

VINYL TAPED MARY JANE

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EXT. FRONT OF PRIVATE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

School lets out. MEGHAN MASON (9, Black, smart, self-assured, spunky, daddy's girl) listens to her best friend, BRIE THOMPSON (9, white, woke, funny in a grown-up kind of way) excitedly chat her ear off.

BRIE

You have no idea how big a deal this is! Everyone is so extra! Spending hundreds of dollars on a dress, arriving in limos, girls wearing corsages. The works.

MEGHAN

You're back on that again?

BRIE

You mean the event of the year? Of course! It only makes the local news every year. I mean it's like the Miss America pageant on steroids.

Brie's eyes are wide. Meghan can't seem to take her eyes off her MARY JANES as they descend the stairs.

MEGHAN

Hmm.

BRIE

Yeah, so everybody who's anybody, is at this dance. Daddy be DAMNED, if I'm not there! And you're going too!

Meghan clenches her teeth. Exhales.

BRIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, so I'm probably going shopping tonight. Knowing my mom-- --Hey! You should ask your mom if you can come.

MEGHAN

(scoffs) That's the last thing on her mind.

Brie is taken aback. A Mercedes Benz pulls up, honks breaking up the awkward moment.

BRIE

That's my ride. Hey, just let her know this is a BIG deal. It's the event of the year. Got to go. See you tomorrow?

MEGHAN

Sure.

Brie jogs backwards towards the car yelling.

BRIE

Don't worry! We'll figure everything out.

MEGHAN

(to herself) Easy for you to say.

Brie gets into the car and they drive off. Meghan walks home.

INT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Meghan stops at a gas station. AHMAD, (28, Pakistani American, friendly, American pop-culture enthusiast) chats her up.

AHMAD

Meghan! How was school today?

MEGHAN

It was OK.

She sits a bag of cheddar goldfish on the counter.

AHMAD

OK. OK. So, I just so happen to catch an episode of My Little Pony.

He looks from side to side.

AHMAD (CONT'D)

And I hate to admit it, but it's pretty good. The ponies have it, man! Friendship? Cutie marks?

Meghan giggles, trying to hide her smile.

MEGHAN

Ahmad, you know that makes you a Brony, right?

AHMAD

Shh! Don't go messing up my street cred, kid.

Meghan pretends to zip her lips and smiles.

AHMAD (CONT'D)
That's better. Goldfish on the
house today.

MEGHAN
Thanks. Hey.

Meghan hesitates.

MEGHAN (CONT'D)
Hey, do you dance?

AHMAD
Who me?! Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

Ahmad shakes his finger.

AHMAD (CONT'D)
Why?

Disappointed, Meghan shrugs and grabs the bag of cheddar goldfish.

AHMAD (CONT'D)
See you later, kid.

Meghan smiles weakly and heads for the door. She stops at AHMAD'S COUSIN (20, the gas valet and store attendant.)

MEGHAN
Hey, do you danc--

--Stares at his green hair. Tattoos. Piercings. Bad idea.

MEGHAN (CONT'D)
Never mind.

AHMAD'S COUSIN
Huh? Say something, kid?

She shakes her head no. Leaves.

EXT. MEGHAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER

Meghan walks down her block. Near her neighbor, PETER SHAW aka MR. SHAW. (50's, white, fit, handsome, a little eccentric, lives alone) 6 guests (white, Black, Latino, Asian in their 50's and 60s) leave his house in an upset.

MEGHAN
 (to herself) What's that crazy old
 man up to now?

She shakes her head then turns to cross street--

PARTY ATTENDEE 1
 --Peter, you need help!

Meghan turns back to see what's going on.

PARTY ATTENDEE 2
 You're not right, Peter.

PARTY ATTENDEE 3
 Been friends for over a year, you
 had plenty of time to come clean.

SYBIL (60's, woman, greying brunette, pragmatic) walks up to
 Meghan.

SYBIL
 Here!

Sybil shoves a wrapped GIFT into Meghan's arms. She
 reluctantly accepts.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
 You'll get more use out of this.

Sybil looks Meghan dead in her eyes.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
 If he ever talks your ear up about
 a Jemma, run!

She shakes her head at Mr. Shaw. He throws his hands up.

MR. SHAW
 Sybil. Come on, guys.

He sits on his front porch stairs. Runs his fingers through
 his hair. Defeated he watches his friends get in their cars
 and drive off.

SYBIL
 Peter, call me, when you're ready
 to talk. Honestly, OK? I'll be
 here.

Sybil is last to leave. Meghan cautiously approaches Mr.
 Shaw.

MEGHAN

Mister. Is this yours?

Meghan offers the GIFT back to Mr. Shaw. Meghan prepares to recoil but softens her stance. His eyes are warm.

MR. SHAW

You can call me Mr. Shaw. And please, keep it. Would you like some birthday cake with that?

MEGHAN

Sure?

Mr. Shaw gets up. Goes inside. Returns with a large square of CAKE in a TUPPERWARE dish.

MR. SHAW

Here you go. Enjoy.

Meghan lifts the TUPPERWARE in gratitude and crosses the street. She notices RED TAPE covering a BROKEN TAIL LIGHT on the family's grey Jeep Wrangler. She steps on the porch. Lets herself in.

INT. MEGHAN'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Meghan steps inside. Comfy, lived-in home. Drops BACKPACK on floor. Puts GIFT, TUPPERWARE on kitchen table. Opens BACKPACK, pulls out FATHER-DAUGHTER DANCE FLYER. Walks towards mom's bedroom.

Overhears mom, CAROLYN MASON (30s, Black, a sweet Atlanta native, fights for her family) on phone.

CAROLYN (O.S.)

(sighs) I haven't heard from Jimmy in over a month. Hasn't returned my Skypes or emails.

Deciding it's a bad time, Meghan turns and tiptoes back.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Well, they're pulling out of Afghanistan. It's not stable now that all the troops are coming home.

Meghan freezes, waiting for her mom's next word.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Uh huh. Well, he was due back home last week.

Getting teary eyed, Meghan angrily wipes her eyes, crumples the FLYER and throws it into her BACKPACK. She pulls a chair out from the kitchen table, making a loud scratching noise across the worn linoleum.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(yelling) Meghan? That you?

Meghan feigns a happy tone.

MEGHAN
Yes, ma'am.

CAROLYN (O.S.)
(yelling) It's a help yourself
night, tonight, sweetie. Leftovers
in the fridge.

Carolyn shuts the door, speaks in hushed tones. Meghan opens the fridge, spots leftovers. Promptly shuts the door. Grabs her CAKE, GIFT and a fork, and walks to the UNOFFICIAL SHRINE to her father, JIMMY MASON (early 30's, Black, Airforce pilot, handsome, doting father).

She STARES at an OLD PHOTO of him lifting her up to fly over his head.

JIMMY MASON (V.O.)
You've got to use your wings, baby
girl...

She looks at his STOIC PILOT PHOTO, plops down on the couch.

MEGHAN
(to herself) What do we have here?

Meghan unwraps the GIFT to find a kid's gemstone dig kit.

MEGHAN (CONT'D)
(to herself) Hmm?

She opens TUPPERWARE, examines the birthday CAKE. Sniffs it. Tastes a dollop of frosting. Decides it's OK. Dives in. Eating until she's full. Falls asleep.

INT. MEGHAN'S HOME - MORNING

CAROLYN
Megs! WHAT are you doing? No time
for washing dishes, girl.

Carolyn shoos Meghan out the door. Meghan dries and tucks TUPPERWARE into her BACKPACK. Grabs her MARY JANES. Puts them on as mom locks the front door.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE - MORNING

In Meghan's rush, she TRIPS OVER her own feet, STUMBLES and SPLITS open her right shoe. They continue down the path, towards the jeep. Meghan and Carolyn get into the Jeep.

INT. JEEP - MORNING

Carolyn presses ignition button, starts Jeep. Pulls off.

MEGHAN

Mom! My shoe! I can't go to school like this!

CAROLYN

What? What is it, Megs!?

Meghan removes her MARY JANE and PULLS the sole from the shoe. EXAMINES the damage. Meghan PRETENDS the LOOSE SOLE and the SHOE FLAP are LIPS, TALKING.

MEGHAN

Mary Jane loves to gossip, Mom.

CAROLYN

(Scoffs) It pours when it rains, don't it!

MEGHAN

I'm not stepping a foot in that school like this.

CAROLYN

Listen. You're one of the smartest, coolest kids in that school. Full scholarship, remember? Hold your head up high and remember you're a Mason.

Meghan rolls her eyes.

MEGHAN

Yeah, well masons are known for building things. I can't show up with a busted, broken shoe.

Carolyn reaches over. Opens the glove compartment.

CAROLYN

Got to be something I can use.

She wildly shuffles through the glove compartment.

Carolyn holds up RED VINYL TAPE as she stops at a red light. She grabs Meghan's shoe and WRAPS RED TAPE around it.

MEGHAN

What is this? This is worse. Look at it! The tape doesn't even match. Nope. Not going. Not today. Uh-uh, not happening.

Carolyn pulls up to Meghan's school. The bell rings and students file in. She reaches over and opens Meghan's door, before cradling Meghan's chin in her hand.

CAROLYN

Honey, listen. We all have our part to do. Make the best of it. We'll get a new pair after school, I promise. But right now, you're mama's running late for work.

Meghan begrudgingly slips on the RED VINYL TAPED MARY JANE and stumbles out of the Jeep. She FALTERS, staring at the school building, then at her shoe and back, full of dread.

INT. SCHOOL LUNCH ROOM - DAY

Meghan walks with Brie through the busy lunchroom to their lunch table.

BRIE

So, I found my dress! It's so lit! Let me tell you--

LILITH BAXTER (10, blonde snarky, mean girl, comes from a prominent, well-connected family) spots Meghan and smiles sinisterly. CAITLYN CAMPBELL (9, mean side kick, entitled rich kid, follower) and EMILY PARKER (9, brunette, spoiled rich kid, follower) join Lilith as she approaches Meghan.

LILITH

--Love that new look, Meghan! What's that? A new trend from the hood?

Lilith and her sidekicks laugh. Point at Meghan's shoe. Meghan stares back, unflinchingly.

MEGHAN
Shut up, you Karen.

BRIE
Yeah, Lilith you lame dogface.
Everybody hates you.

Brie rolls her eyes and turns back to Meghan.

BRIE (CONT'D)
As I was saying my dress--

LILITH
--Making plans for the dance?
(laughs) My mom says Father-
Daughter dances are for girls that
are... Ooh, what's the word?

She raises her forefinger.

LILITH (CONT'D)
Crème de la crème. Girls with
class!

Lilith dabs the air with her finger.

CAITLYN
So true.

EMILY
My mom says that too.

LILITH
Let's be real, do you even have a
dad to take you? I've never seen
him. You sure your mom's not a
broke down baby's mama?

Lilith relishes in the insult. Meghan's nostrils flare. Brie steps in front of Meghan.

BRIE
Why don't you do what dogs do? Lick
the bottom of a shoe or something
with that hot dog breath.

LILITH
Speaking of shoes, I've got to post
yours, Meghan. I'll get so many
laughs --I mean likes for this!

Lilith laughs as she whips out her iPhone. Meghan SNATCHES it, THROWS it to the ground, SHATTERING the screen.

Lunch room gasps. MRS. HAMPSHIRE (late 40s, thin, strict and punishing) runs to the scene.

MRS. HAMPSHIRE
 Absolutely not, Meghan Mason! We are non-violent here. You scholarship kids! After school. Detention--

BRIE
 --But that's not fair! Lilith--

MRS. HAMPSHIRE
 --There's no defense for such aggression, Brie! Detention for you, as well. I'll add another day for the both of you, you say one more word!

Lilith and her two sidekicks smile triumphantly and walk away as Mrs. Hampshire marks down Meghan and Brie's names.

INT. MEGHAN'S CLASSROOM - LATER

School day is over. Meghan and Brie sit. Arms crossed as other detention students file in.

BRIE
 (whispering) This is so stupid.

MEGHAN
 (whispering) Dumb detention.

BRIE
 A waste of time.

MEGHAN
 Lilith the lame dogface.

BRIE
 A waste of breath.

MEGHAN
 Speaking of. You smell her dog breath? Oh my God!

Meghan and Brie giggle loudly. Mrs. Hampshire looks up from her book, over her THICK RIMMED GLASSES.

BRIE
 We've got better things to do. Like getting ready for the dance.
 (MORE)