

STAKES

Written by

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FADE IN

INT. GARAGE - DAY (PRESENT)

A single bulb illuminates PETER (25) at the head of a rectangular table, his cheek on the table - BOUND.

CAMILLA, erect in a chair at the head with Peter, holds a GAVEL. Willful and imposing, she's the first to step in when conflict arises. She sits closest to -

TIMOTHY, otherwise calm, overcome by mania over his friend's death. He hunches over in his chair whispering harshly across at -

JAYA, best friends with Peter. Empathetic above all else and desperate to prove Peter's innocence.

Peter stares past them all at the other end of the table -

A DEAD WOMAN

wrapped in WHITE, STAKE driven through her pale cheek, face colored by DRIED BLOOD.

BANG BANG BANG. Camilla pounds the gavel.

TIMOTHY
Sarah's dead. Why?

Timothy stares at Peter.

PETER
I - I don't know.

TIMOTHY
WHY?

Peter's eyes dart from person to person.

CAMILLA
Do you have an answer?

TIMOTHY
Guilty.

JAYA
We haven't reached a verdict yet!

CAMILLA
Peter... please.

PETER
I don't know. I walked in and she was
lying there.

CAMILLA
Where were you?

PETER
I was buying food.

TIMOTHY
And what else?

JAYA
Just what he said.

They glare at each other.

CAMILLA
She wasn't with you.

PETER
No...

JAYA
He was alone.

TIMOTHY
(whispering)
Guilty dammit.

CAMILLA
When did you see her last?

JAYA
The night before with --

TIMOTHY
So they were together!

JAYA
-- me. Would you prosecute us both?

PETER
It's true she...

Camilla glares at him.

A slow dribble around the stake, BLOOD seeps from the wound.

Peter's eyes go wide, he blinks fast.

TIMOTHY
If I have to.

JAYA
After our conversation, you two left.

TIMOTHY
You followed her home?

PETER
We walked together.

CAMILLA
You were still with her.

JAYA
They were friends!

TIMOTHY
And now!?

Blood pools around the stake.

Peter struggles against his bonds.

Camilla sighs.

CAMILLA
You found her body lying there.

TIMOTHY
And you dragged her.

JAYA
What was he supposed to do?

Timothy nearly leaps from his chair at Jaya. Camilla places a hand on him.

CAMILLA
Why did you move her?

PETER
She was...

TIMOTHY
ANSWER HER.

JAYA
He had to bury her -- !

CAMILLA
Let him speak.

PETER
She was... at peace.

CAMILLA
What did you see?

Camilla leans in. Jaya glances at Peter, pleading.

Blood flows towards Peter as if the table were sloped.

PETER
My door was ajar. I reached for the knob and turned - She lay there her arms tucked neatly to the side; her eyes open and her hair... Dried blood crusted on her teeth, her tongue missing. A hole had been bored through both cheeks --

TIMOTHY
At peace!?

Beat. The objection hangs in the air.

JAYA
There can be peace in death.

TIMOTHY
Not in grotesquerie --

CAMILLA
And she's dead! Peter --

PETER
(faster)
Her eyes! It was in her eyes - I saw peace. A smile, it danced, enormous and vivid. It... she was spectacular.

CAMILLA
But you disturbed her.

TIMOTHY
GUILTY. GUILTY. GUILTY -- !

JAYA
That means nothing!

PETER
She was my friend! I had to - She deserved dignity.

CAMILLA
Peter --

PETER
 AND I BURIED HER. I threw her body
 away! I ruined her, I SENT HER BELOW.
 She's dead but her death meant
 everything to me. None of you can
 know the pain I felt... I feel! And
 yet you condemn me.

TIMOTHY
 And for what!?
 (at the others)
 She meant nothing to him!

Peter glances up, his eyes RED and TEARY.

PETER
 I would die for her.

JAYA
 (at Timothy)
 You can't --

CAMILLA
 (at Jaya)
 You have delayed our decision for too
 long but your place is in this court!
 You have rules to abide by and you
 must be impartial!

JAYA
 I AM IMPARTIAL.

TIMOTHY
 Tell Peter he's guilty.

JAYA
 But --

TIMOTHY
 TELL HIM HE'S GUILTY.

Peter, CRYING.

CAMILLA
 We will pass the decision together.

They rise.

PETER
 Innocent...

A hand CLAPS over his mouth.

The blood about to reach Peter.

Camilla reaches for the light and pulls --

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - DAY

BLACK. Peter still crying.

Light FLASHES on. His mouth TAPED SHUT, stake removed from the woman across the table.

He shuts his eyes.

A hand lines up the stake to his cheek.

BLACK. Muffled SCREAM.

BANG BANG BANG.

FADE OUT