

Hide
by
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INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A circle of women in their late 30's sit around an altar, in loose fitting shawls and dresses, holding hands. They hum softly under their breath. *

The room is lit dimly with candles. The altar sits at its center, laden with a deep purple cloth, and decorated with incense, pentacles, and precious stones and crystals. *

Sitting on a raised pedestal, is an open leather-bound book. Laid on top of the book is a stuffed, homemade CLOTH DOLL, in the shape of a human. Its features are completely blank. *

As the women hum, eyes closed, one woman, CASSIE GARRISS, 37, leans forward, breaking the circle. She places a ceramic face over the blank head. She picks up a needle and pushes a length of white thread through the needle's eye.

Cassie brings the needle down the doll's face. She STABS the needle through the doll's eye. *

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

DAKOTA GARRISS, 15, brunette, pale and mousy, wakes abruptly with her sheets clinging to her body with sweat. She pulls the sheet away from her, throwing it onto the ground. *

She wipes the sweat from her face and twists around, flopping onto her stomach. Clutching her pillow tightly, Dakota closes her eyes.

Dakota winces and opens her eyes. The street lamps outside are still lit, and the sun has only just started to rise. Dakota rolls out of bed. *

She wades through heaps of dirty clothes. She picks up a pair of sweatpants and sheds her shorts. She stares at herself in her vanity mirror as she pulls them on, her face glistening in the dim light. She pulls a sweatshirt over her head. *

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dakota slips out of her bedroom door in running clothes and heads down the hall and down the stairs. *

Once she is off-screen, the door at the far-end of the hall opens and Cassie peeks her head out. She watches Dakota leave down the hall for a beat, and down the stairs. *

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

Dakota sprints along the pedestrian sidewalk of a bridge, spanning a wide river. She has headphones on, and her chest is already soaked through with sweat.

Her breath is ragged, and comes in short gasps. She pushes herself harder, her gaze laser-focused on the narrow end at the other side of the bridge.

Off-screen, there is the SOUND OF WATER DRIPPING.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Dakota yanks sharply on the faucet spigots, and water begins to burst from the shower head. Tossing aside her sweaty clothes, she steps into the shower stall. Steam billows up around her. After a beat, Dakota turns off the "cold" spigot.

She reaches out, bracing her arms against the side of the stall, gasping, her back bowed against the onslaught of stinging heat. She sucks in a shallow breath through her gritted teeth, but her expression is determined.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is dark and cramped. A pentacle ornament hangs from the window catch over the kitchen sink. Beneath the ornament sits a row of lit votive candles, each with a different word inscribed: "love", "healing", "prosperity", etc.

Dakota throws some coffee grounds and a cup of water into the coffee machine on the counter and lets it run.

With her back to the kitchen counter, Dakota turns to the kitchen table. The table is cluttered with small cardboard boxes, spilling over with bubble wrap and packing peanuts. At its center, an open lunch box has been set out with a pre-made sandwich, a banana with a smile drawn on it, and a handmade note.

The note reads, "HAVE A WONDERFUL DAY, SWEETHEART!"

Dakota shakes her head, taking a travel cup down from the cabinets and filling it up with coffee.

Off-screen, a bus horn HONKS.

 DAKOTA

 Shit.

Dakota slams the top onto the cup and bolts.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Dakota rushes into the foyer, cramming her feet into a pair of sneakers.

Off-screen, the sound of approaching footsteps is heard coming down the stairs.

Cassie appears on the landing as Dakota is shrugging on her backpack.

CASSIE
Oh, Dakota, I left something -

DAKOTA
I can't, Mom, I have to go.

Dakota opens the front door and slams it behind her.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Cassie ducks into the kitchen and sees her arranged lunch box untouched. She sighs, disappointed.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dakota slings her backpack over her shoulders and sprints after the bus, which slows as the driver spots Dakota running towards it in its side mirrors.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

In gym shorts and a neon orange pinny over her tee, Dakota runs down a marked forest path, headphones in.

COACH (O.S.)
Keep up the pace!

Dakota looks over her shoulder, yanking one earbud out. A group of other high school students, dressed similarly, round the corner coming into view. At the back of their group the COACH, a slight but muscular woman in her mid-thirties, jogs with her hands cupped around her mouth.

Dakota slows down to a jog.

COACH (CONT'D)
C'mon, I wanna see you keeping pace with Dakota!

A few groans come as response from the other students. They put on a burst of speed, catching up to Dakota.

SAM MALLORY, 15, an African-American girl with short hair, wearing a black band tee and basketball shorts, comes up behind Dakota, out of breath.

SAM
(hissing)
Slow down!

TERRY SOUN, 17, a boy with long black hair wearing a bright red hoodie under his pinny jogs to catch up with Dakota, smirking at her.

TERRY
You make the rest of us look bad.

DAKOTA
Sorry.

Dakota slows down. Sam and Terry jog alongside her.

SAM
We were just teasing!

TERRY
Yeah, don't stop on our account.

Terry gives Dakota a wink.

COACH
C'mon, c'mon, pick up the pace,
we're almost out of the woods!

The group gives another audible groan. Dakota throws a look over at Terry as she runs, blushing.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Dakota sits in the grass by the edge of the forest path with a couple other students, all drinking water or lying down to catch their breath.

COACH
(to class)
Hit the showers before you go to
your classes, folks. You stink.

Dakota watches from a distance as Terry helps pull Sam to her feet, laughing together as they walk across the field back to the gymnasium.

COACH (CONT'D)
Good hustle today, Garriss. You run
like you've got hell at your heels.

Dakota looks up and finds the coach looking down at her with a smile.

COACH (CONT'D)

Glad to have you on the team. You
give me an excuse to push my
runners.

*
*
*

DAKOTA

Thanks.

*
*

Dakota gets to her feet along with the rest of the students,
and joins them in walking back to the gymnasium. The coach
walks beside her.

COACH

How've you been adjusting to FHS?

*

DAKOTA

(hesitantly)
Okay.

Coach claps a hand on Dakota's shoulder.

COACH

Well, it was smart to join Cross
Country. You'll meet a lot of great
people here, Garriss, we take care
of our own. We like to think of
ourselves as a little family.

*
*
*
*
*

Dakota nods, smiling awkwardly. Coach pats her shoulder and
walks away. Dakota glances across the field at Sam and Terry,
now walking arm and arm as they enter the gymnasium doors.

*
*
*

Dakota catches herself scratching her arm. She wraps her fist
around her forearm, stopping herself.

EXT. NATIONAL PARK - HIKING TRAIL - DAY

*

Cassie walks by herself down a hiking trail, dressed casually
in forest ranger's uniform, a baseball cap with the park's
logo on the front pulled low over her eyes. She carries a
clipboard under her arm.

*
*
*
*

AMY (O.S.)

How's that risk assessment goin'
there, Cass?

*
*
*

Cassie raises a walkie talkie to her mouth and speaks into
it.

*
*

CASSIE

Slowly. I'm almost to the site.

*
*

AMY (O.S.)

What a trooper. If I were you, ya
know, I would've fudged the report.

*
*
*

Cassie laughs. *

AMY (O.S.) (CONT'D) *
 No one even goes as far as Spine *
 Ridge anyway for fuck's sake. *

CASSIE *
 It's a nice walk. *

AMY (O.S.) *
 This is why your gonna make CO *
 before I do. *

CASSIE *
 I thought you liked dispatch. *

Ahead of Cassie, the path opens up to the West. Cassie steps *
 out onto a narrow ridge, overlooking a massive drop to *
 another swath of forest down below. Cassie pauses, admiring *
 the view of the park. She digs around in her cargo pants one *
 handed, fishing out a small digital camera. *

AMY (O.S.) *
 Only because it beats babysitting *
 drunk teens and the fruit-nut *
 hikers. *

CASSIE *
 (laughing) *
 Fruit nut? *

Cassie lifts the camera up to her eye, holding the walkie in *
 her other fist, leaning forward to take the picture. *

AMY (O.S.) *
 Yeah, you know. The fruit-nut-and- *
 granola types. The hippie dippie *
 vegans who rent thousand dollar *
 cabins for the weekend to get in *
 touch with nature. *

CASSIE *
 What's so wrong with being vegan -? *

Cassie snaps the photo, taking a step forward, and is cut off *
 short as the ground beneath her feet crumbles. Cassie *
 screams, slipping, the walkie, clipboard, and camera going *
 flying. *

Cassie braces her hands on the lip of the path, scrabbling *
 for a handhold. She watches the clipboard and camera go *
 sliding off the edge of the drop, tumbling into the forest *
 down below. *

AMY (O.S.) *
 Cass? *

Cassie pulls herself back from the drop, taking a long beat to catch her breath. *

AMY (O.S.) (CONT'D) *

Cass, what happened? *

Cassie grabs the walkie from where it fell. *

CASSIE *

I just slipped. *

AMY (O.S.) *

You 'kay? *

CASSIE *

Yeah. Yeah. *

Cassie gets roughly to her feet, edging towards the drop, peering over cautiously. *

CASSIE (CONT'D) *

I found Spine Ridge. *

AMY (O.S.) *

Jesus, Cass. *

Cassie looks down the path that follows the edge of the ridge. *

CASSIE *

I'm gonna follow it through to the end. I kinda lost by risk assessment over the edge of the cliff. *

Cassie walks off, wiping dust off on her pants. *

AMY (O.S.) *

I take back everything I said. *

You're gonna get demoted to recycling. *

CASSIE *

Fuck you. *

EXT. WOODS - DAY *

Wedged neatly in the crook of a tree bough, the clipboard with Cassie's risk assessment forms hangs more than twenty feet above her head. She cranes her neck up to stare at it. *

CASSIE *

Fuck. *

AMY (O.S.) *

What's the verdict? *

Cassie shakes her head. She spots her camera lying in the leaves not far away and walks towards it. Picking it up, she finds that the lens is cracked and the digital display dark.

CASSIE
 Good news: if I hadn't come out here I wouldn't have known to mark this path as a fucking hazard.

AMY (O.S.)
 Is it *really* though? Or are you just a spaz?

Shaking her head, Cassie turns to walk away. She spots something else lying in the leaves. She bends down and uncovers a moldy, running sneaker. She turns it over in her hand, lifting the walkie to her mouth.

CASSIE
 Looks like I'm not the only one.

Cassie cranes her neck to look up at the ledge high above her head.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Dakota stands at the center of the cafeteria, clutching her backpack as she scans the room. The cafeteria is bustling with students crammed around circular tables, joking and jovial. Their trays of cafeteria food seem to go unnoticed as they all chatter excitedly with one another.

Dakota walks forward, noticing an empty spot. As Dakota moves to slip into the seat, the two girls sitting across from her glance her way, stack their empty trays and stand to leave, muttering under their breath.

Dakota watches the girls as they walk up to another group of students, casting backwards glances at her over their shoulders. Dakota slams her bag onto the table, and drops down into her seat. Unzipping her bag, she fishes out a granola bar. She reaches into her bag again, casting her hand around its contents impatiently, and pulls out her book.

A CLOTH DOLL comes tumbling out with it, made of plush but with a gaunt, porcelain face, the same that Cassie made. Dakota stares at it incredulously.

SAM (O.S.)
 Hey!

Dakota looks up, and crams the doll into the bag. Sam slides into the seat across from her with a smile.

SAM (CONT'D)
Newbie! I didn't even know you had
this lunch period.

DAKOTA
Yeah.

Sam pokes at the food on her cafeteria tray with a spork.

SAM
Where was it you moved from again?

DAKOTA
Wyoming.

Sam stuffs a bite of potatoes into her mouth.

SAM
(around her food)
That up in the mountains or
somethin'?

DAKOTA
I mean. Not where I lived. Why?

SAM
(shrugging)
That's a thing right? People from
higher climates are better at
running. Got like, thinner air up
there and all that.

DAKOTA
(smiling)
No. Sorry to disappoint.

SAM
What the fuck is wrong with you
then?

DAKOTA
(laughing)
Does there have to be something
wrong with me?

SAM
With a mile like yours? If I didn't
know any better, I'd think you were
running away from something.

Dakota does not answer, unsure how to respond. Sam clears her
throat.

SAM (CONT'D)
You moved here last month, right?

Dakota nods.

SAM (CONT'D)
I heard you live in a haunted
house.

*
*
*

DAKOTA
What?

*
*

SAM
Like, everyone says you got a bunch
of creepy shit outside your house.
Pentagrams. Little naked demon
statues.

*
*
*
*
*

DAKOTA
Uh. Yeah. Guess we do.

*

SAM
Pretty neat. Your parents must be
super dope.

*
*

DAKOTA
I guess.

SAM
I've always loved shit like that
anyway. All that New Age, "witchy"
kinda stuff.

*
*

DAKOTA
Oh. Yeah...?

*

SAM
(laughs)
I'm Sam, by the way.

*

Sam puts out her hand, and Dakota shakes it.

DAKOTA
Dakota.

SAM
So, you into that stuff? Y'know,
there's a cult up in Port Hope, I
heard. Real big on the blood
sacrifices and naked moonlight
rituals. Or they might've just
been a nudist colony. I forget.

*
*
*
*

DAKOTA
No, we're not -

SAM
It's totally cool if you are. I
think it's kinda awesome.

*