

UNKNOWN VARIABLES

"Lesson 1-1: Solve Equations to Find Yourself."

Written by

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

On one side of the inactive road, a dilapidated refrigerator factory clanks, hums and heaves out clouds of white smoke. Across the street, a dingy billboard welcomes motorists: "You can't go WRONG in REITZville, Indiana."

EXT. REITZVILLE, INDIANA - AERIAL - DAY

With a city plan retrofitted from the 1940's, Reitzville is sprawling and industrial. Patches of green--parks and trees--color the dull landscape. A murky, rough river winds through and around the southwestern Indiana town.

An active six-lane expressway slices through neighborhoods and propels a frenetic pulse through an otherwise wheezing region of rundown factories, degenerating railways and shabby strip malls. The corn fields are long gone.

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The school stands alone as the sun rises in the background.

The structure's two three-story wings are hooked together by a glassed-in walkway: The Link. More glass surrounds the front entrance and encases the main stairway.

A forest green placard posted next to the double doors reads, "Westside High School - Home of the Pioneers" with a smaller heading: "Your Journey Begins Today."

ADRIAN(V.O.)

High school: the place where I'll
"find" myself.

INT. ADRIAN'S ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: ADRIAN HURST, 14, asleep in bed. Adrian has sloppy hair so black it could only come from a bottle. His numerous piercings include a lip ring and gauge earrings.

Adrian opens his eyes.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Which is good because I have no
idea who I am.

His alarm beeps. He looks over, but closes his eyes again.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
But, of course, I pretend to know.

INT. DALTON'S ROOM - DAY

The beeping is echoed in this bedroom where the walls are covered with blue, the carpet is white and Indianapolis Colts memorabilia decorates every open space.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
We all pretend to know who we are.

Sprawled out under a blue and white comforter, DALTON JAMES, 14, picks his head up and looks toward his own beeping alarm clock. He smiles, blinks his bleary eyes and runs a hand through his light, close-cropped hair.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Some of us actually think we know.

Wearing P.J. bottoms and a tank top, Dalton hops out of bed, turns off the clock, drops to the floor and does push-ups. His build is athletic and the exercise is effortless.

After a moment and a few more push-ups, Dalton pushes himself all the way up and walks toward his closet.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
But none of us really do.

INT. MADISON'S ROOM - DAY

The blonde MADISON "MADDIE" FORRESTER, 14, wears a pajama set and stands at her closet, methodically pulling pieces out: a denim mini-skirt, a white cami, a pink polo shirt.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

We put on the clothes we think make
us who we are... or at least who
we're trying to be today.

Maddie lays each piece on her perfectly made bed. Her room is neat and girly with little clutter.

She walks over to a desk where a pair of pom-poms cover the entire surface. She touches the pom-poms and grins.

INT. MELANIE'S ROOM - DAY

MELANIE "MEL" JONES, 14, sits at her desk already dressed in a pair of jeans and a green t-shirt. Mel's long, healthy, dark brown hair complements her olive complexion. She wears glasses that are more modern than dorky, but not flashy.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

We pick out the folders, backpacks
and pencils that best complement
our persona.

On her desk notebooks and folders lay stacked next to an organized pencil pouch and an uneaten blueberry muffin. In her hands, she toys with a new TI-84 graphing calculator.

Mel trades the calculator for the muffin.

INT. CASEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

CASEY PARKER, 15, sits at the kitchen table and eats a bowl of cereal. His shaggy, bowl-cut hair hangs just past his ears. His features are soft and slight, almost feminine.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Then we go around, trying to pass
ourselves off as defined, unique
individuals.

Casey stands to reveal a layered outfit of baggy jeans, a long-sleeved white t-shirt and a black message tee stating, "You're unique... just like everyone else."

INT. FORRESTER BATHROOM - DAY

GRANT FORRESTER, 14, stands before a steamy bathroom mirror with a foamy toothbrush in his hand and a towel around his waist. His wet, wavy brown hair drips onto his forehead.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

The truth is, none of us know who we are... or what we will become.

Grant rinses and spits into the sink. He tosses his toothbrush into a holder next to a pink toothbrush then picks up a digital video camera from the bathroom counter.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

All we can do is watch and wait. Learn and grow. Search and find.

He films the two tooth brushes together until a loud banging at the door causes him to slam the viewscreen shut.

Grant opens the door to reveal Maddie with her arms folded and one leg kicked out to the side. She glances down at the camera then rolls her eyes and pushes past him.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

That's supposed to be the adventure of growing up.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The school parking lot is now filled with cars, kids and blaring music from an orchestra of too-loud stereo systems.

CLOSE ON: The sign. "Your Journey Begins Today."

Adrian, now wearing black skinny jeans, a black t-shirt and black Chucks, walks up to the sign and stares.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

But today I take my first steps on this "journey" as an extremely reluctant traveler.

Dalton walks up and sticks out his hand toward Adrian. They complete a lengthy handshake that ends in a fist bump. The boys look up at the school together.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

I just hope there are others who are as unprepared as I am.

Grant walks backward as he films Maddie and Mel. He stops them right next to Adrian and Dalton then turns his camera on the sign, filming it for a long moment.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Because even though we all showed
up in our masks and costumes...

Behind them, a car pulls up and Casey gets out, walking up behind the group. As his ride pulls away, Casey takes a moment to look at the sign and the building.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
We are supposed to be finding our
true selves somewhere in there.

These six--Adrian, Dalton, Mel, Maddie, Grant, Casey--stand looking up at the school. Friends. Strangers. Pioneers.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
And that is a task far too daunting
for any one of us to face alone.

The group splits and joins the masses who enter the school.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF TEASER

ACT I

FADE IN:

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The parking lot shows no signs of life. Inside, students are visible, passing between the two wings via The Link.

INT. HALLWAY LOCKERS - DAY

Mel stands at her open locker and pulls out items: algebra textbook, 3-ring binder with dividers, organized pencil pouch, graphing calculator. She hesitates a moment then pulls out a ruler. She eyes it carefully.

MADDIE(O.S.)
Lose the ruler, Melanie.

Maddie walks up, smiling wide. Mel looks at the ruler again.

MADDIE
Trust me.

Maddie snatches the ruler from Mel, tosses it back into the locker and slams the door. Mel glares at her playfully then switches into a more serious countenance.

MEL
I'm nervous about algebra.

MADDIE
Why? You were the all-city eighth grade mathlete last year.

MEL
Not about the math. About Mr. Hurst. My brother--

MADDIE
Stop right there and listen to what you just said. Your brother. Not you. Not your family. Just Dylan.

MEL
What if Mr. Hurst--

MADDIE
You're undeniably the best math student he's ever going to have, okay? He'll love you. Love you.

A beat as Maddie puts a hand on her hip.

MADDIE

And thank God we're in the same class. You'll help me keep the C I need for cheerleading, right?

(she puts her hand up)

Hold that thought. Remember that cute guy out front earlier? I found out it was Dalton James. JV Quarterback. He's, like, so hot.

MEL

Did your hair get blonder at cheer camp?

MADDIE

I got new highlights yesterday. Why? Do they look bad?

Maddie's eyebrows raise in consternation. Mel laughs.

MADDIE

What, were you, like, speaking metaphorically or something?

MEL

Like, totally.

(she links arms with Maddie)

Your hair looks great, by the way.

As they turn to walk away from the locker, DYLAN JONES, 18, walks past, casting an unimpressed look. He wears boots, jeans and a polo shirt--very redneck prep.

Mel sighs. Maddie shakes her head then pulls Mel along.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Dylan passes Adrian and Dalton, making eye contact with Adrian who stares back. Dalton pats Adrian on the back and nudges him forward.

DALTON

Not even worth your time, man.

ADRIAN

I just can't believe he's still going here. He should--

DALTON
He should be in jail. He should be
dead. He should at least be sorry.
I know, but you can't make any of
that happen so... rise above, okay?

Adrian sighs and walks forward. A beat.

DALTON
Hey? Can I ask you something?

ADRIAN
Okay...

DALTON
(tentative)
Are you wearing mascara?

ADRIAN
Eye liner. Why?

DALTON
Where'd you get those pants?

ADRIAN
Hot Topic. Something wrong?

DALTON
Come on, Adrian.

Girls walk by, wave to Dalton and give Adrian a weird look.

DALTON
This quarterback thing is crazy.
I'm on the fast track to becoming
the most popular guy in school.

ADRIAN
(mumbled)
What an achievement.

Dalton groans.

DALTON
How about after school we hit the
mall, stop by Hollister and turn
you back into--

ADRIAN
Someone I'm not?

Dalton sighs, but then forces a smile.

DALTON
And this is who you are now? Huh?

Adrian shrugs, blushing slightly.

DALTON
My best friend, the emo.

ADRIAN
(laughing)
Shut up...

Dalton bumps Adrian's shoulder then laughs with him.

The boys pass, but don't take notice of, Mel and Maddie who meander down the hall at a slower pace. Maddie grabs Mel's arm in a vice grip and nods toward Dalton.

MADDIE
(practically squealing)
OMG! There he is.

GRANT(O.S.)
Did she really just say "OMG" out loud? Please tell me she did.

Grant approaches with his camera out, filming the girls.

VIDEO CAMERA P.O.V.

Mel glances at Maddie who still stares after Dalton.

MEL
Please don't let her get any more highlights.

GRANT(O.S.)
Actually, there is no correlation between hair color and I.Q.

MADDIE
Or so he hopes since he's in love with Cassandra Cook.

MEL
The actress?

MADDIE
Hollywood's blonde bombshell indie "it girl," according to Seventeen.

GRANT(O.S.)
Shut up, Maddie.

MADDIE
O... M... G... you should see his
bedroom wall. The word "shrine"
definitely comes to mind.

BACK TO SCENE

Grant slams the camera shut and glares at Maddie.

GRANT(O.S.)
Shut up, Madison!

MEL
You know, Cassandra Cook would
actually be kind of perfect for
you, Grant. I can see the appeal.

Grant smiles gratefully at Mel.

MADDIE
Don't encourage him, Melanie. And
don't be supportive. As you may
recall, he wasn't so kind to me
during my Zac Efron phase.

Grant rolls his eyes, but smiles at Mel.

GRANT
I just don't want my favorite twin
sister falling for a guy who
periodically bursts into song. How
annoying would that be?
(singing)
We're all in this together. Once we
know that we are, we're all stars--

MADDIE
You're way off key.
(beat)
You know the lyrics?

GRANT
(smug)
You know the key?

Mel laughs, but Maddie pouts.

MEL
Okay, Ryan and Sharpay, we have got
to get to class. Come on.

Maddie stomps away. Mel follows. Grant reopens his camera and walks along behind them, filming as he goes.

CAMERA P.O.V.

The camera finds Casey as he leans on his locker and watches people pass. The camera zooms in close on the boy. Through the camera, his features are even more fragile.

BACK TO SCENE

MADDIE(O.S.)
Come on, loser.

Maddie grabs Grant's shirt and drags him down the hall.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM DOOR - DAY

Adrian and Dalton approach the door where RUSSELL HURST, 38, stands to greet his students as they enter. Adrian blows past him, not looking up. Russell sighs. Dalton stops.

DALTON
Hi, Mr. H.

RUSSELL
Hello, Dalton.

Russell offers up a grin and hands two cards to Dalton.

RUSSELL
Give him the Ace.

Dalton nods then enters the classroom. Russell hands out cards to a few more entering students. Maddie and Mel walk up with Grant and his camera in tow. Russell appraises them.

RUSSELL
Greetings. I'm Mr. Hurst. You are?

He looks to Mel first. She bites her lip and looks down.

MEL
Melanie Jones.

Russell tilts his head and looks at her for a beat. Maddie clears her throat. Russell shifts his gaze to her.

MADDIE
Madison Forrester. Maddie.

When Russell looks to Grant, he finds a camera in his face.

RUSSELL
(amused)
Do I look at you or the camera?

Maddie reaches over and grabs the camera from Grant, closing the screen. She shoves it back into his arms.

MADDIE
This is my socially inept brother.

GRANT
Grant... Forrester. Sorry.

He smiles sheepishly and sticks out his hand. Rather than shaking it, Russell hands him a card. Grant looks at it.

GRANT
Two of Clubs.

Grant reopens the camera and gets a shot of the card.

RUSSELL
I like the camera idea. I've always
wanted to be a star on the YouTube.

The trio glance at each other.

RUSSELL
(joking)
The YouTube on the internets?

They stare at him. Russell clears his throat.

RUSSELL
Here...

He hands Maddie a card then looks thoughtfully at Mel. Maddie holds up her Two of Diamonds so Grant can film it.

RUSSELL
And, for you.

Russell hands the Ace of Hearts to Mel. She looks at it then glances toward the classroom. Maddie nudges her toward the door. Russell nods toward the room. The trio enters.

When the bell rings, Russell follows them into the room.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Dry erase boards hang on every wall, though the desks are arranged in pairs of two and face the front of the room. Various motivational posters sprinkle the walls.

Twenty students stand around, most talk in groups. Russell enters and claps loudly three times.

RUSSELL

Okay, ladies and gentleman, I now present to you "assigned seats with a twist."

Most of the kids turn their heads in his direction. Some listen quietly, others moan and groan.

RUSSELL

Each of you has a playing card. Find a person with the same card, but a different suit. Introduce yourselves then find a pair of desks. Go. Oh, and no switching.

Russell looks pointedly at a pair of boys who sigh and trade back their cards. Around them, some students stay where they are, but most walk around, glancing at each other's cards.

Grant and Maddie stand together. Maddie's arms are folded, her lips in a pout. Grant films his classmates.

MADDIE

I can't believe he put us together.

Grant rolls his eyes, but smiles to himself. Maddie turns her attention toward Dalton who wanders around.

Dalton and Casey stop in front of each other, each holding out a Jack. Dalton puts his hand out. They shake.

DALTON

Dalton James.

CASEY

Casey Parker.

DALTON

Can we sit up front?

Casey shrugs so Dalton leads the way to the front row. Maddie picks up on the movement and grabs Grant's arm.

GRANT

Why don't we try to sit by Mel?

Grant casts a longing look back at Mel as she ambles around. Maddie glares at Grant then pulls him toward the front.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Three pairs of desks form the front row. Dalton sits in the left seat of the far left pair. Casey sits in the right seat. There is absolutely no way Maddie can sit next to him.

Grant films Dalton and Casey until Maddie grabs his arm and pushes him down into the left seat of the middle desk pair. She takes the right seat and runs a hand through her hair.

Dalton glances over. Maddie smiles and bats her eyes. Grant shakes his head then looks over. Casey looks back.

CASEY

Cool camera.

Grant squints, glancing down to read Casey's shirt.

GRANT

(looking up)

Thanks.

CASEY

Making a movie?

GRANT

(mysterious)

Maybe.

Casey nods approvingly.

BACK OF THE ROOM

Adrian sits in the right seat of the far right pair in the otherwise unoccupied back row. Mel wanders around, the only person left without a partner. She notices Adrian and stops.

MEL

Excuse me?

He looks up at her. She holds out her Ace. He opens a notebook where his Ace is hidden inside. Mel sits down.

MEL
(sarcastic)
Melanie Jones. Nice to meet you.

Adrian looks at her, his brow furrowed.

ADRIAN
Jones? Not as in Dylan Jones?

MEL
He's my brother. Unfortunately.

Adrian's face turns a deep shade of red, his jaw tightens.

ADRIAN
(mumbled)
I'm Adrian Hurst.

MEL
(curious)
Not as in Mr. Hurst?

Mel looks at the front of the room where Russell is writing his name in big letters on the white board.

ADRIAN
He's my father. Unfortunately.

Mel glances over as Adrian stares straight ahead.

LATER

Russell stands in front of the class. Notes and examples are written neatly all over the white board.

RUSSELL
I'll give you a minute to get caught up on these notes.

Dalton sits up straight in his desk, writing quickly. Next to him, Casey circles an answer then drops his pencil. He glances over at Grant.

Grant, not paying any attention, doodles on the corner of his notebook. He looks up then shrugs, but smiles. Next to him, Maddie stares past Grant and Casey to watch Dalton.

Dalton sets his pencil down. He glances toward the back.

BACK OF THE ROOM

Adrian's head is down. Next to him, Mel looks up, making eye contact with Dalton. She smiles then goes back to writing.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Dalton turns around in his seat, his cheeks turning red. Grant watches Dalton then glances back at Mel. Casey notices the interest. Maddie continues to stare longingly at Dalton.

RUSSELL

So, let's sum things up a little.

The class turns its attention back to their teacher.

RUSSELL

The goal is to do what?

DALTON

(certain)

Get x alone.

RUSSELL

Get the variable alone. How?

CASEY

Work backwards.

RUSSELL

Also known as?

MEL

(quiet)

Inverse operations.

RUSSELL

Perfect.

Dalton glances back at Mel. He gives her a nod and smile.

Russell writes the equation " $5x - 9 = 31$ " on the board.

RUSSELL

If we're working backwards, where do we start?

MADDIE

With x ? Right?

DALTON
You never start with the variable.

MEL
Unless you have variables on both sides--then you do, actually.

Dalton grins jovially and turns around.

DALTON
Then you could. You don't have to.

Mel tilts her head to consider. Russell clears his throat.

RUSSELL
We can continue that debate later, but for now, what's up with this x?

CASEY
It's multiplied by five then nine is subtracted to get thirty-one.

RUSSELL
So... working backwards...

GRANT
Undo the subtraction first.

MADDIE
So you do the opposite? Add nine?

Russell writes "+9" under the "-9."

GRANT
And you have to do it on the other side because it's like a balance.

Russell writes "+9" under the "31" on the right side then rewrites the entire equation as " $5x = 40$."

DALTON
Divide by 5.

RUSSELL
Why divide?

MADDIE
It's the opposite of multiply.

RUSSELL
Opposite. Also known as? Melanie?

MEL

Oh. Inverse operation.

Russell shows his division, writing the equation as " $x = 8$."

RUSSELL

Goal achieved. Okay? Questions?

He looks around. Students shrug or shake their heads.

RUSSELL

Now. The fun begins. Work with your partner on page one seventy-nine. Two through thirty even. One paper per person, por favor.

Some students moan and groan. Others get right to work.

LATER

Russell walks around and stops here or there to help pairs of students. He passes Mel and Adrian. Mel is working diligently, but Adrian still has his head down.

RUSSELL

I know you may find this partnership less than thrilling, but trust me when I say... he needs you, Melanie Jones.

MEL

(pained)

Mr. Hurst, my brother--

RUSSELL

I know.

MEL

I'm so sorry.

Russell looks at her for a long, thoughtful beat.

RUSSELL

Adrian needs nothing short of a miracle to pass this class. I hear you're a miracle worker when it comes to math. I'm counting on you.

Adrian rouses, sitting up. He looks from Mel to his father.

ADRIAN
(sleepy)
What?

Russell sighs as he assesses his son. A beat.

ADRIAN
Hey, can you move her?

RUSSELL
No...

ADRIAN
But, her brother--

RUSSELL
I know.

Russell gives Adrian a pointed look then walks away.
Mel glances at Adrian. He peeks at her before putting his
head back down on the desk. Mel sighs and opens her book.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

FADE IN:

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Adrian picks his head up and props it on his hand. He watches Mel work problems on a sheet of notebook paper.

MEL

You're supposed to be helping with this. We both have to turn in--

ADRIAN

I know the irony of this may be more than a math miracle worker can understand, but I'm not good at math. In fact, I suck at it.

MEL

But your dad--

ADRIAN

My dad's a math teacher? I know. And, so what? Are you good at stuff just because your father is?

Mel lifts her eyebrows then glances away.

ADRIAN

(combative)

I mean, what does your dad even do?

MEL

Other than abandon my family, forcing my mom to work two crappy jobs in order to support his three kids? Other than that? Not much.

Adrian hangs his head.

ADRIAN

Sorry.

Mel nods, looking down at her algebra book. Adrian reaches under his chair and pulls out his own book. He opens it. Adrian stares down into the book; Mel continues her work.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Dalton and Casey work out of the same book. Casey has a full page and his pencil on the desk.

DALTON

You're quick. Did you get negative four for number twenty-eight?

Casey glances down at his paper.

CASEY

Check.

DALTON

Cool.

Dalton goes back to work. Casey looks over in Grant and Maddie's direction to find Grant looking over. Busted. Grant turns back to Maddie who has her hand in her purse.

GRANT

What are you doing? Did you finish number ten yet?

MADDIE

I'm texting Mel. I bet she's done number ten.

Grant glances back at Mel who is working diligently.

GRANT

I bet she has her phone off.

MADDIE

Just because you're hopelessly in love with her doesn't mean you know her phone habits, okay?

GRANT

I am not in--just shut up, Maddie.

Maddie tosses her purse on the floor and looks in the book.

MADDIE

I have no clue how to do number ten. "Three-fourths x equals 12."

Grant looks at the problem in the book.

GRANT

Theoretically, you have to divide by three-fourths, but how... ?

CASEY(O.S.)
Multiply by the reciprocal.

Maddie and Grant look over.

MADDIE
The re-what?

GRANT
Reciprocal. Four-thirds, right?

MADDIE
Oh, when you flip it?

Casey nods.

GRANT
Thanks.

Casey shrugs nonchalantly, forcing back a slight smile.

DALTON
(to Casey)
Hey, man, I'm done. Want me to turn
your paper in with mine?

CASEY
Oh, uh, thanks.

Casey hands over his paper. Maddie jumps up.

MADDIE
(to Grant)
I'll take ours up.

GRANT
We're not even--

She snatches his paper and follows along with Dalton.

GRANT
Done.

Grant shakes his head and pulls out another sheet of paper.

Maddie tails Dalton to a set of trays near the door. He turns around and almost runs right into her.

MADDIE
Hi. You're Dalton, right?

He steps to the side, but nods. Maddie turns in her work.

MADDIE

I'm Madison Forrester. You can call me Maddie. Do you have a nickname?

Dalton shakes his head and forces an uncomfortable smile.

MADDIE

You're gonna be such an awesome quarterback. I'll be at every game cheering for you... and the team.

DALTON

(absently)

Thanks.

MADDIE

I'm a cheerleader so, like, I have to be at every game. I mean, I would totally go anyway...

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Casey watches the awkward interaction between Maddie and Dalton. Grant is hard at work. Casey looks Grant over.

CASEY

So Maddie is your...

GRANT

A)Sister. B)Twin. C)Antagonist.
D)All of the above.

CASEY

And is she always so... charming?

Grant looks sideways at Casey.

GRANT

Do yourself a favor. Don't fall for Maddie. She's high maintenance.

CASEY

Dude, I was being sarcastic.
(he laughs)
She's not really my type.

GRANT

Oh...

They look at each other until Casey breaks the gaze.

CASEY

Speaking of types, I think the girl
you're hopelessly in love with was
just checking you out.

Grant glances back at Mel then shakes his head.

GRANT

She's just a friend.

Yeah, right. Casey masks his disbelief with a smile.

The bell rings. Everyone begins a mass exodus.

GRANT

Ah! Crap. Number thirty. I got two
equals ten.

CASEY

Impossible.

GRANT

I swear, it works out to--

CASEY

No, I mean, that's right, but two
doesn't equal ten so there's no
solution. To the problem.

GRANT

Zero with a line through it?

CASEY

That'll work.

Grant writes it down then breathes a sigh of relief.

GRANT

Thanks.

Grant gathers up his belongings and takes off. Casey takes a
deep breath, then picks up his stuff and exits the room.
Adrian, still in his seat, is the only student left.

RUSSELL

How's the first day going so far?

ADRIAN

Peachy, but I need a new partner.

Adrian stands up and walks toward his father.

RUSSELL
I really think Melanie will be able
to help you out in this class.

ADRIAN
I don't care about this class.

Russell sighs, looking more carefully at Adrian.

RUSSELL
(leaning closer)
Are you wearing make up?

ADRIAN
Will you move me or not?

RUSSELL
No.

Adrian groans.

ADRIAN
Really? You're going to make me sit
next to Melanie Jones?

RUSSELL
Clearly.

ADRIAN
Sister of Dylan Jones.

Russell nods.

ADRIAN
The same Dylan Jones who is
personally responsible for the fact
that my mother is dead.

RUSSELL
(sad)
There's no need to play that card.

Adrian glares at his father, pulling the Ace of Spades out
of his notebook.

ADRIAN
It's a fact, not a card.

Adrian tosses the card at his dad. It hits him in the chest.

ADRIAN
FYI: I hate you for this.

Upset, Adrian marches out. When he is gone, Russell puts a hand on his temple, staring down at the card on the ground.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

The long cafeteria has one wall of large windows which overlook a steep grassy hill. Three rows of round tables stretch from one side of the room to the other.

Students mill about or sit at the tables. Others stand in a long line, waiting for lunch. The line moves slowly.

At one of the tables along the windows, Adrian and Dalton sit down, filling in the last two spots. A gang of preppy, sporty freshmen boys greet them, giving attention to Dalton.

MIDDLE TABLES

A crowded table of bubbly, beautiful girls adds an annoying chatter to the already loud lunchroom. Next to this one, the overflow table is about half full. Mel and Maddie sit there.

Girls at this table chat and pass around a magazine. Most of them, including Maddie, munch on salad. The rest eat nothing at all. Mel, on the other hand, enjoys a piece of pizza.

ABBY DOLBY, 14, a bleached blonde, looks over at them.

ABBY

OMG, Madison, that outfit is hot.

Mel stifles a laugh. Maddie shoots her a look.

MADDIE

Thanks, Abby.

ABBY

(lying)

You look nice too, Melanie.

Mel's look of gratitude is as fake as Abby. Abby goes back to her conversation with the other girls. Maddie sighs.

MADDIE

How's the pizza?

MEL

Pretty good. How's the salad?

MADDIE

Gross...

Mel laughs and tears her pizza in half. She passes a piece to Maddie who takes it with a grateful grin.

LUNCH LINE

Casey stands at the end of the long line that creeps forward at a nearly nonexistent pace. Grant walks backward toward Casey in order to film the cafeteria scene.

Grant slams into Casey, sending Casey a few steps forward and causing Grant to stumble. They right themselves.

GRANT

(turning)

Oh, man, I'm sorry.

(smiling)

Oh, hey. Kid from math.

CASEY

Casey Parker.

GRANT

I'm Grant. Forrester. Casey, huh?

CASEY

(uncertain)

Yeah. Why?

Grant holds up his camera and points it at Casey.

GRANT

Drew Barrymore's character in
Scream was named Casey.

Casey inhales, looking at him with a tilted head.

GRANT

Also, Elijah Woods' character in
The Faculty was named Casey.

Casey glances at the camera, uncomfortable.

CASEY

Can you not do that?

Grant closes the screen on his camera and turns it off. He joins Casey in line as a few more people get behind them.

GRANT
Do you know what those two movies
have in common?

CASEY
(matter-of-fact)
Characters named Casey.

Grant goes for a one-up:

GRANT
Also... both are--

CASEY
Horror movies.

GRANT
(surprised)
Yeah.
(pause)
And both were written by--

CASEY
Kevin Williamson. I know.

Grant's smile is curiously impressed.

CASEY
Kevin Williamson must like my name.

GRANT
Yeah...
(he chuckles)
I do, too, actually.

Casey narrows his eyes.

GRANT
You know Cassandra Cook?

Casey's eyes widen slightly in recognition, but he shrugs.

GRANT
Oh, come on. Hot. Blonde. Actress.

CASEY
Oh. Right. That Cassandra Cook.

GRANT
Yeah. Well, anyway, she goes by
Casey. It's her nickname.

CASEY
 (surprised)
 How do you know that?

Grant blushes, shrugging shyly. Casey smirks.

CASEY
 (teasing)
 Oh. You're a Cassandra Cook fanboy?

Grant's jaw drops, his face covered in mock insult.

GRANT
 No...

Grant dishes up a guilty grin. Casey chuckles.

MIDDLE TABLES

Mel and Maddie are mostly done with their food. Mel glances in the direction of the lunch line.

MEL
 Looks like Grant made a friend.

Maddie looks over to the line where Grant and Casey continue to talk, their conversation growing more animated.

MADDIE
 Hm. How about that?

She glances at Mel, but Mel is still looking over.

MADDIE
 Anything you want to talk about?

Mel whips her head back around.

MEL
 Huh?

MADDIE
 Grant told me how you guys hung out almost every day I was at camp.

MEL
 Oh, well, yeah, but I mean--

MADDIE
 How come you didn't tell me?

Mel takes the last bite of her pizza and chews. Maddie waits with raised eyebrows. After a second, she clears her throat.

MEL

I thought you already knew.

Maddie narrows her eyes and folds her arms.

MADDIE

You know, it's always been obvious that Grant has a thing for you--

MEL

He does not.

MADDIE

Ever since he brought you to our house in the sixth grade--

MEL

I came over to study. We were on the academic team together.

MADDIE

I watched him get jealous over how we became best friends--

MEL

Come on, he never--

MADDIE

But not until this very moment have I ever thought that--

MEL

Maddie--

MADDIE

(epiphany)
You like him back.

MEL

No.

Maddie grins at Mel. Mel looks away.

MEL

We're just friends. You know that.

MADDIE

Yeah. That's what he always says. Suspiciously enough.

MEL

Because it's true. He's my best friend replacement for when you're

(MORE)

MEL (cont'd)
 off at cheer camp getting blonder
 or whatever it was you did there.

Some of the other girls look over at the comment, affronted looks smeared on their make-up covered faces. Maddie's smile is amused as she watches Mel roll her eyes and sip her milk.

LUNCH LINE

Russell stands near the milk cooler and monitors the line.

DR. CHANICE BLUE, 37, walks up. Chanice, an African-American with shoulder-length hair, is strikingly beautiful in her navy suit and heels. She stands next to Russell.

CHANICE
 Mr. Hurst. How's it going?

Russell turns to her and smiles.

RUSSELL
 Dr. Blue. It's going. The district is shipping me off to Nashville for a graphing calculator conference this weekend. That's about the most exciting thing I've got happening.

She leans in.

CHANICE
 How are the kids?

RUSSELL
 Alexis is doing well. Excited to start the fourth grade today.

CHANICE
 And Adrian?

Russell shrugs, sighs and tilts his head in the direction of the table where Adrian and Dalton sit. Chanice glances over.

CHANICE
 Do you want me to pull him from class this afternoon? Talk to him about an expression of grief more appropriate than holes in his head?

RUSSELL
 I don't think he's ready to talk.

Chanice nods. A slight beat passes.

CHANICE
What about you?

He smiles slightly, not looking at her.

RUSSELL
With all due respect, I don't need
a guidance counselor.

CHANICE
How about a friend, Russ?

Her look is patient, but they are interrupted as MR. WINSTON
EMMANUEL, 65, walks past wearing a gray suit, white shirt
and black tie. His white hair contrasts his red face.

RUSSELL
How's Mr. Emmanuel working out?

CHANICE
Between you and me, as a principal,
he's no Amy Hurst.

RUSSELL
(wistful)
Who could be?

Chanice looks at him thoughtfully for a moment before she
gives him a gentle pat on the shoulder.

CHANICE
If you decide you do need a
guidance counselor or a friend--

RUSSELL
I know where your office is.

She gives him an encouraging smile then walks away.

WINDOW TABLES

At Adrian and Dalton's table, freshman JEFF CATES--a blonde,
freckled and lanky boy--dominates the current conversation.

JEFF
D.J., you still throwing that back
to school bash this weekend?

DALTON
Actually, yeah. Me and Adrian are
hosting, but no alcohol allowed.

JEFF

I might stop by with a few people.
 (he looks at Adrian)
 If they aren't afraid of him.

Adrian stares at him, emotionless.

JEFF

I mean, come on, Hurst, why'd you
 have turn yourself into a freak?

DALTON

Don't go there, Jeff.

JEFF

I'm just saying... there's enough
 emos in the world, that's all.

DALTON

He's not an emo.

Adrian glances sideways at Dalton then looks back at Jeff.

ADRIAN

There are enough emos in the world.

JEFF

See, he agrees.

ADRIAN

No, I mean, you said "there's"
 which is the contraction for "there
 is," but since "emos" is plural,
 you should have used the verb "are"
 instead. There are enough emos...

Jeff stares at him, blinking a few times. All the boys
 glance up as Mr. Emmanuel passes. His look is sour as he
 brusquely approaches a group of chatting girls:

MR. EMMANUEL

Either get in line or sit down. No
 loitering in the cafeteria!

Dalton, Adrian and the others look around at one another.

DALTON

Wow.

Just as Jeff leans back in his chair, Mr. Emmanuel passes.

MR. EMMANUEL
(to Jeff)
No leaning back in your chair!

Jeff sits forward in the chair, waiting until Mr. Emmanuel is out of sight to lean back again.

DALTON
(to Adrian)
This guy is going to be a nightmare. I wish your mom was still the principal.

Adrian's scowl forms fast. He shakes his head.

ADRIAN
Yeah, I wish she was still the principal, too. That and, you know, alive. Alive would be brilliant.

Dalton looks down, frowning.

DALTON
I'm sorry, Adrian.

Adrian rolls his eyes, picks up his tray and leaves the table. Dalton watches him go, but doesn't get up.

MIDDLE TABLES

With their trays out of the way, Maddie sends a text and Mel plays with her graphing calculator. Mel glances up to see Adrian walk past their table with his tray in hand.

Adrian pauses to look around the now crowded cafeteria. He spots Mel and Maddie at the only table with empty seats. Mel looks up at him with a curious tilt of her head.

Maddie looks back and forth between them. Adrian turns around and walks toward the trash cans, dumps his tray and heads for the cafeteria doors. Mel watches him go.

MADDIE
Wasn't that your algebra partner?

Mel nods.

MADDIE
Looks like a total freak-o.

MEL

His name is Adrian Hurst.

Maddie purses her lips, looking at Mel carefully.

MADDIE

Mr. Hurst's son?

Mel nods then goes back to her calculator.

INT. HALLWAY BY CAFETERIA - DAY

Adrian walks out of the cafeteria doors and down the hall. His body is stiff, his arms rigid at his side.

INT. THE LINK - DAY

Dylan sits with a few guys and girls on a set of benches. Several conversations take place, but Dylan is silent.

Adrian enters The Link and almost walks right by--until he catches a glimpse of Dylan. He stops and stares.

DYLAN

Keep walking, Adrian.

Adrian continues to straight at Dylan. A trashy looking senior, JESSE, stands up and takes a step forward.

JESSE

Who is this loser, Dylan?

DYLAN

That's Mrs. Hurst's kid.

Adrian scowls and tightens his fists into balls. Jesse snickers and gives Adrian a quick once over.

JESSE

Looks like he wants to hit ya.

Adrian's face turns red, his whole body tenses.

JESSE

Will that make you feel better about your mommy, kid? Huh? You want to hit Dylan?

DYLAN

If you ask me, it looks more like he wants someone to hit him.

JESSE

Oh, I got this. Bring it on.

Adrian takes half a step forward, but then turns and runs away, down the stairs and out the front door of the school.

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DRIVEWAY - DAY

At the bottom of a inclined driveway, a large hunter green sign, surrounded by a flowerbed, reads, "Welcome to Westside High School" with "Principal: Amy Hurst" on the line below.

Adrian stands in front of the sign, staring at it, tears streaming down his face that he can't wipe away fast enough. He sinks down to the ground, crushing flowers as he kneels. He buries his face in his hands and continues to sob.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

FADE IN:

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Mel still toys with the calculator. Maddie stares at her.

MADDIE

You know, Grant won't admit that he likes you either, but--

MEL

Because he doesn't.

Mel looks up with an insistent look.

MADDIE

Melanie--

MEL

Drop it.

She glances over Maddie's shoulder. Maddie looks in time to see Grant and Casey approach the table.

GRANT

Can we sit here?

MADDIE

No.

Casey pauses, but Grant ignores her and sits down. He nods for Casey to take another empty seat. Casey sits. Some of the girls look over then get up in a group with their trays.

GRANT

Guys, this is Casey. His mom is a real estate agent, and they just moved here. From L.A.

Mel smiles at Casey, looking at him for a long beat.

GRANT

Casey, this is my sister Madison who you kind of met in algebra.

CASEY

You go by Maddie, right?

Maddie nods.

GRANT

And this is Melanie Jones. Or, Mel.

Casey looks at Grant slyly before nodding politely at Mel.

MEL

You just moved here from L.A.?

CASEY

Few weeks ago.

MEL

You look so familiar.

Grant wrinkles his brow, glancing over at Casey a moment.

GRANT

You probably just remember him from algebra. He was sitting by me.

MEL

No... it's more than that. You must just look like someone else.

Casey self-consciously runs a hand through his hair.

CASEY

(changing the subject)

So, do you guys take the bus or--

GRANT

We all walk. Mel lives a block away and Maddie and I just live on Elm.

CASEY

Elm? I live on Cherry.

Maddie and Grant look at each other.

MADDIE

Do you have, like, a giant Dalmatian mutant dog?

CASEY

(laughing)

He's a Harlequin Great Dane.

Grant grins.

GRANT

You live right behind us.

Casey's eyes widen with realization.

CASEY

You guys have the trampoline and
guy who mows the lawn every day?

MADDIE

He only does it every other day.

GRANT

That would be our dad. He's big on
lawn maintenance.

Casey laughs and looks at Grant for a long beat. He smiles.
Maddie and Mel trade a look. Casey looks around at everyone.

CASEY

Um, by the way, that Dalton guy--

MADDIE

Dalton James. JV quarterback.
Hottest guy at Westside High.

Casey chuckles.

CASEY

If you say so. Anyway, he invited
me to a party on Saturday. Gave me
the address after algebra...

Casey pulls out a folded piece of notebook paper. Maddie
reaches across and snatches the paper.

MEL

Down, girl.

Mel places a hand on Maddie's arm as she fervently reads the
address from the piece of paper.

CASEY

Anyway, I wasn't going to go, but--

GRANT

Maddie's in, obviously. So am I.

Grant looks at Mel with raised eyebrows. She smiles.

MEL

Count me out.

MADDIE

Come on, Mel. It's Dalton's party.
I need you for moral support.

GRANT
Maddie...

MADDIE
What?

They trade a look until realization dawns on Maddie's face.

MADDIE
Oh...

CASEY
What?

Casey looks to Grant then Maddie. No one's talking.

MEL
Guys, it's cool.
(to Casey)
I don't go to parties with alcohol
so Dalton's big bash is--

CASEY
Completely alcohol free, actually.

MADDIE
Really? That's so freaking cool.

Grant rolls his eyes at Maddie's adoration.

CASEY
He said it's because his best
friend Adrian's mom was--

MADDIE
Oh. Yeah. Yeah, we know.

Casey raises his eyebrows. Maddie gives Grant a pointed look who passes it on to Casey. Casey looks to Mel with a smile.

CASEY
Anyway, if you don't want to go,
it's totally cool. No pressure.

MEL
Count us all in for the party.
Sounds like a good time.

Casey glances at Grant, but says nothing more. When Mel goes back to her calculator, Maddie and Grant trade a look.

EXT. HURST HOME - DAY

The two-story house is well-kept with a neat yard.

SUPER: "Saturday"

Dalton and Adrian stand on the lawn. In the driveway, Russell sits at the wheel of a four-door sedan. He honks.

ALEXIS HURST, 9, comes jogging from the house with a duffel bag draped over her shoulder. She tosses the bag into the back seat then climbs in after it.

DALTON

See ya, Mr. H. Bye Alexis.

Russell nods. Alexis waves from the back seat.

RUSSELL

I left Chanice Blue's number by the phone. She wants you to know you can talk to her anytime you feel like it. Give her a call if--

ADRIAN

I don't need to talk to a guidance counselor... unless she can switch my math class from home.

Russell and Adrian stare at each other for a moment more before Russell backs out of the driveway.

DALTON

You're sure you're cool with having the party here tonight, right?

ADRIAN

Yep.

DALTON

When are they getting back?

Adrian closes his eyes for a moment.

ADRIAN

Tomorrow night.

DALTON

I promise we'll get it all cleaned up before then, okay?

Adrian opens his eyes and looks up at his house.

ADRIAN
Alright, so let's do this.

He gives Dalton five as they walk toward the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HURST HOME - NIGHT

The house is lit up, the front door open. Muted music floats out onto the lawn. Several groups of kids stand around outside, talking, laughing and goofing around.

EXT. JONES HOME - NIGHT

The house is small and the lawn is over-grown. An older model van sits in the driveway with its hood open. Dylan Jones works on the engine. In the driveway, JACOB JONES, 9, rides his bike up and down.

Mel exits the front door. She wears denim capris and a graphic green tank. Her brown hair, styled in loose curls, falls around her face. She wears just a little make-up. When Mel walks past Dylan, he looks up. She keeps going.

JACOB
Bye, Mel.

MEL
I'm staying with Maddie tonight,
but tomorrow we start the next
Harry Potter book, okay?

JACOB
Cool.

Mel smiles at him then continues down the driveway.

EXT. PARKER HOME - NIGHT

The house is a large two-story with a white picket fence. A Saab and a Volkswagon Jetta are parked in the driveway.

INT. PARKER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

CHRISTINE PARKER, 38, unloads Chinese takeout boxes from a brown paper bag. She is a put-together, polished blonde who looks like a television anchorwoman in her business suit.

A large Harlequin Great Dane, Duke, lays on a bed in the corner of the room. He looks up.

The sound of someone walking down a set of stairs echoes through the house until Casey enters the room, wearing baggy cargo pants, a black t-shirt, a green army style jacket and matching cap tilted slightly to the side.

CASEY

Hey, Mom.

CHRISTINE

(mock deep voice)

Hey, Casey.

Casey rolls his eyes and walks over to give Duke a pat.

CHRISTINE

Want something to eat?

CASEY

Nah. Everyone should be here in a few minutes. Thanks for offering to give us a ride, by the way.

Christine looks at Casey with a tilted head. Casey self-consciously looks down at his outfit.

CASEY

What? Too Beetle Bailey?

CHRISTINE

(laughing)

Among other things...

Casey pulls off the hat then puts it back on.

CHRISTINE

Keep it. It works.

(she sighs)

You realize how insane this is?

CASEY

Mom, I don't want to have this conversation again.

CHRISTINE

Okay, so then how about you tell me about this Grant boy instead.

CASEY

What about him?

CHRISTINE

Every story you tell about school
seems to involve him yet you really
haven't told me much about him.

Casey wanders over to the food and pulls out an eggroll.

CASEY

Okay, well... he's obsessed with
movies and stuff. I think he's got
his digital video camera surgically
mounted to his hand.

Casey takes a bite of the eggroll and takes a seat at the
kitchen table. Christine leans against the counter.

CASEY

(casual)

Oh, and, get this, he's obsessed
with Cassandra Cook.

Christine laughs, but quickly stifles it.

CHRISTINE

How... perfectly interesting.

Casey avoids eye contact and takes another bite of eggroll.

CHRISTINE

And... is he cute?

CASEY

Mom! Don't even go there...

Casey blushes. Christine smiles.

CHRISTINE

I'll take that as a yes.

Casey eats the last bite of the eggroll just as the doorbell
rings. Casey gives Christine a look of warning.

EXT. HURST HOME - NIGHT

Christine's Jetta pulls up. Grant, Maddie and Mel get out of
the back seat. Casey gets out of the front. The four
teenagers stand together and look up at the house.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

People mill about in the simple, but nice kitchen. Adrian and Dalton walk in together.

DALTON
Is this awesome or what?

Adrian forces a smile.

DALTON
Now, if you see that girl from algebra, send her my way.

ADRIAN
What girl from algebra?

DALTON
Dude, your partner. Ms. Inverse Operations. She was amazing.

ADRIAN
Oh... that girl's not really your type, though, is she?

DALTON
Smart? Pretty? Yeah, she's my type.

ADRIAN
You think she's pretty?

DALTON
In that trying-too-hard cheerleader way? No. But in that mysterious smart girl way? Totally. Totally...

Dalton looks off a moment, smiling. A beat.

ADRIAN
In that case, there is one thing I should tell you about Ms. Inverse Operations. Her name is Melanie Jones. She's Dylan Jones' sister.

Dalton's jaw drops in genuine surprise.

DALTON
(disappointed)
Oh... Never mind, then. I won't--

ADRIAN
Stop. If you want to ask her out, I'm cool with it. Not that you need my approval anyway, but--

DALTON
(excited)
You think she'd say yes?

ADRIAN
Why wouldn't she?

DALTON
I don't know. She's always with that Grant kid at school. Maybe she's into the artistic type.

ADRIAN
I've never heard you freak out about a girl like this.

DALTON
I've never liked a girl this smart.

Adrian shakes his head.

ADRIAN
That's sad.

DALTON
(light)
Yeah, well, don't cry for me. You might smear your mascara.

Adrian laughs. Dalton pats him on the shoulder and exits. Adrian holds his smile until Dalton is gone then his face falls into a frown and his shoulders slump forward.

EXT. HURST BACKYARD - NIGHT

Mel sits alone on a lawn chair amidst clusters of kids. Grant walks up, spotting her. He sits down next to her.

MEL
Where's your camera?

GRANT
Casey took it to get some crowd footage for me. Where's Maddie?

MEL
Went to look for her quarterback.

Grant chuckles, shaking his head. A beat.

GRANT

So... are we not talking about it?

MEL

Talking about what?

GRANT

No, that line only works when we've made a pact not to talk about it. I entered into no such agreement.

Mel looks away, tucking her hair behind her ear.

GRANT

Come on, Mel... three weeks ago... you... me... the trampoline...

Mel looks down.

MEL

Let's not talk about it.

Grant frowns.

CASEY(O.S.)

There are so many people in that house now. It's crazy.

Casey walks over, holding the camera out to Grant.

EXT. HURST BACKYARD - SWING SET - NIGHT

Casey and Grant sit on swings. Grant stares off into space, his camera in his lap. Casey studies him for a long moment.

CASEY

You and Mel looked cozy...

Grant looks up at Casey, swallowing and blushing.

GRANT

Can I tell you something that I haven't told anyone else?

CASEY

(uncertain)

Sure...

GRANT

This summer, the night before Maddie got back from cheer camp, Mel and I were laying on the

(MORE)

GRANT (cont'd)
trampoline, talking... one of those
really good conversations.

CASEY
I think I see where this is going.

Grant toes the ground to spin slightly in the swing.

GRANT
Maybe it was just a fluke. A random
occurrence induced by a romantic
August sunset and conversation so
philosophical it was almost poetic.

CASEY
Let me guess. You kissed her?

Grant blushes and looks down with a grin.

GRANT
She kissed me, actually.

Casey smiles and observes Grant thoughtfully.

CASEY
Wow. Nice...

GRANT
(sighing)
Except now she avoids being alone
with me. She won't talk to me...

CASEY
Maybe she just needs some time to
sort out her feelings.

GRANT
It's been three weeks.
(beat)
I almost wish it never happened so
things could go back to how they
were. So we could be friends again.

CASEY
Yeah, well, I don't know if kissing
has an inverse operation.

Grant laughs.

GRANT
Maybe you should ask Mel out. You
math nerds should stick together.

Casey laughs.

CASEY

Mel's obviously a great girl, but she's not really my type.

Grant purses his lips and narrows his eyes.

GRANT

That's the second time you've said that. So what is your type?

CASEY

Oh, I don't know. I guess I like someone a little more...

(his look lingers on Grant)

Artsy.

GRANT

Artsy, huh? You won't find too many girls like that around here. Trust me, I've been looking all my life for a girl as passionate about something as I am. Someone like Cassandra Cook, for example.

CASEY

(very interested)

Cassandra Cook is passionate?

GRANT

When she prepares for a role, she spends months researching the character. Knowing the character.

Casey looks off then back at Grant.

CASEY

Besides Mel and Cassandra Cook, are there any other girls with whom you're obsessed?

Grant shakes his head then turns his camera on himself.

GRANT

I think I know why there's no inverse operation for a kiss.

Casey smiles and lifts his eyebrows.

GRANT

Because with stuff like kisses or love, there's either no solution--

CASEY
Or infinitely many solutions.

Grant turns the camera on Casey.

GRANT
Exactly. It's either universally
true or false. And that's it.
(beat)
Man, I hate algebra.

On the small camera screen, Casey chuckles.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

FADE IN:

INT. HURST KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen is crowded with people munching on pizza and sipping soft drinks. The party is loud, but controlled.

Maddie has Dalton cornered. He leans back against the counter as she stands in front of him, a little too close.

MADDIE

You know, they say smart guys make the best quarterbacks. I bet you see the whole football field like a big algebra equation, don't you?

DALTON

(leaning further away)
Uh... not exactly.

Dalton looks around, scanning faces in the crowd.

INT. ADRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The large, tidy bedroom houses a small couch and entertainment center on one side and a bed and writing desk on the other. In between, three large book shelves store volumes of fiction, as well as a few non-fiction titles.

The open wall-space is covered with posters of bands like Secondhand Serenade and Dashboard Confessional. A poster of Indianapolis Colt Marvin Harrison looks out of place here.

Adrian stands in front of the closet door mirror. He uses an eyeliner pencil to paint a thick black line under his eye.

The door opens. Mel walks in. She takes a step back when she sees Adrian. As Adrian turns to look, the pencil slips and marks a inch down his cheek.

ADRIAN

Oh, man...

He looks back in the mirror for a second, shaking his head.

ADRIAN

Can I help you?

Mel looks around and spots the football poster.

MEL
Is this Dalton's room?

ADRIAN
Are you looking for Dalton?

MEL
I was looking for the bathroom.

A beat as Adrian licks his finger and rubs at the eyeliner, virtually erasing the black line. Mel watches.

ADRIAN
What?

MEL
Nothing.
(pause)
I like the liner.

Adrian looks at her through narrowed eyes.

ADRIAN
The bathroom's down the hall.

Mel nods then sighs. She turns toward the door, but then closes it behind her and steps further into the room.

MEL
I'm not a big fan of my brother
either. If that helps.

It does. Adrian shrugs nonchalantly and sits down on his bed. He gestures over to the chair at his desk.

ADRIAN
Have a seat if you like.

Mel pauses, looking first at Adrian then at the chair. She sits down and glances at the open algebra book on the desk.

MEL
So... this is Dalton's room.

ADRIAN
Are you obsessed with my best
friend or what?

Mel laughs.

MEL
Funny you should ask that. My best
friend thinks your best friend is
pretty awesome.

ADRIAN

Yeah, well, potential drama may ensue because Dalton actually thinks you're pretty awesome.

Mel scoffs.

MEL

(dismissive)

Oh, yeah. Ha ha.

Adrian smiles slightly over her dismissal.

MEL

You know, if you need some help with our algebra homework...

Adrian laughs out loud. Mel simply smiles.

ADRIAN

Wait... you're serious?

She continues the smile and adds raised, expectant eyebrows.

ADRIAN

Look, uh, I appreciate the offer, but... I'm a lost cause when it comes to math. I'm more of a words guy. Reading. Writing.

MEL

Algebra's got a lot of letters?

Adrian laughs, still smiling.

ADRIAN

A lot of letters... and a lot of numbers... and a lot of rules that make absolutely no sense.

MEL

The rules make perfect sense. Solving equations is all about undoing stuff. Like, okay...

Mel gets up, grabs the algebra book and walks over to him. She shoves the textbook into his hands.

MEL

You were you, but now you're you plus a book. How do you become you again?

He rolls his eyes, but hands the book back.

MEL

Right. And if you were an x and the book were a five, the way to get x alone is to take away the five.

ADRIAN

(surprised)

Okay. That actually makes sense.

Mel smiles and sits down on the edge of the bed.

MEL

And, just like in real life, there are some things we can't undo.

Adrian looks at her for a long beat then looks down for another. Mel watches him intensely. He looks up at her.

ADRIAN

It's my fault my mom's dead.

MEL

But... What? What do you mean?

ADRIAN

The night my mom died, I called shotgun. She should have been in the front seat, but I was. It's my fault she's dead and...

He looks down. Mel turns, putting a knee on the bed.

ADRIAN

I can't undo it, but I want to take it back so bad. It's all my fault.

MEL

It's Dylan's fault. He was driving drunk. He ran a stop sign. That has nothing to do with calling shotgun.

Adrian looks up at her.

ADRIAN

(somber)

It should have been me.

His pain is evident. Mel puts a hand on his arm.

DALTON(O.S.)

(entering the room)

Dude, what are you doing up...

(he stops in the doorway)

(MORE)

DALTON(O.S.) (cont'd)
 here?

Adrian and Mel both stand up, facing Dalton.

MEL
 I was just...

ADRIAN
 She was helping me with math.

Dalton glares at Adrian, then looks to Mel.

MEL
 Sorry. I was looking for the
 bathroom, but I accidentally found
 your room and he was in here so--

ADRIAN
 (quiet)
 It's my room.

MEL
 What?

ADRIAN
 This...
 (he gestures around)
 is my room.

Mel looks at Dalton with raised eyebrows.

DALTON
 His room. His house. My party,
 though. Awesome party, right?

MEL
 This is Mr. Hurst's house?

Maddie charges into the room.

MADDIE
 Dalton? There you are. I was
 looking all over for you...
 (she notices Mel)
 Hey, and there you are.

Mel nods, tucking her hair behind her ear. Maddie glances at
 Adrian, giving Mel a curious look.

MEL
 Let's go track down the guys and
 get out of here.

DALTON
You don't have to--

MEL
(to Maddie)
This is Mr. Hurst's house.

MADDIE
Oh...

Mel walks over, takes Maddie's arm and leads her out.

MADDIE
(over her shoulder)
See you guys in algebra.

Dalton and Adrian stand silently for a moment. A beat.

DALTON
Did you kiss her?

Adrian chuckles.

ADRIAN
Yeah, we totally made out.

Dalton's jaw drops.

ADRIAN
'Cause you know how I have that
thing for geeky math girls...

Dalton spots the algebra book on Adrian's bed.

DALTON
Alright, alright. Let's get back to
my awesome party.

Dalton puts an arm over Adrian's shoulder and leads him out.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HURST HOME - DAY

SUPER: "Sunday"

Dalton, dressed and wearing flip flops, walks around with a trash bag, collecting litter.

Adrian, shoe-less and wearing pajama bottoms and a t-shirt, walks out the front door. He stretches and yawns.

ADRIAN

You know, my dad isn't coming home until tonight so this can wait.

DALTON

Let's at least get the yard cleaned up now. We can do the rest later.

Adrian sighs, but drags his bare feet down the steps and onto the lawn with Dalton where he begins collecting trash.

EXT. FORRESTER BACKYARD - DAY

Maddie, Mel and Grant sit together on the trampoline, sharing a huge plate of waffles.

MEL

Your mom makes the best waffles.

Maddie nods, chewing and swallowing a bite.

MADDIE

The party was fun last night.

Mel shrugs.

GRANT

I had fun talking to Casey. It turns out he knows a lot about the movie business from living in L.A.

MEL

He seems cool... if only I could figure out why I know his face.

They all think about it.

INT. CASEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room has blue walls, a bed with blue and green plaid bedding, and a large desk with an iMac on top. There are few other decorations or personal touches.

The door to an adjacent bathroom is cracked slightly.

INT. CASEY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Casey, dressed in plaid pajama bottoms and a very baggy hoodie, stands in front of the mirror. He bends down and opens the cabinet under the sink. He pulls out picture--a headshot imprinted with small gold letters that spell out "Cassandra Cook" in the lower right-hand corner.

Casey looks in the mirror for a long moment then at the headshot. He runs his hands through his short, dark hair.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CASEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: the bathroom door as it opens.

CHRISTINE(O.S.)

Casey? Are you up yet?

CASSANDRA "CASEY" COOK exits from the bathroom just as Christine opens the door and enters the room.

This is more than an impression. This is the real deal.

Casey wears a strapless blue sundress that shows off HER curvy figure. The long, blonde hair of her wig falls around her shoulders. She looks like she belongs on a magazine.

Christine smiles when she sees her DAUGHTER.

CHRISTINE

There you are. You look amazing.

Casey rolls her eyes, but smiles and smooths her dress. When she speaks, her voice is light and feminine:

CASEY

You'd think being a guy would be easier, but--

CHRISTINE

Actually being a guy might be easier, but being a girl pretending to be a guy as research for a role she hopes to get in an audition that's months away... very tough.

Casey sighs and nods.

CASEY

I know the idea is to lose myself a little to learn this character, but... I was starting to feel far too lost.

CHRISTINE

That wig isn't as beautiful as the hair you cut off, but it works.

Casey smiles at her mother.

CHRISTINE

If only Grant could see you now.

Casey scoffs.

CASEY

Mom, please. He may be artistic and passionate and totally gorgeous--

CHRISTINE

Aha! I knew you liked him--

CASEY

But. One, he thinks I'm a guy. Two, we're just friends.

CHRISTINE

Three, he's in love with Cassandra Cook... which, by the way, is you.

CASEY

Actually, he's in love with Mel.

CHRISTINE

Oh, I'm sorry, Sweetie.

Christine embraces her daughter.

CASEY

Mom...

Casey wiggles free from her mother's hug.

CASEY

It's cool, okay? I'm glad he doesn't like me. That would be the real crisis, now, wouldn't it?

CHRISTINE

(giggling)

I suppose so.

Casey laughs along as Christine turns her daughter to a standing mirror in the corner of the room. They look into the mirror together, as mother and daughter.

INT. HALLWAY - HURST HOME - DAY

Family photos decorate the wall and include the very beautiful AMY HURST. One, more candid than the rest, stands out: Amy and Adrian embracing before the camera.

INT. HURST KITCHEN - DAY

Cups and pizza boxes are everywhere. Dalton sits on the counter and snacks on a Poptart. Adrian leans nearby with a bowl of cereal. The sound of the opening front door causes the boys to look at one another. Panic fills Dalton's face.

RUSSELL(O.S.)

Adrian!

Dalton hops off the counter.

DALTON

(terrified)

I thought you said he wasn't going to be home until tonight.

ADRIAN

Oops. Now that I think about, I guess he did say Sunday morning.

DALTON

(hurt)

You wanted us to get caught...

ADRIAN

Not us. Go...

Adrian nods to the back door. Dalton shakes his head, but Adrian shoves him out the door just before Russell walks in.

RUSSELL

(angry)

What went on here?

Alexis comes trailing in behind him, her mouth hanging open.

ALEXIS

Holy cow...

ADRIAN
Yeah, I had a party. Sorry.

Red-faced, Russell takes a deep breath.

RUSSELL
(more calm)
Who was here?

ADRIAN
I don't know. Probably the entire
freshmen class.

ALEXIS
More like a heard of elephants...

RUSSELL
You can't have my students over to
a party at my house while I'm out
of town!

Russell looks searchingly at Adrian.

RUSSELL
Adrian, Son, please tell me there
wasn't drinking at this party.

Adrian shrugs and looks smugly at his father.

ALEXIS
Mom would kill you for this.

ADRIAN
Yeah, well, unfortunately, Lexi,
Mom isn't here. Someone killed her.

Alexis stares at him, tears welling up in her eyes.

RUSSELL
(to Alexis)
Sweetheart, why don't you go up to
your room for a little bit--

ALEXIS
But I didn't--

RUSSELL
Please?

Alexis nods and exits the room with her head down.

RUSSELL
You don't have to speak to your
sister that way. She feels the same
pain that you do. That we all do.

ADRIAN
You guys don't feel what I feel.

RUSSELL
Of course, we do.

ADRIAN
Oh, really? You feel like it's your
fault Mom is dead?

Russell tilts his head, looking into Adrian's eyes.

RUSSELL
It is my fault.

ADRIAN
What are you talking about, Dad?

RUSSELL
I was driving. I pulled out in
front of a speeding car.

ADRIAN
You stopped at the stop sign then
went. No one saw Dylan's car until
it was too late. I'm the one who
called shotgun. Mom should have
been in the front seat. Not me.

RUSSELL
(concerned)
Oh, Adrian...

ADRIAN
(shaky)
I should have been where Mom was. I
should be the one who--

RUSSELL
No.

ADRIAN
I should be dead.

He slumps over on the counter, crying lightly.

ADRIAN

I wish it was me instead.

Russell places an arm around Adrian's shoulder.

ADRIAN

Mom did so much. Everyday at school, I hear kids talking about her and how they miss her.

RUSSELL

She was a rare and special person.

ADRIAN

Yeah and, Dad, I'm not...

Adrian looks up at his dad. Russell runs a hand through his son's hair, wiping away his tears.

RUSSELL

I wish you could see that you are.

Adrian squints and snuffles, standing up to face his father.

RUSSELL

Your mother wouldn't want you to blame yourself. You know that.

Adrian looks at the ground. After a moment he nods then looks up at Russell.

ADRIAN

She wouldn't want you to blame yourself either, you know.

They look at each other for a long beat, each smiling.

RUSSELL

Fortunately, when I blame myself, I don't put holes in my body... or throw wild parties.

Adrian smiles.

ADRIAN

There wasn't any alcohol at this "wild party," by the way. I would never disrespect Mom like that.

Russell nods with a sigh of relief.

RUSSELL
So... what did go on?

ADRIAN
I don't really know. I was in my
room with Melanie Jones

Russell frowns and raises his eyebrows.

ADRIAN
She was helping me with algebra. I
think I actually understand the
point of inverse operations now.

RUSSELL
Be still my heart, my son just used
a math vocabulary word.

Adrian laughs. A beat.

RUSSELL
Why don't I help you clean up?

ADRIAN
(surprised)
Okay.

Russell starts collecting cups and boxes.

RUSSELL
Oh, and you're grounded.

Adrian nods and moves to help clean.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT IV

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. HURST BACKYARD - DAY

Adrian and his dad walk around with trash bags, collecting debris. Russell stumbles over a football. He trades the bag for the ball and whistles to Adrian.

RUSSELL

Go long?

Adrian smiles and drops his bag. He takes off running across the yard. Russell heaves the ball in a clean, arching spiral. Adrian speeds up and catches the ball easily.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

All these changes we make to ourselves are just an attempt at disguising ourselves.

INT. CASEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Casey and her mother sit together on the bed, looking through Seventeen Magazine.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

In an equation, the variable is hidden in the problem by various mathematical operations. Let's say you have x and its value is 7. Take x , multiply it by 5, add 8, and it's not 7 anymore. It's 43. Completely different. Totally Unrecognizable.

EXT. FORRESTER BACKYARD - DAY

Mel and Grant jump on the trampoline, one rising as the other one falls. Maddie looks on with Grant's camera.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

But easy enough to get back to, if you do things in the right order. Undo the last thing first, subtract 8. Then undo the first thing, divide by 5. All of a sudden, x is no longer a mystery, it's the familiar number 7.

EXT. JAMES HOUSE - DAY

A fairly large house sits on a big lot, badly in need of a paint job, gutter cleaning and lawn mowing.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Like variables in equations, we
disguise ourselves in high school.
With our clothes or our cliques. Or
our overly rebellious nature.

Dalton walks up to the house with his hands in his pockets.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Some of us more than others.

INT. ADRIAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Adrian stands in front of his mirror, looking at his reflection. He has the earrings out and wears no black eyeliner, but he still has his lip ring and dark hair.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Which makes some of us--like the
variable in a big, complicated,
messy-looking equation--all the
harder to discover.

Adrian takes a deep breath, smiling at his reflection.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

And maybe my fate is to be the sort
of variable that goes unknown for
all of high school. For forever.

Adrian glances at the algebra book on his desk.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Or, maybe someone will come along
and figure me out.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE