

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)

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)

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)

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)

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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)

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

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

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

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)

Opioids 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.]

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.

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.]

TYLER

(VO)

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

[Crunch.]

TYLER

Uhnf...

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.

[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

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

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.

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

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

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?

[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

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

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.

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.

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)

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)

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.]

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

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

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

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

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

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)

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.

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

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

(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...

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.

[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.]

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)

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

(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.]

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.

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

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.

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.

[Train chugging in the distance, fading out.]

[CREDITS]