

IMAGE PROBLEM

Written by

Frank MacCrory

Copyright © 2021. This screenplay may not be used or reproduced for any purpose including educational purposes without the expressed written permission of the author.

fmaccrory@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Four make-up chairs set up, but no people. O.S. cheering.

Three sixteen-year-old girls SOPHIE, TARA, and RUBY stream in wearing brightly-colored costumes, pass before a concert poster of their four-girl pop band, S.T.A.R.

The fourth member, ARIA (also 16), walks in drinking from a water bottle.

SOPHIE

Woo! Great work.

Ruby turns around just as a woman in a Security tee-shirt is about to enter.

RUBY

Nope. We get thirty minutes of "us time" after a show. The make-up people will explain it to you.

Ruby closes the door, looks toward Aria, grimaces just as she walks straight into a chair. Aria glares at the bottle as if it's at fault.

Ruby rubs the inside of her right elbow.

RUBY

Whose idea was the sleeveless outfits?

TARA

(typing on cell phone)
Henry. And some of the crazier fans are hating on them on Twitter.

RUBY

Oh. Aria... tell your dad that he's an ass.

Tara plucks several snacks from a catering tray, but in a pattern so it appears no one has taken anything. She gobbles the snacks while no one else is looking.

ARIA

He said it makes us look fit, better role models or something. And gives teen boys hope that they'll see something.

Tara painfully peels off a strip of double-sided fashion tape from her side.

TARA

False hope. And I have to pay for it with a lot more time in the gym.

Sophie makes her way to her seat, lifts a box sitting there.

SOPHIE

They're here! Ladies... we have OFFICIALLY made it.

The others turn suspiciously toward Sophie.

SOPHIE

A week before our movie comes out --

Sophie opens the box, contents hidden from view.

SOPHIE

-- they'll be handing out THESE in Happy Meals!

Ruby and Tara look into the box. Tara freezes in a wide-eyed expression of disgust. Ruby SCREAMS.

Aria reaches into the box with both hands, pulls out four BOBBLEHEAD DOLLS, one likeness for each band member.

TARA

Who can live up to this? No one is that skinny!

RUBY

Look at my nose!

Aria puts the dolls down on a table. The Sophie and Tara dolls butt heads.

SOPHIE

It's a bobblehead you... bobblehead. It's not supposed to look real.

TARA

Who approved this? Our parents?
(glaring at doll)
I knew Dad didn't like my music, but I didn't think he HATED me.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Ruby sits in sweats on the couch, carefully applies thin padding to a colorful electric guitar where it would touch the inside of her elbow.

O.S. Aria performs voice exercises in a bedroom.

RUBY
Where's Tara?

Sophie - in a bathrobe - leans next to a closed door, points at it with her thumb, pantomimes brushing teeth. Ruby nods.

Tara bursts from the bathroom in workout gear. Sophie and Ruby mouth Tara's next words as she says them.

TARA
I'll be at the gym.

SOPHIE
(gets in TARA's way)
That doll thing really bothered you, didn't it? You won't talk to me, but Doctor Hayes --

TARA
I am NOT bingeing and purging... again. Besides, all she seems to worry about is keeping our tour on schedule.

RUBY
Remember, we're supposed to attack the PROBLEM, not the SYMPTOMS.

Tara grabs a gym bag and storms out of the suite. Ruby puts her guitar back in its case.

RUBY
If it was just me, I'd live with the new outfits. Didn't really seem to affect
(indicates SOPHIE)
keyboard or
(indicates door)
drums. Then of course our --

O.S. voice exercises finish. Aria opens her door, wearing a loose tank-top, pajama bottoms, bare feet, and a bulky set of noise-cancelling headphones.

ARIA
And... cool down.

She pitter-patters across the room - practically in a trance - to the ice bucket, puts an ice cube on her tongue.

RUBY
-- vocalist --

Teenage boys' hopes are crushed as Aria pitter-patters all the way back to her room without a wardrobe malfunction.

RUBY
-- doesn't spend a lot of time in
reality.

Aria closes her door.

SOPHIE
But you think it triggered Tara.
Fine, I'll talk to Henry.

RUBY
I'll do it. You take you shower.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Aria and Ruby knock on a guest door. O.S. TV plays.

ARIA
Dad...

Aria inserts a keycard and opens the door, revealing the back of an easy chair with a man's bare arms visible on the sides.

ARIA
Oh, come ON Dad, we need a hand.
Two, if you can spare them.

Ruby walks around to the front of the chair, SCREAMS.

Aria rounds the chair, gags. INTO VIEW: The only things in the chair are two severed arms and a lot of blood.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Inside the room, a crime-scene technician takes pictures of the area now blocked off with police tape. Out in the hall Aria, Ruby and RUBY'S MOM (38) stand with a world-weary DETECTIVE (47) and the hotel's clean-cut SECURITY CHIEF (52).

ARIA
 No, that's normal. Mom takes an
 Ambien pretty much every night.

DETECTIVE
 I'll talk to her when she wakes up,
 but not expecting much. What I WAS
 expecting was footage from these --

The Detective gestures toward security cameras.

DETECTIVE
 -- but there was some --

SECURITY CHIEF
 -- technical issue on this floor.

RUBY'S MOM
 We... uh... actually paid extra for
 that. Video of the girls keeps
 popping up online.

DETECTIVE
 That's just f--
 (sees ARIA and RUBY)
 -- freakin' great. Anything ELSE
 you'd like to tell me?

ARIA
 That... puddle...

RUBY
 Aria puked in there. And he's gonna
 have like everyone's D.N.A. on him
 'cause he does that handshake-
 bearhug thing.

DETECTIVE
 F-F-F--

RUBY
 It gets kinda awkward, actually.

DETECTIVE
 --Fantastic.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

The Detective sits on a chair facing all four band members on
 the couch. Behind the couch stand Ruby's Mom, SOPHIE'S DAD
 (40), and TARA'S MOM (Botox).

SOPHIE

We have some super-dedicated fans. They know pretty much everywhere we go and everything we do. I bet a couple have rooms in this hotel.

RUBY

(typing on cell phone)
Three. They aren't exactly subtle on social media.

DETECTIVE

And you think these new outfits set off some deranged fan?

TARA'S MOM

They're all smiles on stage, but if you know them, you can tell Ruby and Tara weren't happy out there.

Ruby rubs the inside of her elbow. Tara contracts meekly.

DETECTIVE

So this yahoo thinks he's helping the band. If he's a big enough moron, maybe he'll brag about it online. But remember, these idiots can be just as dangerous to the people they think they're helping. You seriously going through with your next show?

SOPHIE'S DAD

We aren't going to run and let some deranged fan "win."

The Detective scans the parents' faces, raises an eyebrow.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Ruby sits on the couch, tapping away on a laptop. Aria sits in a chair, staring out the window.

O.S. muffled sounds of RETCHING from the bathroom.

RUBY

Hey, Roy's in town.

No reaction from Aria. O.S. sound of a toilet flush then frenetic TOOTHBRUSHING.

RUBY

What state are we in again?
Wondering if it's legal for him to
propose to a sixteen-year-old here.

No reaction from Aria.

RUBY

Anyway, he's like the ultimate
stalker. I bet he knows who else is
snooping around. I'll just meet up
with him and see what he knows.

Ruby pauses for a reaction, but Aria's stare continues.

RUBY

I know it's all kinds of dangerous,
so I'll get some pepper spray
first.

O.S. sounds of toothbrushing end. A moment later, Tara
emerges from the bathroom wearing workout gear.

Ruby and Aria absentmindedly mouth Tara's next words as Ruby
closes her laptop.

TARA

I'll be at the gym.

RUBY

If I'm not here when you get back,
it's because I'm going to go talk
to Roy.

Tara freezes in her tracks with a white-knuckled grip on the
door handle.

TARA

Don't. Encourage. Him.

RUBY

I'm going to get him to tell me
which other stalkers are around,
get a suspect list.

TARA

Can't a cop do that?

RUBY

He won't talk to a cop.

Tara strides to the couch, puts an arm on each of Ruby's
shoulders, stares directly into her eyes.

TARA
He's obsessed. He's --

RUBY
I know. He can always tell which days my feet were hurting.

TARA
He goes on and on about the tiniest change in my jewelry.

ARIA
(softly, facing window)
He told me I'm wearing the wrong bra size.

Wide-eyed Ruby and Tara turn toward Aria, then back toward each other with narrow eyes.

RUBY
Fine. I'll be on the phone with you the whole time. It happens in two hours... I have to buy some pepper spray first.

TARA
I'll be back before then.

Tara rushes out with her gym bag. On her way out, Ruby pauses to give Aria a friendly hug.

RUBY
Everything will get better.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Aria sits in the chair, exactly as before. Tara sits on the couch in a video call on her cell phone.

The image on the phone moves erratically between hedges, sky, and ground.

An exhausted Sophie steps through the main door, waves to someone out in the hall, closes the door, and leans on it.

SOPHIE
We're safe. The hotel's more than happy to keep things quiet, and I convinced Detective Gruffy McGruffFace that he doesn't want copycat killers.

TARA
How does any of that make us safe?

SOPHIE
(uses air quotes)
No "deranged fan" image problem for
the band. Our next show can go on.

Tara looks up from her phone in disbelief.

RUBY (V.O.)
(out of breath)
Okay, this should be the spot.

SOPHIE
Hey, Ruby. What's going on?

RUBY (V.O.)
I'm finding out which stalkers are
in town. Roy always --

Sophie wraps her hands over Tara's, turns the phone (upside-down) toward herself.

SOPHIE
Have you lost your --

Ruby SCREAMS. Sophie and Tara scream in response, fumbling the phone which lands on the table.

REVEAL: On the phone screen, ROY (56) lays dead on the ground with both eyes brutally stabbed out.

INT. DR. HAYES' OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

Aria, Ruby, and Sophie sit subdued in the reception area along with SOPHIE'S MOM (38), Tara's Mom, ARIA'S MOM (36), and Ruby's Mom along with Sophie's Dad and RUBY'S DAD (40).

This section of the hospital is otherwise deserted.

SOPHIE'S MOM
Doctor Hayes will help with all the
trauma you girls went through.

Tara returns from the restroom, sits next to her Mom.

SOPHIE
Calmed down now?

TARA
Feeling much better.

RUBY
So, we're just going to keep pretending we don't know anything about Roy, and that Henry had a heart attack?

TARA
I think at least one of the stabs attacked his heart.

TARA'S MOM
Not helping, honey. Giving that deranged fan the news coverage he wants would cause... an image problem for the band.

Ruby's incredulous gaze shifts between the near-catatonic Aria and Tara's Mom.

TARA'S MOM
By the way, did you see your father?

TARA
He was hungry, and I know where every speck of food is in this place. There's a kitchenette down the hall, turn right, room 8-6-7. The door combination is --

RUBY'S MOM
Five-three-oh-nine?

TARA
Yeah, how'd you know?

RUBY'S MOM
Wild guess.

SOPHIE
What is keeping Doctor Hayes?

RUBY
She has a lot on her mind, maybe she forgot about us. Mom, let's go get Tara's Dad.

Ruby looks to her Mom, they head off together.

INT. KITCHENETTE - DAY

Ruby's Mom punches the code into the keypad, opens the door.

On a table sits one of those where-did-he-touch-you dolls,
but on its neck sits the severed head of Tara's Dad.

Ruby and Ruby's Mom SCREAM.

INT. DR. HAYES' OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

Ruby runs back, splattered with blood.

SOPHIE'S DAD

The deranged fan is here! Everyone,
in the office! Now!

Tara's Mom pushes a silent alarm button at the receptionist's
desk, getting suspicious looks from the other parents.

TARA'S MOM

Tara's here a lot. I notice things.

She joins the others piling through the door.

INT. DR. HAYES' OFFICE - DAY

Sophie's Dad and Ruby barricade the door, Tara's Mom dials on
the desk phone, the others huddle together near the desk.

RUBY

(shuddering)

Tara's Dad's head was... was cut
off. It was on a doll body I think.

TARA

You think?

RUBY

And it was a trap... that got my
mom. I... I ran.

TARA'S MOM

(into phone)

There is a deranged fan of S.T.A.R.
somewhere in this building.
S.T.A.R. You don't have any
daughters, do you? Just find him.
Now, dammit!

Sophie's Dad slides a chair to the door. INTO VIEW: A woman
in a labcoat lays face-down, skull crushed under the foot of
a psychiatrist's couch. Nametag shows "Marilyn Hayes, M.D.,
Psychiatry." Ruby SHRIEKS.

Ruby looks at the barricaded door, and her shriek morphs into a laugh.

RUBY
A lot on her mind, get it?

Ruby pulls a long knife out from her sleeve. Everyone backs away except Tara's Mom who still speaks on the phone.

TARA
Mom! There is no deranged fan out there.

RUBY
You people make me sick. You don't see your kids anymore, you just see dollar signs! Tara spends all this time getting over an eating disorder, and you sign us up with a JUNK FOOD place?!

RUBY'S DAD
Their new menu has some --

Ruby growls at her Dad, shutting him up. She stands at the door, keeps everyone at bay with her knife.

RUBY
I should have seen it coming. Lately, we got our own hotel room just to keep us out of your hair. You don't know how many times I had to keep Aria from going to see some pervert she met on the Internet.

ARIA'S MOM
You didn't--?

Aria slowly looks toward her Mom, shrugs meekly.

RUBY
And knowing full well Tara has body image issues, four of you signed off on those abominations!

SOPHIE
The dolls?

RUBY
Yes! I found the papers. Aria's dad, who's an ass anyway, my mom, and Tara's Dad initialed off on the final design. You care about money so much?

(MORE)

RUBY (CONT'D)

Take the life insurance and your
damned twenty percent and GET OUT
OF OUR LIVES!

Sophie's Mom and Sophie's Dad exchange sidelong glances that
say, "Maybe if we don't move she won't see us."

RUBY

I didn't forget about the fourth
sign-off. Sophie's mom and dad have
the same first initial --

Sophie's Mom and Dad both open their mouths.

RUBY

-- and I can't trust anything
they'd say.

Ruby points her knife and stare directly at Sophie.

RUBY

Looks like Sophie has a choice to
make.

FADE OUT.