

MUST APPEAR NORMAL

BY ISABEL HARPER

INT. HOPE'S OFFICE - DAY

HOPE (29) over-caffeinated and fidgety, sits at her desk, Zoom camera on, wearing a blazer and blouse with grey sweatpants and fluffy slippers, using a toothbrush to slick down her frizzy jet black hair.

Hope stares at her reflection with sunken, empty eyes. She pulls the skin on her face, flattening forehead lines, observing her dark circles, curling the corners of her mouth to form a limp smile before returning to a cold, neutral expression.

Hope's office is clean, clinical and minimalist - plain cream walls, motivational hipster art, a bookshelf ordered by colour, strategically placed self-help books on the windowsill between dying potted plants.

Hope nurses a cup of coffee from a mug that reads "BUT FIRST COFFEE". Her desk is cluttered with empty coffee cups and sugar-free RedBull cans.

CUT TO:

Hope's sucks on her vape pen, anxious. Six faces appear on her laptop screen, her colleagues chat with each other until with JAKE (30), young, handsome, but needs some eggs to go with the chip on his shoulder, enters and takes up the centre of the screen.

JAKE

We need creative, out-of-the-box thinkers with fresh ideas.

(beat)

Does anyone have an idea for the next campaign?

SILENCE.

JAKE (CONT'D)

C'mon people, no idea is a bad idea...I don't bite.

Hope clears her throat and unmutes her mic.

HOPE

(nervous)

I have an idea?

JAKE

Can you make it quick?

HOPE

We're struggling to reach a younger demographic with the brand. Young people love social media trends, so what if we started using trends and memes as a form of marketing?

SILENCE.

Hope's colleagues stare at her, bored, unimpressed. The silence is deafening. Jake stares at Hope blankly, before he grits his teeth into a passive-aggressive, fake smile.

JAKE

Does anyone else have any ideas?

Hope, crestfallen, feigns a smile and purses her lips.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Although...what if we started using social media to tap into a younger audience?

HOPE

Isn't that what I just s-

JAKE

Kids love TikTok and Instagram; if we engage with them online, they'll tell their parents and BOOM! Christmas bonuses all round! How does that sound?

Hope's colleagues cheer and applaud Jake, Jake revels in the praise. Hope's eye twitches, she's stunned into silence.

HOPE

Jake, can I-

JAKE

Okay, I think that's all for today. I'll see you all tomorrow to make a start on the campaign.

The Zoom call ends, faces disappear. Hope is left staring at herself once again. She sucks on her vape pen and slams her laptop shut, pissed off.

INT. HOPE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Hope slams her bedroom door before she collapses on her bed, defeated. She sets an alarm on her phone and puts it on the nightstand.

Underneath her pillow is a vibrator, she holds it for a moment, internally debating whether or not to use it before she chucks it on the floor, and has a nap instead.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: *1 HOUR LATER.*

Hope lays on the bed asleep, snoring and drooling. Her alarm goes off, she clumsily reaches to turn it off, her eyes still closed, but she can't feel it. Suddenly, the alarms stops.

Lying next to Hope is her ID (29), a physical manifestation of her unconscious mind that pertains all Hope's urges, instincts and impulses. Id is RED, SCALY and FLESHLESS; unlike Hope, she is bubbly, eccentric and sentimental.

Id, with bulging eyes that don't blink, watches Hope sleep and gently caresses her cheek. Hope, in a half-awake daze slowly opens her eyes.

HOPE
(groggy)
When did you get here?

Id puts a finger on Hope's head.

ID
I live here, silly.

HOPE
But why are you here?
It's not my birthday.

ID
Has anyone ever told you that you
look really cute when you sleep?

SHADOW (29) an amorphous dark figure resembling Hope's human form with a voice a couple octaves deeper, lurks around the room.

Unbeknownst to Hope, Shadow picks off the dead leaves of Hope's plants, she scoffs at the self-help therapy books; she holds up 'HOW TO BE YOU' by Jeffrey Marsh to show Id.

SHADOW
Clearly, she hasn't read this
one.

ID
(to SHADOW)
This is what happens when we
leave her alone for too long.

HOPE
Why are you here?

ID
Shadow came along to help.

HOPE
Help with what- WHAT THE FUCK?

Hope widens her eyes. Above her, the ceiling fan spins around with her skin flapping on.

Hope gasps, she looks down at her hands that are RED, SCALY AND FLESHLESS. She screams in terror.

HOPE
(panicked)
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

SHADOW
(sing-song)
Surprise!

Hope kicks Id off the bed, bolts up, and starts jumping on the bed trying to reach the ceiling fan. Id and Shadow giggle at her failed attempts.

Id scales the wall effortlessly, and dangles the skin over Hope's head. Id moves at a scattered pace.

Hope starts throwing miscellaneous objects, trying to make Id fall – Id dodges them, enjoying the game.

Hope, now tired and frustrated, gives up and slumps on the bed, slapping and pinching her face.

HOPE
(to herself)
This isn't happening.
This is a bad dream, I just need
to wake up.

Id jumps down from the wall. Hope sits up on the bed with Id on her right and Shadow on her left.

ID
Why'd you stop? I was having fun.

SHADOW
She's a quitter.

HOPE
You stole my skin!

ID
It's *our* skin.

HOPE
I've done everything you've asked
– I smoke, I eat cheese, I watch
porn – What did I do to deserve
this?

SHADOW
You've been letting us down for a
while, Hope.

ID
We just don't think you're up for
the job anymore.

HOPE
Excuse me?

SHADOW

(mocking)

Hi, I'm Hope, I let my boss shit-talk and then steal my ideas because sticking up for myself makes me uncomfortable.

ID

(to SHADOW)

That was a bit harsh.

HOPE

I-I don't understand?

SHADOW

You've suppressed us for too long; we had to intervene.

HOPE

(scoffs)

What are you gonna do? Kill me?

ID

We're taking over the skin.

HOPE

OVER. MY. DEAD. BODY.

SHADOW

(impressed)

There *she* is.

HOPE

(to ID)

You have no idea how to live in the REAL world. You'd ruin everything I've built.

ID

(defensive)

No, I wouldn't! I'd just do whatever I want whenever I feel like it; then we can be happy again.

SHADOW

Or less depressed.

SHADOW pours a glass of wine and takes a seat.

HOPE

I can't live a sustainable life on impulse and desire.

ID pulls a joint from behind her ear and lights it indoors.

ID

Why not? It's easy.

Hope angrily snatches the joint from Id's mouth and chucks it out the window. ID, shocked and now angry.

HOPE

Can't we discuss a schedule of sharing the skin- I'll do weekdays ,you can have it on weekends and holidays?

SHADOW

Don't listen to her Id, we're not here to negotiate.

Hope tries to snatch the skin off Id, but Id has quicker reflexes.

ID

(smug)

If you want it, you'll have to come and get it.

Id scuttles out of the bedroom, leaving Hope to chase after her.

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

Hope runs after the Id, but Id springs from wall to wall to the stairs with the skin flapping in in her clawed grip. Hope is always close behind - but not close enough. Shadow observes the chase, smirking.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Hope, panting, opposite Id, hyper and giddy, with a kitchen island in between them.

SHADOW

(to HOPE)

Bet you regret cancelling your gym membership?

HOPE

Why are you doing this?

SHADOW

It's called rebellion, darling.

HOPE

(to ID)

You don't want to live my life. You like having fun. I only live this way for your benefit.

SHADOW

(to ID)

Don't listen to her, she's manipulating you.

ID
(aggressive)
Stop manipulating me!

HOPE
My life is boring but it's mine -
just let me live it.

SHADOW
Id, if you wear the skin, you
could leave the house, and
finally explore the world.

Shadow's comment excites and distracts Id. Hope seizes the opportunity, she lunges for the skin. Id grips on to the arms whilst Hope tugs on the legs.

HOPE
LET GO! YOU'RE STRETCHING IT!

ID
NO, YOU LET GO!

Hope and Id continue pulling and stretching the skin until Hope loses her balance, she lets go of the skin, catapulting backwards and collapsing into a glass table in the process. The tables shatters, shards of glass everywhere.

ID
Are you hurt?

HOPE
Yes.

Id puts the skin on the kitchen island and rushes over. Id helps Hope stand up. Hope pulls the shards of glass out of her face before she kicks Id in the crotch and bolts towards the skin.

Id beats her again with her supernatural speed, she climbs onto the ceiling, growling, with Hope's skin between her teeth.

SHADOW
(to HOPE)
I like you more when you act like
me.

Hope sinks to the floor, crying. Shadow rolls her eyes.

SHADOW
How could you give up on yourself
so easily?

HOPE
(teary)
I don't know how else to convince
you.

SHADOW

So, you're just gonna give up
every time things get hard?

Id jumps down to the floor and puts her arm around Hope.

ID

Why do you think we took the
skin?

HOPE

To torture me?

ID

No, think about it.

HOPE

I don't know?

ID

You do know, you just don't want
to admit it.

HOPE

Because I'm a failure?

SHADOW

Worst. You're a people-pleaser.

HOPE

I'm just trying to be a good
person?

SHADOW

What's the point of making
everyone else happy but not
yourself?

ID

When you don't stick up for
yourself, you allow others to
live comfortably in your misery.

HOPE

If I don't stick up for myself,
no one else will.

SHADOW

You're not as dumb as you look.

ID

We're here to help you be you.

SHADOW

But we won't be silenced.

INT. HOPE'S OFFICE - DAY

Hope sits anxiously at her desk, her skin back on. She tugs at the corner of her face, it's looser than it was before.

With Shadow on her left and Id on her right, she calls Jake. Her laptop rings several times before Jake answers the call; he looks at her with palpable irritation.

JAKE

What do you want now, Hope? I'm busy.

Hope, apprehensive, wanting to back down, struggles to speak.

ID

(to HOPE)

We practised this, you can do this.

Hope closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, as she exhales, Shadow and Id disappear.

HOPE

I know that you stole my idea.

JAKE

Do you know how serious of an allegation is?

HOPE

I have evidence. You need to apologise and credit me or I will take this to HR.

JAKE

(smirks)

Go ahead. I could just fire you and then you'll have nothing to your name.

HOPE

Fine. If you want to steal from me, I'll just have to steal something from you.

JAKE

What could you possibly steal from me?

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Id and Shadow suddenly appear in Jake's office. Jake is none the wiser until they each place a hand on his shoulders. Jake turns around, bewildered and terrified.

JAKE

Who the fuck are you-

Before Jake can finish his sentence, Id and Shadow maniacally tear off his skin with their bare hands. Jake wails in agony. Hope's face lights up with glee through the laptop screen.

Jake, sits at his desk, RED, SCALY and fleshless.

JAKE

(crying)

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?

HOPE

It's called rebellion, darling.

THE END.