

PROJECT ALKALINE

Written by

Haley Makowski

Michigan State University  
makows47@msu.edu

This excerpt is part of a larger project. In a world ravaged by climate collapse, extreme weather events and untamable pollution have rendered Earth's water toxic. When best friends Bly Topa and Mercie Taylor are quarantined at the high-tech military base Camp Grayling, they — along with other teenagers taken from their families and communities — must navigate this modern apocalyptic world, where the very authorities claiming to protect them may have different goals entirely.

As the group of teens begin to unravel the truth behind their captivity, they must make choices none of them are prepared for while coming face to face with dangers inside their so-called sanctuary and the infected outside. "Project Alkaline" is a modern apocalypse saga following the lives of teenagers searching for safety, friendship, and truth in the midst of a world plagued by sickness, violence, uncertainty, and lies...a world that they are supposed to inherit.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - EAST END COURTYARD - EARLY AFTERNOON

Cadet Riley leads the girls of Dorm 24 out a side door and into a grassy clearing.

Sequestered in a corner where two of the building sectors meet is a cement court with a couple basketball hoops and benches. BUCKETS OF CHALK and JUMP ROPES lie on the perimeter.

CADET RILEY

We want you guys to get outside as much as possible, as long as weather permits it, which is why the weather updates on your monitors are so important...

Off the left side of the HQ wing, the clearing slopes down to the lake, which is fenced off in similar fashion to the forest perimeter Bly spotted.

A smoky haze hangs over the water.

CADET RILEY (CONT'D)

...and that's Lake Margrethe, of course. I know it looks beautiful, but obviously we all have to stay away from the water.

A single rowboat floats on the crystal blue surface, minuscule in its distance from shore.

VAL

(to Riley)

What's that boat doing out there?

CADET RILEY

We've been testing the acidity fluctuations in the water for the past couple months, I believe. Just trying to understand how quickly things are changing and if there's any way we can slow it.

The girls nod and disperse to enjoy their time outside. Mercie and Jules step away into the shadow of the building to check their phone signals.

Bly and Val remain with Riley, observing the lake.

CADET RILEY (CONT'D)

Don't worry, the scientists out there are suited up and protected.

Bly crosses her arms.

BLY  
Lots of people telling us not to  
worry lately.

Riley's expression turns apologetic.

CADET RILEY  
I imagine that it's not as  
reassuring as we hope it to be.

VAL  
(emphatic)  
Hell. No.

Riley nods knowingly and steps away to talk to another  
OFFICER.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EAST END COURTYARD - LATER

Bly and Val sit in the same spot on the grassy slope watching  
the lake, only now the rowboat has returned to shore.

At this distance, they can now see two RESEARCHERS wearing  
combination gear that resembles hazmat protection and scuba  
diving apparel. They hop out of the boat and pull it further  
onto the grass-patched sand.

They tromp to a padlocked shed, still beyond the fence line.  
One taps something to the access screen while the other  
tediously strips off the gear. They disappear into the shed.

MERCIE (O.S.)  
I got it, guys!

Bly and Val turn to spot Mercie waving them over to the  
shade, which has crept its way over half the courtyard.

Bly and Val head over to Mercie. Jules jumps up from the  
ground where she'd drawn an entire flower in chalk around  
herself and joins them, too.

MERCIE (CONT'D)  
(to Jules)  
Here, Jules. Open your WiFi  
settings and I'll share the  
password. We'll go one at a time.  
Probably best to limit how many of  
us are using it at once.

Mercie and Jules fiddle with their phones for a moment, then Jules HUMS with excitement.

JULES

Perfect! I'll post my vlog and maybe text my parents, and then Val can go next.

VAL

No thanks, I don't use social media unless it's for news updates. And at the moment we seem to be the news, so saves us some time.

BLY

What if your parents texted you?

VAL

I'm a foster kid. My foster parents were probably happy to see me get carted off. Almost made it out, too. I turn eighteen in December.

BLY

Oh...I'm sorry.

Val shrugs off the apology and smirks.

VAL

You guys are already proving to be much more fun, anyway. Despite the circumstances.

MERCIE

Okay, Bly, your turn.

Bly pulls her phone from her pocket.

A prompt pops up on the screen allowing Mercie to share her hotspot password. Bly accepts it and cell signal bars appear in the top right corner of the screen.

She watches her screen expectantly for notifications to come in. She only receives one text message from her mother:

MARIA (TEXT)

How is it there? All good here.

Bly chews on her lip.

BLY

(to the girls)

That's weird. I only got one message from my mom.

Mercie taps away at her own phone.

MERCIE

(half-distracted)

I mean...she probably realizes the internet's wonky here. We're kind of in the middle of no- whoa. Check this out guys.

The girls gather around Mercie to look at her screen as she scrolls through various videos depicting riots and protests.

One video cuts between clips of young kids being ripped from their parents' arms, screaming and crying.

Another transitions from images of flooding, volcanic eruption, burnt-down forests, air pollution, and a grainy candid of Leakers attacking each other. This video is captioned: HOW IS IT ALL CONNECTED?

BLY

Damn...Val was right.

MERCIE

Look at this one, though.

The next video is much more professional and elegantly edited, cycling through organized protestors CHANTING and holding signs that read LISTEN TO THE EARTH and INVEST IN THE PLANET.

The camera angle shifts to a young woman wearing an orange t-shirt with an Earth printed on the front with the letters ALK over it. A microphone is held in front of her from a reporter.

JULES

What's she saying?

VAL

Turn the volume up, Mercie.

Mercie pinches the volume up a couple levels.

A headline soars across the screen as the woman speaks:  
RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATE & CLIMATE ACTIVIST ISA PORTER SPEAKS  
ON COUNTRY-WIDE QUARANTINE OF MINORS.

ISA PORTER

(On Screen)

...because no one seems to listen, do they? First we warn them about global warming and the ice melting. What do they do?

(MORE)

ISA PORTER (CONT'D)  
 They keep drilling their oil and  
 causing irreparable damage to our  
 atmosphere and carbon cycle...

Bly's brows raise.

The activist tilts her head to listen to the reporter's next  
 question (inaudible).

ISA PORTER (CONT'D)  
 (On Screen)  
 About the kids? I pray that they  
 are safe and healthy, of course I  
 do. But I can't help but wonder why  
 they should pay the price of our  
 ignorance. If we're going to fix  
 this world for them, it has to  
 start with us caring about more  
 than making a buck...

JULES  
 Who is she?

MERCIE  
 (thoughtful)  
 It's an account called The Alkaline  
 Group.

VAL  
 Shit, Cadet Riley's coming back.  
 Turn it off, Mercie.

Val steps in front of Mercie to block her from Riley's view.

RILEY (O.S.)  
 Girls! Let's head inside.

Mercie scrolls through the videos they watched and clicks a  
 DOWNLOAD button.

BLY  
 What are you doing?

MERCIE  
 I don't know, they could be  
 valuable. Maybe Jules can use them  
 for her vlog, and if I download  
 them, I can show the others later.

The girls tuck their phones away and return to the group to  
 go back inside.

INT. CAMP HEADQUARTERS - CAFETERIA - EVENING

A long buffet is set up on one side of the room, equipped with metal CHAFING DISHES full of grilled CHICKEN and turkey burger PATTIES, as well as CROC POTS steaming with STEW.

Children cluster at the end of the buffet line where the dessert table is.

Bly and Mercie stand by one of the many EQUALIZERS spread around the room, waiting as Mercie's soda trickles back into her CUP.

BLY

Danny's gonna be so happy to see you.

MERCIE

Ugh. I'm surprised we haven't found him yet. I've seen half of my AP Government class already.

The light on the equalizer blinks green and Mercie retrieves her CUP, taking a sip of the bubbly liquid. She makes a strange face.

MERCIE (CONT'D)

(mumbling)

Damn. These things really suck the flavor out of anything that isn't water.

Hands full with PLATE and DRINK, the two girls wander to a round table where Val sits with Macy and Lillian.

A little ways away, Rose stands rigid between a cluster of tables, looking around. Her feet shift with indecision until she spots Macy waving her over.

Bly chews on a CARROT STICK.

BLY

(to the table)

They said all of Bellaire was coming to Grayling, so where are you guys from?

MACY

I'm from Kalkaska. Lillian and Annie were already in the car when I got picked up, so they must be from around there, too.

ROSE

I'm also from Bellaire.

VAL

Hm. Gaylord for me. I heard some of the smaller towns got divided. Makes sense that some of us ended up here since this is one of the biggest compounds.

Mercie steals a FRENCH FRY from Bly's plate. Bly swats at her hand but allows her to take it.

TANNER (O.S.)

Got an early Christmas present for you guys!

Mercie and Bly peer over their shoulders at a shirtless Tanner Drake, dirty-blond hair tussled back and a stubble on his upper lip.

Danny looms behind him looking annoyed.

DANNY

I tried to make him go away, I swear.

Mercie wears a cool expression as she eyes Tanner up and down, French fry propped between her fingers like a cigarette.

MERCIE

Tanner Drake. Funny seeing you here. Apocalypse looks good on you.

TANNER

I would say the same of you, but you look dazzlingly unfazed by all this.

Bly cringes and mouths "dazzlingly unfazed?" to Val. Val HUFFS a quiet laugh.

Mercie rises and side-steps Tanner to hug Danny.

TANNER (CONT'D)

What, no hug for me?

Mercie SCOFFS and ushers Danny to sit down at their table.

MERCIE

Hugs are reserved for fully clothed men.

(MORE)

MERCIE (CONT'D)

Besides, you guys reek and I practically picked out Danny's deodorant, so I'd choose that in a heartbeat.

TANNER

Ouch. We were just at the gym.

Bly perks up and swivels back to face Tanner.

BLY

A gym? Were there treadmills in there?

TANNER

Yeah. Nice to see you talking to humans again, Topa.

BLY

Fuck off, Tanner.

MACY

Bly, language!

Macy tilts her head to Lillian, who is happily munching on a cookie.

Bly turns away from Tanner once more and smiles at Danny.

BLY

(to Danny)

You'll have to take me. I'm dying to run.

Danny nods.

DANNY

For sure. The military staff gets first dibs obviously, but it wasn't too crowded when we went.

A couple more BOYS show up and clasp hands with Tanner, eyeing the table of girls.

The girls look rather displeased by this, and Mercie takes note of it. She gestures to her empty wrist.

MERCIE

Ope. Looks like Tanner Time has expired. You'll have to come back tomorrow.

Tanner rubs the back of his head.

TANNER

Aw c'mon, Mercie. I know you like me...and it's the end of the world.

MERCIE

Maybe I do like you, Tanner Drake. But my friends don't and I trust their judgment more than my own. I have a habit making things look prettier than they are.

Tanner puts a hand to his heart, pretending to be wounded. But he wears a charming smile as he leaves with the other boys.

TANNER

I'll make it my goal to change your mind.

After he has departed, Bly pushes her plate away.

BLY

I've lost my appetite.

MERCIE

What? I sent him away.

BLY

You *flirted* with him. The guy's an asshat.

MERCIE

I have no problem with having an enemy who's also my lover. Like that book trend.

Danny GROANS and snatches Bly's plate.

DANNY

That's not...that's not what that...ew. Whatever.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE:

...Mercie and Macy give the younger girls makeovers. Mercie paints nails while Macy applies glittery eye-shadow to their eyelids. In the background, Jules sits on her bed recording her daily vlog.

JULES

Hey everyone! We have reached Day 8  
of quarantine. Here's the daily  
recap...

...A corner of the Rec-room has been converted into a game  
nook. GAME CONSOLES are hooked up to small COMPUTER MONITORS.  
BOARD GAMES and CHESS PIECES are scattered on the floor.

Bly lounges on a gray BEAN BAG CHAIR, eyes jumping from the  
game screens to a small window speckled with rain drops.

She spots Officer Brown across the room with a steaming CUP  
OF COFFEE. Their eyes meet and he gives her a friendly salute  
with two fingers. Bly smiles and returns the gesture.

...In the gym, Bly and Danny run on TREADMILLS. Danny jogs  
lightly while Bly presses the increase speed button. Her pace  
rises on the tracker in time with her BREATHING.

...Val listens to music on her headphones in the second floor  
common area. Bly is with her, crocheting.

BLY

What are you listening to?

Val unplugs her headphones and slides her phone to Bly.

VAL

Check out my playlist.

...Jules paces the courtyard, panning her phone camera across  
the lake view.

JULES

I can't believe it's almost been  
three weeks. There's been a lot of  
rain and heat waves, but the staff  
keeps spoiling us with stuff, so we  
must be doing alright...

...Bly and Danny run at the gym again. This time Tanner is  
there bench pressing. Mercie sits on the floor close to him,  
fanning herself with a PAPER TOWEL.

Bly's distance tracker on her treadmill BEEPS at 3 miles. She  
makes no move to stop. Some of the military staff pause in  
their workouts to watch her, impressed.

...In bed at night, Bly scrolls through her text messages  
with her mom, a lot of them unanswered. She bites her  
thumbnail.

BLY (TEXT)  
 We're doing good here. Are you guys  
 staying safe from the rain?

BLY (TEXT) (CONT'D)  
 Hey, Mom. Sorry if I'm not  
 receiving your responses. The  
 internet is restricted almost  
 everywhere.

BLY (TEXT) (CONT'D)  
 How's Dad? I'm worried about you  
 guys. You'd tell me if you're sick,  
 right?

MARIA (TEXT)  
 All good. Don't worry about us.

BLY (TEXT)  
 I love you.

BLY (TEXT) (CONT'D)  
 Mom?

The glow of the screen fills Bly's worried eyes. She turns her phone off and tucks it under her pillow, rolling over onto her side, sleepless.

END MONTAGE

INT. CAMP HEADQUARTERS - FITNESS HALL - EVENING

Bly and Danny stand outside the gym room, Danny filling a CUP with water from a DISPENSER. He then pours it into the EQUALIZER. Both of them are sweaty and flushed.

DANNY  
 I'm starving.

Bly leans her head against the wall. The equalizer WHIRS softly.

Down the hall, a WOMAN in a lab coat pushes a CART full of TRASH BAGS to an elevator. She presses the down button.

A digital script appears above the elevator: BASEMENT

While the woman waits, she opens a trash bag and ruffles through it, picking TOOTHBRUSHES out and placing them in a separate BIN.

Bly's eyes narrow as she catches a glimpse. Danny follows her line of sight, looking confused.

DANNY (CONT'D)  
 (voice low)  
 What are we looking at?

BLY  
 You tell me. Why would they be separating the toothbrushes like that?

Danny shrugs.

DANNY  
 Recycling?

BLY  
 I think we're long past recycling, don't you think? And why bring waste to the basement?

Danny hands Bly his freshly purified water.

DANNY  
 I think you're dehydrated, and it's making you edgy. They probably have an incinerator down there, or something. C'mon.

They walk in the opposite direction. Bly GRUMBLES.

BLY  
 I prefer the recycling theory.

INT. CAMP HEADQUARTERS - BASEMENT

Director Treece taps a black NODE on a KEYCHAIN to a padlock. It flashes from red to green before CLICKING open.

RESEARCHERS and DOCTORS mill about the room, some nodding to Treece respectfully as she passes by.

DIRECTOR TREECE  
 What's the status, Doctor?

The woman with the CART now sits at a long table cluttered with PAPERS, GLASS VIALS, PETRI DISHES, and a MICROSCOPE. She picks TOOTHBRUSHES out of her bin and lines them in a HOLDER, standing upright.

DOCTOR (F)  
 DNA samples are still inconclusive. We've tested multiple batches of saliva from the brushes, but it's all coming back the same.

DIRECTOR TREECE  
And the blood?

DOCTOR (F)  
Still running dialysis. We're at about ninety-seven percent for the original blood samples, so we should be set to start collecting again in a few days to compare.

The doctor checks something in the microscope and jots down a note on a YELLOW PAD.

DIRECTOR TREECE  
Did you test for antibodies?

The doctor doesn't look up from her work.

DOCTOR (F)  
Yes. Nothing unusual. Children have stronger immune systems. It's natural they would be less effected-

DIRECTOR TREECE  
We're not fighting a virus here, Doctor. There's got to be something else. Keep looking, and pick up the pace. Blithe needs us to figure this out before anyone else does.

The doctor leans back in her chair, demeanor shifting.

DOCTOR (F)  
You say we're not fighting a virus, and yet you hired some of the country's best doctors to find your money-maker solution.

Treece tosses her a wicked smile.

DIRECTOR TREECE  
People are sick, Doctor. Help us fix it and don't ask questions. There might be a bonus in your future.

The other researchers watch the director with both disdain and intrigue as she turns to leave.

DOCTOR (F)  
I don't need your bonus.

DIRECTOR TREECE  
But you'll take it anyway.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - EAST END COURTYARD - AFTERNOON

CHILDREN are scattered around participating in various outdoor activities: basketball, tag, jump rope, hopscotch, sidewalk chalk. Others sit in the shade playing games on their PHONES.

The sky is cloudless and sun beats down with no reprieve, despite the turning colors of trees beckoning autumn.

Bly and Val lay on the slope overlooking the lake, a PHONE on the ground between them playing Billie Eilish.

VAL  
It's so fucking hot.

Bly slings an arm over her eyes.

In the distance, the rowboat drifts on the water.

Mercie sits in the shade of the building, knees propped up. Jules rises next to her and tucks her phone in her pocket.

JULES  
Thanks, Mercie. I'm gonna go do  
some chalk with Annie and Cait.

Mercie waves casually as she goes and looks around to make sure no one else is watching her.

She picks up her own phone and pulls up her father's contact information, pressing dial on his number. She looks around again self-consciously before bringing the phone to her ear.

She listens. Waits.

GABRIEL (V.O.)  
Mercie?

Mercie SIGHS in relief, turning her body away from prying eyes.

MERCIE  
Dad! It's so good to hear your  
voice. How have you been? How's  
Mom?

GABRIEL (V.O.)

This is, uh, quite a surprise. Your mom and I are doing well. We miss you, honey.

Mercie's eyes line with tears, but she blinks them away.  
SNIFFLES.

MERCIE

I miss you too, Dad. Have you heard anything from your friends in D.C.? When do you think we can come home?

Silence hangs on the other end.

MERCIE (CONT'D)

Dad?

She checks her phone to make sure the connection is still there.

GABRIEL (V.O.)

Listen, sweetheart...things aren't great out here. I-It's complicated...

Fear and shock take over Mercie's expression.

MERCIE

What do you mean? Are you sick? Where's Mom? Let me talk to her.

GABRIEL

We're fine, Mercie. Your mother's on the yacht. All I mean is that you're safer...

Mercie's attention is pulled from the phone call when some of the teenagers on the court start pointing in the distance opposite the lake, toward the tree line.

Bly and Val sit up at the COMMOTION and turn to look.

GABRIEL (V.O.)

...you're in good hands with St. Regis. They know what they're doing-

Mercie glares into her phone.

MERCIE

What does this have to do with St. Regis? I didn't even mention them- wait. Mom's on a yacht?

Silence again.

Mercie watches Bly and Val walk over to Danny. They're joined by Tanner and his FRIENDS a moment later, all of them looking toward the trees.

Gabriel LAUGHS nervously.

GABRIEL (V.O.)

Yeah, uh. We decided to go up to the house in Bay Point. Less people there, more secluded.

Mercie gawks.

MERCIE

You're not in Bellaire anymore? Oh my god, I can't believe this. Things get a little scary and you decide to take a vacation to our house that's on a lake?

GABRIEL (V.O.)

Sweetheart, that's not our intention. I'm doing my best to figure out...

Tanner suddenly strolls off in the direction of the forest, his friends following suit. Danny, Bly, and Val follow with more caution, some other kids going with them.

They disappear past the side of the building wing, out of Mercie's view.

MERCIE

Dad, I gotta go.

She hangs up the phone and follows the small crowd.

Around the side of the building, Mercie shuffles through the other kids, finding Bly and Val at the front of the group.

MERCIE (CONT'D)

Bly, what...

Over Bly's shoulder, a FIGURE moves beyond the fence line.

The thinning tree canopy masks the form for only a moment before it steps fully up to the fence – a MAN. His clothes are worn and dirty, suggesting he's been out in the woods for quite some time.

He shakes the wire fence, testing its give. Then he starts to climb. He slips and grapples, unsteady in his movements. As he scrambles over the top, a glare reflects off his face:

SUNGLASSES over his eyes.

VAL  
That's not good.

DANNY  
We should tell someone, right?

Some of the other children nod, but no one moves to do so.

Mercie stands on tip toes to see past the group to the staff quarters. Some SOLDIERS are outside, but the staggered layout of the barracks must block the intruder from view, because none of them notice.

Mercie takes a step back.

MERCIE  
I'll go ge—

TANNER  
Naw, hold on a minute. This just got interesting.

Bly, Danny, and Val stare in horror as Tanner approaches the haggard-looking man, who jumps down from the fence and brushes off his pants in an erratic, aggravated motion.

VAL  
Are you crazy? That's a—

The strange man collapses to a knee. Pulls himself up. He notices Tanner approaching and staggers to him with a slight limp. He smiles, but it's crooked and inhuman with the bright sheen of the sunglasses over his face.

OUTSIDER  
H-Hello. I don't mean to disturb you. I-I'm just looking for my son.

Tanner's hands slip into the pockets of his gym shorts, nonchalant.

TANNER  
Who's your son?

The man's head twitches, then swivels like he's searching for someone in the small crowd of kids.

TANNER (CONT'D)  
(louder)  
Who's your son, man?

OUTSIDER  
H-his name is...Laurence.

TANNER  
Laurence what?

The man licks his dry lips. He pinches the bridge of his nose between two fingers as if trying to remember.

OUTSIDER  
Uh-Uh...just Laurence. Please...I just want to see my son. It's been too long.

TANNER  
How long has it been, exactly?

The man's arms flare out. He paces.

OUTSIDER  
Too long! I can't...I can't...

Bly flinches at the outburst. Mercie grabs her hand.

TANNER  
Take off the glasses, man.

DANNY  
(voice low)  
*Tanner. Be careful.*

Tanner glances back at them briefly. His gaze meets Mercie's.

TANNER  
I just want to see.

The man is only a couple feet from Tanner. He shuffles and scratches his arms, but his skin is almost fully covered by clothing, despite the heat.

TANNER (CONT'D)  
Look man, I can't let you by unless I know you're healthy. You want to find Laurence? Take off the glasses.

He clasps his hands as if in prayer. His legs tremble.

OUTSIDER

P-Please. It's just the sun. It's  
just for the sun. I need to see my  
son.

Tanner lunges and snatches the glasses off his face, throwing them aside.

MERCIE

(worried)  
Tanner!

Mercie moves to stop Tanner, but Danny holds her back.

The man stumbles back, rubbing his eyes, and when he puts his hands down, it's impossible to unsee the green of his irises bleeding into the whites of his eyes like a burst blood vessel.

OUTSIDER

Son of a bitch, you don't  
understand!

The outsider – the *leaker* – barrels into Tanner and they CRASH to the ground. A few of the children run away.

VAL

(frantic)  
Oh my god–

MERCIE

Someone HELP!

Bly watches the fight unfold in frozen terror, mouth agape.

Tanner and the leaker roll around on the dirt, throwing punches. The leaker is bigger and taller, but his movements are confused and restricted. Unpredictable.

Tanner grapples to restrain the man. The leaker flails and grunts. Tanner has him by his shirt, but the man sinks his teeth into Tanner's forearm. Tanner SHOUTS in pain.

TANNER

What the *fuck*.

OUTSIDER

Y-you don't understand!  
(grunts)  
I-It's not fair!

Spit flies from the leaker's mouth. He cries now, too, and the green flooding his eyes trickles out with his tears.

In a burst of adrenaline and anger, the leaker pins Tanner down.

SHOUTS ring out from three SOLDIERS as they sprint out from the staff sector.

The remaining children clear a path. One of the soldiers shoves the kids back toward the HQ building.

SOLDIER 1  
(to the leaker)  
Hey! Stop right there!

Another soldier raises his RIFLE.

SOLDIER 2  
Put your hands in the air, *now*.

Tanner struggles beneath the leaker, who grips him by the ears. The leaker POUNDS Tanner's head into the ground.

Mercie lets out a SOB and covers her eyes. Bly is still frozen, but a single tear trails down her cheek.

SOLDIER 2 (CONT'D)  
I said HANDS UP! Don't make me  
shoot...

Tanner is unconscious, blood seeping from the back of his head.

The safety CLICKS off on the rifle. Bly's eyes shift an inch to the soldier next to her. He aims down the sight...

BLY  
(whispering)  
He just needs help—

The soldier FIRES.

Bly, Val, and Mercie duck instinctually, hands over their ears.

The leaker, still crouched over Tanner, falls backward, bullet hole straight through the forehead.

More MILITARY STAFF come running from all directions.

Tanner is lifted on a STRETCHER and taken straight to the medical wing. Mercie tries to go with him, but is pointed away. She continues to CRY.

A soldier presses a COMMUNICATION DEVICE to his ear. Listens. Responds (inaudible). He turns to the others.

SOLDIER 1

Patrol unit found an abandoned van  
a few miles off the main road. They  
suspect a group of parents came  
looking for their kids and got  
stuck in the rain while on foot...

Bly stares at the dead body, still frozen, until Val pulls  
her and Mercie back in the direction of HQ. Danny follows,  
glancing back at the scene.

When they get to the doors, Bly hones in on the St. Regis  
logo printed on the glass.

BLY

(blankly)

I remember now...I've seen this...

VAL

Let's get back to our room, okay?

She ushers Bly and Mercie onward.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CAMP HEADQUARTERS - DORMITORY 24 - NIGHT

The room is QUIET, yet no one is asleep, save for the younger  
girls who don't understand what has occurred. Some girls toss  
and turn in an attempt at rest, others scroll on their  
PHONES. One girl prays at the foot of her bed.

RAIN pelts the single window in the room.

Mercie and Val sit at the corner table, the space dimly lit  
by the glow of the monitor screen.

The screen is black, but a continuous message scrawls out on  
repeat: MINORS ARE TO STAY IN YOUR ASSIGNED DORMITORY UNTIL  
FURTHER NOTICE. CAMP SECURITY SWEEP IS IN PROGRESS...

Val stares at the screen and rolls her eyes.

VAL

I've counted that message at least  
two-hundred times in the past three  
hours.

MERCIE

At least they stopped playing it on  
the PA system.

Mercie is vigilant, eyes trained on Bly's motionless form in her bed. Although up on the top bunk, Mercie can see that she faces the wall.

VAL

Is she gonna be okay?

MERCIE

Yeah, um...she lost someone kind of recently, so...death is a lot for her.

(more upbeat)

But she'll bounce back. She's strong like that.

In her bed, Bly stares at the wall, fingers running over the beads of her BLY FLY BRACELET. Her eyes jump back and forth as if reliving a memory.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. BLY'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT, 3 YEARS AGO

SIRENS and flashing lights.

Maria Topa opens the door to a POLICE OFFICER.

Bly (15) sits at the top of the staircase.

POLICE OFFICER

Mrs. Topa, your nephew, Baker Topa, has been involved in a boating accident on Lake Bellaire. I need you and your husband to come with me...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT, HOURS LATER

Bly sits at the kitchen counter with an untouched MUG OF TEA.

Maria speaks (inaudible) while Adrien rubs Bly's back. Maria turns away for a moment, struggling to keep her composure. She places a hand on her chest as she finishes her sentence.

Bly stands suddenly, the counter STOOL tipping back. She backs away, chest rising and falling in an uncontrollable rhythm. She shakes her head repeatedly, the words "No, no, no" pouring from her lips.

Her back hits the wall and she sinks to the floor, SOBBING. Adrien meets her there and hugs her, crying too.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - 1 WEEK LATER

An Asian COUPLE sits on the SOFA. Maria sits across from them in the recliner with Adrien standing behind her. All of them look distraught and fatigued.

The woman, HANA KUMAR (48), clasps her hands together at her chest. Her husband, CHO KUMAR (51), carries himself with stoic rigidity, though his eyes give away the emptiness of grief.

HANA

Please consider this. Our lawyer says we have a strong case. Our boys were not in the wrong...The Nelson family already agreed to testify.

Maria shakes her head and holds her face in her palms, arms braced on her knees.

Adrien SIGHS.

ADRIEN

I'm really sorry, Mrs. Kumar. This has just been so difficult for our family, especially Bly.

He glances at the staircase.

At the top of the stairs, Bly listens with her head leaning against the railing, out of sight. Her eyes are red-rimmed and splotchy. She closes them.

ADRIEN (CONT'D)

We will be there in court to support you, but anything further would put unnecessary strain on our family. I'm so very sorry.

The Kumars stand to go.

HANA

(devastated)

Our Zack truly loved your nephew. They were good boys...different, but good. We won't let those sharks at St. Regis forget it.

Both Adrien and Maria nod as if to say "we know", and the couple departs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

At the counter, Bly types on her LAPTOP.

On the screen, she Googles ST. REGIS CORP. Results appear, including multiple renditions of the company's purple logo and a professional headshot of WARREN BLITHE.

Bly wipes more tears away. Her expression hardens in anger.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAKER'S BEDROOM - DAYS LATER

Bly opens Baker's bedroom door. It is the first time she's been in it since his death. Everything is exactly as he left it: POSTERS and faux VINERY on the walls, RECORD PLAYER on its stand, ALBUMS strewn about the floor.

She carries a Bluetooth SPEAKER to the window and sets it on the sill. She slumps to the floor and selects a playlist on her PHONE. Pinches the volume up to full blast.

MUSIC BLARES. She cries...and cries...and cries.

Baker's GUITAR is propped in the corner. She crawls to it and clutches it across her belly as if to play it. She doesn't. She lies flat on the floor. Continues to cry.

Moments later, she rummages under his bed and pulls out a TIN LUNCHBOX. Inside is a generous arrangement of MARIJUANA, EDIBLES, VAPES, and CIGARETTES. Most of them are unused.

Bly takes a hit of a vape. Another. And another, until she's LAUGHING and rubbing her eyes. They continue to water, but the laughter is unrelenting.

BLY  
(hysterical)  
Such...a liar...Baker Topa.

END FLASHBACK