

The Birds at Night
(working title)

By
Alanah Rafferty

WGA Registration: I351055

914-960-1278
alanahrafferty@mac.com

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all characters are any ethnicity.

BLACK SCREEN

The sounds of frantic, whispered incantations fill the air.

INT. KITCHEN- 1918- DAY

A small, quaint turn of the century house, not too fancy or worldly, in the middle of the woods.

CAROLINE, mid-late 30's, Caucasian, a small, pale, wide-eyed woman, stands in front of the window, her eyes closed, her chest heaving. She holds a brown leather-bound journal, open to one of the last pages.

All around her, smoke starts to rise. Then flames. Caroline continues in her own world, the crackle of flames growing louder.

From upstairs, the sounds of children's screams and tiny fists banging on the door. From behind Caroline, her HUSBAND, mid-late 40's, lying face down on the floor, a puddle of unnatural vomit beneath his mouth, a broken liquor bottle by his hand, grunts awake. He uses the small amount of strength his body he has to crawl towards the stairs.

Caroline finally opens her eyes. A wide, relieved smile slices across her face. The window panes that frame her start to burn, collapse away.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. NYC APARTMENT- DINING ROOM- PRESENT- NIGHT

RUTH, late 20's - early 30's, sits at a table with a Rockwellian dinner on it. The silhouettes of TWO MEN and a WOMAN loom large over her. Ruth forces a polite smile.

RUTH

I'm sure he'll be here soon. His heart sometimes gives him trouble.

Ruth raises her phone up, checks her screen- nothing. She puts it in her pocket.

The man closest to her, her fiancee PATRICK, late 20's-early 30's, a handsome, polished prepster, gives her a reassuring smile.

His parents, CHARLES, late 60's, his years of country club dwelling showing on his face, and LYDIA, early 60's, her body and facial features all tightly held together, both force an agreeable nod.

PATRICK

So, Ruth and I were looking at honeymoon spots. We're thinking maybe the Bahamas, or even Italy.

RUTH

Maybe even somewhere out West, I've always wanted to see the Grand Canyon, Red Rock-.

LYDIA

Nantucket is supposed to be beautiful that time of year as well.

Charles grunts in agreement, takes a sip of his bourbon.

CHARLES

You could take a look at the house while you're there too.

Lydia pointedly clears her throat.

PATRICK

(Under his breath)
Dad.

RUTH

What house?

Patrick looks to his parents.

LYDIA

(picking up her wine)
Well, I guess the cat's out of the bag.

PATRICK

(to Ruth)
Our, our honeymoon present.

RUTH

(processing)
Our honeymoon present, is, a house?

Patrick nods.

RUTH (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
In Nantucket?

CHARLES
The Berkshires. Lovely place, so
quiet, removed from all the chaos
of life.

LYDIA
Good schools, as well.

Ruth tries not to run for safety under the table.

RUTH
Wow, um, that's so generous of you
both. I didn't realize when
applying we'd be moving.

LYDIA
Applying?

RUTH
For the photography program. Here,
in the city.

PATRICK
(covering up)
I definitely told you guys about
that.

Lydia purses her lips.

RUTH
It's fine, I can switch to remote.
And the Florence Newton Studio in
Boston isn't too-.

LYDIA
You plan on doing
this...program...after the wedding?

RUTH
Yes.

LYDIA
That won't work.

RUTH
What, what do you mean?

LYDIA
It just won't. There are too many
things that need to be taken care
of.

(MORE)

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Patrick has to start his town
council run, we have to introduce
you to their wives, make them see
you as one of them-.

(beat)

Oh, don't worry about the money,
dear, I'm sure you can get a
refund.

RUTH

I don't understand. Patrick?

Ruth stares helplessly at him.

He avoids her gaze, looks to Charles and Lydia for a white flag, no luck. He looks back at Ruth in defeat.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I should check in with my Dad
again, please excuse me for a
second.

She shoots out of her chair.

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

Ruth sits on the bed, holds the phone to her ear. On the other end, an answering machine beeps.

RUTH

Hey Dad, it's me again. You
probably, "fell asleep" again. We
can go ahead without you, just, let
me know that you're okay. I love
you, bye.

She hangs up, takes a deep breath. From the nearby trees, birds sing a distressed, disoriented song to each other.

In her hand, her phone buzzes. She holds it up, sees:

INSERT-PHONE:

A notification for an email from Jennifer, with the subject line PERFECT BACH WEEKEND SPOT! She clicks it

Pictures of an idyllic, almost pastoral mid century Adirondack cabin, nestled at the top of the hill by a lake, surrounded by lush, ancient trees, fill the inbox. The text on top reads "no pressure but SO perfect.

Very photog friendly location, town has a gallery or two, and in budget! Let me know what you think :) J <3"

Ruth swipes through the photos, nods her head. She stops at a picture towards the bottom:

A photo of a nearby walking trail that leads into the woods. A dark fault line in the right of the picture, towards the back, catches Ruth's eyes. She zooms in on the picture, squints to try to focus in.

The fault line is a curve, in the shape of a woman's body.

Ruth zooms in, anything outside the picture not existing at the moment. Through the loss of focus and quality from zooming in, she sees:

A frail woman, charred and ashen skin, matted oily hair, her humble Edwardian dress charred and ripped in places, stands behind a tree. Her eyes and teeth stand out like a Cheshire Cat.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Ruth.

Ruth turns around. Patrick walks from the front door towards her, presses reply without looking back at the photo.

She presses reply, writes "Looks awesome!", presses send, drops the phone on the bed.

PATRICK (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Look, I know this is a shock.

RUTH

Why didn't you tell me?

PATRICK

I wasn't supposed to know either.
Then, well, you know how my Dad
gets after a few drinks.

(beat)

I'm not a fan of the plan either.

RUTH

Okay, so we don't have to live
there.

PATRICK

Well, it's, complicated.

RUTH

How?

PATRICK

Look, I'll talk to them, I promise,
Birdy.

He gently strokes her face.

Ruth nods, wanting to believe him.

Back on the phone, the initial picture comes back up without any trace of a shape.

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

Ruth lies in bed, stares at her sleeping fiancée, who sleeps like a log.

She turns on her side, closes her eyes.

OS: The slow, quiet crackle of fire. It grows stronger, and louder.

Beads of sweat form on Ruth's forehead. She shuts her eyes tighter.

CAROLINE (O.S.)

Ut uideant futuram. Ut uideant
futuram....

(Translation: Look upon your fate)

Ruth starts to cough, tries to stifle the sound as much as possible.

OS: The sounds of children's screams, muffled by smoke. Suddenly, the sound of her own pain filled scream rushes in.

Ruth's eyes open right back up.

INT. BATHROOM- NIGHT

Ruth, her body shaking and convulsing with coughs and wheezes, leans against the sink as she yanks the cold water on. She keels down, gulps down water, turns it off.

She presses herself upright, her breath starts to steady, her body calms down. She leans against the sink for support.

She looks at her matted hair, her sweaty brow, her frightened eyes, in the mirror- not exactly a blushing bride to be.

INT. CAR- DAY

JENNIFER, late 20's-early 30's, Caucasian, petite and bubbly with a sing-songy voice, checks her rearview mirror, taps her fingers on the driving wheel to the beat of the music playing.

JENNIFER
All right, perfect timing. Everyone
got their pouch?

In the passenger seat, TAHLIA, late 20's-early 30's, tall, striking and always perfect posture, swipes up on her iPad, speaks into her headphones.

TAHLIA
Yeah, I just need the office to
send me the documents...

Jennifer pulls the car over, puts in park, turns to:

MCKAYLA, late 20's-early 30's, a frail frame with and oversize hipster wardrobe, sits in the back row, her chair completely back, her hands covering her eyes.

JENNIFER
(looking between them)
Hello, Bach Squad, you there??

TAHLIA
(into headphones)
Sorry, hold on.
(to Jennifer)
Yes, ready, two seconds.

McKayla slowly puts her seat back up, takes a deep breath.

MCKAYLA
(to herself)
Okay, cool, I'm good.

She looks up, sees the steam coming out of Jennifer's ear.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
Oh, yeah, I got the, the thing.

JENNIFER
Ah-mazing.

EXT. RUTH'S APARTMENT-DAY

Jennifer pulls the slightly cantankerous mid-size sedan up to the front of Ruth's apartment building.

She parks the car, hops out of the driver's seat. A small pouch filled with something glittery rests in her hand.

JENNIFER

Ready?

Jennifer waits for a response- nothing. She turns around.

INT. BEDROOM- DAY

POV SHOT

Ruth looks out the window, sees Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla head towards the front door.

She grabs her weekender bag off of the bed, carries it to the door. Her hand goes towards the doorknob.

She turns towards the bed, looks under it.

She puts her bag down, kneels down to the floor, reaches under the bed, pulls out a clear storage bin.

She opens it up, pulls out:

A camera bag, its leather worn from use, a slight film of dust covering it. She opens it up, pulls the camera out- a professional camera from yesteryear, slightly scarred but still in pretty good condition.

Ruth reacquaints herself, looks at its curves, the lens, the shoulder strap.

PATRICK (O.S.)
Babe, I think they're here!

Ruth snaps back to reality.

EXT. RUTH'S APARTMENT-DAY

Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla reach in, grab a handful from the pouch. Jennifer watches the door with bated breath.

The front door opens. Ruth comes out with her camera around her shoulder, Patrick behind her bringing her weekender bag.

Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla toss the confetti in the air, cheer and clap.

Ruth freezes, lets the shower of confetti dance around her.

RUTH
(laughing)
Wow, the welcome committee!

JENNIFER
I know, it's just a little
something.

Ruth smiles, dusts the confetti off of her shoulders and shirt. Takes a closer look at the pieces:

All of them are shaped like penises.

She quickly swipes the rest off her shoulder.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
And don't worry, there's plenty
more surprises where that came
from.

TAHLIA
(dryly)
Trust me.

RUTH
Seriously, guys, thank you.

MCKAYLA
We're really happy for you.

Ruth comes down the stairs. Patrick pulls her back towards her, sweeps her in for a kiss.

PATRICK
(winking)
Don't have too much fun.

JENNIFER
It's her last weekend of freedom,
how dare you.

Ruth winces just a little at the dated phrase.

RUTH
I'll call you when we get there.

PATRICK
Mmkay. I love you.

RUTH
I love you, too.

Ruth runs down to the trunk of the car, opens the back.

INT. CAR- DAY

The car drives down the rural stretch of highway.

Alt-Pop music plays as Jennifer drives, Ruth in the passenger's seat. Tahlia and McKayla sit in the back.

Ruth looks back behind them, checking for something that just doesn't feel right.

McKayla, seat lowered halfway, fumbles through her bag, finds what she's looking for. She pulls out a crinkled envelope with "for Talz" written on it, hands it to Tahlia.

TAHLIA

How many times do I have to tell
you not to worry about it?

MCKAYLA

Are you sure?

Tahlia gently pushes the envelope down.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)

Thanks.

TAHLIA

Oh, did you send your CV in to the
office yet?

MCKAYLA

Uhh, not yet. I just need to give
it a quick proof read before
sending it in.

TAHLIA

Well tell me when you do, I want to
give Daria in HR a heads up.

JENNIFER

Uh, ladies, this is the weekend! As
in no work, no business except back
business?

MCKAYLA

Got it! What's first on the agenda?

RUTH

It's really whatever you guys are
cool with.

JENNIFER

Um, whatever we're cool with? Oh my God, no! This is your bachelorette weekend. This is, like, one of the last weekends before you're officially Mrs. Patrick Hayward!

RUTH

I mean, yeah, but I'll still be me.

JENNIFER

Yeah, of course you will! It's like when I got cast in the 42nd Street revival. Like, I'm big time, but like, still me, you know?

MCKAYLA

How's the wedding planning going?

RUTH

Pretty good, we still need to decide on flowers, table setting stuff.

JENNIFER

Oh, um, no you don't.

RUTH

What do you mean.

JENNIFER

Patrick called me, asking for some advice on wedding stuff, so we picked some things together.

The car goes quiet, Tahlia immediately pulls out her iPad. McKayla looks out the window.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

(quickly)

I just figured you should concentrate on the big things, you know, the dress, the cake, the things that will really, really matter.

RUTH

It's okay, it's sweet. I just don't know why he didn't mention anything.

TAHLIA
(not looking up)
Because they're exes, and he didn't
want to seem shady.

Jennifer's face turns pink.

MCKAYLA
Did Stella ever think we were
shady?

TAHLIA
Nah, she got it.

JENNIFER
(trying to laugh it off)
Wow, really, Talz?

TAHLIA
What? It's true. Guys will never be
as totally honest as women, that's
why I don't date them.

McKayla tries to suppress her entertained smile.

JENNIFER
(playfully)
Well, Ms. Know It All, you know we
talked it out before anything
happened, because, like, fighting
over guys is such bad feminism.

RUTH
Hey, we're good. Always have been.

She gives Jennifer a reassuring smile. Jennifer looks at the
directions on her phone.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD- DAY

The car drives down an empty, sun baked road, surrounded by
yellowed grass and empty barns.

INT. CAR- DAY

The girls chat away as a song from before plays.

TAHLIA
All right, this is like the
twentieth time we've heard this,
I'm taking over.

She grabs the aux chord from the phone, plugs it in to hers, types with frenetic speed.

MCKAYLA

Just don't make it too creepy, or, murdery, this time.

TAHLIA

Is that even physically possible for her?

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

It's fine! I found a podcast about the town we're going to. It's history, don't worry.

Tahlia presses play. An eerie, monotone opening song comes on.

Jennifer looks at Tahlia in the rearview mirror, raises an eyebrow.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

History that's perhaps a little...macabre.

Ruth laughs, shakes her head. The PODCAST HOST, female, late 30's, a smooth, resonant Karina Longworth style voice, comes on as the opening music fades out.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)

Hello to all you wonderful weirdos, I'm Catherine Monvoisin, and this is Black Moon Backstories, where we uncover the truth behind some of the most eerie and mysterious crimes in history.

RUTH

(snorting)
Oh, this is so creepy.

JENNIFER

Tahlia, really??

MCKAYLA

(perking up)

Oh, my Dad loved listening to this one during his treatment.

TAHLIA

(vindicated)

See?

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)

... bring you back to the seemingly pastoral times of the early 20th century. In the little town of Aster, NY, Caroline Stoker and her family lived a quiet, happy life on Williams Road. At least, that's what everyone in town would've said.

RUTH

Isn't that where the rental is?

The car gets quiet, all four women listening.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)

... had two kids when one summer, the crops went bad, and the livestock didn't make it. While her husband thought sending their children to work in the city was the best idea, she had other plans.

Ruth leans in towards the speakers, listens in shock and fascination.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...on Sunday, August 22nd at 7:15am, townsfolk started seeing the billows of smoke, and hearing the screams.

McKayla starts playing with the hem of her shirt.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Some say it was a ploy to collect on the insurance money gone wrong, others thought it was something more sinister than that. There had been whispers of witchcraft, as there always were with antisocial women in those days, and witnesses claiming seeing her in the woods with a mysterious, dark robed figure. No one really knows for sure what happened...

Jennifer rolls her eyes at the vitriol of the host, looks over to Ruth- she's enthralled.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But one thing people swear by is the birds.

(MORE)

PODCAST HOST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The frantic, terrified chirps of
the birds that reside in the trees
on that road. Local teens,
especially the young women, report
of a deafening warbles of birds,
indicating that she's there, hiding
in the forest. Waiting for the
right moment to take-.

The car goes over a pothole, the car bobs up and down.

Jennifer reaches down, grabs the aux chord, yanks it out
during the movement.

JENNIFER
Oh, wait, where'd the audio go?

TAHLIA
Dammit, it was just getting to the
good part!

MCKAYLA
We can listen to the rest later.
(under her breath)
Or maybe something else entirely.

JENNIFER
You know what, that was probably
enough murder porn for today
anyway.

TAHLIA
Come on, you don't actually think
she was a witch, do you?

Ruth's phone vibrates in her pocket.

She takes it out, checks the Caller ID- Dad.

RUTH
Pull over the car for a second.

EXT. ROAD- DAY

A few yards away from the car, Ruth paces nervously back and forth on her phone. In the background, Jennifer, McKayla and Tahlia stretch their legs.

RUTH
But I thought I sent you the... Did
you call them...? Okay, I'll send
another hundred to pay it off-...
(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Well, reception isn't great here,
and....Okay, okay Dad?? I'll call
them as soon as I can...I love you
too, bye.

She hangs up, shoves her phone in her pocket, her body
shaking with frustration.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Hey.

Ruth turns around- Jennifer standing behind her.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

You okay?

RUTH

Yeah, just... typical Dad shit.

JENNIFER

I know. I mean, I don't, like, know
know, but, I get how family can be
the worst sometimes.

She puts her arms around Ruth, squeezes her.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Just think of what an amazing
family you're getting with the
Haywards.

Ruth forces a smile. Jennifer notices.

EXT. ROAD- DAY

The sedan drives down a rural, cracked road, shrouded in
trees, the grass and weeds growing through the cracks, the
blazing noon sun darts through the trees.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- DAY

The sedan pulls up to the rental house, parks in the gravel
driveway.

INT. CAR- DAY

In the car, Tahlia keeps her eyes glued to her iPad, looks
through work emails.

McKayla, on her phone, scrolls through an email draft:

INSERT-PHONE:

An email, addressed to hr@simmondshaggardlaw.com, reading:

"Please feel free to call back with questions. Thanks and take care."

She goes back to her drafts, opens up an email, addressed to hr@nowhouseinteriordesign.com. The bottom line reads:

"...why I'd be a great fit for your apprenticeship program. Please feel free to reach out for questions, concerns or references. Thanks and take care."

Her eyes scan the lines.

Her thumb presses send.

McKayla snaps her eyes shut, rubs her head, puts her phone down. She reaches into her pocket, pulls out a bottle of Ativan, reads:

INSERT- BOTTLE:

Side effects may include: nausea, headaches, blurred vision, hallucinations, unusual weakness.

Jennifer's face brightens more and more as the house comes into view.

She turns to Ruth.

Ruth sleeps soundly, her head resting on the window, her hands gently holding the camera.

EXT. WOODS- DAY

Caroline, her skin charred black and ashen from the burns, rotted from the wilderness, yellowed eyes, a few patches of wiry hair left on her head, lies in the dark, damp hollow of an old tree, her eyes closed, her body still, her breath barely audible.

Her eyes move back and forth under her chapped eyelids.

OS: A shrill scream fades in.

Caroline's eyes start to open.

INT.CAR-DAY

Ruth wakes up, looks around.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- DAY

Jennifer jumps out of the car.

An all wood, Adirondack style cabin with a porch overlooking the property, glows in the sunlight, looks almost pastoral.

JENNIFER

It's even better than the pictures!

Ruth gets out, followed by McKayla, who starts to wobble, catches herself.

Tahlia shuts her iPad off, puts it in her bag, steps out.

Ruth pauses-someone, or something, is close by.

McKayla's knees buckle, she crouches over.

Tahlia looks down at her arm- goosebumps. She looks around-the giant trees, the big open sky, the vast nature ready to consume her.

A breeze blows through. Ruth immediately coughs. She tries to catch her breath.

Ruth, leaning against the car for support, tries to steady her breath.

Jennifer looks around at her distraught friends, immediately puts a smile on her face. She walks over to Ruth.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

You okay, babe?

RUTH

(still uneasy)

Yeah, it must be allergies. All this nature.

JENNIFER

I know, it's unreal, right?

(taking her hand)

Come on, let's go see the house.

Jennifer pulls Ruth towards the house.

EXT. WOODS- DAY

CAROLINE POV

From the other side of the lake, Ruth and Jennifer run into the house. Tahlia and McKayla turn and see them, head towards the car trunk.

A small bird flies by, tweets, lands on a branch, continues its song.

Caroline's hand reaches slowly behind the bird. The bird pauses, stops singing.

Caroline's hands snatches it, pulls it towards her.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

The door bursts open. Jennifer skips in, Ruth in tow.

JENNIFER

(joyful)

Ugh, I can't!!

RUTH

(looking around)

Yeah, it's nice.

Jennifer waits for more lauding, to no avail. She shakes it off.

JENNIFER

Here, you relax, those allergies sounded pretty tight.

She saunters through the space, leaves Ruth to take it all in.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Okay, so the banner can go here...

The place is spacious, a few homemade quilts decorate the furniture. Relics of yesteryear- quilts, farming tools, and antique wood paintings decorate- if not clutter- the walls.

Ruth spots a painting off by itself:

A female American goldfinch, surrounded by darkness, perched on a very skinny, jagged elderberry tree branch with one shriveled red berry.

Ruth walks towards it to get a closer look.

The goldfinch rests towards the back of the branch, its yellow feather are pale, weathered. Its eyes are jet black, glassy.

Ruth leans in, stares into its eyes.

OS: The door opens.

Ruth snaps out of it, turns towards the door.

Tahlia and McKayla walk in, all the duffles, groceries and bags from the back in their arms.

TAHLIA

(calling out)

Hey, Jen, did the lady send the Wi-Fi to you or-?

RUTH

Oh shit, I'm sorry. We shouldn't have left you to grab all of those.

TAHLIA

Grab the wine from the back, and we'll call it even.

Jennifer walks back in as Tahlia makes the deal.

JENNIFER

Oh my God, no, you're not lifting a finger this weekend! That's our job.

RUTH

Jen, it's really okay, I'll-.

Jennifer takes both her hands, whiskers her up the stairs.

JENNIFER

-go up to your Bridal Suite and let us do the rest.

She sweeps her up to the:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY- DAY

Jennifer brings Ruth to the bedroom at the top of the stairs.

RUTH

Jen, this is really too-.

JENNIFER

Just 10 minutes!

She pushes her in the room, closes the door.

Jennifer takes a sharp, quick breath in and out- game time.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Jennifer gives orders as she skips down the stairs.

JENNIFER

All right, McKayla, you take the streamers and put them above there. Tahlia, you've got the banners, and I've got the party hats and glasses.

McKayla looks through the bag of supplies and decorations.

TAHLIA

This is incredibly excessive, especially for Ruth.

Jennifer, startled, waits her to inevitably agree with the plan.

MCKAYLA

This color scheme is great!

Tahlia's eyebrows shoot up in shock.

INT. RUTH'S BEDROOM- DAY

Ruth tries to listen through the door.

OS: The ripping of tape, giggles, opening of cellophane packages.

RUTH

Guys, I really gotta pee.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Just like, two more minutes, promise!

OS: A flurry of movement and activity from downstairs.

From behind her, through the window, the bird from before, its eyes dull, a few feathers missing, strangely human eyes, lands on the windowsill.

It watches Ruth, curious.

Ruth paces the room, tries to pass the time. She spots the bird on the windowsill.

Ruth spots her camera resting on the bed, she picks it up, her eyes staying on the bird.

The bird stays completely still, completely silent.

Ruth gets closer to the window, raises her camera up, points at the bird. Snaps a shot.

She lowers her camera, looks the bird all over, spots the missing feathers.

RUTH
Oh, you poor thing.

The bird gazes up at her, beady eyes wide.

Ruth moves closer, raises her camera up.

OS: Jennifer comes up to the door, give a giddy knock.

The bird jumps up, flies away. Ruth tries to follow it with her camera, lowers it in defeat.

JENNIFER (O.S.)
Okay, you can come out now!

INT. STAIRS- DAY

RUTH'S POV

A banner with "Ruth's Rowdy Weekend!", pink and white streamers and balloons, and pictures of the four girls from years before decorate the walls.

Ruth takes in the sudden change. It's become less of a weekend and more of a rite.

Jennifer watches every move, every reaction as Ruth descends.

Tahlia watches Ruth put a forced smile on her face.

RUTH
Wow, guys. I mean first of all,
thank you, but this is, a lot.

JENNIFER
We're so happy to do this for you.

TAHLIA
(earnestly)
Well, she did most of it.

JENNIFER
I mean, it's nothing. We're best
friends, that's what we do.

RUTH

Oh, I should text Patrick, let him
know we-.

JENNIFER

Oh I already texted him.

RUTH

You did?

JENNIFER

Yeah! I figured it's one less thing
for you to worry about.

(beat)

Ooo, the prosecco!!

She dashes off.

MCKAYLA

Are you nervous?

RUTH

Nervous?

MCKAYLA

It's okay if you are. My cousin was
super nervous before she got
married.

RUTH

(nervous)

To be honest, I-.

OS: The pop of a prosecco bottle interrupts her speech.

Ruth, Tahlia and McKayla look over to:

INT. KITCHEN- DAY

Jennifer pours four flutes of prosecco, hands them off:

MCKAYLA

Um, should we maybe be pacing
ourselves?

JENNIFER

What? Oh my God, no! Do men pace
themselves at bachelor parties?
Hell no, cause patriarchy.

TAHLIA

Patriarchy or not, prosecco is
delicious.

(MORE)

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

(beat)

But hey, you do you, no judgements.

Jennifer raises her glass up.

JENNIFER

Here's to our amazing, wonderful,
and kind best friend. We love you,
and we're so proud of you.

They all hold their glass up, toast with a loud clink.

MONTAGE OF:

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

McKayla, blindfolded, gets pushed by Jennifer towards the wall. A poster size hang up of Ruth, her head Photoshopped on a cutout paper doll, with "Dress the Bride!" emblazoned above her head.

McKayla stumbles, slaps the candy cane down on the doll's right shoulder.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- DAY

Ruth, Tahlia and McKayla each pick up party store token, place it on the square reading "Titanic". Next to it are squares that read things like "Dunmore, Pennsylvania", "Diane Arbus", and "Bacon Cheeseburger".

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

A small speaker on a table, surrounded by empty bottles and cans, plays bass heavy pop music. The girls dance, laugh, take group selfies.

As they dance, Jennifer does a professional, graceful move. She lands on her left foot, stumbles, catches herself on the nearby table.

RUTH

(encouraging)

Look at those pro moves!

Ruth spots her camera resting on the table, picks it up, starts snapping candids. She looks at her David Redfern style photos- they're alive, colorful, well composed. She smiles.

She turns around, spots the goldfinch painting. The goldfinch looks right back at her.

She holds her camera up, focuses, snaps a picture.

Jennifer takes Ruth's hand, pulls her back into the celebrations.

OS: Barely audible over the music, a few birds start warbling a distress call.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- WINDOW- DAY

CAROLINE'S POV

OS: The birds' warbling is louder, more fervent.

From outside, Caroline watches the four girls become more and more slovenly, almost barbaric.

Her eyes turn towards Jennifer, walking back from the kitchen sink. She flops into the chair next to Ruth, gives her a hug.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- NIGHT

Wine bottles, only one of them still full, the remnants of a cheese plate, and chocolate wrappers are strewn across the dining room table. A pile of kitschy underwear sits in the middle of the table.

Ruth, Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla sit at the table, all rosy cheeked and laughing, as Ruth drops the last pair in the middle. Ruth takes a deep breath.

RUTH

It's so quiet here. I love it.
Let's never leave.

JENNIFER

No can do, cause you've got a
wedding to be a beautiful bride in.

RUTH

Oh, no, not this wedding thing
again.

JENNIFER

You mean *your* wedding, *your* very
own wedding!!

RUTH

Well, it doesn't feel like it.

Jennifer's always present smile breaks a little.

MCKAYLA
What do you mean?

JENNIFER
Is his Mom trying to plan
everything? She always does that.

RUTH
It's not that. I mean, she is,
but...

Ruth goes quiet, tries to find the words.

TAHLIA
Is there something going on with
you two?

RUTH
No, we're fine, I think.

TAHLIA
Whatever it is, you can tell us.

Ruth tries to bring the truth up, then:

RUTH
It's nothing, just... I never
thought things would end up like
this, you know?

Everyone goes quiet, finds something other than each other to look at.

McKayla lets go of her bottom hem, scoots her seat back.

MCKAYLA
I'm gonna go to the bathroom.
Anyone want anything while I'm up?

RUTH
(kindly)
I'm okay, thanks.

McKayla walks towards the:

INT. DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM- NIGHT

McKayla releases the water in her hands into the sink. She grabs the nearby towel, pats her face down. She takes a deep, steady breath in.

OS: Faintly, a bird starts warbling in the distance. The snap of twigs outside. McKayla turns towards the window.

She walks up to it, peers through the glass.

Outside is covered in dark blue night light, the trees move gently with the wind. It's a little creepy, but also serene.

McKayla starts to back away when:

From the edge of the forest, just a few feet away, Caroline, shrouded in darkness, staggers out with a bundle of sticks under her arm, the bloody carcass of a small bird in her hand.

McKayla freezes, unable to move or speak. She continues to watch as:

Caroline arranges the sticks in a circle. She lays the journal next to her, flips through it, stops on a page.

She takes the bird, plucks the feathers, whispers an incantation, waves her hand in a circular motion.

She squeezes the blood from its body into her other hand. She writes four symbols in the ground. She incants faster and faster.

McKayla's throat finally lets out a frightened squeak.

Caroline pauses looks up, spots McKayla.

McKayla's knees buckle, she starts to hyperventilate.

Caroline smiles, her unnaturally white teeth standing out in the night. She gets up, moves towards the window, whispers something feverish and arcane.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- NIGHT

Ruth, Jennifer and Tahlia make awkward but nice small talk as:

OS: McKayla screams her lungs out from the bathroom.

Ruth, Tahlia and Jennifer shoot out of their chairs, catch their balance, make their way over to the bathroom door.

INT./EXT.- BATHROOM DOOR- NIGHT

McKayla falls through the door, collapses towards the floor in heavy, fear filled sobs. Ruth grabs her just in the nick of time.

RUTH

Kay!! Kay what happened?

MCKAYLA

(gasping)

There's someone out there!!!

TAHLIA

Who? Who did you see?

MCKAYLA

Someone! I saw this dark figure with crazy white eyes and-.

JENNIFER

(rubbing her shoulder)

McKayla, babe, you're safe, don't worry.

MCKAYLA

What if...what if it's her?

TAHLIA

Hold on.

Tahlia reaches into her pocket, pulls out her phone, turns on the flashlight. She walks into the bathroom.

McKayla's body starts to calm down, the fear still fills her eyes. Ruth and Jennifer rub her shoulder, comfort her.

Tahlia comes back out.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

I...

MCKAYLA

What?

TAHLIA

I didn't see anything.

MCKAYLA

Did you see the blood?

RUTH

The what?

MCKAYLA

The blood! It had this dead, thing,
and she squeezed all of its blood
out, and-.

JENNIFER

(to Tahlia)

Are you sure you didn't see
anything?

TAHLIA

Positive.

McKayla goes silent. She looks to Ruth and Jennifer for backup- nothing.

MCKAYLA

Go outside and check.

TAHLIA

I can see perfectly well from the
window.

RUTH

I'll go with you.

TAHLIA

(insistent)

I don't think that's necessary.

JENNIFER

(quietly)

I don't either.

Ruth looks between Jennifer and Tahlia, surprised at the unusual lack of sensitivity.

McKayla stands up, pulls herself away from Ruth's support. She wipes her tears.

TAHLIA

I don't want to, but I have to ask.
Could you be having side effects
from-.

MCKAYLA

I'm going to bed. Good night guys.

She turns, walks towards the stairs, trudges up them.

INT. RUTH'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Ruth lies awake in bed, stares out the window at the night sky.

She sits herself up, turns the light on next to her. She turns to her camera, resting on the nightstand, the iris staring back at her.

EXT. BACKYARD- NIGHT

Ruth, wrapped in a sweater, snaps a picture from the yard towards the bathroom window. She takes a look at the picture- an eerie, Hopper-esque still life.

She turns towards the spot in the yard where Caroline was, looks back at the bathroom window.

She turns back, looks into the darkness of the night.

She looks down at her camera, adjusts a few settings, raises the lens up, snaps a picture.

She walks closer and closer to the spot, snaps another picture. The grass makes a gentle crunch under her feet with each step.

The gentle crunch suddenly stops. Ruth lowers her camera, looks down:

A mound of fresh dirt, hastily covered in a few scant twigs, rests under her feet.

Ruth kneels down, starts to push the dirt away, pulls the object up to the faint bit of moonlight. She wipes off the dirt, revealing:

A leather bound journal, its leather slightly crackled and soften over time. She feels the leather, the edges of the pages.

INT. RUTH'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Ruth sits in her bed, flipping through the pages. She stops at one towards the end, sees:

A drawing of a female American goldfinch, almost identical if not a little more simplistic, to the painting downstairs.

She flips to the first page, reads the entry:

August 27th, 1917

Edmund wouldn't buy paints. He says they're too expensive and wasteful. I could ask my sister for money, but I'd rather not, she's already given enough.

I suppose I'll try this. I found it on my way back from town, it seems to have been deserted.

She flips to a later page with a picture of a small object with swaying lines under it. Next to it are phrases written in Latin, notes in English, and a triangle with a line through it. A note on the side says "how long can it float in air?"

Ruth reaches for her phone, opens up the web browser, types "Latin translation for in manibus"

OS: On the other side of the door, a flush from the bathroom, a door opening.

Ruth pauses, checks the time on her phone- 1:45am.

She puts the journal and her phone on the bedside table, turns off the lights.

CUT TO BLACK

BLACK SCREEN

We hear:

-The creak of a wooden door.

-The sounds of two children fighting. Whispers of an incantation, then silence.

-Caroline's husband slurring words.

HUSBAND (O.S.)
(barely understandable)
Caroline???

-Caroline crumbles something brittle, mixes a liquid, whispers an incantation.

-Two large, sloppy gulps. Then snoring. Then choked cries.

INT. KITCHEN- DAY-1918

Caroline sniffs as she finishes a circle of wormwood sticks and daffodils, places a star anise at each corner of the circle.

She grabs the journal from the counter, steps into the center of the circle. She opens it up to the goldfinch page from before, starts to quickly speak from the page.

She places the journal under her arm, nods- it's time.

She pulls out a small pack of matches from her apron, takes one out. She strikes it, the flame lights up her eyes.

She takes a deep breath, smiles.

She throws the match down.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- PRESENT- DAY

Ruth's hand places an empty water glass on the table, her coffee cup and plate of toast pushed to the side.

She looks back down at the journal in her lap, opened to the page from the night before.

RUTH
(whispering)
In manibus, portae, me latet?

(Translation: Let the wind be my hand)

She waits, watches the glass- nothing.

She takes a deep breath, holds her hand up towards the glass, reviews the words.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(a little louder)
In manibus, portae, me latet.

The glass stays completely still.

RUTH (CONT'D)
In manibus portae, me latet.
(slightly more assured)
In manibus, portae, me latet.

The glass starts to shake, just the tiniest bit. Ruth continues to concentrate.

The rim of the glass lifts off the table.

OS: A door from upstairs opens.

Ruth lets her hand fall, the glass lands, goes still.

Ruth closes the journal, tucks it in the waistband of her pants, conceals it with her shirt. She grabs the glass, heads towards the fridge. She looks up:

Jennifer tiptoes down the stairs, her hair less voluminous, her skin slightly blanched.

JENNIFER

Morning.

RUTH

Morning.

She opens the fridge, pulls out the orange juice.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Want some?

JENNIFER

No, I'm okay, thanks.

(beat)

I'm really sorry about the whole
wedding plans thing last night.

RUTH

Oh, my God, don't worry about it!
Like I said, I was just surprised
he hadn't told me anything. I know
if there was something really
important, you'd tell me, like Talz
said.

JENNIFER

(avoiding her gaze)

Yeah, totally.

RUTH

Is everything else okay?

JENNIFER

Yeah, absolutely!

Ruth searches Jennifer's eyes, then:

RUTH

(teasing)

Are you sure? You're doing that
thing again.

JENNIFER

What thing?

RUTH

The tweeting thing with your voice.

Jennifer holds her breath.

JENNIFER
I mean, it's just something I-.

TAHLIA (O.S.)
Morning.

Ruth and Jennifer quickly exit their private moment, look towards the stairs:

Tahlia comes down with matted hair and puffy eyes, rubbing her temples, grinning through it.

JENNIFER
If you try to tell me you're not on
the struggle bus this morning, even
just for a few stops.

RUTH
(smiling)
Guilty.

TAHLIA
I slept really well, actually. I
had this really awesome dream of my
parents and brother and I. We were
hiking and it was...never mind.

RUTH
You can tell us.

TAHLIA
Nah, it's all right, I forgot most
of it anyway.

RUTH
How's McKayla?

TAHLIA
Sleeping. I figured it's better to
let her be.

RUTH
Same.
(to Jennifer)
Jen, we didn't have any big plans
today, did we?

JENNIFER
Oh absolutely! I've got a wine
tasting that's only 45 minutes
away, followed by a visit to-.

RUTH

Could we maybe reschedule for
tomorrow?

JENNIFER

Oh, uh, yeah, honestly, they're
totally flexible!!

She whips out her phone, furiously types and swipes.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Let me just get this taken care of.

RUTH

Maybe the lake today? Just chill
out, get some sun, relax?

TAHLIA

(gulping down the fear)
What about the town? There was some
cute stuff there?

RUTH

Oh, I don't want to make anyone
drive right now. That's cruel.

She shifts in her chair, the journal peeps out of her shirt.

Jennifer's eyes dart to the journal.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Let's just relax today. This
weekend is about spending time with
you all.

TAHLIA

(convincing herself and the
others)

Of course. Stay close to the house,
not be outside when it's too hot.

(to Jennifer)

Jen, sound good?

Jennifer immediately brings her glance back to her phone.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY- DAY

POV:

Ruth, Jennifer, and Tahlia sit at the kitchen table in their
pow wow.

JENNIFER

Okay, all set!

McKayla, her skin pallid at best, her hair color faded, her eyes bleary, watches from the top of the landing. She sighs, starts to make her way down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- DAY

MCKAYLA (O.S.)

Morning.

Ruth, Jennifer, and Tahlia all turn to her.

TAHLIA

Holy shit, are you okay?

MCKAYLA

(conceding)

I'm fine. I probably imagined it-.

TAHLIA

Listen, I-.

MCKAYLA

(denying Tahlia as much as herself)

No, really, it's fine. We were all pretty drunk, the story from the podcast probably just got to me.

RUTH

No, I mean, you look like you got food poisoning or something.

MCKAYLA

It's probably just the meds. I haven't had that much to drink in a while, or while taking them.

JENNIFER

(alleviating)

All the more reason for some fun in the sun! I've got just the supplies for it.

EXT. LAKE- DAY

Ruth, Tahlia, and McKayla sunbathe on ring floats. Jennifer stands on the dock, pink float by her feet, snaps photos with her phone.

Tahlia and McKayla sit in pink ones, Ruth tries to make herself comfortable in a white float with a giant inflatable diamond on it.

As she shifts, the sound of distressed birds fills the air.

Tahlia takes a deep breath, lets her feet fall into the water when:

TAHLIA
Fuck!!

She whips her foot out- a long, slimy brown clump of water grass has wrapped around it.

She vigorously tries shakes it off, causing water to splash everywhere. McKayla and Ruth in the line of fire, hold their hands up, squeal, laugh.

Ruth gets splashed with water, the birds go silent.

She finally shakes it off her foot. It plops back into the water.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)
(gagging)
Fuckin weeds!

MCKAYLA
It's freshman finals week with
Professor Lynch all over again.

RUTH
(in an exaggerated fuddy
duddy voice)
I'm not serious-.

ALL
(imitating the voice)
I'm fucking serious!

Everyone laughs with their whole body, steadies themselves on their floats.

Tahlia relaxes back into her float.

TAHLIA
(aside)
Kay, you sent your stuff in right?

MCKAYLA
Yeah!

TAHLIA

Cool, I'll email Daria when we're back at the house.

Jennifer holds up her phone, snaps a photo. A notification comes up saying "*Please clear old photos to make room for new ones.*"

She scans through, deletes a few:

INSERT:

She pauses on a photo of her on stage, in full costume and makeup, with five other women. She deletes it. A picture of her and Patrick, embracing at high school graduation, comes up.

Jennifer pauses, takes her chance to fixate on his smile.

EXT. WOODS BY LAKE- DAY

Caroline, her skin slightly healed, a few more locks of hair on her head, stands on the other side of the lake, disguised by the surrounding trees. Her eyes are less bloodshot, her skin less damaged.

She watches the four women, bare skinned and basking in the sun, laughing, smiling, not a care in the world.

She clenches her fist, her jagged nails tearing at the bark.

She spots Jennifer floating towards Ruth's side.

She starts to mumble under her breath:

CAROLINE

(raspy, barely audible)

Ut uideant futuram,
ut uideant futuram....

(Translation: Look upon your fate)

EXT. LAKE- DAY

McKayla turns towards the woods, gazes in Caroline's direction, freezes up.

Ruth laughs, closes her eyes, takes a deep breath.

Ruth opens her eyes again, sees McKayla's face.

RUTH
Kay, you all right?

McKayla breaks her gaze away, rubs her eyes, looks back towards the woods:

Caroline has disappeared, just the trees stand by the lake's edge.

MCKAYLA
Yeah, I'm okay, thought I saw a deer, or, something.

Everyone looks around, tries to suppress the uneasy feeling they have.

JENNIFER
Yeah, I mean, we're pretty, like, in nature and all that.

TAHLIA
(keeping her gaze on her drink)
Really in the woods.

MCKAYLA
I'm running to the bathroom, anyone need anything from the house?

RUTH
I'll come with you.

McKayla starts to paddle towards the dock.

MCKAYLA
Oh, no, it's fine!

RUTH
(insisting)
I need to make a quick call anyway.

MCKAYLA
Okay.

Ruth starts to paddle towards the dock after McKayla.

INT. RUTH'S BEDROOM- DAY

Ruth sits on the floor, her back against her bed, the journal open. She reads an entry from early on:

February 5th, 1918

Edmund still isn't feeling himself. I tried to convince him that work will come back, but he won't listen. I feel helpless, watching him sink into himself, watching our family sink with him. I can't even paint something to sell.

Perhaps I should try what I learned from Him last night.

Ruth flips through the pages, stops on:

March 13th, 1918

He brought me a vision last night, one of a time far away from here. He showed me with a paintbrush in my hand that I'd never have to put down. And it's so beautifully quiet, no screaming or drunken moaning filling the air.

Ruth's phone buzzes. She grabs it, looks at the notification:

A Venmo request from Dad for \$400, labeled "the usual stuff"

Ruth shakes her head, puts her phone down.

INT. MCKAYLA AND TAHLIA'S ROOM- DAY

McKayla reaches into her bag, pulls out her Ativan bottle. She unscrews the cap, drops a pill in her palm. She pauses.

She walks over to the window, looks outside, scans the forest.

She looks back at the pill in her palm. Then back at the window.

She puts the pill back in the bottle, puts the cap on, throws it on the bed.

She grabs her phone, opens up her email:

INSERT-PHONE:

She opens up the email to hr@jonathonadlerdesign.com, hovers over send.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth and McKayla step off the stairs, walk past the goldfinch, towards the door.

Ruth walks back, stops at the goldfinch painting:

The goldfinch's head is now turned straight out, the branch now has another small elderberry growing by its feet.

Ruth spots her camera on the kitchen counter, grabs it, holds it up to the goldfinch. She frames and snaps picture of it.

MCKAYLA (O.S.)
Ruth, you good?

RUTH
Yep, coming!

She puts her camera back on the counter, walks towards the door.

EXT. LAKE- DAY

Ruth, Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla sunbathe on their ring floats, an easy silence between them. The sun shine down on them, the sway of the lake provides the only noise. Everything is beautifully hazy, like an old Polaroid.

Ruth takes a sip from her seltzer can. She relaxes into her float as it turns towards the other side of the lake.

OS: Hurried, fervent whispers.

Ruth opens her eyes, looks towards to see:

Caroline, hiding behind a tree, watching Ruth, whispering an incantation.

CAROLINE
(almost inaudible)
Parva avis canticum inaudita sumus
mane faciet avolare in caelo.

(Translation: Little bird, song unheard, we shall fly in the morning sky.)

Ruth focuses in on her, tries to make out more details of her.

She repeats it with fervor, intent.

Ruth goes into a hypnotic state. Without realizing, her finger starts to swirl around the rim of the can. Her mouth starts to move in sync with Caroline.

RUTH
(inaudible)
Parva avis canticum inaudita sumus
mane faciet avolare in caelo.

Caroline sees Ruth's mouth move, sees her finger move counter clockwise. She repeats it again, and again, more aggressively.

Ruth's finger slices along the edge of the can.

Ruth comes back to reality, looks at her finger.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Ow!!

EXT. LAKE- DAY

Ruth snaps back to reality, turns to Jennifer.

Jennifer brings her cut finger to her mouth.

JENNIFER

Does anyone have a band aid?

A drop of blood falls into the lake on its journey to her mouth.

RUTH

Sorry, I don't. I can run back to the house.

Jennifer plummets though the center of the float. She just gets a breath into her lungs before getting pulled in.

EXT./INT. LAKE- DAY

Jennifer thrashes, flails, does what she can to escape. She looks down:

A thick, slimy piece of water grass wraps around her ankle.

She looks back up, tries to reach towards the surface.

Caroline's decrepit hands stays locked around her ankle.

Three sets of hands reach in, grab Jennifer's arm, pulls.

EXT. DOCK- DAY

Tahlia, Ruth and McKayla pull Ruth onto the dock, give her a towel.

Jennifer coughs up some water, tries to steady herself on her hands.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Jennifer sits wrapped in a blanket, a cup of tea in front of her. Ruth, Tahlia and McKayla surround her in full girlhood mode.

JENNIFER

I'm fine, guys. I just, had a moment and lost my balance.

MCKAYLA

Are you sure?

TAHLIA

I think we should leave.

Jennifer's eyes go wide.

JENNIFER

I think that's a little extreme, don't you think?

MCKAYLA

(uncomfortable)

I'm with Tahlia on this one.

JENNIFER

When I was dancing things like this happened all the time, didn't mean we just up and cancelled the show!

(recovery mode)

Look, why don't we do some indoor stuff? We can just chill out, recoup, get super fun and cozy?

TAHLIA

It's not safe here! What if you drowned, or broke her ankle?

JENNIFER

What do you have against this place??

RUTH

(calmly)

Okay, lets-.

MCKAYLA

Don't you remember what that woman was talking about on the podcast? Weird things happen here, maybe this is-.

JENNIFER

Well, we can't even get our deposit back...

Ruth tunes the debate out, turns around to see:

The goldfinch, staring back at her, its chest puffed, its feathers fuller. There's now a small bunch of elderberries and a budding flower on the branch.

Ruth searches every inch of the painting, tries to discover its mystery.

Jennifer's voice fades in.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Ruth, what do you think? Ruth?

Ruth turns back to the group, all looking at her.

RUTH

What?

JENNIFER

Do you want to stay, or head back home?

RUTH

Let's stay, just a little bit longer? We can leave the day after next.

Tahlia and McKayla nod. Jennifer smiles.

JENNIFER

Give me the main area for like, 10 minutes tops, I've got the perfect thing for right now!

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

A handmade sign that reads "Ring Hunt!", along with the rules, hangs on the wall.

Jennifer, a pleased smile on her face, leans against the wall next to it, using her phone as a timer.

JENNIFER

5 more minutes!

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY- DAY

Ruth looks for rings with minimal effort, she looks over the railing towards downstairs:

Jennifer's eyes are down on her phone, watching the timer.

Ruth turns to her bedroom door, quietly turns the doorknob.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Jennifer, out of the corner of her eye, sees Ruth go into her room.

On her phone, she closes the timer, opens up her text messages, writes to Patrick:

"Hey, wasn't sure how to talk about this but Ruth is acting weird. Did something happen?"

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- DAY

Ruth sits in her bed, reads from the middle of the book:

April 8th, 1918

I can't stop the heaving. Edmund drinks to quell the pain- as if he knows pain! The children cough like crows. No one loves me or us, except Him. He loves me, He'll show me what to do.

She turns another page:

The handwriting is slightly more scattered, but still neat enough to read. Pictures of a triangle with a line through the top fill the corners of the page. She reads:

"He came to me last night, he said it was time, and I'm scared, but I didn't know what else to do."

She turns the page again:

The page has what's either dirt or blood smudged on the side. The handwriting is now scattered, frenetic. We don't have to read it to know what's happening.

On the page next to it, A picture of a swirl, along with the figures of two children and a man lying below it, with a woman standing on top of the swirl.

Ruth, now totally enraptured, turns the page.

On the left page, the writing is now totally incoherent, crazed, aggressive. On the right page, the instructions for what seems to be an incantation are written. Streaks of blood, along with weathered, brittle yellow goldfinch feathers, are stitched into the page.

She reads more closely:

-Lavender to calm them

-Garlic to silence him

-Wormwood to rise again

-Anise for luck and guidance on my journey to the new world

OS: From outside, footsteps across the hall.

Ruth gasps, shuts the book.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Jennifer glances at the timer- two minutes left.

JENNIFER
Two more minutes!

She glances up towards Ruth's room.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Enough time for a drink.

She shakes her head, spots the fridge, starts to walk towards it.

She stops halfway, winces, she looks down at her feet:

Her left foot is mangled, bent almost completely 45 degrees, her front ankle bone pokes out of her purple bruised skin.

Jennifer gasps.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Fuck, fuck I'm so fucked.

She looks around.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Ice, ice, I need ice...

She spots an empty drink, the ice still in the glass. She snatches it, sits herself down, brings it to her foot:

It's completely healed, no swelling or Achilles tendon in sight.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- DAY

Through the window, Jennifer gets back up, dusts herself off, regains her sunny disposition.

From outside, Caroline, her skin slightly less charred and blistered, watches. She grasps a dead crow, apple blossoms, cloves, and stinging nettles in her hand. She smiles, moves towards the house.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Jennifer pulls out a handle of tequila from behind her back.

JENNIFER
Congrats to our winner!

Tahlia and Ruth, still shaken, clap as Jennifer hands McKayla the tequila bottle.

MCKAYLA
This is oddly really satisfying.
Thanks, guys.

OS: A knock from the front door.

Everyone turns towards it.

RUTH
(to Jennifer)
Oh no. Did you?

JENNIFER
Did I what?

RUTH
Hire the stripper I told you not to hire?

JENNIFER
No, I swear I didn't!

EXT. PORCH- DAY

Ruth opens the front door, looks down to see:

A basket, filled with treats, bottles of wine, and assorted goods, rests innocently on the welcome mat.

Ruth looks for a sign of anyone nearby- the surrounding area is completely deserted.

Tahlia comes up behind Ruth, sees the basket.

TAHLIA

Do you-.

RUTH

Have a very weird feeling about this? Yeah, absolutely.

Jennifer rushes up behind her.

JENNIFER

Oh my God! That's so sweet of him!

TAHLIA

Him?

JENNIFER

Oh, I'm sure this came from Patrick.

RUTH

Did he say he was sending something?

JENNIFER

Well, no, but, does he have to?

McKayla joins the group, sees the basket.

MCKAYLA

Who sent this?

TAHLIA

Exactly.

JENNIFER

Guys, it's fine. Really, it's fine!! Ruth just has a wonderful fiancée, that's all.

She holds up the basket as if it were a trophy.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

So what are we waiting for?!

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

The remnants of the basket are strewn across the living room floor. Music plays from a laptop. Drunken laughter fills the air as the girls writhe and roll on the floor.

McKayla and Jennifer's glass are completely empty, Ruth and Tahlia's glasses are half full of wine.

TAHLIA

Okay, okay, ummmmmmm, Ruth. Baby Ruth. Truth or dare?

RUTH

Dare.

TAHLIA

Really?

RUTH

Yeah. What could you possibly ask me to do that's so bad?

TAHLIA

(thinking)

I dare you, toooooo....

(beat)

Oh, shit, what do I dare you to do?

JENNIFER

Ooo, oo, I dare you to make out with McKayla!

McKayla, leaning against the table, suddenly sits up.

MCKAYLA

Uhhhhh-.

TAHLIA

What? Absolutely not.

(to McKayla)

Kay, don't say yes, it's not worth it.

McKayla starts fiddling with her sweater again.

RUTH

Let's do something else.

(to McKayla)

The last thing I want to do is make you feel uncomfortable.

MCKAYLA
(under her breath)
Well, that sh�ped sailed a while
ago.

JENNIFER
What?

MCKAYLA
Nothing.
(to Ruth)
It's totally fine, I don't mind.

JENNIFER
Seeee?! Oh my God, doooo it!!

TAHLIA
No, McKayla, don't just say it's
fine!

EXT. LIVING ROOM WINDOW- NIGHT

POV-CAROLINE

From the window, we see:

A pile of nettles, dirt and entrails scattered where the food and wine should be. Ruth, McKayla, Tahlia and Jennifer all look pallid, like the life has been sucked from them. They speak in garbled words, eyes wild and scared. Dirt and blood cover their mouths and hands.

Caroline's hand reaches towards the window, as if cherishing the moment.

OS: Birds warble a distressed cry.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Ruth gets herself up and ready, crawls over to McKayla *Dirty Dancing* style. Tahlia puts her head in her hand, over it already. Jennifer's body bounces with anticipation.

Ruth leans in, gives a purposeful kiss. McKayla just goes with it.

Jennifer snorts with girlish glee, watches the whole thing happen.

McKayla giggles, revealing teeth covered in thick, black gunk.

RUTH

Oh my God.

MCKAYLA

What?

Ruth blinks- the black gunk is gone.

RUTH

I think you're a better kisser than
Patrick.

Tahlia and McKayla burst out laughing. Ruth joins right in.

JENNIFER

Oh my God, that's so mean!

RUTH

Why is that mean?

JENNIFER

Because, he's your almost husband!
And, he's so nice-.

RUTH

So I can't poke fun at him?

TAHLIA

You don't think he would've liked
that show?

JENNIFER

(unscrambling her thoughts)
No, it's just, it's not fair.

RUTH

How is that not fair?

JENNIFER

I, I don't know. But it's not.

MCKAYLA

I don't she actually meant it.
Right, Ruth?

RUTH

No, it was a joke!

JENNIFER

Well, it's just, I don't know, not
right!

TAHLIA

Oh, if you love him so much, why
don't you marry him?

JENNIFER

I CAN'T!!

The laughter immediately stops, everyone goes silent.

Jennifer stays silent.

TAHLIA

That was a joke.

JENNIFER

(guilty)
I know.

Everyone becomes dead silent, waits for the other person to break the tension. Ruth stares at Jennifer.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I, I want, you two to be happy...

Jennifer grabs the nearest bottle of alcohol, starts to chug it.

She takes one last gulp, slams it down on the table.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

(unraveling)

And he clearly made his choice. He loves you, so much. Every time we see each other-.

MCKAYLA

(attempting damage control)

I think we should call it a night.

JENNIFER

(over her)

All he can talk about is how great you are, and how excited he is to marry you and make you a Hayward-!!!

RUTH

(quietly)

I don't want it.

JENNIFER

And I just keep seeing everything that I could've-what?

RUTH
 I don't want it. I don't want to be
 a Hayward.

Everyone stares at Ruth. Tahlia, not as shocked, nods.

Ruth's whole body releases. She grabs the bottle back from Jennifer. She gets up, not making eye contact with anyone.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (flatly)
 Good night.

Tahlia, McKayla and Jennifer watch her trudge up the stairs.

TAHLIA
 I'll go.

Tahlia gets up, walks towards the stairs, follows after Ruth.

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- NIGHT

Ruth sits in her bed, finishes a swig of the bottle, lets it land on the nightstand with a thud.

OS: From the other side of the door, Tahlia gives a gentle knock.

TAHLIA (O.S.)
 Hey, I know that was... are you all
 right? Do you want me to get you
 anything?

RUTH
 D-d-did you know?

TAHLIA (O.S.)
 No, I didn't. I had a feeling, but
 I didn't know for sure. I promise
 if I did, I would've told you.

RUTH
 Is it supposed to feel this bad?

INT. HALLWAY- NIGHT

Tahlia stands outside of Ruth's bedroom door.

TAHLIA
 When Stella and I ended things,
 there was this...emptiness that I
 couldn't shake.
 (MORE)

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

And then I realized, I had been trying to fill the emptiness with something, or someone, that didn't make me happy, make me whole. It was hard, but better for both of us.

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- NIGHT

Ruth nods.

RUTH

I'm fine. I'll be fine.

TAHLIA (O.S.)

Okay. I'm gonna be up getting some work stuff done, you come and get me if you need anything.

OS: Tahlia walks away from the door, down the stairs.

Ruth leans back, a few tears escaping her eyes.

She looks over to the edge of the bed- the journal lies still open, its pages illuminated by the moonlight.

Ruth reaches over to the book, flips through the pages, stops at a phrase from before:

....and I'm scared, but I don't know what else to do."

She flips to the page she was looking for in the morning, looks over the Latin phrases.

She looks up at the closed window:

RUTH

In manibus, portae, me latet.

No movement. She grits her teeth, holds her hand up.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(demanding)

In manibus, portae, me latet.

The curtain starts to float, hover.

Ruth's eyes go wide. Her hand falls, the curtain falls at the same time.

She thinks about her next move. She takes a deep breath in, then out.

She brings her hand back up again towards the curtain.

RUTH (CONT'D)
In manibus, portae, me latet.

The curtain lifts smoothly.

Ruth moves her hand, the curtain moves with it.

Ruth, holding her hand in place, gets up from the bed, walks towards the window.

She continues to move the curtain left, right, up, then lowers it down, as if they're dancing.

She turns to her phone.

RUTH (CONT'D)
In manibus, portae, me latet.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- NIGHT

From the other side of Ruth's bedroom window, her cell phone moves across the room.

Caroline stands at the edge of the forest, watches the phone go across the room, impressed and enraged.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- DAY

Ruth, dark circles under her eyes, rips a tea bag over a plate, dried mint leaves spill out. She picks up the chamomile tea bag lying next to the plate, rips it open, the leaves spill onto the plate.

She takes two fingers, mixes the dried herbs together four times. She glances at the journal, open on the other side of the plate. She holds her hands over the plate.

RUTH
Lava a domo hac et in illa.

(Translation: Cleanse this house and all in it.)

She waits, takes a breath, re-focuses.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Lava a domo, hac et in illa.

INT. TOP LANDING- DAY

Jennifer, her abdomen sagging, her hair thinning, eyes dull and puffy, stands and watches her at the edge of the stairs.

Ruth's dark circles start to fade away.

JENNIFER
(quietly)
What are you doing?

Ruth looks up, freezes.

RUTH
Oh, um, I found this in, in, the bookshelf. I was up, so, I thought I'd give it a try. It's like some sort of aura cleansing thing.

Jennifer nods, walks down the stairs, sits at the table.

JENNIFER
Yeah, probably, like, some old hippie homeopathic recipe book, or something.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- DAY

They stand silently, waiting for the other to make a move.

JENNIFER
Are you okay?

RUTH
(closing the journal)
I'm fine.

JENNIFER
I mean, are you okay?

RUTH
Oh. Honestly, I feel a lot better. Everything is out in the open, you know? I really care about Patrick as a person. But the life we'd have...I couldn't.

Jennifer nods.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I'm not mad at you.

JENNIFER

When were you going to tell him?

RUTH

When we got back, most likely.

JENNIFER

Most likely? He deserves to know the truth.

RUTH

Of course he does.

JENNIFER

No matter who it's from.

Ruth stares at her.

RUTH

Please, don't.

Jennifer stares back at her.

OS: The bathroom door opens.

Ruth looks up.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Holy shit, Kay.

Jennifer turns around, her eyes go wide.

McKayla, with strands of grey hair glassy eyes and chapped lips, looks about as close to a corpse as you can get while living.

MCKAYLA

I'm fine. I know it's hard for you guys to believe, but really, I'm okay.

INT. MCKAYLA AND TAHLIA'S ROOM- DAY

Tahlia sleeps in her bed, patches of eczema on her arm, a large pile of hair on the floor. She turns around, her mouth smiling, her eyes darting around under her eyelids.

TAHLIA

Mom, Dad, please don't...I love you, too...Don't leave, stay with me...let's never leave...

A ping from her phone cause her to stir. Her eyes open.

She comes to reality, sighs, opens up the email notification on the phone to see:

INSERT-TAHLIA'S PHONE:

Tahlia opens an email from hr@simmondshaggardlaw.com, reading:

Hey Tahlia,

Hope the trip is going well! We haven't received any email from your friend, McKayla. Did she send it to the correct address?

Best,

Daria

Tahlia closes the email, her face frozen.

Tahlia sighs, shakes her head, gets out of bed.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- DAY

McKayla sits at the table. Jennifer brings a cup of tea to her.

Ruth, standing on the other side, peers over at the painting:

The goldfinch is bigger, healthier looking. The branch is thicker, with more berries and flowers.

MCKAYLA
(waving Jennifer away)
I just need some fresh air.

Tahlia enters.

TAHLIA
Fuck, Kay.

MCKAYLA
I'm fine. As long as we don't do anything that involves bright lights, or driving, or alcohol.

RUTH
I know how you feel.
(to Jennifer)
I don't know what we had planned today, but could we maybe do something close by instead?

JENNIFER
(pushing down her frustration)
Totally fine. You're the- I mean,
this is your weekend. What did you
have in mind?

EXT. WOODS- TRAIL- DAY

Ruth, Jennifer, McKayla and Tahlia all walk down an easy hiking trail, their path shrouded and enclosed by trees.

Tahlia takes big, slow breaths. McKayla looks over, discretely holds her hand out. Tahlia nods, grasps it.

Ruth leads, with Jennifer close behind. She snaps pictures with her camera.

RUTH
This reminds me of Dunmore. We had trails like this all around town.

JENNIFER
Oh, that's nice.
(beat)
Have you told your Dad yet?

TAHLIA
(quietly)
That's our cue.
(to McKayla)
Hey, do you mind heading back to the house with me for a second?

MCKAYLA
Absolutely.

They turn, walk the other direction.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
We'll catch up with you guys in a bit.

Ruth and Jennifer continue in silence as Jennifer rubs her eyes, tries to alleviate her screaming headache.

Ruth looks around, lifts her camera back up, snaps a picture.

INSERT- CAMERA:

We see the trees through Ruth's lens, the natural, untamed beauty filling every corner of the frame. She snaps more and more pictures.

RUTH

You know, it's been a while since
I've picked this up. Between
Patrick, the new job, my Dad, I-.

She pauses, then freezes.

Jennifer, Tahlia and McKayla are gone. She looks, left, right, all around.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(calling out)
Jen? Tahlia? McKayla?

OS: Caroline's heavy, raspy breathing.

Ruth turns around- no more trail in front of her.

She turns back to where the group was- the trail is gone.

EXT. WOODS- JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer groans, pulls her fingers away from her eyes.

JENNIFER

If any of you had an Aspirin, I
would love-.

She looks in front of her- Ruth is gone. The trail in front of her now goes in a completely different direction than before.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Guys?

She walks down the trail, looks for any sign of the group. She continues to walk, scan the woods, until she spots:

A DANCER, mid 20's, female, lanky, dressed in all white, moving with an unearthly grace.

Jennifer pauses, watches her, becomes more and more hypnotized by her.

Dancer goes up on her toes, turns towards Jennifer, her long hair and undulating arms obscure her face.

Jennifer watches her, not daring to blink. She moves closer.

EXT. WOODS-TAHLIA- DAY

Tahlia and McKayla walk down the path.

TAHLIA
Thanks for coming with me.

MCKAYLA
No problem. You ok?

TAHLIA
I'm okay, really.
(beat)
It's weird, ever since we got here
I keep having this one dream, it
was the trip we took before my
parents split. We were-.

She turns to McKayla- she's gone.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)
M-M-McKayla?

Her head whips around everywhere.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)
KAY?

EXT. WOODS-MCKAYLA- DAY

McKayla stands in the middle of an unnatural clearing. She starts to shiver.

MCKAYLA
Hello? Tahlia? Ruth? Jen?

Her body starts to wretch. She tries to hold it down.

Black sludge bursts out of her mouth.

EXT. WOODS-RUTH- DAY

Ruth looks around.

RUTH
Hello?! Help, please!

OS: From behind her, the snaps of branches.

Ruth turns around- nothing is there but the thick clusters of trees that hide any path.

OS: Another snap, this time in the rhythm of footsteps.

Ruth starts to think.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Um, ok, what was that one...

She closes her eyes, thinks.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Spiritus ipsol revelarum.

(Translation: Spirit, reveal yourself)

OS: The snaps get closer and closer.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(more quickly)
Spiritus ipsol revelarum. Spiritus
ipsol revelarum.

From the branches, Patrick steps through.

PATRICK
Honey?

RUTH
P-P-Patrick? What are-.

PATRICK
Jen texted me, said you weren't
feeling well.

RUTH
You drove all the way up here?

He moves towards her, puts his arms around her.

PATRICK
What are you doing out here all by
yourself?

RUTH
We were all on a hike. Everyone
just, disappeared.

PATRICK
(embracing her)
Don't worry, Birdy. We'll get you
back to the house.

He gingerly takes her hand. Ruth forces a smile, nods.

EXT. WOODS-TAHLIA- DAY

Tahlia tries to calm herself down.

TAHLIA

Okay, just follow the trail. You'll find them soon. It's just trees and leaves out there, they can't hurt you.

Tahlia scans every direction of the woods, pauses when she sees:

The silhouettes A MAN, late 40's, tall and barrel chested, a WOMAN, mid 40's, short and lanky, and a YOUNG MAN, 13, a few yards away, staring at her, smiling.

Tahlia smiles, tears fill her eyes.

They turn, walk in the other direction.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)

No, please, wait! Don't leave me!

She starts to follow after them.

EXT. WOODS-JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer reaches Dancer, who continues to move in graceful, ethereal circles. Jennifer watches the movements, begins to mimic them.

They move as one, swaying and stepping with an unheard melody. A smile comes across Jennifer's face. She turns to Dancer.

Dancer's chapped lips begin to whisper something ancient and rhythmic. Jennifer listens, falls more into rhythm with her.

EXT. WOODS-MCKAYLA- DAY

McKayla, now on her hands and knees, tries to bring her head up. Her face is sunken, sallow, mouth and chin are drenched in black sludge. She tries to wipe it off with her sweater.

From behind her, something silently moves towards her.

McKayla looks up, sees the trail. She starts to crawl towards it as quickly as her body will allow.

Another round of black sludge comes out. McKayla's limbs buckle, she collapses.

Whatever is behind her moves with more agility towards her.

EXT. WOODS-RUTH- DAY

Ruth follows behind Patrick, the trail in front of them getting darker, denser with tall trees.

RUTH

Um, are you sure this is the way back? I thought-.

PATRICK

We're almost there, I promise.

He pulls her harder, they walk faster.

Ruth looks around her- the trees start to multiply, looking more like the bars of a cage.

RUTH

Patrick.

Patrick turns around, flashes an unfamiliar smile.

PATRICK

Don't worry, Birdy.

Ruth's foot falters. She looks down, checks the ground around her.

RUTH

Patrick, this isn't-.

She looks up. She now caged by the trees. She turns all around her, looks for a way out, but she's trapped.

RUTH (CONT'D)

No.

EXT. WOODS-JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer lets out long, relaxed sigh as she dances in the circle with Dancer.

They move faster and with more ardor.

With each completion of a circle, Jennifer's skin becomes paler and paler.

EXT. WOODS-TAHLIA- DAY

Tahlia runs towards the silhouettes.

TAHLIA

Please, if you could just wait for
me.

The silhouettes move faster, almost fall out of sight.

Tahlia's skin begins to blanche.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)
(whimpering)
No. Mom, Dad, Jeff-.

Tahlia runs faster. Her hair begins to fall out in chunks.

TAHLIA (CONT'D)
Wait!

The silhouettes slow down.

Tahlia smiles, her teeth now withered, yellowed. Her eyes begin to cloud.

EXT. WOODS-JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer spins, and spins, and spins. She finally collapses to the ground, falls onto her back, stares up at the sky.

Dancer stands above her, looks down, reaches towards her cheek.

Jennifer closes her eyes, smiles. Then she opens her eyes, looks over to her cheek to see:

Herself. Putrified skin, foggy eyes, exposed bone.

Jennifer tries to scream. Before she can, Dancer reaches over, clenches her bony, rigor mortis hands around her mouth.

EXT. WOODS- RUTH- DAY

Ruth tries to pull herself out of the tree cage. She grunts, growls, does everything she can.

The trees start to move in closer and closer, pressing against Ruth's arms and legs.

EXT. WOODS- TAH利亚- DAY

Tahlia backs up against a tree, tries to steady herself. She turns towards the tree to see:

A face in the bark, its eyes, nose and fangs naturally occurring in the grooves and bumps.

Tahlia shoots away from the tree, runs in the opposite direction.

She looks up towards the sky, sees:

The faces formed in the leaves and branches overhead looking down at her, laughing at her, moving down towards her.

Tahlia screams, runs in the other direction.

EXT. WOODS-JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer tries to get a breath as Dancer climbs on top of her.

Dancer smiles, reveals her fangs. She opens wide, moves towards her face.

EXT. WOODS-RUTH- DAY

Ruth grunts, presses against the pressure of the trees. She thinks.

RUTH
Te, no, et, et cessare... Fuck!

They press harder and harder, puncture her skin. She closes her eyes tight.

A rogue, thick tree root presses against the side of her foot, bending her ankle past the point of flexibility.

Ruth takes a sharp inhale.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I rid thee forever. I rid thee
forever!!!

The trees start to release.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I RID THEE FOREVER!! GET OFF OF
ME!!

EXT. WOODS-TAHLIA- DAY

The silhouettes turn, face Tahlia, wave towards her.

Tahlia smiles, continues to carry herself towards them as much as she can.

TAHLIA
I'm here, I'm here...

Her eyes completely cloud over, her skin turns a putrid grey and shrinks against her bones.

Her knees buckle, she falls to the ground. The life leaves her body as her eyes stay open, her rotten mouth still in a blissful smile.

The silhouettes smile wider, only their teeth showing.

EXT. WOODS-JENNIFER- DAY

Jennifer continues to choke. Her face goes blue.

OS: Ruth's voice echoes in the distance, Jennifer looks up.

JENNIFER
(wheezing)
Ruth, Ruth!

Ruth's hand reaches down, grabs her elbow, helps her up.

EXT. WOODS- DAY

Jennifer gets up, suddenly back on the trail.

JENNIFER
What happened? Where?

RUTH
(walking down the trail)
We have to find Tahlia and-.

Ruth's ankle bends again, her legs crumble. She yelps as she falls to the ground.

MCKAYLA (O.S.)
Here!!

McKayla comes running from the other side of the path.

Jennifer kneels down, looks at Ruth's ankle.

It's swollen, red, a small cut on the side from the root.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)

Tahlia went to go get help. You're going to be okay, right now we just have to get you back to the house.

McKayla, seeing the ankle as well, reaches down, helps her to her feet.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Jennifer, eyes yellowed, skin saggy and puffy, and McKayla, still rough but not much worse, stand around Ruth, who sits on the couch, an ice bag over her elevated ankle. Ruth's camera rests on the coffee table next to her.

Jennifer holds Ruth's ankle like a baby bird.

JENNIFER

Okay, now point.

Ruth winces as she uses all her might to push her foot forward.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Good, it's not broken, just a sprain.

RUTH

How much do I need to stay off it?

JENNIFER

As much as you can. I know it sucks, but trust me, I learned the hard way.

A moment of silence, then:

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I'll pack up all the food in the fridge, McKayla, maybe you can strip all the beds-.

MCKAYLA

What? We can't just leave Tahlia.

JENNIFER

We can get her on the way. Let's just, cut our losses now.

McKayla watches them go back and forth.

MCKAYLA

But, but-.

JENNIFER

But what?

MCKAYLA

We can't leave. She took the car.

Jennifer looks out the window towards the driveway- the car is in fact gone.

JENNIFER

Shit.

MCKAYLA

Look, I know you planned this all out, and you did a great job-.

JENNIFER

For a pointless weekend.

MCKAYLA

It wasn't-.

JENNIFER

(hopeless)

Yes, it is, we can't all be that delusional!

They continue on as Ruth tunes them out, stares at the goldfinch painting:

The once scrawny goldfinch is now fuller, brighter. The branch has bunches of elderberries and flowers budding from it.

Ruth nods to herself- she needs to know.

MCKAYLA

Ruth, what do you think?

Jennifer and McKayla turn to Ruth.

RUTH

Can we at least wait a couple of hours? Till the swelling goes down? Tahlia should be back by then.

JENNIFER

Sure.

(beat)

I'll pack up your stuff for you. To save some time.

RUTH

Thanks.

Jennifer heads upstairs. McKayla sits on the edge of the couch.

MCKAYLA
Are you okay?

RUTH
Depends.

MCKAYLA
So, what are you going to do now?

RUTH
(confused)
Well, I can't do much-.

MCKAYLA
I mean, what are you going to do
now that the wedding is off.

Ruth freezes, then.

RUTH
Oh, um, well, I don't know. I mean,
I haven't talked to Patrick yet,
and maybe we can work it out.
There's still some time.

MCKAYLA
You would do that to yourself?

RUTH
I'm not doing anything to myself.

MCKAYLA
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset
you. I just don't want you getting
stuck in something you can't get
out of. Trust me, it happens before
you even know it's happening.
(beat)
Can I get you anything? A book,
maybe?

RUTH
I'm okay, thanks.

McKayla nods, gets up, heads towards the stairs.

Ruth reaches towards her camera, grabs the neck strap, rests
it on her lap.

She turns on the viewfinder, looks through the photos:

INSERT- CAMERA:

The scrawny, pallid goldfinch, followed by 2 photos of the evening from before. Then the photo of the goldfinch from the day before.

She holds up the last photo of the goldfinch next to its space on the wall- there's no denying it- it's growing.

OS: Caroline's rapid fire whispering, just audible enough to hear.

Ruth lowers her camera. She looks left, right- nobody. She looks at her ankle, reaches over, lifts the bag of ice.

The swelling is gone, only the tiniest pink scar from the cut remains.

Ruth places the bag of ice on the table, places her camera next to it. She turns to the goldfinch.

The goldfinch's shiny black eyes stare right back at her.

She gets up, walks out of the living to the:

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth walks, almost floats, towards the painting. She passes the stairs, stops at the painting.

(Director's Note: Out of focus, at the top of the stairs, we see the outline of someone looking towards Ruth, then walking into her room).

Ruth stares right back at it, trying to decode every line and paint stroke. She reaches for the painting, gently rests her fingertips on it.

She closes her eyes, feels something within the painting. Her eyes dart around under her eyelids. She opens them back up, looks around:

INT. SUBURBS- KITCHEN- DAY

An open concept kitchen with all the latest appliances. Kids drawings and gold starred homework hangs on magnets on the fridge.

Ruth looks down at herself. She now wears a crisp, pastel colored button up, tapered khakis, and Tory Burch style flats. She looks at her hand- a wedding band rests on her engagement ring.

OS: As the door opens, the sound of loud, high-pitched screams, from a young boy and girl.

Ruth turns around to see:

A YOUNG BOY, 10, and a YOUNG GIRL, 8, running from the doorway through the kitchen, wrestling and swatting at each other the entire way.

YOUNG BOY
Mom, where's my snack?? You forgot it again!!

YOUNG GIRL
Mommy!!! He's hitting me!! Make him stop!! Mommy!

Ruth moves in their path, tries to stop them. They barrel past her, screaming and flailing towards the hallway on the other end of the kitchen.

Ruth looks towards the hallway- two doors on each side, along with one door at the end, the light coming through under the door.

In her pocket, her phone buzzes. Ruth reaches in, unlocks the screen.

INSERT-PHONE:

A message from Patrick, reading:

"Hey, had to extend the work trip another 2 days. Tell the kids I can't make it Saturday."

OS: Soft, staccato crying. Ruth looks towards the source of the sound.

The door, at the end of the now darker hallway.

Ruth puts the phone on the counter, walks towards the:

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE- HALLWAY- DAY

Ruth tiptoes down the hallway. The crying gets more audible, and more angry.

Ruth looks behind her- the kitchen seems farther than it was before.

She turns back around, reaches the door.

She leans her ear towards the door, listens. The crying is mixed with incoherent mumbling.

Ruth reaches towards the doorknob, turns it, pushes the door open.

INT. EMPTY DARK ROOM- TIME NA

Ruth opens the door, looks around to see:

A completely barren, windowless room, almost a vacuum space. The light, coming from what source we don't know, is focused in on Caroline, sitting at an easel with a painting on it, her back to Ruth. Her hair is frizzy, her posture hunched.

Ruth closes the door as quietly as she can. She walks towards Caroline, gets a closer look.

Caroline's skin is unburned, scar free. She mumbles as she paints the last few strokes of the branch the goldfinch stands on.

Ruth doesn't dare make a sound. She moves even closer, listens more carefully.

CAROLINE

...ut fragmen mihi hic dici quod me
meus ad eam...

(Translation: keep a piece of me here, let me return to claim what is mine.)

Caroline holds her other hand up- a large, bloody cut sits in her palm. She dips the paintbrush in it, paints her blood into the red elderberry.

She drops the brush, picks up another small one, dips it in her hand, paints the blood over the eyes of the goldfinch.

Ruth moves closer. She pauses.

Caroline paints more blood into the outline of the goldfinch. Her brush pauses.

Ruth's whole body freezes up. She tries to move, no luck.

Caroline slowly brings the brush away from the painting. She gently puts the brush down, starts to turn towards Ruth.

Ruth chokes back the scream in her throat, does her best to hide her fear.

Caroline turns fully around. Her eyes, wide and tear stricken, lock on Ruth. Her face is pale, and completely motionless.

Ruth watches Caroline for her next move, tries to figure out hers.

A pleased, hungry smile creeps up from the corners of Caroline's mouth. The rest of her doesn't move.

Ruth turns towards the door, it's somehow even farther than before.

Ruth turns back to see:

Caroline, right in front of Ruth. Her smile goes wider, her eyes more elated.

Ruth tries to turn away from Caroline, she caresses Ruth's skin, runs her fingers down her neck, stops towards the sternum.

Ruth opens her eyes, looks down to now see:

Her camera, Caroline's hand wrapped around it, being yanked off her neck.

Ruth shuts her eyes again.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Fac ei quod est esse videatur.

(Translation: Make her see what is to be.)

Ruth's eyelids pry open. They fill with fear as she sees:

Ruth, standing in front of her where Caroline is, holding her camera. The only part of Caroline that remains is her eyes.

Ruth tries to form words- only the hint of choked screams come out.

Caroline, back to her previous form, narrows her eyes. She starts to say in a quiet, ancient voice:

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Parva avis canticum inaudita sumus
mane faciet avolare in caelo.

(Translation: Little bird, song unheard, we shall fly in the morning sky).

RUTH
No.

Caroline opens her mouth, consumes her.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth falls back from the painting, as if being pushed.

McKayla walks down the stairs, sees Ruth.

MCKAYLA
Jen!!

She runs over to Ruth, grabs her shoulders.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
Ruth, come on, wake up, honey.

Jennifer runs into the living room.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
Get some ice!!
(to Ruth)
You're okay, you just gotta wake
up.

Jennifer stays completely frozen, watching Ruth's body writhe
and bend with fear filled eyes.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
Jennifer, get ice, now!!!

Jennifer snaps out of it, runs out.

McKayla watches Ruth's body start to lose strength.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
No, no, no, stay with me.

Jennifer comes back with ice in a cup, puts a cube against
Ruth's head.

Ruth opens her eyelids- her eyes are completely rolled back
into her head. She begins to choke.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Ruth lies on the couch, eyes half open, the color from her
face mostly gone. A consumer grade first aid kit rests next
to her.

She looks around the room, wonders how in the world she got
here.

DR. SHARPE (O.S.)
All right, now follow my finger.

Ruth looks down at the screen.

DR.SHARPE, Black, female, late 20's, light green eyes and a gentle Jamaican lilt, sits in her kitchen on the computer screen.

Dr. Sharpe brings her index finger across the screen, Ruth follows.

EXT. FRONT PORCH- DAY

Jennifer stands by the car, the driver's seat open. She turns the keys, the choppy lack of ignition sputters out. She tries again, and again.

McKayla sits on the porch, watches Jennifer's every move.

Jennifer yanks the keys out, slams the door shut.

JENNIFER
No luck. I picked between mani
pedis and getting my car
serviced...

McKayla shakes her head.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Are you mad at me too?

MCKAYLA
What?

JENNIFER
I don't know, it just feels like,
like you all hate me now.

MCKAYLA
No.

JENNIFER
Are you sure we're good?

MCKAYLA
(a little aggressive)
Are you good?

Jennifer opens her mouth to answer, but can't bring herself to say it..

JENNIFER
I'm gonna get a drink from inside
Want anything.

MCKAYLA
I'm fine.

Jennifer gets up, walks towards the back door.

EXT. BACKYARD- DAY

Jennifer leans against the wall, her phone to her ear.

JENNIFER

Hey, how's it going...? Yeah, it's been...actually, I've been wanting to talk to you. About Ruth.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Ruth continues to stare out into nothing as:

INSERT-TABLET:

Dr. Sharpe, on the screen, finishes up some notes.

DR. SHARPE

All right, so, you suffered what seems like a gran mal seizure?

RUTH

Yes, that's what my friends said. Cervical cancer.

DR. SHARPE

Okay. Any history of brain or nervous system issues in your family?

RUTH

Yes, but...

DR. SHARPE

Yes?

RUTH

They're not hereditary.

DR. SHARPE

(gently)

I see. Any other cancers in the family?

RUTH

Throat and liver cancer.

DR. SHARPE

(scribbling)

Do you smoke, drink?

Ruth averts her gaze from the screen. Dr. Sharpe puts down her pen.

DR. SHARPE (CONT'D)
I don't want you to feel judged,
Ruth. I just want to make sure I
have all the information we need to
get you better.

Ruth nods.

DR. SHARPE (CONT'D)
Are there any recent changes in
your life that may be causing
physical or mental stress?

Ruth holds back, not willing to get into details. Then, she starts to chuckle.

DR. SHARPE (CONT'D)
Is, everything all right?

RUTH
I'm sorry, I'm not laughing at the
question.

She laughs more, tries to contain herself.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I've got about \$30, 207 dollar in
student debt, my Dad is out of work
and can't or won't find another job
so I'm paying for all his bills, I
don't love my fiance but also don't
know how to break up with him, and
to top it all off, I think a
hundred year old witch might be
trying to kill me and my friends so
she can posses me and live her life
through my body.

Ruth laughs, and laughs. And laughs a little more. She finally regains herself.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I just...

She thinks, her face sinking slightly.

INT. BATHROOM- DAY

Ruth sits on the floor of the bathroom, curled up, her phone in her hand.

She opens up her phone book, clicks on "Patrick", presses "Call", brings the phone up to her ear.

The phone rings, and rings, then:

PATRICK (O.S.)
Hey there, it's Patrick. I can't come to the phone, but leave your message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Cool, thanks, later.

Beep, then:

RUTH
Hi, babe, it's me. Everything's fine here. Had a little slip in the woods, but I'm fine, promise.
(beat)
Listen, I'm-.

Click, then:

PATRICK (O.S.)
Honey!

RUTH
Hey, you.

PATRICK
Are you okay? Jen called, she said you were at the doctor.

RUTH
Yeah, I was just dehydrated. I'm fine.

PATRICK (O.S.)
(re: her voice)
Did something else happen?

RUTH
Yeah, I'm ok, I just, have a lot on my mind.

PATRICK (O.S.)
Like what?

RUTH
Like, I don't know, what am I doing with my life?

PATRICK (O.S.)
Your life?

RUTH

Yeah, it's as if, I've become this person I didn't think I'd become, I mean, I didn't want to become. But, it feels like that's the only choice I have.

PATRICK (O.S.)

(concerned)

What do you mean you don't have a choice?

RUTH

I don't have a choice cause this is what happened- my Dad, the student loans, all of it.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Is the wedding stressing you out?

RUTH

Yeah, it is.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Okay, so, what's stressing you out about it?

Ruth tries, and tries, to bring the truth up.

RUTH

I, I don't know. It's really hard to say.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Ok, honey, I have to ask you something, and I need you to be honest.

Ruth nods, prepping herself for the moment of truth.

RUTH

Okay.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Have you guys been drinking?

RUTH

(shocked)

What?

PATRICK (O.S.)

I don't know, sometimes when you come back from brunch with the gang, it just seems like suddenly this whole other part of you comes out.

RUTH

(defensive)

No, I was just having a telehealth visit with a doctor.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Okay fine, that was a dick move, I'm sorry.

(beat)

Look, I don't know what to tell you, other than have fun, and I love you.

A tear falls down Ruth's eye.

RUTH

I love you, too. Bye.

She hangs up, stares out, fire brimming in her.

INT/EXT. BATHROOM- DAY

Jennifer, a soda in hand, stands completely still, listens to Ruth's pain and tears through the door.

She nods her head, knowing what she needs to do.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth steps off the stairs, drops her bag at the foot of it, next to the other two duffles.

Ruth looks towards the kitchen, where McKayla starts to pack the remaining food and drinks in bags.

Jennifer comes out of the bathroom, a small waste bin bag tied up in her hand. She avoids Ruth's gaze, walks over to the kitchen.

Ruth takes in the exhausted silence that weighs the room down.

Ruth remembers something. She walks over to her weekender bag, unzips it, looks through all of her clothes.

She zips it back up, opens up the other pockets, searches through them with more panic.

Ruth zips the compartments back up, whips around, runs as quickly as possible up the stairs.

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- DAY

Ruth throws the pillows off of the bed, whips off the sheets, feel around the bed, reaches under the mattress.

She drops to the floor, looks under the bed- nothing.

She yanks her nightstand drawer open, starts to hyperventilate. She looks around the empty drawer.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth gallops down the stairs.

RUTH

Where is it?

Jennifer and McKayla, walking towards the door with the food bags, turn around.

MCKAYLA

Where's what?

RUTH

My book.

MCKAYLA

What book?

RUTH

(breathless)

My, my journal!

(to Jennifer)

You saw me reading it the other day.

JENNIFER

Oh, that one.

RUTH

I don't want to accuse anyone, I just, did someone move it, or did we put it in the trash by mistake?

McKayla and Jennifer put the bags down, walk over to her.

JENNIFER
(calmly)
Okay, okay, but we need to leave as
soon as-.

Ruth nods, tries to calm her nerves.

RUTH
I just really don't want to leave
without it!!

Jennifer watches her friend struggle to be as strong and put
together as usual.

JENNIFER
Okay, um, why don't I check the car
just in case?

MCKAYLA
Sure, then I'll take upstairs,
Ruth, why don't you look down here.

EXT. PORCH- DAY

Jennifer looks under the space between the ground and the
porch, using her cell phone light to scan the area. Nothing
but gravel.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Ruth throws the cushions off of the couch, looks- nothing.

She collapses to her hands and knees, looks under the couch.

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- DAY

McKayla shines her flashlight under every piece of furniture
and in every crevice.

MCKAYLA
(calling downstairs)
Nothing here!

She gets back up.

INT. KITCHEN- DAY

Ruth pulls open every drawer and cupboard, looks under the
sink.

She slams her hands on the counter.

RUTH
Fuck!!

She catches her breath, paces, tries to think. Through the nearby window, something catches her eyes.

INT./EXT.- PORCH- DAY

Jennifer leans against the adjacent wall, pushes a contact on her phone, holds it up to her ear.

Ruth walks towards the window.

EXT. PORCH- DAY

Jennifer bites her lip, plays with her hair as she waits for the other line to pick up, then:

JENNIFER
Hey, me again...

Behind her, Ruth walks up to the window.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Yeah, we're almost ready to head out...Actually, yeah, I wanted, well not, like, wanted, but need to talk about something else with you...Okay, um...

She takes a deep breath, then.

INT. WINDOW- DAY

Ruth leans in, turns her ear slightly more towards the window to hear more clearly.

JENNIFER
After the wedding, we shouldn't see each other anymore... Because anything we- I mean- anything I'm feeling, no matter how hard I try, it can't happen...And Ruth has been through so, so much, and she deserves everything. Including you.

Ruth listens, stays perfectly still.

EXT. PORCH- DAY

Jennifer's body starts to stay still.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

...And people that love her, and can be honest with her, and support her. Because that's what friends, best friends, do.

(to herself)

Not that I've been so stellar at any of that lately.

(to Patrick)

Anyway, I know that's, like, a lot to take in....

INT. WINDOW- DAY

Ruth wipes away a stray tear. She looks through the window, looks at Jennifer in a way that she hasn't before.

From her pocket, her phone buzzes.

Through the window, Jennifer perks up, starts to turn around.

RUTH

(under her breath)

Shit.

She quickly walks away from the window, makes her way to:

INT. KITCHEN- DAY

Ruth pulls out her phone- another Venmo request from Dad for \$200, with the message "wedding stuff and late fees".

Ruth shakes her head. She opens up her Messages.

INSERT-PHONE

Ruth clicks on her text chain with Dad, writes:

"Hey Dad, this doesn't work for me anymore, we should talk when I get home. I love you."

She presses send, puts her phone back in her pocket.

In her pocket, her phone starts buzzing. She picks it up, looks at the Caller ID, sighs. She answers it.

RUTH
(resolute)
Hi Dad.

INT. RUTH'S ROOM- DAY

Ruth paces back and forth.

RUTH
I know.... I know, and I wish it
was different, but like I said,
this doesn't work for me
anymore...because I-...Dad why
can't you- and you've never been
there when I needed you!

OS: A thud from the next room.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I have to go, we'll talk later.

Ruth hangs up, throws the phone on the bed. She takes a deep breath.

INT. MCKAYLA AND TAHLIA'S ROOM- DAY

Ruth pushes open the partially ajar door.

RUTH
Hey, I'm sorry you had to hear
that, I-.

Ruth looks down, freezes.

McKayla comes up from the floor, the journal in her hand, weekender bag slung over her other arm.

A thick, tense silence between McKayla and Ruth.

MCKAYLA
(on the witness stand)
No problem! I didn't want to
interrupt your call, and I, I
figured I'd put it in here for safe
keeping, give it to you in the
car-.

Ruth reaches over, gently takes the journal from her.

RUTH
Oh, thanks.

McKayla quickly nods her heads.

INT. MAIN AREA- DAY

Ruth, now holding the book, picks her bag up. Everyone picks their bags up as well.

RUTH

We all double-checked we have everything.

JENNIFER

I can always call the owner if we think of anything. Still no word from Tahlia? I'm getting worried.

RUTH

We can look for her on the way out.

(beat)

You planned a great weekend. Even if it didn't go to plan, I...thank you.

Jennifer smiles, finally getting her recognition.

JENNIFER

All right, I'll call us a cab.

She reaches into her pocket for her phone.

McKayla drags her bag on the floor, heads towards the door.

MCKAYLA

I call shotgun.

Ruth and Jennifer's heads turns towards McKayla.

JENNIFER

Wait, really?

MCKAYLA

(shrugging)

Yeah.

RUTH

You never sit in the front.

MCKAYLA

Well, never say never, right?

RUTH

No, you always sit in the back so
you can put your seat fully down.

JENNIFER

Yeah, cause it helps with your car
sickness.

Ruth's eyes go wide. She holds the journal closer to her.

MCKAYLA

(shaking her head)

Look, you guys, I know how to take
care of myself. I'll see you in the
car.

She walks towards the door.

JENNIFER

Honey, we're sorry. McKayla,
please.

McKayla reaches for the doorknob.

RUTH

(quietly)

Caroline.

McKayla's hand pauses, hovers over the door handle. She stays
facing the door.

MCKAYLA

What?

RUTH

Caroline.

MCKAYLA

Who's that?

RUTH

I know it's you.

Jennifer looks at Ruth, then at McKayla.

Ruth begins to whisper under her breath.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(again and again)

Spiritus ipsum revelare.

Spiritus ipsum revelare.

(Translation: Spirit, reveal yourself.)

MCKAYLA
I think we're all exhausted, and-.

JENNIFER
(quietly)
You're not McKayla.
(eyes widening)
Tahlia.

Ruth and Jennifer watch McKayla like a hawk.

McKayla/Caroline begins to turn around. The corner of her Cheshire Cat smile is the first thing to appear.

Ruth raises her voice.

RUTH
Spiritus ipsum revelare.

McKayla/Caroline slowly raises her hand.

MCKAYLA
(casually)
Da mi sinum tuum ex aere.

(Translation: Give me the air from your lungs).

Ruth gasps, then starts to choke.

Jennifer kneels down towards her, tries to figure something out, puts her hand on her back.

McKayla/Caroline shakes her head, holds up her other hand.

Jennifer's hand starts to sizzle where it touches Ruth. She wails, falls back as her hand pulls away. She looks at her hand- no burns.

McKayla/Caroline moves towards Ruth and Jennifer, continues to incant.

Jennifer glances down at her duffle and the food bag next to her. She quietly bends down towards her duffle bag.

She lifts her bag, throws it with all her might towards McKayla.

McKayla/Caroline dodges, watches the bag hit the wall, flop to the floor.

MCKAYLA (CONT'D)
(turning back)
You're going to have to do better-.

Jennifer slams the wine bottle in her hand down on McKayla/Caroline's head.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. LIVING ROOM- EARLY EVENING

Jennifer, standing at the bookshelf, closes a book titled "Legends of the Catskills", puts it back on the shelf.

JENNIFER

Well, no books on when your friend gets possessed by a hundred years old witch ghost.

Ruth nods, looks through the journal. Jennifer looks between the journal and her.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

What's in there?

RUTH

Everything. Her spells, her life with her husband, her thoughts. It's like-.

JENNIFER

You understand her, know how she feels.

RUTH

Exactly.

JENNIFER

Why would she want the journal if she can cast spells without it?

RUTH

She doesn't want to forget.

JENNIFER

Forget what?

RUTH

The person she was before, so she can make sure she's the person she wants to be.

Ruth flips through more of the pages, confidently stops on one midway through.

RUTH (CONT'D)

She has a spell in here that's meant for allowing someone to possess you. Maybe if we reverse it-no, too dangerous. She could transfer herself to one of us.

JENNIFER

Fair point.

(beat)

What about a Bible? Or some sort of cross?

RUTH

She's not possessed by a demon.

Jennifer watches Ruth as she flips through the journal, in her element.

RUTH (CONT'D)

What?

JENNIFER

Nothing, I've just, never seen you like this before.

RUTH

Like what?

JENNIFER

Like, full boss girl mode.

She finds the page.

RUTH

Okay, here. There's a spell meant for extracting the life force from small animals and plants. It may not work on a human, but worth a shot.

Jennifer nods in agreement.

INT. MAIN AREA- EARLY EVENING

Ruth and Jennifer stand a few feet away from McKayla/Caroline's still unconscious body, which has been tied up with Duct Tape, dishcloths, whatever they could find.

Ruth nods, opens the journal. Reads.

RUTH
 Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
 novi.

(Translation: Let your life leave your body, flow into mine
 and make it new.)

They wait, watch- no movement.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (louder)
 Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
 novi. Sit vita, corpus meum ut
 influat novi.

McKayla/Caroline's body stays still. Jennifer scans her body
 for any sign of life.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (faster)
 Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
 novi.

McKayla/Caroline's finger begins to twitch.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (not noticing)
 Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
 novi.

McKayla/Caroline's body starts to slink upright.

JENNIFER
 Ruth.

Ruth pauses mid sentence, looks up.

McKayla/Caroline sits upright, turns her head to the group.
 She looks up at them, waits for a response.

Ruth and Jennifer stay perfectly still.

RUTH
 (less sure)
 Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
 novi.

McKayla/Caroline smiles, turns her head back.

MCKAYLA
 (under her breath)
 vincula dimittis me ex tuo.

(Translation: Release me from thy bonds)

The ties around her hands and feet slowly release.

RUTH
Sit vita, corpus meum-.

McKayla/Caroline gets up, holds her hand towards Jennifer, send her face planting to the floor. Her body rushes to the:

INT. KITCHEN- EARLY EVENING

Jennifer's back slams against the kitchen counter.

A knife resting on the counter swishes off, redirects, flies right into Jennifer's foot, pinning her to the floor.

Jennifer wails out in pain.

INT. MAIN AREA- EARLY EVENING

Ruth runs towards Jennifer.

McKayla/Caroline turns to Ruth, holds her hands to her throat.

Ruth freezes in place, chokes, and chokes.

Ruth tries to scream, talk, do anything, the oxygen is completely gone from her throat. She grabs her throat, tries to do anything to let air in.

McKayla/Caroline walks towards her, ready for the final blow.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Jennifer heaves, the blood still flowing from her foot. She sees McKayla/Caroline with walk towards Ruth.

Jennifer looks up at her hand, knows what she has to do. She takes a deep breath, holds it, reaches for the knife.

She grabs it, pulls- stuck in the wood.

She wiggles it back and forth, tries to suppress the screams desperate to escape her throat.

The blood begins to lubricate the blade. It finally wriggles free, releases from her foot.

Jennifer holds back a yelp, grips the knife in pain.

INT. MAIN AREA- NIGHT

McKayla/Caroline stands over Ruth as she gleefully suffocates her. Ruth holds on to life with everything she's got.

Ruth looks up at McKayla/Caroline, stares her straight in the eyes, finds the one ounce of oxygen left in her mouth.

RUTH
(defiant)
No.

McKayla/Caroline's contentment turns to confusion.

Ruth manages to get one leg up, she pushes upright with all her might. She stares at McKayla/Caroline, shakes her head.

McKayla/Caroline face twists into anger.

Jennifer, knife in hand, moves closer, and closer.

McKayla/Caroline moves towards Ruth as:

Jennifer lunges towards McKayla, plunges the knife into her back.

McKayla/Caroline screams, her screams warping into something otherworldly, demonic.

Ruth gets her breath back, takes a sharp inhale.

Jennifer stabs her again.

McKayla/Caroline bleeds out. Her body goes limp.

Ruth gets back to her feet, backs up against the wall.

McKayla/Caroline body unbuckles, wilts to the ground like a dying flower.

Jennifer freezes, sees if there's any more work she needs to do.

The life drains from McKayla/Caroline's body. She falls face first to the floor, goes still.

Ruth runs over to Jennifer.

JENNIFER
Holy shit. What, what-.

McKayla/Caroline's body jerks back to life, grabs Jennifer's ankle.

Jennifer screams, does everything she can to stay upright.

McKayla/Caroline looks up at her, enraged, blood coming from her mouth.

Jennifer strikes down, plunges the knife into McKayla/Caroline's skull.

McKayla/Caroline's body seizes, then falls limp onto the floor.

Jennifer pulls and pulls on the knife, until it finally releases from the skull.

Ruth and Jennifer stare at each other, frozen.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
(tears in her eyes)
I'm so, so, sorry.

RUTH
Leave everything, we have to get out of here and call 911.

They head to the front door. Ruth turns the front door knob-- it's locked.

She turns the lock knob, tries again. Still locked.

RUTH (CONT'D)
What the fuck?

JENNIFER
I'll try a window.

She hobbles as fast as she can over to the nearest window-- nothing.

Ruth looks around for another way out.

OS: The sounds of bones crunching and snapping.

Ruth freezes, turns her eyes towards where McKayla's body was.

RUTH
Jen.

Jennifer continues to try to open the windows.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Jen!!

Jennifers turn around, see what Ruth sees.

McKayla's body, still limp, slinks towards the shadow-drenched back of the house, leaves a trail of blood, disappears into the darkness.

Ruth and Jennifer freeze, poise themselves for another attack.

From the shadows, the sounds of bone crunching, flesh ripping, eating.

Jennifer runs over to Ruth. Ruth keeps twisting the doorknob with all her strength.

Jennifer grips the knife in her hand even tighter.

The shadows in the room go still, silent. Then, the sound of quiet, breathy sighs comes from them.

Ruth and Jennifer try to search the darkness for the source of the sound.

An emaciated, gray leg steps out of the shadows, then another, the dress following afterwards.

Ruth's eyes go wide, finally getting the full picture of her nemesis.

Caroline steps out of the shadows, smiling, eyes wild and bloodthirsty, skin pale gray, a few small patches of burn scars on her arms and face. She looks at the group, one by one.

Ruth looks down at Caroline's fingers- they're dripping with McKayla's blood.

Caroline holds her hand up towards the group.

They brace for impact.

Caroline flicks her hand to the right.

The door clicks, unlocks.

Ruth looks between the door and Caroline. Caroline doesn't give anything away.

Ruth maintains eye contact with Caroline, reaches for the door handle. She gently opens it.

The door opens up. Jennifer and Ruth back away.

Caroline grins, holds her hand up.

Jennifer falls to the ground head first, her body rushes feet first across the floor to the nearby wall.

Caroline turns back to Ruth, Ruth stares back in horror.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Cum corpus ad auras!!

(Translation: Make your body one with the air)

Caroline's body softens, she tries to keep herself upright.

CAROLINE
Et potum dabis illud Mihi autem
vitam et dimittere.

(Translation: Release the drink of life and give it to me.)

A slash cuts across Ruth's forearm. Blood starts to trickle.

She immediately presses down on the cut, guides her wounded hand.

Jennifer comes to, sees the showdown happening.

RUTH
In manibus, portae, me latet.

Caroline turns back. From behind her, a heavy looking cast iron skillet flies towards her head. She dodges it just in time.

The cast iron skillet flies towards Ruth, she dodges it, it hits the wall and crashes onto the floor.

Jennifer rolls onto her stomach, starts to army crawl towards the front door.

CAROLINE
Sit vita, corpus meum ut influat
novi.

Ruth screams, her face goes pale. She releases her hand, more blood spills out.

Caroline smiles, enjoys the sadistic show. She turns to see:

Jennifer pulling herself up with her uninjured hand on the doorknob. She tries to turn it, pull it open in a last Hail Mary.

She holds her hand towards Jennifer, makes a fist.

The fingers on Jennifer's good hand snap back, release from the doorknob. She wails.

Caroline floats towards her, hovers over her like a cat playing with its food.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Sit vita...

Jennifer's belly slices open, blood comes running out. Jennifer screams a sound only heard in hell.

Ruth's eyes go wide.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
corpus meum...

The cut travels up Jennifer's torso, splits her top in half. Jennifer's sounds are cut off by the pooling of blood in her throat.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
ut influat novi.

The line shoots up her chest, all the way up the neck. Jennifer lets out one last desperate gasp as the blood spills out of her. Her face goes white, her body limp and lifeless.

RUTH
Noooo!!!!

Ruth's whole body shakes with shock and grief.

Caroline turns towards Ruth, she glares at her. Then, she smiles.

She raises her hand towards Jennifer's body, slides it towards her.

Ruth shuts her eyes tight.

CAROLINE
videt omnia quae ego animadverto.

(Translation: See all that I see.)

Ruth's eyes go wide, almost bulging. She tries to shut her eyes, her eyelids won't move.

EXT. LAKE- NIGHT

The cabin looks peaceful, almost idyllic from the lake.

Through the crickets and frogs, Ruth's screams in horror.

INT. MAIN AREA- NIGHT

Caroline, hunched over where Jennifer body was, licks the blood off her hands. She picks a stray fragment of bone off of her cheek.

Ruth, in fetal on the ground, her body heaves, her face hidden.

RUTH

Please, please, I'm sorry.

Caroline stares at her, not buying her act this time.

Ruth peers up from her arms, sees:

The goldfinch, its head turned, wings spread. She gets an idea.

Ruth holds her hands up.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(whimpering)

I'll give you what you want. Just, please.

Caroline continues to stare at her.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(choking back sobs)

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I just didn't understand it needs to be this way.

Caroline takes the tempting offer in.

Ruth crawls to Caroline, slowly gets to her feet.

Ruth looks up at Caroline, nods.

Caroline smiles, her eyes somehow get wider. She strokes Ruth's face.

Ruth looks up, just past Caroline's shoulder.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Just, make it quick. And be kind to Patrick.

Caroline shakes her head.

Ruth closes her eyes. She starts to mouth something.

Caroline laughs, then makes out the words.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(almost silently)
In manibus, portae, me latet.

Caroline's face changes, hearing the words.

Ruth opens her eyes, smiles.

The bloody knife from before flies into Ruth's hand.

Ruth plunges the shard into Caroline's stomach.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Et mittam te ad infernum ultra
usque in sempiternum.

(Translation: I will send you to hell forever more.)

Caroline lets out a banshee cry.

Ruth raises the knife again, plunges it into Caroline's heart.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Et mittam te ad infernum ultra
usque in sempiternum!

Caroline keels over.

Ruth pulls the knife out, turns back away towards the goldfinch painting, doesn't fully relax.

After a minute, Caroline's cries warp into a laugh. She comes back up, alive and ready for another fight.

Ruth shakes her head, backs away.

Caroline launches towards her.

Ruth jumps to the side, lands clumsily by the painting. Caroline turns around, redirects. A foreboding chuckle comes from deep within her.

Ruth gets to her feet as quickly as she can, turns around.

Caroline reaches towards Ruth, speeds towards her.

Ruth raises her knife up.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Et mittam te ad infernum ultra
usque in sempiternum!!!

She stabs the painting of the goldfinch.

Caroline freezes in place.

Ruth stabs it again, and again, breaking up the canvas, tearing it to shreds.

Caroline's body starts to sink, she looks down.

She's ankle deep in a pile of ash, continues to sink.

Ruth continuously stabs the goldfinch painting, repeating the incantation.

Caroline falls deeper into the ash. She begins to cry out incoherently, reaches towards Ruth.

She manages to grab Ruth's hand, starts to pull her down with her.

She wrenches her hand away, gives the painting another stab.

Caroline fully sinks into the pile of ash. Her deranged screams sinking with her.

Ruth catches her breath, turns around, looks at the pile of ash. She slowly moves towards it, ready to attack if needed.

And just like that, the pile fades away, as if never there.

Ruth turns around- the remnants of the painting are now totally gone.

Ruth drops the knife, the exhaustion and grief start to sink in for both of them.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE- NIGHT

Two EMTs, mid 40's, any gender, walk towards their emergency vehicle.

EMT 1
It's not uncommon for coyotes to
hide their food.

EMT 2
Still, this time of year?

They walk towards the EMT vehicle as:

Ruth sits the hood of the sedan, holding a bottle of water, the journal tucked under her arm. EMT 3, mid-late 40's, any gender or ethnicity, checks the dilation of her pupils.

EMT 3
All right, no severe brain
injuries. I'm going to go to the
truck and get some more supplies,
okay?

Ruth nods her head. The EMT walks away.

OS: In her pocket, her phone buzzes. She reaches in, checks the Caller ID, answers it.

RUTH
Hi.

PATRICK (O.S.)
Ruth, honey, oh my God!! I got a
call from the hospital up there!
Are you okay?

RUTH
I'm okay. I will be.

PATRICK (O.S.)
I'm getting a rental car right now,
I'll be up there as soon as I can.

RUTH
(nodding)
No, it's okay.

PATRICK
I'll- wait, what?

RUTH
Don't worry about it. I'll take
care of myself.

Ruth nods, hangs up.

Ruth lets out a long sigh, her head staring at her feet. A few sniffles escape her.

When she looks back up, she looks straight at us, her face devoid of emotion, the lights of the emergency vehicles lighting up her face.

Then, something comes alive in her. Her eyes perk up, narrow. A satisfied, victorious smile slices across her face.

CUT TO BLACK