

Mary & Secret

Screenplay Blueprint

Vibe Profile, Beat Sheet & Production Notes

Prepared for the Peters/Goebel family

Part 1: Vibe Profile

1. Pacing Feel — Unhurried, with earned acceleration

This movie breathes. It lives in the small moments: Mary watching other kids from a distance, the texture of rope in her hands, the sound of a creek. When we're in Mary's childhood, the pace should feel like a long summer afternoon — not slow, but spacious. There's room to notice things the way Mary notices things: physically, precisely, without social narration.

The pacing shifts when adolescence hits. Not faster exactly, but *tighter*. The spaces that felt free start to feel like gaps. Silences that were comfortable become loaded. The world hasn't sped up — Mary's relationship to it has changed.

When Secret arrives, the pacing finds a new rhythm — training rhythm. Repetition, small progress, repetition. This has its own pleasure. The audience should feel the satisfaction of incremental mastery the same way Mary does.

The cancer section earns a different kind of pace — compressed, urgent, clinical. Not thriller-urgent, but the urgency of someone trying to outrun biology. This is the only section where time itself feels like an antagonist.

The ending slows back down. Not to the childhood pace — that's gone. To something new. Quieter, sadder, but deliberate. Mary choosing to move forward, one step at a time, the way she trained Secret to walk beside her.

2. Emotional Register — Specific, interior, restrained

This is not a movie where people make speeches. Mary is not articulate about her feelings — she *acts* on them. She trains, she builds, she moves. The emotional work is visible in what she does, not what she says. When she's spiraling at 13, we should see it in her hands, her posture, the things she stops doing — not in a monologue.

The danger zone is the cancer section, where a lesser version of this movie would let everyone cry and deliver beautiful observations about love and loss. The emotional register needs to stay *specific*. Mary reading bloodwork. Mary adjusting Secret's bed. Mary noticing the slight change in how Secret walks to the door. The grief is in the precision of her attention, because attention is her love language.

"I will be okay" should arrive almost too quietly. Four words. The camera should be on Secret's face when she hears it.

3. World Texture — Real, tactile, Pacific Northwest

The world needs to exist on Tuesday afternoons. Bellingham should feel like a real place — the particular quality of light through evergreens, the specific kinds of mud, the sound of rain on a car roof. This is not a postcard version of the Pacific Northwest. It's the version where you know which roads flood in November.

Mary's world is intensely physical. She experiences everything through touch, movement, sensation. The movie should put us in her body. When other kids are navigating social hierarchies, we should be aware that Mary is noticing the texture of the cafeteria table, the weight of her backpack, the temperature of the air.

Secret's world should feel equally physical. We need to understand this dog as a working animal, not a cute pet. The intelligence in her eyes. The precision of her movements when she's performing. The way her body language reads differently when she's "on" versus when she's just being a dog with Mary at home.

UW should feel like a real campus — overwhelming in scale after Bellingham, loud, full of people moving in patterns Mary has to decode. The apartment she shares with Secret should feel like a small island of order in that chaos.

4. Stakes Calibration — Real-life stakes, internal scale

The stakes in this movie are never life-and-death in a thriller sense (until the cancer, and even then the stakes are emotional, not suspenseful). The real stakes are: Can Mary survive adolescence? Can she build a life that works for how her brain operates? Can she hold onto what she's built when the thing it's built around is taken away? Can she keep a promise that requires her to be okay without the only being who made okay possible?

The ceiling for crisis in this movie is quiet devastation, not spectacle. The scariest moment should be the most still — Mary at her lowest point before Secret, alone in her room, and we just *sit there* with her.

5. Audience Relationship — Invited in, trusted to understand

This movie does not explain autism to the audience. It does not have a doctor deliver a speech about what autism means. It shows Mary's experience from the inside, and trusts the audience to recognize what they're seeing. The diagnosis scene should feel like *relief* — for Mary, and for the audience — because it names something we've already been watching.

Similarly, the movie doesn't explain why dog training works for Mary. It shows her training Secret, and it shows the parallel process of Mary learning to navigate human spaces, and trusts the audience to feel the connection.

The audience relationship is intimate — we are close to Mary, we see through her eyes — but not flattering. Mary is not always likeable. She's blunt, she's impatient with people, she can be dismissive. She doesn't perform warmth she doesn't feel. The movie respects her enough to show her whole.

6. Character Orientation — “I hope she's going to be okay”

This is the core investment vector. The audience should be *worried* about Mary from early on, and that worry should modulate but never fully resolve until the very end. Even during the good years — the viral videos, the college acceptance, the success — there should be a thread of awareness that all of this is built on one relationship, and relationships end.

The audience loves Mary not because she's warm or charming, but because she's *trying so hard* at something most people do without thinking. The gap between how difficult the social world is for her and how relentlessly she attacks the problem — that's where the love comes from.

Secret should be a full character, not a prop. The audience needs to love Secret independently — her intelligence, her devotion, her own personality — so that the loss lands as a double grief: for Mary, and for this specific extraordinary dog.

7. Audience Investment Vector — “I hope these two weirdos make it”

The hope the audience carries: Mary and Secret have found each other, and maybe that's enough. Maybe you don't need to crack the code of human social life if you have one being who gets you completely. The movie plays with this hope — fulfills it during the good years, threatens it with the cancer, and then asks the hardest question: what happens when your person dies and you promised you'd be okay?

The answer isn't that Mary becomes neurotypical or suddenly great with people. The answer is that Secret taught her she *could* learn, *could* navigate, *could* build a life — and that knowledge doesn't die with Secret. Promise is not a replacement. Promise is proof that Mary can do it again, differently, because Secret taught her how.

8. Humor — Dry, observational, Mary's-eye-view

There is humor in this movie, and it matters. Mary's literal-mindedness is funny. Her bafflement at social rituals is funny. Secret's personality — the things she does that surprise even Mary — is funny. The social media montages should have genuine joy and comedy in them.

The humor should never be at Mary's expense. It should come from her perspective — the absurdity of the neurotypical world as seen by someone who doesn't have the manual. This is affectionate, specific comedy, not comic relief.

9. Scope — Small world, big interior life

Bellingham. Seattle. The car rides between. Mary's bedroom. The backyard where she trains Secret. A few classrooms. A vet's office. This is a small-scope movie with a huge interior landscape. The world gets slightly bigger when social media enters — we feel the global audience — but the camera stays close to Mary and Secret. The world comes to them; they don't go to it.

Part 2: Systems Diagram (Beat Sheet)

Act One: The Wrong Planet (roughly first 25%)

Opening image: Mary as a young girl, fully in her element — outside, physical, alive. Catching something, building something, moving. This is a person in harmony with the physical world. Establish Bellingham as a real place. Establish the family: Spencer the cerebral older brother she adores, Izzy the younger sister who follows her everywhere, parents who are present and loving.

The gap: Even in these good years, plant the seeds. Mary at a birthday party, slightly apart from the group. A moment where other girls are whispering and laughing and Mary is studying them like a field researcher. She wants in, but she doesn't have the protocol. She wants a best friend — but her version of best friend is a *partner*, someone to do things with, not someone to talk with.

The fall (inciting incident, ~10–12 minutes in): Adolescence arrives. Not as a single event but as a shift. The camera work should change — spaces that felt open start to feel enclosed. Her friend group is reorganizing around social hierarchies she can't read. Social media arrives (2012–2013) and accelerates everything. The rules of the game have changed and nobody gave Mary the new manual.

The spiral: Mary withdraws. Anger, fear, self-harm. Show this through behavior, not exposition. She stops doing the things that defined her. Her room, which was full of projects, becomes bare. Her family is desperate and out of their depth — they try freedom, counseling, confrontation. Nothing works because they're treating symptoms of something nobody has named yet. Spencer leaves for college. Izzy retreats, scared. The tight family is fracturing.

The bottom: A moment — quiet, specific, not melodramatic — where we understand Mary is in genuine danger. This is the scariest scene in the movie and it should be the most still.

The dog training video: Mary sees it. And we see the thing that has always saved her kick in — obsessive focus on a new project. But this time it's different, because this time she's also drowning.

The drive to Oregon: The whole family in the minivan. 200 miles. This should feel like an all-or-nothing mission, because it is. Mary has put everything on this. The parents are terrified and hopeful and trying not to show either.

Secret: Mary picks up the puppy. The puppy won't leave her side. End of Act One.

Act Two, Part A: Two Weirdos Learn the World (roughly 25–50%)

The training begins: Hard. Frustrating. Mary is still angry and sad, but now she has something external to work on. The key visual rhythm of this section: repetition, small failure, repetition, small success. We should feel the satisfaction of incremental progress.

The parallel process (the thematic engine): As Mary trains Secret — sit, stay, heel, shake, weave through legs — we see her training herself. Secret learning to be calm in a restaurant. Mary learning to be calm in a grocery store. Secret learning to read Mary's cues. Mary learning to read the cues of the human world. They are doing the same work, together. Neither of them was built for the spaces they're learning to navigate, and that's exactly why it works.

The nightly ritual: Every night, Mary and Secret go out together. This is their time. The family can see something is changing, but they're afraid to name it in case naming it breaks it.

Service dog training: Mary realizes she needs Secret everywhere, so she needs Secret to be perfect everywhere. This gives the training a higher purpose and a harder standard. It's also Mary *engineering her own support system* — she can't do the world alone, so she's building a partner who can do it with her.

Social media enters: Mary creates the account. Posts pictures. Gets followers. Then trick videos. Then the Irish dance video goes viral. Her old friend group sees it. The world sees it. But the important thing isn't the fame — it's the *community*. For the first time, Mary has found people who care about what she cares about. Social media, which was part of what broke her, becomes the place where her particular kind of weird is valued.

The diagnosis: Mary reads about autism. Recognition. She goes to UW Medicine. The diagnosis is official. And Mary is *happy*. She finally has a name for it. This scene should feel like the moment you find out the "foreign language" everyone around you was speaking actually has a grammar book, and you just got your copy. It reframes everything — for Mary, and for the audience. She's not broken. She's a different kind of operating system.

Running Start / Community College: Mary trains Secret to handle classrooms, empty first, then populated. She takes classes. She's re-entering the world, on her own terms, with her partner. This is victory, but hard-won and ongoing.

Midpoint — Social media explodes: Lil Wayne, 100 million views, SportsCenter, celebrity comments. The world loves Mary and Secret. Influencer offers pour in, and Mary doesn't care about any of them. This is structurally important: the external success is real but it's not the point. The point is the relationship. The audience should feel both the thrill and the slight worry — this is a lot of identity built on one dog.

Act Two, Part B: The Promise (roughly 50–75%)

WCC graduation / UW application: Mary graduates with her associate's degree as Covid hits. She wants UW. The practical obstacles are real — how does she live away from home, how does she get Secret into a campus life? She grinds through pre-requisites, applies, gets waitlisted, writes the letter, gets in. This should feel like Mary attacking a problem the way she attacks training: systematically, relentlessly.

UW / New life: Fall 2021. Mom comes for the first quarter. Mary gets the apartment. She and Secret become Huskies. New friends. She discovers Japanese. The scope of her world is expanding — she's navigating a university campus, a city, a new social landscape, and she's doing it. Secret is with her every step.

The limp: It starts small. Maybe Secret turned an ankle. But it doesn't go away. The family tries to ignore it. Mary, who notices everything physical, can't ignore it. This is the turn, and it should arrive quietly.

The diagnosis (the other one): Early 2022. The bloodwork. Cancer. And now the movie's pace changes — compressed, clinical, urgent.

The fight: Mary asks to leave school. She throws herself into treatment the way she throws herself into everything — total commitment, obsessive attention to detail. Dr. Sullivan in Bellingham. The Fred Hutchinson connection through her dad. Izzy's GoFundMe. The universe seems to be lining up. But the vibe profile says: real-life stakes, not movie stakes. We should feel both the hope and the biological reality pressing against it.

The deterioration: Months of chemo. Daily vet visits. Bloodwork. Mary is reading Secret's body the way she always has — with physical precision — and what she's reading is getting worse. Secret is one week from the LA radiation trip.

"I will be okay": Mary sees in Secret's eyes that Secret is holding on *for her*. This dog, in pain, being crushed by leukemia, is trying to stay alive because she can see how much Mary needs her. And Mary — who has spent years learning to read cues, to decode what another being is telling her — reads this one perfectly. She tells Secret the hardest thing she's ever said. Four words. Eleven letters. She sees the relief in Secret's face.

Secret dies. The next day. Quiet. Still. The camera should not flinch and should not aestheticize.

Act Three: A New Beginning (~75–100%)

The aftermath: Mary handles it the way she handles everything — with action. She sets up the foundation. She works at the vet's office for the summer. She is keeping the promise by doing the only thing she knows how to do: work.

The dream: Secret visits Mary. Tells her not to worry. Makes her own promise: Mary can love another dog. It will be different, but this is what she was meant to do. This scene needs to be handled carefully — not supernatural, not sentimental. A dream that feels like a dream, but carries real emotional information. Mary wakes up and something has shifted.

Finding Promise: Utah. The breeder. Mary meets all the puppies. One connects with her. For a moment she thinks — is this Secret? No. This is a new dog. And Secret is helping her find this one. She'll watch over them. The blue merle Australian Shepherd. Mary names her Promise.

Return to UW: Mary goes back with Promise. This is not a reset — it's a continuation. The skills Secret taught her didn't die with Secret. She can navigate. She can connect. She can do hard things in spaces that weren't built for her.

Graduation 2024: Mary walks across the stage. Promise walks with her. On her graduation cap: "We did it, Secret." This is the emotional climax, not the narrative climax — the narrative climax was "I will be okay." This is the proof that the promise was kept.

Closing image: Should rhyme with the opening. Mary in motion, in the physical world, alive — but different. Not alone. Carrying something that isn't visible but is absolutely present.

Part 3: Key Screenplay Challenges & Notes

The Autism Reveal

The diagnosis needs to recontextualize everything the audience has seen, not introduce new information. By the time Mary reads about autism, the audience should already have a rich, specific understanding of how her mind works. The diagnosis names it; it doesn't explain it.

Social Media as Storytelling

Viral videos as montage can feel cheap. The solution: make each social media milestone *specific*. Don't show numbers going up. Show one specific video, the reaction it gets, and what it means to Mary emotionally. The Irish dance video matters because it reconnects her to her old friend group. Lil Wayne matters because it means strangers value what she does. Each beat in the social media rise should be a character beat, not a fame beat.

The Training Sequences

These are the heart of the movie and they need to feel real. The repetition, the frustration, the tiny breakthroughs. If the audience doesn't believe in the work — if it looks like movie-magic montage — the whole parallel-process theme falls apart. Consider: real dog training techniques, real time scales, real setbacks.

Secret as Character

Secret needs her own interiority. Not anthropomorphized — we never hear her "thoughts" — but the camera should show us a dog who is intelligent, perceptive, and has her own relationship to the world. The audience needs to grieve Secret as a specific individual, not as a symbol of Mary's growth.

The Two Diagnosis Scenes

The movie has two diagnosis scenes — Mary's autism diagnosis (relief, understanding, joy) and Secret's cancer diagnosis (devastation). These are structural mirrors. The first one gives Mary a framework for understanding herself. The second one destroys the framework she built for surviving. The parallel should be felt, not stated.

Tone of the Cancer Section

The danger is sentimentality. The defense is specificity. Mary reading bloodwork. Mary adjusting medications. Mary on the phone with specialists. The grief should live in the clinical details, not in sweeping emotional moments. Mary grieves by working harder, not by crying — until she can't work anymore.

The Promise — Earning the Moment

"I will be okay" has to be earned by everything that precedes it. The audience must understand three things for it to land: (1) what Secret means to Mary structurally, not just emotionally, (2) that Mary is

reading Secret's state with the same physical precision she's always had, and (3) that saying these words is an act of profound generosity — Mary releasing Secret from the obligation to stay alive for her.

Avoiding Tidiness

The real story has rough edges that the screenplay should preserve. Mary didn't become great with people. She found workarounds. The viral fame wasn't an unambiguous good. The cancer treatment failed. Promise is not Secret 2.0. The movie should resist smoothing these edges into a cleaner arc.