

The Letter Man

by

Banafsheh Esmailzadeh

604-992-4595
banaesma@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - MORNING

The sun shines through the weeping willows. It feels, looks, sounds like summer. Kids talk and laugh in the background.

SUMMER (V.O.)

Dearest Summer, congratulations on your admission to Verdant Grove. I always knew you could do it. You're my hard-working, intelligent girl, and you are sure to get far in life.

The titular VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL's facade stands tall, a brick building with the odd spire piercing the blue sky.

SUMMER (V.O.)

To celebrate, I'm giving you your favourite scent: Bluebell by Azura Hills. Wear it proudly, let it announce you to your new friends.

STUDENTS make their way through the grounds wearing mostly-green uniforms, horsing around while they still can.

SUMMER (V.O.)

As always, I'm only a letter away if you need me. Yours sincerely...

Title card: The Letter Man

SUMMER LANE, 17, clad in the uniform, holds the letter to her heart, eyes closed. Across her cheeks, a field of pink.

SUMMER

Feels like yesterday...

She takes out the bottle of BLUEBELL BY AZURA HILLS and spritzes it on her neck and wrists.

The bell rings.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Summer sits at her table, soon joined by HANEUL LEE, 17. Their teacher MR FLORES (late 30s, deep tan, wavy hair), coffee in hand, shuts the door behind him.

MR FLORES

All right, all right, settle down. Mrs Diaz is on mat leave, so I'm filling in.

He writes his name on the whiteboard, the students all perplexed by how he flicks his wrist, bracelets jingling.

MR FLORES

Mister Flores. Now, let's start with roll call. Imtiaz Jalandhari?

IMTIAZ (17, Indian), raises his hand.

IMTIAZ

Here.

Mr Flores continues calling roll and Summer spaces out until Haneul nudges her.

MR FLORES

No Summer Lane? That's a pity.

SUMMER

No, I'm here.

MR FLORES

I might be new here, but that doesn't mean you can't pay attention. I was in school once, too, y'know.

He continues calling roll. Summer peeks at the letter from inside her bag, and Haneul notices, brows furrowed.

MR FLORES

Haneul Lee?

HANEUL

Present.

MR FLORES

Suzette Loemba?

SUZETTE (17, Congolese) raises her hand and quickly turns her attention back to her notebook.

MR FLORES

Chiara Lombardo?

CHIARA (17, deep-tan-dirty-blonde), pauses her aggressive texting on her flip-phone.

CHIARA

Here.

Haneul does his best to sneak a peek at Summer's letter, and every time she nearly catches him, he plays it cool.

MR FLORES

Sharon Lundquist?

SHARON (17, bespectacled and mousy), raises her hand.

SHARON

Present.

MR FLORES

Mark Maldonado?

(no response)

Mark Maldonado?

Mark (17, pretty boy preferably known as VALERIO) sighs and flicks his hair, showing off his nail polish.

VALERIO

Call me Valerio.

CHIARA

What is it with you picking the most embarrassing names ever?

VALERIO

I can't help if you don't understand my taste.

CHIARA

Ew!

Haneul snickers alongside the rest of the class barring Summer, who rolls her eyes; "so immature." He clears his throat as Mr Flores taps his pointer stick.

MR FLORES

Settle down, settle down. We're gonna get to know each other pretty well this year. Now then, you're all in grade 12, so if you haven't gotten serious by now...

Haneul once again sneaks a peek at Summer's letter and profile, and sees the air mail pattern of the paper and the fine penmanship.

HANEUL

"My dearest Summer, congratulations on winning first place at the science fair..."

Summer hurriedly stuffs the letter back into her bag.

HANEUL

Why would you write this to yourself?

SUMMER

"Write it to myself?" I thought you were better than other high schoolers, Haneul.

HANEUL

You mean someone actually sent that to you?

Summer rolls her eyes and turns her attention to Mr Flores. Haneul, meanwhile, ascertains how to stealthily retrieve the letter only for Mr Flores to clear his throat right behind him.

MR FLORES

Please refrain from giving into
your hormones during class, Mr
Haneul Lee.

As the class laughs at him, Summer smacks him with her book,
and completely misses that another enveloped letter
literally falls into Haneul's lap. He, in turn, hurriedly
stuffs it into his own bag.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - NOON

Different students are out enjoying the sunshine, while
Haneul is at a bench in a mostly secluded spot. He looks
around furtively before opening the letter.

HANEUL

(reading)

"My dearest Summer, please don't
worry yourself about the upcoming
assembly. You are sure to make
everyone proud. Always remember
that you got to where you are
thanks to your efforts. I've sent
you a box of your favourite
strawberry chocolates to help you
calm your nerves. Yours until the
end of time..."

He frowns as he turns the letter over. There's no name
given.

HANEUL

Who the hell wrote this?

SHARON

What're you doing?

She takes a seat beside him on the bench as he hides the
letter.

HANEUL

Nothing.

SHARON

We gotta decide our graduation
projects, y'know. Even get started.

HANEUL

It's just the first day!

SHARON

The sooner we start, the better.
This year's only gonna get busier.

Summer walks over, harried.

SUMMER

Hey, you guys wouldn't happen to have seen a letter addressed to me, would you?

Sharon shakes her head and Haneul does as well, a bit quickly.

SUMMER

Crap... I really needed to read it today.

SHARON

Oh yeah, you got that meeting with Mrs Dr Thompson today, right?

HANEUL

I don't get it. Everyone knows you're gonna be class rep again.

SHARON

She's up for Head Girl, Haneul.

SUMMER

It should've been you, though. You're way more cut out for it.

SHARON

Don't even worry about it.

But worry about it, Summer does. Haneul, meanwhile, feels the weight of the letter in his pocket.

SUMMER

I guess I'd better go. Let me know if you see it, okay? And don't open it, whatever you do.

SHARON

We won't.

Summer rushes off, Haneul watching her back as she gradually gets lost in the horizon.

He snaps out of it when Sharon nudges him.

SHARON

Let's go to the library. We really gotta decide soon.

Haneul's stomach groans but Sharon isn't having it. She lugs him up by the arm and drags him to the library.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

MRS DR THOMPSON (50s, schoolmarm complete with pince-nez glasses and bun), sits ramrod straight, imposing over Summer and Suzette seated opposite her. Summer trembles whilst Suzette is stock still.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Misses Lane and Loemba. You've both
managed a steady 4.0 GPA with
perfect attendance last year.

She closes their folders.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Both of you would be a fine choice
for Head Girl, representing Verdant
Grove in the District Showcase
competition alongside the Head Boy.

She hands both of them a pamphlet about the competition.

MRS DR THOMPSON
You have until next Friday to
prepare your presentations for why
you should be crowned Head Girl.
Any questions?
(before Suzette can
speak)
Very good. You are dismissed.

The girls get up and scurry out.

ADMIN OFFICE

Both of them release a sigh they were holding as Suzette
shuts the door. All along the walls are flyers about
tutoring and the upcoming competition.

SUZETTE
What are you doing for your
presentation?

SUMMER
I don't even know... Let's figure
it out together. Wanna go to the
library?

Suzette hesitates.

SUMMER
C'mon, let's go. Pretty sure there
isn't a rule against helping each
other.

She saunters along, and Suzette scuttles after her.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL DORM YARD - EVENING

The school day has long wound down, and Haneul stands before
the Girls' Dormitory, an impressive heritage-style brick
building with white trim. He holds the letter in his hand.

He looks furtively around for any onlookers before skulking
around the premises for the entrance.

He hears something--or someone--not far off. It's Chiara smoking with her friends from other classes.

Haneul stalks off as best he can out of sight and happens upon a back door and goes inside.

INT. GIRLS' DORMITORY - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

He checks for more girls and ducks away when one passes. Summer's room is number 104.

At the foot of the door is another letter addressed to Summer.

HANEUL

What a creep!

He looks around again and swaps the letters out, making a break for it. Chiara notices for just a moment but goes back to smoking.

INT. HANEUL'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Haneul's room is sparsely decorated and his bed is on the left side. Valerio is asleep and snoring in the other bed, complete with bonnet and face mask. Haneul reads the letter by his cellphone light.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"My dearest Summer, don't be nervous about the meeting with Mrs Dr Thompson. You will become Head Girl and make everyone proud, and I will have a special gift for you for that day. I will support you every step of the way, until the end of time."

He physically wants to vomit at the letter, or even crumple it up.

His phone rings and he hurriedly answers it. Valerio keeps snoring.

HANEUL

Hello?

SHARON (O.S.)

Are you up?

HANEUL

Duh! What d'you want?

SHARON (O.S.)

I think Summer's seeing some guy.

HANEUL

Okay?

SHARON (O.S.)
She just snuck out. She's gonna get caught and lose out on Head Girl.

HANEUL
Okay, so?

SHARON (O.S.)
We gotta find her and bring her back.

HANEUL
Why me? Go by yourself.

SHARON (O.S.)
What if it's a weird guy? We can't be alone! We need you to protect us!

Haneul looks outside and sees Sharon's silhouette hiding in the bushes.

HANEUL
Are you outside?

SHARON (O.S.)
Hurry!

Haneul gives the letter a dirty look and gets out of bed.

EXT. BOYS' DORMITORY - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Haneul stalks out of the dorm and hides beside Sharon. The NIGHT WATCHMAN'S flashlight would've caught him were it not for his agility.

SHARON
C'mon, she must've gone towards the forest.

HANEUL
How'd you figure that?

SHARON
I looked everywhere else already.
C'mon!

Before he can argue, Sharon stalks forth, the night watchman's back turned.

They stay out of the lights' soft illumination and don't dare breathe too loud. Finally, they reach the forest and sure enough Summer is there, looking up at the moon.

SHARON
Summer!

SUMMER
Hey, you guys!

SHARON
What're you doing?

SUMMER
I couldn't sleep, so I went for a walk.

HANEUL
So you're not seeing a guy?

SUMMER
No way, especially not a high school guy.

Somehow that stings Haneul just a little bit; he touches his pyjama top pocket where he'd hastily stuffed the letter and he takes it out.

HANEUL
Then what's this, Summer?

Even in the darkness, Summer's face is whiter than the moon. She reaches over for the letter.

SUMMER
How'd you get this?

HANEUL
Doesn't matter. What is this? Who's it from?

Summer hesitates, Sharon keeps checking for the night watchman.

SUMMER
You're gonna laugh.

SHARON
We gotta go back.

SUMMER
It's from someone really special.

HANEUL
Who?

SUMMER
I don't know.

HANEUL
Then how's he special?

SUMMER
You wouldn't understand, all right?
It's none of your business anyway.

She marches off.

SUMMER

Good night.

Sharon chases after her while Haneul stands there, dumbfounded before making his way back to the dorm.

EXT. RUNNING TRACK - DAY

Another day, Summer and Haneul's class are all running laps outside in their gym uniforms, white tops and green shorts or pants bearing the school crest.

COACH BRUMLEY (40s, footballer physique) blows his whistle.

COACH BRUMLEY

Look alive, people! Let's see some hustle! Move it!

The kids try to run faster but the ones in the back straggle, Summer among them. Haneul hangs back and lets the faster kids pass him by.

SUMMER

I can't believe you took the letters.

HANEUL

I can't believe you're getting them when you don't even know who they're from!

This makes Summer run a little bit faster, and Haneul catches up.

HANEUL

Especially since this guy seems to know everything you're doing.

SUMMER

You wouldn't get it, okay? So get off my case.

HANEUL

No!

He halts, and Summer bumps into him. Coach Brumley blows his whistle again.

HANEUL

How many letters have you gotten from him?

Summer looks away and continues running. Haneul chases after her, and to his surprise, she's gotten faster and faster, eventually reaching the front of the line.

Chiara joins him.

CHIARA
Lovers' spat?

HANEUL
Yeah, right. She doesn't like high schoolers.

CHIARA
Of course not. You're like a worm to her.

HANEUL
Gee, thanks.

CHIARA
A damn shame, too, with how hot you are.

HANEUL
Huh?

CHIARA
A damn shame.

Even she outpaces him, and he halts in confusion until a particularly loud whistle blare spurs him forward.

INT. SUMMER'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Summer lays on her bed in her pyjamas, on the right side of the room. The bed on the other side remains undisturbed.

Another airmail envelope rests on her nightstand, and alongside it a small velvet box where two earrings would be.

SUMMER (V.O.)
"Dear Summer, congratulations on your perfect score in your pop quizzes. There was never a doubt in my mind that you would do well. But I understand that you're still anxious about your candidacy for Head Girl. You mustn't waver; you have it in you to do it and so much more. I will be watching with keen interest and cheering for you every step of the way. Please enjoy these earrings as congratulations for your efforts. Yours for all eternity..."

She hugs the letter, and the earrings are in her ears; rather fetching diamond studs that any girl would want to show off.

The moment is ruined by a series of knocks on the dorm room door.

SUMMER

Just a second!

Summer hurriedly takes off the earrings and puts them and the letter in her desk drawer. She opens the door and it's Sharon.

SHARON

Was I interrupting something?

SUMMER

Not really, what's up? Study group time?

SHARON

Yeah, I thought we could get a head start today. Haneul got us a table.

Summer's face darkens at the mention of Haneul's name but nonetheless she swallows it.

SUMMER

Sounds good. Just let me get my books.

She turns, casting a quick glance Sharon's way. She picks up her binder, pencil case and textbooks and before she knows it, Sharon's closed the door behind her.

SHARON

But before we go, let's talk.

SUMMER

If it's about the letters--

SHARON

We're just worried about you, is all.

SUMMER

What's there to worry about? Nothing's ever gonna happen.

SHARON

You don't know that, though. The other person might not think so.

SUMMER

A guy I can have is way more dangerous. You don't think I know what perverted fantasies all the guys who like me have?

She opens the door.

SUMMER

In any case, let's go study, like you said.

Sharon reluctantly follows after her as she closes the door behind her this time.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - NOON

Sharon points a stick of Pocky at Haneul's face.

SHARON

You gotta run for Head Boy.

HANEUL

What? Why?

SHARON

Because! The best way to convince Summer is to be better than the letter guy. You said he's all fake nice and whatever, right?

HANEUL

But Head Boy? That just sounds...

SHARON

The only other guy who's likely is Imtiaz and I'm sorry, but nobody cares about him. If you do it and completely reinvent yourself, you'll win against him forever.

HANEUL

Aren't you forgetting the part where my grades aren't high enough?

SHARON

That's why I'm gonna help you. We gotta play the long game, Haneul. Summer's pretty dense about this sorta stuff.

HANEUL

You got a point there...

SHARON

Besides.

She actually gives him a stick of Pocky this time.

SHARON

You don't wanna be just another high school guy, right?

Haneul hesitates, and Sharon pushes the Pocky stick closer to him. He takes it.

SHARON

I mean, you're a really good-looking guy to start with, you've just got that typical high
(MORE)

SHARON (cont'd)
schooler lack of ambition. Maybe
this can even be our graduation
project!

She gets a bit too excited about this.

SHARON
It's settled, then! The perfect
graduation project!

CHIARA
So loud.

She appears, nudging Haneul to the side so he's sandwiched
between the girls.

CHIARA
You already decided on your
graduation project?

HANEUL
I haven't, unless being a test
subject counts.

CHIARA
Ew, what're you gonna do?

SHARON
We're gonna make Haneul Head Boy.

CHIARA
Head Boy. As a grad project.

Haneul shifts in his seat.

CHIARA
Sounds interesting, count me in.

HANEUL
Just like that?!

CHIARA
Why not? It's for science.

HANEUL
Geez, way to have faith in me.

Valerio appears in the background, surrounded by a gaggle of
girls fawning over him. He spots them.

VALERIO
(to the girls)
I'll see you guys later.
(heading towards Haneul)
What're you guys doing here?

HANEUL

Discussing the grad project, but I guess I'll spare everyone and say you're a part of it now, too.

VALERIO

Sweet! I hate these things!

CHIARA

How like you.

VALERIO

Hey, I know you're just happy to see me.

CHIARA

Whatever.

He takes his seat beside Chiara, and it's a miracle everyone fits on the bench.

VALERIO

So? What're we doing?

CHIARA

Playing Fairy Godmother to Haneul's Cinderella.

VALERIO

A play! Good stuff, with me we're gonna knock 'em dead!

CHIARA

You're so noisy! Get off of me!

VALERIO

I call the star role!

CHIARA

You can't be the star, dumbass. That's Haneul's part.

VALERIO

If I stand out more than him, that's not my fault.

SHARON

Very good, very good. We'll discuss everything at dinner tonight.

The bell rings.

INT. CAFETERIA - EVENING

Haneul sits with the new group at one table, all the while eyeing Summer sitting with Suzette. He's barely even touched his food.

VALERIO
Whaaaaat? That's what we're doing?

SHARON
Yeah. We're gonna each help Haneul
become Head Boy.

VALERIO
Aren't there easier ways to get
into Summer's pants?

Chiara smacks him upside the head.

SHARON
Unfortunately, no...

Haneul notices how she's at the edge of her seat, and
motions for the new members to lean closer.

HANEUL
It's a long story, but think of it
as a covert operation.

VALERIO
So like... Spies?

SHARON
Yeah, exactly. And the first part
of the plan is this.

Chiara and Valerio nod.

SUMMER'S TABLE

Meanwhile, Summer notices them huddled closer and seems to
want to join them until she remembers why she isn't.

SUZETTE
You don't have to sit with me, you
know. Everyone was staring earlier.

SUMMER
No, I want to. Us potential Head
Girls've gotta stick together,
right?

SUZETTE
Aren't we rivals?

SUMMER
Well, sure, but that doesn't mean
we can't hang out, even be friends.

Suzette shrugs and continues eating. Summer fiddles in her
seat.

SUMMER
In fact...

She nearly pulls out the latest letter.

SUMMER

There's something I've been dying
to tell you, and I think somehow
you'd understand.

She looks furtively around and motions for Suzette to lean
closer.

SUMMER

I think I'm in love.

SUZETTE

You are? With whom?

SUMMER

Well, the truth is, I don't know
who he is. But that's why it's so
exciting, you know? He can be
anyone.

SUZETTE

Anyone?

Her gaze lands on Haneul for the briefest of seconds.

SUMMER

Haven't you ever just, y'know, felt
the stirrings of love in your heart
just because? And you didn't know
who it was for?

Suzette once again tries not to make it obvious she's
looking at Haneul.

SUZETTE

Well sure, something like a bouquet
of roses in my chest.

SUMMER

See? You do understand!

Meanwhile, Imtiaz looks for a table and lingers just before
theirs, and Summer notices.

SUMMER

Hey, you're the presumptive
candidate for Head Boy, right? Why
don't you join our little club?

IMTIAZ

Are you sure?

SUMMER

Of course! Sit down!

He does, though a whole person apart from Suzette. He won't
meet anyone's eyes.

SUMMER

To think... We are gonna shoulder
the whole reputation of the school
in a few weeks...

This prospect doesn't appeal to any of them, though only
Summer is trying to conceal this.

SUMMER

Of course, I love that it'll pretty
much make you a shoo-in for a top
university. Have you guys thought
about where you'd go?

She keeps cheerfully chatting her two new friends up until
Haneul appears and Suzette nearly chokes on her food.

SUMMER

What is it?

HANEUL

Can I talk to you for a sec?

Summer checks with her new friends for signs that she should
stay, but neither of them look up from their trays. She gets
up and follows Haneul out of sight.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - EVENING

They stand outside, by the wall.

HANEUL

Look, Summer, I guess I should
apologise for before.

SUMMER

Well?

HANEUL

I'm sorry for stealing the letter
and lying about it.

Summer, arms crossed, nonetheless looks at his face.

SUMMER

Would've been better if you knew
better from the start, but you are
just a high schooler, so I guess I
forgive you.

Unbeknownst to both of them, Suzette watches from a nearby
window.

SUMMER

So is that all?

HANEUL

Kinda. Well, no. I was wondering if I could borrow your notes for French. I can't understand half of what Mme Beauchemin says.

SUMMER

Why can't you borrow Sharon's?

HANEUL

I wanna borrow yours.

SUMMER

Well, sorry, but I need them more. Pay more attention instead of spacing out.

Before he can argue, she leaves him. He's about to re-enter when Suzette comes out.

SUZETTE

(in French)

I can help you.

HANEUL

Huh?

SUZETTE

I said, I can help you.

HANEUL

But you're not in my class.

SUZETTE

French is my first language.

HANEUL

That's okay.

He bows just a little bit, raises his hands to assure no disrespect, and leaves her.

INT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL CONCOURSE - DAY

Valerio offers flyers to all the students passing in for the day.

VALERIO

Post-midterms All Hallow's Eve party! Come hang out and eat candy and watch movies in the auditorium! And ladies, if you want, you can stay a bit longer with me...

Summer shakes her head as she walks past him. She goes to her locker, where inside a new letter awaits.

SUMMER (V.O.)

"Dearest Summer, I know you are anxious about the preliminaries. Just remember that your appointment only shows that you are someone everyone can look up to and depend on. They are simply catching up to what I have already know to be true. You are prettiest when you smile and are your real self. Don't be afraid to let that shine. I will have another present for your eventual, assured success. Yours sincerely..."

This time, though, she doesn't hug the letter. This might be because Haneul is right beside her.

HANEUL

He's putting letters in your locker now?

SUMMER

How rude! Snooping around me like that!

HANEUL

Summer, seriously. What're you doing?

SUMMER

What am I doing? I'm just trying to get through this year, like everyone else.

HANEUL

Give me that letter.

He reaches for it, Summer resists.

HANEUL

Give it!

SUMMER

No, let go!

HANEUL

No, you!

Of course the letter gets ripped in the process. Summer yanks his half and stuffs it into her locker and stomps off. The bell rings and Mr Flores stops nearby.

MR FLORES

Much as I love morning drama, we both got work to do. Come along.

HANEUL

Yes, sir.

They make their way into the classroom.

INT. CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Haneul makes his way to his desk and sees that Summer isn't seated at their table but rather with Suzette. He avoids both of their eyes, though Summer naturally avoids his.

MR FLORES

All right, settle down, take your seats. I'm gonna give you back your quiz results, some of you are gonna be fine for midterms...

Haneul sits, and before he knows it, Sharon's beside him.

SHARON

You did it again.

HANEUL

I can't help it, okay? Being all secretive isn't really my thing.

SHARON

I suppose that's true, but maybe we need to let him get a bit further ahead to really get him, y'know?

HANEUL

No, I don't know.

MR FLORES

Mister Lee.

He plants an actual DUNCE CAP on Haneul's head and personally hands him his quiz paper. Even Sharon's shocked.

SHARON

Oh, my God! How is it even possible to get that mark?

MR FLORES

I will let you do a makeup quiz. Please, please make this the last time you wear this hat.

Several students laugh. The PA turns on.

MRS DR THOMPSON (O.S.)

Attention, students and faculty, will a Haneul Lee come to the office, please? Haneul Lee.

The students laugh again and Haneul gets up.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Haneul sits beside Imtiaz opposite Mrs Dr Thompson, all of their shoulders rather stiff.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Well, Mr Lee. I must say, it's a rather unexpected development.

HANEUL
Ma'am?

MRS DR THOMPSON
I already thought Miss Lundquist's proposal to use you as her test subject for the position was amusing, but it seems even Mr Jalandhari agrees. He's forfeited his position so you would be considered instead.

Haneul looks at Imtiaz, who keeps his head straight.

MRS DR THOMPSON
I know you and Miss Lane are longtime friends, perhaps it would be best to have you by her side. That being said, would you excuse us, Mr Jalandhari?

IMTIAZ
Yes, ma'am.

He's only too happy to leave.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Your grades are ruinous, Mr Lee.

HANEUL
Yes, ma'am.

MRS DR THOMPSON
If you were doing your graduation project alone, it would be one thing, but it would be inexcusable for you to bring Miss Lundquist or Lombardo or even Mr Maldonado down with you.

HANEUL
Yes, ma'am.

MRS DR THOMPSON
From today on, I will personally tutor you twice a week in the evening. If you are to be Head Boy, you have much to learn.

HANEUL
Thank you, ma'am.

MRS DR THOMPSON
It's a good thing, then, that
you're not enrolled in any
extracurriculars. This means you
will have double the homework to
make up for all your ommitted
scores.

HANEUL
Double?!

He slouches in his seat but nonetheless composes himself,
even bowing low.

HANEUL
Yes, ma'am. I'll do my best.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Wonderful! Then we shall begin this
evening. You're dismissed.

He's also only too happy to leave, but he's much more
languid, already feeling the sleep he's not gonna get.

INT. AUDITORIUM - AFTERNOON

Summer stands on the stage, papers in hand. She takes a deep
breath and begins.

SUMMER
Ladies and gentlemen, my name is
Summer Ilse Lane and I'm a
candidate for Head Girl. I hope to
study at The University of
Margate's English Lit department
with a minor in--ah, no. Sorry.

Suzette pinches the bridge of her nose in the audience. It's
just the two of them there.

SUMMER
Come on, you go this time.

SUZETTE
No, it has to be you. I don't want
everyone's eyes all over me like
insects, even if they're not here.

SUMMER
Ew, now I really can't do the
speech.

SUZETTE
Why don't we just take a break, eh?
We've been doing this for two whole
hours and I'm losing my mind.

SUMMER
Break. Yeah, good idea.

She jumps down from the stage and sits beside Suzette.

SUZETTE

I always thought Head Girl was earned through good grades and conduct. Why are we being treated like politicians who have to win votes?

SUMMER

That's Verdant Grove trying to modernise, I guess.

SUZETTE

I do not like this attempt at democracy.

Summer bites her tongue before she agrees. Suzette checks her watch.

SUZETTE

(in French)

Oh my God, it's so late! And I spent it all with you!

(in English)

I better go. See you tomorrow.

SUMMER

See ya, I guess.

Suzette leaves her, and Summer sighs. She takes out the ripped letter from her breast pocket.

SUMMER

(more to herself)

My assured success... And for what? Representing the school at some event that no one outside of this microcosm gives any kind of a damn about?

She actually crumples up the letter.

SUMMER

Even you're turning on me, aren't you?

She grips one edge of the letter and though she does nick it just a little bit, she stops as if realising it's her own heart she's trying to rip up.

SUMMER

No, of course not. It doesn't matter as long as you believe in me.

(chuckling)

God, I've gotta stop sounding like such a high schooler.

She tries to smooth this ripped letter back out as best she can, but of course it's not happening. She decides to accept this as a lesson.

INT. AUDITORIUM - MORNING

The next day, Mrs Dr Thompson stands at the podium with the different candidates for Head Girl and Head Boy behind her.

To our left are Suzette and Summer.

To our right are Haneul and IAN (15, pre-growth spurt).

All the students whisper to one another, Sharon grabs Chiara and Valerio's hands in excitement. Mrs Dr Thompson claps thrice.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Silence!

The stop almost all at once.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Thank you. We will now begin the preliminaries for the Head Boy and Head Girl elections. Your votes as the student body will be counted towards your representatives for the District Fair.

Suzette and Summer both grab each other's hand to still their nerves whilst Haneul tries not to nod off, and Ian, meanwhile, remains stock still.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Let us start off with Miss Suzette Loemba.

She leads the applause as Suzette rises to her feet and nearly stumbles to the podium.

SUZETTE

Mbote--excusez-moi--I mean, good morning, esteemed colleagues and educators. Je m'appelle--excuse me, my name is Suzette Loemba and I would like to be considered your representative for Head Girl. If elected, I promise to exemplify the values of this hallowed school. Thank you.

The way she darts back to her chair rivals the applause she gets. She covers her face as Summer pats her on the back.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Thank you, Miss Loemba. Next is Miss Summer Lane.

She gets a huge applause, which makes her hide the dread of the expectations no doubt contained within. Nonetheless she keeps her shoulders straight as she approaches the podium.

SUMMER

Hello, everyone. I'm Summer Ilse Lane, from Mr Flores's class. Some of you know me from my tenure as student council rep last year, or as the occasional after school tutor. If elected, I also promise to make Verdant Grove shine in the District Fair, and represent each and every one of you, not just the ones I've had the pleasure to already know. Thank you.

She gets another big round of applause and her heart may as well burst out of her chest as she sits down.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Now, on to our candidates for Head Boy. Please welcome Mr Ian Dougherty.

He gets a modest applause. He can barely even reach the microphone so Mrs Dr Thompson adjusts it for him.

IAN

Hello. I'm Ian Dougherty. I've only been in Verdant Grove for one whole year; last year I was in grade 9. I believe I'm the best candidate because I represent the future of this school, and I've amassed both academic and work habits honour rolls.

His brother in the crowd, the rather hulking COREY (18), cheers, piercing the silence, and for just a moment Ian grins.

IAN

If you vote for me, I will continue to be a beacon of inspiration for everyone and promise to work hard to show the world how special our school is. Thank you.

He gets a better round of applause this time, even if most of it is the girls gushing about how adorable he is. He takes his seat and remains stock still, determined to not show any cracks.

MRS DR THOMPSON

Thank you, Mr Dougherty. Now our next candidate would have been Mr Imtiaz Jalandhari but he has
(MORE)

MRS DR THOMPSON (cont'd)
 requested to withdraw and pass the
 baton to Mr Haneul Lee. Please
 welcome him.

Haneul's applause is loudest from Sharon and company, and he pretends not to notice the scowl Ian and Summer give him nor the hurried look-away from Suzette as he approaches the podium.

HANEUL
 Hi, guys. I'm Haneul. To be honest
 with you, compared to everyone
 else, I'm kind of not even really
 supposed to be here because I'm
 pretty bad at studying.

Some of the crowd laughs.

HANEUL
 All the same, with your support, I
 hope to do the best I can to
 represent what Verdant Grove truly
 stands for; bringing out the best
 in everyone. I hope to show that
 we're not the best because of
 God-given talent, but because we
 worked for it. That anyone can
 become something great.

SHARON
 (to Chiara and Valerio)
 He's doing it! Thank God for all
 the drills!

VALERIO
 (whispering)
 Good job, Sharon.

Chiara rolls her eyes at how much Sharon beams.

HANEUL
 If I get selected, in reality, we
 all get selected. Thank you very
 much.

He gets by far the biggest applause as faculty members MME BEAUCHEMIN (40s, absolute femme fatale build), MR WILTON (50s, portly), MR MELQUIADES (40s, stern-type), and MR CAMERON (60s, like if sunshine was a person) accept ballots from the students in rows.

MRS DR THOMPSON
 Now then, please rejoin your
 classmates for the rest of the
 assembly.

The candidates make their ways back to their seats. Summer nudges Haneul.

SUMMER

You didn't tell me you were running.

HANEUL

I guess there's a lot you don't know about me.

Haneul then finds the only empty spot next to Imtiaz.

IMTIAZ

You did great, way better than I could.

HANEUL

Nah, it's only because I had my friends help me.

IMTIAZ

For what it's worth, I voted for you.

HANEUL

Thanks, man.

Imtiaz nods, and the assembly continues.

EXT. RUNNING TRACK - DAY

Haneul, dark circles under his eyes, goes for a run around the track in his gym uniform, one of the only ones doing so. He has his headphones on, and already sweating through his shirt. He stops when Sharon waves him over.

SHARON

C'mon, time to do math.

He catches his breath, hands on his knees, before joining her, Chiara, and Valerio at an outdoor table.

SHARON

Do these exercises, they're likely to be on the midterm.

She hands him a sizeable stack of problems that is guaranteed overkill. Nonetheless Haneul gets to work, however tentatively.

In the field just a ways off, the RUGBY TEAM, among them Corey, practices drills.

CHIARA

Do they seriously need two whole weeks to count ballots?

SHARON

It's better than resting on our laurels. C'mon, you gotta do yours, too.

Chiara rolls her eyes and nonetheless gets to work on hers, but not without looking over Valerio's answers.

VALERIO

Ugh, none of this makes sense! Are you sure this isn't just you living out some torture fantasy, Sharon?

SHARON

It's what you get for slacking off all the time.

VALERIO

It's karma?! Hope there's a reward in it for me. Like a kiss, at least.

CHIARA

Gross.

Haneul faceplants on his sheet.

VALERIO

Uh, did Haneul just die?

Haneul responds with a deep snore.

CHIARA

Yo, wake up.

She shakes him, to no avail.

SHARON

The endorphin boost won't work, eh...

CHIARA

What do you expect when he has to do triple the homework?

SHARON

It shouldn't take this much out of him, though...

VALERIO

Honey, if you're not gonna reward him with something, he ain't gonna do nothing, okay?

CHIARA

Maybe you got a point.

She whispers something in Haneul's ears and suddenly he's wide awake, even blushing.

HANEUL

Are you serious? You're down for that?

CHIARA
Only if you don't crash.

It takes a little bit of brain buffering, but Haneul is back to his assignment.

SHARON
What did you tell him?

CHIARA
It's not for innocent ears.

VALERIO
Well, then, you gotta tell me.

CHIARA
Hell no. It's all for Haneul.

VALERIO
Tch, of course. The old "it's all for Haneul."

SHARON
(to Haneul)
Good! Good! No, don't use that formula, use this one.

She finds it in the textbook and Haneul nods as he erases what he wrote.

INT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL CONCOURSE - DAY

Another school morning, Valerio is once again passing out flyers to all the kids passing by.

VALERIO
Come to the post-midterm All
Hallow's Eve party! We have a
haunted house and door prize! The
winner gets to go on a date with
Haneul or I to the dance!

A group of girls pass by and giggle as they take a flyer. Suzette even takes one, covertly, as she walks by Summer.

SUMMER
You're going to the party?

SUZETTE
Why not? Maybe I can get closer to him.

SUMMER
You like Valerio? That's kinda unexpected.

Suzette shoots her an exasperated look, and Summer tilts her head.

SUMMER

What? I think it's nice. Valerio's
at least honest.

Suzette goes into her classroom.

SUMMER

High school girls, man...

She enters the classroom next door.

INT. FRENCH CLASSROOM - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Summer takes her seat at the front, one of the first there as Mme Beauchemin writes out the lesson title "L'HOMME EST CONDAMNÉ À ÊTRE LIBRE. - JEAN-PAUL SARTRE" in chalk on the black board.

Summer catches more than a few students checking her out as they take their seats and shakes her head at them as the bell rings.

MME BEAUCHEMIN

Bonjour, classe! Aujourd'hui, nous
explorons cette phrase. Répétez
après moi; "L'homme..."

Summer, meanwhile, steals a glance at Haneul and how bad his dark circles are even in his profile. He's too far away for her nudge him so she scribbles something on a piece of paper and whispers for their mutual neighbour to pass it to him.

Haneul seems to wake up when he sees the strange paper at his desk. He opens it. It reads: "You look terrible!"

Summer waits for his response; he doesn't write one. He's simply trying to survive French class.

MME BEAUCHEMIN

(in French)

This is what most of you aren't
prepared for about adulthood. The
sheer amount of possibilities
before you is more than you can
fathom.

Naturally no one can even pretend to understand this, so she smiles tightly before continuing her lecture.

Summer writes Haneul another note. It reads: "What's with you? What are you doing?"

Naturally he doesn't respond to this when he gets it. Summer's about to write another note.

MME BEAUCHEMIN

Mademoiselle Lane?

SUMMER
(sitting stock still)
Oui, madame.

MME BEAUCHEMIN
(in French)
What possibilities do you hope to
chase when you graduate?

Summer notices the faces all turned her way, though none of them are Haneul's. She searches every available inch of her brain for an answer.

SUMMER
(in French)
I'm sorry, Madame, I don't know.

Summer feels her soul chill with the look Mme Beauchemin gives her over her glasses. Somehow everyone looking away from her now also stings.

Nonetheless she writes in her binder: "possibilities."

All she can populate the paper with is a field of question marks.

INT. HALLWAY - MIDDAY

Haneul has to actually walk with his shoulder against the walls and lockers with how drained he's looking. Summer catches up after him.

SUMMER
Haneul... Are you all right? I
think you'd better go to the
infirmary.

HANEUL
Nah... Can't go to sleep now. Have
to get all my credits.

She looks at him like he sprouted another head.

SUMMER
Yeah, you need to go the infirmary.

She grabs his arm but isn't strong enough to lug him forward. He laughs.

SUMMER
What?

HANEUL
Are you sure I'm the one who needs
to go there?

SUMMER
Don't be ridiculous. C'mon.

She tries again to lug him forward, to no avail. He even breaks off her grip and continues walking.

SUMMER

Haneul!

But he limps away, and Summer looks like he's taken her heart with him. The bell rings, and she has no choice but to go to her next class.

INT. GYMNASIUM - SHORTLY AFTER

Coach Brumley stands in the middle of the gym as everyone sets to work with warmups, and Haneul is the last to join them from the changeroom. Coach Brumley blows his whistle which only wakes him up a little bit.

COACH BRUMLEY

Lee! What's the meaning of this?

HANEUL

Sir?

COACH BRUMLEY

Ten laps around the gym. Get to it!

He blows his whistle again and Haneul starts his jog. Before long, though, he's slowed to a halt, conveniently before a blue mat, thick as a mattress. He falls onto it and sleep follows.

Sharon runs over to him.

SHARON

Haneul! Haneul, wake up!

She shakes him, but he's completely out. She touches his forehead.

SHARON

No fever...

Coach Brumley comes to them.

COACH BRUMLEY

Honestly...

He shakes Haneul hard, and this actually wakes him up.

COACH BRUMLEY

Meet me tomorrow morning for your makeup laps.

HANEUL

Thank you, sir.

He gets on his feet and Sharon escorts him out. Summer watches them leave together.

INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Haneul stops at his locker as everyone else files out of their classes for the day. When he opens it, inside are textbooks and a jacket and an ENVELOPED LETTER.

He pinches himself before grabbing it.

He looks furtively around before opening it. It's written in beautiful penmanship, on fancy stationery.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"Dear Haneul, I would like to extend a friendly challenge to you. Should you accept, you will be a man among men. Should you refuse, you may lose something precious to you."

Suffice to say, this wakes him all the way up.

EXT. GIRLS' DORMITORY - NIGHT

He and Sharon are hiding from the night watchman at the side of the Girls' Dormitory, huddled in their jackets. Sharon uses her cellphone's light to read the letter.

SHARON

You think he's onto us?

HANEUL

What a scary guy.

SHARON

When did you get this?

HANEUL

I dunno. I pretty much never use my locker.

SHARON

Haneul!

HANEUL

I'm sorry, it's just that I've been really busy with all the studying.

SHARON

Dammit... Well, you gotta accept.

HANEUL

I know.

Sharon looks up at him in the meagre light, and before he knows it, she's hugging him.

HANEUL

Sharon?

She hugs him tighter in response. He pats her on the back.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Haneul, freshly showered after his morning run, opens his locker. Inside is another enveloped letter in different beautiful stationery.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"Dear Haneul, I'm glad to see that you are better this morning and have decided to accept my proposal. I know you will be a worthy opponent, especially considering what's at stake. Think carefully about your next steps. Yours sincerely..."

SUMMER

Feeling better?

He whips around and hides the letter like it's an illicit magazine. Summer tilts her head.

SUMMER

Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. Is everything all right?

He looks her up and down, the silence between them is full of words.

He closes his locker door and makes his way to class. Summer rushes after him.

SUMMER

It's like I don't even know you anymore!

He turns around, both of them halting.

HANEUL

Are you sure you can say that?

Even Chiara, who happens to be at her locker just by the classroom door, pauses to see the commotion. Haneul recounts the last full line of the letter, and continues on his way.

Summer herself goes to her locker and there's no letter waiting for her. She slams the door shut.

INT. SCIENCE CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Chiara is partnered with Haneul for a dissection. Both are wearing gloves and masks, even hairnets. All are being watched by Mr Wilton.

MR WILTON

Now you make the incision along the centre, don't press the scalpel too tightly, no one likes the organs ruptured.

Haneul, meanwhile, makes the incision, a little too hard at the end.

CHIARA

C'mon, let me do it.

She takes the scalpel and handles it with much more elegant precision. Several students groan at their discoveries.

MR WILTON

Now you can gently prod the intestines out of the way to see the reproductive system...

More than one student comments about how disgusting this is, meanwhile Chiara calmly swaps tools.

CHIARA

(to Haneul)

So what's going on with you guys? I thought things would've changed now that you're officially in the running.

HANEUL

It's kind of a long story.

CHIARA

Maybe we're gonna have to change our project plan, huh? Doesn't look like it's gonna work out.

HANEUL

Maybe. But it's seriously a long story.

CHIARA

What is?

Haneul realises too late what he's done. Chiara even looks up from her work.

CHIARA

What's a long story? Is there more to this plan after all?

Haneul laughs uneasily.

INT. CAFETERIA - EVENING

The group has convened at their usual table. The letters sit between them and their trays.

VALERIO

What the hell, why didn't you say so before? This is way more exciting than your stated plan!

SHARON

Covert mission, remember?

VALERIO

Right, right...

CHIARA

Why are you even in this group if you have no idea what's going on?

VALERIO

Haneul invited me, remember? I can't help it if I haven't been presented with the opportunity to be useful yet.

Chiara shoots Haneul a look that screams "of course it's your fault."

SHARON

Still, this shouldn't derail our stated plan. If anything, we're actually getting somewhere now.

VALERIO

Ooh! If he threatens you more, I can be your body double!

SHARON

Shhh, don't say that out loud! For all we know, he might be listening.

Haneul looks around at the other students in the cafeteria.

HANEUL

Maybe we should go somewhere else?

SHARON

No, that's too suspicious. We gotta act normal. Don't raise alarm bells. So from now on, let's keep doing what we've been doing, and keep our eyes peeled for anything and anyone suspicious.

Haneul's phone beeps.

HANEUL

I gotta go. Tutoring.

CHIARA

Have fun.

He shrugs as he grabs his backpack and tray.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The students, dressed in their warmer autumn uniforms, chatter away as Mr Flores closes the door.

MR FLORES

All right, everyone, I know you can hardly contain yourselves, so I'm gonna tell you the results of the vote.

Haneul sits up, putting away the packet of coffee jelly he was drinking.

MR FLORES

For Head Girl... Congratulations, Summer Lane.

Everyone cheers for her, and Suzette even hugs her shoulders.

MR FLORES

That makes Suzette runner up. Very good, ladies. Now, for Head Boy...

All of Haneul's group sit up, breath bated. Even Mr Flores waits.

MR FLORES

Right after this pop quiz.

Everyone groans.

MR FLORES

Come on, don't tell me you already forgot about midterms. The class average still needs to go up. Pass these along.

He gives them the papers and he writes the time on the blackboard.

MR FLORES

You have five minutes, starting now.

Everyone barring Summer, Haneul, Suzette, and Sharon struggle with their quizzes. Haneul is actually the first to finish.

Mr Flores nods as he takes his paper.

MR FLORES

You'll find out alongside everyone else. Sit down.

Haneul does. Little by little everyone wraps up, passing their sheets to the front.

Meanwhile, at his desk, Haneul reads the latest letter.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"Dear Haneul, congratulations on your midterm marks. I always knew you would be a worthy rival. However, even I'm concerned about your health. There's no honour in winning against someone who's not in tiptop shape. Until then, I'm declaring our challenge on pause. Please take care of yourself. Until we meet again..."

MR FLORES

All right, that's the last one. You're all finding this out now before literally everyone else, of course I couldn't let you know it for free.

The students all groan again.

MR FLORES

All right, all right. I'll get to it. This year's Head Boy...

Summer and Haneul both sit up straight, lying in wait.

MR FLORES

Is TBD.

The entire school can hear the disappointment of the class.

MR FLORES

Quiet, quiet! I'm not even supposed to be telling you this, you know.

Sharon raises her hand.

MR FLORES

Yes, Miss Lundquist.

SHARON

Why is it TBD?

MR FLORES

If I tell you, promise you won't make another fuss.

Everyone murmurs in protest.

MR FLORES

It's actually a tie. Perfectly down the middle, between Ian Dougherty and Haneul Lee. Normally Mr Dougherty would be too young to run, but there's no denying he's shown great promise.

Everyone murmurs in agreement. Suzette now raises her hand.

SUZETTE

So what happens now?

MR FLORES

That's up to Mrs Dr Thompson. In any case, that's enough on that. Let's get back to what you're actually here for.

Everyone settles down as he opens his book.

INT. HANEUL'S DORM ROOM - DUSK

Haneul sits at his desk doing his mountain of homework, several cans of Boom!ChocoLatte on the side. He looks up when he hears something being slipped under the door.

It's a folded letter, noticeably simpler than before.

HANEUL

"I'm rooting for you."

He opens the door and pokes his head out, and of course no one is there.

INT. SUMMER'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

Summer sits on her bed, surrounded by many different letters in airmail envelopes.

SUMMER

Why haven't you written to me... Is it because of him?

She holds the letter like it'll answer her if she stares at it hard enough. She sets it aside and looks out the window towards the Boys' Dormitory.

She touches her heart before shaking her head at herself.

INT. BELGRAVIA HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - MORNING

The day of the District Showcase, a rival school's auditorium is full of visitors from other rival schools. The Head Boys and Girls all wear their respective school uniforms, standing out among the adults in their suits.

Ian practically fights to escape the crowd of people taller than him. Haneul, about to open a can of Rocket Punch by the entrance, gives it to him instead.

HANEUL

Not a fan of crowds, eh?

Ian takes the can.

IAN

Thanks.

Haneul shrugs. He sees Summer getting more and more surrounded by the other Head Girls and Boys as different university representatives chat up anyone coming by for information.

IAN

It's no wonder she won.

HANEUL

Yeah. She's the smartest person I know.

Ian's face flashes scarlet for just a moment. This is not lost on Haneul. Right away, though, Ian is practically knocked over by someone. Haneul helps him up, and the offender is HEAD BOY 1, in a burgundy uniform.

HEAD BOY 1

Well, well. Ian Dougherty. I almost didn't see you.

IAN

You made it here? Your school really is F-tier.

Next thing they know, Ian's actually lifted up by the collar by Head Boy 1. They are soon joined by other Head Boys in other school colours, and Haneul is practically pushed out of the way. One of them even closes the auditorium door.

HEAD BOY 2

Not so big when your Grade 13 brother's not around, are you?

Ian yelps as a hit lands.

HEAD BOY 3

What's the matter? No more comebacks?

They beat him up some more and Haneul tries to wrench one off but gets knocked to the side.

HEAD BOY 4

Oh, you're that guy he tied with.

HEAD BOY 5

The hell're you even doing here?

Haneul gets a hard shove against the wall and finds himself surrounded as Ian gets a final blow before all attention falls on him.

HEAD BOY 6

I heard about you. The test subject.

HANEUL

Yeah, so what?

HEAD BOY 7

So you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nothing personal.

They all pause when they hear Summer scream.

But what really catches Haneul's attention is another Head Boy in a letterman jacket and navy blue trousers; the 17-year-old CRISTOFF dashing towards them.

CRISTOFF

What are you doing? Aren't you all supposed to be Head Boys?

Haneul lifts a battered and bruised Ian up, and Summer rushes to his side as well.

CRISTOFF

All of you, come with me at once.

Haneul opens the door and Cristoff and Summer herd the offending Head Boys into the auditorium, but Summer soon returns.

SUMMER

Are you okay, Ian?

Ian wipes his face; he totally didn't cry at some point.

IAN

Typical high school losers.

Summer and Haneul exchange a look, and Summer doesn't laugh along right away.

SUMMER

Of course. But come on, let's go and get you patched up.

HANEUL

But we don't know where the nurse's office is.

SUMMER

I do. Cristoff was just showing me around.

Haneul's brain buffers a bit before he helps escort Ian along.

HALLWAY - LATER

Haneul and Summer sit at the bench outside the nurse's office.

SUMMER

Do you think that could've been me?

HANEUL

What do you mean?

SUMMER

Ian just says the stuff I do all the time. Look what happened to him.

HANEUL

I don't think anyone would beat up a girl, though.

SUMMER

Wouldn't they? I probably would, if I were them.

Haneul shrugs, then winces.

SUMMER

They got you, too?

HANEUL

Ian got the worst of it.

SUMMER

Still, you got hurt, too.

(a beat)

But you were really brave.

She smiles softly, and Haneul's heart skips a beat. Before long Cristoff is back.

CRISTOFF

I'm sorry you had to deal with all that.

HANEUL

No, thanks for helping.

CRISTOFF

Terrible business, isn't it? When people act so low class.

HANEUL

At the end of the day, Head Boy is just a title, right?

CRISTOFF

Indubitably. By the way, I don't think I caught your name.

HANEUL

Haneul Lee.

CRISTOFF

Oh, so you're Haneul! Summer's told me a lot about you.

HANEUL

She has?

CRISTOFF

I've been meaning to drop by the school and meet all her friends, but I've been travelling pretty much every month. I literally had to petition my parents to let me at least come here by myself when I heard Summer was coming.

Something about that irks Haneul, or maybe it's the fact that he's studying Cristoff's letterman jacket like he knows it's significant.

SUMMER

Aw, c'mon, Cris, there's no reason to be all embarrassing about it?

CRISTOFF

What's embarrassing about crossing continents to meet your fiancée for her big moment?

The F word strikes Haneul right through the heart, and it doesn't help that Summer giggles.

HANEUL

Fiancée..?

He recoils from her, the colour rapidly draining from his face.

HANEUL

This whole time... You're engaged?

Before he knows it, he blacks out.

INT. INFIRMARY - EVENING

Back at Verdant Grove, Haneul lays in an infirmary bed with Sharon, Chiara, and Valerio surrounding him. The mood is somber as he nurses a juicebox.

SHARON

This is all my fault.

CHIARA

You couldn't've known.

SHARON

I should've! God...

She covers her face, like she's about to cry. Valerio hugs her.

SHARON

I mean... Summer and I grew apart, sure, but I still could've asked her before all this. I could've figured out a better group project at least...

VALERIO

Oh, man, that's right. We're gonna have to actually think about a new project, aren't we?

CHIARA

That's not important right now!

All of a sudden, Sharon gets up and stomps out of the room. Valerio grins sheepishly.

VALERIO

Oops.

Chiara groans and rushes after Sharon.

VALERIO

So uh... If you're staying here for the night... Is it all right if I--

HANEUL

Do whatever you want, but stay away from my bed.

VALERIO

Thanks, man!

He pats Haneul on the shoulder, which of course he forgot hurts. Without further ado, he also leaves Haneul alone.

INT. SUMMER'S DORM ROOM - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Summer has a whole big stack of airmail envelopes on her desk, enough to span a whole year. Two other keepsake boxes house more of them. She sighs, still holding the last letter she got.

She's so deep in thought that the banging on her door sounds like an air raid.

When she doesn't respond right away, the rapping sounds even worse.

SHARON (O.S.)

SUMMER ILSE LANE, OPEN THIS DOOR
RIGHT NOW!

She bangs on the door even more. Summer opens it mid knock and Sharon keeps rapping, this time on Summer.

SHARON
How could you do this?!

SUMMER
Ow! Sharon!

SHARON
How?!

SUMMER
Chiara!

But Chiara cracks her neck and even her own knuckles so Summer has no choice but to grab Sharon's wrists. She notices that Sharon's crying.

SHARON
This whole time... The letters were
from your fiancé... Weren't they?

Summer hesitates.

SHARON
Weren't they?!

Summer lets go of Sharon's wrists to be promptly met with a slap. Even Chiara's stunned.

SHARON
You BITCH!

Sharon's about to slap her again but this time Chiara stops her.

CHIARA
She's not worth it, Sharon.

For a moment Sharon wants to argue, but then...

SHARON
You're right. She stopped being
worth it a long time ago.

Chiara lets go of her, and Sharon runs off. Chiara notices the letters.

CHIARA
No wonder you talked so much shit
about high schoolers. How long have
you been laughing at us?

Before Summer can even pretend to answer, Chiara marches off as well. Summer has to slam her own door shut.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Mr Melquiades is in the middle of writing out a complicated formula on a sliding whiteboard when Haneul comes in late to class.

MR MELQUIADES
Ask Loemba for the notes you
missed. I'm not repeating myself.

Everyone groans but nonetheless he carries on the lesson.
Haneul takes the empty seat next to Suzette and he notices
Summer isn't in today.

Suzette gives him her notes as she continues writing new
ones.

HANEUL
Thanks.

Suzette simply nods. Haneul traces where they were and where
they are now in the notes as he tries to keep up.

HANEUL
(whispering)
Summer's sick?

SUZETTE
I don't know.

HANEUL
But you're with her all the time.

MR MELQUIADES
Would you rather stand in the
corner, Mr Lee, or are you finished
disrupting the class?

HANEUL
Sorry, sir.

MR MELQUIADES
As I was saying...

Haneul resumes attempting to follow along, and he's right
there with everyone protesting when Mr Melquiades grabs the
eraser.

MR MELQUIADES
We don't have time for repetitions,
you know. Try to pay better
attention, everyone.

The eraser cuts right through the wall of math curlicues
like they personally insulted it.

INT. ART CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Now, the students are all in paint-splattered smocks, some
with their hair in nets as Mr Cameron hands out party packs
of balloons for everyone. The wall is lined with several
large canvases.

MR CAMERON

Normally we'd do this outside, but as you know, winter is coming. Why not celebrate the end of midterms with some colour?

He takes his own balloon and puts it at the end of a pump bottle of red paint.

MR CAMERON

You don't want a lot of paint, a little bit will take you a long way. Just a pump will do.

He takes his balloon and brings it to the paint-covered sink.

MR CAMERON

Now you give it about three parts water. Don't fill it up all the way, we're not aiming for the floor. You wanna be able to tie it off, like so. And then you wanna shake it to make sure the paint is fully hydrated.

He shows off the paint-ball in all its jiggly glory.

MR CAMERON

And now, here is where if you're bad at pitching, you can practice. I'll go first.

He rotates his arm like he's a star pitcher, and he punts it to a canvas and it explodes in a splash of red.

MR CAMERON

Off we go!

The students, shoes covered with newspaper and masking tape, try to beat each other to the paint bottles. Haneul once again sees that Summer isn't here.

Chiara is the first to throw a paint-ball. Then it's Sharon, then Imtiaz, then Valerio. Haneul throws as best he can with a still-sore back, and he smiles genuinely at the beautiful chaos he's helping create.

INT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL CONCOURSE - DAY

Valerio once again hands out flyers to everyone passing by, this time joined by Chiara.

VALERIO

Santagrams! For a low-low price, send candy to your crush anonymously for Christmas! And if you don't have a crush, I'm always taking applications! Girls only!

Chiara nudges him.

CHIARA

How are you not ashamed of yourself?

VALERIO

What? I'm always a good choice!

She rolls her eyes and hands one to Suzette who happens to be passing by.

SUZETTE

What is a San-ta-gramme?

CHIARA

It's basically an anonymous gift you can send to someone. Doesn't have to be your crush. And especially doesn't have to be this guy.

VALERIO

You'd make a terrible businesswoman. What if she wants to send one to me?

CHIARA

She won't!

But Suzette is already gone.

VALERIO

See? You just lost her business by insulting her choice.

CHIARA

Whatever, hurry up.

Next thing she knows, Suzette is back, with money.

SUZETTE

So how does it work?

CHIARA

You write the recipient's name, class and block and pick the delivery day. Valerio and I will deliver it and you can decide if you want them to know if it's from you or not.

VALERIO

(calling out still)

Santagram! This is the perfect way to ask someone to Homecoming if you're shy, by the way! The next time you can do this is Valentine's Day!

SUZETTE

Hmmm... Yes, maybe that's better.

She leaves them, and now Chiara shoots Valerio a look, and he simply carries on.

VALERIO

Santagrams! Work your courage to ask your crush to Homecoming with the help of a Santagram! Make your wishes come true!

Chiara shakes her head as she hands out her own flyers.

INT. CAFETERIA - EVENING

By now everywhere has the odd festive decoration, especially the paint-balloon canvases everyone made in art class. Haneul and company are at their usual table, Sharon shuffles four strips of folded paper.

SHARON

Alright, everyone pick one, hopefully no one gets their own name again.

They all take one.

CHIARA

I didn't.

HANEUL

I didn't.

VALERIO

I did.

SHARON

Probability is really not in our favour, is it...

They put their papers back, Sharon repeats. They take it again.

SHARON

Now?

CHIARA

Yup.

HANEUL

Yup.

VALERIO

Uh-huh.

SHARON

Rats! We need more people in on this.

CHIARA

I hate to say it, but yeah, even Summer would make this work out better.

Sharon's face darkens at the mention of Summer's name, but of course even she can't deny it.

CHIARA

I mean, when you think about it, it's Christmas, right? I don't think we should keep being mad at her, even if she did lie about everything.

SHARON

I guess so...

VALERIO

Speak of the devil.

He whistles to call Summer's attention as she enters the cafeteria, looking quite sickly the closer she gets to them.

CHIARA

Little late for Halloween, there, aren't you?

SUMMER

I'm really sorry, you guys.

SHARON

Well, sit down. We need another person for Secret Santa.

SUMMER

Oh, you're doing Secret Santa? Are you sure you want me to do it, too?

SHARON

We're tired of getting our own names every time. We need at least one more person to round it out.

SUMMER

Oh, yeah, of course. In that case, is Suzette around? Can she join?

SHARON

I guess so, we don't really know her, though.

SUMMER

Well, you should. She doesn't really have any other friends, and it's sad. I'd love for her to meet you guys.

She spots Suzette looking for her and waves her over.

SUMMER

Oh, how about Ian? He's gonna be lonely when Corey leaves. Grade 13 and all.

CHIARA

The poor kid... Yeah, I don't see why not.

SUMMER

In fact... Now that I think about it, everyone in the running for Head Boy or Girl was kinda friendless. But it's your call, ultimately, Sharon. I understand if you'd rather not.

The corner of Sharon's mouth tugs as Suzette takes her seat beside Summer.

SUMMER

We were just saying that we need more people to get in on Secret Santa. Do you want to?

SUZETTE

Secret Santa... Sounds mysterious.

CHIARA

It's kinda like the Santagram, only it's within the group. Anonymous gifts, not just candy.

SUMMER

We hold a draw and pick a name, don't tell the person you're their Secret Santa until they get the gift.

Suzette glances quickly at Haneul and seems to blush.

SUZETTE

No, thank you. But also, thank you.

SUMMER

Aww, bummer. Guess I'll ask Ian if he's around.

VALERIO

Just saying, you can always send him a Santagram.

CHIARA

Nice sales pitch.

VALERIO

It's what I do.

SHARON

Okay, everyone, put your papers
back in the pile. We're resetting
the draw.

They all oblige, Summer writing her name and throwing it
into the "pot." Sharon shuffles them and everyone reaches
in, Summer and Haneul's hands touching. Summer is slower to
recoil.

HANEUL

You first.

She takes the one closer to Haneul. He has to take the
other.

SHARON

Anyone got their own name?

CHIARA

No.

VALERIO

No.

HANEUL

No.

SUMMER

Nope.

SHARON

Alright, then it's settled. You
have one week to get your person a
gift.

Everyone barring Haneul and Suzette smile politely at how
awkward this whole thing ended up being.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

During History class with MR STAVROS (50s, watermelon seller
physique), everyone's following him writing notes on the
overhead projector. He looks up when there's a knock on the
door.

MR STAVROS

One moment, please.

It's Valerio and Chiara carrying a basket of BAGGED CANDY
with name tags.

VALERIO

It's Santagram time! We have
bundles of love for these lucky
people: Yulia Shevchenko, from
Boris Kazakov; Breanna Davies, from
all your friends; Charlotte Rhys,
(MORE)

VALERIO (cont'd)
from your secret admirer,
ooh-la-la... And get this, one for
our very own Haneul Lee!

The class claps as the recipients line up to get their Santagrams from Chiara. When it's Haneul's turn, Chiara motions for him to come closer.

CHIARA
(whispers)
It's from me.

Before he can respond, she pushes him back from whence he came.

CHIARA
Thanks, everyone! Maybe we'll see
you again real soon!

With that, they're gone. Haneul meanwhile, looks at the candy bag he got before raising his hand.

HANEUL
May I go to the washroom, please,
sir?

MR STAVROS
Close the door on your way out.

Haneul nods and does just that.

INT. HALLWAY - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

He looks around for Valerio and Chiara, still holding his bag of candy. He spots her coming out of the girls' washroom and runs over.

HANEUL
Chiara!

CHIARA
Hey.

HANEUL
Thanks for this, but... Why?

She exhales through her nose, smiling just a bit.

CHIARA
You really didn't get what I told
you that time in gym class, eh?

HANEUL
What did you say in gym class?

CHIARA
Or that time you fell asleep during
tutoring.

Haneul starts to get it.

CHIARA

Let's just say... I'm gonna spoil for you that I'm not your Secret Santa, and I know Valerio's got a date this Friday and probably won't be back all weekend.

He definitely gets it now. Even Chiara has to laugh at how red his face is.

CHIARA

See ya.

She leaves him, knowing full well he's looking at her walking away.

When she's far enough away, he shakes his head and heads over to his locker. In it is another letter in plain stationery and writing.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"I think about you all the time, but like darkness I'm invisible to you. If I were braver, I'd give you my love, make envy of the love you have for her."

He looks around as if the sender can be anyone who's clearly not there. But what gets him even more is that he nearly missed another letter in fancy stationery, with the beautiful penmanship.

HANEUL (V.O.)

"Haneul, it appears you have chosen to withdraw from my challenge. I'm quite disappointed. Ultimately you're not worthy of the person whom you purport to love, which means you are no longer worthy of my attention. For never and ever..."

His brain takes a bit of buffering and he decides to eat the chocolates after all.

INT. STUDENT STORE - AFTERNOON

Summer peruses the student store, lined with everything necessary for the year. She bumps into Sharon who's scoping out the same shelf.

SUMMER

Hey.

SHARON

Hi. Fancy seeing you here.

SUMMER
Just looking around.

Sharon nods, and they both pretend to go back to doing just that.

SHARON
I'm sorry I hit you.

SUMMER
I deserved it.

SHARON
No, you didn't. I also shouldn't've called you a bitch.

SUMMER
I deserved that, too.

It's written all over her face how much Sharon wants to slap Summer again but even she realises it almost immediately.

Summer grabs her hands.

SUMMER
I wanna show you something.

Sharon nods and Summer leads her out of the store.

INT. SUMMER'S DORM ROOM - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Sharon stands completely gobsmacked at the sight of not just the keepsake boxes of letters but several suitcases full of them, as well as perfume bottles and earrings and other gifts.

SHARON
Is this all...

SUMMER
I'm sorry I kept it from you for so long.

SHARON
No wonder...

She flips through the neatly ordered envelopes in the boxes, how each one bears Summer's name in elegant penmanship. The fact that none of the airmail envelopes have stamps or a return address doesn't register to her.

SUMMER
I just couldn't throw any of it away, you know? You just get attached.

SHARON
I mean, isn't that normal?

SUMMER

You think so?

SHARON

I mean, yeah... Why wouldn't that be normal?

SUMMER

So you think it's normal, huh...

Sharon points to a box.

SHARON

Do you mind if I read them?

Summer hesitates.

SHARON

Oh, yeah, of course. Sorry, I guess it's just so much like old times, I forgot.

She turns her attention to the perfume bottles, and how most of them are Bluebell by Azura Hills, and already empty.

SHARON

Why don't you throw these old bottles away, though? Unless you're gonna use them for something?

SUMMER

I just like having them.

SHARON

Really? You like them that much?

SUMMER

Of course, he gave them to me.

Sharon then sees the many boxes of earrings. Summer doesn't protest so she opens one up.

SHARON

Woah! Aren't these super expensive? Or wait, maybe they're knockoffs.

SUMMER

No, they're the real thing.

SHARON

Geez...

Sharon finally sits on the bed and Summer sits beside her.

SHARON

How long has it been? You know, since you knew each other.

SUMMER
I actually couldn't tell you.

SHARON
That long?

SUMMER
I'm sorry I never told you. I just really liked having it be my thing.

SHARON
I still wish you told me, though. We were--no, are we still best friends? Yeah.

SUMMER
There're always things you can't tell your best friend, y'know.

That stings, but Sharon nonetheless swallows it.

SHARON
Well, I'm glad you showed me. I guess I forgive you.

Summer's eyes well up and her smile is pure sunshine as she hugs Sharon.

SUMMER
I'm so glad you understand. I really should've told you first instead of Suzette.

SHARON
I mean, if you're closer to Suzette now, I can't do anything about that. Good for you.

SUMMER
I shouldn't've let her read them, though. I felt so violated.

SHARON
Oh... I'm sorry to hear that.

SUMMER
I mean, it's so dumb. I guess I missed you so much and really wished she was you instead... I got ahead of myself and then next thing you know...

Sharon does her best to hide the jealousy in her face.

SHARON
Well, trusting the wrong person happens sometimes.

SUMMER

Oh, don't I know it! It's why I'm so glad I have him. But you wanna know a secret?

SHARON

What?

SUMMER

He hasn't written or sent me anything in months. In fact... I don't think I heard from him since midterms.

SHARON

Midterms? Aren't you being kinda spoiled?

SUMMER

Spoiled?

SHARON

Well, yeah, you saw him at the District Showcase, didn't you?

SUMMER

No.

SHARON

Yeah, you did. You introduced Haneul to him, he saved Ian.

SUMMER

No, Sharon. I've never met him.

Sharon laughs uneasily at how serious Summer's face is.

SHARON

Girl... Are you okay? Pretty sure he wouldn't like you talking about him like this.

SUMMER

Are YOU okay? Because he wasn't there. At least... I don't think he was.

SHARON

He totally was! Haneul met him--you and I fought about him, and you confirmed that the letters are all from him!

SUMMER

No, Sharon, I never said that.

SHARON

Yes, you did! When I asked if they were from your fiancé--

Both of them freeze.

SHARON
Wait, you're right. You never
actually confirmed that. But then--

The light in Summer's eyes seems to dim, even go out.

SHARON
Summer?

She gently shakes her.

SHARON
What's wrong? These ARE from your
fiancé, right?

She removes her hand.

SHARON
Right..?

For a horrible moment, Summer doesn't react. Then, almost uncannily, her hand moves towards her skirt pocket and takes out her Secret Santa slip, foisting it upon her.

SUMMER
Bye, Sharon.

SHARON
Summer?

SHARON
Get out of my room.

SHARON
These are all from him, right?

SUMMER
Get out.

As Summer rises, Sharon thinks fast and grabs what letters she can from a keepsake box and makes a break for the door faster than Usain Bolt.

And yes, Sharon's name is on the slip of paper.

INT. HANEUL'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

A quick knock sounds on Haneul's door, and he opens it to let Chiara in. She kicks it shut as she pounces on him in a kiss.

With surprising dexterity he lifts her up and they land on the bed. Shoes get kicked off.

They naturally completely miss the sounds of the key turning, door opening, footsteps approaching.

It's Valerio holding a small ceramic vase.

VALERIO

Hey, do you think Chiara'll like
this as an actual present, or is it
too much?

Haneul and Chiara break apart at record speed as Valerio drops the vase.

His face goes through the effects of having stepped on a lego, backwards.

VALERIO

Oh, Haneul, you BASTARD!

This whole scene is then properly skewered by Sharon tackling Valerio in her desperation to keep running, and she's well and truly winded; all she can do to explain herself is hold up the envelopes she stole from Summer.

LATER

Door held shut by Valerio's deskchair, the group sits facing each other between the beds, passing the letters.

VALERIO

Eugh, what a creepy guy. You just
KNOW he's the type who can't get a
girlfriend to save his life.

CHIARA

And yet Summer's all over him.

SHARON

She had probably hundreds of his
letters, and so many gifts. It's
gotta have been going on for years.

Valerio's so crept out that he actually hugs his blanket.

CHIARA

I don't get it, though. If she's
got a fiancé and he's not the one
writing the letters... Why even
bother?

HANEUL

He said he was always overseas, and
he came by this time for the
Showcase to see her.

VALERIO

If she was lonely, she could've
just asked to see me like everyone
else. What an idiot.

A plain envelope then slips under the door. Haneul reaches over for it.

SHARON

You got another one? Directly to your room?

She scrambles to get the chair out of the way but Chiara stops her.

CHIARA

You got lucky running here without getting caught. Don't blow our cover.

Sharon hates that she's right and sits back down. Haneul crumples up the letter.

SHARON

What're you doing? That's evidence!

She snatches the letter and reads it out loud.

SHARON

"I wish I had the words to tell you I want to see you before we go our separate ways for the season. If you could look at me like I'm everything you wanted, I would die of delight. But alas, I'm nothing to you, but also nothing without you."

VALERIO

Are you sure that's not for me?

HANEUL

I got another one in my locker before. Same language and everything.

VALERIO

So... What? This guy swings both ways? He's all "bi himself?"

The girls both facepalm, but Valerio and Haneul both snicker despite themselves.

VALERIO

What? That was a good one!

HANEUL

Both ways, though...

The cogs in his brain start moving. He checks the sky outside; the night watchman is most certainly out.

HANEUL

Dammit, it's in my locker still. That other really weird letter he sent me. Where he... I guess dumped me.

VALERIO
You got DUMPED by him? I'd say
that's a good thing.

HANEUL
Then why's he sending me these love
letters?

VALERIO
Split personality? One moment he
wants you, and then he doesn't?
Sounds like he's got it real bad
for you, man.

But the cogs in Sharon's brains move now and she holds both
the airmail and plain paper letters in her hands.

SHARON
Oh, my GOD! All of us are stupid!

CHIARA
Excuse me?

SHARON
Look at these. Really look at
these.

She shows them the letters.

SHARON
Different papers. Different pens.
Different handwriting.

She waits for them to get it. They don't.

SHARON
Different people!

They recoil at the revelation, and then a KNOCK is heard at
the door.

VALERIO
Shit...
(to the girls)
Under the beds! Hurry!

They scramble to hide as Haneul goes to answer the door.
It's Imtiaz.

IMTIAZ
Do you have any idea what time it
is?

HANEUL
Late?

IMTIAZ
It's lights out. That means people
are trying to sleep.

VALERIO

Sorry, we were just practicing for a play. Lost track of time.

HANEUL

Yeah, we wanted to see our range. We'll stop now, though.

IMTIAZ

Okay, please do. I know you can't wait to go home for the holidays, but that doesn't mean you can keep everyone up at night.

HANEUL

Sorry. We'll shut up.

IMTIAZ

Yes, you will. Don't make me report you.

HANEUL

We won't. See you later.

Imtiaz leaves and Haneul closes the door. The girls creep out from under the beds.

CHIARA

That was close...

SHARON

No kidding. I didn't think anyone else would be up.

CHIARA

Then how're we gonna get back to our dorm?

SHARON

We can't... Not until morning.

They all realise what this means.

HANEUL

(to the girls)

Take the beds. We'll take the floor.

Valerio looks absolutely cheated but nonetheless nods.

INT. GYMNASIUM - EVENING

It's the Homecoming Dance where the boys are in their school uniforms while the girls get to wear their dresses. A BAND plays music as the kids dance and laugh. Haneul sits at one of the tables.

He sees Summer in a navy blue gown among the dancers with Cristoff, who's in full navy school uniform.

SHARON

They look perfectly matched, eh?

She sits beside him, wearing a soft pink dress though it's hard to tell in the dim party lighting, and a lily corsage on her wrist and matching hair decoration.

SHARON

And yet she's got that letter guy.
What the hell.

HANEUL

Yeah. What the hell.

SHARON

I never thought I'd hate how we get
a whole month off this winter.

HANEUL

We can't really do anything else
but wait.

She hates that he's right. They watch the others dance.

SHARON

Can I tell you something personal?

HANEUL

Sure.

SHARON

I've never told anyone, even
Summer. Though really, I would've,
eventually. I should've. Pointless
as it is now.

She sees Summer and Cristoff laughing as he twirls and then even dips her on the dance floor.

SHARON

Especially if she's already
engaged, and he looks like a pretty
swell guy. And yet she likes that
other guy enough to keep everything
he's ever sent her.

She chuckles bitterly as she touches her heart to soothe its aches.

SHARON

Sorry, it's just... I thought if I
didn't have a shot, surely you
would. I was totally ready to
support you and everything.

Despite her smile, her voice breaks, her eyes well up, and Haneul can't help holding her as her shoulders quake.

SHARON

I'm sorry, Haneul. I didn't mean to drag you into everything.

HANEUL

It's all right.

Gradually she pulls away from him, rubbing her eyes.

HANEUL

Do you wanna dance?

He offers her his hand. She takes it and he leads her to the dance floor as a poppy song comes up. Neither of them really knows how to dance to it and neither of them care.

Meanwhile, at another table, Summer brings Ian over to Cristoff, who rises from his seat and extends his hand.

CRISTOFF

I'm glad you're all right. If I'm being honest, what I saw still haunts me.

IAN

I've had worse. Actually got wedgied on a flagpole and stuffed into lockers.

CRISTOFF

What ghastly business.

He motions for Ian to sit beside him, Summer to the other chair.

IAN

I can't afford to get hung up on it. Before long, we're gonna be out of here anyway.

CRISTOFF

True, true. Incidentally, do you know where you're going to university?

IAN

Thinking of New Davenport, maybe Fulton-Dawes for grad school.

CRISTOFF

Oh, you're thinking of law! I was looking into that as well. Maybe we'll even see each other there.

Ian smiles a little knowing smile. Summer looks softly at them, then rises.

SUMMER

I'll let you guys talk some more. I need some fresh air.

CRISTOFF

It's cold outside, take my jacket.

SUMMER

Thanks, I won't be long.

She takes Cristoff's letterman jacket from his chair and puts it on as she exits the gymnasium.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Sure enough, when you breathe in this air, it's visible. Summer huddles in the letterman jacket as the music carries on, muffled.

The light of a cigarette lighter briefly catches her attention a ways off; it's Valerio and Chiara lighting up. Chiara is wearing a red dress.

CHIARA

Acting, eh? That sounds perfect for you.

VALERIO

Mhm, and you'd make a great surgeon.

CHIARA

I should probably quit doing this, though. And messing around. And honestly, so should you.

VALERIO

I know. Might also start going by my actual name once we graduate. I like "Valerio," but maybe I shouldn't play a character in real life, too, y'know?

CHIARA

Took you that long to figure it out, huh?

Even Summer gently laughs alongside them, though of course they have no idea she's there. Chiara's expression softens, and then she covers her face as thoughts of the future bubble up.

VALERIO

What's wrong?

CHIARA

I was just thinking, it hit me that we're almost done high school. We
(MORE)

CHIARA (cont'd)
might not even see each other
again.

VALERIO
That's not true, we'll still hang
out, at least for the holidays and
stuff.

CHIARA
But I don't want just the holidays
and stuff. Before we know it, it'll
be too late to do anything.

She breaks down in Valerio's arms, dropping her cigarette.
He drops his as well, and then gently lifts her face.

VALERIO
It's not too late tonight.

Chiara slowly clues in, then nods. She takes his hand as
they head in the direction of the dorms. Summer also decides
to go back inside.

INT. BOYS' DORMITORY - IMMEDIATELY AFTER - CONTINUOUS

Chiara and Valerio enter, and no one else is present.

VALERIO
Great, even that blowhard isn't
here tonight.

He's about to lead the way when Chiara stops him.

CHIARA
You have condoms, right?

VALERIO
Of course I do, got enough to last
the whole year.

She gives him a look, and he returns an exasperated one.

VALERIO
Come on, I'm talking to you as
Mark, not Valerio.

CHIARA
All right, "Mark."

He leads her up the stairwell, but stops at the door when he
catches someone. He puts a finger to his mouth as he sneaks
a look, and then tiptoes just like a cat burglar.

When he catches up to that someone, he's surprisingly quick
in grabbing hold of their arm.

VALERIO
Well, well, well... To what do I
owe the pleasure of this
clandestine meeting... Mademoiselle
Loemba?

Suzette's hand holds a plain envelope.

INT. GYMNASIUM - SHORTLY AFTER

Valerio and Chiara both escort Suzette (who looks rather adorable in a mostly teal kitenge ensemble) by the arms. Haneul and Sharon both look up when they reach the table.

VALERIO
Looks like The Great Valerio won
Secret Santa in the Year of Our
Lord--

CHIARA
We found one.

For good measure, she presents the plain envelope to Haneul. Suzette doesn't meet his gaze when he looks between her and the envelope, and wrestles her arms free.

SHARON
Of course! How did I miss that?

VALERIO
Uh, guys, we should...

He leads Sharon and Chiara away to let Haneul read the letter in peace and Suzette remains as she is. Haneul faces her but naturally she can't look at him.

HANEUL
I gotta be honest... I'm relieved
you're a girl and not... Something
else.

Even he's wondering why he said something like that.

HANEUL
You right really well.

SUZETTE
Even with my handwriting?

His polite squirm is enough of an answer.

SUZETTE
Well, you know now. There's nothing
else.

She turns to leave.

HANEUL
Wait!

She halts.

HANEUL

You don't... Know who the other one is, do you?

Her silence is enough of an answer.

HANEUL

You're right, there's nothing else.

She leaves, and Valerio and company return.

CHIARA

That would've been too easy.

HANEUL

Tell me about it.

All the while, Summer's been watching from her table, and she abruptly leaves.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

In their warmer winter uniforms, the students all sit in their seats as Mr Flores finishes calling attendance.

MR FLORES

Welcome back, people. Your last winter break until college, or probably ever, depending on your plans.

Everyone groans.

MR FLORES

I told you at the start, if you don't take things seriously now, it's your own fault. Luckily, you haven't entered the real world yet, so I'm here to help you.

He gives the front-row students some COLLEGE SELECTION SHEETS.

MR FLORES

Pass these down behind you, very good. I know you've all been keeping up with your research over the break, finding your preferred schools. Arrange them according to preference, and provide your answers for your career plans...

Haneul stares at his own paper. The questions feel impossible, even the line for his name. It doesn't help that he's the only one stuck; Summer isn't even beside him.

INT. LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Summer is seated in a standalone chair in the library, the silence loud, full.

In her hands is a new letter, and in her lap, a new notebook.

SUMMER (V.O.)

"My dearest Summer, today you will begin the final leg of your journey through high school. You've grown into the wonderful young lady I always knew you to be, and I would further like to wish you a happy 18th birthday."

She hugs the letter, and the notebook before continuing to read.

SUMMER (V.O.)

"Please forgive my absences in the months prior. As you know, I've always been only a letter away, and I can see clearly now that our time together is ending."

She sets the letter down for a second, then reads it again to make sure it's real.

SUMMER (V.O.)

"You have wonderful friends who love you, and a man you will spend the rest of your life with. The world is your oyster and waiting for your next steps forward. I'm grateful to have been a part of your journey for so long, and as such I cannot deny that you have no further need of me."

The words are sinking in like spikes, her knuckles whiten, the letter shakes.

SUMMER (V.O.)

"You have become a wonderful flower that I am not worthy enough to witness. May your smile rival the sun in brightness--"

Her hands drop on her lap. The letter catches teardrops. Sounds smaller than silence break it.

INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The bell rings and students file out of their classes, happily chattering away with their friends. Sharon and Haneul leave Mr Stavros's class when Sharon is tackled full force by a tearful Summer.

SUMMER
Oh, Sharon! The worst thing's
happened!

SHARON
What?

SUMMER
He DUMPED me! Oh, I can't go on!

HANEUL
Who dumped you?

Now she looks up, red-eyed and brow furrowed.

HANEUL
Your fiancé?

SUMMER
No, Haneul, you IDIOT, HIM!

Even though it's entirely forced, she cries into Sharon's
chest, loud, obnoxious wails.

HANEUL
(to Sharon)
That's good, though... Right?

Summer wails louder. This catches the attention of Mr Flores
who happened to be walking by.

MR FLORES
What on Earth's going on with her?

SHARON
Dumped.

MR FLORES
Ohhh. Well, save that energy for
Drama, not the hallways.
(tapping Summer's head
with a pencil)
And you better let me know if
you're not gonna show up, or else
you're gonna lose Head Girl status.

He leaves them, and Haneul and Sharon are fully expecting
Summer to bawl even harder but she's stone-faced like she
reached Maturity Level 100.

SUMMER
That's it!

Next thing you know, she's running for all she's worth down
the hall, screaming Suzette's name.

HANEUL
What the hell was that?

SHARON

I dunno, but...

She kneels to pick up a POSTCARD off the floor. The picture on it is of Cartagena, Colombia with many different macaws. Sharon turns it over to read the message.

CRISTOFF (V.O.)

"I wish you could see this place. We're doing repair work on an old school, finishing up in time for the first class come September. I really like the mangoes here. Best I've ever had."

Haneul and Sharon exchange looks.

HANEUL

Does she not like mangoes?

SHARON

Loves them.

They read the postcard again, confusion multiplying. The PA comes on.

MRS DR THOMPSON (O.S.)

"Would Messrs Haneul Lee and Ian Dougherty come to my office, please? Once again that's Mr Haneul Lee and Mr Ian Dougherty, thank you."

The PA cuts off, and Haneul looks like the entire world is falling apart around him.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Summer, Suzette, Haneul, and Ian all sit facing Mrs Dr Thompson.

MRS DR THOMPSON

There you have it, then. Miss Loemba, you are now Head Girl and Mr Dougherty, Head Boy. Congratulations on your appointments.

Haneul and Ian both breathe a sigh of relief, meanwhile Suzette is glaring daggers at Summer.

MRS DR THOMPSON

I suppose Miss Loemba has a point, that selecting you via popular vote as opposed to academic performance was not the wisest move.

IAN
We're still grateful for the
opportunity, ma'am.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Very well. Is there anything else?
(not even waiting for a
response)
You are dismi--

Haneul raises his hand.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Yes, Mr Lee.

HANEUL
Ma'am, I was wondering... This
means my tutoring sessions are
over, right?

MRS DR THOMPSON
Don't be silly, it's my honour to
help you.

HANEUL
Thanks, but, well... No offense,
but there's not much point now. And
with exams...

MRS DR THOMPSON
You're not making a very good
argument, Mr Lee.

HANEUL
Yes, ma'am.

Ian raises his hand.

IAN
If you'd like, ma'am... I can take
your place as his tutor.

MRS DR THOMPSON
Are you sure, Mr Dougherty? He is
your elder.

IAN
We're in much of the same classes
and we have to study anyway. I
think as Head Boy, it's the first
thing I should do, don't you?

MRS DR THOMPSON
That is indeed a good idea, Mr
Dougherty. Very well, then, Mr Lee.
I will pass you on to Mr Dougherty.
Dismissed.

The students leave her office.

INT. LIBRARY - EVENING

Haneul groans at the table where several textbooks are open and papers askew, meanwhile Ian himself sighs.

IAN

Come on, this is so easy.

HANEUL

Easy for you, sure. But c'mon, we've been here for four hours. Let's just stop.

IAN

We would've been done an hour ago if you weren't distracted.

Haneul writes his answer and gives it to Ian, who marks it with a big red X.

IAN

That's even more wrong than your last answer!

HANEUL

Whatever, I'm done.

He packs up his things and leaves.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Mr Flores once again places a dunce cap on Haneul's head. Surprisingly, though, or perhaps not, Valerio also was given one.

MR FLORES

Honestly, is your shared braincell still on vacation or what?

The class laughs at them as Mr Flores goes back to the blackboard. Valerio tries to joust Haneul with his.

MR FLORES

Mr Lee, I'd really rather not give you this a third time. Please get it together.

Haneul swats Valerio's cap away as Mr Flores writes.

MR FLORES

Moving right along, let's talk about the origins of St Valentine's Day, since it's that time of year...

Haneul naturally starts zoning out, putting the cap beside his table. His report card sits before him, straight C's. Teacher commentaries say to please study more.

MR FLORES

So think about that the next time
you buy your crush chocolates.

The bell rings, and Haneul is about to leave alongside
everyone else.

MR FLORES

Mr Lee, a moment, please.

Haneul goes to him.

MR FLORES

Sit down.

He does.

MR FLORES

You still haven't handed in your
list of preferred colleges and
universities.

HANEUL

I might not go, sir.

MR FLORES

No? Then do you know what kind of
job you'd like to work?

HANEUL

No, sir.

Mr Flores leans forward in his chair.

MR FLORES

So you'll work part-time? That's
all you wanna do?

HANEUL

Maybe not all.

MR FLORES

Okay, then is there anything you'd
at least like to know more about?

HANEUL

I don't know, sir, I'm not good at
studying.

MR FLORES

Why don't you ask Ian? I heard he
offered to tutor you himself.

Haneul shifts in his seat.

MR FLORES

Well, it's just my suggestion. Make
sure you fill in that sheet by next
day so we can go over it together.

HANEUL
Yes, sir.

MR FLORES
Off you go.

But Haneul remains in his seat.

MR FLORES
Do you have something to say?

HANEUL
Sir... What made you want to be a teacher?

MR FLORES
What made me want to be a teacher... Honestly? I just wanted to keep coming back to school.

HANEUL
You did? Why?

MR FLORES
Because no matter what, you're learning. And I wanted to learn more than I teach.

That makes Haneul's head swim.

MR FLORES
Sorry it's not something cliché like "I wanted to be the person I didn't have in school" or "I want to help kids like you," even though that part's true. But the important thing is that I made a decision, and now it's your turn to make one.

He rises, and so does Haneul.

MR FLORES
Don't forget the sheet.

HANEUL
Yes, sir.

He leaves.

HALLWAY

As he's making his way to his locker, he finds Suzette there. Not being sneaky, but facing forward.

SUZETTE
I have something to say to you.

HANEUL
What is it?

SUZETTE

I know you will reject me. I do not care. I want to do it right.

She braces herself.

SUZETTE

I have liked you for two years. I should have told you myself instead of writing about it in letters. My apologies for how I carried myself before.

For good measure, she makes herself wait for any kind of response. Haneul can see how she almost moves her foot and then keeps it rooted.

HANEUL

I'm sorry for how I took it at homecoming. I shouldn't've said what I said. But... Thanks for telling me, Suzette.

He's then surprised by her smiling, even though her eyes are welling up behind her glasses. She waves as she leaves him, her step noticeably lighter.

INT. SUMMER'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Summer lays in bed, eyes puffy, cheeks sunken. Her stomach growling sends her into the fetal position facing the latest letter.

A knock sounds on her door.

Summer doesn't answer.

Another series of knocks, this time not stopping. She gets up to answer.

It's Suzette, pushing Summer's report card her way.

SUMMER

Thanks.

With a nod, Suzette marches off as Summer watches her, half-proud, half-stung. Nonetheless she closes her door and takes a breath before opening the document.

SUMMER

Huh. A B.

She tries to laugh it off, but the laugh evolves into a sob. Another knock sounds on the door.

This time, Sharon lets herself in.

SUMMER

Oh, it's you.

SHARON

"Oh, it's you," she says. How long are you gonna play hooky?

SUMMER

How long's it been?

SHARON

A week. I wrote out notes for you.

She brings out a small stack of notebooks, and the postcard Summer dropped on top of them, as well as the letters Sharon had stolen. Summer accepts them, and then Sharon hugs her.

They both begin to sob.

INT. BOYS' DORMITORY - SAME TIME - CONTINUOUS

Ian opens his door to Haneul, backpack in hand. He's got bedhead and rubs his eyes.

HANEUL

You sleep this early? It's only 7:30.

IAN

What d'you want?

HANEUL

I was kinda hoping we could study. But we can do it next time. Didn't mean to wake you up.

The sound of a girl's laughter from Haneul's room sounds faintly in the air.

IAN

Another one?

HANEUL

That's Valerio for you.

Ian ponders this, and even Haneul can see him silently accusing him of orchestrating this ruse. Nonetheless, Ian steps out of the way to let him in.

Ian's room is surprisingly colourful; scenic posters abound on the walls, even his bed linens are gingham patterned. The second bed there is standard issue, neglected.

HANEUL

I'll get that desk.

He puts his things on the bed and sets to work moving it next to Ian's own desk. Ian, meanwhile, makes his own bed.

Haneul waits for him at the desk.

HANEUL
I like your room.

IAN
Thanks, I guess. It's quiet without
Corey.

He gets his own study materials out.

IAN
What do you wanna start with?

HANEUL
Math, like last time.

They turn to the page in the textbook. Haneul readies his
pencil and paper.

IAN
Alright, so logarithms are actually
pretty simple...

Haneul nods as he listens, taking notes.

SERIES OF SHOTS - ALL DURING CLASS

A) Mr Melquiades gives Haneul his checkmark-populated test
paper and a pat on the shoulder as he passes the next one
along.

B) Mme Beauchemin searches for a volunteer to write a
missing irregular verb conjugation on the board, and Haneul
raises his hand.

C) Haneul and Ian sketch each other, and both laugh at how
not-like-each-other they look.

D) Valerio looks keenly interested in the unit on the female
reproductive system, while Haneul tries to not let his own
mind similarly wander.

E) Mr Flores crowns Haneul with a dunce cap... the top cut
out so it's more of a crown... And gives him a thumbs up.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - NOON

By now spring has sprung, everyone's in their according
uniform. Sharon waters the herb garden and the others sit at
a table outside having lunch.

Valerio fans himself with a paper fan, loosening his tie and
top two buttons.

CHIARA
You're gonna get cited for that,
y'know.

VALERIO

It ain't my fault May's basically proto-summer. I'm pretty sure asking us to bundle up when we're already roasting is child abuse.

Sharon joins them at the table.

SHARON

Everyone's done their part for the grad project?

VALERIO

Yes, ma'am. I'm ready.

HANEUL

I'm almost done.

CHIARA

Imma need another day.

SHARON

As long as we get done the week of Prom, we're fine.

HANEUL

When's Prom?

VALERIO

Right after finals.

CHIARA

Oh yeah, are you gonna ask anyone to Prom?

HANEUL

Nah... I don't even know if I'm going.

CHIARA

What? You can't not go to Prom, Haneul! You'll regret it forever!

HANEUL

I've got a ton of research to do about prereq classes. Mr Flores said I'm gonna have to do summer school to make sure I'm ready for the actual programme.

VALERIO

Still can't believe you're nerding out this hard. Did Ian convert you or what?

HANEUL

Maybe. Studying's actually kinda fun after all.

VALERIO

Nerd.

Chiara, face framed by her hands and elbows on the table, nonetheless gazes dreamily at Haneul.

HANEUL

What?

CHIARA

Picturing you as a nerd.

HANEUL

And?

CHIARA

Hell yeah.

Sharon looks between both of them, confused.

SHARON

(to Valerio)

I thought you and Chiara were a thing.

VALERIO

She can do whatever she wants. Any guy she does it with is a bastard, though.

SHARON

Even you?

VALERIO

Why would I be a bastard? I didn't make the rules.

Sharon tries to parse the metaphysics of what Valerio said, and the next thing they know, Summer is running towards them for all she's worth, LETTER in her hand.

CHIARA

What's up?

Summer tries to catch her breath, slamming the red paper on the table.

CHIARA

Prom... Face... Face...

SHARON

What about Prom?

CHIARA

Letter...

She's much too winded, but also much too something else. Haneul reads the letter and his breath catches.

CHIARA

What's it say?

Summer takes a seat and drinks out of Sharon's water bottle.

HANEUL

He wants to meet face to face. At Prom.

SHARON

You don't mean--

Absolutely no one can bear to say his "name," and even Summer is shaking at the thought.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Every single event leading up to Prom that should be happy or a relief is anything but:

Final exams are written in a daze.

Even college acceptance letters are just meaningless pieces of paper that still make you physically ill.

Looking at potential corsages or boutonnieres from the school garden isn't even a beautiful experience.

And yet they still manage to get it together for the graduation project, which ended up being a skit with Valerio as the star.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - EVENING

At long last it's Prom, where everyone is dressed up. Valerio is even wearing a top hat with his suit. Haneul's hair is gelled back. Sharon's ballroom gown is a soft coral, and Chiara's is a golden mermaid gown.

All sit at their table as everyone dances on, and Summer is with them wearing a rather modest lavender A-line gown and cardigan.

SUMMER

I hate this. This is even worse than when he dumped me.

SHARON

It's gonna be fine. You got us.

SUMMER

I don't wanna meet him. I think I'm gonna be sick.

CHIARA

The night's just started, though.
There's no time to freak out that
much.

But get sick, Summer does, and so the girls have no choice
but to escort her to the washroom, leaving the boys behind.

VALERIO

So who do you think it is?

HANEUL

Hell if I know. He can't be anyone
we already know... Can he?

VALERIO

You're right, this guy might be
ugly as sin, but he was still cool
enough to hook Summer. Couldn't be
any of us.

HANEUL

Are you sure, though? Seems like a
lot of work for someone who doesn't
go here.

VALERIO

Y'think?

The crowd of dancing female students in particular cheer as
a song comes on, but they don't dance to the music. Not that
the boys notice or care.

VALERIO

Hey, maybe it's Ian!

HANEUL

Ian?

VALERIO

Yeah! He's got the perfect underdog
setup. Head Boy candidate, total
shrimp, someone Summer wouldn't
ever look twice at.

HANEUL

Ian...

VALERIO

What d'you think? Totally possible,
right?

HANEUL

I don't think so. He goes to sleep
pretty much right after dinner.

VALERIO

So, what, he would rather sleep
than flirt? That sounds...

The song ends and the crowd parts to let Ian and Cristoff through, and they're even holding hands as they laugh.

Haneul and Valerio exchange looks. Ian and Cristoff take their seats at their own table and talk, dialogue inaudible.

VALERIO

Why're we watching them? Isn't that--

Haneul puts up a hand to silence him, and he's about to be vocally offended until they both see it; a kiss, initiated by Cristoff.

Haneul is on his feet first and about to head their way when Chiara comes back by herself.

CHIARA

He didn't show up?

VALERIO

Nah, but we discovered another bombshell.

CHIARA

What other bombshell?

Haneul sits back down, puzzled.

HANEUL

It's not Ian.

CHIARA

Okay? That doesn't sound like a bombshell.

HANEUL

No, I mean... Nevermind. It's not even any of our business.

CHIARA

You're not making any sense.

VALERIO

Okay, fine, I'll bite. Summer's fiancé is here.

CHIARA

You mean it's him after all?!

VALERIO

No.

CHIARA

Then what's so shocking about that? Wait... Summer didn't come with him...

She looks around and sees him and Ian not kissing but nonetheless chatting like prom dates, not just good friends.

CHIARA

Yo... What the hell? How does something that makes absolutely no sense make perfect sense all of a sudden?

Valerio and Haneul simply don't question it and they are soon joined by Summer and Sharon. Chiara stands to face Summer.

CHIARA

Summer...

She envelopes her in a hug.

CHIARA

I'm so sorry.

SUMMER

For what?

CHIARA

That.

She points to Ian and Cristoff. Sharon even gasps and joins the hug. But Summer, for once, smiles from the bottom of her heart.

SUMMER

Awww it worked out for them!

CHIARA

What?

SHARON

What?

VALERIO

What?

HANEUL

What?

SUMMER

Oh, I guess I never told you. Cristoff and I weren't REALLY engaged, it was something our parents decided. Well, his parents did. Super traditional types, y'know.

CHIARA

No kidding...

SUMMER

Yeah, they were gonna send him to a conversion camp until they decided it's better to set us up, kinda guilt him into converting himself if he has a wife already picked out. It's super dumb.

The girls let go of Summer.

SUMMER

But this is awesome! Not at all something to be sorry about, it's the perfect outcome to how they met! Rescuer and rescued, it's so romantic! You have NO idea how worried I was that Cristoff wouldn't be able to catch the flight in time!

She's nothing but happiness as everyone else processes this particular bombshell, Chiara even plunks down onto her chair. The dust settles first for Sharon, who still stands, and tries to compose herself.

SHARON

Hey, quick question: what is it with you and withholding important information until THE LAST POSSIBLE SECOND, SUMMER?!

SUMMER

I didn't know you were so interested, I would've told you if you asked.

Sharon lunges forward like a rabid animal and ends up chasing Summer, and it's genuinely hard to tell which one's faster or where they're gonna go next.

CHIARA

So, we were talking suspects?

HANEUL

Yeah, we know Ian's out.

VALERIO

Or Summer's...

HANEUL

Yeah. Not him, either.

CHIARA

Groundbreaking stuff, guys. Way to narrow it down.

They sit and think. Chiara suddenly grows pale.

CHIARA
Oh. Oh, NO.

HANEUL
What?

Chiara's mouth opens and closes like her voice is trapped inside. Valerio himself blanches.

VALERIO
Oh no, I know that look. Shit.
SHIT.

HANEUL
What?

Valerio places both hands on Chiara's shoulders.

VALERIO
How the hell did it happen? We used
a condom!

Now it's Haneul's turn to blanch. For good measure, several people look their way.

CHIARA
What? No!

Valerio's attention snaps onto Haneul, and to say he's absolutely pissed is an understatement. It doesn't help that more people seem to have heard.

VALERIO
You... You're worse than a
bastard...

CHIARA
No, that's--

Valerio shoves his chair to the side as he rises, and Haneul nearly stumbles over his.

VALERIO
I never thought it would come to
this. I'm gonna have to do it,
aren't I?

HANEUL
Do what?

VALERIO
"Do what?" he says! How about KILL
you!

HANEUL
Why would you wanna kill me?

VALERIO

Isn't it obvious? Your dumbass got Chiara pregnant!

HANEUL

I'm not even in our room half the time!

CHIARA

Guys!

Chiara notices Mr Flores coming over and blanches even more.

VALERIO

Don't go making excuses! One time is all it takes!

HANEUL

That's all the more reason it's probably your fault!

VALERIO

The hell it is! She's been all over you these past few months! Process of elimination means it's yours, so be a man and take responsibility!

HANEUL

Oh, sure, I have to take "responsibility" by dying for something YOU did!

Mr Flores gets closer. Chiara rises.

CHIARA

WILL YOU MORONS SHUT THE *FUCK* UP!!!

All the sound and motion in the room stop dead. Even Mr Flores was almost knocked back by the outburst. Chiara sits back down, covering her eyes with a single hand.

CHIARA

You're making a scene.

Mr Flores remembers that he's a teacher and approaches them.

MR FLORES

Is everything all right here?

VALERIO

Sorry about that, sir. Chiara's just got really bad PMS.

Even Haneul feels just how hard Chiara pinches Valerio.

MR FLORES

I'm sorry to hear that, but please don't ruin the night for everyone.

HANEUL

Yes, sir.

MR FLORES

You're looking a little pale, Miss Lombardo. Should I call Nurse Suzuki?

CHIARA

No, no, I'm fine.

MR FLORES

Are you sure?

CHIARA

Yes, I'm sure.

MR FLORES

Okay... Let me know if you need anything.

He takes his time going back, and Chiara gets paler and paler as they wait. When he does, she smacks both of them upside the head. The music resumes.

CHIARA

What is the matter with both of you, jumping to conclusions like that?

VALERIO

I'm sorry, it's just that you looked like you were sick.

CHIARA

Well, it's not because of THAT! It's something worse. Something I really hope I'm wrong about.

HANEUL

What?

She downs her glass of water.

CHIARA

It's a hunch... Sort of.. But what if it's not, y'know...

HANEUL

What? The suspect? What if he's not what?

She still stumbles over the word.

VALERIO

In our class?

CHIARA

What if he's not a student?

VALERIO
Well, what else would be he?

CHIARA
An adult! Like, a teacher, for example!

Haneul and Valerio exchange looks. That shared braincell might actually have been stranded.

VALERIO
Are you sure? Isn't that, like... Really bad?

HANEUL
Yeah... Oh man, I never even considered that.

CHIARA
Come on, you guys! I really don't want it to be true, okay?

She covers her head while Haneul and Valerio sit with this new horrible possibility. Valerio smacks the table.

VALERIO
Haneul! Make a pact with me. As a man. We have to protect Summer, no, every girl, even if it gets us expelled, or arrested, or whatever the hell.

He extends his hand. Haneul takes it and they shake. Sharon and Summer return to the table.

SHARON
What're you guys doing?

CHIARA
(to Summer)
They made a pact, as men, to protect your dumb ass.

SHARON
Why do you need a pact for that?

CHIARA
Don't ask. God, Mark, you're such a scary guy sometimes.

VALERIO
I know you're mad at me, but don't call me "Mark" if we're not alone.

Sharon shakes her head. They are then approached by Imtiaz, completely unrecognisable in an embroidered black Bandhgala suit, hair slicked back, and beard and mustache trimmed.

He's about to speak when Haneul rises, completely coincidentally not having seen him, and offers Summer his hand.

HANEUL
Wanna dance?

Summer, stunned, nonetheless takes his hand, and Imtiaz faces Sharon.

IMTIAZ
Sharon, would you like to dance
with me?

She watches Summer and Haneul disappear into the dance floor, and it looks like she wants to be there--

SHARON
No thanks, my feet hurt like hell
chasing Summer.

IMTIAZ
Okay... Chiara?

CHIARA
Sorry, we're actually all kinda in
the middle of something.

IMTIAZ
No problem.

He nods and finds another thing to do.

Meanwhile on the dance floor, a pop song plays and no one knows how to dance to it, and already it feels crowded and sweaty. Summer, meanwhile, is having a blast.

SUMMER
Come on, Haneul! You can do better
than that!

She grabs his hands and puts herself in a sweetheart hold.

SUMMER
See? It's easy!

They dance a bit more, but then the song cuts out. Everyone groans, and another song, this time a slow one, comes on. Haneul's about to duck out when Summer grabs his hand.

SUMMER
Where're you going?

HANEUL
I don't know this song.

SUMMER
Well, I don't have anyone else to
dance with, and you asked me, so...

HANEUL

You wanna dance to this with me?

SUMMER

It's Prom, Haneul. I don't wanna spend the whole night sitting around or getting chased by Sharon.

She has to make him hold her. He's suddenly very aware that some people can see him, and even moreso that anyone could touch Summer. They "dance," and the lights go down low.

SUMMER

Y'know, I've been thinking... This year went by really fast.

HANEUL

Yeah, it did.

SUMMER

And when we graduate... I'm really gonna miss this place.

HANEUL

I thought you couldn't wait to leave.

SUMMER

Yeah, but I feel this way now. I guess somewhere along the way I realised I was focusing so much on The Letter Man and not who really matters.

She places her head on his shoulder.

SUMMER

I'm proud of you, you know. You did a lot this year. And all I did was give you shit.

HANEUL

It's all right.

SUMMER

No, it's not. You were working really hard. And you're here tonight, and I'm so glad you are.

She hugs him tighter.

SUMMER

When I got that last letter... I was actually mad. Total silence for three months after two other months of silence and NOW he decides he wants to see me?

HANEUL
That is kinda bullshit.

SUMMER
Right? Like I was actually happier
when he wasn't sending me stuff.
And then I felt really bad because
it let me see what I was missing...

She looks up at him.

SUMMER
Can you forgive me, Haneul? For
being a dumbass high schooler?

HANEUL
Didn't you know? That's all you
ever were to me.

For a moment she feels the sting, but then they both laugh.
When they stop, they both realise what the moment is perfect
for. They close their eyes, lean forward--

And then the microphone feedback rings through the room.
It's Imtiaz, eyes red, having trouble standing still. Some
nearby students grimace and wave the air before their noses.

IMTIAZ
Everyone, I have a confession to
make.

He turns his attention to Summer and Haneul. Suzette,
stern-faced in a colourful mermaid gown, doesn't notice
Summer glancing at her as she keeps her attention locked
onto Imtiaz.

IMTIAZ
Five years ago I fell in love with
Summer Lane.

Mr Flores tries to get through the crowd to no avail.

IMTIAZ
But it was not love. I fell in love
for real this year. When I knew she
had someone else she loves.

Summer's breath catches. Imtiaz takes a swig from a hip
flask.

IMTIAZ
Ha! Life is funny. I thought she
loved me for these five years, and
it was perfect because she didn't
want to meet me and I didn't want
her to see me.

Summer grabs Haneul's arm.

IMTIAZ

But now you know, everybody knows!
It was I all along! I even
nominated your duffer friend as
Head Boy just so you wouldn't know
my secret! And it still turned out
that you were engaged to someone
else!

The students all murmur, Mr Flores makes more progress
towards the stage.

IMTIAZ

I lost, huh? I tried to do it
right, but karma still came for me.
But you know what?

He takes a swig so deep he nearly falls over.

IMTIAZ

Subhan Allah!
(to the tune of "Chand
Sifarish")
Subhan Allah, subhan Allah, subhan
Allah! Subhan Allaaaaaah~

Mr Flores pushes through Summer and Haneul to climb onto the
stage and take the microphone and the hip flask.

MR FLORES

That's enough out of you. Come on.

Imtiaz, drunkenness intensifying with each step, can't
decide if he's delighted or destroyed in love like the song
would suggest. Nonetheless, while he can still see Summer,
he calls out.

IMTIAZ

Always a letter away...

When he's gone, Summer collapses into Haneul's arms and
Suzette rushes to help him with her.

EXT. VERDANT GROVE SCHOOL COURTYARD - NOON

It's now the beginning of summer, with an outdoor assembly
for the graduating class, all bedecked in lush green gowns
and matching mortarboards.

The part everyone knows from Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance
March No. 1" plays.

TEACHERS

(singing)

Land of hope and glory, Mother of
the free. How shall we extoll thee
who are born of thee?

The teachers all stand at the outdoor stage, microphones pinned to their lapels.

TEACHERS

(singing)

Wider still and wider shall thy
bounds be set. God, who made thee
mighty, make thee mightier yet!

Suzette tries not to cry as Mrs Dr Thompson moves her tassel.

TEACHERS

(singing)

God who make thee mighty, make thee
mightier yet!

Mrs Dr Thompson adorns Ian with a sash and moves his tassel as she pats his shoulder when they're done. He takes to the podium,

IAN

Hi, everyone. We did it. Another
school year behind us, another
great year spent at this
establishment.

In the crowd, Chiara's already dabbing her eye with a handkerchief as Valerio wraps his arm around her.

IAN

I'd like to thank everyone for
their hard work, and their
friendship in these years. I
learned a lot from all of you.

Sharon grabs Summer's hand and squeezes just a little too tightly.

IAN

Today we leave these halls, these
grounds, ready to take on the
world. Hopefully we'll meet again
in ten years' time to compare how
well we took it on, and pretend we
didn't totally fail at stuff.

Suzette chuckles alongside others.

IAN

One thing's for sure, though; we
might forget a lot of things, but
not a single one of us is ever
gonna forget how smashed Imtiaz got
at Prom.

Even the teachers crack up at that one, and Imtiaz has to cover his face with his mortarboard.

IAN

To that end... Congratulations,
everyone. I can't wait to see you
all again in ten years, if not
sooner. On the count of three.
One...

Haneul grabs his mortarboard.

IAN

Two...

Everyone has theirs in hand.

IAN

(voice dropping)

Three!

They all go up in the air to raucous cheers.

SHORTLY AFTER

The students exchange yearbook signatures, laughing and
crying at how this is it. Valerio gives a girl her yearbook
back, Sharon and Chiara are glued together in a hug.

CHIARA

Don't forget about us when you're a
bigshot CEO!

SHARON

Are you kidding? You're gonna be
all I'm thinking about!

Haneul, meanwhile, sits with Summer on a bench.

SUMMER

Civil engineering, eh? I can see
it.

HANEUL

Yeah, I figured it's a good one.
Trades are the future, y'know.

SUMMER

Mhm. Me, I still don't know what
I'll do other than the thing
everyone else who doesn't know what
to do, does. English Lit.

HANEUL

You'll figure it out.

They pause for a moment, then both try to speak at the same
time.

SUMMER

Go ahead.

HANEUL

No, you.

SUMMER

I was just gonna say that I burned everything he sent me. I'm gonna start over totally new, on my own two feet.

HANEUL

That's great. You can do it.

SUMMER

Can I, though? I gotta admit, it's scary going through things without someone encouraging me. Isn't that lame?

HANEUL

Well... If you want, I can write you letters. They won't be sappy like his, though.

SUMMER

That's okay, it was dumb high school stuff. I'd rather get real letters. Not just about me, but everything you're doing. Plans you wanna make, all that.

HANEUL

Are you gonna write back, too?

SUMMER

Of course! Why wouldn't I wanna have fun, too?

HANEUL

Okay. Then I'll try to write to you when I'm not super busy with studies.

SUMMER

Maybe I'll write to you more, then.

HANEUL

Good, I hope you do.

They're silent again. Summer's lip trembles as she hugs Haneul first.

SUMMER

Why do you have to go to Gillingham?

HANEUL

Because that's where the civil engineering programme is.

SUMMER

I don't mean that and you know it.

HANEUL

You could always try to get in.
Should be a cinch for you.

SUMMER

I guess... Not really big on STEM,
though. Besides, are you sure you'd
want all those guys hitting on me?

HANEUL

Good point.

Summer pretends to cry, but Haneul chuckles which makes her pout.

VALERIO

Hey, guys! Quit moping already!
Let's take some pictures!

CHIARA

We're gonna get good and sick of
each other this summer, make up for
all the time we're not gonna have.
In fact... Mark, should we tell
them?

VALERIO

Come on, I told you not to call me
"Mark" when we're not alone.

She gives him a look.

VALERIO

Okay, fine. You're right.

He grabs Chiara's left hand and slides a ring pop onto her ring finger.

SHARON

You guys! Are you serious?

VALERIO

Never been more serious about
anything in my life.

SUMMER

You gotta get her a real ring,
though. Otherwise it's just high
school stuff.

VALERIO

I will, but this is all I got,
okay? The alternative would've just
looked bad.

Everyone silently decides not to finish that thought.

VALERIO

Anyway, less yapping, more snapping. Suzette, ma chère, be a dear and get us all, would you?

SUMMER

Hey, c'mon, don't be rude. You should be in it, too.

(calling out)

Hey, Ian! You should get in on this, too. Mr Flores, can you take our picture?

They all gather and each give their cellphones to Mr Flores. Ian even drags Imtiaz along. Summer nods and they get into positions.

MR FLORES

Say "cheese..."

Their group photos have all of them laughing, whether it's because they're all obscuring Imtiaz's face with finger L's or holding Ian in a headlock, or just laughing at whatever Mr Flores said.

FADE OUT