

THE SACRIFICE - PILOT

Written by

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1 EXT. WILDVALE WOODS, FROM ABOVE - NIGHT 1

A birds eye view. Vast farm land, carved into fields and cul de sacs. Amidst the civilization, a deep old growth forest emerges. Rich. Dark. Impenetrable.

2 EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT 2

A large clearing draped in moonlight, a massive tree stump in the center.

A WOMAN (72) - long white hair, nightgown, barefoot - stumbles into the clearing. She sits, back against the stump, trying to catch her breath.

She grasps a silver necklace, blood smearing across her chest. She closes her eyes and whispers under her breath - a prayer, repeated, impossible to understand.

In the distance, FOOT STEPS. HEAVY BREATHING. Something is getting closer.

The woman breathes deeply, then rips off the necklace, hiding it under dead leaves. In her other hand, she readies a long, sharp ceremonial blade - the tip red with blood.

Something CRASHES through the trees, into the clearing.

HARD CUT:

3 EXT. WILDVALE WOODS, FROM ABOVE - NIGHT 3

The woman SCREAMS. Agonized. Wild. Powerful. Then, silence.

4 INT. BROOLYN APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING 4

STELLA MOORE (40's) sits up, inhaling sharply as she wakes. Wild hair frames her striking face. She rubs her eyes, wincing at the morning light.

Her phone rings. UNKNOWN NUMBER. She rejects the call. Begrudgingly, she gets out of bed, coming face to face with herself in the mirror. Ugh.

5 INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING 5

LANA FREEMAN (30's) - impeccably maintained face and body of a working actress - moves effortlessly through yoga poses. Between downward dog legs, she notices Stella - watching.

LANA
Hey, my eyes are down here.

STELLA
Wasn't looking at your eyes.

LANA
You were up late. Again.

STELLA
Got stuck. Again. I was thinking...
maybe you could unstick me?

Wink wink. Lana smiles, half-hearted. Kneels.

LANA
I'm kind of on a schedule. I have
that meeting later. With Jack.
About L.A., the audition -

Stella's eyes widen.

STELLA
With Jack? When?

6 INT. HALLWAY - DAY

6

Stella grabs her jacket, shoves her shoes on.

LANA
You forgot a meeting with the
investors?

STELLA
I just - last minute. You know rich
people. It'll be quick.

LANA
Ok. I just thought maybe we should
talk about -

STELLA
Later, promise.

Stella kisses Lana goodbye. And slams the door behind her.

7 INT. MIDTOWN DINER - DAY

7

Stella sits alone, nursing a black coffee and watching the
window. Her phone rings. UNKNOWN NUMBER. She silences it.

Finally, JACK (30's) - polished, in a suit - passes by the
diner window. She throws a crumpled bill on the table and
follows him.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Stella chases Jack down a crowded street.

STELLA
Jack - Jack!

He speeds up, ignoring her. Stella stops, dramatic.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Jack! The baby is yours!

People stare. Jack turns, sighs. Stella catches up. Smiles.

JACK
Not funny. Call my assistant if you
want to talk.

STELLA
I did. Repeatedly. I'm probably
still on hold.

JACK
Stella...

STELLA
You're my agent.

JACK
I'm Lana's agent. You're... a
favor.

STELLA
The investors -

JACK
Are out.

STELLA
Define out.

JACK
Unless you're a secret trust fund
baby or recently secured the rights
to Disney IP - you're not going to
Broadway. I warned you.

STELLA
You did.

JACK
But you begged. Lana begged. I fell
for it. And we failed.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
 Nobody wants a queer feminist
 reimagining of Macbeth.

STELLA
 Lana does.

JACK
 Lana's not a producer. She's an
 actress. Who needs to think very
 carefully about her next project.

STELLA
 Give me one more week. I'll try to
 find the money while you guys are
 in LA - and if not, I'll tell her.

JACK
 You haven't told her?!

STELLA
 She's gonna leave me, Jack.

Jack sighs, softening.

JACK
 If Lana leaves you, it's not
 because your show fell though.

STELLA
 What's that supposed to mean?

JACK
 Tell her the truth, Stella.

9 EXT. PROSPECT PARK - DAY

9

Stella walks in the park, unable to face going home. Her
 phone rings again. UNKNOWN NUMBER. Fuming, she picks up.

STELLA
 I am on every do not call list -

EVAN (O.S.)
 Hi. I'm trying to reach Stella
 Moore?

10 INT. LAWYER OFFICE - DAY

10

EVAN DUMONT (40)- disheveled dad vibes - sits in a small,
 crowded office, papers piled high.

Conversation is intercut:

EVAN
This is Evan Dumont. I'm a friend
of Helena's. And, well, her lawyer.

STELLA
Who?

EVAN
Helena Cleary. Your old teacher?

Stella stops.

STELLA
How did you get this number?

EVAN
I'm so sorry, but, Helena is dead.

Stella sinks onto a nearby bench, holding her stomach.

EVAN (CONT'D)
There's a memorial. Are you able to
travel? There's something -

STELLA
Travel? Where?

EVAN
Home. To Anglerville. You can stay
at Helena's -

STELLA
Anglerville's not home. Look,
Ethan.

EVAN
Evan. We went to school together,
actually -

STELLA
Evan. Helena wouldn't ask me to
come back. Not even for this.

EVAN
Well, something changed, cause it's
the last thing she asked me to do.
So, I intend to do it. For her.

Stella takes a deep breath. Stares at the phone. Thinking.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Stella? Are you still there?

11

INT. BROOKLYN APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

11

Stella packs hurriedly. Lana watches.

LANA

Do you want me to come with you?

STELLA

No! No... That's. No.

LANA

Yea, got it. No.

STELLA

Look, go to LA. Do the screen test.

LANA

Jack would blacklist me if I didn't go to LA. I just... wanted to *talk*, you know? Like, really.

STELLA

Talk. I'm here.

LANA

I'm lonely.

STELLA

It's only a couple of nights -

LANA

Not the trip! You don't feel it?

Stella stares at Lana, not wanting to make a wrong move.

LANA (CONT'D)

I don't know what I'm saying...

STELLA

Then, don't. Don't say it. Go to LA. I'll show my face at this memorial. When we get back, we'll know exactly what to say. Ok?

Lana nods, smiles sadly. Stella takes her by the shoulders, looks into her eyes.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Ok?

LANA

Ok.

12

EXT. ANGLERVILLE, WILDVALE DRIVE - NIGHT

12

A quaint residential street that backs into the woods. A group of teenagers meander, looking for a place to get high.

CARA (16) - gothy, heart on her sleeve - trails behind with JUSTIN (16), her deeply charming, definitely queer, but not quite out yet BFF.

AMBER and RON (16) - twins - lead the pack. Amber - first born - takes a swig of beer and hands it to RON, sporting a baseball cap and a pocket full of weed.

Amber stops, eying a large house at the dead end of the street. It looks empty. Windows like eye sockets.

CARA

Amber, no.

AMBER

It's perfect, Cara. No one's home.

CARA

That's Helena's house.

RON

The witch?

CARA

She wasn't a witch.

JUSTIN

Don't be part of the problem, Ron.

AMBER

Yea, Ron.

RON

What problem?

JUSTIN

Patriarchy.

CARA

Patriarchy.

AMBER

Can't an old lady just get weird anymore? She was a harmless old hippie drama teacher. We all had her. Mom had her.

JUSTIN

So did Tyler Franklin.

AMBER

Oh my god, Justin, don't start.
Tyler Franklin hit his head on a
rock. 25 years ago -

JUSTIN

And was found 1.3 miles from that
rock! Three days later. Blood
drained, ritual markings on his
hands, chest and forehead.

The others stare at Justin.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

You know, typical accidental death
stuff.

CARA

Kinda sounds like you killed him.

JUSTIN

What? I like research. And micro-
fiche. And murder.

Amber heads for the house.

AMBER

Let's go.

CARA

I said no.

AMBER

Ron, can you still be teacher's pet
when the teacher's dead?

JUSTIN

Not funny, Amber.

AMBER

Whatever. Come on, Ron.

Ron looks at them apologetically, follows his sister. Cara
watches them go. Justin puts his arm around her.

CARA

Nobody even cares she's gone.

JUSTIN

We do.

13 EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT 13

Amber and Ron sneak in through the back gate. Ron looks up at a window, looks away - just as a shadow passes inside.

RON
She is dead, right?

14 EXT. BACKYARD - A LITTLE LATER 14

Ron and Amber sit, passing a joint and drinking beers.

RON
Do you think Justin and Cara are like... you know?

AMBER
Sweet, simple Ronald. No. But she's also never gonna be into you.

Ron looks around, shadows everywhere. Something CREAKS.

RON
Did you hear that?

AMBER
No more weed for you.

Amber grabs the joint. Ron looks at the house. Door is open.

RON
I don't think that door was open.

AMBER
Please don't satanic panic right now. I'm too buzzed.

A shadow moves quickly through the trees, behind Amber. Ron sees it - freezes, mouth open, watching.

AMBER (CONT'D)
What? Ron - stop. Not funny!

Amber turns, a DARK FIGURE in a black hood looms behind her.

DARK FIGURE
(nonchalant)
Boo.

AMBER
Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

RON
Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The kids run, abandoning the joint and beer. The figure pulls back its hood. No monster. Just Stella in a hoodie.

Stella smiles, picks up the still lit joint and takes a hit, then follows with a swig of Ron's beer. She walks back into the house, kicking the door firmly shut behind her.

15

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DAY

15

A group of mourners stand in a circle around the massive tree stump, now decorated as a natural altar. In the center is a simple urn and a large framed picture of HELENA (72) - long white hair, piercing silver eyes, warm smile. The woman from the woods.

MONA ANGLER (16) - triple threat - stands next to the altar, singing a slow, sweet a capella tune.

As Mona sings, Evan - in a crumpled suit - watches as the last few mourners add a small keepsake to the altar. He nudges his daughter, Cara, forward.

EVAN

Go on, peanut. You might regret it.

She shakes her head no, twisting a school theater program nervously in her hands.

Last in line, LOUISE "LOU" WOODWARD (40's) - black jeans and doc martens - places a photo on the altar.

As she steps forward, her boot uncovers something in the leaves, glinting. Helena's NECKLACE. She pretends to drop the photo, grabs the necklace and shoves it in her pocket.

Mona finishes the song. Evan steps forward.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Beautiful, Mona.

MONA

You're welcome.

Mona takes her place next to her parents, LAURA & CRAIG ANGLER (40'S) - power couple, tailored suits, sexy. Laura beams at Mona. Mona ignores her.

Behind Mona, her grandfather, AUGUST ANGLER (70)- a looming man in a timeless hat - leans down and rubs her shoulders, whispering in her ear.

AUGUST

Nice job, baby girl.

Evan takes out his notes, awkward and determined.

EVAN

Helena Cleary meant something to all of us. She was first and foremost a teacher - helping generations of students find belonging and purpose in her award-winning theater program.

Laura whispers to Craig.

LAURA

Like, one award. In 1976.

CRAIG

Didn't you win something in theater? Oh no wait, you lost.

Laura looks at him, confused. He smirks.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Your virginity.

Laura elbows him. His hand travels down her waist. Squeezes. Lou shoots them a look. They straighten up, like naughty kids at a school assembly.

EVAN

Students like me. Like Mona. Like my daughter, Cara.

Cara snuffles, wipes her nose on her sleeve, doing her best to hide the tears mingling with her dark eye liner. Mona - dry-eyed - hands Cara a tissue, more for quiet than comfort.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Helena was a loyal friend. A true citizen. A fierce protector of the natural world - especially these woods, which her family maintained for generations.

Lou nods proudly. Craig rolls his eyes. Evan checks his notes. Then picks up the urn, holding it gingerly.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Sorry this part is... new. She asked that we gather to "circle her ashes on sacred ground."

Evan looks up. No one else seems to know what to do next. He looks at his notes again. AUGUST steps in.

AUGUST

Thank you, Evan.

EVAN

Mayor Angler? I... I'm not done.

August tries to take the urn. Evan holds on until it gets awkward, then lets go. Laura and Craig watch, whispering.

LAURA

What is your dad doing?

CRAIG

Being the mayor.

LAURA

Helena hated him.

CRAIG

Not much she can do about it now.

LAURA

Jesus, Craig.

August smiles, addressing the crowd.

AUGUST

Helena and I were more alike than most'd realize. Tough. Stubborn. Rooted in the old ways. Willing to do anything for our beloved town. For Anglerville. So I thank her. For her service. Her sacrifice. For all she gave. Willingly. And with love. Now - her work is done.

Swiftly, August takes the lid off the urn and unceremoniously dumps the ashes. Cara watches, numb, as a sudden breeze carries them into the crowd. People murmur, trying to get out of the way. Evan jumps forward, grabbing the urn.

EVAN

Stop - we were supposed to create a circle... or something.

AUGUST

Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize.

Evan and August stare. Lou walks over, takes Evan's arm.

LOU

It's ok, Evan. She's here. Where she wanted to be.

16 EXT. ANGLERVILLE CEMETERY PARKING LOT - DAY 16

On the side of the road is a sign: *ANGLERVILLE: Established 1842 - In The Name of the Anointed Father.*

Stella sits in a rental car, dressed in black, watching the trees move violently in the wind.

Cara and other mourners begin to emerge from the woods. Stella starts the car. As Stella drives past the mourners, Cara catches her eye and - for a moment - they hold each other's gaze.

17 EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD - EVENING 17

Stella parks, then walks towards a busy main street.

She passes a MEMORY CARE FACILITY, a few patients on the porch. One patient, MRS FRANKLIN (58) - younger than the others, but equally glazed over and worn down - sits in a wheelchair. Her watery eyes lock onto Stella as she passes.

Stella shivers. She can't quite place this woman...

18 INT. EVAN'S OFFICE - EVENING 18

The SNAP of a coffee pod, weak and sad, dripping into a mug that reads: ASK ME ABOUT MY DAD JOKES.

Evan hands Stella the coffee, then sits at a crowded desk.

STELLA
Should I?

EVAN
Sorry?

STELLA
(the mug)
Ask about your dad jokes?

EVAN
Oh. My daughter. Cara. She's, uh,
funnier than me.

STELLA
Sure.
(studying Evan)
Do I know you?

EVAN
I was a freshman, when... Your last
year here. Evan Dumont.

STELLA
 Wait. Dumont? Like, The Full
 DuMonty?

Evan squirms. Stella is delighted.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 I remember your first cast party!
 Kitchen counter. Naked. Buck wild.

EVAN
 Unfortunately I seem to be the only
 one who doesn't remember.

STELLA
 Wow, Dumonty is a lawyer now. But
 does he still party?

EVAN
 I'm, uh, sober. Seven years. Since
 my wife died.

STELLA
 Shit. I'm sorry.

EVAN
 It's ok.

STELLA
 No, it's not.

Evan gathers some papers, hands them to Stella.

EVAN
 Before Helena died I was helping
 her find a way to preserve the
 woods behind her house. I'm an
 environmental lawyer, mostly.

Evan perks up, showing Stella a map of the property, the
 sizable chunk of wild land outlined in a curving red border.

EVAN (CONT'D)
 Old growth forest. Virtually
 untouched since the town's
 founding.

STELLA
 She owns all that?

EVAN
 Owned. You own it now, actually.
 The woods. The house. Everything.

STELLA

I... What? No. I don't want it.

Stella pushes the map back to Evan.

EVAN

Don't - what?

STELLA

Evan. You know why I left. I'm not exactly looking to settle down.

EVAN

I know you got your life together. Made it to New York, to Broadway -

STELLA

Off Broadway.

EVAN

Sorry?

STELLA

Never mind.

EVAN

Helena kept track of it all. I assumed you two were in touch.

STELLA

I'm not in touch. Virtually untouched, in fact. And I need to keep it that way.

EVAN

Helena planned to tell you. Wanted to sort it legally, first. Then...

STELLA

How did she die?

Evan pauses. The answer is there, but he can't grasp it.

EVAN

It was... sudden. I know that. Natural causes, they said.

STELLA

She was sick?

EVAN

I don't... I'm sorry. I don't know.

STELLA
You don't know?

Evan shakes his head. He should know this, shouldn't he?
Stella watches. It's a little weird.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Do you know how to sell it?

EVAN
The land? No. The only buyer who
would preserve the forest is the
government.

STELLA
Great. Give 'em a call.

EVAN
The will forbids any sale to a
government entity. Helena was
adamnt.

STELLA
I'm adamant. About getting out of
here. Not to mention - I could
really use the money right now.

EVAN
Stella. This isn't legal advice
but... I liked Helena.

STELLA
You're right, Dumonty. That's not
legal advice.

EVAN
She left the land to you because
she wanted you to have it. She
trusted you. To do the right thing.

STELLA
Evan. This is crazy. What are you
even asking me to do?

EVAN
Look, I don't know. Maybe she'd
lost it in the end like everyone
said. But she acted like you two
meant something to each other. And
here you are. So, you tell me - was
she crazy?

Stella sits back.

STELLA

Back then, I meant something to her. When there weren't a lot of people to mean something to.

(beat)

But the best thing she did, was get me out of here when I needed it.

EVAN

Stella.

STELLA

Can you do that? Or should I get my own lawyer?

Evan sighs.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I want to know my options. All of them.

EVAN

Ok. Give me a day or two.

STELLA

I'll be back tomorrow.

Stella stands to leave.

EVAN

Oh - Stella? Tomorrow, Helena left some stuff for you at the High School. The Assistant Principal should know where it is.

STELLA

Now you want me to go back to high school?

EVAN

It's just down the road.

STELLA

Believe me, I remember.

19

EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD - EVENING

19

Stella heads back to her car, passing the Memory Care Facility. She tries to avoid eye contact with Mrs. Franklin. No luck. She sees Stella, growing agitated. Their eyes meet.

MRS FRANKLIN

Murderer! Murderer! Witch!

A nurse comes over to quiet her.

NURSE
It's OK Mrs. Franklin.

MRS FRANKLIN
They killed my son!

A chill of recognition hits Stella. Tyler's mother. The nurse smiles kindly, whispering to Stella.

NURSE
Early on-set dementia. She lost her son years ago. Nothing personal.

Mrs Franklin points at Stella, clear-eyed.

MRS FRANKLIN
That witch murdered my Tyler!

The nurse takes a second look at Stella. Stella backs away slowly, then breaks into a run.

20

EXT. SIDE STREET - EVENING

20

Stella turns the corner, smack into - Craig, in running gear, glistening with sweat.

STELLA
I'm so sorry. Are you -

CRAIG
Stella?

Stella takes a step back. Her face falls.

STELLA
Craig Angler.

CRAIG
Wow. I haven't seen you since High School.

STELLA
No one's seen me since High School.

CRAIG
You look... good. Fully formed.

Stella laughs.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I'm serious. I like when women don't give a shit. It's powerful.

STELLA
Then why'd you marry Laura?

Craig ignores her.

CRAIG
Weird timing. There's a rumor
Helena left everything to an old
student.

STELLA
Small town. Big mouths.

CRAIG
You know, I've had my eye on that
property for a while.

Craig unzips a tiny pocket on his shorts, hands Stella a
business card: ANGLER PROPERTIES.

STELLA
You're a... realtor? Thought Baby
Angler might be Mayor by now.

Craig flinches.

CRAIG
Developer. And I have a very
motivated buyer for the property.
They won't stay that way.

STELLA
You mean Daddy?

CRAIG
They prefer to remain anonymous.

STELLA
Sure. Well, maybe I'll see you in
another 25 years.

Stella tries to head towards her car. Craig grabs her arm,
leans in. Things are suddenly tense.

CRAIG
Helena dicked us around for years.
I'm running out of patience.

STELLA
Yea, well, dicking isn't really my
thing.

Stella shoves out of his grasp and heads for her car.

A COUPLE (50's) across the street, stop - watching. Craig smiles, smooths his hair. Waves politely at the couple.

CRAIG
(loud, for everyone)
See you Stella! I'll be sure to let
everyone know you're back in town!

Craig watches Stella get in the car and slam the door. Then pulls out his phone and makes a call.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Hey... I figured it out. The Cleary
Property... Yea. She'll sell... How
soon can you get an offer together?

21 INT. STELLA'S CAR - EVENING 21

Stella crumples the business card and throws it on the seat. Hands shaking, she tries to start the car. She fumbles, then puts her head in her hands and takes a deep breath.

After a moment, she picks up Craig's card, smooths it out.

STELLA
Fucking Anglers.

22 INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT 22

Stella stands in a long checkout line, holding a box of pizza bagel bites and an extra large bottle of wine.

Two women, PHILLY and SUSAN (late 50's), notice Stella. They whisper to each other - glimpses of the conversation.

SUSAN
Isn't she? You know. *The
girlfriend.*

PHILLY
What would she be doing here?

Susan ponders this. Then gasps, hand to mouth.

SUSAN
Helena!

PHILLY
Ah, now. Come on, Susan.

Stella pulls up her hood, trying to ignore them. Someone in the next line leans over, pointing to the bagels. It's Lou.

LOU
Dinner of champions.

STELLA
Comfort food of losers.

Lou smiles, gestures for Stella to go in front of her.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Oh, no. Thanks.

Stella takes Lou in - androgynous glam rock meets lumber jack. Dimples. She looks like she smells good.

LOU
You have two things. Go for it.

Stella puts her items on the belt. Lou reaches past her - close - to put the plastic divider between their groceries.

LOU (CONT'D)
I'm Lou, by the way.

Stella nods, pays for her things.

STELLA
Well... Thanks. See you around.

LOU
Yea? You from here? I'm new, so -
Instinctively, Stella shakes her head no.

STELLA
Just passing through.

LOU
Oh... Too bad.

Dimples again. Stella waves awkwardly. Lou watches her go.

23

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

23

Stella lays in bed, unable to sleep. She sits up and calls Lana. Lana picks up, sun streaming behind her.

VIDEO CALL:

LANA
Hey! Glad you caught me. Just about
to have drinks with the showrunner!
(seeing Stella)
You ok?

STELLA

Yea.

LANA

Are you sure? You look... Are you meditating? Doing those stretches I gave you?

STELLA

No. And never.

LANA

Drinking enough water?

STELLA

I'm eating garbage. And drinking wine. Is that good?

Lana hesitates.

LANA

Taking your meds?

STELLA

You don't have to ask me that one.

LANA

I know.

STELLA

How'd the audition go?

Behind Lana, Jack pops into frame.

JACK

Murdered it. Whole team's obsessed. Now she's gotta go.

LANA

Jack -

JACK

What? We're late.

LANA

Sorry -

STELLA

No. That's amazing. I might have found an investor here, actually.

LANA

Really? Who?

STELLA
An old mentor. Still have to figure
out the details, but...

LANA
That's... wow. I mean, it's great.

JACK
TV beats theater!

LANA
Stop.

STELLA
It's ok. Go. We'll talk later.

LANA
Are you sure?

JACK
Hanging up now!

LANA
Sweet dreams -

The call ends.

STELLA
Sweet dreams.

24 OVER BLACK: 24

FOOT STEPS. HEAVY BREATHING. Something CRASHES through the
trees. Helena SCREAMS.

25 INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - MORNING 25

Stella wakes with a jolt. Then remembers where she is. Ugh.
She falls back on her pillow. Her alarm buzzes.

STELLA
(whining)
But I don't wanna go to school.

26 INT. HELENA'S KITCHEN - MORNING 26

Stella searches the cabinets - jars full of weird grains,
herbs, who knows what - growing increasingly frantic.

A door under the stairs rattles slightly. Stella looks at
it. It rattles again.

STELLA
Maybe you have coffee.

She opens the door - it's not a pantry.

Steep stairs lead down into an unlit, dirt floor basement. Stella stares, for a moment, transfixed. The darkness seems to rise up to meet her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Nope.

She slams the door shut.

27

INT. DUMONT KITCHEN - MORNING

27

Cara scrambles eggs at the stove.

CARA

Dad! Eggs!

Evan stumbles in, trying to tie his tie.

EVAN

No eggs for time. Or... You know. I've got a meeting. Land registry.

Cara holds up a manila envelope.

CARA

This came today. From the police?

She starts to open it. Evan grabs it.

EVAN

No more snooping, Cara.

Evan studies her.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Is the eyeliner maybe...?

Death stare.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Right. Not my department.

He resumes the fight with his tie.

EVAN (CONT'D)

I, um, booked you a session with Dr. Mandel.

CARA

Please. No more crayola drawings to process the colors of grief.

EVAN

She treats teenagers too, Cara.

CARA

I'm fine. Really.

EVAN

I know it's going to be hard.
Without theater or... Helena. But
she wouldn't want you to just do
nothing. Mom either.

CARA

I made eggs. What have you done
today?

Cara takes Evan's shoulders. Ties the tie. Evan smiles.

EVAN

Maybe we can find something outside
of school -

CARA

Dad. I'm not going to die if I
don't do theater this semester.

28

INT. ANGLER KITCHEN - MORNING

28

Mona stands in the spacious, lushly designed kitchen, a
towel wrapped around wet hair.

MONA

I'm going to die if I don't do
theater this semester.

LAURA

Really? You don't seem like the
dramatic type.

Laura, in expensive yoga gear, is busy organizing large
glossy posters for the YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS LEAGUE (YEL),
featuring corporate branding for INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS.

MONA

Mom.

LAURA

Mona, I know its sad, but the
theater program died with Helena.
(the poster)
This is the future.

MONA

I want to be Lady Macbeth.

LAURA

If Lady Macbeth were here today,
she would be a kick ass
entrepreneur.

Eye roll. Big one.

MONA

First you take away ballet. Now
theater -

LAURA

You know what Dr. Mandel said. We
can talk about ballet when you
maintain healthy habits.

Laura opens the fridge and takes out a hardboiled egg.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Like breakfast. Have an egg.

MONA

I already ate.

A lie. They both know it. Mona turns to grab a travel mug.
Laura slips the egg in her backpack.

LAURA

I know! Maybe you can do a Lady
Macbeth... web series! For your
"Purpose Project."

MONA

Cringe.

LAURA

Just come to the info session. If
you join, everyone will.

MONA

It's not like when you were in
school.

LAURA

Then do it for me. No, screw that.
Do it for you.

MONA

Mom...

LAURA

(Phrases from the poster)
"Purpose Driven Empowerment. Brand
Literacy.

(MORE)

LAURA (CONT'D)

Social Media Independence." Like it or not, this is the world you're entering. YEL will give you the tools to do it on your own terms. I don't want you to feel like you have to depend on anyone but yourself.

MONA

I'm, like, literally a dependent. I'm sixteen.

LAURA

Mona, you're always going to shine. You've been a triple threat since you could walk and talk. But life happens. And if you don't have the foundation of yourself, you'll get swept up in someone else's plan. I don't want you to give your power to anything. Or anyone.

MONA

We're still talking about me?
Wanting to be in a school play?

Craig enters, admires the YEL branding.

CRAIG

Glossy. I like it.

He wraps his arms around Laura, gives her a deep kiss. Mona rolls her eyes, fills the mug with coffee and tries to leave the kitchen. Laura pushes away from Craig.

LAURA

Is that coffee?

MONA

Herbal Tea!

LAURA

Where are you going?

MONA

To dry my hair! I'm late!!

LAURA

Then I'll drive you!!

A door slams. Laura sighs, leans against the counter.

LAURA (CONT'D)
She's still lying to us, Craig.

CRAIG
It's coffee.

LAURA
It's an appetite suppressant.

CRAIG
She's sixteen. Remember when we
were sixteen?

Craig reaches for Laura again, suggestive. She resists.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
It's a phase.

LAURA
Most phases don't land you in an
outpatient program.

CRAIG
Didn't the doc say she needs space?

LAURA
I just want her to be... happy.

CRAIG
I know, baby. Me too.

Laura softens, finally lets Craig hold her. He kisses the
top of her head. Then checks his phone.

29

EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD - DAY

29

Justin and Cara walk to school.

JUSTIN
I feel like I need a new thing.

CARA
Thing?

JUSTIN
A vibe. Here's what I'm thinking.
Don't laugh.

CARA
Promise.

JUSTIN
I'm thinking: vampire. Don't laugh.

CARA
That's not funny. It's sad.

JUSTIN
Well, I want something spooky. To
complement whatever *this* is.

Justin gestures to Cara, generally, the totality of her.

CARA
I come by my spooky honestly.

JUSTIN
Oh really?

CARA
Dead mom club. Remember?

JUSTIN
I don't see any fine print that
says you need a dead mom to wear
that much eyeliner.

CARA
You wish you had a dead mom.

JUSTIN
Give my mom a chance. A few more
sleepover dates with boyfriend #12
and you never know what could
happen.

CARA
Ok, that's too dark even for me.

JUSTIN
He has a toothbursh now. And he
tried to give me advice last night.

CARA
Gross.

Justin and Cara stop at an intersection at the corner of the
High School, waiting for the light to change.

30 INT. ANGLER SUV - DAY

30

Laura is driving. New model SUV.

LAURA
You know - I haven't told anyone
yet, but Intelligent Systems are
offering a scholarship for the
winning Purpose Project.

MONA
 Please stop saying Purpose Project.
 (Panicked)
 I think I left my phone at home.

Mona searches her backpack, digging through the front pocket. Horrified, she pulls out the hard-boiled egg.

MONA (CONT'D)
 Are you kidding me?!

Laura looks back, distracted.

LAURA
 I... It's protein.

MONA
 Maybe you need professional help.

LAURA
 Mona.

MONA
 Why can't you just leave me alone?

LAURA
 I'll leave you alone when you stop lying and start eating -

Without thinking, Mona throws the egg at Laura. It crunches against the windshield. Laura turns, livid, eyes off the road.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 Are you kidding me?!

31

EXT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH / INT. ANGLER SUV - DAY

31

The light changes. Cara and Justin step into the road. At the same moment, the Angler SUV speeds around the corner.

MONA
 Mom - watch out!

Laura screeches to a halt - inches from Cara and Justin. They stare at her, shocked. Laura pulls over, jumps out. Mona gets out too, trying to disappear.

LAURA
 I'm so sorry. Justin, Cara. I...
 Mona threw an egg at me, and -

Mona stares at her mom in disbelief. Justin and Cara look at each other, stifling a laugh.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 I mean. She didn't. Do that.
 (changing the subject)
 You know what, if you're unscathed,
 let me give you this.

Laura pops back in the car, pulls out some YEL brochures.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 Young Entrepreneurs League. Info
 session tomorrow. Justin, you'd be
 perfect There's a scholarship
 opportunity.

Justin takes the brochure, blank-faced.

JUSTIN
 Thanks.

LAURA
 Cara?

Laura holds out a brochure to Cara.

CARA
 I don't do hustle culture.

LAURA
 Mona will be there -

MONA
 I'm not going to your fucking info
 session.

Mona storms past Laura. Laura, Cara and Justin watch her go.
 Laura tries to muster a smile.

LAURA
 Rough morning... She'll be there.

32 INT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH ENTRANCE - DAY 32

The bell rings. Stella stands, watching, as a flurry of
 STUDENTS run to class, noise transforming to an eerie calm.

33 INT. ASST. PRINCIPAL OFFICE - DAY 33

Stella finds an office labeled: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: LOUISE
 WOODWARD. She knocks.

LOU (O.S.)
 Come in.

Stella enters.

STELLA
Principal Woodward?

Stella and Lou stare, recognizing each other.

LOU
Bagel Bites?

Lou stands, holds out her hand.

LOU (CONT'D)
Louise Woodward. Assistant
Principal. Friends and grocery line
acquaintances call me Lou.

STELLA
Stella Moore. Helena's, um...
heiress?

Lou's face brightens. Dimples again.

LOU
You're Stella?

34 INT. ASST PRINCIPAL OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER 34

Lou and Stella are leaving the office.

LOU
Uh - one sec. Forgot my key.

Lou runs back to her desk, pulls Helena's necklace out of a
drawer and puts it in her back pocket.

35 INT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH HALLWAY - DAY 35

Stella and Lou walk down the hall, passing the Wood Shop.
Stella leans in, takes a look.

STELLA
Don't tell, but we used to party in
there. They never locked the
basement windows. Easy to sneak in.

LOU
That would never happen on my
watch.

Stella shakes her head.

STELLA
Man it's weird to be back. I really
did spend a lot of time in there.
We used to build our own sets.

LOU
Still do. Or did. I did double duty
as Shop Master. That's how I got to
know Helena.

STELLA
I'm sure theater won't be the same
without her.

LOU
Won't be anything without her.

STELLA
What do you mean?

LOU
No money to hire a replacement.
They cut the budget a decade ago.
Helena kept it going, somehow.

STELLA
I didn't know.

LOU
She was proud of you, you know. She
actually thought you might move
back to Anglerville. Take over the
drama program after she retired.

STELLA
Ha! What else did she have in mind?
Scoop my eyes out with a spoon?

LOU
She mentioned you might be a little
resistant. At first.

STELLA
Maybe she was losing it... Do you
know? How she died?

Lou stops, thinks for a moment.

LOU
It was sudden. Natural causes, they
said, but...

Lou trails off, it's on the tip of her tongue. Stella
watches.

STELLA
Yea. Evan said the same thing.

They come to the Blackbox Theater entrance. Lou puts her hand in her back pocket, feeling the necklace.

LOU
 Maybe we could get a coffee after school or... a drink? Toast Helena?

STELLA
 Oh. I'm leaving as soon as humanly possible. Evan's gonna sell the land and then...

LOU
 Oh. Wow. I didn't... Dumb idea.

Lou leaves the necklace in her pocket. Unlocks the theater.

LOU (CONT'D)
 Here you go. All yours.

STELLA
 Thanks.

Stella takes a deep breath, steps towards the theater.

LOU
 Stella?

STELLA
 Yea?

LOU
 Sorry for your loss.

STELLA
 You too.

36 INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - DAY 36

Stella enters the theater, facing the stage, and stops for a moment to take it in. Everything is painted black. YEL-branded boxes are piled on the stage, next to a piano.

Stella heads for a small office on the side of the stage.

37 INT. HELENA'S OFFICE - DAY 37

Just as Stella remembered. Photos of kids and productions throughout the years plaster the walls. Everything is paint-splattered, piled high with papers, odd props.

She sees a box on the desk labeled STELLA.

STELLA
All right, old lady. What else do
you want from me?

Somewhere in the theater, a piano starts to play. Stella
listens, then grabs the box and follows the music.

38

INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - CONTINUOUS

38

On stage, Cara is playing an eerie, building melody. Almost
automatically, Stella hums the harmony under her breath.

Cara notices and stops, embarrassed.

CARA
Sorry.

STELLA
No. Please, it's lovely. And I'm
leaving. Not lurking. Keep going.

CARA
No - I didn't know anyone was here.
Helena used to let me come if I had
a free period or just... needed to
be somewhere else.

STELLA
She used to let me hide out too.
When I was a student.

CARA
You knew her?

STELLA
Yea. She had a soft spot for... I
don't know.

CARA
Motherless girls.

Stella studies Cara, surprised.

STELLA
Is that how you know that song? She
taught it to you?

Cara nods.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Can't believe I remembered the
harmony. Would you play it again?

CARA
I don't really play. For people.

STELLA
Right. Sorry.

Cara stands, opens up the piano bench and pulls out a notebook, rips out a page.

CARA
Here. I wrote out the melody. She told me not to, but it's the only way I know how to learn music.

STELLA
No - I couldn't.

CARA
Take it. I remember it now.

STELLA
Thank you.

Stella puts down the box and steps on stage to take the music. On the piano, she notices a beat up copy of Macbeth.

STELLA (CONT'D)
That your Macbeth?

CARA
We were gonna do it this semester.

STELLA
What are you going to do now?

CARA
Right now, I'm thinking nothing.

STELLA
Nothing's underrated. I do some of my best work when I'm doing nothing.

Cara smiles.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Do you want to know Helena's theory? About Macbeth?

Cara nods.

STELLA (CONT'D)
There's a fourth witch.

CARA

Fourth?

A door opens. Laura and a woman in an expensive pantsuit, CELESTE PORTNOY (50s), enter mid-conversation - unaware of Cara and Stella.

LAURA

Just using the space for storage until planning comes through. We're so grateful to Intelligent Systems.

Celeste nods.

CELESTE

You've said. Several times. You were going to show me the basement? It's unclear from the plans how deep it goes.

LAURA

Students are so excited about the program. My daughter can't wait.

Cara steps forward, interrupting.

CARA

That's not what Mona said this morning.

Laura whirls. Stella and Cara are on the stage, above her. Cara glares. Stella smiles.

STELLA

Laura Frakowski.

LAURA

Stella? What are you -

CARA

Not Frakowski. Angler.

STELLA

That's right. She's an Angler now.

LAURA

I almost didn't believe Craig.

STELLA

Well, he's a liar, so -

LAURA

Stella! This is Celeste Portnoy. From Intelligent Systems.

(MORE)

LAURA (CONT'D)

They're investing in a state of the art new STEAM facility at the school.

CARA

They're tearing down the theater.

LAURA

Cara, we're building something better -

CARA

Your family is doing whatever you want, like you always do. Like you did to Helena.

LAURA

Cara!

Cara runs out. Laura watches, then gathers herself.

LAURA (CONT'D)

She's taken Helena's death hard. Her mother died several years ago, poor thing.

CELESTE

How terrible.

LAURA

(whispering)

Cancer.

STELLA

What did she mean about Helena?

LAURA

Celeste - this is Stella Moore. An old student. Of *Helena's*.

Laura gives Celeste a meaningful look. Celeste's brow furrows, she looks at Stella then back to Laura, who nods. Celeste smiles. Holds out her hand.

CELESTE

Ms. Moore. Pleased to meet you.

Stella shakes her hand.

STELLA

You know, Laura and I were usually pretty stoned when we went down to the basement, but if I remember correctly - it goes very very deep.

LAURA

Ok, thanks Stella!

Celeste's eyes darken. Her smile remains. Laura tries to pull Stella aside, whispering.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

STELLA

Leaving.

Stella grabs Helena's box and heads for the exit.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Have fun demolishing your childhood!

LAURA

(can't help herself)

Have fun reliving yours!

39

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

39

Cara slams her locker, hard. Revealing Justin.

JUSTIN

What's the point of syncing our schedules if you keep disappearing?
(seeing her face)
What's wrong?

CARA

Not now.

Stella exits the theater, stopping when she sees Cara.

STELLA

Thanks for the song.

Cara nods. Stella hesitates.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Um. I'm sorry. About Helena. She was a good person.

Cara nods, looking away. Justin holds out his hand.

JUSTIN
Justin. Current BFF.

Stella smiles, shaking hands while holding the box.

STELLA
Stella Moore. Former Student. Take
care of each other.

Justin's eyes widen. Stella leaves. He stares at the hand
she shook, unmoving.

CARA
What?

JUSTIN
Stella. Moore.

CARA
So?

JUSTIN
Tyler's girlfriend. Teen witch. The
one who killed him!

Cara watches Stella go.

CARA
Her?

40

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA

40

Noisy. Full of kids in different cliques. Justin, Cara,
Amber and Ron are gathered around Justin's phone, scrolling
through old headlines.

JUSTIN
See. Arrested... strange rituals
... last person seen with him.

AMBER
Keep going. There - she was
released. Never charged. Tyler got
drunk, hit his head on a rock.
Accidental death.

JUSTIN
Tell that to his mom.

CARA
Wait, stop - there's a picture.

Justin zooms in on a grainy photo: TYLER (17) - tall, beaming - flanked by YOUNG STELLA (17) and YOUNG LAURA (17), his arms around them both.

Justin reads the caption.

JUSTIN
Stella Moore, Tyler Franklin and
Laura Frakowski - a.k.a Driving
Miss Crazy.

CARA
She's the real witch.

AMBER
Mona's mom?

Amber and Ron take a closer look.

RON
Woah. She looks just like Mona.

CARA
Dead in the eyes?

JUSTIN
Speak of the devil.

Justin nudges Cara. Mona enters holding a tray with a small salad and a bottle of water. She looks around, then sits on her own.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
There's your BFF now.

CARA
Former.

JUSTIN
Obviously.

AMBER
I heard she wasn't skiing over
Christmas. They had to put her in
an eating disorder camp and that's
why she missed the first two weeks
of school.

RON
Amber...

JUSTIN
Did you see what happened this
morning? Her mom almost killed us.

CARA
More importantly - I'm 99% sure she
said Mona threw an egg at her.

AMBER
Wait - what?

Mona looks up. Icy.

MONA
You know I can hear you, right?

JUSTIN
Oh, good. Maybe you can clarify -
(louder, for everyone)
Did you throw an egg or was your
mom just trying to kill us for fun?

MONA
My mom's not the one with a DUI.

Justin's face darkens. Cara steps in.

CARA
How can you be sure? Your family
would just cover it up, like
everything else in this town.

Mona laughs.

MONA
Is that what your tree-hugger Dad
told you? I guess conspiracy
theories run in the family.

CARA
I guess being a dick runs in the
family.

A couple other kids snicker. Amber leans in for the kill.

AMBER
Leave it alone, Cara. She's just
hangry.

Everyone gets quiet. Mona grabs her tray, storms off.

AMBER (CONT'D)
Too soon?

Cara watches Mona, who angrily throws her salad in the
trash. Ron watches too. Then turns to the group, awkward.

RON
I have to go. To the bathroom.

The others look at him, waiting.

AMBER
Go. Stop being gross.

41 INT. THEATER BASEMENT, COSTUME ROOM - DAY 41

Mona is crying in the overstuffed storage room lined with racks of ridiculous costumes. Ron opens the door. She stands, swiping her tears away.

MONA
Go away.

RON
I just wanted to -

MONA
Seriously Ron. I didn't come here for... *that*.

RON
I know. I didn't tell anyone about Christmas. Or about us. I swear -

MONA
Just go, Ron. I mean it!

Ron nods. But doesn't go.

MONA (CONT'D)
I don't even want to think words anymore.

He takes a step towards her.

RON
Words are overrated.

Suddenly, they lunge at each other, making out furiously against a rack of costumes.

42 INT. HELENA HALLWAY - DAY 42

Stella enters, puts Helena's box down without opening it.

43 INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - DAY 43

Stella walks through the room, studying Helena's old family photos:

As a toddler holding a baby brother. A young girl in a field. Stella lingers on one: Helena (20's) next to an OLDER WOMAN - must be her mother - and two TEENAGE GIRLS. One of them is dark, hair wild. A lot like Stella.

She moves on, inspecting double doors built into the back wall. A closet? She opens them. It's a piano. Stella smiles.

44 INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - DAY 44

Stella sits at the piano, playing the music that Cara gave her. She sings the harmony, periodically stopping to pencil in her part under Cara's melody.

She's in a flow, until - a noise at the front door. A MANILA ENVELOPE slips through the mailbox.

45 INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS 45

Stella looks out the window to see if she can see whoever left it. No one. She picks up the envelope. It's labeled: SIT DOWN.

She doesn't. She opens it and gasps. It's an AUTOPSY PHOTO: HELENA. Strange, ceremonial markings on her hands, chest and forehead. Her cold, silver eyes open, piercing.

Stella steadies herself against the wall and sits, staring at the photo.

46 INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - A LITTLE LATER 46

Stella is still on the floor, shaken, the photo back in the envelope next to her.

Suddenly, A KNOCK. Stella jumps. She shoves the envelope in her pocket and peers out the window. It's... Lou?

47 EXT. HELENA FRONT PORCH - NIGHT 47

Stella opens the door, looking rough.

LOU

Hey, I um ... Sorry. Are you ok?

STELLA

What are you doing here?

Lou holds up the necklace. Stella stares at it.

LOU

It's Helena's.

STELLA

I know.

LOU

I figured if she left you everything then, whatever you decide to do, you should have this.

STELLA

Why do you have it?

LOU

I... It must have fallen out of the box. At the high school.

STELLA

I never saw her without it. Thought she would have been buried in it.

Lou hesitates, unsure how to read Stella.

LOU

Well, she wasn't buried. We, uh, spread her ashes in the woods. Left a little something for her on the old tree - a photo or keepsake. It was nice. You should stop by.

STELLA

I don't do woods.

LOU

I could take something for you. If you want -

STELLA

Were you here earlier?

LOU

No, I... Are you sure you're OK? Are you alone? I could make you a cup of tea or something?

STELLA

You should go.

LOU

Right.

Lou shifts uncomfortably. Holds out the necklace again.

LOU (CONT'D)

Please. It's yours.

Stella takes it, without taking her eyes off Lou.

LOU (CONT'D)
Sorry to bother you.

Lou heads down the stairs, then turns back.

LOU (CONT'D)
You should wear it, you know.

STELLA
What?

LOU
The necklace. It's a ward. Offers protection.

STELLA
Do I need protecting?

Lou shrugs.

LOU
Don't we all?

48 INT. HELENA KITCHEN - EVENING

48

Shadows swallow the room as evening falls. Stella sits at the table, the necklace in front of her, staring.

Her phone buzzes. Lana. She silences it. Then makes a different call.

STELLA
Evan? Hi. Yea. I need to see you.
I'm fine. Ok. First thing tomorrow.

49 INT. DUMONT KITCHEN - NIGHT

49

Cara and Justin finish up a take-out dinner. Justin reads from the YEL pamphlet.

JUSTIN
If your Purpose Project places in the top three, you're eligible for the scholarship. That means *money*, Cara. We like money.

CARA
You're on your own, Count Chocula.

JUSTIN
Just come to the first session.
Aren't you curious?

Evan enters, just off the call with Stella.

CARA
Who was that?

EVAN
A client. Curious about what?

CARA
Late Capitalist neo-fascist
propaganda.

JUSTIN
An unprecedented innovation
sensation.

EVAN
Huh?

CARA
Young Entrepreneurs League.

JUSTIN
Young Entrepreneurs League.

EVAN
Oh. Laura's thing. I'm not crazy
about Intelligent Systems but it
could be... practical?

CARA
I'm not going near Laura Angler.

JUSTIN
What if I invoke Clause 14 of the
Best Friend Agreement?

Cara turns to Justin, shocked.

CARA
That would be... unprecedented.

JUSTIN
Then come tomorrow.

CARA
No.

JUSTIN
Clause 14.

CARA
Take it back.

JUSTIN
You're contractually obligated.

CARA
Clause 14 explicitly states that it
cannot be used solely for the
purposes of irony or spite.

JUSTIN
Good, cause I actually want to do
this.

CARA
Dad!

EVAN
Don't look at me. I just drew up
the contract. You're the weirdos
who wanted it.

JUSTIN
Cara, it could launch my TikTok
investigative journalism initiative.

CARA
Do you hear yourself?

JUSTIN
Legacy media is dead, Cara.

CARA
Helena is dead, Justin.

Cara stands, shoves her chair out of the way and stomps up
to her room. Justin and Evan look at each other.

EVAN
Just... Give her a minute.

Evan stands and starts clearing the table. Justin helps.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Do you actually want to do it?

JUSTIN
Better than her hiding out in the
condemned theater alone, right?

EVAN
You're a good friend, Justin.

JUSTIN
Any dessert?

EVAN
Does vanilla yogurt count?

JUSTIN
No.

50

EXT. ANGLER KITCHEN - NIGHT

50

Laura is moving cupcakes from a bakery box into tupperware. Mona watches - everything about Laura is *cringe*.

Craig enters, tries to grab a cupcake.

LAURA

Stop - those are for Stella.

MONA

Yea dad, she didn't fake bake them for her family.

CRAIG

Not sure the lady needs a dozen cupcakes to herself. But ok.

LAURA

This is your idea. You want to close the deal?

CRAIG

No. You're much more charming.

Craig gives Laura a kiss. There's a knock at the back door.

LAURA

What now?

Laura opens it. August Angler smiles, tips his hat. Laura forces a smile.

AUGUST

Hope I'm not interrupting.

51

INT. ANGLER DINING ROOM - NIGHT

51

The Anglers sit, finishing up dinner. A tense quiet. August sits at the head of the table - nursing a whiskey. Mona pushes food around her plate.

LAURA

The first session is tomorrow. You'll be there, right Mona?

Mona's nostrils flare.

CRAIG

She'll be there.

MONA

Dad.

CRAIG
Not optional, Mona.

Craig notices something on Mona's neck, tries to brush it off.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Think you have a -

Mona covers it quickly, blushing red.

MONA
A scratch.

It's a hickey. Laura and Craig exchange a look.

MONA (CONT'D)
May I be excused?

LAURA
Did you finish your -

AUGUST
Go ahead, baby. I need to chat with your daddy.

Laura is about to protest, but Craig gives her a look.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
(to Mona)
First come give Pappy a kiss.

Mona stands, kisses August on the cheek. He slips a \$100 bill into her hand.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
Spend it on something that'll make you smile. A new dress -

LAURA
August -

AUGUST
Grandfathers have a right to spoil.

MONA
Thanks Pappy.

Mona heads upstairs. August watches.

AUGUST
You're going to ruin that girl.

CRAIG

Dad.

AUGUST

Locking her up for dieting.
Everyone talking.

Laura stands and angrily clears the plates. She takes them into the kitchen, loudly loading the dishwasher.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Whole world's gone hysterical.

CRAIG

We can handle our daughter.

AUGUST

Like you're handling Stella?

Craig stops, looks down.

CRAIG

I... She just arrived.

AUGUST

Two days ago.

August darkens, leans in.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Who did you call?

CRAIG

Call?

August slams the table. Craig flinches.

AUGUST

Yesterday. After Stella left that lawyer.

CRAIG

Are you following me? Or... her.

AUGUST

This is bigger than some little deal you're cooking up. If you think you're going to shut me out -

CRAIG

We talked about this. Separation of church and state. I'm handling it.

AUGUST
By keeping secrets?

CRAIG
I'm the one keeping secrets?

August leans back. Finishes the whiskey.

AUGUST
If you were anointed...

Craig holds up his hand.

CRAIG
I told you, I'm not doing that
Skull and Bones cosplay bullshit.

AUGUST
Your generation wants all the
comfort. None of the sacrifice.

CRAIG
I want to do this my way. Above
board. Public private partnership.
You paid for my MBA. Let me use it.

Laura enters with August's hat. Holds it out to him.

LAURA
Stella will sell. I'll find out
what she wants and we'll give it to
her. Simple.

August leans in to Craig, ignoring Laura.

AUGUST
The longer she's here, the more
dangerous she becomes. Do you
understand me?

Craig nods. Laura laughs.

LAURA
Stella's not dangerous, August.
Just don't push too hard or she'll
push back. She can't help herself.

August takes the hat. Stands.

AUGUST
Thank you for the hospitality,
Laura. And of course, your deep
strategic insight.

Laura nods stiffly.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
 (almost to himself)
 How that woman is still plaguing us
 from the grave...

CRAIG
 Dad.

Craig gives him a look - not in front of Laura. August points to Craig.

AUGUST
 You let me know how things go. When they go. Not after.

CRAIG
 Yes, sir. I'll handle it.

Laura looks at Craig, a little disgusted.

AUGUST
 Let's see if you do.

52 INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - NIGHT 52

There's a knock on the door. Stella peers out the window. It's Laura.

STELLA
 Motherfucker.

Stella opens the door.

53 EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS 53

Laura layers on a broad smile and holds out the tupperware and a bottle of wine in a shiny gift bag.

LAURA
 To welcome you back properly. Craig told me about the house.

STELLA
 This isn't a good time.

LAURA
 Take the cupcakes.

Stella just stares - waiting for Laura to squirm, or leave. Laura tries to look in the house. Stella blocks her view.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You know, you don't always have to make things hard, Stella.

STELLA

Is that why you're with Craig? Does being an Angler make things easy?

LAURA

Money makes things easy.

STELLA

Now you sound like one of them.

LAURA

Craig's offer is legit.

STELLA

I can't sell to the town, Laura. Even if I wanted to.

LAURA

Not the town. Intelligent Systems. Keep this between us, but we're talking about a public nature preserve, a server farm and a cutting edge R&D Facility. Jobs. Training. It would be major. Not just for you. For the town.

STELLA

First a school auditorium. Now this. What will they buy next?

LAURA

Look, I know you have a life to get back to. Your career. And a boyfriend? Or partner...

STELLA

Girlfriend. Lana. I'm a big fat lesbian, remember?

LAURA

Of course. I didn't know if -

STELLA

Thought it might have been obvious - all the times we made out Sophomore year.

LAURA

I... we were kids, Stella.

STELLA

I get it. You made out with a lot of people in high school. Me, Craig... Tyler.

Laura's face darkens. She steps closer, quiet and direct.

LAURA

What do you want, Stella?

STELLA

What happened to Helena?

LAURA

She died.

STELLA

How?

LAURA

I don't know. Natural causes. It was sudden. Ask her lawyer.

STELLA

I did. No one can give me a straight answer. Something here is fucked, Laura. And you know it.

LAURA

You want to solve a mystery? You're staying in her house. Go for it. It has nothing to do with me.

STELLA

Or you're a part of it.

Laura takes a step back, offended.

LAURA

Whatever you think of me, Stella - we all paid a price. But you got out. You got out and you made something of yourself.

STELLA

Jealous?

LAURA

Fuck you.

STELLA

Thanks for dinner.

Stella grabs the wine and tries to slam the door. Laura shoves her foot in the crack, stopping her.

LAURA

Stella. Wait. I don't expect you to forgive me, but don't turn this down just to spite me.

STELLA

You actually do think everything is about you.

LAURA

I know I wasn't there for you. When it mattered.

STELLA

You mean when I needed an alibi?

LAURA

Stella. I am sorry. Really. On my daughter's life.

Laura stares at Stella, unflinching. Stella chuckles.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What?

STELLA

It's just weird how long I wanted to hear you say that... And how little it matters now.

Stella slams the door, leaving Laura with the cupcakes.

54 INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

54

Stella finishes off the bottle of wine as she goes through the box from Helena. It's full of old programs, show binders, photos. She picks up a photo, studying it:

Young Laura - smiling, breezy - kissing a more reserved Young Stella on the cheek, who can't help but smile. Off to the side, YOUNGER HELENA (42) watches, beaming with pride.

Stella stares at the photo. Then puts it down and stands up.

55 INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

55

With determined urgency, Stella opens drawers, cabinets - rifling through, then moving on to the next. Finished with the living room she heads for the kitchen.

As she passes the basement door her pocket vibrates, slightly. She stops. Takes a step toward the kitchen. Nothing. Then a step towards the door. Buzz.

Stella takes out the necklace and walks closer to the door. It vibrates slightly, then turns, suddenly, like a compass, pointing at the door. Is she imagining things?

Stella opens the door. Steep stairs. Pitch black. Why does it have to be the basement?

56

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

56

Stella pulls the string on a single, dim light bulb. The basement is expansive, damp. Dirt walls, old shelves.

Built into one wall is another door - small, old, wooden. There's an energy to it. A pull. Helena's necklace trembles.

Instinctively, Stella looks for a handle or lock. Nothing. It's sealed shut.

The light bulb swings, highlighting a desk. The wall above it covered in what looks like an ongoing investigation. Maps, photos, notes.

There are pictures. Evan. Lou. Craig. Laura. August. In the center of it all, someone has written something. Stella moves closer to read it.

STELLA
'Lift the veil'?

On the desk is a manila envelope labeled TYLER. Full of dread, Stella reaches for it. Takes a breath. Opens it.

A police report. AUTOPSY PHOTOS. Of Tyler. The same strange markings as Helena on his hands, chest and forehead. A blunt wound on the back of his head. Stella recoils.

STELLA (CONT'D)
No.

57

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

57

58

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

58

Quick, stylistic flashes from the past:

- Tyler struggling with someone.
- Young Stella, trying to pull him off.
- Tyler falling backward, his head smashing on a rock.

STELLA

It's ok.

EVAN

What happened? Should I call 911?

STELLA

No. No. I'm ok.

Stella makes her way slowly to her feet, not letting Evan help. Evan notices the wall for the first time.

EVAN

What is this place?
(the photos)
Is that me?

Stella grabs his arm and pulls him towards the stairs.

STELLA

I don't know, but I'll puke if I
don't get out of here right now.

62

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

62

Stella - shellshocked - sits at the table. Evan puts a cup of tea in front of her.

EVAN

You sure you're ok here tonight?

STELLA

All I ate today was a bottle of
wine. I just need to sleep.

EVAN

Are you sure? I could -

STELLA

Go home to your daughter, Evan.

EVAN

Stella, listen. I'm looking into
it. There might be a different way.
Craig Angler is -

STELLA

Evan. I'm sorry. I can't. I'm done.

63

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

63

Stella lays in bed. Her phone buzzes. A text, from Lana.

LANA

I got the part!! Call you soon.

Stella turns the phone off. Moonlight streams in from a crack in the curtains next to the bed. She closes them, curls up in the darkness.

64 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING 64

Sunrise on a misty morning. Craig runs hard, sweating, at full power. Mona follows behind, trying to keep up.

65 INT. CARA'S ROOM - MORNING 65

Cara lays in bed, reading Macbeth. Her phone buzzes next to her. It's Justin. She ignores him.

66 INT. ANGLER BEDROOM - MORNING 66

Laura, in her best power suit, checks herself in the mirror.

67 EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT - DAY 67

Stella stands, for a moment, at the entrance to the trail. She takes a breath. Then walks into the woods.

68 EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DAY 68

Stella stands at the natural altar, still covered with trinkets and the photo of Helena. She adds the necklace to the collection, then bows her head in a moment of silence.

Leaves crunch behind her. She turns. It's August.

AUGUST

Welcome home.

Instinctively, Stella grabs the necklace off the altar, shoves it in her pocket. She backs up, looking around.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Don't worry. We're alone.

August reaches into his pocket. Pulls something out. A heavy pen and a checkbook.

STELLA

Thought the buyer wanted to remain anonymous.

AUGUST

That's Craig's little project. This is a donation. Just for you.

He writes a check, holds it out to Stella. She doesn't move.

STELLA
What did you do to her?

August smiles, sighs.

AUGUST
You know, hysteria is quite draining. Surprisingly contagious. Best nip it in the bud.

STELLA
Do I look hysterical?

AUGUST
You look tired.

STELLA
Your son thought I looked fully formed.

AUGUST
My son is an idiot.

STELLA
I'm not looking for common ground.

AUGUST
What could possibly be here for you, Stella, in our little town? Go back. To your "career." Your "girlfriend." Lana, is it?

Stella tenses. He's done his research.

STELLA
What did you do to Helena?

AUGUST
Wrong question.

STELLA
What happened to her!

AUGUST
Right question: What did Helena do to *herself*? I don't think you'd like the answer very much.

STELLA
I don't like any of this.

AUGUST
There's no shame in it. No one ever
took care of you.

STELLA
Helena took care of me.

August sighs. He's done with this conversation.

AUGUST
Take the money and go, Stella. Like
you did last time.

He holds out the check again. Something flashes over
Stella's face. Shame. She takes the check.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
Good girl.

STELLA
Eat shit.

August tips his hat to Stella.

AUGUST
My generosity has limits. Don't
push them.

He heads down the trail, leaving Stella alone in the woods.

69

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

69

Laura stands on stage, beaming, in front of about twenty-
five students, including Amber, Ron and Justin.

Justin texts Cara: *Where are you?*

LAURA
The key to a winning purpose
project is?
(pausing, no one answers)
You!

Murmurs, lukewarm clapping. Laura scans the group of
students. No Mona. She looks at the door, hoping.

70

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

70

Mona passes the auditorium, glancing in. Then keeps going,
turning down the hall towards the theater.

71

INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - DAY

71

On stage, Cara is laying flat on her back, like a starfish, staring at the ceiling. A door OPENS. She sits up.

Mona enters. Stops.

MONA
What are you doing?

CARA
My best work.
(beat)
Why aren't you YEL-ing with mommy?

MONA
Couldn't physically bare the
cringe. Where's Justin?

CARA
Basking in the cringe.

MONA
Why?

CARA
You know, classic mixture of irony
and ambition.

A silence. About to get awkward.

MONA
Can I... ?

Cara shrugs. Mona sits on the edge, tentatively. Cara lays back down. After a moment, Mona lays down too.

MONA (CONT'D)
I miss her.

CARA
Me too.

A door opens again, clattering. Stella comes in, juggling Helena's box and a cup of coffee, spilling on herself.

STELLA
Mother fu-

She sees the girls, stops. She's wearing Helena's necklace.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Oh. Sorry. Cara - right? And...
(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)
 (squinting at Mona)
 Mini Laura?

MONA
 Mona.

CARA
 Actually, her name is Desdemona.

Stella laughs. Mona glares.

MONA
 So?

STELLA
 That was the one starring role your
 mom didn't get. She could never
 resist a tragic death.

Cara stifles a laugh.

MONA
 Who are you?

STELLA
 I'm Stella, the new drama teacher.
 Principal Woodward is sorting out
 the paperwork.

MONA
 There is no drama. No funding -

Stella smiles wickedly.

STELLA
 Last minute donation came through.
 Anonymous donor.

CARA
 But... they're tearing it down.

STELLA
 Not until summer! So I have three
 months to... figure this all out.

CARA
 Macbeth?

STELLA
 Uh, yea. Macbeth. Want to help?

Stella starts clearing YEL boxes off the stage. Cara smiles.
 Mona raises her hand.

MONA
I call Lady Macbeth!

THE END.