

*Prom Thing:*

Exploring My High School Gender Crisis Through A Horror Comedy

by

Justin Moritz

2023

**The Thesis Committee for Justin Moritz  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:**

***Prom Thing:***

**Exploring My High School Gender Crisis Through A Horror Comedy**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Richard Lewis, Supervisor

Stuart Kelban

*Prom Thing:*  
**Exploring My High School Gender Crisis Through A Horror Comedy**

**by**  
**Justin Moritz**

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**  
**August 2023**

## **Acknowledgements**

*Prom Thing* wouldn't be possible without the support of the University of Texas-Austin RTF faculty, my friends and family, and my peer screenwriters and other beta-readers.

## **Abstract**

### ***Prom Thing:***

## **Exploring My High School Gender Crisis Through A Horror Comedy**

Justin Moritz, M.F.A

The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

Supervisor: Richard Lewis

This thesis documents the process of writing the thesis feature script *Prom Thing*, documenting the process of conceptualizing, outlining, and drafting both the initial first draft in Fall 2022 and the thesis draft in Summer 2023.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Conceptualization.....	7
Chapter 2: Influences .....	9
Chapter 3: First Draft.....	11
Chapter 4: Revision Plan & Thesis Draft .....	13
Chapter 5: Future Drafts .....	15
Appendix A: <i>Prom Thing</i> : First Draft .....	17
Appenxic B: <i>Prom Thing</i> : Thesis Draft .....	138

## CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALIZATION

*Prom Thing*, at its most fundamental, is an emotional deep dive into my own conflicted feelings about my gender, society's emphasis on the gender binary, and a means to sort through the dysphoria I experienced as I was crowned my high school's Prom King while deeply in the closet. When I was crowned in 2016, I found myself juggling an absurd amount of AP coursework, unhealthy amount of extracurriculars, and battling it out for a competitive full-ride scholarship. I didn't even have time to come up, breathe, and even remotely consider my sexuality. Even when I eventually came out as an ambiguously queer individual my freshman year of college, it didn't even occur to me that I wasn't a man, because throughout my life and especially during my Prom King era, I was praised for my masculinity and that pushed any dysphoria deeper.

Cut to 2021, I moved to Austin, Texas with the goal of moving outside my parents' hemisphere and exploring my gender identity as a recently self-discovered non-binary person. *Prom Thing* was originally conceived by the title alone, a throwaway line to casually drop that I wasn't a man when my former Prom King status found its way into conversation (thank you, two truths and a lie). The idea of using the title as a springboard came to me when I was reworking my trans horror musical, *The Devil's Aria*, which followed a trans woman who is launched into pop stardom when she signs a deal with a demonic music producer, only for her transness to be erased as she's marketed as a ciswoman. While *The Devil's Aria* dealt with my own fear of how society would perceive my transness, I set out to create a feature that tackled my non-binary experience through speculative elements, using a fish monster stand-in as an entry point to my exploration of the gender binary and how it's engrained in the education system.

As I prepared my second feature-length project in the UT-Austin MFA Screenwriting program, I wanted to push myself outside my comfort zone. As a writer, I tend to write scripts with smaller casts, so I set out to write a script with a bit of an ensemble, featuring about five or so main character with a rotating cast of interesting faces and personalities to imbue Shady Cove High with life. While I would consider this to be an R-rated teen horror comedy, I did have to consider how my tendency for incorporating violence and carnage into my work would translate in a high school setting, causing me to shift my focus when it came to the horror to be more existential and less extreme. This feature, as compared to *The Devil's Aria*, is definitely more reserved when it comes to the trans analogy at its heart. We never get an explicit moment of Laszlo acknowledging that he isn't a man, but rather, he begins to question his own existence within the constraints of the gender binary, considering what it means to not exactly fit in one category or another.



## CHAPTER 2: INFLUENCES

Influence-wise, I was drawn to other coming-of-age films and series that incorporate genre and speculative elements. Since I am writing a prom horror movie, I was predictably drawn to Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), inspiring me to approach Laszlo's fishy transformation through the lens that puberty and teenage transformation is in itself a horrific ordeal. Similarly, I was drawn to John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000), a coming-of-age werewolf horror film where a girl's burgeoning sexuality coincides with her transformation into a violent werewolf. These films inspired me to approach my protagonist Laszlo's transformation into a *Creature From The Black Lagoon*-esque monster as coinciding with feelings of social isolation, gender dysphoria and confusion, and personal dissonance.

Our primary antagonist, Tara Hunter, a teenage monster hunter turned bigoted PTA mom and cheer coach, is rooted in the campy, bubbly personality of the titular *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but I wanted to pervert this character's archetype, postulating what would happen if Buffy's view of her monster hunting responsibilities shifted from protecting the world to exterminating whatever she views as monstrous. Unfortunately, I was also severely influenced by anti-LGBTQIA+ propaganda and legislation aimed to push queer and trans people out of public life under the guise of "protecting the children". Tara is meant to be a stand-in for parental interference in schooling as well as the crusade to ban books, regulate the gender of clothing items, and police bathrooms. Every time I started to get a sense of how Tara's bigotry impacts Laszlo, his queer peers, and even heterosexual, cisgender students, there would be another ridiculous anti-LGBTQIA+ bill passed or extremist viewpoint entering the conservative playbook. While Tara is a

violent, manipulative, and cruel antagonist, I continue to worry that her extremism will become commonplace as the current era of anti-LGBTQIA+ propaganda continues to escalate.

Structurally, I broke down several teen ensemble comedies, noting that those that succeed contain a strong structural framework with memorable set pieces and sequences. For example, Mark Waters' *Mean Girls* (2004) is a film about infiltrating cliques and creating social sabotage from within. In this film, our protagonist Cady Herron seeks to topple queen bee Regina George by destroying the three pillars of her social status: her boyfriend Aaron Samuels, her "hot" body, and her army of skanks. Incorporating these three tasks into *Mean Girls* gives the plot tentpoles to be suspended between, maintaining momentum throughout Act Two. I struggled with the void of the second act and coming up with plot elements that didn't feel like they belonged in the first act, so breaking down this film and using a similar framework for Laszlo ruining high school jock O'Connell Moore's prom significantly solidified my concept. Additionally, Olivia Wilde's *Booksmart* (2019) inspired me to consider how to incorporate a diverse and interesting ensemble of supporting characters into my script, considering the web of social relationships and the overlap between these characters and our main characters to bring life to Shady Cove High.

## CHAPTER 3: FIRST DRAFT

The first draft of *Prom Thing* was written in Prof. Richard Lewis' 2<sup>nd</sup>-Year Screenwriting Workshop in Fall 2022. My goal when writing this draft was to get a strong sense of my characters, the most rudimentary character arc of my protagonist Laszlo Mayberry, and begin to figure out the dynamics within my ensemble.

Conceptually, my peers and instructor were quite excited about this script, with most of my peers happy that it was more comedic and less frightening than my last script. While beginning to flesh out my ensemble, protagonist, and antagonists, I did frequently run into the comment that Tara Hunter, in her ex-monster hunter turned bigoted PTA mom glory, came across as much more intriguing than Laszlo's shy, keep your head down until graduation philosophy. Readers frequently pondered if I could reimagine my script with cheerleader & newbie monster hunter Cassie Hunter as the protagonist, as her relationship with her mother and her elaborate plans for what Cassie's life should be resulted in a natural arc of Cassie learning to stand up for herself and set out to create her own legacy. However, I remained insistent that Laszlo needed to be the protagonist, as the concept was built on his gender journey, but I was challenged to externalize that internal journey more in future drafts.

My first draft was consistently praised for its humor, as well as its reliance on campy aesthetics and absurdism to elevate this comedy to levels reminiscent of other campy pieces of media such as Ryan Murphy's *Glee* (2009-2015) and Christopher Landon's *Freaky* (2020). Prof. Richard Lewis frequently insisted that I incorporate a romantic element into the script, as it is focused around Prom, which is a pivotal event for coming-of-age romance. This proved to be an intriguing challenge as it allowed me to

dive into Laszlo's sexuality and gender, as well as complicate my character relationship web to elevate tension and dramatic opportunity. Another frequent point of debate was my use of an opening flashback sequence where a teenage Tara Hunter brutally murdered a teen monster, establishing the tone and Tara as someone who could grow up to be hateful and predatory; however, readers noted that there was a disconnect between our introduction of Laszlo that followed this scene.

My first draft did fall into classic Justin Moritz pitfalls. Specifically, as I started writing my draft, I discovered that moments in my second act made more sense being moved to the first act. While I spent a ton of time focused on Laszlo's discovery of his fishy transformation and his eventual revealing of this fact to his friends, I forgot about most of the pomp & circumstance of running for Prom Court. Readers frequently pitched that I incorporate elements of the high school prom experience, such as promposals, to drive the plot forward. I was also encouraged to consider why Laszlo would even go to Prom, especially if he comes to realize it's very likely a trap by those who oppose and spite him. Going into draft two, I wanted to put more emphasis on the Prom part of my script, rather than just the Thing monster part of the script.

## CHAPTER 4: REVISION PLAN & THESIS DRAFT

After reading through the feedback I received from my workshop peers, instructors, and my critique group, my main focus in my second draft was to turn Laszlo into a more active protagonist. While horror films tend to follow an inverse plot arc where a character is pursued until the point in which they act, Laszlo's passivity resulted in him being bland and not standing out amongst the more dynamic cast. With the help of my thesis advisor Richard Lewis, I aimed to reinvent Laszlo in my second draft, turning him from a passive, disinterested nobody to someone who has something to lose as his monstrous transformations threaten his goal of living a normal life, and more importantly, attending the prestigious Stanford University.

In reimagining Laszlo, I had to abandon my notion that it was cheesy to write a character in part inspired by my own experience. This new version of Laszlo is doing everything, except thinking about who he is sexually or gender-wise. He's overloaded with too many extracurriculars, the responsibility of being the school mascot, and navigating the constant harassment of school jock O'Connell Moore. Laszlo, being elevated to the podium of a Prom King candidate, paints a target on his back, bombarding him with a tirade of O'Connell's homophobic abuse and Tara Hunter's pointed antagonism. While Laszlo now plans to ruin O'Connell's chances at Prom King, Tara hopes to secure her daughter and O'Connell the Prom titles in order to make up for her own ruined Prom dreams twenty years earlier.

Significant restructuring of plot points had to be completed in preparation of writing my thesis draft. Many sequences from the later half of my original draft had to be moved up into the first act to shift the story from focusing on Laszlo's discovery of his

fishy form to how he navigates this discovery alongside the social climax of his high school career. I truthfully struggled outlining this draft; however, with many failed outline drafts and random documents of notes, I managed to create a strong first act to springboard through Act 2. During my loose conceptualization of Act 2, I wanted to reimagine my villains and their roles. While Tara remains the primary focus, she and O'Connell now represent two sides of a bigoted coin, with O'Connell representing ignorant bigotry and Tara representing intentional, calculated discrimination and targeted violence. Taking influences from *Mean Girls*, Laszlo and his friends now have a series of tasks to accomplish as they undermine O'Connell's Prom King candidacy, become entangled in his and Cassie's relationship, and feel the wrath of stepping on Tara's long-laid out game plan.

Additionally, the opening flashback sequence caused a lot of contention during my original draft with many praising the tone and establishment of the genre, but criticizing the lack of connection to Laszlo's introduction. While I did originally play with a sort-of montage sequence establishing Laszlo's normal life with voiceover atop, I didn't feel it in me to sustain a voiceover throughout the rest of the script and scrapped it. The whole teen coming-of-age voiceover definitely peaked in like 2005, so I'm glad that I challenged myself to justify my flashback opening. I did this by incorporating a scene where Tara loses Prom Queen due to her tardiness after attacking a group of fish people performing a ritual on the nearby beach, watching as an unknown girl is crowned Prom Queen in her place. Tara very much is still hyperfixated on this core memory twenty years later, so when her malice becomes directed at Laszlo, he remains unsure why he in particular pissed her off; however, as we learn more about the past of Shady Cove, and in turn about Laszlo's mother, we learn that she was the queen crowned in Tara's place.

## CHAPTER 5: FUTURE DRAFTS

As I approach the completion of this thesis draft, I am already beginning to identify areas of improvement I would want to make in subsequent drafts.

Most obviously, for a teen horror comedy, *Prom Thing* is much too close to the 120 page mark. After writing all the scenes I had brainstormed for this new version of the script, I had almost 150 pages. I was able to consider overlap in the purposes of individual scenes and streamline plot beats to get it much closer to my 105 page goal. In subsequent drafts, I would like to further simplify the first half of my second act, as there are several repeated beats of characters discovering Laszlo's fish man identity. While I like the new direction of Laszlo deciding to ruin O'Connell's life and subsequently egging on Tara because O'Connell and Cassie are tied in her own delusional narrative, I would like to start this plan earlier in the script, ideally somewhere around the break into the second act. This might require some reimagining of Laszlo's discovery of his fish side in the first act, as I think that O'Connell beating up Laszlo in the shower is a more powerful trigger for Laszlo's transformation than his current, private discovery of this condition.

At the moment, I might have one too many sequences, as the basketball game, gay bar, and pageant sequences fall mostly back-to-back. With this draft emphasizing Prom much more than the previous draft, I want to brainstorm more ways that Laszlo can accomplish his goal of stealing O'Connell's crown that could occur parallel to one another rather than having distinct sequences. This definitely bloated my script with setup and transition scenes, but overall, I am happy with the new additions I chose to make.

My biggest challenge for future drafts will be reassessing the balance of characters in comparison to Laszlo and his goals. While I think it was the right move to

elevate O'Connell from a bumbling idiot to more of a secondary villain, I do worry that Laszlo's sights being on him rather than Tara muddles my original concept. I also scaled back some of Rayne's political activities, advocating against Tara's frankly fascist control of the school and its curriculum, but wonder if it would be possible to tie this goal in tandem to Laszlo's goal of toppling O'Connell. Other considerations include the balance of humor and horror as I felt like I leaned more humor with horror influences in this draft, as well as seeking out a wider array of feedback to assess if the gender commentary is coming across.



APPENDIX A: PROM THING FIRST DRAFT

Written by

Justin Moritz

FADE IN:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A warehouse sits on a derelict, chum-strewn pier. An otherworldly green glow spills out of the building's large bay windows.

CULTISTS

(pre-lap)

We sing the hymn of the Dweller of the Deep. Chant the chorus of the Bivalved Behemoth. Harmonious amongst the pandemonium of salt and sea, of blood and viscera...

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eldritch symbols are scrawled in blood across the concrete. Hooded cultists draped in barbed hooks and fishing nets dance between them with harpoons and sacrificial implements in their tentacled hands.

CULTISTS

Like the moon, we draw the tides of terror. Sand and grit swelling about his sleepwalking ankles. We proclaim the world his!

HEAD CULTIST SQUIDFACE, demarcated as the leader by his coral headpiece, leads the cultists.

The ground trembles. An earthquake awakening from deep within the ocean.

CRASH! Glass showers from the high ceiling as the windows are kicked out. The cultists look up, their squid-like faces peeking from their hoods as they watch a squad of teenage girls dressed in velour tracksuits flip through the air.

The teens land dramatically in a series of poses they definitely practiced. They're armed with stakes and crossbows, and by the way they immediately start attacking, they know how to use them.

Yet the girls still struggle to fight as the ground shakes beneath them. They seem overwhelmed by the cultists, their weapons quickly knocked from their hands.

One of the girls, HARMONY, has her hair parted with a dozen butterfly clips. But she's not armed with a sword or axe, instead she holds a glittery, bubblegum pink boombox.

HEAD CULTIST SQUIDFACE

You're too late. His ascent is written in the sands of time. You can't stop us. We are inevitable.

Harmony knocks all of the décor off a nearby altar, replacing it with her boombox.

HARMONY

We know we can't. But she can.

Harmony pushes play. Britney Spears' *Gimme More* plays, juxtaposed against the sonorous chanting of the cultists.

BOOMBOX

*It's Britney, bitch!*

CRASH! From overhead, the skylight is smashed out. Despite the length of the fall, TARA HUNTER (18F) perfectly lands, her fist punching a hole in the concrete. She flicks a strand of icy blonde hair out of her eyes, popping bubblegum between her teeth as she stands.

TARA

Sup, bitches.

HEAD CULTIST SQUIDFACE

Tara Hunter, let me be the one to tell you that if you spent less time picking out your outfit, maybe you'd have arrived before the end of the world.

TARA

It's called being fashionably late. And if we're trading advice, calamari is an appetizer at Applebee's not an aesthetic.

Squidface balls his fist in anger.

HEAD CULTIST SQUIDFACE

Kill her!

The cultists ignore the other girls, rushing Tara.

Tara puckers as she applies lip gloss, completely unbothered by the mob running at her. She returns the gloss to her bag, then pulls a massive broadsword from her extremely small enchanted clutch.

The chorus of the Britney Spears song plays.

TARA

Fuck, I love this song.

SPLLLLLLT! Tara spins, the blade an extension of her body. A cultist looks down at his belly as his torso is sliced in two, entrails spilling out.

A swarm of cultists charge Tara with their weapons raised. But she bends at the knees, their blades harmlessly slicing the air overhead.

Tara hacks and slashes her way through the underlings.

Squidface chants in a strange language, balls of green fire erupting in his palms. He launches them at Tara, but she braces herself with the broadsword.

Her platform boots slide across the ground with each deflected blast, but with each successive volley, the sword melts down to a nub.

TARA (CONT'D)

Oh, you're going to pay for that.  
That was a birthday gift from my  
Meemaw!

Tara and Squidface spar. She kicks the ornate crown from his head, the rhinestones bedazzling the ass of her tracksuit reading: SLAY, QUEEN.

But Squidface is an adept fighter, wearing Tara down with each punch and kick.

Harmony jumps across the room for a discarded stake.

HARMONY

Tara, catch!

Tara throws her hand into the air, the stake perfectly landing in her palm. She pirouettes around Squidface, stabbing the stake through his ribs.

Squidface collapses to the ground, blood spilling out of his mouth. Tara grabs him by his tentacled chin.

SQUIDFACE

You may have won today, but he  
shall rise again and rule as king.

TARA

Thing is Shady Cove already has a  
Queen. It's me, duh!

The other girls cheer.

HARMONY  
You did it, Tara!

TARA  
I couldn't do it without my girls.

The girls all hug over Squidface's dying form.

But then they hear the sound of footsteps. The girls turn to see a cultist running towards the doors, an ornate Eldritch tome clutched in his arms.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Launch me!

The girls quickly link arms, tossing Tara through the air. She lands her boot on the cultist's throat. His hood falls down to reveal a barnacle covered face, his tentacles less developed than the other cultists. Just a boy.

SQUIDFACE  
Please, he's my son...he's just a boy, he knows no better...he's innocent.

TARA  
With a face like that, he's far from innocent. Just another urchin crawling out of the world's armpit.

Tara stabs the boy brutally with her stake.

Squidface screams, weakly crawls towards his dead son as the other girls begin kicking him to death, splattering his brains across the warehouse floor.

Harmony approaches Tara.

TARA (CONT'D)  
We did it. We killed the last monsters living in Shady Cove. What is that? Fifteen apocalypses averted this year?

HARMONY  
Seventeen. But what now? Are we just supposed to go back to how things were?

TARA

If I've learned anything, it's that there's always going to be another big bad. And when it slinks out of wherever it's hiding, the Huntresses will be there to defend the world.

The girls cheer.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: EIGHTEEN YEARS LATER

A crowded parent-teacher association meeting unfolds. At the podium is RAYNE VANDERCAMP (18 trans male), signaling to an extremely elaborate PowerPoint presentation with a laser.

RAYNE

If we consider the almost 15% increase in the number of queer couples found within my generation in comparison to our parents' generation, it makes perfect sense to rectify the reliance of the binary in the nomination of Prom King and Queen candidates by shifting to a gender-neutral Prom Royalty contest.

A small subsection of the audience, Shady Cove High's Gay-Straight Alliance, cheer on their president as he presents his case.

But as their cheers subside, weak clapping continues from several rows behind them as LASZLO MAYBERRY (18 closeted non-binary, assigned-male-at-birth) doesn't get the cue that it's time to quiet down so Rayne can continue.

Laszlo awkwardly looks around as the crowd of parents stare at him.

PRINCIPAL SEXTON PRICE (40s M) is much too hunky to be in public education, yet he hides behind the outdated three piece suits of a more distinguished academic.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Mr. Vandercamp, we are concerned regarding the logistics of implementing this change. We respect your passion for this adjustment to protocol, but with final exams quickly approaching and Prom only a week out, this puts incredible stress on your peers.

RAYNE

An incredible amount of stress? A slight adjustment in how ballots are counted would elevate an immeasurable amount of discomfort thrust upon the queer students of this high school...

Rayne flips through his 3-ring binder of evidence.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

According to a study--

The double doors at the back of the room are thrown open. The audience's attention is pulled away from Rayne as a progression of luxury athleisure wearing, high-pony sporting suburban moms enter led by a fortysomething Tara Hunter.

The crowd goes wild, murmuring as Tara walks to the center of the room.

TARA

Let me see if I heard this right?  
We're expected to abandon decades  
of American high school traditions  
for a token minority of attention  
seekers.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Ms. Hunter, the floor has been  
given to Mr. Vandercamp--

TARA

--May I remind you who the governor  
of Florida said was in charge of  
our kids' educations? The parents.

(beat)

This is absurd. It's not even like  
any of you pronoun-having, blue-  
haired attention-seekers would win  
when there are clearly better  
candidates that truly represent  
what Shady Cove is about.

RAYNE

How does it affect you, Ms. Hunter?  
You're like forty--

Tara slams her fist against a nearby table. It's loud enough to muffle the sound of Rayne uttering her age.

TARA

How does it affect me? How dare  
you! As a former Prom Queen, I  
recognize the sanctity of our  
precious high school traditions.  
The Prom Queen and King should  
represent the best of the high  
school experience. They should be  
the zeitgeist of American  
excellence. The queen should be  
beautiful and graceful.

(MORE)



TARA (CONT'D)

The king the epitome of masculine standards and strength.

RAYNE

You graduated pre-9/11, how can you say what represents our high school? You're out of touch, and maybe if you had a gay friend, they'd tell you that those bangs are atrocious.

The crowd gasps. Laszlo looks to his father, RODNEY MAYBERRY (40s M), sitting beside him. Rodney pulls on the collar of his shirt, as if things are getting too hot to handle.

Tara signals to the other Huntresses, who pull pom poms out of their luxury handbags. Tara flips onto a nearby table.

TARA

Ready, ladies?

HUNTRESSES

Okay!

Tara and the Huntresses begin a synchronized cheer.

TARA & HUNTRESSES

One! Two! Three! You know what we don't want to see? L-G-B-T. Yeah, no homos. Yeah, yeah, no homos!

Principal Price tries to speak up.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Ms. Hunter, this is highly inappropriate--

TARA

--What's inappropriate is what the so-called homosexual agenda is doing to our children! Convincing them to be like Mr. Vandercamp, slicing off their bits like some Frankensteinian freak.

The Huntresses continue with their cheer. The crowd joins in. Principal Price elbows the secretary beside him as she mumbles along.

SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

(hissing)

What are you doing?

SECRETARY

What? It's catchy.

Almost everyone in the audience is cheering now. The catchy chant caught in their heads, and the hate in their hearts palatable.

Rayne collects himself and walks away from the podium. Tara begins loudly booing at Rayne.

Laszlo stands up, sweat dripping down his face and staining his shirt. His father tries to tug on his sleeve and get him to sit down, but Laszlo quickly exits the row to leave.

Someone in the crowd throws a chocolate milkshake in Rayne's direction, but Laszlo's body blocks it. SPLAT! Ice cream drips down Laszlo's face as he runs out of the room.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MEN'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Laszlo stands in front of the mirror, tears melting the milkshake off his cheeks. He grabs a wad of paper towels, begins to wipe the ice cream from his skin.

Even as he cleans the mess up, he's dripping with sweat, skin pallid as he tries to steady his breathing. He winces as he swipes milkshake off his cheek, the skin beneath rough to the touch. Almost scale-y, shimmering beneath the skin.

LASZLO

What the fuck?

Laszlo begins to scratch vigorously at the spot, skin flaking away as he does so.

Rayne rushes into the bathroom. As soon as Laszlo sees him, he straightens up, holds a hand over the strange spot.

RAYNE

Shit, are you okay, uh...I've seen you around school...you're the guy who dances in the tuna costume.

LASZLO

It's Laszlo, and he's actually a Mackerel.

Rayne grabs a wad of paper towels to wipe away the ice cream dripping down Laszlo's chin. But he flinches, jumping back as he keeps a hand clasped around the rough patch on his cheek.

RAYNE

Are you okay, Laszlo? I think you might be bleeding.

LASZLO

It's really nothing. Just a pimple. I should be going, my dad is probably looking for me.

Laszlo runs off.

INT. RODNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Laszlo sits in the passenger seat, hands wrapped around his knees, gazing silently out of the window.

Rodney clears his throat.

RODNEY

You hungry, kiddo?

LASZLO

Not really.

Rodney slows the car as several fast-food restaurants are seen in the distance.

RODNEY

Ooh, we could grab some Shake Shack--

LASZLO

--Dad!

RODNEY

Shit, sorry, Lasz.

An uncomfortable beat of silence.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

You sure you're okay?

Laszlo groans.

LASZLO

Why can't we just drive in silence?

RODNEY

What happened back there, it sucks, Laszlo. I don't want my kid to take what those fuckers said to heart.

LASZLO

It doesn't affect me. I just decided to go the bathroom at the wrong time.

RODNEY

You were upset, Laszlo. I'm not stupid.

LASZLO

Just drop it.

RODNEY

You know that I'll always be here for you, bud. Doesn't matter who you, doesn't matter what you are. I'm your father regardless of you're straight, gay, and anything in between. You can talk to me--

LASZLO

Oh my god, Dad, have you ever tried just shutting up?

HONK! Rodney almost swerves into incoming traffic. Laszlo braces himself, grabs hold of the handle above him.

RODNEY

Shit, fuck, shit!

LASZLO

Do you want me to drive?

Rodney shakes his head as he returns to his lane. He looks over to his son, spots the bloody patch of skin on his jaw. Rodney reaches to touch it, causing Laszlo to swat him away.

RODNEY

You're bleeding.

LASZLO

It's a pimple, Dad.

RODNEY

We should have someone look at that.

Laszlo pulls the hood of his hoodie tight around his face.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DAY

It's bright and early. High school students trickle in with massive 'coffees' and very few backpacks in sight. This isn't a school where things are learned. It's more of a vibe.

Rodney's car pulls up to the curve. A hooded, sunglass wearing Laszlo exits the car, shielding his face with his hands. His peers tilt their heads, unsure of who he is.

Laszlo rushes towards the school to try to avoid a scene.

HONK! Laszlo turns to see his father waving out the window.

RODNEY

Laszlo! You forgot your PB&J, hold  
the crusts.

Rodney tosses the sandwich at Laszlo, who has very clearly never been good at catching things in his life. His hood and sunglasses fall off as he picks up his smooshed lunch.

Rodney speeds off before the ridicule begins, seemingly unaware of the students now laughing at his son.

STUDENTS

Look, it's Milkshake Mayberry!

LASZLO

(beneath his breath)  
I wish I was dead.

Laszlo reaches for the door, but a hand slams it shut before he can enter. O'CONNELL MOORE (18M), the epitome of All-American Douchebag, leans into Laszlo's field of view.

O'CONNELL

If you were dead, who would do my  
calculus homework?

O'Connell grins, even his teeth are perfect.

Laszlo sighs, reaches into his bag to hand the homework to O'Connell. O'Connell raises an eyebrow, grabs Laszlo by the shirt.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

This isn't complete, cum wipe.

O'Connell jams his finger against a blank space. But before he can kick Laszlo's ass, FATIMA HAKEEM (17F) grabs the homework, tossing it over her shoulder. Fatima is confident because she deserves to be, she might even scare O'Connell.

O'Connell stumbles before it's carried off into the wind.

FATIMA

That spot is where you write your name.

Fatima grabs Laszlo by the arm, pulls him into the school.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MAIN HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Laszlo opens his locker and begins to crawl inside, grabs the door to slam it closed. She catches the door.

FATIMA

It's not that big of a deal, Laszlo.

LASZLO

Excuse me, I was trying to crawl in here and die. I'll see you when my body starts to smell.

FATIMA

You're going to let this ruin your last week of high school, dweeb?

LASZLO

If you're going to call me names, you need to get more creative.

FATIMA

It's senior year! Are you going to go out of here with your tail between your legs?

LASZLO

Yes!

Laszlo tries to yank the door closed.

FATIMA

Our generation's attention span is like seven seconds. No one will remember this by the afternoon.

Fatima opens her phone, tapping on TikTok.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

See! Everyone is already posting about how Ashlyn Hart's first kiss was to a golden retriever. And how the dog claimed she used too much tongue!

Laszlo swipes the video away, revealing a video of him getting milkshaked in an endless loop.

LASZLO

Oh god, I'm already a Boomerang.

Fatima lets go of the locker, allowing Laszlo to shut it behind him.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - DAY

Tara wears a sweatsuit, her hair pulled up in a diamond-crusted scrunchie. She holds a megaphone in hand.

The cheerleaders stretch in their uniforms beneath Tara's watchful and judgmental eye.

Harmony, sporting a totally-outdated Kate Gosling haircut, follows close, writing notes. Still Tara's bitch all these years later.

Tara grabs ASHLYN HART's (16F) head, pushing her further into a split.

TARA

You call that a split! Touch those toes!

Ashlyn cries, earning her the glares of the other cheerleaders.

ASHLYN

This as far as I go. I already had two ribs removed!

Tara smacks the girl on the head. Harmony makes a note.

HARMONY

I'll be sure to call her parents to bully them into scheduling the removal of two more.

Tara nods, popping bubblegum between her teeth. The pair move down the line, stopping before CASSIE HUNTER (18F), the spitting image of Tara when she was young. But in every way Tara wears being queen bee confidently, Cassie seems unsure.

TARA

Ashlyn, you should take a note from Cassie. I could put her atop a framed photo to determine if it's crooked or not.

Tara smiles at her daughter. But then something catches her eye. She parts Cassie's blonde hair with her fingernails, glaring at the brown roots growing through.

CASSIE  
Something wrong, Mom?

TARA  
I can see your roots, and it's  
Coach Hunter.

Cassie blinks, stammering.

CASSIE  
I'll fix it, Coach Hunter.

TARA  
Good girl.

The gym doors fly open as Laszlo, dressed as the massive mackerel mascot, enters, smacking his head against the door frame with a resounding BANG.

LASZLO  
(as mackerel)  
I'm sorry, I got the head stuck the  
wrong way around.

TARA  
Unless you were getting ground into  
a can of tuna, I don't want to hear  
it. The Prom pep rally is tonight.  
We have a practice we were in the  
middle of getting to.

The cheerleaders aren't exactly hoping to attention. Tara screams into her megaphone.

TARA (CONT'D)  
I said, get in positions!

The cheerleaders scramble.

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - MOMENTS LATER

The Shady Cove Cheer Squad stand at the ready, hands delicately placed against their knees. Proper, poised--

TARA  
--pop those asses, ladies. You're  
not here to take communion.



Harmony gives Tara a thumbs up, then presses play on the stereo. *Primadonna* by Marina blares.

It's clear from their routine that Tara is as good of a cheer coach as she is cruel. Hips swing in time, pom poms in sync. Pyramids built that would gag the Egyptians.

But then there's Laszlo, dancing like a cartoon character that just did a line of coke off Walt Disney's frozen head. Off-beat, the only moves he knows are the Sprinkler and the Shopping Cart.

Tara roles her eyes, motions for him to scoot to the side.

The cheer squad form a sparkling tunnel of pompoms.

CHEERLEADERS

Let's go, boys!

The Shady Cove Basketball team runs into the gymnasium, wearing sparkly silver sweatsuits. They form a line, ripping off their sweat suits one-by-one to reveal much too short, very 80s basketball uniforms.

The boys pair up with the cheerleaders, sweeping them off their feet. The epitome of heterosexual excellence!

Cassie and O'Connell take center stage. They do an exaggerated pantomime of the song's lyrics.

MARINA

(singing)

Would you do anything for me? / Buy  
a big diamond ring for me? / Pop  
that pretty question right now,  
baby!

Laszlo stumbles to O'Connell's side, handing him a comically large bouquet of paper flowers. O'Connell playfully smacks the mascot head, causing it to turn off-center.

O'Connell returns to Cassie as she flips and dances alongside the basketball players and her fellow cheerleaders. He plants a kiss on her cheek before handing her the flowers.

Cassie inspects the flowers, pretends to be shocked as she reaches into the bouquet and pulls out --

--A SABRE!

Cassie tosses the roses aside, sabre-in-hand as the remix's beat drops. Cassie spins the plastic blade with more than just a cheerleader's rhythm and grace. The air whooshes around the blade, imbued with the same strength as Tara.

Everyone, including O'Connell, backs up as Cassie performs.

She throws the blade into the air, spinning on one foot as the weapon hangs in the air.

Cheerleaders suspended from aerial silks fall from the ceiling. Cannons shoot sparks into the air behind the cheer squad. How can this school afford any of this shit?

But Laszlo's mascot head is askew and obscuring his vision. He stumbles too close to Cassie as she catches the saber, puts all of her momentum behind the blade.

The blade smacks into Laszlo's throat, the mascot costume decapitated as he falls on his ass, just barely escaping with his head.

Cassie rushes to make sure Laszlo is okay.

The mackerel head sails through the air, but Tara catches it by the scalp. An irritated look on her face.

TARA

Hey, fish face, next time, hit your mark!

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - DAY

Laszlo sits on the bleachers, his head discarded beside him.

His hand absently scratches at his chin, drawing blood from the scab upon the disturbance.

Cassie clears her throat, causing Laszlo to look at her and the first aid kit she carries.

CASSIE

Looks like I might have broken the skin.

Laszlo inspects the blood beneath his nails.

Cassie sits, removes a cotton ball and rubbing alcohol. She soaks the cotton, presses it against Laszlo's wound.

LASZLO

I should go to the nurse.

CASSIE

It's a flesh wound. You'd be wasting her time.

LASZLO  
I'd be interrupting her smoke  
break.

Cassie laughs.

Cassie digs through the first aid kit, unsatisfied with its contents before pulling out a much too small, inconveniently shaped bandage.

CASSIE  
Looks like this is the best we can  
do.

LASZLO  
Then I guess I'll have to manage.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - WATER FOUNTAIN - SAME

O'Connell sprays his water bottle into his open mouth, wipes the sweat from his eyes to witness Cassie and Laszlo...

...And Cassie is smiling as he talks, carefully placing a bandage on Milkshake Mayberry's bare skin.

O'Connell scoffs, disappearing into the locker room.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The boy's locker room is a series of winding hallways connecting strange-shaped rooms. Filled with steam, it's a maze. The air so saturated with water that you can't see more than two feet ahead of you.

O'Connell pulls off his shirt, balls it up and tosses it on the floor. A polo-wearing water boy runs to fetch it, looking up at the older boy with both fear and admiration.

O'Connell steps out of his shorts, tosses them directly at the freshman's head, as another team member wraps a towel around his hips in total obedience.

O'CONNELL  
If Mayberry had walked a little  
further...Cassie would have taken  
his goddamn head off.

The boys listen intently to their leader.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
But if she had, I wouldn't get the  
chance to wring in his neck.

The basketball team hollers in agreeing.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
He thinks he can walk out of line.  
He thinks he can just walk up and  
talk to my girl. Cassie's mine.  
I've got dibs, and everyone knows  
it.

Another basketball player, PHIL (16M) plots.

PHIL  
You can get a milkshake at any hour  
of the town, boss.

O'CONNELL  
We're beyond milkshakes, we're at  
war, gentlemen. And we're going to  
hit him where it hurts.

O'Connell throws his arm up in victory, disappearing into impenetrable fog leading into the shower room. His clapping team follows. Just men celebrating the promise of violence.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - STUDENT COUNCIL ROOM - DAY

The student council is an organized machine: sorting preliminary prom ballets, testing out color combinations for decorations, and attempting to blow up a very complicated balloon arc.

But the members of the student council all seem strung out, dark circles beneath their eyes and struggling to tie balloons with shaky hands.

At their helm is MARNIE LEWIS (18F), anxiously tapping her foot as she inspects a stop watch from a raised podium.

MARNIE  
Come on, people. We're running  
behind. We should already be mixing  
confetti! Do you want this Prom to  
happen? Do you want to ruin a  
magical night because you're weak?

The student council speeds up, scissors snipping faster and faster. That's when O'Connell enters.

O'CONNELL  
Hello, my fellow student body  
representatives!

MARNIE

Oh, look who it is, the prodigal student body president. Are you here to take credit for our hard work?

O'Connell chuckles, wraps his arm around Marnie who immediately swats him off.

O'CONNELL

What would I do without you, my most precious vice president?

MARNIE

We're on a schedule, O'Connell. I don't have time to entertain whatever last minute change you want to implement.

O'Connell picks up one of his preliminary Prom King & Queen ballot. He begins to check candidates for each, but beneath Prom Queen, he adds a box. We don't see what he writes.

O'CONNELL

You go to that PTA meeting? Think that fruity dude had a point? Maybe it's time we started supporting our LGBTQ dweebs.

O'Connell hands the ballot to Marnie.

MARNIE

No, I won't do it. This is a mockery of democracy.

O'CONNELL

Who even cares about the first round of ballots? We all know that Cassie and I will be voted Queen and King. Just do this one little thing for me, Marns.

Marnie shakes her head, crumbles up O'Connell's ballot.

MARNIE

I have ethics, O'Connell.

O'Connell reaches into his pocket, pulls out a prescription bottle of Adderall.

O'CONNELL

Do you even have time to have ethics, Marnie?

(MORE)

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

It looks like we're a week out from Prom and you don't know your ass from your elbow. How about a little pick me up?

O'Connell shakes the bottle, drawing the crazed eyes of all the student council reps.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Do this little thing for me, and this is all yours.

O'Connell tosses it amongst the masses in need of the fix. Marnie dives after the pill bottle, fighting off the other council members for the bottle of Adderall.

She pours out several pills onto her podium, smashing them with her gavel into a course powder which she easily snorts.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Good girl.

O'Connell exits.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - NIGHT

The student body has crowded into the gymnasium. They cheer and clap as Cassie catches her sabre this time without a near decapitation. Laszlo dances off-beat on the sidelines.

Principal Price holds a microphone as he replaces Cassie center stage.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Okay, okay, everybody I know you're all impressed with what Coach Hunter has been teaching the girls, but we're here to discuss a crucial rite of passage: the Prom.

The audience is ravenous.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

Now, before you get too excited, I would like to remind you all that leading up to Prom, I expect every Shady Cove Mackerel to be on their best behavior.

Boos sound from the O'Connell and the basketball team.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
Very funny, Mr. Moore, but one weekend of hijinks can follow you the rest of your life. You know the worst way to end a great prom? Teen Pregnancy.

Laszlo stumbles down the sideline, armed with a tee-shirt cannon. But BANG! Instead of shirts, hundreds of condoms rain down on the student body.

But within moments, there are blown up condoms being bounced across the crowd like beach balls, coating teenage hands with lube and the smell of grape jelly.

Marnie walks across the gym, her entire body vibrating as she hands Principal Price an envelope.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
I get it. You don't want to hear an old guy talk about sex, but the only thing you'll regret more than having to listen to me talk about safety is genital warts.

The crowd laughs.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
Anyway, onto more important matters: learning which of your peers will fight for the crown. Ladies and gentleman, I present your Prom King and Queen candidates.  
(beat)  
And drum roll.

Principal Price opens the envelope as the students shake the bleachers, a spotlight circling around the gym.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
For Prom King, we have Gary Gomez, Todd Whittingham, and O'Connell Moore.

The spotlight lingers on O'Connell for longer than the other two boys. His whitened teeth sparkling as he waves.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
And time for the most beautiful ladies at Shady Cove High, your prom queen candidates are Ashlyn Hart, Cassie Hunter, Marnie Lewis...and Laszlo Mayberry.

The spotlight lands on the mackerel costume. Laszlo removes the mascot head, blinks in the bright light as he tries to make sense of what happens.

And then the crowd erupts into laughter.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

Students, can we quiet down? My apologies to Mr. Mayberry. I misspoke. This year we have had a tie for our Prom King finalists, so Mr. Mayberry will be considered for that title as appropriate.

O'Connell loudly boos. Laszlo looks at his snickering peers, hides his embarrassment by retreating into the mascot.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - LATER

The student body trickles out as the cheerleaders do miscellaneous cheers, the exhaustion seen on their faces as Tara plays a cowbell to keep them on time.

Laszlo removes the mascot head, begins to walk towards the boys' locker room when Rayne stops him.

RAYNE

Hey Laszlo, wait up!

Laszlo wipes the sweat from his forehead with a fin.

LASZLO

If you haven't noticed, I've spent an embarrassing hour in this mascot that smells like cheese.

RAYNE

They're cunts, Laszlo!

Principal Price spins on his heel towards the outburst.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Mr. Vandercamp!

RAYNE

Sorry, sorry!

Laszlo stops, looks back to Rayne with an eyebrow raised. Curious to see him talk shit.



RAYNE (CONT'D)

Look, I know what it's like to not fit in this world that is all Cassie this, O'Connell that. You can't let them ruin your life.

LASZLO

Aren't you like a new kid?

RAYNE

You really don't remember me, Laszlo.

Rayne reaches into his pocket, places a pair of coke-bottle Jeffrey Dahmer glasses on.

LASZLO

Shit, you were...you were...

RAYNE

Little Susie Can't See For Shit. Yeah, I was.

LASZLO

I thought you perished terrible in a fire after middle school or something.

RAYNE

Turns out when you leave for a semester and come back as a boy, not everyone puts 1 plus 1 together.

LASZLO

Shit, I'm sorry that must have sucked.

RAYNE

There was something nice about being able to be someone who no one recognized. A fresh slate even if the transformation was painful.

Rayne pulls out a flyer, hands it Laszlo.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Look, you should stop by the Gay-Straight Alliance. We understand what it's like to be on the end of the joke.

Laszlo uncomfortably laughs, scratches beneath the bandage on his chin.

LASZLO  
I'm not gay, Rayne.

RAYNE  
You don't have to be.

LASZLO  
I already have a target painted on my back. I'm not going to frame it in neon light for everyone to see by attending your homosexual happy hour. I just want to get through prom and finals and graduation, then never think about this place ever again.

Laszlo storms off into the locker room.

Rayne shakes his head.

RAYNE  
Really bungled that one,  
Vandercamp.

Rayne kicks at the ground till something catches his eye. It shimmers beneath the light: a fish scale slicked in blood, a bandage stuck to one side.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo groans as he steps enters the winding locker room. All is quiet besides the sound of a shower running. Too quiet for the douche brigade to still be changing...

But as Laszlo turns a corner, he's suddenly face-to-face with the last person he wants to see: a shirtless O'Connell with a toothpick held between his perfect teeth.

O'CONNELL  
Hey there, buddy.

O'Connell flicks the toothpick at Laszlo's head.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Think the estrogen injections are  
fucking up your skin, Mayberry.

O'Connell tries to dig his fingernail into the wound on Laszlo's chin.

LASZLO  
I don't want any trouble,  
O'Connell.

Laszlo steps around the jock. But several more basketball players silently appear, blocking his path.

O'CONNELL

This whole keep your head down and stay out of trouble routine is awfully bold from the faggot flirting with my girl.

Laszlo scoffs.

LASZLO

It wasn't flirting. Maybe, you should practice making your girlfriend smile.

Laszlo tries to push past the jocks, but bounces off the wall of meat, smacking straight into O'Connell. Steam is filling the locker room very quickly, already making it hard to see the forming mob.

O'CONNELL

You're out of your lane, fuckface. A total fish out of water.

O'Connell yanks the mackerel head out of Laszlo's arms. He snaps his fingers, causing his underlings to grab Laszlo by the arms. Laszlo struggles as O'Connell places the mascot head on Laszlo's shoulders.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

We wouldn't want our little fish to dry out on the concrete, would we, boys?

The jocks begin to shove Laszlo towards the steamy shower room. Laszlo shouts, but doesn't push back.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - SHOWER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo's shoved into the center of the room. He bounces off the six-headed shower faucet at the center with a groan.

The jocks circle him, sneering

LASZLO'S POV:

We see how little we can see in the mascot suit. Just bits of the other boys' faces as they push Laszlo around in the room.

He hyperventilates, the showers and their steam turning the mascot head into a wet piece of cloth smothering Laszlo.

O'Connell grabs him by the front of the costume. His smile turning into the gritted teeth of a wolf ready to pounce.

END POV.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - SHOWER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

O'Connell pushes Laszlo's back against the pole at the center of the room.

O'CONNELL

You know how Jesus turned a single fish into a bucket of Olive Garden breadsticks, Mayberry? Well, he was better than me and my boys. We're going to rip this little fish to shreds.

O'Connell swings at Laszlo, but his fist mostly connects with the foam mackerel head. It flies off Laszlo's shoulders, revealing his sweaty, flushed face.

But Laszlo isn't only dealing with a bad acne day anymore, a row of scales climb up the side of his face.

Laszlo's pupils have turned to slits, his eyes a noxious yellow sulfur color.

O'Connell dives for Laszlo, but Laszlo charges forward. The jocks try to aide O'Connell in catching him, but Laszlo throws his shoulder out as Phil grabs him around the torso.

The jock is thrown off his feet, slamming hard against the tiled walls with a grunt. The other jocks are conflicted, spotting blood on the tiles as Phil rubs at the back of his head. They choose their teammate as Laszlo runs out the other side of the room.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Get him!

BASKETBALL PLAYER

Phil's hurt, captain.

PHIL

Is this it? Tell Ashlyn Hart I don't mind that it feels like you're going through a car wash when we make out cause of that tongue. I love her!

O'Connell smacks his fist against the wall in anger, having lost his latest victim.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Laszlo runs down the school hallway. Tears fall down his cheeks, wetting the scales that are rapidly slicing through the layers of skin on his face.

His breathing is uneven, a gasping sputtering following each breath. He reaches up to touch his neck, several slits appearing on either side of neck: gills.

Laszlo struggles to shed the sopping wet mackerel suit as he runs out the school doors.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DUMPSTERS - NIGHT

Laszlo comes stumbling out of the school. He paws at the straps holding up his costume, but with the massive fins, it's not really something one can do quickly.

That is until the fin is shredded to ribbons, Laszlo's fingernails, now long and razor sharp, cut through the cloth.

LASZLO

What the fuck?

His scaly, mucus-slicked fingers are connected by thin transparent webbing.

Laszlo falls to his knees, screams out as a seam appears alongside the spine of his costume. A spiked fin splits through the skin alongside his back, the shreds of the mackerel costume falling to the ground.

Laszlo holds his head in his hands, his body grows too big for his clothing, transforming into his final pubescent form: a grotesque *Creature from the Black Lagoon*-adjacent creature we will refer to as PROM THING.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - FLAGPOLE - NIGHT

Fatima sits on the high school sign, swiping on TikTok as she sucks on a juice box. That's when she hears the sound of feet tearing up asphalt.

Fatima turns, her finger instinctively falling on the record button as she watches a scaly fishman running down the hill.

Spitting out her juice, Fatima takes the phone in both hands.

FATIMA

This is STRANGE HAPPENINGS WITH FATIMA HAKEEM, and what I just witnessed will shock you, but will it surprise you? Is that what I think it is? A literal fishman running towards the beach from Shady Cove High. And it appears if it's sporting Converse? What a brand endorsement! I'll tail the creature and report more.

But as Fatima prepares to hop down from the school sign, Prom Thing turns to face her. It's glowing eyes staring right into her soul. She gasps, and in the shock of the moment, she falls over the back of the sign with a THUD!

EXT. SHADY COVE BEACH - DUNES - NIGHT

Prom Thing struggles to find its footing, Laszlo's shoes tearing apart with each step till its webbed flippers are trying to find traction on the sand.

The creature is awkward, unbalanced. A vile croaking noise escapes the creature's throat as it scales the sandy dunes.

EXT. SHADY COVE BEACH - LIFE GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

A group of beanie-wearing, flannel-draped STONERS shield a sagging, poorly-rolled joint against the wind with their bodies as they light up on a lifeguard tower.

Their leader, MARTY 'MARIJUANA' MARIANA (17M)--no thoughts behind his eyes, his mathematics skills not going beyond counting puff, puff, pass--takes in a drag.

MARTY

Listen up, my fair uh, dudes. For I have a story of the most epic proportions.

Marty frames his face in a flashlight's beam.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Long ago, Shady Cove wasn't just known for its Old Navy. But amongst these shores stalked the slimiest, most gnarliest beasts that ever lived. The Fish Men of Shady Cove.

A stoner chick, MEGHAN, blinks wildly.

MEGHAN

Did they like, uh, drink blood and stuff?

MARTY

Worse, they ate all the crabs so all the sushi in town is made with imitation crab!

The stoners scream.

MARTY (CONT'D)

But yeah, my dad, he said that this place used to be crawling with that Scooby Doo shit till that MILF of a cheer coach showed up kicking ass and taking names and stuff.

Meghan takes a hit, hides her face in her hands.

MEGHAN

Stop, Marty, you're scaring me.

Marty takes her chin in his hands.

MARTY

You know I'll protect you, baby. No fish man, fish woman, or fish gender-nonconforming person is going to hurt you.

Meghan cries in fear.

STONER GIRL

But you have asthma!

Marty grabs a joint.

MARTY

If I had asthma, could I do this?

Marty places the joint in his mouth, then grabs several others from his friends, smoking at least five in tandem.

He sits on the railing of the tower, attempting to replace the 70% of his body that is made of water with THC.

There's the sound of footsteps.

Meghan starts to scream.

STONER GIRL

It's the gender non-confirming fish person.

Marty laughs, spilling smoke out of every orifice.

MARTY

No way.

The stoner girl shines the flashlight to the top of the dune where Prom Thing approaches with arms raised.

Marty screams, falls over the side of the balcony. But he manages to catch himself with one hand, a joint still clasped between his knuckles but just barely.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Help me!

The stoners look from Marty to the fish monster stumbling the beach towards them. The stoners run except the stoner girl.

MEGHAN

I don't want to be imitation crab,  
Marty.

MARTY

I'll protect you, baby girl. Don't  
you love me?

Meghan rushes to run up the stairs to pull him up. But that's when the joint slips free from Marty's grasp, his instinct is to save the high and grab for the joint. Too bad he no longer is holding the railing tight in doing so.

Marty falls to the beach below. A grotesque SNAP as his legs hit the concrete base. Marty screams as the stoners rush to help him, blood gushing in their stoned faces.

Meghan looks around the beach for Prom Thing, but all she sees is Laszlo wandering into the ocean, getting sucked beneath the waves.

EXT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - BACKLAWN - DAWN

The pleasant chirping of birds. The sun rising over the horizon as we hear Laszlo groaning. We pan down to find him lying naked on the lawn, shed fish skin being the only thing keeping him modest.

He sits up, rubs at his head.

LASZLO

What the fuck?

The sprinklers pop up, spraying water at him. Laszlo jumps up, runs into



INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The coffee maker grumbles, Rodney's slippers slapping against the wood floors.

RODNEY (O.S.)  
Laszlo, is that you? You're up early.

Laszlo practically jumps across the kitchen to grab the dish towel.

Rodney stops in the doorway as soon as he sees Laszlo, holding a dirty dish towel over his groin.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Ummm...no towels in the bathroom?

Rodney reaches out to place the back of his hand against Laszlo's forehead.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
You okay, kiddo? You're feeling a little clammy.

Laszlo shakes his head.

LASZLO  
I just need to hop in the shower, and go to school.

Rodney nods.

RODNEY  
Whatever you say, pal.

Rodney pushes past Laszlo, begins to pour himself a coffee. Laszlo clears his throat.

LASZLO  
Umm, Dad? Excuse me?

RODNEY  
We're family. Ain't nothing I haven't seen.

LASZLO  
Dad!

Rodney sighs, walks out of the room sipping his coffee. The spined fin on Laszlo's back slowly retreating into his skin.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - TROPHY HALL - DAY

Close-on a trophy case, inside which is the elaborate Prom Queen and Prom King regalia. We hear the sound of footsteps, watch as Tara's reflection appears in the glass.

She bends her knees slightly, placing her reflection beneath the Prom Queen crowd. She smiles, giving a little wave. It's really quite sad to watch this 40 year old woman seem to find genuine joy in the act.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (O.S.)  
Reliving your glory days, Ms.  
Hunter?

Tara straightens her spine, turns to face him.

TARA  
Let's abandon the formalities,  
Sexton. We were both there when the  
gymnasium burnt down mid-Prom,  
denying my ascent to the throne.

Tara reaches into her clutch, handing him a packet of papers.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
What is this?

TARA  
A list of our demands.

Price flips through the packet, sighing louder and louder the longer he reads.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You truly can't expect me to  
enforce this, Ms. Hunter. A  
requirement for female students to  
wear dresses? Purity guards  
ordained by the church to make sure  
students leave room for Jesus?

Price scoffs.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
A total ban on same-sex couples  
attending the prom? Ms. Hunter,  
there is no way the Prom Committee  
will agree to this. They can't even  
decide if we should hire a band or  
a DJ.

TARA

Who needs a DJ when God is in attendance?

Principal Price laughs, pinches the bridge of his nose.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

You're something else, Ms. Hunter. Absolutely ridiculous, truly a buffoon if you think I would sign off on this.

Tara takes a step forward, Principal Price instinctually taking a step back.

TARA

May I remind you who saved you from that werewolf all those years ago?

(beat)

I may have saved you then, but you don't want to be on the other side of my stake.

Tara presses a finger into his chest, pushing him hard against the wall as she walks around him.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

A bunch of teen reporters crowd around Laszlo and Fatima's lockers. Flashbulbs flash. Microphones are shoved in Fatima's face as she tries to hide her joy in this moment.

REPORTER #1

How does it feel to know that you've been right all along and monsters stalk Shady Cove? Any thoughts on your latest viral TikTok putting you on the map of everyone from the Long Island Medium to BuzzFeed Unsolved?

Another reporter elbows her way in front of the other.

REPORTER #2

Are the rumors true? Has the Pulitzer committee already reached out to let you know you've been given the prize for outstanding journalism?

Fatima smiles.

FATIMA

I'll stay mum, it wouldn't be fair  
to other candidates to spoil the  
surprise.

We see the top of Laszlo's head as he tries to push his way  
to his locker.

LASZLO

Excuse me...fuck, excuse me...can't  
I just get my goddamn chemistry  
book?

Laszlo's hands try to break through the wall of bodies.

FATIMA

Hey, that's my best mate. Let him  
through! There's enough of me for  
everyone...

But the student journalists are looking at something else  
down the hall. They begin to murmur among themselves, then  
shove and push each other to give themselves a head start  
towards the next scoop.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

(yelling)

Hey, wait! I'll host a press  
conference. An exclusive with me,  
Fatima Hakeem of Strange Happenings  
with Fatima Hakeem! You know the  
girl who has a TikTok with 25.2  
Million views of the Fish Man of  
Shady Cove.

LASZLO

Fish man? What are you talking  
about?

FATIMA

Come on, Laszlo, this was so twelve  
hours ago. I'm already becoming  
irrelevant!

Fatima stomps away toward the latest source of commotion.  
Laszlo rushes after her, grabbing her shoulder.

LASZLO

Fatima, Fatima, please, I really  
need to know what you're talking  
about.

FATIMA

Are you even on TikTok, Laszlo? The whole world has seen my video of this scaly monstrosity running outside of the school. Except you, my best friend!

Laszlo opens his phone, desperately scrambling to open TikTok and pull up Fatima's video. We watch the short clip of Fatima narrating her footage, the blurry shape of Prom Thing running down the hillside.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Fatima follows the reporters, Laszlo close on her heels.

LASZLO

You can't even tell what we're looking at?

FATIMA

The footage may be blurry, but millions of people believe in Bigfoot despite that shitty ass video.

LASZLO

Do they?

Fatima glares at Laszlo.

FATIMA

Be supportive, Laszlo.

Laszlo nods, nervousness registering on his face.

LASZLO

I'm just saying, like what if this is just some guy running around in a costume.

FATIMA

This is far from the first weird that thing happened in Shady Cove. Now, if you excuse me, I'm going to fight whoever stole the wind from my sails.

The school doors are held open as Meghan, dressed in a black wedding dress, a lace veil attached to her beanie, pushes an extremely stoned Marty into the school, wearing a tuxedo with his mangled legs plastered in casts.

Fatima pushes her way to the front of the crowd.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Playing dress up, Meghan?

MEGHAN  
Actually, after that terrible creature chased us last night, resulting in the mangling of my beloved. We decided to tie the knot because life is short.

A mob of perpetually single, romance book loving girls squeal at the announcement as Meghan holds out a diamond-encrusted roach clip.

MEGHAN (CONT'D)  
He even proposed with like his grandmother's vintage roach clip! So of course I said yes.

Marty lets out a moan.

MARTY  
Fish monster goes glub, glub, glub, glub...

Fatima leans in close.

FATIMA  
What were you saying about a fish monster?

MEGHAN  
Oh, it was like so scary. Like have you ever like looked death in the face and you're like oh shit, that's like so like scary. Well, this big like fish guy chased us, causing Marty to fall from like so high.

Fatima slams her hands on a nearby lunch table.

FATIMA  
Fish monster confirmed!

Laszlo scoffs.

LASZLO  
(under his breath)  
Stoners aren't exactly reliable witnesses.

Fatima stares daggers at Laszlo as she climbs onto the table.

FATIMA  
What was that?

LASZLO  
Maybe, you're getting caught up in  
the tide of virality, Fatima.  
Meghan and Marty haven't been sober  
since 9/11...

FATIMA  
They weren't alive during 9/11.

LASZLO  
Exactly.

Fatima claps her hands together.

FATIMA  
Anyway, you should all note that I  
was right all along. All those  
years of treating me like I was  
some psycho connecting pictures  
with red string are over.

O'Connell sits at a nearby table. He chugs a carton of  
chocolate milk, then smashes it against his head.

O'CONNELL  
Mayberry's right.

FATIMA LASZLO  
What? What?

O'CONNELL  
Mayberry might be a total dweeb,  
but he has a point.

O'Connell wraps an arm around Laszlo. Laszlo squirms as  
O'Connell grabs his shoulder hard.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Maybe, if an upstanding citizen  
like myself had been an eyewitness,  
we could believe in some fish  
monster...

FATIMA  
--I have proof! Ellen DeGeneres  
shared my video!

O'CONNELL

One, Ellen is cancelled for pushing JoJo Siwa into that woodchipper. And two, you aren't like, what's that big movie guy's name? Oh yeah, you're Fatima Hakeem from Shady Cove, not Quintin Tortilla.

The more O'Connell talks, the more the crowd nods, ignoring both Fatima and the stoners. Instead, they gaze up at O'Connell with the respect given to a preacher at the pulpit.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

We have better things to think about. Like, for one, getting Cassie and I elected as King and Queen. Walk with me, people.

The crowd follows, leaving Fatima and Laszlo alone in the cafeteria. Fatima balls her fists.

LASZLO

Fatima, I'm --

FATIMA

I don't want to hear it. Never would I expect my own best friend to take away my moment in the spotlight.

Laszlo stammers.

LASZLO

I really didn't...people our age have awful attention spans.

A dog runs in the opposite direction of where O'Connell disappeared. Fatima tries to stay mad, but she can't help but watch the dog.

FATIMA

Isn't that that blind kid's seeing eye dog?

Ashlyn chases after the dog, mascara bleeding down her cheeks.

ASHLYN

Wait, Henry, I love you!

HENRY

Bark! Bark!



The reporters chase after the latest juiciest gossip: Ashlyn and her on-and-off boyfriend, Henry the Seeing Eye Dog.

Fatima and Laszlo look at each other.

LASZLO

What was that about?

Meghan lights up a joint. She barks to herself for a second, mulling over the meaning of the dog's words.

MEGHAN

Seems like someone is in the dog house, and it's not who you think.

Fatima groans.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM HALLWAY - DAY

Cassie walks down the hallway in expensive athleisure wear, a massive duffle bag thrown over one shoulder. She reaches for the gym door, but she stops upon seeing the lights are off.

Cassie silently, cautiously opens the door to enter

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - CONTINUOUS

She's barely a foot into the gym when SPPPPLT! The sound of something sharp cutting through the air reaches her ears.

Cassie instinctually throws her hands up, catching a massive hunting knife by the handle, its jagged point hardly more than a few centimeters from her eyeball.

Cassie blinks, brandishes the knife as SMACK! A clunky rubber boot hits her, sending her flying through the air. The knife clatters across the gymnasium floor as Cassie contorts her body, managing to land on her feet.

TARA

You're late for practice!

A spotlight suddenly shines in Cassie's eyes. Tara's fist swings into view, but Cassie dodges it with an elaborate series of backhand-springs. Simone Byles who?

CASSIE

I was enjoying a low-fat blueberry muffin.

TARA  
No daughter of mine will ever  
indulge in carbs!

Tara grabs a pair of pompoms from a nearby table. But a chain runs between them, a preppy version of nun chucks!

Tara spins, the air whooshing around her as she winds up to knock the calories right out of Cassie's body. But Cassie slides beneath her mother's strike to grab a quarterstaff.

CASSIE  
Well, I indulged.

Cassie brings up the quarter staff parallel with the floor, Tara's nunchucks tangling around it. Tara tries to pull back, but Cassie twists the weapon, sending the nunchucks smacking back against her mother's forehead.

Cassie yanks the staff back, the nunchucks flying out of Tara's hands.

Tara recovers, balling her hands into fists. She needs no weapons, because she is one.

TARA  
If you ever want to fit into your  
prom dress, you better start  
sweating.

Cassie spins, striking for Tara's botoxed forehead. A death blow to anyone else, but Tara simply holds up an arm, the staff exploding into splinters as it deflects the strike.

Cassie tosses the staff aside.

CASSIE  
Back to the basics, then?

TARA  
Give me your best.

Cassie and Tara spar. Tara swings at her daughter, Cassie drops to the floor, spinning on her shoulders, sweeping her mother's feet out from beneath her.

Tara rolls away from a heel strike, reaches up to grab her daughter by her hair, slamming her against the floor. Cassie gasps, rubbing at her neck.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Is that all you've got?

Cassie spits blood, smiles as she gets back onto her feet. She cracks her knuckles, ready to go.

Every blow Cassie throws at her mother is deflected by a smack of her mother's palm. Tara laughs at every attempt Cassie makes. Her daughter's attacks are powerful, but also strategic, switching between various styles of karate in an attempt to overwhelm Tara.

TARA (CONT'D)  
You call this a fight? I've seen  
better performances at geriatric  
jiu-jitsu!

Cassie screams in frustration. She drops her center of gravity towards the floor as Tara mocks her, applying lip gloss mid-fight. Cassie charges with incredible speed, catching her mother around the waist to slam her.

The lip gloss shatters against the wall.

TARA (CONT'D)  
My Kylie Jenner lipkit!

Tara jumps onto her feet.

TARA (CONT'D)  
That was dirty! Where'd you learn  
that?

CASSIE  
All-American Football, bitch!

Cassie rolls towards her duffle bag, unzips it to grab something.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Now for my secret weapon!

Cassie chucks a big ass chemistry book at Tara's head. Her mother falls to the ground. Cassie is upon her, smacking the older woman silly. Tara smiles as blood spills from her nose.

TARA  
You truly are my daughter...

Tara grits her teeth, uppercuts Cassie hard in the jaw. Cassie moans as she falls onto her butt, tries to jump onto her feet, but before she can, Tara is grabbing her by the collar of her shirt and throwing her stumbling into the center of the gym.

Tara runs at her daughter, performing a series of elaborate gymnastic moves that lead into a sailing kick that sends Cassie flying across the gym. She hits the wall, the bricks cracking upon impact.

TARA (CONT'D)  
But in a real fight, your opponent  
isn't going to go easy like your  
Mommy.

Tara exits the gym, leaving Cassie there to lick her wounds.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - LATER

Cassie applies a butterfly bandage to a small cut on her temple. The auditorium doors are thrown open as Laszlo enters, nearly sweating through his shirt.

He stops in his tracks upon noticing Cassie on the bleachers.

LASZLO  
I'm sorry, I was, uh, getting  
something from the locker room.

CASSIE  
It's okay, I was just leaving.

Cassie stands up, begins to limp towards the exit.

LASZLO  
Cassie, are you okay?

Cassie winces as she stops, puts on that perfect cheerleader smile on her face that is so obviously a front.

CASSIE  
I'll be better by third period.

Laszlo stands in her way.

LASZLO  
You still do that thing you did  
when we were kids.

CASSIE  
What?

LASZLO  
You look at your feet when you're  
lying.

Cassie pushes her hair out of her face, absently twirling a strand.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You play with your hair too.

Cassie stops twirling. She forces a glare onto her face.

CASSIE  
I have to meet with O'Connell.

LASZLO  
I saw your mom leaving the gym when  
I was walking down the hall. You  
know you can talk to me, Cassie.

CASSIE  
Actually, I don't know that,  
Laszlo, because we're not friends.  
You're just some kid I used to  
know. Look if any kindness I showed  
you came across the wrong way, it's  
in your best interest to forget  
about it.

Cassie keeps limping out of the gym, her fists balled, teeth  
digging into her lip with each step.

LASZLO  
Cassie, I didn't think--

CASSIE  
--I have a boyfriend, Laszlo. The  
basketball captain, remember?

Cassie exits the gym. Laszlo gulps.

LASZLO  
What the hell was that?

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Laszlo flips on the locker room lights. He searches for  
something beneath the benches.

LASZLO  
Shit, I don't even know what I'm  
looking for.

FLASH: O'Connell's snarling face. Steam filling the air.

Laszlo moves to the

SHOWER ROOM

Laszlo looks for any sign of evidence regarding last night's events. That's when he spots the cracked tiles where Phil hit the wall upon fleeing, dried blood staining the ceramic.

FLASH: Laszlo's POV through the eyes of the mascot, the sputtering noise of gills first breathing air echoing across the hollow head.

Laszlo blinks away the vision, continues onwards to spot a swatch of his shredded gloves leading into the JV side of the locker room.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BACK HALLWAY

Laszlo runs his fingers along the length of the walls. He senses a change in the texture of the wall: a series of long scratches.

Laszlo fits his fingers into the grooves, continuing outside to

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DUMPSTERS

Laszlo gasps as soon as he steps outside.

His horrified gaze lies on the mangled remains of his mascot costume, shredded and lying in a puddle of mud.

LASZLO  
Shit. Fuck. Shit.

Laszlo falls on his knees, tries to pull whatever he can out of the puddle.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Oh god, furries pay thousands for costumes like this. What the fuck am I going to do?

But then in his panic, Laszlo pulls away a clump of scales. He wipes them clean of mud, their iridescence beautiful in the sunlight. Laszlo screams.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
What the hell is happening to me?

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Laszlo stands in front of the bathroom mirror. He tilts his neck to the side, leaning in close to inspect for gills. But there are no visible slits, no mark indicating their existence.

LASZLO  
Listen to me, Mayberry. You're a  
boy, not a fish.

The scales sit before him on the edge of the sink.

Laszlo strips off his shirt, anxiously looking at his bare chest. Laszlo runs his fingers across the skin, wincing as his fingernails hit a sensitive bit.

He sucks air through his teeth, turns to look at the disturbed area in the mirror. But all that is there is a pimple. Laszlo breathes a sigh of relief.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You are a boy, not a fish.

Laszlo unbuttons his pants.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Time for the *Shape of Water* test.

Laszlo impersonates the hand signal Sally Hawkins uses in the film to explain how she, a human woman, could get it from a seemingly flat fish man.

Laszlo takes a deep breath in, and drops his pants.

Laszlo's eyes go wide upon looking upon his naked body. It looks as if this is the first time in a long time he's taken all of himself in.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Everything is where it's supposed  
to be...you're not a fish. You're a  
boy...

But he seems unsure by this statement. Laszlo inspects his anatomy. He has a boy's broad shoulders. An uneven scattering of hair on his chest. And from the way he looks at his genitals, we can tell that everything is in fact there.

Laszlo squeezes his eyes shut. Sweat dripping down his body.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You're a boy.

Laszlo opens his eyes, but immediately shuts them.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You're a boy, not a fish.

Laszlo runs his hands up and down his body.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You feel like a boy. You smell like  
a boy. You talk like a boy.  
(beat)  
You. Are. A. Boy.

Laszlo opens his eyes, swallows, nods his head.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Nothing is wrong, Laszlo. You're  
just like the rest of boys. Just a  
regular old dude. Not a fish.

Laszlo pulls on his pants, throws on his shirt, but then his attention falls to his shoes. Laszlo kicks them off, holds his breath as he peels off his shoes.

At first inspection, they're just stinky, boy feet. But then Laszlo yanks his toes apart to find translucent webbing between each toe.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Shit. Fuck. You're not a boy,  
you're fucking fish, Laszlo.

Laszlo grabs the sink with both hands. It crumbles in his grip, falling to pieces at his feet.

Laszlo blinks in the mirror, his eyes no longer their usual green, but a yellow, reptilian color.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You're a fish.

But as Laszlo says it, he's looking at himself differently. No longer repulsed as he was when inspecting his masculine anatomy. He seems curious, unfazed as a trio of slits appear on his neck.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You are a fish, not a boy.

Laszlo takes a deep in through his nose, the air whistling in through his gills, and as he seems to relax, his fishy features disappear. When he opens his eyes, he's just Laszlo.



INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

O'Connell picks at his teeth, his feet thrown up onto Tara's dining room table. The house is grotesquely pink, the walls wallpapered in faux millennial pink fur.

Cassie sits across from him, furiously scribbling at her calculus homework.

O'CONNELL

Hey, babe, why don't you ever invite me over? I feel like this is like the third time I've been in your house and we've been dating since middle school.

CASSIE

Maybe cause your grody feet are on the table where I eat.

O'Connell snickers, takes his feet down.

O'CONNELL

Come on, Cassie. Be honest with me, I can take it. I'm a big boy. Does your mom hate me?

O'Connell flexes, kissing his own bicep.

CASSIE

My mom is just...I don't want her to embarrass me.

Tara enters the dining room, balancing plates of lasagna on her forearms. She wears a high school cheer uniform.

Cassie hides her face in her hands as Tara places the plates before them.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Mom, what are you wearing?

Tara inspects her outfit as if she's just now realizing what she's wearing.

TARA

Oh, this is just my old cheer uniform. Looks like it still fits.

O'CONNELL

Sure does!

Cassie loudly kicks O'Connell. He yelps.

CASSIE

But why?

Cassie shoves a forkful of lasagna into her mouth.

TARA

I thought that if you saw how I've kept lean all these years, you might be inspired to do the same.

CASSIE

Mom!

Cassie drops her fork.

TARA

Just think about poor O'Connell here if we have to get a backup prom dress at TJ Maxx.

Tara pinches O'Connell's cheek. He smirks, his mouth full of lasagna.

CASSIE

It's not my fault that you've had my prom dress picked out since I was in the womb.

TARA

But it is your fault that I couldn't fit in it when I bought it. You two using protection? Guess teen pregnancy isn't cool anymore.

O'Connell nods. Cassie is beet red.

CASSIE

Mom, stop it!

O'Connell quickly clears his plate.

O'CONNELL

This food is so fucking good, Ms. Hunter. You must have been slaving away in the kitchen for hours!

TARA

Awww, what a sweet boy you've picked out, Cassie. And call me Tara, O'Connell.

CASSIE

It's Stouffer's. It comes in like, a box.

O'Connell shakes his head.

O'CONNELL  
Whatever it is, it's delicious.

Tara grabs Cassie's plate, pushes it across the table to O'Connell.

TARA  
Here, have Cassie's. We're t-minus seven days until the cameras remember if Shady Cove High had a beautiful prom queen, or a bloated one.

Cassie grabs her homework.

CASSIE  
If you'll excuse me, I have homework to do.

Cassie walks away.

TARA  
How about a little red wine, O'Connell? You're, ummm, plenty grown.

O'Connell nods, his mouth stained with tomato sauce.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - CASSIE'S ROOM - LATER

Cassie tries to do her homework, her brow perpetually furrowed. Tara and O'Connell laugh loudly from outside the room, enjoying each other's company an irritating amount.

Cassie slams her calculus textbook, rushing out to

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tara and O'Connell sit uncomfortably close to each other on Tara's velvet couch. O'Connell sips his wine as he speaks.

O'CONNELL  
I told this pronoun-having, shaved head freak what I thought. You're either a boy or a girl. It's like so simple. Gender fluid? Please! The only time your gender is fluid is when your head is in the toilet getting a swirly.

Tara laughs an exaggerated amount.

TARA

Oh, Cassie honey, have a seat.  
O'Connell and I were just talking  
about the homosexual agenda and how  
it's rotting your peers' brains.

CASSIE

O'Connell, don't you have to be up  
early for basketball practice?

O'Connell sips his wine.

O'CONNELL

They'll wait for me to start.

CASSIE

But remember how you have that  
essay to write?

O'Connell laughs.

O'CONNELL

Are you sure you aren't the one  
who's been drinking? I haven't done  
my own homework since the first  
grade.

Tara taps O'Connell's forehead.

TARA

Talking with you tonight, it's  
clear to me that you're smarter  
than all your classmates, mister.

CASSIE

O'Connell, it's time for you to  
leave!

O'Connell gets up, grabs his letterman jacket.

TARA

Cassie, you're being rude.

CASSIE

Tonight has been fun, but MY  
BOYFRIEND has to go.

TARA

But we were making fun of pronouns!

CASSIE

We is a pronoun, Mom.

TARA  
And how would you know?

CASSIE  
I got a 5 on the AP Language &  
Composition exam. The exam you paid  
for!

O'CONNELL  
The liberals have infiltrated our  
school system, Cassie. You gotta  
use that big pretty brain of yours  
to recognize that.

Tara nods.

TARA  
You should take a page from your  
boyfriend's book. He's such a  
smartie!

CASSIE  
Goodbye, O'Connell!

Cassie shoves O'Connell out of the door. Tara sips her wine.

TARA  
He's a total catch. Conservative,  
athletic, I bet he looks great  
without his--

CASSIE  
--If you like him so much, why  
don't you date him?

Cassie storms off. Tara takes a sip of her wine, tilts her  
side to side. Maybe she should date him.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - CASSIE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cassie grinds her teeth as she returns to her bed, picks up  
her calculus textbook.

CASSIE  
If you can deal with that woman,  
Cassie, you can find this fucking  
integral.

Cassie puts her finger on the book to follow along as she  
reads. But all of a sudden, she grabs the book by the spine,  
tears it in half with ease. She's breathing hot and heavy.

Cassie pulls out her phone.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Let's take a five minute break.  
Just watch some TikToks to relax...

ON SCREEN:

The first video that pops up on Cassie's phone is Fatima's viral video: The image of Prom Thing running down the hill. Cassie presses SHARE, begins to type her mother's name, deletes it.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
She'll expect you to ask for help.  
I can handle it on my own.

Cassie reaches into her bedside table, pulls out a girlish, sticker-covered diary. DO NOT READ written on the front in bubble letters. She opens it, pulls out the bookmark: a wicked looking dagger.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo sits at his desk, a sewing machine before him. He curses as he tries to sew up the shredded mascot costume. But he finally falls into a rhythm. He nods, finally satisfied.

LASZLO  
No one is going to notice.

CUT TO:

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Laszlo wears the "repaired" mascot. It's monstrous, held together with shitty stiches and staples. We can see parts of Laszlo's face and body through the gaps in the fabric. A boy living inside a fish.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PRINCIPAL OFFICE - DAY

Principal Price sits at his desk, playing with a Rubik cube. Very important work for a very important principal who totally hasn't been made obsolete by the PTA.

A KNOCK on the door. Laszlo sticks his head in.

LASZLO  
Principal Price?

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Come in, come in, ummm, uh...

LASZLO  
It's Laszlo. Laszlo Mayberry.

Price tilts his head to look at him from a different angle.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Mayberry...you look exactly like  
your mother. I didn't recognize her  
without the mascot costume  
either...  
(beat)  
So sorry for your loss, of course.

LASZLO  
That's actually why I stopped by.  
See the thing is, I actually lost  
one of my gloves for the mascot  
costume. I was wondering if there  
might be somewhere I could look for  
a replacement.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You haven't checked the Mascot  
Room?

LASZLO  
I'm the mascot, and I've never  
heard about a Mascot Room.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
We had to put a lock on the door  
after a few too many children were  
conceived in it...

Principal Price removes a key from his keyring, tossing it to  
Laszlo who immediately drops it.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
...And Laszlo, keep it PG-13, or  
I'll be revoking that privilege.

LASZLO  
I promise I have more important  
things to worry about than teen  
pregnancy, Principal Price.

Principal Price resumes his Rubik cube.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - DAY

Laszlo unlocks the door, swipes away spider webs to flip on  
the lights.

A single dusty lightbulb lights the crowded space, boxes and various old pieces of furniture scattered about the room.

He enters, spotting a locker on one side of the room. Laszlo opens it, his jaw dropping as soon as he looks inside.

Laszlo grabs a photograph. His eyes go wide, tears quickly welling in his eyes as he looks upon the faces of his young parents. His father arm around Laura Mayberry's shoulders, a mascot head clutched beneath her arm.

But it's not the mackerel. It's a cartoonish Gillman costume. Think if Looney Tunes had a baby with *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*.

Laszlo spins around the room, spotting a massive sheet-covered form in the corner. He wipes the tears from his eyes, yanks the covering free to reveal the cobweb covered Gillman costume.

LASZLO

Guess it's time I become my  
mother's son.

Laszlo grabs the mascot head.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - NIGHT

The school gymnasium is electric with school spirit. Turquoise and yellow letterman jackets everywhere, the student body painting fake scales onto their faces with iridescent eye shadow.

Cassie and the cheerleading squad perform an elaborate cheer on the sidelines.

The basketball team sits on the sidelines. O'Connell taps his foot with irritation as the referee comes up to him, bypassing the coach who sits there like a sad puppy dog.

REFEREE

We need to get this game started,  
Mr. Moore.

O'CONNELL

It's bad luck to start the game  
before the mascot arrives.

The referee taps his watch.

REFEREE

I have places to be, people to see.



Tara sees the argument, walks over to put herself between O'Connell and the rep.

TARA  
O'Connell, let me handle this.  
(to referee)  
Patience is a virtue. Perhaps, it  
will serve you well as you sit in  
line at the unemployment office.

The referee gulps.

REFEREE  
You have five minutes.

Tara nods, grabs a microphone from a nearby stand.

TARA  
Our precious mascot seems to be  
running late. How about a little  
friendly cheer-off?

The opposing cheerleaders hoot and holler. Tara laughs.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Not you. The audience wants to see  
an actual performance.

Tara rips off her sweat suit, revealing her cheer uniform.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Ladies, how about we show these  
little girls what it means to  
cheer?

Various middle age women rise from the stands, joining Tara on the sidelines.

Cassie groans, motions for her cheerleaders to form up.

CASSIE  
One of these old women are going to  
break a hip.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BLEACHERS

Fatima sits in the bleachers by herself, rolling her eyes as she watches the Shady Cove Cheer Squad dance off against The Huntresses. She has her phone to her ear.

FATIMA  
Hey, Laszlo, they're looking for  
you at the basketball game.  
(MORE)

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
And make it fast, some true  
tomfoolery is going on here.

Fatima hangs up the phone, is forced to watch middle age  
women in capris try to flip through the air.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
(under her breath)  
This is Fatima Hakeem, you're  
watching Strange Happenings with  
Fatima Hakeem, and this is truly  
the--

Rayne appears, takes a seat beside Fatima.

RAYNE  
--the weirdest shit you've every  
seen?

Fatima nods.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
Can I sit?

FATIMA  
You're already sitting...I haven't  
seen you at one of these before.

RAYNE  
I was looking for Laszlo.

FATIMA  
For Laszlo? Why?

RAYNE  
I keep thinking it seems like he  
needs a friend.

Fatima scoffs.

FATIMA  
He already has a friend.

RAYNE  
No one has ever died from having  
more than one friend.

FATIMA  
Tell that to Julius Caesar.

RAYNE  
Touché.

From the sidelines, we watch as the cheerleaders seem to notice the mascot approaching from out of our field of view. They stretch a giant paper sign printed with the school's mascot across the entrance.

Tara grabs her microphone.

TARA

Ladies and Gentlemen, put your  
hands together for the Shady Cove  
Mackerel!

Air horns sound, the cheerleaders scream. Fatima clutches her hands over her ears as Laszlo runs through the banner, clad not in the mackerel costume but the revived Gillman costume.

CUE MONTAGE:

-The crowd's cheering halting. Their eyes going wide.

-Laszlo doing the sprinkler in the monstrous costume, dust falling to the floor as he dances.

-Tara's manicured hands turning into fists.

-Meghan and Marty in the front row. Meghan screams.

MEGHAN

It's the fish monster!

END MONTAGE:

Laszlo pulls off the mascot head, sweating as he gives a little wave.

LASZLO

It's just me, reviving our school  
heritage by bringing back our old  
mascot. The very costume seen in my  
pal Fatima's viral TikTok.

The crowd murmurs, then starts to laugh.

Fatima grits her teeth, hisses in Rayne's direction.

FATIMA

That looks nothing like what's in  
my video.

Rayne tilts his head, squints his eyes.

RAYNE

It doesn't...not look like what was  
in your video.

Fatima gets up, storms off. Laszlo watches, a sadness in his eyes as she runs off.

But Fatima is a problem for later, because Tara is speed-walking across the gym. Her face red as she shouts in the microphone.

TARA

How dare you disrespect our precious mascot. That thing is so tacky and ugly compared to the regal and beautiful mackerel. We want something to cheer at, not gasp at. We want school pride, not nightmare fuel!

The crowd quiets down as Laszlo puts back on the mascot head as if that'll protect him from Tara's wrath.

TARA (CONT'D)

Did you ever stop to think why we retired that costume? It's an abomination. An affront to God that celebrates the mistakes that rise from the primordial ooze.

Principal Price tries to grab for the microphone. Tara bats him away, but he manages to shout into the mic anyway.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Let's play ball, boys!

O'Connell leads the team up from the bench. The crowd cheers.

Principal Price attempts to pass the ball to the boys; however, Tara flips through the air, pops the balloon beneath the heel of her platform boot.

TARA

I wasn't done speaking.

Rayne stands up, fists balled at his side.

RAYNE

Oh my god, will you just shut up already?

TARA

I was talking--

RAYNE

--And I'm reclaiming the time you stole with your fat mouth.

Several students and parents applaud. Tara stomps her foot.

TARA

We do not celebrate godless  
creatures, of both the monstrous  
and human variety.

Rayne walks up to Laszlo in the Gillman costume, throws his arm around him.

RAYNE

I've had enough of you and your  
LuLuLemon lunacy. You think you're  
doing the right thing, but your  
righteousness is cruel.

Laszlo appears uncomfortable, sweating as Rayne's soapbox grows higher and higher.

TARA

My "cruelty" is how I care for the  
students of this school!

RAYNE

If you cared so much, then why are  
you leading this school in a witch  
hunt against Laszlo for wearing a  
silly costume? You treat queer kids  
like him like shit.

Rayne holds for applause, but instead comes the sound of murmuring. Laszlo's name on the tongues of everyone once again. Laszlo pulls away from Rayne's embrace, tries to put the Gillman mask back on as quickly as he can--

O'CONNELL

(shouting)

--who would have expected Laszlo  
Mayberry to be a faggot? Oh wait,  
everyone.

The crowd laughs. Rayne grabs for Laszlo's dorsal fin, but he runs across the gymnasium, the Gillman costume head bouncing across the gymnasium floor.

RAYNE

Laszlo, wait, shit, I'm sorry!

Rayne tries to chase after Laszlo, but O'Connell stops in his way. He picks up the mascot head, spins it on his finger like a basketball.

O'CONNELL

You're in my court now.

Rayne tries to push past O'Connell, but he's a wall.

RAYNE

Move it, string bean.

O'Connell shoves Rayne back, sending him sprawling on his ass. Tara laughs as Principal Price tries to intercede. She clasps a hand around his wrist, keeping him from doing his principal duties.

Fatima sees her opportunity as Rayne recovers. She runs after Laszlo. He already has a friend, one who won't out him in front of the entire school.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

Laszlo peels off the mascot's costume. Tossing off a glove, he scratches at his face. The skin has become thin, peeling off in strips as sharp scales push to the surface.

He desperately removes the costume. His shirt tightening about his torso as he grows larger with each step. He hears footsteps from the other side of the hallway, dives down another corridor.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MAIN HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Fatima and Rayne run down the hallway. Fatima pushes her way in front of Rayne upon discovering Laszlo's discarded glove.

FATIMA

He came this way.

RAYNE

It doesn't take a genius to figure that out.

FATIMA

And we wouldn't be looking for clues to where you sent my friend running off to in tears, if you didn't just paint a target on his back.

Fatima keeps walking, looking for more signs of Laszlo.

RAYNE

I didn't mean to. I...I just was so mad at that bleach-blonde bitch.

Fatima turns the corner we saw Laszlo disappear down just moments before. Rayne follows, runs smack dab into Fatima who is waiting for him.

FATIMA

Tara Hunter is the least of your worries, Rayne. You've made an enemy of me, Fatima Hakeem of Strange Happenings with Fatima Hakeem. I will end you.

Rayne pushes past Fatima.

RAYNE

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll be a social pariah. What's new? Do you want to find your friend or not?

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BACK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A trail of Laszlo's shredded tee-shirt stretches the length of the hallway. Fatima and Rayne follow, phone flashlights at the ready as they investigate.

Fatima picks up a piece of the elastic collar of Laszlo's shirt.

FATIMA

Laszlo's been this way.

RAYNE

How can you tell that just from some shredded fabric?

FATIMA

Well, only his **BEST** friend would know that Laszlo's dad writes his name and phone number on all of the tags of his clothes.

RAYNE

That seems so excessive.

FATIMA

I know, right? If someone steals your son's sweaty graphic tee, it might be for the best.

Rayne and Fatima follow the trail of fabric till a fork in the hallway. No clues to lead them in one direction or another.

RAYNE

Looks like we need to split up and look for clues.

FATIMA

Come on, really?

RAYNE

Fred from *Scooby Doo* is transition goals.

FATIMA

Whatever, you just want to find my best friend first to prove you two are buddies.

RAYNE

Come on, Fatima, there's a trail of Laszlo's shredded clothes. I'm concerned for his well-being.

FATIMA

We'll see about that.

The pair split up.

CUE MONTAGE (VARIOUS HALLWAYS):

-Laszlo moans as a spiked dorsal fin splits the exaggerated muscles alongside his spine. His boxers falling to pieces as scales cover the length of his body. Prom Thing emerges with a sputtering of Laszlo's gills

-Images of Rayne and Fatima's shoes as they investigate. Fatima bending down to inspect the discarded underwear.

-Rayne picks up a piece of Laszlo's shed skin, sticking his tongue out in disgust as he spots a cluster of pus-covered scales.

-Prom Thing's yellow eyes going wide as we hear footsteps on both sides of the hallway. A sign besides a nearby door reads POOL. Prom Thing rolls its eyes, dives into the room.

END MONTAGE:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Fatima and Rayne glare at each other as they both turn to face each other in the same hallway. They race to the pool door, pushing each other side as they struggle with the door.



FATIMA  
I found him first.

RAYNE  
You haven't found jackshit!

FATIMA  
I found out that this school  
apparently has a pool.

RAYNE  
No one uses it since Tara Hunter  
convinced the school board to  
redirect the budget for maintaining  
it to get skimpier cheerleading  
outfits.

Rayne pushes his way into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL - CONTINUOUS

The pool is decrepit. Leaves, discarded condoms, and smashed  
beer cans covering the floor. Fatima and Rayne tiptoe their  
way into the space.

They both jump as SPLASH! Something paddles beneath the scum  
of the pool.

Fatima pulls out her phone, recording as she leans over the  
edge of the pool.

FATIMA  
(shakily)  
This is Fatima Hakeem  
with...Strange Happenings with  
Fatima Hakeem...we're here in the  
Shady Cove High pool witnessing  
what appears to be...

Prom Thing's face explodes out of the water. Fatima and Rayne  
both scream. Fatima turns to run, but remembers what's at  
stake: the Pulitzer. She keeps filming as Rayne leans down to  
get a closer look.

Prom Thing stares up at them, scratching at the cement walls  
of the half-filled pool. It's trapped.

RAYNE  
It's Laszlo.

FATIMA  
What are you talking about? There's  
no way, it's...

But then Fatima makes eye-contact with the creature. She recognizes him inside the fish monster. Fatima turns off her camera.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Laszlo, what happened to you?

The creature sputters out what sounds like words, but it's unintelligible.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Come on, don't get worked up,  
buddy. Deep breaths!

Prom Thing disappears beneath the water, reappears with its gills slicked wet.

PROM THING  
Help. Me.

Rayne and Fatima nod, reach down to pull the creature from the pool.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL - LATER

Rayne and Fatima sit on a bench besides Laszlo, a towel wrapped around his waist. He exists in an in-between state, fins and gills steadily retreating into his body.

LASZLO  
I don't know what's happening to me. One moment, I was just Laszlo, then the next thing I know, I'm six foot seven and have gills.

RAYNE  
You're still Laszlo--

LASZLO  
--Am I? Ever since I knew that there was this monster inside of me, I don't know where I end and it begins.

FATIMA  
You aren't a monster, Laszlo.

RAYNE  
There are Florida Fish Monster tee-shirts in your Etsy shop right now...

FATIMA

...that was so six hours ago, but what I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted was I'll always be here for you, Laszlo.

RAYNE

And I should have been more considerate of your feelings. I should have never outed another student like that.

Laszlo stands up, frustrated. The spine alongside his back re-emerges as he grows more frustrated.

LASZLO

What are you even talking about? I'm not gay, Rayne. I like girls.

Fatima laughs. She clears her throat, awkwardly looks away.

RAYNE

But like do you like girls, or do you *like* girls?

LASZLO

What does that even mean?

FATIMA

It makes perfect sense to me.

LASZLO

Then explain it to me!

FATIMA

Like, do you like girls? Or do you *like* girls?

Fatima does the typical gay wrist thing to emphasize the change in her question.

Laszlo blinks confused.

LASZLO

I'm straight.

Rayne and Fatima both look at each other.

RAYNE

But are you straight in like a straight way, or like straight in a fruity way?

Laszlo stomps his feet, his toenails sharpening into pointed claws, scales climbing up his legs the more upset he becomes.

Fatima pulls out her phone, begins to record. Rayne swats it out of her hands.

FATIMA

Hey, what was that for?

RAYNE

You just discovered your best friend is a fish monster, and you're filming.

FATIMA

I also just discovered he's fruity--

Laszlo, now entirely covered in scales, throws a beer bottle against the wall on the other side of the pool.

LASZLO/PROM THING

I'm not fruity.

FATIMA

Sure, you aren't. But my point is, I wasn't filming Laszlo to expose him. I was filming him because in a matter of seconds, he's gone full sentient sushi.

Rayne stands up, motions to Laszlo in his current form.

RAYNE

That might have been the smartest thing you've said like ever, Fatima. Laszlo was like almost de-scaled, then just talking about how "straight" you are made you totally Hulk out.

LASZLO/PROM THING

Can we talk about anything besides the fact that no one believes I'm straight?

FATIMA

We never said we didn't believe you. You're just not convincing.

Laszlo grits his teeth, now pointed like those of a shark.

RAYNE

If you're going to keep this hidden, Laszlo, we have to figure out what makes it tick. You know what that means?

LASZLO/PROM THING

No.

Fatima and Rayne nod at one another.

FATIMA & RAYNE

Training montage!

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Laszlo stands on the beach in a bathing suit, one much too skimpy for his preferences, his hands covering his groin.

Fatima readies her camera.

LASZLO

Why do I have to wear this? If I turn, it's going to snap like a rubber band.

FATIMA

Some of us don't want to see all of that.

Laszlo groans. A few scales sprout to the surface on his chest. Rayne scribbles something on a notepad.

LASZLO

Why are you taking notes? Are you trying to win the science fair using my suffering?

RAYNE

Do you want to figure out what's causing you to change or would you rather go full fish face in the middle of your next Calculus test?

LASZLO

Let's just get it over with.

Rayne and Fatima nod at each other.

FATIMA

This is Fatima Hakeem from Strange Happenings With Fatima Hakeem.

(MORE)

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Today, we ask the most important question: what makes a boy turn into a literal fish out of water?

Rayne pelts Laszlo with a water balloon. He's shocked as he wipes water out of his eyes.

LASZLO

What was that for?

FATIMA

Test #1 failed. Water doesn't cause Laszlo to turn.

RAYNE

Damn, I really thought that would work.

FATIMA

We need to change up our methods.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Fatima and Rayne stand on either side of Laszlo. Rayne cups his hands around his mouth.

RAYNE

LASZLO MAYBERRY IS A FAGGOT!

LASZLO

Hey!

Fatima shouts.

FATIMA

FUCKING FAGGOT!

RAYNE

FAGGOT!!!

Fatima tries to scream louder than Rayne. It's turned into a competition.

FATIMA

FAGGOT!

RAYNE

FAGGOT!

Laszlo looks more annoyed, than upset.

LASZLO  
I don't think it's working. What  
else do you have?

Rayne draws an X on his notepad. He flips it around so Laszlo  
can see the two line-items: WATER BALLOONS and HOMOPHOBIA.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
We aren't winning any science fair.

RAYNE  
I'm sorry, but what do the two of  
us know about fish people?

FATIMA  
Speak for yourself!

Fatima pulls out her phone, begins flipping through dozens of  
saved articles.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Maybe the reason we can't get you  
to transform is because we have no  
idea what it's like to be a fish  
monster. But what if I told you  
there very well might be a nest of  
monsters still in this town?

LASZLO  
I would be irritated that you  
didn't mention that right away.

FATIMA  
Look, I haven't actually been able  
to get through the doors.

LASZLO  
And why not?

CUT TO:

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - NIGHT

Rayne, Fatima, and Laszlo hide behind a hedge across the  
street from Fruits' Cocktail & Karaoke bar.

LASZLO  
A gay bar?

FATIMA

It's a front, I swear. I triangulated every weird happening in town, and you know what lies at the center of all those incidents: this gay bar.

Laszlo laughs.

LASZLO

How do you think I'm supposed to get in? I look like I'm twelve.

RAYNE

Fatima, you do what you're good at. Keep your eyes open for anything weird.

Rayne grabs Laszlo's hand, drags him across the street.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

A good sob story will get you far in the queer community, Laszlo. Trust me. Act mentally ill and closeted...

LASZLO

I don't know how to do it.

RAYNE

Just be yourself!

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - NIGHT

Rayne whispers something into the bouncer's ear, motioning to Laszlo as he talks.

BOUNCER

Oh my god, that's so sad.

RAYNE

I know, right? Just look at him.

The bouncer waves them both into the bar.

LASZLO

What did you say to him? He didn't even ask for any ID.

RAYNE

Mostly just the truth. You're already tragic.



LASZLO

Ouch.

RAYNE

Let's get you a Shirley Temple to  
make it all better.

Rayne walks up to the bar.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Two Shirley Temples--

Laszlo pushes in front of Rayne.

LASZLO

Make that whiskey...on ice.

Rayne rolls his eyes as the bartender pours two whiskeys,  
pushing them across the bar. Laszlo tosses a few bills.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

What are we looking for?

RAYNE

You spend so much time with your  
head down, you don't ever look up  
to see what's happening around you.

Rayne takes a sip of his drink, nods towards a gay couple  
walking onto the dance floor. One of the men blushes as the  
other grabs his hand, brushes his long hair aside to reveal a  
pointed ear.

LASZLO

What do we even say?

RAYNE

Just drink your drink and shut up.

Rayne pushes up Laszlo's drink, a double of whiskey slamming  
into the back of his throat. Laszlo coughs, blinking away  
tears as he turns back to the bartender.

LASZLO

Actually, can I get a Shirley  
Temple?

Rayne throws back his drink, yanks Laszlo towards the dance  
floor.

RAYNE

We need to follow those two,  
wherever they go.

LASZLO  
I don't know how to dance.

RAYNE  
Twinks never do.

Laszlo gulps.

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - SAME

Fatima watches the bar's entrance. She loudly sighs as a whole lot of nothing happens.

FATIMA  
From an up-and-coming journalist to  
a watch dog...

Fatima opens TikTok, begins to swipe. She laughs as she watches videos instead of the entrance.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Damn, that kid really loves corn,  
doesn't he?

SLAM! Fatima looks up to see Tara exit a car wearing an incredibly tailored Kevlar catsuit, hair up in a high ponytail. It's extremely cunty in like a military-industrial complex way.

Cassie exits the other side of the car, still wearing her cheer uniform. She joins Tara at the open trunk.

Cassie picks up a wicked looking axe, but Tara removes it from her hands, instead handing her a simple wooden stake.

TARA  
Basics first.

Fatima dials Laszlo's number, right as Tara slings a crossbow over one shoulder.

FATIMA  
(loud whisper)  
Pick up. Pick up. Pick up!

The last few words are too loud. Fatima dives into the hedge, as Tara turns to inspect the surroundings.

TARA  
Did you hear that?

CASSIE  
Can we just get this over with? I  
have chemistry homework.

TARA  
Patience, honey. I really want you  
to savor your first mass  
extermination.

Cassie walks towards the door, goes to pull it open. She  
screams, inspects a red welt on her hand.

Tara laughs.

CASSIE  
It's not funny!

TARA  
This place is warded against our  
kind. We need a little more  
firepower.

Tara pulls out an antique spell book, begins to flip through  
its pages.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Give me a second. My Eldritch is  
rusty. I lost my Duolingo streak.

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - SAME

Laszlo and Rayne dance in the crowd. Laszlo is visibly  
uncomfortable, completely off-beat.

INTERCUT LASZLO'S POV/FISH-EYED SHOT OF LASZLO:

The bright lights blur with the dancing bodies. He sees the  
crowd in pieces:

-a masculine jaw...Laszlo's fingers running across his own.

-The swing of a woman's hips. She turns to face Laszlo,  
revealing a massive beard growing from her chin. Her features  
appear exaggerated, amplified by the drag makeup. She smiles  
at Laszlo, her tongue flicking out: thin like a snake.

-Laszlo blinks, overwhelmed by a bombardment of images: heels  
and harnesses, breasts and bulges. His breathing becomes  
quick and ragged, until the gills sprout from neck.

RAYNE  
Laszlo, are you okay?

-Laszlo falls on his ass. The crowd gasps, parts. A dozen different queer monsters stare down at him.

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - NIGHT

Tara sits cross-legged before the bar's door. She speaks in tongues, the spell-book levitating up from her lap. Green fire burn up the door's hinges.

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - HEDGE - SAME

From behind the hedge, Fatima begins filming.

FATIMA  
(loud whisper)  
This is Fatima Hakeem with Strange  
Happenings with Fatima Hakeem. High  
school cheerleading coach confirmed  
as monster hunter baddy slash  
wizard--

But then a stake is pressed against her throat. Cassie leans into view.

CASSIE  
Delete it.

FATIMA  
I have a first amendment right.

CASSIE  
Delete. It.

Cassie digs the sharpened stake into Fatima's skin.

FATIMA  
Fine, just chill.

Fatima deletes the video.

CASSIE  
Now, get out of here before my mom  
sees you.

FATIMA  
I'm actually, ummm...waiting for my  
Uber?

CASSIE  
Walking is good for you.

Cassie pushes her down a nearby path, but not before grabbing Fatima's phone out of her hands and slipping it into her pockets.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
I'll put it into your locker, but  
not until I'm sure you leave.

Fatima gulps, begins to walk away down the path.

FATIMA  
(under her breath)  
Intimidating the press. See how it  
comes back to bite you in the ass.

CASSIE  
I heard that!

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - SAME

Laszlo, his shorts just barely staying intact now that he's fully transformed into his fish form, sits at the bar, nursing a Shirley Temple that is like 90% cherries.

Rayne sits on a stool beside him.

RAYNE  
You seem more like yourself this  
time around.

LASZLO  
Maybe this is who I am.

RAYNE  
What about this place made you  
transform?

Laszlo points to his drink.

LASZLO  
Can I get some vodka in that?

The bartender pours with a heavy hand. Laszlo takes a sip, sticks out his tongue in disgust.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
There's something about these  
people...about the way that they  
aren't afraid to be freakish, to  
blur the line between man and  
monster, between man and woman...  
(beat)  
...it feels...it feels...

RAYNE  
...it feels right.

Laszlo throws his drink back, coughs at the burn of it.

LASZLO  
When did Little Suzie Can't See For  
Shit die, Rayne?

RAYNE  
She was never alive. She was a mask  
I wore over who I've always been. I  
shed her like snakeskin, she  
crumbled to bits in the wind.

Rayne reaches out to touch Laszlo's face.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
You're a boy, Laszlo. You're no  
fish.

LASZLO  
What if I'm not a boy?

A red light turns on over the bar. The music cuts off. The entire bar goes into a panic. The bar patrons pull back a curtain, revealing a secret room.

BANG!

RAYNE  
What was--

--The bouncer flies through the air, smacking against the wall behind the bar. Glass and liquor shower Rayne and Laszlo.

TARA  
Listen up, faggots. I've come here  
to kick ass and take names...and  
this jumpsuit has no pockets to  
keep my pen.

Tara fires her crossbow. Rayne throws himself out of the way, the bolt sinking into the bouncer's throat as he stands. He yanks the bolt from his neck, undergoing a transformation into a bull-headed minotaur.

BOUNCER  
You kids need to get out of here.

Laszlo and Rayne scramble across the dance floor towards where the rest of the bar is fleeing.

The bouncer charges at Tara. She barely avoids his sharpened horns, taking the full force of his massive head as he slams her into the brick wall.

Cassie looks between her mom and the fleeing monsters. Tara points her towards the room where everyone is fleeing.

TARA

Don't let them get away!

Tara pulls out her axe. She spins, cleaves through the fleeing minotaur's neck. Laszlo and Rayne scream as the discarded head rolls across their path, but there's no time to stop. Cassie is upon them with her stake raised.

BAR PATRON

Behind you!

Laszlo spins to see Cassie with the stake raised. He swipes at her hand, digging his claws into the palm of her hand. She cries out, drops the stake.

Laszlo and Rayne run into the room, an open sewer grate at the base of the floor. Two of the bar patrons begin to roll down a heavy metal shutter.

TARA

(screaming)

Stop them, Cassie!

Cassie runs towards the descending shutter, grabbing it with both hands and holding it open. But then she locks eyes with Laszlo, even in fish form, she seems to recognize him.

CASSIE

It's you.

LASZLO

She'll kill me, she'll kill all of them. Our blood will be on your hands.

Cassie lets go of the shutter, allowing it to slam shut. Tara rushes to Cassie's side, tries to pry the shutter up but she can't. She stands up, glares at Tara.

TARA

Do you know what you just did? You let those freaks slink off into the sewers.

CASSIE

What did they do to deserve what you were planning for them?

TARA  
Their existence is a stain upon  
this green earth.

CASSIE  
They're people!

Tara slaps Cassie hard, grabs her by the hair. Cassie cries out as Tara tightens her hold, the sound of her blonde hair ripping beneath her mother's grasp.

TARA  
I thought I raised you better. I  
thought I made it clear what sort  
of person you would be.

CASSIE  
All you made clear was that I'll  
never be enough if I'm not you.  
You're a cruel narcissist.

Cassie yanks free, a clump of hair remaining in Tara's hand. Cassie's dark roots are visible, stained with blood.

Cassie begins to walk out of the bar.

TARA  
Where are you going? There's a  
couple dozen goonies to hunt down.

CASSIE  
I'm sure you can handle it by  
yourself, or I'm sure any of your  
little cheerleaders would drop what  
they're doing at a moment's notice.

EXT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Laszlo jumps out of Rayne's car, less fishy than before.

RAYNE  
Laszlo, please call me if you need  
me.

LASZLO  
We got away, Rayne. The best thing  
we can do now is pretend like it's  
any other night. I was in all  
night, so were you.

RAYNE  
Then I'll see you at school.



Laszlo nods, disappears into the house.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo tiptoes through the house. The floorboards creak, causing him to slow and hold his breath. The last thing he needs is to be caught sneaking into the house, way past curfew and lacking a shirt.

He begins to turn to walk down the hallway...

SMACK! Laszlo runs right into his father as he rubs the sleep from his eyes.

RODNEY

I would have expected at least a call from you, Laszlo.

(beat)

Where'd your shirt go?

LASZLO

Dad...

Laszlo blinks, tears welling in his eyes.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Something's happening.

Laszlo buries his face in his father's chest. Rodney cradles his son, taken aback by Laszlo's enormous show of emotion.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Rodney shepherds Laszlo to sit at the kitchen table. Laszlo sputters through tears, his breathing rapid.

Rodney pours a glass of water, pushing it into Laszlo's hands.

RODNEY

Deep breaths and a few sips of water. Then we can talk through this.

Rodney makes a show of breathing in from his belly; Laszlo can hardly manage to suck in an ounce of air as he blubbers.

LASZLO

There's things in this town that we don't talk about aren't there?

RODNEY  
Town secrets aren't abnormal--

LASZLO  
But this isn't a normal town. The  
people you pass by the street...  
They aren't all people.

Rodney inspects his son's torso, looking for signs of harm.

RODNEY  
You aren't hurt, Laszlo. But what  
did you see?

LASZLO  
I saw that I'm more like than them  
than the kids at school.

Laszlo's breathing is still uneven, that is until his gills  
appear once again. He calms, takes a sip of water as Rodney  
reaches out to touch the edges of the new organs growing on  
his son before his eyes.

RODNEY  
I should have told you.

LASZLO  
You knew this was going to happen?

RODNEY  
Not exactly, but no one knows what  
their kid is going to be like till  
they're living and breathing. You  
might inherit my eyes, or your  
mother's hair. You might inherit  
other traits, or have an absence of  
others.

LASZLO  
So that means that Mom-

RODNEY  
-I didn't mind that she had gills  
and flippers. I just knew that I  
loved her, and she loved me.

LASZLO  
Why didn't you tell me? Why  
couldn't you let me know that this  
could happen when people like Tara  
Hunter were out there just waiting  
to catch me?

Rodney's eyes go wide, anger coming to the surface in a way that is uncharacteristic of his normally calm demeanor.

RODNEY

If she put so much as a finger on you...

LASZLO

She didn't have the chance to.

RODNEY

You must never cross her path, Laszlo. Not even at school. She's not some vigilante with a mission, she's a dangerous woman who's off the rails. She's hurt people before, Laszlo. It didn't matter if they were just minding their business. If Tara Hunter has the chance to take the kill, she will.

LASZLO

If you knew so much about her, why didn't you try to tell me?

RODNEY

If I told you the truth, you would try to do something about it.

LASZLO

Mom didn't die in a car crash?

Rodney stammers.

RODNEY

It was better if you thought it was an accident.

Laszlo cries, yells through the tears.

LASZLO

We could've done something. We should've found justice.

RODNEY

Where? In the courts? What am I supposed to say, my wife who is a fish woman was killed by a monster hunter turned Karen? It was safer to keep our heads down. Anything else would have painted a target on our back.

Laszlo, his features become increasingly fishy, walks towards the front door.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Laszlo, where are you going?

LASZLO  
To think.

Rodney grabs for his son, but Laszlo pulls back his lip to reveal sharp teeth. Rodney lets go.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - CASSIE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cassie, dressed in a set of silk pajamas, stands in front of a fogged up mirror. She wipes away the condensation, undoing the towel wrapped around her head.

Cassie's hair is no longer blonde, but has been dyed to match her dark roots. She inspects it for a long time. Is it her?

She rewraps her hair.

EXT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - PORCH - SAME

Laszlo walks up the path to the Hunter household.

With each step he takes towards the door, more scales sprout from his skin. His rage grows hotter as his body settles into its transformation.

Now, in his final form, there is no sign of Laszlo in the hunkering beast. It's only Prom Thing, as it presses a claw against the door bell.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - CASSIE'S ROOM - SAME

DING DONG!

Cassie looks to the alarm clock beside her bed: 1:37 am.

She reaches into her bedside table, palming a stake. She peels back the curtain to look down at the porch. But from her point-of-view, she cannot see the front door, just hears the DING DONG! DING DING DING!

CASSIE  
Unless you're delivering a pizza,  
I'm not interested.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKKNOCKKNOCKKNOCK

Cassie holds the stake at ready, but her hand is shaking.

CASSIE

I have shotgun aimed at the door.  
I'm going to give you to the count  
of three to leave. Otherwise, I'm  
pumping your belly full of  
buckshot.

Cassie takes a deep breath in.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

One...Two...

The door explodes inwards, the whole weight of Prom Thing thrown against it. Cassie slices through the air with her stake as she's caught around the waist by the creature, thrown through the air.

Cassie hits the wall hard, slides down it with a groan. The stake rolls out of her grasp as she stumbles onto her feet. Prom Thing stares her down, sharp teeth gnashing.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Laszlo, are you in there?

A croaking noise escapes Prom Thing's mouth.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

My mom isn't here.

Prom Thing slinks about the living room. Cassie circles in response, trying to keep as much distance as possible.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I know that you're angry. I know  
that you're scared. But, Laszlo,  
I'm not my mother.

Prom Thing snaps its teeth at Cassie. She jumps back, scrambles to grab anything to defend herself. But the creature is diving at her, biting at her face as it knocks her to the floor.

Cassie braces an arm beneath the monster's jaws, keeping it from mangling her; however, the towel tied around her hair comes loose, revealing her change in appearance. No longer is she Tara's mini-me.

Prom Thing rears back, blinking at Cassie. A clawed hand reaches out to touch Cassie's hair. A croaking noise escapes its mouth, a curious rather than an aggressive noise.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Laszlo?

Prom Thing rolls off, clutching its head in its hands. Slowly, but surely, Laszlo reemerges, scales peeling back.

LASZLO/PROM THING

Where is she?

CASSIE

You need to leave, Laszlo.

LASZLO/PROM THING

I'm going to kill her.

Cassie can't help but laugh.

CASSIE

But seriously, you need to leave.

Laszlo bares his sharp teeth. Still somewhere a fish and whatever Laszlo is.

LASZLO/PROM THING

I'll wait.

Cassie grabs Laszlo's face in her hands.

CASSIE

Listen to me, Laszlo. If you stay her, and she catches you. You won't have a chance to get away. My mother will catch you and gut you like a fish.

Tears well in Laszlo's oversized eyes.

LASZLO

I can try.

Cassie helps Laszlo to his feet.

CASSIE

You need to leave. Now. Please, Laszlo.

Cassie shoves Laszlo towards the door.

I/E O'CONNELL'S JEEP - NIGHT

A jeep sits arrives outside of the Hunter house. O'Connell and several of the basketball players sit inside. Cans of beer in their hands.

Phil smacks O'Connell's shoulder.

PHIL

What are you waiting for? Go get your girl.

O'Connell reaches for the door, but then he stops. He watches as Laszlo exits Cassie's house.

O'CONNELL

What the fuck? Is that Milkshake Mayberry?

The other basketball players holler, jeering at O'Connell.

PHIL

Mayberry's got more game than captain of the basketball team.

O'Connell punches Phil in the tit. Phil cries out.

O'Connell flips off the head lights, pulls out onto the street.

PHIL (CONT'D)

What about Cassie?

O'CONNELL

It's time we teach Mayberry a lesson.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Laszlo crosses the football field. He scratches at his chin, the faint trace of flaking scales still visible.

That's when O'Connell's jeep barrels over the chain-link fence, forcing Laszlo to stop in his tracks. O'Connell jumps out of the car armed with a baseball bat.

O'CONNELL

We've got to talk man to man, Mayberry.

LASZLO  
Look, O'Connell, I have bigger  
problems than making you feel  
better about your tiny penis.

Phil and the other basketball players join O'Connell.

PHIL  
It's so not tiny. It's a very  
respectable penis.

O'Connell slams the butt of the bat into Phil's stomach. The  
younger boy bends over in pain. O'Connell turns his attention  
to Laszlo, pressing the bat into his chest. Laszlo backs up.

O'CONNELL  
Now, tell me why I found you at  
Cassie's house at 2 in the morning.

LASZLO  
You first. Tell me why you weren't  
at her house at 2 in the morning.

O'CONNELL  
Oh, that's it. You're dead.

O'Connell winds up the bat, swings for Laszlo's head.

CLOSE ON:

The bat comes to a sudden stop, crushed in Prom Thing's  
clawed hands.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON:

O'Connell's eyes going wide as Prom Thing tackles him.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - FOOTBALL FIELD - SAME

O'Connell bounces across the football field like a stone  
skipping across a smooth lake. He groans as he pushes himself  
up. O'Connell touches his face, blood dripping from his  
forehead.

O'CONNELL  
Get that faggot!

Phil and the other basketball players rush Prom Thing.  
They're unafraid, emboldened by their leader.



Prom Thing struggles to fend off the three other boys as they try to yank him off his feet. He bares his teeth, bites into Phil's throat.

Phil screams, blood spraying from the wound as he collapses onto the ground claspng a hand on the one. One of the other basketball players turns to his injured teammate, giving Laszlo the chance to swipe a claw across the boy's chest.

The remaining basketball player starts to run, but Prom Thing leaps at the boy, tearing into his extremities as he thrashes.

But Prom Thing finds too much catharsis in the attack, the three injured basketball players lying limp on the field as O'Connell speeds off the field.

Prom Thing leaps at the jeep, claws shredding the metal exterior.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

O'Connell's jeep fishtails across the field. But he finally manages to flick off Prom Thing. The creature begins to chase after the car, but then the sprinklers turn on, washing the blood from his eyes.

INT. O'CONNELL'S JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

Far enough away now, O'Connell stops the car. He pulls his phone out of his pocket. He dials Cassie's number, but almost immediately hangs up.

O'CONNELL  
You've left me with no choice,  
Cassie.

O'Connell scrolls through his contacts till he finds Tara's number. He dials it, the call going through after only one ring.

TARA (V.O.)  
It's a little late to be thinking  
about me, O'Connell.

O'CONNELL  
You and I have something in common.

TARA (V.O.)  
We both represent the best this  
town has to offer?

O'CONNELL  
A common enemy.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - MORNING

Principal Price takes a sip of his coffee as he struggles to unlock his office.

The keys slip from his grasp. He groans as he leans down to retrieve them, bracing his forearm against the locked door... but with his weight pressed against the door, it falls open.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Hello?

He stands up, shrugs as he enters

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PRINCIPAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Principal Price flips on the lights.

His chair spins around, revealing Tara waiting for him. Price screams, drops his coffee on the floor.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Fuck, my green tea latte.

TARA  
Come on, Sexton. Green tea? What are you? Some kind of pussy.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
It's full of antioxidants...  
(beat)  
What are doing here?

TARA  
I thought I'd deliver the news personally. Three of your students are in emergency surgery. You better hope they all live because the yearbook can't afford a full-page spread on their sad, short lives.

Price's jaw drops as he stammers.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
What students?

TARA

Nobody important. Background characters in the lives of more important people like my daughter and O'Connell Moore.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Has anyone ever told you that you sound like a psychopath?

TARA

My ex-husband. May he rest in pieces.

Principal Price grabs his desk phone.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

You need to leave while I figure out exactly what happened.

TARA

They were mauled by a fish monster.

Principal Price begins punching in numbers.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

We need to cancel the Prom. Maybe if we're lucky the DJ will give us our deposit back.

Tara swipes the phone off Price's desk.

TARA

You'll do no such thing. One little fish monster isn't enough to ruin my hopes and dreams...Cassie's hopes and dreams.

(beat)

You'll hire me and my Huntresses as private security. The kiddos will dance, spike the punch, all those crucial high school moments. And if that scaly fucker shows up, we'll serve sushi at the afterparty.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo is passed out in bed, the sheet draped across his naked, bloody form. The mattress strewn with discarded scales.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Rodney sits before the TV, a news cast on the screen. A WEATHERMAN speaks.

WEATHERMAN

Our weather balloons have detected an unexpected anomaly this morning. A small tropical storm gaining speed by the hour, threatening to crash against the coast.

DING DONG! Rodney gets up, eyeing the TV as he approaches the door.

WEATHERMAN (CONT'D)

Residents of Shady Cove should remain vigilant and prepared, in case the storm reaches hurricane classification.

Rodney looks through the peephole to see Tara Hunter. She holds a giant fruit basket. He begins to slowly retreat from the door.

TARA (O.S.)

I can hear you, Rodney. I'd advise you open the door.

Rodney curses beneath his breath, unlocks the door but makes sure his body can block Tara's entry.

RODNEY

I'm going to ask you nicely to step off my porch.

TARA

Is your son at home, Rodney?

RODNEY

He stayed at a friend's house.

CUT TO:

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - SAME

Laszlo has thrown on a pair of shorts. He rubs the sleep from his eyes as he tiptoes into

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo cautiously approaches the bannister. Tara and his father's voice audible.

TARA (O.S.)

We wanted all of our Prom Court candidates to enjoy a delicious breakfast. So I thought I would drop off this fruit basket.

RODNEY (O.S.)

Well, I'll take it. But as I said, Laszlo isn't here.

Laszlo takes a step back, the floorboard creaking beneath his foot. Laszlo holds his breath.

TARA (O.S.)

You might want to check on that noise, Rodney. It sounds like someone is home.

Rodney closes the door, walks to the foot of the stairs with the fruit basket in hand. Fear and anger in his expression.

RODNEY

Tara Hunter is making house calls.  
Get down here now!

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - KITCHEN

Laszlo enters the kitchen behind his father. Laszlo absently reaches for a piece of fruit, but Rodney slaps his hand away.

Rodney peels back the cantaloupe half-moons and chocolate-covered strawberries. At the heart of the basket is a pineapple, driven into a wooden stake.

Rodney sweeps the fruit basket into the trashcan.

RODNEY

Go upstairs and pack a bag.

LASZLO

What? Why?

RODNEY

Tara Hunter is too self-absorbed to pay us a visit without an agenda.  
We need to get out of town.

LASZLO  
What about the prom?

RODNEY  
What about it, Laszlo? Would you  
rather get the same treatment that  
pineapple got or go to the prom?

A BREAKING NEWS jingle plays in the other room, drawing both  
their attention.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The weatherman on the TV motions to a stretch of highway  
north of Shady Cove. Video footage of the interstate,  
collapsed into a muddy sinkhole plays.

WEATHERMAN  
Breaking News, a sinkhole has  
suddenly opened up beneath the  
interstate leading into Shady Cove,  
Florida. Police are diverting  
traffic back to the town and  
advising residents to remain  
vigilant.

RODNEY  
That's way too convenient. You're  
not so much as setting a foot  
outside this house.

LASZLO  
It's a coincidence, Dad. And if  
you're so worried about Tara  
Hunter, wouldn't it make the most  
sense to go somewhere were there  
are hundreds of witnesses to keep  
her in check?

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - TROPHY HALL - DAY

A sickly green glow fills the trophy hall, casting the prom  
king and queen crowns in a sinister light. We follow this  
light into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - CONTINUOUS

The Huntresses sit in a large circle, their faces hidden in the hoods of robes. Eldritch symbols are drawn between them, Tara's spell book floating in the center of the circle.

Prom decorations are scattered throughout the gym, still half-assembled.

Tara enters, a duffle bag slung over her shoulders. Harmony rises from the bleachers and joins her.

TARA

The prom decorating committee will be here any minute.

HARMONY

The ritual is almost complete.

Green flames crawl from the eldritch symbols, circling the gym's walls in strange markings and bizarre geometries.

TARA

Well good! When our little friend arrives, we'll be prepared.

Tara throws down the duffle bag on the floor, unzips it to reveal dozens of stakes, axes, and crossbows. A whole arsenal for a single fish "boy".

EXT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - LAWN - DAY

O'Connell's jeep comes to a sudden stop, hopping the curb and fishtailing across Cassie's lawn. He gets out of the car, boombox in hand.

O'CONNELL

Cassie, I'm not leaving until you come downstairs.

O'Connell presses play on the boombox. Some shitty love song, probably something by Maroon 5, plays.

We see Cassie in her bedroom looking down at O'Connell. An irritated scowl on her face as she reaches for the curtains to pull them shut.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Come down, Cassie!

Cassie flips O'Connell off, yanks the curtains shut.

O'Connell places the boombox on the hood of his car. He picks up a stone from a nearby planter.

But O'Connell has too much of an arm to be gently tapping pebbles off the window. Glass sprinkles down on the lawn as the stone explodes through the pane of glass.

Cassie yanks back the curtain.

CASSIE  
What the fuck, O'Connell?

O'CONNELL  
What the fuck me? What the fuck, you? Why is Milkshake Mayberry making late night visits to my girl's house?

Cassie balls her fists at her side.

CASSIE  
Laszlo and I are just friends! And even if we weren't, that doesn't mean you have the right to throw a rock through my fucking window.

O'Connell groans, smashes his palms against his eyes as if to force tears to the surface in a sort of manly temper tantrum.

O'CONNELL  
If you have something to say, come down here and say it to my face.

Cassie disappears inside her bedroom, returns with the rock in hand. She throws it with deadly precision at O'Connell's feet. He just barely jumping out the way.

CASSIE  
We're through, O'Connell. You're an asshole and a bully.

O'CONNELL  
Oh come on! Now you're just going to pretend like you're innocent? Like you're a good person, despite standing by my side for four years.

Cassie blinks.

CASSIE  
Maybe, I'm not a good person, but I'm trying to be.



Cassie yanks the curtains shut once again. O'Connell screams, stomps his feet before getting back into the car.

INT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - CASSIE'S ROOM - SAME

Cassie sweeps up the broken glass on her bedroom floor, discarding as much as she can in a trash can. Tears threaten to spill down her cheeks, but she wipes them away.

Cassie turns her attention to her prom dress, an awful tiered-skirt purple monstrosity. Groaning, she collects the gown and steps into the bathroom.

CUE MONTAGE:

-Cassie curling her hair.

-Tara sharpening a stake, blowing off wood-shavings, pressing her fingers against the sharpened tip.

-Laszlo unzipping a suit bag, his suit a beautiful turquoise color. The only thing you could wear if you're sporting scales.

-Tara in an elegant, form-fitting silver gown. Harmony and the other huntresses helping her attach piece of plate armor and lightweight chainmail to the gown.

-Fatima's mother wiping tears away as she helps Fatima pin her satin hijab in place, the fabric blending beautifully with her cream-colored, beaded dress and its pronounced shoulder pads and sheer layered skirt.

-A well-dressed O'Connell ugly-crying in front of a mirror, sloshing whiskey across his tux as he drinks directly from the bottle.

-Rayne pulling on a tee-shirt printed to appear like a tuxedo. He slicks his hair back with styling mousse, a trans-masc James Dean.

END MONTAGE:

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rodney helps Laszlo with his bowtie, struggling to tie it properly because he's crying.

RODNEY

I wish your mom was here to see you  
off to Prom.

LASZLO  
I wish she was here too...to help  
me sort this all out.

RODNEY  
What is there to sort out?

Laszlo is quiet for a long moment, inspecting himself in the  
mirror.

LASZLO  
Do you remember when I was little  
and I used to try to walk in mom's  
heels while wearing your suit  
jackets?

Rodney nods.

RODNEY  
Yeah, but why is that on your mind  
right now, Lasz?

LASZLO  
I feel like I'm a kid playing dress  
up still...wearing this suit...it  
feels like costume.

RODNEY  
You're a handsome boy, Laszlo.

LASZLO  
I'm not so sure of that anymore.

Laszlo rips his eyes away from his own reflection, no longer  
able to stomach it. Rodney pulls Laszlo into a hug.

RODNEY  
You know I'm always going to be  
here for you regardless of who or  
what you are?

LASZLO  
I know, Dad.

The pair lock eyes.

RODNEY  
Promise me you'll stay safe.

LASZLO  
It's prom, Dad. Anything can  
happen.

Rodney nods.

RODNEY  
I'll wait in the car in the parking  
lot, if you want.

Laszlo sticks his tongue out in faux disgust, pulls away from his father.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DROP-OFF LANE - NIGHT

The drop-off lane of the school parking lot is flooded with the artificial glow of string lights strung along erected trellises.

A red carpet extends from the school's entrance like a tongue, ready to draw in the awkward yet elegantly dressed students into the glistening maw of Prom.

Minivans mingle with rented limousines as Principal Price and a set of hired valets shepherd the prom attendees into the night. Yearbook members guard the red carpet with flashbulb cameras, ready to capture the hottest looks of the night.

INT. RODNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Rodney stops the car.

Laszlo's breathing is panicked, much too fast. His skin clammy, a green tinge just beneath the sweaty surface.

His father turns back to look at him.

RODNEY  
Laszlo, I want you to take a deep  
breath. You're fine. It's just like  
any other night...

But on any other night, the back door of the car isn't being pulled open. Principal Price waves Laszlo out of the backseat.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Looking dashing, Mr. Mayberry, but  
there appears to be a bit of a rush  
to get into the dance. We ought to  
hurry.

Principal Price pulls Laszlo from his seat with an arm around his shoulders. Rodney shouts one last word of advice.

RODNEY  
--And stay safe, Laszlo.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - RED CARPET - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo stumbles forward, blinded by the flashing cameras. Fatima appears to his left, her phone clasped in her hand. Video already rolling.

LASZLO  
Can't you give the video journalism  
a break for one night, Fatima?

FATIMA  
I want to remember this, Laszlo.

LASZLO  
You want to keep it on record.

Rayne quickly catches pace with the pair, his gaze drawn to the slight iridescence of Laszlo's tux.

RAYNE  
Wow, an unlikely fit for Laszlo  
Mayberry.

But then Rayne's eyes find Fatima. He's dumbfounded, mesmerized by how she looks. Mouth agape. Fatima catches him staring.

FATIMA  
Couldn't even rent a jacket?

Rayne sheepishly looks away.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - TROPHY HALL - CONTINUOUS

Students congregate alongside the trophies, chatting to their dates or stopping for one last picture before heading into the dance.

But there's also an uncomfortable number of moms standing guard as the students enter, their eyes scanning the crowd for any sign of teenage indiscretion.

LASZLO  
Is it just me, or is the school  
just swarming with moms in prom  
dresses?

Rayne shrugs.

RAYNE  
Maybe they don't want someone to  
sneak in a boatload of booze?

FATIMA

Knowing our peer's parents, I worry  
that they might be the ones  
slipping in the booze.

Laszlo tries to speak, stammers, gulps in air as his eyes go  
cross-eyed. He scratches beneath his shirt collar as scales  
begin to peak out from beneath his skin.

LASZLO

They look more like Tara Hunter's  
crowd.

(beat)

Is it too late to turn around?

But there's a crowded procession in their wake, pushing them  
forward even as Laszlo looks for an exit. Rayne steadies  
Laszlo by the arm.

RAYNE

All it is is a party. Just a stupid  
party where the dance floor starts  
to smell like feet after half an  
hour, and you have to watch Cassie  
Hunter and O'Connell Moore dance  
beneath a spotlight.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - CONTINUOUS

The trio enter the gymnasium, which has been decked out in  
ocean-themed décor. Coral arches and paper fish, a massive  
papier-mâché whale suspended from the rafters.

Laszlo groans.

LASZLO

Why did no one tell me the theme  
was Under the Sea?

FATIMA

Would it be any more bearable if it  
was any other theme?

RAYNE

Speak for yourself, any other theme  
and there wouldn't be a bowl of  
loose, flavor-blasted goldfish to  
chow down on.

Rayne disappears to the snack table, allowing Fatima and  
Laszlo one last moment before the pomp and circumstance.

LASZLO

I don't know how I'm supposed to tolerate two hours of this.

Fatima shrugs, pointing her camera at Ashlyn, slow-dancing with Henry the Seeing Eye-Dog as his owner tries to shepherd him elsewhere by the leash.

FATIMA

I'm hoping that things start to get messy.

That's when O'Connell enters, not even discretely arriving with a flash pressed to his lips. He stumbles forward, snatching a ballot out of a student council member's hands.

O'CONNELL

Has anyone told you that high school is anything but a democracy?

O'Connell balls up the ballot, throws it at Laszlo's head.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Pokémon Go To The Polls, Faggot!

Fatima can't help but to laugh.

LASZLO

Fatima!

FATIMA

What? I'm just surprised he paid enough attention in history class to quote Hilary Clinton.

Rayne returns with several cups of punch held in his hands. The DJ taps his microphone, drawing the crowds attention as the dance floor clears.

DJ

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, put your hands together for the one, the only: Ms. Tara Hunter and the Huntresses.

Laszlo swipes a cup of punch from Rayne's hands as Britney Spears' *Toxic* blasts from the speakers.

LASZLO

God, I hope someone spiked this already.

Laszlo throws back the drink like a shot as Tara and the Huntresses enter a full-on choreographed dance.

The Huntresses highlight the best of 'white ladies losing themselves in the music' culture, arhythmic hip-swinging and macarena arms highlighting the only one who matters: Tara.

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME

Cassie enters through a back door, obviously embarrassed by her outdated prom dress. But then she sees her mother, busting a move at a high school dance, and her face goes a livid red.

Cassie walks towards the crowd, eyes trained on the ground to avoid dying from second-hand embarrassment. In her efforts to ignore what's happening, she doesn't notice as her heels tangle with something sticking out from a nearby table.

CASSIE

What the fuck?

Leaning down, Cassie pulls up the table skirt to find a harpoon hidden beneath the table. She looks up, her eyes bridging the distance between her mom and Laszlo.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Oh shit.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - STUDENT COUNCIL ROOM - NIGHT

It's chaos in the student council room, the members counting ballots with a fervor reserved to the election offices of crucial, narrow swing states.

Marney grips her podium, a blood vessel in her forehead threatening to pop as she watches her underlings count at a lighting-fast, but still much too slow pace.

MARNEY

If you keep it up at this pace, we won't have results until everyone is already sloshed and halfway on their way to getting pregnant!

The student council members count with more urgency as O'Connell stumbles into the room. Marney instantly points towards the door.

MARNEY (CONT'D)

Get out of here! You can't be here, it's unconstitutional.

O'CONNELL  
Seventeen...Eighteen...Twenty-  
Six...Twelve...

The student council members stop, panic-blinking away tears.

STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBER  
FUCK! I forgot what number I was  
on.

Marney goes wide-eyed, holds out her hands to stop O'Connell.

MARNEY  
Please, stop. We'll do whatever you  
want, just don't throw us off our  
rhythm.

O'Connell sits down at one of the tables.

O'CONNELL  
Relax...I just wanted to do my  
civic duty and you know, count the  
votes.

MARNEY  
You're on the ballot...it would be  
wrong...

But then she sees her peers struggling to make their way  
through all the ballots.

MARNEY (CONT'D)  
Just don't try anything, okay?

O'Connell holds up his hand as if he's swearing on a Bible.

O'CONNELL  
Cross my heart and hope to die.

But as soon as Marney turns her back, O'Connell is reaching  
down his pants, pulling out dozens of ballots. He slips them  
into the pile of the nearest counter while they're busy  
tallying votes.

O'Connell stands up, begins to walk towards the door.

MARNEY  
Hey, where are you going?

O'CONNELL  
I just remembered I would be rather  
be doing literally anything else.

O'Connell runs from the room, his work already done.



INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - NIGHT

The song approaches its end, and with one last moment to impress, Tara flip through the air, landing in a perfect split as her backup dancers cheer for her.

The high school students are more lukewarm to her performance. Someone clears their throat. Another complains that she's burning through precious slow-dance time.

Cassie appears on the edge of the dance floor. Her mother's attention is instantly drawn to Cassie in her own vintage prom dress. Tara rushes to embrace her.

TARA

Oh my god, you look so beautiful.

CASSIE

Care to explain to me why I found a literal spear beneath the refreshments table.

(beat)

And more importantly, why the fuck are you crashing MY prom?

TARA

It's everyone's prom.

CASSIE

Yeah, everyone as in the students of this school's prom, not yours.

TARA

Oh come on, don't be so selfish.

CASSIE

You're here to cause trouble, aren't you? You can't let me have this one night to be a normal kid.

TARA

I'm here to protect you from the bad things that lurk in this school.

Tara scowls as she watches a lesbian couple begin to dance nearby. But she shakes her head, setting her sights on the real enemy once again. Laszlo Mayberry, hiding on the edge of the dance floor.

CASSIE

What threats? It's a high school dance, Mom.

(MORE)

CASSIE (CONT'D)

The worst thing that could happen is I get a blister from these heels. Or worse, my mom shows up at my senior prom!

TARA

When are you going to grow up and realize places like this are the most dangerous?

Tara motions to the dancing lesbian couple, to a group of jocks dumping an obscene amount of rum into the punch bowl, to the grinding bodies of adolescent bodies around them.

TARA (CONT'D)

Everyday I fight for the very institutions you scoff at. If you had it your way, I bet you wouldn't even bat an eye if there were two Prom Queens or a bloody centaur cantered up there to accept the crown.

Cassie balls her fists.

CASSIE

That's because I don't care, Mom! You could throw that Prom Queen crown into the bay, and I wouldn't jump after it.

TARA

It's your birth right!

CASSIE

Just because you got knocked up at your prom, it doesn't mean I was born to be Prom Queen.

TARA

That's exactly what it means!

But Cassie is already running off.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - SNACK TABLE

Fatima, Rayne, and Laszlo stand awkwardly on the side of the dance floor. Rayne reaches into a large fishbowl filled with gold fish crackers, nervously shoving fistfuls into his mouth as his attention returns time and time again to Fatima.

FATIMA  
I thought this would be more  
exciting.

RAYNE  
Prom is just self-important  
homecoming.

FATIMA  
I hate to admit it, but I had hoped  
it would be more magical.

LASZLO  
The evening is young. Someone might  
still ask you to dance.

FATIMA  
Ha! Real funny!

Rayne dunks a cup into the punch bowl, throws back the spiked  
fruit punch like a shot. He bows before Fatima, offering his  
hand as sweat drips down his forehead.

RAYNE  
May I have this dance?

Fatima looks from Rayne to Laszlo, as if asking permission.

LASZLO  
I'll be okay on my own for a few  
minutes.

FATIMA  
But you'll look so sad by  
yourself...

The song changes, causing Fatima to squeal in excitement.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Never mind that, this is my song.

Fatima allows Rayne, her once enemy, lead her to the dance  
floor as Laszlo is left, looking awfully sad by himself.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Rayne awkwardly places his hands on Fatima's waist, stepping  
out of time to the song as they attempt to dance to a dance  
that is much too slow for his taste.

Fatima lets out a yowl as he stomps on her foot.

FATIMA  
Fucking ouch, Rayne.

Rayne lets go of her.

RAYNE  
I'm so sorry!

FATIMA  
Watch where you're putting your  
feet...

But then Fatima sees how pale he is, how he's taking it personally. She grabs Rayne around the waist, leads him.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Just like this. One. Two. Three.  
One. Two. Three.

Rayne falls into the rhythm.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
That's better.

RAYNE  
I have a good teacher.

FATIMA  
You know you don't have to be nice  
to me, just because you and Laszlo  
are friends now.

Rayne stops dancing, forcing Fatima to a halt.

RAYNE  
I'm not being nice to you just  
because Laszlo and I are friends.  
Sure, I admire how committed you  
are to him, and how you're always  
the first person to know what to do  
when we come to face a problem.

Fatima's eyes go wider, the faster Rayne talks.

FATIMA  
Rayne...

RAYNE  
And I know it's a strange  
happening, Fatima Hakeem, but I've  
come to respect you as a person and  
a badass.

Fatima blushes. The disco ball shining sparkling light in her face as Rayne's feelings come spilling out on the dance floor. But as the disco ball spins, there's another metallic glare hitting her eye: a bucket dangling from the rafters above the stage.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

So I guess, what I'm trying to say is that maybe we can consider our friendship outside of Laszlo?

Principal Price climbs the stage, an envelope with the Prom Court results in his hand.

FATIMA

Rayne...

RAYNE

So like maybe have a romantic evening in a haunted sanatorium or something? Or like go to a movie then Olive Garden?

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Ladies and gentlemen, now it's time for the main event: the crowning of our Prom Queen and King. Can I have our candidates come to the stage?

Rayne and Fatima watch as Laszlo is shepherded towards the stage with the other candidates.

FATIMA

Something bad is about to happen.

RAYNE

You're going to say no?

But Fatima's attention isn't on Rayne, it's on O'Connell's very noticeable absence on the stage.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Has anyone seen O'Connell Moore?  
Mr. Moore, are you there?

Crickets as Fatima grabs Rayne by the hand, yanking him towards the area behind the stage.

FATIMA

We can't let that bucket drop.

CUE INTERCUT (STAGE, DANCE FLOOR, and BACKSTAGE):

-Laszlo and Cassie stand together in the bright lights of the stage. Laszlo's fishy pallor visible beneath the shining lights. The bucket dangling above his head.

-O'Connell grasps a rope jerry-rigged to the bucket backstage. He takes a long pull of his flask, just barely holding on.

-Principal Price wets his lips, breaks open the envelopes to pull out the results.

-Tara holds up her phone, ready to see her daughter crowned.

-Rayne and Fatima turn the corner, see O'Connell holding the rope.

-Principal Price leans towards the microphone.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Please put your hands together for  
your Prom Queen, Cassie Hunter.

-Tara screams in excitement, applauds as she looks to the people around her to make sure they're clapping as loudly.

-Cassie grimaces as a sash is slung over her shoulders, an elaborate crown placed on her head.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

And your Prom King, Laszlo  
Mayberry.

-Laszlo's jaw drops. A horrendous scream sounds from the audience as Tara clutches her chest like she's been shot. Her and Laszlo lock eyes as she madly walks towards the stage.

TARA

Enough of this nonsense! I won't  
have it. This day was supposed to  
be special, Cassie and her true  
love, O'Connell, dancing beneath  
the lights! He should have been  
Prom King, not this, not this  
monstrous thing!

-Fatima and Rayne rush at O'Connell.

FATIMA

Don't drop that rope!

O'CONNELL

Drop the rope?

-O'Connell lets go of the rope. It whirs through a series of pulleys.

-Cassie's eyes go wide as she watches Laszlo suck in a panicked breath. His gills appearing as he drinks in air.

END INTERCUT:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - STAGE - SAME

SPLAT! A bucket of fish chum rains down on Laszlo, splashing him with guts and viscera as scales sprout from beneath his skin.

Laszlo's suit is shredded as he rapidly transforms into Prom Thing, no longer a boy but an embarrassed, frightened fish.

The crowd gasps as they witness his transformation. But Tara is unsurprised, unstrapping a silver dagger from her thigh.

Tara jumps onto the stage, the dagger raised. But Cassie throws herself between Laszlo and her mom, catching the older woman's hand in her wrist.

TARA

What are you doing?

CASSIE

Stopping you from making today any worse.

TARA

This was supposed to be magical, till that thing ruined it!

CASSIE

You ruined it, Mom.

Cassie headbutts Tara, the dagger flying out of her hand. Laszlo runs for the stairs as Tara throws Cassie over her shoulder.

TARA

I'll strangle that beast with my own hands if I have to.

Cassie pushes herself back onto her feet, but trips on the skirt of her dress as she tries to stand. She brandishes the dagger, slices through the elaborate, much too big skirt as Tara screams.

TARA (CONT'D)

That is a vintage gown.

CASSIE  
It's an ugly dress!

Cassie grabs hold of the shredded skirt, braids it between her fists to create a makeshift garrot as a Huntress tosses Tara an axe.

TARA  
Enough of this nonsense, Cassie.  
It's your destiny to be like me.

Tara swings the axe at her daughter, not aiming for the death blow, but definitely hoping to teach her a bloody lesson.

CASSIE  
I'd rather die than be like my  
mother.

Cassie wraps the skirt around the axe's handle, gains leverage, tosses the weapon over her shoulder where it sinks into the wall above Principal Price's head.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
I'm going to kick your fucking ass.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - BACK STAGE

Laszlo runs around the stage, right as O'Connell arms himself with a crossbow. But the drunken O'Connell has haphazard aim, the first bolt flying directly at Fatima.

Rayne tackles her to the ground, just barely pushing them both out of the arrow's course.

FATIMA  
Laszlo, run!

O'Connell struggles to reload the crossbow, and Rayne takes the opportunity to dive the larger boy, throwing his whole shoulder in O'Connell's belly as the pair come crashing to the floor.

Fatima and Laszlo run towards the emergency exit, but as soon as Laszlo touches the handle, the walls are engulfed in green flames, eldritch runes covering the door.

Fatima throws her body against the door, bouncing off it as a force field forms.

LASZLO/PROM THING  
It's a trap!



Meanwhile, O'Connell has rolled on top of Rayne, grabbing him by the shirt and slamming his fists into Rayne's face.

O'CONNELL

You really thought you could win a  
fight against me, a real man?

This transphobic comment catches Fatima's attention. She hugs Laszlo goodbye, then pushes him back towards the dance floor.

FATIMA

Find another exit. I've got a punk  
to deal with.

And as Laszlo runs away, Fatima runs right at O'Connell. She close-lines him across the throat, sending him gasping as she grabs hold of the crossbow, slamming the heavy wooden end again and again into O'Connell's face.

O'Connell cries out as his nose is reduced to jelly.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Say one more shitty thing about my  
man, O'Connell. I fucking dare you!

Rayne sits up, pinching his nose to stop the bleeding.

RAYNE

Your man?

FATIMA

Don't push it.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DANCE FLOOR - SAME

Tara throws a fist at Cassie, but she blocks it with precision and grace. She's no longer doubting herself as her mother bombards her with blows that would overwhelm the most seasoned opponent.

But the longer the pair fight, the more Cassie is distracted by the Huntresses in the flanks, arming themselves with stakes and swords, crossbows and axes.

This distraction is enough to give Tara the upper hand. She grabs her daughter by the hair, sends her crashing through the snack table.

Drenched in punch, Cassie watches as several Huntresses chase after Laszlo, weapons in their hands.

But Laszlo isn't completely incompetent. After all, he's a fucking fish monster. He slashes at the women, sends the weaker goons running back as he shows his razor sharp teeth.

Students scream, the music blares. It's chaos as Tara, bathed in the cool, supernatural light, arms herself with a stake. She's going to finish the job.

CASSIE

Laszlo! Run!

But there's nowhere to run. The Huntresses have armed themselves with spears, are backing up the monstrous teenager towards the stage.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - SAME

Fatima, armed with her phone, and Rayne, armed with the crossbow, put themselves between Laszlo and his assailants.

Cassie does a front handspring, landing between her mother and her friend. Blood drips down her face, but she isn't afraid.

TARA

Are you all ready to die for that beast?

FATIMA

This is Strange Happenings with Fatima Hakeem, and you're watching live as an old lady is about to slaughter a fish monster, a Muslim girl, a trans man, and her own daughter in the middle of prom.

Laszlo looks to his friends, retreating closer to him as the half-circle of spear-welding PTA moms gets closer and closer.

LASZLO

You guys shouldn't have to die for me.

RAYNE

We shouldn't have to, but we're going to.

Tara holds up her hand, halting her goons as she tries to plead with Cassie.

TARA

So that's it? You're just going to choose this stranger over your own mother.

CASSIE

Laszlo's my friend, and you're a bitch!

Tara puts down her hand.

TARA

Kill them!

But then something remarkable happens. The frightened prom goers rush past the Huntresses, putting their own bodies between Laszlo and his incoming massacre.

And the Huntresses, watching their own children join the ranks of the to-be slaughtered, begin to back down.

Principal Price steps between Tara and the children.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

It's over, Tara.

Tara laughs, drops her stake in faux defeat. She reaches into her dress, pulling out her spellbook.

TARA

You all don't know how hard it is to me! Every day, someone is on my back telling me that I'm an awful person, that I am a bully, that I have no right to remind you faggots the right way of living life!

Tara begins to chant something from the spellbook. Runes and sacred geometries cover the gymnasium floor. The Prom transformed into the perfect conduit for her evil doing.

TARA (CONT'D)

But when I was crusading against the monsters that stalked this town, all I ever heard was praise. Thank you, Tara, for saving us. Thank you, Tara, for keeping this town holy. But when I crusade against the gays I'm a bigot?

Glowing light explodes from Tara's body, hurricane gusts smashing against the students.

TARA (CONT'D)

So today is the last day, I'll be called names. I don't care if you're a faggot, or a dyke, or a goddamn tranny, but the world will see you as the monsters you are! And when they world sees you as monsters, they won't bat an eye when I stab you death!

Tara throws out her hands. Members of the crowd are enveloped in green light - Fatima, Rayne, and Principal Price among their ranks. They float into the air, screaming as Tara's spell consumes them.

Laszlo jumps onto the stage. He takes a deep breath in, his fishy appearance lessening so he's somewhere in between Prom Thing and the boy he was.

LASZLO

I used to be so scared of people like you, Tara. But the worse you treat me, the more I realize that you only made it all the more clearer who I am. You live in a world ruled by Prom Queens and Prom Kings, so when you meet someone like me, neither king nor queen, you get scared.

Laszlo slams a finger into his chest.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

But when I look in the mirror, and see the fins sprouting from my head, all I see is me. A Prom Thing, but that doesn't mean that I have any less right to exist alongside your cruel binary.

Laszlo watches as his classmates begin to transform under the effects of the spell.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

I don't know why you're cruel. Maybe you're born that way, maybe you choose to be that way. But I hope that one day, you can look in the mirror and see that deep down inside of yourself, I'm not the monster. You are.

And with that, Laszlo slashes his claws slash through a rope. The disco ball falls from the ceiling.

Tara looks up in shock, her features bulbous in its reflection. And Tara closes her eyes, bracing for impact.

YOUNG TARA (O.S.)  
(pre-lap)  
I don't know what I'm going to do.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GIRLS' RESTROOM - FLASHBACK

Young Tara sits on the countertop in tears. She holds a pregnancy test. And sitting beside her is Laszlo's mother LAURA (18F), just a teenager trying to comfort her friend.

LAURA  
You're going to figure it out,  
Tara.

YOUNG TARA  
How do you know that?

Laura takes Tara's face in her hands, draws their foreheads together.

LAURA  
Tara Hunter, you are the bravest  
person I've ever met. You've  
defeated foes from both heaven &  
hell, and more importantly, you've  
survived high school. No one is  
more clever, or resourceful, or  
kind as you are.

Young Tara snuffles.

YOUNG TARA  
You don't mean truly mean that, do  
you, Laura?

LAURA  
Tara, you aren't going to be like  
your mother. If you choose to have  
this kid, you're going to be the  
best mom in the whole damn world.  
Fuck, if anyone's going to change  
the world, it's going to be you--

Young Tara kisses Laura. Laura reels back, less out of disgust and more surprise.

YOUNG TARA  
Oh my god, I'm so sorry. I don't  
know why I did that.

LAURA

It's okay...but, Tara, I'm not gay.

Tara's entire body seizes with that word. A traumatized child remembering the slap of a backhand, slurs hurled at her.

And she's suddenly red in the face, sobbing harder than before as she jumps down from the counter and screams her head off at the girl.

YOUNG TARA

How the fuck dare you? You fucking dyke kissing me like that? Taking advantage of me in my most vulnerable moment? I'm not a fucking dyke.

Laura falls from the counter. She scrambles to her feet as Tara slams her palms against Laura's chest. She smacks hard against the bathroom mirror as Tara's supernatural strength is released at full force.

But Laura lands on her feet, runs out of the restroom without saying anything.

YOUNG TARA (CONT'D)

I'm not a fucking dyke.

Tara falls to the floor, curls her head into her knees.

YOUNG TARA (CONT'D)

I'm not a fucking dyke.

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Tara watches the disco ball fall towards her.

TARA

I'm a monster.

Glass explodes across the gym floor as the decoration crashes against Tara's skull. The cast magic surrounding the queer prom attendees snaps back at Tara like a rubber band stretched to space then released.

She takes the entire blast of the spell, falling to the ground in a plume of green smoke.

Cassie's composure breaks. She runs to her mother.

CASSIE

Mom!

Harmony and the other huntresses spring into action to save Tara. But Tara stands on her own.

The crowd gasps.

As the smoke clears, we see a Tara transformed. Nose, smooshed and deformed. Ragged horns protruding from her skull. Not a single tooth contained within her mouth.

Tara is taken aback by the eyes. They're not staring at her in admiration, but rather, shock. This causes her to panic.

TARA

What are you all staring at?

Harmony rushes over, a compact mirror in hand.

Tara opens it, screams as she sees her own reflection.

TARA (CONT'D)

Oh my god, I'm a troll!

HARMONY

It isn't really all that bad. You look, you look beautiful.

Tara sobs, her looks stolen in retribution for her overall awfulness.

O'Connell stumbles towards the crowd, blood still spewing down his broken face. He's hardly conscious at this point.

O'CONNELL

You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, Tara...

TARA

Cassie's over there, O'Connell.

O'CONNELL

I didn't say Cassie. I said you.

O'Connell's overt flirtation cause Tara to cry harder.

TARA

Oh my god, ew!

HARMONY

It's going to be okay?

TARA

Is it?

CUT TO:

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DROP-OFF LANE - NIGHT

Ambulances enter the drop-off lane. Police holding back parents as paramedics arrive. It's chaos, but the students are, for the most part, fine.

Fatima walks towards the parking lot, undamaged and triumphant. Rayne catches up, gently grabs her by the wrist.

RAYNE

You're not going to say goodbye?

Fatima stops walking, tries her hardest to hide a smile.

FATIMA

High school prom crashed by a 6 ft five fish monster and TERF-y the Vampire Slayer is a hell of a headline. I've got things to do.

RAYNE

Fatima, I have to say this, or I might never say it I like you, and I know deep down, hopefully not that deep down, you like me too.

Fatima can't help but smile.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

I'd like to be your cameraman.

FATIMA

You don't know what you just got yourself into, Rayne.

It's a promise that Fatima seals with a kiss.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CURBSIDE

Laszlo sits on the curb, wearing someone else's gym clothes.

Cassie sits down beside him, a half dozen butterfly stitches crisscrossing her temple. She holds the discarded Prom King crown.



CASSIE  
I didn't know if you wanted this,  
so...I brought it.

Laszlo takes the crown, inspecting it.

LASZLO  
I hate it.

Laszlo tosses it into the gutter, the rain carrying it down  
the storm drain.

CASSIE  
I'm glad that I'm sitting here with  
you, instead of O'Connell. And I  
know you don't want to be my Prom  
King, but the dance, it's kind of  
tradition. Honestly, I'm a little  
worried if we break that one, this  
town might be cursed to five years  
of bad luck.

Laszlo stands up, letting Cassie place a hand on his back,  
his hand on hers. Nobody leading their dance.

LASZLO  
Well, if it'll save this town a bad  
bout of luck, why not?

So they dance in the rain, a Prom Queen with her Prom Thing.  
The monster and the one meant to slay it, swaying together in  
the breeze of an approaching hurricane.

Their music? The persistent tremor of the earth beneath their  
feet, the lapping of waves upon crumbling shores. Hearts  
ablaze with the air of what could be.

FADE OUT.

APPENDIX B: PROM THING THESIS DRAFT

Written by

Justin Moritz

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - NIGHT

SUPER: PROM NIGHT, 2004

A soft glow emanates from coastal Shady Cove High. A mud-stained red carpet leads to a saggy balloon arch. Early 2000s pop music spills from the gymnasium as teens dance.

An unearthly green glow rises from the nearby oceanside. Sinister chanting echoing off crashing waves.

A group of teenage girls run down to the beach. TARA HUNTER (18F), the deified example of the All-American cheerleader, leads them with her flip phone held to her ear.

TARA

(on phone)

Stall them! Spike the punch, fake a seizure. Set the gymnasium on fire and chain up the doors. Just make sure that they don't crown anyone if I'm not back!

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Robed cultists circle a growing bonfire, casting green supernatural light over the cultists' strange features. They pull back their hoods to reveal their fishlike features. Eldritch runes glowing across their scales.

The leader, CULTIST FISHFACE, leads them in a chant that he reads from an ancient tome. He looks up to see Tara tighten her blonde ponytail and snap her flip phone shut.

CULTIST FISHFACE

Lord of the tide, we pray for your blessing. For smooth skin that obscures scales, for voices that sing instead of croak.

TARA

Hey fishface, you forgot to invite us to your party.

From her gaudy, sequined purple Prom dress, Tara pulls and arms herself with a wooden stake in hand.

She's backed by her loyal HUNTRESSES, their weapons held with less poise as they worry about the sand on their prom dresses and watch for Tara's signal.

CULTIST FISHFACE

The war you've waged against  
monsterkind ends tonight.

YOUNG TARA

Two things: one, those robes are  
soooo last season. And two...gut  
them like the fish they are,  
ladies.

The Huntresses charge. The girls try their best against the hulking, incredibly strong fish people.

Tara dodges sharp claws, stabbing cultists with her stake with some sort of enhanced strength and speed. She knows what she's doing as she makes her way towards Cultist Fishface who continues to chant.

The tide rises. The water extinguishes the bonfire, its unearthly glow spreading into the cove. As it laps at high-heeled and webbed feet, the fish people slowly transform, their features nearly passable for human.

Tara stans Cultist Fishface in the throat, tearing the spell book out of his grasp and tucking it beneath her arm.

HEAD CULTIST FISHFACE

All we wanted was to live without  
the fear of having a stake sunk in  
our hearts.

Tara watches as a small fish monster turns into a pimple-faced teenage boy. He, alongside other Prom attire wearing fish-human hybrids, run up the dunes as they become more and more human with each step.

HEAD CULTIST FISHFACE (CONT'D)

Won't you show them mercy? They're  
your peers, but as they reach  
adulthood, they can no longer pass  
as human. This lets them live a  
normal life.

Tara drops Fishface. She jumps to grab the boy by the shirt, brandishing a nearby rock.

FISHBOY

Tara, we have math together--

Tara smashes the stone into the boy's head. Her Huntresses watch in horror as brain matter and blood sprays Tara.

YOUNG TARA  
Push their bodies into the ocean,  
girls. I have a crown to take home.

The girls groan, but complete the task. Loyal to a fault  
eventhough they're missing their own prom.

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The Shady Cove High School gymnasium has been transformed.  
Tinfoil-coated cardboard stars twinkle overhead.

A spotlight shines down as RODNEY MAYBERRY (18M) and a girl  
who isn't Tara are crowned by the school principal.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Ladies and gentleman, can I get a  
round of applause for your Shady  
Cove Prom King and Queen, Rodney  
Mayberry and--

A blood-curdling scream cuts off the principle.

The crowd parts as Tara falls to her knees, mascara dripping  
down her eyes as she sobs.

A female teacher tries to comfort Tara, but Tara resists.

TEACHER  
You were late. We told you to be  
here at 8.

Tara shoves the teacher aside, diving toward the crowned  
queen and violently shaking her.

TARA  
It should've been me.

The principal and Rodney try to pull the girls apart.

TARA (CONT'D)  
IT SHOULD'VE BEEN ME! IT SHOULD'VE  
BEEN ME!

Tara claws at the queen, ripping her sash, tearing the tulle  
of her dress. Tara rips off a silver crucifix necklace,  
sending it slicing across the girl's cheek.

The student body surges forward to protect their queen,  
pulling Tara back as she screams into the night.

Her eyes fall on the queen's face: beneath the girl's skin, Tara can see hidden scales. Her crown lost to a monster.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

SUPER: 20 YEARS LATER

LASZLO MAYBERRY (18M), a preppy nerd, hurries down the hallway with his books held to his chest. He's surrounded by high schoolers that look like they're played by thirty year olds: all beautiful smiles, perfect hair, designer clothes, and Kardashian lips.

LASZLO (V.O.)

Nowadays, if even want a chance at a bargain brand Ivy, you basically have to dedicate your whole life to padding your college resume.

CUE MONTAGE:

-Laszlo controls a high-tech robot with a remote control. The robot wears a little chef's hat and pulls out a tray of perfectly cooked crème brûlée.

-Laszlo delivers an expertly prepared debate, equipped with a well-designed powerpoint. His opponent, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, bursts into tears as he finishes.

-Laszlo sits in a bottom of a pool, snorkeled up. He weaves a basket out of reeds with his feet while electric eels swim dangerously close.

LASZLO (V.O.)

I'm barely eighteen, and I feel guilty for the ten unscheduled minutes of time I have each day.

-Laszlo sits at a table. He opens his backpack and pulls out a book. He sighs a breath of relief as he opens the comic. But then SPLATTT! A jock throws a milkshake at Laszlo's head.

LASZLO (V.O.)

But I guess those ten minutes will be spent getting an Oreo milkshake out of my hair...

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - DAY

The Shady Cove High student body squeezes onto the gymnasium bleachers.

A papier mâché whale, among other Prom decorations, lay scattered about the gym. A banner hangs askew reading UNDER THE SEA.

FATIMA HAKEEM (18F, Muslim American) touts a selfie stick, filming as the students trickle in.

FATIMA

This is Fatima Hakeem with Strange  
Happenings with Fatima Hakeem,  
coming straight from Shady Cove  
High where we are just minutes away  
from seeing who will battle it out  
for Prom domination.

Fatima directs her phone towards a procession of popular students. Cheerleaders arm-in-arm with their jock beaus.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

It's disgusting, isn't it?

A hand reaches out to tap Fatima's shoulder. She reels around, nearly taking Laszlo's head off with her selfie stick. His hair is still dripping wet, post-milkshake.

LASZLO

I see you're scraping the bottom of  
the barrel when it comes to  
content, Fatima.

FATIMA

Ever since that group of nursing  
home residents mistook a helium  
balloon for a UFO because they were  
drunk on toilet wine. Things have  
been slow, Laszlo.

PRINCIPAL SEXTON PRICE (60s M), dressed more like a distinguished professor than a glorified administrative babysitter, taps a microphone.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Students, please take your seats.

Fatima and Laszlo take their seats.

FATIMA

Shouldn't you be running this?

LASZLO

O'Connell didn't want me to ruin  
his vibe.

FATIMA

But Laszlo, you suffered for weeks  
to make sure everyone enjoys Prom.

LASZLO

Prom isn't about kids like me and  
you, Fatima.

The lights dim. A snare trills.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Ladies and gentleman, put your  
hands together for your student  
body president, O'Connell Moore.

O'CONNELL Moore (18M), a freakishly muscular jock, bursts  
through a sign. He doublefists tee-shirt cannons.

But O'Connell doesn't shoot the teeshirts at the people  
jumping up for them. He sends them exploding at unsuspecting  
victims, knocking the off the bleachers with a sneer.

O'Connell tosses the teeshirt guns aside before swiping the  
mic from Principal Price's hand.

O'CONNELL

Hello Shady Cove, as you all know,  
it's like the greatest honor to be  
your student body president.

LASZLO

(under his breath)  
So why hasn't he shown up at a  
council meeting since November?

O'CONNELL

Prom is as American as apple pie.  
It's a magical night that I know  
all of you are looking forward to  
just as much as I am. And can you  
believe in just a week's time,  
you'll be watching me and my girl  
Cassie dance with those crowns on  
our heads...

O'Connell motions to CASSIE HUNTER (18F), a blonde  
cheerleader and the spitting image of her mother. She gives  
an awkward, almost uncomfortable wave as the spotlight shines  
on her.

Laszlo stares at Cassie, his cheeks going red as she tucks a  
piece of hair from her face. Eyes falling to the floor as she  
waits for the spotlight to stop shining down on her.



Principal Price yanks the mic back.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You're getting ahead of yourself,  
Mr. Moore.

O'CONNELL  
Don't get your panties in a twist.

O'Connell plucks Price's glasses from his coat pocket, mockingly placing them on the tip of his nose as he unfolds a piece of paper. Practically everyone except Fatima and Laszlo are laughing at the tomfoolery.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
The people have voted, and you will soon know who has an opportunity to join our Prom Court as Shady Cove's centennial anniversary is celebrated. Your Prom King nominees are...Owen St. Patrick, Terry Teeshirt, and of course, myself.

The various candidates stand, illuminated by spotlights.

FATIMA  
None of those guys have a chance at beating, O'Connell...

LASZLO  
I heard O'Connell stuffs him gym shorts...with fraudulent ballots.

Fatima and Laszlo laugh.

O'CONNELL  
And your Prom Queen nominees are Ashley Vaugh, Cassie Hunter, and in a twist...can I get a drum roll?

The entire student body drums on their legs in anticipation.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Your final prom queen candidate is the fruitiest vice president around. Can you put your hands together for Laszlo Mayberry?

A pink spotlight shines down on Laszlo. A wall of laughter smacks him like a wave. He stands up, nervously clawing at his chin as he makes his way down the bleachers. The skin going red and ragged as something iridescent shines through.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BOY'S RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Laszlo ducks into the bathroom. He systematically inspects all the stalls, double-checking that no one is there. Finally, when the coast is clear, Laszlo grabs the sink with both hands, uttering a guttural sob.

He scratches at his neck, blood caking beneath his nails.

But as the skin peels away, Laszlo seems to notice something else: a shimmering scale beneath his skin.

He winces as he tries to dislodge it, but stops when he hears footsteps. He rushes for a paper towel to hold to the wound as RAYNE VANDERCAMP (18 trans male) enters the bathroom.

RAYNE

Laszlo, I was looking for you.

Laszlo tries to exit the bathroom, but Rayne blocks him.

LASZLO

Excuse me, Rayne--

RAYNE

--You shouldn't listen to that prick, Laszlo.

Laszlo shrugs.

LASZLO

O'Connell is going to keep O'Connelling.

RAYNE

Stick up to him.

LASZLO

Yeah, and find myself dumped into the cafeteria's vat of chocolate pudding in revenge.

RAYNE

You know if you need to talk, we have a whole group dedicated to it.

Rayne passes Laszlo a flyer that says: Shady Cove High Gay-Straight Alliance.

LASZLO

I'm not gay, Rayne.

RAYNE

Think of it as a support group for those who have been personally victimized by O'Connell Moore. Anyone's welcome, gay or straight.

Laszlo doesn't take the flyer.

LASZLO

This isn't my first time being antagonized by O'Connell.

Laszlo rushes from the bathroom.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

A flustered SECRETARY(40s F) wrangles half a dozen phones.

SECRETARY

I understand your concerns. But I assure you, we aren't considering a male student for Prom Queen.

The secretary holds the receiver away from her ear as the parent on the other side screams.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Yes, I can forward you to Principal Price. Can I put you on hold?

The secretary presses the hold button. She screams. Principal Price runs out of his office, sweating buckets.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

We should burn down the school, change our names, and start new lives in the remote tundra.

SECRETARY

Things could be worse.

An alarm sounds above the secretary's desk.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ENTRANCE - SAME

Students shout at cafeteria tables, throwing food at each other and gossiping, but they all go quiet when they hear the smack, smack, smack of flipflops.

TARA HUNTER (40s F) heads a V formation of blonde, gum-smacking, lip-gloss-wearing PTA moms in pink, bedazzled sweatsuits. She removes her sunglasses.

TARA

Time to crack some heads, ladies.

Tara's second-in-command HARMONY (40s F) follows close behind, sporting chunky highlights and a Kate Gosselin pixie.

HARMONY

What's the plan? Hunger strike?  
Change the building ordinance so we  
can cement the administration into  
the walls?

TARA

We're going to file a complaint.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - NIGHT

Principal Price breathes deeply into a paper bag as his secretary dials 911.

SECRETARY

I'd like to call in a bomb threat.

Principal Price ends the call, balling his hands, and elbowing out a glass panel to pull out an emergency, steaming hot Pumpkin Spice Latte as Tara enters.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Coach Hunter, this is for you.

Tara takes one sip, spitting it out at the secretary's face.

TARA

Is this oat milk? I'm not a  
communist.

Tara tosses the latte. Harmony wipes off foam from her mouth with a napkin.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

You're a bit early for cheer  
practice.

TARA

You know that's not why I'm here.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

It was a silly little prank--

TARA

-- a silly little prank? This a  
mockery of American values.

(MORE)

TARA (CONT'D)

A boy nominated for Prom Queen is like Jesus turning water into a mimosa! It's unnatural.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

To correct the issue, Mr. Mayberry will be a Prom King candidate.

TARA

As president of the Parent-Teacher Association, I order you to disqualify Laszlo Mayberry on the grounds that he cannot, by any means, be allowed to be Prom King.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

I can't disqualify any candidate that earned sufficient nominations. And Laszlo, to everyone's surprise, actually did qualify.

Price hands Tara a copy of the vote tally.

TARA

You're going to regret this.

Tara turns, tossing the crumpled paper over her shoulder.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

RODNEY MAYBERRY (40s M) stands in the kitchen, wearing an apron that says #1 DAD. He cuts the crusts off a sandwich, shaping the PB&J into a heart.

He hears the front door thrown open with a THUD!

RODNEY

How was school, buddy?

Rodney grabs the plate and walks into

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - DAY

Laszlo throws his backpack to the floor, the whole floor shaking due to the absurd weight of Laszlo's book-filled bag.

RODNEY

What's the matter?

Laszlo runs up the stairs. The wall above the stairs is a shrine to Laszlo's deceased mother. A hundred photographs surrounding a mural that says: GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN.

LASZLO  
I don't want to talk about it.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Laszlo rushes down the upstairs hallway, as Rodney chases after him.

RODNEY  
I made you an afternoon snack!

LASZLO  
I'm not hungry.

RODNEY  
Are you sure? You're acting a little hangry.

Laszlo runs into his room, slamming the door.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - DAY

Laszlo slides down the door, sitting on the floor with his head in his hands. There a gentle knock on the door.

INTERCUT BETWEEN LASZLO AND RODNEY:

RODNEY (O.S.)  
What's the matter, bud?

Laszlo sighs.

LASZLO  
I don't want to talk about it.

RODNEY (O.S.)  
Okay, well if you need me...

Rodney sits down on the other side of the door. A long moment passes as he waits for Laszlo to respond.

LASZLO  
I got nominated for Prom Court.

RODNEY (O.S.)  
That's fantastic news.

LASZLO  
I got nominated for Prom Queen.

RODNEY (O.S.)  
Oh...that's unfortunate. Maybe this  
will make you feel better.

An envelope slides beneath the door. It's thick.

Laszlo flips it over to see the Stanford University crest.

LASZLO  
It's a package, not a letter!

Laszlo tears open the package, red confetti exploding into his lap. He yanks out the materials, his eyes drawn to a single word: CONGRATULATIONS!

Laszlo jumps up, throws open the door to hug his father.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
I got in...

RODNEY  
You got in!

Laszlo and Rodney jump up and down.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Your mother, she would be so proud--

LASZLO  
--Dad!

RODNEY  
This bullshit doesn't matter!  
You're moving on to greater things!  
Just keep your head high.

Laszlo nods. He wipes happy tears from his eyes.

LASZLO  
I'm going to fucking Stanford.

EXT. OCEAN - DREAM SEQUENCE - NIGHT

Laszlo swims around a translucent, still stretch of water in a pair of white trunks.

He kicks his feet, turning into a backstroke.

But the sky overhead is a mirrored reflection of the ocean below. From this sky pond, LASZLO'S MOTHER (late 30s F) breaks the surface, kicking her long legs out from a matching white one piece swimsuit.

LASZLO

Mom?

His voice echoes, incapable of catching her attention.

The pair swim in tandem, backstroking across the horizon.

The two parallel oceans seem to grow closer, converging so that mother and son are just feet apart. Laszlo reaches up a hand towards his mother, and while we see the graceful, extension of her arm...

...a scaly claw reaches back to touch Laszlo's hand.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LASZLO'S ROOM - MORNING

Laszlo bolts up in bed. He takes a deep breath upon realizing it was just a dream, reaches over to look at his phone. Late, of course!

LASZLO

Shit!

Laszlo jumps out of bed, hopping into a pair of jeans. He runs towards his closet to grab a shirt when he spots himself in the mirror.

A flaky, scaly rash has covered Laszlo's chest and neck.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

What the hell?

Laszlo goes to touch the skin, but winces as he does so.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Get it together, Laszlo. You don't have time for this!

Laszlo digs through his closet, pulls on a beige turtleneck before running out of the door.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Laszlo and Fatima walk down the hallway. Campaign banners read O'CONNELL AND CASSIE FOR PROM COURT.

LASZLO

I had the strangest dream...

But to Laszlo's disgust, someone has postered posters that read: LASZLO MAYBERRY FOR PROM COURT, CAUSE THIRD PARTIES DO MATTER. Laszlo rips it down in disgust as Rayne runs up.



RAYNE

So I was hoping we could talk about your campaign? I've scheduled meet-and-greets with niche cliques. At noon, you'll meet with the horse girls, then at twelve fifteen, the wrestlers suffering from cauliflower ear, then at twelve thirty, the poetry goths.

LASZLO

I'm not running for Prom Court.

RAYNE

But just think how important it would be if you win? The other candidates come from the same jock asshole demographic, if we can just rile up some of the other kids, we could prove to them that they don't run this school.

FATIMA

It does kind of make sense. And just imagine O'Connell's face when you sneak in and steal his crown...

LASZLO

I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I am simply on to better and greater things than Shady Cove High.

O'Connell and his pack saunter by.

O'CONNELL

I can see your religion, Mayberry.

One of the jocks throws a milkshake, but Laszlo dodges. Strawberry milkshake splattering across the wall.

O'Connell shoves his head in Cassie's personal airspace to try and land a kiss as she grabs her books.

LASZLO

My religion?

FATIMA

He's saying you look like a foreskin in that turtleneck.

Laszlo looks down at himself, realizing his mistake.

LASZLO

When I'm Time's Person of the Year,  
they can all say they remember the  
day I dressed like a foreskin.

Laszlo slams his locker, walks off.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Principal Price has the phone held to his ear.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

I can assure you, Ms. Kayne, that  
we aren't teaching your students to  
quote-on-quote "make the frogs gay"  
in biology lab.

A gentle knock at the door, as Laszlo peers through the  
window to look at Price.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

Ms. Kayne, my apologies but I have  
a bit of an emergency to attend to.  
I would recommend you check out FAQ  
section on the school website.  
Check under g, or maybe f, you know  
for our gay frog policy.

Laszlo enters as Price waves him in.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

Mr. Mayberry, to what do I owe the  
pleasure?

LASZLO

The formalities aren't necessary.  
This whole Prom King thing needs a  
big red X on it.

Principal Price removes his glasses, pinching the bridge of  
his nose. He takes a deep breath.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Before you drop out, I want you to  
think about the opportunity this  
presents, Laszlo. You excel at your  
academics, juggle enough  
extracurriculars to throw out your  
back, and continue to put this  
school on the map. Maybe, it's your  
time for a little bit of peer-to-  
peer recognition.

LASZLO  
I was nominated as a joke.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You're good at math, how about a  
math problem?

Principal Price reaches under his desk, dropping the ballot  
box in front of Laszlo. Laszlo opens it, palming several  
paper-clipped ballots. His eyes go wide in shock.

LASZLO  
I tied for the third nomination.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Likely left out of the original  
Prom King ballot due to a slight  
miscount. Your peers want to  
recognize you, Laszlo.

LASZLO  
I don't want to be Prom King.

Principal Price tugs on his collar.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Times are tough, Laszlo. Sometimes  
things are set in stone...

LASZLO  
You already printed the ballot!

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
My secretary is going on maternity  
leave, what was I supposed to do?  
Learn to use the copy machine?

Laszlo scowls, stomps out of the office.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BIOLOGY LAB - DAY

A dead fish lays before Laszlo on a surgical tray. A scalpel  
and forceps beside it. MR. RODRIGUEZ (30s) eyes his students.  
Everybody except Laszlo are in pairs.

MR. RODRIGUEZ  
Now, with your scalpel, you are  
going to make a smooth, steady  
incision down the abdomen.

The fish sweats, its belly swollen.

Laszlo places the tip of the blade against the fish's scaly belly, but he can't apply the necessary pressure to cut.

The door swings open. Cassie rushes in to take her seat beside Laszlo. He sighs, relieved to not be alone.

MR. RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

A tad late aren't we, Miss Hunter?  
I'll remind you how important this  
is when it comes to your grade.

CASSIE

I thought we were doing a frog  
dissection. These are fish.

MR. RODRIGUEZ

Under new Florida child labor laws,  
we can sell the fish you 'dissect'  
to market for a profit. No one is  
buying frog legs.

Cassie settles into her seat beside Laszlo.

CASSIE

I like your turtleneck.

LASLO

You're kidding me, Cassie?

CASSIE

It's sophisticated. Very European.

The pair laughs.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

To be honest, I wanted to distract  
you a bit. You look like you're  
going to puke on that thing.

Laszlo shakes with the scalpel in hand. Cassie takes it,  
smoothly cutting down the length of the fish.

With surgical precision, she peels back the tissue, twirling  
anatomy pins between her fingers to pin the fish open.

LASZLO

How did you make it look so easy?

A nearby jock hacks away at his frog.

CASSIE

My Mom and I are into hunting.

LASZLO

I didn't take you two for hunters.

CASSIE

Let's just say my mom got BOGO pink  
camo.

Mr. Rodriguez hovers over the pairs' shoulder, witnessing as Cassie manages to pull back the liver and intestines.

Laszlo gags as soon as he looks down at the fish, its abdominal cavity filled with hundreds of black eggs. But Cassie pushes them aside, revealing two fatty white organs.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

This doesn't make any sense.

MR. RODRIGUEZ

Care to elaborate?

CASSIE

It doesn't look like the picture in  
the textbook.

Laszlo manages to inspect the fish.

LASZLO

It has both ovaries and testes.

MR. RODRIGUEZ

An animal in nature will do what it  
needs to survive. Nature isn't  
simply a battle of physical  
strength, but also adaptation. In  
this case, genetic mutation.

CASSIE

The frog isn't male or female?

MR. RODRIGUEZ

Stressors can cause transformations  
of the body. Fertilizer runoff, oil  
spills, climate change. It muddles  
binary understanding of biology.

Rodriguez's voice blurs, as Laszlo pays more attention to the fish. The sheen of its waxy skin, its unseeing, dead eyes, the rainbow of color found within its viscera.

Laszlo suddenly vomits all over his sweater.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BOY'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Laszlo stumbles into the boy's locker room. He's breathing heavy and fast as he struggles to pull up his sweater.

Laszlo rushes to the mirror. The turtleneck around his throat, tangled on the irritated, rough skin beneath.

LASZLO

This is the last time I wear a  
turtleneck.

Laszlo tears off the sweater. The rash has spread down chest, cracked and dry around his swollen pecs. Laszlo winces as he presses into the tender tissue.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Am I growing tits?

Laszlo looks down, a trail of vomit running down his pantleg. Laszlo removes the rest of his clothes, absently tossing them on the floor as he clutches at his head and stumbles into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - SHOWERS - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo turns on as many showerheads as he can, stumbling between them as he gasps and struggles to breathe.

Steam fills the room as Laszlo falls to the floor, sucking in the hot air like a fish gasping for water.

He digs his fingernails into his cracked skin. Skin that seems much too small for his rapidly growing body. The skin splits beneath his fingernails, revealing shimmering mucus-slicked scales.

Laszlo rolls onto all fours, as a phantom chorus jeers.

CHORUS

(repeated)

Laszlo Mayberry's a queen!

Laszlo cries out as sharp spines pierce the thinning skin of his back. SPPPLT! A jagged fin tears to the surface, causing what was once Laszlo to peel off like a costume, revealing a frightening, massive fish monster.

A croak escapes the creature's throat as it stands, crashing and stumbling against the tiled walls as the skin that was Laszlo melts down the drain.

The creature scrambles into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The cacophony of the jeering chorus grows undeniable. The creature grabs hold of the sink, the ceramic cracking and crumbling to the floor as it looks in the mirror.

Yellow, double-lidded reptile eyes stare back.

CHORUS

Laszlo Mayberry's a fish!

And with that, the creature bolts through the door. It bounces against the lockers, crushing them with awkward ease.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Cassie runs down the empty hallway, still wearing her lab coat and glasses. She stops in front of the boy's restroom, opening the door to yell in.

CASSIE

Laszlo, are you in there?

A random boy yells back.

RANDOM BOY (O.S.)

Can't a guy take a piss in peace?

CASSIE

Uh, I'm sorry.

Cassie shuts the door, turns down

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ATHLETICS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The athletics hallway is empty of students. It's in slight disarray, mildew blossoming across the popcorned ceiling tiles. The lights flicker along the length of the hallway, giving Cassie pause; however, she proceeds onwards.

She approaches the boys' locker room, goes to open the door when WHAM! The door is thrown outwards by a massive force as the fish monster crashes into the hallway.

Cassie is thrown off her feet, sent crashing against the brick wall behind her. Her eyes go wide as she sees the fish monster struggle to walk on its newly webbed feet and disproportionately large limbs.

But Cassie doesn't scream. Instead, she jumps onto her feet, pulling off her lab coat with ease. She winds up the fabric between two hands in a makeshift garrot.

CASSIE  
Hey fishface, no running on wet  
concrete.

The fish monster turns, but before it can run, Cassie jumps on its back, winding her coat in the creature's panicked, snapping jaws.

Cassie and the creature struggle against one another. But despite her surprising strength, Cassie is bucked from the creature's back. She crashes into the ceiling, then hits the floor hard.

Cassie watches the beast run out of a nearby emergency exit.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - FRONT LAWN - DAY

Tara Hunter and her gang of PTA moms have formed a makeshift picket line. Tara holds a sign that reads: BAN BOOKS. PERIOD.

Across the line, Rayne and the Gay Straight Alliance counter-protest. Rayne holds a sign that reads: BIGOTS, GET A HOBBY.

TARA  
Time for a cheer, ladies.

Tara throws her sign aside, pulling out a pair of pompoms.

TARA (CONT'D)  
I see London. I see France. Yes, we  
care what's in your underpants!

The other PTA moms mimic, their aging bodies struggling as Tara adds needlessly intricate flips to show off.

TARA (CONT'D)  
We hate pronouns! Yeah, we hate  
pronouns.

The GSA boos back at the PTA moms.

RAYNE  
We is a pronoun.

Tara sticks her fingers in her ears.

TARA  
Lalala, I can't hear you.

Cassie rushes up to her mother, tugging her by the sleeve. But Tara digs her feet in, doesn't so much as budge.



TARA (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, I am busy schooling  
these homosexuals.

One of the GSA members grows red in the face.

RANDOM KID  
Hey, I'm actually the straight part  
of the Gay-Straight Alliance.

TARA  
Sure, and Elton John just enjoys a  
pink feather boa in a straight way.

CASSIE  
Mom, it's an emergency.

Tara reaches into her purse, tries to hand Cassie a tampon.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Mom, no! Can you just listen?

TARA  
Fine, ladies, hold the line. We  
wouldn't want anyone sneaking off  
to dye their hair blue.

Tara and Cassie step off into

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PARKING LOT - DAY

Tara and Cassie duck behind a large SUV, which Tara takes as  
a perfect opportunity to sneak a cigarette.

CASSIE  
I thought you quit.

TARA  
I also learned that our precious  
tax dollars are going to install  
litterboxes for teens who identify  
as cats...

Tara continues to rant.

CASSIE  
This is serious! I saw a monster.

Cassie has to shout it. Tara instantly hushes Cassie.

TARA  
Cassie, I can't have you getting hysterical. Where did you see the you know what?

CASSIE  
I think it was heading towards the beach! It was a little fishy.

TARA  
Mommy is going to take care of it.

EXT. SAND DUNES - DAY

Laszlo, still in fish monster form, claws his way to the top of a large sand dune. The sun causes his scales to sparkle.

He lets out a panicked croak before toppling over the top of the dune, rolling head over heel towards the ocean.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ATHLETICS OFFICE - DAY

Tara enters her office. The walls are covered in pictures of herself at 18, the queen bee of Shady Cove High.

She twists the statuettes atop several cheerleading trophies, causing a filing cabinet to turn over, revealing an elaborate arsenal of homemade and professional grade weapons.

TARA  
Hope I'm not rusty...

Tara reaches for old reliable: a sharpened wooden stake.

EXT. BEACH - CLIFFSIDE - DAY

Fatima sits on the cliffside, watching a group of stoners smoke on an abandoned lifeguard tower below.

She holds out her phone, filming the group.

FATIMA  
This is Fatima Hakeem, of Strange Happenings with Fatima Hakeem.

Fatima clears her throat, changing her voice to a half-assed David Attenborough.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Below, you can see the Shady Cove stoners in their natural habitat.

The stoners attempt to smoke marijuana out of an apple, but one of them drops it. MARTY (19 M), his clothing casual but expensive, swipes the apple from the sand and takes a bite.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
The stoner lacks common sense, yet  
by somehow, the stoner persists.

Marty scales the lifeguard house, doing a dangerous handstand off the rusted railing. Yet even when he falls ten feet to the ground, Marty easily hops back on his feet.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Damn it, Marty, you can't even  
break a leg. What about my  
viewership?

Fatima nearly ends her video, but then she spots a fish monster dragging itself toward the sea.

Fatima jumps and her the phone slips out of her hand, bouncing down the cliffside.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Get it together, Fatima.

Fatima begins to climb down the cliffside.

EXT. BEACH - OCEANSIDE - DAY

The fish monster claws its way through the wet sand, struggling to get tractions as the waves bombard it.

Meanwhile, the stoners have managed to perfect their apple bong, blowing clouds of smoke onto the beach. On the outside of their ranks, a preppy cheerleader ASHLYN lurks.

MARTY  
Now that this apple pie is baked. I  
think it's about time that Ashlyn  
trades her pompoms for a puffpuff.

Ashlyn takes the apple bong, as Marty leans in his lighter.

The smoke hits Ashlyn like a punch in the throat. She coughs, the bong flying out of her hands and landing in the sea. Ashlyn instinctually dives for the bong, sliding across the sand to come face-to-face with Laszlo's fish monster.

The creature and Ashlyn's eyes both go wide, both creature and girl screaming.

The monster scrambles over Ashlyn's body, tangling its claws om cheap hair extensions; however, to the onlooker, Ashlyn is being mauled to death.

Marty notices an old weighted net buried in the sand.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Help me with this!

Marty and the stoners pull the net free. But the other stoners lack Marty's bravery, cowering and leaving him to chase the beast alone.

Fatima films from atop the lifeguard tower.

FATIMA  
I'm going to win a Pulitzer.

The stoner corners the fish monster on a rocky precipice. The tide bubbles at their ankle, turning the algae-strewn rocks into a slippery death trap.

But as Marty winds up to throw the net, everyone's attention is drawn to the SLAP SLAP SLAP of Tara's flipflops smacking against the sand. She readies her stake, but in typical fashion, does a complicated backhand stand across the beach.

The fish monster looks for an exit.

Tara completes her routine, landing in a very practiced pose.

TARA  
Nobody told me the cafeteria was serving fish sticks.

MARTY  
Fish sticks would hit the spot--

Marty throws the heavy net, his balance tipping backwards, foot slipping on the slick rock beneath him.

Marty falls into the ocean, the net tangled around his ankle as he thrashes in the raging ocean below.

The fish monster dives off the rocks, dodging the rocks below, but still struggling to escape the current.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Somebody...blub...blub...help me!

Tara prepares to dive off the rocks after the fish monster.

ASHLYN (O.S.)  
Coach Hunter, he's going to drown.

Tara turns to see Ashlyn and the stoners watching in shock. She looks at the slowly escaping monster, then her attention falls on Fatima who is filming the whole ordeal.

EXT. OCEAN - BEACHSIDE - SAME

The fish monster treads water, watching as the stoner flails, drowning as the crowd watches on the shore. It sees Tara staring daggers into the water, scanning for her prey so she can stick it before it flees.

But Marty is struggling on the line, the tide knocking water into his lungs. The fish monster blinks, an intelligence behind its eyes. Laszlo is still somewhere in there.

Laszlo urges his strange new body forward, diving towards the drowning stoner.

Tara readies her weapon, diving towards the boy serving as her bait. She swings for the fish monster approaching the surface, but Laszlo dodges, looping the net attached to Marty around Tara's stake.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Tara yanks her weapon back, dragging Marty out of the water.

Marty vomits sea water, before seizing Tara in a hug.

MARTY

The scary cheerleading coach saved  
my life!

TARA

Did I?

Tara pushes Marty off.

She scans the horizon for her target, but sees no sign of movement, her prey slipped off to sea.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rodney sits on the sofa. He has a folding TV table laid out before him, atop which is an elaborately painted bird house. Rodney applies shingles to the roof one at a time, nailing in tiny nails with a tiny hammer.

A cooking show plays on the television. Rodney half-watches the show, until a BREAKING NEWS announcements interrupts the program. Footage of an ambulance parked in front of the high school on center screen.

NEWS REPORTER

We're reporting live from Shady Cove High School where just moments ago a teen was nearly lost at sea...

RODNEY

Laszlo, I'm coming to save you!

Rodney jumps onto his feet. He runs for his car keys, walks out the front door, only to return for the Home Goods life preserver hanging on the fireplace mantle.

NEWS REPORTER

...only to be saved by an unlikely hero...

Rodney sighs in relief.

NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)

...by an unlikely hero: local political activist turned cheerleading coach, Tara Hunter.

The camera pans to show Tara, standing in anticipation of her interview. Rodney gasps.

RODNEY

Twenty years since graduation and this town is still obsessed with Tara Hunter...

Rodney returns to the couch.

NEWS REPORTER

How does it feel to know you're responsible for saving a young person's life?

TARA

Well, if I'm known for anything, it's for being here and knowing what's best for these kids.

RODNEY

Horse shit!

EXT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - BACK LAWN - DAY

Laszlo lays passed out in the grass, naked and rid of scales.

CHHHT CHHHT CHHHT! The sprinklers pop out of the turf, spraying water all over Laszlo. He bounces onto his feet, instantly aware of his complete lack of clothes.

LASZLO

Shit!

Laszlo runs into

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

He panics as soon as he steps into the house. The TV's on, his father hammering away at his birdhouse in the other room.

RODNEY

Laszlo, that you?

The couch creaks as Rodney stands up.

Laszlo scrambles across the kitchen. His still wet feet slip on the tile floor, but he still manages to grab the dish towel from the oven door.

Rodney walks into the kitchen right as Laszlo drapes the towel over his exposed self. He instantly turns away, but doesn't exit the room. Just stands there awkwardly.

LASZLO

I was looking for a towel.

RODNEY

And we keep them in the upstairs linen closet, same as always.

Rodney places the back of his hand against Laszlo's forehead.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

You sure you're feeling okay?

LASZLO

Yeah, Dad, I'm fine.

Rodney uses a hand to compare his own height to Laszlo's.

RODNEY

What the heck, dude? You're suddenly taller than me now too. What about my little guy?

LASZLO  
It's the chemicals in the water.

RODNEY  
I think you're a little old to be  
having growth spurts.

Rodney goes to fill his coffee cup. Laszlo clears his throat.

LASZLO  
Can I get a little privacy?

RODNEY  
Hold your horses, it isn't like I  
haven't seen it before.

LASZLO  
Dad!

RODNEY  
Fine, but next time, check the  
linen closet before you wrap your  
junk with my nice dish towels.  
Those were a gift.

Rodney returns to the living room.

Laszlo sigh in relief, then he turns to go upstairs,  
revealing a giant fin retreating into his back.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LAWN - DAY

News crews still crowd the high school parking lot, but the town has also joined in the excitement. Harmony and Tara's other cronies hand out signs with Tara's face to hold up in support at her latest act of bravery.

Tara watches the festivities. She wears a sash that reads OUR HERO and holds three dozen red roses. She's clearly irritated at how much attention Marty is getting from news crews.

Finally Tara has had enough. She turns on her heel, walks towards the high school. The flowers are cumbersome, much too oversized, so before she enters the school, Tara stuffs the roses into an overfilled trashcan.

Principal Price watches as Tara disappears into the school. He takes a moment to consider his options: the fanfare outside or catching up to her. He chooses the latter.



INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - TROPHY HALL - DAY

Tara stands in a crowded trophy hall.

She isn't interested in championship trophies or placards detailing the extraordinary alumni of the school. Tara stands in front of the massive prom queen and king crowns.

Principal Price enters.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Haven't you heard, you're being  
praised as a god on the front lawn?

TARA  
They think I saved a boy from  
drowning...

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You did save a boy from drowning.

Tara suddenly slams her fist against the wooden trophy case.

TARA  
You're just like the rest of them.  
You see one saved life and forget  
that fish freak got away.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
I was hoping that those stoners had  
just smoked a laced baggie of weed.

TARA  
Weren't you the one who told me all  
those years ago that saving the  
world came first, and my life  
second?

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
I may have started working here as  
purely a means of supervising your  
extracurricular activities, but  
I've grown to love this school and  
the people who walk through it. A  
crusade isn't worth your happiness.

Tara angrily paces.

TARA  
You've never had to be the one  
wielding the stake.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

You're getting worked up about one lone fishman? This is Shady Cove we're talking about. Things used to go bump in the night a whole lot worse than a fishman.

TARA

I gave up everything to wipe those freaks from the face of the Earth.

Tara stares angrily at the Prom Queen crown in the case.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Is this outburst about Prom? You missed the coronation, you were disqualified. It's been twenty years, move on--

WHAM! Tara slams Price against the trophy case, her forearm braced against his throat to keep him from slipping away.

TARA

History won't repeat itself. I won't see my Cassie lose this crown because of some fishfaced freak. I'll raze the earth if need be.

Tara releases Price, he sits there gasping as she leaves.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo exits the shower, wrapping a towel around his chest instead of at the waist. He ties his hair up in another towel, as if trying his hardest to cover the entirety of himself in fresh linen.

Wiping the steamed up mirror with his hand, Laszlo's eyes seem to look everywhere but his body.

LASZLO

You're just like any teenage boy.

But Laszlo's father is right. Laszlo's abnormally taller, his body bulkier than it was just few days before. He takes a deep breath, slightly pulling down the towel to look at his chest. The flesh of his pecs is tender, inflamed.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

What could be worse than being a teenage boy who turns into a fish? Being a teenage boy growing boobs.

Laszlo paces, his breathing shallow and uneven.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
It's just a growth spurt. O'Connell  
grew nine inches in a summer  
between 9th and 10th grade. You're  
just like any other boy.

Laszlo gulps, squeezes his eyes shut as he drops the towel  
around his waist. He opens his eyes wide to inspect his  
anatomy, sighing a breath of relief.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Everything's there, Laszlo. Just  
like it's always been.

He locks eyes with himself in the mirror, shoving his finger  
in the chest of his reflected self.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
You're a teenage boy, not a fish  
monster.

CUE MONTAGE:

-Laszlo lifts one arm, struggling to inspect his own spine.  
The flesh finless.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
You're a boy, not a fish.

-Laszlo palpates his neck, searching and failing to find so  
much as an indication of gills.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
You're a boy, not a fish.

-Laszlo pulls his lips wide, no monstrous fangs in his mouth.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
You're a boy, not a fish!

END MONTAGE:

Laszlo seems to visible relax. His obsessive inspection of  
his own body complete. Laszlo starts to get dressed, pulling  
on a pair of boxers and tee-shirt.

He grabs for his slippers, hops on foot to try and put them  
on, but his new growth spurt throws him off balance. Laszlo  
falls on his ass. He goes to pull on his slipper, but his  
foot is too big for the shoe.

LASZLO

Really?

Laszlo tries to force it in his shoes, but his toes instinctually spread, revealing a translucent webbing connecting them.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Fuck! I'm a goddamn fish.

EXT. FATIMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Laszlo loudly knocks on the door of Fatima's house. Her father answers the door.

LASZLO

I need to talk to your daughter.

Fatima's father looks Laszlo up and down.

FATIMA'S FATHER

And you are?

Fatima appears, pushes her father aside.

FATIMA

This is Laszlo, my gay friend who is gay. Remember? Laszlo the gay one?

Her father rolls his eyes, waves Laszlo in.

INT. FATIMA'S HOUSE - FATIMA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Fatima leads Laszlo into her room. The walls are decorated of posters of cryptids and corkboards covered in conspiracies.

FATIMA

You know it's the Strange  
Happenings Happy Hour every  
Thursday from 6 pm to 2:30 am,  
Laszlo. Why are you here?

Laszlo falls onto the beanbag.

LASZLO

My body is changing in weird ways.

FATIMA'S FATHER

Oh grow up!

LASZLO  
Just look at this.

Laszlo kicks off his tennis shoe, spreading his toes to show Fatima his webbed feet. She reels back, grabbing for a nearby trashcan as she gags.

FATIMA  
Put those things away. You know how  
I feel about feet!

LASZLO  
Something horrible is happening.

Laszlo pulls off his shirt, revealing the scales sprouting from his chest. Fatima shields her eyes for a moment, but then peeks between her fingers.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
I'm turning into--

FATIMA  
The Shady Cove Fish Man.

INT. FATIMA'S HOUSE - FATIMA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fatima wheels over a rolling white board.

FATIMA  
Strange happenings, as you probably  
guessed from the name of rising  
media franchise Strange Happenings  
with Fatima Hakeem, have been  
happening for years in Shady Cove.

Fatima tears away several pieces of paper revealing tabloid photos of aliens, CCTV captures of werewolves, and time and time again, fish monsters.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
But over the years, the sightings  
got less frequent. Any guesses what  
happened?

LASZLO  
Climate change?

Fatima dramatically flips the board, revealing hundreds of photos of Tara in various eras of her life: cheerleader, social media mommy blogger, local politician, heckler.

I/E. SHADY COVE DRIVE-IN - O'CONNELL'S CAR - NIGHT

Cassie and O'Connell sit in the backseat of O'Connell's car. The front seats folded forwards so they can see an old scary movie that neither of them is watching.

O'Connell is shoveling popcorn into his massive mouth.

O'CONNELL

I was thinking that after Prom, we could get the marriage over with.

CASSIE

Wait, what?

O'CONNELL

Just feels like it's time you make this prince a king?

Cassie rolls her eye as O'Connell fakes a yawn, draping his arm over her shoulder so he can flick off her tank top strap.

CASSIE

Knock it off! Look, I think you should manage your expectations...

O'Connell blinks.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

...about the Prom, duh! I just don't want you to get your hopes that we'll win.

O'CONNELL

But it's just like your mom said. It's fate, you and me. King and queen since the day we were born.

O'Connell leans in for a big, slobbery kiss. Cassie puts her hand up, blocking his advance, but leaning in for a quick, gentle kiss as a car horn blares.

Headlights point directly at their car, and Cassie shields her eyes to see a pink jeep parked in front of her. Neighboring movie watchers honk back, throwing popcorn at Tara as she steps out of the car.

Tara pulls the door open, leading Cassie back to the jeep by the scruff of her neck.

CASSIE

Ow, Mom, you're hurting me.

TARA

There's a monster in Shady Cove,  
and instead of fighting in the name  
of Jesus, you aren't even leaving  
room for Jesus.

CASSIE

You were the one who told me to be  
sweet on him.

TARA

You have other responsibilities.

Tara parts Cassie's blonde hair to reveal her brown roots.

TARA (CONT'D)

And you might want to dye your  
hair, those ugly roots are showing.

Tara shoves Cassie into the car.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CAFETERIA - DAY

Fatima frantically runs a merch table, slinging SHADY COVE  
FISHMAN tee-shirts to whoever holds out a twenty dollar bill.

Ashlyn and several other cheerleaders shove their way to the  
front of the line.

ASHLYN

How about a discount for your  
future prom queen?

Cassie, eyes puffy and covered in dark circles, join her  
fellow cheerleaders.

ASHLYN (CONT'D)

You look awful! Let's get you a  
tacky shirt to draw the eye away  
from your face.

Fatima throws a teeshirt at Ashlyn's head.

FATIMA

There's your large.

ASHLYN

Large? I wear a child's small!

But there's suddenly a commotion on the other side of the  
cafeteria as Laszlo enters. His clothes are too tight, jeans  
riding two or so too inches high to be fashionable.

ASHLYN (CONT'D)  
Who is that hunk?

Fatima and Cassie look to where Ashlyn is pointing.

CASSIE  
Is that Laszlo Mayberry?

ASHLYN  
Milkshake Mayberry? I'm lactose  
intolerant, but I'd suck on those  
tits!

Ashlyn and the other cheerleaders start to nip at each other like dogs, fighting as they chase Laszlo down the hallway.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY

A flock of girls crowd Laszlo, poking and tugging at him as Ashlyn has to fight the others off.

ASHLYN  
Hi Larr--Lenn--

LASZLO  
Laszlo?

ASHLYN  
That's what I said the first time.  
You just couldn't hear me over the  
sound of all those bitches.

Ashlyn kicks one of the girl's shin. She yelps.

ASHLYN (CONT'D)  
You wanted to ask me something?

LASZLO  
I did?

Ashlyn practically pins Laszlo against his locker, hand absently groping for his freshly formed bicep.

ASHLYN  
I just think that hunky boys like  
you should hang out with pretty  
girls like me.

LASZLO  
Oh I get it. It's a joke. Yay, jump  
out of a locker, throw a milkshake  
in my face! Haha we got Mayberry.



Ashlyn blinks, zero idea what Laszlo's talking about.

ASHLYN

Our chances at Prom Court would probably be higher as a couple--

A tall soccer player MANDY shoves her way into Ashlyn's spot.

MANDY

I was just thinking if you don't have a date for the--

Ashlyn grabs the girl by the hair.

ASHLYN

Get your own man!

A full-on brawl starts as the rest of the girls start to fight, desperately throwing letters of admiration at Laszlo, shoving them into the waistband of his jeans.

Laszlo runs down the hallway, diving into a nearby classroom.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rayne stands in front of a half-circle of fellow queer kids. He lavishly motions to a donut in his hand.

RAYNE

And before I declare this Gay-Straight Alliance meeting started, may I remind you why the gays are God's favorite?

The other queers hold up their donuts.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Because God said be gay and enjoy donuts with school district funds!

Everyone cheers, as Laszlo awkwardly stands there, cowering from the sound of charging teen girls.

Rayne notices Laszlo.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Laszlo, I'm so glad you finally joined us.

LASZLO

I'm sorry, I was just trying to hide from a bunch of suddenly crazed, teenage girls.

CAM (18F), a butch lesbian, smacks her chest.

CAM  
You and me both, brother.

RAYNE  
Have a donut, why don't you tell us  
about it?

Rayne forces a donut into Laszlo's hand, practically uses his whole weight to make the ultra-masculinized Laszlo sit.

LASZLO  
I really don't mean to intrude...

CAM  
Come on, bro! We haven't had any  
good gossip since Ashlyn french-  
kissed that seeing eye dog?

LASZLO  
Wait, that's real--

RAYNE  
--You were telling us about your  
lady troubles.

Laszlo shoves half his donut in his mouth.

LASZLO  
Well, the thing is, until this  
morning, girls never noticed me.  
All of a sudden I have a bit of a  
growth spurt--

RAYNE  
--You literally doubled in  
body mass over night.

CAM  
I play for the other team,  
but you're looking like a  
juicy chicken thigh.

Laszlo waits for the group to quiet down.

LASZLO  
I get it: loveable student body  
vice president turned hunk  
overnight. But why does that  
justify them throwing themselves at  
me?

Laszlo reaches into his waistband, pulling out half a dozen  
hastily scribbled love notes.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

This one reads 'Roses are red/violets are blue/ I want Laszlo to stick his'...you get the point, but the thing that upset me is whoever gave this one just crossed out O'Connell's name and put mine.

CAM

You do kind of look like bargain brand O'Connell Moore.

Rayne throws out his hands to quiet the group.

RAYNE

You're not bargain brand, you're a Target exclusive brand, Laszlo.

LASZLO

Is that a good thing?

The crowd gasps.

CAM

Is that a good thing? What kind of gay are you?

Laszlo's face goes red.

LASZLO

I'm not gay.

CAM

You're not? It's 2023, that's like saying you don't breathe air.

RAYNE

Let's remember everyone's homosexual journey differs.

LASZLO

I'm not gay!

The other queer struggle to not giggle.

RAYNE

Then why aren't you out there taking advantage of all this feminine interest, Laszlo?

Laszlo is sweating, his hands sticky with donut glaze. He tries to wipe them clean, but his hand sticks to the fabric.

LASZLO

Ummm...ummm...I don't know! Okay?

Laszlo yanks his hand free, the underside of his hand coated with a dozen tiny suction cup like pores. Laszlo runs.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BOYS' RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Laszlo ducks into an empty stall.

We can hear the sound of students rushing to class. Conversations cut off mid-thought as the BELL rings.

Laszlo pulls out his phone, his fingers sticking to the surface as he texts Cassie: Going to be five minutes late for the calculus test. Fake an illness, or something.

Laszlo inspects his hands. The suckling pores cause him to gag, as scales begin to radiate outwards from his palms.

But the bathroom door is thrown open. Laszlo instinctually throws his feet up, trying to hide.

RAYNE (O.S.)

Laszlo, are you in here?

Rayne begins to check the stalls, stopping before the one locked one.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Laszlo?

LASZLO

Can you just leave me alone?

RAYNE

Look, I know me and the other gays can get pretty intense. And I don't know what you're going through--

LASZLO

--You're right, you don't know what I'm going through.

Laszlo waits for Rayne to leave, but he doesn't.

RAYNE

Look, I'm sorry. I'm not the best at this. Maybe it's cause I transitioned so early, but I forget that people aren't as open about personal things.

LASZLO  
When you transitioned, did you ever  
feel like you had no idea what was  
happening with your body?

RAYNE  
Every day! I wanted what was  
happening to my body to happen, but  
it still made me feel weird.

LASZLO  
What if the changes that are  
happening to my body aren't wanted?

RAYNE  
I don't know. I'm not a doctor.

Laszlo unlocks the stall.

LASZLO  
You have to promise to be cool.

RAYNE  
I've been cool as a cucumber since  
the day I was born.

Laszlo opens the door. He's half fish and half boy.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
Don't let the lunch ladies see you.  
I don't think I could handle  
another fish stick lunch.

LASZLO  
Shut up! I'm late to one of the  
most important tests of my life and  
I can't show up looking like this.

Rayne looks Laszlo over.

RAYNE  
Yeah, I don't think a change of  
clothes is going to work.

But Laszlo stands up, suddenly inspired.

LASZLO  
Depends on the clothes.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CALCULUS CLASSROOM - DAY

Students anxiously wait at their desk as their TEACHER passes  
out the calculus test. Cassie looks to Laszlo's empty chair.

TEACHER  
Remember, this final exam is worth  
30% of your final grade.

The class groans.

CASSIE  
Could you wait a minute for Laszlo--

The classroom door is thrown open as Laszlo, wearing the  
Shady Cove Mackerel costume, stumbles in to take his seat.

TEACHER  
Mr. Mayberry, what are you wearing?

LASZLO  
My off-kilter balance is throwing  
off the routine. Coach Hunter  
ordered me to wear this suit all  
day to reorientate my balance.

TEACHER  
Can you take off the mask?

LASZLO  
I'll happily take it off, if you  
get the a-okay from Coach Hunter.

The teacher sweats, places a test in front of Laszlo.

TEACHER  
Just take your test.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

The school bell RINGS!

Students exit the calculus classroom with forlorn looks,  
except for Laszlo, still mascot-clad, who comes out skipping.

He dances with passing students, who seem more confused than  
overjoyed with his academic successes.

SMACK! He crashes into Cassie as she walks beside him.

O'Connell saunters down the hallway, letterman jacket clad, a  
cardboard drink carrier of milkshakes in hand.

The mascot head flies off, becoming a projectile that smacks  
O'Connell, knocking milkshakes all over him.

Laszlo falls to the floor.

O'CONNELL  
Fucking Mayberry! My mom just got  
this dry-cleaned.

O'Connell's jock posse desperately tear off their own clothes to clean up their leader. But Cassie's attention isn't on her boyfriend, it's on reaching a hand out for Laszlo.

CASSIE  
Laszlo! I'm so sorry.

Laszlo cheeks are bright red. His fingers search for scales, but find nothing but slightly oily teenage flesh.

LASZLO  
It's okay.

O'CONNELL  
You're dead, fish boy!

Laszlo and Cassie look to the mess of O'Connell. Dripping with milkshake, O'Connell utters a war cry as he charges. His jocks barking like dogs as they follow like a pack.

LASZLO  
I better go.

CUE MONTAGE:

-Laszlo rounds the corner, the ridiculous Marlin costuming flopping around as he tries to pick up speed, barely dodging around the student population moving between classes.

-O'Connell only sees red, throwing students aside with ease as Cassie hurries after him.

CASSIE  
O'Connell, wait!

O'CONNELL  
You wouldn't understand, Cassie.

-Laszlo is slowed by a clot of students in an intersecting hallway. There's no path forward.

-Cassie pulls at O'Connell's shirt, digging her whole weight into the ground, but still he persists.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
This is bro business, Cass.

CASSIE  
You can't kill him!

O'Connell grabs a nearby freshman by the scruff of the neck, lifting him off his feet, and tossing him into another group of underclassman like they're bowling pins.

O'CONNELL

No, but I can gut him like a fish.

-Laszlo looks behind him, sees O'Connell just feet away. He watches students' legs moving in rhythm like a school of fish, dives through a gap as O'Connell swipes for him.

-Laszlo sees the cafeteria. It's open water, surely O'Connell couldn't murder him in front of anyone right? Wrong!

Laszlo runs, students picking at their lunches as Laszlo can practically feel O'Connell's breath on the back of his neck.

Laszlo grabs a plastic lunch tray, takes a few steps back, and throws his body atop the tray like it's a sled. He speeds across the long lunch tables, sending nachos and soft drinks flying in the air as O'Connell barrels after him.

-Laszlo sprints down the gym hallway. The exit door in sight, but as he approaches the exterior doors. Several jocks step from a stack of wrestling mats, blocking Laszlo's path.

There's nowhere to go...well, except for the nearby Boys' Locker Room, steam ominously pouring from beneath the door. Laszlo gulps, running into the locker room.

O'Connell motions to his jocks.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Make sure that Cassie doesn't worry her pretty little head.

The jocks block Cassie's path as O'Connell calmly walks into the locker room with the mascot head in hand.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Steam obscures Laszlo's vision, the tile floor slicked with condensation as he stumbles forward.

A red EXIT sign is all that's visible, so Laszlo runs for it, only for several jocks to step through the door, shoving him back into the central locker area.

Teenage boys out for blood hoot and holler as they surround Laszlo, blocking every path of escape. They're sharks out for blood, desperate to tear into a bit of flesh.



O'Connell dramatically rips off his tee-shirt. His abs dripping with sweat and strawberry ice cream.

LASZLO

It was an accident?

Laszlo backs up against the wall, as O'Connell swipes a fingerful of ice cream from his chest, drawing a sickly sweet line across Laszlo's trembling throat.

O'CONNELL

I can't just have you flirting with my girl like that, Mayberry.

LASZLO

We were just talking. She's my lab partner. She's basically a cousin!

O'Connell punches Laszlo's stomach, knocking the air out of his lungs. Laszlo clutches the lockers to stay upright.

O'CONNELL

Here's the problem about faggots like you. You think that all you have to do is keep your head down, dot your t's and cross your i's, but you don't realize you're just a tiny fish in a pond full of sharks.

O'Connell motions to his goons. One of them holds the mascot head, while another jock empties a trash bag full of dissected fish guts.

Laszlo's eyes go wide, panic bubbling up the back of his throat as he eyes the EXIT sign. Laszlo looks down at his body, at how O'Connell no longer towers over him.

Laszlo straightens up, takes a deep breath as he drives his shoulder into O'Connell's stomach, hoisting him off his feet.

But O'Connell doesn't go down without a fight, he grabs Laszlo by the hair, slamming his head against a locker. Laszlo falls to the floor as the other jocks swarm him.

All Laszlo can see is the sight of their feet kicking his ribs, their jeering faces as they spit on his body.

O'Connell yanks Laszlo onto his feet. Blood drips down Laszlo's chin, as he struggles in O'Connell's grasp.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Shall we crown our queen, boys?

O'Connell grabs the chum-filled mascot head. Laszlo writhes, scales crawling up his neck as he jerks his head forward, digging bloody, sharp teeth into O'Connell's shoulder.

O'Connell screams, shoving the mascot head onto Laszlo's head with a squelch as Laszlo breaks free from his grasp.

FROM LASZLO'S POV:

Everything is muffled by the wet chum surrounding his head. His breathing heavy, suffocated as he runs blindly forward. THUDs smack against Laszlo's body as blows are landed.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
I'm going to fucking kill you.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM SHOWERS - SAME

Disorientated, Laszlo stumbles forward. His mascot costume soaking up hot water, growing heavy.

As the jocks circle him, steam obscures his movements as a webbed, clawed hand explodes out of one arm of the suit.

Laszlo swats at the jocks, shredding jerseys and drawing blood as they jump atop him. But Laszlo's body is unfazed beneath their collective weight, growing larger and larger till the seam at the back of the costume splits.

A barbed fin protrudes from Laszlo's back, smacking jocks aside as he dives towards the glowing EXIT sign.

O'Connell grabs for Laszlo, but is easily thrown back.

LASZLO  
You're going to regret this.

Laszlo runs for the exit, the shreds of his mascot suit hanging on his body as he exits the emergency exit.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - NIGHT

RING! Students pour of the classroom, celebrating the day of yet another day of school. Fatima hurries from a nearby classroom to her locker.

She reaches for her lock, but instantly reels back, the lock wet and slimy to the touch.

Fatima flicks the substance off her hand, but on second inspection, she brings it up to sniff it. She instantly gags.

FATIMA

It isn't Tuna Casserole Tuesday.

Fatima pinches her nose shut, unlocks her locker with the other hand. A crumbled, wet piece of notebook paper falls at her feet. It reads: POOL ASAP.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Since when did this school have a pool?

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL HALLWAY - DAY

Fatima nearly walks too far, turning at the last moment to look down the dusty, abandoned hallway. The lights flicker ominously, but she balls her fist, persists forward.

But then the lights cut out, a lanky figure hulking in the distance. Fatima freezes, the note clasped in her hand.

FATIMA

Back up! I got a B- in the women's self-defense unit in PE.

Fatima readies herself to fight, as Rayne steps out from the shadows. He looks at her curiously, removing his headphones.

RAYNE

Sorry, I was listening to a podcast about he/him lesbians.

FATIMA

Well, if you excuse me, I have a mystery to solve.

Fatima pushes past Rayne. But he throws up his hand, a similar piece of paper clasped in his hand.

RAYNE

Looks like you're not the only one looking for Laszlo.

Fatima freezes. She turns on her heel, trying to remain coy.

FATIMA

And why on Earth would Laszlo, my best friend since the first grade, need to drop a note to meet up with me in this seemingly abandoned pool I just discovered we had?

RAYNE

Maybe it has something to do with  
his little problem.

Fatima guffaws as she walks towards a door, the chipping  
paint reading: POOL.

FATIMA

I have no idea what you mean.

Rayne fans his hands on either side of his head, puffing up  
his cheeks to imitate a fish.

RAYNE

He's been a little fishy.

Fatima stops at the door, stomps her foot.

FATIMA

He told you?

RAYNE

Yeah, we're pals.

FATIMA

Pals? Pals! I've been there for him  
through everything, and he tells  
you, a stranger!

Fatima throws open the door.

RAYNE

I wasn't aware that Laszlo's  
supportive friend quota capped out  
at one...

FATIMA

Well, it does!

Fatima stomps inside.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL - DAY

The room is pitch black, the sound of churning water echoing  
against the crumpled bleachers.

FATIMA

Laszlo?

CRACK! Rayne breaks a stack of glowsticks over his knee,  
tossing one onto Fatima's head like he's playing ring toss.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
Why do you even have those?

RAYNE  
Are you allergic to fun?

Fatima swipes the rest of the glowsticks from Rayne, holding them out like a torch as she approaches the pool. The murky, garbage filled water churns, bubbling as the pair get close.

Rayne sucks in a suspenseful breath. Fatima rolling her eyes as a severed fish head floats to the surface.

Rayne screams in shock, jumping up and down.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
They killed Laszlo!

FATIMA  
If you were Laszlo's friend, you would know his mother was in labor for seventy two hours cause of that big ass head.

Fatima tosses the rest of the glow sticks into the pool, their luminescence illuminating an ominous humanoid shape that swims up from the bottom of the pool.

Laszlo breaks the surface in all his fishy glory, slicked over with scales, oversized fins churning water, bioluminescent eyes glowing brighter than the glowsticks

Fatima and Rayne both scream. But Fatima's scream become squeals as she whips out her phone to film the fish creature.

The creature begins to croak.

LASZLO (AS PROM CREATURE)  
Can you not?

Fatima sighs, shoves her phone in her pocket.

Rayne inspects the creature with disturbed curiosity.

RAYNE  
When you said you were a fish guy, I didn't think you were like this much of a fish guy.

LASZLO (AS CREATURE)  
You're probably both wondering why I brought you both here.

FATIMA

To help me win a Pulitzer for my  
award-worthy, totally unappreciated  
investigative journalism?

Laszlo spits a mouthful of water at Fatima's face.

LASZLO (AS CREATURE)

I need your help.

RAYNE

I've never descaled a fish, but I'm  
sure I can figure it out.

Prom Thing shakes its head.

LASZLO (AS PROM THING)

I need your help to win Prom King.

CUE MONTAGE:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Rayne wields a paint roller, rolling glue all over a row of lockers. Fatima follows close behind, sticking posters that read: LASZLO MAYBERRY FOR PROM KING, CAUSE HE DOESN'T SUCK!

LASZLO (V.O.)

Our peers don't realize that they  
have options besides voting for  
Cassie and O'Connell...

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - LIBRARY - DAY

A group of KPop fans sit in the library, loudly watching music videos. They all receive a notification that links to Fatima's TikTok page.

ON SCREEN:

Fatima narrates as a dramatic montage of photos of Laszlo.

FATIMA

You might not know Laszlo  
Mayberry...

A red question mark falls on Laszlo's face.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

But while O'Connell Moore was busy  
douchebagging his way to the top of  
the social pyramid.

We see O'Connell heckling students, dumping one in a trash can, throwing milkshakes at others.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Laszlo was topping the Honor Roll.

Laszlo holds up a test covered in gold stars. A photoshopped Laszlo helps starving orphans do algebra problems.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Laszlo Mayberry, son, friend,  
school mascot. Who's more deserving  
of the Prom King title than the  
beating heart of our school pride?

We see Laszlo dancing poorly in the Mackerel costume.

FATIMA'S FATHER

Meanwhile, O'Connell disrespects  
this school as an institution.

We see a drawing of O'Connell pissing on the mackerel suit with the caption: BASED ON A STORY INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY.

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL - DAY

Laszlo, the scales somewhat retracting into his body, wildly draws on a mildew-stained white board.

Fatima shakes her head.

FATIMA

People have tried slandering the  
popular candidates before.  
You're not popular, Laszlo. We'll  
need to create more of a spectacle  
if we want people to listen to us.

Fatima draws over Laszlo's game plan, writing two words and circling them: PROM PAGEANT.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

If you can be a Dark Horse in that  
utterly ridiculous pageant that  
Coach Hunter puts on every year,  
you'll be elevated to a platform  
that could erode O'Connell's lead.

Rayne claps his hands slowly, the sound echoing in the room.

RAYNE  
Excellent ideas, but you're  
forgetting the thing that all but  
guarantees Prom victory: LOVE.

Rayne walks towards the white board, but stops, swiping a  
discarded speedo from the tiles, launching it at Laszlo.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
And speaking of love, I think I can  
see your umm...special fin, Laszlo.

Laszlo looks down, covers himself as he runs around the white  
board to pull on the speedo.

Rayne draws stick figure caricatures of Cassie and O'Connell  
leaning in close as if to kiss.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
People love a narrative. And there  
isn't anything better at snatching  
the crowns than a high school  
sweethearts to Prom royalty arc.

Rayne draws two Burger King-esque crowns atop the stick  
figures' heads.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
A split ticket where some guy's  
girl dances with some girl's guy is  
awkward. Administration will try  
their hardest to push for the only  
nominated couple.

Laszlo steps out from around the whiteboard, his hands still  
clasped over his now speedo'd groin. Face red against the  
green of his few remaining scales.

FATIMA  
That thing looks like it's about to  
snap like a rubber band.

LASZLO  
My testicles have practically  
ascended back into my body.

RAYNE  
Our troops at the drag bars are  
doing that while lipsyncing to  
Carly Rae Jepsen. Suck it up!

Fatima motions for Rayne to wrap it up.



RAYNE (CONT'D)  
If we can break up Cassie and  
O'Connell...

Laszlo grabs the marker, slashing through the crowns.

LASZLO  
We can knock the crown right off  
O'Connell's head.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - SWIM HALLWAY - DAY

The trio exits the pool. Laszlo wears mismatched, vintage gym gear. The shorts a couple inches too short for Laszlo's comfort, very clearly from the 1980s.

LASZLO  
Okay, break! Time for operation...

RAYNE  
Fillet O'Fish?

LASZLO  
Please, enough with the fish puns.

RAYNE  
I'm a trans guy who grew up in  
Florida. My entire repertoire is  
insufferable dad jokes that are  
vaguely ocean-themed.

Fatima shrugs.

FATIMA  
Operation Prom Thing?

RAYNE  
It's a little on the nose...

LASZLO  
Focus! Fatima, you're on the  
propaganda. Rayne, you're on...

RAYNE  
...supplementary action?

FATIMA  
What does that even mean?

RAYNE

I'm like the guy who holds posters  
for you to hang up, or like...oh I  
got it, I'm Laszlo's wingman for  
when he picks up Cassie.

Laszlo glares, his teeth grinding.

LASZLO

I'm not...you know what, go team!

They awkwardly high five before Fatima and Rayne dissipate,  
walking down opposite halls. A few moments later, we see  
Rayne run after Fatima.

Laszlo sets off, a determined look on his face.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ATHLETICS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo steps out into the intersection.

CASSIE

(rehearsing)

I'm sorry for being tardy Coach  
Hunter...I had to talk to a  
teacher...A teacher had to talk to  
me...A teacher had a heart attack--

Cassie runs directly into Laszlo. The pair fall to the floor.

Cassie rolls onto her feet, immediately reaching a hand up to  
help Laszlo.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I am so sorry, Laszlo. I was  
running late to the basketball  
game, and I wasn't looking--

Cassie's eyes wander down to Laszlo's beanstalk legs.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

--Wait, are you wearing women's  
volleyball shorts?

LASZLO

I think they're actually men's  
basketball shorts from like the  
80s...

Cassie breaks eye contact.

CASSIE  
They're, they're nice! But I wasn't asking about the shorts specifically, I was wondering why you're not in the mascot.

LASZLO  
In the mascot?

A look of revelation crosses Laszlo's face.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Oh, in the mascot, for the basketball game. The game that we're both missing...

CASSIE  
Exactly, wanna go together and come up with an excuse?

LASZLO  
Umm I would, but I need to get the mascot costume on. You know what your mom says about tardiness?

CASSIE  
Yeah, if you're going to be a tardy sardine, she'll can you like a can of tuna?

LASZLO  
Exactly.

Laszlo runs off down the hallway.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Laszlo urgently knocks on the office door as Principal Price twirls the phone cord around his fingers.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
The sausage on the sausage pizza in the cafeteria is made with 95% fresh pork, not "aborted fetus tissue personally harvested by Hilary Rodham Clinton".  
(beat)  
Can I elaborate on the other 5%?  
No, no I cannot.

Price slams the phone down. Laszlo lets himself in.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
Can I get a minute to myself?

LASZLO  
I'll be quick. If your favorite  
Shady Cove Mascot just happened to  
misplace a...fin, where could your  
favorite Shady Cove Mascot look?

Principal Price sighs in frustration.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Did you check the mascot room?

LASZLO  
I'm the mascot, and I had no idea  
we had a mascot room.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
You're telling me you've just been  
getting dressed in the regular  
boys' locker room? That's a death  
wish if I've ever seen one.

Principal Price pulls a key off his massive key ring, tossing  
it to Laszlo who just barely catches it before running off.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - DAY

Laszlo shoves the rusted mascot room door open. He paws in  
the inky darkness of the room, displacing cobwebs to yanks a  
chain and turn on one, ancient lightbulb.

The lightbulb cast insufficient light, shadows clinging to  
the corner of the room.

Laszlo ventures inside, instantly sneezing as he kicks up  
decades worth of dust. He walks over to a nearby locker, a  
lock holding it shut.

But Laszlo is desperate, grabbing for a heavy hammer as he  
discovers the mascot room also serves as a makeshift  
maintenance closet. Because of course it does.

Laszlo swings the hammer, missing the lock, but managing to  
smack his elbow against the rusted contraption. He cries out,  
but the lock pops open, falling heavy on his foot.

LASZLO  
At least no one saw that.

Laszlo throws open the locker, but his face instantly drops as his eyes fall on a photo taped to the inside of the locker with a roll of smiley face duct tape: his mother, just a teenager, holding the Shady Cove Mascot head in her arms.

[Note: we should recognize this girl as the one crowned at Tara's prom]

But the mascot is no mackerel, but rather, a *Creature From The Black Lagoon*-esque fish monster.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
What the hell, Mom? You weren't  
just the mascot, you were a  
freaking fish monster mascot too.

Laszlo turns, nearly jumping out of his skin as he spots a hulking massive shape concealed beneath a stained sheet.

Laszlo pulls the cover away, revealing the mildew-stained fishman mascot suit. It's eyes are bulbous, teeth crooked and contorted into a cartoony grin.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Time for Shady Cove to get back to  
its roots.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The gymnasium is full to the brim, as Shady Cove Alumni and Students alike glare at their rival team's parents and students in red across the gymnasium.

Dads and their sons make up the competing basketball teams, all wearing shorts much too short for the decade.

O'Connell rallies his team, consisting of some freakishly muscular gym dads, the high school basketball team, and the lanky Rodney Mayberry. Rodney is out of place, much like his son on the day-to-day, despite being a former prom king.

O'CONNELL  
Huddle up, you pussies!

The men circle him. The 4th quarter buzzer just seconds away as the rival team are up two. One three pointer and it's Shady Cove's for the win.

RODNEY  
(under his breath)  
I thought Laszlo was  
overexaggerating about this guy.

O'CONNELL

This isn't just a basketball game.  
It's about honor. It's about  
punching the enemy in the throat  
and then shitting in their mouths.  
Are we going to roll over and just  
let them stomp on us during our  
centennial?

The men shake their heads and crack their knuckles.

RODNEY

Is it really that serious?

O'CONNELL

If their bones aren't sticking out  
of their shins, we haven't done our  
job.

O'Connell throws his hand into the air as the huddle breaks.

The referee blows his whistle, the basketball tossed  
backwards into the air.

Rodney catches the ball, his teammates running forward  
towards the three-point line. O'Connell jumps in the air,  
throwing his hip towards a rival player and causing the boy  
to go sprawling to the ground.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Over here, Old Man Mayberry!

RODNEY

Old man?

Rodney lobs the basketball granny-style from between his  
legs. The ball bounces between the rival team's limbs.

O'Connell runs towards the ball, the rival point guard  
rushing him. O'Connell pulls back his teeth, snarling at the  
other boy who instantly turns chicken, falling onto his butt  
as O'Connell snatches the ball.

O'Connell rushes towards the three point line, readies  
himself for a throw. The crowd begins to roar.

But then a snare drum rumbles. The sound of the school theme  
plays as their attention is pulled away from O'Connell to  
Laszlo bursting through a banner.

Except no one is looking at O'Connell, they're looking at  
Laszlo bursting through a banner in the fishman suit.

O'Connell's eyes are yanked from the basket to Laszlo's absurdity. The ball sails from his fingers as the crowd returns their attention to the game.

All eyes are on O'Connell as he misses the shot. The rival team starts to scream in joy as the buzzer calls the game for the other team.

O'Connell lets out a guttural cry, falling to his knees. Cassie rushes to help him up, but he swats her away.

O'CONNELL

I don't want your fucking pity,  
Cassie.

CASSIE

This game doesn't even count.

But Cassie is overshadowed as her mother rushes towards the announcer station, grabbing for the microphone.

TARA

Stop this tomfoolery! Enough with  
this Satanic imagery, gills and  
fins, my god. The Shady Cove mascot  
is a mackerel, not this  
mermonstrosity.

Tara practically screeches into the microphone. Her Karen-  
esque shrill piercing the eardrums of the crowd.

The audience laugh, their ridicule directed towards the  
cheerleading coach.

TARA (CONT'D)

Are you going to tolerate this  
absurdity? This is a perversion, a  
mockery of everything that is right-

-

But Tara's microphone cuts out, a spotlight shining down on  
Rayne. Fatima hijacks the spotlight.

Rayne holds a cordless mic.

RAYNE

Friends and family, Coach Hunter is  
a terror. A cruel manipulator and  
instigator, she seeks to antagonize  
kids who are different...  
She looks at kids like me or Laszlo  
or hell, maybe in your son,  
daughter, or gender non-conforming  
offspring.

(MORE)

RAYNE (CONT'D)

And she decides the best way to deal with someone who already feels like a fish out of water is to toss them on the hot grill of her hatred.

Tara rushes towards Rayne, swiping the microphone from his hand with ease.

TARA

Don't listen to the homosexual!

Tara and Rayne glare at each other, but the crowd is rumbling about something else.

CROWD

(whispered)

Laszlo Mayberry. Laszlo Mayberry.

O'Connell picks up on the frequency, rushing for the microphone, pushing past Tara to press his mouth against it.

O'CONNELL

Did you hear that everyone, straight from the gayest gay of them all, Laszlo Mayberry's a faggot.

Everyone begins to laugh.

RODNEY

Laszlo, don't listen to him--

But Laszlo is turning on his heel, dodging tossed milkshakes as the crowd jeers. Rayne realizes his blunder, trying to run after Laszlo as he rushes out of the gym.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo peels off the mascot suit, his fishy form pushing its way to the surface as he cries. Laszlo looks at himself in the mirror, a mess of tears and scales.

He takes a deep breath, stares at his mother's picture, and as he calms, he begins to look more like a boy again. Regardless, he pulls his hoodie tight around his face to conceal any leftover scales.

I/E RODNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Laszlo sits in his father's car.



Rodney gets in, sitting down with an audible HUFF.

RODNEY

I talked to Principal Price. He said that they can make an announcement over the intercom that you're not a --

LASZLO

--Absolutely not!

RODNEY

I assumed. Look, I'm sorry, Lasz.

LASZLO

It's fine I don't want to talk about it.

Laszlo turns on the radio. Rodney nods, drives the car.

But the longer the silence persists, the more uncomfortable Rodney seems to be with his brooding son. He reaches to slightly turn down the radio.

RODNEY

You know that I had a bully in high school, right?

LASZLO

You were on the basketball team though, you were Prom King for fuck's sake.

RODNEY

His name was Dick Gravy, and it didn't matter who you were, he was a big and an asshole.

Laszlo snorts.

LASZLO

His name was Dick Gravy, and you were the one getting bullied?

Rodney is deadpanned.

RODNEY

People like Dick Gravy or O'Connell or whoever, they don't tend to go out into the world and go places with the heart in their hearts.

(beat)

(MORE)

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Well, unless they become an alt-right fascist or a Congresswoman from Georgia, but the point is, people like you, people who regardless of their race or class or their sexuality lead their lives doing what's right and fair, they make it.

Laszlo winces.

LASZLO

I get it. High school sucks ass.

RODNEY

And you know that I'm your Dad, and I don't care if you're gay or straight or like God help us, one of those furries. But I'll always love you, Laszlo, and do my best to stay educated and supportive.

LASZLO

That's enough, Dad. I just want to sit in silence and listen to the top 40 hits, hating myself. Let's just go home.

Rodney grimaces, as he makes a sharp turn to turn into a drive-thru.

RODNEY

I thought we could get something to eat. I hope that won't be the thing that makes you bite my head off.

Rodney rolls down the window. A goofy jingle plays as a voice speaks from the intercom.

INTERCOM VOICE

Welcome to Milkshake Mike's! How can I make your day wet and creamy?

Laszlo groans.

LASZLO

Not milkshakes.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Students clutter around their lockers, many rocking SHADY COVE FISHMAN tee-shirts. Fatima discretely offloads stacks of shirts from her locker as Rayne approaches.

RAYNE

Weren't you just selling those in the cafeteria yesterday, you've already gone black market?

FATIMA

Principal Price felt iffy on a student running a thriving business on school grounds...and well, if the markets restricted, black market sales are a pretty penny.

A jock palms Fatima \$40, she tosses him a massive shirt.

RAYNE

I know that your business has gone underground so you're probably not regulated by labor laws, but how about a five minute break?

FATIMA

If you think I'm going to talk to Laszlo for you, you're mistaken.

RAYNE

I feel so bad though!

Rayne presses a hundred dollar bill into Fatima's hand.

FATIMA

A hundred bucks? With just this morning's sales, I've put a down payment on a small to medium size studio apartment above a Chinese restaurant in New York City.

RAYNE

Look, I'm not the most eloquent speaker. My parents aren't putting me in Presidential Public Speaking for Pre-K like the rest of my cousins. Cough, the Kennedy's, cough! My phrasing resulted in an unfortunate misunderstanding of Laszlo's sexuality.

Fatima pockets the hundred dollars.

FATIMA

I'm not talking to him.

RAYNE

Fine, fine, just give me a bit of a heads' up where I can find him.

Fatima sighs.

FATIMA

Fine, but if he's not there, the price for a tip is double.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY

A group of fedora'd, waifu bodypillow-toting Anime Incels watch as Laszlo finishes up an elaborate powerpoint.

LASZLO

If my thirty point argument against voting for O'Connell Moore as Prom King didn't sway you, let me speak from my heart: do you really want that asshole to have another feather in his cap?

The incels whisper to each other and their anime girlfriend body pillows.

ANIME INCEL LEADER

We don't care about the Prom King.

LASZLO

But O'Connell does.

ANIME INCEL LEADER

We don't care about the Prom King, cause we're more interested that if we exert our influence over this election that you'll instruct your queen to plant a kiss on our lips.

LASZLO

I'm not going to promise that...

The anime incel leader throws a plastic throwing star at Laszlo, which he hastily dodges.

ANIME INCEL LEADER

Then we shall walk from this here negotiation.

The door bursts open as Rayne interrupts.

RAYNE

Laszlo, I've been looking everywhere for you.

LASZLO

As I can see, I am following through with your campaign plan.

RAYNE

The anime incels are such a minority that they couldn't sway the vote if them and their waifu girlfriends got votes.

LASZLO

That's what Hilary Clinton thought about Wisconsin and Michigan.

RAYNE

Can I just talk to you?

Laszlo clicks the next tab on his Powerpoint, revealing an already prepared FAQ section.

LASZLO

As you can see, I've already addressed several kissing related questions.

ANIME INCEL LEADER

We won't budge without kissing.

Rayne steps in, pulling out a printed certificate and official campaign stamp. He scribbles something.

RAYNE

This document entitles you to a 9 by 14 photograph of our crowned queen and our king, redeemable only in the case that you should vote Laszlo into winning. Oh, and it's laminated!

(to Laszlo)

Laszlo, can I please talk to you?

The anime incels slobber, snapping and biting at each other like tussling puppies over the contract.

LASZLO

Fine, but it'll have to be somewhere where no one can hear your big mouth.

Laszlo pulls Rayne by the arm into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo turns on the light, shoves Rayne into the room.

RAYNE

There's no way this has been here  
this whole time.

LASZLO

I found the fish monster costume in  
here. It was my mom's I guess.

RAYNE

Why do you think they changed it?

LASZLO

Isn't it obvious? There are or were  
things like me in Shady Cove.

RAYNE

It's a good thing to remember that  
you aren't the only one anything in  
the world.

Laszlo nods as he looks at his mother's photo

LASZLO

What if the person like you isn't  
around anymore?

Rayne looks at the photo, then looks to the similarities in  
Laszlo's face. It becoming clear to him: mother departed and  
her son left behind.

RAYNE

I'm sorry for what happened.

LASZLO

It's fine, it's not like you outed  
me. You just outed me as something  
I'm not, just for the record.

RAYNE

I meant I'm sorry about your Mom,  
Laszlo.

LASZLO

Oh...it was a long time ago.

The pair go quiet.

RAYNE

I'm sorry for outing you too. I know what it's like to be called names. When I was younger, I always worried that just calling me those names would make them true. And maybe they did, considering I'm queer as fuck.

LASZLO

I was wearing a mask, yet I still felt as if they were all staring at me. Not the mascot, but me.

RAYNE

You know if you ever want to talk to me about your feelings? I'm a pretty good listener.

LASZLO

And a loud talker.

RAYNE

Shut up!

The pair laugh.

LASZLO

When did you know that you were different?

RAYNE

I don't really know. I know things about my queerness now that make it so I can see clues scattered about my childhood.

LASZLO

But when were you sure?

RAYNE

I don't know if I've ever been sure. But eventually, I couldn't worry if there was water below me when I jumped off the dock. I just had to hold my breath and hope that it was okay. And for the most part, it's been the best decision.

Laszlo looks at himself in the mirror, a few scales retreating back into his skin as he listens to Rayne talk.

LASZLO

I need to go to class, but you, me,  
and Fatima should meet here later  
at final bell.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - DAY

Laszlo flips the whiteboard over. One giant question drawn  
out: HOW DO WE STOP LASZLO FROM SPROUTING GILLS?

LASZLO

The plan goes up in flames if I go  
full fishface at the wrong time, we  
need to learn how it works and how  
to suppress it.

FATIMA

Alternatively, how to make  
selective appearances as the Shady  
Cove Fishman.

LASZLO

Are you going to pimp me out for  
meet & greets, Fatima?

RAYNE

Sex work is the oldest profession.  
You ever seen *The Shape of Water*?

Rayne cups his hands, parting them open to push his thumbs  
out, illustrating just how exactly a fish monster can screw.

Laszlo's glare moves between his friends.

LASZLO

No one is getting a Sally Hawkins,  
*Shape of Water* boning.

FATIMA

Like you'd be the one doing the  
boning.

Laszlo's cheeks redden, scales starting to push their way to  
the surface.

LASZLO

Can you take this seriously please?

FATIMA

I was just testing a hypothesis.

Rayne unscrews the lid of his water bottle, tossing the  
entire contents at Laszlo.



LASZLO  
Are you kidding me?

Laszlo's condition is unchanged, except definitely more annoyed and wet.

RAYNE  
I thought water would bring out the fish in you.

Laszlo sniffs his shirt.

LASZLO  
This isn't water, it's pink lemonade.

RAYNE  
There's water in Kool-Aid.

FATIMA  
He's right about that. But think about, what was happening every time you freaked out?

LASZLO  
O'Connell was being a dick.

Rayne's eyebrows launch up, 2+2 finally equaling 4.

RAYNE  
O'Connell was being a homophobic, sexist, predatory dick.

FATIMA  
Exactly!

Laszlo pinches the bridge of his nose.

LASZLO  
I guess that it all coincided with his classic low blows. The Prom nomination, the locker room...but how the hell do we test out that hypothesis?

RAYNE  
I have an idea.  
(pre-lap)  
FAGGOT!

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - POOL - NIGHT

Cassie and Rayne stand on either side of the speedo-clad Laszlo. Rayne screams at the top of his lungs into Laszlo's ear. As his voice croaks, Fatima draws in a breath.

FATIMA

FAGGOT!

RAYNE

FAGGOT!

FATIMA & RAYNE

FAGGOT. FAGGOT. FAGGOT. FAGGOT!

The sound becomes percussive, ever echoing in the half-filled indoor pool. Laszlo grits his teeth, falls to his knees. A thin, translucent second set of eyelids close over his eyes.

Fatima & Rayne have been replaced by O'Connell and his jocks, Cassie whispering it under her breath, Tara Hunter yelling it into a microphone. Even Laszlo's father throws the slur.

Laszlo's skin grows too tight, splitting at the seams with a wet squelch as fins and scales tear their way free. Gills burst from his neck, webbing expanding between his toes.

Laszlo dives in head first into the pool. He swims for a second before coming up for air.

LASZLO (AS CREATURE)

We need answers about my  
conditions.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - NIGHT

Fatima projects an elaborate map of monster sightings on the wall of the janitorial closet.

FATIMA

As you can see by this immaculately  
prepared map documenting monster  
sightings over the last 20 years,  
The sightings are more common the  
further you move into the swamp.

Fatima clicks onto the next page. Several sightings being highlighted in pairs, an arrow drawn between them.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

These are recent sightings where  
there are overlap in details.

LASZLO  
They're going somewhere.

RAYNE  
Why does that part of town look familiar?

LASZLO  
Maybe it's an underground system of interconnected, nefarious caves.

FATIMA  
Or a secret swamp compound.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS AND KARAOKE - NIGHT

A dilapidated dive bar sits on the edge of the swamp, the crumbling terrace woven with broken spring lights. A rainbow sign flashes: ALL WELCOME.

LASZLO  
This feels like a bad location for a gay bar.

RAYNE  
If you don't want to be seen, it serves its purpose.

FATIMA  
Nobody is stumbling upon this place unless they're looking for it.

Laszlo eyes the entrance, a gay couple disappearing into the bar wearing fashionable, oversized overcoats.

LASZLO  
How are we supposed to get in?

RAYNE  
I can pass for twenty-one.

LASZLO  
You barely have a goatee.

FATIMA  
At least he can grow facial hair.

Rayne shakes his head, loops his arm around Laszlo's.

RAYNE

A good sob story will get you far  
in the queer community, Laszlo.  
Trust me. Act mentally ill and  
closeted...

LASZLO

I don't know how.

RAYNE

Just be yourself!

FATIMA

What's my cover story?

RAYNE

You stand guard?

FATIMA

No way!

RAYNE

Then sell tee-shirts out of the  
trunk of your car. If they kick us  
out, we lose our one opportunity to  
see what's going on here.

Rayne drags Laszlo towards the entrance as Fatima groans.

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KARAOKE - NIGHT

Rayne whispers something into the bouncer's ear, motioning to  
Laszlo as he talks.

BOUNCER

Oh my god, that's so sad.

The bouncer waves them both into the bar.

LASZLO

What did you say to him?

RAYNE

Mostly just the truth.

LASZLO

Ouch.

RAYNE

Let's get you a Shirley Temple to  
make it all better.

Rayne walks up to the bar.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
Two Shirley Temples--

Laszlo pushes in front of Rayne.

LASZLO  
Make that whiskey...on ice.

Rayne rolls his eyes as the bartender pours two whiskeys, pushing them across the bar. Laszlo tosses a few bills.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
What are we looking for?

RAYNE  
You spend so much time with your head down, you don't ever look up to see what's happening around you.

Rayne nods towards a gay couple walking onto the dance floor. One of the men blushes as the other grabs his hand, brushes his long hair aside to reveal a pointed ear.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
Things aren't what they seem.

Laszlo tries to sip his drink, but Rayne tilts it back for him, a double of whiskey slamming into the back of his throat. Laszlo coughs, blinking away tears.

LASZLO  
Actually, can I get a Shirley Temple?

Rayne yanks Laszlo towards the dance floor.

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - SAME

Fatima loudly sighs as a whole lot of nothing happens.

FATIMA  
From an up-and-coming journalist to a watch dog...

But then a pink jeeps pull into their lot. Its brake lights shining red as they stop in front of the bar.

SLAM! Tara exits the car wearing an incredibly tailored Kevlar catsuit, hair up in a high ponytail, giving military-industrial complex Barbie.

Cassie exits the other side of the car, still wearing her cheer uniform. She joins Tara at the open trunk.

Cassie picks up a wicked looking axe, but Tara removes it from her hands, instead handing her a simple wooden stake.

TARA  
Basics first.

Fatima dials Laszlo's number, right as Tara slings a crossbow over one shoulder.

FATIMA  
(loud whisper)  
Pick up. Pick up. Pick up!

The last few words are too loud. Fatima dives into the hedge, as Tara turns to inspect the surroundings.

TARA  
Did you hear that?

CASSIE  
Can we just get this over with? I have chemistry homework.

TARA  
Patience, honey. I really want you to savor your extermination.

Tara walks towards the door, goes to pull it open. She screams, inspects a red welt on her hand.

Cassie laughs.

TARA (CONT'D)  
It's not funny! This place is warded against our kind. We need a little more firepower.

Tara pulls out an antique spell book.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Give me a second. My Eldritch is rusty. I lost my Duolingo streak.

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KARAOKE - SAME

Laszlo and Rayne dance in the crowd. Laszlo is visibly uncomfortable, completely off-beat.

A horned announcer taps a microphone.

ANNOUNCER

Girls, gays, and non-binary  
entities, give a big ol Fruits'  
welcome to Miss E. Nigma.

A hairy centaur in drag appears on stage, lipsyncing to the  
track that plays. Laszlo and Rayne stare up in wonder.

LASZLO

I think I have an idea for the  
talent portion of the pageant.

Laszlo and Rayne dance.

The bright lights blur with the dancing bodies. He sees the  
crowd in pieces:

-a masculine jaw...Laszlo's fingers running across his own.

-The swing of a woman's hips. She turns to face Laszlo,  
revealing a massive beard growing from her chin. Her features  
appear exaggerated, amplified by the drag makeup. She smiles  
at Laszlo, her tongue flicking out: thin like a snake.

-Laszlo blinks, overwhelmed by a bombardment of images: heels  
and harnesses, breasts and bulges. His breathing becomes  
quick and ragged, until the gills sprout from neck.

RAYNE

Laszlo, are you okay?

-Laszlo falls on his ass. The crowd gasps, parts. A dozen  
different queer monsters stare down at him.

EXT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - NIGHT

Tara sits cross-legged before the bar's door. She speaks in  
tongues, the spell-book levitating up from her lap. Green  
fire burn up the door's hinges.

INT. FRUITS' COCKTAILS & KAROAKE - SAME

Laszlo, his shorts just barely staying intact now that he's  
fully transformed into his fish form, sits at the bar,  
nursing a Shirley Temple that is like 90% cherries.

Rayne sits on a stool beside him.

RAYNE

You seemed to be enjoying yourself  
this time, and yet, it still  
happened.

LASZLO  
Maybe this is who I am.

RAYNE  
What do you think made you  
transform?

Laszlo points to his drink.

LASZLO  
Can I get some vodka in that?

The bartender pours with a heavy hand. Laszlo takes a sip,  
sticks out his tongue in disgust.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
There's something about these  
people...about the way that they  
aren't afraid to be freakish, to  
blur the line between man and  
monster, between man and woman...  
(beat)  
...it feels...

RAYNE  
...it feels right.

Laszlo throws his drink back, coughs at the burn of it.

LASZLO  
When did the girl you were as a  
child die, Rayne?

RAYNE  
She was never alive. She was a mask  
I wore over who I've always been. I  
shed her like snakeskin, she  
crumbled to bits in the wind.

Rayne reaches out to touch Laszlo's face.

RAYNE (CONT'D)  
Just cause you're a fish, doesn't  
mean you're not the boy we know and  
love.

LASZLO  
What if I'm not a boy?

A red light turns on over the bar. The music cuts off. The  
entire bar goes into a panic. The bar patrons pull back a  
curtain, revealing a secret room.

BANG!



RAYNE

What was--

--The bouncer flies through the air, smacking against the wall behind the bar. Glass and liquor shower the pair as Tara enters the bar.

TARA

I've come here to kick ass and take names...and this jumpsuit has no pockets to keep my pen.

Tara fires her crossbow. Rayne throws himself out of the way, the bolt sinking into the bouncer's chest as he stands. He yanks the bolt from his neck, undergoing a transformation into a bull-headed minotaur.

BOUNCER

You kids need to get out of here.

Laszlo and Rayne scramble across the dance floor.

The bouncer charges at Tara. She barely avoids his horns, taking the full force of his massive head.

Cassie looks between her mom and the fleeing monsters.

TARA

Don't let them get away!

Tara pulls out her axe. She spins, cleaves through the fleeing minotaur's neck. Laszlo and Rayne scream as the discarded head rolls across their path, but there's no time to stop. Cassie is upon them with her stake raised.

RAYNE

Behind you!

Laszlo spins to see Cassie with the stake raised. He swipes at her hand, digging his claws into the palm of her hand. She cries out, drops the stake.

Laszlo and Rayne run into an alcove, an open sewer grate at the base of the floor. Two of the bar patrons begin to roll down a heavy metal shutter.

TARA

(screaming)

Stop them, Cassie!

Cassie runs towards the descending shutter, grabbing it with both hands and holding it open. But then she locks eyes with Laszlo, even in fish form, she seems to recognize him.

CASSIE

Laszlo?

Cassie lets go of the shutter, allowing it to slam shut. Tara rushes to Cassie's side, tries to pry the shutter up but she can't. She stands up, glares at Tara.

TARA

You let those freaks get away.

Tara picks up the minotaur's severed head.

TARA (CONT'D)

I'll mount this above the fireplace.

CASSIE

Why would you do this?

TARA

Their existence is a stain upon this green earth.

CASSIE

They're people!

Tara slaps Cassie hard, grabs her by the hair. Cassie cries out as Tara tightens her hold, the sound of her blonde hair ripping beneath her mother's grasp.

TARA

I thought I raised you better.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BIOLOGY LAB - DAY

Laszlo and Cassie sit at their lab bench, a cow heart dripping blood and preservative fluids disassembled in front of them. They take turns pinning anatomical pins with labeled flags into the meat.

Cassie grabs a pin.

CASSIE

I think that one there is the pulmonary artery.

Laszlo shakes his head, removing the flag and replacing it.

LASZLO

That's the superior vena cava... were you too busy last night to review the diagram? Maybe you went to the club.

CASSIE

Ummm...

LASZLO

You know if you had something you  
wanted to tell me...

Cassie grabs for another pin, her gaze bouncing between veins  
and arteries, clumps of fat, and swollen ventricles.

A knock at the door interrupts her, a courier rushing in with  
a note for the teacher.

TEACHER

Cassie, you are being called to the  
gymnastics gym.

Cassie nods, begins to walk out of the room.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

It also says that you should bring  
your things.

CASSE

Ummm, okay.

Cassie leaves, her backpack slung over one shoulder, a  
massive biology textbook clasped to her chest.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASTICS GYM - DAY

Cassie walks into the pitch black gymnastics gym. Various  
bars and gymnastic equipment is scattered throughout the gym.

CASSIE

Hello?

Cassie steps out into the darkness. The sound of hands  
slipping off chalk-powdered bars. The air whooshes as Tara  
performs an aerial kick aimed at Cassie's head.

Cassie wheels around, swinging her textbook just in time to  
deflect her mother's flying kick.

But even catching the blow, Cassie is thrown back, the  
strength of Tara's attack undeniable.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

What the hell, Mom?

Tara lands on the ground, rolling into a front-hand spring,  
her legs helicoptering around her as Cassie dives to the  
other side of a balance beam.

TARA

Don't you see what's happening,  
Cassie? First came a fish man. Next  
came your peers cheering for a  
cartoony effigy of that very beast.  
Hell is coming to Shady Cove.

Cassie swings her textbook at her mother as she flips over  
the balance beam, throwing several chops at Cassie's neck.

CASSIE

That doesn't explain why you're  
trying to knock my head off.

TARA

Cataclysm comes unexpectedly. And  
if you aren't ready, you'll die  
like the rest of them after you've  
failed to save them.

Tara kicks hard, Cassie's textbook exploding as the spine  
splits. Cassie blocks punches, dualing with her mother, but  
barely weather the onslaught.

TARA (CONT'D)

You're weak.

Tara uppercuts, sending Cassie flying. She roundhouse kicks  
Cassie's ribs, sending her skipping across the mats like a  
stone skipping across a pond.

TARA (CONT'D)

You ignore what's right in front of  
you.

Tara throws her full might into kicking her daughter's ribs,  
grabbing Cassie by the hair, leaning in close to whisper in  
her daughter's ear as she spits blood.

TARA (CONT'D)

Let this be a lesson. You aren't  
ready to stop an apocalypse. Oh,  
and dye those roots.

Tara walks away, leaving Cassie to collect herself.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - DAY

Laszlo paces as Fatima and Rayne enter.

LASZLO

I said meet at the bell.

FATIMA

If I abandon lunchtime sales, my profits evaporate. And may I remind you that it is I who am funding this war scheme.

LASZLO

You wouldn't be selling shit if I wasn't going full *Shape of Water* freakshow every fifteen minutes.

(to Rayne)

And what's your excuse?

RAYNE

I had to get a burrito!

Laszlo groans.

FATIMA

This place is going to smell like beef and beans for ages.

RAYNE

It's actually tofu and garbanzo beans.

FATIMA

That's even worse!

Laszlo claps his hands at his friends.

LASZLO

Focus! We're on a schedule. So far, all we've hurt is O'Connell's pride. And chipping away at his ego is going to take more than losing a friends and family game.

FATIMA

If O'Connell didn't have Cassie polishing his pecs, he wouldn't know what to do with himself.

RAYNE

But they're in love?

LASZLO

Are they?

Laszlo smiles.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Cassie and O'Connell have been dating since the fifth grade.

(MORE)

LASZLO (CONT'D)

History doesn't equate a healthy relationship. If we can stow some doubt in their relationship, that might be the wedge we need to leave O'Connell rolling to Prom stag.

RAYNE

But how?

LASZLO

Using the very thing they think they have: love.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - PARKING LOT - DAY

Fatima sells poster board signs, glitter paint, and assorted flowers to high school students.

CUE MONTAGE:

-We watch as a dozen promposals occur, passionate displays for young, in-love hearts.

-Cassie watches as boyfriends get on one knee, proclaiming their love and promising the perfect prom.

-Cassie reaches for her boyfriend's hands. But O'Connell swipes flowers from a boy's hand, chewing them up, and spitting the petals at the boy's date.

She looks with jealousy as other girls have their romantic dreams fulfilled by watching their high school boyfriends on one knee.

-O'Connell pushes Cassie aside to delivery a blow of kicks to an elaborate promposal tiered cake as the couple and Cassie watch in horror.

LASZLO (V.O.)

Cassie can only last so long before she starts to wonder.

Cassie pushes her way in front of O'Connell's gaze.

CASSIE

Are we going to Prom?

O'CONNELL

Why wouldn't we?

CASSIE

So you just assume that I've blocked off the date, blocked off your name in hearts to remind me that there is nothing except you for me.

O'CONNELL

You're coming across as a little needy, Cass!

Cassie balls her fists.

CASSIE

You're taking me for granted!

O'CONNELL

What do you want? A flashmob? A small child setting themselves on fire to prove my love for you?

CASSIE

I want you to hold my hand.

O'CONNELL

You have swamp hands, Cassie.

Cassie grinds her teeth.

CASSIE

You're a dickhead.

O'CONNELL

Well, my mom says I shouldn't settle for anyone that can't tolerate me at my worst.

CASSIE

You're always at your worst.

Cassie stomps out as O'Connell shrugs.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - BIOLOGY LAB - DAY

Cassie walks into biology lab to sit beside Laszlo. She falls into her seat, trying her hardest to make it seem like she's not crying.

LASZLO

You doing okay, Cassie?

Cassie sniffles.

CASSIE  
Yeah, I just...had a really hard Spanish test.

LASZLO  
I thought you were excused from taking Spanish. I very clearly remember your mother yelling off Principal Price's ear that quote-unquote we live in America.

Cassie locks eyes with Laszlo.

CASSIE  
You caught me in a lie.

Cassie starts to cry, which instantly overwhelms Laszlo.

LASZLO  
Don't cry, Cassie. If you want to talk about it--

CASSIE  
--It's O'Connell. He's supposed to be my soulmate, but he's...he's a--

--SPLAT! Mr. Rodriguez drops a fetal pig on a surgical tray on the table, spraying them with formaldehyde.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
HE'S A PIG!

CUT TO:

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - MASCOT ROOM - DAY

Laszlo crosses out PERFECT RELATIONSHIP from his line items.

EXT. THE HUNTER HOUSE - LAWN - DAY

O'Connell's jeep jumps the curb and fishtailing across Cassie's lawn. He gets out of the car, boombox in hand.

O'CONNELL  
Cassie, I'm not leaving until you come downstairs.

O'Connell presses play on the boombox. Some shitty love song, probably something by Maroon 5, plays.

Cassie looks down at O'Connell. An irritated scowl on her face as she reaches for the curtains to pull them shut.



O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Come down, Cassie!

Cassie flips O'Connell off, yanks the curtains shut. O'Connell places the boombox on the hood of his car. He picks up a stone from a nearby planter.

But O'Connell has too much of an arm to be gently tapping pebbles off the window. Glass sprinkles down on the lawn as the stone explodes through the pane of glass.

Cassie yanks back the curtain.

CASSIE  
What the fuck, O'Connell?

O'CONNELL  
What the fuck me? What the fuck, you? You're the one throwing away seven years of our relationship.

Cassie balls her fists at her side.

CASSIE  
I'm always the one doing everything in this relationship. I chose your classes, fill your Google Calendar, and I'm even writing your goddamn college application essays. I want a boyfriend who's romantic and kind. You want someone who is basically your mom too.

O'Connell groans, smashes his palms against his eyes as if to force tears to the surface in a sort of manly temper tantrum.

O'CONNELL  
I love my mom. I love you too.

Cassie disappears inside her bedroom, returns with the rock in hand. She throws it with deadly precision at O'Connell's feet. He just barely jumps out of the way.

CASSIE  
You're a bully and an asshole, O'Connell.

O'CONNELL  
Now you're just going to pretend like you're a good person? You've stood by my side for years.

CASSIE  
Maybe, I'm not a good person, but  
I'm trying to be.

Cassie yanks the curtains shut once again. O'Connell screams, stomps his feet before getting back into the car.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - ATHLETICS OFFICE - DAY

Harmony runs conditioning for the cheerleaders and mascot. They run circles around the gym in a three-legged race. Laszlo and Cassie strapped together, two fifty pound weights held on a strap between them.

LASZLO  
Isn't this cruel and unusual  
punishment?

CASSIE  
If it builds character, it's in the  
curriculum.

O'Connell stomps in with one of his mindless jocks carrying a massive bouquet of dry, wilting drugstore roses.

O'CONNELL  
Cass, I wanted to let you know that  
I'm listening.

Cassie scowls at O'Connell, then turns back to Laszlo.

O'Connell snaps his fingers, his minion running after Cassie & Laszlo. But Cassie picks up speed, dragging Laszlo along with her. Laszlo's already winded as they pick up pace.

LASZLO  
Can we cool it on the three-legged  
sprint?

CASSIE  
Time to learn how to use those new  
long legs of yours.

Laszlo blushes, looking at his legs sticking long and awkward from his already too short shorts.

O'Connell eyes Laszlo with a hunters' keenness as he sucks on a milkshake. But then he looks at Cassie ignoring him.

O'Connell stops, and for the first time, he thinks.

He lets his beta chase after Cassie, crumpled roses falling from the bouquet as she denies the flowers.

O'Connell walks to the other side of the gymnasium, dropping his milkshake in the trash before entering

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - ATHLETICS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Tara's office is dark, except for a single desk lamp, pointed in such a way to only reveal Tara's manicured fingernails.

TARA (O.S.)

You come to me on the day that everyone will see who is Little Miss Perfect and Miss Macho Man.

O'CONNELL

It's about your daughter, sir.

O'CONNELL & TARA

Ma'am.

O'CONNELL

I was hoping you could talk some sense into your daughter, ma'am. She's lost it, I swear.

Tara leans closer, motioning for O'Connell to sit.

TARA

That we can agree upon.

O'CONNELL

I don't know how to tell you this, ma'am, but I'm afraid if Cassie and I are broken up...well, on her own, she isn't exactly popular.

TARA

All you had to do was make it a few days, win the crowns, then she could dump you like the high school boyfriend you are.

O'CONNELL

I love Cassie. But she wants some like big proposal. Like what does she expect from me? I can't just think up some grandiose gesture.

TARA

You can't, but I already have.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The various competing Mister Macho Man contestants quickly change between numbers, replacing their formal wear for various accompaniments for their talent performance.

Laszlo struggles to unhook his peach-colored cummerbund. Rayne hurries to help him.

RAYNE

It all falls on the talent competition.

LASZLO

The judging panel is lazy. Price, Mr. Rodriguez, and that pregnant secretary. All that matters is that we get the crowd going.

RAYNE

What about Tara?

LASZLO

She had to bow out to keep things impartial.

RAYNE

I mean how do you feel about the routine with her in the audience.

LASZLO

She's not on the panel, what could she do?

RAYNE

She doesn't have to be on the panel to rip your head off.

Laszlo undresses to his boxers and teeshirt. Rayne motions him towards the bathroom, grabbing a roll of duct tape.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

We need to hurry, you're on in three.

LASZLO

What's the tape for?

RAYNE

Do you want to win or not?

Laszlo gulps.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A small set of stairs are laid out on stage, a sparkling curtain separating the backstage from the top of the stairs.

Music plays as a single, tight-wearing leg kicks out from behind the curtain. The boys in the audience hoot-and-holler till Principal Price announces.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Ladies and gentleman, put your  
hands together for the one, the  
only, Laszlo Mayberry.

A piano melody plays as Laszlo steps out in flamboyant, though cheap drag. He performs a lipsynced version of *Wicked's* "Popular", in classic Kristen Chenoweth overperforming. He descends the stairs in dramatic kicking steps to the song's beat.

LASZLO

(lipsyncing)

Whenever I see someone less  
fortunate than I  
(And let's face it, who isn't less  
fortunate than I?)  
My tender heart tends to start to  
bleed  
And when someone needs a makeover  
I simply have to take over  
I know I know exactly what they  
need.

Laszlo breaks into a tap dance, an overwhelming awkwardness persists throughout the routine. But the audience is cheering, applauding at the audacity of the routine.

Tara who is filming the pageant on her own camcorder, stops filming. She balls her fists, but is intercepted by Rayne.

RAYNE

Excuse me, Coach Hunter, we  
wouldn't want you to get hurt by  
the routine.

TARA

Get out of my way.

But as Laszlo reaches the bottom of the stairs, he pivots on his heel, revealing half his body has been costumed and painted to resemble a sparkling fish man.

LASZLO

Popular!  
You're gonna be popular!  
I'll teach you the proper ploys  
When you talk to boys  
Little ways to flirt and flounce  
Oooh! I'll show you what shoes to  
wear  
How to fix your hair  
Everything that really counts to  
be...

He grabs an oversized powder pillow, smacking blush onto his scaly and feminine cheeks.

The crowd goes wild as Laszlo performs the song, truly feeling himself as he brushes his hair, swapping his kitten heels, for a more daring higher heel.

Tara screams hysterically, stomping her feet.

TARA

Stop the music! Stop the music!

Tara grabs the piano player, throwing her violently aside, only to reveal that she was only pantomiming the track which is playing from the overhead speakers.

The crowd laughs as Tara's mascara bleeds down her cheeks.

TARA (CONT'D)

I'll pluck your eyes out! Stop  
looking at me! Stop it now!

Tara runs out of the auditorium, her flip flops slapping against the floor as Laszlo gives one final bow.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Tara throws open the door of the boys' changing room. O'Connell, of course shirtless, jumps, instinctually covering his nipples. When he sees it's Tara, he relaxes, settling into a pose to show off his pecs.

O'CONNELL

Hey there, crazy lady...I was  
expecting your daughter.

The sound of the crowd cheering Laszlo's name can be heard.

TARA

You need to end this now.

O'Connell shrugs, starts to pull on his dress shirt.

O'CONNELL

My last dress shirt wasn't tight enough. That deceptively babe-ilicious secretary is about to be the victim of these guns.

Tara grabs him by the shirt collar.

TARA

You are standing between me and the crown...Cassie and the crown.

O'Connell pushes a strand of hair out of Tara's face.

O'CONNELL

Did anyone ever tell you that you look sexy when you're angry?

Tara slams O'Connell against the dressing room door.

TARA

This isn't the first time a boy your age has wanted this, but it's Cassie who you need to win over.

O'CONNELL

A little kiss on the cheek, and she'll be putty in my hands.

O'Connell blows Tara a kiss as he exits the dressing room.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - AUDITORIUM - DAY

The crowd is high energy after Laszlo's performance. He watches from the wings as Principal Price begins to speak.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Put your hands together for your student body president, O'Connell Moore.

O'Connell is carried out on the shoulders of his underlings. He holds a microphone.

O'CONNELL

Ladies and gentleman, you already know me. I'm athletic, I'm hot, I'm frankly the best guy I know.

A few people cheer.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
But for my talent portion, I wanted  
to show a side of me that you don't  
always get to see: O'Connell Moore  
the lover.

Two of O'Connell's underlings grab his sleeves, yanking them  
off to reveal his already flexed biceps.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Cassie, darling, love of my life,  
care to join me on stage.

A spotlight shines down on Cassie in the crowd, she sits  
there, looking side to side as her friends elbow her.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Come on, babe.

Cassie shakes her head.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Look, I guess I'm sorry...

CASSIE  
For what?

O'CONNELL  
Hopefully this transcends words.

Cassie sighs, stands up as her mother ducks out from behind  
the curtains to glare at her.

Cassie begrudgingly joins O'Connell, standing awkwardly to  
the side as he flexes and motions to a descending screen.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
Cassie, I'm only strong when I have  
you there to spot me. I'm only hot  
when I have you next to me. I'm  
only the best guy around cause  
you're the best girl around.

A video titled CASSIE AND O'CONNELL'S LOVE STORY, plays a  
sentimental supercut of Cassie and O'Connell's seven year  
relationship. Middle school formals and awkward years  
included. A recording of O'Connell reading compliments plays.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)  
(recording)  
Cassie, you are the apple of my  
eye. The light of my life. The  
peanut butter to my jelly.



Cassie rolls her eyes as rose petals rain from the ceiling.

Laszlo ducks out from behind the curtain, motioning towards the sound booth.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - SOUND BOOTH - NIGHT

Two sound technicians lie tied up on the floor. Fatima pulls out a flash drive, jamming it into the sound mixer.

FATIMA

The funny thing about having a big mouth is if you aren't careful, all the nasty things you say end up recorded.

Fatima presses play.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The recording cuts off, interrupted by spliced recordings of O'Connell talking about Cassie.

O'CONNELL

(recording)

Yeah, Cassie is smart, but it's kind of like if a dog gained consciousness...you just want to take her out back and put her out of her misery.

Cassie steps back from O'Connell.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

(recording)

If we were hosting a wet teeshirt contest, let's just say Cassie would get fourth.

O'Connell throws his hands out.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

That isn't me!

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

(recording)

I, O'Connell Bolt-Action Rifle Moore, swear on my life that if I had to choose between my left pec and Cassie, Cassie would be the one falling off the cliff.

Cassie tries to rush for the stage exit.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

(recording)

In the bedroom? Well, I don't like to kiss and tell, but if you want an easy lay, you're better off asking out any other girl in this school. Hell, if I had a choice, I would go for that MILF of my future mother-in-law.

O'Connell catches Cassie by the wrist, falling on his knees. He pulls a ring box from his pocket.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

Cassie, please, won't you marry me?

Cassie punches O'Connell directly in the throat. She swipes the ring from the box, tossing it into the crowd as she wipes tears from her eyes. Cassie runs off stage.

Principal Price rushes to O'Connell as his jocks help him onto his feet.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

Walk it off, walk it off.

The crowd laughs at as Principal Price seizes the mic.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)

I am afraid to announce that the Little Miss Perfect/ Mister Macho Man pageant has been indefinitely postponed.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Laszlo, Rayne, and Fatima join together in a group hug.

RAYNE

You're skyrocketing in the polls. It's not over till it's over, but this might be a runaway race.

FATIMA

That's the first time I've seen O'Connell taste his own medicine.

LASZLO

We did it, guys!

But as the trio jump up and down in celebration, there's a blur of movement on Laszlo's periphery. Tara rushes Laszlo, tugging him away and pinning him to the floor.

Laszlo's friends try to pull her off as Laszlo gasps.

TARA

You think this is some sort of  
game, faggot?

Tara snarls, spit flying from her mouth as she talks.

Tara smacks her fist hard into the ground beside Laszlo's head, the concrete cracking beneath the blow, promising carnage should she try to strike him.

TARA (CONT'D)

Your bitch mother snatched the Prom  
Queen crown right off my head, and  
now, you're trying to keep up the  
family legacy of ruining my life.

LASZLO

I don't know what you're talking  
about.

TARA

Your little stunt at the basketball  
game. Your little half woman, half  
fishfreak routine. You're exactly  
like her!

Tara reaches into her tracksuit, palming a silver crucifix. Laszlo squirms as Tara presses it into his cheek, his skin scorching as it touches his skin, scales sprouting and combusting as she holds it against his body.

Rayne and Fatima run across the cafeteria, collecting the canvas sign that reads PROM, FRIDAY NIGHT!. They catch Tara around the throat with it, clotheslining her as they wrap the banner around her body and yank her off Laszlo.

Laszlo scrambles back, clutching his cheek as Tara froths.

TARA (CONT'D)

You're just like her, a fish  
flopping about on dry land, begging  
to have someone slice your throat.

Laszlo runs.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo runs through the front door, tears falling down his cheeks. His father sits in his armchair, nursing a beer.

LASZLO  
Why didn't you tell me?

Rodney stands up, begins to pace.

RODNEY  
Your mother and I always knew we would have to tell you, but then she died... Laszlo, I wish she was here to tell you the truth about who and what you are.

LASZLO  
Wait, what are you talking about?

RODNEY  
You've grown a foot in a week. You're coming in dripping wet with a dish towel held over your junk. You've gone from taking shit to standing up for yourself. You've changed just like she did.  
(beat)  
Wait, what you were mad about?

LASZLO  
Mom won Prom Queen, that's why Tara Hunter hates me.

RODNEY  
No, Laszlo, she hates cause you're a fish person. Have a seat we have a lot to talk about.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - HALLWAY - NIGHT

SUPER: PROM NIGHT 2004

A female fish monster pushes her way in through an emergency exit. She's still covered in scales as she pulls on her Prom Dress from its hiding place in a nearby locker.

RODNEY (V.O.)  
Your people have been here since the beginning of Shady Cove.  
(MORE)

RODNEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
After the town grew large enough,  
no one noticed when they would  
sneak their human looking children  
into the general populace.

Her skin glows, as she walks down the hall.

RODNEY (V.O.)  
But puberty brought gills and  
scales. The normal life they  
experienced wasn't sustainable as  
they molted their human forms and  
become full-fledged fish people.

But the fish girl's skin glows, Eldritch runes sliding across  
her scales, turning them into smooth skin.

RODNEY (V.O.)  
The leader of your people thought  
that he could cast a spell. One  
intended to hide monsters from  
their human hunters forever. But  
Tara stopped them, and the spell  
only half worked.

A young Rodney looks down the hallway as Laszlo's young  
mother turns to him. He rushes to pick her off the ground,  
kissing her as she begins to look like anyone else.

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Laszlo sits on the couch next to his father.

RODNEY  
She tried to live a normal life.  
But the further she went from Shady  
Cove, the less the spell worked.  
And the older she got, the harder  
it was to hide. If she hadn't died  
in that car accident, I worry  
that...

LASZLO  
...Tara Hunter would have killed  
her.

Laszlo's eyes go wide as he makes a realization.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Wait, what about Stanford?

RODNEY

I was going to tell you after graduation. Maybe we could make a deal with the school that you could do classes virtually.

LASZLO

So what you're saying is because Tara Hunter stopped some magic spell from being completed, I'm stuck in Shady Cove forever.

RODNEY

I'm sorry, Laszlo.

Laszlo stands up, grabs his tux bag from the banister.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

LASZLO

I need to iron my tux.

RODNEY

I didn't think you'd still want to go.

LASZLO

If I don't go, then Tara Hunter wins. I think it's time we gave Tara the prom of her dreams.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - TROPHY HALL - DAY

A sickly green glow fills the trophy hall, casting the prom king and queen crowns in a sinister light. We follow this light into

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - CONTINUOUS

The Huntresses sit in a large circle, their faces hidden in the hoods of robes. Eldritch symbols are drawn between them, Tara's spell book floating in the center of the circle.

Prom decorations are scattered, still half-assembled.

Tara enters, a duffel bag slung over her shoulder. Harmony rises from the bleachers and joins her.

TARA

The prom decorating committee will be here any minute.

HARMONY

The ritual is almost complete.

Green flames crawl from the eldritch symbols, circling the gym's walls in strange markings and bizarre geometries.

TARA

Well good! When our little friend arrives, we'll be prepared.

Tara throws down the duffel bag, unzips it to reveal stakes, axes, and crossbows. A whole arsenal for a single fish "boy".

CUE MONTAGE:

-Cassie finishing dyeing her hair to its natural brown, curling her hair as she begrudgingly grabs her dress.

-Laszlo unzipping a suit bag, his suit a beautiful turquoise color. The only thing you can wear if you're sporting scales.

-Tara in an elegant, form-fitting silver gown. Harmony and the other huntresses helping her attach piece of plate armor and lightweight chainmail to the gown.

-Fatima's mother wiping tears away as she helps Fatima pin her satin hijab in place, the fabric blending beautifully with her cream-colored, beaded dress and its pronounced shoulder pads and sheer layered skirt.

-A well-dressed O'Connell ugly-crying in front of a mirror, sloshing whiskey across his tux as he drinks directly from the bottle.

-Rayne pulling on a tee-shirt printed to appear like a tuxedo. He slicks his hair back with styling mousse, a trans-masc James Dean.

END MONTAGE:

INT. MAYBERRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rodney helps Laszlo with his bowtie, struggling to tie it properly because he's crying.

RODNEY

I wish your mom was here to see you off to Prom.

LASZLO

I wish she was here too...to help me sort this all out.

RODNEY

What is there to sort out?

Laszlo is quiet, inspecting himself in the mirror.

LASZLO

Do you remember when I was little  
and used to try to walk in mom's  
heels while wearing your jacket?

Rodney nods.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

I feel like I'm a kid playing dress  
up still...wearing this suit...it  
feels like a costume.

RODNEY

You're a handsome boy, Laszlo.

LASZLO

I'm not so sure of that anymore.

Laszlo rips his eyes away from his own reflection, no longer  
able to stomach it. Rodney pulls Laszlo into a hug.

RODNEY

You know I'm always going to be  
here for you?

LASZLO

I know, Dad.

The pair lock eyes.

RODNEY

Promise me you'll stay safe.

LASZLO

It's just Prom, Dad.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - DROP-OFF LANE - NIGHT

The drop-off lane of the school parking lot is flooded with  
the artificial glow of string lights strung along trellises.

A red carpet extends from the school's entrance like a  
tongue, ready to draw in the awkward yet elegantly dressed  
students into the glistening maw of Prom.



Minivans mingle with rented limousines as Principal Price and a set of hired valets shepherd the prom attendees into the night. Yearbook members guard the red carpet with flashbulb cameras, ready to capture the hottest looks of the night.

INT. RODNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Rodney stops the car.

Laszlo's breathing is panicked, much too fast. His skin clammy, a green tinge just beneath the sweaty surface.

His father turns back to look at him.

RODNEY

Have fun, Laszlo. I'll see you at the crowning, but till then, it's your night. I'll just sit in the car and listen to my tunes.

Principal Price waves Laszlo out of the car.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - RED CARPET - CONTINUOUS

Laszlo is blinded by the cameras. Fatima appears to his left, her phone clasped in her hand. Video already rolling.

LASZLO

Can't you give the video journalism a break for one night, Fatima?

FATIMA

I want to remember this, Laszlo.

LASZLO

You want to keep it on record.

Rayne quickly catches pace with the pair, his gaze drawn to the slight iridescence of Laszlo's tux.

RAYNE

An unlikely fit for Laszlo  
Mayberry.

Rayne sees Fatima. He's dumbfounded, mesmerized by how she looks. Mouth agape. Fatima catches him staring.

FATIMA

Couldn't even rent a jacket?

Rayne sheepishly looks away.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - CONTINUOUS

The trio enter the gymnasium, which has been decked out in ocean-themed décor. Coral arches and paper fish, a massive papier-mâché whale suspended from the rafters.

Laszlo groans.

LASZLO

Why did no one tell me the theme  
was Under the Sea?

FATIMA

Would it be any more bearable if it  
was any other theme?

RAYNE

Speak for yourself, any other theme  
and there wouldn't be a bowl of  
loose, flavor-blasted goldfish.

Rayne disappears to the snack table, allowing Fatima and Laszlo one last moment before the pomp and circumstance.

LASZLO

Do you think this plan is stupid?

FATIMA

If we can make both Tara and  
O'Connell look like fools in one  
night, we're doing the Lord's work.

That's when O'Connell enters, not even discretely drinking from a flask pressed to his lips. He stumbles forward, snatching a ballot out of a student's hand before checking his and Cassie's name and dropping it in the ballot box.

STUDENT

Hey!

O'CONNELL

High school isn't a democracy,  
dipshit.

Rayne returns with several cups of punch. The DJ taps his microphone, drawing as the dance floor clears.

DJ

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and  
girls, put your hands together for  
the one, the only: Ms. Tara Hunter  
and the Huntresses.

Laszlo swipes a cup of punch from Rayne's hands as Britney Spears' *Toxic* blasts from the speakers.

LASZLO

God, I hope someone spiked this.

Laszlo throws back the drink as Tara and the Huntresses enter a full-on choreographed dance.

The Huntresses highlight the best of 'white ladies losing themselves in the music' culture, arhythmic hip-swinging and macarena arms highlighting the only one who matters: Tara.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYM - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME

Cassie enters through a back door, obviously embarrassed by her outdated prom dress. But then she sees her mother, busting a move, and her face goes a livid red.

Cassie walks towards the crowd, eyes trained on the ground to avoid dying from second-hand embarrassment. O'Connell suddenly appears from the crowd, grabbing her by the arm.

O'CONNELL

Why aren't you answering my calls?

CASSIE

We broke up, I blocked your number.

O'Connell goes red in the face.

O'CONNELL

You can't just break up with me.  
We're soulmates.

Cassie tries to pull her hand out of O'Connell's grasp.

CASSIE

Let go or I'll embarrass you again.

O'CONNELL

What the fuck happened, Cass?

CASSIE

I realized that history doesn't  
mean I love you.

O'Connell's grip tightens, leaning in to hiss his response.

O'CONNELL

You're making a mistake.

Laszlo pushes his way from the crowd, grabs O'Connell by the scruff of his neck, sending the drunk boy sprawling to the floor. O'Connell looks up in shock as those nearby begin to laugh. His eyes go wide seeing that Mayberry bested him.

LASZLO

Before you come up swinging, may I remind you that you still have a chance of being crowned Prom King?

O'CONNELL

I see what's going on, Cassie. Tossing me for a new piece of meat.

LASZLO

We're friends, asshole.

Cassie wraps an arm around Laszlo.

CASSIE

Really good friends.

Cassie pulls Laszlo off into the crowd.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - PUNCH BOWL

Cassie stops Laszlo beside the punch bowl.

LASZLO & CASSIE

I need to talk to you.

LASZLO

You first.

Cassie reaches a hand out to touch the side of Laszlo's face. He looks away, but she leads his chin so that she can stare him in the eyes. She nods, confirming her suspicions.

CASSIE

I knew it was you. I recognized your eyes even past the scales.

LASZLO

Cassie, I don't know what you're talking about--

CASSIE

--I don't want to be my mom. I won't be cruel when I can be kind.

Laszlo moves Cassie's hand from his face, a flickering shimmer of scales as he wills them to appear and disappear.

LASZLO  
How would you feel about not being  
Prom Queen?

CASSIE  
That's all I've ever wanted.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - BALLOT BOX - SAME

Rayne, toting a massive bowl of flavor blasted goldfish,  
snacks as he and Fatima stuff the ballot box.

The crowd is still distracted by Tara's absurdly long,  
extended dance sequence. But Principal Price climbs on the  
stage, pushing the DJ aside.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
How about a song that everyone can  
enjoy?

Principal Price presses a button, and to everyone's surprise,  
the old principal has pretty good taste, playing Carly Rae  
Jepsen's *Call Me Maybe*. Fatima squeals.

FATIMA  
Oh my god, I love this song.

Rayne shoves a handful of goldfish in his mouth.

FATIMA (CONT'D)  
I said, I love this song.

Rayne continues to snack. Fatima smacks the bowl of goldfish  
out of his hand, pulling him onto

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Rayne and Fatima dance to the song, neither of them having so  
much as a single dance move to share between the two of them.

RAYNE  
You know I was thinking that maybe  
we should consider our friendship  
outside of Laszlo...

Fatima's face goes red.

FATIMA  
I actually was thinking the same  
thing. How would you feel about  
being my cameraman?

RAYNE  
Your cameraman?

FATIMA  
A world-famous video journalist is  
only as good as her cameraman.

Rayne nods.

RAYNE  
I would love to be your cameraman.

Principal Price taps on the microphone.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Ladies and gentlemen, now it's time  
for the main event: the crowning of  
our Prom Queen and King. Can I have  
our candidates come to the stage?

Rayne and Fatima watch as the Prom candidates are shepherded  
towards the stage with the other candidates.

FATIMA  
It's time to Carrie That Bitch.

Rayne and Fatima break to opposite side of the gyms.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - STAGE - NIGHT

Shady Cove students look up at the stage as the Prom Queen  
and King candidates stand on opposite wings of the stage.

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
Before the crowning, I would like  
to welcome back several of our  
alumni royalty here to celebrate  
Shady Cove High's centennial.

Rayne, now atop the bleachers, points the spotlight at Rodney  
and several other former Prom winners dressed in their aged  
Prom regalia. Tara inches her way into the spotlight despite  
not being a crowned queen. She holds a camcorder.

Principal Price opens a gold envelope.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
Ladies and gentleman, put your  
hands together for your Prom  
King...Laszlo Mayberry!

Laszlo steps forward, gives an awkward little wave as the crown is placed on his head. Rodney cheers louder than the rest of the crowd as a student delivers another envelope.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
Your Prom Queen is...

Principal Price opens the envelope, confused.

PRINCIPAL PRICE (CONT'D)  
...this doesn't make sense. There must have been a typo...

But Laszlo grabs the microphone and envelope.

LASZLO  
Time to crown my queen, drum roll everyone!

The sound of stomping feet cuts off Price's protest.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Your Shady Cove Prom Queen is...Tara Hunter!

Rayne points the spotlight at Tara. She screams, jumping up and down like a little girl as she runs towards the stage.

Tara collects her flowers and crown, as she positions herself in front of the mic.

TARA  
I know that this is untraditional, but it has been my dream to be Prom Queen since I was a little girl--

PRINCIPAL PRICE  
--You don't need a speech.

TARA  
In this crazy world, I like to think that this is a step forward in the right direction.

Tara looks up, tears falling down her eyes as she gives her perfect Prom Queen wave.

But then she spots a bucket suspended above her. And to the side of the stage, Fatima releases a rope.

SPLAT! A bucket of fish chum rains down on Tara, soaking her with viscera as it splashes across her body.

Tara wipes her eyes clean, laughter filling the gymnasium. Cassie and Laszlo stand together, smiling as Tara realizes that she's just been ridiculed.

Tara rushes at Laszlo, grabbing him by the shirt. Cassie steps in front of Laszlo, pushing her mother back as Principal Price grabs Tara by the arm.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

You have your crown, but now you  
need to leave.

Tara laughs, shakes her head. She wildly turns towards the crowd, screeching as she speaks.

TARA

You people used to love me. When I  
was the one standing between you  
and the fangs of some vicious  
monster, you said thank you, Tara.  
You're a savior, Tara. But there is  
a beast within your midst, a beast  
that can't be allowed to tarnish  
the very institution that is Prom.

Tara chants in tongues. A green glow emanating from her body as the runes in the gym engulf in supernatural flame.

She's hoisted into the air by magical forces, pure energy exploding from her body as she screams.

TARA (CONT'D)

Two decades ago, a spell was cast  
to hide the monstrous behind human  
masks. But no more! Let those  
inhuman urchins that hide amongst  
us be seen for what they are.

A pulse of energy hits radiates outwards, striking Laszlo and several others in the crowd. Laszlo's suit is shredded as his fins split through the fabric.

He watches as he's not the only one outed, many of his peers and parents turning into their own monstrous forms.

Tara pulls a dagger from her bodice, diving for Laszlo. But Cassie steps between her mother and her friend.

CASSIE

You're going to cut through me.  
(beat)  
Laszlo, run!



TARA  
Huntresses, kill anyone who isn't  
human and while you're at it, kill  
those faggots too!

Tara stabs at Cassie, but she blocks it with precision and grace, knocking the blade from Tara's hand. She no longer doubts herself as her mother bombards her with blows that would overwhelm the most seasoned fighter.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Oh by the way, what the fuck did  
you do to your beautiful hair?

Laszlo runs from the stage, the crown falling from his head.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The Huntresses arm themselves with stakes and swords, crossbows and axes. Several of these underlings go after Laszlo, as the others turn their attention to the other students trying to flee the Prom.

But Laszlo isn't completely incompetent. After all, he's a fucking fish monster. He slashes at the women, sends the weaker goons running back as he shows his razor sharp teeth.

It's chaos as the students run for the doors, only to watch as O'Connell chains the doors shut, locking them in.

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - PUNCH BOWL - NIGHT

Laszlo and Fatima reunite at the punchbowl. Harmony readies a crossbow at the pair, but Rayne intercedes, shattering the bowl of goldfish over her head and swiping her crossbow.

Rayne looks down at the fallen goldfish crackers.

RAYNE  
Your sacrifice won't be forgotten.

FATIMA  
At the bar, Tara had a spell book.  
If we can find that...

LASZLO  
...we can reverse this.

Laszlo's eyes scan the horizon, looking for anything that could possibly conceal the spell book. That's when he sees the papier-mâché whale suspended from the ceiling, its blubber glowing.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
They papier-mâché the whale with  
the pages from the spell book.

Rayne aims the crossbow at the bolt holding the whale in the  
air, but misses. Fatima yanks the crossbow from his hands.

FATIMA  
If you're going to be my cameraman,  
there's one rule: point and shoot.

Fatima sends a crossbow bolt slicing through the rope. The  
whale crashes down on

INT. SHADY COVE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - DANCE FLOOR - SAME

Tara and Cassie spar, but the whale exploding on the floor  
causes them to separate.

TARA  
You're choosing these monsters over  
your own mother!

CASSIE  
You're not my mother, you're a  
fascist bitch who only loves me  
when I'm living the life you want.

Laszlo dives for the whale, pulling off pieces of the spell  
book with urgency. Laszlo's eyes glow, and from his POV, we  
can see the Eldritch symbols transform into English words.

Tara arms herself with a piece of the wooden frame, a  
makeshift stake.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Laszlo, you need to hurry!

Cassie throws herself between her friend and her mother.

LASZLO  
It's not here. There's nothing  
about reversing the spell.

TARA  
You didn't think I would just leave  
the instructions for reversing my  
spell lying around, did you? I  
burnt those pages as soon as I  
committed them to memory.

The other Huntresses turn to see their leader struggling, barely dodging Fatima's crossbow bolt as Cassie beats her with powerful blows. But Tara grabs Cassie by the hair, tossing her towards the trio.

TARA (CONT'D)

Forget the others, ladies. Just slaughter these ones.

The Huntresses arm themselves with spears, encroaching on Laszlo, Fatima, Rayne, and Cassie.

Fatima pulls out her phone.

FATIMA

This is Fatima Hakeem with Strange Happenings with Fatima Hakeem. You're about to witness as TERFy the Vampire Slayer willingly slaughters, a fish boy, a Muslim girl, a trans boy, and her own daughter for the sake of good ol' American values.

But then something remarkable happens. The frightened prom goers rush past the Huntresses, putting their own bodies between Laszlo and his incoming massacre.

Rodney yanks a spear from one of the women, swatting back the hoard of Huntresses.

And the Huntresses, watching their own children join the ranks of the to-be slaughtered, begin to back down.

Principal Price steps between Tara and the children.

PRINCIPAL PRICE

It's over, Tara.

Tara laughs, drops her stake in faux defeat.

TARA

You all don't know how hard it is to me! Every day, someone is on my back telling me that I'm an awful person, that I am a bully, that I have no right to remind you faggots the right way of living life!

Laszlo shuffles through the pages, his eyes going wide as he realizes something: he can't undo what Tara has done. He stands up, his body glowing as he clasps the pages.

LASZLO

I used to be so scared of people like you, Tara. But the worse you treat me, the more I realize that you only made it all the more clearer who I am. You live in a world ruled by Prom Queens and Prom Kings, so when you meet someone like me, neither king nor queen, you get scared.

Laszlo slams a finger into his chest.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

When I look in the mirror, and see the fins sprouting from my head, all I see is me. A Prom Thing, but that doesn't mean that I don't deserve to exist.

Laszlo utters the ancient words, ascending in the air as he uses Tara's trap to his advantage.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

I might not be able to reverse the spell and return to my human form. But if you're going to hate monsters, you might as well look in the mirror and realize you're as monstrous as they come.

Laszlo throws out his hand, a green bolt of energy striking Tara. She takes the entire blast of the spell, falling to the ground in a plume of green smoke.

Cassie's composure breaks. She runs to her mother.

CASSIE

Mom!

Harmony and the other huntresses spring into action to save Tara. But Tara stands on her own.

The crowd gasps.

As the smoke clears, we see a Tara transformed. Nose, smooshed and deformed. Ragged horns protruding from her skull. Not a single tooth contained within her mouth.

Tara is taken aback by the eyes. They're not staring at her in admiration, but rather, shock. This causes her to panic.

TARA

What are you all staring at?

Harmony rushes over, a compact mirror in hand.

Tara opens it, screams as she sees her own reflection.

TARA (CONT'D)  
Oh my god, I'm a troll!

HARMONY  
It isn't really that bad.

Tara sobs.

O'Connell stumbles forward. He's hardly conscious at this point as he drunkenly mumbles.

O'CONNELL  
You're the most beautiful woman  
I've ever seen, Tara...

O'Connell's overt flirtation cause Tara to cry harder.

TARA  
Oh my god, ew!

HARMONY  
It's going to be okay.

TARA  
Is it?

CUT TO:

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - NIGHT

Ambulances, firetrucks, and police cars clog the pick-up lane, holding back concerned parents as their teens exit the gymnasium battered, bruised, but with smiles on their faces.

Monstrous teens walk alongside their human peers, as Rayne films Fatima in front of the scene.

FATIMA  
I'm Fatima Hakeem, from Strange Happenings with Fatima Hakeem. I'm at Shady Cove High, minutes after our Prom was rudely interrupted by a deranged PTA mom attempted Eldritch magic, revealing that a significant portion of the student body is sporting more than just fresh corsages.

A centaur prances behind Fatima, giving her a wave.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

That centaur asked me how to spell  
the word equestrian just last week.  
You'd think he'd know how to spell  
that one.

Rayne's eyebrows suddenly skyrocket up his forehead as he  
stops the video.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

I said you could be my camera man,  
not my director.

RAYNE

You're going to want to see this.

Rayne passes Fatima the phone. On screen, we see Twitter's  
top 10 trending topics; all of them featuring the word  
*MONSTERS*. She clicks on multiple videos, monster sightings in  
every major city.

FATIMA

Are you fucking kidding me? I was  
at ground zero, but I'm the last  
one to jump on the story.

RAYNE

Guess Laszlo isn't alone.

Fatima sighs.

FATIMA

I guess that's all that matters.

EXT. SHADY COVE HIGH - CURBSIDE

Laszlo sits on the curb, wearing someone else's gym clothes  
over his scaly body.

Cassie sits down beside him, a half dozen butterfly stitches  
crisscrossing her temple. She holds the Prom King crown.

CASSIE

You forgot your crown.

Laszlo takes the crown, inspecting it.

LASZLO

I hate it.

Laszlo tosses it into the gutter.

LASZLO (CONT'D)  
Thank you for everything, Cassie.

CASSIE  
I'm sorry I couldn't stop her.

Laszlo shakes his head.

LASZLO  
Maybe, it's a good thing that her  
plan worked. I don't what's going  
to happen, but at least I'm not the  
only one.

Cassie and Laszlo share a smile.

CASSIE  
I'm glad that I'm sitting here with  
you, instead of O'Connell. But I'm  
a little worried if our Prom King  
doesn't have a first dance, this  
town might be cursed to five years  
of bad luck.

Laszlo stands up, letting Cassie place a hand on his back,  
his hand on hers. Nobody leading their dance.

LASZLO  
Well, if it'll save this town's  
soul, why not?

So they dance, the monster and the one meant to slay it.

Their music? The persistent tremor of the earth beneath their  
feet, the lapping of waves upon crumbling shores. Hearts  
ablaze with the air of what could be. A new world born on the  
question of *what if?*

FADE OUT.