

I MADE A PROMISE

"The Wrong Planet"
Act One

Written by
[First Draft]

FADE IN:

EXT. BELLINGHAM - WHATCOM CREEK - DAY

Summer. Late afternoon light through evergreens. The particular green of the Pacific Northwest -- not bright, not dark, alive.

A GIRL, maybe nine, is crouched at the water's edge, mud on her knees, energy radiating off her like heat. This is MARY.

She's scanning the creek methodically, urgently, like she's looking for something specific. Behind her, up the bank, we can hear KIDS PLAYING -- laughter, shouting, the sounds of a birthday party in a backyard. Streamers visible through the trees. Mary heard this ten minutes ago and came here instead.

Her hand STRIKES into the water. SPLASH. She sits up, triumphant, holding a crayfish by the tail. It's huge. She grins -- wild, for herself -- and drops it into the mason jar she's been carrying.

She's not studying it. She's already planning.

IZZY (O.S.)

Mary! They're doing cake!

IZZY (7) appears at the top of the bank. Shorter, softer, watching her older sister the way you watch someone you're trying to learn from.

MARY

Look at this. I'm gonna build it a habitat. We can get a tank and gravel and like, plants, and --

Izzy scrambles down, looks.

IZZY

It's gross.

MARY

It's not gross. And you can help. You could like, design the plants or something. We could make it

really cool. Come on.

IZZY

Mom says come do cake.

Mary looks at the jar. She's already thinking three steps ahead.

MARY

Go get Mom's good glass bowls from the kitchen. The clear ones. Don't tell her. And bring rope or like, string or whatever. Fast.

IZZY

Mary, Mom says cake --

MARY

I don't care about cake. This is important. Go!

She pushes Izzy up the bank. She's not being mean. She's just -- already gone, already building. The crayfish is not a specimen to study. It's a problem to solve.

Mary holds the jar up to the light, turning it, already seeing the structure. She climbs the bank toward the party, but she's not going for cake.

EXT. BACKYARD - BIRTHDAY PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Streamers, a folding table, a sheet cake. A dozen kids, mostly girls, bunched around the table. Mary's MOM (late 30s, warm, capable) is lighting candles. Mary's DAD stands slightly back, holding a camera.

Mary appears at the group, moving fast. She's got something. Purpose. She grabs the birthday girl's arm.

MARY

Hey, we should go to the creek after cake. Come on. I found something we can build. You guys want to come?

The birthday girl looks confused.

BIRTHDAY GIRL

Um, but the cake --

MARY

We'll do cake fast. Come on, it's gonna be cool. Anyone else? We need people. Like, everybody, let's go to the creek!

A couple of girls perk up. Two look uncertain. Mary's radiating certainty and energy like she usually does -- like anything she says is obviously the right plan.

The candles get blown out. Mary's already talking about what they need to bring. A glass bowl, string, rocks for the bottom. She's recruiting, delegating, leading by sheer force of her own momentum.

Four kids follow her toward the creek when they're done eating. Three hang back, uncertain. Mary doesn't notice or doesn't care. She's already moved on to the next thing.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is a workshop. Not messy -- organized chaos. A sewing machine on a desk, fabric pinned to a mannequin form. Drawings tacked to every wall -- animals, mostly, rendered with real skill. A guitar leaning in the corner. A shelf of rocks, sorted by type. Fishing lures in progress. A snake terrarium.

Mary is at her desk, sketching designs for the habitat. Multiple versions. She's muttering to herself -- thinking out loud, the way she does when she's building something. This is how her brain works.

A knock. Her mom opens the door.

MOM

Hey. You had fun today?

MARY

Yeah. Listen, I need to figure out filtration for the crayfish tank. Like, how to keep the water clean without disrupting it, right? Because I can use a pump but it

might be too strong and stress the
crayfish out --

MOM

Sweetie, it's late.

MARY

But I'm trying to plan it. Can we
go to the aquarium store tomorrow?
I need to see what they have.

Mom sits on the edge of the bed.

MOM

You really committed to this
habitat idea.

MARY

Well, yeah. He can't just live in a
jar. That's stupid.

Mom smiles.

MOM

Okay. We'll go tomorrow.

MARY

Really?

MOM

Really. But sleep now. Big day of
building.

Mary nods and kisses her mom goodnight. She's already
thinking about the store, the supplies, the ten steps ahead
of this moment. Mom leaves. Mary is awake, energized,
planning the habitat the way another kid might be thinking
about a dream.

MONTAGE - MARY'S WORLD - VARIOUS

Quick cuts, not rushed. Each image held long enough to feel
it:

Mary on the soccer field, faster than anyone, the ball an
extension of her feet. She scores. Her teammates cheer. She
jogs back, already done with the moment.

Mary at a creek with SPENCER (12, glasses, reading a book on the bank while Mary wades). She holds up a garter snake, immediately excited.

MARY

Come here, look! I can build a better enclosure than the one we have. Help me design it.

SPENCER

That's a garter snake. *Thamnophis sirtalis*.

MARY

Yeah, so come help. Come on.

Spencer doesn't budge from his book. Mary shrugs and wades back in, already thinking out loud about the design. Mary and Izzy in the backyard. Mary is teaching Izzy to do a cartwheel. She demonstrates -- perfect form. Izzy tries and crumples sideways. Mary demonstrates again. Same exact form. She doesn't understand why Izzy can't just see how to do it.

Mary Irish dancing with a group of girls. She's good. Her feet are precise, fast, joyful. This is her body doing what her body does best. The other girls are good too. This works -- an activity with rules, with right and wrong, with a physical standard to meet.

Mary at the dinner table. The family together. Spencer explaining something about space, very seriously. Izzy interrupting. Mom and Dad enjoying it. Mary is eating and listening and present but not leading the conversation. She laughs at the right times. She belongs here. This is the one group where the translation happens easily.

TITLE CARD: Three years later.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Mary is 12 now. Taller. The hallway is LOUD -- lockers slamming, voices bouncing off tile, the particular sensory assault of a middle school between classes. We stay on Mary's face and we feel what she feels: it's a lot. The sounds seem to press in. But she's trying. She's always

trying.

She walks with loud confidence, eyes forward. She's wearing something bright. She's still the person who makes things happen. A group of GIRLS she knows waves her over.

GIRL 1

Mary, oh my god, did you see what Alyssa posted?

Mary hasn't, but she pivots instantly.

MARY

No, but hey, we should all do something this weekend. Like, we could go to the mall or go catch stuff down at the creek. Everyone's been inside too much. Come on, let's go do something!

GIRL 1

Um, we're kind of in the middle of --

MARY

Come on, it'll be fun. We could get ice cream after. I'll convince my mom. She likes you guys.

The girls exchange a look. Not mean -- just confused. Mary can feel the disconnect. She tries to fill it by being louder, bigger, more enthusiastic.

MARY

What? Why are you looking like that? Let's just go do something fun instead of being stuck here. Come on!

The bell rings before anyone answers. Mary's smile tightens just slightly. She turns and walks fast.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is changing. Some of the drawings are still up. The sewing machine is pushed to the corner. Mary is on her bed, phone in hand, scrolling.

She's on Instagram. Looking at photos of girls she knows. Every photo is a performance -- poses, filters, curated backgrounds. Mary scrolls through them trying to figure out the rules.

She looks at her own last photo. It's a picture of a fish she caught. No filter. No pose. Nobody liked it except her aunt.

She puts the phone down. Picks it up. Puts it down.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Mary sits at a table with the same girls from the hallway. She's loud, trying to steer things, trying to make something happen.

MARY

Okay, but here's what we should do. We should form like a group, and we go to this place I know where there's like, tide pools, and we could actually do something instead of just sitting here eating lunch and talking about stupid stuff.

The girls don't react. They keep eating. Mary is undeterred. She leans forward, trying harder.

MARY

Seriously, come on. You guys are always on your phones. We should actually GO somewhere. Do something real. I'm serious. It'll be cool. I'll plan it.

GIRL 1

Mary, who do you think is cuter, Jake or Ethan?

Mary tries to play along but her eyes have gone hard.

MARY

I don't care about that. Why are you asking me that? Let's do something that's actually fun.

GIRL 2

You're so weird.

The girls turn back to each other, effectively shutting Mary out. Mary sits there, her jaw tight. She's trying. Nobody gets it. She keeps smiling anyway, but there's a fury under it now.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS - MONTAGE - THE FALL

This should feel like things narrowing. The frame itself getting tighter. But first it gets louder.

Mary in the hallway, being louder than ever. She's performing. She's trying to wake up the response she used to get. She's doing bits. She's being weird on purpose now. She's loud and bright and LOOK AT ME. But the response has changed. What used to work -- her energy, her momentum, her ability to rope people in -- now just makes people back away.

Mary in the cafeteria doing something physical to get a laugh. She's not being shy. She's being loud and strange and trying everything. The kids give her blank stares. She keeps trying anyway, louder, weirder, more desperate.

Mary's phone, late at night. Scrolling. Scrolling. Girls from school, girls from other schools, a feed of curated lives she can't figure out how to replicate. The blue light on her face. She's not trying to look like them anymore. She's just angry.

Mary in front of a mirror. She's examining her face with a violence in her eyes. This is the face that doesn't work anymore. This is the girl everybody used to want around, and now she's nothing. She grabs at her skin like it's an enemy.

The sewing machine, unplugged. Half-finished projects, abandoned.

The guitar, gathering dust.

Her bedroom walls, increasingly bare. She's stripping it down because nothing that made her Mary is working anymore. And if Mary doesn't work, then Mary shouldn't exist.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary is sitting on the floor against her bed. Phone in hand but screen dark. She's not doing anything. Just sitting. Breathing.

She pulls at the collar of her shirt. Looks down at her body. Grabs the skin on her arm. There's a violence in the way she does it -- a frustration with her own physical self that's new. This girl who was always at home in her body is at war with it.

She pulls her sleeve down. We see, briefly, marks on her forearm. The camera doesn't linger. We know.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Mom is making breakfast. Dad is at the counter with coffee and the paper. Normal morning. Izzy (10 now) is eating cereal, watching something on a tablet.

Mary doesn't come down.

Mom and Dad exchange a look.

MOM

Mary! School!

Nothing.

MOM

(to Dad, quieter)

That's the third time this week.

DAD

I'll go up.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dad opens the door. Mary is in bed, blankets pulled up. Not sleeping. Eyes open, staring at nothing.

DAD

Hey, kid. Time to get up.

MARY

I'm not going.

DAD

You've gotta go. We talked about this.

MARY

I said I'm not going.

There's a hardness in her voice that's new. Dad stands in the doorway. He wants to be the right kind of parent right now and he doesn't know what that means.

DAD

Mary --

MARY

(not yelling, worse --
flat)

Close the door.

He does. He stands in the hallway for a moment. We stay on him. He doesn't know what's happening to his daughter.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

Mom and Dad at the table after the kids are in bed. They're talking quietly. This isn't the first time they've had this conversation.

MOM

She won't talk to the counselor.
She went twice and said it was
pointless.

DAD

So we find a different one.

MOM

Ted, she won't go. She barely
leaves her room.

DAD

What does Sarah think?

MOM

She thinks Mary's depressed. She thinks there might be more going on. She used the word "crisis."

Silence.

DAD

Spencer called. He asked how she's doing.

MOM

What did you say?

DAD

I said she's having a rough patch. Mom gives him a look. They both know "rough patch" is not the word.

INT. IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Izzy is in bed. Through the wall, we hear Mary's voice -- raised, angry, the words indistinct. Then something hitting the wall. Then silence.

Izzy pulls her covers up. She's scared. She doesn't have a name for what's happening to her sister either.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mary is on her floor. The room is almost bare now. The drawings are down. The snake terrarium is empty -- the snake given away or maybe just gone. The sewing machine is in the closet. The fishing lures, the rocks, the projects -- all of it cleared out or shoved away.

Mary is sitting against the wall. She's very still.

The light from the window moves slowly across the floor. We hear the house -- the furnace, a car outside, Izzy's voice downstairs. Life continuing around a girl who has stopped.

We stay on this too long. Long enough to feel it.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER THAT WEEK

Mary is on her bed. Phone in hand. Scrolling, but differently now -- not social media. She's on YouTube.

She stops on a video. A woman training a border collie. The dog is learning to weave through poles, and the woman is patient and systematic and the dog is trying so hard and failing and trying again.

Mary watches the whole video. Then another. Then another.

Something in her face changes. Not hope exactly. More like recognition. She understands this. The language of the video, the structure of the problem, the way progress works through repetition and patience. This makes sense to her the way Instagram never did.

She sits up. For the first time in months, she sits up with purpose.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Mary is at the table when her parents come down. This is unusual enough that they notice.

MARY

I want a dog.

Mom and Dad look at each other.

DAD

A dog.

MARY

An Australian Shepherd. I want to train it. I've been researching breeds and training methods and I found a program for --

MOM

Honey, we've talked about this. A dog is a big --

MARY

I know it's a big responsibility. I know you think it's a phase. I know you think I'll lose interest and then you'll have to take care of

it. That's not going to happen.
She says all of this fast, flat, like she's been rehearsing
it. Because she has.

DAD

Mary, we can talk about it, but --

MARY

I'm not asking if we can talk about
it.

Silence. Mom and Dad are caught between the first real
energy they've seen from their daughter in months and the
certainty that getting a dog is not the answer to what's
happening.

MOM

Let's think about it.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS - THE CAMPAIGN - MONTAGE

Weeks pass. Mary is relentless.

Mary at the kitchen table with a three-ring binder. She's
printed out articles about Australian Shepherds. Temperament
profiles. Training protocols. She has a plan.

Mary presenting the plan to her parents. Literally
presenting it, like a pitch. Feeding schedule. Exercise
requirements. Cost breakdown. Training timeline. Her parents
are listening with the expression of people watching
something they don't fully understand but can't look away
from.

Mary, overhearing her parents arguing quietly about it.

MOM (O.S.)

It's not about the dog. You know
that.

DAD (O.S.)

I know. But what else are we doing
that's working?

Mary on her laptop, searching breeders. Finding one in
Oregon. Emailing. Getting a response. One puppy left.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family at dinner. All four of them -- Spencer's away at college now. Izzy is watching Mary carefully. She's been watching Mary carefully for a while.

DAD

We want to talk to you about the dog.

Mary's face -- she's bracing for no.

MOM

We're going to say yes.

Mary doesn't react the way you'd expect. She doesn't jump up or scream or cry. She nods. Once. Like someone who just got confirmation that the surgery is scheduled.

MARY

The breeder's in Oregon. It's about four hours.

DAD

We know. We called her.

MARY

When can we go?

MOM

This weekend.

Mary nods again. Under the table, her hands are shaking. Izzy sees. Izzy reaches over and puts her hand on Mary's knee. Mary lets her.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The family minivan on I-5 South. Rain on the windshield. The wipers going. Green everywhere -- that corridor of trees between Bellingham and Portland.

Inside: Dad driving. Mom in the passenger seat. Izzy with headphones on, in the back. Mary in the middle row, window seat, staring out. She hasn't spoken in an hour.

The car is heavy with the thing nobody's saying: this might be the most important drive this family ever takes.

DAD

(trying)

You hungry? There's a Burgerville
in Centralia.

MARY

No.

More miles. More rain.

MOM

(turning around)

What are you going to name her?

MARY

I don't know yet. I have to meet
her first.

Mom turns back. She and Dad exchange a glance. The hope on
their faces is almost too much to look at.

EXT. BREEDER'S PROPERTY - RURAL OREGON - DAY

A modest house with a big yard, fenced. The breeder, CAROL
(50s, weathered, no-nonsense), meets them at the gate.
Behind her, we can hear dogs.

Carol leads them to a pen. Several Australian Shepherd
puppies, all energy and chaos. One puppy hangs back slightly
from the others -- not timid, just separate. Watching.

Mary gets on her knees in the pen. The puppies swarm her.
She's patient with them but she's looking past them. She's
looking at the one in the back.

She waits. The swarming puppies lose interest, tumble off to
wrestle each other. Mary stays on her knees. Still.

The separate puppy stands. Crosses the pen. Walks directly
to Mary. Sits in front of her.

They look at each other.

Mary reaches out. The puppy pushes her nose into Mary's hand
and leans her full weight against Mary's chest. Doesn't
squirm. Doesn't leave. Just leans in and stays.

CAROL

Huh. She doesn't do that.

Mary wraps her arms around the puppy. Her face is buried in the puppy's fur. We can't see her expression, but her shoulders are shaking.

Behind her, Mom is crying. Dad has his hand on Mom's back. Izzy is crouched down, watching, and for the first time in a long time she looks like she's watching something good happen to her sister.

MARY

(muffled, into the
puppy's fur)

Okay.

She lifts her head. Tears and dog fur on her face.

MARY

Okay. Let's go home.

She picks up the puppy. It won't leave her arms. She carries it to the car.

INT. MINIVAN - HIGHWAY - DAY

The drive home. Mary in the middle row with the puppy in her lap. The puppy is asleep, completely boneless, draped across Mary's legs.

Mary is looking down at her. One hand resting on the puppy's ribs, feeling them rise and fall.

Izzy leans over from the back seat.

IZZY

(whispering)

What's her name?

Mary thinks. Looks at the puppy. Looks out the window at the green blur of trees.

MARY

Secret.

IZZY

Why?

Mary doesn't answer right away. She's not being coy. She's thinking about it.

MARY

I don't know yet.

Izzy accepts this. She reaches over and touches Secret's ear, gently. Secret doesn't wake up. She's already where she belongs.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - BELLINGHAM - DUSK

The minivan pulls into the driveway. Mary gets out, carrying Secret, who is awake now and looking around at everything.

Mary sets her down on the grass. Secret sniffs the yard. Looks at the house. Looks at Mary.

Mary kneels down. Secret walks back to her.

The light is almost gone. Bellingham in the blue hour -- the mountains, the trees, the particular quality of the air. Mary and her dog on the lawn, and for the first time since we watched her spiral, we can take a breath.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE