Nice Guys Finish Last

Madeline Lacy
*University of Colorado Boulder*, mala6661@colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

Part of the Fiction Commons, and the Screenwriting Commons

**Recommended Citation**

https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/2041

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Honors Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
Nice Guys Finish Last

By

Madeline Lacy

Theatre Department
November 1, 2019
Committee Members:
Kevin Rich (Advisor)
Ted Stark
Rick Stevens

mala6661@colorado.edu
507-261-6263
3529 W 49th Ave
Denver, CO 80221
EXT. LEWIS' HOUSE - NIGHT

We open on a cold spring evening, the snow not quite melted, on a suburban street in a nondescript Midwestern town. There is a white house with a picket fence and red door. Tranquil silence. Suddenly, a 1997 Dodge minivan speeds up in front of the house and screeches to a stop. CAR HORN BLARES. Out steps Jonah, 17.

JONAH
GET IN, LOSER!

Jonah taps on the horn three more times, upsetting Simon, also 17, scrawny, who is sitting in the passenger seat.

SIMON
Jonah, the neighbors!

JONAH
I don't give a fuck about the neighbors.
(Shouting again)
LEWIS! COME ON! Clock is ticking!

Lewis, 18, exits the house, pulling on his jacket as he closes the door behind him. He is tallest and most conventionally attractive of the three - though still far from "leading man" material.

LEWIS
Jesus, I'm coming.

JONAH
Hurry up, we've got places to be. Simon, get in the back.

SIMON
Aw, come on, why can't Lewis sit in the back?

LEWIS

INT. CAR

Simon climbs into the backseat as Jonah and Lewis enter the vehicle. Simon mutters under his breath:
SIMON
Why do I always have to sit in the back?

JONAH
All right, boys! Who is ready to party?! We're going to live. It. Up. Tonight! Who's with me?

LEWIS
YEAH!

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - BOX OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

LEWIS
(Sliding money across the counter)
Three tickets to Captain Marvel, please.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - AUDITORIUM

The OTHER NERDS - SADIE, THERESA, and NATALIA, all teenagers - sit together eating popcorn.

SADIE
Yeah, I don't know. I mean... I want to like it. I just thought Wonder Woman pandered, you know?

THERESA
Yeah, but Brie Larson. We loved her in Room.

SADIE
I know, but-

NATALIA
Shh. Guys.

Natalia widens her eyes and points as Lewis, Jonah, and Simon file into the row in front of them. The girls exchange annoyed looks, get up, and move several rows back. The boys, oblivious, sit down and continue their conversation.

JONAH
I'm telling you, dude. Leia is hotter.

LEWIS
Than Wonder Woman? No way.
JONAH
Yes, way. She de facto wins because Star Wars is a better movie.

LEWIS
No, those aren't the rules. We're talking strictly appearance here. Gal Gadot versus Carrie Fisher. Are you honestly trying to tell me you'd pick Carrie?

JONAH
In her prime? Hell yeah.

Lights dim.

SIMON
What about Natalie Portman? As Padme.

LEWIS
Shut up, Simon. Prequels sucked.

SIMON
I thought you said quality of the movie didn't matter-

MOVIE PATRON turns around.

MOVIE PATRON
Hey, can you keep it down? The movie is about to start.

JONAH
It's just the trailers, dipshit.

(Turning back to Simon)
In this instance, quality of the movie does matter because Padme sucks. And she ruined the franchise.

SIMON
Jar-Jar?

INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY

Movie patrons exit the theater, among them Jonah, Lewis, and Simon. The owner, MR. MCCOY, 50s, sweeps popcorn.

JONAH
Feminazi bullshit, if you ask me.
LEWIS
What? No, it wasn't.

JONAH
Was too. Carol? Total Mary-Sue.

LEWIS
Yeah, but an attractive Mary-Sue.

JONAH
She wasn't that attractive.

LEWIS
Really? Okay. Well, then I guess you won't be jealous at all when I tell you that I'll be seeing her panel this July. At San Diego Comic-Con.

JONAH
You... You're going to San Diego Comic-Con?

LEWIS
Yep.

SIMON
HOW?

LEWIS
My uncle in California is going for work, and he got me an extra ticket.

JONAH
Take me.

LEWIS
Sorry. Just the one ticket. But you wouldn't like it anyway. I mean. Captain Marvel's such a Mary-Sue.

JONAH
Do you know who else will be there? Taika Waititi is going to be there. Mark. Hamill. Is going to be there.

Mr. McCoy, taking notice of the boys, interjects.

MR. MCCOY
Boys! How are we doing tonight?
JONAH
Oh, Mr. McCoy, hi! We're doing great!

LEWIS AND SIMON
Yeah, great.

MR. MCCOY
What did we see tonight?

SIMON
Captain Marvel, sir.

MR. MCCOY
Oh, yeah, I heard that was a good one. Thoughts?

JONAH
(About to start in)
Well, in my opinion-

LEWIS
It was great, sir. We loved it. Thanks for asking.

MR. MCCOY
You know what's funny? I see you boys in here going on about movies in my lobby, oh... probably every Friday night.

SIMON
We like movies.

MR. MCCOY
You know what I liked when I was your age? Girls.

The boys tense up.

MR. MCCOY
I mean, don't kids go on dates anymore, or was that just back in my day?

JONAH
W-we go on dates. Lots of dates.

MR. MCCOY
You ever bring them here?
SIMON
Girls... don't like movies?

MR. MCCOY
So no dates?

LEWIS
Not... really.

MR. MCCOY
Ah. Don't worry about it. I'm just giving you kids a hard time. Always was hard for the nice guys to get the girls. Especially at your age. It'll get easier in college. Night, boys.

JONAH, LEWIS, AND SIMON
(In unison)
Good night, Mr. McCoy.

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - SAME NIGHT
Jonah, Lewis, and Simon sit in a booth at the Waffle House. In the surrounding booths sit several couples on dates. The boys take no notice. Lewis and Simon are conversing, and Jonah stares blankly at his untouched plate of waffles.

SIMON
Do you know what panels you're going to?

LEWIS
You know, I'm not sure yet. I just found out about the tickets last night, so I haven't really had a chance to look into it yet.

SIMON
There's hundreds. It's insane. Way bigger than the one we have here.

LEWIS
I know. I'm so pumped.

SIMON
Are you going to cosplay?

LEWIS
No.

CAR HORN BEEPS outside.
EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE - PARKING LOT

Middle-aged woman, SIMON'S MOM, motions from the car for Simon to come outside, then points at her watch.

BACK TO SCENE

SIMON

LEWIS
See you Monday.

Jonah exits.

LEWIS
So what do you want to do next weekend? D&D?

Jonah, perturbed, is not listening.

LEWIS
Uh, hello? Jonah?

JONAH
Sorry, what?

LEWIS
Next weekend? Plans?

JONAH
Do you think McCoy was right?

LEWIS
What?

JONAH
Do you think McCoy was right about us?

LEWIS
About dating? I mean. We don't go on dates. So yeah. I guess.

JONAH
Do you think we should? I mean look around. It's like everyone here is on a date except for us.

Both boys look around and find themselves surrounded by booths occupied by couples. A young married couple with a baby. An old married couple, mid-80s and still visibly in
love. A jock, BLAKE SHELLINGER, and his cheerleader girlfriend, CAROLINE STEWART.

LEWIS
I don't know, man. I'm just focused on school right now. I mean... isn't that what college is for?

JONAH
Right. So you just want to roll into Northwestern next year a virgin?

LEWIS
Well, no, I don't want to. But. I mean there's not exactly a line of girls knocking on my door.

JONAH
Maybe we just have to be more proactive.

LEWIS
Proactive?

JONAH
Yeah, you know. Make it happen. Stop waiting around.

LEWIS
Good luck with that.

JONAH
What do you mean "Good luck with that"?

LEWIS
You heard what Mr. McCoy said. Girls don't want to go out with guys like us. They want to go out with guys like. Like him.

Lewis motions over to Blake and Caroline. The two share a single milkshake, and Blake smiles adoringly across the table while Caroline laughs. They are, by all accounts, a beautiful, happy couple.

JONAH
Dickwipe.

LEWIS nods in agreement.
LEWIS
Listen, I should get going too. Curfew.

JONAH
Just think about it.

LEWIS
Think about what?

JONAH
Being. Proactive.

LEWIS
You're. Crazy. See you Monday.

Lewis puts on his coat and heads for the door. Jonah, turning around in the booth, yells after him:

JONAH
Think about it!

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - SAME NIGHT

Lewis walks home on a dimly lit street, alone and lost in thought, when he comes upon BEAUTIFUL GIRL, around 16, clearly distressed and trying to change a flat tire. She does not see him. She wears a black dress, ripped tights, and combat boots. Her eyeliner is dark and a touch too thick. Not a girl to be messed with. He pauses, unsure of what to do, then remembers.

LEWIS
(whispers to himself)
Proactive.

(approaches the distressed girl)
Hi.

Girl screams and turns around, brandishing her lug wrench, prepared to strike if need be.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
AH!

LEWIS
AHHHH! SORRY! SORRY! I just thought you looked like you might need some help.
BEAUTIFUL GIRL
(catching her breath)
What?

LEWIS
Your tire. Your flat tire.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
(Relieved)
Oh. Sorry. You just startled me.

LEWIS
Uh, likewise.

Lewis points at the lug wrench, which she is still holding over her head. She notices her stance, then lowers it.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Sorry. Um. Thank you for the offer. I, um, I think I'm good, though.

LEWIS
Are you sure? I mean. I don't mind helping.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
(looks him over)
You know how to change a tire?

LEWIS
(defensively)
Yes... Do you know how to change a tire?

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
I'm figuring it out.

LEWIS
You know it's not always safe around here at night.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Not safe? For a woman to be out alone at night? Gee thanks, I wish someone had told me sooner.

LEWIS
Let me help you.

The girl rolls her eyes and hands Lewis the lug wrench. Lewis takes it and approaches the flat. He fumbles with the wrench
a little. The lug-nuts screw off to the left. No, right. Left? He drops the wrench, and it CLANGS loudly against the pavement. He picks it up, embarrassed. The girl crouches down next to him.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
You've never done this before.

LEWIS
I've... seen it done.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Oh my god. Typical.

LEWIS
What?

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
You coming in here acting like I need your help when you've never even done this!

LEWIS
I don't know! You looked like... you were in distress.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Uh huh. Well, I appreciate your offer to help, but if anything, you're slowing me down. So I'll take that back.

LEWIS
I still don't want to leave you here alone at night.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
You're right. What if I get approached by a strange man? Under the pretense of helping me out?

LEWIS
(joking)
Well, we can't have that. Because you might get attacked.

A look of disgust spreads across her face.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Wow, you know, in that situation my best move would probably be to call
the cops.

LEWIS
I was just joking!

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
And now you're leaving.

Lewis stands for a moment, trying to think of a retort, but nothing comes.

LEWIS
(Pathetically)
Fine. Whatever. I just just trying to help.

Lewis pulls up his hood and walks off. She returns to her flat.

INT. LEWIS' HOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Lewis' mother, MRS. ROTH, 50s, and his little sister, JENNY, sit on the couch in the living room watching television. LEWIS enters through the front door and makes his way for the basement door, but he is intercepted by his mother.

MRS. ROTH
Hey, you!

LEWIS
(turning around)
Hey, Mom.

MRS. ROTH
How was the movie?

LEWIS
It was good.

MRS. ROTH
And how are Jonah and Simon?

LEWIS
They're good too.

MRS. ROTH
So you had a fun night?

LEWIS
Uh... Yeah. It was great.
(Beat)
I'm going to go downstairs.

MRS. ROTH
You don't want to watch with us?

LEWIS
I've got work to do, Mom.

MRS. ROTH
On a Saturday? Can't yearbook wait?

LEWIS
No.

MRS. ROTH
Oh. Okay. Well, have fun. I love you.

LEWIS
Yeah, love you too.

INT. LEWIS' BASEMENT

Lewis comes down the stairs and enters the unfinished basement, which has been converted into a dark room, lit by a string of red Christmas lights. A desk sits in the corner by the radiator. Lewis approaches the enlarger in the center of the room, and the audience is taken through the steps as Lewis places a print in the developing solution and switches the photo from one chemical bath to the next. There is something uniquely magical about the process. When the photo is done, Lewis approaches a string of photos hung on a clothesline by the desk and hangs up his latest piece of art. He then sits down at the desk, turns on the desk lamp, and begins examining his wall of photos from his chair. Most of them depict high school scenes: football practice, band class, students chatting in the cafeteria. The PHONE RINGS. Lewis retrieves his phone from his pocket and checks the caller ID.

INSERT - CELL PHONE

An image of Jonah appears onscreen.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis rolls his eyes and answers the phone.

LEWIS
What?

INT. Jonah'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME
Jonah sits on his bed, speaking into a bluetooth earpiece.

JONAH
Oh, how lovely to hear your voice, too.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

LEWIS
What do you want?

JONAH
So I've been thinking about our girl problem.

LEWIS
Oh my god.

JONAH
Just hear me out.

Lewis exhales, annoyed.

LEWIS
Go on.

JONAH
I have a proposition for you.

LEWIS
A proposition?

JONAH
Think of it... as a gentleman's wager.
(beat)
First one to lose his virginity wins.

LEWIS
What?!

JONAH
Just think of it as a little friendly competition. Some extrinsic motivation to get the ball rolling.

LEWIS
You're insane.

JONAH
Am I? Or am I a genius?
LEWIS
You're insane.

JONAH
Well are you in?

LEWIS
Maybe you should ask Simon if he wants to get in on this because I am definitely not interested.

JONAH
Are you kidding me? I can't ask Simon. He's going to die a virgin.

LEWIS
Harsh.

JONAH
Am I wrong?

LEWIS
You're... not wrong.

JONAH
Come on, dude. Do this with me. You're my oldest friend. There's no one else I'd rather have on this journey with me.

LEWIS
Ew.

JONAH
No homo.

LEWIS
What are the terms?

JONAH
You're in?

LEWIS
NO. What are the terms?

JONAH
I win. You give me your ticket to San Diego Comic Con.

LEWIS
No way. Why don't you just buy a
ticket?

        JONAH
        Where's the fun in that? Besides, my parents are way more likely to buy the plane ticket if the con ticket is already secured.

        LEWIS
        Not happening.

        JONAH
        Don't you even want to hear what you get if you win?

        LEWIS
        Okay, fine. What do I get if I win?

        JONAH
        The contents of my piggy bank.

        LEWIS
        Oh. Great. So like twenty-three dollars?

        JONAH
        Think more like eleven-hundred.

        LEWIS
        Eleven hundred dollars? You have eleven hundred dollars? In your piggy bank?

        JONAH
        Yup.

        LEWIS
        Where did you get that kind of money? You worked at the Dairy Queen for one summer and spent all of your earnings on a drone, which you don't even have a license to pilot.

        JONAH
        I'm working on it.

        LEWIS
        There's no way you have eleven hundred dollars in your piggy bank.
JONAH
For your information, Lewis, every year since I was six, my grandmother has written me a check for one hundred dollars. And every year, I go to the bank, cash the check, and put the money in the very same piggy bank you so callously dismissed. Eleven years. Eleven hundred dollars.

LEWIS
And you never spent any of it?

JONAH
Never had to. Rich parents.

LEWIS
None of it?

JONAH
Not a dime.
(beat)
You in?

LEWIS
I... don't know. Maybe.

JONAH
WHOO!

LEWIS
That's not a yes. Maybe. I'll think about it.

JONAH
Okay.

LEWIS
See you Monday.

JONAH
Good night. Sweet dreams, Lewis.

LEWIS
Screw you.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Lewis pulls into a parking spot and gets out of his car to find Jonah, drinking coffee and dressed like a character from Miami Vice, waiting for him.
JONAH
Lewis!

LEWIS
Hi, Jonah.

JONAH
You give any thought to my proposition?

LEWIS
No.

JONAH
No, you haven't thought about it or-

LEWIS
No, I'm not doing it.

JONAH
Why not? I thought you were on board!

LEWIS
I'm too busy. I've got debate team. And yearbook. And, you know, class.

JONAH
Yeah, but you only do all that stuff for your Northwestern application. And guess what? You already applied. Your grades don't matter now; what's done is done. In fact, I think now is the best time to do this. When else in your life will you be so free from responsibility? Come on! What do you say?

LEWIS
No.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - LOCKERS - SAME DAY

Lewis gets his books from his lockers, while Jonah hovers uncomfortably close.

JONAH
Think about it. You have nothing to lose here. Well. Except for your Comic Con tickets. And your uncle's respect
when he finds out why he's escorting your best friend to Comic-Con instead of you.

LEWIS
No.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - GYM CLASS

Lewis and Jonah are playing dodgeball, badly. Both stand up against the back wall, frantically ducking at the oncoming balls. Lewis is focused; Jonah is not.

JONAH
When you think about it, Lewis, dating is an integral part of healthy social development. What you need is a little fire under your ass to kickstart that process. Of- of learning. And growth.

A stray ball hits Jonah in the face.

LEWIS
No.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - HEALTH CLASS

The lights are off, and the projector is running, as science teacher, MS. RILEY, gives a lecture on human anatomy. Lewis is listening attentively when Jonah, who sits directly behind him, passes him a note. Lewis unfolds it.

INSERT - NOTE

Note reads: "Reconsider?"

BACK TO SCENE

Stone-faced, Lewis writes his response and passes it back to Jonah. Jonah eagerly opens it.

INSERT - NOTE

Lewis' response reads: "No."

CUT TO:
INT. CAFETERIA - LUNCH TIME

Lewis, Simon, and Jonah wait in line, getting their food.

JONAH
I just don't get why you're so hesitant. Unless of course, you're afraid to lose?

SIMON
Lose what?

JONAH
The bet.

SIMON
What bet?

JONAH
Whoever loses their virginity first wins.

SIMON
Wins what?

JONAH
Well, if I win, I get Lewis' Comic Con ticket. And if he wins, he gets my piggy bank.

SIMON
With the grandma money?

JONAH
Yep.

SIMON
Eleven-hundred dollars?

JONAH
Yep.

LEWIS
You knew about that?

SIMON
Dude, I want eleven-hundred dollars. And the Comic Con ticket. Can I be in on the bet?
JONAH

No.

SIMON

Why not?

JONAH

Come on, Simon. You have nothing to gain here and everything to lose.

Simon is about to object but realizes the truth in this statement.

SIMON

Yeah, okay. Why aren't you in, Lewis?

LEWIS

I just. Don't want to.

JONAH

Come on. Give me one good reason why you won't do it. And don't say school because that's bullshit.

Lewis gets to the end of the line and sighs. He pulls out his money and pays for his food.

LUNCH TABLE

The other nerds - Natalia, Sadie, and Theresa, eat their lunch, chatting.

NATALIA

Do we want to see Shazam this weekend?

THERESA

You know I love Zachary Levi, but I'm just not that invested in anything DC, you know? I mean Suicide Squad was SO garbage.

SADIE

Yeah, what if we just stay in and do a game night? Settlers of Catan?

Lewis, Simon, and Jonah approach the table and stop in their tracks when they see the girls.

JONAH

Hey, hey, hey. What are you doing? This is our table!
SADIE
What?

JONAH
This is our table.

NATALIA
No, it's not.

JONAH
Is too. We sit here every day.

For a moment, Jonah and Natalie stare at each other disdainfully. She breaks first and sighs.

NATALIA
Do you want us to move?

JONAH
Aw, would you? How sweet.

The girls roll their eyes and leave. The boys sit down.

JONAH
Lewis, you were saying?

LEWIS
I just don't get how this is supposed to work. I mean, girls don't like geeks. Be honest. When was the last time you met a girl that liked the same things we like?

All three boys sit and ponder this question for a moment.

SIMON
Never?

JONAH
Yeah. Never.

LEWIS
See?

JONAH
Okay, yeah. But you don't need to find your dream girl. Just someone willing and able.

LEWIS
It's the willing part that gives me
pause.

JONAH
Oh, you'd be surprised, my friend. You'd be very surprised. How about you meet me in the library after school, and I'll show you how easy it can be to generate interest. Hmm?

LEWIS
Forget it. I'm not interested.

JONAH
Okay, okay. Maybe I'm approaching this the wrong way. Forget the girl for a second. Just think about what you could do with $1100.

SIMON
Yeah, I mean. You could buy a new camera.

JONAH
Exactly! Thank you, Simon! You could buy a new camera. Aren't you still using your dad's piece-of-shit film camera?

LEWIS
It's not a piece of shit; it's vintage.

JONAH
Vintage piece of garbage.

LEWIS
Film photography is an art form.

JONAH
A dead art form. Digital is the way of the world. You want to be a photojournalist, right?

LEWIS
Yeah.

JONAH
So... you think there's any journalists in Yemen right now setting up dark rooms in their makeshift bomb shelters? No fucking way. So maybe you
should think of this bet as an investment in your career.

LEWIS
(Long pause, carefully considering this angle)
Library?

JONAH
Library. After school.

LEWIS
I have a debate team meeting at 3:30.

JONAH
Don't worry. This won't take long. I promise.

INT. SCHOOL - LIBRARY - DAY (AFTER SCHOOL)

BELL RINGS. Lewis walks into the library and scans the room, looking for Jonah. Suddenly, an arm reaches out and pulls him into the stacks.

LEWIS
Jonah! What are you doing?

Jonah puts his finger to his lips and motions for Lewis to follow him. Lewis does so begrudgingly, and the boys travel down the row of bookshelves. When they reach the end, Jonah parts the books at eye-level to create a window, through which the boys can stare, unnoticed, at a girl, ELLEN PAGEL, studying at a nearby table. She is rather plain, but she wears a full face of makeup and is dressed impeccably, clearly someone who cares about presentation. Jonah points at her with a knowing grin.

LEWIS
Ellen Pagel?

JONAH
Ellen Pagel.

LEWIS
What about her?

JONAH
Look at her. Tell me what you see.

LEWIS
I don't know. She's cute, I guess.
JONAH
Is she? Is she cute, Lewis? Or do you just think that because of her disguise?

LEWIS
Her disguise?

JONAH
Her expensive clothes. Her perfectly coifed hair. Her meticulously applied makeup. But look closely, and you'll see that underneath it all, she's a butterface. A butterface, Lewis. And why do you think she goes through all the trouble of still trying to look attractive, despite her genetic disadvantage? I mean think about it. How long does it take her to curl her hair like that, huh? To put on all that makeup? She probably has to wake up around 5-5:30 to look like that for school. And she does it every day. Why?

LEWIS
I don't know.

JONAH
Because. Lewis. She is flying her peacock feathers, and she is just waiting for the right guy to come along and ruffle them. If you know what I mean.

LEWIS
You're disgusting.

JONAH
I won't object to that characterization. Now go talk to her.

LEWIS
If she's such an easy lay, why don't you talk to her?

JONAH
I'm giving you a little head start, hmm? Measure of good faith.
LEWIS
I don't even know what to say.

JONAH
You'll think of something.

Jonah pushes Lewis out from behind the stacks, and Ellen looks up. Lewis nervously approaches.

LEWIS
Hi, Ellen.

ELLEN
Hi, Lewis! How are you?

LEWIS
Oh, good. Good. I'm great. How-how are you?

ELLEN
I'm good. Just studying for this biology test tomorrow. Kill me, right!

LEWIS
Ha. Biology. Gross...

(long, awkward pause)

Um. Can I sit?

ELLEN
Yeah, go ahead.

LEWIS
You, um. You... look nice. Today.

ELLEN
Oh. Um, thank you.

LEWIS
Youuuu. Are welcome. Aha. Um...

ELLEN
Did you need something?

LEWIS
Need? Something? Oh. No. No, no, no. I just. I, um... I wanted to tell you... uh, tell you...

A HANDSOME BOY enters the library holding a stack of books and approaches their table. He leans down, kisses Ellen on the lips, and sits down next to her.
HANDSOME BOY
Hey, guys, what's up?

ELLEN
Oh, nothing. Lewis just wanted to tell me something.

Both stare, friendly and intent, at Lewis. His eyes widen with panic, and there is a long, long pause.

LEWIS
You know. I forgot. Have a nice day.
Both of you.

Lewis bolts out of the library.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Lewis burst through the library doors, followed shortly by Jonah.

JONAH
Lewis, wait!

LEWIS
(angrily turning around)

JONAH
Okay, okay. Swing and a miss. My bad. I swear I had no idea she had a boyfriend. I mean...
(bursting into laughter)
How could I?

LEWIS
(turning around to leave)
Fuck you.

JONAH
Wait! Come back! I'm sorry!

LEWIS
I have debate practice.

JONAH
Does this mean you're not doing the bet...? Lewis?
INT. GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOM - DEBATE TEAM MEETING - SAME DAY

Lewis enters the classroom, where the students on the debate team wait for their meeting to start. Lewis takes a seat next to Simon.

SIMON
Hey, how was the library? What did he want to show you?

LEWIS
Nothing. It was a waste of my time.

SIMON
Oh. So does that mean you're not doing the bet then?

LEWIS
Oh my god, will everyone just shut up about the bet?

SIMON
Sorry.
(Under his breath)
At least you got asked to do the bet.

CLOSEUP - GIRL'S SHOES

We see a pair of Doc Martens enter the room, though we do not yet see the wearer.

BACK TO SCENE

A manicured hand - black nail polish - taps Lewis on the shoulder. He turns around, and there she is.

POV SHOT

The CAMERA PANS UP, starting at her feet and slowly working its way up her body. She is wearing Doc Marten boots, a pair of ripped tights, and a Johnny Cash t-shirt. The CAMERA reaches her face; she is stunningly gorgeous. And familiar.

BACK TO WIDE

LEWIS
You?

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Oh my god.
LEWIS
What. Are you doing here?

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
I'm new here. I'm looking for the debate team. Am I in the right place?

LEWIS
You? Want to join the debate team.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Yes.

LEWIS
You know that seems fitting, actually.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Am I in the right place or not?

LEWIS
You're in the right place.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Great! Thanks!

The beautiful girl sits down next to him.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Do you guys have a coach?

LEWIS
No, we're a self-taught debate team. Very disciplined.

MR. PAYNE, the debate coach, walks in.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Is that him?

LEWIS
Yes.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Okay...

The girl gets up and approaches Mr. Payne.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL
Hi! Are you the debate coach?
MR. PAYNE
I am.

The girl reaches out her hand, and the two continue speaking inaudibly. Simon turns to Lewis.

SIMON
Do you know her?

LEWIS
Uh. Not really. We met briefly. Who exactly is she?

SIMON
New girl. Junior. She's in Calc with me. Ms. Norbury said she moved here from Seattle, I think?

LEWIS
Seattle. Huh.

The girl finishes speaking with Mr. Payne and returns to her seat. Mr. Payne addresses the class.

MR. PAYNE
Okay, debaters. A couple announcements before we get started. We have a new addition to our team, a Ms. Harper Brooks all the way from Seattle. Welcome to the team. Cecilia, Matthew dropped because of his basketball schedule, so I'm going to have you pair up with Harper for the remainder of the season. In other news, I have just received word from the State Debate League; we have a new a topic.

SIMON
North Korea? Nuclear proliferation?

MR. PAYNE
No...

DEBATE STUDENT
Trade war with China?

MR. PAYNE
Also no. Think domestic.

HARPER
Gun regulation?
MR. PAYNE

All good guesses, but no. It's infrastructure spending.

Students groan.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - FRONT STEPS - GOLDEN HOUR

HARPER (BEAUTIFUL GIRL) exits the building, followed by Lewis. She approaches the bike rack to unlock her bike.

LEWIS

Hey!

HARPER

(Turning around, but still messing with her bike lock)

Oh, hi there, if it isn't McKinley High's resident mechanic.

LEWIS

Ha. Very funny.

(Outstretches his hand)

Lewis.

HARPER

(Takes his hand)

Harper.

LEWIS

Nice to meet you, too! So you're new here.

HARPER

Yep. All the way from Washington.

LEWIS

Enjoying it?

HARPER

Day one wasn't terrible.

LEWIS

Glad to hear it. Well, if you need anyone to show you around, I'm happy to help. I know how much you love a helping hand.
HARPER
(Smiles sweetly)
Only if I can break it.

LEWIS
You are so pleasant, you know that?

HARPER
See you around, Lewis.

Harper gets on her bike and pedals away. Lewis stares, amused, then pulls out his phone to make a call. The PHONE RINGS for a moment, then:

INT. Jonah'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

JONAH
Hello?

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

LEWIS
I'm in.

JONAH
WOOOHOOOO!!! Let the games begin.

INT. SIMON'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Simon, Lewis, and Jonah meet in Simon's basement, which is horribly dated - wood paneled walls, shag carpet, bean bag chairs. Lewis and Jonah sit across from each other at an old card table, the vinyl peeling off. In front of each boy sits a composition notebook, and a projector sits on the table between them. Simon stands next to a chalkboard, leading this meeting.

SIMON
The ground rules. One. The winner must successfully have sex with a girl.
Rule two. Sabotaging your opponent is strictly prohibited and will result in immediate forfeit of the wager.

JONAH
Wait. No. I didn't agree to that.

SIMON
By way of vote, all in favor of the "no sabotage" rule?
Simon and Lewis raise their hands. Jonah rolls his eyes.

SIMON
Majority rules. Moving on. The third and final rule. Contestants must have separate targets, and under no circumstances may one contestant knowingly pursue his opponent's target.

JONAH
Bros before hoes.

SIMON
Lewis, your target?

LEWIS
Harper Brooks.

SIMON
All right. Harper Brooks. And Jonah. Your target?

JONAH
Yeah, you know, I think I'm actually going to go with a different strategy. You see, Lewis here is putting all his eggs in one basket. Nothing wrong with that. But I'm thinking I'll have a higher probability of success if I keep my options open. Instead of chasing down one hen who may or may not be interested? Or in your case, Lewis, is definitely NOT interested.

SIMON
So your target is... anyone?

JONAH
Correct.

SIMON
(Considers for a moment)
I'll allow it.

LEWIS
But you'll stay away from Harper?

JONAH
Yeah, I'll stay away from Harper.
The boys shake hands.

SIMON
Now. Lewis. Let's discuss your strategy for wooing Ms. Brooks. I have some ideas; you might want to take notes.

JONAH
Whoa, whoa, whoa. You can't help him. That's cheating! No outside assistance!

SIMON
That wasn't in the official rules. As contest arbiter, I allow it.

JONAH
Well, what about me? Don't I get outside help?

SIMON
You're free to also take notes.

JONAH
Oh, I've already taken notes, thanks.

Jonah holds up his composition notebook, and inside is a full page of dick drawings.

SIMON
Dude, come on.

LEWIS
Don't worry about it. Jonah's probably getting all his dating advice from Reddit, right?

JONAH
Ha. Ha. Laugh now, but there's actually some really useful information on there, okay?

SIMON
Let's talk about Harper. What do we know about Harper Brooks? She's a new student. Previous residence: Seattle. But any student at McKinley High could
tell you that. We need to look deeper.

Simon turns on the projector, and a photo of Harper flickers into view on the wall behind them. He then pulls out a laser pointer and begins his lecture.

SIMON
Exhibit A. Harper's Instagram profile picture. Observe her alternative style. The stud in her left nostril. Her cool, aloof attitude toward the camera. Based on these telltale signs, I would say your greatest threat at this point would be: the Bad Boy.

LEWIS
The Bad Boy?

SIMON

LEWIS
Okay... well, who is the bad boy in this scenario?

SIMON
Well, Lewis, I'm glad you asked. I took a number of factors into consideration, among them disciplinary record, aesthetic, and rudeness, and I narrowed it down to a few possible contenders. But there was one who stood out to me as the clear choice.

Simon clicks to the next slide, which shows a picture of a devilishly handsome boy on a motorcycle - dark hair, ripped white tee, leather jacket.

SIMON
Chuck Caldwell.

The other boys nod in agreement.

LEWIS
Chuck Caldwell. Of course.
SIMON
Suspended three times senior year alone. Coupled with his obvious good looks and preferred method of transportation. Essentially... he's every girl's dream.

LEWIS
Okay, well. How do I compete with that? I mean - do I... do I dress like him? Do I try to do the "bad boy" thing?

SIMON
You? Do the bad boy thing?

Simon and Jonah both burst into laughter.

JONAH
(through chortles)
Can you imagine him in the jacket? I-I can't!

SIMON
I'm going to pee my pants!

JONAH
(imitating Lewis)
Uh, hey, Harper, want to go for a ride in my... sedan?

LEWIS
Okay! I get it! I can't pull off the bad boy look! Message received! What am I supposed to do then?

SIMON
(pulling himself together)
Well. You can't pretend to be a bad boy because you are so obviously not a bad boy.

JONAH
Can we stop saying "bad boy"?

SIMON
You'll never beat Chuck at his own game. So your only option really is to lean into what you are: the nice guy.
LEWIS
Um. Okay. One obstacle. We didn't exactly get off on the right foot.

SIMON
Well, then you just have to change her mind about you.
   (Clicks slide)

Lewis furiously jots down notes in his notebook.

SIMON
But. It's not enough to just like what she likes. You need to spend time with her.

LEWIS
Right! Yeah! Debate team!

SIMON
What about debate team?

LEWIS
We could be partners!

SIMON
But. I'm your partner.

LEWIS
We can switch. You can work with Cecilia.

SIMON
Cecilia?! Cecilia? come on, she couldn't even tell name the three branches of government, let alone explain to you the nuances of our crumbling infrastructure.

JONAH
Hey, now. No sabotage. That goes for you too, Simon. Don't be a cockblock.
SIMON
Ugh. Fine. You can partner with Harper.

JONAH
Great. That's settled. Your plan is terrible.

LEWIS
What? Why?

JONAH
Dude, you're setting yourself up for capital F. Friend Zone.

SIMON
I was getting there!

JONAH
Then get there.

SIMON
Part Two of my plan: The one thing girls find more alluring than the bad boy.

LEWIS
What?

SIMON
The grand romantic gesture.

LEWIS
The grand romantic gesture... Do you have a gesture in mind?

SIMON
Yes. And it's a classic. While you're gaining her trust and becoming her friend, she will also be receiving anonymous love letters from her secret admirer.

Simon points and Lewis, pleased with himself for coming up with such an ingenious plan.

SIMON
And when the time is right, you reveal yourself, her best friend, to be the very man whose identity she seeks to know. Boom! You win the bet.
LEWIS
I don't know...

JONAH
Yeah, sounds garbage to me.

LEWIS
Why not just be direct?

SIMON
No! No! It's like. Okay. In You've Got Mail-

JONAH
You've Got Mail? Dude, why are you such a girl?

SIMON
I've got sisters, okay? Will you let me finish? In You've Got Mail, if Tom Hanks had just asked Meg Ryan out from the get go - no movie. It never would have worked; she'd have said no. Because she hated him. Similar to how Harper presumably feels about you. But! He puts on his masculine charm in person, while showing her his vulnerable, romantic side via his anonymous IM persona. Two sides, same coin. Reveal them to be one person - you've got yourself a love story.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A) INT. LIBRARY

Simon and Lewis sit in the library, surrounded with books. Lewis scribbles frantically in a notebook while Simon looks on over his shoulder. Lewis finishes what he's writing, tears it out of his notebook, and hands it to Simon who reads it, disapprovingly. Simon shakes his head no. Lewis sighs, takes the paper back and crumples it into a ball. He gets back to work, attempting a second draft.

B) INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Jonah approaches a group of girls and says something to them, inaudible. Jonah gets slapped. They walk away.

C) EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT
Simon and Lewis approach a motorcycle, and Lewis plunges a pocket knife into one of its tires. Both boys panic and abruptly leave.

D) INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM

Lewis enters his bedroom with a shopping bag. He empties the contents out on his bed: a Nirvana t-shirt, a Nirvana album on vinyl, and a copy of *Moonrise Kingdom*. Lewis takes out the record and places it on a turntable on his desk.

E) EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT

CHUCK CALDWELL approaches his bike and swears to himself when he sees his flat tire. Lewis and Simon watch from behind a car.

F) INT. LIBRARY NIGHT

Lewis shows Simon another draft of his love letter. Simon reads it and shakes his head no. Lewis crumples it and throws it on the floor, now covered in crumpled, discarded drafts. Lewis gets back to writing.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

A minivan pulls up in front of school, and Chuck Caldwell angrily gets out from the passenger seat. CHUCK'S MOM rolls the window down, leans forward and yells after him:

CHUCK'S MOM
Bye, Sweetie! Have a good day at school! Love you!

CHUCK
Bye.

Chuck's Mom drives away and Chuck storms out of frame. Simon then walks into frame, with Lewis shortly after him, panting.

LEWIS
Dude! Wait up!

SIMON
Oh, hi, Lewis.

Lewis hands Simon a typed piece of paper.
LEWIS
Here. I can't rewrite it again, man. This is the best I can do.

Simon reads the letter, then looks at Lewis for a moment.

LEWIS

SIMON
I think... it's GREAT! Lewis! Who knew you could be such a romantic?

LEWIS
Really? You like it?

SIMON
I love it!
(handing the letter back to Lewis)
I think you're ready.

LEWIS
There's just one thing I have to do first.

INT. GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOM

Lewis enters the mostly empty classroom, where Mr. Payne sits at his desk grading papers. Simon hovers in the hallway, just outside the door. Lewis approaches.

LEWIS
Mr. Payne! Hello.

MR. PAYNE
Lewis! What can I do for you?

LEWIS
Well, I was hoping to talk to you about switching debate team partners. I'd like to work with Harper for the rest of the season.

MR. PAYNE
Why? You seem to be working well with Simon.

LEWIS
Right. But Simon and I were talking, and we agreed switching it up would actually be best for the team.
MR. PAYNE
And why is that?

LEWIS
I don't want this to come across the wrong way, but... Harper and Cecilia? Sir, I think we could both agree that female-female partnerships tend to perform worse at tournaments, through no fault of their own of course! It's sexist really. But it is the unfortunate reality of the world we live in, and judges tend to respond better to teams with at least one male. The stats speak for themselves. And you know, I just want to do whatever we can to ensure McKinley a successful State Tournament this spring. Do you agree?

Mr. Payne furrows his eyebrows in thought for a moment, then nods as if to say "Fair Point." Lewis turns around and gives Simon a thumbs up.

INT. HALLWAY - HARPER'S LOCKER - DAY

Harper stands next to her locker, texting. Lewis, Simon, and Jonah peek out from around the corner, their heads on top of each other like a cheesy spy movie.

SIMON
Now!

Lewis puts on his brave face and comes out from behind the corner to face her.

LEWIS
Hi, Harper!

HARPER
Hey there, Lou.

LEWIS
Lewis.

HARPER
Lewis. Sorry.

Harper stashes her phone in her pocket and opens her locker. As she enters her locker combination, Simon watches from around the corner with a pair of binoculars.
LEWIS
Well, I just wanted to apologize for getting off on the wrong foot before. And say that I really hope we can figure out a way to be friends.

HARPER
Okay...

LEWIS
Well, and I also wanted to let you know that you and I will actually be debate partners for the rest of the season.

HARPER
Mr. Payne told you this?

LEWIS
Uh, yeah. Just talked to him.

HARPER
Huh. Why?

LEWIS
Oh, well, you know... Cecilia... really sucks. At debate. Yeah, total airhead, actually. So we didn't think it was fair to stick her with the new girl.

HARPER
Oh. Okay.

LEWIS
So you and I should probably get together.

Harper raises her eyebrows.

LEWIS
To research! Prepare our case and all that. You know. Infrastructure spending. Lot to... lot to learn there. The tournament's in two weeks.

HARPER
Right. How's tomorrow?

LEWIS
Tomorrow? Tomorrow's great! I love
HARPER
Library? After school?

LEWIS
It's a date! Study date, I mean. Not like a date-date. Because that would be weird. I mean. Not like bad weird. But I wouldn't want you to think that I was saying something that would jeopardize our professional, working relationship. My priority here is the debate team. There's nothing else funny going on here-

HARPER
Lewis?

LEWIS
Yeah?

HARPER
See you tomorrow.

LEWIS
Yeah. See you.

Harper closes her locker and leaves. Lewis waves goodbye and watches her leave. When he is sure she's gone, he waves Jonah and Simon over.

LEWIS
(To Simon)
Did you get it?

SIMON
Yes. It's 15-31-04.

LEWIS
Okay. 15-31-04.

Lewis tries entering the combination.

LEWIS
It's not working.

SIMON
Well. Okay. It might be 16-30-05.
LEWIS
(attempting the new combination)
Okay...

SIMON
Or 13-29-07.

LEWIS
Dude!

SIMON
Well, you try getting someone's locker combination from 30 feet away!

LEWIS
What am I supposed to do?

Jonah loudly clears his throat.

JONAH
You know I'm only offering my help because I'm so sure this stupid little stunt of yours is going to fail that I'm confident that, in helping you, I am in no way jeopardizing my chances of winning. But I have something that may be of use to you.

Jonah pulls a bobby pin from his pocket and holds it out for Lewis.

LEWIS
Where did you get that?

JONAH
I pulled it from Regina Lang's hair when we were macking in her car last night.

Lewis stares back at Jonah, his facial expression blank.

JONAH
I found it on the floor.

LEWIS
That sounds right.

Lewis takes the bobby pin and jams it into the lock.

JONAH
I'm really close with Regina, though.
LEWIS
Yeah. Sure.

JONAH
For your information, Gretchen gave me Regina's phone number this morning.
HA!

Jonah pulls up Regina's contact page on his phone and holds it in Lewis' face. Lewis ignores it, still trying to pick the lock. Simon squints to read the screen.

SIMON
That's only six digits.

JONAH
(rereading the number)
Oh.
(beat)
Well, then I'm only one digit away from a full phone number.

SIMON
You are so stupid.
(to Lewis)
Do you even know how to do that?

LEWIS
Not really.

Lewis keeps trying until finally he hears a click.

LEWIS
And we're in.

Lewis kisses the note and places it in the locker, followed by a red rose pulled from his bag. Simon gives him thumbs up.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lewis, in a good mood, enters his bedroom and walks over to the bed. He sits down on the bed, picks up a comic book from the bedside table, and flips it open. He reads for a moment, but hovers on a single page. On it, there is a panel of a beautiful young woman swooning adoringly as she stares at a muscled hero. The CAMERA LINGERS on the hero's biceps. Lewis furrows his brow. He looks up from the comic book and looks up at a poster of Conan the Barbarian on his wall. More biceps. Pulling his gaze from the poster, Lewis locks eyes with his own reflection in a mirror on his closet door. He has never looked smaller.
INT. LIBRARY - DAY - AFTER SCHOOL

Lewis sits at a table in the library, twiddling his thumbs nervous and checking his watch. Harper enters, nonplussed about the time, and sits down.

HARPER
Hey, sorry I'm late.

LEWIS
Oh, don't worry about it.

HARPER
Where do you want to start?

LEWIS
(pulling a piece of paper out from his backpack)
Ah, well, I have the tentative case that Simon and I were planning on running.

Lewis hands the case to Harper, and she begins reading. Lewis continues speaking, not noticing that she has begun slashing out every other sentence with a red pen.

LEWIS
Now, we didn't get a chance to run it obviously, since it's a new topic, but I think it's pretty strong-
(noticing the red pen)
Whoa, hey, what are you doing?

HARPER
Making edits.

LEWIS
Well. Stop.

HARPER
What?

LEWIS
I mean- don't stop. But. You're crossing out, like, every other line.

HARPER
Well, I've got a lot of notes.

LEWIS
I. See that.
HARPER
Is there problem? I mean, we're partners. I'm just trying to make it better.

LEWIS
What's wrong with it?

HARPER
There's a lot of fluff.

LEWIS
Fluff?

HARPER
Yeah. Fluff. Like, okay. Here. This paragraph. You use a ton of statistics, but none of the stats you use seem particularly demonstrative, you know? It seems to be a quantity versus quality issue.

LEWIS
Quantity versus quality...
(Opens his mouth to argue, thinks better, and smiles condescendingly)
Harper. I know you're new here, and you're still figuring everything out. But Simon and I are the captains, and we have the best record of anyone on the team. So trust us.

HARPER
(Sees his condescension, matches it)
Lewis. I know I'm new here, so you have no reason to know this. But at my last school, I was a state finalist two years in row, placing third and second and the state tournaments, respectively. So, actually, I think I have the best record on the team.

LEWIS
(long pause)
...So quantity versus quality?

Harper smiles, having won. They return to the case.
EXT. SCHOOL - FRONT STEPS - NIGHT

Harper and Lewis exit the building together in the middle of conversation.

HARPER
If you could find that research on the Minnesota bridge collapse, that would really strengthen our case. But beyond that, I think we are in solid shape for the tournament.

LEWIS
Yeah, I'm feeling confident.
(Beat)
Um. About that the thing with the edits. I wasn't trying to be a dick back there.

HARPER
Oh, you weren't?

LEWIS
I know I was being a little arrogant.

HARPER
(playfully)
A little?

LEWIS
Okay, a lot. I'm sorry.

HARPER
Thank you. I appreciate it. But it's water under the bridge.

LEWIS
Really?

HARPER
Yeah. Besides. I was being a little snappy. I'm just on edge, I guess. New school and all that...
(Hesitates)
And. Mr. Payne's kind of a jerk, right?

LEWIS
What? Really?
HARPER
I don't know. It's just- yesterday, he insisted we have a one-on-one practice, so could assess my "experience." And I don't know. He told me my speaking voice was shrill and to work on being more "palatable" to the judges. His word. Not mine.

LEWIS
Oh.

HARPER
Yeah.

LEWIS
That's weird...

HARPER
Yeah, I guess it just felt like he wasn't really taking me seriously, you know? So when you were upset about the edits, I guess I just got defensive.

LEWIS
No, yeah, I totally get it. That's just so weird that he said that. He's usually so cool.

HARPER
Hm. Maybe he just has a problem with female students.

LEWIS
Mr. Payne? No! He just. I'm sure he didn't mean it that way. He was probably just... having an off day or something. But don't take it personally, you know? If you give him a second chance, you'll come around. He's a good guy.

HARPER
Uh huh. Maybe I overreacted.

LEWIS
Well, it's understandable. New school, lots of anxiety, I'm sure.

HARPER
You're right. Must have been my
anxiety.
(Beat)
I should get going.

LEWIS
Wait. Do you... want to meet for prep this weekend? Maybe Saturday?

HARPER
Um. Sure. Saturday's fine.

LEWIS
Great! We can meet at my house! Goodnight, Harper.

HARPER
Night, Lewis.

Lewis smiles to himself as Harper bikes away.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

The hallway is nearly empty, with the exception of Simon and Lewis. The boys are at Harper's locker, chatting while Lewis tries to pick the lock.

SIMON
So, how did it go last night?

LEWIS
Honestly. Great. We mostly just worked on debate. But as we were leaving, she started to confide in me all this stuff about being new and having anxiety about it and getting off on the wrong foot with Mr. Payne. She was like, totally upset and freaking out about it, and I really talked her down from the ledge, you know? Calmed her down, made her feel better.

SIMON
Hey, look at you! Emotional intimacy!

LEWIS
Come on, Simon. Be a dude.

SIMON
Sorry.
LEWIS
Anyhow, we're hanging out again on Saturday. To do more "debate prep." How's it going with you and Cecilia, by the way?

SIMON
When she found out we were partners she quit the team.

LEWIS
Ouch.

SIMON
Yeah, so I guess that's the end of my season.

Just as Lewis succeeds in opening the locker, the bell rings. Lewis quickly throws another love letter inside, then closes the locker and leans against it, trying to look nonchalant. As the hall fills with people, Simon darts away. Harper emerges from the sea of students.

HARPER
(Seeing Lewis)
Hey there. Nice shirt.

Lewis looks down and remembers that he is wearing the Nirvana t-shirt he bought to impress her.

LEWIS
Oh. Thanks. Yeah, I love Nirvana. Huge fan. Are—are you? A fan?

HARPER
I guess. I used to listen to them a lot.

LEWIS
Used to?

HARPER
Yeah, when I was a freshman. Not really anymore, though. I'm into more electronic stuff now. Like the new Billie Eilish album. Have you heard that one yet?

LEWIS
Oh, yeah, it's great!
Harper opens her locker and puts away some books. As she does so, Lewis, not expecting such mainstream taste from her, whispers to himself:

LEWIS
Billie Eilish?

HARPER
Do you need something?

LEWIS
Uh, yeah. I just wanted to make sure we're still on for Saturday.

HARPER
Uh, yeah, We're still on. My calendar hasn't changed since last night.

LEWIS
Awesome. Great! Neither has mine.

Lewis catches Simon's eye over Harper's shoulder; Simon, panicked, points in the direction of... Chuck Caldwell approaching.

LEWIS
Uh. Can you excuse me for just a second? I will be right back.

Lewis hurries over to Chuck and pulls him aside.

LEWIS
Hey! Hey there, Chuck. How's it going?

CHUCK
I need to talk to Harper.

LEWIS
Oh, you know, not a great idea. She can a real bitch. Definitely on the warpath today.

CHUCK
But-

LEWIS
Really! I am doing you a favor. You do not want to go over there.

CHUCK
I-
LEWIS
You know, Chuck, I actually heard they need you in the front office. Your mom called.

CHUCK
What?

LEWIS
Uh, yeah. Had something to do with your grandma. Didn't sound great. Medical emergency maybe?

CHUCK
My grandma's dead.

LEWIS
...The other one.

CHUCK
Whatever. Will you just give this to her? She left it in Lit.

Chuck holds out a yellow notebook. Lewis, realizing Chuck's intent, breaks into a grin.

LEWIS
Oh. Her notebook. Uh. Yeah. I'll get that to her right away.

Lewis takes the notebook and returns to Harper.

LEWIS
Sorry about that.

A finger taps Lewis on the shoulder. He turns around and comes face-to-face with Blake Shellinger. The Quarterback.

BLAKE
Hey, Lewis! I was just looking for you.

LEWIS
You were?

BLAKE
Yeah, I missed last Thursday in History. I an appointment with Sports Medicine for my ACL injury. Anyway, we've got that test next week so I was hoping I could borrow your notes.
You're like. Smart and stuff. So I thought you'd be a good person to ask.

LEWIS
Uh... sure. I'll send them to you.

BLAKE
Awesome. Thanks, man.

Blake looks past Lewis' shoulder and notices Harper for the first time.

BLAKE
(to Harper)
Uh, hey. Have we met?

HARPER
(smiling)
Uh, no. I'm new here.

BLAKE
Ah, that makes sense. I feel like I would have remembered seeing you around. I'm Blake.

He extends his hand. She takes it.

HARPER
Harper.

BLAKE
How are you liking it here so far?

HARPER
Um, it's been a really great first week actually.

BLAKE
Dope.

Lewis stares at Harper in disgust; she smiles as she stares at Blake adoringly and bites her lower lip. He's seen that look before. He turns back to Blake. The CAMERA LINGERS on his biceps.

BLAKE
You know, I'm having a party at my place this Saturday. You should stop by. You know, to meet people.
HARPER
Really? That would be great! Thanks!

BLAKE
No problem. I'll send you the address.
You on Insta?

HARPER

BLAKE
I'll find you.
(To Lewis)
I gotta head to class. Catch you later man.

Blake waves goodbye to them both and walks away. Harper smiles a big dopey grin and stares after him. Lewis is clearly annoyed.

LEWIS
(Handing her her notebook)
You left this in Lit.

HARPER
Thank you! I was looking for that.

LEWIS
You're not seriously going to that party?

HARPER
Um, I was planning on it. Why?

LEWIS
We have plans Saturday.

HARPER
Right! Well it would be after. I mean, how late can research go, right?

LEWIS
Yeah, but. I don't really think Blake Shellinger's crowd is the one you want to get into.

HARPER
Why not? He seemed nice.

LEWIS
Nice? He's the quarterback of the
football team.

HARPER
Are those things mutually exclusive?

LEWIS
Uh. Yeah. Jocks are bad people.

HARPER
He seemed alright to me.

LEWIS
Well, he know he's got a girlfriend, right? Caroline Stewart?

HARPER
Uh. No. I didn't know that.

LEWIS
They seem very happy together.

HARPER
Well, then I'm happy for them.

BELL RINGS.

HARPER
I've got to get to class. See you Saturday?

LEWIS
Yeah. See you Saturday.

INT. MATH CLASS

Jonah and Simon sit in class together, when both hear their phones VIBRATE. Simon and Jonah exchange a look, then Jonah checks his phone discreetly under the desk.

INSERT - CELL PHONE - TEXT

"Lewis: SOS. EMERGENCY. Meet in bathroom NOW."

INT. BATHROOM

Jonah and Simon enter the bathroom, where Lewis waits pacing.

JONAH
What's the emergency?
LEWIS
Harper. She was flirting with Blake Shellinger.

SIMON
What?!

LEWIS
Blake. Shellinger.

JONAH
You've got to rethink your definition of the word "emergency."

SIMON
W-what about Chuck Caldwell?

LEWIS
He's turned out NOT to be the problem.

SIMON
Oh my god. Oh my god! I should have seen it all along.

LEWIS
Seen what?

SIMON

LEWIS
What does that mean?

SIMON
Ally Sheedy ends up with Emilio Estevez.

LEWIS
Speak MALE.

SIMON
The jock! Ally Sheedy ends up with the jock!

JONAH
You're screwed.
LEWIS
Oh my god, I never should have listened to you. It's over.

JONAH
So should I book my plane tickets now or...?

SIMON
Wait! Wait. Don't give up yet. We can think of something to fix this... I mean Blake's dating Caroline, right? He's taken. So maybe this is a non-issue.

JONAH
You think having a girlfriend is going to stop him? Blake's a god. He goes through women like Kleenex. You can hate him, but you have to respect his game.

SIMON
Okay... Well. Maybe we can appeal to her better nature. Explain to her what a jerk he is-

JONAH
That's never going to work.

SIMON
Why not?

JONAH
I can't believe I'm helping you again. Harper knows he's an asshole. Caroline knows he's an asshole. Every girl that goes to this school knows that Blake Shellinger is king of the douchebags, and they don't care. He could go full Ted Bundy tomorrow, and they'd still want to date him. So no. There's nothing you can say to Harper that's going to make her lose interest. It's just not going to happen.

LEWIS
Then what do we do?

JONAH
You gotta go through Blake. Make
Harper seem unattractive to him.

LEWIS

How?

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - LUNCHTIME

The boys stand a few paces behind a table full of girls, among them CHER ROSEN: 17, blonde, an incredibly fast talker.

CHER
(to the girls at the table)
So anyway. Apparently, Regina showed up to volleyball practice, and Cady - I swear to God - saw a pregnancy test in her gym bag.

The girls at the table gasp.

CHER
I know! I know. Crazy. So I guess that purity ring is just decoration. But you can't tell anyone I told you.

LEWIS
(Unnoticed by the girls)
What are we doing talking to Cher Rosen?

JONAH
Just trust me.

Jonah approaches the table and leans down next to Cher's ear.

JONAH
Hey, Cher. A word?

CHER
Ew, what do you want?

JONAH
I have tea.

This piques Cher's interest, and she rises from the table.

CHER
Spill.
JONAH
Well, first I need a guarantee that I won't be identified as the one who told you.

CHER
You have my word. You know how seriously I take source anonymity.

JONAH
Okay, so you know that new girl Harper?

CHER
The weird one? Punk wannabe?

JONAH
That's the one. So I have a buddy, uh, Hal. Who went to school with her in Seattle.

CHER
Really?

JONAH
Yeah. Small world, right? Anyway. He tells me that apparently she was quite "popular" at her old school, if you know what I mean. And, uh, I guess - and this is coming from him, not me - but apparently... she's got chlamydia.

Cher gasps; Jonah nods. Cher grabs Jonah's face in her hands, stares into his eyes and says:

CHER
Thank you for trusting me with this.

JONAH
Uh... of course. Anytime.

Cher returns to the table gleefully.

CHER
Girls, you will NEVER believe what I found out about the new girl.

INT. SCHOOL - TIMELAPSE - DAY

TIMELAPSE as CAMERA MOVES from Cher's lunch table, through the cafeteria, and down the hallway, darting in and out of
classrooms, showing as the entire school spreads the rumor. Finally, the CAMERA STOPS on Blake Shellinger as he learns the news from another jock.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

BLAKE
Chlamydia? Dude...

Blake makes a disgusted face as he and his friend walk out of frame, revealing Jonah, Lewis, and Simon standing behind him. Jonah and Lewis share a giddy expression and fist bump. Simon, on the other hand, does not share their enthusiasm.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - HARPER'S LOCKER

Harper stands at her locker, putting her books away and trying to ignore all the whispers and stares. Two jocks walk past.

JOCK #1
(coughing into his fist)
Slut!

JOCK #2
Hey, new girl, does it burn when you pee?

The two boys laugh; Harper ignores them and storms off.

EXT. SCHOOL - FRONT STEPS - DAY

Lewis, Simon, and Jonah exit, Lewis and Jonah still gleeful.

LEWIS
I can't believe that actually worked.

JONAH
No way anybody's asking her out now. She's all yours.

LEWIS
You don't think we went too far?

JONAH
Too far? No. I mean, you know what they say. All's fair in love and war. Besides, when you guys finish your ridiculous plan and she finally goes
out with you, I'll just tell Cher that Hal misremembered. Clear the whole thing up.

LEWIS
You're the best, man.

JONAH
You realize though, now that I've helped you, if you do win the bet you're down to like $800?

LEWIS
Worth it. You're a lifesaver. See you Monday!

Lewis walks away, leaving Jonah and Simon walking to Jonah's van in the parking lot. Simon looks up and stops when he sees Harper. She stands under a tree on the far end of the parking lot, crying. Simon bears a pained expression.

JONAH
(Standing at his car)
Dude! You walking home or what?

Simon hurries over to Jonah's car and takes one last look at Harper before getting in.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM - SATURDAY NIGHT

Lewis straightens up his bedroom, nervous. He fluffs up the pillows on his bed, then rearranges the magazines on his desk a few times over - trying to decide between stacked or splayed. As a finishing touch, he grabs a book off the shelf - Stephen King's Carrie - and places it open on the bed. On second thought, maybe Stephen King isn't sophisticated enough. He puts the book back and replaces it with a copy of War and Peace. The DOORBELL RINGS, and Lewis' mother can be heard at the bottom of the stairs.

MRS. ROTH
(O.S.)
Lewis, honey! Your friend is here!

Lewis gives the room one more visual sweep, then exits the bedroom.

INT. LEWIS' HOUSE - ENTRYWAY

Lewis runs down the stairs and eagerly opens the door.
LEWIS
Hi, Harper! Come in!

HARPER
Hi.

Harper steps in and looks around; there is something standoffish about her body language, though Lewis doesn't notice.

LEWIS
I thought we could work in my room?

HARPER
Okay.

LEWIS
Okay! Follow me.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM

Harper and Lewis enter the room, and Harper begins to casually look around at his things. Lewis intently watches her as she does so. Her eyes fall upon the book on the bed.

HARPER
War and Peace. Sophisticated.

LEWIS
Oh, yeah. I guess.

HARPER
Never read it.
(Beat)
I like your Conan the Barbarian poster.

LEWIS
Oh. Uh, thanks.

Harper walks over to his desk and notices a stack of photos.

HARPER
What are these?

LEWIS
Oh. Those are some of the photos I took for the yearbook.

HARPER
Black and white?
LEWIS
Uh, yeah. I shoot on black and white film. It's cheaper.

HARPER
You use a film camera?

LEWIS
Uh, yeah.

HARPER
Huh. Do you develop it yourself?

LEWIS
Yeah, I've got a dark room set up in the basement.

HARPER
Really? Can I see it?

INT. LEWIS' BASEMENT

Harper and Lewis come down the stairs, and Harper takes a minute to look around the room.

HARPER
This is so cool, Lewis.

She comes upon the photos hanging on the clothesline and stops. She pulls one down.

HARPER
Is that me?

Lewis' eyes widen.

LEWIS
Uhh... oh, yeah. Look at that. It is you.

HARPER
Wow. That's... kinda weird, Lou. Why did you take this?

LEWIS
Uh. Well. I... take lots of candids. Of the whole student body. It's for the yearbook. Uh, see?
   (points at photos still hanging)
Baseball team, Art Club... all candids.
HARPER
Oh. Okay.

LEWIS
We, uh, probably aren't going to use that one, actually. Because it's a closeup. And Ms. Ringwald - she's in charge of the yearbook - she really prefers group shots. So we can probably just throw that one away.

HARPER
Oh. Well don't throw it away. I look good in this. I'll just hang it back up.

LEWIS
Should we get to work? On debate?

HARPER
(hesitates)
Do you want to just blow it off?

LEWIS
Sorry?

HARPER
Sorry. I've just had a really shitty week - you have no idea - and it's Saturday night and I just really do not want to work on debate right now.

LEWIS
Oh. Okay. No, yeah. Let's blow it off. What do you want to do?

HARPER
I don't know. Go out maybe? You know this town better than I do. Where do you usually hang out on a Saturday?

LEWIS
Um. Well. The Marquis Theater in Rosewood is a bit of a drive, but I hear they're showing The Royal Tenenbaums this weekend. You a Wes Anderson fan?

Harper scrunches her nose.
LEWIS
No?

HARPER
I don't know. He's okay, I guess.

LEWIS
Huh. Funny. I would have pegged you as a Wes Anderson fan.

HARPER
Not really. I had an ex-boyfriend that was obsessed with Wes Anderson, so I had to pretend to like him for two years. Drove me crazy. It's like. Not everything has to be symmetrical, you know?

LEWIS
Ha. Right. So... that's a no to the movies?

Harper shakes her head no. Lewis thinks for a moment, then snaps his fingers.

LEWIS
I've got just the place!

HARPER
Where?

CUT TO:

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING - ARCADE STOREFRONT

REVERSE SHOT - HARPER AND LEWIS

HARPER
An arcade?

LEWIS
Yeah! Me and the guys, we come here all the time. You'll love it.

HARPER
I didn't even know they still had these. Doesn't everyone just play games on their phones now?
LEWIS
No, no. This is SO much better. It's nostalgic. You'll see.

HARPER
Okay. Let's do this.

MONTAGE - INT. ARCADE
A) Lewis and Harper play air hockey.
B) Lewis and Harper play Pac-Man, and she laughs as he loses.
C) Lewis and Harper collect stacks and stacks of tickets as they win game after game.
D) Lewis and Harper bring their tickets up to the counter and exchange them for a giant bear.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT
Harper and Lewis sit at a table with a checkered table cloth and a pizza - the kind you fold - sitting before them. The bear sits in its own seat.

HARPER
(Laughing)
Wow, I cannot believe how bad you suck at Pac-Man.

LEWIS
I don't suck at Pac-Man. That machine was broken.

HARPER
It was not!

LEWIS
The joystick kept sticking!

HARPER
Hmmm. Funny. I didn't seem to notice that.

LEWIS
Shut up. You know, I did win you this bear, right? I didn't imagine that?

Harper laughs, too loud, not noticing Lewis' adoring stare. After a moment, she composes herself.
HARPER
Thanks for taking me out tonight, Lou. This was more fun than I thought it would be.

LEWIS
You didn't think it would be fun?

HARPER
Not what I meant! I just maybe misjudged you. A little.

LEWIS
Oh, so I'm not a giant douchebag for offering to change your tire?

HARPER
No, you're still a douchebag, but I find it less grating than before.

LEWIS
You really suck at compliments.

Harper laughs again.

HARPER
So, Lewis, tell me more about yourself.

LEWIS
What do you want to know?

HARPER
Well. To start. You're a senior. What's next?

LEWIS
Starting with the easy questions. I like that. Um. I guess the plan right now is to go to Northwestern. Where I hope to study photojournalism.

HARPER
Damn, you got into Northwestern?

LEWIS
I actually don't know yet. Still waiting to hear back.

HARPER
When do you find out?
LEWIS
Any day now.

HARPER
Wow. That is so exciting. I'm sure you'll get in. You seem like a brain.

LEWIS
Thanks.

HARPER
Photojournalism?

LEWIS
Uh, yeah. My dad used to be a photojournalist. Before he quit to be boring. He gave me his old film camera when I was 10, and it's been all downhill from there. Should've given me a stethoscope.

HARPER
Man, that is so cool. You've really got it all figured out.

LEWIS
Don't you?

HARPER
Ha. No. All I know is I can't wait to finish high school.

LEWIS
No big dreams?

HARPER
I don't know. I guess when I was younger I used to think it would be cool to like. Move to New York and become a novelist or a playwright or something.

LEWIS
Why don't you do it?

HARPER
Seems a little unrealistic. And have you seen the apartments in New York? Way too small.
LEWIS
Why do you think it's unrealistic?

HARPER
Because it is.

LEWIS
No, it's not! Listen to me, Harper. You want to know the great thing about this country? Anyone can be anything! If you work hard and you're talented. Cream rises to the top; my dad told me that.

HARPER
(Stares at Lewis for a long time; halfway skeptical, halfway amused. Finally:)
I think it's really great that you believe that.

LEWIS
I believe in you.

HARPER
(Uncomfortable, avoiding his gaze)
Okay. Thanks. We should probably get going. It's getting late.

EXT. LEWIS' HOUSE - NIGHT
Harper and Lewis pull up in front of the house, with Lewis in the passenger seat. The bear is buckled in the back. Harper turns off the car.

INT. HARPER'S CAR

LEWIS
I had a lot of fun.

HARPER
Yeah. It was a blast.

LEWIS
You'll work on debate tomorrow though? Because we have that tournament next weekend.

HARPER
Yes, Dad. I'll do my homework.
LEWIS
Well, you know I just want us to be prepared. I think we could be a real power team.

HARPER
Maybe. We'll see.

Lewis turns to face her and leans in uncomfortably close.

LEWIS
Goodnight, Harper.

Harper, her faces just a few inches from his, turns away to face the steering wheel. She puts her keys back in the ignition.

HARPER
Night, Lewis.

Lewis, disappointed they did not kiss, pulls back and gets out of the car.

LEWIS
Okay. See you Monday.

EXT. LEWIS' HOUSE

Lewis walks over the mailbox and begins to flip through his mail. Harper starts to drive away but screeches to a halt when she hears Lewis exclaim:

LEWIS
OH MY GOD.

HARPER
(Stepping out of the car)
Is everything okay?

Lewis, speechless, turns to her and hold up a big envelope with a purple N on it.

HARPER
Is that? Is that from Northwestern?

Lewis nods.

HARPER
Oh my god, open it!
LEWIS
I- I don't think I can. I mean. What if-? I'm not ready for this.

Harper takes the envelope from Lewis.

HARPER
Lewis! Big. Envelope.

LEWIS
(Hesitates)
Can you do it?

HARPER
Okay.

Harper opens the envelope and pulls out a letter. She reads aloud.

HARPER
(her volume rising as she progresses through the letter)
Dear Mr. Roth, thank you for your application. It is with great pleasure that I offer you ADMISSION into the NORTHWESTERN CLASS OF 2023-

LEWIS
I GOT IN?!

HARPER
YOU GOT IN!!

LEWIS
OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD! I GOT IN!

Both start screaming and jumping, and Harper embraces Lewis in a friendly hug. Lewis hugs back, a little too tight, and closes his eyes. He continues the hug several seconds past the point of awkwardness. Harper furrows her brow and pulls herself away.

HARPER
Wow. Congrats, Lewis. I don't even know to say. That's so amazing.

LEWIS
I know. I can't believe it.

HARPER
You're going to be moving to Chicago!
LEWIS
Yeah!
(Beat)
I'm going to miss you.

HARPER
We've known each other a week, champ.
I think you'll be okay.

LEWIS
You know what I mean.

HARPER
(smiling)
Good night, Lewis.

LEWIS
Good night.

HARPER
(Getting into her car)
Congrats again!

Harper drives away, and Lewis turns back to the house with a dopey grin on his face.

INT. LEWIS' HOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM

Lewis enters the house; his mother sits on the couch reading. He runs up the stairs and she shouts after him:

MRS. ROTH
How was your evening with Harper?

Lewis says nothing, and his bedroom DOOR SLAMS offscreen. Lewis' voice, slightly muffled, can be heard shouting.

LEWIS
(O.S.)
WHOOOOO!!

Lewis' mom smiles, then continues reading her book.

INT. SIMON'S BASEMENT - NEXT DAY

Simon and Jonah sit in front of the television, playing Call of Duty. Lewis stands behind the couch, pacing, mid-tangent.

LEWIS
So after the arcade we went to Sully's for pizza and we started talking
about, like, our dreams and our futures. She wants to be a writer in New York City, which just makes so much sense for her, you know? And I think she was a little nervous about it, but I encouraged her to go for it. And she encouraged me, too. With the photojournalism.

Jonah locks eyes with Simon and makes a mocking face, unbeknownst to Lewis, who is still talking. Simon stifles a laugh.

LEWIS
I mean. It was one of the most amazing nights of my life, honest.

JONAH
(sarcastic)
Wow. I'm so happy for you.

LEWIS
And then. When she dropped me off, I got my Northwestern acceptance letter, which was great-

Jonah and Simon abruptly put down their controllers and turn around to face Lewis.

LEWIS
-and she was great. But I can't stop thinking about how much I'm going to miss her, you know? Like. How fair is it that NOW that she's in my life? And NOW I have to leave? I-

JONAH
SHUT UP! You got into Northwestern?

LEWIS
Yeah, I got the letter last night.

SIMON
Congratulations!

JONAH
Sorry - WHAT?

LEWIS
What?
JONAH
Uh. You buried the lede there a little. You've wanted to get into this school how long?

LEWIS
I don't know... forever?

JONAH
FOREVER! And you finally do, and it's a footnote? In an unrelated story about some girl you just met?

LEWIS
She's not just some girl.

JONAH
She's a means to an end. And don't get me wrong. As your competitor, I'm loving your pace here. But as your friend? I'm telling you to get your head in the game.

LEWIS
(pause)
No.

JONAH
No?

LEWIS
This isn't about the bet anymore for me. It was at first. But, I don't know. It's a real thing now.

JONAH
What?

SIMON
He's in love!

JONAH
You - quiet. He's not in love.

LEWIS
I am! I'm in love!

JONAH
Wait. What about the $1100?
LEWIS
Keep it!

SIMON
You're in love!

JONAH
Stop saying that.

SIMON
We gotta lock it down, man.

LEWIS
How?

SIMON
Prom. Girls love prom. You get her to go with you, and you're gold.

LEWIS
Yes. So - ask her tomorrow, you think?

SIMON
No, no, no. You need more time. You've gotta do a promposal.

LEWIS
A promposal?

SIMON
The grand romantic gesture. Say Anything. Boombox outside her window.

LEWIS
I need a boombox?

SIMON
No, not that gesture, literally. We just need to follow through on the one we already laid out. When you ask her to prom, you reveal yourself as her secret suitor.

LEWIS
When do I do it?

SIMON
(pauses to think)
You lose - awww, she's so sad. What better way to console her, right?

LEWIS
You don't think it's waiting too long? What if someone else asks her?

JONAH
No one else is asking her. We made sure of that.

Lewis takes a second to mull it over, then breaks into a grin.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Lewis walks down the hallway with a literal skip in his step. He walks past Harper, then does a double take - realizing her locker is in a new location. He approaches her.

LEWIS
Hey!

HARPER
Hey!

LEWIS
New locker?

HARPER
Oh, right. Yeah, the lock on my old one was broken so they reassigned me.

LEWIS
Oh? That's. Inconvenient.

HARPER
Yeah. Whatcha gonna do? Anyhow, you still managed to find me.

LEWIS
Yes. Yes, I did. You excited for the big tournament this weekend?

HARPER
Hell yeah. We are going to crush Lakeville. You got the research I sent you?

LEWIS
Yes. Very helpful stuff.
Blake Shellinger walks by.

BLAKE
Hey, Harper.

HARPER
(Blushing)
Hey, Blake.

Lewis' expression falls.

HARPER
Did you hear he and Caroline broke up?

LEWIS
Uh, no. I hadn't heard that. Where... where did you hear that?

HARPER
He mentioned it to me.

LEWIS
...When?

HARPER
Um, at his party on Saturday.

LEWIS
You... you went to that?

HARPER
Uh, yeah. I stopped by for a bit. After we hung out.

LEWIS
Awesome.

HARPER
(smiling)
That's so sad for them.

LEWIS
Yes. So. So sad.

INT. HEALTH CLASS - SAME DAY

Jonah and Lewis sit in Health Class, not super paying attention as Ms. Riley lectures. Blake Shellinger, a few rows ahead, raises his hand.
MS. RILEY
Uh, yes, Blake?

BLAKE
I have a health question.

MS. RILEY
Okay.

BLAKE
Let's say... hypothetically speaking, you want to hook up with a girl who has chlamydia. If you use a condom, you're fine, right?

Lewis widens his eyes and a look of panic flashes across his face. He turns around and locks eyes with Jonah.

INT. CAFETERIA - SAME DAY

Simon sits alone at the lunch table eating a sandwich when Lewis and Joan abruptly sit down.

LEWIS
We've got a problem.

SIMON
What?

LEWIS
Blake and Caroline broke up this weekend.

SIMON
Oh. Well, he still thinks Harper's got... you know?

LEWIS
Yeah, his line of questioning in health class this morning suggests he doesn't care!

SIMON
Oh, shit.

LEWIS
God. God, I am an idiot.

SIMON
You're not an idiot.
LEWIS
Yes! Yes, I am! She likes him, and he likes her, and I... am not even the third leg here. I am not part of this.

SIMON
Not true. What about everything you told us about last weekend? The arcade and the pizza?

LEWIS
What about it? Clearly, it didn't mean anything to her, or else she wouldn't have bowed out early to go to Blake's party.

SIMON
Hey! Listen to me! Humans are complex creatures and their feelings aren't always straightforward or simple. But whatever she has with him doesn't erase what she's got with you. And it seems to me that their connection is superficial at best, but what you have is something real. And you just have to show that to her. But you've gotta compete to win.

LEWIS
How?

SIMON
We just have to move forward our timeline. You go to her house after school and ask her to prom today.

LEWIS
Today?

SIMON
Today.

LEWIS
I can't.

SIMON
Lewis, you can.

LEWIS
No, literally, I can't. I don't have my car today. It's being serviced. I
can't get there.

Simon and Lewis pause and turn to Jonah, who has been conspicuously silent throughout the conversation.

    LEWIS
    Jonah?
    JONAH
    No.
    LEWIS
    Please.
    JONAH
    No.

    LEWIS
    Dude, I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important.
    (Beat)
    Best friends? Since Kindergarten?

Jonah rolls his eyes and sighs.

    CUT TO:

INT. JONAH'S CAR - HARPER'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Jonah, Simon, and Lewis sit in Jonah's car, driving behind Harper biking home. Simon, in the backseat, pulls his binoculars out of his backpack.

    LEWIS
    Dude, put those away! What if someone sees you? You look like a stalker.

    JONAH
    Oh, I'm sorry. Is that not what we're doing here?

    SIMON
    Sorry.

    LEWIS
    Dude, slow down. You're too close.

    JONAH
    Shame on me for forgetting proper tailing distance.
LEWIS
Wait, wait, wait. She's slowing down. This is her house. Pull over. Don't park right in front.

SIMON
(looking through his binoculars)
Is that Blake on the front step?

Harper ditches her bike on the front lawn and approaches Blake, who sits on the front step with a rolled up poster-board.

LEWIS
What?! What is he doing here?

Blake unfurls the poster-board. On it is scrawled in black Sharpie one word: "Prom?"

LEWIS
No, no, no...

Harper smiles, nods yes, and hugs Blake.

LEWIS
Fuck! Dammit!

JONAH
That is some shit timing right there.

LEWIS
Didn't he break up with Caroline, like, yesterday?

Blake leans in and kisses Harper.

LEWIS
I'm going to be sick.

JONAH
Do you have your camera? Take a picture.

LEWIS
What? Why would I want a picture-

JONAH
TAKE A PICTURE.

Lewis complies. He reaches into his bag and pulls out his camera; he snaps a quick picture as Harper and Blake continue
to make out. They part, Harper picks up her bike, and she and Blake walk together into her garage.

SIMON
I'm sorry, man.

LEWIS
How could she like him? I mean. Is the jock thing really that appealing? Is that really all it comes down to?

SIMON
I don't know. Maybe.

JONAH
This isn't over, guys.

SIMON
Um. Did you not see what we just saw?

JONAH
Oh no, I did. And soon everyone else will, too. Lewis, how would you feel about getting some real photojournalism experience for your resume?

CUT TO:

INT. JONAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jonah sits at his computer; Lewis and Simon crowd on either side of him to better see the screen. The monitor displays a web browser with an open tab on Twitter. A scanner sits on the desk next to the monitor. Jonah presses a button on the scanner, and it lights up. A black and white image of Harper and Blake kissing appears on the screen.

LEWIS
How are you doing it?

JONAH
Easy. Anonymous twitter account following 200 people. Should spread easy from there.

SIMON
"@McKinleySluts"?

JONAH
Seemed appropriate. Given our subject
LEWIS
So you just upload it? That's it?

JONAH
It'll take a few hours, but everyone will have seen it by morning. Should be the kiss of death for our honeymooners. People won't be happy when they realize she's the reason behind Caroline and Blake's untimely demise as the McKinley's resident golden couple.

SIMON
Guys. I don't think we should do this.

JONAH
Why not?

SIMON
Because. It's... mean.

JONAH
Mean? Mean is leading someone on as your backup then completely dropping them as soon as the quarterback gives you the slightest amount of attention. This isn't mean; this is justice.

SIMON
I know it sucks! And Lewis, I know you're pissed. But it's done. We don't have to stoop to this. I don't even know if it's legal.

JONAH
GOD. Stop being such a pussy. Lewis. You tried it his way. You tried being nice. It got you nowhere.

Lewis takes a second to think.

LEWIS
Post it.

SIMON
Lewis-
INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

The following day, the school is abuzz with the news. The CAMERA DOLLYS down the length of the hallway as the students spread the gossip. As it moves forward, the CAMERA LINGERS on a group of students just long enough to pick up snippets of their conversations, before moving along to the next group.

First, the CAMERA stops on a group of jocks, staring at their phones.

JOCK #1
Yo, did you see this?

JOCK #2
Doesn't she have chlamydia?

JOCK #1
Nasty!

The boys laugh. The CAMERA moves on to a group of cheerleaders.

CHEERLEADER #1
I think it's disgraceful.

CHEERLEADER #2
For real. You move to a new school and the first thing you do is break up a couple that's been together since freshman year?

CHEERLEADER #3
Caroline must be livid.

The CAMERA moves on to Natalia, Theresa, and Sadie.

SADIE
I reported the account. It's disgusting.

THERESA
Who would do that?

The chatter and frenzy continue as the CAMERA pushes up the stairs to see Jonah and Lewis standing at the top, looking down at the mess they've made, their arms crossed across their chests and satisfied grins on both their faces.
INT. HALLWAY - HARPER'S LOCKER - DAY
Harper stands in front of her locker, tears in her eyes.

REVERSE SHOT - LOCKER
The word "SLUT" has been spray-painted across the front of her locker. The BELL RINGS.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - SCHOOL ASSEMBLY - DAY
The student body sits assembled in the auditorium as Ellen Pagel stands onstage reading announcements.

ELLEN
...On Friday, there will be a bake sale to support the girl's softball team. Please show your support and bring cash to lunch! Prom tickets are currently on sale and can be purchased in the front office. Thank you.

Ellen walks offstage. The principal, MR. STEIN, 50s, walks up to the podium.

MR. STEIN
Before you are dismissed, a very serious issue has been brought to my attention. I have been informed that an anonymous Twitter account, using the McKinley High School name, has been created with the intent of cyberbullying our female students.

Lewis and Simon share an uneasy look.

MR. STEIN
Thus far, only one tweet has been posted to the account, but we have reason to suspect there will be more. I want to emphatically denounce this behavior as completely morally unacceptable. Please know we are doing everything we can to get the account shut down and hopefully find the student responsible. If anyone has ANY information regarding the identity of
the account holder, please come forward and notify the administration. Thank you. You are dismissed.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The study body floods out of the auditorium. Among them are Lewis, Jonah, and a very panicked Simon. Simon pulls Lewis into an empty classroom, and Jonah follows.

INT. EMPTY CLASSROOM

SIMON
Oh my god. We are screwed.

JONAH
Relax, we're fine.

SIMON
We are not fine! They are looking for us! And it's only a matter of time before they find us.

JONAH
Oh, yeah, and how exactly are they going to do that?

SIMON
What if they trace your IP address?

JONAH
I used a VPN.

SIMON
You need to take it down.

JONAH
Take it down? No way! I gained 150 followers in one night, and I've started to receive submissions. You'd be amazed what some of the girls in this school get up to in their free time.

SIMON
Submissions? You can't keep running it!

JONAH
Can too.
SIMON

Lewis?!

Simon looks at Lewis for backup, but Lewis just shrugs innocently.

SIMON

I can't believe you guys. I'm done. I want no part of this.

Simon begins to exit.

JONAH

Wait. Are you narcing on us?

Simon pauses to think.

SIMON

I won't tell them it was you. But if anyone asks me, I'm not lying.

Simon exits.

JONAH

Pussy.

INT. GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOM - DEBATE TEAM MEETING - SAME DAY

Mr. Payne lectures on something or other - Lewis isn't really paying attention. Rather, he is staring at Harper's empty desk.

EXT. SCHOOL - FRONT STEPS - AFTER SCHOOL

Lewis and Jonah exit together.

LEWIS

You don't agree with Simon, do you? Did we go too far?

JONAH

What? No. Of course not. She deserved it.

LEWIS

Did she?

JONAH

She led you on, Lewis. Besides, everything will work itself out. At the tournament Saturday, you can stand
out as her knight in shining armor for sticking by her even though she broke up the school's golden couple.

LEWIS
She wasn't at practice today.

JONAH
Well, she probably needs a day or two for everything to blow over. Don't worry about it.

Jonah pats Lewis on the shoulder and leaves for his car. Lewis stands motionless in consternation.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - EARLY MORNING - SATURDAY

Lewis, dressed in a suit and tie, waits on the curb outside a school bus, periodically checking his watch. Mr. Payne steps off the bus.

MR. PAYNE
Come on, Lewis. We gotta go, or we're going to miss the first round.

LEWIS
Harper's not here yet.

MR. PAYNE
If she's not here by now, then I doubt she's coming.

LEWIS
I can't compete without a partner.

MR. PAYNE
Well, then I guess you can't compete.

Mr. Payne gets back on the bus, and Lewis remains on the curb as the bus drives away.

INT. SIMON'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - MORNING

There is a loud KNOCK at the door. Simon's mother approaches and opens it to come face to face with a disheveled Lewis, still in his suit and tie.

SIMON'S MOTHER
Lewis? What are you doing here? It's so early.
LEWIS
Is Simon here? I need to speak with him.

SIMON'S MOTHER
Hold on.

Simon's mother crosses to the stairs and shouts up.

SIMON'S MOTHER
Simon! Lewis is here for you!

We hear a DOOR OPEN, and Simon appears at the top of the stairs. He glares down at Lewis, who still stands in the front door.

EXT. SIMON'S PORCH
The two boys sit on the steps of the porch in the harsh morning light.

SIMON
I don't see your car.

LEWIS
I walked.

SIMON
What are you doing here?

LEWIS
I need your help.

SIMON
With what?

LEWIS
I need to fix this. I think – I think we messed things up with Harper.

SIMON
We?

LEWIS
Me. I messed things up. Me and Jonah. Harper hasn't been at school all week. She skipped the tournament. She hasn't answered any of my texts, and I don't know if she's going to show on Monday. Or when I'm going to see her again. And I just need your help figuring out
how to undo all of this.

SIMON
You can't undo it.

LEWIS
I know. I know. But-

SIMON
I'm not helping you.

LEWIS
Simon-

SIMON
This whole situation has gotten so fucked up, and I don't want to be part of it anymore.

LEWIS
I get that you're mad. I should have listened to you. But you have to help me. Without you, I'll never get her to go out with me.

SIMON
She doesn't like you! She likes someone else, okay? Give it up. It's over. You're acting like a psychopath.

LEWIS
You think I'm a psychopath?

SIMON
Honestly, yes.

LEWIS
You know it never would have gone this far without you, right? Without your stupid plans and rom-com fantasies?

SIMON
Yeah, maybe you're right! I've been enabling you this whole time, and I'm done.

LEWIS
Whatever. Fuck you, man. I'll do it without you.

Lewis turns to storm off, and Simon calls after him.
SIMON

Lewis?

LEWIS

What?

SIMON

Don't come back here.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lewis sits at his desk, drafting another love letter. It's not right. He crumples it up and throws it away, where it joins a number of other crumpled up rejects. He begins writing another one.

EXT. LEWIS' BEDROOM WINDOW

Lewis continues writing into the night.

INT. BIOLOGY CLASSROOM - DAY - MONDAY

Ms. Riley gives a lecture on punnet squares, but Lewis' mind is elsewhere. Clearly disheveled and sleep-deprived, a jittery Lewis raises his hand.

MS. RILEY

Yes, Lewis?

LEWIS

May I use the bathroom?

INT. HALLWAY

Lewis, alone in the hall, approaches Harper's locker. The front is covered in duct tape in a messy attempt to hide the graffiti beneath. Lewis pulls both the new love letter and a paperclip out of his backpack and then jams the paperclip into the lock, twisting aimlessly as he tries to get it open. He is interrupted by the entrance of MRS. RINGWALD.

MRS. RINGWALD

Lewis?

Lewis turns to see her then sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

MR. STEIN, school principal, looks over the note that was
meant for Harper, as Lewis sits uncomfortably on the other side of the desk. After an excruciating silence, Mr. Stein looks up from the note.

MR. STEIN
Well. The sentiment is... nice. You're no Shakespeare, but I see what you were trying to do here.

LEWIS
So. I'm not in trouble?

MR. STEIN
Oh no, you're definitely in trouble.
(Beat)
Lewis, you're one of our top students here. Excellent grades, involved in extracurriculars, great feedback from teachers, no disciplinary record. And I'm not supposed to announce this yet, but presuming there's no sudden drop in your academic performance, you're going to be our valedictorian at graduation. So believe me, I have no interest in punishing you excessively. Especially over what is a... perhaps misguided... attempt at romance. But I can't have students breaking into each other's lockers. Especially not when one of the students has already complained about the issue to administration and has been the target of bullying since arriving here. You understand.

LEWIS
What's my punishment?

MR. STEIN
One week of detention.

Lewis rolls his eyes.

MR. STEIN
Hey. Don't give me attitude. You're getting off easy.

LEWIS
Sorry, sir. Anything else?
MR. STEIN
No, that will be all. You're dismissed.

Lewis exits Mr. Stein's office. On his way out, he runs into Harper, on her way in. In the collision, she drops her bag, and the contents spill out onto the floor. Both Lewis and Harper crouch down to pick it all up.

LEWIS
Oh my god, sorry.

HARPER
It's fine.

Lewis looks at her and notices that she, too, looks tired. Her hair is pulled back in a greasy ponytail, and she wears no makeup, showcasing the dark circles under her eyes.

LEWIS
You weren't at school last week. Or the tournament Saturday.

HARPER
Oh my god, I'm sorry. I... I had the flu.

LEWIS
The flu?

HARPER
Yeah.

LEWIS
Do you feel better?

HARPER
(smiles sadly)
No.
(Beat)
Stein wants to see me, so I should probably...

She points to Mr. Stein's office, and Lewis nods in understanding. As they stand up, Lewis realizes exactly why Mr. Stein is likely seeing Harper. Panicked, he turns around and locks eyes with Mr. Stein behind him. He nods his head no, a silent plea with the man not to embarrass him like this. Mr. Stein shrugs, ushers Harper in, and closes the door. Lewis takes a seat in a chair outside the office and strains to hear the conversation on the other side of the
door. But all he can hear are muffled voices. After a few moments, the voices grow louder, and the door opens. Harper stands in the doorway, staring at him, a confused, angry expression on her face.

LEWIS
Harper.

HARPER
Don't fucking talk to me.

Harper storms out of the office, and Lewis follows.

INT. HALLWAY

Harper makes her way down the empty hallway; she is surprisingly fast. Lewis quickens his pace to keep up.

LEWIS
Harper, wait! Can we talk?

HARPER
Leave me alone.

LEWIS
Listen, I know it was... weird. And I shouldn't have broken into your locker. I was just trying, in my own weird, messed up way, to be romantic. Because I like you. And that's not how I was planning on saying it, but I do. And- and I didn't know how to tell you. So I thought if I wrote it down, then...

Harper abruptly stops and turns around to face him.

HARPER
It was you, wasn't it? All of it?

This question leaves him visibly shaken.

LEWIS
(long pause)
No. I- I don't know what you're talking about. All of what?

HARPER
Oh my god. It was.

She turns around and continues storming.
EXT. SCHOOL STEPS

Harper bursts out the doors, followed by Lewis.

LEWIS
Harper, I didn't do any of that stuff! I swear.

HARPER
Don't EVER speak to me again.

Harper quickens her pace down the steps and runs up to a lifted truck parked by the curb. Blake Shellinger sits in the driver's seat. She gets in the car, and the two drive away.

LEWIS
Dammit!

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Lewis sulks to his car, which is parked next to Jonah's van. Jonah leans against the hood, waiting.

JONAH
Hey, dude. I heard you got sent to Stein's office. What happened?

LEWIS
It's over.

JONAH
What?

LEWIS
Me and Harper. It's over.

JONAH
What happened?

LEWIS
You happened! She figured it out. All of it. The chlamydia, the picture, the notes.

JONAH
The notes were not my idea.

LEWIS
The notes aren't the problem, Jonah! You are! This whole fucking thing was your idea.
JONAH
I never forced you into anything.

LEWIS
I never would have come up with any of that shit on my own.

JONAH
Oh, okay. So when Simon was telling us to back off, what exactly did you say? Because if I remember correctly, you're the one that told me to post it.

LEWIS
Yeah, well maybe I should have listened to Simon then.

JONAH
Yeah. Maybe! But you didn't. So take some fucking responsibility instead of pretending like I was the only one driving the car.

LEWIS
You know what? I'm done with you.

JONAH
Okay! Fine by me!

Lewis gets in his car, slams the door, and drives away.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A) INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lewis sits on his bed reading a comic book; he gazes longingly at a panel in which a muscled hero kisses a beautiful woman on a rooftop at night. He closes the comic book and throws it across the bed.

B) INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Lewis approaches their regular lunch table, where Simon sits eating. Simon, seeing Lewis, gets up and approaches a different table, where Natalia, Sadie, and Theresa sit, leaving Lewis alone. Lewis looks around for somewhere else to go and locks eyes with Jonah from across the cafeteria. Lewis storms off.

C) INT. GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOM - DEBATE TEAM MEETING
Lewis sits in his desk, staring longingly at the empty desk where Harper used to sit.

EXT. HARPER'S HOUSE - EVENING - TWO WEEKS LATER

Lewis is parked on Harper's street, a few houses down from hers so as to avoid being seen. He watches in agony as HARPER'S MOTHER takes photos of Harper and Blake on the front lawn in their prom attire. They both look stunning, in sharp contrast to Lewis' dirty t-shirt and baseball cap. Harper's mother finishes up taking the photos, then gives Harper a quick hug. Harper and Blake depart together in Blake's truck. Lewis sighs, turns on the car, and pulls away.

INT. LEWIS' HOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM

Lewis enters the house carrying a bag of McDonald's. He begins to head up the stairs when his mother walks by, carrying a basket of laundry.

MRS. ROTH
Hey, you! What are you doing here?

LEWIS
I live here.

MRS. ROTH
Isn't the prom tonight?

LEWIS
So?

MRS. ROTH
I thought you said you were going.

LEWIS
Yeah, well, I'm not.

MRS. ROTH
Why not? It's your senior prom.

LEWIS
I don't have a date.

MRS. ROTH
You don't need a date to have fun. Maybe you'll meet someone there.

LEWIS
I'm just not going, okay?!
Lewis trudges up the stairs, to his mother's bewilderment. His bedroom DOOR SLAMS offscreen.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Lewis sits on his bed and throws the McDonald's bag on the bedside table. He isn't hungry. There is a gentle KNOCK on the door. He doesn't say anything. Lewis' mom gently pushes the door open and steps inside before proceeding to sit down on the bed.

MRS. ROTH
You know you're not allowed to have food in here?

LEWIS
Well, I'm not really eating anyway.

MRS. ROTH
I sense I touched a nerve back there. What's going on?

Lewis says nothing.

MRS. ROTH
Is it Harper?

Lewis looks at his mother, realizing she knows more than she's ever let on.

LEWIS
I ruined everything, Mom.

MRS. ROTH
Oh, honey, what happened?

LEWIS
I... hurt her feelings. She won't talk to me.

MRS. ROTH
What did you do?

LEWIS
I don't want to say.

MRS. ROTH
Okay... Well, did you mean to hurt her?
LEWIS
No!

MRS. ROTH
Okay, then it was a mistake. And mistakes are forgivable.

LEWIS
I don't know...

MRS. ROTH
Just try apologizing. You're a good kid; I know that. And I'm sure she sees it too. And I think you'd be surprised how forgiving people can be when given the opportunity.

LEWIS
What about Blake Shellinger?

MRS. ROTH
Who is Blake Shellinger?

LEWIS
The quarterback.

MRS. ROTH
Ah. Well, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Girls don't really want the Blake Shellinger's of the world. They just think they do. But once they've got them, they realize what they really wanted is someone sensitive and smart. So I think you've still got a shot.

LEWIS
Really?

MRS. ROTH
Really! But you've got to get going. The dance will be over soon.

LEWIS
I don't have a tux.

MRS. ROTH
You know, I think your dad might have something packed away somewhere.

CUT TO:
INT. LEWIS' PARENTS' BEDROOM

Lewis stands in front of a full length mirror, his mother looking on eagerly from behind. The camera PANS up the length of his body, revealing his dad's old suit to be nothing other than an 80's monstrosity: electric blue with a ruffled shirt and matching bowtie and cummerbund. When the camera reaches his faces, Lewis furrows his brow - not ideal. He shrugs.

CUT TO:

INT. JONAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jonah sits at his computer, scrolling through Reddit, when a CARN HORN BLARES offscreen. He walks over to his window where he sees Lewis parked on the street outside.

EXT. JONAH'S HOUSE

LEWIS
Get in!

JONAH
(From the window)
I thought you hated me!

LEWIS
Only sometimes!

JONAH
Where are we going?

LEWIS
Prom!

JONAH
Ugh, why?

LEWIS
I need to win back the girl of my dreams, and you are my best friend. I can't do it without you. What do you say?

JONAH
(Pause)
Hold on.

Jonah leaves the window and emerges from the front door a moment later wearing a suit jacket over a black t-shirt with a tuxedo screen printed across the front. He approaches the
car and takes a long look at Lewis' 1980s getup.

    JONAH
    You look ridiculous.

    LEWIS
    Likewise.

The two boys get in the car and off they go.

EXT. SCHOOL - FRONT STEPS - NIGHT

Music can be heard from inside, and a few stragglers in formalwear hang around outside. Lewis' car pulls up to the curb and SCRECHES to a halt. Despite a clear "NO PARKING" sign, Lewis puts the car in park and both boys exit the vehicle, rushing up the stairs to the dance inside.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Lewis and Jonah enter the gym, which has been completely transformed to match the "Under the Sea" theme. The boys scan the crowd for Harper to no avail. There are simply too many people.

    LEWIS
    Do you see her?

    JONAH
    No. Remind me again what she's wearing. High heels, long dress?

    LEWIS
    We'll never find her with all these people.

Lewis continues searching when his eyes land on the band onstage. Suddenly, he has an idea.

    LEWIS
    Wait here.

    JONAH
    What are you doing?

Not answering, Lewis pushes through the crowd and hops up onstage just as the band finishes the song. Lewis grabs the microphone off its stand, much to the chagrin of the SINGER.

    SINGER
    Hey-
LEWIS
Sorry. Just. One minute.

(Turning to the crowd)
Hey. Hi, everyone. Hope everyone's having a great night. Drive safe! Um. I'm just up here because I have a few words for Harper Brooks if she's out there. Uh, spot guy? Maybe you could shine a light on her...

OFFSCREEN VOICE MALE
Get off the stage!

LEWIS
Getting there! Okay? I'm just trying to do a romantic gesture here. Harper, I-

OFFSCREEN VOICE FEMALE
She's not even here!

LEWIS
What? Where is she?

OFFSCREEN VOICE FEMALE
She left for the afterparty like twenty minutes ago.

LEWIS
Afterparty? Where's the afterparty?

OFFSCREEN VOICE FEMALE
Blake Shellinger's.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT STEPS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS ACTION
Lewis and Jonah rush down the steps and return to the car, a parking ticket now stuck to the window. They speed off, and the parking ticket goes flying.

EXT. BLAKE SHELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT
Jonah and Blake stand outside the mansion, its size imposing. They look up, mouths agape.

JONAH
You ready?
LEWIS
I think so.

JONAH
Let's do this.

INT. BLAKE SHELLINGER'S HOUSE

Lewis and Jonah enter the house, which is filled to the brim with teenagers dancing and spilling their red solo cups.

LEWIS
I'm going to look for her upstairs; you check down here. Okay?

JONAH
Roger that.

Lewis heads up the stairs; Jonah joins the party.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Lewis makes his way down the hallway, peeping his head inside each room as he goes, looking for Harper.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS LIVING ROOM

Jonah walks up to a group of girls.

JONAH
Hey, ladies! Enjoying the night?

The girls roll their eyes and leave.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Lewis approaches a bedroom with the door slightly ajar. He looks in through the crack and sees Harper and Blake inside. Blake sits on the bed, head in his hands, exasperated. Harper stands, pacing back and forth. They are clearly arguing.

HARPER
Screw you, Blake!

BLAKE
Why are you making this such a big deal?

HARPER
Big deal? Are you serious? God, I can't even talk to you right now. I'm
outta here. Where's my purse?

Hearing this, Lewis backs away from the door and ducks into the doorframe of the adjacent bathroom so as not to be seen.

BLAKE
(O.S.)
Oh, come on. Don't leave.

HARPER
(O.S.)
Where's my purse, Blake?

After a moment, Lewis sees Harper open the door and storm into the hallway; she doesn't spot him. She runs down the stairs, and Lewis quietly follows. He reaches the bottom of the stairs just in time to see her exit the house through the back door.

INT. KITCHEN

Jonah enters the kitchen and approaches two girls.

JONAH
Hey, ladies. I'm looking for Harper Brooks. Have you seen her?

GIRL
I think she went upstairs with Blake.

JONAH
Upstairs? Huh. Well this is a pretty big house. Maybe you ladies could come help me look for her?

GIRL
(locks eyes with her friend and laughs)
Uh, no thanks. Good luck.

The two girls leave the kitchen; Jonah rolls his eyes. Then:

FEMALE VOICE
(O.S.)
Jonah!

Jonah turns around to see Cher, red cup in hand, completely out-of-her-mind drunk.

JONAH
Cher! Hey.
She stumbles forward.

CHER
What are you doing here?

JONAH
Uh, I'm looking for Harper.

CHER
Harper! Adventurous Harper. I like her. She's got pretty hair.

JONAH
Uh, yeah. Very pretty hair.

CHER
I never see you out, Jonah! You never come to parties.

JONAH
Well, I'm out now.

CHER
Whoo! Yeah, take a shot!

Jonah raises his eyebrows. Then, accepting the challenge, he reaches for a bottle of liquor from the countertop and pours himself a shot. He downs it; she cheers.

CHER
Yeah, Jonah!

She lifts up her cup to toast him but does so with too much force and spills her drink on his shirt.

CHER
Oh my god. I'm so sorry.

JONAH
It's okay.

CHER
I didn't mean to do that. It's just so loud in here!

JONAH
Maybe we should find somewhere a little quieter, huh?

CHER
Yeah... quiet is good. Less...
She trails off, and Jonah takes her hand to lead her out of the kitchen.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Simon stands in a circle chatting with the other nerds - Natalia, Sadie, and Theresa.

NATALIA
Simon, you should totally come to one of our D&D games sometime.

SIMON
That would great! Who's your dungeon master?

THERESA
Our friend Charlie! You'll love him.

NATALIA
Just don't bring that friend of yours. The gross one.

Jonah and Cher pass by the group as they make their way to the stairs, Cher visibly struggling to support herself as she walks. This catches Sadie's attention. She checks out of the conversation as she watches Jonah lead Cher upstairs, a concerned expression on her face.

EXT. BLAKE SHELLINGER'S BACKYARD

Away from the party, Harper finds a quiet moment to herself on the swing set in Blake's backyard. Still in her prom dress, she sits down on the swing and starts to cry. Lewis exits the house and approaches her from behind. He stops for a moment - afraid to speak. He takes a breath.

LEWIS
Harper?

Harper turns around and realizes who's speaking to her. She rolls her eyes and continues crying.

HARPER
Go away.

Lewis sits down on the swing next to her.

HARPER
God, go away. What do you want?
LEWIS
I'm not trying to bother you. I just wanted to make sure you're okay.

Harper says nothing.

LEWIS
I, um... I overheard you and Blake arguing inside. Accidentally. I was looking for the bathroom. Anyway, I guess I'm just. Sorry. All those guys, the jock types. They can be real jerks, you know? They don't know how to appreciate a girl like you.

Harper snorts.

HARPER
You're serious?
(Beat)
Do you even know why we were arguing?

LEWIS
Uh, no.

HARPER
I found out tonight that Blake only dumped Caroline because she wouldn't put out, and he heard I was easy at my last school in Seattle. So thanks for that.

LEWIS
(awkward pause)
I'm sorry. I... that wasn't my idea. I just - I'm... sorry.
(Beat)
But. Blake is such a dick! Those guys they just - all they care about is sex. And they completely objectify women and treat them like shit. Treat everyone like shit. And they get away with it because they look like Abercrombie models and know how to throw a ball around. They don't care about anything real.

HARPER
Oh, shut up! Stop it. Stop pretending like you're better than him!
LEWIS
I am better than him!

HARPER
No. No, you're not.

LEWIS
He's an asshole!

HARPER
Yes! Yes. He is an asshole. But only one of you completely destroyed my life.

LEWIS
I... can explain all that.

HARPER
Explain? Seriously? You're going to explain to me why you told the entire school I had chlamydia? And manipulated your way into spending time with me? And broke into my locker to leave all these creepy love notes and took secret photos of me for your dark room, without my consent, some of which were taken at my house. At an address I don't ever remember giving you. And when things didn't work out for you, you took one of those photos and posted it online, broadcasting my private life to the entire student body! And through it all, you pretended to be my friend. How could you possibly explain any of that?

LEWIS
I know! I know I shouldn't have done those things, and I know they were crazy, but...

HARPER
But WHAT? Why did you do that?

LEWIS
Because I'm in love with you!

(Pause)
I am in love with you. And people do crazy things when they are in love.
HARPER
You're not in love with me.

LEWIS
I am! I am. I think about you all the time. When I'm with you, it feels like. Like magic. And when I'm not with you, I want to be. Because you are the most interesting person I've ever met. And you're smart and dynamic and different. You're not like other girls. You're special.

HARPER
(Beat)
I am exactly like other girls, Lewis. You don't even know me.

LEWIS
I do.

HARPER
No, you don't. And you don't love me. You can't. Because if you did, you never would have acted the way you did. I mean, I don't know if I've ever met someone who was so... selfish! And psychotic! And manipulative and obsessive and stalker-y and CRUEL-

LEWIS
Oh my god, SHUT UP!

Lewis grabs Harper by the shoulders and aggressively kisses her. She is stunned for a moment, then pushes him away.

HARPER
(Breaking free)
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?!

LEWIS
Shit. Sorry.

HARPER
WHAT ABOUT ANY OF THIS CONVERSATION SUGGESTED I WANTED THAT?

LEWIS
It works in the movies.
HARPER
Oh, right! Hollywood. Font of eternal
goodness. Jesus Christ, Lewis.

LEWIS
I just thought... maybe if we kissed...

HARPER
Then what? I'd realize my latent
attraction? Get a grip. I'm not
interested!

LEWIS
(though his voice is angry, his
eyes well up with tears)
Don't say that! You can't say that.
You have to forgive me. You have to
try.

HARPER
I have to?

LEWIS
Yes! Because I've never felt this way
about anyone before. And I know I
don't deserve it. But please. You have
to give me another shot. Please!
Harper.

Lewis cries; Harper says nothing. She begins to turn away to
leave, but thinks better of it.

HARPER
You know there's one thing I just
can't figure out. If you liked me so
much, why all the lying and scheming?
Why didn't you just ask me out?

LEWIS
If I had, would you have said yes?

HARPER
(beat)
No.

She turns on her heel and heads back towards the house.
Lewis, still crying, does not follow.
INT. BLAKE SHELLINGER'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS CLOSET

Jonah opens the closet door and ushers Cher inside. She leans against the wall and slides down to the floor.

JONAH
How's this? Quieter.

CHER
Yeah. Good.

Cher struggles to keep her eyes open.

JONAH
Oh. Hey, hey. Don't fall asleep.

CHER
But I'm tired.

JONAH
Yeah, but the night is still young. You don't want to miss all the fun.

CHER
The fun's out there.

JONAH
We can have our own fun in here.

CHER
Okay...

Jonah leans in closer to her, and she perks up a little.

CHER
Ooh! Did I tell you I was a spelling bee champion?

JONAH
What?

CHER
Yeah. In second grade. Give me a word; I'll spell anything.

JONAH
Um. That's not exactly the kind of fun I meant.
Jonah is perplexed an annoyed. Cher continues to spell.

CHER

JONAH
You know, I don't think we need to spell right now.

CHER
But if I spell, then I won't fall asleep.

JONAH
I could come up with another distraction for you.

CHER
Yeah, but I don't want to kiss you.

JONAH
Are you sure about that?

He leans in closer, just a few inches from her face. Her eyelids close, not in a romantic kind of way. In an alcohol poisoning kind of way. He gently presses his lips against hers; this causes her to stir. She pulls her face away from his, furrows her brow, then... she pukes in his lap.

JONAH
GAH!

Just as he starts to pull away, the door burst open. Sadie, Natalia, and Theresa stand over him.

SADIE
What the FUCK are you doing?

JONAH
Wh-
SADIE
Is she okay?

THERESA
I think so...

JONAH
She's fine. We were just looking for somewhere quiet-

Before he can finish, Sadie whips around and in one fluid motion punches Jonah square in the nose. Jonah goes down. A small crowd of onlookers gasp and whoop.

NATALIA
Let's get her home.

Supporting Cher, Natalia and Theresa head for the stairs, followed by Sadie. Jonah sits on the ground, pitiful and bleeding from his nose. He looks up and sees Simon standing among the onlookers. Simon looks down at him, not bothering to conceal his judgment. For a second, it looks as though he may help Jonah up, but he instead turns around to follow the girls out.

EXT. BLAKE SHELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sadie, Natalia, Theresa, and Cher emerge from the front door just as Harper emerges from around the backside of the house. She sees them heading for their car and runs after.

HARPER
Hey, wait up!

The girls turn around.

HARPER
Are you guys leaving? Could I get a ride?

NATALIA
Uh, yeah. You'll have to sit in the back with her.

Natalia motions towards the blacked out Cher with her head.

HARPER
Is she okay?

NATALIA
I think she will be...
Harper approaches and takes over supporting Cher, freeing Natalia up to find her keys.

NATALIA
Here, I'm parked this way.

The five girls head for Natalia's car. Jonah exits the house just as Lewis emerges from the back, his eyes still red from crying. They approach each other. Lewis takes a good look at Jonah, who is holding a bloody rag to his nose and is covered in vomit.

LEWIS
What happened to you?

JONAH
I almost won the bet.

LEWIS
Huh.
(beat)
You want to get waffles?

CUT TO:

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - NIGHT

Jonah and Lewis sit across from each other in a booth, not speaking a word. A waitress approaches their table and places a plate of waffles in front of each.

WAITRESS
Let me know if I can get you boys anything else.

The boys say nothing, and the waitress walks away. For a moment, they both just stare at their food in silence. Then, Lewis pipes up.

LEWIS
Women are cunts.

Jonah nods in agreement. The boys dig in.

FADE OUT.

THE END.
Nice Guys Finish Last:  
Research and Discussion  
Madeline Lacy  
University of Colorado at Boulder  
Fall 2019
Introduction

Entertainment was always important to my family. This has been true as far back as I can remember, probably starting around whatever age my parents finally felt that they could share with me the movies they liked, as opposed to strictly showing me the children’s movies in which I was supposed to be interested. I suspect this age was earlier for me than it may have been for most other children. As such, when I think back on my childhood, I have many fond memories of my family all gathered around the TV, popping in DVDs of our favorite movies or tuning in for our weekly shows, of which there were many. I’ve often seen this family dynamic depicted as depressing, a symbol of the death of the closeness of the American family; why are they all sitting around a TV instead of talking to each other?

However, in my family’s case, the opposite was true. Television prompted lively discussions for us. I vividly remember sitting around the dinner table discussing Buffy the Vampire Slayer, certain episodes providing my parents with the window they needed to teach my sisters and I life lessons about topics like dating and substance abuse. We bonded over our shared love of Freaks and Geeks. We hotly debated our theories on Lost. Though my sisters, parents, and I all had disparate interests, as can be expected in most families, television and a love of storytelling was something we shared.

We engaged in a wide variety of movies and television shows, but the genre I feel most at home in has to be the romantic comedy. My dad, a professional guitarist, often worked gigs on Friday and Saturday nights, leaving my mom at home to watch my sisters and I. We quickly developed something of a girls’ night ritual: go to Hollywood Video, rent a rom-com, come home, and make popcorn. Our favorites were those starring Reese Witherspoon or Meg Ryan,
but we didn’t discriminate. As such, by the time I reached middle school, I had seen nearly all of the genre classics.

In 2015, when I moved out-of-state for college, in my homesickness, I found myself revisiting many of the movies and television series that I’d watched with my family as a kid. While some of it was as excellent as I remembered, I found much of it, particularly the romantic comedies, to be very difficult to re-engage with as an adult, in large part due to my new awareness of the dated gender dynamics present in the genre. This should have come as no surprise, as the romantic comedy is inherently nostalgic, existing as a “generic tradition which is adamantly evoked as a defense against social convulsions in the very institutions of love, sexuality, and marriage” (Deleyto, 2003, p. 167). That is, the foundations of the romantic comedy are embedded in heteronormative institutions, and as culture has adapted to be more accepting of different expressions of love and sexuality, the romantic comedy almost feels stuck in a bygone era.

Of course, there are certain movies that I continue to watch and enjoy, even with the knowledge that what I’m watching maybe doesn’t perfectly align with my feminist ideals. I will always love the ending of *Pretty Woman*, and I will watch *When Harry Met Sally* probably every New Year’s Eve until I die. But there are other movies that are so far removed from my current understandings of gender that I find them nearly impossible to sit through start to finish. Nowhere is this truer than in the teen comedy subgenre.

Perhaps more asinine than their adult-centered counterparts, teen romantic comedies host a plethora of laughable tropes, like the over-the-top, public romantic gesture that seemingly must coincide with the prom, or the awkward girl suddenly becoming beautiful once she removes her
glasses. However, among these, the recurring pattern that most stands out to me is the dynamic between nerds and jocks. Over and over again, the school geeks are pitted against the athletes, the two defined in opposition to each other. Where the nerd is brainy, awkward, uncool, and bad with women, the jock is physically fit, popular, charismatic, and sexually experienced. Christine Quail describes this trope as the “hip/square dialectic”, a narrative tool used to explore expressions of masculinity through the antagonistic relationship among social groups, where the nerd serves as “the butt of jokes and psychological violence, yet typically maintain[s] the moral high ground often ascribed to cultural outcasts” (Quail, 2011, p. 461-462). Through this trope, many teen comedies espouse nerd identities as alternatives to hegemonic masculinity, often through the use of romance narratives, in which female affection acts as a vehicle through which nerd identities are validated.

As a female viewer, this particular pattern never really sat right with me. How could geeks represent a utopic alternative to toxic masculinity when, during my lifetime, geek culture had infamously become the site of heavily publicized anti-woman rhetoric? The first example of this rhetoric that comes to mind is the #GamerGate controversy, in which proponents for better representation of women in video games became the subjects of widespread online harassment campaigns, in which their personal information was leaked online and they received an onslaught of anonymous abuse and physical threats from male gamers (Woo, 2018). Other examples include when comedian Leslie Jones was bullied off Twitter by rabid fans after she had the audacity to appear in the all-female led reboot of Ghostbusters, or when fans deliberately tried to tank the box office success of Captain Marvel, the first female-led Marvel movie, by flooding its Rotten Tomatoes page with negative reviews before the movie had even been released (Silman,
To put it bluntly, how could geeks represent an alternative to toxic masculinity when geeks could be so sexist?

Not only did I find this cinema trope to be incongruous with the behavior of geeks in real life, I also had a hard time rooting for the actions of the characters within these movies themselves. Behaviors that I knew to be destructive, like stalking, were romanticized as viable strategies for winning female affection. I began to wonder what would happen if a movie were to portray the actual consequences of such behaviors in a high school setting? And it is from this question that my screenplay was born.

What is a Geek?

In setting out to write a screenplay centered on geeks and geek culture, it first became necessary to define what a geek actually is. The most basic definition I could find argues, “To be a geek is to be engaged, to be enthralled in a topic, and then to act on that engagement” (McArthur, 2009, p. 62). This definition aligns with one of the most prominent geek stereotypes: the fan. The convention attendee. The Doctor Who devotee. The avid comic book reader. In fact, the concepts of geek and fan are so interlinked that in much literature, the two terms are used interchangeably. Busse (2013) distinguishes, “…geeks tend to connote more interest in academic matters, especially technology and science, whereas fans are more often connected to popular culture” (p. 77). Despite this distinction, engagement in fandom, particularly in the science fiction, fantasy, or superhero genres, is one of the most prominent signifiers in media to denote a character’s status as a geek. And, indeed, while fan culture is certainly a facet of geek identity, there are a few problems with using this as the only defining characteristic.
First, much of the media that uses fandom to codify characters as geeks also uses participation in fan culture as a punch line, with *The Big Bang Theory* serving as a prominent example of this type of comedy. In this show, the audience is often meant to identify with the character Penny, who is the only non-geek of the group, and much of the humor is derived from her bewildered responses to the group’s obsession with various science fiction and fantasy media. This tendency unfairly pathologizes participation in fan culture, a quality that, in itself, is not necessarily harmful or deserving of mockery. Furthermore, what many onscreen depictions of geeks ignore is that many participants in fandom are, in fact, women and people of color. Henry Jenkins (1988) argues that fandom serves as a tool through which marginalized communities can “pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations” (p. 87). Given that the initial impulse behind this project was to address misogyny, it does not seem accurate to solely define geeks through a mechanism that is often used as a counter to the very problem that I hope to address.

As such, while fandom certainly serves as a facet of geek identity, for the purposes of this project, it more helpful to focus instead on geekiness as a social stratum and alternate representation of masculinity. Benjamin Woo (2018) explains, “Nerds and geeks are highly accomplished at technical or scientific pursuits that they practice with uncommon dedication; on the other hand, they are foolish, inept, clumsy, unattractive, offensive, boringly conventional, worthless, and insignificant” (p. 6). In essence, geeks are everything jocks are not. They fail to adhere to standard masculine conventions like strength, confidence, and ease interacting with the opposite sex. Ultimately, while outright rejection of said conventions could result in a new set of masculine ideals – like sensitivity, communication, and a sense of safety within intimate partner
relationships – unfortunately, it seems oftentimes the pendulum swings in the opposite direction.

In much of film and television, it is the geek’s desire to achieve status within the confines of hegemonic masculinity, despite his shortcomings, that often result in some of the worst offenses against women.

Movie Reviews

I decided pretty early on in the writing process that I wanted my script to be a satire of teen comedies. To do so, I needed to re-familiarize myself with genre tropes and conventions, so after the initial research phase, my next step was to rewatch a sample of these movies. Movies watched include: Revenge of the Nerds (1984), Sixteen Candles (1984), The Breakfast Club (1985), Pretty in Pink (1986), Clueless (1995), 10 Things I Hate About You (1999), American Pie (1999), John Tucker Must Die (2006), Superbad (2007), Easy A (2010), and Edge of Seventeen (2016). I chose movies based on content, prioritizing movies based on their inclusion of the hip/square dialectic, though some, of course, address geeks more directly than others. It should also be noted that the list of movies that influenced the final script extends far beyond those outlined here; the movies listed are merely the movies I chose to review during the time frame of this project.

Of these, there are four movies I want to address in more detail: 10 Things I Hate About You, Superbad, Sixteen Candles, and Revenge of the Nerds. These movies were chosen because I believe they effectively illustrate some of the common issues present in depictions of geeks in film. Also worth noting is that not all of these movies fall strictly within the confines of the romantic comedy genre. Superbad and Revenge of the Nerds in particular could probably more aptly be defined as buddy comedies. That said, they share some key similarities with romantic
comedies. Most notably, both movies feature romantic subplots in which a nerdy protagonist pursues a woman deemed “out of his league.” These subplots end predictably with the men winning over the objects of their affection. This common movie ending, in which the movie draws to a close just as the couple comes together and lives happily ever after, is known as the “coupled resolution” and is a hallmark of the romantic comedy (Thompson, 2015, p. 21). As such, though these movies are not romantic comedies, they overlap with the genre in such a way that I still found them appropriate for analysis.

To begin, *10 Things I Hate About You* is a 1999 high school romantic comedy based loosely on Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*. The movie introduces the audience to the awkward and sensitive Cameron, a new student at Padua High School, played by a young Joseph Gordon-Levitt. While touring the campus, Cameron’s eyes land upon Bianca Stratford, the most popular girl in school who, inconveniently, is not allowed to date until her older sister, the less pleasant Kat, does so as well. For Cameron, this is love at first sight. Bianca, on the other hand, has her sights set on the rich and popular Joey Donner, who is predictably dumb, narcissistic, and misogynist, serving as a perfect foil to the geeky protagonist. As the plot ensues, Cameron pretends to know French in order to land a job as Bianca’s tutor, while simultaneously plotting with bad-boy Patrick Verona, played by Heath Ledger, to manipulate Bianca’s sister Kat into upending their father’s no dating policy.

At face value, Cameron’s behavior, though dishonest, might be perceived as romantic. However, upon further examination, Cameron’s treatment of Bianca is problematic at best. The idolization of Bianca mirrors one of the most common tropes in geek-centered media: the geek obsessed with the beauty. Particularly popular in television, other examples of this trope include
Ross and Rachel on *Friends* (1994-2004), Sam and Cindy on *Freaks and Geeks* (1999-2000), Seth and Summer on *The O.C.* (2003-2007), Ted and Robin on *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014), Chuck and Sarah on *Chuck* (2007-2012), Leonard and Penny in *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), Denis and Beth in *I Love You, Beth Cooper* (2009), and Quentin and Margo in *Paper Towns* (2015). Typically, in these stories, the suitor starts out as relatively unknown to the object of his affection and gradually wins her over through persistence and an inability to take no for an answer, even in the face of blatant disinterest and the woman’s pursuit of other men. Though normalized in media, the problem with this kind of obsessive lust, beyond the ignoring of a woman’s expressed desires, is that it oftentimes results in a flattening of the female love interest’s character. This is particularly true in the case of *10 Things I Hate About You*, in which Cameron declares his love for Bianca before ever even hearing her speak. At this point, it is impossible for Cameron to know anything about her interests, goals, or demeanor, let alone their potential compatibility as a couple. As such, she is necessarily reduced to a concept. And it is this conception of her, not her, that Cameron uses to justify his obsessive, borderline stalking behavior.

Moving on, *Superbad* tells the story of three geeks in high school who experience a wild night out as they attempt to obtain alcohol to impress their crushes. Much cruder in nature, the film opens with a discussion between friends Seth, played by Jonah Hill, and Evan, played by Michael Cera, in which they debate which porn website they are going to subscribe to once they move into their college dorms. This conversation immediately sets the tone and emphasizes the pursuit of sex as one of the primary themes of the movie. This theme is further compounded when Seth expresses his goal of losing his virginity before the end of senior year. This is another
common plot device in teen comedies, also appearing as the primary motivation in *American Pie* (1999) and *The Virginity Hit* (2010). Such a motivation roots the film in a language of hypermasculinity, with one of the core features of hypermasculine subcultures being a desire for “heterosexual sex without intimacy” (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). This lack of intimacy is particularly evident in the relationship between Evan and his crush Jules, played by Emma Stone. He consistently makes comments to his friends about wanting to sleep with her, and when they are paired together in cooking class, he imitates performing sex acts on her as her back is turned. This visual gag, in which the humor stems from a blatant show of sexual harassment, establishes Seth as someone who does not particularly care about the feelings or character of the girl he pursues. Rather, he is only interested in having sex with her and is therefore completely comfortable publicly making sexual jokes at her expense.

It is worth noting that the relationship between Evan and his crush, Becca, shows a higher degree of intimacy, as Evan treats her with politeness and respect throughout the movie, denying having sex with her when given the opportunity because of her intoxicated state. However, he also is complicit in Seth’s sexual harassment of Jules, laughing at his performance in class and never admonishing Seth’s sexist language. As such, though there are varying degrees of misogyny present within the group, the movie showcases the ways in which men allow misogynist behavior to go unchecked within their peer groups.

Lastly, I will group *Sixteen Candles* and *Revenge of the Nerds* together due to the similarities in their transgressions. *Sixteen Candles* tells the story of 16-year-old Sam, played by Molly Ringwald, who grapples with teenage tribulations as her family forgets her birthday, she is harassed by geeky freshman Ted, and she feels unnoticed by jock, Jake Ryan, with whom she is
infatuated. As the movie progresses, the plot makes several unexpected turns, as Sam decides to give Ted a pair of her panties at the dance as a means of thanking him for giving her helpful advice regarding her crush on Jake. This plot point makes a return at the afterparty. Jake, upset with his drunk girlfriend Caroline and beginning to realize his attraction to Sam, discovers that Ted possesses the panties, which prompts a conversation between the two boys regarding their love lives and Jake’s frustrations with his current girlfriend. The conversation includes the following exchange:

Jake: I can get a piece of ass anytime I want. Shit, I got Caroline in my bedroom right now, passed out cold. I could violate her ten different ways if I wanted to.

Ted: Well, what are you waiting for?

Jake: I don’t know. She’s beautiful, and she’s built and all that. I’m just not interested anymore. (Hughes, 1984)

While the above exchange honestly reads as though it could be a conversation between two cartoon villains, both of these men are portrayed as sympathetic throughout the movie, with Jake being the primary romantic interest of the lead character. And yet, these protagonists engage in an honest conversation about date rape in which neither object morally to the concept. As if that were not enough, Jake proceeds to offer Caroline to Ted in exchange for Sam’s panties, letting Ted drive her home in his Rolls Royce. Before sending her off, Jake remarks, laughing, “She’s totally gone. Have fun.”
The next morning, Caroline awakes in the back seat of the car with no recollection of the previous night. Ted confirms that the two had sex, before asking Caroline if she enjoyed it, to which she responds, “You know, I have this weird feeling I did.”

Interestingly enough, *Sixteen Candles* is the only of the four movies that does not contain the hip/square dialectic. Rather than being pitted against each other, the jock and geek bond over their shared criminal endeavors of trafficking and rape, each equally committed to his gross violation of women’s bodily autonomy.

In contrast, *Revenge of the Nerds* embraces the antagonistic relationship between nerd and jock, depicting the rising tensions between two college fraternities: Alpha Beta, led by jocks, and Lambda Lambda Lambda, led by nerds. While this movie takes place in college rather than high school, I would be remiss not to mention *Revenge of the Nerds* in an analysis of onscreen representations of geeks, as this movie was instrumental in shaping public perception of the geek subculture. Over the course of the movie, the two fraternities battle each other for dominance, the severity of their pranks escalating throughout. In one of the movie’s most infamous scenes, nerd Lewis, having fallen in love with jock Stan’s girlfriend Betty, tricks Betty into thinking that he is Stan by impersonating him while wearing a Darth Vader mask. Lewis and Betty proceed to have sex, and she does not find out his true identity until after the fact. When she removes his helmet, she is at first shocked to see that he is not her boyfriend, but recovers from this shock in mere seconds, responding with, “Are all nerds as good as you?” (Zacharias & Buhai, 1984).

Thus, both *Sixteen Candles* and *Revenge of the Nerds* depict their protagonists committing date rape, either via having sex with someone unable to consent or obtaining consent through deceit. However, in both cases, the acts of rape are explicitly condoned, as the victims
respond to their assaults with admiration of their attackers’ sexual prowess and reward them with continued romantic relationships. I understand that the 1980s were a different time, and people were less educated about rape in that decade. However, these movies are hugely influential in the genre of teen comedy and shaped the structure and tone of comedy for decades to come, so their shocking depictions of assault should not be hastily dismissed as a product of their time and instead understood as a shaping force in our cultural understanding of consent and sexuality.

Ultimately, the four movies discussed demonstrate a spectrum of unacceptable behaviors towards women, ranging from the more benign stalking and obsession depicted in 10 Things I Hate About You to the violence depicted in Sixteen Candles and Revenge of the Nerds, with the sexual harassment and objectification in Superbad lying somewhere in between. Consequently, though the movies code the perpetrators as heroes who are understood to be inherently better and more morally upright than the jocks, the reality is that both archetypes, geek and jock, engage in flagrant misogyny. In the instances where the geeks win over the athletes, they do not do so by condemning the athlete’s behaviors but by engaging in them; that is, by objectifying women and having sex with the jocks’ girlfriends. As Salter and Blodgett (2017) argue, “…both identities are based upon a test for dominance in which men are placed at the top of the hierarchy and vie for control and power.” The losers in this game? You guessed it. Women.

Writing the Script: Process and Structure

Given what I observed about geek identities in these movies, when writing my screenplay, I set out to include these behaviors in my script. However, while the traditional Hollywood model condones these behaviors via female submission and affection, I instead
wanted to highlight how real women feel about being stalked, harassed, and violated. However, I also wanted my script to be funny, so I sought to include some other common beats and tropes in romantic comedies that are deserving of some lighthearted mockery.

Initially, I only had a rough conception of what I wanted to happen in my script, and filling in the plot and providing the necessary structure and pacing was the aspect of putting the script together that I found most daunting. In previous works of creative writing, I always had a tendency to stick to short stories or isolated scenes because structure is what I consider my biggest weakness as a writer. Consequently, as I began the writing process, I first turned to several screenwriting books, which were astronomically helpful. These include: Save the Cat! The Last Book You’ll Ever Need On Screenwriting by Blake Snyder, The Heart of the Film: Writing Love Stories in Screenplays by Cynthia Whitcomb, and The Hollywood Standard: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style by Christopher Riley. Among these, Save the Cat! By Blake Snyder was the most helpful, as Snyder outlines the very specific beats that are included in most every commercially successful screenplay. Once this basic structure was outlined, the rest of the script fell into place for me. I will summarize my script below, organized by Snyder’s beats, with additional notes explaining tie-ins to the research or further thoughts.

1. Opening Image: Snyder explains that all successful screenplays begin with a memorable opening image. In the best examples, the image both captivates the audience and aptly summarizes who the characters are. As such, for my opening image, I wanted it to make the three main characters – Jonah, Lewis, and Simon – immediately
recognizable as geeks. To do so, I placed them at a Captain Marvel screening, here using fandom as an identifying shortcut.

2. **Theme Stated:** Successful screenplays must state their thematic premise or central question within the first ten pages to let audience members know what kind of movie they will be watching. I chose to do so by having the theater owner, Mr. McCoy, explain to the boys how difficult it is for nice guys to get dates with women. This statement is meant to incite the boys to action, drawing attention to the ways in which they have failed to live up to conventional expectations surrounding masculinity. Additionally, this statement set up the central irony of the script: these boys think of themselves as the nice guys, or the heroes, despite their abhorrent treatment of women throughout the movie.

3. **Setup:** In keeping with its name, this section of the movie sets up the story. This section needs to introduce all of the main characters and identify some problem that will be addressed later in the story; what qualities in the main character necessitate a transformation? In my setup section, I identify the boy’s obvious problem: they don’t have girlfriends. However, I also attempted to plant some seeds regarding some of their internalized misogyny. This is evident through their fixation on female celebrities’ appearance in their conversation in the movie theater, as well as Lewis’ condescending attitude toward Harper when he offers to help her change her flat. The flat tire scene also serves as Lewis and Harper’s “meet-cute”, a romantic comedy cliche that establishes the initial attraction between the main characters. The lovers hating each other at the beginning is a prolific plot device in the genre as well.
4. **Catalyst:** The catalyst is the event that calls the protagonist to action. In this case, it is a literal phone call from Jonah, asking Lewis to participate in the bet. Betting on a character’s love life is another rom-com trope, present in *She’s All That, 10 Things I Hate About You*, and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*.

5. **Debate:** The debate section serves as the protagonist’s last chance to turn back before making a decision that will change the world of the story. It must ask a central question. The debate in my script is fairly straightforward; it is Lewis debating whether or not he will participate in the bet. Is Lewis going to lean into Jonah’s misogyny, or is he going to hold out? What kind of person is Lewis, really? Part of Lewis’ dilemma here, unlike Jonah, is that he does believe in romance, and yet there is no girl deserving of his time and attention.

6. **Break into Two:** The break into Act Two is when the protagonist makes a choice to accept his or her call to action. I chose for the break into Act Two to be the reintroduction of Harper, which allows Lewis to accept the terms of the bet without compromising on his belief in romance.

7. **B-Story:** The B-Story is a secondary plot that serves to underscore the central message of the story and reveals its importance in the third act. I would argue that the B-Story in my script is perhaps my weakest beat and one that I spent a lot of time brainstorming how to improve without any clear resolution. However, I would argue that the B-Story in this script is Jonah’s pursuit of winning the bet. Ultimately, the audience doesn’t see much of this from Jonah’s perspective, but the seeds are planted so as to make Jonah’s
action at the prom afterparty stem organically from his actions and dialogue earlier in the story.

8. **Fun and Games:** This is the part of the story where the stakes are lowest and the audience can enjoy seeing the characters have fun in pursuit of their goal. My fun and games section encompasses the boys strategizing how to win Harper, their attempts to sabotage her relationship with Chuck Caldwell, and their spreading of the rumor that she has chlamydia. Here, my goal was to showcase how the boys are clueless in their pursuit of romantic relationships, relying on movie references and complicated schemes. Additionally, I wanted to establish Simon and Jonah as foils with their vastly different approaches to romance. While Simon’s romance strategy is perhaps not necessarily effective, it is well meaning and not particularly harmful. In contrast, Jonah utilizes slut-shaming and cruelty to advance Lewis’ relationship with Harper.

9. **Midpoint:** At the midpoint, the protagonist’s commitment to his or her goal needs to be reaffirmed. Lewis’ goal is reaffirmed through his outing with Harper, which draws the two closer. Though I tried to hint that Harper’s feelings were strictly platonic, I wanted to establish a scenario where the audience could understand how Lewis would interpret her actions differently.

10. **Bad Guys Close In:** After the protagonist’s goal is reaffirmed, an outside threat must endanger the goal. The outside threat here is Blake Shellinger, who I aimed to make the most two-dimensional representation of the jock stereotype, mostly because I wasn’t all that interested in Blake as a character so much as I was interested in what it meant for Lewis’ attempts at wooing Harper to have been in vain. When Plan A doesn’t work,
what is Plan B? When you place latent misogyny and romantic rejection in a crucible, then turn up the heat, what is born from that combination?

11. **All Is Lost:** The All Is Lost beat is exactly as it sounds. The protagonist is somehow led to believe that he has been defeated. This moment occurs when Harper connects the dots and realizes that Lewis is the one behind her streak of anonymous bullying. It was important for me that the All Is Lost moment not stem from Harper’s relationship with Blake but from the accumulation of Lewis’ own actions, which is the one factor he cannot manipulate.

12. **Dark Night of the Soul:** Here, all hope is lost, and the hero becomes isolated in his hopelessness. This is when Lewis, having severed ties with Simon and Jonah and having ruined his chances with Harper falls into a deep depression, which entails parking outside Harper’s house and stalking her.

   a. As a side note, Lewis’ fallout with Simon was very important for me to include to showcase that the misogyny is a choice. Lewis chose to hurt someone close to him; Simon did not make that choice. This hopefully should further clarify that the script does not seek to vilify all geeks; rather, the goal is to identify a particular brand of sexism that exists within some men within a larger community.

13. **Break Into Three:** Something must happen here that pulls the hero out of their downward spiral. I thought the funniest and most effective means of doing so would be a pep talk from Lewis’ mother. I intentionally tried to make Lewis’ mom as generic and
two-dimensional as possible to parody the parents that are often featured in teen comedies, who only exist to give pep talks and do laundry.

14. **Finale:** The finale serves as the synthesis of all the disparate threads in the movie. How are the lessons applied? How do the A and B storylines tie into each other? How is your protagonist changed? Ultimately, this is where my script deviates most from the romantic comedies upon which it is modelled. In romantic comedies, this is where we see the aforementioned “coupled resolution.” However, the central thesis of this story was that men, be they jocks, geeks, or something in between, should not lie, manipulate, and obsessively stalk their way into romance. And so Harper imparts the final lesson on Lewis, which is simply that those behaviors are hurtful and they don’t result in functional relationships. The B Story, Jonah’s misogyny, also comes to a head with his attempted assault on Cher at the afterparty. I opted not to include an actual rape scene like *Sixteen Candles* or *Revenge of the Nerds* because I thought the central idea did not require that an actual rape take place, and hypothetically if this were an actual movie, I would want to spare female audiences the potential retriggering of their trauma in watching a violent assault unfold. When Lewis and Jonah meet up again, both having failed in their attempts at dominance over women, the irony is that they are unchanged, neither able to comprehend that they are not, in fact, nice guys, but rather the villains of the story.

15. **Final Image:** According to Blake Snyder, the final image must be the opposite of the opening image, proving that a change has occurred. Except that in this particular story, a change hasn’t occurred. If anything, Jonah and Lewis are worse than when they
started, more committed to their victimhood and unable to see the faults in their actions.

As such, they end up in the same diner as they started, minus a friend. I think the final line speaks for itself.

**Personal Reflections**

Overall, this project was a big undertaking for me, both as a piece of academic research as well as a creative endeavor. However, now on the other side of it, I can confidently say that this was a really big step for me as an artist. Ultimately, prior to beginning this project, I had often felt that my Media Studies major and Theater major were two different worlds, and I was never sure how to bridge them. While I have loved studying media these past four years and often viewed it as a natural progression of my childhood love of storytelling, the critical and analytical skills I’ve picked up as a media student at CU really only mean anything to me if I am using them to create art that I am passionate about. First and foremost, I have always aspired to be a creator.

Sometimes, as a student honing their craft, impostor syndrome is unavoidable. Can I really call myself a writer if I haven’t written anything substantial? This feeling was doubly true for me in the theater department, as I felt my forays into playwriting were decidedly not theatrical enough and not very well suited for the stage. While my peers exchanged opinions on the plays of Shakespeare and Eugene O’Neill and Samuell Beckett, I always found myself more interested in discussing in the (perhaps low-brow) art I loved as a kid. The beloved sitcoms and cable dramas and romantic comedies we used to discuss at the dinner table. I struggled to assess where this left me as an artist; what kind of art could I make that reflected my interests, opinions, humor, and background while still being taken seriously as a piece of art? Working on this script was the first time I felt I was beginning to find an answer to that question.
Ultimately, this is a first attempt. I am sure when I revisit this script in a year, I will find a million things to change and will probably be embarrassed I ever shared it with anyone in the first place. Such is being a writer. But as a stepping stone into a new craft, I am really proud of this piece of work as both a singular project as well as the culmination of my four and a half years here at CU.
Works Cited:


