

THE STUDY OF THE UNDERSTUDY

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ACT ONE

OPENING SCENE

INTERVIEWER V.O.

I first met Macey at the laundromat on Jefferson and King, as I watched her fold fifteen pairs of tighty whiteys...I thought who the hell goes through fifteen pairs of tighty whiteys? That's when I knew, this woman has got a story. So, I asked her if I could document her. She told me "oh, you don't wanna make a movie out of me, I'm just an understudy"...but that's just what this is, The Study of the Understudy.

TITLE CARD: THE STUDY OF THE UNDERSTUDY

Series of shots- motivational quotes on mirror, scripts with highlights, wigs, family theatre looking photos, *All About Eve* playing on tv. Cut to MACEY, 20's, hard worker, wants to be a star, but seems to always fall short. Uses her hands to tell her left from her right, dorky but owns it. Macey stands in the mirror putting on lipstick mouthing the lines of *Eve Harrington* that plays on the TV.

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - DAY

Macey wears her pet store uniform and stops stocking the fish food as she speaks in a trance.

MACEY

(lovingly)

Oh there is nothing quite like being on stage. The crowd watching every move, you can feel the energy of the people...It's...magnificent... I uh haven't gotten to exactly experience that. (humph) I am well...the understudy.

Macey snaps back into it does a motion as if she is straightening her 'tie' and starts stacking the fish food.

MACEY

I just hope (deep exhale) one day I'll be on the other side of the curtain. And the crowd will be watching my every move... hearing my every line...

cheering my name... (whisper)
Macey...Macey...Macey.

Macey drops fish food and snaps back into it.

CO-WORKER
Hey Mace, we need the algae scraped.
(beat) and you're the best at it.

MACEY
Yeah I got it.

Side eye of embarrassment to camera.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITION ROOM - DAY

MARIE, 30's, director, talks to the manager at restaurants when the order comes out wrong, JAMES, casting director, 30's, eats the food at the restaurant even when the order is wrong, sit behind a table with a camera next to them.

The two sit and shuffle through papers bickering.

INT. MARIE AND JAMES TALKING HEAD - DAY

James and Marie have closeness that emulates a relationship between the weird uncle who would share a bite off his fork with his dog, Marie being the uncle, James being the dog.

MARIE
Fairness, yes, I would say fairness is
the most important part.

James looks to Marie tenderly.

JAMES
I knew you would say that. But I'd say
it is who is most deserving of the
part.

Marie and James look to each other.

MARIE
Together that is what we try to focus
on during casting.

James leans in cupping his ear.

JAMES

What is this...our... fifth play together?

MARIE

It's our sixth.

James rolls his eyes and throws his arms up in a 'what do I know' kind of way.

MARIE

I would say we balance each other nicely... I wish he would speak up more... and not make *me* the bad guy all the time.

JAMES

You're not the bad guy.

Shakes head.

JAMES

I try to tell her.

INTERVIEWER O.S.

Do you think Macey Dockers has a chance of being the lead this year?

Marie goes straight in the face and begins talking with her hands.

MARIE

We show no favoritism...nor nepotism ...and cannot discuss Macey Dockers at this time.

James nodding and slurping the last sips of his drink.

CUT TO:

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD- MORNING

Macey is in the pet store using a fish net cleaning the water.

MACEY

Five years. Yup. Lacy Lamphoon. She always gets the lead. They tell me (high pitched impression) (beat) 'You're great for the part!' (kicking rocks attitude) Great for the part if

Lacy weren't better for the part.

My vocal coach, Vicky Smythe,
(chuckles modestly) not to name
drop... we have been rehearsing, and,
I think I've got a pretty big chance
this year.

INT. VOICE LESSONS - DAY

Vicky Smythe, former hot shot in NYC who was the star in the
broadway musical *A Street Car Named Desire* flings a silky
scarf around when she talks, and sounds like she is from the
1920's. Vicky stands at the piano with Macey.

VICKY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

MACEY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

Each time the pace increases.

VICKY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

MACEY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

VICKY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

MACEY

My mommy made me mash my M&M's

Macey is panting.

INT. VICKY SMYTHE TALKING HEAD: DAY

Vicky Smythe is the type of person whose first and last name
are always said together. She stands next to a shrine of her
glory days.

VICKY

When I first met Macey... her skills
were... how do I put it...

CUT TO:

Archival footage of Macey's audition tape for American Idol
singing Amazing Grace as if sand paper were rubbed against

her vocal cords.

CUT TO:

VICKY

The kazoo. Ah yes, the kazoo. I started to notice...'improvements' when we introduced the kazoo.

CUT TO:

Vicky is standing next to Macey as she plays the kazoo to the tune of Happy Birthday and is holding one ear and raising her other arm to the sky. Macey is fully committed with veins popping out of her head.

INT. AUDITION ROOM - DAY

Title card: AUDITION DAY

James and Marie sit at a table with a camera set up next to them. A man walks on stage carrying a didgeridoo.

JAMES

Whenever you're ready.

The man sets down his didgeridoo and begins to scat.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY TO AUDITION ROOM - DAY

The didgeridoo man walks out. Macey rubs her clammy hands and practices a few notes on the kazoo. Macey shows her headshot while wiggling her eyebrows. Lacy walks out of the audition room. Macey grabs the camera looks into the lens and shakes it a little...

MACEY

Let's go! (grunts)

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - DAY

Macey is back at the pet store, staring at the clown fish and talking to them.

MACEY

You guys get it. Don't you guys.

Macey turns around startled by interviewer.

MACEY

What?

INTERVIEWER O.S.

How do you think the audition went?

MACEY

I think it went well yes... I don't think that James and Marie were quite ready for me....but hey hey hey, here is Macey Dockers.

INT. CASTING POSTING - DAY

A smorgas-board of folks walk up to check the casting list. Macey walks up behind Lacy, while she waits for Lacy to finish looking for her name, Macey checks the list.

Macey walks by herself down a hallway- throwing a temper tantrum. She kicks the movements which are caught as she is simultaneously beating herself up.

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - DAY

Macey wipes her eyes-

MACEY

Year 6 of being Lacy sea-bottom sucker Lamphoon's understudy.

Macey kicks the wall.

MACEY

Am I upset? No. No. No. Not one bit. Actually I just think this is funny. HA-HA... this is all one big joke that I, the most classically trained thesbian performer isn't chosen because that fish butt is related to Marie. Yeah, that's right, Marie. The director... kind of fishy if you ask me.

CUT TO:

Side by side photos of Marie and Lacy.

INT. KIP AND LEAH TALKING HEADS - DAY

LEAH and KIP DOCKERS looking like some goofy folks who are a mix of southern and mid-western. The two sit on a sofa. Kip

has the mindset that Macey can do no wrong, Leah is a bit... jealous/bitter with no self-awareness and sees her relationship as being coated in love and support.

LEAH

Oh yeah- Marie and Lacy are related.
But who's to say that affects anything.

KIP

Oh... so.. when the cameras are on you don't know.

LEAH

(whispers to ear)
...Let's not do this right now.
(tension releasing giggle)
Like I was sayin'...who knows! We think our Macey is the greatest. And no I wouldn't say we put pressure on her to do well because we had to give up our dreams in order raise her. No, that would be putting words in our mouth.

KIP

But... that sure is exactly what happened.

LEAH

Yes. Yes. Unless you're forgetting our Tom.

KIP

(clears throat)
Let's not mention our complete failed theatre prodigy.

LEAH

But who's to say ya know.

INTERVIEWER O.S.

Where do you think Macey's... anger comes from?

Kip and Leah look to each other sharing a 'who us???' look and having a hulk body shift.

LEAH

(defensive/angry)
What do you mean 'Macey's anger?'

KIP
 She can express herself however she
 pleases.

Together they adjust in their seats and pull their collars
 for air.

CUT TO:

Series of shots when Macy is caught expressing anger.
 Punching, kicking, muffling a scream, yelling at a cat,
 kicking literal rocks, yelling at an old woman. Yelling at
 Leah.

CUT TO:

LEAH
 She's super.

Leanne love taps Kip's shoulder.

LEAH
 Our little super-star.

Giddy laugh with a snort or deep inhale.

KIP
 (throat clearing sound of agreement)

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL - DAY

The cast is moving and getting the blocking figured out.
 Macey stands to the side watching. And then goes over
 blocking right after Lacy. Marie is giving notes.

INTERVIEW WITH MACEY AS SHE STANDS TO THE SIDE

MACEY
 (Monotone as if she is being held at
 gun point a little huffy puffy
 attitude and eyes that are rolling and
 throwing around a lot of air quotes)

I am "grateful" for the "experience"
 to be the understudy of Felix the
 Clown. This is an "opportunity" for me
 grow as the actor I "am."

INT. LACY TALKING HEAD - DAY

Lacy is in full clown outfit and giddy after first rehearsal.

LACY

Sick? (giggle) I use throat coat twice daily. I've never missed a show.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCKERS FAMILY DINNER - NIGHT

Macey, her parents, and brother sit at the dinner table. Each family member holds a script in hand and rehearse.

LEAH

Go! Go! Felix it's your time!

MACEY

This'll be the last time...

TOM

It mustn't.

MACEY

Ok. Cut... When you say it that way Tom... it kind of throws me off and I can't respond...in character...ya know?

TOM

No...not really.

LEAH

Let's just take it from the top. Tom try to put some more *umph* in it, will ya?

KIP

I've got this honey. Tom. Do you remember what we talked about last time?

Tom lowers his head in shame of the memory of... last time.

TOM

My food is getting cold.

LEAH

From the top.

Kip is the only one who is eating his spaghetti simultaneously dropping sauce on the script.

LEAH

Go! Go! Felix it's your time!

MACEY

It'll be the last time...

TOM

It mustn't.

MACEY

Yeah. See it happened again.

KIP

Oh I see that it happened again. Tom, somehow you're making Macey's rehearsal time all about yourself. Macey, you're doing great.

LEAH

Well... let's not sugar coat it. Clearly her dialect lessons aren't paying off.

KIP

(to Leah)

It sounds like you're projecting a bit.

LEAH

Oh really...I'm projecting?

MACEY

Should I...start again?

KIP

Start from your line.

Macey flips through the script. Tom and Macey confide in each other through eye contact.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM TALKING HEAD - DAY

TOM is a tough guy, a critic, and scoffs at ambition. He speaks in a "bunch of fuckin' bullshit" tone. He sits comfortably spread, CHEETOS dust on fingers and is licking it off.

TOM

I'm happy help with whatever this play thing is, but it sucks when my parents take their failed theatre career out on me.

CUT TO:

TOM

Yeah... so, they won't say this but ma got knocked up with me when they were both still in the game. Then they started pimping me out to toddler theatre. It was gnarly.

CUT TO:

Archival footage of Tom in a baby crop top being pushed on stage by his parents.

CUT TO:

TOM

Then it was my 11th birthday...I had my first play as the lead...I went on stage...(beat)... sorry... this is hard for me to talk about...(beat) and I...I literally broke my leg.

CUT TO:

Archival footage of EMT taking Tom off stage and his parents trying to shield the audience from looking. "Don't look at him!"

CUT TO:

TOM

And then my parents gave up on me and had Macey...and she is now next in line to live my parents dream of being a star.

Tom starts eating Cheetos to dodge answering the question.

TOM

Do I think Macey is a good actress? Uhhhh. Well. My mom is pregnant again so. I think Macey does really well at the pet store and could have great success there...

INTERVIEWER O.S.
 (hesitantly) The question was if you
 think Macey is a good actress?

Tom cups his ear to hear.

TOM
 (dodgy)
 Well, yes I think the name *The Wet Pet*
 limits the success of a pet store to
 grow. They are kind of stuck with only
 wet pets...

INTERVIEWER OS
 So - Do you think Macey should go to
 Broadway eventually?

TOM
 I mean... I think Macey should develop
 her other skills too. But crazier
 things have happened.

Bounces head.

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL- DAY

The cast is on stage running through blocking and lines Marie
 is doing dramatic arm directions.

CUT TO:

INT. MARIE TALKING HEAD - DAY

The director is looking out over the stage as the set
 designers are putting up decorations. Wiping sweat off
 forehead during interview, wrings out hanker-chief.

MARIE
 A little over a week until opening
 night. Am I nervous that JEAN MICHELLE
 ROULÉ is coming? NO. Do I wish that I
 maybe didn't know? YES. There is now
 some added pressure that the toughest
 critic in the North Eastern Theatre is
 coming. It's not a big deal. It's a
 huge deal. And everything does need to
 be... perfect. Is that tooooo much to
 ask? Better not be. That's all.

Marie notices a set piece being put in the wrong area.

MARIE

No. No. No. No. (bark) Not there.

Marie looks back to camera.

MARIE

I've gotta take care of this.

Marie walks away. We still hear them.

MARIE

To the left. No MY left.

Looks back to camera in a 'you see what I'm working with?' way.

CUT TO:

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - AFTERNOON

Macey stands to the side of rehearsal speaking in a normalizing toxic behavior tone.

MACEY

Yeah... Marie will start barking at us. Probably the stress.

Shrugs shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES PLAY MANAGER TALKING HEAD - NIGHT

James stands scared with bug eyes.

JAMES

We are way over budget.

INT. SET DESIGN - NIGHT

There is drilling of set pieces. Clothing racks dispersed. Folks are painting the set. Underlying hurried energy.

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - DAY

Macey stands behind the curtain.

MACEY

I think I heard her cough today.

Eyes dart around.

MACEY

Web MD says that's one of the first signs of whooping cough so.

(shoulder shrug)

You know. Uh Break a leg. Hope you catch whooping cough.... ha

CUT TO:

INT. PLAY PRACTICE - NIGHT

Run through of the play everyone is bumping into each other. Lacy is taking throat coat.

CUT TO:

INT. LACY TALKING HEAD: NIGHT

In full clown makeup looking drained.

LACY

We have been having an extra rehearsal every day. (breathy) I feel like... the only cucumber... in a women's prison...

Covers her mouth to cough and wipes clown makeup on sleeve.

Lacy reaches into her pocket and pulls out a flask size of throat coat and takes a swig. She reacts the same as one would if they took a shot of whiskey.

LACY

OOOoff.

CUT TO:

INT. MACEY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Macey sits at the mirror and practices putting on clown makeup.

MACEY

I feel like I've got a good feel for Felix as the clown he truly is. I think that IF by god's grace Lacy got sick, I would feel prepared to do the role. Or maybe Lacy has a wood shop accident? Who knows... it is... show

business.

INTERVIEWER O.S.

It kind of sounds like you want something to happen to Lacy.

MACEY

I didn't say that. You said that.

INTERVIEWER O.S.

I know... it just seems that way...

MACEY

Do you want something to happen to Lacy?

INTERVIEWER O.S.

No it just -

MACEY

(out of her normal vocab)
Aight then.

Eyes dart around the room.

MACEY

But I would play Felix really well. I could do a read through... since I've got the makeup on after all.

Shrugs shoulders.

INTERVIEWER O.S.

Um... yeah sure.

Macey is fully committed to this performance. She is clenching and kicking herself to get it right.

MACEY

Javier, get the tight rope, we're going for a walk.

Macey looks off into the distance in a soliloquy gaze.

MACEY

There was only one way this could go ... I was either going to fall into the fire...or I was could rise from the ashes... (smirk) but...I already knew. (snicker then huff)

Macey shakes her head in frustration.

MACEY

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Ok let me try again...I know I can get this right.

Macey has now smeared her clown makeup on her face.

MACEY

There was only way this to go. No.
DAMN IT.

Macey's eyes bulge- she takes a gasp- embarrassed eyes to the camera. The tension in the room is similar to how it feel when your friends parents fight in front of you.

MACEY

The only way this would go... What is WRONG with me? Are you kidding... I've done this a thousand times. I know the lines. I know Felix.

CUT TO:

INT. PLAY PRACTICE - NIGHT

Title card: First week of shows: Hell Week

Lacy is coughing up a storm on stage during practice. We see her step to the side of the stage and take shots of throat coat. The director is barking at the cast.

DIRECTOR

(bark sounds)

CUT TO:

INT. PLAY PRACTICE - NIGHT

MARIE

I want the whole enchilada this time.
Sauce and all. Let's go.

The cast is DRAINED. Marie is being handed a sauced enchilada and eating as the cast steps back in places. Lacy is hacking up some gnarly coughs. Taking more throat coat. She wears a white board around her neck that reads "VOCAL RESTING."

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL - MORNING

Title card: 2 days before show.

The cast shuffles in. People get on their marks.

MARIE

Macey!

Macey eagerly walks over to Marie.

MARIE

You're up. Lacy's got whooping cough.

MACEY

(cheesing like a mofo) I'm up?
(wheezing a lil) Whooping cough?

MARIE

Don't start wheezing. You're up. Are you off book?

Macey salutes Marie.

MACEY

Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. MACEY TALKING HEAD - AFTERNOON

Macey does a dance before getting into her car. Sitting in the driver seat she confesses:

MACEY

All I'm thinking about is making sure I don't flubb. This is a pretty big deal. I mean pretty big.

Macey's arms expand to a full wing span.

MACEY

Huge.

INT. MACEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

We see Macey putting on her clown makeup and running lines.

INT. PARENTS TALKING HEAD - NIGHT

LEAH

This is what we've been waiting for.

KIP

I know she can do it...but...
sometimes the pressure...eh gets to
her.

LEAH

We'll see. Proud? Eh... We'll see.

INT. SHOW TIME - NIGHT

Hustle bustle of people trying to get the lighting- moving stage props - Marie barking in the corner - putting on makeup. People entering the theatre, ushers walking the aisles. Marie keeps peeking her head out the curtain to see the seats filling up.

Marie clears her throat after a bark.

MARIE

Jean Rouché Michéllé is HERE. Don't
(bark SFX) up.

The cast is making eye contact with each other. Macey is cheesing while also shaking in her clown shoes.

EXT. JEAN ROUCHE MICHELLE TALKING HEAD - NIGHT

Jean Rouché Michéllé is a lil guy. He gets out of his car drinking a big gulp in the parking lot.

JEAN ROUCHE MICHELLE

My editor kept getting emails asking
for me to review this play... so here
I am... I was promised that our unpaid
intern would get me coffee all next
week if I did this.

Jean Rouché Michéllé throws the big gulp away and walks into the theatre.

INT. THE BIG PERFORMANCE - NIGHT

We see Jean Rouché Michéllé take his seat- he brings his own yellow note pad and ask the usher to get him a booster seat.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Macey is hula-hooping while tap dancing trying to save a baby doll.

There is a fight scene over the golden clown nose.

Jean Roché Michéllé is taking notes.

The audience laughing.

Macey doing a solo kazoo performance.

The audience pondering life.

Jean Rouché Michéllé writing manically.

Macey flubs a few lines and muscles through.

Macey does a rap "My name is Felix and I'm here to say WHAT'S UP BAY-BAY."

The crowd cheers.

The cast holds hands and bows.

INT. NEWSPAPER READING - MORNING

Macey grabs the paper excited to read the review. She begins rustling through the paper. Gets back inside. Kip, Leah, and Tom sit at the breakfast table.

Macey starts reading the paper out loud.

MACEY

(skimming noise bzzp bzzp) When Macey Dockers-

She looks up at her family and mouths "that's me"

MACEY

took stage the sliver of hope that I had for this play was lost. The performance wreaks havoc on the theatre community. None the less, the clown makeup was oddly charming. I would not recommend anyone go see the show. (bzzp. bzzp.)

Leah, Kip, and Tom cringe at the review and pity oozes out of their eyes.

LEAH

Welp.

Leah rubs her pregnant stomach.

LEAH

(whispers to belly)
You better get this right.

MACEY

Did you guys hear that?

KIP

(under his breathe)
God damnit.
(deep sigh)
You gave it your all kid.

TOM

At least you didn't break your leg.

Macey jumps up and down.

MACEY

I made the paper! MACEY DOCKERS. Right
HERE! (Screech) Charming!

Her family does a pursed lip and squinty eyes thankful that
Macy is not phased by the review.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS

INTERVIEWER V.O.

I can't say I understand Macey any
more after diving into her world, but,
I am glad I did.

EXT. MARIE'S DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Marie grabs the paper flips to read the review and starts
barking - the other neighborhood dogs start barking back.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Lacy lies in a hospital bed reading the review and begins
coughing and crying.

INT. DOCKERS LIVING ROOM - DAY

The review is framed on the wall of the Dockers house.

FADE OUT

END