

MANIC

Written by

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INT. ASTORIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

A vinyl record spins around and around in a teenage girl's bedroom. A staticky rendition of "And She Was" by Talking Heads fills the space.

Morning light streams through patchwork curtains reflecting onto posters: Radiohead's *The Bends*, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, and 90s *Sailor Moon*.

Thumb-tacked to the wall is a calendar, open to a photo of Times Square underneath the month of September. Today's date is highlighted in electric blue highlighter, the words "180 DAYS TIL ESCAPE" scribbled into the box.

Across the room is a desk. The wood is stained with pink hair dye and loose glitter. ZEUS, a gecko, sits in a terrarium placed on a copy of *The Bell Jar*.

Sat with her legs bunched up in a rollie-chair is ASTORIA SPARROW, 17, passionately singing along to the record as she dots faux-freckles across her nose.

Through the open door, BILL SPARROW, 40s, a rugged man wearing tattered overalls, passes the room. He doubles back, leaning through the door frame.

BILL

Gonna be late, Birdie! Hurry it up.

ASTORIA

Shit.

Astoria scrambles to finish her makeup before springing out of her chair, roller-skates on her feet. She grabs her backpack, a pair of headphones, and her lucky SILVER COMPASS.

She skates over to the door, giving her dad a frantic thumbs up. She makes her way down the hallway, awkwardly clunking down the stairs. Bill smiles half-heartedly before shutting the bedroom door.

The room is still. The record continues to spin. Zeus chirps.

Astoria bursts back into the room. She sits at her desk and picks up a pair of safety scissors. She quickly snips off the ends of her platinum blonde and pink-streaked bangs before running back out the door.

TITLE CARD: MANIC

EXT. STREET - DAY

The music from the vinyl kicks into full volume as it blasts through Astoria's headphones. She skates down a comically long street, passing several small-town landmarks: a run down deli, several churches, and a fishing shop with a sign reading "SPARROW'S BAIT & TACKLE".

A group of TEENS stand at a bus stop. They don't react to the pink whirlwind that glides past, except for one boy dressed head to toe in black... TODD JOHNSON, 19.

A silver Lexus drives past. Inside, a gaggle of TEEN GIRLS scream the words to some pop song Astoria can't hear.

In the passenger seat sits VIA MARTINEZ, 17 and preppy. She gives Astoria a timid wave as the car passes.

Driving the car is BRITNEY MOORE, 18, wearing Burberry sunglasses and a designer top. She takes a hand off the wheel, dangerously sticking her sparkly cellphone out the window to take a selfie of the group.

Astoria, in the background of the photo, glares into the lens. The girls speed off.

Astoria rounds the bend of the street, arriving at...

EXT. EAST PALTRY HIGH - DAY

Cliques of STUDENTS fill the high school's front courtyard. Astoria snakes between them, nodding along to her music.

BRAD WILSON, 18, a clean-cut jock, runs to catch a frisbee and collides into Astoria. She loses her balance, but he grabs her arms and keeps her upright.

BRAD

Woah, close one! Totally my bad.
You good?

Astoria looks into his eyes dreamily as hearts bubble around his face. She can't hear him over her music and the sound of her heart.

Her eyes trail down, taking in his football jersey. Her smile falls as her daydream fades back to reality. She pats him on the shoulder and skates off into the school.

INT. EAST PALTRY HIGH HALLWAY - DAY

Astoria places her skates into a locker. She hums under her breath, lost in the music from her headphones.

Slowly, a threatening and unknown hand slowly creeps behind her.

Astoria blows her bangs out of her eyes, none the wiser.

Its fingers flex for a moment, menacingly waiting to strike.

It clutches onto her shoulder.

Astoria gasps, whipping around and slamming into the lockers as she rips her headphones off. Then, her demeanor relaxes.

ASTORIA

Jesus, Maisie! You scared me.

MAISIE CLARKE, 17, tugs on the strap of her Van Gogh tote.

MAISIE

Sorry. I called your name like eight times.

ASTORIA

Whatever. I forgot my pepper spray today, so you got lucky.

She turns back to her locker and opens her bag.

MAISIE

You would've pepper sprayed me... in the art wing?

ASTORIA

Smile!

Astoria holds up a digital camera and snaps a picture.

Maisie blinks, smiling meekly after the flash has already gone off.

Astoria reviews the picture and grimaces.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

You look like your cat died or something.

Astoria turns the camera around- not Maisie's best photo.

MAISIE

Thanks?

ASTORIA

Go again. Strike a little pose this time.

Astoria holds up the camera once again. Maisie smiles stiffly, giving a small thumbs up.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Is that the best you've got?

Maisie cycles through a few poses, each more awkward than the last. Astoria watches through the camera, waiting for her to settle into something remotely natural.

In the background of the image, Todd looks her way.

Astoria glances over the top of the camera, making eye contact with him. He averts his gaze, pretending to scroll on his phone.

He's dressed in all black with shaggy brown hair and pale, pale skin.

Astoria narrows her eyes, trying to make out the image on his black graphic tee. She breaks into a smile when she recognizes the image as Geordi from *Star Trek*.

Todd nonchalantly looks up from his phone, meeting Astoria's gaze. She holds up a hand in a 'live long and prosper' gesture. The boy stares.

MAISIE

(through her teeth)

Astoria? Did you take it?

Astoria snaps her attention back to Maisie, who is grinning uncomfortably with her hands on her hips. Astoria hits the shutter.

ASTORIA

Got it.

Maisie moves next to Astoria to look at the preview screen.

In the image, Maisie looks awkward, yet endearing. Todd looms behind Maisie, his dark gaze striking the lens.

Astoria looks up to call him over, but he's gone.

MAISIE

It's cute! Is it going in your portfolio?

ASTORIA

We'll see. Going on my wall for sure, though.

BRITNEY (O.S.)

Ooh, digital camera! Sooo Y2k. Take one of me!

Astoria and Maisie look up from the camera to see Britney, posed and blowing a kiss.

BRITNEY (CONT'D)

Come on, I don't have all day.

ASTORIA

Are you kidding?

Britney scoffs, breaking her pose and stealing the camera from Astoria's hand.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Hey!

BRITNEY

Fine, I'll do it myself.

She quickly snaps a selfie in the same pose as before. Astoria snatches the camera back.

ASTORIA

You're a bitch.

BRITNEY

Actually I'm "@It's Britney B-Exclamation Point-T-C-H" on all platforms. Tag me if you post it.

ASTORIA

Fuck you.

Britney blinks, clicking her tongue against her teeth.

BRITNEY

Aaaand that's my cue. Pull that head out of your ass, Pixie. You'd be kinda pretty without a nasty snarl on your face.

Britney winks at Astoria and Maisie before flipping her hair and strutting off.

Astoria watches her leave, seething. Maisie reaches out to comfort her, but decides not to poke the bear.

MAISIE

I... think she was trying to be friendly?

ASTORIA

Please. She's basically Dorian Gray with Dior lipgloss and an iPhone.

MAISIE

She kinda complimented you, though! Maybe it would be nice to end the year on good-terms. You know, try to make-up while you still can?

ASTORIA

She's the last person I'd ever want to make up with.

She slams her locker shut, revealing the smiling face of Via, inches away from Astoria.

VIA

Hi Tori!

ASTORIA

(to Maisie)

Sorry. Second-to-last.

VIA

I just saw Brit take your camera. I'm sure didn't mean any harm, that was still super uncalled for. Don't worry, I'll tell her off for you.

ASTORIA

My hero.

She shoves past Via. Maisie moves to follow Astoria, but Via cuts her off.

VIA

By the way, I'm really sorry you didn't win the photo contest last year. I totally voted for you! But the rest of STUCO thought dismemberment was too gruesome to promote, even if you did use glitter instead of blood, but-

ASTORIA

What do you want, Via?

Via steps back, her smile tightening into a line.

VIA
I miss you.

ASTORIA
Right.

VIA
And...

She flips open a lavender folder and pulls out a flier—clearly designed on Canva.

VIA (CONT'D)
I'm hosting the homecoming
afterparty this year. It's next
Friday night, and I know it's not
your scene, but it would really
mean a lot if you could make it.

Via rolls it up, sticking it into the side pocket of
Astoria's backpack. She looks at Maisie, smiling kindly.
Maisie looks away.

VIA (CONT'D)
Bring a friend. The more the
merrier.

ASTORIA
Yeah, that won't be happening.

Astoria grabs Maisie's hand, pulling her away from Via and
down the hallway.

VIA
Think about it, Tori.

ASTORIA
Don't call me that.

The school bell rings.

INT. EAST PALTRY HIGH ART ROOM - LATER

Astoria and Maisie sit at an art table, taking up the space
with their belongings.

They're the only ones in the room aside from MRS. REDNOUR,
40s, an art teacher dressed like a suburban soccer mom.

Astoria picks at a veggie burger and fries, haphazardly
taking photos of the room. Maisie paints on a canvas. There's
Tupperware with the remains of a salad next to her.

Astoria clicks through her photos, dissatisfied.

ASTORIA

I hate fluorescents. These look like they were taken in some dingy classroom.

MAISIE

It is a dingy classroom.

ASTORIA

It's an art classroom. You'd think they'd at least take some artistic license with the space.

MAISIE

I don't think you're gonna take any masterpieces in here.

Maisie pushes a basket of oil pastels toward Astoria.

MAISIE (CONT'D)

Here. Exercise some other creative muscles for a bit.

Astoria grumbles.

ASTORIA

Fine.

Astoria pulls out a red pastel. She taps it against her chin as she scans the room for a spare canvas.

After a moment, she leans over to her backpack. She hoists the bag onto her lap, taking out Via's flier and flipping it upside down. She takes the pastel to the paper.

MAISIE

You're gonna ruin that.

ASTORIA

Yeah, so?

MAISIE

You don't even want to consider going?

ASTORIA

Why would I want to spend a Friday night watching Britney do shots off of some Lacrosse player's abs when I could be doing literally anything else?

MAISIE

I thought it sounded kinda fun. And
it seemed like Via wants you there.

ASTORIA

Via's just on her moral high-ground
shit as always. It won't be fun.
Trust me.

Maisie watches Astoria aggressively draw on the back of the
flier before turning her attention back to her canvas.

The pastel wears down, red dust across the desk. She looks at
the paper. It's a mess of emotion with no artistic value.

Astoria pushes herself out of her seat to look at Maisie's
canvas. She's made a breathtaking still-life image of the
watercolor palette she was using to paint.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

MRS. REDNOUR

Language, Sparrow!

Maisie looks at Astoria worriedly, who pays the teacher no
mind.

ASTORIA

You did that in the past forty
minutes?

MAISIE

It's been like forty-five by now.

The school bell rings.

MAISIE (CONT'D)

See?

ASTORIA

And you say you're not good enough
to get into an art program. I'm
telling you, this time next year,
we're gonna be in New York
together.

MAISIE

Right...

Astoria slouches back into her chair, pushing the flier to
the side of the table, returning her attention to her camera.

Maisie looks at the flier for a few moments before picking it up. She rolls it up and slides it back into Astoria's bag.

Students begin to file into the room. Maisie stands up, grabbing her salad. She reaches for Astoria's tray.

MAISIE (CONT'D)

You're done with your lunch?

Astoria nods. She uses her camera almost like a pair of binoculars, observing her environment.

Through the lens, we watch as:

Maisie throws out the girls' lunches.

Mrs. Rednour tries to get the Wordle on her phone.

Hordes of teens walk down the hallway past the open door.

...And the boy in the *Star Trek* tee walks through the door.

Astoria lowers the camera, holding it close to her chest as she watches him walk to the back of the room. Todd's gaze is to the floor, and he wears a hood over his headphones.

MAISIE (CONT'D)

Astoria?

ASTORIA

Who is he?

Maisie raises her eyebrow, following Astoria's dreamy gaze to the boy, sitting alone at a table in the corner.

MAISIE

I don't know. His back's to us.

ASTORIA

I've never seen him before. Is he new?

MAISIE

I hope not. My mom was telling me that someone transferred here from **Manhattan.**

Upon hearing the word Manhattan, Astoria's vision swirls into a world of pastels and hearts. Everything aside from the boy fades into the background. Romantic music swells. Over the sound of it, she doesn't hear as Maisie continues...

MAISIE (CONT'D)
(faintly, underneath
music)
The guy's a real creep apparently.
She heard he's only here because he
got expelled for threatening some
girl, really scary stuff actually.

Astoria springs up from her seat, snapping out of her daze.
She makes a beeline for the back of the room, toward the boy.

MAISIE (CONT'D)
Okay, then.

Todd sits alone, scribbling on a beat-up notebook.

Astoria's digital camera is shoved into his face with a
bright FLASH. He barely reacts, calmly lifting his gaze to
the camera.

He pulls his hood down, and Astoria feels her heart THUD. He
half-heartedly lifts his headphones off one ear.

ASTORIA
Say cheese!

TODD
You're supposed to say that before
you take the picture.

ASTORIA
Yeah, but you wouldn't have heard
me, silly goose.

She reaches out, removing the other side of his headphones.
They awkwardly slide off his head onto his neck. He blinks.

TODD
Um, guess not.

Astoria taps his sleeping phone, letting the screen light up.

A Soundcloud widget reads: NOW PLAYING- 'CREEP' BY RADIOHEAD

ASTORIA
Excellent taste. I'm more of a
'Karma Police' girl, but 'Creep'
was the first song I learned on
uke.

Todd continues to stare.

Astoria sticks out a hand, smiling brightly.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Astoria Sparrow. Current high school senior, future photographer extraordinaire.

He tentatively shakes her hand.

TODD

Todd. Astoria, like in Queens?

ASTORIA

Yes! My mom always loved New York. I'm surprised you knew that! Most people around here don't know geography outside of the state.

TODD

I'm from the city, so...

ASTORIA

(feigning surprise)

No WAY! That's incredible! You have to tell me ALL about it!

Astoria reaches across Todd, grabbing the pen he was using to draw.

She grabs his arm, pushing up the sleeve of his black zip-up, and scribbles an address onto his forearm.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Go to these coordinates at 7pm tonight. I'll give you the run down of East Paltry, and you'll tell me everything about New York.

Todd stares at his arm in disbelief.

Astoria clicks the pen closed, putting it back down onto the notebook. She stands with her hands on her hips proudly.

Her gaze drifts to his drawings.

The page is covered in depraved sketches of a girl in sexual positions.

The girl has freckles and twin braids with bangs. A mirror image of Astoria.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Is that... me?

Todd slams the notebook shut.

TODD

No.

Silence.

The bell rings.

MRS. REDNOUR

Alright, everyone in your seats.

Astoria doesn't move.

MRS. REDNOUR (CONT'D)

That means you, Sparrow!

Astoria snaps out of it, stumbling back and knocking a classmate's Hydro Flask onto the ground with a loud CLANG.

She starts walking back to her table. Maisie watches incredulously.

Astoria stops and turns.

She points between her arm and Todd's as she mouths: "seven o' clock".

MRS. REDNOUR (CONT'D)

Astoria!

Astoria steps back into her seat, smiling attentively.

MRS. REDNOUR (CONT'D)

Okay. Now that we're all ready to start...

Astoria shifts her gaze from the teacher to Maisie. She smiles, giving a thumbs up.

ASTORIA

(whispering)

He thinks I'm sexy.

Maisie buries her head in her hands.

INT. ASTORIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

An eyeshadow brush reaches out and dusts against Zeus's little cheeks, his gecko eyes staring into space. A dusting of pink eyeshadow makes him look as if he's blushing.

ASTORIA

Perfect. All of the other geckos will be so jealous.

Astoria uses the brush to finish her own eyeshadow as Zeus sits on her desk. She places the brush down, turning towards him and striking a little pose.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
So? Am I date-ready or what?

Zeus blinks.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
You're right. Ribbons.

She pulls two silver ribbons from the mess of her desk and begins to tie them around the ends of her braids.

A gentle KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK raps on the half-open door.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Come in!

Through her mirror, she watches as Bill pokes his head into the room.

BILL
So, how was your last first day?

Astoria fusses with her ribbons.

ASTORIA
Same as always. I persevered.

BILL
Good. It's not so bad when you put your mind to it.

ASTORIA
I didn't say *that*.

Bill stands against the doorframe as Astoria continues to focus on her appearance.

BILL
So... I'm heading to the shop later tonight if you wanted to tag along... we could make some custom tackle together? A fun little arts-and-crafts project for-

ASTORIA
Can't. I've got a date tonight.

Bill's face falls momentarily before smiling again.

BILL
That's okay. Some other time.

She turns over the back of her chair, smiling back at him.

ASTORIA
Totally.

BILL
Have fun, Birdie.

He ducks out of the room, and Astoria reaches for a bottle of perfume.

BEEP BEEP.

Astoria looks down at her phone, seeing an Instagram notification.

It reads: @TODDJ0HN666 STARTED FOLLOWING YOU.

She smiles. Zeus begins to wander. Astoria stands out of her chair and picks him up, putting him back into his terrarium on the hutch of her desk.

Her gaze travels to her window. A boy stands underneath a tree, features shrouded by the shade.

Her smile fades. Is that... the *Star Trek* tee?

She glances at the Instagram notification.

Todd started following her.

Her breath hitches. When she looks back out the window, there's nobody there.

Astoria shakes her head, sitting back down.

EXT. TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Astoria bounces on her toes, clutching the straps of her backpack. There's no sign of Todd.

She checks the time on her phone- it's 7:26.

She groans, surveying her surroundings. The area surrounding the church is rather barren, an expanse of dark woods lit up by a few streetlights.

Then, she sees it.

Half obstructed by a lamppost is a dark, hooded figure, watching her from a distance.

The air escapes Astoria's lungs. She stumbles back, beginning to tremble.

ASTORIA
(calling out)

Todd?

The figure doesn't move. Astoria's gaze travels from the figure to the length of street behind her.

If she just makes a run for it...

Slowly, the figure emerges from its hiding spot, beginning to stalk towards her. Astoria's heart races. The figure calmly pulls off its hood.

It's Todd. Astoria lets out a sigh, forcing her lips into a smile.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
You're late. I said seven o'clock sharp.

TODD
You were late too.

ASTORIA
Five minutes late, max!

Astoria's smile fades, brow furrowing.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
How... long have you been here?

Todd shrugs.

TODD
Like thirty seconds. You just seem like the perpetually late type.

ASTORIA
Right...

TODD
Don't worry, it's cute. And I'm sorry for not getting here earlier. If I'm being honest, I was nervous. It's not every day a pretty girl asks you out via sharpie.

Astoria lets out a giggle.

ASTORIA
It wasn't sharpie. It'll wash off.

TODD
I wouldn't mind if it didn't.

They gaze into each others' eyes. Astoria's shoulders relax.

ASTORIA
Okay, then. Let's get going.

Todd looks up at the church, then back to Astoria.

TODD
I thought you'd be atheist.

ASTORIA
What? No. We're not going in there.

Astoria reaches into her pocket and pulls out a PINK HEADLAMP, snapping it onto her forehead.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Are you ready for an adventure?

TODD
Sure.

Astoria turns to the woods. Looking into the darkness, her smile falters. She takes a deep breath.

Then, she gathers herself, returning to her cheery self.

ASTORIA
Follow me. If you dare.

Astoria begins to skip off. Todd watches for a moment.

Then, he follows.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A narrow pathway is illuminated by Astoria's headlamp as she sashays through the woods. Todd trails behind, a silhouette in the dark.

Astoria points to a small pond in the distance, turning her head to guide Todd's eyesight.

ASTORIA
I smoked my first joint on that rock. The guy I was on a date with dropped it in the water. I cried.

She turns to the other side of the pathway.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

And up that hill over there- see that hill? At the top there's a huge meadow. I tried shrooms up there. Did not know my limits. Kinda went into a state of psychosis.

Astoria stops short, causing Todd to stumble into her.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Over there!

Astoria grabs Todd's shoulders to stabilize him, pulling him down so that he's cheek to cheek with her.

In the distance is an arrangement of logs in the general shape of a house. Time has covered the wood in moss, and there are gaps in the walls.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Do you see it? Do you know what that is?

TODD

The spot where you tried meth?

ASTORIA

It's the fort I played in when I was little.

She smiles softly, looking into the distance. Imaginary daylight shines through the dark. The moss disappears and the holes repair themselves, as if traveling back in time.

A LITTLE ASTORIA flits around the fort wearing costume fairy wings on her back.

Behind her, a LITTLE VIA messes with the structure of the building, placing flowers in the gaps between the wood.

ASTORIA (V.O.)

My best friend Via and I used to come here all the time. We spent hours living different lives... pretending we lived out here.

Little Astoria jumps out from behind the fort, tackling Little Via in a hug. The girls roll on the ground, giggling, before Little Via grabs a handful of dirt and slams it into Little Astoria's face.

The little girls fade away as a MIDDLE SCHOOL ASTORIA wearing a *Panic! At The Disco* t-shirt and a MIDDLE SCHOOL VIA with braces on her teeth appear, sitting inside the fort. Moss has begun to creep up the sides of the logs.

ASTORIA (V.O.)
Town felt so far away here. It was
like an escape.

Visions of the two fade in and out of existence. They play card games. Astoria loses, throwing her cards at Via's face. They do each other's makeup. Via snorts as she messes up Astoria's lipstick.

ASTORIA (V.O.)
No cell service. No homework. No
worries. It was just us.

The scene fades away again, and middle school Via sits in the fort reading a *Teen Vogue* magazine with a MIDDLE SCHOOL BRITNEY. Middle school Astoria walks up to the fort, holding two ice cream cones in her hands.

ASTORIA (V.O.)
Until it wasn't.

She spots Via and Britney, drops the cones, and runs off.

The light vanishes. Astoria stares ahead at the decaying fortress, eyes glossy.

She turns to face Todd, smiling softly, looking for sympathy.

He's looking at her cleavage.

Astoria clears her throat, and his eyes snap up to hers.

TODD
Oh. Uh... what changed?

Astoria steps away. She adjusts her top, yanking it up.

ASTORIA
She did.

TODD
She sounds like a bitch.

ASTORIA
Yeah.

TODD
What did you do about it?

ASTORIA
What do you mean?

TODD
She betrayed your trust. You can't
just let her get away with that.

ASTORIA
I mean, I cut her out of my life.
But that's basically it.

Todd looks at the fort. He huffs.

TODD
If I were around, she'd regret ever
treating you like you're
disposable. You're... perfect.

ASTORIA
Um. Thank you.

The silence between them weighs heavy. Astoria's headlamp
shines on Todd's face like an interrogation lamp. His stare
pierces her soul.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Anyway. This is the end of the
path.

TODD
That's all then? You took me out
here to show me your old fort?

ASTORIA
No! I mean, there was more, but...

She trails off, nervously fidgeting with one of her bows. She
surveys Todd, scanning over his form. He has something in his
pocket. Probably a phone. Probably.

Astoria takes a deep breath, her expression softening into a
half-hearted grin.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
There's more.

She reaches behind herself, taking a SILVER COMPASS from the
side pocket of her backpack.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Just gotta go off the trail.

Astoria flips open the compass. She reaches out her hand for
Todd to take. It's trembling ever so slightly.

He takes her hand. The silence between them weighs heavy as they walk, the sounds of crunching leaves beneath their feet.

To break the tension, Astoria begins to hum a melody.

TODD

Is that "Buddy Holly"?

They disappear into the darkness.

EXT. OVERLOOK - NIGHT

Astoria and Todd emerge from the woods, coming to a small clearing.

The ground, a slab of cliffside rocks, is graffitied in sloppy drawings and profanity. The space is several yards deep, a steep cliff dropping off at the end.

Below are the dim lights of East Paltry, but in the distance, the distant shine of a city skyline glows against the starry night sky.

Astoria pulls her hand from Todd, the tension leaving her body. She runs, stopping a few feet from the edge of the cliff. She looks up to the sky and spins, giggling to herself.

Todd stands still. He pays little mind to the view, eyes locked onto the graffiti on the ground.

ASTORIA

Breathtaking, right?

TODD

It's cool.

She beckons him over, sitting down. Todd approaches, standing stiffly behind her.

Astoria raises her hands, pretending to cup the town between her palms.

ASTORIA

I can fit the entirety of East
Paltry in my hands up here. C'mon,
look.

After a moment of hesitation, Todd crouches down next to Astoria, looking between her hands.

TODD

Nice.

He sits down, finally getting comfortable. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a cigarette, and lights it.

Astoria's nose wrinkles at the smell. Todd holds it out, offering it to her.

ASTORIA

No thanks. I don't smoke.

TODD

What, so weed is okay but not cigs?

ASTORIA

Just not my style.

Todd clicks his tongue, shaking his head in disapproval before taking a hit. As he blows out the smoke, he nods toward the distant city lights.

TODD

Is that Manhattan?

ASTORIA

Are you serious?

Todd shrugs.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

No... its way too far away. I think
it might be Columbus or something?
But hold on.

She flips open her compass, holding it out for Todd to see.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Northeast. If we kept moving
towards those lights, we'd get to
New York eventually.

Todd looks at the lid of the compass. It's engraved, reading:

"Follow your heart. It'll take you home. JS"

TODD

"JS"? Who'd you steal this from?

ASTORIA

What? Nobody. "JS" stands for
Jennifer Sparrow. My mom.

Todd hums, satisfied with the answer. Astoria gazes into the distance, transfixed by the lights.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

This used to be hers. She always wanted to see the world. But New York was always her end goal.

TODD

Sounds familiar.

ASTORIA

She used to tell me fairytales about how basically anything is possible there, and how once I was old enough and she had saved up enough, we'd leave of this place and actually live life...

Astoria runs her thumb over the engraving.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

She was supposed to go to Columbia after high school... she turned down her acceptance to stay with my dad when I came into the picture.

TODD

And now? Why are you guys still here?

Astoria takes a shaky breath.

ASTORIA

She died before she could ever get out.

She squeezes the compass, holding it close to her heart.

Todd exhales smoke. He puts his cigarette out.

TODD

You know... New York isn't some perfect, magical place. I mean, yeah, it's great, but not perfect.

He stares into the skyline.

TODD (CONT'D)

It's littered with garbage. Literal shit on the streets, posers who think listening to Lana Del Rey makes them unique... asshats who think it's okay to get others expelled for bullshit reasons...

Astoria glances up at him with glossy eyes.

TODD (CONT'D)

The city's great and all, but at the end of the day, people are the same everywhere. Fucked up.

He reaches out, twirling one of Astoria's baby hairs around his finger.

TODD (CONT'D)

You just gotta find the good ones.

Astoria's eyes glitter with tears highlighted by the moonlight.

Todd's hand moves to cup her cheek, turning her face toward his.

He crashes in, kissing her.

Astoria automatically winces under his lips. His mouth is aggressive and the taste of cigarette smoke still lingers.

After a moment, she exhales, closing her eyes. She places a hand on Todd's chest, attempting to de-escalate the passion. He refuses to let up, forcing his tongue into her mouth and tugging at one of her braids. He slips the ribbon off of the end.

He pushes Astoria to the ground, tearing his lips off hers as he looms over imposingly. His eyes are dark with possessive lust.

Astoria's chest heaves. Her face is pale. This isn't right.

Todd lowers his mouth to Astoria's neck, latching on like a vampire. His hand grabs her breast through her shirt. She gently pushes against his shoulders, but he doesn't budge.

ASTORIA

Okay, that's enough.

His mouth trails down to her chest. His hand follows the path down to her hips.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Todd.

His teeth graze her cleavage. His fingers wrap around her inner thigh, finding her zipper...

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

I SAID THAT'S ENOUGH!

Astoria knees Todd between the legs, causing him to double over in pain. She shoves him off, sitting up and clutching her chest.

TODD
What the fuck?!

ASTORIA
Sorry... I... didn't mean to...

She pitifully watches him convulse on the ground as she catches her breath.

Todd exhales shakily, sitting up.

TODD
Whatever.

The hoots of owls echo in the silence. Todd's head is low, hair obstructing his expression. His hands are balled into fists, knuckles white.

Astoria's heart pounds in her head. It's dizzying.

ASTORIA
I... um...

Todd's breathing is loud. And angry.

She stands, wrapping her arms around herself.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
I have to meet a friend. Let's head back.

Astoria starts to walk toward the woods. He doesn't move.

She clutches the compass like a lifeline.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
You coming?

Silently, Todd stands and makes his way over to Astoria.

He raises his head, finally meeting her gaze. He smiles, but there's a threat in his eyes.

TODD
Lead the way.

Astoria's feet stay glued to the ground. She looks to the dark abyss before her, then back at Todd.

Her hand trembles as she reaches up to turn her headlamp back on.

She walks into the woods, Todd following behind her.

EXT. TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Astoria emerges from the woods, letting out a deep breath. Todd keeps a distance from her, hands in his pockets.

ASTORIA
Well, we made it.

Todd doesn't reply, simply looking down the street.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

TODD
Why wouldn't I be okay?

ASTORIA
I don't know... you didn't say much on the walk back, and I just wanted to make sure you weren't mad about-

TODD
I'm fine.

Astoria's eyes flick to his hand in his pocket. His arm is tense. He's clutching onto something.

ASTORIA
So... My friend Maisie's expecting me. She'll be worried if I don't show up soon.

Finally, Todd makes eye contact. His stare calls her bluff.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
I guess this is goodbye then! I'll see you around school?

TODD
Sure.

ASTORIA
I had a nice time. I really did.

TODD
Sure.

Astoria gives a small wave before starting her walk down the street.

A few feet down the block, she glances over her shoulder. Todd has yet to move, and he's watching.

She pulls her phone from her pocket, going to her contacts and letting it ring. A drowsy Maisie answers.

MAISIE (O.S)

Hello?

ASTORIA

(loudly)

Hey Maisie! I'm on my way over! I should be there in five-ish.

MAISIE (O.S.)

What do you mean? What happened to your date?

ASTORIA

I know, it's a ridiculous assignment! We'll get it done, I promise.

Astoria turns back around. Todd is gone. She sighs.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

Sorry. Needed an out.

MAISIE (O.S.)

Are you okay?

ASTORIA

Yeah, should be now. Just said goodbye to him.

MAISIE (O.S.)

Okay. Am I good to go back to sleep?

ASTORIA

It's ten PM.

MAISIE (O.S.)

And?

Astoria snickers.

ASTORIA

Goodnight Maisie. I'll be fine.

MAISIE (O.S.)
Tell me everything tomorrow.

Astoria hangs up, continuing her walk in silence. She listens to the sound of her sneakers SQUEAK, SQUEAK, SQUEAKING against the sidewalk.

Why does it sound like there's a second pair of steps?

She whips her head around. There's nobody there.

Astoria shakes her head, running her hands over her face. As she walks, she toys with the ends of her braids.

She stops. One of her bows is gone.

She curses under her breath, quickly scanning over the sidewalk to see if it's nearby. It's not. It must've gotten lost in the woods.

Astoria dejectedly pulls the remaining bow from her hair and stuffs it in her pocket. She turns the corner, disappearing.

Moments later, a shadowy figure makes the same turn.

INT. ASTORIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Astoria swings open her bedroom door, slugging inside. She flops onto her bed face down and lets out a muffled scream.

She turns her head, seeing Zeus climbing on a plastic tree. With a smile, she walks over and pulls him out of his terrarium.

ASTORIA
Hey handsome.

She places a kiss on the top of his head, setting him down on her desk.

Astoria reaches in her pocket and takes out her hair bow. She sets it on Zeus's head, giggling at the sight.

She reaches over to her desk and grabs her digital camera, snapping a picture.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)
Pretty princess.

Astoria looks at her pet fondly. She picks him up, leaning against her desk and stroking his little back.

Her lip quivers. Quietly, she begins to sob.

INT. EAST PALTRY HIGH BATHROOM - DAY

Astoria sits on a bathroom sink, legs scrunched up to fit onto it. Maisie stands across from her, doing her best to not touch anything.

Astoria reads off of her phone.

ASTORIA

And then- and then! He sent me *this* post...

She turns her phone toward Maisie, showing an Instagram meme. It's a picture of two early 2000s scene teenagers with the caption "What if we kissed in the Hot Topic fitting rooms?"

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

I think it's supposed to be funny?
But, like, what?

MAISIE

Can't you just block him?

ASTORIA

I did.

MAISIE

Then I guess that's all you can do.

ASTORIA

He also requested my spam account.
And I'm pretty sure he went through my Tumblr too, because someone with the user "Torturous Todd" liked all of my posts last night.

MAISIE

You still have a Tumblr?

ASTORIA

It doesn't even have my name on it!
I have no idea how he found it.

Astoria leans her head against the mirror, groaning dramatically.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

It's been a week. How has he not gotten the hint by now?

Maisie walks over to the sink next to Astoria's. She pulls a paper towel from the dispenser, puts it on the sink, and hops on, mirroring Astoria.

MAISIE

You just gotta talk to him. He may be a creep, but he can't read your mind.

ASTORIA

I hope not.

MAISIE

You can't just keep ghosting people. It's counterproductive.

ASTORIA

When have I ever ghosted someone before?

MAISIE

Julian? Emmett? Morgan? *Via??*

ASTORIA

Yeah, yeah, I get it. It's just...

Astoria's mind flashes to Todd hovering over her, that proprietorial thirst in his eyes.

ASTORIA (CONT'D)

This time is different.

Maisie puts a hand on Astoria's arm, eyes sympathetic.

MAISIE

Did you tell your Dad?

ASTORIA

No. And he doesn't need to know. He'd never let me out of his sight again. It'd be "Bye Bye Big Apple".

MAISIE

Are you sure you-

ASTORIA

(cutting her off)

Besides, nothing actually happened. I didn't feel safe, so I cut it off. Done deal.

MAISIE

It's not a done deal if he's still harassing you.

Astoria sighs.

ASTORIA

Yeah. Fine. I'll talk to him.

Her phone buzzes. The girls look down in synchronicity.

Astoria picks it up, reading the notification.

She looks up at Maisie with a blank stare, holding up the phone. Todd has sent a voice memo. She hits play.

The first few chords of 'Wonderwall' ring out.