

The following sample features a possible opening scene for Chapter Four of Pixelberry's Choices: Veil of Secrets.

You: Oh my god!

The man in the ski mask whips his head around, pinning you with a frightening stare. Before you can say another word, he lifts up the wrench and charges!

You: I should...

1. Kick him!
2. Dodge!

OPTION 1:

Your leg snaps out, hitting your attacker with a devastating kick. He drops the crowbar and clutches his sore belly.

OPTION 2:

You rush out of the way of your attacker just as he brings down the crowbar. The tool lands on the porch railing, splintering wood and catching on a nail.

STORY CONTINUES

Before you can press your advantage, the masked man lurches forward and throws a punch. He hits the same eye that caught Bryce's elbow earlier in the day, and you're left seeing stars. Strong fingers close around your neck. The world goes dark at the edges. Gunfire brings you back to your senses.

Naomi: Put your hands where I can see them!

Naomi is standing in the driveway, her gun pointed toward the sky. The first shot was a warning, but her tone of voice makes it clear the second one won't be. The masked man takes off running. Naomi rushes over to you.

Naomi: Are you okay?

You: Yeah. Nothing worse than what I went through to get my brown belt.

Naomi gives you a dubious look, her gaze lingering on the fresh bruises covering your neck.

Naomi: Let's get you cleaned up.

She brings you to the parked patrol car in the driveway, taking a first aid kit out of the glove compartment.

Naomi: I can't do anything for those bruises, but I can disinfect the scratches.

You: Thanks. You're a lifesaver, Naomi. Literally.

Naomi: You're welcome.

Naomi: Just try not to make a habit out of this. This is the second time today you've gotten hit in the face.

You: Don't worry. Being able to take a punch is Journalism 101.

Naomi pauses to inspect your neck.

Naomi: Was he wearing gloves? There's no fingernail marks.

You: I think so. They were pretty rough, like gardening gloves.

Naomi: Hmm. That's something to keep in mind. Do you know what he was doing here?

You: Trying to break in. He smashed the window with a crowbar and then he went after me.

You catch sight of the radio near the car's gearshift.

You: Are you gonna call this in?

Naomi: Not just yet. I'm...not really supposed to be here.

You: A born rebel, aren't you? What will the chief think?

Naomi: Hopefully, he'll never have to know.

Naomi: But it looks like you had the same idea. Maybe Kate's apartment will give us some clues about where she is.

You: You really think she's missing, don't you?

Naomi: The worst thing I could do at this moment is jump to conclusions, but the circumstances sure are suspicious.

Naomi: If she is missing...we're on a ticking clock.

You: Then let's not waste any more time.

The two of you approach the front door.

You: I checked it before that man tried to break in. It's locked.

Naomi: Well...there is an open window. That's enough for probable cause.

You watch as Naomi collects a set of lock picking tools from her belt, deftly opening the door.

You: That's a handy skill for a cop. And a waitress.

Naomi: And a girl growing up on a reservation. You wouldn't believe how many of my neighbors accidentally locked themselves out of their homes throughout the years.

You: I...

1. Want to know how you learned to do that.
2. Appreciate it.
3. Wouldn't mind if you broke into my place sometime.

OPTION 1:

Naomi chuckles.

Naomi: Like I said, it's just something I picked up.

You: Fine, be all mysterious about it. I'll get it out of you eventually.

OPTION 2:

A smile pulls at the corners of Naomi's lips.

Naomi: You're welcome. I'm glad that I can help out.

You: I'm glad to have you here.

You: Seriously, I might have had to crawl through that broken window if you hadn't showed up.

Naomi: Never mind the guy who tried to strangle you.

You: That too.

OPTION 3:

Naomi laughs.

Naomi: Do you use that line a lot? That's going to get you into trouble with the wrong woman.

You: Not if I'm only looking to get into trouble with *one* woman.

Naomi's cheeks turn pink.

STORY CONTINUES:

You and Naomi step into the apartment. Kate's always been messy, but none of the loose socks or sprawled blankets look out of place.

Naomi heads straight for her closet and presses the light switch.

Naomi: Her suitcase is here.

You: So are all her toiletries. Kate would die before staying overnight anywhere without her toothbrush.

Naomi: This doesn't look like someone who planned to leave.

Naomi's hand tenses into a fist as she speaks.

Naomi: Let's see if we can find anything of note.

You: (Should I ask Naomi if she's alright?)

1. Ask Naomi if this is her first kidnapping case. (20 Diamonds.)
2. Leave it be.

OPTION 1:

You: Naomi...is this the first time you've been involved in a kidnapping case?

You: I mean...you mentioned that you grew up on a reservation.

Naomi scowls at you.

Naomi: Let me guess...you studied some Native American statistics in college.

Naomi: Are you going to show me a term paper about how one in three native women are assaulted while living on reservations?

You: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to touch a nerve. You just seemed worried.

Naomi: No...it's not you. It's just...

Naomi sighs.

Naomi: When a girl like Kate goes missing, it's national news. If the Sterlings wanted to, they could blast her face on every media outlet in the country.

Naomi: Her case will be filed, her name will go into a national database, and people will search for her.

Naomi: They'll send police, volunteers, and dogs to comb the woods. Even if the worst happens, there will be closure.

Naomi: There's no closure for women living on reservations.

Naomi: It might be a friend, a cousin, a sister...

Naomi: One day, someone you know will disappear.

Naomi: Even though there's nothing but open skies and fields, they won't find anything but a broken cellphone. Or a backpack.

Naomi: If a woman is lucky enough to make it home alive, the men who took her will never see the inside of a cell.

Naomi grits her teeth.

Naomi: Under the law, our court can't prosecute anyone who commits a crime on our lands unless they're a native.

Naomi: And if you report it to a non-native bureau, the police can't do a thing to stop it. Crimes on reservations are outside their jurisdiction.

Naom: The law makes it possible for every kidnapper to walk free.

You: That's monstrous.

Naomi: It's unforgivable.

Naomi: And the chief is treating it just like the police back home. Like it's not his problem.

Naomi's shoulders suddenly slacken, and her eyes lose their hard edge.

Naomi: Come on. I want to make sure Kate has her best chance.

OPTION 2:

You decide to let Naomi be.

STORY CONTINUES:

The two of you look through the apartment, searching for anything that might explain Kate's disappearance. You catch sight of her laptop.

Kate left it plugged in and powered on. The desktop appears the moment you touch the keyboard.

A single app catches your attention. It's the logo for a home security company.

You click on the app, and it puts a camera display on the screen.

Kate appears to have cameras set up both inside and outside her home.

You: Why did you have this, Kate?

The last several hours feature nothing but sun, wind, and the occasional squirrel.

But as you look at the footage from last night, you see a familiar figure standing in the driveway.

You: Flynn?

Flynn is looking toward the end of the block. A red truck pulls up, and Flynn moves to speak to the driver.

You can't make out the person in the vehicle, but you see Flynn walk away with a paper sack.

Flynn gets on the back of a motorcycle and speeds away as soon as the car is gone.

Naomi: Have you found anything yet?

You: (Should I show the footage to Naomi?)

1. Show Naomi the footage.
2. Keep the footage to yourself.

OPTION 1:

You: Yeah. Take a look at this.

Naomi watches the footage, her expression hardening when she sees Flynn collect the bag.

Naomi: Can you make a copy of this video? I want to see if I can run a license on that truck.

You: I'll do that.

You pull a flash drive off your keychain and plug it into the computer.

You: Why do you think Kate installed a home security system?

Naomi: Maybe she was afraid of something. Or maybe the Sterlings were. They're paying for this place, yes?

You: That's what I was told.

OPTION 2:

You: Nothing yet, Naomi.

Naomi: Damn.

Naomi: Well, let's keep looking. Something will come up.

While Naomi searches the bedroom, you email the footage to yourself and delete the original copy.

STORY CONTINUES:

Naomi's radio suddenly buzzes.

Radio: All units, we have a crime in progress at South Street and Main. Appears to be a bar fight.

Radio: Suspects are Flynn O'Malley and Bryce Sterling. Over.

Naomi: Copy that. Headed there now. Over.

You: Flynn's in trouble?

Naomi: That's what it sounds like. Do you want to come along? You might be able to talk some sense into him.

You: Of course. Let's go right away.

You and Naomi leave the apartment and jump into her car. She drives straight for the bar at South Street and Main.

END SAMPLE