

UNKNOWN VARIABLES

"Lesson 1-2: Use the Distributive Property to Feel Less
Alone."

Written By

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Property to Feel Less Alone."

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - HURST HOME - NIGHT

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Before, I was normal.

RUSSELL, ALEXIS and ADRIAN exit through the front door. Adrian's hair is light brown and his piercings and eye liner are nonexistent. He wears khaki shorts, an Abercrombie t-shirt and flip flops.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Just an average boy in an average
family leading an average life.

The trio walks toward the car, laughing and talking.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Though some aspects of my life were
slightly above average.

Behind them, AMY HURST, 40, exits the house. Her hair is blonde and just above her shoulders. Her bright blue eyes sparkle in the moonlight.

AMY
(light)
Aren't you forgetting someone?

ADRIAN(V.O.)
She was above average, for sure.

Amy locks the door as the others stop and turn to her.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
In fact, she was off the charts.

Amy walks toward her family with a big smile on her face.

ADRIAN
Just trying to beat you to the
front seat for once. Shotgun, by
the way.

Adrian grins. Amy smiles and rolls her eyes playfully.

RUSSELL
(to Adrian)
Soon enough, you'll be the one
driving the Hurst family on late
night ice cream runs.

ALEXIS
That's a scary thought.

Everyone, including Adrian, laughs.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Then it all changed.

Their laughter distorts and the picture fades and flashes. The laughter turns into something high-pitched and inhuman as the image twists and darkens. Slowly the sound clears and turns into shrill sirens as red and blue lights flash against a dark background.

EXT. FOUR-WAY STOP - NIGHT

The scene is chaotic.

Wreckage from a car accident--the car accident--is strewn all over the street. The Hursts' car sits diagonally in the intersection with the hood of an older model Camaro smashed into its back side.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
My average life changed.

Emergency vehicles and workers are all around.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
I changed.

Amy Hurst lies on the ground, surrounded by EMTs. They frantically perform CPR, but she does not move.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
So did my father.

Russell sits on another curb. An EMT applies a bandage to one of his arms, but Russell is oblivious to his own injuries and keeps trying to look past the EMT to Amy.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
So did my sister.

In the middle of it all, Alexis and Adrian stand together looking around from their father to... their mother.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

In a split second, my family went
from average to annihilated.

Tears stream down Alexis' face as she clings to Adrian. In shock, Adrian watches as the EMTs stop working on Amy.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

While Dylan Jones got to go on
living the same life...

Dylan sits on the curb wearing jeans, boots and a t-shirt with the sleeves cut off. A small cut on his forehead shows a little red, but he is otherwise unharmed.

Dylan stares straight ahead until OFFICER GARY PETTIT, 31, gets him to his feet, puts him in handcuffs and leads him away to a patrol car.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

She didn't get to go on living at
all. The person who made me feel
like I meant something to someone.

Everything around Amy's lifeless body body begins to blur. The sirens get louder. The blue and red flashes take over the entire screen. Then... Darkness. Silence. Nothing.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

And now, I feel so alone.

EXT. FOUR-WAY STOP - NIGHT

Adrian stands alone in the middle of the empty intersection, looking much more like the current version of himself: dark hair, baggy pants, piercings, but no eyeliner.

The intersection is free of debris and the night is quiet.

Adrian turns his head to look down one of the intersecting streets. Out of nowhere, a Camaro barrels toward him. The headlights illuminate his unaffected expression. He blinks.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

And I'm afraid...

INT. ADRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark as Adrian sleeps in his bed.

Suddenly, Adrian sits straight up in bed, gasping for air. He is soaked with sweat and trying desperately to catch his breath. He looks around, discombobulated.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
I'm afraid that the nightmare has
now become my life. Even when I'm
awake, I'm not really...

Adrian wipes his brow then flops back against his pillow. He takes several breathes as he stares up at the ceiling.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Because I still hurt. I still miss
her. And I'm still alone.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF TEASER

ACT I

FADE IN:

INT. HURST KITCHEN - DAY

Alexis, dressed for school, sits at the table and eats a bowl of cereal. Russell, dressed for work, leans on the counter and eats a piece toast while grading papers.

Adrian enters, wearing pajama bottoms and a black t-shirt.

ALEXIS
Morning, sleepy head.

Adrian nods to her and opens a cabinet. He pulls out a box of Poptarts, takes out a packet, opens it, and inserts the pair of Poptarts into the toaster.

Russell glances at Adrian then trades a look with Alexis.

ALEXIS
Dad just graded your quiz.

ADRIAN
(sarcastic)
Awesome.

Adrian stares at the toaster and rubs his eyes. Russell smiles at Alexis. He gives her a nod.

ALEXIS

You got a C. Eighty-three.

Adrian glances at Alexis then looks to Russell.

RUSSELL

Not bad, huh?

ADRIAN

Well... it's not an F.

RUSSELL

I'm impressed, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Don't be. I mean, it's not like I got smarter. I just found someone who could explain math using real words... as opposed to math words.

ALEXIS

Who?

ADRIAN

(to Russell)

No offense.

Russell smiles genuinely.

RUSSELL

None taken.

ALEXIS

Who explained it to you?

RUSSELL

And, just think, you wanted me to move you away from her.

ALEXIS

Move him away from who?

ADRIAN

That was before I got to know her.

ALEXIS

Her who?!

She finally has their attention.

RUSSELL
Melanie Jones.

ADRIAN
Melanie Jones.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Everyone chats as Russell hands back quizzes.

BACK OF THE ROOM

Melanie and Adrian sit silently, though they occasionally glance at each other. Mel spins her pencil in her hand.

MEL
So... what happened to the liner?

She points at her own eye, but looks over at his.

MEL
I've been meaning to ask.

ADRIAN
Ever do something that seemed
right, but then felt all wrong?

Mel looks toward the front of the room.

MEL'S P.O.V.

Grant talks animatedly to Casey.

BACK TO SCENE

MEL
Hmm... maybe.

Adrian momentarily follows her gaze. She stares straight ahead for a second then looks back at him.

MEL
Why?

ADRIAN
That's what happened to the liner.

Mel nods then tucks her hair behind her ear. Russell walks up and puts Mel's quiz face down. Adrian glances over as she turns her quiz over: 100%. Mel shrugs, but Adrian smiles.

Russell appears again to give Adrian his quiz. Mel glances over as Adrian turns his quiz in her direction: 83%.

MEL

Not bad.

ADRIAN

It's a start, I guess.

Mel nods and puts her own paper into her three-ring binder.

ADRIAN

Two weeks sitting next to you and I'm making C's in algebra. My dad was right about you being a math miracle worker. You have no idea.

MEL

It's no big deal.

Adrian's gaze lingers on her for a moment then he looks off.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Dalton looks over his quiz thoughtfully. Maddie stares down at her red-ink covered paper with folded arms. Casey and Grant are mid-conversation. Grant's camera sits on his desk.

GRANT

So, you're telling me you've got an iMac with Final Cut Pro?

Casey nods.

GRANT

Dude, you're so my new best friend.

CASEY

Thought I already was.

Grant offers up a chuckle-scoff.

GRANT

Yeah, well, I'm making it official.

Russell walks up and hands Grant his quiz. Grant turns the paper around, revealing an "87" to Casey who nods in approval. Grant tosses the paper down on his desk.

Maddie glances over at Grant's quiz. She huffs and moves into full-on pout mode.

GRANT
I'm also coming over after school.

CASEY
(uncertain)
Oh. Okay...

GRANT
I mean, if that's cool?

CASEY
Yeah, it's cool. Definitely cool.

GRANT
Cool.

They both chuckle awkwardly.

MADDIE
(to no one in particular)
I can't believe I flunked the quiz.

Grant trades a look with Casey then looks over at Maddie.

GRANT
You didn't exactly fail. You got a seventy-one. That's a D.

MADDIE
I have to have a C for cheerleading!

GRANT
It's barely the third week of school. You've got plenty of time to bring it up. Get Mel to help.

Dalton glances over at the mention of Mel's name. Maddie sticks out her lip and says nothing more.

RUSSELL
(addressing the class)
Okay, ladies and gentlemen, your solving equations quizzes looked pretty good overall.

Maddie folds her arms even tighter around herself.

RUSSELL
Today we're going to toss something new into the mix. We're still solving, but...

Russell writes " $2(x + 4) = 18$ " on the board.

RUSSELL
How could we solve this?

CASEY
Divide both sides by 2.

Russell does this, leaving " $x + 4 = 9$ " on the board.

GRANT
Oh, it's easy from there.

RUSSELL
Do tell.

GRANT
Subtract four from both sides.

MADDIE
So x is thirteen?

DALTON
Five. Nine minus four... is five.

Maddie's cheeks turn red as she slinks down in her chair.

RUSSELL
Now that we know the answer...

Russell jots down " $x = 5$ " off to the side then rewrites the problem: " $2(x + 4) = 18$ " in the middle of the board.

RUSSELL
Is there another way we can do this? Two times the sum of x and four... Any ideas?

MADDIE
(perking up)
Oh! Rainbow math.

Grant chuckles and nods. Dalton and Casey look skeptical.

MEL
She means the distributive property. Our teacher last year always used different colored chalk to show the multiplication and... it kind of looked like a rainbow.

Russell grins.

RUSSELL
Rainbow math. I like it.

When Russell gives her a look of encouragement, Maddie sits up a little straighter. Russell uses two different colors as he draws one arch between the two and the x and another between the two and four.

RUSSELL
Rainbow math. Okay. So, operation?

MEL
Multiplication.

DALTON
Oh, so you do two times x and two times four.

MEL
Two x plus eight.

Dalton looks back and smiles at Mel. Russell writes "2x + 8 = 18" on the board.

RUSSELL
Someone finish it off. Adrian?

ADRIAN
Subtract eight then divide by two.
The answer is five.

RUSSELL
Perfect.

Russell shows each step and ends with "x = 5." He connects this with the "x = 5" written off to the side.

RUSSELL
Same answer either way.

CASEY
This is probably a dumb question--

RUSSELL
No such thing.

CASEY
Isn't the second method way more complicated?

Russell steps back and looks at the board a moment before turning back to Casey and the class.

RUSSELL

Yes.

A beat as the class looks around then back at Russell.

RUSSELL

It's really your preference. Do what's convenient for you given the problem you have to tackle.

Russell writes " $3(x + 4) = 5(2x + 4)$ " on the board.

RUSSELL

Here, dividing by three isn't convenient. Distributing is easier.

Casey nods.

MEL

So... something that seems really complicated could be really easy?

RUSSELL

Exactly.

Russell smiles to himself before turning to erase the board.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM DOOR - DAY

A bell rings and kids pour out of the classroom. Grant exits and talks relentlessly to a patient-faced Casey. Dalton and Adrian walk out together, chit-chatting.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Maddie waits by the door as Mel packs up her things. They are the only students left in the room with Russell.

RUSSELL

Melanie, do you have a minute?

Mel looks to Maddie who shrugs.

MEL

Sure.

Maddie sighs and exits the classroom. Mel carries her stuff up to the front of the room.

RUSSELL
Do you have a job?

MEL
No.

RUSSELL
Want one?

MEL
Um...

RUSSELL
Tutoring Adrian. Fifteen dollars an hour. An hour and a half a day. Two days a week. Interested?

Mel raises her eyebrows.

MEL
Sure, but I'm not sure he would--

RUSSELL
He will. Could you stop by tonight around, oh, say, six-ish?

MEL
Okay...

RUSSELL
If you can get someone to drop you off, I'll be glad to give you a ride home. Sound good?

Mel nods then lingers a moment before exiting.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MR. HURST'S ROOM - DAY

Mel exits to find Maddie waiting outside.

MADDIE
What was that about?

MEL
Nothing. He wants me to tutor Adrian in algebra.

MADDIE
Speaking of, I need you to tutor me. I barely passed my quiz.

MEL

He wants to pay me.

MADDIE

Are you saying I have to make a better offer?

MEL

No. I'm saying it was weird, and I don't know if I should do it.

MADDIE

Is the pay good?

MEL

Yes.

MADDIE

Will you still have time to help me pull my grade up to a C?

MEL

Yes...

MADDIE

Then, you should do it.

Mel sighs and starts walking. Maddie follows.

MADDIE

Also, you should ask that Adrian kid to the homecoming dance.

MEL

I'm really happy that you were nominated to the court, but--

MADDIE

Don't even say that you're not going. Even if you have to take my awkward, girl-challenged brother--

MEL

I am not going with Grant.

MADDIE

Adrian it is.

MEL

No!

Maddie grins as she walks quicker down the hallway, leaving Mel to keep up with her.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Adrian and Dalton stand by a set of lockers. Dalton hunts through his locker and pulls out various books and folders.

DALTON
So... the homecoming dance.

Adrian laughs.

ADRIAN
Oh, no...

DALTON
I'm in the court. I need a date.

ADRIAN
Sorry. My dance card is full.

DALTON
I'm asking Mel Jones.

Adrian winces.

ADRIAN
Really? Is that a good idea?

A crowd of roughnecks push their way down the hallway. Dylan Jones walks at the back of the pack. He glares at Adrian. Adrian swallows and sets his jaw, but Dalton is oblivious.

DALTON
Okay, man, at the party, you said it was cool if I asked her out.

ADRIAN
I know, but that was before--

DALTON
Before you had her up in your room?

ADRIAN
I did not "have her up in" my room. She wandered in and we talked about algebra. All we talk about is--

DALTON
Exactly. You guys always talk.

ADRIAN
Dude. Stop. Seriously.

Adrian turns away and starts walking. Dalton follows.

DALTON
Then why would you ask me if it's a
good idea to ask her to the dance?

ADRIAN
Stop and think. You know why.

DALTON
(hesitant)
Is it because of Dylan?

ADRIAN
(adamant)
It's because her best friend--

DALTON
Maddie Forrester likes me. I know.
Everyone knows. Who cares?

ADRIAN
Mel might.

Epiphany rings on Dalton's face.

DALTON
This sucks.

Dalton stops to lean on a locker with his head tilted back.
Adrian also stops just as Mel and Maddie turn the nearest
corner. Adrian watches them walk closer.

MADDIE
Hi, guys.

Dalton looks up, his eyes landing on Mel.

DALTON
Hey.

Maddie blushes as they continue past. Mel briefly locks eyes
with Adrian. When they are gone, Dalton's gaze lingers on
the empty hall.

DALTON
This really sucks.

Adrian nods in agreement.

EXT. PARKER HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The silver Jetta is parked out front, but the Saab is gone.

GRANT(O.S.)
For the record, you suck.

INT. CASEY'S ROOM - DAY

Grant sits in front of Casey's computer, mouse in hand and Final Cut Pro open before him. He stares in awe. Grant's camera sits on the corner of Casey's desk.

GRANT
This is so freakin' cool. Far superior to anything I have.

Casey sits on her bed with a Spanish book on her lap.

CASEY
Feel free to use it anytime.

Grant spins around in the chair to face Casey.

GRANT
I want to make a documentary--

CASEY
I know.

GRANT
About you.

Casey's eyes widen. She swallows.

CASEY
Dude, I'm so boring...

GRANT
Dude, you're so different.

CASEY
Grant--

GRANT
Casey... hear me out. The west coast collides with the midwest in this true tale about a guy from L.A. who tries to fit in Indiana.

CASEY

Who said I was trying to fit in?

Grant leans back as a beat passes.

GRANT

Hey, speaking of social conformity,
are you going to the homecoming
dance on Friday?

Casey's laugh is forced.

CASEY

Doubtful. Are you?

Grant groans.

GRANT

Unfortunately, I might have to be
Maddie's escort in the homecoming
court since Dalton's the only one
she wants to go with and he barely
knows she's alive.

CASEY

Yeah, what is that? Dalton and
Maddie would be so cute together.

Grant's eyebrows come together, his head tilted back.
Casey's eyes widen. She clears her throat then smirks.

CASEY

It's called sarcasm. Look it up.

GRANT

Oh...

(beat)

Well, you should go. To the dance.

Keep me company. Give commentary.

(he picks up his camera)

For the documentary.

Grant puts on a charismatic smile. Casey looks back down at
her Spanish book.

CASEY

I'll think about it.

Grant's smile turns genuine for a moment then he turns back
to the computer.

INT. MADDIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mel sits at Maddie's desk as she works on homework. Maddie stands in front of her mirror and holds up a chic, white strapless dress. She smooths the taffeta fabric.

MADDIE
Think about it, at least.

MEL
I already did. I'm not going.

Maddie stamps her foot and tosses the dress onto her bed.

MADDIE
Why not?

MEL
Dances are infinitely awkward.

Maddie balls her hands into fists and groans.

MEL
I thought I was here to help you
with your algebra homework not
watch you throw a temper tantrum.

Maddie glares at her for a moment then loosens up.

MADDIE
I swear, you're harder to deal with
than algebra, Melanie.

Mel chuckles. Maddie turns to the door.

MADDIE
I'm going to get my book.

Mel stands up and glances at Maddie's dress. She takes a step toward the dress with her hand out.

MADDIE(O.S.)
Are you coming?

Mel retracts her hand, takes a deep breath and exits.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

FADE IN:

INT. GRANT'S ROOM - DAY

An open window lights the room which is cluttered, but neat. Random video, lighting and sound equipment are piled everywhere. Framed movie posters cover all the walls and display titles like E.T., Star Wars, The Godfather, Raging Bull, The Breakfast Club, Clerks, Forrest Gump, The Royal Tenenbaums, Kill Bill and Juno. Eclectic, but smart choices.

His closet is mirrored, but nearly the entire surface has been covered by pages torn from magazines which feature articles about film. One large section features several stories about and pictures of Cassandra Cook.

The room door opens and Maddie and Mel enter.

MEL

Why is your book in here?

Maddie walks to Grant's book bag and pulls out a book.

MADDIE

It's not exactly my book...

Mel nods, rolling her eyes. She freezes in front of the closet. Her eyes widen as she looks at everything.

MEL

Whoa. This is...

MADDIE

Insane?

Maddie walks up next to Mel.

MEL

Intense.

Maddie nods, her lips pursed. Mel squints and adjusts her glasses to examine the Cassandra Cook display.

MEL

She looks vaguely familiar.

MADDIE

Uh, yeah. She's famous, remember?

MEL

I know, but she looks like someone.

Maddie shrugs. Behind her, the door opens. Grant enters, startled. He freezes just a step into the room. Maddie and Mel turn around. Maddie holds up the book.

MADDIE

I needed your algebra book.

Maddie walks toward the door. Mel follows. Grant steps aside to let them out of his room. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath as his cheeks flush a deep red.

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Adrian, Russell and Dalton walk out of the building together. Dalton wears football pants and a sleeveless t-shirt. Adrian and Dalton carry backpacks. Russell has a briefcase in one hand and a lunch bag in the other.

RUSSELL

Adrian, do you have your math book?

ADRIAN

No.

RUSSELL

You need it.

ADRIAN

We didn't have homework...

RUSSELL

Melanie Jones is coming over to tutor you tonight.

Dalton and Adrian glance at one another.

RUSSELL

Go get the book. I'll pull the car around. Okay?

ADRIAN

But--

DALTON

Come on. I'll go with you.

Dalton leads the way back into the school. Adrian tosses his dad a scowl before following.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Dalton and Adrian walk briskly down the hall.

DALTON
I can't believe Mel is going to be
at your house... tonight.

ADRIAN
That makes two of us...

DALTON
Dude, talk to her for me?

ADRIAN
About what?

DALTON
Find out if she's into me.

ADRIAN
"Thanks for teaching me the
distributive property, Mel. Oh,
speaking of words that begin with
D, isn't Dalton a hottie?"

Dalton bumps his shoulder into Adrian's.

DALTON
Come on, man, I'm serious.

Adrian lets out a groaning sigh.

ADRIAN
I'll try to work it in, but--

DALTON
Yes! Thank you. Thank you...

Dalton grabs Adrian's shoulders, shaking him. Adrian's face
twists in unease, but he fakes a smile.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOUSE - NIGHT

Russell is at the sink washing dishes. Adrian dries.

ADRIAN
About this Melanie Jones thing. I
think it's a bad idea.

RUSSELL
Why?

ADRIAN
Dalton's into Mel.

RUSSELL

Hmm. I would have thought he'd be more of a cheerleader kind of guy.

ADRIAN

Ironically, Maddie Forrester has a very public crush on Dalton.

Russell chuckles as he hands off a plate to Adrian.

ADRIAN

And Dalton keeps implying that there's something between Mel and me. Which is... so dumb.

Russell glances at his son and smiles to himself.

RUSSELL

Forgive me, but what does all this have to do with algebra?

Adrian opens his mouth, but the doorbell rings. Russell and Adrian look at each other silently.

ALEXIS(O.S.)

Hey! Melanie Jones is here...

Adrian sighs and puts the plate and towel on the counter.

LATER

Adrian and Mel sit at the kitchen table with a book open between them. Mel watches as Adrian does a problem.

MEL

Okay, wait. You keep forgetting to distribute. It's three times the quantity of x plus two.

ADRIAN

Three x minus two.

MEL

Three x minus 6. Distribute.

Adrian tosses his pencil down.

ADRIAN

This is so dumb.

Mel sighs and tucks her hair behind her ear. She picks up the pencil and draws a set of parentheses on the paper.

MEL
Ever feel all alone in something?

Adrian looks at her, his brows drawn down. He props his head on his hand and looks down at the paper.

ADRIAN
Yeah...

MEL
What?

Adrian stares at the paper as Mel write his name inside the parentheses. She draws a box in front of the parentheses.

ADRIAN
Everything. Life.

MEL
Can you narrow it down?

ADRIAN
My mom. The accident.

MEL
That makes you feel alone?

ADRIAN
Yeah... because no one else knows
what it's like...

Mel squeezes the word "accident" into the tiny box. Inside the parentheses, she writes "+ Mel" after Adrian's name. She draws an arc from "accident" to "Adrian." In the brief silence, Adrian studies her face.

MEL
I haven't spoken to my brother
since that night. Things at my
house have been... hard.

ADRIAN
At least you still have a mom.

MEL
Barely. My mom takes as many extra
shifts as she can, and it's not
just for the money. My brother
hardly talks to her. All he does is
work on his stupid van. Sometimes
they argue about why Dad left.

Mel draws an arrow from "accident" to her own name.

MEL
Trust me, Adrian, you're not alone.
(she puts the pencil down)
The accident affected me, too.

Adrian bites his lip, toying with his lip ring. He touches his finger to the paper, to Mel's illustration.

ADRIAN
I know this won't make you feel
better, but I doubt I'll ever
forget to distribute again.

Mel looks up at him. She laughs lightly. The moment lingers. Russell enters and clears his throat.

RUSSELL
Time's up. You kids about done?

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Russell drives. Adrian sits in the front seat. Alexis and Mel share the back. Alexis glances over at Mel's notebook.

ALEXIS
I like your notebook.

MEL
Oh, thank you.

Mel smiles at her. Alexis grins back.

MEL
It's right here. The white one with
the van in the driveway.

Russell stops the car in front of the house.

RUSSELL
So are we going to make this a
regularly scheduled event?

Russell glances over at Adrian.

ADRIAN
I'm in if she is.

Russell looks back at Mel.

MEL
Yeah. I'm in. Definitely.

RUSSELL
Great. Thank you.

Mel nods and opens the car door.

ADRIAN
Oh, hey, I'll walk you in.

Russell raises an eyebrow as Adrian quickly hops out.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Adrian walks up the driveway with Mel. Mel continuously glances over at him as he fidgets. There's something coming.

MEL
What?

ADRIAN
You know how the homecoming dance
is on Friday?

Mel raises her eyebrows.

MEL
Yes.

ADRIAN
Is there any possible way I could
convince you to go with, uh...

Mel tilts her head.

ADRIAN
Would you go with Dalton?

Mel's jaw falls slack.

MEL
Are you insane? Why would I go with
Dalton? Maddie likes Dalton.

ADRIAN
And Dalton likes you. I told you
that at the party.

MEL
I thought you were joking...

Adrian shakes his head. Mel lets out an exasperated sigh.

MEL

Tell him to ask Maddie to the dance, okay? Once he gets to know her, I think he'll figure out that she's way more his type than I am.

ADRIAN

Look, Dalton can be really laid back, but he can also be super-obsessive. Usually it's about good stuff like school or football, but now it's about you.

Mel blushes and tucks her hair behind her ear.

MEL

Number one, I wouldn't do that to Maddie. Number two, I don't know him. I've barely spoken to him.

ADRIAN

Okay, your answer's no. Got it.

Mel nods, looking around.

ADRIAN

Thanks again for--

The front door opens abruptly to reveal Dylan.

DYLAN

(eying Adrian)
What's he doing here?

Adrian takes a few steps back, his jaw clenched.

MEL

(to Adrian)
See you tomorrow.

She pushes past Dylan and goes inside.

DYLAN

I don't like you being around my little sister. She hates me enough already. I don't need you filling her head with lies.

ADRIAN

Lies? You're the one who--

DYLAN

Get off my property. Now.

Dylan takes a step out of the door. Adrian clenches his fists, but turns around and walks away. Dylan stands in the door and stares at Adrian's back as he leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALLWAY - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Adrian stares into his locker. Dalton bounds up.

DALTON

So? What happened? What'd she say?

Adrian looks up, his reverie shattered. He swallows.

ADRIAN

She said that one, Maddie likes you and two, she doesn't know you.

DALTON

In that order?

ADRIAN

Hence the elaborate number system.

DALTON

And that's it? No three or four?

ADRIAN

Or five. Or six. Or seven.

Dalton grins.

DALTON

That's awesome. That is... awesome.

Adrian pulls out a few books and notebook.

ADRIAN

Why is that awesome?

DALTON

Because, she could have just said she thinks I'm ugly or dumb or something, but she didn't.

ADRIAN

I guess that's technically true...

DALTON
I think if she has a chance to get
to know me, I might have a shot.

ADRIAN
Too bad she won't get that chance.

DALTON
Who says? Watch this...

Dalton's eyes are focused down the hallway. Adrian follows his gaze to Mel and Maddie as they stand at Maddie's locker. Dalton walks off in their direction. Adrian shoves his stuff back into his locker and jogs after Dalton.

ADRIAN
What are you doing? I told you--

DALTON
Trust me. I got this.

ADRIAN
But, Mel--

DALTON
It's under control.

Dalton walks up to the girls with a confident smile. Adrian stumbles up behind him, averting his eyes when Mel looks curiously in his direction.

DALTON
I was wondering if you'd like to go
to the homecoming dance with me?

Mel's eyes get wide until she notices that Dalton is looking directly at Maddie. Maddie's cheeks flush. She smiles wide.

MADDIE
Sure. I mean, since we're both in
the homecoming court--

DALTON
It makes perfect sense.

MADDIE
Yeah.

Dalton glances at Mel. He smiles at her.

DALTON
You know, we could all go together.

Maddie grins.

MADDIE
That would be awesome.

She looks pointedly at Mel. Mel shakes her head.

MEL
Count me out.

ADRIAN
Ditto. Not going.

Dalton glares at Adrian.

ADRIAN
I mean, I guess it could be fun.

Mel gives him a dirty look.

ADRIAN
But, probably not.

Maddie looks at Dalton conspiratorially.

DALTON
(flirtatious, to Maddie)
If you convince your friend, I'll
convince mine. Okay?

Maddie giggles.

MADDIE
It's a deal.

DALTON
Cool.

Dalton smiles warmly at Maddie then turns and walks away.
Adrian stands there, staring at Mel. She scowls back at him.
Maddie lets out a happy sigh.

MADDIE
Wow...

Mel rolls her eyes then looks back at Adrian.

MADDIE
I have to go to my cheer meeting.

MEL
(cold)
Bye.

MADDIE

You two are so going to the dance.

They both look at her, mouths ready to speak, but Maddie turns and walks off down the hallway.

MEL

What was that?

ADRIAN

I have no clue.

A beat.

MEL

That wasn't exactly what I had in mind when I said you should get him to ask Maddie instead.

ADRIAN

Trust me when I say he came up with that one all on his own.

Mel sighs and looks around. Adrian leans against a locker with his eyes closed. Casey walks by, meeting eyes with Mel.

MEL

I'm not going to the dance.

Adrian nods in acknowledgment and agreement.

MEL

Bye.

Adrian nods again and watches Mel walk after Casey.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

People are lined up for food. At the tables, groups sit and eat cereal and breakfast burritos. Casey enters. Mel walks in quickly behind her.

MEL

Hey, Casey?

Casey turns around.

MEL

Where's Grant?

CASEY

He's shooting some footage of
homecoming dance posters.

MEL

That's Grant. Every major event
must be documented.

CASEY

I don't know if I'd consider a high
school dance a "major event."

MEL

Good point.

They both laugh.

MEL

I guess that's what makes him so
special. The way he sees all the
details. Major and minor.

Casey nods with just a hint of skepticism.

CASEY

You know, from what I can tell, he
thinks you're pretty special, too.

MEL

(dismissive)

Grant and I are just friends.

CASEY

No, Grant and I are just friends.
You and Grant are crushee and
crusher, respectively. Maybe.

Casey looks at Mel carefully.

MEL

The only person Grant's got a crush
on is Cassandra Cook. Trust me.

Casey inhales sharply.

CASEY

He's a Cassandra Cook fan. That
doesn't automatically mean--

MEL

I take it you haven't seen his
closet doors.

Casey tilts her head. Mel smiles and walks away.

GRANT(O.S.)
Good news. Maddie has a date.

Casey turns around as Grant walks up with his camera already out and in Casey's face.

CASEY
Should we send her a card? Or would flowers be more fitting?

Grant laughs.

GRANT
Dalton asked her to homecoming.

CASEY
Cool. So you don't have to go.

GRANT
We don't have to go.

Casey nods, running a hand back through her hair.

GRANT
And I have the perfect alterna-dance activity.

Grant pulls out a DVD from his backpack and films the box then holds it out to reveal a film called "Prom Misses."

Cassandra Cook stands in the foreground of the front cover wearing a pink prom dress, black and white striped tights and pink and black Converse All Stars. A handsome teenage boy stands in the background wearing a nice tuxedo.

GRANT
This was Cassandra Cook's breakout role. When she went from being a "child actress" to an indie star.

Casey swallows back a smile.

CASEY
What's it about?

GRANT
In kindergarten, these two
(he points to the cover)
promise each other that they'll go to prom together some day. Flash forward to high school. They haven't spoken in years. He's popular; she's eccentric.

CASEY

But they go together anyway.

GRANT

Except they get sidetracked, miss the prom all together and end up having the night of their lives.

CASEY

Sounds a little... Pretty in Pink.

Grant's jaw drops.

GRANT

It's very Pretty in Pink... meets Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist.

Casey grins and nods.

CASEY

Sounds like my kind of movie.

GRANT

Then we're on like Donkey Kong. Friday night. Cool?

CASEY

Cool.

Grant nods and puts the movie back in his bag.

GRANT

I'll see you in Spanish.

Casey nods as Grant walks off and over to Mel who has taken a seat at a cafeteria table. He sits down with her, striking up an easy conversation. Casey watches, sighing and pushing both hands through her short hair.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Dalton walks down the hall with a smile on his face. Adrian jogs up to him.

ADRIAN

Hey. Dalton.

DALTON

What's up?

The boys stop walking in order to talk.

ADRIAN
I'm not going to the dance.

DALTON
Dude, you have to. It has to look
like you're the one interested in--

ADRIAN
Why don't you just go with Maddie
and try to have a good time?

DALTON
Because Mel--

ADRIAN
Isn't interested, okay?

Dalton looks at Adrian for a long moment.

DALTON
Are you sure?

ADRIAN
If you don't believe me...
(he shrugs)
Ask her yourself.

Adrian backs away, shaking his head. He turns around and
leaves Dalton to ponder his words.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

FADE IN:

INT. SEÑORA CHO'S CLASSROOM - DAY

SEÑORA CHO, an attractive Chinese-American woman of about
40, stands before a small class which includes Grant, Casey,
Dalton and Mel, none of whom sit near each other.

SEÑORA CHO
Okay, estudiantes. As I explained
last time, you will be working on a
collage in pairs of your choice.
Just remember, you must explain the
items in your collage or the
overall meaning... en español.

The class looks around, but no one moves.

SEÑORA CHO
Vamos, por favor.

Señora Cho claps and everyone gets up and looks around. Dalton meets eyes with Mel who quickly looks away. She walks hurriedly to Grant and grabs his arm.

MEL
Be my partner.

Grant looks down at her grip then over to Casey who leans coolly against her desk. Casey smiles encouragingly at Grant. Grant nods at Mel who releases her grip on his arm.

MEL
Thank you.

LATER

Pairs of students cut and glue magazine pictures. In the back corner of the room, Mel and Grant work. At the front, Dalton sits with Casey who cuts stuff out.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Casey cuts out a picture of a horse. Dalton writes on a sheet of notebook paper.

DALTON
How do you say horseback riding?

CASEY
Not sure. "Caballo" is horse.

Dalton grabs his book and opens it to the glossary.

CASEY
The sports theme was a good idea.

DALTON
Thanks.
(reading)
Montar a caballo.

Dalton jots it down on his paper then glances backward. Casey also glances toward the back of the room.

CASEY'S P.O.V.

Grant and Mel are laughing about something. Mel touches his arm as she reaches across him to take the scissors.

BACK TO SCENE

DALTON
She's something, huh?

Casey looks back at Dalton.

CASEY
What? Who?

DALTON
Mel...

Casey nods, cutting out another picture. A beat.

DALTON
Do you think she likes Grant?

CASEY
I don't know...

DALTON
He likes her though, right?

CASEY
I don't know...

DALTON
Aren't you friends with him?

CASEY
Yeah, but...
(she stares at the scissors)
Dude, we don't talk about crap like
that. I mean, we're guys. Guys
don't talk about about that stuff.

Casey glances up at Dalton.

CASEY
I mean... right?

Dalton shrugs.

DALTON
I talk about that stuff. Obviously.

He chuckles. Casey laughs along hesitantly.

BACK OF THE ROOM

Mel flips through a magazine while Grant watches.

MEL

Oh, here's a good one.

She turns the magazine around to reveal a picture of Cassandra Cook wearing a bright pink dress with her long, blonde hair falling wildly over her shoulders.

GRANT

(sheepish)

About that...

MEL

It's no big deal. The girl's pure stalker bait anyway. Look at her.

Mel looks down at the magazine in her hands. Grant examines the in-progress collage which seems to be "movies" themed.

MEL

I think it's mainly the hair.

Mel cuts out the picture of Cassandra Cook, but leaves most of her hair behind. She trims it up a little.

MEL

See, without the hair, she looks...

She holds the picture out, but Grant doesn't look.

MEL

Look.

Grant smiles and looks everywhere but at the picture. Mel laughs at him and puts the cutout down on the desk.

MEL

Fine, but--

The bell rings. Mel and Grant look at each other.

SEÑORA CHO

Oh, no! Mis estudiantes, please clean up before you leave.

Students rush out the door, tossing down their magazines, glue and scissors on a table at the front of the room.

SEÑORA CHO
Stack your collages neatly!

Students throw stuff on the table as they hurry out. Señora Cho sighs and drops her arms to her side, watching the mess in front of her grow.

Casey and Dalton struggle to get their area cleaned up. In the back of the room, Mel and Grant do the same.

SEÑORA CHO
Gracias, but feel free to go ahead.
I don't want you to be late.

Grant and Mel look at the magazine clippings around them.

MEL
I've got my stuff for algebra. You
can go ahead. I'll clean up.

GRANT
You're a lifesaver.

Grant grins and pats her arm before exiting.

Dalton watches Grant leave the room.

DALTON
(to Casey)
My locker's on the way to Mr.
Hurst's room so I can handle this.

CASEY
Cool. Thanks, man.

Casey rushes out with her books cradled in her arms.

SEÑORA CHO
Gracias, gracias.

Señora Cho straightens up the front table as other students enter the room. Dalton puts his materials neatly on the table then turns to Mel. He walks tentatively toward her.

DALTON
Need some help?

He kneels down to help her pick up small pieces of magazine.

MEL
Oh, thanks.

DALTON
What's this?

He picks up the cutout head of Cassandra Cook.

DALTON
Kind of looks like that Casey kid.

Dalton chuckles and starts to crumble it up, but Mel snatches it from him and looks at it.

DALTON
What?

Mel shoves the picture into her binder.

MEL
Nothing. Come on, we're going to be late if we don't hurry.

She picks up her books and balances them with glue, scissors and her collage. Dalton carries his handful of trash. Mel leads the way to the table where she drops everything off.

Dalton grabs his books and tosses the trash into the trashcan as he follows Mel out the door.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The hallways are nearly empty as people make a mad dash to get to class on time. Mel walks quickly. Dalton follows, his eyes fixed on Mel.

DALTON
So... the dance is going to be--

MEL
I'm not going.

DALTON
It'll be fun.

MEL
Somehow, I doubt that.

Dalton takes a deep breath and grabs Mel by the hand.

DALTON
Wait, hang on.

Mel stops, her eyebrows knitted. She looks down at his hand.

MR. EMMANUEL(O.S.)
You two. My office. Now.

Mel and Dalton look up as Mr. Emmanuel huffs and puffs his way down the hallway. Dalton drops Mel's hand then turns to Mr. Emmanuel.

DALTON
What's the problem, sir?

MR. EMMANUEL
PDA of any sort will not be tolerated at Westside High.

MEL
But--

The bell rings.

MR. EMMANUEL
And, you're tardy. Let's go.

Mr. Emmanuel turns and walks off, motioning with his hand for Mel and Dalton to follow. Mel glares at Dalton before following Mr. Emmanuel. Dalton moans before trailing along.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Chairs line a wall leading to a door labeled "Principal."
Mel and Dalton sit in the two chairs closest to the door.

Dalton is bent forward, his elbows on his knees. Mel sits up straight and toys with the edge of the three ring binder in her lap. She sighs. Dalton glances over.

DALTON
Sorry about this.

Mel shrugs dismissively and opens her binder. Inside, the hairless picture of Cassandra Cook is stuck in the front pocket. Mel pulls it out and looks at it. She squints.

Mel opens her pencil pouch and pulls out a black Sharpie. She uses it to color the centimeter of light hair. She adjusts the hairstyle with a few extra strokes.

DALTON
What are you doing?

Dalton glances over, but Mel quickly flips the picture over and slides it back into the binder pocket. Mel looks up with feigned innocence and shakes her head. A beat passes.

DALTON
So... the reason I stopped you--

RUSSELL(O.S.)
Not the usual crew of troublemakers
in the office today.

Mel and Dalton look up as Russell walks up to them. Mr. Emmanuel bursts out of his office.

MR. EMMANUEL
No talking while--Mr. Hurst.
Finally. What took you so long?

RUSSELL
I was teaching my class...

MR. EMMANUEL
Oh, well, no matter. Dr. Blue is
covering it for you now, correct?

RUSSELL
Yes. Covering. Not teaching. I--

MR. EMMANUEL
Come into my office.

Russell glances at Dalton with a raised eyebrow.

MR. EMMANUEL
You two, as well.

Mel and Dalton look at one another then stand to follow.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Students sit at their desks, working on an assignment from their books and chatting noisily as Chanice walks around.

Adrian taps his pencil as he reads a question. Chanice walks up and sits down in the empty seat next to him. Adrian looks over at her.

ADRIAN
Hi.

CHANICE
Hey, how's it going?

Adrian shrugs.

ADRIAN
Better, I think.

CHANICE
I'm glad to hear that.

She watches him patiently for a moment.

ADRIAN
Ever since school started...

He looks around at his classmates, each of whom is wrapped up in their own conversations.

ADRIAN
Don't get me wrong, I've still had my ups and downs, but every time I start to get really low, it seems like there's someone around to pick me up. To make me feel better.

Chanice smiles.

ADRIAN
I mean, I know I should probably be working on developing my own coping skills, but--

CHANICE
A support system is a good thing.

Adrian nods and looks around the room.

ADRIAN
What's weird is that my entire "support system" is now M.I.A.

Chanice glances around.

INT. MR. EMMANUEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Dalton, Mel and Russell take three seats across from Mr. Emmanuel's bulky desk. Dalton sits in the middle.

The room lacks personal touches completely. A computer sits on the edge of the desk. Stacks of folders occupy the rest of the space on the desk.

Russell looks around the office then sighs.

MR. EMMANUEL
Mr. Hurst, do you know where these
students were?

RUSSELL
In your office?

MR. EMMANUEL
Before that.

RUSSELL
The hallway?

Dalton chokes back a chuckle.

MR. EMMANUEL
They were not in your classroom
when the bell rang. Correct?

RUSSELL
That is correct.

MR. EMMANUEL
Yet they were not marked absent on
your online attendance.

RUSSELL
If you mark someone absent and they
come in late, you can't undo it.

MR. EMMANUEL
There's a form you can file with
the attendance secretary.

RUSSELL
I usually just wait a few minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel scowls with disapproval then reaches to his
computer. He clicks a few times with his mouse.

MR. EMMANUEL
Yet they are still not marked
absent on your attendance.

RUSSELL
Because Dr. Blue came and said you
wanted to speak with me two minutes
after class started.

MR. EMMANUEL
At our summer faculty meeting, I
outlined the importance of
submitting your attendance at the

(MORE)

MR. EMMANUEL (cont'd)
very start of the period. Do you
remember what I said about it?

Russell shifts uncomfortably in his chair.

RUSSELL
I wasn't at that meeting.

Mr. Emmanuel scowls.

MR. EMMANUEL
And why not?

RUSSELL
I was out of town.

Russell glances at Dalton and Mel, but then looks down. Mr. Emmanuel grunts and shakes his head.

DALTON
He was in Georgia sprinkling his
wife's ashes into the Atlantic
Ocean. He took a personal day.

Russell puts a hand on Dalton's shoulder. Dalton hangs his head. Mel focuses on a spot on the wall.

MR. EMMANUEL
Is that the sort of personal
business you share with your
students, Mr. Hurst?

DALTON
(incredulous)
His son is my best friend!

MR. EMMANUEL
(to Russell)
At any rate, my point is, you
didn't know where these students
were, yet they were supposed to be
under your supervision. Instead, I
found them canoodling in the hall.

Russell tilts his head.

DALTON
Oh my gosh, sir, we were not
"canoodling." We stayed to help
Señora Cho clean up. We were
running a little late. That's it.

MR. EMMANUEL

I'll have to talk to her about
issuing passes to students if she
causes them to be tardy.

DALTON

She didn't cause us to be tardy.
She told us to go, but--

MR. EMMANUEL

So, you disobeyed her?

DALTON

No. Mel, help me out here?

He looks over at Mel. Mel glares at him briefly.

MEL

(to Mr. Emmanuel)

She said we could go, but we didn't
want to leave the room in a mess.

RUSSELL

It sounds as if they were trying to
be good Samaritans.

Mr. Emmanuel sets his eyes on Dalton.

MR. EMMANUEL

You're a ball player, aren't you?

Dalton nods.

MR. EMMANUEL

It's a shame that you'll have to
miss Friday's homecoming game.

DALTON

Friday is varsity's homecoming
game. I play quarterback for J.V.

MR. EMMANUEL

Then you'll be suspended from
Thursday's junior varsity game.

Dalton's jaw drops and his eyes widen.

DALTON

What? That's not fair!

Russell again puts his hand on Dalton's shoulder. Dalton
looks over at him, his eyes pleading.

DALTON

The coach said one hundred percent commitment. Suspended for one game means suspended for all games.

Russell closes his eyes for a moment then turns to Mr. Emmanuel who wears a devious smirk.

MEL

I think I should clear something up, Mr. Emmanuel.

Mr. Emmanuel looks over at Mel, as do Russell and Dalton.

MEL

I grabbed Dalton's hand. He didn't want me to because he knew it was against school rules, but I did it anyway. Because I like him so much. I take full responsibility.

DALTON

Mel, what are you--

MEL

Look, Dalton, I get it, okay? The feelings between us aren't mutual. We can't be together. You don't have to explain it all again.
(she looks down)
It hurt enough the first time.

Mel snuffles. Dalton raises his eyebrows.

MR. EMMANUEL

Oh, enough of this teenage drivel. Mr. James, you may play in the game. Ms. Jones, you have Saturday detention and may not go to the homecoming dance on Friday.

Mel feigns a few more snuffles. Dalton stares at her in disbelief. Russell looks back and forth between them.

MR. EMMANUEL

Mr. Hurst, please escort these two directly to your class.

Russell stands.

RUSSELL

Come on, you two.

Dalton and Mel look at each other for a long moment.

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

At the back of the room, Chanice sits and talks with Adrian.

At the front of the room, Maddie sits with her head propped up on her hand and a silly smile on her face. Casey fiddles with Grant's camera as she watches him work. Grant looks up.

GRANT

God, you're worse than Mel.

Casey bites her lip and knits her brow.

GRANT

You're both so freakin' smart.

Casey laughs uncomfortably.

GRANT

Speaking of Mel...

Casey rolls her eyes, but smiles when Grant looks at her.

GRANT

Wonder where she is?

Casey shrugs.

CASEY

He's gone, too.

She nods over to Dalton's empty desk.

GRANT

They couldn't still be cleaning up
the Spanish room...

The door opens and Dalton and Mel walk in, followed by Russell. Maddie looks up, her eyes meeting Mel's curiously. Mel looks away only to find Adrian watching her with his own curious smile as she makes her way to her seat.

Chanice gets up so that Mel can sit down then walks up to Russell. She leans in to whisper.

CHANICE

Everything okay?

Russell, lips pursed, leans closer to Chanice.

RUSSELL

That guy reams me out in front of
my students again, I'm going to the
union, Chanice. I swear.

CHANICE

Mr. Emmanuel did that?

Russell nods. Chanice is speechless.

RUSSELL

Thanks for watching the class.

She nods, but raises her eyebrows inquisitively. Russell smiles and opens the classroom door. Chanice exits the room.

RUSSELL

Alrighty, ladies and gentlemen.
Sorry for my absence. Finish up
what you're working on and we'll
check over it.

Students look up briefly then go back to work and talking.

FRONT OF THE ROOM

Maddie leans in front of Grant and talks past Casey.

MADDIE

Hi, Dalton. Where were you guys?

Grant, pressed back against his chair, glances over at Casey who gives him an amused shake of her head.

DALTON

Um... we stayed to clean up last
period then we got caught late in
the halls. Emmanuel is nuts.

MADDIE

That sucks. Did you get in trouble?

DALTON

Mel took the blame.

MADDIE

You let her?

DALTON

She did it so we could still go to
the dance together. You and me.

Maddie smiles.

MADDIE

She's such an awesome friend.

DALTON

Yeah...

Dalton follows Maddie's gaze to the back of the room. Mel glances at Dalton then at Maddie. Maddie presses her knuckles together and uses her thumbs to form a heart out of her hands. She puts the shape over her natural heart.

BACK OF THE ROOM

Mel smiles genuinely until Maddie turns around. She sighs.

ADRIAN

So... where were you guys?

MEL

Got in trouble for being tardy.

ADRIAN

What'd they need my dad for?

MEL

Emmanuel yelled at him because we were supposed to be in his class, but instead we were late and "canoodling" in the hallway.

Adrian's jaw hangs slightly agape.

ADRIAN

Does canoodling mean what I think?

MEL

He also called it P.D.A.

Adrian's eyes get wider.

ADRIAN

You guys were--

MEL

It was a misunderstanding.

Adrian nods, his brows twisted in curiosity. A beat.

ADRIAN

You want the assignment?

Mel nods. Adrian hands over his paper. Mel pulls out a sheet of notebook paper and writes down the assignment at the top. She hands Adrian's paper back to him.

ADRIAN
I remembered to distribute.

Adrian points to his paper. Mel glances at his work.

MEL
Very good.

She smiles at him then opens up her book.

ADRIAN
I'm glad you're back.

Mel glances up, her head tilted.

ADRIAN
I was starting to feel all alone.

Mel smiles warmly. She glances over at Russell who is giving Dalton the assignment. She looks back at Adrian then leans past him to draw a parenthesis on the far edge of his desk.

ADRIAN
What is that?

She draws another parenthesis on the far edge of her desk.

ADRIAN
I get it. Parentheses.

Adrian looks down at his paper with a nod.

ADRIAN
I get it...

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

FADE IN:

INT. MADDIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mel sits on Maddie's bed while Maddie stands in front of her mirror, wearing her white strapless dress. Her hair is lightly curled and her makeup is heavy, but tasteful.

MADDIE
Think Dalton's going to love it?

MEL

If he doesn't, he's an idiot.

Maddie grins just as the doorbell rings. Maddie squeals.

INT. FRONT HALL - NIGHT

Grant opens the front door with his camera rolling. Casey is standing on the other side. She is dressed in a hoodie and baggy jeans and wears her army cap. She smiles when Grant opens the door, but something else catches her eye.

CASEY

Oh, wow. That dress is amazing.

Oops. Casey swallows as Maddie and Mel walk down the stairs.

CASEY

On you, I mean. That dress is amazing on you. You look amazing.

Maddie blushes as she and Mel hit the bottom of the stairs.

MADDIE

Thanks.

Mel discreetly glances at Grant who looks at Casey with raised eyebrows. Casey notices Grant's expression.

CASEY

Where are we watching this movie?

Grant closes his camera.

GRANT

Basement. And Mel's going to join us, if that's cool.

CASEY

(disappointed)

Oh.

(faking a smile)

Yeah, that's totally cool.

Mel wears a smile, but examines Casey through narrowed eyes.

MADDIE

(to Grant)

When Mom and Dad get back from dinner, remind them to--

GRANT

Pick you and Dalton up at nine.

The doorbell rings. Maddie's face lights up. Grant rolls his eyes and leans forward to open the door.

MADDIE

(whispered)

Wait. Wait.

Maddie runs up the stairs. Grant looks at Mel with an arched brow. Mel holds up a finger until Maddie is all the way upstairs. She nods. Grant opens the front door.

Dalton stands on the stoop wearing a tie, dress shirt and slacks. His hair is combed neatly. He holds a corsage box.

DALTON

Hi. I'm here for Madison.

Grant lets the door fall open to reveal Mel and Casey. Dalton nods to Casey then makes eye contact with Mel.

DALTON

Hey.

Mel looks away, tucking her hair behind her ear. She shifts.

GRANT

(shouting)

Maddie! Dalton's here!

Maddie walks down the stairs again. Dalton grins.

DALTON

Whoa...

Mel watches with a pleased smile as Maddie reaches them.

DALTON

You look great.

Dalton glances at Mel, his look conspiratorial.

MADDIE

Thank you.

Maddie bites her lip, her face flushed. Dalton takes out the corsage and places it on her wrist. Dalton glances up at Mel again, but then turns to Maddie.

DALTON

Shall we?

He holds out an arm, bent at the elbow, for Maddie to take. She sticks her arm through his and leads her out the door. When they are gone:

GRANT

I'll meet you two in the basement
with some popcorn. Okay?

Casey and Mel nod in agreement, subtly eying each other.

INT. FORRESTER BASEMENT - NIGHT

A large, windowless room is home to a sectional sofa, big-screen TV and pool table. Casey and Mel walk down a set of stairs into the room.

MEL

So, I'm sorry for intruding...

CASEY

Huh?

Casey glances at Mel then heads for the pool table.

MEL

You probably wanted to spend some
time alone with Grant, since you're
just getting to know him and all.

Casey pushes around a few pool balls. She adjusts her hat then looks up at Mel with a confused expression.

MEL

About what you said the other day.
About Grant and me...

CASEY

You shouldn't feel bad because he
likes you. You're a great
girl--exactly the kind of girl that
a guy like Grant should like.

Casey rolls the cue ball from one hand to the other.

CASEY

The Dalton thing is a little
surprising, though.

Mel frowns.

MEL

What are you talking about?

CASEY

Oh, come on, Maddie was standing there looking amazing, but Dalton couldn't keep his eyes off you.

Mel walks over to the pool table.

MEL

(panicked)

If Maddie even thought--

CASEY

She won't hear it from me.

Casey looks up.

CASEY

And neither will Grant.

MEL

What I was going to say, about Grant and me... he's moved on.

CASEY

To who?

MEL

Just look in the mirror.

Casey tenses, her eyes a little wider.

MEL

Or mirrors, on his closet door.

Casey furrows her brow.

MEL

You have seen the Cassandra Cook shrine, right?

CASEY

Oh, gosh, back to her again?

MEL

Haven't you noticed? For Grant, it always comes back to her.

Casey stares at the cue ball in her hand. She slides it into a group of colored balls. They scatter across the table.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

The room is darkened and full of well-dressed high school students. Lightening is provided by twinkle lights strung around the room. In the background, a country song plays.

Dalton and Maddie walk in together, looking the part of the perfect couple. They walk through the crowd and stop to get some punch. Other students wave and smile at each of them.

They make their way to a free space near the wall. Abby and Jeff, holding hands, practically run up to them.

JEFF

Dude, 's up?

DALTON

Oh, hi, Jeff. This is Madison.

JEFF

I know Maddie. We've got French.

Jeff glances at Maddie then smirks at Dalton.

ABBY

I'm Abby.

Dalton nods politely.

ABBY

Me and Madison are, like, BFFs.

DALTON

(humoring Abby)

Oh? Really? Cool.

He glances at Maddie who forces a smile.

ABBY

You two are totally perfect together, by the way. Everyone's been saying so all week.

Maddie blushes. Dalton takes her hand.

DALTON

Well, hey, if you'll excuse us, I think we're going to go dance.

Maddie smiles gratefully. Dalton takes her cup of punch and hands it to Jeff along with his own. Jeff snarls for a split-second, but then smirks again and walks off with Abby.

On the dance floor, as the music switches over to a slow tune, Dalton stands in front of Maddie. He reaches out and places a hand on her waist. She steps a little closer and wraps her arms around his neck. He puts his other hand on her waist. They sway to the music.

DALTON

So...

MADDIE

So...

They laugh awkwardly. A beat.

MADDIE

You know, Abby and I... I mean, she's my friend, I guess. We cheer together, but we're not BFFs.

DALTON

Same with Jeff. Football.

Maddie nods. A beat.

DALTON

So, Mel Jones? Is she your BFF?

Maddie smiles then nods.

MADDIE

Mel's pretty special.

Dalton smiles.

MADDIE

I think your BFF thinks so, too.

Dalton's smile falters, but he forces it back onto his lips. Dalton pulls Maddie a little closer as they dance.

INT. HURST KITCHEN - NIGHT

Adrian sits alone at the table with a notebook in front of him. He writes slowly, but intensely. Russell enters.

RUSSELL

Okay. Your sister is out of the bath and in bed. She'll probably be up reading for a little while.

Adrian continues to write.

RUSSELL

I'll be home around eleven. Since I took the second shift, I have to help clean up after the dance.

Adrian turns a page and keeps on writing.

RUSSELL

On second thought, maybe I'll run away to Mexico instead. Sound good?

ADRIAN

Lexi's in bed. You'll be home at eleven. Please don't go to Mexico.

Russell chuckles then tilts his head.

RUSSELL

What are you writing?

Adrian pauses briefly then goes back to work.

ADRIAN

I don't know. Nothing. Something.

RUSSELL

It's good to see you writing again.

Adrian nods, but continues to scrawl on the page. Russell pats Adrian on the back before exiting the room.

INT. STAIRS - FORRESTER HOME - NIGHT

Casey walks up the stairs. She reaches the landing and looks around. She spots the bathroom, but turns the other way.

INT. GRANT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Casey enters and turns on a light. She looks around. With each poster she sees, her smile grows wider--until she sees his closet doors. She walks over hesitantly.

She runs her finger along a few of the articles then glances up. When she makes eye contact with her own reflection, she jumps slightly. She laughs softly, shaking her head.

Casey looks at herself for a moment. She pulls off her hat and pushes her short hair around on her head.

GRANT(O.S.)
People really don't get me.

Casey spins around, dropping her hat onto the floor. Grant steps over to the closet and surveys the doors.

GRANT
I always have stuff up on my
mirror. Right now I've got Ron
Howard, Kevin Smith, Bruce Lee...

He points here and there on the wall.

GRANT
Just, like, people who inspire me.

Casey looks around at the images and nods.

GRANT
Maddie and Mel come in here and all
they see is "Grant's obsessed with
Cassandra Cook." Like I'm some kind
of stalker or something.

Grant walks up to Casey, right in front of her.

GRANT
But she's up here because I respect
her. I respect the work she does.

CASEY
Why? What's so special about her?

GRANT
The roles she takes. Her approach
to acting. She's not method. She
doesn't become the character. She
just tries to find a way to relate
to the character. It's so special.

Casey stares at Grant for a long beat, caught up.

CASEY
So... if she was standing here,
right in front of you, all you'd
tell her is how you respect her
approach to acting?

Grant's smile is lopsided. He looks Casey in the eye.

GRANT
I'd tell her she's the most special
girl in the entire world.

CASEY

Really? More special than Mel?

Grant's mouth falls open as he looks down. He considers.

GRANT

Yeah...

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE GRANT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mel stands just outside the door, listening in. She takes a step back from the door, her face reflecting disappointment.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Hand-in-hand, Maddie and Dalton walk through the crowd. Students greet them, giving thumbs up and grins of approval.

Across the room, Russell walks over to Chanice who stands near the door. She smiles.

CHANICE

Ah. Backup.

RUSSELL

Yep. You're finally free.

She shrugs and folds her arms.

CHANICE

Or, I could stay.

Russell smiles.

RUSSELL

Co-op. Even better than backup.

They stand together, monitoring students.

CHANICE

Friendship. Better than trying to take on too much by yourself.

Russell glances at her, his lips turned up in a smile.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOUSE - NIGHT

Adrian, bent over his notebook, continues to write.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
There are different ways to be
alone.

INT. FORRESTER BASEMENT - NIGHT

Mel sits on the couch as Grant and Casey play pool.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
A person can be alone in a room
full of people.

Dalton and Maddie walk down the steps together and greet everyone. They go over to the pool table to join the group.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
A person can be alone because he's
different from everyone else.

Casey fidgets, running a hand through her hatless hair.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOUSE - NIGHT

Adrian writes.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Or, a person can just literally,
physically be alone.

Adrian sets down his pen and looks around.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Mel and I, while each alone in some
way, while on two different
paths--are really on the same
journey. Together.

CLOSE ON: Adrian's paper.

He doodles at the top of the page. Two stick figures with blank faces. He draws a plus sign between them and a set of parentheses around them. He sketches a smiley face in front of the parentheses.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
And something about that is just so
incredibly special to me.

Adrian writes an equals sign then draws the same two stick figures, this time each with a happy face.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Something about her is special.

BACK TO SCENE

Adrian smiles and closes the notebook.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT IV

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Dalton leans against the building. He pulls out his cell phone to check the time. He nods and looks up at the school.

Students, a rough crew, exit the building. Amidst them, Mel makes her way out the door. Dalton spots her and walks up.

DALTON
Hi.

MEL
(confused)
Hi. What are you doing here?

DALTON
I wanted to apologize. After all,
it's my fault you're here.

MEL
Yeah, well, just don't try to hold
my hand again and we'll be cool.

Dalton laughs as Mel stops, wearing the slightest smile.

MEL
Seriously, it's no big deal. I just
sat there and did homework. No real
repercussions. I'm assuming that
missing Thursday's game would have
been a big deal for you.

DALTON
I definitely see it as my way out.
Football. It means a lot to me.

Mel nods empathetically then turns to walk again. Dalton takes a deep breath then walks along with her.

DALTON
So, I'm really glad I took Maddie
to the dance last night.

Mel laughs.

MEL
Yeah, I've been getting texts all
morning. She had a good time, too.

DALTON
She wasn't exactly my first choice.

MEL
Dalton--

DALTON
Everyone thought we were perfect
together. And, I guess we are.

Mel nods, breathing a sigh of relief.

DALTON
On the surface.

He looks at her with intensity.

DALTON
But, I want you know, I'm deeper
than the surface, Mel. And if you
haven't figured it out by now, I
really like you. A lot.

MEL
(dismissive)
You don't even know me.

DALTON
I know you're smart. Beautiful.

Mel shakes her head, tucking her hair back.

DALTON
I know that you would never do
anything to hurt Maddie.

Mel meets his gaze.

MEL
So why are you here?

DALTON
I told you. To apologize.

Mel rolls her eyes.

DALTON
And to say that... I hope we can
still be friends. What do you say?

Mel sighs.

MEL
Friends. Sure.

Dalton grins.

DALTON
Cool. Very cool.

They continue walking off campus and down the street.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE