

Perfect

By

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FADE IN:

1

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

1

Early morning light trickles in behind a stream of milk cascading into a measuring cup. Faint, upbeat music is coming from the radio.

BELLA, 19, is at once beautiful, exhausted and sick. She is pale, her hair is brittle and her posture makes her bones look malleable.

Bella slides the measuring cup forward on the counter.

BELLA

Good?

SHELBY, 35, smiles through perfectly applied strokes of matte raspberry lipstick. Her eyes grow warm at the sight of Bella. Her ample build and bright glow tell us Shelby is a beacon of love and comfort.

SHELBY

(teasing)

A little bit more.

Bella gives the cup a meager splash.

GABBY, 25, awkwardly approaches the counter. Her dark eyebrows and exaggerated features form shadows on her face. Her long, thick brown hair threatens to swallow her stubby, stout legs whole.

GABBY

Good morning!! Any intentions for breakfast today, Bella?

Gabby's spunk hits Bella like a slap in the face.

BELLA

(distant, not sassy)

To eat it.

GABBY

Achievable and realistic! One bite at a time, as I always say.

ELLIE, 17, exits the pantry with a packet of instant oatmeal in hand. Her body is hidden underneath drab, black, baggy garb. But her soft, blonde hair and porcelain skin tell us there is a brighter side to Ellie.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIE

You've literally never said that.

SHELBY

Bel, will you gong for me?

Bella looks like a puppet being controlled by a tired, out-of-practice puppeteer. She lazily drags herself to the common room.

2 INT. COMMON ROOM-DAY

2

Bella stands opposite a black gong, picks up the velvet clad mallet and gives the instrument a mild tap.

It lets out a haunting cry and Shelby, Gabby, Ellie and THREE OTHER GIRLS who seem to have never smiled in their lives walk past the gong. Each girl has a drastically different shape.

3 INT. DINING ROOM-DAY

3

Everyone finds their seats at a long wooden table. Each place setting has well balanced meals prepared and waiting under cheap plastic cloches.

They sit down silently. Gabby throws GIRL 1 an encouraging look.

GIRL 1

I felt guilty for eating french toast yesterday because it caused me to take up more space in the world. I know that thought is disordered, so I'm challenging it by eating french toast again today.

Gabby looks like God just professed his love for her. Everyone else's expression reveals about as much excitement as it would had a street light changed from red to green. They begin interacting with their food.

GABBY

Anybody have any weird dreams last night?

A sly smile spreads across Ellie's face.

ELLIE

I--

SHELBY
I'm actually going to STAT this conversation.

GIRL 2
(whispers)
STAT?

GIRL 1
Stop talking about this.

GIRL 3
"Triggering content." Ellie has nightmares.

Most of the girls snicker. We hear forks clanking against glass plates.

4 INT. COMMON ROOM-DAY

4

The girls are covered in blankets and scattered on the couch and lounge chairs.

Karen, 40, sits on a folding chair with her legs crossed and back straight. She is wearing a pantsuit, heels, huge clip on earrings and red lipstick. Her curly afro is like a halo over her head.

KAREN
How are we doing, ladies?

The girls AD LIB unenthusiastically.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I'm excited for our group session today. I've got a new coping skill for your arsenals. This one helped me through recovery.

Tiffany, 32, is very obviously the oldest patient in the room. The stains on her sweatpants suggest negligence. Her collar bones protrude with such definition that they look like sharp razor blades on her chest.

She glares at the younger girls from her dark corner of the couch.

TIFFANY
(thick Long Island accent)
Can I leave? I know the coping skills.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIE

This is your seventh time in treatment. I'd be concerned if you didn't.

KAREN

No, Tiffany, I'd like you to stay here. I'm sure the girls would appreciate insight from someone with your experience.

Tiffany rolls her eyes and slouches deeper into the couch.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Bella, you were assigned an eating disorder/healthy self dialogue in therapy this week. Can you explain what that is?

BELLA

(shy)

Sure. You have two voices in your head: your E.D. voice and your Healthy Self voice.

KAREN

(short beat)

Right, and the two voices argue back and forth. Which one is really you?

BELLA

Healthy self...

(short beat)

...The E.D. voice is your inner critic.

KAREN

That's why when you have disordered thoughts, they sound like someone is reprimanding you. Those thoughts are really Ed bullying you.

Karen looks at Bella patiently and waits.

BELLA

(nervous, hesitant)

For the dialogues, you write down something Ed would say, like, "You can't hang out with your friends until you've perfected yourself." Then you write a healthy self response.

(CONTINUED)

KAREN

What would the healthy self respond to that?

The room is quiet. All of the patients avoid Karen's eyes.

KAREN (CONT'D)

(long beat)

My healthy self would tell me that my friends aren't looking for me to be perfect. They're looking for me to be me.

TIFFANY

It's not about your friends. I can't be part of the world until I've met my standards.

ELLIE

They're not your standards.

BELLA

They're Ed's.

KAREN

I'd like for each of you to write an E.D./Healthy Self dialogue in your journals, and we'll share them at the end of session. But first, does anyone have hopes for Bella's pass today?

TIFFANY

How does she already have a pass? I've been here for three months.

ELLIE

If passes depended on how long we've been here, I'd never have to come back from mine.

KAREN

Bella might have to leave soon, so we want to give her the option to experiment with independence while she still has us as supports to fall back on.

BELLA

(to Ellie)

My insurance is gonna cut me.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIE

Screw that. I'm sorry.

KAREN

Well there's not much we can do at this point, so, Bella, if you choose to go on your pass, you'll have the next five hours to leave the facility by yourself.

GIRL 1

So she gets to miss afternoon snack?

ELLIE

Why do you think we all want passes?

KAREN

Yes, Bella won't be here for afternoon snack, so it's up to her to stick to her meal plan.

ELLIE

(whispers to Bella)

If you screw up just tell them you got a cookie.

TIFFANY

And don't come back here all sweaty. One girl just ran for five hours straight. Got all her privileges taken away.

GIRL 2

I'm right here.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Tiffany. We are nonjudgemental observers; we do not reprimand, we support. And please don't plant seeds in other peoples' heads.

TIFFANY

(to Bella)

What, are you gonna spend your pass doing jumping jacks in the neighbor's yard now that I "planted that seed?"

Bella is quiet and uncomfortable.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIE

(to Bella)

I hope you hold your ground no matter what Ed says to you. Don't let that asshole push you around.

BELLA

Thanks.

5

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER PARKING LOT-DAY

5

Bella exits a cab in her treatment garb: sweatpants, a teeshirt and a messy ponytail. Her ghostly face stands in stark contrast to the flushed, sun-kissed cheeks that pass her by.

ED, a grayish-white translucent cloud, floats a step in front of Bella. His body is a shapeless piece of cotton, and his only expressive feature is a devious smile.

They walk across the parking lot.

ED

I care about you, Bella.

BELLA

No, you really don't.

ED

You have so much potential; you just have to keep working hard.

BELLA

I'm too tired to try anymore.

Bella approaches a cafe and reaches for the door, but Ed moves in front of the handle. His sly expression changes to a scowl.

ED

You think you're miserable now? You wouldn't last a day without me.

BELLA

You won't even let me try.

ED

(Enraged)

Because I know what's best for you, Bella.

Bella jumps back in fear and takes off running as fast as she can. Ed is close behind.

(CONTINUED)

ED (CONT'D)

You don't really think *running* is going to get rid of me. You're practically embracing me right now.

BELLA

Shut up!

ED

(Tauntingly)

You're gonna do what I want anyway, we might as well be amicable with each other.

Bella runs into an empty playground.

ED (CONT'D)

Remind me again, who's been your best friend for seven years?

Bella is hysterically crying. She runs over to a swing set and grabs onto the metal pole to keep herself from toppling over. She struggles to catch her breath while Ed leisurely assumes his position facing her.

ED (CONT'D)

Look at you. They taught you how to cry again. You look pathetic. You are embarrassingly weak.

Bella moves away from the pole and collapses onto the grass. She lies down with her leg tucked into her chest and her arms protectively holding her body together. Ed floats over her, casting a shadow over her body.

Bella sits completely still for a few beats. She releases the tension in her jaw and her arms slightly. She looks broken, but peaceful. Ed drifts a few inches away from her.

The sun glistens on her cheeks and floods her entire body. She opens her eyes and all she sees are the clouds in the sky.

END.