

A CURSED GROUND

Ep. 101

"Something Wicked This Way Runs"

Written By:

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FADE IN:

ON CLAWS

Razor sharp. Slashing deep, precise furrows into wood planking. Trying to cut through to something. *What?*

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A FIGURE, hurtling through the dense foliage, hair billowing out from behind her.

This is TAYLOR BURKWOOD (12) -- looking strong and confident in a two-piece animal skin outfit, a POUCH full of stones hanging from her waist.

In the trees above her, THREE DEMON SPIRITS pursue her, leaping from tree to tree, teeth gnashing, eyes gleaming RED.

But Taylor doesn't seem concerned about them. She leaps over rocks, slides under fallen trees with ease.

Mid-stride she pulls a ROCK from her pouch and whips it at one of the demon spirits. It hits the demon dead on. POOF! The demon goes up in smoke.

TAYLOR

Ha! Looks like you won't be
snacking on the jungle queen today!

She hurl another rock at the second demon. POOF! It's gone.

She has a third rock ready and poised when, suddenly, she hears a SCRATCHING NOISE. She grits her teeth, trying to ignore the sound as it gets LOUDER AND LOUDER.

Finally, it's too much. She stops in her tracks.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Pixie, for the love of God, can you
stop it?!

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY - 1997

Taylor stands on a grimy recliner, next to an algae-covered pool, looking not so confident and much more awkward in a one-piece bathing suit, a rock in her hand, and a book splayed on the ground besides her: ROXENA, JUNGLE QUEEN.

She has been playing pretend.

However, at the moment, her attention and ire is directed at--

PIXIE, a tabby cat, who's clawing away at the wooden fence that encircles the yard.

TAYLOR

Did you hear me? Stop it!

Pixie stops and looks at her. Then ignores her and continues. Taylor brandishes the rock.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

I'm warning you!

Pixie keeps clawing. Taylor shakes her head and lobbs the rock into the bushes besides Pixie. Pixie scurries off.

Taylor drops down onto the recliner.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Dumb cat's going to drive me crazy
before this place ever does.

She looks around her. Sighs. She's bored.

She closes her eyes and tries to enjoy the day, but something nags her. She opens her eyes and looks to Pixie's fresh claw marks. Then above them, to what lies beyond the fence.

A FOREST. Dense. Ominous. Trees dead or dying. Some by decay. Others with SCORCH MARKS on them.

A BREEZE blows through the trees towards Taylor and brings with it what sounds like WHISPERING.

Taylor leans in, entranced, as the forest GROWS IN HER VISION.

MEOW!

The spell is broken. Pixie paws at the backdoor to the house, an old VICTORIAN MODEL. Taylor sighs.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Jesus. Ok. I'm coming.

She stands and heads towards the house.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Taylor pours cat food into Pixie's bowl. Pixie attacks it ravenously. Taylor scowls.

TAYLOR
You're gross.

She looks to the fridge. A note is pinned to it.

Taylor, please do these by tonight. I'll be home late. Aunt Margaret.

Listed beneath are a number of chores. Taylor grimaces.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Taylor loads a CD - *FUSH YU MANG* by SMASH MOUTH - into her DISCMAN and presses play. "WALKIN' ON THE SUN" starts as...

BEGIN MONTAGE

Taylor VACUUMS the tacky LIVING ROOM

DUSTS a FIREPLACE MANTLE loaded with trinkets.

POLISHES a photo of Pixie. We PULL OUT to reveal a lengthy HALLWAY with dozens of photos of the cat.

WASHES DISHES in the KITCHEN. She dries a flower vase and puts it on the window sill above the sink.

END MONTAGE.

INT. AUNT MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Taylor puts a laundry basket full of clothes on Aunt Margaret's bed. She goes to the dresser and tries to open the top drawer. Jammed.

She tugs harder. It gives slightly. She yanks at it... CLUNK!

The drawer gives and comes out completely, sending Taylor flat on her rear end. Her back slams into a BOOK SHELF.

TAYLOR
Crap!

She recovers and notices a PHOTO ALBUM splayed on the ground besides her. She's knocked it off the shelf.

She picks it up, and is about to return it to its spot on the shelf, when curiosity gets the best of her. She opens it.

It's filled with NEWSPAPER ARTICLES.

She flips through them. A HEADLINE draws her attention: PYRE FAMILY MURDERED.

Her eyes widen. She keeps flipping. She stops at another HEADLINE: LOCAL BOY MISSING.

TAYLOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
July 11, 1941. Local boy... Henry
Pyre. Gone missing...

She notices the photo that should accompany the article has been cut out. Her gaze holds on that empty square...

CRASH! From downstairs. Startled, Taylor snaps the photo album shut.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Taylor carefully descends the staircase to the first floor. She creeps forward into the...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She enters, nervous, unsure what she's going to find.

TAYLOR
Pixie?

There's glass on the floor and counter. The remains of the vase. Taylor looks to the window sill where she originally placed the vase.

The window is open and the curtains flap with a breeze.

Taylor stares out the open window into the BACKYARD. The same breeze RUSTLES the forest.

SCRATCH! SCRATCH!

Pixie is clawing madly at the fence again. Suddenly, he stops, turns, and stares her right in the eye.

GOOSEBUMPS sprout up on Taylor's arm.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER plays on the TV. Taylor slumps on the couch, a BOWL of POPCORN besides her, watching Buffy on the TV as she faces off against her own demon spirits.

Taylor reaches for a handful of popcorn and knocks the bowl onto the floor. Kernels spill everywhere.

Taylor stares at the mess a moment. Her anger boils over.

TAYLOR

This sucks!

Her voice sounds lonely in the empty house.

Pixie enters. He sniffs at the popcorn then looks at Taylor. Taylor picks the cat up and places him in her lap.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

(weird voice)

Hi, Taylor. How are you?

(regular voice)

Not great, Pixie. Pretty awful actually.

(weird)

What's wrong?

(regular)

I'm stuck in the middle of nowhere all summer taking care of your stupid butt.

(weird)

That sounds awful. I'm the worst.

(regular)

You are the worst, Pixie. And yeah, it is awful. I should be back home at camp, going hiking and swimming. Having actual adventures.

(quiet)

Making friends.

(regular)

Instead I'm in some old creepy house that smells like mildew, living with an Aunt I never even knew existed, talking to a cat. All because my mom's too busy to take care of me.

(weird)

I'm sorry, Taylor.

(regular)

It's okay, Pixie.

(weird)

Taylor...

(regular)

(MORE)

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Yes, Pixie?
(weird)
Can you go pour more food into my
bowl?
(regular)
Sure.

Taylor shivers.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Ugh. I feel like I'm in *The
Shining*.

CUT TO:

LATER

Taylor's asleep on the couch. She wakes. Looks to a clock.
It's 11:57 PM

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Taylor stands in front of the refrigerator. There's another
note pinned to it.

Taylor, pizza in the fridge. Aunt Margaret

INT. TAYLOR'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The room is austere, not at all the bedroom of a twelve-year-
old girl. The only personal touch is a DREAMCATCHER that
hangs over Taylor's bed.

Taylor sleeps, SNORING lightly.

A SHADOW falls over her. Taylor opens her eyes and jumps in
her bed. It takes a second for her to recover.

TAYLOR
Hi, Aunt Margaret.

AUNT MARGARET (39) -- prim, dark eyes -- towers over Taylor.
In her eyes we see nothing but dislike.

AUNT MARGARET
Taylor. Pixie has escaped into the
street. Catch him, please. Before
he escapes.

She spins on a dime and marches out of the room.

TAYLOR
(under her breath)
Good morning to you too.

EXT. PORCH - MORNING

Taylor exits onto the porch, wearing overalls over an old tee-shirt. Looking quite dorky.

Pixie stands in the middle of street, staring at her.

TAYLOR
Pixie, come here. Now.

Pixie bolts off down street.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Pixie!

Taylor scowls and starts after him.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Taylor continues after Pixie, who trots leisurely ahead of her, constantly looking behind him.

TAYLOR
Pixie, I swear to God, when I catch
you...

But Pixie doesn't stop.

Taylor finds herself in...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

It's a quaint little downtown area. The architecture dates back a century at least. RESIDENTS go about their business.

Pixie darts through the crowds, effortlessly weaving between legs and hopping over feet.

Taylor stops a moment to take in her surroundings. She's never actually been in town before.

She looks back to where Pixie was, but he's gone.

TAYLOR
Shoot! Pixie, where'd you go?

She scans the street. Continues down the street, looking under bushes. Down alleyways.

UP AHEAD, outside a BLOCKBUSTER VIDEO -- WHITNEY (13), tall and effortlessly pretty, wearing a halter top and skirt, stands outside a payphone, holding a BEDAZZLED DENIM HANDBAG.

She taps at the payphone glass, trying to get the attention of the PERSON inside.

WHITNEY

Excuse me, can you hurry up?

Meanwhile...

LIV (12), wearing a Marilyn Manson tee, ripped jeans, and a baseball cap, and BENNY (8), Liv's younger brother, walk out of the Blockbuster. Benny tugs at a VHS in Liv's hand.

BENNY

Come on, Liv, I want to watch.

LIV

No, Benny. You're not old enough.
Plus, I don't want to watch with
you.

And here comes Taylor, head down, not looking where she's going. They all COLLIDE, each of them falling to the ground.

WHITNEY

Hey, what the hell?

Taylor blushes, immediately shier and more self-conscious around these girls than we've seen her before.

TAYLOR

Oh my God. I'm so sorry. I wasn't
looking.

Liv picks herself up.

LIV

(to Taylor)

No shit, Sherlock. I swear, if you
scuffed my-

She stops, realizing that Whitney's there. She grins.

LIV (CONT'D)

Hey, Whitney. You're looking mighty
fine today. Is that a new handbag?

Whitney shoots her a look.

WHITNEY

You still live in this town?

Benny gets to his feet, grabbing the VHS and Whitney's handbag from the ground.

BENNY

Don't worry, Liv. I'm okay too.

Whitney redirects her scowl at Taylor.

WHITNEY

What were you even doing?

TAYLOR

I - I was looking for my cat. Well he's not my cat, but--

BENNY

I saw him! I saw your cat.

Liv gives Benny a whack on the shoulder.

LIV

Shut up, Benny. No you didn't.

BENNY

Yes, I did, Liv! When we were in the store. He ran by.

Whitney sees that Benny has picked up her handbag.

WHITNEY

Give me back my handbag, please.

Benny pays her no attention. He points off down the street.

BENNY

Look. There he is!

He's right. There's Pixie, watching the four of them from a couple blocks down.

Benny doesn't think twice. He BOLTS DOWN THE STREET after Pixie.

TAYLOR/LIV/WHITNEY

Pixie! / Benny! / Hey! Come back here!

And suddenly, all three girls are running after Benny.

After a few seconds, they realize they're all running and share uncomfortable looks.

TAYLOR
I'm so sorry about this.

LIV
No, I'm sorry. Benny's such a
little shit sometimes.

They look to Whitney. She's not apologizing for anything.

Benny darts down another street. They continue after him.
Taylor looks sheepishly at the other two.

TAYLOR
I'm Taylor by the way.

LIV
Liv.

They look to Whitney. She glares at them.

WHITNEY
Your brother better not ruin my
handbag.

She speeds up past them.

LIV
That's Whitney. I'm sure you
noticed the sexual tension between
us.

Taylor gives her a weird look. Liv sighs mid-stride.

LIV (CONT'D)
Yeah, she and I dance a delicate
dance. I hit on her and she
pretends she doesn't totally dig
me.

Benny calls out from in front of them.

BENNY
He's going into the forest!

Taylor follow's Benny's eye-line. A FLASH OF FUR darts
into...

THE FOREST. The same one beyond Aunt Margaret's fence. Benny
runs in.

LIV
Benny, goddamnit, no!

But Benny's already gone. Whitney and Liv continue after him.

Taylor skids to a stop. She looks up at the dead trees. Shivers. Then screws her face up in a look of determination. She's not letting the forest get to her.

TAYLOR
Wait up for me!

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Taylor SPRINTS through the forest. Jumping over rocks, ducking under fallen trees. Maybe she is going to get her adventure after all.

She smiles wide. Speeds up more, heart POUNDING.

She passes a chainlink fence. So fast that she doesn't notice the sign - TRESPASSERS BEWARE.

Suddenly, she bursts into a clearing, just managing to stop herself before she plows into Whitney and Liv.

They barely notice her, both staring off.

TAYLOR
What is it?

She follows their gazes. Her breath catches.

Atop a MASSIVE TREE, the tallest in the forest, sits a TREE HOUSE, scorch marks on its sides.

Pixie looks down at them from the entrance to the tree house. Benny is half way up a ROPE LADDER that dangles from it.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
What is that?

But Liv and Whitney don't have any answers.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE