

DEEP RIVER

Written by

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Showtime

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OVER BLACK...

We hear SOUNDS of crackling burning timber mixed with the aural threads of panicked human escape -- running FOOTSTEPS, SNAPPING twigs, a woman's frantic BREATHING growing louder and more desperate until we--

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

A pick-up truck moving along a two-lane country road (dense green forest on either side), BLUEGRASS MUSIC playing over the radio.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

An OLD MAN drives, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel to the music. Nothing to think about out here but road and forest.

He shakes out a cigarette. Looks down as he lights up... Then, glancing up at the road again, total surprise--

30 feet in front of the truck stands a YOUNG WOMAN covered in blood.

The old man slams on the brakes, truck SCREECHING to a halt inches before running her over.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

He jumps out of the truck.

OLD MAN

What the...

She stares at him in a state of shock...

As we PULL BACK from the two of them, back and up, up, so that they become two small figures on the road and the road becomes a dark line through dense forest -- and in that forest, not far from the road, we see a house in a clearing engulfed in flames and dark smoke.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

And elsewhere, in the darkened bedroom of a grand New England home, a phone starts RINGING.

Jolted awake in bed, where he's been sleeping alone, WHITAKER "WHIT" WALCOTT (54, unusually charismatic for a WASP born to the ruling class, but his handsome face permanently etched with loss) fumbles for a lamp, switches it on. A clock reads 4:10. He answers the phone.

WHIT

Hello?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Is this Whitaker Walcott of Deep River, New Hampshire?

WHIT

It's four in the morning. Who is this?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Are you the father of Nicole Grace Walcott?

WHIT

(furious)

Is this some kind of sick joke? Who the hell are you?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Mr. Walcott, this is Lieutenant Burgess of the Sheriff's Department in Ashe County, North Carolina. We have a 26-year-old female in Jefferson Memorial Hospital who says she's your daughter.

WHIT

What...?

Suddenly, Whit's sitting bolt upright in bed.

WHIT (CONT'D)

I don't understand. You're saying...?

BURGESS (V.O.)

Yes, sir. Your daughter's alive. And she's asking for you.

Whit's stunned eyes seek out a PHOTOGRAPH in a silver frame on the bedside table: a beautiful blond girl around 14 years old in a lavender-colored "Deep River High" hoodie and jeans.

He tries to catch his racing breath.

WHIT

Tell her... tell her I'm coming.

And he begins to sob uncontrollably.

EXT. ROAD, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

The same two-lane country road as before, but now an Ashe County Sheriff patrol car and fire truck sit on the shoulder, unattended radios squawking.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A forest clearing reached by a dirt road, and -- ringed by police tape -- the charred remains of a house very recently burned to the ground.

SEVERAL FIREMEN walk the blackened, ruined site, occasionally blasting fire extinguishers where they find wisps of smoke still rising from piles of debris.

The cement foundation, I-beams, refrigerator, sinks and toilets, some metal furniture, and a small half-melted television set are the only remains of the house or its contents still intact and identifiable upon first glance.

In what used to be the basement (reached by ladder, since the stairs have burned away) LIEUTENANT GENE BURGESS (40, professionally ambitious but decent) and his partner SERGEANT BRET TOMS (late 20s, brash and immature) of the Ashe County Sheriff's office stand over two charred, human-shaped lumps.

Burgess stares at the misshapen forms -- almost unrecognizable as people -- trying to contain his shock and revulsion behind a veteran's professional facade.

Toms, meanwhile, turns away and starts to retch.

BURGESS (V.O.)

Miss Walcott?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON NICOLE WALCOTT, 26, the bleeding victim from the road, startlingly beautiful despite a nasty scrape on her cheek, tangled, unwashed blond hair, and eyes stunned almost lifeless by years of trauma. Staring out now through the hospital room window at...

Clouds in the sky. Nothingness.

Burgess and Toms glance at each other. Burgess holds a small detective's notebook. This case is already turning out to be unlike any he's seen before.

BURGESS
(gentle)
I'm afraid we need to ask you some questions.

She doesn't seem to hear him. Terribly thin, wearing a hospital gown and lying on the bed. There are signs of a large surgical BANDAGE over her abdomen.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
The other girl who was in that house with you...

Nicole's eyes twitch.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
The things is, if we can't identify the body, we won't be able to inform her parents.

A long silence.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Miss Walcott...?

NICOLE
(almost inaudible)
Mary Jo.

BURGESS
Sorry?

NICOLE
Her name was Mary Jo.

TOMS
You got a last name to go with that?

Burgess shoots Toms a look. *Wrong tone.*

NICOLE
(long beat)
Cameron.

BURGESS
(patient)
Mary Jo Cameron?

Nicole nods. Burgess jots the name in his notebook.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Do you know where she was from?

NICOLE
(beat)
West Virginia.

Burgess jots this down.

BURGESS
Do you know which area?

Nicole shakes her head.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
That's okay. Can you tell us about
how long this -- how long Mary Jo
Cameron was kept prisoner in that
house, along with yourself?

Nicole stares at the clouds out the window. She has begun,
faintly, to tremble. Burgess waits for her.

NICOLE
(barely audible)
12 years.

BURGESS
(thinks he misheard)
Sorry...?

NICOLE
12 years.

Burgess and Toms look at each other. This is much, much
worse than anyone thought.

BURGESS
I only have a couple more questions
for you right now, Miss Walcott.
The, um, second body we found in
the house... the male
perpetrator...

NICOLE
Ronald Tibbett.

Burgess jots the name in his notebook.

BURGESS
That's two Bs and two Ts in
Tibbett?

Nicole yanks a strand of hair from her head. Her face shows no pain. She studies the hair impassively, then watches it float to the floor.

Burgess indicates the door to his partner. *Time to leave her be.*

BURGESS (CONT'D)
We'll let you rest now, Miss
Walcott. We'll come back later.

They turn to go.

NICOLE
(quiet)
She's an orphan.

BURGESS
What's that?

NICOLE
Mary Jo. She was an orphan.

Burgess nods. The men go out and the door clicks shut.

Only now do tears of helpless shock appear in Nicole's traumatized eyes.

EXT. DEEP RIVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE - ROAD - DAY

A black Range Rover with New Hampshire plates ("LIVE FREE OR DIE") drives along a bucolic country road.

The car passes a 200-year-old CEMETERY filled with gravestones with names so worn they are no longer legible.

In a near corner of the graveyard, however, is a relatively recent headstone decorated with several fresh, elaborate bouquets of flowers. The headstone reads: "CORINNE DEWEY WALCOTT 1962-2013".

TITLE: "ONE MONTH LATER"

INT. RANGE ROVER (MOVING) - DAY

Whit drives, now and then casting concerned, almost haunted glances at his daughter in the passenger seat.

Nicole mutely watches the passing countryside. Her beauty more apparent now, face unmarked, hair brushed, wearing brand-new clothes.

EXT. BOWER'S RUN ROAD - A LITTLE LATER

The car turns off the road and through an old stone gate etched with the name "BLACK POWDER FARM".

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Black Powder Farm is Whit Wallcott's inherited estate, a true New England jewel: grand old main house; pretty two-story guest house; old dark-red barn; small stable; tens of acres of lawn, pasture and woods.

All peaceful now, perfectly pastoral, as...

The Range Rover comes up the long gravel drive.

INT. RANGE ROVER - CONTINUOUS

Whit parks next to three other cars; turns off the engine and looks at Nicole. She stares straight ahead.

WHIT

Here we are.

Silence. Nicole's eyes dart anxiously over landscape, main house, guest house, barn.

NICOLE

You painted it.

WHIT

(confused)

What?

NICOLE

The barn was gray.

With deft, minimal movement, she yanks a hair out of her head. Her face doesn't register the pain; it's Whit who flinches.

WHIT

Please don't do that -- don't hurt yourself.

After a moment, fleeing the enclosed space, Nicole opens the car door and gets out.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

She stops walking; she's in a field, facing away from her father, the house, everything.

The field is large, the forest beyond larger, deeper, darker. The sky above vast, endless nothingness. No boundaries, no enclosure... Her breath turns shallow and more rapid.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

In Whit's antique-filled living room JAY WALCOTT, 26 (prep-school good looks, not as simple as he seems), takes a handful of cubes from an ice bucket on a bar cart, drops them into a crystal highball glass, picks up a bottle of gin and--

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

(pointed)

Jay.

Jay glances at his father, GEORGE WALCOTT, 52 (cool-blooded, would-be patrician), who raises an eyebrow. Jay sets down bottle and glass and walks away from the bar cart.

Both men are restless and tense; as is George and Whit's sister NORA WALCOTT, 45 (sexy in an unWASPY way, twice-divorced and childless, never felt valued in the family), standing by the window observing Nicole, who stands alone in the field.

GEORGE

What's she doing out there?

NORA

Trying to get her head together before facing us.

George joins Nora at the window.

NORA (CONT'D)

She was just a girl when we last saw her.

They watch Nicole's back, which seems to be trembling.

GEORGE

She's not a girl anymore.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - SAME TIME

In front of the house, Whit stands helpless and uncertain, watching Nicole in the field.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - FIELD - SAME TIME

Nicole is trying as hard as she can not to be completely freaked out by the sky overhead. A cloud seems to her to be racing faster and faster, replaced by other clouds, the world spinning out of control...

She forces herself to look away. Sees a DEER standing at the edge of the field -- frozen in fear, tail twitching. For a moment woman and animal stare at each other; then the deer leaps away into the woods.

Somehow, this helps; bit by bit, she gets her breathing under control.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

She stands with Whit facing the brass door knocker (in the shape of two taped sticks of dynamite).

WHIT
(gentle)
Ready?

Nicole's face is blank. Whit reaches out, gives her hand a squeeze of encouragement. She flinches at his touch; he notices and lets her hand go.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nicole enters the large beautiful room, takes a few tentative steps and stops.

HER POV: Her relatives facing her as a group, looking at her, warm but awkward smiles on their faces. And Whit right beside her.

WHIT
(quiet)
You okay?

George steps forward with a smile.

GEORGE
Welcome home, Nicole.

Silence; her eyes twitch.

WHIT
Your Uncle George.

GEORGE
(smiles at her)
She knows who I am.

George tries to hug her; she goes rigid in his embrace and he quickly lets go.

A moment of awkward silence.

WHIT
And Aunt Nora and Cousin Jay.

Nora does not make the mistake of trying to hug her.

NORA
You are so beautiful.

JAY
We're all just glad you're home,
Nic.

Nicole's eyes dart from one to the other, then around the room. The silence grows...

WHIT
She's tired from the trip.

GEORGE
We'll be going. We just wanted to
be here to welcome you.

NORA
We love you, Nicole.

George, Nora, and Jay begin heading for the door.

NICOLE
Thank you.

A somewhat odd thing to say under the circumstances. They nod, smile at her, and finally leave.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - STAIRCASE TO SECOND FLOOR - A LITTLE LATER

Framed FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS of several generations of Walcotts cover the staircase wall. Nicole stands transfixed before the images:

-- Her beautiful WASPY MOTHER holding a blond baby girl (herself);

-- A formal commissioned portrait of her parents and herself (at 8 or 9), all dressed up and unsmiling, no one touching;

-- Herself with a younger Whit on the bank of a river; she's around 12, wearing rubber waders, he's teaching her how to cast a fly rod, they're both laughing.

-- Herself at 14, already sexier than she should be, wearing a lavender-colored "Deep River High" hoodie and smiling. (This is the same photo that Whit has on his bedside table.)

She takes this last picture of herself off the wall and stares at it. Silent tears of anger roll down her cheeks.

Whit appears beside her, gently takes the picture from her.

WHIT

I wish your mother was here to see
you.

Nicole wipes her eyes. After a moment, Whit replaces the photograph on the wall.

INT. NICOLE'S OLD BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Her old bedroom, obsessively preserved as a shrine to the 14-year-old girl she was.

Whit enters; for him, it's still a shrine.

WHIT

I kept your old room exactly as it
was.

He picks a silver comb off the dresser; every object in here clearly a talisman for him.

WHIT (CONT'D)

I always knew you'd come back. No
one else believed it. But I did.

Nicole has stopped a foot inside the doorway.

NICOLE

I can't stay here.

He looks at her, surprised and hurt. Then recovers.

WHIT

Of course you can't. Not right
now, anyway. When you're ready.

NICOLE

I'm sorry.

WHIT

Don't ever apologize -- not to me
or anyone.

NICOLE

I want to stay in the guest house.

WHIT

(another blow)
Of course.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - ENTRY HALL - LATER

A two-storey guest house, simply but elegantly furnished.

Nicole's new carry-on suitcase sits by itself in the middle
of the entry hall.

INT. HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

She stands at the edge of the basement stairs, staring down
into the black depths as...

INSIDE HER HEAD - (AURAL) FLASHBACK

She hears the encroaching clomp of HEAVY FOOTSTEPS DESCENDING
STAIRS, each percussive step louder and more frightening...

INT. HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Her entire body begins to tremble, until...

INSIDE HER HEAD - (AURAL) FLASHBACK

At last the awful footsteps go silent and we know that
whoever it was has reached the bottom of the stairs...

INT. HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

And Nicole slams the door to the basement -- blocking out the
darkness and the memory.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - LATER

She sits rigidly on the edge of the bed, feet on the floor,
eyes darting around the room.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

She stands naked in front of a full-length mirror, her expression blank. A 3-inch red SURGICAL SCAR on her abdomen.

With a precise jerk she yanks a single hair out of her head.

INT. SHOWER - A MINUTE LATER

The water runs. She is washing her hair but it's difficult; every time she closes her eyes the BEATING SOUND OF THE WATER grows incredibly loud and she begins to panic and has to open her eyes again. Then shampoo gets in her eyes and she begins to panic more until...

Hair still half-covered with shampoo, she stumbles out of the shower and stands gasping for breath.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER (NIGHT)

Dressed again, hair damp, she stands at the corner of the curtained window peering out at...

Her father's house across the lawn, a number of lights on. His SILHOUETTE just visible in a downstairs window.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Whit stands at the window looking across the dark lawn at the lighted guest house.

He seems haunted. He turns from the window, walks to the bar cart. Stands there desperate for a drink, at war with himself.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

He sits in an arm chair, staring into the empty fireplace.

He finishes the whiskey in his glass, pauses, makes a guilty decision, and refills from a crystal carafe on the side table.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

A hand hunts through a drawer full of kitchen knives...

Pulls out a 10-inch cook's KNIFE.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - MOMENTS LATER

The night lit by stars. Carrying knife and unlit flashlight, Nicole walks toward the hulking shadow of the BARN. Lights are still on in her father's house.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

She enters the barn and slides the heavy wooden door shut behind her. Her panic spikes -- the barn cavernous, creepy, scattered with old farm equipment parts, discarded furniture, hay bales, shadows. She switches on the flashlight, swings the beam this way and that... then forces herself forward.

At the back of the barn, a wooden ladder leads to a hayloft. She stares at it.

INT. HAYLOFT - MOMENTS LATER

The flashlight beam probes up through the opening in the wooden floor, partially illuminating the dark hayloft filled with rotting hay.

Nicole emerges, tense with fear. PILL BUGS appear in the hay in her flashlight beam. She picks one up and it curls into a protective ball on her palm; this seems to calm her for a moment. Carefully, she puts the insect back down.

She places the flashlight on the hay so it shines over one corner of the loft. She gets down on her knees there. She grips the knife with both hands, raises it above her head, counting desperately to calm herself...

NICOLE

One, two, three, four--

The blade flashes downward and for a split-second it looks like she's about to stab herself -- but instead of ripping into her stomach the knife slashes violently into the hay in front of her. Then she raises it and does it again. Then again, each time striking a slightly different place...

On the fourth slash the BLADE STRIKES METAL. Clawing into the hay with her hands, she lifts out a flat metal box.

Her fingers tremble as she lifts the lid. Inside the box is a girl's lavender-colored "Deep River High" hoodie (the same as in the photo). And a leather journal.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - MOMENTS LATER

She walks back across the lawn toward the guest house, carrying knife, journal, hoodie, the flashlight switched off.

She looks over at her father's house -- now completely dark -- and keeps going toward the guest house, walking a bit quicker now.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - ENTRY HALL - MOMENTS LATER

She enters the guest house and bolts the door behind her.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

She stands looking at the kitchen table. Arranged there like objects in a display case are the knife, the journal, the hoodie.

Suddenly a HIGH SHRIEKING WHISTLE blasts the room, startling her horribly...

A TEA KETTLE...

She hurls herself at the stove and switches off the burner.

Silence. But she's undone.

INT. KITCHEN - A MINUTE LATER

She sits at the table, hands cupped around a steaming mug of tea. Wearing the hoodie -- it still fits, "Deep River High" tight across her chest -- she looks almost 14 years old again as...

INSIDE HER HEAD an image flashes, flickers, comes to life (there's no sound)...

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

She's 5 years younger, wearing common clothes, sitting at a cheap card table (the background blurry), hands cupped around a steaming mug with a yellow Lipton's tea tag hanging over the rim...

The skin around her left eye is swollen black and blue. Her gaze is on someone or something we can't see, her expression wary but not without interest.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Coming out of her memory, Nicole's hands shake, spilling some tea on the journal. She rushes to wipe up the liquid with paper towel but the damage is done -- there's a stain now on the leather cover, which upsets her terribly. To calm herself she pinches the inside of her arm hard with her fingernails. (Now we notice a trail of little red welts previously made by her fingernails up and down the inside of her arm.)

She opens the journal. On the first page, in her 14-year-old-girl's handwriting, she reads: "Nicole Grace Walcott, April 2004-".

She stares at these words on the page, trying to remember that girl. Then she turns to the next page and first journal entry (the entries are not dated) and reads:

NICOLE (V.O.)

"Went riding with Mitch all afternoon. I was on Gully, he took Culver's mare. He doesn't really know how to ride but he was sweet, followed me all the way to the clearing by the stream and there was this moment where I thought like, let's just keep going, don't stop, let's just disappear together. But we couldn't. Instead, I got down and took off my clothes for him. He looked so grateful I thought he might cry."

End of first entry; she turns the page, reads the next one:

NICOLE (V.O.)

"Met Mitch at the garage after school. His dad was behind the desk, checking me out like usual. Gives me the creeps sometimes. Mitch took me to Spiderman 2 and drove me home. He won't come in the gate, says my dad hates his guts. I told him it's not true, and then at dinner Mom says in that ice-cube voice she gets, 'Your father and I are assuming you're still a virgin.' It wasn't a question. And Dad's just sitting there staring at his favorite new painting on the wall, like we're this perfect happy family, not saying a fucking word."

End of second entry; Nicole closes the journal. She gets up and goes to the window and looks out, breath coming in shallow pants, until the barn and her father's house and the darkness outside are all finally obscured by the fog on the glass.

EXT. DEEP RIVER - EAST SIDE - SAME TIME

And now we're a few miles away in EAST SIDE -- the working-class, industrial part of Deep River Township; literally the wrong side of the tracks. On a strip of rundown-looking businesses along the main drag we find a three-bay working garage connected to a separate office, under an unlit sign that reads "CORKINS AUTO BODY". Cars in various states of disrepair are parked off to the side. Behind the office windows all the blinds are closed; interior light glows around the edges.

INT. CORKINS AUTO BODY - OFFICE - NIGHT

EARL CORKINS (early 50s, a rough cunning man who puts tension in a room just by being in it) enters the cheaply furnished, garage-like office with a key, closes and bolts the door behind him.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

What took so long?

EARL

You ever try to find a place that sells this stuff after 10 P.M.?

Earl pulls a brand-new SPRAY CAN OF EASY-OFF OVEN CLEANER out of a paper bag, tosses it to...

JIMMY CORKINS (27 muscled, bearded, tattooed, quick-minded ex-Marine), who snatches it out of the air and holds it up in front of...

The terrified eyes of the MAN he has duct-taped to a chair. (The man's mouth has also been taped so he can't speak.)

JIMMY

So this here's your basic oven cleaner. I like it cause it's cheap and you can find it pretty much anywhere.

EARL

\$4.87.

[Note: We have the sense that this is a kind of performance that father and son have played before.]

JIMMY

We're gonna add that to what you already owe us. Okay with you?

The man taped to the chair nods frantically.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Which makes... \$20,004 and 87 cents. That's how much you haven't paid us. Even though we've been very, very patient.

Jimmy removes the cap from the Easy-Off.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Which is why we've asked you here tonight. So my Dad and me, we can show you in person -- which, in the unlikely event you've ever read *The Iliad* by Homer, you'll know is a form of respect among adversaries on the battlefield -- that our patience is most definitely at an end.

Jimmy takes a moment to glance at the instructions on the back of the can.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Says here you're supposed to shake it before you use it.

EARL

So shake it.

Jimmy shakes the can. The man's eyes have begun to bulge with terror, breath pumping out of his nose. Jimmy checks the instructions again.

JIMMY

"Hold can 8 to 12 inches away from surface to be cleaned."

He holds the can about 8 inches from the man's face. Now the man is desperately trying to scream for help, but can't because of the tape over his mouth.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I know, I know -- these instructions are never clear. They're written by, like, Indians.

He sprays a long blast of oven cleaner directly into the man's face. The man begins to scream and writhe in agony as the chemicals burn his face and eyes -- or he would be screaming and writhing if he weren't taped to a chair with his mouth sealed shut. Instead, all he can do is WHIMPER horribly.

Jimmy looks at him with genuine pity. Then with one lightning-quick PUNCH he knocks the man unconscious. His version of a mercy blow.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

He won't need to shave for a while.

Earl pulls a bottle of vodka and two shot glasses out of a metal desk, pours. Walks a glass over to Jimmy, who's wiping oven-cleaner off his knuckles with a rag.

EARL

Got an interesting call today.

JIMMY

Fuck, this shit really burns.

EARL

Our friend who works baggage at the airport. You're not gonna believe who he saw stepping off a private jet at 11:15 this morning.

JIMMY

Who?

EARL

The fucking "Gentleman of Bower's Run".

JIMMY

So he's got his own plane now. So what?

EARL

You're missing the point, Jimmy.

Jimmy's only half-paying attention. Still shaking his punching hand and looking at the unconscious guy in the chair, he takes the shot and throws it down.

JIMMY

What's the point?

EARL

The point is, he was with his daughter.

Jimmy looks at him, stunned.

JIMMY
No fucking way.

EARL
(nods)
Back from the dead. And all grown
up.

JIMMY
He was positive?

EARL
One hundred percent.

JIMMY
How can he be so sure?

EARL
You remember her, before she
disappeared.

Jimmy's face says he remembers her very well.

JIMMY
You tell Mitch yet?

Earl pours him another.

EARL
Thought you should be the one to do
that.

Jimmy nods, downs the shot.

EXT. DEEP RIVER - MITCH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A small ranch-style on the edge of the nicer side of Deep
River. Minimal landscaping.

Jimmy parks his well-maintained vintage Plymouth Duster in
the driveway next to Mitch's Prius.

He knocks on the front door. MITCH (30, clean-cut and
handsome) opens the door, stares unsmiling at his brother,
then turns back into the house.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy follows, looks around the living room: pizza box and empty beer bottle on the coffee table, Red Sox on the widescreen.

Mitch returns, hands Jimmy a beer.

JIMMY

Jeez, man. And here I've been thinking my big brother was living the high life for all of us.

MITCH

What's Dad want?

JIMMY

Who says he wants something?

MITCH

(knows better)

So this is just a social call?

A beat; Jimmy grabs the remote from the coffee table and switches off the TV.

JIMMY

We got an eyewitness saw Nicole Walcott at Manchester airport this morning.

A stunned, confused beat from Mitch. Then:

MITCH

Fuck you, Jimmy.

JIMMY

I'm serious. She walked off a private jet with her old man.

MITCH

Says who?

JIMMY

Someone reliable.

MITCH

I would've heard about it from the DA's office. It would've made the papers.

JIMMY

You know that family, Mitch. They got enough money to buy the news when they want.

MITCH

That might be what they think, but the reality's a little more complicated.

Jimmy reaches down, picks up a slice of pizza.

JIMMY

(taking a bite)

Yet get this at Mizza's?

MITCH

Even if it is her -- which I seriously doubt -- it's got nothing to do with me anymore.

JIMMY

Just thought I'd give you a heads-up. You were the one thought she walked on water when we were kids, not me.

Jimmy drops the half-finished slice back in the box.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Anyway, congrats. Now everyone'll know you're innocent.

MITCH

They already know. You don't get made Deputy Prosecutor if people think you're guilty.

JIMMY

Right, I forgot. You get made Deputy Prosecutor by half the fucking town owing Dad favors.

Mitch glares at his brother.

MITCH

Get out.

Jimmy shrugs, walks slowly to the door.

JIMMY

How about dinner with me and Dad some night? We promise not to talk business.

MITCH

I'm busy.

JIMMY

Keeping your "professional distance"?

MITCH

That's what you and Dad never understood, Jimmy. It's not professional. It's personal.

JIMMY

If you say so. Night, brother.

Jimmy exits. Mitch closes the door after him and stands alone in his house, staring 12 years back into his past.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Whit sits alone at the kitchen table, eating scrambled eggs and toast and reading *The Wall Street Journal*. He looks tired and preoccupied.

Nicole enters. Whit stands immediately, nervous and eager to please.

WHIT

Good morning.

NICOLE

Morning.

WHIT

How'd you sleep?

She doesn't answer; stands looking at the large kitchen full of sunlight like it might be dangerous.

WHIT (CONT'D)

Coffee?

NICOLE

Any tea?

WHIT

I'm afraid that's one thing we don't have. You can make a shopping list for the housekeeper.

NICOLE

I don't ever want to eat meat again.

WHIT

(beat)

Okay, no meat.

She sits at the table. Picks up the front section of the *Journal*, glances at it; then drops it like she can't make sense of it. In her own mental bubble, she pulls Whit's plate over and tries a forkful of egg. Then another. Once started, she plows the food into her mouth until the plate is clean.

Whit stands watching her, realizing he doesn't understand a goddamn thing about her now. And he might never again.

WHIT (CONT'D)

You were hungry.

He takes the empty plate and puts it in the sink (first time he's ever waited on anybody in his life). He brings her a small glass of orange juice. She drinks it in one gulp and wipes her mouth with her hand.

NICOLE

I want to hold a press conference.

A pause as he tries not to stare with alarm at the trail of red welts he's just noticed on the inside of her arm.

WHIT

I understand. But maybe you should wait a bit. Until you're more acclimated.

NICOLE

It's my story. If I don't tell it, they will. And they'll get it all wrong.

WHIT

There are ways of managing that.

NICOLE

(fierce)

It's my story.

WHIT

(beat; backs off)

Okay.

EXT. DEEP RIVER - MAIN STREET - DAY (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

A black chauffer-driven Mercedes 500S with tinted windows drives slowly along Main Street.

[Note: On the surface, the central and oldest part of Deep River is everything you could ever imagine a pretty, prosperous, Revolutionary-era New England small town to be.] The car garners disapproving interest from PASSERSBY. *Not how we do things here.*

INT. DEEP RIVER TOWN HALL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A large bright town hall with rows of seating and a semi-raised stage at the front. The seating/viewing area is filled with Press and fronted by news Photographers and local television crews, the whole room quietly murmuring in anticipation of a hot story.

At the rear of the platform (dressed for the occasion) George and his wife JUDY, (40s, social climber, country-club looks), Nora, and Jay stand stiffly, even somewhat haughtily, in a semi-circle of familial support. In front of them is a microphone stand still waiting for a speaker.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Whit (in suit and tie) knocks softly on a closed restroom door. The murmuring of the press is fainter here but still audible.

WHIT

Nicole?

INT. RESTROOM - SAME TIME

She stares at her own face, blank with terror, in the mirror above the sink. Her breathing is shallow. Her dress brand-new for the event. The sink strewn with blond hairs that she's yanked out.

INT. TOWN HALL - AUDITORIUM - MINUTES LATER

A hush falls over the press; then, all at once, cameras begin clicking and rolling.

Whit stands at the rear of the stage with the rest of the family, eyes anxiously locked on...

Nicole at the microphone, her eyes darting, panicked, over the audience.

NICOLE

Hello--

A shriek of MIC DISTORTION cuts her off, scaring the daylights out of her and triggering...

A SOUNDLESS IMAGE SEQUENCE INSIDE HER HEAD of obscenely colored half-blurred patterns, moving in violent jerks, weird and disturbing...

While on stage she remains exposed before the hall full of gawking Journalists...

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

As the moving colored pattern continues, repeats, coming more into focus... And we realize that it's her own close-up view of a cheap bedspread as she is being violently raped from behind...

INT. TOWN HALL - AUDITORIUM - SAME TIME

While in reality she's still on stage, mentally reeling, trying to function.

NICOLE
Sorry... God, this is...

Whit can't watch anymore -- he comes forward and stands beside her for support.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
I'm okay.

Whit gives her room but stays nearby. The Journalists watch, recording her, taking pictures. Nicole regathers herself. She speaks haltingly at first, but gradually grows more assured.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
Thank you all for coming. As you know, for the last 12 years of my life I've been a missing persons case. Most people believed I was dead. I don't blame any of them. There were many times during what happened to me when I thought I was dead, too.

She looks at Whit, holds his gaze for an emotional moment, then turns back to the audience.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

When I was 14, I made the really stupid decision to run away from home. None of the things I was unhappy about then seem very important now. In the Boston bus station I was approached by a man in his mid-30s who asked me why I looked so sad. He had a southern accent, and he said his name was Ronnie.

INT. BAR - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

YOUNG NICOLE, 14, sits at a bar table with RONALD TIBBETT (predatory, not quite handsome). He hands her a pina colada and guides the straw into her mouth. She smiles at him tentatively and he smiles back with manly confidence. He watches her finish the drink.

NICOLE (V.O.)

I let him buy me a drink. He put something in it, I don't know what.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

She lies, eyes wild with fear, bound and gagged in the backseat of a moving car.

NICOLE (V.O.)

When I came to, I was bound and gagged in the back seat of his car. He was driving. I was terrified. It was dark and I had no idea where we were, except I thought I could smell pine trees.

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA WOODS - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

HER POV: A clearing in the woods, eerie country darkness, sound of crickets, slamming of car door and Tibbett's heavy footsteps... Then he's hauling her like a side of beef from the car, carrying her over his shoulder toward a harsh light that shines from above the door of a shabby wooden house. (The house from the opening that burned to the ground.)

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

The basement of Tibbett's house has been cheaply but carefully made into a secure one-room apartment.

The windows are narrow rectangles set high up and reinforced with steel bars. In one corner, a standing screen hides a toilet, sink, and free-standing bathtub.

NICOLE (V.O.)

He'd planned the whole thing very carefully. He'd turned his basement into a prison apartment. There was no way to get out unless he let us out.

FEMALE JOURNALIST (V.O.)

(politely interrupting)

Excuse me?

INT. TOWN HALL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Pulled out of her flashback, Nicole looks out at a FEMALE JOURNALIST, early 30s, in the audience.

NICOLE

Yes?

FEMALE JOURNALIST

Marnie Grigson from the New York Times. Sorry to interrupt, but you said "us".

WHIT

Nicole will take questions after her statement.

NICOLE

(answers anyway)

There were two of us. Another girl was already there.

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

Now we see that the apartment is fitted out with two of everything: two sleeping cots placed end-to-end along one wall; two chairs at a card table; two towels by the sink.

NICOLE (V.O.)

Her name was Mary Jo Cameron. He'd picked her up hitchhiking in West Virginia a couple of months before he took me. We were the same age.

INT. TOWN HALL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

FEMALE JOURNALIST
Where is she?

NICOLE
(beat)
She's dead.

FEMALE JOURNALIST
How did she die?

A long beat; Nicole's eyes glisten, but tears don't fall.

NICOLE
He cut her throat.

A stunned silence in the room. Then a MALE JOURNALIST, 35, speaks up.

MALE JOURNALIST
Was she wealthy too?

WHIT
What kind of question is that?
What publication are you with?

MALE JOURNALIST
Tom Yankus, Mr. Walcott, Boston
Globe. I'm just trying to
understand why this man might've
taken these particular two girls.

WHIT
Because he was a goddamn animal,
that's why.

NICOLE
I can't tell you the reason because
I don't know. We were the same age
and both blond, if that means
anything. All I know is it wasn't
money he was after. What was
important to him was having us to
himself. Mary Jo was born in a
trailer park. Her mother died of
cancer when she was little, and her
father abandoned her. She didn't
have siblings. She ran away from
every foster home she was sent to.
And when she disappeared off a
country highway at 14 no one even
noticed.

(MORE)

NICOLE (CONT'D)

No one ever gave a shit about Mary Jo Cameron in her life, except me.

MALE JOURNALIST

So this man--

NICOLE

His name was Ronald Tibbett.

MALE JOURNALIST

Is he in custody?

NICOLE

No.

MALE JOURNALIST

Then what happened to him?

NICOLE

Right after he killed Mary Jo, he tried to kill me. He failed. Then I burned his house to the ground.

MALE JOURNALIST

Am I understanding you correctly...? You're saying...?

NICOLE

I stabbed him in the heart with the same knife he used on Mary Jo.

Another stunned silence in the room; even the veteran journalists look discomfited. Then a Man speaks up from the back corner.

MAN

I have a question.

He stands. It's Mitch, in sportcoat and tie, unable to keep the years of intense feeling for Nicole out of his voice.

MITCH

Mitch Corkins, Deep River Deputy Prosecutor.

WHIT

(sharp)

Mr. Corkins, the conditions for this press conference were clearly stated. Journalists only.

Whit's animosity feels personal. Nicole holds up a hand until he reluctantly backs off.

NICOLE
Go ahead, Mitch.

MITCH
Did you ever try to escape?

NICOLE
Seven times the first four years.
We never made it out of the house.
It was like he always knew exactly
what we were thinking. Like he was
inside our heads. And each time he
caught us he was more brutal than
before. After that we stopped
trying.

MITCH
Until this time.

She shakes her head.

NICOLE
No one's going to understand this.
I wasn't trying to escape. I just
couldn't stand it that he killed
her.

She and Mitch stare at each other; between them some intense, highly complicated connection. Then Whit steps to the mic and ends it.

WHIT
Any further questions for Nicole
should be directed through the
spokesman for Walcott Enterprises.
Now we ask that you respect our
family's privacy during this
important period of healing and
reunion. Thank you for coming.

He switches off the mic.

INT. GEORGE'S CAR (MOVING) - LATER

A Volvo wagon. George drives home from the press conference with Judy next to him in the front seat.

JUDY
That wasn't something you see every
day.

Brooding to himself, WASP to the core, George doesn't respond.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Do you still talk? Or is that extra?

GEORGE

She's very damaged.

JUDY

I thought she handled herself extremely well.

GEORGE

We just heard our niece announce to a roomful of reporters that she killed a man with her own hands.

JUDY

It was self-defense, George. That psychopath stabbed her in the tummy. She's lucky to be alive. I bet she's got a horrific scar. I'll give her the name of my plastic surgeon, that's what I'll do.

GEORGE

The real scar's inside her head.

JUDY

Why do you always have to over-analyze everything? The point is she survived. Probably raped over and over for years, poor thing, like having some disgusting, rabid dog poking and snarling at you from behind.

GEORGE

(dry)

Less is more, thank you.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Volvo turns into a driveway and pulls up outside a large beautiful home -- a gorgeous property, no question, though not quite as impressive as his older brother Whit's.

INT. VOLVO (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE

There's the question of what all this means for the family.

JUDY

What are you talking about?

George gets out of the car, followed by Judy. They start walking along the bluestone path to the house.

GEORGE

You know I put Jay up for a seat on the board. Whit's been supporting the move, at least in theory. But now that Nicole's back, I know him, his whole mindset could change.

JUDY

Jay deserves that seat.

GEORGE

Of course he does. And I'll see that he gets it.

JUDY

But what if he doesn't? That seat belongs to us.

GEORGE

(tight)

I said I'll take care of it.

Irritated, Judy starts walking ahead of George.

JUDY

That's what you always say and it never happens. Whit's stronger than you and he always wins.

In a flash of rage, George grabs Judy by the shoulder, turns her, and SLAPS her hard across the face. She stumbles back, hand over her cheek, before managing to right herself.

GEORGE

(mortified)

I apologize. I lost my temper. I shouldn't have done that.

Her cheek still burning, she straightens her clothes and faces George coldly.

JUDY

I'll start fixing dinner.

She enters the house. As she goes in, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel comes out and starts jumping on George's legs, eager for attention.

But George -- staring across his property into the distance, lost in his own unhappy thoughts -- seems not to notice.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - SAME AFTERNOON

One of the cheap motel chains, all hideous oranges and browns and nubbly rayon. The blinds are drawn and the TV's playing *Top Chef* at low volume.

On the queen bed, well-practiced partners, Nora (wearing nothing but a black lace bra) straddle-fucks Earl Corkins, both of them building toward climax, his hands pumping her hips.

NORA

Give it to me. I said fucking give it to me, you cocksucker.

EARL

I'll give it to you, you bitch.

NORA

Then do it. Fuck me.

EARL

You wanna get fucked?

He roughly grabs her tits and she grabs his hands and squeezes them harder -- the rougher the better. Moments later, they both come in a slew of orgasmic curses.

NORA

Fuck me with your cock!

EARL

Fucking cunt!

It's over; she rolls off of him. Their sex hour a regular transaction once again satisfying both parties.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

They're almost dressed. All business now, Earl zips up his fly while peering warily around the edge of the window blinds to the parking lot. Nora comes out of the bathroom wearing the same dress she was wearing at Nicole's press conference. She checks her lipstick in the mirror. He turns from the window.

EARL

You haven't mentioned it.

NORA
Mentioned what?

EARL
Don't play dumb.

NORA
Ask Mitch. He was there.

EARL
You know he won't tell me anything.

NORA
I'm sure it'll be on the news
tonight.

EARL
God, you can be a real WASP bitch,
you know that?

NORA
Church and state, Earl. Church and
state.

EARL
What kind of Thomas Jefferson crap
are you spouting now?

NORA
Separation of powers. You know the
rules. We keep our mouths shut and
no family talk, or the deal's off.
This room's Switzerland, only a
whole lot sexier. Let's not fuck
it up, okay?

She walks over to him, grabs his crotch, and kisses him on the mouth. She takes her purse and exits the room. Earl returns to the window, checking to make sure no witnesses saw her leaving the motel.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - STABLE - LATE AFTERNOON

Nicole (still in her press conference dress) walks up to the stable at the edge of the pasture behind the barn.

INT. STABLE - CONTINUOUS

She enters, stopping when she sees an old CHESTNUT HORSE standing in the far stall. (The few nearer stalls are empty). The horse is old, his coat and withers streaked with some gray. He watches Nicole silently as...

A stable hand, LOUIS (late 20s, local, sweet), emerges from the rear tack room carrying a grooming bucket, and Nicole freezes.

LOUIS

Sorry.

He's staring at her, more than a little overwhelmed by being so close to her beauty. Her chest heaving faintly, eyes flipping between him and the horse.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Hello, Miss Walcott. I'm Louis. You probably don't remember me, I was the stable boy when you were still -- I mean, back when you--

NICOLE

I remember, Louis.
(smiles)
Good to see you again.

LOUIS

(bashful)
Um, you too.

NICOLE

I came to see Gully. I hope that's okay.

LOUIS

(beat, realizing)
Sure, sure. I mean, he was your horse. You used to ride him all the time.

She nods, still trying to calm herself.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I try to spend as time with him as I can, so he doesn't get lonely. He's in pretty good shape for an old fella.

NICOLE

Can I be alone with him?

STABLE HAND

Course.

Louis returns to the tack room and closes the door. After a moment, Nicole approaches the horse's stall, Gully watching her silently.

She reaches into the pocket of her jeans and pulls out half a carrot. (As she does so, unbeknownst to her, a FOLDED BUSINESS CARD falls out of her pocket.)

Carefully, she holds the carrot out toward the horse.

NICOLE
Remember me, Gully?

Gully backs up in his stall and watches her warily.

Seeing the horse's reaction, a still coolness comes over Nicole's gaze. She drops the carrot on the floor.

INT. TACK ROOM - SAME TIME

Louis is rubbing oil into a bridle when he hears the BANG of the stable door closing.

INT. STABLE - CONTINUOUS

He emerges from the tack room and finds Nicole gone. He sees the the piece of carrot on the ground and wonders what happened.

LOUIS
(to horse)
You do something to scare her away,
old Gull? Shame on you, that's not
how you treat a beautiful woman.

The horse looks down. Now Louis sees the folded business card that fell out of Nicole's pocket. He picks it up, unfolds it...

It's the card of "Lieutenant Gene Burrese, Ashe County Sheriff's Department, Jefferson, North Carolina". Two phone numbers and an e-mail address are listed.

Louis has no clue what this means, only an instinct that holding on to it might help Nicole somehow, and that's what he wants to do -- help her and be her protector and maybe, maybe one day get her to love him as he loves her. He pockets the card for safe-keeping.

EXT. LT. BURGESS' HOUSE, JEFFERSON NC - EARLY EVENING

And now we're on a quiet middle-class street on the outskirts of this town in the North Carolina High Country of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The door to Lieutenant Gene Burgess' garage is rolled up, a work light on.

INT. BURGESS' GARAGE - SAME TIME

Lieutenant Gene Burgess of the Ashe County Sheriff's Department, in jeans and work shirt, wrench in hand, is bent over the exposed motor of a lawnmower. On a shelf in the corner of the garage is a small TV set with rabbit ears. The local news is on, but Burgess is too immersed in trying to fix the mower to pay any attention. Until he hears Nicole's voice...

NICOLE (O.S.)

I can't tell you the reason because
I don't know.

It's a CLIP from the press conference; Burgess' head snaps toward the TV set... he drops the wrench.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

We were the same age and both blond, if that means anything. All I know is it wasn't money he was after. What was important to him was having us to himself. Mary Jo wasn't wealthy. She was born in a trailer park. Her mother died of cancer when she was little, and her father abandoned her. She didn't have siblings. She ran away from every foster home she was sent to. And when she disappeared off a country highway at 14 no one even noticed. No one ever gave a (BLEEP) about Mary Jo Cameron in her life, except me.

On TV the image of Nicole is replaced by a local FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (30, out-of-fashion clothes, North Carolina accent) comes on.

NEWS ANCHOR

That was kidnapping victim Nicole Walcott at her press conference earlier today near her home in Deep River, New Hampshire. Walcott's father, explosives magnate Whitaker Walcott, has asked for privacy for his daughter in the wake of one of the strangest and most chilling cases of abduction in North Carolina history. And that will do it for us here this evening--

Burgess clicks off the TV. Troubled, he stands slowly wiping engine grease from his hands, trying hard to remember something that Nicole Walcott told him back in the hospital in the days after her escape.

INT. BLACK POWDER FARM - MAIN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

An impressive room, elegantly wall-papered and furnished. Nicole sits stiffly at one end of the long table, two dinner places set with china and silver in front of her, staring at a PAINTING on the wall of her younger self with her parents. Whit (younger) and Corinne formally dressed, Young Nicole in a sexy short skirt.

Whit enters, followed by his housekeeper/cook CARMEN, 30s (Mexican, attractive, quiet) carrying two plates of food.

WHIT
(sitting down)
I told Carmen you don't eat meat.

CARMEN
I hope you like vegetarian lasagna.

Carmen sets down the plates.

NICOLE
Thank you, Carmen.

Carmen smiles, exits.

WHIT
I'd offer you wine but I gave away
my cellar a few years ago.

Nicole takes a sip of water.

NICOLE
He never gave us anything to drink
but water and tea.

It takes Whit a moment to process the "he".

WHIT
I've been trying not to ask you
questions.

NICOLE
I appreciate that.

WHIT
Well, bon appetit.

He starts to eat. Nicole doesn't touch her food.

WHIT (CONT'D)

Carmen can fix you something else
if you'd like.

NICOLE

It's fine.

WHIT

You were brave in front of all
those people today. A real
Walcott. I was proud of you.

NICOLE

(indicates portrait)
When was that painted?

WHIT

That? 13 years ago. You had
terrible poison ivy on your legs,
remember? Your mother begged you
to put on long pants but you
insisted on that tiny little skirt.
(smiles)
God, you were a piece of work.

NICOLE

(off the portrait)
I don't see any rash.

WHIT

I made the painter cover it up. I
wanted you perfect.

NICOLE

(beat)
There's a lot I don't remember.

WHIT

Sometimes that can be a blessing.

INT. CORKINS AUTO BODY - OFFICE - NIGHT

Earl sits at his desk, drinking coffee and looking through
the private account books. The TV's on -- the local 11
o'clock News -- but the sound's off and he's not paying
attention. He opens a drawer, reaches past a handgun stashed
there, pulls out a calculator, closes the drawer again. He's
in the middle of checking a row of figures when he glances up
at the TV...

And sees Whit and Nicole (a CLIP from the end of their news conference).

Earl grabs the remote and presses the volume button...

WHIT

Any further questions for Nicole should be directed to her through the spokesman for Walcott Enterprises. Now we ask that you respect our family's privacy during this important period of healing and reunion. Thank you for coming.

The camera shows Whit switching off the mic. Then we REVERSE ANGLE and we're looking at Earl (watching Whit on TV), a deep, private hatred in his eyes.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Propped in bed, wearing the "Deep River High" hoodie, Nicole opens the leather journal to a page about a third of the way through. She reads the undated entry...

NICOLE (V.O.)

"This'll be the last time I write. I'm going to bury you alive. If anybody ever finds you they'll know what I've been through and maybe they'll understand. But I doubt it. You've been my only real friend. You're empty until filled by someone else. Just like me."

End of entry. Haunted by her own words, Nicole turns the page... and finds it blank. Turns more pages... all blank. That was the final entry in the journal.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

A mug of steaming tea on the kitchen table. Ballpoint pen in hand, Nicole contemplates a fresh blank page in the journal. Hesitates, then starts writing a brand-new entry...

NICOLE (V.O.)

"I faced them today. Told my story and answered their questions. And they still have no idea what it was like. How would they? It didn't happen to them. They weren't there.

(MORE)

NICOLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 They weren't the ones that saw the
 look on your face when you realized
 your throat had been cut and you
 were about to die."

She takes a sip of tea, her hand steady this time.

EXT. DEEP RIVER - MAIN STREET CAFE - DAY

A cafe on Main Street with a chalkboard sign out front: "Try
 Our House-roasted Organic Coffee".

Nicole -- carefully dressed, looking beautiful but fragile --
 hesitates outside the cafe entrance.

INT. MAIN STREET CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

She enters, looks around anxiously. Mitch stands up at a
 table in the corner where's he's been waiting for her. As
 she walks toward him she gets recognized by a couple of other
 PATRONS in the cafe.

MITCH
 I didn't think you were coming.

She sits and then he does. A WAITRESS (26, nose ring,
 Birkenstocks) comes over to take her order.

WAITRESS
 Coffee?

NICOLE
 Tea, please.

WAITRESS
 What kind?

NICOLE
 I don't care, as long as it's not
 Lipton's.

WAITRESS
 We don't carry that brand.

NICOLE
 Just so it's not Lipton's.

WAITRESS
 I just told you, we don't carry it.

MITCH
(stepping in)
She'll take Earl Grey. Regular
coffee for me. Okay?

WAITRESS
Sure.

The waitress walks away.

NICOLE
Sorry.

MITCH
I'm not a big Lipton's fan myself.

A pause; Mitch looking at her like he can't quite believe she's real.

NICOLE
What do you see?

MITCH
You look different.

NICOLE
You too. 12 years.

MITCH
All that stuff that happened to
you, it's like it's still there in
your eyes. And I don't even know
what it is.

The waitress re-appears, sets down their drinks.

WAITRESS
One tea, not Lipton's. And coffee.

MITCH
Thanks.

WAITRESS
(to Nicole, cool)
We were in English together
freshman year. Mrs. Jacoby's
class. Before you...

The Waitress doesn't finish. Without waiting for a response,
she walks away.

NICOLE
Don't think she liked me much.

MITCH

People feel threatened by anything that makes them scared.

NICOLE

Why would she be scared of me?

MITCH

You're the ultimate victim. And rich and beautiful to boot.

NICOLE

Sounds like some sick version of *America's Got Talent*: "And now, from Deep River, New Hampshire, please welcome... The Ultimate Victim."

MITCH

(surprised)
You had a TV?

NICOLE

We begged for it for months. He finally gave in just to shut us up. That little set became our God and psycho ward, all wrapped in one.

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

HER POV: Two pairs of outstretched female legs lead to a tiny 10-inch TV set with rabbit ears and flickery reception. On the TV screen: a *CSI* episode, William Petersen and Marg Helgenberger standing grimly over a dead female who's been slashed and raped by a serial killer.

NICOLE (V.O.)

To pass the time we'd retell each other the plots of shows. We knew all the roles by heart.

INT. MAIN STREET CAFE - DAY

MITCH

Were you heroes or victims?

A long beat, both realizing the question is bigger and more complicated than it seems.

NICOLE

You can't be both?

MITCH
Maybe you can.

NICOLE
(beat)
Mary Jo always wanted to play the
hero. So I ended up playing the
victim.

EXT. MAIN STREET CAFE - A LITTLE LATER

As they exit the cafe, they look up and see the Mercedes 500S idling ten yards up the street. The driver, NOLAN, 40 (black, careful movements, bodyguard physique), gets out and stands watching them from the curb.

MITCH
I see you've got the company car.

NICOLE
My dad insisted.

MITCH
It's okay. I wouldn't take any
chances with you either.

NICOLE
Mitch, I owe you an apology.

MITCH
No, you don't.

NICOLE
Disappearing on you the way I did.
It was cruel.

MITCH
You were 14. You were having
problems I didn't know anything
about. I still don't. But I'd
like to.

NICOLE
I just want you to know it wasn't
you. And it wasn't your family.
It was me. I didn't mean to hurt
you, but I felt if I didn't leave
right then, just vanish... I was
scared I was going to kill myself.

Her words visibly affect Mitch; he feels too much to speak.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
What was it like for you, after I
left?

MITCH
(beat)
Some people around here thought I'd
killed you and buried the body.

NICOLE
What?

MITCH
Your father was one of them.

NICOLE
God, I'm sorry.

MITCH
It's okay. I got through it.

NICOLE
Is that why you became a
prosecutor?

MITCH
No.
(beat)
Maybe.

She stands looking at him. Glances over at Nolan, then takes
Mitch's hand.

NICOLE
See you soon?

Mitch's nod is serious: *you will*. She leans in and kisses
him on the cheek. He watches her walk to the waiting car.
Nolan opens the door for her and she gets in. And now Mitch
can't see her through the tinted windows.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Nicole rides in back, eyes scanning PASSERSBY through the
tinted glass as Nolan guides the car through town.

NICOLE
I can see them but they can't see
me.

NOLAN
Welcome to the club.

After a moment, she smiles.

NICOLE
That's funny.

NOLAN
Once in a while, the truth *is*
funny.

NICOLE
What's your agenda, Nolan?

NOLAN
Beg your pardon?

NICOLE
My father's orders. You supposed
to not let me out of your sight?
Keep the press away?

NOLAN
Plus any unforeseen individuals.

NICOLE
So you're more than just a driver?

NOLAN
You could say that.

EXT. BOWER'S RUN ROAD - A LITTLE LATER

The Mercedes cruises out of town along the road that leads to
Black Powder Farm.

EXT. BOWER'S RUN ROAD - SAME

A FARMER riding an old, smoke-spewing tractor chain-drags a
massive tree stump across the road.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - SAME TIME

Nolan sees the tractor blocking the road and slows to a stop.
The Farmer holds up his hand -- *just a minute* -- and gives
the tractor more gas--

BANG! The engine backfires...

And in the backseat the sudden explosive noise sends Nicole
recoiling in terror as we...

CUT TO:

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

The POV through the narrow steel-barred basement window to Tibbett in his dirt yard, bottle of homemade moonshine in one hand and handgun in the other. Drunk, unsteady on his feet, he aims the gun at a tree on the edge of the clearing and rips off a series of wild shots... BANG! BANG! BANG! As...

The CAMERA turns and finds one of the cots along the wall, where (dressed, lying on top of the covers, their backs to camera) Nicole comfort-spoons and strokes the blond hair of a shaking MARY JO CAMERON, who with each gunshot outside (BANG! BANG! BANG!) let's out a whimper of terror.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

In the backseat of the Mercedes Nicole digs her nails into the soft flesh inside her elbow until the pain displaces the memory. Glancing up, she finds Nolan observing her in the rearview mirror.

NICOLE

You can go now.

The tractor has crossed, the road is clear. After a moment, Nolan drives on.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - PARKING AREA - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Earl Corkins' custom-outfitted Dodge Ram pick-up is the only vehicle currently parked in the Walcott driveway. He's leaning against the truck, alone and unhurried, visually cataloguing every acre of the estate.

He turns when he hears the Mercedes coming up the driveway.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - SAME TIME

NICOLE

Who's that?

Nolan is on alert and not thrilled.

NOLAN

That's Earl Corkins.

Nolan parks the Mercedes.

NOLAN (CONT'D)

I'll take care of this.

EXT. BLACK POWDER FARM - PARKING AREA - SAME TIME

But Nicole is out of the car before him.

NICOLE
Hello, Mr. Corkins.

Earl smiles at her, his cool, miss-nothing gaze injecting some immediate, hard-to-place tension into the mix.

EARL
Since when is it "Mr. Corkins" to you?

Nolan, meanwhile, has alertly positioned himself between Earl and Nicole.

NOLAN
Mr. Walcott's out on business.

EARL
Shame. But I wasn't coming to see him anyway. I wanted to welcome you back personally, Nicole.

NICOLE
Thank you.

EARL
Sounds like you had yourself one helluva a rough journey out in the big bad world.

NICOLE
It's what it was. I can't change it.

EARL
None of us can.

Nolan takes a step closer to Earl.

NOLAN
Hate to cut this short, but you were just leaving.

Earl and Nolan eyeball each other a moment, neither man moving.

NICOLE
It's okay, Nolan. I've known Mr. Corkins--

EARL
Call me Earl.

NICOLE
--and his family a long time.

EARL
That's exactly right. The Corkins
and Walcott families go way back.

He shoots her a cool, appraising look -- then abruptly
smiles.

EARL (CONT'D)
But that's ancient history.

After a moment, Nicole nods to Nolan: *it's okay.*

NOLAN
(grudging)
I'll be right over here.

Nolan walks off about 10 feet and stands watching Earl, arms
ready at his sides.

Earl turns his back on Nolan and focuses on Nicole.

EARL
Mercedes, black bodyguard, family
estate -- must feel like quite a
change from your recent situation.
Appalachia somewhere, wasn't it?

NICOLE
(ignores the question)
I just saw Mitch.

EARL
I know.
(off her surprise)
This town's the same postage stamp
it ever was.

NICOLE
You must be proud of him.

EARL
First Corkins to go to law school,
let alone college. Youngest Deputy
Prosecutor in the state. Who
woulda thunk? But I didn't come
here to brag about my kids. Like I
said, I just wanted to welcome you
home.

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

If there's ever anything me or my family can do for you, anything, all you gotta do is dial.

(hands her a card)

There's my cell.

As she takes the card, he leans in and speaks quietly, his nearness almost making her flinch.

EARL (CONT'D)

And, uh, no need to pay back that 500.

For a moment, before she can cover it up, her face draws a blank.

NICOLE

Thanks.

Earl studies her with cool, considering eyes.

EARL

You don't remember, do you?

NICOLE

(covering)

You gave me money, before I left.

Earl still thinking, brain clicking away darkly.

EARL

Yeah, I did. Our little secret. Well, you take care of yourself, Nicole. And don't forget to call if you need anything.

With a hard look at Nolan -- *you'll get yours* -- Earl gets in his truck and drives off. Nicole watches him tensely. She knows something bad just happened, she just doesn't know what it is.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

TING, TING, TING... Whit taps a silver knife against a wine glass filled with red wine. Around the long table covered with china, silver, and platters of food, Nicole (to Whit's right), George, Nora, Jay, and Judy all fall silent, as a uniformed Maid discreetly removes herself through the swinging door into the kitchen.

Whit gets to his feet, his face infused with a joy and vigor we've never quite seen before; he seems almost a new man.

WHIT

All of you know I'm not a fan of big speeches. But tonight's special. I even got some wine put in. A little Chateau Palmer never hurt a celebration.

Nora and George share a glance: *he's drinking again*. Whit turns to speak directly to Nicole. She meets his gaze steadily.

WHIT (CONT'D)

I never gave up hope this day would come. For 12 years I didn't know where you were or what had happened to you. But I always knew that somehow, some way, my little girl would come back to me. I missed the chance to see you grow up. So did your mother. I didn't protect you when you needed me. I'm so very sorry. But we're together now. That's the only thing that matters. You're home where you belong, surrounded by the people who love you most. We have a second chance.

(smiles)

And I'm never going to let you out of my sight again.

Brief relieving laughter around the table. Whit raises his glass.

WHIT (CONT'D)

To Nicole.

The family raise their glasses, each in his own mood bubble: Judy moist-eyed but shallow; Nora smiling but watchful; Jay a little drunk; George half-smiling and reserved.

FAMILY

To Nicole.

Before anyone can drink, Nicole raises her own wine-filled glass.

JAY

(serious)

Don't toast yourself, Nic -- it's bad luck.

Ignoring the cousinly warning, Nicole smiles at all of them.

NICOLE

To Nicole.

She drinks to herself a little brazenly -- *fuck bad luck* -- and for a moment the family seems taken aback. Then Whit drinks, the wine going down his throat like sweet medicine, and the others follow suit.

NICOLE'S POV: The PAINTING on the wall: her younger self with her parents, and we...

CLOSE ON her short skirt, her legs painted clean of poison ivy.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - LATER

Alone, dread in her eyes, she stands staring down into the black depths of the guest house basement.

CUT TO:

INT. RONALD TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

CLOSE ON a man's workboots, noisily descending basement stairs -- *THUNK, THUNK, THUNK* -- and we...

PULL BACK TO Tibbett, unshaven, drunk, unsteadily carrying two identical dinner TRAYS (microwaved TV dinners, plastic spoons, plastic bottles of water) and...

In a sheath at his hip, a long HUNTING KNIFE.

CUT TO:

INT. GUEST HOUSE - HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Fighting fear and every instinct she has, Nicole forces herself -- a brutal test of her own nerve -- to take the first steps down into the darkness of the guest house basement, as the...

SOUNDS OF A BURNING HOUSE fill her ears...

CUT TO:

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - GROUND FLOOR - DAY - FLASHBACK

Bleeding from a stab wound in her abdomen, gasping and coughing from pain and smoke-inhalation, and hauling a gallon can of lighter fluid, she stumbles up out of the basement stairway, through the open door and onto the ground floor of Tibbett's house. Behind her the basement is raging with fire, black SMOKE already pouring up through the doorway into the rest of the house.

She takes one haunted look back down where she came from, then drops the lighter fluid can and runs for the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. GUEST HOUSE - HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Hyperventilating from a panic attack, she crawls out of the guest house basement on all fours...

And huddles on the hallway floor, desperately trying to catch her breath.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL NORTH CAROLINA - WOODS - DAY - FLASHBACK

She's running for her life through woods, not knowing where she's going, breath shallow and panicked, twigs snapping underfoot, as somewhere behind her TIBBETT'S HOUSE IMPLODES WITH FIRE, and suddenly...

A branch smacks her hard in the face and she goes down in a heap; claws her way back to her feet and keeps going until...

Exhausted, losing blood and on the verge of collapse, she spots an opening in the woods ahead, runs toward it with the last of her strength...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY - FLASHBACK

Stumbles out of the woods onto paved road -- at the same moment hearing to her left a terrible SCREECHING OF TIRES, turning to see--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

A mug of steaming tea on the kitchen table. All quiet and still except for a ballpoint pen moving over paper...

Wearing the "Deep River High" hoodie, she's writing a new entry in the leather journal...

NICOLE (V.O.)

I guess we'll never really know why
some of us are stronger than
others. Why some of us, against
all odds, survive, where others
don't.

INT. TIBBETT'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

The same scene from earlier -- "Nicole" and "Mary Jo" lying together on the cot -- only now it's a few minutes later, the gunshots outside have stopped, and they're facing each other, as physically and emotionally intimate as sisters or lovers, and we can see -- it's eerie -- that they look so much alike they could be identical twins (though we can just tell them apart).

[Note: here, confusingly/shockingly, the woman we've known from the beginning as "Nicole" speaks in a voice we've never heard before, with a West Virginian accent; and the woman we've believed was "Mary Jo" speaks in the voice of "Nicole".]

MARY JO

(Nicole's voice; suicidal)
I want to die.

NICOLE

(Mary Jo's voice; loving)
Shut up, Nicole.

MARY JO

(Nicole's voice)
Promise you'll help me.

NICOLE

(Mary Jo's voice)
We'll get through this. I'm gonna
kill that motherfucker if it's the
last thing I do.

MARY JO
 (Nicole's voice)
 I don't want to get through this,
 Mary Jo. I just want it all to
 end. Promise you'll help me.

"Mary Jo" begins to sob desperately, and "Nicole" holds her.

NICOLE
 (Mary Jo's voice)
 I promise.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Still writing...

NICOLE (V.O.)
 (Mary Jo's voice)
 It's a mystery, what it takes for a
 human being to keep goin'. To be
 the last one standin' among all
 others. You'd think for sure it'd
 be the girl born in Paradise with a
 silver spoon in her mouth, cause
 she's got the most to get back to.
 But then it turns out there's no
 such place as Paradise, not on this
 earth. There are bad people
 everywhere.

"Nicole" puts down the pen. Out the window she sees that
 lights are still on in her father's house. Calmly, without
 flinching, she yanks a hair out of her head, lays it in the
 journal like a memento, and closes the book.

EXT. RURAL NORTH CAROLINA -- COUNTRY ROAD - DAY - FLASHBACK

HER POV: The pick-up truck SCREECHES to a halt just in front
 of her. The Old Man jumps out...

OLD MAN
 Miss?

And now we see her as he does: a young beautiful blond woman
 covered with blood, in shock and desperate for help...

Not "Nicole" Walcott, in fact, but actually Mary Jo Cameron.

MARY JO
 (Nicole's voice)
 Please... My name is Nicole Walcott
 and I need your help.

And we PULL BACK from the scene, back and up, up, so that the young woman and old man become two small figures on the road and the road becomes a dark line through dense forest -- and in that forest, not far from the road, we see a house in a clearing engulfed in flames and dark smoke.

THE END