde hair riddled with split ends, and though she's short, she's sturdy. Kinetic. Dangerous.

Mrs. Brooks holds a dead, bloody RABBIT in her hand.

She lays the animal along a wooden block on her front porch, picks up a carving knife, and starts to PEEL the skin away.

The kids watch in a mixture of AWE and HORROR.

Suddenly, Mrs. Brooks LOOKS UP.

She meets eyes with Sydney directly. Her globes are bright red, as though she isn't sleeping.

MILL

Holy shit!

TY

C'mon!

Ty GRABS Sydney and the four kids TAKE OFF RUNNING.

They whip around the cul de sac entranceway and SINK into a cluster of bushes.

Sydney peers from between the leaves and watches as Mrs. Brooks calmly goes back to CARVING her game.

SYDNEY

Why'd she look at me like that?

MILL

Well...you did find her daughter floating in a creek...

TY

She was scary before that, though. She's always been kinda mean.

JONATHAN

She's probably jealous. How would you feel if your daughter was smarter and prettier than you'd ever been your whole entire life?

MILL

I'd feel happy. Taylor couldn't help being perfect.

Jonathan mimes KISSING. Mill NUDGES him. Laughter.

SYDNEY

Does she always kill animals?

TY

She goes hunting a lot. Why?

SYDNEY

I found something else last night.

TY

What?

SYDNEY

I buried it.

(beat)

But I'll show you. As long as you keep it secret.

The boys look at each other. They NOD.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

GRANDMA JEANIE (60s), is an older, shorter version of Shay. Dark skin, salt and pepper hair, and a hearty abundance of laugh lines trace the sides of her face.

She makes her way through the living room. Shay and Lee try to help her, but she BATS them away.

GRANDMA JEANIE

This is just *gorgeous*, Shay. Absolutely beautiful.

SHAY

Thanks mama. Please be careful--

GRANDMA JEANIE

I got it, baby. I'm 60, not 80...

LEE

Thanks so much for helping us out
with Sydney.

GRANDMA JEANIE

That girl don't need no babysitter.
She can watch after herself just
fine.

(beat)

So I don't mind. It'll be easy
enough.

Jeanie finally makes her way to the kitchen table. She sinks
into a chair and rubs her knees.

Shay hands her a glass of tea.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)

I do have one question, though.

SHAY

What's that, mama?

GRANDMA JEANIE

Why in the hell did you two move to
Hillbilly Town, USA?

Silence. Lee and Shay share a LOOK.

Grandma Jeanie LAUGHS.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)

Seems I've found the elephant.

She takes a sip of her tea.

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Sydney, Ty, Jonathan, and Mill gather around the gutter vent
where Sydney buried the rat.

But something's missing. The grave has been excavated.

The rat is completely GONE.

MILL

You tricked us, didn't you?

JONATHAN

Yeah! You just wanted us to come to
your house.

SYDNEY
I'm not lying. I swear it was here
yesterday.

MILL
Then where is it?

Sydney stares at the newly disturbed dirt mound.

SYDNEY
Somebody stole it. They dug it up.

JONATHAN
Who would steal a stupid dead rat?

Ty turns towards the forest beyond Sydney's house. Sydney and the others follow suit.

The curiousness of it all draws them like a MAGNET.

All four head towards the forest's edge. They wouldn't dare go in, but they stare up at the trees.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
I'm really starting to think it was
a ghost.

MILL
Jon--

BEEP. A sound.

Small and mechanical. A tone that's almost cute.

Jonathan STARTS.

Sydney, Ty, and Mill look for the source of the noise--

There. Wedged into the soil beneath a pile of fallen leaves is a small, pink FLIP PHONE.

A browning flower sticker PEELS away from the center of the screen.

Sydney picks it up and looks it over. She FLIPS the screen open. It's off. Maybe the battery is dead.

SYDNEY
Whose is it?

The boys SHRUG.

MILL
Looks like some girl's.

TY
Least we know ghosts don't carry
cell phones.

JONATHAN
You never know--

BEEP.

Mill takes the phone. He hits the home button. Nothing. He holds it down for a few seconds.

Still nothing.

MILL
This shit is busted.

SYDNEY
Lemme see.

MILL
Why?

Sydney SNATCHES the phone from Mill.

Sydney messes around with the phone. She hits a few buttons.

More nothing.

MILL (CONT'D)
Told you so.

Sydney flips the phone over. She opens the battery flap. ROTATES IT. Hits the home button again.

Finally, the phone COMES TO LIFE.

The boys crowd around as Sydney scrolls through.

MILL (CONT'D)
Holy shit.

SYDNEY
What?

TY
That's Taylor's phone.

The kids look around: nobody is watching.

Sydney opens the text messages. The latest one was sent on the evening of July 4th between Taylor and an unnamed number.

It reads--

TAYLOR: I'm rly confused. I don't know what to do.

UNNAMED: Come on over this evening. Maybe I can help.

Sydney's eyes scan the words. She looks towards her house, where her father stands inside...

END ACT TWO.

ACT THREE

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Grandma Jeanie sits at the kitchen table, sipping tea. Sydney wraps her in a long, warm HUG.

GRANDMA JEANIE
There's my sweet baby.

SYDNEY
How long are you staying?

LEE
She's gonna watch you while we're gone for today.

SHAY
And that means some ground rules.
(beat)
Stay near the house...and don't bring your little creek jumping friends in here. She only agreed to babysit one child.

SYDNEY
I will.

Shay smiles and hugs Sydney.

Lee also goes in for a hug--but Sydney taps him on the shoulder.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
I need to show you something.

Sydney hands Lee the phone. He takes it and looks it over.

LEE
Whose is this, baby?

SYDNEY
It's Taylor's. That girl who died.

SHAY
What?

SYDNEY
That's what Ty said.

LEE
Where'd you find this?

SYDNEY
Outside by the woods.

SHAY
What were you doing in the woods?

SYDNEY
Nothing. I was playing and I found
it.

Lee opens the phone and looks through the text messages. He narrows his eyes.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Who was she texting?

LEE
Don't worry about it, Syd.

SYDNEY
But--

LEE
Go on back outside.

SHAY
And keep that girl outta your head!

Sydney sulks back through the front door.

Shay peeks over Lee's shoulder.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Lee, you *can't* do this.

LEE
I'm just gonna turn it in, alright?

SHAY
No you won't. You'll do more. You
always do more.

LEE
I can't not investigate this, Shay.

SHAY
You can! Look, I know this is
different for you Lee, but listen
to me. You ain't in Chicago
anymore.

LEE
What's so different about Kentucky?

SHAY

Everything.

(beat)

Chicago's all about fixing things.
Making things better. Building a
city.

LEE

People die left and right in
Chicago--

SHAY

But they're *striving* for something.
The south doesn't change. It likes
itself.

(beat)

It's beautiful here. We can live a
beautiful life. But you should know
that the soil is rotten. All of it.
And even if it's killing all your
crops, you don't go digging it up.
It'll just make you sick.

LEE

I'm not digging anything up.

SHAY

So leave that girl alone.

(beat)

They're already watching us, Lee.
Around here, we gotta try to blend.

LEE

I'm blending.

Lee plants a KISS on Shay's forehead.

Grandma Jeanie SMIRKS and sips more of her tea.

EXT. THE MARS HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Sydney returns to the edge of the forest where the boys are
hidden behind trees.

They slowly peer out from behind their trees as she
approaches.

SYDNEY

My parents are gone.

MILL

Good for you.

JONATHAN
Where's the phone?

SYDNEY
My dad took it. He's a cop. He'll
figure out what to do.

MILL
That's proof, isn't it?

SYDNEY
Proof of what?

MILL
Proof that someone, or *something*
killed her. Why would she leave her
phone?

JONATHAN
Whatever killed her is still out
there.

The four kids look into the deep, dark WOODS.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
What do we do?

TY
I dunno.

Ty reaches into his pocket and pulls out a POCKET KNIFE.
Small and sharp.

Sydney stares at it. Narrows her eyes. Ty notices.

TY (CONT'D)
But we have to be ready for
anything. Even if it is a ghost in
the woods.

Before the kids can attack any ghosts--

VOICE (O.S.)
Sydney!

The voice is DIRECTLY behind them.

The kids whip around to find Grandma Jeanie. She stands
behind Sydney, ankle deep in grass.

The boys are frozen, unsure of what to do.

Ty SHOVES his knife back into his pocket.

Sydney's eyes dart between them and her Grandmother.

SYDNEY
Grandma, we--

GRANDMA JEANIE
I don't care about your friends.
They're more than welcome, long as
you don't tell your parents.

Sydney exhales.

JONATHAN
We won't. Swear it.

Mill shoots a GLARE at Jonathan.

SYDNEY
What's wrong, Grandma?

GRANDMA JEANIE
I need you to do me a favor.

Sydney nods.

EXT. CATHY YATES' HOUSE - DAY

A white-pillared PLANTATION HOUSE with a wrap-around second story porch sits in the center of a bright green field.

It's beautiful, but also unsettling.

Mere decades ago, slaves lived here.

Shay pulls up the elongated driveway and gets out of her car, taking it all in.

She walks towards the front door.

INT. CATHY YATES' HOUSE - DAY

Shay and Cathy sit on the covered porch eating small bites, sipping wine, and staring out into the wilderness that surrounds them.

CATHY
So? What do you think?

SHAY
Honestly, I'm speechless, Cath.

Cathy SMILES and takes another sip. Her bracelet GLINTS in the sunlight.

CATHY

Took about three years to complete the restoration because, as you know, it's incredibly old construction.

(beat)

But I think we finally got it.

Shay takes a sip of her own wine.

CATHY (CONT'D)

I guess you probably think I'm a hick or something, right?

SHAY

No. Why would I think that?

CATHY

I dunno. Cause I'm out here in the middle of bum fuck nowhere.

Cathy NUDGES Shay.

CATHY (CONT'D)

And you're a big city girl now, right?

SHAY

Not really.

CATHY

You are though!

(beat)

I wanna hear all about it. Tell me about Shay's Chicago Shenanigans.

Cathy laughs at her own bad alliteration. Shay smiles.

SHAY

I dunno what to say, really. Chicago was great. It was...big, you know? It felt infinite.

Cathy nods.

CATHY

So why the hell'd you move back here?

SHAY

(beat)
My husband's job. He's a cop.

CATHY

That'll do it. Chris always has me running all over the damn city.

SHAY

What's he do?

CATHY

Runs those Derby horses. Always trying to catch a lucky break.

Cathy sits her wine down and leans forward.

CATHY (CONT'D)

And you'll like this part--he also runs a non-profit for at risk youth.

SHAY

That's great!

CATHY

It is and it isn't. Don't get me wrong, I love the charity but...it just breaks my heart sometimes. You know? You can't save all those kids.

(beat)

I'm sure you know all about that.

SHAY

You just gotta try and help the ones you can.

Cathy nods.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a pack of CIGARETTES. She offers one to Shay, who declines.

CATHY

You sure? We got our work cut out for us next week when school comes back.

SHAY

I can imagine.

CATHY

You don't know the half of it.

Cathy LIGHTS her cigarette.

CATHY (CONT'D)
You know that Brooks girl? The one
who died?

Shay nods.

CATHY (CONT'D)
She went to the school. All the
kids loved her. Sweet girl. She was
part of the charity. Pretty and
popular.

Cathy takes a DRAG of her cigarette.

CATHY (CONT'D)
But you know what, Shay? I said it,
and I kept saying it--that girl's
mother is batshit fucking insane.

Shay narrows her eyes.

SHAY
Really?

CATHY
Insane!
(beat)
Her husband left her. Got out while
he still had time. And that
girl...Shay, I wouldn't be
surprised if she killed her
herself.

Shay shakes her head.

CATHY (CONT'D)]
Hey. Can you make it down to the
school tomorrow?

SHAY
For what?

Cathy takes another drag.

CATHY
I gotta meet with her. Taylor's
mom. We're planning a memorial for
the kids and we need her
permission. You know.

SHAY
Sure, I guess.

CATHY

I know it's short notice and you don't know her very well. But you're the counselor. And besides, I feel like I need a witness, in case she decides to kill me.

Shay cuts a glance at Cathy.

SHAY

I'll come.

(beat)

But if she decides to kill you, I'm leaving. Imma leave you in there.

CATHY

Really?

SHAY

Just like Lord of the Rings. I'll live to tell your tale.

Cathy SNORTS. Shay sips her wine and stares out into the trees.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jeanie sits propped up on the couch.

Sydney holds her ankles in her lap and gently massages LOTION into her feet.

The boys sit on the floor, watching and SNICKERING.

Sydney shoots them the occasional GLARE.

GRANDMA JEANIE

I appreciate it, honey. Can't reach down there like I used to.

SYDNEY

No problem.

More LAUGHING. Jeanie turns to the boys.

GRANDMA JEANIE

What's good in the peanut gallery?

JONATHAN

I ain't laughing at you, ma'am!

Jeanie smiles.

GRANDMA JEANIE
 You're laughing now, but one day
 this'll be you.
 (beat)
 I'll admit, I'm curious about you
 kids.

The boys look at each other.

SYDNEY
 What do you mean?

Grandma Jeanie turns to Sydney.

GRANDMA JEANIE
 Ain't it true ya'll found a body in
 the creek the other day?

Sydney nods.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)
 And you weren't scared at all?

Sydney hesitates. Mill SCOOTs forward.

MILL
 I wasn't scared.

A smirk from Jeanie.

GRANDMA JEANIE
 Of course you weren't. You don't
 look like you'd be.
 (to Sydney)
 What did she look like?

SYDNEY
 Just a regular girl.

GRANDMA JEANIE
 Regular. No marks or injuries?

Sydney hesitates. The BRUISE on the girl's leg--

SYDNEY
 I dunno.

GRANDMA JEANIE
 You'd know.

Jeanie shoots a glance at all four kids.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)
 How do you think she died?

TY

(beat)
She drowned.

GRANDMA JEANIE

And why would a "regular girl," as Sydney put it, just up and drown? She probably had some help.

Sydney hesitates.

SYDNEY

I don't think she drowned.

GRANDMA JEANIE

What do you think?

SYDNEY

Her dress was ripped. I think someone hurt her.

Jeanie's eyes soften. Somehow, Sydney has grown older.

Jeanie's gaze slowly tapers off to the woods beyond the cul de sac.

GRANDMA JEANIE

They say Wendigos live in them woods.

SYDNEY

What?

GRANDMA JEANIE

A Wendigo is a monster...but normally they disguise themselves as something else. Like a human. That way, they can lure people into the trees and kill them.

A tense beat. Sydney holds her breath--

And Grandma Jeanie BURSTS into laughter.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)

When I was a young girl, I was terrified of them things.

(beat)

I used to be your age. Afraid of Wendigos. And one day, you'll all be my age, getting your feet rubbed.

Grandma Jeanie LEANS back on the couch and closes her eyes.

GRANDMA JEANIE (CONT'D)
Life is a circle that way.

Sydney, Ty, Mill, and Jonathan trade nervous glances.

INT. LEE'S CAR - DAY

Lee sits in his car in the parking lot of the police station.

He flips through the phone Sydney found. His eyes are wide in HORROR.

INT. VALLEY STATION POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

The station is as quiet as ever.

Lee sits at his desk near the back of the briefing room. He SLAMS numbers into his computer.

ON SCREEN: The numbers run through an endless database, searching for a match.

Lee watches and waits. Then--PING. A match.

Lee furrows his brow.

LEE
Chief?

Lee beckons Williamson over. He moves swiftly.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
What'd you find?

LEE
I ran that unknown number through our database. Got a name.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
Who?

Lee points at the screen. Chief Williamson LEANS IN to see.

A single name is linked to the unknown number: Joel Robinson.

Ty's father.

END ACT THREE.

ACT FOUR

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shay lies on the couch staring up at the ceiling. Lee paces back and forth, a glass of sweet tea in hand.

SHAY

And what did he say?

LEE

He acted like it was normal.

(beat)

He said the girl was fast. Said everyone knew she had relations with older men. He said that's how she was. The whole town knew.

SHAY

What did you say?

Lee shakes his head and sits next to Shay.

LEE

I can't accept that, Shay. I know you said that we should settle and I should stay out of it, and I wish I could but...that man lives here. Our daughter lives here--

SHAY

Staying out of it is how we keep her safe. How we keep her from being a target--

LEE

According to you, she's already a target! Long as she's breathing--

SHAY

My God, Lee--

SYDNEY (O.S.)

What happened?

Shay and Lee turn to find Sydney peeking around a corner. Eavesdropping.

SHAY

Sydney. This is adult talk.

SYDNEY

You guys adult talk really loud.

SHAY

You know, this would be so much easier if you two would just *listen* to me!

SYDNEY

What?

SHAY

(to Sydney)

Why the hell were you digging through the woods looking for cell phones?

SYDNEY

We were just playing and--

SHAY

I told you to stay away from those boys!

SYDNEY

You told me to make friends!

LEE

Sydney...you do need to stay away from that Robinson boy.

SYDNEY

Why?

LEE

For your own safety.

SYDNEY

What does that have to do with my safety?

Silence. Lee hesitates.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Tell me.

Still nothing.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Did he send those texts? I read them.

(beat)

She seemed really scared--

LEE

Syd--

SHAY
 (to Lee)
 You see?

Shay's eyes dart between Sydney and Lee.

SHAY (CONT'D)
 Both of you need to stop all this
 investigating and be quiet!
 (beat)
 If we ain't careful, this town will
 eat us whole.

LEE
 If the town's hungry, it'll eat
 regardless--

SHAY
Trust me. I lived here my whole
 life. I know.

And with that, Shay storms off.

Lee and Sydney trade glances.

INT. VALLEY STATION HIGH SCHOOL - CATHY'S OFFICE - THE NEXT
 DAY

Shay and Cathy sit at a small, round table across from Mrs.
 Brooks.

Mrs. Brooks seems on edge. Her eyes shift nervously between
 the two women.

CATHY
 Mrs. Brooks. It's so good to see
 you. I'm so sorry it has to be
 under these circumstances.

MRS. BROOKS
 I'm sure you are.

A cutting silence.

Cathy clears her throat.

CATHY
 Your daughter was a wonderful
 person. So many of the students and
 staff here adored her, myself
 included.

Cathy gestures to Shay.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Mrs. Shay Mars is the new school counselor this year, and she and I are planning a memorial service for Taylor.

SHAY

(beat)

It's important to give the students a chance to grieve. Especially at the beginning of the year. Things can feel really turbulent.

Mrs. Brooks seems unmoved. Not even so much as a nod.

Cathy looks at Shay and continues.

CATHY

So, if it's not too much to ask, we'd like your permission to use some pictures of Taylor for the memorial.

Silence. Mrs. Brooks shifts in her seat.

MRS. BROOKS

What was going on at your school, Cathy Yates?

CATHY

Excuse me?

MRS. BROOKS

I don't mean to be curt, but I'd just like to know.

Cathy shakes her head, searching for an answer.

MRS. BROOKS (CONT'D)

I found out yesterday that my daughter was getting text messages from a grown man.

CATHY

I--I'm so sorry to hear that, Mrs. Brooks. But I'm not sure I could've prevented that.

Mrs. Brooks nods suspiciously.

MRS. BROOKS

And when exactly were you gonna divulge this information Shay Mars? You live right next to me.

SHAY
Mrs. Brooks--

MRS. BROOKS
Is there anything else I should
know about? Anything your husband's
told you?

Shay hesitates. She looks at Cathy.

SHAY
Lee doesn't tell me anything.

MRS. BROOKS
Really.

Silence settles. Cathy clears her throat.

CATHY
Mrs. Brooks, I can't imagine--

MRS. BROOKS
That's right, you can't.

CATHY
(beat)
If you could just give us your
permission. I already have some
photos, but--

MRS. BROOKS
Oh, you do?

Cathy freezes. Hesitates.

CATHY
I mean, I--

MRS. BROOKS
Which photos do you have Cathy
Yates?
(beat)
You don't need my permission to use
what you already have. Do what you
want.

Mrs. Brooks stares DAGGERS at Shay.

She gets up, SLAMS her hands on the table, and storms out of
the office.

Cathy exhales, on the verge of hyperventilating. She grasps
Shay's arm.

CATHY

Thank you *so much*. She's insane. I told you...

Shay watches her go, the gears in her brain TURNING.

EXT. THE KENTUCKY FIELDS- DAY

The boys gather in the fields near the forest's edge. They trade glances.

MILL

So, what do you think?

A long beat. The wind rattles the trees.

JONATHAN

I think it's real.

(beat)

Since when do old people lie?

MILL

Old people lie all the time!

JONATHAN

So you agree with me?

MILL

Maybe.

TY

It don't matter either way.

MILL

Yes it--

TY

It don't. We know something's in there, we just don't know what it is.

Mill turns to the others.

MILL

Where's Sydney?

Jonathan and Ty SHRUG.

JONATHAN

Why does it matter?

MILL

I dunno. I was just wondering--

TY
He likes her.

Mill turns RED.

MILL
No I don't!

TY
You do.

Silence.

Mill KICKS a nearby rock.

MILL
It don't matter. She don't like me
anyway.

Jonathan snickers.

EXT. THE ROBINSON HOUSE - DAY

The Robinson House is wide and sprawling--the most impressive house in the neighborhood. The forest stretches on behind it, green and neverending.

Sydney stands in front of the house, taking it all in. She looks around. The boys are nowhere.

But there's SOMETHING ELSE--

There, in the distance, between the tall green trees, stands a young girl with BRIGHT RED HAIR.

This is MARA (13). She stares at Sydney.

Sydney stares back.

Mara smiles. She beckons Sydney into the trees.

Sydney slowly complies.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Mara leads Sydney through the trees. The girls wind around rocks and vegetation.

Sydney looks Mara up and down. Her fiery hair and worn out shoes.

Mara looks back and giggles.

MARA

What?

SYDNEY

Are you Mara?

Mara nods.

MARA

And you're Sydney. Glad we got that out of the way.

Sydney watches a worm WIGGLE its way around the bark of a tree.

MARA (CONT'D)

I stole your rat. Sorry.

(beat)

It's just...I saw those people put it in your mailbox and I didn't want you to feel bad.

SYDNEY

What people?

Mara shrugs. She HOPS over a stone.

MARA

So where'd you move from?

SYDNEY

Chicago.

MARA

Holy cow. That's a big city, right?

SYDNEY

Yeah.

MARA

What's it like?

SYDNEY

What do you mean?

MARA

I mean...what did it look like? Were there buildings with lights?

SYDNEY

Yeah. Lots of buildings and lights. There's a lake that kinda looks like the ocean cause you can't see the end of it.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(beat)

I used to ride the L trains with my friends all the time.

MARA

Where'd you go?

SYDNEY

Nowhere. Just in a circle over and over. So we could look at the city.

MARA

Oh.

Mara narrows her eyes.

MARA (CONT'D)

You make it sound kinda boring.

SYDNEY

Yeah. We didn't have anything like this.

Sydney gestures at the forest.

Owls HOOT. The trees rustle.

MARA

Is it your first time in the woods?

Sydney nods.

MARA (CONT'D)

I'll bet you're scared.

SYDNEY

You're not?

Mara shakes her head.

MARA

I'm out here all the time.

SYDNEY

(beat)

Do you believe in Wendigos?

MARA

Hell yeah. I've just never seen one before.

SYDNEY

How would you know? They look like humans.

MARA
I feel like I'd know.

Leaves CRUNCH under Sydney's feet. She turns to Mara.

MARA (CONT'D)
Why were you at my house?

SYDNEY
I was looking for Ty and the others.

MARA
Oh. Well who needs them, right?
It's more fun with just girls.

SYDNEY
You should hang with us sometime.
(beat)
Is it true what Ty says? That you're always running away?

Mara stops in her tracks. She nods silently.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Why do you do that? It's dangerous out here. A girl died.

Mara shakes her head.

MARA
That don't matter. Taylor would never run in the woods.

SYDNEY
You knew her?

MARA
She was my best friend.

The girls continue to walk, going nowhere in particular.

SYDNEY
I found her cell phone.

MARA
Really?
(beat)
Where is it?

SYDNEY
My dad has it.

MARA

Oh.

SYDNEY

She was texting someone before she died. I think it was your dad.

MARA

My dad?

SYDNEY

Yeah.

MARA

So what does that mean?

Sydney shrugs.

SYDNEY

I dunno.

(beat)

Do you think he--

MARA

My dad wouldn't hurt anyone.

SYDNEY

(beat)

But someone did. I saw her in the water. Her dress was ripped--

MARA

I don't wanna talk about this anymore.

Sydney looks at her shoes. Takes a deep breath.

SYDNEY

Sorry. It's just sad, that's all.

MARA

It is.

More walking. Mara and Sydney trade secret glances with each other.

MARA (CONT'D)

I miss her. Me and Taylor would always tell each other secrets.

A slight smile from Sydney.

SYDNEY

That's nice.

MARA
(beat)
Can you keep a secret?

SYDNEY
Sure.

Mara LEANS in to Sydney. Whispers in her ear.

MARA
I don't really want to run away
anymore.

Mara puts SOMETHING in Sydney's hand. Something we can't see.

Then, Mara KISSES her. Sweet, innocent, and warm--

CRASH.

The sound of broken glass CRACKS across the sky. It's loud.
Like a window. Somewhere back in the neighborhood.

Sydney and Mara separate, ears perched.

MARA (CONT'D)
What the hell?

Suddenly--

A blood curdling SCREAM from the same direction.

Mara grabs Sydney's hand.

MARA (CONT'D)
C'mon!

The girls waste no time in rushing towards the noise...

END ACT FOUR.

ACT FIVE

EXT. THE ROBINSON HOUSE - DAY

Sydney and Mara RACE through the cul de sac at the sound of the glass and the screaming.

They make their way to the front of the Robinson house.

Ty, Mill, and Jonathan meet them there.

Mrs. Brooks stands SHAKING in the driveway.

She levels a shotgun at Joel, who stands by the door, hands raised.

His wife, MELANIE ROBINSON (30s)--striking blond hair like Ty's--stands behind him, peering through her newly broken front window.

She SHRIEKS again.

Mrs. Brooks doesn't flinch.

INT. VALLEY STATION POLICE DEPARTMENT - SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY

Considering that this is a police department, you'd think this room would be impressive.

It isn't.

It's about as big as a closet. Dual computer screens are hooked up to a large, black TOWER on the concrete floor.

Dust in the air. Lee waves it away as he sifts through the footage.

There. July 4th.

Lee clicks and fast forwards through the video. Suddenly, he STOPS.

ON SCREEN: Joel Robinson STROLLS through the entrance of a baseball stadium. His wife Melanie, and children Ty and Mara, are with him. TAYLOR BROOKS, alive and well, walks alongside the family.

Her little dog trots next to her, sporting a bright blue collar and leash.

Lee skips ahead.

ON SCREEN: Later that evening. Taylor and her dog leave alone. It's about 10 pm.

More SKIPPING.

ON SCREEN: The Robinson family leaves together several hours later. Long after Taylor went missing.

Lee rewinds and watches the video again.

Chief Williamson walks up behind him. Pats his shoulder.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
Watching her on tape won't bring
her back.

Lee shakes his head.

LEE
We gonna arrest this guy? Joel?

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
Arrest him for what?

LEE
You saw those texts.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
I did. They were vague as all get
out.

(beat)
We need more evidence. It's as
simple as that. Video proves he
didn't kill her.

LEE
Doesn't prove he didn't rape her.

Lee exhales and puts his head in his hands.

As he struggles to process--

Williamson's cell rings. He answers it.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON
Chief here.

Williamson listens and nods. His eyes grow WIDE.

CHIEF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
We'll be right down.

He hangs up.

LEE

What's going on?

CHIEF WILLIAMSON

There's been an incident in your neighborhood.

Lee furrows his brow.

EXT. THE ROBINSON HOUSE - DAY

A swarm of LMPD police cars CROWD the cul de sac entrance, flashing their red and blue lights.

One officer speaks to Mrs. Brooks through a megaphone.

OFFICER #1

Mrs. Brooks? You need to put down that shotgun.

Mrs. Brooks COCKS her gun. Holds it steady.

Sydney and the boys watch, bewildered.

Ty is SEETHING. On the verge of tears. His eyes dart between Mara and his father.

Sydney puts her hand on Ty's shoulder. He PUSHES her off.

TY

Get off me.

MRS. BROOKS

Do you know how old she was? My Taylor?

Joel shakes his head.

JOEL

Mrs. Brooks--

MRS. BROOKS

She was 15. 15 years old.

Mrs. Brooks looks around. She glances at the police officers.

MRS. BROOKS (CONT'D)

I know you killed her.

JOEL

I swear to you, I didn't--

MRS. BROOKS

I want you to *say it!* Admit to me that you killed her!

JOEL

I didn't kill your daughter Mrs. Brooks.

MRS. BROOKS

But you slept with her, right?

JOEL

No I didn't. I never touched that girl.

Mara takes Sydney's hand. Holds it tight.

MRS. BROOKS

I saw her. Sneaking out, going to your house at night. Going *places* with you.

(beat)

What happened?

JOEL

Maybe she did sneak out, and that's on you. But I never touched her.

(to Melanie)

I *never* touched her!

Mrs. Brooks gestures to Melanie.

MRS. BROOKS

Did *she* figure it out? Didn't want your little secret to get out, so you had to kill her?

JOEL

You're telling lies Mrs. Brooks--

MRS. BROOKS

(to Melanie)

Well I hate to break it to you honey, but your husband had sex with a *goddamn child!*

As Mrs. Brooks continues to YELL--

Lee PULLS UP to the scene.

He eases out of his car and assess the situation. Makes eye contact with Sydney.

JOEL

Mrs. Brooks, you gotta understand,
what you've been hearing ain't
true. I loved your daughter like
she was mine!

MRS. BROOKS

So I've heard.

JOEL

This has been hard on me too! The
girl ain't have no father. She came
to me and I tried to *help* her. I'd
never hurt her!

MRS. BROOKS

What did she say when you killed
her?

OFFICER #1

Mrs. Brooks! Lower your weapon.

MRS. BROOKS

Did she cry? Did she ask you to
stop? Did she ask for me?

Joel backs away--

Ty reaches into his pocket--

Lee moves forward--

Mrs. Brooks EDGES CLOSER--

MRS. BROOKS (CONT'D)

Did she feel how you feel *right*
now?

Melanie lets out another SCREAM.

Ty takes his pocket knife and LUNGES for Mrs. Brooks--

Sydney tries to stop him, but he SLIPS from her grasp--

Ty LUNGES at Mrs. Brooks, grazing her with the knife--

The police move closer, guns raised--

Mrs. Brooks PUSHES Ty to the ground. Levels her gun--

LEE (O.S.)

Mrs. Brooks?

He's close. Right behind her. She stops in her tracks.

MRS. BROOKS

I'm a good shot Lee Mars. You take one more step, and I'll kill this boy.

LEE

I don't doubt it.

(beat)

You're not wrong Mrs. Brooks. You have every right to be upset. But this isn't right.

Ty GLARES at Lee.

Still, he continues.

LEE (CONT'D)

Joel didn't kill her.

MRS. BROOKS

How do you know?

LEE

I saw the security footage. The night she disappeared, Taylor went to a baseball game with the Robinsons. She left on her own after 2 hours. Joel didn't leave until hours after she was gone.

Mrs. Brooks SHAKES with fury.

MRS. BROOKS

That doesn't mean anything. He still had sex with her!

LEE

I know it doesn't seem like anyone's fighting for you, but I promise you, I am.

(beat)

I won't stop until the day that we see justice for your daughter.

Lee puts a gentle hand on Mrs. Brooks' shoulder.

The other officers look on in AWE, impressed with his composure.

LEE (CONT'D)

But if you pull that trigger, that day might never come.

(beat)

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

Let's get justice for Taylor the
right way.

Slowly, slowly, Mrs. Brooks lowers her weapon.

The police MOVE IN.

Ty starts to CRY. Joel and Mara rush over and wrap him in a
group hug.

Lee makes a beeline for Sydney.

He grabs her by the arm.

SYDNEY

Hey--

LEE

We're going home.

Lee shuffles Sydney down the block, chaos dissipating in
their wake.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Sydney, Shay and Lee gather around the living room table.

Shay paces back and forth.

SHAY

What the hell were you doing over
there?

LEE

Shay--

SHAY

No, you could've been *killed*! Both
of you!

(to Sydney)

Didn't we say to stay away from
that house?

Silence. All eyes on Sydney. She hesitates.

SYDNEY

I was just playing.

LEE

Playing with who?

SYDNEY

I--

KNOCKING at their front door.

Lee and Shay share a glance.

Lee cautiously walks over and answers it. On the other end are JOEL AND MELANIE ROBINSON.

Shay makes her way to Lee's side.

LEE

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson...

A tense beat--

--before Melanie WRAPS her arms around Lee. She starts sobbing.

MELANIE

Thank you so much.

Lee, Shay, and Sydney meet eyes, equal parts flattered and confused.

Joel pats Lee on the shoulder.

JOEL

I know we got off to a rough start...but I appreciate what you did for my family today. That Mrs. Brooks--

LEE

I understand.

Joel nods. Takes a long look at Sydney.

JOEL

I know what I said before, but your daughter is more than welcome to play with Ty or come around.

Lee and Shay share another GLANCE, half worried, half suspicious.

Sydney SMILES widely.

SYDNEY

Thanks Mr. Robinson.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Sydney sits on the couch next to Shay--who attempts to tame her hair into a set of dual french braids.

Lee sits across from the girls, watching Shay's expert fingers weave.

SHAY

(to Lee)

Well, you did it. You got to be the hero.

LEE

I wasn't trying to--

SHAY

Yes you were.

(beat)

I'm glad it worked out. Really. But you have to know...that's not normal around here. Things don't always *work out*.

Lee nods. Shay's words hang heavy in the air.

SHAY (CONT'D)

(to Sydney)

What about you. Are you alright?

SYDNEY

I'm fine.

SHAY

A lot happened out there.

Lee leans forward.

LEE

You said you read those text messages. What did you read?

Sydney hesitates.

SYDNEY

She was texting that man.

SHAY

You understand that's wrong, don't you? You don't talk to grown men--

SYDNEY

I know.

Shay takes a deep breath. Keeps braiding.

LEE

And those boys you hang out with.
You're not dating any of those
little boys--

SYDNEY

If I start dating a boy, I'll let
you know.

Lee and Shay share a glance.

SHAY

I thought this would be peaceful.

LEE

(beat)

We got a chance to do something out
here. To change things. We couldn't
do that in Chicago. We can *help*
people here.

SYDNEY

Helping can be peaceful.

SHAY

Maybe sometimes. But we gotta be
careful. All of us.

Shay finishes her braid. It's PERFECT.

INT. THE MARS HOUSE - SYDNEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sydney lies on her back in bed, eyes wide open in the
darkness.

SYDNEY

I bet the person who created the
door knocker won the Nobel Prize.

Several beats pass--and LAUGHTER ensues.

Not just Sydney's.

REVEAL: Mara is here, hiding under Sydney's bed. She snorts.

MARA

That's so lame!

SYDNEY

But you laughed...

Mara flips over onto her side, facing the window.

Suddenly, she NOTICES SOMETHING.

MARA
Sydney. Look.

Sydney turns to the window.

Outside, in the front yard, is A CAR. Parked in front of Sydney's mailbox.

MARA (CONT'D)
Whoa.

Both girls RUN to the window and stare.

It's dark. Hard to make out who's in the driver's seat.

Sydney presses her nose against the window.

Someone REACHES out of the driver's side door. They open Sydney's mailbox and place something inside.

REVEAL: It's Taylor's dog's COLLAR. Glowing brightly blue under the orange streetlights.

Sydney SQUINTS. She still can't see who it is. But there's one unmistakable detail--

This person sports a BRILLIANTLY shiny diamond bracelet...

END PILOT.