

THE RIFT

FADE IN:

EXT. THE RIFT - DAY

Twelve going on eighteen, SAM's a serious kid, the weight of the world on her freckled face.

She stares nervously at a line of pine forest marked by faded red ribbons. Snowflakes drift from a lead gray sky into the shadowed gloom of its snowy depths. The remnants of a WARNING sign is posted on a gnarled oak which stands like a sentry.

BRAD (O.S.)

You're on first watch...got your whistle?

BRAD (12) has a life as a ski bum or a surfer dude already chiseled into his future. He's the kind of kid that's hard to say no to, especially for Sam, who has a hopeless crush.

SAM

Why do we have to do the Rift? You know the rules. S'posed to be at least twenty kids. Let's go over to Hopkins, the hill's almost as good there.

BRAD

What're you 'fraid of? No one's seen the monster since before we were born anyway.

Ten year old WILLIE, Sam's kid brother, is quick to support the older boy.

WILLIE

Yeah, what're you 'fraid of?

BRAD

You got your whistle, just make sure you watch real good.

SAM

The monster doesn't care about a stupid whistle, Brad.

Sam stares into the dark woods.

Brad is already starting up the hill, Willie on his heals.

BRAD

Just make sure no one goes past the line.

She drops her sled by her feet. Not happy.

The wind stirs the pines, loosening a tuff of snow which falls with a THUD.

SAM
Just hurry up!

A HOWL of wind drowns out their voices, already distant.

Sam fidgets with the whistle hanging on her neck...eyes the woods...occasionally glances up the hill toward the boys, invisible somewhere past the crest.

She walks over to the bottom of the hill, maybe a couple dozen yards from the wood's edge. Draws a line in the snow with her heel.

She faces the woods. Arms folded across her chest. This monster better not mess with her!

A SHOUT of joy from the hill.

Willie flies down the slope on his sled.

Sam watches him descend, whistle in her mouth.

Peeks at the woods.

Willie comes around a turn...fast...too fast.

He heads for the line in the snow. She moves to stop him. He sleds right by toward the treeline.

She runs desperately behind him.

He stops just before the trees.

WILLIE
Awesome!!

She tugs him away from the treeline.

SAM
We're goin' home after Brad comes down.

WILLIE
Noooo!

SAM
We're in trouble enough for cuttin'
school. We're going home and that's
that.

A SHOUT reaches them from the top of the hill. It's Brad coming at lightning speed...his face a mask of ecstasy.

Sam eyes the woods. Did something move in there?

Brad comes at them with double Willie's speed.

As he hits the line, she reaches out trying to slow him...gets a piece of shoulder but hardly makes a difference.

He streaks past...barely slowing as he reaches the marked trees...proceeds straight into the thick pines...careens out of sight down another hill.

SAM

Brad!!!

Sam and Willie take off towards the woods. Stop at the line.

WILLIE/SAM

Brad!!

Silence within the snow covered pines.

Willie steps across the line...

WILLIE

Brad!

Sam jerks him back.

They stand and listen. Whispering pines in the breeze.

A distant beastly GROWL.

Sam blows the whistle with all her might.

Over and over.

WILLIE

We gotta get out of here!

She stops blowing and listens. Silence within the dark depths.

SAM

Come on, we have to get help.

Sam retrieves her sled and they walk briskly along the line of forest. Snow thickens in the air.

Willie struggles to keep up.

Another distant GROWL within the pines.

SAM

Drop your sled, hurry up!

WILLIE

But...

Off her scowl he drops it. She keeps hers.

LATER

Snow blankets the air. They have wandered into light forest.

WILLIE

Are we goin' the right way?

She doesn't seem sure. They trudge on.

A FLOCK of QUAIL burst from a tree, startling them.

WILLIE

We should'a went to school.

Her face a mask of guilt. She takes his hand.

The snow lightens enough to reveal a line of chimney smoke a short distance away.

SAM

Come on, we'll call for help!

They hurry toward the smoke.

EXT. CABIN - AFTERNOON

Rustic, covered in snow. A 'WELCOME FRIENDS' sign hangs over the front door. Smoke snakes out of the chimney.

Willie and Sam eye each other, unsure.

Sam leads him to the door and knocks.

Through a small snow covered window they see cartoons playing on an old TV.

A wrinkled old woman opens the door. Blind with cataracts, aided by a walking stick, this is ANDROMEDA.

ANDROMEDA

Is that Pop Tarts I smell?

Brother and sister look at each other.

WILLIE

I had one for breakfast.

ANDROMEDA

Wonderful! You must tell me about it, I haven't had one in so long.

SAM

It's an emergency, Mam, we need to use your phone.

ANDROMEDA

Come in, come in, it's colder than a...well, it's quite cold.

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

She closes the door behind them. The children stare wide eyed at the cozy cabin of eccentricities: herbs drying on rafters, hanging portraits of mythical creatures made of candy, art work crafted from old toys.

Andromeda leads Sam to a phone on a long, wide table. The girl picks it up...presses numbers. A look of frustration.

SAM

No dial tone.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, it will come back, sweetie. We'll check in a few minutes. Now what's this emergency?

WILLIE

The monster got our --

Sam silences him with a fierce look.

SAM

Our friend is missing in the woods, and we need to call for help.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, to be lost in this weather, we must indeed get help. Now don't panic, dears, all will be well.

AARGH! The children jump at the screech of a BIRD.

BIRD

All will be well, all will be well.

A colorful parakeet in a cage so tiny it barely fits. A large, old fashioned lock secures its door.

WILLIE

Cool!

SAM

That cage is rather small.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, you heard him, he's quite content. Now...tell me about this monster.

The siblings eye each other.

SAM

Down by the Rift, it takes kids if they get too close to the woods.

ANDROMEDA

I've a hunch that's just a story to frighten, I'd not worry much over it.

WILLIE

A hunch?

ANDROMEDA

That's a little voice inside your head that tells you things, even when you don't know why. Like, for instance, when it told you not to skip school this morning.

Sam turns bright red under the old woman's stare. A shiver runs through her body.

ANDROMEDA

How about some cookies while we wait for the phone?

Willie nods enthusiastically. Sam is on guard now.

While the old lady makes her way to the little kitchen, and Willie takes a closer look at the caged bird, Sam spies a set of keys hanging on a nail. Quick as a cat, she pockets them. On a hunch.

Andromeda returns with a plate of cookies.

ANDROMEDA

There we are. Now what kind of Pop Tart did you have this morning?

SAM

Can we try the phone again?

ANDROMEDA

Of course, sweetie.

Sam tries it again. Nothing.

ANDROMEDA

I think perhaps it could be that
the cord is loose. Could you be a
dear and check it under the table?

Sam crouches and sees where the cord leads to a connection in
the floor. She drops to her knees and crawls under the table.

The old lady picks up the receiver to the phone.

ANDROMEDA

Nothing yet. Why don't you give her
a hand?

Cookie in mouth, Willie dives below the table.

THUNK. Iron bars pop up from the floor and lock into the
table creating a cage. The siblings are trapped within.

SAM/WILLIE

Hey!

They rattle the bars desperately.

ANDROMEDA

Sadly, they don't make Pop Tarts in
the flavor I'd prefer.

She moves to the little parakeet cage. Taking it in hand, she
carries it to the nail where the keys hung. Finding them
missing, she searches her pockets.

Defeated in the search, with surprising strength she bends
and breaks off the top of the cage.

BIRD

All will be well, all will be well.

Her jaws extend unnaturally into the cage and bite into the
bird. She swallows it whole, blood visible on her teeth as
the tail clears down her throat.

ANDROMEDA

A bit too optimistic, he was, don't
you think?

Willie breaks into quiet sobs. Sam holds him.

Andromeda drops her walking stick and skips into the kitchen,
rejuvenated. Begins lining up spices, humming while she does.

Sam begins feeling between the bars along the table edge.

ANDROMEDA

I simply must have children for
dinner more often!

Sam finds what she's looking for: a keyhole.

She pulls out the ring of keys. Begins testing each one.

ANDROMEDA

You don't eat too much
polyunsaturated fat, do you kids?

As Andromeda turns toward them, Sam quickly hides the keys.

ANDROMEDA

After five centuries I really have
to be careful not to clog my
arteries. A healthy witch is a
happy witch, you know.

Andromeda bends to retrieve something from a closet.

Sam returns to the lock. Tries the keys.

ANDROMEDA

You know what the scariest monsters
are, kids? Of course you don't. The
scariest ones are the likable ones.
The ones you just can't help
wanting to be around, even though
you should know better.

SNAP. Sam finds the right key. The bars slide down. Andromeda
turns in rage.

The siblings run to the door. Locked. Andromeda laughs.

Sam tries the keys. Andromeda runs at them now.

Sam finds the key. They rush out as the witch closes in.

OUTSIDE

Blinding snow. Sam grabs her sled.

SAM

Come on!

They both climb on and ride it down a hill.

Snow stinging their eyes, they ride and ride. Through scratching bushes and grazing pines, they ride.

At last they slow to a stop, far from the cottage.

WILLIE

We should'a gone to school.

Sam hugs him.

LATER

Fading light, blinding snow...they reach a snow covered road, slush visible within several car tracks.

SAM

Someone will come by.

They walk along the road.

A dark figure emerges from the woods just ahead of them. They GASP and turn to run.

BRAD

Wait! Wait!

Sam stops Willie and turns to Brad.

BRAD

Sam?

She runs toward him. Almost hugs him. Too shy. He steps forward and embraces her.

BRAD

I've been lost all day!

SAM

We have to get outta here.

Brad pulls out a cell phone.

BRAD

I got service a little while ago.
My mom's on the way. Boy, am I
hungry!

He gives Willie a friendly slap on the shoulder.

BRAD

Dude, you guys musta been pretty
scared.

WILLIE

Sam was.

Sam smiles at her brother.

HEADLIGHTS approach. Blinding as the large SUV pulls up.

BRAD

Shotgun!

INT. SUV

Brad climbs in the front.

Sam and Willie a bit unsure. A cool rock ballad comes on the car radio.

Willie opens the back and climbs in, followed by Sam.

The driver...well, you know where this is going. In a hooded parker, the driver's face is invisible.

As the SUV drives off, the automatic locks click.

Willie confused...Sam's face a mask of terror.

SAM

Brad?

BRAD

Did I say I was hungry? Dudes, I'm
famished.

Andromeda turns to them and laughs.

FADE OUT.