

THE SILENTISTS

By
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ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL
NOTABLE AMERICAN WOMEN

By
Ben Marcus

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FADE IN:

EXT. A FAMILY FARM, RURAL OHIO - DUSK

A late middle-aged BEN MARCUS stares into the distance at what's left of his childhood home. He leans resignedly with his back against a tree. Haggard and gaunt, he slowly turns to face the damage. He raises the day's last cigarette to his lips.

MAN (V.O.)

How can one word from Ben Marcus's rotten,
filthy heart be trusted?

BEN

(to himself)

Can words ever be trusted? Can anything?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FARM'S PROPERTY - DAY

The Marcus's family farm is seen in its prime—the epitome of a profitable family farm.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE POND - EARLY MORNING

The pond on the farm where Michael Marcus, Ben's father, taught him to swim...a place of family gatherings in happier times.

CUT TO:

EXT. A TREE SWING - SUNSET

A homespun tree-swing blows gently in the late evening breeze.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM, RURAL OHIO - NIGHT

The Marcus family at an earlier time is gathered around the dinner table, hands linked, saying grace. The room appears to be the rock-solid center of family life.

FLASHBACK:**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Teenage Ben lay on his back, naked in bed doing his best to stare into space, expressionless. His eyes heavy, he is ready for much-needed sleep.

Astride his scrawny teenage body is a plain-faced woman, late 30's, in a white shroud wearing a mouth guard and blinders, is screwing him with vigor, sweating profusely. She is also doing her best to stare into space, expressionless.

Rocking rhythmically, the woman moans faintly.

BEN

Can we please finish?

WOMAN

Not until I reach (gasps)
elimination of this (gasps)
embarrassing spasm of (gasps)
the body.

Ben, still on his back, continues to do his best to remain motionless, expressionless. While his eyes are steady, the look on his face is clearly one of distress.

BEN (V.O.)

I wanted to handle the heads of
girls, to grip their faces, clutch
their brittle tied-back hair,
clasp their necks.

I should be so submissive that
something can finally come true
for you.

In the proper way of The
Silentists.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Outside Ben's bedroom, the shadow of a face appears; it is the enigmatic JANE DARK, tall, steely, lean-faced, mid-40's. Behind her is Ben's mother, also named Jane.

JANE DARK
(coolly reminiscent)

Ah, the silence of a forced
breeding. An act of true serenity
for us.

She nods slightly releasing a slow, satisfied sigh.

However, the woman atop Ben moans more urgently now as the bed frame knocks rhythmically against the wall.

JANE DARK
Silence, girl! Enough now.

The woman quietly clears her throat; she then falls silent. The rustle of bed covers can be heard.

JANE MARCUS, a worn-looking farm wife in her late-50's, now stands alongside Jane Dark.

JANE MARCUS
(whispering to herself)
Yes, it's worth it.

JANE DARK
We won't know, of course-
until we're done-with the others.

With this, Jane Dark turns her head and nods slowly in the direction of the doorway just beyond.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY'S KITCHEN - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Ben is sitting at the table looking haggard and worn. While he didn't age overnight, he seems older--his eyes red-rimmed from the night before. He wears all black and fights back tears behind burning eyes.

He slowly pushes his breakfast plate away and stares out the window at another gray day ahead. His mother is motionless at the kitchen counter gazing out the window.

JANE

You know, I've been watching out this window on and off for years now. Not as long as some in this community of ours, I suppose, but long enough to see a lot of change.

I never did get used to it-the change.

She allows herself a tiny, yet perceptible sigh. Ben detects a moment of emotional recognition between them, but remains stoic as is expected.

JANE

(CONT'D)

My heart goes out to them.
(pause) They want so much...
to be...good.

BEN

Mom...

Ben's shoulders begin to tremble gently as he tries to put his feelings into words.

JANE

(firmly)

I told you never to call me that.

BEN

Please?

JANE

(resolutely)

No. Never.

Crestfallen, Ben gathers himself and pushes his chair away from the table.

As he stands, he looks over at her seeing only the remorseless disciplinarian. She offers him no comfort.

BEN (V.O.)

It is clear my mother has spoiled me for silence that is her world...then and now.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BACK PORCH, FARMHOUSE - SAME DAY

Ben rushes out of the house, heading out to the pond just beyond the yard. As he heads past the tool shed, he stops short of an opening - a hole in the ground covered with a sheet of copper grating.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Is someone there? Please?

(pause)

Ben? Ben, are you there?

Ben stares at the opening, hesitant to answer the voice. As he looks over this shoulder, he has the feeling he is being watched from the house

CUT TO:

EXT. BEHIND TOOL SHED - SAME DAY

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Ben? (pause) Ben, are you there?

BEN

Yes...yes, it's me.

Ben slowly and carefully removes the heavy, rusted grating from atop the hole.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(CONT'D)

Ben, are you there?

BEN

I'm here.

He cautiously peeks into the hole to find a man's face looking back at him. The face is wild-eyed and skeletal, with filthy, matted hair. Though barely recognizable, it's a face that Ben instinctively fears.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

It's the voices...please...the voices...it never ends.

Suddenly, there is a rustling underfoot from inside the hole. There is a sharp cry; the sound of utter desperation.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(CONT'D)

If it's possible...but only if it's possible. Please!

BEN

I will.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Promise me?

BEN

I will.

Ben replaces the grating in one swift movement. Standing over the hole, he stares into its emotional abyss for a moment, and then backs away slowly.

BEN (V.O.)

She came to us ready to do battle with her expert voice in "The New Behavior," demonic and vicious at its core.

CUT TO:**INT. IN THE BARN - LATER THAT DAY**

Jane Dark is front and center at an unadorned platform. She is clearly in her element preaching before The Silentists and is speaking in a decidedly calm and careful manner.

JANE

Let this always remain a space of redefinition for this New Behavior. A place bathed in silence. Thereby, creating perfect stillness in the world.

Slowly, she moves away from the podium in a carefully controlled manner to join her followers. Rapt in her presence, she addresses her fellow Silentists.

JANE (CONT'D)

As you may realize, we are facing issues of endangerment due to formerly unsuccessful breeding procedures.

You who are primary breeders are solely responsible for the success of our current program.

She pauses for maximum effect.

JANE (CONT'D)

I trust you will be successful in your endeavors.

Jane's smile is firm and reassuring in that all will be well... no matter what.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY'S KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

At a snail's pace, Ben's mother is carefully preparing dinner for herself and Ben. As she shuffles about the kitchen, she watches Ben carefully from the corner of her eye aware of the palpable tension between them.

JANE

I'm glad to know that you'd been to The Learning Pond the morning. You know how I feel about that being part of your re-education.

BEN

It's just a pond—no more, no less.

JANE

It's a place of reinvention, Ben—a place to ingest The Learning Water that's so crucial to your continued development.

I trust you found The Silence there?

Ben does not answer. He sits uneasily, trying to distance himself from the conversation by reading.

JANE

I'm so glad to see you're reading. I must remind you to limit yourself to The Daily Quota of Written Language. Any reading beyond The Quota will trigger a mild explosive that will destroy the mouth.

Ben is silent, fearful of an incorrect response. He continues staring at his book. There is a long, weighty pause before his mother speaks.

JANE (CONT'D)

Miss Dark tells me that she's seen you near the tool shed.

Ben senses the possibility of a severe reprimand in the air.

BEN

(cautiously)

Just passing by on my way to the pon—I mean, The Learning Pond.

JANE

Well, I'm glad to know that you'd been to The Learning Pond the morning. You know how I feel about that being part of your re-education.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEHIND TOOL SHED - MIDNIGHT

Jane approaches the hole eyeing it steadily. With a quiet determination, she removes the metal grating and enters the hollow.

She is about to address her now-captive husband, MICHAEL MARCUS.

JANE

Did I ask to be Ben's mother?

She does not wait for an answer.

JANE (CONT'D)

I did not.

There is the distinct sound of breathing coming from the void.

JANE (CONT'D)

Did I know that you were having
sex with me?

I did.

MICHAEL

(weakly)

Did you enjoy it?

JANE

I did not.

And encourage it?

She shakes her head in a slow, deliberative manner.

JANE (CONT'D)

Hardly.

Jane waits, but there is no response.

JANE (CONT'D)

Did I realize that your rampant
thrusting over my inert body would
lead to a child such as Ben?

I don't think so.

MICHAEL

So, whose fault is it?

JANE

Mine, of course. Is anyone else to blame?

Well, you are.

Michael grunts sardonically.

JANE (CONT'D)

Do I want something from you now?

(pause)

You'd better fucking believe it.

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