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THE STARLING

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* TRIGGER WARNING *
Self-harm, suicide, implied abuse.

FIRST DRAFT

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EXCERPT

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

CADENCE (9) looks DOWN. Bloodied water creeps along the floor to meet her feet. We hear a slow running tap and spilling water. The LAP LAP LAP of a creature can be heard O/S. We discover it is a CAT drinking the water.

A bathtub is overflowing with bloody water. A limp hand hangs over the edge.

CADENCE stands in the doorway dressed in her pyjamas. She is silent, frozen in shock.

Footsteps echo along the hallway. PORTER (36) appears behind his daughter. He is wearing a sheriff's uniform. A portable radio is clipped to his belt.

PORTER

(Shocked / Surprised)

What the...

His face turns to anger. He pushes past Cadence. Her stance wavers but she remains in place.

PORTER (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ! What the fuck
have you...

Porter kneels next to the bathtub in the bloodied water and checks for a pulse on CIRCE, but there is nothing. He drops her hand. It thuds limply against the edge of the bathtub.

Porter reaches for his radio.

PORTER (CONT'D)

(Into the radio)

Tom? It's Porter. Can you send
someone to 349 Marshall Street?

Toms voice crackles over the radio

TOM O/S

349 Marshall Street? Isn't that
your house?

Cadence is still standing emotionless, her eyes glazed.

PORTER O/S

Yeah... yeah, it is. Circe... the damn bitch has gone and killed herself.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Cadence is standing in front of her mother's fresh grave. She is dressed in a heavy black coat and has the same glazed look in her eyes. Behind her is a small gathering of people, sharing condolences. They pay her no attention.

The group - Tom, a PRIEST, a WELL-DRESSED OLDER COUPLE, and a scantily clad BLOND WOMAN (24) - all stand around Porter, who is dressed in his uniform. Tom stands stoic while the couple over-sympathetically coo. The blonds hand rests tenderly on Porter's arm, while the Priest tries to avert his eyes from her cleavage.

Cadence places a bunch of white daisies tied with a red ribbon in front of Circe Porter's headstone. O/S a burst of laughter erupts from the group. As the laughter dies down, Cadence notices a SHRILL CHIRPING coming from the trees that frame the cemetery.

Cadence walks of in the direction of the chirping. Under a tree she finds a small bird. It is a young STARLING, not yet a fledgling.

Its beak opens wide as it calls hungrily for its mother.

Cadence looks around, but there is not another bird in sight.

She reaches down and scoops up the tiny bird, who flails in her grasp. Cadence gently strokes the birds head with her thumb.

CADENCE

Have you lost mama?

The shrill chirping of the bird dissolves into small squeaks as it begins to calm in Cadence's hand.

CADENCE

(CONT'D) I've lost my
mama too...

The small bird closes its eyes.

Cadence strokes its head a few times before opening a pocket in her coat, and carefully placing the bird inside.

It starts chirping again. Cadence holds her hand to the outside of her pocket and the small creature calms down.

CADENCE (CONT'D)

(Soothing)

Shh... It's okay. Everything is going to be ok...

INT. PORTERS RESIDENCE - CADENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cadence looks at the bird. It sits in a shoebox lined with tissues, opening and closing its beak silently to beg for food.

CADENCE

Have you lost your voice? Probably just as well...

She goes to stroke the bird's head. The bird thinking her finger is food, tries to eat it.

CADENCE (CONT'D)

You must be hungry... What do you even eat?

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGEROOM

Porter - still wearing his uniform - is propped up on the couch, snoring. The cat is curled up asleep next to him. A laptop sits on a coffee table surrounded by empty beer cans and an overflowing ashtray. Hardcore pornography plays on the laptop, with the glow from the screen being the only source of light.

Cadence enters and tiptoes towards the computer, careful not to wake her father.

The cat wakes and watches her with curiosity. Porter snorts and stirs but continues to sleep.

Cadence kneels in front of the laptop. Paying no attention to the video on the screen, she closes the open window and opens a fresh webpage and types: WHAT DO BABY STARLINGS EAT.

INT. KITCHEN - SINK

The sound of WATER as we see it fill a glass.

INT. KITCHEN - CATFOOD BOWL

The hand of Cadence grabs a handful of dry cat food, the kibbles rattling against the ceramic of the bowl.

INT. BATHROOM

Cadence stands staring blindly into a mirrored cabinet. The glass of water sits on the edge of the sink. In the reflection behind her the bathtub can be seen. It is stained faintly with blood. After a moment, she reaches to open the cabinet.

INT. CADENCES BEDROOM

The kibbles are in the glass of water. Cadence sloshes the glass to mix them together.

She takes the lid off the shoebox that is sitting on her bed. The starling silently begs again for food.

Cadence picks up a piece of soggy kibble with the tweezers.

CADENCE

I hope it tastes better than it smells.

She feeds it to the starling who gobbles it up eagerly. A quiet warble escapes the bird.

CANDENCE (CONT'D)

Shh... Dad can't know you're here.

It birds cocks its head and look at her as if it understands.

Cadence feeds it more kibble. Once it is full, it hops onto her hand.

She raises her hand to eye level to better see the bird.

CADENCE (CONT')

You really need a name.

Cadence glances at a photo of her mother sitting on her bedside table.

CANDENCE (CONT'D)

Circe. I will name you Circe.