POM POM MASSACRE

by Amin Osman

FADE IN:

EXT. PRACTICE AREA -- DAWN

CLOSE on a POM-POM. Red and white, iconic, and for the moment, very still.

IN SLOW-MOTION, the pom-pom begins to shake, the streamers rattling in the early-morning breeze.

ANGLE: A SNEAKER

In SLOW-MOTION still, the pristine white sneaker lifts off the ground--

DISSOLVE TO:

ANGLE: A CHEERLEADER, FROM BEHIND

As she gracefully lifts off the ground, starting a routine that's clearly been practiced many a time. Her short red skirt lifts slightly as she jumps, offering a glimpse of whatever inevitably tempting underwear lies beneath.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANGLE: THE SKY

The pom-poms RISE INTO FRAME, the colors popping against the greyish morning sky. The streamers' RUSTLING can be heard very faintly as they are shaken, and they slowly DESCEND OUT OF FRAME as

THE CHEERLEADER

LANDS on the ground. She extends her arms out horizontally and TURNS TOWARDS CAMERA. For the first time, we see her face-- and it's a beautiful one. Tall, blue-eyed, and of course, blonde, this is AMBER TURNER.

Amber does a graceful cartwheel, then impresses us further as she transitions into a backflip.

CLOSE on Amber's hair. Glints of the rising sun shine through her blonde mane.

Amber finishes her backflip, a smile of self-assured pride on her face. She's serene and on top of the world, until

A BULLET

Rips its way through her chest. There's hardly time to see the blood blossoming against the white of her shirt before Amber, ROCKED by the bullet's impact, ungracefully teeters back and FALLS OUT OF FRAME.

ANGLE: THE GROUND

Amber's body lands with a sickening THUD. Her right arm lays extended toward the CAMERA, pom-pom still in hand. The convulsions of her dying body make the pom-pom shake in a grotesque mockery of her routine.

And then, the pom-pom stops.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

NESS (V.O.) "It'd be funny if they buried her in uniform."

FADE IN:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

CREDITS OVER:

VANESSA "NESS" KENDRICK, 17, slumps resignedly in a chair. She'd be attractive if her face wasn't set in a permanently bored expression. She's dressed in dark clothing-- not punk, not goth, just nondescript. Perfect for not standing out.

> NESS (to someone) What? Was that too morbid for you?

PAN across the austerely-decorated office to reveal DR. MILCH, 42, an icy-looking woman in a grey suit and similarly drab hairstyle. She sits at her desk, notepad in hand.

> DR. MILCH I didn't say anything.

NESS Yeah, but your eyes are Spanish Inquisitioning me here.

This joke gets no reaction. Ness slumps further in her seat.

DR. MILCH I find it interesting that your best friend was murdered and you have nothing concrete to say about it.

NESS (testy) Aren't you supposed to just take everything I say and interpret it? DR. MILCH Yes, but I feel we've worked together long enough for me to know that your joke isn't all you have to say on the subject. Beat. NESS (annoyed) Well what do you expect? First of all, she isn't-- wasn't-- my best friend. Dr. Milch is silent. NESS (CONT'D) The last time I even talked to her was four months ago! (beat) Besides, Spencer's my best friend. DR. MILCH Yet you've referred to Amber Turner as your best friend on at least three occasions since you started seeing me. Ness is thrown. Beat. NESS (challenging) Are you sure? DR. MILCH I'm observant. NESS (unnerved) I can see that. Well, if I did, I meant "former". Her guard goes down a little. NESS (CONT'D) Yeah, it's true, we have history. So we were both slaves to the Baby Hooker industry once--

DR. MILCH (interrupting) Vanessa. Calling it that is not going to make it any easier for you to discuss it. They were what they were. (beat) Beauty pageants.

Ness gives her a withering glare.

NESS Like I said, the Baby Hooker industry. Yes, Amber and I walked the walk and waved the wave. But that was, like, six years ago. She moved away, and I... (this is difficult) well, you know what happened.

Dr. Milch nods.

NESS (CONT'D)

We snail mailed, but that didn't last. Despite what the Spice Girls say, friendship does, in fact, end.

DR. MILCH

And when she came back last year?

NESS

When she came back last year, her ginormous boobs and sudden love of pom-poms pretty much nixed any chance at a rekindling.

DR. MILCH You ran in different circles?

NESS She ran in circles. I was more in

a line. A line of me and Spencer.

DR. MILCH How did that make you feel?

NESS I wasn't jealous, if that's what you're getting at. (beat) I really wasn't. (MORE) NESS (CONT'D) Sure, she was popular, but having a circle made up of bitches and date rapists doesn't exactly strike me as the best kind of geometry to find yourself in.

Dr. Milch smiles to herself.

DR. MILCH Alright, I see. (beat) How did your mother deal with the news? She was close to Amber's mother, no?

NESS (smirking) My mom?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NESS' MOTHER'S HOUSE -- EARLIER THAT DAY (FLASHBACK)

KENDRA PLOTKIN, 39, sits at her kitchen table, holding a GLASS OF SCOTCH close to her heart. Her buxom chest shakes as she sniffles, tears streaking her heavy eye makeup. Ness sits across from her. She's uncomfortable.

NESS

Mom, are you gonna be OK?

Kendra can't meet her daughter's eyes. Ness slowly, awkwardly places her hand on her mother's hand-- but Kendra LEAPS out of her chair and grabs her expensive-looking purse.

> KENDRA I have a hair appointment.

She stifles one last sob and races out of the room.

RETURN TO:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- PRESENT DAY

Dr. Milch's eyebrow is raised.

DR. MILCH A hair appointment?

NESS (a bit apologetic) For a body wave. She wanted to look good for the funeral. Dr. Milch's disapproval is barely hidden.

DR. MILCH And your father?

Ness smiles and shrugs.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. NESS' FATHER'S HOUSE -- THE PREVIOUS NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TOM KENDRICK, 43, holds Ness tight and whispers to her. Ness' stoic facade is in danger of crumbling as a SINGLE TEAR falls from her eye.

> NESS (V.O.) "He was great. He always is."

> > RETURN TO:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- PRESENT DAY

NESS So, reaction-wise, my parents were pretty much status quo.

DR. MILCH How does that make you feel?

Ness laughs wryly.

NESS Your favorite question. I don't know. Stable, I guess?

DR. MILCH Very well. (beat) When was the last time you and Amber spoke?

Ness is uneasy. She sighs.

NESS It was the week she moved back. She came to find me when I was practicing gymnastics.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- DAY -- ONE YEAR AGO (FLASHBACK)

Ness walks in, wearing a leotard. Free of her drab attire, you could actually see her being a former pageant girl.

She lowers herself onto a mat and does a painful-looking SPLIT, before jumping up and climbing onto the BALANCE BEAMS. She balances between them, doing a SERIES OF STRETCHES, FLIPS, ETC... hardcore gymnastics stuff that demonstrates how great of an athlete she is. She's about to do one last FLIP when the silence is shattered:

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AMBER (O.S.)
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Vanessa?

Ness turns and nearly falls of the beams when she sees

AMBER

Looking amazing and smiling nervously.

AMBER (CONT'D) Vanessa, it's me. It's Amber.

Ness keeps her face emotionless, but it's clear in her voice that she's unnerved.

NESS

Hi.

AMBER "Hi"? Is that all? Come down and give me a hug, you freak!

Though Amber meant this lovingly, it's struck the wrong chord with Ness. She clings to the beam.

NESS No, that's... I'm good here.

AMBER

(a little sad) Okay. Okay, I get it. I know we sorta lost touch and stuff, but like, I'm back now. So I'm gonna keep coming back here every day. If only to watch you practice, 'cause... wow, you're awesome.

Ness smiles faintly.

AMBER (CONT'D) But also because I miss you. I miss us.

Ness is unable to respond. Amber continues, veering into "nervous babble" territory.

AMBER (CONT'D) I'm gonna go catch up with all the other girls, but I will be back tomorrow. I mean, you have to come off of those beams sometime, and hey, friendship never ends, right? (beat) Who are we to doubt the wisdom of the Spice Girls?

Amber turns to leave. As she does, Ness' face molds into something resembling a hopeful smile. Amber turns back toward Ness just in time to catch her smile.

> AMBER (CONT'D) We have a smile! Dude, I just know we'll be painting each others' nails before the week is over.

Amber winks at her and departs, leaving Ness awash in a sea of conflicting emotion.

RETURN TO:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- PRESENT DAY

NESS She never came back. I don't know what happened. She probably heard from the other girls that I was a freak now, that my parents split up and my best friend is a 19-year-old loser. And that I'm in therapy for my (air quotes) "inability to have meaningful social interactions." All that good stuff. (beat) So you see what I mean when I say that she's in the "former" category.

Dr Milch starts to say something--

NESS (CONT'D) (looking at her watch) And I think our time is up.

DR. MILCH

I'm not sure--

But she's interrupted by a SMALL BELL RINGING.

NESS That would be the alarm indicating that our time is up.

Ness gathers her bag and jacket quickly.

DR. MILCH Where are you headed so fast?

NESS (the irony dripping) Amber's funeral.

DR. MILCH (sympathetically) Good luck with that. I'll see you next week, Vanessa.

Ness heads toward the door, talking as she walks.

NESS Same time, same place. Same deepseated emotional insecurities. You got it, Doc.

Ness leaves the room, shutting the door. Only when she is alone does Dr. Milch allow herself a small smile.

END CREDITS

INT. ALL THE REST FUNERAL HOME -- AFTERNOON

Soberly-dressed MOURNERS quietly file their way through the room. Soft CLASSICAL MUSIC plays and beautiful flowers adorn the room- it's a dignified, if somewhat bland affair.

A CASKET on a platform sits in the corner of the room. Ness stands in front of it, lost in her thoughts. PAN across the casket's OPEN TOP to reveal

AMBER

Looking surprisingly good for a corpse. Angelic and serene in a white dress, her body rests in peace. Ness looks at Amber's face. She tried valiantly to fight back her tears, but they start flowing anyway. She looks away, perhaps to see if anyone has caught her crying, when--

> AMBER (O.S.) Oh, come on Vanessa, the dress isn't that bad.

Ness whips her head back to the casket and sees that, against all reason, Amber's EYES ARE OPEN and she's TALKING CHEERILY.

AMBER (CONT'D) (looking down at herself) I mean, it's no prom dress, but nothing to cry about. Like, on a list of things to be buried in, I'd rank it about a 7. (beat) Maybe an 8, if there were more cleavage.

Ness opens her mouth to talk, but the words don't come out. She looks on in horror as Amber keeps talking.

AMBER (CONT'D) Seriously, do you not have anything to say? I mean, look at me-- I'm defying the laws of nature, the least you could do is say "hey"!

Ness speaks, but it's barely a whisper.

NESS

Amber?

Amber nods sadly.

AMBER He put something in me. (beat) I tried to take it away. That's why I'm here.

Ness shakes her head in confusion.

AMBER (CONT'D) I don't think it worked. (scared) It's still in here.

Amber looks down at her chest, tears filling her eyes. Ness follows her gaze...

CLOSE on Amber's chest, where a RED STAIN is forming.

AMBER (CONT'D) I thought I could hide it but it doesn't work that way.

The stain SPREADS ACROSS HER CHEST ...

AMBER (CONT'D) (agitated) Don't you get it? You can't stop caring. It just doesn't work that way!

Ness starts hyperventilating, tears streaming from her eyes.

CLOSE on the stain as it starts PULSING. Something inside Amber's chest is growing... and a RUMBLING GROAN echoes throughout the room. Ness looks around, trying to see if anyone else has noticed. But the mourners are peaceful, talking quietly to one another.

Suddenly, just as it is so loud that nothing else can be heard, the RUMBLING STOPS. Silence blankets the room.

Amber's face relaxes, a tiny smile playing across it.

AMBER (CONT'D) Here it comes.

The stain on Amber's chest BURSTS OPEN and a RAIN OF RED, WHITE AND BLUE CONFETTI EXPLODES from it. Somewhere in the distance, the NATIONAL ANTHEM can be heard playing.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Touchdown!

Amber laughs quietly to herself. Ness stands, petrified, as the CONFETTI rains down on her--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ALL THE REST FUNERAL HOME -- SAME TIME

Ness stands in the same place at the casket, looking freaked... until she notices that there's NO MUSIC playing, NO CONFETTI. She looks at the casket and is stunned to see that IT IS CLOSED. Ness lets out a yelp of nervous laughter.

> SPENCER (O.S.) Well, I see we need to work on your funeral manners.

Ness looks up to see SPENCER, 19, standing on the other side. His penetrating blue eyes glint behind his glasses and unruly, unnaturally black hair. His clothing style can only be described as completely inappropriate for the funeral.

> SPENCER (CONT'D) For real, Ness. The giggles are kind of gauche. Now I love a good mixed message, but--

> NESS (confused) Spencer. How-- what are you doing here?

SPENCER (deadpan) I'm here for banjo lessons.

Ness is still puzzled. Spencer laughs.

SPENCER (CONT'D) What do you mean, what am I doing here?

NESS Spence, you didn't exactly sing Amber's praises when she was alive.

SPENCER Well, she's dead now. I felt like I should be here. It's a respect thing. (beat) Besides, I'm mostly here to lend moral support. I mean, Amber, she was... I know you were close. (beat) Not as close as we are, mind you, but--

Ness crosses over to his side and engulfs him in a tight hug.

SPENCER (CONT'D) Plus, I knew there'd be groping.

Ness lets go of him and slaps his shoulder.

NESS Thanks, Spence. It means a lot. SPENCER Hey, there was nothing good on MTV today anyway. (beat) Or ever, actually.

Ness attempts a smile, then turns and stares back at the casket.

NESS It's just so--

She stops talking as she notices something.

ANGLE: NESS' POV

Behind the casket, a YOUNG GIRL stares angrily at Ness and Spencer. After a few seconds, she walks away.

NESS (CONT'D) That was... SPENCER

Amber's sister.

NESS How did you know?

SPENCER Obituary. Said there was a 10-yearold.

NESS We used to baby-sit her.

SPENCER

Touching.

Ness looks back to where the little girl was:

The girl goes up to a SAD-LOOKING WOMAN clutching a CRYING BABY in her arms, and whispers something into her ear. The woman turns her eyes toward Ness and Spencer, glaring.

Ness gulps nervously.

NESS That's Amber's mom. And baby brother, I guess. God, I didn't even know she had one.

Spencer quickly moves behind Ness until only his head can be seen as he looks over her shoulder.

SPENCER She doesn't look too happy.

Ness slowly turns to face Spencer and raises an eyebrow.

SPENCER (CONT'D) (realizing) Well that was incredibly dumb. (beat) I just meant... now. She doesn't look too happy at us. In particular.

NESS Who knows what Amber and the rest of the girls have said about me...

She looks down at Spencer's clothing. HIS T-SHIRT is black and reads: "IT'S PROBABLY MY FAULT."

> NESS (CONT'D) Your shirt isn't helping either.

SPENCER (looking down at it) What? It's... ironic. Whatever, I'm not here for her. I've got a date right after this, and I don't have time to change.

NESS

(teasing)
Oh, just stopped by to say "hi",
then?

SPENCER Pretty much.

NESS How sweet of you. (beat) And I actually kind of mean that.

Spencer grins.

SPENCER Then I actually kind of thank you. (beat) Well, I better head off.

NESS Your date awaits?

SPENCER

That she does.

NESS Who is she? Wait, let me guess. Chunky, low self-esteem, easily impressed by mildly inventive witticisms?

SPENCER That's my type. Also, she's easy.

Ness shakes her head.

NESS Sometimes I wonder why I'm friends with you.

Beat.

SPENCER 'Cause I'm the only guy who can make you giggle at a funeral?

Ness laughs in spite of herself.

SPENCER (CONT'D) As always, it's been a hoot. (beat) You sticking around here?

NESS

Yeah, my mom's somewhere and I have to keep an eye on her. (beat) And I want to be here for the burial. I-- I have to. You know?

SPENCER Okay, but you're only torturing yourself.

He shoots her a lopsided grin and walks away.

EXT. CEMETERY -- LATER

ANGLE: THE BURIAL SITE

The cold light of a sunless day casts a bleak air on the funeral proceedings. FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, and other MOURNERS gather around the CASKET as it is lowered into the earth. The FAINT CHANTING of a PRIEST can be heard as we WIDEN TO REVEAL NESS

Standing apart from the others, observing things from a distance. As she scans the scene, something catches her eye:

A DETECTIVE

Stands at a respectful distance from the burial, surveying the proceedings and occasionally jotting down notes on a pad. Solemn-looking.

Ness is so busy watching him that she does not notice when A BALD MAN steps into FRAME beside her. His face is unseen.

BALD MAN Not the reunion I was hoping for.

Ness jumps a little and turns to see who her mysterious companion is. PAN across her shoulder to reveal ELIOT TOILE, age 43. Dapper-looking in a black suit, Eliot nevertheless bears the beaten-down look of a man who's past his prime and knows it. His strangely bald head is offset by his kindly blue eyes.

> NESS Excuse me? Who are you?

ELIOT (inspecting her) I could ask the same of you. I mean, for one thing, combat boots? Could you be any more clichéd? (beat) Your hair's still nice, though. Color's a little harsh, but then again... you seem to be projecting an overall harsh aesthetic.

NESS Who the fu--

ELIOT Language, little Nessie.

Ness stops, her mind racing. Her eyes gleam with recognition.

NESS "Nessie"? Who-- Eliot?

ELIOT In the fabulous flesh, my dear. ELIOT (CONT'D) Now I love hugs, but I have a feeling Mrs. Turner wouldn't approve.

NESS Trust me, at this point there's not much else I could do to piss her off.

ELIOT Nonsense. I'm sure she's happy you're here. You and Amber were so close back in the day. You wouldn't even let me style your hair unless you sat together.

Ness lets out a harsh chuckle.

NESS Yeah, well Amber and I weren't exactly close before it... happened. Things change.

ELIOT (surveying the burial) No kidding. (beat) What about the others?

Ness laughs bitterly.

NESS Not so much with the changing. They've just traded in pageants for pom-poms.

ELIOT My girls are cheerleaders now?

NESS

Some of us.

She nods her head toward the burial.

NESS (CONT'D) See for yourself.

Eliot looks out, and we PAN ACROSS THE CEMETERY to find

SIX OF THEM stand near the burial, chattering softly. Their CHEER UNIFORMS and made-up good looks stand out garishly against the desolate atmosphere of the cemetery.

ELIOT (incredulous) Oh my God, is that Jessica? And --Delilah? (beat) Wait, why are they in uniform?

NESS Their version of the twenty-one-gun salute. Honoring a fallen comrade.

ELIOT Amber was a cheerleader too?

NESS Amber was <u>the</u> cheerleader.

ELIOT The heftiest girl in the Young Delights Beauty Pageant? Now there's a twist ending I didn't see coming.

NESS Haven't kept up with the town news?

ELIOT If there's a loop, then I'm out of it. I left for L.A. a little while after Amber moved away and you--(awkward) -- stopped competing.

Ness ignores his mention of her former career.

NESS What are you doing out there?

ELIOT (embarrassed) Styling girls' hair in beauty pageants. I learned pretty quickly that my skill set is limited.

Eliot shrugs and lapses into thoughtful silence.

ELIOT (CONT'D) (looking at the cheerleaders) But would you look at them. Like a pyramid with no apex. Bet they're falling apart, those poor girls.

NESS You wouldn't say that if you knew them.

ELIOT Oh, hush. Where's your pageant solidarity?

Ness sighs. Beat.

NESS

Buried.

Eliot smiles sadly at his old favorite. They stand in silence, watching the funeral.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NESS' FATHER'S HOUSE -- ESTABLISHING -- NIGHT

An angular, modern house with a lush garden surrounding it. Ness wearily walks up the pathway to the front door. She is about to put her key in the door when she hears a RUSTLING NOISE from the bushes. Ness stops and looks around.

ANGLE: NESS' POV

But as she scans the garden, she sees nothing unusual.

Ness rolls her eyes and turns back to the door, only to see that it is ALREADY OPEN and A SHADOWY FIGURE stands in the doorway!

Ness SHRIEKS and backs away when the Figure flips a switch near the door and the PORCH LIGHT comes on... revealing the Figure to be Ness' dad, TOM.

> TOM Honey, what's wrong?

NESS I thought...

She breaks down laughing, realizing her paranoia.

Tom reads a newspaper while Ness flips through channels on TV. The DRONE of the TV and the RUSTLING of newspaper are all that we hear. Tom puts his newspaper down and begins to watch his daughter. He looks like he wants to say something, but he doesn't-- he picks his paper back up instead. Beat. Then he puts it down again and starts to speak:

> NESS (immediately) I'm fine, Dad.

TOM Are you sure?

No answer. Beat.

TOM (CONT'D) How was the funeral?

NESS It was... funeral-esque.

Tom sighs, frustrated. He tries a new approach:

TOM How was your mother?

NESS

She wore a veil and cried for two hours straight. Then she insisted on taking Amber's mom out for drinks.

TOM At her daughter's funeral?

NESS Guess that's just how Mom rolls.

Tom rolls his eyes. Awkward silence, then--

NESS (CONT'D) Eliot was there. Remember him?

Tom smirks and makes a "limp wrist".

TOM The hairdresser guy? NESS The one and only. We're going to do lunch. Catch up.

Tom nods. Beat.

TOM Honey, if you want to talk about it-

Ness MUTES the TV and turns to face Tom.

NESS Dad. I appreciate the at-home Dr. Phil treatment. But in case you forgot, I already have Dr. Milch. (beat) And if I tell you all my feelings, I won't have anything interesting left to tell her. Then she'll accuse me of avoiding my problems and not opening up to people.

TOM (miffed) But... you are avoiding your problems. And you're not opening up to me.

NESS True, but Dr. Milch won't know that when I let all these pent-up feelings out at our next meeting.

Tom can't help but laugh nervously at his daughter's logic.

TOM I see now how your mind works. (beat) And it's very, very odd.

Ness shrugs and turns the TV back on. Tom watches her, worried. THE RINGING OF A SCHOOL BELL TAKES US TO:

EXT. MORGAN HIGH SCHOOL -- MORNING

The bell keeps RINGING as STUDENTS pour into Morgan High School, a run-down relic of academia far past it's prime.

PUSH IN on the main doorway as we find Ness, standing on the steps. Nervous, she takes a deep breath and enters.

INT. MORGAN HIGH SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

TRACK with Ness as she wanders the hallways. STUDENTS fill the area, greeting each other, comparing homework answers, etc... but Ness navigates the crowd alone. She walks by rows and rows of LOCKERS, lost in her own thoughts... but she's RIPPED from her reverie when she passes by

AMBER'S ENORMOUS FACE

Staring out from the wall of lockers.

Ness STOPS, and WE TRACK with her as she walks backwards until she reaches Amber's face again. She nervously turns her head and breathes a sigh of relief as she sees that the image of Amber--

ANGLE: THE LOCKERS

Is in fact a GIANT PORTRAIT. This is the AMBER ALTAR -FLOWERS, POSTCARDS, PICTURES, and other trinkets decorate this makeshift temple set up where Amber's locker used to be. It's both touching in its haphazardness and hilarious in its gaudiness-- a souped-up tribute to a larger-than-life memory.

Ness approaches it, curious. She scans the various pictures adorning the lockers. One in particular catches her eye:

CLOSE ON THE PICTURE

Under a banner reading "YOUNG DELIGHTS BEAUTY PAGEANT" stands group of mostly blonde pre-teen girls, opulently dressed in pageant wear and too young to be wearing that much makeup. You'd have to look pretty close before you could pick YOUNG NESS out of the crowd.

Ness stares in disbelief, so lost that she doesn't notice Spencer come up. He makes a disgusted face at the picture.

> SPENCER Hello, Baby Stepford Wives.

Ness turns, annoyed.

NESS Good morning to you too. Whatever happened to respecting the dead?

SPENCER I'm still cool with the concept, but when the dead are so clearly asking to be mocked... Ness shakes her head.

SPENCER (CONT'D) I'm serious. (re: the picture) Dude, who was your sponsor, the Hitler Youth?

NESS (halfhearted) Shut up.

She's too engrossed with the tribute to really be engaged in the banter. She takes in all its elements.

NESS (CONT'D) This is insane.

After one last look, they start walking down the hall and we TRACK with them.

SPENCER Yeah, I just feel bad for whoever's locker is behind that thing...

NESS Wait, how come you're in school today? It's Monday, shouldn't you be nursing a hangover somewhere?

SPENCER Eh, I figured I'd take in a class. Maybe throw some spitballs.

NESS Sounds productive. Oh, hey, how did your date go?

Spencer thinks.

SPENCER Well, I wore a condom. So I think it went well.

Ness grimaces.

NESS

Go to class.

Spencer smiles and leaves in the opposite direction. Ness shakes her head and starts walking again when she BUMPS into

THE DETECTIVE

The same one who was at the funeral. This is DETECTIVE STEVEN PAGE, 34, and not having a very good day.

PAGE

Sorry.

He walks away, but Ness follows him.

NESS You were at the funeral, right?

Page stops.

PAGE Yeah. What's it to you?

NESS Nothing, I... I was there. I was there too.

PAGE I'm sorry for your loss, miss.

Beat.

NESS So... how's the investigation going?

PAGE (eyebrow raised) None of your business.

He turns to leave.

NESS No, I just--

Page turns back to her.

PAGE Look. I appreciate your concern. (beat) Actually, not really. But I figured I'd be polite. So why don't you be polite too and let me go. I got a room full of cheerleaders to question and not nearly enough caffeine in my system to make that task bearable. NESS Can I-... I mean, I just wanted to know if you knew anything yet.

PAGE You a witness?

NESS

No.

PAGE Were you close to Amber Turner?

Ness can't answer that.

PAGE (CONT'D) (more intense) Do you have anything to tell me that's more important than the interrogation I have to be at?

Ness is again silent.

PAGE (CONT'D) Didn't think so.

He turns and leaves. TRACK with him as he walks down the hall, leaving Ness in his wake. She stands quietly, and we can still hear her say:

NESS

I knew her...

Follow Page as he turns a corner and enters

INT. MORGAN HIGH -- CONFERENCE ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Page enters and surveys the room. He's nervous. PAN across the room until we find the object of his trepidation:

A table, full of seated CHEERLEADERS. We'll get to know them individually later, but for now they present a beautiful, vacuous and united front.

PAGE Um... thank you, ladies, for coming in.

They remain silent.

PAGE (CONT'D) I wanted to ask you some questions about Amber Turner. We could really use your input.

One of them, JESSICA, speaks up. She's glacially cool-clearly the de facto queen bee now that Amber's gone.

> JESSICA We don't think it'd be appropriate.

PAGE (stunned) I'm sorry?

JESSICA So soon after her dying and everything.

Another one, MARCY, nods in agreement.

MARCY Yeah, I mean, it's totes not cool to talk about friends behind their backs.

JESSICA Especially dead friends.

MARCY So we abstrain.

Jessica turns to Marcy.

JESSICA "Abstrain"? It's abstain, moron.

Marcy giggles apologetically at Page.

MARCY Sorry. I'm here for my looks.

She winks at him.

JESSICA Like I said, we don't really want to talk about it. Grief's a personal thing. And if we tell you about it...

MARCY Then it's not personal. Jessica shoots an icy smile at Page.

JESSICA But good luck with the investigation.

MARCY We're totally cheering for you.

Page is at a loss. He gathers himself, then--

PAGE Okay. You wanna play it that way?

He strides over to Jessica and puts his hand on her shoulder.

PAGE (CONT'D) I think it's time for a little divide-and-conquer.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- LATER

MONTAGE of the cheerleaders being interrogated individually. Start with Jessica, sitting across from Page.

PAGE How long did you know Amber?

JESSICA Since we were five.

Marcy now sits in the seat.

PAGE Would you say you were close?

MARCY Once she let me borrow her leggings. Even though she knew I don't really wear underwear that often.

A new cheerleader, DELILAH, African-American and striking, sits opposite Page.

PAGE Did Amber frequent any dangerous locations, or associate with any suspicious individuals? DELILAH Do band geeks count?

PAGE

Band geeks?

DELILAH Suspicious ones.

Now, cheerleader number four, DEENA- loud and lovable.

DEENA Has anyone ever told you you look like a moodier William Shatner?

PAGE

What?

DEENA You really do.

PAGE I-- thank you. But back to the question--

Jessica sits in the chair again.

PAGE (CONT'D) Did Amber have someone special in her life? A boyfriend, maybe?

JESSICA

What, one who secretly beat her up but she never dumped 'cause his sweet gangster lovin' hurt so good? No. She didn't live in a Lifetime movie.

Marcy now.

MARCY

Well, I think she might have had a guy, but it was before she moved here. I could tell you about it...

Page leans forward.

MARCY (CONT'D) Maybe over dinner?

Page rears back.

DEENA

I don't think I can talk about that. Secrets are like, crucial. You can't just be all revelatory. Once I told everyone about how Jessica used to worship George Michael, and now I can't listen to "I Want Your Sex" without thinking about pom-poms and rug burn. (beat) So I guess... no comment?

Deena is apologetic. Page slumps.

PAGE Is there anything at all you could tell me? Anything?

MARCY Does Italian sound good?

DELILAH I plead the fourth. Wait, fifth.

DEENA Ohmygod please don't tell Jessica I told you about the George Michael thing. Oh, and I don't know anything. Really.

It's Jessica's turn to answer. All she does is shrug.

INT. MORGAN HIGH -- HALLWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

Page leans against a wall, utterly defeated. Something catches his eye, and he walks down the empty hallway up to the Amber Altar. He stares at the gigantic portrait.

PAGE (to the portrait) I hate your friends.

NESS (O.S.) Join the club.

Page turns to see Ness at her locker.

NESS (CONT'D) Seriously, there's an anthem.

PAGE Really not in the mood, kid. What are you still doing here? NESS Gymnastics practice. (beat) What, was your mission impossible? Could have told you that this morning.

Page lets his guard down.

PAGE They're just so-- I mean I've never seen so much... I don't know. It's not going well, that's for damn sure. Chief's gonna be pissed.

NESS (sympathetic) Can't get blood from a stone-cold bitch. I think that's how the expression goes.

Page snorts. He turns to Ness.

PAGE

Alright. I'm Detective Page. Here's the deal. I can't talk right now, it's migraine time. But if you think of anything that could help, come on down to the station.

Page can't believe what he's just said.

NESS I don't think I'd be much help.

PAGE (shrugs) Yeah, but what have I got to lose?

He starts walking away.

PAGE (CONT'D) (to himself) Chances are I'm getting fired anyway.

Ness watches him go. She turns back to the Amber Altar and looks into Amber's eyes, almost in a trance. A lonely living girl and a cherished dead one. Hold there for a while--

> NESS (whispering) I have to go.

She turns and leaves.

FROM A DISTANCE, we see Ness leave. Suddenly, CAMERA LURCHES FORWARD, moving toward the Altar. SLOW BREATHING can be heard as we become aware this is SOMEONE'S POV.

CAMERA reaches the Altar and does a PAN across its expanse... whoever's eyes we're in is looking for something. Finally, CAMERA moves closer to a PICTURE of the cheerleaders.

A BLACK-GLOVED HAND RIPS the picture from the display.

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- LATER

PAN across the expanse of the gym as Ness BACKFLIPS across a mat. She's full of energy. After completing a rigorous series of stretches, she stands. A VOICE breaks the silence--

```
JESSICA (O.S.)
Are you done?
```

Ness turns and is startled to see Jessica, Delilah, and Deena standing, hands on hips. Pissed.

NESS I'm... yeah. I can be done.

JESSICA (awkward) Okay... (beat) We need the space.

Ness shrinks in her leotard.

NESS Let me just get my stuff.

JESSICA That's fine.

Ness gathers her stuff and rather clumsily shuffles out of the gym. As she leaves, the rest of the cheerleaders roll their eyes at her. TRACK with the dejected Ness as she exits the gym--

INT. MORGAN HIGH HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Ness walks a safe distance, then stops. Her ears perk up as she hears the Cheerleaders TALKING. She turns back and observes them from the doorway. Jessica, Delilah, and Deena stand. It's awkward. Delilah does a half-assed stretch, but it's clear that her heart isn't in it.

> JESSICA (annoyed) Where's Marcy?

DELILAH She said she'd be a little late.

DEENA (suddenly) Should we start without her?

The other girls look up at her.

DEENA (CONT'D) Without Marcy, I mean. Not without... (beat) You know.

They lapse into silence. Jessica shakes herself out of it.

JESSICA Yeah. Yeah, we should, we have to learn the new routine for Homecoming.

DELILAH (trying for enthusiastic) Okay. Okay, let's do it.

Beat.

DEENA

Um.

JESSICA

What?

DEENA (almost a whisper) Amber had the new routine. She came up with it.

JESSICA

Oh.

INT. MORGAN HIGH HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Framed in the doorway, Ness watches the -- her expression almost sympathetic. She turns and walks down the hallway.

EXT. MORGAN HIGH -- PARKING LOT -- CONTINUOUS

Ness, her arms full with a BACKPACK, a GYM BAG, etc., makes her way to her CAR. She fumbles with her KEYS and unlocks the door. She throws her stuff inside and climbs into the driver's seat. Her KEYS fall out of her hands and onto the ground-- she doesn't notice. She slams the car door shut. Beat.

> NESS (0.S.) (muffled, from car) Shit!

She swings the door open and the door SLAMS into Marcy's gut as she walks through the parking lot. Marcy falls onto the ground. Ness looks at her, mortified.

> MARCY What the hell is wrong with you?!

NESS Sorry, I didn't see. I--... my keys, and... sorry?

Marcy gets up from the ground, inspecting herself.

MARCY You know, for a gymnast, you're pretty damn clumsy. That's probably why you never won any of the talent competitions.

Ness bristles.

MARCY (CONT'D) Why are you still here, anyway?

NESS I was doing gymnastics.

MARCY Well, we have practice now.

NESS Yeah, Jess informed me of that. In the nicest way possible. MARCY (snorts) Whatever. You lost the right to complain about us when you stopped talking to us. NESS (defensive)

I didn't stop talking, there were--

MARCY "Issues", sure.

Ness is silent.

MARCY (CONT'D) Anyway, I have to go. I'm late, and Jessica's probably PMSing about it. (beat) See? I can talk shit about her because I'm her friend.

NESS That's the most twisted mean-girl logic I've ever heard.

Marcy smirks and walks off.

MARCY Hey, I don't make the rules. Good night, Vanessa.

Ness cringes at Marcy's smug over-enunciation of her full name. She stares at Marcy's retreating figure and then looks down at the ground, where her KEYS lay glinting in the moonlight.

NESS

There you are.

She picks them up, closes her car door, and starts the engine. As she drives away, we quickly PULL OUT--

So that we catch up and TRACK with Marcy as she makes her way across the parking lot. The WIND blows through her hair... the MOONLIGHT glistens on the pavement... it's eerie. Marcy suddenly STOPS, worry flickering across her face.

And ever so quietly, FOOTSTEPS can be heard.

Her eyes look down at her bag, so she doesn't see the LOOMING, BLACK-CLAD FIGURE barring the doorway. We can't see the Figure's face-- his back is facing CAMERA. Marcy walks up and BUMPS STRAIGHT INTO HIM. She looks up, eyes widening in horror.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- SAME TIME

The Cheerleaders sit on exercise equipment, save for Jessica, who paces across the mats.

JESSICA (pissed) No, really. Where is Marcy?

RETURN TO:

EXT. MORGAN HIGH -- PARKING LOT -- SAME TIME

The Figure whips out a HUGE GLEAMING KITCHEN KNIFE. In a blindingly fast move, the knife PLUNGES into Marcy's belly. A strangled moan escapes her mouth as the knife TWISTS.

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- SAME TIME

Jessica paces.

JESSICA Seriously, as if we didn't have enough to worry about already.

EXT. MORGAN HIGH -- PARKING LOT -- SAME TIME

The knife JABS into Marcy's belly a few more times with mechanical precision.

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- SAME TIME

JESSICA Tardiness just crazes me, you know?

EXT. MORGAN HIGH -- PARKING LOT -- SAME TIME

ANGLE: THE GROUND
We see Marcy's feet and the Figure's feet. Marcy's knees buckle and she topples down on the ground into FRAME, making slight moaning noises. Finally, the Figure's HAND enters FRAME, holding a bizarrely-decorated BATON. The kind you would twirl in a parade. The Figure SLAMS it down into Marcy's gut, lodging it there. Blood squirts from her belly. The streamers blow in the wind.

TILT UP to reveal

THE FIGURE

For the first time, we can see it clearly. Clad entirely in black, features indistinguishable. Except for the mask, because of course, there's a mask. A GRINNING, BABY DOLL MASK hides his face. Let's call him DOLLFACE.

Dollface slowly stalks TOWARD CAMERA, the mask's delirious grin filling the screen--

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- SAME TIME

Jessica stands, hands on hips. She checks her watch.

JESSICA She is so dead, I'm not even kidding.

Perched on equipment, Delilah and Deena nod their heads sympathetically. Jessica sighs. Off this tableau of bored annoyance--

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

A SCREAM RINGS OUT... and slowly morphs into the BEEPING of an ALARM CLOCK as we

FADE IN:

INT. TOM'S KITCHEN -- MORNING

The kitchen is sunny and spotless. Tom stands at a counter, back to CAMERA. He's holding the morning paper and is very still. Ness enters, puzzled at her dad's stillness.

NESS

Dad?

Beat. Tom slowly turns toward Ness. Hesitation furrows his brow as he looks down at the paper-- should he show her?

Tom suddenly extends his arm and gives Ness the paper-- like he doesn't want to hold it anymore.

Ness takes it and begins reading. We can't see what it says, but from her face, we know it's bad. Ness looks up at Tom, her expression hardening.

INT. MORGAN HIGH -- LATER

Marcy'S GRINNING FACE

Is all we see. WIDEN to reveal that it's a PICTURE on a locker, surrounded by smaller PICTURES and TRINKETS. This tribute has been set up right next to the Amber Altar.

Ness stands in front of the lockers, staring. Behind her, Page rushes in and out of FRAME as he attempts to chase down a CHEERLEADER for questioning.

Spencer comes up to Ness and stares too. He cocks his head.

SPENCER Hmm. It's smaller than Amber's. Guess they didn't love her as much.

He snickers and pats Ness' shoulder as he walks away. Ness barely reacts.

A WHIMPERING SOUND breaks Ness' trance. She turns to see Delilah standing nearby, trying to stifle her tears. Delilah looks up at Ness, her eyes narrowing-- "I dare you to make fun of me". Ness quickly averts her gaze. She rustles for something in her bag, then walks toward Delilah.

Delilah frowns as Ness approaches... but Ness walks past her. SOMETHING DROPS out of Ness' hands.

DELILAH

Hey, you dropped--

But Ness keeps walking. Delilah looks down to the ground to see what fell:

It's a pack of TISSUES.

Delilah picks it up and looks back at Ness' retreating figure, curiosity playing across her face.

EXT. RESTAURANT -- LATER

Ness and Eliot sit at a table on a terrace. Food is on their plates, but they don't eat.

ELIOT So... your salad looks good.

No response. Eliot tries again:

ELIOT (CONT'D) I just love avocados--

NESS (interrupting) Why Marcy?

Beat.

ELIOT I think these things just... happen.

NESS Amber. That, as much as it sucks, "just happened". But Marcy... that's a pattern.

ELIOT

A pattern?

NESS They're connected.

ELIOT They were both cheerleaders.

Ness shakes her head.

NESS They were both in the pageants.

Realization dawns across Eliot's face.

NESS (CONT'D) They said there was a baton stuck in Marcy's body. What was Marcy's talent?

ELIOT Baton twirling. NESS If you call that a talent.

ELIOT So you're saying someone's after my girls?

NESS Looks like. But who?

Beat. Eliot suddenly sits up.

ELIOT (amused) What if it was Mary Marvin?

Ness rolls her eyes.

NESS

Oh God.

ELIOT She'd come up to me and say "You know Eliot, if you put a little less makeup on these Jezebels they might actually stand a chance at getting into heaven!"

NESS Why was she involved with the pageants anyway?

ELIOT I think she thought she could slip a little Jesus juice in with the etiquette lessons.

NESS

She did give me that cross for my tenth birthday...

Beat.

NESS (CONT'D)

I can't really imagine her shoving a baton in anyone's belly, though.

ELIOT

She was always more passiveaggressive. Besides, I think she moved away. Got a degree or something. Beat.

ELIOT (CONT'D) Do you think the other girls have recognized the pattern?

NESS

Doubtful.

ELIOT Someone should tell them.

He stares pointedly at Ness.

NESS And by "someone" you mean me.

ELIOT

Yes.

NESS Eliot, we're not exactly braiding each others' hair.

ELIOT

Now hush. You might've grown apart, there was a time when those girls would have done anything for you. You know, you and Amber were the only ones with half a brain. It strikes me as no surprise that she ended up leading them. (beat) Same way it wouldn't have surprised me if you had ended up head cheerleader instead.

NESS Me? Why would I ever--

ELIOT

(interrupting)
Because you're a leader, Nessie.
You just never realized it.
 (intense)
Who helped them remember their
steps? Who consoled them when they
lost? You did. Don't you
remember?

NESS I try to block most of that stuff out.

ELIOT Well you can't anymore. Amber's gone, and like it or not, they need you. You need each other. NESS Why? I mean, who says that this stuff won't just stop? ELIOT Because it won't. More girls could die. Ness frowns. NESS Including me. ELIOT (pained) Yes, including you. But don't you think stand more of a chance together? Beat. NESS I'll think about it. ELTOT That's all I ask. (beat) I just can't believe they're gone. (musing) Well, at least they died doing something they loved ... NESS Cheering? Yeah, talk about fulfilling your life's ambition. ELIOT Nessie. Now maybe cheerleading isn't something you aspire to, but for some girls... it was the most

> they could do with their lives. We can't all be smart like you. NESS

I didn't mean it that way.

ELIOT

I know you didn't, hon. But I'm just saying, however flimsy it was, at least they found some purpose in their lives before they died.

Eliot speaks softer now:

ELIOT (CONT'D) I'd kill for that.

Ness slowly looks up at him. Fear and realization fill her eyes.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Ness walks through the shoddy police station bustling with COPS. Her steps are hesitant-- she doesn't want to do this. She approaches a desk where an attractive receptionist, TAMMY, looks up at her.

TAMMY

Can I help you with something?

Ness heaves a reluctant sigh.

NESS Is Detective Page around?

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM -- MINUTES LATER

Page paces around a desk, while Ness sits.

PAGE So you're saying you suspect him? This Eliot guy.

NESS I don't know. He's a nice guy and I don't think he could ever hurt anyone.

PAGE So why come to me?

NESS Because there's just some stuff about him that makes me wonder.

PAGE Like what?

NESS He used to do my hair. When I was in pageants. Page lets out a belly laugh. PAGE You? Ness sneers at him. NESS Laugh it up. Anyway, he left. Never came back, no contact. Then Amber died and he shows up at the funeral. Stays in town. Page's smile dies. NESS (CONT'D) Then Marcy... and with the whole baton thing ... Page grimaces. NESS (CONT'D) (hesitant) It just seems like the killer would have to know a lot about the girls. PAGE I see. NESS Look, I'm not saying he did it. It's just that he acts like he's bitter about the way his life turned out, and I can't imagine that styling obnoxious brats makes him feel any better, so who knows? PAGE Add in a little crazy and you've got yourself a psycho killer. Ness stands up violently. NESS No! I'm not telling you to arrest him. He's just the only person I could think of right now, so maybe... watch him?

PAGE I will. Better than nothing.

Ness makes her way to the door.

PAGE (CONT'D) Hey... thanks. (sincere) I really needed this.

Ness' eyes are full of regret.

NESS You're welcome.

She leaves. Page stands for a bit, nodding to himself. Then he rushes out of the room, yelling:

PAGE Chief, I think I got something!

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- NIGHT

Jessica is freaking out at a CHEERLEADER. The others watch.

JESSICA I mean, what the hell, Tiff? You show up twenty minutes late to practice and now it's "I forgot my pom-poms"?!

TIFF Jess, listen, I--

JESSICA

No you listen. Just because you beat me in the swimsuit competition when we were twelve which, by the way, was a totally unfair victory, does not mean you get to disregard my orders. You're not one of my favorites. You're just on the team. (beat)

And that can be changed.

TIFF

Look, it's not my fault, I had to sneak out of the house! My parents... they didn't want me to come to practice.

JESSICA Why not? ידד They said it wasn't safe! (beat) And you know, maybe they're right. Amber and Marcy were killed on school grounds. Doesn't seem like you're doing a very good job of keeping everyone alive. Jessica flinches. Tiff's rant gathers more steam. TIFF (CONT'D) Honestly, I'd rather be home right now anyway. I won't get murdered, plus I won't have to deal with you. (beat) I quit. Tiff flounces off toward the locker room, yelling as she qoes:

> TIFF (CONT'D) Have fun staying alive!

Jessica stands stock still. She's trembling. Deena comes up to her and cautiously lays a hand on her shoulder. Jessica violently brushes it off.

JESSICA

Just...

She trails off into silence. She walks over to a bench and sits. She rests her head in her hands.

TIFF (V.O.) "What a fucking moron."

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SAME TIME

Tiff is at her locker, getting her stuff and talking to herself. She slams her locker shut and heads for the exit.

TIFF Best decision I ever--

Tiff is PULLED by BLACK-GLOVED HANDS into a dark corner. A MUFFLED SCREAM is all we hear... before the sound of SLICING.

INT. KENDRA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ness comes through the front door. She's as quiet as can be.

KENDRA (O.S.)

Vanessa?

Ness' face falls and she winces.

INT. KITCHEN -- SECONDS LATER

Ness enters the kitchen. The TV flickers on the counter. Kendra sits, drink in hand.

KENDRA

Hi, honey!

NESS You're cheerful.

KENDRA Well, you know...

NESS Yeah, I know. Scotch is the ultimate pick-me-up.

Kendra ignores this.

KENDRA

Honey?

Ness looks through the fridge for food.

NESS

What?

KENDRA

So, I won this trip for two to that spa out in Cranston. I was thinking--

NESS (exploding) God, is that all you can think about? People are dying and all you want to do is get a facial? And the shit you pulled at Amber's funeral... You wanted to take her mom out for drinks!

Kendra shrugs.

NESS (CONT'D) The woman just lost her daughter! Kendra takes a deep swig of Scotch and looks squarely at Ness. KENDRA Well sometimes I feel like I lost one too. Ness doesn't say anything. Beat, then she intones evenly: NESS If you did, it's your fault. Kendra's face changes. She stands and her eyes glaze over. NESS (CONT'D) (angry) No, you can't start this and not finish. You want to talk about it? KENDRA Vanessa. NESS Don't try--KENDRA (dead serious) Ness. Ness pauses -- it's rare that Kendra uses her preferred name. NESS What, Mom? Kendra nods toward something -- PAN across the kitchen to see she's looking at the TELEVISION, where a NEWS REPORT shows pictures of Tiff. Ness picks up the REMOTE and turns up the volume. ANNOUNCER (V.O.) "... the victim, the third in a gruesome series, was found in a locker room..." KENDRA Oh my God... Ness stares at the TV.

47.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) "...Morgan policemen have taken in an individual for questioning..."

Worry crosses Ness' face.

ON THE TELEVISION, THE news report shows Eliot being taken in handcuffs by a POLICE OFFICER.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D) "Eliot Toile, linked to the deceased via a number of beauty pageants, was cooperative with county officials. This may indicate that--"

The television shuts off.

The remote trembles in Ness' hand and her eyes are wide with confusion. She turns and stomps out of the room. Kendra whirls around, calling after her:

KENDRA

Honey? (beat) Could you at least leave the remote?

The front door SLAMS. Ness is gone.

INT. NESS' CAR (MOVING) -- MINUTES LATER

Ness speeds along in the night, frantic.

EXT. POLICE STATION -- A BIT LATER

Ness' car SCREECHES to a halt. She gets out, slams the door and races into the building.

INT. PAGE'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

The door burst open and Ness strides in. Page looks up at her from his desk.

PAGE Whoa, where's the fire?

NESS What did you do?

Page considers his words before speaking:

PAGE

I made a decision.

NESS

No, you just found a scapegoat-you told me yourself, the chief was on your ass. So you just arrested the first guy who looked a little suspicious.

PAGE

Hey, hey! First of all, a little respect. I'm an officer of the law. Secondly, you're the one who told me about him.

NESS I told you to watch him, not arrest him!

PAGE Well I did. I watched him. I watched his file, too. And Mr. Eliot's file is an interesting one.

He rifles through a FOLDER on his desk.

PAGE (CONT'D) (reading) Arrested for theft, twice, in Tucson, 1984... a few bounced checks... and you know the most interesting thing? He moves around a lot.

NESS (uneasy) So?

PAGE So did you know that up until a year ago, he lived in Denver?

Ness' face falls.

PAGE (CONT'D)

Right. Same Denver where Amber Turner was living at the time. Same place she moved back here from because, in the words of her mother, she was "having trouble".

Ness looks at him, confused.

Ness shakes her head.

PAGE (CONT'D)

Now look. Despite being a beauty queen or whatever? You've got good instincts. You came to me with a gut feeling and it looks like it's paid off. So why don't you just accept the fact that there are terrible people in this world and some of them are your nearest and dearest.

Beat.

NESS Is he here? Can I... (beat) Can I see him?

Page looks at her. Beneath her tough exterior, her world is falling apart-- and he can tell. He sighs.

PAGE You'll only be torturing yourself.

NESS

Everyone keeps saying that.

Page gets up and pulls out his KEYS.

INT. JAIL CELL ROOM -- CONTINUOS

THROUGH THE DOOR, we see Page guarding the entrance. Ness enters and approaches the cell with trepidation. A VOICE rings out:

ELIOT (O.S.) Is it time for my manicure already?

NESS

Eliot...

Eliot gets off the bench and goes to the bars. He peers at Ness through them, his blue eyes almost unnaturally bright.

ELIOT Nessie. I don't wanna be clichéd, but...you got some splainin' to do. NESS Eliot, listen. I didn't-- this wasn't supposed to happen.

Eliot looks around his cell.

ELIOT

And yet...

NESS

I just made a bad decision. There wasn't any headway being made on the case, and--

ELIOT

"Headway"? They've got you talking like one of them. Since when do you care, anyway?

NESS

Of course I care.

ELIOT

Yes, you do. From a distance. Instead of asking me directly about my involvement, you went the sneaky way.

NESS I did what I thought was right.

ELIOT

You did what you knew was safe. I know you, Nessie. You don't like getting dirty.

NESS (offended) What is that supposed to mean?

ELIOT

When Amber got her period right before the Flirty Fall pageant... Deena called her mother, Jessica comforted Amber. Hell, even Mary Marvin told her about "the woman's burden". And what did you do?

Ness doesn't answer.

ELIOT (CONT'D) You hid in the broom closet. Because you thought it was icky. NESS I was twelve!

ELIOT Maybe, but besides your looks, it doesn't seem like much has changed.

Beat.

NESS Why were you in Denver?

ELIOT (caught off guard) What?

NESS See, I want to believe you. But there's... why were you in Denver?

ELIOT I can't tell you that.

Ness can't believe this.

ELIOT (CONT'D) I can't because I made a promise to Amber. Just trust me when I say that I am not involved in this. Not in the way you think. (beat) But now you've got the morons they call cops here involved, and they're grasping at straws that don't even exist. The girls will never cooperate with them-- they want to keep whatever they know in the family. Things would be so much easier if you had just talked to them.

NESS It's not that easy--

ELIOT It is that easy. I know the shadows are where you think you belong, but for once-- you have to get involved.

Ness' mind is racing.

ELIOT (CONT'D) Those girls are dumb and scared-but they knew Amber and the others better than anyone else. As frightening as it sounds, the key to solving this rests in their hands... but only if someone gets it out of them.

Ness' face becomes resolute. She wants to believe him.

NESS I will. (beat)

I'm sorry about this, Eliot. I'll talk to them. I'll find a way.

Eliot laughs -- it's ugly and harsh.

ELIOT And how are you going to do that?

INT. MORGAN HIGH HALLWAY -- THE NEXT DAY

Ness passes by a POSTER on a wall. She looks at it-- it reads "EMERGENCY CHEERLEADER TRYOUTS-- Get Involved!" Below this in RED INK, someone has scrawled "Come for the pom-poms, stay for your bloody murder!".

Ness shakes her head, but she can't quite take her eyes off the poster.

CLOSE on the "Get Involved!" part of the poster.

PUSH IN on Ness' face-- this is the moment where it all becomes clear to her. She knows what she has to do.

INT. KENDRA'S KITCHEN -- EVENING

Ness enters the kitchen, hesitant.

NESS

Mom?

Kendra sits and drinks from a GLASS. She looks up at Ness.

NESS (CONT'D) (reluctant) I need money... for a cheerleading uniform.

Kendra's face lights up. She SLAMS her glass of Scotch down and runs to Ness, her arms outstretched.

As Kendra hugs a bewildered Ness, PAN DOWN to show the GLASS sitting on the table. It looks lonely.

INT. MORGAN HIGH HALLWAY -- AFTERNOON

ANGLE: A BANNER

Reading "EMERGENCY CHEERLEADER TRYOUTS". It's posted on top of two double doors leading to the gym.

PAN DOWN to reveal a BLONDE in a cheerleading outfit standing with her back toward CAMERA. From inside the gym doors we hear:

JESSICA (O.S.)

Next!

The blonde takes a deep breath and enters the gym--

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- CONTINUOUS

Jessica, Deena, and Delilah sit at a table. They are bored, and Jessica doesn't even look up as the blonde enters.

JESSICA Alright, let's have you--

DEENA (stunned) Oh. My. God.

Jessica looks up. All three of them stare at

NESS

Who is, of course, the blonde entering the gym. PAN up her body-- it's totally gratuitous, but damn is it worth it. The outfit accentuates her curves, she's makeup-free but still looks amazing, and her hair is now a light brown with blonde streaks. This isn't Ness. This is Vanessa.

> JESSICA (skeptical) Really?

Ness meets her gaze. Inside she's scared, but you'd never be able to tell. Her eyes practically glow.

NESS

Really.

And with that, she BACKFLIPS across the room. Quick as a flash, she transitions into a series of JUMPS, then goes into-

55.

JESSICA Okay, we get it.

Ness awkwardly lands on her ass. She gets up, pride deflated.

NESS

What?

JESSICA (brisk) You're a gymnast, great. Welcome to the team.

NESS But I-- there was a routine. Don't I have to... prove myself?

Jessica's beyond caring:

JESSICA (barely any emotion) Usually. But Homecoming's coming up and all the other girls are either quitters or dead, so it's not like I have much of a choice. (beat) Send in the next girl. Practice on Monday.

Ness slowly turns and walks out. She's confused-- this should have been harder, right?

SPENCER (V.O.)

"What?!"

INT. SPENCER'S APARTMENT -- THE NEXT MORNING

SPENCER You've gotta be screwing with me!

Ness lies back on Spencer's bed, while Spencer sits on the floor against the bed. He's tense.

NESS

I'm not, Spence, and I don't see what's so ridiculous about--

SPENCER What's ridiculous about you being a cheerleader? Besides everything?

NESS

Yes.

Spencer laughs incredulously.

SPENCER It's just that -- it's not you. That whole slutty, catty thing.

NESS

I used to be in pageants. I know all about slutty and catty.

SPENCER Yeah, I'm sure you were a really slutty twelve-year-old cat.

Ness does an elaborate stretch on the bed.

NESS I'm a great gymnast, too.

SPENCER

Fine, so you're stretchy. But why the hell do you want to go back to all of that?

NESS Spence, I don't have a choice. These girls need protection--

SPENCER

The only kind of protection those girls need is a pack of Trojans. Listen to yourself-- you're just making excuses. You think you can just swoop in and warn them, and then go back to life the way it is. It doesn't work that way. (beat) You're either one of them or you're not.

NESS This isn't about taking sides-

SPENCER

(bitter) No, see, you'd really spark on that, wouldn't you? You see your chance to get welcomed back into the fold and that makes you feel all tingly inside.

Ness moves off the bed down to Spencer's level.

NESS Oh, like you don't get off on dissing them when deep down, you'd die for a conversation with one of them?

Spencer is at a loss for words.

NESS (CONT'D) Two can play the psychoanalysis game, buddy.

SPENCER I just don't want you to... (beat) It's no fun sitting on the sidelines if you don't have anyone to watch life go by with.

NESS

Relax. I will be back on the sidelines in no time, chock full of banter. But now... No matter what these girls have done to me... I know something's up with these murders. There's a pattern, and I need to protect them. I think it's what I have to do.

Spencer looks away, not wanting to meet her glance.

NESS (CONT'D) Besides, it's not like any of them have enough brains to protect themselves.

A tiny smile forms on Spencer's face. Ness continues.

NESS (CONT'D) I mean, really, when you think about it, I'm just doing the bimbos a favor.

Spencer doesn't look so sure.

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- DAY

It's the first practice. Jessica, Deena, and Delilah stand in front of a line of GIRLS. PAN across the line until we find Ness. She doesn't want to be there. Next to her stands GOLDIE-- 15, with honey-colored hair and a smile that sparkles. Immensely huggable, even more so now as she fidgets nervously. Ness looks at her--

NESS Is something wrong? GOLDIE (babbling) No, I'm just nervous, it's my No. first practice and I've seen these girls perform and it's like totally amazing and I don't know if I can keep up because--NESS Whoa, kid. Come up for air. GOLDIE Sorry, I just... I want this to work. It's such an opportunity. NESS (shrugs) I guess. Goldie keeps talking, more to herself: GOLDIE Well, I think it is. I just moved here, and I almost flipped out when I found out this school doesn't have a gymnastics team. But I guess cheer is just as good. Ness looks over at her mention of gymnastics. NESS You're a gymnast? GOLDIE Used to be. Ness nods-- she likes her more already. Goldie flashes a dazzling smile and extends her hand out to Ness. GOLDIE (CONT'D) I'm Goldie, by the way. Ness shakes it, amused.

NESS Nes-- uh, Vanessa.

Jessica interrupts them as she speaks to all of them:

JESSICA Enough chatter, ladies. We've got a Homecoming game in two weeks. Now, I'm not a choreographer. We had one, but... well. We need a new routine. Anyone think they can come up with one? She scans the line. All the girls are too scared to talk. Finally... a voice rings out. NESS I can do it. Jessica turns to her. JESSICA This isn't some balance-beam thing, this is a cheer routine. NESS And if you knew anything about gymnastics, you'd know they're pretty similar. JESSICA (challenging) Okay. Then teach them. Ness looks down the line-- she has everyone's attention. Pretty unusual for her. She thinks, then: NESS Well... I guess we want to start with something simple. Can anyone do a back flip? Jessica snorts. JESSICA Oh, 'cause that's really simple. You know--GOLDIE I can do one! Everyone turns to Goldie. She grins, embarrassed. GOLDIE (CONT'D) Hi! Hi, I'm Goldie, and... I can back flip too. We could show you guys...

Some of the girls perk up. They're almost enthusiastic. They gather around Goldie. Ness stares at the growing circle for a moment. She turns and meets Jessica's eyes, then goes into the group.

> NESS (hesitant) Alright, what you want to do first is stretch.

She continues talking and her voice grows confident. Jessica stands alone outside the circle.

MUSIC COMES UP AS WE GO TO A MONTAGE OF SCENES:

INT. POLICE STATION -- NIGHT

Page sits at a table opposite Eliot, who is handcuffed to a chair. Page holds up a PICTURE of Amber and interrogates Eliot. We CANNOT HEAR HIM but it's clear Page is reaching the end of his rope. Eliot does not answer. He just looks at the picture of Amber.

INT. NESS' BEDROOM -- EVENING

Ness rushes into her room. She throws her POM-POMS onto her desk. She notices that under the pom-poms, the ANSWERING MACHINE is BLINKING. She brushes the pom-poms aside and presses a button. A VOICE MAIL begins playing.

> PAGE (V.O.) "Hi, Detective Page here. So, anything new? I'm only asking because Eliot's not cooperating and I figured you might have heard something by now. Let me know."

Ness DELETES it. She falls onto her bed, exhausted.

INT. MORGAN HIGH HALLWAY -- DAY

Ness and Goldie walk down the hall, chatting. Goldie suddenly stops and grabs Ness arm, motioning across the hall.

NESS

What?

GOLDIE

Look.

TWO GUYS in varsity letter jackets stand there, watching them. ERIC and TYLER are incredibly good-looking, and know it, too. They shoot killer grins at the girls. Goldie looks at Ness, incredulous. She drags Ness back along the hallway, waving at the boys.

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- DAY

The cheerleaders practice. Goldie and Ness do BACK FLIPS... the other girls try. Some succeed. Jessica doesn't.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER -- EVENING

Spencer stands alone on the sidewalk in front of a movie theater. He checks his watch and looks out into the street.

Ness runs up to him, breathless and in cheer uniform. Spencer looks her up and down, shakes his head, and heads toward the theater entrance. Ness rushes to catch up to him.

EXT. MORGAN HIGH -- NIGHT

Jessica and Delilah exit a door on their way out of practice. They pass a nearby TREE as they leave... and when they're gone, DOLLFACE steps out from behind the tree. Watching.

EXT. PARK -- DAY

CLOSE on a BANNER reading "CHEERY CHARITY CARWASH!".

PAN DOWN to reveal the cheerleaders soaping up cars, having fun, etc. We find Ness and Goldie working on a car. Ness scrubs a window, while Goldie lazily passes a sponge over the front of the car.

> NESS Could you pick up the pace? We have two more to go.

Goldie stares at Ness. A sly grin crosses her face as she picks up a BUCKET and SPLASHES WATER all over Ness.

Ness rises, glowering. Goldie is afraid until Ness smiles and throws her soaking wet SPONGE at Goldie. An all-out water fight breaks out between them.

PAN ACROSS the mayhem until we find Jessica, who stands behind them and watches. Doesn't look like she approves. Then, ever so slightly, she smiles. She can't help it-- Ness and Goldie are putting the "cheer" back in cheerleading.

END MONTAGE AS WE GO TO:

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- DAY

Ness and Goldie walk in, heading to join the crowd of girls.

GOLDIE So... I have news.

NESS What, you're giving up this life of frivolity and dedicating yourself to a career in neuroscience?

Goldie giggles -- she's used to this by now.

GOLDIE You love your big words.

NESS They're not big, they're just mine.

GOLDIE Okay, smarty-pants. Anyway, so you know Eric and Tyler?

NESS The creepy skeeves who ogle us in the hallway?

GOLDIE You mean the co-captains of the football team who admire our beauty from a distance?

NESS You say tomato, I say stalker.

GOLDIE (eyes rolling) My point is-- I heard one of them is, like, into you.

Ness is intrigued, but tries not to let it show.

NESS Good to know.

GOLDIE So are you gonna jump their bones or what?

NESS What are you, like, twelve? NESS

Exactly.

She pats Goldie on the shoulder and sits down. Goldie sits too, frustrated at the lack of boy-crazy enthusiasm.

Jessica clears her throat and begins talking.

JESSICA I have an announcement.

The girls perk up.

JESSICA (CONT'D) I want you all to make sure your Saturday schedules are free. We've been invited to Amber Turner's house for a luncheon. (quiet) Her mom wants to see us.

The cheerleaders begin whispering to each other.

JESSICA (CONT'D) Now I know some of you are new and didn't know Amber... but she was an instrumental part of this team's success and we need to remember that. We need to honor her.

Jessica stares squarely at Ness.

JESSICA (CONT'D) Attendance is mandatory.

The girls react-- some are excited, some confused. PUSH IN on Ness-- she's completely freaked.

NESS (V.O.) I need to see Dr. Milch right now!

INT. WAITING ROOM -- LATER

Ness stands at a desk, still in cheer uniform. She talks to a RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST I'm sorry, Ms. Kendrick, but she's seeing a patient right now. NESS Is there anyway she could squeeze me in? I really--

She's interrupted as the office door opens and a TALKY LADY comes out, followed by Dr. Milch.

TALKY LADY (to Dr. Milch) Oh, thanks so much for this. You don't know how long it's taken me to find a doctor I feel I can really connect with.

DR. MILCH I understand, and thank you so much for the gift. It's lovely.

Talky Lady turns and addresses the waiting room at large.

TALKY LADY Alright then, God Bless!

She smiles at Ness as she walks out the door. Ness turns back to Dr. Milch.

NESS Let me guess-- televangelist who feels bad every time someone touches her naughty bits?

DR. MILCH (ignoring her comment) Vanessa. Can I help you?

NESS

I hope so.

DR. MILCH You know this isn't exactly procedure. And you've missed a lot of appointments.

NESS (firm) Kind of not leaving.

Dr. Milch shakes her head and smiles. She goes into her office and beckons Ness inside.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MILCH'S OFFICE -- A BIT LATER

Ness sits on the couch, Milch at her desk. It's clear they've been talking for a while.

NESS So yeah, the idea of going to Amber's house... it freaks me out.

DR. MILCH Why do you think that is?

NESS

I don't know, it jolted me. I mean, the whole reason I joined the squad in the first place was to find out more about Amber's death. And the others. (beat) But I've sort of strayed from the path.

Milch nods, though it's barely visible.

DR. MILCH So you feel your priorities have shifted?

Ness doesn't want to be saying this.

NESS Maybe-- it's just, bitchiness aside, I'm... enjoying myself. It's like I'm...

DR. MILCH Back in the pageants?

Beat.

NESS

Yeah. I mean, most of the girls are still awful human beings. But I've made a friend, Goldie, and she's really sweet.

DR. MILCH Do you feel you're being influenced?

NESS

How so?

DR. MILCH Well, you used to say that whole social scene disgusted you. "Bitches and date rapists" is the way you phrased it, I believe.

Ness cringes -- that sounds like it's from a different person.

DR. MILCH (CONT'D) (hesitant) I just... I know this is not exactly professional, but I don't want you to feel like you're falling in with the wrong element.

NESS

(a bit annoyed) Thanks, but I'm not here to talk about the dangers of peer pressure.

Milch sighs.

DR. MILCH

Please don't take that the wrong way. It seems like you're in a transitional period right now, and I want you to make sure you're making the right choices.

NESS And what would the right choice be?

Beat.

DR. MILCH To do what feels best for yourself. And considering the fact that there's a killer loose, to keep yourself out of harm's way.

NESS (shaking her head) I just don't know if I can keep up with all these changes.

Milch considers her words before she speaks:

DR. MILCH Vanessa. Change can be good. It's what keeps us going. It doesn't matter if it's a crazy new hairstyle, or going back to school when you're 40, or even a nose job. (MORE) DR. MILCH (CONT'D) You just need to make sure that if you're changing, you're changing for the better.

Ness takes this in.

NESS I just don't want to let anyone down.

DR. MILCH Interesting.

NESS

What?

DR. MILCH The Ness of a few weeks ago would never have said that.

NESS

Well, I mean, it's different now. I have this team I'm a part of, and I'm working with Detective Page...

Milch frowns.

DR. MILCH

Vanessa, you're not a detective, you're a seventeen-year-old girl. Are you sure this isn't all too much for you?

NESS

It probably is, but what can I do? There's a whole lot more riding of my shoulders. I have all this shit- (off Milch's look) --uh, stuff, I'm responsible for now. But isn't that a good thing?

Milch smiles.

DR. MILCH It's a change.

NESS

Yeah...

DR. MILCH So how does Spencer feel about all this?

Ness' eyes widen.

NESS Oh, fuck me.

DR. MILCH

Pardon?

Ness stands and starts gathering her things.

NESS I'm missing a lunch date with Spencer, he's gonna rip me a new one.

DR. MILCH I'm guessing things between you two are--

NESS Tense with a side of awkward.

Ness goes to the door. When she reaches it, she sees

A SMALL METAL CROSS

Now hanging from the door at eye-level. Ness turns to Milch.

NESS (CONT'D) Doing some decorating?

Beat.

DR. MILCH It was a gift. From the woman who was here before you.

NESS Oh. How missionary of her. You gonna keep it up?

DR. MILCH Is it a problem if I do?

NESS No! No, I just didn't exactly think Jesus was your homeboy.

Milch frowns... is she, maybe, a bit hurt?

DR. MILCH (staring Ness down) Well, I didn't know you were so closed-minded.

NESS (babbling to cover) I didn't mean anything by it, it's just... a change. (beat, distracted) It's nice, though. Really. Ι think I have one just like it somewhere in my attic ... (realizing) Oh, shit, Spencer! Dr. Milch just stares at her. Ness is flustered. NESS (CONT'D) God, listen to me, I sound like If I get any more air-Deena. headed, please, just kill me. Ness leaves. Dr. Milch watches her go. EXT. CAFE -- AFTERNOON Spencer sits at a table. A half-eaten hamburger lies on a plate. He's disgruntled. Ness runs up to him, breathless. NESS Okay, I know you're mad, but I--Spencer looks up, a grin on his face too big to be sincere. SPENCER (mock cheerful) Oh, hi, Vanessa! It's so great of you to come. Ness frowns. SPENCER (CONT'D) (again with the mocking) You want to know what I did while I waited? I took my fries and I made a fort with them. It was real hard, but I did it. Then I took my salt and pepper shakers and pretended they were soldiers. And you know what I did next? (beat) I re-enacted the Alamo. Yup, I did. I re-enacted the goddamn Alamo and I am so fucking glad you finally showed up so I could tell you all about it.

Ness leans over the chair opposite him, defeated.

NESS

Look, there's nothing I can say that's gonna make this right. I've just had a lot on my mind--

SPENCER

(nasty) Yeah, I can see how thinking of new ways to spread your legs and call it dancing could be time-consuming.

NESS

(trying to keep calm) That's not what I meant. I want--

SPENCER

Oh, sorry, maybe it's just that I'm not some protein-shake meathead, so I automatically don't rate Ness time anymore.

NESS

Spence--

SPENCER

You know all those steroids make their balls shrink, right? Or do you not even care? I bet--

NESS

(exploding) Shut the fuck up, Spencer!

Spencer stops talking.

NESS (CONT'D)

Just shut your mouth, because I am sick and tired of your passive aggressive bullshit! It's not my fault that you don't have any other friends. It's not my fault that your ego's so damn big that you can't see past your own insecurities.

(tearing up) I'm going through a lot here. It's not all pom-poms and splits, and I could really use a friend right now, not some obnoxious jackass who thinks berating me's gonna make anything better between us! SPENCER

(just as intense) You don't get it. Can't you see what's happening? I'm losing you. When you joined the squad, you said nothing was gonna change. But you know what I see? I see an empty chair beside me wherever I go. I see you and your new highlights and your Wonderbra and it just makes me wonder where my best friend is. My only friend. And maybe that's selfish and maybe I'm an asshole, but I'm your asshole and it's time you remember that. (beat, then awkwardly) Or something.

Ness stifles a giggle.

NESS You're my what?

SPENCER (quiet) Just sit. Sit down and shut up and let's be friends.

Ness nods and sits. She looks over the menu.

NESS (hesitant) So... what's good here?

SPENCER Well, I'd have you eat crow, but all they had on the menu was humble pie. (sheepish) I'll split it with you.

Ness smiles.

NESS

Good one.

Beat. She looks at Spencer's head.

NESS (CONT'D) Your roots are showing.
SPENCER Yeah, haven't had anyone to help me dye it in a while.

NESS

We'll do it this weekend... Oh! So, I really want you to come to the Homecoming game next week.

SPENCER Because I'm such a fan of the Morgan Mighty Men?

NESS Marauders. We're the Marauders. (beat) Really, you should come. You're gonna flip when you see what routine we're doing. It's insane--

SPENCER (bitter) Could you maybe go 10 minutes without talking about your damn team?

He stands up and walks away from the table. Ness watches him go, then looks back down at her lap.

EXT. NESS' HOUSE -- EVENING

Sunset. Ness' car pulls up the driveway. She exits, weary. She's about to walk up to the door when a CAR HONK rings out. She turns to see A POLICE CAR parked a little up the curb. The window is down and Detective Page sits in the driver's seat. He yells:

> PAGE A moment of your time, miss?

Ness rolls her eyes and trudges toward the car. Page gets out and looks at her uniform.

PAGE (CONT'D) New look?

NESS Method acting.

PAGE I see. Do the uniforms not have pockets? NESS

Huh?

PAGE 'Cause if there's no pockets, then you can't keep your phone on you. Which would explain you not answering my calls.

Ness turns and starts walking away.

NESS

Can you just come back another day?

Page follows after her.

PAGE

No time like the present, kid. I got a suspect who won't talk and a boss who I think might be Satan, so forgive me if I can't sympathize with your pom-pom anxiety.

NESS I can't do this right now--

PAGE And you know, I thought you were different. (beat) But I guess I should have learned my lesson in high school. You can't trust a cheerleader.

NESS I'm not a cheerleader!

Page looks at her uniform-- oh, hey irony.

PAGE

Then prove it. Get back on track.

Ness takes a moment to calm herself.

NESS Look, I'm going to Amber's house tomorrow.

PAGE (intrigued) Really? (elated) Perfect, that's great... NESS (wary) Why do I not like where this is going?

PAGE Because you know I'm gonna ask you to do your best to find out whatever you can.

NESS

How?

PAGE By being the pushy girl who stopped me in the hall. Cause I gotta say, she had a lot more spirit than you.

He starts to walk away, warning as he goes:

PAGE (CONT'D) Get your head in the game, cheer queen.

NESS (smirking) Was that a "High School Musical" reference?

Page turns -- busted. He grins.

PAGE I got a 12-year-old. You should see me do the karaoke.

He nods at Ness, then walks away. Ness sighs-- it's epic and well-deserved.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

The Cheerleaders head up a walkway to a well-manicured, attractive residence. Ness stands before the front door. She does not move as the others pass her-- she's too anxious. Goldie comes up beside her and stares at the house too.

> GOLDIE Pretty epic villa, no?

The front door opens and Amber's mother, Teresa, steps out. A smile blooms on her face as she sees the girls.

TERESA Come on in, girls! The Cheerleaders head toward the entrance. Ness stays behind, as if rooted to the ground.

GOLDIE

You coming?

Ness nods. Goldie starts for the door, then turns to see Ness still standing. She walks back to her and drags her by the arm into the house.

INT. FOYER -- MOMENTS LATER

Cheerleaders file in and greet Amber's mother. Delilah, Jessica, and Deena give her warm hugs. Others nod politely. Last in are Ness and Goldie. Goldie follows the other girls down a hallway. Ness stands in the doorway.

She looks around the now-empty foyer. She takes it all in-the family pictures, the chic decoration, the Amberness of it all. This is where she lived. Her trance is shattered by Teresa's voice:

TERESA (0.S.)

Vanessa.

Ness turns to see Teresa standing near the hallway. Her expression is a thin veneer of neutrality.

NESS Hi, Teresa. (beat) Mrs. Turner.

Teresa opens her mouth to say something, then stops. Then:

TERESA The other girls are in the family room.

She turns and heads down the hall. Ness follows.

INT. FAMILY ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

The family room is homier, more lived-in than the rest of the house. The Cheerleaders assemble around a buffet table laden with sandwiches, drinks, etc. They settle in on couches, chairs, and the floor.

Ness enters and sees Goldie standing at the table. She goes over to her and is about to speak when Teresa speaks:

TERESA I'd like to thank you all for coming today. You don't know how much it means to me. To my family.

Teresa looks around the room and focuses on Delilah, Deena, and Jessica.

TERESA (CONT'D) Some of you were Amber's best friends.

Her gaze falls across Ness now.

TERESA (CONT'D) And some... well... I don't know.

Ness' face is the embodiment of awkwardness. Teresa breaks her gaze and addresses the girls as a whole.

TERESA (CONT'D) Some of you are new.

TERESA (CONT'D) But regardless, you came. You might not have even known my Amber but you came anyway and that is so... (tears fill her eyes) It's special, and I'd like to think that it's because Amber was special too. Isn't it? (beat) Wasn't she?

Teresa wants so badly to believe this. Jessica goes over to her and holds her hand. Teresa's face crumples into tears.

The others quickly resume eating and talk in quiet tones.

GOLDIE

Awkward...

Ness doesn't answer. If she did, the tears would start.

NESS

I need to get some air.

She throws her plate onto a table and rushes out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY/FOYER -- CONTINUOUS

Ness speeds down the hall. This is just too much. She's about to open the front door when--

MISTY (O.S.)

Nessie?

Ness comes to a stop and turns to see MISTY, Amber's 10-yearold sister. Tall for her age. Definitely future cheerleader material.

NESS

Misty?

MISTY It is you, right?

NESS It is. I--

But she's interrupted as Misty envelops her in a bear hug. Ness smiles.

NESS (CONT'D) So how are things?

Misty shrugs.

MISTY Okay. I like it when people come around, it's... better. Mom's less whiny.

Ness nods. She is about to speak when a BABY'S CRIES fill the air. Misty goes into the living room, Ness follows her.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Misty goes over to a crib and holds the hand of an unseen BABY. Ness comes over and looks down into the crib.

NESS Is that your baby brother?

MISTY Yup. Nessie, meet Dixon.

Ness cautiously peers down at

DIXON

He's small, but chubby. A thickish mop of brown hair. But really, it's his BRIGHT BLUE EYES that stand out most.

NESS Wow. He's so...

MISTY

Smelly?

NESS Beautiful.

She reaches down with her hand. Dixon grips her finger with his tiny hand. Ness is overcome with emotion.

NESS (CONT'D) And look at his eyes. Just... wow.

Misty nods.

MISTY Eyes like his daddy's.

Ness looks up at her. Misty shrugs.

MISTY (CONT'D) It's just what Amber used to say.

Misty walks away. Ness looks back at the baby. For a moment, she looks puzzled, then shakes it off.

INT. FOYER -- LATER

The Cheerleaders pass by Teresa and say goodbye on their way out the door. Ness stands at the back of the group. Jessica is about to leave, when:

TERESA

Jessica?

Teresa takes a DIARY from a table and hands it to Jessica.

JESSICA (uncomfortable) This was Amber's diary.

TERESA I think she'd want you to have it.

JESSICA Are you sure? I mean, that's-- TERESA Of course I'm sure. You girls were like sisters to her. (motions to diary) I can't think of anyone else more worthy of knowing all the juicy details.

Jessica smiles.

JESSICA Fresh gossip is always good.

TERESA (trying to be cheerful) If you read anything interesting, let me know... I never did figure out which football player she had a crush on...

JESSICA It was Sean.

TERESA

Sean?

JESSICA Awkward Sean.

DEENA The water boy...

TERESA (surprised) The water boy?

JESSICA (distasteful) The water boy.

Teresa raises an eyebrow and makes a face. In this moment she is seventeen again.

TERESA Wasn't he a little bit--

JESSICA Non-crushable? You're telling me. But Amber thought he was cute.

TERESA (fondly) She always did go for the dorks. Jessica, Deena and Teresa share a moment of silence. Then:

TERESA (CONT'D) (serious) Be safe, girls. Please.

DEENA We will. (taps her purse) I bought mace.

The girls file out. Ness tries to slip by unnoticed.

TERESA

Vanessa.

Shit.

NESS

Yeah?

TERESA

I, uh... I have something for you.

Teresa turns to the table and takes a PHOTO ALBUM. She hands it to Ness.

TERESA (CONT'D) I know you and Amber didn't hang out much recently. I don't know why, but... I guess that really doesn't matter anymore.

Ness restrains the impulse to explain herself. Teresa motions to the photo album.

TERESA (CONT'D) But there was a time when you were featured quite exclusively in Amber's scrapbooks, so... I figured this was meant for you. (beat) It's mostly pageant photos, but there are some sleepover ones, and the trip to Aspen we all took...

They are both lost in the memories.

TERESA (CONT'D) I'd have given it to Jess too, but she has those unfortunate braces in most of the pictures... probably best for her not to relive that. She hands it to Ness, who takes it gingerly.

NESS Thanks. (beat, really meaning it) Thank you.

She reaches out and squeezes Teresa's hand. Teresa cautiously runs her hand along Ness' face. So familiar... Almost like having Amber there. The moment passes--

> TERESA You'd better go. Tell your mother hello.

Ness nods, not quite meeting her eyes. She leaves, closing the door behind her. Teresa stands still. She looks to the sky and a faint smile grazes her lips.

INT. NESS' CAR -- NIGHT

Ness drives home, barely holding it together. She glances at the passenger seat, where the photo album rests. Waiting.

INT. NESS' BEDROOM -- LATER

Ness walks into her room, throwing her stuff on the ground. She takes the photo album and sits on her bed. She lifts the cover of the album... then closes it again. Beat. Opens again... closes again.

Finally, she sighs and opens it up. Her face floods with emotion as she sees

THE PICTURES

Birthdays, pageants, pajama parties. Ness and Amber dressed in tuxedos. A chubby Amber in a Supergirl outfit, Ness as Catwoman. The Kendricks and the Turners in a silly-looking portrait that would be cheesy if they weren't so earnestly happy.

Ness runs her fingers across the images, taking the memories into her hands as if to relive them. Page after page of a past forgotten.

And Ness cries.

It's the epitome of catharsis. She's not a cheerleader. She's not an outsider. She's just a scared girl who lost a best friend she never knew she still cared about. And it fucking sucks. Finally, the tears subside. Ness turns to

THE LAST PAGE

Which has no pictures on it.

Disappointment fills Ness' face. She is about to close the album when she sees

AMBER'S FACE

Or rather, an edge of a PICTURE of Amber's face. Part of a picture tucked discretely into the fold between the page and the back cover.

ANGLE: UNDER NESS

As she pulls the PICTURE out. It's BACK is to CAMERA so we cannot see what it is of. We only see that it is MISSING ITS OTHER HALF-- the jagged tear lines at the edge of the photo attest to this.

We stay UNDER NESS as she stares at the photo. And it's pretty damn scary because

NESS' FACE

Is morphing into a mask of terror. Her eyes widen, practically bulging. The smile leaves her lips and she is suddenly seriously horrified.

We CRANE ABOVE HER, then PUSH IN ON THE PICTURE, and we know why: in the picture, below her smiling face, we can see that

AMBER TURNER IS VERY, VERY PREGNANT.

The picture trembles in Ness' hand. She leaps up and bolts out of the room.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PAGE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Page sits at his desk, looking beat. Ness bursts in, photo in hand. She slams it onto his desk.

NESS Amber was pregnant!

Page looks at the picture, incredulous.

PAGE

Whaaat?

NESS (to herself) Oh God... "His daddy's eyes"... PAGE (completely confused) Who's daddy? NESS Something Amber's sister said! When I went over there I saw Amber's baby brother. Or, who I thought was her brother... PAGE (getting it) No way... NESS And I noticed that the baby --Dixon... I noticed that he had these amazing blue eyes. And Misty, Amber's sister--She told me Amber used to say the baby had his daddy's eyes. PAGE But I questioned Mr. Turner, he--NESS Has brown eyes, yeah. But that's 'cause we just assumed the baby was theirs. PAGE But if it was Amber's... NESS (putting it together) That makes total sense. She moves away to Denver. Everything goes fine, then she gets a guy. PAGE One of the Cheerleaders said there might have been one. NESS Yeah. So Amber hooks up with him. PAGE Gets knocked up.

NESS (makes a face) Yeah. And that would explain Amber's mom saying she had--

PAGE (air quotes) "Trouble".

NESS

So she has the baby. Passes it off as her parents'. Loses all the baby weight, and moves back here.

PAGE

And overcompensates for her sinful wedlock baby by becoming the most popular girl in school.

NESS

But what about the dad? What if... (beat) What if he followed her back?

PAGE She took his blue-eyed boy away, and that didn't sit well with him.

NESS

So he follows her back to Morgan and just when she's at the top of her game--

PAGE He blows her belly open.

Their eyes meet. Beat.

NESS That's a pretty convincing theory.

PAGE But what about the other murders?

NESS Maybe he wanted to get back at her friends?

PAGE

Why?

NESS They represented her new life. And her old life... basically her life without him. And he couldn't deal.

PAGE

But the M.O. doesn't fit. Amber was shot. The other girls were... there was a baton for Marcy. And there was that Bedazzler for Tiff. So I don't think we should rule out the possibility of two killers.

NESS

(skeptical) Two killers? This is Morgan, we don't even have two Burger Kings!

PAGE

But think about it. Amber's death was clearly related to the baby. Shot in the stomach. But the others... those murders all seem to be linked to their pageant talents, right?

Ness is silent. Page's eyes light up.

PAGE (CONT'D) But wait...

NESS

What?

PAGE (slowly) There is a link there. Someone who was in Denver and the pageants... (beat) And guess what color his eyes are?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PRISON CELL -- MINUTES LATER

BRIGHT BLUE EYES

Are all that we see. PULL OUT to reveal they belong to Eliot, who sits in his cell. Page and Ness enter, Ness looking quite puzzled.

PAGE

(brash)

I'd offer you a cigar, but I think it'll set off an alarm.

ELIOT

A cigar?

PAGE To congratulate the proud Papa.

NESS (to Page) Wait, what are you--

PAGE Guess we know what you were doing in Denver.

Ness is still confused.

ELIOT What are you talking about?

NESS

Detective--

PAGE

Amber Turner. You did her hair in pageants. You liked her, right? So when she moved away, so did you. To Denver. And you preyed on her low self-esteem and then... well, you know the rest. You knocked her up and when she ditched you, you shot her in--

NESS Detective! Eliot can't be the father!

PAGE

Why not?

Ness looks to Eliot, then back at Page.

NESS 'Cause he's gay!

Beat. Page raises an eyebrow. Ness nods seriously, until:

ELIOT

Um. No, I'm not.

Ness turns to him, mortified.

NESS You're not--

ELIOT

Nope.

NESS Then what about the hair--

ELIOT

Nope.

NESS And the clogs--

ELIOT

(testy)

Vanessa.

Beat.

NESS

Oh.

PAGE

But if you're not gay, then who's to say you're not the father?

ELIOT

Because I'm not! I didn't even know Amber was in Denver until I saw her at a hair salon.

NESS

Then why didn't you want to tell me what happened in Denver?

ELIOT

I promised Amber I wouldn't. Before her family found out, I was the only one she told about the baby.

NESS So you were like some guardian angel?

ELIOT If you want to put it that way. PAGE (matter-of-fact) All right. If you're not the father, then who is?

Several beats.

ELIOT (lamely) I never met him.

Eliot turns to Ness. His eyes plead.

ELIOT (CONT'D) Nessie, I would do anything for you girls. I was just trying to protect Amber!

NESS From what?

ELIOT From her ex. Because from what she said, he was psychotic and mean and possessive as all get-out. So if she moved back here, it was to get away from him. Not me. (beat) Look, your theory is spot-on, but you've got the wrong man. Which means that Ol' Blue Eyes is still out there somewhere...

Page and Ness fall into silence.

EXT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Page and Ness stand outside the station entrance.

NESS I honestly don't know what to think.

PAGE

What do you mean?

NESS

I'm still having a hard time buying Eliot as a killer... maybe just because I don't want to believe it. But at the same time--

PAGE It all matches up. NESS Circumstantially. (beat) I mean, for one, the whole gay thing? PAGE He said he wasn't--NESS But there are signs. Him calling you "honey" would be one of them. Plus, hairdresser... so that's all--PAGE Circumstantial? Beat. Ness considers this for a moment, before: NESS Touché. PAGE They taught us not to jump to conclusions. NESS Then why'd you arrest Eliot in the first place? PAGE (sheepish) Because honestly, there were no other leads. The other murders-they're more gruesome, but Amber's is the only one with more clues, more background... and even then, it's not like there's much to go on.

Ness sighs, uneasy.

NESS There might be more to go on.

PAGE What do you mean? NESS At Amber's house. I got the photo album... but Jessica got Amber's diary.

PAGE (intrigued) You think there might be something in there about Denver?

NESS

Amber always kept a diary. It was more Elle Woods than Sylvia Plath, though, so I'm not sure if there's anything worth reading into.

PAGE So then maybe we should make sure.

NESS What, get a warrant for it?

PAGE I was thinking more along the lines of you stealing it off Jessica.

Ness rolls her eyes at this new mission -- here we go again ...

INT. MORGAN HIGH GYM -- NIGHT

The Cheerleaders are warming up, stretching, etc. Jessica stands near the bleachers and looks through her DUFFEL BAG. Ness walks by, stealing a glance at Jessica going through the bag. We see a GLIMPSE of what might be the DIARY in the bag. Jessica puts down the bag and walks away.

Ness slowly walks toward Jessica's bag. She looks around to make sure no one's watching, then reaches inside... sure enough, the DIARY is in there. Ness pulls it out when

A HAND

Grabs her arm. We see that it's Jessica. Pissed as hell.

JESSICA Sticky fingers much?

NESS (awwwwkward) Jess... hey...

JESSICA What are you doing? NESS Nothing, I'm just--

JESSICA Stealing?

Ness doesn't answer. She puts the diary back down and starts walking away. Jessica follows her and grabs her arm again.

JESSICA (CONT'D) Oh, you're not walking away from me. What were you trying to do?

NESS Jess, look. I need to read that diary. It's... (quieter, so no one hears) It's about the murders.

Jessica pales.

JESSICA You really are a freak. What, are you a detective now?

NESS I'm trying to find out who killed her.

JESSICA The killer's in jail!

NESS No, not "the killer". Eliot. Eliot's in jail. Do you really think he could murder anyone?

Jessica shrugs. It pains her to talk about this.

JESSICA

People change.

She turns to leave when Ness grabs her shoulder. Jessica whips around, rage in her eyes.

JESSICA (CONT'D) Stop it! Just stay out of this.

NESS

I just--

JESSICA (dead serious) Let. It. Go. One more word and you're off the team. I mean it, Vanessa.

Ness bristles. She's about to risk it all and say that one more word when a SCREAM pierces the air. She and Jessica look to the gym entrance, where DELILAH stands. Her white uniform is stained in BLOOD, and she's shaking.

> JESSICA (CONT'D) (very concerned) Dee, what happened?

Delilah tries to speak but the words don't come.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Delilah!

DELILAH (a jumble) I-- there was a-- I was walking... Here, and then... I was attacked. Something... someone, tried to--(tears flowing) He had a knife...

Delilah dissolves into hysterics. Some cheerleaders crowd around her. Jessica stands still, completely shocked.

NESS What was that about the killer being in jail?

Jessica turns to meet Ness' gaze, but says nothing.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ness sits across from Dr. Milch.

MILCH It seems like you've had an eventful week.

NESS Yeah. Delilah's still pretty shaken up, but... this means the killer's still out there.

MILCH (delicately) You know, I've said this before... (MORE) MILCH (CONT'D) I really feel it's best to leave all this to the police.

NESS I have to help.

MILCH

Why?

Ness doesn't know what to say. Beat, then finally:

NESS 'Cause I do. I mean, does there have to be a reason?

MILCH

It helps.

NESS

Okay, how about, to help distract me from this awful Homecoming routine we're doing? It's so ridiculous, you should see it.

MILCH

I plan to.

Ness furrows her brow in confusion.

MILCH (CONT'D) I'm coming to the game.

NESS

Really?

MILCH

It seems to be the talk of the town. I don't know many people here, so... I think it's a good chance for me to-- (realizing) Well, that's neither here nor there. Besides, I want to see what's been keeping you from attending our sessions. I hope it's worth it.

NESS Oh, it's worthy. Of what, I'm not sure, but... you'll be entertained.

MILCH Any plans for after the game? NESS

Yeah, there's a party at Goldie's cabin up in Fowler Woods after. And yes, I'm dreading it.

MILCH Because of the murderer?

NESS Because of the socializing.

Milch smiles.

MILCH

Nice to see some of the old you is still in there.

Ness gets up and grabs her coat.

NESS I have to go... there's something I have to do before the game tonight.

MILCH Which would be...?

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- EVENING

NESS (V.O.) "There's this bridge that's burning. I kind of have to put it out."

Ness walks up to the entrance of an nice-looking apartment building. We hear a DOORBELL RING as we GO TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Spencer walks across a spacious but messy apartment. Boxes litter the floor, and a thin layer of dust covers everything. Spencer opens the door to find Ness standing there.

SPENCER (gruff) Hey...

He walks back into the apartment without meeting her look. Ness takes a few cautious steps in and looks around.

NESS So... looks like we never got around to decorating this place. SPENCER I'll get to it some day.

NESS Spence, you've been here a year.

SPENCER Yeah, but I'm thinking it doesn't matter.

Ness gives him a quizzical look.

SPENCER (CONT'D) (explaining) Dad's threatening to pull the plug on my bachelor pad aesthetic. Says I didn't live up to my part of the deal.

NESS Oh, boo hoo, Spence. The mere fact that your dad lets you live alone wherever you want is something to be grateful for.

SPENCER Well it's only 'cause he can't stand living with me.

Ness takes a deep breath. She's been dreading this.

NESS

So here's the deal. I want you to come to the game. I want you to see what I do. I want you to live in the world for a bit. It's not so bad out there, and the sidelines? Kind of overrated.

SPENCER Why are you so amped on me coming?

NESS (calm) Because if you don't, you're out of my life.

SPENCER (shocked) So what, it's an ultimatum now?

NESS Seems like the time for it. She heads to the door, then turns around. They stare at each other for several beats. Ness speaks kindly:

NESS (CONT'D) I really, really want you to be there. But I understand if you don't come. And I hope you'll understand if...

She trails off, then nods. She turns and leaved. Spencer watches her go, apprehensive. He wasn't expecting this.

INT. STAIRWELL -- MOMENTS LATER

Ness walks down the steps. Her face is contorted into a grimace-- she's trying to keep from crying. Amidst the murders and investigations, this is still the hardest thing she's had to do. She takes a moment to rest against a wall, breathing deep. Just as she's ready to go on, her PHONE RINGS. She picks up:

> NESS (hoarse)

Hello?

The following is INTERCUT WITH:

INT. POLICE STATION -- SAME TIME

Page stands in the cell room, talking into his PHONE. We CANNOT SEE if the cell is occupied.

PAGE

The diary?

NESS No luck there. Jess threatened to kick me off the team if I went snooping one more time.

PAGE Well find a way. Tonight.

NESS I can't, it's Homecoming.

PAGE Then after the game.

NESS We're all going to this party at Goldie's cabin in Fowler Woods. PAGE A cabin in the woods? Did you cartwheel away your last brain cell?

NESS

What?

PAGE Just after another attack, you guys decide to head off to a secluded location and drink? Wait, are you maybe also providing a selection of knives at the door?

NESS

Look, life goes on! I don't even want to go, but someone has to watch them. Unless you want to do your job and send a police escort?

PAGE

I can't. Fowler Woods isn't in our jurisdiction-- I have to call Englewood County PD and they can send someone... if they ever get off their asses...

NESS

Well hey, why should we worry? I mean, at least according to you, the killer's behind bars.

PAGE (regretful) That's where you're wrong.

NESS What do you mean? Is this about your "two killers" theory again?

PAGE Partially. But also-- we just released Eliot.

NESS (stunned) You did?

PAGE A few minutes ago.

The lack of evidence, plus the recent attack on that cheerleader... we can't hold him on much anymore. NESS I... I think--PAGE Don't think. Do. Get the diary. We need it now more than ever. I'll see you at the game. NESS You're coming? PAGE Of course I am. NESS Everyone's so eager ... INT. POLICE STATION -- CONTINUOUS Page hangs up. He turns to Eliot and starts to say something, then stops. Beat, then: PAGE Stay in town, okay? I'm not done with you. ELIOT (bitter) I'm at your beck and call, Detective. Page looks like he wants to apologize, but he doesn't. Eliot walks out of the room, shoulders drooped. Page turns to the door and yells: PAGE Tammy! Get Englewood County on the line and tell them I need some guys up at the cabins in Fowler Woods! INT. POLICE STATION -- MAIN LOBBY -- CONTINUOUS TAMMY Sure thing!

He looks to his side, and we PAN across the room to reveal Eliot out of the cell. A POLICEMAN removes his handcuffs.

PAGE (CONT'D)

98.

She picks up her phone and begins to dial, but is interrupted when Eliot comes up to her desk.

ELIOT I'm here for my things.

TAMMY Of course, Mr. Toile.

She opens in a drawer and pulls out a hat and coat. He puts the coat on.

TAMMY (CONT'D) So... what are you gonna do first now that you're out?

Eliot thinks for a few moments.

ELIOT Maybe find a church.

TAMMY I would think after a stint in here you'd be all out of confessions.

ELIOT (chuckles) Not why I'm going.

TAMMY Oh... well, what about after that?

ELIOT (musing) You know... I hear the woods are nice this time of night...

He puts his hat on and walks out the door. Tammy watches him go, slightly creeped. She looks back at her phone-- "what was I supposed to do?"... but shrugs and goes back to work.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- NIGHT

It's total HOMECOMING MADNESS. The FOOTBALL GAME is in full play. WE SEE GLIMPSES OF THE GAME, AUDIENCE MEMBERS-- among them Tom sitting in the bleachers, Kendra chattering on her cell phone, Page standing near the entrance surveying the area, and Milch sitting by herself in the bleachers, awkwardly picking at some cotton candy. INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SAME TIME

Excitement buzzes in the air as the cheerleaders stretch, put on uniforms, etc. Ness and Goldie enter and Goldie goes off to a locker. Ness looks around the room before setting her sights on Deena. She nods to herself and heads over to her.

DEENA

Hey, are you pumped? This is gonna be amazing, people are gonna talk about us for, like, ever!

NESS 'Cause that's what's important.

DEENA I know, right?

NESS

Sure. So, about that diary...

DEENA

Uh, you should really ask Jess about it. I saw what happened last time.

NESS

No, I don't want to read it. I just was curious about what it might say. About Denver.

DEENA

(avoiding) I don't really know much.

NESS But you know something...

DEENA

(under pressure) I just know that it was a bad time.

NESS

Because of a guy?

DEENA

Yeah-- wait, you know about that?

NESS (cautiously) Sort of? DEENA How much do you know?

NESS How much do you think I know?

DEENA Vanessa, no trippy mind games, please.

NESS I just want to make sure we know as much as each other, I don't want to tell you stuff you aren't supposed to know.

DEENA Oh, I <u>so</u> know more than you! I'm me. I know, like, everything. She met this guy, his name was--

JESSICA (0.S.) (yelling) Alright, everyone listen up!

Deena stops talking. She leans into Ness' ear and whispers:

DEENA We'll talk later.

Ness' face fills with epic frustration. So close! They turn their attention to Jessica, who stands at the front.

JESSICA It's showtime in a few minutes, so I wanted to make sure you're all ready.

She surveys the room and nods in approval.

JESSICA (CONT'D) I also wanted to say a few words. As captain, that's my job, but this time...

She pulls Amber's diary from her bag.

JESSICA (CONT'D) I'm gonna let someone else do the talking.

Jessica opens the diary to a page and begins reading.

JESSICA (CONT'D) "I got elected captain today. I wish I could say I was surprised, but I wasn't. Not because I think I deserve it... but because Deena totally told me in that note she passed me in French class."

Jessica clears her throat and gives a pointed look at Deena, who is mortified.

JESSICA (CONT'D) "And while I'm not surprised, I am incredibly grateful. Because these girls rock. I've known them forever and I could not be prouder of the women they've become. People underestimate cheerleaders because they think all we do is bounce and jiggle. They pass us off as giggly whores... and I say screw them. I say that my girls are amazing both on and off the gym floor, and anyone who says different is smoking a freak kind of crack."

Jessica glares at Ness, who looks down in embarrassment. She continues reading, her voice filling with emotion. Ness looks up at her and in this moment it is AMBER WHO SPEAKS:

AMBER

And so here I am. I've changed so much over the past few years, and it's been hard. So I'm glad that I have this new mission. I'm also scared shitless. But I know my girls will have my back. In a literal sense, because I think I'm on the bottom of the pyramid this season. But also in the other way. And I couldn't be happier to be at the bottom. These girls make me feel like I'm on top.

The diary closes, and suddenly it's Jessica who holds it again. She looks up at the girls-- her eyes are filled with tears.

JESSICA And she's right. Now go.

The girls stay still for a moment... then leap into action.

DEENA Shit! I forgot my portrait!

Jessica puts the diary back into her bag.

JESSICA

What?

DEENA I left it in my car! I can go get it, I--

JESSICA We're on in two minutes, you're not gonna make it! Damn it, Deena, you're borderline retarded sometimes!

> DEENA (hurt)

You don't have to be such a bitch about it, Jess.

JESSICA What did you call me?

Deena puts on her bravest face.

DEENA A bitch. 'Cause that's what you are, and I'm sick of it.

JESSICA Are you crazy?

DEENA No, I'm just sick of being your-shit, what was it? (thinks, then) Whipping boy! I'm gonna go get my portrait and I'll come out onto the field when I do. But after that... things are gonna change.

Deena's kind of amazing right now. She smiles, and it's not the smile of a lackey anymore. She's almost her own woman. She turns and leaves.

Ness beams with pride at Deena, before going over to Goldie.

NESS Goldie... I have a favor to ask you. It's big. (MORE) NESS (CONT'D) And kind of dangerous, but I can't do it myself.

GOLDIE Ness, spill. I'll do it.

Ness takes a deep breath and begins to speak as we GO TO:

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- MINUTES LATER

The audience buzzes with excitement as the FOOTBALL PLAYERS leave the field.

PUSH IN on the bleachers. Spencer slowly walks up and takes a seat. He doesn't want to be here. But he has to be. The noise is silenced as an ANNOUNCER'S VOICE rings out:

> ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (cheerful) "And now, the Morgan High Cheerleading Squad presents a dance tribute to their fallen teammates, whose cheerleading careers were tragically cut short due to their brutal murders."

Silence blankets the field as everyone waits. Several beats. And finally... WE HEAR THE TWANGY GUITAR INTRO to "DON'T FEAR THE REAPER" BY THE BLUE OYSTER CULT.

The music blares from the loudspeakers as AUDIENCE MEMBERS look puzzled. As the COWBELL kicks in, the cheerleaders come out onto the field, sans Deena. And it's pretty trippy because in their hands are GIANT FACE PORTRAITS OF THE DEAD CHEERLEADERS. The photos wave and sway as the girls dance, giving the illusion that the dead girls are dancing too.

As the girls dance, we PAN ACROSS THE AUDIENCE TO SEE

TOM-- completely mystified.

KENDRA-- Crying hysterically into a handkerchief.

SPENCER-- Laughing his ass off. This couldn't be funnier.

Finally, we PUSH IN on the dancing to see NESS. She holds a GIANT PORTRAIT OF MARCY and looks like she hates life. But she'll keep dancing anyway.

As the FIRST VERSE ENDS and THE SECOND BEGINS, we GO TO:

"DON'T FEAR THE REAPER" still plays as Deena walks into the room, holding a giant portrait of a cheerleader. In a hurry, she puts her purse in her bag and heads for the door when

DOLLFACE

Appears in the doorway! Deena stands stock still, rigid with fright. Dollface produces a KNIFE from his pocket and LUNGES for Deena, who snaps out of her shock and runs across the room. She picks up a BAG and THROWS it at Dollface, who swats it aside and lunges forward again.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

The girls dance, smiles bright on their faces.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SAME TIME

Deena runs from the back of the room. Dollface pursues and GRABS the back of her hair, pulling her into his clutches. He RAISES THE KNIFE--

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

And the girls keep dancing ...

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SAME TIME

As the knife PLUNGES into Deena's shoulder. If the MUSIC weren't so loud we'd hear her SCREAM. She pushes forward and escapes Dollface's grasp, running out the door. Dollface pursues.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

Spencer laughs hysterically.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- SAME TIME

Deena speeds out of the locker room, bleeding heavily but not giving up hope.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

The dance builds to a frenzied pitch, with the girls assembling their portraits in vertical pyramid.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- SAME TIME

Deena is about to reach the door to the field when Dollface JUMPS UP BEHIND HER and DRAGS HER to the floor.

We can't see them anymore, but we DO SEE the KNIFE as it COMES UP AND DOWN AGAIN AND AGAIN--

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

The pyramid is assembled and the girls stand in a final position, smiling. There is utter SILENCE in the crowd.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- SAME TIME

CLOSE ON DEENA'S FACE as the life slowly drains from her bloodied eyes. They close, and AS THE SONG ENDS, so does Deena's life.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM -- SAME TIME

The crowd ERUPTS into CHEERS AND APPLAUSE.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- LATER

The girls crowd into the locker room post-routine. Everyone's excited, but Jessica is pissed.

JESSICA

Where's Deena?

WE MOVE through the room until we find Ness and Goldie. They speak in whispering tones.

NESS Are you sure you're up to this? Because I can--

GOLDIE Dude, don't worry about it.

She pulls keys from her pocket.

GOLDIE (CONT'D) Here are the keys to the cabin, everything should be set up.

Ness pockets the keys.

NESS Thank you so much for this.

GOLDIE

No problem.

Ness grabs her bag and heads out the door, looking back at Goldie as she goes.

Ness weaves through the CROWD. She stops when she sees Page standing near the parking lot. She goes up to him.

PAGE

Is there any way I can convince you not to go to this party?

NESS You could arrest me for no good reason.

Page rolls his eyes.

NESS (CONT'D) I'll be fine. And if psycho killer shows up, I have your number.

PAGE You need more than that...

He's lost in thought. Ness tries to interpret his expression, but to no avail. Finally, Page reaches into his holster and pulls out his GUN. He extends it toward Ness, who backs away.

> NESS No no no! I can't take that.

> > PAGE

Why not?

NESS Because then I'll have to use it! That's how these things work.

PAGE (struggling to justify) I gotta stay here, so I can't keep you safe, and... well, those Englewood guys are dumb as shit, so... (hapless) It's the only way.

NESS I don't even know how to--

PAGE (demonstrates on the gun) You unlock the safety and pull the trigger. It's like riding a bike.
NESS Bikes don't put holes in people.

PAGE You know what I mean. (beat) Ness, please.

Ness sighs, then slowly takes the gun from Page's hands. She gingerly drops it into her bag and zips it up. She looks back up at Page.

NESS Thanks. I guess.

PAGE

I hope you don't need it.

They stare at each other for a few moments. Then they move in, as if to hug each other. Page stops before they get too close and extends his hand to her. Ness shakes it. He nods at her, and she walks away. Page watches her go, and through his gruff exterior, you can see his eyes are filled with fear.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- LATER

It's empty, but all the girls' stuff remains. After a few beats, Goldie enters, looking cautious.

GOLDIE

Hello...?

No answer. Goldie walks across the rows of lockers.

GOLDIE (CONT'D) (re: lockers) Jessica... Jess, where are you...?

She reaches a locker and tries to open it-- it's unlocked. She smiles as she opens the door and rifles through it. Finally, she pulls out AMBER'S DIARY. She holds it carefully in her hands and looks at it.

> GOLDIE (CONT'D) Ness, I hope this is worth it. I really, really--

But she stops talking when MUSIC begins playing. It's quiet and muffled-- as if coming from INSIDE one of the lockers. Goldie looks curious as she follows the sound-- it's coming from the VERY END of the row of lockers. Goldie listens as she walks along the rows, and it becomes clear to her that the song is coming from the LAST LOCKER. She walks up to it and puts her ear up to the door, completely confused. Finally, she reaches out for the handle and OPENS THE LOCKER, only to have

DEENA'S CORPSE

Fall straight out of the locker onto the floor. She's bloodied and stiff... and "A WHOLE NEW WORLD" plays on a TAPE RECORDER that's been SHOVED IN HER MOUTH.

Goldie SCREAMS her head off, and can you blame her? Still holding the diary, she RUNS out of the locker room and into

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Where she keeps running. She looks behind her, as if expecting someone to follow, which is why she SLAMS into

SPENCER

Who stands in front of her. He's bewildered, and Goldie is too freaked to talk.

SPENCER Uh... what's going on?

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL -- LATER

Page strides out the doors and down the main steps. Around him, two POLICE CARS are parked and POLICEMEN take notes, talk to a JANITOR, etc. Page walks over to Spencer and Goldie, who stand near the steps.

> PAGE Alright, miss, you're safe now.

GOLDIE What about Deena? Is she-- is she...

Page nods sadly. Goldie stifles a sob. Spencer awkwardly pats her on the shoulder.

PAGE (to Spencer) And who are you? SPENCER I found her. I'm Spencer.

PAGE

Who?

SPENCER Spencer... Ness' friend?

Page shakes his head-- doesn't recall hearing about him.

PAGE (to Goldie) But you're Goldie, right?

Goldie nods.

PAGE (CONT'D) Nice meeting you, Ness talks about you a lot.

Goldie smiles, slightly reassured. Spencer laughs bitterly to himself.

PAGE (CONT'D) So we've gotten everything we need from you, Goldie... you should probably head on home. (to Spencer) Take her?

SPENCER (incredulous) Me?

PAGE Yeah, you. Got a problem with helping a girl out?

Spencer looks like he does, but he relents.

SPENCER My car's over there.

PAGE (to Goldie) You get some rest now. Just go home and go to--

GOLDIE I want to go to the party. Spencer and Page exchange glances before returning to Goldie.

GOLDIE

Yeah.

PAGE You don't think maybe you're a little too shaken up?

GOLDIE I am entirely shaken up. Which is why I'd rather be at my cabin with my friends than home alone. Dad's

on a business trip, so... PAGE

Suit yourself. (to Spencer) Get her there?

Spencer stares Page down before finally nodding. He starts walking to his car, saying to Goldie over his shoulder:

SPENCER

Let's go.

Goldie follows him. Page watches them go then pulls out his CELL PHONE.

INT. CABIN -- MOMENTS LATER

The PARTY rages. CHEERLEADERS still in uniform dance, JOCKS take shots, and MUSIC pulses. WE MOVE THROUGH the chaos until we find Ness seated on a couch. In uniform and very much alone. When her phone RINGS, she seems almost grateful.

NESS (into phone) What's up?

PAGE (over phone) Deena's dead.

Ness almost drops her phone. She steadies herself.

NESS

How--

PAGE Your friend Goldie found her. NESS (shocked) Is she alright? Is she--PAGE She's fine. Fine, and on her way

up to the party. Said she didn't wanna be left alone. Your friend took her.

NESS Which friend?

PAGE Surly-looking type, I forget his name.

Ness thinks, then shakes her head-- it couldn't be Spencer.

NESS Good... but I'm more worried about who else might be paying a visit.

PAGE Stay inside and lock the doors. I have to finish up here, but I'm coming up afterwards. And Ness... don't tell anyone yet. You don't want to start a panic.

Ness looks around, worried.

NESS Get here as soon as you can.

INT. SPENCER'S CAR -- NIGHT

Spencer drives and Goldie sits in the passenger seat. They both stare straight ahead of them. It's too awkward for words. Of which there are none, for several beats. Then:

> GOLDIE So you're Spencer?

SPENCER Pretty much for a living.

GOLDIE Kind of weird that we've never met. SPENCER That's probably because I'm kind of weird. Ness doesn't want that side getting out.

GOLDIE Oh, please, Ness is plenty weird. That's why I love her.

SPENCER I thought cheerleaders didn't do weird.

GOLDIE I'm not just a cheerleader.

Spencer looks at her uniform and laughs to himself. Beat.

GOLDIE (CONT'D) Well anyway, thanks so much for this, it's... it means a lot to me. (no response from Spencer) I'm sure it will for Ness, too.

SPENCER You think I'm doing this just to get back into her good graces?

GOLDIE Not just. But it's a big part.

Spencer smiles, impressed.

SPENCER You're perceptive.

GOLDIE No, you're just really obvious.

SPENCER Well, I have my secrets.

GOLDIE Oh, like what?

Spencer turns to her, grinning.

SPENCER What if I'm the killer?

Several tense beats... then Goldie laughs.

GOLDIE Not possible.

SPENCER

Why not?

GOLDIE

Because you don't seem like you'd waste time on a cheerleader. If you were gonna kill someone, it'd be personal.

SPENCER Glad to hear I'm a murder elitist.

Goldie laughs.

GOLDIE

So what's your deal? Are you just, like, Ness' creepy older friend?

SPENCER

You really wanna know?

GOLDIE

It's either that or totally awkward silence.

SPENCER Fine. Ask away.

GOLDIE Um... okay, for starters, where are you from?

SPENCER Around. I move a lot.

GOLDIE Like where?

SPENCER Utah, Colorado... Mexico, for a while.

GOLDIE Cool. Why'd you move so much?

SPENCER

I get restless.

GOLDIE Well, I hope you stay in Morgan a little longer. Ness really needs you.

Spencer smiles -- it's genuine this time. They lapse into comfortable silence, until:

GOLDIE (CONT'D) We probably shouldn't tell anyone about Deena... right?

SPENCER What, you don't wanna harsh anyone's party groove?

GOLDIE No. Well, yes, it's my first party and I want it to be gloom-free. But I figure, the killer's back in Morgan... so let them have their fun.

EXT. CABIN -- NIGHT

GOLDIE (V.O.) "We won't worry them unless they're actually in danger."

THROUGH THE WINDOWS of the cabin, we see the party. PULL OUT until the entire cabin is in view, and then MORE until a SILHOUETTED FIGURE appears. As we TRACK AROUND him, we take in the BLACK HAT and COAT that reveal him to be ELIOT. He watches the party for a few moments... then nods and stalks away into the woods.

INT. CABIN -- KITCHEN -- LATER

The kitchen is empty. BOTTLES litter the counter tops. Ness enters, looking wary. She goes over to the BACK DOOR and reaches down to LOCK IT. She locks it.. and goes still as she senses something.

She slowly turns... to find TYLER (football jock from way earlier) standing behind her. Ness jumps, relieved.

NESS

Hi!

TYLER What are you doing? NESS Nothing, just... I don't want... wind. To enter.

Tyler nods, not really getting it.

TYLER

So I gotta say, you looked pretty slammin' out on the field tonight.

NESS

Thanks?

She's not good at the flirting thing.

NESS (CONT'D) You, also, were... good. With the throwing and catching.

TYLER

(laughing)
I try. So, any reason why you're
not dancing?

NESS I can only do the Macarena.

TYLER You're funny. I like funny chicks.

NESS I'm not a "chick".

TYLER My bad. I meant "babe".

NESS (eyes rolling) Did that really just happen?

TYLER I'm not good with words, so enough with the distractions. Why aren't you dancing?

Ness smiles-- she's not immune to his lunkhead charm. She lets go of the doorknob and is about to respond when a KNOCKING AT THE BACK DOOR interrupts her. She looks back through the glass pane to see Goldie and Spencer standing outside. Spencer wears a BACKPACK. Ness turns to Tyler.

NESS

That's why.

TYLER I'll catch you later...

Ness watches him go, and for a moment, she seems sad about it. But she shakes herself out of it and opens the door. Goldie enters first. Ness envelops her in a hug.

> NESS I'm so, so sorry you had to--

GOLDIE I'll be okay. I'm glad you're here. I'm gonna go clean up a bit.

She walks away, leaving Ness to look at the doorway again. Spencer stands at the threshold, hesitant. Beat.

SPENCER It's not a party without awkward crashers.

NESS You brought Goldie up here?

SPENCER

Yeah.

NESS (warm) Spence...

She hugs him.

NESS (CONT'D) Just when I think I've got you all figured out...

Spencer gently unwraps her arms from him. They bask in their renewed bond until Goldie returns. She goes up to Ness.

GOLDIE I got what you needed.

Ness realizes what she's talking about.

NESS (to Spencer) Sit tight, Spence... I've got to take care of something. SPENCER Wait, what am I supposed to do?

NESS

Um, mingle?

SPENCER Right. I'll just go mingle myself up a cocktail.

He goes over to the counter and starts fixing himself a DRINK. Ness and Goldie leave.

INT. BATHROOM -- MINUTES LATER

Ness sits on the edge of the bathtub while Goldie stands by the door, holding it shut. Ness takes a deep breath and opens the diary. Her eyes move across the pages, taking Amber's words in. WE HEAR DISTANT MURMURS OF AMBER'S VOICE as Ness reads.

> NESS Here it is...

> > GOLDIE

What?

NESS (reading) "I was at Weight Watchers today at the mall when I ran into Mr. T."

GOLDIE Not... actual Mr. T.?

NESS No, it's probably a nickname. Either that or things just got a

whole lot weirder. (reading again) "He told me to ditch the meeting and go get ice cream with him. It's kind of nice-- having a friend that's not always on my back about the weight thing".

Ness looks up, considering this.

NESS (CONT'D) It could be Eliot, his last name starts with a T...

Ness flips the pages and reads a later entry.

NESS (CONT'D)

"It's nice when we're always alone, but I feel like T. doesn't want to share me with anyone else. I like spending time with him but I'm used to having so many friends back home... I miss Vaness-"

Ness goes quiet, reading that part silently.

NESS (CONT'D) Okay, so Eliot doesn't want the girls back here to know... which makes sense, since they knew him.

She flips the pages more.

NESS (CONT'D)

"I told T. I was pregnant. He was actually really happy-- he said we had to keep the baby. It didn't go how I expected, I'm kind of worried about what to tell Mom and Dad..."

More page flippage.

NESS (CONT'D)

"T. hit me today. I told him I was telling my parents about the baby and he freaked-- like it was our little secret and I betrayed him. He's been really moody recently, problems with his family or something ... I'm kind of thinking this isn't gonna work." (stops reading) There we go. (keeps reading) "I broke down and told Mom and Dad about T. and how he's been following me. They want to meet him, maybe even press charges, but I said I wanted to move away. They said they'd think about it ... "

Ness closes the diary, her head spinning.

GOLDIE You think that Eliot guy really did it? NESS

How can I not? It all sort of fits. There's just... I've made all the excuses I can make. He was in Denver, he's been acting creepy, and the baby's got his eyes.

Goldie's eyes narrow. She leaves the door and begins pacing.

GOLDIE This was in Denver?

NESS

Yeah.

GOLDIE

Oh... (uneasy) You know, there's someone else who--

THE DOOR OPENS and Jessica stumbles in, clearly tipsy.

JESSICA Are there any more--

But she stops when she sees Ness holding the diary. Her eyes move between Ness and Goldie in accusatory horror.

JESSICA (CONT'D) What did you... ?

Ness rises, resigned.

NESS I had to know, Jess.

JESSICA (trembling with fury) That's it. You're dead. Everyone's gonna know what you did.

She turns and walks out the door, Ness and Goldie following.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- SAME TIME

The partiers mingle while Spencer sits on the couch and drinks. JESSICA AND NESS' VOICES APPROACHING make everyone take notice. Jessica and Ness enter, Goldie close behind. Jessica addresses the entire room:

JESSICA Guess what this bitch was doing? Just guess-- DELILAH Jess, what's going on?

JESSICA She stole Amber's diary!

Everyone turns toward Ness, Spencer included.

JESSICA (CONT'D) She thinks she's some police officer or something. The only reason she joined cheer was to pump us for information!

NESS Jess, I think you need to calm--

JESSICA

Shut up! Just shut up, Vanessa. After what you did, you don't have the right to tell me what to do.

NESS Then calm down! The only reason it came to this is because you guys are so dumb the police couldn't get anything out of you!

JESSICA God, you just don't stop! Why do you hate us so much?

NESS (incredulous) <u>I</u> hate you?

JESSICA Yes! Ever since you left the pageants, it's like you think we have some kind of disease or something. You avoid us, you make fun... and none of it's our fault!

NESS I just-- you guys just remind me of a tough time in my life and I--

JESSICA A "tough"? God, you are so melodramatic. (to the room) You know what made her quit? (MORE)

JESSICA (CONT'D) I know some of you do, but I'm sure there's people who aren't in on this little story. Everyone's in rapt attention, except Ness who is anxious. JESSICA (CONT'D) The reason Vanessa decided to go and become a huge outcasty bitch is because... (looks at Ness) She flashed the judges. Ness is horrified. It's out. JESSICA (CONT'D) Accidentally. (she laughs) That's it. One day, she was in a hurry and forgot to put on panties and oops, it was talent day. So she comes out in a little cheerleader skirt and does a cartwheel, and... well, they got to see quite a lot of her talent. Everyone stares at Ness. JESSICA (CONT'D) But that's all it was. We didn't bully her, she didn't get raped... she just couldn't handle her little malfunction and went all So before anyone rags on me crazy. for picking on poor misunderstood Ness... think about that. Ness is deeply angry. Her eyes radiate fury as she speaks: NESS (low and intense) And you know what happened after that? JESSICA What, you bought some underwear? NESS My mother shaved my head. She put all her life into the pageants, so it was too much for her. So one night, she got drunk and she-she... (tears) (MORE)

NESS (CONT'D) And then my parents split up. And you guys wouldn't talk to me at school because I'd quit... (regains composure) So you can see how a little wardrobe slip made my life fall apart.

Jessica takes this in-- she didn't know.

JESSICA (genuine) Well I'm sorry. (beat) But it doesn't give you the right to come onto the team and manipulate us all. So why don't you be a good little outcast and keep your conspiracy theories to yourself?

NESS (coldly) Deena's dead.

Shock ripples through the crowd.

NESS (CONT'D) And the supposed killer, Eliot-- he just got released. So you can think it's a conspiracy theory or you can think I'm insane, but the fact remains that you're all in danger now. Now I know this is scary, but we should be fine if we just stay here and--

THE LIGHTS GO OUT IN THE LIVING ROOM!

The crowd goes dead silent... then they BURST INTO ACTION. Some scream, some panic, some run out the door... Ness tries to stop them.

> NESS (CONT'D) (to everyone) No, wait! Wait, you need to-- you have to stay inside!

Jessica and Delilah run out of the room, panicked. Spencer comes up to Ness and she turns to him.

NESS (CONT'D) Spence, I'm going after them. I need you to stay here in case people come back!

Ness rushes out the door, leaving Spencer alone. He surveys the empty room, unsure of what to do.

EXT. CABIN -- MOMENTS LATER

Ness rushes out the door. She stands and surveys the surrounding areas. WE HEAR CARS STARTING... people are leaving the scene. She scans the area again until she sees

TWO CHEERLEADERS

Running into the woods. Ness pursues, yelling:

NESS Jess! Delilah!

EXT. WOODS -- CONTINUOUS

Ness runs through the trees -- they're getting thicker.

NESS' POV

Delilah and Jessica run in the distance-- Ness is nearing them.

EXT. WOODS -- SAME TIME

We're with Jessica and Delilah now, who are slowing down. They reach the edge of a CLEARING enter it, stopping to catch their breath. Delilah looks back and is horrified.

> DELILAH Jess, I think someone's coming!

Jess looks back, afraid, until she sees that the PERSON approaching is just Ness.

NESS You guys need to come back to the house, it's safer there!

JESSICA Right, in the dark house with no lights?

NESS It's better than getting lost in the middle of the woods! Jess and Delilah start walking.

JESSICA I'd rather be here than back there. I think the highway is just through that clearing...

All three girls look at each other during this, so they don't notice that

ELIOT

Now stands before them. He holds a SWITCHBLADE. The girls stand still, paralyzed with fear.

ELIOT

Evening, girls.

All three SCREAM and run in the other direction. Eliot watches them go, his expression unreadable.

EXT. WOODS -- MOMENTS LATER

The girls run through the woods, yelling:

NESS We have to get back to the cabin!

DELILAH (looking back) Is he following?

JESSICA I don't care, let's just get to safety and then we'll--

She stops running suddenly when she sees something in the darkness. Ness and Delilah stop too, and they see a DARK FIGURE standing in front of them. The figure moves out into the moonlight, revealing itself to be

DOLLFACE

Big sharp knife in his hands. Ready for some carnage. He takes the girls' momentary standstill to LUNGE FORWARD, waving the knife at them. The girls begin running again, but Dollface is fast. He SWIPES the knife at them as they RUN!

CLOSE ON NESS as she runs first, terror radiating from her eyes. She pulls her CELL PHONE out of her pocket and tries to dial a number while still running. Her hands fumble and she DROPS THE PHONE. She looks back and sees that Dollface is GAINING ON THEM. No time to get the phone. She looks forward and sees

AN OLD CABIN

Just up ahead. She turns back:

NESS

This way!

Ness runs toward the cabin, Jess and Delilah following out of sheer panic. She opens the door and the three girls enter, SLAMMING THE DOOR SHUT.

HOLD on the cabin for a few beats. WE HEAR the girls WHISPERING from inside. And then... Dollface makes his appearance. He walks slowly up to the cabin door and gently turns the knob-- it's almost graceful. He carefully enters--

INT. OLD CABIN -- CONTINUOUS

BAM! Dollface is KNOCKED to the ground by a CHAIR that Ness SWINGS at his head. She looks closely at his slack figure...

DELILAH Is he... ? NESS

Out cold. (looks around the room) Delilah, get me that rope.

Delilah looks around the abandoned cabin until she sees a few scraps of ROPE on a counter. She hands them to Ness.

NESS (CONT'D) Help me get him into this chair!

The three girls lift Dollface into the chair. They look like they're ready to run at any second. Delilah grabs a ROLLING PIN from the counter and KNOCKS Dollface on the head.

DELILAH

Just in case ...

Ness would laugh if she wasn't so tense. She ties the rope tight around Dollface and then stands to address the girls:

NESS Go back to the cabin. Spencer's there, tell him to call the police.

DELILAH We can't just leave you here! NESS I lost my phone and we need to get the police. Just hurry up, I'll be fine!

Jessica looks like she wants to speak, but she doesn't. She heads out the cabin door. Delilah nods at Ness and leaves. Ness stands alone in the room, watching Dollface intently.

She approaches him slowly. Her hands reach out... and she grabs hold of the BABYDOLL MASK. And with a pull, she takes it off, revealing Dollface to be

DR MILCH

Ness' knees buckle and she very nearly falls down. She stares incredulously at Milch until Milch's EYES BURST OPEN.

DR. MILCH Don't look so surprised. I told you I'd see you tonight.

Ness jumps back.

NESS You... how could you...

DR. MILCH Because the world is a better place without them. A cleaner place.

Ness is horrified.

DR. MILCH (CONT'D) Don't act like it's not true. You said so yourself-- they're worthless.

NESS That doesn't mean you have to kill them!

DR. MILCH But how do we rid the world of evil if we don't harvest it ourselves?

This is a new twist.

NESS What are you talking about...?

DR. MILCH

I'm talking about sin. I'm talking about vanity, greed, gluttony, fornication, and many other things these girls have in spades.

NESS

(horrified realization) So everything I told you... that's how you knew where to find them? That's what made you do this?

DR. MILCH Partly. But they've always been this way.

NESS

Always?

DR. MILCH Ever since the pageants.

NESS How do you--

DR. MILCH Because I was there.

Beat.

NESS What do you mean?

Milch laughs-- it's loopy.

DR. MILCH Oh, forgive me. I forget sometimes how we've all changed since then.

Ness doesn't understand.

DR. MILCH (CONT'D) Of course, my change has been a little more radical than most. Surgery will do that to a girl.

NESS

Who are you?

Milch grins.

DR. MILCH My Christian name was Mary. Realization flows across Ness' face.

NESS Mary Marvin? DR. MILCH In the flesh. NESS But--DR. MILCH I know, I know. It's all a bit much-- the name change, the surgery... I guess you could say I still suffer the sin of vanity. (beat) But it had to be done. I realized back then that there was no way I could teach the Word of God in that environment, try as I might. Homosexuals and hairspray rarely make for a good biblical learning experience. NESS So you moved away... DR. MILCH I got smart. I got my degree in psychology. NESS You're insane. Milch looks at Ness' uniform. DR. MILCH We do what we have to do to get things done. You of all people, in your new push-up bra, should understand that. NESS So then you came back to Morgan to kill us all? DR. MILCH Not all of you. Just the ones who deserved it. (beat)

I wasn't going to kill you, if that's what you were wondering.

NESS

Why?

DR. MILCH Because you were different. You were shy, you were... a good lamb. You didn't succumb to sin. Your mother, God love her, took you out before you could.

NESS

So I was righteous enough to live.

DR. MILCH You were. Now I'm not so sure.

NESS What about Amber? She was-- she was fat and nice and not... sinful. Why'd you kill her?

Dr. Milch furrows her brow, then cocks her head curiously.

DR. MILCH Oh, but that's the thing. (beat) I didn't kill Amber.

Huh?

MILCH SHOOTS OUT OF THE SEAT AS THE ROPES FALL LOOSE FROM HER SIDES. She KNOCKS Ness onto the floor and swipes the KNIFE from the counter top. She pins Ness down.

DR. MILCH (CONT'D) I wish I could spare you too.

She BRINGS THE KNIFE DOWN and Ness ROLLS to the side, the knife narrowly missing her. She stands and runs behind a table. Milch stands on the other side-- it's a standoff.

NESS (more scared than she's letting on) The police are coming.

Milch throws her head back and cackles.

DR. MILCH I don't care. As long as I've rid the world of sin I'll gladly pay the price. (MORE) DR. MILCH (CONT'D) To do the Lord's work is to sacrifice your own life in the process.

Ness can't believe how crazy she is.

NESS See how you feel about that when Big Bertha makes you her prison bitch.

Milch angrily LUNGES FORWARD across the table, screaming:

DR. MILCH LANGUAGE, Vanessa!

Ness runs around the side of the table. Milch SLASHES ACROSS NESS' SHOULDER, leaving a shallow wound. Ness CRIES OUT IN PAIN as she runs for the door. She's almost there when

MILCH PULLS HER LEGS DOWN, making her fall flat on the floor. Ness SCREAMS as Milch drags her back. She kicks at Milch's hands until she frees her legs.

Ness LEAPS UP and RUNS OUT THE DOOR. Milch smiles giddily and pursues.

EXT. WOODS -- MOMENTS LATER

Ness bursts out the door, Milch in hot pursuit. Ness runs through the tangled woods, getting scratched up in the process. It's dark, but behind her, WE SEE THE GLINT OF MILCH'S KNIFE as it gets CLOSER.

Ness puts in one last burst of speed and moves faster... until she TRIPS AND FALLS! She scrambles to get up when Milch PINS HER DOWN again. SHE RAISES THE KNIFE...

> DR. MILCH I promise you'll be in a better place, Vanessa.

AND THE KNIFE GOES DOWN HALFWAY WHEN BAM! Milch is KICKED IN THE FACE by a SNEAKER-CLAD FOOT. She flies back onto the ground. A bewildered Ness turns around and sees

JESSICA AND DELILAH

Standing tall. Strong. Totally kick-ass. Jessica reaches an arm down to Ness.

JESSICA Need a hand? JESSICA (CONT'D) Ness, go back and call the police.

NESS

You didn't call them?!

DELILAH We heard you scream and came back.

Ness can't believe it-- but then again, she's alive because of it.

NESS Are you sure--

JESSICA We can handle it. Go!

Ness nods at Jessica. It's a nod of respect and confidence. Ness runs back in the direction of the cabin. Jessica and Delilah turn back to face Milch, who has gotten to her feet. Milch laughs at their bravery.

> DR. MILCH You really think a couple of whores can stop me?

Delilah stoops to the ground and picks up MILCH'S KNIFE. She tests its' weight in her hands.

DELILAH I don't know...

The girls face Milch.

JESSICA Let's find out?

Beat. AND THEY RUSH AT EACH OTHER --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CABIN -- SAME TIME

Ness runs into the cabin. The lights are still out, but some CANDLES and the MOONLIGHT provide illumination. Ness moves through the house, her steps weak and cautious.

NESS

Spencer?

She listens to the silence in dread... before HIS VOICE echoes out:

SPENCER In the living room!

III CHE IIVIIIG IOOM.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ness enters. Spencer sits on the couch, a book in his hands.

NESS Where's Goldie?

SPENCER Went to see if she could find anyone in the woods.

NESS You let her go alone?

SPENCER She insisted. Brave little toaster. (re: her appearance) What happened out there?

NESS There's-- well, long story short, my therapist's a murderer.

SPENCER

Whaaat?

NESS (rushed) I'll tell you about it later, I need to use your phone. I lost mine outside!

SPENCER It's in the room where we put our bags. In my backpack.

Ness rushes out of the room. HOLD on Spencer, and as he lifts his book to the candle to get better light, we see he's reading AMBER'S DIARY.

INT. BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Ness enters the bedroom. She scans the bed, where numerous BAGS (hers included) lay. Finally, she locates Spencer's backpack. She rushes over to it and starts looking through the pockets, pulling out stuff-- condoms, a pen, a notepad...

NESS (frustrated) God, Spencer, you're such a pack rat.

She finally locates a CELL PHONE. She dials a number and waits... we dimly hear a VOICE MAIL LADY speaking through the phone:

VOICE MAIL "If you'd like to leave a message, please..."

Ness exhales in anger. She speaks into the phone:

NESS Page, you need to get out here. There's no cops here, I don't know what-- anyway, the killer is Dr. Josephine Milch, her real name is Mary Marvin, and...

She trails off as something in Spencer's bag catches her eye.

NESS' POV

Inside one of the pockets, we can see a PHOTO OF NESS AND SPENCER. Making goofy faces in front of a movie poster. Ness reaches in and pulls out a STACK OF PHOTOS. She looks through them and sees that there are some of Spencer, some of Ness, and some of them together. Ness can't help but smile. She sees the LAST PICTURE:

It's one of Spencer alone. His HAIR is a different color and his smile is unnaturally big. But what's strangest is that HALF THE PICTURE is torn off. Ness runs her finger along the jagged edge... and the blood drains from her face.

Trance-like, she goes over to her bag and rifles through a pocket until she pulls out a PICTURE.

The one of Amber when she was pregnant.

Ness lifts the picture of Amber and the picture of Spencer together and joins them at their jagged edges.

And it's a PERFECT FIT.

Spencer and Amber hold each other, Amber with child. With Spencer's child.

Ness' eyes widen as it all comes rushing together for her.

Ness drops the pictures and turns to see Spencer standing in the doorway, hands behind his back.

NESS (trying to stay calm) Spencer, I--

SPENCER Doing some snooping?

NESS No, just-- I needed your phone, that's all...

Spencer laughs -- it's tinged with insanity.

SPENCER Come on, Ness. Am I really supposed to believe that?

He's eerily menacing as he grins in the moonlight. He pulls his hands from behind his back and RAISES A GUN AT NESS.

SPENCER (CONT'D) And just when you thought you had me all figured out...

NESS Spencer, what are you--

SPENCER Drop the act! Drop it, Vanessa, because we both know you know what I did.

Tears fill Ness' eyes.

NESS

Amber...

Spencer nods, matter-of-fact. He points the gun at her.

NESS (CONT'D) You were "Mr. T".

SPENCER (laughs) Oh, that. My middle name is Terrence. I went by that back then. (MORE)

SPENCER (CONT'D) (he cringes) I know, I know, how I ever got any pussy with that name is beyond me. NESS Why'd you do it? SPENCER Why do you think? I met her and she was mine. We were together and it was good and I was finally feeling like I had something and then she got pregnant. Spencer becomes more unhinged. SPENCER (CONT'D) And I was so happy! That would make her mine forever. We'd be a family. The right kind of family.... And I'd never abandon my son. Ness is confused. SPENCER (CONT'D) In my mind it was always gonna be a boy. And I was gonna be the best dad ev--(beat) Well, we all know how that one turned out. NESS So you followed her back to Morgan. SPENCER That I did. NESS (deeply upset) And what ... being friends with me, was that all part of the plan? SPENCER That was the plan. I knew you used to be friends, so I figured you'd be a good place to start. But then I got to know you and... (he giggles) Twisted as it is, you really are my best friend.

SPENCER I'm a father. I'm a father who can't even see his own kid.

NESS Maybe 'cause you're batshit insane?

Spencer SHAKES THE GUN AT HER FACE.

SPENCER STILL the one with the gun here!

Ness puts her hands up, trying to calm him. Trying to buy time. She slowly moves across the room.

NESS Okay, okay. But why did Amber never notice you?

SPENCER She was the head cheerleader and I was the loser who never went to class. Why <u>would</u> she notice me? And besides, why do you think I kept having you dye my hair?

Spencer reaches for his glasses.

SPENCER (CONT'D) Why do you think I wear these?

He takes them off and stares at Ness. She looks at him-- and you know, his EYES really are VERY BLUE.

NESS (to herself) "Eyes like his daddy's..."

Spencer is intrigued.

SPENCER You've seen him? Does he... (hopeful) Does he look like me?

Ness doesn't respond -- she's not giving him the satisfaction.

SPENCER (CONT'D) Don't worry. I'll find out. I'm planning to pay a visit to the Turners when this is all over.

Alarmed at these words, Ness MOVES to her right, her back against the bed. Spencer moves the GUN in her direction.

SPENCER (CONT'D) Not so fast, babe.

NESS (screaming) HELP!!

Spencer laughs.

SPENCER You can scream all you want. But no one out there can hear you. There's two killers, remember?

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS -- SAME TIME

Delilah SCREAMS in pain as Milch claws at her from behind, making her drop the KNIFE. Jessica THROWS HERSELF ONTO MILCH and knocks her onto the ground... right next to the knife.

Milch grabs the knife and PLUNGES IT INTO JESSICA'S THIGH. Jessica SCREAMS--

RETURN TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- SAME TIME

As Ness screams too:

NESS Help! Somebody!!!

SPENCER (annoyed) Could you please stop that? Like I said, there's no one--

NESS (reassuring herself) Goldie's around here somewhere, she'll--

Spencer laughs again.

Still pointing the gun at her, he walks over to the CLOSET and OPENS IT.

Goldie lies inside, unconscious, her HANDS BOUND TOGETHER. Her mouth is DUCT-TAPED and BLOOD trickles from her forehead.

Ness' face contorts in horror. She seems like she can no longer stand-- she sits down onto the bed near her BAG.

SPENCER (CONT'D) You know, she figured it out first? Way before you did. (beat) Poor little girl... she tried to reason with me. Kept bringing you up, like it would make a difference somehow.

NESS

Wouldn't it?

SPENCER As far as I'm concerned, the Ness I know is gone. You all leave me sooner or later. Just like Amber... you're not Ness. You're just some cheerleader who's not worth my time.

Ness' hands are behind her back and she seems preoccupied. After a moment she turns back to Spencer.

NESS And yet here you are, holding two of us hostage. Seems like we're worth it.

Spencer angrily moves the gun closer to her.

SPENCER Uh-uh-uh, Ness. Sassy girls get holes in their head!

NESS What do I have to lose? I mean, you're gonna kill me anyway, right?

SPENCER

Shut up!

NESS

(almost breezily now) What's the matter, headcase? No witty retort? Come on, I mean, you've got a gun... blow me away!

SPENCER SHUT UP!! Stop being Ness. You can't do this!

He gets worked up and the gun wobbles in his hand.

SPENCER (CONT'D) You can't be Ness when I do this!

NESS You're pathetic, Spencer. You're a damaged loser and I'm ashamed I ever thought <u>you</u> were worth my time!

Spencer LOSES IT. HE DROPS THE GUN TO HIS SIDE AND YELLS:

SPENCER SHUT THE FUCK UP, YOU STUPID, FUCKING CUNT!

BANG! QUICK AS LIGHTNING, NESS RAISES A GUN FROM HER SIDE AND SHOOTS SPENCER IN THE KNEECAP. He TOPPLES to the ground.

Ness looks down at the GUN in her hand. PAGE'S GUN.

Spencer groans in pain-- his knee bleeds heavily. Ness walks by him, keeping her gun trained on him. She goes to the closet and grabs Goldie, who STIRS AND AWAKENS. Ness rips the tape off her mouth.

> NESS (soothing) Come on, you'll be fine, come on, come on...

The two girls limp over Spencer. Just as they pass him, Spencer REARS UP and GRABS GOLDIE. She screams and falls to the floor, her hands still bound. Spencer takes his gun and PUTS THE BARREL TO HER HEAD.

> SPENCER One more move, Ness, and Goldie's face is gone!

Ness points her gun at Spencer but it's pointless. He's gonna kill Goldie before she does anything.

SPENCER (CONT'D) Say goodbye to your little friend...

HE TIGHTENS HIS GRIP ON THE GUN AND IS ABOUT TO PULL THE TRIGGER WHEN

PAGE

Bursts through the doorway, GUN pointed at Spencer.

PAGE DROP YOUR WEAPON!

Spencer doesn't drop the gun, but he is momentarily stunned. This is all the time Goldie needs to HEADBUTT HIM. HARD. Spencer falls over, giving Ness the opportunity to pull her away from his grasp. Goldie grabs Spencer's gun from the ground.

> PAGE (CONT'D) Get outside, now!

Ness takes a moment and locks eyes with Spencer. They share a last look... and both of them are sorry. Several beats... then Ness and Goldie leave the room. Page looks down at Spencer.

> PAGE (CONT'D) Who are you again?

Spencer laughs, and a THIN TRICKLE OF BLOOD escapes his lips.

SPENCER No one special...

PAGE You're a murderer.

He takes out HANDCUFFS and begins cuffing Spencer.

SPENCER

(weak)
Just one of two, though.
 (beat)
So even if you lock me up... I'm
thinking some cheerleaders are
dying tonight anyway.

Off Page's troubled look, we

Jessica lies on the ground, her thigh bleeding from the knife wound. PAN ACROSS the ground to find Delilah and Milch, who looks beaten-up. Milch's hands are around Delilah's throat.

> DELILAH (strangled) Jess...

Jessica looks up but is in too much pain to do anything. Milch looks at them and laughs.

DR. MILCH Ashes...

She brings the KNIFE up to Delilah's eyes and moves it between them as she sing-songs:

DR. MILCH (CONT'D) They all... fall... dow-

SOMEONE RIPS MILCH OFF DELILAH AND THROWS HER TO THE SIDE. Jessica and Delilah look up to see

ELIOT

Still in his hat, his coat blowing in the night wind. An avenging angel.

ELIOT I've been looking for you girls.

He turns to Milch.

ELIOT (CONT'D) And you, too, Mary.

Jessica and Delilah exchange curious glances. Eliot takes the knife off the ground and throws it to the side, far from anyone's reach. He goes over to Milch and turns her over until he can see her face. She groggily recognizes him:

DR. MILCH

You...

ELIOT Yes, Mary, it's me. I wish I could say it's good to see you. But then that'd be a lie, and... that's a sin, right? DR. MILCH (weak but still batshit) Don't wag your tongue at me, you immoral fagg--

ELIOT SLAMS MILCH'S HEAD BACK ONTO THE GROUND. THEN DOES IT SEVERAL MORE TIMES, ALL WITHOUT EVER BREAKING A SWEAT... before turning to the girls.

ELIOT You know, I never really liked her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CABIN -- LATER

POLICE CARS and POLICEMEN have taken over the entryway. Several CHEERLEADERS stand nearby, chattering to each other.

WE MOVE THROUGH THE CROWD until we find a PARAMEDIC with a stretcher. Jessica lies on it, her leg bandaged. Ness comes up to her, regretful.

NESS You shouldn't have to be here.

Jessica doesn't respond.

NESS (CONT'D) I should have let you run away. This is all my--

JESSICA Vanessa, shut up.

NESS

What?

JESSICA I'm lying on a stretcher, my leg is killing me, and I sure as hell can't dance in next week's game. So can you just stop whining?

NESS (frustrated) I'm trying to apologize here!

JESSICA You don't need to apologize. It's simple. You were in trouble and we helped you. NESS But you didn't have to. JESSICA

Yes, I did.

NESS

Why?

JESSICA It's what being a captain is all about. No girl left behind. You might not be my favorite... but you're still on the team.

NESS (impressed) That's really... honorable.

JESSICA

I have my moments.

The Paramedic begins to wheel Jessica away, but she calls out:

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Ness!

Ness follows the stretcher.

NESS

What?

JESSICA I think my cheer days are over for now. (Ness starts to say something) <u>Don't</u> start apologizing again, dumbass. But I do want you to do something for me.

NESS (genuine) Anything.

Jessica takes a long silence, then:

JESSICA Make sure you have the girls practice the rally routine. I feel like it's our weakest right now. Ness nods... then realizes what Jessica means.

NESS Wait, what are you doing?

JESSICA I'm giving you some advice. Excaptain to new captain.

Ness smiles warmly as Jessica is loaded into an AMBULANCE. Before the doors close, we hear her:

> JESSICA (O.S.) (CONT'D) This doesn't mean we're friends, by the way!

The doors close. Ness takes a moment, then walks away. She comes toward Goldie, who sits against a police car. She puts her hand on her shoulder and they start talking... but we don't hear them because we MOVE once again through the crowd until we find Eliot. He stands alone, surveying the area. He becomes worried when he sees Page approaching.

> PAGE Eliot. How's--(the words aren't coming) Is there... I mean, if--

> > ELIOT

I forgive you.

It's that simple. Page smiles, grateful he doesn't have to say it.

PAGE How did you know it was her? Mary Marvin?

ELIOT

I had my suspicions. She always seemed a little off to me. So I went to St. Augustine's after I got out of jail and I talked to the priest. He said she was like Tammy Faye Bakker with extra bloodlust. That he was glad she moved away... (beat) So I put two and two together.

PAGE (impressed) You really just thought it out like that? ELIOT I'm intuitive.

PAGE I can see that.

Beat.

PAGE (CONT'D) So you're a free man. What's next?

Eliot smiles sadly.

ELIOT

Not much.

Page thinks, long and hard.

PAGE Well, you do what you want, but after tonight... (beat) I'm just throwing it out there-you ever consider being a detective?

Eliot looks up at him, his blue eyes shining with curiosity. Page shrugs.

PAGE (CONT'D) Just something to think about.

Page walks away. Eliot takes a moment to consider Page's words... and a small smile crosses his lips. He puts his hat back on and strides off into the night. Life's full of possibilities for Eliot Toile.

WE MOVE AWAY from Eliot until we find Ness. She stands alone, in a daze.

PAGE (O.S.) (CONT'D) Guess this is it, huh?

Page comes up to Ness.

PAGE (CONT'D) It's finally over. NESS I hope so... (beat) Spencer? PAGE Still in the cabin. Cuffed to the bed. I got one of my boys on him.

NESS

Good...

She nods hesitantly -- she's not so sure it is.

PAGE

So what now?

NESS What do you mean?

PAGE

Well... you were pretty amazing tonight. You held your own against two killers. That's talent.

NESS

And?

PAGE

I don't know. I was just thinking, maybe an internship at the station? We don't really do those, but a mind like yours? I bet we could--

He's interrupted by Ness' laughter.

NESS That sounds great. Really. But see, I just got elected captain of the squad. I feel like I'm gonna be pretty busy.

PAGE (sputtering) But... but you're not just some cheerleader!

NESS No. I'm captain of the cheerleaders.

She shakes her head-- who'd have thought it? Page is still completely thrown.

PAGE But is that all you want to be? Is it-- I mean, is it really enough? Ness considers the question for a long moment before answering with complete, beatific clarity:

NESS Yeah. It is.

She starts walking away, leaving Page completely bewildered. Ness stops and turns back to him.

NESS (CONT'D)

For now...

She winks and walks over to Goldie. Page watches her go. He seems sad for a moment, before shaking it off and grinning.

PAGE Oh, she'll be back.

He nods, as if to convince himself, then runs to the cabin entrance.

INT. CABIN -- BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Page enters the bedroom, all bravado.

PAGE And as for you...

He scans the room and sees a BODY-SHAPED LUMP in the corner. He rushes over and turns the lump over-- it's a POLICE OFFICER. A GASH on his forehead BLEEDS and he's halfunconscious. Page shakes him awake, worried as hell.

> PAGE (CONT'D) Lawler! Lawler, what happened?

Officer Lawler GROANS but doesn't speak. Instead, he weakly points toward the wall opposite him.

Page follow his hand to the wall-- and sees that the WINDOW is SHATTERED. BLOOD DRIPS off the jagged peaks of broken glass.

Page gets up and walks over to the window. He looks out, and sees that beyond it is a path into the woods. He goes white.

PAGE (CONT'D) The Chief is gonna kill me.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PRACTICE AREA -- DAWN

THE SKY

Is gray in the early morning light. A RED-AND WHITE POM-POM rises into the sky. It goes down, and we see that it belongs to

NESS

As she practices her early morning routine in uniform. IN SLOW MOTION, she does a CARTWHEEL, and then a BACKFLIP. When the backflip is finished, she lands, pom-poms up high. Triumphant and proud, until

GOLDIE (O.S.)

Boo!

Ness jumps and DROPS her pom-poms. Her fear turns to exasperation when she sees that it's only Goldie, who stands nearby.

> NESS Goldie! Way to give me a coronary.

GOLDIE Hey, it's not my fault you're so jumpy these days.

NESS Sorry. Must be all this cheer stress.

GOLDIE (teasing) It's a tough job.

NESS Someone's gotta do it.

Goldie laughs. The BREEZE picks up, and Ness shivers slightly. She looks around, almost as if she expects something to happen. Goldie tries to get her attention:

> GOLDIE Well, we're all waiting inside.

> > NESS

For what?

GOLDIE For you, obviously. NESS Then let's go.

men iec s go.

The girls start walking back to the gym.

GOLDIE So this new routine...

NESS

Yeah?

GOLDIE Am I gonna die from amazement?

Ness thinks for a moment before a mischievous grin crosses her face.

NESS It's a killer.

As the girls walk back, we WIDEN to take in the entire practice field. As we move further and further, a FIGURE enters FRAME and watches the girls. TRACK AROUND him to reveal that it's

SPENCER

Bloodied. Weak. Cuts and scratches all over his face. But his blue eyes are as bright as ever. As he watches the girls, something like sadness comes over his face. He stands there for a moment, then turns and walks away.

As he goes, we PAN DOWN to GROUND LEVEL, where we find

NESS' POM-POMS

She never picked them up. They lay still. Unmoving.

But soon the WIND picks up, and they start RUSTLING--

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END