THE RIFT
FADE IN:

EXT. THE RIFT - DAY

Twelve going on eighteen, SAM’s a serious kid, the weight of the world on her freckled face.

She stares nervously at a line of pine forest marked by faded red ribbons. Snowflakes drift from a lead gray sky into the shadowed gloom of its snowy depths. The remnants of a WARNING sign is posted on a gnarled oak which stands like a sentry.

BRAD (O.S.)
You’re on first watch...got your whistle?

BRAD (12) has a life as a ski bum or a surfer dude already chiseled into his future. He’s the kind of kid that’s hard to say no to, especially for Sam, who has a hopeless crush.

SAM
Why do we have to do the Rift? You know the rules. S’posed to be at least twenty kids. Let’s go over to Hopkins, the hill’s almost as good there.

BRAD
What’re you ‘fraid of? No one’s seen the monster since before we were born anyway.

Ten year old WILLIE, Sam’s kid brother, is quick to support the older boy.

WILLIE
Yeah, what’re you ‘fraid of?

BRAD
You got your whistle, just make sure you watch real good.

SAM
The monster doesn’t care about a stupid whistle, Brad.

Sam stares into the dark woods.

Brad is already starting up the hill, Willie on his heals.

BRAD
Just make sure no one goes past the line.
She drops her sled by her feet. Not happy.

The wind stirs the pines, loosening a tuff of snow which falls with a THUD.

    SAM
    Just hurry up!

A HOWL of wind drowns out their voices, already distant.

Sam fidgets with the whistle hanging on her neck...eyes the woods...occasionally glances up the hill toward the boys, invisible somewhere past the crest.

She walks over to the bottom of the hill, maybe a couple dozen yards from the wood’s edge. Draws a line in the snow with her heel.

She faces the woods. Arms folded across her chest. This monster better not mess with her!

A SHOUT of joy from the hill.

Willie flies down the slope on his sled.

Sam watches him descend, whistle in her mouth.

Peeks at the woods.

Willie comes around a turn...fast...too fast.

He heads for the line in the snow. She moves to stop him. He sleds right by toward the treeline.

She runs desperately behind him.

He stops just before the trees.

    WILLIE
    Awesome!!

She tugs him away from the treeline.

    SAM
    We’re goin’ home after Brad comes down.

    WILLIE
    Noooo!

    SAM
    We’re in trouble enough for cuttin’ school. We’re going home and that’s that.
A SHOUT reaches them from the top of the hill. It’s Brad coming at lightning speed...his face a mask of ecstasy.

Sam eyes the woods. Did something move in there?

Brad comes at them with double Willie’s speed.

As he hits the line, she reaches out trying to slow him...gets a piece of shoulder but hardly makes a difference.

He streaks past...barely slowing as he reaches the marked trees...proceeds straight into the thick pines...careens out of sight down another hill.

    SAM
    Brad!!!

Sam and Willie take off towards the woods. Stop at the line.

    WILLIE/SAM
    Brad!!

Silence within the snow covered pines.

Willie steps across the line...

    WILLIE
    Brad!

Sam jerks him back.

They stand and listen. Whispering pines in the breeze.

A distant beastly GROWL.

Sam blows the whistle with all her might.

Over and over.

    WILLIE
    We gotta get out of here!

She stops blowing and listens. Silence within the dark depths.

    SAM
    Come on, we have to get help.

Sam retrieves her sled and they walk briskly along the line of forest. Snow thickens in the air.

Willie struggles to keep up.

Another distant GROWL within the pines.
SAM
Drop your sled, hurry up!

WILLIE
But...

Off her scowl he drops it. She keeps hers.

LATER
Snow blankets the air. They have wandered into light forest.

WILLIE
Are we goin’ the right way?

She doesn’t seem sure. They trudge on.

A FLOCK of QUAIL burst from a tree, startling them.

WILLIE
We should’a went to school.

Her face a mask of guilt. She takes his hand.

The snow lightens enough to reveal a line of chimney smoke a short distance away.

SAM
Come on, we’ll call for help!

They hurry toward the smoke.

EXT. CABIN - AFTERNOON
Rustic, covered in snow. A ‘WELCOME FRIENDS’ sign hangs over the front door. Smoke snakes out of the chimney.

Willie and Sam eye each other, unsure.

Sam leads him to the door and knocks.

Through a small snow covered window they see cartoons playing on an old TV.

A wrinkled old woman opens the door. Blind with cataracts, aided by a walking stick, this is ANDROMEDA.

ANDROMEDA
Is that Pop Tarts I smell?

Brother and sister look at each other.
WILLIE
I had one for breakfast.

ANDROMEDA
Wonderful! You must tell me about it, I haven’t had one in so long.

SAM
It’s an emergency, Mam, we need to use your phone.

ANDROMEDA
Come in, come in, it’s colder than a...well, it’s quite cold.

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

She closes the door behind them. The children stare wide eyed at the cozy cabin of eccentricities: herbs drying on rafters, hanging portraits of mythical creatures made of candy, art work crafted from old toys.

Andromeda leads Sam to a phone on a long, wide table. The girl picks it up...presses numbers. A look of frustration.

SAM
No dial tone.

ANDROMEDA
Oh, it will come back, sweetie. We’ll check in a few minutes. Now what’s this emergency?

WILLIE
The monster got our --

Sam silences him with a fierce look.

SAM
Our friend is missing in the woods, and we need to call for help.

ANDROMEDA
Oh, to be lost in this weather, we must indeed get help. Now don’t panic, dears, all will be well.

AARGH! The children jump at the screech of a BIRD.

BIRD
All will be well, all will be well.
A colorful parakeet in a cage so tiny it barely fits. A large, old fashioned lock secures its door.

WILLIE
Cool!

SAM
That cage is rather small.

ANDROMEDA
Oh, you heard him, he’s quite content. Now...tell me about this monster.

The siblings eye each other.

SAM
Down by the Rift, it takes kids if they get too close to the woods.

ANDROMEDA
I’ve a hunch that’s just a story to frighten, I’d not worry much over it.

WILLIE
A hunch?

ANDROMEDA
That’s a little voice inside your head that tells you things, even when you don’t know why. Like, for instance, when it told you not to skip school this morning.

Sam turns bright red under the old woman’s stare. A shiver runs through her body.

ANDROMEDA
How about some cookies while we wait for the phone?

Willie nods enthusiastically. Sam is on guard now.

While the old lady makes her way to the little kitchen, and Willie takes a closer look at the caged bird, Sam spies a set of keys hanging on a nail. Quick as a cat, she pockets them. On a hunch.

Andromeda returns with a plate of cookies.

ANDROMEDA
There we are. Now what kind of Pop Tart did you have this morning?
SAM
Can we try the phone again?

ANDROMEDA
Of course, sweetie.

Sam tries it again. Nothing.

ANDROMEDA
I think perhaps it could be that the cord is loose. Could you be a dear and check it under the table?

Sam crouches and sees where the cord leads to a connection in the floor. She drops to her knees and crawls under the table.

The old lady picks up the receiver to the phone.

ANDROMEDA
Nothing yet. Why don’t you give her a hand?

Cookie in mouth, Willie dives below the table.

THUNK. Iron bars pop up from the floor and lock into the table creating a cage. The siblings are trapped within.

SAM/WILLIE
Hey!

They rattle the bars desperately.

ANDROMEDA
Sadly, they don’t make Pop Tarts in the flavor I’d prefer.

She moves to the little parakeet cage. Taking it in hand, she carries it to the nail where the keys hung. Finding them missing, she searches her pockets.

Defeated in the search, with surprising strength she bends and breaks off the top of the cage.

BIRD
All will be well, all will be well.

Her jaws extend unnaturally into the cage and bite into the bird. She swallows it whole, blood visible on her teeth as the tail clears down her throat.
ANDROMEDA
A bit too optimistic, he was, don’t you think?

Willie breaks into quiet sobs. Sam holds him.

Andromeda drops her walking stick and skips into the kitchen, rejuvenated. Begins lining up spices, humming while she does.

Sam begins feeling between the bars along the table edge.

ANDROMEDA
I simply must have children for dinner more often!

Sam finds what she’s looking for: a keyhole.

She pulls out the ring of keys. Begins testing each one.

ANDROMEDA
You don’t eat too much polyunsaturated fat, do you kids?

As Andromeda turns toward them, Sam quickly hides the keys.

ANDROMEDA
After five centuries I really have to be careful not to clog my arteries. A healthy witch is a happy witch, you know.

Andromeda bends to retrieve something from a closet.

Sam returns to the lock. Tries the keys.

ANDROMEDA
You know what the scariest monsters are, kids? Of course you don’t. The scariest ones are the likable ones. The ones you just can’t help wanting to be around, even though you should know better.

SNAP. Sam finds the right key. The bars slide down. Andromeda turns in rage.

The siblings run to the door. Locked. Andromeda laughs.

Sam tries the keys. Andromeda runs at them now.

Sam finds the key. They rush out as the witch closes in.
OUTSIDE

Blinding snow. Sam grabs her sled.

    SAM
    Come on!

They both climb on and ride it down a hill.

Snow stinging their eyes, they ride and ride. Through scratching bushes and grazing pines, they ride.

At last they slow to a stop, far from the cottage.

    WILLIE
    We should’a gone to school.

Sam hugs him.

LATER

Fading light, blinding snow...they reach a snow covered road, slush visible within several car tracks.

    SAM
    Someone will come by.

They walk along the road.

A dark figure emerges from the woods just ahead of them. They GASP and turn to run.

    BRAD
    Wait! Wait!

Sam stops Willie and turns to Brad.

    BRAD
    Sam?

She runs toward him. Almost hugs him. Too shy. He steps forward and embraces her.

    BRAD
    I’ve been lost all day!

    SAM
    We have to get outta here.

Brad pulls out a cell phone.
BRAD
I got service a little while ago.
My mom’s on the way. Boy, am I hungry!

He gives Willie a friendly slap on the shoulder.

BRAD
Dude, you guys musta been pretty scared.

WILLIE
Sam was.

Sam smiles at her brother.

HEADLIGHTS approach. Blinding as the large SUV pulls up.

BRAD
Shotgun!

INT. SUV
Brad climbs in the front.

Sam and Willie a bit unsure. A cool rock ballad comes on the car radio.

Willie opens the back and climbs in, followed by Sam.

The driver...well, you know where this is going. In a hooded parker, the driver’s face is invisible.

As the SUV drives off, the automatic locks click.

Willie confused...Sam’s face a mask of terror.

SAM
Brad?

BRAD
Did I say I was hungry? Dudes, I’m famished.

Andromeda turns to them and laughs.

FADE OUT.