

THE SHORTCUT

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GENRE: Drama

LOGLINE: Three best friends decide to take a shortcut where they encounter a mysterious man who brings out the worst in them.

CAST:

LUKE (16-17, scrawny, a nerd. The type to hold his backpack straps with both hands. Desperately trying not to get left behind.)

MORGAN (17-18, curly-headed, eyebags. Busy being the peacekeeper in his own parent's divorce. Obeys authority figures and avoids conflict.)

KIERAN (18, scruffy blonde hair, leader-type. Mourning his older brother. Thinks he's the toughest around.)

THE MAN (Adult/ageless. Mysterious and an instigator. Takes pleasure in other's distress. Speculated Devil incarnate.)

LOCATIONS:

EXT. STREET

Sidewalk on a street in town.

EXT. SHORTCUT PATH

A shaded, hidden path connected to the main street.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

An overcast, winter day. Pedestrians walk along the sidewalk in their coats and cold-weather gear. Christmas lights.

KIERAN (18, scruffy blonde hair, leader-type), LUKE (16, scrawny, holding his backpack straps), and MORGAN (17, curly-headed, eyebags) walk together, bickering.

LUKE

I'm just saying, based on the amount of credits I've taken, this semester-

KIERAN

Well, like I'm saying, who gives a shit about your credits, man?

LUKE

Me, actually, I give all the shits!

Kieran laughs at Luke but stops and turns to face him, putting a hand on his shoulder.

KIERAN

Luke, just finish out your senior year, man. Don't bother with all that graduating early stuff.

LUKE

You're just worried people will know I'm smarter than you.

MORGAN

Please, everyone knows you're smarter than any of us combined.

KIERAN

Ain't that the truth.

Luke shrugs them off. They keep walking. Then, Kieran halts the gang and points up ahead.

KIERAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Let's go this way. It's a shortcut.

Luke and Morgan share an uncertain look.

KIERAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I promise! It's a shortcut, it'll be way faster.

MORGAN

Right...

KIERAN

What, have you guys never taken a shortcut for once in your life?

LUKE

Oh, so a spontaneous shortcut through the woods is okay but a thoroughly planned out "shortcut" through one year of high school isn't?

KIERAN

It's different and you know that.

LUKE

Whatever.

MORGAN

Guys, quit it.

KIERAN

Fine. Whatever. If you guys wanna be chicken, I'll just go alone.

Kieran pushes the branches aside and jumps angrily down onto the path. Morgan rushes after him.

MORGAN

Kieran, wait-

Luke stands with his arms crossed against his chest. He taps his foot impatiently. Then he groans and follows after.

EXT. SHORTCUT PATH - AFTERNOON

Kieran, Morgan, and Luke all walk on the path. It is entirely shrouded from the main street by overgrown trees.

KIERAN

Spooky.

They walk. It's quiet. Morgan rubs his hands together in his gloves. Luke grabs a stick off the ground and swings it around like a sword, fighting off imaginary foes. Kieran joins him and they clash stick swords together.

They walk for a while before the road splits into four paths.

KIERAN (CONT'D)

Uh...

MORGAN

Oh, don't tell me...

Morgan scoffs. Luke looks between the two of them, processing. Then Luke throws his stick at Kieran.

KIERAN

Ow!

LUKE

What the hell, Kieran? You got us lost already?

KIERAN

Hey, no, it's not my fault!

LUKE

Isn't it?

A faint WHISTLE pierces the air. The three boys all dart their heads in the direction of the song.

A MAN strolls up ahead. He glides, a gracious, confident walk. The boys look at each other, then dash to meet the Man.

MORGAN

Excuse us! Hello?

The Man smiles at the kids, coming to a cheery stop.

THE MAN

Good evening.

MORGAN

Uh, sorry to bother you, sir, but do you know how to get back on the main street?

THE MAN

Whoa now, what's the rush? Have you all got some kind of family dinner to get to, hm?

MORGAN

Uh...

KIERAN

Look, could you just tell us which direction to go?-

MORGAN

-, Sir?

THE MAN

Why are all of the youth in such a hurry these days?

The boys exchange looks. Morgan sighs and turns to The Man.

MORGAN

I'm needed back home for dinner.

LUKE

You're still doing dinner together?

MORGAN

Yeah. 'Course.

THE MAN

(He smiles)

I love a good feat. Surprising, though- They still eat together?

MORGAN

What?

THE MAN

It's just strange that they'd make dinner a family event...all things considered.

Morgan blinks in confusion.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Parents can be so overbearing, don't you think? Oh, well. Once the peacekeeper always the peacekeeper, Morgan.

MORGAN

Sorry, do I know you?

THE MAN

(Turning to Luke)

And you must be happy with everyone home for the Holidays, no?

Luke forgets himself in the happy thought, forgets that The Man shouldn't know anything about him.

LUKE

Yeah, it's great!

THE MAN

Oh, to hold on tightly. To cling. Do you cling, Luke?

LUKE

What?

THE MAN

Don't you wish you could?

LUKE

Wish I could what?

THE MAN

Hold onto this time. Maybe even stop time. I mean, it's not your fault you're younger. There's no shame in being selfish.

KIERAN

(Standing in between them)

Whoa, what the hell are you talking about?

THE MAN

I'm just chatting. Do the young people nowadays not chat?

They all share uncomfortable glances.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Here, I'll show you how to have small talk. Wow, what a chilly day! Have you three ever seen snow?...Ian would have liked to see it now.

KIERAN

How do you know Ian?

THE MAN

Oh, kid, I know Ian. Where else do you think he went? Up there with the big shots?

The Man mimics a little person climbing stairs with his fingers. He chuckles sarcastically.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Upstairs is for the ones who actually play the game, Kieran. I mean, everyone knows what happens to "tortured" little boys like him.

Kieran is still for a second. The Man and Kieran stare at each other. And then, Kieran lunges at The Man, wildly swinging his fists. Morgan holds Kieran back.

MORGAN

Whoa, whoa, Kieran! Stop!

KIERAN  
What the hell is he talking about?

MORGAN  
Just drop it! He doesn't know anything. He's just messing with you.

KIERAN  
Why are we still talking to this guy if he can't even give us some fucking directions?

THE MAN  
We're just chatting.

MORGAN  
He's just trying to get in your head?

KIERAN  
Well, it's working!

Luke stands away from the commotion, not having moved since his conversation with The Man. His eyes are distant.

LUKE  
What did you mean by "stop time"?

THE MAN  
Just that, kid. You can stop time.

LUKE  
How would I do that?

The Man throws his head back in a laugh.

THE MAN  
You know enough already about how to be selfish. But, all you'd have to do is shake my hand. And then we have a deal.

LUKE  
And then we have a deal?

THE MAN  
It's as easy as that.

LUKE  
What do you get out of it?

THE MAN

Can't a man just give a gift out of the goodness of his heart? It's almost Christmas, is it not?

KIERAN

Are you seriously considering whatever this stranger has to say?

LUKE

What does it matter to you? I don't want to be left behind when you both go off to college! You won't let me graduate early, you won't let me do anything!

KIERAN

Why do you care what I think anyway? I'm not your dad, Luke! Make you own goddamn decisions!

LUKE

I am!

KIERAN

Oh, don't be stupid.

LUKE

Jesus, I can't do anything right in your eyes. What did I ever do to you, Kieran? You just think you're better than all of us just because you're older.

KIERAN

It's not because I'm older, idiot.

LUKE

Oh, I forgot, it's because you've been through more. You think you're better just 'cause you've been through more shit. You think just because your brother died-

KIERAN

You don't know anything! You think you're the smartest person alive but you're so lonely, you'd throw your whole life away just to not be alone for one second-

MORGAN

Guys, cut it out! Kieran, he didn't mean anything by all that. He's just scared.

LUKE

Scared? Don't try to protect me, Morgan. You're the one who's really scared.

KIERAN

Yeah, you can't even stand up to your stupid parents.

MORGAN

It's not my fault they can't get along! How is that my fucking fault?

KIERAN

You can't even say that to their faces, can you?

Kieran, Luke, and Morgan shout over each other, throwing insult after insult.

At some point, the first punch is thrown. It easily escalates until they all are rolling on the floor in a big fist fight.

The Man begins to whistle again. He puts his hands in his pockets, turns, and walks leisurely away.

THE MAN

So much for shortcuts, huh?

FADE TO BLACK.