

IN ABSENTIA

a short film  
written by  
Kyle Maxwell Mungenast

128 Wakefield St, Reading, MA  
978-930-4185  
Kyle.mungenast@spartans.ut.edu

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FADE IN:

INT. ESTHER'S HOME - BEDROOM - EVENING

ESTHER (20s) sits curled up in her bed, beside a windowsill which she leans her shoulder against. Shadows cast her shape as a dark silhouette.

Esther stares out the window looking at the sea of bleak rundown buildings.

She leans the elbow of her pale white, twig-thin arm against the glass, holding a blunt between her slim fingers.

With her other hand, Esther twirls a finger through her long, knotted dark brown hair.

She stands up from the ratty, old mattress and strolls over to a wooden side table, covered in dents and word carvings.

She picks a lighter off the table, holds it up to light her blunt, but is interrupted by the buzzing of her flip cell phone vibrating on the table. She answers it.

ESTHER

Yeah? I was wondering when you'd call.  
I'm gonna go looking for her.

She places her phone between her head and shoulder, holding it there leaving both her hands free.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Tonight.

Esther places the blunt back between her lips. She brings the lighter back up.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

What? I don't feel like waiting, alright?  
Are you coming or not?

Her finger strikes the lighter, igniting the flame.

CUT TO:

EXT. IMPOVERISHED FLORIDA TOWN - ALLEY - EVENING

BRANDON (20s) leans against a concrete wall, covered in old torn up "MISSING PERSON" signs.

Next to him is one crisp white sheet of paper, neatly taped on top of a plethora of older gray papers to the wall.

This sign reads "MISSING: ANNA REED" and pictures an African American young woman, smiling.

BRANDON

Okay, I'll need a-

Brandon's eyes glare with slight confusion. He lowers his cracked up iPhone away from his ear to see Esther hanging up suddenly.

Brandon pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, takes one out, and sticks it between his teeth as he takes out a lighter.

He scratches the red sunburn that is splotched on his white skin. With a firm grasp, his thick finger quickly strikes the lighter, igniting the flame.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY - ONE WEEK EARLIER

Esther has a cigarette between her lips, and is about to light it before ANNA (20s) grabs it out of her mouth.

Anna sits beside Esther on the edge of a bridge. Their legs dangle off the side as they look down at the brook below them.

ANNA

Don't do that.

ESTHER

Hey, what the hell?

Anna holds up the cigarette.

ANNA

This is giving into government trickery. They work hand in hand with fucked up cooperations to make sure this shit which deliberately kills people ends up in our hands.

Anna flicks the cigarette out of her fingers and it falls weightlessly into the peaceful stream below.

Esther rolls her eyes.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
What? It's a piece of shit.

Esther laughs.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
You were saying about your mom?

ESTHER  
You're still the only person I've told  
about her.

Anna takes a joint out of her pocket. She hands it to  
Esther.

ANNA  
This is a horse of a different color.

Esther takes the joint.

ESTHER  
No shit.

Anna smiles.

ANNA  
How long has it been going on for?

ESTHER  
Few months. That's about how long she's  
got left, too.

ANNA  
What do you use the money for?

ESTHER  
Nothing exciting.

ANNA  
I hope you don't pity her.

Esther lights the joint.

ESTHER  
No. I just get what I need and go as soon  
as she lets me. Usually the longer I stay  
the more I get.

They sit in silence.

ESTHER (CONT'D)  
What about you?

ANNA

What about me?

ESTHER

Have you told your story to anyone else?

A run down, larger car pulls up on the bridge behind them. Brandon, in the driver's seat, rolls down the window.

BRANDON

Anna!

He motions his head for her to get in the car. Anna's smile fades off her face as she looks at Esther.

ANNA

I have to go.

ESTHER

See you tonight?

Anna shrugs and looks down at her feet before sauntering toward the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLORIDA MARSHES - DUSK - PRESENT TIME

Esther leans on the hood of her small, dusty gray car. She stares at the marshy Florida plains that evolve from a narrow town center lined with brown and tan buildings.

Esther watches as Brandon walks toward her from that direction.

ESTHER

Didn't ask me for a ride?

BRANDON

You didn't offer.

ESTHER

No?

Brandon's ominous pace reaches Esther's car as he stands across from her.

BRANDON

You hung up.

ESTHER

You have a car.

Brandon scoffs.

BRANDON

Why this place?

Esther looks down at her feet and shuffles them in the dirt before looking back up at Brandon.

ESTHER

It's the last place I saw her.

BRANDON

You never told me that.

ESTHER

Never got a chance to.

Esther shakes her head then stands from her lean and starts walking down the road, kicking the dirt with her feet on each step.

BRANDON

You said they had a license plate for a suspect?

Brandon follows her.

ESTHER

They couldn't identify it.

BRANDON

Probably means it's at the bottom of a lake somewhere.

ESTHER

It means they haven't bothered investigating it.

Esther leads Brandon toward a forest, closer to the depths of the Florida swamps.

BRANDON

When did you put up the sign?

ESTHER

Yesterday. It finally got you off your ass, didn't it?

Brandon catches his clumsy steps as he catches up with Esther, walking beside her.

BRANDON

It didn't help much when I put one up for Dan.

Esther stops and turns her face to Brandon, staring right in his eyes.

ESTHER

So I take it you never found that piece of shit you call your friend?

BRANDON

He died.

ESTHER

Good.

BRANDON

What?

ESTHER

If I didn't like him when he was alive, why would I have any incentive to like him when he's dead? With all that aside now, do you want to find your girlfriend, or not? This way.

Esther leads Brandon down a dirt side path off the road. Brandon scoffs and shakes his head.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You don't care anymore, do you?

BRANDON

What do you mean?

ESTHER

He's been dead so long it doesn't matter to you now.

BRANDON

I can't say you're wrong.

Brandon shakes his head as he takes out a cigarette. Esther stares at him in disgust as he lights it.

CUT TO:

INT. ESTHER'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAYS EARLIER - EVENING

Esther slides a joint out from her lips and breathes out the smoke. Anna sits next to her on the messy bedroom floor, leaning against her back against the bed.

Esther sighs as she stares somberly at the fresh bruise beneath Anna's cheekbone.

ANNA

I'm getting out of this shit hole. You should come.

ESTHER

My mom-

ANNA

You never liked her when she was alive, Esther. You shouldn't feel any need to when she's dying.

Esther bites her lip and rubs her hand against her face.

ESTHER

What are you going to do?

ANNA

I'm going to Atlanta. I'll call you as soon as I arrive.

ESTHER

Anna, you have no money, no anything, where are you going to live, work-?

ANNA

I'll figure it out, okay?

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT TIME

Esther carries herself nervously, scanning her surroundings, and looks back uncomfortably at Brandon.

BRANDON

How much fucking longer are we gonna do this?

Esther gulps as she looks to her side. Her eyes follow a trail of blood that leads to a fallen down tree.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

What's that.

Esther walks cautiously on the blood trail, past a bracelet, and toward the tree. She looks behind it to see Anna's backpack.

ESTHER

It's her's.



BRANDON

Anna's?

Esther scans the area and notices a singular shoe by a tree. She slowly approaches it while her eyes wonder warily.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

What do you see?

Esther draws nearer to the tree.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Is it her... Her...? Fuck, I can't...

Esther reaches the tree, and slowly walks to the other side of it. Nothing.

ESTHER

She's not here.

Esther scans around the forest one last time before returning to where Brandon stands.

Brandon exhales in relief.

BRANDON

Thank God, let's get out of here.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY - DAYS EARLIER

Esther drives through the town. Past the brown, gray buildings. Past the overgrown sidewalk.

She finally stops right outside the town, 50 yards or so ahead from where she parks with Brandon. She sees Anna talking to a car pulled over. Esther pulls over.

Esther looks out the windshield to see Anna ahead talking to the rolled down window of a pulled over black pickup truck, rusted in spots.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT TIME

Esther glares into Brandon's eyes.

ESTHER

You don't get it, do you? You think this is over?

Brandon slaps another bug and rolls his eyes.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Something happened to her. She's fucking out there, somewhere, dead or if not probably wishing she was.

BRANDON

You stay here if you want - I'm done.

Esther hovers her hand near her pocket.

Brandon starts to walk back.

ESTHER

Brandon?

He stops.

BRANDON

What?

ESTHER

Why'd you do it?

Esther puts a hand in her pocket with a clear hold of something.

BRANDON

Do what?

ESTHER

Everything.

Esther's grip in her pocket tightens. She gulps as she takes a quick breath, breathing heavily and slightly trembling.

Brandon scoffs and turns around to face Esther.

BRANDON

Fuck off.

ESTHER

You still have no idea, do you? No idea why she fucking left? Why... Any of this happened.

Esther tries to keep confident in her words, but her hand trembles.

BRANDON

What, some psycho probably picked her off the road. And you know what? She fucking had it coming.

Brandon turns around and storms through the path.

Esther, overcome with adrenaline, follows as she slides the knife from her pocket.

The knife FLICKS open.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLORIDA MARSHES - DAY - DAYS EARLIER

Esther gets out of the car door as Anna starts getting into a pickup truck about a hundred feet in front of her. Esther gets out of her car.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT TIME

Esther stabs the knife into Brandon's back.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLORIDA MARSHES - DAY - DAYS EARLIER

Anna stands next to the truck where a DRIVER sits. Anna looks back and squints to make out Esther's shape. They stare at each other silently.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT TIME

Brandon struggles and is able to grasp his hands around Esther's neck.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLORIDA MARSHES - DAY - DAYS EARLIER

Anna finally sighs, and gets into the car. The car drives off. Esther stares at it as it disappears in the distance, leaving her alone in the vast landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT TIME

Esther manages to pierce Brandon's stomach with the knife. He moans and then drops onto the ground, struggling for his last few breaths before collapsing.

Esther is nearly hyperventilating as she stares down at the red stained knife in her hand.

Esther looks up and takes some deep breaths before wiping her face with her arm. She climbs over to a tree and leans against it.

Esther slides her finger down the knife and looks at Brandon's blood resting on her finger tip.

Esther then closes the knife, without bothering to wipe any more of the blood off it, and slowly sticks it in her pocket as she stares at Brandon's corpse.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLORIDA MARSHES - DAWN

Esther sits on the edge of the grass and the road, beside her car. She looks at her twitching hands which are covered in Brandon's dried up blood.

She reaches into her pocket and takes out a blunt and a lighter.

The sound of a pickup truck ROLLS in the distance.

Esther's hand trembles puts the blunt between her lips and holds up the lighter to light it.

Her attention shifts to the sound of a pickup truck, ROLLING to a stop in front of her. Esther's hand twitches as she slowly raises her head up to look at the truck.

The same driver who drove Anna rolls down the window and leans his thick, tattoo covered arm out the window. He stares down at Esther.

Esther quickly glances at him, takes the blunt out of her mouth, then studies the black pickup truck, rusted in spots.

DIRECTOR

Need a jump?

Esther gives a quick shake of her head snapping out of her zone in on the truck details before tilting her head back up to the driver.

ESTHER

What?

DIRECTOR

Your car.

Esther looks over at her car, then back at the truck. Her dry eyes stare ahead losing focus. She finally looks up at the driver and shakes her head.

The driver stares down at her. He finally switches into gear and drives off.

Esther stares hopelessly at the bumper of the truck as it drives off into the sun.

With two fingers, Esther slides the blunt back between her lips and holds her lighter up to it.

Her twitching finger strikes the lighter, igniting the flame.

CUT TO BLACK.