

Belle

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INT. BEDROOM - DAY

BELLE, a young girl about 16, sits in front of a vanity and mirror. She is dressed in black clothes, and wears a dark BACKPACK. The room is strangely devoid of color.

The MAKEUP covers her face in a heavy layer and actually makes her look much worse than she should.

While she puts more makeup on, she is looking at a PICTURE spread out on the vanity top. The picture is in full color. A man, apparently Jesus, laughs while holding a little girl on his lap. He fascinates Belle. The bright colors, but mostly just his eyes, his laugh.

Belle adds some more mascara and eye shadow, overhearing her mother's conversation with her brother.

STUPID (O.S.)

Mom, do you hate me?

MOM (O.S.)

Yes, why, of course I do, Stupid.
Your father and I both do.

Beat. Belle screws the cap on her mascara.

MOM (O.S.)(CONT'D)

Ugly! Are you ready to go?

Belle quickly reaches for the picture of Jesus, but knocks over the mascara. She grabs the picture just as

Her MOM, about forty, wearing dark gray pants, a black shirt and similarly heavy makeup, steps into her room. She, too, wears a dark pack on her back. She sees the picture and snatches it from Belle.

BELLE

Mom!

MOM

What's this?

Pretending to ignore her, Belle slides her backpack around front (as if it were almost a part of her) and starts putting her makeup items inside.

BELLE

Nothin'.

MOM

I don't think so young lady.

Her younger brother, STUPID, about 10, runs in. He's wearing a paper bag over his head with little cut outs for his arms to fit through. The bag has eyes and a face drawn on it, with a mouth that is open--which makes sense when he starts screaming and running around the room, wearing his gray little backpack.

BELLE

Shut up, Stupid. Get out of here.

MOM

I demand an explanation.

BELLE

(to Stupid, alarmed)
Don't touch anything!

STUPID

(to Mom)
Lemme see, lemme see!

He pulls her arm down with the picture and looks at it.

Her DAD pokes his head around the corner. He is also dressed in dark gray and black, with a charlatan's snide smile painted on his face along with a mustache, some thick eyebrows and makeup around his eyes and cheeks. A black businessman's backpack rests on his shoulders and he carries a BRIEFCASE.

DAD

What's goin' on?

Mom shows him the picture.

DAD (CONT'D)

Whoa there, Ugly. You know the rules, no beauty in this house.

BELLE

But Dad--

DAD

No buts about it, that's gotta go.

STUPID

It makes me wanna *smile*.

Mom crumples the picture up and puts it in the trash can.

DAD

I'm going to work. Bye Ugly, and
Stupid, and my hideous faced wife!

Mom beams at the compliment. Dad turns and walks down the
hall.

BELLE

(with feeling)

I hate you, Dad.

STUPID

Yeah, me too.

DAD (O.S.)

Same here!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A classroom full of STUDENTS, including Belle, are standing
by their desks. A TEACHER, wearing a heavy book bag,
presides over the class, a large blackboard behind her. All
dressed in grays and blacks, with different variations of
heavy makeup or masks and styles of backpacks (still on
their backs).

ALL

(in unison)

I am nothing more than a
meaningless collection of atoms
that randomly collided. I have no
value except the value I
create. Love is a fleeting feeling
that does not exist.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Belle walks down the hallway, passing the lockers and many
kids, not making eye contact. The kids scowl mostly,
jeering, name calling, pushing each other. A boy points at
her, laughing meanly.

A kid rushes past Belle, bumping into her. Some TALKING,
but nothing clear. SHOUTS, SCREAMS, LAUGHTER.

RANDOM KID

Let's go!

They all storm past Belle, who has almost reached the door.

EXT. OUTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL/FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The overcast sky intensifies the coldness, as several high school kids pick up rocks and bricks from the flowerbeds on either side of Belle.

She looks at them, puzzled. Another group of kids further away shout: "Goodie two shoes!" "Nice boy!"

Then Belle sees him. A young MAN, 20's, in full, bright color, whistling merrily and carrying a large white BIBLE as he crosses the field in front of her. He isn't wearing a pack at all.

The kids hurl their rocks and bricks. They sail through the air, pelting the grass around the man. A rock hits him in the arm and he rubs it. The kids SHOUT.

As they throw more rocks and shout, to intimidate him, Belle stands alone, watching him. She likes him, and is concerned for him.

After the man crosses the street, the kids cheer in triumph.

EXT. PARK - MOMENTS LATER

The man walks into the park. Belle follows discreetly, from a safe distance, peeking at him behind a tree. She steps on a leaf and he hears her. Turning, he sees her. But is she a friend or foe?

Belle's wide eyed fascination and sincere longing in her eyes convince him. He smiles. She softens. She trusts him, and pulls out the carefully smoothed out picture of Jesus from her pocket. She shows it to him.

He smiles broadly. Then he opens up his Bible to the exact same picture, which is only a piece to a bigger picture. She joys over this discovery and steps forward.

He reaches for her backpack. She recoils. Then tries to recover.

BELLE

Hi.

MAN

Hello.

INT. DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Her family sits around a dinner table in a spartan dining room with a haunting picture of a man screaming hanging on the wall. They are eating out of metal tins in place of plates and everyone is using sporks. On each tin there is a slice of sandwich bread with sardines carefully arranged on the top. There are several opened tins of sardines on the table.

Dad's face no longer has a snide smile painted on it, but instead an exhausted end-of-the-day lack of smile. Stupid's paper bag now has a cut-out hole in it for his mouth. He is drinking from the empty sardine cans.

DAD

Stupid, stop drinking the juice and start eating your dinner.

STUPID

But this is my dinner.

MOM

Listen to your father.

There is an awkward pause.

DAD

So how was your day today, Ugly?

BELLE

It's Belle.

DAD

Excuse me?

BELLE

My name is Belle.

MOM

Is this another sick joke?

BELLE

No, that's what this guy told me.

STUPID

Ugly has a boyfriend!

BELLE

He's not a boyfriend.

DAD

Well, you should've sent him to me.

STUPID

Ugly hates a boy! Ugly hates a boy!

BELLE

Dad, he's not my boyfriend.

MOM

Who was this *good* man?

BELLE

Just somebody I met on the way home.

DAD

Well, how old was he?

BELLE

College age.

MOM

Ugly how could you!

BELLE

Mom-it's not, he's not...he just told me about Jesus.

MOM

Jesus! How could he!

DAD

Well, what about him?

BELLE

He...um...well, I guess it was just that He loves us.

DAD

Ugly! Go to your room! I don't ever want to hear that word again!

Belle fumes silently. She gets up from her chair.

INT./EXT. BEDROOM / LAWN - EARLY EVENING

Belle slams the door behind her. Her room is still, quiet. She opens the window, and pops out the screen.

OUTSIDE -

Her sheet set comes flying out the window. Next her mattress gets stuck.

INSIDE -

She manages to push the mattress out. The pillows, the comforter.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Belle lies on the mattress, now properly fixed and made, studying a picture of Jesus in the big Bible.

BELLE
 (whispering)
 Jesus, Lord, God, I want to love
 you.

Her dad sticks his head out her window.

DAD
 Ugly-I...I'm not even gonna
 ask. Are you coming in?

BELLE
 It's Belle.
 (beat)
 And no, I'm not.

DAD
 I'm shutting the window.

BELLE
 Fine.

DAD
 It'll be cold out there.

BELLE
 I have my blanket.

EXT. LAWN - NIGHT

Belle shivers while sleeping on the bed. She wears her backpack in front of her, tenderly holding it.

Silently a VEILED FIGURE, cloaked in gray, steals across her lawn. He slips his hand, hidden in a dark glove, through the handle of her backpack and pulls. Still sleeping, Belle holds on, trying to pull it back to her. She wakes, groggy.

The Veiled Figure pulls harder, Belle yanks on her pack, bringing him into her comforter at the end of the bed.

Frightened, she clutches her pack desperately. He peels one of her hands off the pack. She SCREAMS.

He wraps his hands around the backpack. He tries to wrestle it out of her hands. She kicks him in the stomach and he GRUNTS, letting go.

Belle breaths a sigh of relief as the Veiled Figure stands. As he does, she glimpses his feet, peeking out beneath the gray cloak. They are in full color.

She watches as the Veiled Figure walks away. The cloak slips off entirely, revealing a white robe. Even from behind, clearly this is JESUS. She looks wistfully at him.

Belle rolls over, holding on tightly to her backpack. She shifts restlessly.

EXT./INT. LAWN/BEDROOM - DAWN

BELLE
(whispers)
Okay, Lord.

Belle sits on her bed, looking at something, longingly. Her eyes are sad, missing something.

CLOSE ON - THE BACKPACK

It is on the grass a few feet away from the bed. Alone.

She crosses her arms and hugs herself, trying to comfort herself like the backpack. It doesn't work. She wraps herself in her comforter and lies down on her side.

Watching the backpack.

LATER INSIDE -

Belle's eyes...in the mirror...studying her face. Like she's looking for a zit, scrutinizing herself for any tiny hopeful dot of color.

She's disappointed. Still as colorless as always.

There is a KNOCK at her bedroom door. Belle opens it slowly, bracing for the worst.

It is Jesus. He radiates light, color and life, dressed in a white robe with a golden belt. He doesn't speak a word, but he doesn't need to. His eyes melt with love and understanding for Belle. She receives this.

She is uncertain what to do. He hugs her, which is awkward for her, and wipes some of the makeup off her face. She hugs him tightly.

Belle's face has begun to color, as has her shirt. Seeing this, she smiles. Letting go of Jesus she dances, jumping for joy as she sees her reflection in the mirror.

She looks back, but Jesus is no longer there.

SUDDENLY -

the door flings open. Mom jumps, screaming, as she sees Belle.

DAD (O.S.)
What? Is it a mouse?

Dad enters the room, still carrying his briefcase. Furious, he SLAMS his briefcase onto her desk, startling Belle and sending her books and ceramic trinkets flying.

DAD (CONT'D)
You little worthless collection of atoms!

MOM
We'll get it out of you! No child of ours will have life!

Dad SHOVES Belle. She falls backward onto the floor.

BELLE
Jesus!

DAD
I'll get him out of you, too!

Mom pulls out a makeup kit from her backpack and rushes in to Belle. She smears some gray dust back across Belle's face, covering up the color.

DAD (CONT'D)
Well, I'd say you're permanently grounded, young lady, until you forget about this Jesus and stop being loved by Him!

MOM

And you must change your shirt!

The door SLAMS.

Belle starts crying. In the mirror she sees the color disappearing from her shirt. She tries wiping the makeup from her face, but it doesn't wipe. She cries bitterly.

Outside her window, Jesus stands, crying, as it rains. She hurls her bible at the window. She misses, hitting a bureau.

BELLE

(at Jesus)

I hate you!

Belle looks at her reflection and points at herself.

BELLE

And you too--Ugly!

INT. LIVING ROOM - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Belle holds tightly to her regained backpack as she shuts the front door.

In the b.g., Mom and Dad drink tea on the couch, watching her proudly.

DAD

You made the right choice, my little wart-faced Ugly.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She plops onto her bed. Unzips her pack. She pulls out a black cloak and a scary-looking dark teddy bear. She covers herself in the cloak and squeezes the bear close. It doesn't help.

Angrily she shoves both back into her pack, but something catches her eye. She digs around a black bowling ball and pulls a dark army-style knife, sheathed in black leather. Zips her backpack and swings it over her shoulders.

Sitting in front of her mirror, she looks at herself, wondering why she gave it all up. Wishing, but depressed.

She unsheathes the knife. It is menacing, as it gleams in the light.

She clasps it with two hands, lifts it into the air, the sharp tip pointing at her, and

JESUS -

stops her. She tries to shake his grasp from the knife, but he is too strong. She resents him. He loves her. The sadness in his eyes makes this real. She softens.

Then, as if it's too much, she pushes him away and looks back at the knife. She turns. Outside Jesus walks away.

Dropping the knife, she runs to the window, opening it.

BELLE

(kicking out the screen)

Wait!

He turns and runs toward her with his arms outstretched. She jumps, hugging him tightly. While her grip on him remains ironclad, she slips out of her backpack, throwing it one-handed through her open window.

He smiles, relieved. In the rain, the makeup is washing from her face.

JESUS

My beloved daughter.

By now most of Belle's makeup has washed away and color is quickly coming to her clothes. The sun begins shining.

EXT. PARK - LATER

Belle carries her Bible, smiling and talking (MOS) with the young man she first met. Several other people, full of color and without backpacks sit at a table and some benches in the b.g. enjoying each other. Jesus sits with them, in the center.

FADE OUT

