

# THE GRACE YEAR

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A U T U M N

**FADE IN ON:**

**EXT. AERIAL - ESTABLISHING**

*A bird's eye view: A VILLAGE set in a clearing in the middle of impenetrable forest that stretches as far as we can see.*

*We move closer, gaining details-- the surrounding patchwork of farmland. The high wooden fence, stark and foreboding.*

*And into the town itself. Spare, spartan. Rows of simple houses leading into a central marketplace and the innermost hub-- the church. Like the nucleus of a cell.*

*A tiny microcosm of civilization forged through sheer force of will out of unforgiving, untamed wilderness.*

*In this world, heat and light come from fire. Water comes from a well. Food comes from the ground and the forest. And survival is a gift from God.*

**EXT. TOWN - SUNRISE**

*We float, disembodied, through the empty town toward the church. It looms over us, ominous and imposing. A puritanical, frontier vibe.*

*We come to a stop in front of the church, at the town's centerpiece:*

*A giant leafless TREE made out of twisted metal. Where a WOMAN stands on a platform with a noose around her neck.*

*She stands silent and still in a heavy shroud. Her head bowed. Neck bent unnaturally. Long hair hanging down, obscuring her face.*

*We move closer... closer...*

*And now we see-- BLOOD dripping from the Woman's hands. Dropping into puddles on the ground on either side of her.*

**INT. BEDROOM - MORNING**

**TIERNEY JAMES** (16) jolts awake, gasping for breath. Her night dress damp with sweat. Her plaited hair in disarray.

PENNY

Tierney?

Tierney looks across the homespun quilt to her two younger sisters sharing the bed-- **CLARA** (14) and **PENNY** (12)-- both in identical night dresses and white-ribboned braids, sharing the same look of concern.

CLARA  
Are you alright? Was it...  
(low, scandalous)  
A dream?

PENNY  
Maybe your magic is coming in!

Tierney tenses. Shivers. *Magic*... But she shakes it off.

TIERNEY  
It was nothing. I'm fine.

She slides out of bed, feet on the bare wooden floor. Pulls on her dress, starts to do up the buttons-- but her sisters are staring. Did she miss a button?

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
...What?

Penny and Clara giggle.

PENNY  
Did you forget?

CLARA  
Because Aunt Linny didn't.

(O.S.) A door SLAMS. A sharp VOICE echos in.

AUNT LINNY (O.S.)  
Oh Giiiiiiiiirrrrrrrls!

#### **INT. SEWING ROOM - DAY**

CORSET STRINGS tighten against Tierney's back as Clara YANKS them with all her might. Tierney sucks in her breath, holding onto the sewing table for support.

TIERNEY  
Ow...

Penny SCRUBS Tierney's calloused feet. We see the scar of a BRAND on the sole of one foot: three slashes in a rectangle.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
Careful--

**AUNT LINNY** (severe and ruthless) DIGS the dirt out from under Tierney's fingernails with a file.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

*Hey!*

AUNT LINNY

It's your own fault. Running wild like a dog...

Aunt Linny picks up a deep-blue raw-silk dress with river-clam pearls along the neckline.

AUNT LINNY (cont'd)

Come on. Arms up.

Tierney looks at the dress the way a convict eyes a noose. But she obediently raises her arms overhead...

#### **MOMENTS LATER**

Aunt Linny surveys her handiwork. She just looks resigned, as if this is the latest in a long series of disappointments.

AUNT LINNY

It will have to do. One last thing.

She goes to the sewing box for A LONG, RED RIBBON.

Vibrant. Daring. Almost vulgar compared to the girls' muted and modest clothing. A color of danger and sin and blood.

Aunt Linny gently undoes the white ribbon from Tierney's braid and lets it fall to the floor. She takes her time tying the red ribbon in its place. A rite of passage.

And as she works, we may notice-- half of her thumb is missing. An old, ugly wound.

AUNT LINNY (cont'd)

Today, my dear, you leave childhood behind. Today you become a *woman*.

Penny leans in to Clara.

PENNY

She looks like a stuffed turkey.

Tierney studies herself in a full-length mirror. Pink cheeks, freshly scrubbed. Dark hair, perfectly coiffed. Pale skin, offset by the deep blue of the dress. Heaving chest, constricted by the corset.

A reflection she doesn't recognize. She frowns, not sure what to make of this stranger in the mirror.

ABE (O.S.)  
My little Tierney. Look at you.

The girls straighten up as-- their FATHER (**ABE**) walks in. He has a kind face, a strong frame, and a twinkle in his eye. He carries a heavy medical bag and a weary expression.

Aunt Linny stands to the side. Eyes downcast, deferential. Penny and Clara sit with their legs tucked under them and their hands in their laps, prim and obedient.

AUNT LINNY  
I did my best. Even if a veil is out of the question...  
(sighs)  
She'll at least look the part.

TIERNEY  
I don't need a veil. There's nothing wrong with the labor houses.

AUNT LINNY  
Working your fingers to the bone, struggling for scraps, sharing a room with ten other girls...

TIERNEY  
(sharp)  
Better than being someone's wife.

It's like the air goes out of the room. Everyone freezes. Aunt Linny looks like she's been slapped.

AUNT LINNY  
How dare you show such disrespect--?

But Abe waves it off. He gives Tierney a wink.

ABE  
Tierney's right. There is no shame in hard work. The dairy and the mill are both entirely respectable. And she's always been a free spirit.

Aunt Linny just huffs.

AUNT LINNY  
And you've indulged her. Far be it for me to tell you how to raise your daughters, Abe, but--

TIERNEY  
Can I go now?

ABE / AUNT LINNY  
Yes. / No.

Tierney can't leave fast enough. But as she reaches the door:

ABE  
And while you're out, pick up some  
berries from the market.

Tierney stops short. Penny and Clara giggle.

TIERNEY  
Like this?! But-- it's Veiling Day!  
Everyone will be there!

Abe holds Tierney's gaze. Aunt Linny gives a slight smirk,  
as if she's won some battle.

ABE  
That's the point. And Tierney, today  
of all days-- mind your dress.

#### **ON TIERNEY**

Storming out of the sewing room as Aunt Linny's voice echoes:

AUNT LINNY (O.S.)  
Alright, girls-- morning scriptures.

Striding through the modest house-- past stockings drying on  
the mantle... a basket full of unfinished knitting... herbs  
hanging in the windowsill...

She grabs a cloak and bursts out the front door--

#### **EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS**

--toward the market and the looming steeple of the church.

She passes women hanging laundry... Men loading a wagon...  
Little boys playing with sticks... Little girls cuddling  
corncob dolls. She feels all their eyes on her--

Her exposed chest and collarbone. Her bare calves and knees.  
The bright red ribbon in her hair.

Tierney wraps the cloak around her, hiding her body. She  
quickens her pace, hurrying toward the crowded--

**EXT. MARKET - CONTINUOUS**

The heart of the town: a maze of open air stalls, and a cacophony of people. Bartering and gossiping. Hurrying through a list of chores.

And now we notice-- so many women in this town are DISFIGURED in different ways. A faded scar... A hobbled walk... A patch over one eye... A missing ear...

They all walk with stooped shoulders, bowed heads, eyes downcast. And they're all modestly dressed in muted colors, their hair braided back. With a few exceptions:

We spot other red ribbons in the crowd. Teenage girls freshly primed in fancy dresses, escorted about like show cattle. The flashes of skin, vibrant colors, and adornments feel daring and extravagant, and even lewd.

Tierney is so busy people watching that she forgets her own discomfort and lets her cloak fall open as she goes to the fruit stall to fetch a basket of berries.

BEHIND HER

My, my, Tierney.

Tierney turns to see **KIERSTEN** (16), a porcelain beauty in a silk dress with strands of gold woven in her hair. Her full lips are as red as her ribbon. Her eyes are cold and cruel.

She stands with two other girls, JENNA and JESSICA, planets orbiting the sun.

KIERSTEN

So you do have a figure under there.  
Who ever would have guessed? Pity it  
will only go to waste.

Jessica and Jenna giggle. Tierney can feel her cheeks flush.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

If you see Michael, say hello for me.

And with that, Kiersten and her sycophants move on. Tierney trades a few coins for a basket of berries as the FRUIT VENDOR grins at her chest. He was clearly eavesdropping.

FRUIT VENDOR

I'd give you a veil and then some.

Tierney just grits her teeth. She starts to turn away when--



A DOG growls at her feet. Scrawny and dirty and heavily muzzled. An animal that's had meanness beaten into it. And the Young Man holding the leash is **TOMMY PEARSON**.

TOMMY

Nice dress.

Tommy reaches out and runs a finger over the the tiny pearls near Tierney's collarbone. Enjoying her rage when she SMACKS his hand away.

TIERNEY

Touch me again, you'll lose a finger.

TOMMY

Such a temper for a lady. Someone needs to teach you the manners your father never could.

Tierney goes to smack him again, but people are watching. So she reigns in her temper, smooths her dress, glares.

He leans in. Invading her space. Close enough to whisper:

TOMMY (cont'd)

I've got a new muzzle that needs breaking in and a veil to match. And I don't care who your mother was.

That's enough. Tierney's eyes flash. She pushes past him--

The crowded market no longer feels like a place she can hide. Everyone seems to be looking at her. Women frowning. Children whispering. Old men leering. Young boys laughing.

She hurries away... through narrow alleys and back streets... until she reaches

#### **AN OLD MILL.**

Abandoned and falling apart. Singed and charred from some long-ago fire. Nothing but farmers' fields beyond it and-- in the distance-- the high wooden FENCE that separates the town from the surrounding forest.

Tierney looks around to make sure no one is watching...

#### **INT. MILL - MOMENTS LATER**

Tierney slips inside--

All shadows and cobwebs and broken bits of machinery. The floorboards groan and creak beneath her feet. And suddenly--

A FIGURE grabs her from behind! Tierney WHIRLS around--

TIERNEY  
(furious)  
Michael!

**MICHAEL**-- 16, grins at her, teasing. But when he takes in the full sight of her, all dressed up, his eyes go wide.

MICHAEL  
Wow. You look--

TIERNEY  
Don't. Start.

Tierney sets down her berries and makes her way to a rotting ladder. She climbs up to a--

#### **LOFT - MOMENTS LATER**

A musty, cramped space made cozy with rugs and cushions and candles and a bolt of tattered cloth covering the broken window. A secret hideaway.

Michael pulls aside a rug to reveal-- a crude checkerboard pattern carved into the floor.

Tierney pulls up a loose floorboard to retrieve a small box with little trinkets inside: a thimble, a spool, a button, a bullet etc.

They position the trinkets on the board and we realize-- they're GAME PIECES.

Michael moves his first piece on the board. Tierney moves next. Soon they're both deep in concentration...

Or are they? Michael keeps stealing glances at her.

TIERNEY  
Stop it.

MICHAEL  
What?

TIERNEY  
You're looking at me.

MICHAEL  
You're... hard not to look at. Like that.

TIERNEY  
You should see some of the other girls.  
(smirks)  
Kiersten sends her regards. She says she looks forward to bringing you many sons.

MICHAEL  
Not funny.

TIERNEY  
I'm sure your Fathers already have names picked out.

Tierney moves a piece, removing one of Michael's. Michael studies the board, his expression inscrutable.

MICHAEL  
And what about you? What does your future hold?

TIERNEY  
Actually, that might depend on you.

Michael pauses. He was about to make a move, but now his hand freezes on a game piece...

MICHAEL  
What do you mean?

TIERNEY  
I was thinking, if I make it back from the Grace Year--

MICHAEL  
*When* you make it back.

TIERNEY  
--I want to tend the fields. And I was hoping you could ask your Father to pull some strings for me.

Michael's paralysis breaks. He captures one of Tierney's pieces and swats it aside, surprisingly hostile.

MICHAEL  
The fields? That's the lowest work available.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
 You'd be alone, open to the elements,  
 with no protection. And so close to  
 the forest--

TIERNEY  
 I can take care of myself.

MICHAEL  
 Against a ghost?!  
 (before she can reply)  
 The point is-- You deserve a real  
 home. A real life.

TIERNEY  
 Where my every thought and action can  
 be dictated by my husband's whims?

MICHAEL  
 Maybe, with the right husband--

But Tierney shoots him a look.

TIERNEY  
 No man in his right mind will ever  
 take me for a wife. I am stained with  
 my mother's sins. And even if I  
 wasn't... You know how I feel.

Michael sits quietly. Thinking. He knows.

MICHAEL  
 Is this because of... you know. Your  
 dreams?

Tierney tenses. This is dangerous territory.

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
 Have you had any more?

Tierney makes another move on the game board. Evasive.

TIERNEY  
 I told you, I'm done with all that. I  
 just...  
 (from her soul)  
 I want to be able to stare up at the  
 sky anytime I want. And feel the sun  
 on my back. And dig my fingers into  
 the earth. And help things grow. I  
 want to feel useful and untethered  
 and... *Free*.

Michael doesn't respond. He reaches for a piece--

But Tierney grabs his hand. Commanding his attention.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
Please. Say you'll do this for me.

Michael looks at her. Serious, sincere.

MICHAEL  
I would do anything for you...

He wants to say more, but-- the CHURCH BELL begins to clang. Michael and Tierney trade a look. Their time is up.

#### **ON TIERNEY AND MICHAEL**

Walking back to the center of town. Tierney clutching the basket of berries in her arms.

MICHAEL  
I can't believe I'm not going to see you for an entire year...

TIERNEY  
You'll be so busy you won't even notice. What with training for the Council, and preparing your new home for your future bride...

Michael looks around, ensuring they're alone.

MICHAEL  
What do you think it'll be like?

TIERNEY  
Hmm. I'm imagining lots of lace. And Kiersten seems partial to blue...

MICHAEL  
No-- you know... The Grace Year.

TIERNEY  
(feigning horror)  
Michael Welk! You know we don't speak of such things!

MICHAEL  
Come on. How long do you think it takes for your magic to come in?

Tierney tenses. He's struck a nerve.

TIERNEY  
We really should not be talking about  
this.

MICHAEL  
Do you think it will happen to all  
the girls at once? Like with your...

She shoves him, but it's half-hearted. Her mind is suddenly  
elsewhere...

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
I wonder how it will manifest. I  
overheard my mother and her sister  
once. Something about reading minds...

Tierney's gaze is up ahead. Sound falls away as she fixates  
on the monstrosity in the center of town square:

THE PUNISHMENT TREE.

The very tree we saw the Woman hanging from in our opening.  
Its twisted metal branches adorned with BODY PARTS. Fingers.  
Toes. Ears. Braids of hair. Hanging like ornaments.  
Tierney stares at it-- transfixed. Remembering her dream.

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
Tierney...?

Tierney snaps out of it. She looks down to see--

Her hands are stained bright red. Just like the Woman in her  
dream.

It takes her a moment to realize-- it's the berries. She was  
squeezing them. And now her dress is stained as well.

Up ahead, women and girls are filing into the church. And  
here comes Aunt Linny, looking frantic.

AUNT LINNY  
There you are! What were you-- *Your  
dress!*

Michael gives Tierney's hand a squeeze.

MICHAEL  
Hey. Whatever happens... It's going  
to be okay. I promise.

And now Aunt Linny is dragging her toward the church.

**INT. CHURCH - DAY**

All the women and girls of the town mill about the church. Knitting. Laughing. Gossiping. Complimenting dresses and admiring babies and comparing the length of their braids.

Tierney stands among them, but apart. Alone in a crowd. When people look at her it's with pity or judgment, never a smile.

She watches Kiersten, Jenna, and Jessica approach an awkward girl keeping to herself near the back wall. **GERTRUDE**.

Kiersten toys with Gertrude's sleeve.

KIERSTEN

Such fine detail with the lace. And the gloves are a nice touch, aren't they, girls?

Right on cue, Jessica and Jenna move in. Mocking her.

JESSICA

As if everyone's forgotten what they're covering.

JENNA

Poor thing thinks she actually has a chance. But who would want to marry *Dirty Gertie*?

Gertrude flushes. Cornered. Desperate to escape...

Tierney looks away. Not her problem. And then--

A middle-aged woman comes rushing down from the bell tower.

WOMAN

The veils are coming!

The women and girls rush to take their seats in the congregation. Tierney and the other red-ribboned girls form a line in the front of the church.

A woman in the front pew stands, reading from a Bible as--

BIBLE READER

"An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels..."

The doors OPEN...

And KIERSTEN'S FATHER steps inside with a delicate veil in his hands. He walks up the aisle and places the veil on Kiersten's head like he is crowning a queen.

Kiersten smiles angelically. *The first veil.* An honor.

BIBLE READER (cont'd)  
"Her husband trusts his heart in her."

Other Fathers file in.

BIBLE READER (cont'd)  
"And he will have no lack of gain."

Jessica gets a veil... And Jenna...

BIBLE READER (cont'd)  
"She does him good and not evil all the days of her life..."

Tierney TUNES OUT the bible reader, watching the other girls. They light up with joy and relief as their fathers approach. Some cry. Some squeal. One girl almost faints.

Eight veils given... Nine... Only five left to go. The other girls in line are getting restless. Nervous.

Murmurs of surprise ripple through the crowd as Gertrude's Father approaches with a veil. Gertrude looks STUNNED as he places it on her head. And some of the girls near her look like they'd like to rip it off.

Tierney's eyes wander over the other girls. Faces twisted in anger and jealousy. Tears streaming, dreams dashed, hearts broken. But she's so busy watching that she doesn't see--

ABE  
Tierney...

Tierney looks. She blinks. There must be some mistake...

Her Father is standing before her holding a veil.

Before she can react, he places the veil on her head, lowering the lace over her face...

Like she's looking through the bars of a cage.

ABE (PRE-LAP)  
I know this isn't what you planned--



**INT. TIERNEY'S HOME - NIGHT**

Tierney confronts her Father in the privacy of their home, where she can actually speak her mind.

But Tierney is seeing red. Wild with fury. Pacing the floor.

TIERNEY

Who is it? Tommy Pearson? He's cruel  
and stupid and arrogant! Did you even  
try to stand up for me? Did Michael?

Her sisters watch her fury from the stairs. Abe grimaces.

ABE

There were plenty of protests all  
around, believe me. But your suitor's  
mind was set.

And now Tierney stops. She meets her Father's gaze. And it's not just fury in her eyes-- it's pain. It feels like her Father betrayed her.

TIERNEY

*How could you do this to me?*

ABE

I just want what's best for you. You  
have to believe that.

TIERNEY

What about what *I* want?

Abe reaches out to touch her, to comfort her-- but Tierney smacks his hand away.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Don't touch me!

She turns and runs up the stairs--

**INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

--SLAMMING the door behind her. She RIPS off the veil and FLOPS onto the bed. Hating the world. Hating her life.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

And Tierney is still awake, with Clara and Penny sleeping next to her, when she hears HEAVY FOOTSTEPS stop outside her door. Her Father.

She can see his shadow under the door crack. Lingerin'. As if he wants to come in, but doesn't dare.

Then the heavy footsteps recede. And yet-- the SHADOW remains. *What's this?*

Tierney creeps out of bed and opens the door to see--

His MEDICAL BAG. He left it here for her. *An invitation.*

**INT. STUDY - MOMENT LATER**

Tierney enters with the medical bag to find her Father waiting for her.

He gestures for her to sit. She does. But she's still salty.

TIERNEY  
I would rather die than be Tommy  
Pearson's wife.

Abe remains stoic.

ABE  
Right now that should be the least of  
your worries.

OFF TIERNEY: Still sulking, but she knows he's right.

TIERNEY  
What happens? During the Grace Year?

At that, her Father sighs.

ABE  
If I knew, I would tell you. I swear  
it. But no man is privy to that  
sacred rite. And your mother never...

But he trails off, unable to continue.

Tierney looks up sharply at the mention of her mother. A subject they rarely speak of. But since he brought it up...

There's another question weighing on her. One she's never dared to voice before.

TIERNEY  
Was she really harboring her magic?

Abe looks at her quizzically. Studying her. Weighing how to answer.

ABE  
Your mother was a good woman. No  
matter what people say.  
(beat)  
And we can discuss it further when  
you're back where you belong.

But Tierney's voice trembles as she reveals her true fear:

TIERNEY  
But what if the same thing happens to  
me? What if-- I return from the Grace  
Year... and my magic hasn't run out?

At that, Abe softens.

ABE  
You just make sure you return at all.  
Whatever it takes, you hear me?  
Everything I taught you-- use it. And  
we'll sort the rest out together.

Tierney nods. Though she's not exactly reassured.

ABE (cont'd)  
Now. The bag.

Tierney opens the medical bag. She reaches in... and removes  
a glass vial. She pulls out the cork, gives a small sniff.

TIERNEY  
Camphor. Distilled from the bark of  
the tree. Applied topically to  
relieve pain and itching. Inhaled to  
reduce a cough.

Abe grunts his approval. Tierney reaches in for another  
item-- a tiny dropper.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
Primrose oil...

**INT. BEDROOM - MORNING**

Tierney blinks awake in bed to see-- Penny, staring at her.

PENNY  
If the ghosts get you, will you come  
back and haunt us?

Across the bed, Clara wallops her with a pillow.

CLARA

The ghosts stay in the forest. Their magic binds them to the place where they died. Everyone knows that.

TIERNEY

But I will make a point to haunt you personally if you touch my things.

Clara rolls her eyes, but Penny looks nervous as--

The bedroom door opens, and in comes Abe, carrying a tray laden with enough food for the entire family.

He sets the tray on the bed. Penny and Clara eagerly reach--

ABE

This is for Tierney. All of it.

Tierney dutifully begins to eat as she pulls on her clothes. No finery today-- thick wool stockings, heavy leather boots, a cotton chemise and linen smock. Traveling clothes.

She slips a biscuit to Penny and Clara as--

Abe presents her with a hand-crafted HEAVY CLOAK.

ABE (cont'd)

And so is this. It was your mother's. Warm enough for winter, and you can take off the sleeves for a vest come spring. Just-- mind the lining.

Tierney pulls it on, ignoring him.

ABE (cont'd)

*Tierney.*

TIERNEY

Spring. The lining. I heard you.

Tierney hugs the coat tightly around her. *Her mother's...* This really means something to her.

Outside, the church bell CLANGS. Tierney freezes. But Abe picks up her veil.

ABE

Come on, then. It's time.

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

The church bell keeps CLANGING as Tierney and the other thirty-three girls stand in a line. Thirteen in veils. All with red ribbons in their hair.

Tierney stands between Kiersten and Gertrude.

The rest of the town gathers to watch the ceremony. When the bell stops, all eyes turn to the church. The doors open...

A DRUM begins to beat. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. And the first of this year's eligible men exits the church:

**GEEZER FALLOW.** A stooped old man in mourning attire, though he doesn't even try to hide his smile as he makes his way to the square to claim a new bride.

Tierney tenses. Is it just her imagination, or is Geezer Fallow smiling at her?

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Geezer Fallow gets closer... Oh god. He's heading right for her. His smile widens as he stops--

--in front of Gertrude.

Murmurs of surprise ripple through the crowd. Gertrude looks stunned and horrified as he lifts her veil.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. The next boy arrives, nervous and sweaty.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. More boys follow. Lifting veils. Claiming their brides...

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Here comes Tommy Pearson. He catches her eye and smiles cruelly. Heading right for her.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Tierney looks out into the crowd-- to her Father. Silently pleading with him: *Do something!!*

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Tommy Pearson comes to a stop--

--in front of Kiersten.

Murmurs ripple through the crowd. Kiersten GASPS-- shocked, confused-- as Tommy lifts her veil.

Tierney frowns. Not understanding what she's seeing...

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. And then a pair of freshly shined boots stop in front of her. Fingers lift the veil--

And it's Michael standing before her.

TIERNEY

Michael? What are you doing?

Next to her, Tommy Pearson is pawing all over Kiersten.

MICHAEL

You didn't really think I'd let you be assigned to the field house.

TIERNEY

(reeling)

What about Kiersten...? *What about your Father...?*

MICHAEL

Father... will come around. But it doesn't matter. This is my choice.

(he takes her hands)

You must know. You have to know. I've wanted to tell you for so long.

Tierney-- *I love you.*

Up ahead, Mr. Welk raises his hands to the crowd. We recognize him; the man who sentenced Tierney's mother to die. Everyone quiets, attentive.

MR. WELK

The original sin was Eve's. The Serpent preyed upon her vanity, her curiosity, her ambition. He tricked her, and cursed her with the gift of power. A dark magic that seduced Adam and brought about the downfall of all mankind. A curse that is passed down to every member of the female sex as they come into their womanhood.

Tierney quietly pleads with Michael...

TIERNEY

Please. You're my best friend. But I don't...

MR. WELK

The power to turn a man's head. To prey on man's weakness. To inspire lust and incite jealousy. To sow chaos and discord. To destroy families and from within and tear entire communities apart. Such wickedness is an affront to the Lord. And it is coursing through your blood. Threatening to destroy us all.

Tierney is frantic. Desperate. How to get through to him...?

TIERNEY

*I will never be the wife you need--*

MICHAEL

I don't want a wife. I want you. Just as you are. That's all I've ever wanted.

He leans in and kisses Tierney's cheek. And whispers:

MICHAEL (cont'd)

You can keep your dreams. But I dream only of you.

MR. WELK

But there is hope. With faith, and perseverance, and penitence you can renounce the magic inside of you. You can cast the darkness out and be born anew. Righteous, humble, meek and mild. Ready to serve the Lord.

Up ahead, the gates LURCH open, revealing the impenetrable forest beyond. The crowd murmurs with mounting excitement.

MR. WELK (cont'd)

And so, as Eve was banished from the Garden, now must we cast you out. Go with grace, and know that our hearts go with you. Burn through your magic and return to us as purified women. Or do not return to us at all.

Michael, Tommy Pearson, and the other boys step back. For just a moment, Tierney locks eyes with Kiersten-- her face seething with silent hatred. But then--

Guards approach, flanking them, and the girls begin to walk.

Tierney keeps her eyes on her family for as long as she can... Then she stares up at the high, pointed walls of the fence... And then she sees--

Last year's Grace Year girls returning.

They stagger past slowly, single-file. Bone weary, emaciated, reeking with rot and disease. Their eyes glazed over. Hair matted, haphazardly shorn, red ribbons in tatters. Some with egregious wounds-- a dislocated shoulder, a festering wound, missing teeth.

Up ahead, one of the girls in Tierney's line breaks ranks.

GIRL  
Lisbeth? Sister, is that you?

She reaches out, but the returning girl turns her head, exposing a blood-crusted scab where her ear used to be, and just keeps walking. Oblivious.

Another girl GRABS Tierney as she staggers past--

STAGGERING GIRL  
The ghosts are watching... Don't  
stray from the path--

But the girl behind her shoves her forward.

Family members rush to greet the other returning girls. Hugging them, examining them, fussing over them. Shouts of joy, cries of relief. Until--

A frantic mother's voice rises over the commotion:

FRANTIC MOTHER  
Ada...? Ada...?! Where is Ada?!

The last of the returning girls passes Tierney, and behind her-- a Guard marches solemnly with half a dozen RED RIBBONS draped across his arm. Like the medals of fallen war heroes.

The tenor of the crowd changes. Shouts of anguish, wails of grief. Tierney shivers. The danger of the forest is suddenly all too real...

OOF! Kiersten YANKS Tierney's braid from behind, snapping her head back. She leans in, whispering in Tierney's ear--

KIERSTEN  
You're dead.

Then she strides past, making her way to the head of the line. Jessica and Jenna follow, SHOVING Tierney as they pass.

Tierney rubs her neck. Staring up at the trees whose branches snake overhead. Wondering what awaits her...

#### **INT. FOREST - DAY**

The girls march. Single-file. Guards ahead of them and a wagon full of supplies behind. Following a narrow, worn path through the trees.



The sounds of the forest echo around them. Branches reach for them like gnarled claws. And every now and then, they pass signs of violence--

Blood smeared against a tree trunk...

A bird pecking at a severed finger discarded on the path...

A bird pecking at something just off the path. Curious, Tierney takes a few steps off the path into the brush--

The bird flies off, revealing-- A SEVERED FINGER.

Just then-- BRANCHES SNAP in the brush just ahead. *Something watching her?*

Tierney HURRIES back to her place in line.

#### **EXT. FOREST - NIGHT**

The girls huddle around a fire as the guards prowl around them in an uneasy perimeter. Already a hierarchy is forming--

Kiersten, Jenna, and Jessica hold court around the flames. The other veiled girls sit with them, enjoying the fire, while the unveiled girls shiver together behind them.

Only one other girl sits apart, isolated and alone. Her veil only making her more of an outcast: Gertrude.

Tierney perches on a stump, keeping one eye on the forest. And she's not the only one. They're all on edge, watching the woods, jumping at shadows.

MEG

How many are there, do you think?

Tierney perks. Listening in. Absorbing as much as she can...

MARTHA

Think of all the girls who never return from their Grace Year every year. If even a fraction of that was the girls consumed by their own magic... It would be more than enough to overpower us-- if they wanted to.

LAURA

Stop it.

HANNAH

I bet they're watching us right now.  
Plotting their revenge.

RACHEL

I heard they follow us from the  
moment we leave the gates. Ready to  
strike at any moment.

LAURA

(about to cry)

*Stop!*

Now Kiersten speaks up. Her voice calm and assured.

KIERSTEN

Then you'd better hope your magic  
comes in soon. So you have the power  
to fight them off.

The other girls consider this. Jessica looks around to make  
sure the guards aren't listening. Then she leans in,  
speaking low, testing the waters.

JESSICA

I know it's a sin, and it's forbidden  
to even talk about, but... I keep  
wondering what my magic will be.

The other girls brighten, an illicit thrill rippling through  
them. Many of them are curious, even excited. *But they've  
had to keep that to themselves-- until now.*

A wiry girl, DENA, grins conspiratorially:

DENA

Speaking to animals runs in my family.

Another girl, HELEN, spreads her arms wide.

HELEN

Maybe I'll command the wind.

MEG runs her fingers over the fire.

MEG

Or be impervious to fire.

Another girl, TAMMY, pipes up with a sneer.

TAMMY

We all know Tierney's magic. Stealing  
another girl's husband.

Everyone goes quiet. It's the elephant in the room. The unspoken tension that has finally been voiced aloud.

TIERNEY

I didn't--

But Kiersten just laughs. Calm and cool.

KIERSTEN

Please. She didn't steal him from me.  
I wanted Tommy all along. A real man  
who can give me sons.

The girls all titter at that. And Kiersten's minions quickly change the subject.

JENNA

What magic are you hoping for,  
Kiersten?

KIERSTEN

It's not about hope. My magic is  
already coming in. I can feel it  
tingling deep inside me... Here.

She presses her hands into her abdomen just below her navel.  
The other girls murmur, intrigued.

Behind them, a Guard COUGHS uncomfortably. Eavesdropping.

OTHER GIRLS

Tell us! / Please? / What is it?

Kiersten considers. Playing up the drama. So the other girls are hanging on every word. Then, almost casually:

KIERSTEN

I can control people with my  
thoughts.

Someone SNORTS. It's Gertrude.

Kiersten looks up sharply. But rather than confront Gertrude directly... She turns to the girl next to her-- BETSY, plain, and slight, and fragile.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

And what magic are you hoping for,  
Betsy? The power to turn back time?

Betsy shrinks in the sudden spotlight.

BETSY  
Why would I want that?

Kiersten smiles sweetly.

KIERSTEN  
So you might think twice about  
meeting Owen Gains in the meadow.

Betsy flushes. The other girls gasp at the scandal.

BETSY  
He said if I... He promised me a  
veil...!

Kiersten leans in. Her sweet smile turning cold.

KIERSTEN  
And instead he made you a whore.

Betsy looks stricken. The other girls laugh openly. Her eyes  
fill with tears. She gets up and BOLTS for the woods...

The Guards react--

GUARDS  
Hey! / Get back here! / Where do you  
think you're going?!

--but they make no move to follow. She's on her own.

Kiersten looks at Tierney across the fire. Still smiling.  
Another kind of fire burning in her eyes.

KIERSTEN  
See what I made her do?

Tierney looks away. No one speaks. They stare out into the  
forest with baited breath. Even the Guards.

A GUTTURAL ROAR cuts through the night. Everyone flinches.

Then another ROAR sounds out. And another. And another.  
Coming from all directions. A call and response, like a pack  
of wild dogs. The Ghosts.

And then comes the SCREAMING. Screams of terror. And pain.

The Guards tense. Closing their ranks around the fire.

SHORT GUARD  
Anyone else feel like running?

No one's laughing now. Even Kiersten's smile is gone. Some girls start to cry. They all wince with every new scream.

RACHEL  
I told you. They're watching us.

**EXT. FOREST - DAY**

The girls walk. Veils leading the pack, the unveiled following behind. Tierney observes them quietly:

HANNAH uses a walking stick, hobbling painfully.

VIVIAN picks berries from nearby bushes.

Laura stops now and then to pick up large rocks. She slips them into her pockets and continues on.

Gertrude walks alone, as usual. Also observing.

And Kiersten moves from one cluster of girls to another, whispering. The girls all turn back abruptly, looking at Tierney. Are they talking about her??

Gertrude notices it, too. She falls back to Tierney.

GERTRUDE  
You need to be careful.

TIERNEY  
(bristles)  
Of Kiersten?

GERTRUDE  
You saw what she did to Betsy.

TIERNEY  
You think her magic has come in?

GERTRUDE  
It doesn't matter. Magic or not, it was her doing.

Tierney regards Gertrude. The gloves hiding her hands.

TIERNEY  
Didn't you two used to be friends?

Gertrude looks at her. Eyes haunted. About to answer...

Suddenly, Gertrude TRIPS on a root. She stumbles, almost falls, but Tierney catches her. And when they look up--

Up ahead, Kiersten is LOOKING AT THEM. A little smile on her face. As if she made it happen.

Gertrude clams up. She moves ahead, leaving Tierney alone.

### **LATER**

The girls and their guards reach a lake. Four canoes waiting on the shore. The girls climb in, squeezing together, as the Guards unload the supply wagon.

Laura stops to dig a large, heavy stone out of the wet earth. She hides it under her cloak, already sagging and heavy with rocks.

Tierney watches. Curious. *What is she doing...?*

The Guards begin to paddle.

Kiersten reaches over the side of the adjacent boat and skims her fingers along the water...

Tierney keeps her eyes on Laura-- two rows in front, staring straight ahead.

The canoes reach the middle of the lake. Laura slowly turns her head...

For a brief moment, she looks at Tierney.

And then she drops over the side of the canoe.

The other girls scream. The Guards scramble. The Tall Guard DIVES into the water after her--

### **SHORT GUARD**

She was just-- Out of nowhere-- I didn't...

The Tall Guard comes up sputtering. Empty-handed.

The Short Guard helps him back into the boat. They both look spooked. The Tall Guard shivers, soaked to the bone.

In the next boat, Kiersten pulls her hand from the water. The other girls gape. *Did she do that??*

### **EXT. FOREST - DAY**

The girls walk, a new wagon carting their supplies behind them. The lake is just a distant glimmer.

Tierney stares out into the forest, mind wandering...  
Suddenly, in the distance she sees--

A FIGURE, vaguely human, cloaked in a dark shroud. Standing perfectly still. Watching them.

Tierney stops short. The girl behind her KNOCKS into her--

GIRL BEHIND HER

Hey!

When Tierney looks up again-- the Figure is gone.

TIERNEY

Sorry... sorry...

She starts walking again. Puzzled. Scanning the woods... but whatever it was, it's gone. If it was ever there at all.

Up ahead, the guards stop. The girls gather behind them. Tierney approaches to see--

A TOWERING WOODEN GATE

Adorned with hundreds of red ribbons. Some tattered and faded. Some a crisp, deep crimson.

A tribute to the many girls who didn't survive their Grace Year. And a warning-- that the hardest part is yet to come.

The guards pull open the gate.

TALL GUARD

Go on. Inside.

The girls just look at them. Scared and unsure. Finally--

Kiersten strides in, ready to take charge. Tierney and the other girls trickle in after her...

#### **INT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

A massive open plot of land. A primitive lodge house at one end. Two small shacks at the other end. An old stone well in the center and one lone tree. A pile of smoldering ashes scattered beneath it. An axe resting against the fence.

The girls gape in shock. Disbelief. Horror. For the next year, this is home.

VIVIAN

This can't be it... For a whole year?

One girl, HANNAH, nudges the pile of ashes with her foot.

HANNAH

I heard they did this. But I didn't believe it. It's the remaining supplies. Everything they built... everything they used to get through the year.

JENNA

But-- why would they burn it?

Hannah looks at the lone tree. Forty-six notches carved into its trunk. One of them fresh.

HANNAH

Because it was done to them. Year after year...

But Tierney has noticed something else. Something RED in the dirt. Little drops-- of blood.

Another drop splashes down, staining the dirt. *It's just like her dream...*

Helen suddenly GASPS. She points up at the gnarled limbs of the tree. The other girls follow her gaze. And now we see:

The tree branches are adorned with BODY PARTS.

The other girls back away, but Kiersten steps forward.

KIERSTEN

It's a Punishment Tree. Just like the one in the square.

HANNAH

But... who's going to do the punishing? At home the judges are the men of the Council, chosen by God.

The other girls murmur in agreement. They've never been alone like this before...

KIERSTEN

What do they say about the Grace Year? What's said here... what happens here... remains here forever. That is our most sacred vow. *We are the only gods here.*

And we can see it in her face-- the rush of power.



Something SLAMS behind them. The girls all whirl around to see-- the GATE is closed. The Guards are gone.

They're on their own.

#### QUICK CUTS OF THE ENCAMPMENT

--THE PRIVY, smeared with festering filth and buzzing flies.

--THE LARDER, dank and empty save for a small sack of spoiled grain.

--THE WELL, slimy green algae clinging to the stones, the rope, the bucket.

--THE LODGE HOUSE, dark and ominous...

#### INT. LODGE HOUSE - DAY

The doors creak open to reveal-- twenty iron beds set up with putrid mattresses. The rest piled up in a corner. The room reeks of rot and decay.

HELEN

There aren't enough mattresses.

Vivian pokes at one of the mattresses in disgust.

VIVIAN

And this one is... wet.

DENA

Do we really have to sleep here?

JENNA

You don't.

Tierney looks around-- waiting for someone to propose a solution. But the other girls just look lost and helpless.

Kiersten struts over to the side with the matted beds and sits down on the center bed like it's a throne.

KIERSTEN

Veiled girls on this side.

The veiled girls quickly scramble to join her. Only Tierney and Gertrude stand back with the others. They're used to being outcasts.

It's a test. Battle lines being drawn.

GERTRUDE  
Everyone needs a place to sleep.

Kiersten and the veiled girls watch from across the room...

...as Tierney, Gertrude, and the unveiled girls work together to take down the stack of bed frames.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT**

The girls all sit around a fire. Kiersten holds court over the veiled girls. The others have separated into smaller groups. Suddenly--

A high-pitched SHRIEK pierces the night air. From somewhere out in the forest. The girls all freeze. Shaken. Thrilled.

JENNA  
Ghost.

Tierney looks like she wants to say something... but she holds her tongue.

Jessica nods sagely.

JESSICA  
Poor girls. Clinging to their magic,  
even in death. Even though it  
tortures them.

HELEN  
(nervous)  
But... they can't come in here, can  
they? Into the Encampment?

Now Meg pipes up, eager to contribute.

MEG  
No. The Encampment is sacred ground.  
That's why they're so angry. And why  
they're so eager to kill us the  
second we leave.

Another SHRIEK echoes out. Some girls jolt, others tremble, one of them starts to cry. They're terrified.

And Tierney can't keep quiet any longer.

TIERNEY  
It's an elk.

All eyes turn to her.

JENNA  
How would you know?

Hannah pipes up timidly.

HANNAH  
Is that your magic, Tierney? Knowing  
things...?

Tierney shrugs. Uncomfortable in the spotlight.

TIERNEY  
I used to go into the northern  
forests with my Father this time of  
year to check on the trappers. That's  
the sound they make when they're  
looking for a mate. The elk, I mean.  
Not the trappers.

The girls smile. But Kiersten just sneers.

KIERSTEN  
See? Not magic. Just her Father  
treating her as a son all her life.

The other girls giggle, but there's a moment of tension.  
Tierney can feel them eyeing her.

Another SHRIEK-- but the girls don't seem to mind. They're  
talking, settling in, enjoying this taste of freedom...

Until Kiersten suddenly pulls the red ribbon out of her hair  
and shakes her braids free. Her long hair spills down over  
her shoulders in waves, glowing in the firelight.

The other girls gasp. Scandalized. Thrilled.

GIRLS  
What are you doing?! / Your ribbon--!  
/ Your hair!

KIERSTEN  
Who's going to stop me?

The other girls look at each other. She has a point.

Rachel eagerly reaches for her own ribbon... but Kiersten  
GRABS her wrist. Hard.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
No. Only girls who have claimed their  
magic can remove their braid.  
(MORE)

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
We all know I have. Can anyone else  
claim the same?

The other girls titter with excitement and Kiersten basks in the attention. Pleased to have the spotlight back.

Tierney touches her own braid wistfully.

BEHIND HER  
This is how it starts.

Tierney turns; it was Gertrude who spoke, talking to herself.

TIERNEY  
What?

Gertrude just stares into the fire.

GERTRUDE  
This is how we turn against each  
other.

Tierney watches the other girls. Unsettled...

**EXT. TOWN - SUNRISE (DREAM)**

*We float toward the church, the Punishment Tree, where the  
HANGED WOMAN is waiting.*

*She stands on the platform with the noose around her broken  
neck. Head bowed. Hair hanging in her face. Shroud billowing  
around her.*

*Blood drips from her hands, pooling on the ground below. And  
then suddenly--*

*Her head JERKS UP. Her mouth twists into a SNARL.*

*And she LUNGES off the platform right at us--*

**INT. LODGE HOUSE - DAWN**

Tierney gasps awake. She looks around-- did anyone notice?

No. Everyone seems to be sleeping. But the gray light of dawn is seeping through the cracks in the rough-hewn walls...

She shivers. Her breath PUFFS in little clouds in front of her face. It's cold.

Tierney slips out of bed, pulls on her mother's heavy coat.  
Time to work.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAWN**

THWACK! Tierney heaves the axe to split a tree branch. A stack of logs piled nearby.

She's alone, isolated, at the far end of the Encampment. The white noise of the forest a deafening buzz all around her.

She pauses to wipe her brow, when--

Something CRUNCHES on the other side of the high fence that separates the camp from the outside world.

Tierney freezes. All her senses attuned.

She tightens her grip on the axe and slinks forward... careful to make no sound... toward a KNOTHOLE in the fence.

Slowly... cautiously... she presses her eye to the hole...

MOVEMENT FLASHES BY--

TIERNEY

Gah--!

Tierney stumbles backwards. She clutches the axe to her. Adrenaline pumping... Ready to strike...

But all she hears are the sounds of the forest.

*Was that a ghost??*

**LATER**

Tierney carries firewood toward the center of camp.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Get back. Veiled girls first!

She comes around the privy to see Jessica and Jenna pushing their way through a line of girls to the front of the well, grabbing the algae-covered bucket from Martha.

That's when-- Gertrude comes storming out of the lodge house. Trembling with anger and humiliation.

GERTRUDE

Who took them?! Who took my gloves!?

For the first time, we see Gertrude's BARE HANDS-- the thick, rope-like scars across her knuckles. The result of a brutal beating.

The girls snicker. Murmurs of *Dirty Gertie* ripple through the crowd. Jenna and Jessica just smirk.

JESSICA  
Must have been a ghost.

JENNA  
Try not to touch anyone. You don't want to make them dirty, too.

Jessica and Jenna drink their fill, shove the bucket back to Martha, and stride off to find Kiersten.

Martha sips some water, makes a face.

MARTHA  
Ugh. Is this all there is to drink?

Tierney hesitates. Weighing her options... and finally--

TIERNEY  
We could make rain barrels.

MARTHA  
(impressed)  
You know how to do that?

Nearby, Lucy and Helen perk up, shy but interested.

TIERNEY  
It's a lot of work. But if we can find the right tools...

Gertrude approaches as well. Desperate to be included, to put this latest humiliation behind her.

GERTRUDE  
...I'd like to help.

The other girls look at Tierney-- is she really going to include this outcast? But Tierney just nods.

TIERNEY  
We can use all the help we can get.

#### **SERIES OF SHOTS**

Tierney and the other girls get to work:

--CHOPPING wood into planks.

--SIFTING through the ashes at the base of the Punishment Tree to find stray nails.

--RIPPING into their skirts to remove the boning.

--SHARPENING knives on a smooth stone.

--STACKING firewood into piles.

--STANDING BACK to admire-- their first rain barrel.

They smile at each other, feeling accomplished. They built this thing. And they did it *together*.

#### **EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DUSK**

Tierney and her new friends return to the center of camp, exhausted and dirty from a hard day's work, to find:

The other girls are holding hands in a circle around--

DENA, standing naked, with Kiersten at her side.

HELEN

What are they doing?

Dena shivers. Cold, nervous. Feeling everyone's eyes on her. She squirms as Kiersten presses a palm into her abdomen.

KIERSTEN

You should feel it here. A warmth, a tingling. Like your blood is reaching for the surface, wanting to scream. Do you feel it?

DENA

(whispers)

Yes.

KIERSTEN

That's your magic. Latch onto it. Welcome it. Keep pulling it forward.

Dena clenches her eyes shut, takes a few deep breaths.

DENA

I think I feel something.

KIERSTEN

Now get on all fours.

DENA

Wh-why?

KIERSTEN

Just do it.

Dena gets down on all fours.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

Reach out to the animals of the forest. Feel their presence.

DENA

I don't know how.

KIERSTEN

Close your eyes. Feel every heart beating in the woods. Find one. Focus in on that rhythm.

Dena lifts her head. Eyes straining toward the forest.

DENA

I hear something. I feel heat. Blood. I smell... damp fur.

Suddenly-- A HOWL comes from the woods. Everyone jumps. But Dena looks the most surprised of all.

Kiersten gives Dena's braid a painful YANK.

KIERSTEN

Answer.

Tierney watches, spellbound. *Is this what it's like? Coming into your magic?*

Dena digs her fingernails into the earth and HOWLS back. Stretching her neck. Straining for the magic within her.

She keeps howling until her cheeks are flushed and streaked with tears. Finally-- Kiersten PULLS the red ribbon from her braid, letting her hair fall wild and loose around her.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

I knew you could do it.

Dena stands up, rising like a woman reborn. She takes Kiersten's hand. The circle parts to let them through and they walk toward the lodge house together.

The other girls watch. Awed and envious...



**INT. LODGE HOUSE - DAWN**

Again, Tierney wakes before the others. Again, she quietly slips out.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - MORNING**

The axe rests near another pile of split logs as--

Tierney is on the ground on all fours. Hands pressing into the earth. Eyes closed. Imitating Dena.

But finally... her eyes open, defeated. *Nothing.*

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Four rain barrels are now situated around the Encampment, along with two big wash tubs by the well. There's even a covered area for cooking.

Tierney and her friends have been busy.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney and her friends take turns chopping wood. The puffs of their breath visible even in the mid-day sun.

Tierney tests the icy mud with her boot, frowns. Winter won't be long.

LUCY

(chopping wood)

Why are we... the only ones... out here? What are they... doing all day?

She passes the axe to Martha, who starts chopping.

MARTHA

Whatever it is... it sure makes them hungry... The larder's... already... half empty.

She passes the axe to Helen, who is gazing up at the trees...

TIERNEY

Helen?

Helen turns, as if in a dream. She looks down at the axe in her hands, like she doesn't know how it got there.

Tierney looks up at the trees, wondering what had Helen so entranced. *For a moment, the leaves seem to RIPPLE and PULSE.* But then she blinks, and the effect is gone.

Just an illusion... or something more?

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT**

Tierney and friends stagger to the nightly bonfire. Blistered, sweaty, exhausted. Meanwhile:

Tammy sways in the breeze, lost in a reverie.

TAMMY  
I can hear the wind whispering!

Hannah holds up a withered flower.

HANNAH  
I made it wilt just by looking at it!

With great ceremony, Kiersten unties the red ribbons from Tammy and Hannah's braids. They shake their hair loose as the other girls rejoice around them.

Suddenly, Meg swipes her hand through the flames.

MEG  
I... I can't feel it!

Meg looks at Kiersten for approval. The other girls buzz.

Meg tries again. This time she HOLDS her hand in the flames. That gets Tierney's attention.

TIERNEY  
What are you doing?!

MEG  
I can't feel it...

Meg watches as the skin of her hand starts to BUBBLE. The other girls watch too. No one tries to intervene.

Tierney GRABS Meg and PULLS her away.

TIERNEY  
I need water! And bandages!

Gertrude rushes to help. But no one else moves.

Meg looks up at Tierney. Her eyes are HUGE AND BLACK. She starts to LAUGH.

And all the other girls start laughing, too. Everyone except Kiersten, who watches Tierney closely.

**INT. LODGE HOUSE - NIGHT**

Tierney flops into bed, exhausted, as--

A handful of unveiled girls drag their beds over to Kiersten's side of the room. The divide is growing...

Tierney leans in to Gertrude. Whispering in the dark.

TIERNEY  
Have you felt anything yet?

GERTRUDE  
It will happen. We just have to be patient.

But Tierney stares into the darkness, anxious and unsure.

**INT. LODGE HOUSE - DAWN**

Tierney flinches in her sleep. Her arms twitching. She gasps awake to find--

ANTS crawling over her arm. She FLINGS the covers off--

Her entire body is covered with ants.

She flails. Scratching at her skin. She LEAPS out of bed--

And suddenly the ants are gone. She turns to inspect her bed-- Nothing there.

She tries to calm down, catch her breath. *What was that?*

Then a thought occurs to her. She peers through the dim light over to KIERSTEN'S BED... It's empty.

Tierney whirls around. Sensing someone watching her...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAWN**

Tierney is at the well, splashing cold water on her face. But when she looks up, she sees--

The RAIN BARRELS, that she and her friends worked so hard to make, have all been SMASHED.

TIERNEY

What--?

Tierney blinks. It can't be. Surely this is a vision, too.

Tammy passes by. Loose hair tangled and matted. Eyes black.

TAMMY

A ghost did it.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney, Gertrude, Lucy, Helen, and Martha stare down at one of the smashed barrels. Exhausted and demoralized.

TIERNEY

So we'll... build more...

But Lucy has had enough. She goes to join Kiersten's group. Helen and Martha stare after her longingly.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney sits alone in the trees by the far fence, trying to reassemble the rain barrel on her own.

Gertrude approaches with a cup of water.

GERTRUDE

Don't know why you'd bother. They'll just end up smashed again.

TIERNEY

Are Helen and Martha...?

But Gertrude's look says it all: they're not coming.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

But why the rain barrels? It doesn't make sense. They were for everyone...

GERTRUDE

That's Kiersten for you.

Tierney takes the cup, and she can't help staring at Gertrude's HANDS-- the scars across her knuckles.

GERTRUDE (cont'd)  
Go ahead. Ask me.

Tierney hesitates. Sheepish.

TIERNEY  
Is it true? You were punished for...  
(a whisper)  
Depravity?

GERTRUDE  
It's... complicated. I helped  
Kiersten steal something from her  
home. And when we got caught with  
it-- I took the blame. I thought it  
would be easier that way, that I was  
helping her...

TIERNEY  
Why would Kiersten steal something  
from her own home?

Gertrude looks nervous. But she sighs. Resigned.

GERTRUDE  
It was her father's. A lithograph. He  
has a whole collection, from long ago.  
(beat)  
It was a picture of a woman. She was  
naked. And she was-- touching herself.

Tierney's breath hitches with shock.

TIERNEY  
That's why Kiersten calls you Dirty  
Gertie? But-- you were friends! How  
could she let you take the blame--  
and then ostracize you for it? How  
could you let her get away with it?

Gertrude shrugs sadly. As if she's asked herself the same  
thing many times. She looks at Tierney; open, vulnerable.

GERTRUDE  
She was scared. I thought, if I could  
be strong for both of us... things  
would go back to how they used to be.  
I know how that sounds, but... Have  
you ever been with someone who makes  
you feel like-- like you're two sides  
of a magnet?  
(MORE)

GERTRUDE (cont'd)  
Like there's an invisible force  
drawing you together, and there's  
nothing you can do to fight it, and  
when you touch, it's like-- there was  
a piece of you you never knew was  
missing, but finally you're... *whole?*

Off Tierney: realizing Gertrude feels that way about  
Kiersten. And then realizing-- she has never felt that way  
about anyone. Yet another thing that's wrong with her.

And Gertrude can see it on her face; *Tierney doesn't  
understand.* So she puts her guard back up.

GERTRUDE (cont'd)  
Never mind. The point is, there's no  
telling what Kiersten is capable of.

Tierney frowns. Taking Gertrude's warning to heart.

#### **EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney is still working on the barrel. But she seems to be  
zoning out. Her concentration drifting.

Her gaze travels to the rough wood in her hands... *The deep  
ridges PULSE with energy to the rhythm of her heartbeat.*

Tierney marvels. She runs her hand over the wood, and it  
seems to WHISPER. She lifts it up, pressing it to her ear...

KIERSTEN  
Pretty.

Tierney drops the wood and whirls around-- Kiersten is  
sitting on a nearby tree stump. She runs her hands over the  
fur of Tierney's discarded coat. Admiring it.

TIERNEY  
That's mine.

Kiersten lifts her hands with a little smile. *No harm done.*

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
What are you doing here?

KIERSTEN  
Believe it or not, I want to help you.

Tierney doesn't answer. She doesn't believe it.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
I know what your problem is. Your  
magic hasn't come in. And you're  
wondering why, what's wrong with you.  
Are you doomed to repeat your  
mother's fate?

Tierney winces. That's exactly what she's been wondering.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
When really the explanation is  
obvious.

TIERNEY  
It is?

Kiersten moves toward her. Gentle and calm, like a friend.

KIERSTEN  
Completely. At least, to me. See, I  
think you actually have the opposite  
problem. I think you've been burning  
through your magic for years, right  
under all our noses. Maybe without  
even realizing it yourself.

Tierney reacts, shaken. *Could that be true?*

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
That's how you got your Father to  
teach you all those things.

Kiersten leans in close. And now all trace of her gentle  
sweetness is gone. Replaced with cold, cruel contempt.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
That's how you stole Michael from me.  
And now... you're all. Used. Up.

And Tierney recoils. The spell is broken.

TIERNEY  
I didn't *steal* Michael. I don't even  
want Michael! I don't know why he  
chose me but it wasn't *my* doing.

The trees seem to PULSE with energy. She squeezes her eyes  
shut. But when she opens them again, they're still PULSING.

KIERSTEN  
Regardless. All this work? It's a  
distraction for the rest of us.  
(MORE)

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
We don't need to be comfortable and  
well fed. We need to focus on the  
only thing that matters. *Our magic.*

OFF TIERNEY: The trees are pressing in on her. Bending,  
pulsing to the beat of her heart. Her head is spinning...

TIERNEY  
If we aren't prepared when winter  
comes, girls are going to die.

But Kiersten just laughs.

KIERSTEN  
It's the Grace Year, Tierney! Of  
course girls are going to die! The  
point is how we live while we're  
here-- in the one place, at the one  
time in our lives, when we can truly  
be free. No tempering our feelings or  
swallowing our pride. Everything  
that's inside us, we can just let it  
all out... until it's gone. And then  
we won't have to feel anything at all.

Suddenly Kiersten looks lost. Sad. Intensely vulnerable.

Tierney closes her eyes. And when she opens them, finally,  
mercifully, the vision is gone. The trees are just trees.  
She sighs. Exasperated... and exhausted.

TIERNEY  
What do you want me to say? The other  
girls can do what they like. I don't  
know why my magic hasn't come in, but  
until it does... I can't just sit  
around and do nothing.

Kiersten shrugs. *Suit yourself.*

KIERSTEN  
Then I can't help you after all. You  
win, Tierney. You're on your own.  
Just the way you like it.

She picks up the axe and walks away. In the distance,  
thunder RUMBLES in gathering storm clouds. A warning...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney is drinking from the well when-- she sees Kiersten  
cornering Gertrude against the larder.



Tierney hurries over-- but Kiersten gives Gertrude a pointed look and strides away.

TIERNEY  
What was that about?

Gertrude can't quite meet Tierney's eyes.

GERTRUDE  
She apologized. She wants to be friends again.

TIERNEY  
After everything she did to you? You can't possibly believe her.

Gertrude looks away, toward the larger group of girls.

GERTRUDE  
You don't know what it's like. I just... I don't want to be Dirty Gertie. And she can make it stop.

And now Tierney connects the dots. Realizing...

TIERNEY  
And what did you promise her in return? For her friendship?

GERTRUDE  
I think it's best... if we don't speak anymore.

And just like that, Gertrude walks away.

#### **EXT. ENCAMPMENT - LATER**

Tierney is alone in the trees at the back of the Encampment. Down on all fours, *naked this time*, her hands and knees pressed into the cold ground.

Gritting her teeth. Squeezing her eyes. Clenching every muscle in her body. *Willing* her magic to come...

She feels a pinch. And another. She opens her eyes-- SPIDERS are crawling all over her!

She shrieks-- leaps up-- smacking them off her--

And just as suddenly, the spiders are gone.

Tierney sinks to the ground. *What is happening to her??*

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - LATER**

Heavy storm clouds block out the sun as Tierney returns to the center of camp with an armful of firewood...

To find all the girls huddled around the front fence. Kiersten is speaking to someone near the gate, impossible to see who from the back of the crowd.

KIERSTEN

All you have to do is run to the cove  
and back. Then I'll take out your  
braid, and you'll be one of us.

Tierney pushes her way to the front-- it's Helen. Looking timid and unsure as Kiersten strokes her hair like a child.

TIERNEY

She can't leave the Encampment!  
That's a death sentence!

KIERSTEN

Her magic will protect her.

Helen looks at Tierney, her eyes glassy and dazed.

HELEN

The ghosts can't see me if I'm  
invisible.

The other girls push Tierney back. Physically blocking her from the front. Tierney scans the crowd for an ally.

KIERSTEN

I'll even let you wear my veil.  
That's how much I believe in you.

Helen beams as Kiersten places a veil on her head.

TAMMY

But-- that's my veil--

Kiersten gestures to Jenna and Jessica, who haul open the gate. The forest stretches out before them, wild and dark.

The other girls step back. Kiersten nudges Helen forward.

KEIRSTEN

You can do it. Go!

Thunder RUMBLES. Lightning CRACKS. And Helen TAKES OFF--

TIERNEY

Wait--!

The other girls let down their guard and Tierney shoves her way forward-- through the crowd-- through the gate-- into

**THE FOREST.**

She stops, realizing what she's done. The trees loom over her. The wind whips her. The noises of the forest echo...

For a moment, Tierney is frozen in fear. But she gathers her courage and races down the path...

She spots Helen up ahead, the veil trailing behind her.

TIERNEY

Helen!

Helen stops. She turns back, panicked.

HELEN

You can see me?

A LIGHTNING STRIKE blinds them. When their vision clears--

A FIGURE emerges from the thicket of trees behind Helen. Wrapped in a dark, gauzy shroud. A GHOST.

At first Tierney is too stunned to react. Totally paralyzed.

TIERNEY

Helen...

Helen frowns. With growing dread she turns around--

The Ghost's shroud-covered arms SNAP HER NECK like a twig.

Helen crumples to the ground. Dead. And the Ghost lets out a ROAR that echoes into the trees...

Then another ROAR bellows out of the brush. And another. And another. Coming from all directions. They're everywhere.

That breaks Tierney's paralysis. She turns and flees, but--  
THE GIRLS ARE CLOSING THE GATE.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

NO--!

But the gate SLAMS shut. She POUNDS on the gate as her heartbeat POUNDS in her ears. But it's no use.

Behind her, the Ghost is fast approaching-- Tierney LEAPS up onto the gate--

Grabbing the dead girls' ribbons, PULLING her way up... DIGGING her fingernails into the splintery wood... CLAWING and KICKING until she TOPPLES over the edge--

**INT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

--and lands hard on the ground. She made it. She's safe.

But then Kiersten is pressing the axe against her throat.

KIERSTEN  
Why did you do that?

TIERNEY  
I was trying... to save her!

KIERSTEN  
She would have been fine if you  
hadn't interfered!

Kiersten lifts the axe. She looks at the other girls now.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
Don't you see what she's doing? She  
wants you to deny your magic. She  
wants you to die out here! Or worse--  
to hold on to it so when we return to  
the county you'll be sent to the  
gallows. *Just like her mother.*

TIERNEY  
You're the reason Helen is dead--!

KIERSTEN  
All she wants is to turn us against  
each other... and away from what  
we're meant to do. But I say it's  
time we turn our backs on her. From  
this moment on, anyone who associates  
with this heretic will be punished.

Tierney watches, helpless, as the girls react. Averting their eyes. Stepping back. Turning away.

She is an outcast. Friendless and alone.

And with the next cascade of thunder, the clouds open up and SNOW begins to fall...

W I N T E R

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Icicles hang from the trees. Snow blankets the ground.

The covered area has been torn down. The wash tubs Tierney and her friends built are all destroyed, their remnants lying in useless piles as a reminder to all.

Tierney staggers through the camp, haggard and gaunt. Her eyes are black and haunted. Her coat is matted and filthy.

No one speaks to her. No one looks at her. She might as well be invisible. Until--

She goes to the well for a drink...

THUD! A stone lands at her feet. THUD! Another stone hits her in the back. THUD! Another stone hits her in the forehead, drawing blood.

Six girls hurl stones at her mercilessly, until she has no choice but to retreat.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

Tierney wanders aimlessly in the safety of the trees. Staring vacantly as the branches pulse and the trunks swirl and the light dances between them. Lost in a haze...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY**

The girls line up for supper. Almost all of them wear their hair long and loose. Tammy scoops a thin stew into their bowls one by one.

Tierney takes her place at the end of the line. When it's her turn, Tammy scrapes the bottom of the kettle for the last scoop of stew...

And pours it onto the ground.

Tierney drops to her hands and knees to eat off the ground--

But Katie digs her boot into the slop, SQUISHING Tierney's fingers in the process.

**INT. LODGE HOUSE - NIGHT**

Tierney walks through the lodge house. Now ALL THE BEDFRAMES are on Kiersten's side. All except one. Hers.

She goes to her bed-- but the mattress is gone, and the frame has been FLIPPED upside down. A message.

Tierney has no energy to fight. She curls up on the floor...

The door creaks open. Footsteps coming near.

Tierney TENSES. Like an animal playing dead. Waiting...

There's a soft TAP on the floor behind her back. And then the footsteps quickly retreat. When the door creaks closed, Tierney rolls over to find--

A POTATO. Smaller than her fist.

She sinks her teeth into it... Desperate for sustenance...

It takes every last bit of willpower to tuck half away in her pocket for later.

She pulls her coat over her and drifts off to sleep...

#### **INT. LODGE HOUSE - NIGHT**

...until a KICK FROM A BOOT jolts her awake.

Kiersten and her posse are standing over her. Their eyes black, their expressions a mix of dreamy and deranged.

KIERSTEN

Hold her down. Empty her pockets.

TIERNEY

...wha...?

A dozen girls pin her to the floor. Hands invading her--

Jenna pulls the other half of the potato from her coat.

KIERSTEN

You stole this from the larder.

Tierney's head is swimming.

TIERNEY

No I... didn't...

KIERSTEN

Then who gave it to you?

TIERNEY

I just... I found it...

KIERSTEN  
What happens to girls who lie?

JENNA  
They lose their tongues.

Kiersten smiles.

KIERSTEN  
Get the calipers.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT**

Tierney kicks and thrashes and screams as a mob of girls drag her from the lodge house to The Punishment Tree.

They haul her up against it. Pinning her to it. And she has no strength to fight them.

Hannah skips over with a rusty clamp.

Kiersten grabs Tierney's face, squeezing her cheeks.

KIERSTEN  
Stick out your tongue. Or stop me  
with your magic. If you can.

Tierney struggles against her...

IN THE CROWD  
Stop! I did it!

They all turn to see Gertrude stepping forward.

GERTRUDE  
I gave her the potato. Look at her.  
She's starving.

But Kiersten is looking at Gertrude. Her face inscrutable.

KIERSTEN  
Is this how you repay me? After  
everything I did for you? I gave you  
a second chance, I forgave you... And  
that still wasn't enough, was it? We  
both know what you really want.

Gertrude shirks back, eyes pleading.

GERTRUDE  
Don't... please...



KIERSTEN  
Is anyone curious how *Dirty Gertie*  
got her name?

GERTRUDE  
(fighting tears)  
*Kiersten!*

KIERSTEN  
She tried to kiss me. She wanted me  
to do the dirty things she found in a  
dirty picture. To sin against God.

The crowd of girls reacts-- horrified, outraged, gleeful.

Gertrude grabs Tierney's arm. Trying to lead her away.

GERTRUDE  
Come on. Let's go--

But suddenly Gertrude's head JERKS back. She cries out.  
Falls to her knees. Blood pooling down her back as--

Kiersten clenches Gertrude's braid in her fist. A bloody  
patch of scalp at one end, the red ribbon at the other. In  
her other hand she holds the axe.

The other girls are stunned. Even Kiersten looks shocked.  
But we watch her expression change as she decides to own  
it-- to *embrace* it. She raises the bloody braid with glee.

KIERSTEN  
I warned you, didn't I? Those who  
help the heretic will be punished.

Tierney is horrified. She can barely whisper--

TIERNEY  
*What did you do?*

Kiersten ignores her. Drunk with power. Manic with energy.

KIERSTEN  
We thought shunning her would be  
enough. But we must expel this poison  
from our system. Open the gates.

Tierney backs away.

TIERNEY  
No. No, I'll... I'll put my hand in  
the fire. Or you can take my braid--  
my finger-- an ear--

KIERSTEN

Give her to the ghosts and be done.

Tierney staggers back. But the girls are surrounding her... The trees pressing down from above... the high walls of the fence closing in...

There is nowhere to run.

Dozens of hands are PUSHING her, SHOVING her, HERDING her toward the gate. Dozens of faces SMILING and SCOWLING.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

Wait. I want her coat.

The hands RIP at her, TEARING at her clothes, trying to PRY the coat away. Tierney clings to it desperately--

But then Kiersten is blocking her path, raising the axe.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

I said GIVE IT TO ME--

A HUSH falls over the girls. They drop their hands. Step back. Their black eyes wide with surprise and fear.

Even Kiersten falls back. She looks at Tierney with a low, nervous laugh...

And then they're all laughing. Tierney follows their gaze...

TO THE AXE EMBEDDED BETWEEN HER SHOULDER AND HER CHEST.

Her hands tremble as they reach for the handle. She YANKS--

The girls laugh harder. Tierney tugs and tugs until finally-- she pulls the axe out. And a TORRENT OF BLOOD comes gushing with it.

The girls laugh harder. Doubling over. Tears streaming. Birds start to caw, a mocking sound. The trees seem to shake, as if they're laughing, too.

And Tierney-- RUNS. Still gripping the axe.

Past the girls. Out the gates. Into the forest.

The laughter echoing behind her...

**ON TIERNEY**

Staggering through the woods, a trail of blood behind her.

The ground sways under her feet. The trees seem to reach for her. Shadows dancing all around...

Her vision blurs around the edges. The axe sags in her arms. She's ready to collapse. When--

One of the shadows STEPS into the path behind her. A FIGURE hidden by a shroud. A Ghost.

But Tierney keeps going. Lumbering toward--

### **THE LAKE.**

Frozen over with ice. The moon shines down, creating a perfect reflection on its surface.

Tierney pauses at the bank. Unsure. But THE GHOST is coming toward her. A faceless angel of death.

Tierney steps out onto the ice. Testing the weight... It holds! She takes another step. Another. Another...

CRAAAAAACK. She freezes. Slowly, she turns to the shore...

THE GHOST has followed her onto the ice. Reaching for her...

The wind whips her. The moonlight glints off the deep black of her eyes. She looks completely unhinged.

TIERNEY  
Stay away from me!

With the last of her strength she raises the axe. Blood trickles down the handle, pooling on the ice at her feet...

Tierney heaves the axe down into the ice.

The CRAAAAAACK echoes all around her, and then suddenly

She PLUNGES down into the frigid water--

And everything goes

**DARK.**

### **A FRANTIC GASP OF BREATH AS--**

IMAGES flash across the screen:

--A bonfire climbing into the night.

--A serrated blade tearing through Tierney's clothes.

--A circle of women, dancing with arms outstretched.

--Strips of cloth tying down Tierney's arms and legs.

--Smiling, laughing, faces in the firelight.

--A hot iron searing into Tierney's shoulder flesh.

--The Woman, hanging from the Punishment Tree. But it's not blood dripping from her hands. It's tiny RED FLOWER PETALS.

They spill onto the ground where twin patches of red flowers are growing...

## A ROOM

Gradually comes into focus:

Long strips of sinewy meat hanging from hooks. Tanned hides drying on a rack. An assortment of knives and tools on a rough table. A fire crackling in a hearth.

Tierney tries to sit up, only to find--

Her arms and legs are restrained. She starts to panic--

MOVEMENT in the corner as-- the SHROUDED FIGURE approaches.

Tierney reacts. Twisting and writhing in vain--

The Figure grabs her face. Squeezes her cheeks to open her mouth. Tilts a cup to her lips. And now Tierney sees--

EYES staring down at her from a gap in the shroud. Dark and piercing. As if they are staring into her very soul.

Tierney is so surprised that she chokes on the liquid. She coughs and sputters--

But her vision blurs, and her eyes flutter closed...

## INT. ROOM - LATER

Tierney wakes. The room is quiet and still. The fire has gone out. She turns her head, looking around. No sign of The Figure with the dark eyes. Suddenly--

A ROAR sounds in the distance. Followed by a chorus of ROARS answering it, echoing from all directions. The Ghosts.

She struggles against the restraint holding her good arm down. Twisting, yanking, rubbing her skin raw. Bleeding onto the bed. Gritting her teeth. Blinking back tears. But the more she struggles, the tighter the restraint pulls. No use.

She thinks... looks around. There's a table on the other side of her, but she can't see what's on it.

Her fingers are just close enough they might be able to grasp the table leg-- but it's her bad arm. Can she do it?

She wiggles her fingers. They barely graze the table leg.

She stretches her arm out... pushing through the pain... Until she has a firm grip on the table leg.

She takes a few quick, deep breaths. Steeling herself...

TIERNEY

One... two... THREE--

She YANKS. The wound in her shoulder RIPS-- she CRIES OUT-- her arm goes LIMP-- but the table TIPS toward her, its contents sliding onto her bed...

A glass vial of liquid. A roll of gauze. And-- A BLADE.

She twists her torso and pulls the pelts covering her with her teeth, maneuvering the blade over to the other side of the bed. The fingers of her good hand reach... stretch...

*Got it.* She positions the blade to slice through the hide. Sawing... Sweating... Eyes on the door...

Until finally-- the hide tears enough that her hand slips free. Success!

She rolls over and cuts through the restraint binding her bad arm, still limp and useless at her side.

No matter. She sits up, pulls back the pelts, and cuts through the strips binding her legs. She's free--!

SOUNDS come from outside the room. Oh shit. The Figure is returning. And the table is overturned and there's blood on the bed and severed restraints. What to do...?

Tierney acts fast. She THROWS HERSELF off the bed, landing in a contorted heap on the floor. Face hidden. Perfectly still. Playing dead.

TIERNEY'S POV: We HEAR the Figure coming toward her.

The Figure grabs her by the shoulders. Rolls her over...

NOW.

Tierney PLUNGES the blade into the shroud--

And it STICKS. Sliding into thick, solid flesh. Tierney reacts, stunned--

The Figure cries out-- staggers back--

And Tierney sees her chance. She SCRAMBLES to her feet...

Her weak legs buckle under her. But she picks herself up. Her left arm hanging limply, dead weight.

She scrambles for the doorway-- a thick hide, sunlight shining behind it.

Behind her, The Figure calls out--

FIGURE

Stop--!

And to our surprise, the Figure's voice is low, guttural. It's the voice of a YOUNG MAN.

But Tierney ignores his warning. She LUNGES through--

INTO NOTHING BUT AIR. Oh shit. This room is in a--

**EXT. TREE - CONTINUOUS**

She loses her balance. Teetering toward the ground--

The Young Man GRABS her by her bad arm, JOLTING her to a stop. She SCREAMS in agony--

YOUNG MAN

Give me-- your other-- hand!

Tierney dangles over the edge. A forty foot drop to the snow-covered ground. Wind biting into her bare skin.

YOUNG MAN (cont'd)

*Tierney!*

The Young Man grips her from above, leaning over the edge of the narrow platform on which this room-- A HUNTING BLIND -- has been built.

Tierney reaches up. The Young Man grasps her good wrist and pulls her up. Back into the--

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - CONTINUOUS**

They lay gasping on the floor. Tierney curled in the fetal position. The Young Man clutching the wound in his abdomen. Both of them reeling, for different reasons:

YOUNG MAN  
You... stabbed me...

TIERNEY  
You're not... a ghost...?

Suddenly her face contorts as something trickles down her arm. A thick, oozing pus tinged with blood--

She looks down at the WOUND in her shoulder-- gaping open, maggots squirming in rotted, gangrenous flesh.

The room seems to LURCH. Tierney's eyes roll back...

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - LATER**

She wakes up, back in bed. Her shoulder freshly bandaged. The Young Man is sitting at her side. She RECOILS as he presses his wrist to her forehead.

YOUNG MAN  
Your fever broke.

TIERNEY  
...Water.

The Young Man lifts a cup to her lips. She drinks greedily-- until he pulls the cup away.

YOUNG MAN  
Slow.

TIERNEY  
Who are you?

He doesn't answer. Suddenly-- Tierney lurches over and VOMITS over the side of the bed. Her vision blurs.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
What's happening to me?

YOUNG MAN  
It's the infection.

TIERNEY  
Am I going to die?

YOUNG MAN  
I don't know.

His voice as flat and cold. As if to say, *I don't care*.  
Tierney's eyelids start to flutter.

TIERNEY  
How do you... know my name...?

But he doesn't answer. And she succumbs to sleep...

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - LATER**

A chorus of echoing ROARS startles Tierney awake. She sits up... winces. Her shoulder is throbbing. Across the room, the Young Man stirring a pot over the fire.

TIERNEY  
I need medicine. Poppy... or valerian  
root... even willow bark--

YOUNG MAN  
No.

TIERNEY  
Please. I'm in-- so much pain.

YOUNG MAN  
At this point, it will do more harm  
than good.  
(beat; reluctant)  
Are you hungry?

Tierney considers. Eyeing whatever's cooking in that pot.

TIERNEY  
Yes.

But he tosses a sack of walnuts onto her bed instead.  
Tierney picks one up. The nut rattles inside the shell.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
How am I supposed to...?

He comes over and places a steel nutcracker in her bad hand.



YOUNG MAN  
Don't try anything. I got careless  
 once. I won't again.

Tierney tries to use the cracker, but...

TIERNEY  
 It's too hard.

YOUNG MAN  
 You need to start building muscle.

TIERNEY  
 I can't do it.

YOUNG MAN  
 Then you won't eat.

Tierney fumes. Famished and frustrated. But she keeps trying... And finally-- the nut cracks open. She scoops out the meat and wolfs it down. Then onto the next nut...

TIERNEY  
 You're not a ghost.  
 (no answer)  
 And you're not a girl.  
 (still no answer)  
 Why are you dressed like that?

The Young Man bristles.

YOUNG MAN  
 We wear our shrouds for protection.

TIERNEY  
 From what? The ghosts?

He looks up sharply.

YOUNG MAN  
From you.

And with that, he turns his back to her once more.

# **INT. HUNTING BLIND - NIGHT**

Tierney blinks awake from a fitful sleep to see The Young Man tending the fire, his back to her. And for the first time, we're really SEEING him:

His shroud is off, his body illuminated in the firelight--

Lean muscle coiling under bare skin etched with scars. His hair is dark and thick. His face sharp, angular.

Tierney watches. Motionless beneath the fur pelts. Taking in the sight of him with quiet awe. *Absolutely riveted.*

He turns abruptly. She sees a FLASH of dark eyes-- but she squeezes her eyes shut, feigning sleep. *Did he see her...?!*

When she finally dares to look again...

He's back to tending the fire. But now his shroud is on.

#### INT. HUNTING BLIND - DAY

Hidden beneath his shroud, the Young Man dresses Tierney's wound. His movements are gruff, cursory.

TIERNEY

What's your name?

(no answer)

How do you know my name? Have we met?

Still no answer. Not a conversationalist, this guy.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Are there others like you? Out here in the forest?

Oops; he drops the cloth. Tierney reaches for it--

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Here--

--but her sudden movement startles him. He jolts away.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Are you afraid of me?

YOUNG MAN

You stabbed me.

She holds the cloth out to him. He eyes her warily. But finally, he yanks the cloth out of her grasp--

And as he does, she GRABS his shroud with her good hand, getting a fistful of fabric.

TIERNEY

*I want answers. Or I swear I will rip this thing right off--*

But he digs his fingers into her wound. She HOWLS with pain, releasing her grip. Writhing on the table.

And by the time she can see past the pain, he's gone.

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - NIGHT**

It's full dark when he finally returns. Tierney is practicing with the nutcracker, sitting by a fire.

YOUNG MAN  
(surprised)  
You built a fire.

TIERNEY  
I got tired of sitting in the dark.

They regard each other for a moment. Wary.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
I'm sorry I grabbed you.

The Young Man considers. And finally, reluctantly...

YOUNG MAN  
I think, if I were in your position,  
I would have done the same.

He sits down, still careful to keep his distance.

YOUNG MAN (cont'd)  
You want answers.

OFF TIERNEY: both relieved to be talking and terrified of what he might say. But the not-knowing is worse, so:

TIERNEY  
...Yes.

YOUNG MAN  
I'm a Poacher. I patrol the forest to  
keep the County safe.

TIERNEY  
By killing innocent girls?

YOUNG MAN  
They're hardly innocent if they break  
the rules and leave the Encampment.

Tierney reels. Trying to process. Her voice trembling:

TIERNEY  
Did you kill Helen?

YOUNG MAN  
I don't know.

TIERNEY  
She was running toward the lake. A  
ghost-- *someone* snapped her neck.

YOUNG MAN  
No. That wasn't me.

As they go, Tierney's fear turns into anger, and their  
conversation takes on a RAPID FIRE feel:

TIERNEY  
So there are more of you?

YOUNG MAN  
Yes. Many more. Maybe a dozen.

TIERNEY  
I've lived in the County all my life  
and I've never heard of Poachers.

YOUNG MAN  
No, you hear stories about ghosts who  
haunt the woods and kill any girl who  
strays from the path. You hear what  
they want you to hear, whatever they  
think will keep you in line and in  
the Encampment *where you belong*. And  
when that doesn't work... we take  
matters into our own hands.

TIERNEY  
But-- why would they lie to us?

YOUNG MAN  
For the same reason they banish you  
from your homes and lock you away in  
a cage for a year. Because they're  
afraid of you. *And your magic*.

TIERNEY  
(sneers)  
That's why you wear this... bed  
sheet? To protect you from my magic?

YOUNG MAN  
Yes.

TIERNEY

Well then you don't have to worry. My magic hasn't come in yet. You're safe.

YOUNG MAN

(snorts)

Exactly what you would say.

TIERNEY

Do you think if I had even an ounce of magical ability I would still be here in this... this... tree house butcher shop?

YOUNG MAN

It's a hunting blind.

TIERNEY

Well it's hideous. And it smells.

YOUNG MAN

That's you.

Oh. They stare each other down. A silent stand off.

TIERNEY

Why didn't you kill me?

But this time, the Young Man doesn't answer.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

I broke the rules. I left the Encampment. Am I a threat?

YOUNG MAN

I'm done talking.

He gets up, crosses the room--

TIERNEY

You know, for someone going to such trouble to keep me alive, you don't seem terribly happy about it.

(no answer)

How do you know my name?!

#### **INT. HUNTING BLIND - NIGHT**

Tierney wakes to find the Young Man draping pelts over a fishing line strung across the room-- a makeshift curtain to hide a small metal tub filled with steaming water.

YOUNG MAN  
You need a bath.

Tierney almost dives off the table. Yes. She starts to strip off her chemise-- then pauses. Suddenly very aware that she will be taking off her clothes with an audience.

But the Young Man is busying himself across the room. Keeping his back turned.

Tierney quickly undresses and slides into the water.

TIERNEY  
Ahhhhhhh...

She can't help herself. It feels like heaven.

YOUNG MAN  
There's tea tree oil for your hair.  
And a salve for your scars.

Tierney peeks through the pelts, watching him. Curious and energized by the illicit thrill of what she's doing.

TIERNEY  
Why won't you tell me your name?  
(no answer)  
You know mine. It's only fair.  
(still nothing)  
What should I call you then? Boy?

Under the shroud, she can see his body tense. She's gotten under his skin. And there's a part of her that feels smug.

YOUNG MAN  
How about you don't talk to me at  
all?

Fine. She massages the tea tree oil into her hair... And then a new thought occurs, and her smugness vanishes.

TIERNEY  
Well. Whoever you are... *Thank you.*  
For this, and... for saving my life.  
Whatever your reasons.

She doesn't expect an answer, of course...

YOUNG MAN  
You're welcome.

She looks over at him, surprised. And as she sinks down into the water... *she smiles.*

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - DAY**

The Young Man leans over Tierney to change her bandages.

YOUNG MAN  
So. What happened to you?

Tierney can't believe it. *He's* initiating conversation?

TIERNEY  
Tell me your name.

YOUNG MAN  
(sighs)  
Forget it.

TIERNEY  
It was an axe. One of the girls...  
she attacked me. And turned the  
others against me as well.

YOUNG MAN  
What did you do to her?

TIERNEY  
*Nothing.* She thinks I stole her  
husband-- which couldn't be further  
from the truth.

Is it her imagination, or does the Young Man suddenly tense?

YOUNG MAN  
That's right. You have a veil.

TIERNEY  
(bitter)  
Not by choice.

YOUNG MAN  
What's wrong with him?

TIERNEY  
That's-- nothing's *wrong* with him.  
He's my best friend. I just never  
felt... And I thought he understood.  
He knew I didn't want to be a wife.

RYKER  
You don't love him. In that way.

Tierney flushes as he dabs her wound with witch hazel. His touch is surprisingly gentle...

TIERNEY

What about you? Do you have... anyone?

YOUNG MAN

My mother. My sisters. I do this work  
for them. To protect them, provide  
for them.

(beat)

But no. There's no one... else.

They fall into silence. He reaches to wrap her new bandages,  
and his shroud raises-- exposing small, tight stitches on  
the side of his abdomen. The spot where she stabbed him.

Tierney reaches out and skims her thumb over it.

TIERNEY

Did I do that?

The Young Man inhales sharply. But he doesn't pull away.

Tierney can feel his eyes on her. She meets his gaze. Their  
faces so close, with only the gauze of the shroud between  
them. An electricity in the air...

YOUNG MAN

You could say... you've made a  
lasting impression.

He's still holding her hand.

They let their fingers intertwine. Marveling at the feel of  
this unexpected touch...

It's just like Gertrude once said-- like they've been drawn  
together by some invisible force. *Magnets...*

But suddenly-- SOUNDS come from outside. Boots trudging  
through heavy snow. The clink of bone chimes.

Tierney freezes. Fear flashes in the Young Man's eyes.

POACHER (**ANDERS**) (O.S.)

Ryker, you there?

The Young Man (**RYKER**) puts a finger to his lips. *Quiet.* He  
pulls off his shroud and exits through the flap of hide.

RYKER (O.S.)

Hey. Sorry. I was sleeping.

Tierney slips out of bed and grabs a blade from a far table.  
She crouches low in the corner. Adrenaline pumping.



ANDERS (O.S.)  
I bagged another one last night by  
the eastern fence.

RYKER (O.S.)  
Is that right?

ANDERS (O.S.)  
Sixteenth kill of the season. They're  
more reckless than usual. Must be  
strong magic.

Tierney reacts: *Sixteen?!*

ANDERS (O.S.) (cont'd)  
You sure you're alright?

RYKER (O.S.)  
Touch of fever. Just need some rest.

There's a pause in the conversation. Tierney tenses...

ANDERS (O.S.)  
Okay. But don't rest too long. You're  
missing out on a massive payday. You  
need anything, let me know.

The footsteps retreat. Ryker comes back inside...

But he STOPS when he sees Tierney crouching in the corner  
with a blade. He goes perfectly still. Like a deer. His  
protective shroud all the way across the room...

TIERNEY  
Ryker. That's your name.

Ryker raises his hands. A gesture of surrender. But Tierney  
doesn't move. She grips the blade.

RYKER  
Just... take it easy...

TIERNEY  
Sixteen girls? Dead?

RYKER  
You'd rather we leave them to unleash  
their magic on anyone in their path?

There's another blade on the table next to him, but he  
doesn't go for it. He keeps his hands raised.

TIERNEY

If that Poacher had found me here,  
would he have killed me?

RYKER

No. I wouldn't let that happen.

TIERNEY

Why not? Why do you care?

RYKER

*I don't.*

But he looks away. He can't meet her gaze. *Liar.*

TIERNEY

What aren't you telling me?

Ryker's jaw flexes. Some inner conflict brewing.

RYKER

I made a promise. To keep you safe.

TIERNEY

To who?

And now he does look at her. Steady and unwavering.

RYKER

Your Father.

It feels like a punch in the gut. Like the air has been  
ripped from her lungs. The blade trembles in her hand.

TIERNEY

How... do you know my Father?

RYKER

When you're ready-- when you're  
strong enough-- I'll show you.

She looks at him-- standing there, open and honest, with all  
his secrets laid bare. Without his shroud he seems exposed,  
vulnerable. And the way he makes her feel is undeniable.

Tierney considers. Can she really trust him...?

And finally-- she makes a decision. She puts the blade down,  
slides it across the floor.

*Truce.*

S P R I N G

**EXT. FOREST - DAY**

Birds chirping. Trees budding with flowers. New growth on the forest floor. And TWO FIGURES in heavy shrouds tramp through the undergrowth, cresting a high ridge.

Only their eyes are visible, and we recognize them instantly: Ryker... and Tierney. She's traded her veil for a shroud.

TIERNEY

This is a terrible idea.

RYKER

You're doing fine. Just relax. Act confident.

His hand brushes the small of her back. An intimate gesture, but casual. A sign of their new comfort around each other.

TIERNEY

If anyone catches me--

RYKER

You're welcome to go back to the blind. But look-- we're here.

He crouches down low at the top of the ridge. Leaning over the edge to see what's below. Tierney follows suit, peering over the edge to see what's below--

THE OUTSKIRTS VILLAGE.

Thatched cottages nestled in a clearing. Strings of herbs and freshly tanned hides and simple linen garments hanging to dry in the sun. Children running wild between the trees.

And women. Chopping wood, doing wash, tending gardens, using tools. So many women... and not a man in sight.

And Tierney is in awe. She's never seen anything like it.

TIERNEY

What is this place?

RYKER

My home. This is why I do what I do. To protect my people. To keep them safe.

TIERNEY

It looks... like paradise.

Ryker darkens.

RYKER

It's not.

But Tierney doesn't notice. She's focused on something else:

The clearing is dotted with tiny RED FLOWERS. And there's something about them that seems so *familiar*...

TIERNEY

Those flowers...

But suddenly-- below them, a young woman comes into view.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

I know her! She used to work in the mill, but then-- she was banished...

RYKER

Many of the women here were. The older wives, they don't tend to last very long. But the younger ones can earn a living.

There's something biting in his voice.

TIERNEY

But-- where are the men?

RYKER

They visit from time to time. Just long enough to satisfy their urges. Then it's back to town, to their pious wives and respectable families. But at least they pay for the pleasure-- just enough to keep their bastard children from starving.

As if on cue, a middle-aged man emerges from one of the houses, buckling his belt and adjusting his coat.

TIERNEY

No...

RYKER

If you aren't lucky enough to be a wife or skilled enough to be a laborer... You can always be a whore. Their sons are raised to be trappers or poachers and their daughters age into the family trade. It's a hard life, but it could be worse. At least out here... we're free.

Tierney gazes. Fascinated. Horrified. Unable to look away...

RYKER (cont'd)

Your Father, he's one of the good ones. He comes here to heal, lends his services out of the goodness of his heart. My youngest sister, she was stricken with pox this time last year. He saved her life, refused any payment in return.

(beat)

But he did ask a favor.

TIERNEY

That you would protect me.

RYKER

If I could.

But it's too much for Tierney. Her stomach lurches.

TIERNEY

I'm going to--

She staggers to her feet and hurries down the hill. Tearing off her shroud moments before--

She vomits into the underbrush. She needs... water...

Ryker's footsteps crunch behind her.

RYKER

Are you alright--?

But the RUSH of a stream echoes out from somewhere nearby. She follows the sound...

...and kneels down at a small brook. She cups her hands in the water and lifts them to her lips to drink--

When Ryker suddenly SMACKS her hands away.

TIERNEY

Hey--!

RYKER

What are you doing?! That's hemlock silt!

He points-- the rocks in the stream are covered with ALGAE, a green so bright it almost seems to glow.

He's holding her shroud in his hands, and now he thrusts it at her. Looking around, anxious.

RYKER (cont'd)  
Put this on before someone sees you.

But Tierney picks up one of the algae-covered rocks. Studying it up close. Something so familiar about it...

TIERNEY  
What's hemlock silt?

RYKER  
It's-- I don't know, a fungus. Poisonous. It seeps into your mind. Even a drop on your tongue can incapacitate you for hours.

Off Tierney: a dawning, dreadful realization...

TIERNEY  
And if you were drinking it by the cupful? All day... every day?

RYKER  
You would go insane.

#### INT. HUNTING BLIND - DAY

Tierney paces the algae rock, more distraught than ever.

TIERNEY  
The well in the Encampment is covered in this algae! It's the only water we have to drink! That's why the girls were acting crazy-- hallucinating and communing with nature and impervious to pain. I was, too. Seeing things, hearing things, that weren't really there. *But it wasn't magic, it was poison.*

But Ryker shakes his head.

RYKER  
I've seen a girl take a dagger through the gut and keep on charging. I've seen a girl overpower three Poachers at once...

TIERNEY

But have you ever seen one fly? Or disappear before your eyes? Have you ever seen them do anything but die?

Ryker doesn't answer.

RYKER

What are you saying, Tierney?

TIERNEY

Everything we've been taught is a lie. We thought the forest was filled with ghosts. We thought banishment from the County meant certain death.

(overcome)

They let us think that we were dangerous... that we were powerful... That we needed to be *purified*... And all this time I thought there was something wrong with me-- because I couldn't...

But Ryker shakes his head. He won't believe it. He can't.

RYKER

It doesn't make sense. How could they do that to their own wives? Their own daughters? Let you risk your lives and lose your minds? *Let us kill you?*

Tierney looks at him. The truth suddenly seems so obvious.

TIERNEY

To break us. To make us meek and obedient and afraid. To keep themselves in power and keep us where we belong. And when they can't... they kill us.

(beat)

Just like they killed my mother.

She looks at Ryker. Her entire body clenched in fury.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

They claimed she was hording her magic. *My Father* accused her. But it was all a lie. *There is no magic.*

But Ryker is shaking his head. Refusing to believe it.



RYKER  
No. It's not true. It *can't* be true.  
If you're just-- *girls*... Then what  
does that make me?

His face twists with anguish, his stomach turns...

RYKER (cont'd)  
I'm sorry-- I can't--

...and he lurches for the door. Gone.

### INT. HUNTING BLIND - NIGHT

Tierney sits by the fire. Wrapped in a pelt. Staring into the flames. Lost in thought.

Her entire world has been dismantled. She is alone and in shock. Feeling helpless and foolish and furious. She's reached her lowest point. And then--

Slowly, deliberately, her hand goes to her hair. She pulls the red ribbon from her braid and shakes her hair loose...

Letting it fall down her back... Running her fingers through it... Feeling the weight of it...

An act of defiance. An act of freedom.

She tosses the red ribbon into the fire and watches it burn.

### LATER

The flames have turned to embers when Ryker finally returns. At first, he can't even look at her.

RYKER  
You have to know... If I'd thought  
for a moment I was-- *murdering*  
innocent girls...

TIERNEY  
I know. We've all been lied to.

The look in his eyes is pure misery as he turns to her, desperate for absolution. But when he sees her-- he gasps.

RYKER  
Your hair...

Tierney looks at him, steady and calm.

TIERNEY

My entire life is dictated by men.  
The Father who raised me. The boy who  
will wed me. The Poacher who could  
save or end my life. How I dress, how  
I act, what I believe. But I won't  
live like that anymore. I'm done.

In the dying firelight, with her back rigid and her eyes  
fierce and her hair cascading around her, Tierney has never  
looked more powerful. Or more beautiful.

And Ryker is frozen in place. Staring at her.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

You can take off your shroud. You  
don't have to be afraid of me.

But Ryker doesn't move. The air between them is laced with  
an electric charge.

RYKER

I'm not-- afraid.

Tierney rises. The pelts slip off her, revealing her BARE  
SKIN underneath. She goes to him-- eyes locked on his.  
Entirely naked and entirely unashamed.

She moves toward him-- like some invisible force is drawing  
them together, and there's nothing they can do to fight it.

She lifts his shroud the way Michael once lifted her veil.  
Claiming him.

RYKER (cont'd)

Tierney...

Tierney runs her hands over the scar she gave him, up his  
torso, across his chest...

TIERNEY

This is my body. And my life. And I  
will do with it what I please.

She leans into him, cupping his jaw, pulling his face to  
hers... They kiss. Long and deep and tender.

His arms wrap around her. Skimming over her back. Tangling  
in her hair.

They melt into each other like they've spent their entire  
lives missing a piece and now finally-- they are whole.

But it's more than just desire that's driving them. This is an act of rebellion. Of revolution.

They sink down into the pelts, and the rest of the world disappears. For this precious moment in time, there is nothing but the HEAT of their breath and the RUSH of their blood and the BEATING of their hearts...

**LATER**

Tierney and Ryker lie together under the pelts.

RYKER

The moment I first saw you-- out on the ice... Wild and bleeding and half dead already. You looked so...

TIERNEY

Helpless?

RYKER

Defiant. When you struck the ice with that axe... it was one of the bravest things I've ever seen. Everything you do is on your own terms. Even dying.

He looks at her now with a new expression. Admiration. Awe.

TIERNEY

I think... this may be the first time I've ever seen you smile.

And just like that, his smile fades.

RYKER

What are we doing? I'm a Poacher and you have a husband waiting for you--

TIERNEY

As if I would ever go back there.

RYKER

Won't you? You have a life, a family.

TIERNEY

Will you? Can you stay a Poacher, now that you know the truth?

Ryker frowns. He can't. He is just as unmoored as she is.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
I could just stay here. Where things  
are simple. And I don't have to  
answer to anyone.

RYKER  
As long as you stay in hiding.

TIERNEY  
Then-- I'll leave. See what's out  
there beyond the forest. I can take  
care of myself.

RYKER  
I am well aware.

Ryker traces the long, jagged scar across her clavicle.

RYKER (cont'd)  
Last year a trapper brought us a  
message from a family we knew. They  
made it beyond the forest, over the  
mountains, to a settlement where men  
and women live side by side as  
equals. Where they're free.

Tierney considers. A future entirely of her own making...

TIERNEY  
Then that's it. That's what I'll do.  
(beat)  
But there's something else I need to  
do first.

Ryker waits for her to elaborate. And then he realizes...

RYKER  
You're not serious. The Encampment?  
You can't go back there. They tried  
to kill you!

TIERNEY  
They didn't know what they were  
doing. They were out of their minds,  
just like I was.

RYKER  
You don't owe them anything.

But Tierney won't be swayed. She's made up her mind.

TIERNEY

It's not about me. They deserve to know the truth.

RYKER

You'll be alone in there against all of them. If they turn on you again...

Tierney gets up and takes a blade from a nearby table.

TIERNEY

Then I'll be ready.

#### **INT. FOREST - DAY**

Tierney wears a Poacher's shroud as she navigates through the trees, alone. Making her way to--

The high walls of the Grace Year Encampment. Looming over her like some eerie fortress. No telling what awaits inside.

She tests the walls for weaknesses, making her way around to the back... There. One of the fence posts is rotted. Tierney gives it a KICK-- her foot goes right through. An opening.

With a little grunt work, she pries away just enough of the fence to squeeze through...

She hesitates. Glancing back toward Ryker's hunting blind. It's not too late. She could just turn back, walk away, wash her hands of the whole thing. It would be so easy...

But instead, she slips inside...

#### **INT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Hiding among the trees, Tierney removes her shroud, folds it up, and stuffs it in her dress.

She looks around. Takes a deep breath. And clutches Ryker's blade, discreetly in one hand. *Here goes nothing...*

#### **ON TIERNEY**

She strides into the heart of the camp. Tense. Alert. Ready for a fight. But completely unprepared for what she finds...

Now that she's clear-headed and healthy, whatever magical veneer we once saw this place through is gone:

The place is a wreck. Pots and kettles piled next to the fire, rotting food curdling at the bottom. Empty jars and cans strewn about. Rats and roaches scuttling underfoot.

The limbs of the Punishment Tree hang heavy with new body parts and braids. One girl stands next to a branch stroking the long braid that used to be attached to her head.

Most girls pass her by without a second glance, looking right through her with glassy eyes.

Like zombies lurching through some post-apocalyptic wasteland.

Dena staggers over to her, covered in dirt and grime.

DENA

I know you...

Dena reaches up...

--Tierney's grip tightens around her blade--

...Dena simply scratches her head, pulling out a clump of hair in the process. Then she simply staggers away.

Tierney shudders. She moves on. Walking slowly, deliberately. Trying not to draw attention.

She opens the door to the--

#### **INT. LODGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

--and the STENCH of decay and disease knocks her back.

Girls like on cots, filthy and emaciated, barely breathing. Some babble, eyes open, lost in a world of their own making.

Tierney searches their faces...

TIERNEY

Gertie...?

Suddenly a HAND GRABS her ankle from under a bed.

Tierney SCREAMS-- SLASHING at the air with the blade--

But the girl peeks out from under the bed. It's HANNAH, with a puckered SCAR where one eye used to be.

HANNAH

Shhhh... you'll wake the ghosts.

TIERNEY  
Hannah? What happened to you?

Hannah grins maniacally.

HANNAH  
I see them now. They're everywhere.  
All around us. I had to take out my  
eye to make it stop. But Gertie...  
they took her to the larder.

TIERNEY  
What? Why?

HANNAH  
Gertie was too dirty.

Hannah's body shakes. Is she laughing or crying? Maybe both.

Tierney backs away, uneasy. Feeling an increasing sense of  
urgency and dread...

She hurries out of the lodge house--

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

--heading for the larder. Moving fast, no concern for who  
might see her. She pries the door open...

And a SWARM OF FLIES comes pouring out. But she pushes  
through them to find--

**INT. LARDER - CONTINUOUS**

TIERNEY  
Gertie?!

Gertrude is laying on a cot piled high with ratty blankets.  
A bucket of bile on the floor beside her.

GERTRUDE  
(faint; weak)  
...Tierney? Is that you...?

Tierney rushes to her. Lifting her up.

TIERNEY  
It's me. I'm here. There's so much I  
need to tell you--

But Gertrude RETCHES into the bucket on the floor. She's bone thin, her skin gray. The WOUND where Kiersten scalped her is gooey and festering. It's a miracle she's even alive.

GERTRUDE  
I can't... keep anything down...

Tierney gently presses the swollen flesh around the wound.

TIERNEY  
Does this hurt?

GERTRUDE  
No, but... I think I lost my braid.

Tierney grimaces. *She doesn't remember.*

TIERNEY  
Don't worry. You're going to be alright--

KIERSTEN (O.S.)  
Where is she?

Tierney stiffens. She pulls a blanket over Gertrude and stands up. Gertrude whimpers, but reassures her.

TIERNEY  
It's okay. I'll be right back.

#### **EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Tierney emerges from the larder. Every muscle tensed. Blade bared for all to see. And there she is:

Kiersten. Her skin sallow, her cheeks sunken, her hair matted, her eyes completely black. Clutching the rusty axe. Girls buzzing around her like flies.

Not some all-powerful mage, but still-- no less of a threat.

KIERSTEN  
We need firewood.

And yet, she has lost her spark, her fire. Her tone is flat, emotionless; her gaze unfocused. She doesn't even seem to notice Tierney's blade. The effects of prolonged poisoning.

And Tierney realizes-- *Kiersten doesn't remember either.*

TIERNEY  
Alright...



Tierney reaches for the axe... But Kiersten pulls back.

KIERSTEN

Hold on. You're not allowed to take  
out your braid unless you've embraced  
your magic.

Other girls close in. Sensing a confrontation. Tierney  
thinks on her feet... How to diffuse this...?

TIERNEY

But I have. You helped me. Remember?

Kiersten's eyes narrow. Suspicious.

Tierney looks at these girls. Starving, sick, completely  
untethered from reality. No idea what they're capable of.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

You dared me to go into the woods. I  
was lost-- for a long time...

There are so many of them. She is overpowered, surrounded.  
Her paltry blade looks ridiculous. No way she can win this  
fight. What was she thinking? This was such a mistake--

But that's when one of the other girls pipes up:

RACHEL

You survived the woods? The ghosts?

That's it. Tierney starts to form a new plan... Maybe she  
can't outmatch them, but she can still outwit them.

TIERNEY

Yes. The ghosts-- they spoke to me...  
saved me... They led me to a spring  
in the woods. Full of special water.  
I was sick, but the water healed me.

The girls murmur among themselves. Looking to Kiersten for  
guidance. Kiersten herself seems to be plotting. Finally--

KIERSTEN

Prove it.

#### **EXT. FOREST - DAY**

Tierney, wearing her shroud, carries a bucket of water  
toward the Encampment. She's about to reach the main gate--

When ANOTHER POACHER emerges from the trees up ahead.

POACHER

Hey!

We recognize his voice. It's the Poacher who came to check on Ryker that day. Anders.

Tierney freezes. Heart pounding in her ears. Using every ounce of willpower not to break into a run.

ANDERS

What are you doing?

He's coming toward her now. What is she going to do?? Tierney thinks fast...

She raises a finger to her lips. *Shhh*. And she points down at the ground--

Tracks. Footprints leading from the Encampment down to the lake. Fresh. Because they're hers.

Anders perks. He pulls out a blade.

Tierney gestures: *Around the side*.

Anders nods. He slinks back into the trees, following the tracks. Tierney stays frozen, listening to the sound of his footsteps receding...

CRUNCH... CRUNCH... CRUNCH...

And when the sound fades out, she RUNS for the gate.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

She stays there for a moment. Leaning against the gate until her heart stops racing, her hands stop shaking.

That was close.

She takes off the shroud, folds it up, and knocks on the gate...

**INT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

The girls let her in, wide-eyed. Kiersten inspects the water.

KIERSTEN

You first.

Tierney dutifully takes a sip of water.

TIERNEY  
See? It's good.

Kiersten glares; but she doesn't push back. The girls CLOSE IN, eager to drink-- but Tierney stops them.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
The ghosts gave me this. They said  
you can have one sip each, for now.  
The rest is for supper.

The girls quickly form a line, eager to please the ghosts.

Tierney helps them each take a sip. But she also keeps a close eye on Kiersten-- who is watching from the sidelines, pacing like a tiger in a cage...

#### INT. LODGE HOUSE - SUNSET

Tierney spreads clay over Gertrude's scalp to heal it.

GERTRUDE  
I never told you the truth... about  
what really happened with Kiersten...

TIERNEY  
You don't owe me an explanation--

GERTRUDE  
No, I-- I want to. I need to.

Gertrude takes a deep breath. As if this is something she has been holding in for a long time.

GERTRUDE (cont'd)  
When she showed me the lithograph, I  
thought she was trying to tell me  
something, give me some kind of sign.  
So-- I kissed her. Like we'd done a  
dozen times before. I wasn't asking her  
to do those things in the lithograph.  
It wasn't dirty. I'm not dirty. I was  
just trying to tell her...

TIERNEY  
*That you loved her.*

Gertrude relaxes. She can sense it; this time, Tierney truly does understand.

Gertrude starts drifting off to sleep...

GERTRUDE  
What... were you going to tell me?

TIERNEY  
It can wait. Get some rest.

Tierney gets up, tucks the blankets tightly around Gertrude.

GERTRUDE  
Tierney... it's like you're back from  
the dead.

TIERNEY  
Maybe I am.

**EXT. FOREST - NIGHT**

In her shroud, Tierney climbs up into Ryker's hunting blind.

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - CONTINUOUS**

She pulls off the shroud and Ryker is waiting with open arms. She sinks into him. Physically and emotionally exhausted. Letting the horrors of the day wash over her.

TIERNEY  
There's no getting through to them  
like this. They need time to get the  
poison out. To heal. So they can  
really understand.

RYKER  
So... you're staying?

TIERNEY  
For now. Don't get too comfortable.

She nuzzles into him. Nowhere she'd rather be.

S U M M E R

**SERIES OF SHOTS**

As Tierney takes control of the Encampment...

--Near the Punishment Tree, Tierney doles out stew. She gestures for the girls to form a line, and they meekly obey.

--At the well, Tierney cuts the rope and drops the bucket down into the well. No more poison water. The other girls watch, murmuring angrily. But they don't try to stop her.

--In the larder, Tierney organizes the food that hasn't spoiled. Two other girls enter, volunteering to help.

--In the lodge house, Tierney supervises a dozen girls as they beat mattresses, sweep away the filth, and rearrange the beds into uniform rows.

--Around the campfire, the other girls settle around Tierney, orbiting her like the sun. Only Kiersten continues to keep her distance. Watching, waiting to strike.

--By the gates, Tierney brings fresh berries from the forest. The girls flock to her, excited. Kiersten approaches and pops a berry into her mouth with a little smirk. Now that she's getting healthy, her spark is back. Which makes her more dangerous than ever.

--And back in the hunting blind, Tierney stretches out in front of the fire with Ryker as night settles in...

**EXT. HUNTING BLIND - NIGHT**

Ryker stands on the platform, feeling the night air as a breeze rustles the tree leaves. When he comes inside...

RYKER  
Nights are getting warm again. You  
should think about--

**INT. HUNTING BLIND - CONTINUOUS**

...Tierney is rummaging, filling a pack with supplies. His face falls. He knew this moment would come.

RYKER  
...leaving soon.

TIERNEY  
You're right. They're healthy, lucid.  
*They trust me. It's time.*

Ryker nods. Pained, but resigned.

RYKER  
Tomorrow, when the sun sets, go down  
to the lake, take one of the canoes.  
I'll cover you.

Tierney nods. Energized and overwhelmed... and guilty.

TIERNEY  
Do you think they'll be alright?

Ryker hears the tension in her voice, and the unspoken question beneath her words: *Will you be alright?*

He goes to her, wraps her in his arms.

RYKER  
That's up to them. Either way, it's  
not your problem anymore.

Tierney leans into him. Feeling safe and secure and loved.  
And here in this moment-- she makes a decision.

TIERNEY  
*Come with me.*

Ryker studies her.

RYKER  
You're sure...?

Tierney doesn't hesitate. She knows what she wants, and she's not afraid to ask for it.

TIERNEY  
I'm sure.

Ryker reaches under the bed and pulls out-- his own pack and bedroll. Ready to go.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
You knew I would ask?

RYKER  
(a rare smile)  
No. But I hoped.

They wrap their arms around each other. Holding each other.

RYKER (cont'd)  
Tomorrow?

TIERNEY

Tomorrow.

**INT. LODGE HOUSE - DAY**

Tierney cleans and dresses Gertrude's wound. The infection is almost gone. She keeps one eye on the open door-- outside, the sun is just beginning to set.

GERTRUDE

You're different today.

TIERNEY

There's something... I need to ask you. A favor.

Her hands are trembling. Gertrude notices. *This is serious.*

GERTRUDE

Anything.

TIERNEY

Will you tell Michael... I'm sorry.

Gertrude looks surprised... and then solemn. She understands.

GERTRUDE

You have my word.

(beat)

You're leaving?

Tierney nods. Fighting tears. And to her surprise--

Gertrude HUGS her. And Tierney hugs her right back. They stay that way, locked in an embrace.

GERTRUDE (cont'd)

Wherever you're going... *Don't you dare look back.*

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SUNSET**

The sky is a brilliant orange as the girls sit around the campfire eating their evening meal. The girls are noticeably different. Stronger, clear-eyed.

They perk at A RUSTLING in the forest beyond the fence. Hannah tilts her empty eye socket toward the sound.

HANNAH

What are they saying?



But Tierney is distant, distracted. Gertrude gently nudges her-- and she realizes everyone is waiting for her to answer.

TIERNEY  
...What?

HANNAH  
The ghosts.

TIERNEY  
Oh. I don't know...

But that's when Jenna pipes up.

JENNA  
I do. They talk to me now. Ever since I started drinking the ghost water.

Tierney frowns.

TIERNEY  
That's not--

RACHEL  
Me too. I hear them.

DENA  
So do I! It's part of my magic--

Finally Tierney has had enough.

TIERNEY  
*Nobody hears them.* Not even me.  
(beat)  
Look, there's something I need to tell you. Something I need you to really hear. It's important. And-- it's the truth.

She has them rapt. She takes a deep breath. This is it:

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
The ghosts aren't real. And neither is magic.

The other girls give a collective gasp. What Tierney's saying is blasphemy. But she keeps going. She pulls an algae-covered rock from her coat pocket and tosses it into the center of the circle for all to see.

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
It's the well water. The algae-- it's hemlock silt.  
(MORE)

TIERNEY (cont'd)  
That's what's been making you see  
things and hear things and feel  
things that aren't real. It's poison.

The girls begin to murmur with unease.

JESSICA  
But--

TIERNEY  
And it's deliberate. We're made to  
think we have this power inside us to  
make us easier to control. We're made  
to think there are ghosts haunting  
these woods when really it's just  
men. Men our own County have bought  
and paid to slaughter us if we step  
out of line. I know because I met  
one-- out there in the forest. He  
found me, took care of me. He's the  
reason I stayed alive.

And now Tierney reveals-- the SHROUD she carries with her.

Gertrude's face twists with revulsion. Shock. Horror. And  
she's not alone. Tierney's words are hitting home. Until--

Kiersten stands up. No more lying in wait. She's finally  
making her move.

KIERSTEN  
She's lying.

TIERNEY  
No, I'm not--

KIERSTEN  
Men or ghosts, it doesn't matter. The  
magic is real. We've all felt it. And  
I'm going to prove it. And when I do,  
we will cut out your heretic tongue  
once and for all.

Kiersten gets up and strides toward the gate. The other  
girls quickly follow. She yanks open the gate and steps over  
the threshold into the forest.

JENNA  
What are you doing?!

KIERSTEN  
It's fine. No harm will come to me.  
Watch.

Kiersten keeps going. Gaining confidence with every stride.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
Nothing can touch me. My magic  
forbids it. Join me and you'll see.

Jenna and Jessica tentatively step over the threshold...

When a FIGURE appears steps out of the brush up ahead.

A POACHER. Anders.

The other girls freeze. They rush back into the Encampment.  
But Kiersten just laughs.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
Don't worry. If it's just a man under  
that shroud as Tierney claims, he'll  
be powerless to act against my will.

Kiersten takes another step forward. As if taunting him.

Anders stands there, considering. Then he draws a knife. And  
strides toward her.

Tierney pushes her way to the front.

TIERNEY  
Kiersten...

Kiersten's smile begins to waver, but she stands her ground.

KIERSTEN  
That's as close as my magic will  
allow. Watch.

But Anders keeps coming. And TWO MORE POACHERS emerge from  
the brush, flanking him.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)  
Stop. I command you.

TIERNEY  
Kiersten-- run!

Kiersten turns to look back at the Encampment-- a glimmer of  
real FEAR in her eyes. But--

Other girls SHRIEK as TWO MORE POACHERS emerge from around  
the sides of the Encampment. Forming a circle. Knives drawn.

KIERSTEN  
I said stop!

But they keep closing in. And we watch Kiersten's face as--  
*Realization finally washes over her. And with it... terror.*

TIERNEY

We need to help her! We need to-- do something!

But the other girls are frozen in fear. Tierney spies THE AXE near the door. She grabs it and CHARGES out SWINGING--

The Poachers hesitate. Giving her a wide berth. Allowing her to catch up with Kiersten--

Before they close ranks again. Now Tierney is trapped in the middle too. Kiersten looks at her, trembling.

KIERSTEN

I don't understand...

Tierney raises the axe. Bracing for a fight.

For a moment, she LOCKS EYES with one of the Poachers in the circle. *It's Ryker*-- looking frantic and terrified. *What are they supposed to do now??*

Slowly, calmly, Ryker steps into the circle.

ANDERS

What are you doing?!

RYKER

Listen to me. *There is no magic.* It's all a lie. They're just girls. They're sick and they're scared, but they aren't dangerous. I promise.

The Poachers pause. Taking this in. For a moment, it seems like they might actually stand down...

And then ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.

A Poacher LUNGES at Tierney-- his blade slices into Tierney's heavy COAT and--

THWACK! Ryker strikes-- burying his blade in the Poacher's back. The Poacher stumbles forward, gurgling blood.

Anders and the others gape at Ryker with shock.

Ryker turns to Tierney-- a hundred emotions stirring in those dark eyes.

RYKER (cont'd)

Run.

TIERNEY

No--!

Too late. Anders and the Poachers turn on Ryker. Swarming him. He draws a pair of blades to meet their attack...

But the odds are against him. The Poachers' blades flash and Ryker disappears from view. Swallowed up by their shrouds.

Kiersten cowers behind Tierney and her axe as Tierney howls--

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Stop it!!

But they don't stop. Not until it's over.

The Poachers step away. There's blood on their blades, blood on their shrouds, and Ryker's body broken on the ground.

TIERNEY (cont'd)

You killed him. How could you?! He was one of you!

The Poachers stagger back. Dazed. One of them pulls off his shroud and VOMITS on the ground. And with his face revealed we see-- he's just a boy.

Then they all remove their shrouds. Facing the terrible truth of what they've done...

But then Anders's face twists into a SNEER. Pointing his bloody blade at Tierney and Kiersten.

ANDERS

No. No-- you did this.

Kiersten huddles against Tierney, who stares back at Anders defiantly. Clearly just two scared, defenseless girls.

And finally-- one of the other Poachers forces his arm down.

ANDERS

It's not our fault! They made us do it.  
With their magic. We had no choice!

But the other Poachers lead him away. Slinking back into the forest in shame.

And Tierney leads Kiersten back to...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Jenna and Jessica rush to Kiersten, who is a sniveling, trembling mess. Utterly broken.

KIERSTEN

It was all... a lie...?

Tierney is in shock. Her ears RING, her vision BLURS. Everything is a haze...

She drops the axe. Feeling lost and alone and utterly hopeless. Everything has gone so terribly wrong...

The other girls stand there in stunned silence. Their entire worldview has just been shattered. Ghosts aren't real. Magic isn't real. Everything they've been taught is a lie. *Where can they possibly go from here...?*

GERTRUDE

Your coat.

Tierney looks down at the long GASH in her heavy winter coat. A blow that surely would have killed her. She touches the hole-- and frowns. Feeling something unexpected...

A SEED. She rolls it between her fingers. A memory forming--

TIERNEY

The lining...

KIERSTEN

*Tierney.* What are we supposed to do?

And that's when Tierney realizes-- ALL THE GIRLS are looking at her. Desperate for guidance. For a leader.

And we see the shifting expression on Tierney's face:

*Resignation.* That she will never escape and start over with a new life. And then... *Resolve.*

Tierney sloughs off her coat. She grabs the torn fabric in the side and RIPS--

DOZENS OF SEEDS spill out onto the earth.

Tierney stands tall. Strong. Determined. Confident.

TIERNEY

*We survive.*

A U T U M N

**EXT. FOREST - ESTABLISHING**

A crisp wind moves through the trees, rustling leaves. Trees are covered in vibrant red-orange leaves.

We push in on the Encampment...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

And it is a world transformed.

An elaborate IRRIGATION SYSTEM of tree bark pipes channels fresh water into the camp.

There's a new wash station with VEILS used as netting. A covered area for cooking.

The well has been boarded over, the word POISON scorched into the planks for good measure.

Trees in the back of the camp have been cut and cleared to make room for a massive garden. Pumpkins. Tomatoes. Celery. Carrots. Potatoes. Peas.

In the lodge house, the beds are set in a circle with clean sheets and newly sewn-and-stuffed mattresses.

And THE GIRLS themselves are healthy and strong-- and hard at work. Cleaning the privy. Organizing the larder. Washing clothes and picking vegetables and cooking a feast.

They work hand in hand, side by side, helping each other as they go. Even Kiersten is hard at work.

**INT. LARDER - SAME**

Tierney carefully places a folded piece of paper just so on a shelf. It looks like a note.

Then she closes the cupboard door and makes her way out...

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Tierney stands there, taking it all in. We see that she's still wearing her (mended) coat, despite the heat.

Gertrude approaches. Her hair has started growing back, covering the scar from her wound.



GERTRUDE

The privy's been scrubbed and the mattresses freshened. There's a full cord of firewood stacked next to the lodge house. I'd say we've set the next girls up for success.

TIERNEY

Just one thing left to do.

Gertrude follows her gaze over to... The Punishment Tree.

**THWACK!**

Hannah drives the axe deep into the base of the Punishment Tree. Then she pries the axe free and turns to--

A line of girls each waiting for their turn.

THWACK! One by one, the girls each take a swing.

THWACK! Channeling all their sadness and rage and guilt.

THWACK! Braids, toes, fingers, teeth rattling until--

THWACK! The Punishment Tree falls to the ground.

**EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT**

The gnarled limbs of the Punishment Tree burn in the bonfire. The girls gather around the flames. Their hair flowing. Their bare feet against soft grass.

Happy. Harmonious. Free.

Snug in her coat, Tierney smiles to herself. And for just a moment, the scene TRANSFORMS INTO--

***TIERNEY'S VISION***

*The crackling flames of a BONFIRE in the middle of a forest. WOMEN dancing around it, all wild hair and billowing dresses and twisting arms...*

**BACK TO REALITY**

But Tierney shakes her head, and the vision fades as-- Gertrude approaches, standing beside her.

GERTRUDE  
Feeling alright?

TIERNEY  
I was just... thinking. About everything we've built here. All of us, together. I want to believe that it matters. That it happened this way for a reason. I *have* to believe that.

GERTRUDE  
(grimaces)  
Don't do that. Don't pretend that this is fate. That it's *fair*.

TIERNEY  
Should I be angry instead? Scared? Wallowing in self-pity all the way to the gallows? I won't give them that satisfaction.

Gertrude looks at Tierney now. Fighting tears.

GERTRUDE  
There must be something you can do.

TIERNEY  
There is. I can tell the truth. I can look them in the eyes and tell them all what the Grace Year really is. At least that way, my death will mean something.

GERTRUDE  
(pointed)  
But it's not just about you anymore.

Tierney holds her gaze. Just as pointed.

TIERNEY  
You're right. It's about all of us. And Ryker. And all the girls who walked the path before us and will walk it long after we're gone.

Gertrude sniffs. Quietly contemplative.

GERTRUDE  
I wish... we could just stay here.

Tierney gazes out at the scene before them.

TIERNEY

Do you know what I see, when I look  
at these girls? Strength. Warmth.  
Peace. Radiating out of every single  
one of them.

GERTRUDE

You've been drinking from the well.

TIERNEY

Imagine if you were able to let that  
light shine, all of you together, how  
bright the world could be.

Gertrude smiles, imagining. It's a nice thought. Even though  
they both know it's not that simple.

They watching the flames together. And across the fire...

Kiersten is watching them. Her expression inscrutable.

We PAN UP to the night sky, filled with stars...

And before our eyes the night turns to... DAWN.

# **EXT. FOREST - DAWN**

The Tall and Short Guards trudge to the Encampment's gate.  
They start to knock, but--

The gate swings open wide, and the girls file out:

One at a time. Hair braided. Clothes clean. Shoes polished.  
Eyes downcast. Lips sealed.

The guards trade a look, surprised. This is... *unusual*.

They do a head count.

TALL GUARD

Fifteen? Is that it?

SHORT GUARD

(nervous)

Strong magic this year.

# **EXT. LAKE - DAY**

The girls climb into the waiting canoes. They disperse among  
the four boats... so much room between them this time.

Tierney, bundled in her coat, sweats under the sun. The Short Guard notices.

SHORT GUARD

Warm today.

Tierney doesn't answer. She hugs her mother's coat tighter around her. Bulkier than usual.

#### **EXT. FOREST - DAY**

The girls walk. Following the well-worn path. Tierney is sweating profusely now. Breath heaving as she stumbles along. A panic attack...?

She pauses to catch her breath--

But a guard roughly shoves her forward. She almost falls, but Gertrude is there to steady her.

GUARD

Keep moving. Go on.

She keeps staggering along. One foot in front of the other. Until they reach--

#### **THE GATES**

Looming up ahead. This is it.

The church bell tolls, announcing their return. The gates open and

THE NEW GRACE YEAR GIRLS

funnel out in a prim little line, all dressed up like dolls.

They stare, wide-eyed, as they pass Tierney and her group. Fearful and naive and not at all prepared for what awaits them.

Without warning, Tierney REACHES OUT to one of the new girls and GRASPS her arm. The girl GASPS, tries to recoil-- But Tierney holds her fast.

TIERNEY

(low)

It's going to be alright--

But then the Guards are on her, forcing her back in line.

TALL GUARD  
That's enough. Keep moving.

The new girl keeps going, shaken. And Tierney falls back in line as they pass through the gate into--

**EXT. TOWN - CONTINUOUS**

They head for the square. The whole town has gathered. Everyone is waiting to see which girls made it. Families cheer with relief or wail with disappointment.

Tierney spots her family in the crowd. Penny. Clara. *Her father*. But she can't bring herself to smile at them.

The men and boys who offered a veil stand in a row in the center of the square, each holding a black ribbon.

Tierney and the girls line up to face them... And Tierney finds herself face to face with MICHAEL. He looks so earnest. And hopeful. And relieved.

Beside her, Gertrude scans the crowd, confused.

GERTRUDE  
Where is... Geezer Fallow?

Indeed, there is an empty space across from her. They see Mr. Welk approaching. He stops in front of Gertrude. Leaning in, speaking low...

Gertrude gasps. She sinks down to her knees. Murmurs ripple through the line of Grace Year girls...

When Mr. Welk leaves, Gertrude looks over at Tierney, a smile behind her hand as she feigns grief for the crowd.

GERTRUDE (cont'd)  
He's dead. He passed this winter.  
They're sending me to the fields...

TIERNEY  
See? Everything as it should be--

MICHAEL  
Tierney!

Suddenly Michael is there. He's broken formation to greet her. Wrapping his arms around her...

MICHAEL  
I couldn't wait--

But he freezes. His arms drop. He staggers back. Confused.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

What...?

Mr. Welk notices. Sensing something is off. He starts to approach...

And Tierney realizes-- this is it. She's run out of time. Just like Michael, always ruining her plans.

She steps forward. She unbuttons her heavy coat and lets it fall to the ground.

Gasps of shock. Cries of outrage. Michael RECOILS. Because--  
Tierney is visibly pregnant.

Her hands are shaking as she raises her chin to face the crowd. For all her bravado, she is terrified.

TIERNEY

(voice trembling)

There's something... I want to say--

But her voice is quickly drowned out by the condemnation of the crowd. Tierney's Father looks ill. Her sisters look stricken. And Michael looks utterly heartbroken.

Mr. Welk steps to Michael's side.

MR. WELK

Guards!

In moments two guards grab Tierney by the arms.

MR. WELK (cont'd)

Never in all my years has a crime  
been so apparent. Get her out of our  
sight.

And before she can speak, the guards drag her away.

#### **INT. CELL - NIGHT**

Tierney sits on a cold dank floor behind a row of metal bars. Head bowed. Hands resting on her heaving belly. Resigned to her fate.

A door screeches open. Footsteps echo in. And someone approaches her cell. Michael.

Tierney struggles to stand up--

MICHAEL  
Don't. Please.

He looks utterly miserable.

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
Tell me... you were taken... against  
your will...

Tierney holds his gaze.

TIERNEY  
I wasn't.

His face twists, new anger burning in his eyes. He spits the words out like they're bitter to taste--

MICHAEL  
How could you-- *betray* me--?

And Tierney's own anger comes flaring back--

TIERNEY  
How could I? How could you?! You *knew*  
I didn't want to be a wife!

MICHAEL  
So you did this, what? Out of spite?

TIERNEY  
No. It wasn't about you at all. It  
was about me.

Michael glares.

MICHAEL  
Who is he? One of the guards...?

TIERNEY  
He was a Poacher.

MICHAEL  
A what?

Tierney studies his face, but Michael appears genuinely confused. *He doesn't know the truth about this place.*

TIERNEY  
Ask your Father.

MICHAEL  
Do you... do you love him?

Tierney looks away.

TIERNEY  
It doesn't matter. He's dead.

And at that, Michael finally brightens.

MICHAEL  
Then lie. Tell the Council this man  
forced himself on you. Or-- or your  
magic made you do it. They'll show  
compassion, I know they will--  
(off her reaction)  
Tierney, *you're going to hang.*

Tierney doesn't answer.

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
What's wrong with you? The Tierney I  
know is a *fighter*, not a martyr.

And at that, Tierney laughs. Bitter and cynical.

TIERNEY  
The Tierney you know? You have no  
idea what I've been through. The  
things I've seen... the things I've  
done... You don't even know what's  
happening in this County, right here  
under your nose.  
(cold)  
The Tierney *you know* died out there  
in the forest. You don't know me at  
all anymore.

Michael wilts. No idea what to say to that.

MICHAEL  
Maybe I don't.

And with that, Michael slinks out.

Tierney slumps back. Leaning her head against the wall. A  
shadow falls across the floor--

TIERNEY  
I have nothing else to say to you...

But it's not Michael. It's a new visitor: Her Father.



ABE  
My little Tierney...

Emotion floods through her. Shame... fear... *betrayal*...

TIERNEY  
*Don't.*

ABE  
I'm so sorry. I thought... I could  
keep you safe.

TIERNEY  
By lying to me? For my entire life?

ABE  
(winces)  
Whatever you think I--

But she's been bottling this resentment for too long--

TIERNEY  
I don't think. I *know*. About all of  
it-- the Poachers, the Outskirts  
Village, the hemlock silt.

ABE  
Hemlock silt...?

TIERNEY  
I know there's no such thing as  
magic. The only thing I don't  
understand is how you live with  
yourself. Knowing you condemned an  
innocent woman to die.

ABE  
You think that was easy for me?! You  
think I don't feel that weight every  
second of every day? I loved your  
mother more than anything in this  
world. *But I had no choice.*

TIERNEY  
I don't believe you.

ABE  
Then you've forgotten. Or repressed  
it. The real reason your mother died.

He reaches through the bars and places something on the  
floor of her cell--

A tiny, red flower. Just like the ones growing in the Outskirts Village. Just like the flowers that fell from the Woman's hand in her dream...

ABE (cont'd)  
Think, Tierney. Remember...

Tierney looks at the flower. And suddenly-- it hits her. Like a lightning strike...

**INT. TIERNEY'S HOME - NIGHT - PAST**

YOUNG TIERNEY startles awake in the middle of the night. Her other sisters still asleep beside her.

She gets up and goes to the window, where she sees--

A FIGURE slipping away from the house...

**EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PAST**

Tierney stumbles through the trees. Up ahead-- A light. Shifting, stretching, dancing with a fluid grace.

A BONFIRE.

Around it-- movement. Figures forming a circle. Tierney moves into the clearing to find--

Women. Their hair loose and wild, their dresses unbuttoned and unlaced, their feet bare on soft ground that is blanketed with tiny red flowers. And one of them is--

The Woman from her dreams. But there is nothing frightening or sinister about her. She radiates joy and love.

YOUNG TIERNEY  
Mommy?

Her Mother spots her. Lifts her up and nuzzles her. And then they see--

A different kind of light shining through the trees. And another. And another. Orbs of light floating in the darkness, completely surrounding them:

Lanterns. They've been caught.

**INT. CELL - NIGHT**

Tierney sits. Holding the red flower. Tears in her eyes.

Her dream was never a vision of the future... It was a memory from the past.

TIERNEY

She was... fighting back.

Abe sighs. He suddenly seems very old and very tired.

ABE

And she was caught. And she knew there was no way she could save herself. But if she took the blame-- if she said she bewitched the others with her magic-- she could save the movement.

OFF TIERNEY: A new memory rushing back to her. One she's repressed for so long, it turned into a nightmare...

**EXT. TOWN - SUNRISE - PAST**

*We're knee-high in a crowd of people. Scanning faces, desperately searching--*

*We push through to the front-- to see THE WOMAN standing on a rolling staircase under the Punishment Tree with a noose around her neck. And now we know-- it's **TIERNEY'S MOTHER.***

*A group of men stand at the base of the tree-- THE COUNCIL. Tierney's Father, ten years younger, joins them. The Head of the Council, **MR. WELK** (Michael's Father) addresses the crowd.*

MR. WELK

Ruth James. You stand accused of harboring your magic. Your own husband confirms it. Do you deny it?

*Tierney's Mother stares out at the crowd. Her face is stone.*

TIERNEY'S MOTHER

*I do not.*

*Murmurs ripple through the crowd. Tierney's Father looks like he's going to be sick.*

MR. WELK

*So be it. Ruth James, on behalf of God  
and the chosen men, I hereby sentence  
you to--*

*But Tierney's Mother doesn't wait. She shocks them all by  
stepping off the ledge.*

*The rope pulls taut. Her neck snaps. Her body convulses. And  
her hands fall open to reveal--*

*A TINY RED FLOWER in one palm. It falls drops to the ground  
beneath her feet.*

**INT. CELL - NIGHT**

Tierney looks at her father with a new kind of fury.

TIERNEY

*You accused her.*

And he looks at her with anguish.

ABE

*And for that I will never forgive  
myself. But I made her a promise.  
That I would protect what she  
started. And pick up where she left  
off. And keep you girls safe.*

TIERNEY

*You should have told me...*

ABE

*I was afraid. I'd already lost her, I  
couldn't bear to lose you, too. I  
thought, once you returned from the  
Grace Year...*

*(ashamed)*

*I'm sorry. I'm sorry-- for all of it.  
I tried to protect you, prepare you.  
...But I've failed you. In every way.*

*They lean their heads together on opposite sides of the  
bars. The weight of the world between them.*

ABE (cont'd)

*Hemlock silt. In the Encampment?*

TIERNEY

*In the well. We were drinking it by  
the cupful every day.*

ABE  
(stunned)  
Then it's all a lie. There is no  
magic. There's no reason for... *any*  
of this.

But Tierney is off on her own tangent...

TIERNEY  
All this time, I was so afraid of  
her. Of becoming like her. And yet  
here I am. Just like her in the end.

Abe looks at her, a new kind of pain in his eyes.

ABE  
No. Your mother gave her life for  
this cause, and I supported her. But  
please. Don't ask me to do it again.  
The last thing we need is another  
martyr.

But Tierney stares back at him defiantly. And here in this  
moment, she looks so much like her mother.

TIERNEY  
What would you have me do? You want  
me to live with their lie?

ABE  
Not live with it, no. *Use* it...

PRE-LAP: the steady beat of a drum as--

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

The town is gathered to watch as Guards lead Tierney to:

THE PUNISHMENT TREE. A noose hangs from its thickest branch,  
the gallows below.

They force her up the steps, tighten the noose around her  
neck. She's just like her mother, looking down on the crowd.

The Council in the first row. The Grace Year girls scattered  
throughout the crowd, standing with their families, or their  
new husbands, or their respective labor houses.

And there is her Father. He's left Penny and Clara at home.

Mr. Welk steps forward. Michael at his side.

MR. WELK

Tierney James. You stand accused of depravity, debauchery, and fornication. What do you have to say for yourself?

The Grace Year girls are looking up at her with bated breath, full of dread and awe...

But Tierney looks calm. Controlled. No trace of the fear that gripped her yesterday.

TIERNEY

I only have one thing to say. And that's-- the truth.

So much for her Father's plea...?

She looks at the other Grace Year girls. At Michael. At her Father. The men of the Council. The faces in the crowd...

And she gives a little GASP of surprise as she notices--

Everywhere, all throughout the crowd, are flashes of red:

A tiny red flower under one woman's apron bib. Beneath the ruffle of a dress. Pinned to a collar. Threaded in a braid. Tucked behind an ear.

It is a red wave. A united front of silent, secret solidarity. And it is proof--

That Tierney is not alone in this fight. *Her mother's revolution lives on.*

And she's ready to join it. She takes a deep breath:

TIERNEY (cont'd)

It's Michael's baby.

The crowd murmurs. Her Father nods encouragement. (Aha, she's taking his advice after all.) Michael frowns. Mr. Welk just laughs.

MR. WELK

Michael hasn't set foot outside the county all year.

TIERNEY

I came to him in a dream, night after night. That was my magic.

More rumbles from the crowd. It's working! She might just be winning them over. But then--

KIERSTEN steps forward in the crowd. *Oh no...*

KIERSTEN

I have something to say, if the  
Council will allow it.

Tierney's heart sinks. This girl has spent an entire year plotting to destroy her. And now she finally has her chance.

Mr. Welk brightens. He knows Kiersten has more ill-will toward Tierney than anyone. He gestures for her to continue.

Kiersten looks up at Tierney with cold, hard eyes. They both know Tierney's life is in her hands. And then--

She turns to address the crowd.

KIERSTEN (cont'd)

What Tierney says is true. We all  
witnessed it. The baby is Michael's.

Tierney is stunned. *What...?* But Kiersten glances back at her-- with that little spark in her eye. They share a common enemy far greater than their own rivalry.

MR. WELK

(incredulous)

You don't expect us to believe that--

But then Gertrude steps forward.

GERTRUDE

She had the strongest magic of all of  
us.

The other girls step forward now. All vouching for Tierney.

Tierney now turns her gaze to Michael. Challenging him. Imploring him. He looks up at her-- pain and anger and humiliation etched across his face...

MR. WELK

Enough of this. Tierney James, on  
behalf of God and the chosen men--

But Michael turns away from his Father, to the crowd--

MICHAEL

Yes. The child is mine. I commanded  
her to do it.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
 I didn't want to wait an entire year.  
 If you need to punish someone, punish  
 me.

(to Tierney)  
I was selfish. And I'm sorry.

It's a genuine apology. A glimpse of the boy she knew  
 before. And a promise of the man he'll be in the future.

MR. WELK  
 Michael, don't be a fool...

TIERNEY  
 Are you calling us liars? All of us?  
 My magic was powerful, Mr. Welk. *Just*  
*like my mother's.* And if you don't  
 believe that, maybe you'd like to  
 explain why.

There it is. The threat. Let her live; or reveal the truth.

Mr. Welk stares Tierney dead in the eyes. Hatred pouring out  
 of him. But there's a deeper emotion behind it as well.  
 Fear. The fear that he might be losing control.

He's in a no-win situation. And they both know it.

And that makes Mr. Welk FURIOUS. With a ROAR, he CHARGES the  
 gallows-- SHOVING it aside--

Tierney PLUMMETS-- The rope pulls TAUT-- The crowd GASPS--

MICHAEL  
*Tierney--!*

And yet...

Tierney lives. *As fourteen pairs of hands hold her up.*

The Grace Year girls stand together. Supporting her.  
 Protecting her. A show of solidarity unlike anything this  
 town has ever seen. Tierney is an outsider no more.

They remove the noose from her neck; help her to her feet.

Mr. Welk moves toward her-- but Michael intervenes.

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
 Careful, Father. That's my wife.

Michael gives Tierney a nod. A gesture of support. He is  
 here for her, no matter what.



Mr. Welk looks past them all to Tierney. He growls low:

MR. WELK  
This isn't over.

Tierney holds his gaze, and then bows her head demurely. She will play this game... and she will win.

Tierney moves into the crowd. The other Grace Year girls following behind her. And now we PAN OUT--

Past the town...

TIERNEY (V.O.)  
*They're right to fear us.*

Into the forest...

TIERNEY (V.O.) (cont'd)  
*We are dangerous. We are powerful.*

Across the river...

TIERNEY (V.O.) (cont'd)  
*And it has nothing to do with magic.*

And into the Encampment...

TIERNEY (V.O.) (cont'd)  
*Our strength lies in each other.*

#### **INT. ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS**

...where the new group of Grace Year Girls are crowded around the larder, reading the NOTE that Tierney left them:

TIERNEY (V.O.)  
*The Grace Year was meant to break us,  
but you can take it back. Let it be  
your sanctuary. Your shelter. And  
your proving ground. And when you  
return-- you too can join the fight.*

The girls look at each other. Revolution brewing in their eyes. And just beyond them, at their feet--

A tiny RED FLOWER is poking up through the grass.

**FADE TO BLACK.**