



MALLORY BASH: THE MILK CARTON KIDS

by

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BLACK

Rain falls. Thunder rumbles softly. Then it BOOMS--

EXT. ASPHALT ROAD - SMALL TOWN OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

A motorcycle screams by.

The driver is a muscular YOUNG MAN (27), with loose brown waves of hair, a heavy brow, and a short, scruffy beard. A helmeted YOUNG WOMAN (25) clutches his waist as they speed wildly over the wet road. The back tire slips and regains traction. She looks up at him through the rain stinging her face. His expression is earnest and grim--she fears him. She takes her helmet off and a short crop of blonde hair escapes. She places the helmet over her pregnant belly.

The speedometer climbs and the engine roars over the thunder and rain. They rapidly approach a darkened path where the road cuts through the forest. On either side of the road are high concrete retaining walls, with trees forming a tunnel overhead. He tries to slow down to traverse the road as they enter, but it's too late. The cycle fishtails.

EXT. TUNNEL EXIT - CONTINUOUS

A cacophony of crashing metal rings out as flashes of red and yellow light spin out over the road just beyond the exit of the tunnel. The bike spins out into sight, empty, and settles in the middle of the road. And then...quiet.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER

Emergency vehicles litter the site. The rain is interminable. An OLDER MAN, like a ginger Santa Claus, stands at the barricade. A PARAMEDIC approaches him. The news is clear--but they're carrying a bundle in their arms. The paramedic hands the bundle to him. He folds back the blanket and reveals the sleeping baby. Rain spatters its face, nearly waking it. He shades it with his hand.

He stares at the child beneath a heavy brow. He's wary and broken, but a smile finds its way to his face as the rain calms. He moves his hand away from the baby's face.

MUSIC CUE: Runaway - Janet Jackson

CLOSE IN on the man's face as the early sun creeps over the horizon and casts a soft halo around him. ON DRUMS--

INT. BROOKWOOD FOREST - DAY

SUPER: "Ten years later..."

A bright autumn day. The forest path is clear. A calm puddle reflects the sun beaming above the silhouette of the canopy. SPLASH!--MALLORY's feet pound through, breaking up the reflection. Mallory (10), a gap-toothed redhead with big bangs and a poofed ponytail, joyfully tears down the trail.

She carries a backpack, and under her arm is a framed photo of her father, PHELIM--the man on the motorcycle.

MONTAGE:

1. She blazes through the forest understory with a grin of determination and adventure.
2. She leaps a narrow creek.
3. She surfs down a steep hill toward a fence at the bottom and slides right through a twisted break in the chain link.

ANGLE ON: A sign reads - "Brookwood Shoshone Reservation," and a sign beneath reads - "No Trespassing: Violators are subject to federal or tribal laws."

RIVER

4. She hops across a series of stones--the last is a tortoise, and she stomps right on it's back, slipping and tumbling into the river. The tortoise rolls about underwater, bewildered.
5. She wades up from the river onto the sand, drenched. She passes a herd of bighorn sheep as she walks up the beach toward the treeline. A young girl in a wooden coyote mask hides among the sheep, watching Mal studiously. As Mallory leaves the flock, the COYOTE GIRL riles them up. She leaps about, spooking them into a frenzy. The sheep circle back and begin chasing Mallory up the beach.

FOREST

6. Mal dodges sheep and darts through the trees. She snatches up a long, sturdy stick. She jumps and lands her stick between two tree branches and swings up like a gymnast. She teases the sheep below, and punctuates it by thrusting her stick in the air, but--CLUMP! Right into a hornet nest! She throws her backpack over a fallen branch and ziplines to the ground. She races across the sand, hornets and sheep at her heels. She dives into the river--face to face with the unamused tortoise.

RIVER - TOWHEAD

7. She crawls through a patch of briars, all scraped up, onto a small towhead. She trudges through the dirt, kicking up a marchline of ants into a cloud of dust.
8. She brandishes two newspaper hats, a small one for the portrait and a large one for her. She places the portrait atop a high stump and honors it with a presentation. She models supplies from her pack: rope, small shovel, pocket knife, and first aid kit. She smirks as she opens the kit, revealing not first aid--but two packed lunches. She sets up lunch near the river for herself and the portrait. She eats, staring up at the sky, and talks to the portrait.

END MONTAGE

MUSIC CUE: Fade Out "Runaway"...

MALLORY

(munching)

Peanut butter and brown sugar.

Mm--the best!

(staring off)

I'm almost ready. I finally got the magnifying glass to work! Started a pretty solid fire.

(scanning the landscape)

I'm gonna find you. But I need something bigger. A real test.

She digs her notebook out of her backpack. Scrawled in blocky letters on the cover: "Milk Carton Kids."

MALLORY

Something's happening in Moonblush.

It's big. Like what you used to do.

In the bushes at the river's edge, the Coyote Girl stretches her palm against the ground. A small root creeps up beneath the portrait and knocks it into the river.

MALLORY

(turning back)

It's exactly what I--

The portrait is gone. She runs down the towhead, scanning frantically. She spots it rolling down the river. She runs right to a plank of sheet metal and kicks off like a surfboard. She rides the river in pursuit.

The portrait lodges in a tangle of roots. Mal surfs toward it, but the roots churn up into a towering dam, caging the portrait at its ridge. Mallory stares, dumbfounded by what has spawned before her. She crashes at its bank, shakes it off, and rushes to the top. She tears open the cage and snatches up the portrait. As she stands triumphant atop the mound, the cage reforms around her. The dam coils down to a pillar and cuts through the water, spinning toward the towhead. Mallory grips the portrait tight as she's served on a platter of roots toward the shoreline.

The cage slides up onto the sand as the Coyote Girl, clad in rollerblades, glides in on a large pale tree root. She gracefully rolls to the sand, poses with poise--then drops to all fours and trots a circle in the sand. She scurries up to the cage and sniffs all around it. Mallory doesn't let the Coyote Girl out of her sight.

MALLORY

What is this? Are you...feral?

The Coyote Girl zips to her feet and thrusts an accusing finger.

COYOTE GIRL

(melodramatic)

GUILTY!

MALLORY

What?! I didn't do anything!

COYOTE GIRL

(indicating the portrait)

Not you, HIM!

The cage opens up. Mallory steps out, but the cage roots contract around her arm, imprisoning the portrait.

MALLORY

Let me go!

COYOTE GIRL

(tricksy)

I don't think he can hear you.

MALLORY

Not him, YOU!

COYOTE GIRL

You can leave whenever you want!
You just gotta let go.

MALLORY

No! He's not guilty!

COYOTE GIRL

Guilty of what?

MALLORY

You're the one putting him on
trial! Of...of...whatever! Of
anything!

COYOTE GIRL

Hmm. You make a compelling
argument... Fine. He's free to go.

The cage unravels and the roots retract into the sand. Mallory clutches the portrait to her chest. The Coyote Girl takes a step toward her; Mal clutches so tight that the glass cracks and cuts her arm. She winces, but holds fast, even as blood trickles to the sand beneath her feet.

COYOTE GIRL

Ooo, you should get that taken care
of. Oh, I know! We'll use your
emergency first aid sandwich!

She grabs the sandwich, peels it apart, and slaps one side right on Mallory's wound.

MALLORY

GAH! Leave me alone you little weasel!

COYOTE GIRL

Clearly a coyote...

Mallory goes to wash her arm in the river. The Coyote Girl invasively inspects the portrait.

COYOTE GIRL

Run away from home, did he?

MALLORY

What? No. None of your business.

COYOTE GIRL

We lose more parents that way. You think you were a good daughter, that you showed 'em love and raised 'em right, and then suddenly they're screaming they hate you and running off to join the circus.

Mallory scrubs harder; a nerve was struck.

COYOTE GIRL (O.S.)

Mm. Wonder if you ran away, you could catch up to him...

MUSIC CUE: "Runaway" Outro

Mal springs up to fire back, but the Coyote Girl is gone. Mal looks around; all she finds is a wooden mask, shaped and painted like a red robin. She turns it over in her hand before stowing it in her backpack. She looks down at the broken portrait. Her blood is smeared over Phelim's face. She packs it and heads toward home.