

ARTLESS

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

TORCHES illuminate a late night beach party. College-age coeds dance, drink, smoke.

TWO GIRLS stand at the edge of the party, considering.

NOELANI (19) is a lithe, caramel-skinned beauty. She's stunning, in her element, on the prowl.

KRISTEN (19) stands in contrast to Noelani. She's pretty, fair skinned, and unsure of herself.

NOELANI

You ready?

KRISTEN

No.

Noelani takes Kristen's hand.

NOELANI

Come on.

Noelani leads Kristen into the heart of the revelry.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Noelani grabs two drinks. Kristen takes a sip of hers, self-conscious. Noelani notices TWO BOYS watching them.

She flags them down.

KRISTEN

What are you doing?

NOELANI

Showing you a good time.

The boys sidle up beside the girls.

KAI (19) is slender, muscular. He goes the extra mile to make sure he looks good.

MAKANA (19) is handsome, but less forward. He lets Kai take the lead.

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KAI

Hey.

NOELANI

Hey yourself.

An awkward silence.

NOELANI (cont'd)

So, you boys have names?

KAI

Boys?

An elbow from Makana lets Kai know that he wants to play it cool.

KAI (cont'd)

I'm Kai. Elbows here is Makana.

Noelani smiles, takes a drink.

KAI (cont'd)

You girls have names?

NOELANI

Noelani.

KAI

Who's your friend?

NOELANI

She can speak for herself.

Kristen is mortified. She finds her voice.

KRISTEN

Kristen.

MAKANA

Nice to meet you, Kristen.

NOELANI

Looks like someone has an admirer.

KRISTEN

Noelani!

Noelani ignores the chiding, scans the beach.

NOELANI

Kristen is from the very exciting state of Ohio. This is her first

(MORE)

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NOELANI (cont'd)  
semester, and her first beach  
party.

KAI  
I thought you said she could speak  
for herself.

NOELANI  
She can, but she's a little shy. I  
don't think that drink's strong  
enough to help her loosen up and  
enjoy herself.

Noelani fixes her eyes on Kai, traces one muscular arm.

NOELANI (cont'd)  
Got anything stronger?

Kai grins. He hurries away.

Just beyond the torchlight, Kristen watches Kai speak with  
an older woman dressed in a flowing dress: THE PRIESTESS.

Kristen watches as they make an exchange.

KRISTEN  
Who's that?

NOELANI  
Three weeks on the island, and  
still haven't heard of The  
Priestess? Freshman.

Kai runs back. He opens his hands, revealing two JOINTS, a  
GLASS PIPE, and a small VIAL OF POWDER.

NOELANI (cont'd)  
What'd you get?

KAI  
What do you say we find out  
together?

Noelani makes eye contact with Kristen. They debate  
wordlessly. Kristen relents.

NOELANI  
Light 'em up.

Kai leads them toward the surf, away from the main group.  
Kristen pulls close to Noelani.

KRISTEN

Are you sure this is a good idea?

NOELANI

Of course not. You wanted to have fun, right? Well, let go for once. Have fun.

KRISTEN

Have fun.

Kai lights up a joint and hands it to Noelani. She takes a hit, and the euphoria is immediate.

She passes the joint to Kristen. Kristen hesitates. Makana grabs the joint, takes a hit.

Kristen glances around. On the far edge of the darkness, the Priestess watches them.

Kai fiddles with the pipe, gets it going.

KRISTEN (cont'd)

Have fun.

Kristen takes the pipe from Kai. She inhales deep, coughs, gags.

KRISTEN (cont'd)

Tastes like burnt plastic.

KAI

Just wait.

The drugs wash over Kristen like a tidal wave. Her world becomes a psychedelic wonderland.

Time ceases to have any meaning. So does reality.

The girls dance with the boys. The girls dance with the girls. Faces distort. Sounds transform.

The nearby party descends into a scene reminiscent of Goya's "Courtyard with Lunatics."

The images are intense, erotic.

At the edge of her vision, Kristen keeps catches a glimpse of someone, of a SHADOWY THING. When she turns, it's gone.

Makana wraps his arms around Kristen's waist. She takes his face in her hands and kisses his lips. They kiss with increasing passion. His hands roam.

(CONTINUED)

Noelani inserts herself between them.

NOELANI

Come on.

Noelani leads Kristen away, as Kai and Makana protest behind them.

NOELANI (cont'd)

That's enough fun for one night.

The Priestess watches the girls leave.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Noelani walks arm-in-arm with Kristen beneath the streetlamps.

KRISTEN

(slurred)

I thought you said we were going to have a good time.

NOELANI

We were, but you've got to pace yourself. You don't jump into deep water until you know how to swim.

KRISTEN

Oh, that's good, that's good. I've got one. The gopher who sticks its head up gets shot first.

NOELANI

What the hell's that supposed to mean?

KRISTEN

It's something my mom always used to say. Keep a low profile, and you'll stay out of trouble.

NOELANI

If she could see you now.

Kristen stops. She looks hurt. She and Noelani exchange a look.

Both girls erupt in simultaneous LAUGHTER.

Kristen turns away, tries to catch her breath.

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The Priestess stands beneath a streetlight nearby, watching them. She cradles something in her arms.

Kristen strains to make it out in the dim light. It looks like a BABY. She looks closer. It's not a baby.

It's a BABY'S CORPSE.

All laughter stops. Kristen spins.

KRISTEN  
Noelani, I-

But Noelani is nowhere to be seen.

KRISTEN (cont'd)  
Noelani?

MOVEMENT in the shadows. The shadowy thing from her drug trip has followed her here.

Kristen panics.

KRISTEN (cont'd)  
(screaming)  
Noelani? Where are you?

A woman's HAND on her shoulder. Kristen screams.

NOELANI  
Quiet down. Someone will call the  
cops.

Kristen tries to bring herself down. The Priestess is gone. No movement in the shadows.

KRISTEN  
Where'd you go? She was right  
there. And the thing, in the  
shadows... did you see it?

Noelani shakes her head.

NOELANI  
Gotta learn to swim first. Let's  
get you home.

Noelani takes Kristen by the arm. They continue on their way.

INT. NOELANI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kristen sits in a comfortable chair. Noelani emerges from the kitchen, carrying a mug of hot tea.

She hands the mug to her friend. Kristen takes a sip. Noelani collapses on the couch.

KRISTEN

How long until this wears off?

NOELANI

How am I supposed to know? My high wore off before we were halfway home.

KRISTEN

Oh god.

Kristen takes another sip. She glances at her friend.

Noelani lies sprawled out like Goya's "Maja Ubrana." Her clothes fade away, and for an instant Kristen sees her friend as "Maja Naga."

The clothes reappear, disappear, reappear.

Noelani notices Kristen's expression.

NOELANI

What?

KRISTEN

Nothing.

NOELANI

It's something. Are you still seeing things?

KRISTEN

You don't want to know.

NOELANI

Try me.

KRISTEN

Your clothes. They keep disappearing.

NOELANI

Really?

Her voice is playful. She sits up. Kristen sets down her tea.

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NOELANI (cont'd)  
And how do I look?

Kristen stammers, averts her eyes.

Noelani stands, takes Kristen's hands in hers. She pulls Kristen close.

KRISTEN  
Wait. I don't-

Noelani places a finger over Kristen's lips. She removes the finger, kisses her friend. Kristen kisses back.

The two continue to kiss as they fall back on the couch.

Kristen pulls away.

KRISTEN (cont'd)  
What are we doing?

That's when Kristen sees the shadowy thing, moving through the shadows.

It's in the room with them.

Kristen SCREAMS.

NOELANI  
What? What is it?

KRISTEN  
It's here! It's here!

Noelani SCREAMS. She jumps up. Both girls huddle close together, too scared to move. They watch the shadows.

Nothing moves.

Noelani finds her courage first. She edges toward the wall, toward the shadows. She reaches for the light switch.

CLICK.

The room is empty.

NOELANI  
What did you see?

KRISTEN  
I don't know. I just... I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

NOELANI

Was there really something there,  
or are you still tripping?

KRISTEN

I don't know!

Noelani looks around the room again.

Kristen checks the door. Locked. She peers into an adjoining room. Nothing.

Noelani and Kristen stand alone in the center of the room.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Kristen walks along the beach. Her CELL PHONE rings.

She checks the caller ID. MOM. She ignores the call.

She comes upon a VAGRANT. He hovers over a picnic basket, eating, chewing.

Kristen tries to get a better look at his meal. She spies a tiny FOOT protruding from the basket.

The vagrant SLAMS the lid down, turns on Kristen, snarls.

VAGRANT

Get your own!

Appalled, Kristen hurries away.

Just audible over the lapping waves, Kristen hears a BABY CRYING. She scans the beach, the water.

There. In the surf. A WICKER BASKET.

She searches the beach for someone, anyone, but she's entirely alone. Even the vagrant has vanished.

The cries get louder.

Kristen wades into the water, half-swims toward the basket. As she touches it, the cries stop.

Kristen looks back toward the beach. She sees The Priestess, watching her.

DARK HANDS erupt from the water, shadowy things. They pull her under.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Kristen wakes up in the bath, yelling, sputtering.  
She takes a moment to collect herself. Just a dream.  
A RAPPING at the door downstairs.

KRISTEN  
Noelani?

No answer. She's alone in the house. More KNOCKING.  
Kristen steps out the bathtub and dons her robe.

INT. NOELANI'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Kristen enters the room, just as a SHADOWY THING disappears  
from view. She doesn't notice it.  
Kristen answers the door in her bathrobe. Makana, the boy  
from the party, stands in the doorway.

MAKANA  
Hey.

Kristen is flattered at first, then suspicious.

KRISTEN  
Hey. How did you know where I live?

MAKANA  
I asked around. You didn't look so  
good last night. I wanted to make  
sure you were okay.

KRISTEN  
Oh.

Kristen turns her eyes down, unsure of what to say next.

MAKANA  
Sorry. I should have got your  
number instead, called or  
something. Stupid.

Makana turns to leave, embarrassed.

KRISTEN  
Wait.

He stops, looks back.

(CONTINUED)

KRISTEN (cont'd)  
You want to come in or something? I  
could make some tea.

MAKANA  
I'd like that.

Kristen shows him inside.

INT. NOELANI'S KITCHEN - DAY

Kristen and Makana sit at the kitchen table, each sipping a  
cup of hot tea.

MAKANA  
So you're a student?

Kristen nods.

MAKANA (cont'd)  
What are you studying?

KRISTEN  
Art.

MAKANA  
Seriously?

Makana seems stunned. Kristen gets defensive.

KRISTEN  
Seriously. Art might not be the  
most lucrative career, but it makes  
sense to me.

MAKANA  
No, it's cool, it's cool. It's  
just... Hawaii? People come here to  
study things like marine biology  
and tropical ecosystems. I mean,  
art?

KRISTEN  
I grew up in Ohio. It's next to  
impossible to be inspired by  
cornfields and farmhouses.

MAKANA  
I wouldn't know. I've never seen a  
cornfield. I've never been on the  
mainland.

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KRISTEN

Before I came here, I'd never seen the sunset over the ocean. Or waves that curl around surfers, swallowing them whole. Or tropical forests so lush, so green, that you can only dream of capturing a fraction of their essence.

MAKANA

I get it.

KRISTEN

How could you? You live in a paradise. Life back in Ohio is so-

MAKANA

Boring?

Makana's interruption brings her back.

MAKANA (cont'd)

Life is boring everywhere. We see the same places and the same people every day. Eventually, one day blends into another, and you can't even tell when, or if, things were ever different or exciting.

KRISTEN

This place is exciting.

MAKANA

Exciting isn't a place. It's what you do. It's who you do it with. Taking chances is exciting.

KRISTEN

Like you coming here, out of the blue?

He smiles. He inches his chair closer to hers.

MAKANA

I hoped you'd invite me in.

KRISTEN

Really? And what did you hope would happen after I invited you in?

He leans in, puts one hand behind her neck.

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MAKANA  
Something exciting.

They look into each other's eyes. Kristen leans in and kisses him.

One kiss leads to another, and another. Before they realize it, they're making out like they were the night before.

Kristen stands. She takes Makana's hand, leads him out of the kitchen.

After they're gone, a SHADOW crosses the kitchen.

INT. KRISTEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kristen stands at the foot of her bed. She lets the robe slip from her shoulders.

Makana removes his shirt. He lays her down on the bed.

Kissing soon becomes much more. As they writhe together on the bed, Kristen spies the shadowy thing in her room.

It skirts the edge of her vision, denying her a clear look.

Kristen tries to focus on Makana, but she knows the shadowy thing is there, so close she could reach out and grab it.

The tempo picks up. Kristen's mind flits between Makana and the shadowy thing.

As she gets closer to climaxing, she feels surrounded. The shadowy thing multiplies. It's everywhere at once.

In a scene reminiscent of Rosemary's Baby, Kristen and Makana climax at the same time, surrounded by shadowy things.

Kristen looks at Makana.

His body remains that of a vigorous young man, but his HEAD has been replaced by something GROTESQUE and HORRIBLE.

Kristen screams.

INT. NOELANI'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Noelani enters, a bag of groceries in one arm.

Kristen sits on the couch, wearing her bathrobe. Every light in the room is on.

Noelani can tell that something is wrong. Kristen stares off into space. Dried tears stain her cheeks.

NOELANI

Kristen?

No answer.

NOELANI (cont'd)

Kristen? What happened?

KRISTEN

Makana stopped by.

NOELANI

What did he do? Oh my god.

Noelani drops the groceries, runs to her friend.

NOELANI (cont'd)

Are you okay?

Kristen shakes her head.

Noelani reaches for her cell phone.

KRISTEN

Who are you calling?

NOELANI

I'm calling the cops on that son of a bitch.

Kristen takes the phone from Noelani, hangs up.

KRISTEN

He didn't do anything wrong.

NOELANI

Then what happened?

KRISTEN

It was here. The shadow.

(CONTINUED)

NOELANI

Kristen, you're scaring me.

KRISTEN

How can I still be seeing things?  
What did we smoke?

NOELANI

I was smoking weed. Whatever you  
had in that pipe must have been a  
hell of a lot stronger.

KRISTEN

I think I need to go to the  
hospital.

NOELANI

You can't.

KRISTEN

Why not?

NOELANI

Weed is one thing, but whatever you  
took was serious. Maybe serious  
enough to get you kicked out of  
school. Or arrested.

Kristen breaks down.

KRISTEN

I can't sleep. I'm afraid to be in  
a room by myself. Noelani, I think  
I'm going crazy. What am I supposed  
to do?

Noelani wraps her arms around her friend.

NOELANI

The Priestess. She knows what it  
was. She's got to know how to fix  
this.

Kristen pulls away, calms herself.

NOELANI (cont'd)

If you really want to go to the  
hospital, I'll take you. It's your  
choice. What do you want to do?

Kristen considers.

(CONTINUED)

KRISTEN  
How will we find her?

Noelani gives her friend a sympathetic smile.

EXT. PRIESTESS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Noelani and Kristen stand on the sidewalk outside The Priestess' house.

The house is dark, oppressive. Light emanates from a single downstairs window.

NOELANI  
You ready?

KRISTEN  
No.

Noelani takes Kristen's hand.

NOELANI  
Come on.

Noelani leads Kristen to The Priestess' front door.

Noelani knocks on the door. Sounds of movement from the other side. Silence.

The door swings open, startling both girls.

The Priestess stares at them both. She doesn't speak.

NOELANI (cont'd)  
We were at the party last night. On the beach. My friend-

THE PRIESTESS  
She wasn't ready.

The woman's eyes bore into Kristen. Kristen turns away.

THE PRIESTESS (cont'd)  
Come in.

The Priestess turns and disappears into her house. Noelani and Kristen exchange a look.

Kristen is the first to enter. Noelani closes the door behind them.

INT. PRIESTESS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Priestess places a kettle on the stove, turns on the heat.

She rummages through her cupboards. Noelani and Kristen stand at the edge of the kitchen.

The Priestess produces a MORTAR and PESTLE, along with VIALS OF POWDER and BAGGIES OF DRIED PLANTS.

THE PRIESTESS  
Tell me. What did you see?

NOELANI  
Excuse me?

THE PRIESTESS  
Not you. You. What did you see?

KRISTEN  
I don't know.

THE PRIESTESS  
You know. They always know.

Steam begins to rise from the kettle. The Priestess stands still, waiting for her answer.

KRISTEN  
Babies.

The woman nods, understanding. She begins to mix to the powders and plants in the mortar.

KRISTEN (cont'd)  
They were in danger. Always in danger. And I saw...

THE PRIESTESS  
Go on.

KRISTEN  
I don't know how to describe it. It was a shadow, or it lived in the shadows. When I tried to look at it...

The kettle WHISTLES. The woman stops her work and stares at Kristen, ignoring the kettle.

(CONTINUED)

THE PRIESTESS

It hides.

No one speaks as the kettle continues to whistle. An uncomfortable moment passes.

The Priestess finally removes the kettle from the stove. She pours the concoction into a mug, adds the hot water, stirs.

She hands the mug to Kristen.

THE PRIESTESS (cont'd)

Drink.

Kristen holds the mug before her, hesitates. The Priestess begins putting things away.

KRISTEN

What did I smoke last night?

THE PRIESTESS

DMT.

KRISTEN

What?

THE PRIESTESS

Dimethyltryptamine. A hallucinogen. Nature provides us this wonder through a number of plants. The human body even produces DMT, in very small amounts.

The Priestess turns. Kristen has yet to take a drink. The Priestess motions for her to drink up.

Kristen takes a sip, then another, then another.

The Priestess returns to her work. As she speaks, Kristen's mind starts to fog. The Priestess' words ring in her ears.

THE PRIESTESS (cont'd)

DMT opens one's mind to the world beyond. It enables us to peer into our dreams, to connect to another reality. As infants, our bodies produce a large amounts of DMT in the first few weeks of our lives. Our bodies only produce that much of the drug at one other time in our lives.

(CONTINUED)

KRISTEN

When?

The Priestess stops, turns to face Kristen.

THE PRIESTESS

When we die.

The SHADOWY THING emerges from the other room and wraps its skeletal arms around Kristen.

Kristen passes out.

Darkness.

INT. INNER SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Kristen wakes. She tries to move, but her body is paralyzed from the neck down. She can only move her head.

She tries to speak but no words comes out. Only sounds.

She turns her head from side to side, searching for help.

Noelani stands at the edge of the room's only light. Kristen tries to call her.

NOELANI

She's awake, Mom.

The Priestess enters from an adjoining room. Her hands and clothes are covered in BLOOD.

Kristen can't make sense of what's happening. She looks away, leans her head back.

Makana stands over her. He looks at The Priestess.

MAKANA

Did we do okay?

The Priestess takes Makana's cheek in her hand.

THE PRIESTESS

You did well.

Kristen wants to scream, but she can't. All she can do is cry.

NOELANI

When should I begin looking for another roommate?

(CONTINUED)

THE PRIESTESS

Tonight.

MAKANA

How soon will we know?

THE PRIESTESS

Soon enough.

The Priestess bends down. When she stands, she's holding a WICKER BASKET.

Kristen spies a TINY FOOT sticking out over the edge.

THE PRIESTESS (cont'd)

Noelani, dear, we're done with this one. Can you take care of it?

Noelani takes the basket from her mother, leaves the room.

The Priestess places a bloody hand on Kristen's belly.

THE PRIESTESS (cont'd)

(to herself)

Soon enough.

(to Makana)

Makana, take her to the other room.

Makana nods. He lifts Kristen from the bed and carries her through the open door.

INT. NURSERY - NIGHT

Makana carries Kristen through a room full of YOUNG WOMEN, each in a different stage of pregnancy.

Hovering over each woman is a SHADOWY THING. Here, in this room, they don't try to hide. Kristen can see them clearly.

Each is a grotesque monster, covered in flowing dark robes. They HISS and SNARL at the paralyzed young women, demonic nurses tending their wards.

Makana lays Kristen on an open bed with tenderness. He brushes her hair back, kisses her forehead.

He gives her one last affectionate look. Then he looks up, behind her.

Kristen looks up, following his gaze. She looks into the face of her own shadowy thing.

(CONTINUED)

When she looks into the abyss behind its eyes, the abyss  
looks back, into her.

CUT TO BLACK