

ABSTRACT

Xiaofan and The Horseman

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Inspired by classic horror genre tropes that turn benign objects like dolls and clowns into monsters that terrorize children, this thesis seeks to invert that process. The screenplay explores the possibilities of using storytelling to demystify and humanize figures from childhood stories and tall tales that are historically portrayed as monstrous villains. In *Xiaofan and The Horseman*, fourteen year-old Xiaofan meets The Headless Horseman and embarks on a journey to find the missing magic amulet that her father died to protect. In order to save her town from the evil spirits that threaten it, she must come to terms with her father's death, work through her anger, and learn to love and accept love from the community around her.

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XIAOFAN AND THE HORSEMAN

AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

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By

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DEDICATION

To my mom, Jackie, who I miss every day. I love you.

To my dad, Jeff, and my brother, Ryan, for encouraging me in everything I do and always giving me a safe place to come back to.

And to my sister, Shannon, for being the best friend I never asked for, the best birthday present ever, and for loving me and encouraging me no matter what.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On Writing a Creative Thesis

There is something innately human about storytelling. In her 2014 TEDxSanAntonio talk, Dr. Sarah-Jane Murray describes how the human mind is built to process and experience story, through neural coupling and hormones like cortisol and oxytocin. With good storytelling she explains, “you’re causing all your brain to fire on many cylinders” (Murray, “Hardwired For Story”). The images conjured in the audience’s mind lead the senses to interpret the story as events the audience is living. This validates what we all know from childhood: that stories are more than words or images. They’re experiences.

I credit my mother, Jackie, for exposing me to stories as early and often as possible. As a former grade-school teacher she loved teaching and had a great passion for stories herself. From a young age, I can remember her reading to my sister and me: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Dr. Seuss’ *Hop on Pop*, and as a Christmas tradition *The Night Before Christmas*. I was captivated by the stories and the images they formed in my mind. I hung on every word. She would stop to teach us words we didn’t know, until gradually we would read more and more while our mother listened. And then I began to create my own stories. Since my mother passed away, I have found myself more and more aware of the impact she has had on my life and in shaping me into the person I am today.

One of the books my mom introduced me to was *The Lightning Thief*, the first novel in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series written by Rick Riordan. It featured classic mythology as a basis for the modern story of Percy Jackson, an awkward, teenage, demigod son of Zeus. If the premise seems zany, that's because it was. Yet the books are great. The mythology basis only adds to the story of the main characters and its off-beat humor and quirky personalities were never campy, only endearing. It was a coming of age story that was told on an Olympian scale. It was, in short, everything I love in stories. In many ways, it went on to inspire my thesis screenplay. I still remember how surreal it was meeting Rick Riordan at a book signing. It wouldn't dawn on me until later that storytelling could actually be a profession, and that his writing would influence my own work so profoundly.

Going in to my freshman year at Baylor as a part of the Honors Program I knew writing an Honors Thesis was inevitable. The prospect of undertaking a project that spanned over two years filled me with excitement and dread. I knew that in order to write my thesis, I would have to make sure the project was something I was committed to, something that prepared me for my post-university career, and something I could remain passionate about. As a Film & Digital Media major, I found myself in an odd place of not feeling particularly drawn to the technical research and theory usually associated with film studies. For me, at its heart, filmmaking is about storytelling. Taking screenwriting and television writing classes, I felt drawn to learning more about creating stories, equipping myself with the knowledge and experience I need to see my various story 'seeds' to fruition.

In Dr. Murray's Masterworks in Drama course, I learned not just about film and screenwriting, but about the storytelling principals that are staples of novels, poems, even plays like those written by Shakespeare. It gave me a greater perspective on what story was and how the tradition of storytelling pulls on a common thread of three-act structure. I was able to analyze familiar works like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* (1994) among others, in a new light that helped me better understand the process of writing and how to apply it to my own work. In Dr. Murray's Screenwriting course, I gained experience in applying those techniques and continued to study great writing like the screenplays for *Coco* (2017) and *Darkest Hour* (2017). While my own writing was far from the quality of Shakespeare's, I could at least now look back at great dramatic works and identify what aspects worked well and where my own work was lacking.

The film courses I have taken at Baylor weren't the only ones that guided me to the decision to write a creative thesis. Dante & the Italian Renaissance further expanded my understanding of stories. In studying Dante Alighieri's *Purgatorio* I also learned more about the role of the writer. All the sweeping themes, all the intricate details of Dante Alighieri's work are so intentional, but doesn't seem manufactured or ring false. It is that incorporation of every detail into the whole of the story and the appreciation for the creative process that I took with me after that class ended.

Having practiced writing screenplays in their traditional format, it was a different beast entirely to enter into Professor Brian Elliott's Television Writing class. While I could see the overlap in the process of television writing with what I knew about screenwriting, the new medium taught me not to get complacent. There was, and still is, a lot I didn't know about writing. Learning how three-act structure works within thirty-

minute and sixty-minute TV shows forced me to see concepts in a different setting and offered alternative methods of developing a story. The biggest thing I learned from that class was that you have to make the story interesting. It seems obvious, but it is important never to lose sight of the bottom line: if the audience isn't interested, they won't watch or read.

This includes if an audience loses interest because a story or character is too complex. The story and characters could be complex, but first the writer has to make the audience feel something for the characters and the stakes of the story. Writing a television pilot and even studying the pilot episode of *Fargo*, I realized that every act within an episode had to have an arc, and every episode within the season has to have an arc, and all of that has to fit in to the season arc. The different levels of organization in television writing, and the small units it can be broken up into, forced me to return to my thesis script with new intentionality and a greater awareness of rhythm, pacing, and integration. It taught me to delve even further into world and character-building.

A creative thesis presented itself as a great opportunity to take everything I had learned and practiced in my coursework and implement it into something original and uniquely mine. Also appealing was the concept of leaving university with a finished product, something that summed up my growth as a student and as a human being. Part of my conviction to complete a screenplay as my creative thesis was that I felt driven to prove to myself that I could do it at all. In my classes I had written the first act of several feature screenplays, had written a few short films, and a television pilot, but I wanted to do more. I wanted to live with one story and see it through start to finish.

The Process of Writing Xiaofan and The Horseman

The road to completing this thesis project was long and tiring. Perhaps even more than it changed me, it changed the story I set out to tell. Before I even opened my computer to type up the screenplay, I put in hours and hours of work to mold the events and characters of the story. Implementing the Three-Act Structure outlined in Dr. Sarah-Jane Murray's *Basics of Story Design*, I built the story from the ground up. However, every building starts not at the construction site or even at an architect's drawing board. It all starts with a single idea. I began this journey with a single story seed: what would it look like for a small-town child to befriend The Headless Horseman?

After seeing and hearing many advertisements for the Stephen King film *It* (2017), I made a stunning connection. It seemed to me that the horror genre had a track-record of portraying kids as the victims of the monster, murderer, or supernatural force that was at play in these stories. Even more, the antagonists are fashioned after things kids are taught to view as benign or pleasant: animals, clowns, dolls. As children are highly impressionable and human brains respond to stories as personal experiences, it is unsettling that the market is flooded with stories that twist images and present them as lingering, unknown threats to be feared. I thought more deeply on this concept and attempted to list films, television programs, and books that played with the inverse effect. I was left with an all but non-existent list.

It was then that I resolved myself to find a story to tell that countered such fear-mongering. Stories can unsettle us, plant doubt and fear, but they also have the power to reveal new ways of looking at beings or objects, demystifying them, even humanizing them. If horror films capitalize on vilifying something children love, then what kind of

being or story that children fear could I give a new perspective on to remind kids that evil doesn't lurk around every corner? Aside from fairytales, other cultural stories that children grow up with are tall tales and legends with dark themes, heavy subject matter, and protagonists who meet gruesome ends. Take for example, The Headless Horseman. That was the connection that planted the story seed.

A kid befriendng the Headless Horseman is great and all, but it isn't exactly a story. I knew I wanted the story to be about both this protagonist and The Headless Horseman growing through their friendship, a coming-of-age story for a new age of horror. I had to be careful not to jump in too quickly because as Hal Ackerman points out, the phrase 'a coming-of-age story' does not reveal anything about the protagonist, her character arc or her motivations. It doesn't make explicit the obstacles she must overcome in order to achieve her goal. Essentially, the phrase skips over "the eight trillion things that make a character an individual" (Ackerman 53). The phrase also does not hold any meaning for the events of the story. "These writers are saying what their story is about, but they are not telling the story" (Ackerman 53).

The next step in finding the story I was going to tell was to identify the antagonist and the MacGuffin, the tangible goal the protagonist pursues during the quest. The MacGuffin gives physical presence to the larger ideological conflict as both parties struggle to control it. In having a physical item be the goal, MacGuffins also allow the audience to visually track how close or far the protagonist is from her goal and witness definitively when the protagonist achieves her goal or loses it forever. If the protagonist's goal was to banish the evil spirits from her world, then it followed that this tangible goal would be an object that could banish the spirits. Originally, the amulet could send the

spirits back to the spirit world, and this became more visual as the rift between the town and the spirit world entered into the equation.

The protagonist started out as a young boy named Davey. Painfully shy, invisible to his classmates, Davey was what I thought the protagonist of this story had to be. It was not until my thesis advisor, Dr. Murray, challenged our screenwriting class to write stories with minority protagonists, with an emphasis on women of color, that everything changed. I still thought of the protagonist, now Xiaofan, as shy, invisible, deserted in a lot of ways. However, that version of Xiaofan disappeared as I wrote scenes. The particular moment she took on a life of her own, was in writing the first scene in which she appears.

Through hashing out her relationship with her father, his past, and her grieving his death, I felt she had an intense need to defend him. She was hurting and missed him, and refused to listen to people speak ill of him. This notion of her defending her father seemed simple enough. Somehow, I failed to realize that this desire, this perceived obligation of hers, would inform her emotions and actions.

As Mary taunts her and insults her father, I felt Xiaofan's boiling anger, moments away from snapping. In my head, once Mary takes Xiaofan's charm bracelet I saw Xiaofan get up and punch her. I had not planned that in the scene at all. In fact, it was completely incongruous with what I knew about Xiaofan's character. I thought "Xiaofan wouldn't do that". Then I realized yes, she would. While I had planned for her to be a timid, artistic loner her desire to protect her father and her memory of him shaped her into an entirely different person. I had accidentally infused her with a fire that gave her spirit new life. That session of writing was when everything started to click for me. She

wasn't the character I had wanted. She was better. She was more active, more flawed and complex, someone I could watch grow and root for. She was an actual protagonist.

Through the various drafts of the script the antagonist evolved just as much. The Dark Spirits, malevolent, ghostly counterparts to The Headless Horseman, were originally the antagonist of the story. I found the story's true antagonist in a character I had already created, Steve. This changed when I realized that the Dark Spirits weren't present during most of the story. It was a race against the clock to make sure the Dark Spirits didn't escape into the human world and destroy the town, but as antagonists they could not act as an opposing force pushing back against Xiaofan. The Dark Spirits also acted as one which made it difficult to establish their individuality. As a result, their personal motivation and beliefs ended up serving the story rather than being tied to their characters.

This discouraged me at first. It took a lot of time for me to internalize what Richard Walter asserts in his book *Essentials of Screenwriting*: "If something ends up eliminated...it does not mean the experiment was a failure. Quite the contrary, discovering that something does not work represents just another kind of experimental success" (Walter 227). Once I accepted that the first draft was not the only version of the story to tell and was not even the best version, I learned to allow myself to make changes, big and small, that I felt could push the story and take it in a new direction that clicked better. If it didn't click, hitting Edit, Undo could bring me right back where I started to test out a new solution.

Shifting to Steve as the antagonist also solved the problem of the Dark Spirits being too weak. If they could not get into town until Halloween then the stakes weren't

high enough. Xiaofan would have plenty of time to find a way to stop them and no one was standing in her way. If someone else was looking for the same amulet which could control The Dark Spirits (now secondary antagonists) then the conflict would be rooted in competing desires, and it is characters' desires that are at the center of all "sharp, unpredictable, volatile, exciting scenes and stories" (Ackerman 61). To heighten the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist I realized that having Xiaofan's godfather and paternal figure, Steve, as the antagonist would add a deeply personal aspect to that relationship. His scheming and ultimately his world views would feel to Xiaofan like a betrayal and this adds an inner-conflict for the protagonist as well.

In developing Xiaofan's desire and her motivation for setting out on the quest, I recognized a lack of personal connection for her. If her father had died why would she feel personally responsible for protecting the town that had hated him? After a lot of brainstorming and rewrites I determined I was stuck. Outlining exercises and talking my story out with classmates helped me make a connection that I hadn't yet made in my story: that the protagonist's 'ghost', the event that haunts her and holds her back from her goal, is inherently tied to the MacGuffin. With this new perspective the story became about Eric's legacy and Xiaofan retracing his steps in order to finish what he started. This, combined with targeting her anger at the Dark Spirits who killed Eric, created a multi-faceted motivation for Xiaofan that was both honorable and selfish. It was a story about Xiaofan saving her town, reconnecting with her father and letting him go, but it was also about revenge. This complexity allowed for story moments where Xiaofan seemed to have grown and evolved in character and other moments where her anger and flaws got the best of her.

Her motivations also enhanced the necessary conflict between Xiaofan and the townspeople. The townspeople believe her father was crazy and Xiaofan holds a grudge about that. So, when she needs their help she has to overcome her resentment and trust the townspeople to unite.

Her need to defend her father also leaves her angry at her mother and sister who try to forget about their family's past and move on. The disconnect and conflict with her family allowed for another side of the reconciliation in the story. While they have different outlooks on the world and on their family's tragedy Xiaofan, Lily, and Jemma love one another. That love is tested throughout Xiaofan's quest and their love is what allows them to understand each other better and overcome their differences and familial frustrations.

This part of the story took on a new role as Xiaofan's older sister, Jemma, replaced The Headless Horseman as the supporting character. The sibling relationship is often times tense and sometimes outright hurtful. I found that it was a delicate balance to strike between these characters challenging each other and these characters working against each other. It helped to look at other sibling relationships that are similar like those in *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) and *Stranger Things* (2016), to see how that balance could be struck, and how ultimately reconciliation was crucial for them in reaching their shared goal.

In August of 2018 I undertook my own quest in an effort to fill in the foundation of the story and ground the story world in something real. While in New Jersey, my family and I took a day trip to Sleepy Hollow, NY. I was pleasantly surprised to find much of what I wrote in terms of the world these characters inhabited aligned fairly well

with the town that inspired Washington Irving to write *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, one of the cornerstone works of Headless Horseman mythology.

We drove by what would have been the Old Dutch Bridge, now a concrete bridge that stretched over the river below. Driving into the parking lot of the Old Dutch Church, I was struck by how visceral the script felt in light of the history that informed it. It was that groundedness that I later sought to further incorporate into my work. We toured Sleepy Hollow Cemetery and got to see tombs, mausoleums, and even Washington Irving's grave. Upon learning more about his personal history and his time in the village of Sleepy Hollow, I ended up incorporating aspects of his life into the backstory of *The Headless Horseman*, which while not explicit in the screenplay nonetheless informed how I wrote his character.

I had already written in my personal mythology of *The Horseman* that he was a Hessian soldier from the Revolutionary War and that he was killed by his fiancé's brothers as they disapproved of his marrying their sister. *The Horseman* had kept a locket of her hair as a remembrance of her after she had died and he had been reanimated.

While Washington Irving's backstory didn't have the same grand magic and bloody feuds, it did include a love story. Washington Irving was said to have been in love with a young woman and when she passed away he was heartbroken, keeping her prayer book in his coat pocket at all times. While *The Headless Horseman* is not the protagonist and so his backstory is not included in the script, this story did end up influencing the history of the amulet and in particular, the charm bracelet that Eric gave to Xiaofan. She wears it all the time and is very protective of it. Had I not learned this story about

Washington Irving, I don't believe the MacGuffin of the amulet and the link between the amulet and the bracelet would be what it is today.

Our tour guide, who by now knew of the script I was writing, bent the rules and extended our tour to include the Old Dutch churchyard. There she showed us a patch of grass that was flagged off. This landmark, she went on to explain, was connected to one of the greatest stories of the supernatural that Sleepy Hollow has to offer. She wove her words intricately as she told us of a witch whose infant child was rescued from certain death by a Hessian soldier. This soldier was killed for assisting a woman of pagan faith so the witch set out to repay him with a proper burial. She managed to convince the clergy of the Old Dutch Church to bury the soldier in the churchyard. Being an enemy of the revolution and associated with a witch, the burial was performed but the grave was left unmarked to ensure the soldier's memory and legacy would fade away. According to the lore and to our tour guide, every winter when the grass of the churchyard yellows and dies, there is one patch of grass which still flourishes- the grass over the Hessian soldier's grave. I found this story mesmerizing and without much trouble incorporated it into the aforementioned backstory of The Headless Horseman I already had plotted out for my screenplay.

We then went on to visit the Sleepy Hollow high school and junior high. I once again found that the reality of Sleepy Hollow did not conflict in any significant ways with the Sleepy Hollow I had written. There were obvious differences between the real Sleepy Hollow and the version I had written, but I was careful not to let that stifle my creativity. I wanted to treat Sleepy Hollow as a separate entity from the story world I was creating and to find inspiration in it rather than letting it define how I wrote. Of course, much of

the research I did while there did not end up in the script itself, but having that background and history of Sleepy Hollow to inform what I put on the page has given the story world a backing and depth that it otherwise would have lacked.

I also briefly researched Chinese names and Mandarin terms of endearment. While I did not include much Chinese culture in the completed thesis, it is a major priority of mine going forward to talk to people in the Chinese-American community (and in particular Chinese-American women) in order to ensure that Xiaofan's family life and her values accurately represent one possible account of how a young girl of Chinese heritage would interact with and move around this magical story world.

I initially was going to name the protagonist something like Emily or Sarah. However, the more I considered that, the more it felt like a missed opportunity. There are so many Chinese names that are beautiful, but that white American never take the time to learn. Growing up, so many kids at the schools I went to had Americanized names in order to accommodate people around them. It doesn't seem fair that they are expected to have two names, and no one is expected to learn their birth names. The first step to respecting diverse cultures is to show an interest in them. By giving the protagonist a Chinese name, I wanted to challenge more people to show an interest other cultures and in learning to pronounce foreign names as a basic sign of respect. Her Chinese name shows that she is an outsider, refusing to acquiesce to the pressure of social norms in an Americanized town. While Eric, Lily, and Jemma took Americanized names, Xiaofan keeps her birth name which demonstrates her stubbornness and scrappy attitude. Grounding Xiaofan and her family in their cultural heritage, and having that shape them just as it would any real person, is the next step in grounding these characters in

something that allows audience members to relate to and root for them. I fully commit to the research and communication that is key to building an informed representation of a Chinese-American family, which studio-led works all too often lack.

There are so many sources of inspiration I have drawn from in writing *Xiaofan and The Horseman*: from films like *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), *Halloweentown* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005), and *Wall•E* (2008), to television programs like *Stranger Things* (2016) and *Phineas and Ferb*'s "Are You My Mummy?" episode (2008), to literature and history.

Often times I worked out aspects of my screenplay, outlined, and even wrote scenes only to afterwards realize how much some of my favorite childhood films had influenced this story. *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) was one of the first works to influence it. I felt the idea of both Lilo and Stitch being outsiders in town despite Lilo being from the town was a great way to bring the two characters together and have the audience bond with them and root for their friendship. This factored heavily in the portrayal of The Headless Horseman as being from another world and Xiaofan feeling drawn to him because she felt she fit more with him than with her own world.

Halloweentown (1998) was also a huge inspiration for *Xiaofan and The Horseman*. The film itself is set around the eponymous holiday. Marnie is swept into this magical world for the first time and feels she belongs there. It seems to fill a hole in her and she better understands herself with her new knowledge of her family's past and her role as a blossoming witch. Xiaofan also feels that her life makes more sense when she learns more about her father's death. That causes her to further commit to the world of magic and follow the legacy of her family, even if her mother does not approve. This

strained mother-daughter relationship was another piece of the puzzle influenced by *Halloweentown* (1998). While Marnie's mother fears for Marnie's safety and so shields her kids from the world of magic, Lily fears losing her children in the same way she lost Eric and many of her actions show this. She keeps Eric's home office locked, she prioritizes getting rid of his old stuff, and focuses on keeping herself busy in order to move on from the tragedy their family has experienced.

Halloweentown (1998) also has great moments of levity and humor despite its dark themes and conflict. The sibling bickering provides much of the comic relief and wit of the film and this inspired some of the lighter moments of my script along with the playful tone even in arguments between Xiaofan and Jemma.

One of the biggest challenges in writing this screenplay was how to make The Headless Horseman a compelling character without verbal communication. Without a head talking didn't seem to fit with the character, even within a story world with magic. Plus, there was something exciting about the challenge of creating a character with no dialogue or facial expression.

The key to this was body language. Either through physical humor with a slightly slapstick feel, or through small movements and non-verbal cues like those seen in the robots in *Wall-E* (2008) I focused on having the character's movements tell the story rather than their words. Almost any Pixar or Disney film is a great resource for studying non-verbal communication and almost all of them feature a character or characters who don't speak.

Wall-E (2008) was inspiring to me because it not only told the audience Wall-E's story through his movements, but it made the audience feel for Wall-E. His movements

made him cute and spunky and that understanding of his character was only further enhanced by the film's sound design. The animators made us root for Wall-E in a way we likely would not have had the protagonist been one of the humans later introduced in the film. That attachment to a character that isn't human, that doesn't speak English, and that primarily lets us in on who they are through their actions, was something I worked hard to capture in the character of The Headless Horseman.

In many ways, I believe that my writing of other characters was helped by focusing more on action than words. As Hal Ackerman mentions in *Writing Screenplays That Sell: The Ackerman Way*, actions are likely the strongest way of showing, not telling, who the character is. We understand their desires by what they pursue on screen and what they are willing to sacrifice for those goals.

In shifting my thinking about characterization to strictly visual presentation, I found that Xiaofan made a more compelling protagonist as well. By showing her actions and letting those reveal her interior state, it freed me up to let her feelings manifest in bigger ways on screen. Rather than her complaining that Mary stole her bracelet and insulted her father, she acts on the anger she feels. That is easier to understand for a viewer and we also know that by a character's feelings dictating their actions, those feelings must be strong: they are a top priority for the character. This kind of characterization was not a new idea to me, but I found it much easier to implement in this story as I focused on The Headless Horseman being defined by his actions, and then let that concept bleed into everyone else.

Overall, I think sources like kids' movies and animated films helped me understand how it is that viewers can connect with the strangest, most foreign, even

‘ugly’ characters onscreen. That allowed me to fully flesh out The Headless Horseman as a character rather than having him in the script as an object following Xiaofan around.

While this screenplay will not be the final draft of this story, I must recognize that it has come a long way. In the Spring of 2018 I developed the seed idea, outlined the major story beats, outlined the individual scenes and completed the first draft of Act I. By the time classes resumed for Fall 2018 I had completed the first full draft. In Fall 2018 I started an entirely different new draft. With a reinvented beat sheet, a new protagonist, and new scene outlines to boot, I wrote the first act of the second draft which was drastically different from the first. By that December I completed the full second draft then reworked my scenes outlines and scenes again. The third draft was completed in January before the Spring 2019 semester began. Since then, I completed the fourth draft and went through multiple rounds of feedback and rewrites to reach the screenplay in its current state.

To me, the story has completely changed and the way I have set out to tell it has changed as well, and rewriting it has been key. I’m so glad that I undertook this thesis project and I’m proud of how this story has evolved.

The Story Beats

The story beats are the tentpole, landmark moments of a screenplay. These events are what creates momentum in the plot and make a character’s inner journey possible. Each beat serves a specific purpose within the work and together they give the screenplay its shape and structure.

Opening Image

In *Xiaofan and The Horseman*, the Opening Image is Eric's standoff with the Dark Spirits that pursue him and his resultant death. The Dark Spirits, accompanied by Steve, hunt Eric down. In the struggle, Eric defends himself with the magic amulet he has protected but loses hold of the amulet which disappears. The scene establishes the MacGuffin of the missing amulet and shows the magic capabilities of the amulet in that it repels the Dark Spirits. Steve is infuriated to find the amulet is missing. In this scene we see the Dominant Values of anger, control, and evil win out against the opposite Underdog Values of forgiveness, inner peace, letting go, and good. The audience understands from this that if Steve obtains the amulet the Dominant Values will win out in the story world and evil will triumph over good. The stakes are set high, the goal of the quest is established, and we know who Xiaofan will be up against.

Ordinary World

Xiaofan is introduced while she is drawing at school. By her simple action of drawing, the audience learns about her creativity and her introspective nature as she sits alone. She gets in a fight with a classmate who bullies her and taunts her with cruel words about her father. We see her unresolved anger issues and her protectiveness over the memory and reputation of her deceased father, Eric. As she deals with the consequences of that fight, we see her strained relationships with her mother, Lily, her sister, Jemma, and her godfather, Steve. However, this sequence is just another day for Xiaofan. She perceives no indication of the quest that awaits her, although the audience gets the idea

that a Storm Is Brewing, and that it will alter her life forever. Her protectiveness and loyalty show both her character strengths and flaws, which will be tested throughout the story. In observing Xiaofan in her natural environment, we learn who she is apart from the quest, in her own normal life.

Inciting Incident

The Inciting Incident isn't a big bang, but an event which starts the timer ticking down to the moment Xiaofan will have to choose whether or not to go on the quest. When Xiaofan quite literally bumps into The Headless Horseman, she is exposed to the existence of magic and the spiritual realm. This new knowledge changes her understanding of her own world. She struggles to accept the existence of this magic and its connection to her father, Eric. That connection is what draws her to embark on the quest.

Dilemma

Xiaofan faces her dilemma when The Headless Horseman directly (although non-verbally) asks for her help to foil the plot to summon the Dark Spirits. She must choose to either ignore the Extraordinary World of magic and spirits in order to stay in the familiar Ordinary World, or leave her old way of life behind to aid The Headless Horseman in finding the amulet which can repel the Dark Spirits and protect the village of Sleepy Hollow. By rejecting the quest, she would be letting her resentment for the town that hated Eric get the best of her as it would mean almost certain destruction for Sleepy Hollow. In accepting the quest, she would be letting go of her anger, honoring her

father's love of the town, and venturing into the unknown. Xiaofan initially refuses the call to action and rejects The Horseman's plea for help.

Crossing the Threshold

After learning that the Dark Spirits that threaten her town are the same spirits that killed her father, Xiaofan crosses the town line with The Headless Horseman in tow. She commits to the quest to find the amulet and leave her old life behind. She picks up her father's mission where he left off. She is also motivated at this point by her desire for revenge against the Dark Spirits.

Extraordinary World

Xiaofan navigates the new world of the quest. She succeeds at mini-goals, like hiding The Headless Horseman from her mother, recruiting her sister for their quest, and finding the witch her father approached for answers. The obstacles to her mini-goals are fairly easily overcome and retrieving the amulet seems doable. She learns more about magic through Mrs. Epps, the local witch, and is ushered into the new world of spells, spirits, and ancient artifacts. The stakes are not raised further until the Midpoint.

Meet the B Character

Xiaofan's B character is introduced near the beginning of Act 2. Her older sister, Jemma, discovers The Headless Horseman in Xiaofan's room and Xiaofan convinces her to join the quest. Jemma introduces tension: she threatens to reveal everything she's seen to their mother. With Xiaofan's help, she shifts from being an obstacle in the quest to a

teammate. The two girls challenge each other as Jemma's cynicism and practicality conflicts with Xiaofan's adventurous spirit and imagination. It is important to note though, that Jemma and Xiaofan's characters work together well because their differences balance each other out. After the initial panic Jemma's first reaction upon meeting The Headless Horseman is to call their mother for help. This shows that Jemma and Xiaofan have very different outlooks at this point. Those outlooks are challenged throughout the story and their characters evolve as they come to better understand each other.

Character Moment #1

Xiaofan allows The Headless Horseman to handle Eric's journal. Up until this moment, Xiaofan has been protective to a fault of her father's memory and has closed many people out of her life. Here, she makes the conscious decision to let go of the journal and trust someone else with one of her most prized possessions. This symbolically shows that she has begun to let go of her grief and let others into her life again. She never would have done this in Act 1, but it reveals that she has already begun her character arc as the quest and her interactions with Jemma and The Horseman have shaped her in a new way.

Midpoint

In bringing in Steve to help them find the amulet, Xiaofan takes a stand and decides to do things her way. Although they have been making progress, she shifts from from passive to active in her pursuit of the MacGuffin, in an effort to expedite the process

and exercise her own agency. While her actions are well-meaning, her decision to trust Steve is miscalculated and sets in motion the Downward Spiral. By bringing Steve into their circle, she unknowingly hands her intel and strategy to the enemy. Everything that happens after this is a direct result of her action at the midpoint and the tough consequences culminate in her emotional low-point at the Brick Wall.

Downward Spiral

Steve tears up Xiaofan's map and informs Lily of their dangerous ventures. Steve gains the upper hand as things go from bad to worse for Xiaofan's team: Lily kicks The Headless Horseman out, the girls are grounded, and Lily destroys Eric's old files. Odd phenomena crop up around town, earthquakes, unsettled neighborhood dogs, and death overcoming the town's flora, all as Steve's power from dark magic grows. Every attempt Xiaofan makes to close in on the MacGuffin effectively fails and this is only worsened by her discovery that Steve was responsible for Eric's death. The girls flee school as Steve pursues them but they cannot access Eric's office at the museum. Her chances of finding the amulet seem slim, but she and the audience hold out hope for a last second breakthrough.

Character Moment #2

After getting into Eric's work office and finding the amulet, Steve confronts them. Xiaofan charges at him with the amulet in hand. She never would have done this in Act 2A, but her journey has changed her. She has embraced the world of magic fully and

wields the amulet as a weapon. Her inner journey is far from complete. She is still full of anger and grief, and her actions directly result in the Brick Wall.

Brick Wall

In her attempt to attack Steve, Xiaofan loses the amulet and Jemma, Mrs. Epps, and The Headless Horseman, are all injured. Trapped in Eric's office, the quest is doomed. Richard Walter dubs this moment "The Big Gloom" "when all seems forever and irretrievably lost" (Walter 76). In Hal Ackerman's words the Brick Wall is "the worst thing that happens to the protagonist short of death" (Ackerman 102). The amulet has never been so far out of reach for Xiaofan. She experiences a moment of self-realization, and sees that her anger and actions brought them to this point. Jemma encourages Xiaofan to continue the quest. While most screenplays present the supporting character's pep-talk as a defining moment that leads the protagonist to recommit to the quest, I felt there was another character Xiaofan needed to hear from even more. When Eric's spirit appears to her he and assures Xiaofan that the love and strength within her give her the power she needs to defeat Steve and the Dark Spirits. This moment allows her to push through the Brick Wall and recommit to the quest with a new sense of confidence and direction. After realizing that the charm bracelet her father gave her contains a piece of the amulet gem, she sets out to use its magic to save Sleepy Hollow.

The Plan

Xiaofan rallies the neighborhood kids for a strategy meeting. She forms a plan to make one last run for the amulet and embraces the community around her to ask for their

help. She finds her friends and neighbors want to help, but it is a bit more difficult to rally some of the adults from town. She lets herself be vulnerable as she makes an announcement to the townspeople and stands her ground when others doubt her story is true. She even manages to convince the head of the police department that the oncoming ghost threat is real and their forces yet again grow.

The Plan Is Working

As some of the townspeople pile into their cars and gather to meet Xiaofan and her team at the cemetery, her plan seems to be working. It appears they might have a chance after all if they rally together. The town is falling apart from the supernatural pressure that continues to build. The earthquakes and tremors have grown to the point that they crack pavement and the town's infrastructure is damaged. She and The Headless Horseman stick to the plan and ride for the cemetery on horseback, avoiding the traffic and damaged roads.

The Plan Is Failing

When they arrive at the cemetery they find the rift between Sleepy Hollow and the spirit world open. Malevolent spirits flood out into the cemetery to attack the Sleepy Hollow community army. Xiaofan sees Steve holding the Groundskeeper, Mr. Sykes, captive. The protagonist's chances of obtaining the MacGuffin are at an all-time low, but she pushes onward.

Climax

In the moment the entire screenplay has been leading up to, Xiaofan faces off against Steve. Both the protagonist and antagonist are so close to their goal. Xiaofan does not waver and she summons her strength to use the amulet gem charm on her bracelet to destroy the amulet Steve wields and send the evil spirits back through the rift. She chooses love and forgiveness over the anger and resentment that Steve fights with. Good overcomes evil and Xiaofan's quest is now completed.

Resolution

Love and good have won out and a new ordinary world is established as a new equilibrium for the town of Sleepy Hollow. Xiaofan says her goodbyes to Eric's spirit and to The Headless Horseman as they both return to the spirit world and the rift between their worlds closes. The town celebrates their safety and months later Xiaofan starts her own journal to remember her magical adventures and her father. She joins a community tea party at Mr. Sykes's house and bonds with her friends and family. With the satisfaction of all that the Opening Image promised, the story concludes.

What I Have Learned

The experience of writing this screenplay has taught me so much and I will take the lessons I learned about writing and storytelling with me to future drafts of this script and to entirely different stories. One of the things that made the biggest difference was having others read my work critically. I had been living with this story in my head for so long that different versions blurred together and I was blind to continuity errors, loose

ends, and payed off story moments that were never set up. With the fresh eyes and feedback of others I was better able to identify why certain sections weren't working and make the necessary corrections.

Other helpful tactics for spotting problem areas include reading your own work out loud and having peer table reads which both gave me greater perspective and clarity on how to condense and clarify scenes to ramp up the tension and get readers more invested. I've learned new techniques through reading about how other screenwriters approach building stories and with what I learned about my own writing process and style I can improve upon my process to work more efficiently and better recognize weak points in my writing.

A concept I really found appealing was the use of index cards in plotting out the structure of the story. It can help me visually understand how my story is set up and what key features need to be worked out before rushing into writing a full draft. I think in the future, that process will save me a lot of time rewriting as it would help me do even more work upfront in testing the sturdiness of the framework I'm building.

Working on this screenplay for years has been creatively draining. Never before have I considered the option of just walking away from a project, taking a break to work on other stories and gain distance and new experience that could be used to my advantage when returning to work on this one. I think as I write more and more drafts of this script I will utilize that strategy to come back to the story with fresh eyes.

Another valuable source of new perspective is reading. Whether it is analyzing a great screenplay or reading another writer's ideas on the craft, taking in information and examples, patterns, and different perspectives is the first step to synthesizing your own

screenplay. It adds to your toolkit as a writer and widens your view of the world which makes it easier to connect with your characters and shape characters that an audience can connect to.

After struggling with the structure of this screenplay for months, I made a breakthrough. I let the story go where it wanted to go. I had been trying to force it to be something it wasn't: the story I thought I should tell. By letting your mind explore various options in every moment of writing you open yourself up to failure but it is also the only way to improve and welcome in amazing ideas, revisions, and additions.

There are a great many things in this screenplay that I would like to revise in future drafts. I want to focus in on giving each character a unique voice as I feel at times in the script that Xiaofan and Jemma's voices especially started blending together. It was difficult to balance Xiaofan's story while also addressing the motivations of other characters like Steve and Lily. Since Lily really is on Xiaofan's side I'd like to clarify her motivations more and why she does not want her daughters mixed up in the world of magic. I'd also like to find a better way to communicate Steve's past with Eric and in that Steve was like a research partner to Eric but turned on him to use the information they had against the town for labeling them pariah.

Apart from all the things I'd like to change in this script, one of the biggest things I learned is that no matter how much you think the story you are telling is outside yourself, it is not. I certainly did not intend for Xiaofan's experience grieving for her father to resonate with my experience grieving the loss of my mother, but it did so naturally. Stories tap into the writer-- and that is okay. It doesn't mean every story you write is going to be an autobiography. I had internalized a key pillar of creative writing:

“Write what you know”. If you create with an honest heart and open mind, that truth in you will infuse your work with the kind of empathy and humanity that makes stories feel universal.

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INT MUSEUM OFFICE NIGHT

A framed painting of a colonial town hangs on the wall behind a desk. ERIC (45) searches through papers, books, and sticky note memos by the light of a desk lamp.

ERIC

Come on. Has to be here somewhere.
It has to. Stupid little--Ahah!

Eric uncovers his leather journal, opened to a sketch of an amulet.

He picks up a crudely-made emerald charm from beside his desk lamp. He examines the jagged gem then pulls a gold charm bracelet from his pocket and SNAPS the charm onto it.

He slips his journal and an audio recorder into a packing envelope labeled 'Xiaofan'. Eric closes his hand around the bracelet then drops it in too and stores the envelope in the desk drawer.

His phone on the desk BUZZES. A photo of MRS. EPPS (80) with a cat in her arms pops up on his phone with the caller ID.

Eric hits decline then turns and pulls the painting from the wall to reveal a safe.

Eric enters the passcode and the safe POPS open. He pulls out a satchel and hugs it to his chest.

INT CAR NIGHT

Eric coasts down the road.

A family photo of Eric, his wife, and two daughters sits on the dash. He switches the radio on and the ANNOUNCER'S voice blares.

ANNOUNCER

It's midnight and you know what that means. We're continuing our Halloween Spooktacular Countdown with your number two track. Your number one track is coming right up. So kick back, let loose, and have a ghoulish time.

The song kicks off and Eric SINGS, loud and out of tune.

The first verse ends and STATIC cuts across the music.

ERIC
Come on, not again.

Eric SLAPS the radio, switches stations, then switches back.
A deep MOAN echoes through the static, joined by two others.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Wha--No, can't be. It's too soon.

Eric looks up to the road where three DARK SPIRITS materialize in his path.

SCREECH. The brakes squeal and Eric veers off the road.

The car flips over and CRASHES into the town sign.

Eric yanks at the seatbelt that binds him in the wreckage. He strains, fingers outstretched to reach his satchel.

Down the road, a MYSTERY MAN (42) approaches from a parked car.

ANNOUNCER
Now the moment you've all been
waiting for, here's your number one
track.

Upbeat music plays clearer than ever and the Mystery Man peers into the car.

The car lies empty, the passenger side door open.

EXT FOREST

Eric's run slows to a walk. He stumbles and grips the satchel tighter.

ERIC
Where are you? Which way to the--

Eric winces and applies pressure to the cut on his forehead.

He ducks behind a tree and pulls out his phone.

The call tone RINGS until he reaches the voicemail message of LILY (45).

LILY (V.O.)
Hello, you've reached Lily. Can't
come to the phone right now, but
leave a message and I'll call back.
(MORE)

LILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If this is a medical emergency
don't hesitate to reach out to
Irving Memorial and I'll follow up
as soon as I can. Take care.

The line BEEPS a tone at Eric and he leaves a message.

ERIC
Hey honey. Guess you and the girls
had a good time trick-or-treating.
I'm running late, but I should be
back in time for breakfast. So,
save me a seat.

The low MOANS echo in the distance and Eric ends the call. He pulls his satchel into his coat and crawls under a bush.

The moans grow LOUDER. Eric shuts his eyes until they fade.

FOOTSTEPS approach, stop in front of him, then pass. The forest falls SILENT until Eric's phone RINGS and the caller ID pops up on the screen: STEVE.

Wind sweeps leaves into the air and the moans resume.

Eric fumbles his phone. He hits 'decline' and bolts through the trees to...

EXT CLIFFSIDE

Eric stops at the edge of the cliff and looks down to the river. It ROARS, churns, and CRASHES onto the rocks.

When he turns around a Dark Spirit reaches into his chest.

Eric CRIES out. He pulls a green gem amulet from his satchel and raises it.

With a surge of green light the amulet illuminates. A chip in the gem forms a hot spot of white light.

The Dark Spirits SHRIEK and their leader swats at Eric's hand. The amulet flies from Eric's hand and skids to a stop at the edge of the cliff.

The Dark Spirits fly back to the trees and Eric collapses.

He drags himself over to the amulet. His fingers stretch out, but knock the amulet over the cliff's edge.

The amulet falls toward the rapids and vanishes in mid-air.

Eric exhales one last time and his body falls still.

The Mystery Man stands over Eric's body. His hands glow dark purple.

A talkie on the Mystery Man's shoulder GRUMBLES and the voice of a POLICE DISPATCHER rings through.

POLICE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Come in. Officer, what's your status? We've got reports of a car wreck, possible 10-55. Please respond.

The static grumbles again. The Mystery Man switches the talkie off and reaches for the satchel next to Eric's body.

He grabs the satchel and pulls out a few papers and a half-eaten granola bar. The Mystery Man paces and kicks up dirt in frustration. The number one track echoes on in the distance.

EXT ROADSIDE

The song comes to the last chorus and the Mystery Man carries the satchel to his parked car.

Smoke billows up from the wreckage of Eric's vehicle, past a sign that reads:

WELCOME TO THE VILLAGE OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

INT CLASSROOM DAY

In the back corner of the room sits XIAOFAN (14), her head buried in a sketchbook. Students around her hang up Halloween decorations and throw candy at one another.

SUPER: Present Day

MARY (14) supervises the festivities.

A CLASSMATE (14) leans over Xiaofan's desk and hangs streamers over the window.

Xiaofan eyes the clock on the wall: 11:59. The hands tick up to 12:00 where they stick. She furrows her eyebrows and returns to her drawing as her classmate knocks into her hand.

Xiaofan's drawing is left with a streak across the middle. The classmate looks down at it and snickers.

CLASSMATE

My bad.

Xiaofan scoffs as the classmate walks away.

Mary steps up onto a desk in the middle of the room and the students shift their attention to her.

MARY

I have an announcement, everybody.
My annual Halloween party is Friday
at seven o'clock sharp.

Mary hands out invitations which make their way around.

MARY (CONT'D)

And costumes are mandatory. No
costume, no costume party.

A wave of excitement builds among the students. Mary makes eye contact with Xiaofan and her smile sinks into a grimace.

The remaining invitations come to rest on a desk ahead of Xiaofan.

She checks for the all-clear, slips out of her desk, and reaches for the last invitation.

Mary flies in and snatches it away.

MARY (CONT'D)

Not. So. Fast.

Students circle at this first sign of trouble.

MARY (CONT'D)

You can't be serious. Crazy runs in
your family. You getting an
invitation would be like the
beginning to a slasher film.

Xiaofan opens her mouth and turns to her classmates.

XIAOFAN

I thought everybody--

Mary TEARS the invitation in half.

MARY

I'm sorry, you were saying?

The class JEERS and snickers at Xiaofan.

MARY (CONT'D)

I don't think you understand. You don't get an invite because nobody wants you there.

The class grows rowdier.

The bell RINGS and the students drift to their seats.

Xiaofan turns her back to Mary.

MARY (CONT'D)

Hey don't ignore me, freak.

Mary lunges. She rips the charm bracelet off Xiaofan's wrist and holds it up.

XIAOFAN

Don't. That was from my dad, give it back.

Mary appraises the bracelet and Xiaofan grabs for it.

MARY

A gift from your dead, psycho dad.

Mary stalks toward Xiaofan, bracelet in hand.

MARY (CONT'D)

So sad, that he didn't have better taste.

SCRRR. Three desks collide in front of Mary and stop her in her tracks.

MARY (CONT'D)

What did you--

XIAOFAN

I didn't do anything.

MARY

Take your stupid bracelet, freak. Stay away from me.

Mary tosses the bracelet aside and Xiaofan scrambles to the floor.

She searches only to find the bracelet back on her wrist.

XIAOFAN

Huh?

MARY
 (to Classmate)
 It's not exactly a surprise. That
 level of crazy must be hereditary.

MRS. BROOKES (55) strides into the room and faces the board.
 Xiaofan huffs and pushes herself up from the floor.

MRS. BROOKES
 Okay, take a seat. Settle down.

Mrs. Brookes turns to the class right as Xiaofan decks Mary
 in the face.

INT SCHOOL HALLWAY DAY

A swarm of teens and pre-teens bustles through the hallway.
 Lockers SLAM, feet SHUFFLE, and voices compete to be heard.

Xiaofan sits in a chair outside an office door. She folds her
 legs up into her chest as students tussle past her.

The crowd disperses and Xiaofan puts her feet back down. She
 plays with her bracelet then stops.

She turns to the office door and eases it open a hair. The
 voices of her mother, Lily, and PRINCIPAL NEWBORN (50) leak
 into the hall.

LILY (O.S.)
 She's not violent.

PRINCIPAL NEWBORN (O.S.)
 Your daughter has acted out on
 numerous occasions.

Down the hall, the door to the Nurse's Office SWINGS OPEN.
 Xiaofan halts reconnaissance, but holds on to the door knob.

Mary stomps out into the hall followed by her HELICOPTER MOM
 (50).

MARY
 (to her mother)
 Told you she's crazy. Great, now
 the cops show up.

STEVE (42), a uniformed police officer, clears his throat
 behind Xiaofan. He admonishes her with a harsh gaze and
 enters the office.

STEVE
Sorry I'm late.

PRINCIPAL NEWBORN (O.S.)
And you are--

STEVE (O.S.)
The kid's godfather.

The door shuts but Xiaofan still hears faint voices.

She spots a vent near the ceiling and drags a chair under it.
She stands on the chair, on her toes to see inside.

PRINCIPAL NEWBORN
I'm obligated to consider
suspension.

Steve clenches his fists.

STEVE
She needs to learn her lesson, but
you can't--

POP. Principal Newborn's desk lamp bursts and sends glass
everywhere.

PRINCIPAL NEWBORN
What in the world?

Principal Newborn uses a file folder to push the broken glass
into a trash bin.

Xiaofan's legs shake and she shifts one leg off to the side.

TING. Her charm bracelet catches in the vent grates. She
twists the bracelet and tugs until she pulls it free.

PRINCIPAL NEWBORN (CONT'D)
I do have a connection over at the
cemetery.

Xiaofan's leg gives out and her knee SLAMS into the wall.

Through the vent, Steve stares straight at her.

STEVE
(to Principal Newborn)
Do you mind?

Steve turns on the fan under the vent. Its ROAR masks their
words. Xiaofan huffs and drops back into her chair.

She stares at the hallway clock, its hands stuck at 12:00.

Moments later, Steve and Lily exit the office. Lily strides past Xiaofan without a glance. Steve sets a hand on Xiaofan's shoulder and kneels down.

XIAOFAN
Guess it's pretty bad.

STEVE
Kid, what you did was wrong.

Xiaofan fiddles with her bracelet.

XIAOFAN
But she said my dad--

STEVE
A lot of people say a lot of things about your dad. I don't like it either, but that doesn't mean you can start throwing punches.

XIAOFAN
Jemma was right. I'm going to juvie.

STEVE
No, not today anyway. Community service at the cemetery. I tried for something better, but Principal Newborn insisted. Promise me no more fighting. Let this go.

Xiaofan is silent.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Good. But from what I heard you had pretty good form.

Steve smirks and pushes her down the hall.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Now beat it, before I buy you boxing lessons.

Xiaofan sprints off after Lily.

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

Xiaofan sits on the floor at the table, a math textbook open in front of her. She writes down numbers one at a time then consults the textbook. She scratches the numbers out.

The BARKS of neighborhood dogs echo in the distance. On the couch, JEMMA (17) reads a magazine and POPS her gum.

XIAOFAN

Stop. I can't hear myself think.

JEMMA

Living room's shared space. Get over it.

INT KITCHEN

Lily puts away dishes at the sink.

XIAOFAN (O.S.)

This is cruel and unusual punishment.

LILY

Consider this a makeup lesson for the time you missed punching classmates.

Lily turns the sink faucet on.

XIAOFAN (O.S.)

Only one classmate.

LILY

One too many. Now work.

The tap runs then the stream of water turns brown.

LILY (CONT'D)

Really?

Lily shuts the faucet off and crosses to the hall.

INT LIVING ROOM

Xiaofan continues her homework while Lily opens the door to Eric's home office.

Papers, boxes, and bags litter the floor in piles. Lily drags a trash bag into the hall next to four boxes.

LILY

Jem, carry these to the car. I need to dump them before work.

JEMMA

Have the juvenile delinquent do it.

Lily says nothing.

JEMMA (CONT'D)
Fine, I'll get my shoes.

Jemma tosses her magazine at Xiaofan and runs off.

LILY
Car keys.

Lily searches the kitchen then goes to her bedroom.

Xiaofan scurries to the packed boxes and opens one. It is crammed full of kid's drawings and folders. Her eyes land on an opened packing envelope with her name on it.

Lily rushes back into the room and shuts the box.

XIAOFAN
You're getting rid of his stuff.

LILY
We'll talk about this later.

Lily steers Xiaofan back to her math and disappears into the office.

XIAOFAN
No we won't. You never wanna talk.

Xiaofan slides the boxes back into the office one by one.

Lily carries a fish tank out into the hall and Xiaofan latches onto it. Water sloshes to the rim.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Not Blue's home.

LILY
Blue is gone. We don't need the tank.

XIAOFAN
But, what if we get another fish?

LILY
No more fish.

They tug the tank back and forth. The water sloshes higher.

XIAOFAN
Blue belonged to Daddy. You can't get rid of it unless Daddy says so.

LILY
It's not staying in my house. That
is final.

Xiaofan's hands slip off the tank and water dumps onto Lily.

XIAOFAN
Mommy, I--

LILY
Don't. Go to your room.

Lily shoves the trash bag back into the office, pulls out her keys, and locks the office door.

INT BEDROOM

Xiaofan peers out into the living room from her bedroom.

LILY
Now I'll be late. And the carpet.

Jemma brings Lily a towel and a dry pair of scrubs.

LILY (CONT'D)
Thank you. Make sure your sister
eats and keep her out of trouble.

Lily rushes out of the house and Xiaofan shuts her door.

EXT CEMETERY DAY

Xiaofan pulls at the chained cemetery gates. They don't budge. She slips between them, pulls her bag through, and holds on to her school community service form.

XIAOFAN
Hello. Anybody. I need someone to
sign this paper for me.

The cemetery is SILENT except for insects and crows.

A GUST of wind tears the form out of her hand and Xiaofan chases after it.

She catches up to it but trips over a headstone. She picks up the paper and finds that underneath it insects and worms pour out of the ground. Xiaofan recoils.

A crow CACKLES and a shadowy figure passes by in the trees.

Xiaofan freezes up and turns around. A man in a Halloween mask, MR. SYKES (72), wields a yard rake. Xiaofan lets out a SCREAM. Mr. Sykes doubles over in LAUGHTER and removes the mask.

MR. SYKES
You must be the delinquent!

XIAOFAN
I'm not a delinquent.

MR. SYKES
That's exactly what a delinquent would say. You are late. Mr. Sykes, I'm the Groundskeeper here.

He shakes Xiaofan's hand a little too long.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)
Don't suppose you have a name.
That's alright, I'll figure it out eventually.

Xiaofan holds her school form out to him.

XIAOFAN
I have to get your signature on this.

MR. SYKES
Nope. Not until the work is done.

Mr. Sykes slaps his rake into her hand.

XIAOFAN
The whole yard?

MR. SYKES
No, not the Van Ankeren plot. Too many reported sightings. Can't have another kid fainting on me. No sightings here though. Suppose he knows this is my spot.

XIAOFAN
I'll start here.

MR. SYKES
You should start at the Warners. Work your way around to the Huffmans, next to the Van Ankerens. Best do it quick before the sun goes down and they really come out.

XIAOFAN

The ghosts?

MR. SYKES

The mosquitoes. Well, I'll turn my hearing aid way up. Holler if you need me.

Mr. Sykes hobbles off to his cottage in the back of the yard.

EXT CEMETERY EVENING

Storm clouds fill the dark sky. Xiaofan scoops up leaves and shoves them in a full trash bag.

With each step she gets closer to the mausoleum. She reaches a dead zone around it where the grass is yellowed and dry.

Thunder RUMBLES and she drags the bag to the next pile of leaves.

It snags on a twig and she pulls at the bag. The plastic tears and leaves spill everywhere.

XIAOFAN

Oh, come on.

She bends over and scoops leaves back into the torn bag.

A blue light glows from behind the mausoleum then sputters out.

Xiaofan backs away until CRAAACK. A branch snaps behind her.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Sykes? This isn't funny.

A shadow passes through the trees and Xiaofan drops the bag.

CACAAAW. A crow cackles and Xiaofan dashes for cover inside...

INT MAUSOLEUM

Xiaofan rushes inside and eases the door closed. Only a sliver of light is let in.

She backs away from the door. Behind her, a dark figure with no head mimics her movements until it reaches the back wall.

BUMP. Xiaofan backs into the figure and COUGHS on the resultant cloud of dust and dirt.

She turns around to the figure and is met by the Headless HORSEMAN, who greets her with a wave.

Xiaofan SHRIEKS and bolts out of the mausoleum.

EXT CEMETERY

Xiaofan rounds the corner of the mausoleum and collides with another figure, Mr. Sykes.

He grabs her arm and raises his flashlight to her face.

MR. SYKES

Well, someone seems to have worked
themselves into a fright. I came to
let you go for the night.

Xiaofan escapes his grasp and points to the mausoleum.

XIAOFAN

But he's in there. And I saw--He--
And then I--No head.

The Horseman sneaks out of the mausoleum and into the foliage.

Xiaofan and Mr. Sykes continue to talk, unaware.

MR. SYKES

Suppose I only have myself to
blame, trying the old scared-
straight tactics. No need to worry.
Nobody in there that's still
drawing breath.

Rain sprinkles and grows heavier. The wind picks up.

XIAOFAN

I saw him. I know I did.

MR. SYKES

Say, you've spent a good bit of
time out here in the elements. And
ghost or no ghost, this storm is
fixing to get a lot worse. Let's
get you inside.

Mr. Sykes picks her backpack up and leads her to...

INT SYKES'S COTTAGE NIGHT

Xiaofan sits at a table, a towel wrapped over her shoulders.

The wind HOWLS and the storm RAGES on outside.

A kettle WHISTLES from the kitchen.

MR. SYKES

Sorry if it's a bit drafty in here.
This place has its quirks, but it's
mine. Or at least I should hope so
after the mortgage I paid off.

Mr. Sykes sets down a tray of baked goods and pours her tea.
He takes notice of the rotted flowers on the table.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

I don't get it. I watered these
yesterday.

Mr. Sykes sits down. He beckons for her to drink her tea.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Go on. It's great for the nerves.
Why don't you tell me about this
thing you think you saw.

Xiaofan wraps her hands around the tea cup, but says nothing.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Talking about things that scare you
really does help. Helps me a lot.

Tree branches SCRATCH the windows and lightning flashes.

BOOM, thunder BELLOWS. The Horseman appears in the window and
Xiaofan shoots up from her chair.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

The wind's really throwing a fit.

XIAOFAN

I need to get home.

MR. SYKES

Home will wait. Can't have you out
in a storm. Your parents would have
a fit, I imagine.

He motions for her to sit and piles cookies onto her plate.

She pulls the towel tighter around herself and fixes her eyes
on The Horseman.

XIAOFAN

It's okay. My mom, she wouldn't
care.

MR. SYKES

Oh. I see.

Mr. Sykes jumps up and startles Xiaofan.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

My hydrangeas.

The Horseman perks up as Mr. Sykes shuffles to the door.

XIAOFAN

No!

MR. SYKES

I'll only be a second.

Xiaofan lets her tea cup drop to the floor and it SHATTERS.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Oh, shoot.

He scoops up the china shards with a kitchen rag.

The Horseman TAPS on the window and points to the door.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

You say something?

Xiaofan shakes her head no.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

You've gone pale. Sit, sit, sit.

Mr. Sykes parks her on the couch and sets to work in the kitchen.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

They can be scary, but storms do have a bright side. Plants grow, rivers fill, animals drink. They aren't so bad.

The downpour lets up. Mr. Sykes looks out the window.

The Horseman is gone.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Now, let's see about my hydrangeas.

Xiaofan grabs her bag and makes for the door.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Feeling better, I see. Go rest up. Oh, almost forgot.

Mr. Sykes grabs a pen from his pocket and CLICKS it. Xiaofan stares at him with a blank look until he mimes a signature.

She pats her pockets, finds the form in her jacket, and hands it to him.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Try not to worry about what you saw. It's dark, you're tired.

Xiaofan examines her hands then her jacket, coated with dust.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Our eyes have a way of playing tricks on us.

She wipes her hands off on her pants and takes the signed form from Mr. Sykes.

XIAOFAN

Yeah, I'm sure it was nothing.

INT MAUSOLEUM DAY

Xiaofan sits on the floor and sketches The Horseman. She pauses, CRUMPLES up the paper, and tosses it onto a pile of crumpled sketches.

With a faint KNOCK, the Horseman arrives.

Xiaofan scrambles to her feet then waves.

XIAOFAN

Hi. I thought you might show up here again. Sorry I screamed at you. I've never met anyone... without a head before.

He sits in front of her, crosses his legs, folds his hands in his lap, and ever so slightly rocks back and forth.

Xiaofan lowers herself to the floor. She returns to her sketchbook and sneaks glances at The Horseman.

On a new page she scribbles numbers 1-9, A-Z, 'Yes' and 'No'.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

You clearly want something, so we're gonna to play a game. I'm gonna start a sentence and you spell out your answer.

She offers him a pencil. Instead, the Headless Horseman crouches over her box of colored pencils, takes each one into consideration, and selects the orange one.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Good. Let's start with an easy one:
Hello, my name is--

He holds the pencil over the paper. He pauses and his shoulders sag.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

It's okay. We'll start with something else. My favorite animal is--

The pencil hovers over H, but stops there.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Favorite color.

Nothing.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Stupid, stupid idea. You don't even have a head.

The Horseman picks up the sketchbook and flips through Xiaofan's drawings. Xiaofan grabs it and sets it back down.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Hey. That's private. I'm trying to help you here.

He picks up the colored pencil and points to H-E-L-P M-E.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Help, yes I'm helping you.

The Headless Horseman spells out 'close'.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Close? Close to what?

The Horseman spells out 'close' again.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, close.

He waves her off and sets the colored pencil down. He picks the sketchbook up and closes it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Oh, close.

The Horseman spells out 'rift', then 'evil'.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Help, close, rift. I don't know
 what that means.

He runs through it again, 'help', 'close', 'rift', 'evil'.

Xiaofan shakes her head.

The Headless Horseman SLAMS his fist down on the sketchbook
 and Xiaofan flinches.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, okay. I tried. Maybe
 someone else can help.

The Headless Horseman grabs her by the wrist. She pulls her
 arm away and checks her bracelet's condition.

The Headless Horseman picks up his colored pencil and waves
 it to get Xiaofan's attention.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Alright, alright. One more try.

He spells out one last message: H-E-L-P M-E

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Yeah, I got that one.

The Headless Horseman keeps going and spells out one last
 word: X-I-A-O-F-A-N.

Xiaofan freezes.

The Headless Horseman takes a photo out of his pocket. It is
 the same photo Eric had on his dash the night he died.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 How--

Xiaofan snatches up her sketchbook and hurries out the door.
 She closes it behind her and holds it shut.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Whatever you are, leave me alone.
 Next time I come here you're gonna
 to be gone, okay?

She turns and runs for the gates.

INT POLICE HEADQUARTERS DAY

On his computer, Steve scrolls through past town headlines.

An OFFICER passes by and Steve CLICKS open a case file.

The coast is clear. Steve closes out of the case file and returns to the headlines. He clicks on one:

NOV. 2, 2017 LOCAL MAN KILLED IN SUICIDE CAR CRASH

A photo of Eric's wrecked car sits below the headline.

OFFICER CARTER (40) leans into the cubicle and KNOCKS on the wall. Steve minimizes the browser window on his computer.

OFFICER CARTER
Chief needs to see you.

STEVE
Yeah. In a minute.

OFFICER CARTER
He said it's urgent.

STEVE
Alright.

Steve logs out and pushes back his chair. He crosses the floor and KNOCKS on the Chief's door, then opens it before any response can come.

INT CHIEF'S OFFICE

The CHIEF (60) stands at his desk, mug in hand, lost in a case file.

Steve clears his throat and The Chief closes the folder.

CHIEF
Here's the man I need to talk to.

The Chief motions for Steve to sit. He straightens the folders on his desk, the notepad, then the pencils.

Steve tenses in his seat and waits for the bomb to drop.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
Lieutenant, since the incident with your friend, I know you've tried a lot to make it up to the department.

STEVE

His name was Eric, sir. I've done everything you've asked, but I won't apologize for last year. I did my job.

CHIEF

Careful, Steve. When you let yourself get roped into your friend's ghost stories you did a lot of damage to the reputation of this police force. So let me remind you: You don't decide what's right for this town. Your job is to do right by me. Right now I need you for a special case.

Silence.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Thought you'd at least be a little happy. Been wanting something big for a while now.

The Chief holds the case file out. Steve walks to the door.

STEVE

I appreciate it, sir. I've got a lot on my mind.

CHIEF

That wasn't a request, Lieutenant.

Steve returns to Chief's desk and reaches for the file, but the Chief pulls it back.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

I need to know I can count on you. No more poking around in your friend's case. Suicide, open and shut. As difficult as it may be, this department needs you here.

Steve grabs the folder and the Chief surrenders it to him.

STEVE

Understood.

INT POLICE HEADQUARTERS MOMENTS LATER

Steve tosses his new case file onto his desk. He sits down, pauses, then unlocks a desk drawer.

Inside lie Eric's manuscripts, photos of the two men, and an old satchel--a shrine to his lost friend.

He digs to the bottom and pulls a paper out. He consults the paper then scribbles down a note.

Steve locks the desk drawer and pulls the note from his notepad.

Through his office blinds, the Chief watches Steve grab his coat and rush out of the precinct.

INT KITCHEN DAY

Lily tosses her purse and keys onto the counter where dirty dishes form a winding trail to the sink. A TV LAUGH TRACK and VOICES float in from the living room.

LILY

Xiaofan.

The TV grows LOUDER.

LILY (CONT'D)

I told you to wash these dishes.

Still no answer.

LILY (CONT'D)

Xiaofan. Kitchen, now.

Xiaofan stomps into the kitchen with the remote.

XIAOFAN

I don't have to listen to you. You don't listen to me.

LILY

Excuse me.

XIAOFAN

I saw Blue's tank in the trash outside.

LILY

Don't start this again.

Lily snatches the remote from Xiaofan's hand.

LILY (CONT'D)

I ask you to do something, you do it. Now clean this mess up.

XIAOFAN
If dad was here--

LILY
But he isn't, and I am. So I guess
you got stuck with the mean parent.

Xiaofan eyes Lily's keys on the counter, grabs them, and runs to...

INT HOME OFFICE

Xiaofan SLAMS the door in Lily's face. The knob turns, but Xiaofan locks it from inside.

LILY (O.S.)
Absolutely not. Open this door now.

Lily BANGS on the door.

Xiaofan slumps to the floor. In a box beside her, waits a packing envelope labeled 'XIAOFAN'. She empties the contents onto the floor: a leather journal and an audio recorder.

LILY (CONT'D)
You have until the count of five,
or no TV for a month. One. Two.

JEMMA (O.S.)
If we end up with leftovers for
dinner again it's on you.

LILY (O.S.)
Three. Four. Five. That's it. I'm
getting the spare key.

Xiaofan scrambles to barricade the door with furniture: a bookcase, a round table, chairs. She plops back on the floor and hits play on the recorder.

ERIC (V.O.)
It is 2:52 AM on October 13th. This
audio tape and any photos from
tonight will go into the records.

She flips through a folder titled Oct. 13, 2017.

ERIC (V.O.)
As we suspected, more spirits have
been crossing. The rift must be
close.

The door CLICKS as Lily unlocks it and pushes in. Xiaofan keeps her back against the barricade, but it budes.

The first photo in the folder shows a blurred light in the dark. The next has two blurs. In the third, a figure with no head stands in a clearing.

ERIC (V.O.)
Our old friend showed up again.
Doesn't stay very long, but I see
him a couple times every October.

LILY (O.S.)
When I get in there your punishment
will make community service look
like an amusement park.

Xiaofan tears through folder after folder of notes. She lands on a photo of three ghosts, shadowy rather than bright.

ERIC (V.O.)
Three new ones showed up the other
night. Can't figure out what to
make of them. They seem different,
angrier. Maybe I'm going crazy.

The door cracks open and pushes against the barricade. The barricade SCREECHES in protest.

Lily gets a foot through the door and Xiaofan puts all of her weight into it as she leafs through the journal:

DEAR XIAOFAN,

Lily shoves the door harder and gets an arm through.

Xiaofan flips to the next page:

DEAREST JEMMA,

Lily knocks a chair away from the barricade.

ERIC (V.O.)
We've been trying to figure this
out for so long. I'm ready for it
to be over.

The recorder CLICKS and goes silent.

LILY
Don't make me tell Steve about
this.

Xiaofan holds Eric's journal open to the last page:

OCT. 30, 2017 NEVER FORGET THAT I LOVE YOU.

Xiaofan gives the door one last shove, scoops up the photos, and ducks out the office window.

Lily forces her way into the room in time to watch Xiaofan's escape.

EXT FOREST NIGHT

Xiaofan and The Horseman sit on tree stumps. Her flashlight flickers and she hits it a few times, then hands it to The Horseman. Xiaofan opens Eric's folder, flips a paper over and writes 'yes' and 'no' on the back.

XIAOFAN

I know you didn't like this the first time, but it's really important.

The Horseman reaches for the fireflies that float around him.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Hey. Over here, buddy.

She hands him the orange colored pencil and he crosses his arms over his chest.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Please, a few more and we'll stop. I need to understand.

He hesitates and takes the pencil.

Xiaofan slides a photo of Eric to him.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

You knew this man, my dad.

The Horseman drags his pencil to hover over 'yes'.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

And you know what happened to him.

'Yes'.

She pulls out Eric's photo of the Horseman.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

This, this is you.

'Yes' again. She fans out several ghost photos.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

And these ghosts can somehow get
from their world to this world
through a 'rift'.

'Yes'. Xiaofan leans closer.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

So when you said 'close rift', you
meant like, stop spirits from
crossing over. You can do that? Is
that what my Dad tried to--

The Horseman points to Eric's journal in Xiaofan's lap.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

This is how you stop ghosts?

The Horseman waves his hands 'no' and motions for Xiaofan to
open the journal. She sets it down on a tree stump and opens
it. The Horseman motions for her to flip the pages.

Xiaofan turns page after page until The Horseman holds up a
hand for her to stop. The journal lies open to a sketch of a
green gem amulet.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Woah. This necklace thing, this can
close the rift?

The Horseman holds up one finger and mimes opening a book.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Close it or open it. So it works
both ways.

The Horseman waves a hand to say 'more or less'. He points to
Eric's notes below the sketch, the last line circled.

AMULET CONTAINS POWERFUL LIGHT MAGIC

CAN CLOSE RIFT PERMANENTLY

CAN KEEP RIFT OPEN PAST DAYBREAK (LET SPIRITS THROUGH)

FIND WITCH?

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

If the necklace is missing then
it's safe.

The Horseman cups his hands and places them where his eyes
would be.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Binoculars. Looking, sorry.
 Looking. Someone else is looking
 for it.

The Horseman gives her a thumbs up.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 But you don't know who is it?

The Horseman shrugs.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 I'm guessing this other person
 isn't planning on closing the rift.
 Did my dad ever figure out--

The Horseman reaches for the photo of the Dark Spirits.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 This one? These are the spirits you
 have to stop?

He takes the photo. A chill falls over the forest. Ice
 crystals form on tree trunks and fallen leaves. The Horseman
 trembles and she chokes out one last question.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Those spirits. They're the ones
 that killed my dad.

The Headless Horseman points to the Yes/No paper: 'Yes'.

EXT ROADSIDE NIGHT

Xiaofan pokes her head out of the trees and checks the road.

XIAOFAN
 This had better work.

She ducks back into the foliage and regroupes with The
 Horseman.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 I can maybe get you inside his
 office for a minute, but only a
 minute.

The Headless Horseman taps his hands together in celebration.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Don't make me regret this.

She leads him out to the side of the road. Headlights approach and Xiaofan yanks him back into the trees. The lights fade and they venture out again.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 You have to be careful. People here don't like things that are different. So this has to be a stealth operation, starting now.

They move along the road and Xiaofan stops at the town sign. The town sign is enclosed in a circle of dead grass.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 This is where it happened.

The Horseman reaches to touch her shoulder, but holds back.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 They won't get away with what they did. I won't let them.

She charges across the town line and the Horseman stays put.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Come on, don't tell me you've got cold feet.

The Horseman lifts one foot up over the town line and steps to the other side.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 So far, so good. Remember: stealth mode.

Xiaofan treks ahead and The Horseman tip-toes after her.

INT HOUSE NIGHT

Xiaofan tip-toes past Lily in the kitchen, her footsteps covered by the DIN of dishes.

LILY
 I assume you have a reason for being out this late, alone.

Xiaofan freezes in place.

XIAOFAN
 I wasn't alone. I was with Mr. Sykes.

Lily abandons the dishes to reprimand Xiaofan.

LILY

Really. Because when I called him,
he said you left over an hour ago.

XIAOFAN

I... walked back with a friend. We
took the long way.

LILY

Then your friend can call the
hospital and tell them why I'm
late.

Lily picks up a laundry basket and carries it to...

INT HALLWAY

Jemma passes by in the opposite direction. Lily reaches
Xiaofan's door, then stops.

LILY

You know, I was so worried I almost
called Steve to find you. Twice.

XIAOFAN

I'm sorry. It won't happen again.

THUD. A soft clunk comes from Xiaofan's room.

Lily opens the door halfway.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Mom.

Lily whips around to face her.

Inside the bedroom, the Horseman has his hands to the floor
to break his fall while his legs dangle out the window.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I...should call Mr. Sykes. To tell
him I made it back okay.

LILY

5 minutes then straight to bed.

Lily opens the door further. Jemma approaches with a bowl of
popcorn. Xiaofan panics and swats the snack to the floor.

JEMMA

Hey, what the hell?

LILY
 (to Jemma)
 Language.

Xiaofan moves to slip by them, but Lily shifts her weight and stands in the middle of the doorway. The Horseman flails and shimmies in distress.

JEMMA
 But she--

LILY
 I don't want to hear it.

JEMMA
 Seriously, you're mad at me.

Xiaofan drops to the floor and pretends to clean up popcorn. She crawls to the door, eases it shut, then stands.

LILY
 (to Xiaofan)
 I don't know what has gotten into you, but it'd better be gone when I get back.

Xiaofan nods and Lily shoves the basket into her arms.

LILY (CONT'D)
 Apologize to your sister and clean this up.

Lily takes a step and SLIPS on a popcorn patch. She regains her composure and grabs her purse.

XIAOFAN
 Bye mom, see you tomorrow.

The front door CLICKS and Xiaofan turns to Jemma.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
 Oh, right. Jemma, I'm sorry.

JEMMA
 Save it, loser.

Jemma storms off.

Xiaofan ditches the laundry and rushes into...

INT BEDROOM

Xiaofan pulls The Horseman in through the window.

XIAOFAN

You good?

She brushes him off and COUGHS on the resultant cloud of dust. The Horseman flashes her a thumbs up. Xiaofan unrolls a sleeping bag and sets it on the closet floor.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, it's the best I can do right now. We'll work on a disguise tomorrow. That way you can leave the house with me.

The Horseman hunkers down in the closet. Xiaofan gets in bed and turns off the lamp.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Good night.

The Horseman lies there, stiff. Glow-in-the-dark star stickers cover the bedroom ceiling. He drags the sleeping bag out next to Xiaofan's bed and plops down again.

INT LIVING ROOM DAY

Xiaofan adds another stack to her pile of craft supply boxes.

Jemma enters and stops mid-step.

JEMMA

No way. I have friends coming in an hour.

Xiaofan unpacks each box and inventories her resources.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Hello. Earth to Xiaofan.

Xiaofan continues her task, unaffected.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You have your own room for this.

XIAOFAN

My room is currently occupied.

JEMMA

Well you can't be here, because this room is occupied.

Xiaofan wears a blank stare and HAMMERS at a block of clay.

Jemma carries a stack of boxes to Xiaofan's door.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Fine. You want something done you have to do it, yourself.

XIAOFAN

Jemma, wait!

Jemma steps into the room and DROPS the boxes. On the bed, The Horseman plays with a stuffed animal horse.

Jemma sways and falls to the floor. Xiaofan kneels over her.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Please don't be dead. Please don't be dead. How am I going to explain this to Mom?

The Horseman stands over them to assess the damage. Jemma's eyes flutter open. She sees The Horseman and inhales to scream. Xiaofan covers her mouth before she has the chance.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I can explain. I found him in the cemetery. He was dead but now he's not, sorta. He was all alone and he needed help so I brought him here. What part should I explain first? The no head part? That seems like a good place to start.

Jemma pushes Xiaofan away and stumbles toward the phone. Xiaofan launches over the couch and beats her to it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

He won't hurt you, promise. He's really nice.

Jemma grabs hold of the phone too and a grudge match ensues.

JEMMA

Right, and I'm sure mom would love having that thing in our house.

XIAOFAN

Mom doesn't need to know. What are you even going to say?

JEMMA

I'll think of something.

XIAOFAN

No!

Xiaofan bites Jemma's hand and wrestles the phone free. She holds it up to the edge of the counter.

JEMMA

You wouldn't.

Xiaofan brings the phone down and it CRACKS in half.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You're insane. You've officially lost it.

XIAOFAN

Give me five minutes. Five minutes to change your mind.

JEMMA

There is nothing you could possibly say to make me change my mind.

Xiaofan pauses.

XIAOFAN

He knew dad.

INT HALLWAY DAY

Xiaofan drags Jemma to the office door then turns to The Horseman.

XIAOFAN

Key please, Sir Key Guardian.

The Horseman pats his pockets, pulls out the key, and places it in her hand.

Xiaofan opens the door and drags Jemma toward it. Jemma pulls her arm free.

JEMMA

Nope. Not going to happen.

XIAOFAN

Come on. Mom's not here, she won't know. Enjoy a little adventure.

Xiaofan crosses the threshold into the office. The Horseman shrugs at Jemma like 'give it a shot', and they step into...

INT HOME OFFICE

Xiaofan leads Jemma to the desk. She spreads out Eric's journal, research papers, and photos.

XIAOFAN
See, look at all this.

Xiaofan hands Jemma the journal.

JEMMA
Some old diary is not going to
change my mind.

Jemma tosses it back on the desk.

XIAOFAN
Read the first page then.

Xiaofan opens it and directs Jemma to read. Jemma takes it, skims the first three pages, then closes it.

JEMMA
So he wrote about ghosts. That
means he's crazy like everyone
says. None of this is real.

Xiaofan points to a photo of the Horseman then to the real Horseman.

Jemma shoves the journal into Xiaofan's arms.

JEMMA (CONT'D)
It doesn't even matter. Dad's gone.
Hosting some walking Halloween
decoration won't bring him back.

Jemma opens the door and gets one foot out.

With a CLICK, Xiaofan starts the audio playback.

ERIC (V.O.)
Our old friend showed up again.
Doesn't stay very long, but I see
him a couple times every October.

Xiaofan hits a button and scrubs through to the end.

ERIC (V.O.)
We've been trying to figure this
out for so long. I'm ready for this
to be over.

Xiaofan stops the recording. She holds the journal open to the last page.

XIAOFAN

October thirtieth two thousand seventeen. 'Never forget that I love you.' We know how he died, but we don't know what he died for. Maybe we should trust him a little.

Jemma stands, arms crossed and taps her foot.

JEMMA

Fine, for answers. But Mom cannot find out about this and as soon as we figure out what Dad was after, Scarecrow here goes.

The Headless Horseman puts his hand to his chest, offended.

XIAOFAN

Fine. Deal.

INT BEDROOM MORNING

Xiaofan YAWNS and swings her legs over the side of the bed. Down at her feet the Horseman's sleeping bag lies empty.

She checks the closet, under her bed, outside the window.

Nothing.

She throws open her door and runs out into...

INT KITCHEN

Xiaofan stumbles into the room. Jemma and the Horseman are side by side at the stove.

The Horseman dumps a cup of baking mix into the bowl and it puffs into a cloud all over him. Jemma SNORTS in laughter.

JEMMA

No, no, leave it. It looks fine.

Jemma flips the pancake and adds it to a piled plate.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

If you want to stay here you have to be able to cook.

The Horseman grabs the pancake mix.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Nope. That's cheating. That is a secret family recipe from my...Aunt Jemima.

XIAOFAN

He can't be out here. Mom is home.

JEMMA

Relax, she got back even later than usual. She won't be up for hours. Besides, worrying is my job.

Jemma flicks pancake batter at Xiaofan and a war of flour and batter breaks out.

LILY (O.S.)

Girls.

Lily approaches from down the hall and Xiaofan shoves The Horseman into the pantry.

Lily kisses each girl on the head and looks to the stove.

LILY (CONT'D)

Mmm, pancakes. My favorite.

The girls stand frozen.

XIAOFAN

Mom, you're awake.

The pantry door creeps open and Xiaofan pushes it closed.

LILY

I couldn't sleep. Too much giggling going on out here.

Jemma looks down to their breakfast battlefield.

JEMMA

Sorry. We'll clean this up.

Lily sits at the table.

LILY

Alright. Let's have breakfast first.

Jemma and Xiaofan serve Lily, then themselves.

Xiaofan slips a paper plate of pancakes under the pantry door and takes her seat.

LILY (CONT'D)
Good to see you two haven't killed
each other yet this morning.

Xiaofan and Jemma meet eyes and GIGGLE.

Lily eyes them with suspicion and they dig in to their meal.

INT PANTRY

The Horseman sits on the floor in the dark.

He holds his plate of pancakes, but can't eat them. No head.

INT SCHOOL CAFETERIA DAY

Xiaofan and Jemma huddle at a table with Eric's files in
stacks.

JEMMA
We've been through them all.

Students at a nearby table stare and snicker.

XIAOFAN
Then we check again. My...friend
says Dad knew how to close the
rift. It has to be in here.

JEMMA
It isn't. Nothing even mentions a
rift.

Jemma organizes the papers.

The students at the next table watch and whisper. Xiaofan
glares at them and stands up, but Jemma pulls her back.

JEMMA (CONT'D)
We don't have time for you to have
another one of your bad days.

Xiaofan folds her arms across her chest, then her face lights
up.

XIAOFAN
Bad day, that's it.

Xiaofan pulls Eric's journal out of her backpack.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

We can't figure out what Dad was looking for. So, we should let him look for what he was looking for.

JEMMA

Yeah, cause that makes perfect sense.

Xiaofan flips to the last page and works her way backward.

XIAOFAN

Dad knew how to close the rift by the time he died. Figuring that out would have been a really good day for him.

Jemma slides a stack of folders in front of her and opens one.

JEMMA

So if we use his journal to find a day he was happy and excited--

XIAOFAN

We find when he figured it out. And we use that day's folder to see where he went, what he saw, who he talked to.

JEMMA

We follow him to it. That's brilliant.

Xiaofan grabs some folders and sets the journal between them. She jots down a note but her pen runs dry.

XIAOFAN

Keep going, I'll be back.

She gets up, turns around, and SMACKS into Mary.

Mary's lunch tray spills all over her clothes and Mary SHRIEKS.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, I didn't see you--

Xiaofan realizes who it is.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Actually, never mind.

MARY

You psycho. Physically assaulting me wasn't enough, now you have to ruin my wardrobe.

JEMMA

I think I found something.

XIAOFAN

(to Mary)

Guess I got distracted. Must've been those voices in my head you always talk about.

A few students around them LAUGH.

Mary charges at Xiaofan. SCRRR. Xiaofan's chair slides itself between them to block Mary.

The kids at the surrounding tables MURMUR, and Xiaofan steps back in shock.

Mary pushes the chair out of her way and empties her milk carton onto Eric's files and Xiaofan's backpack.

Jemma snatches up the journal before the milk reaches it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Stop!

Xiaofan shoves Mary away, but the damage is done.

The soaked papers drip milk off the table to the floor.

Jemma gives Xiaofan a 'don't do anything stupid' look.

Xiaofan ignores her and smears a slice of pie all over Mary.

Mary SCREAMS and throws her lunch at Xiaofan.

The cafeteria breaks out into a free-for-all WWE match. Food and drinks fly in every direction.

INT SCHOOL HALLWAY DAY

A group of five PRACTICAL JOKERS (14) sits outside the principal's office. They target each other with spit balls and wads of paper.

A few seats down the hall, sit Xiaofan and Jemma. Their hair and clothes drip soft drinks and smushed food.

Lily walks past them. If looks could kill.

She enters the principal's office.

JEMMA

So screwed.

XIAOFAN

Yeah, welcome to my world.

JEMMA

Oh, not me. I'm not going down for this. You couldn't let it go.

XIAOFAN

Hey, you were there. You were there and you didn't even say anything.

JEMMA

You should be thanking me. I saved dad's journal. I took a pie for you.

SILENCE.

XIAOFAN

Yeah, thanks for that. Don't suppose you managed to save any of Dad's files.

JEMMA

No.

Xiaofan rings her hair out into a trashcan.

Jemma pulls a USB drive out of her bag and holds it up.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

I saved all of them.

EXT ANTIQUE SHOP STOREFRONT DAY

Jemma and Xiaofan fight over Eric's journal in the middle of the sidewalk.

The Horseman turns his neck back and forth to test out the new paper-mache head that sits atop his shoulders.

Jemma pulls the journal away from Xiaofan.

JEMMA

And you're sure this is the woman Dad visited?

Xiaofan pulls the journal back.

XIAOFAN
How many Edith Epps do you know?

JEMMA
If we're not sure then we shouldn't
be out here advertising our house
guest.
(to The Horseman)
No offense.

He lifts his fake head up and shakes it side to side.

The girls shout over each other.

XIAOFAN
Dad came here. We can't know what
he knew if we don't scope it out.

JEMMA
We don't know her. She could have
led Dad the wrong way. She could
have worked against him. No, I
won't do it.

XIAOFAN
We won't talk to her. We'll have a
look around. If we see anything
weird we'll make a new plan. I have
to try something.

A store bell RINGS and the shop door swings open.

The doorway sits empty.

INT ANTIQUE SHOP

Xiaofan and Jemma step into the shop. Xiaofan walks along the
shelves and tinkers with tchotchkes. The Horseman trails
behind her.

Jemma observes the decor: runes, dreamcatchers, skulls, and
religious symbols.

Xiaofan fumbles a porcelain figurine and it falls to the
floor. SMASH.

MRS. EPPS
You break it, you buy it.

The group turns to Mrs. Epps who is now behind the counter.

Xiaofan picks the figurine up and tries to reattach the man's
head to his body.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
That's ten dollars.

Xiaofan walks up to the counter.

XIAOFAN
For this? Seems kinda expensive.

Xiaofan fishes bills out of her pocket then resorts to change.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Four eighty five.

Mrs. Epps stares at her with a blank look. Jemma steps in and hands Mrs. Epps the rest of the charge.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Hi. I'm--

MRS. EPPS
I know who you are, and why you're here. I can't help you. I won't.

XIAOFAN
But I haven't even said anything.

MRS. EPPS
I know everything I need to know, too much. That's what got your father killed.

JEMMA
So you did know our dad.

MRS. EPPS
Yes. He tracked me down, said he was looking for something.

XIAOFAN
The necklace.

JEMMA
Amulet.

Xiaofan sneers at Jemma and turns back to Mrs. Epps.

MRS. EPPS
I gave you your answer. Now go.

XIAOFAN
You're the witch he was looking for.

MRS. EPPS

Leave now. I won't ask again.

Jemma tugs on Xiaofan's arm.

XIAOFAN

Please, we have to close the rift.
We have to stop those spirits.

Mrs. Epps waves her hand and the store doors SWING OPEN again. Jemma pulls Xiaofan toward the door.

JEMMA

Let it go.

XIAOFAN

We're not alone. We have help.

Xiaofan gestures to The Horseman who looms in the corner.

MRS. EPPS

Child, you'd need a lot more help
than that.

Xiaofan fights against Jemma's grip.

XIAOFAN

Then you help us, because if you
don't--

Xiaofan breaks free and approaches Mrs. Epps.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Then those spirits win and our dad
died for nothing.

Xiaofan unzips her backpack and pulls out everything she's got.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I don't have any more money, but I
can draw.

She shows Mrs. Epps her sketches.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

And I have a bus pass, and five
arcade coins, and...

Xiaofan rummages through her bag, but comes up empty.

MRS. EPPS

I don't need money. To find the
amulet, I need great magic.

XIAOFAN

Well how--

Mrs. Epps slides the broken-statue fee into the register.

MRS. EPPS

What I need, I suspect you are not willing to give.

XIAOFAN

Teach me how to beat those ghosts and I'll give you anything.

Mrs. Epps closes the register and leans over the counter to look Xiaofan dead in the eye.

MRS. EPPS

The most powerful magic comes from strong emotions: love, sadness, hate. Any object can contain magic, most only a little. But some have great power.

JEMMA

Like the amulet.

MRS. EPPS

And only strong magic can track an item as powerful as that.

JEMMA

You mean another object that has strong emotions tied to it.

Xiaofan searches her bag then stops. She stares at the charm bracelet on her wrist.

MRS. EPPS

I told you, dear child, you would not be ready to give what I need.

Xiaofan pauses, unclasps the bracelet, and SLAMS it on the counter.

XIAOFAN

Let's get rid of those ghosts.

INT ANTIQUE SHOP STOCK ROOM

Mrs. Epps shepherds Xiaofan, Jemma, and The Horseman inside. She directs them to a table cluttered with books, vials, and a feral cat.

MRS. EPPS
Girls, help me clear this off.

They move items and cram them onto filled shelves and chairs.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Your father tracked me down with
the same questions. I told him what
I knew: when lost the amulet
returns to its last residence.

Xiaofan picks up the cat and searches for a clear spot. She
gives up and hands him off to The Horseman.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Only problem was neither of us knew
where that was. He wanted to use a
tracking spell. I told him it was
too dangerous. We're all safer if
that amulet is lost, especially on
Halloween.

Mrs. Epps sets out vials, flowers, a cauldron, and spices.
Jemma stands to the side.

JEMMA
What, no animal bones?

MRS. EPPS
Don't be so morbid. I've gone
vegan. Flowers for earth, water,
and herbs to clear any bad auras.

Xiaofan follows Mrs. Epps as she works.

XIAOFAN
Wait, what's special about
Halloween?

Mrs. Epps sprinkles ingredients into the cauldron one by one.

MRS. EPPS
Did your father not--On Halloween
the rift opens. Normally, only
benign spirits pass into our world,
and wander back to theirs before
the rift closes at sunrise.

Mrs. Epps walks to a wall of bookcases and scans one.

XIAOFAN
But the amulet can keep the rift
open.

Mrs. Epps goes to another bookcase and looks it over as well.

MRS. EPPS
Your father thought the amulet had
to be protected.

Mrs. Epps shakes her head.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Ah, I know.

Mrs. Epps SNAPS her fingers and the two bookcases part to
reveal a secret bookcase.

XIAOFAN
The amulet controls spirits.

MRS. EPPS
It can keep them at bay. By not
repelling them, its attracts them.

Mrs. Epps selects the thickest book on the shelf.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Dark spirits are drawn to magical
power. They will serve anyone they
believe can give them that power.

THUD. She drops the book onto the table and opens it up.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Perfect. The spell to activate the
brew. One more thing. Candles.

Xiaofan grabs the lighter and circles around to every candle.
She finishes and stands with Mrs. Epps.

XIAOFAN
What do the candles do?

MRS. EPPS
Oh, nothing. I love candles.

Mrs. Epps drops the charm bracelet into the brew and pulls
Xiaofan's hands to rest over the cauldron.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)
Think very hard on what this
bracelet means to you. Let your
feelings float to the surface.

Xiaofan and Mrs. Epps shut their eyes.

Mrs. Epps CHANTS and the cauldron BUBBLES and STEAMS.

The CHANT GROWS LOUD and Xiaofan squeezes her eyes shut.

Bubbles and steam multiply. A drop of the brew flies out onto the table cloth and sings a hole in it.

Xiaofan squirms and Jemma rushes to her side.

JEMMA

You can do this. Keep going.

The brew HISSES and spews a cloud of smoke. Xiaofan pulls her hands away with a YELP.

Mrs. Epps stumbles back and lowers herself onto the couch.

Jemma inspects Xiaofan's hands.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Mrs. Epps. The amulet--

MRS. EPPS

Nothing. All I saw was darkness. A darkness I haven't felt in years.

JEMMA

But the magic from the bracelet.

MRS. EPPS

I'm sorry, child, but that bracelet is no match for the darkness.

JEMMA

Xiaofan, you must've seen something.

XIAOFAN

That was her job.

(to Mrs. Epps)

You promised. You promised you'd help me destroy them.

Mrs. Epps rises to her feet.

MRS. EPPS

I never promised that. Magic does a lot of things, but it never destroys.

XIAOFAN

It did to my dad.

Mrs. Epps opens the stock room door.

MRS. EPPS

There's nothing I can do. It's far beyond that. I see that now.

Xiaofan storms out of the store. Jemma chases after her. The Horseman follows, but turns back.

He hands the cat to Mrs. Epps and departs.

INT HOME OFFICE NIGHT

Jemma slips inside with her laptop and eases the door shut.

Xiaofan sits on the office floor with a blanket and pillow. The Horseman pops up from his sleeping bag behind the desk.

XIAOFAN

Welcome to the pity party.

Jemma sits down across from Xiaofan.

JEMMA

Oh come on. I know you. You're not giving up that easy.

XIAOFAN

I dunno. Like you said, dad's gone. None of this is gonna bring him back.

JEMMA

Well, maybe if we found a certain magic amulet.

Xiaofan throws her pillow at Jemma.

XIAOFAN

I wish we could go back. All that time with him and this is it.

Xiaofan motions to the damaged files, recorder, and journal.

Jemma flips through Eric's damaged papers.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

It's like he was never here.

Jemma works in silence.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Nothing? Not even a, yeah I miss him too? Not even gonna try to make me feel better.

JEMMA

Be quiet.

XIAOFAN

You do this every time, you and mom. It's like you want to forget him.

JEMMA

Shhhh.

Jemma waves her off and spreads the papers in a line.

Xiaofan circles around to watch.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Time. You said time.

She moves the hair dryer that sits atop the stained files and shuffles through them too.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

No. No. Useless.

She takes a few and adds them to her lineup.

XIAOFAN

Yeah, time. As in, we don't have any.

The Horseman points a finger gun at her as if to say 'you said it, man'.

JEMMA

We went to the last place Dad mentioned in his journal. The last place he figured something out. We skipped to the end.

Xiaofan takes a few papers and places them in the lineup.

XIAOFAN

You want to go back to the beginning. See how he got to Mrs. Epps. See if we missed something.

Jemma tapes the papers together.

Xiaofan takes more tape and sticks the timeline to the wall. They step back and assess it.

Xiaofan grabs a marker and rummages in Eric's boxes. She pulls out an old county map.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
If we're looking at when he was
doing what, we should also see
where.

She goes through each file and compares with Eric's journal.
Xiaofan circles spots on the map and numbers them in order.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Something's not right though.

The Horseman points to two dates on the timeline.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
You're right. There's a time jump.
A few days.

Jemma pulls up the files on her laptop and scrolls.

JEMMA
Those dates aren't in my scans
either.

The Horseman leafs through Eric's journal.

XIAOFAN
No, no, please don't touch that.

She rushes over and grabs hold of the journal.

JEMMA
Hey, it's okay. He's fine.

XIAOFAN
Right. Sorry.

The Horseman whips out his orange colored pencil and points
to a word on the page: 'WE'.

He scans the page and points to another 'WE'.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Mom never said anything about Dad
working with someone else.

Jemma sits on the floor and wraps her arms around a pillow.

The Horseman hands Xiaofan Eric's journal.

JEMMA
To be fair, she never said anything
about his work at all. But if he
did have a partner it must've been
someone he trusted.

XIAOFAN

I always picture him working alone.
Fighting off ghosts.

Xiaofan closes the journal and sets it on the desk.

JEMMA

The man had a diary, clearly he was
lonely. He never told us. He barely
told mom anything.

XIAOFAN

What about Uncle Steve? Dad knew
him since forever ago, like the
80's.

JEMMA

Plus, he's a cop. Maybe dad went to
him for help. We can't exactly ask
him.

Xiaofan springs to her feet.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You're smiling that creepy 'I've
got a plan' smile. Please stop.

XIAOFAN

Nope! Because I've got a plan.
Tomorrow. I'll take care of
everything. You be ready. And make
sure Mom isn't home.

JEMMA

I really hate your plans.

INT LIVING ROOM DAY

Xiaofan holds the phone. Jemma sits next her on the couch.

JEMMA

Okay, I'm out.

XIAOFAN

Two more minutes top.

JEMMA

He's going to be so mad when he
realizes the house isn't on fire.

XIAOFAN

He'll be fine.

Steve BUSTS through the front door and strides over to them.

STEVE
Tell me you didn't.

Xiaofan shrugs.

STEVE (CONT'D)
I sped over here worried I was
going to find this place a pile of
ash.

XIAOFAN
Now you don't have to worry because
we're all okay.

Steve pulls out his phone.

STEVE
You've really outdone yourselves
this time. Your mother's going to
throw a fit.

The girls jump up. Xiaofan lowers the phone from his ear.
She leads Steve to their workstation at the table.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Hold up, these are your father's
papers.

JEMMA
(to Xiaofan)
Told you he'd know something.
(to Steve)
So, we have most of the two weeks
before his death, but now we're
stuck.

Xiaofan points to each spot on the map in numerical order.

XIAOFAN
We thought maybe you could fill in
the missing pieces.

Steve raises his phone and hits a button.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
(yells to her bedroom)
Uh, I think we're ready for you.

The Horseman steps into the room and Steve DROPS his phone.

The Horseman picks it up and offers it back to him.

STEVE

He's real. Exactly like the photos.

XIAOFAN

It all is. Spirits are going to destroy Sleepy Hollow and we need your help.

STEVE

This can't be happening.

Steve shakes his head. The table TREMBLES, papers FLUTTER, and a pencil falls to the floor.

JEMMA

Uncle Steve.

Steve grabs the map and TEARS it to bits.

XIAOFAN

What are you doing?

STEVE

I don't care how much of what your father said was true. Sleepy Hollow hated him for it, hates me for it. I won't let you fall in the same trap.

Steve yanks the USB drive out of Jemma's laptop and pockets it.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Send that thing away and go to your rooms. I won't ask again.

Xiaofan scrambles to gather the map pieces.

Steve storms out of the house. The house plant in the entryway shrivels and droops as he passes.

INT LIVING ROOM EVENING

Xiaofan sits on the floor with a roll of tape. She aligns pieces of the map and applies one strand of tape at a time. Jemma, curled up on the couch, watches.

JEMMA

Give up already. It's no use.

Xiaofan continues her task.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You heard Steve, he's calling mom.
When she gets home she's going to
tear it up again.

XIAOFAN

It's fine. I can fix it. You can
give up if you want, that's fine.
I'll do it myself.

JEMMA

Fix it? You were so convinced we
could trust him. Now everything's
ruined. This is on you.

Jemma gets up and grabs the bandaged map.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You can't save the world.

Jemma shoves the map in the trash. Xiaofan snatches it out.

XIAOFAN

Dad would have.

Jemma balls the map up and fends off Xiaofan. The two grapple
and The Horseman walks out, into the fray.

Jemma traps Xiaofan in a headlock.

JEMMA

Dad couldn't even save himself.

Xiaofan freezes then bites Jemma's hand. Jemma SCREAMS and
drops the map.

The Horseman grabs Xiaofan's waist and pulls her off Jemma.

The sisters SCREAM, kick, HIT, and scratch.

The front door SWINGS open and Lily and Steve enter.
Everyone freezes. The Horseman sets Xiaofan down.

LILY

Who the hell?

Lily pulls Jemma and Xiaofan away from The Horseman. She
grabs a broom and points it at The Horseman to keep him at
bay.

LILY (CONT'D)

Stay back. I'm warning you.

Steve lowers the broom in her hand.

LILY (CONT'D)
(to Steve)
Tell me what the hell is going on.

INT LIVING ROOM MOMENTS LATER

The Horseman sits next to the girls and twiddles his thumbs.
Lily paces in front of them.

STEVE
Lil.

LILY
This is insane. Am I concussed?

STEVE
Eric was telling the truth. I know
it doesn't make sense. I'm still
trying to wrap my head around it.

XIAOFAN
Mom, he's not dangerous.

STEVE
That is for your mother and me to
decide.

XIAOFAN
(to Steve)
Why are you even here? You're not a
part of this family.

LILY
Steve is an honorary family member.

Xiaofan points to The Horseman.

XIAOFAN
Well, he knew Dad too.

The Horseman holds Eric's family photo out to Lily and she
registers what it is. She charges at The Horseman and grabs
him by his jacket.

LILY
Get out. Get out of my house.

She pulls him to his feet and The Horseman complies. She
drags him to the front door.

XIAOFAN
You can't do this. He didn't do
anything wrong.

JEMMA
He's helping us.

Xiaofan chases after them. Steve wraps an arm around her waist and holds her back. Lily yanks open the front door.

LILY
Not my kids, too. You can't take them.

XIAOFAN
Please, don't do this.

LILY
Stay away from my family.

She shoves The Horseman out, SLAMS the door, and LOCKS it.

JEMMA
(to Xiaofan)
Mèi mei.

Lily strides to Eric's home office. She returns with a stack of Eric's papers and a shredder.

She SHREDS the first stack of papers.

Xiaofan tugs at Steve's arm and reaches out to Lily. Steve picks Xiaofan off her feet.

JEMMA (CONT'D)
Mom.

LILY
I should have done this a long time ago.

Lily SHREDS the second stack.

LILY (CONT'D)
This family is stuck in the past.
It's time to move on.

Jemma grabs Lily's wrist.

LILY (CONT'D)
(to Jemma)
Jiang-li, you know I'm right.

Jemma lets go and Lily returns to the shredder.

Eric's journal lies on the table. Xiaofan's gaze flicks from it to Jemma. Xiaofan mouths 'please'.

Jemma slips the journal off the table and under her sweater.

INT ANTIQUE SHOP STOREFRONT NIGHT

Outside the glass doors Xiaofan fiddles with the lock.

The street lamp across the street flickers.

Xiaofan pushes in the door. Jemma enters behind her.

XIAOFAN

Well that was easy.

JEMMA

I'm not so sure. She's a witch. She has to have some sort of security.

XIAOFAN

In and out. We'll be home before the neighbors come to check on us.

They pass by a grandfather clock, its hands stuck at 12:00.

They make their way to...

INT ANTIQUE SHOP STOCK ROOM

Jemma shines a flashlight up to Xiaofan on the bookcase.

XIAOFAN

Higher. Keep going.

Xiaofan climbs and Jemma shines the light at the top shelf. Xiaofan SLIPS and catches herself.

JEMMA

Be careful.

XIAOFAN

I'm careful, I'm careful.

Xiaofan's handhold book FALLS and HITS Jemma on the way down.

JEMMA

Watch it.

XIAOFAN

This would be a lot easier with someone's help.

JEMMA

Get the book and we can find your
'friend'.

XIAOFAN

Give me a boost.

JEMMA

No way. You got yourself up there
you can get the rest of the way up.

Xiaofan's fingers slide to the edge of the shelf.

XIAOFAN

Please shut up and help me.

Jemma sets the flashlight down and boosts Xiaofan up further.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Little higher. Almost there.

CLUNK. The door SLAMS shut and the lights FLICK on.

The full length mirror on the wall SWINGS OUT to reveal Mrs.
Epps in a secret passage.

MRS. EPPS

Stop right there.

Jemma drops Xiaofan. Mrs. Epps waves her hand and Xiaofan's
fall stops inches from the floor. Then she lands with a THUD.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)

This isn't a library. You break
into my shop, try to steal my spell
book, and you thought it would end
well?

Mrs. Epps summons a broom and chases them out of the room.

INT ANTIQUE SHOP

The girls split up and use the store shelves for cover.

JEMMA

We didn't have a choice.

Xiaofan ducks behind a bowl of water beads, each one with a
miniature object inside. She studies one that holds a rabbit.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

We had to try something. We're
running out of time.

The bead slips from Xiaofan's fingers and bounces. It ROLLS to a stop a few feet away and POPS. Where it lay, a life-sized bunny springs to life and hops away.

Xiaofan grabs a handful of orbs and shoves them in her bag.

MRS. EPPS

Without training in magic you could decimate the whole town.

XIAOFAN

Without The Horseman we don't stand a chance. We don't know who we're fighting. We need magic.

Xiaofan sprints to Mrs. Epps and grabs her arm.

MRS. EPPS

Let go of me. Go home, stay inside, and let this thing pass.

Xiaofan drags her toward the door. Mrs. Epps resists.

XIAOFAN

Come with us. Once we find The Horseman you can go home. We won't bother you anymore. One last thing. For our dad.

MRS. EPPS

I said let go.

Mrs. Epps aims a BLAST of dark magic. Xiaofan flies backward and HITS the floor.

Jemma runs to her side and Mrs. Epps shrinks away from them.

MRS. EPPS (CONT'D)

Out before I call the police.

XIAOFAN

Fine, waste your magic. Hide like you did when our dad needed you. Guess it's what you're good at.

Jemma helps Xiaofan up and they hobble out of the shop.

EXT CEMETERY NIGHT

Xiaofan slips between the gates and dashes through overgrown grass and headstones.

She TRIPS over a rake and FALLS to the ground. The abandoned rake and bag of leaves sit alone.

XIAOFAN

Mr. Sykes, I need to talk to you.

No one replies. Xiaofan walks to Mr. Sykes' cottage and sets the rake down.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I'm looking for my friend. Maybe you could help.

Xiaofan stops. The porch plants are dried, crumpled inward. A Notice to Vacate hangs on the door. Xiaofan peeks inside, but the house is empty. She RIPS the notice off the door and reads it.

CLANG. A loud CLATTER comes from the mausoleum.

INT MAUSOLEUM MOMENTS LATER

Xiaofan runs in as The Horseman lowers a recliner to the floor.

To the side, Mr. Sykes oversees the move-in.

MR. SYKES

Thank you, young man.

The Horseman flashes a thumbs up and Mr. Sykes lowers himself into his chair.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Xiaofan, good to see you. I met your friend here.

Xiaofan holds up the eviction notice.

XIAOFAN

Mr. Sykes. I thought you were gone.

MR. SYKES

I imagine someone wants me out of this cemetery. Over my dead body. I was moving out when your friend offered to let me stay with him.

(to The Horseman)

Good thing it wasn't too far.

(to Xiaofan)

I showed the officer my bills but he slapped me with that paper anyway.

At the bottom of the notice is a fresh signature.

XIAOFAN

The officer, what did he say his name was?

MR. SYKES

He didn't. Had to ask for it. Asked to see his badge actually. Johnson, I think. Sam, maybe.

XIAOFAN

Steve.

MR. SYKES

Why, yes. I believe it was Steve.

Xiaofan sprints to The Horseman.

XIAOFAN

(to The Horseman)
We've gotta go.

MR. SYKES

Go? You've only just arrived.

XIAOFAN

(to The Horseman)
If my godfather signed this, then whoever wants Mr. Sykes gone must be high up in the police department.

MR. SYKES

Conspiracy theories. Never believed them. Bunch of tall tales.

XIAOFAN

(to The Horseman)
I promise I won't let anything happen to you. You gotta trust me.

The Headless Horseman follows her to the door. He turns and waves goodbye to Mr. Sykes.

MR. SYKES

Okay, I'll--

The doors shut. The skylight only lets in a sliver of light.

MR. SYKES (CONT'D)

Wait here.

INT POLICE HEADQUARTERS LOBBY DAY

Xiaofan leads The Horseman and Jemma into the lobby. The Horseman dons his fake head.

They brace themselves, but everything continues as normal. They look around, form a huddle, then break.

Jemma steps up to the front desk. Xiaofan and The Horseman come in from the side and crouch at her feet.

A group of officers with Officer Carter crowds around a security TV and watches a basketball game. The officers' party ends when Jemma KNOCKS on the desk.

Officer Carter swivels around in his rollie-chair.

OFFICER CARTER

Lost.

JEMMA

I--

OFFICER CARTER

You must be lost. You're either here for an appointment--

He wheels over to the desk and opens a day planner.

OFFICER CARTER (CONT'D)

Which you're not, you're the youngest person out of the academy ever, or you're lost.

Jemma stands stunned and Xiaofan elbows her in the leg. Jemma flinches then pulls it together.

JEMMA

My name is Jemma.

The officers light up. Carter is unfazed by this news.

OFFICER CARTER

Jemma. Course, you're one of Steve's girls.

Xiaofan and The Horseman creep to the side of the desk, almost clear of the officers.

OFFICER CARTER (CONT'D)

Let me ring him real quick.

Carter picks up the phone.

JEMMA

No!

Xiaofan and The Horseman freeze. Carter and the officers turn and stare at Jemma.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

You don't have to bother him.

The other officers turn back to the game.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

I'm actually here to ask a question. It'll be quick.

OFFICER CARTER

Shoot.

JEMMA

Um.

Jemma rummages through her purse and settles on her wallet. She pulls out her ID.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

I got my driver's license last year.

All but one of the officers cheer as a point is scored.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

Carter turns back to her.

OFFICER CARTER

It seems like there was some sort of mistake on my driver's license.

She hands it to Carter and waits. Nothing.

JEMMA

It states my eyes are brown when they are clearly dark hazel.

The officers turn their attention to her.

Xiaofan and the Horseman sneak further around the desk.

Carter looks to Jemma, then the license, then to her again.

OFFICER #2 (35) speaks up from the back of the group.

OFFICER #2

Yeah, your eyes are definitely brown.

JEMMA

Well, clearly you are color blind. I demand to see the manager.

The officers fall silent.

OFFICER #2

The Chief?

Xiaofan and The Horseman sneak past, into the hall.

OFFICER CARTER

Yeah, I'm gonna go ahead and say this is a DMV problem.

INT POLICE HEADQUARTERS HALLWAY DAY

Xiaofan and The Horseman stand around the corner from a door labeled 'Evidence Room'. The Horseman TEARS a piece of his jacket off and ties it around a security cam.

XIAOFAN

Nice. You seem like you've done this before.

They turn away as a STAFF MEMBER and VETERAN OFFICER pass by. The VETERAN OFFICER swipes her ID then enters a PIN. The Evidence Room door BUZZES and she enters. The hallway empties out and Xiaofan glances at her watch.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Come on, hurry up in there.

INT EVIDENCE ROOM

The Veteran Officer unlocks an evidence locker. It SPRINGS open and throws toy snakes out at her.

VETERAN OFFICER

Carter.

She pushes the door open and walks out into the hall. Xiaofan catches the door before it can close and she and The Horseman slip inside.

They stand among rows of lockers. Xiaofan steps over the toy snakes and reads the tag on a locker.

XIAOFAN

Look for my dad's stuff. No getting distracted. They're ordered by case number and date. It's close.

They walk along adjacent rows and get halfway to the end. The Horseman stops and taps on a locker. Xiaofan rushes to it and yanks the handle.

Locked.

She SLAMS her fist on it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

ID, passcode, and key? We've gotta find it, quick.

She looks around the room. CLANG. The handle and lock fall to the floor. The Horseman stands at the locker with a fire extinguisher.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Or we could do that.

Voices outside boom into the room.

STEVE (O.S.)

What the hell?

XIAOFAN

(to The Horseman)

He's here.

The Horseman takes off his false head, picks up the warped locker handle, and shoves it back into its slot.

VETERAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Probably Carter again.

Xiaofan grabs the evidence box and pulls open a tall locker.

STEVE (O.S.)

I'll talk to him.

FOOTSTEPS precede a third voice.

OFFICER #2 (O.S.)

Sir, I don't know what's going on. You've got a visitor up front. She's going nuts over nothing.

Xiaofan slides the box into the tall locker. Officer #2's FOOTSTEPS fade away.

VETERAN OFFICER (O.S.)
Lily, or one of her kids.

STEVE (O.S.)
Hell, if I know. I'll take care of
this. You get Carter in line.

Xiaofan clambers into the locker and pulls The Horseman in
after her.

INT LOCKER

The door buzzes and the Veteran Officer passes the locker.

VETERAN OFFICER
Carter. I swear if you sneak up on
me I'm going to pepper spray you.

On her second pass she stops in front of the locker. She
peers through the locker vents, but only sees empty space
where The Horseman's head would be.

Her FOOTSTEPS retreat and the door closes.

Xiaofan and The Horseman TUMBLE out of the locker.

Xiaofan rummages through the evidence box and compares it to
the list inside. The Horseman looks over her shoulder.

XIAOFAN
There's stuff missing. His phone,
his keys.

Steve's initials sit at the bottom of the list. She shoves
the box back in the locker and runs to the door.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
Go meet Jemma at the car. I'll be
out in a sec.

The Horseman gives her a thumbs up, but she is already gone.

INT POLICE HEADQUARTERS

Xiaofan weaves through a sea of desks and checks name plates.
She finds Steve's desk and sits down.

Xiaofan checks the drawers: pencils, pens, notepads, paper
clips. She tries the last drawer, but it catches.

She grabs a paper weight from Steve's desk and breaks the
drawer lock.

Her hands move faster and faster through its contents: Manuscripts, photos. She pulls out a plastic evidence bag with a phone in it, and another with a set of keys.

She digs deeper and finds an old satchel stamped "EL". Xiaofan runs her fingers over the monogram.

STEVE

Hey, kiddo.

Xiaofan's head snaps up. She eases the drawer shut with her knee right as Steve walks up.

Steve pulls his shirt sleeve down to cover the strange markings on his arm.

STEVE (CONT'D)

What're you doing here at nine AM?
Tell me nothing's on fire and
nobody's been killed.

XIAOFAN

Not yet. I wanted to stop by before
school.

STEVE

Sweet of you, but guests have to be
accompanied.

Xiaofan stands up.

XIAOFAN

They would have, but the officers
up front recognized us and let us
in.

STEVE

Us?

Steve looks both ways and steps toward her. Xiaofan backs up.

XIAOFAN

I mean, me. Jemma drove, but she
stayed out there.

Steve sits down on the corner of the desk, his leg inches from the broken drawer handle.

STEVE

I thought 'grounded' meant home,
school, home, no detours. Your mom
wants you safe at--

XIAOFAN

I couldn't be anywhere safer.

She forces a smile. Steve smiles back and pushes her toward the lobby.

STEVE

True, but I can't make you late.
I'll let you know if you miss any
fun paperwork today. Later, kiddo.

He ruffles her hair and Xiaofan speed walks away. Steve watches Xiaofan leave, sits, and scoots his chair up.

His pant leg snags on the broken drawer handle. He runs a finger over it and turns back the direction Xiaofan left.

INT SCHOOL DAY

At the chalkboard, Mrs. Brookes completes a diagram of the Nitrogen Cycle.

At the back of the room, Xiaofan draws a word web: DAD, RIFT, EVIL SPIRITS, AMULET, HALLOWEEN, STEVE.

MRS. BROOKES

Now, if anyone has any questions
about the Nitrogen cycle--

A boy in the middle of the room raises his hand.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)

Yes, Mr. Crane, this will be on the
test.

The boy lowers his hand.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)

Xiaofan.

Xiaofan looks up and the whole class stares at her.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)

Why don't you come up here and
explain the Nitrogen cycle in your
own words.

Xiaofan is silent.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)

I thought so. Front of the room.

Xiaofan closes her notebook and joins Mrs. Brookes.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)
Share with the class what you're
doing back there. Clearly it must
be very important if you can't
bother listening to the lesson.

Mary and her friends stifle their laughter.

MRS. BROOKES (CONT'D)
Nothing? Then apologize to your
friends for wasting class time.

Xiaofan stares at the floor.

She reaches for her bracelet, but her wrist is empty.

XIAOFAN
I'm sorry that I--

MRS. BROOKES
Eyes up.

Xiaofan raises her head and avoids eye contact with anyone.

XIAOFAN
I'm sorry that I--

Xiaofan's eyes wander to the window. Steve walks up the
school steps.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
I have to go.

Xiaofan dashes to the door, rips it open, and runs into...

INT SCHOOL HALLWAY

Where she COLLIDES with Jemma. Both let out a SCREAM.

XIAOFAN
Good it's you. Steve's here.

JEMMA
Yeah, I came to get you.

Jemma holds up a colorful bathroom pass.

They rush down the hall. Xiaofan catches up and takes the
lead.

XIAOFAN
He must've realized we were poking
around at the police station.

JEMMA

Yeah, well you weren't exactly discrete about it. Left. Left!

Xiaofan brakes and makes a hard left. They fly into...

INT SCHOOL BATHROOM

Xiaofan LOCKS the door and Jemma rests back against the door.

JEMMA

Man, this sucks. You'd better be one hundred percent positive it was dad's briefcase--

XIAOFAN

Satchel.

JEMMA

Whatever.

Xiaofan catches her breath.

XIAOFAN

I am. There's no logical world in which a Steve Johnson would have his personal bag initialed EL.

JEMMA

Sorry for wanting to make sure before we turn ourselves into renegades.

Xiaofan examines the room for escape routes.

XIAOFAN

Stop being so dramatic.

Nothing, no doors, no windows.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Now what?

Jemma catches her breath.

JEMMA

I'm not in charge of ideas.

XIAOFAN

You're clearly not in charge of the good ones.

Xiaofan goes through every stall, nook, cranny, and crevice.

JEMMA

You think of something. You're the experienced juvenile delinquent.

Xiaofan stops and looks to a vent above the stalls. Jemma follows her gaze.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

I really hate your ideas.

EXT BEHIND SCHOOL GYM MOMENTS LATER

Jemma and Xiaofan KNOCK on the dumpster and the Horseman pops his head out.

JEMMA

That's disgusting.

XIAOFAN

(to The Horseman)

Time to go buddy.

(to Jemma)

We'll wait here. You pull the car around.

Xiaofan gives him a hand and he climbs out of the dumpster. Jemma searches her jacket and pant pockets.

JEMMA

Slight problem. Plan B?

The Horseman runs to the bike rack. Xiaofan unlocks her bike.

XIAOFAN

Jem, hop on.

JEMMA

No, way. If I'm getting on that thing then I get the seat.

Xiaofan gives up her seat to Jemma.

The Horseman admires a tiny tricycle and pulls it out.

XIAOFAN

Buddy, you can't ride that one. It's too small. You gotta pick a different one.

The Horseman's shoulders sag.

EXT STREET SHOPS DAY

The Horseman pedals after Xiaofan and Jemma on a flame-ornamented bike.

WHAH WHAH WHAH. The parked cars on either side of the street sound off in a symphony of alarms.

JEMMA

What's going on?

XIAOFAN

I don't know. Keep pedaling.

Pedestrians on either side of the street watch the scene and cars SCREECH to a halt in the road.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I think we have an audience.

JEMMA

Can't do much about that. Hold on.

HOOOONK. Xiaofan looks back over her shoulder.

The Horseman is boxed in by cars. Road-rage drivers step out of their cars and pedestrians close in around him.

XIAOFAN

(to Jemma)

Stop.

Jemma hits the brakes.

The mob of pedestrians encircles The Horseman, YELLS, and pushes him around.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

This is bad. This is very bad.

(to The Horseman)

Get out of there!

The Horseman's trike is sandwiched between two wrecked cars.

An angry driver pops open his trunk and makes a bee line for The Horseman, baseball bat in hand.

The Horseman pulls at his trike, but it is no use.

A blue burst of light sparkles between the two wrecked cars and they reel away from each other.

The crowd breaks into a frenzy and disperses in every direction.

The Horseman grabs his bike and hops on.

Xiaofan looks to Mrs. Epps, on the curb.

JEMMA

That couldn't have gone worse.
Let's go home.

Mrs. Epps grabs her broom and disappears into her shop.

A police cruiser pulls into their path and SIRENS BLARE on.

XIAOFAN

Okay, new plan. The Museum.

Jemma turns the bike around and takes off. The Horseman follows close behind. They turn at the next intersection.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing? The museum's the other way.

JEMMA

We're not going anywhere with him following us. Trust me.

A second cruiser rounds a corner in front of them.

XIAOFAN

You were saying?

Jemma swerves down an alleyway and they lose the cruisers.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

That was totally awesome.

JEMMA

We're not out of the woods yet.

The alley dumps them back out on the street and the cruisers close in.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

We're not going to make it. If you've got any tricks up your sleeve now would be the time to use them.

Xiaofan digs in her pocket and pulls out the miniature orbs.

She drops one. It bounces on the road then bursts to reveal a full-sized horse.

The Horseman turns over his shoulder as the mare gallops off.

XIAOFAN

Oops. Still new at this.

She picks out another one that has a miniature tree in it. She turns it on its side and launches it at the cruisers.

The orb rolls to a stop in the road and sits there.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Oh, come on.

After a delay, a towering pine tree topples over in the road.

The cruisers swerve and SCREECH to a halt in front of it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

That's what I'm talking about.

The Horseman air-high-fives Xiaofan.

INT MUSEUM BOX OFFICE EVENING

The Horseman, Jemma, and Xiaofan reach the box office where a teen, goth BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE (25) speaks into the microphone.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE

Next.

They step to the window and force smiles.

JEMMA

Three tickets please. Two kids, one adult.

The Box Office Employee looks to The Horseman.

He waves at her and she continues the transaction.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE

That'll be thirty two dollars, fifty cents.

Jemma pulls cash out and hands over thirty dollars.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

That'll be two dollars, fifty cents.

Jemma picks through the change in her wallet and comes up with four quarters and a nickel.

JEMMA

One second. I know I have it.

She fishes in her bag and offers up two dimes and a penny.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE

That'll be one dollar, twenty-four cents.

Xiaofan and The Horseman dig into their pockets. Xiaofan comes up with a quarter, an arcade coin, and a piece of gum.

The Box Office employee takes the change, slides the arcade coin back to Xiaofan, and pops the gum into her mouth.

She stares at The Horseman and waits. The Horseman slides a grimy copper coin, dated 1778, to her. The employee examines it then looks up at them.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

That'll be ninety-nine cents.

XIAOFAN

Please. We'll pay as soon as we can. We need to get to our dad's old office.

JEMMA

Forget it, let's go.

Jemma strides toward the museum entrance. The Box Office Employee presses a button in her booth and a SECURITY GUARD (40) saunters up.

BOX OFFICE EMPLOYEE

Please, show our friends here out.

The Horseman blocks the Security Guard. The Security Guard pulls out his baton and STRIKES The Horseman.

A cloud of dust puffs out of The Horseman's coat. The Security Guard COUGHS and stumbles backward. The Horseman wraps the Security Guard in a bear hug.

JEMMA

Get his keys, get his keys.

Xiaofan pulls the keys from the guard's belt.

INT MUSEUM BOX OFFICE MOMENTS LATER

The group disappears into the exhibit area.

From inside the Box Office booth, the Security Guard and Box Office Employee bang on the glass.

SECURITY GUARD
Hey, get back here--

INT MUSEUM OFFICE NIGHT

Xiaofan searches Eric's desk, Jemma searches the file cabinets, and The Horseman looks through bookcases.

He wipes away a line of dust. Xiaofan's SNEEZE sends dust everywhere and he wipes more dust from the furniture.

JEMMA
If he had something that important then he should have had somewhere to put it. A locked container, or secret compartment.

XIAOFAN
Maybe he did and it's not here.

The Horseman dusts the colonial painting. The frame RATTLES.

JEMMA
We checked everywhere at home. This is it. It's either here or we're not going to find it.

The Horseman picks at the dust on the frame. One edge of the frame pulls away from the wall, but swings back like a hinge. Xiaofan PEELS the frame back to reveal Eric's safe.

The group gathers and Jemma hits the keypad.

JEMMA (CONT'D)
There are four digits.

The PA System WHINES.

STEVE (V.O.)
This is Officer Steve Johnson with Sleepy Hollow PD. We're calling for an immediate evacuation of the premises for emergency safety.

Jemma punches digits, but the safe only BEEPS in response.

STEVE
Please proceed to the nearest exit in a calm and orderly fashion.
(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

We will get the situation sorted
out as soon as possible. Thank you.

Jemma tries the combination again. The Horseman KNOCKS on the safe and waits for it to open.

Jemma slings her bag over her shoulder.

JEMMA

Grab your things.

XIAOFAN

(mumbling)

Need to remember. Don't forget.

JEMMA

Mèi mei, you can't remember a
passcode you never knew. We've got
to go.

XIAOFAN

Never forget that I love you.

Xiaofan looks to the keypad. Each button bears a number, with tiny letters below. She types in the digits for L-O-V-E and pulls the handle.

The lock CLICKS and the safe opens. Inside, the amulet sparkles and Xiaofan scoops it up.

JEMMA

You did it. You found it.

The office door SLAMS shut.

STEVE

Which I can't thank you enough for.

Jemma pushes Xiaofan behind her and The Horseman pushes Jemma behind him.

XIAOFAN

You're too late. Your stupid plan
failed.

STEVE

My plan is over a year in the
making. This is a speed bump
compared to what I've overcome to
get here.

Steve unsheathes a knife at his hip.

XIAOFAN

Like our dad.

He opens a vial and pours a thick, dark liquid on the blade.

STEVE

I didn't want that, but he got in my way. I suggest you not do the same.

The Horseman scoots toward Steve. Steve flips the knife over in his hand and stabs The Horseman in the chest. The Horseman falls to the floor and Steve handcuffs him to the radiator.

He takes out a pouch and pours a pile of the ashy contents into his hand. It glows a deep purple that flashes like lightning.

Jemma and Xiaofan back up.

JEMMA

(to Xiaofan)

Go right.

From the desk's right side it is a straight shot to the door.

Jemma picks up the desk lamp and brings it down toward Steve's head.

Xiaofan bolts for the door. Steve blows the powder at Jemma and she freezes, petrified. Before Xiaofan can reach the door, it FLIES OPEN with a GUST of wind.

Mrs. Epps steps into the room. She holds her palm out toward Steve and begins to CHANT. The scarf around her neck begins to glow yellow and she approaches Steve.

Steve pulls up his sleeve and runs the tip of his knife over symbols in his skin. His whole arm glows a bloody purple.

He clenches his hand into a fist and the fibers of Mrs. Epps's scarf burn to ash. He pushes his hand outward and his spell strikes her down.

The amulet in Xiaofan's hand glows a sickly green. She lets out a BATTLE CRY and charges at Steve.

Steve grabs her throat and throws her against the wall. He prries the amulet out of her hand and she GASPS for air.

The glow of dark magic runs up his arm to his hand and seeps into Xiaofan's skin like a dye. She CRIES OUT but the magic ceases to advance into her skin.

STEVE

Very interesting. Maybe there's too much darkness inside you already.

He drops her to the floor and leaves with the amulet.

Xiaofan passes out as Steve LOCKS the door with a final flourish of magic.

INT MUSEUM OFFICE NIGHT

Xiaofan wakes up. Her head rests in Jemma's lap and The Horseman tends to Mrs. Epps.

JEMMA

Hey there.

Xiaofan pushes herself up.

XIAOFAN

It's gone. He's gone. It's over.

JEMMA

Maybe not. It's only ten o'clock.

XIAOFAN

It's hopeless.

Xiaofan wraps The Horseman in a hug and he hugs her back.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Epps.

JEMMA

She's going to be okay. We think. If we get her to a hospital soon.

Xiaofan KICKS a bookshelf.

XIAOFAN

Oh gee, if only we had some sort of amulet that opened and closed portals.

JEMMA

Don't do that to yourself.

XIAOFAN

He's right. I hate him. I was so mad, I basically handed it to him.

Xiaofan slumps down next to Mrs. Epps and takes her hand.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

First Dad and now you guys, Mrs. Epps, pretty soon Mom, the whole town. They're all gonna get hurt because of me.

A white glow leaks out of Mrs. Epps' coat pocket.

Xiaofan reaches inside and pulls out her charm bracelet. It grows brighter and brighter until light fills the room. The light dims and ERIC'S SPIRIT stands in front of her.

ERIC'S SPIRIT

You are the only thing standing in the way of them getting hurt. All that anger and hate, break it to pieces. Find the love underneath it, inside you.

The white glow of the bracelet dims and only the green glow of the gem in it remains.

ERIC'S SPIRIT (CONT'D)

I did what I did because I loved you. I still love you.

She reaches for his hand, but she goes right through him.

XIAOFAN

I can't save them. I'm not strong enough.

Eric's Spirit takes the charm bracelet in one hand.

ERIC'S SPIRIT

You don't have to be. The love you give and the love you get will always see you through. And if you ever need me--

He places his hand over Xiaofan's heart and holds the bracelet there. She puts her hand over his.

Eric's spirit fades and her hand alone holds the bracelet to her heart.

With the bracelet on, Xiaofan marches to the door and extends her arm outward. A beam of light BLASTS out of the bracelet and crushes the doorknob. The office door SQUEAKS open.

INT HOSPITAL HALLWAY NIGHT

The paramedics rush Mrs. Epps into the hospital on a gurney. Jemma, Xiaofan, and The Horseman follow.

The paramedics take her through a set of doors labeled 'Medical Personnel Only Beyond This Point'.

The girls and The Horseman stop in the hall and Xiaofan sinks into a chair along the wall.

XIAOFAN

She's gonna be okay. She has to be.

The Headless Horseman points to the clock on the wall. The hands are stuck on 12:00. Jemma checks her watch. 11:14.

JEMMA

He's right. We can't stay. We're almost out of time.

Patients, nurses, and doctors halt and stare at The Horseman.

JEMMA (CONT'D)

Nothing to see here. Just your standard decapitation. Carry on.

A MAN WITH AN ARM CAST (50) stops his conversation with a NURSE (35).

MAN WITH AN ARM CAST

That's the guy from the intersection--after my car crashed.

(to NURSE)

I told you I'm not crazy.

The crowd gets RILED and some patients shut themselves in their rooms.

Lily turns a corner down the hall and rushes toward them.

LILY

Where's Steve? Please tell me no one is hurt.

Xiaofan runs and tackles her in a hug.

LILY (CONT'D)

Guess not.

Jemma pushes Xiaofan toward the door.

JEMMA
 (to the crowd)
 Okay people, show's over.

LILY
 Hold on. I think I deserve an
 explanation as to what's going on.

Jemma shakes her head no at Xiaofan.

XIAOFAN
 (to Jemma)
 You said it, we're almost out of
 time. We need all the help we can
 get.

The Headless Horseman enters their circle.

LILY
 Not this again. Out.

XIAOFAN
 It was Steve this whole time.

The Nurse hands Lily a patient file.

NURSE
 Mr. Yang in Room 149 is ready for
 discharge.

Lily takes the file and Xiaofan tugs on Lily's sleeve.

XIAOFAN
 He sent the ghosts that killed dad
 and now he's trying to destroy the
 whole town.

LILY
 I don't know when you started
 making up stories, but it stops
 now.
 (to Jemma)
 And you've gotten sucked into it. I
 buy your sister getting into this.
 I expect better from you.

Lily waves down two security guards stationed down the hall.

LILY (CONT'D)
 I tried to do this the nice way.

The lights FLICKER and SHUT OFF. Car alarms BLARE in the
 parking lot outside. People SHOUT OUT in panic.

A chill sweeps over the hall. Lily exhales and her breath condenses.

NURSE
Everybody stay calm.

XIAOFAN
(to Lily)
You can't honestly tell me this is normal. I wouldn't make things up. Not when it comes to dad.

Xiaofan whispers to The Horseman. He hands her Eric's family photo and Xiaofan holds it out to Lily.

The generator HUMS to life and emergency lights TURN ON. Nurses and doctors direct patients and staff members.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)
You've gotta believe me, believe him.

Police cruisers with their SIRENS and lights pull into the parking lot.

JEMMA
That could be him.

Lily pulls her ID tag off.

LILY
Jem, your jacket.

Jemma removes her jacket and Lily pulls it over her scrubs.

LILY (CONT'D)
(to Nurse)
I need Kat to take over for the night. She can discharge Mr. Yang.

NURSE
Are you sure?

LILY
I'm sure. It's a family emergency.

The Nurse shrinks back and stares at The Horseman.

LILY (CONT'D)
Yeah. He's family too.

Lily leads them down the hall, away from the door.

EXT OUTSIDE HOUSE NIGHT

Every car on the street FLASHES its lights and BLARES its alarm. Street lamps flicker. TRICK-OR-TREATERS and NEIGHBORS flood the sidewalks and yards.

PARENTS turn in circles in search for their children. The BARKS and WHINES of neighborhood dogs echo all around. Lily pulls the car up to the curb and they climb out.

JEMMA

With the amulet Steve's too strong.
No one will be able to get to him.

LILY

Then we need a distraction.

JEMMA

We need more people.

Costumed kids gather around The Headless Horseman in awe. A costume-clad ROBOT CHILD (7) stares up at The Horseman.

ROBOT CHILD

Woah.

XIAOFAN

(to Jemma and Lily)
I think I can help with that.

Mary and her friends stalk over. She shoves a FAIRY GIRL (10) out of her path and reaches Xiaofan.

MARY

Whatever crazy hex you and your nut-
job friends put on this town you'd
better knock it off right now.

XIAOFAN

Think whatever you want, Mary.
(to the Costumed Kids)
You don't have to believe in ghosts
or magic to get that Sleepy
Hollow's in danger. But we can save
it together. So if you're up for it
follow me.

Xiaofan turns away.

Mary brings a costume broomstick down at her. The Horseman grabs it, wrenches it from her hands, and tosses it aside. Mary stomps her foot and storms off.

Xiaofan ushers kids inside. Lily pokes her head out the door.

LILY
Sweetie, we've got to start soon.

XIAOFAN
We're hurrying.

HELICOPTER MOM (O.S.)
Excuse me, excuse me.

Mary's Helicopter Mom forces her way to the door.

HELICOPTER MOM (CONT'D)
(to Lily)
I am appalled that you have enabled, no, encouraged your child's delusions. Corrupting the youth of this town!

XIAOFAN
I'm not corrupting anyone.

HELICOPTER MOM
Magic? Ghosts? Surely you don't believe her.

Lily steps out onto the porch and goes toe-to-toe with her.

LILY
There are very few people in this world I trust. And my daughter is telling the truth. Given the time-sensitive nature of our current situation I know you'll forgive me when I say either join the meeting or get off my lawn.

Xiaofan and the last of the kids file into the house. Lily steps inside and SLAMS the door.

Mary's mom stands on the porch, mouth open. The porch light flicks off.

A phone screen illuminates with the digits 9-1-1.

INT KITCHEN

Jemma sets papers on the table and Xiaofan unfolds a map. Their forces are scattered: On the floor, kids trade candy. Pre-teens watch TV. Teens mill through bedrooms.

INT HALLWAY

Jemma shoos teens out of the bedrooms and shuts the doors.

INT LIVING ROOM

Kids CHEER on black and white zombies. They GROAN when Xiaofan clicks the remote and the TV goes black.

INT KITCHEN

Lily pulls kids from the pantry and sets them at the table. The meeting convenes.

Xiaofan points to the cemetery on the map.

XIAOFAN

There will be a rift, a magic portal here.

She holds up her arm to display her charm bracelet.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Steve, the bad guy. He has a necklace with a jewel, like this one. He has strong magic so we have to be careful. Our goal is to get the necklace away from him and keep it safe.

ROBOT CHILD

But if we can't--

XIAOFAN

We will.

The Robot Child squirms and twirls his costume antennae.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

It's okay. Think of it like a game of Capture the Flag. We get the necklace, we win.

Red and blue lights arrive outside. Kids SHRIEK and shove.

LILY

Everyone, stay calm. Stay calm.

BWAAAAAAAAAH. Jemma stands on the couch with an air horn in her hand and the room falls SILENT.

XIAOFAN

Everyone split into groups. Gather as many people as you can and be at the cemetery by 11:45. This only works if we stop Steve from using the amulet at midnight.

LILY

Okay team, out the bedroom windows. Stay out of sight.

Jemma and The Horseman shepherd kids to each bedroom.

LILY (CONT'D)

(to Xiaofan)

I'll stay and distract the police.

XIAOFAN

Mom, I can't do this without you.

LILY

You can. Look at all this. You did this.

The LEAD TROUBLEMAKER (14) of the five PRACTICAL JOKERS (14) brings his costumed pirate crew over.

LEAD TROUBLEMAKER

Perhaps we can be of service. We specialize in misdirection and mayhem. Ask Principal Newborn.

EXT OUTSIDE HOUSE MOMENTS LATER

DING DONG. A GRIZZLY OFFICER (30) rings the door bell.

GRIZZLY OFFICER

Sleepy Hollow Police. Open up.

The voice of PRACTICAL JOKER #1 (14) calls from inside.

PRACTICAL JOKER #1 (O.S.)

Nobody's home.

A THUMP is heard, followed by a CRY of pain.

GRIZZLY OFFICER

This is official police business. Open up or we're coming in.

Feet SHUFFLE. The door swings open to reveal the Lead Troublemaker, whose crew continues their zombie flick.

The officer flashes his badge.

GRIZZLY OFFICER (CONT'D)
Is there an adult present we can
speak to?

LEAD TROUBLEMAKER
Uhhh. No. Yes. No.

Xiaofan's door sits open as kids exit through the window.

GRIZZLY OFFICER
I'll come in while you decide.

The officers step inside.

LEAD TROUBLEMAKER
Wait a minute, I watch Law & Order.
I know my rights.

The Grizzly Officer turns around.

GRIZZLY OFFICER
So you do. Hiding something?

Behind him, a COWGIRL (12) readies her lasso. She loops it around the doorknob of Xiaofan's bedroom door and pulls the rope in a hands length at a time, until the door CLICKS shut.

GRIZZLY OFFICER (CONT'D)
Then you won't mind if we have a
look around.

EXT TOWN HALL NIGHT

In front of Town Hall a stage and mic look out over a sparsely populated Fall Festival. Tables lined with candles offer crafts, food, and games, all untouched as party goers socialize. The Chief stands by, an apple cider in his hand.

CHIEF
All this superstitious nonsense
it's a wonder half these people
even showed.

Officer Carter chows down on hors d'oeuvres and speaks between bites.

OFFICER CARTER
Supernatural, not superstitious.
Opening an umbrella in the house,
that's superstition. Ghosts,
supernatural.

The Chief glares at him as Officer Carter bites into a mini quiche.

OFFICER CARTER (CONT'D)

Ooh. Hot, hot, hot.

CHIEF

Carter, if the Mayor comes over at least try and act professional.

Jemma, Xiaofan, and Lily weave through groups of party goers until Xiaofan loses sight of her family.

A hand grabs her shoulder and spins her around.

JEMMA

Come on.

They reach the stage and Lily lifts Xiaofan up onto it. Xiaofan steps up to the mic and the feedback SCREECHES. Audience members fall SILENT and stare at her.

CHIEF

When catering asks if you'd like one, they don't mean one platter.

Officer Carter taps the Chief and points at the stage. A MIDDLE AGED MAN (55) shouts from the crowd.

MIDDLE AGED MAN

Come on, do something!

CITIZEN #1 (65), CITIZEN #2 (40), and CITIZEN #3 (30) join in.

CITIZEN #1

What are you waiting for?

CITIZEN #2

Can she even talk?

CITIZEN #3

Get off the stage!

At the foot of the stage, Jemma and Lily nod and smile.

XIAOFAN

Hello everyone. Thanks for coming out tonight. I have an announcement real quick. We need your help.

The lights on the sides of Town Hall FLICKER.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Some pretty weird stuff has been happening. You've probably heard rumors going around: Magic and some dude with no head. You should know that the rumors are true.

The crowd breaks into WHISPERS and MURMURS.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

A year ago, my dad died. Some people said he was crazy, and a lot of you believed that. But tonight, we need to protect the people we all care about from ghosts.

The murmurs get LOUDER and people SHOUT from the audience.

CHIEF

Oh no, this has got to stop.

The Chief hands his cider to Carter and strides toward the stage. Carter sets the cider down and scurries after him.

XIAOFAN

My mom didn't believe at first. My sister didn't believe at first. My dad probably didn't either.

The Chief climbs up on stage. He stops when all but the overhead lights die, and the mic cuts off. Xiaofan continues.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

But he did believe in Sleepy Hollow. Now, someone is trying to destroy it, destroy us.

The Chief saunters up to Xiaofan and pulls her toward the side of the stage. She shouts the end of her announcement.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Like he did my Dad.

Lily and Jemma leap onstage.

CHIEF

Carter, hold onto the girl.

The Chief shoves Xiaofan toward Officer Carter. Officer Carter steps back and shakes his head. The Chief turns to address the townspeople.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Kids, they sure love their scary stories. I assure you our police force is ready for any situation, including the superstitious--supernatural.

The Chief LAUGHS but the audience doesn't respond.

XIAOFAN

This isn't a story. Steve can control evil spirits.

OFFICER CARTER

Sir, Johnson has been acting weird for a while.

CHIEF

Ridiculous. I'm a man of evidence. I don't believe in fairy tales.

The overhead light surges and BURSTS. The Chief cowers and SPARKS rain down.

LILY

If you're so sure, then tell me where Steve Johnson is right now.

EXT CEMETERY NIGHT

Mr. Sykes flips through his key ring and locks the gates.

The FLUTTER of bird wings draws his attention, but the night landscape is empty.

Mr. Sykes startles at a blue light that sputters then shines steady behind the mausoleum.

He steps back to the gates and a pair of gloved hands grabs him. Steve.

MR. SYKES

It's you.

STEVE

Unlock the gates, old man.

Mr. Sykes clutches the key ring clipped to his belt.

MR. SYKES

I can't do that.

Steve pulls the amulet from his pocket.

STEVE

You're in my way. I won't ask again.

Mr. Sykes unclips the key ring from his belt and a specter floats by behind him.

STEVE (CONT'D)

They're coming. The keys. Now!

Mr. Sykes grips the keys. He tosses them away into the yard.

Steve YELLS and shoves Mr. Sykes back.

A beam of light from the amulet BUSTS the gates open. The smoke clears and the gates lie in shambles. Mr. Sykes, pinned under one of the gates, strains to lift it. Steve pushes the gate aside and drags Mr. Sykes toward the blue light.

EXT STREET NIGHT

Neighbors clear the street and shut up their houses. The barks and howls of dogs are replaced with WHIMPERS. Xiaofan, Lily, and Jemma return to the car. The Horseman waits at the curb with The Fairy Girl.

XIAOFAN

We're cutting it close.

LILY

Buckle up, I'll get us there as fast as I can.

The pavement of the road CRACKS and shifts. Webs of cracks spread down the road in each direction.

Lines of cars on the street crawl to a halt. Drivers lay on their HORNS.

XIAOFAN

We'll never make it at this rate.

The Headless Horseman taps Jemma on the shoulder and puts his fingers where his mouth would be, in a whistling motion.

JEMMA

Is that supposed to mean? Oh.

Jemma raises her fingers to her mouth and lets out a WHISTLE. They stand together in SILENCE.

The Horseman holds up a pointer finger. Wait for it.

Distant hooves CLAP against the asphalt. They grow LOUDER and the maree from the magic orb CANTERS up to them.

FAIRY GIRL

Woah. I want one.

JEMMA

Go, we'll meet you there.

Across the street, Mary stands under a street lamp.

MARY

Mom. Mom, where are you?

The street lamp BURSTS. SPARKS rain down. Mary crouches on the pavement and shields her head with her arms.

Xiaofan turns toward Mary's SCREAMS. With a metallic GROAN the street lamp tips over toward Mary.

Xiaofan bolts across the street.

XIAOFAN

Mary, move!

Mary gets to her feet and Xiaofan pulls her out of the path of the street lamp right before it CRASHES into the pavement.

JEMMA

We've gotta go.

XIAOFAN

(to Jemma)

Coming!

(to Mary)

We could use your help if you're up for it, Mary.

Mary snaps out of her daze. She walks to an abandoned baseball bat on the sidewalk, picks it up, and turns it over in her hand.

MARY

Let's do this.

The Horseman mounts his horse and pulls Xiaofan up behind him. Jemma gives Xiaofan a flashlight and Lily grabs Xiaofan's hand.

XIAOFAN

We can do this. See you at the cemetery.

The Horseman taps his heels against the horse's sides and the horse GALLOPS off down the line of cars.

EXT CEMETERY NIGHT

Xiaofan and The Horseman charge through the gates and he pulls his steed back.

Townspeople flood into the cemetery on either side.

Ghosts fly out of the rift and gnash their teeth as they descend upon the townspeople. The townspeople and kids fight back with makeshift weapons, sticks, and costume props.

CITIZEN #2

Get 'em!

CITIZEN #1

Sleepy Hollow!

At the rift, Steve CHANTS and mixes ingredients in a bowl.

Xiaofan drops down from the saddle and swipes her flashlight at a NASTY GHOST. The ghost puffs into a smoke-like haze, but the same ghost reforms in front of her.

XIAOFAN

Come on, stay dead already.

She swipes at him again and fights her way to the rift. She rounds the corner of the mausoleum. Steve pulls Mr. Sykes to his feet and raises a knife to Mr. Sykes's throat. His other hand clutches the amulet.

STEVE

Don't try anything.

Xiaofan raises her hands in the air.

XIAOFAN

Okay. Don't hurt him.

STEVE

You care so much about him. These people don't give a damn about you. They turned on me and your father.

XIAOFAN

You're wrong.

Steve lowers his blade a hair.

STEVE

Look at you. You hate me as much as I hate them. I'm not the bad guy, kid. Let me show you.

XIAOFAN

Let him go first.

MR. SYKES

Don't do it.

Steve raises the knife back to Mr. Sykes's throat.

STEVE

Yeah, won't be doing that. Blood of a commoner, that's the last ingredient. Then you'll see.

Steve backs toward the rift and drags Mr. Sykes with him.

XIAOFAN

My dad trusted you. You were supposed to protect him.

STEVE

After everything they did he wanted to roll over. Forgive them. He had the knowledge to rebuild this town the way we wanted it. But he was too weak.

Steve points his knife at Xiaofan.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Like you.

XIAOFAN

You're right. I am like him.
(to The Horseman)
Now!

The Horseman SWOOPS in on horseback and knocks Steve down.

Steve drops the amulet and Mr. Sykes scrambles away.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

(to Mr. Sykes)
Go help the others.

Steve searches the grass and he and Xiaofan lunge for the amulet. The Horseman turns around to circle back.

Steve slashes his knife at Xiaofan. She pulls her arm back and CRIES out in pain.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

No, no, no.

She clutches her wound. A drop of blood hits the grass and the amulet glows in Steve's hand.

Fog seeps out from the rift and The Dark Spirits emerge.

STEVE

Our time is finally here. The town
is ours. Spare no one.

The Dark Spirits fly at Xiaofan. The Horseman jumps in front of her and the Dark Spirits tear him away.

The townspeople are surrounded by ghosts. They fight back, but their weak swings and stabs slow.

EXT CEMETERY GATES NIGHT

Jemma catches up to Lily at the gate and scans the crowd. Mary and the Fairy Girl bumble after them.

LILY

She could be anywhere in here.

A ghost reels toward them. Mary swings her bat through it like a cobweb.

FAIRY GIRL

My turn, my turn.

JEMMA

(to Mary)
Thanks.

MARY

No problem.

Mary swings her bat over her shoulder and bounds into the graveyard.

JEMMA

We know why she came. She'll be
wherever he is.

EXT MAUSOLEUM

Xiaofan is on her hands and knees. Jemma and Lily run toward her.

XIAOFAN

Mom.

Steve KICKS Xiaofan in the stomach and she collapses again. She runs her fingers over her bracelet and looks down to it.

STEVE

It's over, kid. You made your choice. They can't save you now.

XIAOFAN

No, but I can save them.

She rises to her feet and extends her arm toward him.

Her bracelet illuminates a bright white light.

STEVE

That's impossible.

Steve raises the amulet and the two beams of magic collide. The amulet's magic gains on the white magic. The force of it pushes Xiaofan back and she digs her heels into the ground.

Lily and Jemma battle their way toward her. Xiaofan shuts her eyes and Eric's spirit appears at her side.

XIAOFAN

Never forget--

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

That I love you.

ERIC'S SPIRIT

That I love you.

STEVE

How are you--

Xiaofan braces her arm with her other hand and the bracelet's magic surges. Cracks shoot out from the chip in the amulet's gem.

XIAOFAN

(to Eric's Spirit)

I won't forget, I promise.

Eric's spirit brushes her shoulder and his hand passes through her. He floats on toward the rift.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Dad!

Eric's Spirit turns back to her.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

I love you too.

He smiles at her and glides through the rift.

Xiaofan inhales and delivers one last blow of white magic.

The amulet's gem SHATTERS to pieces. The bracelet's light fades and Jemma and Lily reach Xiaofan.

STEVE

No, no!

The shrapnel left in Steve's palm crumbles into ash and the Dark Spirits SHRIEK. They shrivel to half their size and flee back to Steve.

The townspeople form a circle around Steve and the spirits.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Now, wait a minute, ladies.

Xiaofan's bracelet lights up and she joins hands with Jemma and Lily. The white magic spreads up Xiaofan's arms, to Jemma and Lily.

The Dark Spirits SHRIEK and shrink smaller. The other ghosts escape back through the rift.

More townspeople join the chain and the light spreads to form a magical barrier. They close in around the Dark Spirits.

The Dark Spirits back up toward the rift and Steve cowers behind them.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Don't do this. Don't leave. We can fix this.

Mr. Sykes completes the chain and the light fills the cemetery. The Dark Spirits flee and sweep Steve into the rift with them.

Townspeople CHEER and hug one another. The rift shifts to shine the same white light as Xiaofan's bracelet. Its edges fade and the portal grows transparent.

The Horseman gives a hug to Lily and then to Jemma.

LILY

(to The Horseman)

Thank you.

JEMMA

I'll miss you.

He takes a step toward the rift.

XIAOFAN

Not you too.

She tackles him in a hug. He hugs back and picks her up.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Stay. Feels like you just got here.

The Horseman holds the hug then sets her back down.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

At least tell me if I'll see you
again.

The Horseman pulls out Eric's family photo and the orange
colored pencil.

He scribbles on the back of the photo and turns it around to
her. In orange pencil it reads: 'Yes' 'No'.

He returns the photo to her, tucks the colored pencil into
his jacket pocket, and pats it.

XIAOFAN (CONT'D)

Good, now you won't forget me.

The Horseman counts his jacket buttons and tugs one loose. He
sets it in her palm and closes her fingers around it. When he
reaches the rift he turns back and flashes Xiaofan a thumbs
up.

He passes on and the rift blooms bright white. When the light
dies down the rift is gone.

EXT CEMETERY GATES NIGHT

The crowd spills out of the cemetery.

Lily, Jemma, and Xiaofan walk out together and Mary jogs up
to walk with them.

MARY

Hey, so I think Claire's mom is
hosting a post-Halloween 'Glad The
Town Didn't Get Destroyed' party
tomorrow, if you want to come.

Xiaofan's mouth hangs open and Lily nudges her.

XIAOFAN

Yeah. Sure thing. See you there.

Mary bounds away. The Robot Child runs by, a Pixy Stix in each hand, and YELLS to the sky.

ROBOT CHILD
Best Halloween ever!

A trail of little kids WHOOPS and HOLLERS as they follow.

LILY
Oh I feel bad for his parents.

Xiaofan admires the gem charm on her bracelet and SNAPS it off.

XIAOFAN
Guess we don't need this anymore.

Xiaofan tosses it away into the tall grass.

LILY
No more rifts.

JEMMA
I second that motion.

The charm hits the ground and rolls to a stop. After a moment it disappears without a trace.

EXT CEMETERY 6 MONTHS LATER

Xiaofan sits against a tree. She pushes her now long hair behind her ear and writes in her journal. Eric's family photo sits paper clipped to the top of the page.

Lily CALLS OUT from Mr. Sykes's yard.

LILY
Xiaofan.

Xiaofan CLICKS her pen in conclusion. She fiddles with her bracelet and scans over her work.

Her bracelet sports a new charm, the Horseman's button.

LILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Xiaofan. Time to come in.

A SNORT above her head grabs Xiaofan's attention. She gets up to pet the Horseman's mare. Mary leads a well-healed Mrs. Epps to the house and Mr. Sykes pokes his head out the door.

MR. SYKES
Tea Time!

MARY
(to Xiaofan)
You'd better hurry before I grab
all the scones.

Jemma walks to the cottage with a few neighborhood kids. The kids dash to the porch and Mr. Sykes leaps out of the way.

XIAOFAN
(to the horse)
Be back soon.

MR. SYKES (O.S.)
Watch the hydrangeas.

Xiaofan runs off to the cottage and disappears inside.

FADE TO BLACK.