

\\-- 02/10/2993 --\\ MM/DD/YYYY

## A Three Month Shadow: The Maple High Suspicions

*(In the quiet suburb of South Maple County, there was a place children whispered about, a place parents actively avoided on their daily commutes. Three months ago, this local oddity became the suspected epicenter of a tragedy that would scar the town. Five students, one after another, vanished. The police, with no leads and no evidence, floated a desperate theory that clung to the town's geography: they had gotten lost in the sprawling, dense woods that bordered the school's athletic fields—a tragic but simple explanation for an impossible situation. But for a few, in the deepest and most fearful corners of their minds, they knew the truth was not in the woods. The truth was inside the school, a place with, no prying eyes, and secrets that festered in its silent halls.)*

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\\-- 02/12/2993 --\\

*(A recollection from a student, two days after the first disappearance.)*

**Ethan:** *(His voice barely a whisper)* Did you hear what happened to Marco? His parents are plastering missing posters everywhere. The cops think he got lost hiking.

**Chloe:** *(Shaking, hugging her knees to her chest)* He's not missing, Ethan. He's gone. And he didn't go near the woods. I... I was in math class with him. I saw what happened.

**Ethan:** What are you talking about? My mom said he probably wandered off after school. Everyone is saying that.

**Chloe:** No. It wasn't the woods. It was the quiz. He failed it... Miss Circle... she didn't even raise her voice. She got so, so quiet, and the whole room felt like it was freezing over.

**Ethan:** So? She's always creepy. That doesn't mean anything. What did she do?

**Chloe:** *(Hugging herself tightly)* She just... pointed at him with her compass. The one that's part of her arm. She didn't touch him from her desk. She just pointed it at him and said his calculations were "imbalanced."

**Ethan:** That's it? That doesn't make any sense! What does that even mean?

**Chloe:** He started crying, begging her. He said he'd do better, that he studied all night and just panicked. But she just drew a big red 'F' on his paper, really slow and deliberate. Then... she walked up to his desk.

**Ethan:** And? What happened, Chloe?! You have to tell someone!

**Chloe:** She put her hand on his shoulder. And he just... screamed. It wasn't a normal scream, Ethan. It was... wet. And then there was blood. So much blood, all over his test paper, dripping onto the floor. When the bell rang, she told us all to leave and not look back. I looked back. He was slumped over his desk, not moving, and she was just... wiping her compass clean.

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*(A hushed conversation in the hallway, one week later.)*

**Mia:** Where are Tares and Liam? They missed the art fair, and they're not answering their phones. The police are asking if they were outdoors.

**Luke:** *(Looking around nervously, pulling Mia into an empty alcove)* They didn't go to the woods, Mia. They're gone. You need to be quiet about this, okay? Promise me you won't tell anyone.

**Mia:** Gone? What do you mean, gone? Where did they go?

**Luke:** I saw them yesterday. That bully, Oliver, was talking to them. He was being so nice, you know? That charming but super creepy way he gets when he wants something.

**Mia:** What about it? What did he say to them?

**Luke:** He was telling them about a secret door. A shortcut, he said. A way to get out of the school and directly to the old hiking trail in the woods.

**Mia:** A shortcut? In the old service wing? There's nothing back there but junk and old lockers.

**Luke:** It was a bright blue door, at the very end of the corridor. Oliver swore it was the "real" exit, that the teachers used it all the time to avoid the student crowds.

**Mia:** And they believed him? He's a known liar! Why would they do that?

**Luke:** They were desperate. They were about to get detention from Miss Thavel, and they were terrified of her. They said it was worth the risk. I... I followed them to see if it was real.

**Mia:** What did you see, Luke?! Tell me!

**Luke:** They opened the door. There was this... weird, colorful light, like from a cartoon on TV. And I heard a sound... a girl laughing, but it sounded... wrong. It was high and

distorted, like a broken music box. Then they just looked at each other, shrugged, and walked in. The door slammed shut behind them with this loud bang. They never came back out. I ran. I just ran.

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*(A phone call between two parents, two weeks later.)*

**Mrs. Blossom:** Have you heard from the police about Sofia? Anything at all? They keep searching the woods, but my gut tells me that's wrong. She hated bugs.

**Mr. Kim:** *(Sighs heavily, the sound weary and defeated)* Nothing new. They came by again today.

**Mrs. Blossom:** But... someone had to see something! It's a library! The librarian, other students... you can't just vanish from a room full of people!

**Mr. Kim:** That's what I told them! But no one saw a thing. The librarian was in the back room, and the other two students were at the computers with headphones on. It's like she just... evaporated. The police are now officially calling her a runaway who met with foul play in the woods.

**Mrs. Blossom:** A runaway who leaves all her belongings behind and doesn't tell her best friend? That's absurd! They're not even trying! They're just looking for an easy answer!

**Mr. Kim:** Nothing about that school is easy. When I went to get her things, the principal just stared at me. No sympathy. No concern. Nothing. Just... cold, empty eyes. Like a doll's.

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*(Two teachers gossiping in the lounge of a different, normal high school.)*

**Mr. Harris:** Did you hear about the latest "accident" at Maple High?

**Ms. Albright:** The one in the science lab? I heard a student, Leo, had some sort of chemical spill and ran off into the woods out of panic. Tragic.

**Mr. Harris:** My cousin's son, Alex, is in that class. He told a very different, and much darker, story. He said the teacher, a Miss Bloomie, got angry because Leo's experiment was "impure."

**Ms. Albright:** Impure? What does that even mean in a high school chemistry class? That's not a scientific term.

**Mr. Harris:** Who knows. But Alex said she sliced his project in half with a razor she keeps on her arm. He said it just flicked out of her skin. Then... there was a flash of green light, and a sound like a firecracker. And Leo was just... gone. His lab coat was on the floor in a heap, and Alex said there was blood on the ceiling.

**Ms. Albright:** My god! That's horrifying! That school needs to be investigated by the state! The parents need to be told!

**Mr. Harris:** The police already did. They found nothing. Just a clean lab, no blood, no signs of a struggle, and one less student. The school is covering it up, and the police are letting them, because it's easier to blame the woods.

## **The Ghost Network: Probing a Wounded Town**

*(Four individuals who did not look like they belonged in the sleepy county began their work. They were ghosts, blending into the background of diners and parks, their questions soft but their purpose sharp as a razor. Agents Sterling, Cross, Bell, and Shaw of the SCP Foundation's Intelligence Division were tasked with finding the truth.)*

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### **(Interview Session 1 - Agent Sterling & Marco's Father)**

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** *(His tone respectful and somber)* Mr. Diaz, my name is Sterling. I'm with a support group for families... we're here to help.

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** *(His eyes hollow)* You can't help. No one can.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** I can listen. The police report said your son, Marco, wandered into the woods.

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** *(A bitter laugh)* That's the story they tell so they can sleep at night.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** You don't believe it?

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** My son was terrified of that school. Not the woods. The school.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Why was he scared?

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** His grades. He was terrified of failing. Especially math.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Was the teacher very strict?

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** He just said she had "high standards." Said she didn't tolerate mistakes.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** That sounds like a lot of pressure.

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** He was up all night studying. Shaking. Said he couldn't get a single one wrong. I thought he was just being a teenager.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** You couldn't have known.

**Mr. Diaz (Marco's Father):** No. But I should have listened to him more closely.

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### **(Interview Session 2 - Agent Cross & Leo's Mother)**

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Mrs. Gable, thank you for speaking with me. I'm here about Leo.

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** The police think he's in the woods. He hated the woods. He was allergic to everything.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did he seem happy at Maple High?

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** *(Shakes her head)* He was always so tired. Said the science labs were intense.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Intense how?

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** His science teacher was a perfectionist. He said she would destroy projects that weren't exactly right.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Destroy them?

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** Smash them, cut them up. He came home one day with a small cut on his hand. Said she sliced his project while he was holding it.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did you report this?

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** He begged me not to. Said it would only make it worse.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** That sounds like a very stressful environment.

**Mrs. Gable (Leo's Mother):** It was more than stressful. He was scared to go to that class.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Thank you. This is very helpful.

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**(Interview Session 3 - Agent Bell with Jenna's Mother)**

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Mrs. Kent, I'm so sorry for your loss.

**Jenna's Mother:** They still haven't found her. They think she ran away with Liam.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Do you believe that's what happened?

**Jenna's Mother:** No. Jenna was a good girl. But she was... she had a big imagination.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** What do you mean?

**Jenna's Mother:** She started talking about strange things at that school.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Strange how?

**Jenna's Mother:** Secret doors. Ghost stories. She never named names, just... vague, scary things.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did you think anything of it?

**Jenna's Mother:** I thought it was just kids' imaginations running wild. I told her to focus on her studies.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did she seem scared?

**Jenna's Mother:** She was scared of one teacher. Her language arts teacher. She said her punishments were... unusual.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** This is important information. Thank you.

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**(Interview Session 4 - Agent Shaw with Liam's Father)**

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Mr. Lith, thank you for your time. I'm here about your son, Liam.

**Liam's Father:** The police think he ran off with Jenna. He wasn't that kind of boy.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** What kind of boy was he?

**Liam's Father:** Loyal. He'd do anything for his friends. Maybe too loyal.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did he ever mention any problems at school?

**Liam's Father:** He mentioned the bullies. A group of them.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did he name them?

**Liam's Father:** Just the ringleader. A boy with a sharp attitude.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** What did this boy do?

**Liam's Father:** Played cruel pranks. Dared kids to do dangerous things. Liam hated him.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Did Liam ever get caught up in one of these pranks?

**Liam's Father:** Not that he told me. But he was protective of Jenna. If that boy was bothering her, Liam would have stepped in.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** I see. Thank you.

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### **(Interview Session 5 - Agent Cross with Sofia's Parents)**

*(The Reyes' living room is unnaturally quiet, filled with the heavy silence of grief. Agent Cross sits opposite Sofia's parents on the sofa, a datapad resting untouched in her lap. A framed school photo of a smiling girl sits on the mantelpiece.)*

**Agent Cross:** *(Her voice is soft, respectful)* Mr. and Mrs. Reyes, thank you again for speaking with me. I know how difficult this is.

**Sofia's Mother:** *(She clutches a crumpled tissue in her hand, her eyes red and swollen)* Difficult? It's... it's a nightmare we can't wake up from. The police have given up. They just call it a cold case now.

**Sofia's Father:** *(He stares at the school photo on the mantelpiece, his jaw tight)* They have no leads. Nothing. She just... she went to school that morning, like any other day. And she never came home. We waited... and waited...

**Agent Cross:** Tell me about her school life, her academics. How was she doing?

**Sofia's Father:** *(He finally looks away from the photo, his expression weary)* She was decent. Her grades... they were okay. She was rarely at the top of her class, but she worked hard.

**Sofia's Mother:** She studied so hard for her tests. Sometimes she would get so frustrated she'd cry, but she never, ever gave up. She was such a good girl...

**Agent Cross:** Did she seem worried about anything? Any specific classes or teachers?

**Sofia's Mother:** *(She shakes her head, a fresh wave of tears welling up in her eyes)* We don't know! That's the worst part! We just... we don't know anything!

**Sofia's Father:** *(His voice finally breaks, his own composure crumbling)* Please... you have to find her. We can't... we can't live like this. Not knowing where she is... if she's... *(He covers his face with his hands, his shoulders shaking with silent sobs.)*

**Sofia's Mother:** *(Crying openly now, her voice a desperate plea)* Please, just bring our baby home. Whatever it takes. We're begging you.

**Agent Cross:** *(She leans forward, her expression firm but filled with empathy)* I promise you, Mr. and Mrs. Reyes. We are not giving up. We will find out what happened to Sofia. We will not stop looking.

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### **(Interview Session 6 - Agent Sterling & a Grounds-keeper for the Park Across the Street)**

**Agent Sterling:** *(gesturing with his chin towards the school)* You get a good view of the school from here.

**Grounds-keeper:** *(Pauses his work, leaning on the rake)* Decent, I guess. See it every day.

**Agent Sterling:** Ever notice anything... off about it?

**Grounds-keeper:** The building? Nah, it's a building. Brick and mortar. It's the, uh... the comings and goings that are strange.

**Agent Sterling:** How so?

**Grounds-keeper:** You see cars, you know? Black ones, real fancy. They show up at weird hours, long after the kids and teachers have gone home. People in sharp suits get out, but they never look happy to be there.

**Agent Sterling:** Business meetings, maybe?

**Grounds-keeper:** *(Scoffs softly)* At two in the morning? I don't think so. And sometimes... you hear things.

**Agent Sterling:** Hear what?

**Grounds-keeper:** Not loud things. Just... echoes. Like a scream that gets cut off real fast. Or a loud bang. By the time you look up, everything's quiet again, like it never happened.

**Agent Sterling:** Interesting.

**Grounds-keeper:** It's a weird place. I tell my grandkids to stay away.

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### **(Interview Session 7 - Agent Cross & a Local Diner Owner)**

*(Agent Cross enters the Maple Convenience Store, a small bell jingling softly. Gregory Tanners, the owner, looks up from behind the counter, his face etched with weariness.)*

**Agent Cross:** *(Her voice is calm, friendly)* You get a lot of Maple High students in here after school?

**Gregory Tanners (Store Owner):** *(Sighs, leaning on his counter)* Used to. Not so much anymore. Not since... all this started. Town's spooked. Bad for business.

**Agent Cross:** It's a climate of fear. Did you know any of the children who went missing?

**Gregory Tanners (Store Owner):** Knew their faces, you know? They'd come in for sodas, candy. Seemed like good kids. A little quiet, maybe, but that's most of the kids from that school.

**Agent Cross:** Did they ever talk about school? Complain about tests, teachers?

**Gregory Tanners (Store Owner):** *(Shakes his head)* Not to me. They were always polite, but they kept to themselves. I have no idea what's really going on over there. I just know good kids go in and sometimes... they don't come out. It's a damn shame.

**Agent Cross:** It is. Thank you for your time, Mr. Tanners.

**Gregory Tanners (Store Owner):** Yeah. Hope you folks can figure it out. The cops seem to be chasing their tails in the woods.

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*(As Agent Bell concluded the final interview, a grim certainty settled over the team. The individual testimonies, while vague on their own, collectively painted a chilling mosaic of fear, secrecy, and bizarre occurrences all centered on Maple High. The Foundation's initial*

*suspicious were no longer just based on faint energy readings; they were now echoed in the hushed, terrified whispers of an entire community, even if the people themselves couldn't see the full picture. The yellow flags they had been looking for were now raised, numerous, and blood-red.)*

## **Command Post Alpha: Staring into the Abyss**

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** *(Standing before a holographic map of the county, her arms crossed)* Report. Give me the full, unfiltered picture.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** It's worse than we thought. The town has officially accepted the "lost in the woods" narrative, but underneath, they're terrified of the school. They're just too scared to say it out loud.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** The five disappearances from three months ago are, based on these interviews, highly likely to have originated from within Maple High, based on the student were educated at that school. The official police report is a work of fiction, likely they don't believe this shit the people made, and a deep-seated, unspoken fear of confronting the school.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** *(He sighed)* Alright, what's next.

**Director Ash (Site-77i Director):** *(On screen, her expression grim)* Let's build the profile. What are the common threads? What are the yellow flags telling us?

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Extreme academic pressure is a recurring theme. The parents of at least two victims, Marco and Leo, described their sons as being terrified of failing specific classes—math and science, respectively.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** The fear seems disproportionate. It wasn't about getting a bad grade; witnesses and parents describe a life-or-death level of anxiety. One bystander overheard a victim saying he'd rather face a bear than his math teacher after a bad quiz.

**Supervisor Vance (Area-11 Overseer):** *(Also on screen, his face tight and pale)* So we have a faculty that rules through extreme fear. What else?

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Multiple parents mentioned their children being afraid of specific, but often unnamed, teachers. A math teacher, a science teacher, a language arts teacher. The descriptions are consistent: "intense,"

"perfectionist," "unusual punishments." One parent mentioned her son's science project being physically destroyed by the teacher for being "impure."

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** We also have multiple, independent mentions of a recurring urban legend within the school. It involves a "secret door" and a so-called ghost girl that supposedly haunts the halls. The parents of two of the victims, Jenna and Liam, both mentioned their children talking about this right before they disappeared.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** A localized mythos. Anomalies can sometimes generate or gravitate towards those. It could be a key component or a simple distraction.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Adding to that, we have a confirmed social component. The father of one victim, Liam, mentioned his son was frequently in conflict with a specific bully, a ringleader who dared other students to perform dangerous acts.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** And that same bully's name was brought up in connection with the ghost story. The narrative suggests he may have used the legend to lure at least two of the victims away.

**Director Ash (Site-77i Director):** So we have a potential ecosystem. Predatory faculty, a student instigator, and a localized legend that may correspond to a fifth, currently unidentified entity.

**Supervisor Vance (Area-11 Overseer):** What about the school itself? The interviews suggested the building itself was decent.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Negative, It appeared the building is not doing strange phenomena.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** The administration is also a major red flag. A former school board member described the principal as a "gatekeeper" who is hostile to any and all oversight, with test scores and budgets that are "too perfect."

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** So we have a potential nexus for anomalous activity, run by a secretive administration, which is potentially staffed by hostile entities who prey on students under the guise of academic discipline, and is haunted by at least one other entity.

**Director Ash (Site-77i Director):** And the local authorities classified these events as accidents and runaways? It's gross negligence.

**Supervisor Vance (Area-11 Overseer):** This is a complete, ongoing containment failure. It's been operating for months, right under our noses, and we missed it.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** We have no definitive proof. We have no grounds for a full-scale intervention that wouldn't risk massive exposure. We have to establish a permanent, covert observation post. I want Overwatch-7s to maintain their position indefinitely.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** What is his primary objective now? To confirm the school is the locus? Or what.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** Just to watch, then monitor the Campus activity. We suspect the entities, and the location. We just don't know their hunting schedule or their triggers. We need irrefutable proof before we can act.

**Director Ash (Site-77i Director):** We need a trigger, a sign that the pattern is starting again. We need an undeniable anomalous event to justify a full-scale intervention over the objections of local law enforcement.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** So we're knowingly going to let it happen again? We're going to sit back and wait for another child to die?

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** *(Her voice cold as ice)* We are going to be there to catch them in the act this time. A blind assault on that school would be a massacre, and you know it. We don't have enough information to proceed without risking every child inside.

**Supervisor Vance (Area-11 Overseer):** It's a bitter pill to swallow, Sterling, but it's the only strategic option. We go in now, we're just another group of armed fools blundering in the dark.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** So we wait for another child to disappear from the face of the earth.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** Let Overwatch-7 monitor, then, we wait for an anomalous activity inside. When it does, and it corresponds to a new missing person report, that is our proof. That is when our operation goes green.

**Agent Shaw (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** And until then?

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** We watch, plan, and we pray we're not too late to save the next one.

**Agent Sterling (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** Hmm... Ok... What's Overwatch-7's cover story for a long-term post?

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** Well, as I mentioned Mister Sterling, Monitor the activity. Keep it boring, keep it official. No one looks twice.

**Director Ash (Site-77i Director):** A very disturbing start to this operation. The psychological toll on the town is already immense.

**Supervisor Vance (Area-11 Overseer):** Let's hope the next phase gives us a clear target.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** The school is the target, Vance. We just need to know which monster to shoot first.

**Agent Cross (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** I have a bad feeling about this place.

**Agent Bell (Foundation Intelligence Agent):** You should.

**Lead Agent (Intelligence Division):** Then let's prepare to starve it. Dismissed.

**All Agents:** *(In unison)* Yes, ma'am.

*(The meeting door closes then the scene goes black. Fast forward three months to the day the original story began)*

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## The Last Day

*(The dreaded silence that had haunted South Maple County for three months was shattered. A fresh wave of panic, sharp and piercing, ripped through the community. The day is the normalcy cooling down what happened in the past months. Maple High School, located at Maple County, began like any other, with a low, anxious hum that passed for normalcy. Claire, a girl with a quiet strength that often went unnoticed. The Car was heading to the Maple High School.*

*(The scene opens inside a modest family car. The interior is simple, clean, but slightly worn. CLAIRE, a young girl with a distinct paper-like appearance—pale, with hand-drawn features—looks nervously out the passenger window. Her DAD, sharing the same paper-like quality, is driving, his hands resting on the wheel.)*

*(The car crawls down a quiet suburban street, past an endless, monotonous line of identical houses, all rendered in a simple, stark, hand-drawn style. The tires crunch on the gravel as*

*the car pulls to a stop. Through the windshield, the "MAPLE HIGH SCHOOL" looms over them—a large, imposing, and slightly crooked building whose very angles seem wrong. Walls are stained, and the front doors are a dark, gaping rectangle that feels more like a mouth than an entrance.)*

**Dad:** *(His voice is bright, almost forcing the cheerfulness)* Hey, how's my girl? Aren't you excited for your first day at a new school?

**Claire:** *(She turns from the window, her small voice barely a whisper)* But Dad, I don't know if this is safe. The "Maple School"... really? I've heard horrific stories of that place, and none of them end blissfully.

**Dad:** *(He chuckles, but it fades, his smile becoming strained)* Well... I will admit, I did go to this school. And I also admit I did see some... graphic imagery. *(He taps the steering wheel, his gaze distant, lost in a memory)* It's been a while. Like, 30 years. But I do remember some... grim and vile memories. Like one of my old friends, Ashley. She apparently got quote, "turned into a flesh pie." She was never seen since.

*(He shakes his head, snapping back to the present and forcing another bright smile.)*

**Dad:** But eh! I'm sure they're all just fake rumors, right?

*(A long, heavy, awkward silence fills the car. Claire just stares at him, her expression unchanging. The silence stretches, broken only by the car's idling engine. Finally, the car door's lock clicks open with a loud thunk.)*

**Claire:** ...Uh-huh.

*(Claire slowly opens the car door, her backpack clutched in front of her like a flimsy shield. She steps out onto the cracked, weed-choked pavement, her eyes fixed on the towering school. It looms over her, casting a long, sharp shadow. The front doors remain a dark, uninviting void.)*

**Dad:** *(Calling from the car's open window, his voice still straining for optimism)* Hun, I'm sure you'll be fine! If I can survive, so can you. Not to mention, it's only your first day. You'll live... well and dandy! Now, you get out there and get a good grade, my dear.

**Claire:** *(She doesn't turn around, her shoulders slumped)* Uh-huh. Yep. ...Yes. You'll pick me up, right?

**Dad:** Of course, dear! I have to go though. Goodbye!

**Claire:** *(Quietly, to the pavement)* Okay... bye.

*(The car's engine revs, and it drives off, its sound fading into the oppressive silence. Claire is left completely alone. She stands there for a full minute, a small, pale figure against the massive, grim building. The only movement is her paper hair rustling in a slight, eerie breeze that seems to originate from the school itself. She takes a deep, shaky breath, her paper shoulders squaring up with visible effort.)*

**Claire:** *(To herself, a fragile whisper)* You got this, Claire. You got this.

*(She takes one hesitant step towards the entrance, her shoe scuffing the pavement. The scene cuts to black.)*

*(The door opens to a blindingly bright, chaotic hallway. The noise is a cacophony of shouting, laughing, and running feet. Students made of paper, rough sketches, and colorful scribbles are rushing in every direction, shoving and pushing. Claire stands in the middle of it all, frozen, looking small and overwhelmed, her eyes wide with sensory overload. Suddenly, two familiar figures push through the chaotic crowd, their voices cutting through the din.)*

**Engel:** *(Shouting)* Claire!

**Bubble:** *(Waving frantically, her round form bouncing)* Oh my God, it's been so long!

*(ENGEL, a cheerful-looking sketch with a kind face, and BUBBLE, a round, bubbly-looking character, pull Claire into a tight, three-way group hug, shielding her from the hallway's chaos.)*

**Claire:** *(Stunned but a small, genuine smile breaking through her fear)* Engel? Bubble? Oh my God, it's been so long! We haven't seen you for the past four years!

**Bubble:** Me and the King have missed you so much!

**Engel:** It's really you! I've missed you and the others so much. That's why I'm here.

**Claire:** *(Looking around, her anxiety returning slightly)* ...Yeah, and I'm here too, I guess.

**Bubble:** *(Pulling back, her hands on her hips)* Anyways, Claire, old friend, where have you been all these years?

**Claire:** Oh my, it's been a while. Been on vacation. Went to all sorts of places that I can barely remember.

**Engel:** Wait, if you guys are here... then does that mean everyone else is here, too?

**Bubble:** Oh yeah, there's everyone! Like Abbie, Lana, Kevin... and Oliver and his henchmen bully friends.

**Engel:** *(His smile fades, replaced by a groan)* Oh yeah... them. Let's hope you don't run into them today. They're a real hassle now that we're in Middle School.

**Claire:** *(Nervously)* Oh... them. Yeah.

**Bubble:** I forgot the others, like Zip and Edward!

*(As Clare speaks, a random book out of nowhere hit Claire and fell. She groans. The school bell rings, a harsh, grating, metallic sound that hurts the ears. As the crowd thins, three imposing figures saunter up, their steps echoing with arrogance: OLIVER, the clear leader, flanked by ZIP and EDWARD.)*

**Claire:** *(Sneering, looking Oliver up and down)* G... speak of the devils.

**Oliver:** *(Smirking)* He-He-Hey, look who it is. It's the chump from elementary school.

**Zip:** I thought I'd recognize that ugly mug of hers.

**Edward:** Yeah, yeah. Speak of the mic, she looks even worse than when we kicked her face in.

*(Without warning, Oliver shoves Claire hard. She isn't expecting it and goes sprawling to the ground, her books and papers scattering across the dirty hallway floor.)*

**Engel:** Cl-Claire! Are you okay?! *(His face was mad, and goes to Oliver, yelling)* Jerk! What was that for Oliver?!

**Oliver:** *(Laughing, a cold, barking sound)* She needed a taste for what's to come. Daily.

**Bubbles:** *(Stepping in front of Claire, trying to shield her)* You weirdos get out of here! Go to your own side of the school!

**Zip:** *(Shoving Engel back easily)* Says the one without a real face.

**Engel:** Besides, Oliver... I thought you were talking to your... oh... *(He smirks, his eyes glinting)* ...girlfriend?

**Oliver:** *(His face flushes a dark red)* Hey, you asshole! Don't just say that out loud! You and Claire are the lovey-dovey ones.

*(Oliver grabs Zip and Edward by their collars, his good mood evaporating.)*

**Oliver:** Come on, you two. We're leaving.

*(The three bullies walk off, their laughter echoing back down the hall. Engel sighs and helps Claire up, gathering her scattered books.)*

**Engel:** Come on, Claire. We gotta get used to the school.

**Bubble:** *(Nodding, her confidence returning)* Yeah, that's right, Bubble! Oh, of course! It would be nice to catch up.

*(A distorted, crackling voice suddenly blares from an unseen intercom, making them all jump. The static is loud, almost painful.)*

**Miss Grace (On PA Comms):** Attention, Class 10B. Your classes are beginning. Start to Miss Circle's class immediately. Five minutes late will result in an after-school detention.

**Claire:** *(Confused, her head tilted)* Uh... Miss who?

**Bubble:** *(Grimacing, her bubbly form deflating slightly)* Miss Circle. She's a weird case. You'll get to know her in a while.

**Engel:** Come on, let's go.

*(They hurry down the hallway, swallowed by the remaining crowd of students. The scene fades.)*

*(The scene fades in on a sparse, cold-looking classroom. There are only a few desks, and the walls are bare save for a few faded educational posters. MISS SASHA, a teacher who looks like a simple, nervous sketch, is at the front, nervously shuffling a small stack of papers.)*

**Miss Sasha:** *(Happy)* You know something? I never really realized how we have, like, maybe 100 students in this school.

**Miss Emily:** *(Loudly filing her nails, not looking up)* You know what? Yeah, that really seems strange.

**Miss Demi:** *(weak voice)* Well it look like a private school or something.

**Miss Sasha:** *(She clears her throat, but her voice still comes out as a trembling squeak)* Y-you five. We have a new student in the school. Their name is... Claire

**Mister Demi:** *(shaking)* ...new student? Are they going to be rude? Like, they have a...

**Miss Sasha:** Hey, Mister Demi, calm down. I'm sure they'll be sweet.

**Mister Jack:** *(Nodding, his voice gentle and airy)* Believe me, okay? Yeah, we haven't even met them yet.

**Mister Demi:** O-okay.

**Miss Circle:** Anyway... now that we got... I need you five to k-keep it up. I know this is usually Grace's job, but... Grace's job can't be bothered (*scary tone*)

*(Miss Sasha stammers, trailing off, her hands shaking so much she fumbles with her papers. They spill from her hands and scatter across the floor. Kevin lets out a loud, exasperated sigh and gets up, slowly, to help her.)*

**Miss Circle:** Emily, you need to quit stuttering during your class. Makes you look too weak. Especially You Davis!

*(Emily's expression was mad inside and disowned by her. Davis wanted to kill her so badly.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Flustered, her face angry)* S-Sasha!... Stop raising your voice at students! That's... mine and other's job!... Jack and Demi... *(Demi was shaking nervously, while Jack remained calm)*... just give me 5 minutes. You're doing good enough...

*(Sasha expression was disappointed and sad)*

**Mister Demi:** *(his sparking happy reaction)* Mhm

**Miss Circle:** That's what Grace said, though. But she doesn't see how terrible it is. You actually, suck, hehe *(She glares at Mister Demi who shrinks, seemingly becoming smaller.)*

*(Demi becomes sad, he sniffs. Sasha pats him)*

**Miss Circle:** Now, I... to go now. Take good care of Grace's words into consideration. *(She smiles, a cold, thin smile that doesn't reach her eyes)* You sucks.

*(Miss Circle leaves, slamming the door just as loudly as she entered. Miss Sasha looks like she's about to cry, her entire body trembling.)*

*(The scene shifts to a different, more crowded classroom. The air is buzzing with chatter. Claire, Engel, and Bubble are sitting at a desk. Two other girls, ABBIE and LANA, rush over, their faces bright.)*

**Lana:** *(Gasps, her hands flying to her mouth)* Claire?! Claire! Oh my... oh my God, it's really you! I... I haven't seen you in, like, four years! Where have you been?!

**Abbie:** Oh, hey Cl-Claire.

**Kevin:** *(Calling from across the room)* Oh guys, look, it's Claire from elementary.

**Skell:** *(Sitting next to him, his voice a dead, emotionless monotone)* They'll die soon enough.

*(At another desk, Oliver is glowering, carving into the desk with a compass. His lackey, Skell, leans over conspiratorially.)*

**Ruby:** *(Questioned)* ...who?

**Riley:** *(addicted dreaming)* Hehehe, Oliver is super cool, right?

**Robby:** *(concerned)* What?

*(Meanwhile at bully table)*

**Edward:** Oh... Oliver, chill out, dude. It was only a puny insult.

**Zip:** Yeah, man, suck it up.

**Oliver:** *(frown)* Can you guys quit it?! I already stopped complaining. However... I'm going to scheme up a revenge arc for the next five minutes.

**Miss Circle:** *(Shouting)* ...Silence!

*(The classroom door bursts open, hitting the wall with a loud smack. MISS CIRCLE enters. She is terrifyingly tall, with a perfectly round, featureless white head and a wide, fixed, painted-on smile. She's holding a large, sharpened, metal geometry compass like a weapon.)*

**Miss Circle:** Hello, students! Welcome back to Maple School. Ever since your break, I'm sure you have forgotten your mathematics! And so... I'll go back through the basics. And behavior...

*(She glares at Claire, who was whispering to Engel. Her smile doesn't change, but her voice becomes icy.)*

**Kevin:** ...that sounds "Claire" (in clear).

**Petunia:** Please... shut up.

**Lana:** *(Leaning over to Claire, whispering)* So, Claire, what you been doing?

**Claire:** *(Whispering back frantically)* Trying to listen! I don't want to fail my first class!

**Lana:** *(Also whispering, her puppet-covered hands gesturing)* Okay,

**Abbie:** just... just ignore them. They get utterly energetic to new faces. But anyways, CI-

**Miss Circle:** *(She shouted)* Abbie!

**Miss Circle:** *(Her voice suddenly booms, echoing in the small room, making everyone jump)* ...did I say, or you could speak, Abbie, in my classes?!

*(Abbie shaking nervously, her face pale with terror.)*

**Miss Circle:** Uh... *(Her deep tone voice)* besides your little rant, you're already failing. Next mess up... you'll be seeing me after class. Got it?

**Abbie:** *(Her voice trembling)* Uh... yes, Miss.

**Miss Circle:** *(Her smile returns, as if nothing happened)* Good... Anyway, we got a new student. Her name is Claire, Say hi Claire!

**Class:** *(A quiet, terrified mumble)* Hi, guys...

**Miss Circle:** Yes! Anyways, let's start off with a simple... Math

*(She turns to the board and, with lightning speed, scrawls a complex equation that fills the entire space.)*

**Miss Circle:** ...you have a 3-minute... absolute silence... go.

*(An agonizingly long, thick silence fills the room. The only sound is the tick-tick-tick of the clock. Miss Circle stares at the class, her smile unwavering, her head slowly rotating. Engel nervously, shakily, raises his hand.)*

**Claire** Engel. Got an answer for question three?

**Engel:** *(He stands up, sweating, his paper legs shaking)* Yeah! ...over three... by the two... and there... go!

**Claire:** *(Her head tilts, a full 90 degrees, then looks at Engel, concerned)* ...I don't think that makes sense for even a math answer, but... sure.

*Claire tried to lose herself in her work, the soft scratch of her pencil a small, comforting sound. The calm was shattered by the soft thud of a paper airplane bouncing off her head. She ignored it, a familiar annoyance she had learned to swallow. But a moment later, a second, harder impact—a crumpled paper ball—hit her shoulder. Her annoyance finally broke through her composure. She looked over her shoulder, her gaze meeting the smug, mocking smirks of Oliver, Zip, and Edward. Her friends, Engel and Bubbles, looked over as well, their expressions a mixture of concern and a shared, weary anger. The Bullies Laughing)*

*(Miss Circle goes to her desk, sits down, and pulls out a large stack of papers. She begins stamping them with a large, bloody-red 'F' stamp, the thud echoing in the room.)*

**Claire:** *(Whispering to Engel, horrified)* And I'm going to be dealing with this for how long?

**Bubbles:** *(Whispering back, not looking at her)* Another four years.

**Engel:** *(Focused)* Try to be... no mind to them. I'm sure you'll be fine.

*(3 min later)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Without looking up, her voice sharp)* times up! Now, give me your tests. The highest score gets a perfect score.

*(She sweeps through the room, snatching the papers from the students' desks. She glances at each one for a fraction of a second before marking it with a decisive, violent red stroke.)*

**Miss Circle:** Okay, there is... most are correct. The first impression is... same... AI-generated... skills... Robby's are the same... and Oliver is... Okay. I've done some judging. It's... is... actually three people. Zip, water... yeah. Good job, Oliver.

*(Oliver smirks, holding up his 'A+' paper for everyone to see.)*

**Lizzy:** *(Looking at Oliver jealous)* This is literally the sixth... time. What the actual fuck

**Miss Circle:** *(She stops at Abbie's desk, her shadow falling over the girl)* ...and that's the... It's Abbie, again... *(she sighs)* How you manage to mess up on the same questions for the 64th time... will never cease to amaze me. You'll be seeing me here *(She hards her fist hand)* after class.

**Zip:** *(Whispering, loud enough for Abbie to hear)* Ooohhhh, Someone's in trouble.

*(The bell rings, a harsh, sudden shriek. Everyone scrambles to pack their bags, desperate to leave.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Still frozen, staring at her 'F')* It's been, like, two or three minutes... how the fu-. OK, Class, Asides from Abbie... pack your things... next door is Language Class, by Miss Thavel. Get out. Now!

**Claire:** *(As they're leaving, whispering to Claire)* What kind of a name is Miss Thavel?

**Engel:** That's her last name. Her first name is probably normal.

*(The scene shifts. Abbie is alone in the now-empty classroom with Miss Circle. The teacher is at a grindstone in the corner, sharpening her large compass. The sound of metal on stone is deafening, sending sparks flying.)*

**Miss Circle:** You...

**Abbie:** *(Terrified, clutching her backpack)* Uh, yes, Miss?

**Miss Circle:** Constant feeling. Constant chatting. Constant annoyance! You're on paper-thin ice, Abbie. Paper-thin. *(She slams the pointed compass down. It punches straight through the wooden desk, breaking it in two)* And when you get on my paper-thin ice, it looks a little... like... THIS!

**Abbie:** *(Yelps, scrambling back)* Jesus Christ! You're bloody crazy! Just breaking your own tables!

**Miss Circle:** *(Grinning maniacally, her smile seeming to stretch wider)* Shut it, you apple muncher! Now, let's play a game. A game very much loved around this school. And that may be...

*(She yanks the compass free from the ruined desk and raises it, pointing the sharp end directly at Abbie.)*

**Miss Circle:** ...Tag. Better get running.

*(Abbie scrambles out of his chair and bolts for the door, screaming. Miss Circle lets out a high-pitched, delighted laugh and begins to chase him. The scene shifts to another classroom, this one more colorful. It's taught by MISS THAVEL, who is operating two colorful hand puppets.)*

**Miss Thavel:** *(In a high-pitched, squeaky puppet voice)* ...hello, students! Oh, wait, who is this?

**Claire:** *(Confused, looking around)* Oh... me? Oh, I'm Claire. Hello, Miss Thavel.

**Engel:** *(He grabs her and forcefully lean to him)* She's an old friend of ours from elementary school. Ain't she sweet?

**Miss Thavel:** *(Still using the puppet, which nods vigorously)* ...right. Like... did... will go over the rules and basic... In fact... no. You get the rules at this point. Let me just... ramp on about... and junk.

**Claire:** *(Whispering to Engel, her nose wrinkled)* I can already sense bad stuff from these teachers. She smells like a kid died or something.

**Engel:** *(He smirks)* To be fair, she had a tendency for flesh.

**Claire:** What?!

**Lana:** *(Sitting alone at a desk, staring at an empty chair)* I wonder where Abbie is right now. I kind of miss him a lot.

**Engel:** *(Patting her shoulder gently)* Don't worry, Lana. I'm sure your Abbie is just fine.

**Lana:** *(Pulls out a piece of paper and a red crayon, her voice quiet)* I'm going to draw him. Should... definitely get him off my mind.

**Engel:** *(Watching Lana, her expression critical)* Hmph. God, she's a knucklehead. Same as old days. She can make up her little puppet shows... I still don't know why she always wears those Muppet things.

**Claire:** *(Questioning)* Ain't her hands sweaty?

**Engel:** I don't know. Maybe she's hiding something. I'm not sure. Don't think I want to get involved, however.

**Claire:** Uhh– Fair.

*(The scene cuts back to the hallway. It's a blur of motion. Abbie is sprinting, panting heavily, his face slick with sweat. The sound of heavy, rhythmic STOMP... STOMP... STOMP echoes from behind him, getting closer.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Her voice echoing, distorted)* You may run... but you can't hide.

*(Abbie glances over his shoulder and screams in terror. He ducks into an empty classroom, slamming the door shut and leaning against it, his whole body heaving as he gasps for air.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(From the hallway, her voice a sing-song taunt)* Get back here, puppet! Get back here and succumb to the inevitable, you vermin!

*(Back in Miss Thavel's class, the lesson is interrupted by the distant sounds.)*

**Robby:** *(Looking up from his desk)* ...anybody hear that?

**Skell:** *(Nonchalantly, as if talking about the weather)* Probably just Abbie, chased to death.

**Robby:** *(Staring at him, disturbed)* Dude, I think you have issues.

**Claire:** *(Her eyes wide, listening)* I hear loud stomping noises... They're getting louder.

**Engel:** Yeah, me too.

*(Lana, still drawing, looks up at the window as the sounds grow. She sees Abbie sprinting across the courtyard below, a tiny, desperate figure.)*

**Lana:** *(To her drawing, then gasps, seeing him out the window)* Abbie... Abbie...

*(She bolts from her desk, shoving her chair back, and rushes to the door, yanking it open and running out into the hall.)*

**Miss Thavel:** *(Shouting after her, her voice dropping to its normal register)* Lana, what are you doing?!

*(The door slams shut, leaving the classroom in silence.)*

**Miss Thavel:** *(Sighs, her puppets drooping)* ...And she's gone... Anyways...

*(Back in the hallway, Abbie finds another empty classroom and ducks inside, slamming the door and fumbling with the lock, securing it. He leans against it, panting, believing he's safe.)*

**Abbie:** *(Gasping)* I... I think... I think I lost her-

*(CRASH! The double doors explode inward, blasted off their hinges and splintered into a thousand pieces by Miss Circle's massive compass. Abbie is thrown to the ground. Miss Circle stands in the ruined doorway, a dark silhouette against the bright hallway light.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Her voice a terrifying, low purr)* Abbie...

**Abbie:** *(Scrambling backward, shaking, tears streaming down his face)* Ge-get away! Get away, you monster!

**Miss Circle:** *(Smiling, she slowly walks toward him, her steps casual)* It appears I won this game of tag. *(She holds up Abbie's 'F' graded math quiz, which she apparently retrieved)* Now, let me have my victory.

*(She rips the paper in half. Abbie covers his face with his hands, peeking through his fingers in terror. Miss Circle raises her compass high, the metal point gleaming. Abbie lowers his hands, his eyes wide with a final, tear-filled plea. Miss Circle strikes downward. The compass point embeds itself between his eyes with a sickening, wet thwack. Blood splatters everywhere. She yanks the compass free, tearing a chunk of his head with it, guts and gore spilling onto the floor. She then smacks his limp body with the side of the compass, sending it skidding across the room, leaving a thick, glistening trail of blood. She picks up the body with her compass, lifting it high. Just then, the door creaks open. Lana peers in, her colorful puppets covering her mouth.)*

**Lana:** *(Her voice a tiny, shaking whisper)* A... a-a... Abbie?

*(Miss Circle turns slowly, her head at a ninety-degree angle, her smile dripping with blood. She takes a massive, chomping bite out of Abbie's body. The crunch of bone and splatter of blood echoes in the silent room. She looks over her shoulder, her eyes now predator-black, directly at Lana. Lana's own eyes are wide with unimaginable horror, her hands trembling. A long, dead silence. The scene cuts to black.)*

*(A few moments later, in Miss Thavel's classroom. The bell has rung.)*

**Miss Thavel:** *(She is holding a tablet, the lesson clearly over)* ...and that, students, is what we call these things. Period. And not for stops. Especially 'and not's'. *(She makes a strange, deep, deer-like growling noise)* Any questions?

**Claire:** *(Raising her hand, her voice small)* Yeah. Where the heck is Lana? And why was Abbie getting chased by...

**Miss Thavel:** *(Appearing in the doorway, her voice chipper again)* Oops! Sorry there. One, I'm afraid your break time is ready. About time you get moving.

**Claire:** *(Sighing, gathering her things)* Uuughh, fine.

*(The students file out, visibly relieved. Miss Thavel stays at her desk, her head drooping. A moment later, she is fast asleep, her head on the desk, snoring loudly.)*

**Engel:** *(Stretching as he walks down the hall, yawning)* Finally! F-ing... her... on... these brats are annoying. I'm going to bed.

*(The scene shifts to the cafeteria. It's loud, crowded, and smells of stale food. Claire, Engel, and Bubble are at a table, looking shell-shocked.)*

**Claire:** *(Her voice trembling with a mixture of anger and fear)* You're really asking that?! It's really worrying me! Abbie and Lana have gone missing for the past hour, and none of the teachers are taking action! Those people are so special to me! Surely you understand, right?!

**Engel:** ...What about you, Bubble?

**Bubble:** Dude, I wasn't in your English class. I'e missed. I don't know what's going on. But... yeah, whatever is happening does seem really concerning.

*(Just then, Oliver, Zip, and Edward walk over to their table, trays in hand. They loom over them.)*

**Oliver:** Hey, punk-ass. Y'all whining about your two friends?

**Engel:** *(Glaring up at him)* Please, Oliver, not right now.

**Zip:** *(Ignoring him, talking to Oliver)* Zip it, 'weeb face'.

**Edward:** Why do you always even care for those guys, anyway? They're just two stupid students, like you guys.

*(Claire's face darkens, her hands clenching into fists on the table, her knuckles white.)*

**Oliver:** Yeah, I bet that Circle lady already killed them.

*(Engel glances at Claire, his expression worried as he sees her fuming, her face turning a deep, angry red.)*

**Claire:** *(Slamming her hands on the table, shooting to her feet)* Can you guys shut up for more than two seconds?! They're not stupid! They're our friends! And quit listening in on our conversations!

**Oliver:** Ooh... Oliver, you hit a button.

**Edward:** Yeah, seems so.

*(Oliver walks right up to the table, slamming his own hands down, leaning into Claire's face. The cafeteria's noise seems to dim. Claire flinches back, her sudden burst of anger replaced by raw fear.)*

**Oliver:** *(Leaning in, his voice a low, threatening hiss)* You don't scare me, twerp. You're just another cog in the wheel, like your freak-show buddies. That's why we're the favorites.

*(Edward and Zip burst out laughing, pointing at Claire's terrified face and howling. As they laugh, Claire's hands, hidden under the table, clench so hard her paper fingers begin to tear. Oliver smirks, his face inches from hers, and laughs right in her face. That's the last straw. A primal sound, a guttural roar, rips from Claire's throat. She snaps.)*

**Claire:** *(Lunging)* Rrraaaaaaaggghh!

**Oliver:** *(His eyes widening in genuine surprise)* Woah-!

*(Claire lunges across the table, grabs Oliver by his shirt, and punches him square in the face. The sound of the impact, a solid thwack, cuts through the cafeteria's din. Everything stops. Then, the cafeteria erupts. Students shout, stand on tables, and swarm, forming a tight, cheering circle.)*

**Engel:** *(Yelling, trying to get through the crowd)* Holy shit! Claire, stop!

*(Claire, in a blind rage, doesn't hear him. She continues to punch Oliver in the face over and over. Oliver tries to block, but she's relentless, fueled by fear and fury. The scene is pure, unadulterated chaos.)*

*(The scene shifts abruptly. Later, at the principal's office. The room is dark, wood-paneled, and imposing. Claire is sitting in a hard, wooden chair, tapping her foot nervously, her knuckles bruised and slightly torn. Oliver sits in the chair next to her, looking at her, a smug, infuriating smirk on his face. The office door opens, and Miss Grace's sharp, clipped voice makes Claire jump.)*

**Miss Grace:** *(Off-screen, her voice dripping with disapproval)* ...so, let's see, Oliver. What happened?

**Oliver:** *(His voice instantly changes. He puts on a dramatic, tearful, shaky voice)* Oh, Miss! It was horrible! I was only minding my own business, until this... *monster*, Claire, decided to punch me in the face! And strangle me! I couldn't even defend myself!

**Claire:** *(Jumping up from her chair)* What the fuck?! Are you adding more to it?!

**Miss Grace:** *(Appearing in front of her, towering over her)* And you, Claire. Tell me your story.

**Claire:** *(Stammering, intimidated)* Well, Miss, I... I was simply...

**Miss Grace:** *(Cutting her off with a sharp gesture)* That's enough of you.

*(Miss Grace studies them both, her eyes cold and analytical. Oliver continues to put on a show, dabbing at fake tears, sniffing pathetically.)*

**Miss Grace:** Well... judging by how Oliver was clearly acting out his entire bit, and shows no signs of being hurt... I'd have to easily say that... he's the clear victim of the story.

*(Claire's jaw drops. She looks from Miss Grace to Oliver, speechless.)*

**Miss Grace:** And you, Claire... punching some innocent boy in the face for no reason. Really. Even I'd never stoop to such a crummy low. That results in a detention. Now, if I were you, I'd say you two better get out of my office.

*(In the hallway, Claire is seething, walking stiffly, her whole body vibrating with rage. Oliver saunters beside her, that infuriating smirk plastered back on his face. He side-eyes her, clearly enjoying her anger.)*

**Claire:** I'm sorry, but what the heck?! Did you have to add more bullshit to the list?! You're making it sound way worse! And also... where are your bruises?!

**Oliver:** *(Waving a hand dismissively)* That's not the point. Only part I'm happy about is that I'm still thriving... and you're still the same loser that you were in elementary.

*(He drapes a heavy arm over her shoulder. Claire freezes, her skin crawling, disgusted by his touch.)*

**Oliver:** *(He grins, his face close to hers)* I always win here, Claire.

*(A long, tense silence hangs between them. He suddenly shoves her, hard, against the lockers. The metallic clang echoes in the hall.)*

**Oliver:** *(Laughing as he walks away, his laughter bouncing off the walls)* Hahahahaha!

**Claire:** *(Muttering, furious, pushing herself off the lockers)* Mmph. Hmph!

*(The scene shifts to Miss Sasha's quiet classroom. She is trying to teach a visibly bored Chip, who is doodling on a piece of paper.)*

**Miss Sasha:** ...and that, kids, is how you draw a flower.

*(A sharp knock on the door. Miss Sasha looks up, startled, nearly dropping her chalk. She peers through the small, grimy window at the top of the door.)*

**Miss Sasha:** Oh, Chip! Someone's here for you.

**Chip:** *(His eyes light up, his entire demeanor changing)* Zip?! Is that you?

*(The door bursts open, and Zip rushes in, her face wreathed in a huge smile. Miss Sasha stumbles back in shock.)*

**Zip:** *(Opening her arms, ready to hug her lil brother)* Chip!

**Chip:** *(Leaping from his chair and jumping into her arms)* Sister!!!

**Zip:** *(Lifting him up effortlessly, carrying him)* How was Miss Sasha?

**Chip:** *(Looking at her, his eyes shining)* She was so cool! She made us... a flower!

**Zip:** *(Laughs, a genuine, warm sound)* That's great, Chipster. And we got something for you. Now that it's break time...

**Chip:** *(Eyes sparkling)* ...are we doing what I think we're doing?

**Zip:** *(She pulls a small, plastic pirate hat from her bag and puts it on her own head)* Grab your floaty. We're going to the swimming pool!

**Chip:** *(Pumping his fist)* Yay!

**Miss Sasha:** *(Smiling weakly from the corner)* ...you guys have fun.

*(In the hallway, Engel and Bubble are walking, both wearing colorful swimsuits. Engel looks glum, his shoulders slumped as he walks.)*

**Bubble:** *(Looking around, trying to be cheerful)* Don't worry, Engel. Claire should come back anytime now. *(She smiles)* We'll have a blast when we go swimming.

**Engel:** *(Sighing, unconvinced)* I guess you're right. Got the pool noodle?

**Bubble:** Yep.

*(They continue walking, Engel still looking sad. Suddenly, they hear rapid, light footsteps and heavy panting behind them. They turn to see Claire, running to catch up, her face flushed.)*

**Claire:** *(Panting, hands on her knees)* Hey guys, where... where are y'all going?

**Bubble:** We're going swimming!

**Engel:** *(His face lighting up, his sadness vanishing)* Hey Claire, you want to come with us?

**Claire:** *(Her mood lifting slightly, a small smile appearing)* I'd love to! I think I got some form of a swimming suit in my... oh! *(She gasps, a hand flying to her mouth)* In fact, guys... guys, I want y'all to meet someone. *(She holds up her backpack, which is wiggling)*

**Bubble:** Oh? Who is it?

*(Claire unzips her backpack. A small, sleek black cat with less-saturated, striking orange-yellow irises pokes its head out and lets out a tiny, inquisitive meow.)*

**Claire:** Meet my new cat, Moemoe!

**Engel:** *(Gasps, his eyes turning to stars)* Oh my God, he's so cute!

**Bubble:** *(Melting, her voice going high-pitched)* He's so adorable! Oh my gosh... oh, look at you, just a little baby! *(She leans in and kisses the top of its head)* Mwah, heheheh!

*(Engel gently pets the cat's head with one finger, and it purrs loudly, rubbing against his hand.)*

**Claire:** Okay, little guy's got to go in now. Go, go, go. *(She gently places Momo back in her bag and zips it up, leaving a small gap for air).* Anyways, about the swimming place, let's get going.

*(The three continue walking down the hall, their spirits visibly lifted.)*

**Engel:** *(Excited)* Heard they installed a little pirate boat to float around in! *(His face falls again)* Let's just hope the bullies ain't snatched it already.

*(Both Bubble and Engel sigh, their shoulders slumping in unison at the thought.)*

*(Meanwhile, in the pool's humid, chlorine-scented locker room. RILEY is yelling at RUBY, a red, robotic-looking student with a blank, digital face.)*

**Riley:** *(Frustrated, pacing back and forth)* Listen, you bucket of bolts! I needed someone to help me confess to Oliver! Give me your... you're nothing but AI with no feelings! I thought you would help me!

**Ruby:** *(Monotone, her voice synthesized)* Well, first of all, I do have... they're... Secondly, I think Oliver is dating...

**Riley:** *(Perking up, her voice sharp and frustrated)* Wait, who?!

**Ruby:** ...singly. I don't want to... her! But I think she comes around...

**Riley:** *(Furious, her fists clenched)* ...I'll give her a piece of my mind! Let me at 'em! Let me at 'em!

*(Riley storms out of the locker room, slamming the door. Ruby watches her go, then sighs, a mechanical puff of air. She sits down on a bench, looking disappointed.)*

**Ruby:** *(To herself)* Hmph. How dare she.

*(She looks to her left and sees Robby, sitting on the edge of the pool, dangling his boots in the water and splashing idly. He seems mesmerized by his feet, watching the ripples.)*

**Ruby:** *(Walking over to Robby)* Hello master. What is your feet doing?

**Robby:** *(Startled, looking up)* Oh! I'm just looking for fish in the water.

*(Ruby sits down next to him, her metallic legs making a small clink on the tile. Robby continues to splash his feet. A moment later, Chip runs up, excited, and sits on the other side of Robby.)*

**Chip:** *(Happily, kicking his own feet)* Water pool!

**Robby:** *(Startled again, jumping)* Aaah! Oh, it's you.

*(The scene shifts to the main indoor school pool. It's massive, the water a bright, chemical blue. Claire, Engel, and Bubble are standing at the edge, taking it all in.)*

**Claire:** *(Amazed, her eyes wide)* Wow, this place is huge! *(She gasps, pointing)* There's a slide!?

**Engel:** *(Shrugging, hands in his pockets)* I know, it's odd having that at a school swimming pool. Probably for the toddlers, though.

**Bubble:** *(Looking around, her eyes darting nervously)* ...at least the bullies aren't here yet... *(She gasps, her voice dropping)* ...huh?

*(Bubble stares in disbelief. Across the pool, Oliver is holding a blue bar of soap and taking a large, deliberate bite out of it. He munches on it, unfazed, as if it's a candy bar. Zip and Edward are standing next to him, looking shocked and disgusted.)*

**Oliver:** *(Munching, his voice muffled)* Listen, you two... as a... you taste to it. Come on.

**Zip:** Oliver, is your whole taste in things weird? First, you're into demon girls, and now you're into eating bars of soap? *(She sighs, then turns and smiles at Chip)* Me and Chip are going to ride the boat. Ain't that right, Chip?

**Edward:** Yeah, I'm going to go in the water. Bye!

*(Edward jumps into the pool with a large splash. Claire stares at Oliver, who is still eating the soap. Oliver notices Bubble approaching him, her steps hesitant.)*

**Bubble:** *(Her voice weirded out and deeply worried)* What... what are you eating?

*(An awkward, wet silence hangs in the air. Oliver just chews, looking at her blankly.)*

**Bubble:** *(Staring, her eyes wide with a dawning, specific horror)* ...Is that you, Uncle Robert?

*(Oliver looks at the half-eaten bar of soap, then back at Bubble. He shrugs, as if just now realizing.)*

**Oliver:** *(Shrugs and holds out the soap)* Yeah, probably. Here... *(He spits the soapy, saliva-covered remains into Bubble's outstretched, trembling hand)* ...you can have it.

*(Claire and Engel stare in bewildered, horrified silence. Bubble looks down at the disgusting mess in her hand, her face pale and traumatized. Her lower lip begins to tremble, and tears well up in her eyes. She lets out a quiet sob and walks away, crying, her shoulders shaking.)*

**Claire:** *(Her fists clench, her body tensing as she starts to move toward Oliver)* Why are you-

**Engel:** *(Grabbing her arm, his voice firm)* Claire, no. You know what happened last time.

**Claire:** *(Sighs, her anger deflating, leaving her looking tired)* Okay, yeah, you're right. Let's just go relax. You and me.

*(Engel smiles and smirks, his good mood returning.)*

**Engel:** *(Smiling)* Nah... nah! Last one in is... *(She bolts and jumps into the pool with a huge splash)*

**Claire:** *(Laughing, running after her)* Hey! Get back here!

*(The two laugh and splash each other, their earlier worries melting away in the water. Over at a bench, Ruby and Robby are watching the entire, bizarre scene.)*

**Robby:** *(Calling out)* Hey, is Bubble okay?

**Ruby:** *(Monotone, processing)* She just witnessed her uncle, who was turned into a bar of soap, be partially consumed by her bully. Statistically, she is not "okay." But she will process the trauma in time.

**Robby:** Jesus Christ! I'll try to catch up to her later. A-maybe I can make it feel better.

**Ruby:** *(Nodding, a simple, logical gesture)* Yes, that is what you always do.

**Skell:** *(Sitting nearby, buried in his phone)* Oliver should hand me a bar of soap, too.

**Ruby:** *(Looking at Skell, her voice flat and bored)* Please stop.

*(In the pool, Edward surfaces from underwater, blowing a stream of bubbles.)*

**Edward:** *(Gasping, wiping water from his face)* I... I love the taste of filtered pool water!

*(Edward hears a splashing noise and looks up, his eyes widening in panic as he sees the small plastic pirate boat, with Zip and Chip on it, heading right for him at full speed.)*

**Zip:** *(On the boat, striking a dramatic pirate pose)* Wee-dee-dee-hoe! X marks the spot!

**Edward:** *(Panicked, trying to swim away)* What the-?! Oh, shit!

*(The boat collides with Edward's head with a loud, hollow thwack. He sinks under the water without a sound.)*

**Claire:** *(Looking over, wincing)* Oh Jesus, is he okay?

**Engel:** *(Shrugging, splashing water at her)* Being honest... why should we care?

*(A stream of bubbles rises from the other end of the pool. Edward surfaces, coughing and sputtering, his hair plastered to his face.)*

**Edward:** *(Gasping)* I'm alive! *(He coughs, spitting out water)* I'm heading out...

*(The pirate boat drifts to the edge of the pool and bumps against the concrete. Zip hops out, looking triumphant.)*

**Chip:** *(Wincing, looking at Edward)* Why did we hit... Edward?

**Zip:** ...we did. Oh, shit, Edward!

*(Zip rushes over to Edward, who is sitting on the edge of the pool, holding his head and groaning in pain.)*

**Zip:** *(Kneeling beside him, her voice suddenly soft)* Huh? What is it? Sorry, I didn't see you... *(She gives a small, soft 'hehe')*

**Edward:** *(Groaning, but he looks up at her and manages a weak smile)* No... you're fine. Nothing a Band-Aid can't fix.

**Zip:** *(She gently puts her palm on his cheek, right over the forming bruise)* You have a massive red bruise on your face. I don't think that's good. *(She gives him a sweet, concerned smile)*

**Edward:** *(Blushing, his pain forgotten)* Yeah, no biggie. I... she'll probably help it out.

*(A school bell rings, harsh and loud, echoing off the pool's tiled walls. All the students begin to gather their things and head out of the pool area, leaving a lone coach to start cleaning up the mess. The scene shifts to a dark, ominous hallway on the second floor. The entire class is gathered outside a single, black, metal-plated door. Miss Circle stands beside it, her fixed smile seeming even more sinister in the dim light.)*

**Miss Circle:** Hello, students! Welcome to... 's room. Like every... the month... we'll be quickly reminding you all on who is Alice... and what she can do.

*(She gestures to the menacing door.)*

**Miss Circle:** What... anybody like to knock on the door?

**Oliver:** *(Stepping forward, full of bravado)* I think I speak for all of us when I say I shall open the door.

**Claire:** *(Whispering to Engel, her voice shaking)* Why does a student have their own room?

**Engel:** *(Whispering back, his eyes fixed on the door)* They're... they're no student. They're a monster.

**Claire:** What?!

**Oliver:** *(Walks up to the door and bangs on it with his fist)* Hey yo, Alice!

*(The door creaks open with a sound of scraping, rusting metal. Two glowing white eyes appear in the pitch darkness inside.)*

**Oliver:** *(Happily, waving)* Hey, it's me, Oliver!

*(A tall, shadowy figure, ALICE, steps into the light. She is terrifying, with long, sharp claws, a vaguely demonic appearance, and an aura of pure malice. Miss Circle gets out of the room, seeing her hand, Marco Diaz, was weak, Blood marks, scratch all over the body, and severely damaged, by Miss Circle, keeping him alive)*

**Marco:** *(Horrificed, weak, begging)* H-Help

**Miss Circle:** *(Still smiling, grabbing Marco torso to hold him in place)* Students, now that you have met Alice, it is time to learn what would happen when contact is made with her. This is

**Marco:** *(Struggling, pulling out a small knife)* He-Help, *(He tries to squiggles)* Let-Let me Go Miss, ill will try... to be... perfect.

**Miss Circle:** *(Her grip tightens, squishing Marco slightly)* Now, if you are in the presence of Alice, expect to be...

*(Alice, ignoring his beg, gets closer to Marco, their faces inches apart. Alice leans in and lets out a deep, demonic laugh that builds in volume, rattling the lockers.)*

**Alice:** *(Demonic Roar)* HRAAAAAH!

*(Marco is paralyzed, tears of pure, abject terror streaming down her face. Alice and Marco stare at each other. Alice suddenly grabs Marco, slamming her hard onto the floor. Alice's massive, clawed left hand clamps onto the right side of Marco's head, her sharp thumb pressing into Marco's right eye. With a sickening, wet squelch, Alice rips the eye from its socket. Blood and guts spray across the floor. Marco lets out a blood-curdling, horror-movie scream that echoes down the hall. Alice, grinning, holds the eye up for a moment, examining it, before tossing it aside. Marco cackles, thick saliva spilling from his mouth as she rips a piece of skin from Marco's cheek. Alice then grabs Marco's body and moves backward, away from the students, dragging her into the shadows of her room. She lifts Marco up with both hands—one hand on her torso, the other on her legs. Marco is weak, breathing in ragged,*

wet gasps, her one good eye crying. He looks down as he feels herself being stretched taut. Alice begins to pull. Marco's clothes rip, and dark, bloody marks appear on her torso as the skin stretches. Alice pulls harder. The sound of wet tearing and bones snapping fills the air. Blood gushes from Marco's midsection. he closes her eye in agony. Then, Marco's mouth opens in a final, deafening scream as blood pours from it. Alice rips her in two. Ribs, bones, and internal organs scatter across the floor in a massive, grotesque spray of gore. The students scream, cry, and gag. Lizzy and Pentunia are hugging each-other, sobbing hysterically. Kevin looks on, his face pale but stoic, though his hands are shaking. Cubbie has small, silent tears running down his cheeks. Alice callously drops the two halves of Marco's body. She picks up the upper torso and hurls it into the middle of the crowd. It lands with a wet splat, splattering blood on the nearby students' shoes.)

**Claire:** (Gagging, her hand over her mouth) H-H-holy shit!

(Claire gags again, turning away, her face a pale green. She looks like she's about to be sick. The upper torso of Marco is, impossibly, still moving. Her one good eye, red and tear-filled, blinks weakly. He looks around, helpless, her breathing a faint, gurgling sound. A pair of shoes walks up and stops in front of her. Oliver steps hard onto Marco's chest, pinning her. Marco's eye looks up at him, confused and pleading.)

**Oliver:** (Looking down at Marco, his voice filled with strange adoration) That's my girlfriend. (He lets out a cold, evil laugh)

**Oliver:** (Muttering) Nice one, Alice.

(Marco's eye continues to cry, a single tear rolling down her bloody cheek. Oliver laughs again, then draws back his foot and kicks Marco's head, detaching it from her torso with a sickening crack. It rolls across the floor, leaving a bloody trail, and bumps against the wall.)

**Engel:** (Worried, pale) I told you she was a monster.

**Claire:** (Swallowing hard, trying not to vomit) I think I'm going to be sick.

(Alice walks back toward her room, her claws dripping, passing the terrified students as if they're not there. As she reaches the door, Oliver calls out.)

**Oliver:** Wait, Alice...

**Alice:** (Her voice, soft and almost human now, comes from the darkness) ...yes...

(Oliver walks over, past the horrified stares of his classmates, takes Alice's bloody, clawed hand, and kisses it. Alice leans down, a grotesque parody of affection, and kisses Oliver on

*the forehead. He giggles, a high-pitched, unnerving sound. Alice then disappears back into her room, closing the heavy door with a final, booming thud.)*

**Zip:** *(Sighing happily, her eyes half-lidded)* Simp.

**Oliver:** *(Glaring at Zip, his romantic mood shattered)* Hey, I'm a... I kissed first! *(He switches tones, brushing dust off his shirt)* Anyways, we still got 15 minutes of break time to kill. Come on, Edward, we're going to the library.

**Edward:** Oh, all right.

*(The bullies walk off, leaving the other students frozen in horror. Engel waits by the nearby bathroom, looking pale. A moment later, Claire stumbles out, her face pale, waxy, and disoriented. Engel rushes over to her.)*

**Engel:** Claire, are you okay?

**Claire:** *(Shaking, her voice distant)* I... I surprisingly wasn't sick. But I'm still trying to process the... split Marco... I just saw. I pray that won't happen to me.

**Engel:** *(Putting a hand on her shoulder, trying to ground her)* Yeah... I do too. Hey, I know. Let's go to the library. Maybe Bubble is over there.

**Claire:** *(Nodding slowly, not really processing)* Oh, yeah. Sure... sure. Let's go.

*(They start walking, their steps slow and shaky.)*

**Claire:** ...Uh, by the way... I... I want to say thank you. For being here for me on my first day at Maple High. Despite how... traumatizing our situations have been, you're always finding ways to help me feel better. It... it really means a lot.

**Engel:** *(Blushing slightly, a small, sad smile)* Oh, of course, Claire. I... I hate to see you sad. I like being around you. You're a great person.

**Claire:** *(Smiling a little, the first real smile in a while)* Well, I... I like being around you, too.

**Engel:** ...Well, let's... let's... let's get going now.

**Claire:** All right.

*(Two minutes later, they arrive at the library entrance. The place is massive, a stark contrast to the rest of the school. It's vast, with towering, chaotic shelves of books reaching up to a second-floor mezzanine, creating a maze of paper and dust. Sunlight streams in through high, grimy windows, illuminating billions of dust motes dancing in the air. It's almost*

*completely silent, the only sound their own footsteps. They spot Bubble sitting alone at a large, empty table, her head resting in her hands.)*

**Claire:** Here are. Wow, this place is huge. There's so much that could be done here. How do you guys ever choose what to do?

**Engel:** Well, people usually read, but it is one of the biggest libraries in any school. *(Then he spotted Bubble, who was sitting with Robby)* Hey look, it's Bubble.

*(Meanwhile, at Bubble's table, she is still looking down, her shoulders slumped, traumatized. Robby is sitting with her, trying to comfort her.)*

**Robby:** *(To Bubble, his voice gentle)* ...that sounds terrible. I hope you're doing okay now.

**Bubble:** *(Her voice muffled by her hands)* ...yeah. It's not every day you end up seeing your bully eating your uncle. Let alone any of your family members at all. ...Thank you, though.

**Robby:** *(Patting her hand)* No problem. But hey, on the bright side, your friends are here.

*(Bubble looks up, her eyes red and puffy. She sees Engel waving happily and Claire walking over. Engel is waving his hand back and forth, grinning, oblivious. Bubble's expression sours instantly.)*

**Bubble:** *(Her voice flat, cold, and disappointed)* Thank you for the surprising lack of help back there. Really appreciate it.

*(Claire and Engel freeze, their smiles vanishing. They look down, ashamed, the weight of their inaction hitting them.)*

**Claire:** *(Quietly, twisting her hands)* Oh, uh... I'm... I'm sorry about that. We... we... we were really just so excited about the pool. I... I promise we have nothing against you.

**Bubble:** *(Sighs, her anger fading, leaving only exhaustion)* All right... I can't stay mad at you two. But just... don't talk about it. Please.

**Engel:** Yeah, that works.

**Claire:** *(Trying to change the subject, desperate to lighten the mood, she grabs a random picture book from a nearby cart)* Ooh, look what I found! *The Hungry Caterpillar!* I love that book! Let's read it! Let's read it!

**Bubble:** *(To Engel, ignoring Claire's attempt)* Anyways, Engel, let's talk about something to get our mind off of the mutilated child I was for... and let's just talk about how perfect our precious little lives are.

**Engel:** ...Um, sure.

*(The library doors slam open with a deafening bang, making them all jump. Oliver, Zip, and Edward stride in, their loud voices shattering the silence.)*

**Oliver:** *(Loudly, grinning)* Let's get this party started! Look, Oliver, look what the cat dragged in!

**Oliver:** *(Smirking as he spots them)* Well, well, well. What do you suppose... throw paper airplanes or fling rubber bands at them? And...

*(His eyes scan the room, looking for a new way to torment them, and land on a large, battered cardboard box tucked under a nearby table. A label is scrawled on the side in messy black marker: "DRONE EDDY ONLY". A wicked, creative grin spreads across his face.)*

**Oliver:** *(Turning to Edward)* Or, Edward... what do you say about us using that little machine of yours?

**Edward:** *(His eyes widen, gesturing to the box labeled "EDDIES ONLY".)* That one, for what?

**Zip:** *(Nudging him)* Come on. We've got a plan.

**Edward:** *(Nervously, wringing his hands)* Uhh, I need an answer... what is the plan?

**Oliver:** *(Draping a heavy arm over his shoulder)* Oh, it's simple. That drone's claw can easily pick someone up.

**Zip:** What do you say we have a little fun with that?

**Edward:** *(His face goes pale)* As in... dropping Claire into the pit obviously! What are you, insane?! Listen, I'm all for the verbal abuse and throwing paper planes and whatnot, but... we could get in serious trouble for this!

**Oliver:** *(Sighs, rolling his eyes)* Don't be a party pooper, Edward.

**Edward:** I am not allowing this! I... it could get us into...

**Oliver:** *(Leans in close, his voice a low threat)* ...Do you want me to tell Ms. Grace about the... "pencil sharpener incident"?

**Edward:** *(His defiance crumbles instantly. He deflates)* ...Oh. Fine.

**Oliver:** *(Patting his back, grinning)* That's my lackey.

**Zip:** Do you think we're being too rough with him?

**Oliver:** *(Waving him off, already bored)* Nah, he'll be fine.

*(Edward reluctantly kneels, opens the box, and unpacks the drone. It's a surprisingly sophisticated piece of hardware. He pulls out a complex controller, flipping a few switches and checking the battery lights. He toggles the joysticks, and the drone's small lights blink in response. Satisfied it's working, he places it on the table just as Zip walks over, her eyes wide with curiosity.)*

**Zip:** *(Reaching for the controls)* Ooh, shiny!

**Edward:** *(Snatching the controller away from Zip's hand, holding it protectively)* No, hands off! This thing can be pretty difficult to control, you know.

*(Edward carefully places his thumbs on the joysticks. The drone's propellers whir to life, and he makes it lift slowly and carefully off the table, its motors buzzing loudly in the otherwise quiet library. He guides it unsteadily through the air, concentrating. Just as he seems to be getting the hang of it, Oliver shoves him hard in the shoulder.)*

**Oliver:** *(Pushing him aside)* All right, you're being too slow with this. My turn!

*(Edward stumbles, losing his grip on the controller. Oliver deftly snatches it out of the air before it can fall.)*

*(Oliver, with surprising skill, expertly maneuvers the drone over to where Claire is sitting, engrossed in *The Hungry Caterpillar*. A large, metal claw mechanism on the drone suddenly drops, clamps around her waist, and yanks her from her seat.)*

**Claire:** *(Shrieking, her legs dangling)* Who, Wh-Whaa, What the f-?! Get this thing off me!

*(The drone strains, its motors whining, lifting Claire a few feet off her chair. Oliver, Zip, and Edward all look up, laughing maniacally as she dangles helplessly in the air.)*

**Oliver:** *(Shouting into the controller's speaker)* If you say so!

*(Oliver guides the drone over a large, dark, railed-off pit in the center of the library floor and hits the release button. The claw opens.)*

**Engel & Bubble:** CLAIRE!

*(Claire falls, her scream echoing as she disappears into the blackness. Oliver and Zip are laughing hysterically.)*

**Edward:** *(Horried, his hands shaking)* Well... there's no chance of her surviving down there!

**Oliver:** *(Wiping a tear of laughter from his eye)* Calm down, fuzz-head. There's plenty of cushions and stuff down there.

**Edward:** *(Still shaking)* There... there better be!

**Zip:** Do you think we went too far?

**Oliver:** Not even close. Not yet, at least.

**Zip:** ...What do you mean by that, exactly?

**Oliver:** *(Smirking)* I'll show you. You coming with us, Edward?

**Edward:** *(Shakily, looking at the pit)* I... I think I'll stay here. Thanks, though.

**Oliver:** *(Shrugging)* You're lame.

*(Oliver and Zip stride out of the library, laughing, leaving Edward alone to stare into the dark pit. They walk down the hall and duck into a nearby empty classroom. Oliver looks around, then spots a stack of poster paper and some markers on a teacher's desk. He grabs a large sheet and a thick black marker. Zip watches him, curious.)*

**Zip:** *(Confused)* Oliver, what the hell are you planning?

**Oliver:** Just the process, Zip. Grab the tape. We're fooling someone today.

*(Oliver spreads the paper on the floor and carefully, meticulously writes "EXIT" in huge, block letters. He holds it up, admiring his handiwork.)*

**Zip:** *(Pointing)* Where in hell would you think of putting the...

**Oliver:** *(Cutting her off, his eyes gleaming)* Oh, don't ask questions. Just grab the tape.

*(The scene shifts. They are now at a T-junction in a hallway. A large, dark, ominous pit blocks the end of the hall, identical to the one in the library. Oliver is carefully taping the "EXIT" sign to the wall, with a large arrow pointing directly into the pit.)*

**Zip:** You sure about this?

**Oliver:** *(Stepping back to admire it)* Fuck yeah. It'll trip someone eventually.

**Zip:** I just don't see how stupid someone could be to fall for this.

**Oliver:** Anyone could.

**Zip:** Well, all right. If someone does fall for this, though, I'm going to laugh.

**Oliver:** Fuck yeah. *(He adjusts the sign, making it perfectly straight)* **Zip:** *(She squints)* It's a little crooked.

**Oliver:** So what? It's not like anyone's going to care.

**Zip:** Yeah, you're right. Who do you think would fall for it, though?

**Oliver:** Someone stupid enough.

**Zip:** Hmm, Think we should get back to the library to get Edward?

*(The bell rings, its harsh sound signaling the end of break.)*

**Oliver:** Nah, whatever. Sign's... got enough.

**Zip:** ...If you say so.

*(Meanwhile, in the deep, dark pit below the library floor where Claire fell. It's a massive, cavernous storage area, damp and smelling of dust and mold, filled with forgotten shelves and teetering boxes. Claire's "Aaah!" echoes and is suddenly cut short as she lands hard, face-planting onto the grimy concrete floor with a heavy, sickening thwack. She groans, unmoving for a long moment. She slowly, painfully pushes herself up, her body aching from the impact. She stands up, wincing, and spits a small amount of blood from her mouth. She has a fresh bruise forming on her eye.)*

**Claire:** *(Struggling, her voice hoarse from pain)* Uggh... oh god. Hnngh...

*(She gets to her feet, her legs shaking. She looks around the dim, vast, and terrifyingly large storage room. In the far distance, she spots a single, rickety wooden staircase leading up to a small, square hatch of light—presumably the exit back into the library. She limps towards it, every step an effort. She stops at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at the long, daunting climb.)*

WELCOME TO HELL, BITCH.

**Claire:** *(She sighs, a sound of pure pain and exasperation)* Well... fuck.

*(The bell rings. The scene shifts to the music classroom. MISTER DEMI is at his desk, meticulously writing a report on a piece of paper. He has shoulder-length blunt white hair styled in a bob-cut, with a pair of white pencils and small black horns resting on his head. His left bang is styled to look like a piano keyboard. He wears black glasses, through which only*

*his left eye is visible—a light green that often appears blue. He's dressed in a white collared, puffy-sleeved shirt under black suspenders, with an eighth note emblem on the shirt's center. His arms are white with black stripes, while his forearms and hands are solid black, matching his pants and heeled boots. He's startled from his paperwork by the sound of the classroom door slamming open. He looks up, flustered, as Oliver and Zip swagger in and head to their seats in the back.)*

**Mister Demi:** *(Rushing over, looking flustered)* ...they asked... why are you two late?

**Oliver:** *(Glaring, leaning back in his chair)* None of your business, twink.

**Mister Demi:** *(Flustered, his voice high)* C-can we keep that language outside of this...

**Oliver:** Don't tell me what the fuck I can and can't do.

**Mister Demi:** *(He stops writing, his hand shaking)* A-as I was saying... that's the difference between the sharp notes and flat ones. This...

**Oliver:** ...kind fucking sucks.

**Mister Demi:** ...W-well... sharp notes tend to be a... higher--

**Oliver:** *(Cutting him off, his voice full of venom)* Nobody wants to learn this shit, twink.

**MISTOR DEMI:** ...t-the flat notes tend to be a... one lower--

**Oliver:** This class is lame.

*(A sharp, authoritative knock echoes through the room, making everyone jump. The door swings open, and Miss Sasha steps inside, her expression composed but firm. She takes a moment to scan the room, her gaze lingering on Oliver and Zip in the back before softening as she looks at a flustered Mister Demi.)*

**Miss Sasha:** Hey. I couldn't help but notice some commotion, coming from this class.

**Mister Demi:** It's... it's... it's nothing, really...

*(Miss Sasha looks around the classroom one more time, her eyes landing decisively on Oliver. She then turns back to Mister Demi, and her stern expression melts into a warm, happy smile.)*

**Miss Sasha:** May I see Oliver in the hallway?

**Mister Demi:** *(Relieved)* Go right ahead.

**Miss Sasha:** Great. Oliver, come with me.

*(Later, Oliver sullenly exits the classroom. In the hallway, Miss Sasha follows him out and shuts the door firmly, the click echoing. The moment the door is closed, her demeanor shifts. She grabs Oliver by the shirt and slams him hard against the lockers. Her face is ballistic, contorted in pure, unadulterd rage.)*

**Miss Sasha:** What the actual fuck is wrong with you?! Every time you get into that class, you start some kind of commotion!

**Oliver:** I... I'm sorry...

**Miss Sasha:** Keep your fucking mouth shut! If I ever... and I mean ever... see you pulling that shit again, I myself will get Circle to handle you. *(She leans in, her voice dropping to a terrifying hiss before she shouts)* UNDERSTOOD?!

*(Oliver is silent, paralyzed with fear, his eyes wide.)*

**Oliver:** *(Terrified, voice cracking)* ...Yes. Yes, ma'am.

**Miss Sasha:** Good. Get back to class.

*(Oliver, looking thoroughly cowed, scrambles back inside the classroom. He opens the door and walks sadly back to his seat. Mister Demi watches him go, then looks up at Miss Sasha, who has followed him in and is now walking towards the desk.)*

**Mister Demi:** *(Softly, looking down)* I'm so sorry you have to deal with him all the time. I'm not very good at...

**Miss Sasha:** *(Her voice suddenly warm, almost purring)* Mister Demi, darling.

**Mister Demi:** *(Disappointed in himself, stammering)* I'm... I just... I feel so bad for him to get you in here because I can't stand up--

*(As Mister Demi looks down, apologizing and dejected, Miss Sasha leans over the desk. She gently cups his chin, lifts his face, and kisses him directly on the lips. It's a soft, romantic kiss that lasts for a long moment. She pulls back, smiling warmly. Mister Demi is frozen, his entire face a deep, vibrant red.)*

**Miss Sasha:** *(Gently)* Keep yourself together. It's fine. Seriously. I don't mind it all. And if anything... I like helping you... Bye-bye, darling.

*(Miss Sasha turns and walks gracefully out of the classroom. The moment she's gone, Mister Demi, still bright red and speechless, swoons and faints, collapsing back into his chair with a quiet thud.)*

**Mister Demi:** *(Blushing, dazed)* ...Yes, ma'am.

*(Later, the scene shifts to a long, winding hallway. Claire emerges from the stairwell that led up from the library pit. She is exhausted, covered in dust, and breathing heavily, leaning against the wall to catch her breath after the long climb.)*

**Claire:** Oh my God... why... there's so many stairs... holy shit... I miss... I am so... holy shit...

*(As Claire walks cautiously down the new hallway, she sees a figure standing at the far end. It's Miss Bloomie, her favorite teacher from elementary school. But something is wrong. Miss Bloomie has short black bob hair with blunt bangs and a pair of black horns tilted to the left. Her hair is in a small ponytail with a white bow. Her outfit consists of a white-collared black long-sleeved shirt, a long white skirt, and black, pointed legs. Her left arm is replaced with a giant, terrifying box cutter blade, and her right hand has sharp, pointed fingers. She is standing perfectly still, a sinister grin on her face, holding a piece of paper with a large 'F' mark.)*

**Miss Bloomie:** Oh... how I finally get to kill again. It's such a shame you failed such a simple test, Claire.

**Claire:** *(Backing away)* What?! Who... who are you?

**Miss Bloomie:** *(She sweats nervously, her smile not wavering)* I'm Miss Bloomie. Your science teacher today, a-and, I'm your teacher from elementary school. Remember?

**Claire:** I've never heard of you!

*(Miss Bloomie's face twists in disgust. With a metallic shing, she extends her razor-blade arm to its full length. The blade gleams under the flickering hallway lights. Claire's eyes go wide with terror, her body trembling.)*

**Claire:** *(Panting)* Hh... huff... hah...

*(The chase is on. Claire turns and bolts, her footsteps echoing. Miss Bloomie follows, her movements unnervingly calm. Claire, in a panic, runs down a side hall, spots an unlocked locker, yanks it open, and scrambles inside, pulling the door shut just as she hears Bloomie's footsteps approaching. She holds her breath, peering through the tiny slots. Miss Bloomie stalks past, her head scanning from side to side, her blade arm leaving a long scratch along*

*the opposite wall. She continues down the hall. Claire waits, her heart pounding, until Bloomie is out of sight. She slowly pushes the locker open, peeks out, and gulps, terrified. She slips out and runs in the opposite direction, panting. She fast-walks, turning corner after corner, completely lost, until she runs straight into Miss Thavel, who stands there, a wide, predatory grin on her face.)*

**Miss Thavel:** *(Grinning)* Hehh, hehe. You think you can run from us forever, Claire?!

**Claire:** Wuh- Woahh!

*(Claire screams and turns, running again. Miss Thavel gives chase, her heavy footsteps slamming against the floor. Claire, breathing in ragged gasps, her heart pounding, spots a heavy textbook on a bench. She keeps running, Miss Thavel right behind her, grabs the book, and hurls it over her shoulder.)*

**Claire:** H-YAH!

*(The book flies at Miss Thavel, who doesn't even slow down. With a single, contemptuous swipe of her clawed hand, she slices the book in two, its pages scattering like confetti.)*

**Claire:** *(Panicked)* Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit!

*(Meanwhile, in the music classroom. Engel is sitting at his desk by the window, trying to write his music essay. He looks down at the courtyard and freezes. He sees Claire sprinting across the grass, pursued by a terrifying Miss Bloomie and the even more terrifying Miss Thavel. He goes pale with worry. He immediately raises his hand. Mister Demi looks over.)*

**Mister Demi:** Yes, Engel?

**Engel:** Yes, Engel... may I be excused?

**Mister Demi:** *(Concerned)* You... you may, but be quick about it, please.

**Engel:** *(Forcing a smile)* I... I will!

*(Engel bolts from the classroom, slamming the door behind him. Back in the chase, Claire bursts through a set of double doors. Miss Thavel smashes through them right after her. Miss Thavel's heavy footsteps falter. She slows down, her body convulsing. Claire glances back and keeps running. Miss Thavel groans, falling to her knees. Her body twists and cracks. Wendigo-like antlers burst from her head, her arms and legs become covered in thick fur, and her clothes tear. She throws her head back and lets out a demonic, bestial roar that echoes through the school. Claire, hearing the roar, runs even faster, only to be cornered by Miss Circle, who slams her compass arm into the wall just in front of her face. The chase resumes, a blur of hallways, Claire desperately running from the three teachers.)*

*(The chase bursts into the cafeteria. Lizzy, Pentunia, Kevin, and Cubbie are sitting at a table. Lizzy and Pentunia have makeup kits out and are applying bright red lipstick to Kevin, who looks mortified but is secretly enjoying the attention from two girls. Cubbie watches, amused.)*

**Lizzy:** *(In a romantic tone)* You look beautiful, Kevin.

**Pentunia:** *(Also romantic)* Hold still, nerd, got to add some lip--

*(They're interrupted as Claire vaults onto their table, scattering makeup, and sprints across it. A second later, Miss Circle follows, her compass smashing their books and trays. The four students scream in shock and panic.)*

**Lizzy, Pentunia, & Kevin:** Woah-! Wuh-! What?!

*(Claire, with her last ounce of strength, sees a small gap between the teachers and tries to slip past. But Miss Bloomie's razor-sharp arm lashes out, slicing the back of her foot. Claire screams and falls to the ground, helpless. She looks up, injured, at the three monstrous figures surrounding her.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(She lets out a high-pitched, evil laugh)* Hahahaha! Ohh, I'm so glad I finally get to get rid of... You.

**Miss Bloomie:** *(Frowning, her voice flat)* I could have done this by myself.

*(Miss Circle shoots Miss Bloomie a furious, squiggled-eye glare.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Angrily)* SHUT Up. Let me have this.

*(Miss Circle raises her compass arm high, the sharp point aimed directly at Claire's face. Claire squeezes her eyes shut, bracing for the end. The arm swings down. But the killing blow never lands. Engel, in a burst of pure, unthinking courage, has thrown himself forward. His small, trembling hands have caught the cold, sharp point of the compass just inches from Claire's face. Miss Circle freezes, her expression one of genuine, shocked surprise. Miss Thavel, in her beast form, also seems taken aback. Miss Bloomie just looks annoyed. Engel, his own face a mask of terror, turns his head to Claire.)*

**Engel:** *(His voice brave but panicked)* QUICK! GET OUT OF HERE! RUN!

*(Claire, seeing her chance, gives Engel one last, worried look before scrambling to her feet. She runs, her injured foot sending jolts of pain up her leg. Miss Circle, enraged, turns on Engel.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Roaring)* Get out of my fucking, WAY!

*(With a furious swipe, she throws Engel against the lockers with tremendous force. He slams into the metal and slides to the floor, a trickle of blood coming from his right eye. The three teachers instantly forget him and resume their pursuit of Claire. Claire's desperate flight leads her to an open classroom. She ducks inside, hoping to hide, but the sight that meets her eyes is one of pure horror. The mangled, dismembered bodies of Lana and Abbie lay in a grotesque heap. Lana's head has been chopped off, her eyes stabbed with pencils. A piece of paper with Alice's 'symbol' lies on the floor next to her. A fresh wave of terror washes over Claire. She stumbles back, only to bump into Miss Circle, who is standing right behind her, a sinister, predatory grin on her face.)*

**Claire:** *(Panting)* Hah... huff... hah...

*(Claire turns and bolts again. She runs down a long hallway, her lungs burning. And then she saw it: a door at the end of the hall, a hastily made sign taped to it that read "EXIT." A surge of desperate hope floods her. Freedom.)*

**Claire:** *(A choked, hopeful laugh)* Heh... hehe... heha... Hahah! Yes! Yes! Yes!

*(She makes a beeline for the door, her last reserves of strength propelling her forward. As she runs, the three teachers closing in behind her suddenly stop dead in their tracks. Their expressions of predatory rage shift to ones of pure, dawning horror.)*

**Miss Bloomie:** *(Shouting in a panic)* CLAIRE, WAIT!

*(They know that door isn't an exit. It's Alice's room. But it's too late. Claire bursts through the door, thinking she has found salvation. She stumbles to a halt, panting, expecting to feel cool, fresh air. Instead, she's in a vast, empty, black void. The door slams shut behind her, vanishing.)*

**Claire:** *(Exhausted, breathing hard)* Hah... huff... *(She looks around, relaxing slightly)*  
Where... Where am I?

**Alice:** *(A demonic laugh echoes from the darkness)* Hehehe... Hahahahaha!

*(Claire freezes. She wasn't outside. She was in Alice's domain. In the center of the void, Alice stands, glaring at her. Claire's eyes widen as she realizes her fatal mistake. She had sealed her own fate.)*

**Alice:** *(Her voice booming, echoing)* I WASN'T... EXPECTING VISITORS.

**Claire:** *(Trembling, backing away)* You again?! Engel, you were right... you're... you're no student--

**Alice:** *(Her voice getting louder, more demonic)* A MONSTER. YES, YES, YES. AND I NEVER MEANT IT METAPHORICALLY. OR RHETORICALLY. OR POETICALLY. OR THEORETICALLY. OR ANY OTHER... **FANCY WAY!!!** *(Her voice drops to a low, threatening tone as her eyes glow red)* I'm Alice... straight up.

*(Claire shakes, paralyzed by fear. Alice stomps her foot, and a barrage of sharp, black spikes erupts from the floor, shooting towards Claire. With a desperate leap, she just barely avoids them. Alice, with unnatural grace, leaps from one of the spikes and soars through the air, striking Claire across the eye with her claws. Claire rolls across the black, polished floor. She scrambles to her feet as thick, black tentacles sprout from Alice's back. Alice leaps again, descending on Claire, who dodges the blow and turns, bursting back out into the school hallway. Alice is right behind her, a relentless, demonic pursuer.)*

**Alice:** *(Her demonic laughter echoing, growing louder)* AHAHAHAHAHA!

*(Meanwhile, Engel is lying crumpled against the lockers. His vision is blurry, his heart pounding. He hears a faint, static-like noise. Bubble is kneeling over him, shaking him gently.)*

**Bubble:** *(Worried)* Engel. Engel. What happened? Engel?!

*(Engel groans, slowly gaining consciousness. His right eye flutters open, his breathing heavy.)*

**Engel:** *(Looking around slowly, his voice weak and worried)* Whe-Where's Claire?! Is-- is she okay?!

**Bubble:** I don't know exactly.

*(A blood-curdling scream echoes from down the hall. Bubble and Engel flinch, their faces filled with terror. Meanwhile, Claire reaches the real exit, a set of heavy, solid oak doors. She slams against them, rattling the handles, only to find them chained and padlocked.)*

**Claire:** *(Panicked, her heart pounding)* Come on, open! Please, please, please, please, please, please...

*(She's trapped. She hears Alice's loud, demonic laughter right behind her.)*

**Alice:** *(Demonic laughter)* HAHHAHAHA!

*(Claire turns slowly, her back pressed against the locked doors. Alice, in her full, monstrous form, is slowly crawling towards her, savoring the moment. Claire is breathing in short, panicked gasps. The air is thick with suspense.)*

**Alice:** *(Her voice a demonic threat)* I've enjoyed the chase, Claire. But I think we've reached the end now. You. AND. I!

*(Alice raises a massive, clawed hand. The four claws glint. She strikes. The scene cuts to black as Claire's final, piercing scream echoes, followed by a sickening, wet, gushing sound. Then, silence.)*

**Claire:** *(Screaming)* AAAAAAAAAAAHHH!

*(The campus is silent. The scene fades in on Claire's mutilated, dismembered, and destroyed body, lying in a pool of blood by the locked exit. A minute later, Engel, bruised and injured, limps down the hallway. He lets out a weak, painful laugh. He sees a crowd of students—Lizzy, Bubble, Skell, Kevin, Cubbie, Ruby, and Robby—all standing in the main hallway, stunned, shocked, and terrified. Engel runs past them, ignoring their calls.)*

**Kevin:** *(Stuttering, worried)* W-why... is it... only short...?

**Pentunia:** ...Oh my fucking god.

*(Engel pushes past a stunned Principal Grace to see what had happened. He reaches the front doors, and his look of worry turns to one of pure, soul-shattering horror. He sees Claire's mangled body. His world shatters. He falls to his knees, his breath catching in a sob. He slowly reaches into his pocket and pulls out a worn, folded piece of paper. He unfolds it. It's a photograph of him and Claire as children, smiling, with the date "08/13/2981" written on the bottom. A disturbing, high-pitched ringing sound begins as Engel stares at the photo, his mind flashing back.)*

*(Flashback: A bright elementary school hallway. Little Engel and Little Claire run into each other, a clumsy collision that scatters their books and papers everywhere.)*

**Little Engel:** *(Scrambling, his cheeks red)* Oh, I'm so sorry!

**Little Claire:** *(Gathering her own papers, she giggles)* It's okay! I wasn't looking.

**Little Engel:** *(He hands her a book)* I'm Engel.

**Little Claire:** *(Taking it, she smiles)* I'm Claire! It's nice to meet you.

**Little Engel:** *(Smiling back, his nervousness fading)* You too!

**Little Claire:** *(Tilting her head)* Hey, are you new?

**Little Engel:** *(Nodding, shuffling his feet)* Yeah, it's my first day.

**Little Claire:** *(Her eyes light up)* Cool! Want to come to the library with me at recess?

*(Flashback: A sunny park. Engel and Claire are on a swing set, pumping their legs, laughing as they fly through the air.)*

**Little Claire:** *(Shouting with joy)* Higher, Engel! Push me higher!

**Little Engel:** *(Laughing, pumping his own legs)* I'm trying! You're going so high!

**Little Claire:** I can touch the sky!

**Little Engel:** *(Grinning)* No, you can't!

**Little Claire:** Yes, I can! Watch! *(She times her swing and jumps off at its highest point, landing in a clumsy heap in the sand. Engel stops his swing and runs over, his face a mask of concern. He gently places his palm on her cheek.)*

**Little Engel:** *(His voice worried)* Are you okay?

*(Flashback: A bright, happy classroom filled with colorful art. A younger, human-looking Miss Bloomie, with two normal arms and a sweet, patient smile, stands at the front.)*

**Miss Bloomie:** *(Clapping her hands)* Okay, class! Time is almost up! Please bring your volcanoes to the front!

**Little Engel:** *(Frantically mixing a beaker)* Quick, Claire, add the baking soda!

**Little Claire:** *(Pouring a scoop into the volcano)* I'm doing it, I'm doing it!

**Little Engel:** *(Staring at it)* It's not working!

**Little Claire:** *(Her hands on her hips)* Just wait! *(The volcano suddenly erupts, spewing red foam all over the desk.)*

*(Flashback: Miss Bloomie holds up a shiny gold star sticker.)*

**Miss Bloomie:** *(Happily)* Yeay! A-plus! *(The rest of the class claps. Engel and Claire high-five, grinning from ear to ear.)*

**Little Engel:** We did it!

**Little Claire:** *(Smugly)* I told you it would work!

**Miss Bloomie:** *(Kneeling down, hugging them both)* You two make such a wonderful team!

*(Flashback: A sun-dappled sub-forest area. A woman, KATIE, is leading a young Engel and Claire down a narrow path, the air filled with the sound of birds.)*

**Katie:** *(Pointing to a colorful moth on a leaf)* And this, kids, is a Cinnabar moth. They're very important. They eat Ragwort, which is poisonous to horses and cows. It's all part of the ecosystem.

**Little Claire:** *(Her eyes wide with wonder)* Wow...

**Little Engel:** *(Deep in thought)* So, everything has a purpose?

**Katie:** *(Smiling warmly down at him)* That's right. Everything and everyone. Even when it's hard to see.

**Little Claire:** *(Her voice small)* What about... life? Is it always... hard?

**Katie:** *(Her smile softens)* Sometimes. But that's what makes the good parts so bright.

**Little Engel:** *(Looking at Claire)* Like friendship?

**Katie:** *(Watching them, her eyes kind)* Especially like friendship.

**Little Claire:** *(Smiling at Engel)* I'm glad you're my friend, Engel.

**Little Engel:** *(Beaming)* Me too, Claire.

*(Flashback: Night time in the same forest. Katie is playing an acoustic guitar by a crackling campfire. The mood is peaceful, the stars bright overhead.)*

**Katie:** *(Singing softly, her voice clear)* ♪ Sweep through the halls... To escape will have some sacrifices... No room for jealousy... I've got no time to play hide and seek... 'Cause eventually, he'll surely find me... Have to be brave or better keep behaving... ♪ *(Claire and Engel are watching, mesmerized. They slowly, quietly, join in, their voices small but earnest.)*

**All Three:** *(Singing)* ♪ Count... 'Til I don't know what counts... Every inch of fear is all that's ingrained... Can't understand, what's the solution?... The problem is the mess in my brain... I'm pushed around with all the pressure... To be here when I don't wanna stay... There's gotta be some sort of exit to get away... ♪ *(Katie finishes the song with a sweet, gentle melody on the guitar as Engel and Claire smile and hold hands, their faces lit by the firelight.)*

*(Flashback: Engel and Claire, now 12, are sitting on a grassy hill at night, under a breathtaking sky full of shooting stars. Engel is playing a guitar, his skills much improved.)*

**Engel & Claire:** *(Singing softly together, their voices harmonizing)* ♪ You... Yeah, I always know the truth... But I can't just say it to you... Yeah, I know the truth... I knew... Yeah, I

always know the truth... But I can't just say it to you... Yeah, I know the truth... I never thought we'd see it through... I never could rely on you... And few times your face came into view... Into view... I'm not into you... Into you... ♪

*(Engel plays the final, beautiful chords, letting them ring out in the vast, starry night air. A peaceful, comfortable silence settles over them. Claire leans her head on Engel's shoulder.)*

**Claire:** *(After a long moment)* That was beautiful, Engel.

**Engel:** *(Looking at the stars)* Not as beautiful as this.

*(They watch the stars, sparkling and glimmering)*

**Claire:** The stars are amazing tonight.

**Engel:** *(Turning to look at her)* Yeah... they are.

**Claire:** I feel like... I could stay here forever.

**Engel:** Me too.

**Claire:** Will... will we be together forever?

**Engel:** *(His voice is calm)* I hope so.

**Claire:** *(Lifting her head)* Me too.

**Engel:** *(His voice quiet, nervous)* I... I really like you, Claire. *(They smile at each other. Engel lifts his right hand and gently places his soft, fluffy palm on Claire's left cheek. They both blush, and Claire giggles softly.)*

*(Back to the dark, bloody present. Engel is kneeling over Claire's mutilated body. He slowly, gently, touches her cold cheek with his fluffy right palm. He leans down and softly closes her one remaining, staring eye. His body is wracked with a silent, devastating sob.)*

*(Meanwhile, back in the hallway where the bullies were left, Oliver, Zip, and Edward are standing, looking horrified at the sounds of the chase and the final scream.)*

**Zip:** *(Her voice shaking, hands over her mouth)* Oh no... what have I done?

**Oliver:** *(Trying to reassure her, his own voice unsteady)* It's not your fault. Look, you're not the one that...

**Edward:** *(Pacing frantically)* Well, that escalated quickly.

**Oliver:** *(Sighs, running a hand through his hair)* Zip... she would have been killed either way.

**Zip:** *(Her voice turning cold, filing her nails nervously)* Why do you two care so much? If anything, I'm glad she's out of the way.

**Miss Circle:** *(An angry, animalistic growl echoes from down the hall)* Zip... Edward... OLIVER!

*(The three students freeze, their blood running cold. At the far end of the hall, Miss Circle, Miss Bloomie, and the transformed, bestial Miss Thavel appear. Their forms are silhouetted, and they are dripping with fresh blood.)*

**Miss Circle:** *(Her voice dangerously calm, angry)* ...Oliver. What are you doing?

*(back at engel)*

**Engel:** *(A choked, horrified whisper)* Claire....

**Principal Grace:** *(Her voice strained, her professional composure shattered)* My God... Its Alice again.

**Mr. Demi:** *(Staring at engel)* It's... I— I can't, I'm sorry.

**Miss Emily:** *(Her hand covering her mouth, tears streaming down her face)* She... she just... oh, heavens...

**Engel:** *(He continuous to cry, his voice breaking)* Claire...Clare

**Principal Grace:** Engel, stay back!

**Mr. Demi:** It's not safe!

**Miss Emily:** *(she pauses)*

**Engel:** *(Reaching the body, his voice a raw scream of grief)* NO!

**Bubble:** *(Running up behind him)* Engel!

**Principal Grace:** Everyone stay back!

**Mr. Demi:** I... I think I'm going to be sick.

**Miss Emily:** *(a heavy sigh of profound grief)* Again...

**Engel:** Claire... please... dont... leave me...

**Bubble:** I'm so sorry...

**Principal Grace:** *\*sigh\** Everyone, Keep calm, ill Handle this situation, just Stay back.

**Mr. Demi:** I'm sorry, Engel.

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*(Engel, his body wracked with sobs, crawled the final few feet to Claire's body. His big claw fur hands, now vividly colored, trembled as he reached for her. He gently turned her over, his face crumbling as he saw her lifeless eyes staring into nothing. With a strength born of pure grief, he gathered her limp form into his arms, pulling her into a tight, desperate hug, rocking back and forth as silent sobs wracked his entire body.)*

**Bubble:** *(Kneeling beside him, her own tears falling freely, placing a gentle hand on his back)*  
Engel... I'm here. I'm right here with you.

**Engel:** *(Muttering into Claire's hair) \*sobbing heavily\**

**Bubble:** I know. It's not.

**Mr. Demi:** *(His voice trembling, looking at Grace)* We can't just leave him there with her. It's not right. The other children are watching.

**Miss Emily:** What can we do? The doors are locked. And that... that monster... Alice-

**Principal Grace:** Keep the kids away! I want it clear now!. I'll handle her, Miss Emily. Just, move these kids away,

**Miss Sasha:** *(From a distance, her voice filled with horrified sadness)* Oh, you poor children...

*(The other students stood in a frozen, silent cluster down the hall, their faces pale with shock. Near the art room, Miss Sasha had her five small kindergarten students huddled behind her, their eyes wide with a terror they couldn't possibly comprehend. She was trying to shield their view, but it was impossible. The horror was everywhere.)*

**Chip:** Miss Sasha, why did the world get all bright?

**Harbin:** And why is that boy crying so loud?

**Miss Sasha:** *(Her voice choked with unshed tears)* He's... he's just very sad, sweetie. Something sad happened.

**Engel:** It's my fault... I couldn't save her.

**Bubble:** No, it's not. It's not your fault. It's... Them.

**Principal Grace:** Get them to their classrooms. Keep them calm. I will warn those Three Kids !!! Uggghh, I'll get it cleaned up.

**Engel:** *(A final, heartbreaking sob, looking at Claire's face)* I'm so sorry, Claire... I'm... sorry...

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*(Meanwhile, on a high, forested hill four kilometers away from the campus, the two operatives of Overwatch-7 were finalizing their observation post. Amira Dai was fine-tuning a portable satellite uplink while Soren Jaeger calibrated the optics on a heavy spotting scope mounted on a tripod. The quiet of the woods was suddenly broken by a series of fast, electronic beeps from their laptop. Amira moved to the screen, his eyes narrowing at the chaotic energy signature that had just appeared.)*

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Hey, Jaeger. Get over here, you're gonna want to see this.

*(Soren walks over, peering at the monitor as Amira points to the erratic line on the graph.)*

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** That's coming from the school... Dead center of the main building.

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Not a massive spike. But it's... unstable. What do you figure? One of the teachers having a bad day?

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** Could be. Or it could be that 'Alice' thing from the intel packet. The ghost story the kids whisper about.

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Right.

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** Whatever it is, it's the first real ripple we've seen in three months. Command's gonna be thrilled.

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Alright. Get on the glass. I want to know if the outside looks as weird as the inside feels right now.

*(Soren moves to the spotting scope, settling in behind the eyepiece and adjusting the focus. He scans the front of the school building, the main entrance, and the windows.)*

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** Can't wait to see the looks on their faces when we tell them their haunted school is actually haunted. Our friends in Command are gonna love this.

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Eh, they'll just throw another MTF at it. Comes with the territory. Besides, it's what we're here for, right? To find the weird shit.

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** Yeah, part of the job. Just wish the job came with a better view. Got nothing here. Windows are dark. Front lawn looks empty.

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Always is, right before the shooting starts.

*(A moment of silence passes, the only sound the wind in the trees and the low hum of their equipment. Soren continues to scan the building, his focus absolute.)*

**Overwatch Amira Dai:** Alright... I'm logging this energy event... time-stamped. Signature is chaotic... low-level reality distortion, maybe... We'll keep eyes on the building... document any and all visual changes, no matter how small... and we'll feed this all back to Command. Let them figure out what to do with it.

**Overwatch Soren Jaeger:** Roger that. Just tell 'em to send coffee with the cavalry.

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*(The scene zooms into the laptop, as it zooms, it goes pure black going to the mainframe)*

*(The screen is black. A single, pure, high-pitched school bell rings, its chime echoing and distorting, as if underwater. The sound fades into a low, ambient hum.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** *(Voice is a low, weary rumble. Calm, professional, tired.)* We have a word for the line. The one that separates the world you *know*... from the one you aren't *allowed* to. We call it 'The Veil'.

*(A grainy, green-hued night vision shot. Kofia's helmet-cam. He's standing across the street from MAPLE HIGH SCHOOL. It's 03:00. Rain falls, streaking the lens. The school is a dark, silent monolith. It looks... wrong. The angles are too sharp, the paper-like texture of the building seeming to absorb the light.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** Most of the time, it's a wall. Thick. Strong. But sometimes... you find a tear. A quiet little infection in the fabric of what's real. We found one in South Maple County. For three months, we just watched it. We drew a line around it. We called it 'contained'.

*(CUT TO: A montage of chaotic, daytime news footage. Glitched text overlays: "EIGHT CHILDREN MISSING", "SOUTH MAPLE COUNTY", "FEAR GRIPS COMMUNITY".)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** Then the whispers got loud. But when you're on the line, you learn that the public... they don't *want* to see the tear. They'll find any other answer. A gas leak. A mass hysteria. A man. They'll build a cage of comfortable lies before they admit the monster at the door is real.

*(The montage accelerates. Quick cuts.)*

*(A local News Anchor 1, her face grim.)* **News Anchor 1:** ...unprecedented panic... police are now expanding their search...

**News Anchor 2 (V.O., Pundit):** *(Overlapping)* ...but Chuck, the official story just doesn't add up. Eight kids don't just 'get lost'.

**News Anchor 4 (V.O., Expert):** *(Overlapping)* What we're seeing is a classic case of communal trauma, a folie à plusieurs, where...

*(An overhead tactical map. A red circle is drawn over the "MAPLE FOREST". Search grids are visible. The words "LOGICAL SEARCH SECTOR" are stamped on it.)*

**Police Chief (V.O.)** *(From a press conference, his voice strained)* ...every indication points to the woods. We are doing *everything* in our power...

**News Anchor 3 (V.O., Field):** *(Overlapping)* The scene here is chaos, Tom! Parents are demanding answers the police simply don't have!

*(Handheld phone video of a protest. Angry parents holding signs. "SEARCH THE SCHOOL", "THEY'RE LYING".)*

**Protester (V.O.)** They're not in the woods! They're not listening!

*(A local news report. Miss Malum is on camera, her face pale, her eyes hollow.)*

**Miss Malum:** *(Her voice breaking, but laced with a terrifying certainty)* ...he was scared of failing. Is that a crime now? You're searching the damn trees while the *monster* is in the schoolhouse!

*(The audio of Miss Malum's voice ("...in the schoolhouse...") echoes and distorts, blending with static.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** She was right. But the monster wasn't what she thought. And the crime... was education.

*(CUT TO: A heavily distorted, image. A security camera feed from inside the school. The hallway is bright, colorful, and utterly empty. Static rolls across the screen.)*

**Miss Circle (V.O.)** *(Audio log, terrifyingly cheerful, academic.)* The standard is perfection. A failing grade isn't a mistake. It's... *untidy*. It's an imbalance. And we must... *tidy up*.

**Kofia (V.O.)** We're trained for human evil. Sociopaths. Cults. We get those. But... this was *institutional*. It was systemic. And it was hungry. We look for patterns. It's what we do. The killer has a type. The monster has a territory. This... had homework.

**Kofia (V.O.)** The locals saw a tragedy. We saw a feeding pattern. A localized, predatory, cognitohazardous ecosystem.

*(CUT TO: A Foundation analyst's screen. A map of the school. Red dots appear inside, one by one. AUDIO LOG: "ENERGY SIGNATURE DETECTED. COINCIDES WITH 'LUNCH BELL'.")*

**SCP Analyst (V.O., Recording):** *(Voice is urgent, horrified)* Director, the telemetry is... it's not a *location*. Must be the *curriculum*. The energy spikes match the damn class schedule. It's... my god, it's *teaching* them. And the final exam...

*(A sudden, piercing, blood-curdling SCREAM. It cuts off abruptly.)*

*(A dark briefing room. A holographic map of the school, a multiple monitors glows in the center. Director Ash is a grim silhouette.)*

**Director Ash (V.S.):** *(Her voice is cold, sharp, commanding.)* Iota-10 is going in. You are our eyes. I want a full threat profile. I want a survivor count... *if any*. And I want a weakness. Find me the kill switch.

*(A montage of MTF Iota-10 operatives gearing up. This is not "Hammer Down." The gear is sleek, dark. Lockpicks. Fiber-optic cameras. Sound-dampening boots. Concealed sidearms. An agent (Anya) checks a small, specialized sensor.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** Most jobs, we're the hammer. We go in, we break the anomaly, we get out. But this wasn't a hammer job. This was surgery. In the dark. With a rusty scalpel. And the patient was already dead.

*(Kofia, in full tactical gear, slides a magazine into his pistol. The sound is loud, sharp, and final in the quiet room.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** You can't smash a shadow. You have to cut the light. We had the reports. We had the satellite data. We had the grieving parents. But we didn't understand the *cost*.

*(CUT TO: An overhead, high-angle shot of the school cafeteria. The image is from the prologue. Students are frozen in terror. The mutilated body of MARCO DIAZ is on the floor. Engel is kneeling, screaming silently. Bubbles, Lizzy, and Kevin are watching, paralyzed.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** You can't prep for this. You can't train for the moment you see the *cost*. Not until we saw *this*.

*(The camera PUSHES DOWN, fast, from the ceiling. It drops past Engel's grieving face, past the horrified students, locking onto the mutilated, paper-like body of CLAIRE by the exit doors. The user's requested shot.)*

*(The camera ZOOMS IN, fast and unflinching, onto her face... onto the empty, bloody, torn socket of her missing right eye.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** You look into the abyss... you expect something to look back. You don't expect it to be *empty*.

*(The camera DOES NOT STOP. It PUSHES INTO the blackness of the socket.)*

*(CUT TO: PURE BLACK.)*

*(The sound of a high-pitched, demonic laugh, (Alice's), echoes. It morphs into the sound of a dial-up modem, then into screaming data-static.)*

*(The blackness FLICKERS. It becomes a glitching FOUNDATION MAINFRAME. Red text flashes, faster than the eye can read:)*

> ERROR: REALITY INTEGRITY COMPROMISED - SECTOR 7G

> THREAT CLASS: KETER (ESOTERIC, ONTOLOGICAL)

> WARNING: COGNITHAZARD DETECTED

> SYSTEM\_INSTRUCTION: {PERFECTION}

> WARNING: VEIL INTEGRITY AT 4%

> QUERY: WHAT IS THE COST OF A LESSON?

*(For a single, distorted frame, Alice's monstrous face, as seen by Claire, flashes on the screen, her mouth open in a silent roar.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** This wasn't just a monster. This was a god. A small, petty, hungry god. And it had built its own church.

*(The static and screaming cut off abruptly.)*

*(CUT TO: The dim interior of COMMAND POST 1. It's 04:50. The high-tech command center is alive with the soft hum of servers. Personnel move like shadows in the background, their voices a low, serious murmur.)*

**Technician (V.O., distant):** ...Overwatch-7B has a clear view of the west entrance. No movement...

**Analyst (V.O., distant):** ...Hume readings are stable at baseline. It's quiet. Too quiet.

**Security (V.O., distant):** ...Lambda-5 is on standby. Greenlight is contingent on your signal, Iota.

**Director Ash (V.O., filtered):** ...this is a Class-A cognitohazard. I want no un-vetted comms. Stick to the protocol.

*(Agent Anya Volkov and Kofia Jackson, both now in simple, blue janitor uniforms, sit side-by-side at a console. They are silent. Tense. Anya stares intently at a schematic of the school. Kofia sips black coffee from a styrofoam cup, his gaze distant.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** So, how do you fight a god? How do you hunt a shadow that enforces its own secrecy? A thing that *lives* inside the rules?

*(A GPS map is visible on a nearby screen, showing a static map with a single red dot labeled "MAPLE HIGH SCHOOL".)*

**KOFIA (V.O.)** You don't send soldiers. You don't send heroes.

*(The camera pushes in slowly on Kofia's reflection in the dark monitor. His eyes are dark, focused. He looks nothing like a soldier. He looks like a man on his way to a job he hates.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** You send the janitors. You send the ones who have keys to all the doors. The ones who are paid to be invisible.

*(He takes a final sip of coffee and sets the cup down with a soft, final click.)*

**Kofia (V.O.)** Because at the end of the day... someone has to clean up the mess.

*(The command post is silent, save for the hum of the machines. Anya and Kofia continue to sit, waiting for the order to move.)*

*(FADE TO BLACK.)*