

BURNINGWOOD PILOT

Written by

Elise Van Pelt

INT. STUDY - DAY

We find ourselves in a brightly sunlight study that looks like it belongs to an intellectual. Books are everywhere, and it looks warm, smart, and inviting. An empty chair is the main focus in the frame. Shortly DOUGLAS WARD, 63, kind but precise, walks on from off screen and takes a seat in the chair. We immediately know the chair is his because he matches his surroundings in appearance and demeanor. He gets comfortable, looking off camera to his interviewer. This is ALEX ZHANG, 24, an adventure seeking college dropout.

ALEX

You ready?

DOUGLAS

I believe so, yes.

ALEX

Sound?

Sound is JORDAN RODRIGUEZ, 26, a man of few interests who doesn't care about anything else. He spits his gum into a nearby trashcan and lazily replies.

JORDAN

Speeding.

ALEX

Camera?

Camera is NATALIE BROOKS, 22, a woman who spends a lot of time trying to appear like she doesn't give a shit. She messes with the focus one last time, then hits record.

NATALIE

Rolling.

Alex gestures to his assistant director, HALEY KERRIGAN, 23, an overachiever who isn't particularly interested in film. She takes the slate and loudly claps it a bit too close to Douglas's face.

HALEY

Douglas Ward, take one.

She walks out of frame and Douglas smiles. He looks nervous but excited.

ALEX

Would you mind introducing yourself?

DOUGLAS

Sure. I'm Dr. Douglas Ward, and I am the resident local historian here at the University of Connecticut.

ALEX

Tell me about your work at the university.

DOUGLAS

I've been teaching here for nearly 20 years now. When I was first hired I devoted myself strictly to teaching, but as I learned more about this area I spent more and more time researching local history. I'm originally from Illinois, so when I moved here with my family I was hearing all of these crazy stories for the first time. People from around here just accept them as normal, so it became me who studied them. I suppose no one else really cared.

ALEX

What kind of crazy stories?

DOUGLAS

Most of the things I hear are from the 80's. It was a surprisingly wild time here in the woods. But I suppose you really want to hear about Burningwood, don't you?

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

We match cut from the footage to Natalie looking down at it. She looks up and yells to Alex, who is packing the car with equipment with the rest of the crew.

NATALIE

Yeah, we got it all.

ALEX

Great! I think it went well, right?

He looks around at everyone else.

HALEY

We probably could have done another take.

NATALIE

We got two hours of footage. We didn't need to.

JORDAN

It sounds good. That's all that matters.

NATALIE

No, the visuals are just as important. We're not making a radio show here.

The car is packed up, the 3 of them stand around arguing while Alex climbs into the passenger seat. He tries to butt in.

ALEX

Guys, let's get on the road please.

No one hears him.

HALEY

They're both equally important, yada yada. How many times do we have to do this?

Alex climbs back out of the passenger seat and walks up next to Haley.

JORDAN

If I weren't here it would be 1000x worse, that's all I'm saying.

ALEX

We've got a long way to go.

HALEY

Sorry, these idiots are holding us up.

They all walk around to their doors and get in.

NATALIE

Jordan's the one holding us up, he can't stop talking about how important he is.

JORDAN

Not my fault you can't accept it.

HALEY

Oh my god.

She starts the engine and pulls out of the driveway.

INT. CAR - DUSK

The sun slowly sets as the crew drives. Jordan is listening to his recording from today, Natalie is eating a sleeve of saltine crackers, Alex doodles and makes notes in a small notebook. Haley drives in silence, deep in thought. Natalie wraps up the crackers, sticks them in her bag, and fishes around for a minute. She comes up empty handed. She smacks Jordan's shoulder, and he takes one headphone off of his ear.

JORDAN

What.

NATALIE

Did you eat my jerky?

Jordan puts his headphone back on. She smacks him again, harder.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Jordan!!

JORDAN

Natalie!!

NATALIE

My jerky!!

ALEX

You're right, it is getting late.
We should stop and eat.

NATALIE

No! This is a matter of principle!
This is the fourth time he's done
this Alex, it has to stop!!

HALEY

We'll get some food.

JORDAN

You guys want to hear how good this
sounds?

NATALIE

I want to hear what the fuck
happened to my jerky.

ALEX

Yeah, let's hear it.

Natalie turns away and glares out the window. Alex hands Jordan the AUX cord and he plugs in. Jordan drops his headphones to around his neck and presses play.

DOUGLAS

(Recorded)

But I suppose you really want to hear about Burningwood, don't you? Burningwood, how do I say this, was the state's solution to mental health problems. The state was flooded with people seeking care, but it refused to pay for hospitals and things, so Burningwood was established.

ALEX

(Recorded)

And what exactly was Burningwood?

DOUGLAS

(Recorded)

It was this little town the state built to house all of the people they deemed crazies. Pardon my bluntness, but that's how they were treated at the time. The government decided rather than try and care for them, they would create a town for them all to live in, and just leave them there. And they did. It's still there you know.

ALEX

(Recorded)

How did it function-

Before Alex finishes speaking Jordan turns the recording off.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You're right, that does sound really good. Good job man.

Jordan looks at Natalie and smirks. She ignores him.

HALEY

Look, food. I'm stopping.

NATALIE

I'm not actually hungry, I just wanted-

ALEX

We should get out. Stretch our legs.

NATALIE

You sound like my dad.

Haley turns into a parking spot.

HALEY

Natalie, you're not hungry because you've been eating for 3 hours. We're going to kill each other if we don't get out. Come on.

Haley opens her door, gets out, and slams it behind her. Natalie grumbles and slowly follows. Jordan finally looks up and looks around as Alex gets out. Jordan hurriedly puts his stuff down and chases them into

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

They have walked into a dingy looking buffet. Haley looks around decisively, trying to figure out how the establishment works. Natalie and Jordan walk straight up to a booth and sit down across from each other. Haley looks at them, unsure if she should wait to be seated. Alex comes up to her side and gestures to the table. She uncertainly follows him. Alex sits next to Natalie, Haley sits next to Jordan.

HALEY

Do we wait or...?

JORDAN

It's a buffet. I'm gonna go get a plate.

Haley stands to let him out, and he slides down the seat and walks toward the buffet table. She sits.

HALEY

Are you satisfied with what you got today?

ALEX

Yeah, I am. I'm concerned about B roll though.

Natalie groans.

NATALIE

Jesus, I forgot about that.

HALEY

Do I have to be involved in that? I have a pretty big project in sociology that I need to get done.

ALEX

We can wait. When will you be done?

Timing isn't Haley's issue.

HALEY

I don't know Alex, I...

Jordan comes back with his plate full of food. Haley lets him back in.

NATALIE

What are we even doing to do for B roll? Go into the woods and film some spooky houses?

JORDAN

I think you should ditch the video all together.

NATALIE

Oh shut up.

ALEX

I don't know. I figured y'all would go back to school and I'd think about it for a while you know.

NATALIE

Fuck school. There's plenty of woods around here, let's just go film something.

HALEY

We have class Monday, we can't. We won't make it back in time.

NATALIE

Like you've never skipped class. Come on, it'd be fun!

HALEY

I haven't!

JORDAN

Let me impart some wisdom on you, your 8 AM isn't worth it. Let's go fuck around in the woods!

HALEY

Are you agreeing with her?

NATALIE

For once in his life he wanted to be right. Come on Haley, please?!

Haley is looking more and more concerned/scared by the moment. She turns to Alex, eyes pleading him to be reasonable.

HALEY

This is stupid. Where would we stay?

Natalie takes a french fry from Jordan's plate. Alex considers the proposition.

ALEX

I mean, it couldn't hurt right? We can head back in an hour or two. We wouldn't need to stay anywhere. I can drive so you can sleep if you want.

NATALIE

Dad has spoken!

ALEX

I'm two years older than you!

HALEY

I cannot believe this. I'm going to get food.

She walks off.

ALEX

I'm gonna get a plate, then we'll get going.

He gets up and follows Haley.

JORDAN

Alex does act like a dad.

NATALIE

And you act like his 12 year old son.

JORDAN

Then you act like his 9 year old daughter!

NATALIE
Hell yeah I do!

CUT TO:

INT. BESIDE THE BUFFET TABLE - NIGHT

Haley picks through the food, nothing is up to her standards. Alex slides up next to her and starts loading his plate with junk.

ALEX
Don't worry ok, it's gonna be fun!

HALEY
We're gonna go around with a camera in the woods for hours, and then drive back? You realize it'll be like 4 AM right? You won't want to drive, we'll have to stay somewhere, and I don't have any more, and I know those dumbasses sure as hell don't! This is a terrible idea, can we just go back?

Alex grabs her shoulder to calm her.

ALEX
Hey. It's going to be ok. I've been wanting