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Run like you're on fire

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Abstract

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film [or pilot for television, or play for the theatre]; plus a 6000-word essay (exegesis). A summary of the script is as follows:

Run like you're on fire tells the story of a young woman, April, in search of the truth behind her lover's sudden disappearance. April's journey takes her to Freedom Hill, a prestigious youth camp led by Mary and her brother, Lucas, where her lover was last seen working. April applies for a job in Freedom Hill and is subsequently put in charge of overseeing repairs to an old barn by a group of teenagers punished by Mary. April grows closer to one teenager in particular, Marissa, who provides her with the information she needs in order to find out the truth. April's investigation leads her to believe that something fatal happened to her lover and that the camp is not what it appears to be. Despite the threat of danger, April is more determined than ever to find out the truth.

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Attestation of Authorship

On the first page after the table of contents, the following attestation signed by the candidate certifying the original authorship of the thesis/dissertation is to appear:

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Exegesis

In this first section of my exegesis, I discuss the core story of my script, *Run like you're on fire* in relation to five chosen primary texts. First, I define the term 'core story' then identify and describe it in my script. Second, I discuss the commonalities between each primary text and how they treat the same core story. Third, I discuss the differences between each primary text and the ways in which they dramatize the same core story. In considering these commonalities and differences, I make my own observations and conclusions in relation to how these affect audience connection and relatability. I also discuss the ways in which these key commonalities and differences relate to my own script, *Run like you're on fire*. In the second section, I introduce my own script through a synopsis, then further establish its setting and protagonist. I discuss key elements of my script, such as protagonist motivation, character arc, the script's main antagonist and the script's main takeaway.

What is a core story?

A 'core story' is the main action performed by the protagonist, in which all key actions and decisions made by the protagonist in the film contribute to, and are expressions of, that main action. The core story of *Run like you're on fire* follows the protagonist, April, on her journey to uncover the truth, while fighting a community, or collective force, that is preventing her from doing so. The five primary texts I have chosen to discuss are *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (Clark, Turtletaub, Frugiuele, Montepare & Akhavan, 2018), *Winter's Bone* (Rosellini, Madigan-Yorkin & Granik, 2010), *Get Out* (McKittrick, Blum, Hamm & Peele, 2017), *Hot Fuzz* (Park, Bevan, Fellner & Wright, 2007) and *You were never really here* (Attab, Caucheteux, Wilson, O'Brien & Ramsay, 2017). I discuss the similarities and differences between these films and, later, my own script to conclude the ways in which they treat the same core story.

Commonalities

Setting up the emotional stakes is an important part of dramatizing a narrative. The emotional set-up lets the audience know why it is so important for the protagonist to achieve their goal and why it is that they put themselves through dangerous situations to do so. For example, in *Get Out*, the protagonist, Chris's relationship with his girlfriend is on the line. The initial set-up has Chris willing to meet his girlfriend's family, despite his apprehension, in order to maintain his relationship. At this point in the narrative, Chris wants to achieve a relationship with Rose's family. He wants to be accepted by them.

Similarly, in *Winter's Bone*, the protagonist, Ree, is shown to have a very important role in her family. The beginning of the film sets Ree up as a protective and caring figure to her younger siblings and her ill mother; family is the most important thing in Ree's life. The audience sees, through Ree's actions in the film, that she is willing to do anything to keep her family safe. This allows the audience to become emotionally invested in the hero's journey, to better understand the protagonist and to sympathize with their cause. Ree's main goal is to find her father, but to do so she must uncover the truth behind his disappearance by getting herself involved with dangerous people.

Emotional stake is important in these core stories because it establishes the willingness of a protagonist and the reason why they fight so hard achieve the core action. For example, in my script, the emotional stakes have my protagonist, April, willing to submit herself to a foreign setting and community. Another important part of the hero's journey is overcoming the challenges presented to them. In relation to the core stories discussed above, this challenge comes from a community whose goal is to prevent the protagonist from achieving their goal of uncovering the truth.

Disrupting the protagonist's everyday life and changing their environment can create effective moments of suspense. A shift in setting can also create a shift in tone, as in the case of the core story in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Here, location is an important aspect of the narrative because it is presented as the protagonist's main space for change. Cameron is no longer within the safety of her home with her aunt or her friends. The use of setting has set up the suspense in which the mystery takes place. It is also important to consider how the setting is first portrayed, as this helps in understanding when the protagonist eventually uncovers the truth about it. In my script, April's search for the truth has her navigating a setting, portrayed as pristine and highly regarded youth camp, when in truth this is far from the case.

Creating friction within the environment with secondary characters and then having the protagonist become involved sets stakes to be discovered within the space that neither the protagonist nor the audience know are possible. For example, when Cameron witnesses one of her fellow camp participants go through a mental breakdown, she is compelled to question why and how this happens, and what will happen next. The same can be seen in *Hot Fuzz* when the protagonist is taken out of his comfort zone and put into an environment that is completely different to what he knows and is used to. Nicolas and Cameron are put into these new locations in order for their story to move along. What creates such suspense is that these settings are not something the characters familiar with. It leaves the audience watching and waiting to see how they will move around and interact with the new environment. Creating suspense in a new space that challenges the protagonist is an effective way of garnering audience investment in the narrative. This new setting must make the protagonist think on their feet and react accordingly to the challenges presented to them. The audience becomes

invested in the hero's journey, anticipating the potential changes that might happen within the protagonist and waiting to see if that change is even possible.

It is important to consider the inner line within the protagonist as a large part of a dramatic narrative. The inner line is important because it can pull an audience in towards that character, as well as to allowing it to get to know and understand the character better. Regarding the core story, the inner line drives the protagonist to change in order to achieve the main action. In my script, April must change from being a stoic and unassuming protagonist to someone who must socialize and push through her limits to find out the truth.

In *You were never really here*, Joe's inner line is a very important part of the narrative. His struggles with suicidal tendencies and fantasies, and the effect of a traumatic past creates further suspense within the protagonist. The use of flashbacks in *You were never really here* play an important role in further amplifying the effects of Joe's trauma and why he continues to suffer graphic suicidal fantasies. His hurtful past is another example of a narrative set-up of emotional stakes to relay what it is about the character that needs to change. The running theme prevalent in the narrative of *You were never really here* is trauma versus acceptance or change. Joe's mental health is at risk, and he must learn how to overcome his mental trauma in order to ease his suffering. A protagonist's past plays a major role in depicting their internal conflict and building tension. In *You were never really here*, Joe is portrayed as a hurt man who slowly learns not to succumb to the main cause of his internal struggle.

The inner line plays a major role within the narrative structure due to the way it involves the audience's investment in the hero's journey. For example, in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, Cameron's story is largely about a young teenage girl figuring out not only her sexual

identity, but also how she comes to accept herself in spite of what she has been taught in the past. The inner line not only serves to commit change within a character. It also stands as an obstacle which, in the case of the core story, is needed to be overcome in order to find the truth. Though Cameron's acceptance of her identity, she realizes the truth behind the inner workings of 'God's Promise'. This further highlights the importance of the inner line in dramatizing the narrative in a way that effectively contributes to the core story. The core story calls for internal conflict, for the protagonist to question themselves, to face their past and to achieve their external goal.

Another effective way of dramatizing the core story is the use of flashbacks. These show the audience important past events or significant aspects of a character that signify what has the potential for change. *You were never really here* makes use of flashbacks several times to relay the importance of Joe's past and how it has affected his character in the main narrative. In this way, flashbacks act as a tool that give the audience more information regarding a potential character's inner line. Considering the core story, this is helpful in further establishing what the protagonist must overcome internal in order to achieve their external goal.

Differences

An effective dramatic narrative calls for a certain degree of suspense to keep the audience on their toes and watching for what will happen next. While some scripts may use recognizable methods to create drama and suspense, many adopt them in different levels of dominance. Developing a certain type of protagonist is one method that can be used in several different ways to achieve effective dramatic writing. Things like age, social status and even gender are important in setting the tone and mood of the story. *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and

Winter's Bone are told from the perspective of young, teenage girls, and this gives the story a youthful point of view. *You were never really here* and *Hot Fuzz* are two films that hold an action heavy narrative presented from the perspective of older male protagonists. The protagonist plays a major role, not only in telling the narrative but also setting the tone and attitude of the story. Having *Winter's Bone* told from the perspective of seventeen-year-old Ree is an effective way to create suspense due to her young age and the conflict she must overcome as a young girl. *Get Out* takes the perspective of a black man in a predominately white setting and an inherently psychological narrative.

The Miseducation of Cameron Post takes on a completely different overall message, telling the story of a young teenage girl recently outed as gay and put into conversion therapy. The film explores themes of sexuality and identity but, because it is told from the perspective of a young girl, the drama and the mood are entirely different than they might have been if told from the perspective of a full-grown adult with more life experience. It may be argued that *Hot Fuzz* also explores themes of identity and self-discovery due to the changes that take place in Nicholas as he confronts his past lifestyle and changes for the better without sacrificing any of his important qualities.

In terms of setting the mood of the story, the overall stylistic choices used to achieve the intended feel of the film are important in dramatizing the narrative. The films, *You were never really here* and *Hot Fuzz* have a completely different stylistic approach compared to *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and *Winter's Bone*. The first two films are action-heavy as opposed to the noir and mystery style of *Winter's Bone*, and the coming-of-age approach of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. If applied to the core story of my script, such treatments would completely change the tone; the story would become more

reliant on an action line and affect the kind of protagonist needed to match the mood. A prominent action line serves the narrative in that the audience is always given reminders of why the protagonist commits certain actions and decisions. While *Get Out* takes a more psychological approach in terms of how it presents challenges and the main antagonistic force, suspense is created in the way the narrative presents such foes. For example, one antagonistic force in the film, are the group of party guests who view Chris as something less than a human being. This sets up feelings of apprehension, a sense that something is not quite right, and that this must be explored by the protagonist – leading to the core story.

In contrast, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* uses more emotional effect to create tension and suspense for the protagonist. Cameron is depicted as a clueless, vulnerable young teenager thrown into a new environment with no friends or family support. One of the most significant turning points in the film happens when Cameron receives a letter from another girl whom she had thought was her best friend, but who basically ostracizes her, crushing all hope Cameron ever had of living a normal life. This moment is depicted through a letter and, although the letter-writer is not shown on screen, her words have a significant emotional effect on young Cameron. Both these examples are wildly different in their use of physical versus emotional action, yet they create enough suspense for the audience to wonder how the protagonist will deal with the situation and whether she will ever recover. *You were never really here* uses both a physical and psychological approach in order to relay an effective dramatic narrative. The film uses Joe's inner conflict alongside his external mission of finding the truth behind Nina's kidnapping and her father's death.

Conclusion

To create an effective dramatic narrative, I have established that setting up the emotional stakes is an important part in creating tension and suspense. Building what is most important to the protagonist lets the audience know why the protagonist is so deeply emotionally affected when an important part of their life is threatened. This may derive from a relationship with another character, with that other character being a loved one of some kind. Or it may point to the importance of the protagonist achieving or winning something. *Winter's Bone* shows the audience exactly what is at stake from the beginning, by putting Ree through various 'ups and downs' in order to test her. It is important to relay to the audience what is at stake. They need to see whether the protagonist will be able to achieve their goal via the decisions they make throughout the narrative.

Likewise, when taking into consideration the inner line and its role in the narrative, I believe that the inner line holds a great amount of emotional effect that is mostly felt by the audience. The inner line puts the protagonist's internal struggle into focus, by highlighting character elements, such as flaws and shortcomings, all of which contribute to their relatability. The audience needs something to hope for in a dramatic narrative, so to be able to identify the protagonist's personal struggle and see them overcome it acts as a return on the audience's emotional investment. When it comes to dramatizing a narrative, it is imperative that a set-up is created that the audience can connect to. This may be a question that needs to be answered, a mystery that must be solved, or even uncertainty as to whether the protagonist will succeed.

Relation to my own script

Considering the commonalities and differences of the films discussed so far, one difference between them and my script, is overall mood. *You were never really here* and *Hot Fuzz*, have contrasting elements and stylistic approaches, while my script shares a more subtle, subdued

tone in terms of setting and themes. They also feature a dominant use of action line over a relationship or inner line. Another major difference between my script and *You were never really here* and *Hot Fuzz* is the type of protagonist. Not only are both protagonists of these films men, but they are also older, bordering on middle age, and this gives the narrative a rather different perspective to that of my script. The protagonist of *Get Out* is closer to April's age but his experience as a black man in America paints a wildly different perspective to that of the other characters within the same core story who happen to be white. The same applies to *Winter's Bone* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. While both protagonists are female, their age difference is already enough to affect the dramatic narrative.

The protagonist is important in setting the tone for story. I feel that considering things such as age, gender and social status in a protagonist, gives way to better capturing the kind of experience you want your audience to have with them. For example, I feel that Cameron's story deals with very relatable issues regarding teen identity and sexuality, and that this allows a younger audience to feel the narrative more emotionally. Of course, this does not mean that an older person who watches *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* would not connect to her character; Cameron's story taps into very real social issues that not only dramatize the narrative but also strengthen the overall message of the film. Similarly, April's story largely deals with her own personal struggle with grief and lost loves, and these are issues sure to have been experienced by a huge variety of audiences.

Synopsis

Run like you're on fire follows April, a young woman on a journey to uncover the truth behind the disappearance of her boyfriend, Simon. Simon's last known location takes April to Freedom Hill, a youth camp where April applies for a job in order to find him. April meets

Mary, the camp's director, along with her younger brother Lucas. She also meets, Mathias, the camp's groundskeeper, and all-around handyman with whom she quickly forms a friendship. April feels stumped at first, as nobody at the camp seems to know Simon, much less to have heard of him. Meanwhile, an incident involving some troubled teens, Marissa and three others, lands them the punishment of fixing up an old barn throughout the summer program with April as their supervisor. April gets a call from Jay, a private investigator she hired initially to look for Simon. Jay drops the job unceremoniously, leaving April to investigate Simon's disappearance on her own. April pushes on in her search, all the while trying not to rouse Mary's suspicion. Later, Marissa proves to be April's only source of information when she reveals that she witnessed Mathias and Mary meeting up secretly last year.

April breaks into both Mathias' workspace and Mary's office, and finds two key pieces of evidence that Simon was at Freedom Hill. Simon's old lighter, which April had given him for his birthday, and his employee file and ID tucked into a picture frame in Mary's office. Lucas catches Marissa and April meeting after 'lights out', and April is being accused of being a bad influence and threatened with dismissal. Jay returns to April, to deliver a letter from Simon that he wrote to her before he left. The letter states that he intended to come back home after a short break. This letter becomes April's only source of closure. Running out of time, April decides to confront Mary and Mathias. April hurls accusations at them and in a fit of rage, physically assaults Mary and is thrown out of the camp. Mathias and Jay retrieve April from the local police station, where Mathias reveals that Mary ordered him to bury a body within the campgrounds last year.

The three of them return to Freedom Hill where Mathias leads April to the body. After confirming that it is Simon, they notice lights in the barn and go to investigate. Mary ambushes them inside and stabs Mathias on the shoulder. Mary reveals that Simon was killed by Ronald (the camp security guard and Mary's right-hand man) when he threatened to report Mary for neglecting a dangerous gas leak in the camp. April and Mary get into a physical fight, leading to Mary being knocked out by Mathias. The barn lighting malfunctions and the whole building catches fire. Jay comes to save them and, after some indecision, April decides to pull Mary out of the burning barn before the three of them make their escape. The film ends with Jay at the wheel, driving them far away from the camp while April holds a bleeding semi-conscious Mathias in her arms and Simon's lighter clutched in her hand.

World

The story takes place in 2018 in a location called Freedom Hill, a renowned youth camp located in the Kumeu area. Freedom Hill is an isolated stretch of farmland with a small tourist town about thirty-minutes' drive away. Freedom Hill is run by Mary, an older woman known to rule her employees with a firm but gentle hand. Her younger brother, Lucas, joined her as a co-director after studying abroad. The land was passed down to Mary after her parents passed away fifteen years ago when it was run as a regular farm and vineyard. Mary converted the farm into a camp a year after she took over. The camp itself has a large roster of employees and takes in about 100 kids aged thirteen to seventeen in one program. The local people know Freedom Hill as the place where many of the area's affluent families send their children to spend the summer. It is also regarded as an effective program that welcomes troubled teenagers by giving them a place to be during the summer while school is out.

Mary is thought of as very sociable, having several connections with affluent parents who provide her and the camp with donations and positive press. Freedom Hill's employees are mostly local, with most of them being older or much older folk on the verge of retirement. The community generally sees Freedom Hill as a place that provides opportunities for a variety of people and age ranges, and is thus widely celebrated.

Theme

Intention

I was initially interested in telling the story from the perspective of a teenager, Marissa, who is stuck in a disciplinary youth camp. I was interested in the ways in which Marissa might navigate her own shortcomings as a daughter in order to come to terms with the strained relationship she has with her father. Initially, I intended Marissa to have a strong relationship line with my current protagonist, April, who was employed as a counsellor at the camp. Later, in my own development of the story, I decided to tell the story from an older person's perspective. I kept the idea of April as a new and inexperienced counsellor struggling to balance her strained relationships with the teenage residents, as well as the conflict occurring between the adult secondary characters, Mary, Lucas and Mathias. I was drawn to the idea of how a young woman, who did not quite have the same experience as Mary, might struggle with wanting to keep her job while sympathizing with the teenagers within the camp. I wanted to tell the story from the perspective of a young adult fresh out of school, starting her career and having to deal with the real world. For a long time, I bounced between perspectives, going from Marissa's perspective to April's. Eventually, I settled on April's experience in Freedom Hill, how it changes her, and helps her move on and overcome her painful and lonely past.

Audience

April's story touches on issues of holding onto the past versus moving on. Her relationship with Simon is portrayed as having major issues leading up to his disappearance. My aim is for the audience is to ultimately remember the emotional journey April takes in finding out the truth, and what it means to confront things in your past; especially if this is done for purely selfish reasons. April's grief and sorrow establishes the importance of how an emotionally broken young woman must learn how to confront her inner conflict, and move on with her life without clinging on to the past or completely shutting it out of her life. I want the audience to understand how April must change in order to become someone deserving of a new beginning.

Key Images

The biggest key image within the script is when April, Jay and Mathias are looking up the burning barn while standing right next to Simon's disinterred body. The barn itself is a signifier of something that is isolated and kept far away from Freedom Hill's more pristine aesthetic. It is also a site in which plenty of major events takes place. These include Simon's burial, Marissa driving a van into the side of the barn, its repair and the beginning of April's friendship with major characters. Here, the fire symbolizes a purification of everything that took place in the barn and at Freedom Hill, while having Simon's body found outside the barn points to how his death cannot easily be erased.

Protagonist

Motivation

My script follows April, a young twenty-five-year-old woman who has recently lost both her parents, less than a year after the disappearance of her boyfriend, Simon, from their shared

flat. April's main goal in the story is to find Simon, and to understand why he disappeared. Hints of their relationship point to something less than healthy in nature; happy one day, angry and violent the next. After her parents pass away, April sells the family home, and uses her entire savings to hire Jay, a private investigator, to locate Simon. Finding any information about Simon proves difficult until Jay reveals to her that Simon's last known location is Freedom Hill. With no home and nothing to lose, April applies for a job at the camp in the hope of finding Simon there. Once April realizes that Simon is nowhere to be found at Freedom Hill, she must employ other tactics to find the answers she seeks.

Stakes

The story makes it clear that April has trouble trusting other people regarding her personal feelings. As a result, she ends up pushing people away; people who could potentially help her move on and heal. In this sense, April's happiness and freedom from the past is the most significant emotional stake. At the same time, and once April decides to set out and find Simon, her relationship with him is set up as at stake. April longs to meet Simon one last time to make things right between them, and to ensure that what they had before still means something. The stakes rise the closer April gets to the truth and as she discovers more and more about Freedom Hill and how it operates. April is confronted by her almost obsessive need for closure, and this prevents her from moving on after Simon leaves. This is apparent in the fact that she hired a private investigator despite it being several months since Simon's disappearance.

Arc

It is made clear through a flashback that Simon asked April to marry him at one point, but she declined him, and this made the cracks in their relationship worse. It is later revealed that

April regrets her answer and she suffers heavily from guilt over her fear of commitment as a result. Parts of her past are revealed throughout the story, which show that April's parents were absent for most of her life and her relationship with them only improved as she grew older. She ignores her need for friendship and companionship until finally coming to the realization (after her parents pass away and Simon leaves) that if she does not change soon, she will never move on with her life. After Simon disappears, April has more time to reflect on their relationship. She wakes up to the notion that, even though they loved each other, they were not healthy for each other. Her change mostly comes from her interactions with other characters, namely Marissa and Mathias. Both these characters are there to incite change within April, namely, in showing her how she can begin to trust again.

Antagonist

The role of my story's main antagonist is to challenge April's goal. Thus, the main antagonistic forces in my script are Freedom Hill and its director, Mary. The camp stands as a source of conflict for April, influencing how she must act as an employee in order not to call attention or rouse suspicion from her co-workers. In fact, the setting of Freedom Hill has such an intimidating reputation that it makes April stumble in her attempts to find the truth. One such instance that has April thinking twice about her actions is when she meets Ronald, the camp's head of security and Mary's right-hand man. Ronald's role in the script is mostly a silent one but his presence is meant to intimidate and to remind April that, despite Freedom Hill's reputation, the camp is always watching and listening. Another conflict that lends itself to the camp's antagonistic force is between April and the other staff. During April's investigation, it becomes clear something is not right when April tries to gather information from the other staff members, only to be rebuffed and deflected at every turn. The

antagonistic force of Freedom Hill works to have April adapt to the environment, and to become loyal to Mary who stands at the helm of it all.

Mary's role as antagonist involves not only getting in April's way but also challenging her motivations throughout the story. There is a point in the script where Mary questions April about going out to dinner with Lucas, as well as her budding friendship with Mathias. Mary's character is intended to be an example of a strong, ambitious woman, ahead of her game and in control of everything. Mary's agenda is made clear throughout the story as April learns more about the camp. There are moments when April must confront her reasons and motivations for carrying on with her investigation. After all, she could have a simple, peaceful life working at Freedom Hill, doing whatever Marked asked and wanted. Mary presents her with the opportunity for another life surrounded by people, a good job in a highly regarded facility and a nice place to live. Mary pushes April to a more psychological and emotional change – where the weakest parts of April's character lie.

The Core Story

The core story of *Run like you're on fire* follows the protagonist, April, in her search for emotional closure through uncovering the truth behind her lover's disappearance. The main suspense that the audience will watch for is whether April will find Simon or, at the very least, figure out what happened to him and why. April's internal need for closure establishes the importance of her external need to find Simon. Hence the main dramatic question is, 'will April find Simon?'. This is established in Act One of the script, in a scene where April and Jay have a phone conversation in which Jay provides her with information about her search. He tells her that Simon was in Freedom Hill but is not anymore, and that no further record can be found of him working anywhere else. April, following her gut instinct, chooses to stay

in Freedom Hill to find out the truth. The set-up ends after a scene in which a secondary character, Marissa, drives a van into the side of a barn and April is tasked with supervising the children repair the structure. This represents the first hindrance to her investigation, as she must now spend most of her day away from the main camp. The end section begins once April is pushed into finally confronting Mary and Mathias. April, in a fit of emotion, assaults Mary physically and is detained by the police. The momentum begins to build as the truth about Simon's disappearance becomes clear to April and the audience. The dramatic question is finally answered near the climax of the story after Mathias admits to burying Simon's body and takes April to the gravesite. April confirms that the body in the ground is Simon, thus answering the dramatic question.

The main character question

The main character question of my script is, 'will April ever find closure?'. This points to an inner longing for happiness that is not explicit in her inner line, but which coincides with her longing for closure with her life with Simon. I want the audience to feel that the main issue with April is her selfish aspect that acts only in service to her external need, which is to find Simon. Her need for closure gets in the way of building stronger relationships and friendships. Her only focus is Simon, she is less concerned with Freedom Hill the first time she steps into the camp. However, put into a situation where she is forced to interact with secondary characters, such as Marissa, April comes to the realization that she does not want anyone else to suffer. One turning point that establishes this inner need is when April snoops inside Mathias' shed. This puts her friendship with him in danger because she must lie to him when he catches her inside. The more April investigates Simon's apparent employment, the more the closure she wants is threatened, and she begins to suspect the worst; that Simon is dead. Another important turning point in the story is when April breaks into Mary's office

and is caught by Marissa. Despite her friendship with Marissa, April is unwilling to reveal to the true reason why she was in Mary's office in the first place.

In contrast, April's change derives mostly from the way she forges relationships with other characters. This is sign that April can look past her selfish need for closure and moving forward. A significant turning point in the story shows April sharing a conversation with Marissa, who has been dubbed as something of an outcast among the other teens and staff members. April sees a likeness in Marissa that she once saw in herself, and this compels her to admit a change in view on how Mary runs the camp. That is, that despite Freedom Hills' outwardly pristine appearance and good reputation, there are some kids who fall through the cracks and suffer the consequences.

A major dilemma that April faces arises after she has found Simon's body and confronts Mary for the final time. Once the barn catches fire, April is left with the decision of leaving Mary inside and avenging the death of her boyfriend or pulling her out to safety. April struggles to decide between her emotional desire for revenge and what she knows is the morally correct thing to do. This is a major challenge in her character's growth so far. Another key moment that signifies April's change is when she looks, one last time, at Simon buried in the ground, and leaves the engagement ring she had previously taken with his body. This is a sign that April is finally ready to move on after finding out the truth. In the final moments of the film, it is revealed that April has held on to something of Simon's – his lighter . It signifies all the good times they shared together, rather than the engagement ring, which is a symbol of that which put their relationship over the edge in the first place.

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