

UNIVERSAL CABLE PRODUCTIONS

Horizon

Pilot

Written by
Bridget Tyler

2nd Revised
October 5, 2012

Universal Cable Productions
10 Universal City Plaza
Bldg. 1440, 14th Floor
Universal City, CA 91608

COPYRIGHT © 2012 UNIVERSAL TELEVISION, LLC.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NOT TO BE DUPLICATED WITHOUT PERMISSION.
This material is the property of Universal Television, LLC and is intended solely for use by its personnel.
The sale, copying, reproduction or exploitation of this material in any form is prohibited.
Distribution or disclosure of this material to unauthorized persons is also prohibited.

HORIZON

"Pilot"

Written by

Bridget Tyler

SECOND DRAFT

10/05/2012

COLD OPEN

EXT. THE SOUTH PACIFIC - OPEN WATER - NIGHT - 1942

Pure, tropical darkness.

Opaque ocean water reflects the glittering arc of the MILKY WAY as it stretches across the sky like a second horizon.

Abruptly, a sliver of light slips across the water.

What was that!?

There's another one. And another.

The drizzles of light are outlining something...

A DEAD BODY.

And that strange light? It must be bioluminescent algae, unraveling in the dead man's wake.

He's not alone.

Soon the current is festooned with DEAD MEN. Their twisted and broken bodies illuminated by the eerie algae glow that blooms around them as they drift.

It's a deeply strange sight...

And it's about to get stranger.

The glow is starting to gather around a particular body.

Other than three missing fingers on his right hand, this man has no visible wounds. He's handsome, but unremarkable. His blue eyes gape, empty and vacant. Dead.

Then a thin stream of glowing water slips up his neck, snakes through his hair and flows into his ear.

Okay, so maybe this isn't algae after all.

Multiple ribbons of luminescent light are flowing over the body now. Wrapping him in their glow.

Light oozes into his eyes and ears and mouth. Then...

The dead man blinks.

Holy. Smokes.

He takes a gasping breath. Another. Filling starved lungs.

OFF the formerly dead man... bodies bobbing around him as he gazes up at the dizzying stars

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - SAC'S OFFICE - MORNING

A tightly closed door labeled SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE is guarded by a young woman. She perches behind a desk that bristles with lumbering office equipment.

This is high tech, circa 1942. It looks tortuous, but LAUREN HOWL (23) moves through it like a fighter pilot mid-dogfight.

AGENT WILL (SPARKS) SPARKMAN, 28, a big guy with a little boy's nervous energy, is slumped in the visitor's chair across from her.

A GRAPH PAPER NOTEBOOK is open in his lap.

They're in the middle of a conversation. Lauren types steadily, even while she's talking.

LAUREN
I still think it's a cipher, but you're the FBI agent. I'm just a secretary. What do I know?

SPARKS
Lauren Howl, since when has being "just a secretary" ever stopped you from meddling in one of my cases?

LAUREN
I never meddle.

SPARKS
Ha!

LAUREN
Hey, you came to me, Sparks. You can always go belly ache to someone else.

SPARKS
I do not belly ache.

LAUREN
Ha!

Sparks scrubs at his face, frustrated.

SPARKS
Harris is convinced the tractors are destroyers and the plows are subs.

Lauren reaches across the desk, snags his notebook. Reads.

LAUREN
Which would mean there are 24 Jerry U-boats in the Potomac and the Navy just hasn't noticed?

SPARKS
I didn't say Harris was right.

LAUREN
Harris is never right.

SPARKS
But if he's wrong, where's the code?
(shaking his head)
If Esman is communicating with the Nazi's, he's using these invoices. We already ran the inventory numbers and--

LAUREN
SHHHH.

SPARKS
Did you just shush me?

LAUREN
Yes! I've almost... it's the prices.

SPARKS
Huh?

LAUREN
String them together and have the girls in crypto run it. That's your code.

Sparks grabs the notebook back. Stares at it, brow furrowed.

SPARKS
Why do you--

LAUREN
$2,341.39 for a plow? Steel prices have gone up, but not that much.

SPARKS
I don't know.

LAUREN
That's because you didn't spend high school making time with your future husband in his dad's machine shop.

SPARKS
(completely distracted)
In a machine shop?

LAUREN
Uncomfortable. And greasy. But that isn't the point. The point is I'm right. Run it, you'll see.

She shoots a framed photo on her desk a conspiratorial grin.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Who'd have thought being an old married lady would be so useful?

Sparks watches her as she goes back to her typing. From the look on his face, you'd think he was jealous of a photograph. And you'd be right.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
I believe it's your line, Sparky.

SPARKS
(covering)
I, ah, is the boss man in?

LAUREN
Nope, he's got a big meeting with the Director. Won't be in for ages.

SPARKS
In that case, wanna bail out on the paperwork, come with me to crypto?

Lauren grins. She loves winning.

LAUREN
Give me five minutes and--

ELLEN (O.S.)
Lauren, I need to talk to you.

ELLEN OLSEN (25) enters, shuts the door behind her.

Usually, Ellen has a grand champion poker face and enjoys using it, along with her dynamite curves, to her advantage.

Today, she's fighting tears.

LAUREN
Ellen, what's wrong? Did something...

Ellen answers her question by holding up a distinctive MILITARY DEATH NOTIFICATION TELEGRAM.

Catching on quicker than Lauren--

SPARKS
Oh. Christ.

LAUREN
(oblivious)
That's the fourth one this week! Thank goodness you're pals with Betty over in Notifications. Can you imagine--

ELLEN
Lauren...

LAUREN
Whose is it, anyway?

Ellen still can't bring herself to say it. Her eyes dart to the framed photograph on Lauren's desk instead.

Lauren finally catches on.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
No. That isn't for me.

Ellen exchanges a helpless look with Sparks.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Don't make that face. That isn't mine.
(desperate)
Ellen. Please.
(tears welling)
Tell me George isn't dead.

But Ellen can't do that, and they all know it.

INT. HOWL HOUSE - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

It's a classic wake, from the jello mold to the white wreath draped over a framed picture of a young man in uniform. We can't quite see his face, but Lauren can.

She stands, staring up at the picture. Alone in the crowd.

Her face, as always, is an open book that shares every thought with the world.

It's a sad story today. Nerves. Exhaustion. Grief.

Across the room, Sparks pretends he's not watching her.

It isn't doing him any good. His heart might as well be pinned to his sleeve.

ELLEN (O.S.)
You should just go over there.

Sparks turns to find Ellen standing beside him.

SPARKS
It's her husband's wake, I can't--

ELLEN
At least you admit it.

SPARKS
I didn't admit--

But he can't even maintain the argument. Not today.

SPARKS (CONT'D)
I just wish I could DO something.

ELLEN
Then find out what happened to George.

SPARKS
You know I tried.
(off her look)
The army is treating the incident as top secret, Ellen. That's above my security clearance. And yours.

ELLEN
Fine. You don't think you can manage it, I'll figure it out on my own.

SPARKS
I know you think trading intel with your girlfriends is a gas, but--

ELLEN
She needs to know, Sparks.

SPARKS
More like you *want* to know.

ELLEN
Of course I do. One particular skirmish is tagged top secret out of a multi-island battle and you *don't* want to know why?

He does, but...

SPARKS
We will all have to live with disappointment. I don't wanna hear--

ELLEN
Oh, don't worry. I wouldn't tell you now if you begged.

With a toss of her hair, Ellen crosses to Lauren and wraps an arm around her waist.

Lauren leans into Ellen, eyes still lingering on the memorial photograph of her husband.

From this angle, we can finally see the picture of Lauren's husband, GEORGE, clearly.

He has a kind face. Nice blue eyes. He's handsome, but unremarkable.

AND WE RECOGNIZE HIM.

The first time we met George Howl, he was floating dead in the Pacific...

Of course, he isn't all that dead anymore.

OFF George Howl's memorial photograph...

EXT. HOWL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

We cut to George Howl's face. He stands in the shadows, across the street, watching Lauren through a window.

Something about the way he holds himself isn't right. It's subtle, but disturbing.

George struggles to control his emotions, but watching his wife grieve is just too much.

He swipes at his eyes with his mangled right hand, but we can still see the tears sliding down his face.

BECAUSE THEY'RE GLOWING.

Luminescent white light gathers at the corners of his eyes and runs down his cheeks. It's beautiful. Heartbreaking.

And definitely not human.

George, or the person... or THING... that looks like George, scrubs at his face again. Pulling himself together.

Then, with one last, longing look at Lauren, he pulls his hat down over his eyes and strides away.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. HOWL HOUSE - LAUREN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

THREE WEEKS LATER

Lauren straightens her dress. Again. It's one of those days when nothing feels like it fits quite right.

The high-heeled, oxford shoes she eases her feet into are no exception. Somebody's got blisters. Making a face as she ties the laces...

LAUREN
Ow ow ow. Damn you Hitler, I want my nylons back.

Lauren straightens up and turns to the mirror. The girl who looks back is stylish in a simple way. Pretty. Her hair isn't quite right, but it never is.

Satisfied, Lauren heads for the door. She stops at the threshold and looks back at the girl in the mirror.

Is she ready for this? There's only one way to find out.

Lauren pulls the door open.

INT. HOWL HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lauren takes the back stairs two at a time. She almost makes it to the back door before --

ESTHER HOWL (O.S.)
Where are you going?

Lauren turns to find her mother-in-law, MRS. ESTHER HOWL (50's), doing dishes at the sink. Esther is just as well kept and old fashioned as her house.

LAUREN
I'm going to work, Mom Howl.

ESTHER HOWL
So soon?

LAUREN
My boss has a lot to manage. The Nazis are--

ESTHER HOWL
I see. Well, Father Tom is coming to the house today to say a special mass for George. He'll be disappointed, but I'm sure he'll understand.

She carefully places a clean plate in the drying rack.

ESTHER HOWL (CONT'D)
You have more important things to do.

It's a swing and a hit. Guilt home run.

Lauren gives up. She puts her handbag on the kitchen table and starts rolling up her sleeves.

LAUREN
I'll take care of the dishes. You go relax before Father Tom gets here. Close your eyes for a few minutes.

ESTHER HOWL
No.

Lauren stops mid-roll.

ESTHER HOWL (CONT'D)
(pointed)
A good wife puts her home and her family first.

Lauren can't decide whether to burst into tears or punch the bitch. To avoid doing either, she grabs her purse and flees.

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

The RECEPTIONIST doesn't even look up from her magazine when Lauren steps off the elevator.

It's a slow morning. The lobby is empty except for a little boy, sitting alone. This is TEDDY MCNEIL (5).

Teddy is slight. Mildly disheveled. He's sketching something in a composition book.

The intense focus on his face catches Lauren's curiosity.

LAUREN
You all by yourself, kiddo?

TEDDY
(still drawing)
No. My dad went with Agent Harris.
(beat)
Agent Harris couldn't find his butt with two hands and a flashlight. That's what dad said.
(beat)
I wasn't supposed to be listening.

Lauren smiles.

LAUREN
That sounds like Harris, alright.

Lauren should get to work... but she doesn't want to.

She sits next to Teddy instead. Catches a slant at his notebook.

Teddy is drawing an elaborate AIRCRAFT. It's V winged, with huge cylindrical engines. It looks like a plane, sort of.

But there's something strange about it. Something... alien.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
What are you drawing?

TEDDY
It took my sister.

LAUREN
What do you mean, honey?

Teddy stops long enough to point at the page with his pencil.

TEDDY
That. It took my sister.

Lauren looks from the picture to the little boy. Fascinated.

But before she can ask more questions --

JOE (O.S.)
Right, Harris, I'm sure you'll be in touch.

Lauren looks up to see JOE MCNEIL (35) being half-shoved through main doors by a portly guy who must be AGENT HARRIS.

Joe is tall, too thin for his frame... and his suit. His eyes are shadowed from more than just fatigue. He's also furious.

JOE (CONT'D)
Guess you have to be a Lindbergh for the FBI to care when your kid gets snatched.

HARRIS
Nope. If Lindbergh thought Martians had taken his kid, nobody would have given him the time of day either.

JOE
Christ almighty, Harris. It obviously wasn't a SPACE ship.

HARRIS
That's not what you said when you filed the report.

JOE
I was out of my head that night and whatever that thing was... it sure as hell LOOKED like something straight out of a bad comic book.

HARRIS
Well, it sure as hell sounds like a bad case of the DTs.

JOE
At least come and LOOK at what it did to the woods out behind--

HARRIS
You sure you want that? I hear the local sheriff took a long look at those woods. And he still thinks you killed the girl. What if I find evidence that he's right?

JOE
You won't.

HARRIS
You so sure of that?

JOE
SHE'S NOT DEAD.

Harris sighs.

HARRIS
No, she probably isn't. Your daughter ran away, McNeil. Face facts and stop wasting the FBI's time.
(smirk)
There's a war on, remember?

JOE
I know. I've been there.

And you haven't. The unspoken accusation is sharp as glass.

HARRIS
(deeply insulted)
Defending the homeland is imperative to the war effort. And frivolous reports put our nation in jeopardy.

With that, Harris marches back into the bull pen.

Joe rips off his hat and hurls it at the ground.

JOE
(near tears)
God damn it.

Then he sweeps up his discarded hat and jams it on his head.

Without even sparing Lauren a glance--

JOE (CONT'D)
Come on Teddy, we're leaving.

Joe jabs the elevator call button, waits impatiently.

Teddy looks up at his father, then back at Lauren. As the elevator doors open, Teddy makes a decision.

He RIPS OUT the page he was drawing on, runs to Lauren and thrusts the torn piece of paper into her hand.

Teddy and Lauren lock eyes for a long beat.

JOE (CONT'D)
Theodore. Come here. NOW.

This time, Teddy obeys.

As the elevator doors close behind them, Lauren looks down at the picture, still clutched in her hand.

The sharp, V winged craft glowers back. It's rough, but remarkably detailed for something dreamed up by a tiny boy...

Lauren turns to the receptionist, who has been taking in the commotion with avid interest.

LAUREN
Who was that, Mabel?

RECEPTIONIST A.K.A. MABEL
Oh, that's Mr. McNeil. He might be a looker but he's totally screwy.
(shakes her head)
He's been in here causing a fuss every other day since his daughter ran off.

LAUREN
They're sure she ran away?

Mabel nods, eager to share her juicy gossip.

MABEL
Oh, yes. Agent Harris told me, completely confidentially of course, that McNeil had JUST taken custody of the children from their grandparents and the girl HATED him for it.
(tisk)
Poor lamb's mother died while he was fighting in Europe, you see.

LAUREN
How sad.

MABEL
(she loves it)
Dreadful.
(suddenly realizing...)
I thought you were on leave for another two weeks, Lauren. What are you doing back so soon?

Lauren folds up Teddy's picture, slips it into her purse.

LAUREN
The boss man needs me.

MABEL
You're *so* brave. If I was married and my husband died, I'm sure I wouldn't be able to get out of bed for weeks.

Husband died. The words bring a lump to Lauren's throat. She swallows hard, pushing the grief back. Fakes a bright smile.

LAUREN
I make do. Besides...
(echoing Harris)
There's a war on, remember?

With that she marches for the main doors.

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - BULL PEN - MOMENTS LATER

The place is already hopping. A regular whirlwind of bobbed hair, pencil skirts and worse for wear three-piece suits.

Lauren weaves through the chaos, ignoring the shock wave of whispers and sympathetic looks that follows her.

Sparks sprawls at his desk. Lauren catches his eye, but he plays busy, shuffling papers. The snub hurts, but before she can process it --

ELLEN (O.S.)
What's a nice dame like you doing in a place like this?

Lauren turns to find Ellen, heading her way.

LAUREN
Didn’t have anywhere else to be. What are you doing on this floor?

Ellen hooks her arm through Lauren’s and they keep walking.

ELLEN
Just came to see you settled.

LAUREN
You’re a pal.

ELLEN
Occasionally.

They stop in front of a door labeled SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE.

Abruptly, Ellen pulls Lauren into a tight hug. She clings for a moment, then, just as abruptly, steps away.

ELLEN (CONT’D)
(covering)
Besides, your dear boss won’t let anyone else touch his files. So when you’re not here... this happens.

Ellen pushes the door open and they cross into--

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - SAC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It’s a disaster zone of files, microfiche and evidence bags.

But Lauren doesn't see the mess. Her eyes go straight to the framed photograph buried in the paperwork rubble on the desk.

It’s George, of course. That smile used to be comforting. Today, it’s heartbreaking.

A tear slips down Lauren’s cheek. Then another.

She can't have this.

Lauren opens a drawer and lays the frame inside. She looks down at it for a long beat. Then she firmly shuts it away.

ELLEN
You sure you’re ready to be back? I can talk to--

LAUREN
No! I... I need to be here. I just... I need to work.

Ellen nods. She gets it. Paints on an affectionate scowl--

ELLEN
Then you best stop dawdling and get started, hadn't you?

LAUREN
(grateful)
Dawdle? Me? Never.

Ellen heads for the door, then turns back.

ELLEN
You have plans tonight?

LAUREN
Other than avoiding my mother-in-law? No, not especially.

ELLEN
Good. Be ready at 5:30. We're taking a little field trip. There's someone I want you to meet.

And with that mysterious declaration, she sweeps out.

Instead of digging into the mess that's taken over her office, Lauren pulls Teddy's picture from her bag and unfolds it, smoothing it on her desk. Stares down at it, intrigued.

OFF the child's sketch...

INT. MAX'S TOWNHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We're close on a photograph. It's old. Worn around the edges with much handling. But...

IT'S DEFINITELY THE SAME AIRCRAFT TEDDY DREW. A V winged monster with enormous, cylindrical engines. Bright and menacing, even through the faded, cracking sepia.

From now on, we'll just call it... THE SHIP.

The photograph is one of a half a dozen pictures sprawled across the chest of MAX HARTMAN (40's).

Max is passed out on his couch. He's dressed in yesterday's shirt and tie. A mostly empty bottle of rye sits on the coffee table beside him.

He's the kind of man you want to like, even when he's stone drunk. He just has one of those faces.

As Max snores, we study the pictures:

The ship. And the churned up crater around it. The soil beneath it, bleached white by heat. Tree roots, thrust skyward from trees that have been BLOWN out of the ground.

The phone rings.

Max startles awake, reflexively swinging a LUGER PISTOL up, aiming it at the front door.

Whoa. Passed out drunk AND armed? Who is this guy?

The phone rings again and Max realizes what woke him. Lowers his gun. Checks his watch.

MAX
Oh, hell.

Max scrambles for the phone.

MAX (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hartman here.
(listens)
No. I'll be there in twenty minutes.

He hangs up. Gathers his wits. Checks his watch again, swears. Sniffs himself. It'll have to do.

He sweeps up the scattered pictures, moving fast... until he hits the last photograph.

This one is not like the others. It shows a much younger Max, grinning down at a beautiful woman and a little girl. A man with his whole world in his arms.

The picture brings a complex smile to Max's face. Love, mixed in equal measure with sadness and guilt.

MAX (CONT'D)
(whispered)
My sweet Liesel.

But he's late. No time for sad memories.

Max puts the pictures in A SECRET COMPARTMENT built into one corner of his fireplace.

Then he grabs a bundle of AMERICAN DOLLARS from the mantel and puts it on top of the pictures. A bundle of BRITISH POUNDS comes next, and another of SWISS FRANCS.

Passports for four different countries, two boxes of BULLETS and the slim Luger pistol follow.

Whoever he is, he's ready to disappear at a moment's notice.

Max closes the secret compartment carefully, then grabs his briefcase and his fedora and dashes out the front door.

EXT. MAX'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It's an average, upper-middle-class D.C. neighborhood. Max tears down his front steps and hurries up the block on foot.

When he turns the corner, a familiar man slips out of the shadows. GEORGE HOWL.

He casually strolls up to Max's front door. Trying to look like he belongs there.

At the door, George pulls out a pair of LOCK PICKS and goes to work on the lock. It's tough going with his mangled right hand, but eventually...

The door swings open.

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - FILE ROOM - LATER

Lauren, arms piled precariously high with file folders, pushes through the half open door and straight into an exiting Sparks.

Files, everywhere.

SPARKS
Christ, you spooked me.

LAUREN
I spooked *you*?
(gestures to the floor)
Do you know how long those took to alphabetize?

She kneels to gather the wreckage. Sparks crouches to help.

Silence.

This is awkward as hell...

SPARKS
How are you?

LAUREN
Fine.

SPARKS
Oh. Good.

Silence again. It stretches out, smothering. Until--

LAUREN
You avoiding me all day helps, obviously.

SPARKS
(lying)
I have not been avoiding you.

LAUREN
It's almost lunch. Since when are you not in my office jawing about something or other at least three times before noon?

SPARKS
I just... I didn't know what to say. I didn't know whether you'd want me to say anything. Whether you'd want me...

LAUREN
Of course I want...

Suddenly, Lauren has no idea what she wants.

She stops sorting and looks up at him, at a loss. Finally--

LAUREN (CONT'D)
I want everything to be normal. Just for a little while. Please?

Sparks takes a deep breath. Normal. He can do that. Maybe.

SPARKS
(tentative)
So bereavement leave. Real morale booster, I take it?

LAUREN
Oh yeah, between Mrs. Peterson force feeding me potato salad and my mother-in-law weeping about how she'll never have grandchildren...
(watery laugh)
It's really too bad they can't bottle it and send it to the troops.

SPARKS
It sounds awful.

LAUREN
Yeah. It was.

A long, quiet moment. An old bond rebuilding itself. A true connection, perhaps more intense now than either remembers.

SPARKS
The big man is out of the office today, right?

LAUREN
Indefinitely, apparently. He's on a classified assignment.

SPARKS
In that case, how about I buy you dinner? I promise it won't be potato salad.

LAUREN
Ellen beat you to it. Rain check?

SPARKS
Deal. See you around, kid.

LAUREN
Not if I see you first.

They exchange a good natured eye roll and Sparks heads out.

Lauren gathers up her stack of files. Eyes a little brighter. One more piece of her world back in place.

But instead of putting the folders away, she abandons them on a work-counter and crosses to a filing cabinet on the other side of the room.

She pulls out a slim file and starts to read.

Soon she's engrossed. Work forgotten.

What could be so fascinating?

Then we see the file's label: MCNEIL, JOSEPH.

Lauren lingers over a school portrait of MARLEY MCNEIL.

Marley is about half way to being a stunner. At 15, her big dark eyes and curly black hair are still on the awkward side of striking, but she'll grow into them...

If she gets the chance to grow up.

Lauren sighs. Goes to close the folder... and then something on the page behind Marley's picture catches her eye.

A box labeled SPECIAL PROJECT CODE.

Stamped inside it, just one word: HORIZON

OFF Lauren's intent, puzzled face...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - WEST END - DUSK

Max rings the bell of a well kept brownstone.

A matronly woman in a beautiful Chanel suit and double strand of pearls opens the door. This is MRS. PIERCE.

MRS. PIERCE
Mr. Hartman! A pleasure, as always.

He smiles at her, a bit grim.

MAX
The pleasure is all mine, of course.

MRS. PIERCE
Come in, come in.

She ushers him inside.

INT. MRS. PIERCE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Tasteful and feminine. Stylish in an old money way.

MRS. PIERCE
Anna will be thrilled to see you, darling.

MAX
I hope so.

The hall widens ahead of them into --

INT. MRS. PIERCE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's delicate. Refined. Elegant.

The room is mostly populated with gorgeous women in lingerie. They're elegant too, but they're definitely whores.

MRS. PIERCE
I'll just find her.

MAX
Thank you, Mrs. Pierce.

Max settles into a chair and pretends he isn’t listening to the large, red faced gentleman on the sofa across from him.

INDISCRETE GENTLEMAN
We keep files on everyone you know. You should HEAR the hijinks that some very, very interesting names have been up to.

The plump whore he's chatting up giggles, impressed.

GIGGLER
Shock me, darling. I can take it.

Max’s casual eavesdropping is interrupted by a delicate white hand on his shoulder. It belongs to ANNA WEBER, 26.

Anna is the best possible combination of Veronica Lake, Grace Kelly and Sophia Loren.

LENA
Max. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you all day.

Max smiles up at her.

MAX
(not entirely true)
The feeling is mutual, my dear.

ANNA
Let’s leave Loose Lips here to tell Mata Hari what he knows, shall we?

Indiscreet heard that. He blushes fiercely. Glares in her direction but she's already leading Max away.

INT. MRS. PIERCE'S HOUSE - ANNA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Silk sheets. Blood red roses. Beautiful, but just a touch aggressive.

Anna closes and locks the door behind them. Then her body language changes. Back straight. Eyes sharp. All business, and not the business we thought she was in.

SHE SPEAKS TO HIM IN GERMAN.

ANNA
You’re late.

Max replies in the same language.

MAX
Replacing Esman has been time consuming. We needed the new man in place before the next submarine drop.

It’s all starting to make sense now...

The gun. The variety pack of passports and cash. The talking about submarines in German with mysterious prostitutes.

Max Hartman is a Nazi spy.

ANNA
I trust you have taken care of it?

MAX
Of course.
(switching to English)
Stop being coy, Anna. Why am I here?

ANNA
(in English)
There's been a sighting.

Max crosses to the small bar in the corner and pours a stiff drink. He slugs it back and pours another. Bracing himself.

MAX
I know. In Virginia. Fifteen miles outside the city.
(deeply bitter)
They took Joseph McNeil’s daughter, right in front of his eyes.

ANNA
(jaw dropped)
You knew that the Auslanders had returned? And you didn’t report it?

MAX
What was there to report? They took another girl and returned to the stars from which they came.

ANNA
And if they come back?

MAX
They didn’t come back last time.

ANNA
That was then. This is now. The Americans CANNOT be allowed to make contact before we establish--

MAX
I know. And the best way to achieve that, in this case, is to do **nothing.**

Max takes a deep breath, trying to ease his temper.

MAX (CONT’D)
The FBI is sure it’s a hoax and the local sheriff believes that McNeil killed the girl himself.

Max shakes his head, pity in his eyes.

Anna clocks it. She disapproves.

ANNA
Be that as it may, we'll need to erase the incident. Completely. The family will have to be eliminated.

MAX
That's unnecessary. Joseph McNeil will be forgotten, all on his own. Without me lifting a finger.

ANNA
The Gestapo disagree.

Max fights the urge to say something he'll regret. Finally--

MAX
There are days when I regret agreeing to this arrangement.

ANNA
As though you had a choice.

MAX
You are very young, Anna. Your view of Germany is... simplistic.

She stands and stalks across the room, going toe to toe with him. In her three inch heels, she can look him in the eye.

ANNA
There is nothing wrong with simplicity.
(beat)
I wouldn't like to think I was wrong when I told the Gestapo that you were loyal to the Reich.

MAX
I have been serving Germany longer than you have been alive. You actually presume to question my loyalty?

ANNA
Yes. I do.

Sparking tension.

Then Max cracks the moment with a wry smile.

MAX
Relax, Anna. I've been living with the Americans for a long time. Believe me, my faith in the superiority of the German people is quite secure.

He lifts his hat from the bar, places it back on his head and reaches for the door. As he pulls it open --

ANNA
If you don’t take care of the McNeil family, we will.

Max hesitates. Then steps out and closes the door behind him.

INT. MCNEIL HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

A lovely room, gone hollow with disuse. It’s so quiet in here that Joe and Teddy look like intruders perched at the table.

Teddy isn't even pretending to eat. Joe can't blame him. The mushy casserole in front of them is... mushy.

Guilt, doubt, annoyance, despair. All in Joe's face as he watches Teddy poke at his food.

The doorbell rings. Relieved, Joe jumps to his feet.

JOE
Finish your dinner.

INT. MCNEIL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe opens the door. EDWARD TYRELL, ESQ., 55, rumpled despite the nice suit, stands outside.

JOE
Ed. Have you heard something? The FBI--

ED
Hello to you too, Joe.

ED (CONT’D)
Nina made cookies.
(raising his voice)
Anyone in there that likes cookies?

In a flash, Teddy is standing between them. Ed grins. Hands him a large brown bag that is clearly full of cookies.

JOE
Theodore! I told you to finish your dinner.

Teddy looks up at his father. Solemn. He doesn't really have to say it, does he?

JOE (CONT’D)
Fine. You can have one now, but save the rest. We'll walk down to the diner after I talk to Ed.

ED
(with a wink to Teddy)
If you have two, he'll never know.

Joe rolls his eyes.

JOE
Maybe not, but if you spoil your dinner, I'll...
(fumbling for a threat)
I'll make you eat the leftover casserole for lunch tomorrow.

Teddy considers that. Nods.

TEDDY
One cookie. One cookie is good.

Ed laughs as Teddy and the cookies disappear into the house.

The moment he's gone--

JOE
What's going on, Ed?
(off Ed's silence)
Come on. You didn't burn a hole in your gas ration just to deliver cookies.

ED
The Petersons have filed a custody suit. They're using Sheriff Ford's investigation to prove you're unfit.

Joe fights the sudden impulse to vomit.

JOE
I'm not going to lose a second child because Ford lacks the imagination to look past the end of his nose. I'll--

ED
You shouldn't fight this.

Joe stares at him, thunderstruck.

ED (CONT'D)
I'm serious, Joe.

JOE
They're trying to take my kid, Ed.

ED
They are his grandparents.

JOE
And he's my son.

ED
Is he?

They're both shocked Ed said that out loud.

Joe twists to make sure Teddy isn't lurking. Shuts the door behind himself, just in case.

ED (CONT'D)
Cripes. I'm sorry, Joe. I...
(shakes his head)
No, actually I'm not sorry. It needed to be said. You and I both know that boy isn't yours.

JOE
We don't know that for sure.

ED
You were sure, the day you enlisted. That's why you went, after all.

Joe closes his eyes for a moment. Even the memory hurts.

ED (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Joe. But we both know you'd be better off without a child to worry about.

Joe stares out into the summer evening for a long beat. Thinking. Temptation gnawing at him. Finally --

JOE
That doesn't matter.

ED
It doesn't?

JOE
Teddy believes that I'm his father.

ED
I know he does, Joe. But maybe the boy deserves the truth.

JOE
I'm *not* going to tell Teddy he's the bastard of a married man who won't acknowledge his existence. I can't.

ED
That still doesn't make him your responsibility.

JOE
Yes, it does.

End of story.

Ed sighs. He's seen that look on Joe's face before.

ED
Okay you stubborn, honorable S.O.B. We'll fight. But you better pray for a miracle. We're gonna need it.

INT. MUNITIONS BUILDING - HALLWAY - EVENING

Lauren and Ellen walk down a long hallway that runs through the temporary structure. The sound of female voices and typewriters clacking echoes through the corrugated tin walls.

Ellen is in mid-cigarette and mid-story.

ELLEN
You should have seen his face. I did this --

She demonstrates a flirty wave.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
-- and I thought he was going to faint. Good Lord, I was there with a date. What was I going to do, run up and introduce myself to that blue nosed wife of his?

LAUREN
I wouldn't put it past you.

ELLEN
Neither would I.

That actually earns her a laugh. Lauren's first in a while.

LAUREN
Okay, enough stalling. What are we doing here?

Ellen throws her friend a sidelong glance. Takes a drag on her cigarette. Uncharacteristically hesitant.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
What is it, Ellen? Is something wrong?

Ellen stops, turns back to Lauren.

ELLEN
Remember that doctor I was seeing? The one who turned out to have three other girlfriends and a wife?

LAUREN
You aren't seeing him again, are you? Ellen, he's --

ELLEN
No, no. I am not THAT dizzy a dame.

She takes another drag.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
But I got to be pals with one of the girlfriends, Cherry Delaney.
(beat)
She works here, at the war department. If there's something to know about the Pacific theater... Cherry knows it.

Lauren jumps straight to the right conclusion.

LAUREN
Even...
(off Ellen's nod)
I thought George's file was marked top secret.

ELLEN
Cherry has Top Secret clearance.

Lauren sucks in a breath, suddenly shaky. Ellen clocks it.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Are you sure you want to hear this, Lauren? You don't have to, you know.

Lauren isn't sure. Not even a little bit. But...

LAUREN
I don't want to. I need to.

ELLEN
Then there's no time like the present.

INT. MUNITIONS BUILDING - TELEGRAPH ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lauren and Ellen step into a wide, low room. It's a sea of young women in bulky headphones, hammering at typewriters.

These GOVERNMENT GIRLS are young, single and smart... imagine the cast of GOSSIP GIRL with the fate of WWII literally at their fingertips and you've got the right idea.

A tiny redhead walks the room like a drill sergeant. This is CHERRY DELANEY. Ellen waves her over.

CHERRY DELANEY
Ellen! Doll!

ELLEN
Hello, dear.
(re: Lauren)
(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Remember that friend of mine who wanted to talk to you?

Cherry looks at Lauren. Shrugs.

CHERRY
Not here! Come on.

Lauren and Ellen follow Cherry to a door in the back of the room. They step into--

INT. MUNITIONS BUILDING - CHERRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It's quieter in here, but only just. Cherry extends a hand to Lauren for a firm shake.

CHERRY
Cherry Delaney. Lieutenant, WAC.

LAUREN
Lauren Howl. Secretary, FBI.

Cherry chuckles. Gives Lauren a once over. Her eyes are friendly, but they don't miss a thing.

CHERRY
(to Ellen)
Trustworthy?

ELLEN
Trust her with my life.

CHERRY
She's the one whose sweetie died at Tulagi, right?

ELLEN
Right. The files have been marked Top Secret and--

CHERRY
Of course they have. They don't want a soul to know about that plane.

LAUREN
Plane?

CHERRY
Some kind of new Jap bomber. Thus the hush hush. Gotta keep it quiet until we figure out what that thing can do.

Cherry grabs a pack of cigarettes. As she lights one--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
It's top priority. Already has it's own special project code and everything. Horizon.

Wait. WHAT? Did she just say...

LAUREN
Horizon?

CHERRY
Yeah. Odd one, huh?

LAUREN
Do you know what it looks like? The bomber, I mean.

CHERRY
Sure. The survivors said it had V shaped wings, like a knife. And it's bigger than a B-17. Huge engines.

LAUREN
Propellers?

CHERRY
No. Big tubes, stuck to the back.
(shakes her head)
The way they described it... sounded like something H.G. Wells made up.

Sound familiar? Lauren thinks so too.

She drags a piece of folded paper from her bag. TEDDY MCNEIL'S DRAWING. She unfolds it and holds it up.

LAUREN
Something like this?

Ellen and Cherry stare at the sketch, jaw dropped.

CHERRY
Where the devil did you get that?

LAUREN
There's a man, Joseph McNeil. He claims a huge plane landed in the woods behind his house in Virginia last week and took his daughter.
(beat)
His son drew this. From memory.

ELLEN
Isn't McNeil the one who thinks Martians took his kid?

LAUREN
So? Look at the picture! McNeil might think it's a space ship, but it's the same plane that killed George.

CHERRY
Seems like a stretch.

LAUREN
Yeah, it would be. If the McNeil file didn't have a special project code.

ELLEN
(catching on)
No way.

LAUREN
Yes. The McNeil file is coded HORIZON.

CHERRY
But... if that's the same plane that killed those boys in the Pacific--

ELLEN
-- that means the Axis are slipping past our borders and nobody knows.

LAUREN
Somebody knows. Somebody assigned that code. And I'm going to find out who.

CHERRY
How? It could be FBI, Department of Defense, Army, Navy--

ELLEN
There are an awful lot of rocks to turn over, kiddo.

Lauren stares down at the picture, brain running hot...

LAUREN
No, there aren't. The McNeil file didn't get past our office. Harris barely investigated it, for pity sake. That means --

ELLEN
The code is FBI.

Lauren stuffs Teddy's picture back in her purse.

LAUREN
All I have to do is find out which agent tagged the McNeil file. Whoever it is, he'll know what Horizon means.

She reaches for the door. Ellen gets in her way.

ELLEN
You can't tell ANYONE what you heard here. You know that right? Not even Sparks. Sharing classified material --

LAUREN
-- is treason. I know. But there's got to be another way to make them put it together. I just have to find it.

With that she ducks around Ellen and dashes off.

ELLEN
(calling after her)
Don't do anything stupid!
(to herself)
Who am I kidding? It's Lauren. She's going to do something stupid.

And Ellen’s grin says she can't wait to see what it is.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAWN

Max sits on the steps at Lincoln's feet, contemplating his Luger pistol. His mind is a million miles away.

ANNA (O.S.)
Max.

Max whirls to his feet, hiding the gun reflexively before he recognizes the voice.

Anna is barely recognizable under her lumpy raincoat and ugly shoes... But we'd know those green eyes anywhere.

Max smiles at her. Wry and sad. She doesn't smile back.

MAX
Did I ever tell you why I come here?

ANNA
Max, you need to--

MAX
Liesel started it. She always wanted to come here. I asked her why, once.

He looks up at Lincoln.

MAX (CONT'D)
She said he was honest, and he always seemed to know what to do when he was in a spot. So if you had a question... he was a good person to ask.
(he laughs, bleak)
Logical girl, was my Liesel.

Now that his back is turned, sympathy... and something deeper, shines in Anna's eyes.

ANNA
Does he answer your questions?

MAX
No. Never.

After a long, quiet beat, he turns back to her.

MAX (CONT'D)
I know why you're here, and--

ANNA
You have to kill McNeil, Max. If you don't... I can't cover for you with the Gestapo. Not after the last time.

MAX
I know, Anna. You're a good partner. A good friend.

ANNA
And good friends tell you when you've gone astray.

MAX
Is that what I've done?

ANNA
I know you feel for this man... it's only natural, given your history.
(firm)
But the McNeil family has to die. The future of Germany depends on it.

Max stares up at Lincoln... gun still clutched in his hand.

MAX
I know.

Anna gives in to her feelings and reaches out to rest a gentle hand on his shoulder. Comforting.

Max doesn't even acknowledge the touch.

Stung, she turns and walks away.

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - CONTINUOUS

Anna strides past a familiar figure in a parked car, smoking and reading a newspaper. Except he's not actually reading...

INT. SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

From behind his paper, GEORGE HOWL watches Anna go. He doesn't move to follow her. He's waiting for...

Max strides up the path, every muscle tense with purpose. He jumps into a nondescript black Ford and roars away.

As soon as Max turns the corner, George puts his idling car in gear and follows him.

INT. MCNEIL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joe stands at the window. He's watching Teddy, who sits on the porch steps outside, drawing in the summer sunshine.

There are only a few feet between them, but the distance feels like miles.

Joe is about to turn away when a SHERIFF'S CAR pulls into the driveway. A YOUNG DEPUTY gets out.

Joe hurries to the door.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - DRIVE WAY - CONTINUOUS

Teddy looks up as Joe steps out. Notices the sheriff's car. He looks up at his dad, eyes wide.

JOE
Go inside, Ted.

Teddy doesn't move. Joe doesn't have time to scold him.

YOUNG DEPUTY
Mr. McNeil?

JOE
It's Joe, Harry. You've known me since you were Teddy's age.

The young deputy, Harry, doesn't get any friendlier.

HARRY
Sheriff Ford needs to ask you a few more questions, *Mr.* McNeil.

JOE
We'll have to bring my son, I've got no one to watch him.

HARRY
(zero sympathy)
We can do that.

Joe sighs. It's going to be a long day.

JOE
Fine. I'll answer Ford's questions. Again. I just wish somebody would believe the answers. Just once.

We cut from Joe's miserable face to...

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - HALLWAY - LATER

Lauren Howl - just the girl Joe is wishing for... if she ever gets the chance to ask the questions.

Sparks is trying to out pace Lauren as they clip down the hall. It's not working.

SPARKS
No. Absolutely not.

LAUREN
Why not? I'm trying to help you here, Sparks. The McNeil case could be huge.

SPARKS
Or it could make me into a huge yuck.

LAUREN
The thing practically landed on top of the White House.

SPARKS
True. If the White House was in the woods. In Virginia. In the drunken fantasies of some hick.

LAUREN
(ignoring him)
Obviously it's not a spaceship. But it COULD have been an, um...

Vague. Must be vague. But not too vague...

LAUREN (CONT'D)
...Axis spy plane. On American soil. If you bring THAT in, you could write your ticket.

That hits its mark. Sparks considers. Maybe... Nah.

SPARKS
It's a hoax, Lauren.

LAUREN
SOMETHING took that girl.

They stop in front of the SAC's office.

SPARKS
Nothing snatched that girl. She ran away, or her father killed her.
(hesitates)
Look, I know things are bad right now--

LAUREN
Don't.

The fragile edges of her recovery are abruptly visible.

He nods. Fighting the impulse to pull her close and hold her until the brittleness fades.

Instead, he course corrects away from the sore spot.

SPARKS
Don't you have something better to do than bully me into wild goose chases?

LAUREN
(relieved)
I do not "bully" you. I encourage.

SPARKS
Sure.

LAUREN
You got promoted over a case I "bullied" you into. Are you really telling me you'd rather I just file these things away?

SPARKS
Filing IS your job, Sunshine.

LAUREN
I didn't say it wasn't, Sparkles.

SPARKS/LAUREN
DON'T CALL ME SPARKLES.

She laughs. Sparks glares. It's a good thing he would never hit a girl.

Lauren pushes her door open. Turns back for one last try.

LAUREN
Sparks, I really think--

SPARKS
I know you do. And I know you need... something, right now. But chasing Joe McNeil's Martians isn't it.

In a moment of daring he reaches out and takes her hand.

SPARKS (CONT'D)
If you really want to see a spaceship that badly, I'll take you to the movies. I'll even spring for popcorn.

She stares down at their entwined fingers, finally catching on to his feelings.

She's overwhelmed. Confused. Not ready for this.

And being Lauren, she can't hide a second of it from him.

Sparks drops her hand. Covering for the sting of rejection, his tone is sharper than he means it to be.

SPARKS (CONT'D)
This case is a bad apple. Let it rot.

He pushes past her down the hall. Lauren starts to call after him, then stops. What would she say?

OFF her frustrated face....

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - LAUREN'S OFFICE - LATER

Lauren tries to focus on her typing. It's not working.

She opens the drawer she banished George's picture to. Looks her dead husband in the eye. Guilt washes over her.

LAUREN
There's nothing you can do about it, Lauren.

She firmly closes the drawer. Starts typing again.

But we linger as she clatters away. Waiting. Because any second now...

Lauren stops typing, shoves herself back from her desk and half runs for the door. Bursting out, into the--

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - BULL PEN - CONTINUOUS

Lauren darts through the usual chaos, heading for the--

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - FILE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lauren slams the door behind her and bee-lines for a particular filing cabinet. She yanks out a familiar, slim folder. THE MCNEIL FILE.

Lauren flips it open to the last page. To the Special Project Code box... to that one, mysterious word: HORIZON

OFF Lauren as she stares down at it... and idea brewing.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

Joe limps through the sun-dappled woods.

The shifting shadows make it impossible to not feel like something is moving, just in the corner of your eye...

Or is there someone actually there? Following Joe?

Every few feet Joe stops and calls --

JOE
MARLEY?! MARLEY? MAR-LEY!?

Then moves on. Repeats the process.

JOE (CONT'D)
MAR-LEY. MARLENE?

He pushes through a stand of high brush.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come on. Please.
(quiet now)
Please, come back.

Silence is the only answer to his plea.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to himself)
What did you expect, McNeil? She's not here. She's gone.

A rustle of movement, somewhere in the brush behind him.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hello??

He knows it's wishful thinking but --

JOE (CONT'D)
Marley is that you?

No response.

Then... SNAP. Twigs, crackling under shifting feet. There's definitely someone back there.

JOE (CONT'D)
Show yourself!

Suddenly impatient, Joe snatches up a stick. Prods the brush.

TEDDY
OW!

JOE
Teddy?

Joe leans in and fishes Teddy out of the bushes.

JOE (CONT'D)
What are you doing out here, Teddy?

Teddy stays mute. Terror or defiance, we can't tell.

JOE (CONT'D)
Answer me, young man.

TEDDY
(in a rush)
I'm helping.

Joe kneels awkwardly in front of the little boy, maneuvering his stiff right leg.

JOE
Helping?

Teddy takes a deep breath.

TEDDY
Find Marley. Helping find Marley.

Oh. Oh my. Heart bursting and breaking at the same time...

JOE
Thanks. I could use a little help.

TEDDY
Yeah. You could.

Joe can’t help but chuckle. His despair broken by Teddy’s childish frankness.

JOE
I’m hungry. What do you say we go in and you help me make dinner instead?

Teddy considers this possibility. Then he holds his small hand out to Joe. Joe takes it. Leaning into the support to get up.

As we watch them walk back towards the house, we realize we're not alone out here.

MAX steps out from a cluster of trees.

He's been watching them too.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - WOODS - SHIP'S CLEARING - LATER

Max stands in the center of the crater.

Above him, tangled roots thrust skyward from trees that have been blown out of the ground.

Under his feet, the dirt has been bleached white by a fire so hot it’s turned the earth to ash...

It looks just like Max’s pictures.

He takes it all in. Awe-struck. Angry. Shaken to the bone.

But he has a job to do. He slips on black leather gloves. Then pulls his Luger from his pocket.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - BACK YARD - SECONDS LATER

Max closes on the back of the house, elegant pistol hanging loose in his hand.

He takes the steps two at a time. Silent. Slips across the porch to the door. Stops. Braces himself to go in firing.

Then a sharp knock breaks the late afternoon stillness.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - DRIVE WAY - MOMENTS LATER

Max weaves around the side of the house, ducking past windows to peer up at the front porch, where he sees --

Lauren. Standing alone at the door.

She's nervous, but determined... and she has no idea she just stepped into a Nazi spy's cross-hairs.

Max curses silently, as Joe opens the door.

Joe doesn't recognizing her--

JOE
Can I help you?

Lauren freezes up. Deer in the headlights. This seemed like a better idea, back in her office.

JOE (CONT'D)
Sorry, honey. If you're selling something--

LAUREN
I'm not selling anything! I, um... I work for the FBI and I had a few questions and--

JOE
You work for the FBI?

LAUREN
Yes. I do. I--

Joe shakes his head, exhaustion and humiliation flashing over into anger.

JOE
WEEKS of begging you people for help and they send what, a secretary?

LAUREN
Well, they didn't **send** me... per se.

Joe slams the door in her face.

Max breathes a sigh of relief. Surely now she'll leave and he can go about his murderous business.

Sorry, Max. No such luck. Lauren knocks again.

Joe throws the door open, eyes flashing.

JOE
Listen, sister. You may think it’s a good laugh to “investigate” the crazy fellow who saw spacemen, but this is my **life.**

LAUREN
I know, Mr. McNeil. And I won’t bother you again. I swear. I just needed to say... I'm sorry I disturbed you, but I needed to tell you...

Joe blows out an exasperated sigh, temper cooling. He's almost starting to feel sorry for her.

JOE
Just spit it out, kid.

LAUREN
It's real. The plane that took your daughter. I know it’s real.

That gets his attention.

She keeps talking, voice a little stronger now.

LAUREN (CONT’D)
And I'm going to figure out what it is. I thought you’d want to know.
(beat)
That’s all.

She turns and clips down the drive towards her car.

Joe goes to close the door, but he can’t bring himself to do it. Instead, he calls after her...

JOE
Why are you doing this?

LAUREN
Because they took someone I love too.

That was the last thing Joe, or Max, expected to hear.

A long, silent beat.

Lauren gives up, heads for her car again.

Max tenses, ready to move the moment she’s gone.

But then --

JOE
Do you want to see it?

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - WOODS - LATER

Max follows Lauren and Joe. Ghosting through the trees behind them, deadly and silent. And FURIOUS.

For some reason, the idea of adding a third innocent life to his tab seems nearly unbearable... but his gun is still out.

No matter how much he hates it, Max Hartman has a job to do.

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - WOODS - SHIP'S CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Up ahead of Max...

Lauren and Joe stop at the edge of the violently churned up clearing left behind by the ship.

Lauren is speechless. Fascinated. But not afraid.

Joe watches her, intrigued.

JOE
So, Mrs... a... Howl, right? Where did your husband die? Europe?

LAUREN
Call me Lauren.
(beat)
George died in the Pacific.
(beat)
How did you--

JOE
Black dress. Ring. Reckless attitude.

LAUREN
How do you know I have a reckless attitude?

JOE
You're here.

Suddenly, Lauren finds herself fighting tears.

LAUREN
Observant.

JOE
Army Rangers tend to be. Or they tend to be dead. One, or the other.

LAUREN
George was a Marine.

And then, because it’s the kind of thing you can only tell a stranger...

LAUREN (CONT’D)
Lately, it’d gotten so I couldn’t even remember why I missed him. And then, out of the blue, he’s dead and I...

She doesn’t have to finish the sentence. Joe’s complete understanding is palpable.

CRACK. A noise somewhere behind them.

JOE
Teddy? Is that you?
(to Lauren)
My son. He's five. Sometimes when I come out looking for Marley he --

Another flat, coughing crack. This time, Joe recognizes the sound.

He shoves Lauren to the ground.

LAUREN
What --

JOE
That was a gunshot.

LAUREN
Are you sure?

COUGH. Another one. So close it nicks through Joe's sleeve. Drawing blood.

Lauren drags him down beside her.

LAUREN (CONT’D)
Jesus H. Christ, do you want to get shot twice? Get down.

He shakes his head, pure determination in his eyes.

JOE
Stay. Here.

He slips away, staying low and moving fast despite his bad right leg. Injured or not, we suddenly get the feeling Joe isn't the kind of guy you should mess around with.

ON MAX

Max sights along the barrel of his gun. Swings left. Then right. Eyes searching for...

There. A flash of blue plaid through the trees. Joe.

Max follows. No hesitation now. Max isn't one to be trifled with either.

ON JOE

Joe limps through the woods, cursing steadily under his breath. Where the fuck is this guy?

Another shot wings just a breath from Joe's ear. He ducks. Waits for another bullet that never comes.

Defiant, he straightens up. Scanning for the shooter.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come out here, face me like a man you coward.

Max steps out from the trees behind Joe and swings a vicious kick to Joe's bad leg...

WHICH BREAKS OFF.

The wooden prosthetic rolls away as Joe goes sprawling.

Max plants a foot on Joe's back, keeping him pinned, and levels his pistol. Finger tightening on the trigger. Regret already swelling in his eyes.

VRMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

A blast of heavy air sends Max flying backwards.

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Joe drags himself painfully towards his wooden leg. Fighting for every inch. Hurting bad. He won't make it on his own.

VRRRRRRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Lauren bursts through the trees. Clocks the prosthetic. She's surprised, but she doesn't stop moving. She snatches it up and runs to him.

JOE (CONT'D)
I told you to stay put!

LAUREN
What have you learned about me today that makes you think I follow directions?

VRRUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Joe shoves his leg back into place and staggers to his feet.

He's not even close to steady, so Lauren drags him backwards. They stumble out of the way just as --

VRRRRRRRRUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

With a snap, the SHIP is above them. Descending from the clear dusk sky to settle in its churned out hollow.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Holy. Mary. Mother. Of God.

It crouches before them like a space age bird of prey. Silver in the dying evening light. V-winged. HUGE. It's nose juts a good eight feet over Joe's head.

In person, we can tell - this is no Japanese bomber. This is a U.F.O. As in from space.

JOE
It's a plane. Right?
(convincing himself)
It... it's a plane.

LAUREN
Doesn't look like a plane.

She's right. It doesn't. It looks like a fucking spaceship.

JOE
I knew it.

As Joe and Lauren stare at the SHIP, we jump to:

MAX.

Lying on his back. His eyes pop open. He lifts his head and sees... THE SHIP

Max Hartman's very own white whale. Finally in his sights.

Abandoning his gun in the grass, Max rolls to his feet and walks towards it. Mesmerized.

As he gets closer, he can see that the ship is surrounded by a translucent SHIELD. Like it's sitting in a massive bubble of rippling water.

Max reaches out to it, slowly.

Light bursts through his fingers when his hand comes into contact with the throbbing shield.

His palm glows white in the evening shadows.

Max doesn't realize he's not alone until he feels the cold edge of a very sharp knife, pressed against his throat.

We pull back to find:

GEORGE HOWL standing behind Max, his mangled right hand closed like a two fingered vise on Max's shoulder. His knife pressing into Max’s throat.

Max stays calm. Speaks to the attacker he can’t see.

MAX
What do you want from me?

George says nothing.

Max tries again, this time in German.

MAX (CONT’D)
Was wollen sie?

George doesn’t answer, he just presses the blade into Max’s throat. Blood wells.

Max closes his eyes. Prepared to die.

George tenses. Wishing he was ready to kill.

GEORGE
They would use you to destroy us. I’m sorry, but I can’t allow that.

Just when we’re expecting George to slit his throat....

CRACK. The heavy wooden handle of the knife connects with Max's skull. He crumples to the ground.

ON LAUREN

Joe leans on her shoulder for support. The ship looms over them, blocking George and Max from view.

JOE
It's real. It's actually real.

LAUREN
You weren't sure, were you?

JOE
I thought I was losing my mind.

He slants a quick glance down at Lauren. Surprised he said that out loud to this near stranger.

He shakes it off. Turns his eyes back to the ship.

JOE (CONT’D)
But now it’s back. All I have to do is figure out how to get inside.

A flash of movement through the shield.

JOE (CONT'D)
Marley!?

He cranes his neck, trying to get a clear view of the blurry figure standing on the other side of the wavering shield.

ON GEORGE

-- who's staring back.

From this angle, Joe and Lauren are just as blurry and anonymous as George was to them.

His eyes linger on the smaller form. Lauren.

He looks at her like a man in the desert, staring at a mirage he can't help but pray is real, even though he knows better.

We can hear Lauren and Joe from here:

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
MARLEY!?

LAUREN (O.S.)
That's too big to be Marley... Joe, I think we should get out of here.

JOE (O.S.)
No. I'm not letting this thing out of my sight until I get her back.

GROAN. Max is coming around.

George tears his eyes from Lauren. Looks up at the ship.

As though it can hear him--

GEORGE
You may have followed us to this distant sun, but you will never leave. I promise you that.

Then he hoists Max's limp form and strides away.

ON LAUREN AND JOE

The figure beyond the shield fades into the growing darkness.

JOE
HEY! COME BACK HERE.

He starts for the ship again, but Lauren digs in her heels.

LAUREN
Wait! Joe! We have no clue what that thing can do--

JOE
I'm going to find out.

LAUREN
You can barely walk.

JOE
I can't just stand here, I have to--

Then his sentence snaps like a twig. Because...

The ship is UNFOLDING. The sharp lines of its undercarriage unfurling like an origami flower, bursting into bloom around a perfect circle of white light.

A familiar outline steps into the brilliant white circle. She's still in silhouette, but that's definitely...

JOE (CONT'D)
MARLEY!

Joe pushes away from Lauren and stumbles to the edge of the shield bubble.

JOE (CONT'D)
Marley! I'm here! I won't let them hurt you.

LAUREN
Are you sure that's her? I can't see--

JOE
(with total conviction)
That's Marley.

Abruptly, a ripple runs through the shield, like the aftermath a pebble skipping across a lake.

LAUREN
What was that?

As though in answer to her question...

VRUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

JOE
No! NO! YOU CAN'T TAKE HER!

The ship isn't listening.

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

LAUREN
Does that mean... is this thing taking off? Joe, we should --

Joe flings himself at the shield. He gives it everything he has, which, in this condition, isn’t enough.

The shield sends him FLYING in a flash of white light.

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Joe moans in pain... but that doesn’t stop him. He struggles to a seated position, drags his prosthetic straight...

LAUREN (CONT’D)
Joe! Stop! You’ll hurt yourself!

Joe ignores her, keeps fighting to get to his feet.

But he's not going to make it. Not in time.

BECAUSE THE SHIP IS FOLDING IN ON ITSELF. Pulling Marley deep into it's metallic embrace.

Lauren looks from Joe to the quickly disappearing girl. Makes a decision.

She darts up the steep slope of the crater.

Crests the top...

And THROWS herself downhill. Hurtling towards the shield.

When she hits it--

THE SCREEN FLARES TO WHITE.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

EXT. MCNEIL HOUSE - WOODS - SHIP CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Joe is outlined by the fiercely glowing bubble of white light that used to be the ship.

Lauren is GONE.

JOE
Marley?! Mrs. Howl?! LAUREN!

Nothing.

Then...

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

JOE (CONT'D)
NOOOOOO!!!!

Joe claws his way upright. Stumbling toward the ship. But he only makes it a few feet before --

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

A ripple of air slaps through the trees, knocking him flat.

Joe twists, struggling to find his feet again. Desperate.

VRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Another blast of air sends him FLYING into an upended tree's tangle of roots.

Joe sits up, dazed, and finds that...

THE SHIP IS GONE.

JOE (CONT'D)
(whispered)
Marley... no...

LAUREN (O.S.)
Mr. McNeil!

Joe's head snaps in the direction of her voice. Lauren staggers into view... a familiar teenage girl with a long tangle of black hair clutched against her.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Look who I found.

Yup. That's definitely MARLEY MCNEIL.

Nobody moves for a beat, then Marley hurls herself into her father’s arms. Burrows close.

MARLEY
Daddy? Where have you been?

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - LAUREN'S OFFICE - EVENING

ONE WEEK LATER

The office is clean. Orderly. The picture of George is back in place on Lauren's desk. Business as usual reestablished, except for the small bouquet of flowers beside the photo.

Sparks sprawls in the guest chair.

Lauren pointedly ignores him. Types at light speed, eyes on the steno pad full of short hand she's transcribing.

SPARKS
You're really just going to leave me in suspense?

Yup. Definitely.

SPARKS (CONT’D)
That girl just reappears from thin air, and you didn’t see a thing?

Lauren finishes her page with a flourish. Yanks it free.

LAUREN
She didn’t reappear from thin air.

SPARKS
Then what happened?

LAUREN
Read the report.

SPARKS
The report is all wet and you know it.

,LAUREN
Yes I do. But you called the case a waste of time, so I'm not going to waste any more of your time jawing about it.

SPARKS
Lauren.

LAUREN
Sparks.

The spike of fire is there. She can’t pretend not to see it anymore. If only she had a clue what to do about it.

ELLEN (O.S.)
Aren’t you two just a picture.

Ellen saunters in, breaking the moment.

SPARKS
What? No. We, ah... we were just discussing the McNeil case.

LAUREN
If you want to call Sparks begging me for details, "discussing."

SPARKS
I was not begging.

ELLEN
Poor thing. You didn't get to see the pretty spaceship and now you're pouting.
(artfully casual)
Of course, if I was you, I'd be more curious about the flowers than the Martians.

Sparks' eyes shoot to the bouquet. Suddenly aware of the possibility that --

SPARKS
Are they from him? From McNeil?

LAUREN
No. That would be totally inappropriate.

ELLEN
They're from the kids. Aren’t they lovely?

She shoots Sparks an arch look that couldn't be clearer. *If you want her, better go get her. Now.*

Before Sparks can figure out how to answer that challenge, a voice from behind him:

MAX (O.S.)
Yes, Ellen, they are quite lovely. Who sent them to you, my dear?

Sparks snaps out of the chair as...

MAX HARTMAN steps into the room and crosses to the door behind Lauren’s desk.

When he pulls it open, we finally see the words that are stenciled on the door’s pebbled glass window:

SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE: MAX HARTMAN

Holy. Christ.

Max Hartman the Nazi spy...

Is also a SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE at the FBI.

MAX HARTMAN is Lauren’s boss.

LAUREN
Oh, hello sir. They’re from a family I helped out--

Then she notices that Max is in a bad way. He’s bruised. Limping. Suit and shirt a dead loss.

LAUREN (CONT’D)
Are you all right? We haven’t heard from you in more than a week and now--

Max gives her an affectionate, exhausted smile.

MAX
(lying convincingly)
Don’t fuss, I’m fine. The assignment went longer than expected, that’s all. I am sorry I couldn't contact you.

Ellen, Sparks and Lauren exchange a concerned glance.

ELLEN
Maybe we should--

SPARKS
--go. Yes. We should.

Max waves them off.

MAX
No need to run off on my account. I'm sure you young people have plans.

LAUREN
I can stay. If you need me.

MAX
No, no. Go! Enjoy your evening. I will see you in the morning.

He moves into his office, letting the door swing not-quite closed behind him.

ELLEN
(to Lauren)
Come on. We’re gonna be late.

LAUREN
I don't know... the boss man looked pretty beat up, maybe I should stay.

SPARKS
He'll be fine. You just want to tell him all about Joe McNeil's Martians.

Lauren looks up at Max's nearly closed door. Ellen isn't wrong... but then she shakes her head.

LAUREN
Joe doesn't want the FBI involved.

SPARKS
I knew it! I knew something happened out there.

With a pointed look at Sparks, Ellen ignores his outburst.

ELLEN
(to Lauren)
So we're calling him Joe now?

LAUREN
He saved my life, I saved his kid. I think first names are called for.

SPARKS
Okay, will someone PLEASE put me out of my misery and tell me what happened to Marley McNeil?

LAUREN
No.

Lauren pulls the dust cover over her typewriter and slips into her coat.

As she packs up, we drift into--

INT. DOJ HEADQUARTERS - FBI - MAX'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where Max Hartman sits in his desk chair, listening to his secretary and her friends gossip about the case his Nazi superiors ordered him to bury.

The family he was meant to kill.

The look on his face is beyond complicated.

SPARKS (O.S.)
I'll buy you a drink.

ELLEN (O.S.)
You'll buy both of us a drink. And dinner.

As their banter fades up the hall, Max reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a WAR DEPARTMENT FILE.

The label reads: GEORGE HOWL, DECEASED.

Max puts the file on his desk.

He stares down at it for a long beat. Then he flips the file open and begins to read.

INT. MARLEY'S HIGH SCHOOL - HISTORY CLASS - THE NEXT MORNING

The teacher's monotone buzzes in the background. Something about the Roman Empire.

Marley isn't paying attention. Her eyes, and her mind, are somewhere beyond the big picture windows.

Is she daydreaming?

No. She's focused. Staring at something just outside.

Or someone.

We pull back, following her gaze through the glass --

EXT. MARLEY'S HIGH SCHOOL - YARD - CONTINUOUS

George Howl stands under a tree, watching Marley through the window. Smoking with his ruined right hand.

But there's something different about it today. When last we saw George, his hand was an angry mass of red scar tissue that supported only two fingers.

Now it's pink. Clean. AND IT HAS THREE FINGERS.

The middle finger is still a bit formless and stubby, lacking a finger nail. But it's definitely GROWING BACK.

Off George... eyes locked with Marley McNeil's.

FADE OUT