

SPLITTING ROOTS

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INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT

In a dim, candle-lit basement, four teens (17-20) arrange candles, metal bowls with water, and incense around a large pentacle drawn in chalk. JENNY (18) reads from a leather book and directs the teens.

Jenny and two teens carry a dirt-covered body to the center of the pentacle and lay it on its back.

The teens nod before sitting cross-legged around the pentacle. Jenny takes her place at the top of the pentacle, closest to the stairs that lead up, and she sets the book down. Using a silver lighter, she lights the incense.

The teens hold hands, eyes closed, and chant. A low hum begins to grow louder.

TEENS

...Et ex mortem ad vitam.

Silence. The teens drop each other's hands and open their eyes. They look at the body in the middle and at each other in confusion. Jenny picks up the book and flips through the pages.

The candle flames go out in a single blow. One girl screams. The candle flames return bigger and brighter.

The body in the center is now bent backwards, standing on its hands and feet, head lolling upside-down.

JENNY

Viv?

The gnarled hair drags on the ground as the head cocks to the side.

Suddenly the body crawls toward Teen 1. The teens scream and scramble away from the pentacle.

In flashes of blood and violence, the body tears through the teens. Jenny is the only one to run up the stairs and out of the basement. She slams the door shut, locks the knob, and leans against the door.

Her heart is pounding and her breath is ragged.

There is pounding on the other side of the door. Jenny squeezes her eyes shut.

JENNY (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Oh God.

EXT. FOREST-DAY-FLASHBACK

Shown through shadows on a leafy autumn forest floor, Jenny climbs up a large, oak high above the forest floor. Below, VIV (18, Jenny's identical twin) climbs more cautiously. Jenny laughs. The tree shakes.

A branch snaps.

Viv gasps.

There's a thud.

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-PRESENT

The pounding continues for a few seconds. Jenny presses harder against the door. The pounding stops.

JENNY
(whispering)
Oh fucking God.

There is a soft scrape on the other side of the door.

VIV (O.S.)
Ex mortam ad vitam. From death to
life. That's what you asked for.
Isn't it? Jenny?

Jenny's breath catches.

JENNY
Viv?

VIV
Unless you dug up someone else's
grave.

Jenny gives a shaky laugh. Jenny slumps down to sit with her back against the door.

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

The back of bloody and dirt-covered Viv sits in the reflection of an uptilted, shattered full-body mirror. A deep, bloody gash at the base of her skull sits in the center of the shattered glass.

JENNY (O.S.)
Did you...

VIV
Mhmmm...

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Jenny's head falls forward into her palms.

VIV (O.S.)
I'm sorry. I was so...ravenous. All
full now.

The doorknob above Jenny shakes but doesn't twist open.

VIV (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Please Jenny.

JENNY
I can't, you-

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Viv looks back at the carnage of bloody body parts. One body missing an arm starts to struggle to move up the stairs. Viv shushes and pushes it back down the stairs.

VIV
You led them to their end, just
like me and that tree.

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-PRESENT

Jenny looks over her shoulder, as if she can see through the door.

JENNY
We were exploring.

VIV (O.S.)
You let me fall.

JENNY
The branch broke.

VIV (O.S.)
And my friends just dropped dead.

JENNY
They volunteered-

VIV (O.S.)
 (growing angrier, talking
 over Jenny)
 This was all your idea, your
 absolution.

There's a single loud thud on the door. A lamp on a side table in the hall next to Jenny flickers out and back on again.

Jenny flinches.

JENNY
 I just wanted my sister back. I
 don't need to be absolved.

VIV (O.S.)
 (sneering)
 You're the reason I'm dead.

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Viv bangs on the door.

VIV
 God damnit, Jenny! Open the door!

The room is dropped into deathly silence.

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

A single tear rolls down Jenny's cheek.

JENNY
 I can't.

VIV (O.S.)
 Can't? Where's that classic Jenny
 'can do' attitude? That belief that
 just because you can means you
 should. "I can open the door, so I
 should."

EXT. FOREST-DAY-FLASHBACK

Quick, chaotic shots of shadows on the forest floor cut between the dialogue.

VIV (V.O.)

"I can revive Viv, so I should. I can climb that tree, so I should..."

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-PRESENT

In the mirror, Viv sits at the foot of the door and presses her head against the door. Her bloodied, dirty hair obscures her face.

VIV

"...and I'll drag Viv along. Just. Because. I. Can."

Viv bangs her head against the door with each word.

JENNY (O.S.)

How was I supposed to know that you would grab the one weak branch? If you were more cautious, you would still be alive.

Viv pulls her head away from the door and sits straight. She tilts her head slowly to the side.

VIV

Oh because you are such an expert tree climber. You knew exactly what you were doing. I always was the favorite child, and you just hated that.

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Jenny sits up straight, pulling away from the door and turning to face it, as if she is making eye contact with Viv.

JENNY

What?

VIV (O.S.)

Everything was going well for me. I had a loving boyfriend, a full ride to Yale, perfect friends. And you were always leeching off me.

Jenny looks down at her sweater, the name Viv is embroidered on the hem.

VIV (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You've thought about it, taking my
 place. Just slip into Yale...

A folded envelope with Yale's mailing address appears in her
 hand. Jenny's brow furrows.

VIV (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 ...pretend my friends were always
 your friends. Except- oops, I guess
 you can't now.

JENNY
 Viv, I never wanted to take your
 place.

Jenny throws the envelope away down the hall.

JENNY (CONT'D)
 I never wanted to go to Yale.
 You're friends are-were always mine
 too. Plus, your boyfriend is a
 loser.

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

In the mirror, Viv pulls at the hair on her scalp.

VIV
 (shouting)
 Then why did you fucking do it?!

She slams a heavy fist on the door.

EXT. FOREST-DAY-FLASHBACK

Shown in shadows, Jenny pauses.

JENNY
 Come on, slowpoke.

Jenny jumps from one tree branch to another, giggling. The
 whole tree shakes. Below, Viv stumbles.

VIV
 Wait-

Viv gasps.

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Jenny is curled into a ball against the door, crying.

JENNY

I'm sorry you're gone. I wish you weren't. I love you so much, and I will never stop loving you. But I can't apologize for something that wasn't my fault.

INT. BASEMENT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

In the mirror, Viv leans down and grabs the silver lighter that sits on the stairs. She turns back to the door.

VIV

(comforting)

It's alright, Jenny. You don't have to apologize.

A flame flickers to life in Viv's eyes (the first time we see Viv not in the mirror).

INT. HALLWAY-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Jenny is still curled into a ball. At the corner of the door, a fire starts to grow. The flame catches on Jenny's sweater. Jenny jumps to her feet, trying to put it out.

VIV (O.S.)

You'll be sorry. Eventually.

Jenny watches in horror as the door burns. The shadows behind her grow darker and longer, waving chaotically. Smoke curls around Jenny, crawling up.

Viv giggles.

CUT TO BLACK.