

Eleventh Hour

written by

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MERCY - DANAYA

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INT. CAR - MORNING

Two silhouettes against the late morning sun, a couple rides in their car to a vacation cabin in the forests of upstate New York. The woman, MERCY (25-28), is at the wheel, face set in stone determination. The man, JULIAN (25-28), is riding shotgun, his elbow perched on the car door.

MERCY

Listen... about earlier, we can-

JULIAN

No, it's fine. I don't wanna talk about it.

MERCY

Are you sure? Because we *can* talk about it if you want.

JULIAN

(Slightly irritated)

No, no it's fine. I don't- it doesn't matter to me anymore.

Mercy takes a quick glance at Julian.

MERCY

Okay. Fine

They pull up to a clearing. As they progress, a cabin appears behind the trees. All wooden panelling, it's rustic and quaint. A bit primitive.

MERCY (CONT'D)

I think that's it.

Mercy parks the car, despite the only driveway being two dirt trails indicating where the tires should go. They exit the car, walking towards the cabin's entrance. The area is surrounded by dense forest.

EXT. FOREST CABIN - CONTINUOUS

MERCY

Looked better on Airbnb.

Julian laughs.

MERCY (CONT'D)

It's kinda nice though, right?

JULIAN

No, yeah, it's really nice. I can't remember the last time we went on a trail like this.

A collective sigh is released as they pause and take in their surroundings.

MERCY

Okay, now help me get our stuff.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - DAY - HOURS LATER

The couple are hiking through the forest. The scenery is idyllic- the chirp of cicadas and the rustle of leaves is a gentle hum. The canopy of leaves extends into the ether. The forest is all-encompassing, but not suffocating. Not yet.

As they progress through the woods, a trail of DARK DROPLETS speckle the leaves of the path. Only Julian seems to notice this, as Mercy continues ahead. Slowly, Julian follows the trail. The gentle hum of the forest gives way to the sound of buzzing flies.

He takes another step forward, before being greeted with a SQUELCH. He looks down, to find that he's stepped on the leg of a fawn. It's long deceased- half decayed away as flies consume what's left of it.

Julian down at the animal, a mix of awe and revulsion on his face.

MERCY (O.S.)

Oh my God! A lake!

Julian's head whips around. He takes one more look at the animal before heading off to join Mercy at the base of the lake.

Mercy stands few yards from the lake, prideful in her discovery.

JULIAN

What do you wanna do?

She gives him a knowing look before she flings her hiking boots and flannel outerwear off and heads towards the water.

JULIAN (CONT'D)

Are you sure you should...?

He trails off- She's already made her way to the lake, setting her belongings down and trotting into the water fully clothed.

Hesitantly, but not unwilling, he follows after her. He settles on sitting on a rock overhanging the lake. His leg dangles off of it, plunging into the water.

Mercy wades over to him, a wicked smile on her face. She raises her hand.

MERCY

Give me a high-five.

JULIAN

(Suspicious)

Why?

MERCY

I just- It's just for completing the trail. It's celebratory.

Tentatively, Julian high fives her. Mercy's hand closes over his, and she pulls him into the water with her. Despite having the strength to resist, Julian lets himself get pulled in.

He hits the water with a splash, crying out from the cold. Mercy laughs hysterically.

MERCY (CONT'D)

It takes a lot to get used to, right?

JULIAN

(Teeth chattering)

It's fucking freezing.

They laugh and splash each other with water and carry on
Until,

A rustle, then the snap of a twig. Both Mercy and Julian turn to the source of the noise. A MAN, 50s, presumably from the VILLAGE nearby, steps out from behind the brush. He's outfitted in heavy, nature toned clothing, and carrying hunting gear, yet no rifle.

Mercy wades towards the shore and drags her shoes and jacket closer to her. ~~She eyes him suspiciously.~~

VILLAGER
Sorry, neighbor, didn't mean to intrude.

~~Mercy stays silent.~~

JULIAN
You're fine. I mean, it's a public trail, right?

VILLAGER
Right. Right...

~~A beat.~~

VILLAGER (CONT'D)
You're taking a swim?

MERCY
Yep.

VILLAGER
Don't you think it's a bit cold for that?

MERCY
We'll manage.

She stands up now, the water at her waist. She ties her hair up, revealing a splotchy BIRTHMARK behind her ear.

JULIAN
So... you from around here?

VILLAGER
Yep. Been here my whole life, one way or another. I'm guessing you're not?

MERCY
How do you know where-?

VILLAGER
Just saying that because you'd never catch a local out on these trails. I meant no offense by it.

~~The man offers a smile. It's not returned.~~

Julian's walking out of the water now, ringing out his shirt and wiping water from his face.

JULIAN
You're right, actually.
(laughs awkwardly) We're, um, we're from the city.

VILLAGER
That's good... are you up here for
anything in particular or-?

MERCY
(Curtly)
Just visiting.

JULIAN
Yeah, I mean, the city just gets
repetitive after a while. Needed a
change of pace.

VILLAGER
Where've you been staying?

JULIAN
Oh, we're just near the trail to the--

MERCY
We're just-
~~She gestures vaguely to the area.~~

MERCY (CONT'D)
-Around.

~~Julian gives a POINTED GLANCE at Mercy, but says nothing. He looks
back to the man.~~

JULIAN
Yeah, our place is small, but the
scenery's beautiful so far, so I guess
it's worth it.

VILLAGER
Yeah. This place has a way with
people... It's 'cause, you know, up
here, theres less of that buzz. It's
all nature here. Gets so quiet...
silence can be deadly, you know?
Especially with all the forest and
isolation. I guess what I'm trying to
say is sometimes you've gotta employ
more caution when trekking about out
here. Especially after dark, Things go
missing after dark. People, too.

~~A beat.~~

MERCY
We'll make sure to keep that in mind.
~~The man smiles. A genuine, glad smile.~~

VILLAGER
Take care, you two.

INT. FOREST CABIN - SUNSET - HOURS LATER

Mercy and Julian are in the cabin bedroom. Mercy sits on the floor
next to their suitcases, sorting through the clothes, while Julian,
who stands near the room's dresser, retrieves the clothes and puts
them into the drawers.

They've established a system, a sort of rhythm in which they put
away their clothes.

MERCY
 (Handing off a pile of
 shirts)
 First drawer.

JULIAN
 Mhm.

Through the window, the last few rays of daylight pierce into the room. One of these rays lands on Mercy, illuminating her neck and her birthmark.

Julian looks at her, eyeing her BIRTHMARK.

MERCY
 You know, no matter how long we've
 been together, you always stare at it
 when my hair is up.

JULIAN
 I'm not judging. It's nice. It looks
 like a star.

~~She gives him a skeptical look.~~

MERCY
 You don't have to make it all poetic.
 It's fine to admit it's kinda ugly.

JULIAN
 (Jokingly)
 No, I'm serious-It's like a rounded,
 slightly uneven star.

She snickers and shakes her head, passing him another item of clothing.

Moments later, a resounding croak sounds from the ceiling. A low rumble, as though a day's worth of rain has dropped onto the roof in the span of a moment.

The couple pause what they're doing, slowly looking up towards the ceiling, then at each other.

MERCY
 What was...?

Julian sighs. His face is pensive, contemplating if they should investigate the noise.

JULIAN
 Probably nothing. I mean, this house
 is at least a... century old? Maybe
 more?

She hands off another pile of clothes.

MERCY
 Third drawer.
 (A beat)
 Do you ever think about the guy who
 built this place?

JULIAN
 Probably some weird old guy, like the
 guy from the forest.

~~Mercy nods. She tries to let out a light laugh, but it comes out like a shaky exhale instead. She shifts uneasily.~~

JULIAN (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

MERCY

I didn't like him... The guy from the forest, I mean.

~~Julian considers this for a moment.~~

JULIAN

...I didn't either.

Mercy takes in this information, her mood shifting to thinly veiled irritation.

MERCY

...Mm.

JULIAN

What?

MERCY

No, it's just- you say that, but you were so friendly with him.

JULIAN

(Scoffs)

I was being *amiable*-

MERCY

You know, sometimes it's okay to not keep the peace with everyone. He was being creepy.

(Regarding clothes)

Second drawer.

JULIAN

He could've been some old schizophrenic guy for all we knew.

MERCY

I was just trying to be cautious.

(Pause)

And it wasn't just this either. The trail was weird too, and this place is just...

~~She trails off, tense.~~

Julian stops placing the clothes in the wardrobe for a moment.

JULIAN

You think we should leave?

MERCY

...We already paid for it. We're already here. Let's just make the most of it, okay?

(Sighs)

All I'm saying is that I wish you backed me up or something. You didn't have to make me look like a total asshole.

JULIAN

~~Trust me, you did that on your own.~~

~~Mercy stops sorting through the clothes, giving him a dangerous look. Julian catches her glare, throwing his hands up in defense.~~

JULIAN (CONT'D)

You always do this when we're meeting new people! You get all paranoid, then you shut down--

MERCY

'Paranoid'?

JULIAN

--You've done this before. You did this at the party, you-

MERCY

(Exasperated)

Oh my god, is that what this is really about?

She throws the clothes back into the suitcase, ~~now putting her full attention on Julian.~~

MERCY (CONT'D)

I asked if you wanted to talk about this earlier. And you said no!

She begins to storm out of the bedroom. Julian follows promptly behind.

INT. FOREST CABIN - CONTINUOUS

They disperse from the hallway into the main space. Mercy paces around the living area, while Julian keeps his distance staying in the kitchen.

JULIAN

Because I *didn't* want to talk about it earlier. I didn't wanna bring this shit here, it's supposed to be a vacation.

MERCY

(Under her breath)

More like a 'hail Mary'...

JULIAN

And whose fault is that?

MERCY

'Whose fault'- Julian, I'm not the one fixating on this. Why do you care so much anyway?

JULIAN

It was embarrassing! You think I wanted that many people to know that we have *nothing* planned out?

MERCY

Okay, yeah, maybe we should've spoken about it before. But we were caught up in the moment, and that's *fine*.

JULIAN

It's what everyone expects of us!

She stops pacing, whipping around to face him.

MERCY

(Explosive)

It's what everyone expects of YOU, and I am tired of you bringing me into your shit! You knew I never wanted marriage, kids-- you knew I never wanted any of that! That's what you want. It's always been about what you want!

~~They both stay silent for a while, taking in what has just been said. Slowly, Mercy turns and looks around the area. She looks at the coat rack.~~

MERCY (CONT'D)

My sweater.

JULIAN

...What?

MERCY

On the trail earlier. I, um, I left my sweater.

~~Without further explanation, she starts to gather her things and slip on her boots.~~

JULIAN

You're gonna go now?

MERCY

It's expensive.

~~Julian can tell there's more to it, but he doesn't question any further.~~

JULIAN

I'll go with you.

MERCY

NO.

JULIAN

I don't want anything to happen, just let me go with you.

MERCY

I said no.

JULIAN

The sun is setting.

She glances out the window.

MERCY

(Irritated)

I'll get back before the sun sets then.

~~She struggles with her boots, stumbling a bit before she slips them on. Aggravated, she storms out and slams the door, leaving Julian alone in the empty stillness of the cabin.~~

INT. FOREST CABIN - NIGHT - LATER

Wind whistles outside the window. Rain has started coming down over the cabin and the forest that surrounds it, but still no sign of Mercy. Julian paces in the kitchen area. He murmurs under his breath, rewriting the argument in his mind, thinking of what he should've said, or what shouldn't have been said at all.

He feverishly glances at his phone for the time- the lockscreen is of him and Mercy, highschool aged and noticeably happier.

The time reads 8:34- about a half-hour since Mercy left.

He attempts to call a number to no success. The line's down- we hear the phone ring twice, before switching to a no-dial tone.

Julian frantically glances between the phone and the front door. After a moment of deliberation, he throws on his own jacket and decides to venture outside, in hopes of returning with Mercy.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

The wind rages, violent and unyielding. Julian finds himself in the middle of not just a rainshower, but a TEMPEST.

Despite the dire conditions, he continues down the trail, determined to find Mercy. Muddy footprints appear in the trail. As he he progresses deeper into the trail, the weather settles, until the only evidence of there ever being a storm is the mud on the ground and Julian's soaked clothes.

~~He repeatedly calls out to Mercy, to no response.~~

As he walks on, time itself seems to warp, and he finds himself going in circles. By the time he stops, the footprints have long since washed away.

Defeated, he returns back to the cabin.

EXT. FOREST CABIN PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

His shaking hand closes around the doorknob. He twists it, venturing inside-

INT. FOREST CABIN - CONTINUOUS

-where he finds Mercy, standing in the center of the living area beside the couch, her back facing the door. She doesn't react upon hearing Julian's entrance.

JULIAN

(Quietly)

Oh God...

He quietly shuts the door behind him, without taking his eyes off Mercy. She finally turns around, confronting his stare, her face indecipherable.

He approaches her and throws a sweater over her shoulders.

JULIAN (CONT'D)

(Panicked)

Where have you been? I kept calling you and I didn't know what- I thought something terrible happened and I didn't...

JULIAN
Mercy!

JULIAN
Mercy!

JULIAN
Mercy

Julian registers her silence for the first time. Mercy doesn't look at him, but rather, through him. She's drenched from the rain, made evident by her hair, as it drips and sticks to her forehead. A close up of her hands- there's dirt under her fingernails.

JULIAN (CONT'D)

Mercy? Please talk to me.

(A beat.)

Are you okay?

As if gaining lucidity for the first time, she finally looks him in the eye. Her stare doesn't have the slightest hint of familiarity, and her eyes are a bit bloodshot.

MERCY

I'm fine. Just tired.

~~A beat.~~

MERCY (CONT'D)

(Quietly)

I'm going to take a shower now.

She slips past a bewildered Julian, into the bathroom, where we can hear her close and lock the door.

Upon hearing the door lock, Julian rushes to the door and contemplates knocking. He stand outside the door for a few moments, thinking of what to do. ~~He runs a hand over his face and sighs~~ deeply.

JULIAN

Do you need anything?

MERCY (O.S.)

No. I'm fine. Don't let me keep you awake.

~~Her voice is eerily monotone. Despite this,~~ Julian does as told and, albeit reluctantly, heads to the bedroom to go to sleep.

INT. FOREST CABIN - MORNING

Julian wakes up to find no one in bed beside him.

He walks into the kitchen to find Mercy already eating at the breakfast nook. He joins her in silence, a bit wary. She doesn't react, not even to give him a dirty look.

JULIAN

What happened in the forest last night?

~~Mercy pauses, looking up at him.~~

MERCY

I'm not sure what you're talking about.

JULIAN

Last night. You-

MERCY

I went into the forest, I retrieved my jacket, and returned.

Julian glances over to the coat rack. The jacket is in fact returned, yet now it's caked in mud and tattered in places. Mercy doesn't acknowledge this fact.

JULIAN
I went looking for you, you know. I was calling your name out.

MERCY
I know.

JULIAN
..Why didn't you answer?

MERCY
I wasn't sure if it was you.

JULIAN
Who else could it have been?

Mercy doesn't respond. She continues to eat. The fork screeches against her teeth.

INT. FOREST CABIN - EVENING

Julian sits with Mercy on the sofa. Outside the window. The woods are quiet. The television channel cuts out to static and white noise. Mercy continues to stare at the screen, vapid, unaware to any change.

Julian looks at Mercy, wondering if she will register the change.

MERCY
Why do you look at me like that?

JULIAN
Like what?

MERCY
Like you're... afraid of me. Like you think I'm gonna do something.

~~She returns his stare, looking back at him now.~~

MERCY (CONT'D)
What do you think I'm going to do?

~~Julian doesn't answer. He shakes his head slightly and looks away.~~

By the time the television signal comes back on, Mercy has already fallen asleep. As she lay on the sofa, we see Julian once again look over at her. Instead of seeing his perspective, though, we see his face, as his eyes catch onto something. He freezes. We watch as his expression goes from confusion, to unease, to unrelenting terror.

CUT TO:

The subject of Julian's gaze.

Mercy, sleeping.

Behind her ear, she no longer has a birthmark, though. The skin is smooth and even.

CUT TO BLACK.