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Excerpt — Scenes 1–15 of 30

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v365

FADE IN:

INT. VOSS'S CLASSROOM, SKYDALE HIGH SCHOOL — MORNING

Silence. The clock's second hand ticks. Chalk scrapes across the blackboard.

WORLD HISTORY
UNIT 3: ORDER AND COLLAPSE

A dirty sneaker sits on the teacher's desk, planted on top of an open textbook.

Wide: thirty students, and VOSS, late forties, at the board with her back turned.

Nobody moves.

A girl glances at the shoe on the teacher's desk, looks away.

The clock's second hand drops a notch.

A boy chewing gum stares hard at the sneaker on the desk.

Chalk scrapes across the blackboard.

Two rows over, someone else can't stop looking at the shoe on the teacher's desk.

Near the front, HUNTER is watching the room, waiting.

The chalk stops. Voss sets it down and turns around.

Her eyes stumble upon the sneaker on her desk and she jumps slightly.

She looks disgusted.

The room holds. Hunter waits.

Someone snorts.

The class explodes.

Voss looks at the shoe on her desk, then at the class. The laughter starts to fade.

She pinches the sneaker between two black-gloved fingers and carries it over the trash can. Holds it above the opening.

The class watches. The shoe dangles.

Then suddenly, she grabs it full-handed, crosses to the window, throws it open, and hurls the shoe outside.

EXT. QUAD — CONTINUOUS

The sneaker flies in the air, drops from the second floor and hits the pavement beside the GARDENER. He freezes. Looks at the shoe. Then looks up toward Voss's classroom.

From inside, LAUGHTER erupts.

INT. VOSS'S CLASSROOM — CONTINUOUS

The class is bursting. Hunter leans toward EMILY.

HUNTER
It's okay. Those are knockoffs.

Emily glances down. Hunter's right foot is in a sock. She looks back at him. He shrugs, smug about it.

Emily goes back to her book.

Voss shuts the window and turns back to the room, standing still. The laughter fades.

She returns to her desk, takes out a packet of alcohol wipes, and cleans her gloved hand completely, multiple times. She drops the wipes in the trash.

Hunter watches, smiling, head bobbing to nothing.

NOAH raises his hand.

VOSS
No.

NOAH
I didn't even ask yet. Can I go to the bathroom? Please.

Voss looks at him.

VOSS
Go.

Noah gets up. He's almost through the door when Voss gets there first, puts her hand between him and the door.

He stops. She looks down at his feet. He has both shoes on.

She drops the hand and lets him go.

Emily leans toward Hunter.

EMILY
Hey. Did you see that?

HUNTER
See what?

EMILY
She looked at his shoes.

Hunter stops bouncing his head. He looks at Voss, then at the door Noah just exited through.

A grin creeps in.

He turns in his seat and whispers to the boys behind him.

The boys look at him. A frown, a short laugh. Hunter gestures under the desk. They look down, then back at him.

Hunter smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. VOSS'S CLASSROOM — LATER

The bell rings. Everyone stands.

VOSS
Sit.

Everyone sits. Voss opens the door.

VOSS
Line up. One at a time.

A BOY steps up. One shoe on, one socked foot.

VOSS
Where's your other shoe?

BOY 1
Right here.

He opens his coat. It's tucked inside. He grins and goes.

Another BOY, hands behind his back.

VOSS
Shoe.

BOY 2
Got it.

He brings it around front, waggles it, and goes.

Two GIRLS pass through, both shoes on, unbothered. One glances back down the line at the boys still waiting, a slight twitch of the lips to one side. From his desk, Hunter

catches her eye and winks. The twitch goes flat. The other stares at them, open-mouthed, in disbelief.

The next BOY steps up with his shoe balanced on his head. He doesn't wait to be asked, tips his head forward and lets it slide off into his hands. Keeps going.

Voss's jaw sets.

The one after him crouches down to put his on.

She slaps the back of his head.

VOSS
Outside.

He scrambles up and goes.

At his desk, Hunter is still packing his bag slowly. Emily stands at the desk beside him, arms crossed, both shoes on, watching the parade.

Down the line, the boys are all smiling, holding their expression. Out in the hallway, past her, it breaks the second they're through the door.

Someone starts whistling. Others pick it up. "Heigh-Ho," the Seven Dwarfs' march, one boy after another, all the way down the hallway.

Voss lets out a single, disbelieving laugh. Her mouth stays open after it, a beat too long.

She keeps looking down the hallway. The whistling goes on, getting smaller.

A boy slips past her, one shoe on. She doesn't see him.

TYLER reaches the door. One shoe on. Empty hands.

He stops.

He swings his backpack around, unzips it, reaches in.

Nothing. He digs deeper.

Voss's eyes come back. Down. To the one shoe.

TYLER
It was in here.

Voss waits.

TYLER
I mean, I had it. I put it— I only took it off because—

Voss grabs his arm before he finishes.

VOSS
You're coming with me.

TYLER
Ms. Voss, wait—

She storms out. Tyler stumbles after her, one shoe on.

INT. HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Hunter exits behind the others. He reaches into his backpack and pulls out Tyler's shoe, letting out a small laugh.

Emily appears beside him. She sees the shoe. He looks at her with a big grin on his face.

EMILY
You're such an ass.

Emily walks off.

Hunter, still amused, holds the shoe up beside his face, holding the grin.

FREEZE.

HUNTER, written in chalk-white letters, the U in red.

Release.

He walks off with the shoe.

INT. STAFF OFFICE — MORNING

Small. Neat. Quiet.

Tyler sits across from Voss.

One shoe on, one socked foot tucked under his chair.

He hugs his backpack on his lap very closely.

Voss studies him.

VOSS
So, how did you end up missing one shoe?

TYLER
I put it in my bag.

He hugs the backpack a little tighter.

TYLER
Everybody was doing it. I mean not everybody. Like... a bunch of people. It was supposed to be funny.

VOSS
I didn't laugh.

Tyler lowers his eyes.

VOSS
But sure, I found it very funny.

Tyler looks up, he half tries to smile, half tries to look serious.

TYLER
You did? I mean, yeah. It was kind of funny. The look on your face! I mean. Not... you. And what you did after.

VOSS
You're feeling sorry for me, young man?

Tyler panics.

TYLER
No.

Nothing from Voss.

TYLER
I mean... kind of? Not like that. I just meant I know it was annoying.

He looks at the floor.

TYLER
I wasn't trying to ruin your morning. It was just a stupid shoe thing.

VOSS
(mocking)
You think I'm sad?

Voss lets him sit with that.

VOSS
Oh, Tyler. You really have no idea what it takes to make a person like me sad.

TYLER
Gee, I really don't.

She looks at his backpack.

VOSS
Hey, did you have lunch yet? I'm starting to get a little hungry.

She grabs his bag. Tyler jolts forward.

TYLER
Hey wait, that's my bag.

He grabs the strap but does not yank it back.

TYLER
I brought lunch, but it's mine. Obviously it's mine. It's in my bag. Can you not?

Voss opens the bag.

She takes out a hard-boiled egg and shows him.

VOSS
Looks delicious. Do you mind if I...

TYLER
Yes. I mean, yes, I mind. That's my lunch.

He reaches for it, stops short of her hand.

TYLER
You're already holding it after asking.

Voss salts the egg and takes a big bite.

VOSS
Oh, thanks, Tyler. You can't imagine how starving I was.

Tyler stares. Actually offended now.

TYLER
Why even ask?

Voss grabs the Vegimilk.

VOSS
Damn, all this salt has gotten me thirsty.

Tyler grabs the Vegimilk before she can drink.

Not hard. Just fast.

TYLER
No.

He surprises himself. He holds it against his chest.

TYLER
That's mine too. You already ate the egg. You don't get the drink.

Voss holds out her hand.

Tyler holds on a few seconds longer.

Then he gives it to her.

Voss sips it.

VOSS
Tyler, I like you. You seem to show a bit of resistance toward me.

Tyler stares at the Vegimilk. Then at Voss.

TYLER
You just stole my drink while saying that.

VOSS
That's why I'm a little confused why you're not doing the same with your so-called friends.

Tyler is angry now.

TYLER
And they're not my so-called friends. They're my friends. They mess around. I mess around. That's what friends do. Why are you even talking like that?

The anger slips.

TYLER
I just got stuck being the idiot.

VOSS
I am messing around too, just like your friends.

Voss smiles with the Vegimilk.

VOSS
But hey, if they're allowed to mess around with you and not me, I can understand. It's your rules.

She reaches into the bag and pulls out a folded printout.

VOSS
Oh, look what I found. Another egg.

His anger drops into panic for half a second.

TYLER
That's not mine. I mean yeah it's mine, but I didn't make it. Give it back. It's just a stupid picture people were passing around. It's not a big deal.

He looks at the egg in her hand. Then the egg-shaped capsule in the photo.

TYLER
I just don't want you taking stuff out of my bag. And it's not just an egg. It's a time capsule.

He shrugs, not convincingly.

TYLER
Supposedly.

He reaches for the photo again, a little braver.

TYLER
Can I have it back?

VOSS
Sure, but you gotta tell me more, because you piqued my curiosity.

She hands the photo toward Tyler, then retracts as he reaches out.

VOSS
A time capsule. Tell me more.

Tyler exhales through his nose.

TYLER
That's so annoying. It's just old school stuff. People said they buried it or hid it or whatever. Everybody was joking because it looked like an egg.

He looks at the half-eaten egg.

Voss follows his eyes. She puts the photo down on the table, picks up the egg, and finishes it. Slowly. She savors every bite. Then a long sip of Vegimilk.

Tyler watches the egg disappear. Then the Vegimilk. His mouth opens a little.

TYLER
You have a problem with food. I was saving that.

He grabs the photo before she can take it back.

TYLER
And this is mine now. You don't get to have my picture.

VOSS
That's fine, Tyler. I'm... sorry I ate your lunch.

Tyler looks suspicious immediately.

VOSS
What can I do for you to make up for it? Would you like to try my lunch?

TYLER
No.
(beat)
I mean... what is it?
(shuts his eyes)
No. Wait. No. You're doing that thing where you act nice and then suddenly I'm missing more food.

VOSS
You're very perceptive.

Voss watches him one more second. A small smile, almost

proud.

VOSS
You can go now. Just try to stay out of trouble next time.

Tyler stands halfway.

VOSS
By the way, I'm so curious. Why do you care so much about that photo of an egg?

Tyler's hand finds the door handle.

TYLER
I don't care that much. It's just funny.

VOSS
Funny how?

TYLER
Because people are saying stuff.

He lowers his voice, a slight smile.

TYLER
Dumb stuff. Like there's a magazine in it.

VOSS
Ah? What kind of magazine?

Tyler is enjoying this.

TYLER
I don't know. Like an old one.

He lets it hang.

TYLER
People said Playboy. From the nineties. It's probably not real.

VOSS
Playboy, huh? That's interesting. Have you ever seen one before?

Tyler freezes. Then a grin escapes him.

TYLER
What? No. Where would I even get one? Why would you ask me that? That's a weird question to ask a

student.

VOSS
You're right. It seems like you're curious about that magazine, otherwise you wouldn't have mentioned it.

TYLER
I mentioned it because you asked. And because everybody was talking about it. I'm not, like, obsessed with it. I've thought about it maybe twice. Can I actually go now?

VOSS
It's weird. Why would they put a Playboy magazine inside a giant egg? Who would do such a thing?

Tyler makes a face.

TYLER
I don't know. Weird people? That's not even why people care. I mean... I don't care. Other people care.

He looks up at her. Really looks.

TYLER
Why do you care so much? About a stupid egg.

Voss leans back. The teacher voice goes on like a light.

VOSS
I just don't really see what's so special about a Playboy from the nineties. Surely you would know how to get one nowadays if you wanted to.

Tyler shakes his head.

TYLER
It's not just some random Playboy.

His hand stays on the door handle. He chuckles.

TYLER
People think they know who it is.

VOSS
On the magazine?

Tyler smiles. He turns all the way to her. His hand has left the handle.

TYLER
Yeah. Someone from school.

Voss's head goes up, and she looks at him.

TYLER
A teacher. Maybe years ago, before she worked here.

Voss sets the Vegimilk down. She turns to face him fully.

VOSS
What did you just say?

Tyler doesn't answer.

VOSS
(interested)
A teacher from our school?

TYLER
Forget what I said.

Voss straightens. The teacher voice, back on.

VOSS
Tyler, you do realize that a teacher posing nude in a Playboy magazine could be a serious offense? Think about it, she's working with children all day. Come on Tyler, give me more details.

She holds his eyes. Dead serious.

A long silence.

The light goes off. She cracks up. Alone. She can't stop.

VOSS
(grinning)
Oh, the humiliation.

Tyler stares at her, terrified.

VOSS
Which teacher?

TYLER
I don't know. Nobody said a name.

Voss doesn't answer right away.

VOSS
A teacher. In a Playboy.

She says it slowly. She's smiling, slightly biting her lips.

TYLER
(uncertain)
I guess.

He shifts his weight, some small discomfort he can't name.

VOSS
Huh.

She's still smiling.

VOSS
Where is it?

No game in it.

TYLER
What?

VOSS
The egg. Where do people say it is?

Tyler blinks at the tempo.

VOSS
The photo came from somewhere. Who took it?

TYLER
It just gets sent around.

VOSS
Sent to you by who?

TYLER
I don't remember.

VOSS
Hey, Tyler. Remember!

TYLER
Okay, I'll tell you! Just don't say it came from me —

His teeth click shut.

Voss waits.

Tyler looks at his sock.

TYLER
I don't know where it is. Nobody knows.

Voss slams her hand on the table.

The door opens.

MEI LEE stands there.

Voss is up out of her chair.

Tyler turns so fast he almost trips on his sock.

TYLER
Ms. Lee.

Relief, then instant embarrassment.

Mei takes in the room: Tyler with one shoe, backpack clutched to his chest, empty Vegimilk, egg napkin, Voss.

MEI
Beatrix.

VOSS
Mei.

Tyler looks from one to the other. Voss and Mei look each other in the eye.

VOSS
We are not done here.

MEI
That's not for you to decide.

TYLER
I want to leave.

MEI
You heard the man.

Voss's eyes harden. Behind Mei, MIA, seven, peeks in.

MIA
Tyler?

She sees his face.

Then Voss.

MIA
You're a mean person.

Tyler almost smiles despite himself.

TYLER
Mia.

Mia takes his hand.

MEI
Tyler, take your sister home.

Tyler goes with Mia, her small hand in his.

One shoe squeaks. One sock whispers.

In the hallway, Mia looks back. Tyler turns with her.

MIA
Thank you Mrs. Lee.

Mei smiles and waves her goodbye.

Tyler's eyes leave Mei. Find Voss.

Voss is already looking at him.

MEI (O.S.)
You got what you wanted?

Voss does not answer right away. Her eyes stay on the hallway.

VOSS
Oh no.

She turns her head to Mei. Looks her straight in the eye.

VOSS
I suddenly feel like wanting much more.

On Mei. She looks Voss in the eye. We stay on her. A long time.

CUT TO:

INT. TEACHER LOUNGE — MORNING

The lounge is mid-morning quiet. Coffee is brewing in a machine. A microwave hums. A teacher grades quizzes with a red pen. Another rinses a mug in the sink. A counselor laughs softly at something on her phone.

HENRY, a male teacher, is standing, talking to CHARLES, sitting.

HENRY
How is it going with the senior class? I heard you're having trouble with discipline.

CHARLES
To be honest, I've completely given up. It's above my pay grade.

HENRY
Hey, don't worry. There's a big fight at the stadium on Saturday night. They all calm down after that.

MR. BRIGGS sits at a table with a Carl's Jr. bag in front of him, grease already coming through one corner, a large soda in his hand.

Voss enters. All teachers' eyes turn to her.

She scans the room. Finds Briggs.

Two teachers at the coffee machine are mid-laugh. The woman sees Voss, puts her cup down, and walks out. The other one looks away and drinks his coffee.

VOSS
Mr. Briggs.

BRIGGS
Beatrix.

He starts opening the bag.

VOSS
Come with me.

BRIGGS
Is everything okay with you?

VOSS
I have a question.

Briggs studies her. Then stands, the bag in one hand, the soda in the other.

Voss gently takes the bag from his hand on her way to the office.

Briggs looks at the hand that held it. Then follows.

INT. BRIGGS'S OFFICE — CONTINUOUS

The nameplate on the door: MR. BRIGGS, PRINCIPAL.

Small. Warm. Overcrowded. Old school photos. Framed certificates. A dusty trophy. Too many binders.

Voss sets the bag on his desk. Briggs closes the door, sets his soda down next to it.

BRIGGS
All right.

Voss opens the bag. Fries. She takes one.

BRIGGS
Help yourself.

Voss does.

VOSS
Do you remember the egg?

Briggs looks at the bag.

BRIGGS
I only ordered a burger.

VOSS
Remember? The time capsule. Shaped like an egg.

Briggs pauses.

BRIGGS
Oh.

He smiles a little.

BRIGGS
That egg.

He takes a framed photo down from the shelf and sets it on the desk.

A younger Briggs. More hair. Parents in coats. The egg on a dolly, ribbon around it, a combination dial on the front, half into the wall.

Briggs chuckles. He sits.

BRIGGS
I haven't thought about that thing in years.

Voss picks it up. Looks at it. Sets it down.

VOSS
What did people put in it?

BRIGGS
Oh, you know. The usual.

Voss takes another fry.

BRIGGS
Letters, photos, newspaper clippings. A yearbook, I think.

VOSS
Anything weird?

BRIGGS
It's a box of junk people picked out. All of it's a bit weird.

Voss watches him.

VOSS
Anything unusual for a time capsule?

BRIGGS
Not that I remember.

Voss takes another fry.

VOSS
You remember something.

BRIGGS
I remember having more hair. That's about it.

Voss reaches into the bag. Finds the burger still wrapped.

BRIGGS
When I said help yourself, I was talking about the fries.

Voss unwraps it. A serious burger. Juicy. Dripping. Perfect.

She takes a bite.

Briggs watches.

BRIGGS
Apparently I was unclear.

Voss chews. Waits. Briggs says nothing.

VOSS
Playboy.

Briggs goes still for half a second. Then he looks away with a small, bad laugh.

VOSS
I heard someone put one in the egg.

BRIGGS
I don't recall anything like that.

Voss smiles. Takes another small bite.

BRIGGS
That's a very good burger.

VOSS
Hmm...

BRIGGS
I was looking forward to it.

VOSS
Who was on the cover?

BRIGGS
That's not your business.

Silence.

VOSS
Was it you?

Briggs laughs.

BRIGGS
No.

VOSS
You sure?

BRIGGS
Pretty sure.

VOSS
Could've been tasteful.

Briggs shakes his head, amused.

BRIGGS
You are impossible.

VOSS
Was it your wife?

Briggs looks at her. Not angry, just offended enough.

BRIGGS
Beatrix!

Voss softens.

VOSS
I'm joking.

She lets that sit.

VOSS
Marjorie is a lovely lady.

Briggs holds her gaze.

Voss sets the burger down. Still partly unwrapped.

BRIGGS
Why are you asking me this?

VOSS
Vague curiosity.

BRIGGS
My sixth sense tells me you're trying to stir something up.

Voss smiles.

VOSS
Where is it?

BRIGGS
Not your business.

VOSS
I thought you didn't remember.

BRIGGS
I remember where to stop.

Voss studies him. Then the half-eaten burger.

She picks it up and takes one last bite, over the desk. A fat drop of ketchup falls onto the glass of the frame.

Burger still in hand, she nudges the frame aside with her knuckles. Her other hand flat on the desk, she leans in toward Briggs. Then she half-sits on the edge of the desk. She sets the burger down on its wrapper.

She reaches into the bag. Pulls out a second straw, still in its paper. Unwraps it. Slides it into his soda, right next to his.

She drinks. Long. All the way to the bottom. The straw rattles and gurgles on ice.

Briggs watches. No joke this time.

Voss slides off the desk and heads for the door.

BRIGGS
Beatrix.

She stops at the door.

BRIGGS
Leave it alone.

Voss looks back.

VOSS
Of course.

She exits.

INT. TEACHER LOUNGE — CONTINUOUS

The teacher with the red pen marks another quiz. She is tall, severe, silver hair pulled tight, reading glasses low on her nose.

Voss watches. The woman circles an answer wrong in big red.

Voss moves on.

At the sink, another teacher dries her mug with a paper towel. Soft-faced, floral blouse, a gold cross at her throat. She folds the towel neatly before throwing it away.

Voss watches the little ritual, moves on.

Near the vending machine, another teacher shakes peanuts into her palm. Athletic, sleeveless cardigan, hair cut short. She eats quickly.

Voss watches the peanuts fall into her hand. Moves on.

Then Mei laughs.

Voss turns.

Mei Lee stands near the coffee machine with two teachers. Asian descent, good posture, warm eyes. Her dark hair is pinned up loosely, a few strands escaping around her face.

She wears a cream blouse tucked into a fitted skirt, simple earrings, a mug cradled in both hands.

She isn't trying at all.

She says something. The two teachers laugh. Mei laughs with them, loose, bright, unbothered.

Voss looks at her longer than the others.

Mei does not notice.

VOSS
(softly)
Oh, Mei...

She watches Mei laugh.

VOSS
Could that be you?

Mei keeps laughing.

Voss bites her lip. She doesn't look away.

Not until Mei is gone.

Then she walks away.

INT. BRIGGS'S OFFICE — CONTINUOUS

Briggs picks up the frame to put it back on the shelf. The drop of ketchup, dead center on the glass.

Behind the glass: nothing. Empty.

He turns it over. Checks the desk. Checks the floor. He looks at the door.

He slides the wrapper out from under the burger and wipes the glass with it. It smears wider.

He puts the empty frame back on the shelf. Picks up the soda. Two straws. Nothing left.

He sits down to his cold fries.

INT. HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Voss walks. Unhurried. Heels on tiles.

She fans herself with the photo.

FREEZE.

BEATRIX — chalk-white, the B in red.

Release.

She walks on.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

MUSIC — "S&M" by Rihanna, low under the hallway noise.

SLOW MOTION.

Against the lockers, TWO BOYS are fighting. One has the other by the collar. The other bleeds from the nose.

Students step around them like they're roadblocks. A girl hops over a dropped backpack without looking down.

Voss does not break stride. The boys separate to let her walk through, then go back at it as soon as she passes.

One of them gets slammed into the lockers, grabs at whatever's above him: a paper banner. It tears loose and comes down behind Voss in one long sheet.

HOMECOMING 2016

She doesn't turn around.

Further down, a TALL GIRL has a SMALLER GIRL backed against the lockers. Finger in her face. Low voice.

Voss approaches.

The music fades. NORMAL SPEED.

The tall girl straightens instantly. Sweet smile and waves her hand.

TALL GIRL
Hi, Ms. Voss!

Voss does not answer. She keeps walking without looking.

The smaller girl snatches a wallet from the tall girl's pocket and runs away. The tall girl goes after her.

TALL GIRL
Hey, give it back, you little rat!

Voss walks past Hunter and out of frame. We stay on him.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Hunter moves through the busy hallway.

He wears one of his own shoes. On his other foot: Tyler's shoe.

Tyler's shoe doesn't quite fit his foot, and doesn't quite match the other shoe.

Hunter walks like this is completely normal. He says hi to a girl at her locker. She doesn't look up.

TANNER steps into his path. TOMMY right behind him.

TANNER
Yo Trey, look who we have here.

TOMMY
How's it feel stepping in Tyler's shoe?

Hunter turns.

TREY stands behind him.

Tommy leans near the lockers, watching Hunter's way out.

TREY
Not very nice, what you did to Tyler.

HUNTER
Like you care.

TREY
You're right.

Trey moves closer.

TREY
All I care about is getting back the diary you stole from my sister.

Hunter's face changes.

Just enough.

TREY
Give it to me.

Hunter shifts to one side.

Tanner moves with him.

Hunter stops.

HUNTER
It's not yours.

TREY
She's my little sister. I'll make sure she gets it.

HUNTER
I don't know, Trey. Maybe Chloe would mind her brother snooping into her private life.

Trey's face changes.

He steps toward Hunter.

TREY
Oh now you're gonna get it!

Tanner reaches for him.

Hunter slips past Tanner and runs.

Trey, Tanner, and Tommy take off after him.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Hunter runs down the hallway with Trey, Tanner, and Tommy closing in behind him. Students press themselves against the lockers to get out of the way.

Ahead of him, two restroom doors: BOYS and GIRLS.

Hunter doesn't slow down. He shoves through the GIRLS door.

The three boys skid to a stop in front of it.

They stare at the door. Then at each other.

Tommy points at the sign, as if the others haven't seen it.

INT. GIRLS' RESTROOM — CONTINUOUS

The restroom is clean, bright, and quiet. A faucet drips.

KELSEY stands at the mirror applying lip gloss. She spots Hunter in the reflection and stops. Hunter freezes too.

He raises a finger to his lips: please. Then, for good measure, his best smile.

Kelsey looks at him, then down at his mismatched shoes. Without a word, she turns back to the mirror and goes on with her lip gloss, like he's a mop somebody left out.

Hunter picks a stall and eases the door shut without letting it click. He steps up onto the toilet seat and crouches so his feet can't be seen under the door.

The restroom door opens.

The three boys creep in close together, like they're trespassing somewhere sacred. Tommy is careful not to touch anything.

Kelsey is still at the mirror.

She watches the three of them in the reflection, lip gloss paused mid-stroke. Annoyed disbelief.

The boys stop. For a moment, nobody knows the etiquette.

TOMMY
It smells so much better in here.

TREY
Shut up.

Kelsey goes back to her lip gloss.

Four stalls. Two of the doors are closed.

Trey signals for them to spread out. Tanner cracks his knuckles. Tommy crouches and peeks under the first closed stall: no feet. He straightens up and shows a smirk.

Kelsey caps her gloss, drops it in her bag, and walks out between them, unhurried, without a word. She has seen where Hunter is hiding. She tells them nothing. Not her problem.

In his stall, Hunter holds his crouch on the toilet seat. His legs are starting to shake, and Tyler's shoe is slowly sliding off his heel. The shoe hangs there, half on, half off.

Then a FART comes from the OTHER closed stall. A quiet one. But in this silence, it might as well be a gunshot.

The boys freeze and look at each other. Tanner points at the stall and mouths: him. Trey nods.

They gather in front of the wrong door. Tommy raises a fist to knock, then hesitates. Tanner doesn't bother — he grabs the top of the door and yanks it. The latch pops and the door swings open.

GIRL IN STALL (O.S.)
CREEP!

A chunky black Mary Jane flies out of the stall and cracks Tanner square in the forehead. He drops.

The door slams shut again from the inside.

GIRL IN STALL (O.S.)
PERVERTS!

Tommy stumbles back into the sinks. Trey holds both hands up at the closed door.

TREY
Wrong stall. Lady. Wrong stall.

Behind them, Hunter's stall door drifts open without a sound. He tiptoes out in his mismatched shoes, taking long, careful steps. He passes Tanner on the floor and slips out the door.

Tommy turns around just in time to see the empty stall and the door still swinging.

TOMMY
It's him!

TREY
Damn it!

He bolts for the exit. The others scramble after him — Tanner up off the floor, one hand pressed to his forehead.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Hunter sprints down the hallway.

Behind him, the restroom door bursts open and the three boys pour out — into the CUSTODIAN and his cleaning cart.

The cart tips over. Spray bottles skate across the floor, a mop lands on Tommy, and toilet paper rolls scatter in every direction. One roll unspools down the hallway after Hunter like it wants to come too.

The custodian stands in the middle of the wreckage and looks down at the boys. The boys look up at him.

A pack of cigarettes has skated clear of the pile from Tanner's pocket.

Hunter, twenty feet down the hall, stops.

He comes back for it.

He is gone again before anyone thinks to grab him.

He sprints past Kelsey, who is pointing a TEACHER, bald, skinny, glasses, toward the girls' restroom. She doesn't point at Hunter. Not her problem.

Hunter keeps running — still looking back at the mess.

Still looking back —

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Hunter doesn't see GWEN coming the other way.

They collide. Hard.

Gwen's backpack strap slips off her shoulder. A small angel charm, clipped to the strap, snaps loose and skids across the floor. One of its wings breaks off and skitters further.

Hunter barely glances back at her and keeps running.

He's gone.

Gwen doesn't call after him. She doesn't react much at all.

She fixes her backpack. Looks down. The charm is a few feet away. She walks over, not in a hurry, and kneels down to pick it up.

The wing is a little further on, by the lockers. She picks it up too.

She holds the two pieces together. They fit but don't hold.

The hallway keeps going around her. None of it reaches her.

She stands up and puts both pieces in her pocket.

She looks once down the hallway, where Hunter ran off.

Her face doesn't give anything away.

She walks after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD — CONTINUOUS

Hunter bursts out of a side door into the courtyard and stops short at a dead end.

A wall. A fenced corner. Nowhere to go.

He turns around. Trey, Tanner, and Tommy come out of the same door and spread across the courtyard, blocking the way out. Tanner still has a red mark on his forehead shaped like a shoe heel.

They slow down. No need to run anymore.

Hunter backs up until the fence rattles behind him.

TREY
Nowhere left, Hunter.

HUNTER
We can talk about this.

TANNER
Let's rearrange your beautiful face.

Hunter rests his chin on his hand, framing his face, and smiles.

HUNTER
Thanks, man.

Tanner looks at Tommy. Tommy looks back.

TOMMY
He's just an idiot.

Tanner steps forward.

Students start to gather around the courtyard's edges, coming from the other side. A few are already holding their phones, ready to film.

Then the crowd shifts.

Gwen calmly pushes through the middle of it. She passes between Tommy and Tanner like they're furniture and stops in front of Hunter.

The courtyard goes quiet.

Hunter looks into her eyes. His face falls.

HUNTER
Oh no.

Gwen doesn't say anything.

HUNTER
Look that was an accident.

She takes one step closer. He shuts up.

Trey and his boys trade looks. Whatever this is, it's not their fight anymore. They back off a step, glad to have front-row seats instead.

Somewhere in the crowd, MIKA slides a small notebook out of her jacket. MIKA inked on the cover. She clicks a pen.

Hunter raises both hands, palms out.

HUNTER
Okay. Okay. Let's be adults about this.

Gwen moves.

We stay with the crowd.

A sneaker squeals on concrete. A grunt. Thirty faces flinch at once.

For one second, between two shoulders: Hunter swinging wide, ugly, desperate, at nothing. Gwen isn't where the punch lands.

The crowd laughs.

Phones come up now. All of them.

A thud. A girl at the front covers her mouth, eyes huge, delighted. The fence rattles hard. The front row jumps back as one. Someone whoops.

Tommy and Tanner high-five without looking at each other, eyes still on the fight.

Trey watches Hunter get destroyed by someone else. He starts to smile and crosses his arms.

TOMMY
Fifty on Gwen!

Money moves through the crowd toward Mika. She writes without looking up.

Tyler is already at the front, Mia beside him, holding a

fold of bills far too thick for a school courtyard.

TYLER
Two hundred. On Gwen.

He watches Mika write it down.

Through a gap in the crowd, Hunter's face, mid-stagger, finds Tyler. Tyler looks him straight in the eye and flips him off.

Another impact. Mia claps her hands, laughing.

MIA
Gwen! Gwen! Gwen!

At the edge of the crowd, a skinny freshman shadowboxes along with every sound, jab, jab, duck, flinching with each hit like he's the one taking them.

Among the students, the bald TEACHER from the hallway, arms folded, trying hard to stay serious. A loud smack. His mouth twitches. He gets it back under control.

Then, discreetly, he holds a folded bill down toward Mika.

TEACHER
Twenty on the girl.

Mika takes it and writes. She doesn't look up for him either.

A scuffle of feet. One sharp breath. Then the whole fence shivers, the sound of it carrying across the courtyard.

Silence for half a second. Every face frozen, mouths open.

Then the crowd erupts.

The crowd parts for a second: Hunter flat on the ground against the fence, Gwen standing over him. She isn't even out of breath.

Hunter scrambles up and bolts, shoving through the crowd, not looking back.

Gwen watches him go. Then walks after him, as calm as the way she came in.

The applause starts somewhere in the back and spreads. The whole courtyard claps her out.

Phones follow them both all the way out. Thumbs are already tapping. The clip is uploading to social media.

CUT TO:

EXT. ICE CREAM STAND — BEACHFRONT — AFTERNOON

An ice cream stand on the boardwalk, a few blocks from school. Sand past the railing, then the ocean. The Santa Monica Pier a few hundred yards down the sand, the Ferris wheel turning. The VENDOR is watching something on a phone.

On the screen: the fight. Gwen putting Hunter down, shot from the crowd.

It's Gwen's phone. She leans on the counter, waiting for him to finish.

VENDOR
You did a number on that poor boy right there.

GWEN
(jokingly)
He deserved it.

The camera drifts off her...

...and finds Hunter right there at the side of the stand. Fresh bruise on his cheek, hair still wrecked from the fight. Smirking, a cigarette in his mouth, a pack in one hand, and a lighter in the other that gives him spark after spark and no flame.

Gwen steps over. Takes the cigarette out of his mouth. Takes the pack out of his hand. She sets both on the vendor's counter.

HUNTER
Hey —

GWEN
Keep the change.

The vendor sweeps it off the counter, smiling at both of them. He hands back her phone and gives her two cones, a single coffee and a double: cookie dough and lemon sorbet.

Gwen holds up the coffee scoop.

GWEN
This one's for me.

She licks it. Eyes closed for a second.

GWEN
This one's for you.

She holds out the double. Hunter grabs it.

EXT. BEACHFRONT — SEAWALL — LATER

Gwen and Hunter sit on the concrete, legs over the sand. She's working on her cone. His is barely started.

Nobody passing by would guess these two were beating each other up an hour ago.

Down on the sand, a dog is digging a hole.

Hunter holds the cone in one hand and his phone in the other, pressed to his ear.

HUNTER
(into phone)
Bullshit.
(listens)
Wait. Now I'm paying for your lunch?

He opens his mouth to argue. Stops. Looks at his phone. Turns to Gwen.

HUNTER
Tyler's cutting my share.

GWEN
Your share of the bet? Why?

HUNTER
He says I have to pay for his lunch. Because Voss ate it. And it's all because of me.

GWEN
Voss ate his lunch?

HUNTER
Egg, drink, everything. And since the whole school also bet on you, I'm down to nine dollars.

Gwen laughs, still looking at the water.

GWEN
Voss is insane.

She looks at him.

GWEN
To be fair, why would you go after Voss? That's reckless.

HUNTER
I know, right? Everybody thinks she's untouchable. Until you meet Hunter.

GWEN
You're so bad. He took the blame for you, then he had to spend an hour with that nutcase of a teacher. I'd cut your entire share if I was him.

HUNTER
Hey, come on, Gwen. Eating his lunch, that's nothing. If I was him, you know what I'd do? I'd tell her: want my lunch? Fine! Show me yours, let's compare.

Gwen laughs. He leans in.

HUNTER
Mine is cheese pizza.

GWEN
I know!

HUNTER
Tyler needs to grow a pair. You know what saved him? His little sister. Came up to Voss and stood up to her. Looked her in the eye and called her a meanie.

Gwen bursts out laughing, harder. The cone slips out of her hand and lands on the sand, scoop first.

GWEN
(still laughing)
Ah, shit!

She looks at it.

Hunter holds his cone out to her. Smiling.

GWEN
Yuck. Your saliva's all over it.

He takes it back. Bites it. He thumbs his phone. Scrolls. Stops.

HUNTER
Check your page.

Gwen takes hers out. Opens it. Looks.

The clip is everywhere. Her, calm and flawless. Hunter, crashing around the courtyard. The numbers under it keep moving.

She smiles.

GWEN
Not bad.

She keeps the phone in her hand and goes back to the water.

Hunter is still looking at her. He doesn't stop right away.

Down on the sand, the dog has given up on the hole and lies in it.

Hunter looks at the water too.

Then he rubs his cheekbone.

HUNTER
You actually hit me, you know. That one was real.

GWEN
It had to look real.

HUNTER
(muttering)
Felt real too.

GWEN
You broke my angel.

She puts the phone on her leg and takes two pieces out of her pocket: a small angel charm, and its snapped-off wing. She holds them together the way she did in the hallway.

They still fit. They still don't hold.

HUNTER
Oh.

He has no idea when that happened. He doesn't ask.

She puts the pieces back in her pocket and continues tapping.

Hunter digs into his jacket and pulls out a small pink diary, its little heart-shaped lock hanging open.

GWEN
Why do you have Chloe's diary?

HUNTER
I just need to know if she likes me. Let's see where was I.

Gwen snatches it out of his hands mid-lick.

HUNTER
Hey —

GWEN
You don't get to know. That's her private life.

HUNTER
So I'm supposed to what, just live like this not knowing?

GWEN
Ask her.

HUNTER
Ah, forget it.

Gwen puts the diary in her bag.

Hunter slumps and keeps eating his ice cream, sulking.

Gwen scrolls her phone. Stops on a photo. Adrian, unposed, mid-laugh at something else. She looks a bit longer.

HUNTER
You know, Gwen, I don't think it's fair. I always get the short end of the stick, even though I'm the better fighter.

GWEN
No, you're not!

HUNTER
And I'm putting all the effort here. Coming up with the plan and everything.

GWEN
Hey, I'm doing my part too. And you never thanked me for saving your ass when Trey and his gang had you cornered.

HUNTER
I would have beaten them.

Gwen holds her laugh while looking at him.

HUNTER
Okay... you're right. That was good timing.

GWEN
And...

HUNTER
I owe you one. That's what you wanted to hear? I'll buy you that overpriced drink you love so much.

GWEN
Caramel Ribbon Crunch Frappuccino!

She lets out a goofy little giggle, eyes closed.

HUNTER
But you have to let me win the next one.

GWEN
No!

HUNTER
Come on, Gwen! You can't just win every single one. The odds are always garbage.

GWEN
But I'll lose subscribers.

HUNTER
What? No. They need to see you lose once, so they can root for you. The comeback, that's where you gain subscribers.

GWEN
I don't believe you.

HUNTER
Think about it. Remember Uma Thurman in that movie you love, Kill Bill? You remember how much she gets kicked down before she makes a comeback?

GWEN
Huh. It's true, I do love that movie.

HUNTER
Right. Because she comes back and destroys everybody.

GWEN
Yes, I can see it. However...

HUNTER
Oh, what now?

GWEN
If you fight to win, you could really hurt me.

Hunter looks deadpan at Gwen.

HUNTER
Really, Gwen? What am I, some kind of mindless brute?

Gwen shrugs.

HUNTER
May I remind you? You're the one who gave me the bruise right here.

GWEN
That's my point! Even for an expert like me, it's hard to control my punch.
(quieter, almost to herself)
Especially if you cut my subscribers...

Hunter doesn't catch it.

HUNTER
An... expert like you. Sure, Gwen. You're the expert at everything.

A notification slides in on her phone. She opens it.

Her face doesn't move. Then it does.

A small laugh escapes her, and she puts her hand on her mouth. She reads it again.

HUNTER
What, another smartass comment from Adrian?

She doesn't answer. She types something. Locks the phone. Looks at Hunter.

HUNTER
I'll be careful, Gwen. Not gonna hurt you. I promise.

She's still looking at him.

HUNTER
Do we have a deal?

Her phone chimes. She opens it.

Gwen bursts out in joy.

GWEN
Yes!

Hunter turns his head.

GWEN
He said yes!

Hunter half-raises his hands off his knees — yes to WHAT? — and gets nothing back. He lets them drop.

She looks up, at nothing, smiling at the water.

GWEN
He said yes.

Hunter watches her. He has never seen her face glow like this before. His jaw sets a little.

Gwen locks the phone. The smile stays.

GWEN
He said yes.

Hunter bites his ice cream.

CUT TO:

INT. VOSS'S CLASSROOM — NEXT DAY

Voss at the board, back to the room. Chalk moving. Half a sentence up there, unfinished.

Behind her, thirty chairs move at once.

The chalk stops.

She turns.

The class is gathered at the window, crowded at the glass, shoulder to shoulder, jostling for the angle. Someone laughs. Someone says something and three more laugh.

Every seat empty but one.

Kelsey. Middle of the room, still sitting. A comic open on the desk. A Vegimilk in one hand.

She doesn't look up.

Voss sets the chalk down.

She crosses the room. Stops at Kelsey's desk.

VOSS
Kelsey, what are they doing?

Kelsey shrugs.

She doesn't look up.

Voss goes to the window.

The students move aside for her without being asked to.

She looks out.

Below, on the path along the building, ADRIAN walks toward the back lot, hands in his pockets, in no hurry.

Tyler jogs up beside him. They talk. Tyler holds out his phone, and Adrian leans in to look. They both crack up.

Voss's eyes follow them for a moment.

Then they find the crowd.

EXT. SCHOOL — BACK LOT RETAINING WALL — DAY

A long concrete retaining wall at the edge of the back lot. Waist-high on the crowd side. On the other side the ground drops down to a service path.

Gwen and Hunter are on top of the wall, mid-fight.

No explanation for why. Nobody needs one anymore.

A crowd is packed along the near side. Mika sits at the edge of it with her notebook open, money flowing toward her.

TOMMY
Fifty on Gwen. Obviously.

Bills pass over heads. Mika writes without looking up.

Tyler pushes through to her and holds out folded money.

TYLER
Two hundred. On Hunter.

Someone snorts. Tyler ignores it and looks up at the wall.

Hunter catches the look mid-exchange. Tyler gives him a small nod. Hunter slightly smiles, almost misses his cue.

The fight is a show. Hunter swings big. The crowd gasps.

Gwen throws a punch that lands exactly where Hunter's left hand is waiting. He blocks it, and hits her back in the stomach.

Gwen steps back, puts one hand on her stomach and winces. Hunter loses composure for a second.

Gwen winks discreetly at Hunter and goes back into a fighting stance. Hunter relaxes and approaches.

Gwen ducks under one, plants both hands down, and does a backflip on a wall. It blocks nothing, serves no tactical purpose, and every phone in the back lot comes up at once.

Her palms come away gray with wall dust. She brushes a strand of hair off her face mid-move and leaves a smudge across her cheek.

Bills keep traveling. Mika's pen doesn't stop.

Hunter looks around the crowd with a smile. Everyone is watching him.

Behind him, Gwen's hand goes back to her stomach. Just for a second.

At the back of the crowd, hands in his pockets — Adrian. He's watching the fight with mild interest.

Gwen turns into the next exchange and sees him.

Hunter clocks him too. He rolls his eyes mid-swing.

HUNTER
(under his breath)
Oh, look who showed up.

And while his eyes are on Adrian —

Gwen's hand goes to her cheek. Finds the dust.

She turns that side of her face away from him.

She steps back off the far side of the wall, in full view of two hundred people. One step. Down. Gone.

UP AT THE WINDOW — Voss. From up here, the far side of the wall is in plain view: Gwen on the service path below it, scrubbing the dust off her cheek with her sleeve.

Voss's eyes open a little wider.

BACK TO SCENE

Hunter turns back to the fight. His opponent has vanished.

He stands there. Looks left, looks right. Backs up a step, scanning the wall like she might be behind him somehow — backs up another —

— and he trips, backs off the edge. The near side. The crowd side. He falls flat on his back on the asphalt in front of everyone.

Silence.

Hunter stares at the sky. Then, loud, worried:

HUNTER
Gwen?!

One person laughs. Then everyone.

The phones are still up all pointing at Hunter.

Hunter sits up against the wall, scanning around looking for her, and finds Tanner and Tommy instead. They step out of the front row, staring at him with menacing eyes.

The crowd shifts and parts.

Trey walks through the middle of it, calmly, cracking his knuckles.

INSERT — MIKA'S NOTEBOOK

A pen crosses out GWEN.

Writes: TREY.

Mika doesn't look up.

Money floods toward her, all in one direction. Nobody bets on Hunter.

Hunter presses his back against the wall he was just standing on.

Trey steps in.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET — LATE AFTERNOON

A bicycle. Gwen pedaling, steady.

Hunter behind her on the rack. The black eye has fully arrived. Mid-sentence already:

HUNTER
— and something's wrong with my ribs. Listen.

He breathes. Something clicks.

HUNTER
You hear that? Ribs don't click, Gwen.

Nothing from the front.

He twists to demonstrate from a better angle. The bike wobbles, hits a bump. The bell rings on its own.

GWEN
Sit still or walk.

He sits still.

For two seconds.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANOTHER STREET — CONTINUOUS

HUNTER
— and Trey. Trey beat the shit out of me. After you abandoned me. That's what happened.

Gwen pedals.

HUNTER
And the money's gone. All of it. Tyler's too.

CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE CANALS — CONTINUOUS

The bike rolls along a narrow canal walkway now, slow green water beside it. Ducks.

HUNTER
And there's a video. Me, going off the wall. It's got more views than the fight.

Gwen's face: nothing.

HUNTER
I swear on my sister, Gwen. I could've taken Trey. Easy. I just wasted all my energy on you.

Her knuckles shift on the handlebars.

He can't see it. He's talking to the back of her head.

HUNTER
And why? Because Adrian walks past and you evaporate. Adrian this, Adrian that. That's all I hear. All day. Meanwhile, when you talk to Adrian —

A tiny voice:

HUNTER
"Hi. Um. Hi, I — no. Sorry. I just — your, um. I like... okay. Nothing. Bye."

Normal voice:

HUNTER
That's what he gets. He doesn't have to hear about himself for one goddamn second. How is that fair to me?

Nothing.

Up ahead: a LOW FOOTBRIDGE arches over the canal. Wooden rail. Hip-high, at best.

EXT. CANAL FOOTBRIDGE — CONTINUOUS

The bike rolls onto the bridge. Boards knock underneath.

HUNTER
And you want to know the best part? Since we're being honest today. The

best part.

Gwen pedals.

HUNTER
Five minutes after you vanished for him — five minutes — he was making out with Emily.

The bike stops.

Hunter lurches into her back, mid-word.

HUNTER
See, now you —

Gwen puts a foot down. Turns to him. Both hands push him.

Hunter goes over the rail.

A beat of empty air.

SPLASH.

Then, from the water, spluttering — and:

HUNTER (O.S.)
Gwen! What the fuck! GWEN!

A few ducks paddle around him, unbothered. One of them QUACKS.

Gwen doesn't move yet.

She gathers her hair back. Ties it. Then looks back over her shoulder. Head tilted slightly.

Not a smile. Something at the corner of her mouth, gone almost before it arrives.

FREEZE.

GWEN — chalk-white, the G in red.

Release.

She rides.

Boards knocking. Then pavement. Then the road.

HUNTER (O.S.)
What the FUCK, Gwen! GWEN!

A duck answers. QUACK.

HUNTER (O.S.)
GWEN!

Two ducks. QUACK. QUACK.

The yelling gets smaller with distance, the ducks answering every time.

It doesn't stop.

CUT TO:

INT. LEE KITCHEN — EARLY EVENING

A large cake on the counter. White frosting. Simple, careful, finished.

Gwen folds a flat piece of cardboard into a cake box. Her hair is still a little wrong.

She runs her thumb down a crease, slowly.

She stops. Looks at nothing. Then she doesn't. Back to work.

She slides her hands under the cake —

MEI (O.S.)
Careful.

Mei is in the doorway. Dress, earrings, hair done. She's been standing there for a moment.

GWEN
I am careful.

The cake lands in the box, perfect.

Mei comes closer. Looks at the cake over Gwen's shoulder.

MEI
So. Who is it for? That boy?

Warm. Real fondness in "that boy."

Gwen's hands stop.

A giggle gets out of her before she can decide about it.

GWEN
You noticed?

MEI
Of course I noticed. Is it Hunter's birthday? You should bring him

over.

Gwen's face closes.

GWEN
It's not for Hunter.

MEI
No?

GWEN
It's for Adrian.

MEI
Who's Adrian?

GWEN
A boy. From school.

MEI
Is he cute?

GWEN
Mom.

MEI
Okay, okay.

Gwen needs somewhere to put her eyes —

— and finds her mother. When she sees her, she opens her eyes wide. The dress. The earrings. All of it.

GWEN
Why are you dressed like that?

MEI
Like what?

Gwen gestures. All of it.

MEI
Sexy?

GWEN
Mom.

MEI
I dressed to look sexy.

GWEN
For who?

MEI
For me.

A small turn, checking her own reflection in the dark window, pleased with her look.

MEI
I used to be very sexy, you know.

GWEN
You're... you look nice.

MEI
Nice.

GWEN
You look great, Mom. Like a real model.

Mei stops.

MEI
I was a model once. For a magazine.

GWEN
Okay.

MEI
I was.

Gwen looks at her. Mei takes her time.

GWEN
What magazine?

MEI
Playboy.

GWEN
You were not.

MEI
Before the school. Before you.

Gwen stares at her mother. The composure goes.

GWEN
Mom. What?

MEI
I know.

GWEN
You were in Playboy?

MEI
I looked incredible.

Gwen laughs. Both hands come up to her face and don't cover anything.

Mei watches her daughter squirm and enjoys it.

The laugh runs out. What's left underneath is curiosity.

GWEN
Can I... see it?

Low. Almost not asked.

Mei looks at her and pauses.

MEI
No.

GWEN
Mom.

MEI
I don't have it.

GWEN
You threw it away?

MEI
No.

She takes her time.

MEI
There's a time capsule at the school. They put it in the year you were born.

GWEN
...We have a time capsule?

MEI
A big concrete egg, half into the wall in the old building. Everyone brought something for it. They sealed it at the ceremony, everybody clapping.

GWEN
Okay...

MEI
I went back afterwards and put my last copy of the magazine in there.

GWEN
WHAT. How —

Mei smiles. Doesn't answer.

GWEN
Who else knows?

MEI
The principal. I told him.

GWEN
...Mr. Briggs?

She pictures it.

MEI
I know him, and he promised to keep it secret.

GWEN
Why did you do it?!

Mei shrugs.

MEI
In a hundred years somebody opens it. And there I am.

GWEN
What if they open it early?

For a second, Mei doesn't smile.

MEI
Then I'll have to look for another job.

She means it. Then she laughs, and waves it away.

MEI
Why would they do that?

GWEN
You're insane.

MEI
A little.

GWEN
Tell me later tonight. I gotta go.

Gwen shakes her head. The smile stays on her the whole time. She closes the box lid over the cake.

MEI
Where are you going with the cake?

GWEN
School. It's for tomorrow — I'm putting it in the fridge there.

MEI
Put a sticker with your name on it, or Mr. Briggs will help himself.

Gwen picks up the box, smiling.

Mei laughs. Opens her arms.

MEI
Come here.

Gwen leans in, box and all. Mei kisses her on the head, and holds it for a few seconds.

MEI
Tell Adrian happy birthday for me.

GWEN
Yes, Mom.

She's out the door.

The kitchen is quiet.

Mei stands there in her dress.

The frosting bowl sits by the sink, a white streak left inside.

She swipes it with one fingertip. Eats it.

Hums to herself.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM — BACKSTAGE STORAGE — NIGHT

Dark. Dust and old paint. A work light hangs near the wall.

Risers stacked along one side. Painted flats against the back wall: a forest, a castle, a car, all turned away. At the end of the row, a plaster Virgin Mary from some old Nativity, hands open.

Hunter crouches behind a folding-chair cart. A duffel bag open at his feet: wire, confetti canisters, tape, two small black receivers with their back panels off.

He strips a wire with his teeth, twists it onto the first receiver, tapes it to a canister.

Picks up his phone. Taps. Nothing.

He steals the antenna off the second receiver, screws it on. Taps again.

A tiny lever on the receiver snaps over. Click. He grins.

He hears footsteps and freezes.

He kills his phone's flashlight, drops flat behind the cart, and drags the duffel in after him.

A door swings shut on the stage side.

FOOTSTEPS. Unhurried.

Through a gap between two folding chairs: Gwen, alone, a cake box on one hip. She doesn't turn on the work light.

She sets the box down on the stacked risers. Her hand rests on the lid a moment.

She takes out her phone. Opens a profile. ADRIAN'S PHOTO fills the screen.

Behind the cart, Hunter claps a hand over his mouth.

GWEN
Adrian.

She smiles at the screen.

GWEN
I can't believe you said yes.

She laughs. Both hands fly up to her mouth. She spins once, a full turn.

Behind the cart, Hunter stares.

She giggles again, hand still over her mouth.

GWEN
You said yes.

She hugs the phone to her chest.

GWEN
It's your birthday.

She looks over at the cake box.

GWEN
And out of everyone, you chose to spend it with me.

She looks at the photo again.

GWEN
You know... I wrote a song. It was meant for you.

Behind the cart, Hunter goes still.

GWEN
I'll never have the guts to play it for you.

She shakes her head at herself. Then, smaller:

GWEN
Or maybe someday.

She looks at the phone a moment longer.

Gwen sets the phone down on the riser beside the cake box. The screen is still bright.

She walks out toward the edge of the dark stage.

She starts to sing a cappella. Just her voice.

GWEN
(singing)
My heart beats
When I see your eyes
Why can't I be
Normal, by your side
I'm not like other girls
Gushing over boys
I'm not that brave enough
To raise my voice

Someday, I want
To talk to you
About what I feel
When I think about your smile
And maybe then
You will realize
You might like to have a timid girl like me
By your side

Her voice catches on "timid." She keeps going.

GWEN
(singing)
I'm shaking
When you touch my hand
This feeling
I cannot understand
Don't look at me
I feel so ugly
Let me be alone
Hiding in your shadow

Someday, I want
To talk to you
About what I feel
When I think about your smile
And maybe then
You will realize
You might like to have a timid girl
like me
By your side

Without breaking the line, she reaches back, finds the phone by feel, taps it once, and sets it down again. A quiet instrumental comes up under her, sounding homemade.

Behind the cart, Hunter shifts for a better look. His backside catches the Virgin Mary. She tips.

He catches her before she goes. Steadies her. Crosses himself. Goes back into hiding.

GWEN
(singing, over the track)
Why can't I be
Just by your side.
I'm only watching you
Closely, from afar.
Why it hurts so bad
Deep inside my heart
I want to know
What you tell those other girls

Someday, I want
To talk to you
About what I feel
When I think about your smile
And maybe
You will realize
You might wish to have a timid girl
like me
In your life

The last note hangs. The track fades out a beat late.

Behind the cart, Hunter is still looking at her.

Gwen stands in the dark a moment.

She wipes under one eye with the back of her wrist.

She picks up her phone and locks it. Picks up the cake box.

Her way back to the door goes close to the cart. Hunter drops flat behind it.

She passes a few feet from him. There's a lift in her step. She's careful with the box.

Once she's past, he lifts his head. Watches her to the door.

The cake box goes out with her, down the dark hall toward the staff lounge.

CUT TO:

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE — NEXT MORNING

Morning sun through the blinds, the office flat and overexposed. A long counter. Behind it, filing cabinets, a beige computer humming to itself, a fern that has seen things. On the counter, a glass jar of wrapped candies, full.

THERESA GOOD, seventies, reading glasses on a beaded chain, cardigan buttoned to the top, works through a drawer of folders one-handed, a fat black cat draped over her other arm, at the pace of continental drift. Her nameplate on the counter.

Across the counter: VOSS. Not the Voss we know: cream blazer, pearls, hair pinned up. No gloves. Long nails, lacquered black. A big handbag sits open on the counter, next to the candy jar. Poking out of it, the photo from Briggs's office: the egg-shaped time capsule.

She taps her nails on the counter. Tick-tick-tick-tick.

THERESA
Tyler... Tyler... We have a lot of Tylers.

She licks a finger. Turns one folder. Then the next. The cat shifts on her arm, its yellow eyes fixed on Voss. Theresa waits for it to settle.

THERESA
You know, when I started here, the children said good morning. Every one of them. They stood up when an adult walked in the room.

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

THERESA
Now it's the phones. The Facebook. The Snapchats. And my goodness. The things they watch on television.

She pulls a folder. Squints at the tab through her glasses.

THERESA
Tyler... Durden. Is that him?

VOSS
No. It's Tyler Wal—

THERESA
Oh, I think I remember this one. Such a polite boy. He once told me he started a little club in the basement, but then nobody ever talked about it.

She puts the folder back.

THERESA
They still play, though. I see them from the window, chasing each other all over the courtyard. Like puppies. It warms my heart.

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

She turns to Voss, smiling.

THERESA
Guess how long I've worked here.

Voss doesn't answer.

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

THERESA
Thirty-one years. I was here before Mr. Briggs. Twenty-two years he's been principal now. His wife Marjorie makes lemon bars for every staff party. Have you tasted them? They're delicious.

VOSS
Yes they are. About Briggs—

THERESA
My granddaughter loves them. She's a student here, you know. Her name

is Kelsey. She doesn't talk much.

The tapping picks up. Faster.

THERESA
Some students are still sweet. Last week a boy brought me a muffin. Blueberry. I helped him with something... I forget what. I think his name was Hunter. And he says to me, "Thank you, madam, you're the GOAT."

She looks up over her glasses, delighted.

THERESA
The goat! I told him, young man, it's Good. G-O-O-D. Not Goat. The student thinks I'm a goat.
(beat)
Good lord!

She laughs at her own joke. Alone.

Voss closes her eyes. Breathes in. Holds it. Opens them. Her head turns.

Behind her, through the glass of the office door, out of focus: Adrian, walking past.

The tapping stops.

Theresa wipes under one eye, still chuckling, closes the drawer, and opens another. Full of the same folders.

THERESA
What was his last name again?

She looks up.

Nobody at the counter.

The door eases shut. The cat is still staring at it.

The candy jar is empty. So is the counter.

CUT.

EXT. SKYDALE HIGH SCHOOL — SIDE STEPS — MORNING

Concrete steps along the side of the building. Students pass at the bottom without stopping.

Emily sits near the top, bag beside her.

CHLOE comes up the steps. A small pink diary in one hand, heart-shaped lock on the front.

CHLOE
Hey, Emily.

EMILY
Hi Chloe.

Chloe sits.

CHLOE
So, what's new with you?

EMILY
I lost all my money on Hunter.

CHLOE
On Hunter.

EMILY
Yep.

CHLOE
Why Hunter?

EMILY
He kept badgering me about it.
(mimicking Hunter)
Emily, I got this in the bag, I know all her moves now, yadiyada.

Flat. No voice. She stops when she's bored of it.

EMILY
I paid to watch him fall on his ass.
(mimicking Hunter again)
And then he goes, GWEN! GWEN!

Chloe laughs.

EMILY
Did you make a bet?

CHLOE
I was thinking of putting 20 on Gwen. Glad I didn't.

EMILY
Why? They swapped her out for Trey, so you would have won.

CHLOE
It's the principle. That would've meant making money off my brother beating people up.

EMILY
But if Gwen does it, that's fine.

CHLOE
Of course!

They both laugh.

Emily looks at the diary.

EMILY
What's that?

CHLOE
My diary. That idiot Hunter took it out of my bag. Gwen got it off him, gave it back to me this morning.

EMILY
Hunter... he took it.

CHLOE
Yeah!

EMILY
Oh. Is that why your brother went after him the other day?

CHLOE
That's right.

EMILY
He's such an ass. Look what he did to Tyler.

CHLOE
Poor Tyler.

EMILY
Why your diary though?

CHLOE
I asked myself the same question. Gwen's the one who told me.

EMILY
And?

CHLOE
He thought I liked him.

EMILY
What? Why would he think that?

CHLOE
I don't know.

EMILY
Did you ever give him signals?

CHLOE
No! I don't think so...

Emily takes the diary out of her hand and holds it up.

EMILY
Maybe I'll find something in here.

CHLOE
Give me that —

She takes it back. Emily lets her. They're both laughing, until it runs out.

CHLOE
How about you? I saw you talking to Adrian yesterday.

EMILY
By the fence.

CHLOE
And?

EMILY
He asked about Gwen.

Chloe turns to face her.

CHLOE
Gwen?

EMILY
Just about her.

Emily keeps looking straight ahead.

EMILY
He's never mentioned her to me. Not once. Then he's asking.

Chloe doesn't say anything. She sits with it.

CHLOE
Okay. So does she like him?

EMILY
How would I know?

CHLOE
You know what I mean.

Emily thinks about it for a while.

EMILY
She's hard to read.

CHLOE
Everyone says that.

EMILY
Because she is.

Chloe drops back against the step.

EMILY
Apparently they're meeting today.

Chloe's head comes up.

CHLOE
Today today?

EMILY
That's what he said.

CHLOE
We could see where this goes.

EMILY
We could.

They look at each other, grinning. The grins hold, then go.

CHLOE
We're not going to.

EMILY
No.

CHLOE
Ah, Gwen. What's in her head?

EMILY
Well. I know one thing for sure.
(beat)
She HATES Hunter.

CHLOE
Oh, yeah, I know. Those two can't stand each other.

A BELL goes off inside the building.

They pick up their bags and go down the steps together.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAFÉ TERRACE — AFTERNOON

A café on the second floor. Tables and chairs out on the open terrace, a waist-high railing along the edge, the street below. At the far end, stairs run down to the sidewalk.

It's a student spot. Half the tables taken, backpacks on chairs, fries in paper cups.

Adrian and Gwen at a table near the railing. On the empty chair beside her, a cake box.

Adrian is mid-story. Something about his cousin and a bus. Nothing important, just a nice story.

GWEN
And he made it?

ADRIAN
Barely. He had to run the last block. My aunt saw the whole thing from the window.

GWEN
Did she say anything?

ADRIAN
She waved.

Gwen laughs a little.

Her eyes drop to the cake box, come back up then drop again.

ADRIAN
...right?

GWEN
...

ADRIAN
The fries here.

GWEN
Sorry. What?

ADRIAN
Best fries or not. It's a serious question.

GWEN
Best.

ADRIAN
Thank you.

He eats one. Gwen smiles and her eyes are already back on the box.

GWEN
Okay. Before anything else.

She stands. Lifts the box lid, brings out the cake with both hands. White frosting, simple, careful, finished. She sets it down between them.

Adrian sits up.

ADRIAN
This is for me?

She doesn't answer. She's already planting candles, one at a time, evenly spaced, standing over the table while he sits there looking up at her, then at the cake, then back at her.

She lights them.

ADRIAN
Oh my god.

She sings.

GWEN
(singing, quiet, voice trembling)
Happy birthday to you...

Just for the table. Adrian grins and looks at the candles, shifting his eyes up slowly. At the next table, a girl turns, smiles, turns back.

Gwen finishes. Sits.

He blows the candles out.

Gwen takes the candles out of the frosting, one at a time. Slowly. Sets them on the edge of the plate.

GWEN
My mom says happy birthday, by the way.

ADRIAN
Ms. Lee knows it's my birthday?

GWEN
She does now.

ADRIAN
Can you believe it? She's the second teacher to wish me happy birthday.

GWEN
Really? Who else did?

ADRIAN
Ms. Voss.

Gwen goes silent for a few seconds, then she bursts out laughing.

GWEN
No fucking way!

Adrian laughs with her.

ADRIAN
Okay. Best birthday thing today. Easily.

GWEN
What's second?

ADRIAN
You'll laugh.

GWEN
I won't.

ADRIAN
My brother sent me his accordion.

She laughs.

ADRIAN
You said—

GWEN
(still laughing)
Why an accordion?

ADRIAN
It's his old one. I used to mess with it when we were kids. He says I'm the only person who ever touched it, so.

GWEN
Can you play it?

ADRIAN
Define play.

GWEN
Can you make it make music.

ADRIAN
I can make it make sounds. It's like a goose. A dying goose.

She's laughing for real now.

ADRIAN
But the goose knows three songs.

GWEN
Three.

ADRIAN
Two and a half.

He mimes it, elbows out, squeezing air, one eye shut with effort. It's the stupidest thing anyone has done on this terrace. Gwen covers her mouth with her hand. It doesn't help.

Somewhere in there she reaches over and takes one of his fries without asking. Adrian nudges the cup toward her.

The laugh runs its course. The cake sits between them untouched. Neither of them reaching for the knife.

Gwen looks at the table for a second. Then up at him.

GWEN
Can I tell you something?

ADRIAN
Sure.

GWEN
Don't laugh.

ADRIAN
After the accordion? You're safe.

GWEN
Okay. So.

She straightens the fork against the edge of the table even though it was already lined up.

GWEN
There's... okay.

ADRIAN
Take your time.

GWEN
Don't rush me.

They're both smiling. She looks down at her hands. The cloth napkin is twisted tight in one fist.

GWEN
Okay. I'm just going to say it.

INSERT — A PHONE SCREEN

A thumb over the screen.

It comes down.

BACK TO SCENE

A beep.

Small. Electronic. From the table.

They both stop.

Another beep. Closer together.

They look at the cake.

Under the frosting, a light. Blinking red through the white.

They lean in.

The blinking speeds up.

The cake EXPLODES.

White everywhere. The table disappears under it. Frosting hits their faces, their hair, the railing, the window behind them. A chair goes over. Somewhere a cup breaks.

Then it's quiet.

Frosting slides down the window in one long streak.

Adrian sits absolutely still. Cake across his face and shirt, hands half-raised. He doesn't wipe anything.

Across from him, Gwen. Frosting through her hair, down the front of her, across her face. She doesn't move either.

The napkin drops out of her hand.

The terrace doesn't move. At the next table, the girl sits frozen with a fry halfway to her mouth.

Then, from the terrace door — laughter.

Hunter steps out, doubled over, one hand on the doorframe to stay up. In the other hand, his phone, held high. Thumb still on the screen.

HUNTER
Happy birthday.

Adrian looks at him. Cake down his face.

HUNTER
You should see your face. Gwen.
Your face!

The terrace is silent. Frosting drips off the table.

Gwen stands. She wipes her eyes clear with one hand, slowly and just looks at him.

Hunter's laugh runs out of air, and he straightens up, still grinning.

GWEN
(half-screamed)
FUCK you!

She tips their table over. Cake, plates, all of it.

She drives him away down the terrace.

The first hit puts him into a table before his hands are all the way up. It skids. Cups go off it.

He comes up fast, hands raised, still grinning.

HUNTER
Okay— okay— whoa—

She's already there. He blocks. The next one is already through.

HUNTER
Oh, now we get the real you.

There's no rhythm to it. She's fast.

Students scramble out of chairs and press back along the far side of the terrace.

Gwen grabs a chair, throws it at him. He dodges it.

He backpedals, still grinning.

HUNTER
You're sloppy you know that? You get mad, you get sloppy!

He slips one by pure luck and celebrates it.

He eats the next three punches. A table goes over. A standing umbrella tips and folds.

HUNTER
You left me on the wall! In front of everybody!

He tries one of his own, fast, real, and hits nothing.

HUNTER
(delighted, breathless)
HAHA! Since when can you do that?!

A hit answers him.

He shakes his head clear. Keeps his hands up. Keeps talking.

HUNTER
So now we're even. We're even!

A chair he kicks between them buys him half a step, no more.

Another one through.

His jokes get shorter.

HUNTER
Gwen—

Shorter.

HUNTER
Hey—

A hit gets all the way through and he stops talking altogether. The grin is gone.

He covers. Gives ground. Gives more.

The railing touches his back. He doesn't notice it.

The last hit lands clean. His head snaps around, his heels catch, his weight goes where nothing is...

Over.

A beat of empty air.

A sound from below. Flat. Short.

The terrace is silent.

Gwen's hands are still up.

They come down.

She goes to the railing and looks over.

Below: Hunter on the pavement. Face-down. Not moving.

People on the sidewalk are stopping. Turning. Starting toward him. Mika is standing among them.

Gwen runs.

Along the railing, past Adrian straight to the stairs, down them two at a time, one hand slapping the rail.

Below, over her shoulder, the first phone comes up.

She's still on the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET BELOW THE CAFÉ — CONTINUOUS

Hunter face-down on the pavement. Not moving.

Under his face, dark red on the pavement. A thin line of it, still moving.

People stand around him in a loose half-circle. Nobody talking.

Gwen comes off the stairs and breaks through them.

She drops to her knees beside him. Her eyes are already wet.

GWEN
Hunter.

Nothing.

She touches his shoulder. Barely any weight on it.

GWEN
Hunter. Hey. Hey hey. Please Hunter...

The lightest push. It moves nothing.

She gets both hands under his shoulder to turn him over, stops, doesn't dare to push hard.

The street noise. Her own breathing.

Her hands move over him, back, shoulder, hair, never quite landing, trembling.

The circle tightens.

At the front of the crowd, Mika. Completely still. Staring. The notebook stays in her jacket.

Gwen digs out her phone. The screen unlocks on her face wet with tears, cake in her hair, and she goes for the dial pad.

Nine. Then a wrong digit. Delete. Her thumb is shaking. Wrong again.

GWEN
Come on. Come on! No!

Wrong again.

Below her, she hears a sound, small, from the pavement.

She's down over him, ear close.

HUNTER
(barely there, half into the ground)
...water.

She looks up.

Adrian is there, at the edge of the circle, frosting down his shirt and one side of his face.

She thrusts the phone up at him. It shakes in her outstretched hand until he takes it.

GWEN
Call.

She's up and moving.

Through the crowd, shoulder-first, down the sidewalk to a WATER FOUNTAIN by the café front.

Nothing to fill.

She spins, grabs a glass from a table in front of somebody. She takes it, dumps it out, jams it under the arc of the fountain.

Water climbs the glass. Her hands won't hold still. Her face is wet.

Behind her, across the sidewalk:

HUNTER (O.S.)
(weak, but it carries)
Gwen... I... I have your phone.

She doesn't turn.

GWEN
Wait, Hunter... not now.

HUNTER (O.S.)
(normal tone)
I have your phone.

She lifts her head and turns.

Hunter is standing in the middle of the circle, upright. One hand pressed to his ribs. Red smeared down one cheek.

Above him, the shop's canvas awning sags, torn through the middle.

In one hand, her phone.

Beside him, Adrian. Empty hands.

He lets go of his ribs. Reaches under the front of his jacket and pulls out a big cushion.

Drops it. It lands flat on the pavement.

A small plastic packet drops with it, dark red, emptied.

The crowd makes a sound, all at once, nothing in words.

Then the street is quiet again.

Gwen doesn't move. Her eyes lock on him.

Her hands have stopped trembling.

The glass shatters in her left hand. Water and pieces going

out between her fingers.

Then red. Down the inside of her wrist, into the water.

She doesn't look at it.

Her eyes never leave him.

The phone BUZZES in Hunter's hand. Buzzes again.

He glances at it.

INSERT — THE PHONE SCREEN

Notifications stacking up. Likes. More likes.

BACK TO SCENE

HUNTER
Huh. You're still getting likes.

He looks at her. Then back at the phone.

His thumb starts moving. Tap. Tap. Tap.

He turns the screen toward her. Holds it there.

INSERT — THE PHONE SCREEN

A confirmation page.

DELETE YOUR ACCOUNT?

BACK TO SCENE

GWEN
(low)
Hunter... don't.

He doesn't move.

She does.

Hunter backpedals, grinning.

HUNTER
Whoa, okay, easy!

She swings for the arm holding the phone. He switches hands.

She lunges again past his face, past every opening he leaves, going after the phone.

HUNTER
You're not even trying to hit me.
I'm right here!

She gets her left hand on his sleeve. He twists loose.

Red on the sleeve where she had him.

The phone RINGS in his hand. He looks at it mid-duck.

His face opens up.

HUNTER
(delighted)
It's your mom.

She doesn't stop.

He answers, phone to his ear, free arm keeping her off.

HUNTER
(bright)
Ms. Lee! Hey!

GWEN
HUNTER—

HUNTER
(to phone)
No, she's here. She's right here.

She grabs for the phone arm. He turns his shoulder into it, phone pinned to his ear.

HUNTER
(to phone)
She's doing hard exercise.

GWEN
GIVE IT—

INT. SCHOOL — MUSIC ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Mei at her desk, phone to her ear. Through it, tiny, a scream.

She holds the phone away an inch. Looks at it.

Puts it back.

MEI
...Tell her to take it easy.

EXT. STREET BELOW THE CAFÉ — CONTINUOUS

HUNTER
(to phone)
I will.

Gwen swings. He takes it on the arm.

HUNTER
(to Gwen, loud enough for the phone)
Push harder, Gwen!

She comes again.

HUNTER
(to phone)
...Okay. ...Okay. Bye, Ms. Lee.

He turns away from her, thumb going to the screen without looking.

INSERT — THE PHONE SCREEN

CALL ENDED, floating over the confirmation page.

His thumb taps it away.

DELETE YOUR ACCOUNT?

His thumb comes down again.

On the red button.

BACK TO SCENE

He doesn't see it. His eyes are on Gwen.

Hunter keeps moving, phone swinging at the end of his arm.

She lunges. He gives ground —

— and glances at the phone.

He stops moving.

She almost runs into him. Doesn't.

He's looking at the screen.

His face goes somewhere it hasn't been all scene.

His thumb hovers over it. Doesn't land.

Gwen looks at his face. Then at the phone.

He turns the screen toward her.

The same gesture as before. Nothing behind it now.

INSERT — THE PHONE SCREEN

Her account. Gone. In the middle of the screen:

YOUR ACCOUNT HAS BEEN DELETED.

BACK TO SCENE

Neither of them moves.

Cake in her hair, red on his cheek, the phone between them.

All around, the phones are still up.

Nobody moves.

CUT TO:

INT. TYLER'S HOUSE — MIA'S ROOM — DUSK

On the nightstand, close: a small plastic figurine. A cartoon alien girl with long red hair, fists raised, green energy molded around them.

The focus pulls past her. Behind: star-patterned wallpaper, a bed under a pink comforter, and on it, Mia, a tablet in her lap. On the screen: ACCOUNT NOT FOUND.

She refreshes. Same thing.

She's crying, a fat pink stuffed pig squeezed in her arms. Small, quiet sobs she's trying to hold in.

Tyler stops in the doorway. Sees the screen.

TYLER
Hey, it's okay. Let me fix that.

He sits on the edge of the bed and takes the tablet. Refreshes. Types Gwen's name.

ACCOUNT NOT FOUND.

Tyler stares at the screen.

Mia is watching his face. Her chin starts to go.

MIA
(through tears)
Maybe something bad happened to

Gwen!

Tyler puts the tablet down and an arm around her. She cries into his side.

Over her head, he pulls out his own phone. On the home screen, pinned right next to his bank app: a shortcut to Gwen's account. He taps it.

ACCOUNT NOT FOUND.

TYLER
Gwen, what the...

The screen changes before he can do anything. Incoming call: HUNTER.

He looks at it. Looks at Mia.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE STREET — CURB — DUSK

A quiet street. No crowd. No phones.

Gwen sits on the curb. Cake gone hard in her hair.

Her left hand is wrapped in a café napkin. Red has come through it.

She cries without a sound.

Down the street, out of her earshot, Hunter, pacing a slow circle, phone to his ear. The red on his cheek has faded to a smudge.

Gwen holds her phone with both hands but doesn't look at it.

The dark screen.

INSERT — MEMORY

A phone screen fills the frame. Behind it, out of focus: warm light, a curb, two figures side by side, soft, gone-golden.

Comments, one after another:

"i watched this three times."

"ok that's the coolest thing i've ever seen."

"the red suits you."

BACK TO SCENE

Gwen. The tears keep coming.

INSERT — MEMORY

One more comment. The oldest. First post on the account, two years back:

"proud of you. keep going."

big_game_hunter.

BACK TO SCENE

Her shoulders start. Still no sound. She presses the back of her wrist against her mouth and cries harder than before.

Down the street, Hunter paces.

HUNTER
(into phone)
...I fucked up, man.

He listens.

HUNTER
No. Worse. I deleted her account.

He listens.

HUNTER
She's...

He turns around. Looks at Gwen.

HUNTER
Tell her she'll be okay.

He listens. Rubs his face with his free hand.

HUNTER
I don't know. I don't know what I was doing...

A long moment. Tyler is saying something.

HUNTER
In a time capsule?

He stops pacing. A small laugh gets out of him, despite everything.

He listens.

HUNTER
No way.

He glances down the street at Gwen, small on her curb.

HUNTER
Wait. People are talking about this?

He listens. Something is coming back into his body. He stands straighter.

HUNTER
Where?

He listens. Nods. Listens. Says nothing. His phone buzzes against his ear. He pulls it away and looks at his phone.

HUNTER
It really does look like an egg.

He listens one more second. The old grin is coming back.

HUNTER
Send me everything. ...Yeah. ...You're my man, Tyler.

He hangs up. Looks at the photo again. Then down the street, at Gwen. He pockets the phone and goes to her.

He stops a few feet short. Careful.

HUNTER
Hey.

Nothing.

He crouches to her level, keeping the distance.

HUNTER
I'm gonna fix it. The account. You make a new one from scratch. We'll set everything up, we do it tonight.

She just stands slowly, expressionless, slips the phone into her jacket pocket, and starts walking.

HUNTER
(rising)
Gwen, wait.

He touches her shoulder, she shakes it off. She keeps walking. Away from him, down the empty street.

HUNTER
There's a time capsule.

His phone is already out. He holds it up toward her back, the egg bright on the screen.

She does not stop.

HUNTER
There's a Playboy in it. With a naked teacher. From our school.

Her next step doesn't land.

She stands there, back to him, one foot still half-forward.

HUNTER
Everyone's talking about it. Tyler heard some guys are planning an egg hunt this weekend.

MEI (V.O.)
In a hundred years somebody opens it.

Silence.

Her back. The empty street beyond her.

She isn't crying anymore.

For half a second, her face changes.

She turns around.

The phone in his hand. The egg, bright in the dusk.

Then her face closes over it.

Dry. Flat. Steady.

GWEN
(quiet)
Everyone's talking about it?

HUNTER
Everyone.

He lowers the phone. Comes a step closer, hands starting to move, making the plan up as he goes.

HUNTER
I'm gonna get it for you, Gwen. That's... that's the comeback. That's how you come back. You know?

This is actually good. You lose everything, and then, boom. Bigger. Like Uma Thurman in Kill Bill!

She looks him in the eye and frowns, then looks down.

HUNTER
I'll go alone. The place is infested with gang members. It's bad. And you've been through a lot.

He gestures, at her hair, the day. All of it.

HUNTER
So I go, I get it, and I bring it to you.

GWEN
(looking back at him)
I know the code.

HUNTER
The code?

GWEN
For the lock on the time capsule.

Hunter looks at the photo again. A combination dial on the front of the egg.

HUNTER
There's a code... So you're coming?

She just looks at him.

HUNTER
I know where it is. You know how to open it. And just like that, the gang is back!

A laugh gets halfway out of him before he catches it, and it escapes anyway, small.

Gwen smiles back. It takes effort.

It comes a half-second late. Hunter doesn't notice.

He's already turning away, phone out, dialing.

HUNTER
(into phone)
Tyler. Tyler, you're a genius. Now, listen...

He stays a few feet off, talking with his free hand.

Behind him, Gwen. Watching his back.

The smile is gone.

She crouches down. Her phone slides out of her jacket pocket onto the pavement. Both hands go up into her hair, pushing it back off her face. They stay there.

Her eyes close, her mouth forms the word. No sound comes with it.

HUNTER
(into phone)
Tomorrow. We're going tomorrow.
She's in.

He never turns around.

Both of them lit last-orange by the dusk.

On the pavement, the lock screen of the phone face up shows Mei blissfully smiling at the camera, and Gwen with a shy smile, arms wrapped around her.

CUT TO:

END OF EXCERPT

That's where the excerpt stops.

Eighty-two pages in, nobody has a plan and the damage is permanent. There are forty more pages.

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