

THE RUMINANTS

by

Dipti Bramhandkar

607-205-9129
Diptib@gmail.com

In nature, nothing exists alone. Rachel Carson

Time & Setting:

The present. Spring semester at Rose College, a small, selective and heavily endowed college in the Finger Lakes region in Central New York State. In this rural setting nestled in the hills above a lake, the college is surrounded by farms. The stars hang low, the forests are rich and lush, and the blossoms suffuse the air with fragrance. There is a sense that if people abandoned the college, nature would take it over in no time.

Characters:

ARIA - freshman, psychology major, A.R.N. member

BEKKA 'DOUBLE K' - senior, ethics and communications major, family legacy at Rose, President of A.R.N. (Animal Rights Now)

CHIP & LINDA YOUNG - Bekka's parents (appear in voice memo)

EB - junior, Bekka's roommate, physics major, first in their family to go to college, A.R.N. member

JUSTIN - junior, journalism major

OLLIE - junior, theater major, A.R.N. member

PETE - sophomore, Aria's boyfriend, biology major

PROFESSOR GORDON - Rose College's President

WALTER P. RABBIT - an erudite rabbit

ACT 1**DREAMS ARE UNREALIZED WISHES, AMIRITE?**

EB returns to her dorm from a late shift at 2am. She peels off her jacket to reveal her t-shirt from her place of work - a bar called "The Chapterhouse." She peers into her suite mate Bekka's room and sees the bed unmade and empty. She takes out her phone to text. She waits for a response. Reluctantly, EB puts her jacket back on, goes to her bed and wraps her duvet around her shoulders. She walks outside to The Slope, a grassy hill overlooking the lake and campus below. She sees Bekka sitting on the grass.

EB

How long have you been out here?

EB sits down next to her and gestures with her duvet.

BEKKA

Nah, I'm good. It's 50 degrees out.

EB

50 degrees is winter!

BEKKA

How was work?

EB

The ZETAs were there, ZETA-ing around.

BEKKA

Two for one mojito night.

EB

I hate how they say mojito.

BEKKA

(Valley girl accent) Mojito!

EB

(Valley girl accent) But, like, can you make it, like, extra skinny? I need it to be, like, super low-calorie, you know? Oh, and, like, can you use, like, stevia or something instead of sugar?

BEKKA

(Valley girl accent) Of course, hun! We'll make it the skinniest, healthiest mojito you've ever seen.

(MORE)

BEKKA (CONT'D)

I'll use organic, gluten-free, non-GMO, sugar-free, unicorn-sweetened syrup just for you! It'll practically be a salad in a glass. Enjoy!!!

EB

Wow - you're scarily good at that.

BEKKA

(*Valley girl accent*) God, I am obsessed with Skinny Mojitos!

They laugh. They sit looking out and up. EB points at the stars.

EB

Cancer, Canis Minor and - see that zig zag?

BEKKA

Kind of.

EB

It's a little faint - that's Lynx.

BEKKA

How do you see all of that?

EB

It's like a map. You can read maps too.

BEKKA

I can read Google maps, sure. Not sky maps.

EB

I like the idea of stars being places on sky maps. *Beat*. So what are you doing out here in the tundra?

BEKKA

I talked with my Dad today and he was in one of his overwhelmingly cheerful moods. And my Mom was on at the same time obviously, chirping away and fact checking whatever my Dad said.

EB

Chip and Linda!

BEKKA

They say hi and that they love you.
Etcetera. Etcetera.

EB

That's nice.

BEKKA

After the call, I had a minor panic
attack.

EB

Why? What did they say?

BEKKA

My Dad's really excited for me to
start working with him soon. He's
like, we'll commute together. We'll
have our packed lunches. Of course,
the company has summer Fridays...

EB

Cute. Your Dad is so cute.

BEKKA

We've had this conversation like a
hundred times. But today, when he
was telling me about the initiation
ceremony thing, again. They hand me
a massive jigsaw puzzle piece, and
I have to fit it into this enormous
puzzle they've been working on for
years. It's like a 20-foot-long
puzzle, and I have to find the
right spot for my piece.

EB

Very Chip!

BEKKA

So he's telling me and I can't
breathe very well, like my breath
isn't coming in normal.

EB

How come?

BEKKA

I don't know. Maybe it's not what I
want.

EB

The puzzle?

BEKKA

No, all of it. Working with them.

EB

Really? You seemed excited about it a few weeks ago when they were here.

BEKKA

It's kind of hard not to be when they're right in front of you. You know how they are. My aunt, my dad, my brothers...now me. It's what we do. It's what the Youngs do. Join up! It's like the army.

EB

They do interesting work with local communities.

BEKKA

But none of it is mine.

EB

You'll make it yours.

BEKKA

But I didn't earn it.

EB

So what? People get what they don't earn all the time. Why shouldn't it be you?

BEKKA

Maybe I don't deserve it.

EB

Deserve what?

BEKKA

All of...all of this...no one should have this much luck.

EB

It's not *all* luck.

BEKKA

Anyway, I talked to them and it was on my mind. And then I had a weird dream that I can't shake off.

EB

So you came out here to commune
with the universe.

BEKKA

I'm sorry I'm being a downer.

EB

Take that back!

BEKKA

What?

EB

We agreed - no more sorrys. And who
was crying her guts out to you
because of a *chem test* two days
ago?

BEKKA

That's different. That was a real
thing, not some kind of vague bad
feeling.

EB

We don't keep score of who has the
right to be more anxious. The only
rule is that we can only be
emotional wrecks one at a time.

BEKKA

You seem fit for purpose, so I can
fall apart a little, right?

EB

Absolutely. What was the dream
about?

BEKKA

So, I'm by the ocean - Seabrook I
think.

EB

The place by your parents' house
last summer?

BEKKA

Yeah. I take off my socks and shoes
and put my feet in the water. I
feel the water swirling around my
ankles, like tendrils, like soft
hands. I'm standing there and then
water was sort of...*sort of pulling
me in.*

EB

That's freaky.

BEKKA

Yeah, but I'm not scared. The water flows over my legs and around my waist and suddenly I'm swimming. I'm swimming! Then my Marine biology teacher Mr. Warwick pops up out of nowhere and he's writing *sodium, potassium and calcium* on the board and telling us that humans and fish share a combination of those same elements in our veins - almost in the same proportions. It's so dark I can barely see the difference between the sky and the water. And then I hear something.

EB

Hear what?

BEKKA

I can't make out what it is. A voice? I know it's important though. Like I'm meant to hear it. Then I woke up. What does it mean?

EB

What do you think it means?

BEKKA

I don't know.

EB

Was the voice God?

BEKKA

I don't think so. Maybe? What does God sound like?

EB

Neil deGrasse Tyson?

BEKKA

It wasn't Neil deGrasse Tyson.

EB

Maybe it was your inner voice? Like your real voice telling you what to do. Break it down, Freud.

BEKKA

Dreams are shaped by manifest content and latent content. The manifest content is the literal imagery.

EB

Right. The water. The swimming.

BEKKA

The latent content represents the symbolic meaning.

EB

Keep swimming or get out?

BEKKA

Someone was going to tell me what to do.

EB

Like a professor type? Mr. Warwick?

BEKKA

No it was a different voice.

EB

Maybe Chip's voice because you talked to him today.

Bekka takes out her phone.

BEKKA

Look, this is what ChatGPT says: drowning dreams are about uncertainty and being overwhelmed with emotions.

EB

Uh. No shit. But you weren't drowning. You said so yourself. You were swimming.

BEKKA

I would have though.

EB

Why? You weren't going under. No sharks in the dream. And besides, you're a great swimmer.

BEKKA

You think it means I'm treading water? Treading the water of life?

EB

I don't think dreams actually *mean* anything.

BEKKA

Just humor me.

EB

I think you're anxious. Senior year. It's normal. Come on, let's go inside. Nothing that Swiss Miss can't cure.

BEKKA

Your solution is always Swiss Miss.

EB

Chocolate like substance with tiny marshmallows cures almost everything.

BEKKA

Do you ever think that...*(She trails off.)*

EB

Do I ever think what?

BEKKA

Is *this* it?

EB

What do you mean?

BEKKA

College: we take classes. We go to parties. We meet people. We read. We drink. We eat. We sleep. I mean, is that all that there is?

EB

What else do you want?

BEKKA

Today my dad was like (*happy Dad voice*): "Rebekka Jane! You'll look back on this time and say, those were the best days of my life."

EB

What's wrong with that?

BEKKA

Nothing, but - these are the best days? What's so best about them?

EB

Are you kidding? So many things! This week I saw the Orion Nebula, which is 1,500 light years away.

BEKKA

Well, that's you, that's what you love.

EB

We can swipe a card and eat anytime we want.

BEKKA

So, 24-7 snacks?

EB

We get a free pass to act however we want to for a while before real life starts.

BEKKA

Great. We're in a bubble!

EB

It's a nice bubble: paradise for two weeks in September and maybe early May.

BEKKA

Don't you want more than that?

EB

Being here makes me feel like I made it.

BEKKA

But there's so much happening around us: Rising temperatures, natural disasters, pandemics - did you know the Avian flu is supposed to be the next one? Political instability, violence, displacement, job insecurity, poverty, cyber attacks, an aging population, no one can pay for healthcare, racism, sexism, the decline of democracy, the rise of nationalism. The opioid crisis, the loneliness crisis.

(MORE)

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Social media making kids depressed.
I could go on.

EB

Please don't.

BEKKA

All I'm saying is, this is
happening and we're sitting around
eating peanut butter cups.

EB

I could eat a peanut butter cup
right now. *Beat.* Look, we don't sit
around. We do a lot. We've done a
lot with A.R.N.

BEKKA

And what has that changed? I'm two
months away from graduation and
what have I actually done?

EB

What are you talking about? You've
done so much.

BEKKA

Just down there in the Ag school
are animals in cages. They were in
cages in my first year. And they're
still in there. Nothing changes.

EB

I know.

BEKKA

And what's worse - the vivisections
are still happening. Maybe even
right now.

EB

Well, probably not right now unless
it's a Sweeney Todd situation down
there.

BEKKA

The college doesn't call it what it
is of course. That's why people
don't realize it's still happening.
They say animal modeling or
preclinical. One of the things they
do is put a window over a cow's
stomach to see how it works.

Bekka pulls out her phone.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Look at this.

EB turns away.

EB

I know. Oh man, that's so nasty!

BEKKA

People are sleeping on how amazing cows are. They have their own individual personalities; they have companions. And they're ruminants - four stomach compartments - a very complex digestion system.

EB

I could use that!

BEKKA

They align their bodies along the north-south axis because they're sensitive to magnets, like they're living compasses! They're the sailors of the pastures.

EB

The sailors of the pastures?

BEKKA

Did you watch that doc I sent you?

EB

Which one? You sent me like ten links.

BEKKA

The Temple Grandin one.

EB

Maybe?

BEKKA

She's the one who invented the squeeze machine for cows because they know.

EB

They know what?

BEKKA

When they're led away for slaughter, they know they're gonna die.

EB

We all know we're gonna die.

BEKKA

Is that supposed to be comforting?

EB

No. It's just true. Do we need to get you a squeeze machine?

BEKKA

I'm serious.

EB

Okay, so we haven't shut down testing, but we've made other progress.

BEKKA

What? The vegan soft serve machine? The vegetarian salad bar. That's my legacy?

EB

Your *legacy*?

BEKKA

Well, yeah. When I look back and ask, what did I actually do in college, what will I say?

EB

You got a degree. You can't tell me that's not something.

BEKKA

It is something.

EB

Something major!

BEKKA

We keep doing the same thing again and again and it makes no impact. New people come in every year and it's like everything we do is erased.

EB

That's what college is: doing things again and again. Seeing what sticks. Rebooting.

BEKKA

What's the point of that?

EB

Training wheels for real life.

BEKKA

But there's nothing real about this.

EB

Feels pretty real to me.

BEKKA

You think any of this matters?

EB

I do actually. You think this conversation isn't real?

BEKKA

No. No of course it is. But if I don't change things up, it's like I went through the motions. Like I just did all the things people expected me to do, and nothing more.

EB

You're acting like you have no control in any of this. You have every choice in the world.

BEKKA

I'm on the slow train to Nowheresville. Another girl moving to another city with a LL Bean tote bag full of almosts and maybes. Then I go to work for my own Dad. Lame.

EB

Not lame! You have a job already and you haven't even graduated. That's the golden ticket.

BEKKA

Why doesn't it feel like it?

EB

And college can just be college.
There's nothing wrong with that.

BEKKA

It doesn't have to be *just* that,
right?

EB

I think it's kinda nice that we're
here for a bit and then new kids
come in. When we're long gone, two
other friends are going to sit here
in the middle of the night
analyzing dreams and looking at the
same stars. Isn't that something?

EB stands up and puts puts her hand out for Bekka and pulls
her up. They consider the stars. The sky is very big. EB and
Bekka are very small. They go inside.

NATURE | NURTURE

Pete and Bekka walk out of their Curious Minds class. They
meet EB, who is waiting for them outside.

BEKKA

I don't buy into the idea that
people are solely driven by their
biology. Hi Beebs.

PETE

Hey EB.

After greeting EB briefly, they return straight into their
argument, and keep walking.

PETE (CONT'D)

Our genes dictate MOST of our
predispositions.

BEKKA

But it's our experiences that truly
shape who we really are.

PETE

Of course you'd say that.

BEKKA

Why?

PETE

You major in ethics, so you think we have complete control over our lives, but it's our genes, plain and simple.

BEKKA

Well, we can still make decisions based on our experiences and values. We can change the course of our lives.

PETE

Not really.

BEKKA

Not really?

PETE

Okay take this for example: Twins raised in totally different environments since they were babies have the same hobbies, favorite foods, even a similar IQ. How do you explain that?

BEKKA

Sure, but what about people who've risen above their circumstances?

PETE

Luck. Random genetic variations that happen to work in their favor.

EB

Hold up a second.

PETE

What?

EB

You think luck is the reason people accomplish things?

PETE

No, not like *normal* luck. I mean *genetic* luck. Evolution has favored certain genes that help us adapt and succeed.

EB

It's more than that. It's about our choices.

PETE

Our genetic makeup has been refined over thousands of years to promote survival and reproductive success. We're becoming more efficient. That makes me feel optimistic.

EB

It's not optimism; it's just ignoring the influence of privilege.

PETE

No, it's not.

EB

So, are you suggesting that your advantages are all due to genetic superiority?

BEKKA

Because that would be terrifying.

PETE

Not superiority - I'm not saying that at all.

EB

You are. You're saying that the people who have certain kinds of lives have better genes.

PETE

Not better genes. Specific genes. Our genetic makeup does have an enormous impact on how we respond to the world.

BEKKA

So we resign ourselves to our biology? We're just along for the ride. That's what you think.

EB

Genes set the stage for each person, but at the end of the day: we make choices and we live with them.

BEKKA

Exactly.

PETE

I see genetic power where you see choices.

EB

I come from a family where no one had the opportunity to go to college. Not poor genes. No opportunities. I am the first and I've had to fight against limitations imposed on me.

PETE

That's incredible. I'm not trying to take it away from you.

EB

And yet you feel that it's merely the toss of the coin that got me here.

PETE

I'm not saying that.

EB

Good genes, right?

PETE

Well-

EB

Pretty reductionist thinking for a scientist.

PETE

You two think you're in the drivers seat. I think we're passengers and our genetic blueprint shows us the way.

BEKKA

And you don't think your access to crazy good resources plays a part in your life at all?

PETE

Of course, but so much of it is prewired. Think about it - some people are naturally gifted with intelligence or talent from birth. They have a *head start* from birth. How? Genes.

BEKKA

Even if someone is born with great potential, without the right conditions to nurture that potential, it might not fully get realized.

EB

Okay, okay, this conversation is draining me of my life force. Pete, if you think it's all genes - and that your family won the genetic lottery - why try at all? If it's all predestined, shouldn't we just get some popcorn and watch our lives unfold?

PETE

Well, we still make decisions, but they're within a very limited set of possibilities.

EB

That is such a bleak view of human nature.

PETE

We're all animals at the end of the day, powered by instincts.

BEKKA

You work in the lab at the Ag school, right?

PETE

Is that a trick question?

BEKKA

Not at all.

PETE

Yes, I work in the lab.

BEKKA

What do you do there?

PETE

I'm an assistant now. One day I'll be in charge of my own research projects.

BEKKA

Maybe you should come to an A.R.N. meeting? We can talk about that research.

PETE

I know you're in the "soft sciences" but labs are where real work happens; our research leads to real things that help people.

BEKKA

But at any cost right-

PETE

Like vaccines - which got us back to campus in person! And A.R.N.'s not my thing really. I'm not a 'protest' type of person.

BEKKA

What type of person is that?

PETE

I'm not political. It's a matter of personal choice.

BEKKA

The personal is political.

PETE

Carol Hanisch.

BEKKA

You read that?

PETE

Yes I read. Look, I prefer to process my feelings independently of a group.

BEKKA

I have independent thoughts.

PETE

Yeah. A lot of them! You both do.

EB

It's not me talking though; it's my FOXP2 gene.

PETE

Impressive.

EB

I read too.

PETE

I gotta go, but we can argue on Thursday after class too. It's kind of fun, actually.

Pete walks away.

BEKKA

Can you believe that guy?

EB

Why are you picking a fight with an know-it-all bro?

BEKKA

I'm not picking a fight.

EB

Um. You kinda just did.

BEKKA

Maybe entitled dudes need to be challenged a little more.

EB

Everyone needs a hobby.

BEKKA

What does Aria see in him anyway?

EB

Why were you asking him about the lab?

BEKKA

Curiosity.

EB

You know what that did to the cat, right?

BEKKA

There's a second half to the proverb - but satisfaction brought it back.

EB

I didn't know that.

BEKKA

Besides, cats have seven lives.
Might as well live one of them with
some umph.

THE PLAN

A gathering of some members of A.R.N. in a ground floor room of the arts building on campus. The meeting hasn't started because they're waiting for Bekka and EB. There are paintings stacked up against the wall, and some paper mache masks. Ollie wears one of the masks and mimics the people in his movement class.

OLLIE

Ah, behold! A realm where words become redundant, and our bodies speak volumes! I, the humble acting student, embark on a journey of discovery, unlocking the mysteries of physical expression! (*He begins to move gracefully, his body flowing.*) We don masks like these, not to hide who we are, but to free ourselves from societal constraints.

JUSTIN

Bravo...?

OLLIE

It's a paradox, you see!!

JUSTIN

(*mock theater critic voice*) The exaggerated animal movements and absurd mime routines only serve to elicit superficial laughter. It's as if the ensemble is pandering to the audience's desire for a momentary distraction from their own lives.

OLLIE

We are *all* pandering to the audience's desire for that. That's what life is - distracting ourselves.

JUSTIN

You seriously ditched me to do this? I don't have the constitution to swirl in the world of make-believe.

OLLIE

You like real life that much, huh?

JUSTIN

I like keeping it real.

OLLIE

Admit it, you're jonesing to join me on stage.

JUSTIN

Nothing would thrill me more than pretending to be an animal or juggling invisible objects. As much as I'm enjoying your performance, where is she anyway?

OLLIE

She's late on purpose. She likes to come across as disproportionately burdened.

JUSTIN

Maybe she *is* burdened.

OLLIE

Trust me, she's not. She has the same neuroses as all of us. She just branded hers.

Bekka and EB walk in.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Double K, you're late.

ARIA

Hi ladies.

BEKKA

You came!

ARIA

Well, it sounded like something I shouldn't miss with all of your mysterious texts with indecipherable emojis.

EB

What is this place? I've never been down here before. Nothing good happens in basements.

BEKKA

I wanted somewhere private.

EB

What's on your face, Ollie?

JUSTIN

Ollie is very method. He's playing the part of Nicole Kidman in Eyes Wide Shut.

OLLIE

And this is Justin - our future Maggie Haberman.

BEKKA

Can we trust him?

OLLIE

Are you asking if he's a spy?

BEKKA

I'm asking if we can trust him in this situation.

OLLIE

I didn't know we were in a "situation."

JUSTIN

You can speak directly to me.

BEKKA

I'm Bekka, Double K.

JUSTIN

I know who you are.

BEKKA

I need you to swear that you're not going to write about anything that goes down in this room.

JUSTIN

Not in this room, I swear. But you did agree to a profile for The Thorn.

BEKKA

We can talk about that another time. Ok, let's call this meeting to order.

ARIA

I thought it wasn't official.

BEKKA

Well, it's not official *official*.

ARIA

So, it's unofficial...

BEKKA

We wanted it to be a smaller group.

OLLIE

For the love of god, what are we doing here? I'm so hungry.

BEKKA

Setting my intention: Protect and Respect! Animal Rights Now!

OLLIE

Protect and Respect! Animal Rights Now!

ARIA

Protect and Respect! Animal Rights Now!

EB

Protect and Respect! Animal Rights Now!

JUSTIN

Protect and respect...

BEKKA

Meeting in session...unofficially.

ARIA

Do you want me to take notes then?

BEKKA

No! It's a secret unofficial meeting. *Beat*. I've been thinking about our year. we've done pretty good this year: Some protests, some articles, that art-poetry-jam thing...I don't know what that was...but -

EB

And merch!

BEKKA

Yes, we finally have merch, but that's not the point.

OLLIE

Don't be so down on the merch. Brigham and Young Virginity Club had the best t-shirt this year. No one had ever heard of them before that.

ARIA

What did it say?

JUSTIN

Say No to Satan's Cocktail of Sex and Drugs. I bought one.

OLLIE

It sold out in minutes.

ARIA

I'm sure they didn't want their stuff used that way.

OLLIE

Probably not. But everyone knows about their mission now.

BEKKA

Well, this is private. We won't be needing merch.

She steps away from the group.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

This is the thing - we're not changing anything. I joined A.R.N. three years ago, and the college still has the same terrible policies. Animals are being tortured day and night on this campus.

JUSTIN

What do you mean?

BEKKA

Are you serious?

ARIA

He's not a member, Double K. He doesn't know.

BEKKA

For "research purposes," animals are put into unfamiliar environments or suffer through training protocols, forced behaviors, or exposure to scary trauma. They get injections, surgeries, even genetic modifications. Then there's drug testing: toxicity, organ damage, or severe side effects-

JUSTIN

-but this is all in the name of science, in the name of progress. Right?

BEKKA

I'm not in the mood to debate.

JUSTIN

I'm not allowed to ask questions? It's sort of my job.

BEKKA

I figured you'd do some research before joining us.

JUSTIN

I did.

BEKKA

On A.R.N.?

JUSTIN

On you.

OLLIE

Oh boy...

He takes out his phone.

JUSTIN

A third generation Rose scholar. Consistently making it onto the Dean's List, semester after semester.

EB

We're *all* on the Dean's list.

JUSTIN

Noted. You raise stacks for a local charity. You publish poetry in the Rose & Dagger Monthly. Varsity Tennis, the Innovation Club, the Spanish Club, and you're the President of A.R.N. You seem to be good at a lot of things.

BEKKA

I know you think you're the smartest person in the room.

JUSTIN

No I don't. I'm interested. Really. What made you decide to join A.R.N.?

BEKKA

Are you asking seriously?

JUSTIN

Yeah. I'm a serious person.

BEKKA

My family lived in England for a bit when I was in high school. And my Dad would take me to this "nose to tail eating" restaurant.

JUSTIN

Sounds right up your alley.

BEKKA

I wasn't always vegan. They had stuff like chicken liver toast, grilled lamb's heart, deep fried cod cheeks, ox tongue. Very *British*. And their fries - they call them chips - they were double deep fried in lard.

JUSTIN

Delicious.

ARIA

No wonder they colonized the whole world - they needed better food.

BEKKA

I ate all of it. Slurped the marrow out of the bone and everything. But then one day, my Dad ordered the special - Deviled Crab.

(MORE)

BEKKA (CONT'D)

They bring it over in this big bowl and the claws, they're reaching out of the broth like the crab drowned in there a minute ago. They tie a bib around my dad's neck and give him a metal cracker. I watch him crack open the claws and they don't give right away. Like, even in death this crab was fighting back for his dignity. And then the snap, and the crab juice would fly onto the table and my dad says "got you!" Like he caught the crab with his own bare hands. Like it was some kind of triumph to hear the shell crack. It got to me. I vowed to never eat another living creature again. And right now, a half mile away from this room, there are animals who are being cut into to observe and study their organs, tissues, or bodily functions while they are alive.

ARIA

It's disgusting. I don't know why the college still does it.

BEKKA

They claim that it provides 'unparalleled' access to medical and vet students.

ARIA

That's bullshit.

BEKKA

Yes it is. And I can't sit around anymore while they do this and god knows what else. So, I have a plan.

OLLIE

Been waiting all day for the plan!

EB

She didn't even tell me about it. Some super secret spy shit.

BEKKA

Next week, there's an all-AG school conference happening at Levins. The lab will be pretty much empty. That's when we'll go in.

ARIA
Go in where?

BEKKA
Into the lab.

ARIA
Okay. And?

BEKKA
And destroy it.

OLLIE
Uh, are you kidding?

BEKKA
Nope. Dead serious.

JUSTIN
Isn't that a crime?

BEKKA
It's direct action. Direct action
is when you-

JUSTIN
I know what direct action is.

BEKKA
It's what we need to do.

OLLIE
How will we even get in?

Bekka looks at Aria.

ARIA
No. Don't give me that look.

BEKKA
He won't have to know.

ARIA
So, you want me to take it from
him?

BEKKA
Well, get it...somehow.

ARIA
God, you really thought about this.

BEKKA
Of course I thought about it!

ARIA

Even if I could get the pass, there are probably cameras everywhere in that building.

BEKKA

We'll wear masks.

OLLIE

Ooooo, masks.

BEKKA

This is serious, Ollie.

OLLIE

Ok, so you want to break into the lab, destroy it, and...?

BEKKA

Show our strength to the administration. Force them to abandon animal testing.

OLLIE

What about a protest?

BEKKA

I cannot make another poster, sit in a demonstration, tie myself to a fence.

ARIA

We'll get in a ton of trouble.

BEKKA

They won't know it's us.

OLLIE

Won't it be obvious?

BEKKA

How? We wear all black. We take precautions. We're in. We're out.

JUSTIN

Can I say something?

BEKKA

If you have to.

JUSTIN

Have you ever participated in direct action before?

BEKKA

Well, no...why?

JUSTIN

Direct action feels empowering,
like we're taking matters into our
own hands. But it has its
drawbacks.

BEKKA

No shit.

JUSTIN

So, what if you do this and nothing
changes?

BEKKA

At least I tried.

JUSTIN

And what if you get punished?

BEKKA

Sure. Community service. Fine.

JUSTIN

Or worse?

BEKKA

Our professors are always talking
about demanding change.

OLLIE

This isn't protesting. This is
breaking and entering.

BEKKA

We'll have a pass.

ARIA

Is that the only reason you
included me in this?

BEKKA

No.

ARIA

Really?

BEKKA

Well, it was one of the reasons,
sure, but you're one of our most
passionate first years. Cultivating
the next gen and all.

ARIA

Right.

BEKKA

Don't do what I did. Don't waste your time here. Do something meaningful.

ARIA

What we're doing with A.R.N. *is* meaningful.

BEKKA

It'll be meaningful if it changes something, if it makes a real impact on the system.

JUSTIN

Which system are you talking about?

BEKKA

The one that keeps the truth out.

JUSTIN

Working within existing systems can also create lasting change.

BEKKA

True, but we've done that.

JUSTIN

It's about playing the long game.

BEKKA

We don't have time for the long game.

JUSTIN

You want to inspire change, not just get attention. It's about heart, not noise.

BEKKA

So, you're an expert?

JUSTIN

I spend a lot of time with change makers who are very strategic.

BEKKA

Well, strategy without passion is a powerpoint slide.

EB

Uh, can I make a point here?

BEKKA

Of course.

EB

He's right about one thing - there will be consequences, and we don't know what they'll be. Honor code and all that.

BEKKA

I'm not disagreeing with that. Risks are part of it.

EB

And you're not worried?

BEKKA

In my opinion, they're risks worth taking. I don't want to wait any more to do something meaningful. Life is way too short.

OLLIE

Life can be long too. Like this meeting.

BEKKA

And I'd rather be a person who starts early. Look at Greta Thunberg.

ARIA

You're comparing yourself to Greta?

BEKKA

I don't mean we're the same literally. Just the intention. Just not wanting to sit around and wait for something to happen.

EB

You're acting like we've been sitting on our asses this whole time!

BEKKA

Like I said before, we've done some good things with A.R.N. But we're not PETA. We're not making waves in the way that they do.

EB

They do some wild stuff though.

BEKKA

Exactly. They get noticed. People sit up. They do these iconic campaigns.

EB

They're controversial. They invite it. They're offensive. We're not.

ARIA

And all that stuff about euthanizing animals in their care?!

BEKKA

Look, I don't want A.R.N. to be PETA - I want results. They get results. That's what I want. And if that makes me crazy, then fine.

ARIA

We don't think you're crazy. We're processing this thing you've just dropped on us.

OLLIE

Well, I'm in.

ARIA

Okay, some of us are processing...

BEKKA

Really?!

OLLIE

Yeah, why not? If the college feels this way about helpless animals, they probably feel that way about us, too.

JUSTIN

Like we're lab animals?

OLLIE

That's what we are.

JUSTIN

We're not getting experimented on.

OLLIE

Not experimented on,
but...programmed.

JUS'TIN
We're not cadets.

BEKKA
None of this matters. The only
question is, are you willing to put
yourself on the line for what you
believe in?

They are silent.

JUSTIN
Sorry. I can't be a part of it.
Gotta stay neutral for the news.

No one speaks.

BEKKA
Aria?

ARIA
Fine, okay, fine.

BEKKA
Yes, girl.

ARIA
I still have to get Pete on board.

BEKKA
You will.

OLLIE
This is going to be incredible.

BEKKA
Making history.

They all bump fists. Bekka turns to EB and extends her fist.
EB holds back and then says:

EB
I have to think about it.

BEKKA
What? No? Come on! We can't do it
without you.

EB
I want to think about it.

BEKKA
I thought you'd be all in.

EB

I'm not allowed a minute to decide whether to wear a mask and enter school property illegally to do some kind of damage to it? And they *will* find out who did it. So we have to be willing to face whatever they say or do. So I'm gonna think about it.

BEKKA

No...yeah. Of course. But... history isn't made by people who overthink.

JUSTIN

Well, actually--

BEKKA

Shut up, Wikipedia.

OLLIE

Okay everyone is hangry. Let's get something to eat. I'm starving.

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Aria and Pete are playing UNO on her bed.

PETE

Seven. Green.

ARIA

And reverse, reverse, skip, skip, draw two! UNO!

PETE

I'm glad I'm not a betting man.

ARIA

Because I'd take all your money.

PETE

This game is all chance.

ARIA

There's some strategy in it.

PETE

Luck.

ARIA
Whatever, I win again! You are a
big, big L!

PETE
Isn't there something about being a
good winner?

ARIA
I think it's more about not being a
sore loser.

PETE
What about being an annoying
winner?

Aria puts him into a playful headlock.

ARIA
I'll show you annoying winner.

PETE
So annoying! And violent!

They fake wrestle for a moment. She releases him and moves a
few steps away. Pete rubs his arm.

PETE (CONT'D)
I think you broke something!

He stretches out.

ARIA
Listen, I want to talk to you about
something.

PETE
I hate it when people say that.

ARIA
What?

PETE
"We need to talk."

ARIA
I didn't say, "we need to talk." I
said, "I want to talk to you about
something."

PETE
Same tone.

ARIA

You know the super-secret meeting
Double K invited me to?

PETE

Yeah. She's...special.

ARIA

She has something planned that's
pretty major for A.R.N.

PETE

Throwing red paint at anyone
wearing a fur coat this winter?

ARIA

Who wears fur coats here?

PETE

What is it?

ARIA

You know that the college does
animal testing, right.

PETE

Yeah, safely and for specific
purposes.

ARIA

Well, Double K thinks that we need
to do something bigger to get them
to stop.

PETE

Why would we do that?

ARIA

Uh, because animals are being
tortured.

PETE

They're not being "tortured."

ARIA

Yes, they are, Pete.

PETE

They're part of experiments and the
scientists take great care of them.

ARIA

Before they burn their eyes out so that someone can make a new type of eyeliner or something.

PETE

No.

ARIA

No?

PETE

You're making it sound like they're doing this for pleasure. They're doing it for knowledge.

ARIA

Tech can help us move away from testing.

PETE

It already has, but in some cases, tech can't replicate the processes we're trying to observe.

ARIA

Don't you think the college should at least *engage* with A.R.N. on it?

PETE

Why would they do that? The scientists know what they're doing.

ARIA

Okay, look. There's this group called Extinction Rebellion. Heard of them?

PETE

Uh, no, they're here?

ARIA

No. They're in England. They broke into an animal testing facility and saved sixteen beagle puppies.

PETE

Specifically beagles?

ARIA

Yes. Marshall BioResources breeds 2,000 beagles per year. They get them when they're only 4 months old!

PETE

What were they testing on beagles?

ARIA

I don't know. That's not the point!
The point is that they got a ton of
attention pointed at Marshall.

PETE

Well, right. Beagles are cute.

ARIA

We're going to do that too.

PETE

Save beagles?

ARIA

No! Break into the lab.

PETE

My lab?!

ARIA

Well, not yours, but like, the one
where all the animals are kept.

PETE

That is mine.

ARIA

You said you don't test on animals.

PETE

I'm a sophomore. I move equipment
around and observe.

ARIA

Do you see any of it?

PETE

Not that up close.

ARIA

But can you access it?

PETE

Hold on. Are you serious about
this?

ARIA

Absolutely.

PETE

You want to break into the lab and do what?

ARIA

Make a point.

PETE

You know that animal testing leads to things that save lives, human lives.

ARIA

I know but--

PETE

Transplants, transfusions, vaccines, medicines.

ARIA

At any cost? (repetitive)

PETE

I get you care about it, but there are other ways of making a point.

ARIA

None of those things have worked.

PETE

Shit takes time to change.

ARIA

Shit is not changing. It's the same old shit.

PETE

I respect your passion.

ARIA

Don't be condescending!

PETE

I'm not. Really. I think it's amazing that you care so much about animals.

ARIA

Well, someone has to.

PETE

What does that mean?

ARIA

You go on and on about research saving lives, but if we don't care about all living things, we're brutes. We're real brutes.

PETE

You're calling me a brute?

ARIA

No. But you're going to be a doctor one day and don't you want your **studying** not to cause more harm than good?

PETE

It's not causing harm.

ARIA

It's contributing to the pain and suffering of animals who have no choice. Some of them never see the sky, the sun. It's so awful. I'm not saying we blow up the place, but we can make a difference. I want to.

PETE

You are making a difference.. You do more than most people.

ARIA

But if we don't really shake things up, the college will just be like, "how cute! Another protest." They won't engage in the way we want.

PETE

So ask more questions. Keep asking questions. Talk about it. Things will change.

ARIA

We DO ask questions, but they don't really think it's important to change anything. Double K has a point - she's like, this is something we can actually do.

PETE

So, you trespass and then?

ARIA

Mess stuff up. I don't know.

PETE

Sounds very thought out.

ARIA

You know, never mind. You never take me seriously.

PETE

That's not true!

ARIA

You're laughing at me.

PETE

I'm not. It's a crazy idea. And I don't think it'll work and why do you want to risk everything? You want to be the person who broke into a building?

ARIA

But I wouldn't be breaking in if I had pass, would I?

PETE

Ok, cool. So then they know who let everyone in.

ARIA

No. We'd use your pass, and you'd report it lost on the night.

PETE

No.

ARIA

Pete.

PETE

I don't think you should do it. And I don't want to get in trouble either.

ARIA

You won't! You're like Mister Rogers - no one would think you were making it up. You say you lost it. They'll believe you.

PETE

You think I'm like Mister Rogers.

ARIA

Well, I-

PETE

Why because I'm Presbyterian?

ARIA

No! Because you're a nice person. You're caring and you do wear the occasional cardigan.

PETE

Nothing is more emasculating than being called Mister Rogers.

ARIA

Hell no! Fred Rogers was down by law. He was a fighter. He didn't have to raise his voice. People just listened. That's what you're like.

PETE

It's a bit of a stretch.

ARIA

Mr. Rogers was a vegetarian. He said he could never eat anything that once had a mother.

PETE

Okay, why are we taking about this guy?

ARIA

He wanted to make a difference in the world. He did. I want to make a difference. This is something I can do. So, will you please help me? Do it for me.

Pete swings his legs over the side of the bed. He stacks the strewn cards. He sorts them.

PETE

Okay, listen. I can't do this. I won't talk to anyone about the plan. But I can't give you the badge.

ARIA

Why not?

PETE

If you want to take my badge, take it. I'm not going to give it to you.

ARIA
It would be better if you could
just give it to me.

PETE
No. And I don't want you to go. You
need to decide whose side you're
on.

ARIA
I'm not taking sides.

PETE
Uh, yes. Yes you are.

THE GLOAMING AND ARIA'S CHOICE

Just after sunset outside near the slope, EB and Aria talk in
the shadows. We can see their breath in the cold air.

ARIA
Put your hand out.

EB
Why?

ARIA
Just put it out.

EB
I don't like surprises.

ARIA
You'll like this one.

EB extends their hand and braces themselves. Aria hands her an
envelope. EB opens it.

ARIA (CONT'D)
Don't open it here!

EB
There's no one here. (*They take the
badge out.*) Pete?

ARIA
Shh!!

EB
What did he say?

ARIA

He said that he wouldn't give it to me, and that I had to make a choice.

EB

And this is your choice.

ARIA

Yes.

EB

Good for you.

ARIA

He'll probably break up with me.

EB

He seems to be wildly in love with you.

ARIA

I know he can seem like a jerk, but he's really smart. Really passionate, you know?

EB

Sure.

ARIA

He is.

EB

Whatever makes you happy.

ARIA

I'm not going to go though.

EB

What? Why not?

ARIA

It's bad enough taking the badge, but going will worry Pete too much. And I'm bringing him into all of this anyway.

EB

Well, he can report it lost.

ARIA

That's what I told him.

EB

And he won't get in trouble.

ARIA

We don't know that.

EB

People with families like his - they don't really get in 'trouble.' He'll get a letter sent to his parents or something, and then there will be some kind of rich people handshake - moisturized hands and all - and it'll all go away. Maybe a donation will follow.

ARIA

Don't be mean.

EB

I'm not. It's just what happens.

ARIA

You're not going to convince me to go?

EB

I've just convinced myself to go. I'll leave Bek to convince you, if you want to be convinced.

ARIA

She's pretty persuasive.

EB

She can be...I thought about it, and why the hell not? I've been feeling like I have to do something too. Not just make signs, like we always do. Not share people's posts.

ARIA

I know what you mean. It's like you're watching all these people doing stuff to make their lives better, make other people's lives better. And here we are waiting for our lives to begin.

EB

I feel like I'm saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing or not doing enough or doing too much or taking away from someone else's battle or not fighting my own.

ARIA

That makes me feel tired.

EB

But this is clear: animals who are being hurt for outdated reasons. It's something most people - maybe not Pete - can agree on.

ARIA

I didn't think about it that way, but you're right. How are you supposed to know how to get involved when everything feels like it's on fire? I have my tiny bucket of water.

EB

You're much more tuned in than you give yourself credit for.

ARIA

I may be throwing away a great relationship, so I don't know about that.

EB

He'll understand. And if he doesn't, you'll look back and think that you did something just for you.

ARIA

You know I thought you and Bekka cooked up the plan together.

EB

No, this was her thing. She needs it.

ARIA

I just figured you'd be in on it because you're so close and all.

EB

We've been through some shit. I met her on move in day.

(MORE)

EB (CONT'D)

She was wearing this yellow t-shirt that said, "Can I Help You?" in huge letters. Everyone's parents were helping them move into the dorm. I was here solo and was so confused. I was pushing my stuff on one of those dumb carts into the dorm and all my books fell off.

ARIA

Don't tell me she picked them up. That sounds so romantic.

EB

Actually she picked one of them up: The Great Gilly Hopkins. That's my book. My good luck book.

ARIA

I don't know that one.

EB

It's a YA thing before YA.

Aria pulls out her phone and looks it up.

ARIA

You kind of look like her.

EB

Not really, but I read that book a million times.

ARIA

What's it about?

EB

It's about a lot of things, but mainly it's that Gilly learns that happy endings are lies.

ARIA

That's sad.

EB

No, it's true. Bek picked it up and she had read it too. I liked that she dusted it off with her t-shirt before she gave it back to me.

ARIA

Sweet.

EB

Yeah, and I couldn't get rid of her after that. We starting hanging out. She had an answer for everything I didn't know about living on campus. She was comfortable with everything and knew everyone.

ARIA

Well, she had a year on you.

EB

No, it was more than that. It's like there was no question that whatever she could do, whomever she was talking to, that would be available to me to. She didn't ever remind me that I wasn't like her.

ARIA

What do you mean?

EB

She practically grew up on this campus. Her parents went here. Her brother was here a year ago. I was shy and worried everyone could smell it on me that I didn't 'summer' anywhere, or that my parents could never come up for parents' weekend or anything.

ARIA

And she didn't?

EB

She might have, but she never said anything. And she never really cared. And the more I got to know her, I realized that she's just a different flavor of nerd.

ARIA

I hope I meet someone like that.

EB

It was a lucky moment, but you will. Just don't rush ZETA.

ARIA

Do I look like a ZETA to you?

EB
Could be undercover.

ARIA
I wear Birkenstocks.

EB
Immediate rejection!

ARIA
So our big moment with the lab is
your last hurrah together?

EB
I want to be there for her, that's
all. And this seems like the right
thing to do.

ARIA
You're a good friend, Gilly
Hopkins.

EB
She knows that.

ARIA
I meant to me.

EB
We started out like we're in
Mission Impossible and now we're
like Monica and Rachel making up
after getting in a fight about
something Ross said.

ARIA
Which one am I?

EB
Actually, you're kind of more like
Phoebe.

ARIA
I can live with that.

THE BREAK IN AND THE UNLIKELY TALE OF WALTER P. RABBIT

EB, Bekka and Ollie wear all black clothing and balaclavas covering their faces. They carry backpacks containing flashlights and silly string. They're in a long hallway approaching a door.

BEKKA
Here goes nothing.

She holds Pete's pass against the sensor. The door swings open. They brace themselves for an alarm or noise, but there's nothing.

They enter a very quiet room with tables, microscopes, beakers, etc. It looks like a typical lab. There are no animals in sight. EB holds up scalpels and forceps.

EB
God, look at this, this is nasty.

OLLIE
I feel like I'm in Black Mirror.

EB
This is for cauterizing. I saw it on my uncle's farm.

Ollie unfurls a wrapped bandage and throws it to the ground.

EB (CONT'D)
There are so many syringes in this drawer. What are they injecting?

BEKKA
Who are they injecting?

OLLIE
What are we supposed to do now?

BEKKA
Just make it messy. We shouldn't linger. Like this.

She swipes a stack of folders with her gloved hand and they fall to the floor with a thud.

OLLIE
You're so punk. What about this?

He empties a pencil cup to the floor. EB joins him - they open drawers, and throw paper into the air. In the flurry of activity, EB knocks a microscope onto the floor and it breaks.

BEKKA
Eebs!

EB
It was an accident!

BEKKA

Don't break the equipment!

OLLIE

Come on, let's take an us-ie!

EB

Cool, cool. Proof that we broke in!

OLLIE

I'm not gonna post it. I'm gonna take it just for us.

EB

This is how sex tape scandals start: "This is just for us, honey."

OLLIE

Tell me more!

EB

Idiot!

BEKKA

Stay focused!

EB

What are we supposed to do?

BEKKA

I'm going to that room.

They empty drawers and and throw things around. They're inefficient with everything, but having fun and laughing. They take silly string out of their bag and spray it everywhere. While they're doing that, Bekka goes to the darkened adjacent room which has stacks of animal kennels. There are rustling noises and some whining. She jumps back. She tentatively approaches one kennel and peers inside.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Hi, little guy. Don't be scared.
I'm not a baddie. I'm a goodie.
Honestly.

She looks around the room, examining the other cages, and then comes back to the same crate. She slowly opens the door. Nothing happens.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Come on out.

Nothing.

BEKKA (CONT'D)
Here little guy, come out.

She taps the floor. She makes whistling noises.

BEKKA (CONT'D)
Come out. Let's go, let's go!

The animal doesn't budge.

BEKKA (CONT'D)
Shit. What am I doing here?

She slumps to the floor. She sits in front of the cage with her head in her hand. A rabbit comes out of the kennel.

WALTER
Hello. Can I help you?

BEKKA
What the hell?

She leaps to her feet.

WALTER
Don't be scared! I'm not a baddie either. Oof, it's cold out here. Hold on.

Bekka rubs her eyes and looks wildly around the room. The rabbit goes back into the crate and retrieves a red sweater and puts it on outside the cage.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Oh, that's better.

BEKKA
Am I dreaming?

WALTER
Are you?

BEKKA
What?

WALTER
Are you dreaming?

BEKKA
I must be.

WALTER
Could be.

BEKKA

I have to be.

WALTER

Eh? Could not be.

Bekka reaches out to pet him.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Whoa, whoa, whoa, lady. What are you doing?

BEKKA

Oh my god. What is happening to me?

WALTER

It could be a number of things: Psychosis, anxiety...did you eat today?

BEKKA

Rabbits don't talk.

WALTER

I thought you were the smart one in the group.

BEKKA

You don't.

WALTER

It's just that you don't listen very well.

BEKKA

(calling out to the room) Okay, this isn't funny. Did someone put shrooms in my water bottle or something?

WALTER

I don't think someone with your fickle nature should partake in psychedelics.

BEKKA

Oh my god. I think I'm having a breakdown.

WALTER

It's overwhelming.

BEKKA

You are talking to me, right?

WALTER

There's no one else here. I mean there are a lot of us, but they don't talk much. Not to humans anyway. You can understand that.

BEKKA

Uh.

WALTER

So you did it. You came in here.

BEKKA

Yes.

WALTER

But you weren't sure what you were going to do next, were you?

BEKKA

No.

WALTER

Right. Well, next time, spend a little more time thinking about it.

BEKKA

Are you okay in here? I know you're not, I mean, don't they hurt you?

WALTER

I'm engaged mostly in behavioral experiments. They can get uncomfortable, but it's okay.

BEKKA

Oh.

WALTER

C'est ma raison d'être.

Bekka is silent.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Isn't that why you're here too? To find a purpose?

BEKKA

No. I want animal testing to stop.

WALTER

You use Dove deodorant, right?

BEKKA

How do you know that?

WALTER

(*He sniffs*) Excellent sense of smell. And you don't look like the natural deodorant type.

BEKKA

What about my deodorant?

WALTER

Unilever tests on animals.

BEKKA

When alternatives aren't available.

WALTER

I'm not against it.

BEKKA

What are you talking about?

WALTER

I'm not against animal testing.

BEKKA

But you're...you're...

WALTER

A rabbit, yes. But think of it this way: so many others are out there doing what? Eating vegetables in other people's gardens? And god forbid (*he shudders*) working as a pet for some grubby pawed kid?

BEKKA

Pets offer emotional support to a lot of people.

WALTER

I come from a long line of lab animals. Like you.

BEKKA

I'm not a lab animal.

WALTER

But you do come from a long line of people who went here, right? Generational privilege and all. We're alike you and me.

BEKKA
You're imprisoned.

WALTER
I contribute to the betterment of
science.

BEKKA
They torture you.

WALTER
That's a strong word. You've hardly
been on the planet long enough to
know how to tie your shoes, let
alone debate the ethical dimensions
of scientific inquiry.

BEKKA
I study this very topic.

WALTER
Studying and living are two
different things.

BEKKA
I am living.

WALTER
You need to understand nature and
then you'll understand your own.
You can't rely on your phone for
your own edification. One day you
will understand: the violence of
milk, the ecstasy of grass, the
revelation of a sunset. Nature.
That's the great teacher.

BEKKA
Listen, no offense or anything, but
I can't keep talking with you.

WALTER
It wasn't my intention to talk to
you either.

BEKKA
You're making me feel like I'm
crazy.

WALTER
It's not a walk in the park for me
either, sis.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

I was having my evening chamomile
and tucking into my poetry volumes
and then you stick your enormous,
unsanitary face into my doorway.
Imagine my horror! I am aghast! I
am *aghast!*

Suddenly an alarm blares, and EB pokes her head into the
room.

EB

Bek, we have to go right now!

WALTER

That is so loud!

BEKKA

(*To Walter*) Shh!! (*To EB*) I'll be
right there!

EB

Who are you talking to?

BEKKA

No one.

EB

Come on. We have to get out of
here!

EB turns and runs. Bekka scoops up Walter into her arms.

WALTER

What are you doing?!

BEKKA

I'm getting you out of here.

WALTER

I live here!

BEKKA

There's sun outside and grass and
vegetables and happiness.

WALTER

No! Put me down, lady! I will not
be taken like this!

BEKKA

Shh. Someone will hear you.

WALTER

That's the point! Help!!!!!!!
Help!!!!!!

BEKKA

I'm not going to hurt you!

WALTER

You're hurting my dignity! Unhand
me! My glasses! Where are my
glasses?!!!!

BEKKA

Shh, quiet!

WALTER

You people are ANIMALS!

Bekka goes to the other room and it's completely ransacked. Instead of a talking Walter, she holds a tiny, quivering rabbit under her arm. She hears footsteps ahead of her and she leaves the lab. The alarm blares on over a dark stage.

ACT 2**ALL THE NEWS THAT'S SORT OF FIT TO PRINT**

The morning after the break-in. Bekka paces in her living room. There's a knock at the door.

BEKKA

Finally.

She opens the door and pulls Justin inside.

JUSTIN

Gimme a second.

He shakes off snow from his coat.

BEKKA

What took you so long?

JUSTIN

I was sleeping! I had to walk up a hill of black ice.

BEKKA

I feel like my entire life is black ice right now.

JUSTIN

Invisible and slippery?

BEKKA

Full of unseen threats.

JUSTIN

What's the emergency?

BEKKA

I didn't say emergency. I said "very urgent."

JUSTIN

Very urgent implies emergency. Can I use your bathroom?

BEKKA

Use the one down the hall.

JUSTIN

What - you didn't clean yours for my arrival?

He starts to walk over to the bathroom inside the suite.
Bekka blocks him.

BEKKA

No, use the one outside!

Justin ignores her and goes in to see Walter in the tub.

JUSTIN

Oh my god.

BEKKA

I can explain.

JUSTIN

Double K, you have a rabbit in your
tub.

BEKKA

It's not funny.

JUSTIN

It kind of is. And you put him in a
gross box.

BEKKA

I tore up a newspaper for the
bottom of it.

JUSTIN

An Amazon box!

BEKKA

You think he'll object on anti-
capitalist terms?

JUSTIN

You stole him.

BEKKA

I *rescued* him.

JUSTIN

Fine line.

BEKKA

He said --

JUSTIN

He *said*?

BEKKA

He *looked* so helpless. The alarm went off in there and I scooped him up and ran. I didn't think.

JUSTIN

You called me to help you with this? I write for the paper. I'm not animal control.

BEKKA

No, I have a plan for him.

JUSTIN

What kind of plan?

BEKKA

I'm taking him somewhere safe in a couple of days.

JUSTIN

Okay...how do you know it's a him? Is he soft?

Justin leans down to pet him.

BEKKA

Don't pet him!

JUSTIN

Why not? The poor dude's probably stressed.

He takes out his phone to take a picture and starts to whistle to make Walter look at him. Walter continues to stare at the wall.

BEKKA

Stop it!

JUSTIN

Okay, captain. So, what's the fake emergency about?

BEKKA

Did you see the email from Professor Gordon?

JUSTIN

No. Why?

BEKKA

It went to everyone on campus.

She pulls up an email on her phone and reads aloud:

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Listen to this - last night, our Agricultural School laboratory was subjected to an act of vandalism, resulting in significant damage to the facilities and the unfortunate disappearance of one of our cherished animals. This distressing event not only entails financial implications but also raises concerns about the well-being and safety of the missing animal. We implore the responsible parties to promptly return the animal to the lab. Rest assured, we are committed to conducting a thorough investigation and ensuring that those responsible are held accountable.

JUSTIN

Well, yeah. They want their animal back.

BEKKA

It's bullshit. That's absolute bullshit.

JUSTIN

It seems pretty matter-of-fact.

BEKKA

But they don't care about his welfare.

JUSTIN

It's the PR machine, doing its thing.

BEKKA

They know what this is about, and they're choosing to ignore it.

JUSTIN

They don't want to call attention to the issue.

BEKKA

They're suppressing the message.

JUSTIN

Maybe they didn't get the message.

BEKKA

It couldn't have been clearer.

JUSTIN

I don't know about that.

BEKKA

Why would anyone break into a lab that does animal testing?

JUSTIN

Why would they?

BEKKA

Are you intentionally trying to annoy me?

JUSTIN

Look, you talked all about direct action last week.

BEKKA

Yeah, and then I did it.

JUSTIN

The other part of it is taking responsibility for it.

Bekka is silent.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

If you want your message to be heard, it has to come from a person, not a bunch of masked marauders.

BEKKA

I have an idea. It's probably a bad one.

JUSTIN

What do you propose?

BEKKA

You know the profile you were writing about me?

JUSTIN

I'm game to do it.

BEKKA

What if you do something else instead?

(MORE)

BEKKA (CONT'D)

What if you say that you have a source - me - that cites the reason for the break-in?

JUSTIN

That's putting a fine point on it.

BEKKA

Don't use anyone else's names obviously. There are a bunch of animal groups on campus, not to mention in town.

JUSTIN

You want to put your name out there.

BEKKA

You just said I had to take responsibility. And I believe in what we did. So yeah. Do it.

JUSTIN

I thought the idea of breaking in was dumb at first. But I agree with you now. If other ways don't work, you have to do something that does.

BEKKA

So, you'll write it?

JUSTIN

They'll ask me a load of questions about it.

BEKKA

Can't you claim journalistic neutrality or something?

JUSTIN

It's a college paper not the Post.

BEKKA

You wouldn't have come here unless you were on our team.

JUSTIN

Animal testing is an injustice.

BEKKA

Yes! And why is the college not engaging with us on these critical issues? What are they afraid of?

JUSTIN

I'll have to talk to the other side too, you know. It's not a hit piece.

BEKKA

What other side? There's only one side.

JUSTIN

Well, the scientists, the administration.

BEKKA

The scientists are murderers.

JUSTIN

Bekka...

BEKKA

What? They are. They should be protesting too.

JUSTIN

They have their own objectives. Some highly noble ones.

BEKKA

So, you're on their side now?

JUSTIN

It's not about sides. I'm a journalist, and I want to hold onto perspective and distance.

BEKKA

You want to keep things at a distance. You don't want to engage directly in life. You want to observe it.

JUSTIN

I walked through the snow and up a hill at seven o'clock in the morning to see you because you asked to me to. And there's a rabbit in your bathroom. And a destroyed lab down the hill. And I'm fully here in mind, body and spirit. I'm fairly sure I'm engaged in life. You have a weird way of talking to people.

BEKKA

I'm sorry. I'm hopped up. I'm worried. I appreciate that you came here, but you can't just use your presence in this moment as a shield for your "both sides" argument. It's a cop-out.

JUSTIN

I'm not trying to avoid anything. I'm trying to maintain journalistic integrity.

BEKKA

Journalistic integrity doesn't mean you have to sit on the fence when it's clear one side is wrong. "Both sides" is dangerous. Both sides can be used to justify terrible behavior, immoral behavior. You know this!

JUSTIN

Yeah, but I'm not saying both sides are equal! I'm saying that representation of opinions is the only way we can really talk to each other. I don't jump to conclusions without the facts.

BEKKA

There comes a point when neutrality becomes complicity. By refusing to acknowledge when one side is clearly causing harm, you're indirectly endorsing it.

JUSTIN

I want to report the truth without bias.

BEKKA

Sometimes the truth is biased. It's about recognizing that certain actions are fundamentally wrong!

They're both silent.

JUSTIN

If we're too quick to condemn, we might end up doing more harm than good.

BEKKA

What's happening down the hill is wrong. We can't afford to be passive observers when we have the ability to shine light on it.

JUSTIN

I hear what you're saying, but i'm reporting what I learn. That's my condition.

BEKKA

I hope you'll always be open to the possibility that there is only one side...

JUSTIN

I'll write it. I'll take your statement, and I'll get in touch with the others.

BEKKA

Do not call us vigilantes.

JUSTIN

Vigilantes don't use silly string as their primary method of destruction.

BEKKA

This is a serious thing.

JUSTIN

And I'm a -

BEKKA

Serious person. So am I.

JUSTIN

Go and tend to that rabbit of yours. Did you see how he was facing away from us? Like he was pissed off. I'd be pissed off too if someone put me in a box.

Justin gathers his things and leaves.

YOOHOO HONEY!

Bekka slouches next to Walter (in the tub.) She mindlessly scrolls through TikTok. The videos pop up and we hear them. Walter shakes his head, watching her.

She gets a text on her phone. She springs back to life, and then sighs when she notices who it is from.

LINDA YOUNG VOICE MESSAGE

Yoohoo, honey! It's Mom! Isn't this fun? It's a voice memo. Your brother taught me how to do it. You know, you should really set up your voicemail on this number. It says it's not set up. Anyhow, I sent you a few text messages, and Daddy says you haven't returned his messages either. You okay? I know you're busy. (*Sounds of Chip coming into the room.*) Oh! Your Dad's here. Here, say hello to Bekka. (*Chip speaks.*) Rebekka, sweetheart. How's our almost college graduate? Two more months until the fun begins? Right? (*He pauses.*) Can you hear me? Hello? (*Linda speaks.*) Oh, no, dear, I'm leaving a voice memo. She's not on live. (*Chip says to Linda.*) Oh, well, you could have told me that. Call us back, Bekka. Your mother's worried.

Bekka turns back to scrolling through Tiktok.

WALTER

For the love of Jane Goodall turn that off!

Surprised, Bekka suddenly turns to face Walter.

BEKKA

Hello?!

WALTER

I am languishing here! Simply languishing! You have to pull yourself together.

BEKKA

I'm waiting for EB. They're not answering my texts.

WALTER

Twelve unanswered texts - that's the message they're sending.

BEKKA

They've got to come back here eventually. I'm worried.

WALTER

Take a hint, Sherlock.

BEKKA

Look, it was a rough day. I'm sure they're processing.

WALTER

They have processed enough to avoid you.

BEKKA

You don't have to be mean about it.

WALTER

Is this a hostage situation or what?

BEKKA

You're not a hostage! You're *rescued*! Is there anything you need?

WALTER

Uhhh. My house! My life!

BEKKA

I made you a hutch.

WALTER

This is a box.

BEKKA

Do you want something to pass the time?

Walter looks around at the torn up newspaper serving as his bedding.

WALTER

Well, you tore up the paper.

BEKKA

I wanted you to feel comfortable.

WALTER

And by the way, I read some of these opinion pieces...well, the ones that were still intact. Absolute drivel if you ask me.

BEKKA

I can get you something else to read.

WALTER

Reading isn't my objective here. I want OUT! Maybe you should call Chip and Linda back. They sound like people with plans.

BEKKA

How do you know their names?

WALTER

Do you know mine?

BEKKA

What?

WALTER

My name?

BEKKA

How would I know your name?

WALTER

Sometimes the simplest common courtesies escape you. My name is Walter P. Rabbit. Not that you ever asked.

BEKKA

What does the P stand for?

WALTER

(Emphasizing the Ps.) Patience, persistence, purpose...penitence. Maybe I did something wrong in my last life to be here today?

BEKKA

You believe in reincarnation.

WALTER

One's beliefs change in solitary confinement.

BEKKA

I promise this is only temporary.

WALTER

All of this is only temporary.

I FOUGHT THE LAW AND THE LAW SUCKS

A day later, EB's inside of Professor Gordon's office. EB holds index cards with their key points on them. They refer to them while talking.

EB

I took some notes.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Take a tissue if you want one.

EB

I'm not the crying type.

PROFESSOR GORDON

What kind of type is that?

EB

I don't need a tissue.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Elizabeth, I'm deeply concerned about the incident at the animal testing facility. Breaking into a secure facility is a serious matter.

EB

The only person who calls me Elizabeth is my mom.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Apologies. EB. Why were you compelled to take such drastic action?

EB

I acknowledge that my actions were extreme, but they come from what I learned in my Morality and Science class.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Dr. Frazer's class?

EB

Yes.

PROFESSOR GORDON

How does breaking the campus guidelines align with the principles of ethical inquiry?!

EB

We've been taught to challenge the status quo, question the ethical foundations of scientific research and engage in meaningful introspection.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Yes, all true.

EB

It was in this class that I became acutely aware of the ethical concerns surrounding animal testing. That's why I joined A.R.N. in the first place.

PROFESSOR GORDON

I understand the importance of critical thinking, but there are legal and ethical boundaries that we have to uphold.

EB

I respect those boundaries. However, when confronted with an issue as morally complex as animal testing, I felt a deep responsibility to take real action.

PROFESSOR GORDON

And that meant breaking into school property?

EB

Sometimes our moral duty requires us to step outside the comfort of legality and make a bold statement against injustices that might otherwise go unnoticed.

PROFESSOR GORDON

But there are established channels for activism and advocacy that don't involve breaking the law. Why didn't you pursue those avenues?

EB

I did! I wrote letters, signed petitions, and participated in peaceful protests.

PROFESSOR GORDON

And when you didn't get what you wanted, you decided to throw caution to the wind?

EB

They failed to generate the necessary attention and urgency needed to bring about change.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Change isn't always fast. I've been at this college for 30 years, and they finally repainted my office. You didn't see me kicking the door in, did you?

EB

You're telling me that that my only option is to write letters and hold up protest signs?

PROFESSOR GORDON

I am not saying that.

EB

Systemic change doesn't happen that way.

PROFESSOR GORDON

You didn't think about engaging directly with the faculty of the AG school? Perhaps there is a middle ground?

EB

How is there a *middle ground* when it comes to torturing animals? There is no middle ground.

PROFESSOR GORDON

So, the scientists that are diligently studying medical breakthroughs? The ones that stay up late and apply for grants for the equipment that you destroyed - they should be ignored?

EB

Direct action is meant to create a crisis.

PROFESSOR GORDON

A crisis that has put your own education and that of your friends' in jeopardy, that has put your fellow students in jeopardy. You didn't think it through.

EB

I really thought I was doing the right thing. And sometimes that's also about standing up and with your friends.

PROFESSOR GORDON

Is that why you did it? For your friends?

EB

For all of it, but obviously, yes, my friends. Doesn't that count for anything? I believe that Rose has a responsibility to encourage open dialogue, nurture compassion, and empower students to take a stand against unethical practices.

PROFESSOR GORDON

That is one thing we agree on...in principle. Not in practice. Not in this instance. *Beat.* We convened as a group and what we're recommending is pretty lenient in my opinion: a learning module with the scientists who run the lab, community service that includes clean-up of the surrounding fields.

EB

Okay.

PROFESSOR GORDON

And, there's one more thing...this is very regrettable to me, but the Vanguard committee met with me, and unfortunately, they will be withdrawing you from your scholarship.

EB

What do you mean withdrawing?

PROFESSOR GORDON

I'm sorry.

EB

My scholarship? I don't have any money.

PROFESSOR GORDON

There are options.

EB

Like what?

PROFESSOR GORDON

Loans, work study. Options.

EB

When does it stop?

PROFESSOR GORDON

Effective at the end of the semester.

EB

That's not fair.

PROFESSOR GORDON

There are consequences to actions.

EB

What about Bekka and Ollie?

PROFESSOR GORDON

I had a similar chat with them.

EB

But they get to stay in school?

PROFESSOR GORDON

No one is kicking you out of Rose.

EB

By taking away my scholarship, you are!

PROFESSOR GORDON

It's out of my hands, I'm afraid. I will do everything I can to connect you with the people who can help you navigate it. I'd start by talking with your parents.

EB

My parents?

PROFESSOR GORDON

Yes.

EB
They can't help.

PROFESSOR GORDON
Perhaps they'll have some ideas? Or
at least provide some comfort?

EB
Ok. The world...it's just so fucked
up. There is so much wrong with it.

PROFESSOR GORDON
Yes there is a lot wrong with the
world.

EB
And we're expected to read about
it, and talk about it, and get
scared.

PROFESSOR GORDON
Sometimes when the world feels too
large, it's good to focus on
smaller things in your life, to
break them down. To see what you
can change personally. One day at a
time.

EB
Yes, that's what I did.

PROFESSOR GORDON
EB, you're a smart person and have
a bright future ahead. Take a
minute to think about what's next.
I'm here to help. Truly.

EB
Right. I've heard that one before.
Never works out for me.

EB takes the unused tissues, folds them and places them on
Professor Gordon's desk. EB leaves the office.

FAKE NEWS | REAL NEWS

Pete, Aria, Justin and Ollie sit in the common room of Pete's
building.

ARIA
What I'm saying is - you totally
messed up!

JUSTIN

How did I mess up? Bekka asked me to write about it. She told me to put her name on it.

ARIA

But all of us are on the hook now. They know it's her, and they'll know it's us.

JUSTIN

Without my article, the school would have rolled over it.

OLLIE

They're still rolling over it.

JUSTIN

No. Look at the comments - they're from students and people from other places. Not just Rose.

ARIA

So?

JUSTIN

It means the story is getting out there. And that's the point, right? The school doesn't want negative press attention. They'll have to act.

PETE

Do you really think that one article and one action is going to make this school abandon decades of research?

JUSTIN

So, it's better we didn't do anything and didn't write about it?

PETE

To be clear, you didn't *do* anything.

JUSTIN

I did. My name is on the byline. You don't think Professor G interrogated me like I was a criminal?

PETE

Writing about the risk isn't the same as taking it.

JUSTIN

I'm not saying it is, but free press is the foundation of every democracy.

PETE

Thanks for the history lesson.

OLLIE

Take it easy.

JUSTIN

Every time I show up, someone yells at me. Guess I'm the idiot.

ARIA

You heard about EB, right?

OLLIE

Yeah. We all got community service, but she...they took away their scholarship.

PETE

Oh man. That's terrible.

ARIA

That's on us.

PETE

I was saying this was going to go belly-up from the beginning.

ARIA

You know what, Pete? You don't need to say "I told you so" anymore. Why are you even here?

PETE

I'm here because I can't afford for you guys to do anything else stupid.

ARIA

Who are you calling stupid?

PETE

Not stupid. Irrational.

ARIA
You said stupid.

PETE
I meant irrational. Don't be hysterical!

ARIA
So, I'm a stupid, hysterical and irrational woman?

PETE
Aria stop it! I'm not good with words.

ARIA
You always say that when you are acting like a jerk. But you have plenty of good words when you're not on your back foot.

PETE
I'm here because I care, and-

ARIA
This is you caring?

PETE
You took my freaking badge! My access to the Lab can be suspended if they find out. And you're next too!

ARIA
You gave me the choice! And I made it. And they *believe* that you lost it. There's a reason for that.

PETE
Oh here we go again..

OLLIE
What do you mean?

PETE
She's going to say because of my Dad.

ARIA
Well, yeah.

PETE
He has nothing to do with anything. I barely talk to the guy.

ARIA

Helpful that his name - YOUR name-
is on a list of people who funded
the whole building in the first
place.

PETE

Do you have to bring it up every
day? I don't know why I'm suddenly
the enemy here. I'm here, aren't I?

OLLIE

Okay, okay, stop you two.

ARIA

What do we do now?

JUSTIN

You keep going.

ARIA

What do you mean?

JUSTIN

It's not a lost cause. You believe
in ending animal testing. Then
stand up for it. Find more ways of
putting pressure on the
administration. Own up to it. Let
me write about it again. Put your
neck on the line.

ARIA

We already did.

JUSTIN

Change can take time, but there's
strength in numbers. Maybe get some
faculty members on board.

PETE

You know, that's not a bad idea.

JUSTIN

I have a few good ones from time to
time.

OLLIE

I'm not sure I have any actual
skills to contribute to this.

JUSTIN

Are you kidding? Of course you do.
You're a playwright. You're an
actor. Make art about it.

OLLIE

Make art about it? Weren't you
mocking me just last week.

JUSTIN

You know. Like, write a play or
something. Do what you can.

ARIA

It's a good plot. A break-in. A
fight: good versus evil.

JUSTIN

A rabbit.

ARIA

A rabbit. That poor thing.

PETE

She's gotta give it back.

OLLIE

Maybe it's a musical, the thing I
write.

ARIA

"Caged No More" - I can see it.

JUSTIN

But seriously, you can't expect to
do one thing and stop. Aria, Pete,
you have years to go. You can do
more and more if you care about
this. Pete, you're on the inside of
it - make change there.

PETE

Maybe. I'm not sure this is the
cause I want to take up.

ARIA

Cuz it doesn't serve you, right?

PETE

You know what...never mind.

Pete leaves.

JUSTIN

Oh jeez. You might want to follow him.

ARIA

Nope.

OLLIE

Has anyone checked in on EB?

ARIA

Not yet. We should do that.

OLLIE

What about starting a go fund me for her?

ARIA

That's a really good idea. Yeah. I'm going to go find her.

Aria leaves.

JUSTIN

You really think you can raise that much money.

OLLIE

I don't know. But I like to bet on hope.

JUSTIN

Better than the alternative.

OLLIE

Yeah it is. Feels like you're sucked into this A.R.N. thing too.

JUSTIN

I don't know. Maybe I am.

OLLIE

Give up burgers yet?

JUSTIN

One step at a time.

MADLY & DEEPLY

Later that day. Pete sits in the hallway outside of Bekka and EB's apartment. Aria sits beside him.

ARIA
Back where we started.

PETE
What do you mean?

ARIA
Us being weird in a hallway.

PETE
Yeah. That feels like a long time ago.

ARIA
It was a semester ago.

PETE
Time is weird in college. *Beat.* I should go home. I have a ton of stuff to do. I guess they'll show up eventually.

ARIA
Pete, wait.

PETE
What?

ARIA
I heard from Justin what you did for EB.

PETE
Yeah.

ARIA
That's a really nice thing.

PETE
He didn't bite though.

ARIA
But you tried. What did you say to him?

PETE
I was like, Dad, please call the scholarship committee and see if you can - in his style - "lean on 'em."

ARIA
What did he say?

PETE

He said that if I spend my time trying to 'save people,' I'll get distracted from my own life. That's how he thinks about the world - the winners - and everyone they climb on to get there.

ARIA

You're not your Dad. And it was nice of you to ask.

PETE

I'm not actually an asshole.

ARIA

I didn't think you were.

PETE

I knew you'd take my badge.

ARIA

I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't important.

PETE

Maybe I was hoping you wouldn't. Like you'd take my side.

ARIA

It wasn't you versus this...not ever.

PETE

But you get why I couldn't give it to you. It would have made me even more part of it than I already am.

ARIA

I didn't totally ignore you by the way. I didn't go. I wanted to, but I didn't.

PETE

Things like that - protesting - I don't like getting involved in stuff like it. Maybe it makes me a shitty person.

ARIA

You don't have to get involved in the way other people do. You have your own way of doing stuff.

PETE

People don't like that - they say that I'm not committed. Even A.R.N. says that silence is complicity.

ARIA

You have so much 'fight in you' - why don't you want to use it?

PETE

Growing up it was always a fight to get a word in with my Dad. We'd sit as he'd monologue about taking over the world...literally. I never had any fight in me. Maybe he took all of it. Maybe the apple fell too far from the tree.

ARIA

Maybe you haven't found something that you *have* to fight for?

PETE

Maybe. Or maybe I'm just a coward?

THE CHANDRESEKHAR LIMIT

Bekka has been searching for EB. Finally a few hours after sunset, she wanders outside of their dorm to the slope, where EB is sitting on a jacket on the grass.

BEKKA

I've been texting and calling you. Where have you been?

EB

Here and there.

BEKKA

Did you talk with Professor G?

EB

Yes.

BEKKA

And?

EB is silent, looking up at the sky.

EB

It's weird to think that people solve what's up there by doing complex math problems down here.

BEKKA
Physicists.

EB
Yes.

BEKKA
Like you.

EB
I learned about this thing today -
the Chandrasekhar Limit.

BEKKA
What's that?

EB
It establishes the maximum mass a
star can have to remain stable.

BEKKA
Oh?

EB
It's a threshold that determines a
fate of a star.

BEKKA
Cool.

EB
As the star exceeds the limit, it
creates a supernova. The explosion
releases a huge amount of energy
and scatters the star's enriched
material into space.

BEKKA
So, the star dies when it crosses
the limit?

EB
Yes, but by sacrificing its own
existence, the star becomes a
cosmic alchemist, dispersing the
necessary elements for life. It's
from this act of stellar death that
the potential for life emerges.
Like everything - the grass, the
ocean, the food we eat, who we are.
All of it.

BEKKA
That's beautiful.

EB
That's physics.

BEKKA
I'm sorry.

EB
For what?

BEKKA
Justin's article. So we're going to do community service together, right? Assuming you got fields clean-up, like me and Ollie?

EB
You know I can't come back next semester, right?

BEKKA
What?

EB
I can't come back.

BEKKA
To Rose?

EB
Nope.

BEKKA
What do you mean?

EB
I couldn't see the stars at all at home. There was too much light pollution. And when I first got to Rose, I thought: I can sit out here and look at this every night.

BEKKA
Why can't you come back?

EB
I lost my scholarship. They said I wasn't upholding the values of the Vanguard Society.

BEKKA
The values?

EB

CHI: Compassion. Honesty.
Integrity.

BEKKA

You are *all* of those things.

EB

Apparently defacing school property
isn't something they can put in the
newsletter.

BEKKA

And that's it? You don't even get
another chance?

EB

Most people don't get second
chances. Most people don't even get
first chances. Being here - that
was my first chance. That was my
only chance.

BEKKA

We'll sue.

EB

I violated a policy that I agreed
to.

BEKKA

There has to be some give. I was
the ring leader of all of this. I
was the one who persuaded you.

EB

I persuaded me, not you.

BEKKA

What can I do?

EB

Nothing. It's my fault. I got
comfortable. I thought that I had
the right to take something down.

BEKKA

You do have that right?

EB

But I forgot there is no net for
me. I forgot that.

BEKKA

No safety net?

EB

I thought that you and I were the same.

BEKKA

We are.

EB

No, we're not. You were born with power. I have to fight for it.

BEKKA

I don't see anything different between us besides how we grew up.

EB

This kind of reminds me of the chat we had with Pete - is it genes?

BEKKA

Of course it isn't!

EB

It's something. My whole life I feel like I missing something. Not just missing. *Lacked*. I've had to work twice as hard for the same outcome. I thought that if I worked hard, I could forget about what happened before I came to Rose.

BEKKA

You do work so hard. You do.

EB

It doesn't erase the past. It doesn't make me closer to being equal to everyone else.

They are silent for a moment.

BEKKA

I feel like I should be the one getting the harsher punishment.

EB

People who are privileged can walk away from it, but it's make believe. They know the net is still there if they take a wrong step.

BEKKA

Is that how you feel about me? Am I
"people"?

EB

It's the way people can engage in
the world so confidently, like
they're protected all the time.
Walk into any room with their chest
puffed, into any circumstance, into
any problem. They know they're the
top of the heap.

BEKKA

I didn't mean to do anything
intentionally.

EB

You don't need to think about it.

BEKKA

I think all the time.

EB

In an academic sense. You think
about ideas, not real life. You
don't have to think too much about
real life because all of that is
taken care of for you.

BEKKA

That's not fair. I do care. I
actually do.

EB

You have never had to worry about
where you live, how you live, where
to get food. You don't have the
static that most people live with
every day.

BEKKA

I may be all of those things, but I
still think it's really unfair that
they took away your scholarship.
You're such a good student.

EB

Good, bad, it doesn't matter if you
don't have money. That's the level-
up. Money.

BEKKA

We'll fundraise. We'll-

EB

Bek, please just stop.

BEKKA

I would have never let you come if I thought--you know, it's the system. The system is broken.

EB

Stop talking about the system!! What does that even mean? Systems are good things. They create order and stability.

BEKKA

Sometimes the system allows terrible things to happen.

EB

The system keeps me alive - my scholarship, my healthcare, my clothes, my shoes, everything. And honestly, the Ag school - the sciences - they bring so much money to Rose. You think one student's morality would topple that?

BEKKA

So, it's not worth trying?

EB

We aren't that special, Bekka. I wanted to go to college. That was my thing. My only thing. I didn't want to bring down this particular system. I need it!

BEKKA

I'm sorry I didn't see it like that.

EB

You don't have to think about the system. You live in it, but you're not reliant on it. It doesn't keep you alive. You have parents who can do that. People who rely on the system should never be asked to take it down.

BEKKA

This is something I really cared about, something that I needed.

(MORE)

BEKKA (CONT'D)

And you're my best friend and I wanted you to be part of it.

EB

It was my fault for spending too much time in the illusion that this life was actually mine when it wasn't. I was always on borrowed time. Everything about me at this place is borrowed.

Bekka puts a hot chocolate down next to her.

BEKKA

I brought you this. It's Swiss Miss.

EB

I'd like to be alone now.

BEKKA

Is there anything I can do? Get you?

EB

Let's say goodbye, and leave it at that.

BEKKA

Goodbye? What do you mean?

EB

People don't usually get to say goodbye at the right time.

Bekka stands for a minute, thinking of what to say. She finally walks away. EB sits on the hill, looking out at the campus lights twinkling below and the stars above.

EPILOGUE

Bekka drives down an empty road. Walter is in a box in the front seat. He peers out.

BEKKA

So, you're not talking to me either?

Walter twitches his nose.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Look, I know you didn't raise your paw and say, 'get me outta of this hell hole.' But trust me, that lab isn't what you think it is. I couldn't just leave you there while being subjected to who knows what kind of experiments. You have no idea what you've been spared from.

Walter rolls his eyes.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

Those scientists...they were probably planning to turn you into some kind of mutant superhero or something.

Walter's ears perk up, and then he turns away from Bekka.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

I checked this place out online. It's a rabbit utopia. You, the lab rabbit turned King, living it up in your very own bunny paradise. I can already hear the whispers in the burrow, "Did you hear about Walter? The daring escapee who lives the high life in his own private carrot kingdom!"

Walter stares out the window, avoiding her gaze.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

You'll be the talk of the warren, my friend, the legend of the hops!

Walter turns. He opens his mouth to speak, but stops himself.

BEKKA (CONT'D)

I don't regret doing it. It didn't pan out the way I imagined it would. Maybe everyone will forgive me one day. Maybe they won't. Do you think they will?

Bekka pulls into a dirt driveway leading to the sanctuary. She gets out of the car and hands the box with Walter in it to a person who works at the sanctuary. She gets back in the car and watches them walk away.

WALTER

(elegiacally) Oh lamentations!
The cat sits on the mat.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

The mouse scurries across the path.

The bird sings in warning.

The pig wallows in the mud.

The bee dashes itself against the screen.

The rabbit, Walter, will not go mad at the river crossing.

The human whistles, not noticing the thousand eyes looking at her, expectantly.

END OF PLAY