SOCIO

"Pilot"

by
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ACT ONE

OVER BLACK:

GIRL'S VOICE
He's been acting strange lately.
So... quiet. Weird. Different.

FADE IN:

EXT. RYDER HOUSE - BACKYARD - FLASHBACK - EVENING

The GIRL'S VOICE belongs to JO, a shy, sweet eleven-year-old girl. Her friend LACEY, a snarky tomboy, also eleven, pushes her on the SWINGS in a big, well-landscaped backyard.

LACEY
Probably more family stuff. His mom is such a she-beast.

JO
Yeah. Maybe. I don't know though.

LACEY
Or maybe he's having his puberty.

JO
(grossed out)
Lacey! I don't think that's it.

LACEY
My cousin with all the boyfriends says it makes you moody and crap.
(pulling the swing to a stop)
My turn! Extra high this time.

Jo gets up off the swing, as we REVERSE ANGLE ON --

THE BACK DOOR, as a sweaty eleven-year-old BOY steps slowly through it. This is DANNY RYDER. He's squeezing a RED JUMP ROPE and staring straight ahead with a dazed, troubled expression. He hears the sound of Jo and Lacey's LAUGHTER. He slowly turns his head toward it, as we REVERSE ON:

The SWINGS, where Jo pushes Lacey higher and higher... until suddenly, she grabs the chain, pulling her to a stop.

Danny now stands before them, still tightly gripping the red jump rope. He stares at them, absently.

LACEY (CONT'D)
Watch it, numb-nuts. I almost just took your head off.

He doesn't respond. A fall BREEZE blows past. Jo stares into Danny's cold, vacant eyes. She shivers.

JO
Danny? Are you... okay? Why were you inside for so long?

He loosens his grip on the jump rope, and it falls to the ground. Then, he speaks, in a quiet, detached voice:

DANNY
I had to. There was no other choice. Please... don't hate me.

Jo and Lacey stare down at the rope, then back up at Danny, their eyes filling with mounting horror.

We MOVE IN ON Jo's scared, innocent face, then SMASH TO:

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - JO'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A much less innocent Jo BOLTS AWAKE in bed, terrified.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Jo! Breakfast is ready!

She's sixteen now, with a small, metal STUD in her nose and experimental purple streaks running through her messy, light-brown hair. There's a hardness to her, but beneath that rough edge, there's a plain, unassuming prettiness, as well as a carefully concealed vulnerability. She sits in bed, catching her breath... bracing herself for the day to come.

NEWS ANCHOR VOICE (PRE-LAP)
Ryder's return to Green Grove High has been met with controversy...

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jo, now dressed in baggy jeans and a loose, grey sweatshirt, eats breakfast with KYLE (forties), her sturdy, handsome father/town sheriff. He watches her push her eggs around on the plate distractedly, eyes locked on the LOCAL NEWS:

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
He was released yesterday from the Juvenile Detention Facility that's held him for five years, since he strangled his aunt, author Judith Ryder, while she baby-sat for him and two friends...

ANGLE ON TESS, Jo's gentle, naturally beautiful artist mom (forties), cleaning dishes as she stares at the TV, uneasily.

TESS
Can we turn that off now, please?

JO
This is my new reality. I might as well get used to it.

TESS
I know, sweetie. I just think you'll feel less tense if you try not to focus on it so much.

JO
I'll feel less tense once I see the lunatic freak and tell him I hate his guts.

Tess and Kyle exchange concerned looks. Tess sits down at the table across from Jo, blocking her view of the TV.

TESS
Jo, your dad and I have been talking, and... well...

KYLE
We think you should start seeing Dr. Shin again.

JO
No. *Hell* no. That guy smelled like cat food.

KYLE
Which is why we can afford him.

TESS
This is a lot to handle...

JO
Mom, I'm *fine*.

KYLE
You just said you wanted to yell at a confessed, unrepentant murderer.

TESS
Kyle. Unrepentant murderer?

KYLE
I'm just stating a fact, hon.

TESS
I know that, *dear*... but no one knows why Danny did what he did.

KYLE
Yeah, because he wouldn't explain it to me.

TESS
He was a scared little kid. So now, what? He should be condemned for the rest of his life?

KYLE
I never said that. I just want our daughter to be safe.

TESS
And that's not what I want?

They stare each other down, tensely. Jo observes them.

JO
(wryly)
Wow. Maybe you two are the ones who should go see Dr. Shin.

TESS
This isn't about us. You need to talk to someone.
(then, cautiously)
How about Lacey? Have you tried reaching out to her?

JO
Uh, no. Why would I do that?

TESS
This is something only the two of you have in common.

JO
We have nothing in common.

Jo's eyes wander back to the TV, as the ANCHOR recalls the tragedy that's befallen the Ryder family since Danny's crime. He talks over FOOTAGE of a Coast Guard ocean search:

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
It was just five months ago that Ryder's father, real estate developer Martin Ryder, fell off a company yacht while intoxicated. His body was never recovered...

The news then abruptly CUTS TO FOOTAGE of a BMW pulling into a driveway outside of a big Colonial three-storey house.

A swarm of REPORTERS rush the car, as a harried KAREN RYDER (late forties), botoxed and dressed in her designer best, steps out of the driver's side, pushing past the MOB.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
Widowed Karen Ryder returned home last night with her son...

KYLE
Karen never changes. Always ready for her close-up.

Tess stares at the TV. Unlike Kyle, she looks sympathetic as she watches Karen struggle to reach her front door.

Suddenly, the CAMERA jerks away from Karen to a SECOND PERSON emerging from the car, barely visible amongst the MOB. Jo tenses: *It must be him.* She leans toward the TV, struggling to catch a glimpse of Danny, but she can't get a good look.

She shoots her parents a reassuring smile, then turns back to the TV, anxiously: *What will it be like facing him again?*

ESTABLISHING - THE TOWN OF GREEN GROVE

A picturesque small town nestled in the FORESTS of upstate New York. It runs the socioeconomic spectrum with everything from towering, baroque HOUSES to quaint, one-storey COTTAGES lining the residential streets. A hilly MAIN STREET packed with shops, bars and restaurants winds through the classically Americana town center.

EXT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT QUAD - MORNING

STUDENTS gossip outside the traditional red-brick public HIGH SCHOOL, abuzz over Danny's return. REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS move through the crowd, talking to TEENS and PARENTS.

INT. KYLE'S POLICE CRUISER - MORNING

Kyle and Jo pull up outside the school, taking in the CHAOS.

KYLE
You gonna be okay?

JO
Sure. I've gotten pretty good at ignoring reporters.

KYLE
I'm not talking about reporters.
(then, concerned)
I hope you weren't serious about confronting him.

JO
It's not like I can just pretend he isn't here.

KYLE
That's exactly what you should do.

Beat. Jo stares out her window at the frantic activity.

JO
I can't believe he came back. I just wanted to get through the next three years and get the hell out of here, and now... it's like, suddenly I'm eleven again.

Kyle sighs, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

KYLE
Call me if you need me, okay? I can be back here in five minutes.

JO
Tone it down, dad. He's not gonna come at me with a battle axe.

She kisses him goodbye, takes a deep breath, and gets out of the car. Off Kyle, watching his baby enter the fray.

EXT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT QUAD - MORNING

LACEY (now sixteen) stands before REPORTERS. She's grown from a tomboy into a beautiful, poised, confident teen -- the kind of cool, fun person that other people wanna be around.

REPORTER #1
You were one of the two kids who discovered Judith Ryder's body. Tell us what that moment was like.

LACEY
Oh, it was *fantastic*. What little girl doesn't dream of seeing a dead body before her twelfth birthday?

The reporters CHUCKLE. Lacey grins, but there's a hint of anxiousness beneath her snarky, playful demeanor.

LACEY (CONT'D)
Seriously, though... it was hard. It's still hard. I don't like being reminded of that night, but I guess now I have no choice.

REPORTER #2
And if you did have a choice?

LACEY
Are you kidding? I wouldn't let that socio anywhere near my school.

The reporters REACT, loving that sound-bite. Lacey notices Jo behind them, eavesdropping. Jo briefly locks eyes with her, then turns and walks off. Lacey sighs, watching her go.

EXT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

Jo heads toward the school, avoiding eye contact with other STUDENTS, who whisper and point when they see her. Today's not a good day in her "keep to yourself" social strategy.

RICO (fifteen), her cute but nerdy, socially oblivious friend-study buddy, rushes to catch up to her.

RICO
You ready for today? It's gonna be a tough one.

JO
I'm well aware, Rico. Trust me.

RICO
I prepped all night. My mom had to make me three espresso shots.

Jo stops. She turns and looks at him.

JO
Okay, what are we talking about?

RICO
Our pre-calculus quiz. What are you talking about?

JO
Danny Ryder?
(off his confusion)
The murderer? The one who starts today at Green Grove High?

RICO
I'm not familiar.

JO
Why did you think all these reporters were here?

RICO
Doesn't the debate team have that showdown today with Dayton Prep?

Jo smiles, rolling her eyes, as she and Rico head inside.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Lacey walks the hall with her best friends, gorgeous, energetic, outgoing REGINA, and petite, acerbic, tough-as-nails SARITA. Regina smiles down at her I-PHONE.

REGINA
Ooh, look, Lace. Your "socio" line is trending on Twitter.

LACEY
Good. Maybe he'll get the hint and stay away from me.

SARITA
He better. He'll wanna run crying back to his padded cell if he tries to mess with our girl.

LACEY
Okay, let's maybe focus on not pissing off the psychotic killer.

SARITA
Whatever, he doesn't scare me. I'm a fourth German.

REGINA
And you know I've been really mean since I went off carbs. We have your back, Lace.

Lacey smiles, grateful for her supportive besties. ARCHIE, her hot, athletic boyfriend, strides up, nuzzling her ear.

ARCHIE
Saw you on the news. You're sexy when you're all traumatized.

LACEY
(sarcastic but playful)
Aww, thanks Arch. I'm glad my scarred psyche turns you on.

ARCHIE
Don't stress out. Fifty bucks says the freak transfers out once he realizes everyone here hates him.

LACEY
I still can't believe they let him back in. "Fully reformed" my ass.

SARITA
Yeah, like he'd really admit during a psychological profile that he wants to drown puppies.

ARCHIE
Come on now, let's be fair... the guy's a strangler, not a drowner.

REGINA
I heard Danny's mom had to seduce Principal Mirel to get him back in. Like, a full-on, shut the blinds, clear the desk office hook-up.

LACEY
Okay, that's disturbing. Why would she do that? This school isn't even that good.

SARITA
Weird, freaky people do weird, freaky things.
(then, noticing someone)
Speaking of weird and freaky...

REVERSE ON Jo, walking toward them. She hurries past Lacey and her friends, approaching her locker and opening it.

REGINA
Her hair makes me sad.

SARITA
I can't believe you used to be such good friends with her, Lace. What did you two even talk about?

LACEY
Yeah, like I even remember.

She's trying to act blase, but there's a tinge of regret in Lacey's tone. Archie kisses her goodbye.

ARCHIE
Gotta run, Mr. Kane is a lateness Nazi. See you at lunch.

He leaves. Lacey watches Jo, sorting through her locker. Regina and Sarita walk off to go greet some FRIENDS, as Lacey peels away from them, cautiously approaching Jo.

LACEY
Hey. How you holding up?

Jo reacts, surprised that Lacey's actually talking to her.

JO
Okay, I guess. You?

LACEY
Okay. My mom's pissing me off. Danny coming back is the perfect excuse for her to bulldoze her way into my life, you know?

JO
Yeah. My parents are trying to force me back into therapy.

LACEY
Yikes. That's a bummer.
(then)
Have you... started having those dreams again?

JO
(guarded)
No. Not really.

LACEY
I have. He's always squeezing that yellow jump rope... like it's a part of him, or something.

JO
Red.
(off her look)
It was a red jump rope. I think.

They share a brief moment of connection, before Jo breaks it, turning back to her locker. Lacey watches her, conflicted.

LACEY
Look, I know you probably won't even care, and it's not your scene, but me and my friends are having this party tonight...

Jo perks up, caught off guard by this social invite, especially from Lacey. But she quickly swallows her eager excitement, turning back to Lacey with casual disinterest.

JO
On a school night. You crazy kids.

LACEY
Yeah, well... Regina's parents are out of town, so we thought we'd throw a little "Michael Myers goes to our school now, let's blow off some steam" kind of shindig...
(off Jo's apparent lack of interest)
Pretty much everyone's coming, so... whatever, I don't care. If you wanna come, you can.

Jo deflates, hurt by what she now assumes is a pity invite.

JO
Don't do me any favors.

LACEY
That's not what I...

JO
It's not like I lie around wishing I could party with your lame, superficial friends, anyway.

LACEY
(turning cold)
Fine. Then don't come.

Tense beat. Jo looks like she regrets her harsh reaction, but she doesn't say anything. They just stand there awkwardly, the wall back up between them. Suddenly, the hall goes SILENT. Jo and Lacey turn around, REACTING TO:

DANNY has arrived. He stands in the middle of the hall, emanating a brash, sexy charisma, his eyes lit from within with a magnetic glow. The air around him almost seems to buzz. STUDENTS gape at him, hateful, fearful, fascinated... some even lustful. Danny takes in the stares, coolly and confidently scanning the room, locking eyes with people, seemingly un-intimidated... unwilling to back down.

ANGLE ON Sarita and Regina, as Sarita leans in, whispering:

SARITA
Paging Dr. Lecter. Your spawn is loose on aisle four.

REGINA
I'd let him loose on my aisle. Who knew socio had sex appeal.

BACK TO Danny, as he notices Lacey and Jo. He starts to make his way toward them, every eye in the hallway following him.

Jo and Lacey watch him approach, frozen in place. When he finally reaches them, there's a tense SILENCE... until he breaks into a playful, charming, boy-next-door GRIN:

DANNY
Boo!
(off their horror, quickly backpedaling)
Kidding. Sorry. So, uh... how are you guys?

They continue to stare at him, too startled to respond. They get a reprieve when PRINCIPAL MARK MIREL (forties), polished with a hint of sleazy, walks up.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
Mr. Ryder. Come with me please.

Danny flashes them one more quick, friendly smile, before turning and walking off with the principal.

CLOSE ON Danny's FACE as he walks away, his confident smile dissolving into a nervous, worried expression: *Coming back here is gonna be much harder than he thought.*

CLOSE ON Jo and Lacey, watching him walk away, both reeling from their first Danny encounter in five years...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Danny and his mother KAREN sit opposite Principal Mirel.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
Academically, I think you'll be fine. I see you passed all your entrance exams with flying colors.

KAREN
I'm extremely proud of him.

DANNY
(to Mirel, pleasantly)
I had plenty of time to prepare. Five years of non-stop study hall.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
Yes, yes... that's certainly true.
(awkward beat)
Socially, however... well, this isn't going to be easy. Even my faculty is a little skittish.

KAREN
My Danny's a very social boy. Once everyone gets used to having him back, things will begin to return to normal. Right, sweetheart?

DANNY
(tightly)
Right, mother. I'm sure you'll be running the PTA again by Spring.

KAREN
That's not what I meant.
(turning back to Mirel)
I've lived in this town, in the same *house,* for goodness sake, my entire life. As has Danny. I just think that's worth the struggle.

DANNY
Yes. So many happy memories here.

KAREN
(smiling tensely)
Let's talk about this later.

SILENCE. The decision to stay in Green Grove is clearly a major source of tension between them. Mirel forces a smile.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
Well, Danny, as I always like to say, the things that test us during adolescence turn us into the adults that we were always meant to be.

Danny stares at him. He smiles to mask his annoyance.

DANNY
That's very wise, Principal Mirel.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
And hey, it doesn't hurt to have such a beautiful, supportive mother guiding you. Am I right?

KAREN
Oh, Mark. Stop it.

They share a flirty laugh. Danny subtly rolls his eyes.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Jo finishes gathering books from her locker, when she turns to see Danny approaching. She tenses, quickly shutting her locker. But before she can get away, he's reached her.

DANNY
Hey. Sorry I had to run off before. I had to meet with the principal to discuss my "adjustment." And yes, it was as painful as it sounds.

SILENCE. Danny clocks the tension, struggling to maintain his charming, easygoing smile. Jo stares at him, coldly.

JO
I have to get to class. So.

DANNY
Oh, okay. Sure.
(then quickly, re: her locker)
This yours?
(smiling, playfully)
Any pictures of me in there?

Jo maintains her icy glare. Danny smiles, weakly.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Sorry, I'm a little nervous. Can't we just... chat? Just for a couple minutes?

JO
Chat? You wanna chat? Fine... let's chat. What should we chat about first? I know: How about my lost childhood? Ooh, or my journey into the wacky, delightful world of post-traumatic stress!

DANNY
I'm sure it's been rough. I can't even begin to imagine...

JO
No, you can't. You weren't here.

DANNY
I tried to stay in touch at first. Didn't you get any of my letters?

JO
Yeah. They burned great.

Danny takes in her pain and anger. She starts to walk away, but he blocks her, looking down at her, almost pleadingly:

DANNY
Jo, please. It's *me*. I'm still the same boy you grew up with.

JO
The boy I grew up with wouldn't have hurt a fly.

DANNY
Look, it's not as if I just... I had a *reason*, okay?

JO
What, the little voices in your head tell you to do it?

DANNY
I'm not some psycho. Come on, Jo, you know me. Better than anyone.

Beat. Jo studies him, skeptically.

JO
I know you were never a big Aunt Judith fan. So, what? She do something to you? Say something?
(off his reluctance)
If you had an actual reason, why didn't you tell it to the police?

DANNY
(sad, haunted)
Because... *I couldn't*. I still can't. I can't tell anyone that. Ever.

Jo takes this in, confused, uneasy... and maybe even a little intrigued. The bell RINGS, signaling the start of class.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Can you at least just show me how to get to my next class? This place is like a giant maze.

He hands her his SCHEDULE. Her face goes pale.

JO
Psychology with Mrs. Fisk. That's my next class, too.

DANNY
Oh. Well. Lead the way then.

Off Jo, heading to Psych with her potentially psychopathic former best friend. So much for avoiding him.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Eccentric, charismatic ROWENA FISK (forties) weaves through the room, leading her CLASS-- including Jo, Danny, and Lacey's boyfriend ARCHIE-- in a discussion of memory.

MRS. FISK
Semantic refers to stored facts and episodic to sequences of memories, but what is the deeper difference?

SILENCE. Fisk scans her distracted class, realizing they're all nervously eyeing one person. She faces Danny.

MRS. FISK (CONT'D)
Danny Ryder.

DANNY
Yes, uh... ma'am? Sorry, I'm not caught up on all the reading.

MRS. FISK
I'm sure you're not. You've been in my class ten minutes, and you already appear to be the most interesting thing about it.

ARCHIE
Sorry, Mrs. Fisk. None of us have seen a real psycho up close before.

Tense beat. Jo observes Danny's reaction, but he takes the moment in stride, calmly glancing at a grinning Archie. Fisk ignores Archie, staring intently at Danny.

MRS. FISK
Your nickname on Twitter is "the socio," correct, Mr. Ryder?

DANNY
(covering his hurt)
Is it? Huh. I guess I should get into this whole Twitter thing.

MRS. FISK
Oh, you should, it's a delightful waste of time... and since, as you all know, I'm such a *huge* champion of wasted class time, I guess we have no choice but to switch gears and discuss what's on everyone's minds. So! What is the definition of a "socio," or its more common scientific synonym, socio-*path*?

ARCHIE
A person who wakes up every morning in a pool of someone else's blood?

A few people CHUCKLE. Archie shoots Danny another malevolent smirk, but Danny ignores him, maintaining a stoic expression.

MRS. FISK
Actually, no... the majority of sociopaths do not have violent urges. Anyone else?

JO
A sociopath has no conscience. No guilt or remorse. No ability to feel empathy for other people.

Jo glances at a surprised Danny. She quickly looks away.

MRS. FISK
Good, Jo. Who else has a...

JO
Mrs. Fisk? How can you... tell? If someone's a sociopath. I mean, you can't read a person's mind.

MRS. FISK
True, the human mind is essentially unknowable. And while sociopaths may lack human emotions... they're damn clever at mimicking them.

The class studies Danny with anxious, suspicious faces. An increasingly isolated Danny can only smile, weakly: *Could this get any worse*? Only Jo watches him uncertainly, wishing she could read his mind: *Is he a sociopath, or isn't he?*

LACEY (PRE-LAP)
Please tell me you don't *actually* wanna have sex with a killer.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - STUDENT LOUNGE - DAY

STUDENTS mingle between classes. Lacey, Regina and Sarita hold court at a prime table in the center of the room.

REGINA
I'm sorry, I know you're still all traumatized, but he was only *eleven* when he did that. I mean, nothing really counts before you're like, thirteen or fourteen. I did ballet when I was eleven, but that doesn't make me a ballet dancer. Although I did look great in that tutu.

LACEY
Are these words really coming out of your mouth right now?

SARITA
Chill, Lace. She's all talk.

REGINA
Um, excuse me?

SARITA
(teasingly)
Oh, come on. If you actually hooked up with a fraction of the guys you thought were hot, you'd be in the slut section of the Guinness Book of World Records by now.

Regina glares at her, annoyed. They notice people whispering and gossiping, and turn to see:

Danny has walked in. He heads toward the VENDING MACHINE, ignoring the whispering and staring. Regina turns back to Lacey and Sarita with a determined look.

REGINA
All talk, huh?
(then, calling out to him)
Socio! Come over here!

A mortified Lacey covers her face. The whole room REACTS, shocked that a popular girl has engaged with the socio. Danny pauses, then tentatively approaches Regina, smiling.

DANNY
I'm not sure I should start responding to that nickname...
(noticing Lacey)
Lacey. I've been looking all over for you.

Lacey doesn't respond. Regina jumps up to greet him.

REGINA
I'm Regina, Lacey's BFF, but we're more like sisters. Right, Lace?

LACEY
Right, Reg. Will you girls excuse me? I have Bio in ten.

She gathers her stuff and leaves, avoiding eye contact with Danny. He watches her walk away, sad and disappointed.

REGINA
She's super sensitive, but she'll come around. Everyone will. This school is actually very friendly.

DANNY
Clearly. I feel like I'm in an episode of <u>Glee</u>, and everyone's about to break into song.

REGINA
They let you watch <u>Glee</u> in prison?!

DANNY
It was part of our punishment.

Regina giggles. Danny briefly locks eyes with Sarita, who stares up at him with a dark, hateful intensity.

REGINA
So listen, I'm throwing a little party at my house tonight. You in?

SARITA
Regina. What are you doing?

REGINA
(to Danny, flirtatious)
Ignore Sarita, she's frigid. So? What do you say?

Danny considers, smiling... when suddenly, he notices the RED-AND-GOLD NECKLACE Regina has on. His face shifts to serious.

DANNY
Where did you get that necklace?

REGINA
I don't know, I think it was a gift. Why? You like it?

Danny doesn't respond, staring at the necklace, lost in an odd, distracted daze. Sarita observes him uneasily. After a few seconds, he snaps out of it, forcing a weak smile.

DANNY
Thanks for the invite. I'll try to stop by.

With that, he turns and walks away. Sarita stares at Regina.

SARITA
Are you high on hormones?

REGINA
(ribbing her, playfully)
I hope he's that intense in bed.

EXT. MASTERSON HOUSE - FRONT STOOP - DAY

A sweaty, post-gym Tess opens the door, startled to find:

Karen, on her stoop, immaculately made up and put together.

KAREN
Tess. I catch you at a bad time?

TESS
Uh, no... of course not. Come in.

Karen walks past her inside. An anxious Tess shuts the door.

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tess hands Karen a coffee and sits across from her on the couch. They sip their coffees. The SILENCE grows awkward.

KAREN
I love what you've done with this room. Very... minimalist chic.

TESS
Oh, well... thanks.
(then, sadly)
Karen, I'm so sorry about Martin. I can't even begin to imagine what you've been going through.

KAREN
(restrained but emotional)
Yes. It has been difficult.

TESS
I wanted to call, but, you know...

KAREN
Your flowers were lovely, Tess.

Another SILENCE. Tess breaks it this time, forcing a smile.

TESS
Congrats on Danny's return. You must be thrilled to have him home.

KAREN
Actually, that's why I'm here. I wanted to invite you and your family over for dinner this Friday.

Tess visibly tenses. Karen notices, but she forges ahead:

KAREN (CONT'D)
I thought it might be nice for Danny and Jo to start to get to know each other again. She *is* his best friend...

TESS
Was.
(then, quickly)
I don't think now is a good time.

KAREN
I understand your reluctance, I really do. But Danny's a good boy, and he's facing a very difficult transition. Jo embodies Green Grove for him. I just think if they had a chance to...

TESS
Karen, I'm sorry. It's just not a good idea right now.

Karen's face hardens... any warmth instantly dissipates.

KAREN
Fine.

TESS
But please, if you ever want to grab lunch or something... if you need someone to talk to...

KAREN
(smiling ruefully)
Spare me your pity, Tess. I'll be just fine.

And with that, she stands and walks out. A sad, guilty Tess exhales heavily, watching her go.

INT. FAMOUS GREEN GROVE DINER - EVENING

Jo and Rico sit at a booth, working on a problem set, physics TEXTBOOKS open. Jo looks like her mind is elsewhere.

RICO
So then, if we multiply that by the rate of acceleration, we get...
(off Jo's distraction)
Someone who's apparently okay with an A *minus* on this problem set.

JO
What could he have meant?

RICO
Are you still thinking about your crazy psycho murderer friend?

JO
No. And he's not my friend. It's just... let's say you killed your aunt, but you believed you had a reason for doing it. Wouldn't you wanna explain it to people? Or, at least, tell it to the police?

RICO
(uncomfortable)
Uh, I don't know. I like my aunt. She buys me presents and makes yummy apple cinnamon pancakes. Why are you obsessing about this?

JO
When he said he couldn't tell, it was like he was... sad, or scared, or something. It was so weird.

RICO
Maybe it was just an act. Maybe there is no reason. Maybe he invented the whole reason thing just to make you feel bad for him.

Jo considers this theory. She looks uncertain.

JO
You're right. I'm sure you're right. He was just trying to manipulate me.

RICO
Exactly. Now, as our generation might say, let's quit this here *chillaxing* and get all up in this *dope* problem set.
(off her baffled look)
"Chillaxing" is an artificial word combining "chill" with "relax"...

JO
(amused)
Yeah, I got it. Please never do that again.
(forcing herself to focus)
Okay... where were we? Mass times acceleration...

ANGLE ON the ENTRANCE, as Danny walks in and approaches the COUNTER. SAM, a grizzled employee, tenses when he sees him.

DANNY
Sam! Wow, you haven't aged a day. You have work done? Chemical peel? Cheek implants?
(off Sam's icy silence)
Skipping the banter today, I see. Can I get a piece of that best-on-the-planet key lime pie?

SAM
You're making the other customers uncomfortable.

Danny turns to see ANXIOUS CUSTOMERS starting to recognize him. He turns back to Sam, forcing a friendly smile.

DANNY
I guess I'll have that pie to go.

Sam goes to get the pie. Danny sits at the counter, defeated and isolated. Suddenly, his eyes light up as he notices:

ANGLE ON the BOOTH: Rico looks up and sees Danny.

RICO
Okay, Jo, whatever you do... don't turn around and then look up.

Jo turns and looks up at: Danny. He smiles tentatively, tossing her a quick wave. She whips her head back around.

JO
Any chance he didn't see me?

Danny pays for his PIE. He starts to leave, then stops. He considers, before slowly turning and approaching their booth.

DANNY
Hey. You're still a regular here, I see.

JO
Yup. A fact you obviously didn't forget.

DANNY
I promise I'm not stalking you.
(holding up the to-go bag)
I came for the pie.

Jo tries to ignore him, looking down at her textbook. Danny absorbs her continued coldness. He turns to Rico, smiling.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Danny Ryder. Nice to meet you.

RICO
(quickly, nervously)
Hi, I'm Rico, I'm extraordinarily uncomfortable right now.

DANNY
(grinning)
Hey, you and me both, Rico.

Sam approaches them, staring pointedly at Danny.

SAM
People are starting to *leave*.

ANGLE ON the ENTRANCE, as anxious customers migrate out.

BACK TO THE BOOTH: Danny nods at Sam, relenting. He glances at Jo, and she quickly looks away... but beneath her coldness, there's conflicted emotion. Danny catches it. He leans in toward her, boldly.

DANNY
If I had my choice, wanna know where I'd be right now? Anywhere in the entire world but here. But it's not my choice, it's my mom's choice... so here I am.

JO
Okay. Fine. Am I supposed to feel bad for you?

DANNY
No. You have every reason to hate me. I guess somehow I still thought you'd be the one person who'd give me half a chance.

Jo holds his look, trying to maintain her steely resolve. Danny notices Sam's increasingly hostile glare. He shoots Jo one more pointed look, then turns and walks out with his head held high, ignoring the stares of the other customers.

Rico exhales, relieved.

RICO
Wow. I feel like I just lived through a Hitchcock movie.

Jo ignores him, turning to watch Danny disappear out the front entrance, a glint of sympathy flashing across her eyes.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. GREEN GROVE - MAIN STREET - EVENING

Danny moves quickly down the street, when a VOICE stops him:

JO (O.S.)
Danny! Wait!

He turns to see Jo rushing after him. He smiles, hopefully.

DANNY
Hey. Sam kick you out, too, for cavorting with the enemy?

JO
Look, I know this must be hard for you. But you can't keep coming up to me, at school, or the diner, or wherever. It's hard for me, too.
(off his sad silence)
You want things to magically go back to the way they were, but they can't. Everything's different. I'm different.

DANNY
Fair enough. I promise I'll leave you alone.

JO
Okay. Thank you.
(beat)
You're gonna be alright.

DANNY
That's what my mom keeps saying.
(then, bitterly)
Suddenly, she's this fountain of parental warmth and wisdom.

Jo considers his tough relationship with Karen. She softens.

JO
I'm sorry about your dad. He was always really nice to me.

DANNY
Yeah. He was a definite Jo fan.

Jo watches Danny control his emotions: *But is it real*? Danny reads her skeptical expression. He can't help but grin.

DANNY (CONT'D)
You're wondering if I'm mimicking human emotion, aren't you?

JO
What? No I'm not.

DANNY
Don't worry about it. After that crazy class, I'm assuming pretty much everyone I see is a sociopath.

Jo allows a smile. Encouraged, Danny steps toward her.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Okay, I know we just had this whole "leaving you alone" convo... but there's this party...

JO
Danny, *no*. I can't deal with...
(stops, realizing)
Wait. Are you talking about Regina Crane's party?

DANNY
Yeah, that's the one.

JO
How do *you* know about that party?

DANNY
Because I was invited to it.

JO
You? Invited? By an actual human?

DANNY
By the hostess herself, actually. She's a very... friendly person.

JO
And you're going?

DANNY
Sure. Why wouldn't I?

JO
Oh, I don't know... maybe because most of the people who'll be there think you're a deranged psychotic homicidal monster?

DANNY
Everyone's entitled to their opinion. You can either isolate yourself and bury your head in the sand, or face the haters head on.

Jo takes this in, impressed by his social boldness.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Of course, it'd be easier to show up there with someone else. Might take some of the edge off.

Jo pauses, conflicted... before uneasily making a decision:

JO
This wouldn't make us friends.

DANNY
You don't even have to talk to me. I wanna be free to play the friend field, anyway.

JO
Friend field? Good luck with that.

DANNY
Hey, the night is young.

Off an anxious Jo: *Is she really about to do this?*

KYLE (PRE-LAP)
A party? Really? Our daughter?

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - TESS' ART STUDIO - NIGHT

An uneasy Kyle watches Tess work on a PAINTING.

TESS
I know. It's a miracle.

KYLE
Uh-huh... who's she going with?

TESS
She didn't say. A school friend?

KYLE
Who? *Rico*? Yeah, that one's a real social butterfly.
(off her look)
I just think the timing is... odd. The day Danny gets back, she goes to her first high school party?

TESS
Will you please stop being such a paranoid cop. You heard her, she "hates his guts." Besides, she told me she barely saw him today.
(tentative beat)
Speaking of which... Karen Ryder stopped by to see me. She invited all of us over for dinner.

KYLE
Oh God. You didn't...

TESS
Calm down, I said no.

KYLE
Good. I can't believe she even asked. Was she on drugs?

TESS
Stop it. Show some sympathy. She must be having a hard time.

KYLE
Okay, defending the kid was one thing, but Karen Ryder? Really? After everything she said to you? Everything she *did*...

TESS
Her son had just killed her sister-in-law, Kyle, she wasn't in the best emotional place. Besides, I said some awful things to her, too.
(then, guiltily)
I told her she was a bad mother.

KYLE
She provoked you. What she was asking of us was insane.

TESS
Was it? All she wanted was for Jo to be a character witness at Danny's sentencing. Maybe we should've just let her...

KYLE
No, absolutely not. We did the right thing for our daughter.

TESS
I wonder if Jo would agree.

KYLE
Of course she would.

Off an anxious Tess, hoping that's true...

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON an anxious Jo (now wearing a cuter outfit-- jeans that fit and a yellow sweater), as she and Danny venture into the loud, jam-packed party. TEENS dance in a sweaty THRONG to Lady Gaga's "Born This Way." They gradually stop as they notice the two unexpected interlopers.

ANGLE ON Archie and a few of his athletic MALE FRIENDS across the room, glaring at Danny with threatening expressions.

ANGLE ON the ADJACENT ROOM, where Sarita stands with Lacey and a few other POPULAR GIRLS. Sarita nudges Lacey.

SARITA
Look what the crazy dragged in.

Lacey reacts, stunned to see Jo and Danny arriving together.

BACK TO the FRONT HALL, as the music CUTS OUT. The TEENS drift away from them. Jo exhales. Danny smiles.

DANNY
Don't take it personally. That may've been more about me than you.

JO
You're very perceptive.

DANNY
You can ditch me now, by the way, I won't be hurt. Go, drink. Mingle.

Jo nods, but remains frozen in place. She catches Danny observing her, grinning. She turns defensive.

JO
I don't drink.

DANNY
Okay. That's cool. This is your first high school party, isn't it?
(off her silence)
What a coincidence! Mine, too.

Jo shoots him an amused eye roll.

JO
Cute.

DANNY
I thought so. Want some advice, one party virgin to another? I'd try a bit harder to hide some of that fear. People can smell it.

JO
What, you learn that in prison?

DANNY
Juvi, actually, but yeah... not the most welcoming crowd. I had to learn fast that if you act like you belong, people will assume you do.

Jo softens a little, absorbing all that Danny's had to face the past five years... before quickly hardening again.

JO
Yeah, well... I'm not interested in belonging with these people.

DANNY
Then why'd you come here?

JO
(pointedly)
Hey, gotta tell my grand-kids I did something stupid in high school.

DANNY
Good point. And *God forbid* they think you weren't the most popular girl in the class.
(then, noticing someone)
Speaking of...

REVERSE ON Lacey in the next room, laughing with her friends. She catches Danny shooting her a friendly wave. She ignores him and locks eyes with Jo, who also waves at her, weakly. An uncomfortable Lacey waves back, then returns to her group.

Danny watches Jo, who's sadly watching Lacey.

DANNY (CONT'D)
So... what happened with you two?

JO
I don't know. I guess we outgrew each other. Or, she outgrew me.
(off his sympathetic look)
Hey, being friend-less has its perks. I won't be one of those lame-o's weeping at graduation.

DANNY
You and that Rico guy seem *chummy*.

JO
I think he just wants to keep me close so I don't sneak past him for Valedictorian.

DANNY
That's how it always starts.

Jo laughs. It's an unexpectedly nice bonding moment.

ANGLE ON the LIVING ROOM: Lacey watches Danny and Jo have their nice moment. She's not sure what to make of it.

BACK TO the HALL: A tipsy Regina skips over to Danny.

REGINA
Socio! You came... !
(smiling tensely at Jo)
... And look who you *brought*!

JO
Lacey invited me, actually.

REGINA
Oh. Okay. Well, I'm... so glad you made it, yay! Come on, I'll introduce you to people.

Regina drags Jo away. Danny turns back to Lacey, laughing in her group. Off Danny, gathering his courage...

<u>INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - DEN - CONTINUOUS</u>

The DANCING TEENS have regrouped here. Regina leads Jo in, before turning and sizing her up with a competitive grin.

REGINA
So! What's up with you and Danny?

JO
Up? There's nothing up.

REGINA
Don't play dumb with me. You want him, don't you?

JO
Uh, *no*. Do you want him, Regina?

REGINA
Uh, *yeah*, I'm not blind. I'm open to sharing though. I've never had a threesome before...

JO
(horrified)
That's okay! He's all yours.

REGINA
Aw, Jo! You're so cool. Everyone is so wrong about you.

Jo reacts, vaguely insulted. She studies Regina, curiously.

JO
So, you're really not worried about getting too close to him, huh?

REGINA
We'll use protection.

JO
That's not... I meant, because of his past. You know, that whole murdered his aunt, "socio" thing?

REGINA
I guess I believe in my nation's criminal justice system. Besides, he's here and he's clearly not going anywhere. What are we all gonna do, hate him forever?

This lands for Jo. A TEEN passes by with a TRAY OF SHOTS. Regina grabs one and smiles at Jo, holding it up for a toast. Jo takes in this gesture of friendship from popular Regina. She grabs a shot. They CLINK and drink, and Jo immediately starts hacking and coughing. Regina watches her, giggling.

<u>INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT</u>

Lacey and Sarita are pouring themselves fresh drinks, when Danny suddenly walks up to Lacey with a confident grin.

DANNY
One gin-and-tonic, bartender. Easy on the gin, heavy on the tonic. My tolerance isn't what it used to be.

Lacey stares up at him dismissively, then immediately looks back down to finish pouring her drink. A protective Sarita takes a couple menacing steps toward him.

SARITA
Hey, creep. You trying to add "stalker" to your criminal record?

DANNY
(beat, smiling)
Sarita, right? I remember you now. You were the one with that facial hair problem in fifth grade.

Sarita's tough exterior wavers: This is clearly a troubled period in her adolescence, one she prefers not to remember.

SARITA
I think you're mistaken. *Freak*.

DANNY
No... it was definitely you. You had to leave school for a week to have an electrolysis procedure only approved in Germany or something.
(then, studying her face)
Looks like it worked okay. I can still see the faint outline of a mustache. But nothing too bad.

Sarita storms away, furious. Lacey glares at him.

LACEY
I see you're winning over the student body, one charming remark at a time. Great strategy.

DANNY
It got you to say something to me.

Danny flashes a roguish grin, but Lacey remains ice-cold.

LACEY
Congrats. What an accomplishment.

DANNY
Wow, *two* something's. I'm on a roll.

This time, she cracks a slight smile. Danny looks pleased.

ACROSS THE ROOM: Archie laughs and drinks with a bunch of his GUY FRIENDS... until he notices Lacey and Danny talking. His smile vanishes. He quickly makes his way toward them.

BACK TO Danny and Lacey. She still has her guard up, but she's loosened up enough to be a little playful with him.

LACEY
I see you got Jo to follow you around like a puppy dog again in under a day. Impressive.

DANNY
Puppy dog? Wow. That's harsh.

LACEY
Didn't you hear? I'm a bitch now.

Danny smiles. But his smile quickly fades when Archie walks up, kissing Lacey and wrapping an arm around her.

ARCHIE
Hi, babe. Oh, psycho boy! Hey, buddy. Good to see you again.

LACEY
You two've met?

ARCHIE
We have Psych together. Spent the whole period debating whether this nut-bag is a sociopath or not. You know, Lace, because of your nickname for him... the socio.

Danny looks at Lacey, surprised and hurt that she was the one who stuck him with that dark label. Lacey's face reddens, embarrassed, while Archie just stares Danny down with an arrogant smirk. Danny smiles at Lacey, rescuing the moment:

DANNY
Hey, don't worry about it. I think it's kind of a catchy.

Lacey responds with an appreciative smile, quickly dropping it when she notices Archie watching her, tensely. He squeezes her tighter. Danny observes them, amused.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Anyway... I should find Jo before she starts having actual fun. Good to see you Lacey. Archie.

He turns and leaves. Archie smiles at Lacey, exhaling.

ARCHIE
You're welcome.

LACEY
For what? Embarrassing me? Or holding me like a possession?

ARCHIE
I was rescuing you! The guy had you cornered.

LACEY
I can handle him, okay?

She walks off to go greet some friends. Archie chugs his drink, threatened and emasculated.

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - NIGHT

A tipsy Jo weaves through the CROWD, sipping alcohol from a SHOT GLASS. She bumps into a grumpy Sarita.

SARITA
Hey! Watch where you're swinging those fat meaty ape arms.

JO
Okay, my arms are *not* fat. Yes, they're disproportionate to the rest of my body *at the moment* in a somewhat simian-like way, but the Internet says that's normal.

A darkly amused Sarita takes in Jo's drunkenness.

SARITA
Wow. Someone's having some fun.

JO
I *am* having fun, and I wanna have even *more* fun, so... *deal with it*.

Jo finishes her shot. Sarita eyes her, a predator eyeing its prey. SCOTT, a blandly hot jock (one of Archie's athlete friends from before) stumbles past them. Sarita grabs him.

SARITA
Scott, meet Jo. She wants to have more fun. Take your shirt off.

Scott shrugs, pulling off his SHIRT in one quick motion. Nearby PARTYGOERS cheer his abs. Jo reacts, horrified.

JO
You know, I think I'm actually having the appropriate level of fun. You can get dressed now.

Sarita grabs a SHOT off a passing tray. She hands it to Jo.

SARITA
(like a drill sergeant)
Pour this on him and lick it off.

JO
Off of *him*?! Uh, I don't think...

SARITA
Do it, do it, do it...

PARTYGOERS
Do it! Do it! Do it... !

Jo sighs, giving in to the crowd. She takes a deep breath, pours the shot on Scott's TORSO, and then licks it up from his stomach to his chest. The crowd CHEERS.

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Danny pushes his way through the mob, searching for Jo. He runs into Regina, who immediately throws herself at him.

REGINA
So-ci-o! There you are. There's something I wanna show you.
(leaning in, whispering)
Wanna hint? *It's my bed*.

DANNY
Um, not now... have you seen Jo?

JO (O.S.)
Wait, stop! *Get the hell off me!*

Danny rushes toward the sound of Jo's distressed voice--

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

He shoves his way through the CROWD, coming upon Scott and Sarita, trying to force Jo to take her shirt off.

SARITA
Come on, Jo. Tit for tit. That's Green Grove High law.

JO
Well, it's a dumb, gross law.

SCOTT
It's not a dumb law! We need laws to create order. Without order, we're *in chaos*.

Danny steps in, inserting himself between Scott and Jo.

DANNY
Hey, looks like *someone* was paying attention in Poli-sci.

Jo reacts, surprised and moved to find Danny coming to back her up... like an actual friend.

SCOTT
Mind your own business, freak.

DANNY
"Freak"? Really? That's so... generic. That the best you can do?

SCOTT
How about *Rope Boy*?

Danny tenses. The crowd CHEERS Scott's boldness, egging him on. Sarita enjoys the spectacle, while Jo watches nervously as the situation begins to spiral out of control. PARTYGOERS from other rooms, including Regina, Lacey, and Archie, push in to watch the mounting confrontation.

DANNY
Okay, that was more pointed. But why don't we just settle down...

Suddenly, Scott SHOVES Danny, hard. The crowd GASPS.

JO
Stop! Leave him alone!

Scott grabs Danny's shirt and pulls him in, winding up to punch him. But before he can, Danny quickly leans in and whispers in Scott's ear:

DANNY
Back off. I've killed before, and I can do it again. *It'll be fun*.

Startled, Scott FREEZES. He lets go of Danny and backs away, turning and bolting out of the room. Danny watches him go with an innocent, non-threatening expression.

SILENCE. Partygoers exchange baffled looks: *What just happened?* Danny collects himself, grabs Jo's hand, and leads her out the front door. Regina watches, jealous and pissed.

Off Lacey, impressed by Danny's gallantry, and maybe even a little wistful watching her two childhood best friends walk away from the party together.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. GREEN GROVE - SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

Danny leads Jo down the dark, empty road. That last body shot pushed her over the edge from “drunk” to “wasted.”

JO
That was *amazing*! What the hell did you whisper to him, anyway?

DANNY
I don’t know... something about suing him for assault and winning.

Jo erupts in uncharacteristic GIGGLES. Danny watches her, amused. A dingy HONDA pulls over next to them. The window comes down... REVEALING an equally amused Lacey.

LACEY
Thought so. They didn’t teach you to drive in prison, huh?

JO
Lacey! Danny, it’s Lacey! Lacey, Danny... Danny, Lacey...

Lacey jumps out and helps Danny guide Jo into the backseat.

DANNY
(to Lacey)
I thought you were a bitch now?

Danny grins at her. She glares back with a hint of a smile.

INT./EXT. MASTERSON HOUSE - FRONT ENTRANCE/STOOP - NIGHT

Kyle and Tess pull open the door, shocked to find Danny standing on their stoop, propping up their drunk daughter.

JO
Mom! Dad! You came! Welcome!

Danny passes Jo off to Kyle, who guides her into a chair.

KYLE
(furious, to Tess)
Some *friend* from school, huh?

TESS
Just stay calm.
(off his lack of calm)
Fine, or don’t. I’m gonna go get Jo some water.

She disappears into the kitchen. An intimidating Kyle faces Danny on the stoop. Danny smiles up at him, nervously.

DANNY
Sheriff. Good to see you again.
(off his anger)
Don't be too hard on her, sir.
This is what you do in High School,
right? Go to parties? Get drunk?

KYLE
And how would you know? You read
about that in the prison library?

DANNY
Juvi, actually. *Sir*.

They stare each other down. Tess returns with water for Jo.

JO
(energized and babbling)
Mom, the party was awesome. This
dude was like, "take your shirt
off, I wanna lick you" and Danny
was all, "get away from her, you
suck" and then the dude was all,
"*blah*, I'm gonna push you now."
And Regina and I totally bonded.
She was like, "I want Danny," and I
said, "you can have him," and she
was all, "I'll pass him to you
after, sharing is caring!"

A horrified Kyle and Tess turn and stare at Danny.

DANNY
Yeah, I should probably...

Kyle SLAMS the door in his face. He and Tess watch Jo gulp her water. They share a look, relieved she's home safe, but troubled by her sudden re-connection with Danny.

<u>INT. LACEY'S CAR - NIGHT</u>

Lacey drives Danny home. They enter the more affluent side of town, passing an increasingly impressive series of HOUSES. Lacey talks on her phone, speaking into a HEADSET.

LACEY
Yeah, Arch, I'm just gonna take
Pepto and go to bed... I'll call
you tomorrow... me, too... bye.

She hangs up. Danny smiles at her.

DANNY
Stomach ache, huh?

LACEY
Archie wouldn't have understood.

DANNY
Understood what, exactly?

LACEY
Maybe I didn't wanna leave Jo alone on a dark road with an ex-convict.

DANNY
Well, whatever your reason, thank you. You saved me at least an hour of tedious drunk walking.

LACEY
Don't mention it.
(then, pointedly)
Seriously, to anyone. *Ever*.

DANNY
Got it. Oh, stop up here, mine is the house at the end of the...

LACEY
I remember.

Danny nods, flustered: *Of course she does*. She pulls up outside a big, dark HOUSE at the end of the block: *Danny's house, the scene of the crime*. She stares up at it, anxiously... then exhales, refusing to let the fear in.

DANNY
So... wanna come in and hang out?

Lacey gapes at him. She laughs. Danny smiles, weakly.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Or not. I just thought it'd be nice to catch up. We haven't had a chance to talk since I got back.

LACEY
Okay, you realize that's intentional, right?

Lacey laughs again. There's a long SILENCE. Her eyes dart over to Danny, quickly looking away: A part of her *does* want to go hang out with him... to get to know this person she once knew so well. Danny can tell that she's conflicted.

DANNY
I have Cool Ranch Doritos. Your favorite.

LACEY
How do you remember that?

DANNY
You used to inhale them by the bucket. You don't forget a mental image that traumatizing.

She slaps him on the arm. Danny blocks her, laughing.

INT. RYDER HOUSE - DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny and Lacey sit on the floor, eating Doritos.

LACEY
I can't believe I'm here right now. I must be completely crazy.

DANNY
I don't think you're crazy.

LACEY
You wouldn't. Crazy is relative.
(mouth full of Doritos)
Oh, so good right now. I haven't eaten these in years.

DANNY
Me neither. Remember when we dared Jo to eat a bag of every flavor?

LACEY
Uh-huh. She made it to Spicy Nacho before she vomited all over my dad's favorite New York Yankees throw rug. He never got over that.

Danny grabs the bag, takes a handful.

DANNY
Poor Jo.

LACEY
Why? My dad blamed me, not her.

DANNY
I mean now. She's having a hard time in high school. Unlike you.

Lacey rolls her eyes, swiping the Doritos back.

LACEY
Okay, what did she say? That I ditched her? Abandoned her?

DANNY
Of course not.
(then, fishing for info)
Why? That's *not* what happened?

Beat. Lacey's smile fades. She turns defensive.

LACEY
Do you think it was easy, being the best friends of the child murderer?

DANNY
(softening, guilty)
No. No, I'm sure it wasn't...

LACEY
Yeah. *It wasn't*. Forget the fact that you turned our childhoods into Children of the Corn. We were both ostracized, associated with the psycho freak. Middle School is rough enough without all that crap, so excuse me for doing everything I had to do to survive... to *move on*.

DANNY
You're right. And I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you and Jo.

Lacey studies him. She pauses, then abruptly blurts out:

LACEY
You sure meant to hurt someone.

Danny reacts, thrown by her directness. Lacey looks like she wishes she hadn't said that, but she pushes her fear away.

LACEY (CONT'D)
Do you... regret it?

DANNY
The past is in the past.
(considering, sadly)
I wish I hadn't affected other people's lives. That I do regret.

Lacey doesn't say anything. Danny takes back the Doritos.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Wanna know what I *really* regret?

LACEY
Not if it's creepy.

DANNY
I regret not growing up with you and Jo. Ruining what we had.
(smiling, softly)
We had some fun, didn't we?

A flash of wistfulness crosses Lacey's face. She suppresses it, but not before Danny notices. He leans in closer.

DANNY (CONT'D)
I miss it.
(eyes locked on her)
I think you miss it, too.

Lacey stares back at him, steadily. Then, she leans in, too.

LACEY
I thought the past was in the past?

DANNY
Touche.

Their faces almost touch. There's a long, tense SILENCE, which turns into a charged, intimate, slightly sexual moment. It's unexpected, new... exciting. Their faces linger an inch apart: *Are they about to kiss?* But instead, Lacey grabs the Doritos out of his hand, before retreating, leaning back.

LACEY
Quit hogging the Cool Ranch.

Danny smiles. Lacey smiles back, taking a big bite of chips.

INT. RYDER HOUSE - DANNY'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Lacey lies asleep on the floor, arms wrapped around the bag of DORITOS. Danny grabs a BLANKET and drapes it over her, sweetly. His cell phone BUZZES. He pulls it out and reads:

A TEXT MESSAGE: *Hey, hot stuff. It's Regina. Party's over. Wanna come back for an after party of two*?

Danny rolls his eyes. He quickly types back: *Thanks, but I'll pass. How'd you get my number?*

Beat. Then, another TEXT: *Whatev, got it from someone. Please come over?! Socio + me = yes please!*

Danny cringes, embarrassed by the way she's throwing herself at him. He TEXTS back: *No thanks. Not tonight.*

Danny hopes that did it. But as he puts his phone away, another TEXT pops up-- with a much less playful tone: *Come over now. We have to talk. I know why you killed your aunt.*

Off a stunned Danny, staring at his phone, as we SMASH TO:

INT. RYDER HOUSE - DANNY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Lacey opens her eyes. She reacts to the DORITOS still in her arms, disgusted. She sits up, noticing Danny, lying asleep on the floor beside her. She covers her face with her hands, horrified that she spent the night. She quickly leaps up, grabs her PURSE, and tip-toes out of the room...

INT. RYDER HOUSE - FRONT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Lacey rushes down the stairs, as we REVERSE ON:

Karen, exiting the KITCHEN, wearing a bathrobe. She STOPS SHORT when she sees Lacey bolting out the front door.

Karen reacts, surprised. She looks up the stairs at Danny's bedroom, smiling hopefully to herself: Could this sleepover be a sign that their lives *are* starting to return to normal?

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - JO'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jo wakes up, emitting a low, hungover MOAN. She grabs her water and CHUGS it. She puts the glass down. She smiles, recalling the events of last night.

She drags herself out of bed and goes to her CLOSET. She sorts through BOXES, finally pulling out:

A FRAMED PHOTO of herself, Lacey and Danny as kids, around age ten or eleven. They're laughing together, happily.

Jo wipes the dust off, placing it on her bedside table. She looks at it, confused, uncertain... and maybe a little happy?

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A plump, middle-aged MAID enters, taking in the post-party MESS. She angrily mumbles to herself in SPANISH as she makes her way into the room... when suddenly, she TRIPS over something. She turns, looks down, and starts to SCREAM.

REVERSE ON Regina, sprawled out on the floor on her back, head bloody, face white, eyes wide open. *She's dead*.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT./INT. RYDER HOUSE - FRONT PORCH/FRONT HALL - MORNING

Jo approaches the house. Halfway up the path, she pauses, gripped by the same fear that Lacey experienced. She pushes past it, striding up to the porch and ringing the BELL.

Danny opens the door in boxers and a t-shirt, surprised and pleased to find Jo smiling up at him, nervously.

JO
Hey. Sorry, did I wake you?

DANNY
No, no, I was already up.

JO
Oh, okay. Good. I just wanted to thank you for getting me home last night. And for standing up for me to that wannabe rapist jock prick.

DANNY
I think that may actually be his full legal name.

He smiles, motioning for her to come in. She steps inside.

DANNY (CONT'D)
So. How's the punishment? Daddy Dearest didn't seem too pleased when I brought you home.

JO
We'll see. He'd already gone into work when I woke up, and my mom was still asleep when I left.

DANNY
Maybe they'll go easy on you. First time offense.

Jo smiles grimly, doubtful. Karen passes through. She notices Jo and reacts, pulling her into a big hug.

KAREN
Jo! Look at you, you're so big... not in a fat way, just in a grown up way. It's so good to see you.

JO
Good to see you too, Mrs. Ryder.

Karen flashes her son an amused, knowing smile.

KAREN
Well, well, sweetheart... two days back and you've certainly had your share of female visitors.

Danny responds with a frosty glare, but Karen just laughs, walking off into the kitchen. Jo looks at Danny, intrigued.

JO
Visitors? As in, plural?

DANNY
As in *two*. Lacey ended up sleeping over last night.

JO
Oh! Wow... you guys didn't... ?

DANNY
No, we just talked and fell asleep. But let's keep it on the DL, okay? I bet that guy she's dating would love nothing more than to take it the wrong way.

JO
My lips are sealed.

They share a conspiratorial smile. Suddenly, they hear Karen SCREAM OUT:

KAREN (O.S.)
Danny! Jo! Get in here!

They look at each other and rush into the kitchen--

INT. RYDER HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They enter to find a stunned Karen staring at the TV:

NEWS ANCHOR
A housekeeper discovered Green Grove High sophomore Regina Crane beaten to death in her home this morning at around six-thirty AM...

TIGHT ON Danny's FACE: Shocked, worried, and slightly pale.

The ANCHOR continues talking, as embarrassing PHOTOS of a goofy, preening, partying Regina-- clearly culled hastily from her Facebook page-- FLASH across the screen:

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
Crane was a beloved leader in the Green Grove High community. She was a star on the Cheerleading Squad, and was voted Homecoming Queen last year as a freshman...

A stunned Jo glances at Danny, studying his reaction. She locks eyes with Karen, also watching him. They both quickly look away, scared and confused, but both contemplating the same unsettling possibility: *Could he have done it again?*

INT. REGINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Last night's party has become a CRIME SCENE, swarming with PARAMEDICS and COPS. Kyle pulls the sheet off Regina's BODY: There are big purple BRUISES on her head where something appears to have smashed against it. SANDY (thirties), his strong, attractive female deputy, approaches him.

SANDY
We reached the parents on vacation in Florida. They're coming back on the next flight out.

Kyle nods, dazed. Sandy crouches down beside him.

SANDY (CONT'D)
Sorry, boss. She a friend of Jo's?

KYLE
No, but Jo was here. I'm never letting her go to a party again.

SANDY
Sure. That doesn't sound like an overreaction at all.

Kyle responds with a sharp grin. These two have a good rapport, and a smooth, effective working relationship.

SANDY (CONT'D)
No signs of breaking and entering. We know who else was at that party?

KYLE
Every teen in Green Grove, from the way the neighbors described it. It quieted down at two, and Bobby estimates time of death at around three or four. Which could mean...

SANDY
Someone never left.

KYLE
Or someone came back.

Beat. They're both clearly thinking the same thing.

SANDY
And what about Green Grove's most famous teenage ex-con? He part of that "most" you mentioned?

Kyle nods, unsettled.

KYLE
Let's not jump to any conclusions.

SANDY
Okay. But two days after he comes back, we get our first murder since he went all "Good Son" on his aunt?

Kyle doesn't respond. He stands and starts to pace.

KYLE
Anything missing?

SANDY
The housekeeper says Regina usually wears a red-and-gold necklace. I've got officers searching her bedroom, but apparently she never took the thing off.

KYLE
What about her cell phone?

SANDY
Also gone. Unless she's the only Homecoming queen in the world who doesn't have one.

KYLE
Contact her service provider. Get the records for every text, voice-mail and incoming call in the last twenty-four hours. If she knew her killer, then they probably had some sort of communication.

Sandy rushes off. Kyle watches BOBBY THE CORONER put Regina in a BODY BAG and zip it up. Off Kyle, stressed, troubled.

EXT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT QUAD - MORNING

REPORTERS talk to shocked, grieving STUDENTS, while other TEENS stand together in groups, hugging and whispering.

Jo and Danny arrive, taking in the FRANTIC ACTIVITY. Danny turns to Jo with a nervous grin.

DANNY
This is gonna be bad, isn't it?

Jo doesn't respond. Rico sees them and rushes over.

RICO
Did you hear about Regina?

JO
Yeah. It's insane.

RICO
(abruptly, to Danny)
So... did you do it?

DANNY
Excuse me?

JO
Rico!

RICO
I'm sorry! That's what everyone's saying. I'm not totally immune to the lures of sensationalized gossip.

Danny catches Jo nervously eyeing him, then quickly looking away. He turns and faces her.

DANNY
Jo, look at me... I didn't do this. *I swear*. You believe me, right?

Danny searches her face with sad, desperate eyes. Jo wants to believe him... but her own eyes are full of uncertainty. REPORTERS spot Danny and bolt toward him.

REPORTER #1
Danny! What was your relationship with Regina?

REPORTER #2
Danny! Danny! When did you leave the party last night?

Danny, Jo, and Rico rush away from the reporters, heading inside into the-- relative-- safety of the school.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - STUDENT LOUNGE - MORNING

Lacey sits with Archie, Sarita, and Scott, each heartbroken and devastated by the sudden loss of Regina. Lacey and Sarita hold onto each other closely, still in shock.

LACEY
It's so weird. I feel like she's gonna come bouncing in any second.

SARITA
Yeah, all excited over some dumb Internet quiz about "matching with your celebrity hair twin."
(smiling, emotional)
God, she was such an idiot.

ARCHIE
I told her... I begged her not to throw herself at that lunatic.

SARITA
We all tried to warn her, Arch.

SCOTT
I even offered to bang her, if she was just itching to get banged.
(sighing, sadly)
If only she'd listened.

LACEY
Are we *sure* it was Danny? We all saw him leave the party...

ARCHIE
He wouldn't do it in front of us.

SARITA
Yeah, he's psychotic, not retarded.

Lacey doesn't reply. She won't mention her sleepover with Danny, but it's enough to make her wonder about his guilt. Archie watches her, unhappy to see her so conflicted.

ARCHIE
Scott, tell Lacey what Danny whispered to you.

SCOTT
He said if I didn't back off, he'd kill me. And that he'd enjoy it. Just like he did last time.

Lacey reacts, unsettled.

ARCHIE
So, Lace? Still think the little creep is innocent?

Off Lacey, upset and confused... not sure what to think.

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

Principal Mirel stands at a podium, facing the bleachers packed with STUDENTS. The FACULTY -- including psychology teacher Rowena Fisk -- sit flanking him on either side.

PRINCIPAL MIREL
Regina was a loving, energetic, positive force in our community...

ANGLE ON Lacey in the BLEACHERS, lost in a sad daze. She's seated beside Archie and Sarita, who both glare down at:

Danny, sitting with Jo and Rico. Danny catches Archie and Sarita's GLARES. He notices other GLARES, from all sides.

PRINCIPAL MIREL (CONT'D)
... Now, we must come together in our grief and support each other. It's what Regina would've wanted...

An emotional and angry Sarita locks eyes with Danny, mouthing the word "socio" at him. Other STUDENTS do the same... a few even HISS it at him. Jo reacts to the nasty hissing.

PRINCIPAL MIREL (CONT'D)
(noticing the hissing)
I urge you to keep in mind that the police have not named a suspect, so *please stop* spreading unfounded accusations against your peers...

The HISSING continues to build and build. An increasingly sympathetic Jo watches a stoic Danny try to withstand it.

Suddenly, the doors BURST OPEN. Kyle and two other COPS stride in. They spot Danny, and make a beeline for him.

KYLE
Danny Ryder. Come with us, please. We need to ask you a few questions.

Danny nods, miserably, as the entire room ERUPTS in shocked whispering. A stunned Jo leans in toward Kyle, pleading:

JO
Dad, come on... not here. Not in front of everyone like this.

KYLE
I'm sorry, honey. Danny, let's go.

As Danny starts to get up, Jo quickly turns and locks eyes with Lacey, who immediately looks away. After a conflicted beat, Jo impulsively jumps up, facing the other students:

JO
HEY! Listen! I know that we're all scared...

SUDDEN SILENCE. The entire school stares down at Jo, startled by her outburst. She takes in all the eyes focused on her, pushing past a brief moment of doubt and nerves:

JO (CONT'D)
We're scared... and we're sad, and we're angry, and it's easy to focus all of that on the one obvious person. But is that really fair?

Danny reacts, moved by her defense. Archie and Sarita glare at her with dismissive contempt. But Lacey listens closely.

JO (CONT'D)
I don't know if Danny did this or not... I don't have the answers... but do you? Do any of us? I mean, it's not like he's under arrest.
(to Kyle, pointedly)
Right?

She locks eyes with her dad. He doesn't respond, but he seems unhappy and worried by his daughter's defense of Danny.

JO (CONT'D)
Please, just... give him a chance. Don't ostracize him even more.

ANGRY, SKEPTICAL FACES glare down at her: She isn't winning many hearts and minds. Rico looks on proudly, impressed by her guts. Jo sits back down, defeated. Danny smiles at her.

DANNY
Well... this should do wonders for our social lives, huh?

He gives her a grateful arm squeeze, before standing and walking out with Kyle and the cops. Off Jo, watching as he's led out like a criminal in front of the entire school.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. GREEN GROVE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

STUDENTS file out of the gymnasium, abuzz over Danny's big public "arrest." Jo grabs Lacey and pulls her aside.

JO
I know you agree with me. I saw your face while I was talking.

LACEY
Okay, that wasn't my agreement face, it was my what-the-hell-is-she-thinking face.

JO
Look, what if someone else did have a reason to kill Regina? Wouldn't the day Danny got back be the perfect time to do it? Think about it... he's the instant suspect.
(off Lacey's skepticism)
I know that sounds... I just feel like someone has to give him the benefit of the doubt. Right? Someone has to try and believe him.

LACEY
(incredulous)
And that someone has to be you?

JO
No. *Us*. Who else will it be?
(beat, then)
I know about last night.

Lacey tenses.

LACEY
Nothing happened.
(then, desperately)
Please. Don't tell anyone.

JO
I won't, because you need to tell everyone. If you say you were with him, people will believe you.

LACEY
I was asleep! I have no idea what he did or didn't do last night. All I know is the best friend I've ever had is dead.

Jo flinches a little, stung. There's a loaded SILENCE, as they both contemplate their own lost best friendship.

JO
I know. And I'm so sorry. But Danny was trying to start over. Why would he do this?

LACEY
Why'd he do it before?
(off Jo's sad silence)
Just trust the police, okay? Trust your dad. If Danny's innocent, they'll figure it out. And stop defending him. You're only making things worse for yourself here.

JO
You haven't changed. All you care about is what other people think of you. After the way you cut us both loose five years ago, I shouldn't be surprised you'd do it again.

Jo walks away, angrily. Off a guilty but defiant Lacey...

INT. GREEN GROVE POLICE STATION - KYLE'S OFFICE - DAY

Kyle sits perched on his desk, staring down a weary Danny.

DANNY
I swear. I got the text, turned off my phone, and went to bed...

KYLE
And you didn't wanna go talk to her? Find out what she meant?

DANNY
I knew what she meant. She wanted to get me into bed.

KYLE
And you didn't go? A sixteen-year-old boy who just got out of juvi? Those hormones must be raging.

DANNY
I guess I'm saving myself for someone special.

Kyle reacts: *Is he talking about Jo*? He takes a breath and composes himself, then leans in, forcing a kind smile.

KYLE
Danny, the people in this town don't care about the truth. All they want is your head on a stick. But me? I'm open to hearing your side of the story. So, just tell me: What really happened?

DANNY
(getting frustrated)
Nothing happened. I didn't leave my room after twelve-thirty.

KYLE
Okay. Fine. Can anyone vouch for that?

Danny pauses, reluctant to use Lacey as his alibi. Kyle studies him. Sandy opens the door and sticks her head in.

SANDY
Karen Ryder and her lawyers are here.

Kyle nods, not surprised. He turns back to Danny.

KYLE
Looks like we'll have to finish this up another time.

DANNY
Sure. Anything I can do to help.

Danny shoots him a cooperative smile, before standing and walking out. Kyle watches him go, more suspicious than ever.

EXT. GREEN GROVE POLICE STATION - DAY

An angry Karen and a demoralized Danny leave the station.

KAREN
Questioning a minor? Without a lawyer present? It's contemptible.

DANNY
Settle down, mother.

KAREN
I will not settle down. Kyle Masterson is a vindictive, petty man. He always hated me, and he resented your father's success.
(then, uneasily)
What exactly did he ask you?

DANNY
What do you think? He wanted to know if I did it, obviously.

KAREN
Did you tell him you were home? That Lacey spent the night?

DANNY
Can we not? I think I've been interrogated enough for one day.

He starts to walk away. Karen calls out after him:

KAREN
Where are you going?

Danny doesn't respond. Karen watches him go, worried and unsettled by his odd evasiveness.

EXT. GREEN GROVE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Jo and Rico walk together in silence. Rico watches her.

RICO
That was brave, the way you stood up in assembly. I almost broke out into hives just watching you.

JO
Whatever, it's not like I was destined for prom queen or anything. But thanks.

RICO
You're welcome. And you're not alone in this. If you trust him, I trust him. Okay?

A moved Jo pulls him into a grateful HUG. TIGHT ON Rico's FACE: It's clear from his smitten expression he wants to be more than Jo's study buddy. Jo looks up, surprised to see:

DANNY, standing outside the DINER, waiting for her.

DANNY
I escaped. Had to swim through the sewer, Shawshank-style. Not as easy as it looks on AMC.
(smiling nervously)
You got a second?

Jo shoots Rico a look, and he nods, understanding. He heads toward the diner, stopping in front of Danny.

RICO
Prove me right, Danny.
(intensely, overdramatic)
Prove me right.

Danny hides a baffled, bemused grin, as Rico disappears inside the diner. Jo approaches him.

DANNY
Hope you didn't catch too much grief for that little speech.

JO
You stood up for me last night. I was just returning the favor.
(then)
Sorry about my dad. Pulling you out in front of the entire school like that, that was...

DANNY
He was just doing his job.
(beat; then, anxiously)
Regina texted me last night.

JO
Texted you? You mean... after we left the party?

DANNY
She wanted me to come back. And when I said no, she... *insinuated* that she knew why I killed my aunt.

Jo reacts, stunned. She turns suddenly and starts walking away from him. Danny rushes after her.

DANNY (CONT'D)
She was probably just goading me, trying to get me to come over...

JO
She's dead, Danny, she died right after she sent it. Are you really trying to tell me it meant *nothing*?

DANNY
I have no idea what it meant! All I know is that I ignored it. I should've told you before, but I was afraid you'd assume I killed her, just like everyone else...

She stops, turning to face him.

JO
Why *did you* kill her?

DANNY
Jo, please, I didn't...

JO
Not Regina. Your aunt. And don't just say you can't tell me.
(stepping toward him)
I have to know.

DANNY
I'm sorry. I'm protecting you...

JO
From what? Jesus, you want this second chance, but you make it so freaking difficult by acting all weird and mysterious. If you just tell everyone why you did it...

DANNY
Then what? They'll get over it? Laugh it off? The mayor will hand me the keys to the city?

JO
No... but maybe they won't call you the socio anymore.

DANNY
They'll always call me that, but I can live with it. It's kind of a cool, intimidating nickname.

He smiles, trying to ease the tension. But Jo just stares back at him.

JO
What do you want from me?

DANNY
I want you to believe me about Regina. I want you on my side.
(off her reluctance)
I may have killed someone before, but I've never lied to you.

Jo can't help but laugh.

JO
That's a real great pitch for a strong, trusting friendship.

Danny doesn't respond. Jo looks at him, searching his eyes for that truth, that belief... before accepting she may never be a hundred percent sure. She exhales, making a decision:

JO (CONT'D)
If you are lying to me, I swear I'll kill you. Then I'll be the one with the intimidating nickname.

They share a smile, a tentative truce... and maybe the start of a new friendship. They hear a BEEP, followed by a VOICE:

ARCHIE (O.S.)
Hey buddy! Murder anyone today?

They look up to see a CAR drive slowly by: Archie's behind the wheel, Scott rides shot-gun, and Sarita and Lacey sit in the backseat. Lacey stares straight ahead, but the other three glare out at Danny and Jo with vicious, hateful eyes.

JO
Lacey sure knows how to pick her friends, huh?

DANNY
She'll come around eventually.

Off an unruffled Danny, watching the car turn a corner...

INT. MASTERSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tess watches Kyle and Jo face-off, angrily.

KYLE
I'm asking you not to hang out anymore with a *serial killer.* Most sixteen-year-olds would kill for that kind of hands-on parenting.

JO
Serial killer? Whatever happened to innocent until proven guilty? Or did Green Grove secede from the Union without me realizing it?

KYLE
Honey, please... trust me. My gut's telling me Danny did this.

JO
Yeah, well my gut's telling me he didn't.

Jo walks out. Kyle watches her go, heavy with concern.

TESS
I know you're trying to protect her. But we can't tell her who to be friends with.

KYLE
I'll remind you that you said that when we're identifying her at the morgue.

He storms away, leaving Tess alone, sadly contemplating this burgeoning rift in her family.

INT. RYDER HOUSE - DANNY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Danny flips through an old PHOTO ALBUM, stopping on:

A PORTRAIT of HIMSELF, around ten, sitting with a stiff, impressive man in a dark suit-- his father, MARTIN RYDER.

Karen sticks her head in, lightly knocking on the open door.

KAREN
Can I come in?

Danny looks up at her. He nods. She sits down beside him on the bed. She notices the photo, flashing a wistful smile.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I had to bribe you both to sit for this photo. Remember what I bought you?

DANNY
The new Power Rangers mega-mission helmet.
(grinning)
And how'd you bribe dad?

Awkward beat.

KAREN
I, uh... I don't remember.
(then, firmly)
Danny, I want to talk about what happened at the police station.

Danny ignores her. He stands up and walks across the room.

KAREN (CONT'D)
All I want to do is help you...

DANNY
(turning on her, sharply)
Help me? Is that why you brought me back to a town where everyone thinks I'm the teenage Ted Bundy?

KAREN
This is our home. It's where your father and I raised you.
(holding back emotion)
It's where we were a family.

DANNY
No, it's where you were top of the small-town pyramid. The most popular mom in the neighborhood.

Karen stares up at him. She exhales, guilty and exhausted.

KAREN
We couldn't sell it.
(off Danny's confusion)
We couldn't even get people to come to the open house. We kept lowering the price, but...

DANNY
I never even knew you put it on the market.

KAREN
We didn't want to burden you.
(then, floodgates opening)
We still thought about leaving here. But then your father's drinking got worse, and he gambled on some bad investments, and, well... suddenly, we didn't have as many options. It wasn't until after his accident that I found out how bad it really was.

DANNY
Are you saying we're... broke?

KAREN
We'll be okay. We have enough to live on. But the majority of the money is tied up in this house.

Danny processes his parents' struggles, stunned and guilty. Karen walks over to him, placing a maternal hand on his face.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I love you, Danny. I just want you to be happy. And if that means we have to pick up and leave and start over somewhere new, then that's what we'll do. We'll make it work.

DANNY
I haven't brushed up on my criminal law lately, but I think fleeing town might make me look guilty.

KAREN
I don't care how it looks.
(then, almost hopefully)
I know you're not guilty.

DANNY
(moved)
Thanks, mother. And we don't have to leave. Once they find the real killer, all this will blow over anyway. Right?

They smile at each other-- it's a rare glimpse of the bond underneath all the emotional baggage.

KAREN
Get some rest. You've had a long day. We'll talk more tomorrow.

She kisses him and walks toward the door, turning around to give him one more loving smile. Danny smiles back. After she leaves, his smile vanishes. He sits back down on the bed and picks up the PHOTO ALBUM. He starts flipping through it again, stopping when he gets to:

An OLDER PICTURE of a very young DANNY, sitting on the lap of a sour-looking WOMAN in her late thirties. A CAPTION reads: "Danny and his Aunt Judith at his fourth birthday party."

TIGHTER ON the PHOTO: Around AUNT JUDITH's neck hangs a NECKLACE-- the *exact same* RED-AND-GOLD NECKLACE that Regina was wearing. The one that's now missing.

Danny stares at the photo. He reaches under his mattress, pulling out the missing necklace. He weaves it through his fingers, eyeing it with an unreadable gaze, as we:

CUT TO BLACK

END OF PILOT EPISODE