

THE WOODS AREN'T QUIET

Written by

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ACT ONE

OVER BLACK

SUPER: SCHOOLHOUSE POINT- WASHINGTON STATE

We hear a dull dial tone, followed by the prim, quiet voice of SYLVIA.

SYLVIA (V.O.)
(confused)
Hello?

UNKNOWN (V.O.)
Good afternoon. Is this Sylvia Mitchell?

SYLVIA (V.O.)
It is. Who is this?

UNKNOWN (V.O.)
My name is Claire; I'm from the Glen Cove Police Department. Is this a good time?

SYLVIA (V.O.)
Uhm-

There is a murmur of Sylvia's voice before heels clacking on marble.

SYLVIA
Yes, now is fine. What's the problem?

CLAIRE (V.O.)
I'm sorry to inform you that your wife- Marion Waters, is that correct?- has been reported missing.

Pause.

SYLVIA (V.O.)
I- I'm sorry?

CLAIRE (V.O.)
She was-

A rustling of papers.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 -supposed to arrive in town for an
 interview with Ms. Catherine Dwight-
 she was the one who reported her
 missing- yesterday afternoon, but
 she never showed.

SYLVIA (V.O.)
 I don't understand.

CLAIRE (V.O.)
 The details of her trip were shared
 with Ms. Dwight, is that right?

SYLVIA (V.O.)
 Yes, but-

CLAIRE (V.O.)
 We have no footage of her even
 stepping onto her 11am train.

SYLVIA (V.O.)
 But she left the house. I know she
 did. She was so excited about that
 job. Marion- she-

Silence except for a few faint, uncomfortable sounds of
 shifting. Then, gasping cries- Sylvia's.

CLAIRE (V.O.)
 Ms. Mitchell, would you be able to
 report to your nearest police
 station?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Wooden stairs creak as black tennis shoes climb them. We see
 Sylvia, in green yoga pants, a thin black running jacket, and
 brown skin and brown frizzy hair tied down above her nape.
 She exhales, a hand on the railing.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - THE PREVIOUS AFTERNOON

OFFICER DAVIES, burly with a beard and a firm yet calm tone,
 stands behind a wooden desk stacked to the brim with
 paperwork. Sylvia sits in the chair in front of him.

OFFICER DAVIES

We need you to search for anything that might've led to her disappearance. Emails, letters, bills that haven't been taken care of, anything that could've implied someone had a problem with her.

SYLVIA

No one ever had a problem with Marion. Everyone loved her.

OFFICER DAVIES

Clearly not enough.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - SAME

The stairs don't lead to a door, but a trapdoor to the attic instead. Sylvia pushes this open, shining a red flashlight through the opening and climbing through.

The attic is cluttered with their belongings. Sylvia walks around, shining the flashlight on boxes. Her gaze latches onto one particular box.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - A YEAR PRIOR

Sylvia and MARION move around the attic, placing boxes on the floor. Marion has golden brown curly hair tied down into two pigtails and freckles on matching golden brown skin. She's smiling.

MARION

We are definitely going to let this get out of control, aren't we?

SYLVIA

Probably. I think it's better that we accept that and ignore it anyway.

MARION

Exactly. This is why I married you.
Now, I say we have an elf on the
shelf type thing, but we hide it
all the time around the house. This
would be the perfect hiding place.

She's pointing to a box that conceals the corner of the room.
Sylvia laughs and places another box on top of it, and they
stack boxes until it reaches the slanted ceiling.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - SAME

Sylvia moves to that corner, pushing the boxes away with her
foot. In the corner, she finds a folded piece of paper. A
letter.

MARION (V.O.)

Dear Sylvia...

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - LATER

Officer Davies holds the letter in one hand, along with other
papers Sylvia has brought along in the other.

OFFICER DAVIES

This makes no sense.

SYLVIA

It's her. I know it's her.

OFFICER DAVIES

It doesn't even match her
handwriting.

SYLVIA

It is! Look- she-

Sylvia walks around the desk to jab at the papers.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Her g's hook the same way, and she
always dots her i's with a big
blob, dramatically.

OFFICER DAVIES

Her a's are drastically different.

SYLVIA

She's always wanted her a's to be the hooked ones instead of the regular ones. I swear. I know this is from her.

OFFICER DAVIES

(shaking his head)

Respectfully, Ms. Mitchell, we cannot base this investigation off groundless evidence- that being letters left in the attic of your house. Have you considered that relatives typically have similar-

SYLVIA

She changes her handwriting all the time. I can show you some of her schoolwork from college, it's different too- if this- but she's still alive-

OFFICER DAVIES

Sylvia...

SYLVIA

-if this is the last thing she wrote while she was still alive, then she'd want to make it pretty, that's how she is-

OFFICER DAVIES

(more firmly)

Sylvia.

Sylvia stops, looking to him.

OFFICER DAVIES (CONT'D)

I think... you may be looking for something that's not there.

A pause.

SYLVIA

Excuse me?

OFFICER DAVIES

Ms. Mitchell, the contents of this letter don't make sense. 'Go to our forest?' 'A tree with no leaves,' when she told you to go through the middle of the woods?

(MORE)

OFFICER DAVIES (CONT'D)

'A rock in the shape of a four?' At best, this sounds like the first draft of a mystery book.

SYLVIA

At least take it into consideration. Can't you scan it for her fingerprints or something?

OFFICER DAVIES

Do we have her fingerprints on file?

Sylvia steps back. She stares at him, realizing that he truly does not believe her. Officer Davies sighs.

OFFICER DAVIES (CONT'D)

Look, I think you should go home and process. Things only start getting drastic when it's been 48 hours, and your wife is a grown woman who knows how to manage herself. I don't doubt we'll find her soon.

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Sylvia opens the garage door, dressed in a new pair of yoga pants and a running jacket. Inside are items put in storage-boxes, a dusty surfboard, an area labeled 'camping,' covered by a tarp.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. THE OUTSIDE SEATING OF A CAFE - TWO MONTHS PRIOR

Sylvia and Marion sit on yellow, thin chairs with a bright orange table between the two of them. The sun reflects off of Marion's sunglasses as she sips her drink.

MARION

If I ever disappeared, you would come find me, right?

Sylvia gives her a weird look.

SYLVIA

Didn't I say some synonym of that in my vows? Of course.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - SAME

Sylvia moves to the pile marked 'camping' and uncovers it,
tossing the tarp aside.

ACT TWO

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

Sylvia, holding the letter from Marion, trudges up a muddy hill in the mountains. The sun hasn't yet set in the distance and she moves faster with a camping bag on her back. She looks down at the letter.

MARION (V.O.)

Dear Sylvia. I know you're scared, and I know you're confused, but I promise this is for the best. And I know you're thinking, of course not, this is not good, but I love you too much to leave you with something you won't be able to manage for the rest of your life. The only thing I ask of you now is that you find me quick, and that you trust me.

Clouds loom overhead. Sylvia keeps reading.

MARION (V.O.)

I know you've heard this all before, but I hope you'll bear with me as I say it again. Go to our forest. Go toward our normal campsite, but turn left at the vine maple tree.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - TWO MONTHS PRIOR

It's night, and they're settling down to watch a movie. Sylvia brings over hot chocolate from the kitchen, hands one to Marion, and settles down under the blankets. Marion is flicking through the options. She has a remote in one hand and taking tentative sips of the hot chocolate with the other.

The sliding movies pause on one called 'The Great Outdoors.'

MARION

Don't you think we really should go camping again?

SYLVIA

At this point, we should just move the camping stuff from my parent's house to ours.

MARION

Maybe. I'm only asking 'cause I need to check on something.

SYLVIA

Check on what?

MARION

Do you remember seeing a vine maple tree on our walk there?

SYLVIA

I don't think so, but I wasn't looking, exactly, so I wouldn't count it.

MARION

I just- feel like I need to make sure it's there. I keep seeing it at the back of my mind.

(she shakes her head)

Never mind. Come on, help me choose.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - SAME

Sylvia pauses, retrieving a water bottle from her bag and taking a sip. She studies the letter for a long time.

SYLVIA

What was happening with you, Marion?

CUT TO:

OVER BLACK

There's the ringing tone of a phone call.

OFFICER DAVIES (V.O.)

Pick up, pick up, pick up.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
(muffled, in the
background)
You had a meeting with her... when?

OFFICER DAVIES (V.O.)
An hour ago.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
I'll get in touch with her
workplace.

OFFICER DAVIES (V.O.)
The bank.

The dial tone continues, then goes dead.

SYLVIA (V.O.)
Hi, this is Sylvia. Sorry I missed
your call. Leave a message, and
I'll get back to you as soon as
possible.

OFFICER DAVIES (V.O.)
(frustratedly)
Don't've done something rash,
Sylvia.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - SOME TIME LATER

Sylvia stands before a vine maple tree, resolute. She looks
to her left: a faintly trodden path. She takes a breath, and
continues on.

MARION (V.O.)
The walks get longer from here, but
you like walking, so you should be
fine. Tell me you chose a good time
of day, you were always reasonable.
Walk as straight as you can until
you reach the rock shaped like a
four, then turn right.

Sylvia walks for a while as it starts to get dark. She
rummages through her bag and pulls out a flashlight, banging
on the end a few times until it turns on.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - TWO MONTHS PRIOR

Flickering light, until Sylvia finally gets it to stay on.
She marches outside.

SYLVIA

Marion? Marion- what are you doing
out here? It's four a.m.

Marion squats on the driveway up to their house, picking
through the small pebbles in a bath robe. She doesn't look up
as Sylvia approaches.

MARION

Go back to bed, Sylv. I'll be back
in a few minutes.

SYLVIA

What are you- why are you picking
through rocks?

MARION

I just need to make sure it's real.

SYLVIA

What are you talking about?

MARION

Fuck, Sylvia- I keep seeing things,
and I know they're real, I know
they are, and I need to make sure-

SYLVIA

I don't understand.

MARION

Can you help me, please? It looks
like a four.

SYLVIA

No rock would be formed in the
shape of a four.

MARION

It's real. I know it's real.

SYLVIA

Marion, I don't think this is good
for you-

MARION

Do you believe me?

SYLVIA

I-

MARION

Why don't you believe me?

SYLVIA

Mare, please, let's just go back to bed.

Marion stands abruptly, folding her arms around her stomach.

MARION

If I do, will you help me check tomorrow?

SYLVIA

Yes, I'll check tomorrow at work.
Come on.

She doesn't end up checking.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - EVENING

The sun hits the horizon as Sylvia finds it.

It's in a clearing near a cliff, the ideal spot to set up camp. Sylvia looks around, running her thumb over the rock. It is shaped like a four, without the hole in the middle, and fits in her palm.

She sits down near the edge of the mountain and sighs. She rummages around in her bag and snacks on a protein bar, fiddling with the strap around the sleeping mat. She reads the letter.

MARION (V.O.)

I made sure I didn't go far, just far enough that it'd only be you that found me. One more direction. I made it simple, because you'd never liked complicated. I won't go on about how that's the whole problem and that's how we got here, because this was my choice, not yours. Go north from here until you reach the tree with no leaves, and turn left.

It's getting dark. Sylvia rests her chin on her knees, watching a butterfly flutter around. It lands on her elbow, small and blue. Sylvia watches it closely. Then it takes off, north, and disappears into the night.

The sky rumbles, and her flashlight is dim, but there's not much to go. Sylvia sets off.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - ONE MONTH PRIOR

It's dawn, and the sun streams through thin curtains in their bedroom. Marion's head rests on Sylvia's chest, and it's very quiet.

Marion brushes her thumb over Sylvia's wrist.

MARION
You're real.

It's definitively not a question.

SYLVIA
Of course I am.

MARION
Do you think it's possible for a tree to have no leaves when it's surrounded by trees that do?

SYLVIA
If it has a disease, I suppose, yeah.

MARION
Right.

Silence, for a few moments.

MARION (CONT'D)
You don't think I'm crazy, right?

SYLVIA
What? Of course not.

MARION
Sometimes I think you don't believe anything I say. Everything I'm seeing is real.

SYLVIA
I mean- dreams happen, Mare.

Marion gets up. She draws the curtains and stands in it's light. Sylvia frowns, reaching out.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Wait, no. Come here. Give me a
kiss.

A peck on the lips. Marion looks unconvinced.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Listen. You're okay, alright?
Nothing's going on. It's just you
and me.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - NIGHT

It's raining.

SYLVIA
Oh, no. No no no no no.

She draws up her jacket, and pulls it over her head, drawing her arms within it. The terrain has started uphill, and she scrambles to find her footing. Her pants are stained with mud.

She reaches for a branch to steady herself on, panting. The forest is dark and she contemplates every step. Her flashlight is weak and flickering.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
When was the last time we changed
these batteries, god damn.

Sylvia readjusts her jacket and trudges on, grimacing at the mud soaking through her sneakers. In her clenched fist, protected, is the letter.

Minutes go by. She keeps her head down and her flashlight up. She clutches her stomach; she only packed that bar. She rubs her eyes: her watch tells her it's nearly midnight. She looks back at where she just came from.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
(mumbling)
Did I...
(MORE)

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

I didn't fall asleep when I sat
down, did I? I couldn't have...

The flashlight flickers, then turns off completely.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

No.

She slaps the end of it once, then repeatedly.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

No, not right now. Not when she's-
no, come on.

She smacks the butt of the flashlight against a nearby tree
trunk. Bark chips off. She goes to check her phone, and
realizes that it'd died hours ago.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

She's so close, I know she is, I
just need a few more minutes,
please just work-

It doesn't.

In the rain, in the dark, in the middle of the forest, Sylvia
can do nothing but wait.

ACT THREE

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. SYLVIA AND MARION'S HOUSE - TWO DAYS PRIOR

Sylvia and Marion walk out the front door, Sylvia carrying Marion's bags. She sets them down as Marion closes the door. A taxi waits beside the sidewalk.

MARION

I'll text you as soon as I get reception, but considering I'm staying in a motel, I'm not sure when that'll be.

SYLVIA

Don't worry about it. Focus on getting that job, alright? I'll pick you up from the train station on Sunday.

MARION

You sure you'll be okay?

SYLVIA

It's only four days. I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself.

MARION

When's the last time we've been apart this long?

SYLVIA

(chuckling)

You're making this seem like you're traveling to the other side of the planet.

MARION

What, I can't miss my wife?

SYLVIA

You have me beat.

She steps closer. She gives Marion a kiss on the lips.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Love you, I'll see you on Sunday.
You've got this.

MARION

Thank you. And I love you too.

Marion turns and begins to walk away while Sylvia lingers at the front door. Then, she turns around abruptly.

MARION (CONT'D)

You really get me, don't you?

SYLVIA

What do you mean?

MARION

I mean, understand me.

SYLVIA

I'd like to think so.

Marion nods, shoulders dropping. She gets into the taxi.

END FLASHBACK

OVER BLACK

SYLVIA (V.O.)

Hi, this is Sylvia. Sorry I missed your call. Leave a message, and I'll get back to you as soon as possible.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

At the tone, please record your message. When you are finished recording you may hang up, or press one for more options.

The typical phone 'beep.'

OFFICER DAVIES (V.O.)

Okay, so you aren't at home, or at work. If you know something and want to keep it to yourself, that's not the way to go with this. If you're compromised too, this just got a lot worse and a lot more interesting. But if you know anything, at all, please, call us back.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNT PLEASANT WOODS - DAWN

Sylvia wakes up, her back propped up against a tree. She rubs her eyes, looking to where a bird calls above.

SYLVIA
(quietly)
Shit.

She stands, grimacing as she rubs mud off of her legs. Yawning, she tries her flashlight again despite the newfound daylight. Nothing.

The letter is still crumpled in her fist. Sylvia opens it, sighing when she sees it's dry.

MARION (V.O.)
I'm going to ask you a question before I leave. I'm going to ask you some variation of 'do you think you understand me?' I know what you'll answer. You'll say yes. But it'll be nice to hear it.

Sylvia leans back against the tree trunk.

MARION (V.O.)
And that's how I'll remember everything. I'll never blame you for this. You did your best, but I was never going to leave you with what's happening to me- I'm seeing and hearing things and my doctor doesn't understand and I can't live like this. You keep telling me no but I feel like I'm going crazy. By now, I know I am. You could never even see any of it. I don't blame you for it- for anything. I just wish, in some different circumstance, there's a me that understands how to put thoughts into words, and there's a you that knows how to translate the inbetweens. But we met in accounting, and it's hopeless to think otherwise.

Another chirp in the distance. Sylvia doesn't look up.

MARION (V.O.)
I found this house in my family's property records from the 1940's.
(MORE)

MARION (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It never got bought, and I think we forgot about it. It's the perfect place, the right one. This home was never anyone's forever, and I think, at some point in all of this, you and I both knew that I wasn't yours.

Another squawk, louder.

MARION (V.O.)

You'll find me. I know you will.
All my love, Marion.

Sylvia finally looks up, and some few meters away: a tree with no leaves in the midst of a forest.

SYLVIA

(exasperated)

It was- right there. The whole time.

Sylvia folds the letter nicely into quarters, and turns left.

She doesn't walk for long. There, in the distance, a house. Worn down, wooden, shabby. She speeds up.

She gets there. She throws the door open.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Marion? Mare- Marion!

Inside, there's only worn down carpet and broken shutters hanging from the windows. Sylvia moves toward a hallway, pushing open multiple sets of doors until.

Inside a room on the right lays a bed frame. On that bed frame lays Marion, tucked in nicely in one of their blankets from home. She is still.

Sylvia freezes. After a moment, she swallows and moves forward. She drops to the floor beside her. Marion is as clean and pristine as the day that she left. Sylvia is stained with dirt in every crevice on her body.

The birds squawk outside. Nearby, the sound of a river. An autumn breeze rustles the trees and knocks the shutters of the house against broken window frames.

Sylvia sits there with her wife, and she listens.

END