

Chess club

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. STATE CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP - GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

A vast hotel ballroom, transformed into a silent battlefield. Rows of chessboards stretch into the distance, each a quiet warzone. The only sounds: the *clack* of pieces, the mechanical tap of clocks, and the suppressed exhales of players realizing their mistakes.

At the center table, under harsh overhead light, sits ALEX HARPER (15) Intelligent, introverted, calculating. His mind is a machine, running endless simulations, but his fingers hesitate.

Across from him: DANTE REEVES (15), the reigning state champion, charisma and cockiness in equal measure.

The digital clock beside them ticks down.

00:15

00:14

00:13

From the sidelines, the Franklin High Chess Club watches, each member locked in their own version of the game.

SAM TORRES (15), Witty, charismatic, a fast talker.

MAYA BROOKS (15), Introverted, logical, hyper-observant.

DEREK KING (15), Quiet, strong, and protective.

LILY CHEN (16), Bold, dramatic, unpredictable.

SAM

He's frozen. Come on, Alex, don't overthink—

Maya doesn't blink, eyes on the board.

MAYA

He's waiting for the right moment.

Derek, arms crossed, leans in.

DEREK

Or he's out of moves.

Lily bites her nails, vibrating with nervous energy.

LILY
I hate this part. Someone say
something encouraging.

Back at the board, Dante smirks.

DANTE
You're stalling, Harper. Just
resign.

Alex doesn't react. He's too deep in thought. then, he sees
it.

A flicker of realization. His knight, a piece Dante forgot to
respect.

Alex's fingers grip the piece. A slow inhale. A single
heartbeat. Then.

Click. He moves. Knight to E7.

Dante's smirk vanishes. His eyes dart over the board,
searching for an escape—but there isn't one.

The murmurs in the crowd start. Players whisper. Dante leans
forward, desperation creeping in.

The clock ticks.

00:15

00:14

Dante's breathing shifts. He's out of options.

Finally, a sharp exhale. Dante slumps back and tips his king
over.

DANTE (CONT'D)
Checkmate.

The Chess Club erupts. Sam punches the air.

SAM
Yes! That's my guy!

Derek slaps Alex on the back with enough force to make him
stumble.

DEREK
Didn't doubt you for a second.
Well, maybe a little.

Lily practically tackles Alex in excitement.

LILY
That was SO STRESSFUL, never do
that again.

Maya just gives Alex a single nod of approval—the highest praise from her.

But Alex barely reacts. He's watching someone else.

PRINCIPAL WARD (50s) polished but uninterested strides past him, to shake Dante's hand first.

PRINCIPAL WARD
Great effort, Dante. You played an
excellent game.

Alex finally stands, waiting for the same acknowledgment. Instead, Ward gives him a brief nod and moves on.

The Chess Club's victory is already forgotten. Across the room, Ward is already laughing with the school's football coach.

Lily steps beside Alex, still buzzing from the win.

LILY
You know, for a game about kings
and queens, they sure treat us like
pawns.

Alex stares at Ward, his jaw tight. His fingers unconsciously tighten into a fist.

ALEX
One day they'll see it's more than
a game.

INT. HARPER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

A warm, suburban home, but tonight, it's alive with energy. The Chess Club has taken over. Pizza boxes, soda cans, and an eclectic mix of music fill the space.

A homemade banner hangs above the fireplace.

FRANKLIN HIGH CHESS CHAMPS - CHECKMATE!

In the middle of it all, ALEX sits on the couch, staring at the state championship trophy on the coffee table.

Across the room, SAM stands on a chair, raising a soda bottle like a victory toast.

SAM
To Franklin High's greatest chess
team! Brains over brawn, baby!

The team cheers, clinking soda bottles. Lily grabs a slice of pizza and holds it up like an award.

LILY
And to me, for being the true MVP
of mind games!

DEREK
You bluffed one guy, Lily.

LILY
Yes. And he folded. Like a cheap
suit.

They all laugh, except Alex, who stares at the trophy, lost in thought.

At the kitchen counter, Alex's mom, RACHEL HARPER (40s), warm but practical, sharp-eyed like her son, refills a tray of snacks.

His dad, MARK HARPER (40s), glasses, math professor, supportive but analytical) leans in, watching the group.

RACHEL
(to mark)
They actually look like they're
having fun.

MARK
I think this is their version of
wild partying.

Rachel shakes her head, amused, then calls out to the room.

RACHEL
Alright, champions, anyone need
more pizza?

SAM
Mrs. Harper, you're the real MVP.

RACHEL
Flattery won't get you extra
slices.

SAM
Then I take it back.

Laughter. But as Rachel hands out drinks, she glances at Alex, noticing how quiet he is.

RACHEL (TO ALEX)
Hey. You okay?

Alex snaps out of it, forcing a small smile.

ALEX
Yeah. Just... thinking.

Rachel studies him, unconvinced.

Mark joins Alex at the couch, adjusting his glasses.

MARK
Already strategizing your next tournament?

Alex doesn't look up. Instead, he moves a piece on the coffee table chessboard.

ALEX
We won. But nothing changed.

Mark raises an eyebrow.

MARK
You expected a parade?

ALEX
I expected something. Respect.
Recognition.

Rachel exchanges a look with Mark.

RACHEL
Alex, I know it feels unfair. But winning doesn't always mean instant rewards.

Alex frowns, still staring at the board.

ALEX
Then maybe we're playing the wrong game.

Mark and Rachel exchange another glance—concerned.

Before they can push further, Sam claps a hand on Alex's shoulder.

SAM
Alright, brooding genius, what's
the next move?

Alex finally looks up, eyes sharp.

ALEX
We stop waiting for recognition.

Maya leans forward, intrigued.

MAYA
Are we talking strategy... or
rebellion?

Alex moves a pawn forward.

ALEX
One move at a time.

The group exchanges glances. Something shifts in the room—
this is no longer just a celebration.

Rachel and Mark watch from the kitchen. Mark exhales, shaking
his head.

MARK (TO RACHEL)
He's planning something.

Rachel smiles, but it's tinged with worry.

RACHEL
He always is.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MORNING.

The air in Principal Ward's office is thick with cheap coffee
and condescension. The Chess Club stands in a semi-circle,
facing Principle Ward sits behind his oversized oak desk. A
fake smile plastered across his face.

Behind him, the school trophy case gleams, prominently
displaying football, basketball, and track medals—but not a
single chess award.

PRINCIPAL WARD
First off, congratulations on your
big win. State champions—very
impressive.

ALEX
Thank you, sir.

Ward nods, as if that's enough praise, then leans back in his chair, exhaling like he's about to deliver great news.

PRINCIPAL WARD

And now, even better news. You'll
be going undefeated next year.

The team exchanges confused glances.

LILY

How?

Ward smiles wider, as if proud of himself.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Because starting next semester...
there won't be a Chess Club.

A beat of silence.

SAM

Interesting strategy. No club, no
losses. Bold choice, sir.

DEREK

Wait, what?

MAYA

You're cutting the defending state
champions? Why?

Ward sighs, as if they're making *him* the victim here. He
slides a memo across the desk.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Budget cuts. We had to make some
tough calls. We're focusing on
activities that bring in real
revenue, sports, social media
programs, things that give our
school visibility.

ALEX

You're saying chess isn't valuable?

Ward leans forward, patronizing.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Alex, it's just a game.

ALEX

No. It's not.

Ward chuckles, shaking his head.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Look, I get it. You kids put in a lot of work, and you should be proud. But at the end of the day, no one buys tickets to a chess match.

LILY

Excuse you, sir, but last night's party was *sold out*.

SAM

She means your living room.

LILY

Still. Packed house.

Maya ignores them, her focus on Ward.

MAYA

So, what happens to the funding?

Ward waves a hand dismissively.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Reallocated. Football gets a new weight room. The social media team is getting professional content creators. We're investing in what makes Franklin marketable.

The room is silent.

Sam laughs once, a hollow sound.

SAM

Right, because God forbid this school be known for intelligence.

Ward closes the file on his desk, signaling the conversation is over.

PRINCIPAL WARD

I know this is disappointing. But look on the bright side—you'll always be remembered as the last Franklin High Chess Club. You went out on top.

Alex stands very still.

His mind is already working. Calculating.

ALEX

Not yet, we haven't.

Ward raises an eyebrow, but Alex is already turning to leave. The rest of the team follows, tension thick in the air.

Just as they reach the door.

PRINCIPAL WARD

Oh, and don't try any... petitions or protests. Decisions are final.

Alex doesn't turn around.

ALEX

Checkmate, sir.

They exit.

Ward watches them go, his smile slipping just a little.

EXT. FRANKLIN HIGH - SCHOOL COURTYARD - AFTERNOON.

The final bell rings. The hallways explode with life as students pour out of the building, laughing, shoving, making weekend plans. But in the far corner of the courtyard, under the shade of an old oak tree, the Chess Club sits in silence.

Alex stands with his hands in his pockets, eyes distant. Sam leans against the bench, uncharacteristically quiet. Maya is on her phone, not texting anyone, just scrolling blankly. Derek sits with his arms crossed, jaw clenched. Lily swings her legs off the edge of the bench, staring at the ground.

SAM

So, that sucked.

Lily looks up, a weak attempt at humor.

LILY

Oh, you mean when Principal Ward killed our entire existence in under five minutes? Yeah, that was fun.

Derek exhales, shaking his head.

DEREK

I still don't get it. We won. We won everything. And they just-cut us? Like we don't matter?

Maya doesn't look up from her phone.

MAYA
Because to them, we don't.

SAM
So, what do we do now?

No one answers.

LILY
We could, I don't know. Try
something else? The Drama Club
always needs people.

Derek lets out a short laugh.

DEREK
I don't do drama.

LILY
Says the guy who broke a chess
clock over Kyle Dawson's head last
year.

DEREK
That was self-defense.

SAM
Okay, technically it was a Sicilian
Defense, but sure.

No one laughs. The silence settles back in.

MAYA
Maybe that's it, then. Maybe we
just, move on.

LILY
So that's it? We just-stop hanging
out?

Alex finally speaks, his voice quiet but firm.

ALEX
That's not happening.

They all look at him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We're more than a club. We've
always been more than a club.

Sam watches him carefully.

SAM
Okay, so what are we, then?

Alex hesitates. He doesn't have the answer yet.

ALEX
I don't know.

DEREK
We could fight this, right? A
petition, an appeal, something?

MAYA
He said no petitions.

DEREK
Since when do we listen to *him*?

ALEX
We're not playing by their rules
anymore.

Maya raises an eyebrow.

MAYA
What does that mean?

Alex looks up, a fire in his eyes that wasn't there this
morning.

ALEX
It means we stop thinking like
students. And start thinking like
players.

LILY
Players, in what?

Alex glances toward the school.

ALEX
Something bigger than chess.

The others exchange looks—uncertain, intrigued.

Sam leans back, a smirk forming.

SAM
Alright, what's the first move?

Alex doesn't answer right away. He just watches the school
doors close, the faculty locking up for the night.

ALEX

I don't know. I need to think. I'm going home.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - SIDEWALK - AFTER SCHOOL.

The sun hangs low in the sky as Maya, Alex, Sam, Derek, and Lily walk home together, backpacks slung over their shoulders. It's the first day without Chess Club, and it feels off—like a piece is missing from the board.

Maya scrolls through her phone absently, eyes scanning the screen.

MAYA

So, my neighbor lost her dog.

Sam raises an eyebrow.

SAM

Fascinating. Truly. Riveting storytelling, Maya.

Maya ignores him, still reading.

MAYA

She's offering a hundred bucks as a reward.

That gets their attention.

LILY

Wait, Real money?

MAYA

Cash, In hand. If we find him.

Derek shrugs.

DEREK

So, go look for the dog. What's the problem?

MAYA

She's ninety-three. Last saw him three days ago. Thinks she heard barking last night. That's all we've got.

ALEX

Okay, Let's think like a chessboard. Pieces. Positions.

Sam groans.

SAM

Oh my God, we are not turning this into a strategy breakdown.

ALEX

Where was he last seen?

Lily nods, thinking.

LILY

I don't know. If I were a small dog, where would I go?

SAM

If you were a small dog, Lily, I'd be concerned for everyone involved.

LILY

I mean, if I were scared. I'd look for somewhere familiar.

DEREK

Or safe Small spaces. Less noise.

ALEX

We need data. Information. Maya, pull up the neighborhood's security cams. See if anyone's doorbell caught anything.

Sam sighs dramatically.

SAM

Oh, so now we're detectives.

ALEX

We're problem-solvers. We need to talk to Lily's neighbor.

EXT. FRANKLIN HIGH - SOCCER FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON.

The sun hangs low in the sky, casting golden light over the soccer field. Bleachers are packed with students and parents, buzzing with energy. The scoreboard ticks down—second half, a close game.

On the field, Maya sprints down the sideline, laser-focused, number 7 on her jersey. She weaves between defenders, quick, precise, calculated.

In the stands, the Chess Club, Alex, Lily, Sam, and Derek sit together, watching.

LILY
Come on, come on, come on...

SAM
I thought we were the nerds, but
you're acting like this is the
World Cup.

LILY
Because it *matters*.

Alex watches intently, taking in Maya's movements like he's
analyzing a chess match.

ALEX
She's reading the field.
Calculating every move before she
makes it.

DEREK
She's kicking ass, that's what
she's doing.

Maya fakes left, cuts right, and blasts past a defender. The
crowd roars.

Near the goal, she spots an opening. She takes the shot—

The ball rockets past the goalkeeper. GOAL.

The crowd erupts. Maya throws her arms up, grinning,
teammates swarming her.

LILY
YES!

SAM
Damn, Maya!

Derek whistles, impressed. Alex smirks slightly, nodding.

Maya glances up at the stands, sees them cheering, she just
smiles.

EXT. LILY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MR. GRANT'S HOUSE - EVENING.

The sun is setting, casting long shadows over the quiet
street. The Chess Club approaches a modest, single-story
house, the porch light flickering on as they step up. Lily
knocks on the door.

After a few seconds, MR. GRANT (60s) retired, gruff but kind,
baseball cap pulled low over his weathered face cracks it
open, eyes narrowing as he sees the group.

MR. GRANT

Let me guess. This is about Buttons.

LILY

You got it.

MR. GRANT

Poor Mrs. Alderson she's been calling for him all day.

ALEX

We're trying to retrace his steps. Can you tell us exactly what you saw?

Mr. Grant sighs, stepping onto the porch, arms crossed.

MR. GRANT

Couple nights ago, I was out here having my evening smoke. Saw Buttons in the backyard like usual. Sniffing around, looking for trouble.

MAYA

Gate was closed?

MR. GRANT

Locked.

DEREK

No holes in the fence?

MR. GRANT

Didn't think so... but I heard a noise, a kinda *thump*, like something shifting. Didn't check, though. Wish I had.

Alex's mind is already working, eyes scanning the backyard fence. He steps off the porch, heading toward Mrs. Alderson's yard. The others follow, Mr. Grant trailing behind.

EXT. MRS. ALDERSON'S BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The yard is small, well-kept, except for a section of the wooden fence near the back. One of the boards is loose, cracked near the bottom, leaning outward.

Sam crouches, tapping it with his knuckle.

SAM

Yeah, this is an exit ramp if I've ever seen one.

Derek grips the board and wiggles it—it shifts easily.

DEREK

If Buttons squeezed through here, he didn't walk out. He ran.

MAYA

Away from something? Or toward something?

LILY

Doesn't matter. We've got our first real lead.

Alex straightens, mind already on the next move.

ALEX

He's microchipped, right?

Mr. Grant nods.

MR. GRANT

Yeah. Mrs. Alderson had it done years ago, but those things don't have GPS.

Maya's fingers fly over her phone.

MAYA

No, but they do have RFID frequencies. If we get his from the vet, we might be able to track any nearby shelters or clinics that scanned him.

Alex nods, turning to the group.

ALEX

Then let's move.

The team heads for the street, already shifting into mission mode.

FADE TO—

INT. VETERINARY CLINIC - RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

The clinic is quiet, save for the occasional bark from the back. Fluorescent lights hum overhead.

The receptionist, JESS (20s, tired, sipping a massive coffee), barely looks up as the group approaches the counter.

JESS

Let me guess. Sick hamster?

Lily leans on the counter, flashing her best dramatic face.

LILY

Tragedy, actually. A beloved pet,
lost to the cruel unknown.

Derek pulls her back.

DEREK

We're here about a missing dog.
Buttons Alderson.

Jess scrolls through the computer, typing lazily.

JESS

Yeah, I remember him. Sweet old
lady. The chip info should be
here...

She clicks through records, then turns the screen slightly.

JESS (CONT'D)

Here you go. RFID frequency,
microchip registry.

Maya snaps a picture of the screen.

MAYA

Got it.

Jess sips her coffee, unimpressed.

JESS

Hope you guys find him.

Alex nods, leading the team toward the door.

ALEX

We will.

As they step outside, the cool night air settles around them.

Maya checks her phone, already cross-referencing databases.

MAYA

Alright, next move—we check every
vet, shelter, and rescue in town
that scanned a dog with this
frequency.

Alex glances at the dark streets ahead, eyes sharp.

ALEX

Well we could do that or there's
another way

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - LUNCHROOM - NEXT DAY

The cafeteria buzzes with energy—students talking, laughing,
debating over the latest viral trends. But at the far corner
table, the Chess Club sits huddled together, locked in quiet,
strategic planning.

Alex leans forward, sketching a rough map of the neighborhood
on a napkin, his eyes intense, focused.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We're running out of time. If
Buttons got picked up, he could
already be in another county.

Maya scrolls on her tablet, cross-checking animal shelter
reports.

MAYA

No matches on his RFID so far.
Either no one's scanned him, or
someone's keeping him off the grid.

Derek crosses his arms, frustrated.

DEREK

How do you even *hide* a dog? It's
not like stealing a car.

Sam leans back, smirking.

SAM

You'd be surprised. Some people
hoard 'em. Some sell 'em. Some are
just *garbage humans*.

Lily swirls her drink with a straw, deep in thought.

LILY

So, what's the next move, fearless
leader?

Alex sets his pen down, eyes locking onto her.

ALEX
We use the drones.

A beat. The group blinks.

DEREK
Wait. What?

ALEX
The school's media department has four drones. High-res cameras, great range. If we rig them with RFID scanners, we can sweep the neighborhood from the sky.

Maya leans in, impressed.

MAYA
That... could actually work. If we load the chip frequency into a scanner, the drones might pick up a signal.

SAM
Okay, but what do we tell the school? *Oh, hey, we need these drones for totally normal, definitely-not-borderline-illegal reasons?*

Alex smirks.

ALEX
That's Lily's problem.

Lily gasps, placing a hand over her heart.

LILY
Are you suggesting that I, a pillar of honesty, a beacon of truth, should resort to—

Derek deadpans.

DEREK
You literally faked an asthma attack last week to skip a history quiz.

Lily grins.

LILY
And I sold it.

ALEX
Exactly.

Lily leans back, considering.

LILY
Alright. You're in luck. I just so
happen to be Franklin High's Drama
Club star.

SAM
Oh no. Here we go.

Lily stands on her chair, striking a dramatic pose.

LILY
Lead actress. Three years running.
Best Monologue, Spring Festival.
The critics wept.

DEREK
Your mom was the only critic.

LILY
And she was *moved*.

Alex pinches the bridge of his nose.

ALEX
Lily. The drones.

Lily hops off the chair, rolling her shoulders.

LILY
Right. No worries. By the end of
the day, those drones are ours.

Sam whistles.

SAM
I'd pay money to see this.

Lily winks.

LILY
You will see it. I perform in the
small theater every third Thursday.
Tickets are fifteen bucks.

Maya slides her tablet across the table, all business.

MAYA

While Lily sweet-talks the school,
the rest of us divide up and start
making calls. If Buttons is out
there, someone's seen him.

Alex folds up the napkin-map, sliding it into his pocket.

ALEX

We're making our next move. Let's
do this.

The team scatters, each with their task. As Alex stands,
adjusting his bag, he watches the hallway outside the
cafeteria.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - AUDITORIUM - AFTERNOON

The auditorium is half-filled with students, some waiting to
audition, others just watching. A few teachers sit at a long
table, scripts in front of them. The stage lights cast a warm
glow over the wooden floor.

Near the back, the Chess Club—ALEX, MAYA, SAM, and DEREK—
slouch in the seats, watching as LILY stands center stage,
script in hand.

MAYA

So, what's she auditioning for
again?

SAM

I think she said the lead.

DEREK

Bold move.

On stage, LILY clears her throat, straightens her posture.
The drama teacher, MS. PATEL, looks over her glasses.

MS. PATEL

Whenever you're ready, Lily.

A deep breath. Then—Lily transforms.

LILY

"Do you think I don't see? You talk
of love like it's currency, to be
traded, hoarded, spent on the
highest bidder. But I know the
truth—love is war. And I do not
intend to lose."

The auditorium falls silent. Even students who had been half-distracted now turn their heads.

In the back row, the Chess Club exchanges looks.

MAYA

Damn.

ALEX

She's good.

SAM

I always forget she's a drama kid.
Then she does this and scares me a
little.

DEREK

Yeah, she's got this.

Lily finishes, lowering her script. There's a pause—then polite applause from the audience. Ms. Patel scribbles something on her notes, nodding approvingly.

MS. PATEL

Thank you, Lily. Well done.

Lily steps off the stage, expression neutral, but the moment she reaches the others, her mask drops.

LILY

Okay, how was it?

MAYA

Are you kidding? You owned that
stage.

SAM

Low-key terrifying, but in a good
way.

DEREK

You're a natural.

A beat. Lily turns to Alex, waiting.

Alex pauses, then nods.

ALEX

You crushed it.

Lily beams. She doesn't need to hear anything else.

EXT. MRS. ALDERSON'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - AFTER SCHOOL

The sun is dipping low, casting long golden shadows over the quiet neighborhood. MRS. ALDERSON (93, frail but determined) stands on her porch, watching as the Chess Club assembles in her front yard.

Alex stands in the center, his notebook open, mapping out the area. The four school drones sit on a nearby picnic table, already powered up. Maya tinkers with one, connecting it to her laptop, eyes narrowed in focus.

MRS. ALDERSON
You really think this will work?

ALEX
It's our best shot.

Lily leans against the railing, arms crossed.

LILY
And it's way cooler than knocking
on doors.

Maya nods at the drones.

MAYA
The RFID scanner only has a 20-foot
range. So we're not looking for a
strong signal—just a faint ping.

Alex taps his notebook.

ALEX
We start with a low and slow grid
search from here and expand
outward. We move block by block. If
anyone picks up a signal—

DEREK
Call the others. We converge.

Alex nods.

SAM
This is either gonna be genius or
the most expensive game of *Where's
Waldo* we've ever played.

Lily cracks her knuckles.

LILY
Guess we'll find out.

MRS. ALDERSON
Please... just bring my boy home.

A brief beat. They all feel the weight of that.

Then—Alex steps back, nodding.

ALEX
Let's find Buttons.

Maya activates the drones. The soft whir of propellers fills the air as they lift off, hovering like watchful sentinels.

The team splits up, each heading into the neighborhood. The search is on.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - EVENING

The Chess Club moves through the quiet streets, eyes on their screens, scanning yards, alleyways, and porches. The drones hum softly above them, their cameras sweeping for any sign of movement.

Maya adjusts her laptop, frustrated.

MAYA
Three hours. Nothing.

Derek wipes sweat off his forehead.

DEREK
Starting to think Buttons found a new family.

Lily leans against a mailbox, rubbing her feet.

LILY
If this is what detective work is like, I am officially switching to soap operas.

Sam stares at his scanner, sighing.

SAM
Guys, maybe we—

BEEP.

A small blip appears on Maya's screen. Then another.

MAYA
Wait.

Alex snaps to attention.

ALEX
Talk to me.

Maya zooms in, triangulating the location.

MAYA

Weak signal, but it's close. Other
side of that fence.

They all turn to a small house with an overgrown backyard.
The fence is old, slats missing—and just barely visible
through the gap—

A tiny, trembling furball.

LILY

Oh my God. It's him.

Buttons is huddled beneath a bush, eyes wide, ears pinned
back.

MRS. ALDERSON (O.S.)

Buttons!

They turn. Mrs. Alderson stands at the edge of the yard,
breathless.

ALEX

Derek, you're up.

Derek moves forward carefully, lowering to a crouch.

DEREK

Hey, buddy. You ready to go home?

Buttons whimpers.

Derek reaches into his pocket, pulling out the peanut butter
crackers from lunch.

DEREK (CONT'D)

C'mon, man. We got snacks.

A long beat. Then—Buttons inches forward, sniffing.

A second later, he jumps into Derek's arms.

EXT. MRS. ALDERSON'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - EVENING

The sky is deep purple now, the last light of the sun fading
behind the rooftops. The Chess Club stands at the front door
of Mrs. Alderson's house, Buttons nestled in Derek's arms,
tail wagging wildly.

Maya knocks gently. A beat. Then—

The door swings open, MRS. ALDERSON for a moment, she just stares.

Then—her hands fly to her mouth.

MRS. ALDERSON
Oh... oh my...

Derek gently handing Buttons over.

DEREK
Somebody missed you.

Buttons squirms out of his arms and into hers, licking her face furiously.

MRS. ALDERSON
Oh, my sweet boy... I thought I lost
you forever.

She hugs him close, eyes shimmering with tears. The team watches, smiling, something warm settling in their chests.

After a long moment, Mrs. Alderson looks up, voice thick with emotion.

MRS. ALDERSON (CONT'D)
I don't know how to thank you.

She reaches into her sweater pocket, pulling out a small envelope.

MRS. ALDERSON (CONT'D)
One hundred dollars, just like I
promised.

Alex glances at the others. They exchange a look. No words needed.

ALEX
Mrs. Alderson... we can't take that.

MRS. ALDERSON
Nonsense. You earned it.

ALEX
Donate it. To your favorite
charity. In our name.

She studies them, then nods, smiling.

MRS. ALDERSON
You kids are something special.

A beat. Then she tilts her head, a new thought forming.

MRS. ALDERSON (CONT'D)
Well... if I can't pay you in cash,
how about something better?

SAM
Better than money? Unlikely.

She gestures behind her.

MRS. ALDERSON
How do you all feel about fresh-
baked cookies?

SAM
I accept this reward on behalf of
the entire team.

Lily nudges Alex, smirking.

LILY
See? This is why we help people.
For snacks.

Alex just shakes his head, but he's smiling. They step
inside.

INT. MRS. ALDERSON'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Chess Club sits around a cozy, old-fashioned kitchen
table, plates stacked with warm cookies and glasses of milk.
The kitchen smells like vanilla and cinnamon.

Buttons snores lightly in Mrs. Alderson's lap, belly full,
home at last.

Laughter fills the air. Sam argues with Lily over the last
cookie. Maya types something on her laptop. Derek leans back
in his chair, finally relaxed. Alex watches them all, taking
it in.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - LUNCHROOM - DAY

The cafeteria is buzzing with Homecoming energy. Posters of
the Franklin High Falcons hang on the walls, students chatter
excitedly about the big game tonight.

At their usual corner table, the Chess Club sits together,
but instead of plotting a strategy, Sam leans back in his
chair, grinning.

SAM

Alright, nerds. I better see all of you at the game tonight.

Maya barely looks up from her laptop.

MAYA

Since when do you care about school sports?

Derek smirks, tossing an apple between his hands.

DEREK

Since *I'm playing in it*.

Lily throws her hands in the air, mock dramatic.

LILY

Wow. A real-life jock sitting at our table. How do we mere mortals deserve this honor?

Derek rolls his eyes, but he's grinning.

DEREK

It's just Homecoming. Chill.

SAM

Dude. It's your first *official* game since your injury last season. That's kind of a big deal.

Derek shrugs, but his usual confidence flickers.

DEREK

Yeah, well... just hoping I don't screw it up.

Alex notices that flicker—but before he can say anything, Lily claps her hands together.

LILY

Okay, well, now we *definitely* have to go. Not just to see Derek tackle people, but also—

Her eyes lock onto Alex, smirking.

LILY (CONT'D)

—to get Alex to finally talk to Clara Simmons.

Alex, mid-sip of his drink, chokes.

ALEX
What— I— That's—

Sam grins, leaning in.

SAM
Ohhh, this is good.

Maya, without looking up, casually types.

MAYA
Clara Simmons. Junior. Cheer
captain. 4.1 GPA. Runs an Etsy
store for handmade earrings.
Extremely out of Alex's league.

Alex groans, head in his hands.

ALEX
Can we not do this?

Lily grins wider.

LILY
Come on. She's cheering tonight.
This is your chance.

Derek leans forward, smirking.

DEREK
Dude. You *literally* analyze chess
moves in your sleep. Talking to
Clara is just another strategy.

ALEX
No. Chess is predictable. Clara is...
not.

Sam throws an arm around Alex's shoulder.

SAM
That's why you have us. We'll coach
you.

Alex shakes his head, fast.

ALEX
Absolutely not.

Lily tilts her head.

LILY
Okay, fine. One question—

She leans forward, lowering her voice.

LILY (CONT'D)
Would you rather stay here forever,
sitting at this table, in this
exact spot, always watching life
from the sidelines?

Alex doesn't answer.

Lily smirks.

LILY (CONT'D)
See you at the game, *lover boy*.

She hops up, grabbing her tray. The others follow, laughing
as they head out.

Alex stares at his tray for a long moment.

Then, reluctantly, he glances toward the cheerleading table.

Clara is laughing with her friends, bright, confident,
completely out of his league.

Alex sighs.

ALEX
...This is a terrible idea.

EXT. FRANKLIN HIGH - FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

The stadium is alive, packed with students, parents, and
alumni. The blaring horns of the marching band, the rhythmic
stomp of the cheerleaders, and the roar of the crowd create a
pulse of energy under the bright floodlights.

The Chess Club sits together in the bleachers, a rare sight
among the usual Homecoming crowd.

Maya watches the game with mild disinterest, scrolling
through her phone. Sam leans forward, getting way too into it
for someone who never cared about football before. Lily has
both hands cupped around her mouth, screaming like it's the
Super Bowl.

ON THE FIELD

Derek cuts through the defensive line, dodging a tackle. The
crowd erupts as he barrels forward, jukes left, then plows
into the end zone.

TOUCHDOWN.

The stadium explodes in cheers.

LILY
THAT'S MY BOY, DEREK! HIT 'EM WITH
THE CHECKMATE!

MAYA
That's not... how chess works.

Sam throws his arms up.

SAM
I have *no idea* what just happened,
but I love it!

ON THE FIELD

Derek rips off his helmet, grinning. He looks up at the bleachers, spotting the Chess Club cheering wildly. Even Alex, the least sports-inclined person in history, gives a small fist pump.

Derek shakes his head, laughing. He'd never admit it, but having them here means something.

HALFTIME - THE PUSH

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - BLEACHERS - NIGHT

The band takes over the field, blasting their slightly off-key rendition of a pop song. Students flood the concession stands and wander through the aisles.

Lily, grabs Alex's arm and yanks him up.

ALEX
Lily-what are you-

LILY
No more excuses, Harper. It's go
time.

She steers him down the bleachers, ignoring his protests.

ALEX
This is a *bad* idea.

LILY
This is a *perfect* idea. You have to
strike when the moment is right-
just like chess.

ALEX
You literally just screamed
checkmate at a football player.

Lily waves that off.

LILY
Semantics. Look, Clara's right
there, by the concession stand.
She's alone. She's drinking a
Gatorade. She is prime for
conversation.

Alex glances over, and sure enough—Clara Simmons stands by
the fence, scrolling through her phone, completely oblivious.

He freezes.

ALEX
Nope. I can't.

Lily grabs his shoulders, turning him toward her.

LILY
Alex. You are literally the
smartest person I know. But if you
don't go talk to her *right now*, I
will march down there and tell her—
loudly—that you have a giant,
painfully awkward crush on her.

Alex blinks.

ALEX
...You wouldn't.

Lily grins.

LILY
I absolutely would.

Then, with a long, suffering sigh, Alex reluctantly steps
forward.

ALEX
I hate you.

LILY
Love you too, champ. Now go!

Alex starts toward Clara, trying very hard not to overthink
every step.

EXT. BLEACHERS - NIGHT

Back in the stands, Sam has wandered down a few rows, looking for nachos. Instead, he pauses, ears perking at a conversation happening two rows down.

Two juniors, low-level troublemakers, whisper to each other, hunched over their phones.

STUDENT #1

I'm telling you, they said we have to do it *tonight*. While everyone's here.

STUDENT #2

Dude, I don't know... breaking into a house? This is next level.

STUDENT #1

We *have* to. You think I wanna get expelled? They've got *everything* on us.

Sam's brow furrows.

Sam slowly backs away, eyes scanning the crowd for the rest of the Chess Club.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - BLEACHERS - NIGHT

The marching band is still playing, and the crowd is chatting, laughing, and grabbing snacks before the second half starts. The lights overhead buzz softly, illuminating the sea of blue and gold.

Sam pushes through the crowd, moving fast, his usual laid-back energy replaced by urgency. He spots Maya first, still scrolling on her tablet, and Derek near the bench, hydrating for the second half.

Sam practically crashes into them.

SAM

Guys, we have a *serious* problem.

Maya barely looks up.

MAYA

You ran out of nacho money?

SAM

I just overheard two guys talking about a break-in. They're being *blackmailed* into doing it *tonight*, while everyone's at the game.

Derek wipes sweat from his face, shaking his head.

DEREK

Dude. It's Homecoming. No one's robbing houses right now.

SAM

I *heard* them, man. This is real.

Maya finally looks up, skeptical.

MAYA

What exactly did they say?

SAM (*QUICKLY*)

One guy was panicking, the other one said they "had to do it" or they'd get expelled. They said someone has "everything" on them.

Maya narrows her eyes.

MAYA

Did they say who's behind it?

SAM

No, but it was *serious*. They weren't just messing around.

Lily walks up, overhearing the last part.

LILY

Sooo... lemme get this straight. You're saying someone's running a *high school blackmail operation*... and forcing kids into burglary?

SAM

YES.

Lily stares at him for a long beat. Then—

LILY

That is the *plot of, like, six teen dramas on Netflix*.

SAM (*GROANING*)

Oh my God. I am *not* making this up!

Derek gestures around.

DEREK

Look, man, maybe you misheard. Or they were just *talking big*. You know how people like to flex.

SAM

No, this wasn't "flexing." This was *fear*.

Maya tilts her head, processing.

MAYA

Even if it's true, what are we supposed to do? We don't know where, or who, or when.

SAM

We do know *when*. *Tonight*.

Lily leans against the bleachers, smirking.

LILY

Okay, but let's be real—if someone actually had dirt on me, I'd just fake my own death and flee to Paris before breaking into a house.

Sam throws up his hands.

SAM

THANK YOU FOR THAT USELESS INFORMATION.

Sam exhales sharply, frustrated.

SAM (CONT'D)

You guys are *unbelievable*.

He turns, muttering.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hope none of you ever get blackmailed into a crime, 'cause I won't believe you either.

Derek claps a hand on his shoulder.

DEREK

Dude, relax. It's probably nothing.

Sam shrugs him off, shaking his head.

SAM

I *really* don't think it is.

He walks off, still on edge.

Behind him, the team exchanges glances.

EXT. FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL - FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

The scoreboard displays: "FRANKLIN HIGH 28 - RIVERTON 21."
The crowd erupts in celebration as the home team secures their homecoming victory.

ON THE FIELD

ALEX, SAM, MAYA, and LILY cheer enthusiastically. CLARA approaches, her face glowing with excitement.

CLARA
Hey, Alex!

ALEX
Oh, hey, Clara.

CLARA
some of us are heading to Jake's party. Wanna come?

ALEX
Oh, sure. Sounds fun.

CLARA
Great! See you there. he smiles and heads off to join her friends.

LILY
Look at you, Mr. Popular.

SAM
Just don't forget about us little people when you're hanging with the cool kids.

ALEX
Never.
(MAYA)
Let's go celebrate.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Yeah, let's do it.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The party is in full swing. Music pumps through the speakers as students dance and mingle. The living room is decorated with streamers and balloons in school colors.

ALEX enters with SAM, MAYA, and LILY.

SAM
This place is packed.

MAYA
I see the snack table. Be right back.

LILY
I'm gonna find the dance floor.

ALEX
'll catch up with you guys later. s
his friends disperse,

Alex spots CLARA across the room, laughing with a group of cheerleaders. She catches his eye and waves him over.

CLARA
Alex! You made it!

ALEX
Yeah, wouldn't miss it.

CLARA
Come on, let's dance!

She grabs his hand and leads him to the dance floor.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Alex tries to keep up with Clara's moves, feeling a bit out of his element but enjoying himself.

CLARA (CONT'D)
You're a pretty good dancer.

ALEX

Thanks. You're amazing.

CLARA
Thanks.

They continue dancing, the energy of the party surrounding them.

EXT. JAKE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - LATER

The backyard is quieter, with a few groups chatting around a fire pit. Alex and Clara step outside to catch their breath.

CLARA
It's nice out here.

ALEX
Yeah, a bit of a break from the noise.

CLARA
I'm glad you came tonight.

ALEX
Me too. hey share a comfortable silence, looking up at the stars.

CLARA
You know, you're different from the other guys at school.

ALEX
that a good thing?

CLARA
Definitely. he leans in and kisses him softly.

ALEX
Wow.

CLARA
Good wow?

ALEX
Very good wow. hey smile at each other, the night feeling full of possibilities.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Alex and Clara rejoin the party, holding hands. They find Sam, Maya, and Lily near the snack table.

SAM
There you are!

MAYA
we were wondering where you went.

Lily notices their handw.

LILY
Well, well, well.

ALEX
We were just getting some air.

CLARA
Mind if I hang out with you guys?

SAM
Of course!

MAYA
The more, the merrier.

LILY
Welcome to the crew.

They all laugh and continue enjoying the party together, the bonds of friendship growing stronger.

EXT. WILLOW CREEK ESTATES - NIGHT

A quiet, high-end neighborhood, where gated mansions sit dark and silent. The only movement—a black van rolling slowly out of the driveway of the Wilcox estate, its headlights off.

MR. LANSING (70s, retired, light sleeper) watches from his second-story window, frowning.

HIS POV - THE VAN

It doesn't speed. It doesn't hesitate. It knows exactly where it's going.

MR. LANSING
Not tonight.

He grabs his phone and dials 911.

EXT. WILCOX ESTATE - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

RED AND BLUE LIGHTS FLASH.

Two patrol cars sit in the driveway, their lights bouncing off the wrought-iron gate.

A third burglary in two months.

DETECTIVE JAMES CRAWFORD (40s, sharp, methodical, carries an air of exhaustion) steps out of his unmarked sedan, taking in the scene.

A uniformed OFFICER (late 20s, eager but green) approaches.

OFFICER

Third one in this neighborhood.
Same pattern.

CRAWFORD

Let me guess. No forced entry. Safe
cracked. Jewelry, gold, and cash
gone.

OFFICER

Just like the other two. No
electronics, no big-ticket items.

Crawford exhales sharply, rubbing his jaw.

CRAWFORD

Because they're taking what's easy
to move. No serial numbers. No
tracking.

He pulls on gloves and steps inside.

INT. WILCOX ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT

The grand entrance is pristine—no sign of a struggle.

Crawford walks the scene. He scans the empty safe, the
dresser drawers ripped open, the jewelry box dumped out.

He kneels by the safe, running his fingers over the seam of
the blown door.

CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

Whoever did this had time.

An officer approaches.

OFFICER

Security system was disabled. No
footage.

Crawford clenches his jaw.

CRAWFORD

Same as the last two.

The officer hesitates.

OFFICER

But we do have a witness this time.

EXT. WILCOX ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Crawford steps over to MR. LANSING, who sips a coffee, unfazed.

CRAWFORD

Mr. Lansing, you said you saw a van?

Lansing nods, setting down his cup.

MR. LANSING

Black. No plates. Didn't peel out. Didn't hesitate. They knew what they were doing.

Crawford nods, taking notes.

CRAWFORD

See how many people inside?

MR. LANSING

No. But this wasn't some kids looking for a thrill. This was professional.

Crawford looks back at the house, frowning.

CRAWFORD

That's what I'm afraid of.

He closes his notebook.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - LUNCHROOM - DAY

The cafeteria buzzes with morning energy—students chatting, laughing, and scrolling their phones. But at the Chess Club's usual table, the mood is different.

Sam slams a newspaper down onto the table, front page up.

HEADLINE: THIRD HIGH-END BURGLARY IN TWO MONTHS - POLICE BAFFLED

The group stares.

SAM

Read it and weep.

Lily picks up the paper, reading the article out loud.

LILY

"Last night, a crew hit another estate in Willow Creek.

(MORE)

LILY (CONT'D)
Police report no security footage,
no forced entry, and no suspects.
Authorities warn wealthy homeowners
to remain on high alert."

She sets the paper down, sheepish.

LILY (CONT'D)
Okay. Fine. You were right.

Sam leans back, arms crossed.

SAM
Say it again. Slower.

Derek shakes his head, exhaling.

DEREK
Damn, man. We should've listened.

Maya frowns, scrolling her laptop.

MAYA
This changes things. If it's really
happened it'll happen again.

Alex nods, deep in thought.

ALEX
Which means... we need a plan.

A beat. Then Lily leans forward, grinning.

LILY
Are we forming a crime-fighting
operation? Because if so, I call
code name "Queen."

Sam grins.

SAM
Obviously. I'm "Knight."

Derek smirks.

DEREK
I'm fine with "Rook."

Maya raises an eyebrow.

MAYA
We're naming ourselves after chess
pieces?

Alex shrugs.

ALEX
It's our thing.

Maya rolls her eyes, but she's already typing notes.

MAYA
Fine. But if we're doing this, we
need a base of operations.

Sam leans forward.

SAM
Like a command center.

Derek grins.

DEREK
I got one.

The group turns to him.

ALEX
Where?

DEREK
My treehouse.

Lily blinks.

LILY
Wait. You still have a treehouse?

DEREK
Not just a treehouse. A *two-story*
treehouse. Fully reinforced, power
outlets, and a sick rope ladder.

Sam leans back, nodding approvingly.

SAM
Respect.

Alex nods, already planning.

ALEX
Alright. After school. We move in.

The group exchanges looks.

For the first time in weeks, they feel like a team again.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - HALLWAY -DAY.

The hallways buzz with students heading to lunch. Clara walks with her usual group of cheerleader friends, laughing—until she spots Alex and the Chess Club at their usual table.

Without thinking, she smiles and gives a small wave.

Alex notices, hesitates, then waves back.

Her friends immediately pounce.

JENNA

Okay, Clara. What was *that*?

SOPHIE

Are you *friends* with the Chess Club now?

TINA

Correction—are you *dating* one of them?

Clara rolls her eyes, playing it off.

CLARA

It's not a *thing*. We just talk.

JENNA

You *talk* to Alex Harper?

SOPHIE

The guy who *brings* a *strategy notebook* to cafeteria debates?

TINA

Hey, at least he's kinda cute, in a nerdy professor way.

Clara tries to ignore the warmth creeping up her neck.

CLARA

They're not bad, okay? And Alex is... different.

JENNA

Oh my god. You *like* him.

Clara shoves her locker shut, rolling her eyes.

CLARA

You guys are ridiculous.

Sophie grins, nudging her.

SOPHIE

We're just saying, Homecoming Queen
and the King of the Nerds? That's
prime rom-com material.

JENNA

Please don't go full *Breakfast Club*
on us.

Clara shakes her head, laughing as she walks off.

But as she does, she glances back at Alex, still deep in
conversation with his friends.

EXT. DEREK'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

A massive oak tree towers over the yard. Nestled among the
thick branches is Derek's treehouse—a two-story fortress of
childhood imagination, now repurposed for something much
bigger.

A rope ladder dangles, and soft yellow light spills from the
open doorway.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The treehouse is surprisingly spacious—a mix of old posters,
bean bags, and a beat-up couch, now littered with laptops,
notebooks, and half-eaten snacks.

Maya types furiously on her laptop, screens flickering with
lines of code.

Sam leans over a second laptop, adjusting a makeshift
scanner.

Lily paces, tossing a stress ball in the air.

Derek leans against the wall, arms crossed, surveying their
progress.

Alex stands at the center, deep in thought.

ALEX

We need evidence. The cops have
nothing on these burglaries. If we
can figure out who's involved, how
they communicate, and where they'll
strike next... we stop them.

MAYA

Which means we need access.

SAM
Which means... hacking.

Maya smirks.

MAYA
Already on it.

She hits a final key. A beep sounds.

On her screen? Franklin High's security system dashboard.

LIVE CAMERAS. ACCESS LOGS. ADMIN FILES.

The group leans in, eyes widening.

DEREK
You just hacked the school.

MAYA
Not my best work, honestly.

Lily whistles, impressed.

LILY
Remind me to *never* get on your bad side.

Maya scrolls through feeds.

MAYA
We can't pull footage from before, but we can *monitor in real-time*. If someone in this school is connected to these burglaries, they'll slip eventually.

Alex nods, thinking fast.

ALEX
So we watch. Gather intel. Track movements. If we find out who's involved, we figure out *where they'll hit next*.

SAM
And *then*... we make our move.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING

The school hallways are buzzing with morning energy—students gathering at lockers, chatting, making plans.

ALEX walks toward his locker, spotting CLARA a few feet away, laughing with her usual group of cheerleaders.

He hesitates, then takes a breath and steps forward.

ALEX
Hey, Clara.

She glances at him—just for a second. Then, just as quickly, she looks away.

Jenna and Sophie smirk, nudging Clara.

JENNA
Oh look, it's *your chess boyfriend*.

SOPHIE
Are you gonna invite him to
practice so he can strategize a
cheer formation?

Clara forces a small laugh, but there's something off in her expression.

Then, without another glance at Alex—she keeps walking.

Alex stands there, trying to play it off, but there's a slight sting in his eyes.

He turns to see Lily, Derek, Sam, and Maya watching from a few feet away.

ALEX walks back to the gang.

SAM
Rejection. A true coming-of-age
moment.

ALEX
It's not like that.

LILY
Oh, honey. It's *exactly* like that.

Maya tilts her head, ever the analyst.

MAYA
She looked uncomfortable. That
wasn't a normal brush-off.

Alex shrugs, masking whatever he's feeling.

ALEX
Doesn't matter. We have more
important things to focus on.

Sam grins.

SAM
That's the spirit. Bottling up
emotions *always* ends well.

Alex gives him a look.

INT. TREEHOUSE - COMMAND CENTER - LATER

A LAPTOP SCREEN GLOWS.

The Chess Club huddles inside their makeshift headquarters,
eyes locked on Maya's laptop as she scrolls through security
footage.

MAYA
Okay, I flagged activity in the
principal's office after hours.
Let's see if anything—

She pauses.

The screen shows a recording from last night.

ANGLE: PRINCIPAL CALLOWAY'S OFFICE.

The door opens. A student steps inside.

SAM
Wait... is that—

The camera angle shifts, giving them a clearer view.

It's KYLE PARKER. Derek's teammate. One of the star football
players.

Kyle sits across from Wade. They talk quietly—but then
Calloway slides a piece of paper across the desk.

Kyle reads it. Nods. Shakes Calloway's hand.

And then—he leaves.

The screen pauses.

A beat of silence.

Then—Sam exhales sharply.

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, damn.

LILY

Looks like the *golden boys* aren't so squeaky clean.

Derek frowns, arms crossed.

DEREK

Kyle wouldn't be mixed up in this.

MAYA

Then why is he meeting privately with Calloway at night?

Alex leans forward, thinking fast.

ALEX

The last burglary was last night. And we just caught Kyle and Calloway meeting.

Maya nods.

MAYA

That wasn't a student-teacher chat. That was a *deal*.

Derek exhales sharply, tension in his jaw.

DEREK

If Kyle's involved... I need to find out *why*.

Alex nods. He writes principal Wade and Kyle's names on the wall.

ALEX

We now have two suspects. It's a beginning. We keep digging until we identify all of the players.

The group exchanges looks.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING

The hallways are packed with students heading to class, voices bouncing off the lockers.

DEREK walks at a normal pace, but his eyes are locked on KYLE PARKER, who's a few feet ahead, laughing with a group of football players.

Derek keeps his distance, blending in, but watching.

SERIES OF SHOTS - DEREK TRACKS KYLE THROUGH THE DAY

CAFETERIA - LUNCHTIME

Kyle sits with Brandon Wells and two other guys from the football team. Their conversation seems normal at first—until Kyle pulls out his phone, shows them something. Brandon nods, looking a little tense. Derek pretends to scroll his own phone but keeps listening.

GYM LOCKER ROOM - AFTER PRACTICE

Kyle waits until the room clears out, then leans against a row of lockers, checking his phone. A text pops up on Kyle's screen: "Meeting after school. Be ready." He quickly locks the screen, looking around.

HALLWAY - BETWEEN CLASSES

Kyle steps away from his usual crowd and heads toward the faculty wing. Derek stays back, watching as Kyle ducks into Principal Calloway's office. The door closes behind him. Derek tightens his grip on his backpack.

DEREK (V.O.)

That's the second time I've seen
him meet with Calloway.

He steps behind a corner, pulls out his phone, and types:

DEREK (TEXTING GROUP CHAT):

*Kyle just went into Calloway's
office again.*

INT. PRINCIPAL CALLAWAY'S OFFICE - DAY

A dim desk lamp casts long shadows across stacks of papers. The office is silent, except for the faint tick of a clock on the wall.

CLARA sits stiffly in the chair across from PRINCIPAL CALLAWAY, her hands gripping the edge of her bag.

Calloway leans back in his chair, watching her with a calm, calculating expression.

CALLAWAY

You have something for me?

Clara swallows hard, then reaches into her bag.

She pulls out a small folded paper and slides it across the desk.

Calloway unfolds it, his eyes scanning the address.

CALLAWAY (CONT'D)
Ah. Gated community. Quiet street.
No security cameras.

He folds the paper neatly, sliding it into his desk drawer.

Clara forces herself to stay calm.

CLARA
This is the last one, right?

Calloway pauses. Looks up.

Then—he chuckles softly, shaking his head.

CALLAWAY
Oh, Clara.

His smile fades as he leans forward, voice dropping to something cold and final.

CALLAWAY (CONT'D)
You don't get to walk away.

Clara stiffens.

CALLAWAY
You think you can just stop? After everything I've done for you?

She grits her teeth, voice low.

CLARA
You didn't do anything for me. You threatened me.

Calloway tilts his head, amused.

CALLAWAY
And yet, here you are. Doing exactly what I ask.

CALLAWAY
I own you now. Never forget that.

A beat. Clara blinks hard, jaw clenched.

She stands quickly, shoving her bag over her shoulder.

CLARA
Not forever.

She turns and walks out fast, shoulders stiff.
Calloway watches her go, the smirk returning to his face.
Then—he picks up his phone, dialing.

CALLAWAY
We're a go for the next job.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The treehouse is now a full-on command center.
Maps and notes pinned to a corkboard. A makeshift "Crime Board" covered in printed photos and red string. Maya's laptop screen flickers, security footage rolling. ALEX stands at the board, marker in hand, scanning their collected evidence.

Maya pushes back from her laptop, face tense.

MAYA
We have a problem.

The group turns to her.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I was watching Calloway's office feed. Clara was there.

Alex freezes.

ALEX
What do you mean, *there*?

Maya clicks, rewinds, plays the footage.

ON SCREEN: Clara slides a piece of paper across Calloway's desk. He nods, pleased.

MAYA
She's giving him addresses.
Vacation homes. She's feeding him targets.

The room goes silent.

Alex grips the edge of the table.

ALEX

Did she look like she *wanted* to be there?

Maya hesitates, then shakes her head.

MAYA

No. She looked like she'd rather be *anywhere* else.

Sam leans back, whistling.

SAM

Damn. That's rough.

Lily crosses her arms, processing.

LILY

So she's in *deep*. Whether she wants to be or not.

Derek clears his throat.

DEREK

And it's not just her.

The group turns to him.

DEREK

Kyle Parker's in deep too. And it's not just him. Brandon Wells and another guy from the football team are involved.

Alex nods, focused. He steps toward the board.

He grabs a marker, writing:

CLARA - TARGET SCOUT KYLE - CREW MEMBER BRANDON - UNKNOWN
ROLE Then-he draws a red line from Calloway's name to his phone.

ALEX

We need to know who Calloway called.

Maya nods, already typing.

MAYA

I'm on it.

Alex steps back, studying the board.

ALEX

This isn't just Calloway. Someone
else is pulling the strings.

A beat of silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)

It's time to shake things up.

The group exchanges looks.

EXT. WILLOW CREEK ESTATES - NIGHT

The Chess Club watches from their hidden spot as the thieves—
Kyle, Brandon, Darnell, and Ethan—sprint out of the house,
panic in their eyes.

Distant sirens wail, getting closer.

The unmarked van roars to life, tires screeching as it peels
away from the house.

Derek tightens his grip on the wheel.

DEREK (*gritting teeth*)
They're running.

Alex leans forward, calm but focused.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Then we follow.

Derek hits the gas.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The Chess Club's SUV follows the van at a distance, keeping
the headlights dimmed.

Inside, Maya monitors the drone feed, tracking them from
above.

MAYA (*watching screen*)
They're heading toward the industrial district.

SAM (*tense, watching the road*)
That's not home for any of them.

Lily leans between the front seats, eyes narrowed.

LILY

Which means they're dropping
something off.

Alex nods, mind working fast.

ALEX
Someplace quiet. No cameras.
Somewhere they feel safe.

Maya's screen blips.

MAYA
Got it. Storage facility, Warehouse
District. Unit 14B.

Derek tightens his grip on the wheel.

DEREK
Time to see what they're hiding.

EXT. STORAGE FACILITY - NIGHT

The van pulls into a nearly deserted storage unit facility,
stopping in front of Unit 14B.

The Chess Club's SUV parks down the block, hidden behind an
old shipping container.

The gang watches from a distance.

MAYA
They're unloading.

Alex raises his binoculars.

Through the night vision lens, he sees Kyle and the others
dragging duffel bags out of the van.

LILY
Please tell me that's just a
weirdly heavy gym bag.

Alex lowers the binoculars, jaw tightening.

ALEX
Jewelry. Cash. Gold. Everything
stolen from the last three houses.

Sam lets out a low whistle.

SAM
That's a lot of stolen property.

Derek leans forward, eyes locked on the scene.

DEREK

This isn't just kids getting in
over their heads. This is
organized.

Maya keeps watching the drone feed, then frowns.

MAYA

Wait.

The others turn to her.

She zooms in.

ON SCREEN:

A fifth person steps into the frame.

Not a student.

An older man, mid-40s, well-dressed, composed, clearly in
charge.

The Chess Club stares at the screen.

LILY

Who the hell is that?

The mystery man walks up to Kyle, pats his shoulder like he's
giving instructions.

Alex exhales sharply.

ALEX

That's who Calloway called.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - PRINCIPAL CALLAWAY'S OFFICE - MORNING

The morning sun filters through the blinds, casting sharp
shadows across Principal Calloway's desk. His office is
meticulously neat—too neat. Not a paper out of place.

He sits, calm, controlled, sipping coffee, flipping through
fabricated budget reports.

Then—a knock.

Before Calloway can respond, DETECTIVE CRAWFORD steps inside,
badge already in hand.

He closes the door behind him.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD

Morning, Principal Calloway.

Calloway blinks, feigning surprise.

CALLAWAY
Detective Crawford. This is...
unexpected.

Crawford takes his time, glancing around the office, as if searching for something unseen.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (
Big night. Home invasion in Willow
Creek Estates. Four high schoolers
caught on surveillance breaking
into a house.

He pauses, letting the words settle.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
Now, I'm guessing you already heard
about that.

Calloway offers a measured nod, setting his coffee down deliberately.

CALLAWAY
Yes, I read the news this morning.
Terrible situation. It's
unfortunate when young people make
reckless decisions.

Crawford studies him.

Something in Calloway's voice—too smooth, too rehearsed.

He steps closer, lowering himself into the chair across from Calloway's desk.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (LEANING IN,
LOWERING VOICE)
You know what else is unfortunate?

A pause.

Calloway doesn't answer.

Crawford taps a file onto the desk—

A manila folder, thick, slightly creased, filled with documents.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (QUIETLY,
DELIBERATELY) (CONT'D)
The 911 call we got last night...
came from inside this school's
network.

Calloway's fingers still for just a fraction of a second.

Not much. But Crawford catches it.

(CALLAWAY (masking
irritation)
Detective, Franklin High has over a
thousand students. It could've been
anyone.

Crawford smiles slightly.

But his eyes? Cold. Calculating.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (CONT'D)
It could've been anyone—but it
wasn't.

He opens the file, pulling out a printed document—a phone
log.

Slides it across the desk.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (TAPPING
PAGE) (CONT'D)
The call came from a school-issued
device. A personal laptop assigned
to a student. Maya Brooks.

Calloway glances at the page.

Then—leans back in his chair, carefully neutral.

CALLAWAY
Maya? She's a bright student, but
she's a tech kid. They like to...
poke around in systems, play spy.
I'm sure she—

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
I'm not looking for excuses.

A beat.

Calloway presses his lips together.

Crawford leans forward, voice low, direct.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (CONT'D)
I need to speak to Maya. Today.

Calloway's mask cracks—just slightly.

A flicker of something—annoyance? Concern?

CALLAWAY
Detective, I just don't see why—

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
And I don't see why you'd have an
issue with that.

A long, tense silence.

Calloway studies Crawford, then exhales a forced chuckle,
shaking his head.

CALLAWAY
Of course, Detective. I'll have her
sent to your office right away.

Crawford finally stands, straightening his jacket.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
You seem real eager to downplay
this.

Calloway's jaw tenses, but he forces another smile.

CALLAWAY
I care about my students. I don't
want anyone falsely accused.

Crawford nods slowly.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
That's funny. Neither do I.

Callow exits.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - COMPUTER SCIENCE CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom hums softly with the sound of clicking
keyboards and students murmuring.

MAYA BROOKS sits at the back, eyes locked on her laptop
screen, fingers flying across the keys.

On her screen: lines of code. A background process running.

She isn't doing classwork.

She's hacking into something.

Sam, sitting next to her, leans in.

SAM
Please tell me you're not hacking
the Pentagon.

Maya barely glances at him.

MAYA (*DISTRACTED*)
Relax. Just running a background
trace on Calloway's call logs.

Sam raises an eyebrow.

SAM
Yeah, totally normal.

Maya smirks, still focused.

Then—the classroom intercom crackles to life.

INTERCOM (V.O.) (*STATIC, THEN CLEAR*)
*Maya Brooks, please report to the
principal's office.*

Maya freezes.

The class goes silent.

Students glance at her, some smirking, some curious.

Sam sits up straight, eyes wide.

SAM (*LOW VOICE*)
Uh. That's not good.

Maya slowly closes her laptop.

She takes a breath, masks her expression, and stands.

As she grabs her bag and heads for the door, Sam whispers—

SAM (*GRINNING, BUT SERIOUS
UNDERNEATH*) (*CONT'D*)
Don't get arrested.

Maya shoots him a smirk over her shoulder.

MAYA (*COOL, CONFIDENT*)
No promises.

She pushes open the classroom door—

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

The hallway feels longer than usual as MAYA walks toward the principal's office.

She keeps her pace steady, face unreadable—but her mind? Racing.

She pushes open the office door.

INT. PRINCIPAL CALLAWAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maya keeps her expression neutral as she sits down.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD studies Maya, taking her in.

Then—he extends a hand.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
Maya Brooks, right? I'm Detective
James Crawford.

Maya hesitates—then shakes his hand, meeting his gaze.

CALLAWAY
Maya, thank you for coming.

MAYA
Didn't seem like much of a choice.

Calloway chuckles.

CALLAWAY
We just have a few questions about
an incident last night. Nothing to
worry about.

Maya tilts her head.

MAYA
Oh no. Did someone *cheat* on a
calculus test?

Calloway's smile tightens.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
Maya, we know the 911 call about
last night's burglary came from
device. Specifically, yours.

Maya blinks, feigning surprise.

MAYA
Oh. That's weird.

Calloway leans in, pressing.

CALLAWAY
You didn't see anything unusual?

Maya shrugs.

MAYA
I mean, I see a lot of things.
Define unusual.

Calloway narrows his eyes slightly.

Crawford? He's watching closer now.

Maya tilts her head, playing it cool.

MAYA (CONT'D)
But, you know, now that you mention
it... I did hear something about a
break-in.

She leans back, studying Calloway.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Shame the cops got there so fast.
Bet that really *shook things up*.

Calloway stiffens.

Crawford smiles just slightly.

He caught that.

Calloway recovers quickly, forcing a polite chuckle.

CALLAWAY
We just want to make sure you're
safe. If you saw or heard anything,
now's the time to speak up.

Maya leans forward slightly, locking eyes with Calloway.

MAYA
And if I *did* know something... you'd
want me to tell you?

Calloway studies her.

Maya smiles, just enough to be unsettling.

Maya tilts her head, still watching Calloway.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I'll let you know if I *remember*
anything.

Calloway's jaw tightens.

Crawford, still smirking, finally stands.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
I think we're done here.

Maya nods, relaxed.

MAYA
Cool. *This was fun.*

She stands, grabs her bag, and heads for the door.

Right before she exits, Crawford calls after her.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD
Oh, Maya.

She glances back.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD (CONT'D)
You ever *do remember something*—give
me a call first.

Maya smirks.

MAYA
I'll keep that in mind.

She walks out, head high.

Crawford watches her go, impressed.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The lot is mostly empty, the glow of a few dim streetlights casting long shadows.

SAM and DEREK make their way toward Derek's car, still talking about the case, laughing lightly—until—

A black SUV pulls up fast, tires screeching.

FOUR FOOTBALL PLAYERS step out.

Kyle Parker leads them. Brandon, Darnell, and Ethan follow.

The smiles fade from Sam and Derek's faces.

KYLE

You guys don't know when to quit.

Derek steps forward, fists clenched.

DEREK

What's your problem, Parker?

Kyle shakes his head.

KYLE

You are. You and your little chess
nerd club sticking your noses where
they don't belong.

Sam swallows hard, glancing at Derek.

SAM

We were just leaving, man.

Kyle chuckles.

KYLE

Yeah. You were. You called the cops
on us.

Then—Brandon throws a sucker punch into Sam's gut.

Sam gasps, doubling over.

Derek lunges at Brandon—

But Ethan and Darnell grab him, slamming him against the car
hood.

Kyle steps closer, staring down at Derek.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Walk away, King. While you can.

Derek spits blood, glares up at him.

Kyle pulls out a phone, types a message, then tosses it onto
Derek's chest.

ON SCREEN: A text to Alex.

STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING. WALK AWAY WHILE YOU CAN.

Kyle nods at his crew.

They release Derek, letting him drop to the pavement.

Sam groans, clutching his ribs.

The football players walk off, laughing, hopping back into the SUV.

The car peels away.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The atmosphere is tense.

Sam sits with an ice pack pressed to his ribs. Derek has a swollen lip.

Alex stares at the phone, rereading the message.

Lily and Maya stand near the door, pale.

MAYA

This isn't a game anymore.

Lily nods, hugging herself.

LILY

We just got a warning. Next time?
They don't stop at bruises.

A beat.

Sam lets out a bitter laugh.

SAM

Maybe we should stop.

Derek shoots him a glare.

DEREK

Are you serious?

Sam gestures to his bruises.

SAM

Look at us! Look at what they did!

Lily grabs her bag.

LILY

I'm out. I'm not gonna be next.

Maya hesitates—then nods, voice small.

MAYA

Me too.

Alex watches them go, his grip tightening around the phone.

Derek exhales sharply, shaking his head.

DEREK
So what now?

Alex reads the message one more time.

Then, slowly, he clenches his jaw.

ALEX
Now we make our next move.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - LUNCHROOM - DAY

The Chess Club's usual table feels emptier than ever.

The air is heavy, tense.

Sam slowly chews his food, one hand rubbing his sore ribs.
Derek has a fresh bruise on his jaw, arms crossed.
Lily picks at her lunch, silent.
Maya scrolls through her phone, avoiding eye contact.
Alex stares at the table, deep in thought.

No one speaks.

Finally, Maya exhales, setting her phone down.

MAYA
So... what now?

Derek leans back, shrugging.

DEREK
I got practice.

Alex looks up.

ALEX
That's it?

Derek meets his gaze, eyes sharp.

DEREK
Yeah. That's it.

A long silence.

LILY
I have rehearsal.

MAYA
Soccer.

SAM
Electronics club.

Alex scans their faces, his stomach sinking.

They're walking away.

ALEX
So that's it? We're just done?

Lily exhales, frustrated.

LILY
Alex, I didn't sign up for this.
For fights. For threats.

Maya nods, looking down.

MAYA
I just... I need to focus on other
things.

Derek scoffs, shaking his head.

DEREK
Maybe you should too.

Sam stands up, grabbing his tray.

SAM
See you guys around.

One by one, they leave.

Maya.
Lily.
Derek.

Until Alex is the only one left.

His grip clenches around his fork.

Slowly, he leans back, staring at the ceiling.

EXT. ALEX'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

The sky is dimming, golden sunlight fading into early evening.

Alex sits on the porch steps, hoodie on, earbuds in, mind elsewhere.

He's been thinking about the others, about the fact that he's alone now.

Alex looks up.

CLARA stands at the bottom of the steps, arms wrapped around herself, eyes darting around like she's afraid of being seen.

She looks shaken.

ALEX

Clara?

She hesitates, then steps closer.

CLARA

Can we talk?

Alex nods, standing up.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The treehouse creaks softly in the wind. Inside, a single lantern casts flickering shadows on the walls. Papers, old maps, and a half-abandoned crime board hang around them—remnants of a team that isn't here anymore.

ALEX sits on an overturned crate, elbows on his knees. Across from him, CLARA hugs her knees to her chest, eyes darting around like she's searching for a way out.

ALEX

Talk to me.

CLARA

Calloway's never gonna let me go.

A beat. Alex watches her carefully, his expression unreadable.

ALEX

Tell me everything.

Clara exhales shakily, rubbing her hands together.

CLARA

It started small. He just wanted me to watch people. Keep track of when they were home, when they weren't.

She lets out a bitter laugh, shaking her head.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Felt harmless. Just... information.

A long pause. She swallows hard.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Then one day, he hands me a list of
addresses. Tells me to pick one.

Alex's jaw tightens, but he doesn't speak. Just listens.

CLARA (CONT'D)
And then another. And another.

Her voice drops to almost a whisper.

CLARA (CONT'D)
I didn't wanna do it. But I didn't
know how to say no.

Silence. Alex stands, pacing the small space, running a hand
through his hair.

ALEX
He's keeping you in. Keeping you
scared.

Clara nods, her voice trembling.

CLARA
And now the cops are asking
questions. If they figure it out...
I'm done. I can't go to jail.

Alex stops pacing. He looks at her—really looks at her.

ALEX
No. We're not letting that happen.

Clara searches his face, desperate for something—hope,
certainty, a way out.

CLARA
You think you can stop him?

Alex doesn't blink.

ALEX
I know I can.

Clara exhales, a breath that sounds half like relief, half
like disbelief. She nods, wiping at her eyes before they can
betray her.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING

The school hallways buzz with students, lockers slamming,
voices blending into a constant hum. But Alex moves through
it with purpose, his mind elsewhere.

He spots Derek at his locker.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Meet after school. Same spot.
There's been a development.

Derek raises an eyebrow, shutting his locker with a thud.

DEREK
Define "development."

ALEX
I'll explain everything later. Just
be there.

Derek studies him, sees the intensity in his eyes, then nods once.

Alex moves on, weaving through the crowd. He finds Lily outside the auditorium, script in hand.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Treehouse. After school. It's
important.

Lily hesitates, then sighs, nodding.

LILY
This better not interfere with
rehearsal.

He smirks slightly.

ALEX
It won't.

Next, Maya, near the soccer field, stretching before practice. She sees him approach and gives him a look.

MAYA
This about Clara?

ALEX
Yeah. And more. After school.

Maya exhales, then nods.

MAYA
Fine. But this better not get us
arrested.

ALEX
No guarantees.

Finally, Sam, tinkering with a circuit board in the tech lab.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Treehouse. After school.

Sam doesn't look up, just keeps soldering a wire.

SAM
We getting paid for this meeting?

ALEX
No.

SAM
Fine. But there better be snacks.

Alex shakes his head, walking off as Sam smirks to himself

INT. TREEHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun filters through the wooden slats of the treehouse, casting golden streaks of light over the worn-out furniture, scattered notes, and an untouched crime board. The atmosphere is thick with tension—uncertainty, hesitation.

One by one, the gang arrives.

MAYA leans against the wall, arms crossed. LILY sits on a crate, shifting uncomfortably. SAM sprawls on the old couch, drumming his fingers against his knee. DEREK stands near the window, looking like he'd rather be anywhere else.

ALEX stands in the center, his usual calm masking something more intense. He looks at each of them before speaking.

ALEX
Clara needs our help.

A beat. No one reacts, but no one leaves either.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Calloway's got her trapped. He's pressuring her for another target. The cops are asking questions. If we don't do something, she's going down for everything.

Maya exhales, rubbing her forehead.

MAYA
This is getting dangerous, Alex.

ALEX

I know. That's why I've been
thinking—there's a way to end this.
A way where everyone wins.

That gets their attention.

DEREK

And what does that look like?

ALEX

We take Calloway down. For good.

A loaded silence. Sam lets out a low whistle.

SAM

Well, damn.

LILY

You say that like we're just gonna
checkmate him in three moves.

ALEX

That's the idea.

Maya watches him carefully, hesitant.

MAYA

And how exactly do we do that?

ALEX

We set a trap.

A beat. Maya tilts her head, intrigued despite herself.

MAYA

Go on.

ALEX

We feed Calloway a final target.
Make him think Clara's still
cooperating. We let him set
everything up, gather proof, then
bring it all down on him.

Derek lets out a slow breath, processing.

DEREK

You're talking about taking down a
criminal network.

ALEX

And making sure Clara walks away
clean.

Sam glances at the others, then back at Alex.

SAM
And what if we say no?

A heavy pause. Alex meets each of their eyes, steady, unwavering.

ALEX
If anyone wants to pass, I get it.
No pressure. No hard feelings.

A long silence. Then—

LILY
If we do this, we do it *smart*.

Maya exhales, nods.

MAYA
And *careful*.

DEREK
And we *win*.

ALEX
Exactly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Calloway thinks he's untouchable.
He's careful, he's protected, and
he's got people doing his dirty
work. But even the best players
leave gaps in their defense.

A beat. He looks around the room, making sure they're all with him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We're going to expose him. And
here's how.

He grabs a marker and writes on the board: "The Board is Set."

Alex turns to MAYA, SAM, and DEREK.

ALEX (CONT'D)
First, we move the stolen goods.
Right now, Calloway's crew is
holding everything at Storage Unit
14B. If the cops raid it, Clara's
tied to it, too.

Maya nods, already thinking ahead.

MAYA
I can disable the cameras. No
digital footprint.

DEREK
And I'll get the van.

SAM
I assume I'm the designated
lookout?

ALEX
Exactly. You keep watch, Maya makes
sure we're invisible, Derek drives,
and we move everything to a safe
location.

He points to a circled spot on the map—an abandoned
warehouse.

ALEX (CONT'D)
If the cops don't find the
evidence, Calloway has nothing to
pin on Clara.

Maya, Sam, and Derek exchange looks. Then—they nod.

Alex turns to LILY.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Calloway has a meeting coming up.
We need to hear it.

Lily leans back, arms crossed.

LILY
So, what? You want me to audition
for "Sneaky High School Spy"?

ALEX
I need you to get into his office
and plant a bug. We record
everything.

Lily raises an eyebrow. Then, she smirks.

LILY
Give me 10 minutes, a fake sob
story, and access to the front
office—I'll have it done.

ALEX

Good. We need proof that he's
working with someone higher up.
That's the key to taking him down.

Alex turns to CLARA, who watches him anxiously.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Clara, you need to do this one last
time.

Clara swallows hard but nods.

CLARA

I already have an address. He's
expecting it.

Alex exhales, relieved.

ALEX

Good. You give it to Calloway.
Then, we leak it to Detective
Crawford.

Maya's eyes widen.

MAYA

So we're feeding the cops a live
crime scene?

ALEX

Exactly. Calloway will send his
guys in, thinking it's just another
job. Only this time, the cops are
waiting.

A beat. The weight of it all settles in the room.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We do this right, Calloway goes
down, his entire operation
crumbles, and Clara walks away
clean.

He scans their faces. No pressure. No guilt. Just a choice.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But if anyone wants out, I get it.
No hard feelings.

A long silence.

Then—Derek smirks.

DEREK
I never fold this late in the game.

MAYA
I'll handle the tech.

LILY
Guess I better warm up my acting skills.

SAM
Fine. But if I get caught, I'm blaming all of you.

Clara looks around, sees them standing with her. A flicker of hope in her eyes.

CLARA
Let's do it.

Alex nods. The plan is set. No turning back now.

EXT. STORAGE FACILITY - NIGHT

A dimly lit parking lot. Rows of storage units stretch into the darkness, metal doors locked tight. A single flickering streetlight hums above.*

A black cargo van rolls up silently. Inside—MAYA, SAM, and DEREK.

INT. DEREK'S VAN - NIGHT

Derek grips the steering wheel, eyes scanning the lot. SAM slouches in the passenger seat, chewing gum, while MAYA sits in the back, laptop balanced on her knees.

DEREK
Tell me you got the cameras, Maya.

Maya types quickly, her screen reflecting in her glasses.

MAYA
Three seconds and... boom. We're invisible.

A light on her laptop flashes green. Sam grins.

SAM
Remind me never to piss you off.

MAYA
That should've been obvious by now.

DEREK
Alright. Let's move.

EXT. STORAGE UNIT 14B - NIGHT

The unit door rattles as Derek lifts it, revealing shelves and duffel bags stacked inside.

Sam lets out a low whistle, stepping forward.

SAM
That is a lot of stolen property.

Maya doesn't hesitate—she grabs a duffel, unzips it. Inside—gold watches, jewelry, stacks of cash.

MAYA
They've been at this for a while.

DEREK
Let's clear it out.

They move quickly, hauling duffels into the van, working in silent urgency. Sam tosses one into the back, shakes his head.

SAM
So technically, we're stealing stolen stuff.

MAYA
Less talking, more moving.

EXT. BACKROADS - NIGHT

The van rumbles down an empty road, headlights off. No traffic, no cameras. Just shadows and silence.

Maya watches the road behind them, checking for headlights.

MAYA (CONT'D)
No tails. We're good.

DEREK
We stash the van at the barn, lock it down. No one finds it till we want them to.

SAM
Man, I can't wait to not go to prison.

Maya smirks, shaking her head.

MAYA

Then don't screw up.

Derek turns onto a dirt road, headlights bouncing over an abandoned warehouse in the distance. They pull up to a side entrance, out of sight.

EXT. ABANDONED BARN - NIGHT

The van rolls to a stop. Derek kills the engine.

Maya hops out first, scanning the area. Sam stretches, shaking out his arms.

SAM

Well, that was almost too easy.

Derek shuts the van doors, locking it tight.

DEREK

Then let's not stick around to make it harder.

Maya tosses the van keys into an empty metal crate nearby, covering them with old junk.

MAYA

Hidden. If we need it, we come back.

Sam grins at them.

SAM

So, uh... what's next?

A pause. Then Derek smirks.

DEREK

We head back to town.

They share a look. For the first time tonight—they feel ahead of the game.

INT. FRANKLIN HIGH - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

The school office is busy with ringing phones, teachers passing through, and the secretary typing away at her computer. The smell of stale coffee lingers in the air.

LILY walks in, looking flustered, script in hand. She approaches the front desk, eyes wide with manufactured panic.

LILY

Oh my god, I think I'm having a crisis.

The secretary barely glances up, unimpressed.

SECRETARY

What now, Lily?

LILY

I had my entire audition monologue written down, and now it's gone. Vanished. Poof. I know I had it when I came in here yesterday—maybe I left it in Principal Calloway's office?

The secretary narrows her eyes.

SECRETARY

His office?

LILY

Yes! I was so stressed about the callback, I must've dropped it! Ms. Patel said I might have to redo my entire audition, and honestly, I might die if I have to do that.

The secretary rubs her temples, already regretting this conversation.

SECRETARY

Fine. Two minutes.

Lily gasps dramatically, clasping her hands together.

LILY

You are an angel. A queen. A true savior of lost souls.

The secretary waves her off, motioning toward Calloway's closed office door.

INT. PRINCIPAL CALLAWAY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Lily slips inside, closing the door behind her. The office is neat, impersonal, with a few stacks of files on the desk. A framed photo of the school hangs behind the chair.

She moves quickly to the desk, pulling out a tiny listening device from her pocket.

She crouches down, feeling under the desk—smooth wood, no good crevices to hide it.

LILY (CONT'D)
Come on, come on...

Her fingers brush against the underside of the drawer. Perfect.

She presses the device firmly into place, securing it.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

Lily freezes. Someone is right outside the door.

A KEY JINGLES IN THE LOCK.

Lily's eyes widen.

She grabs the nearest file, flips it open, and pretends to be searching just as the door swings open.

PRINCIPAL CALLOWAY steps inside, mid-conversation, phone pressed to his ear.

He stops short when he sees her.

CALLAWAY
Ms. Chen.

Lily spins dramatically, holding up the file like it's evidence in a courtroom.

LILY
Oh! Thank god! I found it! It was,
uh—right here the whole time! Ha!

Calloway's eyes narrow. He glances at the file in her hand—not a script. A budget report.

CALLAWAY
That... doesn't look like a
monologue.

Lily peeks down at the paper. Definitely not Shakespeare.

LILY
Oh, it's not! I, um... got
distracted. By... numbers.
Fascinating stuff, really.

Calloway's expression hardens.

For a moment, Lily feels his sharp, assessing gaze. Then, slowly—he smiles. But it doesn't reach his eyes.

CALLAWAY

I'd hate for you to be late for class.

Lily nods too quickly, already backing toward the door.

LILY

Right! Would never want that. Gotta go, so much math to ignore.

She slips out fast, heart hammering. As soon as the door clicks shut behind her—she exhales shakily. Close. Too close.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The gang and Clara huddles around Maya's laptop, listening to the crackling feed from the bug. CALLAWAY'S voice comes through, smooth, professional—deadly.

CALLAWAY (V.O.)

It's set for Thursday night. Everything's in place.

A second voice joins—a man they don't recognize. Deep. Calculated.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (V.O.)

Good. And the loose ends?

Lily, Maya, Sam, and Derek exchange uneasy glances. Alex leans in, eyes darkening.

CALLAWAY (V.O.)

Handled.

LILY

Are we the loose ends?

Maya frowns, adjusting the audio, trying to enhance the signal. The second voice becomes clearer. Sam suddenly stiffens, eyes widening.

SAM

No. No way.

ALEX

What?

SAM

I know that voice.

Maya and Lily glance at each other, alarmed.

CLARA

Who is it?

Sam swallows hard, then looks up at them, his face pale.

SAM

That's Gerald Langston.

A beat. The name hangs in the air.

LILY

Who?

SAM

The Chairman of the School Board.

A heavy silence. Derek exhales sharply, rubbing his face.

DEREK

So our big bad isn't some criminal
mastermind... it's the guy in charge
of school funding?

Maya scoffs, shaking her head in disbelief.

MAYA

No wonder Calloway's untouchable.
Langston's the one pulling the
strings.

Alex leans forward, his mind already racing, piecing together
the bigger picture.

ALEX

It makes sense. He has control over
budgets, programs, even security
contracts. He could funnel money
wherever he wants.

LILY

That's why the Chess Club got cut.

MAYA

And why he pushed for all those
"community projects." They weren't
about helping students—they were
about laundering money.

Sam lets out a hollow laugh, shaking his head.

SAM
And all this time, we were worried
about Calloway.

A heavy pause. Then—Alex straightens, eyes sharp.

ALEX
This changes everything.

Maya frowns.

MAYA
How?

Alex's gaze hardens.

ALEX
We're not just taking down Calloway
anymore.

A beat. He looks at each of them, steady and unwavering.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We're taking down Gerald Langston.

The group absorbs that. The stakes aren't just high anymore—they're dangerous. But no one speaks against it. They're already in too deep.

Maya slowly closes the laptop, exhaling.

MAYA
You do realize we're going up
against one of the most powerful
men in the city, right?

ALEX
Yeah. And we're going to win.
Because he doesn't know we're
coming for him.

The fire in his eyes spreads to the others. Sam cracks his knuckles. Lily leans forward, intrigued. Derek clenches his jaw, determined. Maya shakes her head, but a small smirk forms.

EXT. FRANKLIN HIGH - COURTYARD - DAY

The morning rush of students fills the courtyard, but ALEX is off to the side, leaning against a bench, lost in thought. His mind isn't on class—it's on the takedown. The biggest game of chess he's ever played.

CLARA approaches hesitantly, clutching the straps of her bag. She looks nervous, like she's been rehearsing this conversation in her head.

CLARA

Hey.

Alex looks up, surprised but guarded.

ALEX

Hey.

A beat. Clara shifts awkwardly, then sits beside him on the bench.

CLARA

I just... wanted to say thank you.

Alex raises an eyebrow.

ALEX

For what?

CLARA

For everything. For getting me out of that mess. For not telling me to go screw myself after the way I treated you before.

Alex shrugs, but doesn't say anything.

CLARA (CONT'D)

I mean it. I was awful to you. And you still helped me.

Alex finally looks at her, studying her expression. She's not just saying it—she means it.

ALEX

I wasn't gonna let Calloway ruin your life just because you were a little mean to me in the past.

Clara exhales, shaking her head.

CLARA

I was more than a little mean.

Alex shrugs again, this time with a small grin.

ALEX

I've had worse.

Clara looks down, fidgeting with the hem of her sleeve.

CLARA
I wish I had been braver back then.
Been a better friend.

A pause. She turns to him, suddenly playful but still sincere.

CLARA (CONT'D)
So. How do I repay you?

Alex arches an eyebrow.

ALEX
I don't need anything.

CLARA
Oh, come on. Everyone needs something.

Alex hesitates. Then—Clara notices something. She smirks.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Wait. Prom is Friday, isn't it?

Alex tenses slightly.

ALEX
Yeah.

CLARA
And you don't have a date.

ALEX
Wow. Thanks for the reminder.

Clara bites her lip, like she's debating something. Then—she makes a decision.

CLARA
So, what if I went with you?

Alex blinks. Did he hear that right?

ALEX
You? Want to go to prom... with me?

CLARA
I mean, it's the least I can do,
right? You saved my entire future.

Alex studies her, unsure if she's joking. She meets his gaze, no sarcasm this time—just genuine warmth.

A beat.

ALEX
Alright. Let's do it.

Clara grins, leaning back against the bench like it was obvious all along.

CLARA
Good. Pick me up at seven.

She stands, slinging her bag over her shoulder. Before she leaves, she glances back at him.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Try to act surprised when I win
Prom Queen.

Alex chuckles, shaking his head as she walks away.

INT. TREEHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The gang gathers around the makeshift crime board, tension thick in the air. ALEX stands at the center, arms crossed, laying out the final pieces of their plan. LILY leans against the desk, arms folded, a sly smirk on her face.

ALEX
We need Langston out of his house tonight. Long enough for Sam and Derek to get in and plant the stolen property.

LILY
Leave that to me.

MAYA raises an eyebrow.

MAYA
You already have something planned, don't you?

LILY
How dare you suggest I would manipulate an innocent family into leaving their home?

SAM
Because you literally said you would two minutes ago.

Lily waves a dismissive hand.

LILY
Fine, fine. Watch and learn.

Lily sits, headset on, laptop open. She adjusts her posture, switches into "perfect customer service voice" mode, and dials a number on her spoofed caller ID labeled: Westwood Steakhouse - VIP Promotions.

The phone rings. A moment later—MRS. LANGSTON picks up.

MRS. LANGSTON (V.O.)

Hello?

LILY

Good evening, Mrs. Langston! This is Angela from Westwood Steakhouse, calling to let you know that you and your husband have been selected for our exclusive VIP dining experience—completely on the house!

A pause. Lily can hear Mrs. Langston processing.

MRS. LANGSTON (V.O.)

I... don't remember signing up for anything.

LILY

Oh, it's completely random! We select one valued guest each month, and tonight is your lucky night! A five-course meal, wine pairing, private seating—the works. All complimentary!

Muffled voices—Langston himself now, low and cautious.

GERALD LANGSTON (V.O.)

Sounds too good to be true. What's the catch?

LILY

No catch at all! Just our way of showing appreciation for our wonderful guests. But we do need to finalize your reservation by 7:30 PM.

A long pause. Then—

MRS. LANGSTON (V.O.)

Well... we did talk about going out tonight.

GERALD LANGSTON (V.O.)

Hmph. Fine. But if this is a scam, I'm getting the manager fired.

LILY
We'll see you both at 7:30 sharp!

She hangs up, grinning victoriously.

MAYA, DEREK, SAM, and ALEX sit around Lily's laptop, waiting. She pulls off her headset, spins her chair around dramatically.

LILY (CONT'D)
Langstons leave at 7:30 PM for
their exclusive steak dinner.

DEREK
Showtime.

ALEX
You have exactly thirty minutes to
get in, plant the stolen goods, and
get out before they come back. No
mistakes.

Maya watches Sam and Derek carefully.

MAYA
And if something goes wrong?

SAM
Then we improvise.

The team exchanges a look. The plan is set. No turning back now.

Stop

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

MAYA sits at the edge of the table, phone in hand, fingers hovering over the dial pad. The others—ALEX, LILY, SAM, and DEREK—watch in tense silence.

ALEX
OK. It's time to spring the traps.

Maya takes a breath, then dials.

INT. DETECTIVE CRAWFORD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A dimly lit office. Papers stacked high. DETECTIVE JAMES CRAWFORD leans back in his chair, rubbing tired eyes. His phone buzzes to life.

CRAWFORD
Crawford.

Maya's voice comes through—altered by a voice modulator.
Calm. Precise.

MAYA (V.O.)
There's a break-in happening at
Westwood Estates, 42 Maple Drive.
Four men. Armed.

Crawford immediately straightens, grabs a pen.

CRAWFORD
Who is this?

MAYA (V.O.)
Doesn't matter. Just don't be late.

Click. The line goes dead. Crawford doesn't hesitate—he grabs his badge and keys, storming out of his office.

EXT. WESTWOOD ESTATES - NIGHT

The quiet, upscale neighborhood is suddenly alive with flashing red and blue lights. Multiple police cruisers surround the estate. Officers move in, weapons drawn.*

Inside, the four burglars ransack the place—until red and blue lights flood through the windows. They freeze.

OFFICER (O.S.)
This is the police! Drop your
weapons and come out with your
hands up!

The burglars panic. One bolts for the back—tackled instantly. Another tries to run upstairs—cut off. Within minutes, the police have them cuffed and on the ground.

CRAWFORD
Gotcha.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The room is dimly lit, the glow from MAYA's laptop casting flickering shadows. The gang sits around in tense anticipation. ALEX holds a burner phone, fingers hovering over the dial pad.

MAYA, LILY, SAM, and DEREK watch him closely. This is it—the final move.

ALEX
Once I make this call, there's no
undoing it.

DEREK

Then let's make sure it counts.

Alex nods, then dials.

INT. POLICE DISPATCH CENTER - NIGHT

A cluttered office, the hum of radios and quiet chatter filling the space. A DISPATCH OPERATOR, headset on, types at their terminal.

DISPATCH OPERATOR

911, what's your emergency?

ALEX (V.O.)

I have information on stolen property hidden inside Gerald Langston's house. Wine cellar. Secret storage room in the back.

The operator pauses, taking notes. This isn't a prank call.

DISPATCH OPERATOR

And how do you know this?

ALEX (V.O.)

Because I saw it myself.

A beat. The operator exchanges a look with a supervisor, nodding.

DISPATCH OPERATOR

I'm forwarding this to Detective Crawford now.

Click.* The call ends. Alex slowly lowers the phone, his expression unreadable.

EXT. WESTWOOD ESTATES - NIGHT

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD stands by his car, when his phone buzzes.

DISPATCH OPERATOR (V.O.)

Anonymous tip just came in. Stolen property hidden in Langston's house. Wine cellar.

Crawford's eyes sharpen. He grabs his badge, already moving.

CRAWFORD

Send a team. Now.

EXT. LANGSTON ESTATE - NIGHT

Red and blue lights flicker against the grand white-brick mansion. A team of uniformed officers step onto the front porch. One knocks firmly.

*The door opens. A woman in a housekeeper's uniform—MRS. REYES, the Langstons' maid—blinks in surprise.

MRS. REYES

Yes?

Crawford steps forward, flashing his badge.

CRAWFORD

Detective James Crawford. We have a warrant to search the property.

Mrs. Reyes' eyes widen. She hesitates, wringing her hands.

MRS. REYES

Mr. and Mrs. Langston... they're not here.

Crawford exchanges a glance with his partner.

CRAWFORD

Where are they?

MRS. REYES

They... they went to dinner.

Crawford smirks slightly. Perfect.

CRAWFORD

Then let's make ourselves comfortable.

The officers sweep inside. Mrs. Reyes steps aside, hands trembling.

Crawford heads straight for the wine cellar.

INT. LANGSTON WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

The officers move fast, searching through the shelves of expensive wine bottles. One officer presses against the back wall— and it shifts slightly.

OFFICER #1

Sir, we've got something.

Crawford steps forward. He watches as an officer pushes open a hidden panel— revealing stacks of stolen property.

*Jewelry. Cash. Expensive watches.

More than enough to bury Langston.

OFFICER #2

That's a lot of stolen goods.

Crawford folds his arms, surveying the room. He exhales sharply, a slow grin spreading.

CRAWFORD

You said that the Langston's are at dinner.

MRS. REYES

Yes.

CRAWFORD

Where?

MRS. REYES

Westwood Steakhouse.

INT. WESTWOOD STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

The restaurant is bustling with soft jazz and quiet conversation. At a private table, GERALD and MRS. LANGSTON sip expensive wine, laughing, completely unaware.

*Then—police flood the restaurant. Customers murmur, heads turning.

Crawford steps forward, badge out.

CRAWFORD

Gerald Langston. You're under arrest.

Langston slowly sets down his wine glass. He keeps his face neutral, but his fingers grip the tablecloth just a little too tight.

LANGSTON

On what charges?

Crawford smirks. This is the best part.

CRAWFORD

Oh, let's see—conspiracy, theft, money laundering. And my personal favorite? Hiring high schoolers to commit felonies.

Murmurs ripple through the restaurant. Langston's face tightens. His wife stares at him, confused, horrified.

MRS. LANGSTON slowly stands, backing away from the table.

MRS. LANGSTON
Gerald...?

Langston says nothing. Just glares at Crawford as two officers pull him to his feet and cuff him.

LANGSTON
You don't know what you're doing.

Crawford leans in, voice cool, satisfied.

CRAWFORD
Yeah? Well, maybe you should've
been a little quieter about it.

He motions to the door. The officers haul Langston out. His wife remains frozen, stunned into silence. The restaurant returns to hushed whispers as Crawford strolls out.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex stands in front of his mirror, straightening his tie. He adjusts his suit jacket, exhaling slowly. The weight of everything—the takedown, the risks, the secrets—lingers in his eyes. But tonight, for a few hours, he's just a high school senior going to prom.

A knock at the door.

MRS. HARPER (O.S.)
Let me see my handsome son before
you go.

Alex smirks, shaking his head. He opens the door to reveal his mom, who gives him an approving once-over.

MRS. HARPER (CONT'D)
Not bad. I half-expected you to
show up in a chess-themed tux.

ALEX (
Yeah, because nothing says "cool"
like a bishop print vest.

MRS. HARPER laughs, stepping forward to adjust his tie.

MRS. HARPER
You sure you're okay?

A beat. Alex hesitates—then nods.

ALEX
Yeah, Mom. I'm good.

MRS. HARPER smiles, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

MRS. HARPER
Alright. Go get your girl.

Alex grabs his car keys and heads out.

EXT. CLARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

*Alex pulls up in front of Clara's house. Before he can even step out, the front door swings open—Clara steps outside.

She looks stunning. A sleek, elegant dress, hair styled just right. But she's still Clara—still effortless, still confident.

Alex steps forward, momentarily at a loss for words. Clara smirks.

CLARA
If you stare any longer, I'm gonna start charging.

Alex blinks, smirks back.

ALEX
Just surprised you don't have a tiara already.

CLARA
Prom Queen vote isn't in yet.

She loops her arm through his.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Come on, let's go make people jealous.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - PROM NIGHT

The gym is transformed—soft string lights draped across the ceiling, a DJ blasting music, students dancing, laughing, and taking pictures. It's the one night a year where everything feels like a movie.

Alex and Clara step inside, eyes scanning the crowd. They don't rush to the dance floor, just taking it all in.

CLARA (CONT'D)
So? This everything you dreamed of?

ALEX

Yeah. You, me, and a bunch of
sweaty teenagers in overpriced
outfits. Perfect night.

Clara laughs, shaking her head. Then, her expression softens slightly.

CLARA

So, what about Principal Calloway?
He just gets to walk?

Alex's smirk fades slightly. He glances toward the stage, where the principal stands, chatting with faculty, completely unaware.

Alex turns back to Clara, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

ALEX

Oh, I have something special for
him.

Clara raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

CLARA

Should I be worried?

ALEX

Only if you hate surprises.

The music picks up. Clara shakes her head, amused.

CLARA

Come on, Harper. Dance first, world
domination later.

She pulls him toward the dance floor, laughing. Alex follows, but his mind is already working.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Not bad, Harper. For a guy who
thinks six moves ahead, you
actually have rhythm.

ALEX

I study patterns. Dancing's just a
less predictable chess game.

Clara laughs, shaking her head.

ALEX and CLARA turn to see the rest of the gang arriving—
LILY, MAYA, DEREK, and SAM, dressed up but still undeniably
themselves.

Lily wears a sleek dress, but it's her confident smirk that really sells it. Maya is in a simple but elegant outfit, looking slightly out of place but owning it. Derek—surprisingly sharp in a suit—grins, hands in his pockets. And Sam? He went full flashy tux, like he's ready to crash a casino heist.

LILY

So, what's it like dating the King of Chess? Do you have to make all your moves three hours in advance?

CLARA

Nah, I just wait for him to overthink and steal the win.

Maya snickers, while Derek claps Alex on the back.

DEREK

I'll admit, man. Didn't expect to see you here of all places.

ALEX

Yeah, well. Even masterminds take the night off.

SAM

Lies. You're definitely up to something.

Maya nods in agreement, arms crossed.

MAYA

Yeah. We know that look, Alex.

A beat. Alex glances toward the stage, where PRINCIPAL CALLOWAY stands, looking smug, chatting with other faculty. Alex's eyes glint with mischief.

ALEX

Just enjoying the night.

LILY

Right... and that doesn't have anything to do with Calloway standing over there?

CLARA

I told you they'd see right through you.

DEREK

Alright, spill it. What's the plan?

Alex takes a sip from a cup of punch, completely unfazed. Then, he finally smirks.

ALEX
Stick around. You'll see.

The stage is set at the front of the room, where PRINCIPAL CALLOWAY stands at the microphone, delivering some boring, self-congratulatory speech.

ALEX weaves through the crowd, grabbing MAYA's arm gently. She turns, raising an eyebrow.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You got everything ready?

Maya smirks slightly, adjusting her bracelet where a small remote control is hidden.

MAYA
Everything's in place. Just say the word.

Alex nods, exhaling. This is it.

ON STAGE - SAME TIME

PRINCIPAL CALLOWAY smiles smugly, addressing the students.

CALLOWAY
And of course, none of this would be possible without strong leadership guiding this school to greatness!

The faculty politely claps. Some students half-heartedly cheer. Calloway soaks it in like he's the mayor of some small kingdom.

Then-ALEX steps onto the stage.

Confident. Unshaken. A move planned five steps ahead.

ALEX
Excuse me, sir, but I'd love to say a few words.

Calloway hesitates—he wasn't expecting this. But he won't turn down public praise.

CALLOWAY
Ah, Alex Harper. Our chess champion. By all means, go ahead.

Alex takes the microphone. Faces him directly.

ALEX
I just think it's so important to
recognize everything you've done
for this school.

Clara and the gang exchange glances from the dance floor.
Derek leans toward Sam.

DEREK
Oh, this is gonna be good.

Calloway smiles wider, playing along.

CALLOWAY
Why, thank you, Alex. That means a
lot.

ALEX
Which is why we put together a
little video tribute.

A hush falls over the crowd. The big screen behind them
flickers to life.

Maya, in the crowd, flicks the switch on her remote.

ON SCREEN - THE COLLAGE OF CRIMES

The first few frames show innocent school events—football
games, pep rallies. Then—the footage shifts.

*A grainy security camera clip of Calloway accepting a bribe.

*Audio of him pressuring a student into committing theft.

*A video of him meeting with Langston in secret, exchanging
cash.

And finally—a clear clip of him speaking to one of his
enforcers. His voice booms through the speakers.

CALLOWAY (ON SCREEN, RECORDED)
If they don't do what I say, I'll
ruin them. Do you understand me?

INT. SCHOOL GYM - REAL TIME

*The entire gym falls silent. The energy shifts— from party
to something cold, electric, dangerous.

Calloway stiffens. His smug expression drops instantly. His
eyes widen, darting to the screen.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

TURN THAT OFF.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD steps into the room, flanked by uniformed officers.

The crowd gasps.

STUDENTS BEGIN WHISPERING.

LILY

Oof. Tough look, boss.

Calloway turns, fast, eyes darting for an escape. But the officers are already closing in. Crawford steps forward, pulling out his badge.

CRAWFORD

Principal Calloway, you're under arrest.

A ripple of shock runs through the crowd. A few students cheer. Some grab their phones, recording.

Calloway glares at Alex, fury in his eyes.

CALLOWAY

You think you've won?

Alex steps forward, tilting his head slightly.

ALEX

Checkmate.

The officers grab Calloway's arms, cuffing him. Crawford reads him his rights as the students erupt into stunned chaos.

Maya approaches Crawford.

MAYA

So glad you could join us,
Detective.

DETECTIVE CRAWFORD

Thanks for the invite.

MAYA

My pleasure.

Clara leans toward Alex, whispering.

CLARA

You really do know how to throw a prom.

ALEX

Yeah. One for the history books.

The energy in the gym slowly returns to normal, though the buzz of what just happened still lingers in the air. Students whisper excitedly, some still staring at the doors where Calloway was dragged out.

On stage, the VICE PRINCIPAL, clearly overwhelmed but trying to keep things moving, steps up to the mic.

VICE PRINCIPAL

Well... that was unexpected. But! The night must go on!

The crowd cheers. The vice principal fumbles with the Prom Court envelope.

VICE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

And your Prom Queen for this year is... Clara Simmons!

The room erupts into cheers. Clara laughs in disbelief, covering her mouth. Lily nudges her forward.

LILY

Go get your crown, Your Majesty.

Clara makes her way to the stage, accepting the tiara. She turns to Alex, smirking.

CLARA

Told you I'd win.

Alex chuckles, shaking his head. The vice principal gestures for her to take a dance with the Prom King—some random football player. But Clara? She grabs Alex's hand instead.

CLARA (CONT'D)

I'm choosing my own King.

The crowd "Oooooohs," laughing and cheering. The DJ starts a slow song as Clara pulls Alex onto the dance floor.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

The lights are dim, the music soft and slow. Clara and Alex sway gently in the center of the floor, lost in their own world.

CLARA (CONT'D)
So. You saved my future and got me
a crown. What do I owe you?

ALEX
Just don't blackmail any more
students.

CLARA
I'm reformed now, Harper.

She pauses, looking at him more seriously.

CLARA (CONT'D)
You really pulled it off. Took down
Calloway. Saved the school.

A beat.

CLARA (CONT'D)
So... what now, Chessmaster?

Alex glances around at his friends—Lily chatting with Maya,
Derek giving Sam a hard time about his ridiculous tux. They
made it through this together.

Then, he looks back at Clara, smirking.

ALEX
I think... I'm gonna enjoy the win.

Clara smiles, pulling him a little closer as they continue to
dance.

Alex hesitates, just for a second. Then—he closes the
distance.

A soft, slow kiss.

When they finally pull back, Clara smirks, eyes still closed
for half a second longer than necessary.

CLARA
So was that just a friendly "you're
welcome" or something else?

Alex smirks back, his voice low, warm.

ALEX
Depends.

CLARA
On?

Alex leans in slightly, voice almost a whisper.

ALEX

Would you steal another dance with
me?

Clara's smirk turns into something softer. She rests her head
against his shoulder as they continue swaying to the music.

FADE OUT.