



Harlan Coben's Shelter

"El Chico Nuevo"

By Ed Decter

Based on the Mickey Bolitar Novels

By

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ACT ONE

EXT. DENSE FOREST SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE - DAWN

A SIX-YEAR-OLD GIRL, unusually gaunt and thin, with striking blonde hair wearing a gray-and-black striped uniform, and for some reason, the OUTLINE OF A BUTTERFLY tattooed on her forearm, scrambles through the dense birch forest; no clear idea where she is headed.

Running alongside her is an EMACIATED MAN whose teeth are blackened by malnutrition, but we can still see the resemblance he has to the Blonde Girl -- this is her FATHER. In the distance we HEAR the BARKING of large dogs -- both the Blonde Girl and her father are being pursued. A SHOT rings out -- the bullet takes out a chunk of birch bark right beside them. Strangely, the young girl's expression seems more determined than terrified.

FATHER

(in Polish)

Never stop fighting, my dove.

The Father slows a step and positions himself directly behind his daughter as they claw their way through the birch trees. Another SHOT rings out. The Father is hit dead center in his back and falls lifelessly to the forest floor. The Blonde Girl's face contorts with grief and pain. But she heeds her father's last words and continues fighting. Taking note of the outline of a BUTTERFLY carved into one of the birches, which reminds us of the one on her forearm; she heads straight for the butterfly marker and disappears into a dense thicket of trees.

CLOSE ON: WHITE BIRCH TREES

A FIGURE emerges out of the dense thicket -- but it is no longer our Blonde Girl, it is MICKEY BOLITAR, who is running on:

EXT. PATH UNDERNEATH HIGH TENSION WIRES - SUBURBAN NEW JERSEY

And it is PRESENT DAY. Mickey is 16, unusually tall, and normally has the calm confidence of a naturally gifted basketball player who doesn't feel the need to trash talk, letting his game speak for him, but is now running at full speed and is SWEATY, PANICKY AND HIGHLY AGITATED. He runs along a grassy path beneath towering high tension wires. The wires hum and crackle in the night, making the mood even more tense.

He's trailed by a short, wiry, biracial high school junior (we'll find out later his name is ARTHUR TOMPKINS, but for now, Short Guy), who is having trouble catching his breath.

MICKEY
(urgently)
Rápido.

SHORT GUY
(gasping)
Just to clarify, you are a foot taller than I am, I'm not Usain Bolt, and you don't know where you're going. Watch out!

Mickey's and Short Guy's eyes go wide as they see a BLACK HELMETED MOTORCYCLE RIDER barreling straight toward them on a MOTOCROSS BIKE as if planning to bulldoze them. The Motorcyclist menacingly extends a COLLAPSIBLE BATON. We almost don't have time to register that the motorcycle is SILENT.

Acting on instinct and training, instead of turning and running AWAY from the danger, Mickey charges directly toward the onrushing bike and just before he's flattened, deftly moves to his right and takes hold of the Motorcyclist's forearm and shoulder using the momentum of the motorcycle to force it into a sharp turn. Mickey now pivots with the full force of his 6'4" frame and heaves the rider off the bike. The baton goes flying as the Motorcyclist goes airborne and his black helmet collides with one of the high-tension tower stanchions, completely knocking him out.

SHORT GUY (CONT'D)
What the hell? No one uses this shortcut. We're being *followed*. And by a guy on an electric motorcycle made in Austria.

It doesn't surprise Mickey that Short Guy knows this.

MICKEY
We don't have time to figure it out.

Mickey scoops Short Guy up in a fireman's carry and continues running, with extreme urgency.

SHORT GUY
Is this really necessary?

MICKEY
Ashley could be hurt or kidnapped, or even worse...
(MORE)

MICKEY (CONT'D)

I can't lose anyone else, do you understand me? *I can't lose anyone else.*

Short Guy's expression hardens with resolve.

SHORT GUY

Cut through here.

Mickey veers to the right. They emerge from the woods at a cul-de-sac on:

EXT. 34 EDGEMERE LANE - CONTINUOUS

They freeze. Mickey puts Short Guy down. They stare at a modern stone and glass custom home which is completely surrounded by a cordon of YELLOW POLICE TAPE. There are four POLICE CRUISERS and AN AMBULANCE. We see Mickey and Short Guy's HORRIFIED EXPRESSIONS in the flashing RED LIGHTS.

SHORT GUY

What. The. Actual. Fuck.

MICKEY

You sure this house is Ashley's?

A powerfully-built POLICE OFFICER stares directly at Mickey.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

(booming)

MICKEY BOLITAR!

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH SCHOOL - SWIMMING POOL

SUBTITLE: THREE DAYS EARLIER

We're in a 25-meter indoor pool in a suburban New Jersey High School. Mickey raises his hand as if to indicate "present" to a gym teacher standing at the pool's edge with the name "LINFANTE" stitched on his green Livingston High polo shirt.

MR. LINFANTE

(bellowing)

ASHLEY KENT!

Next to Mickey, we see ASHLEY KENT, who looks to be Mickey's age. Her green eyes radiate a keen intelligence; insightful beyond her years. There is a reason for this, but that's for much later. Ashley raises her hand and stifles a laugh. She is the only other person in the pool -- who else would be Ashley Kent?

ASHLEY

Um... here.

Mr. Linfante thinks every high school student is a pain in the ass, and Mickey and Ashley have just confirmed this.

MR. LINFANTE

According to the regulations from the state of New Jersey, I don't assume gender identity or chosen pronouns until you've self-identified.

MICKEY

(scans the empty pool)
I guess we're the only new juniors.

ASHLEY

(sotto: with a smile)
I'm not complaining.

Mr. Linfante has done so many of these tests that he does not even need to refer to the script on his clipboard.

MR. LINFANTE

Welcome new students to Livingston High School. We will now begin the mandatory water safety swim test.

(off script to Mickey and Ashley)

The origin of the swim test has been lost to history, but no Livingston High student will be drowning on my watch! Is that clear? Now, cross the pool in under 30 seconds!

As Mr. Linfante blows his WHISTLE, he clicks his STOPWATCH.

Ashley pushes off the side of the pool and does a choppy crawl as if she's had no formal swim training. She churns as fast as she can; trying to beat Mickey to the other side.

Mickey lets her get halfway across the pool then goes deep underwater utilizing an expert breaststroke. Each powerful sweep of the long arms of the much taller Mickey closes the gap between him and Ashley. As he passes her:

FROM MICKEY'S POV UNDERWATER:

He catches a glimpse of the bottom of Ashley's bare foot; it looks as if she has been burned.

BACK WITH MICKEY:

As he emerges at the opposite end of the pool, he waits for Ashley to touch the wall beside him.

ASHLEY
Were you showing off for me, Mickey Bolitar?

MICKEY
Possibly. Did it work?

ASHLEY
(with a smile)
Well, it didn't not work.

Ashley slips out of the pool, leaving Mickey behind.

In the bleachers, we see what looks to be a SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR checking out something on his phone.

INSERT: Close on School Administrator's phone. We see he has zoomed in on Ashley in her bathing suit. He's been recording her. Creepy.

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - HALLWAY NEAR THE GYM - TIME CUT

A BELL RINGS, and a mass exodus of HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS pours out of the gym and nearby classrooms heading for the exits; clearly the end of the school day.

Mickey is like a stone in a stream, everything rushes by him, and he seems like a lonely island not part of the world around him. A gym-pumped JOCK (we'll meet him later as TROY TAYLOR, it's not important now) shoulder-checks Mickey, knocking his phone to the floor. Mickey doesn't take the bait. As he picks up his phone from the floor, WE SEE A CRACK on his screen, which runs right over the lock screen photo of him flanked by his PARENTS (who we will come to know as KITTY and BRAD BOLITAR); they are wearing Pashtun headscarves. Mickey looks at his screen wistfully.

Ashley emerges from a door marked GIRL'S LOCKER ROOM, her hair still glistening from the pool. It's easy for her to spot Mickey leaning against the wall waiting for her, he towers above the swirl of students.

ASHLEY
(off the crowd)
Should we mingle? Meet our new classmates?

MICKEY
(with a smile at Ashley)
No, I'm good.

Ashley laughs. The two of them stroll down the hallway outside the gym that is emblazoned with the words: "LIVINGSTON HIGH LANCERS HALL OF HONOR." The NAMES of every school record-holder are listed under each sport. Ashley clocks that Mickey walks right past the MEN'S BASKETBALL section, where the name M. BOLITAR appears repeatedly. She notices that Mickey doesn't even glance at the wall. Just as Ashley is about to ask about this, Mickey asks:

MICKEY (CONT'D)

What happened to your foot?

Ashley's face clouds momentarily.

ASHLEY

... Walked over some hot coals.
Didn't move fast enough.

Mickey can sense that Ashley doesn't want to reveal more.

MICKEY

I once saw these tribal leaders in Mongolia fire-walk across red hot embers -- it was like they were gliding across cool grass.

ASHLEY

Okay, rewind just a bit -- what were you doing in *Mongolia*?

MICKEY

My parents moved around a lot.

ASHLEY

And if that was less vague?

MICKEY

They worked for an international children's health organization, so I kind of grew up everywhere, just not here.

ASHLEY

That's why.

MICKEY

And if *that* was less vague?

ASHLEY

We're both new at school and found each other in the first week. Lonely people seek out lonely people.

MICKEY'S FLASH OF MEMORY

Mickey, in the front passenger seat, is being driven in a small SUV by his father, BRAD BOLITAR, and they are sharing a laugh about something, when they are BROADSIDED on the driver's side by another vehicle. The SUV turns over and over. END FLASH.

ASHLEY clocks the slight shift in Mickey's mood. She and Mickey pause in the doorway of an empty classroom; an eddy in the river of students.

MICKEY

I never thought of myself as lonely.

ASHLEY

People like us never do.

MICKEY

How could you possibly be lonely?

Instead of answering Mickey, Ashley leans toward him as if to kiss him, but stops short; suppresses a laugh.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

(confused)

What's funny?

ASHLEY

You're blushing. That's your tell.

MICKEY

So I'm the lonely guy with a tell?

Ashley takes Mickey by the hand as they resume walking. It's clearly the first time and Mickey is enjoying it.

ASHLEY

I'm not playing you -- you have to get going, right?

Mickey checks his phone.

MICKEY

(conflicted)

I do. My mother... it's kind of a long story.

ASHLEY

Tell me tomorrow up at Hemlock Falls? It's less crowded.

Mickey smiles at the idea.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Just promise me one thing, Bolitar --
never play poker.

MICKEY

Prometo.

Ashley pushes through the EXIT DOOR to:

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - PARKING LOT OUTSIDE GYM

As Ashley crosses the sidewalk into the parking lot, we can see that Livingston High is a '50s-era colonial brick structure with a modern glass-enclosed atrium attached to it. There are basketball courts across the street in THE OVAL, an expansive green-space with a GAZEBO at the center.

Mickey is caught in a crush of students and attempts to catch up with Ashley but is slowed by a LIVINGSTON HIGH MAINTENANCE PICK-UP TRUCK (with CROSSED MOP HANDLES emblazoned on the door) pulling to a stop in front of him. The SHORT GUY (ARTHUR TOMPKINS) we met at the opening heads toward the passenger door while his FATHER, African-American, 40s, dressed in a JANITOR'S UNIFORM, moves his thermos and lunch pail from the front seat. The Short Guy warmly hugs his dad before they drive off. For some reason, the closeness of father and son seems to make Mickey a bit pensive; then BOOM, because he isn't paying attention, Mickey bumps into someone:

The someone is a VERY TALL GIRL dressed head to toe in black, complete with a vintage CLASH T-shirt, she has full sleeves of tats, multiple ear, eye and nose piercings; fluorescent purple hair with Day-Glo lipstick to match and she carries a guitar case.

VERY TALL GIRL

(to Mickey)

Watch it.

MICKEY

Sorry.

VERY TALL GIRL

(with a sneer)

Typical.

Mickey watches her for a beat wondering what that meant. He then proceeds across the street where Ashley waits for him beside her RED VESPA SCOOTER. A few steps away, in The Oval, Mickey glances at a pick-up 5-on-5 BASKETBALL GAME. Ashley clocks Mickey's intent observance of the action.

ASHLEY

On the wall of fame near the gym --
M. Bolitar. Your father?

MICKEY

Uncle.

ASHLEY

He has every basketball record at
the school.

Mickey now understands that nothing gets past Ashley.

MICKEY

He does.

ASHLEY

You looking to break some yourself?

MICKEY

We'll see.

ASHLEY

Family landmine?

Mickey nods.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Okay, so another story for
tomorrow.

ON THE BASKETBALL COURT, Mickey sees an aggressive point guard (who we will come to know as TROY TAYLOR) dribble through a double-team, and instead of making the easy pass to his uncovered teammate, forces up an off-balance midrange jumper that clanks off the rim. Mickey unconsciously shakes his head; disapproving of selfish basketball.

MICKEY

(to himself)

Egoísta.

ASHLEY

I don't need a translation for
that.

TROY

What are you looking at, assholes?

Before Mickey can answer:

ASHLEY

Not much.

Troy gives them both the finger. Mickey is about to storm forward, Ashley gently pulls him back.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

First week at a new school -- no enemies, okay?

Ashley's incandescent smile dissipates Mickey's protective urge to go after Troy.

After climbing aboard her Vespa, Ashley slips on her preppy GREEN PLAID HEADBAND to hold back her hair. Mickey extends his long arm and TAKES A PICTURE OF THEM BOTH. It looks odd, petite, slim Ashley in the driver's seat of her scooter with giant, broad-shouldered Mickey sitting on the back.

FROM ANOTHER ANGLE - BINOCULAR POV

Someone concealed in the darkness of the woods watches as Mickey and Ashley drive out of the lot. They are being observed, but why?

EXT. STREETS OF SUBURBAN LIVINGSTON - MOMENTS LATER

Mickey and Ashley cruise on the Vespa through the leafy suburb past the single-story and split-level tract homes built just after WWII and the more upscale suburban manses built in the '60s and '70s that sport expansive lawns and ornate decor.

MICKEY

(to Ashley)

Make the next right.

As Ashley rounds the turn she focuses on:

EXT. HAZEL AVENUE - WIND-WEATHERED HOUSE

Its front lawn untended and wild. The house itself looks as if gravity is caving it in. It seems as if it is being reclaimed by the forest behind it. Ashley slows to a stop.

ASHLEY

That place is creepy.

MICKEY

One of my neighbors told me they call it Bat Lady's house.

ASHLEY

Bat Lady?

MICKEY

Suburban legend. Some super-old lady who supposedly kidnaps kids in the middle of the night. No one's ever actually seen anyone living there. The creepy abandoned house -- every neighborhood has one.

ASHLEY

Even in *Mongolia*?

MICKEY

Well, there it would be the creepy abandoned yurt.

ASHLEY

Yurt? Showing off again?

MICKEY

(with a smile)
I might have been.

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE

From inside the second story of the house, a HAND moves a curtain a few millimeters just as Mickey and Ashley zoom off on her red Vespa.

BACK WITH MICKEY AND ASHLEY

Ashley speeds up as if to put distance between herself and the sinister-looking house.

MICKEY

I'm the next left.

Ashley rounds the corner.

EXT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - TIME CUT - MOMENTS LATER

Ashley drops Mickey off in front of his two-story suburban home with a deep lawn and mature trees. The Bolitar home is on a corner, so the driveway is on the side of the house, the grass-covered front lawn bisected by a flagstone walkway to the front door.

ASHLEY

Beautiful house.

MICKEY

My dad grew up here.
(after a beat)
You're kind of like a spy.

ASHLEY

How's that?

MICKEY

You know a lot about me, but you
don't tell me much about you.

Ashley smiles enigmatically.

ASHLEY

Tomorrow, Bolitar.

She gently pulls Mickey toward her and this time kisses him
tenderly on the lips.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

(with a smile)
You're blushing again.

MICKEY

I've got to work on my tell.

ASHLEY

Do me a favor. Don't.

Mickey looks a bit off balance as he turns and walks up the
flagstone walkway toward his front door.

Ashley lingers a beat to take in Mickey's house; wistful for
some reason. She unlocks her seat to pull out a Livingston
High sweatshirt. At the bottom of the compartment we catch
sight of a BERETTA 9MM HANDGUN. Ashley quickly closes and
locks the compartment.

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

When Mickey walks in the front door, his aunt, LEAH BOLITAR,
is waiting for him; car keys in hand. She too, is athletic
and is extraordinarily *alert*, which is a huge asset for her
work as a civil rights attorney, but a pain in the ass for
Mickey to have as an aunt. (At another time we'll discover
that this is Mickey's grandparents' house, but that's not
important now.)

LEAH

The clinic's visiting hours are
only for another hour.

MICKEY

I know. I got held up.

LEAH

By that lovely young woman on the Vespa? She a new friend?

(off Mickey's look)

None of my business. Noted. First kiss?

MICKEY

(embarrassed)

I can drive myself to see my mom, you know.

Leah leads Mickey outside to:

EXT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

They head toward an older-model GREEN FORD TAURUS.

LEAH

You may have driven around the African subcontinent or in Laos, but here in New Jersey according to statute 39:3-29; you're required to have an actual driver's license.

Leah fobs open the doors to the Taurus. Mickey goes around to the passenger side.

MICKEY

I've signed up for my test; just waiting for my birth certificate to arrive then -- seré libre.

LEAH

On your *seventeenth birthday*. So until that glorious day when you will be "libre," your aunt will be driving you.

(realizes)

Your lovely new friend already has a license. Well played.

Instead of responding, Mickey climbs into the car.

LEAH (CONT'D)

(to herself)

I guess she is attracted to the strong silent type.

Leah seems to accept Mickey's less-than-enthusiastic attitude toward her, there's a history to this obviously; we're wondering what it is all about, but that's for later.

EXT. LIVINGSTON REHABILITATION CLINIC - LATER

The Ford Taurus pulls into the parking lot of a MEDICAL PLAZA.

INT. LEAH'S FORD TAURUS

Mickey reaches for the door handle.

MICKEY

(to Leah)

I'll go in. Mom might get upset if you're with me.

LEAH

(nods)

I brought work with me.

Leah motions toward some legal files in the back seat.

MICKEY

Don't wait. I can walk back.

LEAH

Who knows, you may want to talk after.

Mickey exits the car, closing the door between them.

LEAH (CONT'D)

(again to herself)

Or not. That's okay, too.

INT. LIVINGSTON REHABILITATION CLINIC - LATER

Mickey enters the glass and steel lobby of the addiction clinic. Mickey is met at the reception desk by DR. CHRISTINE SHIPPEE, who heads the clinic. She is the gatekeeper Mickey must get past in order to see his mother.

MICKEY

Hi, Dr. Shippee.

DR. SHIPPEE

Hi, Mickey.

MICKEY

How's my mom doing?

DR. SHIPPEE

She's made a lot of progress and seems to be on a good trajectory.

MICKEY

"Seems to be"?

DR. SHIPPEE

I would guard against too much optimism. Relapse always lurks as a possibility.

MICKEY

(heard this before)

I get it.

Mickey gestures toward a doorway with an electronic lock.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

My mom must be waiting for me.

DR. SHIPPEE

I'll buzz you through.

Dr. Shippee swipes a keycard allowing Mickey to enter:

INT. LIVINGSTON REHABILITATION CLINIC - CONTINUOUS

The DAYROOM of the rehab clinic has modern furniture all in calming pastel colors. Mickey's mother, KITTY BOLITAR, is a former top-ranked tennis player from Puerto Rico. She is in her mid-thirties and looks startlingly young to have Mickey as her son.

Kitty is slender and wears a thick woolen sweater that seems overly-large for her. She gives Mickey a warm embrace. When Mickey is with her, he is *watchful*, always protectively making sure she is okay. (Kitty and Mickey slip in and out of Spanish at will.) Kitty spins in place so that Mickey can take a look at how well she looks.

KITTY

Mira.

MICKEY

Parece que podrías ganar a Serena sin problema.
(You look like you could take Serena in straight sets.)

KITTY

No en mi mejor día hijo mío.
(Not even on my best day.)

MICKEY

Dr. Shippee says you're making
great progress.

KITTY

(imitates Dr. Shippee)
"But relapse is always a
possibility."

Mickey laughs.

KITTY (CONT'D)

Siéntate.

Mickey and his mother sit together on a sofa.

KITTY (CONT'D)

I've been having dreams, Mickey.

MICKEY

(worried)
Bad dreams?

KITTY

No, beautiful ones! In my dreams
your father is still alive; And
when I wake up; it feels real, like
he was so close to me.

Mickey puts a comforting hand atop his mother's as we SMASH
CUT TO:

MICKEY'S FLASH OF MEMORY: Inside the small SUV moments after
the impact of the truck. The car is now OVERTURNED. REVEAL:
Kitty Bolitar was in the backseat. She's moaning softly,
injured but alive. Mickey looks toward his father, who is
bleeding from his mouth and nose but not moving. Mickey is
helplessly pinned on his side of the car trying futilely to
reach for his dad. A PARAMEDIC, with sandy blonde hair and
piercing blue eyes, is on his belly, reaching into the
crushed driver's side window -- he looks over at Mickey with
a sad expression: there's no hope, your father is gone.

INT. LIVINGSTON REHABILITATION CLINIC - CONTINUOUS

Mickey's face is clouded by this horrific memory but he tries
to remain upbeat for his mother:

MICKEY

I miss papá, too. But your job is
to concentrate on feeling better.

KITTY

But I am. Dr. Shippee might let me go home soon.

MICKEY

Mamá, that is so awesome. Then we can find our own place.

KITTY

How has it been with Aunt Leah?

MICKEY

How do you think?

KITTY

Your aunt is doing our family a huge kindness.

Mickey is surprised by Kitty's statement.

MICKEY

But, she--

KITTY

-- never approved of me. But look around, Mickey. Can you blame her?

MICKEY

This place isn't you.

KITTY

It's me now. But soon, we'll be back together and I want us both to embrace Aunt Leah for looking after you. Jurame? (promise me)

MICKEY

(stubbornly)

I don't need anyone to look after me.

KITTY

We all need someone, mi hijo.

She puts her hand on Mickey's chest near his heart.

KITTY (CONT'D)

Don't you feel it here that papá is still with us?

Mickey wishes that were true; but knows it's not.

MICKEY

(worried)

Please don't say that to anyone but
me, mamá.

EXT. LIVINGSTON REHABILITATION CLINIC - LATER

Mickey is concerned about his mom as he leaves the clinic where his Aunt Leah is waiting for him in the parking lot. Remember, Leah is *alert* and she intuits that something is bothering Mickey.

LEAH

Are you okay? Did your mom have a
setback?

MICKEY

Why do you always assume the worst?
It so happens she's doing great.

LEAH

You may not believe this, Mickey,
but I'm happy to hear that.

MICKEY

You're right. I don't believe you.

LEAH

Mickey, please don't forget your
dad was my brother and I miss him
terribly.

MICKEY

Then how come when he was alive you
and Uncle Myron pushed him and mamá
away?

There is obviously a complicated answer to this and Leah decides not to debate it.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Thanks for taking me here but I
think I'll walk home.

LEAH

It's getting late; let me drive
you.

MICKEY

I need to walk.

Mickey starts off down the street. Leah is a force of nature but it's not like she can pick Mickey up and put all 6'4" of him back into her car.

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - BASKETBALL COURTS - EARLY EVENING

Needing some type of outlet for his frustrations, Mickey heads for The Oval where he stops to watch a full-court pick-up game.

A calm seems to come over Mickey as he follows the rhythm of the basketball game. LOCALS have gathered around the perimeter of the court. This nightly game draws spectators.

A team waiting for their ups is short-handed and Mickey sits on a wooden bench, joining them. No words have to be exchanged, this is how things work in pick-up basketball.

When the game is decided, Mickey and his team stand and head onto the court. Mickey is immediately confronted by the pugnacious and gym-pumped point guard he encountered earlier, Troy Taylor. Troy speaks loudly enough for everyone to hear the following:

TROY

You're a Bolitar, right?

MICKEY

Mickey.

Mickey extends his hand; Troy leaves him hanging.

TROY

Just because your uncle was some sort of local legend doesn't mean shit to any of us.

MICKEY

Entiendo.

TROY

You some kind of smart ass?

MICKEY

Are we going to trash talk or are we going to hoop?

TROY

Remember -- losers sit.

Troy calls over to his pretty girlfriend RACHEL CALDWELL. She's wearing a basketball varsity jacket that has "Taylor" stitched on the front and a "C" for captain on the sleeve.

If you guessed Rachel's a cheerleader -- you would be right.
If you underestimate her, you would be wrong.

TROY (CONT'D)

Make sure you get all this, babe.

Rachel rolls her eyes and begrudgingly hits record on her phone.

RACHEL

It's not like your last one did numbers, "babe."

Mickey can't help but notice that amid the crowd is a BALD MAN who looks more like a soldier than a spectator, wearing aviator sunglasses at night. Weird.

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - BASKETBALL COURTS - QUICK CUTS

Mickey Bolitar is poetry in motion. They are unable to stop him until Troy and his "enforcer" friend, ALEC SCHULTZ, low bridges Mickey, knocking him sprawling to the ground.

This is pick-up b-ball, you don't call fouls, so Mickey takes it. Next time down, Mickey dunks over Troy, which draws the applause of the Spectators and this pisses Troy off even more.

Next time Troy has the ball, Alec body-blocks Mickey so violently that it knocks him against the backboard pole and Mickey is momentarily stunned. Troy scores easily, stares at the dazed Mickey and says:

TROY

Who's got next?

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - NIGHT - LATER

The game is over, an angry and bruised Mickey is now walking away from the basketball courts on his way home. He notices he has ten messages from his Aunt Leah, which he ignores. As he crosses:

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mickey finds himself in front of the wind-weathered house. He can't help but notice that there is a SINGLE LIGHT on in one of the second story rooms. He pauses a beat; wondering if someone does live in the old wreck of a house. That's just when the front door cracks open a small bit.

It's night, so Mickey's not entirely sure this isn't his eyes playing tricks on him, but the door opens WIDER.

Mickey now sees what can only be described as a WRAITH-LIKE FIGURE, an EXTREMELY ELDERLY WOMAN with long, white frizzy hair, wearing what looks like an antique wedding dress. Could this be "Bat Lady?" Mickey stares at her transfixed because "Bat Lady" is pointing her boney finger at him.

BAT LADY

Mickey! Mickey Bolitar!

Mickey is stunned. WTF? How does this woman know his name?

BAT LADY (CONT'D)

Your father is still alive.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - A BEAT LATER

Mickey is wide-eyed. Did that just happen or was he imagining it? He walks across the street and knocks on the door of the wind-weathered House. No one answers.

MICKEY
Hello? Hello?

He steps back a few steps, looks up at the second floor -- it is now dark. It's clear by Mickey's expression, he's questioning his own sanity. He rushes down the street toward:

EXT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mickey, completely preoccupied with what has just happened, enters the front door to find:

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Leah is waiting for him. She's holding her cell phone as if to display the ten messages she's left him. She can clearly see that Mickey is upset by something so she is more concerned than angry.

LEAH
Are you okay?

MICKEY
Why wouldn't I be okay?

LEAH
Well, I left you ten texts. All unanswered.

MICKEY
Sorry. I got caught up playing ball.

Mickey heads for a door near the kitchen.

LEAH
I feel like I have to review our agreement again.

MICKEY
You absolutely don't.

Mickey opens the door and heads down some stairs to:

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - THE BASEMENT - MICKEY'S BEDROOM

Leah follows him down.

LEAH

I conditioned my agreement not to become your court-mandated legal guardian on a few simple requirements: you answer my texts or calls immediately and keep me apprised of your location and schedule. Do we now have to renegotiate the terms of our agreement?

MICKEY

No. I said I'm sorry, okay?

Someday we will learn that Mickey's room down in the basement used to be his famous Uncle Myron Bolitar's room (much more on that as the series goes on), but for now, we see a lot of classic NY Knick basketball posters (Patrick Ewing, Bernard King) as well as a lot of signed basketballs from Knick greats Walt Frazier, Willis Reed, Bill Bradley. All-in-all a pretty cool room for Mickey to spend time in. Mickey clicks on a lamp on his desk.

LEAH

Mickey, did something happen?
You're pale.

Mickey is on the verge of confiding in his aunt.

MICKEY

I'm not sure if I imagined...

On Mickey's desk is a framed PHOTOGRAPH of Mickey flanked by Kitty and Brad, they are all wearing PASHTUN HEADSCARVES. We SMASH CUT TO:

MICKEY'S FLASH OF MEMORY:

Mickey, holding an umbrella, stands beside his mother Kitty, and watches as a polished mahogany CASKET is lowered into the ground. Raindrops pelt the polished wood as it descends. Mickey puts his arm protectively around Kitty as she weeps. Mickey's eyes rim with tears.

BACK ON MICKEY

He's drained from this emotionally wrenching memory.

LEAH
(concerned)
You're not sure if you imagined
what, Mickey?

Mickey pulls back from confiding to Leah.

MICKEY
I will the follow the agreement.
Soon my mom will be home and then
we'll get our own place and all
this "litigation" can end.

LEAH
Mickey, is there something--

MICKEY
-- Can court be adjourned? I have
homework.

Leah understands Mickey is in some type of pain. She does not
press him further.

LEAH
There's Starlite Pizza for you in
the kitchen.

Mickey knows he should thank his aunt, he's just so lost in
conflicting emotions, he can't.

CLOSE ON -- A STARLITE PIZZA BOX

Mickey's hand reaches in and takes a delicious slice. He's in:

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - KITCHEN - MUCH LATER

Mickey is enjoying the world's best pizza, ravenous after his
game. The house is very quiet but Mickey hears Leah
whispering on the phone in the:

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - OFFICE NEXT TO KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Leah is on her cell, so we only hear her side of the call.

LEAH
I miss you, too. Did you speak to
the Federal Office in Newark? Did
they have any openings?
(listens a beat)
I know... I can't. For the time
being, my life is here now. Myron
is in Africa...
(MORE)

LEAH (CONT'D)

I have no idea when he'll be back.
Can you make more calls? Manhattan
is only 20 minutes from here. Even
Philly would work. I miss you so
much. I love you, Sam.

Leah HEARS a cellphone PING from the kitchen. She realizes Mickey must be there, so she closes the door to the office so she can't be overheard.

INT. THE BOLITAR HOUSE - KITCHEN

Mickey *has* overheard it all, but his attention is now focused on his phone. There is a text from Ashley: **Looking forward to tomorrow.** There's a RED LIPS EMOJI. Mickey texts: **Me too.** He considers the red lips emoji but then thinks better of it.

EXT. THE OVAL - MORNING

Mickey crosses near the central GAZEBO. He spots Troy Taylor sitting on one bench in the gazebo speaking to Rachel Caldwell, who is now wearing an LH cheerleading uniform with a "C" emblazoned on it -- yes, she's the captain. She sits on the bench at the far side of the gazebo, as far from Troy as she can manage. She is seething.

Troy gives Mickey side-eye as he passes. Mickey OVERHEARS the following conversational snippet:

RACHEL

(to Troy)

If you and Alec are such ballers,
what are you hacking the new guy
for?

TROY

Just seeing what Bolitar's made of.

RACHEL

I'll tell you what he's not made
of: pure douche.

Troy is stunned. What's up with his girlfriend? Mickey tries to suppress a smile as he approaches:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - MORNING - TIME CUT

TIGHT ON: Mickey and Ashley. They are in front of Ashley's locker. It's like they are the only two people in the world.

MICKEY

You want to go up to Hemlock Falls together?

ASHLEY

I have to meet you there. I've got cheerleading tryouts after school.

MICKEY

Seriously?

ASHLEY

Are you going to make some comment about me acting stereotypically, Mr. *Basketball* player? You want to belong to a team -- so do I. We're lonely people, remember?

MICKEY

Not anymore.

ASHLEY

(with a smile)

Don't get ahead of yourself. Let's see how kiss number two goes.

Ashley heads off to class, leaving Mickey staring after her. Mickey turns and finds himself face-to-face with Troy Taylor.

TROY

FYI, there are SIX returning seniors on varsity. No junior is getting any playing time. Got that, benchwarmer?

MICKEY

Am I the only one who thinks you're a *douche*? There have to be others, right?

Troy now looks murderous.

TROY

At least when I go home, I have a father.

Everyone in the hall senses there could be violence at any moment. The Short Guy we met earlier threads himself in between Mickey and Troy and begins working the combination on his lock. For some reason, there is a SPOON sticking out of the breast pocket of his short sleeve shirt. Out of nowhere, Short Guy starts in on a random topic.

SHORT GUY

You ever notice how male gamers rank female game characters by looks rather than by intelligence and skill? Don't you think that contributes to normative toxic tropes about femininity?

TROY

Hey, janitor's kid, what's your dad wipe the toilets with -- your hair?

SHORT GUY

Actually, he wipes them with your mother's face.

Troy reaches out as if to strangle Short Guy, but Mickey seems to pull Troy toward him as if to whisper a secret, and in the blink of an eye, Troy is sprawled out on the floor.

SHORT GUY (CONT'D)

(without missing a beat)

Troy! You slipped! Let me help you up!

Troy, frothing mad, kicks Short Guy away, then stands, and makes the "slit your throat" sign at Mickey. He storms off.

SHORT GUY (CONT'D)

(to Mickey)

Was that some kind of Muay Thai?

MICKEY

You practice martial arts?

SHORT GUY

No, but I've streamed every Asian action film out there. Donny Yen -- my particular favorite. Wushu rules. Troy wanted you to take a swing at him.

Short Guy points to a "STOP BULLYING NOW. STAND UP. SPEAK OUT." SIGN that spans across the hallway.

SHORT GUY (CONT'D)

You'll never make the team if you're written up for bullying.

The Short Guy lets go of the lock without opening it.

MICKEY

Did you forget your combo?

SHORT GUY
This isn't my locker.

MICKEY
Thanks, Spoon.

SHORT GUY
You're new, so-- wait, what'd you call me?

MICKEY
Sorry, I didn't know your name, but I couldn't help but notice your spoon--

SHORT GUY
It's a camping spoon. I bought one on Amazon but 12 of them came, so I have extra if you want one.

MICKEY
Why carry a "camping spoon"?

SHORT GUY
You've seen the sanitary conditions at this school, am I right? You should really consider packing your own spoon. By the way, it's also a fork and knife.

Spoon holds up the camping spoon. It's like a Swiss Army knife of utensils.

MICKEY
I'm good, Spoon.

SHORT GUY
Hold on. Let me think. "Spoon." I like it. Never had a nickname before.

MICKEY
What's your real name?

SPOON
Arthur. So you can see why a nickname is so appealing.

MICKEY
I'm Mickey--

SPOON
--Bolitar. Everyone knows. You going out for the team?

Mickey nods.

SPOON (CONT'D)

Then watch your back with Troy.

The BELL RINGS. Mickey and Spoon head down the hallway amidst the swarm of students.

MICKEY

What about *you*?

SPOON

Me? I'm not even on Troy's radar.
You threaten him with the enormous
height and being...

Spoon points to the TROPHY CASE that says "LIVINGSTON HIGH, HOME OF MYRON BOLITAR." In the case there is one PHOTOGRAPH of a smiling MYRON BOLITAR wearing his LIVINGSTON HIGH JERSEY with his arms around his younger sister Leah, and his younger brother Brad.

MICKEY FLASHES ON: The Bat Lady pointing her boney finger:

BAT LADY

Your father is still alive!

TIGHT ON MICKEY

His face clouded with loss. But we're no longer in the hallway, we're in:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - SPANISH CLASSROOM - TIME CUT

Mickey is staring out of the window; lost in thought.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Señor Bolitar?

Mickey realizes that the Spanish teacher Señor Bético has been calling his name.

BÉTICO

Señor Bolitar, no creo que estés escuchando. (I don't believe you're listening.)

MICKEY

(Puerto Rican accent)
He escuchado todo lo que has dicho
y no tienes que preocuparte de que
yo siga el ritmo.

(MORE)

MICKEY (CONT'D)

(I'm listening to everything you
say and have no trouble following.)

BÉTICO

No one is impressed with your
street Spanish, Señor Bolitar.

Rachel Caldwell, the cheerleader we met earlier, mutters
something under her breath:

RACHEL

I am.

Mickey's eyes narrow at Bético. He now speaks not in a Puerto
Rican accent, but in perfect Castilian Spanish.

MICKEY

Te recomiendo que no insultes el
idioma que me enseñó mi madre. (I
recommend you not insult the
language my mother taught me.)

Looking at the tall Mickey, Mr. Bético backs down, but makes
a notation in his day planner, underlining whatever he wrote
several times.

Rachel has trouble suppressing a smile at the new tall
handsome kid who speaks more fluent Spanish than the teacher.
She leans forward and whispers to Mickey:

RACHEL

You just poked a bear with a stick.
Nice work, El Chico Nuevo.

Mickey is too lost in his own thoughts to pay much attention.
That doesn't often happen to Rachel Caldwell. Duly noted.

CLOSE ON RACHEL

But we're not in Spanish class, we're out on the:

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - FOOTBALL FIELD - TIME CUT

Where Rachel supervises CHEERLEADING TRYOUTS and is watching
Ashley dance. Ashley can really move, as if she's had a lot
of professional dance training. Rachel makes note of this on
an iPad she holds.

RACHEL

Okay ladies, let's work on some
tumbling.

We PAN to the stands and see the same creepy School Administrator surreptitiously taking another video of Ashley.

FAR ACROSS THE FIELD - OUTSIDE THE CHAIN LINK PERIMETER FENCE

Mickey is trying to pick out Ashley among all the dozens of girls trying out for the squad, but is having trouble locating her.

The Very Tall Girl we saw earlier (we'll know her as EMA WINSLOW) sneers in Mickey's direction.

EMA
Stalker much?

MICKEY
No, I--

EMA
Typical.

Ema turns her back on Mickey leaves; carrying her guitar.

EXT. A MODEST SPLIT-LEVEL HOME - TIME CUT

Ema seems to be headed for the front door, but instead she cuts toward:

EXT. WOODS SURROUNDING CANOE BROOK RESEVOIR - CONTINUOUS

Ema enters the dense forest on a NARROW PATH. Even though it is a sunny afternoon, the canopy of leaves shades the woods, making it almost seem like evening.

Ema stoops near a HOLLOWED-OUT TREE and pulls out a CAMOUFLAGED BACKPACK. We're wondering why she has stashed the pack in a tree.

Ema pulls off the hoodie she is wearing to reveal a tank-top underneath. She pulls out a Wet Wipe and washes her face. We can see that she doesn't just have sleeves of tattoos, her entire body is covered by them. If we were truly observant we would spot a small but COLORFUL BUTTERFLY which seems as if it has two animal eyes on its lower wings mixed in with the other tattoos on her shoulder blade.

Ema stuffs her hoodie into the backpack then sits down on a stump, takes a hit off her WEED PEN. She pulls out her acoustic guitar and starts to play a sad, plaintive melody -- she's a very talented musician, but we wonder -- is Ema homeless? As Ema's GUITAR MUSIC CONTINUES, we PUSH IN on Ema's butterfly tattoo.

CLOSE ON: A butterfly tattoo. But it's not Ema's. It's the forearm of the six-year-old Blonde Girl we saw earlier who is hidden in:

EXT. THE DEEP SHADOWS OF THE DENSE FOREST - 1941

The GUITAR MUSIC seems to pitch upward, sounding almost like a WAIL. We are clearly no longer in Livingston, we are on the fringes of:

EXT. FARMHOUSE IN POLAND

The Blonde Girl climbs up the embankment of a stream. She is drenched; shivering from the cold. She crawls on her belly like a commando in the direction of the FARMHOUSE, where off in the distance someone plays a SUKA, a traditional Polish string instrument. From her POV we see: A SQUAD OF NAZI SOLDIERS loudly knocking on the door of the farmhouse -- clearly they are searching for escapees from the Concentration Camp.

The Blonde Girl is careful to keep the OUTHOUSE between her and the rear windows of the farm. She snatches a CHILD'S DRESS from a CLOTHESLINE then yanks some carrots out of a small vegetable garden and slithers back into the woods.

EXT. THE DENSE FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Once she is deep enough to completely conceal herself, the Blonde Girl drops behind a fallen tree and begins greedily eating the carrots, not even bothering to wipe the soil from them. Suddenly TWO ADULT MALE HANDS grab her and yank her out of frame.

EXT. HEMLOCK FALLS - PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

Mickey has been impatiently waiting for Ashley to join him at a beautiful rock WATERFALL in the South Mountain Reservation.

He does not notice or care about a BLACK SUBURBAN parked far down the parking area. The deeply tinted windows prevent us from seeing a clear image of the lone MAN behind the wheel, but it appears his face is covered with TATTOOS.

Mickey sits down on a split-rail fence and checks his phone for messages. There are none.

Finally he texts Ashley: "Tryouts go long?" Strangely, Mickey sees the (!) symbol indicating that the text didn't get delivered. He tries it again -- same result. That's strange.

Mickey then calls Ashley. He HEARS the familiar THREE-BEAT TONE and the words "This number is no longer in service."

WTF? Now Mickey is baffled. Mickey tries the communication method of last resort -- he composes an EMAIL.

"Hey Ash, everything okay?" The email promptly bounces back.

Now Mickey is *worried*. He's also confused -- what could possibly be the explanation for all of Ashley's modes of communication to be cut?

Suddenly, Mickey hears a BLOODCURDLING SCREAM. He races toward the falls and behind a large outcropping, sees a YOUNG MAN grabbing Ashley. Mickey snaps into action and expertly sweeps the legs out from under the Young Man, revealing that it's not Ashley but a Hysterical Young Woman.

YOUNG MAN

(a stoner)

Dude, what the fuck?

MICKEY

(to the Hysterical Young Woman)

Are you OK?

HYSTERICAL YOUNG WOMAN

No, I am not OK! I have a tick! Get it off! Get it off! Kill it! Crush it!

MICKEY

(sighs)

Can't crush it.

(to the stoner)

I assume you have a lighter?

The Young Man hands Mickey a lighter. Off the flame--

EXT. HAZEL AVENUE - MUCH LATER - DUSK

Mickey, pre-occupied, walks toward his house, constantly checks his phone to see if somehow Ashley has tried to reach him. There are no texts or messages. As he approaches:

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mickey scans the second floor and sees there are no lights on. We sense a rising agitation and frustration in Mickey spurred on by his worry about Ashley. It seems as if he's crossed some type of rubicon.

He's just about to make his way across the street when a black Suburban rolls past him kind of slowly. Mickey impatiently lets it pass and he then marches toward the front door of the house. It's past dusk and the neighborhood is dark; crickets provide a thrum in the background. Mickey knocks on the front door. Then he starts POUNDING on it. Then Mickey yells:

MICKEY
HEY! ARE YOU IN THERE? DO YOU HEAR
ME? ARE YOU IN THERE? COME OUT AND
TALK TO ME! NOW!

Lights come on in some of the houses nearby.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME? WHAT DO
YOU KNOW ABOUT MY FATHER? YOU CAN'T
JUST SAY MY FATHER'S ALIVE AND THEN
DISAPPEAR! OPEN THIS DOOR! NOW!

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE

**We're back on the second floor. We sense someone breathing
but not moving, hiding in the shadows.**

BACK TO MICKEY

MICKEY
I'M NOT LEAVING 'TIL YOU ANSWER ME!
OPEN THIS DOOR!

Suddenly, Mickey is torched by a POWERFUL BEAM OF LIGHT. He holds up his hands to block the glare and squints. Before Mickey can speak, a LIVINGSTON POLICE CAPTAIN and a PATROLMAN grab him.

LIVINGSTON POLICE CAPTAIN
Mickey Bolitar, you are under
arrest for trespassing.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. LIVINGSTON POLICE STATION - NIGHT - LATER

A very modern small town police department; it looks more like a Starbucks than a gritty precinct.

CLOSE ON: a PHOTOGRAPH OF TROY TAYLOR IN HIS BASKETBALL UNIFORM STANDING NEXT TO THE POLICE CAPTAIN, who is now standing in front of Mickey. The Captain's NAME TAG: TAYLOR. PULL BACK on Mickey, who is now handcuffed.

OFFICER TAYLOR

I heard you ambushed my son.

MICKEY

Did you *follow* me?

OFFICER TAYLOR

Did you or did you not ambush my son?

MICKEY

So is the charge trespassing or assault? I didn't realize the school's disciplinary body had such a wide reach.

OFFICER TAYLOR

Answer me.

MICKEY

Why would I do that? Troy's such a sweet guy and hopefully my future teammate.

OFFICER TAYLOR

Too bad a misdemeanor disqualifies you from the squad.

LEAH'S VOICE (O.S.)

Is that a threat, Kevin?

Leah rounds the corner escorted by a YOUNG OFFICER. She squares off with Officer Taylor. Mickey now gets to see his Aunt Leah in her element.

OFFICER TAYLOR

Leah Bolitar. Time has not been kind.

Leah ignores him.

MICKEY

You two know each other?

LEAH

"Kev" here was the senior star of Livingston High basketball team, that is, until your Uncle Myron as a freshman obliterated all scoring records in the state of New Jersey. Looking to settle some old scores, Kev?

OFFICER TAYLOR

Your nephew was trespassing.

LEAH

By knocking on a door? Is someone coming forward to press charges?

Officer Taylor stays silent.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You didn't answer me, Kev. I however am someone who can press charges for harassment. Especially harassment with racial bias. Please see *City of Pascagoula, Mississippi Police Department v. Singleton*. Or if you have trouble wading through the legal jargon or just words in general you can go visit the three officers I sent to federal prison. Your choice.

Officer Taylor swaggers forward trying to intimidate Leah. This is not possible with Leah Bolitar -- she holds up her iPhone, which is recording:

LEAH (CONT'D)

Please come at me, *Officer Kevin Taylor*, it will make the viral video so much stronger and pay for Mickey's college education. Now uncuff my nephew.

INT. LEAH'S FORD TAURUS - NIGHT - LATER

Mickey would like this to be a ride home in silence. Leah chooses the other option.

LEAH

What were you doing at Bat Lady's house?

MICKEY

I'm not really sure.

LEAH

Was it some kind of manhood-proving thing? Your father ever tell you his story about going inside there?

MICKEY

My dad went *in* there?

LEAH

When your dad was like eight or nine, he used to be scared the Bat Lady was going to come kidnap him while he was sleeping. Your Uncle Myron's basketball buddies were four years older and used to tease your dad mercilessly about it. So, one day Brad went up to the front door, knocked. The door must have been unlocked or something and it just swung open -- so Brad went inside.

MICKEY

Did he meet Bat Lady?

LEAH

There is no Bat Lady. But Brad stayed inside there, maybe to prove he wasn't scared to the older guys. After a while, Myron finally went up to the door to get him and it was *locked*. Myron and his friends hung around for like an hour and were about to call the police when Brad came walking up behind them. He must of snuck out the back or something. And from that day on your dad was changed somehow.

MICKEY

How?

LEAH

Less fearful, calmer.

MICKEY

Because he proved he wasn't afraid?

LEAH

Maybe, but it's like he came out of your uncle Myron's shadow, and trust me, it's a long shadow, and became his own person.

MICKEY

What did he say happened in there?

LEAH

He never told me and I know it's hard for you to imagine but your dad and I were the closest of anyone in the family -- but that was the day Brad started keeping secrets.

Leah's words hang in the air as Mickey covertly checks his phone - no calls or texts from Ashley. Leah picks up on this. Knows something is going on with her nephew, but their estrangement is such that she won't push it.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You don't have to bear everything alone, Mickey. I'm here.

MICKEY

I have a mother, but thanks.
(realizes)
That was harsh, I apologize.

Leah notes this microscopic turning point in Mickey's attitude.

EXT. A FOREST IN POLAND - 1941

The six-year-old Blonde Girl is now being carried over the shoulder of an enormously POWERFUL MAN whose face we can't see. They approach a:

EXT. THE MOUTH OF A CAVE

Standing in the cave are lots of CHILDREN all wearing threadbare clothes. The Blonde Girl begins to kick and fight, she refuses to be captured again. The Powerful Man simply drops her off of his shoulder. As she falls, we are:

CLOSE ON A BODY FALLING BACKWARDS

But, we are no longer in Poland in 1941, we are in:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - HEALTH CLASS - MORNING

The health teacher, MRS. SAMSON, has arranged a "trust exercise" where students get up on a desk, fall backwards, and are caught by the other students.

MRS. SAMSON

When we can trust others is when
others can trust us.

Mickey is looking around for Ashley. She's nowhere to be found. As the line moves forward, Mickey spots Ema, the girl with fluorescent purple hair, looking tentatively at the much smaller and lighter students falling backward. A PETITE GIRL behind Ema stares up at her.

PETITE GIRL

(raises her hand)

Mrs. Samson? No amount of trust is
going to stop her from hitting the
floor. May I be excused please?

Ema lets the Petite Girl pass her in line; perhaps hoping her turn will never come. Mickey raises his hand.

MRS. SAMSON

(to Mickey)

Question?

MICKEY

What if I'm uncomfortable with
participating? Is this a required
exercise?

MRS. SAMSON

Well, it's not *compulsory*.

MICKEY

Then I opt out.

(to Ema)

Would you mind keeping me company?
I don't feel safe.

The other students are kind of stunned by the 6'4" guy that doesn't feel "safe." Mickey and Ema slip out into:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ema is mortified.

EMA

(to Mickey)

Nice work, you saved the freakishly big chick from crushing someone. You have some kind of macho savior complex?

MICKEY

I don't know, you're the first macho I've saved.

Emma rolls her eyes and ducks into:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Ema pulls a protein bar out of her backpack and stress eats it as she sits at an empty table. She glowers at Mickey, who sits down across from her.

EMA

And now the pity sit?

MICKEY

Pity sit? Is that even a thing?
(off her shrug)
The 'tude is wearing thin.

EMA

Did you just use the word 'tude?

MICKEY

I did. Unapologetically.

EMA

The '80s wants their catch phrase back.

Mickey laughs. Ema has a sliver of a smile as Spoon slides into a seat next to Mickey. While he talks, Spoon aligns everyone's cafeteria trays so they are at right angles.

SPOON

We all know that Jersey is the most densely populated state, but did you also know it ranks 49th in overall suitability for retirement? So the question remains, why aren't people leaving?

EMA

We're now officially the loser table.

SPOON

No, Mickey's not a loser, he's just new.

EMA

Arthur, could you--

SPOON

It's Spoon now. I've even let my parents know.

EMA

"Spoon"?

SPOON

My new moniker, which I think is more erudite than "nickname."

(to Ema)

Speaking of which, I have nine more of these.

(pulls out his camping spoon)

I can add you to the waiting list.

EMA

Hard pass.

MICKEY

Hey, do either of you guys know anything about the Bat Lady?

EMA

Why would you think the freaky alt chick would know?

MICKEY

Maybe for the "alt" reason you've lived here your whole life and I haven't.

SPOON

The Navajo tell of a spirit called the Windigo that has infinite hunger and consumes humans by biting off their heads.

MICKEY

Does that thought connect at all to my question?

EMA

I think Arthur--

Spoon holds up his camping spoon.

EMA (CONT'D)

Sorry, "Spoon" is suggesting that the Bat Lady might be a kind of an apocryphal tale.

MICKEY

But I saw her. Or at least I think I did.

This stops the conversation dead in its tracks. Spoon begins typing furiously on his ever-present laptop.

EMA

You actually *saw* her?

MICKEY

Unless I was hallucinating. Which I'm not ruling out.

SPOON

A30432 Foundation. 1951.
(off their uncomprehending looks)
That's the county assessor's info on the title of the house. And before you ask, there's nothing on the A30432 Foundation anywhere.

MICKEY

Why would a "foundation" own a dilapidated house in Livingston, New Jersey?

SPOON

Very solid question. We need to do a deeper dive.

THE BELL RINGS. We TIME CUT to:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - SPANISH CLASSROOM - LATER

Just as Señor Bético is getting ready to begin class, he gives a side-eye glance toward Mickey. Mickey's getting used to all the side-eye and ignores it. He turns around and faces Rachel Caldwell, who is now dressed in street clothes.

MICKEY

Hey, I'm Mickey.

RACHEL

I know who you are, everyone does. Not ignoring me today?

MICKEY

I.. uh, I'm friends with Ashley
Kent...

RACHEL

Just friends?

MICKEY

Well, you know, it's--

RACHEL

Wow, you're a lot more articulate
in Spanish.

MICKEY

I just wanted to know where she
might be. I know she tried out for
cheerleading.

RACHEL

She did, she's a very good dancer.

MICKEY

(hopeful)

Did you see her afterward? We were
supposed to meet up and she never
showed. I think her phone is broken
or missing or something. And her e-
mail bounced back...

RACHEL

(all-knowing smile)

Mickey, you're not the first person
that's ever been ghosted.

MICKEY

I know. Oh, wait -- you mean you
know she ghosted me or you *guess*
she ghosted me?

RACHEL

Don't be so self-centered, Mickey.
It's not all about you.

MICKEY

(deeply confused)

I... don't think Ashley would have--

RACHEL

-- Gotten a new phone number or
changed her email? Girls have to do
that all the time.

MICKEY

But I didn't--

RACHEL

Shh-- I need to pay attention, I can't rely on a sports scholarship like some people can.

As Señor Bético begins class, Mickey feels like he has LESS information now than before. Rachel looks at Mickey for a beat. Hard to tell if it's with pity or compassion.

EXT. HAZEL AVENUE - NIGHT

Mickey, dressed in a dark hoodie, stays in the shadows of the trees as he is about a half block from Bat Lady's house. Both Ema and Spoon rise up from behind a pony wall -- scaring the shit out of Mickey.

MICKEY

Were you guys following me?

EMA

Didn't have to, we knew where you were going.

SPOON

We don't think you've told us the full story.

EMA

You said you "might" have seen Bat Lady -- did she say something to you?

Mickey makes a decision to trust these new friends.

MICKEY

I know it sounds insane, but it has something to do with my father, he went inside there when he was a kid on a dare or something.

Ema is extraordinarily intuitive and tolerates no bullshit.

EMA

And...?

MICKEY

The Bat Lady, or whoever it was I saw, knew my name and she said my father is still *alive*.

(MORE)

MICKEY (CONT'D)

And even though I know he's dead --
I can't let it go.

Only Ema notices a rim of moisture rimming Mickey's eyes. The fact that Mickey has bared his soul is the spark that begins to unite these three. They head toward:

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Which isn't really a yard -- it is as if the forest has grown all the way to the back of the house. It provides the three of them perfect cover.

SPOON

What are we going to do?

MICKEY

You mean what am *I* going to do.

Mickey pulls out a credit card.

SPOON

I think that's a TV convention that does not work on real locks.

Mickey slips the card downward and the back door pops open.

SPOON (CONT'D)

And I am wrong.

MICKEY

You guys have to stand guard.

EMA

We're in this now. We're going with you.

MICKEY

I'm the only one breaking and entering. End of discussion.

SPOON

What makes you the leader? Your height?

MICKEY

My problem, my risks.

Spoon relents:

SPOON

Keep your phone open and on mute.
We'll post sentry.

(MORE)

SPOON (CONT'D)

Pay attention, it's a house built
in the '50s. If the grandma's
basement smell doesn't kill you,
the asbestos will.

Mickey puts in his AirPods, as do Ema and Spoon. Mickey heads
into:

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mickey calls out in a loud whisper:

MICKEY

Hello, it's Mickey Bolitar. You
called out to me the other day!
Hello!

There is not a sound. There are STAIRS down to a dark
basement, and a set of STAIRS leading to the second floor.
Mickey takes the less ominous route toward:

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

The eerie house clearly hasn't been redecorated since the
'60s. It's like time froze. On a side table, there is an old-
school record player with a stack of vinyls on the side. The
top album is for a band called SHELTER. On the album COVER:
TWO WOMEN and TWO MEN from the band are sitting on a worn-out
sofa; each wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the *COLORFUL
BUTTERFLY with the animal eyes on its lower wings.*

FLASH OF MEMORY -- Mickey in a Land Rover with his mom and
dad on a rutted dirt road somewhere in AFRICA. Kitty puts a
CD into the old-school dashboard player. The CD is the same
as the album -- *SHELTER.*

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BACK ON MICKEY as he ponders this. Suddenly in his AirPods,
Mickey hears:

SPOON (O.S.)

ABORT, ABORT!

Mickey rushes to the back window to see:

FROM MICKEY'S POV:

A BLACK SUBURBAN pulling into a driveway that is hidden in
the woods. The headlights of the Suburban light up a RICKETY
GARAGE concealed between the dense cedars and pines.

Mickey starts to head in the opposite direction toward the front door but stops as he sees something above the fireplace mantel -- a GREEN PLAID HEADBAND. Mickey FLASHES ON:

ASHLEY on her red Vespa, slips on her GREEN PLAID HEADBAND.

BACK TO MICKEY -- WTF? The headband can't be Ashley's -- it doesn't make sense.

In his AirPods:

EMA (O.S.)
Mickey get out! Get out!

SPOON (O.S.)
Do you copy?

MICKEY
(whispers)
Hold on a sec.

SPOON (O.S.)
ABORT! ABORT!

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ema and Spoon have positioned themselves behind a thick elm tree in the dark shadows and are looking back toward the garage hidden in the dense woods. The Suburban pulls into the rickety garage, which now judders shut. The lights go off. It is inky dark; it is impossible to see a thing.

EMA
Mickey, let us know you are safe.

SPOON
Meet at The Oval.

There is no reply. Suddenly, a DARK FIGURE emerges from the shadows -- a BALD MAN, wearing mirrored sunglasses at night. Yes, the same military-looking guy who was at Mickey's basketball game. This isn't good.

BALD MAN
Do you want to explain what you're doing on private property?

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Without hesitating, Ema grabs Spoon and begins passionately kissing him. She then glares at the Bald Man.

EMA

Are you some kind of perv? You get off on sneaking up on teenagers making out?

SPOON

STRANGER DANGER! STRANGER DANGER!

Lights go on around the neighborhood.

SPOON (CONT'D)

I'm just trying to get with my girlfriend and you're creeping around wearing sunglasses at night?

EMA

PERVERT! There's a PERVERT! CALL 911!

BALD MAN

Leave both of you.

EMA

You leave, PERV!

BALD MAN

Last warning.

It's hard to tell, but he might be reaching for a gun.

INT. BAT LADY'S HOUSE

Mickey is ready to charge out the back door and confront the Bald Man, but he sees that Ema and Spoon are retreating toward Hazel Avenue. Mickey wastes no time, he shoots for the front door; pausing only to snatch the Shelter album and the green plaid headband off the mantel.

EXT. THE OVAL - GAZEBO - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Ema and Spoon are hiding in the GAZEBO in front of LHS.

SPOON

Very impressive quick thinking.

EMA

Don't read anything into it.

SPOON

Completely get it -- it was a ruse;
no subtext to it at all. You would
prefer the Mickey Bolitar type.
Understandable.

EMA

I'd prefer *neither* type. *At all.*

SPOON

(after a beat)

Got it. That relieves us of the
burden of underlying sexual
tension.

EMA

(mutters)

I just can't.

Ema notices that Spoon is tapping on the wood frame of the gazebo. Spoon notices her noticing.

SPOON

Some people do yoga. This is
cheaper.

Mickey arrives. He's sweating, not only from the sprint to the park but from the overall tension of the mission. Just at that moment, a POLICE CRUISER sweeps past, headed in the direction of Bat Lady's house. They duck down in the gazebo. The searchlight sweeps across The Oval but Mickey, Spoon and Ema are well hidden in the gazebo.

EMA

Give us the full download.

MICKEY

Wait, that guy. The one with the
mirrored sunglasses. I think he was
at my basketball game.

SPOON

You think he's been following you?

MICKEY

I don't know.

EMA

What happened in Bat Lady's house?

Mickey unzips his hoodie and pulls out the vinyl Shelter album. Spoon is confused, but Ema isn't:

EMA (CONT'D)

Shelter -- an early 2000s guitar band, reminiscent of the Eagles with influences from the Police and Genesis. Biggest songs were "Red Sea," "Underground Railroad," and "Butterfly" was a top-twenty hit. Did not know they did a vinyl release.

Both Mickey and Spoon stare at Ema, amazed at her encyclopedic musical knowledge.

EMA (CONT'D)

(to Spoon)

Do you have some kind of monopoly on facts?

SPOON

(to Mickey)

But was this album worth breaking and entering into a creepy house?

MICKY

My parents used to listen to this.

EMA

So, a coincidence?

MICKY

Then what about *this*?

Mickey shows them the PLAID GREEN HEADBAND. Spoon and Ema stare at it blankly.

EMA

Is this supposed to have some significance?

Mickey pulls out his phone and shows them the SELFIE he took -- Ashley is wearing the *exact same headband*.

SPOON

Hold on. Your father, when he was young, went into the Bat Lady's house. Now you find a fairly obscure band's album.

EMA

They weren't that obscure. My
tattoo artist loves them.

Ema pulls her shirt off her shoulder and shows them the Butterfly Tattoo -- it's the exact same butterfly with the animal eyes on its lower wings. Both Mickey and Spoon are deeply perplexed.

SPOON

Okay, wait. We might write off
Ema's back ink and the album as
coincidental but then the EXACT
headband that Ashley Kent was
wearing two days ago is in that
house? What. The. Actual. Fuck.

MICKEY

I have no clue what is going on, but
maybe Ashley isn't ghosting me --
maybe she's in some kind of trouble.
I mean, maybe there *is* a Bat Lady
who kidnaps people in the middle of
the night?

They all stare at the headband, as if it held answers to what
kind of trouble Ashley could be in.

INT. A CAVE IN POLAND - 1941 - NIGHT

*The Blonde Girl is seated on the rock floor atop a pile of
woolen blankets. A hearty stew is being cooked atop a roaring
fire. In the flickering firelight, the Blonde Girl looks
toward the mouth of the cave for possible escape routes. But
as she scans the faces of the other children; they appear
happy. No one is shackled, no one is being beaten. They are
waiting for their stew and singing songs in a forbidden
language -- Yiddish. The crackle of the fire illuminates a
chalk drawing on the cave wall -- a COLORFUL BUTTERFLY just
like the one on the Shelter album cover and Ema's tattoo...
Our Blonde Girl's expression says it all -- am I safe?*

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - SPANISH CLASSROOM

Mickey enters class early. He's the first one there. Señor
Bético barely looks up as Mickey approaches. Mickey chooses
to speak in English as he doesn't want to show up Bético.

MICKEY

Señor Bético, I know Ashley Kent
has missed class and --

SEÑOR BÉTICO
How is that your business?

MICKEY
We're friends.

SEÑOR BÉTICO
So?

MICKEY
I'm trying to get her the homework;
I left her a bunch of voicemails
and I thought maybe I could bring
it to her if... you had a record of
her home address?

SEÑOR BÉTICO
It's none of your concern, Señor
Bolitar.

MICKEY
See, I am kind of concerned, you
know maybe she's not feeling well,
so I thought I'd--

SEÑOR BÉTICO
-- Ashley Kent is no longer
attending Livingston High. Her
parents have withdrawn her.

Señor Bético shows Mickey a short memo on his desk.

MICKEY
Withdrawn? No more info than that?

SEÑOR BÉTICO
El mundo no gira para tu beneficio,
Señor Bolitar. (The world does not
turn for your benefit.)

Señor Bético sees the look of shock and despair on Mickey's
face. He softens.

SEÑOR BÉTICO (CONT'D)
I also found this unusual.

Mickey is now more worried than ever about Ashley.

INT. GARAGE - LOW ANGLE

The garage door rolls open, revealing a pair of girl's
Supergas. The Supergas walk toward camera until they reach
the wheel of a motor scooter.

As we tilt up, we see it is ASHLEY'S RED VESPA. A hand reaches into the seat compartment, pulls out the Beretta handgun, drops and checks the clip, then slams it back into the chamber. The tilt continues to reveal: Rachel, a stoic look on her face. It's clear she's handled guns before. WTF?

EXT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - LATE NIGHT - TIME CUT

Mickey and Spoon are in the shadows near a REAR DOOR.

MICKEY

I would never ask something like this unless it was important.

SPOON

I was born for this.

Spoon has an ENORMOUS RING OF KEYS -- he's the janitor's kid after all. He opens the rear door into:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT

Mickey follows Spoon into the darkened hallway. There is a feeling of danger -- an empty school at night.

SPOON

We have two missions. We have to obtain the info you need. And then we have to delete the footage on the school cameras that capture our movements. We leave no footprints.

Suddenly, Spoon grabs Mickey and pulls him into:

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - JANITOR'S CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Spoon puts his finger up to his lips. A flashlight can be seen underneath the door jamb. Someone is whistling as they walk down the halls. Spoon whispers:

SPOON

That's Carla. Night security. She's very nice, got me a camera drone for my last birthday.

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - ADMIN OFFICE - LATER

Spoon and Mickey try to log onto the GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S COMPUTER TERMINAL but they are being asked for a PASSWORD.

MICKEY

How old is this guidance counselor?

SPOON

Ms. Yates? Late 20s.

MICKEY

Too young. Who's the oldest
guidance counselor?

SPOON

Mr. Paul. They built the building
around him.

INT. LIVINGSTON HIGH - MR. PAUL'S OFFICE - TIME CUT

Mr. Paul's office is buried with COLLEGE BROCHURES, SUMMER
PROGRAM BROCHURES, STUDY ABROAD BROCHURES.

Spoon takes off his jacket as he sits behind the computer
terminal and for some reason, begins straightening some pens.

MICKEY

Spoon?

SPOON

What?

MICKEY

Did you have your shirt
embroidered?

We see the word "Spoon" stitched above the pocket of Spoon's
short-sleeve shirt.

SPOON

I did it myself. It's a cross-
stitch. You should try it sometime.
Very relaxing.

Mickey gets back to the mission and opens Mr. Paul's
cluttered drawers and finds a Post-it note with BATESGRAD1971
written on it. Spoon tries it as a password. The screen flips
to a search box.

SPOON (CONT'D)

We're in.

MICKEY

Search for Ashley's transcript.

SPOON

Here. It says "pending." Maybe her last school was slow to send it.

MICKEY

What about the address?

SPOON

Dr. and Mrs. Julian Kent, 34 Edgemere Lane.

MICKEY

You know where that is?

SPOON

What am I, new?

MICKEY

Let's go.

SPOON

One sec.

Spoon ducks into the computer closet where the SECURITY SERVERS are kept. We see there are SECURITY CAMERAS that cover the entire school. Spoon, hits a few commands and deletes some security FILES.

SPOON (CONT'D)

We are good to go. I know the best shortcut.

MICKEY

You were born for this.

Spoon smiles broadly; basking in Mickey's approval.

EXT. PATH UNDERNEATH HIGH TENSION WIRES - TIME CUT

We're back where we began:

Mickey scoops Spoon up in a fireman's carry and continues running, with extreme urgency.

SPOON

Is this really necessary?

MICKEY

Ashley could be hurt or kidnapped, or even worse... I can't lose anyone else, do you understand me? *I can't lose anyone else.*

Spoon's expression hardens with resolve.

SPOON
Cut through here.

Mickey veers to the right and he and Spoon emerge from the woods at a cul-de-sac on:

EXT. 34 EDGEMERE LANE - CONTINUOUS

They stop short and observe a modern stone and glass custom home, completely surrounded by a cordon of YELLOW POLICE TAPE. There are four POLICE CRUISERS and AN AMBULANCE. We catch glimpses of Mickey's and Spoon's horrified expressions in the flashing RED LIGHTS.

SPOON
What. The. Actual. Fuck.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. EDGEMERE LANE - MOMENTS LATER

Mickey and Spoon emerge from the woods. As they walk toward Ashley's house, they confront Officer Taylor. He's almost happy to see Mickey again; hoping he has another chance to arrest him.

OFFICER TAYLOR
Back away, Bolitar.

MICKEY
(stands firm)
I'm checking on my friend Ashley,
is she alright?

OFFICER TAYLOR
You get nothing from me, Bolitar. I
don't work for you.

SPOON
Do they not cover this at the
police academy: you absolutely do.

OFFICER TAYLOR
Shut up, janitor boy.

SPOON
Do you and Troy confer on the wit?

MICKEY
We think that Ashley Kent may be in
trouble. I have to check on her.

Mickey steps forward, Office Taylor stops him in his tracks.

OFFICER TAYLOR
You're not getting anywhere near
that house. In fact, you're a
suspect. You tried to bash the door
down at the Hazel Ave. house, we
just got another call about a
disturbance there tonight and then
you show up at a crime scene where
there's been a break-in and
assault. Where were you two hours
ago, Mickey Bolitar?

Before Mickey can say a word, Spoon interjects:

SPOON

Don't know about Mickey but I was curled up in bed with your wife.

OFFICER TAYLOR

Come again?

SPOON

That's what she said.

Officer Taylor lunges for Spoon, but Spoon is already on the move, and he is quick. Taylor chases after him. Mickey uses this distraction to hurdle the police tape and sprint toward a GURNEY being wheeled out of the house. Taylor still hasn't caught Spoon but yells:

OFFICER TAYLOR

GET BOLITAR!

Mickey jumps toward the gurney to see who is on it -- but it is a full-grown MAN, presumably DR. KENT, who is bloody and bandaged. Several PATROL OFFICERS tackle Mickey at the same time, he falls to the driveway with a thud.

A WOMAN, MRS. CHARLOTTE KENT, exits the house, looking deeply concerned for her husband but then sees the Police Officer scrum on top of a teenaged boy. Officer Taylor has given up on catching Spoon and approaches:

OFFICER TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Cuff him! CUFF HIM!

CHARLOTTE KENT

What's going on, Officers?

OFFICER TAYLOR

We think this suspect is somehow connected with your break-in.

CHARLOTTE KENT

I told you it was an adult male with tattoos all over his face. Does this kid look like that to you? Let him up.

MICKEY

(as he stands)

Mrs. Kent? I'm a friend of Ashley's. Is she all right?

CHARLOTTE KENT

Can't you see what's happened here -- I have to go with my husband to the hospital.

MICKEY

I'm sorry, Mrs. Kent, I just want to know if Ashley is okay.

CHARLOTTE KENT

Who are you?

MICKEY

I'm Mickey Bolitar.

CHARLOTTE KENT

Myron Bolitar's son?

MICKEY

Nephew. Can I just speak to Ashley?

CHARLOTTE KENT

Who is Ashley?

MICKEY

(confused)

Your daughter.

CHARLOTTE

We don't have a daughter.

Off Mickey's utter confusion.

EXT. POLAND - 1941 - TRAIN TRACKS IN FOREST - DAY

A CATTLE CAR TRAIN festooned with swastikas cuts through the towering trees. 400 feet ahead of the train, three 60-foot tall WHITE BIRCH TREES topple across the tracks. The train's brakes SCREECH, causing every bird within miles to flutter toward the heavens. Ten NAZI SOLDIERS immediately emerge from the train -- but before they can take three steps, are CUT DOWN BY MACHINE GUN FIRE. There is a moment of deep silence, even the forest's insects have quieted. Suddenly, there is a POUNDING sound, as PASSENGERS PACKED INSIDE THE CATTLE CARS try to free themselves from the train. Our Blonde Girl, now carrying a MACHINE GUN, leads the other Children we saw in the cave (also carrying guns) out of the shadows in the forest and they immediately free the JEWISH FAMILIES from the cattle cars. On the bare forearm of our Blonde Girl, we see her TATTOOED CONCENTRATION CAMP NUMBER -- A30432. Tattooed above that -- the distinctive colorful butterfly...

END OF SHOW