

GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION

Pilot - "Archived"

"You're only as innocent as your circle."

Written by Kay Hart

PORTFOLIO SCRIPT / ORIGINAL ONE-HOUR DRAMA PILOT

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SCRIPT SAMPLE | OPENING 10 PAGES

TEASER

BLACK SCREEN.

A CLICK.

The soft WHIRR of a CASSETTE TAPE. Two clear reels turning.

A red REC light BLINKS.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

State your name for the record.

We do NOT see faces. Only details.

A GIRL'S LEGS under a metal table. Knees bouncing once—then going still.

A GORGEOUS GOWN... smeared with mud along the hem. Thread caught like it ran through thorny brush.

A hand—manicured, trembling—rests near the tape recorder. A smear of dried blood under one nail.

A flash of ICONIC RED-BOTTOM SHOES. Perfectly polished... except one scuff.

Silence.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Miss— for the last time. State your name.

The girl inhales. Sharp. Controlled.

GIRL (O.S.)

If you wanted a confession, you should've brought someone I'm afraid of.

A beat.

The DETECTIVE shifts. We finally see part of him: a sleeve, a watch, a pen hovering over a notepad.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Let's try something simple.

What happened at the Founder's Gala?

The girl's knee starts bouncing again. Fast.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Who went into the East Wing after midnight?

The knee stops.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Who did you see on the balcony?

The girl's hand tightens. Her knuckles whiten.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Who fell?

A violent, tiny flinch.

GIRL (O.S.)
Stop the recording.
The reels keep turning.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)
I can't do that.
The girl leans forward, and now we see—just barely—her throat. A faint
bruise at the collarbone. Like fingers pressed too hard.

GIRL (O.S.)
Yes you can.
Beat.
The detective's finger HOVERS over STOP.
DETECTIVE (O.S.)
Is this your statement?
GIRL (O.S.)
This is me doing you a favour.

The detective presses STOP.
CLICK.
Black.
TITLE CARD: GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION.
SMASH CUT TO—

ACT ONE

EXT. BRIGHTMOORE - MORNING

A postcard-perfect town with something practised about its perfection.
White fences. Green lawns. A church with old stone. A MAIN STREET that
smells like money and tradition.
A sign: WELCOME TO BRIGHTMOORE — WHERE LEGACY LIVES.
Under it, someone has scratched a tiny mark into the wood:
a faint CIRCLE with a vertical line through it.

EXT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - MORNING

Windsor Academy rises like a promise and a threat: ivy-covered brick,
arched windows, wrought iron gates.
A banner: FOUNDERS WEEK — WINDSOR TRADITION SINCE 1891.
A line of luxury cars. Uniformed students. Smiles sharpen as people pass.
HARPER JAMES (17) steps out of a modest car. She straightens her blazer, checks
the gates, then makes herself walk through them.
She stares at the gates like they might close on her.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS

A hall of portraits: headmasters, benefactors, families who've "donated"

their way into history.

HARPER clutches a campus map, trying not to look lost.

A group sweeps past—like they own the oxygen.

AUDREY WINSLOW (17): immaculate. Controlled. Beautiful in a way that feels

engineered. Her smile is a weapon she keeps holstered.

With her:

LILA SONG (17): camera-ready, influencer energy, perfectly casual.

NAOMI KELLER (17): sharp eyes, bored mouth, rebellion under a blazer.

ESME ST. CLAIR (17): polished softness, anxious perfection, quiet menace if pushed.

Students move out of their path instinctively.

HARPER watches, fascinated despite herself.

LILA

New girl. Cute blazer.

NAOMI

That's not cute. That's "I got it on sale and I'm praying no one can tell."

ESME glances at Harper with something like pity.

AUDREY stops.

The others stop with her. Nobody seems to notice they have.

Audrey turns. Looks Harper up and down.

A beat where Harper is aware of every thread on her uniform.

AUDREY

You're in my year.

It's not a question. Harper forces a nod.

HARPER

Harper James.

Audrey's smile arrives—slow, deliberate.

AUDREY

Welcome to Windsor, Harper.

(then, to her group)

Let's not be late. Traditions are so fragile.

And they glide away.

HARPER exhales like she's been underwater.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - ADMIN OFFICE - LATER

Headmaster GRAY (50s) shakes Harper's hand too firmly.

HEADMASTER GRAY

We take scholarship placements very seriously.

You will uphold Windsor standards.

He slides her a folder: student handbook. In the corner, a small embossed

symbol—an ivory-coloured circle with a vertical line.

HEADMASTER GRAY (CONT'D)

Founders Week begins today. You'll attend orientation, then... the assembly.

HARPER nods, eyes catching a framed photo behind him: a group of adults in tuxedos and gowns at a country club—faces slightly blurred by glare.

Caption: THE IVORY CIRCLE — WINDSOR BENEFACTORS' SOCIETY.

Headmaster Gray's body shifts to block it, like instinct.

HEADMASTER GRAY (CONT'D)

Any questions?

Harper lies.

HARPER

No, sir.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - SCHOLARSHIP OFFICE - MORNING

Harper sits opposite MRS. BELL, 40s, efficient without being unkind. A scholarship agreement lies between them. Windsor crest. Too much fine print.

MRS. BELL

Your placement covers tuition. It does not cover mistakes.

HARPER

Good. I wasn't budgeting for any.

Mrs. Bell almost smiles.

MRS. BELL

Attendance, conduct, grades. Windsor reviews all three at the end of each term. Headmaster Gray signs the continuation recommendation.

That lands. Harper looks through the glass wall. Gray crosses the corridor beyond it.

MRS. BELL

You earned your place here, Harper. Don't let anyone make you behave as though you borrowed it.

HARPER

Does anyone tell them that?

Mrs. Bell follows Harper's gaze to a row of legacy-family portraits.

MRS. BELL
Not often enough.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - HISTORY CLASSROOM - LATER

A teacher writes BRIGHTMOORE: CIVIC HISTORY across the board.
Harper slips into the only empty desk.
Someone has carved a name into its underside: CASS.
Harper runs a thumb over the letters.

TEACHER
Miss James. Since Windsor has generously
given us your attention, perhaps you can
tell us why institutions preserve
records.

HARPER
So the people in charge can decide what
gets remembered.

A few students turn. Naomi, two rows over, looks interested.

TEACHER
A cynical answer.

HARPER
You asked why. Not whether I approved.

Naomi hides a smile. Audrey does not turn around, but her pen
stops moving.

Harper opens the desk. Inside: an old Windsor library slip.
CASSANDRA HOLT. One title is stamped OVERDUE.
Before Harper can pocket it, Audrey's hand appears beside the
desk.

AUDREY
You're in her seat.

HARPER
Whose?

Audrey takes the slip. Reads the name. Her expression barely
changes.

AUDREY
No one's.

She tears the slip cleanly in half and drops it into the bin on
her way out.

Harper watches her go. Then retrieves both pieces.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Assembly. A student choir sings something too patriotic for a
school.

Students sit by invisible caste lines.

Harper ends up near the back.

Onstage: Headmaster Gray speaks about "legacy," "honour,"
"family."

HEADMASTER GRAY

...and this week culminates in our
Founder's Gala at Brightmoore Country
Club. Our most cherished tradition.

Applause from the front rows. Polite clapping from everyone else.
Harper's gaze drifts to the balcony above the stage.
For a split second, she sees a FIGURE up there—just a silhouette—
then it's gone.
A chill crawls up her spine.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Harper washes her hands. Over and over. Like she can scrub off
the feeling
of being watched.

A stall door CREAKS.

A voice, soft and close:

VOICE (O.S.)

Don't drink anything they hand you at a Windsor event.
Harper freezes. Looks. Empty stalls. No feet. No shadows.

HARPER

Who's there?

Silence.

On the mirror, in faint condensation like a breath:

ARCHIVED.

Harper whips around. Nothing.

The word fades.

Harper stares at herself in the mirror, unsettled.

EXT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - LUNCH QUAD - DAY

Harper eats alone on a stone wall, reconstructing the torn
library slip with clear tape.

Lila appears in frame before she appears in person: phone held
up, filming herself.

LILA

Founders Week, day one. Windsor is
pretending this is normal and I am
pretending the blazer is breathable.

She clocks Harper and lowers the phone.

LILA

You're the scholarship girl.

HARPER

I have a name.

LILA

I know. Audrey used it. That's basically
a christening here.

Lila notices the torn slip.

LILA

Where did you get that?

HARPER

Why?

Lila's easy expression tightens for half a second.

LILA

No reason.

Her phone BUZZES. She looks. A message from AUDREY: DELETE TODAY'S STORY.

Lila deletes it without hesitation.

HARPER

She always tell you what to post?

LILA

No. Sometimes she tells me what not to.

Lila walks off. Harper looks from the repaired slip to Lila's retreating back.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - LOCKER CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

Naomi slams a locker shut. Harper is waiting.

NAOMI

That's unsettling. You've been here six hours and already learned to lurk.

HARPER

Cassandra Holt.

Naomi's face shuts down.

NAOMI

Never heard of her.

HARPER

You're a terrible liar.

NAOMI

And you're very invested in surviving your first day badly.

HARPER

Her name was carved into my desk.

NAOMI

Then get another desk.

Naomi starts away.

HARPER

Did she transfer?

Naomi stops.

NAOMI

That's what Windsor says.

HARPER

What do you say?

Naomi turns back.

NAOMI

I say Windsor is very good at making verbs passive. People don't disappear. Records get misplaced. Girls get transferred. Doors get locked.

HARPER

And Cass?

NAOMI

Stop saying her name in hallways.

She leaves Harper with that.

EXT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Students pour out. A black SUV waits by the curb.

AUDREY steps into sunlight like it was staged for her.

A driver opens the door. Audrey stops and looks back at the building.

NAOMI notices.

NAOMI

You're doing the thing again.

AUDREY

Which thing?

Naomi tips her chin toward the balcony.

NAOMI

Checking if the ghosts still like you.

Audrey's smile is small, private—and not quite humour.

AUDREY

Ghosts are only scary when they have receipts.

She slips into the SUV.

As it drives away, Harper stands at the edge of the courtyard, unseen.

And up in the window, again, that same silhouette flickers.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Small, warm, lived-in. The opposite of Windsor. Harper's MUM, MARA JAMES, 40s, works at the table with bills spread beside a mug of tea.

Harper enters in her uniform and immediately starts peeling off the expensive-looking blazer as though it burns.

MARA

First day?

HARPER

I learned rich people have their own weather system.

MARA

Stormy?

HARPER

Mostly smug with scattered threats.

Mara laughs, then notices Harper's face.

MARA

You can hate it and still use it.

HARPER

That sounds healthy.

MARA

That scholarship opens doors I couldn't buy you a key for.

Harper looks at the bills. Mara casually covers one with another.

MARA

You don't owe Windsor gratitude. You owe yourself the chance.

Harper takes out the repaired library slip.

MARA

What's that?

HARPER

Nothing.

She hates how quickly the lie comes.

INT. WINSLOW HOUSE - AUDREY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

A bedroom curated like a magazine spread. Audrey sits at a dressing table while her mother, CELESTE WINSLOW, 40s, fastens an ivory necklace at her throat.

CELESTE

Your grandmother wore this to her first Founder's Gala.

AUDREY

Did she enjoy being strangled by tradition?

CELESTE

She understood the difference between pressure and privilege.

Celeste catches Audrey's eyes in the mirror.

CELESTE

The James girl arrived today.

AUDREY

You know the scholarship intake by surname?

CELESTE

I know who enters rooms that belong to this family.

Audrey's jaw tightens.

CELESTE
Be kind to her.

AUDREY
That sounded like a threat.

CELESTE
Kindness is useful. People tell kind
girls things.

Celeste kisses Audrey's temple and leaves.

Audrey opens a jewellery box. Beneath the velvet tray: a PHOTO of
the four girls with CASS. Audrey turns it face-down.

Her phone lights: UNKNOWN NUMBER. One message: FOUNDERS WEEK.
DON'T FORGET HER.

Audrey deletes it. Her hand is perfectly steady until the screen
goes black.

INT. ST. CLAIR HOUSE - ESME'S DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Esme stands on a small platform while a seamstress adjusts her
gala gown. Her mother circles her like an appraiser.

MRS. ST. CLAIR
Shoulders back. The photographs last
longer than the evening.

Esme catches sight of a pale scar near her wrist and pulls the
sleeve down.

MRS. ST. CLAIR
Audrey will keep things smooth tonight?

ESME
Audrey always does.

MRS. ST. CLAIR
Good. Last year was embarrassing enough.

Esme goes still.

ESME
Cass was missing.

MRS. ST. CLAIR
Cassandra was unstable.

ESME
That isn't the same thing.

Her mother's smile disappears.

MRS. ST. CLAIR
At Windsor, darling, it very often is.

INT. WINDSOR ACADEMY - MEDIA LAB - AFTERNOON

Lila sits alone in front of three monitors, editing a glossy
Founders Week reel. On-screen, Windsor looks effortless. She cuts
around every awkward pause.

A notification appears from an account with no profile picture:
ARCHIVED has mentioned you.