

THE SACRIFICE

Pilot

Written by

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EXT. WILDVALE WOODS, FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

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.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

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, struggling to catch her breath.

She grasps a silver necklace, smearing blood 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:

EXT. WILDVALE WOODS, FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

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

INT. BROOLYN APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING

STELLA MOORE (43) opens her eyes, inhaling sharply as she wakes. Wild hair frames her 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.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

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. Was thinking...
maybe you could unstick me?

Wink wink. Lana smiles, half-hearted. Comes out of the pose.

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?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

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 thought maybe we should -

STELLA
Later, promise.

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

INT. MIDTOWN DINER - DAY

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
window. Stella throws down a crumpled bill 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!

A WOMAN glares at Jack. He turns, sighs. Stella catches up. Smiles.

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

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

JACK
Stella...

STELLA
You're my agent -

JACK
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'm a sucker for begging. And we failed. 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.

EXT. PROSPECT PARK - DAY

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.)

Is this Stella Moore?

INT. LAWYER OFFICE - DAY

EVAN DUMONT (41)- 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 service. Are you able to travel? There's something -

STELLA

Travel? Where?

EVAN

Home. To Anglerville. You could 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 must have changed, cause it's the last thing she asked me to do. And 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?

INT. BROOKLYN APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

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. I just wanted to talk, you know? Like, really.

STELLA
Talk. I'm here.

LANA
I'm... I don't know. 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.

EXT. ANGLERVILLE, WILDVALE DRIVE - NIGHT

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

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

AMBER and RON BOYLE (16) - twins - lead the pack. Amber, first born, takes a swig of beer and hands it to RON, who's 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. You need to stop listening to podcasts. Tyler Franklin got drunk and 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 microfiche. 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 Cara apologetically, follows Amber. Cara watches them go. Justin puts his arm around her.

CARA
Nobody even cares she's gone.

JUSTIN
We do.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

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?

EXT. BACKYARD - A LITTLE LATER

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.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DAY

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 sniffles, 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 old ways. Willing to do
anything for our beloved
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
breeze carries them into the crowd. People murmur, trying to
get out of the way. Evan jumps forward, grabbing the urn.

EVAN
Wait - we were supposed to
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.

EXT. ANGLERVILLE CEMETERY PARKING LOT - DAY

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.

EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD / INT. RENTAL CAR - EVENING

Stella drives down a bustling, well maintained Main Street - wondering at the posh stores, streetside cafes, and specialty coffee shops.

STELLA
Damn, Anglerville. Bougie.

She parks on a side street and heads towards town, passing a MEMORY CARE FACILITY - a few PATIENTS sitting on the porch. One patient, MRS FRANKLIN (58) - younger, 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...

INT. EVAN'S OFFICE - EVENING

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
I bet.

EVAN
We missed you at the memorial.

STELLA
Oh, yea... I don't do woods.

EVAN
Right. Of course.

STELLA
(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 other buyer
is the government.

STELLA
Great. Give 'em a call.

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

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 lost
it in the end like everyone said.
But she acted like you two meant
something to each other. Was she
wrong?

Stella sits back.

STELLA
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. Ms. Woodward, 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.

EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD - EVENING

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 closer look at Stella. Stella backs away slowly, then breaks into a run.

EXT. SIDE STREET - EVENING

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. Rumor is 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 heads for her car. Craig grabs her arm, leans in.

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

STELLA
Yea, well, fucking 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... The Cleary Property... I
figured it out. Yea. She'll sell...
How soon can you get an offer
together?

INT. STELLA'S CAR - EVENING

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, smoothes it out.

STELLA
Fucking Anglers.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

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.

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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.

OVER BLACK:

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

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

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.

INT. HELENA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

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.

INT. DUMONT KITCHEN - MORNING

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... But Helena
wouldn't want you to just quit, do
nothing.

CARA
I made eggs. What have you done?

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.

INT. ANGLER KITCHEN - MORNING

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'd probably be a kick ass
entrepreneur.

Eye roll. Big one.

MONA
First you take 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... Tik Tok! 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 now. 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.

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
This is still about me?

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
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 - and checks his phone.

EXT. ANGLER BOULEVARD - DAY

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.

INT. ANGLER SUV - DAY

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.
(MORE)

MONA (CONT'D)
(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?!

EXT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH / INT. ANGLER SUV - DAY

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. Mona
threw an egg at me, and I -

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.

INT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH ENTRANCE - DAY

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

INT. ASST. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

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?

INT. ASST PRINCIPAL OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER

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.

INT. ANGLERVILLE HIGH HALLWAY - DAY

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 break in.

LOU
Shocking. 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 realize.

LOU
She was proud of you, you know. She
actually thought you might move
back to Anglerville. Take over
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 almost exactly 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.

INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - DAY

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.

INT. HELENA'S OFFICE - DAY

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, grabs the box and follows the music.

INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - CONTINUOUS

On stage, Cara is playing an eerie, building MELODY. Stella
watches, humming the harmony under her breath, almost
automatically.

Cara notices and stops, embarrassed.

CARA
Sorry.

STELLA
No. Please, it's lovely. And I'm
lurking. Keep going. I'll go.

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 do 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. Now, 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 your daughter 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!

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!

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

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 in a huff, then 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?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA

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 put her in an
eating disorder camp and that's why
she missed so much 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.

INT. THEATER BASEMENT, COSTUME ROOM - DAY

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.

INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - DAY

Stella enters, puts Helena's box down without opening it. She walks through the room, studying Helena's old family photos: As a TODDLER holding a BABY BROTHER. A TEEN 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. Like Stella.

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

INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - DAY

Stella sits at the piano, playing the music 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.

INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

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.

INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - A LITTLE LATER

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?

EXT. HELENA FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

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, even if you sell,
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'd be 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
something for her on the old tree -
a photo or keepsake. It was nice.
You should go.

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 shifts uncomfortably. Holds out the necklace again.

LOU
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 could 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?

INT. HELENA KITCHEN - EVENING

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.

INT. DUMONT KITCHEN - NIGHT

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

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 the purpose thing?

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.

EXT. ANGLER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura is moving cupcakes from a bakery box into tupperware. Mona watches - everything about Laura makes her skin crawl.

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.

INT. ANGLER DINING ROOM - NIGHT

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)
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
Let us 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
(incredulous)
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. 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 gives him a look - not in front of Laura. August points to Craig.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
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.

INT. HELENA FRONT HALL - NIGHT

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

STELLA
Motherfucker.

Stella opens the door.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

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 data center 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. He said *exactly* the same thing. 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 it has everything to do with you.

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 really 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...

Stella slams the door, leaving Laura with the cupcakes.

INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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.

INT. HELENA LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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?

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

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 back wall is covered in what looks like an ongoing investigation. Maps, photos, notes. 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.

FLASHBACK: EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

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.
- Blood seeping into the ground.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

It's too much. Stella shoves everything back in the envelope. Panicking, she backs up towards the sealed door.

She touches the door. Everything goes BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

HELENA (O.S.)
Stella.

Strange flashes through blurred sight. A roaring fire, a cavern. Underground? A woman, impossible to see. Helena?

HELENA (CONT'D)
Stay. Stella. Restore the lineage.
Lift the veil. Stay.

Everything goes black again.

HELENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Stella!

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Evan is bent over Stella - passed out on the basement floor
- trying to wake her.

EVAN
Stella!

Stella opens her eyes, then scrambles away from Evan.

STELLA
No!

EVAN
Stella. Jesus. You're ok. It's ok.

STELLA
What are you doing here?

EVAN
Craig called and made an offer.
I... I thought I could talk you out
of it. But you didn't answer and
the door was unlocked, the basement
was open. I'm sorry -

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.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

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
I've been looking into it. It'll
take more time, but there might be
a different way.

STELLA
Take the offer.

EVAN
Stella, listen, Craig Angler is -

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

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING

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

INT. CARA'S ROOM - MORNING

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

INT. ANGLER BEDROOM - MORNING

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

EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT - DAY

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

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DAY

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. 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 pet 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. And 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
The right question is: 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.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

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.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

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

INT. BLACKBOX THEATER - DAY

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

MONA
Can I... ?

Cara shrugs. After a moment, Mona lays down too.

MONA (CONT'D)
I miss her.

CARA
Me too.

A door opens again, clattering. The girls sit up.

Stella enters, 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...
(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!

TAG: INT. BASEMENT LOUNGE - NIGHT

Leather and smoke, a masculine room. A small vile fills with
blood.

August's large form is bent over the couch. He expertly
finishes a blood draw, flinching only when the phone RINGS.

He turns toward his phone, across the room, revealing
COURTNEY (19), half-conscious, sprawled on the couch.

August puts the vile of blood in his pocket. Removes latex
gloves. Answers the phone. He mostly listens.

AUGUST
Not yet... You did the right thing.

August hangs up. Makes another call.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Ms. Turner is ready to go. She
might need assistance.

August straightens Courtney's skirt. She moans slightly.

August opens a door leading into a basement room, dirt
floor. On the far side of the room, built into the wall, is
a door - small, old, wooden. Sealed. Just like Stella's.

August walks into the room and shuts the door behind him.

THE END