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EPISODE 7 - "TYLER" - © 2023 W. Keith Tims - All rights reserved.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 1

INT./EXT. TYLER'S MEMORY - CHANGING

[Music. Freight train whistle, far away.]

TYLER
(VO)
I know that I didn't always love Ren, but I can't seem to remember when it happened, anymore. She's become inescapable. She's a deep well with slippery sides and nothing will stop gravity from pulling me down into the dark water. I'll fall in. The world at the top will go on without me. I'll sink deeper and deeper, and wait for the water to fill my lungs. She won't notice. And the world won't notice. And... I won't care. It's not her fault. She don't know. And she don't owe me anything. Just... it's always supposed to have been her. Even when it wasn't.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 2

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - MORNING

[Distant sounds of young children playing. Wind stirring leaves.]

TYLER
(VO)

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There are times when Ren was just Ren. My first memory of her was in first grade, at school in Saltville. We were outside playing before classes started. The playground was covered in leaves. The end of autumn. The chill seeped in through our second-hand coats. You had to keep running, keep playing, to keep warm. Which is why it was strange to see her just standing at the edge of the playground, by the fence, her back to everyone. She was staring at the ground. It was Janet who saw her first.

YOUNG JANET
(a little out of breath from playing)
Hey Tyler!

YOUNG TYLER
(same)
Huh?

TYLER
(VO)
She was my best friend, Janet was.

YOUNG JANET
Who is that?

YOUNG TYLER
I don't know. Someone new? (pause) What's she doing? What's she looking at?

YOUNG JANET
(pause)
We should be friendly. C'mon.

[They run over. Footsteps on leaves. Pause.]

TYLER
(VO)

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The new girl wore a patched dress and a handmade knit cap. Bright red hair, like some kind of strange fire in the chilly air, spilled out from under it. She didn't turn around.

YOUNG TYLER
Hey!

TYLER
(VO)
Nothing. I wondered if she heard me.

YOUNG JANET
Hey. I'm Janet. This is Tyler. What's your name?

TYLER
(VO)
She turned around then and stared at us. It was... unnerving. She had pretty eyes. Even then I remember how striking they were--No. No wait, we were only six. I didn't think like that, then. Ren was just Ren. But she had this sharp, cool, expression--smart, and perceptive. She saw us. She took us in. The playground, the school, almost the whole world in a single look, and she just ... had no reaction to it all.

YOUNG REN
Catherine.

YOUNG TYLER
Are you new?

YOUNG REN
... am I?

TYLER
(VO)

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She tilts her head as if she doesn't understand the question, and then turns back to look at the ground at her feet.

YOUNG JANET
Whatcha looking at?

[Music. Somber, ominous.]

TYLER
(VO)
There's something at her feet, just on the inside of the fence. A small gray shape. It's a bird. A mourning dove. Dead. Its head is twisted strangely, it's feet are curled up, grasping at nothing.

[YOUNG JANET and YOUNG TYLER gasp softly.]

YOUNG JANET
Oh no... What happened? Did you hurt it?

YOUNG REN
(matter-of-fact)
No.

YOUNG TYLER
Did someone shoot it? My daddy says we should only shoot animals that are dangerous or we're gonna eat.

YOUNG JANET
Maybe a cat got it? What should we do?

YOUNG TYLER
Should we tell Miss Adams?

TYLER
(VO)

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Ren crouches and picks it up in her hands, unafraid.

[YOUNG TYLER and YOUNG JANET make quiet sounds of awe and mild disgust.]

TYLER
(VO)
Janet and I are still kids, we're still afraid of dead things. Or more like, we don't really understand them. They're a mystery, hinting at some mortality we'll have to face eventually. My daddy hunted: squirrel and possum, deer when he could get one. But I was just six. I was spared the butchering process. There were animals, and there was meat, but the space between the two was unclear. Except watching Ren fearlessly pick up the dove, it was like she and death were old friends. She turns it over in her hands, watching its head loll this way, now that.

YOUNG JANET
We should get a shoebox. We should get a shoebox and put it in, then we can bury it.

YOUNG TYLER
You want to bury it?

YOUNG JANET
We could hold a funeral. Like they did in that book Miss Adams read to us, about the goldfish who died and the family put him in a box and buried him.

YOUNG TYLER

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Where should we bury it?

YOUNG JANET
What about by the flagpole? We could see him every day and we could cry if we need to and we can remember him.

YOUNG TYLER
... okay. Uh. Where can we get a shoebox?

[REN takes a deep breath at the indicated moment below.]

TYLER
(VO)
Ren ignores us. She brings the bird to her face and she ... smells it. Like you might a flower. And then she gently rubs it against her cheeks, feeling the feathers tickle over her skin. And then, without warning, she hurls the bird over the fence, where it disappears into the trees just beyond.

[SFX: REN throws the bird. Bird falls into the brush, a ways off.]

YOUNG JANET
Hey! Why did you do that?

YOUNG REN
It's dead. You shouldn't worry about it.

TYLER
(VO)
I can't tell if Janet is about to bust into tears or throw herself in anger at the new girl. She glares at her, fists clenched, confused. But Ren just stares right back, unmoved and

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unthreatened. Instead, she points to the swing sets.

YOUNG REN
What are those?

YOUNG TYLER
What?... those... those are swings. You've never been on swings before?

YOUNG REN
No.

YOUNG TYLER
(pause)
Well. Come on. I'll push you. You too, Janet.

YOUNG JANET
I... uh. Okay.

[Swings creaking over transition to next memory.]

INT. TYLER's MEMORY

TYLER
(VO)
Janet was mad for about five minutes, but then she just sort of forgot about the bird, and I pushed them on the swings, first one, then the other, until Janet was laughing and Ren was smiling. Smiling was about the best you could get out of Ren in elementary school. I didn't wonder too much about that. I don't think I really understood this, back then, but a lot of us at the school were poor. And some of the poor kids were really, really poor. My daddy's a carpenter, which is sort of feast or famine, but we did okay.

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Janet's mom did hair, sometimes, when she was sober. But Ren had that look--thin, tired, haunted. Even if we didn't understand, we knew. She'd come from the hills, where they got next to nothing. Where life is hard and people are harder. And even though her adopted family did okay by her, and she grew out of the thin and tired, the haunted stuck. She carried something down off the mountain with her.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 3

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

[It’s quiet. Not much conversation.]

TYLER
(VO)
Anger, for one thing. She's like hot ashes, covered by dirt. Drop a little fuel, and suddenly there's fire. Ren had been in school I guess a couple of months when I saw the rage that fills her up for the first time. I had gone to the fair in Kibkibbney with my dad and had won this pink, sparkly pen in one of the games. It had a feather sprouting from the top, stars all over the body, and wrote in this hot pink ink. Seems like Ren didn't have many colorful things in her life. So I gave it to her.

YOUNG TYLER
Here!

YOUNG REN

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What's this?

YOUNG TYLER
It's a pink pen! You can have it.

TYLER
(VO)
She turned it over in her fingers as if it were an alien thing. Then she uncapped it, sniffed the tip, smelling the cheap fumes. Then she stared at me, as if confused.

YOUNG TYLER
It's okay! I don't want it.

YOUNG REN
(pause) ... give me your hand.

YOUNG TYLER
Huh? Why?

YOUNG REN
Just give it.

TYLER
(VO)
I held out my hand and she grabbed my forearm, holding it still. And then with great concentration she drew a pink heart on my wrist, right over the veins. I mean, it was kinda misshapen, none of us had great penmanship that young. But there it was, this crooked heart on my skin.

YOUNG REN
There.

TYLER
(VO)
I stared at that heart, confused and touched. Was this the moment I fell in love with her? ... no. I didn't love her then, but that

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gesture opened a part of me that hadn't before. Sometimes I'll dream of that bright pink heart, a little deformed, glowing like the sun, even today.

[Music shift. Activity changes, to a classroom, kids working, pencil sharpener turning, someone writing on a white board, etc.]

TYLER
(VO)
The next thing I recall about that day was during centers. We were all in different parts of the classroom, some of us reading books, some of us coloring, some of us playing with math toys. Miss Adams was on the other side of the classroom, working with a small group. I forget what I was doing, but I look over and I see Yvette Brown laying on the carpet, feet kicked up behind her lazily, drawing with that pink pen. I don't know how she got it. I remember her as being kinda selfish and stuck up, but, c'mon, what kid isn't? Anyway, the next thing I see is Ren walking over to her, and this storm is in her eyes. Yvette doesn't see her coming. Ren stands over her a moment, then without a second of hesitation, turns around, pulls down her sweat pants and pisses all over the back of Yvette's neck and head.

[SFX: Girl screams. Kids commotion. Patter of urine stream.]

TYLER
(VO)
Yvette thrashes and squirms, but Ren keeps going, staring at her

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over her shoulder with this black look on her face. Miss Adams rushes over.

MISS ADAMS
Catherine! Stop!

TYLER
(VO)
But she doesn't. She looks up at Miss Adams without a trace of shame or guilt and keeps right on peeing, until Yvette, soaked and humiliated manages to run away to sob in a corner of the room.

MISS ADAMS
Catherine!

TYLER
(VO)
There's no remorse on her face as she pulls up her pants. Everyone else in the classroom is staring. We can't believe what just happened. Ren gets sent to the principal. Refuses to apologize to Yvette. Gets sent home. There were punishments, but it didn't matter. Ren didn't seem to mind them. I asked her later why she did it.

YOUNG REN
(matter-of-fact)
She took my pen.

[Pause.]

TYLER
(VO)
The pink heart was still staining the skin of my wrist.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 4

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EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND – SUMMER DAY

TYLER
(VO)
After that it was always hard for Ren to make friends. Everyone was scared of her. Even Janet kept her distance. She really only stayed friends with Ren because I was friends with both of them and always tried to include them in whatever I was doing. I knew Janet had it rough at home, and Ren was alone on that bleak farm. I just figured we'd all be better together. Anyway, Janet changed her tune about Ren a couple of years later.

[Old AC unit fan, outdoors.]

TYLER
(VO)
Janet was absent from school for a few days. When she came back, she was walking slow. She seemed withdrawn and sad. Wouldn't talk to the teachers. It was late August and hot, but Janet was wearing tights under her dress. At recess, the three of us hid out of view from everyone else behind this ancient AC unit, water trickling out and muddying the ground around it.

YOUNG TYLER
C'mon Janet. Tell us what happened?

TYLER
(VO)

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Janet pulled down her waistband just enough to show us. There were makeshift bandages on her belly, below her navel and across her hips. Some of them still bloody. (pause) Her mother's latest boyfriend had taken a broken bottle to her. Cut her up. Did other things. She started crying again, more from the shame than the pain she felt. I watched Ren kneel down in the mud, studying the bandages with this intense curiosity for a few moments, before she said...

YOUNG REN
It doesn't matter.

TYLER
(VO)
At first I was angry. I thought she was calling her weak, telling her to get over it. But then Ren turned around, lifted her shirt, showed us her bare back. There were scars there. Old strap marks, where she'd been beaten by a belt. There were long cuts, too, like white rivers running alongside her spine. Jagged and rough. Angry-looking.

YOUNG REN
See?

TYLER
(VO)
These weren't fresh, though. She hadn't gotten them from her new parents. They were from before she was adopted. She pulled her shirt back down and shrugged at us.

YOUNG REN

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It doesn't matter. We're still here. (pause) Come on, Janet. Tyler is going to push us on the swings.

[AC Fades.]

TYLER
(VO)
And I did. Janet felt better, and in a few days wasn't limping anymore. The two girls became best friends. And that was us until we went to middle school.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 5

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

[School bell rings.]

TYLER
(VO)
Middle school... that's when the changes started. I mean, that's a hard time for any kid. But it was really hard on all of us. We were all growing, changing, filled with new feelings, carrying anger and fear from childhood, but we had nothing to do, nowhere to put all that. The library shelves were bare. There weren't that many school clubs, we lived so spread out, and our parents were either working or passed out or missing... What were we supposed to do, play bingo at the VFW? Go hiking on the trails? The trails were for tourists. You'd see them drive up in their expensive cars, tour the old mill, complain about

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the heat, and drive off again, taking their money with them. Even at 12 and 13, we absorbed the anger of our world. And we put it into violence, or tried to blot it out, chasing oblivion.

[SFX: Kids running, School locker opening.]

TYLER
(VO)
It was in middle school that she started going by Ren instead of Catherine. And then, as if she decided it was so, she started calling me 'Ty.' She was starting to soften... okay, a little. (pause) I know every kid looks to their peers to learn how to behave, but... I think with Ren it didn't come naturally. I saw her a few times, watching other students and mimicking their facial expressions, the way they talked and carried themselves. She had to practice, I guess. The only thing that came natural to her was anger. But I didn't realize how angry she was until 8th grade.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL GYM – DAY

[SFX: Kids playing basketball, talking. Boys wolf whistling.]

TYLER
(VO)
Ren matured early. By 14, she had already filled out. She's not voluptuous or anything, she has this wiry quality to her, but many boys couldn't take their eyes off of her. I ... I know that while I noticed her body, then, I still didn't think of her that way. She

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was my friend. That was all. I think. I'm sorry, it's hard to remember clearly. The present keeps coloring the past. But... uh. Right. Eighth grade.

[Boys laugh to each other, indistinct commentary about REN's body.]

TYLER
(VO)
There was this kid. Colt.

[COLT's laugh sounds out from the rest.]

TYLER
(VO)
Opiods had flooded the mountains. Meth was still a popular choice, too. Colt's older brother was a dealer. Kind of big time, for Saltville anyway. Had his own little gang, and Colt was a kind of mascot for it, I guess. Colt's brother was hot shit, so Colt thought he was, too.

[School doors closing, echoing.]

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

TYLER
(VO)
There was an assembly. Most everyone was already there. I had to go to the bathroom and Ren was getting something from her locker. She said she'd wait for me out in the hall.

[Locker closes. We shift locations. Hum of fluorescents. COLT writing with a marker on the walls.]

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INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

TYLER
(VO)
Colt was in the bathroom, alone, with a black marker, writing racial slurs and dirty words on one of the stalls for his own amusement. He even managed to spell some of them right. I didn't say nothing--no one messed with Colt, for fear of his older brother.

[COLT snickers and leaves.]

TYLER
(VO)
He just sneered at me and left, so I did what I came in to do, washed up, and went out into the hall.

[Bump of bathroom door. Fluorescents out.]

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

TYLER
(VO)
But Ren wasn't waiting for me at her locker.

TYLER
Ren?

[COLT snickering somewhere nearby, but out of sight.]

TYLER
(VO)
I immediately guessed what had happened. There was a stairwell at the end of the hall, a little secluded corner, there.

TYLER walks down the hall. We hear the drone of fans in a big stairwell.

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COLT
(voice getting louder as Tyler gets closer)
C'mon. Show me what you got. I know you got good ones, you're shaking them around all the time. C'mon Playboy. Heard you pulled down your pants in Kindergarten, this ain't no different.

TYLER
(VO)
He had backed her against the wall. She was taller, but he was stocky: heavy bones knitted with cruel muscle. He was leaning in, his grubby hands on her, his crooked teeth bared in a sick smile. Ren was very still. Tense. Staring at him. She seemed frozen. He hadn't seen me yet.

COLT
You got that red hair, Playboy. Does the carpet match the drapes?

TYLER
(VO)
His hand went down the front of her jeans. She didn't react at all. Her pupils were big black pools, like she was just... processing all this. Studying him.

TYLER
Let her go!

TYLER
(VO)
I punched him in the ear.

COLT
Aaagh!

[Sound of boys fighting.]

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TYLER
(VO)
He fell off of her, rounded on me. We struggled a moment, then he got me across the nose.

[Crunch.]

TYLER
Uhnnf...

TYLER
(VO)
He hit me again and I crashed to the floor. Blood filled my mouth.

[TYLER falls to the floor.]

COLT
Motherfucker! I'll fucking kill you!

TYLER
(VO)
I think he meant it, too. He dropped on me, hard. He's glowing with rage.

[Punches. TYLER gasping. COLT shouting obscenities.]

TYLER
(VO)
He beats me over and over. Until...

[COLT yelps.]

TYLER
(VO)
She has him. One hand yanking his hair back hard, the other gripping his head. He struggles a moment but then she digs two fingers into his eye... and pushes.

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[COLT screams, a high, surprised shriek. Meaty splatters as REN gouges out his eye.]

TYLER
(VO)
Blood spurts from his face, raining down on me. She twists her fingers deeper and deeper, until she's up to the second knuckle, and then with a scooping motion, she pulls out whatever's left of his eye.

[Screaming continues, and fades, reverberating into tense music.]

TYLER
(VO)
He doesn't stop screaming, even when the paramedics arrive. They have to sedate him in the ambulance. But before all that, I look up at Ren, with gore on her fingers and a fistful of his greasy hair. There is that hard, cold stare, again. No pity as she looks down at him. No disgust about what she's done. But more than that... she's very calm. Her breathing is slow and even. Through all of that, his assault and her retaliation, she didn't break a sweat.

REN
C'mon Tyler. We're okay now.

[Hallway noises fade.]

TYLER
(VO)
There's a police investigation. I tell them what happened. Between Ren's troubled past, Colt's family

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life, and the assault, they consider it self defense. They don't charge Ren with nothing. The cops look deeper into Colt's home life. They discover his older brother's business, who goes to jail. Colt, with an eye patch, gets put into foster care and moved to another part of the state. So, no payback, I guess. From anyone. Even the teachers are afraid of Ren, now. But I don't blame her, after what he did. And Janet, well, Janet understands about boys like Colt, and what they do. And men like him, too, the men her mother brings home, who trade meth for a turn with Janet. She became Ren's defender at school. Anyone started talking shit about her, Janet would shut them down, fast. But still, the rest of the year, everyone stared at her. And us. When the year ended, I think we hoped high school would be a new start.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 6

EXT. SALTVILLE FARMLAND / FOREST - NIGHT

[Crickets chirping. Lapping water.]

TYLER
(VO)
After what happened, Ren's adopted parents kept her home all summer. They were afraid, too. I only got to spend any time with her one late July night. Janet and I hatched a plan to sneak her out and go night swimming at a lake near her family's farm. It was

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warm and clear. The pine trees threw shadows over the gently rippling water, and the little fishing pier we sat on. Janet and I had worn our swimsuits under our clothes, but when Ren undressed in the shadowy dark, she wasn't wearing anything. Janet and I both stared as she slipped into the water.

[Soft splashing and laughter.]

JANET
I can't believe you're doing this! Skinny dipping?

REN
(in the water)
It feels good. You should try it.

JANET
I... I can't!

REN
Why not?

JANET
Well, Tyler is here for one!

TYLER
Hey, uh, I don't mind.

JANET
(laughing, splashing water)
Shut up, you.

[The kids laugh.]

TYLER
(VO)
It was just banter. I didn't really think of either of them that way. But I was 14. It was hard not to think of that stuff, you know, generally.

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REN
Come on. I dare you.

[JANET is suddenly quiet.]

JANET
I... I can't.

TYLER
(VO)
Janet wraps her arms around herself, stares down at the dock. There's a haunted look in her eyes. I guess with what's going on at home, it's to be expected. I don't know what to say. But Ren swims up to the dock, looks her in the eyes.

REN
It's your body. Not theirs. And it's just swimming.

[Long pause.]

JANET
... okay.

TYLER
(VO)
And she did. I looked away as she undressed. Just... didn't seem right to peek. Besides, she was my friend.

[Splash. More laughter.]

REN
See? Told you. Your turn Tyler.

TYLER
(VO)
I could just make them out in dark, the moonlight reflecting off of the lake, the water coming up to their shoulders. Janet was

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giggling. I think she felt some relief, you know? Reclaiming something of herself for a few minutes anyway. Ren just smiled and watched. Curious about what I'd do. Evaluating. But I chickened out.

TYLER
... uh, nah. You go ahead.

JANET
Well, you can still swim. Come on.

TYLER
... You sure?

JANET
Yeah!

TYLER
(VO)
So I stayed in my trunks and joined them.

[TYLER runs and leaps into the water. Splash. Swimming. Kids laugh.]

TYLER
(VO)
And so we swam, in the dark water, under a dim moon. I think all of us shed some of the weight we carried on our shoulders--at least for this one night. Even Ren laughed, some.

[Splashing fades, turns to drips, creaking of the pier.]

TYLER
(VO)
Eventually, we climbed onto the dock. Ren wrapped herself in a towel and lay down, staring up at the sky. Janet got her clothes on

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and joined her. So did I, dripping onto the rough wood of the pier.

[They are quiet a while. An owl calls in the distance.]

REN
We're going to be here forever.

TYLER
What do you mean?

REN
Here. This town. These woods. These mountains. We're going to be here forever.

JANET
God, I hope not.

[Pause.]

TYLER
Would it be so bad to, I dunno, stay here and start a family or something?

[Pause.]

JANET
I can't.

TYLER
Can't stay?

JANET
(soberly)
Can't have children. That's what the doctor said. I'm... tore up inside. Scar tissue. Nothing works right.

[Long pause.]

TYLER
... I'm sorry. (pause) Do you want a family, Ren?

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[Pause.]

REN
I have never even thought about it. (pause) No. I can't even... no. Why would you want to bring anyone else into this place? It's ... a trap. (pause) Can't you feel it? Don't you feel the world reaching out for you? Like hands tugging you. Down, down, down into the earth. Weights on your limbs. Stuck. Trapped here with stupid kids and useless adults. Stuck. Stuck here. Forever. It makes me so... angry.

[Pause.]

JANET
I'm not staying here. First chance I get, I'm leaving. I don't know how or where, but I can't stay here. I'm getting away from mom, and ... and all of her boyfriends and... I'm never coming back.

REN
Do you think it will be better somewhere else?

JANET
It has to be.

TYLER
(VO)
I reach over and take her hand. On the other side, Ren does the same. She holds on tight, like she's starved for the touch.

[Pause.]

TYLER

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My dad says you can build a good house most anywhere, if you know what you're doing, and with the right people. (pause) I hope wherever we end up, we're still together.

JANET
(sudden idea)
Let's all leave together, then! Right after graduation, we'll go. The three of us.

TYLER
Where will we go?

JANET
Anywhere but here. Are you in?

TYLER
Yeah!

JANET
Ren?

REN
(pause)
Yeah. Okay.

TYLER
(VO)
But both of us knew that behind that faint, moonlit smile, she didn't believe it.

[Lake sounds fade.]

TYLER
(VO)
This would be the last time the three of us were unguarded with each other. I think I could have fallen in love with Ren then. But I don't think I did. In a few years, after high school, I'll see Ren naked again, only clearly. The

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two of us will make love. I'll be awkward and confused. But she'll move like a dancer, like she knew my own body better than I did.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 7

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

[School bell rings. Cars pulling up, school buses driving past, opening doors, discharging students.]

TYLER
(VO)
High school. Janet and I are talking out front. We hadn't seen much of each other since swimming. We hadn't seen Ren at all. Janet was wearing sunglasses. She had a black eye. But Janet never gave away too much of that part of her life at school.

TYLER
Hey.

JANET
(tired)
Hey.

[Pause.]

TYLER
So. High school, huh?

JANET
Yeah. Four more years.

TYLER
Yeah. (pause) You joining any clubs or sports or anything?

JANET
Yeah, thinking about it.

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TYLER
(VO)
Anything to keep from going home.

TYLER
I'm thinking about basketball.
Maybe track?

JANET
Track. Hm.

[Old pickup truck pulls up, engine idles. Door opens.]

TYLER
(VO)
Ren pulls up in her father's
truck. She gets out.

[Truck door slams. Truck drives off.]

TYLER
(VO)
We both saw it. There was
something different in her. Even
in the few weeks since the lake,
she'd ... grown. Somehow.
Something indefinable. The way her
clothes fit her curves, the
unconscious way she tossed her red
hair. She was still serious, still
with that flinty veneer and
intense eyes. But now she
seemed... comfortable in her own
skin. A feat, for 9th grade.

TYLER
(VO)
We aren't the only ones to notice.
Heads are turning her way. We were
used to stares. Ren was trouble,
and she couldn't escape that
reputation in our little town. But
they were staring in curiosity
now, not fear.

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REN
Hey.

[School sounds fade, replaced by music.]

TYLER
(VO)
God she's so pretty, look at her eyes, look at the shape of her lips, the way they curl, like carved marble. In six years, she's atop me and her hair is spilling around my face and my hands hold her hips and... no. No I don't see that yet. It's 9th grade, and Ren is still just my friend, Ren is Ren, I have to remember that. She's just Ren, and she walks up to us and says...

[Music cuts abruptly. Back to school soundscape.]

REN
(same as before)
Hey.

JANET
Hey. Wow you look... I don't know. You look good.

REN
Thanks. (pause) Sunglasses.

[Pause.]

JANET
It's fine.

[Pause.]

REN
Yeah. You are.

TYLER
(VO)

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They embrace. And for the first time, I feel jealous. And I have no idea why.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 8

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

[Music.]

TYLER
(VO)
I got on the basketball team. The exercise did me good. I grew into my gawky frame, put on a little muscle. Janet did join track, training to do cross-country, 5K, the 800 meter: Whatever the longest distance, that's what she ran. But Ren... Ren found boys.

TYLER
(VO)
I should say, they found her. They were drawn to her like iron filings to a magnet. They'd twist when she walked past, orienting themselves to her aura. She didn't even have to do much. A glance was often all it took and they'd approach, say hi, offer to carry her bag, offer to help her with homework, tell her how pretty she was. And she let them. She spent her whole life on the outside, angry and alone, the attention must have felt good.

[REN laughs.]

TYLER
(VO)

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And it was the teachers too. Mostly the men, but even the women seemed to take it easy on her. Missed assignments forgiven, misbehavior let off with a warning, tardiness left unreported. She bought some history paper off the internet, and Mr. Dobson confronted her on it. Threatened to fail her. I'd seen the cheerleaders toss their blonde hair, pout a little, to try to get out of similar situations. But not Ren. She just looked him straight in the eye. She placed her hand atop his.

REN
You don't really want to do that.

TYLER
(VO)
And his eyes got huge. Suddenly he was blushing, trying to cover it with a cough. He turned away, and so did she. And that was the end of that. I asked her about it later.

REN
I don't know. People do what you ask if you know what they want. Figure that out and you can make anyone do anything.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 9

INT./EXT. SOMEONE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

[It's a high school party. There's laughing, drinking, general merriment.]

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TYLER
(VO)
In 11th grade, Ren started going through boyfriends. One of her suitors would catch her eye and she'd pull him from the pack. She'd sleep with him right away, they'd date for a few weeks, then she'd get bored and dump them. This would repeat every couple of months. They never went down easy, her exes. They'd stalk her in the halls, leave dozens of texts, beg and plead for her to take them back. They would come up to Janet and me and ask for help, but we didn't know what to tell them. Ren was going to parties, drinking, losing herself in feeling good. We saw her less and less.

[Beer cans cracking open, laughter, bottles and cans, etc.]

TYLER
(VO)
She was dating this guy from the basketball team, Frankie. A senior. They'd been together a couple of months. There was a party at his place. I was there. We were all pretty drunk. I'd been outside talking for a while, and went in to use the bathroom.

[Music a little louder. Laughter of teens.]

FRANKIE
Please! D-Don't... don't say that.

TYLER
(VO)
Frankie was kneeling in the middle of the room, his shirt off. Ren was standing over him, holding a bottle of beer. There were other

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guys from the team in a circle around them, laughing and watching.

REN
Leave me alone! How many times do I have to tell you. We're through!

TYLER
(VO)
She was drunk. Her eyes were cold. Her lips curled into a sneer. He reached out for her, tried to pull on her shirt. She slapped him.

[Slap. Party crowd laughs.]

REN
Get your fucking hands off of me. Leave me alone!

FRANKIE
Please! Please take me back! I'll do anything.

TYLER
(VO)
I'd never see him like that before. Frankie was an A student, level-headed, good on the court. The teachers liked him. I don't even know why he ended up with Ren in the first place. There are tears streaming down his face as he looks up at her, panic shivering through his body. Ren upends her beer and pours it all over him.

[Beer splashing, crowd laughing.]

FRANKIE
(sputtering)
Please.

REN

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Soak him!

[More laughter, splash of beer pouring.]

TYLER
(VO)
Ren shoves me out of the way and storms outside. All the rest of the boys upend their beers onto Frankie, until he's drenched in suds, just crying his heart out. I run after her.

[Party sounds fade into the distance. Footsteps running.]

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

[Dogs barking, crickets singing.]

TYLER
Ren, stop!

[They stop.]

REN
Are you going to start stalking me too?

TYLER
What? Whoa, stop! What's going on? What the hell was that? You're breaking up with Frankie? Like that? What is wrong with you?

REN
He won't fucking leave me alone, Tyler! None of them will! It's been a nightmare! He won't stop texting me, calling me. He showed up at my house in the middle of the night, trying to climb the porch to get to my room! He leaves gifts in my locker. I had to change the lock! He's been talking about marriage! I mean, Jesus

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Christ! They're all fucking like that!

TYLER
Well, maybe you shouldn't act like you do with them.

REN
"Act like I do?" What do you mean Ty? Go on. Spit it out!

TYLER
You're out of control! You're in this spiral and no one seems to be willing to stop you! No one sees it, but I do! You're partying all the time, you're using these guys, you... you fall into bed with them on the first fucking date!

REN
What, jealous?

TYLER
(VO)
I'm not jealous. Am I? I...

REN
You were too chicken shit to take off your bathing suit. Afraid to show us your little thing? Afraid to show us your boner? Think you had a chance, and now you regret it?

[Long pause.]

TYLER
I don't understand why you're so cruel. And I don't think you do, either.

[Pause.]

REN
I... I don't know! I just... I need to feel good. I need to feel

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something! I'm all alone there at the top of the fucking farmhouse, and I'm laying on the sheets at three o'clock in the morning. I have nightmares, Ty. Every fucking night. There's this weight, this cold hollow spot inside of me and I have to fill it with something. I'm laying there and it's like I'm chained to the world. I can feel animals crawling on the mountains. I can feel the people hiding in their houses. The vibrations travel the whole planet just to crawl under my skin and there's nothing I can do, nowhere for me to go. I just want to fill that empty spot with something.

TYLER
(VO)
I can’t believe it. Ren is crying. It's the first time I really see that something got broken inside her, up on the mountain. I don't know what to say. I wish I had, though. It might have stopped what comes next.

[FRANKIE comes running up.]

FRANKIE
Ren!

TYLER
(VO)
Frankie is soaked in beer, still without a shirt on. No shoes either.

REN
(muttered)
Jesus Christ.

FRANKIE

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Ren. Please let's talk this through. I can't be without you. Please! I can't think of anything but you. I dream about you every night. I mean it. Every night, you're there.

REN
Oh Jesus, give it a rest.

FRANKIE
I'm not exaggerating! I don't know what's happening to me. I'm ... I'm fading away. And you're all that's left, only you're not there anymore and...

REN
Listen, Frankie. It's done. We're done. You /are/ fading away. From now on, I am going to pretend like I don't even see you. As far as I'm concerned, you're invisible.

FRANKIE
(holding back sobs)
But... what will I do?

REN
Go sit on the train tracks for all I care. Jesus. I'm going home.

[Party sounds fade.]

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 10

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

[Crickets. All is still for a moment, then a train whistle. Sound of an approaching train, getting louder.]

TYLER
(VO)

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The CSX freight train was 150 cars long. It stretched a mile and a half, and it was traveling at full speed, fifty miles per hour, loaded with coal and bound for Charleston, South Carolina. It was around 4 in the morning. (pause) Frankie didn't stand a chance. The train didn't even slow down until it hit him.

[Train roars past then fade.]

TYLER
(VO)
There was a note left by the tracks, where he had been waiting all night. It was on a ripped piece of notebook paper. It just said...

FRANKIE
Do you see me now?

TYLER
(VO)
The police came and talked to Ren. And to me. Again. But just like always, it came to nothing. Tragic suicide. Broken heart. Foolish teenagers. No one could blame Ren for what happened to Frankie, of course. But everyone did. My dad was angry with me that I was at that party, so I was grounded for the rest of the year. I think though, he did it to keep me away from her. But Ren made it easy. She avoided me. She avoided everyone. Except for Janet. She and Janet still sometimes talked.

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EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

[Outdoor picnic table at school, daytime. Finches chirp. Teacher lecturing students in the distance.]

JANET
She's confused. And sad. I think. She hasn't been sleeping.

TYLER
Yeah. I bet she feels guilty about Frankie.

JANET
(thinking)
I don't know. I can't tell. She doesn't talk about it much.

TYLER
What do you two talk about, then?

JANET
Um. I dunno. Usual stuff. TV. Homework. What we're going to do after graduation.

[Pause.]

TYLER
Why are you still friends with her?

JANET
Because... because we both have scars, inside and out. And because we both get attention from men we don't want. And because she's alone. Guys don't understand. Girls need someone who sees the world in the same way. So we can compare notes and make sure we're not crazy.

TYLER

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She told me she's just trying to fill this empty space inside her. That's not healthy, to be around anyone like that. I don't want you to get hurt, Janet.

JANET
She's broken. So she's got jagged edges that might hurt people. But if I leave her alone, what is she going to have to fill that hole? Drugs. Booze. Sex. Look around. What else is there in this town? I don't know. Maybe I can help her find something else to fill it with. At least, just long enough until we can get out of here.

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 12

EXT. TYLER'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

[Summer night sounds. Crickets singing like mad.]

TYLER
(VO)
Ren graduated with the rest of us, but didn't attend the ceremony. Probably for the best. There was a big memorial for Frankie. After, there were parties for a while. Some of us left for college or jobs elsewhere. But most of us just kept on doing what we had been, only without school. I didn't have anything, so I started working with my Daddy, putting up drywall. Janet was working at Wal-Mart, trying to save up enough money to move away. Richmond maybe. Roanoke.

JANET

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(Memory, same as earlier)
Anywhere but here.

TYLER
(VO)
A year passed. Then another. I saw very little of either of them. Was thinking about going to a trade school, get an apprenticeship, or something. But then she just showed up. It was May. Unseasonably hot. The air was still and even at night the sweat just rolled down your skin. I was still living with my parents. It was late and they were asleep, when I saw Ren standing at the edge of the driveway, staring at the house. We snuck back to my room, sat on the bed in silence for a long time. She looked exhausted and miserable.

REN
Janet's leaving.

TYLER
What?

REN
She's taking the money she's saved and she's going to hike the Appalachian trail. She's leaving soon.

TYLER
How long will she be gone?

REN
I don't know. Months. Until winter, maybe.

TYLER
Wow. Uh. Okay. But... she'll be back and...

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REN
Don't you get it? She's not coming back. Not here. Not really. She's going to find somewhere else and she's going to leave us.

TYLER
She's always said she would, Ren.

REN
And we're going to let her?

TYLER
(VO)
She draws her knees up to her chin and hugs them. I've never seen her look this lost and confused.

TYLER
I don't think we can make her do anything she doesn't want to do.

REN
... she's all I have left. No one talks to me anymore, except her. (pause) You don't talk to me anymore. Why don't you talk to me?

TYLER
(pause) Because you were cruel. Because you seemed like you were set on throwing your life down a hole and dragging everyone else with you.

[Pause.]

REN
I'm sorry.

[Pause.]

TYLER
It's okay. I'm ... sorry too.

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[Pause.]

REN
All these years, you never ...

TYLER
What?

REN
You never... tried to get with me.

TYLER
I didn't... I don't see you like that.

REN
You don't think I'm pretty? I've seen you look at me.

[Subtle music creeping in. Purring and humming.]

TYLER
(VO)
I remember watching her hips sway. The way her sweater hugged her breasts. Those intense eyes, framed by her red hair, the curl of her lips... Of course, I saw. But the attraction, the need, that comes later. (pause) No. That comes now.

TYLER
Of course you're pretty. But you... you're my friend. You're the girl who was never afraid of anything.

REN
It's been forever since I've felt good, Tyler. When Janet leaves, I'll be alone. And... I don't think I can be alone.

[Pause.]

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TYLER
You won't be alone. You can talk to me.

[Her voice is subtly processed, command voice, on the next line. Pause.]

REN
Kiss me.

TYLER
(VO)
The flush in my cheeks is instant. Something flutters in my throat, and in my head. She locks her eyes with me, and I can't look away. I know I shouldn't. I know how she's treated all the guys before me. I don't think of her that way. Not then. But now that I look at her... how could I not have realized the truth. That we were meant for each other. From the first day we met in the playground with that dead dove at her feet, we were meant to end up together. Everything we went through leads to this. I cup her cheeks in my hands. She breathes in deep, anticipating. I am the first hit of a craving being satisfied.

TYLER
Ren...

TYLER
(VO)
Don't. Don't do it. It's ... Something is wrong.

REN
Please...

TYLER
(VO)

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Our lips touch. She pulls me to her, urgently. Soon I'm running my hands over her bare skin. She sits atop me, leaning forward, hair around my face. We're trying to be quiet so as not to wake my parents. My brain hums with nothing but her. And this... this was the moment.

TYLER
(whispered)
I love you.

TYLER
(VO)
But it has always been Ren. I have always... always... loved her. The misshapen pink heart she drew on my wrist is incandescent.

REN
(whispered)
(pause) I love you too.

TYLER
(VO)
Yes. Yes. Always.

[Music fades.]

EPISODE 7 - SCENE 13

INT./EXT. TYLER'S MEMORY

[We hear the ring of someone placing a call on a cell.]

TYLER
(VO)
I'm so happy. For several months.

[Ringing continues.]

TYLER

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(VO)
The news comes of Janet's disappearance. Ren takes it hard.

[Ring.]

TYLER
(VO)
The anger returns. She starts spending more time alone. She's avoiding me.

[Ring. Voicemail picks up.]

REN
(Voicemail recording, same as E1 S3)
Leave me alone, unless I like you, then I'll call you back.

[He hangs up.]

TYLER
Shit.

TYLER
(VO)
And then... then she says she wants to break up.

[Cell dialing again.]

TYLER
(VO)
I don't understand. All those years to find each other, and now she wants to call it off?

[Ring.]

TYLER
(VO)
She's not thinking clearly.

[Ring.]

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TYLER
(VO)
She's upset over Janet's death. I mean, I understand! I am too!

[Ring.]

TYLER
(VO)
I just need to talk to her. We'll get through this. Together.

[Phone picks up. This is the same conversation from E2 S1, but from Tyler's side.]

REN
What is your problem?

TYLER
Ren! Where are you?

REN
No, I asked you a question first. What is your problem?

TYLER
What do you mean? I was w--

REN
19 times. You texted me 19 times in the last two days, Tyler. You've called. You've left voice mails. I didn't answer. What does that tell you?

TYLER
Ren, please. I...

REN
I can't believe I have to say this again, but I want to be unambiguously clear. We're broken up. We're not dating anymore. You can't keep stalking me like this. I am this close to blocking you with all my other exes.

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TYLER
(pause)
Why haven't you blocked me, then?

REN
(pause)
Because you were my friend. Because we've known each other for so long and... I mean, now that's all messed up. I don't want it to be. But you're out of control, and I thought you were different.

TYLER
I'm sorry. I just... I love you.

REN
(pause)
I know. Love screws everything up. But please. Stop calling, stop texting, or I will have to block you.

TYLER
Can you just tell me where you are? I'm worried. No one's seen you around, Abigail said you just took off yesterday.

REN
Tyler...

TYLER
I can't stop thinking about you, Ren. You took off and ... and I don't even know where you are, and I ... I feel like that if... If I don't get the chance to talk to you again I'll...

REN
You'll do what Frankie did?

[Horrified silence.]

TYLER

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Ren... that's... that's such an awful thing to say.

REN
Is it? Because you're starting to act a lot like he did. Jesus, every time. I'm not going through that again, do you understand? So, I'll ask again, are you going to do what Frankie did?

TYLER
... no.

REN
Good. Because... I liked you better than Frankie.

[Long pause.]

TYLER
Will you please just tell me where you're going? I'll feel better if you just tell me.

REN
(pause)
I'm going to Kilruane.

TYLER
Why?

REN
(pause)
To look for Janet.

TYLER
Ren...

REN
Don't. Don't treat me like a mental patient. Don't pity me. Everyone's given up on her, the cops, her family, and I just... I can't. You and she were my only real friends and now... now you're both gone.

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TYLER
(pause)
I'm not gone, Ren. We can still be friends.

REN
(signal breaking up, this is fading out and choppy)
That's not how it works.

TYLER
Maybe it can be. Just give me a chance to make things right. Please.

REN
(heavy interference)
Ty? You're breaking up. It's these mountains. Ty?

TYLER
Please. I love you. I can show you if you'll just come home!

[Call drops. Music under, urgent. Pause.]

TYLER
(VO)
... I... no. No, that's... (pause) I know she's right. I... I'm not... I'm not like Frankie. (pause) Am I? No... She just needs to... No. It's not her. It's me. She doesn't owe me anything. I just... If I can talk to her face to face... then... then...

[Train whistle.]

TYLER
(VO)
Then everything will be happy again.

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[Train chugging in the distance, fading out.]

[CREDITS]