SEASIDE:

COVERUPS AND BLOWUPS ON 30A

A One-Hour TV DRAMEDY

By

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TEASER

EXT. SEASIDE - DAY

A picture-perfect shot of Seaside, FL., the enclave that epitomizes luxury and indulgence on the gulf coast. Pastel houses, white fences. Tourists shop in the stores along Seaside's horseshoe Green. A yoga class unfolds on the Green.

BUDDY (V.O.)
You ever notice how the prettier a place looks, the darker the people's hearts? Here in Seaside, we've got sun-bleached smiles, oceanfront views, and enough secrets to keep the Catholic confessional full for months.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- Trudy checking her lipstick in a rearview mirror. There's a man's shirt in the passenger seat.

- Blade performing at a sold-out stadium concert.

- Biff fixing a window at the Hartley house, shirtless.

- Amy and Brad walking the beach hand-in-hand.

- Detective Hawks scratching off a lottery ticket.

BUDDY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Down here, the truth's buried under more unmentionables than a spring break suitcase. You got affairs under palm trees. Bribes behind pilates. Now don't get me wrong. I love this town. Best sunsets you'll ever see. But behind every picket fence is a list of off-shore bank accounts and a browser history nobody wants subpoenaed.

Now we pass Buddy himself, (60's, shaggy uncut hair, dirty clothes) riding his old, squeaky bike. He stops and glances at the tourists walking along Seaside's County Highway 30A. And ignoring him.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
You won't hear it from them. But welcome to Seaside. Where the truth shows up late, uninvited, and loud.

INT. TRUDY AND BLADE'S MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ceiling fan spins lazily. The sound of soft music plays from speakers. Silhouettes move under linen sheets. Passionate, intimate, loving.

BIFF HARTLEY (early 30s, impossibly handsome, muscled, easy charm), and TRUDY MCGUFF (40s, structured and sculpted), lie tangled in silk sheets. They're flushed, breathless.

TRUDY
That was a mistake.

BIFF
Yeah? Felt like a good mistake to me.

TRUDY
You should go.

BIFF
You always say that after we make passionate love. But your body says otherwise.

They both laugh. She touches his face, suddenly tender.

TRUDY
If he finds you here

A door slams. They freeze. A pause. Footsteps. Heavy boots.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
Shit. Closet. Now.

Biff grabs his clothes, scrambles into the walk-in closet just as the bedroom door opens.

BLADE MCGUFFIN (40s, tall, charismatic) stands in the doorway. Cowboy hat, faded jeans.

He eyes Trudy naked under the sheets.

BLADE
Well well. Look who left the porch light on.

Trudy laughs nervously.

TRUDY
I thought you were in Memphis ‘til Tuesday.

BLADE
Missed you. Missed this bed. Missed that damn body of yours.

He crosses to her, kisses her neck. She flinches. Closet door behind him shifts. Blade pauses. Looks. Shrugs it off.

BLADE (CONT’D)
What? You’re not in the mood? We’ll fix that.

TRUDY
Blade, no. I’m tired, it’s late.

BLADE
You don’t say no to your husband, Trudy. Not when I’ve been living out of a goddamn tour bus and writing you songs.

She doesn’t answer. He starts unbuttoning his shirt. A bump from the closet. They both freeze, turn to the door.

BLADE (CONT’D)
That you?

TRUDY
What?

BLADE
That noise.

TRUDY
Probably the cat.

BLADE
We don’t have a cat.

Blade crosses the room slowly. Hand to the closet door. A long, quiet beat. He pulls...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GALA TENT - NIGHT

A huge white tent, dazzling string lights everywhere. Buffet tables overflowing. A small stage. An elegant crowd mingles, showing off like flamingos.

Blade stands at the bar doing shots of bourbon. Fans crowd around. He ignores them.

Biff, in an old sport coat, adjusts speakers near the stage.

Trudy watches Biff from across the Green. Their eyes meet. A loaded glance. Blade notices.

LILITH SALAZAR (50s, curvy, botoxed) approaches Biff, champagne in hand.

LILITH
We need to talk. About Hollister.

BIFF
Not here.

LILITH
Then when? You've been avoiding my calls.

BIFF
I said not here.

He walks away. Lilith watches him go, fury barely concealed behind her smile.

JIMBO SALAZAR (30s, high-strung) wearing a captains hat, and ELIZABETH SALAZAR (40, straight-laced, determined) argue over a banner taped to a table:

“In Loving Memory: Hollister’s Legacy Gala.”

An empty donations jar sits on the table.

JIMBO
Why does the banner say In Loving Memory? He’s not dead yet.

ELIZABETH
It was a pre-print option. Anyway, I had to order it a week ago. A lot can happen in a week.

Biff checks his phone. A text from AMY:

"Don't stay out too late, old man."

He smiles. Texts back: "Never do, kiddo."

Across the tent, Trudy mounts the small stage.

TRUDY
Attention everyone!

Clinks her glass as the crowd hushes.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
We've got a very special guest tonight. Just off his second world tour, my favorite country legend, and oh yes my husband.

Polite laughter.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
I give you Nashville's - and Seaside's - very own, Blade McGuff!

Blade jumps onto the stage to the applause of the crowd, country star charisma turned all the way up. He straps on his guitar and adjusts the mic.

Some of the older women fan themselves.

Trudy moves to the side with a glass of wine.

Blade strums a few bars of his heartbreak ballad. The one that made him famous.

BLADE
Hello Seaside!
(into mic)
This one's for anyone who ever gave their heart to the wrong person, and didn't take it back in time.

Complete silence, a few glance at Trudy, others whisper. Trudy notices.

Trudy's smile falters. Her hand tightens around the stem of her wineglass.

Biff locks eyes with Blade from across the tent. Biff's eyes flicker, recover. Biff leaves out the back toward the beach. Trudy notices, a worried look on her face.

The song begins, rich and loaded. It's slow, aching, full of regret.

BLADE (CONT'D)
(singing)
I left my heart in a stranger's hands /
Thought I'd take it back, but it sank in the sand

DETECTIVE HAWKS (48, weathered, in civilian clothes) watches from the edge of the crowd, nursing a beer. He notices Biff leave.

INT. GALA TENT - LATER

Blade finishes his set. As the crowd applauds, he hands off the guitar and leaves toward the beach. The same path Biff took.

Hawks notices.

Trudy pulls out her phone and types frantically:

“Get off the beach. He’ll kill you.”

She hesitates, deletes. Starts over:

“I’m sorry.”

She hits send.

EXT. GALA TENT - CONTINUOUS

Buddy sits in his lawn chair just outside the tent, watching, whispers to no one in particular.

BUDDY
Y’all feel that?
Storm’s comin’.

END OF TEASER

ACT I

EXT. SEASIDE STREET - MORNING

Buddy sits on a folding camp chair in front of a saggy tent on the lawn of a large estate, drinking gas station coffee.

BUDDY (V.O.)
Biff has a heart of gold. But he's also got a dark side that Amy's about to find out about. She's gonna have to grow up fast.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - KITCHEN - MORNING

While tiny, the place still has a woman's touch. Sunlight streams through the window. Biff flips pancakes as he sings a country song.

AMY HARTLEY (18, girl-next-door cute) stumbles in wearing pajamas, hair a mess.

AMY
(laughing)
Is that? Are you singing?

BIFF
I'm celebrating. My daughter's going to college.

AMY
In three weeks. You're celebrating early.

BIFF
(plating pancakes)
Never too early to be proud.

He sets the plate in front of her. Perfect with a whipped cream smiley face.

AMY
(smiling)
I'm eighteen, not eight.

BIFF
You'll always be eight to me.

She takes a bite. Closes her eyes. Perfect.

AMY
Okay, these are good.

BIFF
Damn right they are.

He sits across from her with his own plate.

BIFF (CONT'D)
So. Lat night's gala was a roaring success.

AMY
Stayed for the whole thing?

BIFF
Someone had to set up their sound system. Might as well eat their shrimp while I'm at it.

AMY
(laughing)
You're shameless.

BIFF
I prefer resourceful.

His phone buzzes. He checks it. His smile fades slightly.

AMY
Everything okay?

BIFF
(forcing smile back)
Yeah. Just work stuff.

He puts the phone away. Focuses back on her.

BIFF (CONT'D)
You know I love you, right?

AMY
(suspicious)
Why are you being weird?

BIFF
I'm not being weird. I'm being a dad.

AMY
Same thing.

He reaches across, squeezes her hand.

BIFF
I'm proud of you, kiddo. Whatever happens, remember that.

AMY
(concerned now)
Dad, seriously, what's going on?

BIFF
Nothing. Everything's fine.

But his eyes say otherwise.

INT. TRUDY & BLADE'S MANSION - KITCHEN - MORNING

The place is decorated in coastal white. Art and fine furniture everywhere. Trudy paces, arms folded tight. She holds a glass of wine. The front door slams. BLADE storms in, still buzzed from the gala, eyes bloodshot.

BLADE
(voice low, dangerous)
You think I wouldn't hear? Word gets around this town awful damn fast.

TRUDY
What word? That you drink too much? That you glare at our friends like you're deciding which tree to hang them from?

BLADE
Don't play. You've been whispering things you swore would never leave this house.

Trudy stiffens. Covers it with a scoff.

TRUDY
Whispering? Please. If I wanted to spread gossip, I'd buy ad time on Apollo's radio show.

BLADE
(steps closer, voice breaking just slightly)
You gave him ammunition, Trudy. That man knows things he shouldn't know. Things I trusted you with.

TRUDY
I didn’t tell Biff anything that matters. Not really.

BLADE
Not really? That’s the problem. “Not really” gets a man buried in Arkansas.

Silence. Trudy looks away, fiddling with her necklace.

TRUDY
Maybe if you stopped living like every one’s out to sink you, you wouldn’t see betrayal everywhere.

BLADE
Or maybe betrayal’s the only thing I see ‘cause it keeps showing up in my bed.

Trudy looks wounded.

TRUDY
If you’re so sure I’m the knife in your back, why are you still here?

Blade doesn’t answer. He storms past her into the bedroom.

The door slams hard. A framed photo on the wall rattles loose and crashes to the floor.

Trudy stands in the silence, staring at the broken shards.

It’s a photo of Blade holding up a giant trophy fish with a drunken grin. Trudy stares at her fractured reflection.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - AMY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Small but tidy. On the desk a folder from Northwest Florida State College “Welcome Freshmen!” Photos everywhere: Amy and Biff fishing, building furniture, laughing at the beach. A framed photo: Amy in cap and gown with Biff, both beaming.

Amy wakes to her phone buzzing. She reaches for it groggily.

7 MISSED CALLS - DAD

She sits up, suddenly alert. Checks the time: 8:47 AM.

AMY
Dad?

She dials. Rings. Voicemail.

AMY (CONT'D)
(leaving message)
Dad, it's me. You were supposed to help me pack today. Call me back?

She hangs up. Opens Find My Phone.

Biff's location: Seaside Beach. Last updated: 11:52 PM.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amy walks through the small house calling out.

AMY
Dad?

Empty. Coffee pot cold. His work boots by the door.

She checks the kitchen. His lunch pale still in the fridge.

EXT. SEASIDE BEACH - MORNING

Amy's beat-up Honda pulls into the empty parking lot. She gets out, scanning the sand.

Nothing. Just waves and gulls.

She walks toward where his phone last pinged, checking her app. The blue dot pulses: You are here.

AMY
Dad?

Silence.

Near the dunes, something catches her eye: Biff's work jacket. The one with his name stitched on the pocket.

She picks it up.

AMY (CONT'D)
(louder)
Dad!

No answer. Just the sound of waves.

She pulls out her phone. Dials 911.

EXT. SEASIDE BEACH - 20 MINUTES LATER

A sheriff's cruiser arrives. Hawks climbs out. He approaches Amy pacing near the waterline.

HAWKS
You Biff’s daughter?

AMY
Yea.

HAWKS
How long’s he been missing?

AMY
Since midnight. His phone's been off and I found his jacket

HAWKS
So nine hours?

AMY
He always comes home. Always. And he never turns off his phone.

Hawks sips his coffee, unimpressed.

HAWKS
Sweetheart, I know your dad. Good guy. Heart of gold. You're young. There's things you don't know about him.

AMY
I'm eighteen, not eight. And I know my father.

HAWKS
Look, give it twenty-four hours. If he doesn't turn up, file a report.

AMY
I'm filing one now.

HAWKS
(sighs)
I'll put out a BOLO. But your dad's gonna walk through your door tonight with flowers and an apology.

He heads back to his cruiser.

AMY
(calling after him)
What if he doesn't?

Hawks pauses, turns back.

HAWKS
Then we'll talk.

He drives off. Amy stands alone on the beach, holding her father's jacket.

INT. SALAZAR ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A lavish old-money home on the beach south of 30A. White pillars outside, expensive art everywhere.

Inside, we find HOLLISTER SALAZAR, late 80s, sun-leathered, looking like he’s at death’s door. Half propped up on a chaise in a silk robe and a Trump MAGA hat from 2016.

His grown children, Jimbo and Elizabeth, circling like buzzards. A nurse adjusts his oxygen.

JIMBO
(whispers to Elizabeth)
I swear, if that old man croaks today, she gets everything. Including the goddamn flamingo float.

ELIZABETH
It’s not about the float, Jimbo. It’s about principle. And the deed to the marina.

JIMBO
(to nurse)
Can we, I dunno, wake him up with bacon or something? He always liked the smell of bacon.

NURSE
He’s not unconscious, sir. He’s just ignoring you.

Hollister’s eyelids flutter open. A slow, crooked smile.

HOLLISTER
I liked you better when you were both in diapers. At least then you couldn’t lie to me with a straight face.

JIMBO
Dad, this is serious. Lilith is just taking your money. You bought her a jet ski last week!

HOLLISTER
It was on sale. And she said she'd ride it in heels.

ELIZABETH
She's wearing heels right now, Daddy. With a thong. In the house.

JIMBO
She just passed me in the hallway dressed, if you can call it that, like she was posing for Sports Illustrated.

HOLLISTER
She's expressive.

JIMBO
She's a widow-in-waiting!

ELIZABETH
Daddy, please. The will. Just sign the damn will.

JIMBO
We got it all drawn up. We even used the fancy notary with the good teeth.

HOLLISTER
I signed a will already.

ELIZABETH
You signed her will. Lilith's. The one where she gets everything if you drop dead with a hard-on.

HOLLISTER
(Suddenly alert)
Sounds like a hell of a way to go.

JIMBO
Come on Dad. Just tell us where the last one is.

HOLLISTER
She might be a gold-digger, but she's better in bed than your mama ever was.

JIMBO
Gross! Our mama gave you two children and gout.

ELIZABETH
You need to tell us where the will is. Before your libido finishes the job the strokes started.

Hollister leans back, distant. A seagull squawks outside. The moment softens.

HOLLISTER
You kids think this town's about property. It’s not. It's about secrets. You outlive the ones who know yours, you win. Course, if I die tomorrow Lilith wins anyway. That's what you're really scared of.

ELIZABETH
We're scared we'll lose what you and Mama built. And what you forgot you promised us.

Hollister stares at them a moment, then closes his eyes. Long pause. He might be asleep. Or dead. No one's sure.

JIMBO
Did he die?

Elizabeth slaps Hollister's leg. He grunts. Not dead.

ELIZABETH
Nope. Just being an asshole.

Just then, Lilith sweeps into the room like Elizabeth Taylor, wearing a gauzy wrap that covers absolutely nothing important. She holds a smoothie and a yoga mat. Straddles Hollister’s recliner and takes a pull from his oxygen tube.

LILITH
Rise and grind, sugar lump. Your heart’s still ticking and I just did ten lunges in a thong for nothing.

Hollister is suddenly chipper.

HOLLISTER
Morning, sugar plum. You stretch those hips out good for me now.

Jimbo recoils. Elizabeth gags a little.

ELIZABETH
Daddy. Focus.

HOLLISTER
I've survived three hurricanes and two wives. If a yoga orgasm takes me out, it's how I want to go.

LILITH
See? He gets it.

Lilith winks, struts off toward the bedroom. Jimbo watches her go like a man watching his inheritance walk off a cliff. Hollister sighs admiringly at her retreating figure, half-drunk on love and blood thinners.

HOLLISTER
(to himself)
God bless America.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - BIFF'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Amy stands in the doorway of her father's room. Bed made. Everything neat.

She walks in slowly, looking for something. Anything.

On his nightstand: reading glasses, a water glass, a photo of Amy's late mother.

She opens the nightstand drawer. Bills. Receipts. A worn Bible.

Nothing unusual.

She turns to his closet. Opens it.

Work shirts. Jeans. Tool belts hanging on hooks.

Then she notices it, pushed to the back, behind his winter coats: a metal lockbox.

Amy pulls it out. Locked. She searches for a key, finds one taped under the nightstand drawer.

Her hands shake as she unlocks it.

Inside:

Stacks of cash , maybe $10,000

A burner phone

Photos of multiple selfies with Biff:

Trudy kissing him. Lilith in an argument with him. Jimbo with Biff, a finger in his face. Blade McGuff, neither smiling.

A small leather notebook.

She opens the notebook. Reads aloud, voice shaking:

AMY
Blade McGuff, one thousand monthly, Arkansas incident. Lilith Salazar, one thousand monthly, Hollister's will. Jimbo Salazar, five hundred monthly, gambling debts plus marina fraud.

She flips through more pages. More names. More secrets. More money.

AMY (CONT'D)
(whisper)
Dad, what are you doing?

She turns on the burner phone. Phone calls to Trudy, Blade, Jimbo, Lilith and others.

She grabs the box contents and heads out.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Hawks sits at his desk. Amy bursts in, breathless, clutching the lockbox contents.

HAWKS
Sit down, Amy.

AMY
Did you find him?

HAWKS
No. But we found his phone. In the water about fifty yards from where you found the jacket.

He shows her a plastic evidence bag. Biff's phone inside. Screen smashed.

HAWKS (CONT'D)
We pulled the SIM card. Last text was sent at 11:43 PM. To Blade.

He shows her his computer screen. The text message:

"I'm done. Meet me at the beach. We end this tonight."

Amy's breath catches.

AMY
So he was meeting Blade.

HAWKS
Looks that way.

AMY
Then Blade knows what happened to him.

HAWKS
Maybe. Or maybe your father never showed up. Or maybe they met and your father left.

AMY
With a torn jacket? A smashed phone? Without his truck?

Hawks doesn't answer.

AMY (CONT'D)
You think something happened to him.

HAWKS
I think it's, concerning. But without more evidence

Amy pulls out the burner phone. The notebook. The photos.

AMY
Is this enough evidence?

Hawks takes them. Flips through the notebook. His expression darkens.

HAWKS
Where did you get these?

AMY
My dad's closet. He was blackmailing people. A lot of people.

Hawks studies the photos. The notebook entries.

HAWKS
(whispers)
Jesus Christ, Biff.

He looks up at Amy.

HAWKS (CONT'D)
Did you know about any of this?

AMY
(sharp, defensive)
No. I thought he was a handyman. I thought he fixed people's houses.

HAWKS
Looks like he fixed a lot more than that.

He sets the evidence down carefully.

HAWKS (CONT'D)
Amy, if your father was blackmailing these people, and something happened to him, any one of them could be responsible.

AMY
Then question them.

HAWKS
I will. But I need you to understand something. This changes things. Your father isn't just a missing person. He was involved in criminal activity. That makes people dangerous.

AMY
Are you saying he deserved what happens?

HAWKS
I'm saying you need to be careful.

Hawks pulls up security footage on his computer. Amy leans in.

HAWKS (CONT'D)
This is from the Green. Last night. Charity gala.

ON SCREEN: Grainy footage. Elegant crowd under string lights.

HAWKS (CONT'D)
Your dad was there. Left around 11:47.

ON SCREEN: Biff exits toward the beach path, checks his phone, walks into darkness. His face is tense.

AMY
Who else left?

Hawks clicks to another angle.

ON SCREEN: Blade exits later. Same direction. His jaw is clenched. Fists tight.

AMY (CONT'D)
He followed him.

HAWKS
Keep watching.

Hawks clicks through more angles.

ON SCREEN: Lilith Salazar exits through a side path at 11:50, phone to her ear, looking agitated.

ON SCREEN: Jimbo Salazar stumbles toward the beach at 11:52, drunk, arguing with someone off-camera.

ON SCREEN: Trudy McGuff stands near the stage at 11:53, watching all of them, phone glowing in her hand.

Amy's breath catches.

AMY
(whisper)
They all followed him.

HAWKS
Or they all had somewhere else to be.

AMY
At midnight? On the same beach?

Hawks doesn't answer. The implications hang heavy.

AMY (CONT'D)
Four people. Four motives. Any one of them could have

She can't finish the sentence.

HAWKS
We don't know that anything happened. Your father could still be

AMY
Alive? With a torn jacket and a smashed phone and four people who wanted him dead?

Hawks closes the laptop.

HAWKS
I'm going to question all of them. But you need to stay out of it. These are dangerous people.

AMY
My father's missing. I'm already in it.

Hawks pauses, then pulls out a POST-IT note and starts writing.

HAWKS
Go see Sylvania at the theater. She knew your dad pretty well. She may know something. She’s not in on this so I’ll be busy with others.

INT. SEASIDE COMMUNITY THEATER - DAY

SYLVANIA PETTIPIECE (60s, theatrical diva, draped in scarves) directs auditions. A sign hangs at the back of the stage: Tryouts - Steel Magnolias”

AMY enters quietly through the back and takes a seat.

She sits in the back row.

On stage, Darlene (50s) is trying out.

DARLENE
I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful,

SYLVANIA
(interrupting)
Stop. Stop! Darling, you're playing a Southern belle, not a hostage reading a ransom note.

DARLENE
I'm from Michigan.

SYLVANIA
I don't care if you're from Mars!
Find your inner magnolia!

DARLENE
I don't know what that means.

SYLVANIA
(to the heavens)
Why do you test me?

She turns to her ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (30s, exhausted).

SYLVANIA (CONT'D)
Make a note. "Lacks magnolia."

SYLVANIA (CONT'D)
Try again. But this time, imagine you're, I don't know, a flower. A beautiful, tragic flower.

DARLENE
What kind of flower?

SYLVANIA
A magnolia! We've been over this!

DARLENE
I've never seen a magnolia.

SYLVANIA
(losing it)
It's a TREE! With FLOWERS! Google it!

The actress tries again. Somehow worse.

DARLENE
(reading, monotone)
I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special.

SYLVANIA
(clutching her chest)
You're killing me. You're literally killing me. I can feel my heart stopping.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(to Darlene)
Maybe try it with emotion?

DARLNE
This is emotion!

SYLVANIA
What emotion? Boredom? Constipation?

DARLENE
I'm nervous!

SYLVANIA
Then use that! Channel your fear! Your anxiety! Your, whatever it is you're feeling that makes you sound like a hypnotist.

Darlene bursts into tears, runs off stage.

SYLVANIA (CONT'D)
(calling after her)
That's better! That's real emotion! Come back!

She's gone.

Sylvania notices Amy in the back.

SYLVANIA (CONT'D)
You! Girl in the back! Get up here!

AMY
I'm not here to audition.

SYLVANIA
Everyone's here to audition. Life is an audition! Death is the callback!

AMY
I really can't. I just need to ask you about my dad.

SYLVANIA
(marching down the aisle)
Nonsense. You've got the look. Tragic. Haunted. Like you've seen things.

AMY
My father's missing.

SYLVANIA
(eyes lighting up)
Perfect! That's exactly what I need!

She grabs Amy's arm, pulls her toward the stage.

AMY
This isn't a good time.

SYLVANIA
There's never a good time for art! That's what makes it art!

She shoves a script into Amy's hands.

SYLVANIA (CONT'D)
Read Shelby. Page forty-two. And don't hold back. I want to see pain. Real pain.

AMY
I have plenty of that.

SYLVANIA
Then share it with us! Theater is therapy! Cheaper, too.

Amy stares at the script. The words blur.

AMY
(reading, voice cracking)
And when it's all said and done there will be a little piece of immortality with Jackson's good looks and my sense of style, I hope. Please, please I need your support. I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special.

Silence. Sylvania's eyes well up.

SYLVANIA
(whisper)
That's it. That's the pain.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(wiping eyes)
That was beautiful.

SYLVANIA
(to Amy)
You're hired.

AMY
I'm not auditioning.

SYLVANIA
You're hired anyway. Rehearsals start Monday.

AMY
I can't. I have to

SYLVANIA
(interrupting)
Find your father? Yes, I heard.

Amy stares.

AMY
How did you

SYLVANIA
Darling, this is Seaside. Everyone knows everything. Except where your father is. That's still a mystery. Speaking of which, your father. He came to see me. Two days ago.

Amy's attention sharpens.

AMY
What did he want?

She leads Amy backstage.

INT. SEASIDE THEATER - TECH BOOTH

Small, cluttered. Sound equipment everywhere. MIKE (30s, kind eyes) sits at a mixing board, headphones on.

SYLVANIA
Mike, honey, can you help us with something?

MIKE
(removing headphones)
Sure. What's up?

SYLVANIA
This is Amy. Biff's daughter.

MIKE
Oh. I'm so sorry. Your dad, he was a good guy. Fixed my car last month. Wouldn't take any money.

AMY
He did?

MIKE
Yeah. Said to pay it forward. So if there's anything I can do.

SYLVANIA
(interrupting)
The recording. From the spring production. Can you pull it up?

MIKE
(confused)
The, the Blade thing?

SYLVANIA
Yea.

MIKE
(to Amy)
Your dad asked about it too. Two days ago.

AMY
He did?

MIKE
Yeah. Came by. Asked if we still had it. I told him we did. He seemed relieved. And scared.

AMY
Scared of what?

MIKE
(pause)
He didn't say. But he kept looking over his shoulder. Like someone was following him. Mike pulls up the audio file on his computer.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Here. This is from March. Blade got drunk backstage after the show. Started talking. I was recording levels, caught the whole thing. He clicks play.

AUDIO
(Blade's voice, drunk)
That's why I left Arkansas. Too many questions about Nash.
(MORE)

AUDIO (CONT'D)
Now he's nobody anymore. You don't mess with me.

Mike stops the recording.

MIKE
There's more. About five minutes of him rambling. Want me to put it on a thumb drive?

AMY
Please.

Mike pulls out a USB drive, starts copying the file.

MIKE
(while copying)
Your dad, he was worried. Said if anything happened to him, this recording was important. That it was, what did he call it, insurance.

AMY
Insurance against what?

MIKE
No idea, man.

The file finishes copying. Mike hands Amy the drive.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I hope this helps. And Amy? Be careful. If your dad was right,

AMY
I will. Thank you.

SYLVANIA
(to Amy)
Monday! Seven PM! Rehearsal!

AMY
(leaving)
I'll think about it.

SYLVANIA
(to Mike)
She's perfect for Shelby. That pain. That grief.

MIKE
She's eighteen and her father's missing. Maybe give her a break.

SYLVANIA
Art doesn't take breaks, Michael.
God, I love my job.

EXT. SEASIDE COMMUNITY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Amy walks to her car, USB drive clutched in her hand. She looks at it. Her phone buzzes.

Text from unknown number: "Stop digging or you'll wind up like your old man."

Amy stares at the message. Fear flickers across her face. Then determination. She gets in her car. Starts the engine.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

EXT. BUDDY'S TENT - MORNING

Buddy climbs out of his tent and stretches, looking over his shoulder at his estate like it was a prison. He grabs his rickety bike and heads off.

BIFF (V.O.)
Reason I know so much about this town's secrets is 'cause people don't see me. Not really. They kinda see through me. I guess they'd like me better if they knew about my daddy. But prolly not.

He passes a poster tacked to a pole:

"Biff Hartley Missing. Call Seaside PD"

BUDDY (V.O.)
Like poor Biff. Everybody thought he was poor. Turns out he had a way to make himself some money, live like them. Now he's missing, but sometimes missing just means somebody's done hid the truth too well. But sooner or later, truth has a way of tracking sand across every clean floor in town.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amy sits at her desk, laptop open. The USB drive from Sylvania plugged in.

She clicks play on the audio file. She hears two voices, a male, and a female. She knows both.

BLADE'S VOICE (O.S.)
(drunk, slurring)
You know what the problem with Nashville is? Too many questions. That's why I left Arkansas. Too many questions about Nash.

SYLVANIA (O.S.)
Who's Nash?

BLADE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Nobody anymore. Doesn't matter. Forget it.

The audio cuts out.

Amy searches: "Nash Arkansas missing person musician"

Results flood the screen:

"NASH WHITLEY, 32, MISSING SINCE 2019"

“Arkansas Man Vanishes After Bar Fight”

A KNOCK at her window. She jumps, spins around.

BRAD McGUFF (19) stands outside.

Amy opens the window.

AMY
Brad, you scared me.

BRAD
Sorry. Saw your light on.

He climbs through the window with practiced ease.

AMY
You okay?

BRAD
(deflecting)
I should be asking you that.

AMY
I'm managing.

BRAD
(noticing laptop)
What are you working on?

AMY
Just research.

She closes the laptop quickly. He notices.

BRAD
You don't have to hide things from me.

AMY
I'm not hiding anything.

BRAD
(sitting on her bed)
Have you, have you heard anything? About your dad?

AMY
No. Nothing. Hawks is questioning people tomorrow.

BRAD
(pause)
Including my dad?

AMY
Probably. He was the last person to see him. According to the security footage.

BRAD
Right.

Silence. The weight of what they're not saying.

AMY
Brad, I need to ask you something.

BRAD
Okay.

AMY
When you were a kid. Did your dad ever talk about someone named Nash?

BRAD
Why?

AMY
Just answer the question.

BRAD
He had nightmares. Used to wake up screaming. My mom, my real mom, she'd have to calm him down.

AMY
Brad, where were you? That night. When my dad,

BRAD
(pulling back)
Home. Asleep. Why?

AMY
Just asking.

BRAD
(tense)
You think I had something to do with,

AMY
No. I'm asking everyone.

BRAD
(standing)
I should go. It's late.

AMY
Brad, wait,

BRAD
(at window, forced smile)
Get some sleep. Tomorrow's going to be hard. For both of us.

He climbs out. Amy watches him go.

EXT. FISHING MARINA - MORNING

A beat-up charter boat, paint flaking, held together with tape and zip ties. Jimbo, wearing his dirty captain’s hat, stands proudly beside the boat addressing a nervous couple of TOURISTS.

JIMBO
Welcome aboard the "Reel Justice." She’s a bit temperamental, but then again so’s my ex-wife.

TOURIST WOMAN
Is there seating?

JIMBO
Depends how much you drink.

He gestures them aboard. They climb on with hesitation.

INT. FISHING BOAT - CONTINUOUS

TOURIST MAN
Do we need life jackets?

JIMBO
Only if we plan on sinking. Which, let’s be honest, is a possibility.

The boat's motor coughs. Jimbo kicks it, sputters louder as they head for open water.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
Don't worry. If we can't find fish. If we don't catch anything, we'll hold up bait and tell your friends it was a fighter. I have Photoshop.

He steers them toward the horizon, slightly crooked.

INT. SALAZAR LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hollister sits in his recliner in pajamas, watching a YouTube sermon of REVEREND APOLLO at full volume on the TV.

Lilith enters in silky see-through negligé carrying two mugs of hot tea.

LILITH
Evening blessings, my sweet patriarch.

HOLLISTER
I already brushed my teeth.

LILITH
It's not tea, Hollister. It's an invitation. To legacy.

She hands him a printed brochure:

"The Future Stewards of the Gulf. A Ministry of Preservation and Youth."

Hollister squints.

HOLLISTER
This logo looks like the fish from Stinky's.

LILITH
It's modern branding. Christ in Helvetica.

She settles beside him, laying it on thick.

ELIZABETH
I just want to honor your values. You're a pillar. A moral compass. A fiscal lighthouse.

He sips the tea. Makes a face.

HOLLISTER
Is this mint?

ELIZABETH
Spearmint. And a touch of holy ambition.

He looks at the brochure again. Reads aloud:

HOLLISTER
“With your generous gift of real estate, small watercraft, and/or end-of-life dividends”.

He pauses. Looks at her.

HOLLISTER (CONT’D)
Is this about my will?

LILITH
It’s about your eternal footprint, my love. Plus, you say you added me to your will, but I’ve never seen it.

HOLLISTER
Lilith. You already tried to kill me twice this week.

ELIZABETH
That’s called passion, sweetness.

He reaches for the TV remote and turns up the sermon.

HOLLISTER
This preacher’s got something in his eyes. Might be allergies. Might be truth.

Lilith lifts her mug. Sips. Seethes. Smiles.

INT. APOLLO HOME - RADIO BOOTH - DAY

It’s a strange hybrid space: part basement man cave, part makeshift radio studio. A camera sits on a tripod. Dusty books on theology lean against a stack of vinyl gospel records. A giant neon cross buzzes on the wall.

At the desk sits REVEREND JOSIAH APOLLO (70s, equal parts theologian and vaudeville actor). He wears a blazer over a t-shirt that reads "GOD’S ORIGINAL INFLUENCER."

His voice is buttered velvet. Seasoned and still peddling salvation like it's two-for-one at the Piggly Wiggly.

APOLLO
(into mic)
Welcome back saints and sinners, to Grace After Dark, where the Lord's light shines just bright enough to catch you sneakin' out the back door.

A knock at the door, and Mike peaks his head in.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Come on in, son. You looking for salvation?

MIKE
Not sure. Maybe. I dunno

Apollo motions him to a chair, and he takes the seat.

APOLLO
So. You wanna talk about your afflictions. Tell me about them, son. No charge.

MIKE
I don't know if it's addiction or just poor taste in the company I keep.

APOLLO
That's the same thing in this zip code. You been drinkin' to forget or drinkin' to remember?

MIKE
Both. Depending on who I wake up next to.

APOLLO
(laughing)
The devil don't need a pitchfork, son. He just needs an open tab and bad lighting. You still got faith?

MIKE
I've got feelings. Not sure they qualify as faith.

APOLLO
Feelings are faith's sloppy cousin. I'll take it.

MIKE
I just wanna stop being the punchline at my own altar call. I get fallin' down drunk every weeekend. And to top it off, my wife is threatening to leave me. I need help, Reverend.

APOLLO
Then you're in the right place.

He hits a button. Gospel organ music plays faintly.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Let us pray.

MIKE
Now?

APOLLO
Son, there's no such thing as a convenient moment for grace.

They bow their heads.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Lord, we lift our voice up for Mike today. Help him put down the bottle, zip up his pants, and pick up Your holy intention.

Apollo pauses.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
And if You can't do all three at once, start with the pants.

Mike laughs. Real this time. Something loosens in his shoulders. Apollo turns to his credenza, and picks up a bottle.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Can I interest you in some bourbon? It's Holy Molly. Bible verse on every bottle.

MIKE
No thanks, Reverend. But thanks for the advice.

APOLLO
Don't thank me. This is my job. Now us Baptists don't do Hail Mary's.
(MORE)

APOLLO (CONT'D)
So go make amends. Or failing that, order the Cuban from Sal's.

He hits the outro jingle:

Grace After Dark /

Where redemption's half price after sundown

Mike leaves. The Reverend leans back, lights a cigar, and pours two fingers of Holy Molly Bourbon into a whiskey glass.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
(to himself)
That boy's got him some issues.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - MORNING

JIMBO sits across from Hawks, nervous, sweating. Still wearing his captain's hat.

HAWKS
Mr. Salazar, where were you the night Biff Hartley disappeared?

JIMBO
I already told you. With my sister.

HAWKS
Elizabeth says you weren't with her.

Jimbo's face goes pale.

JIMBO
She's, she's lying. Or confused. She gets confused.

HAWKS
Your sister's a real estate agent. She seems pretty sharp to me.

JIMBO
(defensive)
Well, she's also a Scorpio. They're naturally suspicious.

Hawks stares at him.

HAWKS
What does that have to do with anything?

JIMBO
I don't know! I'm grasping at straws here!

HAWKS
Security footage shows you leaving the gala at 11:52. Heading toward the beach.

JIMBO
I was drunk. I don't remember.

HAWKS
How drunk?

JIMBO
(thinking)
Like, a solid eight out of ten. Maybe eight and a half.

HAWKS
That's very specific for someone who doesn't remember.

JIMBO
I remember the drinking part! It's the walking part that's fuzzy!

Hawks slides a photo across the table. Jimbo and Biff arguing at the marina.

HAWKS
This was taken two weeks ago. You were threatening him.

JIMBO
I wasn't threatening, I was, I was negotiating. Aggressively.

HAWKS
With your finger in his face?

JIMBO
That's how I negotiate! I'm Italian! Well, half Italian. Quarter, maybe. My grandmother was,

HAWKS
(interrupting)
You were paying Biff five hundred a month. Why?

JIMBO
(slumping)
I owed money. To some bad people in Pensacola. Gambling debts. Biff found out. Said he'd tell my father unless I paid him.

HAWKS
So you had motive to want him dead.

JIMBO
I had motive to want a lot of people dead! Doesn't mean I killed them!

HAWKS
Them? Plural?

JIMBO
(panicking)
Him! I meant him! Biff! Just Biff!

HAWKS
You followed him to the beach that night.

JIMBO
I got to the beach. But he was already, he was already with Blade. They were arguing. So I left.

HAWKS
You left.

JIMBO
Yes! I'm a coward! I admit it! I saw two angry men and I thought, "Jimbo, this is not your fight. Go home. Have a sandwich."

HAWKS
Did you have a sandwich?

JIMBO
What?

HAWKS
When you got home. Did you have a sandwich?

JIMBO
I, I don't remember. Why does that matter?

HAWKS
Because if you went home, someone would have seen you. Your wife. A neighbor. Someone.

JIMBO
I'm not married. I live alone. With my parents. Or sometimes on my boat, which is sinking.

HAWKS
I noticed.

JIMBO
(defensive)
It's a metaphor!

HAWKS
For what?

JIMBO
For my life! Everything I touch sinks! My boat! My finances! My alibis!

Hawks makes notes. Jimbo slumps in his chair.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
Am I under arrest?

HAWKS
Not yet. But don't leave town.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

EXT. SEASIDE PAVILION - MORNING

BUDDY (V.O.)
Funny thing about guilt. it don’t sunburn, but you can sure feel it blister. Around here, redemption’s just another word for spin. And bless their hearts, they all think they’re the good guy.

INT. APOLLO HOME - DAY

Hawks sits across from Reverend Apollo, nervously clutching his confession journal, wearing a WWJD t-shirt.

APOLLO
I really shouldn't be sharing this. Pastoral confidentiality.

HAWKS
Biff Hartley is missing. Possibly dead. This isn't about confidentiality anymore.

APOLLO
Biff came to me three weeks ago. For confession.

HAWKS
What did he confess?

Reverend Apollo opens his journal.

APOLLO
(reading)
Expressed guilt over taking money from people who deserve to lose it. Asked if blackmail could be considered divine redistribution.

HAWKS
What did you tell him?

APOLLO
I said God works in mysterious ways, but extortion isn't one of them. Then I suggested he return the money and seek forgiveness.

HAWKS
Did he?

APOLLO
He laughed. Said forgiveness doesn't pay the bills. Then he wrote me a check for a thousand dollars.

HAWKS
For what?

APOLLO
The new stained glass window. But the check bounced. Which, in retrospect, was probably the Lord's way of saying don't take blood money.

HAWKS
You think it was blood money?

APOLLO
Well, it was certainly guilt money. Or, or sin money? Is there a difference? I should look that up.

He starts to pull out his phone. Hawks stops him.

HAWKS
Reverend. Focus.

APOLLO
Right. Sorry. I get distracted. ADHD. Well, not diagnosed. But I suspect.

HAWKS
Did Biff say anything else? About being afraid? About threats?

APOLLO
He said he'd made a mistake. That he'd taken money from the wrong guy.

HAWKS
Did he say who?

APOLLO
No. But he seemed terrified. Which was unusual. Biff wasn't the terrified type. More the confident-bordering-on-cocky type.

HAWKS
Anything else?

APOLLO
He asked if I thought God forgave murderers. I said God forgives everyone who truly repents. He said, what if they don't repent? What if they just keep killing?

Hawks leans forward.

HAWKS
He said keep killing? Plural?

APOLLO
Yes. Like there was more than one. Or more than one person. Or, or maybe he meant killing as a hobby? Like stamp collecting but, you know, darker.

HAWKS
I don't think murder is a hobby.

APOLLO
Well, not a healthy one, certainly.

Hawks stands, pulls out a card.

HAWKS
If you remember anything else, call me.

APOLLO
Of course! Should I, should I pray for Biff? Or is it too late? I never know the protocol for possibly dead people.

HAWKS
Pray for him.

APOLLO
Oh good. I'll add him to the list. Right after Mrs. Henderson's cat. It's still missing.

Hawks leaves, shaking his head.

INT. APOLLO HOME - RADIO BOOTH - NIGHT

Apollo leans into the mic. Bible open.

APOLLO
Before we close tonight, just remember that for every sin forgiven, your donation gets you another. Free of charge. Now I want all of you to put your hands on the radio and collectively send up a prayer for Brother Jimbo Salazar, whose charter boat may have finally given up the ghost. And for the couple still missing from last Tuesday's 2-for-1 fishin' cruise.

He adjusts his collar and leans in.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
And to the woman who called in earlier asking if adultery counts if you're sorry. Yes, it still counts. Especially if your HOA president is involved, Ethyl. Don't forget to stop by and have me confess your sins. Just know they're going in next Sunday's bulletin. Good night, Seaside.

He flicks off the mic. Removes his headphones.

Mike, rumpled and twitchy, emerges from the side door holding a bottle of Holly Molly and two plastic cups.

MIKE
That was almost profound.

APOLLO
Nah. I save the good stuff for Sunday.

He eyes the bottle.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Is that what I think it is? I thought you were climbing on the wagon, rickity as it may be.

MIKE
Tomorrow, Reverend. Tonight, a bottle of sin.

Apollo makes room and Mike sets the bottle down on the cluttered desk.

MIKE (CONT'D)
You ever think about telling people?

APOLLO
Telling them what?

MIKE
About Biff. That night.

Apollo sips.

APOLLO
Nope.

MIKE
Why not?

APOLLO
Because he didn't confess. He threatened.

MIKE
He didn't know what he was doing.

APOLLO
He knew enough to scare me sober. But he's gone now. So maybe the Lord intervened.

They sit in silence a moment.

APOLLO (CONT'D)
Or maybe you did. Or Brad. Or Blade. Or Lilith.

Mike doesn't answer. Just refills both glasses.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

LILITH sits perfectly composed. Her LAWYER (50s, expensive suit, exhausted) sits beside her.

LAWYER
My client is here voluntarily. She's not under arrest.

HAWKS
Yet.

LILITH
(cool)
Ask your questions, Detective.

HAWKS
Where were you the night Biff Hartley disappeared?

LILITH
At the gala. Then home.

HAWKS
Security footage shows you leaving at 11:50. Toward the beach.

LILITH
I went for a walk. To clear my head.

LAWYER
(interjecting)
My client enjoys evening constitutionals. It's very healthy. The American Heart Association recommends,

HAWKS
(to lawyer)
I'm not asking for medical advice.

LAWYER
Just establishing that beach walks are perfectly normal behavior.

HAWKS
At midnight?

LAWYER
My client is a night owl.

LILITH
(to lawyer)
I can speak for myself, Gerald.

LAWYER
I'm just trying to,

LILITH
You're trying to make me sound like a crazy person who wanders beaches at midnight.

LAWYER
I'm trying to establish reasonable doubt!

LILITH
There's no doubt to establish! I didn't do anything!

LAWYER
Then why did you hire me?

LILITH
Because you're supposed to be good at this!

LAWYER
I am good at this! You're just a difficult client!

HAWKS
(interrupting)
Are you two finished?

They both glare at each other, then turn back to Hawks.

LILITH
Yes.

LAWYER
For now.

Hawks slides a photo across the table. Hollister at the bottom of stairs, Lilith at the top.

HAWKS
Six months ago, your husband fell down the stairs. Biff Hartley got there 10 minutes later. Took these photos.

Lilith's composure cracks slightly.

LAWYER
(to Lilith)
Don't answer that.

LILITH
(ignoring him)
My husband fell. It was an accident.

HAWKS
Biff didn't think so. That's why you were paying him a thousand a month.

LAWYER
Alleged payments for alleged services,

HAWKS
We have bank records.

LAWYER
Circumstantial!

HAWKS
We have photos.

LAWYER
Out of context!

HAWKS
We have Biff's notebook with detailed entries.

LAWYER
Hearsay!

HAWKS
(to Lilith)
Did you kill Biff Hartley?

LAWYER
Don't answer that!

LILITH
(standing)
I didn't kill him. But I'm not sorry he's dead.

LAWYER
(head in hands)
Why do I even come to these things?

LILITH
Because I pay you three hundred dollars an hour.

LAWYER
Not enough. Not nearly enough.

Lilith walks out. Her lawyer follows, muttering.

LAWYER (CONT'D)
I should have been a dentist. Like my mother wanted.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. SEASIDE BEACH - MORNING

Buddy sits on steps leading down to the sand. Kids are building a sandcastle nearby. The sky is foreboding.

BUDDY (V.O.)
You ever seen a sandcastle in a storm? That’s Seaside right now. Secrets don’t stay buried — not in this heat. And what rises up ain’t always what you hoped for. But it sure makes for good theater.

EXT. SEASIDE MARINA - DAY

Amy and Brad walk the docks. They spot Jimbo on his boat, now waist-deep in water, still bailing.

AMY
Mr. Salazar?

Jimbo looks up, sees them.

JIMBO
Oh good. Witnesses to my humiliation.

BRAD
Your boat's really sinking.

JIMBO
Thank you, Captain Obvious. What gave it away? The water? Or my tears?

AMY
We need to ask you something.

JIMBO
Can it wait? I'm in the middle of a maritime disaster.

AMY
It's about my father.

Jimbo stops bailing. Looks at her.

JIMBO
I heard. I'm sorry.

AMY
Are you?

JIMBO
(pause)
Honestly? I don't know. Your father was, complicated.

BRAD
That's one word for it.

JIMBO
What do you want me to say? That I'm devastated? I barely knew the man. Except for the part where he was bleeding me dry.

The boat lurches. Water pours in faster.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
Much like this boat. Which is also bleeding me dry. Everything in my life is a metaphor for financial ruin!

AMY
Detective Hawks said you were at the beach that night.

JIMBO
I was drunk. I don't remember.

BRAD
Convenient.

JIMBO
(to Brad)
You know what's not convenient? Being interrogated while drowning!

He bails frantically. The bucket has a hole in it. Water pours back out.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
Are you kidding me?! The bucket has a hole?!

AMY
Mr. Salazar, this is serious.

JIMBO
So is this! I'm literally sinking!

BRAD
Then get off the boat.

JIMBO
I can't! If I leave, someone will steal it!

AMY
Who would someone steal a sinking boat?

JIMBO
(pause)
Pirates?

BRAD
There are no pirates in Seaside.

JIMBO
You don't know that! Florida's full of surprises!

The boat tilts dangerously. Jimbo grabs the mast.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
Okay, fine! I was at the beach! I saw Biff and Blade arguing! And then someone else showed up and I ran! Happy?!

AMY
Who else showed up?

JIMBO
I don't know! It was dark! And I was drunk! And scared! And now I'm wet!

The boat sinks another foot. Water up to his chest now.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
(to the heavens)
This is karma, isn't it?! For that thing in Tallahassee!

AMY
What thing in Tallahassee?

JIMBO
Nothing! Forget I said that!

A DOCK WORKER appears, filming on his phone.

DOCK WORKER
Way cool. This is going viral.

JIMBO
(still in sinking boat)
At least tag me! Spell my name right! J-I-M-B-O!

Amy and Brad walk away, leaving Jimbo to his fate.

JIMBO (CONT'D)
(calling after them)
Tell the Coast Guard I'm at slip forty-two! Or what used to be slip forty-two!

INT. TRUDY McGUFF'S HOUSE - DAY

Hawks sits across from TRUDY. She's clearly already tipsy.

HAWKS
Mrs. McGuff, it's a little early for,

TRUDY
(interrupting)
In my world, it's always five o'clock, Detective.

She pours herself another glass.

HAWKS
I need you to tell me the truth. Where were you the night Biff Hartley disappeared?

TRUDY
At the gala. Then home.

HAWKS
Security footage shows you leaving at 11:53.

TRUDY
(taking a large sip)
Then I guess I left at 11:53.

HAWKS
Where did you go?

TRUDY
(pause)
For a walk.

HAWKS
You were having an affair with Biff Hartley.

Trudy nearly chokes on her wine.

TRUDY
(coughing)
Excuse me?

Hawks slides a photo across the table. Trudy and Biff kissing.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
(staring at photo)
Where did you get this?

HAWKS
Biff's lockbox. He had quite a collection.

TRUDY
(pouring more wine)
Of course he did. Probably alphabetized them too. He was very organized for a blackmailer.

HAWKS
So you admit it.

TRUDY
(drinking)
At this point, what's the use in denying it? The whole town probably knows. Seaside's like a small-town Facebook. Everyone's in everyone's business.

HAWKS
And your husband knew.

TRUDY
He suspected. Blade suspects everything. It's exhausting.

HAWKS
So when Biff texted Blade to meet him at the beach, you followed them.

Trudy sets down her wine glass. Her hands shake.

TRUDY
(quietly)
Yes.

HAWKS
What did you see?

TRUDY
I saw them arguing. Blade was furious. Screaming about the money. About Nash. About how Biff was ruining his life.

HAWKS
And then what?

TRUDY
And then, someone else showed up.

HAWKS
Who?

TRUDY
I don't know. It was too dark. But they, they had words. All three of them.

HAWKS
What did they say?

TRUDY
I don't know. I was too far away. But then, then I heard, I heard something. A struggle. And then silence.

HAWKS
And you ran.

TRUDY
(crying now)
Yes. I'm a coward. I'm a terrible person. I'm, I'm everything my mother said I'd be.

She pours more wine, hands shaking.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
You know what the worst part is? I actually loved him. Biff. Not Blade. Biff. And now he's, he's,

She can't finish. Just drinks.

HAWKS
Mrs. McGuff, I need you to come to the station tomorrow. Make an official statement.

TRUDY
(laughing bitterly)
An official statement. Sure. Why not? Add it to my list of terrible life choices. Right after "marry a country singer" and "have an affair with the handyman."

HAWKS
This is serious.

TRUDY
(raising her glass)
So is day drinking, Detective. But here we are.

She drinks. Hawks stands to leave.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
Detective?

HAWKS
Yes?

TRUDY
If, if he finds out I talked,

HAWKS
He won't.

TRUDY
(shaking her head)
You don't know him like I do. He always shows up. Like herpes. Or taxes.

INT. HARTLEY BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Amy sits on the couch, staring at nothing. Brad brings her tea. She doesn't touch it.

A KNOCK at the door. Brad answers.

BUDDY stands there, bike helmet on, holding a casserole dish.

BUDDY
Heard about Biff. Brought tuna casserole.

BRAD
(confused)
Tuna casserole?

BUDDY
It's what you bring when someone's having a hard time. Tuna casserole or lasagna. I don't know how to make lasagna.

BRAD
(taking the dish)
Thanks?

BUDDY
Can I come in? I got information.

Brad looks at Amy. She nods.

Buddy enters, sits in the armchair, helmet still on.

AMY
You can take off your helmet.

BUDDY
I know. But it makes me feel safe. Like a turtle.

No one knows how to respond to that.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
I saw something. That night. The night Biff, you know.

AMY
(sitting up)
What did you see?

BUDDY
I was on my bike. Riding past the beach. Around midnight. Saw a bunch of people heading down there.

AMY
Who?

BUDDY
Blade. Biff. That Salazar woman, the gold digger. The drunk guy with the boat. And, and someone else.

AMY
Who?

BUDDY
Couldn't tell. Too dark. But they were, they were younger. Moved different. Not like the others.

BRAD
Younger how?

BUDDY
(shrugs)
I don't know. Less, less creaky. You get to be my age, you can tell who's got good knees and who doesn't.

AMY
Did you tell the police?

BUDDY
Tried. That young deputy, the dumb one, he said I was, what was the word, "unreliable."

BRAD
Why would he say that?

BUDDY
Because I also told him I saw a UFO last week. But that's unrelated.

AMY
(gently)
Buddy, did you really see someone else at the beach?

BUDDY
(serious now)
Yes. I swear on my bike. And I love my bike.

He stands.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
Your daddy was a good man. Complicated, but good. And whatever happened to your dad, those bad men are still out there. Watching. Waiting.

AMY
How do you know?

BUDDY
Because I've been watching too. And I've seen things. Things that don't add up.

BRAD
Like what?

BUDDY
Like, like why would Blade go back to Nashville? And why would Lilith stay if she did? And why, why is everyone so scared?

AMY
Scared of what?

Buddy shrugs.

He heads for the door, then turns back.

BUDDY
Oh, and the casserole's got peas in it. If you're allergic, don't eat it. I'm not liable.

He leaves. Amy and Brad sit in silence.

INT. BIFF'S WORK VAN - NIGHT

Biff’s faded white contractor van sits in a storage lot behind the sherif’s office, backed up against palmettos and old trailers. The paint's chipped, the tires half flat.

Hawks leans into the back, flashlight in his mouth, rummaging through dusty boxes labeled "TOOLS" and "PARTS."

He moves slow, methodical. Pulls open a rusted drawer. Junk. A warped cassette tape. A bent screwdriver. Nothing.

Then, tucked behind a panel near the wheel well he finds something wrapped in a rag: a **tiny digital voice recorder**, the kind no one uses anymore.

HAWKS
Well hey there, little dinosaur.

He pockets it, crawls out of the van, and gets into his car. Cracks open the glovebox, pulls out headphones. The recorder's beat up, but it still works. He rewinds and presses PLAY.

Recorded sounds of a struggle. Several voices. Two are Blade and Brad.

BIFF (O.S.)
You don't get to say sorry, Blade. Not when you keep doing the same damn thing!

BLADE (O.S.)
Walk away, Biff. You just won’t stop. With Trudy. With Arkansas. With all your shit. Stay out of our lives, Biff. Blackmail someone else less dangerous.

BRAD (O.S.)
Dad, stop. You’re going to kill him.

Sounds of retreating footsteps. Then silence. After a minute sounds of Biff possibly struggling to his feet:

BIFF (O.S)
"I've got to get this down. If something happens to me, this stays on the record."
(click, rustle, long pause)
The things I've seen, the things I know about this town. If he ever snaps again, someone's going to end up in a hole, just like his dad. And that poor boy in Arkansas.

Hawks pauses the recording. Eyes narrowing.

HAWKS
Who’s dad? What the hell, Brad?

He rewinds, plays again. slower, listening for details.

Hawks sits back. Breathes out slowly.

He puts the car in gear. Drives off toward Seaside. As he goes, his headlights pass a familiar figure: Buddy, riding a bike with a milk crate full of coconuts and a wind chime tied to the handlebars.

Buddy watches him go, like he already knows what Hawks just heard.

END OF ACT IV

TAG

EXT. DUNES - EARLY MORNING

A lone golden retriever sprints ahead of a jogger, barking excitedly.

The dog halts. Growls. Starts digging near the base of a dune, nose deep in sand.

The jogger catches up and squints — something dark is showing. Fabric. A boot.

A hand.

JOGGER
(shaky, calling out)
Hello? Help!?

He pulls out his phone and dials. The golden retriever barks once, then backs away.

BUDDY (V.O.)
Yep, Seaside's got the softest, whitest sand in Florida. Which is great for tourists. And terrible for footprints. Folks here are real good at buryin' things. Truth, guilt, ex-husbands. But the thing about sand is, sooner or later, the tide comes in. Secrets wash up. Lovers drift out. And the whole shiny town keeps smilin' like nothing ever happened. Hell, maybe it didn't. Maybe we're all just makin' it up to feel interesting.

MONTAGE OVER BUDDY'S V.O.

- Blade on a private jet, staring at a photo of Trudy and Brad.

- Trudy wiping at her tear-smeared mascara, then flipping the bathroom light off.

- Brad pacing alone on the beach, lit only by his phone.

- Amy walking out of the police station sobbing.

- Hawks in his office, sitting alone in the dark.

- And finally, Buddy, pedaling his bike down an empty street, wind chimes jangling behind him, a cat in the basket.

He pulls into his front yard, steps off his bike, cracks a beer, and sits on a camp rocker in front of a sagging tent.

BUDDY (V.O.)
Either way tide's comin' in.
Might wanna hold your breath.

END TAG

Title Card: "TO BE CONTINUED"