

HEROES AND VILLAINS

ENTERTAINMENT



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*weird

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INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

BEN (19, meek, very much on the spectrum) sits in the waiting room, headphones over his ears, going through a music app on his phone. The normal sounds of the hospital are muted through his headphones.

He looks up, sees a DOCTOR and NURSE speaking quietly in the corner, then a CANCER PATIENT walking around the hallways with help from a nurse, then NURSES working at their station.

He hits play. A weird, offbeat but fun song, perhaps "Something for Your M.I.N.D." by Superorganism.

For the first moments of the song, everything remains normal, but soon enough Ben starts to see everyone dancing. *Subtly at first, the Cancer Patient taking steps to the beat, Nurses at the station moving papers and typing in time. The doctor/nurse duo swaying back and forth.*

But it quickly evolves into a more complex dance, interpretive, chaotic but still melodious and beautiful. Each of the three groups Ben's watching moving and dancing their own ways.

The heightened dance reality continues until Ben's GRANDPA knocks his headphones off (as lovingly as one can knock off headphones) and everything's back to normal.

GRANDPA
She's ready for you.

INT. MARY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

MARY, Ben's Mom, a cancer-stricken woman in her 50s, lies in a bed, hooked up to an IV and a heart monitor with a LARGE BLANKET. She sees Ben and smiles weakly, beckoning him over.

Ben walks over, various emotions flashing across his face, like he's unsure how to express himself.

BEN
I was listening to a good song.

MARY
Yeah? I got one for you. Here.

Ben hands his mother the phone, and she starts to play "It Makes No Difference Now" by Ray Charles.

The EKG syncs up to the beat of the song.

They listen to the song, Ben smiles initially but at the :30 mark--"I'll get along without you now, it's plain to see"-- Ben shuts off the song, a quick passing pain in his eyes.

BEN

Not as good. Here, listen.

"Something for your M.I.N.D." picks up again.

MARY

It's no Ray Charles, but I understand.

Ben laughs, then leans over to hug his mother as the song plays. She caresses him.

The song continues over--

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A very bright and sunny day for Mary's funeral. Ben shifts uncomfortably in his clothes, headphones on and song still playing as the officiant speaks.

Various funerary proceedings happen in time with the music. The shutting of the bible, lowering the mother, mourners offering condolences.

Ben just stands there the whole time, nearly dead to the world. A few tears sneak through.

INT./EXT. GRANDPA'S CAR/UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CAMPUS - DAY

Ben's still listening to the song.

GRANDPA

(muffled)

Hey.

The song ends. Ben hits repeat, but before it kicks in, Grandpa knocks the headphones off again.

The car's near the front steps of a dorm building on an otherwise normal day. Grandpa's driving.

GRANDPA

You can still change your mind. Take another few months. Start in the Winter. Or next year. When you're ready.

BEN
I'm ready now.

Grandpa sighs.

BEN (cont'd)
My grades were good.

GRANDPA
I know you're smart, Ben. Everyone does, but college isn't just about grades. What about connections?

BEN
I'm not going to be a politician.

GRANDPA
Not--I mean people you can be around and actually enjoy it. Friends, a confidant. A girl?

BEN
I didn't need those before.

GRANDPA
You had your mom before.

A very uncomfortable pause. Grandpa tries to salvage it.

GRANDPA (cont'd)
Ben, I love you. You need more time to process--

BEN
I'm going.

Ben exits the car.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - DAY

MICHELLE, the RA, leads Ben, rolling his luggage down the hallway.

MICHELLE
And this is your room right here, 812. It's a single, so congrats on that, and you've got your ID and everything?

Ben nods.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

Great. Laundry in the basement, communal kitchen downstairs, dining hall across the street. A lot of us like to hang out in the lounge, but don't feel pressured if it's not your thing. And if you have an emergency or whatever, my door's always open. Metaphorically. Just knock. You get it.

BEN

Yes.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Ben unpacks. Clothes into the dresser, computer on the desk, large speakers next to the desk, school books on the shelves. Noticeably, no posters or other sort of decorations.

CARL (O.S.)

Suck my giant purple DICK. WOOOOOOO!

CARL (19, brash but charismatic) will show up later.

EXT. DORM HALLWAY - DAY

Ben sticks his head out his door to see who yelled that, but only sees ERIC and GABE (they'll show up soon, too) walking into a room down the hall, laughing with each other.

INT. ACADEMIC ADVISER'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Ben sits with RON (50s, a little fat, good heart) who reads over Ben's transcript on his computer.

RON

Looks like you filled a lot of core requirements with your community college classes and APs. That's good, that's good. Do you know your major?

BEN

No.

RON

Anything stuck out during community college? And why, if you don't mind, did you go there by the way?

(MORE)

RON (cont'd)
Your grades are fine, and I see
you're here on scholarship.

BEN
My mom was dying of cancer. Fighting
cancer.

RON
Oh god, that's horrible. Is she okay?

BEN
No.

RON
Oh god. Still going through chemo?

BEN
She died.

RON
Oh god. Well, I'd shoot myself in the
foot if I didn't put in a pitch for
anthropology. That's what I studied,
near east specialization. Best
decision I ever made.

Ben notices the room is filled with books on the Byzantines
and Ottomans.

BEN
No.

RON
You know what you don't like, at
least. You've still got a few weeks
to finalize classes, so for now let's
put you in a few across the board. A
little physical science, a little
history, a little English, see what
you like, what you maybe grow to
like? Growth's a big part of college,
you know.

Ben nods.

RON (cont'd)
Let me print you a book list.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

Ben walks across the quad where a club fair is taking place.

Lots of people. Lots of yelling. Ben's uncomfortable. One girl, REBECCA (20, big glasses, almost capable of hiding her intelligence, wears a little leather bracelet), makes eye contact with Ben.

REBECCA

Hey! Join the club! We're not a cult!

MIKE (20s) an ironic but lovable douche.

MIKE

We're a little bit a cult!

Ben, unsure of what to do, hurries off, slipping on his headphones.

Rebecca slaps Mike on the shoulder.

REBECCA

Stop scaring everyone away!

MIKE

You said cult first!

EXT. SEMINARY CO-OP BOOKSTORE - DAY

Ben notices a student walking out with their hands filled with books, then walks into the lovely, heavily windowed bookstore.

INT. SEMINARY CO-OP BOOKSTORE - DAY

Ben walks through the basement, where the class catalogs are stored, stacking an ever-growing pile of books in his arms.

FIRST FLOOR

Ben exits the stairs, too concerned with his own world to see PROFESSOR ADAM PALMER (60s, very smart, over everything). They collide, Ben spills his books.

PROF PALMER

Christ. Every year. Honestly, every goddamn year.

Prof Palmer sees Ben cleaning up his books, and bends down to help with an unnecessarily loud groan.

BEN

Thank you.

PROF PALMER

I bet you're a first year, too.

BEN

Uh.

PROF PALMER

You're a first year, right? I'm not going to kill you just for bumping into me. What is this, 11th Century Bavaria? If you took my class you'd get that joke.

BEN

I'm a sophomore.

PROF PALMER

A second-year? Well then you are in trouble.

BEN

I transferred.

PROF PALMER

Joke, again. Bad delivery, I know. Welcome to UChicago. Little tip slash apology, you don't need those books, it's a scam.

(as he leaves, loud
whisper)

Get the PDFs. Online.

Ben looks down at the books, then over to the cash register. He turns one of the textbooks around, sees its price, \$240, and then gently puts the entire stack on the ground and walks away.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - EVENING

Ben finishes (illegally) downloading the last of his required textbooks for class. He plugs his phone into his speakers. Scrolls through a playlist called MOM'S SONGS, but doesn't play a song.

His stomach growls lightly.

BEN

Oh, right.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Ben, plate full of food, finds a table to sit at, alone.

At a table nearby sits CARL (the OS voice from before), EMMA (20, a big picture person, very little capacity for shame), ERIC (19, always stoned, still extremely intelligent), having a very loud conversation.

CARL

Bruh, you cannot just say Plato supported eugenics and then not follow it up. Evidence based argument.

EMMA

Number one, "bruh?" Find some better slang. Number two, have you read The Republic? Philosopher-King? Strict class system?

ERIC

Did you skip the part about the class designation happening during childhood, not at birth?

EMMA

Yeah, but any system like that would obviously end up encouraging eugenics.

CARL

I'm sorry, what's that? Sounds like someone's coming to an independent conclusion not supported in the text? What's that called, again?

EMMA

Not being trapped by details.

ERIC

Or is it putting words in Plato's mouth? Oh, and, oh it's on the tip of my tongue.

CARL

Fucking being wrong.

EMMA

Fuck you.

CARL

Try it.

Carl and Eric high five.

KRITHI (19, small, steady in a metaphorical sense) and GABE (20, destined to be a center-right politician from a suburban district).

KRITHI

Do you understand how embarrassing you are?

ERIC

Do you understand how great it is to be right?

GABE

Seriously, don't make me disavow our friendship in ten years.

EMMA

Guess my blackmail photos will come in handy, Mr. Future Representative.

GABE

Mr. Future *Speaker*, and you wouldn't dare.

CARL

What is it again? You want a law passed allowing monkey pets at a federal level.

EMMA

I want a law passed allowing me specifically to have a monkey pet. No one else.

GABE

Oh, well that's no problem at all. Let me call up my high school ex's dad.

EMMA

Don't tease me!

She throws a pea at Gabe, Gabe mocks offense, Emma gives him a friendly cheek kiss, and they all break into laughter.

Ben looks back down at his food. Picks up a pea, tosses it at the empty chair across from him, practicing.

INT. DORM BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ben, in full pajama, brushes his teeth and practices facial expressions. Big smile, frown, smirk, smirk again because the first one wasn't great, soft smile.

Someone walks through the door, Ben quickly goes back to brushing. It's Carl. He heads to the toilets, but pokes his head back when he sees Ben.

CARL

Hey.

BEN

H--

Ben spits out the toothpaste.

BEN (cont'd)

Hi.

CARL

I haven't seen you around before,
man. You live on this floor?

BEN

Yep.

Carl expects a longer answer.

CARL

Cool. Well I'm Carl, it's good to
meet you.

He sticks out his hand to shake.

BEN

I don't--

CARL

Not into handshakes, I get it, don't
know where my hands have been, you
know? Ha, that's gross, we just met.

Carl studies Ben for a bit, who is not used to this type of scrutiny.

CARL (cont'd)

You're kinda...funky*, huh?

An off-key DING rings out as Carl says "funky", heard only by Ben.

CARL (cont'd)
That's cool, man. Normal people are so boring, that's what I say. Sorry, my guy, didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. You wanna come by my room sometime? Play some games or smoke or something? Got some friends hanging right now.

Ben tries to put on the smile he was practicing. It's not great.

BEN
I'm in my pajamas.

CARL
Oh, yeah, for sure. 817. Door's always open. Literally we leave the bolt on so it can't close. You get it.

BEN
That's bad for personal security.

CARL
Yes! Yes, dude, hilarious! Come by whenever.

Ben rinses out his mouth and leaves.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben scrolls through MOM'S SONGS again. His thumb hovers over a song.

He decides against it, instead putting real clothes over his pajamas.

EXT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben stands outside the door in his clothes, a bit of pajama peaking out from underneath.

He hears buzzed revelry from inside.

Ben sees the door is bolted open. He tries very hard to muster the courage to knock. Starts to panic a bit.

CARL (O.S.)
Drinking? On a school night? For shame.

Carl opens the door, beer in hand, sees Ben right there.

CARL
Hey, man. Changed out of the pjs.
Nice look.

Silence. Ben has a deer-in-headlights look.

CARL (cont'd)
Wanna come in?

BEN
I--um, no. No. School night. You get
it.

Another very bad smile, then Ben walks back to his room.

CARL
Alright.
(to his friends)
Yo, we getting shitty school pizza or
what?

FRIENDS
SSP!/Pizza!/Give me a second!

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben, back in his pajamas, swaddles himself in his mom's BLANKET, then plugs his phone into the speakers, goes to MOM'S SONGS, and plays a sad-ish love song like "Romeo & Juliet" by Peter McPoland.

Ben starts to dance to the music. Moving around his pretty small room, using the blanket to accentuate the dancing. He's not very good, but he's free, completely unconcerned with potential ridicule or saying or doing the wrong thing.

After a bit, someone knocks on his door and he snaps back into his normal and shuts off the music.

He answers the door, it's Rebecca, also in pajamas. They don't recognize each other.

REBECCA
Sorry, it's late and tomorrow's the
first day of class. I'm trying to get
some sleep and your music's keeping
me up.

BEN
Too loud?

REBECCA
Too good. But also, yeah, too loud.

BEN
I'll put on my headphones.

REBECCA
Thanks. Have a Newman-O.

She hands Ben a healthy-ish Oreo.

REBECCA (cont'd)
It's like an Oreo, but good. Well,
better.

BEN
Is this a Pavlov thing?

REBECCA
Sure is. See you.

And she leaves. Ben closes the door. A little smile crosses his face. A real one, with just a tinge of confusion. He's not entirely sure how he managed that conversation so well, short as it was.

He lies down, puts on his headphones, closes his eyes.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - MORNING

"10 A.M. Automatic" by the Black Keys (or a similar high-energy rock song with a specific reference to the morning time) kicks in. Ben's eyes open.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL MONTAGE

- Ben puts notebooks in his bag.
- he dresses a little too formally.
- in the dining hall, he spoons scrambled eggs onto his plate, toast pops from the toaster.
- Ben walks on campus eating his impromptu breakfast sandwich. *Students next to him stepping in time with the song.*
- first class, big lecture, bald MATH TEACHER, everyone (except Ben) opens their notebooks at the same time.
- walking on campus again, some passers-by moshing it up.

- English class, another lecture, ENGLISH TEACHER asks a question to the class. A student responds, *nailing the drum solo*. Another question from the teacher, another student *slams the drums in perfect time*.

- walking again, Ben unboxes foodtruck food. Takes a bite. *Looks over, sees a bunch of friends rocking the guitar at the end of the song.*

INT. PALMER'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Ben walks into a small seminar classroom. He sees how small the room is, and the song comes to its end.

He looks around, checking if he's in the wrong room.

A POLKA-DOT DRESS WEARING STUDENT already sitting there notices him freaking out a little bit.

POLKA-DOT
History 241?

Ben checks.

BEN
24100.

POLKA-DOT
Same number. You're in the right place.

BEN
Oh. Okay.

He sits down. Other students quickly fill in, including Rebecca.

REBECCA
Oh, hey cookie guy, what's up?

BEN
(fully sincere)
A fluorescent light.

REBECCA
Overly literal. That's fun.

BEN
I mean, nothing, what's up with you?

Prof Palmer walks in, starting class.

PROF PALMER

Alright, everyone shut up. Class time. Polka-Dot, do this part for me.

He's asking Polka-Dot to set up his computer with the projection system. Polka-Dot does, a little taken aback.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Welcome to History 241, titled and ostensibly about An Overview of the Holy Roman Empire, but in reality more a series of Germanic-ish tangents I think are interesting and technically classified as history. Everyone bought their textbooks, yes? I'm looking at you, PDF pirate.

PDF pirate is Ben, who looks scared. The class laughs, and Ben follows along.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Kidding. Did anyone buy their textbooks? No? Good, you're learning. Fuck the system. I can say that because I'm tenured, I will be marking down foul language in this classroom. Shitheel here knows what I mean.

Another round of laughter. Ben looks around at the enthralled class, in awe of Palmer's charisma.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Kidding again. Polka-Dot's moving a little slow and it's the first class, so how about a round of icebreakers. There will be much discussion in this discussion class, so get comfy with it. You, curly hair, get us started.

REBECCA

Uh, yeah. I'm Rebecca, a second-year from New York City--

PROF PALMER

Which borough?

REBECCA

From Jersey City--

PROF PALMER

Yep.

REBECCA
--and I'm a Public Policy Major.

PROF PALMER
In a history class.

REBECCA
I like medieval things.

PROF PALMER
And how'd you spend your summer?

REBECCA
Interned at a civil defense firm in
Manhattan. Lotta filing.

PROF PALMER
I'll bet. Literature larcenist,
you're up. Name, year, major,
summertime, go.

BEN
Uh. I--uh.

PROF PALMER
Let's try again. Go!

BEN
Ben--

PROF PALMER
Good.

BEN
Second-year?

PROF PALMER
Perfect.

BEN
Undecided.

PROF PALMER
That's allowed.

BEN
And my mom died.

Uncomfortable silence. Ben realizes he didn't quite nail the
ice breaker.

PROF PALMER

Okay. Let's skip the rest of the
intros, yeah?

Murmurs of approval from the class.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Polka-Dot?

Polka-Dot finishes setting up the computer, and a slide pops
up on the screen welcoming people to class.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

The Holy Roman Empire, according to
philosopher and genius Voltaire, was
in no way holy, nor Roman, nor an
empire. Of course, that statement was
from the 18th century, and the HRE
had been around for roughly 1000
years by then, plus Voltaire's real
name was Francis-Marie, and that
sounds like a liar's name, so let's
dive on in and, hopefully, in 10
weeks you'll know if Voltaire was
right, or if he was a just some dumb
French Aristotelian wannabe.

The class laughs. Ben loves this guy.

LATER

The class starts gathering up to leave.

PROF PALMER

As we're wrapping up, I want to
instill this in you as you get to
your readings: the most important
word. Why. Always ask why. Why did
they write this thing? Why did they
write it how they did? Why am I
assigning it to you? Use it in real
life. Why am I in college? Why am I
taking this particular class? Why do
people throw sticks of deodorant at
me? Could lead to some profound
discoveries. Hey, book bandit, hang
on.

Ben stops putting his stuff away. As the rest of the class
leaves.

BEN
Am I in trouble?

PROF PALMER
You think you got in trouble on the first day? No. I, uh, look, I wanted to--okay, I put you in a rough position there, and I want to acknowledge that. So...I'm so--

BEN
I'm fine.

PROF PALMER
Great. Well, look, I feel a little icky still, so if you're feeling things or stuff and want to talk about it or whatever, my office number is on the syllabus.

BEN
Thanks.

He does that practiced smile again.

PROF PALMER
Yeah.

Palmer is a little unnerved by the smile.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

As Ben leaves class, he notices Rebecca chatting with her friends as they walk to the library-shaped brutalist travesty (The Regenstein Memorial Library).

Then he sees Carl and that group messing around as well. A lot of people out here, all socializing and having a good time.

Too many people, too close to him. Ben tries to calm down with deep breaths. Doesn't work.

He puts on his headphones, tries to play music, but his phone is out of battery.

INT. PALMER'S OFFICE - DAY

A medium sized office filled with books. Palmer sits at his desk with a whiskey glass of something, probably whiskey. A big exhale. He was "on" in the classroom, now he's "off."

A knock at the door.

PROF PALMER
Still not interested, Kate.

Ben walks in.

BEN
Who's Kate?

PROF PALMER
Oh. Hi. A colleague, wants a co-author. Did you forget something? If you have a question, email is normally better.

BEN
Do you have a phone charger?

PROF PALMER
Is this a prank? Did Belew put you up to this?

BEN
Is Belew Kate?

PROF PALMER
I'm not going to answer that.

BEN
You said I could come by your office for "whatever."

PROF PALMER
I meant that in the more metaphorical sense. You know, like "sorry your mom died, I want you to know that I know that it sucks, but don't actually take me up on this offer." That sort of thing.

BEN
Oh.

A tinge of sadness behind the practiced smile. Ben starts to leave.

PROF PALMER
Wait. Come on, sit down.

Ben does.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
What kind of phone do you have?
Doesn't matter I only have the one
cable. Here, let me see it.

Ben hands over his phone, Palmer plugs it in.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Oh, good. It fits.

Silence.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Can I offer something? Some whiskey,
or--how old are you?

BEN
19.

PROF PALMER
I offer you alcohol and you tell me
your actual age?

BEN
I don't like lying.

PROF PALMER
Right. Why do you need the phone so
bad it couldn't wait until you got
home?

BEN
I need it to get home.

PROF PALMER
Do you live in Oz?

BEN
No. It helps me, I think the most
accurate way to put it is, not freak
out. There's a lot of noises here.
And people. It's overwhelming
sometimes.

PROF PALMER
Sometimes?

BEN
All the time. It's always
overwhelming.

Palmer chuckles.

PROF PALMER
You're funny, literature larcenist.

BEN
I don't mean to be.

PROF PALMER
Still. So you're a little...unique*,
huh? That's gotta be fun.

Another DING. Ben flinches just a bit.

BEN
It's not.

PROF PALMER
I was being facetious.

BEN
Oh. Right.

PROF PALMER
Don't worry about it, words wascal.

BEN
It's rascal.

PROF PALMER
Rascal isn't alliterative.

BEN
My name is Ben.

PROF PALMER
They give us these name sheets with
your pictures on them, but I never
look at them. Ben, huh? Short for
Benjamin? A little boring, but
classic, from the old testament.
Binyamin. Like mine.

BEN
Like your what?

PROF PALMER
Name. Adam. Old testament. Don't call
me that, Professor Palmer is fine.

BEN
Okay, Professor Palmer.

More silence. Palmer checks the charge on Ben's phone, only
2%. He sighs.

BEN (cont'd)
Professor Palmer, can I ask you a question?

PROF PALMER
Sure. And you don't have to call me Professor Palmer every time. Use it normally. Like you see me in the hall, "hey, Professor Palmer." Like that. What's your question?

BEN
You seem very--the class laughed a lot. I think you have this thing called "charm." You seem "likable." I would like to, at some point, be also likable. Do you have--is there maybe some trick?

PROF PALMER
You want friends?

BEN
I think so.

PROF PALMER
Well first off, don't second guess yourself. "I think so" isn't an answer. "Maybe" isn't an answer. Desire is a binary situation, you either want something or you don't. You want friends?

BEN
Yes.

PROF PALMER
Great. Second off, that feeling I assume you have, like there's a wall, a metaphorical wall, since I'm getting the vibe I should specify that aspect, between you and what you want, everyone has that. It sounds like maybe yours is a bit thicker, maybe made of steel instead of plywood, metaphorical again, but at some point, we learn how to punch through it. There's no secret way around, just through, you understand?

BEN
I think so.

PROF PALMER
Understanding is also a binary.

BEN
Then yes.

Some quick exciting intro of a song, maybe "Good Times, Bad Times" by Led Zeppelin.

EXT. MIDWAY PARK - EVENING

Ben walks home, exuding, what is that, confidence? while the song keeps playing.

Some soccer players on the midway are kicking the ball around to the beat of the song.

EXT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben once again stands outside the door, staring it down. He raises his fist to knock, then lowers it, then, spurred on by the song, raises it again.

Ben knocks on the door, ending the song.

CARL (O.S.)
It's open!

Ben pushes the door open while remaining firmly in the hallway.

Carl has a dorm apartment, with its own little living room and kitchenette. Ben sees Carl's squad hanging out, playing Smash Bros and drinking alcohol.

BEN
I want to be friends.

CARL
Fucking love the bluntness, my man.
Get in here.

INT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl gives a quick intro to each of his friends.

CARL
Gabe, hates politics, also loves politics.

GABE
Basically.

CARL
Krithi, from Western Pennsylvania,
not India.

KRITHI
Um.

CARL
Eric, does not technically meet the
federal designation of being a drug
dealer.

ERIC
Look, I'm gonna be a pharmacist
anyway, I'm just getting a head
start.

CARL
Emma, makes outrageous claims about
classical philosophers without
evidence.

EMMA
Hi.

Ben is immediately smitten.

BEN
Hi. I'm Ben.

KRITHI
Why was my introduction the only one
involving race? That's fucked up.

CARL
Sorry, Krithi, the only one of us to
have an STI.

KRITHI
Asshole!

Krithi hurls a pillow at Carl's face, gets him pretty good.
Everyone laughs. Ben also laughs, following along.

INT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - LATER

Ben plays Super Smash Bros. with Carl. Krithi and Eric chat
over on the side while Gabe and Emma watch the game.

GABE
No, okay, you're intentionally
mishearing me.

EMMA
Okay, explain what "a nation's value
is clearly evident in its GDP" is
supposed to mean, if not exactly what
it sounds like?

Carl wins, jumps up.

CARL
Yeah! Woo! Suck my dick, yeah!

BEN
No thank you.

Snickers all around, Emma laughs.

CARL
No, it's--don't actually suck my
dick.

BEN
No problem.

Another laugh from Emma.

CARL
Gabe, you're up.

Gabe grabs the controller from Ben.

GABE
Go easy.

CARL
No.

Emma walks to the kitchenette, Ben sees her go, then follows
in an awkward enough way that it distracts Eric from his
conversation.

Emma reaches into the fridge for a beer.

BEN
Hi.

EMMA
Hey. Want a beer?

BEN
Like with alcohol?

EMMA
No, we used \$80 fake IDs to buy non-
alcoholic beer.

BEN
Facetious.

EMMA
Mhmm.

Ben's pleased with himself for picking up on that.

EMMA (cont'd)
So beer? No pressure.

BEN
I'm not s--

EMMA
A little pressure.

BEN
Then yes. Please. Yes please.

EMMA
Here you go.

She hands him a can of beer from the fridge. As Ben grabs it, his hands brush Emma's. He's spellstruck, just staring at her.

EMMA (cont'd)
What, do I have something on my face?

BEN
No, sorry, you're just so pretty that
I forgot what I was doing.

Emma laughs.

EMMA
Is this you flirting?

BEN
Not intentionally. I'm just saying
things that are true.

EMMA

Good, that was a little too direct.
Are you going to drink that or would
you rather stand here awkwardly
looking around each other?

He pops the beer open gives it a little sniff, not a huge
fan of the smell.

BEN

I've never had beer before.

EMMA

But you've had, like, drinks before,
right?

BEN

Yes. Normally water. Sometimes root
beer.

EMMA

You are flirting with me.

BEN

No?

EMMA

What?! Hey! Hey! Pause the damn game,
Carl.

CARL

Like, 20 seconds.

EMMA

Pause it.

Gabe pauses the game.

CARL

What the shit?

GABE

You can finish winning in a second.

EMMA

Benjamin here is about to have his
first ever alcoholic beverage.

ERIC

But he's under 21, isn't that a
felony?

KRITHI
Says the drug dealer.

ERIC
Substance provider, please.

BEN
This feels like a lot of pressure.

EMMA
We can all turn around if you want.

BEN
Give me a second!

GABE
Intense.

BEN
(gesturing to the
music source)
Can I--?

CARL
Whatever makes you comfortable.

Ben scrolls through the phone, then selects a song.

BEN
Okay.

"2young" by Stop Light Observations begins. Ben drinks the beer.

EMMA
Alright, felon, welcome to the club.
Oh shit, isn't Maddy's party tonight?

CARL
That's right! Ben, you in?

BEN
Sounds like a lot of people.

CARL
Super low-key, it's at a friend's
apartment. First Friday of the
quarter, man.

EMMA
You should come.

Ben looks at her.

EXT. MADISON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The song continues through Ben's headphones. Everyone gets off the school shuttle at an apartment north of campus, opening carrying half-empty bottles of liquor and an opened 12-pack of cider.

They all (except Ben) see people they know going to the party and greet them. Ben's starting to look overwhelmed, until Carl guides him inside.

INT. MADISON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

They all walk in. Drop their coats in an empty bedroom near the door.

Ben stands behind them as they all greet people, grab drinks, or otherwise break off from the core group. Ben stands near Carl the whole time, headphones on.

Everyone at the party bobbing to the beat of the song.

Carl introduces him to various people, but in a not-that-sincerely way.

Emma comes up to him with a red plastic cup, from which Ben drinks.

INT. ANOTHER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Song continues. A few days later, another party. Ben's more into it this time, in a conversation circle with Emma and several others, and he's actually engaging.

Emma tries to pull him to dance, he shakes his head, no.

The circle breaks up.

He's standing next to Carl as the latter chats up a girl, putting a hand on her back. Ben pays strong attention to this move. He takes another swig of the drink.

INT. ANOTHER-NOTHER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Yet another apartment party. Song continues.

Everyone, including a headphone-less Ben, is pretty drunk. *Beats echoing the first two parties repeat here, but sloppier and more chaotic.*

He slips into a drunken fugue of laughter and weird movements and having a good time, until plops down on a couch.

He looks to his left, sees Emma right there, apparently they're in the middle of a fun conversation. She throws her head back laughing, then leans in. He copies Carl's hand on back move.

They start making out, and the song comes to an end.

SMASH TO BLACK

INT. DINING HALL - MORNING

Ben walks with his bowl of cereal, extremely hungover, headphones on, no music.

REBECCA

Yikes.

Rebecca's sitting at a table he just passed.

Ben lowers his headphones.

BEN

What?

REBECCA

I said "yikes."

BEN

Law intern Jersey girl. Rebecca.

REBECCA

Loud music cookie guy. Ben.

BEN

Yep.

Rebecca gestures for him to sit down.

BEN (cont'd)

Does that mean you want me to sit?

REBECCA

It means you can sit if you want to but should feel no strong obligation one way or another.

Ben tries to think about what that means, but he's still a little buzzed.

REBECCA (cont'd)
Yeah, sit down.

He does.

REBECCA (cont'd)
You look awful.

BEN
I feel awful.

REBECCA
Eat this, it'll help.

She shoves her plate of bacon over to him.

BEN
Pavlov again?

Rebecca smiles.

REBECCA
It's turkey bacon. I don't eat pigs.

BEN
Jewish.

REBECCA
Really only in that regard.

Ben takes a bite. Rebecca goes back to eating. Ben searches for something to say.

BEN
I like your bracelet.

Rebecca fiddles with it, in a vaguely longing sort of way.

REBECCA
(sad, then not)
Thanks, it was--not important.

BEN
It sounds important.

Rebecca doesn't want to go down this conversation path, cheerfully ignoring Ben's point.

REBECCA
What are you listening to?

BEN

Oh, nothing. Sometimes everything is just too loud. Also I'm hungover.

REBECCA

Good night?

BEN

Long night.

REBECCA

That's why I always go to bed before twelve.

BEN

Smart.

REBECCA

I do that sometimes, the headphone thing, earbuds for me, though. Not a big music fan but I do like the occasional podcast.

BEN

What do you mean?

REBECCA

I just know a bunch of people around campus, sometimes I don't want to have to stop and say "hey, what's up, how's Schuster's class? No, she did what?" forty-two times on my way to the library.

BEN

That's a lot of friends.

Rebecca shrugs.

BEN (cont'd)

You don't like music?

REBECCA

No, I mean--it's just nothing special. For me. "Oh, cool, you put tones in an order and paired it with some angsty poem. Wow." No offense.

BEN

Are you flirting with me?

REBECCA

I'm not entirely sure how you got that from this conversation.

BEN

I'm still trying to figure out exactly what flirting is.

REBECCA

I'm currently seeing someone, anyway. Well, seeing is a strong word, I'm not really feeling, you know, relationshipy right now. I mean--

BEN

How do you not like music?

REBECCA

Oh good, another personal question. My favorite.

BEN

I have to play you something. Is there a genre you can tolerate?

REBECCA

Look, loud music cookie guy--

BEN

Law intern Jersey girl.

REBECCA

The whole undefined not-you guy thing means you can't flirt with me either.

BEN

(sincere)

I was just copying you. I already like someone else.

REBECCA

--people have tried the "you just haven't heard the right song" thing like a hundred times before. Music's not for me, I'm fine with that. You should also be fine with that, then we can move past barely aware classmates to slightly in-the-know class-quaintances. That's a port-manteau of classmates and acquaintances.

BEN
You've only listened to one hundred
songs? That's like saying you hate
cookies but you've never had
chocolate chip.

REBECCA
Was that your first time making an
analogy?

BEN
Pretty much.

Carl, Eric, and Gabe walk by with their own food.

CARL
There he is!

ERIC
Bro, nice moves!

GABE
Ben-ja-min, Ben-ja-min.

They laugh and smack Ben on his back, in that way that
people do in a congratulatory way.

Rebecca raises an eyebrow at him.

BEN
I think I kissed someone.

REBECCA
You're very comfortable sharing a lot
of information with people you don't
know that well, huh?

BEN
When I want to know them better.

REBECCA
I'm not really a sharing person.

BEN
That's allowed. I'm going to talk
with my friends now. Thanks for the
turkey bacon, class-quaintance.

REBECCA
Sure thing. Oh, and sorry about your
mom. Meant to say that earlier. I
know it sucks.

BEN

Okay.

BOYS TABLE

Ben sits down.

CARL

Yo, it's big boy Benji coming in for a landing.

BEN

Thank you.

Carl, Eric, and Gabe laugh.

ERIC

Dude, do you even remember what you did last night?

BEN

Parts.

GABE

But not, like, *that* part?

BEN

What part?

GABE

That part.

ERIC

You know, *that* part.

CARL

That part.

BEN

This is unhelpful.

CARL

Dude, you full on made out with Emma. Do you not remember?

GABE

He doesn't remember! Ha!

BEN

No, I--there were parts that I--

Emma and Krithi walk up.

KRITHI

Hey guys.

EMMA

That orange dreamsicle drink is dangerous.

BEN

H--hel--hi. Hello, Emma. And also Krithi.

Everyone except Ben and Emma burst out laughing. Emma looks a bit embarrassed, Ben bewildered.

CARL

Bro, be honest. Was she your first ever kiss?

EMMA

Carl!

She smacks his arm.

BEN

Yes.

Carl, Eric, Gabe, and Krithi give him a standing ovation. Ben beams.

EMMA

Guys, come on.

CARL

That's a big deal!

ERIC

How was it? Huh?

BEN

I don't remember.

EMMA

Yeah, he was blackout, I was crossed, come on. Not a big deal.

KRITHI

Spoilsport.

Everyone takes a seat. Emma smiles at Ben in that "these guys, am I right?" way.

INT. PALMER'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Palmer lectures on the Investiture Controversy (1076-1122). Ben stares directly across at Rebecca, but his eyes are spaced out. He's daydreaming.

PROF PALMER

For these reasons, the Emperor was hesitant to give up the power of "lay" investiture, claiming that this demand from the Church was a blatant power grab by the Pope, which, obviously, it was.

Rebecca tries to focus on the lecture, but is both confused and a little uncomfortable by Ben's staring. She keeps looking over at Ben. A few classmates notice this and also look at Ben.

Palmer checks his watch, then notices Rebecca's discomfited glances. He too looks at Ben. His lecture slows down.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Not to say the crown's attempt to retain this power was not grabby in and of itself because it... obviously...was.

Slowly, the whole class looks at Ben.

Ben is still in his day dream. Palmer matches Ben's eyeline, walks right in front of it.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Hey bud. Watcha thinking about?

Ben comes out of it. He looks around at everyone looking at him, some giggling. He smiles, very much not in on the joke.

BEN

I made out with a girl at a party, and it was fun.

The class is silent. About 70% of the class and Palmer turn to look at Rebecca.

BEN (cont'd)

No, someone else.

The class explodes into laughter. Palmer squeezes his eyes then claps a few times, Rebecca can't believe what she just heard.

Ben doesn't totally get why everyone's laughing but still smiles.

PROF PALMER
Alright, get out of here everyone.
Class over. Paper prompt on the
website. Jesus Christ.

Everyone packs up. Rebecca looks over at Ben again, laughs.

Palmer walks out, Ben walks out.

INT. HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Palmer and Ben turn the same way, walk down the hallway.

Palmer glances at Ben. Ben gives him a practiced "hey there" smile, not so bad this time. Palmer nods.

They keep walking.

PROF PALMER
Where you heading?

BEN
Your office.

Palmer stops to take a breath. Ben stops after two more steps.

PROF PALMER
Is this about a class thing or what
you just brought up in class?

BEN
How much does my answer influence
whether or not you let me into your
office?

INT. PALMER'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben paces as he talks. This might be the most energetic he's been so far. Palmer sits at his desk, whiskey glass in hand, listening.

BEN
But I didn't remember too much the
next morning, but when the guys told
me what happened, and also after I
stopped being hungover, I started to
remember it better, and it was great.
(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)
I think. It's still a little fuzzy,
but the parts that are there were
great. Yes.

Palmer nods, taking in the whole explanation.

BEN (cont'd)
It was my first kiss. So. Big deal,
is what I've been told. By my friend.

PROF PALMER
So--

BEN
And I think I'm nervous? I'm not
completely sure, I've never been
great with emotions. My mom would
always--

A tinge of sadness invades Ben's face, he shakes it off.

BEN (cont'd)
But she's really pretty, and she
smiles at me a lot, which makes me
feel happy, and it makes me feel like
I want to spend long periods of time
with her, which is very surprising
because--

PROF PALMER
Stop for a second. Stop talking. Sit
down.

Ben sits. Palmer centers his thoughts for a second.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
How long have you known this girl?

BEN
Emma.

PROF PALMER
Ahp. No names. That's a degree of
intimacy I'm not comfortable having
with someone I'll never think about
again in a few minutes. How long have
you known this girl?

BEN
A few weeks.

PROF PALMER

So, you don't really know her. You've hung out a couple times.

BEN

Nine times.

PROF PALMER

Now when you say "spend long periods of time with," and I'll preface this question by saying that I'm not super caught up with the courting rituals of your generation, do you mean like a girlfriend or just someone to mess around with every now and again?

BEN

A girlfriend.

PROF PALMER

And by mess around with I mean have sex with.

Ben reconsiders the question.

BEN

A girlfriend. I've never had sex.

PROF PALMER

Thank you for sharing. So what you're saying, if I may condense it, is you're lonely and want a comforting presence.

BEN

Who's a girl. And likes me.

PROF PALMER

I'm going to ask you something a little personal. How are you feeling regarding your mom dying?

Palmer treads more carefully. He's comfortable with the superficial stuff, nothing deeper.

BEN

How is that related?

PROF PALMER

It's related.

BEN

Fine. It happened. People die. It's normal.

PROF PALMER

Yeah. That's one way to look at it.

Ben shrugs.

BEN

Is this one of those times I should be sad? People die. It's a natural event. I don't get sad when people get older. I don't get sad when--when--when I eat. You know? Or fucking breathe. Or when there's a full moon. It's natural. It happens. Can't help it. That's life, you know? Sorry for swearing.

PROF PALMER

Don't worry about it. Those nine times, were they one on one?

BEN

Huh? Oh, no. In a group. But we made out.

PROF PALMER

Yeah. You mentioned that a few times actually.

Ben looks upset.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Don't read into this. My psychologist friend said this once. When bad things happen to us, ie a mother's death, it can trigger a pathological drive to secure ourselves against that pain. For some, they wade into mind-altering substances, ie cocaine or really expensive sushi. For others, they might dive into interpersonal relationships they wouldn't otherwise want. Do you get what I'm saying?

BEN

Maybe. I don't understand metaphor.

PROF PALMER

Mmm. See you in class. Don't put off the paper.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The last bit of a soft love song, maybe "My Lover" by Birdtalker plays through Ben's speakers.

He types away at his history paper, already on page four, but he stops right in the middle of sentence, and pulls up Emma's social media. He scrolls through it as the song plays.

He smiles.

A knock on the door as the song hits its climax. Ben turns off the music.

Ben answers the door. It's Emma.

BEN

Hi!

EMMA

Hi! You busy?

BEN

Writing a paper. For history. A history paper. How about you? Nope.

Emma giggles.

EMMA

We're all gonna get high and watch a movie that is, according to Carl, "seriously fucked up," in about an hour. Wanted to let you know.

BEN

You wanted me to know?

EMMA

We're friends? You're...fun*. Finish your paper and come hang.

DING.

BEN

I've never been high.

EMMA

You've never done a lot of things,
sounds like. We should change that.

BEN

Haha yeah.

She touches his shoulder. He instinctively pulls away.

EMMA

So we'll see you later?

BEN

Yes. Oh, uh and I was thinking, maybe
we could--nope. Nope, forget it. I'll
see you at the movie drugs thing.

EMMA

Cool.

She leaves.

Ben returns to his paper, starts to type, half-heartedly,
before lightly smacking himself in the head.

BEN

Stupid.

Another knock, Ben nearly trips trying to get it open as
fast as possible.

BEN (cont'd)

Okay, so--

It's Rebecca.

REBECCA

Expecting someone else, perhaps a
certain...

She looks down the hall at Emma, still walking away, then
back at Ben. She raises her eyebrows.

REBECCA (cont'd)

Blonde?

BEN

No.

REBECCA

Whatever you say. So not to pry,
but--

BEN
I'll turn it down.

REBECCA
Presumptuous. What was the one you
were just listening to?

BEN
You like music now?

REBECCA
I would like to maybe listen to that
specific song at some point in the
undefined future. Let's not get ahead
of ourselves.

BEN
It's a love song.

REBECCA
Oh, thanks, the lyrics didn't give it
away.

BEN
Facetious.

REBECCA
More sarcastic, but yeah.

They stand there.

BEN
Do you want to listen now?

REBECCA
Extremely presumptuous.

It takes Ben a second.

BEN
Oh. Oh, no, not--I'm not--that's--

Rebecca smiles devilishly.

BEN (cont'd)
You're joking.

REBECCA
I'll be more obvious in the future.

BEN
Thank you. Here's the song.

He shows her his phone.

REBECCA
You have a problem saying the word
"lover" out loud?

BEN
I don't like to say the titles out
loud. Kinda ruins the song.

REBECCA
Okay. I can dig it.

She just kinda stands there.

BEN
How's the paper going for you? That's
something people ask each other.

REBECCA
It is, good job. Alright, gonna work
on it at the library later with some
friends if you want to come?

BEN
So you're sharing now?

REBECCA
Sharing time and/or space is not the
type I'm opposed to.

BEN
That time I was joking. I'll try to
be more obvious in the future.

REBECCA
Ha ha.

There is a real smile under her sarcastic laugh.

BEN
I'm almost done with it, actually.

REBECCA
So you asked me just to brag?

BEN
Pleasant side effect. Gonna get high
and watch a quote seriously fucked up
movie unquote.

REBECCA
(sounds awful)
Sounds fun.

BEN
Hopefully.

INT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - NIGHT

CELL PHONE POV

Eric finishes packing a bowl. Ben and the rest of the crew,
minus Gabe, sit next to him.

CARL
You're on?

GABE (O.S.)
Rolling.

BEN
I don't understand what's happening.

CARL
We're recording for posterity!

ERIC
Ben's first high.

He presents the pipe.

EMMA
This is so dumb. Let's just watch the
movie.

KRITHI
Seconded.

CARL
This is a big moment in little
Benji's life, okay? Chill. You ready
Ben?

BEN
Yes? How does it--

ERIC
You just breathe in, Carl'll handle
the thumb movements.

BEN
Thumb movements?

GABE (O.S.)
I don't have a ton of space, guys.

CARL
Don't freak man, I got you.

BEN
Okay.

Ben takes a toke while Carl holds the pipe.

ERIC
Okay now hold it in.

CARL
But only as long as--

Ben starts to cough, over and over.

ERIC
Ah, too long!

EMMA
Drink this water.

She hands him a glass of water, but he doesn't have time between coughs. Everyone's laughing, mostly with Ben.

CUT TO:

INT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - LATER

Ben sits next to Emma watching the movie with the rest of the gang. He's having a rough time.

MOMENTS LATER

Big squelching blood noises, a chainsaw, other horror movie things. Ben is truly uncomfortable.

MOMENTS LATER-ER

A calm moment in the movie, until JUMP SCARE. The gang jolt and then laugh it off. Ben jolts and then curls into a ball, pulling his sweatshirt's hood down way over his face.

More horror stabbing squelching noises, Ben covers his ears with his hands and pulls himself more into a ball.

BEN
(quietly)
I hate it I hate it I hate it I hate
it I hate it I hate it I hate it.

CARL
I think he might hate it.

Everyone laughs.

GABE
I gotta pee. Five minutes? Five
minutes?

Gabe goes to the bathroom.

ERIC
Sure.

Eric pulls out the pipe and offers some to Krithi, who
accepts.

Ben comes out of his ball.

BEN
I'm gonna leave. Go on a walk.

ERIC
In the dark? Don't get fucking
chainsawed.

EMMA
Hey, don't be a dick to him, alright?
He's...you know*.

DING.

ERIC
Oh, yeah. Sorry, man.

CARL
Hey man, I'll take a walk with you.
Keep watch for any leather-masked
power tool murderers.

EXT. QUAD - NIGHT

Ben and Carl watch a family of rabbits on the quad.

BEN
Most of a rabbit's heat loss happens
through their ears.

CARL
Thanks for the rabbit facts.

BEN
You're welcome.

One of the rabbits hops over and nuzzles another.

BEN (cont'd)
What did Emma mean earlier? That I'm
"you know"?

CARL
She means you're you know*, man.
Unique*. Interesting*, what
Woodstockers would have called
groovy...* Cool*.

DING. DING. DING. A little pause as Ben parses what that
means, then a fourth DING. DING.

BEN
She thinks I'm cool?

CARL
Yeah, dude, you're awesome. The
random facts, the straight-no-
bullshit responses, all that, man.
She digs it.

BEN
How much does she dig it?

CARL
I'm starting to think when you have
very specific stoned behavior, only
asking questions about people named
Emma.

BEN
No, I just, I dunno, think she's
cute.

CARL
I fucking hope you think she's cute,
dude. You guys full on hooked up at a
party. Or did you forget?

BEN
I thought we just made out.

CARL

Yeah. It's a broad term. Applies to really any sort of sexual activity. Like making out is hooking up, but hooking up isn't necessarily making out. Like squares and rectangles.

BEN

Oh. I love nuance.

CARL

Sarcasm? Yes, my dude, learn that shit.

Carl grabs his shoulder and shakes vigorously in that way that men do sometimes. Ben tenses up.

CARL (cont'd)

My bad, man. Little fuzzed in the brainstem, you get it.

They watch the rabbits again.

BEN

So you've slept with women before.

CARL

Yes. Several. Why? Pro tip, lots of movies and shows have people fucking to music. Do not do that. Creates a whole rhythm thing problem, and then if you have different music tastes she might get up in the middle of the action to change the song, which, I mean, you get it.

BEN

Sure. That's not what I was going to ask about, though.

CARL

Oh my god. You like Emma!

BEN

Yes.

CARL

You want to fuck Emma!

BEN

Uh.

CARL

I knew it!

BEN

It's pretty obvious, I thought.

CARL

Well, now that you bring it up, I mean yeah. Oh! You want my help?

BEN

Yeah. I think she's cute, and I want to date her, but I don't know the processes.

CARL

"Processes." Dude, delightful. No worries man, I gotchu. You know, I've never thought of her like that, but I guess Emma is pretty hot.

BEN

And nice.

CARL

For sure. Look my mind's already racing with these intricate beautiful plans. I'm thinking group hang, segue into solo hang, make a few solid jokes, a cute little compliment, turns into dot dot dot late night hang?

BEN

That seems complicated.

CARL

Not at all! She clearly dug you at that party, right?

BEN

So just go to more parties.

CARL

No, man. Go to THE party. What do I mean? Great question. You just keep doing what you're doing. I talk you up, talk about your jokes, your brains. How's your body? Take off your shirt. I'm kidding, it's 40 degrees out.

(MORE)

CARL (cont'd)
We do that group hang et cetera stuff
I said earlier, that's phase 1,
then--You ready for this shit?

BEN
Yes?

CARL
Not good enough.

BEN
Yes!

CARL
Then phase motherfucking two: the
Devil in the Details party. You get
some drinks in, get some dancing in,
then let your little mouths do the
double tango all night long, you know
what I'm saying?

BEN
No.

CARL
You're gonna hook-up!

BEN
Which kind.

CARL
Whichever kind you both want!
I'm fucking cold, you coming back?

BEN
I'm gonna stay here, I think. Think
about the plan. Watch the rabbits.

CARL
Sick.

Carl heads out.

CARL (cont'd)
This plan's gonna W-O-R-K work. Phase
2!

Ben sits on a bench to watch the rabbits.

REBECCA
What's phase 2?

It's Rebecca on her way back from the library. Her friends in a gaggle off to the side, including Mike (from earlier), KOMAL (21, Mike's girlfriend), and DANIEL (22, Rebecca's guy).

BEN

Hi.

REBECCA

Hi.

BEN

I'm watching rabbits.

It's like they're in their own little world, until--

MIKE

Yo, Beks, you coming?

REBECCA

Swear to fucking god you call me Beks again I rip your genitals off and ship them to your grandmother.

MIKE

Ha! My grandma's dead.

KOMAL

I'd prefer you leave his genitals alone.

REBECCA

I'd prefer he use my actual name.

DANIEL

Seriously though, you coming? I thought we were gonna boink.

REBECCA

I'll meet you in bit, okay?

DANIEL

Works for me, babe.

He goes in for the cheek kiss, she dodges out of the way.

DANIEL (cont'd)

No PDA, my bad.

The gaggle moves away.

MIKE

There were fewer violent threats last year.

KOMAL

She didn't mean it, sweetie.
Probably.

They're gone. Rebecca walks over to Ben, Ben offers the seat on the bench, like she did in the dining hall. She sits.

BEN

Who were they?

REBECCA

Friends.

BEN

And a boyfriend?

REBECCA

Boyfriends require a level of emotional intimacy I don't really possess anymore. He's a guy.

BEN

What happened?

REBECCA

Nice try.

BEN

You don't like sharing, that's fine.
You know a lot of people.

REBECCA

A couple dozen.

BEN

They're all your friends?

REBECCA

Depends on your definition of friend.

BEN

Which is?

Rebecca shrugs.

REBECCA

People I can talk to.

BEN
Mine too. I have fewer.

Rebecca thinks on that for a moment, Ben goes back to watching the bunnies.

BEN (cont'd)
I think you're my friend, going off that definition.

REBECCA
So what's phase 2?

BEN
Carl's helping me with a girl that I like.

REBECCA
The girl you kissed. That you told the whole class about? After staring at me for five minutes?

BEN
Yes. The way you said that makes it seem like you're teasing me.

REBECCA
I am.

BEN
Okay. Then I am embarrassed. But the right kind of embarrassed, where you don't feel bad but know you had an effect on me.

REBECCA
People thought we kissed.

BEN
You have what I would call a boyfriend.

REBECCA
"Have" is a strong word, but that's what I told them. I'm still not flirting with you. I like rabbits, too.

BEN
Thank you for the clarity.

REBECCA

You're welcome. Give me your headphones.

BEN

That's like asking a normal person to give you their large intestine.

REBECCA

In that you could technically live without it but it would be extremely uncomfortable and you'd prefer to keep it?

BEN

Exactly.

REBECCA

I meant the cord. You showed me a song, I show you a song. I've heard it's the unspoken rule of enjoying music.

BEN

You're a fast learner.

REBECCA

We'll see if it sticks.

Ben hands his aux cord over to Rebecca, who plugs it in. She hits play, and a Ray Charles song kicks in. Maybe even "It Makes No Difference Now."

Ben knocks off his headphones.

REBECCA (cont'd)

You should treat your large intestine better.

BEN

No, it's--

REBECCA

Not a Ray Charles fan then.

BEN

No. It's--my mom used to--

REBECCA

Oh.

BEN

It's not--I'm gonna leave. Thank you
for the recommendation. It's
horrible.

REBECCA

I'm sorry.

Ben hurries away, once again overcome by a slew of emotions that he doesn't know how to process. Rebecca looks after him with a degree of worry, but doesn't follow.

He scrolls through his music, can't decide. His emotions take over, and he hurls his phone away.

BEN

Shit damn fuck shit motherfucker
goddamn Christ fuck!

He punches a tree. It hurts his wrist quite a bit.

He sinks down, back against the tree, head in his hands. Stays there a moment, feeling a wave of discomfoting grief.

He hears a little rustle in the bushes. A bunny pops out. Ben wipes his face of any potential tears. A second bunny.

The bunnies nuzzle each other. Ben puts his headphones back on, and plays "My Lover" from earlier as he watches the two lovebirds--er, lovebunnies--snuggle up.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

The song continues as Ben (now with a wrist brace) sits next to Emma while eating. They're laughing, having a good time. The other friends are there, but Ben isn't looking at them.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

Ben walks to class, *sees couples everywhere. Undergrads studying on a blanket, one shuts their book and kisses the other on the nose.*

Two grad students lying on the grass, holding hands and cloud gazing.

Ben looks up, *even the clouds have formed a heart.*

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Song continues. Ben shares a package of M&Ms with Emma as they study.

EXT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Ben and Emma walk outside, having a decent time. *Ben sees couples all around them, moving quickly arm in arm before starting a lovely waltz under the night sky.*

Emma heads out, but Ben's too busy watching the dancers to notice.

As the song finishes, everyone returns to being a normal human walking through the space. Ben looks around for Emma.

INT. PALMER'S OFFICE - DAY

Palmer grades papers at his desk. Ben walks in the door, his wrist in a brace.

PROF PALMER

Do you understand the concept of appointments?

BEN

Here's my question.

PROF PALMER

Is it about your final?

BEN

No.

PROF PALMER

Then the answer is I don't know or I don't care or it's something you will only discover through life experience.

BEN

I'm stuck.

PROF PALMER

That's not a question.

BEN

Why do I feel stuck?

PROF PALMER

How could I possibly know the answer to that?

BEN

I can't stop thinking about Emma.

PROF PALMER

Name.

BEN

I can't stop thinking about the girl I like. We've been spending some time together, which is nice, obviously, but, I don't know, I don't feel much closer to her. We haven't hooked up again.

PROF PALMER

This is borderline inappropriate.

BEN

Carl--my friend whose name I didn't say--said it's all part of phase 1--

PROF PALMER

There's phases now? Great.

BEN

But shouldn't I still feel some progress? Something? Before phase 2?

PROF PALMER

Is that all the phases?

BEN

My mom fucking died, okay? Can you fucking stop with the jokes and just fucking help me?

Palmer and Ben are both shocked.

PROF PALMER

I get you're going through something, but you absolutely cannot speak to me like that ever again, understand?

BEN

Yes. Sorry.

Ben turns to leave.

PROF PALMER
No, don't leave. Take a seat.

Ben takes a seat.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
I need you to understand that what I'm about to ask is, as far as my personal behavior goes, exceedingly rare. I'm making a special case for you because of the aforementioned deceased mother and, and I will deny this if anyone asks, I find you tolerable. Now, are you okay?

BEN
Yeah, it's just a sprain.

PROF PALMER
Not your arm.

BEN
Wrist.

PROF PALMER
Are you okay? Look, I've been in almost your position before, and I've noticed you're getting a little testy in class, you're getting, not quite obsessed but certainly very focused on this girl. We all deal with grief differently, but--

BEN
I'm not grieving.

PROF PALMER
You just swore at me about your mom.

BEN
I was angry, not grieving. I already told you, death is natural, it happens.

PROF PALMER
The existence of something in nature doesn't predefine our emotional response to it.

BEN
It should. Makes it easier.

PROF PALMER

Well look, when you--if you start to
not grieve, but feel certain ways,
I'm...
Nevermind. Final's due next week,
have a good break.

BEN

Thank you.

INT. CARL'S DORM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben and the gang cheers with a variety of shotglasses.

ALL

End of finals!

They down their shots, Eric's goes down fine, everyone else
sputters.

CARL

What the fuck is in this dude?

ERIC

You like it?

EMMA

No!

BEN

This is really bad.

KRITHI

Truly heinous.

ERIC

It's part vodka, part gin, a dash of
triple-sec, a drop of bitters, most
of a lime, and some simple syrup.

GABE

It's disgusting. Stick to weed.

CARL

What's it called?

ERIC

I dunno. I just threw our leftovers
in the shaker with some ice.

GABE

Never, ever be a bartender. Ever.

CARL
Good aftertaste though. Another
round? To the end of fall quarter.

They all cheers.

EXT. UCHICAGO DORM - DAY

Ben and Emma wait with their bags among a small throng of
students getting picked up by taxis or their families.

EMMA
Midway?

BEN
O'Hare.

EMMA
Too bad. We could have shared a cab.

Ben considers whether or not this was a flirt.

BEN
Yes, too bad. Is it okay if I text
you over break?

EMMA
I kinda figured we're at the stage
where you don't need to specifically
ask. But yeah, I guess so.

Carl shouts next to a cab he hailed.

CARL
Em! Midway, right?

EMMA
See you, Ben. Have a good break.

She kisses him on the cheek. Carl gives him a huge cheer.
Emma turns to leave, Carl tries to play it cool.

Rebecca comes up on Ben's other side.

REBECCA
Lucky guy.

BEN
Hope so. O'Hare?

INT./EXT. UBER - DAY

Ben and Rebecca sit in the back.

BEN
Your guy's not going home?

REBECCA
He is.

BEN
But you're here.

REBECCA
I am.

BEN
Are you fighting?

REBECCA
His flight left yesterday.

BEN
You have other friends.

REBECCA
You're my friend.

BEN
Depends on your definition.

REBECCA
I'm going off yours. Did you not want to share a ride? See, this is why I don't share things. I don't share feelings, I don't share memories, and now I don't share songs, apparently.

BEN
Songs, plural?

REBECCA
Yeah, I had like two more for you.

BEN
Oh. Sorry I freaked out.

REBECCA
I get it.

They share a smile.

BEN

If I let you show the other song--

REBECCA

I'm not going to negotiate a burgeoning friendship, Ben. That's ridiculous. Give me the plug.

BEN

Fair.

Ben hands her the aux cable. She plugs it into a splitter, her earbuds in the other port. "Good Feel" by Boy Named Banjo starts playing.

REBECCA

This one's a little closer to what you showed me.

A horn honks on the beat. A driver in the car over smacks his steering wheel in time.

Ben sees Rebecca subtly playing air banjo to the song.

An electronic billboard shows the lyrics as they pass. The motor of a passing traffic copter plays into the song somehow.

Ben starts to barely play air drums. Rebecca glances over and smiles.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DAY

The song continues quietly in the background. Ben and Rebecca grab their bags out of the trunk.

REBECCA

So pretty good, right?

BEN

Yeah. Going right on my flight playlist.

REBECCA

Awesome. You should send me more songs. And then I'll send you more songs. Friendship.

BEN

Wait, would we be...sharing?

REBECCA
Not if you keep asking dumbass
questions.

BEN
I will only ask smartass questions
from now on.

REBECCA
See you later, Ben.

She gives him a hug, and weirdly enough he doesn't tense up at all. In fact, Ben hugs her back. Not super hard, just a normal hug, but still.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME - DAY

Grandpa opens the door as Ben pulls his luggage inside.

GRANDPA
Dinner's in a few hours.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME, UPSTAIRS - DAY

Ben lugs his suitcase upstairs, drags it to his room. He passes a room with Mary's photo nailed to the front.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben and his Grandpa eat dinner across the table from each other. A few half-assed Christmas decorations around, including an under-decorated Christmas tree in the corner.

On a nearby table is a small shrine dedicated to Mary, consisting of a few photographs of her in her healthy days. Ben occasionally glances over before averting his gaze.

GRANDPA
How are your classes?

BEN
I passed them.

GRANDPA
That's good.

Grandpa notices Ben glance at the shrine.

GRANDPA (cont'd)
I kept it in her room, but I kept forgetting. I thought, "I haven't seen her in a few days." Then it hurts all over again.

Ben doesn't respond. Grandpa goes back to eating.

Ben stands up, walks over to Grandpa and gives him an awkward hug. Grandpa softens.

BEN
There's a girl I like. Her name is Emma.

Grandpa laughs at the sudden subject change. He wipes away his slightly moistened eyes.

GRANDPA
(pleased)
Oh, hell. You've been making friends?

BEN
Yes! There's Emma, who's great, and Carl, who's great, Krithi, Eric, Gabe, we're all in a group. Then there's this other girl Rebecca and we talk sometimes. Friends are nice.

GRANDPA
Guess it's only right. The universe balancing out the bad with the good.

BEN
Yeah. Balancing.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME, BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Snow falls outside. Ben, wrapped in his mother's blanket, stares at his phone. He scrolls through texts with Emma, a perfectly fine conversation, if not an engaging one.

His phone buzzes. A message from Rebecca, including a link to a new song. Ben smiles.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME, UPSTAIRS - DAY

Ben stands outside his mom's old room, deep in thought. He looks at the door knob, the reaches for it. Then stops. Then reaches for it again. Then stops.

He puts on his headphones, flicks through his phone to his mom's Ray Charles song, and hits play.

He reaches again, turning the knob. The door swings open, and Ben's face twists into a nigh-inscrutable...frown? He wills the tears away before shutting the door and turning off the music.

He walks away from the door.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME - DAY

Ben pulls his luggage to the front door.

GRANDPA
You're excited to go back.

BEN
I am.

GRANDPA
That's good. Before we head to the airport, I wanted to, oh hell, I want to say it looks like you're doing well. Better than I thought you would.

BEN
Yes.

GRANDPA
I'm truly happy to see it. And I know she would be too.

This hits Ben hard.

BEN
Oh. Good.

EXT. UCHICAGO DORM - DAY

A light snow fall as Ben pulls his bags out of a car. Other students are arriving, too. As Ben pulls his luggage into the dorm, he slips on some ice.

Carl, walking back from the dining hall with Emma, laughs uproariously, then comes over to help.

CARL
No snow back home?

BEN
Lots of snow. Less ice.

EMMA
If you waddle on the ice, you won't fall.

BEN
Like a penguin.

CARL
Devin the Penguin!

Carl and Emma laugh like maniacs.

BEN
I don't get it.

CARL
Oh, no it's a--I'd explain it but it's a whole story.

EMMA
Yeah, sorry.

BEN
Oh. That's fine.

CARL
Sick man, appreciate you. Oh! That's right. Devil in the Details. Friday. I didn't forget, did you?

BEN
No!

EMMA
Something happening at the party?

CARL
Not something you should worry about. Right Ben?

BEN
Right. Yes. Do not worry.

EMMA
(to Carl, playful)
You're a dick.

Carl gives Ben a thumbs up behind Emma's back. Ben gathers himself and his luggage, and follows after them.

INT. PALMER'S OFFICE - DAY

Palmer taps away on his laptop, takes a sip from his glass.

Ben walks in.

PROF PALMER

No. No, I checked my roster this quarter and you're not on it.

Ben sits down.

BEN

I'm nervous.

PROF PALMER

I'm working.

Ben's too engrossed in his concerns to notice the dismissal.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Can I ask you something, before you give me the lowdown on whatever teen angst or dead mom problem you're having this particular week?

BEN

Yes.

PROF PALMER

Rhetorical. Why me? Why--why--why do you come here? Interrupt my free time when there's literally dozens of people employed by the school to do this exact thing.

BEN

There are?

PROF PALMER

There are. Therapists and psychiatrists, free ones, too.

BEN

I don't know them. I know you.

That gets to Palmer, just barely.

PROF PALMER

Fine. Drink?

BEN

I'm still nineteen.

PROF PALMER
Just tell me the problem.

BEN
I'm going to a party Friday.

PROF PALMER
And you've never been to a party?

BEN
It's a big one. It has a name and everything.

PROF PALMER
Congrats.

BEN
Thank you, it's a big step. The girl I like will be there. There's a whole plan.

PROF PALMER
Darlene.

BEN
Emma.

PROF PALMER
I tried.

BEN
Right. And the party is when phase 2 starts. When I tell her that I like her. And then, if it works, we make out again.

PROF PALMER
You want my advice for big parties? Don't go. Not worth it. Too loud, too many people. Ugh.

BEN
I am wary of loud things and crowds.

PROF PALMER
See? You know what you like, you don't need to change for other people.

BEN
Growth is a part of attending school.

PROF PALMER

There's a difference between growth and change.

(then)

Look, you like this girl, you like any girl, next time you see her you tell her. Simple, no beating around the bush, no coy guessing bullshit. "Hey, Emma, I'm into you, and I'd like to take you on a date" or hang out or Netflix and chill or whatever the fucking line is nowadays.

Ben considers this.

BEN

That feels hard.

PROF PALMER

You remember the wall? This is just another one. And if you rely on tricks and alcohol to get around the wall--

He takes a sip of whiskey.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

You'll never learn to knock it down by yourself.

BEN

Originally I was supposed to punch through it.

PROF PALMER

It's a metaphor, the objective isn't always consistent.

BEN

But the party...

PROF PALMER

It might be easier, doesn't mean it's better, you know what I mean?

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Looking in a mirror, Ben smooths out a nice shirt and pants that he's not totally comfortable in.

Carl pushes the door open, offers Ben a shotglass and a pair of extremely nerdy glasses.

CARL
You ready? Phase 2!

INT. HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Carl, Emma, Eric, Krithi, Gabe, and Ben walk through the hallway, dressed in various degrees of stereotypical nerds. A few other groups of undergrads also walk head to the elevators, obviously all heading to this party.

Rebecca walks out of the communal kitchen, right into the group.

REBECCA
Hey!

BEN
Hey! Hi! I haven't seen you yet.

REBECCA
This year.

BEN
Is what I meant. Are you coming to the party? That's where we're all going. To the party. The big party, with all the people and noises.

The group has moved past Ben by now.

REBECCA
You sound excited.

BEN
I might be. Not sure.

REBECCA
I'm not going. Doing a board game night with some friends.

She points to Mike, Komal, and a few heretofore unseen friends trying to bake cookies in the kitchen.

BEN
I've seen some of them before.

REBECCA
They're the friends.

BEN
Where's the guy?

REBECCA
He wanted more, I didn't.

BEN
Sorry.

REBECCA
Eh, no big deal. Can't get hurt when
you don't let them in, right?

BEN
That's sad.

REBECCA
It was a joke.

BEN
A sad joke.

Rebecca laughs.

REBECCA
Yeah, I guess. We're playing
Dominion. Which is card based but
it's close enough.

BEN
That sounds super fun.

Through the glass, the friends have all noticed Rebecca
talking to Ben, and stopped baking to watch.

REBECCA
Better than Catan, anyway. You don't
know how many relationships that game
destroyed.

BEN
How many?

REBECCA
Four.

BEN
Wow.

Komal opens the door, the other friends turn back to their
cookies.

KOMAL
Cookies are almost done.

REBECCA
We also have cookies.

Rebecca and Ben keep standing there. Komal steps in.

KOMAL
Would you like to join us?

BEN
Thank you, but I'm going to a party.
Phase 2.

REBECCA
Of course, phase 2.
(at Komal)
For the girl you like.
Good luck.

BEN
Thanks.

He hugs her, and heads off.

KOMAL
He's the song guy?

REBECCA
No.

They head back into the kitchen.

INT. SCHOOL SHUTTLE - NIGHT

Ben rides on the bus, surrounded by his rowdy friends and rowdy strangers. His headphones are on, he's starting to breathe a little faster, obviously nervous.

He looks over to Emma, chatting with the others in the group, and only gets more nervous. He searches for a song. Just as he hits play, Carl hits the headphones off his head.

CARL
No time for music, motherfucker!
We're here!

EXT. SCHOOL SHUTTLE/FRAT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

"Stranger" by Miki Fiki plays as they get off the bus.

Carl enthusiastically greets people he knows, chatting and drinking outside.

Finger guns, jumping high-fives, grabbing drinks out of their hands in time with the music as Ben walks behind.

Carl waves Ben up to the entrance.

INT. FRAT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On "...colder" (0:20), Carl opens the door to a somewhat chill party. Following the theme, the house is decorated with notebooks, TI-84 calculators, anything nerdy with a hellish twist. Most people are dressed as nerds, except the frat brothers, who are all dressed as angels and devils.

Carl leads Ben to the drinks table. Carl hands Ben a red solo cup of beer. On "...freedom" (0:29) Ben looks up, sees his friends have already moved into the party.

A few kids push in front of Ben to grab some alcohol, including Emma. Ben smiles at her, she smiles back. They say some words, Emma laughs.

Emma leaves. Ben tries to follow, gets blocked by a Devil lunging in front of him to grab a plastic shot glass.

He sees Emma across the party now laughing with a group and Carl. Carl catches Ben's eye, nods like "get over here."

Ben walks towards them, but on "...hounds" (0:40) a horde of people walk through the door. Ben tries to move through them but can't. People bump into him. He gets knocked around in a circle. The bass picks up, and he's bumped faster and faster.

On "...where" (0:58) they stop. He's smack in the middle of a huge crowd, but completely alone. On "stranger" (1:02) the crowd pulses out then in like a tide. He looks for an escape.

On "break her" (1:10) a portion of the crowd parts, he sees Emma, chatting with friends, and tries to get to her, but the crowd comes back on "please," sealing him off.

At each cymbal crash he sees a friend through the crowd: Eric handing off a baggie of weed. Krithi chatting with some people. Gabe telling a performative story to a group of rich-looking kids. But the crowd crashes back together before he can get to them.

Ben puts his head down and shoves through the crowd. At "...walk you through that door" (1:35) he finds a couch in a less crowded corner and sits down.

He lets out a long breath. Gabe sits down next to him, hands him a beer. On "does it make any sense?" (1:46) a partygoer passes in front of them, and it's now--

LATER

Ben's more drunk and disheveled, nodding along to whatever Gabe's ranting at him.

Ben sees two Bros mouth along to the song.

ANGEL BRO

(1:55)

...is all 'cause of me.

DEVIL BRO

(1:56)

I blame it on you.

Devil Bro somewhat playfully attacks Angel Bro. They move out of the way, and Ben sees Emma again, talking with a group of people including Carl.

Ben stands up to reach her, starts walking. Eric swings over, claps him on the back in encouragement on "...I am doing fine" (2:05). He gains confidence.

Ben reaches Emma. He freezes. Carl pushes him (gently) into Emma. She laughs. Ben and Emma take a few steps away from the group.

Ben looks at her. She looks at him. He takes a moment, just as he starts to talk, she sees Carl start a beer pong game. She walks past Ben and instantly disappears into the crowd.

The chorus plays again (2:20) and Ben begins to panic again. Looks for his friends, can find any. The crowd once again surrounds him, parting on the cymbal crashes, but he can't see anyone through them.

He pushes through them again, on "...walk you through that door." (2:58) he finds an empty--

BATHROOM

He turns on the sink, splashes some water on his face. He takes another sip of beer.

He opens the door and the party has calmed down a bit, still a lot of people, but not an overwhelming amount.

He walks through the party, looking for his friends. He sees Carl and Emma, kissing in the middle of the room.

He walks up to him, slowly. The crowd moves with him. Carl sees, puts his hands out like he's trying to explain himself. At the (3:20) cymbal crash, Ben PUNCHES him in the face. The scene turns into a slow-motion tableaux, back-lit with red light, as Ben follows through, Carl reels, Emma watches in horror and the dozens of partygoers flailing along with the punch.

Carl recovers. Ben tries to punch again, but Carl grabs Ben and (3:28) shoves him away, again the scene turns into a back-lit, slow-motion tableaux, the partygoers now moving in the opposite direction with Ben.

Time resumes. Some Frat Bros grab Ben, manhandle him towards the door. He struggles against it, hating being touched. Ben's friends watch silently.

EXT. FRAT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

They shove Ben down the steps. He stumbles and falls onto the ground. Someone tosses his coat onto him. The song ends.

Ben lies there.

BLACK

INT. PALMER'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben slowly comes to on a strange couch. He looks around the room, more curious than afraid. He sees classic house decor. Framed things. A few awards. Some plants.

A BORDER COLLIE (6) walks up to him, nuzzles his leg.

BEN

Hello, I love you immediately.

PROF PALMER

Slow down, Casanova. Catch.

It's Palmer's house. That's Palmer's dog. Palmer tosses an Advil at Ben, who doesn't even try to catch it. He's very hungover.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Or don't.

Palmer walks up, hands Ben the Advil bottle.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Take one. Or two. Not more than four
though, that'll mess up your liver.

BEN
What's your dog's name?

PROF PALMER
Lola.

BEN
From the song.

PROF PALMER
No.

Ben takes the Advil with a sip of couch-side Gatorade, then
keeps petting the dog.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
I take it phase 2 didn't go as
planned.

BEN
No. Carl kissed her instead.

PROF PALMER
Rough.

BEN
And then I punched him.

PROF PALMER
I--okay. Thought I had a response for
that, but I do not. There's a
question I assumed you'd have asked
by now, and honestly I'm a little
concerned that you haven't.

BEN
(unsure)
How did I--

PROF PALMER
--get here. Yes, that one. You were
passed out drunk, I was walking the
lug here. Was worried you'd die,
didn't want to call the ambulance and
saddle you with the \$5000 hospital
fee, blah blah blah.

Ben smiles.

BEN
Do you have food?

INT. PALMER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Palmer serves Ben an omelette and toast.

PROF PALMER
I haven't cooked for anyone else in a while.

Ben takes a bite.

BEN
It's good.

PROF PALMER
Something's on your mind. Don't tell me what it is.

BEN
My grandpa said something over break.

PROF PALMER
Fuck.

BEN
Something about the universe balancing out the good and the bad. The bad being my mom, the good-- here's what I don't understand. My mom is dead. That is a bad thing. A very heavy bad thing.

He pushes a large piece of omelette to one side of the plate. The bad side.

BEN (cont'd)
Friends. That's a good thing. A small good thing.

He pushes small pieces of the omelette to the other side.

BEN (cont'd)
Girlfriend. That's a big good thing.
Good grades. Small good thing.
Mentor. Small good thing.

PROF PALMER
I'm not--oh shit you're right.

BEN

But all these good things, still so much smaller than the bad thing. I didn't even get a girlfriend, so that's not even--

He moves the girlfriend piece off the plate.

BEN (cont'd)

And if you look at the two sides, it's very very very very very much bad side, and only a little good side. And that doesn't seem fair. It seems like maybe I should get a girlfriend, and maybe I should get the best grades and the lottery? And maybe a free car? Because then maybe, maybe it would be even. Maybe then it would be even because right now it's not!

Omelette bits scatter from his plate. Some hit the floor, which Lola eats.

BEN (cont'd)

Can she eat that?

PROF PALMER

It's fine.

BEN

Unrelated: I think I'm gonna throw up.

INT. OUTSIDE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Palmer stands outside the bathroom. Ben vomits within.

PROF PALMER

Are you done?

BEN

No.

He vomits again. Palmer's stuck between annoyed and concerned.

EXT. OUTSIDE - DAY

Ben drinks gatorade as he walks with Palmer and Lola.

PROF PALMER
She likes you.

BEN
Animals are easier. The air makes me
feel better.

PROF PALMER
You punched a kid?

BEN
Big fresh air fan.

Palmer looks at him, expecting an answer.

BEN (cont'd)
I was drunk.

PROF PALMER
So all that "I'm nineteen" stuff,
that was nonsense.

BEN
You're not mad?

PROF PALMER
What does my emotional reaction have
anything to do with it? You're
nineteen, you're an adult.

Palmer can see Ben shut down, then reconsiders.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
This guy, Punchface--

BEN
Carl.

PROF PALMER
Right, Punchface, you told him about
your feelings for the girl--

BEN
Emma.

PROF PALMER
I told you about the name thing.

BEN
It's impolite.

PROF PALMER

I don't want to get attached. But you told the guy how you felt about the girl.

BEN

That is what happened, yes.

PROF PALMER

And he still went and stuck his tongue down her throat?

BEN

And then I punched him.

PROF PALMER

Yeah, I mean, that's what I would have done.

BEN

Okay, good.

PROF PALMER

No, bad. You don't want to end up like me.

BEN

Respected and old?

Lola pees on a nearby tree.

PROF PALMER

No. I'm not that--it's not important. Look, here's what you do, apologize to Punchface.

BEN

I don't want to apologize, though. He betrayed me.

PROF PALMER

He kissed a girl you made out with one time. Who cares? In five years you won't remember either of their names.

BEN

Then why apologize?

PROF PALMER

Let me pull an example from class. When Duke Henry rose up against his brother King Otto, he probably had good reason. Maybe Otto levied unfair taxes on him, maybe Otto made out with his crush when they were teenagers. But the only story we hear is the rebellion. Henry the pissed off brother, Henry the bad guy. Don't be Henry. You know what I mean?

BEN

Is this a metaphor because I'm still very bad at metaphors.

PROF PALMER

Stories spread quickly. When people tell the story, they're going to tell the exciting part. The punching part. And they'll make up the reasons to suit the story. And people will think certain things of you. That you've got anger management issues, that you're crazy, that you're naturally violent. And if it goes on long enough, you'll start to think those things of yourself. And then you'll be alone.

Palmer kneels down to scratch Lola.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Mostly alone, anyway.

Ben sort of gets it.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Ben approaches the Carl & Friends table. Gabe sees him walk up, and they one by one stop laughing and joking and turn to watch him.

Ben notices another, completely unrelated table, turn to watch what he's going to do. And then several more tables.

He does not notice Rebecca shush her friend to watch whatever's about to unfold.

BEN

(to Carl)

Hi, I'm sorry.

CARL

For?

BEN

For hitting you.

Carl looks at his table.

CARL

Come over here, let's talk.

Carl leads Ben by the shoulder (which Ben hates) over to a corner. The onlookers have returned to their conversation.

Rebecca still watches him while sitting with Mike, Komal, and Daniel.

MIKE

You heard what happened, right? The wacko fucking bit him or something.

KOMAL

I heard it was a full on fight.

REBECCA

Don't talk about him like that.

Carl lets out a big, performative sigh at Ben.

CARL

What are we gonna do, man?

BEN

Regarding what?

CARL

The whole situation, my guy. You physically assaulted me, that's sort of a red line.

BEN

I apologized.

CARL

Plus I know Emma doesn't feel comfortable around you anymore.

BEN

But I didn't hurt her.

CARL
Not physically, man.
(touches head)
In here.
(touches heart)
And here. Metaphorically.

BEN
But I said sorry.

CARL
Sometimes sorry isn't enough like,
for example, when you fucking punch
someone in the fucking face for no
reason.

BEN
I told you I liked Emma, and you
still kissed her!

Some people turn to look at the outburst.

CARL
Woah, man don't spazz out.

Emma stands up from the table and marches over. Someone way
off at another table cheers her.

EMMA
Fuck off!

Everyone turns back to their food, embarrassed.

Rebecca keeps watching the confrontation.

Emma arrives at the pair.

EMMA (cont'd)
You two are talking like I'm not
sitting thirty feet away! Jesus fuck,
you guys. Ben, I'm sorry, I was drunk
the first time we kissed, I didn't
think it was a big deal.

BEN
You also kissed me on the cheek.

EMMA
I'm an affectionate person! I spent a
quarter in Paris! I was figuring
stuff out! Or do I have to have
static feelings to fit into your...
bizarre* little world?

DING. Much harsher. Ben physically cringes from the noise.

BEN

I liked you.

EMMA

You never told me, you can't stand around and expect other people to magically discern how you feel about things. That's not how people work. He kissed me, I kissed him, we kissed each other, whatever the fucking events of the evening, Ben, your freak out was embarrassing, it was scary, and none of us want to be around you right now, especially me.

Ben looks at Emma, then at Carl, then over to the friend table, then all around the room. A lot of people are looking at him.

He walks out of the room. Then hurries. Then runs.

Rebecca watches him go. She follows, food half-eaten.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Ben slams the door closed, almost leaping into bed. He puts his headphones on. Searches for a song, playing the beginnings of many songs.

Someone knocks on the door. Ben opens it, it's Rebecca.

She sounds physically distant.

REBECCA

Hi.

Ben doesn't say anything.

REBECCA (cont'd)

That was rough. In the dining hall. To watch. Probably more to experience.

His face squints into an expression of miserable confusion.

REBECCA (cont'd)

We can...talk. About it. If you want.

Ben doesn't respond. Rebecca's feeling a bit vulnerable.

BEN

No.

Ben closes the door.

He keeps trying to find a song, wrapping himself in his mom's blanket.

He lies there, all sorts of emotions flying across his face. Anger, sadness, fear, anger again, a laugh for some reason, just chaotic. The white noise grows louder, then suddenly shuts off.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben's phone lights up, alarm going off, completely soundless.

Ben wakes up in the early morning, still dark.

DEPRESSION MONTAGE

- Ben puts his notes in his backpack. A pen falls to the floor. Ben looks at it, decides to leave it.

- Ben dresses warmly but sloppily.

- He stands in the dining hall, Rebecca waves him over, but he doesn't register and sits alone.

- Ben walks to class, surrounded by heavily jacketed students. A few people bump into him. He doesn't react.

- Ben sits in class, watching the lecture, barely taking notes.

- Ben walks through the quad, catches the eye of Emma. Carl, walking right next to her, puts his arm around Emma. Ben looks down.

- Ben stands at a street corner, cars whizzing by. He doesn't register them at all, his head still down. He steps off the corner, potentially right into traffic.

EXT. THE REG - PRESENT - NIGHT

Everything's silent again. Ben walks into the iconic, brutalist library.

INT. THE REG - NIGHT

Ben types at his laptop, consulting his notebook, dead eyes. His headphones are on, but everything is still completely silent.

Palmer, walking through with a handful of books, notices Ben. He thinks to himself, weighs options, then decides to walk over.

PROF PALMER
(silent)
Hey.

No response.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
(silent)
Ben.

Palmer jabs Ben's shoulder. Ben looks up, gives a weak smile, returns to his computer.

Palmer sighs, puts his books on the table, walks away.

Ben tries to focus on his paper, but his eyes glaze over.

Palmer's back, places a coffee cup on the table.

BEN
(distant)
I don't drink coffee.

PROF PALMER
(silent)
It's hot chocolate. Hey? Did you hear me? Ben?

Palmer jabs him a little harder. Ben looks over.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
(normal-ish)
It's hot chocolate.

EXT. THE REG - NIGHT

Palmer smokes a cigarette. The sound is literally audible but something's still off.

BEN
I didn't know you smoked.

PROF PALMER
If it's self-destructive and legal...

Palmer looks over at him.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
No quick and overly literal retort?

BEN
No.

PROF PALMER
Alright.

Ben sips his hot chocolate.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
You haven't come by in a while.

Ben doesn't respond.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Wanted to make sure you were still
alive. I see that you are, and I will
now let you go back to your paper.

BEN
You gave me bad advice.

PROF PALMER
Hm?

BEN
I apologized, and now I'm alone.

PROF PALMER
You punched him.

BEN
I apologized.

PROF PALMER
And the apology doesn't suddenly make
it so you didn't punch him. This is a
consequence, Ben. Apologizing doesn't
make it magically better, it makes it
not worse.

BEN
And now I'm alone.

Palmer look down at himself, checks his arms, touches his
face.

PROF PALMER

Sorry, for a second there I thought I didn't exist.

Ben lets a brief smile escape.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Do you know how many of my students I can name from the last, I don't know, twenty years?

BEN

Four.

PROF PALMER

None.

Ben's smile is gone. Palmer looks at him, sighs again.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

Look, you've heard "the only way out is through"? That's where you're at right now. It's gonna fucking suck for a while, no way around it. But you've got at least one person rooting for you. And willing to help. A little bit, don't take advantage of me. The best thing you can do is move through it, find new friends, a new crush--

BEN

A new mom?

Palmer stops.

PROF PALMER

It's all coming up now.

Palmer pulls out a flask, takes a swig.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)

You want?

BEN

I'm still nineteen.

PROF PALMER

I've seen you blasted drunk.

Ben just looks at him. Palmer retracts the offer.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Losing someone is different. It's--I
don't know how to explain it. Are
metaphors completely disallowed or
just discouraged?

BEN
Discouraged.

PROF PALMER
Okay. It's like this. Right now
you're depressed. You feel either
nothing or like shit, just empty.
Like the plains. Flat, empty, awful.
Occasionally there's a light rain--a
small wave of sadness. Or a full
storm passes through if you're
lucky--that's anger. Otherwise
nothing.

He takes a drag of his cigarette.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
And one day, out of the blue, a
little flower starts to grow, right
there in the dirt. A miracle. You can
turn away, spend your time in the
other 99% of the field, miserable and
alone, feeling empty until that's all
you know and all you remember, or you
can take care of the flower. Water
it, prune it, let it grow. And you
might find more flowers, a bee or
two, some trees or something. A whole
garden. You'll still carry the pain,
that never goes away, but you can
build on it. Use it, and cultivate it
to make something better than you
ever could without it. Make sense?

BEN
The flower is hope?

PROF PALMER
Hope, laughter, a nice drink, the
flower's whatever you think it is.
You don't have to feel better
tomorrow, you don't have to feel
better ever. Just be open to it.

INT. THE REG - NIGHT

Ben sits back at his computer. Starts typing again.

EXT. QUAD - NIGHT

Ben walks home, his feet crunching the snow. The sound continues to fade. He squeezes his eyes, hard, trying to fend off another emotional thing.

He stops, standing in the quad. Suddenly he flings off his backpack, takes out his laptop, and starts beating the backpack into the tree. A CYMBAL CRASH with every hit.

A group of students hurries away from him, leaving Rebecca standing there.

Ben's out of breath. He returns the laptop to his bag.

He sees Rebecca, looking at him.

Ben zips up his bag to hurry away, but Rebecca walks up to him too fast. He doesn't notice, but she's wearing a small flower barrette in her hair.

REBECCA

Ben. Hey, Ben!

She grabs his arm. Forcing Ben to look at her. She meets his eyes.

REBECCA (cont'd)

I know what you're going through. Let me help.

BEN

No you don't.

Ben leaves.

EXT. UCHICAGO DORM - DAY

Another start of break day with students hopping into cars, soundless. Ben stands there, alone.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME - DAY

Ben pulls his luggage through the threshold. His Grandpa says something, but he doesn't hear it.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOME, UPSTAIRS - DAY

Ben drags his suitcase to his room. As he passes Mary's room, he hears something, a small musical cue. He opens Mary's room.

INT. MARY'S ROOM - DAY

It's a normal room, a little dusty, mostly untouched for a few months. Some pictures of YOUNG BEN and MARY around the wall.

He touches a knick-knack on her desk, one of those little salt lamps.

On the bed, ANOTHER MOM BLANKET. Ben sits on the bed, wraps himself in the blanket, his head tucked down.

MARY (PRE-LAP)

Ben, what are you feeling right now?

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. GRADE SCHOOL - FLASHBACK - DAY

YOUNG BEN (7) stands outside the school with his head down. MARY, his cancer-free mom, stands over him.

YOUNG BEN

I don't know.

MARY

Good or bad?

YOUNG BEN

I don't know.

Mary crouches down, gently pulls his face up. His face is a little dirty and he's got a small cut on his chin.

MARY

You're angry. I can tell. And a little sad? That's okay. Feelings are okay, you know that. All feelings.

YOUNG BEN

Okay.

Mary smiles.

INT. MARY'S CAR - DAY

Mary drives them home, Ben sitting (irresponsibly) in the front seat.

MARY
You know the best way to let it out?
The best way to *feel* the feeling?

Ben shakes his head.

Mary lowers the windows, then angry-screams at the air.

MARY (cont'd)
Try it.

She screams again.

MARY (cont'd)
Come on, with me.

She screams again, notices Ben is just sitting there.

MARY (cont'd)
Not a screamer. That's fine.

They pull up at a red light, Mary goes through her iPod (with the scroll wheel), which is plugged into the car. She picks a song.

MARY (cont'd)
This is what I do when I'm just
furious.

She puts on "Bulls on Parade" by Rage Against the Machine.

MARY (cont'd)
Hear that guitar? How mad it is?

She starts headbanging a little.

MARY (cont'd)
Yeah. What do you feel?

YOUNG BEN
I don't know.

MARY
Yes you do! Don't think about it.
Come wit it now!

Mary is really going with the music. Young Ben looks at her.

YOUNG BEN
He said the F-word.

MARY
Don't listen to the words! Listen to
his voice, his emotions, what they
want you to feel. Let it wash over.

Young Ben's head just barely starts to move with the music.
Mary glances over while driving.

MARY (cont'd)
Yes! Yes, Ben!

The chorus hits and Ben starts flailing.

MARY (cont'd)
Yes! Amazing! Feel it!

Ben screams. Mary joins. They both break into laughter.

MARY (cont'd)
Perfect, Ben! I love this kid!

INT. MARY'S ROOM - DAY

The sound is distant.

Ben's having a full on emotional catharsis on his mom's bed.
Grandpa hurries to the door, sees Ben. He sits on the bed
next to him, and puts his arm around him. Ben fully leans
into him, still sobbing.

EXT. UCHICAGO DORM - DAY

Ben returns to campus. People returning, greeting friends,
hiding from the spring rain, muted but at least a little bit
there.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

The sun shines through. Barely audible.

Ben eats alone at a table. Over to his left, his old group
of friends laugh, ignoring him. Over to his right, Rebecca,
Mike, and Komal have an animated discussion.

Ben goes back to his food. He hears a muted Rebecca (and
only Rebecca) above the distant background noise.

REBECCA (O.C.)
 Do we need to resurrect Thomas Hobbes
 and ask him? Because that is
 literally impossible. I've tried.

Ben, surprised to hear anything, looks up at her table.

Mike says something in response.

REBECCA
 Locke then! William of fucking
 Orange. Whoever I need--Komal, stop
 laughing I'm dead serious--to
 convince you I'm right and you're--I
 have *Two Treatises of Government*
 right here, motherfucker.

Komal responds. Ben notices the small flower barrette.

REBECCA (cont'd)
 Plato?! You're insane.

Ben walks over to her.

BEN
 Hi.

All three look at him.

REBECCA
 Hey.

MIKE
 Argument over we win! Komal run!

He and Komal grab their trays and run to the drop-off.

REBECCA
 Put it in your pub-pol paper, bitch,
 I dare you!

BEN
 I interrupted something, I'm sorry.

REBECCA
 Nah, it was over anyway.

BEN
 I like your flower.

REBECCA
 Thanks, it's a barrette.

BEN
I'm sorry. You tried to help and--

REBECCA
It's fine.

Ben smiles. Rebecca softens.

REBECCA (cont'd)
Nice day out.

EXT. MIDWAY PARK - DAY

Ben and Rebecca take a stroll.

REBECCA
That's amazing. In the face?

BEN
Yeah.

REBECCA
I heard rumors, but damn. And over Emma? I mean, she's fine but, like, come on.

BEN
Jealous?

REBECCA
Yep. I've got a massive crush on the guy who shared some music with me and didn't talk to me for three months except to tell me to fuck off when I was trying to help him out.

BEN
Sarcastic.

REBECCA
Maybe. Yeah.

BEN
I apologized. You're still mad.

REBECCA
I'm not mad. That's a lie, I'm a little mad. But let me get in some barbs for a day or two, and we'll be good.

BEN
I was going through something.

REBECCA
I could tell, believe it or not.

BEN
Still am, a bit.

REBECCA
I can still tell, believe it or not.

They walk in peaceful silence. Rebecca tries to get something out.

REBECCA (cont'd)
When my b--

It doesn't work.

BEN
When your what?

REBECCA
Nevermind. I know what will help you feel better. Come to Mike's apartment tonight.

BEN
I'm not really a party guy.

REBECCA
It's more of a friend hang with alcohol and snacks, and also there's music in the background, if that makes it any more tolerable.

BEN
That sounds like a party. I don't--

REBECCA
Here's the thing, though, is that you're actually going to come. Because despite your insistence that no one else can possibly understand what you're going through, I do, and I know what will make you feel better. And it's a friend-hang-with-alcohol-and-music.

Ben considers it.

REBECCA (cont'd)
I'll give you a Newman-O.

BEN
Sounds good.

INT. SCHOOL SHUTTLE - NIGHT

Ben sits in the shuttle, surrounded by LOUD STUDENTS. He has his headphones on, fiddling with the unconnected end.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben stands outside a Hyde Park apartment, headphones on, compares his phone to the address. Hits the buzzer.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben enters, there's a bunch of people here, but it's not fully a party.

Rebecca, in the middle of conversation, sees Ben, lights up, and rushes over to him, putting a cookie in his hand.

BEN
How long have you been holding onto this?

REBECCA
The cookie or the bit?

BEN
The cookie.

REBECCA
About twenty minutes. Oh! You have to meet some of my friends.

She guides him over to her Mike and Komal.

BEN
I've seen you before.

MIKE
Likely. 'Sup, man? Mike.

REBECCA
"'Sup?" Really?

KOMAL
He's been getting really into '90s
slang lately, don't get me started.
I'm Komal.

BEN
Hi. Ben.

MIKE
Oh, we know.

KOMAL
Mike!

BEN
Is that a good "we know" or a bad "we
know."

KOMAL
A little of both.

REBECCA
Mostly good.

BEN
Oh, phew.

REBECCA
Mostly.

They all laugh.

LATER

Ben walks over to the drinks table, pours various liquids
into his cup.

EMMA
Hey.

Ben turns, surprised to see Emma.

BEN
Hi. I didn't think you knew Rebecca.

EMMA
Gabe knows Mike from MUN? 6 degrees.
We thought it would be more of a
party party.

She gestures over to Ben's old friends, who are all staring
right at them. They look away.

BEN

I'm sorry for what happened. In winter.

EMMA

You already apologized.

BEN

I'm also sorry for that. That was "I'm supposed to be sorry" sorry. This is "I recognize what I did was wrong" sorry. I'm not flirting with you.

EMMA

I didn't think you were. And, look, thanks for that. Carl's still pissed, but maybe I can talk to him? Pull a miracle off and get him to chill the fuck out?

BEN

How's that going?

EMMA

I mean, yeah.

BEN

I don't know what that means.

EMMA

Me neither.

Carl slides up and puts his arm around her.

CARL

'Sup, this guy bothering you?

EMMA

Carl...

BEN

No, I'm--

CARL

Relax, man, I'm just playing. All good here, you get it.

Emma rolls her eyes, Carl leads them away.

BEN

I don't.

CARL

Hm?

BEN

I don't get it. I don't know what you mean. I don't get it. I never get it. I just don't. I want to. I'd like to be included in your secret coded language you and everybody else has that they can express whole ideas with the right twitch of an eyelid or a certain gesture at a particular time, but I don't see the world like that. I don't see it like any of you, and it's not that I don't want to. I'd love it if I woke up tomorrow and was just like you, and I just knew the right speed to throw food at a friend to make it playful or what exactly these mystical signals people send each other when they're into them are, but I can't. I cannot do that because there is a big fucking, invisible, metaphorical wall between me and all of you. And I guess that makes me...funky* or...fun* or...you know. Unique*. Interesting*. What Woodstockers would have called groovy*. Cool*.

Ben hits his glass with a fork at each *, making a DING.

BEN (cont'd)

But then they realize I'm not making jokes. I'm not playing around. This is really who I am. And then they say what those words really mean. I'm a freak, or that kid with anger management issues, or just fucking weird. I don't like it.

Ben realizes the entire friend hang is looking at him.

BEN (cont'd)

Sorry. I'm sorry. Sorry. Sorry.

He runs out of the room, grabbing his coat on the way.

Rebecca follows, but not before chastising Mike.

REBECCA

God damn it, Mike.

EXT. HYDE PARK - NIGHT

Ben hurries towards campus, Rebecca catches up to him.

REBECCA
That was an impressive speech.

Ben doesn't say anything.

REBECCA (cont'd)
Jokes on you, I'm fucking great at being ignored. Did it all the time in high school.

BEN
You followed me just to rub salt in the wound? I think I used that right.

REBECCA
Yes. Because that's exactly the kind of person I am.

BEN
Sarcastic.

REBECCA
No shit. Slow down a bit, my legs are shorter than yours.

Ben slows down a bit.

REBECCA (cont'd)
That is how you use the expression, just so you know.

BEN
Thank you.

Silence.

REBECCA
Just so you know, you are really fucking weird. By far the weirdest person I've ever met.

BEN
Finally someone says what they mean.

REBECCA
Weird isn't bad, Ben. Weird is a gift. Do you know how boring life is for normal people?
(MORE)

REBECCA (cont'd)

We go our whole life and the sky is just the sky, the grass is just the grass, buildings are just buildings, people just people. No matter how amazing something or inspiring to look at something is, it's only ever going to be what it is. Now, I'm not going to pretend to know how you experience life, but I know you. Better than you think I do. However you see the world, it's fantastic. And I know it's hard for you to communicate or whatever, but when you can get someone to understand you, you can open their mind. Help them see the world in a new way. In your way. And that's a gift.

Ben's not quite buying it.

BEN

I don't have the strongest emotional control. Maybe I should just be alone. You don't have to keep walking with me.

REBECCA

Too bad.

Ben looks at her.

REBECCA (cont'd)

Sorry. Or, no, actually I'm not. I can stop talking if you want, I can drop back a few steps, but I'm not leaving you to be miserable and alone. That's the second worst combination out there. "What's the worst?" Great question.

BEN

What's the worst?

REBECCA

Great question. Didn't think that far ahead.

Not even a smile.

REBECCA (cont'd)

Let me show you a song.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca plugs her phone into the speakers. Ben sits on the bed.

BEN
I should just sleep. I always feel
better in the morning.

REBECCA
Do you know how many people tried to
get me into music?

BEN
Four?

REBECCA
Dozens, at least. Never stuck. Listen
to the song.

"Heysátan" by Sigur Rós, a melancholic masterpiece.

Ben notices Rebecca's warm smile turns into a distinctly sad one as the song begins.

He leans back to listen to it for a few seconds. Sits up to say something, but instead--

BLACK

He sees Rebecca, alone in a black void, dancing to the song. Somewhere between ballet, interpretive, and modern dance. Conflicted, feeling the weight of loss and the barest hint of contentedness in the song.

Ben watches the whole thing, completely entranced.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

The song comes to an end. Neither of them say anything. Rebecca pulls the aux cord out of her phone, then sits back on the bed, centimeters from tears.

Finally:

BEN
Who did you lose?

REBECCA
My first boyfriend. Died early last
year. Hip cancer.
(MORE)

REBECCA (cont'd)
(re: leather bracelet)
This was his, actually. You were the first person to ask me about it, you know.

BEN
Same. My mom, not my--

Rebecca laughs in the briefest way.

BEN (cont'd)
She also didn't give me her bracelet. This was her blanket though.

REBECCA
I got it.

BEN
Also it was a different kind of cancer.

She laughs again, then reaches out, gently strokes his arm.

LATER

Rebecca lies with her head on Ben's leg, they've been here for a while.

BEN (cont'd)
There was this song she'd sing to me when I was younger, only I looked it up a few months ago and it turns out she'd always used the wrong lyrics.

REBECCA
He refused to say bagel correctly. Only ba-gel. He would watch Canadian TV when he was a kid, liked how they said it, and flat out refused to ever say it normally. What a doofus.

BEN
My mom hated sushi.

Rebecca sits up, looks at him curiously.

BEN (cont'd)
That's not a super deep one, I know, it just popped up. Look, I don't control my mind.

Rebecca laughs, wipes her eyes.

BEN (cont'd)
Thanks for staying with me.

REBECCA
Anything for a fellow grief
aficionado. I haven't told anyone
else at this school about my thing.

BEN
Yeah, you're not a sharer. I've told
a lot of people about mine.

She laughs again.

BEN (cont'd)
Why me?

REBECCA
Not really sure. I guess you're just
the right kind of different.

They smile at each other. Rebecca checks her phone, 2am.

REBECCA (cont'd)
You wanted to know the signals when
someone likes you?

BEN
Very much.

Rebecca pulls a strand of hair in front of her eyes.

REBECCA
Here's a classic. If her hair is like
this, in front of the eyes, you take
your hand and gently move it behind
her ear, and if she lets you, she
likes you.

BEN
Okay. Can I try?

REBECCA
Please.

He does, but some of the hair escapes.

BEN
I'm gonna try again.

He does, still doesn't quite get it.

BEN (cont'd)

Damn it.

He goes to try again.

BEN (cont'd)

Wait, I can get it.

REBECCA

Two times is really the max.

BEN

But the hair's still there.

REBECCA

The hair doesn't matter.

BEN

Then why even move the hair?

REBECCA

It's to get in position to kiss her.

BEN

That feels sneaky.

REBECCA

It's cute sneaky.

BEN

Is that what flirting is?

REBECCA

Plus the girl will stop you if she's not into it.

BEN

Feels invasive. I don't like it.

REBECCA

Well, it's a classic.

BEN

Got it.

Rebecca looks at him expectantly, he's not getting it.

BEN (cont'd)

What?

REBECCA

Really?

BEN
Really what?

REBECCA
You're weird.

Instead of the DING, he hears a lovely little chord progression. Ben smiles.

REBECCA (cont'd)
I like you, and I'd be down, but if
you want to just be friends that's
fine, too.

BEN
Oh.

Ben crawls towards her on the bed, still uncertain. He moves her hair away from her eyes.

REBECCA
Exactly like that.

They kiss.

BEN
That was nice.

REBECCA
Yeah.

BEN
I like you, too. In case that wasn't
clear.

Rebecca laughs and kisses him again.

INT. PALMER'S OFFICE - DAY

Palmer sits at his desk, brow furrowed. Ben sits across from him petting a sleepy Lola (the dog).

PROF PALMER
I don't need to know about your sex
life.

BEN
We haven't had sex.
(huge smile)
Yet.

PROF PALMER

Thank you so much for informing me.

BEN

We are dating though.

PROF PALMER

And you've talked about that?

BEN

Yes.

PROF PALMER

Then wonderful, I'm very happy for you.

BEN

I am also happy for me. She thinks I'm weird. In a good way. And she tells me her feelings and stuff like that. Which is a whole new thing for her.

PROF PALMER

Fantastic.

BEN

The whole flower thing, I still don't completely understand but I think I mostly get it. I still get sad, but it's not overwhelming anymore. And I think Rebecca is a big part of that.

PROF PALMER

This feels like it's leading to something.

BEN

But without your help, I wouldn't have been open to her at all. Just alone and miserable, the second worst combination out there.

PROF PALMER

What's the first?

BEN

Don't know. I read online that adults say thank you with gifts, and I know you like alcohol, so I bought this.

Ben pulls out a bottle of whiskey.

PROF PALMER
You're nineteen.

BEN
Well, I paid someone who bought it
for me, for you.

PROF PALMER
How much was this, twenty bucks?

BEN
Thirty-three dollars and twelve
cents.

PROF PALMER
You're not supposed to tell the
recipient of a gift the price of the
gift.

BEN
I will remember that for the future.

Palmer's touched.

PROF PALMER
You're not recording this, right?

Ben shakes his head.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Good. I'm about to say something
sincere, and you have to promise
never to say anything to any of the
faculty or students. As far as they
know, I'm an unapproachable, not that
old curmudgeon, and I want to stay
that way. For now.

BEN
Promise.

Palmer stands up, walks around the desk.

PROF PALMER
You're a good kid. I'll remember you,
Ben.

He puts his arm on Ben's shoulder. Ben goes right in for the
hug.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Okay. Alright, that's enough.

Ben lets go.

PROF PALMER (cont'd)
Never again. But thank you. Alright,
we're done, get out.

Ben heads to the door.

BEN
See you next week. Bye Lola!

Lola raises her head up, wags her tail a bit, and goes back to sleep.

Palmer smiles.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

Ben exits the building, where Mike, Komal, and Rebecca are sitting at a bench chatting. The sun is shining bright, and nothing funky is going on with the sound.

KOMAL
The basis of your arguments can't
just be shouting the names of
political theorists!

REBECCA
They can and will! Rousseau!
Voltaire!

BEN
Cicero! Marx! Alexis de Tocqueville!

REBECCA
My boy here get it.

She kisses Ben on the cheek. He beams.

MIKE
Eww!

Komal kisses Mike on the cheek.

MIKE (cont'd)
EWW!

Komal slaps him on the shoulder.

KOMAL
Dick. Come eat food with me.

MIKE

You got it.

They head off.

Ben pulls out his phone. Rebecca takes out her splitter. They plug in and Ray Charles' "It Makes No Difference Now" plays, the song he freaked out over before.

REBECCA

You feeling good?

BEN

Better. I'll get there.

He kisses her again, and they start to walk off.

The world, including Rebecca, moves to the song, but this time, for the first time, so does Ben. They dance together through the quad in a perfect little jazzy duet.

THE END

Bonus credits song: "Tell Me How" by Miki Fiki