

LIFE UNDERWATER

Written by

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INT. SHASTA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

SHASTA ZYWICKI'S eyes are closed. Her young face is set in a pain-filled grimace. She has brunette hair tied back in a loose ponytail.

Her left forearm is slit open and blood pours into the sink. She presses into her right arm with a weakened hand.

She opens her eyes to look from the mess she's made up to her own gaze.

A realization strikes her. She scrambles for towels and stumbles from the bathroom.

INT. SHASTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JULES (early 20s) sits curled up on the couch while she listens to the TV and reads a book.

Shasta shuffles into the living room and sways on her feet.

SHASTA

I'm so sorry for all that's about to happen.

Jules casually looks over and screams as Shasta collapses onto the hardwood floor.

BLACK OUT

TITLE CARD: "Life Underwater"

INT. QUELL HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Shasta is led down the hall by DR. JACKSON, a woman in her 40's who is dressed well.

DR. JACKSON (V.O.)

So I'm gonna start off with just a few boring questions for posterity and then we'll get into you and more about what brought you here.

(beat)

Okay, alcohol: daily, often, infrequently, or never?

They pass by other patients and different parts of the house which the doctor points out.

SHASTA (V.O.)

Often.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - INTAKE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Shasta clings to a pillow with gauze-wrapped arms as she and Dr. Jackson continue their conversation across a large desk. Her bag lies at her feet.

DR. JACKSON  
How many times per week?

SHASTA  
Three to five, probably.

DR. JACKSON  
Marijuana: Daily, often, sometimes,  
infrequently, or never?

SHASTA  
Daily.

DR. JACKSON  
How much would you say in grams per  
day?

SHASTA  
Half a gram, maybe? I never think  
in terms of weight.

DR. JACKSON  
How frequently?

SHASTA  
Mostly at night.

Dr. Jackson jots something down on a notepad nearby.

DR. JACKSON  
Hard drugs? Cocaine, heroin,  
meth...?

SHASTA  
God no.

DR. JACKSON  
Hallucinogenics or party drugs?

SHASTA  
I took 'shrooms once. And I've done  
Molly a couple times.

Dr. Jackson writes for a long moment then signs the bottom of the page and turns it toward Shasta.

DR. JACKSON  
Sign this stating you've been  
honest.

Shasta abides. Dr. Jackson replaces it on the desk with  
another, shorter form.

DR. JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Same here. This basically states  
that you won't do any harm to  
yourself or others during your stay  
with us.

Shasta reads for a moment then signs.

DR. JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Put out your right wrist for me.

Dr. Jackson takes a pink paper bracelet and puts it around  
Shasta's forearm, above the gauze.

SHASTA  
What's this for?

DR. JACKSON  
So we know that you're a self-harm  
risk.

Dr. Jackson brings the notepad before her.

DR. JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Alright, enough of the fun stuff.  
(beat)  
So tell me, Shasta, why are you  
here?

SHASTA  
(dismissive)  
Isn't it obvious?

DR. JACKSON  
I'd like to hear it in your own  
words.

SHASTA  
Then... I couldn't make it stop. I  
felt ready to die.

DR. JACKSON  
How do you mean?

SHASTA

I had rectified all the reasons not to do it so I was like "Okay, let's get this over with." I was surprised when I broke skin.

DR. JACKSON

What changed once that happened?

SHASTA

The guilt fairy came to visit.

DR. JACKSON

Meaning...?

SHASTA

Meaning I'm a coward.

Silence.

DR. JACKSON

Have you had a recent breakup?

SHASTA

It's been awhile let's just say.

DR. JACKSON

Your family?

SHASTA

They're completely fine, that's the fu--other thing.

DR. JACKSON

It's fine to swear.

SHASTA

Then it's the fucked up thing. It's all fine and normal and yet here I am, completely blown apart.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - SHASTA'S ROOM - EVENING

Shasta unpacks her things into a dresser then places her suitcase in the closet.

DR. JACKSON (V.O.)

It's the nature of your illness.

SHASTA (V.O.)

I just wish other people would understand that.

DR. JACKSON (V.O.)  
 For the first time in your life  
 you'll be surrounded by people who  
 will.

She sits on the edge of the bed and heaves a sigh. The air conditioner hums.

She picks up and skims the welcome packet from the Quell House: "A place for healing from addiction & mental disorders."

She tosses the papers aside, lays on her side and curls up into a ball.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - TV ROOM - NIGHT

Shasta sits in the back corner of the room.

WYATT (30s), with a potbelly and handlebar mustache, approaches her. His bracelet is green.

WYATT

Hey.

Shasta looks over.

WYATT (CONT'D)

You're where business happens.

Shasta looks around as the phone begins to ring next to her.

WYATT (CONT'D)

That's for me.

SHASTA

Then just stand.

WYATT

Really? C'mon, lady. Just let me answer the phone.

Shasta picks up the phone and holds it out to Wyatt.

WYATT (CONT'D)

Seriously?

Wyatt snatches the receiver and sits on the armrest as he begins to talk on the phone.

Shasta shoves him away and stands. Wyatt takes her seat with a grin. She's not sure where to sit: every love seat is half-occupied and four people play a board game at the table.

She watches the TV on her feet for a long moment before she exits.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Shasta comes out of the hall unsure of where to go. She heads out the glass door to the--

EXT. QUELL HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Shasta comes through a haze of cigarette smoke and vapor to a group of patients around a table.

KYLE (20s), gaunt and blonde with bandages around an elbow, talks to EDDIE (20s), athletic and wild-eyed. They both wear green wristbands.

KYLE

Yea, no, after I watched them drain this goddamn thing today I'm never gonna eat again. If you ever relapse, keep away from the needles man.

EDDIE

But I'm super careful and I usually used to smoke the stuff anyway so...

Eddie's eyes turn toward Shasta.

KYLE

Hey, who're you?

SHASTA

Me? I'm Shasta.

EDDIE

That's kind of a funny name.

KYLE

I drink that sometimes.

SHASTA

(to Eddie)  
Not really.

EDDIE

Sure, not really.

SHASTA

What's that supposed to mean?

He throws his hands up in concession.

EDDIE  
Nothin', Jesus.

KYLE  
(to Shasta)  
What're you in for?

SHASTA  
Can't I have my fucking privacy?

Eddie scoffs.

EDDIE  
Where the fuck does it look like we are? I'm here because I love drugs, Kyle's here because he love heroin. Greta loves meth, and most everyone else love boozin'. What do you love?

SHASTA  
I--I'm just here cuz I'm sick, is that okay? I'm not addicted to nothin', I'm just sick, alright?

GINNY  
Same here, don't worry.

Shasta looks over and sees Ginny (early 30s), blonde and thin and seemingly carefree, smoking a cigarette. Her wristband is pink.

GINNY (CONT'D)  
(to Eddie)  
And we ain't the only ones neither.

EDDIE  
(to Shasta)  
See? We all got our thing.

ZACH  
I'm here because my parents don't believe in mental retardation!

ZACH (20s), autistic and vibrant with curly brown hair and a pink bracelet, comes into the light.

SHASTA  
Seriously?



ZACH

Well they definitely don't like it that's for sure. My dad says I'm what's holding him back from ever going back to school. And my mom thinks I'm what keeps her from being a great artist or something. I really don't know anymore. My sister, though, she's okay. She thinks I'm special, y'know, like every other retard. And I can say that word because it's like the n-word or it's lesser cousin "Negro" where black people can say it but white people can't and so since I'm retarded I can say it.

SHASTA

But you really shouldn't be that hard on yourself.

ZACH

Retard literally means "To cause to move or develop slowly." And I've done nothing but slow people down in my life.

KYLE

But you talk so fast!

ZACH

Fuck you and the horse you rode in on.

Eddie throws his head back and laughs.

EDDIE

Dude, you just got told.

GINNY

(to Shasta)

Come sit with me.

She slaps the empty seat next to her as an invitation. Shasta smiles and complies.

GINNY (CONT'D)

So you never got addicted to nothin' neither?

SHASTA

Nope. Just nuts.

GINNY

Same here, apparently. Did you just find that out too?

SHASTA

No it's been since about seventh grade when I first got diagnosed but it really started to show up the year before.

GINNY

Y'know, right around when you got your first period.

SHASTA

(awkward)

Actually, yea...

GINNY

But, so. Seventh grade what happened?

SHASTA

They put me on meds until they thought I'd adjusted well to high school. And it all kinda turned to shit afterward and nobody really noticed--least of all me.

GINNY

Life just keeps chugging along.

SHASTA

My grades got worse and my focus started turning toward boys and... I dunno, I think the pills just shut their door on me finally is why I wound up here...

Shasta goes quiet and shrugs.

SHASTA (CONT'D)

Again, I dunno.

(beat)

What about you?

GINNY

It feels really recent in terms of talking to doctors and that type of thing but I've been suspicious that I was sick like you for a long time, I guess. My ex used to yell at me about it but it never set in.

(MORE)

GINNY (CONT'D)

Not until the moment before I  
passed out in the car and I saw my  
son's face all grown up and....

She breaks and begins to cry.

FADE TO BLACK

IN BLACK

The sound of high tide ocean waves. An underwater scream.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - TV ROOM - MORNING

DR. BURROUGHS (70s), a lanky man with white hair, leads a group consisting of Shasta and three other bleary-eyed patients (Wyatt, Greta, Kyle) spread out among the room's chairs and couches.

DR. BURROUGHS

Who didn't sleep last night?

Wyatt and Kyle raise their hands.

DR. BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

And who had dreams?

Shasta and GRETA (50s), heavysset with a permanent frown that speaks to a meth addiction, raise their hands.

DR. BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

Greta, was it a dream or a  
nightmare?

GRETA

Oh it was definitely a dream. I was  
getting eaten out by--

DR. BURROUGHS

You know the rules, sex dreams are  
kept private.

GRETA

Ah man! I was really hopin' you'd  
let me talk about it. You were in  
it doc.

(beat)

Nah, I'm just messin' with ya.

DR. BURROUGHS

(to Shasta)

Then let's turn to you. Dream or nightmare?

SHASTA

Can I pass?

DR. BURROUGHS

We'd rather you didn't.

SHASTA

But, then it was a sex dream.

DR. BURROUGHS

Are you sure about that?

Wyatt leans forward.

WYATT

What's the big deal? It's just a dream.

GRETA

You're gonna have to say a lot worse in group later, hon'.

DR. BURROUGHS

Please, your input is appreciated.

Silence.

SHASTA

...it started out as a dream where I'm fully dressed and swimming out deeper in the ocean. And then all of a sudden I couldn't swim anymore. I'm exhausted. And my clothes turn to lead, my shoes seem to suddenly fill with sand.

(beat)

I blink and suddenly somehow I'm back on the shore but it still sounds like I'm drowning. I try to move forward, but the sand is viscous so that I can't--I can't help myself.

WYATT

Maybe it's because of the way you present yourself.

SHASTA

(to Dr. Burroughs)  
Is he allowed to talk?

DR. BURROUGHS

This is your first group, isn't it.

WYATT

What's with you? I was just trying to say that you're all put together on the outside but on the inside you're crashing in the waves.

SHASTA

(offended)  
Oh okay.

DR. BURROUGHS

I'd like to open this up to further to discussion. May we, Shasta?

SHASTA

But these people don't know me.

GRETA

Then say something about yourself! Jesus Christ, girl.

SHASTA

Fine, fuck it. What do you wanna know?

KYLE

Anything.

SHASTA

I work in fast food and I'm going to school but I'm 22 and still undecided about what to do with my life. Pretty fuckin' unique, right?

DR. BURROUGHS

Thank you for finally opening up, Shasta. What do others have to say about her dream?

GRETA

You need to bring yourself back together.

KYLE

Maybe you feel like two different people. And one can't help the other.

SHASTA

Yea, I guess it really feels like--

An alarm goes off.

DR. BURROUGHS

Our time is up for those who attend  
Anon groups.

Every patient except Shasta gets up and leaves.

Dr. Burroughs turns to Shasta.

DR. BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

And what do you think?

SHASTA

I think it's bullshit. I was just  
about to open up.

DR. BURROUGHS

Consider it a confidence building  
exercise for the next group.

SHASTA

But can't we just be private about  
it? Like, I don't wanna spill my  
guts to people I don't know, you  
saw that.

DR. BURROUGHS

I saw.

SHASTA

But what keeps them from hating me?

DR. BURROUGHS

I'm sure they've been through  
worse.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

Ginny stands in the line for breakfast. Her eyes scan the  
room and she spots Shasta alone at a table in the center.

She is handed her plate of food by a nurse behind the counter  
then maneuvers through the tables and chairs. Shasta looks up  
when Ginny's plate plops down.

SHASTA

Oh, hey.

GINNY  
Mornin'. How'd you sleep?

SHASTA  
Okay... I went to dreams group.

GINNY  
Damn, so not much then.

SHASTA  
Nah, though it was interesting.

GINNY  
I've never been to dreams. I sleep  
like an angel here.

SHASTA  
Lucky.

GINNY  
Well what? I don't have a son to  
worry about here so much. It's the  
best thing ever taking a break from  
being a full time mom.

SHASTA  
How old is he?

GINNY  
Foster? He's Fourteen.

Shasta's eyes go wide with shock.

GINNY (CONT'D)  
I had him when I was 16, yea. It  
was totally a white trash love  
story--we were living in a trailer  
in the Sangre de Cristo mountains  
in some bumfuck town. Gratefully,  
my ex and I never got married so  
there wasn't a fight when I took  
our son back here to where I really  
wanna raise him anyway.

SHASTA  
May I ask what happened?

GINNY  
With what? My ex? I guess, sure. He  
tried to kill me.

SHASTA  
Fuuuuuuck....

GINNY

I felt like it was my fault. It's weird because I loved him more intensely after he choked me screamin' out "This is how I love you!"

(beat)

Christ, what an experience.

SHASTA

But so you didn't break up with him?

GINNY

No, I mean everyone told me to but it's weird because supposedly I mistook fear for love. That's what the doctors said anyway.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Ginny speaks without ceasing. She now addresses a group of patients led by Dr. Jackson.

GINNY

(continuing)

But I also knew I wasn't ever gonna stand for that shit again so when he tried something for the second time, which was bound to happen, I broke his fuckin' nose.

People in the group cheer.

GINNY (CONT'D)

Which is good, sure, but it left me and my son without an income so it was like all I had was the choice to come back here and it's totally different when it happens by force... So I was immediately back to where I was before, alone and my parents hate me all over again and... I miss him. I out and out miss him. It's fucked up and I hate myself for it.

GRETA

Same thing with me. The dude's name was Brett. What a white-ass fuckin' name.



SHASTA

(to Ginny)

You shouldn't hate yourself--it's just a flaw now you have to work on.

GINNY

(offended)

A flaw? What's that supposed to mean?

ZACH

Not a flaw maybe since that has a negative connotation like damaged or unsound or--

KYLE

Treat it like an addiction, maybe.

ZACH

Exactly, because it's not necessarily a problem with her character or her memory or her past.

EDDIE

We could go get him for you--start a lynch mob. "We're comin' for ya motherfucker!"

Ginny laughs.

GINNY

(to Shasta)

Yea, it's not a flaw it's just something that I'm working on.

SHASTA

Sure, fine, sorry I put it that way.

KYLE

Violence against women is fucking stupid.

DR. JACKSON

Watch yourself, Kyle, there may be someone in the room working through some issues.

KYLE

Oh, sorry hypothetical person.

DR. JACKSON  
Alright, let's get back on topic.  
Who haven't we heard from?

She looks around the room and locks eyes with Shasta.

DR. JACKSON (CONT'D)  
What about you?

SHASTA  
What do you want me to say? I can't  
cook up something about a normal-  
ass family. I mean, my brother went  
through a divorce but that's about  
it. Everyone still talks to  
everyone. There's no drama to it,  
it seems like.

WYATT  
(off-hand)  
Then why the fuck are you here?

Dr. Jackson turns.

DR. JACKSON  
What was that Wyatt?

WYATT  
(to Shasta)  
I said, why are you here? If shit's  
so normal then you probably don't  
belong here.

SHASTA  
Where the fuck did you come from if  
you think--

WYATT  
You probably just cut yourself for  
the attention.

SHASTA  
I didn't fake practically dying,  
prick. You don't understand.

DR. JACKSON  
Wyatt, Shasta, personal insults  
aren't welcome here.

WYATT  
 But I didn't insult her. I was just pointing out a fact. We're here because of real shit. You and Ginny and Zach and whoever the fuck else with your faggoty pink bracelets are here because of petty shit.

SHASTA  
 Well that's what he's being!

ZACH  
 We aren't petty you're just being an asshole.

WYATT  
 (standing)  
 I'm sorry, what?

ZACH  
 (standing also)  
 What...?

WYATT  
 Are you really gonna start something?

ZACH  
 Let's just say you should be glad I signed a waiver saying I wouldn't.

Shasta stands and faces Wyatt.

WYATT  
 And what about you?

DR. JACKSON  
 Please, everyone take a seat.

WYATT  
 I'll sit when she leaves.

Shasta gives him the finger and holds it as she exits the room.

ZACH  
 Hey wait.

Zach follows after her.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Zach comes out of the group therapy room and watches Shasta walk down the hall and into her room.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - SHASTA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shasta comes into the room, motions to close a door that isn't there then collapses into sobs.

After a moment, Zach appears in the doorway. He hesitates then knocks.

Shasta looks up.

SHASTA

Yea?

ZACH

Sorry I can't come into your room otherwise I'd come in and sit down but that's okay because we can talk from here.

SHASTA

Oh, sure.

ZACH

Thanks for sticking up for me. People find it tough apparently to do that sometimes and so I appreciate it.

She turns around with a smile.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Maybe we belong here because we're supposed to be together. I mean I thought this place sucked too for the past few days but then you came and I'm really glad you're here. It's too bad I don't have the same effect on you though.

Shasta slumps.

SHASTA

Man, I just wanna get better.

She gets up and walks past him.

ZACH

Okay that's fine I guess. I'm disqualified from giving you advice then.

Shasta stops and turns back.

SHASTA

It's not that it's just--

ZACH

That I apparently don't have emotions or any sort of an idea on how to take care of shitty things when they happen sure. Well let me tell sister you there's a lot more to it than that. I mean if you actually let me sit down and talk to you then maybe you'd understand.

SHASTA

But my parents are paying for doctors so I should probably see one.

ZACH

Okay sure that's fine I mean--

INT. QUELL HOUSE - INTAKE OFFICE - DAY

DR. ROBERTSON (40s), a tall and fit black man, sits across from Shasta.

DR. ROBERTSON

What seems to be the trouble?

SHASTA

I guess it's that everyone else's stories are about how hard their lives are and all that. I ain't got shit compared to most people in here.

DR. ROBERTSON

Their stories are simply noisier, not more important. They're jealous of the life you've had.

SHASTA

Christ, I think that makes it worse.

DR. ROBERTSON

Then I'm sure you've done your share of shady things.

SHASTA

All my fights have been verbal-- mostly.

(MORE)

SHASTA (CONT'D)

Unless, well, I've hurt people because they've hurt me by talking shit about my chicken legs or my jump roping or whatever.

DR. ROBERTSON

Which is good in a way, you stand up for yourself. Keep doing that, just maybe with less intensity next time.

Silence.

DR. ROBERTSON (CONT'D)

What would happen if I signed you out right now?

SHASTA

Well right now I'd probably just wait around and then go back to school.

DR. ROBERTSON

I mean immediately.

SHASTA

Oh, then I'd probably sit in my room and think. Enjoy the quiet, probably.

DR. ROBERTSON

So you'd still isolate yourself?

SHASTA

...yea... but who're you to say that a couple more days in this place will change that?

DR. ROBERTSON

I'm not saying that. I'm saying that it'll be healthiest for you to stick around.

Silence.

DR. ROBERTSON (CONT'D)

Are there a lot of things in your life that you don't finish?

SHASTA

This'd be one in a long line, if you let me out, let's just say.

DR. ROBERTSON

Then let's make that a goal: finish something for once.

SHASTA

(quietly)

...I sincerely hate that you have a point.

INT. QUELL HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ginny leans against the wall next to the doorway which Shasta comes through, completely blind to others.

GINNY

(after Shasta)

Hey.

Shasta stops and turns to face her.

EXT. QUELL HOUSE - SMOKING PATIO - NIGHT

Ginny, Zach, and Shasta are the only ones left. Zach paces around the perimeter and converses with himself.

GINNY

I asked a nurse and she said that Wyatt'll only be here for a couple days.

SHASTA

That's good, I don't understand why he's gotta be such a dick though.

GINNY

It's probably cuz he wants you.

SHASTA

Oh Jesus, don't start with that.

Ginny laughs.

GINNY

Yea, fuck it. We'll get through our time.

SHASTA

When're you out?

GINNY

Day before you, if it all works out. I may try'n stay though.

SHASTA

Why would you ever wanna do that?

GINNY

Because I'm scared of going back to earth.

SHASTA

But group therapy sucks. And the food?

GINNY

At first, sure, but you get used to it.

SHASTA

And Foster? What does he think of all this?

GINNY

He's coming to visit tomorrow and he's old enough to understand when I need to get my shit together. It's not like he's five and confused or nothin'. He knows mom's crazy.

Silence.

SHASTA

How'd you do it?

GINNY

I... Well, I did the whole hose-in-the-exhaust-pipe thing which I guess is kinda old school now but it seemed like the easiest way to go... Except when I passed out I hit my head on the horn and woke everyone up. It was a goddamn disaster.

Shasta holds up her arms.

SHASTA

I scarred myself for life. Maybe I'll get tattoos to cover them.

GINNY

Can I see?

Zach comes forward.



ZACH

Yea, that'd be cool.

SHASTA

I'd rather not. It's a pain in the ass to get it off and on. Plus it's embarrassing as fuck right now since it just represents a failure.

ZACH

I'm gonna have infrequent internal bleeding for the rest of my life.

GINNY

What happened?

ZACH

I took my mom's sleeping pills with cough syrup but it still didn't work. Also I think it was because I couldn't stop thinking as always and now all of a sudden I saw all that was supposed to happen and I just I couldn't sleep. Then when I got up I fell. That's when everyone woke up.

SHASTA

It's embarrassing, huh.

ZACH

What? No well I mean it could be if you don't bury it in your past with the rest of it. But that's what I'm gonna do. My family wants me to live now and that's a nice change of heart for them so I'll stick it out until they don't again and then the process will probably start over.

GINNY

Are we supposed to be glad we're here?

ZACH

I mean aren't you? You have your son.

GINNY

I had a TV-movie change of heart at the last moment but the rest of my life is still bullshit.

(MORE)

GINNY (CONT'D)

That's where my embarrassment comes  
in--can't being a mom be enough  
sometimes?

SHASTA

Nothing ever is. I just wanna go  
back to that night and give myself  
the courage.

BLACK OUT