

UNKNOWN VARIABLES

"Lesson 1-3: Struggle With Inequalities to Analyze Justice."

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"Lesson 1-3: Struggle with
Inequalities to Analyze Justice."

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A statue of the blindfolded Lady Justice stands before the courthouse, her scales in one hand and sword in the other.

Adrian stands at the foot of the statue, staring up at her. He wears fitted khakis and a black polo shirt. His hair is combed down onto his forehead. He still wears his lip ring.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

"That's not fair," we'd say. With
balled fists and tears in our eyes.

Alexis walks up to him wearing a dress, her hair in ribbons.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

When we were young and things
didn't go our way.

Russell, wearing a dress shirt and tie, walks up and places a hand on Alexis' shoulder.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

"Life's not fair," they'd tell us
with experience and bitterness that
meant nothing to us at the time.

Dylan Jones walks past the group and into the courthouse without giving even a glance in the direction of the Hursts.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Then, one day, we became them.

Mel walks up the courthouse steps with Jacob following behind. She looks over, giving the Hurst family an uncertain wave. Russell gives her a forced smile.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

We no longer need anyone else to
tell us that life's unfair.

Adrian looks away.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Now, it's glaring... blatantly...
hopelessly... obvious.

Russell leads Adrian and Alexis into the courthouse.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JONES HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

SUPER: "Two days earlier."

Jacob rides his bike in the driveway while Dylan works under the hood of the white van. An older model station wagon pulls into the driveway. Jacob pauses to let it by.

INT. KITCHEN - JONES HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel sets the table. Behind her, two pots occupy burners on the stove. She sets down the last plate and hurries back to the stove to stir a pot of tomato sauce.

SONYA JONES, 40, enters the kitchen wearing a waitress uniform. The dark circles under her eyes are more prominent than her tacky makeup job. The lines around her mouth are enhanced when she purses them around a cigarette.

Sonya lifts a lighter to the cigarette, grabbing Mel's attention. Mel shakes her head, a frown on her lips. Before Sonya can get the cigarette lit, the phone rings. Sonya grumbles, but goes to pick it up.

SONYA
Hello?... Yes, did you want to talk
to my son... I wasn't plannin' on
it... Look, Mister, I've got to
work overtime just to feed my kids
so--... I understand that, but--...
Fine... Fine. We'll be there.

Sonya hangs up the phone, angry.

SONYA
Stupid lawyer says we need to go to
the hearin' day after tomorrow.

MEL
I'm not going.

SONYA

Yeah, ya are. We all are.

MEL

Isn't this the preliminary hearing?

SONYA

Don't know, but whatever it is,
you'll be there along with the rest
of your family.

Mel knits her brow and folds her arms in front of her, but Sonya turns away to light her cigarette. She inhales.

MEL

You should really quit.

SONYA

Get off my case already. I told ya
I'd quit for my New Year's
resolution, okay?

Sonya puffs on her cigarette, blowing out a mist of smoke that hangs around her head.

MEL

Cigarettes cost a lot.

SONYA

I work eighty hours a week to put
food on the table and keep a roof
over your head. Back off.

MEL

About that. I'm tutoring a boy in
my algebra class. I'm making almost
fifty dollars a week so maybe I can
help out with the groceries.

Sonya smiles. Without taking another puff on her cigarette, she grabs an ash tray and puts it out.

SONYA

Save your money, baby girl. You
don't owe me nothing. You do plenty
around here to help out.

Sonya steps over and wraps her arms around Mel. She exhales one last puff of smoke that Mel leans away from.

SONYA

I appreciate it, though.

When the smoke has evaporated, Mel returns her mother's hug.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOME - NIGHT

Russell is busy in the kitchen with pots on the stove. Around the counter, an empty spaghetti box and several stray noodles are scattered about. An empty jar of spaghetti sauce drips its leftovers onto the counter top.

Adrian and Alexis sit across from each other at the nearby kitchen table. They both lean forward.

ADRIAN

He can't possibly screw up spaghetti. Right?

ALEXIS

That's what I thought about hotdogs, but I think we both remember how that turned out.

They both look away for a moment and shudder.

RUSSELL

You know I can hear you, right?

Alexis and Adrian smile at each other.

ADRIAN

So... what's the occasion, Dad?

RUSSELL

What do you mean?

ADRIAN

It's Monday.

Russell looks over at Adrian with a raised eyebrow. He glances at Alexis.

ALEXIS

It's Sub Hub night.

Russell pulls out three plates and piles on a messy scoop of spaghetti and sauce onto each one.

RUSSELL

Oh, come on, kids. We can't eat take out for the rest of our lives.

ADRIAN

We could actually.

ALEXIS
We definitely could.

Alexis and Adrian smile at each other again.

Russell carries over two plates and sets them down in front of his children. He heads back over to retrieve the last plate and joins the kids at the table.

Alexis and Adrian look down at the food then up at each other. They each shrug and pick up a fork to dig in.

ALEXIS
(mouth full)
This is really yummy, Dad.

ADRIAN
Yeah, not bad.

Russell smiles, but it falters.

RUSSELL
Listen, kids, I need to talk to you
about something pretty serious.

Alexis and Adrian share a look.

RUSSELL
The prosecutor called. He would
like us to be at Dylan Jones'
preliminary hearing on Wednesday.

ADRIAN
Us? As in... all of us?

He glances over at Alexis then back at Russell who nods.

ALEXIS
I'm not a baby. I want to go.

RUSSELL
No one thinks you're a baby, Honey,
but this will be difficult. For all
of us. They're going to talk about
the accident.

ALEXIS
I can handle it, Dad.

Russell nods and looks over at Adrian who has gone back to eating his spaghetti in a robotic fashion.

INT. KITCHEN - PARKER HOME - NIGHT

Christine leans against the counter and reads the directions on a box of spaghetti. Her lips are pursed and twisted.

Duke lies in the corner on a big, fluffy dog bed.

A back door, leading from outside into the kitchen, opens. Casey comes bounding in, red-faced and smiling.

CASEY

Okay, it is ridiculous how much fun trampolines are. We should get one when we move back to L.A.

Duke barks. Casey smiles at him.

CHRISTINE

You're in a good mood.

Casey rolls her eyes and plops down into a chair.

CHRISTINE

You're not letting Grant get too much footage of you, are you?

CASEY

No... not too much.

CHRISTINE

You don't want him selling it off to the paparazzi.

CASEY

It's not like he's ever going to know that I'm me so I really don't think that's going to be a problem.

CHRISTINE

Still. Use good judgment, please. You tend to go off the deep end when you like someone.

CASEY

First, and as I have already explained to you numerous times, I do not "like" Grant. He's a friend. That's all. Second--

CHRISTINE

If you're going to bring up Zeke Cain, save it. I know you won't make a mistake like that again.

Casey sighs and looks off. After a beat, she spots the spaghetti box in Christine's hand.

CASEY
What's that?

CHRISTINE
Dinner? What's it look like?

CASEY
In your hands, it looks like... a
deadly weapon.

CHRISTINE
Oh, come on, I can make spaghetti.

CASEY
Have you? Ever?

CHRISTINE
Well, no, but--

CASEY
Exactly.

CHRISTINE
We could try it together.

Casey smiles thoughtfully then nods. She makes her way to Christine and takes the spaghetti from her to read the directions.

INT. KITCHEN - JONES HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel is at the sink doing dishes alone. Dylan enters.

DYLAN
(begrudging)
Your spaghetti was good.

Mel uses a sponge to scrub hard on a plate.

DYLAN
You gonna go on ignoring me for the
rest of your life?

Mel blows a strand of hair out of her face as she rinses off her dish and places it into a dish drainer.

DYLAN
You know, one of these days, maybe
you should consider asking me my
side of the story...

Mel grabs another dish, pausing for just a moment. She stares down into the sink.

Dylan glares at her back then storms out of the nearby back door, slamming it hard on the way.

Mel drops the dish into the sink and bites her lip. She looks around and shakes her head.

FADE TO BLACK.

END TEASER

ACT I

FADE IN:

INT. CASEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Casey sits at her computer. Her tank top and short shorts show off her feminine figure. She sips from a coffee cup as she clicks through a few internet pages with a knitted brow.

A light knock at the door precedes Christine's entrance. She is dressed in a business suit and looks put together.

CHRISTINE

You're not dressed.

CASEY

I'm not going to school today.

CHRISTINE

And why is that?

Christine takes a step into the room and glances over Casey's shoulder.

Casey minimizes her web browser and turns to face her mom.

CASEY

Mom, I'm used to tutors. This whole school thing is getting kinda lame. I've decided to take the day off.

CHRISTINE

Unfortunately, you don't have the luxury of making that decision.

Casey raises her eyebrows, her lips in a pout.

CASEY

I can't be around people today.

CHRISTINE

Not even your "friend" Grant?

CASEY

Ugh. Especially not him. His normally adorable chatter... it'll just be incessant today.

CHRISTINE

In other words, you're in a mood. One of your moods.

CASEY

I suppose so.

Casey looks away, her eyes fixed on a spot on the wall.

CHRISTINE

You want to tell me why?

CASEY

Not particularly...

Casey glances at her computer.

CASEY

I guess I'll get dressed. I need something to take my mind off this.

Casey rises and walks into her bathroom, leaving the door opened just slightly.

Christine looks curiously at the computer and sits down. She re-opens the web browser and pulls up a celebrity gossip website. A story entitled "Zeke dishes on Cassandra" accompanies a video.

Christine inhales sharply, but clicks play on the video.

CLOSE ON: the computer screen

ZEKE CAIN, 17, sits handsomely and comfortably in front of the camera. His brown hair sticks out in all directions, a well-orchestrated mess.

ZEKE

(on screen)

She was just too focused on her career. Too focused on herself, really. I think she was actually relieved when I broke up with her.

BACK TO SCENE

From the bathroom, the sound of a cabinet slamming shut draws a look from Christine's eyes. She looks back to the screen as a cheesy edit leads to another clip.

ZEKE

Cassandra's logic doesn't work like a normal person's, that's for sure. How she gets from point A to point B sometimes, it makes no sense to anyone but her. It's kinda funny.

Another slam then the water turns on.

A new edit on the screen leads to a new perspective.

ZEKE

I wouldn't exactly call her self-absorbed.

(he chuckles)

Well, okay, maybe a little. But, what beautiful girl isn't?

Christine fumes and glances toward the bathroom again. The water is still running, but it barely masks the sound of Casey brushing her teeth and spitting into the sink.

ZEKE

What kind of guy would be right for her? Huh. Maybe someone who wanted to follow her around with a camera all the time because that's when she's the best version of herself.

On the screen, Zeke laughs as the picture fades.

Casey exits the bathroom door, dressed now in her boy gear with her slightly shaggy hair hanging in her eyes.

CASEY

I hate him.

Christine stands up and walks over to Casey. She pulls Casey into her arms. Casey caves and lets herself be held.

CHRISTINE

He's an idiot.

Casey pulls back.

CASEY
But he's also completely right
about me, isn't he?

CHRISTINE
No. He's completely wrong.

Christine releases her daughter. Casey folds her arms.

CHRISTINE
Except when he said that you're
beautiful. That he was right about.

CASEY
(sarcastic)
Yeah, I bet I look real beautiful
right now.

CHRISTINE
Beauty isn't just the cover. It's
everything inside, too. And, trust
me, you're still beautiful.

Casey stares at her for a moment, deadpan.

INT. GRANT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Grant walks in.

GRANT
Okay, okay, I'm getting it, Mom.
(mumbling)
Stupid laundry.

Grant grabs a pile of clothes from in front of his closet. At the bottom, he finds Casey's green army hat. He tosses down the rest of the clothes and picks up the hat.

Confusion muddles his face for a moment, but then he smiles as he draws the hat closer to his head. In the process, he inhales. He pulls the hat away quickly to look at it.

He shakes his head then places the hat onto his own head. He looks in the mirror and smiles approvingly at the image.

INT. HALLWAY - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Maddie, Mel and Grant stand together in front of a group of lockers. Mel and Maddie laugh at something as Grant toys with his camera. He still wears the hat.

Maddie snatches the camera from Grant and turns it on him.

MADDIE
What is with that hat?

CAMERA'S P.O.V.

Maddie zooms in quickly and sloppily to capture an image of the hat. She zooms out a little and pauses on Grant's face, which gives away the slightest blush.

BACK TO SCENE

Grant snatches the camera from Maddie and glares.

DALTON (O.S.)
Hey...

All three look up as he approaches, his eyes clearly on Mel, but he forces his look to Maddie.

DALTON
How are you, Madison?

Maddie grins, sheepish.

MADDIE
I'm good. How about you?

DALTON
Can't complain. You look very pretty today, by the way.

Maddie blushes and looks down. Grant and Mel trade an annoyed look.

DALTON
Can I walk you to class?

Maddie nods, her smile wide. Dalton brushes her arm and nods for her to follow. She tosses an apologetic look at Mel and Grant, but both offer her encouraging looks.

Dalton pauses to look at Mel and smile, but she only nods politely at his existence. Dalton and Maddie walk away.

GRANT
Are they a thing now or what?

Mel looks carefully Grant.

MEL
I think they decided to be friends.

Grant nods absently, his eyes darting around. Mel narrows her eyes, but her look is good-natured.

MEL
Why are we waiting by Casey's
locker again?

GRANT
Because he left his hat in my room.

Grant points at the hat on his head.

MEL
Well, he better get here soon.

Mel looks around as the hallway becomes less congested.

GRANT
Oh, hey, smell this.

MEL
Excuse me?

Grant pulls the hat off his head and waves it in front of
Mel's face. She takes a hesitant whiff.

GRANT
Well?

MEL
Um... ?

GRANT
It smells good right? Like,
insanely good?

Grant waves the hat in front of her again.

MEL
Smells like vanilla... mixed with
you.

Mel bites her lip and looks off. Grant retracts the hat and
puts it back on his head. They stand awkwardly for a moment.

MEL
I should get to class. Don't want
to be late again.

Grant nods.

GRANT
I'm going to wait another minute.

Mel nods and walks away.

INT. HALLWAY - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Mel walks quickly down the hallway.

ADRIAN (O.S.)
Mel, hey, hang on.

Adrian runs up and falls in step with her.

ADRIAN
I was looking all over for you this morning.

MEL
Why?

ADRIAN
Algebra. I didn't really get how we jumped from solving equations to that weird number line stuff.

Mel sighs.

MEL
Can we talk about it this afternoon at tutoring?

Adrian's face falls, but then he looks more closely at Mel.

ADRIAN
(gently insistent)
What's up? Is everything okay?

She glances over at him, stopping in front of a science classroom. Adrian halts to a stop as well.

She stares at him, blinking. He lifts one eyebrow.

MEL
I have to go to class. Sorry.

She walks into the science classroom leaving Adrian with a confused crinkle in his forehead.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MR. HURST'S CLASSROOM - DAY

A few people mill about, chatting. Dalton and Maddie walk in together. Maddie has no books; Dalton has a double load, though carrying the books is effortless for him.

Dalton sets Maddie's stuff down on her desk.

MADDIE

Thanks.

DALTON

Sure.

Dalton smiles and heads for his seat. He pauses when Mel enters the room. She, too, pauses for a split-second. They make eye contact, but Mel walks back to her seat.

Dalton turns to Maddie. He grins mischievously and slides his books to Casey's seat. He nods toward Grant's seat.

Maddie bites her lip and slides over into Grant's seat.

Casey walks in, pausing to glare at Dalton for just a moment. She slides into Dalton's former seat, folds her arms and stares down at her desk.

Grant walks into the room wearing Casey's hat. He stops to take in the new seating arrangement.

GRANT

(to Maddie)

You're in my seat.

Casey looks up, the hint of a smile wiped off when Casey sees her hat on Grant's head.

MADDIE

Just for today, okay?

Her eyes beg. Grant rolls his eyes and turns to Casey. He walks up to her new desk.

CASEY

(to Grant, hostile)

Where'd you get that?

Grant smiles and takes the hat off his head. He holds it out to Casey. She reaches for it, but he pulls it back.

GRANT

This hat smells like vanilla.

Casey stares at him, her mouth just slightly open. Grant smells the hat again. He smiles.

GRANT

Dude, you gotta tell me, why does your hat smell so good?

Casey stands up, taking a step toward Grant.

CASEY
(stern)
Just give me my hat.

Grant holds it out, but pulls it away again.

GRANT
Come on. It looks better on me.

He puts it back on his head. Casey's cheeks turn red, her eyes narrow, and her breathing speeds.

CASEY
(through her teeth)
Give me my hat.

Casey takes another step, a threatening step, to Grant. He holds the hat out again, but then snatches it back.

CASEY
Now, Grant. I'm warning you.

DALTON
Just give him the hat. Geez.

Grant glances in Dalton's direction. The slight distraction gives Casey the opportunity to reach over and take hold of her hat. Grant tightens his grip, laughing good-naturedly.

Casey pulls on her hat and pushes Grant with her free hand. He stumbles backward and relinquishes the hat.

Casey puts the hat on her head then slams herself down into her new seat. Grant looks at her with uncertain eyes. His eyes still on her, he goes to his new seat.

Adrian slips in the room, just ahead of his father.

RUSSELL
Hat off, Casey.

Casey scowls, but takes the hat off and tosses it on top of her other stuff. She puts her head down. Grant looks over at her, concern wrinkling his brow. The bell rings.

Dalton gives Maddie a half-grin as he opens up his notebook. Maddie does the same and sits up straight, looking studious.

RUSSELL
Good afternoon, class. If you don't mind, I wanted to kick things off with homework questions.

At the front of the room, Casey keeps her head down. Grant pulls his homework out, but keeps his eyes on Casey. Dalton and Maddie also take their homework out, exchanging a smile.

In the back of the room, Adrian and Mel already have their work out. Mel sits with her arms folded. She stares down at her desk. Adrian raises his hand.

RUSSELL
(curious)
Adrian? Yes?

People turn around and look at him. Next to Adrian, Mel has her head propped up and turned away from him. He glances at her then up at Russell.

ADRIAN
Uh, yeah. Number 20?

Russell smiles at Adrian for a moment then picks up his teacher edition and writes the problem on the board: $-3x + 2 < 23$

ADRIAN
I know the answer's negative seven.

RUSSELL
Well, not exactly. Hang on.

Russell turns to the class.

RUSSELL
Dalton, do you want to walk us through this problem?

DALTON
What problem?

Dalton looks up, spotting the problem on the board.

DALTON
(embarrassed)
Oh, um... Yeah, sorry.

People laugh.

DALTON
This is easy; it's negative seven.

Russell tilts his head, an uneasy smile.

MADDIE
Is it positive seven?

Russell glances at her out of the corner of his eye.

RUSSELL
This new seating arrangement isn't
really working for me.

He points from Dalton to Casey and from Grant to Maddie.

MADDIE
But--

RUSSELL
Switch back. Now.

Maddie pouts, but gets up and trades seats with Grant.

Meanwhile, Dalton gestures over to Casey who has yet to pick her head up. Dalton nudges her with his elbow.

CASEY
(irritated)
What?

The class laughs. Casey picks her head up and looks around. Dalton rises and walks over to her seat. She slides over then moves her stuff. She stares forward.

Next to her, Grant looks over, searching her face.

RUSSELL
So, back to my problem. Mel, what
do you think?

Next to Adrian, Mel turns quickly to the front.

MEL
I'm sorry, what?

Mel looks at the problem on the board, her brow knitted.

RUSSELL
Dalton thinks the answer is
negative seven. Maddie thinks it's
positive seven. What do you think?

MEL
Um, I think he's wrong. She's
actually right, in a way.

Russell smiles.

RUSSELL
Now we're getting somewhere. Why?

MEL
(irritated, fast)
It's an inequality, there are infinitely many solutions, seven included. Anything larger than negative seven is a solution.

DALTON
(smug)
So, the answer is negative seven, like I said.

MEL
(condescending)
No, you're still wrong.

RUSSELL
Can you try to explain why again?

MEL
I'd rather not, if that's okay.

Russell raises his eyebrows and glances at Adrian.

ADRIAN
Never mind. I get it now.

Russell looks out at his class. Not one student is talking, but few are looking up at him.

RUSSELL'S P.O.V.

Casey has her head down, surrounded by her arms.

Grant stares over at Casey.

Dalton has his book and notebook closed.

Maddie doodles in her textbook.

Mel looks out the window.

RUSSELL
Wow, guys. Can you all join me on planet algebra today, please?

BACK TO SCENE

A few people laugh, but others sigh and shuffle.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Maddie and Dalton sit at a table with Jeff and Abby. They all chat pleasantly. Maddie looks up and waves.

Way across the cafeteria, Mel exits the line. She groans, but then smiles uneasily. Adrian slips up next to her, his own tray in hand.

ADRIAN

I'll go with you, but walk slow.

Mel looks over and starts a crawling pace. Adrian follows.

MEL

Hi.

ADRIAN

Hi.

MEL

What's Dalton doing?

ADRIAN

Exactly what you wanted him to do.

Mel shakes her head then looks off.

ADRIAN

That's not what you're upset about, though... is it?

MEL

I'm not...
(she sighs)
No, that's not it.

ADRIAN

So, what's wrong?

Mel swallows and looks around. She glances back at Adrian.

MEL

I have to go to my brother's preliminary hearing tomorrow.

ADRIAN

Yeah, me too.

Mel nods once and looks off. She glances at him.

MEL

It's a little weird being around
each other, considering...

They walk a few more steps.

ADRIAN

I can't think of anyone else I'd
rather share the weirdness with.

A small, but bright smile lights Mel's face.

Adrian and Mel reach a set of doors that lead to a hallway.
One of them is propped open. Dylan suddenly enters through
the open door and cuts off Mel and Adrian.

DYLAN

I thought I warned you to stay away
from my sister.

MEL

(to Adrian)

Come on.

She steps past Dylan, but when Adrian moves to do the same,
Dylan takes his tray and hands it to Mel. He grabs Adrian
around the shoulder and pulls him out into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The hallway is empty until Dylan drags Adrian out, an arm
now more around his neck than shoulder. Dylan slings Adrian
into a nearby set of lockers.

Adrian winces as his face reddens. He charges Dylan who
pushes him back up against the lockers, pinning him there.

Mel runs out of the cafeteria, her hands now empty.

MEL

Dylan! Stop! Stop it!

Dylan eases up for a split second, but then shoves Adrian
again. His face now bright red, Adrian glares at Dylan.

MEL

What are you thinking?

She walks over, jamming her arm between Dylan and Adrian.
She pushes against Dylan, trying to push him back.

DYLAN

(to Mel)

I'm thinkin' that this kid needs to get the message.

(to Adrian)

I don't want you around my sister.

MEL

Well, that's too bad because I tutor him so he's going to be around me. Get over it.

Mel wedges herself in between Dylan and Adrian. Dylan steps back, willingly. His arms fall loosely to his sides.

DYLAN

You spoke to me.

Mel stares at him. Dylan smiles.

DYLAN

That's it? You're his tutor?

Mel nods, searching her brother's eyes. Behind her, Adrian's breathing becomes more steady, his face less red.

DYLAN

See? Was it so hard to just tell me that? To talk to me?

Mel looks down.

DYLAN

Can we talk some more?

MEL

Later, okay?

She raises her eyebrows, pleading.

DYLAN

Okay, later. You can finally hear about things from your own brother--instead of a stranger.

Dylan nods and walks away down the hallway. Adrian makes a move to go after him, but Mel spins and restrains him.

MEL

(whispered)

You're better than him.

Adrian stops struggling against her.

ADRIAN

So are you.

He leans back against the locker. Mel looks at him uncertainly. She sighs and steps away from him.

ADRIAN

And you thought being around each other was weird before...

Mel laughs nervously. She and Adrian both look away.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

FADE IN:

INT. COMPUTER LAB - DAY

A typing class is busy at work. Grant and Casey sit next to each other with the teacher, MRS. PAUL between them. Grant's video camera sits, turned off, next to the keyboard.

MRS. PAUL

Okay, boys, good work. You're done.

She smiles to each of them then walks to the next student. Casey stares ahead at her computer screen. Grant watches.

GRANT

You know, I'm sorry about earlier.

Casey glances over without turning her head. Grant waits, but she says nothing more.

Grant sighs and turns to his computer, opens an internet browser and surfs to a celebrity gossip page. Cassandra Cook's picture is next to the lead story. Grant clicks.

Casey glimpses the site, her head still straight ahead.

CASEY

I'm the one who should be sorry.
I'm not having the best day, but...
I shouldn't take it out on you.

Grant's eyebrows push together.

GRANT

What's going on? What's wrong?

Casey turns her head to him now, the website catching her eye again. She rolls her eyes and looks away.

CASEY

(light)

What isn't wrong?

Grant closes the browser and turns to her. He folds his hands on his lap and raises his eyebrows. She chuckles.

CASEY

Okay. This morning... I sorta...
heard from my ex. About all the
reasons I'm not good enough...

Grant's lips part and he tilts his head.

GRANT

You have an ex?

Casey takes a deep breath.

CASEY

We had a totally unhealthy,
reckless relationship. It was
horrible for me, but we were in
love... or I was, at least.

Casey looks down. Grant glances over at his camera, but then looks back at Casey.

CASEY

Or maybe I just thought I was.

The bell rings. All the students around Grant and Casey leave, but Grant doesn't move. Casey looks at him.

CASEY

What are you doing?

GRANT

Listening.

CASEY

Why?

Grant thinks about it.

GRANT

Because you hardly ever talk about yourself. You listen while I ramble, but... you rarely share and... I'm suddenly curious.

Casey looks at him for a long moment. She shrugs.

CASEY

You asked for it.

Grant's smile turns even more curious.

INT. HALLWAY - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Maddie stands at her locker, peering into a magnetic mirror. She shifts her hair from one shoulder to the other.

Dalton walks up behind Maddie and puts his head just above her shoulder, looking into the mirror with her.

DALTON

I hope this effort isn't for me.

Maddie spins around to face him, her face red.

DALTON

Then again, maybe I do...

Dalton grins at her for a moment as he plays with a strand of her hair. A beat passes as Maddie stares him.

DALTON

So, I haven't seen Adrian. Did you get to ask Mel where the two of them disappeared to at lunch?

Maddie takes a deep breath.

MADDIE

Yeah, it was a thing with her brother Dylan. He and Adrian kinda got into it... over the accident.

Dalton straightens up, his jaw set.

MADDIE

Mel took care of it.

Dalton smiles at that. Beat.

DALTON

Can I walk you to cheer practice?

Maddie nods and pulls a small duffel bag from her locker. Dalton takes it from her and closes her locker. They walk down the hallway together.

EXT. PARKING LOT - WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Dylan stands at a car, talking to a group of friends.

MEL

You're supposed to go directly home after school.

Dylan spins around. He smiles when he sees her.

DYLAN

You're still talking to me.

MEL

That was the deal, wasn't it?

Dylan nods. He turns back to his friends and says a wordless goodbye. They all groan or roll their eyes. Dylan walks off.

DYLAN

(to Mel)

Come on. Let's go.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Mel and Dylan walk along together in silence.

MEL

I would appreciate it if you didn't threaten Adrian like that again.

DYLAN

I know. It was stupid. But, he's always starin' me down like I--

MEL

Killed his mother or something?

Dylan sighs and looks down.

DYLAN

I hadn't been drinkin' that night.

Mel narrows her eyes.

MEL

You drank every night back then.

DYLAN

Not sayin' I wasn't plannin' on it.

MEL

Then why'd you refuse the
breathalyzer?

DYLAN

I don't know. I was in shock or
somethin'. Seein' her like that...

MEL

Adrian's mom?

Dylan nods.

DYLAN

Amy Hurst. The whole reason I'm
still in school. I couldn't speak,
I couldn't even think. How was I
supposed to... I was... it broke my
heart to see her like that, Mel.

He shakes his head and puts his hands in his pockets. Mel
watches him as her thoughtful look turns into a scowl.

MEL

Is that your defense?

Dylan frowns.

DYLAN

It's the truth.

Mel peeks over at him.

MEL

I don't think so, Dylan.

DYLAN

You know, I was going to tell you
the whole story, but if this is
your attitude, you can just go back
to not talkin' to me again.

MEL

Fine by me.

Mel folds her arms as they walk. Dylan fumes next to her,
quickenning his pace. They walk along in silence.

INT. RUSSELL'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Russell sits at his desk and grades papers. Adrian is writing in a notebook. He stops suddenly.

ADRIAN

Have you ever felt connected to someone... but for all the wrong reasons?

Russell chuckles and looks up.

RUSSELL

I think most males could relate to that statement.

Adrian looks down to hide a blush.

ADRIAN

Not... not like that. Not attracted. Just... connected.

Russell tilts his head, his look more serious.

RUSSELL

I don't think I really understand.

Adrian sighs and starts writing again. Russell watches him for a moment then goes back to grading.

ADRIAN

Okay, like, let's say that the one person in the whole world who understands you perfectly also happens to be the sister of the person who, say... killed your mom.

RUSSELL

Oh.

Russell nods, sighs and looks down.

RUSSELL

Mel.

Adrian looks down at his notebook, doodling in the corner.

ADRIAN

(softly)

She sees me so perfectly.

Russell smiles curiously.

ADRIAN

(slow, thoughtful)

She understands with minimal explanation. She puts me at ease even when I feel like I'm about to explode. She knows how to break through my brain to make me understand things... like math.

Russell grins.

RUSSELL

Sounds like quite the crush.

Adrian glares at his father.

ADRIAN

Look, Dad, if you're expecting some sort of epiphany, you're not going to get it. I don't like her like that. I'm just not really sure I should like her at all.

Russell suppresses a laugh with a cough.

RUSSELL

Well, Son, if you're looking for my approval, you know you have it. I think it's wonderful that you and Mel are friends.

Adrian raises his eyebrows.

ADRIAN

But Dylan...

RUSSELL

Isn't Mel.

ADRIAN

Mom...

RUSSELL

Mom would love Mel.

Adrian's smile is skeptical.

RUSSELL

Listen, Mom scrutinized every girl you ever looked twice at--and you never looked twice at a girl even half as good as Melanie Jones.

Adrian scrunches up his face.

ADRIAN
That sounds like a ridiculously
complex math problem.

RUSSELL
Well, you know who to go to when
you need help with math.

Adrian laughs. A beat.

RUSSELL
Seriously, though, don't worry so
much about your mother. Mel's so
much like her, I don't see how she
wouldn't have wanted you to be
friends with her.

ADRIAN
You think Mel's like Mom?

RUSSELL
You hadn't noticed?

Adrian blinks a few times. Russell smiles to himself and
goes back to grading his papers.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOME - NIGHT

Adrian and Mel sit next to each other at the table. Adrian
is staring into the book, his face wrought with confusion.
Mel sits next to him, her eyebrows raised.

ADRIAN
I just don't get it.

MEL
(light)
Yeah, you seem to be having a
really hard time with this.

ADRIAN
(annoyed)
Maybe you're just having a hard
time explaining it.

Mel sighs impatiently.

MEL
Solving inequalities is exactly
like solving equations, Adrian.

ADRIAN

If it were exactly the same, I could do it, Mel.

MEL

The differences are subtle.

ADRIAN

Yeah, and those subtle little differences are what make me so frustrated. It's the same, but different. You do it the same, but not exactly. Ugh...

He shakes his head and looks away. Mel takes a deep breath.

MEL

Hey?

He looks over.

MEL

Difference one. The inequalities. Do you know the symbols?

He shakes his head.

MEL

Put out your hands.

ADRIAN

What?

MEL

I can't turn everything into a metaphor, okay? Some things you just have to memorize and this is how I memorized the symbols. Maybe it'll work for you, too.

Adrian turns to her and puts his hands out, palms up.

MEL

Palms down. Thumbs out.

Adrian flips them over and separates his thumbs from his hands, forming right angles with his thumbs and forefingers.

ADRIAN

This reminds me of how I learned my left from my right. This hand looks like an "L."

Mel smiles then reaches over and pulls his elbows out which makes his hands tilt inward.

MEL

Now your "L" looks like a "less than" symbol. L for less.

Adrian looks up at her then back at his hands. Mel uses her index finger to trace the outline of the tilted L.

MEL

See?

Her finger lingers a moment. Adrian stares at it.

ADRIAN

(bitter)

Why do you have to make so much sense? It's really not fair.

Mel takes her hand away and tilts her head.

ADRIAN

And why do you have to come in here and teach me something the exact same way that my mom did?

Mel smiles.

MEL

Your mom taught you the hand thing?

Adrian glares at her.

ADRIAN

Yeah. And now... she's never going to teach me anything again.

He rubs his face with his hand.

ADRIAN

Do you know how unfair that is? How angry it makes me feel?

Mel folds her arms and sits back in her chair.

MEL

I wish you'd stop taking out your anger with my brother on me.

Her breath quickens. Adrian stares.

MEL

Because I'm angry enough with him,
and I come over here and try to
forget about that, try to sit down
with you and help you and not think
about Dylan and how much I hate
what he's done to you.

ADRIAN

Mel--

MEL

Then you act like you hate me and
that you don't want to be around--

ADRIAN

I want to be around you--

MEL

All because of Dylan? I mean,
that's so not fair.

ADRIAN

It's not because of Dylan. It's
because of my mom. Being around you
makes me think about my mom.

MEL

And you don't like thinking about
the accident. I know.

Adrian tilts his head.

ADRIAN

You don't remind me of her death,
Melanie. You remind me of her life.

She looks up at him, her jaw hard, but her eyebrows lifted.

ADRIAN

My Dad pointed out--I'm starting to
realize that you're so much like
her. I kinda think I love it.

Mel's forehead creases.

ADRIAN

But I think I might hate it, too.

Mel nods and starts collecting her books.

MEL
I'm gonna go.

Adrian watches as Mel collects her stuff and storms out.

EXT. HURST HOME - NIGHT

Mel rushes out of the front door and almost runs into Dalton who walks up the front walkway. Dalton spins to avoid her, but takes hold of her shoulders to stop her.

DALTON
Mel? Are you okay?

A few tears slide down her cheeks. She looks away.

DALTON
What's wrong?

MEL
Let go of me, Dalton.

He drops his arms and puts his hands in his pocket.

DALTON
Sorry.

She rushes down the walkway, toward the sidewalk.

DALTON
Where are you going?

MEL
Home.

Mel walks past Dalton. He shakes his head as he watches her.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

FADE IN:

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Mel cuts around a corner and Dalton chases behind her.

DALTON
You can't walk home. Where's Russ?

MEL
At the store. I'm not waiting.

She quickens her pace so much that Dalton nearly jogs to keep up with her.

DALTON
Did you and Adrian--

MEL
It's none of your business. Nothing about me is your business.

DALTON
I thought we were going to be friends.

MEL
I thought you and Maddie were going to be friends.

Dalton narrows his eyes.

DALTON
Maddie and I are friends.

She spins around on him. Now he almost collides with her.

MEL
Do you always flirt with your friends like that?

Dalton takes a step back, taking a deep breath.

DALTON
I'm confused. I thought you wanted Maddie and I to--

MEL
I do want you and Maddie to...

She looks around and inhales, her face red.

MEL
But I don't want you to fake it.

Dalton stares at her and folds his arms.

DALTON
This isn't fair.

She glances down, but then meets his eye.

DALTON
You can't tell me to like Maddie
instead of you then turn around and
get angry because... maybe I do.

Mel nods, examining her shoes.

MEL
So.... you're not faking it?

She looks up at him, searching his eyes.

DALTON
No, I'm not, but... if I knew it
would get your attention like this,
I might have considered it.

Mel chuckles.

MEL
(light)
That is not what I wanted to hear.

DALTON
(teasing)
You sure about that?

She rolls her eyes and starts to walk away. He keeps pace.

DALTON
At least let me walk you home. You
can explain what happened with
Adrian.

MEL
(to herself)
I doubt that.

She shakes her head and continues to walk. Ahead of them, a car stops. The window rolls down to reveal Russell. Alexis is in the back seat.

RUSSELL
Hey, kids. Everything okay?

He looks to Dalton for a response.

DALTON
She needs a ride home.

MEL
(mumbled)
Traitor.

Dalton looks at her out of the corner of his eye as he stifles a smile. He looks back at Russell.

RUSSELL
Oh... okay. Well, get in.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Mel climbs in the back seat. Dalton closes the door behind her then opens the front door.

MEL
What are you doing?

Russell glances back at her before looking to Dalton.

DALTON
Can I ride?

RUSSELL
Fine with me.

He glances back at Mel with a small lift of his brow.

MEL
It's fine.

RUSSELL
Home?

MEL
Um...

INT. GRANT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Grant and Casey sit across from each other. Grant leans against his closet doors. Casey leans against Grant's bed. They bounce a tennis ball back and forth between them.

GRANT
You know, it blows my mind that you
were in a relationship like that.

Casey chuckles and tosses Grant the ball.

CASEY
Why?

GRANT
Well...

Grant holds the ball in his hands and examines it.

GRANT
I've never even had a girlfriend.

Casey looks down with a smile then looks up with a straight face in time to catch the ball.

CASEY
I thought we already established
the reason behind that...

Casey tosses Grant the ball. He studies it again.

GRANT
We did?

CASEY
None of the girls around here are
passionate enough for you.

Grant laughs.

GRANT
Yeah, sure. My cover story. None of
them are good enough for me. Right.

He bounces the ball to Casey.

GRANT
(mumbled)
I'm the one who's not good enough.

Casey squints, her eyes scrutinizing Grant for a long moment. He looks up at her with raised eyebrows.

GRANT
What?

CASEY
You're... you are good enough,
Grant. You're more than that.

Grant scoffs.

GRANT
Find a girl who thinks so and--

CASEY
Well, it's funny you should say
that, actually, because--

Maddie bursts into the room with a laptop.

MADDIE
Grant? Oh, hey...

She nods to Casey then walks to Grant.

MADDIE
OMG, you are going to flip.

Maddie hugs the laptop to herself and kneels in front of
Grant. Grant looks at her then exchanges a look with Casey.

GRANT
What?

Casey peeks over Maddie's shoulder at the laptop and rolls
her eyes when she sees the screen. Grant leans closer.

GRANT
Come on. What?

MADDIE
Zeke Cain--

GRANT
Is an idiot?

Casey stifles a laugh.

MADDIE
No, he--

GRANT
Broke up with Cassandra Cook.

MADDIE
Yeah, like months ago and no one
even knew about it. How'd you know?

GRANT
I saw the headline earlier.

MADDIE
Did you watch the video?

GRANT

No, but--

MADDIE

They pulled it. Zeke Cain demanded that they take it down. He's saying they took it all out of context.

CASEY

What?

MADDIE

Check it out...

Maddie turns and sits between Casey and Grant as they both inch closer to the screen. Maddie hits play.

ON SCREEN: Zeke walks along on a street in L.A.

ZEKE

When are you stalkerazzi going to get the hint? I don't want to talk to you. You take everything out of context. You make it seem like I don't care about Cassandra when...

MADDIE(O.S)

If she doesn't want him...

CASEY(O.S.)

Shh.

ZEKE

I'm in love with her.

Maddie closes the laptop. Grant shakes his head, a scowl taking over his face. Casey stares, breathless.

MADDIE

Anyway, that's all the good stuff.

GRANT

Was that all you wanted? To shove that in my face?

MADDIE

I thought you'd think it was good news. They broke up. She's all yours now.

Grant glares at her. Casey looks at Grant thoughtfully. Maddie looks at Grant with a raised eyebrow.

MADDIE
(genuine)
Sorry. I really did think you'd--

GRANT
It's cool. I mean, if she falls for
stuff like that then... whatever.

Maddie gets up and tosses him another apologetic look. She
nods to Casey then exits. Casey continues to watch Grant.

CASEY
Are you okay?

Grant chuckles lightly. A beat.

GRANT
Think he was telling the truth?

CASEY
Who? Zeke?

Grant nods.

CASEY
I think... he's a good actor.

GRANT
There's a difference, you know.

CASEY
Between what?

GRANT
Acting and lying.

Casey considers this.

CASEY
You really think so?

GRANT
Of course.

CASEY
What's the difference?

GRANT
The purpose behind it.

Casey takes a deep breath.

CASEY

Grant, I--

The door opens again and Maddie bursts in... again.

MADDIE

Mel's here. And Dalton. Come down.

Help me... entertain.

Casey and Grant glance and one another then get up.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOME - NIGHT

Adrian sits at the table. He stares at his math book. Russell and Alexis walk in carrying groceries. They set the bags down on the counter. Alexis glances at Adrian.

ALEXIS

I'm going to do my homework.

RUSSELL

Okay.

She leaves the room. Russell starts putting stuff up.

RUSSELL

I gave Mel a ride.

ADRIAN

Cool...

A beat.

RUSSELL

Were you just going to let her walk home alone? Because that's not--

ADRIAN

I heard Dalton talking to her. I knew he'd take care of her.

RUSSELL

I dropped them off over at the Forrester twins' place.

Adrian rolls his eyes and closes his book.

ADRIAN

Great. Just what she needs. A night of watching Dalton flirt with Maddie in some misguided attempt...

Adrian sighs.

RUSSELL
I'm guessing you don't want to
continue tutoring?

Adrian inhales sharply.

ADRIAN
I didn't know I had an option.

RUSSELL
Well, you do.

ADRIAN
I can't learn this stuff from
anyone but her, but... she also
gets a say, and I'm pretty sure she
never wants to talk to me again.

RUSSELL
What exactly happened?

ADRIAN
It's just, like... everything's too
hard. The odds are stacked against
us, and even though I think we both
want to be friends...

Adrian looks around, finally staring down at the table.

ADRIAN
I don't think I've ever met someone
so easy to get along with... or so
easy to hurt. It's just not fair.

Russell considers him carefully for a moment.

RUSSELL
You know, I really wish your mother
could be here for this little
roller coaster ride you're on.

Adrian wrinkles his nose.

RUSSELL
The sensation of fear and
anticipation. Uncertainty. Right
before you get to the top of the
biggest hill. Right before you...?

ADRIAN
What? Fall?

Russell nods, but Adrian rolls his eyes.

ADRIAN
 Will you please just take me over
 to Maddie and Grant's?

Russell smiles.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Maddie and Dalton play pool together. Grant, Casey and Mel sit around on the sectional with their Spanish books open and papers scattered about.

GRANT
 Okay, how do you say "to go to the
 beach?"

MEL
 Why?

GRANT
 I'm memorizing it as one of the
 things I like to do. What is it?

Mel shrugs.

MEL
 You'll have to look it up.

Grant flips to the back of his book.

CASEY
 You like to go the beach?

Grant runs his finger down the through the glossary.

GRANT
 I've only been once, but yes, I
 like to--

CASEY
 Ir a la playa.

Grant looks up at Casey and grins then writes it on his paper. Casey smiles. Mel looks between the two of them. She sighs and glances over at Maddie and Dalton.

Across the room, Dalton glances up. He smiles slightly, but then turns his attention back to Maddie as she sinks a ball.

DALTON
 You're pretty good at this. I
 haven't even had a turn yet.

Maddie shrugs, but beams. She gestures to the table.

MADDIE

Go ahead.

He looks at her skeptically, but approaches the table. She watches him try to get the pool stick sliding smoothly between his fingers. After a moment, she approaches.

MADDIE

Hang on. Try this.

Maddie tentatively takes his hand and forms it into a ball. Dalton watches as she pulls his thumb up and moves his hand back to the table. Dalton slowly brings the stick up to rest on the cradle made by his thumb.

MADDIE

Try that one.

She points to a ball.

MADDIE

Hit it just right of center.

He starts to aim. Maddie takes his hand holding the stick and adjusts it slightly. Dalton blushes and glances at Maddie, her face is close to his. She smiles and steps back.

MADDIE

Try that.

He nods and shoots. The cue ball smacks into another ball and sends it into one of the holes. Maddie squeezes his shoulder. Dalton's grin is satisfied.

MADDIE

That was good.

DALTON

That was all you.

He smiles and wraps an arm her waist, pulling her into his side. Her face flushes as she lets her hand slip across his neck to his other shoulder.

Across the room, Mel openly stares at the scene. Grant watches her carefully. He glances down briefly then clears his throat and looks in the direction of Maddie and Dalton.

GRANT

Hey, I wonder how you say "to flirt shamelessly with someone's sister"?

Dalton closes his eyes then lets his arm drop. Maddie's face turns a deep pink, but she otherwise ignores the comment.

Casey and Grant trade an amused look, but Mel stares into her book.

The sound of someone walking down the stairs catches everyone's attention. Adrian tentatively walks into the room. He carries a book and notebook.

ADRIAN
(to Grant)
Your mom let me in. I hope that's--

MADDIE
It's fine. Are you here for Mel?

Maddie smiles warmly at him. Behind her Dalton scowls.

ADRIAN
I'm here for help. With algebra.

He holds up his algebra book.

MEL
Well, then you're not here for me.
I'm a bad teacher, remember?

ADRIAN
You're an excellent teacher.

Grant looks back and forth between them. He stands up.

GRANT
You know, it seems like she wants
you to leave.

Dalton takes a step toward Adrian.

DALTON
Yeah, dude, you know, if you guys
had a fight or something--

ADRIAN
(to Mel)
Is that what you told him?

MEL
I didn't tell him anything...
(she glances at Dalton)
Except that it was none of his
business, but for some reason he
wants to make everything his
business.

Maddie glances at Dalton with a curious look.

GRANT
You should go.

Grant takes a threatening step toward Adrian. Casey stands up.

CASEY
Maybe everyone should calm down.

She puts a hand on Grant's shoulder, but he shrugs it off.

ADRIAN
(to Mel)
If I swear I'm just here for the algebra help, will you back these bodyguards off me?

She looks at him and bites her lip, but says nothing.

ADRIAN
Look, it doesn't have to be like this. We're just... trying too hard or something.

GRANT
All right. Come on.

Grant steps up to him, grabbing him by the arm.

ADRIAN
Get off me.

He pulls his arm loose and shoves Grant backward. Grant charges him, but Casey tries to hold him back. Grant easily twists out of Casey's grip, but Dalton is there to pull Adrian away and up the stairs.

Maddie steps in front of her brother.

MADDIE
What are you doing? Stop!

Grant listens and stands still.

MADDIE
God, you're embarrassing.

Mel stands with her mouth slightly agape. Casey leans against the wall, rubbing her shoulder. Grant and Maddie stare each other down.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

FADE IN:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Casey and Mel are the only ones left. Casey leans against the wall while Mel sits on the couch. She opens up her notebook and peers inside.

CASEY

Another one bites the dust.

MEL

What are you talking about?

Mel looks up, her eyes cool.

CASEY

Grant. Dalton. Now, Adrian.

Mel blushes, but stares down.

CASEY

Maybe Maddie'll just let the three of them fight to the death.

Casey rubs her shoulder again.

CASEY

In which case I'll stay down here.

(a beat)

Grant's easy enough to read, the way he wears his heart on his sleeve. And, Adrian, he's obviously in denial about how he feels.

Mel looks up, taking a deep breath.

CASEY

Dalton's hard to figure out, though. I mean, he couldn't be that good an actor--

MEL

(mumbled)

You'd know, right?

Mel shakes her head.

CASEY

Maybe he's starting to like Maddie, too. What a mess that's going to--

MEL

Can you please just stop? Stop talking about my life like you're recapping a soap opera.

Casey sighs and sits down next to Mel on the couch.

CASEY

I'm just trying to give you some perspective. Instead of freaking out because three boys are all about you, maybe you should take a minute and enjoy it. How many girls get to be adored like that? Really, it's kind of unfair--

MEL

What about the girl who gets to have a million boys worship her?

Mel stares into Casey's eyes.

MEL

Maybe she's the one who needs some perspective because what's really unfair is that, out of all the boys in the world, the one that I really wanted--the one that I was being so careful with--seems to be the one that... she has a thing for.

Casey stares at her blankly. She blinks.

CASEY

I have no clue what you're--

MEL

You may be a good actress, but you're a horrible liar... Cassandra.

Casey inhales sharply. She stares at Mel. A long beat.

CASEY

How... how did you--

Mel smiles.

MEL

I knew it.

She opens her folder and pulls out the magazine cutout of Casey. She hands it over. Casey takes it and inspects it.

MEL

I was bluffing just then. I thought I was right, but--

CASEY

You're good.

MEL

You're... wow. Just, wow.

Casey laughs. A beat as Mel looks at her closely.

CASEY

About what you said... your feelings for Grant...

Mel looks up at her with a sad smile.

CASEY

Was that a bluff, too?

Mel swallows.

MEL

I find it interesting that you're asking me that question before you even ask if I'm going to tell him... you know, that you're the girl of his dreams and all.

Casey's eyes get wide.

MEL

Don't worry. I won't. Yet.

Casey looks at her, her features tense.

MADDIE (O.S)

Okay. Geez. Dalton took Adrian outside. They're waiting for Mr. Hurst to pick them up.

Maddie walks down the stairs with Grant behind her.

MADDIE

And he's sorry for being an idiot.

She points at Grant. He glares at her, his cheeks red.

GRANT
Sorry, Mel.

MADDIE
Now, what's the real deal?

Mel glances at Casey before looking back at Maddie.

MEL
We both have to go to Dylan's
hearing next week and... we're both
freaking out about it. That's all.

MADDIE
Mel... you didn't even tell me.

MEL
You've been busy with Dalton and--

MADDIE
Whoa.

Maddie makes her way over to Mel. She sits next to her.

MADDIE
You know you're more important to
me than some stupid boy, right?

Casey and Grant glance at one another. Grant nods toward the stairs. Casey nods back and grabs her stuff.

EXT. FORRESTER BACKYARD - NIGHT

Casey and Grant walk toward Casey's house.

CASEY
That was some serious girl drama,
dude. I'm so glad I'm single again.

Grant clears his throat as they pass the trampoline.

CASEY
Do you need any more help with
Spanish 'cause I'm pretty good--

GRANT
You know, it's not fair.

Casey pauses and faces Grant.

CASEY
What's not fair?

GRANT
She kissed me. She freakin' kissed
me, Casey. Right freaking there.

He points at the trampoline, his breathing erratic.

GRANT
She knows I would be with her--

CASEY
Maybe she's just... proceeding with
caution. Being careful with... you.

GRANT
Maybe she likes Adrian.

Grant kicks at the grass and continues walking. Casey follows.

CASEY
From what she said when you guys
were out of the room, that's just a
friend thing.

Grant swallows and stares ahead.

GRANT
It's so frustrating. Waiting around
for the day that Mel--or any girl,
really--looks around at her options
and ends up picking me.

CASEY
Maybe that girl's already picked
you. Maybe she's just waiting for
you to realize that... she's there.

Grant scoffs.

GRANT
A girl with a crush on me?

He laughs. And spreads his arms above his head.

GRANT
Bring her on...

He shakes his head and walks faster.

GRANT
Okay, I'm done whining.

CASEY
(teasing)
Thank God.

Grant laughs.

CASEY
Of course, you did listen to my own
problems quite patiently today
so... I guess I owe you.

GRANT
Yeah, except your problems are
actually interesting. I'm just a
loser who can't get a girlfriend.

CASEY
And I thought you were done
whining...

They both laugh as they continue on to Casey's house.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Mel and Maddie sit on the couch together.

MADDIE
(calm)
So, all that flirting... it was
just to make you jealous?

MEL
(quiet)
I don't think he meant for it to--

MADDIE
Don't defend him. He's a jerk.

MEL
He does like you, Maddie. It's
obvious. And you like him so--

MADDIE
I liked him. Past tense.

MEL
You don't have to--

MADDIE

If you can resist him... so can I.

She folds her arms and sits back against the couch.

MADDIE

I wish you would've told me sooner.
You must have been freaking out.

She shakes her head at the thought.

MEL

I'm still wondering if he was just
joking anyway...

MADDIE

Oh, self-deprecation should cease
now, Mel. You know better.

Mel blushes and looks down. Maddie shakes her head.

MADDIE

Now, my plan for revenge.

Maddie rubs her hands together. Mel raises her eyebrows.

MEL

I think the lack of you in his life
is punishment enough.

Maddie folds her arms.

MADDIE

Hm. Maybe.

Mel and Maddie laugh together.

INT. KITCHEN - PARKER HOME - NIGHT

Casey and Grant sit at the kitchen table with their Spanish
stuff spread out. A book bag lays open across one half of
the table. Casey's hat sticks out. Grant grabs it.

GRANT

So... is it your ex-girlfriend who
smells this good? Is that why you
freaked earlier? Did she wear this
all the time or something?

He smells the hat.

CASEY

Dude. Stop sniffing my hat. It's creepy.

GRANT

Fine.

Grant puts the hat on his head. Casey holds her hand out. Grant hesitates, but gives her the hat. She grabs it and takes a quick whiff. Grant raises his eyebrows.

CASEY

You're such a freak.

She tosses the hat back on her book bag. They laugh.

Christine enters through the back door and smiles instantly at the scene. She carries a briefcase and a pizza box.

CHRISTINE

Hello, boys.

She gives Casey a conspiratorial wink. Casey rolls her eyes.

CHRISTINE

You doing okay, Casey? Out of that "mood" you were in this morning?

Grant laughs.

GRANT

A mood? Is that what you call that attitude? Man, that was...

He shakes his head. Christine laughs. Casey rolls her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - HURST HOME - NIGHT

Dalton and Adrian sit at the kitchen table with Adrian's algebra book in front of them. Adrian works on a problem.

ADRIAN

Okay. Is that right?

He slides his paper to Dalton. Dalton looks.

DALTON

Yep... oh, except, you didn't flip the symbol. It's z is less than 14 not greater than.

ADRIAN
I just randomly flip the symbol?

DALTON
It's not random. You divided by
negative two so you have to flip
the symbol.

ADRIAN
Why?

DALTON
I dunno. The math gods say so.

Adrian looks at him a moment then erases his symbol and
redraws it. He pushes the paper away and closes the book.

ADRIAN
Thanks for your help.

Dalton eyes him.

DALTON
Doesn't seem like you really
understood anything we just did.

ADRIAN
Whatever. It's done. And I'm tired.

DALTON
She really is the only person that
makes it click for you, huh?

Adrian shrugs and runs his finger along the algebra book.

DALTON
So, I'm gonna ask Maddie out.

ADRIAN
Where are you taking her?

DALTON
No, I mean, like, I'm going to ask
her to be my girlfriend.

ADRIAN
Oh.

DALTON
At first, I thought she was your
typical cheerleader ditz, but she's
actually really cool... smart, too.

ADRIAN
Just make sure it's for real.

Dalton nods, staring off.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT IV

TAG

FADE IN:

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Students sit around eating breakfast and talking.

Dalton and Adrian sit together. Adrian stares into his algebra book. Dalton composes a text message.

Maddie, Mel, Casey and Grant sit at a table together. Mel and Grant are the only ones eating.

GRANT
Maddie, your purse is buzzing.

MADDIE
Huh? Oh. Text.

She pulls out the phone and looks up.

MADDIE
Dalton says "meet me by the milk."

Maddie grins wickedly.

MEL
Go easy on him.

MADDIE
Ha! Watch this.

She gets up and walks confidently toward the milk.

Across the room, Dalton gets up and heads her way.

They walk up to each other, both smiling.

DALTON
Maddie, I--

Maddie wraps her arms around Dalton's neck and kisses him. His eyes widen in surprise, but he quickly closes them and kisses her back. On her tiptoes, Maddie runs her hands through Dalton's hair. Dalton puts his hands on her waist.

With no teachers in sight, a crowd has gathered to watch.

They part slowly. Maddie drops down to stand normally. She stares at him, chewing her lip and out of breath.

DALTON

Wow.

MADDIE

(disconcerted)

Yeah...

They stare at each other a moment more. Maddie clenches her fists and sets her jaw. She purses her lips.

MADDIE

Well, I just wanted you to know what you're going to be missing.

DALTON

I'm missing it already.

He smiles and takes her hand.

DALTON

I wanted to ask if you'd like to go out with me?

She stares at him. He takes a step toward her.

DALTON

Be my girlfriend? Officially?

Maddie sighs wistfully, but then scowls.

MADDIE

That would really make her jealous, wouldn't it?

She smirks. Dalton's mouth falls open.

MADDIE

You screwed up. I hope my little demonstration showed you how bad.

He stares at her, his expression blank.

DALTON

Yeah. Mission accomplished.

Maddie's smile is bittersweet.

MADDIE

Good...

Maddie flips her hair and walks away. Dalton stares at the floor for a beat.

Mel, Casey and Grant are all staring at Maddie when she returns. She grins.

MADDIE

Just giving him a taste of what he can't have.

GRANT

A taste? Looked more like a seven-course meal to me.

Casey laughs. Mel elbows Grant. Maddie rolls her eyes then glances across the cafeteria. Mel follows her gaze.

Across the large room, Dalton shakily pulls his chair out and sits down.

ADRIAN

What'd she say?

DALTON

Mel told her everything.

ADRIAN

Oh. Oh, no. Then why the kiss?

DALTON

That was... her version of revenge I guess. It definitely worked...

He sighs and smiles, his cheeks turning rosy.

DALTON

I think I'm in love...

He touches his lips lightly. Adrian shakes his head and laughs. Dalton sighs and looks off. He smiles to himself.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Some of life's injustices are trivial in the long run.

Across the cafeteria, Grant talks excitedly while Mel and Casey listen. Maddie stares off, chewing on her lip.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Of course, it never feels that way at the time. In the moment, even the smallest unfairness seems like the biggest injustice in the world.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

CLOSE ON: Lady Justice

ADRIAN(V.O.)

And in cases where the scales seem tipped so clearly in your favor? Just wait a minute or two because justice is a delicate balance.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

People are settling into seats. Dylan sits in the defendant's chair with a lawyer at his side. They whisper.

Mel, Jacob and their mother sit in the first row behind Dylan.

Across the aisle, Alexis and Adrian sit with Russell. Adrian has his algebra book in his lap and a pencil behind his ear.

Russell stares straight ahead at nothing in particular.

ALEXIS

Are you ever going to stop reading that algebra book?

ADRIAN

Maybe when I start understanding.

ALEXIS

It can't be that complicated.

Adrian grunts and closes the book. He gets up and walks down the aisle toward the courtroom door.

EXT. COURTHOUSE HALL - DAY

People mill about as Adrian walks out carrying his book. He finds a bench and sits down.

MEL (O.S.)

They're not just like equations.

Adrian looks up. Mel smiles and walks to him. She sits.

MEL

I shouldn't have said they're just like equations. They're not. There are all these extra parameters that make something that seems easy... way too complicated for no reason.

Adrian looks at her carefully.

ADRIAN

That sounds familiar.

She smiles and grabs the pencil from behind his ear.

MEL

Like the negative thing, for example. You're solving normally, using inverse operations...

She writes under a problem in his book.

MEL

Trying to isolate the variable and then you end up multiplying or dividing by a negative.

She writes a little more.

MEL

It's just like life, Adrian. Negatives flip everything around. Like this trial... and the reason behind it. How it's ruined us.

ADRIAN

We're not ruined.

She looks up at him. He half smiles.

MEL

I mean, of course, there's a math reason behind it. If you don't do it, you'll have the wrong set of answers.

ADRIAN

That's another thing. How is there a set of answers? X is less than or equal to negative six. That's the answer, right?

MEL

What you just said is not a solution. It's a set of possibilities. Negative six is just the pivot point. The fulcrum of the scale. This time...

Mel draws a number line in the book. She puts an open circle at -6 .

MEL

Since it's less than or equal to, negative six is included...

She colors in the circle.

ADRIAN

If it was just less than, it'd be empty? Or an open circle?

Mel nods.

MEL

Okay and everything's tilted to the left because--

ADRIAN

All the numbers that are less than negative six are... to the left.

He holds up his hands and examines his right angles.

MEL

Right. I mean, right, you shade to the left.

Mel shades in the number line to the left.

ADRIAN

Now I see why everyone keeps telling me this is easy. I get it.

MEL

I knew you could.

ADRIAN
I knew I could, too.

Inside the courtroom, the bailiff's booming voice calls everyone to order. Mel and Adrian look at one another.

ADRIAN
Oh, man. Here we go.

He takes a deep breath.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Infinite possibilities exist on
both sides of justice, both sides
of the scale.

Mel stands up and tentatively holds out her hand to Adrian. He stands up and takes her hand. They walk together toward the courtroom doors.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Mel and Adrian walk down the aisle. When they reach their families they look down at their hands then at each other.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
And, in the end, it's not really
like algebra at all because it's
not about which side you're on.

They give each other an encouraging look then drop hands and walk to their respective sides.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
It's not like one side is
completely true or false. It's a
balance of both. Even justice is a
mix of facts and fictions. It's not
"fair" at all.

Russell puts a hand on Adrian's shoulder.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
I guess those adults knew what they
were talking about.

Adrian glances at Mel who gives him a weak smile.

ADRIAN(V.O.)
Life... is not... fair.

LATER

Dylan sits with his head hanging low. Lawyers on both sides lean forward in their chairs toward the judge's bench.

JUDGE MARTHA BLACK, 60, a distinguished woman with white hair, puts on a pair of reading glasses.

JUDGE BLACK

Based on the evidence presented today, it seems clear that there is probable cause to continue this prosecution.

The judges on the prosecution side look at each other with nods of congratulations. On Dylan's side of the room, his defense attorney gives him a solemn, but encouraging look.

JUDGE BLACK

The arraignment will be on October seventh. The defendant will enter his plea at that time. Do you understand this, Dylan?

DYLAN

Yes.

Behind him, Sonya begins to sob. Mel puts a comforting arm around her. Sonya cries into Mel's shoulder. Beside them, Jacob looks around in confusion.

JUDGE BLACK

Because I do not believe the defendant to be a flight risk, I will release him into the custody of his mother at this time.

Behind the prosecutors, Adrian and Russell trade a relieved look. Alexis looks at her father with raised eyebrows. Russell gives her a nod and small smile. She smiles back.

ADRIAN(V.O.)

Then again, maybe amidst the infinite possibilities and inequality, there is the hope of justice, after all.

Mel and Adrian look across the aisle at one another, their shared gaze holds both sadness and hopefulness.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE