

THE HALF OF IT

Written by

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ON BLACK:

"Love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole." - Plato, The Symposium

ELLIE (V.O.)

The Ancient Greeks believed humans once had four arms, four legs, and a single head made of two faces.

NEW SLIDE: Classical Greek illustration of a TWIN-BEING.

ELLIE (V.O.)

We were happy. Complete.

A HEART encircles the twin-being. Both faces smile.

ELLIE (V.O.)

Too complete, as fate would have it, for the gods who - fearing our wholeness would quell our need for worship - cleaved us in two...

NEW SLIDE: Twin-being split. Twin cries of despair.

ELLIE (V.O.)

...leaving our split-selves to wander the earth in misery, forever longing...

We ZOOM IN on the FACE of a split-being CRYING. The face MORPHS into an ICONIC CRY-FACE FROM ART.

ELLIE (V.O.)

...longing...

We "animate" through FAMOUS ART CRY-FACES...

ELLIE (V.O.)

...longing...

The ART FACES morph into CLASSIC MOVIE CRY-FACES...

ELLIE (V.O.)

...for the other half of our soul.

From Cleopatra to Sally Albright. So many tears.

ELLIE (V.O.)

It is said that when one half finds its other...

NEW SLIDE.

Scene from a CLASSIC MOVIE: lovers' eyes finally meet.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
...there is an unspoken  
understanding, a unity - and each  
would know no greater joy than  
this.

A CLASSIC KISS. Music swells.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKERS - MORNING

Two seniors joined as one by the lips.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
Of course, the Ancient Greeks never  
went to high school.

BELL RINGS. The seniors break apart like it was nothing.

SENIOR GUY  
Good hangout.

SENIOR GIRL  
Whatever.

Both pull out phones, part ways.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
Or they'd realize...

Sound of the MORNING BELL dissolves into...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - SAME

...the BLAST of a TRAIN WHISTLE... growing LOUDER...

CLOSE ON the FACE OF A GIRL, 17, pressed against a LAPTOP  
KEYBOARD, her body curled around a copy of PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM,  
fast asleep inside a frosted TICKET BOOTH. She jerks awake.

ELLIE  
Crap.

This is ELLIE CHIU.

She bangs out a line on the keyboard, presses SAVE, bolts out  
of the booth.

On her computer screen we see (and hear in voiceover):

ELLIE (V.O.)  
We don't need the gods to mess  
things up for us.

A PASSING TRAIN wipes frame...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - MOMENTS LATER

...leaving Ellie on the RIGHT SIDE of the platform, waving a  
signal flag.

SUPER: "THE HALF OF IT"

The station is otherwise empty.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - MORNING

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- ELLIE'S HEAD POPS OUT OF A SWEATER, spray of foam,  
toothbrush.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
If you ask me, people spend far too  
much time looking for someone to  
complete them.

- SHE SLAPS TWO FROZEN SWANSON CHICKEN PIES ON THE COUNTER

ELLIE (V.O.)  
How many people find perfect love?  
Or if they do...

- STARES AT A COMATOSE CAT, A SHOT OF INSULIN AT THE READY.  
Is it... *dead*?

ELLIE (V.O.)  
...make it last?

The cat BOLTS.

ELLIE  
Goddammit, Schrodinger!

She gives chase... past an ALTAR for HER DEAD MOTHER. We  
linger on a PHOTO OF HER MOTHER: young, laughing, striking  
the same pose as the STATUE of BOB'S BIG BOY just behind her.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
More evidence of Camus' theory that  
life is irrational and meaningless.

- A PRINTER spits out a page on which is written:  
 "...Camus' theory that life is irrational and meaningless."  
 A HAND grabs the page, signing "Trevor Carson, AP English".  
 CUT to ANOTHER PAPER. On its last page:  
 "We don't need the gods to mess things up for us."  
 The hand signs - in new penmanship - "Todd Ball, English"  
 REVEAL ELLIE signing, then tossing papers onto a stack.  
 - ON COVERS GENTLY BEING PULLED OVER EDWIN CHIU, 50's,  
 snoring in a LA-Z-BOY.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 And that, my friends, is some A+  
 love philosophy right there.

Ellie tiptoes around him.

- CHECKS OFF A LIST BY THE DOOR: "Breakfast" (check) "Take  
 Vitamins" (check) "Shoot Cat" (check) "Sunscreen" (check)  
 "Stay Away From Boys" (check) "Have Good Day" (check)

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 Or A-, if Mrs. G is in a bad mood.

Ellie grabs her bookbag. The door slams behind her.

CUE OPENING CREDITS

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

A dilapidated BILLBOARD IN THE SHAPE OF AN ARROW announces:  
 "It's Happening In SQUAHAMISH!"

The arrow points to an empty field.

Ellie speeds past on her bike.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - MORE TOWN - LATER

The road continues past a small CATHOLIC CHURCH. Outside, a  
 Man with a SIGN: "JESUS IS COMING. ARE YOU READY?"

FATHER SHANLEY, 90's, stands in the doorway bellowing:

FATHER SHANLEY  
 "Outside are the dogs the sorcerers  
 the immoral persons and everyone  
 WHO LOVES AND PRACTICES LYING!"

Ellie flies by.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - CARSON GRAVEL - LATER

A giant granite sign heralds "CARSON GRAVEL. We're more than just gravel!" A showroom gleams in the background.

Ellie huffs up a hill. A TRUCK rips by, a trio of OBNOXIOUS TEEN BOYS heckle from the flatbed:

OBNOXIOUS TEENS  
 ELLIE CHIUUU! Chugga-chugga-chugga-  
 chugga, Chugga chugga... CHIU CHIU!

They tear off, laughing.

Ellie presses on toward the peak...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - CONTINUOUS

...and coasts down the other side.

We lift up to see this former mining town in its faded glory.

A SWELL OF OFF-KEY SINGING from a STUDENT CHOIR.

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - CHOIR ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A handsome, pained DEACON FLORES brings it to a close.

DEACON FLORES  
 Fantastic. God feels your worship.

Hidden in the corner: Ellie at a piano, adjacent to the BAND. She sneaks a term paper into the folds of a hymnal, sends it down the reed section.

On Ellie's phone: "Todd B. venmoed you \$20."

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)  
 How do you imagine God gets His  
 message through?

Hymnals travel the room. Venmo notifications roll in.

As the Deacon sermonizes, we see kids on their phones.

One SHY BOY OBOIST types out: "Wanna go to OKTOBER FLING?"...  
 ... which appears on a FLAG GIRL'S SCREEN. She forwards...  
 ...to three of her friends who roll eyes...  
 ...one posts a SCREENSHOT with caption "#nerdalert".  
 Snickers throughout the room.

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)  
 Is there a problem?

WHOLE CLASS (EN MASSE)  
 No, Deacon.

DEACON FLORES  
 As I was saying...

Shy Boy Oboist melts into his seat, beet-red.

Ellie's eyes travel past him into the CHOIR, where a group of rich kids (QUADDIES) buzz around a TALL HANDSOME BOY, 17. This is TREVOR CARSON. Gravel money.

Trevor drapes his arm around A GIRL, 16, glued to her hymnal... which hides her phone. THIS IS ASTER FLORES.

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)  
 Turn to page 116...

He lifts his baton. Aster reluctantly shuts her hymnal, prepares to sing as the music starts.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 In case you haven't guessed, this  
 is not a love story.

Ellie's eyes stay on Aster. Aster's voice rings out pure...

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 Or not one where anyone gets what  
 they want.

...and travels out the window, where we hear...

COACH (O.S.)  
 ARE YOU MEN, OR ARE YOU LOSERS?

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - SAME TIME

...a PACK OF FOOTBALL PLAYERS stampede in a CLOUD OF DUST. One BROAD-SHOULDERED BOY lags behind, staring through the window at Aster, transfixed. This is PAUL MUNSKY, 17.

COACH (O.S.)  
MUNSKY!

He tosses a last glance over his shoulder... starts running.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Your basic school hallway jungle between bells. The populars, the not-so-populars... high-fives, side-eye, dismissals.

MRS G (O.S.)  
Notice the lack of fire and  
brimstone in No Exit. No torture  
devices necessary...

Unnoticed in the swirl of activity is Ellie, staring at a poster labeled "SENIOR RECITAL SIGN-UPS - MANDATORY."

MRS G (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
We are the source of our own hell.

She signs her name resignedly - the only solo on the sheet.

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - MRS. G'S CLASSROOM

In chalk on A BLACKBOARD:

"Hell is other people. -- John-Paul Sartre, NO EXIT."

BELL RINGS.

MRS GESELSCHAP, 60's, sinks back into her chair.

MRS G  
500 words on Sartre's use of  
thwarted desire. Monday.

Students stream out, Ellie the last to leave.

MRS G (CONT'D)  
Six different takes on Plato.  
Impressive.

ELLIE  
(innocent) Just the one.



MRS G  
Sure, sure. That's what I tell the bartender.

ELLIE  
How come you've never turned me in?

MRS G  
And have to read the actual essays they'd write? (makes face)

Mrs. G slides over an APPLICATION FOR GRINNELL COLLEGE.

ELLIE  
You know I'm going to "E-Dub."

MRS  
It's a damn shame.

ELLIE  
It's a damn "full-ride." I can live at home. Plus, I get to stay in lovely Squahamish.

MRS G  
*Hell-quamish.*

ELLIE  
It's not that bad.

Mrs. G shoots her a look.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Okay, it's not that good either. But it's what's happening.

MRS G  
I spent four of the best years of my life at Grinnell.

ELLIE  
And look at you, back home in *Hell-quamish.*

MRS G  
You're right. Stay away from the liberal arts.

Ellie laughs and stuffs the application in her bookbag.

ELLIE  
Try not to get fired over the weekend.

MRS G  
Are you kidding? Everyone in this  
town fears God. You know who God  
fears? (smug) The Teacher's Union.

Ellie shakes her head fondly, and is gone.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - AFTERNOON

Ellie pedals home from school.

That SAME TRUCK from morning hurtles by.

OBNOXIOUS TEEN BOYS  
Chugga-chugga-chugga, Chugga-chugga-  
chugga... CHIU CHIUUUUU!

Ellie keeps pedaling.

Moments later.

PAUL (O.S.)  
Hey!

Ellie pedals faster.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hey!!

FASTER.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
HEY!!! HOLD UP!

A BREATHLESS PAUL appears in frame. He grabs onto Ellie's  
saddlebag, bringing her down.

ELLIE  
What is wrong with you??

PAUL  
Sorry I-

He dry-heaves from exertion. Still coughing, he digs into his  
KNAPSACK... pulls out a bratwurst. Stuffs it into his mouth  
and keeps rummaging.

Ellie sighs. She knows what this is.

ELLIE  
\$10 for 3 pages. \$20, 3 to 10. Not  
in the over-10 page biz-

PAUL  
It's not- I'm not tryna to cheat-

ELLIE  
Nobody is. Which class is it for?

PAUL  
It's not- It's uh...

He pulls out an ENVELOPE and offers it to her.

ELLIE  
What's this?

PAUL  
A letter.

ELLIE  
Who writes letters these days?

PAUL  
I thought it'd seem romantic? Also  
she doesn't have Facebook. Maybe  
you could make me sound smart?

ELLIE  
Who's "she"?

She opens it, curious...

INSERT: THE LETTER. "Dear Aster Flores..."

She shoves it back.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
I can't help you.

PAUL  
I just need a few words. Good ones.

ELLIE  
I'm not writing to Aster Fl- to  
some girl. It'd be wrong. A letter  
is personal. It's supposed to be  
authentic.

PAUL  
That would be *awesome*!

ELLIE  
No, I can't be *you* being authent-

Gives up. Mounts her bike.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 Get a thesaurus. Use spell-check.  
 Good luck, Romeo.

Pedals off.

PAUL  
 I can pay more for authentic!

She's gone.

He hurls his KNAPSACK to the ground. Takes a sheepish bite of his bratwurst.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Close on a TV playing the last scene of CASABLANCA.

Reverse on Ellie and Edwin Chiu, in twin La-Z-Boy recliners, eating pot pies. Ellie keeps one eye on the screen, the other on a laptop where she writes three papers at once.

The lights flicker.

ELLIE (IN MANDARIN)  
*Did you call the power company?*

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)  
*They don't understand my accent.*

ELLIE  
*Did you try?*

EDWIN  
*Sssshh. Best part.*

HUMPHREY BOGART (ON TV)	EDWIN (CONT'D)
I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.	I think this is beginning of beautiful friendship.

Edwin shoots his daughter a sheepish look. She sighs, affectionate.

ELLIE  
*I'll call tomorrow.*

Father and daughter take synchronized bites of pie.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - NIGHT

A train hurtles past.

The station deserted save for a lone Ellie - in the ticket booth - pounding away on her keyboard.

ON BLACK:

"The god of love lives in a state of need. -- Plato. Again."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

Ellie bikes to school, phone pressed to ear.

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)  
Inland Power and Light...

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)  
I'm calling for account 467838...

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)  
Please hold...

Hold music plays. Ellie sighs.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - SCHOOL CORRIDOR - MORNING

Ellie skirts through the fray, still on phone.

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)  
Account 467838.

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)  
Please re-enter your selection.

She spies PAUL out of the corner of her eye LOOKING TO GET HER ATTENTION. She dodges down an arterial hallway...

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)  
Bill... Extension.

...but can't merge into the dense crowd. Paul pulls closer. Ellie presses herself against the wall and slides away.

HOLD MUSIC continues.

INT. CHAPEL - NOON

Ellie alone in the Chapel, playing a dirge-like solo to accompany the HOLD MUSIC.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

A weary Ellie braves the afternoon hallway crowd, phone still pressed to ear. Spins to avoid PAUL on the far end of the hallway with his teammates...

... SLAMMING right into TREVOR AND HIS QUADDIES, who walk through her, oblivious. Books, papers, bag go flying.

She scrambles to gather her things.

ASTER

These hallways are murder.

Aster has stooped down. To help.

ASTER (CONT'D)

It's a whole natural selection situation waiting to play out.

Ellie is struck dumb. *Say something, say something...*

ELLIE

I'm Ellie Chiu.

ASTER

(amused) Yes, I know. You've only been playing my dad's services for like four years. You're his favorite heathen. He can't handle mediocre accompanists - even if they are saved.

They stand. Aster glances at the book she picked up.

ASTER (CONT'D)

"Remains of the Day". Loved it. All that barely repressed longing.

She pops it on top of Ellie's stack... and is gone.

ELLIE

(groaning) "I'm Ellie Chiu?"

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)

Yes I know. Your bill is 3 months overdue, Mrs. Chiu. If we don't get a minimum payment of \$25, your power will terminate at month's end.

Close on Ellie's face, desperate...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - OUTSIDE BOY'S LOCKER ROOM - 5PM

A roughed-up Paul emerges out of the locker room. Brightens at the sight of Ellie.

ELLIE

One letter. \$25. After that you're on your own.

PAUL

YES!

He pumps his fists, and heads towards Ellie for a hug, or chest bump or... they settle on an awkward hand shake.

INT. CHAPEL - LATE AFTERNOON

Ellie reads Paul letter, slouched in the last pew of the Chapel. Paul sits across the aisle.

ELLIE

"Dear Aster, I think your really beautiful. But even if you were ugly, I'd want to know you. Cuz you are smart and nice too. It's hard to find all those things in one girl. But even if you were only two of those things, I'd be into it. But your like all three. Just to be clear."

She looks up at Paul: *What is this?*

PAUL

She's like - all three.

ELLIE

Thanks for clarifying.

She goes back to the letter.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

"About me. I am kind of cute. Some people think I'm the cutest one in my family! Those people being my grandma. Who's dead now. Never mind about my dead grandma. All I am trying to say is that I like fries. I like dipping them in my milkshake. Is that weird? It's actually really tasty! Would you like to try that with me some time? Let me know.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 I work part time and I have a  
 truck! Let me know. Whenever.  
 Thanks, Paul Munsky. (Second-string  
 running back. Football.)"

Beat.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 So what you're trying to say is--

PAUL  
 I'm in love with her.

ELLIE  
 Have you ever spoken to her?

PAUL  
 I'm not good with words.

ELLIE  
 But you *know* you "love" her.

PAUL  
 I *know* I think about her when I  
 wake up, and when I'm doing  
 sprints, and when I'm eating my  
 mom's brats, and when I'm saying my  
 prayers and when I'm--

ELLIE  
 That just means you're stubborn.  
 Not that you're in love.

PAUL  
 No, it's love. Love makes you  
 screwy. Don't you get screwy?

ELLIE  
 No.

She goes back to the letter, skimming it.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 (to self) This whole section is -  
 that fry thing does sound good -  
 (crossing out) dangling modifier...

Paul takes her in.

PAUL  
 Oh. I get it.

ELLIE  
 Get what?



PAUL  
You've never been in love.

Ellie looks at him. Shoves the letter into his ribs.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Ow!

ELLIE  
You want a letter about love? I'll  
write you a letter about love.

She grabs her bag.

PAUL  
One that'll make her fall in love  
with me. Not storm off in huff.  
Like you're doing right now.

She's gone.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - NIGHT

ONSCREEN: "Wings of Desire" by Wim Wenders.

Edwin watches, rapt. Ellie handwrites furiously. She looks  
up, momentarily stumped. Notices the screen.

ELLIE  
*This isn't even American. How are  
you going to learn English?*

EDWIN  
*Sssh. Best part.*

WOMAN (ON TV, IN GERMAN)  
*Longing for a wave of love  
that would stir in me. That's  
what makes me clumsy.*

EDWIN (CONT'D)  
*Longing for a wave of love  
that would stir in me. That's  
what makes me clumsy.*

Ellie considers this. Writes "Longing for a wave of love..."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - LOCKERS - MORNING

An exhausted Ellie shoves a letter toward Paul.

PAUL  
You sealed it. (off Ellie's glare)  
I'm sure it's good.

Ellie leaves.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
(calling after her) Thank you.

ELLIE  
Venmo me.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

Another day, another...

PAUL (O.S.)  
Hey!

*Not this guy again.* Ellie pedals faster.

Paul appears in the background, flushed from exertion.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
She wrote back!

Ellie jerks to a stop.

INSERT: ASTER'S RESPONSE:

ASTER (V.O.)  
"I like Wim Wenders too. Wouldn't a  
plagiarized him though."

Off Ellie's astonished reaction. *Who is this girl?*

PAUL  
Who's this Wim Wenders dude? And  
why'd you cheat off him?!

ELLIE  
I didn't cheat off him-

PAUL  
I looked up "plagiarize"-!

ELLIE  
I kinda cheated off him-

PAUL  
I PAID you-!

ELLIE  
But this is good!

PAUL  
*How?*

Yeah, how?

ELLIE  
It's uh... like a game. She's like  
challenging us. In a good way.

PAUL  
So we're still in... the game.

ELLIE  
Yup. Uh. We are. So. Yay.

She offers a weak fist bump. Which misses. With an awkward wave, she pedals off.

PAUL  
I'll Venmo you?

But Ellie's already speeding down the hill.

ELLIE  
Game on, Aster Flores. Game. On.

A PIANO SOLO commences...

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"Dear Aster. Okay. You got me."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - DUSTY ROAD - DAY

Ellie is a DISTANT SPECK, biking towards CAMERA.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"I sometimes hide behind other  
people's words."

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Ellie and Edwin in La-Z-Boys watch another classic movie.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"For one thing, those people are  
published. For another..."

Father and daughter each toss back a YAKULT.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"...I know nothing about love."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

A PASSING TRAIN WIPES THE SCREEN...

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"I'm 17. I've lived in Squahamish  
my whole life."

...leaving ELLIE and her SIGNAL FLAG on the platform alone.

INT. CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

Ellie and Paul argue from separate pews.

PAUL  
This is such a downer!

ELLIE  
It's not a downer!

PAUL  
Dating is supposed to be fun. Ask  
her to hang out!

ELLIE  
What exactly is "hanging out"?

PAUL  
You know. *Hanging out*.

ELLIE  
But like what do you *do*?--

A couple guys from the team ENTER. Paul and Ellie immediately  
separate, pretend not to know each other.

FOOTBALL DUDE  
Munsky! What's doing?

PAUL  
Nothing.

FOOTBALL DUDE  
We were gonna confess. Wanna go to  
Joey's and hang out instead?

PAUL  
Yup.

They leave Ellie behind.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - EARLY MORNING

Ellie scrunched in her ticket booth, writing.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "I hang out with my friends."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - EARLY MORNING

The TEAM runs around the track.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "I keep my head down."

Paul huffs, lagging behind.

EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Paul empties the garbage.

Angle on ELLIE from her ATTIC BEDROOM watching him.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "I'm a simple... guy. Which is to  
 say..."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - DUSTY ROAD

Ellie is now almost at the CAMERA.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "If I knew what love was, I would  
 quote myself."

Ellie rides past.

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - LUNCHROOM - NOON

Close on Aster's face absorbing this last line. Around her:  
 the faded sounds of teens grandstanding.

The PIANO SOLO ends.

INT. CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

Ellie bent over the piano for a quiet moment, just breathing.

PAUL (O.S.)  
 Psssst.

Her head jerks around.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
In here!

She stares at THE CONFESSION BOOTH.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie slides into one side of the booth; Paul's in the other.

ELLIE  
Isn't this sacrilegious?

PAUL  
I used to hide here when my  
brothers got too rowdy.

He slides a LETTER under the scrim.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
She wrote back.

Ellie opens the letter.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"Dear Paul..."

INT. SQUAHAMISH - CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

Weekly mass through Aster's eyes. Dream-like and mundane. The sounds of her father's homily in the background.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"Did you know it takes eleven  
muscles to yawn?"

Close on Aster's face, smiling, stifling said yawn.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"This is the sort of weird fact I  
find myself recalling to keep  
myself from... well, yawning..."

Trevor uses the mirror app on his phone to groom himself.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"...or showing anything that I  
feel, really."

He adjusts his screen to see how he and Aster look together.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"Assuming I know how I feel."

Deacon Flores beams at the two of them.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"So yeah, I turn to other people's  
words too."

Aster's attention drops back to her phone. On it: a  
downloaded version of REMAINS OF THE DAY.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"Far better than my own."

Angle on a MOSTLY HIDDEN ELLIE playing piano, watching her.

INT. CARSON FAMILY DINNER TABLE - EVENING

The Carson and Flores families dine together chez Carson.  
Haute society, Squahamish-style.

TRIP CARSON  
You can't even imagine how much the  
right gravel can change your life!

DEACON FLORES  
From gravel we came, to gravel we  
shall return! And this pot roast!  
Do I detect a hint of saffron?

Mrs. Carson preens.

TREVOR  
Babe, let's take a selfie.

Trevor snaps a photo with a dutifully smiling Aster.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"When you're a pretty girl - and I  
know it makes me sound conceited -  
but that's why you're even writing  
me, right?"

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH

Ellie and Paul look at each other... *She's not wrong.*

They go back to the letter.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"When you're the pretty girl,  
people want to give you things..."

EXT. ASTER'S LOCKER - DAY

Aster shuts her locker to reveal one of the QUADDIE GIRLS holding a CARDIGAN. Exactly like the one she is wearing. And that of her two friends.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "But what they really want is to  
 make you like them."

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
 It would look so cute on you!

ASTER  
 Oh. Thanks!

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "Not 'like them' as in 'I like you'  
 but 'like them' as in 'I am like  
 you.'"

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
 Like... soooo cute on you!

Quaddie Girl #1 smiles at Aster expectantly.

ASTER  
 Oh! You mean right now.

MOMENTS LATER:

ASTER WALKS DOWN THE HALLWAY, FLANKED BY QUADDIE GIRLS, ALL IN CARDIGANS. Trevor throws an arm around all of them.

TREVOR  
 Looking good, girls!

He basks in their adoration.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "So I'm like a lot of people."

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH - AFTERNOON

Ellie reads from the letter.

ELLIE  
 "Which makes me kind of no one."

She marinates in that for a beat.

PAUL  
 Can I text her now?



ELLIE  
It's too soon.

PAUL  
I'm gonna do it.

ELLIE  
If you want her to think you're  
like everyone else.

Paul stops. Sighs. Types something on his phone.

CHA-CHING. Ellie looks at her phone.

VENMO NOTIFICATION: "Paul M. venmoed you \$25"

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"I never really thought about the  
oppression of fitting in before."

We see a MONTAGE of letter snippets while:

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN

Ellie gathers speed on her bike.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"The good thing about being  
different is that no one expects  
you to be like them..."

PAUL (O.S.)  
Wait for me!

Paul huffs to catch up with Ellie. Ellie sighs.

INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Aster reads a letter hidden in her textbook.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"...Doesn't everyone think they're  
'different' but pretty much we're  
all different in the same way..."

TREVOR (O.S.)  
Babe. Taco Time?

Trevor's at the door of the class. Aster slams her book shut.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "...Some of us are more different  
 than others. You might be  
 surprised..."

A PAGE from the letter FALLS TO THE FLOOR, unseen, as Aster  
 hurries to meet him.

INT. GIRLS' BATHROOM - SQUAHAMISH HIGH - DAY

Ellie scrubs bike grease from her hands.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "...Well, you are surprising."

Door opens.

Through the MIRROR:

TWO QUADDIE GIRLS enter stalls.

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
 The one in Tukwila has a Gap Body.

QUADDIE GIRL #2  
 I LOVE Gap Body!

Ellie can't quite get the grease out of her nails.

Door SWISHES. ASTER HAS ENTERED. She moves to the back wall,  
 where she leans, waiting for a stall.

Her eyes meet Ellie's through the mirror. Ellie's snap down.

Aster takes in the back of Ellie. The wiry frame. Keys  
 CLIPPED to belt loop. INK STAIN through back pocket.

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (CONT'D)  
 ... it has like 15 dressing rooms.

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
 It's totes the better Gap.

On Ellie face: puzzled. *Is this how normal girls talk?*

Aster smiles. Ellie blushes. The two girls share a moment.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (CONT'D)  
 Trev checked in at Dick's Burgers!

QUADDIE GIRL #2  
 Aster is so lucky.

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
Totes lucky. His family owns half  
of Squahamish.

QUADDIE GIRL #2  
Hers doesn't even own their house.

Aster, red-faced, slips out of the bathroom.

Ellie watches her go. Turns to look at the stalls.

DUAL FLUSHES.

Close on the STALL DOOR HINGE being shifted with a BIKE TOOL.

MOMENTS LATER

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (CONT'D)  
HEY. What's wrong with this door??

The stall doors rattle, unyielding.

QUADDIE GIRL #1  
What the--? HEY!

Rattle, rattle, rattle...

EXT. OUTSIDE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie slips out of the bathroom.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"What's surprising is: people don't  
see what they're not looking for."

She merges anonymously into the fray... walking right through  
Aster casting a furtive glance across the hall at Paul.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"The obvious unseen."

RECORD SCRATCH as ELLIE IS SUDDENLY YANKED INTO...

INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

...a classroom. She looks blankly at Mrs. G... who holds up a  
trampled stray page of a LETTER. Guilt floods Ellie's face.

MOMENTS LATER:

Mrs. G stares at Ellie, post-confession.

MRS G  
Ellie. What you're doing is *wrong*.

ELLIE  
I know.

MRS G  
This is a girl's heart you're  
playing with. Not just a money-  
making venture for you.

Ellie looks away... and Mrs. G sees the truth. More gently:

MRS G (CONT'D)  
I wondered why all the rich kids'  
essays got so bad all of a sudden.

ELLIE  
I'll be back to my usual business  
soon enough. I mean this can't go  
on much longer.

She slinks out. Mrs. G watches her go, concerned.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"I've been thinking about what you  
said about 'seeing' and 'not  
seeing.'"

INT. VIOLA'S - DAY

Aster waits on a table of demanding customers at an upscale  
restaurant. She is accommodating, poised.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"I had a painting teacher once tell  
me that the difference between a  
'good' painting and a 'great'  
painting..."

While the customers bicker, her eyes land on a painting on  
the wall: a reproduction of Klimt's "The Maiden."

Her eyes take in the artistry of the painting.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"...is typically five strokes. And  
they are usually the five boldest  
strokes in the painting. The  
question of course..."

We see a touch of longing in her gaze.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "Is which five strokes?"

CLOSE ON THE PAINTING.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "I get it."

PULL OUT TO SEE: Ellie - in her token booth - staring at the same painting on her phone screen.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "After one's slaved away at making a "pretty good" painting, the last thing you'd want to do is..."

The SOUND of a HUGE RIP...

EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - DAY

...OF A BURLAP SACK as raw sausages pour out.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "...make a BOLD STROKE and potentially..."

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "...ruin everything. That's why I gave up painting."

Wider to reveal THE SACK BEING RIPPED BY PAUL.

Next to him, ELLIE HOLDS UP HER PHONE displaying an IMAGE OF THE PAINTING, explaining.

Paul wipes sweat off his puzzled brow.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "Still... I wonder if that is how I'm living my life."

INT. CARSON GRAVEL SHOWROOM - DAY

ASTER writes a letter, in the folds of her hymnal.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "It's a 'pretty good' life."

TREVOR  
 Babe? Which one.

Trevor holds up two very similar jean jackets. A photo shoot for a Carson Gravel ad campaign awaits him.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Right one, right? Great.

Aster goes back to her letter.

In the background, Trevor throws an arm around his dad.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"Probably the best life one could  
hope for in Squahamish."

PHOTO FLASH.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

FLASH of WHITE as a FREEZER DRAWER opens.

Ellie considers a BEEF PIE and a CHICKEN PIE. Beef... or Chicken.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"Perhaps. But how well do you  
really know Squahamish...?"

EXT. SIDE OF AL'S BIG BEEFY - AFTERNOON

Aster rounds the corner, tentative. Consults A LETTER with geographic coordinates.

CRAPPY GRAFFITI lines the side wall of Al's Big Beefy.

Up high, in freshly sprayed BIG BOLD LETTERS:

"ANY FIVE STROKES..."

An ARROW points toward the expanse of graffitied wall.  
Another points to a CAN OF SPRAY PAINT hidden in the weeds.

Aster laughs. A cautious glance around... she PICKS UP the can and SPRAYS ONE BOLD STROKE. Exhilarated. Sneaks away.

ASTER (V.O.)  
"...Your move..."

Dissolve to ELLIE now SPRAYING ANOTHER STROKE...

Alternate between the two...

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "Oh so THAT's your boldest  
 stroke..."

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "I'm into the slow build. What the  
 hell was THAT...?"

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "Greatness..."

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "You want greatness? Is THIS bold  
 enough for you...?"

...as their SPRAY PAINT ART CREATION TAKES SHAPE.

It's a beautiful mess. Aster can't stop smiling.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "And thus was abstract art born."

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "Timeless."

BIG BEEFY AL (O.S.)  
 HEY!

Aster is startled... and takes off running. BIG BEEFY AL runs  
 into frame, shaking his fist.

Dissolve into the wall NOW PAINTED GREY.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "Or not."

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "Everything beautiful is ruined  
 eventually."

ELLIE (V.O.)  
 "Maybe that's the thing. If you do  
 ruin your painting..."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - DAY

Ellie stares across the train tracks, lost in thought.

ASTER (V.O.)  
 "...you gotta know you have  
 everything in you to get to that  
 'pretty good' painting again. But  
 if you never do the bold stroke..."

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY

Aster stares out the window, lost in thought.

Bzzz. Aster glances down at her phone.

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM TREVOR: "Don't let me eat carbs today"

Aster deliberates. Clicks IGNORE.

ELLIE (V.O.)  
"...you'll never know if you could  
have had a GREAT painting."

She stares at a blank page. And starts sketching.

EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE

Paul empties the garbage.

PAUL  
So when does the "dating" start?

ELLIE  
(a little dreamy) This is dating.

PAUL  
No, dating is... BURGERS. And  
FRIES. And SHAKES. And maybe  
ANOTHER ORDER of FRIES. And... I'm  
gonna text her.

Sound of a TEXT SENDING. Startling Ellie.

ELLIE  
Wait, *what*?

PAUL  
At a certain point, you gotta  
close.

ELLIE  
We're *not* at that point!

PAUL  
We are way past that point!

Ellie grabs Paul's phone.

EXT. COWFIELD - SAME TIME

On ASTER'S PHONE:



"[A BURGER, FRIES, SHAKE and another FRIES emoji] tonite? I have [truck emoji]! [smiley emoji]!"

Aster stares at her phone. She is flanked by Quaddie Girls cheering on their boyfriends...

Who are "mudding" their trucks through a HUGE MUD PUDDLE.

BACK TO ELLIE/PAUL AT SAUSAGE SHOP:

Ellie and Paul stare at his phone. "Thinking" dots appear.

ELLIE

Oh my god.

"Thinking dots" disappear.

Paul hurls a GARBAGE CAN to the ground.

PAUL

GODDAMN IT.

Ellie starts typing.

ELLIE

(writing aloud) "Sorry. My little sis hacked into my phone. Can we take this onto a safer platform? Kik Messenger? My handle's.... SmithCorona."

Thinking dots reappear.

PAUL

Who's Smith Corona?

ELLIE

Some guy.

Dots disappear.

PAUL

Crap!

BACK TO COWFIELD:

A TRUCK STUCK in the mud, wheels spinning.

TREVOR

I'M KING OF THE MUD! Babe! Did you get that? Caption it MUDDING KING!

Off Aster's face, considering...

BACK TO THE SAUSAGE SHOP:

DING. From Ellie's bookbag.

Ellie and Paul scramble for Ellie's phone.

ELLIE'S SCREEN:

StarFlower: "Does the burger offer still stand?"

	ELLIE	PAUL
YES!		YESSSSS!

Paul chest bumps the wall.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
We did it!

Off Ellie's face realizing: *Paul* is going on this date.

EXT. WALLY'S DINER - EVENING

A truck pulls into the parking lot of a small-town diner.

ELLIE (OVER PHONE)  
She prefers abstract to  
representational. And if she brings  
up *Remains of the Day*, talk about  
how the movie loses out by not  
spending more time on the Nazis--

PAUL (O.S.)  
Relax, I got this.

ELLIE (OVER PHONE)  
But--

PAUL (O.S.)  
It's a date, not a book report.

INT. WALLY'S DINER - EVENING

Aster slides a copy of *REMAINS OF THE DAY* across the booth.

ASTER  
I got two of them signed when he  
came to Powell's books last year. I  
drove all night to get there.

Her face is lit, shy, expectant.

PAUL  
Oh. Uh. Super cool!

ASTER  
You've probably read it. But I  
thought you'd like one.

PAUL  
Yeah. Totally. I love... Nazis!

Aster is confused.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I mean the ones in the book.

Close on his phone in his lap, connected to...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - SAME TIME

...Ellie's phone. Ellie listens, horrified.

PAUL (OVER PHONE)  
More of *those* Nazis, am I right?

She groans.

BACK TO DINER:

Milkshakes arrive. Paul sips, nervously.

Aster, flustered, tries again.

ASTER  
Speaking of Nazis, thanks for  
meeting me here. My dad is... not a  
*Nazi* exactly... but he can be a  
little strict. And people talk.

PAUL  
Oh. Yeah. Talk. UGH.

Silence.

ASTER  
But it's nice to make a new friend.

PAUL  
Friend. Yeah. Good.

He has sucked down his milkshake. Toys with the straw.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
They use ReddiWhip.

ASTER

Oh.

PAUL

It's from a can. But it's okay.

More silence. Awkward. So awkward.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - SAME TIME

It's all over Ellie's face: *this is a disaster*.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - EARLY MORNING

Ellie bikes up the hill, Paul trying to catch up.

PAUL

It wasn't that bad.

ELLIE

What about that date wasn't *bad*?  
You have *nothing* in common-

PAUL

Not yet but-

ELLIE

Game over.

PAUL

We can't give up-

Paul has in fact given up and is heaving behind some shrubs.

ELLIE

Look. You and Aster Flores? NOT  
GONNA HAPPEN.

HOOONK. The truck of OBNOXIOUS TEENS cruises by.

OBNOXIOUS TEENS

(heckling) CHUGGA CHUGGA CHUGGA,  
CHUGGA-CHUGGA-CHUGGA... CHIU CHIU!

PAUL (O.S.)

HEY!

Paul jumps out from the side of the road and STARTS CHASING  
AFTER THE TRUCK.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Who you calling Choo-Choo?

Obnoxious Teens freeze.

ELLIE  
(embarrassed) Paul, let it go...

PAUL  
What kind of wusses say dumb stuff  
then drive away? I'M GONNA GET YOU!

They tear off, shakily, Paul bearing down on them.

He hurls a rock. From far off: "OW!"

PAUL (CONT'D)  
YOU BETTER RUN!

Turns back to see Ellie staring at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
WHAT?

Her eyes wide as saucers.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - EARLY EVENING

Ellie patches some wires in the signal panel. Paul hovers.

ELLIE  
Aster Flores thinks you're into  
abstract art... and repressed  
British literature and-

PAUL  
Cool!

ELLIE  
None of that is *you*.

PAUL  
It could be. I started reading that  
*Remains of the Day* book.

ELLIE  
Really?

PAUL  
Fell asleep a few times... but I'm  
still reading it! That's gotta  
count for something.

ELLIE  
There are no points for effort.

PAUL  
 Why not? Isn't that what love is?  
 The effort you put into loving  
 someone?

*Is that true?*

ELLIE  
 Well, whatever love is... we just  
 blew it with Aster Flores.

DING. On Ellie's phone, A MESSAGE:

"Starflower: So that was... weird?"

PAUL  
 YESSS! (then to Ellie) I can do  
 this. We can do this.

He wants this so bad...

ELLIE  
 (sighs) Okay.

Joy floods Paul's face.

PAUL  
 I'll pay you double.

ELLIE  
 You don't have to pay me.

PAUL  
 Don't be weird! Why else would you  
 do this? I got savings!

Off Ellie's conflicted expression...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - EARLY MORNING

Ellie draws A GAME PLAN on A WHITE BOARD in her ticket booth.  
 Paul outside the booth, jogging in place.

ELLIE  
 Your next date is two weeks away.

PAUL  
 Two weeks?

ELLIE  
 You told her you're slammed with  
 football training.

PAUL

I did?

ELLIE

Yes. Also you're in a debate on  
who's the better Hepburn-

EDWIN (O.S.)

WHO THERE?

From the APARTMENT WINDOW ABOVE, Edwin wields a kitchen  
sprayer.

ELLIE

*Sorry to wake you, Baba. School  
project.*

PAUL

Hi Ellie Chiu's dad!

Edwin shoots Paul a suspicious glance. Retreats.

ELLIE

(whispering) We don't have time to  
school you on everything Aster  
thinks "you" are, so we have to be  
selective. Deep vs. broad-based  
learning.

PAUL

Hunh?

ELLIE

We spy on her, then cram you on her  
Greatest Hits.

PAUL

(loud whisper) Oh. Cool.

ELLIE

Are you ready for this?

PAUL

Yes.

ELLIE

ARE you READY For This?

PAUL

YES! SIR YES SIR!

ELLIE

Ssshh! So in *No Exit*, three people  
are trapped in hell...

Cue "Rocky"-themed training MONTAGE MUSIC...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

Paul jogs alongside Ellie on her bike.

PAUL

That's nuts. He can't stand these people, a door opens for him to leave - *but he doesn't leave?*

ELLIE

He's trapped in hell. It's a metaphor for existence.

PAUL

My Nana hated Minnesota. She left.

ELLIE

Your Nana is not one of the great thinkers of the 20th century!

PAUL

My Nana's not trapped in hell either!

Ellie groans and pedals faster.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hey! Where you going?

He picks up the pace...

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - AFTERNOON

...until he is now running on the track, passing teammates left and right.

COACH

What the hell's gotten into Munskey?

Paul breaks into the lead. Under his breath:

PAUL

SAR-TREE... SAR-TRA... SARTRE! VAN GOFF... VAN GAAWW... VAN...

CLOSEUP: ELLIE'S HAND UNDERLINES "HEPBURN" ON A WHITEBOARD



INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Edwin alone in his La-Z-Boy. An untouched pot pie next to Ellie's lounge. THE PHILADELPHIA STORY plays on TV:

JOHN HOWARD/GEORGE KITTREDGE (ON TV)  
 "You're like some marvelous,  
 distant, well, queen..."

He shoots a glance toward the window.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - SAME TIME

Outside, the same scene plays on Ellie's laptop.

Ellie, in booth, draws a diagram with "Katherine Hepburn" in the middle; "Cary Grant", "Jimmy Stewart" and "John Howard" surround her. Paul eats a sausage, outside the booth.

KATHERINE HEPBURN/TRACY LORD (ON TV)  
 "I don't want to be worshipped. I  
 want to be loved."

ELLIE  
 The key thing about "The  
 Philadelphia Story" is that it's a  
 plea for tolerance...

PAUL  
 Check this out.

He holds up a sausage wrapped in a corn tortilla.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
 I'm calling it "Taco Sausage."  
 Wanna bite?

She raps his knuckles with her marker.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Ow!

ELLIE  
 Pay attention! So tolerance...

PAUL  
 Two hand foods. One great taste!

Angle on EDWIN peering down at them from the window.

INSERT: ON THE WHITEBOARD: "CONVERSATION LESSONS"

INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - DAY

Ellie serves the ball at a ping pong table.

ELLIE  
Conversation is like ping pong. I  
hit one, then you--

Paul SLAMS the ball back. It flies wildly.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
WHAT THE--?

PAUL  
(sheepish) Sorry...

INSERT: ON WHITEBOARD: "RECONNAISSANCE"

TRAINING THEME picks up as we go to a MONTAGE:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - AFTERNOON

Onscreen: A SLASHER TEEN FILM, one moment before SLASHING.

Pan the anxious faces of Quaddie Girls... to land on Aster.

Pull back to reveal PAUL seated with TEAM DUDES... further  
still to ELLIE, in back row alone, taking notes.

The SLASHING HAPPENS! Girls SCREAM! Aster GUFFAWS!

Paul and Ellie lock eyes, excited. *More data!*

TEAM DUDE  
Who you checking?

PAUL  
No one.

He turns back.

INT. TOKEN BOOTH

On the WHITEBOARD: a hand writes "Likes a good slashing."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

In the distance: Ellie on her bike quizzes Paul, jogging  
alongside. Two distant specks headed toward CAMERA.

INT. PHARMACY

ASTER drops a TUBE OF TOOTHPASTE in her cart and moves on.  
ELLIE and PAUL'S HEADS poke around the aisle.

INT. TOKEN BOOTH

Now on the WHITEBOARD: "Flavor Crystals. Woodsy Scents."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

Ellie and Paul now closer to CAMERA. Still "training."

INT. TOKEN BOOTH

ON THE WHITEBOARD: "OPPO RESEARCH"

Brandishing a marker, Ellie maps out a "GOOD COP/BAD COP" interrogation scene for a confused Paul.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY SIDE ROOM

Ellie and Paul usher Trevor into a closet off the hallway.

ELLIE

We're writing a profile on the  
student we most admire!

This checks out for Trevor.

TREVOR

Cool, cool.

ELLIE

So what are your views on  
women in the workplace?

PAUL

Does Aster like tacos?

Ellie and Paul confer sotto voce behind Trevor's back.

ELLIE

What are you doing?

PAUL

What are you doing?

ELLIE

I'm good cop.

PAUL  
If you're good cop, how come you're  
not smiling?

ELLIE  
I'll SMILE when you follow the plan  
I CAREFULLY--

TREVOR  
(thinking aloud) I'm surprised more  
kids haven't asked to interview me.

An oblivious Trevor stares at his reflection.

PAUL  
Ooo, can I play good cop now?

Ellie sighs.

EXT. TOKEN BOOTH

On WHITEBOARD under "OPPO RESEARCH": "Doesn't know her  
favorite food. Or band. Or anything."

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - LUNCHROOM

Aster clears her LUNCH TRAY. Moments later, Paul slides over  
to the GARBAGE CAN, peers in. Marks a grid.

EXT. TOKEN BOOTH

On WHITEBOARD: "Eats all meats. Hates raisins."

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN

Ellie and Paul blow past CAMERA and suddenly PAUL is...

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - EVENING

...RUNNING toward the ENDZONE and ALMOST CATCHES A WILD PASS!

ANNOUNCER  
WOAH! The Squahamish Moose ALMOST  
SCORED! That would be the first  
score in five years! Nice hustle  
from #86... P. Munskey!

The half-filled stands half-cheer, Aster among them.

Paul breaks into a toothy smile.

EXT. TOKEN BOOTH - SAME TIME

Ellie listens to the game. Pumps her fist. Gets a text from Aster: "Cute smile." Bittersweet.

End TRAINING MONTAGE MUSIC.

EXT. OUTSIDE FLORES HOME - EVENING

Through a large dining room window: the Flores' at dinner.

Across the way, inside THE CAB OF A TRUCK, Ellie and Paul are on a "stakeout." Ellie takes notes. Paul's stomach GROWLS.

PAUL  
You're not hungry?

ELLIE  
Not if it's not time to eat.

PAUL  
That's weird.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: The Deacon says a loooong grace. Mrs. Flores notices Aster's collar is askew. Aster adjusts it. Mrs. Flores winks at her daughter.

Ellie's face shows a touch of yearning. Paul sees it.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Can I ask you a question?

ELLIE  
I don't want to try a taco sausage.

PAUL  
Why Squahamish?

Ellie looks at Paul. *What kind of question is that?*

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Your dad seems so unhappy here. And you also seem kinda unhappy.

Ellie unbuckles her seat belt.

ELLIE  
I gotta go.

PAUL

Wait--

ELLIE

You're not taking this seriously, I have a ton of work to do--

PAUL

I just think you're so, like, smart, too smart to--

ELLIE

...waste my time trying to win you some girl who'll probably never--

PAUL

...it just seems weird--

ELLIE

...You're weird!

PAUL

...No, I mean, yes--

ELLIE

Enjoy your "happy" life in Squahamish!

She's about to slam the truck door. Paul springs across the front seat, catches the door before it closes.

PAUL

The thing about *No Exit* is it's like how what I really want is to run my own shop - one with new recipes - and FYI, "TACO SAUSAGE" IS REALLY EFFIN GOOD - but I'm just the fourth son, and my family has made the same dogs for 49 years, and doesn't matter that we're going out of style or broke - it's Nana's recipe, and if my Ma can't have her Nana, at least she can keep making her sausages, and if I break away, I'd break her heart, and it's her heart or mine so... I stay.

Paul is breathless. It's more words than he's ever said.

Ellie slowly gets back into the truck. Exhales.

ELLIE

We had to go where my dad could get a job.

PAUL  
He studied trains?

ELLIE  
Engineering. PhD, no less.

PAUL  
So he became... the Station Manager  
at Squahamish?

ELLIE  
To start. Plan was to be promoted  
to "System Engineer" or... *anything*  
"Engineer". Squahamish was a  
jumping off point. (beat) Turns out  
speaking good English trumps a PhD.  
Or one from China, anyway. And my  
dad...

PAUL  
Has a hard time speaking.

ELLIE  
(bristling) He's not *bad*.

PAUL  
I have a hard time speaking too.  
They watch the Flores family start dessert.

ELLIE  
True. What's your excuse?  
Tension broken. Paul grins. He starts the engine.

PAUL  
How do you feel about pot roast?

ELLIE  
I should get back to the station.

PAUL  
We gotta eat.

Ellie's stomach GROWLS.

INT. MUNSKY DINING ROOM - EVENING

It's mayhem. The six members of Paul's family: COLLEEN (MA),  
BILL (PA), brothers GREG, PETE, TOMMY, and sister LENA  
function like one chaotic organism.

Paul and Ellie stand off to the side, unnoticed.

GREG MUNSKY  
So Marcy and me are thinking Vegas  
for the honeymoon! Cheap AND fancy!

PETE MUNSKY  
Dog-wrestling, Pa! Sport of the  
near future!

LENA MUNSKY  
Tommy, stop friending my friends!

TOMMY MUNSKY  
Stop making hot friends!

BILL MUNSKY (PA)  
You're *not* running a dog-wrestling  
ring out of our house!

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
NO ONE gets married until they can  
afford to move out and pay rent!

Ellie glances at Paul.

ELLIE  
Half a chicken pie?

PAUL  
Yup.

They slip out.

Cue opening strains of GUITAR SOLO (tentative title "Life Is  
As Sweet as It Can Be.")

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Ellie in her La-Z-Boy, pot pie in hand, eyes glued nervously  
to the TV. (On screen: another classic. "City Lights?")

Widen to reveal Paul CURLED ON THE FLOOR next to her, also  
eating a pot pie.

Widen further to reveal EDWIN, in his La-Z-Boy, glaring.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

Ellie biking at 75% speed with Paul keeping up.



INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - DAY

We're back at the ping pong table.

ELLIE

Match energy. Match strokes. Then  
just say one thing.

Paul nods, deliberate and slow. Ellie serves.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Where were you born?

Paul hits the ball back, gently.

PAUL

Here in Squahamish. What about you?

ELLIE

Okay good! That wasn't so hard!

PAUL

But where were you born?

ELLIE

I don't need talking practice.

PAUL

Just seems like a really short  
conversation.

*Damn.* He has a point.

ELLIE (O.S.)

I was born in Suzhou. China.

PAUL

When did you come here?

ELLIE

At five. What do you like about  
Squahamish?

PAUL

I've never been anywhere else.

Beat.

ELLIE

Me neither.

The ball continues between them.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Back in the apartment watching another classic film.

Paul offers Edwin and Ellie a taco sausage. They decline.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - LATE NIGHT

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM starflower: "Favorite time of day?"

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM smithcorona: "Now probably."

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM starflower: "Smooth..."

Angle on Ellie, alone, smiling at her phone.

INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Ellie is at the piano while the Deacon delivers a homily.

Father Shanley awakes with a jerk.

FATHER SHANLEY  
OUTSIDE ARE THE DOGS AND THE  
SORCERERS--

Ellie sneaks a peak at Aster, head bent over her devotional.

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM starflower: "Think Father Shanley has any idea what's going on around him?"

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM smithcorona: "I think Father Shanley KNOWS ALL."

Aster's mouth twitches upward. Ellie smiles.

Aster turns to look at Paul... who breaks into a goofy smile.

Ellie's eyes drop to the piano keys.

INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Ellie tries to avoid Mrs. G's gaze on her way out. Then turns back.

ELLIE  
You know what it's like to *finally*  
meet someone your age who *gets* you?

MRS G  
You know where else you can meet  
people your age who get you?  
COLLEGE.

Ellie slinks out.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH - AFTERNOON

Ellie and Paul back in the booth, arguing.

PAUL  
You should send some emojis!

ELLIE  
I'm not sending her emojis!

PAUL  
Oh! Do Pineapple, Owl, Caterpillar  
with glasses!

ELLIE  
What does that MEAN? That doesn't  
mean ANYTHING!

PAUL  
Glasses make the caterpillar look  
smart!

This deep debate rings out over the empty chapel.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - AFTERNOON

Ellie at full speed. Paul keeping up.

INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - DAY

Back to conversation lessons.

PAUL  
Favorite food?

ELLIE  
Braised pork over rice. Yours? Let  
me guess...

PAUL  
Taco sausage!

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Taco sausage.

PAUL

Does braised pork have five-spice powder?

ELLIE

How do you know five-spice powder?

PAUL

Kinda creeped in your cabinets.

Ellie shoots him a look.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm always looking for new spices.

ELLIE

Giving up on the taco sausage?

PAUL

No way! I've been writing to the paper in Wenatchee for months now. If I could just them to taste it...

ELLIE

Wenatchee's lips to God's ears.

PAUL

I hope so. You gotta try it!

ELLIE

What does your family think?

PAUL

They haven't tried it.

She sees he's bummed.

ELLIE

"Taco sausage" has a nice ring.

PAUL

Right?

He brightens.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hey.

ELLIE

Yeah?

PAUL

What was your mom like?

Beat.

ELLIE  
Young. Funny. Dead.

PAUL  
*Before* she died.

ELLIE  
Young. Funny. (beat) Fun.

Paul's listening intently.

PAUL  
She sounds cool.

ELLIE  
She was the light in our family.

Now Ellie's embarrassed.

PAUL  
Bet she would have tried the taco  
sausage.

Ellie throws the ball at him.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - LATE NIGHT

INSERT: ELLIE'S SCREEN:

MESSAGE FROM starflower: "Why is late night your favorite?"

Smithcorona: "Everyone's asleep. Alone with your thoughts"

Starflower: "Hour of secrets?"

Smithcorona: "Something like that"

Starflower: "So what secrets are you hiding...?"

Angle on Ellie biting her lip.

INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - DAY

Back to convo lessons.

ELLIE  
What do you like about Aster?

PAUL

She's pretty and smart and she's never mean and she smells like fresh ground flour. Why?

ELLIE

Just wondering.

PAUL

Why else could I like her?

ELLIE

I don't know. (thinking) How her eyes look right into yours... How she twirls her hair when she's reading. How her laugh busts out like she can't help herself and she stops being so... *PERFECT* for just a few moments. How she has at least five different voices. How you could live in an ocean of her thoughts and feel like she knows you, like really KNOWS--

Ellie stops mid-sentence. Paul is staring at her.

PAUL

I am so stupid.

ELLIE

(nervously) I just mean-

PAUL

I am so dumb. A real dummy.

ELLIE

I mean, don't think I actually-

PAUL

What you just said? *That's* what you say when you love someone.

ELLIE

No! I was just talking-

PAUL

No, it is. And you don't even care!  
I love her and I can't... UGH!

He slams his paddle onto the table. Ellie exhales in relief. Then realizes: Paul's miserable.

ELLIE

You try harder than anyone I've  
ever met - with the possible  
exception of my dad with my mom -  
to show a girl you love them... And  
if love isn't the effort you put  
in: then what is it?

Paul looks up.

PAUL

Yeah?

ELLIE

Yeah.

He brightens.

Sound of a TOASTER OVEN DOOR OPENING.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

CLOSE ON PAUL'S HAND pulling out three broiled sausages.

Everyone in their respective positions in front of the TV.  
Each with a "taco sausage" before them.

Ellie watches Edwin glare at his sausage, take the tiniest  
bite... His brows shoot up. He takes another.

Ellie, now curious, bites into her sausage. Eyes widen.

ELLIE

This is... insanely delicious.

Paul's face breaks into smile of unbearable sweetness.

LATER:

Edwin has fallen asleep.

Ellie and Paul, still watching TV, drink Yakults.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I can't believe you know Yakult.

PAUL

They sell 'em for a quarter in the  
Stadium Basement.

ELLIE

Seriously? The only Asian grocery  
is three hours by bike.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 Few times a year, I make the trek  
 so my dad can cook real food for a  
 couple nights.

Paul shoots her a thoughtful glance.

ON THE TV: A train pulls out of a station.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 (to TV) Do not run after her train.  
 Do NOT... Do NOT... Ugh.

PAUL  
 It's sweet.

ELLIE  
 It's trite.

PAUL  
 It shows he cares.

ELLIE  
 It shows he's a moron. Who outruns  
 trains? Bet that girl's thinking:  
 thank god I got away before wasting  
 my life on that idiot.

Beat.

PAUL  
 She looks sad.

ELLIE  
 Then she's a moron too.

Paul sniffles.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - TICKET BOOTH - LATE NIGHT

INSERT: ELLIE'S SCREEN:

MESSAGE FROM smithcorona: "No secrets. Am just a good guy...  
 And you should be with a good guy."

The song "Life Is as Sweet as It Can Be" wraps up...

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT

... as we reveal that it's Ellie singing the song, playing  
 her mom's old guitar.

The last bars drift out her window to...



EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

...the back of Munsky Sausage Shop, where Paul has stopped garbage duty to look up and listen. Moved.

The song ends.

The light in Ellie's window goes off.

EXT. WALLY'S DINER - EVENING

Paul's truck is in the parking lot.

IN THE TRUCK

Paul toys nervously with the zipper on his down vest.

Sound of a BIKE SCREECH outside.

Ellie throws herself into the cab, breathless.

ELLIE

Sorry, mandatory meeting about Senior Recital. I'm a little, like a lot, freaking out about it, but whatever. Okay. ASTER. If she brings up immigration, you've been talking about the recent--

PAUL

I know.

ELLIE

When in doubt, if the name is Italian, probably an artist, if French, probably a--

PAUL

Hey.

What?

PAUL (CONT'D)

Thanks.

ELLIE

Oh. Sure.

PAUL

I'm probably gonna crash and burn. But thanks for sticking it out with me anyway.

ELLIE  
Well. Not like you didn't pay me.

PAUL  
Well. Thanks.

Paul starts to go.

ELLIE  
Hey.

What?

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
You're not gonna crash and burn.

She gives him a thumbs up. His face lights into a huge grin.

He's gone. She exhales anxiously.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
You're totally gonna crash and burn.

She starts worrying the zipper on her down vest.

INT. DICK'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Paul sits across from Aster. It's awkward.

ASTER  
So I was wondering--

PAUL  
How about that immigration bill--

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Sorry, go ahead.

ASTER  
No, you.

PAUL  
Oh uh. The immigration bill?

ASTER  
Un hunh?

PAUL  
Uh. Right?

ASTER  
(confused) Right?

PAUL

Yup.

They lapse into silence.

INTERCUT WITH THE CAB OF PAUL'S TRUCK

The conversation plays over Ellie's phone, linked to Paul's.

ELLIE

Come on, Paul.

BACK TO THE DINER

The waitress drops off their order.

ASTER

We don't have to talk about...  
serious things.

PAUL

Oh. Okay.

More silence.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What were you about to say?

ASTER

Oh, uh. It's still cool that  
we're... friends?

PAUL

Yeah. Cool. Friends.

Now even more awkward.

BACK TO THE TRUCK

Ellie pulls out her phone.

BACK TO THE DINER

Bzzz. Aster looks at her phone.

ASTER

Oh. You messaged me.

PAUL

(confused) ...Yup.

ON ASTER'S PHONE: Message from smithcorona: **"I get nervous  
when you're close."**

Aster looks back at Paul. Smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Yup...?

While Aster's head is buried in her phone, Paul peers out at Ellie, mimes: *What is going on?*

ON PAUL'S PHONE: Message from Ellie: **"Pretend to be on your phone."**

The next series of messages appear as chat bubbles superimposed on the screen.

**ASTER/STARFLOWER: "I'm just a girl."**

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "You're not just a girl."**

**ASTER/STARFLOWER: "What are you?"**

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "Also... not just a girl."**

Aster laughs. Looks up at Paul.

He gives her a wide, goofy smile. And a thumbs up.

Aster's not sure how to react.

Ellie groans.

**ASTER/STARFLOWER: "You're strange. But cute"**

Ellie is out of her depth.

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "You have..."** (pause) **"really classic bone structure."**

Aster's lips twitch up.

**ASTER/STARFLOWER: "... Thanks."**

Ellie flushes. She tries again.

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "I think you are..."**

She deletes it.

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "You are..."**

Delete. She takes a breath.

**ELLIE/SMITHCORONA: "What I mean to say is..."**

BACK IN THE DINER

Paul can take it no longer... and STANDS. Flushed with conviction.

Aster looks up from her screen, startled.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

ELLIE

What?? No! BAD. Sit!

BACK IN THE DINER

PAUL

I don't want to be just friends.

ASTER

Oh!

The whole diner's watching.

PAUL

I think you are pretty and funny  
and smart and your laugh is like...  
an ocean of thoughts... or five  
oceans of thoughts... or five  
voices or... (exhales) I LIKE YOU.

ASTER

(flushed) I don't know what to say.

PAUL

Me neither. I'm not a good talker.

He's so earnest. She smiles.

ASTER

That's okay.

He reaches for her hand. She lets him.

BACK TO THE TRUCK:

Ellie slips out of the truck. Her work is done here.

PULL OUT:

EXT. ROAD BACK TO SQUAHAMISH - NIGHT

We follow her tiny bike light as it heads into the night.

INT. CLOTHESTOWN - DAY

A jubilant Paul high fives MANNEQUINS.

PAUL  
What up haters! Who rocked their  
second date? #86 Pauuuul MUNSKY!

Ellie picks through a row of ON SALE CARDIGANS.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
And now his best girl is gonna rock  
THE SENIOR RECITAL!

ELLIE  
It's a piano solo.

She pulls a cardigan over her hoodie.

PAUL  
You're gonna be AWESOME!

ELLIE  
I'm gonna be puking.

PAUL  
You're *always* playing for an  
audience.

ELLIE  
On the side. Not on stage. Alone.

PAUL  
You're gonna crush it. OH. Did I  
tell you that some food guy from  
the paper in Tukwila wrote me? He  
musta heard about me from the guy  
in Wenatchee. He says he likes how  
I described my sausage and wants to  
try it! Boom! It's Munskey time!

He shadow boxes... anything.

ELLIE  
Hey! Look at you.

She pulls a pleated skirt over her jeans.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
So... what did you and Aster talk  
about?

PAUL  
I dunno. We got milkshakes and  
fries and held hands and it was...  
*quiet and... nice.*

He relives that moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Then she had curfew so we walked to  
her car... and I kissed her.

Ellie fiddles with a zipper.

ELLIE  
How does that happen?

PAUL  
What?

ELLIE  
The kiss.

PAUL  
(shrugs) I kissed her.

ELLIE  
You don't ask first?

PAUL  
No one asks first.

ELLIE  
Then how do you know she *wants* to  
be kissed?

PAUL  
(thinks) She gives you a *look*.

ELLIE  
A *look*?

He fixes Ellie with a "look." She is confused.

PAUL  
(sighs) It's a LOOK. And when you  
see the look? *You make your move...*  
or you come off like a real putz.

This is Greek to Ellie.

PAUL (CONT'D)

And now we're going out on a date  
date - not a friend date - when she  
gets back from some youth group in  
Sacramento!

He reaches out for a high-five. Notices her motley outfit.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There are dressing rooms, you know.

ELLIE

I'll just get this.

PAUL

Really?

ELLIE

Yeah?

She sounds less certain than usual. Paul takes her in.

PAUL

Without the jeans and flannel  
shirt...

Ellie straightens.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You look weird.

She slumps.

ELLIE

Gee thanks.

PAUL

It just doesn't look like you. All  
girl-ed up.

ELLIE

I know.

She's deflated.

PAUL

Go to the dressing room. I'll toss  
you some things.

ELLIE

You're a *dude*-

PAUL

I have a sister. Go.



He starts browsing with intention.

LATER

Ellie comes out of the dressing room in a fitted blue shirt and skinny slacks. She looks... good.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
(amazed) You look better than I  
thought you could.

ELLIE  
Gee. *Thanks.*

PAUL  
I mean you look like *you*. But  
better.

ELLIE  
Dreams do come true.

Despite the snark, she seems... almost happy.

Cue a rendition of "In Your Eyes" by Peter Gabriel...

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - ASSEMBLY HALL - EVENING

... played onstage by A TRIO of OBOES.

FROM THE WINGS

Ellie peeks out at the PACKED HOUSE of students and their families. Every seat taken... save for two in the second row marked "PARENTS OF ELLIE CHIU".

EMCEE  
Well our next Senior needs no  
introduction!

A chant picks up: "Trev! Trev! Trev!"...

And with that, TREVOR IS ON STAGE, electric guitar flung over his back, a BACKING BAND behind him.

TREVOR  
WHAT UP, SQUAHAMISH MOOSE!

The crowd is on its feet.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
YOU KNOW WHO I AM. I KNOW WHO I AM.  
LET'S DO THIS.

He launches into a cover of "Bizarre Love Triangle". It's terrible. The audience is enthralled.

BACKSTAGE

Ellie slumps at a piano. A STAGE MANAGER pokes her head in.

STAGE MANAGER

Ellie Chiu? You're up next.

Great. Ellie heads to the bathroom.

The Obnoxious Bullies sneak in and fiddle with the piano.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Paul slips in from the back, pulling off a Munsky Sausage apron.

To chants of TREV! TREV! TREV! Trevor strides off-stage with his band... passing a lone Ellie, rolling her piano on.

EMCEE

Next we have (consults sheet again)  
Ellie Chiu? Let's give it up!

FROM THE AUDIENCE

OBNOXIOUS BULLIES

Chugga-chugga-chugga- CHIU CHIU!

Paul glares into the crowd. Spies an empty seat.

ONSTAGE

Ellie looks out into the audience... just in time to see Paul settling in her "parent's" seat. Paul gives her a thumbs up.

She takes a breath. Starts to play. It is WILDLY DISCORDANT.

She stops. THE PIANO IS HORRIBLY OUT OF TUNE.

The Obnoxious Bullies cackle at their prank.

The audience is restless.

Ellie is frozen.

PAUL

Crap.

BACKUP BAND DUDE

(catcalling) NEXT!

Audience laughter. Paul glares at Backup Band Dude... Notices his guitar.

ONSTAGE

Ellie gathers her sheet music and prepares to flee when A GUITAR SLIDES ACROSS THE STAGE and STOPS IN FRONT OF HER.

Paul gestures from the side: *Play it.*

Ellie looks at the guitar. At the crowd. Back at Paul.

She sits down on the bench. Closes her eyes. Starts to play "Life is As Sweet as It Can Be." Her voice starts shaky... then steadies... finishing pure and clear and strong.

It is dead silent in the auditorium.

AND THEN THE CROWD GOES WILD.

Ellie is startled. *What is happening?*

IN THE AUDIENCE

Paul beams. Doesn't even notice Trevor next to him.

TREVOR

When did Ellie Chiu get kinda hot?

Paul stares at Ellie. *When indeed?*

ONSTAGE

A flushed Ellie takes it all in.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - LATER

A TRAIN whips past, leaving:

Ellie holding the signal flag, still smiling.

PAUL

Hey!

Paul's truck has pulled up, filled with friends.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Get in!

Smiling people wave her over. Ellie deliberates.

INT. CARSON MCMANSION - NIGHT

A high school party in full swing.

Ellie trails Paul's crew, backpack squarely on shoulders.

ONE PERSON

The Chinese girl came!

RANDOM PARTY PEOPLE

CHINESE GIRL!

Red Solo Party cups are raised.

A GIRL FROM MATH CLASS runs up.

GIRL IN MATH CLASS

Ellie Chiu! I just wanted to say  
that we've had math together all  
four years, and I've always wanted  
to tell you that I like your nails.

ELLIE

Oh. (embarrassed) Yeah, I can't get  
the bike grease out.

GIRL FROM MATH CLASS

They look badass! Want to play  
Drinkers from Catan?

ELLIE

Sure?

GIRL FROM MATH CLASS

It's like Settlers but...

She pulls Ellie into the fray. Ellie looks back at Paul, who  
gives her a thumbs up.

LATER

Paul moves along the periphery, clearing stray cups and  
trash, as he keeps an eye on ELLIE LAUGHING WITH HER PEERS,  
having the time of her life.

ELLIE

I will trade you Wheat for Rye.

SENIOR GUY

Bourbon it is.

A senior guy hands Ellie a full cup. Paul intercepts.

PAUL  
Hey, thanks.

Ellie gives him a hard look.

ELLIE  
I want you to know (pause) that I  
can tell I have been drinking  
spirits (pause). Because I have to  
pee far more often than would be  
indicated by plain punch. So don't  
think I haven't been monitoring the  
situation.

Triumphant look.

PAUL  
Cool, cool. So how many cups have  
you monitored?

Ummmmmmmmmm...

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Time to get you home.

ELLIE  
Okay.

She throws up on him.

INT. PAUL'S BASEMENT ROOM - LATER.

A slightly disheveled basement repurposed as a boy's room.

We can hear Ellie and Paul's voices coming from behind the  
closed bathroom door.

ELLIE (O.S.)  
I'm so sorry.

PAUL (O.S.)  
It's okay.

ELLIE (O.S.)  
I think I'm done now.

PAUL (O.S.)  
Okay.

ELLIE (O.S.)  
No wait...

PAUL (O.S.)

Okay.

Beat.

ELLIE (O.S.)

I'm good.

PAUL (O.S.)

Okay.

Bathroom door opens.

Paul carries Ellie over his shoulder into the bedroom.

ELLIE

Are you taking me home now?

PAUL

Yeah.

ELLIE

Okay.

She passes out.

He lays her gently on the bed.

Sets her backpack against the bed... out spills SEVERAL SEALED LETTERS to various food critics around the state. Addressed in "his" writing.

Paul stares at the letters. Then at Ellie.

He settles in an armchair in the corner, awake.

Night falls.

INT. PAUL'S BASEMENT - MORNING

A ray of SUNSHINE lands on a sleeping Ellie. A muffled BUZZING from her backpack. She stirs.

On the bed stand, a full glass of water and two aspirin.

She reaches for them.

From upstairs:

COLLEEN MUNSKY (O.S.)

He's at practice, but you can leave it in his room.

ASTER (O.S.)  
It's just a silly thing I thought  
he'd like.

Ellie does a SPIT TAKE.

ON HER PHONE are FIVE UNREAD MESSAGES. The first: "Home early  
from Sacramento. Walk tomorrow?"

She falls out of bed in a frantic attempt to groom, clean,  
calm herself because ASTER FLORES IS ON HER WAY DOWN.

In her haste, she wakes Paul's laptop, which starts playing  
an episode of "The Family Guy."

ELLIE  
Ugh.

She can't get it to stop.

Above, a door opens. Colleen and Aster descend the stairs.

COLLEEN MUNSKY (O.S.)  
...we went as far as Sekiu once,  
but never made it all the way to  
California. You're quite the world  
traveler!

Colleen and Aster enter, just as Ellie manages to pause "The  
Family Guy."

COLLEEN MUNSKY (CONT'D)  
Oh, it's Paul's Chinese friend!  
Didn't hear you come in.

ELLIE  
Hi Mrs. Munsky. Just leaving some  
books...

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
Aster is about to leave something  
too-

A LOUD GRINDING FROM UPSTAIRS.

COLLEEN MUNSKY (CONT'D)  
Tommy! Hands off the grinder!

Colleen hustles back upstairs.

Aster smiles, a bit guarded.

ASTER  
Hi.

ELLIE

Hi.

ASTER

So you and Paul-

Paul's laptop wakes - a particularly inane moment from "The Family Guy" punctuates the silence.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Is that "*The Family Guy*?"

ELLIE

Yup. I was watching that.

ASTER

Are you two...?

ELLIE

Oh god no! No, no! He is totally one hundred percent into you!

ASTER

(surprised) You know about us?

Beat.

ELLIE

He wanted to do some extra reading, so I lent him some books.

ASTER

He's doing extra reading?

ELLIE

For you.

ASTER

That's... sweet.

ELLIE

It is.

The tension is broken.

ASTER

(confessing) On our first date, I kept talking about books... I think I almost drove him away. God, I can be such a nervous idiot.

What?



ELLIE  
You could never be an idiot. I mean  
Paul would never think that. He's  
way into you.

Aster takes this in, smiling.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
I should get back to the station.

She notices a SMALL CANVAS PRINT in Aster's hand.

ASTER  
(self-conscious) Just something  
silly I made on my trip.

Ellie reaches for it. It's reminiscent of the mural they  
made. But clearly the stirrings of Aster's own voice.

ELLIE  
I like this stroke off to the side.  
Lonely. And hopeful.

Aster looks at her own painting.

ASTER  
Yeah.

Ellie hands it back.

ELLIE  
He'll love it.

She starts to go. Aster looks up from her painting.

ASTER  
Can I come with?

To the station?

ASTER (CONT'D)  
I already lied to my dad about  
where I'd be. I have the day.

Off Ellie's uncertain expression...

ELLIE (O.S.)  
Yellow, then Green. Green!

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

CLOSE ON the side of a train slowing... then starting to  
speed up... then jerking to a stop.

Then finally pickup speed to WHIP BY, leaving... Aster on the platform, laughing, clearly having botched the signal flags.

ASTER  
You get to do this every day?

ELLIE  
Twice. 5:40am and 9:40PM weekdays.  
12:10PM and 7:20PM weekends. Give  
or take an hour.

ASTER  
That is AWESOME!

ELLIE  
(wry) It's a real blast.

ASTER  
It's so master-of-the-universe.

ELLIE  
A teeny-tiny universe.

ASTER  
At least you rule *something*.

Ellie takes the flags and ducks into the booth. Aster points at some ELECTRIC SIGNAL LIGHTS.

ASTER (CONT'D)  
What about those?

ELLIE  
My dad doesn't trust them.

Ellie finishes stowing the flags.

An awkward beat. What next?

ASTER  
Want to get out of here?

Ellie glances up at the apartment window.

Aster smiles, winningly.

CUE ROADTRIP MUSIC.

INT. ASTER'S FORD FIESTA - LATER

From a car window: "IT'S HAPPENING IN SQUAHAMISH!" whips by.

Aster cranks up the radio.

ELLIE  
Where we going?

ASTER  
My favorite secret place.

Ellie peers back out the window as Squahamish recedes in the distance. She closes her eyes. Feels the wind in her hair.

EXT. ABANDONED MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER

The Fiesta slows to a stop at the end of a dirt road.

It is lush and foggy and deserted.

Ellie gets out of the car.

ELLIE  
This is your favorite secret place?

ASTER  
Almost.

Aster pulls out a duffel bag and starts down the trail.

EXT. SECRET HOT SPRINGS - LATER

The two girls push through some brush... into A BILLOW OF STEAM rising from a HOT SPRINGS SWIMMING HOLE. It's pristine.

ELLIE  
Woah.

ASTER  
Right?

Aster strips down and dives in. Re-emerges, glistening.

Ellie looks anywhere but Aster.

ELLIE  
Are these deciduous trees?

ASTER  
(amused) I wouldn't know.

Aster turns to give her privacy.

ASTER (CONT'D)  
We didn't have trees like this in Sacramento.  
(MORE)

ASTER (CONT'D)  
Everything's reversed there. Things  
die off in summer, turn green in  
winter.

ELLIE  
Is that where you grew up?

ASTER  
Born there. Moved here. My life  
story.

She hears Ellie slip into the spring. Turns to find her still  
in a t-shirt. Glasses fogged. And...

ASTER (CONT'D)  
Is that long underwear?

ELLIE  
Yes.

Aster's mouth twitches. Then suddenly she hauls her body -  
naked - out of the spring.

ASTER  
I almost forgot.

Ellie averts her eyes wildly.

ASTER (CONT'D)  
There's no cell service here, so...

She digs a SMALL RADIO out of her duffel, switches it on.

A THROWBACK CLASSIC ROCK SONG pours out.

ASTER (CONT'D)  
It's like nothing can reach us  
here.

Nothing but Foghat. Ellie relaxes slightly into the water.

EXT. CHIU APARTMENT - SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - SAME TIME

Edwin looks out the window to see Paul peering up.

EDWIN  
Ellie not here.

PAUL  
I have something for you.

Paul lifts up a sack of fresh pork. And Chinese spices.

Edwin lowers the spray hose.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - LATER

Edwin shows Paul how to season the meat with five-spice powder. They work silently and companionably.

EXT. SECRET HOT SPRINGS - SAME TIME

Ellie on the side, watching Aster do a slow backstroke.

ASTER  
Catholic school was the worst.

ELLIE  
The nuns?

ASTER  
The girls. Like Lord of the Flies  
but with Lisa Frank.

ELLIE  
Ah. Miss Piggy's head on a stick.

ASTER  
(smiles) The "beast" reimagined as  
a sparkly unicorn.

ELLIE  
Instead of a naval officer, Taylor  
Swift's yacht saves the day.

Aster laughs, slows to tread water. Takes Ellie in.

ASTER  
I don't think I've hung out with  
another girl and not talked about  
boys before.

ELLIE  
Oh. Sorry.

ASTER  
Don't be. It's nice.

Aster seems thoughtful.

ELLIE  
(blurts out) Paul's cool.

Beat. Then Aster shifts gears too.

ASTER

He's... confusing. When I'm with him, I feel... safe. He's a... sweet guy. Then he writes these things that feel... not safe.

ELLIE

Not safe.

ASTER

They just make me wonder...

She trails off, a million unspoken thoughts.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I should marry Trev.

ELLIE

Oh.

ASTER

Should I?

Ellie doesn't have an answer.

ASTER (CONT'D)

(sighs) God doesn't know either, if it's any consolation. Or He's not telling.

ELLIE

I don't believe in God.

ASTER

That must be so nice.

ELLIE

No. It's not. It's... lonely.

It's the most real thing she's ever said.

ASTER

Yeah.

She lets it sink in.

ASTER (CONT'D)

I wish I knew what I believed. I overheard Trev once talking to my dad about our future wedding - he hasn't even asked me yet - he's just so *sure*. And maybe that's love? I've been asking God to give me a sign.

(MORE)

ASTER (CONT'D)  
If this is what love is, I'll  
accept it and be grateful. But if  
it's supposed to be something  
bigger, something more... And then  
Paul's letter appeared in my  
locker. And I've never felt so...  
understood.

She glances at Ellie, embarrassed.

ASTER (CONT'D)  
Silly, right?

ELLIE  
No. It's not silly.

A moment of real connection.

ASTER  
You know what *is* silly?

Aster wades slowly toward Ellie... removes her glasses...  
Then PANTSES her. They tussle. Shrieking. Laughing.

LATER

Heads together in the center of the hole, floating, staring  
into the sky. Ellie more relaxed than we've ever seen her.

ELLIE  
Gravity is matter's response to  
loneliness.

ASTER  
Who said that?

ELLIE  
...I don't know.

ASTER  
Well then you said it.

Is this true? They float.

FROM THE RADIO: "If You Leave Me Now" by Chicago.

ELLIE  
(exhaling) My mom loved this song.

They listen.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
She said every song, movie, story  
has a best part.

Beat.

ASTER  
Was that the best part?

ELLIE  
Do you think it's the best part?

Aster bites her lip. Listens more intently.

ASTER  
Was that it?

ELLIE  
You asking or saying?

Suddenly the swell of the bridge:

CHICAGO (FROM RADIO)  
"A love like ours is love that's  
hard to find. How could we let it  
slip away?"

ASTER  
That's it.

ELLIE  
Yeah.

It is.

CHICAGO (FROM RADIO)  
"...when tomorrow comes and we both  
regret/the things we said today. If  
you leave me now..."

They listen, floating.

The last bars of the song fade out.

Both stare into the sky, smiling.

The last light is slipping away. But this moment is perfect.

INT. ASTER'S FORD FIESTA - NIGHT

It's dark as Aster's car wends its way back to Squahamish.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - LATER

Ellie gets out of the car and starts toward the station.



ASTER

Hey!

She turns back.

ASTER (CONT'D)

Hope you find something good to  
believe in.

They share a smile. Aster drives off.

Ellie casts a nervous glance up at the apartment.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie peeks in.

Edwin, in his lounge, eating a sausage, watches a movie.

Everything seems weirdly fine.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)

*Paul made a braised pork sausage.  
Pretty tasty. Yours is in the  
microwave.*

Ellie pulls a covered plate out of the microwave.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN) (CONT'D)

*He asked you to call him later.*

Ellie shuts her bedroom door behind her.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - LATER

Ellie lies on her bed, a dreamy smile on her face. She  
notices the moon out her window.

EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Close on a garbage can lid going on tight.

Paul wipes his hands on his apron.

ASTER

Hey.

Aster has been watching him.

PAUL

Oh. Hey!

ASTER  
Do you believe in God?

PAUL  
(confused) Of course.

ASTER  
Yeah.

PAUL  
I got your painting. It was pretty.

Beat.

ASTER  
Thanks.

Suddenly, Aster kisses him... as if to feel something. Paul, startled, kisses back.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

From her high vantage point, Ellie sees them kiss. Draws the blinds. No longer dreamy.

She sinks into her desk. Pulls a stack of papers toward her.

A Grinnell application falls open.

The cat jumps onto her lap.

ELLIE  
How are you not dead?

She looks at the application. Sighs.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Not like I'll send it in. But...

She cracks it open and starts filling it out.

EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Aster and Paul finish their kiss. It wasn't bad but... both seem a little confused.

PAUL  
Big game this week. Training.

ASTER

Good luck! I'll see you after it's over.

PAUL

Have a good week!

Paul watches Aster leave.

Looks over at the train depot.

The back door flings open.

TOMMY MUNSKY

Hey Paulie! You marrying the garbage out there?

With a last glance at Ellie's window, he heads in.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - EARLY MORNING

Shots of the town, waking. Superimposed over the images, the following messages:

"star\*flower: Good luck at the game tonight!"

"smithcorona: Thx!"

On a different part of the screen:

"Ellie: Good luck. That was from Aster"

"Paul: You'll be there tonite, right?"

"Ellie: Can't wait to see buncha guys in a pile sniffing each other's butts"

And with that we cut to...

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - EVENING

A bunch of guys in a pile sniffing each other's butts.

From the BENCH, Paul scans the crowd. Locates Ellie far up. Waves.

Aster - seated closer - waves back.

ANNOUNCER

In the closest Big Game we've seen in years, the Squahamish Moose down by 5! But it's looking grim.

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)  
Fourth down, their own twenty yard  
line, less than a minute on the  
clock.

Paul turns to the Coach.

PAUL  
Put me in.

COACH  
We're going for the field goal.

PAUL  
I can do this.

Coach looks at him.

MOMENTS LATER FROM THE STANDS

Ellie watches Paul run onto the field. She worries her  
zipper, more invested than she expected.

BACK ON THE FIELD

The Quarterback takes the snap... is about to get sacked...  
throws the ball wildly. It lands in one player's hands,  
slips... into an opposing player's hands, slips... into  
PAUL'S HANDS. Players dive from all sides, but he breaks free  
and starts running... and running... and running...

... until he makes it into the endzone.

TOUCHDOWN.

CROWD GOES WILD.

ANNOUNCER  
A 24 YEAR LOSING STREAK SNAPPED!  
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? WHAT NEXT, SUN  
IN JUNE?

Paul looks into the stands. Everyone is cheering. Even Ellie.

He breaks into a wide grin.

LATER INSIDE THE STADIUM

Paul pushes past fans, searching for Ellie.

AT ANOTHER PART OF THE STADIUM

Aster searches for Paul.

BACK TO PAUL

Paul stops a random student.

PAUL  
Have you seen Ellie?

RANDOM STUDENT  
Who?

PAUL  
Never mind.

*Where could she be?* And suddenly, he knows.

EXT. BASEMENT OF STADIUM - MOMENTS LATER

A bottle of YAKULT falls from a VENDING MACHINE.

PAUL (O.S.)  
Hey.

Ellie turns, her arms full of Yakult.

ELLIE  
All hail the pride of Squahamish!

PAUL  
Thanks! You didn't have to get me a Yakult.

ELLIE  
Oh did you want one of these too?  
Just kidding! Of course you can  
have one. One.

PAUL  
I don't want a Yakult.

ELLIE  
Even better.

PAUL  
I need to talk to you--

ELLIE  
I don't have a hand free. Could--?

Paul sighs, opens one of the Yakults. Then "feeds" Ellie.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
So good.

PAUL  
HEY.

ELLIE

What?

She has a Yakult mustache. Paul struggles to find the words. Then takes her by the shoulders... and LAYS ONE ON HER.

Ellie's eyes bug out. Yakults topple to the floor.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

PAUL

YOU DON'T WANT ME TO KISS YOU?

ELLIE

NO!

A lone Yakult rolls to a stop.

PAUL

(crushed) Is there someone else?

A gasp at the door: ASTER STANDS THERE, mouth agape.

ELLIE

Aster! This... not what it looks like!

But she's gone.

Paul stares at the stricken look on Ellie's face. Light bulb.

PAUL

No...

ELLIE

Paul...

PAUL

You...

He starts to back away.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You... You're a...

He wants to pound the wall. He can't look at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(quietly) You're... going to hell.

He leaves.

Leaving Ellie, standing in a pile of crumpled Yakult.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - LATER

Ellie slows to a stop. This night could not get worse.

TREVOR (O.S.)  
I'm onto you, Ellie Chiu.

Or maybe it can. Trevor pulls out of the shadows.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
I know why you're always hanging  
around. Popping up everywhere.

She's so tired. It's time to confess.

ELLIE  
It was just supposed to be--

TREVOR  
You're in love with me.

Record scratch. Then, sighing:

ELLIE  
Yes, Trevor. I'm in love with you.

TREVOR  
I get it.

He leans in to kiss her... and gets SMACKED in the face with  
a STREAM OF WATER.

Edwin, at the apartment window, armed with a hose.

EDWIN  
*Get out! Get out!*

TREVOR  
This is cashmere fleece!

He hops into his fancy black truck and tears off.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - LATER

Ellie enters the apartment, passes her father, goes into her  
room and shuts the door.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - NIGHT

The lights go out on this murky night. It starts to rain.

ON BLACK:

"Hell *is* other people. - Sartre"

Cue "Long dark night of the soul" MONTAGE:

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - EARLY MORNING

Ellie bikes through the rain.

Truck approaches... then passes, leaving her alone.

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - ASSEMBLY HALL - MORNING

An assembly to honor the football team. Folks clap Paul on the back. He looks miserable.

INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - LUNCHROOM - NOON

Aster picks at her lunch while the Quaddie table cheers Trev on as he manages to drink a Dr. Pepper without his hands. She looks miserable.

INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

A concerned Mrs. G watches Ellie pass by, also miserable.

INT. MUNSKY KITCHEN - EVENING

Paul at a computer as his brothers spar in the background.

He types "homo" into a browser. Clicks on a link "How do you know if you are gay?"

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
Paulie! Garbage duty.

PAUL  
Got it, Ma.

He shuts down the computer, heads out.

The screen pops back on. His mom's eyebrows shoot up.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - EVENING

Edwin and Ellie in their usual La-Z-Boys eating dinner.

Laughter erupts from a CLASSIC COMEDY on screen.



Edwin shoots a worried glance at his silent daughter.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH - DAY

Angle on Aster in the confession booth.

ASTER (O.S.)

Bless me father for I have sinned.  
It's been 34 days since my last  
confession. I... had feelings for  
someone who wasn't my boyfriend.  
And I didn't tell you. Or my  
boyfriend. Or even God. I just kept  
it for myself. I was selfish. Maybe  
love is... selfish. It's like  
having this secret that's stashed  
in you, until one day someone else  
has that same secret, and suddenly  
this thing you didn't even know you  
held feels full and amazing and  
real... But it turns out it's a lie.  
And you're left lonelier than ever.  
I know now that what I was feeling  
wasn't love, or the right kind of  
love. It was... I don't know what it  
was. But I believed in it. And I  
know not to believe in it anymore.  
And I'll do whatever Hail Mary's  
you deem fit. But whatever  
punishment you give me, it can't be  
worse than this feeling. Because  
even now... he's still the only  
person I want to talk to. And it's  
like he doesn't even really exist.

Aster slips out of the booth.

Pull out to reveal ELLIE, on the other side, heartbroken.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - EVENING

A train whips by.

Leaving a soaked Ellie, alone, on the platform.

End Montage.

ON BLACK:

NEW SLIDE:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not  
boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, etc,  
etc. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-8"

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - MORNING

Out of a patch of weeds, the first crocus.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - MORNING

SLAM. 30 POUNDS OF GROUND PORK land on the kitchen counter.

Paul wipes his hands on his apron, over an ill-fitting suit.

PAUL

See you next month, Mr. Chiu.

He starts to leave.

EDWIN

Paul?

PAUL

Sir?

Edwin hesitates.

EDWIN

Did you and Ellie... break up?

PAUL

We weren't... together.

EDWIN

She just seems so sad.

Paul doesn't know what to say, starts to leave. Then turns back, knowing exactly what he wants to say.

PAUL

You don't see her.

EDWIN

See... what?

PAUL

HER. What she *is*. What she could be. You don't... UGH.

Paul slumps against the wall.

Edwin is quiet.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)

*When Ellie's Ma died, I lost my mind. I didn't move for days.*

(MORE)

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN) (CONT'D)  
*When I finally "woke", I found  
 Ellie in the booth, doing the  
 switch. She looked up at me. Just  
 13. So serious. And I... smiled.  
 After that, she took over. And I  
 let her.*

He smiles now, remembering.

EDWIN (CONT'D)  
*It was a good way to know where she  
 was every morning. Every night.*

He looks at Paul, eyes soft. Now in English:

EDWIN (CONT'D)  
 Have you ever love someone so much,  
 you don't want anything about her  
 to change?

Off Paul's face absorbing this thought.

Sound of EASTER MASS BEING SUNG...

INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

Close on a LIT PASCHAL CANDLE.

Angle on the CONGREGATION singing.

Angle on FATHER SHANLEY, heavily guided by DEACON FLORES,  
 presiding over the mass.

Angle on Ellie playing the piano.

Easter Sunday Mass finishes without a hitch.

Deacon Flores exhales.

And then as if awakening:

FATHER SHANLEY  
 "OUTSIDE ARE THE DOGS AND THE  
 SORCERERS AND THE--"

Deacon Flores wrestles him back.

DEACON FLORES  
 And to close our Easter services, a  
 few readings from the  
 congregation...

IN THE CONGREGATION

Paul slides onto a pew next to his mother.

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
You're late.

PAUL  
Had to grind something.

She eyes him suspiciously.

FROM THE PIANO

Ellie peers out and locates Paul... then a somber Aster.

FROM THE PULPIT

DEACON FLORES  
Our final reading today is from  
Trevor Carson.

Trevor stands in the audience, clears his throat.

TREVOR  
"Love is patient, love is kind. It  
does not envy, it does not boast,  
it is not proud..." Which is why I  
am in love with this little lady.

He gestures to a startled Aster sitting one row over.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
And why she'll make me a fantastic  
wife. Aster, will you?

Wave of approval ripples through the crowd.

Aster, frozen, gives the barest of nods.

The congregation bursts into applause.

ELLIE  
NO!

Gasps.

Ellie is suddenly aware that she's STANDING.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
I just... uh... I uh.

So many eyes on her.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
I just wanted to say, uh... love  
isn't...

Aster is staring at her, eyes narrowed.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
...isn't uh...

DEACON FLORES  
*Thank you, Ellie. Everyone, let's-*

PAUL  
Love isn't pretending.

ANGLE ON PAUL STANDING.

Another collective gasp. *What is going on?*

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I know because *I've* been  
pretending. Only for a few weeks.  
But it SUCKS.

ELLIE  
Paul-

PAUL  
*And I've been thinking* about how  
much it would suck to have to  
pretend to be - *not you* - your  
whole life.

He's careful not to look at Ellie. But he's speaking to her.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I always thought there was one way  
to love. One right way. But there's  
more. So many more than I knew. And  
I never want to be the guy who  
stops loving someone... for loving  
the way they want to love.

His voice has never been stronger. Ellie's eyes are full.

DEACON FLORES  
*Thank you, Paul, that was... odd.*  
Now let's give Trev our-

ELLIE  
I also have been pretending.

Again, gasps. This is getting exciting. The Deacon slumps.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
I've been uh, pretending-

TREVOR  
I think I know where this is going.  
Ellie, I'm flattered. But you and I-

ELLIE  
You know, Trev, I have been writing  
your papers for the last four  
years.

Startled gasps. More than a few guilty faces.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
And if you'll forgive me, I'm just  
gonna rewrite you one last time.  
Love isn't patient and kind and  
humble. Love is *messy* and *horrible*  
and *selfish* and...

She can feel Aster's confused gaze.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Bold.

A flicker of recognition on Aster's face.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
It's not finding your perfect half.  
It's the trying and reaching and  
*failing* - it's the effort you put  
in (nod to Paul) - when there's no  
guarantee of success. Love is being  
willing to ruin your good painting  
for a chance at a great one.

Ellie looks directly at Aster.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Is this really the boldest stroke  
you can make?

Silence.

ASTER  
You.

ELLIE  
Yeah.

Every breath is held as Aster walks slowly toward ELLIE. She  
stops in front of PAUL. Eyes still on Ellie - she SLAPS Paul.

As Aster leaves, the congregation breaks into MAYHEM.

ANGLE ON DEACON FLORES AND FATHER SHANLEY

DEACON FLORES  
Everyone please take your seats!

FATHER SHANLEY  
"OUTSIDE ARE THE DOGS AND..."

ANGLE ON TREVOR

TREVOR  
Wait. I'm the *good* painting?

ANGLE ON PAUL AND HIS MOTHER

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
Mommy wants you to know in case you  
are gay... Mommy still loves you.

PAUL  
I'm not gay, Ma.

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
Thank god!

She hugs her son hard.

PAUL  
I might want to change our sausage  
recipe, though.

COLLEEN MUNSKY  
Are you insane?!

She WHACKS him with her handbag.

ANGLE ON MRS. G SURVEYING THE CHAOS HAPPILY

MRS G  
Now *that's* some divine  
intervention.

ANGLE ON ELLIE AT THE DOOR

She catches Paul's eye. The two friends share a nod.

DIRECT HIT from his mom's handbag.

PAUL  
Ow!

Ellie slips out, grinning.

INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHIU APARTMENT - LATER

Ellie enters the apartment.

Bags of freshly folded dumplings sit on the counter. Edwin has been hard at work.

She rinses her hands and joins her father.

ELLIE

*This is a lot of dumplings.*

EDWIN

*It's six days. 18 meals. To Iowa.*

Ellie stares at her dad, astonished.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

*We didn't come to this country so  
you could be like me. We came here  
so you could be like your mother.*

Ellie flushes. A lovely beat as father and daughter fold dumplings, neither looking at the other.

ELLIE

*You don't mean "dead", right?*

EDWIN

*God, I hope not.*

The cat wakes up and stretches.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT

Outside, it's grey and rainy. And beautiful.

ON BLACK:

New slide: "Love is messy and horrible and selfish... and bold. - Ellie Chiu"

EXT. VIOLA'S - A FEW MONTHS LATER

A sunny late August day.

A GROUP OF GRADUATES in cap and gown burst out of Viola's.

As they clear out, a shift of WAITSTAFF exit, laughing. Aster is the last out. She stops when she sees...

ELLIE, leaning against her bike, waiting.



Aster hesitates, waves her friends on.

She starts to walk. Ellie falls in next to her.

ELLIE  
You haven't been to choir practice.

ASTER  
I've been busy.

ELLIE  
Yeah?

ASTER  
(beat) You need four portfolio pieces for art school, so...

ELLIE  
Art school? That's great!

ASTER  
Nothing's *great* yet, but we'll see.  
What's going on with you?

ELLIE  
Well, I'm headed east to Grinnell.  
They took me late acceptance, so--

ASTER  
Good for you, Ellie. Take care.

She starts to cross the street.

ELLIE  
Aster. (beat) I'm sorry.

Aster slows to a stop, still not turning.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
It was just supposed to be one letter. But then writing you turned out to be the closest I've ever come to being... heard. (beat) I never meant to hurt you.

A flicker of pain crosses Aster's face. Then:

ASTER  
Sometimes I wish... "you" existed.

ELLIE  
I know. I'm sorry.

A Bronx cheer arises from a distant sports bar. Then silence.

ASTER  
 Deep down I probably knew the  
 truth. (beat) I mean you really  
 didn't put enough emojis in his  
 texts...

Beat.

ELLIE  
 I *don't* know what they mean!

ASTER  
 Like a puppy or a sausage-

ELLIE  
*Really.* I should have sent you a  
 SAUSAGE EMOJI?

ASTER  
 (beat) Fair point.

Truce. They smile at each other. Then, looking away:

ASTER (CONT'D)  
 For what it's worth, it's not like  
 it *never* crossed my mind if things  
 were different. Or I was different.

Beat.

ELLIE  
 You could never be different.

Aster looks back sharply.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
 (lightly mocking) "Am I *sure* I'm  
 different? How do I *know* I'm *sure*?"

ASTER  
 I can be *sure*!

ELLIE  
 "I mean, *what does God think...*?"

ASTER  
 Oh my god-!

ELLIE  
 Just on and on and-

ASTER  
 You watch: in a couple years, I'M  
 GONNA BE SO SURE.

ELLIE  
GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

They smile at each other. Ellie mounts her bike.

ASTER  
Find something good in Iowa to  
believe in, heathen.

Just a flicker of something unspoken.

Ellie starts to ride off... then *to hell with it*. She drops her bike, strides back toward Aster... and KISSES HER.

Aster is startled. But starts to kiss back.

Ellie breaks the kiss.

ELLIE  
See you in a couple years.

She gets on her bike and rides off.

Aster watches her go, breathless. Starts laughing.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - SAME TIME

Ellie flies down a stretch of road on her bike, grinning, free. She lets out a WHOOP.

Behind her, the town fades into the distance.

ON BLACK:  
New slide: "[emojis of pineapple, owl, caterpillar with glasses] - various sources"

Sound of a TRAIN WHISTLE.

INT. TRAIN - LOCOMOTIVE CAB

An astonished ENGINEER over headset:

ENGINEER  
We're stopping... in *Squahamish*?

The train slows into the station with a LOUD EXHALE.

EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - MORNING

Close on a LARGE RUCKSACK being lifted onto Ellie's back.

Paul hands her a COOLER stuffed with frozen dumplings.

From the Token Booth, Edwin waves, then quickly looks away.

PAUL  
I'll keep him busy tasting new  
ketchups.

ELLIE  
Nice writeup in the Town Crier.

PAUL  
Right? Munsky Sausages is gonna  
blow up! Might get to Iowa before  
you do...

ELLIE  
Better get going then.

They smile at each other.

It's time to board.

ELLIE (CONT'D)  
Here.

She types something, presses send on her phone.

DING. Paul looks down at his.

PAUL  
That caterpillar does look smart.

ELLIE  
Too smart to be standing on a  
platform, crying, like some wussy.

PAUL  
I'm not crying!

ELLIE  
(mouthing) Wussy... Wussy...

She's on the train.

Paul swallows.

INT. TRAIN - PASSENGER CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie sinks into a seat next to the window.

Turns to look at Paul. She mouths one last "wussy."

As the train starts up, a flash of trepidation crosses her face. Paul sees it.

And starts to JOG ALONGSIDE THE TRAIN.

ELLIE

Oh no... don't... no...!

The train gathers speed... and so does Paul, grinning like a maniac.

And now Ellie is laughing. Hard.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

(under her breath) You moron.

The train pulls away, Paul running after it... a DISAPPEARING SPECK Ellie watches until it is gone.

When she turns back, there are tears in her eyes.

The ELDERLY LADY across the aisle smiles.

ELDERLY LADY

How sweet! Is that your boyfriend?

ELLIE

No...

Then simply:

ELLIE (CONT'D)

He's my friend.

Like it's the best thing in the world.

She knows it. We know it. And as the train hurtles onward...

Somewhere, someone is listening to "If You Leave Me Now."

FADE OUT.

THE END.