

THE DEEP

"Pilot"

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ON THE BRIDGE

Sean wrestles with the wheel. Through the wipers, he can see a commotion on the deck. Xander lumbers in, pushes back his hood. He shouts.

XANDER

Dad! There's something we caught, I don't know what it is. It got Chris, he's messed up bad.

CAPT. SEAN

Shark?

XANDER

That thing's no shark.

ON THE DECK

The monster slithers behind some crates, barely visible. It thrashes against the hull, attacking anything in sight.

Two crew members grab long GAFFING HOOKS. They snare it up against the bulwark and force it into the hold with the other fish. They slam the latch. The two men exchange a glance.

CREWMAN

What the hell--?

They're interrupted by a WHEEZING sound. It's CHRIS, 25, the injured crew member. His mates stagger through the howling wind toward him.

IN THE GALLEY

The men carry Chris inside. They clear space and lay him down. Open up his survival suit. A nasty gash, soaked with blood. The boat creaks and moans as it pushes through the violent sea.

Captain Sean appears, looks over his man.

CREW MEMBER #1

He's lost a lot of blood.

CAPT. SEAN

Tamp it down. Get your fingers in there good and tight.

The Captain looks at Chris' young face. His eyes loll and close, passing out from the pain and blood loss.

CAPT. SEAN

Hang in there, son, think of your family, gonna call in evac. We're gonna get you out of here.

Sean pushes out of the galley. A crew member, CALVIN (Asian American, 25), is by the door, a haunted look on his face.

CALVIN

What is that thing, Cap?

Sean shakes his head and ducks out through the door.

ON THE BRIDGE

Sean gets on his radio. The wipers sweep back and forth. There are snapshots of Sean's family taped to the window.

CAPT. SEAN

(into radio)

This is Captain Sean McClure of The North Star, vessel #534221. Position 57 25 North, 176 33 West, with a bearing of 228 degrees. We have a crew member in need of immediate medical evacuation. Over.

EMERGENCY DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Nature of injury? Over.

CAPT. SEAN

(into radio)

A bite to the abdomen. Severe blood loss. Over.

EMERGENCY DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Cause of injury? Over.

CAPT. SEAN

(beat, into radio)

Something I've never seen before.

He cuts the wheel hard.

CAPT. SEAN

(into radio)

Altering course to 126 degrees, 12 knots. Confirm rendez-vous. Over.

3

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

3

The North Star pitches down a deep trough as it swings about, setting a new course.

DECKER

Of course, where are my manners?
We'll be needing him as well.

One of the Crewmen has carried Chris onto the deck. Decker nods to two NAVY SEALS who quickly attend to him. They put an oxygen mask over his mouth.

A basket lowers from the helicopter. They strap him inside and lift him to the helicopter. Decker faces Sean.

DECKER

Now then, Captain.

CAPT. SEAN

I'm entitled to my catch. That's the law.

DECKER

I'm sorry, Captain, but at this moment, I am the law.

The Seals pry open the latch on the fish hold.

CAPT. SEAN

Hey!

Two Seals train their weapons on him. Decker peers into the hold. What he sees has a great impact on him. Decker signals a Navy Seal, who loads a TRANQUILIZER cartridge into a rifle. He takes aim. POP!

A pod-like tank drops from the helicopter. The Seals guide it into the fish hold. Sean is going ballistic.

CAPT. SEAN

That's my goddamn catch! That belongs to me!

His son Xander restrains him. They finish loading the creature into the tank, then hoist it out of the hold and into the chopper above. Throughout the process, the creature itself remains hidden. Decker nods respectfully to Sean.

DECKER

You've done a fine job, Captain.
We'll take it from here.

He clips onto a winch cable and is lifted into the Super Stallion along with the other Navy Seals. The engines ROAR on the huge chopper.

It rises, banks hard, and powers away into the night.

The fishermen stand on the deck, staring in shock at the helicopter as it disappears. And they don't notice a hundred yards behind their stern, in the water--

An iridescent TAIL FLUKE, cutting across the surface. It swiftly slips beneath the water, back to the murky depths.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

7

EXT. TOWN - DAY

7

A rainy fishing village along the Olympic Peninsula. A few neglected trawlers clank in the marina. The remnants of a once-thriving canning industry lie decrepit along the wharf.

TITLE OVER: BRISTOL COVE, WA

The local high school MARCHING BAND plays down main street. It's a parade. But not just any parade.

They march under a banner that announces the annual end of summer "MERMAID DAYS FESTIVAL." Bristol Cove is the unofficial Mermaid Capital of the World.

- There are DOGS DRESSED LIKE MERMAIDS.
- Kids lick MERMAID POPSICLES.
- Tourists wear MERMAID HATS and MERMAID JEWELRY.
- There are MERMAIDS riding in the back of convertibles.

It's a perverse slice of Americana, more David Lynch than Norman Rockwell.

The parade passes an old CURIO SHOP filled with skulls, mermaid diagrams, vintage maps, carved shells. On the window is lettered "Helen's Antiquities."

The old shop lady, HELEN HUBBELL, stands in the doorway, regarding the parade with a certain disdain. Two tipsy COLLEGE GIRLS, dressed in mermaid gear, are staring at the oddities in the window.

COLLEGE GIRL

What is all this stuff?

Helen looks down at them with her dark green eyes.

HELEN

Real artifacts. Not the nonsense in that ridiculous parade. You could spend a little money, if you like.

The Girls don't know what to make of it. Their FRIENDS, also dressed in silly mermaid gear, stumble up with drinks.

FRIEND

Hey, y'all, look what we found--
Mergaritas! Woo-hoo!

The Girls take their drinks and head off. Helen can only roll her eyes as she watches them leave.

8

EXT. WATERFRONT PARK - DAY

8

The culmination of the parade route. A large FISH PROCESSING PLANT looms nearby with a prominent sign, "Pownall Seafood. Wholesale - Processing."

A crowd of tourists has gathered in the park to watch SCHOOL CHILDREN perform a play about the "history" of their town. The young NARRATOR shouts to be heard.

NARRATOR

It was more than a hundred and fifty years ago, that local fishing captain, Charles H. Pownall fell in love with a mermaid in these very waters, enchanted by her beautiful siren song.

A YOUNG BOY is dressed like an old time fisherman, he's even got a pipe. He rows a boat through cardboard waves. A young MERMAID emerges from the waves, singing a dainty song. They hug. Other Mermaids dance around them.

NARRATOR

They spent every day together.

YOUNG MERMAID

I love you, fisherman.

YOUNG CHARLES

I love you, mermaid.

NARRATOR

But one day, he went out in the bay, and his mermaid was gone. He pined for his lost siren, going to the same rock overlooking the water, hoping to see her again. But she was gone, back to her home in the sea, never to return.

As Young Charles sits on the cardboard rock, a CHORUS of kids dressed like lobsters, crabs, squid, and fish moves onto the stage and sings "Fathoms Below" from the Little Mermaid.

NARRATOR

And that is how, thanks to Charles H. Pownall, Bristol Cove became the Mermaid Capital of the World.

A few small fireworks go off. The crowd cheers. TEACHERS help the kids move the sets off the stage.

TED POWNALL, 50s, dressed casually, but still exuding wealth and power, sweeps onto the stage with a big smile.

TED

Thank you, and thank you to the fifth graders in Ms. Salazar's class at Seaview Elementary for that charming performance. That's my great-great-great grandfather depicted up there, so as you can see, our family goes back a long ways in Bristol Cove. And that is why, in the shadow of the cannery built by my father, it is my honor that I present to you the latest Pownall family venture.

A large OBJECT is covered in a shroud.

TED

This has been a passion project for our entire family, so please allow me to introduce my beautiful wife Elaine, and our two wonderful sons, Doug and Ben.

ELAINE, late 40s, beautiful, wheelchair bound, is pushed onto the stage by their son DOUG, 27, a clone of his father. Elaine is extremely well put together, with frosted blonde hair and a designer suit.

Their youngest son, Ben, is nowhere to be seen. Elaine whispers in Ted's ear.

TED

It seems, uh, Ben got caught in the parade traffic, but I assure you, he is here in spirit.

He is clearly furious, but presses on.

TED

To all the good people of Bristol Cove, and the thousands who visit us each year, it's our great pleasure to welcome you to the brand new, Charles H. Pownall Park!

They dramatically sweep the cover off to reveal a STATUE of Charles Pownall and the Mermaid. The crowd claps. Music plays. Balloons are released.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Ted, can we get a shot of you and your family?

Ted gathers with Elaine and Doug. He grits his teeth.

TED

Where the hell is Ben?

9

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

9

A small vessel bobs in the water. On its hull, in faded letters, is written, "MARINE RESEARCH FOUNDATION." Reggae music plays. A stoner assistant, JERRY, 28, smokes a joint. He tosses it away, clears the air when he sees bubbles and a DIVER emerge from the kelpy water.

Jerry helps the diver on board. He takes off his tanks and mask, and we get our first glimpse at marine biologist BEN POWNALL, 25, as he peels off his wetsuit. He's handsome even with saltwater dripping all over him.

JERRY

How's the crabbin', boss?

BEN

Perfect day for it.

Jerry helps him take off his air tanks.

JERRY

Yeah, not sure your dad's gonna agree with that, yo.

BEN

Add it to the list of things we don't agree on.

Ben carries the specimen bags to the water tanks. He places small European Green CRABS into the tanks.

BEN

I had to come out today, we're so close to finishing this grid.

JERRY

Yeah, totally. I hear that. Grid's gotta be finished. Crabs gotta be counted, or whatever, right?

Ben picks up one of the little crabs from the tank.

BEN

Dude, these guys right here, they're ground zero, the scavengers, once they go, and according to our research their numbers are dwindling, the whole food chain implodes. We're already seeing entire populations of top level predators migrating to new hunting grounds.

Jerry's eyes suddenly light up. His mind is blown.

JERRY

Whoa. Crabbageddon.

BEN

Full on.

They exchange a fist bump. Ben picks up his iPad, starts filling in graphs. He notices the time.

BEN

Maddie didn't come up yet?

JERRY

Not yet. Is that bad?

Ben scrambles to the other side of the boat, wrestles his dive gear back on. He straps on his tank and mask.

JERRY

Uh, I don't think there's enough air in there for you, man--

Too late, Ben plunges back into the water and begins a frenzied descent.

10 **EXT. UNDERWATER - SAME**

10

Ben dives to the bottom, guided by a torch light. He finds a DIVER stuck, a leg tangled in the rocks of the sea floor.

Ben frantically attempts to free the leg. But there's a problem. His tank is empty. He rips out his regulator.

Using a dive KNIFE, he cuts the fin off, freeing it from the rocks, then puts an arm around the Diver and makes the arduous swim upward.

11 **EXT. RESEARCH BOAT - SAME**

11

Jerry paces nervously on the deck. He sees them break through the surface. Ben gasps for breath. Jerry's impressed.

JERRY

You got a crazy set of lungs, bro.

Jerry helps them onboard. They rip off the diver's mask to reveal a young woman, research assistant MADDIE BISHOP (24). She's breathing and alive.

As her wetsuit comes off, we see Maddie is of Native American heritage, with Haida tribal tattoos, short cropped pink hair, black nail polish, a rocker chick vibe.

BEN

You okay?

Maddie rips off the cut scuba fin and throws it down.

MADDIE

No, I'm not okay. Total stupid rookie mistake.

Ben puts a comforting hand on her shoulder.

BEN

We made it, you're all right, that's all that matters.

MADDIE

(angry)

I should have known better than to traverse that rock fall down there.

BEN

Hey, Maddie, we're good.

He gently strokes the back of her neck. They sit there, face to face, adrenaline pumping, saltwater dripping. Maddie leans in and kisses him. It's passionate, deep, sexy.

MADDIE

You realize you're never gonna be able to top that?

BEN

What do you mean?

MADDIE

You did a crash dive through a kelp forest, slashed my fin, performed a controlled rescue ascent with no air, and somehow didn't go hypoxic.

BEN

Jump in there with some sharks next time and I'll see what I can do.

Jerry gives a stoner chuckle from across the boat.

JERRY
Sharks. Awesome.

12 **EXT. BRISTOL COVE MARINA - DAY**

12

The research boat powers back to the marina. Jerry ties it up and starts unloading gear.

Ben and Maddie carry the crab tanks up the dock. They load them into a pickup truck.

BEN
I'll take these back to the lab.

MADDIE
Twelve degrees celsius.

BEN
Straight seawater on mild
filtration.

MADDIE
I love it when you talk salination
levels.

She gives him a sexy kiss, grabs his ass. Ben grins.

BEN
You wanna come over later? I could
show you my tide log.

MADDIE
I can't. I told my dad I'd make him
dinner.

BEN
Maddie, you can't always--

MADDIE
The man can't cook ramen. I'm
serious. It's disturbing.

Maddie smiles awkwardly. Ben regards her. He loves her too much to press the issue.

13 **INT. MADDIE'S HOME - EVENING**

13

Maddie prepares dinner, boiling a shellfish stew. Through the window, a SHERIFF'S CAR pulls onto the driveway. Sheriff WILL BISHOP, 52, Maddie's father, gets out.

The kitchen door opens, and Will enters. He's a proud Haida man who walks like he carries a weight on his shoulders.

MADDIE

Hey, Dad, good day at the office?

Will takes off his gun belt. He washes his hands.

WILL

Oh, let's see, some tourists had their car broken into, stole two mermaid sculptures outta the trunk. And the bench outside Melanie's shop got tagged with graffiti.

MADDIE

Sounds like another busy day of crime in Bristol Cove.

She brings the stew to the table and serves it in bowls. They both sit down and join hands.

WILL

Creator, for the food, and for You, we thank you.

Will grips his napkin tightly in his other hand.

WILL

And for Susan, may she find peace on her journey and within herself and find her way back home.

They start to eat the stew.

MADDIE

It's been eight months since we've heard from her, might be time to start dropping her from the blessings.

WILL

I believe your mother is being guided.

MADDIE

She's gone, Dad. And no Haida spirit voodoo is gonna bring her back. It's okay. We're better off without her. You're forgetting what it was like when she was here.

Will eats a clam from the stew. Maddie regards him, upset.

14

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

14

A fleet of fishing boats creak on their moorings. Amongst them is THE NORTH STAR, worse for wear from her harrowing night at sea.

On one of the boats, a DOG sits up, ears suddenly alert. It starts BARKING loudly at something unseen in the water. The dog's OWNER calls from the cabin.

OWNER

Bear, knock it off!

The dog won't stop. It senses something out there in the dark and quiet water. And perhaps we glimpse a shape slither across the surface at the far end of the harbor.

INT. THE GALLEY BAR - SAME

A tough dockside bar decorated with a nautical theme. It's populated by FISHERMEN. Lots of empty bottles on the bar.

Ben enters, takes a place at the end of the bar.

BEN

Hey, Valerie, a Widmer when you get the chance.

BARMAID

You got it, honey.

She plonks a bottle down in front of him. The large figure of Xander steps up next to him. He seems edgy and nervous.

XANDER

Hey, man, I've been looking for you.

BEN

I thought you guys were going out past Bowers Ridge? You're back early.

XANDER

Yeah, I, uh, need to talk to you about something. Come here.

Xander leads Ben to a table in the corner where Sean sits with the other North Star crewmen. Ben takes a seat. He notices Sean wringing his hands. Calvin speaks up, tensely.

CALVIN

We said we keep this between us, don't tell anybody.

Xander exchanges a look with his crew. They seem skittish.

XANDER

Ben knows about this stuff, he can help us. He's one of us.

ANOTHER CREWMAN

He wasn't on the boat. He doesn't fish with us no more.

They all look to Sean, who nods, giving approval. Xander turns to Ben.

XANDER

We caught something out there, something we've never seen before. It attacked Chris, he was airlifted out. Big ass military commando helicopter.

OTHER CREWMAN

Navy Seals, the whole deal.

CALVIN

The CG says they have no record of the evac. Like it never happened.

XANDER

Chris is just gone.

Ben listens, not sure what to make of this.

BEN

And you don't know what attacked him?

The men look at each other. Xander takes a deep breath. He nods hesitantly to a carved WOODEN MERMAID statue on the wall. Ben smirks, assuming they're pulling his leg.

BEN

A mermaid?

OTHER CREWMAN

Only it didn't look like that, it was a predator.

CAPT. SEAN

It's worth a fortune. It's the holy grail. And it belongs to me.

Ben looks at them for a moment, then he cracks up.

BEN

Okay, this was a good one. Very well done. Maybe they'll let you in the parade next year.

CALVIN

I told you.

Xander grabs Ben by the wrist, leans toward him.

XANDER

Dude, this is real. Why else would they take it away from us? Look--

He takes his phone out. It shows grainy video footage of the creature in the hold. It's very dark and hard to make out, but it's enough to make Ben question for a moment. He quickly dismisses it.

BEN

Xander, man, seriously, this could be anything.

He glances at the grainy frozen image on the phone.

BEN

I don't know what you caught, but trust me, it's not what you think it is.

16 **EXT. MILITARY BASE - DAY**

16

A sprawling military complex for U.S. Army and Air Force operations. Barracks line a parade grounds where TROOPS are in basic training. Humvees and Trucks power about.

TITLE OVER: "Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Tacoma, WA."

A late model SEDAN drives through the base. It pulls up to a plain, one-story building. Two men get out. One of them is Aldon Decker, the man from the opening scene. The other is a high-ranking MILITARY OFFICER. They head into the building.

17 **INT. BUILDING - SAME**

17

It's actually a modern, high-tech bunker inside. They pass through several security levels, descending deeper below.

In a darkened hall, lined with aquariums, we glimpse bizarre, deep sea species. They might as well be from outer space. The last tank has a scary ray-like specimen that flashes past before disappearing in its tank.

Decker and the General pass through a final security level and into a RESEARCH LAB. There's a tall octagonal tank in the center of the room.

As they sweep around, we get our first clear, full view of what's inside--

And holy fucking shit.

The captured MERMAID. She's floating motionless, as if in hibernation. Her coppery red hair fans out across the surface of the water like seaweed. She has jagged teeth, opalescent skin that blends into a powerful fluke-like tail.

She's scary and captivating all at once.

SCIENTISTS work at computers. Decker and the Army General stand before the tank.

ARMY GENERAL

Son of a gun. All these years, Agent Decker, chasing after every nut job who ever dropped a line in the water, claiming they pulled up some alien sea monster from down below.

DECKER

We followed the signs. First those Japanese fishermen reported seeing a strange sea creature off the Kuril Islands, then those dolphin carcasses with the odd bite marks that washed ashore in Alaska, and finally the NOAA research vessel that picked up strange frequencies coming from points in the Bering Strait. We knew *something* was out there.

ARMY GENERAL

Why now?

DECKER

Your guess is as good as mine. Something's forced them closer to the surface, we don't know what it is.

The General leans closer to the glass.

ARMY GENERAL

Is it sleeping?

DECKER

She's been in a dormant state since the tranquilizers wore off.

ARMY GENERAL

It attacked one of the fishermen who caught it?

DECKER

He's still in critical condition, we have him confined, she did quite a lot of damage.

ARMY GENERAL

Not exactly The Little Mermaid, is it?

The General stares at the creepy face of the mermaid, when suddenly it BOLTS TO LIFE, sending out an ear-splitting SHRIEK that shakes the tank, nearly knocks him off his feet.

And just as abruptly, the mermaid goes back to her dormant state. The General gathers himself.

ARMY GENERAL

What the hell was that?

DECKER

Sonar.

The creature floats eerily in the tank.

DECKER

We think it might be some sort of distress call.

ARMY GENERAL

We're buried a hundred feet in the ground, in a bunker with five foot thick concrete walls, it ain't gonna do a whole lot of good.

DECKER

You're missing the point, General. She's trying to signal others of her kind.

(faces General, giddy)

If there's one, there's more.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

18

EXT. COVE - NIGHT

18

Something is lurking out in the cove. From its water level POV, we see a distant bonfire raging on a beach. We hear the sound of voices, music filtering out across the water--

ON THE BEACH, a group of TWENTY-SOMETHINGS is partying, drinking. Ben and Maddie walk along the sand.

MADDIE

I feel like we're being watched.

They walk past a cluster of YOUNG LOCALS, holding red party cups, stealing glances at them, and no doubt gossiping.

BEN

Are you having a flashback to high school?

MADDIE

Yeah, like how much it sucked being the weird punk rock Haida girl.

BEN

I wouldn't know, since I was pretty much Mr. Golden Boy.

MADDIE

We never would have dated back then.

BEN

No. I wasn't nearly evolved enough.

Maddie smiles, they walk a bit further.

BEN

You know what I'd do most days after school? I'd come here and free dive out past the break. I'd close my eyes, and just let the water surround me.

MADDIE

Sounds delightful.

BEN

It was the one place I couldn't hear my parents fighting. My own private world. It was perfect.

MADDIE

Until Pownall Seafood buys up every last fish left in the ocean.

Ben nods, taking in the irony of it all.

BEN

Yeah. But hey, he built a new park for the town, so who cares what he does to the ocean?

MADDIE

Well, I think it's awesome you're standing up to him.

She throws her arms around him.

MADDIE

Someone's gotta stick up for the fishies.

Ben puffs out his cheeks, makes a funny fish face. Maddie cracks up. They kiss like young lovers.

Maddie notices Xander sitting off by himself, staring blankly into the bonfire.

MADDIE

What's up with Xander?

BEN

I better go talk to him.

Ben steps over and joins Xander by the fire.

BEN

Hey, how's it going?

Xander doesn't respond.

BEN

Come on, you're not really pissed at me, are you?

XANDER

I shouldn't have told you. I shoulda known better.

Ben is getting annoyed now.

BEN

Think about what you're asking me to believe.

XANDER

I get it, you weren't there. You don't come out on the boat with us anymore.

BEN

What you're talking about... it's mythology.

Xander runs a hand through his beard.

XANDER

So you're saying you know everything there is to know?

BEN

No, of course not.

XANDER

Then look me in the eyes and tell me it's possible.

BEN

Xander--

XANDER

Just do it.

Ben regards his friend sympathetically.

BEN

Okay, sure, ninety-five percent of the oceans remain unexplored.

Xander's eyes look a bit crazed in the fire light.

XANDER

So it could happen.

BEN

Xander, man, I love you, you know that. And as your friend, I'm tellin' you, you gotta stop talking like this.

XANDER

What's it gonna take, huh, for you to believe me?

Ben thinks about this for a while.

BEN

I'd need to see one.

Xander's face suddenly lights up with a wild grin.

XANDER

Yeah, that's it, that's exactly right. We gotta catch another one.

He crushes his beer can, stumbles away, on a mission. Ben shakes his head. He stares across the beach.

Some kids have grabbed pieces of driftwood and lit them on fire. They burn lavender and blue from the salt in the wood.

Ben looks at Maddie, laughing with a group of people at the water's edge.

Things are starting to get crazier. Music is turned louder. Other people strip off their clothes and dive into the water.

20

EXT. COVE - NIGHT

20

A THIRTEEN YEAR-OLD KID, someone's younger brother, swims out in the dark cove. He's out further than he should be. A concerned SISTER calls to him.

SISTER

Lucas, get back here! It's not safe out there.

The boy ignores her, keeps swimming. He stops to rest, treading water. His teeth chatter from the frigid water. There's an ominous sense he's not alone.

A shadow passes behind him. He turns. Nothing. The boy is getting tired. He can hear his sister calling from the shore.

He dips under the surface, and through the murky water, a shape, getting bigger, coming towards him. The kid watches.

And then, once it's nearly upon him, we see the open jaws of a MAKO SHARK.

The kid pops back up, SCREAMING like hell.

KID

Shark! Shark!

Others swim over to help. They pull him to the shore. The boy is panicked. A crowd gathers at the water's edge.

GUY #1

Look.

The "shark" is actually the SEVERED HEAD of a Mako, bobbing in the water. Some boys swim out and drag it to the beach.

GIRL #1

That's like the most disgusting thing ever.

GIRL #2

It's so freaky.

GUY #1

What did it?

GUY #2

Probably a killer whale, they hunt sharks.

Ben kneels down beside the shark head. Maddie is next to him.

BEN

You up for a late night autopsy?

MADDIE

Thought you'd never ask.

21

INT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - EXAMINATION ROOM - NIGHT

21

The decapitated SHARK HEAD rests on a metal table, bathed in a pool of light. Ben, wearing magnifying glasses, probes around the head. Maddie leans in close, engrossed.

BEN

This damage was not inflicted by an orca. The bite radius is too small.

MADDIE

So what then?

Ben is looking deep inside the head.

BEN

Well, it's not another shark.

MADDIE

Maybe some fishermen caught it, their dogs got to it?

None of these theories adds up and Ben knows it. He lifts his glasses and stares at the severed head, his mind racing. The events of the past day and his friend Xander's story weighing on him.

MADDIE

What are you thinking?

His eyes fall to some NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS tacked to the wall with headlines like, "Brazilian Boy Catches Rare Dinosaur Fish."

BEN

What if there's a new predator out there, one we haven't seen before?

MADDIE

And it can rip the head clean off a mako shark? Then I might have to cancel my scuba trip next weekend.

23 **OMITTED** 23

24 **EXT. ROAD - NIGHT** 24

Ben's truck drives down the desolate road. On one side is the rocky beach, on the other side is forest.

25 **INT. BEN'S TRUCK (MOVING) - SAME** 25

Ben turns on the radio, searches for a station. He looks up and, out of nowhere, a NAKED GIRL dashes in front of his headlights. Ben swerves hard and skids into a ditch.

He gets out, sees the girl running away into the forest.

26 **EXT. FOREST - NIGHT** 26

The girl runs through the darkened forest on WOBBLY LEGS, like a drunk. Ben chases after her. She falls down, gets up, keeps going.

BEN

Hey, wait!

The girl weaves haphazardly through the forest. She trips over a fallen tree, lands in some pine needles.

Ben catches up. At last, a closer look. She curls up on the ground, shivering. Her whitish blonde hair tumbles in wild locks down her backside; her eyes a PIERCING GREEN. Let's call her Po.

BEN

Are you okay?

Po is terrified, like a trapped animal. Her eyes dart about. She's having trouble breathing. She must be on drugs.

BEN

Were you at the party? Where are you from?

She doesn't speak. She's probably just a visitor in town for the festival.

BEN

Here, take my jacket.

He steps closer. Po bolts, knocking him down with surprising strength as she pushes past.

But her legs can't carry her far. She tumbles into a small ravine, passed out. Ben climbs down to get her.

27 **EXT. ROAD - NIGHT**

27

Ben carries the naked girl, wrapped in his coat, to his truck. He places her in the front seat. First the shark head, now this. It's one of those nights.

28 **INT. TRUCK (MOVING) - LATER**

28

Po is asleep in the passenger seat. Her breathing is WHEEZY and HEAVY. Her lungs sound wet. Ben is on his cell phone with the town doctor.

BEN (INTO PHONE)

No, she's breathing fine, a little heavy. Someone probably gave her something at the party. I could take her down to the hospital in Olympia.

DR. ABBOTT (V.O.)

It's a two hour drive and then you'll spend the next five hours waiting in the ER. Why don't you take her to your place, put her on the couch, I'll be right over to have a look.

BEN (INTO PHONE)

Okay, Dr. Abbott, thank you.

29 **INT. BEN'S HOME - NIGHT**

29

Ben puts a log in the fire. Po lies on the sofa. She's dressed in one of his Marine Mammal Center t-shirts and a pair of oversized sweatpants. She stirs, opens her eyes.

She looks around nervously. She notices her ill-fitting clothes. Ben turns from the fireplace.

BEN

Sorry, it's all I had.

BEN

I don't know where she went.

The Doctor gives him a dubious look.

DR. ABBOTT

A slippery one, huh?

Off Ben, as he stares longingly outside, his mind racing--

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

32

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

32

Morning light filters in. Ben is asleep in his bed. We PUSH IN slowly on his face. Po's SIREN SONG echoes softly in his dreams. It seems to be having an erotic effect on him.

There's a tapping at the window. Ben cocks an eye open and sees his mother Elaine and her AIDE outside.

There's a loud BANGING as the Aide guides her wheelchair into the room. Elaine, as always, is impeccably dressed. Ben gathers himself.

BEN

Mom? What are you doing here? What time is it?

ELAINE

Good morning, dear. Your father is terribly angry with you.

BEN

Good morning to you, too.

Elaine looks up at her Aide.

ELAINE

You can step outside, Anthony.

The Aide exits. She waits until he's gone. Then faces Ben.

ELAINE

I don't give a rat's ass that he's angry. A lot of things make him angry. The fact that a woman who can't walk insists on buying six hundred dollar shoes.

Ben sits up, rubbing his sleep encrusted eyes.

ELAINE

You know what he called me the other day? Bitch on wheels.

BEN

That's actually pretty funny.

ELAINE

I thought so, too. And you know why it was okay? Because it was behind closed doors.

Elaine wheels a bit closer to the edge of Ben's bed.

ELAINE

Family rule. Say whatever the hell
awful thing you want in private,
but in public--

She puts on a smiling face that looks like Miss America.

ELAINE

This is the face that keeps mommy
in her nice shoes.

BEN

I get it.

The smile drops from Elaine's face.

ELAINE

No, I don't think you do. Because
if you did, you'd show up, you'd
flash that famous Pownall charm,
you wouldn't leave your father up
on stage with his dick in his hand.

BEN

I'll tell him I'm sorry.

ELAINE

A little late for that. I need this
family to keep working. I'm not
willing to suffer for nothing.

BEN

Okay.

Ben pulls a shirt over his head. His mother isn't finished
just yet.

ELAINE

Doug tells me you've been hot and
heavy with Maddie Bishop.

BEN

Yeah, Mom. We're dating. Remember?

Elaine rolls her wheelchair back. She regards her son.

ELAINE

You've always had a thing for the
wild girls.

NURSE

No, sorry.

CALVIN

We've called every hospital in the area, nobody knows where he is.

The Nurse shrugs. The Guys, dejected, start to head out. The Nurse regards them, sympathetically.

NURSE

Don't worry, I'm sure you'll find him, he's gotta be *somewhere*.

43

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

43

A stark white room. It's antiseptic and lonely. Chris lies in a bed. He slowly awakens and moves his lips.

CHRIS

Water... Water.

A NURSE, dressed in a traditional white uniform, steps into the frame. She calmly takes a syringe from a tray and plunges it into Chris' arm. His eyes widen, then drift shut.

The Nurse exits the room. She walks down a TOMB-LIKE CONCRETE CORRIDOR, through a security level. Clearly this is no ordinary hospital. She passes the now familiar research lab that houses the mermaid. It's all part of the same complex.

44

INT. MILITARY BUNKER - DAY

44

The captured mermaid floats in her tank. Her skin looks pallid. Her powerful tail hangs limply. Aldon Decker stares at her through the glass.

Then, the creature slowly OPENS HER EYES and looks straight at him. It's an oddly intimate moment between them.

Her lips begin moving, and ever so faintly, she emits the ETHEREAL SIREN SONG. Their eyes are locked together as Decker touches his fingers to the tank, entranced by her.

The creature quickly returns to hibernation when a SCIENTIST approaches the tank. He addresses Decker, unaware of what just transpired.

SCIENTIST

Heart rate and respiration have been steadily decreasing over the past eight hours. Core temperature has gone down as well.

Decker whispers to the mermaid.

DECKER

Are you not well? Are you sick?
Tell me what it is you need.

He seems to be growing infatuated with the creature. The Scientist regards this uneasily. He clears his throat.

SCIENTIST

We ran some DNA analysis.

He offers Decker a printed report. Decker ignores it. He just keeps staring at the tank. The Scientist presses on.

SCIENTIST

It's very early stage, but there's some interesting data presented, an abundance of glial cells in the cerebral cortex--

DECKER

You're the one in the white coat, Doctor, not me.

SCIENTIST

Well, it would suggest a highly advanced and adaptive mind, an extraordinary ability to process information and to learn quickly.

DECKER

(to mermaid, a crooked smile)
I wouldn't have expected anything less of you.

SCIENTIST

Not only that, these glia also contain a clustering of pattern formation genes, neoblasts. We've seen it in species that have the ability to regenerate limbs, newts, salamanders, though never in a higher level vertebrate like this. Not in this density.

DECKER

You're saying she could grow new tissue?

SCIENTIST

Yes, potentially.

Decker gazes at the creature floating in the tank, his eyes alight with fascination and possibility.

DECKER

The medical implications... her
DNA... helping the crippled walk
again... amputees growing new
limbs... giving sight to the blind.
(touches the tank)
You're more special than we ever
imagined, aren't you?

The creature floats there in its watery cocoon, unmoving, eternal, full of promise.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR45 **INT. BEN'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

45

A couple is in the throes of passion. Forceful, loud, and aggressive.

Ben pins Maddie to the bed. He increases his pace further, we PUSH IN on his face, nearly reaching the point of ecstasy.

They both climax loudly. Ben rolls off her and collapses onto the pillow. They're breathing hard. Maddie looks over.

MADDIE

What got into you, tiger?

46 **EXT. TRAILER PARK - OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - MORNING**

46

Po walks along a fence, past the rear of the run-down trailer park. She pauses, pulls up the leg of her pants and scratches her calf, and we notice--

HER ENTIRE LEG is covered in a plaque-like crust--the skin is blistered and raw, DRYING OUT in the most gruesome way.

She continues onward. One of the yards is scattered with children's toys. Something catches her eye--

Po deftly hops the fence and picks up a small TOY HELICOPTER. She studies it with great excitement and interest.

A QUICK FLASHBACK TO: *The opening scene, played now from a WATER-LEVEL POV, as the giant Sikorsky lifts the mermaid tank off the deck of the fishing boat. Rotor wash everywhere.*

BACK TO SCENE. Po holds the toy helicopter. There's a strange NOISE coming from the home. Po steps up to the open window. A TV is playing the TELETUBBIES. A little TODDLER is holding a sippy cup, watching.

Po peers through the window at the bizarre program. The Teletubbies speak in quasi-English. Basic words like "hello."

The red Teletubby says its name. "I am Po." Po mouths the words. And we learn the origin of her name.

PO

I. Am. Po.

The toddler turns to see Po at the window. He giggles at her.

TODDLER

Hello, Po.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Tyler?

We can hear his mother coming from the other room. Po swiftly ducks out of the way.

MOTHER

Were you talking to someone?

TODDLER

I talk to Po.

FURTHER ALONG in the trailer park, a redneck GUY, 35, is working on his old Impala. He's got a Navy hat on.

The Guy lowers the hood of his car and notices Po standing across from him. He wipes his greasy hands with a rag.

GUY

Hey, little miss, didn't see you there.

She's staring at his hat. The Navy insignia. The same symbol on the helicopter that took her sister away.

PO

I. Am. Po.

GUY

Not from around here, are you?

He steps closer to her.

GUY

What're you, like Russian or something?

Her eyes remain fixed on the Navy hat. She points at it.

GUY

My hat?

The Guy takes it off and shows it to her.

GUY

Did a coupla tours. Can't say we liked the Russians much, but shit, that ain't your fault. If they all looked pretty like you, mighta liked 'em better.

Po surprises him by suddenly getting in his car. The Guy smiles and decides to go for it.

GUY
 So you need a ride, huh?
 (beat)
 Okay. I'm headed down to Aberdeen.
 How 'bout you, little lady?

47 **INT. IMPALA (MOVING) - DAY**

47

The Guy grips the wheel. Po is in the passenger seat. He looks over at her.

GUY
 Not much of a talker, huh?

He can't keep his eyes off her.

GUY
 That's okay. It's still nice to
 have company. Sometimes I'll pick
 up a hitcher, but it's mostly
 dudes, not a pretty thing like you.

Po holds the TOY HELICOPTER. She shows it to him.

GUY
 Brought your toys with ya, eh?

48 **EXT. ROAD - DAY**

48

The Impala pulls off the main road, onto a secluded dirt road surrounded by forest. It rolls to a stop. The Guy gets out and urinates in the bushes.

49 **INT. IMPALA - SAME**

49

He returns to the driver's seat. The Guy sits there a moment, then reaches across Po, into the glovebox. He takes out a whiskey flask and has a sip. He stares at her.

GUY
 You're like a little girl. A pretty
 little girl who doesn't know how to
 talk.

He takes another sip.

GUY
 Now I bet your momma told you not
 to get in cars with strangers. But
 you didn't listen to her. A little
 rebel, huh?

He reaches out and touches Po's neck.

GUY

Your skin is dry, you oughta put
some cream on that, make it nice
and soft.

Po tries to push on the door, but doesn't know how to get it
open.

GUY

You don't need to get out.

He takes her hand and puts it between his legs.

GUY

Isn't that what you're lookin' for?
Adventure. Little girl running away
from home. Gettin' in a big man's
car.

He moves her hand back and forth. The Guy moans.

GUY

Go on, yeah, see how it feels.

He moves on top of her, groping with his hands, pulling her
pants down, fumbling for his belt. Po is terrified as the guy
forces himself upon her.

50 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - SAME**

50

The Impala rocks back and forth on its springs. The windows
are fogging up. Then there's a sudden HISS. The car jolts.
Bodies thrash inside. BLOOD splatters across the windows.

Smash! The Guy's head is thrust through the windshield. He's
lodged there up to his shoulders. His neck is broken.

The door opens and Po climbs out. She surveys the damage.
She's breathing heavily. She runs away down the dirt road,
ducks into the forest, and disappears.

51 **EXT. FOREST - LATER**

51

Po runs. At last she slows down. She notices blood on her
sweatshirt. She takes it off. She's now just in Ben's t-shirt
again. It reveals the skin on the inside of her arms has the
same dry, blistered, crusty lesions as her legs.

52 **EXT. ROAD - DAY**

52

Po moves along the road by the beach. She stares down at the
rocky coastline and the ocean beyond.

She comes upon a SIGN at the roadside. It's for the Marine Mammal Center. Po looks at the t-shirt she's wearing. The symbol matches. Po stares at the sign, thinking.

53 **EXT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - LATER**

53

Po enters the parking lot. She's immediately swept up by a large group of SCHOOLCHILDREN being corralled into the facility.

TEACHER

Stay with your partners. Quiet, please.

Po attempts to move aside, but a VOLUNTEER steps in front of her.

VOLUNTEER

Sorry, Miss, all visitors this way.

54 **INT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - SAME**

54

It's clear the dedication and passion of its employees and volunteers, not big funding, is what keeps this place going.

Po looks around curiously. The walls are filled with PICTURES of rescued marine animals. Maddie leads the kids through.

MADDIE

This is not a zoo. This is a working hospital and research center for the many species of marine mammals that inhabit our region. Our patients include seals, otters, sea lions, and we have tanks for the short-term rehabilitation of small whales and dolphins.

She leads them toward a glass-fronted room that looks like a doctor's examination room. Po regards the facility with fascination. It has a calming influence on her.

MADDIE

When an injured animal is brought to the center, this is where it goes first. We're able to offer veterinary care, perform surgical procedures, and administer medication.

A GIRL, 8, in the front of the group, raises her hand. She's got horses on her sweatshirt. Maddie calls on her.

GIRL

When you were a kid did you know
you wanted to work here?

MADDIE

Actually, it was when I was a
teenager and saw a video about a
baby dolphin that had washed
ashore. Instead of helping it, the
people on the beach passed it
around taking their picture with
it. Even after it died, they kept
taking selfies. That video made me
sad and I wanted to do something.
So I came here to volunteer. Now
it's become my job. I do everything
from assisting marine biologists
with their research projects and
doing animal rescues to handling
paperwork to feeding the animals
and cleaning out their cages.

Maddie leads them into a room with industrial metal tables.

MADDIE

Speaking of which, you might be
wondering what our animals like to
eat. This is our kitchen where we
prepare one of their favorite
treats.

She holds up a large blender filled with fish.

MADDIE

Our fish shake. Today it's a
delicious blend of herring and cod,
with various nutrients mixed in as
well.

She blends it. The children squirm at the concoction.

MADDIE

Would anyone like a taste?

Everyone shakes their head "no" with grossed out looks.

TEACHER

Come, children, this way.

They file out. Po lingers as the group heads out. When
nobody's looking, she takes the fish shake and hungrily
drinks it down.

55 **EXT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - SAME**

55

In various pens and tanks are elephant seals, harbor seals, otters, sea lions.

MADDIE

Once our animals have received the medical care they need, they come out here to recover and prepare for their journey back to the wild.

As soon as Po steps outside, the animals start panicking in their cages, BARKING, SQUEALING, trying to escape. They sense a predator in their midst.

TEACHER

What's going on?

MADDIE

I'm not sure.

It's scary as a giant elephant seal rears up against its cage.

TEACHER

Okay, everyone back inside. Now.

One of the KIDS notices a seal cowering away from Po. Ben and the other researchers rush into the area to check on the commotion. Barking. Squealing. Thrashing.

Ben is surprised to see Po amongst the group. The Kid at the back points to her as he's led inside.

KID

It was her, she did it.

BEN

(to Po)

Come with me.

She thinks for a moment, then follows him through the tunnel of noise. As soon as she's gone, things settle down.

Maddie and the other researchers look around at the animals, unaware Po had anything to do with it.

MADDIE

That was weird.

56 **INT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - OFFICE - SAME**

56

Ben leads Po inside. She regards him, hesitantly. Ben smiles.

BEN

We meet again. You gonna tell me
who you are this time?

She backs away from him.

BEN

It's okay, I'm not going to hurt
you.

Po seems cautious, nervous. Her eyes dart about. Ben slowly
steps toward her.

BEN

I can help you. My name is Ben.
(points to his chest)
Friend.

Her eyes look wan and sickly, the corners of her mouth are
chapped and dry. She stares at him, trust slowly building.

PO

I am Po.

BEN

Po. Okay. Nice to meet you. Where
are you from?

She starts COUGHING. Her lungs sound dry and wheezy. Ben
notices the fissures all along the inside of her arm.

BEN

Are you sick?

He reaches out and takes her arm. He gently touches her
plaque-encrusted skin. Po lets him.

BEN

We have medication here. We can
help you.

It's an oddly intimate moment. Ben lingers. This girl has a
strange effect on him. He stares into her eyes.

BEN

The night we met, you sang a song.
I can't get it out of my head.
Everywhere I go, I hear it.

The moment is broken when Maddie enters the room. She's
surprised to see Ben has a visitor.

MADDIE

Oh, hey. Um, everything's back to normal out there, not sure what that was all about--

Ben lets go of Po's arm.

BEN

This is Po. She's a visitor here. She doesn't really speak English.

Maddie notices her condition.

MADDIE

Is she okay?

BEN

I'm not sure.

MADDIE

I think we need to call a doctor.

BEN

I'll do it. I'll take care of her. Why don't you finish closing things up out there and head home.

Maddie senses something is amiss with Ben. She regards the sickly, exotic girl in the corner, not sure what to make of it. Maddie steps closer to Ben.

MADDIE

(gently)
Dude, are you okay?

BEN

Yeah, I'm good.

Maddie looks to Po. Then she gives Ben a deep, sexy kiss, like a she-wolf marking her territory.

MADDIE

I want you to come over, my dad's got night shift, so I'll be alone.

BEN

Okay, sounds good.

Maddie gives Po a final glance, then turns and exits. Once she's gone, Ben faces Po.

BEN

I'm gonna call the doctor for you.

- Her legs FUSE together with the sound of cracking bones and melding flesh.
- Po winces in agony. Gill SLITS open behind her ears.
- Ben watches slack-jawed.
- Po's toes BREAK APART, fanning out as the powerful tail forms.
- Chunks of MOLTING FLESH fall away. Scales push through the skin with a sickening crunch.
- WEBBING fills in between fingers. She wails as her facial structure alters, teeth sharpen.
- The massive tail unfurls.

And then, just like that, it's over. And all is calm. The mermaid submerges peacefully in the tank.

Ben stands there, astonished. He steps to the edge of the tank, watches the creature swimming gracefully along the bottom.

He leans over to get a better look. The mermaid swims toward him, breaks the surface with a terrifying flash of teeth.

The monster grabs him and pulls him into the water. In full predator mode. Aggressive. Wild. Transformed.

She drags him to the bottom of the tank, drowning him. The seals and sea lions in other pens bark wildly.

Ben manages to kick free. He gulps air before he's tugged under again. Blood fills the water.

Ben grabs a cleaning net from the edge of the tank and hopelessly attempts to fend her off.

She comes at him with open jaws. At the last second, he holds up the net, which she bites in half. It gives him just enough time to make a final, desperate lunge for safety.

He tugs himself out of the tank, rolling down the concrete steps, before crashing onto the floor, crumpled, bloody, and unconscious. The creature angrily hisses at him.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

61 INT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - TREATMENT ROOM - NIGHT

61

A LIGHT SHINES in our eyes. It's Dr. Abbott, checking Ben's pupils. Ben sits on the metal exam table usually reserved for marine animals. His face is gashed and bloody.

BEN

What happened?

DR. ABBOTT

Apparently one of the sea lions didn't like the herring you served him for dinner and decided to attack.

Ben is just now coming to his senses.

BEN

No, it wasn't a sea lion.

DR. ABBOTT

Seal, sea lion, I can never tell the difference.

BEN

Where is she? Po. The girl.

DR. ABBOTT

Ah yes, your mystery date. First she appears naked out of the ether. Then you call me a few days later saying she's in dire need of medical attention.

Dr. Abbott puts his light away, gets serious.

DR. ABBOTT

Ben, I've known you and your family for a long time. There have been challenges. You and your father have not always seen eye to eye. I guess that's to be expected. I've always found you to be a focused, passionate young man.

Ben is growing impatient, half-listening.

DR. ABBOTT

But if you're having visions,
thoughts, flights of fancy,
whatever this is, there are
professionals you can talk to, who
can help you. And if you're not,
well, then I suggest you stop
playing these kinds of games.

Ben gets up from the exam table.

BEN

I have to find her.

Dr. Abbott shakes his head as Ben pushes past.

62 **EXT. MARINE MAMMAL CENTER - NIGHT**

62

It has begun to rain. Ben glances in the salt water tank,
which is now empty.

He rushes out, toward a side gate of the facility. The lock
has been SMASHED open. The bars are BENT.

Ben hurries out into the parking lot. The rain sprinkles
down. He looks around in all directions. There's no sign of
her anywhere.

Ben rushes to his truck. He drives away.

63 **INT. BEN'S TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT**

63

Ben drives along the beach road. He stops and gets out. The
cold, infinite ocean stretches out before him. Ben hurls a
rock into the water, screaming into the night--

BEN

Where did you go?!

64 **INT. BEN'S TRUCK (MOVING) - LATER**

64

Ben drives through town, gripping the wheel, a possessed look
in his eyes. Rain pelts down. The wipers click.

There's a BUZZING sound. A series of texts from Maddie appear
on his phone. *Where r u? Waiting for u.* And then a SEXY
PICTURE of her in a t-shirt and panties. Ben, single-minded,
puts it aside.

He rolls past various shops, then suddenly SLAMS on his
brakes. He backs up and looks at one of the storefronts--

HELEN'S ANTIQUITIES.

65

EXT. HELEN'S ANTIQUITIES SHOP - NIGHT

65

Ben dashes from his truck in the pummeling rain. He KNOCKS on the shop door.

BEN

Hello? Ms. Hubbell? Hello?!

He peers in close to the window, and suddenly, there's a FACE staring out at him. It's Helen with her shocking white hair.

Ben startles back. He shouts to her through the rain.

BEN

That girl yesterday. I know you saw her. You said you didn't, but you did. You knew something about her.

Helen's face disappears from the window. Ben is crestfallen. Then the shop door creaks open. A bony finger beckons him.

HELEN

Come in out of the rain.

66

INT. HELEN'S ANTIQUITIES - NIGHT

66

Helen leads Ben inside. The collection of skulls and mermaid oddities are especially creepy at this time of night. Helen faces him in the half-lit shop. Her emerald eyes glaring.

HELEN

What is it you think I know?

Ben takes a breath.

BEN

That she's one of them. I saw it tonight.

The rain is coming down harder now, lashing the windows.

HELEN

What exactly did you see?

BEN

Lower half, cetacean, powerfully built, triangulated teeth. A top level predator.

He picks up a dusty old tome entitled THE HISTORY OF MERMAIDS. The illustration of a mermaid on the cover bears a striking resemblance to the real thing.

BEN
Just like this.

Ben steps closer to Helen.

BEN
When I was a kid, we'd come in here and you'd tell us stories about the mermaids. We were always told they were just tall tales. Not to believe you. But they weren't made up, were they? They were true.

Helen regards him, intensely.

HELEN
So all these years you laughed at me, and ridiculed me--and now you come here seeking answers?

She stands amidst the artifacts, a dark look in her eyes.

HELEN
No. I owe you nothing.

BEN
I don't get it. You want people to know the truth. It's *here*. What are you afraid of all of a sudden?

HELEN
(pained)
Why don't you ask your wonderful family that question?

67 **EXT. WATERFRONT PARK - NIGHT**

67

Pownall Seafood looms in the distance. The newly unveiled statue of Charles Pownall and the Mermaid is lashed by the rain.

68 **INT. BEN'S TRUCK (PARKED) - NIGHT**

68

Ben, soaking wet, takes something out from under his jacket. It's the tome--THE HISTORY OF MERMAIDS.

In the dim light, he flips through pages. In it are gory ILLUSTRATIONS of death and murder:

- Mermaids and mermen being savagely HUNTED by fishermen in whaling boats.

- Mermaids attacking sailors, TEARING them to shreds.

- Men HACKING the heads off mermaids on a beach.

It suggests a much darker history than we ever imagined. Ben reads with both fascination and horror etched on his face.

69 **EXT. FOREST - NIGHT**

69

A few DEER nibble leaves at the edge of the forest. The Marine Mammal Center is visible through the branches in the distance.

As the deer move quietly through the wet forest, they pass what appears to be chunks of MOLTED FLESH. Further along, half-buried in the mud, lies the mermaid's disembodied TAIL.

And there is Po, back in human form, curled naked amongst the mossy roots of a tree. Her skin is rosy and luminous, coated in an amniotic sheen. She's gorgeous, radiant, re-born.

The SIREN SONG emanates gently from her lips. It fills the verdant forest like a birdsong.

70 **INT. BEN'S HOME - NIGHT**

70

Ben lies asleep in his bed, the leather-bound book open on his chest, his face encrusted in dried blood. Po's SIREN SONG plays over, once again echoing in his dreams.

71 **INT. MADDIE'S HOME - MORNING**

71

Eggs cook in a skillet. Maddie slides them onto a plate in front of her father. She's got a phone in the crook of her neck while she does this. Maddie hangs up.

WILL

What's wrong, Mads?

MADDIE

Nothing. I've just been trying to get a hold of Ben. I don't know why he's not calling me back.

WILL

Don't you worry. I'm sure he's just busy with stuff.

The house phone RINGS. Maddie bounds up to get it.

WILL

See, there you go.

MADDIE

(into phone)

Hello?... Yeah. He's here, hang on.

She holds the phone out to her dad.

MADDIE
For you. It's Clarence.

Her father regards her sympathetically as he takes the phone.

WILL
(into phone)
Hey, Clarence, what's up?...
Okay... Where at?... All right,
I'll be there.

He hangs up. Will seems taken aback by what he's heard. He grabs his jacket and hat from the wall.

MADDIE
What's going on?

WILL
They found a body, some guy
attacked in his car. Out by Stinson
Lane. I gotta run.

He kisses Maddie on the head and exits without finishing his breakfast.

72

EXT. THE NORTH STAR - MORNING

72

Xander and Sean are working aboard their ship, shoring up lines, locking down winches. Sean secures a 12-gauge SHOTGUN onto a rack in the bridge. Xander enters.

XANDER
Dad, you don't have to go out with me. This could get ugly, you know.

CAPT. SEAN
You kidding? I'm not going out with you. You're going out with me.

Xander grins. Sean cranks up the old diesel.

CAPT. SEAN
Anchors aweigh, ya little pisser.
Got us a fish to catch.

73

EXT. BRISTOL COVE - MARINA - SAME

73

Xander releases the lines holding the boat. The North Star chugs out of the marina, rears up, and powers out toward the open ocean.

74 **INT. MILITARY BUNKER - NIGHT**

74

The water in the tank has grown cloudy. The creature is not moving. Machines BEEP and CHIRP, monitoring her condition.

On one of the many security monitors we glimpse footage of Chris locked in his private hospital room.

Decker is alone in here, standing beside the tank, regarding his prize with deep concern. He mutters to her.

DECKER

Please, please, my dear. Be strong.

Decker's eyes are haunted and hollow.

DECKER

I'm going to take good care of you.
I won't let anyone hurt you.

75 **EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT**

75

The North Star plows across the moonlit ocean.

76 **INT. FISHING TRAWLER - SAME**

76

Sean pilots his boat. His fish finder sonar starts beeping. He looks at the colorful monitor alight with curved lines indicating fish. Sean pushes his hat back as he regards it.

CAPT. SEAN

Xander! Get in here!

Xander enters the bridge.

CAPT. SEAN

It's big. And there's a lot of them.

XANDER

They're moving fast.

Sean heads outside, to the bow of the ship. Xander is behind him. They both stare out at the still ocean. Sean grunts.

CAPT. SEAN

Show yourselves, you lousy bastards! You cowards! I know you're out there!

Nothing. Then suddenly, breaking the surface a hundred meters off the bow, a fast-moving body. More follow.

They're DOLPHINS. A large pod of them. Sean curses to himself, breathing hard, the image of a man desperate and consumed. Xander puts a hand on his Dad's shoulder.

As Father and Son stand on the prow, we move around to the back of the boat. The fishing trawler rises and falls on the ocean swells, it almost seems peaceful, until, from out of the dark water--

A DOZEN MERMAIDS rise from the surface, bobbing like seals. They stare placidly at the trawler. It gives us just a moment to breathe, when suddenly, right in front of us--

AN ARM grabs onto the gunwale of the boat. A MERMAN, bigger, scarier, more powerfully built than the others, lifts itself up out of the water. It looks like a primordial warrior on the hunt with a whale bone SPEAR in hand.

END OF PILOT