

LOW TIDE

A treatment

The sample project in Scriptopus. A 12-page short drama.

LOGLINE

On the day her late mother's cottage is sold, a sound recordist who listens to empty rooms for a living goes back to record it one last time, and finds the father she has refused to hear for thirteen years already inside.

THE STORY

MARA WELLES (early 30s) records the sound of rooms for a living: the particular hush of a place before it changes hands. On the coast road, headphones on, she is recording the sea when an old cassette in the car gives up a few seconds of her mother's voice. She stabs STOP and keeps driving, dry-eyed.

Her mother's cottage stands at the end of the road with a red SOLD sign by the gate. Mara still has a key. Inside, the house is half packed, stopped mid-sentence: a box is labelled KEEP? in marker, the question mark left hanging. She sets up her microphone in the empty living room. Then a floorboard creaks that isn't hers.

DES (60s), her father, steps out of the back hallway. They have not spoken in thirteen years, not since Mara stood in the doorway at her mother's funeral and left before the cars did. Neither of them leaves now. The estate agent is coming for the keys at sundown, and there is a kitchen to pack.

The afternoon turns into an argument conducted over newspaper and packing tape. Small courtesies curdle. A box of school things surfaces: a child's drawing of a yellow house, a birthday tape. Des lets slip that "you'd be amazed what she kept", then shuts the subject like a drawer.

At low tide Mara walks out onto the flats to record the water, and Des follows. Out there the argument finally breaks open. She accuses him of deciding she should never know her mother was dying. "Then whose decision was it?" she asks. He can't answer. He walks back up the beach, and the tide fills his footprints.

In her mother's study, Mara finds a key taped under the desk, where her mother always hid the spares. Against her father's plea she opens the bottom drawer: letters addressed to her and never sent, and a dozen numbered cassettes. Tape one is ELENA, her mother, speaking to her. Elena hid the worst of her illness on purpose. She made Des promise to keep Mara away, so that her daughter wouldn't put a hard-won life on hold to spend two years watching her mother die. Des kept the promise, and let his daughter hate him for it.

On the porch step, as the tide turns and starts back in, Mara admits she made him the villain because it was simpler than her own guilt. When forgiveness comes, it is a laugh neither of them saw coming.

When the agent's headlights swing into the yard, Mara does the one thing she knows how to do with something she loves and is losing. She points her microphone at her father and asks him to tell her one story about her mother. At nightfall she drives away with the house sold and his voice saved, playing it over her recording of the sea. She drives with the window down.