

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 GEELSCHAP, 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. SOUAHAMIISH 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.

I'll call tomorrow. ELLIE

Father and daughter take synchronized bites of pie.

EXT. SOUAHAMISH 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 you're 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 you're 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 Munskey. (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)	EDWIN (CONT'D)
<i>Longing for a wave of love that would stir in me. That's what makes me clumsy.</i>	<i>Longing for a wave of love that would stir in me. That's what makes me clumsy.</i>

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'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 Munsky?

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 lounger. 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. Munsky!

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 get 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?

Ummmmmmmm...

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 lounger, 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? Munsy 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.