

VEGGING OUT

by

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FADE IN ON:

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

MELISSA WILLIAMS (19) sits at her desk and scribbles furiously. Her gaze shifts between lecture and notes.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS (O.S.)
David Hume. Kant. John Stewart Mill.

PROFESSOR HUBERT JENNINGS (45) writes names across the board. Chalk SCRAPES against the surface.

He's a short man with glasses, and curly brown hair. Not very manly. But there's an air of vitality about him - making him attractive in a subtle sort of way.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Aristotle. Ayn Rand. Can anyone tell me
what these philosophers have in common?

He leaves the podium and paces between the students.

He pauses over JACKIE LAWLER (20), surprises her in the middle of a text message.

Melissa smirks at her friend.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
(to Jackie)
Surely not their political views. Right,
Ms. Lawler?

Jackie hesitantly shakes her head 'no.'

Behind Jennings, Melissa gives her a sarcastic thumbs-up.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Certainly not, considering their
ideologies ran from rugged individualism
to religious conservatism.

Jennings proceeds down the aisle.

He passes DAN KLEINER (20), a dark haired, rangy student dressed in grunge attire and glasses.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
But maybe that's the wrong question.

Jenning's gaze pans the room.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Maybe we should be asking - why are these philosophers so important to know?

In the back, JACK MORRIS (20) sits huddled with friends, all stamped from the same "university jock" mold.

JACK

Um, to pass the class?

A few students GIGGLE. Jennings nods amiably.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

That's one reason.

He returns to the head of the classroom. Taps Melissa's chair as he passes.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Despite their differences, these writers pursued a similar goal. Which was?

Melissa raises her hand.

MELISSA

A unified theory of morality?

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Glad to see someone's paying attention.

Melissa beams with satisfaction. Jackie rolls her eyes at Melissa, mouths "Suck Up".

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

None of you live in a political vacuum. With the possible exception of Mr. Morris and company.

In the back of the room, Jack and his friends SNICKER.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Every day, each one of us makes decisions based on our moral values. That's not a choice - just a basic fact of life.

Jennings taps the podium.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

The only option we have is whether our values are adopted arbitrarily, or as part of a comprehensive moral system.

The clock strikes Eleven PM. Students begin to stir.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Next week's assignment is to pick a political topic - could be abortion, legalization of drugs, anything you consider...interesting.

Jennings strains to project over SHUFFLING papers.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Be prepared to argue your position. Not from slogans, church or what Mommy and Daddy taught you. But from the fundamentals.

Jennings watches as students file out of the classroom - some quicker than others.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Class dismissed.

Melissa and Jackie are the last to leave. Jennings intercepts them at the door.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Melissa. Started reading your draft on Locke's epistemology. Good start.

MELISSA
Thanks, Professor Jennings.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Looking forward to seeing how you tackle his theory of social contract...

Jennings looks at Jackie pointedly.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
And Ms. Lawyer? You need to start paying more attention in class. Understood?

JACKIE
Yes, Professor Jennings.

Jennings turns to leave.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS
Melissa, we need to schedule time to discuss your thesis. My office, next week.

MELISSA
I will. Promise.

Melissa and Jackie wave to Jennings as they back away.

JACKIE
Epista- what?

INT. COLLEGE HALLWAY - DAY

The hallway hums with activity as STUDENTS head to class.

Dan loiters with TOM MIDDLETON. Blonde, well-dressed and far over six feet, Tom looms over his roommate.

JACKIE
Don't know how you stand poly-sci. Let
alone major in it.

Melissa spots the boys and waves in their direction.

MELISSA
Hey, guys!

Dan shuffles over, drapes himself between the girls.

DAN
Hey, Mel. Trying to talk politics with
Jackie again? Thought you learned your
lesson after she fell asleep during your
debate on gun control.

TOM
Because that was just so stimulating.

Dan shoots his roommate a nasty look.

JACKIE
I'm supportive. I just...get bored after
a few hours.

DAN
You two have the depth of an ashtray.

Dan shakes his head in disgust. He turns to Melissa, his voice sincere.

DAN
Next time you want a meaningful
conversation, come see me. Don't mess
around with these guys.

Tom leans over, gazes into Melissa's eyes.

TOM
Two hours of discussing politics with
Dan, and you'll never want a meaningful
conversation again. Trust me, I know.

Jackie shifts under the weight of her bookbag.

JACKIE

I thought you guys were hungry?

Dan and Melissa nod in agreement.

Tom shakes his head, points down the hallway.

TOM

Gotta do a few things in lab. Meet you tonight for the party, though?

DAN

Deal. See you back at the room.

They "punch it out".

Leaving Tom, the three head for the cafeteria. Out the door, across the sprawling campus lawn.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS.

In the distance, a small CROWD gathers around a folding table and a few handmade signs.

At the forefront, CARA SULLIVAN (19) passes out leaflets - a goth girl with multiple piercings and an effective set of lungs. Her skin is pale, beneath jet black hair.

Photos on the signs become visible as the three approach - graphic shots of slaughtered animals and livestock.

CARA

Meet Your Meat! Go Veggie Today!

Jackie recoils, disgusted. She tugs on Melissa's sleeve.

JACKIE

Let's go. That's gross.

Melissa takes a step closer and squints at one of the sign holders, an African American girl with dreads.

Quieter than her counterpart, FAUN SOMMERS (18) wears a hippie style dress and chats with one of the students.

MELISSA

I think I know her.

JACKIE

Are they allowed to do this on campus?

DAN

Free speech. As long as they stay in public areas.

MELISSA

I do know her. She's in my dorm.

JACKIE

Mel, that's PETA stuff. You know - throwing paint on fur coats, breaking into labs.

Jackie shudders as her friends break rank.

Melissa heads towards Faun. Dan approaches Cara, hand extended for a leaflet.

Jackie reluctantly follows, hovers at a distance.

MELISSA

Hey - you're Faun, right?

Faun looks up, squints at Melissa.

FAUN

Melissa...from Wesley?

She looks at Melissa's textbooks.

FAUN

And class. We took a course with Professor Brunner.

Melissa brightens in recognition.

MELISSA

Oh yeah. Hard stuff. Only got a B.

FAUN

Don't feel bad; Brunner never gives A's. Against his personal policy.

Melissa smiles.

Her expression dims as she looks at the literature on the table.

MELISSA

Didn't know you were veggie.

FAUN

Vegan, actually. But it's not like I carry a Scarlet V on my forehead.

FAUN (CONT'D)

Or talk about it to strangers in the dorm. Just strangers in public forums.

Melissa glances at Dan, already engaged in heated debate with Cara (MOS).

MELISSA

Unlike your friend, there.

FAUN

Cara's more dramatic. We balance each other out.

Faun smiles.

FAUN

I prefer to focus on health aspects of the lifestyle. Welfare issues that most people agree with...whether they know it or not.

Melissa flips through a few pamphlets, depicting graphic images of debeaking. She winces.

FAUN

That's debeaking. They do that with a soldering iron when they're two to five weeks old. Beaks are pretty sensitive, you know - full of nerves.

MELISSA

Aren't things like this covered under cruelty statutes?

FAUN

Depends on the state. Livestock falls under a different category, anyway.

Jackie waves frantically at Melissa, anxious to get away.

FAUN

Remember in Brunner's class, when he discussed the use of force in civilized society? He argued it could only be justified when preventing equal or greater harm, such as in the case of self defense or emergency situations.

Faun pauses, aware of Melissa's growing discomfort.

FAUN

I'm not saying animals are the same as people...but they're sentient.

FAUN (CONT'D)

If going veggie doesn't harm us, then
don't we owe them some sort of
consideration in return?

Melissa remains silent, as Faun hands her a leaflet.

Behind her, Cara gestures wildly to Dan, passionately
debating the concept of "Happy Meat."

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Dan, Melissa and Jackie stand in the buffet line, roll
trays past steaming offerings of burgers, hot dogs, and
mystery meat goulash.

Wrinkling her nose at a grey patty, Jackie chooses
barbecue wings. Melissa selects a burger, Dan a hot dog.

The three drop their bags, and settle in at the table.

DAN

Dude, that was fun.

He shovels the hot dog into his mouth.

Jackie makes a face while Dan chews animatedly.

DAN

In your face, fuckin' balls out activism!
Hey, maybe that's what I'll cover next
week in class! Show 'em some of these...

Dan pulls Cara's literature from his pocket, fans it
across the table. On top is a picture of a bloodied
chicken, half of it's feathers missing.

Jackie drops her hot wing and stares at him bug-eyed.

Dan shuffles through pages, oblivious to her reaction.

DAN

This stuff is friggin' intense. Reminds
me of the Khmer Rouge, or acid attacks
against women in Afghanistan.

MELISSA

Dan...

DAN

You're saying hate crimes against women
aren't important?

MELISSA

No. But this isn't the time. Look what you're doing to Jackie. In case you didn't notice, we're trying to eat.

Dan looks petulant. His gaze wanders, and he points at Jackie's plate.

DAN

That makes it the perfect time. Jackie, you know that's a body part you're eating? Still looks it, too.

He reaches across the table and picks up a wing. He waves it at Jackie, simulates PEEPING sounds.

Jackie SLAPS his hand, hard.

JACKIE

Stop! You're being an asshole, you know that?

MELISSA

He knows. Ignore him, and he usually stops. Besides, that's not a veggie dog he's eating.

The three lapse into silence.

JACKIE

(beat)

Everyone excited about the party?

Melissa and Dan nod.

JACKIE

Mel, you bringing anyone? How about that Lacrosse guy? I think he likes you.

She beams, and misses the look that crosses Dan's face.

Melissa shakes her head and swallows a bite of burger.

MELISSA

Just me. And you guys, of course.

JACKIE

You study too much. I know your parents are going to kill you if you don't get good grades. But you need a life. Seriously.

DAN

She's got us.

JACKIE

My point exactly. She needs to broaden her horizons.

Jackie takes a bite from her meal.

JACKIE

In case you haven't noticed, we can be really lame.

Melissa smiles wanly, and raises the hamburger to her mouth.

She pauses, and looks at it thoughtfully. A few moments later she puts the burger down, untouched.

INT. COLLEGE DORM ROOM - NIGHT

The party is packed.

Dim lights illuminate wisps of smoke. In one corner, a group of students play beer pong.

Everyone has a drink - including Dan, Tom, Jackie and Melissa. Gathered at a table, they shout to be heard over the music.

TOM

What's everyone doing for the holidays?

JACKIE

Going home, visiting my Dad.

MELISSA

Mom's picking me up after mid-terms. Aunt Blanche always hosts Thanksgiving dinner - invites all the relatives I never see the rest of the year. Really boring.

DAN

I'm staying on campus. Parents are a bunch of losers. I'd rather stay here and avoid the grief.

Tom grins.

TOM

My family's taking me to Aspen. Gonna ski for three days straight.

DAN

You fuck.

Tom raises a glass to his friend and smiles.

TOM

Back at ya.

He leans across the table to the girls.

TOM

You know, I saw all that shit he brought home today. He was showing me pictures of animals for over an hour.

He turns to Dan, and points an accusatory finger.

TOM

You deserve it for subjecting me to that.

DAN

What, subjecting you to the truth?

TOM

Exposing me to your latest obsession. I have to sit and listen every time you get a boner about a cause.

He turns a pleading eye to Melissa and Jackie.

TOM

Am I right?

MELISSA

Okay, I know Dan can be an asshole.

Jackie nods enthusiastically.

MELISSA

But some of what they were saying made sense.

DAN

Thanks for the vote of confidence, Mel.

Melissa stares silently at her glass.

MELISSA

Animals can feel pain. They should have some protection under the law.

TOM

Sure, but we're not talking about cute little puppy dogs, Mel. That's what they're bred for. They wouldn't even exist otherwise.

DAN

Spoken like a true slave owner.

Tom SIGHS - his throat suddenly clears at the sight of a cute BLONDE (19) approaching the table.

She holds out a tray of cupcakes. Dan and Melissa grab one each. Jackie shakes her head.

JACKIE

No thanks. I'm on a diet.

The blonde walks away, her departure watched closely by both Jackie and Tom.

Tom grins and rises to his feet.

TOM

Think I'll go freshen my drink, leave the debate team alone for awhile. Have fun with your intellectual jerk-off, guys...

He disappears into the crowd, whistling happily.

Jackie grimaces, grabs a handful of potato chips for solace.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Melissa sits in the laundry room, textbook in lap - accompanied by the CLUNK of the dryer.

A RESIDENT enters, face obscured by laundry. Melissa recognizes Faun from her dreads, which peek out past her shoulders.

The pile wobbles dangerously.

Mel drops her book, rushes to help steady the basket.

FAUN

Thanks, almost lost it.

Faun sets the laundry down, and recognizes Melissa.

FAUN

Hey, you again.

MELISSA

You too. Guess we do live in the same dorm.

FAUN

Good thing. Almost had an avalanche.

She eyes Melissa's reading material.

FAUN

Studying? Wouldn't the library be quieter?

MELISSA

I'm multi-tasking. The machines don't bug me, and there are less people here...most times of the day.

An apologetic look steals over Faun's features.

MELISSA

Don't worry. I needed the break.

Melissa's dryer shuts off with a CLICK.

She hauls her basket up to the door, and removes sheets.

Faun loads her own wash into a machine. Glances quickly at Melissa's textbook.

FAUN

"Fundamentals of Government"? Remember that from last semester. Real page turner.

Melissa SNORTS sarcastically.

FAUN

Guess you're taking Jennings's class. Reading's tough, but he's terrific. Really pushes you to think outside the box.

Faun tops off the washer, and closes the lid.

FAUN

I remember one time, he spent the entire class on axioms. Most of the other students fell asleep, but it kept me busy for weeks, working out the details.

Melissa looks up from her machine, eyebrow raised.

MELISSA

Let me guess. Poly Sci major?

FAUN

Philosophy. Great career choice, I know. After graduation, I can't even work at Burger King. If I do, they take away my V-card.

Melissa smiles in response.

MELISSA

Been vegan long?

FAUN

About four years. Read Peter Singer in high school, never looked back.

MELISSA

Ever miss it?

FAUN

Not usually. Well, sometimes sushi. But the cravings go away after awhile.

Done loading her basket, Melissa regards Faun seriously.

MELISSA

I see where you're coming from. That stuff needs to be regulated. But animal rights - isn't that a bit extreme?

FAUN

You mean like Cara, all wild eyed and radical?

MELISSA

Well, she got my attention.

FAUN

You know....one time in class, Professor Jennings defined radicalism as 'the practice of taking political theory to it's logical conclusions.'

Faun leans against a corner of the washer, looks at Melissa appraisingly.

FAUN

I just like to think of myself as morally consistent.

Her clothes on spin cycle, Faun assists Melissa with the folding process.

FAUN

Look at it this way - you have pets?

MELISSA

At home, sure.

Melissa's face lights up as she reminisces.

MELISSA

A Jack Russell named Rocket.

FAUN

And you'd never do anything to harm him?
Or let anyone else hurt him?

Melissa shrugs. Folds the laundry into neat squares.

MELISSA

Course not.

FAUN

And that's not just because he's your
property, right? I mean, if he was a
stray, you'd feel the same way?

Melissa gathers the laundry basket to her chest, holds it
protectively.

MELISSA

Of course. That's what cruelty laws are
for.

Faun moves to the front door, and opens it for Melissa.

FAUN

I'm just saying, take a look at your
premises. I stopped eating meat the day
I realized there was no difference
between pets like Rocket, and the cow in
my hamburger.

Melissa opens her mouth, then lapses into silence.

MELISSA

Thanks for helping with the door.

FAUN

Thanks for juggling my laundry. Could've
been a mess.

She spots Melissa's book on the counter, brings it over.

FAUN

Listen, you're on the fourth floor,
right? I'll bring over a few books when
the wash is done. No pressure, but you
might find some of it interesting.

Faun wedges the book into Melissa's basket.

FAUN

Lighter reading than this, that's for sure.

INT. DORM REC ROOM - AFTERNOON

Dan and Melissa sit at a table in the rec room, surrounded by piles of books and empty Red Bull cans.

On a nearby couch, Tom watches a game on TV and snuggles with JENNIFER, the blonde from the party.

Dan stares resentfully at Tom.

DAN

Must be nice to have everything handed to you. College. Aspen. Blonde bimbos.

MELISSA

Give him a break. You know Tom works his butt off in class. Besides, just because she's blonde doesn't mean she's a bimbo.

She peeks over at Jennifer, busy tickling Tom.

MELISSA

Okay, well, maybe this one is.

Dan angrily crosses out lines in his notebook.

DAN

I don't know why you defend him so much. Tom gets everything, and he goofs off half the time.

He points to a stack of unsteady books, near Melissa.

DAN

While you study every night, and scrape by on a scholarship. Just because he was born into a family with shit-loads of cash.

Dan crumples up paper, throws it on the floor.

DAN

Like half the people on this campus...

MELISSA

Tom's a good guy, stop obsessing. Do some studying yourself; you've got financial aid requirements, too.

The look on her face suddenly morphs from stern to thoughtful.

MELISSA

Speaking of family. You're seriously staying on campus for Thanksgiving? All by yourself?

Dan shrugs.

DAN

Dad's home these days; gets kind of loud. I'd rather stay here, where it's less violent. And quiet at least part of the time.

Tom SHOUTS suddenly at the TV screen, points out an offending play to Jennifer.

Dan grimaces.

MELISSA

Okay. But give me a call if you get bored. It'll give me a break from my family dramas, especially my sister. Besides, us non-Aspen types have to stick together.

Dan smiles gratefully at Melissa, and turns back to his books.

Tom SNORTS in disgust, and throws a napkin at the screen.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Autumn has arrived on campus. The air is clear, and the grass green - covered with a blanket of colorful leaves.

STUDENTS play Lacrosse under the trees. One of them scores; the victory heralded by CHEERS.

Melissa and Jackie trot by, clad in baggy sweats.

JACKIE

We really have to go? Last time we went to the gym, it smelled like sweat socks and Doritos. You know...like Tom after a party.

MELISSA

You said you wanted to get in shape.

JACKIE

Yeah, but weight lifting? I don't want to bulk up. I just want to tone.

Jackie looks towards a CLUSTER OF MALE STUDENTS in the grass. She smiles flirtatiously. One of them waves back.

Melissa grabs Jackie's arm, pulls her along faster.

MELISSA

A little exercise won't kill you.

Jackie frowns, but trails along obediently.

JACKIE

Isn't there a Zumba class we could go to instead?

INT. COLLEGE GYM - DAY

The gym facilities are cramped and sweaty; consisting of grey walls, lines of Nautilus machines and free weights.

STUDENTS mill about, exercise with varying degrees of intensity.

Some sit on bikes and read. Others flirt. GRUNTS issue from the free weight section, populated by JOCKS.

Melissa and Jackie work out facing each other. Jackie does vertical presses, while Melissa counts the reps.

JACKIE

So then she tells me it's my turn to clean the bathroom.

MELISSA

Nine, ten...

JACKIE

And that I shouldn't be upset her boyfriend stayed over until Three AM.

MELISSA

...eleven... Come on, one more...

JACKIE

Even though I had a test the next day!

Jackie slams down the weights, finishes with a CLANG.

MELISSA

Good job! You know, you work out better when you're angry.

Jackie gives her the finger, then points it to Melissa's machine.

Jackie's attention wanders as Mel starts her set. She looks at her lap, squeezes a roll of skin at her waist.

JACKIE

Doesn't look any smaller.

MELISSA

It takes time. You've only been lifting a few weeks.

JACKIE

Maybe I should go on a diet.

MELISSA

You could eat cleaner.

JACKIE

How about Atkins? Terry lost fifteen pounds.

MELISSA

I've seen the way you eat fries. You wouldn't last a day on Atkins.

Melissa finishes her last rep, and leans forward thoughtfully.

MELISSA

You know, lots of people lose weight on vegetarian diets.

JACKIE

Um, slight difference. You know, that all meat/no meat thing?

She holds her hands out, balances them like a scale.

MELISSA

Seriously. Clinton lost twenty pounds going vegan.

Jackie points at her accusingly.

JACKIE

You've been talking to that girl in your dorm again, haven't you? You're getting obsessed. You know that, right?

Mel shakes her head earnestly.

MELISSA

I've been reading up a bit, and I thought it might be worth a try. We don't have to stick with it, if we don't like it.

JACKIE

"We"?

MELISSA

I thought about going vegetarian, but vegan seems more morally consistent.

Jackie rolls her eyes - her workout abandoned.

JACKIE

Whoa. Hold it right there.

Melissa grabs Jackie's hand, excited.

MELISSA

Come on, Jackie! You're my best friend. I could really use your support. If we do it together, it could be fun! Try new recipes, stuff like that.

JACKIE

Sounds boring.

MELISSA

You know who's vegan? Alicia Silverstone.

JACKIE

Oh, you mean Fat Girl?

Melissa searches her limited knowledge for the perfect celebrity, desperate to seal the deal.

MELISSA

Okay. How about Natalie Portman? She was vegan when she did Black Swan...

JACKIE

Really? Natalie Portman?

MELISSA

Come with me, Jackie. Join the dark side. Lose some weight. Piss off your roommate.

Melissa grabs her gym bag and heads towards the door.

Jackie sighs, and follows her friend - her wrist trapped in Melissa's grasp.

JACKIE

Okay, fine. But if I don't fit into a size four by Christmas, I'm eating a hamburger in front of you. Deal?

Melissa nods, and drags her out the door.

INT. TOM AND DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Your usual college man cave, Tom and Dan's room is cluttered and covered with posters - divided equally between sports figures and political icons.

Tom seems less than pleased.

TOM

What is this, a virus?

Dan sits on his bed, a smug look on his face.

DAN

Took you girls long enough to catch up. I made the decision a week ago.

Tom turns desperately to Jackie.

TOM

You too? You're going along with this?

Dan leans over to Melissa, his voice low.

DAN

What'd you blackmail her with? She sleep with a professor?

Melissa pushes Dan away, hugs Jackie as a show of support.

MELISSA

We decided we'd give it a try. No pressure, no blackmail.

She points a finger at Dan.

MELISSA

And no preaching either. It's just an experiment we want to try out for awhile.

Jackie nods vigorously.

JACKIE

Just for the rest of the semester.

Tom smirks, and points out the girls' close proximity.

TOM

If you guys are experimenting, there are better things to try.

MELISSA

Thanks, Tom. Knew we could count on you for support.

Jackie tugs on Melissa's arm.

JACKIE

Let's get out of here, before he gets really gross.

Tom leans over to Dan, whispers in his ear.

DAN

Too late. You should hear what he just suggested you guys do.

The girls retreat quickly, chased by yells of encouragement from Dan.

DAN (O.S.)

For once, I think Tom's got a good idea. It'd be just like that scene with Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis. Guys? Hey guys?

INT. FOODMART - DAY

Faun leads Melissa and Jackie on a tour of the supermarket.

She stops every few feet to point out products. They start in health and beauty - the walls lined with cosmetics, hair gels and vitamins.

FAUN

Supplementation's important. Some people claim you can get everything from food, but a good multi-vitamin can't hurt.

Melissa picks up the supermarket brand, only to be redirected by Faun.

FAUN

Probably contains gelatin. Look for one with a vegetarian label.

They continue down the isle as Jackie browses hair coloring kits.

As she picks up boxes, Faun turns them over and points out ingredients.

FAUN

Watch out for stuff like Lanolin,
Glycerol. Companies that do animal
testing.

Jackie squints at the lengthy label, loaded with indecipherable ingredients.

She turns to Melissa.

JACKIE

Remind me again why we're doing this?

FAUN

Don't worry about every little thing,
especially at first. It'll drive you
crazy.

She takes the shampoo from Jackie's hand, returns it to the shelf.

FAUN

Remember, the goal isn't purity. It's
minimizing animal suffering through
product choice. You don't have to be a
saint. Once you get the hang of it,
veganism can be fun...!

JACKIE

I'm having so much fun right now.

Faun grabs the cart, heads towards the greener end of the store. They travel through the produce section.

Faun adds food to the cart as Melissa crosses off items on a notepad.

FAUN

Try to focus on veggies, fruits and
grains - you know, unprocessed stuff.

Faun leads them to the "health food" nook. Points out blocks of tofu and assorted meat substitutes.

FAUN

Throw in a protein source, and you're
set. If you cook your meals, it's
cheaper, too.

Melissa picks up an unfamiliar item. Beige, shapeless contents are visible through the plastic wrapper.

MELISSA

Tempeh?

FAUN

Fermented soybean cake, from Indonesia.
Lots of B-12, and it makes a great burger
crumble...

JACKIE

Yum.

Faun shakes her head excitedly. Dreads dance across her shoulders.

FAUN

You like Chinese and Indian food? I'll
lend you some cookbooks. You'll love it.

Jackie scans the "alternatives" shelf, spots packages of veggie dogs and hamburger patties.

She throws them in, on top of bags of broccoli and peppers.

JACKIE

Okay, this looks good.

She takes charge of the cart, and breaks away from the group - in search of more pre-packaged goodies.

FAUN

You know, there's vegan pizza too. And
these days, the cheese really melts!

Reaching the dessert section, Jackie scans the shelves.

Her face lights up at the sight of Soy Delicious Ice Cream. She grabs a carton.

JACKIE

Oh. My. God. Cookies and Cream?

Faun smiles and nods.

JACKIE

And it actually tastes good?

Faun pats her somewhat ample midsection.

FAUN

Unfortunately, yes.

Jackie turns to Melissa.

JACKIE

Okay, you win. Maybe this will be fun.

She steers the cart towards the checkout isle.

Melissa and Faun trail after her.

FAUN

(to Melissa)

Make sure she doesn't eat too much junk food, okay?

INT. DORM KITCHEN - NIGHT

Melissa and Jackie putter around the kitchen, furnished with a stove, microwave and 70s style refrigerator.

Counter space is at a premium, leaving little room for cooking implements.

Two pots sit on the stove. One contains rice, the water bubbling away.

Melissa sautes onions in the other - stops periodically to consult the cookbook in her free hand: "Skinny Bitch in the Kitch."

MELISSA

Two minutes left. Is the tofu ready?

At the counter, Jackie fumbles with a block of tofu - pushes on it clumsily with a paper towel.

JACKIE

The book says you have to press it first, get all the water out.

Melissa snaps her fingers at Jackie, her attention glued to the browning onions.

MELISSA

Give me what you've got. We're out of time.

Jackie lifts the towel and peeks underneath. Bits of soggy paper stick to the tofu's remains.

JACKIE

How the fuck do you press tofu? Mash it, maybe.

She glances at Melissa, a worried expression on her face.

JACKIE

Slight problem. Looks like cottage
cheese.

Melissa looks over, horrified. Recovering, she makes a
quick executive decision.

MELISSA

Hand it over. We'll use it anyway.

She dumps the tofu into the pan and stirs. Adds in
tomatoes and assorted spices. In minutes, the mixture is
bubbling away.

She covers it with a lid, steps back from the oven.

MELISSA

Now, we wait. Twenty minutes.

JACKIE

I'm hungry now.

Melissa wipes down the stove. She shoots Jackie an
exasperated look.

MELISSA

Wait a bit, then we can try it out
together. Homemade Tikka Masala. Yum!

A dubious expression on her face, Jackie lifts the lid on
the saucepan. She takes a sniff and wrinkles her nose.

JACKIE

And why did we go with the exotic recipe?

MELISSA

Because it's fun. And because Faun said
that South Indian cuisine has a lot of
cool dishes.

JACKIE

Let me get a snack. Something to tide me
over.

Jackie rummages in a bag, pulls out an Amy's wrap labeled
"Indian Samosa".

She pops it in the microwave, ignoring Melissa's protest.

JACKIE

It's Indian. Consider it an appetizer.

Minutes later, the microwave BEEPS.

Wrap in hand, Jackie plops down in the kitchen's only chair, as Melissa washes and stacks used bowls.

JACKIE

Mid-term's tomorrow. You ready?

MELISSA

Pretty much. Then I have to pack.
Mom'll be here Saturday.

JACKIE

Ready for the holidays?

MELISSA

Almost, though I don't know what we're
doing for Chanukah and Christmas.

JACKIE

Me neither. But if this works out, I'll
be fitting into a really cute dress.

Melissa pouts as Jackie takes a bite out of her wrap.

MELISSA

I really wish you'd wait.

Jackie looks past Melissa to the oven burners.

JACKIE

Looks like some of it's done now.

Melissa whirls to see the rice burning. Puffs of smoke waft from the pot.

Removing the rice from the flame, Melissa dashes to the saucepan. She stirs the mixture. Lifts clumps of sauce that congeal to the spoon.

Defeated, Melissa turns off the burner.

She looks over at Jackie, catches her in the acting of unwrapping a vegan Tastycake.

JACKIE

What? It's vegan...

Jackie looks at her innocently, and continues to chew.

Melissa drops her spoon, and SIGHS in despair.

INT. PROFESSOR JENNINGS'S STUDY - DAY

Your typical college office - the walls lined with books, and awards. A photo in the corner depicts Jennings playing baseball. In the shot, he grins ear to ear.

Melissa hands her term paper to Jennings.

MELISSA

I expanded on Locke's theory of property, like you suggested.

Jennings adds the report to the collection of papers in his lap. He opens a folder, jots down notes.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

I mentioned it to Dean Connor, and he's interested in taking a look, too. Rest of mid-terms turn out okay?

Melissa smiles hopefully.

MELISSA

Finished the last one this morning. Pretty confident, except for physics. Fulfilled my science requirement, though.

JENNINGS

You'll do fine. I'm sure of it.

Jennings leans forward confidentially.

JENNINGS

Before the break, I did want to talk to you a bit about graduation plans.

Melissa looks taken aback.

MELISSA

I'm a sophomore. I haven't even officially declared my major.

Jennings smiles and nods.

JENNINGS

You clearly have an interest in political science. Have you thought about what you'd like to do as a career?

MELISSA

My parents are hinting at law school, but I'm not sure that's my thing.

JENNINGS

What about politics? If you want to make an impact?

Melissa looks thoughtful.

MELISSA

I could see that.

JENNINGS

Well - not to be selfish and try to steal you to my camp, but I could see that, too. From what you've demonstrated in class, you've got what it takes.

MELISSA

Thanks.

JENNINGS

But if that's the track you want to take, you need to pad your resume a bit.

Jennings taps the paperwork in his lap.

JENNINGS

The public likes to see candidates do more than just argue the issues. They need to see you're willing to act on your beliefs, get personally involved.

Melissa looks at him quizzically.

MELISSA

In other words, be more activist?

JENNINGS

Not necessarily. But well-rounded, yes. Pick something you care about. Go out and volunteer. An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory.

Standing, they shake hands.

MELISSA

I'll think it over during break, let you know.

Jennings smiles, and rolls his eyes.

JENNINGS

Trust me, you'd enjoy volunteering. Get some fresh air, escape campus for awhile. Us academic types are pretty dull, you know.

EXT. DORM PARKING LOT - DAY

A battered station wagon pulls up to the dorm's entrance, guided by MRS. WILLIAMS (45).

Melissa, Tom and Jackie greet the car, weighed down with baggage.

In the back seat, SARAH WILLIAMS (12) is barely visible. Her blonde head bobs to music on her Ipod.

Mrs. Williams exits the car - blonde and plump. She envelops Melissa in a motherly hug.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Baby!

She holds Melissa at arm's length, gives her the once-over. Behind her, Jackie mouths "Baby" at Melissa.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Everything go well with mid-terms? Get any grades back?

Mrs. Williams dusts a speck of lint from Mel's jacket.

MELISSA

No, mom. I mean, everything's good. But they don't give out grades until after break.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I know you'll do fine. You always do.

She shoots a meaningful look at Sarah, still in the car.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Sarah. Come out and say hello to your sister!

Sarah looks up briefly, then goes back to playing games on her Touch.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(to Melissa)

She got it for her birthday. Can't tear her away.

Mrs. Williams turns to Melissa's friends, gives big hugs to both.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Tom, Jackie - so good to see you!

Tom loads the suitcase into the trunk.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Thanks, dear. Looks like you've grown.
What are you, six foot four?

TOM

Six three. My parents are hoping I stop soon. They say I eat too much.

Mrs. Williams smiles, regards Jackie pleasantly.

MRS. WILLIAMS

And you look like a real lady. Behaving yourself?

Jackie nods; a study in innocence.

Satisfied, Mrs. Williams turns to Melissa.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Ready to go?

Melissa hugs her friends, climbs into the car. She throws her duffel bag in the back seat, misses Sarah by inches.

Without looking up, Sarah gives her the finger, just out of their mother's sight.

The car pulls away, and heads for home.

INT. THE FAMILY CAR - DAY

Mrs. Williams drives along, eyes glued to the road.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Tom and Jackie look well. Are they staying at school for the holidays?

MELISSA

Jackie's dad is picking her up this afternoon. Tom's flying out to Aspen tomorrow.

Mrs. Williams' eyes widen.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Aspen? Does Tom ski?

MELISSA

Yep. Been doing it since he was a kid. He actually used to compete.

Mrs. Williams nods, impressed.

MRS. WILLIAMS
Are he and Jackie dating?

MELISSA
Just friends.

Sarah watches the conversation idly, like a spectator at a volleyball tournament.

Mrs. Williams raises an eyebrow meaningfully.

MRS. WILLIAMS
Tom seems to be turning into quite the handsome young man.

Behind Melissa, Sarah kicks her chair. Melissa SIGHS.

MELISSA
We're just friends. Nothing going on.

MRS. WILLIAMS
Well, I wouldn't mind if you were dating. As long as he's the right kind of boyfriend.

Uncomfortable, Melissa attempts to reroute the topic.

MELISSA
You know, I've been talking with my advisor about plans after school ends.

MRS. WILLIAMS
Grad schools?

MELISSA
More like career plan. He was suggesting politics. I think I might like that, instead of law school.

MRS. WILLIAMS
A lot of politicians get their start as lawyers.

MELISSA
I know, but law seems just so...dry.

MRS. WILLIAMS
You think law is dry? Try listening to a session of Congress someday.

Mrs. Williams shakes off the comment, unconcerned.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Never mind. You have plenty of time to decide. Now, what's this I hear about you going vegetarian?

Melissa looks shocked.

MELISSA

Um, vegan actually. How'd you find out?

Sarah leans in, chirps gleefully from the back seat.

SARAH

She saw it on Facebook. You posted about it, right next to those pictures of you drinking. You're in big trouble!

Melissa sits back. A storm brews on her face.

MELISSA

Knew I shouldn't have friended you, Mom.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Have to keep track of you girls somehow.

She grins, her eyes still on the road.

MRS. WILLIAMS

We'll talk about the partying later. Can't have my future politician getting into any campus scandals!

EXT. THE WILLIAMS' HOME - DAY

The car pulls up the driveway, and settles into idle.

It's a modest house - with screens that need replacement, and paint chipped from the door.

Flower pots sit on the stoop, obviously cared for and nurtured.

Melissa throws open the door, dashes towards the house.

INT. THE WILLIAM'S HALLWAY - DAY

Mel bursts in, backpack slung over one shoulder.

BOB WILLIAMS (45) stands at the threshold, towel in hand - still dressed in his mechanic's uniform.

ROCKET, the family terrier, sits nearby - anxiously awaiting a treat.

Melissa throws herself happily at her father - lifted into the air in a bear-hug embrace.

Rocket bounces at their feet. His tail vibrates uncontrollably.

Mrs. Williams enters with the suitcase. Sarah trails in last, texting.

Regaining the floor, Melissa smiles at her father.

MELISSA

Hey, Dad.

MR. WILLIAMS

Hey, pumpkin.

He leans over, plants a kiss on his wife.

MR. WILLIAMS

How was the trip?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Not bad, considering both of them were in the same car.

Melissa scoops up Rocket, buries her face in his fur.

MELISSA

Rocket! I missed you so much!!

Her parents exchange amused looks.

MR. WILLIAMS

What am I, chopped liver?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Quiet. You got your hug already.

MR. WILLIAMS

So, how was school?

Sarah tugs on Melissa's sleeve, suddenly animated.

SARAH

You gotta check out the new T.V. We finally got a flat-screen!

Melissa releases Rocket to the floor, looks at her parents apologetically.

MELISSA

Let me go unpack. I'll be back in a few.

She follows her sister out of the room, Rocket close on their heels.

INT. MELISSA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Melissa sits on the bed and unpacks her suitcase.

Rocket lies at the foot of the bed. His angular head pivots, watches as Sarah wanders around the room, touching things randomly.

SARAH

Okay, so now that Mom's gone - do you have a boyfriend?

MELISSA

I told you, no boyfriend.

SARAH

But you're partying, right?

MELISSA

A little.

SARAH

How about drugs? And sex?

She grins at Melissa, who shoots her sister a "don't go there" look.

MELISSA

Don't touch that!

Sarah stops in mid-exploration of Melissa's dresser.

She moves to the closet, watches as her big sister hangs up clothes.

SARAH

So you're vegetarian now, huh? Freak.

MELISSA

Vegan, actually. Loser.

SARAH

What's the difference?

MELISSA

Vegetarians don't eat meat. Vegans don't consume any animal products. No eggs, milk, or cheese. No honey, even.

SARAH

No ice cream?

MELISSA

We have soy ice cream. We have hamburgers and hot dogs, and pizza too.

Sarah shakes her head. Doubts about her sister's sanity show on her face.

SARAH

What about leather and fur?

Melissa smiles, happy that Sarah seems to be getting the message.

MELISSA

Both off limits.

SARAH

No leather coats, or purses?

MELISSA

Nope.

Sarah looks around Melissa's room, wheels turning in her head. Melissa pulls out her phone to check her messages.

SARAH

So...can I have yours?

Melissa looks up sharply and drops her phone.

MELISSA

What?

SARAH

You know, your leather jacket and stuff. You're not going to use it.

Not waiting for permission, Sarah makes a bee-line to Melissa's closet.

She starts pulling things out: a leather jacket, belt, purse, skirt and two pairs of shoes.

Sarah holds up the skirt, visually tries it on for size.

SARAH

This is going to look so slick!

Melissa opens her mouth, but stops in mid-slur.

MELISSA

Guess I would have given them to the
Salvation Army.

Sarah scoops up the goods, and heads out of the room.

SARAH

Thanks, Mel! You going vegan is going to
be so cool!

Melissa watches her leave glumly.

MELISSA

You know, none of that's gonna fit you.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Williams family gathers for their first meal with
Melissa back home.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Aunt Blanche wants us there at five.
Last time, the guests arrived late and
Uncle Irv was already watching the game.
She wants to head that off this year,
right at the pass.

MELISSA

Is the rest of the family coming?

MR. WILLIAMS

Usual number. Figure about fifteen or
so, including the cousins on your
mother's side. Get ready for questions.
Everyone wants to know how you're doing
at school.

Mrs. Williams throws a sharp glance at Sarah, seated at
the far end.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Sarah, I saw that. Stop feeding Rocket
under the table.

Sarah gives her parents a dark look, goes back to playing
with her food.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Now, don't worry. I've already told Aunt Blanche that you're vegetarian.

MELISSA

I'm vegan.

MRS. WILLIAMS

And she promised that she'll make you something special to eat.

SARAH

Like Tofurky!

Sarah beams at the chance to show off new-found knowledge. She turns to her father proudly.

SARAH

That's a real thing. I saw a picture of it on the web.

MELISSA

No-one has to make a fuss. I'll be fine with whatever.

Mrs. Williams looks anxiously at the plates on the table.

Three of them hold baked potatoes and chicken breast, covered in gravy.

Melissa's plate is meatless - an extra helping of steamed veggies added to fill the space.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I hope you like your meal? I only found out the other day, so we didn't have any meat substitutes available. And they're a bit expensive...

MELISSA

It's great, Mom. I'm just glad to have a home cooked meal. You should see what they serve in the commons.

MRS. WILLIAMS

You should learn to cook a few recipes on your own. I'd feel better if I knew you were eating well.

She misses the pained expression on Melissa's face.

MR. WILLIAMS

You know, your mother used to be vegetarian.

MRS. WILLIAMS

That's right. I was vegetarian in high school, when I was a senior. Didn't know that, did you?

Melissa shakes her head, suddenly intrigued.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Did it for a whole semester, until graduation. Then I got into the real world, and just...sort of grew out of it.

Melissa sits back, disappointed.

MRS. WILLIAMS

But the point is, we understand where you're coming from. And we're here to support you, for as long as it lasts.

Mel's parents smile at their daughter, united in their show of support.

INT. AUNT BLANCHE'S HALLWAY - EVENING

The family stands in the hallway, pressed nose to nose in the limited space.

AUNT BLANCHE (80) bustles about them, removing coats. Round and squat, she seems quite sturdy for her age.

They step into the living room, decorated in classic old-lady style - complete with plastic on the sofa.

They're greeted warmly by clusters of RELATIVES. One after another - the line seems endless.

Aunt Blanche wanders over to Melissa, peers up through coke-bottle glasses.

AUNT BLANCHE

My, you've grown!

She reaches up on tip toe and kisses Mel on the cheek.

MELISSA

Hi, Aunt Blanche. Where's Uncle Irv?

Aunt Blanche points towards an old box television. Several male relatives have gathered around it.

UNCLE IRV (85) holds court in the center, drink in hand.

AUNT BLANCHE

We're all going to want to hear how
you're doing in school.

She pinches Mel's cheek.

AUNT BLANCHE

Have to keep tabs on my favorite career
girl, before she becomes the first famous
lawyer in the family, and leaves home for
good.

Before Mel can respond, Aunt Blanche turns to address the
guests. She waves them in the direction of the dining
room.

AUNT BLANCHE

Everybody, head toward the table. Dinner
in five minutes.

She shoots a caustic look at Uncle Irv.

AUNT BLANCHE

Whether you're ready or not.

She turns to Melissa and smiles.

AUNT BLANCHE

Don't worry, hon. Your mother told me
all about your diet. I made something
special, just for you.

INT. AUNT BLANCHE'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The family gathers at the dining room table.

Already on display and ready to carve, the turkey is huge
- even by traditional family standards.

Seated directly behind the bird, Melissa tries to hide
her dismay; her eyes round, her expression pained.

Prodded to the table, Uncle Irv waits until everyone is
seated before proceeding with the ceremonial prayer.

UNCLE IRV

Dear Lord, we give thanks for this meal
that you have put before us. We thank
you for the gift of family, and health,
and the ceiling above our heads. God
willing, we will meet again next year
under similar circumstances, and for many
years to come.

He takes a drag from his cigarette, and carves the bird with a flourish.

Relatives "oh and ah", and hand over plates to be filled.

Placing a slice on the last plate, Uncle Irv puts down his knife.

Without a word, he returns to the living room, joins a handful of other RELATIVES around the T.V.

Aunt Blanche bustles in with the side dishes. Dots the plates with stuffing and cranberry sauce.

She proudly sets down a separate plate for Melissa, complete with stuffing, steamed broccoli and fish fillet.

Melissa looks at her plate in dismay as guests dig into their meals.

She whispers (MOS) to Aunt Blanche, seated to her left.

AUNT BLANCHE

No fish?!?

Mel looks at her apologetically, and shakes her head.

Visibly upset, Aunt Blanche sweeps up the plate, and hurries it back to the kitchen.

She returns with the fish removed, an extra helping of broccoli put in its place.

Resigned to a lackluster meal, Melissa digs in.

At one end of the table, cousins MICHAEL (25) and ANDREW (19) argue over the latest game.

MICHAEL

Detroit is beating the Giants this year.
They don't stand a chance with Hill.

ANDREW

You, my friend, are going to be fu--
Really disappointed. They're gonna lose,
big time.

Melissa takes a bite out of the stuffing. Her face lights up. She shovels in more. It's delicious!

Aunt Blanche glances at Mel, still visibly irked by the fish fiasco.

AUNT BLANCHE
Is that okay, dear?

MELISSA
This is terrific, Aunt Blanche. Thanks!

Aunt Blanche smiles, glad to hear from another satisfied customer.

AUNT BLANCHE
Oh, no problem dear. I've making it for years.

She looks at Melissa confidentially.

AUNT BLANCHE
It's the chicken broth that makes it so good.

Melissa gags on a spoonful.

Across the table, Sarah GIGGLES at the unexpected entertainment.

Afraid to further offend her aunt, Melissa switches silently to broccoli, munches on a single green stalk.

AUNT BLANCHE
Have more of the stuffing, sweetie.
There's plenty available.

She dumps an extra spoonful on Melissa's plate, and looks offended when Melissa fails to dig in.

AUNT BLANCHE
Don't you want some more?

MELISSA
Um, I can't eat chicken broth. It's an animal product.

AUNT BLANCHE
But it's not meat, it's broth!

Several guests fall silent.

Melissa's mother looks across the table, speechless.

Melissa shakes her head, attempts to defuse the situation.

MELISSA
No problem. I'm full, anyway.

Aunt Blanche grabs the plate and carries it to the kitchen. She returns in a huff.

Now the only guest without a plate, Melissa sits alone in the spotlight - mortified.

It's Cousin Andrew that breaks the silence.

ANDREW

Okay, what's wrong with meat products?

Melissa gives him a look to shut up, which he ignores.

MICHAEL

(to Andrew)

Well, you mean aside from pork, which you won't touch.

ANDREW

That's different. This is about Mel.

MELISSA

I don't want to support animal cruelty, that's all.

ANDREW

How are you supporting it? Aunt Blanche bought the ingredients, not you.

Melissa sighs.

MELISSA

But eating it implies acceptance, even if I didn't pay for it.

ANDREW

Yeah, but don't you think it's rude to make a big deal, when Aunt Blanche went through the trouble of cooking a nice meal for all of us?

Michael leans over to UNCLE JESSE (50).

MICHAEL

Here we go.

ANDREW

Who are you to judge what the rest of us eat?

Melissa looks pleadingly at her mother.

Mrs. Williams looks ready to melt under the table.

MELISSA

I don't want to make a big deal about it.
Listen, I'm fine with whatever you want
to do.

Mr. Williams clears his throat.

MR. WILLIAMS

Honey, didn't you say you wanted to catch
the rest of the game?

Melissa looks at her father blankly.

MR. WILLIAMS

And you haven't had a chance to talk with
Uncle Irv about your classes. You know
he'd love to hear all about it.

Melissa nods, and gets up from the table quickly.

MELISSA

Oh yeah. Uncle Irv. Um, excuse me
everyone...

She beats a quick exit and heads to the living room.

From the vantage point of the table, the family watches
Melissa join the TV circle.

Uncle Irv takes the cigarette from his mouth long enough
to give her a kiss.

Around the table, silence is golden. Everyone breathes a
sigh of relief.

SARAH

Dad, I thought that Mel hated football.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Sarah, please shut up.

INT. MELISSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Melissa lies on her bed, types glumly on an old laptop.

She checks Facebook posts from Dan, Jackie and Tom.

There's a knock on her door. Sarah sticks her head in.

SARAH

Can I come in?

MELISSA
Sure, bug. How you doing?

SARAH
Okay.

Accompanied by Rocket, Sarah enters the room and drops down next to Mel.

Rocket jumps up, carrying his favorite squeaky toy. Rests his head soulfully on Sarah's leg.

SARAH
So, that was fun.

MELISSA
I bet Mom and Dad are pretty pissed.

Sarah GIGGLES.

SARAH
Um, yeah. They're downstairs now, discussing your punishment. But it was great when you pissed off Andrew.

MELISSA
Yeah, you're right. He can be a real asshole.

She corrects herself quickly.

MELISSA
Not that you heard me say that, of course.

SARAH
Course not.

They sit in silence, interrupted by the occasional SQUEAK from Rocket's chew toy.

SARAH
So why are you vegan? Really? Just to be cool?

Mel scowls.

MELISSA
Yeah, it's really cool to be singled out at Thanksgiving dinner, or not be able to have pizza with your friends...

SARAH
So what's the deal?

Melissa sits up, looks at her sister soberly.

MELISSA

Well, it's like this. You know pigs are actually smarter than dogs?

SARAH

Really?

MELISSA

Yeah. They've actually done experiments, and shown they're capable of thought. I'm not saying they're Charlotte's Web smart or anything, but you know they can play video games?

SARAH

No shit?

MELISSA

No shit.

Melissa smiles at her sister.

MELISSA

And what about Dolphins? Would you eat Dolphin meat?

SARAH

Eat Flipper? No way!

MELISSA

How about dog meat? You know, it's a delicacy in Korea.

Sarah gags at the thought.

SARAH

Ew.

Melissa pulls on Rocket's chew-toy. Initiates a brisk tug of war before letting go.

Rocket grumbles and curls up with his trophy. SQUEAKS rise from the dog-shaped ring of fur.

MELISSA

Well, why not?

Sarah looks at her quizzically.

MELISSA

Listen, I'm not saying that I know how intelligent animals are.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

But a lot of them, like Rocket, definitely have personality and can think. At least a bit. And they all feel pain. Even the dumb ones, like Andrew.

Sarah giggles.

MELISSA

I just don't want to be responsible for hurting them. That's all.

Sarah crosses her arms, unsatisfied by the explanation.

SARAH

So what's wrong with dairy and stuff? It's not like you're killing anything.

Melissa shakes her head, pops open a window in her browser.

MELISSA

It has to do with how the animals are treated. In the dairy industry, they keep cows in these narrow crates. And that doesn't even cover what they do to calves...

She starts to bring up pictures, when a KNOCK is heard at the door. Mrs. Williams sticks her head into the room.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Mel, can I see you outside for a minute? Sarah, go to your room.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Melissa stands in the hallway, facing both parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Williams have stern looks on their faces.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Mel, I don't want you showing pictures like that to Sarah.

MELISSA

Mom, I'm sorry about tonight. I didn't start it, and I tried to keep everything under control.

Mrs. Williams puts her arm around her husband.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I'm not talking about that right now. We understand that tonight wasn't directly your fault. But I don't want Sarah exposed to PETA propaganda and radical ideas.

MELISSA

It's not like I'm telling her to burn down medical labs.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Sarah's only 12. She's too young to be exposed to graphic pictures like that. She'll be traumatized.

Melissa looks to her father for support, becomes increasingly distraught.

MELISSA

Isn't it wrong to lie to her, and pretend that burgers aren't made out of cows, or that chickens have a happy life? What's wrong with telling her the truth and letting her make up her own mind?

Mrs. Williams sighs, her patience exhausted.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Mel, it's one thing to be vegetarian. We'll support you - you know that. But there's no reason to be radical about it. Next thing you know, you're going to insist on feeding vegan dog food to Rocket. Is that where this is going?

Melissa opens her mouth to protest.

MELISSA

Well actually, there is a...

Mr. Williams CLEARS his throat; his voice quiet but firm.

MR. WILLIAMS

I think what your mother is trying to say, is that it costs a lot for us to send you to college. And it's worth it; to see you get a proper education, and a head start in life. But we didn't send you there so you could run around, and get involved in things like this.

Mrs. Williams nods, her arms crossed.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Believe what you want, Mel, but don't start preaching to your sister. End of discussion.

Mel looks between the faces of her parents, disgusted.

MELISSA

Well, if that's the way it's going to be, I'm glad this is going to be a short visit.

She storms into her room and SLAMS the door.

Her parents stand in the hallway, look at the door in dismay.

MRS. WILLIAMS

It's going to be a long drive back.

MR. WILLIAMS

I'll tag along, just in case she gives you the silent treatment.

EXT. DORM PARKING LOT - DAY

Mel pulls the last suitcase out of the trunk of the car. Jackie hovers near-by.

Sarah is conspicuously absent for the return trip.

Melissa steps up to her parents to say goodbye.

MELISSA

Mom, Dad....I'm really sorry. I didn't want to end up fighting all weekend.

She reaches up and hugs her parents.

MELISSA

I love you guys.

Mrs. Williams holds her daughter, and kisses her warmly.

MRS. WILLIAMS

It's okay, hon. I'd forgotten what it was like to deal with a daughter older than 12. It's a different set of rules.

MR. WILLIAMS

You'll have to be patient with us, Pumpkin.

MR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
 You'll always be our little girl, so
 you'll have to forgive us for over-
 parenting at times. Okay?

Melissa grins, clearly relieved.

MELISSA
 Okay, Dad.

She runs to Jackie as her parents climb into the car.
 She spins around and waves goodbye.

MELISSA
 Love you!

She turns back to Jackie as they walk into the dorm.

JACKIE
 Tough trip?

MELISSA
 Tough? Shit, wait'll you get a load of
 this one...

INT. THE FAMILY CAR - CONTINUOUS

Back in the car, Mel's parents watch her leave.

Mrs. Williams SIGHS as the door closes behind her
 daughter, leaving them alone in the parking lot.

MRS. WILLIAMS
 I worry about her diet, Bob.

MR. WILLIAMS
 So send her a care package with some
 health bars in it. She'll be fine.

MRS. WILLIAMS
 You think she's getting too radical?

MR. WILLIAMS
 Remember when she was six, and she wanted
 to be a ballerina? Then when she was
 Sarah's age, she wanted to play the
 saxophone. We bought her that damned
 alto. Two years later, it was gathering
 dust and we had to sell it on Ebay.

He puts a comforting hand on his wife's leg.

MR. WILLIAMS

Trust me. This is just another phase she's going through. This is Melissa we're talking about. You know she'll always do the right thing.

Mrs. Williams nods, but continues to look worried.

INT. TOM AND DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Dan surfs the web, while Tom watches a movie.

There's a KNOCK at the door. The girls enter, kicking random junk out of the way.

DAN

The warriors return!

JACKIE

Glad to see you guys cleaned up while we were gone.

TOM

Bring back souvenirs?

MELISSA

You're the one that went to Aspen.

Tom grins, and puts aside his DVD player.

TOM

I did. And it was glorious.

He pats the bed next to him.

TOM

Take a load off, girls. Mel, how was the visit with the fam?

Melissa drops down next to Tom. A look of jealousy flickers across Dan's face, unnoticed by the others.

Jackie perches on the corner of Dan's bunk.

JACKIE

Don't ask. I already got an earful.

MELISSA

No big. I fought with Mom. Stupid stuff, really.

She brightens.

MELISSA

But it was cool to see Rocket.

She whips out her phone, shows pictures from the visit.

MELISSA

And Sarah. That was fun, too.

TOM

Last time we spoke, you were calling her
"The Black Plague."

Melissa looks pensive.

MELISSA

I know, but she's grown up a bit. She
turned twelve this year, and you can
actually have a conversation with her.
It's...kind of nice.

Dan pushes away from his computer and stretches.

DAN

Well, while you guys were have family
reunions, I was here...alone...being
productive.

TOM

Is that what they call it these days?

Dan throws a cup at his roommate's head. Tom ducks. It
misses him by inches.

DAN

Cara and I filed paperwork to start an
animal rights group at school. We get
accepted, that guarantees us the right to
speak at board meetings and collect dues.

Tom grimaces, gives Dan the finger.

Ignoring him, Dan continues - redirects his comments to
Melissa and Jackie.

DAN

With funding, we could buy video cameras,
put together PSAs. We can boycott the
biology department, publicize their
dissection policies.

TOM

Dude, that's my major.

Dan leans to Melissa, excited.

DAN

Mel - want to help out? You're great at debate. We could use extra voices at the protest.

MELISSA

I don't know, D. I'm not sure where I stand on all the issues.

DAN

I know you're good at graphics. So what about helping set up fliers, do some leafleting to get the word out?

Melissa shrugs - noncommittal.

MELISSA

I got yelled at enough this weekend for refusing to eat turkey. Give me time to think about it, okay? I'd really like a better grip on everything before going all super-activist.

Dan's face darkens. He turns to stare at his monitor.

DAN

(mutters)

I expected more from you, Mel. Thought you were the one that actually cared about ideas.

Melissa looks at Dan's back apologetically.

MELISSA

We just got back from break.

Dan refuses to turn around.

Jackie and Tom look uncomfortable, do their best not to acknowledge the situation.

DAN

Besides, I thought you said Jennings wanted you to do volunteer work.

MELISSA

I don't know what I want to do yet.

She looks sadly down at her phone, and scrolls through pictures taken over the holiday.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Shots of Sarah

B) Pictures of Mom and Dad.

C) A shot of Rocket, rolling in autumn leaves.

Melissa suddenly smiles. She's had an idea.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER LOBBY - DAY

Melissa stands in the lobby of the animal shelter, strains to hear PATRICIA SAUNDERS (35) over the noise.

BARKS and YELPS bounce off cement walls.

Patricia is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. A tag hangs from her pocket, identifying her as a volunteer.

PATRICIA

This is the reception area, where visitors sign in. We also screen potential adopters here - make sure they're capable of taking care of an animal.

She points to a window, facing three rows of chairs.

PATRICIA

You probably won't be doing much of that. We've got full-time employees that handle that kind of processing.

Melissa follows Patricia through a set of doors.

They enter a room, lined on one side with MEWING cat cages. A window is set into the opposite wall.

Through the glass, Melissa sees a YOUNG COUPLE playing with a PUPPY. A VOLUNTEER sits in the corner and supervises.

PATRICIA

That's the playroom - the area we use to give visitors a chance to meet the animals, see if they're a good match. You'll get to know that room quite well.

Melissa smiles as the couple rubs the puppy's belly.

MELISSA

I can do that.

The tour continues.

Melissa follows Patricia into an adjacent room, filled with industrial cages and dogs of every size.

Leashes hang from walls. Charts are taped to the cage doors, covered with codes.

PATRICIA

Before you show a dog, you want to make sure they're a good fit for the family.

Patricia bends down to one cage, containing a WHITE MINIATURE POODLE.

She lifts the clipboard, shows Melissa the chart.

PATRICIA

We test each animal that comes in, note which ones are good with kids, other pets. Ask visitors about their household situation before you even take one of these guys out.

Melissa reaches in to stroke the poodle's head. The dog wriggles furiously.

PATRICIA

Another item to keep in mind. See that date in the corner?

Patricia points to a section of the paper.

PATRICIA

We're a city shelter, with limited room. Barring behavioral issues, we keep animals for three weeks.

She picks up the clipboard, and scans the information.

PATRICIA

For instance, "Freddy" was surrendered on the Fifth. He's got five more days. He's a great little guy, but most people come in wanting a puppy. The older ones tend to get passed over.

Her voice softens.

PATRICIA

So when you show visitors around, check the dates. You may want to give some of these guys more...attention than others. Understand?

Melissa looks at Freddy. She nods, and reaches out to touch his face.

INT. BIG DOG ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Patricia leads Melissa into another room, the air thick with the sound of BARKING dogs.

Nails SCRABBLE against concrete floors.

The dogs in this room are considerably larger. They walk past GSDs, Pit Bulls, many mixes.

PATRICIA

Here's where we keep the big boys. You mentioned you have a Jack. Ever handle a large sized dog?

She eyes Melissa's relatively short stature.

MELISSA

Sure.

PATRICIA

How about Rottweilers? Pit Bulls? You comfortable with them?

MELISSA

Growing up, my neighbor had a Rottweiler named Soldier. Used to walk him when they went on vacation. I'm fine with big dogs.

Spotting a PIT BULL, Melissa crouches down. She makes a show of petting it's head, scratches behind one floppy ear.

Patricia looks relieved.

PATRICIA

Good. Some of the volunteers are scared to handle them, and our older employees just don't have the strength. Which leaves us with you...and Brian. You'll be working with him a lot.

A drop of drool hits Melissa's shoe.

Glancing up, she finds herself face to face with a SHEPHERD MIX.

Her gaze follows the leash up to the eyes of BRIAN ANDREWS (22); handsome and lean, with sandy brown hair.

He holds his hand out to Melissa, to help her up.

BRIAN

Hi. I see you've met Rufus?

EXT. EXERCISE YARD - CONTINUOUS

Melissa and Brian stroll through an exercise lot, led by a Rufus. Freddy trots along at a geriatric pace, on Melissa's leash.

They pass pens, populated by even more dogs.

MELISSA

Worked here long?

BRIAN

About 3 years. Started as a volunteer in college, figured I'd go into publishing or journalism. Something involving a desk and a laptop.

Rufus stops to investigate a bush.

BRIAN

When I started, it was just a nice change of pace from studying. There's a lot of physical activity here. Walking dogs, picking up 40 pound bags of food. Not intellectually stimulating, but a great substitute for a gym.

Brian and Melissa enter a dog run, near the back. The ground is dust, with patches of trampled grass.

A chain link fence segregates the area. A fountain flows freely in one corner.

BRIAN

When I graduated, I looked for a job, but there wasn't much. Temp work didn't pay well. And honestly? It was boring. They offered me a position, so I took it. Now I get paid to play with dogs, and do good at the same time.

MELISSA

Gotta admit, that's cool.

Brian closes the fence. They sit down on a wooden bench.

They remove the leashes, and Rufus darts free. Freddy sits in the shade between Mel's feet - content to watch passively.

BRIAN

So what's your excuse for volunteering?

MELISSA

My advisor said I needed an extra circular activity.

Rufus runs laps around the fence's perimeter.

MELISSA

Besides, I've been really getting into animal issues recently. Went vegan a few months ago.

Brian chuckles.

BRIAN

Vegan, huh?

Melissa bristles. Brian smiles, to defuse the tension.

BRIAN

That's cool. I've got vegan friends.

He tosses a ball to Rufus.

BRIAN

Considered it, but it's not my style.

MELISSA

Why not?

Rufus drops the ball in Melissa's lap, covered with slobber.

MELISSA

How can you spend so much time saving animals...and be okay with eating them?

BRIAN

(to Rufus)

Here, boy!

Brian reattaches the leash, and shakes his head. He's heard this speech before.

BRIAN

It's the natural order of things. These guys eat meat too, you know. Everything dies. That's just how nature works.

Melissa gathers Freddy, already at her feet. They venture back towards the shelter, tired dogs in tow.

BRIAN

I just want to make sure these guys are treated well, and find good homes.

They reach the shelter's back door. Brian holds it open, as Melissa and Freddy enter.

BRIAN

Politics isn't my thing. I leave that for people like you.

EXT. COLLEGE HALLWAY - DAY

Students bustle through the hallway.

Dan and Cara stand behind a table, loaded with pictures of abused animals. Most students pass the exhibit without a pause.

JACK (O.S.)

PETA, huh?

Wearing a rugby jacket with the school logo, Jack leans in for a closer look.

Behind him stands KEITH COLLINS (19), a muscled African American student, dressed in similar team colors.

Jack turns to Keith and smirks.

JACK

I hear it stands for 'People Eating Tasty Animals.'

DAN

Wow, never heard that one before. You come up with that all by yourself?

Jack pulls Keith to the table. He waves a hand over the literature, points to Dan and Cara.

JACK

Check this out. You know they don't even eat oysters or honey? They're worried about insect rights, and killing little baby bees.

Dan mutters something under his breath.

Keith shoots him a look.

KEITH
(to Jack)
I think the tree hugger just said
something about you.

JACK
What'd you call me?

Dan clears his throat, stares Jack in the face.

DAN
I said, you're a fucking speciest.

Jack pokes his friend good-naturedly.

JACK
These freaks care more about animals than
people.

Keith mutters in agreement. They turn to leave.

DAN
Which makes you no better than a fucking
racist.

KEITH
You mother fucking little...

Keith bolts for the table, pulled back at the last second
by his friend.

JACK
Come on, man. This is stupid. Let's go.

Keith grumbles, but allows himself to be led away.

They swerve to avoid Melissa and Jackie, and head towards
the exit.

The girls approach the table, concerned looks on their
faces. Melissa turns to stare at the retreating jocks.

MELISSA
You guys okay?

Sipping a mocha latte, Jackie looks over the table
silently.

CARA
We're used to dealing with assholes.

Dan shrugs, focuses on rearranging pamphlets on the
table.

DAN

Besides, someone's got to take this to the next level.

He shoots a look at Mel.

DAN

Even if it means going all super activist.

Jackie looks up from her drink, a look of indignation on her face.

JACKIE

Mel's contributing, too. You know she's volunteering at the local animal shelter?

CARA

Great job. Saving a handful of cute, fuzzy puppies.

Jackie leans across the table to defend her friend's honor - inadvertently spills drops of mocha on the literature.

JACKIE

Hey! She's busy with school. She's got a full course load and she's still volunteering three days a week. Give her a break!

Melissa elbows Jackie in the ribs.

MELISSA

Drop it.

Cara stares at Jackie in icy silence. She tilts her head to read the label on Jackie's cup.

CARA

Latte, huh?

JACKIE

Yeah. Got it from the cafeteria.

Cara looks over at Dan, an "I told you so" expression written on her face.

CARA

The cafeteria doesn't serve soy lattes.

Jackie looks puzzled, and more than a little annoyed.

JACKIE

So?

CARA

So, there's milk in it. Fucking poseur.

Melissa glances at the drink, and mutters to Jackie.

MELISSA

She's right, you know.

Cara smirks, as Melissa swings to face her.

MELISSA

Hey, leave her alone! At least she's trying.

She looks to Dan for support, but he avoids her eyes.

MELISSA

Stop making this such a purity test. Stuff like that scares people away. You do that, you're hurting your own cause.

CARA

People like you are cowards and hypocrites. Dan says you're great at talking philosophy. But I don't see you taking risks. Volunteering at a shelter isn't so god-damned dangerous.

Melissa leans across the table, nose-to-nose with Cara.

MELISSA

And you're perfect? Got special tires on your hybrid car? That's got animal products too. Or don't you know your own cause?

Jackie grabs Melissa by the elbow. Yanks her away.

JACKIE

Mel, we should really go. We have to get to class. Now.

She stares at Melissa meaningfully.

Melissa glares at Cara. Then looks over at Dan, an apologetic look in her eyes.

MELISSA

Okay. Listen, D - we still have to study.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

I've got a session at the shelter, but
I'll meet you tonight at nine. Usual
spot?

Faced with no response, Mel collects Jackie and they walk away together.

Dan opens his mouth to call to Melissa. Words fail him.

Cara puts her hand on his shoulder, in a show of support.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER LOBBY - AFTERNOON

The room's emptier than last visit. Even the dogs are quiet, except for the occasional BARK.

Melissa watches as Brian emerges from the playroom, hands busy with a wriggling puppy.

A WOMAN and DAUGHTER (6) follow behind, all smiles.

Brian grins and gives Melissa the "thumbs up." All three head for reception, to process paperwork.

Melissa looks into the lobby. It's empty.

She pauses, then walks alone into the cage room. The door CLICKS shut behind her.

She emerges moments later with a leash - and Freddy. The small dog trails along as Melissa leads him to the playroom.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER PLAYROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mel shuts the door, places Freddy gently on the floor. She drops in a seated position, cross-legged.

She pats the floor eagerly.

MELISSA

Come on, boy. Let's play!

Freddy looks at her quizzically, but doesn't move.

Melissa rolls a ball in his direction.

MELISSA

Look what I have. Get the ball..! Get the...

The ball rolls past Freddy, ignored.

It hits the back wall, bounces off into a corner.

Melissa spies a squeaky toy. She holds it up and gives it a few squeezes.

MELISSA

Come on, Freddy. Squeaky, squeaky?

No response. The last SQUEAK comes out, sad and prolonged.

Freddy wags his tail. A drop of drool hits the floor.

Melissa puts the toy down.

MELISSA

Not doing it for you, huh?

She smiles suddenly.

MELISSA

I know what you want.

Still cross-legged, she scoops Freddy into her lap.

Freddy SIGHS and rests his chin in the crook of her arm. Melissa smiles and relaxes into the moment.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Brian stands in the hallway, paperwork in hand.

The middle-aged woman and daughter shake his hand. Brian gives them the release form, and they head out the door.

Brian looks towards the playroom, and sees Melissa - still on the floor, cuddling Freddy.

Brian leans against the wall and watches the scene. He smiles...just a little.

INT. TOM AND DAN'S ROOM - EVENING

Dan walks in the door, drags his bag along the floor.

The alarm clock shows the time as 11:30. One corner of the room is lit by the glow of Tom's laptop.

The remainder of a Happy Meal clutters the rest of Tom's desk - including a supersized soda and Chicken McNuggets.

Dan SNAPS on the overhead light. Tom winces.

TOM

Thanks for the warning. Ever hear of knocking?

DAN

Why? I don't see any girls. Having fun by yourself?

Reflexively, Tom gives him the finger.

Dan dumps the contents of his bag on the bed, and rummages through.

TOM

You know, Mel was here at nine. Said you guys had a study date.

Tom watches as Dan pulls leaflets from the pile, sorts them into tidy stacks.

TOM

She stuck around for forty minutes, then had to bail. We called your phone, but you didn't pick up.

Dan fishes his phone from his pocket, glances at the display.

DAN

Oh yeah, missed it. Must have been on vibrate.

TOM

And you didn't feel that through your pants?

Dan shrugs, removes a poster tube from the bag.

Tom leans forward. A few SNAPS of his fingers gets Dan's attention and irritation.

TOM

Mel told me about the fight. And she was real upset when you didn't even call. That's not cool, man. She's a friend.

Dan looks over at Tom. A wistful expression flutters on his face, then dies.

DAN

Mel's overreacting. It wasn't that bad.

TOM

Bad enough that you didn't bother to show tonight. Where were you - hanging out with that Cara chick? You know she's bad news.

Dan stares at the floor.

DAN

Stay out of it, man. You don't understand.

He unrolls the poster - a gory, technicolor composite of pictures taken from farms, and medical facilities.

Tom fishes a McNugget off the desk, takes a bite. Chews it slowly, as he eyes the poster.

Dan shoots him a look of absolute hate.

TOM

What?

He examines the McNugget, holds it out for Dan's inspection.

TOM

Dude, this thing's made from parts even the chicken didn't want.

DAN

Ignorant fuck.

Dan turns away, pulls a roll of tape from his pocket.

Tom SIGHS, closes his laptop with a CLICK.

TOM

I understand that you gotta get a grip. You're going overboard - just like the time you protested the war.

He waves a hand towards the leaflets littering Dan's bed.

TOM

Chill out, stop taking it to extremes. Because I don't want to see you on the evening news, on some rooftop with a rifle. Even if it does get me a four-oh for the semester.

Tom takes another bite of mystery meat, points it at the wall as Dan picks up the poster.

TOM

And if you put that in my room, I'll kick your ass right out of this dorm.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER DOG ROOM - DAY

Barks echo off the walls in the crowded room.

Melissa stumbles in the door, pulled along by an OVER EXCITED LAB MIX.

MELISSA

Bailey, slow down!

Patricia and Brian watch in amusement as Bailey bounds in their direction. Melissa trails helplessly in his wake.

Patricia grins, and mutters under her breath.

PATRICIA

Big dog experience, my ass....

Bailey launches himself at Patricia. She grabs his paws, forces him into a controlled down.

Melissa catches her breath, and stares in admiration.

MELISSA

He wouldn't even sit for a jerky treat.

Patricia ruffles Bailey's ears affectionately.

PATRICIA

It's a dominance thing. Teach them control, or they'll control you. Especially these guys.

Brian glances towards the exercise yard.

BRIAN

How'd it go with the adopters?

MELISSA

Great! They're talking it over. I think they're going to take him...!

Patricia nods. A satisfied look spreads across her face.

PATRICIA

That'd make four adoptions today. The pug went an hour ago, and Brian just filled out paperwork for the silver pit. Not too shabby.

Melissa beams happily at Brian. He grins in return.

MELISSA
Four? Who else went?

She looks around the room, and spots an empty cage.

Her face brightens even further.

MELISSA
Hey, Freddy's gone! Who got him?

Brian and Patricia's faces fall. Patricia pats Brian, and walks away quietly.

Melissa looks up, confused by the reaction.

BRIAN
We adopted out the Husky this morning.

MELISSA
What about Freddy? Isn't that five...

She stops, as the implication hits home.

BRIAN
They took him in this morning.

Melissa's face crumples in shock.

MELISSA
No. Not Freddy.

BRIAN
They gave him three weeks. He was twelve years old.

Brian touches her on the shoulder.

BRIAN
I'm sorry, Mel. But we have to make room, give others the same chance we gave him.

He hugs Melissa gently.

BRIAN
Think about Bailey, and the ones we do save. That's what makes it worthwhile.

Melissa SOBS, and the tears start to fall. Bailey wags his tail and WHINES.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Students flow out of Jennings's classroom. Phones to ears and books in hand.

Jennings corners Melissa as she prepares to leave.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Ms. Williams. Long time, no see.

Melissa glances back at the now-empty classroom.

MELISSA

Um, five seconds ago in class?

Jennings raises an eyebrow.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

The status report sessions for your thesis. You know, the one on Hume? Haven't seen an update recently. Deadline's only a month away.

MELISSA

I'm sorry. I meant to check in. It's almost done.

Jennings looks at her, concerned.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

You've seemed distracted in class. Not participating as much, or paying attention. Everything ok?

MELISSA

Just personal stuff. Been really busy, between classes and the volunteer work you suggested.

Melissa pauses, shifts her weight awkwardly.

MELISSA

But I can have revisions to you by Thursday. I think you'll like my analysis of Hume's theory of causation.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

I'm sure I will.

Jennings pats her on the shoulder. He gathers his briefcase, walks with Melissa to the door.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Let me know if you need anything. We'll touch base on Thursday.

Melissa nods, relieved.

Jennings watches her walk away, a concerned look on his face.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Melissa slumps at the table, distraught.

Tom and Jackie sit opposite, and listen to the tirade.

MELISSA

So then he says it's due in less than a month. I haven't even started!

TOM

What's the delay?

Melissa waves her hands in the air.

MELISSA

Lots of stuff. Everything. School, volunteer work. Problems with Dan.

Jackie eyes Tom's yogurt greedily. She picks up a spoon to sample it.

Melissa shoots her a stern look. Jackie puts it down.

Melissa looks pleadingly at her friends, and wails.

MELISSA

I can't let my grades slip - I'm on a scholarship! What the hell am I going to do?

Tom leans back in his chair, unfazed.

TOM

No sweat. You've always been super student. Bang it out in the next few weeks. It'll be fine. We'll help - right, Jackie?

The ever attentive friend, Jackie nods in agreement.

START MONTAGE:

Melissa sits on the laundry room floor, Macbook in lap. Faun brings her a soda, which she sips gratefully.

Melissa works out in the gym at the pec deck. In front of her, Tom flashes cue cards with philosopher's names.

Jackie sits at an opposite machine, dangling her legs. Pinches an inch at her waist, looks hopefully at Melissa. Mel shoots her a look and shakes her head. She goes back to pumping iron, and reading Tom's cards.

Melissa studies alone at the library.

She sees Dan at another table, waves in his direction. He looks up emotionlessly, then goes back to writing without a word.

Melissa's face crumples. She turns back to her book, disappointment on her face.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. EXERCISE YARD - DAY

Melissa sits with Brian at the dog run, giggling.

Rufus circles the fountain, plays tag with a CHOW MIX.

MELISSA

So then she goes to do a jello shot. And I have to tell her it's off limits, 'cause of the gelatin...

Brian nods, listening.

BRIAN

So, what'd she do?

MELISSA

She put it down and had a Bailey's. I didn't have the heart to tell her.

Brian laughs, while Melissa shakes her head.

MELISSA

I know Jackie's only in it because of me. When we were freshmen, we joined lacrosse together, even though she hates sports. Couldn't hold the stick right. Kept getting hit with the ball. Know how much that bruises, even with protective gear?

BRIAN

She's being supportive. That's great.

MELISSA

Everyone's been pretty much supportive - even though it's a major change. Even my parents got used to it.

Brian throws a ball to the dogs, and shrugs.

BRIAN

Only fair. From what you've told me, you're pretty supportive of your friends, too.

MELISSA

I just wish things were better with Dan. He's been avoiding me ever since that fight. He can be a pain in the ass, but we've been friends forever. And I don't want to lose that.

She smiles sadly.

MELISSA

At one point, I even thought he might have a crush on me.

Melissa plays with Rufus' leash.

MELISSA

Nothing ever happened. We were pretty silly as freshmen. I was probably imagining things.

Brian regards Melissa seriously.

BRIAN

Why not? You're smart, kind, really ambitious. And cute, too. What's so silly about having a crush on you?

Startled, Melissa looks up as Brian leans closer. She settles into his arms, beaming.

The kiss grabs Rufus' attention. He darts across the yard to drop a slobbery ball in their lap.

Front paws on their knees, he stands panting and waiting for a response. He waits a long time.

INT. CARA'S DORM - EVENING

A single occupant dorm room - everything neat and in it's place. Goth posters hang on walls, add a touch of punk to the decor. The lighting's dim.

Cara and Dan sit on the floor, close enough to touch.

Cara brushes a strand of hair from her face, SIGHS.

CARA

We're wasting time with the table. No-one's taken a pamphlet in over a week.

Dan grins; inspiration sparks in his eyes.

DAN

What if...

He places his hand on a brochure, slides it across the floor, towards Cara.

DAN

...we move the table to right outside the cafeteria. Still on public grounds - but close enough that everyone has to see it, walking in?

Cara grins.

CARA

Go to the source. I like it.

Dan beams. Glances at his hand; his fingers almost touch Cara's. He looks up, flustered. Cara smiles back, her expression surprisingly sweet.

CARA

I've really enjoyed the last few weeks.

She stares at the floor - littered with brochures.

CARA

Faun still thinks this'll work. Play by the rules, and expect things to change.

She bites her lip, shuffles the papers.

CARA

Sometimes, I wonder if it's worth it. Inspiring some freshman to stop wearing leather for a week. Or volunteer at a shelter, and think that's some great sacrifice...

DAN

Hey..!

Dan's face darkens. He shakes his head.

DAN

...don't go there.

Cara looks up at him quietly.

CARA

We have to get more aggressive. You agreed with that.

Dan nods, nervous.

CARA

I think we need to start up Operation ALF. If you think you're ready.

Dan nods again, more determined. Cara slides a hand-drawn map across the floor, back to Dan.

CARA

Worked out some of the details. Timing, worker shifts. But we need extra help, no way Faun would go for it. If you've got anyone you can ask...

Dan pauses for a moment. Then nods reluctantly.

INT. CAMPUS COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

Sun shines through the window of the student center.

The coffee house is bright and cheerful - filled with the CLATTER of plates being cleared, lattes being foamed.

Melissa sits near the entrance. A notebook covers the table's surface, leaves little room for her Venti cup.

At the counter, Professor Jennings picks up a large latte, topped off with foam.

He's accompanied by DEAN CONNOR (53) - a middle aged man with sleek gray hair and a very expensive suit.

Jennings steps away, towards the exit.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

(to Dean Connor)

Adding an assistant to the department wouldn't be prohibitively expensive.

Jennings spots Mel, and stops at the table.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Ms. Williams. Good to see you being productive!

He touches Connor's sleeve, points to Melissa.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

I don't know if you've officially met Melissa Williams. She's that sophomore I told you about, taking my Ethics in Government class. One of my most promising students. Melissa, meet Dean Connor. Head of the Political Science division.

Jennings beams.

Connor nods at Mel, and shakes her hand.

DEAN CONNOR

High praise, coming from this one. If he keeps that up, make sure he gives you an A.

The Dean looks at his watch, then turns to Jennings.

DEAN CONNOR

Board meeting in thirty minutes. We'll discuss the budget in more depth tomorrow?

Jennings nods, and pats the Dean amiably on the shoulder. The older man leaves.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

(to Melissa)

It's called networking. Very useful in politics. Get good at it.

He points to the empty seat across from Melissa.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Mind if I join you?

Melissa shakes her head "no." Jennings settles into the chair, takes a sip from his cup.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

How's the volunteer work coming?

MELISSA

Great! I'm volunteering at the local animal shelter, and I'm really enjoying it. I get to exercise, play with dogs. And it's terrific whenever one of them gets adopted.

She shakes her head, beaming.

MELISSA

You were right; volunteering is a great change of pace. Thanks for recommending it.

Jennings looks at the contents of Melissa's cup. The coffee's midnight black.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

You like the pure stuff, eh? Too many late nights studying?

Melissa shrugs, and nods at the notebook. The pages are crammed full of writing, even in the margins.

Jennings pushes his latte towards Melissa.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Try this. It's a Chai Tea Latte, my favorite. Absolutely delicious.

Melissa looks at the foam with hesitation.

Jennings raises an eyebrow.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

I'll pour it in a separate cup. No teacher cooties that way.

MELISSA

Thanks, but... I went vegan a few months ago. No milk allowed.

She looks at Jennings and winces. Almost looks like she expects to get hit.

Jennings just grins.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Vegan, huh? Seems to be a lot of that going around. Dan Kleiner's been bringing that up in class, non-stop. You two get infected by the same carrier?

MELISSA

Pretty much. Different symptoms, though.

Jennings crosses his arms with a SIGH.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Been thinking through the issues on that?

Mel nods.

MELISSA

A lot. I've been reading Singer, Froer. I thought about bringing it up in class, but it didn't seem appropriate.

Mel looks at Jennings hopefully.

MELISSA

It's one thing to say "I won't eat meat", or "I won't wear leather". But when you get into specifics, it's a lot more complicated than you'd think.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

It always is.

Melissa leans across the table, suddenly animated.

MELISSA

I mean, what about animals that are killed harvesting vegan crops? Do they count? And what about the impact of agriculture on natural habitats?

She takes an enthusiastic SLURP from her coffee, then continues on in the same breath.

MELISSA

And what about animals that have to eat meat? What do we do about them? What if it turns out that a vegan diet really isn't ideal? How far should we compromise, before saying we have to eat meat for our health?

Jennings crosses his arms, a "devil's advocate" gleam in his eye.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

What about animal testing? Should you abstain from medicines obtained through the use of lab rats, or primate test subjects?

Melissa SLAPS the table. The drinks jostle and spill...just a little.

MELISSA

Exactly!

She looks at Jennings apologetically. Wipes drops of foam off the table with a napkin.

MELISSA

Where do you draw the line? At clams that don't have nervous systems...just because they're classified as animals?

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

You could use intelligence as the defining criteria. But if so, where does it start? At shrimp? Bees? Fish? How do you do that, without being arbitrary?

Melissa looks at Jennings helplessly.

MELISSA

Not too many people I can talk to about this. So many gray areas to discuss.

Jennings sighs.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Welcome to my world. Moral ambiguity's a bitch, isn't it?

He stands up, pats Mel on the shoulder.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Glad to see you're not taking the black and white approach. Wouldn't expect any less from my top student.

Mel looks at Jennings, gratitude on her face.

MELISSA

Thanks for listening. And for being patient with the thesis this semester.

Jennings grabs his cup. Takes one last, satisfied swig.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Any time you want to talk, let me know. You know my office hours.

He heads towards the door, and points at Melissa.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

But don't let it affect your studies. I get cranky when I don't get papers on time.

And then he's gone.

Melissa gathers together her notebook and cup.

She looks towards the entrance and smiles.

INT. FRAT PARTY - NIGHT

The gang sits on the couch as Melissa officially introduces Brian to her friends.

MELISSA

Brian, this is Tom and Jackie.

Jackie waggles her fingers in Brian's direction. She winks at Melissa, gives her the "okay" signal.

Melissa blushes.

She points to Dan, who stands at the end of the couch. One hand on the arm, the other wrapped around a whiskey glass.

MELISSA

And my friend Dan, who doesn't know how to sit.

Dan's eyes slide in Brian's direction. He looks slightly inebriated, and very disinterested.

DAN

Hey.

BRIAN

Mel's told me all about you guys.

JACKIE

Uh-oh.

Tom hands Brian a beer as Melissa and Jackie GIGGLE. He examines Brian in mock-appraisal.

TOM

You're the guy who's been taking up all of Mel's time. Seducing her with cute fuzzy puppies.

Hearing the words, Dan flinches. He looks dully at Melissa, and catches her eye.

DAN

Mel, can I see you for a minute?

Her smile dies mid-sentence.

Melissa walks with Dan to the back of the room. They lean up against a wall to talk.

MELISSA

What's up?

Dan looks extremely uncomfortable.

DAN

I wanted to apologize for how I've been acting. I said some harsh things, and I'm sorry.

MELISSA

It's okay.

DAN

I mean, I'm really happy for you and Brian, and I wanted to smooth things over between us. We've got too much history to let things get out of hand over a stupid disagreement.

Melissa sighs, relieved.

MELISSA

I know. I feel the same way. I miss spending time with you too, D.

At this, Dan perks up.

DAN

Listen, Mel. I wanted to talk to you about doing something. But with the way things were, I didn't feel comfortable.

Melissa eyes at him suspiciously.

Dan leans closer, speaks in confidence.

DAN

I've been planning an intervention over at Greig's Farm. You know, the one about thirty minutes from campus?

Melissa's jaw drops open.

MELISSA

Oh, no. No.

DAN

Word is, conditions on the farm are really bad. But no-one's brought charges, because there isn't any proof.

MELISSA

This is a really bad idea.

Dan waves his drink around dramatically.

DAN

Hear me out. I'm not talking about protesting, or doing anything violent. I'm just going to sneak in and take some pictures. We post them on the web, get some media attention, and that's it. No risk involved.

MELISSA

No risk involved? It's trespassing!

Dan puts down his glass, and grabs her by the shoulders.

DAN

But for a really good cause! An hour's worth of work, and we save animal's lives. Isn't that worth it?

He sees Mel's hesitation. His face falls.

DAN

But you don't want to risk it. That's cool, I get it. Not everyone's cut out to be an activist.

Dan picks up his drink. Opens the sliding glass doors, and walks to the backyard. He stares out at the lawn, his back to Melissa.

Disturbed, Mel glances across the room.

Still on the couch, Tom, Jackie and Brian have clearly hit it off. They laugh and joke (MOS) as Tom gestures expansively.

Mel looks pensive.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. PROFESSOR JENNING'S STUDY

JENNINGS

...an ounce of action is worth a ton of theory...

EXT. EXERCISE YARD

BRIAN

...you're pretty supportive of your friends, too...

INT. COLLEGE PARTY

DAN

...it's cool, not everyone's cut out to be an activist...

BACK TO PRESENT

Mel looks to Dan, alone on the patio.

She squares her shoulders, and walks outside. She touches Dan's arm. He looks at her, his eyes red.

MELISSA

Just pictures? You promise?

Dan nods mutely.

Melissa shudders, and looks him dead in the eye.

MELISSA

Okay, I'm in. But just to keep you safe, make sure you don't do anything even more dumb.

Dan smiles happily.

EXT. GREIG'S FARM - NIGHT

Clothed in dark garb, Melissa and Dan scale the fence surrounding Greig's farm. Knotted wood with strands of wire strung between the gaps.

Dan's loaded down like a pack animal. A duffel hangs off one shoulder, a camera dangles from his neck. Both carry flashlights. Neither are lit.

Dan points across the muddy field.

DAN
Studied the layout for weeks. The pig
barn's to the north, that direction.

He swings around, points out a structure to his left.

DAN
But we gotta get pictures of the chickens
first.

Melissa steps in a puddle, and grimaces.

MELISSA
You said this was going to be quick.

Dan nods vigorously.

DAN
It will be, I promise. A few shots, and
we're outta there.

They head for the barn - a smaller building with light
seeping out around the edges of the doorway.

Dan fishes in the backpack, produces a bolt cutter.

Given the age of the lock, it doesn't take much time.

INT. CHICKEN BARN - CONTINUOUS

They squeeze in, open the door just enough to pass
through.

Inside, the glare of lamps turn night into day. Melissa
shields her eyes with her hands.

A moment later, she lowers her hands to her mouth and
nose, gags and coughs.

Dan tosses her a dust filter mask.

DAN
Put this on.

Melissa snaps the mask in place.

Dan moves quickly through the aviary, snaps pictures of
cages and diseased hens.

DAN
Lighting's great here, thanks to forced
molting. Shouldn't take long.

Mel wanders to the center of the barn - an open penned area bathed in light.

Hundreds of birds mill around. With little room to spare, they climb over each other, flutter their wings.

The CLUCKING is deafening.

Mel spots a chicken with a broken wing. It flops along the fence, in an unsuccessfully attempt to avoid being trampled by the other birds.

Melissa pulls out her phone and snaps pictures.

She looks up as Dan calls to her.

DAN

Got enough shots. Let's go.

EXT. GREIG'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

The two trudge across the lot, towards the pig barn.

Mel looks visibly shaken.

MELISSA

You read about this stuff in books.
Seeing it is so different.

DAN

Yeah. Smelling it, too. You see the
filth in there? Now you know why I want
to see this exposed?

Melissa shudders, and fights to keep up with Dan.

They reach the barn and stop, faces covered in shadow.

Dan turns on his flashlight, starts working on the chain with the bolt cutter.

Minutes pass before the chain drops to the dirt. The door swings open.

INT. PIG BARN - CONTINUOUS

In the dark, Melissa and Dan pull out flashlights, play them over pens and crates.

Light falls on a gestation crate. Inside, a pregnant sow lies in straw. Only an inch separates her from the crate's walls.

Melissa bends down, examines flecks of dried blood on the front bars.

Dan follows her gaze.

DAN

That's from chewing the bars until their teeth bleed.

Melissa looks up at him, horrified.

DAN

They live in those crates for years, go crazy from boredom.

He removes the camera from around his neck, and snaps a few pictures of the crate.

DAN

Have to get some shots from the other end. Stick around, I'll be right back.

Left alone, Melissa wanders the cages. Takes pictures of piglets, other sows in crates.

She hears a CLANG, and swings her flashlight in the direction of the sound.

It's Dan - in the last stages of breaking open a batch pen, housing several SQUEALING hogs.

Leash in hand, he pries open the door and extracts one of the smaller pigs.

MELISSA

What the hell!?!?

She rushes over, and slams the gate with a body check.

MELISSA

You promised! I'm not going to let you steal anything!

Dan glares at her as he fights to secure the leash around the pig's neck.

Frightened, the pig fights back, and bucks against the restraint.

DAN

You want to leave him here to get slaughtered?

Melissa stares at her friend, who has clearly gone insane.

MELISSA

What do you think you're going to do with him? We drove here in a Mazda, for christ sake!

Dan smirks, a look of superiority on his face.

DAN

Got that covered. Cara's got a truck and pen over on the south side.

He looks at his watch.

DAN

She should be there about...now.

He turns from Melissa, pulls the pig out of the barn.

MELISSA

You bastard.

Unsure of what else to do, she follows him outdoors.

EXT. GREIG'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Melissa stands in the cold, her arms crossed.

At the far end of the farm, Cara's truck is barely visible. A light flashes on and off.

Dan returns the signal with his flashlight, holds the pig down with his spare arm.

Dan looks at Melissa, frustrated.

DAN

Want to give me a hand?

MELISSA

I'm not going to be part of this.

Dan rolls his eyes.

DAN

Fine, thought I'd ask.

INT. PIG BARN - CONTINUOUS

The remaining pigs in the pen pace back and forth, agitated by the intrusion.

Stressed to the breaking point by Dan's efforts, the door hinges bend. Metal SCREECHES as it tears loose from the pen.

The door falls to the floor, trampled by a herd of escaping pigs.

EXT. GREIG'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Pigs burst from the barn door. They flow around Melissa and Dan, fan out in multiple directions across the farm.

One of them collides with Melissa, who drops her phone.

Hooves hit the ground around it, bury it deep in the mud.

MELISSA

Oh, shit! Dan!

Dan fights through the melee, drags his captive pig towards Cara's truck.

CARA

Hurry! This way!

Melissa attempts to herd some of the pigs back to the barn. She has no luck - they've spread out too far.

DAN

We have to go. Now! You coming?

Melissa spins around, aware of the clock ticking.

She swallows hard. Then turns from Dan and runs in the opposite direction, towards her car.

EXT. DORM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Melissa's Mazda sits in the dorm parking lot, parked haphazardly. Muddy smears streak the door.

INT. MELISSA'S SHOWER - CONTINUOUS

Melissa stands in the shower, shaking and sobbing.

Outside, muddied clothes lie in a heap on the floor.

She scrubs with soap, but somehow can't get clean.

INT. MELISSA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa shuffles out of the bathroom, dressed in gray sweats, baggy tee and slippers.

Slowly, she walks past walls decorated with "cute" posters, several academic certificates.

She crawls into bed, pulls the comforter to her chin. Curles into a fetal position and stares at the clock.

INT. MELISSA'S DORM ROOM - MORNING

Light shines into Melissa's face from the window. She opens her eyes, and blinks.

A few inches from her face is a picture of her family. They're all smiles, gathered together in a group hug. A Hallmark frame around the picture declares "World's Best Daughter!"

Shuffling her feet, Melissa heads for the bathroom.

She avoids the muddy clothes on the floor, and walks towards the sink.

She brushes her teeth, and looks at herself in the mirror. Red rimmed eyes stare back at her.

She sighs, and heads back to the pile of clothes.

Melissa picks up the jeans by the waistband. Holds them out at full length, making every effort to avoid touching the mud on the fabric.

She fishes in the pockets. Tries the back. The front. Nothing.

She heads to her jacket, hung on the back of the door. Nothing in those pockets, either.

MELISSA

Where the hell did I put my phone?

A look of realization crosses her face.

MELISSA

Oh.

She drops the coat on the floor.

She stands there, shaking and stunned.

INT. TOM AND DAN'S ROOM - LATER

Tom sits at his desk, browses through soft porn on the web. He clicks a link, grinning.

TOM

Rosario Dawson, you still got it goin'
on...

BANG.

There's a flurry of knocks at the door. Each one louder, more insistent than the last.

Tom jumps from his chair, quickly switches to the Weather Page on Yahoo.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Tom shuffles to the door.

TOM

Okay, I'm coming.

He opens the door.

It's Melissa. Now dressed, and clearly irate.

Tom shoots a quick look at his computer screen. Nothing incriminating pops up. He sighs in relief.

TOM

Hey Mel, come in. Just working on a
paper for class.

Melissa storms in the door, looks around frantically.

MELISSA

Where is he?

Tom drops down on his bed.

TOM

Who?

He stops in mid-sentence; frozen by her sudden glare.

TOM

Oh. You mean Douche Bag Dan. Not here.
Didn't come home last night - probably
stayed over at Cara's.

MELISSA

What dorm is she in?

Tom shrugs with indifference.

TOM

Dunno. She's not my friend.

Mel stares at Tom for a moment, then collapses on Dan's bed in frustration. Buries her face in her hands.

Tom's at her side in seconds. He puts an arm around Mel, and hugs her gently.

TOM

Okay, calm down. Tell me what the Fuck-Head did, and I'll kill him for you.

Mel looks up. Tears stain her cheeks. Though it looks like they've stopped; at least for now.

She shivers, and looks into Tom's eyes helplessly.

MELISSA

You know Greig's Farm, over on 87?

TOM

Yeah, Greig's. Dan's been talking about doing a rescue over there for months.

Tom stops. His jaw drops.

TOM

Don't tell me he suckered you into that.

Melissa wails.

MELISSA

He told me it was just going to be pictures! Next thing I know, he's taking pigs out of the barn. And Cara shows up out of nowhere with a truck. Half the animals escaped. Probably ended up on the road, and got hit. And it's all my fault!

Tom pauses to digest this bit of information.

TOM

Oh, shit.

Disgust dawns on his face.

He looks at Melissa, crumpled helpless on the bed.

The tears look like they're about to start up again.

TOM

Dan lies to you, and you think this is all your fault?

MELISSA

He couldn't have done it without me.

TOM

You're one of the only good friends he's got. Bastard shouldn't have pulled you into this.

He turns to Melissa, helps her into a sitting position.

He looks at her sincerely, bravado suddenly gone.

TOM

Mel, you know how I feel about this vegan stuff.

Mel nods tentatively.

Tom gazes in her eyes.

TOM

I think you're a bunch of fucking wack jobs, that care more about animals than people. And you all really need to get laid.

Mel SNIFFLES, then bursts out laughing.

TOM

But if there's anything good about you guys, it's what you've been trying to do. You care about animals. You're working at that shelter, and making a difference. I respect what you're doing. Even if I don't understand it.

Tom hands Melissa a tissue. She wipes her nose gratefully.

MELISSA

Thanks. I needed that.

Tom grins.

TOM

But the next time I see that ass-wipe, I'm shoving a sausage down his throat.

He pauses, looks at Melissa quickly.

TOM

Didn't mean that in a gay way. I swear.

A key CLICKS in the lock.

Tom and Melissa look up, as the door swings open.

It's Dan.

Dean Connor stands next to him, a grim look on his face.

A semi circle of students fan out behind the two, mouths open and gawking.

Faun and Jackie are in the group, horrified looks frozen on their faces.

Dan walks into the room, his head down. He's silent. Even more uncommunicative than usual.

Dean Connor crooks a finger at Melissa, gestures for her to follow.

Melissa walks out quietly, unable to look her friends in the eye.

INT. DEAN CONNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Lavishly furnished, the office is more officious than Professor Jennings's study. Bookcases line the walls, flanked by leather couches.

A mahogany desk takes center stage. The only thing more imposing is Dean Connor himself, seated behind the desk.

Melissa sits in the visitor's chair, looking small.

Professor Jennings stands to one side, shoulder to shoulder with Melissa's parents.

DEAN CONNOR

We received the call from authorities last night, after they found your phone at the scene. They intercepted your friends speeding on Route 87, along with the stolen...property...still in the truck.

Melissa bites her lip, her voice barely audible.

MELISSA

They're not my friends.

DEAN CONNOR

Both students spent the night in jail, and were released this morning to their parent's custody. Needless to say, the owner of the farm was quite upset, and expressed interest in pressing charges.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

The university is fully aware of the severity of the situation.

He turns to Melissa.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

All three of you should consider yourselves lucky. Greig's Farm opens onto a main highway. If any of the pigs had gotten past the main fence, this could have been far worse.

DEAN CONNOR

As it stands, University policy for students convicted of criminal activity is expulsion, after formal investigation by our disciplinary review board.

Mrs. Williams GASPS. Melissa turns pale, and looks at the floor.

DEAN CONNOR

There are, however, extenuating circumstances in your daughter's case.

He looks over at Jennings, who addresses Mel's parents.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Mr. Kleiner made it clear that Melissa was unaware of plans to remove anything from the farm. While that doesn't excuse willful trespass, it is a mitigating factor.

Dean Connor holds up one formidable hand. The room falls silent.

DEAN CONNOR

Based on your daughter's academic record, and a very strong recommendation from Professor Jennings, we're willing to accept probation, and forego additional disciplinary proceedings.

Mr. Williams rests a hand on his daughter's shoulder.

MR. WILLIAMS

Which means?

Dean Connor comes as close to smiling as the lines of his face will allow.

DEAN CONNOR

Barring any further incident, everything will be fine.

Mel's parents rush forward to thank the Dean.

They gather their daughter, and usher Melissa out of the office with silent efficiency.

As the door closes behind them, Jennings settles into the visitor's chair.

JENNINGS

Well, that went well.

The Dean pours a glass of water from a snifter.

DEAN CONNOR

This opens us up to a possible lawsuit, if the owner pushes the issue. I hope she's worth it.

JENNINGS

Ms. Williams is one of my best students. Sharp, capable, has a lot of potential. This is just a case of getting mixed up with the wrong crowd. I'd stake my reputation on it.

Dean Connor looks at him pointedly.

DEAN CONNOR

You just did.

Jennings SIGHS, and rises to leave.

JENNINGS

I'll follow-up tomorrow morning with the board, let you know the status regarding her terms of probation.

His hand is on the doorknob when Dean Connor clears his throat.

DEAN CONNOR

Between you and me...

Jennings turns to face his boss.

DEAN CONNOR

I heard from the investigating officer that conditions on the farm were clearly substandard. They'll be forwarding information to the USDA for investigation. I doubt the owner's going to have time to press charges against Ms. Williams.

He looks at Jennings drily.

DEAN CONNOR

Your girl got lucky on this one.

JENNINGS

I know.

INT. MELISSA'S DORM ROOM

Melissa sits on the bed, the mood is subdued.

Mr. and Mrs. Williams stand in front, forming a protective parental shield.

Melissa looks at them nervously.

MELISSA

You're not mad?

Her mother shakes her head firmly.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Oh, we're mad. Don't think this is over.

MR. WILLIAMS

We'll be discussing it in the car, to decide how best to handle this. We'll let you know.

Mrs. Williams looks at Mel with motherly concern.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Honey - are you sure you don't want to come home for a few days, take a break?

Melissa considers the option.

MELISSA

Um, I don't think I want to be around for the drive home.

Jackie appears in the doorway, flanked by Brian.

MELISSA

Besides, I'd rather face the music now,
and get it over with. Thanks for not
killing me.

She stands, gives her parents a timid kiss. She hugs her
mother - and clings to her for a full minute.

Her parents leave just as Brian enters.

Jackie waves from the doorway. Then she disappears, and
leaves them alone.

BRIAN

Hey, you.

MELISSA

Hey. Heard the news?

Brian sits down on the bed, next to Mel.

BRIAN

Yep. You okay?

MELISSA

Been better.

BRIAN

I can imagine.

MELISSA

All we were going to do was take some
pictures. I didn't know they were
planning to...

Brian cuts her off in mid-sentence.

BRIAN

It's okay. Jackie filled me in on the
details.

Mel smiles weakly, looks up at Brian.

MELISSA

So, we're okay?

Brian smiles.

BRIAN

We're fine. I just never knew I was
dating such an outlaw.

Melissa smiles shyly as Brian takes her hand.

INT. MELISSA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A cough from Jackie gets the couple's attention.

They look up. Tom and Dan hover in the hallway, arms loaded down with boxes.

Melissa looks at Brian, who nods.

She heads for the doorway, her eyes locked on Dan.

TOM

Looks like it's moving day. Helping the D-ster with a few boxes.

Melissa smiles briefly, and turns her attention to Dan, her eyes filled with a mixture of reproach and regret.

MELISSA

You're getting expelled?

Dan avoids her gaze. Looks at the floor, the wall. Anywhere but Melissa.

DAN

Suspended for now, but it's just a formality. It's not like they really want me around here.

Melissa chews her lip in hesitation - reluctant to insult to Dan's injury.

MELISSA

You should have told me.

Dan looks up. A shudder shoots through his thin frame.

DAN

Would you have gone, if I'd told you the rest of the plans?

MELISSA

No.

Dan stares at her in resignation. His eyes are dull, the spark extinguished.

DAN

You saw what it was like in there. We had to do it.

Melissa pauses, as images of the chickens and pigs flood her memory.

MELISSA

You shouldn't have lied. There are other ways.

DAN

Not for them. And not in time to make a difference.

Dan shrugs, gestures to Tom to keep moving.

He turns to Mel.

DAN

See you around.

MELISSA

See you, D-

Mel watches Dan's back as he moves the last of the boxes out of the dorm.

In the street, she hears the REV of a car engine.

Tom re-enters the dorm. His hands are empty. And he's alone.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

The laundry room seems silent. No washing machines run, no driers tumble - no students fold bedsheets on the counter.

Melissa sits cross-legged on the floor. No reading material graces her lap. She sits and stares across the room, at nothing in particular.

Faun sticks her head in the doorway. Her dreads swing with the momentum.

FAUN

There you are. Gang's been looking for you. Especially Brian.

Faun waggles her eyebrows meaningfully.

MELISSA

Hey.

Faun's smile slips from her face. She ambles over the Melissa's corner, regards her seriously.

FAUN

Should have known to look here first.
The way you party, it's either the
laundry or the library.

She observes Melissa's lack of study material.

FAUN

No textbook today. You okay, hon?

Melissa looks up from her reverie, startled.

MELISSA

Sorry. Guess I came here to think.

FAUN

You mean, hide?

MELISSA

Yeah, hiding's a good word for it.

Faun smiles sympathetically.

FAUN

Not that there's anything wrong with
that. Wanna talk?

MELISSA

What's to discuss? Just trying to figure
things out. Unsuccessfully.

Faun sits down on the floor, joins Melissa in staring
across the room. After a moment of silence, Melissa
looks at Faun expectantly.

MELISSA

Well?

The edges of Faun's lips curl up into a wry smile.

FAUN

What do I look like, Yoda?

She shoots a quick glance at Mel.

FAUN

Wait a minute. Don't answer that.
Please.

MELISSA

Okay, I know I'm being a drag.

Faun raises an eyebrow.

FAUN

Well?

Mel sighs, rolls her eyes.

MELISSA

I'm just feeling confused. Been kind of a tough week. Think you already got the memo on that one.

FAUN

Oh, that? Heard something about it.

MELISSA

Just trying to figure out how things got out of control, so quick.

Faun listens attentively.

MELISSA

It seemed so easy. Avoid some animal products, and everything's cool. Next thing I know, we're breaking into barns and liberating pigs.

FAUN

And nearly getting expelled -

Melissa shoots her a look.

FAUN

Sorry - sore topic. You were saying?

MELISSA

It's just... It seems like it turned into such a slippery slope.

Faun nods sympathetically.

FAUN

Yeah, it can be like that. You just have to set limits on where you want to take it. And how fast.

Melissa smiles cynically.

MELISSA

Thanks, Yoda.

FAUN

Take me, for instance. Two years into being vegan, I started having health issues. Nothing big.

FAUN (CONT'D)

Just a few aches and pains, some weight gain from the carbs.

Faun looks at her hands intently.

FAUN

In retrospect, it was just a case of being a junk food vegan. Relying a bit too much on Boca Burgers. But at the time, it really made me question if I'd made the right decision. So I quit, and went back to eating fish for awhile.

Melissa turns to her, surprised.

MELISSA

You told me that you turned vegan, and never looked back.

Faun continues, now in full confession mode.

FAUN

I...exaggerated a bit on that one. Fact is, I was segan for six months, while I sorted stuff out.

MELISSA

Segan?

FAUN

Someone who eats fish, but stays away from dairy and eggs.

Faun shrugs.

FAUN

I swear, it made sense at the time. But I couldn't justify it long-term. Kept coming back to the same issues that made me go veggie in the first place. So I cleaned up my act, made some changes. And got back on the wagon. You have to do the same thing, figure it out for yourself.

Melissa nods, sighing.

MELISSA

You know, I saw what it was like in that farm. It wasn't pretty. When we got into that fight, Cara called me a coward. I just don't want to quit for the wrong reason. Because it's too hard, or just because I got in trouble one time.

Faun stands up, and pats Melissa on the back.

FAUN

Cara has a big mouth. You have to figure this one out yourself. Live with your own conscience.

Faun tucks her dreads behind her ears.

FAUN

Think I'll leave you to your...laundry. I'll let the guys know you'll meet up later?

Faun pauses, her hand on the door.

FAUN

You miss Dan?

MELISSA

A bit. We were friends for years. After this, we'll probably never speak again.

Faun nods sadly.

FAUN

You never know.

MELISSA

You miss Cara?

A wan smile crosses Faun's face.

FAUN

Tell you the truth - not so much. C was a bit too dramatic for my style. And her taste in music really pissed me off.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Sun shines through the window at the commons cafeteria.

Four students gather around a table.

Four plates sit in front of them, loaded down with bacon and eggs, a cheese omelet, oatmeal and a fruit cup.

Faun digs into a strawberry, points it at Jackie's plate.

FAUN

You gave up the cause. Cheese and eggs. Traitor.

Her eyes wide with innocence, Jackie points at Tom.

He listens to the conversation, contentedly decimating his bacon-egg sandwich.

JACKIE

Look at him. At least mine's vegetarian.

Faun gives her an arch look, winks at Tom.

FAUN

Tom doesn't count - he's a heathen. Come back from the dark side, Jackie, before it's too late!

Melissa kicks Faun under the table.

MELISSA

Leave her alone. At least she's trying.

Tom eyes Melissa's oatmeal, sprinkled with cranberries and walnuts.

TOM

Surprised you stuck with it, Mel. Especially after what happened last month. And you're still game?

Melissa stops in mid-chew, and shakes her head.

MELISSA

I still want to do the right thing.

Seeing Tom's look of disgust, Melissa sits up straight in her chair, points an accusing finger in his direction.

MELISSA

Besides, I thought you liked that I had my own opinions, and a strong sense of values.

Faun pats Melissa's shoulder reassuringly.

FAUN

You can't change the world all at once. Especially when it comes to Tom.

Mel wipes her face, and stands up from the table.

MELISSA

Listen, guys. Gotta go. Got an appointment with Professor Jennings to go over next year's curriculum.

The group nods, and waves at Melissa as she leaves.

INT. PROFESSOR JENNING'S STUDY

Melissa sits in the visitor's chair in Jennings's office.

Jennings leans back, ready to start the review.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

So according to this, your grades bounced back. 3.8 GPA overall. 4.0 in political science. Good job.

MELISSA

Thanks.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Your thesis looks good too. Comprehensive work, despite the late submission. Looks like everything's on track.

Melissa smiles, grateful for the reprieve.

MELISSA

Professor?

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Yes, Melissa?

Melissa looks down, fumbles with her class ring.

MELISSA

I wanted to thank you for your support earlier this year. I don't know how things would have gone, if you hadn't vouched for me to Dean Connor.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Didn't want to lose one of my best students due to an isolated incident. Don't worry about it - over and done with. Past history.

He gives her a sly look.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Besides, willingness to take chances for your beliefs isn't a characteristic I really want to discourage in my students. Everything okay at home?

MELISSA

Not too bad. My parents settled down after a few weeks. Though they're calling me regularly to check up.

Jennings smiles, and holds out his hand.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Now, regarding the official declaration of major: you have the paperwork?

Melissa hands over a thick pile of paper.

MELISSA

Poly-sci, as promised. But you knew that already.

Jennings flips through the documents.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

How about a minor? Just a stab in the dark, but I'm guessing philosophy?

Melissa smiles, and hands him a second sheet.

MELISSA

Thought I'd go for something a little more practical. Who knows - it might be a unique fit with my other studies.

Jennings glances at the header, which reads "Department of Science: Zoology."

He raises an eyebrow, and gives Melissa a look.

PROFESSOR JENNINGS

Interesting combination. Can't wait to see where it leads.

FINAL FADE OUT.