

Natsukashii

by

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FADE IN

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A still river.

A gnarled branch sits in the water, motionless against the breathing, sun-lit foliage behind it.

Slowly, another branch drawn by a soft current floats in, lightly turning. It brushes against the resting branch. Bumping off, a tiny limb of the moving branch grasps the still branch.

The water current pirouettes one around the other.

The second branch glides away. We hear a terse masculine voice.

MARK (O.S.)

Hey!

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES' ROOM - MORNING

JAMES, 18, scruffy, unconcerned, sits at a desk by the window, looking at the overcast sky, his cynical reflection in the window.

His gaze turns down to the street below outside his house. MARK, 18 -- well-cut hair and a smarter appearance -- stands there with his arms out, as if to say, *what gives?*

James opens the window.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE - MORNING

James sticks his head out.

JAMES

Yeah?

MARK

We're late.

Mark paces around the front of the wooden, turquoise-trimmed house.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - MORNING

James sighs, turns back into his room for a moment.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE - MORNING

James comes back out.

JAMES
Can we stay late?

MARK
You can, but I'm leaving.

JAMES
Alright, alright. Give me a second.

James closes the window.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - MORNING

He surveys his room. A small bookshelf stands next to his unkempt bed -- a wallet sits on one of the shelves.

James' phone VIBRATES on the desk, lying next to a laptop and several decorative trinkets, including a stuffed giraffe.

James reads a text on the screen: "Laura: Around 12?" He picks it up, types back as he walks out, grabbing his wallet from the shelf on the way.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - MORNING

James and Mark briskly walk, passing trees on the verge of green under a grey sky. James is holding a scone.

MARK
So you still on with Laura today?

JAMES
Yep.

James takes a bite of his scone. Mark shakes his head.

MARK
James, I'm not sure--

James puts up his hand, finishes chewing.

JAMES
We'll talk, it'll be great. Shush, Mark.

Mark relents.

JAMES

I'm just pissed we have this mandatory senior bonding -- whatever -- especially on a Saturday.

MARK

Did you know everyone I talked to from other schools didn't have to deal with this? They didn't even know what a "senior bonding assembly" was.

JAMES

Figures. Of course we're the only ones to put up with this last-minute-get-to-know-you schtick, as if the last four years wasn't plenty of time to realize, "Hey, I don't like these people!"

James sighs.

JAMES

This moment, this very moment, I should be reading.

MARK

Or asleep.

JAMES

That works too! Anything but a "Senior Meeting."

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MORNING

A beat-up, beige Saab from the '90s sputters up the road. We hear two girls speaking inside.

DONNA (IN CAR)

What's the point of it?

RILEY (IN CAR)

I think it's supposed to be a bonding experience. Getting to know everyone before you leave.

The car abruptly turns into the parking lot, jerking forward through the turn past a sign: "Bayview High School."

They pull into a parking spot at a sloppy angle. We see their faces, DONNA, 18, sharp, calm, sitting next to RILEY, 18, sly.

INT. DONNA'S CAR - MORNING

Donna pulls the parking brake, puts on a pair of shades.

DONNA
I know "everyone."

RILEY
Yeah.

DONNA
I don't really want to know
"everyone."

RILEY
Yeah...

EXT. SCHOOL GYM - MORNING

James and Mark walk through a set of double doors into a large school gym. Other late students hurriedly move to the doors.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - MORNING

Sports banners adorn the walls, basketball hoops hang from the ceiling, the floor gleams with fluorescent lighting.

James tosses the last bit of his scone in a trashcan by the entrance, not stopping as he goes up to a large gathering of students standing around. We hear conversations from the cluster.

RANDOM GUY 1
So we're going to turn up at your
ski house this weekend?

RANDOM GUY 2
Yeah, man. We're not skiing--

James and Mark wade through the group of students milling about the entrance. One girl, MICHELLE, happily chirps to no one in particular.

MICHELLE
I finally convinced my mom to let
me drive her car. Isn't that
so bomb?

They share a look, moving toward a flimsy table visible through the group.

RANDOM GAL
I dunno, I think that's more
dalé...

James' eyes go wide as he holds back a laugh.

James reaches the table, Mark behind him. An overenthusiastic SCHOOL FACULTY MEMBER sits at the table, a clipboard with an attendance sheet in front of her.

ATTENDANCE LADY
Good morning! How are you?

James scratches the back of his neck.

JAMES
Really great.

ATTENDANCE LADY
Isn't this exciting? March, just
three months from graduation? All
these fun assemblies?

JAMES
...sure. Need our names?

ATTENDANCE LADY
Yes, please.

JAMES
James Hawthorne.

MARK
Mark. Mark Evans.

The attendance lady checks with her pen twice on the sheet.

ATTENDANCE LADY
Alright! Have fun!

James and Mark walk past the table, headed towards the bleachers where people are already sitting.

JAMES
"Have fun?" "Isn't this exciting?"

MARK
I mean, it is the end of high
school.

JAMES

And is the end of a prolonged,
unpleasant medical procedure
"exciting?" If you want to show me
"fun," show me the door. I want
out.

James realizes something.

JAMES

Do we know how long this vasectomy
is going to take? Laura's expecting
me around noon.

MARK

No idea. Besides, maybe there are
"fun" activities.

James groans.

JAMES

Oh, God no.

They walk up, looking for a seat.

MARK

We'll guide each other blindfolded,
do trust falls -- maybe even sit in
a circle and answer personal
questions, take off our collective
cool jackets.

James finds a row and starts walking down it, laughing a
bit. Mark follows.

JAMES

I swear, if that happens...

MARK

Spin the bottle.

JAMES

Or spin the chamber.

They sit down. James thinks for a moment.

JAMES

It'll probably happen.

MARK

Yep.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Donna and Riley walk in -- the crowd is a lot thinner, most of the students are in the bleachers.

DONNA
(sarcastic)
Oh good, we made it.

Donna easily gets up to the table, talks before the attendance lady can get a word in.

DONNA
Donna Carrington.

ATTENDANCE LADY
Oh! Okay. Isn't this exci--

RILEY
--Riley Lynn.

The attendance lady checks twice quickly.

ATTENDANCE LADY
Have fu--

Donna puts on an excited schoolgirl smile.

DONNA
--We will!

Donna waves and jauntily walks past the table. Her smile disappears. She and Riley go up the bleachers, trying to find space.

They spot a free section a couple of rows behind James and Mark. A breezy and handsome guy, CHRIS, 18, sees Donna and Riley, waves them over.

Donna sits down next to Chris, Riley next to her. Chris smiles.

CHRIS
You decided to show up?

Donna pulls a mint container out of her pocket, pops a mint in her mouth.

DONNA
For now. Mint?

As soon as she offers, an energetic man with a mint green collared shirt, PRINCIPAL FARLEY, strolls onto the gym floor holding a microphone. A few other faculty members, a mirror of the same apparel in different colors, stand at the sidelines.

He yells into the microphone.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Hey guys! It's DAVE FARLEY, and
I'll be your Principal this
afternoon! Now, how's it going!?

An assortment of MURMURS and uninterested faces: "great," "fine," "eh..." One or two excitedly shout.

Farley puts on an exaggerated frown.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Aw, c'mon, guys, I know we can do
better than that!

A couple of the staff members at the side pinch their noses, put their hands to their faces.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Again: HOW'S IT GOING!?

AUDIENCE
GREAT!

Donna hasn't moved her mouth an inch.

JAMES
(just after)
Great...

James is resting his elbows on his knees. Behind him, Donna notices the echo from his slouched frame, peering over her shades. Her eyes rest there for a moment, then flick back to Farley.

Farley gestures to the duck row of faculty members.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Now, let's get FIRED UP for some
trust falls--

James closes his eyes.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
--after a quick overview of student
conduct with our "killer" Assistant
Principal, CHAD BOZEMAN!

A bald man, CHAD BOZEMAN, amply filling out his shirt and slacks, walks up and takes the mic. Farley claps his hands and jogs to the sideline.

Bozeman clears his throat, taps the mic and speaks too closely into it in a deep voice.

CHAD BOZEMAN

Thank you, Principal Farley. Now--

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

James stands on a gym mat, Mark a bit behind him. Around them, several other pairs of students are similarly spaced, falling down and catching each other.

After some hesitation, James slowly creaks backward, faster and faster, way past the point of being caught as Mark steps back--

JAMES

Oh, you ass--

James crashes down.

INT. OTHER SIDE OF GYM - MORNING

Donna catches Riley, lifts her back up.

RILEY

That conduct discussion sure was enthralling.

DONNA

Did you know we can "only" skip three classes and still get A's? I didn't know we could skip that many. We should start skipping more.

Riley glances around, sees a door no staff seem to be looking toward. She looks to Donna.

RILEY

Hey.

Riley tilts her head at the door.

Donna raises her eyebrows questioningly.

Riley tilts again more urgently, mouthing "let's go!"

Donna mouths, "the usual exit?"

Riley nods. Donna nods back, shoos Riley away. Go, go.

Riley starts strolling to the gym door. Donna stands around, trying to look busy alone in a room full of trust falls.

Donna checks her watch, an aged pair of hands at nine-thirty. She scans the room.

Now at the gym door, Riley furtively opens it a crack and slides through.

Donna moves to join her when Farley calls out on the microphone.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY

ALRIGHT! Awesome trust falls, guys,
but now let's all go back for a
convo at the bleachers.

Mark pulls James up as everyone starts shuffling back to the bleachers.

MARK

So I really can't convince you
about this Laura thing?

JAMES

Nope. Drop it like you dropped me.

Mark shrugs as they head back. Donna walks quickly to the door, brushes past James in the wrong direction. James keeps heading to the bleachers with Mark.

Donna slows down at the edge of the crowd -- the gym door is completely exposed and most everyone is at the bleachers.

DONNA

(to herself)

Shit.

Donna looks down in frustration for a moment.

James and Mark sit down in the bleachers. James spots Donna, clearly separate from the throng.

James leans towards Mark, amused.

JAMES

Looks like she wants out, too.

MARK

Donna Carrington? She's a bit weird.

JAMES

I wouldn't know.

Donna starts walking back to the bleachers. She sits down in the front row next to Chris.

MARK

I thought you were in the same class?

JAMES

We're both in Lit, yeah, but I don't know her. I mean, I know her, but I don't "know" her. You know?

MARK

Well, she's fucking Chris there.

James does a little double take, exasperated.

JAMES

Jesu -- wha -- why do I need to know that? Who cares?

James shakes his head.

JAMES

We should be about done, now, right? How much more can they make us do?

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Mark and James sit in a circle of other students on the floor, pen and paper out, scribbling. Donna plays Tic Tac Toe by herself in another circle.

James turns to Mark.

JAMES

I want to die.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Two large circles of students rotate in opposite directions, matching different pairs of people facing each other.

High five, rotate.

James matches with Mark.

JAMES
Still want to die.

High five, rotate.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

James and Mark sit on the floor in a circle again, now with a TEACHER sitting with them.

TEACHER
And what's one truth you haven't
told anyone before, James?

James adjusts his seat a bit, pretends to think for a moment. Donna, in a neighboring circle, glances over.

JAMES
Still want to die.

Donna snorts. The teacher stares at James, at a loss for words. Mark has his hand over his mouth. The teacher finds his voice.

TEACHER
How--how long have you felt this
way, James?

James shrugs.

JAMES
Eh. Since the Friendship Circle. Or
two hours ago.

James ends his sentence with a pointed glare. The room around him is silent. The OTHER TEACHER -- in Donna's group -- turns to her as she regains her composure.

OTHER TEACHER
Your turn, Ms. Carrington.

DONNA
Oh. Uh --

Donna sticks her thumb at James' circle.

DONNA
Ditto?

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

James and Donna stand in front of a disappointed Principal Farley off to the side of the gym. James holds his hands behind his back, tapping his foot while Donna takes off her glasses, stares in mock attention.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY

I just don't get it, guys. You're usually such awesome students -- why do you have to bring your classmates down with this bumner attitude?

James starts.

JAMES

I--

Donna the schoolgirl cuts him off.

DONNA

We're both so sorry, Dave.

James looks at Donna. *Dave?*

PRINCIPAL FARLEY

You should be! You were snide and glib about what could have been a very cool happening! Both of you. So let's keep the Hate-orade to a minimum and have fun, okay?

DONNA

Sure thing, Dave!

PRINCIPAL FARLEY

James?

James sighs.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY

Look, I know these can seem "lame" or whatever, but I need you to grit your teeth here. In fact, from now on, I want you two to be my ambassadors of awesome.

Donna, grinning ear to ear, turns and shakes a little with suppressed laughter upon seeing James' bewildered face.

Farley looks at James expectantly. James speaks, incredulous.

JAMES
Sounds good... "Dave."

Farley claps his hands together.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Great! Now, I need my two top
students --

He points at James and Donna with both hands.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
-- to run down to the office and
give Mr. Bozeman a message. You
feel me?

DONNA
We're on it, sir!

Donna starts marching away. James is stunned.

JAMES
Wait, you expect us to just --
leave and, and come ba--

Donna swoops back and yanks James' arm.

DONNA
Come on.

JAMES
But--

Donna drags a confused James.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
And, guys?

James and Donna turn around.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Ambassadors of awesome!

Donna gives an arm out-raised salute in mock solidarity.
James makes his own Hitler salute, humoring Farley.

Farley, missing the jab, enthusiastically nods and goes back
to the other students as James and Donna slip out.

JAMES
I can't believe this.

DONNA
Neither can I, but that's no reason
to stop, is it?

EXT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Donna pushes aside the gym doors, laughing. James follows,
also cracking up. The cloud cover has broken in the sky.

DONNA
We aren't going to the office,
right?

JAMES
Oh, of course not.

DONNA
Good.

Donna meanders for a moment. She pivots to James.

DONNA
That was a display.

JAMES
You mean with the "I'm already
dead?"

DONNA
Yes.

James and Donna start to walk from the gym.

JAMES
Well, what good are my last few
months here if I don't speak my
mind a little? They did ask me,
after all.

DONNA
That they did. What they didn't ask
for was a performance to go along
with it, much as I enjoyed it.

James cracks up.

JAMES
Now, hold up. You think I'm --

James points to himself.

JAMES
-- I'm. The one. Who "performed,"
after that schoolgirl routine you
pulled back there?

DONNA
Listen, I just wanted Dave --

They both laugh.

DONNA
-- I just wanted Dave to know what
great students we were.

JAMES
Yeah, but did you have to make it
so... porn-y?

DONNA
It wasn't porn-y!

JAMES
"I'm so sorry, Dave."

James bats his eyelids at Donna.

JAMES
"Is there anything I can do to get
that grade?"

DONNA
I didn't say that!

Donna's pocket vibrates.

JAMES
Might as well have.

She pulls out her phone as she and James continue to walk.

DONNA
Riley just texted me. She's in town
-- want to come along?

James is surprised into a smile, taken aback as he's about
to reply -- when he realizes something. His features fall.

JAMES
That would be great... but I
actually have to meet someone for
coffee. In town, ironically.

Donna smiles a hair too late.

DONNA
It's no problem. Got a date?

JAMES
Sort of.

He stops, unsure.

Donna turns around, thinks a bit.

DONNA
You know, if you want, I could give
you a ride.

JAMES
Really? You barely know me.

DONNA
We're going to the same place. Why
not?

JAMES
(sincerely)
Wow. Thanks.

DONNA
It's no problem.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

James and Donna approach the parking lot.

DONNA
That's me.

Her Saab is hunched in its spot as they walk up.

JAMES
You've seen better days.

Donna opens the door with a creak.

DONNA
Bertha has plenty of life in her,
okay?

Donna and James get in. BERTHA, 20, sinks a few inches.

JAMES
"Bertha?"

INT. BERTHA - DAY

Donna slams her door closed.

DONNA

Like a grand old automobile.

James tentatively closes his, all too aware how fragile Bertha likely is, trying not to step on the Miles Davis CDs on the floor.

Donna starts the car --

EXT.SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

-- and Bertha sputters off.

INT. BERTHA - DAY

DONNA

See? She'll surprise you.

James looks around at Bertha's fading, grey interior.

JAMES

I'm sure it'll be a surprise when she breaks down.

DONNA

Oh, shush. Bertha may not like hills, but she hasn't broken down once.

JAMES

What's wrong with hills?

DONNA

If I don't gun it from the very bottom, Bertha won't make it. She rolls back and I have to do the whole thing over. It's quite annoying, really.

Donna smirks at James.

DONNA

Hopefully there are no hills between us and this date, hmm?

James sighs, bemused.

JAMES
We're back to this, huh?

EXT. STREET - DAY

They reach a red light. Bertha jerks to a stop at the line.

INT. BERTHA - DAY

DONNA
Who is she? Have you just gotten
coffee with her or are you already,
ahem --

Donna takes her hands off the wheel, makes a ring with one hand and sticks a finger through it. James doesn't know how to respond.

DONNA
Oh, forgive me. Can't be too
careful these days -- are they a
"he?" Is it more like --

Donna bumps two fingers against each other. James is shocked into laughter.

JAMES
No. Light's green, Donna.

DONNA
Oh!

Donna quickly gets her hands back on the wheel and floors the gas pedal.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Bertha screeches forward.

INT. BERTHA - DAY

DONNA
Okay, you're discreet. I can
respect that.

JAMES
I just don't think it's much of
anyone's business -- and not in a
standoffish way, just... if someone
really makes you happy, why shout
from the rooftops about it? Why
does it need that validation?

Donna smiles a bit.

DONNA

Huh. Not many guys think about it like that.

James smiles back as Donna then frowns.

DONNA

Really, I don't get how most of you talk about it.

Donna dives into a hyperbolic impression.

DONNA

"Oh, I totally NAILED this chick last night, bro, like, I FUCKED HER PUSSY!"

Donna flashes a jittery, irate shrug.

DONNA

Like, A: How else would I let you fuck me, and B: aren't my orgasms my own business?

Donna tries to laugh it off, unable to hide her resentment. James, still a little shocked, nods.

JAMES

I get that. Wouldn't phrase it quite like that, but I get it.

Donna continues driving.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Bertha pulls up to the curb a few lengths from a coffee shop.

Several small shops and restaurants line the street as well -- a suburban town center where the affluent can feel quaint.

DONNA (IN CAR)

Here we are.

INT. BERTHA - DAY

James nods.

JAMES

Here we are.

He and Donna are silent for a moment.

JAMES
Thanks again for doing this.

DONNA
It was my pleasure.

JAMES
I do feel bad not taking you up on
that offer earlier.

DONNA
Don't. Some other time.

JAMES
Some other time.

James pops open the door.

JAMES
See you in class?

DONNA
Yeah.

He gets out. Donna smiles, pulls out her phone and starts
typing.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

James turns and closes the door. He jogs around the car, up
to just outside the coffee shop. He looks inside the window,
spots someone he recognizes.

He steps away from the window, takes a deep breath. He walks
in.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

James enters. He sees LAURA, 18, concerned, getting up from
her table with an empty coffee.

James steps up to her, his higher pitch belying his offhand
cadence.

JAMES
Hey! Laura.

LAURA
James...

James hugs Laura. She returns it lightly.

JAMES

I know, I know. I'm late. There was this awful "Senior Meeting," I'm actually lucky I got here when I did, Donna was nice enough to give me a ri--

Laura frowns.

LAURA

Who?

JAMES

Donna. Carrington? Don't tell me you forgot everyone from school. I mean, sure, I barely knew her--

LAURA

No, I remember her, but --

Laura looks out the window, sees Donna getting out of her car, decides not to be irked about it.

LAURA

James, I have to go.

JAMES

Look, I know you drove 30 minutes. I'm sorry I'm late. Can we at least talk for a bit?

Laura watches James, unsure.

JAMES

It'll be quick! 5 minutes, tops.

Laura contemplates the space next to James for a moment.

LAURA

Okay.

JAMES

Okay! Great.

James sits down, neatly tucking his chair in. Laura follows, doesn't bother to move her chair at all.

A loaded silence. James relaxes, smiles, thinks of something to say. Laura surveys the room, counting the seconds, politely returns James' smile.

JAMES
So, how's private school since you
transferred?

Laura stands up, starts to leave.

JAMES
Wait, Laura--

Laura stops.

LAURA
What are you doing, James?

JAMES
I'm making small talk, is that the
worst thing?

LAURA
You did not call me months later
for small talk.

JAMES
I did. Forgive me, I did.

LAURA
Why?

JAMES
Because why not? We are friends,
right?

LAURA
It's more complicated than that,
and you know it.

JAMES
But does it have to be?

Laura doesn't respond.

JAMES
Am I making any sense here?

LAURA
No. I need to go.

Laura starts to walk away.

JAMES
If you're going to be like this,
why'd you even come?

She wheels around, hard-eyed.

LAURA

Because I wanted to end this! It should have been over months ago, but...

Laura can't find the words. James understands, nods.

LAURA

So, consider it ended. Fun while it lasted, but over. When things are done, they're done. Please figure that out before you get actually hurt.

James blinks, looks down. Laura speaks for him.

LAURA

Okay.

Laura almost lays her hand on James' shoulder. She pulls away.

LAURA

Bye, James.

Laura looks at him, not unkindly. She turns her back to James and goes out the door.

James forces himself to not watch Laura leave. He stares intently at the wall.

He turns his eyes back to the window. His reflection is glassy-eyed, despondent.

James gets up and walks to the bathroom.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Donna and Riley sit on a bench eating Cuban sandwiches.

Donna attempts (unsuccessfully) to cram half in her mouth with one hand, holding an open paper sandwich box with the rest in her other. Riley has already devoured hers.

RILEY

So where's Chris?

Donna holds up a finger, mouth full, hoisting up the box too. She swallows a bit, nods.

DONNA

(stuffed)

At the meeting still. He'll get out as soon as he can.

Riley chucks her empty sandwich box.

RILEY
How'd you get out, anyway?

Donna gulps the rest down.

DONNA
James and I found an opening.

She drops the rest of her Cuban into the box, closes the top.

RILEY
James?

DONNA
Guy from Lit.

RILEY
Oh, him.

DONNA
Little less mopey in person.

Donna turns as she hears footsteps behind her, spots Chris walking up to them.

CHRIS
Hey, you.

DONNA
Hey yourself.

Chris hugs Donna from behind, Donna hooks an arm around him in return. He sidles up next to Donna on the bench.

CHRIS
So, what are we up to?

DONNA
We were actually waiting for you
before deciding that. Cuban?

Donna holds up her sandwich box.

INT. COFFEE SHOP BATHROOM - DAY

James paces back and forth in an empty bathroom, BREATHING HEAVILY. He puts his hands on his hips, scratches the back of his head, keeps pacing.

He whirls around, throws his arms up in frustration, SLAMS one of his hands down on the top of a stall door. He grips it tightly, arm tensing and shaking.

He kicks the floor several times, cursing with each kick, the STAMPS reverberating.

JAMES
Shit! Shit! Shit!

He goes still. All we hear is his BREATHING as only his chest moves, steadily, urgently rising and falling. His head falls, one last deep BREATH --

With a final EXHALE, James' entire form droops.

He pulls himself up, takes his hand off the stall. His arms hang slightly limp as he steps to the mirror.

James looks at his reflection. His reflection stares back, despondent, wrinkles of worry on his forehead.

James blinks several times, breathes. His forehead relaxes, smooths out.

A cynical, unconcerned face stares at James.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Donna, en garde on the bench, brandishing a branch as if it were a sword, advances towards a similarly-armed Riley.

She takes a swipe.

DONNA
Ha!

Riley blocks. Chris simply stands by the bench, amused. Riley stabs back.

RILEY
Hiya!

CHRIS
Wrong fighting noises!

Donna and Riley continue sword-fighting on the bench.

RILEY
Silence, peasant! This courtly matter concerns you not!

CHRIS
Oh really?

Chris picks up a short twig, flurries it at Donna and Riley. They turn to their third combatant.

DONNA
Oho! A spy! A brigand! A --

Donna puts down her branch. Chris and Riley hesitate.

DONNA
What else could I call him?

Riley hits Donna and Chris with her branch.

Ow! DONNA Shit! CHRIS

Riley tosses her branch aside.

RILEY
That decides it. We're going to the beach.

The rest disarm and sit down.

CHRIS
Better luck next time, Donna.

DONNA
Ah, I've got reach on her. We usually go where I want.

RILEY
Very usually.

CHRIS
Well, wherever, we could still see
that Chinese tea place we've always
wanted to go to afterward.

DONNA
Oh, yeah! That'd be great.

RILEY
I might have to leave after the
beach -- I've got a family thing
tonight.

Donna snorts.

DONNA
Having your folks around? What's
that like?

Donna's rhetorical question hangs unanswered as she spots James walking by. She waves.

DONNA
Hey! What's up?

James stops, affecting calm. He puts up a little smile.

JAMES
Oh. Hey guys. Nothing much.

Donna insists. Chris watches.

DONNA
How did the thing go?

James winces a little.

JAMES
It was fabulous. Listen, I've gotta
get back now, alright?

DONNA
Alright.

James stalks off. Donna looks after him for a moment.

RILEY(O.S.)
Shall we?

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DUSK

James wanders down the street, dim in faded orange light. He looks around, aimless -- until he spots someone.

JAMES
Hey.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE - DUSK

James approaches his house. Mark sits on steps to the porch.

MARK
Hey.

James walks over the lawn, leans on a column aside Mark.

MARK

I'm glad you showed up. Any more time sitting on your porch and it was going to get weird.

JAMES

Just had to be alone for a bit.

James pulls out some grass, starts tearing it up.

JAMES

Aren't you going to say, "I told you so?"

MARK

Why?

JAMES

You were right about Laura. Complete and utter shit show.

MARK

What did you expect?

JAMES

Not that.

James keeps tearing.

JAMES

Why couldn't she see it?

MARK

See what?

JAMES

That it wasn't some grand romantic gesture!

MARK

Maybe you should see it her way.

JAMES

I mean, I can see it her way, but... but goddammit why can't she see it mine!?

James hurls the shreds of grass, storms off, paces around. Mark continues to sit.

James starts and stops himself talking, too much to say at once. Overcome, he screams.

JAMES
HOW FUCKED IS THIS!?

James fumes. Mark responds softly.

MARK
Laura may not get you, but she has
a point. It's over. What else can
you do?

James deflates. He walks back to the porch, sinks onto the
steps next to Mark.

JAMES
You're right.

James quietly rustles in his seat.

JAMES
It hurts. It actually -- hurts --
in my chest. I never thought that
was real.

Mark puts his hand on James' back.

JAMES
I just want to be done.

Silence. Mark takes his hand off.

MARK
If it makes you feel any better,
the "senior lunch" blew. Apparently
Bozeman missed some key
information.

James silently laughs.

JAMES
That might have been our fault.

MARK
"Our?"

JAMES
Well, Farley tried to delegate.
Donna and I just split instead.

Surprise registers on Mark's face.

MARK
Donna?

James frowns, defensive.

JAMES
Yes, Donna. Why is everyone so surprised by this?

MARK
Oh, no reason.

After a moment, Mark comes back in song.

MARK
(schoolyard sing song)
You have a buddy...

JAMES
Oh, please.

James gets up, Mark follows.

JAMES
She's a friend. One of my many friends. Like you.

MARK
Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

James and Mark walk inside.

EXT. CHINESE TEA SHOP - DUSK

Donna and Chris get out of Bertha.

They walk into a tea shop.

INT. CHINESE TEA SHOP - DUSK

Donna and Chris are immediately overwhelmed by the number of containers and jars of tea on all the walls.

Donna can't take in enough, she's so excited.

DONNA
Oh, this place is awesome!

CHRIS
How are we supposed to pick one of these?

DONNA
Why stop with one?

A woman with a slight Cantonese accent speaks up.

TEA SHOP OWNER(O.S.)
Need any help?

Donna and Chris turn around to the OWNER.

DONNA
We're good, thanks.

INT. CHINESE TEA SHOP - LATER

Donna and Chris stand at the counter as the owner rings up a few bags.

TEA SHOP OWNER
You two are a cute couple.

After a moment's shock, Donna points to Chris, Chris to Donna. They hastily reply, talking over each other.

DONNA
Oh, him? No. No, no, no, we're not--

CHRIS
--we're not a boyfriend and girlfriend type-pair--

DONNA
--if we were a pair at all, that is--

CHRIS
--which we're not. At all.

The owner shrugs.

TEA SHOP OWNER
Okay.

Chris and Donna roll their eyes at each other.

EXT. CHINESE TEA SHOP - NIGHT

Chris and Donna walk back to Bertha.

DONNA
Can you believe that?

CHRIS
Yeah, crazy.

Donna opens her door.

INT. BERTHA - NIGHT

Donna and Chris get in. Donna starts Bertha, checks her mirrors.

DONNA

To be fair, we are a cute couple.

Chris smiles a bit, nods.

CHRIS

Oh, for sure.

EXT. CHINESE TEA SHOP - NIGHT

Bertha drives off.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - NIGHT

James shuffles into his room. Giving a long, exasperated sigh, he flops onto his bed fully clothed.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - MORNING

James slowly comes to, blinks, looks around his room, unfocused. He raises his head, sees the trinkets on his desk.

He groans. He grabs a pillow and puts it over his head as he lays back down.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Three long tables ring the room in front of the whiteboard -- as classmates filter in, James droops at the middle table, an empty seat next to him, scribbling in his day planner underneath a motivational poster of a kitten on a branch: "Hang in there!"

He scrawls on the last page, June 9th, in fast, tiny, untidy handwriting: "Graduation -- England." He underlines it three times.

James stares at the page, sighs.

LAUGHTER can be heard outside. James looks up, sees Donna with Chris. Chris peels off at the door, Donna enters.

James busies himself with pulling the right books out of his backpack as Donna pulls out the empty seat.

DONNA
Seat taken?

JAMES
Right now, by peace and quiet.

Donna mock demurs.

DONNA
Oh, that's too bad.

She drops her bag and sits down anyway. James raises his eyebrows, amused, but doesn't say anything.

DONNA
So, how was the rest of your weekend?

JAMES
Ever look up from bed in the morning and think, "Nope?"

DONNA
All the time.

JAMES
Well, the feeling hasn't worn off yet. So, if you don't mind.

James goes back to scribbling in his day planner.

DONNA
If you insist.

Donna pulls out a camera, makes a show of it. James looks over, keeps scribbling.

JAMES
What's with the camera?

DONNA
Oh, don't mind this silly thing. It's just a DSLR. I only use it sparingly, y'know -- professional portfolio here, fellowship there.

James puts down his pen and sighs, grins a bit.

DONNA
And with this silly video project coming up, surely such skills are useless--

JAMES
What, do you want to partner up?

DONNA
If you insist.

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Bertha sits on the driveway of a suburban home next to a grassy lawn, a sloping hill behind it.

JAMES
Did we really have to come all the way out here for this?

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

James strolls by a camera on a tripod, looking at all the china in glass cabinets near a wooden table. Candles, wine glasses, and plates adorn it.

JAMES
I still think we should have filmed a couple of trash cans in black and white and called it art.

Donna opens a drawer in front of him and looks through it.

DONNA
We're supposed to attempt a decent period short, here, James. It should look good.

James grunts as he sits down on the table.

JAMES
Yes, "good," not "award-winningly minute in detail."

DONNA
Okay, I know it seems crazy and overdoing it, but my house is honestly the best place to film.

Donna stops rummaging, pulls out a few ornate knives and forks, starts to turn.

DONNA
The table is even authentic Victorian --

She sees James on the table, clutches the cutlery tighter.

DONNA
Authentic Victorian rosewood.

James starts.

JAMES
Oh! Off?

DONNA
Yes, off!

James plops down, realigns the table cloth. He looks to Donna encouragingly, only to see her still glaring.

He puts his hands in his pockets and hangs his head in mock guilt.

Donna moves past him and puts a pair of silverware next to a plate on the table. James turns. She frowns, swaps them back and forth. She stops, frowns again.

DONNA
Should the knife go on the left or the right?

JAMES
American or European?

DONNA
European.

JAMES
Either way, I don't know.

Donna drops the rest of the silverware, starts leaving.

DONNA
Alright, we're getting my book.

James follows, incredulous.

JAMES
You have a book on
table-setting...?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Donna and James trot through the hallway, past family photos, pictures, a small painting or two.

DONNA
You don't?

James gives her a look.

DONNA
Kidding. But yes, I do.

Donna swings abruptly around a corner, James backs up to follow.

INT. STAIRCASE - DAY

Donna and James walk up some stairs.

DONNA
Old-fashioned decorum, etiquette,
it's all so fascinating. I don't
think I could stand living like
that for long, though.

JAMES
According to your books, you aren't
very ladylike?

DONNA
No.

INT. DONNA'S ROOM - DAY

Donna rifles through her overstuffed bookshelf, scanning titles. "Japanese Etiquette and Conduct"; "A Sicilian Romance"; "Proper Table Setting."

DONNA
See? I adore this shit.

Donna slides the last book out. James looks over the bookshelf.

JAMES
Japanese conduct?

DONNA
Oh, Japanese conduct especially.
You know how repressive they were?

JAMES
And this is a positive?

DONNA
But of course!

James shakes his head, smiling.

JAMES
You're a weird lady, Donna. A cool
one, but... juuuuust a bit insane.

Donna smiles back. James quickly speaks again, hopes she won't get the wrong idea.

JAMES
I mean that as a compliment, of course.

James looks for a reaction. Donna looks straight back.

Suddenly self-conscious, James looks away, clears his throat. Donna doesn't.

DONNA
Do you want to see the abandoned crawlspace?

JAMES
Ha ha.

DONNA
Seriously, I just need to show you a body or two.

JAMES
Uh huh.

James begins to walk out. Donna ticks off her fingers as she follows, holding her book.

DONNA
The men who've scorned me, my illegitimate half-brother, my neighbor's annoying pug...

JAMES
You killed Puggy?

DONNA
I mean, I am insane.

Donna closes the door behind them, leaving the room empty.

DONNA (LATER)
What about you, James?

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

James arranges the silverware on the table -- European style, taking cues from the book lying open on the table. Donna sits there, too, playing with a matchbook in her hands.

DONNA
What catches your eye these days?

JAMES
Nothing, really.

DONNA
Really?

JAMES
Really. I figure as soon as I'm out
of here, I'll write, but until
then...

James shrugs.

DONNA
So you're a writer?

JAMES
Oh, no. A writer needs to write.

James arranges the last placement, sits down across from
Donna.

JAMES
It sounds silly, but I really just
need this year to end.

DONNA
Oof. Don't we all.

JAMES
Maybe. I need it a little more than
everyone else, probably.

Donna quietly fiddles with the matchbook, sensing he has
more to say. James puts up a hand.

JAMES
Mind if I get real pretentious here
for a second?

DONNA
By all means -- you see the decor.

James looks at the china again.

JAMES
Right. How can someone care about
you and not care about you at the
same time?

DONNA
Are you thinking of anyone in
particular?

JAMES
Just a friend or two.

James laughs.

JAMES
I guess that's what's really on my
mind.

Donna thinks for a moment, puts down the matchbook.

JAMES
I'm sorry. I'm even boring myself
here.

DONNA
You're not boring me.

JAMES
Please. No one wants to talk about
this stuff. Not when we could
gossip or whine about school -- you
know, important things.

James pauses, biting back his sarcasm. Donna watches, torn
between sympathy and laughter.

JAMES
I sound like a real asshole, don't
I?

DONNA
A little, yes. And dramatic.

James chuckles, smiles to himself.

JAMES
Huh. I never noticed before, I
guess.

James goes quiet, self-conscious again. Donna grins, picks
up the matchbook again.

DONNA
Listen. That isn't the worst thing
in the world. And if it's the end
of the year you want...

Donna opens the matchbook, strikes a match.

JAMES
What, you can time travel?

DONNA
No, but I can think of a way or two
to pass the time.

Donna lights the candle at the table.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Tom Lehrer's "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park" starts to play.

James and Donna walk through an aisle of a grocery store.
Donna turns to James.

DONNA
Ever pretended to be an arguing
married couple in public?

James' confused expression speaks for itself.

DONNA
Want to?

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - DAY

Donna's about to take a picture of James with her camera,
when James pulls a stupid face at the last moment. Donna
hits James.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

James and Donna loudly bicker. Passersby exchange
uncomfortable looks.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

James and Donna randomly run into each other walking the
same direction in the hallways. They carry on a loud,
obnoxious conversation, "oblivious" to the classes nearby.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE - DAY

James strolls to his mailbox. He opens it, takes out an
official-looking envelope. He frowns.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna tells a joke that makes James laugh so hard he crumples under his desk.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

James and Donna's bickering couple gets physical as loaves of bread are thrown in the altercation.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

James can't close his stuffed locker as Donna stands around impatiently. He opens it, starts rearranging items inside.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna looks over the spot James collapsed, a little concerned as he can't stop cackling.

DONNA

James?

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The locker still won't shut. James starts to open it again when Donna politely moves him aside by his shoulders and slams the door, pounding it with her fist a few times for good measure.

She shrugs at him as they walk away.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna is still looking over James' desk when he speaks up, albeit in a winded voice. The song ends.

JAMES

I'm good...

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - DAY

James sits next to Donna against the wall, watching a laptop propped on Donna's lap, food and drinks out by them.

On the screen, "Rebel Without a Cause" plays, Natalie Wood living up to her name with her performance.

NATALIE WOOD

...is this what love is like?

James and Donna burst out laughing.

JAMES

Yes, that's what love is like.

DONNA

"I've known him for 10 hours, I'm 16, and I'm mildly horny. It must be love!"

JAMES

And he should know better, too. Oh look, the annoying little kid is back.

DONNA

"Go away, Plato, Jim and I need to jump on the bed for a bit!"

James shakes his head, takes a sip of his soda.

JAMES

Fuckin' Natalie Wood, man.

Further down, Mark watches the pair, amused. Riley walks up to his side.

RILEY

Hey, Mark.

MARK

Hey, Riley.

RILEY

You know, Donna told me the other day that James was the only person in Lit she actually liked being around.

MARK

That's not exactly surprising.

RILEY

No, but it's weird to hear it out loud, isn't it?

MARK

Very.

James and Donna start laughing again.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - DAY

James searches inside his closet, pulls out an open cardboard box, plops it on his desk. In it sit little trinkets, reminders.

One by one, he picks up the trinkets on his desk, looks at them, and tosses them in the box or the trash can on the floor -- except for the giraffe.

He comes to a packet of hot sauce, picks it up, scrunches up his face.

JAMES

Oh, hell no.

James chucks it in the trash with particular force, quickly looks back to make sure the packet didn't break. Satisfied, he grabs the box, when he sees something inside. He picks it up.

A picture of Laura, smiling in a way we've never seen her before.

James looks at the girl as he would a stranger.

He tenderly places the photo back, face down in the box.

INT. DONNA'S ROOM - DAY

Donna's camera clicks as she takes a photo.

Chris sits at Donna's desk, holding a silly pose with one of Donna's Japanese folding fans, Donna on her bed. Clothes litter the floor.

Donna looks down at the picture on the camera's screen, laughs. She holds up the camera for Chris to see.

DONNA

Sexy, no?

CHRIS

Very. That's only one of my many
"fans."

Donna puts the camera away.

DONNA

I'm just going to ignore that. You
sticking around?

Chris gets up, fishes for his shirt on the floor.

CHRIS
Nah, I've got stuff to do, sadly.

DONNA
Strange, I don't remember hearing
about these plans five minutes
ago...

Chris slides his shoes on.

CHRIS
I'm sorry. Wasn't it ten minutes?

DONNA
Let's be real, Chris -- it was
five.

CHRIS
We'll settle this later.

Chris goes over and hugs Donna.

CHRIS
Later.

DONNA
Later.

Chris reaches the door.

DONNA
Actually, Chris?

Chris stops. Donna smiles, on the verge of saying something.
She eventually just shakes her head.

DONNA
You know what, I'll tell you some
other time.

Chris smiles back, leaves.

Donna, alone in her room, gets up, ambles around. She picks
up her phone and earbuds, flops back on her bed.

She swipes on her phone, puts in her earbuds. Miles Davis
starts playing. She closes her eyes.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna, humming the same song, doodles a perverse cartoon in her notebook, one of dozens on the same page. James stares at it, slouching, head in one hand, oblivious to the lesson taking place.

Donna looks over, whispers.

DONNA
You're bored, aren't you?

James whispers back.

JAMES
Very. But so are you.

DONNA
What, these?

JAMES
It's a whole page, Donna.

DONNA
Oh, that's nothing.

Donna flips through dozens of pages in her notebook, all the way to the end, all filled with doodles. James looks back to the front of the class.

JAMES
I take it back. How could you be
bored when accomplishing so much?

Donna punches James in the arm. James grips it in pain, trying to keep quiet.

JAMES
Ow!

James shoots an accusatory glance at Donna. She just smiles serenely. He starts actually taking notes on the lecture.

Donna leans over.

DONNA
Hey, James.

James ignores her.

DONNA
Hey, James.

James coughs.

DONNA

Psst!

JAMES

What.

DONNA

Prom's in a month.

JAMES

That it is.

DONNA

You going?

JAMES

I don't know. Probably not.

Quiet note-taking. James whispers again.

JAMES

What about you?

DONNA

I don't think I'll go either.

JAMES

It's just such a sham.

DONNA

Oh, absolutely. You buy an expensive dress, listen to a bad DJ, mill about with people you don't really care about--

JAMES

Actually, I'd just hang out in the corner. Besides, something about me in a dress feels off.

DONNA

True, true. And the whole time, our fine peers are completely and totally wasted, doing only god-knows-what in the bathrooms.

JAMES

Really? I think it's pretty clear what they're doing.

Donna sighs.

DONNA
It is painfully obvious, isn't it?

Donna shrugs.

DONNA
Might actually be fun.

James tentatively responds, hemming and hawing.

JAMES
In the right mindset, sure.

DONNA
So you may go?

James sighs.

JAMES
I may go. Emphasis on the "may."

Donna smirks.

MARK(LATER)
(loudly)
You might go to prom?

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Mark sits upright at the table, rows of bookshelves behind him, his hands out in shock above an open copy of "Catcher in the Rye."

James waves his hand down in a "shushing" motion.

JAMES
Shh! Quiet down!

Mark puts his hands down, relaxes in his seat. James goes back to calculus work, a textbook and scratchpaper splayed out on his side of the table.

MARK
(quieter)
Why? Because it's a library, or
because you don't want anyone to
know that you --

Mark points at James, jabbing with each part of his name, breaking out in quiet laughter by the end.

MARK

James Nathaniel Hawthorne. Are going to anything as common, normal, and dare I say, high school-y as the prom?

JAMES

May! Emphasis on the "may!"

MARK

Sure thing, chief.

Mark goes back to his book, quickly looks up again.

MARK

Mind if I come over tonight? I figure I can finish this essay at your place.

JAMES

"Sure thing." Just don't call me chief again.

INT. DONNA'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Donna plays Scrabble with Riley at the table, now barren compared to its lavish setup for the film earlier.

RILEY

Parents out again?

Donna puts down a few letters.

DONNA

Yep. I'm thinking whatever's left in the fridge, a movie, and sleep.

Donna's phone on the table buzzes. She picks it up as Riley looks back and forth from her letters to the board, twirling a piece in her fingers.

DONNA

Or not. Chris just texted me. He wants to come over.

Riley puts the piece down, gets up as Donna taps on her phone.

RILEY

That's my cue to go.

DONNA
No, not like that. (beat) He'll be
here soon.

Donna shrugs, a little excited.

INT. DONNA'S ENTRANCE - DAY

Chris can be seen through the window on the front door.
Donna opens the door.

CHRIS
Hey.

DONNA
Hey, yourself.

Chris looks in, sees Riley sitting at the table, smiles and
waves.

CHRIS
Hey, Riley.

RILEY
Hi, Chris.

Chris keeps standing outside the door.

DONNA
Do you want to come inside, or...?

CHRIS
Not really. Actually, can we talk
outside?

Donna laughs a little, confused.

DONNA
Okay...

CHRIS
Later, Riley.

RILEY
Bye, Chris.

Chris and Donna go outside.

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Donna closes the door behind her. She walks with Chris out to the lawn, early evening low rays of sunlight streaking the grass.

DONNA
What's up?

Chris laughs.

INT. DONNA'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Riley moves to the window, watches Donna and Chris.

CHRIS(O.S.)
What do you mean, what's up?

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Donna shrugs.

DONNA
Coming out like this?

CHRIS
Oh, it's no big deal. It can wait
until later, if you want.

Donna comes closer to Chris.

DONNA
No, you came all the way here, spit
it out.

Chris hems and haws.

CHRIS
Ahhh, I didn't know Riley was here.

Donna laughs.

DONNA
Come on, I tell her everything
anyway. It's fine. What did you
want to tell me?

Chris bites his lip.

DONNA
Maybe you changed your mind and you
do want to hang out tonight?

Donna tilts her head playfully.

DONNA
Or maybe it's something else.

Chris nods.

CHRIS
It is something else.

Donna looks up into Chris' eyes, unblinking.

DONNA
What is it?

Chris laughs a little.

CHRIS
I don't know how to say this. I'm
kinda embarrassed.

DONNA
So just say it.

Donna puts her hand on Chris' arm, still looking into his eyes. Chris takes a breath.

CHRIS
I started seeing someone.

Donna's eyes go dead. Her hand stays on his arm.

DONNA
That's great, Chris.

Chris nervously laughs a little.

CHRIS
Right?

INT. DONNA'S DINING ROOM - DAY

A look of disbelief spreads on Riley's face.

RILEY
He did not just...

EXT. DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Donna takes her hand off, puts on a smile.

DONNA
Well, who is it?

CHRIS
Michelle.

DONNA
Oh, Michelle. She's cute. Spunky.
Says "bomb" a lot, doesn't she?

Chris laughs a bit.

CHRIS
Yeah, she is. She does, huh?

DONNA
She's a nice girl.

Chris' brows furrow slightly.

CHRIS
So, you're cool with this, right?

DONNA
Oh, completely.

CHRIS
I mean, we've been hanging out for
a while.

Donna affects a shrug.

DONNA
It was always totally casual.

CHRIS
Right. Right, I agree completely.
We're friends, that's all.

DONNA
Yeah.

Donna stands around, Chris doesn't know what to say.

DONNA
Well, thanks for letting me know.
I'm going back inside.

Donna hugs Chris.

DONNA
See you.

CHRIS
See you.

They part. Donna walks back to the house.

INT. DONNA'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

Riley watches Chris go back to his car through the window. She hears Donna slam the door shut on her way in, turns to look at her.

Donna drags herself back to her seat at the table, distant.

Riley puts her hand on Donna's shoulder. They sit still for a minute.

Finally, Donna speaks, quiet.

DONNA

That dick.

Donna sniffs a little.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - NIGHT

James writes in a notebook at his desk, a messy pile of papers almost covering a large, official-looking envelope. Mark sits on James' bed behind him, propped against the wall.

MARK

I figure the two hours before class
is enough time to finish that
paper.

JAMES

Oh, more than enough. You're
talking about "Catcher in the Rye."
Just write "it's all phony," and
you're done.

Mark nods at James' notebook.

MARK

Which homework is that?

JAMES

None. I'm just writing.

Mark gets up, looks over James' shoulder.

MARK

Actual words? Stories? James, you
haven't done this since--

James turns his chair to face Mark, only the back of his head visible.

JAMES
Since Laura. Yeah.

MARK
That's great, man!

Mark claps James on the back.

JAMES
Thanks.

MARK
But wait, I thought you were
cramming on that university
application? Where'd all this free
time come from?

James looks down for a moment.

JAMES
I finished it. A while ago,
actually. In fact --

James pauses. Mark spots the open envelope and reaches over
James, grabs it. Rooted in place, he reads the front.

MARK
"Admissions office..."

James stays still. Mark fumbles inside the envelope, pulls
out the letter.

MARK
"Dear Mr. Hawthorne, it is our
pleasure to inform you..."

Mark throws the letter down.

MARK
You got in!?

Mark hugs James, the end of a wide grin visible on the edge
of James' face.

JAMES
I did, I did.

MARK
Holy shit, man!

Mark lets go of James.

MARK

So it's happening? In a month,
we're graduating, and then a couple
months later...

James turns his chair once more, now facing Mark, his face
in full view for the first time, smiling yet melancholy.

JAMES

I'm gone.

The two come down a little.

MARK

I'm guessing that's why you didn't
tell me?

James nods.

MARK

And why you probably haven't told
Donna?

JAMES

Why should I? We both know it's
coming, we have since the day we
met. It's not exactly a surprise.

MARK

College is not a surprise.
England is.

JAMES

It's fine. It will be fine.

Mark sits back down on the edge of the bed.

MARK

James.

James turns to Mark, affecting calm.

MARK

Is Donna just a friend? If she is,
great, but if not...

JAMES

We're friends. That's all.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Rain pours outside the hallway. James walks through. He spots Michelle with Chris pass by as he enters a classroom.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna sits upright in her customary spot, etching another drawing in her notebook.

James plops down next to her, clapping.

JAMES

You showed up first! I'm proud,
really, I am.

Donna puts on a high pitched laugh.

DONNA

Why thank you, my esteemed
gentleman.

Donna abruptly stops and goes back to her drawing. James leans over.

JAMES

What's that?

DONNA

More boredom. Moredom.

James looks down. Several shockingly well-drawn cockroaches adorn the page.

JAMES

Really? Because those look like
cockroaches.

DONNA

Oh, they are.

Donna stops drawing and props up her notebook for a clearer view.

The cockroaches are dismembering a stick figure.

JAMES

...and they're eating this guy.

DONNA

Mhm.

JAMES
Didn't realize stick figures could
bleed.

DONNA
Oh, they can.

James drums his fingers on the table.

JAMES
Do you want to talk about anything,
Donna?

He's only half joking.

DONNA
No, not really.

JAMES
Alright.

EXT. CITY BUILDING - NIGHT

JAMES
Far from it!

James and Mark walk up to a stone facade of columns, wearing suits, a limo pulling up to the curb behind them.

MARK
Come on, this is fine.

JAMES
I don't care how fancy the venue
is. We could be in the Sistine
Chapel, and it'd still be prom, the
last hurrah of suck.

They hear obnoxiously loud LAUGHTER behind them. They turn and see a few kids passing around a bottle of rum next to the open-doored limo.

James shakes his head and turns back as they keep walking.

JAMES
I'd just feel bad for the chapel
more than anything. Here, too,
while we're at it.

A line forms in front of two guards at the entrance of the building. James and Mark stop at the end. Mark crosses his arms.

MARK
So why are you here?

JAMES
Because...

James throws his arms up.

JAMES
Because why not. Watching *Speed* on
cable isn't as fun the sixth time
around.

The group of kids from the limo catches up. One spots Mark,
clearly inebricated.

INEBRICATED KID
Hey man!

MARK
Hey, Mike.

INEBRICATED KID
This is a pretty fresh jam, huh!?

JAMES
How can you tell? Shouldn't we
see the dance before making that
call?

The kid laughs hysterically.

INEBRICATED KID
That's funny! You're so funny, man!
What's your name again?

James rolls his eyes as the kid puts his hand on James'
shoulder. He shrugs it off as he sees the line open up.

JAMES
Oh, is it time to go in already?

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

The room, dimly lit, made mostly of marble, may have been
grand in other circumstances.

Underneath an ornate chandelier (unlit) and strobe lights
(cheap), the dance floor undulates with students
half-heartedly bobbing to a pop song.

INT. PROM BALCONY - NIGHT

James walks up to a balcony overlooking the scene, sighs. Mark, right behind him, only looks for a moment before speaking.

MARK
I say we get drinks.

JAMES
What, bum off of Mike's rum bottle?

MARK
I was thinking the punch bowl at
the edge of the room, there...

Mark points to a table with a tacky red tablecloth, cups, and a punchbowl. There are more people watching the "dance" from the edge than dancing.

MARK (CONT.)
...but spirits could work too, if
you're in the mood to get
plastered.

JAMES
I'll let you know.

The two start to work their way down some stairs.

EXT. CITY BUILDING - NIGHT

Bertha the Saab jerks into a parking spot across the street from the prom venue.

INT. BERTHA - NIGHT

Donna pulls the handbrake, takes the key out of the ignition, Riley next to her.

Riley gets out, looks back in.

RILEY
You coming?

DONNA
Oh, go ahead, I'm just going to be
a moment.

RILEY
'kay.

Riley hesitates for a second before closing the door and walking away.

Donna sits, illuminated only by the lights of passing cars, staring out. Her watch lays on her left wrist.

She looks down, smoothes out her dress, and gets out.

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Donna sidles through the bobbing crowd, smiling, waving, saying "hi" here and there.

She keeps pushing through until she spots Riley milling about at the edge of the crowd, James and Mark nearby sitting at one of the tables by the punch. James' face is slouched on his arms, peering at the crowd.

Donna walks next to Riley and nudges her toward the table.

As Donna and Riley come over, James speaks up, his voice muffled in his arms.

JAMES
(muffled)
I don't know if I'm going to make
it.

Riley jerks her head at James.

RILEY
Has he been like that the whole
time?

MARK
Yep. And it's barely been an hour,
mind you. We have to stay here at
least four more.

James groans, sinks deeper, puts his head face down.

JAMES
(muffled)
That's the sound of my soul slowly
leaving my body...

DONNA
You'll be fine.

Donna looks at the dance floor.

DONNA
Might as well go on the floor for a
bit.

Donna turns back.

DONNA
Anyone else coming?

RILEY
I'm good.

Riley sinks into one of the seats.

MARK
Later, maybe.

James grunts. Donna shrugs, heads off.

James picks himself up. The table is quiet.

MARK
On second thought, I think I'll go.

Mark gets up and leaves. James drinks some punch.

JAMES
So, Riley, are you as happy here as
I am?

Riley laughs.

RILEY
A little less, honestly.

JAMES
I don't know, that's pretty tough.

RILEY
Donna mingles more. I could care
less either way.

James thinks for a moment.

JAMES
You know, she doesn't actually
enjoy mingling.

RILEY
No.

JAMES
So why do it at all?

RILEY
I honestly can't say.

JAMES
Hm. I wish I knew what she thought
sometimes.

RILEY
Just ask her. We can't all be
painfully obvious like you.

James laughs.

JAMES
Point taken.

CUT TO:

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - LATER

Different house music is playing. James leans back in his
chair at the table, absent-mindedly swiping on his phone.
Donna appears at James' shoulder.

Without turning around, James addresses Donna.

JAMES
How goes the ball?

DONNA
As well as you'd expect.

JAMES
Oof.

James looks up at the crowd, still bobbing.

JAMES
Now, I'm new to this whole scene,
but... isn't it customary at a
dance, to, y'know -- dance?

DONNA
Oh no, good sir. It's a well known
fact among America's dancing
elite--

James snorts.

JAMES
"Dancing elite?"

Donna ignores him.

DONNA (CONT.)
-- that the low-class hoedown you'd
call "the waltz" was phased out
years ago for the ever-more refined
"rave."

James nods.

JAMES
Mm.

DONNA
Or, for formal occasions or black
tie affairs such as this --

Donna shrugs.

DONNA
-- grinding.

Suddenly, Donna spots someone, starts.

DONNA
Oh, time for me to go.

James turns around.

JAMES
Wait, what?

Donna bolts off. James is left turning back and forth when
Principal Farley walks up, still wearing his mint-green
shirt.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
James! How's it going, my man?

Could've let me know, Donna.

JAMES
...great, Mr. Farley.

PRINCIPAL FARLEY
Enjoying yourself?

JAMES
Well, being at the prom, I think my
enjoyment speaks for itself.

INT. OTHER SIDE OF PROM - NIGHT

Donna, Mark, and Riley watch James look around uncomfortably as he talks to Farley.

MARK

Did you really have to leave him
blowing in the wind?

Farley goes on and on.

DONNA

Hey, it was him or both of us.
Besides, isn't this worth it?

Farley holds up his hand for a high five.

MARK

Alright, this is great.

James un-enthusiastically obliges Farley.

RILEY(O.S.)

That poor soul. I'm starting to
feel bad for him.

Farley walks off. Mark and Donna are still chuckling.

DONNA

Okay, we've had our fun.

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Donna, Riley, and Mark all come to the table, James staring at his hand as if it is mutilated.

MARK

See? How bad can prom be if you get
to slap skin with Farley?

Donna and Riley chuckle. James keeps clutching his hand.

JAMES

You were all waiting for him to
leave, weren't you?

Innocent whistling.

JAMES

How much time is left here again?

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - LATER

What counts for a "slow" song these days, rap, plays in the background. James, Donna, Mark, and Riley sit at their table in that order.

RILEY
Two hours left.

MARK
Okay, even I'm counting now.

DONNA
At least we have the dulcet tones
of Fetty Wap to pass the time.

JAMES
This isn't Fetty Wap.

DONNA
Whatever.

Someone walks by the table.

RILEY
That's the fifth time that guy's
used the restroom.

Two conversations start.

MARK
Maybe he just really cares
about his appearance.

DONNA
"Bitch Ima fuck you up the
fuckfuck with mah AK fuck."

RILEY
With hair like that?
Please.

DONNA
See, I can rap too.

MARK
The tousled look is a look.

JAMES
There's a little more
nuance than that.

RILEY
There's tousled and then
there's that.

DONNA
Oh, forgive me. "Bitch my
dick more OG than Donald
Trump, Ima fuck you up the
fuckfuck with mah AK fuck.
Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck.
Better?"

MARK
See, you're insulting him,
but that guy has nicer hair
than me.

JAMES
Perfect.

Riley has the last word.

RILEY
It must be whatever he's snorting.

Silence. Riley looks at her phone.

RILEY
An hour and 58 minutes left.

James gets up.

JAMES
I'm going to get more punch.

MARK
They're out.

JAMES
Then the ice cubes, I don't care.

James shuffles away.

DONNA
I think I'm going out again.

RILEY
Really?

DONNA
I've awkwardly sat here for an hour
-- now it's time to awkwardly stand
around for an hour.

RILEY
Well, I'm staying right here.

MARK
I second that motion.

Donna starts to get up. She spots Chris in the crowd. They make awkward eye contact for a moment and Donna goes back down.

DONNA
On second thought, here is lovely.

INT. PROM ROOM BY PUNCH TABLE - NIGHT

James tilts a ladle in the empty punch bowl, looks around the table.

JAMES

Not even a cooler. God damn it.

James shrugs. Someone taps him on the shoulder.

James turns face to face with Chris.

JAMES

Oh! Howdy.

CHRIS

Hey, James.

JAMES

...can I help you?

Chris hems and haws.

CHRIS

Well, this is pretty awkward. Maybe you can, but... you and Donna seem pretty close.

James raises an eyebrow.

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Donna spots Chris talking to James.

DONNA

(to herself)

Oh no...

INT. PROM ROOM BY PUNCH TABLE - NIGHT

JAMES

I'm not about to get decked, am I?

CHRIS

Oh, no, no, nothing like that.

JAMES

I thought you two were tight?

CHRIS

Yeah, so did I. Then I tell her I'm with Michelle--

James' eyes widen, narrow again.

JAMES
Says "bomb" a lot, doesn't she?

CHRIS
Donna said the same -- anyway, now
she's giving me the cold shoulder.

James snorts.

JAMES
Look, I'm no expert, but do you
really need this spelled out?

CHRIS
We agreed it was casual. How was I
supposed to know?

JAMES
Are you telling me what someone
says and what someone thinks can be
two different things?

Chris' nostrils flare.

CHRIS
I'm not an idiot!

JAMES
Really, now.

CHRIS
You know, I'm having second
thoughts about not decking you.

Chris grits his teeth, puts his arms out in confusion.

CHRIS
I just, I really thought Donna and
I were good.

James can't keep the scathing tone out of his voice.

JAMES
Well, we don't want to sleep with
anyone seriously, now do we. Go
figure, the silly girl got
feelings.

CHRIS
James, could you drop the sarcasm
for one moment!

JAMES
Okay, I'll drop it: you fucked up.

CHRIS
I--

JAMES
What do you want?

CHRIS
Could you just talk to her?

James sighs.

JAMES
Fine.

James, shaking his head, walks off.

CHRIS
Really, I had no idea.

James turns, incredulous, and shrugs, as if to say, *what difference does it make?* He keeps walking.

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

James walks into the crowd, hanging at the edges. He finds a pillar, leans against it.

He stares into the crowd.

A hand brushes James' shoulder as a figure moves past him.

James turns and sees the back of Donna walking away. She looks over her shoulder and goes up the staircase. James pushes his back off the pillar.

INT. PROM BALCONY - NIGHT

Donna has her back to James, arms crossed as he comes up the stairs to the balcony.

JAMES
Chris says--

DONNA
I don't give a fuck.

JAMES
Figured.

Donna turns.

DONNA
You want to get out of here?

JAMES
There's an "out?"

Donna tilts her head to a nearby door. Despite multiple "DO NOT ENTER" and signs of the like...

JAMES
Oh, please.

Donna leads the way out.

EXT. CITY BUILDING BALCONY - NIGHT

James and Donna breathe deeply, both leaning on a railing overlooking the street. They're not looking at the street, but up at the night sky.

Donna speaks quietly.

DONNA
Finally, I can hear myself think.

JAMES
And we don't have to yell ourselves hoarse to hear each other.

DONNA
It's the little things, isn't it?

They keep looking up silently.

JAMES
You know, if we were back home, instead of out in the city, we could see more stars.

DONNA
I already miss them. We should stargaze sometime.

JAMES
Sure. It's a --

James stops himself.

JAMES
Occasion. It's an occasion.

Donna laughs.

DONNA
An "occasion?"

James changes the subject as a particularly loud song can be slightly heard from inside.

JAMES
Now, I'm afraid I may sound like an old man here, but the music they're playing in there...

DONNA
Oh, I know. It's awful.

JAMES
It's weird, but I miss old things, you know? Even if I never lived through them.

DONNA
Like music?

JAMES
Like a lot of things, but music definitely. Especially at the prom. Where's actual romantic music?

DONNA
For actual romantic music, you need actual romance.

JAMES
Touché.

DONNA
Well, I get it.

Donna holds up her wrist, showing her watch to James.

DONNA
Do you know why I still have a watch?

JAMES
Why?

DONNA
Because it's beautiful. It may be useless, time may be fleeting -- but it's beautiful. And beauty exists far beyond the limited time it occupies.

Donna turns to James, looks him in the eye.

DONNA
Don't you think?

James is struck. He stares back at Donna, in awe.

Donna pulls herself up, takes out her phone.

DONNA
Here, you'll like this. Speaking of
real music...

She taps a few times. Billie Holiday's "I'll Be Seeing You" starts to play. She puts the phone on the railing, holds out her hand.

DONNA
Would you care to join me in a
waltz?

JAMES
I'm afraid I don't know how.

DONNA
It's simple. I'll teach you.

Donna shakes her hand. James grins sheepishly, takes her hand. They step away from the railing.

They turn. Donna outstretches her arm holding James' hand. James hesitates a split second before putting his other hand on Donna's back. They stay there a moment.

DONNA
Okay, first, you step back.

James steps back, right-left, Donna following closely.

DONNA
Bring your feet together.

James puts his feet together.

DONNA
Now step forward.

They move together, left-right.

DONNA
And then just turn all the while.
Ready?

James nervously laughs.

JAMES
Not nearly.

DONNA
Well, we'll just have to make do.

They start to slowly waltz. James looks at Donna sparingly, but mostly off to the side.

DONNA
Look at me, James, not the guy
being sodomized across the street.

James laughs, loosens up.

JAMES
There's a guy being sodomized
across the street?

DONNA
No, but it got you to relax, didn't
it? You're doing fine.

James, still laughing a little, keeps looking at Donna, grows into the dance.

They turn in each other's arms in content silence.

Donna moves her fingers, feeling James' hand, closes her eyes. James breathes deeply. He allows himself to do the same, for a moment.

Right-left. Left-right.

When James opens his eyes, Donna is beaming.

DONNA
What a wonderful way to spend an
evening.

James sees the look in Donna's eyes.

JAMES
You sure you're okay about Chris?

DONNA
Oh, I'll make do. I like him an
awful lot, and it'll take forever
to get over him, but --

Donna smiles.

DONNA

It doesn't seem so bad right now,
for some reason.

She stops for a moment, but keeps going, as if this has been
on her chest for a while, still waltzing.

DONNA

I heard you talking to Chris. I
know all about Laura.

JAMES

Oh, no, Donna--

DONNA

It's okay! It's actually more than
"okay," it's... there's this
decency about you, James. A decency
I didn't even know I missed.

Donna takes her hand off James' back, puts it on his arm.

DONNA

And I don't know if I want to miss
it again.

James looks at Donna, afraid. He pauses before telling her
what he has to.

JAMES

I'm going to England.

Donna looks down, still smiling. They keep moving.

DONNA

Ah.

James tries to joke it off.

JAMES

But hey, if I find any decent guys,
I'll be sure to swing them your
way. Because there sure as hell are
none here, right?

James tries to say something else, to find the words -- but
he can't.

Sadness tinges Donna's smile as she looks back up.

DONNA

I love Billie Holiday. I really do.
In fact, I only have one problem
with her.

Donna tears up a little.

DONNA
She's so damn coy.

Donna pauses.

DONNA
You want to know what I think?
What's true about me? This. Now.
Pleading you to just tell me what I
know you --

Donna stops dancing, at a loss for words. James stops, too.

JAMES
I -- I can't.

They stand silent, Billie Holiday still playing.

DONNA
Well, thank you for the dance. It
was grand.

JAMES
While it lasted.

DONNA
While it lasted.

JAMES
I'll see you in class?

DONNA
Yeah.

James walks away. Donna slowly walks back to the railing as the song ends.

As she sits down, crumpled, back against the railing, a cheery synth-pop song starts.

INT. PROM BALCONY - NIGHT

All we can hear is the song. James looks at the crowd below.

EXT. CITY BUILDING BALCONY - NIGHT

Donna looks up at the starless sky, still sitting at the railing.

INT. PROM DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

James wanders in the crowd, seeing all the happy faces.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

Bertha is alone in her lane, cars passing by.

INT. BERTHA - NIGHT

Donna watches the road, trying to be stoic. Riley sleeps in the passenger seat.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - NIGHT

James shuffles in his room, tired. He looks around as if thinking, *here we are again*.

INT. DONNA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Donna lies in her bed, looking through photos on her camera. She comes to the picture of James making a stupid face.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

James bumps shoulders with other kids as he walks.

INT. LIT CLASSROOM - DAY

Donna sits down next to James. They exchange brief pleasantries, then stare straight ahead.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - DAY

James writes in his room.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - DAY

James and Mark walk along the courtyard past Donna and Riley. James and Donna politely wave, Mark and Riley shrug at each other behind the other two's backs.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

James stands in line at the coffee shop. He looks at the empty table in the corner.

INT. DONNA'S ROOM - DAY

Donna comes across James' photo again on her camera. She deletes it.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - DAY

Wearing a graduation robe, James uses his phone's camera as a mirror, adjusts the robe. He sighs a bit, walks out.

EXT. SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Rows of parents sit in chairs on the field, a podium and balloons at the front. James stands in the line of students filing into the crowd.

EXT. SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

James sits in the audience next to some other asshole whose last name starts with an H, watching Principal Farley blather on at the podium, the back of Donna's head in his peripheral vision a few rows up.

EXT. SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

Everyone stands up and throws their hats in the air. The hats come back down.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Tables of snacks line the gym. Balloons are attached to too many surfaces. Everyone walks around, excitedly (or relievedly) talks with family and friends.

James sees Donna laughing with Riley a few feet away.

The synth-pop song ends. The sounds of the crowd TALKING, their FOOTSTEPS, Donna's LAUGHTER fade in.

James looks around, hems and haws. Seeing Donna happy with Riley, he decides not to intrude. Mark runs up, smiling.

MARK

There you are! DUDE! It's over!

James affects a grin, laughs back, his attention divided between Mark and Donna. James watches her as he replies.

JAMES

Yeah. It's over.

Donna turns around, smiling. She sees James. Her smile fades.

James puts on a feeble smile. Donna returns a hasty polite grin.

James turns and walks away with Mark. Donna turns her head. They melt into the crowd. She watches the empty gap.

JAMES(O.S.)
It's over.

BLACKOUT

FROM BLACK:

Seconds of total silence.

The sound of a crow CAWING.

FADE IN:

INT. JAMES' ROOM - DAY

James lies in bed. Bright afternoon light streams in his room as the crow continues to CAW. James blinks, slowly comes to.

JAMES
(to himself)
Of all the idyllic suburban
paradises to live in, we chose the
one with crows...

James pushes himself up, grabs his phone from the side of his bed, checks the time. He grunts, gets out of bed.

INT. JAMES' KITCHEN - DAY

James, wearing his pajamas, pops two pieces of bread in the toaster. He pulls out a plate from a cabinet, puts it down on the counter.

He crosses his arms, watching the toaster. He's ready to wait minutes for the toast, but it's only been a few seconds when someone KNOCKS on the door.

James walks over to the door, opens it, and immediately lets Mark in.

JAMES
Howdy.

James walks back to the toaster. Mark closes the door behind him.

MARK

Hey.

JAMES

I'm making toast instead of
grabbing a scone from the pantry.
I'm an adult now.

Mark joins him at the counter.

MARK

Clearly. Don't tell me you just
learned how to--

JAMES

No. I've made toast since around
elementary school. I just decided
to start again.

James pulls out some butter and a knife.

JAMES

See, during school, I always told
myself I didn't have enough time to
make toast. My time was too
valuable. But now?

James shrugs.

JAMES

My schedule's wide open, and for a
triumphant college-bound high
school graduate, my time feels
remarkably un-valuable.

The toast pops out with a DING. James takes the toast out.

JAMES

So, what do you want to do? Watch a
movie?

He butters the toast, takes a bite.

MARK

I was thinking we could go to that
bonfire tonight.

James chokes a little on his toast.

JAMES

What!? We just escaped our peers,
and now you want to party on a
beach with them?

MARK

You've been moping around for a month.

James scoffs.

JAMES

I'd hardly call this moping.

MARK

Okay, moping or not, why don't you want to go?

JAMES

I thought my reasons were quite clear.

MARK

Yes, but they're bullshit. You don't hate everyone, that excuse flew out with Donna.

JAMES

Oh, yay, there's a person I can stand. And besides, even her, we're not on the best of whatever right now.

MARK

I'm sure if you said something--

JAMES

No! Remember what Laura said? "When things are done, they're done." I'm not about to forget that particular lesson.

MARK

But there's a difference between letting things go and pulling the trigger yourself, deciding it's over just because it might be inconvenient --

Mark stops himself.

MARK

Whatever. My point is we should just go to the damn bonfire.

James picks up his piece of toast.

JAMES

Please, this toast is more
satisfying than some beach
turn-up--

James takes a bite and immediately throws the toast down.

JAMES

Ugh! It's cold now -- alright,
fine, we'll go to the Kumbaya fest,
or whatever, before I change my
mind. Do you actually think this
will be enjoyable at all?

MARK

Oh no, on the contrary. Teens,
booze, fires and open water? Sounds
like a disaster in the making.

James starts to walk out the room.

JAMES

So why force me to come?

MARK

It sounds like a disaster in the
making.

JAMES

Oh! A fun disaster we can laugh at!
Got it.

James walks out.

INT. BERTHA - DUSK

Donna watches the road from behind her shades, shallow
marshes speeding by in her window as she steers.

DONNA

What's the point?

Riley looks out her window.

RILEY

Seeing lots of people before we
leave.

DONNA

Wrong. The point is to have an
excuse to go to the beach and set
up my picnic blanket before you
leave.

EXT. BEACH ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Bertha approaches a hill.

DONNA (IN CAR)
Oh! Hill!

Bertha abruptly screeches forward faster up the hill, Donna pounding the gas pedal.

DONNA (IN CAR)
Hopefully there's enough road on
the other side.

Bertha disappears over the crest.

DONNA(O.S.)
God damn it.

EXT. BEACH PARKING - LATER

Donna and Riley stand at the end of the road next to Bertha -- at the very foot of the hill, with a cluster of other cars.

DONNA
How am I going to get up to speed?

RILEY
Eh, climb that hill when you get
there.

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

Orange light bathes the beach. Some guys play beach volleyball, others frisbee -- plenty just lie around drinking.

Donna, shades-less, watches from her red blanket, Riley next to her.

DONNA
They're happy.

RILEY
Yep.

DONNA
I guess I'm happy. Or not.

RILEY
What?

DONNA

I don't know. I knew it was coming,
but... a lot of friends are gone.

Donna shrugs.

DONNA

Chris went kaput. You're leaving in
like, two days.

Another name goes unspoken.

DONNA

I just didn't think it would go
like this. Any ending is better
than none, I guess.

RILEY

Hey.

Riley hugs Donna.

RILEY

I understand.

DONNA

What am I supposed to say, here?
Final words suck, I'm not going to
see you for months.

RILEY

You know, we all pretend graduation
is this big, dramatic, thing. But I
think it isn't. For better or worse
--

Riley shrugs.

RILEY

I think the future's going to be a
whole lot more of this.

DONNA

If you're there, it's for the
better.

Donna squeezes Riley.

DONNA

I love you, Riley.

RILEY
I love you too, Donna.

Donna and Riley keep holding each other.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

James and Mark wade through the sand. A fire glows in the distance, a few people can be seen huddled around it. The two walk toward it.

JAMES
You are a scary driver, man.

MARK
Well, I just got my license.

JAMES
And how you managed that still confounds me.

MARK
"Thanks for the ride, Mark. I owe you one, Mark." These are the words I'll never hear.

JAMES
...thanks for the ride, Mark.

MARK
No problem.

They arrive at the bonfire. The group drunkenly hails them.

DRUNKEN GROUP
MARK AND THE OTHER GUY! HEY!

James turns to Mark.

JAMES
It's good to know I'll leave a lasting legacy here at Bayview.

One guy in the bonfire group addresses James specifically.

BONFIRE GUY
Hey, (hic!) -- other guy.

James sighs. In the distance behind him, a figure starts approaching.

JAMES

Yes? James?

BONFIRE GUY

Well, Jamal, isn't that (hic!) girl
you were all over here?

JAMES

Um, actually, we're just friends.

BONFIRE GUY

Really? (hic!) The one that
transferred?

James groans, rolls his eyes. The figure now resembles a
girl.

JAMES

God damn -- well, do you know where
she is? So I can, y'know? Never go
there?

LAURA

Here, thanks.

James jumps, whips around and sees Laura right behind him.

JAMES

Ah!

He composes himself.

JAMES

I mean, "Oh hi there."

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Donna lies down with her eyes closed on her blanket. Riley,
who's up, sees something by the fire.

RILEY

Hey, I think James may be here.

Donna gets up.

DONNA

Well, that's my cue to leave.

Donna looks down at Riley, points at the blanket.

DONNA

If you harm a thread on Agnes --

Riley lies back down on AGNES, 7.

RILEY
Won't happen.

Donna wades away, trekking through the dry sand.

DONNA
Better hope not!

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

James and Laura slowly walk away from the fire, the group (and Mark) behind them still cackling at James' reaction.

JAMES
Look, I was startled.

James turns to the group.

JAMES
I was startled!

He turns back as the laughter is renewed.

LAURA
I'm sorry.

JAMES
Ugh, no, please, don't be. I've heard you say that enough.

The sounds of the group get quieter as James and Laura keep walking.

LAURA
Well, I meant it each time.

JAMES
That really doesn't make it better.

Laura stops. James follows.

LAURA
Do we want to try this again?

JAMES
Sure.

LAURA
Hey James, long time no see.

JAMES
Oh, hi there.

LAURA
What have you been up to?

They start walking again.

JAMES
Nothing much. How about you?

LAURA
Packing. Again.

JAMES
You must be sick of it by now.

LAURA
It's actually kinda fun, in the right context.

JAMES
And what's that?

LAURA
College. It's a cliché, but I'm excited.

JAMES
Hm. Excitement didn't seem to come with my luggage.

James pauses.

JAMES
Why'd you show up?

LAURA
I liked the people at my new school fine, but after only a few months, they didn't feel like, you know -- the friends I wanted to say goodbye to before a whole new chapter begins. I wanted to see everyone.

JAMES
Man, you got sentimental.

LAURA
A bit, yeah.

JAMES
Like, a lot.

LAURA
No need to rub it in. Being
sentimental can be good, sometimes.

JAMES
As a word, it actually has a
negative connotation.

LAURA
I'm talking about more than
English, James.

JAMES
I know. I'm just messing with you.

James sighs.

JAMES
The thing is, I don't think I can
afford to get sentimental right
now.

LAURA
Why?

JAMES
Remember Donna?

LAURA
Yeah...

JAMES
I think I fucked things up with
her.

LAURA
Big surprise.

JAMES
Thanks. She tried to open up to me,
and I just...

James shrugs. They keep walking. The people by the bonfire
are barely audible now, masked by the sound of the tide.

LAURA
James?

JAMES
Yes'm.

LAURA

With all due respect: Are you hung
up on me? Is that why Donna went
south?

James thinks for a moment.

JAMES

No.

LAURA

Then why?

James scoffs.

JAMES

Why are you even asking?

LAURA

I--

JAMES

First Mark, now you. It's like you
think a pep talk is all I need, and
everything will work out like that.

James snaps his fingers on the last word.

JAMES

Guess what? They don't. I don't get
a happy ending. I just have to
stumble along, do my best, accept
the shitty consequences, and do it
all over again. I'm leaving, she's
leaving, and no matter what, that's
not changing. The most I can do is
accept it.

James looks down.

JAMES

Man, that sounds shitty out loud.

LAURA

Don't you even want...?

JAMES

What I want doesn't matter.

Laura sighs.

LAURA
Whatever you say.

JAMES
I say, let's stop talking about
this.

James puts on a grin.

LAURA
James...

James smiles more sincerely.

JAMES
Really, it sounds depressing, but
I'm good. Or, will be, soon enough.
Thanks for the concern, anyway.

LAURA
No problem.

EXT. BEACH PARKING - NIGHT

Donna schleps through the sand until she gets out onto the
road. Exhausted and a little irritated, she gets in Bertha.

INT. BERTHA - NIGHT

Donna rolls down the window, turns the key. The engine turns
over but doesn't start.

DONNA
Oh, you've got to be shitting me.

Donna turns the key again. The engine still doesn't start.

She hits the dash.

DONNA
God damn it.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

James and Laura get back to the bonfire. Mark lies down by
the fire.

JAMES
I'm still surprised you're here.

LAURA
Given what I assume is still your
deeply pessimistic outlook, isn't
that a good thing?

JAMES

I suppose.

LAURA

Given the chance, most people will pleasantly surprise you.

JAMES

Well, I'm not sure about that, but...

James pauses when he hears an engine trying to start in the distance. He recognizes the car's noise, turns to Laura.

JAMES

Listen, Laura -- thanks for talking, but -- I think I've got somewhere to be.

LAURA

Where?

JAMES

Stumbling along, doing my best.

James quickly hugs Laura.

JAMES

Sorry about the past few months. I'm trying, really, I am.

Laura smiles.

LAURA

Thanks.

James crouches down and shakes Mark.

JAMES

Mark, if you can't get up, just know that I'm off being stupid.

Bertha struggles and fails to start again.

MARK

(muffled)

Oh, good. Let me sleep now.

JAMES

Got it.

James wades as quickly as he can towards Bertha.

INT. BERTHA - NIGHT

Donna, now livid, turns the key one last time. Bertha still won't start as James walks up to the window.

DONNA
Why won't you start!?

James knocks on the window frame.

Donna turns, shocked. Upon seeing James, her demeanor cools.

DONNA
Oh. Hi.

JAMES
Is this the wrong time to say, "I
told you so?"

Donna rolls her eyes at James' smug expression.

DONNA
Definitely.

JAMES
Want any help?

DONNA
You know, believe it or not, the
further away you are, the more
you're helping, so if you could
just back--

JAMES
I'm sorry.

Donna is frozen mid-sentence.

DONNA
What?

JAMES
I'm sorry.

DONNA
Well, thank you, but I don't see
what good that does.

JAMES
Me neither, honestly. I just
thought it should be said.

Donna is at a loss for words. When she finds her voice, she speaks in a far quieter tone.

DONNA
Anything else?

JAMES
Not if you don't want. Should I
still back up?

DONNA
Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.

James steps back a bit.

JAMES
Listen, I know it's been a while,
and there's not a lot of time left,
and it's a longshot, but... would
you want to hang out sometime?

Donna frowns, looks away for a moment.

DONNA
...I don't know, James. Let me
think about it. And if not...

JAMES
Some other time.

DONNA
Some other time.

Donna tries to start Bertha again. She immediately purrs
into life.

DONNA
Unbelievable.

Donna turns to James.

DONNA
At least Bertha works, now.

James nods.

JAMES
Bye, Donna.

DONNA
Bye, James.

EXT. BERTHA - NIGHT

James starts walking away when Donna pulls the brake, slaps her forehead.

DONNA

James?

James turns around.

JAMES

Yeah?

Donna laughs, incredulous.

DONNA

Remember what I said about Bertha and hills?

JAMES

Yeah...

DONNA

I wasn't kidding. I need you to push me up a bit of this thing.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - DAY

James and Mark sit on the bed, Mark looking at his phone, James holding his stuffed giraffe. The room is emptier than usual, belongings in packed bags.

MARK

And since then --

JAMES

Nothing. I'm leaving in a week, and she's been quiet for days.

MARK

Well, good on you for trying.

JAMES

I'm not so sure. It's been days since I said it, but I still feel -- I dunno. Jittery, frail. Out on a limb. I hate it.

MARK

Oh, cheer up.

JAMES

I will when Donna actually calls.

James looks at his phone on the desk, waiting.

Mark raises his eyebrow.

MARK

What are you doing?

JAMES

I thought that would be a
convenient time for her to -- oh
never mind.

INT. JAMES' ROOM - NIGHT

James lies awake in bed. His phone lying on his desk
VIBRATES.

EXT. LAKE FOREST - DAY

James and Donna walk along on a trail at the edge of a lake,
lush green bushes and trees surrounding them, looking out at
the water.

DONNA

I told you, Bertha hates hills.
Almost as much as Agnes hates
foxtails.

JAMES

You really have to explain the name
thing.

DONNA

What, would you like a nickname?
Because you have one.

JAMES

I'm not sure I want to--

DONNA

"Clumsy giraffe."

JAMES

Alright, alright, I'll leave the
names alone.

DONNA

Speaking of names, you know the
name of one of my fine future
roommates?

JAMES
What?

DONNA
Brigitte.

JAMES
Oh, that's bad.

They walk in comfortable silence for a bit.

JAMES
So, I know this seems redundant,
seeing as you're already here, but,
are we good?

Donna grins, teasing.

DONNA
If you need it spelled out like
that, yeah, we're good.

James looks unconvinced.

DONNA
I wouldn't be here if I didn't want
to be. If you really want, I can
sign some legal papers to clear the
matter for you.

James loosens up.

JAMES
Har har.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Donna and James walk near a river that runs into the lake.

DONNA
Just a few days left until we're
gone.

JAMES
I know. It's ironic, isn't it? When
we met, we couldn't wait to jump
ship, and now...

James loses his train of thought as he looks at the river.

A still river.

A gnarled branch sits in the water, motionless against the
breathing, sun-lit foliage behind it.

James blinks several times in disbelief.

Slowly, another branch drawn by a soft current floats in, lightly turning. It brushes against the resting branch. Bumping off, a tiny limb of the moving branch grasps the still branch.

The water current pirouettes one around the other.

The second branch glides away.

DONNA(O.S.)

Hey.

James shakes his head. Donna leans in.

DONNA

What's up?

James thinks for a moment.

JAMES

Oh, nothing. Just some deja vu.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING

James and Donna sit next to each other, on top of Agnes on the sloped shore, snacks and fruit by their side.

They sit in content silence, watching the lake.

DONNA

God, it's beautiful.

JAMES

Yeah. I'm not going to miss much about here, but... I'm definitely going to miss this.

James turns and looks at Donna. Donna looks back.

JAMES

Mind if I get real pretentious here for a second?

Donna smiles.

DONNA

Hasn't stopped you before.

James picks up a stick from the ground, plays with it as he talks.

JAMES

I'm tired of waiting. We wait too much. We waited for school to end, you waited for Chris, I waited for Laura... But honestly, none of that tires me so much --

James pauses, a little nervous. He stares at Donna, and for the first time, he doesn't hide the affection in his eyes.

JAMES

-- as waiting for the right moment to tell you, simply, that I love you.

Donna has the same expression on her face.

JAMES

...I'd hate to look back years from now and regret not telling you that.

James and Donna stare at each other.

They fall into each other, Donna leaning on James' shoulder.

They sit, watching the lake.

A flicker of doubt appears on Donna's face.

DONNA

What now?

James sighs.

JAMES

I don't know. That's the exciting part, right?

They stare out across the water, the late sun fading in the trees.

BLACKOUT