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RUN WITH ME

Written by

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Draft 4

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XT. WOODS – SUNRISE

The woods are half-lit by the sunrise. Pale light filters through the trees.

NATASHA PARKER, 17, is a pretty, well put together girl, who tries to keep up her appearances portraying a picture perfect life while hiding a dark secret. Her body is defined from being a track star at her school. She's lean, her light brown hair is always well done as well as her makeup.

Earbuds in, ponytail perfect, she runs with precision. Her form is exact. She looks at her smartwatch, her breaths are counted. She follows the trail by the woods, the same one she runs every morning. A ritual. She passes a creek, stops to stretch and take a breather before continuing. Nearby, a TENT is tucked into the trees, and smoke curls from a small campfire.

The HOMELESS MAN, late 40s to 50s, cuts wood next to his camp. His hair is badly cut, and his beard has clearly not been taken care of for a while. He wears many coat layers to keep him warm from the winter cold, and hiking boots.

He looks at Natasha. Natasha never looks back, but she feels it like a shiver down her spine, as her eyes slightly lose focus of her run.

She keeps running.

MONTAGE BEGINS

INT. NATASHA'S BEDROOM – MORNING

Natasha's room is immaculate. Minimal. Controlled. Mirrors line the walls. Closet mirror. Vanity mirror. Full-length mirror. Natasha stands in the center, reflected endlessly. She wears pink.

Standing in front of a wall mirror, Natasha studies her body carefully, looking down to her waist, adjusts her top and her hair, and practices a smile.

INT. NATASHA'S BATHROOM – MOMENTS LATER

The shower shuts off. Natasha steps out as a timer beeps. She shuts it off immediately.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Natasha grabs her toast from the toaster as soon as it's popped out.

She is very quick and precise, as her breakfast in the morning is always the same. One slice of toast, one egg, and a green smoothie. Natasha eats silently, sitting at the kitchen counter, eyes flicking to the clock between bites. When the last sip is gone, she stands.

Natasha grabs her car keys and leaves.

INT. NATASHA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

EMILY, 17, is an athletic, warm, beautiful girl. She is Natasha's best friend, and just like her, a track star. Emily is very well put together, her hair is always perfectly curled, or slicked back, and she attracts people's attention wherever she goes. Blue is always part of her wardrobe, reflecting some of her kind and light personality. She wears the same pair of GOLDEN EARRINGS every day.

Emily enters the passenger seat. She sits down with her backpack on her lap, as Natasha turns the volume up, blasting the music. They sing on the way to school.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT./INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Students crowd the entrance. Natasha and Emily move through them effortlessly.

RYAN, 18, is a loud and confident young man. He is Natasha's boyfriend. His tone is laid back, one of the dumb cool kids at school. He plays as a forward for the Calgary Canucks, and while talking to his hockey buddies in front of the entrance doors, he's wearing his team's jacket.

He's talking to two of his hockey friends, who are also wearing their team colours.

JOSH is the popular guy in school, the captain of the Calgary Canucks. He has piercing eyes that gets all of the girls' attention, and is Ryan's best friend.

CHRIS is the stereotypical Albertan hockey boy. He has a thick accent, and acts like everybody loves him, when in reality he's just loud and obnoxious.

Ryan spots Natasha and walks towards her.

RYAN

There she is.

He walks towards her and wraps an arm around her. Josh and Chris follow as they roughhouse behind the couple.

RYAN (cont'd)

You coming to the game Friday, babe?

NATASHA

(flirtatiously)

Of course, I've had it in my schedule for weeks baby, I wouldn't miss it.

Emily takes a pile of posters for the Winter Ball out of her backpack, and starts putting them on the bulletin boards as she walks past them.

EMILY

(laughing)

Yea don't be silly Ryan, she has everything in her schedule down to when you guys can make out.

RYAN

Can't complain about that!

He winks at Natasha, and she giggles at him and looks away.

CHRIS

(confidently)

Hey Em... how ya doin'?

He smiles at her as she starts to nod her head awkwardly.

EMILY

Great. Thanks

Emily looks at Natasha, widening her eyes to signal for help.

NATASHA

(laughing)

Well I have to head to class, I'll see you in science Em!

Natasha starts to walk away, and Emily gestures her hands away in annoyance before turning back to the boys out of politeness.

Natasha's smile drops as soon as her face is out of sight.

Behind her, Emily walks away from the boys and starts to head to class.

INT. SCIENCE CLASS - DAY

Bell rings.

Natasha is sitting in the second row of the class paying attention to the teacher while he talks about reptiles. One row back and to her right, Emily is sat at her desk, taking notes intensely.

Suddenly, the door opens.

NADIA, 16, steps inside. She is the new girl, mysterious, gothic, who always wears dark colors with a hint of green. She typically lingers in the shadows, trying not to draw attention to herself.

The teacher takes a pause. Nadia is wearing a black hoodie with a band logo no one recognizes. Chipped black nail polish, smudged eyeliner, headphones looped around her neck, framing the SNAKE CHOKER. There's a faint splash of green on her shoelaces. She scans the room with eyes downcast, before making eye contact with Natasha. Nadia chooses an empty desk in the front row, to the right of Natasha. The teacher continues the lecture.

Natasha watches her, and something sharp flickers in her eyes. She fidgets with her pen, clearly getting distracted staring at the void at the back of Nadia's head.

Emily throws a piece of paper at her, bringing Natasha back to the present moment.

EMILY

Nat, do you want to work on this after class?

Natasha looks around, realizing class is over. She then smiles and nods at Emily.

NATASHA

Sure.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER THAT DAY

The cafeteria is full and well lit with lots of chatter.

Natasha sits with the group. Ryan is next to her, talking with Chris and Josh, Emily is right across. She barely touches her food. On the other side of the cafeteria, Nadia eats alone with her headphones on banging her head slightly to the music. Natasha watches her without blinking.

EMILY

You okay?

NATASHA

Yeah. Just tired.

Emily follows her gaze.

EMILY

You might scare her.

NATASHA

I doubt it. She's the scary one.

JOSH

Who's scary?

EMILY

Nat's new obsession.

RYAN

You talking about me again?

NATASHA

Always.

CHRIS

So... Em... what are you doing for the Winter Ball?

EMILY

I'm working it. Speaking of which, I've got meet with the leadership team in five.

Emily gets up, taking her food with her, and walks away.

CHRIS

Right...

JOSH

What Chris? I thought you were my date.

Josh blows Chris a kiss, as he pours ketchup on his food. Chris squeezes the bottle making a mess. The boys laugh.

Natasha fake laughs as her focus goes back to Nadia.

MONTAGE BEGINS

INT. HALLWAY — DIFFERENT DAY

Natasha stands at her locker. She looks up and closes it as she notices Nadia walking by and it's as if her world begins to move in slow motion. Nadia doesn't seem to notice, but Natasha stares until Nadia gets out of sight.

INT. SCIENCE CLASS - DIFFERENT DAY

Natasha, Emily and Nadia are seated in their assigned spots. Nadia scribbles away in her notebook, clearly not paying attention to what is going on in class.

The bell rings and Natasha stands up quickly to try to swiftly walk past Nadia to see what she's writing, but Nadia quickly closes it and gets up to leave class. Emily notices and shoots Natasha a confused look.

EXT. SCHOOL PICNIC TABLES — DIFFERENT DAY

Nadia sits alone, carving into the wood with a small KNIFE. The blade scratches against the table. Natasha watches from a distance. Nadia looks up, and their eyes meet. Neither of them look away, until Nadia gets up and walks away from discomfort.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SMOKE PIT — LATER AFTER SCHOOL

Nadia leans against a fence, cigarette dangling from her fingers, and hoodie pulled tight against the wind. Natasha looks around to make sure there is no one there besides the two of them, and approaches. She puts on a soft smile.

NATASHA

Hey.

NADIA

(confused)

Hey.

A beat.

NATASHA

I like your look... I think it's really cool.

NADIA

(confused)

Uh... thanks.

NATASHA

You don't really try to fit in.

NADIA

I don't know if that's a compliment.

NATASHA

It is.

A pause.

NATASHA (cont'd)

Hey would you maybe like to hang out sometime...?

NADIA

(hesitant)

Sure... My parents are gone tonight.

NATASHA

Oh okay, yea. Can I get your number and you can text me the address?

Nadia nods and hands her phone over. She inhales the smoke while looking over at Natasha typing, still suspicious, with her shoulders arched and eyes half-closed.

Natasha gives the phone back to Nadia.

NATASHA (cont'd)

I'll see you later then.

She puts her hands behind her back and smiles before walking away. As she turns her back to Nadia, she bites the inside of her mouth nervously.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – LATER IN THE AFTERNOON

After track practice, Natasha is standing putting her shirt on, while Emily is sitting on the bench putting on her socks and her shoes.

Natasha's phone vibrates and she picks it up to see a text from Nadia with the address.

NATASHA

I'm hanging out with the new girl tonight.

EMILY

That Nadia girl?

NATASHA

Yeah, I don't know. Maybe she's cool.

Emily looks at Natasha curiously.

NATASHA (cont'd)

She doesn't have any friends yet, so I thought it would be a nice thing to do.

EMILY

Wow!

NATASHA

What?

EMILY

Nothing, I'm just impressed.

They pause. Emily stands up and grabs her bag.

EMILY (cont'd)

That's really nice of you.

They both put their backpacks over their shoulders and close their lockers.

EXT. NADIA'S HOUSE — NIGHT

A quiet suburban home. Natasha hesitates at the door, looking around to make sure nobody notices her. She looks down at her phone to double check the house number. She knocks three times, in a consistent rhythm.

Nadia opens the door. She's wearing a comfy pair of sweatpants and a baggy sweater. Her face is clean.

NADIA

(hesitant)

Oh.. hey... Come on in.

INT. NADIA'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Natasha steps inside and looks around. The house is a bit older but has a humble charm she isn't used to. It feels calmer than her own home, with warm lights and plants.

NADIA

Sorry it's messy. I didn't think you were coming.

NATASHA

Yeah, sorry. I just got really busy with practice.

Nadia bumps into a chair.

NADIA

Sorry. I'm clumsy.

NATASHA

I think we both have to stop apologizing.

They both laugh nervously. Nadia starts to walk to the kitchen and Natasha follows her.

INT. NADIA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

NADIA

Do you want a tea or something?

NATASHA

Yeah that would be great, thanks.

Nadia nods and smiles and starts filling the kettle in the sink. Natasha leans on her side against the entrance of the kitchen.

NATASHA (cont'd)

People think you're really dark yenko?

NADIA

Ah, let them.

Natasha slightly frowns, showing curiosity.

NATASHA

What do you mean?

NADIA

(hesitating)

I think we have a lot more in common than you think.

NATASHA

Why would you think that?

NADIA

Just come with me.

Nadia starts walking towards Natasha, shying away as she crosses her at the kitchen entrance, lowering her gaze. Natasha follows.

INT. NADIA'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Nadia opens her bedroom door and turns on the light, revealing a scenario that looks the complete opposite of her looks. There are fairy lights, a bookshelf filled with poetry books and the classics, as well as a poster from a local pop artist Natasha listens to.

Nadia gets closer to the poster and points at it.

NADIA  
You know Micah Sage right?

Natasha is still trying to take it all in, looking around with a numb countenance, disappointed Nadia is nothing like she thought she was. She gets close to the bookshelf.

NATASHA  
Yea, she's one of my favourite artists.

Natasha takes a POETRY BOOK out of the bookshelf.

NATASHA (cont'd)  
(disappointed)  
You read poetry?

NADIA  
I write it too!

Nadia starts getting excited, thinking Natasha likes everything she sees, as if it is a good surprise. She rushes to get a tiny notebook that is on her nightstand and shows it to Natasha.

NADIA (cont'd)  
I really love writing about fantasy for the most part, but usually I end up writing about the juxtapositions of societal norms, or like the hypocrisy of most people, especially political heads, but even down to the life of high schoolers. It just really pisses me off, you know?

She turns to Natasha. They start hearing the kettle screech from in the kitchen.

NATASHA

(half joking, half  
serious)

Oh... I assumed you were a bit darker than that. Your gorey band shirts and goth makeup made me assume you'd be into horror or something.

NADIA

(laughing nervously)

Yeah, it's kind of political, I guess. Not in a protest-sign way. More in a quiet refusal way. I don't really care about fitting in. That whole thing feels... obedient.

Natasha's eyebrow raises. The screaming of the kettle gets louder and louder in her head.

NADIA

Goth isn't about being dark for attention. It's about rejecting what we're told is normal, pretty, or acceptable. Most people spend their whole lives trying to be palatable. There's something comforting about choosing the things people are afraid of. It reminds you you're still thinking for yourself.

Natasha stares at her. Something inside her fractures. This isn't what she expected. Her fists tighten, her jaw clenches, she can't stop staring at Nadia's snake choker.

The kettle screams loudly.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. SCIENCE CLASS - DAY

A documentary plays. A BOA CONSTRICTOR coils on the projector as a narrator describes how it kills its prey. Natasha sits in class, watching it almost without blinking. She glances at Nadia's empty desk in the front row. Emily notices.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER THAT DAY

Emily and Natasha are sitting together at a table with the boys, eating their lunch, laughing, brainstorming funny ideas for Emily's speech at the Winter Ball. Emily clears her throat.

EMILY  
I think it's safe to say this Winter  
Ball is already snow much fun!

They all laugh. Chris laughs louder than everybody else.

CHRIS  
You're so funny, Em!

EMILY  
(awkwardly)  
Ha ha... thanks.

Josh nudges Chris, teasing him and they both stand up and  
Josh signals to Ryan for them to leave.

RYAN  
(standing up,  
laughing)  
See you later babe.

Natasha smiles at him as he joins the boys.

Emily's expression sharpens up a bit. She leans closer to  
Natasha.

EMILY  
Did you end up hanging out with  
Nadia? I didn't see her in class  
today.

NATASHA  
She bailed. I think she chickened  
out.

EMILY  
What makes you think that?

NATASHA  
She just never returned my texts and  
now she can't even show up to class.

EMILY  
Hm... weird

EXT. WOOD - NIGHT

Natasha runs. Her pace is fast but consistent. The moonlight  
reflecting on the woods feel colder now. She passes the  
homeless man's camp. He stands from close to his campfire  
and watches her. Natasha stops, looks back, controlling her  
breathing, and then keeps running.

MONTAGE BEGINS

Days are passing by.

Natasha has her habitual morning routine. She puts mascara and lip balm on, and grabs her running jacket.

She scrolls through her Instagram account and sees a missing person notice from the high school page showing a school photo of Nadia.

Natasha excels, getting an A on her test handed back in class.

She smiles. Laughs hard with the boys. Emily has a harder time laughing, and is visibly uncomfortable. She looks over at Natasha, who doesn't seem as bothered.

Natasha checks the burial site during her runs, almost sneaking off the regular path she always stays on. A wildflower rests on the disturbed ground. She stops, and nervously looks around as her stomach drops. She slicks back her ponytail and keeps running.

On a ride home from school, Emily opens the backseat door of Natasha's car to grab her extra bag, as she picks it up, she notices something sparkling on the seat. She takes a closer look and realizes it's a snake charm. The same one from Nadia's choker.

Cops are a regular occurrence at their high school now. Natasha sees TWO COPS standing in the hallway speaking to her PRINCIPAL. One of them makes direct eye contact with her. She smiles as she walks by. As soon as she passes her smile drops. She looks nervous.

As Natasha walks down the hallway, she doesn't notice Emily at her locker.

Emily closes her locker, and her eyes follow Natasha. She looks over to the cops. She stands there for a moment looking at the cops, as if she wants to go talk to them, before deciding against it and walking the other way.

At night, Natasha is laying on her bed, reading Nadia's poetry book.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. NATASHA'S HOUSE - SUNRISE

There's a knock at the door.

Natasha opens the it and sees Emily standing there, wearing a blue running suit, gloves, a scarf and her hair slicked back in a perfect wavy ponytail.

EMILY

Run with me. We need to talk.

EXT. WOODS – MOMENTS LATER

They run side by side in a different trail by the woods. Faster. Harder. They start to get deeper and deeper into the woods. Emily slows.

EMILY

You were with her that night.

NATASHA

With who?

EMILY

With Nadia. What even happened? Did you scare her off or something?

NATASHA

I don't know, I told you I never saw her, she bailed like the weird freak she is.

They both are trying to catch their breath while stretching it out.

NATASHA (cont'd)

God forbid someone try to extend a branch out to the weird new girl.

EMILY

Then why did I see your car parked on her street?

FLASHBACK  
BEGINS

EXT. NADIA'S STREET

Emily is running on the sidewalk. She slows down as she sees Natasha's car parked on the street. She looks inside to see if her friend is there, and when she isn't, Emily looks around curiously to see if Natasha is anywhere to be seen.

FLASHBACK ENDS

Natasha stops, trying to hide that she is stunned.

EMILY  
What? Do you know something?

Emily stops stretching.

NATASHA  
Are you accusing me of something?

EMILY  
Uh... no. Why are you being so weird?  
It's just a question.

NATASHA  
(laughing)  
Is it though?

Natasha steps closer.

EMILY  
I'm not accusing you of anything,  
Nat. I just think you know more than  
you're telling me.

NATASHA  
Em... why would you bring someone  
you're suspicious of into the woods?

Emily backs away.

EMILY  
Nat-

NATASHA  
What? What did you think was going to  
happen Em?

Emily pushes Natasha away from her.

EMILY  
(raising her voice)  
What's your problem? I just wanted  
to know that you're okay.  
You're acting like you did something.

Natasha's face drops. As she moves towards Emily.

Emily steps back. Silence.

EMILY (cont'd)  
Nat... did you do something?

Natasha pushes her to the ground and Emily fights her back.  
Natasha grabs a rock from the ground and goes to hit Emily.

INT. NATASHA'S BATHROOM — MORNING

The timer from her phone BEEPS. Natasha shuts off the shower immediately and grabs her towel. She steps out and stands in front of the foggy mirror and wipes it to reveal her face. She tries her best to smile in front of it, coaching herself into normalcy. She sheds a tear and wipes it away. She looks back in and gives herself a convincing smile before continuing on with her morning routine.

INT. NATASHA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Natasha puts her pink lip chap down on her vanity and smacks her lips together. She picks up her mascara and applies it before jumping up and grabbing her backpack.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Breakfast is already prepared. One slice of toast. One egg. A green smoothie. Natasha eats silently, eyes flicking to the clock between bites. When the last sip is gone, she stands.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Natasha walks into class just after the bell rings. Emily's desk is empty. Natasha looks out the window. A faint green reflection crosses her face. She blinks and looks ahead straight into the camera. Emily's golden earrings sparkle from her ears.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The homeless man walks quietly. He kneels and places a wildflower on disturbed ground.

FADE OUT

FIN