

I MADE A PROMISE

"A New Beginning"  
Act Three

Written by  
[First Draft]

## ACT THREE

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - BELLINGHAM - DAY

Days later. Mary's room. Secret's bed is still on the floor. The leash is still on the hook by the door. The medication chart is still on the wall. The LA bag is still packed by the door.

Mary is at her desk. She's on her laptop. She's working.

What she's working on: the GoFundMe money. Tens of thousands of dollars remain after the treatment costs. She's researching veterinary cancer research foundations. She's building a spreadsheet. She's setting up a 501(c)(3).

This is what Mary does. She works. She builds. She makes the next thing. The grief is in the precision of what she's building -- a foundation to fund canine cancer research, built with the money that was supposed to save the dog it couldn't save.

Mom appears in the doorway. Watches. She's been checking on Mary every few hours, the way she did during the spiral years ago.

MOM

You should eat something.

MARY

I ate.

MOM

Mary.

MARY

I'm setting up the foundation.

There's a lot of paperwork.

Mom comes in. Sits on the edge of the bed -- Secret's side of the bed. She catches herself. Mary sees her catch herself.

MOM

How are you doing?

MARY

I'm fine. I promised.

She says it matter-of-factly. Not performing strength. Just stating the terms of the arrangement. She made a promise. She is keeping it. That is what's happening now.

Mom nods. She doesn't push it. She's learned when Mary means what she says.

INT. DR. SULLIVAN'S VETERINARY CLINIC - DAY

Summer. Mary is here, but not as a client. She's wearing scrubs. She's working.

She's at a desk, entering data into the clinic's system. Lab results, treatment schedules, patient records. The same kind of meticulous data work she did tracking Secret's bloodwork, but now for other people's dogs.

A TECH walks past with a dog -- an older lab, moving slowly, the resigned patience of an animal in treatment. Mary watches for a second. Her hand twitches toward the dog, then pulls back.

She goes back to the data.

Dr. Sullivan passes by. Stops.

DR. SULLIVAN

How are you holding up?

MARY

Fine. The intake forms from Tuesday have a formatting error. I fixed it.

DR. SULLIVAN

That's not what I asked.

Mary looks at him. She knows it's not what he asked. She answered what she could answer.

MARY

I like having somewhere to be.

He nods. That's enough. He moves on. Mary goes back to work.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - BELLINGHAM - NIGHT

Mary has moved back from Seattle. She's in a smaller place now. The apartment is sparse -- functional, organized, the way Mary's spaces always are.

But there's a hole in it. Secret's bed is not here. She didn't bring it. The leash is not on the hook. The space where a dog should be is just space.

Mary eats dinner standing at the counter. She goes to the couch. Picks up her phone. Puts it down. Gets up. Goes to her desk. Opens the laptop. Closes it.

She doesn't know what to do with a night that has no dog in it. For seven years, every evening had a shape -- walk, training, settling in, the weight of Secret against her legs on the couch. Now the evenings are formless. And Mary doesn't do formless.

She goes for a walk. Alone. The same Bellingham streets. No leash. No partner. Her hands are in her pockets where the leash used to be.

She walks for a long time.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary asleep. The room is dark. Still.

What follows should feel like a dream -- not crisp, not logical, but emotionally precise. The edges are soft. The light is different. We know we're not in the real world, and we don't need to be told.

EXT. BELLINGHAM - WATERFRONT TRAIL - MAGIC HOUR

A familiar path. Mary is walking. The light is gold -- warmer and softer than real Bellingham ever is. The water is calm. The mountains are there but they're gentler, the way remembered things are gentler than real things.

Mary hears a sound behind her. Nails on pavement. A familiar gait -- four beats, a rhythm she knows in her spine.

She turns. Secret is there. Not the thin, tired Secret of the last months. The real Secret. Full coat, bright eyes, the alert intelligence that made her who she was. She's trotting, and her movement is easy and joyful in a way it hasn't been for a long time.

Mary kneels down. Secret comes to her. Leans against her chest. The same lean from the breeder's pen, seven years ago.

They stay like that.

Mary's face is wet but she's not making any sound. She holds Secret and breathes.

When she looks up, Secret looks at her. And in the way of dreams, where you know things without being told, Mary understands what Secret is telling her: it's okay. You can do this again. Not the same -- different. But this is what you're meant to do. You're someone who needs a partner, and that's not a weakness. That's what makes you work.

Secret pulls back. Looks at Mary one more time. That look -- the focus, the attention, the I-see-you-completely look that Mary has never gotten from a human being.

Then Secret turns and walks down the trail. Not away. Ahead. And Mary understands that too.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Mary wakes up. Lies still. The ceiling. The light.

Something has shifted. Not healed -- she's not healed. But the formlessness of the last weeks has a direction now. She knows what the next thing is.

She picks up her phone. Opens a browser. Starts searching.

EXT. BREEDER'S PROPERTY - RURAL UTAH - DAY

A different state. A different breeder. But the same feeling -- a modest property, a fenced yard, dogs everywhere.

Mary gets out of a rental car. She's come alone this time. No family in the minivan. No all-or-nothing desperation.

She's doing this because it's the next thing to build, and Secret told her so.

The BREEDER (40s, sunburned, patient) leads her to a pen. Australian Shepherd puppies, blue merle and red merle, tumbling over each other.

Mary sits on the ground. She doesn't reach for any of them. She just sits.

The puppies investigate her and move on. Investigate and move on. One by one they lose interest.

Except one. A blue merle female. Smaller than the others. She doesn't rush up. She approaches slowly, sits in front of Mary, and looks at her.

Mary's breath catches. For a second -- one second -- she sees Secret. The same focus. The same I'm-looking-at-you-and-I-see-you quality.

But it's not Secret. The eyes are different -- lighter, a little wider. The markings are different. The energy is different. This is a different dog. A new dog. And Mary recognizes the difference, and she doesn't try to erase it.

BREEDER

That one's been watching you since  
you sat down.

Mary reaches out. The puppy sniffs her hand. Doesn't lean in the way Secret did. Instead she puts one paw on Mary's knee. Tentative. Testing.

Mary puts her hand over the paw.

MARY

Hi.

The puppy puts her other paw up. Mary picks her up. The puppy settles against her, and it's different from Secret -- lighter, more tentative, figuring things out -- but it's right.

BREEDER

She got a name?

Mary is quiet for a moment. Looking at the puppy. Looking at the mountains behind the property. Thinking about a promise

she made and a promise that was made to her.

MARY

Promise.

She stands up, holding the puppy. Walks to the car. Doesn't look back. The next thing has started.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - CAMPUS - DAY

Fall again. The campus is golden. Mary walks across Red Square with a blue merle Australian Shepherd puppy at her feet. Promise is on a leash, head swiveling, taking in everything. She's not Secret -- she's bouncier, more uncertain, less composed. She's a puppy.

Mary is patient with her. Not the desperate patience of the first days with Secret, but a practiced patience. She knows how this works now. She built the system once. She can build it again.

MARY

(to Promise)

Heel.

Promise drifts. Mary stops. Waits. Promise comes back to position.

Click. Treat.

They keep walking.

INT. UW - CLASSROOM - DAY

Mary in class. A different class now -- advanced Japanese. She's fluent enough to follow the lecture. Promise is under the desk, not as invisible as Secret was -- she shifts around, chews a toy quietly. She'll get there.

After class, Kenji falls into step beside her.

KENJI

New dog.

MARY

Yeah.

KENJI

She's cute. What's her name?

MARY

Promise.

KENJI

That's a big name for a little dog.

Mary doesn't explain. Kenji doesn't press. They walk together toward the study group, Promise trotting between them, and Mary is navigating -- a campus, a friendship, a conversation -- without the partner she built these skills with. But the skills are still there. Secret taught her. The teaching didn't die.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS - REBUILDING - MONTAGE

Quick cuts. Mary building the new life on the foundation of the old one.

Mary training Promise in the apartment. Sit. Down. Stay. The same exercises, the same patience, the same click-and-treat rhythm. But Mary is different this time -- calmer, more experienced, less desperate. She knows the system works because she built it before.

Mary and Promise at a coffee shop. Promise under the table, fidgeting. Not perfect yet. Mary doesn't stress about it. She gives a quiet correction. They'll come back tomorrow.

Mary in the study group, arguing about Japanese grammar, animated, sure of herself. Promise is asleep under the table. The group has absorbed Mary's bluntness as a feature, not a bug. This is how she is. They know that now.

Mary at her desk, working on a final paper. Promise on the bed, chewing a toy. The room has the same organized infrastructure as always -- leash on the hook, vest on the chair, training treats in the cabinet. The system, rebuilt. Different dog. Same architecture.

Mary on her nightly walk. Promise beside her, not in perfect heel yet, drifting and coming back, drifting and coming back. Mary's hands aren't in her pockets anymore. One hand holds the leash. The other swings at her side.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - HUSKY STADIUM - DAY

June 2024. Graduation day. Thousands of people. Thousands of chairs on the field. Thousands of caps and gowns. The scale of it -- after Bellingham, after the small WCC ceremony in a parking lot -- is enormous.

We find Mary in the crowd. Cap and gown. She's written something on her cap but we can't read it yet.

Promise is beside her, in her vest. Not perfect -- she's still young, still learning. She bumps into the person in front of them. Mary corrects her quietly. They wait.

In the stands: Mom, Dad, Izzy, Spencer. Spencer is here. The whole family. They're scanning the crowd for Mary, can't find her in the sea of caps.

IZZY

(pointing)

There. Third section. See the dog?

They all look. There she is. The dog makes her findable, the way the dog has always made her findable.

Mary's row stands. They begin to file toward the stage. The line moves slowly. Mary is quiet. Promise walks beside her.

When Mary's name is called, she walks across the stage. Promise walks with her. The audience reacts -- laughter, applause, a few cheers. Some of them know who she is. The girl with the dog videos. The girl with millions of followers. Most of them don't. Most of them just see a young woman and her dog crossing a stage together.

Mary takes the diploma. Doesn't wave. Doesn't pose. She looks out at the crowd for a moment -- all those people, all that noise, a sensory environment that would have destroyed her at thirteen -- and she's standing in it.

She walks off stage. Kneels down. Shows Promise the diploma, the way she showed Secret the WCC diploma years ago.

MARY

(quiet, to Promise)

Step two.

She stands up. And now we see her cap.

Written in Mary's handwriting, in silver marker:

WE DID IT, SECRET.

In the stands, Mom sees it first. Then Izzy. Then Dad. Then Spencer. One by one, they read the cap, and one by one, they break.

Mary doesn't see them. She's walking away from the stage with Promise, back into the crowd, back into the noise and the people and the world she built a way to live in.

EXT. BELLINGHAM - WHATCOM CREEK - LATE AFTERNOON

The creek from the opening scene. The same rocks. The same light through the same evergreens. Summer.

Mary is here. She's 23 now. She's kneeling by the water, and for a moment the shot rhymes perfectly with the nine-year-old on her belly reaching for a crayfish.

But she's not reaching for anything. She's setting something up -- she's building a small dam out of rocks, a project, adjusting the water flow, doing something with her hands the way she's always done something with her hands.

Promise is beside her, nose in the water, snapping at a leaf floating by. Not composed. Not professional. Just a dog being a dog.

Behind them, up the bank, we can hear voices. A gathering at the house -- the family, maybe friends. The sounds of people.

Mary looks up at the sound. She doesn't flinch. She doesn't dread it. She'll go up in a minute. She'll navigate. She has the tools for it now, even though the one who gave them to her isn't here.

She looks at Promise.

MARY

Come on.

She stands up. Wipes her hands on her jeans. Starts up the bank toward the noise. Promise scrambles after her, ungainly, slipping on the rocks.

Mary doesn't look back at the creek. She's heading toward the people. She's going to be okay.

She promised.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

On black, in Mary's handwriting:

"the end"

And then, as if being painted over by a brush held in a dog's mouth:

A NEW BEGINNING

END OF FILM