

I HEARD A RUMOR

by

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Inspired by *Much Ado About Nothing*

by William Shakespeare

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FADE IN:

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS -- DAY

We PULL BACK from a computer screen where a student reads about friends on a college campus social site.

Students sit on the lawn in small groups, eating, talking. Two stand, toss a baseball back and forth. MUSIC PULSES, and the OPENING CREDITS appear.

Two Japanese-American young women, BEATRICE and her cousin HIROKO, sit under a tree, laughing. They are the only Asians among mostly Caucasian students. Beatrice is a smart, funny, lively junior. Hiroko is a freshman: delicate and young.

JOHN, a surly-looking upperclassman, stalks by. He stares pointedly at Hiroko, who does not notice. A girl on the grass looks after him, and urgently whispers in her friend's ear.

The friend's eyes open wide as the MOVIE'S TITLE appears on screen: I HEARD A RUMOR.

INT. GYMNASIUM -- DAY

The bleachers are filled with cheering college students. On the mats, a pair of wrestlers warily circle.

CLOSE on PETE and his opponent as they strain and grapple. Pete's a big guy, a senior; he pours all his strength into trying to throw the other wrestler.

The crowd in the bleachers cheers, and so do BEN and CODY on the sidelines, rooting for Pete. The ref calls the match.

Now Ben is the wrestler on the mat. He dances around a bigger and more muscular guy. Ben is a junior: comic, agile, smart.

He stares off and points, mouth open, as if astonished! His opponent looks off that way too, to see what's so amazing; Ben moves in to put him in an unbreakable hold.

Their crowd cheers; the students from the other school are pissed off. Pete towels off his sweat. He and Cody cheer Ben on, and yell advice. We hear the ref call the match, and Cody and Pete slap their hands together.

Now we are CLOSE on Cody on the mat; he and his opponent circle each other. Cody is a freshman, almost too cute, too good-looking. He tries a choke hold on his opponent, but the referee BLOWS the WHISTLE. The crowd BOOS.

Finally, Cody manages to pin the guy with his arm behind his back; we see him jerk up on the arm with a surprisingly vicious smile on his face.

The crowd from our school cheers our three men, as Ben and Pete rush out to embrace Cody. Pandemonium!

## INT. WOMEN'S DORM -- AFTERNOON

Beatrice, Megan and Hiroko lounge in the common room. Bea and Megan wear sweatpants, t-shirts and socks; they play cards, and swig from a bottle of Diet Coke.

Hiroko, in a skirt and blouse, sits on the couch, reading a Harlequin romance.

MEGAN

Okay, here we go . . . Gin!

Megan is an exuberant, ditsy South California girl, who has come East for college. She whoops. Bea makes a face.

BEA

Screw you.

MEGAN

Oh yes, oh yes, I know I'm great.

BEA

Okay, wanna play another hand? And this time, just to make it interesting, you won't cheat, right?

MEGAN

Cheat? As if. Some people can play, some can't -- that's all.

Megan shuffles the cards; Bea turns her attention to Hiroko.

BEA

Good book you got there, cuz?

Hiroko looks up, nods with a sheepish smile.

BEA

I don't *get* romance novels. I guess you gotta start early with Twilight stuff, and read bios of guys in boy bands, and work your way up to Harlequin Silhouette Wildfire whatever . . . I started with Kafka and Dorothy Parker, and it all went horribly wrong, somehow.

HIROKO

(shyly holds out the book)  
If you'd like to borrow it --

BEA

Naah, that's okay. Sweet of you to offer. The guy on the cover doesn't have a massive, manly codpiece, does he?

Hiroko, not quite sure, shakes her head no.

BEA

Well, then. I couldn't possibly --

MEGAN

Bea. Are we, like, playing, or not?

BEA

Okay, calm down.

As Megan begins to deal a dippy RINGTONE SOUNDS.

MEGAN

Shit! Where's my phone?

She gets up, and runs down the hall to answer it. Bea slouches, and advises Hiroko.

BEA

See, you should try *Pride and Prejudice*. That's the thinking woman's romance novel.

HIROKO

Is that a Harlequin?

Now Bea is not sure how to respond.

INT. MEGAN'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Megan fumbles through the junk on her bed, finds the phone and answers.

MEGAN

Yes, hello?

(excited by what she hears)

He did? Really? Wow, that is so cool! All three of them?

So, that means, we're like . . . ohmigod! Thanks for telling me, Ralph, I'll see you later. I love you!

She blows a kiss and hangs up, and runs back toward the common room, screaming.

INT. COMMON ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Megan bursts in, still whooping and screaming.

MEGAN

They won! The guys won, we're, like, the state champions. We won the wrestling thingie! The district final -- whatever.

HIROKO

They . . . all won?

MEGAN

Yeah! I'm telling you, it was like a total blow out.

Bea appears amused, unconcerned. She swigs some soda.

BEA

And how many opponents did the Bench-warmer go through? Were there any casualties? Was he one of them?

MEGAN

(blinks at her)

The Bench-warmer?

BEA

The Bungee Jumper, you know. Ben-there-done-that. Not-so-Gentle-Ben.

MEGAN

Oh!

(to Hiroko)

She and Benjamin Hartley have, like, this weird insult war going.

BEA

You mean Ben Bad-for-your-Hartley.

MEGAN

It's totally juvenile.

BEA

You've met him, Hiroko. Good old Ben-Gay, Bent-from-birth --

MEGAN

He's not gay, Bea.

BEA

Yeah, I know. A shame, isn't it?

MEGAN

You are such an idiot.

BEA

So, how'd he do? When's he coming out of intensive care?

MEGAN

Actually, Ben did really well. Ralph said he pinned this, like, big, massive guy.

BEA

Well. Now they're pinned, I guess they're goin' steady for good.

Megan sits back down and re-shuffles the cards.

BEA

Who's his new bromance? His whole life is a series of buddy movies.

MEGAN

Ben? I think that kid Cody -- a frosh. He's really cute, actually.

At the mention of Cody's name, Hiroko looks up; he is of interest to her. Bea surveys her cards in disgust.

BEA

It figures. Ben always adopts stray underclassmen. They make him feel mature . . . look at this! Megan, how did I happen to get this hand?

MEGAN

(happy)  
Ha, ha, ha, look what I got . . .

EXT. HIGHWAY -- AFTERNOON

Pete's old car drives along. Pete's at the wheel, Ben's next to him, RALPH and Cody sit in the back, and they're all singing along with QUEEN on the TAPE PLAYER.

GUYS

'Cause weeee are the champions, my friend, and  
weeeee'll keep on fighting till the end, we are the  
champions, WEEE are the champions, no time for losers,  
'cause we are the champions . . .

EXT. GUYS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Students mill around, drinking beer from plastic cups at a kegger to celebrate the wrestling victory. Some stand in a loose line to the keg. Several examine the tall wrestling trophy on the porch.

Beatrice blows soap bubbles through a large wand, which she dips in a giant bottle of bubble stuff. Hiroko looks on; Beatrice offers her the wand and bottle, but Hiroko only smiles and shakes her head.

WILLIE, a blond goofball, and SANJAY, a heavy-set Indian guy, play air guitar in pajamas and shades. ALT ROCK PLAYS, and the ramshackle house has its flood lights on.

Megan dances wildly and drunkenly with Ralph, the guy she talked to on the phone. Hiroko sips seltzer, and wanders over to stand near Ben, Pete and Cody.

HIROKO

I -- just wanted to congratulate you guys.

PETE

Thanks, Hiroko. Hey, y'know, we're not supposed to be getting you drunk. In fact, we're not even supposed to serve you alcohol --

HIROKO

(earnestly)

Oh, don't worry, Pete -- this is just seltzer.

PETE

Seltzer -- ugh! I didn't mean you have to go *that* far . . .

HIROKO

No, I like seltzer, really. It tickles my nose.

BEN

Look, kid, this is a kegger. Let me get you a beer. I live here, I can jump the line --

HIROKO

No, honestly, Ben, thanks -- but I'm fine with the drink I have.

BEN

Amazing. You raised by Mormons or something? Don't get me wrong -- it must be useful to actually *like* seltzer . . .

Bea has wandered over, without the bubble stuff, and has been standing with hands on hips, listening to Ben.

BEA

It's great how you babble on, Ben, when nobody's listening. You just keep going and going -- like the Energizer Bunny!

Ben feigns astonishment.

BEN

Hey, Beatrice! Wow! Are you still alive?

BEA

'Fraid so.

BEN

Really? You didn't get hit by a truck, or crushed by a falling tree or something, while we were away?

BEA

Nope. I stayed in one piece, just to welcome you back.

BEN

Aw, that's beautiful!

BEA

A big wrestling hero like you -- gosh. What's a girl to do but squeal and wet her pants?

BEN  
I'm sorry, can I get you some Depends?

BEA  
Can you spare a pair?

Hiroko, Cody, Pete and the others find their banter unsettling. They laugh uneasily, and Pete and Cody punctuate the barbs with an occasional "tssss" or "ouch!" Ben smiles, sips his beer.

BEA  
Ooh! There, on your arm! Is that a muscle, Ben? All that beer you've been lifting must really keep you in shape.

BEN  
(deep hero's voice)  
Well, you know. Steroids make a man thirsty.

BEA  
(wide-eyed, innocent)  
And is it true they make your balls shrivel up like peanuts?

BEN  
No, Bea, all I need for that is the sound of your melodious voice.

PETE  
Look, you guys, take it easy.

HIROKO  
Bea, let's go inside for awhile.

BEA  
Hey, relax, Hiroko, Ben's a star athlete now. He knows he's got to deal with groupies like me.

BEN  
Yeah, I'm a big man on campus. Too bad, with all you girls breaking your hearts over me, that I just can't reciprocate.

BEA  
You're too butch, huh? Try nipple piercing, for greater sensitivity.

BEN  
No thanks, ladies first.

BEA  
And besides, girls have cooties, right?

BEN  
Aw hell, Bea, speak for yourself.



BEA

No, but really, girl-hating is so comic-book-cool. I've always been like you, y'know -- one of those silent loner types.

BEN

Yeah, Bea, you're about as silent as a car alarm.

BEA

Mmm. And you're about as cool as Bill O'Reilly or Glenn Beck sounding off on camera --

BEN

Yeah, Bea, I'm so right-wing.

BEA

I just picture you riding a nuclear missile bareback, out of the blue.

BEN

Riding a missile?

BEA

Oh, I'm sorry, you don't get the reference? Slim Pickens at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*?

BEN

Oh, sure, I get the reference. It's just a tiny bit obscure.

BEA

I see. I'll try to dumb my conversation down for you.

BEN

Or maybe provide subtitles. It's not so much *conversation* these days, is it? It's more like a free associational tone poem. Delightfully random. Very artistic.

BEA

No kidding.

BEN

Yeah, you might want to do an interpretive dance with scarves. When you go off on these tangents -- don't hold back. Let the mind wander. But I'll tell you, Bea, it's good you see yourself as a loner -- saves some poor schmuck from getting his face all scratched up.

BEA

Hey, now, honey, if you can't take the heat --

BEN

Get away from the bitchin'.

He makes a show of moving away from her, while those around them chuckle.

CODY

Wow, you guys are brutal!

BEN

Oh, it's nothing. Just Punch and Judy on crack.

John, the scary guy from the title sequence, looking unfriendly, walks over sipping a beer. The laughter abruptly ends.

John lopes up to Pete and stands almost eyeball to eyeball, makes a show of drinking a few inches from his face. The two men bristle with hostility.

JOHN

Hello, Peter.

PETE

(nods)

John.

JOHN

(nods toward porch)

Quite a little trophy you got there.

PETE

Thank you.

JOHN

Is it all right if I mill around at this here party of yours?  
You won't have me thrown off the property or anything,  
will you?

PETE

No. Not unless you take advantage of someone who's  
had a few too many.

John raises his beer bottle to him in a sarcastic mock toast, and says as he walks away:

JOHN

You're such a gracious host.

They watch him go with their eyes.

The CAMERA MOVES around the party. Megan and Ralph are still dancing. John goes over to them, and he and Ralph slap each other on the back; they are clearly friends.

Sanjay, one of the guys playing air guitar, is doing a Chuck Berry duck walk. Willie is spinning around, his arms out, his eyes closed. Couples make out under the trees.

Ben walks along, near the street, sipping his beer, looking out at the night. Cody runs up to him.

CODY

Hey, Ben! Ben, wait up.

BEN

Dude. Nice little party we got going, huh?

CODY

Yeah, it's great.

BEN

Yeah, people actually came and everything.

They walk slowly down the road. The music grows faint, replaced by CRICKETS. A few street lamps illuminate the way.

CODY

Listen, Ben. What do you think of that girl, Hiroko?

BEN

What do I *think* of her?

CODY

Yeah, I mean, she's really pretty, isn't she? She seems really nice.

BEN

Whoops. Heads up. What're you telling me? You interested in her?

CODY

No . . . I dunno. I just wanted your opinion.

BEN

Mmm. You want me to give you a serious answer, or be my usual misogynist self?

CODY

(anxious)

Just, like, tell me what you think.

BEN

I think if she was any different than she is, she'd be ugly and annoying, but since she is who she is . . . I still don't like her.

CODY

C'mon, Ben, I'm serious! What do you think of her?

Ben peers at him, gets more serious.

BEN

Look, Cody, if you like the girl, you don't need my permission -- or my opinion. It's not like buying a car.

CODY

Do you think she's going with anyone?

BEN

Not that I've heard.

CODY

'Cause, y'know, I was scared all the girls at college would be ball busters, like her cousin --

BEN

Don't worry, Beatrice'll leave you alone. She's a one scratching-post woman. I'm the lucky guy she sharpens her claws on.

CODY

But Hiroko . . . seems really nice.

BEN

Yeah, it figures. There's only so much toxic venom to go 'round in every family. Bea cornered the market in hers.

EXT. GUY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Hiroko, back at the party, is staring down at her drink, when John bumps into her not-so-accidentally.

JOHN

Oh. Excuse me.

Hiroko smiles.

JOHN

My luck, I'd bump into the prettiest girl at the party. Let me guess, you're a freshman, right?

Hiroko nods.

JOHN

What's your name?

HIROKO

Hiroko.

JOHN

Hiroko. Pretty name. Pretty girl. You Bea's cousin?

She nods again.

JOHN

That's right. I see you around, but you don't really seem like a "party person," huh?

He indicates, with a nod of his head, Megan who is squealing and running in circles as Ralph pelts her with pretzels.

HIROKO

I guess --

JOHN

What?

HIROKO

I guess I'm shy, or, I dunno -- I'm new here.

JOHN

Yeah, I feel kind of shy and new here too. Your friends betray you, and when you come back and visit, it's like a whole new world.

CLOSE ON:

BEA, TWENTY FEET AWAY

She has been watching, amused, as Megan and Ralph play-fight. But she sees Hiroko talking to John, and her expression changes to one of fear, and alarm.

She takes a few steps closer, to hear what they are saying, and they again FILL THE FRAME:

HIROKO

What do you mean about your friends --

JOHN

Oh -- just some people around here I thought I could count on. I don't want to get into it. Anyhow, Ralphie's cool, he invited me tonight. You know him?

HIROKO

Kind of.

JOHN

By the way, I'm John, John Morgan.

He shakes hands with her, and holds on to her hand. Hiroko giggles shyly. He turns her hand over, examines her veins.

JOHN

Hmmm. Interesting life line. I see a tall, dark stranger in your future --

HIROKO

(Giggling)  
Come on! Leggo!

JOHN

Don't worry, I'll give you your hand back, eventually.

He turns it palm down again, and kisses the top, and lets go.

JOHN

There. You see? Good as new.

Suddenly, Bea is upon them. She grabs Hiroko by the shoulder and shuffles her away.

BEA

'Scuse me, Prince Charming, but Hiroko and I have to have a little talk.

John watches, startled, as Bea leads Hiroko away, and talks to her, low and urgently, with a few looks in his direction.

MUSIC PLAYS, boppy and happy in the background, but John's expression changes to one of fury, as Hiroko glances at him, fearful now. He strides over to the two women. Others stand nearby.

JOHN

Are you her mother now, Bea? Huh? Got to fill her head with your Feminazi man-hating bullshit?

BEA

We're just having a conversation here, no business of yours.

JOHN

The hell it's not.

BEA

Why not go mingle? Maybe you can find . . . some small pets to poison or decapitate, or something.

He stalks away, muttering:

JOHN

Bitch.

She calls after him:

BEA

It's so great someone invited you!

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Pete comes walking up to Ben and Cody, who are heading back in the direction of the house.

PETE

Hey! Where you guys wandering off to? We're supposed to be throwing this shindig, remember?

BEN

Cody's just been sharing all his deep, dark secrets.

CODY

Ben!

Ben and Pete enjoy Cody's discomfort.

PETE

Really? Spill it. Let's hear what you got.

BEN

You want the whole saga, or just the cliff notes version?

CODY

Ben, shut up!

BEN

Just cliff notes, then. He's hot for Hiroko.

CODY

I am not!

BEN

*Madly* in love with her.

PETE

She's a cute kid.

CODY

Don't make fun of me!

PETE

I'm not, Cody, I promise you. I really like her.

CODY

(earnest)

Well, fine, 'cause I swear to God . . . I think this is it, Pete. This is love.

BEN

(mocking their intensity)

And I *promise* and *swear* to both of you -- there ain't no such animal.

PETE

(bored, annoyed)

Oh, here we go.

CODY

No such animal as love?

BEN

Not in the whole zoo of life.

PETE  
 (to Cody)  
 Please don't get him started.

Ben, slightly drunk, ignores Pete, and lifts a hand, to expound on his pet theory.

BEN  
 There is horniness. There is loneliness, and boredom,  
 and the need for ego-gratification . . .

PETE  
 A need for self-gratification.

BEN  
 (now deferring to Pete)  
 I leave that to the master.

PETE  
 I doubt it.

BEN  
 (back to his theory)  
 There is a grubby, treacherous biological imperative. But  
 why make such a big deal out of it?

EXT. GUYS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ralph aims a phone camera at Megan, Hiroko and Bea, who stand smiling, arms linked.

RALPH  
 Smile!

The party goes on around them.

John wanders through. Some people say hi to him, some give him the cold shoulder.

DEXTER, a hard-core science nerd, hopeless hair, button-down shirt with pens in the pocket, thick glasses, waves John over, giggling. He has brought his lap-top to the party.

DEXTER  
 Hey, John! John, c'mere, lookit this!

John sees what Dexter has been showing others: on the screen, an image of Betty Boop. He hits a few keys and her clothes disappear; her mouth drops open and her hands move in to cover herself. A girl standing by disapproves.

GIRL  
 You're sick.

DEXTER  
 What do you think, John?



JOHN

You've really got something there, Dexter.

DEXTER

You want to see her get it on with Yogi Bear? I can make them --

JOHN

(pats his back)

That's okay, guy. You keep working on it.

John walks off. He comes upon Hiroko, huddling into her sweater, and smiles at her. But she now looks fearful.

JOHN

So, yeah, I'm an outlaw. And there are bullshit rumors about me. But don't believe the hype, you know?

HIROKO

(Embarrassed, unsure)

No, I just . . . I've got to go --

JOHN

What's the rush? I don't bite. We were just getting acquainted.

HIROKO

No, really --

He can see how scared she is, and it pisses him off.

JOHN

Fine. Be like the rest of them. Just think of me as the monster under your bed.

She blinks, unsure what to say. He suddenly growls, and puts his hands up like claws, and she flinches and steps backward. He smiles a bitter smile as he walks away.

JOHN

Hasta la vista.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

The three guys head back toward the house, continuing their discussion.

CODY

You're not into dating, even?

BEN

Look, don't get me wrong. A woman gave birth to me, I'm grateful for that. Some of my best friends are women.

(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)

But why spoil a perfectly good friendship by giving them a chance to screw you over -- or put you on a major guilt trip? Over something that doesn't exist?

PETE

God, I am so tired of hearing this crap! Sometime this year, Ben, we're going to see you freaking out -- pale, sick, miserable with love.

BEN

I don't think so. With diarrhea, maybe. With post-dining hall syndrome, with terror before my finals -- not with love.

They have made their way back to the party. People are now dancing, to "Hey Nonny Nonny" by the Violent Femmes. The three guys stand and look at Hiroko, who is talking to Beatrice.

PETE

I'll tell you what, Cody. I know the girls in Hiroko's house, we hang out sometimes, it's no big deal. Why don't I talk to them, and maybe to Hiroko, and sort of sound things out for you?

CODY

You'd really do that for me?

PETE

Why not? No skin off my ass. I'd do it for any friend. I'll do it for Ben, when he asks me.

BEN

Yeah, don't hold your breath.

Sanjay and Willie are passed out on the lawn; people dribble beer on their heads, laughing.

Up on the sloping roof of the house a cluster of people sit and talk by the chimney. A couple holds hands.

The camera MOVES DOWN to the darkened driveway. John and Ralph are there, standing by Pete's car, the one the guys drove home in. They exchange nasty smiles; John gets out a set of keys, proceeds to key the paint on the car.

EXT. THE WOMEN'S DORM -- DAY

The trees outside the dorm have shed leaves of brilliant colors, now raked up into giant piles.

Ralph and Megan walk up, followed by Beatrice and Hiroko. All carry books, or bookbags, or wear knapsacks.

Ralph gives a yell, and leaps into a leaf pile. He jumps out, GROWLING MEGAN'S NAME, and grabs hold of her hand. She squeals, as he pulls her in after him. Leaves scatter everywhere, as they roll around.

BEA

Hey -- the poor maintenance guys have spent hours on these.

MEGAN

Ouch, stop it, Ralph, my hair!

She play-punches him, and cracks up laughing. Beatrice puts her hands on her hips and jokingly scolds Megan.

BEA

You laugh now, young lady, but you're going to have to pick up every single leaf and put it back where you found it . . . oh, what the hell.

She gives a whoop, and falls forward into one of the other leaf piles. She flounders around, and Hiroko helps her pull herself out. Leaves cling to Beatrice all over. Grinning, she tries to brush them off.

BEA

This could lead to a major lint problem. Hiroko, why don't you give it a shot? Swan dive?

She jerks her head at the leaf pile. Hiroko shakes her head, smiling timidly.

BEA

Aah, it's a little undignified, so what?  
 (notes Megan and Ralph are still  
 submerged in leaves)  
 If those two don't come up for air soon, we're gonna have to call the fire department.

She kicks the leaves from the pile she crushed back into their original shape. Hiroko helps her.

At last Megan and Ralph surface, red-faced, panting and grinning.

BEA

Have a nice roll in the hay?

MEGAN

(ignoring Bea)  
 Hiroko, what are you going to do about that frosh guy Cody?

Hiroko is startled, nonplussed.

HIROKO

Wh-what about him?

Megan is trying to get the leaves out of her hair.

MEGAN

Well, Pete's been asking all these questions that make it seem like maybe Cody likes you.

BEA

We're not supposed to tell you directly. It's major intrigue.

Hiroko is blushing and ducking her head.

HIROKO

(mumbling)

I dunno . . . Cody seems like a really nice guy . . . I dunno.

She shrugs. Ralph and Megan stagger up out of their pile of leaves, and give it a few half-hearted kicks to get it back into shape.

BEA

Uh oh. Sounds like she's got it bad -- and that ain't good.

MEGAN

Why not? I think Cody's a babe!

Ralph whacks her; she whacks him back.

HIROKO

I've got some studying to do. I'll see you guys later.

Upset, she runs toward the dorm. Surprised, worried, Beatrice calls after her.

BEA

Hiroko! We're just messing with you, wait up!

Hiroko disappears into the dorm.

INT. THE WOMEN'S COMMON ROOM -- DAY

Hiroko is sitting stiffly on the couch with a textbook open. Beatrice enters, panting from running up steps, and Hiroko stands up, ready to flee into her room.

BEA

Take it easy, I'm just trying to talk to you. Look at this, I'm a frigging tar baby, here.

One by one she pulls leaves off her person, and drops them onto the coffee table.

HIROKO

I don't really want to talk about --

BEA

Look, if you like Cody, that's fine. It sounds like he likes you. I don't believe in relationships on principle -- but that's just my own personal strangeness. I have lived among you humanoids for many years; I still do not understand your ways.

HIROKO

*Why* don't you believe in them? In relationships?

BEA

It's just this unlikely, unworkable proposition. Men and women come from different countries, different planets altogether.

HIROKO

Venus and Mars, right?

BEA

No, see, even those are too close. Mercury and . . . something in the Delta quadrant.

HIROKO

But what do you look for in a man?

BEA

I'm telling you, I don't.

She carries her pile of leaves over to the garbage.

BEA

They're so pretty, I really should press them in a book. But, then again . . .

She drops them in the garbage, and opens the fridge.

BEA

Who's been guzzling all my soda?

HIROKO

But what would you look for, if you did believe in relationships?

Beatrice takes a bottle of juice out of the fridge, pauses, and sighs.

BEA

I would look for wit. I would look for a man who was verbal. My vagina is wired directly to my ears -- and unfortunately, guys are not verbal. They sit on the couch watching the game, they crush beer cans against their foreheads . . . occasionally they grunt . . . It just doesn't do it for me.

HIROKO

But some guys are . . . witty.

Beatrice pours a glass of juice. She takes a sip.

BEA

Oh, sure, guys like Oscar Wilde. I don't think he would have been very interested in me, do you?

HIROKO

What about Benjamin Hartley? He's verbal *and* he's masculine.

Some of the juice goes down the wrong way. Beatrice snorts and coughs.

BEA

Yeesh. Gimme a break, girl. Ben Hartley doesn't talk, he spouts. He runs off at the mouth, he jabbers, he pontificates, there's no "off" switch.

Megan bursts in, pulling off the last few leaves.

MEGAN

God, I am totally going to kill Ralph. I'll never get these things out of my hair.

BEA

How gnarly.

MEGAN

Shut *up*, Bea. Now, Hiroko, I think Pete's going to talk to you about Cody at the Halloween dance. We've got to dress you up as something really sweet.

BEA

(sarcastic)  
A pussycat.

MEGAN

That could work.

Bea waves her glass of juice around, and talks with exaggerated, comic cynicism. She's doing Bette Davis, or Tallulah Bankhead . . .

BEA

Love's a little like a college dance, y'know? You slather on bling, you start out with high hopes and a drink in your hand, you shake your groove thing -- and you end up with aching joints, messed-up clothes, a headache and a sticky floor.

MEGAN

That's really gross. Anyway, Bea, what would you know about love?

BEA

Hey, I read a book about it once, okay?

INT. HIROKO'S ROOM -- DAY

There are cute, soft-focus posters on the walls. One shows kittens in a basket.

Hiroko enters. She picks up a campus paper, which has an article about Cody on the first page, and a picture of this newest wrestler. She sits on the bed reading.

A cute, bright RINGTONE SOUNDS. She answers the phone on her bed.

HIROKO

Hello. Hello?

After a moment of silence, we HEAR the phone on the other end being turned off. Hiroko loses her happy smile.

EXT. CAFETERIA BUILDING -- NIGHT

BOB RAYBURN, the Dean of students, sits outside the building at a table. He is a dignified, solid man in his mid-forties, but at the moment he's dressed as a pirate.

He takes money from students as they enter, and stamps their hands. Most of the kids are in costume.

ROCK MUSIC pours from the darkened building; we can see some colored lights and decorations inside. Beatrice, Megan, Hiroko, and a fourth girl, AMBER, approach.

Hiroko is indeed dressed as a little pussycat, with cute little ears in her hair, and whiskers drawn on her face, and a long, soft tail which she plays with nervously, like the Cowardly Lion.

Megan is dressed as Barbie. She wears a t-shirt that says: I WANNA BE BARBIE, and an open jacket and a tight skirt and high heels. She is heavily made up and in a blond wig.

Beatrice is beautifully turned out in a long, elegant, somewhat low-cut gown -- topped off with a Groucho Marx plastic nose, glasses and mustache. Amber is dressed as Katy Perry. Beatrice approaches Rayburn.

BEA

See? I told you it was Dean Rayburn. How are you, sir?  
How did you get stuck with this job?

RAYBURN

Happy Halloween, ladies. Admission is three dollars each.

BEA

That's a very rakish eye-patch you've got on there, sir.

RAYBURN

Thanks. Now, pay up.

AMBER

I didn't know there was an admission charge.

MEGAN

I know, it's really lame.

BEA

Sir, aren't our tuition money and love and loyalty enough?

RAYBURN

Don't start with me, Beatrice.

BEA

How did you know it was me?

RAYBURN

I took a wild guess.

MEGAN

Listen, I've got some money -- I can pay for us.

She reaches down into her shirt, and sexily pulls up a little string purse from her cleavage; it hangs on a cord around her neck. She gets out twelve dollars, and pays Rayburn. He stamps each of their hands in turn.

BEA

(muttered)

Great. Branded for life.

INT. CAFETERIA -- NIGHT

The room has been converted into a dance space for Halloween, with orange and black streamers, cardboard witches, black cats, skeletons, etc. There are carved, glowing pumpkins on the food tables, and dishes of candy. **ROCK PULSES THROUGH THE ROOM.**

Many students are dancing, and most are in costume. Spideys, X-Men and vampires dance with Lady Gagas, Katniss Everdeens and Little Mermaids. Some people have just dressed a little fancy or weird.

Willie, the goofball from the party at the guys' house, is dressed as a character called Captain Condom. The name is emblazoned across his chest.

He wears a long, clear plastic garbage bag; his head sticks through it, and there is a shower cap on his head. He has a cape, and unrolled condom earrings, and rubber gloves, and he rides a skateboard.



His friend Sanjay looks oddly beautiful, made up and in drag in a sexy dress. His dancing, however, is wild and male. The four women enter, and look around, taking in the party. Beatrice claps a hand on Hiroko's shoulder.

BEA

See? And you thought college would be different from high school.

Ralph, in a wig that makes him Jim Carey in "Dumb and Dumber," wades out of the crowd, and grabs hold of Megan's hand. They make their way out onto the dance floor.

Amber also melts into the crowd on the floor. Pete, dressed as one of the Three Musketeers, approaches Hiroko, and offers her a dixie cup.

PETE

Hey there, Hiroko. How about a glass of seltzer?

Hiroko is unsure what to do, uncertain whether to leave Beatrice. She glances at her questioningly.

BEA

Go on, tell him everything. Bare your soul to the man.

Hiroko smiles up at Pete, and walks off with him.

Ben is also dressed as a musketeer, but he has a black mask which rides up on his forehead like a visor.

Bea, still in the Groucho face, drifts over and watches Ben watch Sanjay bob for apples at a refreshment table.

Sanjay goes down, again and again, and make-up is leeching off his face into the water. At last he comes up, bug-eyed, mascara streaming down his cheeks, with an apple in his mouth. People applaud.

BEN

Yecchhhh.

Beatrice turns, so he won't see she's been watching him.

MATCH CUT:

Ralph, who has been dancing, turns in the same direction Beatrice turned, because John, who does not have on a costume, has laid a hand on his shoulder. John leads Ralph to the wall. Megan goes on dancing.

RALPH

Hey, guy, what's up?

JOHN

That's what I want to know. That Oriental chick Pete's with.

RALPH

Hiroko.

They both look over to where Hiroko and Pete are standing at the edge of the dancers, moving slightly to the music, and talking.

JOHN

Yeah, Hiroko. Is he doing her?

RALPH

Hell, no. She's, like, this Mega-virgin. Megan says Pete's trying to set her up with Cody.

JOHN

Ah.

(scanning the room)

Okay, pal, you can go back to dancing.

RALPH

Later, dude.

Ralph struts back onto the dance floor. John focuses on Cody, the third musketeer, standing by the opposite wall. He heads toward him. There follows a series of QUICK SHOTS:

Ben watching Beatrice sway to the music. He pulls his black mask down over his eyes. With the musketeer's hat and costume, and the mask, in the dark room, he feels he is reasonably well-disguised. He heads toward her.

THEN:

Rayburn and MRS. HARRIS, a female administrator, stand conferring as they scan the room, holding clipboards, judging and giving points to various costumes.

THEN:

Ralph and Megan, dancing comically and suggestively. People dance in unlikely costumes and combinations. Willie, dressed as Captain Condom, goes skateboarding madly through the dancers, pumping his fist in the air.

WILLIE

Safe sex! Safe sex! Safe sex! Safe sex!

THEN:

Bea and Ben sipping their drinks, clearly in the middle of a conversation, by the wall. Ben is talking in a deeper, slightly disguised voice.

BEA

But you won't say who told you that?

BEN

Nope. I just heard it around.

BEA

And you won't tell me who you are.

BEN

Can't do that, lady, it's Halloween.

BEA

But you just had to come over and tell me that everyone thinks I get all my best lines off of Stewart and Colbert?

BEN

Yeah, it's all recycled wit, you steal freely. From those guys, plus a little Conan and Bill Maher now and then. It's just what I heard.

BEA

Mmm. I bet you heard it from Ben Hartley.

BEN

Who's he?

BEA

He's this pathetic sidekick loser who tags along behind Pete and that frosh Cody. One of those Play Station Generation types with no social skills, you know? He's sort of a sad little mascot to the Frat Pack -- the court jester. They pretend to laugh at his jokes out of charity, when they're not kicking his butt at wrestling practice. Plus, he buys them beer --

BEN

But he has no real friends?

BEA

Well, like any village idiot, I guess he provides *some* comic relief. And he makes them look good around women, by way of contrast. Most of the time they don't mind him following them around.

BEN

If I ever meet this guy, I'll tell him what you say about him.

BEA

You do that.

BEN

Yeah, well you take care. It looks like the whole world and its brother are hot to dance with you tonight.

He storms off. Bea looks after him, stung. Then she smiles, and sips her drink, lifting up her plastic nose, so that the mustache doesn't drag in the punch.

CLOSE ON:

Cody walking along with John. They are getting to know each other.

JOHN

So, you like it in that house?

CODY

Yeah. What made you move out?

JOHN

Well, Pete and I never really got along. He's not a bad guy, I guess, but -- kind of overbearing, you know? I wasn't really looking for a father figure in a frat brother.

CODY

He's been real nice to me.

JOHN

Oh, sure. And that girl he's with is certainly a babe.

They look across the room to Pete and Hiroko, who are still talking. She is smiling, and leaning over to whisper something in his ear. Cody is alarmed.

CODY

She's not -- his girlfriend.

JOHN

Sure looks like it. They've been whispering and giggling together for, like, half an hour. He always goes for the me-so-horny exotic types, you know? Whatever you think of Petey, you gotta give him credit. He is smoooooth with the ladies.

John walks away, and Cody is left looking angry and hurt, on the verge of tears.

CLOSE ON:

Rayburn and Mrs. Harris by the door, CUTTING OFF THE MUSIC, and blowing into a mic, which gives off SCREECHY FEEDBACK.

MRS. HARRIS

Students? Students. May I have your attention, please. Dean Rayburn will now read to you the winners of this year's Halloween costume competition.

A few people applaud halfheartedly. There are jeers. Rayburn takes the mic.

RAYBURN

Thank you, Mrs. Harris. We have two big winners this year. Willie Obers wins the award for most hygienic costume, for his Captain Condom outfit --

Willie begins to whoop, and people clap more wildly.

RAYBURN

And Sanjay Mehra also wins big, for the cutest knit ensemble, and scariest Halloween make-up.

Sanjay and Willie jump up and down, yelling:

SANJAY AND WILLIE

We won! We won!

The MUSIC COMES BACK ON. Ben saunters over to Cody and claps him on the shoulder.

BEN

How we doing, d'Artagnan?

CODY

(shrugging him off)

Leave me alone.

BEN

Whoa, what's up?

CODY

I can't *believe* I listened to you and Pete! I thought you were my friends. I even believed you when you said Hiroko likes me.

BEN

Well, good 'cause she does like you.

CODY

Not as much as she likes Pete.

BEN

You've lost me, Cody. You're not making sense, here. Synaptic response is not occurring.

CODY

Look at them!

BEN

(looking)

He's being avuncular. He's relating to her. Pete's a natural-born guidance counselor.

CODY

He's a natural-born jerk.

BEN

What is your problem? He wouldn't do that to you. He's trying to set you up with her.

CODY

Yeah, right. He can have her. I'm not interested.

Pete, the third musketeer, wanders over, all smiles.

PETE

Hey, people. Are we happy campers?

CODY

Save it.

PETE

What's wrong? I was just talking to Hiroko, and she --

CODY

(furious)

I *saw* you talking to Hiroko.

Pete

And?

Cody tries to keep the crying out of his voice.

CODY

If you wanted to date her, you didn't have to pretend -- to be talking to her -- for me.

PETE

What?!

CODY

(mumbled)

Forget it.

BEN

He thinks you're after her for yourself. I'm trying to tell the guy, you're just kindly and benevolent, but --

PETE

Cody, you bonehead, she's interested in you. She says she's liked you since orientation. She was just telling me about how homesick she is --

CODY

She likes me?

PETE

She's waiting for you to ask her out.

BEN

But, you're not interested anymore, so --

CODY

I'll -- catch up with you guys later.

He starts to go, then hesitates, and turns back.

CODY

I'm sorry, Peter.

Ben throws his arms around both of them, making fun of Cody's earnestness.

BEN

That's it, that's the idea. One for all, all for one. It's so beautiful, *God, I love you guys!* Now, go get her.

Cody heads off, toward Hiroko. As he draws near, she drops her eyes, extremely shy. A SLOW SONG IS PLAYING. Cody speaks to her, nervous, hoarse.

CODY

Hey, there, little kitty. Want to dance?

He cautiously takes her hand. He leads her out onto the dance floor. They sway together, carefully. Hiroko rests her head on his shoulder. He puts his arms around her.

Pete and Ben look on. Ben shakes his head.

PETE

Wow. Were we ever that young?

BEN

No, man. Absolutely not.

A FITNESS ROOM -- DAY

We are CLOSE on Cody's face as he lies on his back on the bench press, straining to lift it in the air.

We PULL BACK, as he slowly lifts the press, and see Ben standing nearby, looking on with concern. Both wear sweatpants and t-shirts -- or Cody is shirtless.

BEN

Do you want me to reduce --

CODY

(gasping)

No, man, I'm good, I'm good.

He takes a deep breath, and lifts again. He lets the press go, and lies, panting and gasping.

CODY

Ben?

BEN

Yeah? Talk to me, Cody. If I get you killed here, it'll look really bad.

CODY

What's with that guy John?

BEN

John?

CODY

Yeah, he was at our party, and at the dance . . .

BEN

That John.

CODY

Why'd he have to move out of our house? I get the feeling it wasn't his idea.

We have continued to PULL BACK, to discover other students in the room, riding exercise bikes, and using other kinds of equipment.

BEN

Yeah, well. It's a long story.

CODY

I'm gonna need a moment to get my wind back here.

Cody throws wide his arms, inviting Ben to go ahead. Ben appears reluctant to talk about it. He crouches down by the side of the bench press to speak softly, so only Cody hears.

BEN

There was a party after finals last year. A girl passed out in John's room -- your room, now. Her friends wandered off and left her there. John came in and had sex with her.

CODY

So? He was probably messed up too, right?

BEN

He was drunk, and he was wired on coke . . . but I was hanging out with him earlier. I think he knew what he was doing.

Cody wipes perspiration off his brow with the back of his arm. Ben rummages in his sweatpants pocket and comes up with a crumpled sweat-sock.

BEN

Here, have a dirty sock.

Cody accepts it with mixed emotions.

CODY

Thank you.

He gingerly dabs at his brow with it, then hands it back.



CODY

So, what happened?

BEN

(sighs)

So . . . when the girl came to, and realized what had happened, she freaked. She was gonna go to the dean and charge John with rape, but she wound up just . . . dropping out of school.

CODY

Did you know her?

BEN

Yeah, she was an okay kid. Unhappy. Got drunk a lot. But when that happened she just -- flipped out completely. It was a shock for everybody -- a pretty ugly end for the year. That was when I started to see John as a real scumbag, frankly.

CODY

(puzzled)

And so Dean Rayburn made him move out?

BEN

No. Pete said John should live somewhere else this year, and the other guys got behind him. I think we did the right thing. I mean, we like to party and act stupid but -- we're not that kind of a house.

CODY

Oh. Sure, sure, I can see why you guys would feel that way.

BEN

Ralph was against it -- him and John are buddies. But ultimately, Ralph decided to come back, and I think he's over it, now. I'd actually stay away from John, if I was you, Cody. He might be good for scoring coke, but he's not good for much else, I have to say.

CODY

Thanks. I'll keep that in mind.

He wraps his hands around the handles of the bench press and prepares to lift it. His face twists as he tries.

BEN

Wait a minute, man. You get a double hernia, I get egg all over my face. Hold off.

He goes behind, to reduce the weight Cody is lifting.

## INT. SHOWERS -- DAY

Cody and Ben are in neighboring stalls in the steamy room; they can see each other's heads and shoulders over the dividers.

BEN

So, listen, guy. How's the big romance going, huh? It seems like you and Hiroko are getting pretty serious.

CODY

What makes you say that?

BEN

Because. You're always spacing out and mooning around, even at practice. You're ironing your clothes -- I didn't even know our house *had* an iron.

CODY

I bought one.

BEN

Uh huh. And you're going all metrosexual with that aftershave that kills at thirty paces.

CODY

You think I use too much?

Ben hands him a cake of soap over the divider.

BEN

You'll never catch me making a fool of myself that way. For no broad. It don't fit in with the rugged, Spartan athlete's life-style.

He puts up his arm to make a muscle, and grimaces.

CODY

(laughs nervously)  
Take it easy, Ben.

Ben narrows his eyes, assumes a psychotic, gay Eastwood persona.

BEN

Feel lucky, punk? Pick up that soap! I dare ya!

## EXT. GYMNASIUM -- DAY

The two guys exit, dressed in regular clothes, their hair still a little wet.

CODY

But, Ben, don't you have . . . like . . .

BEN  
What?

CODY  
Basic needs?

BEN  
Sure I do. I whack off.

CODY  
(startled)  
What?

BEN  
I flog the bishop, walk the dog, spank the monkey, say  
hello to Rosie Palmer and her five sisters.

He extends a hand and flexes the fingers.

CODY  
Geez.

BEN  
What? You don't?

CODY  
I just never met anyone who came out and said it like  
that.

BEN  
What, you've never sat in on a bull session? Listen, 98%  
of the population does it, and the other 2% are lying.

CODY  
Girls don't do it.

BEN  
What planet are you from, Cody?

CODY  
And masturbation is really enough for you?

BEN  
Hey, it keeps my wrist in shape for wrestling. It's a  
useful way of avoiding complications: Overpopulation,  
disease, passive-aggressive emotional manipulation -- all  
that good stuff.

CODY  
Yeah, but --

BEN  
Wanking is very important, Cody. "Learning to love  
yourself, it is the greatest love of all." Never forget that.

CODY

Whatever you say.

BEN

(after a beat)

But, seriously, things are good with you and Hiroko?  
Young love everything it's cracked up to be?

CODY

(smiling)

It's good, man. It's going good.

#### ROMANTIC MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

We HEAR the SAME SLOW SONG Hiroko and Cody danced to on Halloween THROUGHOUT THIS SEQUENCE: something by the Platters or the Penguins or Nat King Cole.

#### EXT. PUBLIC FOUNTAIN -- AFTERNOON

Cody and Hiroko, in overcoats, walk arm in arm. Her head rests on his shoulder.

#### EXT. DRUGSTORE -- AFTERNOON

Hiroko waits outside. Cody emerges from the store with a coke can with a straw in it. Taking a sip, he hands it, smiling, to Hiroko, who also sips.

They walk past a series of stores, and stop in front of a pet store. There is a big box of puppies in the window, and the two smile as the dogs play/fight.

Then Hiroko catches sight of a gray kitten, all alone in a small cage, lower down, and crouches, looking in at it sadly. She stands, Cody puts his arm around her, and they walk away, as Hiroko glances back at the tiny kitten.

#### INT. COLLEGE LIBRARY -- DAY

Hiroko sits at a long table, staring bleakly into her chemistry textbook. The gray kitten comes stepping down the length of the table. Hiroko notices it as it approaches her and sniffs her chem text; she gasps and starts backward.

She looks up, and finds Cody standing there, smiling. An older woman librarian walks into picture and glares in the direction of the cat. Cody looks at her uneasily.

#### INT. HIROKO'S DORM ROOM -- DAY

Hiroko cradles the gray kitten in her arms and feeds it milk out of a medicine dropper. Cody looks on.

She puts it down in a nest of soft tissue and cloth she has made in a shoebox, and Cody takes her in his arms. She hesitates for a moment -- then allows him to kiss her. Slowly they fall backwards together on the bed.

THE SONG FADES OUT, replaced by an INSTRUMENTAL on the SAME THEME. Over this, we hear MONOTONOUS SPEAKING.

INT. LECTURE HALL DAY -- DAY

At the blackboard, a hapless foreign T.A. is explaining a series of mathematical equations on a blackboard. His English is poor; we PAN across a row of deathly bored freshmen.

A girl stares straight ahead, blowing gum bubbles. People have earbuds and music on, or gamble on-line on laptops, or text friends.

But Cody looks surreptitious. He darts his eyes down the row, finishes scribbling a note, glances down at it, folds it -- then he passes it to his right.

The note goes down the row of expressionless students. One girl doodles on a pad; she passes it without looking up. At last it reaches Hiroko, who takes it, glances down the row at Cody, and carefully opens it.

END OF ROMANTIC MONTAGE

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Bea and Hiroko lounge on a wooden bench, watching their clothes spin around in the big machines. A girl stands in the background, folding clothes. MACHINE WHIRRS have replaced the instrumental music.

BEA  
(incredulous)  
He's writing you love poetry now?

Hiroko nods. Happy, proud, she reads the poem that was in the folded note:

HIROKO  
"Who's cuter than a kitten,  
As cute as cute can be,  
Who's sweet as a little girl,  
But sometimes a little dirty?  
Who's awesome like a rainbow,  
And so hot she drives me loco?  
You better believe it's true,  
It's my own girlfriend, Hiroko."

She looks up at Bea hopefully. Bea stares back blankly.

HIROKO  
What do you think?

BEA

Um.

HIROKO

He's not very good with the rhythm, but the rhymes are okay.

BEA

To be perfectly honest, Hiroko --

HIROKO

I know, it's terrible.

BEA

I mean, as Megan would say, 'Gag me, gross, I'm gonna hurl.'

HIROKO

(defending Cody)

I've been trying to write a poem to send back to him. It's not as easy as it looks.

BEA

(grinning)

You're writing poetry now? Lemme see!

HIROKO

No!

BEA

Come on, come on . . .

HIROKO

No!

She sits on her spiral notebook, and looks at Bea defiantly.

BEA

Calm down, don't get so defensive. In my youth, back in freshman year, I tried to write poetry for awhile.

HIROKO

You did?

BEA

Yeah, I was taking this Shakespeare seminar. I talked my way out of Freshman Comp. And I was trying to write sonnets. Out of the whole batch, I only came up with one half-decent verse.

She puts her head back, and recites from memory.

BEA

You think he wants to fuck you, but you're wrong;  
It seems he's only fucking with your mind.  
This understood, the tension's no less strong,  
For after all, it's fucking of a kind.

(gets up to retrieve laundry from the  
machine)

One good stanza. And all the rest sucked.

HIROKO

Who were you writing about?

BEA

(suddenly too casual)

What? Oh, nobody. I was just being artsy and  
pretentious, as usual. Shit! These jeans are still bleeding!  
Blue fucking panties again.

INT. HIROKO'S ROOM -- NIGHT

The room is dark. Hiroko is asleep, in a floral nightgown. Her RINGTONE SOUNDS, and she gropes around to turn on the light, sits up and answers the phone on her bedside table.

HIROKO

Hello?

There is no response. EDGY MUSIC, underscores her unease.

HIROKO

Hello, who is this?

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

John sits on his bed in the darkened room, holding a beer and a cell phone. We HEAR HIROKO'S PHONE VOICE say again:

HIROKO (OC)

Hello? Please tell me who you are. This isn't funny.

Gently, John turns off his phone.

INT. CAFETERIA -- EVENING

The room has been transformed since Halloween. Now it's been refilled with long dreary white tables. Students sit gossiping and picking at the food on orange plastic trays.

Bea sits, flipping a soggy stir-fry around with her fork. Hiroko sits near her. Ben comes over, hesitates, and then sets down his tray at the table, opposite Bea.

BEN

Hey.

BEA

Well. If it isn't one of the mouseketeers!

BEN

(annoyed)

Musketeers.

BEA

(breezy)

That's what I said, the Three Mouseketeers. You're not quite Justin Timberlake -- one of the also rans. What have you got there, Ben?

BEN

A chicken sandwich. I figure, how badly can they mess that up?

BEA

I wouldn't know. I stay away from cooked flesh.

BEN

Oh, are you some kind of big vegetarian, Bea? Since when?

BEA

Since a long time ago, you observant guy.

BEN

Why? Save the planet? Good nutrition? Fear of hormones scarier than your own?

BEA

All of that -- and, since I know I couldn't bring myself to kill an animal, I don't think I should eat the gussied-up end product.

BEN

(incredulous)

What?

BEA

Could you slit a cow's throat, Ben? Or a pig? Or even a chicken?

BEN

Well, maybe, if I had to, if I grew up in that kind of --

BEA

Please. The other guys in your house kill the ants and spiders for you, right?



BEN  
 (annoyed again)  
 So, I don't enjoy squashing bugs, so what?

BEA  
 You couldn't kill your own hog, or even your own termite, Ben. So, it's wrong to have someone else do all that cruel stuff for you, and mentally wall-paper over it.

BEN  
 Oh, and you're so p.c.

BEA  
 That's such a tired label.

BEN  
 You're perfect, Bea. You're Joan of Arc.

BEA  
 You're right, I probably will wind up being burned at the stake as a witch. However, we were discussing *your* moral cowardice and general hypocrisy.

Hiroko is dismayed by the growing argument. She opens her mouth to say something, but Ben puts up his hand.

BEN  
 Bea, let me ask you something. Are you sure you animal rights nuts've got your priorities straight? I mean, you're defending cows and ducks and bunny rabbits --

BEA  
 I have no problem with a rabbit coat, if the person kills and skins the rabbits herself.

BEN  
 -- When all over the world, now, there are people getting raped and murdered and tortured in prisons. Now, if *I* was a bunny rabbit --

BEA  
 But you are!

BEN  
 -- Or a cow or a fish, well, that would be who I'd look out for.

BEA  
 It's ridiculous not to make the connection between cruelty to animals and people. It's shortsighted and specieist.

BEN  
 Yeah, well it's specious to call people specieist.

BEA  
Ho ho ho, Mr. Wordplay.

BEN  
And what're you eating there, Bea?

BEA  
A mystery stir-fry from hell. Why?

BEN  
Aren't you sucking the life force out of living things now dead? Aren't you a vampire succubus drawing strength from their violent, unnatural demise?

BEA  
I'm eating soggy vegetables. I can pick vegetables myself. I've done it before.

Ben's voice is getting louder now, and students at other tables have stopped talking, and are looking over at them. Hiroko glances around nervously.

BEN  
But you're consuming a morally superior life form. Those plants were nourished on sunshine and shit -- they didn't kill anything to stay alive. How *dare* you victimize them? Don't you realize you're being kingdomist?

BEA  
Kingdomist?

BEN  
(rises, pounds table)  
You chauvinistically value the animal kingdom over the plant kingdom -- when, except for venus flytraps, and triffids, maybe, plants victimize no one. Just because they think differently than we do --

BEA  
All right, you're cute, you can stop now.

BEN  
You're a bigot. Make connections. Be honest, Bea. Is the difference in I.Q. between your average chicken and your average cucumber really all that great?

BEA  
Point. Love. Game. You win, cut it out.

As Ben sits, there is APPLAUSE from various tables. He looks around, startled, rises up in his seat again, and bows. Nearby, Willie and Sanjay pound their table and chant:

Willie and Sanjay

Fuck the herbivores! Fuck the herbivores! Fuck the herbivores!

BEA

Now look what you've done. You've gotten Willie and Sanjay all excited. They'll have to be hosed down.

BEN

Pass the salt.

Hiroko does so. Ben salts the sandwich, bites into it, and makes a face.

INT. SCIENCE BUILDING -- EVENING

Dexter sits at his computer consul, while John looks on. Dexter makes the screen image of a super-model, morph: into Bride of Frankenstein, Bruce Willis, etc. Each time, she becomes the super-model again, before changing.

DEXTER

Huh? Huh? Look at that. Pretty amazing, huh?

JOHN

You really need to get out more, Dexter.

DEXTER

Tell me who you want her to be, and I can do it. Gimme a picture, and gimme a day -- that's all.

JOHN

Who is she?

DEXTER

Just some model I got off the 'net. There are pictures of her a lot nastier than this. You wanna --

JOHN

That's okay, guy. But I'm impressed. You really got something here.

He pats his shoulder, and walks off. Dexter, with his mouse, happily draws a mustache on the super-model.

INT. CAFETERIA -- EVENING

Same scene as before.

BEA

So, since your priority is human beings, Ben, what have you done lately to better their condition?

Ben responds seriously, a little self-conscious but proud.

BEN

Nothing world-shaking. I've gotten into the Big Brother/Big Sister program, actually. I hang out with this kid in town, twice a week.

Bea laughs derisively.

BEA

Lucky kid.

BEN

Oh, so you look down on being a Big Brother?

BEA

No, it's a lovely thing to do, Ben. Really. George Orwell wrote a whole book about it.

Ben stands, and picks up his tray off the table.

BEN

You know what? It's been great, but I think I'll finish my sandwich outside. More atmosphere by the dumpsters.

He walks away. Bea calls after him:

BEA

Enjoy your dead bird carcass!

He bites into the sandwich, makes a show of enjoying it.

BEN

Mmmmmm.

But we FOLLOW HIM as he leaves, and see his disgusted expression by the cafeteria EXIT. He shoves the tray into the rack, throws the rest of the sandwich in the garbage, and slams out through the doors.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING IN TOWN -- EVENING

The building is on the main street, where Cody and Hiroko shopped in the montage. Ralph approaches the building, counts over some money and hit the buzzer. He is BUZZED in.

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Coke is cut into lines on a mirror. John snorts through a straw, lying on the bed. He puts his head back, and sniffs. He hands the mirror to Ralph, who does a line. The room is a mess: bed unmade, strewn clothes and a window shade askew.

Ralph sets the mirror on the cluttered desk, and makes appreciative noises.

RALPH

Oh, man. That really is good stuff.

John picks up a fat baggy full of coke, tosses it in the air, and catches it.

JOHN

Does the delivery man always deliver? Huh?

RALPH

Dude. You're my lifeline.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a wad of bills, and hands it to John. John takes the money, and is about to put the baggy into Ralph's hand -- but then pulls back.

JOHN

Oh, one more thing.

RALPH

What? That's how much you said!

JOHN

Not money. Information.

RALPH

Shoot.

JOHN

How're the little love bugs?

RALPH

Cody and Hiroko? They're still a couple. He's always over there, he's really into her.

JOHN

He sleeps over there?

RALPH

Naah. I don't think he's boned her yet.

John sits up and smiles. He tosses the baggy to Ralph. Ralph stuffs it into his coat pocket.

JOHN

Not like you and Megan, huh?

RALPH

(laughing)

Megan is so wild, man. You know she let me do her poop shoot?

JOHN

No kidding.

RALPH

(shaking head)

Unbelievable, man.

JOHN

I bet she'd do just about anything you tell her to, huh?

At first Ralph smiles and nods -- then rises, wary.

RALPH

What you got in mind?

JOHN

(rises also)

Relax. You got any classes this evening?

RALPH

Nothing I'm going to.

JOHN

(hand on Ralph's shoulder)

Well, then, I want you to come to the science building to meet a friend of mine. A science geek so hard-core nerdy, you won't believe your eyes.

RALPH

Yeah? Why do I want to meet him?

JOHN

How much do you know about morphing, Ralph?

They are speaking softly. Ralph grins.

RALPH

Dude! Like the Power Rangers?

JOHN

Not exactly. I'm talking about a kind of . . . video magic.

EXT. WOMEN'S DORM -- EVENING

There is a bonfire blazing. Students are toasting marshmallows. Bea and Hiroko move to the fire and warm their hands over it. Pete and Cody see them, and head over to them. Cody takes Hiroko's hand and gives it a squeeze.

PETE

Hey, ladies.

BEA

Hey, handsome. This legal?

She indicates the fire. Pete shrugs.

PETE

They haven't busted us yet.

CODY

(to Hiroko)

So, we going to the movie later?

HIROKO

(smiling, ducking head)

Cody, I have to study.

CODY

Study. You can't fool me. You're just gonna sit in your room and play with your cat.

HIROKO

(giggles)

Maybe. Guess what I've named him.

CODY

I don't know, what?

BEA

Cody?

HIROKO

(astonished)

How did you know that?

Bea picks up a stick, and goes a marshmallow with it. She bends, and toasts it over the fire.

BEA

A wild, lucky guess. Ain't love grand, Pete?

PETE

Have you fallen for someone?

BEA

Nope. Never. The whole world pairs off, two by two, and gets on the ark, except for me.

PETE

I'll find you a good guy, Bea.

BEA

A good man is hard to find. A hard man is good to find, as they say. But a hard, good man is a rarity. Who you gonna get me?

PETE

What kind of person interests you?

BEA

Let's see. Are there any more like you at home? Strong, decent, president of the fraternity, captain of the wrestling team, classic American archetype?

PETE

Come on --

BEA

You are. You're the perfect guy, Pete, face it. Honest, quiet, unassuming --

PETE

(embarrassed)

I guess we all have different "archetypes" of what the perfect person would be like.

BEA

Mmmm. I'll show you mine, if you show me yours.

PETE

(surprised, serious)

Are you propositioning me, Bea?

BEA

Me? What am I gonna do with the perfect guy?

Embarrassed, she realizes he thought she was serious.

BEA

No, Pete, I -- listen, I'm just an awkward nerd, okay, all sorts of drivel comes out of my mouth, don't mind me, please --

PETE

You don't have to apologize for being funny. We like it when you keep us guessing.

Beatrice awkwardly stands, hands her marshmallow stick to someone, picks up her bag, and backs away.

BEA

No, seriously, I'm socially challenged, I say obscene things, I say obnoxious things, you gotta believe me, it's genetic -- ask Hiroko, my mom's the same, it's like a form of Tourette's, it drove her mom crazy, we're both motor-mouths, it's pathetic. I'll see you guys later.

She flees toward the dorm.

INT. STAIRWELL -- EVENING

Bea runs up the stairs and winces in embarrassment.

BEA

Fuck.



## EXT. WOMEN'S DORM -- EVENING

Same as before.

CODY

That girl needs to lighten up.

HIROKO

She's in therapy, twice a week.

PETE

Bea's s fun, just a little neurotic.

(pause)

She'd be *exactly* the right girl to set up with Ben Hartley.

Hiroko's eyes open wide. Cody freezes, biting down into a marshmallow. He speaks with his mouth full.

CODY

What?!

HIROKO

They'd talk each other crazy, Pete.

CODY

They'd kill each other!

PETE

Listen, kids. We've got a Mission: Impossible, here. And your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to help me get Bea and Ben together as a couple. Are you with me, Cody?

CODY

Sure, if you got an idea.

PETE

Hiroko? How about you?

HIROKO

I'd do anything to help Bea find a good boyfriend.

PETE

Well, she could do worse than Ben. How we do it is . . .

## INT. SCIENCE BUILDING -- NIGHT

DEXTER sits before his computer screen, while John and Ralph stand by. Dexter is sucking on a lollipop; it bulges in his cheek, and the white stick wobbles as he talks:

DEXTER

This is how we do it. Let me have the photo, please.

John pokes Ralph. Ralph, looking uncomfortable, reaches into his bookbag, and pulls out thumb drive. Dexter plugs it in, clicks on the drive and a file, and we are looking at the photo of Megan, Bea and Hiroko standing together smiling, arms linked, from the party after the guys won the wrestling trophy.

DEXTER

Now. Which girl are we morphing here?

John points from Megan to Hiroko.

JOHN

We want *her* to look like *her*. Just CGI some slanty eyes in or something.

DEXTER

Aha. Dum de dum de dum.

He uses the mouse to highlight Hiroko's face, drags it over, and places it over Megan's. He presses in a command; the computer BLIPS rejection.

DEXTER

Phooey!

JOHN

Watch your mouth.

DEXTER

Ha ha.

He tries again. This time, we see the image on the screen change; Megan's face morphs into Hiroko's. The expression matches the one Megan was wearing before.

DEXTER

That's more like it . . . voilà, gentlemen.

He swivels around, looking self-satisfied.

JOHN

And you can do the same thing with a videotape?

DEXTER

In principle. It's just a little more complicated. It would help if I didn't have to change the clothes, and all of that -- and if we don't see the girl's face all the time --

JOHN

I think that can be arranged.

RALPH

(sharply)

John.

JOHN

Yeah. Dexter here sure knows his way around a computer, huh?

RALPH

(Grabbing his arm)

C'mere, man, I've got to talk to you.

John looks down, angry, at the hand on his arm, and then back up at Ralph. Ralph lets go of him, and says with a little less force and urgency:

RALPH

Please. It's important.

They walk off, as Dexter whistles to himself and draws animated horns on the images of the girls on his screen. John and Ralph talk by the door of the computer room.

RALPH

Look, man. Like, I'm sorry, but -- I can't do this for you. I mean, Megan's never gonna go for it.

JOHN

She doesn't have to know.

RALPH

If we make a home porn movie, I think she'll know.

JOHN

But she doesn't have to know what it's for. She's got the brains of a Kardashian. You tell her you've got a thing for little girl virgins, you want her to dress up in Hiroko's clothes. It's so simple.

RALPH

But then -- he's gonna do this thing with the video --

JOHN

And we mess with young Cody's mind a little bit, that's all. Simple practical joke.

RALPH

John, look. We're friends, right? I mean, you *know* I'm your friend.

JOHN

I thought you were.

RALPH

I got you Hiroko's number, right? But I hang with those guys. I mean, Pete bugs me sometimes -- but I don't think I can handle this.

JOHN

I don't think you have a choice, Ralphie. I'm your friend, I'm your connection, I write your papers -- I set the rules.

RALPH

Okay, but Megan's never gonna --

JOHN

Megan's gonna do what you suggest, Ralph. I have great faith in you. You both get a little buzzed, she dresses up -- I think you'll have a wild time. Huh?

Ralph manages an uncertain smile. John glances back over at Dexter, across the room. Dexter beams. John smiles back.

EXT. CAMPUS -- DAY

Students cross the main quad, alone and in groups, headed to class. Hiroko walks along holding books, looking ridiculously happy. She spots Bea with Amber, and calls out to her:

HIROKO

Bea? Bea!

Bea looks at Hiroko, waves goodbye to Amber, and meets her cousin. They walk toward a tree-shaded bench, and sit.

BEA

And why are you so happy? They're reviving Full House? Another royal baby on the way?

HIROKO

Guess. Guess what Cody gave me.

BEA

A dozen long-stemmed roses.

HIROKO

Well, yeah -- but besides that.

BEA

Another kitten. An ocelot. A dust buster.

HIROKO

No . . . look.

She holds out her hand. There is an engagement ring, with a diamond set in it, on the hand.

BEA

Whoa, watch out. That looks almost like an engagement ring.

HIROKO

It is.

BEA

Why would Cody give you that?

HIROKO

Bea! Because he asked me to marry him. And I said yes. We're engaged.

BEA

No, you're not. You're a freshman.

HIROKO

Bea.

BEA

You've known this guy for, what, a couple of weeks?

HIROKO

We're in love. We don't have to get married right away. We'll finish school -- or Cody will. I might drop out and get a job.

BEA

Wrong! You hardly know this bozo.

HIROKO

He's not a bozo!

BEA

He's nice, he's cute, big deal, you're moving much too fast. Did he sleep over last night?

Hiroko blushes and looks down.

BEA

Yeah, I *thought* I heard bad male singing in the shower this morning. Hiroko, I promised your folks I'd keep an eye on you. I don't want them driving out here to beat me up.

HIROKO

They'll be happy for me.

BEA

Don't tell them yet. That much happiness might kill them.

HIROKO

I thought *you'd* be happy for me. But you think I'm just a big baby, don't you?

BEA

Right now I'm afraid you're too starry-eyed to protect yourself properly. And I mean that on about five levels simultaneously.

HIROKO

You think I'm helpless! You're going to try to bully me out of what's important to me, just like Aunt Seiko always bullies my mom and laughs at my mom --

BEA

Whoa, whoa, look, let's just leave them out of this. I mean, yeah, maybe you're right, okay? I don't really get this whole wide-eyed, "bryko" Gidget thing you and your mom are into, and I guess my mom feels the same. It's like you're still . . . But never mind. That's them, with their Issei issues. Don't screw around with this little jock just to get back at me, or at my mom, for God knows what.

HIROKO

You really think I'd do that. You really think this is just about *you*. Me dating Cody -- everything is all about you!

BEA

Hiroko . . . I just don't want to see you get hurt. You're so vulnerable, you believe every Harlequin Silhouette Wildfire whatever the hell you've ever read, you're putting all your money on one horse --

HIROKO

(angry, standing)

He's not a horse, and I'm not gambling. We're in *love*, okay? And I'm sorry if you don't believe in that, and you'll never even know what it is!

She runs off, and Bea glumly watches the crowds go by.

BEA

(muttered)

Okay, okay. Congratulations.

INT. LIBRARY -- AFTERNOON

Ben goes to a computer near the front desk, to look up a book. We see Cody and Pete watching him from the stacks; they whisper conspiratorially.

We see from their POV Ben approaching the front desk and the librarian telling Ben where to look for something. When she points near them, they duck out of sight.

Ben heads over, and loses himself in the stacks one set of shelves away. They can partly see him, through the bookshelves, and Pete clears his throat to begin.

PETE

So, big guy. How's it going with Hiroko?

CODY

It's going great, guy. Really.

PETE

Any hot gossip out of the girl's dorm?

CODY

Just what Hiroko was telling us before, man. That Bea has a thing for Ben.

CLOSE ON:

Ben, on his side of the stacks, looks up from a book he's been paging through, visibly startled. He HEARS the CONVERSATION on the other side.

PETE

Unbelievable. That's so bizarre.

CODY

I know. I mean, I had Bea figured for a dyke, or as just not -- sexual. But a crush on *him*, of all people!

CLOSE ON:

Cody and Pete. Cody is trying to wink at Pete; he is on the verge of cracking up. Pete shakes his head in a warning gesture, and says loudly:

PETE

Maybe it's just a new game Beatrice is playing. You and Hiroko are pretty gullible.

CODY

I don't think so, man. Hiroko says she finds Bea sitting in the girls' common room at 3:00 a.m, weeping and talking about him.

PETE

Weeping?

CODY

Weeping, dude.

PETE

No kidding.

Ben's amazed face peeps through the books at them. They seem not to notice. Pete saunters down the row, and Cody follows. Ben moves too, on the other side of the stacks, trying to keep up with them.

CODY

She keeps looking him up on social media, like a stalker. She writes him these elaborate e-mail love letters, and then deletes them. She figures he'd laugh at her -- like she'd laugh at him if he sent her something like that.

PETE

What a pair of psychos.

CODY

Tell me about it.

CLOSE ON:

Ben, stopping as they stop. He crouches down, and peers through at their legs through the forest of books.

PETE

Maybe we should tell him, huh?

CODY

Ben? No way, man. He'd laugh in her face!

PETE

You think he'd be that crass? Hell, I wish she'd fixated on *me*. I'd know what to do with a girl like that.

CODY

That's the way it goes, guy. Sometimes the smart ones have lousy taste in men.

PETE

Maybe she'll get over it.

CODY

Hiroko says she's worried Bea's gonna do something stupid.

PETE

Like tell him?

CODY

Like mess up on her exams, or -- try something crazy. You know, that whole Japanese suicide thing.

CLOSE ON:

Pete and Cody. Their eyes flick down occasionally to where they are being watched. Again, it seems at times as if Cody will give them away.

PETE

It's a shame. Ben is whack. He doesn't know what he's missing. You got your books?



CODY

Yeah, more than I'll read.

PETE

Let's get out of here. Tell me about this little party you're gonna be throwing.

He indicates with his head that they should leave. They walk out of the row. Ben's head peeks through the shelves, and looks after them.

CLOSE ON Pete and Cody as they head for the EXIT. Cody nudges Pete in the ribs, whispers feverishly:

CODY

Oh, we got him. You *know* we got him!

Pete puts his arm around him, shakes him, and whispers urgently:

PETE

Yeah, now *shut* up! You'll give it away.

CLOSE ON:

Ben, sitting on the floor between the stacks, staring straight ahead, as if in shock.

INT. FITNESS ROOM -- DAY

Ben is on an elliptical, still looking spaced. He is moving rapidly, agitated, then slows down dreamily . . . then collects himself and speeds up again.

INT. INDOOR BASKETBALL COURT -- DAY

Ben is playing basketball one-on-one with IVORY, a twelve-year-old black townie, his Little Brother, at a Y.

Ivory easily gets past him and shoots baskets. Ben is not concentrating. Ivory bounces the ball high in frustration.

IVORY

Man, I *told* you not to let me win everything all the time!

BEN

I'm not letting you win.

IVORY

Well, you can't be *this* pathetic.

BEN

Yes, I can. I'm just distracted, that's all.

IVORY

You getting sick of me already?

BEN

What?

(suddenly focuses)

No, Ivory, it has nothing to do with you. I just overheard my friends talking about . . . something weird.

Ivory grins; he is interested. He dribbles the ball.

IVORY

You been eavesdropping?

BEN

Accidentally.

IVORY

You hear them talking about you?

BEN

Me and -- somebody else.

IVORY

Who?

Ben takes the ball from him, and walks around nervously, dribbling it.

BEN

Remember what I told you about my views on love?

IVORY

(bored)

Yeah, you don't believe in love, it's all dumb, it's people acting out what they see on TV.

BEN

Something like that. Well -- it sounds like this girl has fallen in love with me.

IVORY

Which girl? The one who's always doing snaps on you?

BEN

How did you know?

IVORY

(laughs)

Oh, man!

(steals the ball back, dribbles it)

So, what are you gonna to do?

BEN

I don't know.

IVORY

Is she pretty?

BEN  
Yes.

IVORY  
Is she good to be around?

BEN  
She -- can be.

IVORY  
Is she a ho?

BEN  
No.

IVORY  
So, what's the problem?

BEN  
I dunno. I think her love . . . must be requited. I think I'm going to have to love her back.

IVORY  
This is a policy decision?

BEN  
Basically. My friends may make fun of me, a little, given what I've said in the past --

IVORY  
Well, let me be the first.

BEN  
But, people change.

IVORY  
Shit happens.

BEN  
Exactly. Life is for living.

IVORY  
A man's got to go for it.

BEN  
The world must be peopled!

Ivory whoops, and throws him the ball. Ben catches it joyously, and shoots a basket.

BEN  
I'm gonna be *madly* in love with her!

IVORY  
She'll never know what hit her.

## INT. HIROKO'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Hiroko sits smiling, combing out her hair. Her RINGTONE SOUNDS and she loses her smile. She stares at her cell phone fearfully, then moves to answer it.

HIROKO

(scared)

Hello? Hello?

We hear the CLICK. Hiroko sits on the bed with the phone in her hand as Bea knocks.

BEA (OC)

Hey, you in there?

Bea pushes in the door and enters.

BEA

You up for a trip into -- oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know you're on the phone.

HIROKO

No, I . . . I'm not.

BEA

Well, who was that?

HIROKO

(near tears)

I don't know. Somebody calls sometimes -- and hangs up.

Bea marches over to her, angry.

BEA

Is that so?

The RINGTONE SOUNDS again. There is no answer.

BEA

Same creep? I don't know . . .

HIROKO

I don't know . . .

(into phone)

Hello?

There is no answer. Bea takes the phone from her, and speaks in a psychotic whisper:

BEA

This is the castrating witch of the north, and I'm coming to get you. I'm sharpening up the silverware --

Toward the end of this there is a CLICK.

BEA

Aw, he hung up. Too bad the number's blocked --

HIROKO

Okay, Bea, forget it.

BEA

Do you have any idea who it is?

HIROKO

No.

BEA

You better call the police -- and campus security.

HIROKO

No, let's not make a big thing out of --

BEA

Look -- you've got to understand -- guys at college . . . They're away from home for the first time, no supervision, so, some of them . . . They kind of have this Lord of the Flies thing going on, you know? This happens to be the most dangerous time in our lives. But at least this place has some codes and rules, about stalking and harassment, and if you tell the dean --

HIROKO

No! Maybe it's just one of the guys, doing it for a goof.

BEA

(astonished)

Hiroko, what *is* it with you? Do I know you? Are we related? Did you inherit some mutant wuss gene?

HIROKO

Maybe he doesn't know how scary it is for me.

BEA

Then he ought to be told.

HIROKO

Look, I'll ask Cody, maybe he knows who it is. Let me handle this in my own way, okay?

Bea stares at her, bewildered.

HIROKO (CONT'D)

I'm a big girl, okay? And I don't want to cause a lot of trouble.

EXT. CAMPUS -- DUSK

Students cross the quad, some carrying books.

INT. STUDENT LOUNGE -- DUSK

Ben stands in a zombie state, by the drinking fountain. Other students are on couches, talking, drinking soda. Beatrice wanders in, carrying his bookbag, suspended from one finger. She spots him and yells:

BEA

Hey, Ben!

He wheels, and looks at her, grinning sheepishly. She heads over to hand him the bag.

BEA

Glad to find you here. You left this in the seminar room -- I told Professor Lewis I'd get it back to you.

BEN

Thank you, Bea, it was thoughtful of you -- to go to the trouble.

BEA

Oh, it wasn't *that* challenging --  
(peering at him)  
You spaced, or something?

BEN

Why would you say that?

BEA

'Cause you look like you been banging into things, or sniffing glue. Did the school nurse up your Ritalin dosage?

She passes a hand back and forth, in front of his eyes. Ben continues to beam at her, and blink. She pats his shoulder.

BEA

Enjoy your bookbag. Get help.

Beatrice leaves. Cody and Pete, who have been out of sight on the lounge chairs, saunter up to Ben.

PETE

Ben! Nice shirt you got there. It's new?

BEN

What? No, I just don't -- wear it much.

CODY

(touches Ben's chin)

That's a nice, clean shave you got there, man. I noticed you bought one of those double-blade shavers.

BEN

So?

PETE

So, why this sudden interest in being well-groomed?

BEN

I shouldn't have to tell you that, Pete. I have the image of the house and the team to maintain.

PETE

(pats Ben's cheek)

Well, you're doing a fine job.

EXT. POST OFFICE -- EARLY EVENING

Beatrice enters the building. Megan and Hiroko approach it, once she has gone inside.

INT. POST OFFICE -- EARLY EVENING

Bea passes the front window. The postman, HARRY, is still in his office.

BEA

Hey, Harry, anything hot for me today?

HARRY

Sorry, a couple of rejections, it looked like.

BEA

Nuts! Those were, like, my best stories! Snooty old fossil magazines that still want freaking snail-mail submissions . . .

HARRY

Hey, what can you do? Don't blame me, I'm just the messenger.

BEA

I don't blame you.

HARRY

Better luck next time.

BEA

Thanks, Harry.

Bea heads back into the rows of mailboxes. Amber, who has been turned away from her, now opens the post office door. She beckons through it and steps back.

Hiroko and Megan enter, nervous, giggly. Amber points to where Bea has disappeared. Hiroko and Megan head back there.

CLOSE ON:

Beatrice, behind a rise of mailboxes, sifts through the mail she has pulled from her box. There are several self-addressed large manila envelopes containing short stories.

She rips one open, and pulls out the form rejection letter. Her disappointment is manifest.

BEA

Fuck.

She continues to sort through her mail. As she HEARS VOICES from the other side of the wall of mailboxes, she looks up, increasingly engaged.

MEGAN (O.C.)

I still don't believe it.

HIROKO (O.C.)

All I know is what Cody tells me.

MEGAN (O.C.)

And I'm, like, supposed to buy that Ben Hartley is hot for Beatrice? As *if*, I am so sure.

HIROKO (O.C.)

I don't think Cody's making it up.

CLOSE ON:

The other side of the wall of mailboxes. Hiroko and Megan make a show of unlocking their boxes, though they do not look inside them. They try to suppress their laughter, and to sound natural, though loud.

MEGAN

So, are you, like, going to tell her?

HIROKO

The guys wanted me to. But I said they should just tell Ben to get over it.

MEGAN

Why? Don't you think Bea and Ben could show each other a bodacious hot time between the sheets?

(laughs, bops Hiroko)

Va va voom!



HIROKO

Seriously, Ben is such a nice guy -- I wish he had a chance with her. But Bea always has something nasty to say about everyone.

CLOSE ON:

Bea, on the other side, drinking in every word.

HIROKO (O.C.)

You show her any guy on campus, and she'll tell you how he's psycho or stupid or probably can't get it up -- she's so in love with her clever lines, she won't give men a chance.

MEGAN (O.C.)

But she's funny, sometimes, Hiroko -- you gotta admit.

HIROKO (O.C.)

(expressing real anger)

She makes everything a joke. She misses the good in people.

MEGAN (O.C.)

Well, that's true.

CLOSE ON:

Megan and Hiroko locking their mailboxes, glancing at the divider, then heading for the door.

MEGAN

You should tell her, if that's how you feel about her.

HIROKO

She'd laugh in my face. She'd make a fool of me. I'm actually thinking of going to Ben myself, and telling him to just get over it.

MEGAN

Yeah, so, anyhow. Tell me about your engagement party!

HIROKO

Oh, you've *got* to help me figure out what to wear . . .

They head out the door of the post office, still talking.

EXT. POST OFFICE -- EVENING

Megan, Hiroko and Amber join hands and jump up and down, with squeals barely suppressed in volume. Then they run away.

INT. POST OFFICE -- EVENING

Bea leans back against the boxes, clutching her mail.

INT. BEA'S BEDROOM -- EVENING

A few posters: a large black and white one of Louise Brooks with the caption "LOUISE BROOKS, DIARY OF A LOST GIRL," and a portrait of the young Virginia Woolf. The desk and floor are covered with books and papers, including the new mail.

Bea lies in bed almost in tears. She turns on her side.

MATCH CUT:

Bea in the office of her SHRINK. She is lying on the couch, and turns in the same direction. This time, she really is crying. Periodically, she reaches for Kleenex on the table.

The shrink is a pleasant-looking woman in her forties, who occasionally nods, and notes something on a small pad. She sits in an armchair, five feet away.

BEA

I -- didn't know that's how Hiroko sees me. I mean -- we don't have that much in common -- she knows how I feel about her getting engaged to that guy Cody -- but I'm coming to their party, and all --

SHRINK

But is that the real issue? What about what they said about Ben?

Bea considers for a moment, then opens her mouth to form words -- and then bursts into tears again.

MUSICAL SEQUENCE: SONG OR INSTRUMENTAL

INT. GUYS' HOUSE -- DAY

Ben exits his room with a button-down white shirt. He sniffs the armpits and looks dismayed.

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

Ben pours shampoo upon the armpits of the shirt, and uses water to suds it up.

Ben, a DIFFERENT ANGLE, blow-dries the armpits of the shirt.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Ben enters, and looks around furtively, to make sure no one can see him. He takes the iron down from a shelf, plugs it into the wall, and spreads the shirt out on the kitchen table.

## INT. BARBER SHOP -- AFTERNOON

Ben, whose hair has gotten longish, and who has five o'clock stubble on his chin, sits in the chair, towels tucked around him, while the barber sets to work.

## INT. BEA'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Bea is rummaging through her closet, taking out various articles of clothing and holding them up to examine them -- then discarding them on the floor.

## INT. EYEGLASSES STORE -- AFTERNOON

CLOSE on a row of eyeglasses, then a WIDER SHOT shows the location. Bea tries on different frames -- less severe than her usual ones. She looks in the mirror, uncertain. She balances the glasses on the tip of her nose, makes faces.

Suddenly, she flattens herself against the mirrored pole, seeing Hiroko and Amber through the glass shop windows, on the street outside. Bea does not want them to see her.

## INT. RALPH'S ROOM -- EVENING

The lights are dimmed. Ralph is pouring Megan a drink. Megan is dressed up to look like Hiroko -- in a soft sweater, a skirt, and saddle-shoes.

Ralph puts his arm around her, drinks from the cup, and salutes the camcorder with it; it is pointed in their direction. He and Megan kiss tonguily. They pull apart, and Ralph puts a hand up to squeeze her breast.

He turns and leers at the cam-corder.

## INT. COMPUTER ROOM -- NIGHT

Dexter leers back. He is working at his consul, sucking a lollipop. His POV is a freeze-frame of the shot, on his monitor. Dexter hits some buttons, and Megan's face begins to morph, coming to resemble Hiroko's.

DEXTER

Dum de dah de dum . . .

Dexter hits another button, and the video runs forward on the computer screen. Megan/Hiroko removes the sweater over her head and Dexter smiles appreciatively. His hands dance over the keyboard.

## INT. STUDENT LOUNGE -- NIGHT

Light from the TV screen flickers and glows, in the darkened room, on the faces of Cody, Pete, and John. Cody is horrified. Pete looks grim, John serene.

The shadows on the screen appear to be Ralph and Hiroko in bed, although it's hard to see clearly. Cody looks away, very upset. Slowly, the MUSIC FADES OUT.

END OF MUSIC SEQUENCE

As the music fades, we can HEAR SEX SOUNDS from the screen. At last, disgusted, Pete snaps:

PETE

Turn it off.

JOHN

Sure you don't want to see more?

PETE

I said, that's enough!

JOHN

(Aims remote, clicks off set)

Now do you believe me?

PETE

I don't know what to believe.

JOHN

Seeing is believing. And you guys didn't trust me.

PETE

*Weird* things happen when you're around, John. Like, someone keyed the paint on my car the night of our big party. Who was that, huh?

JOHN

I don't know, Pete. There were a lot of people there. Right now, I'm trying to think of your friend Cody, here. He must be pretty upset about this. Huh, Cody?

Cody looks away, fights back tears. Pete points at the DVD player.

PETE

Why would Ralph let you have this?

JOHN

(shrugs)

For kicks. Or maybe he wanted me to show you. Maybe, like me, he doesn't want your friend here to have a big public engagement with the campus slut. He just didn't know how to say it, you being house-mates and all.

PETE

Hiroko's not a slut. We shouldn't even have looked at --

JOHN

It's not just Ralph, man. Face it, this girl's famous. She does townies. She does nerds. She pulls trains. You guys need to get out of that house more -- you're sheltered, you don't hear things. I mean, this girl does frat parties, she initiates --

CODY

(shouted)

Shut up!

John stares at him in silence for a moment. He puts up his hands in a gesture of mollification.

JOHN

Okay, man. I was just trying to help you out, show you I'm a better friend than you thought. But if you still want her -- go ahead and marry her.

EXT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

An upscale restaurant in town, called "Maxi's."

INT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

This is a reserved party, in an elegant dining room. There are lit candles on the table. Bottles of champagne chill in buckets of ice. Each person has a glass of champagne.

Cody and Hiroko sit at the head of the table, he in a tux, she in a white gown, with a string of pearls around her neck. She smiles at him adoringly. He smiles back tightly.

Pete sits near him. Also present are Beatrice, Megan, Amber and Ralph -- and John, and a few other kids from the kegger.

People murmur quietly. Bea and Ben are both nicely turned out -- he in the white shirt and a sports jacket, she in a lovely dress, wearing her new glasses. They steal shy, self-conscious glances at each other.

MEGAN

(loud, amused)

Hey, Bea! Those are *hot* new frames! You are dressed to kill! Isn't she, guys? Ben?

Bea grimaces and gives Megan the finger.

At last, Ben rises, and taps with a spoon on the glass of champagne for silence.

BEN

Before we drink, and before we chow down, I think we should have a few toasts to Hiroko and Cody, future Mister and Missus, the founders of our feast.

People applaud and shout "Yeah!" Cody rises.

CODY

I -- think I'd like to make the first toast myself, Ben.

BEN

(shrugs)

You're the boss. You got the floor.

He sits. Cody looks down at his glass, and clears his throat. He looks at the assembled people, full of purpose.

CODY

First of all, I'd like to thank all of you for coming here, tonight. It means a lot to me. In the few months I've been at college, I've met some really good people -- you're all here.

People smile, and Hiroko beams up at him.

CODY

This was meant to be one of the most important -- and one of the happiest nights of my life. It seems almost like I've always been looking forward to a night like this. So, I'm sorry if it doesn't turn out to be quite as happy as we all thought it would.

People are confused. Ben tries to lighten Cody up.

BEN

Don't worry, guy, we're having a swell time, this is very classy --

Pete cuts him off with a sharp, warning tone.

PETE

Ben.

CODY

I gave my heart, and my trust and my love away -- and an engagement ring. But hey -- it could have been worse, right? I could have taken that final step.

HIROKO

Cody, what's wrong?

CODY

(losing control)

What's *wrong*? Nothing. I've just been finding out *who* you are and *what* you've been up to -- that's all. And with who -- huh, Ralph? You having a good time at this little banquet?

Ralph will not meet his eye. Megan looks at him questioningly.

BEA

What the hell is this?

CODY

Like I said, it's nothing. I love to be publicly humiliated. I love to get engaged to a girl, and then find out she's been screwing half the guys on campus!

HIROKO

(near tears)

Cody, what are you saying?

CODY

(crying)

I was true to you. I was in love with you.

HIROKO

(crying also)

Did I ever seem any different?

CODY

(sobbing)

Seemed? No! You *seemed* perfect. To me, you seemed like a new flower, opening up to the world. You were the most graceful, beautiful, delicate girl I'd ever met. You seemed like an angel -- not a pro, you lying bitch!

BEA

(standing)

You little brat, what the fuck are you talking about?

PETE

It's true, Bea.

BEA

It's bullshit.

PETE

It's true. I saw the tape. I've been hearing stuff around.

At the mention of the tape, Megan looks alarmed.

CODY

(sniveling)

I don't know if I'll ever be able to -- trust -- a woman -- again. So, you've had your laugh --

He flings his glass full of champagne into Hiroko's face.

CODY

And you can take *that* from me, you fucking whore!

He bolts out of the restaurant. Pete stands up and follows him out. Ben looks around, perplexed. John sits back and smiles. Bea tries to clean up Hiroko. The party is in ruins.

## HIROKO'S ROOM -- DAY

Hiroko lies in bed, looking ill and pale. She holds the gray kitten close to her cheek. It nuzzles and licks her.

There is a KNOCK at the door, and then Beatrice softly enters. She carries plastic basketful of food, covered with a napkin. She tries to be cheerful and funny.

BEA

Hey, there! Basket of dubious cooking, fresh from the cafeteria.

HIROKO

(looking away)

I'm not really hungry.

BEA

(sits on bed)

Don't speak too soon. Monday is fried chicken day, remember? With negative fourteen herbs and spices.

HIROKO

You don't believe in that.

BEA

Well, yeah, maybe not for me. But the carnivores seemed to be enjoying it, so I brought some along for you.

HIROKO

Not right now.

Bea is disappointed, but tries to stay up-tempo. She leaves the basket of food on Hiroko's desk.

BEA

Okay. It'll sit here and -- decant for a little while.

She breaks off a little piece of chicken, and brings it back to the bed, to show the kitten.

BEA

And how about you, kitty? You ready to set an example?

The kitten sniffs the chicken, then eats it out of her fingers. Bea talks to it in a cute, silly voice.

BEA

Oh, yeah! Finger lickin' mediocre!

HIROKO

Bea -- I'm thinking I better go home.

BEA

(soothingly)

We can all use this winter break.



HIROKO

No, I mean -- not come back next term.

BEA

Hiroko chan, I'm gonna help you study. You'll get through your exams, you'll rest up --

HIROKO

(barely audible)

No! It's . . . what if they take away my kitten?

BEA

What?

HIROKO

(hysterical)

What if they take away my kitten? He's illegal, I'm not allowed to have him here! What if the guys tell the dean, and they come in here and take him away from me? He's my responsibility, I don't want to lose him!

Bea places her hands on Hiroko's arms, and gently pushes her back down.

BEA

That is never going to happen.

HIROKO

How? How can you know that?

BEA

Because. Because anybody who wants to come in here is gonna have to get through *me*. And I am pledged to guarding the personal well-being of that kitten. Anyone tries to touch so much as a *whisker*, I bust heads first, ask questions later. Okay? Hiroko chan?

Bea smiles, she gets Hiroko to smile weakly.

HIROKO

Okay.

BEA

(rising)

Well, I'm glad that's settled. You rest -- and give lunch some serious consideration.

She squeezes Hiroko's hand, and leaves.

## INT. HALLWAY -- AFTERNOON

Bea emerges from Hiroko's room. She catches sight of Ben, standing awkwardly in the common room, and heads out to him.

## INT. COMMON ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Bea enters.

BEN

I didn't buzz. Someone was coming in, so I -- let her let me in. How's Hiroko?

BEA

She's lousy.

She flops onto the couch, and does not look at him.

BEN

And how are you?

BEA

I'm lousy too.

Ben perches on the couch, not too near to her.

BEN

Is there any way to help?

BEA

If we had a friend left in the world, yeah.

BEN

Is it something a guy friend could do?

BEA

There's no such thing. And if there were, you ain't it.

BEN

(slowly, with great effort)

Bea. In this whole world, there is nothing that I care about -- the way that I love you.

(laughs nervously)

Pretty strange, huh?

BEA

About as strange -- as if I said -- I loved you, or -- whatever.

BEN

What?

BEA

I confess nothing, I deny nothing. Okay? I'm worried about the kid in there, right now, that's all.

BEN

(direct, sure)

You're in love with me, Bea.

BEA

What makes you so sure?

BEN

Because you are.

BEA

Oh. Okay. Then I guess I am.

Cautiously, he reaches out his hand, and takes hers. Both are moved, but they still do not make eye contact.

BEN

Now, tell me what I can do to help here. Anything.

BEA

Kill Cody.

BEN

Come on, Bea. Be serious.

Bea turns on him, angry, snatching her hand away.

BEA

Then don't waste my time making false offers and promises you can't keep! *Big*, protective male, until I actually *ask* you for something --

BEN

Take it easy --

BEA

Get out. We didn't invite you in here, so leave!

BEN

Not till we resolve this.

BEA

Yeah, you'd rather have it out with me than with that lying bastard!

BEN

You think he was lying?

BEA

What game is that? Invite us all to dinner, get all dressed up, and then say that shit and do that to her in front of everyone --

BEN

Beatrice --

Bea glances furtively at the hall and closes the door to the common room so Hiroko will not hear. She turns back to Ben.

BEA

Porn movies, huh? Because, if she's Asian, then she must be a delicate little lotus blossom, right, like he was saying, but of course she's *also* got to be a geisha girl, doesn't she? Have I got the fantasy right? God, I just want to *pound* that little piece of . . . Guys all over *campus*? How likely is that? I've grown up with her, you've known her a couple of months. But can *you* see it? Would *you* believe it?

BEN

Pete saw it too --

BEA

I'm not interested in what they say they *saw*. You know her. Do you believe it?

BEN

No.

BEA

And they'll get away with it. She can't go to classes now, without people whispering and yelling shit. They just do this to her and -- nothing happens.

BEN

What should happen?

BEA

If I were a guy . . . I'd beat the crap out of both of them. If *I* were on the wrestling team, they wouldn't be out there joking about it. They should be kicked out of school! *They* should be exposed to this kind of crap, not Hiroko!

BEN

Look, I'll talk to them --

BEA

I don't need *words* anymore, Ben. That's all men are good for now. A bunch of smooth talkers, and a naive kid like her comes along --

BEN

Then what?

BEA

Break with them. They deserve it.

BEN

They're my best friends.

BEA

Right. And since you haven't outgrown traveling in herds, and hanging out in a no-girls-allowed clubhouse, and all your wild frat-boy male bonding, why are you here bothering me?

They stare at each other for a long moment.

BEN

You think they deliberately set out to hurt her?

BEA

(almost crying)

I think they hurt her. And she can't fight back. So we have to.

BEN

(stands, straightens)

All right then. I'll see you later. Keep on taking care of your cousin -- tell her I hope she feels better.

He leaves. Bea stares after him.

EXT. GUYS' HOUSE -- DAY

Megan, looking troubled, approaches the house.

INT. GUYS' HOUSE -- DAY

Pete and Cody are at the kitchen table as Megan enters.

PETE

Hey, Megan. Don't you ever knock?

MEGAN

Fuck off.

CODY

Well, *that's* friendly.

MEGAN

I just want you to know I think what you guys did the other night was totally disgusting.

CODY

Well, we think your little dorm mate is totally disgusting.

MEGAN

You're wrong about her, Cody. You're way off base.

Pete

Listen. We saw --

MEGAN

Where's Ralph?

PETE

I don't know. Haven't seen him all day. In his room, I guess.

MEGAN

Well, I'll catch you jerks later.

She marches past them out of the kitchen. Cody yells:

CODY

Thanks for stopping by!

He and Pete get up, and head for the kitchen door.

EXT. RALPH'S ROOM -- DAY

Megan stands outside, and raps on the door.

MEGAN

Ralph? Ralph, let me in, we have to talk. I want to know what's going on.

INT. RALPH'S ROOM -- DAY

The room is dark, as Megan enters. There are rap posters, a bong, and toys and sports equipment strewn around.

MEGAN

Ralph?

She catches sight of him, sprawled out on the bed. He is unconscious; white foam is dribbling from his mouth.

MEGAN

Oh, shit!

She runs to him and shakes him.

MEGAN

Ralph, you stupid fuck!

## INT. HOSPITAL -- AFTERNOON

Megan sits at Ralph's bedside, while a nurse checks his pulse, and a tube feeds him oxygen. Megan is crying.

MEGAN

You stupid fuck. You stupid piece of shit.

## INT. BAR -- NIGHT

Men smoke, watch a ball game on TV and talk quietly in this townie joint. Cody sits at the bar, keeping to himself, upset, drinking vodka. He is not handling it well. John sits nearby, smoking, coolly watching him.

About to lose it -- either get sick or start to cry -- Cody staggers off in the direction of the bathroom.

John smiles, finishes his own drink, throws money down and follows him.

## INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

As John enters, we HEAR Cody in one a stall being sick. John's face shows distaste, but he waits silently, smoking.

We HEAR a mixture of gasping and weeping, and the paper roll spinning, as Cody cleans himself up. He comes out of the stall, sees John and nearly jumps.

JOHN

Feel better?

CODY

Lay off.

He runs some cold water at the sink and splashes it on his face, as John grinds out his cigarette.

JOHN

Just wondered if you needed any help.

CODY

Yeah, well, thanks, but I think you've done enough already.

JOHN

Hey, don't shoot the messenger. Where'd you get your fake ID?

CODY

(weary)

Ralph got it for me.

JOHN

Let's take a look.

Cody hands it to him, goes to the paper-towel dispenser, pushes down the lever and smacks the thing for being empty.

JOHN

This is a pretty good job. Ralph's okay. A little spaced, like his girl. But you can count on him to come through for a friend.

CODY

(sighs)

I guess.

JOHN

You know, Cody, *I* tried to be a friend to you, also. It pisses me off to see a good man pussy-whipped by the campus whore, that's all.

CODY

I'm not pussy-whipped. The engagement is off. You saw.

JOHN

Yeah, but *look* at you. You're a wreck over that piece of ass. An amateur porn star, and you --

CODY

(fighting down his tears)

I'm not a wreck. It's over. She means nothing to me.

John proffers to him a thick black magic-marker, and nods in the direction of the wall.

JOHN

So, prove it. Warn the next guy.

CODY

What?

JOHN

Let the world know that the slut is a slut.

CODY

I -- already called her enough names.

JOHN

Yeah, and already you're thinking about crawling back and apologizing. Right?

They lock eyes. John has hit a nerve. Cody, still unsteady and drunk, snatches the marker away. He begins to scrawl above the urinals: WATCH OUT FOR HIRO . . .

CODY

Well. Maybe I *will* warn the next guy.



John leans against the wall by the mirrors above the sinks, and smiles, watching him write. In an INSERT, we see John patting another marker in his back pocket.

JOHN

Be proud. Just consider it a public service announcement.

EXT. BRICK BUILDING -- AFTERNOON

Bea is walking across campus. She stops, as she sees graffiti scrawled large across a wall.

There is a crude, naked picture of Hiroko, and the words "HOT PUSSY -- HIROKO" and then a phone number.

Bea stares at it in fury for a moment.

There is a large campus bulletin board a few feet in front of the wall and to one side. It is wooden, two planks leaning together, and it is covered with posters for campus events: concerts, movies, and so on.

Bea circles around it and violently pushes it in the direction of the wall. It is heavy, not made to be moved. She pushes harder, MUSIC underscoring her anger.

Slowly the thing scrapes along the ground and comes to stand in front of the wall. She pushes, pulls, stops to check from the front, and sees that part of the graffiti is still exposed.

She jerks the bulletin board a few more inches forward to hide the numbers, and stands panting in front of it, still furious.

INT. GYMNASIUM -- AFTERNOON

Pete and Cody are down on the mats doing push-ups, with a few other guys. Ben comes in, in sweatpants and a T-shirt -- but not in the mood for wrestling practice. Pete sees him and calls out to him.

PETE

You're late for practice, Hartley. But it's good to see you. We need some cheering up.

Pete and Cody stand, panting. Ben approaches, unfriendly.

BEN

Do you.

CODY

Yeah, we've been feeling pretty grim. Got any jokes for us?

BEN

(shaking his head)  
No jokes today. Just a riddle.

PETE

(grins)  
Okay, let's have it.

BEN

Why would two scumbags publicly humiliate a shy, sweet girl who hasn't done anything?

Pete and Cody lose their smiles.

PETE

Seriously, man. Don't bait us about that. It wasn't fun for Cody, or for me.

Ben continues to advance on them. He gets too close.

BEN

I feel so sorry for both of you.  
(to Cody)  
Especially you.

PETE

It *was* hard on Cody. We know what we saw. Anyhow, I've been hearing stuff. Apparently everyone on campus knew about Hiroko but us.

BEN

Oh, really? That's downright uncanny.

PETE

Ben, people are telling me stories. I'm seeing graffiti in the locker room --

BEN

(angry)  
Maybe what you did to her started those rumors! Maybe you wrote that garbage on the walls yourself.

Pete and Cody are confused, and anxious to restore good feeling between them.

PETE

Ben, come on now. Don't do this.  
(a beat, then an attempt at humor)  
See, your problem is, you're blinded by passion. Which reminds me -- it's weird how Beatrice has been looking pretty good all of a sudden. And you're looking pretty handsome yourself.

CODY

Yeah, that's a pretty sharp haircut --

Ben pushes Cody backward, so he lands on the mat.

BEN

I'm not *interested* in your little games anymore! The subject at hand is two assholes, and the girl they ambushed. Why don't you face up to what you've done?

Cody gets up, angry, and marches back to confront him.

CODY

You better watch what *you're* doing, right now.

BEN

I know just what I'm doing, you arrogant little shit. And if you want to have it out here and now, I'm ready for you.

Cody and Ben grapple. They punch each other. Cody tries to trip Ben. Ben pins him on the mat. Pete breaks them apart.

PETE

Stop it, both of you. I'm not gonna have this, here. We're supposed to be a team.

BEN

Yeah, well, I'm off the team and out of the house.

PETE

What are you saying?

BEN

That I don't want anything more to do with either of you. I'm moving off campus.

(points at them, shouts)

And before the break, I'm going to the dean about this. I don't think people like you should get a free ride. It's like what John did to Liza at the party last year. It's not okay.

PETE

This is totally different.

BEN

Is it? After you two left the house, Megan took Ralph to the hospital.

PETE

Why, what's wrong?

BEN

He OD'd on coke. And Megan's not being very coherent, but she thinks it has something to do with John, and something to do with sex, lies and videotape. Some kind of digital tricks. Okay? But you stand by your story. It's maybe gonna force Hiroko to drop out of school, but fine. The bitch had it coming, right?

PETE

Ben --

BEN

I'll see you guys in Dean Rayburn's office. Enjoy your practice.

He storms out. Cody and Pete exchange worried glances.

INT. WOMEN'S DORM -- DAY

In the stairwell, Bea coaxes Hiroko toward the EXIT.

BEA

You'll be glad once you get there, kid, I'm telling you. It's your favorite class, right? You don't want to hurt the professor's feelings by missing it again.

HIROKO

Maybe on Thursday, right now --

BEA

Hiroko, you can't let 'em do this to you. You fall off a horse, you get right back on and ride. Where's that old I-don't-give-a-fuck spirit?

HIROKO

(smiling weakly)

I don't know, Bea. Where is it?

BEA

You're brimming full of it. You just don't know it yet. Come on.

EXT. WOMEN'S DORM -- DAY

Bea leads a hesitant Hiroko, who looks thin and unwell, out the door, quietly feeding her words of encouragement.

BEA

See? This is how we greet the day. Pretty campus, nippy fresh air --

A bunch of guys, including Willie and Sanjay, are talking to a group of girls, including Amber, at the end of the walk. The guys catch sight of Hiroko, and begin to whistle and yowl and catcall. The girls laugh.

WILLIE

Oh, Mama, hold me tight!

SANJAY

There she is! The movie star!

The laughter and jeering continue. Hiroko blanches, mortified. Bea tries to steady her, but she turns and runs back inside. Bea turns on the guys, and charges them, twirling her bookbag above her head like a weapon.

BEA

Scram! Scat! Shoo! Get out of here!

WILLIE AND SANJAY

Oops! Watch out! She's mad!

AMBER

Run for it!

They scatter, laughing, feigning fear as Bea advances. She stands at the end of the walk and scream after them:

BEA

Cowardly fucking scum!

#### INT. FRESHMAN ENGLISH -- AFTERNOON

A group of freshmen students sit around a seminar table. The professor, an older man, is pacing in front of a blackboard.

PROFESSOR

So, it may be worth bearing in mind, then, with Dickens, that he was being paid by the word, and he was writing chapters in monthly installments for magazines . . .

As he speaks, Beatrice enters with a notebook open, and sits at the seminar table. The other students, younger than she, glance at her oddly. The professor sees her and studies her.

PROFESSOR

Excuse me. You're not in this class.

BEA

But I hear it's really good.

PROFESSOR

This is a freshman seminar. I'm afraid you'll have to leave.

BEA

My cousin Hiroko's absent.

PROFESSOR

Yes, I know. Again.

BEA

Well, so, like, I'm her understudy. I've been sent by the central government to take her place. Carry on, please, really, don't mind me at all.

She throws him a big encouraging smile. The professor narrows sighs, annoyed, and at last turns back to the board.

PROFESSOR

There are other things about *Nicholas Nickleby* to keep in mind . . .

EXT. STUDENT BOOKSTORE -- AFTERNOON

Bea has selected a few serious books for herself. She stands at a rack of Harlequins near the cash register, trying to decide which to buy. Ben enters and sees her.

BEN

You reading romance novels, Bea?

BEA

I can't keep track of the titles, which ones she's read. *She* doesn't find them interchangeable.

BEN

Hiroko?

BEA

I know it's what she likes. But still. It feels like giving sugar cookies to a diabetic. It's the worst thing I could do, it started all her problems . . .

BEA

(takes one, gets on line to pay)  
Let's try this.

BEN

You'll be proud of me, Bea. I cursed out Cody.

BEA

Mmm. I saw something like that on "a very special episode" of WWF.

BEN

What?

BEA

I told you what I think of men who are all bluster and swagger, and no action.

BEN

That's really how you see me?

BEA

Words are wind, it's all just verbal flatulence. It's like sending Rush Limbaugh in to do Rambo's job.

BEN

Well, I don't know if I'm *Rambo* -- but I told Cody and Pete I'm leaving the house, quitting the wrestling team, going to the dean.

BEA

Really?

BEN

Really. You gonna take back the Rush Limbaugh crack?

BEA

If you actually follow through. I just might.

BEN

So, tell me, at least. What was it about me that was so attractive, you finally couldn't resist?

BEA

Your cockiness. You're so cute when you think you're being tough! And what made you realize you were stuck on me?

BEN

I am stuck on you -- impaled is more like it, actually.

BEA

Mmm. Like an iron maiden. Want a hug?

BEN

I think it was your gentle, feminine softness that won me over. How's the kid?

Bea turns more serious, looks away.

BEA

Talking about going home, giving up, dropping out.

BEN

I thought you were going to her classes for her.

BEA

And taking notes for her, yes, and it's not going to work. She can't take her finals if she's afraid to leave the frigging dorm --

Megan enters. For a moment, she simply looks at them, and they look at her. Then she heads over.

MEGAN

Okay. Look. Ralph finally told me what happened. And, like, don't get all judgemental on me, okay? I swear I didn't know . . .

She's crying. Bea puts a hand on her shoulder.

MEGAN

It was John's idea . . .

EXT. SCIENCE BUILDING -- NIGHT

Ralph, Pete and Cody approach the building, carrying flashlights. Pete punches in the door lock code. They enter.

INT. SCIENCE BUILDING -- NIGHT

They enter the large room from the hall, carrying flashlights. TENSE MUSIC underscores the fact that they are not supposed to be here at this time. The guys move down the silent rows of computer terminals, raking them with their flashlight beams. At last, Ralph stops in front of Dexter's cubicle, points his flashlight on it, and whispers tersely:

RALPH

Pete!

Pete and Cody come over to join him. They shine their beams on the terminal in question, and Ralph nods. Pete picks up several DVDs in slim-line cases and small digital tapes lying by the computer. He turns them over, to look at their titles.

PETE

Bingo.

EXT. STREET IN TOWN -- AFTERNOON

Dexter walks along, unhappy, sucking a lollipop, glancing nervously at other pedestrians.

INT. BAR -- AFTERNOON

It's the townie bar again -- and as Dexter wanders in, he looks very out of place. People drinking at the bar look at him curiously. The jukebox PLAYS something METAL.

Nervous and miserable, he asks the bartender something; the bartender points to the back of the room.

INT. POOL ROOM -- AFTERNOON

John is shooting pool with some townie friends, one with a bandana, and one with long hair. He is lining up a shot, when he sees Dexter in the doorway, and nods to him. We can FAINTLY HEAR the MUSIC from the other room.

JOHN

Hey there, Dexter, what's up? Didn't know you hung out here.



The townies chuckle. John goes ahead with his shot.

DEXTER

John, listen, we have to talk. Things have gotten way out of control.

JOHN

Just a second.

He lines up his cue, and shoots again. Dexter is leaning on the pool table, hovering, pissing him off.

DEXTER

No, *now*, John, seriously, we really really gotta talk right --

JOHN

Okay, okay! But not here.

He hands his pool cue to a friend, opens the men's room door, and sarcastically gestures for Dexter to enter first.

INT. BATHROOM -- AFTERNOON

It's empty. Cody's graffiti about Hiroko remains. Far cruder remarks about her have been added in other colors. Dexter and John enter; John shuts the door behind them.

JOHN

So, what's the problem? It better be good -- I don't like being seen with people like you out in public.

DEXTER

(panicky)

Listen, John, they're getting us in trouble, they're going to get us expelled --

JOHN

Who is?

DEXTER

Pete, Cody! They know. They're going to the dean!

JOHN

Relax. Anything they say will get them in as much trouble as us.

DEXTER

They know that. They're going anyway, and your friend Ralph --

JOHN

Ralph's going?

DEXTER

Yes! We're in deep, deep doo-doo, here. I don't want anything more to do with this.

John is worried now. He paces to the sink, and slicks back his hair with water.

JOHN

You took my money, you're involved. Deal with it.

DEXTER

This was not my idea --

JOHN

You're the brains of the operation, Dexter. I'm just a practical joker sidekick. Besides, relax. They still can't prove anything. I've got the DVD, and without that, their story'll be pretty hard to believe.

DEXTER

(hysterical)

They've *got* the DVD!

John turns on him now, quiet, angry and menacing.

JOHN

I gave you real explicit instructions about that Dexter. *One* copy, I said. And then erase the original tape.

He grabs Dexter by the shirt collar, and slams him up against a bathroom cubicle.

JOHN

One copy! Are you telling me you didn't do that?

He pulls the lollipop out of Dexter's mouth, and crushes it under his foot.

JOHN

Answer me!

Dexter shakes his head, miserable, crying.

DEXTER

I kept the tape. And one morphed copy for myself.

JOHN

Why?

John is shouting, again holding him by the shirt collar; he seems on the verge of wringing his neck.

DEXTER

(petulant)

I did a lot of work on it. I wanted it.

JOHN  
You pathetic loser!

He releases Dexter, whose head slams backward, and steps away.

JOHN  
If you wanted a porn movie, I would have fucking  
*bought* you a porn movie!

DEXTER  
(looks down, mumbles)  
I liked that one.

JOHN  
(closes eyes)  
Which version did they get?

DEXTER  
They went to my science cubicle and stole both of them.  
Before and after.  
(beat. scared)  
John? What are we gonna do?

John stares at him in disgust.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

Cars whip along, under an overpass. John emerges, out of the overpass, and walks on the shoulder of the road, thumb out. He has a duffel bag slung across his back. A car slows, stops. A burly driver looks out at him.

DRIVER  
You one of those college kids?

JOHN  
Naah. Nothin' like that. Where you headed, Mister?

DRIVER  
Somerset. Little town, 'bout seventy miles west of here.

JOHN  
Sounds good to me.

He gets in and closes the door. The car speeds away.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE -- LATE AFTERNOON

Ben sits across from Dean Rayburn, who sits at his desk.

BEN  
Do you know if they're coming, sir?

RAYBURN

I know that my secretary put notes in their mailboxes, telling them to come. And that's about all I know.

His intercom BUZZES. He presses it.

RAYBURN

Yes?

SECRETARY (OS)

Three boys to see you, Dean Rayburn.

BEN

Just three?

RAYBURN

Send them in.

The door opens. Cody, Ralph and Pete troop in. Pete seems to be herding the other two along. He gives Ralph a poke. Ralph glances at him, then at Ben, then places the two video cassettes on the dean's desk.

RAYBURN

Please be seated, gentlemen.

The three guys take seats in front of the desk.

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING -- LATE AFTERNOON

We see them through the large window, sitting and talking to Rayburn. Snow drifts down past the window.

EXT. CAMPUS ROAD -- DAY

A car holds two grim-looking, nerdish parents in the front seat, staring ahead. In the back seat, Dexter sits beside some of his luggage, clutching his lap-top, blubbing freely. The car rolls away from the college.

MUSIC COMES UP, and PLAYS OVER the FOLLOWING SEQUENCE. It should be something sad, something full of regret: (A new soul recording of "Careless Whisper"?)

EXT. BRICK WALL -- DAY

Pete, Cody and Ralph scrub the graffiti off the wall that Bea hid earlier. A few snowflakes fall.

## EXT. CAFETERIA -- DAY

Pete, with a watery can of paste and a roller, is posting a sign on a lamp post. The sign says in large letters: PUBLIC APOLOGY. The small print refers to what happened with Hiroko. Snow falls, piling up around his feet.

## EXT. POST OFFICE -- DAY

Ralph pastes up an identical sign on the wall of the building. Snow falls. Several students leave the post office and wander over, curious, to take a look at what Ralph is doing. He glances at them sheepishly.

## EXT. WOMEN'S DORM -- DAY

Cody cries, wipes his eyes on his sleeve as he pastes one of the signs outside the dorm, and glances up at Hiroko's room. Snow is accumulating in heavy drifts, all around.

## INT. HIROKO'S ROOM -- DAY

Hiroko, in her nightgown, glances out the window for awhile, and then draws the shade. She gets back into bed, and cradles her kitten.

## INT. CAFETERIA -- NIGHT

The room is empty, the benches up on the long tables. Cody, Ralph and Pete are handed mops by a JANITOR, and get to work.

## INT. STUDENT LOUNGE -- NIGHT

Several students are looking at a campus social media site on a laptop. Suddenly, the apology to Hiroko, signed by the guys, fills the laptop screen.

## INT. BEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Ben packs his things, clearing off his dresser. He comes across a picture of him with the other guys on the team. He looks at it for a moment, then packs it away.

## INT. WOMEN'S COMMON ROOM -- NIGHT

Bea and Hiroko sit on the couch, with notebooks and textbooks all around them and strewn on the coffee table in front of the couch. Hiroko glances up from the math book open before her. Her gaze wanders, and a tear falls down her face.

Bea looks up, notices, hands her a Kleenex, and taps on the text in front of Hiroko. Hiroko nods and looks down.

## INT. EXAM ROOM -- DAY

Hiroko sits at one small desk among many, leaning over a page full of math problems, as other students work and proctors walk down the aisles, looking for cheaters.

One proctor sees her furtively glance into a locket she has around her neck. He marches over, and puts out his hand, demanding to inspect the locket. Hiroko reluctantly takes it off and hands it over.

The proctor turns it over in his hands, and opens it. Inside is a picture of Hiroko's kitten. He stares at her for a moment, makes a face, and hands back the locket. Hiroko bends over her problems again.

## EXT. THE STUDENT LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

Through the large window, we can see the students milling around inside at a Christmas party. THE MUSIC SEQUENCE ENDS, and gives way to CONVERSATION and ROCK MUSIC at the party.

## INT. STUDENT LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

A large banner reads: PRE-CHRISTMAS BASH. The room is decorated with red and green streamers, and there is a decorated tree in the corner.

Sanjay and Willie sit near the door, both dressed as Santas. Megan walks in, in a pretty, Christmasey outfit, and Willie calls out to her:

WILLIE

Ho ho ho! Come sit on my lap, little girl, and tell me what you want for Christmas!

SANJAY

Have you been naughty or nice this year?

MEGAN

Fuck off, creep.

WILLIE AND SANJAY

Ho ho ho.

Ben stands near the refreshment table by the window. His Little Brother, Ivory, is sampling the cookies and punch.

BEN

So, Ivory, what do you think of college life, huh?

IVORY

This is it? You promised me a spread.

BEN

This isn't enough? You got cookies, you got punch --

IVORY

You said the punch would be spiked.

BEN

I said maybe.

IVORY

Lame, lame, lame.

Pete and Cody wander over, awkward. They stand and look at Ben. He stands and looks at them.

PETE

(too hearty)

Hey, Ben. Haven't seen you around much.

BEN

I took a room in town.

PETE

Ah. No wonder your room looks so neat now.

He chuckles nervously. Ben looks at them . . . at last he relents. He taps Ivory.

BEN

Ivory -- this is Cody and Pete, two guys from my old house.

Ivory waves vaguely, doesn't really look at them, continues to load his paper plate.

IVORY

Hi, how you doing.

BEN

So. How much more civic stuff you guys have to do on campus?

CODY

A shitload of stuff next term. Kitchen patrol for a month -- and a term of working at the women's crisis center -- to "sensitize" us.

BEN

Doesn't sound like a bad idea. Although I have trouble imagining Ralph working the women's crisis hot-line phone.

PETE

He's talking about not coming back. Again. But I think he'll be here. And you're right. Maybe some sensitivity awareness bull training and reeducation will do us good.

BEN

Here's hoping.

He toasts them with his cup of punch, and drinks it.

PETE

So. I guess we can't talk you into moving back into the house next term?

BEN

No, man. It's just . . . we actually feel we want to have a place of our own, now, off campus.

CODY

(grinning)

We?

Pete nods toward the door, and nudges Cody. Bea enters the room. Conversation lulls. People turn and look at her. Willie begins to bait her.

WILLIE

Another good little girl. Ho ho --

Bea leans down, grabs him by the beard, and snarls at him, eyeball to eyeball:

BEA

What was that, Santa?

WILLIE

(scared)

Never mind.

BEA

Good.

She straightens. She goes into the hall, and returns leading Hiroko by the hand. People in the room applaud her. Very shy and self-conscious, Hiroko looks down. Amber runs up to her and squeezes her hand.

AMBER

Hiroko, I just want you to know, I think you're really brave to come here. It's so great to see you. And I never believed any of the things people were saying.

Hiroko smiles and responds graciously, cautiously.

HIROKO

Thank you, Amber.

AMBER

I'm so proud of you, really --

Bea leads Hiroko away from the gushing Amber.



BEA  
 Come on, kiddo. Let's go check out the punch situation.  
 (whispering)  
 With good friends like that, who needs anthrax, right?

They head to the refreshment table, where the guys are gathered. Bea smiles at Ben.

BEA  
 Hey, Rambo.

BEN  
 Hey yourself, St. Joan.

Ivory looks up at the two of them, and asks Ben:

IVORY  
 Is this her? This is the girl?

BEN  
 This is the girl.

Ivory puts out his hand, and Beatrice shakes.

IVORY  
 I'm Ivory, Ben's Little Brother.

BEA  
 I figured.

IVORY  
 I get to hear a lot about you. Took him a long time to even figure out he was after you.

BEA  
 He's slow that way. You gotta break things down for him.

IVORY  
 I know what you mean. I try.

Bea is noticing that Cody and Hiroko are holding hands, and interacting like a couple. This is distracting her increasingly as she and Ivory talk.

IVORY  
 Good thing I got somebody else to help me with him now.

BEA  
 He's a handful, isn't he? It's nice of you to take him under your wing. He needs companionship. Excuse me a minute.

She grabs hold of Hiroko's arm.

BEA  
Hiroko, we gotta talk.

She drags Hiroko off to the corner of the room.

IVORY  
(to Ben)  
Acceptable man. I must admit, I'm impressed.

BEN  
You thought I couldn't get a girl with looks and a brain?

IVORY  
I thought you couldn't get a girl with two legs who could talk.

CLOSE ON:

Bea, angry and bewildered, questioning Hiroko.

BEA  
So, what the hell is going on?

HIROKO  
Nothing's going on.

BEA  
Why are you holding hands with that creep? You want to catch something?

HIROKO  
Bea, look, I don't want to get into this right now.

BEA  
Hiroko --

HIROKO  
It's none of your business!

BEA  
Hiroko, I had to sit through math lectures, and French class, and boring Freshman English seminars -- I think that makes it my business.

HIROKO  
I'm grateful you helped me. But I've gotten through the first term of college now -- and Cody and I are getting back together.

BEA  
*What?*

HIROKO  
He's sorry about what happened --

BEA

He's sorry he's on probation and KP duty --

HIROKO

No, he's really sorry.

BEA

(bitter)

Oh, and are you his little flower blossom baby doll again? Until the next time he stabs you in the back, or lets you down?

HIROKO

Bea, don't.

BEA

Megan doesn't even *talk* to Ralph.

HIROKO

Well, what Ralph did was worse.

BEA

Cody runs him a close second.

HIROKO

I believe in him.

BEA

Like he believed in you, when you needed it?

HIROKO

I can help him with the things about him that aren't so good, I can fix it so that --

BEA

You can fix him? Do you hear yourself? Hiroko, do you know what happens when women try to fix men?

HIROKO

People change! You've changed. I love him, Bea. I gave him back his ring. We're taking it slower. But, I thought you'd understand now. About love.

Bea realizes she cannot bully Hiroko out of her feelings. She's not happy, but she will not cause a scene. She claps Hiroko on the shoulder; they wander back toward the others.

BEA

Yeah, that's it for you, young lady. No more romance novels. Only Wittgenstein, Beckett and Poe from now on. I'm seeing to it.

HIROKO

(to others)

Bea worked so hard to help me pass my exams, she hardly studied for hers.

BEA

I crammed. I work best when I'm terrified -- it gets my adrenaline pumping.

PETE

So, I hear you kids are living off campus next term, Bea.

BEA

Yeah, we're doing the apartment thing. We're closet townies.

PETE

Seems more like you're closet romantics. I told you, Ben, we'd see you in love before the year was out.

Ben has his arm around Bea now. All are smiling.

BEN

You said you'd see me pale and sick and miserable with love. I guess that's about the size of it.

BEA

You mean you aren't always this sickly and clammy, sweetheart?

BEN

It's all because of you. You play havoc with my ph balance. You make me break out in hives.

BEA

Mmm. And you light me up like a fork in a toaster.

CODY

I never thought we'd see the day that Ben shacked up with a girl.

BEN

It's the only way. You look sad there, Pete. Get a girlfriend, get a life. Too much male bonding, and you wind up like those guys, huh?

He points out into the dancing area, where Willie and Sanjay, still dressed as Santa, are bumping and grinding. Others join them, including Hiroko and Cody. The song is "I Heard a Rumour" by Bananarama.

It's a happy room full of students dancing, Ivory munching and watching them, Pete sipping punch . . . and Bea and Ben, who have wandered over to stand beneath the mistletoe.

BEA  
Just answer me one question, genius --

BEN  
Uh uh.

He kisses her. She kisses him back. She puts up a finger and continues, breathless --

BEA  
As I was saying --

He kisses her again. She kisses back.

FADE OUT.

END OF FILM