

Calm Like Skinny?

by
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FADE IN:

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

A steam-covered mirror.

Sounds of someone mumbling complicated words.

A hand wipes a small window into the steam revealing

LOTTIE MACGYVER, 26, her meager bathroom spread behind her, her mind always far from her physical presence.

She gives herself that resigned look every woman saves for her mirror. Tries to remember it this time.

LOTTIE
It is the duty of the historian
to...

It's gone. She rubs her face on a dingy towel, stifles a cry, and grabs a notecard from the stack on the counter.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

It's a wonder anyone could turn around in this kitchen, much less cook a meal in it. Lottie obviously hasn't used it for anything but storage anyway.

Day-old coffee stews in the pot.

Now-dressed Lottie sniffs it, her eyes ever on her notecards, dumps it in the sink, and refills the decanter without rinsing it.

Grounds mostly make it into the filter.

LOTTIE
For if I write good things of good
men, then the reader is encouraged
to do what is right--

Oh yeah, you have to turn the coffee pot on.

LOTTIE
But if I write of the bad ends of
wicked men, the reader--

A PHONE BEEPS. Lottie snatches it from the counter. Is that really the time?

LOTTIE

Crap.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - DAY

Elbows bump the walls as Lottie shoves her feet into dress shoes. This isn't her natural state.

She catches sight of herself in the mirror in the next room.

Reflected is a professional figure, hair up, makeup nice but not too heavy, dress serious without being stodgy.

Notecards in hand

Lottie breathes deep, shoves the notecards in her bag.

LOTTIE

You can do it.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

The coffeepot percolates alone.

LOTTIE (V.O.)

The study of history is a discipline that requires the utmost attention.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Lottie's back is to her students. She's busy writing on the board.

LOTTIE

The most care you've devoted to any other subject. In history, we're studying the lives of people.

She turns, confidence growing. Barely.

LOTTIE

Not marble statues reduced to a paragraph in an encyclopedia, but real people who lived and breathed and loved and died on this earth where we stand. They had dreams, love, everything we do, and their acts were recorded by people much like them. How can we trust that?

(MORE)

LOTTIE (cont'd)
 How can we read these stories
 without buying into the lies many
 of them tell?

Now for the money line.

LOTTIE
 Historiography. It's the only way
 we can read these sources
 critically. Only in understanding
 the philosophy of recording
 history, a philosophy each culture
 created for itself, can we have any
 hope of learning from the past.
 Philosophy is the key. Without it,
 we're lost.

She waits. It's heavy. It needs time to sink in.

Pull back to reveal

LOTTIE'S CLASS

Half-asleep. Blank stares. Non-stop flight. They're
 fifteen. Maybe.

Lottie waits for the questions she knows are brewing.

She waits.

A hand.

LOTTIE
 Yes?
 (glances at roster)
 Jonah?

Her hands finger her notecards hidden on the desk.

JONAH
 Do you want us to write in cursive?

LOTTIE
 What?

JONAH
 When we take notes. Do you want
 cursive?

SADIE
 And can we write on the back?

Lottie searches the class for something else, some sign that
 they've been listening.

They want to know the answer to Jonah's question.

Another year, another defeat.

LOTTIE

You can take notes however you
want. Turn to page five.

The class brightens. Now they know what to do.

Lottie shoves her notecards deep into the drawer.

INT. TEACHERS' LOUNGE - DAY

The only thing that makes the tiny workroom a sanctuary is the absence of students. For that, though, it may as well be Shangri-La. Teachers crowd copiers, an ancient industrial coffeepot, inter-office mailboxes, one rickety table.

Lottie nurses her cup of coffee next to ANNE DARCY, 20s, a small woman with a fierce energy and laughing eyes. The kind of teacher you remember.

LOTTIE

Just once! Once! I dream of
getting one kid who knows what I'm
talking about.

ANNE

You tried to use words over three
syllables again, didn't you? You
teach freshmen, Lottie.

LOTTIE

I can dream, can't I?

HEANEY DONALDSON, 60s, the school's beloved headmaster and a surprisingly formidable opponent to student and teacher alike pours his coffee nearby. Of course he takes it black.

HEANEY

Dreams are for summer, MacGyver.
For the next ten months we do our
best to quash them.

LOTTIE

You do it excellent well, sir.

ANNE

Hear, hear.

HEANEY
Stop it, ladies, I'm blushing.

Heaney waddles off in mock-gruffness.

ANNE
If only he were kidding.

LOTTIE
Wow, ten minutes into second period
on the first day and the cynicism's
thick in the air. That's a new
record for you.

ANNE
I need a real job.

LOTTIE
Twelve months a year--

ANNE
I need to marry a rich man.

AN IMPOSSIBLY TALL STACK OF PAPERS

SMACKS onto the table. ELIZABETH CLEARLY, 30s, emerges from
behind it, her ever-disheveled hair faithfully untouched.

ELIZABETH
What a day!

ANNE
Starting early. What's that?

ELIZABETH
My proof that when this generation
takes power, we are doomed, my
friends. Simply doomed.

Lottie investigates.

LOTTIE
Pop quizzes? On the first day?

ELIZABETH
I like them to know what they're in
for.

ANNE
Just keep making the rest of us
look like the good guys.

ELIZABETH

It won't matter. They're idiots.
We're doomed. Some of these things
will be voting this year!

LOTTIE

Not a chance. They'd have to turn
off their ipods to first.

CRASH!

Half the copier has fallen onto the ground.

JIM

Damn!

This is obviously a regular occurrence. No one moves to
help.

ANNE

Hey, Jim! School's here. No
bowling words til May.

JIM EDWARDS, 50s, balding, tubby, hopelessly nerdy and
terrified of his students, is mortified.

JIM

I didn't-- I just-- Anne, you know
I don't use words like that. It's
just I have a lab starting in two
minutes and the copier won't--

ANNE

Easy, Jim. I'll help.

She heaves herself from the chair, sharing her enjoyment with
her friends.

ANNE

I just love to watch him squirm
like that, don't you? Every year!

Anne goes to Jim. Lottie raises her cup. Empty already?

She starts toward the coffeemaker.

The BELL RINGS.

She gives the coffeemaker a last, loving look, tosses her
cup, and starts to the hall.

LOTTIE
Once more unto the breach, my
friends--

ELIZABETH
Or close the gap with our English
dead.

LOTTIE
Teaching Henry V?

ELIZABETH
Hundred Years' War for you?

Well, at least someone got the joke.

JIM
No one gets my bio jokes.

ANNE
I can imagine they're a riot.

They all part ways, like men condemned to hard labor. Or at
least just getting up too early.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Lottie and Anne fight their way through the cattle car
hallways. Students swirl around them, screaming, texting,
groping, hitting.

ANNE
Whoa! I've been teaching too long.
That one's cute.

Lottie wrenches her arm away from a passing couple to see

DANTE SCOTT

early 20s, muscular, GQ, man meat to a T, walking with
Heaney.

LOTTIE
Dressed a little well for a kid.

ANNE
That's even better.

HEANEY
Ms. MacGyver!

Anne winks and ducks away, carried by the flood of teens.
Lottie does her best to stay in one place.

LOTTIE
I have class in--

Heaney waddles up. Somehow, the kids part the waters for him. Lottie marvels.

HEANEY
This will only take a moment.
Dante here--

Dante isn't here. Heaney growls, reaches back and extracts him from a crowd of fifteen-year-old glitter and ipods.

HEANEY
--is a new hire. Took Robinson's old post. It's last minute, so he won't start until tomorrow, and I want him to get the feel of things. He'll be observing you today and you'll mentor him through his first year.

LOTTIE
Heaney, don't you think someone more experienced would be--

HEANEY
If I can remember your name, you've been here long enough. Charlotte MacGyver.

With ease unexpected of his bulk, Heaney's on the attack. He corners a swaggering senior.

HEANEY
We meet again, Mr. Williams. Save yourself the trouble and hand over the hat now.

Lottie stares at Dante. Dante stares at Lottie. Around them, the crowd begins to recede.

LOTTIE
He has a collection. Of hats. In his office. He nails them to the wall. Hats aren't allowed.

Lame.

DANTE

Neat.

Lamer.

LOTTIE

So.

That wonderful awkward pause.

DANTE

Don't you have a class--

LOTTIE

Right!

She leads the way, hoping she'll do better in her element.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

She doesn't. The kids bounce off the well-decorated walls. Lottie's room is an extension of herself: chaotic, colorful, a mass of image and text. Distracting in a good way.

Dante watches from her desk. She takes a breath. Time to pull out the big guns.

LOTTIE

Ladies and gentlemen!

Nothing. Still chaos.

LOTTIE

Boys and girls! Children of all ages!

Fine then. Lottie strides to her desk, whips up a large BELL and RINGS it. Loud. Ear-splitting.

Suddenly she has their attention.

LOTTIE

Alright. This is 9th grade world history. I'm Ms. MacGyver, and no, I'm not related. But I can make a bomb out of a dixie cup, a shoelace, and a wad of gum.

Crickets.

LOTTIE
Come on, guys, you know, MacGyver?
He fights Murdoc?

More crickets.

LOTTIE
When were you born?

GIRL
1993.

LOTTIE
It wasn't ever on Nick at Nite?
Mr. Scott, can you believe this?

Dante's panicked look tells her he missed the show, too. Wow.
He is young.

LOTTIE
(resigns herself)
History is a discipline that
requires the utmost attention.

EXT. TEACHER PARKING LOT - DAY

Lottie perches on the hood of her car, eyes to the sky, bag
on the ground where it fell, papers and books strewn across
the ground.

Anne emerges from the path between bushes, winded from the
mile walk from the school. She spies Lottie.

ANNE'S BAG

hits the ground.

ANNE'S SHOES

follow.

Anne settles next to Lottie. They stare at the clouds in
silence for a long time.

ANNE
Manmeat didn't pan out?

LOTTIE
He didn't get my jokes.

ANNE

You tried the bomb one again,
didn't you?

LOTTIE

It kills in the over 30 crowd.
(beat)
Heaney saddled me with him for the
year. Mentorship or something.

ANNE

Then you have time. I'll buy him
the dvds. You'll be a riot.

LOTTIE

Where did you see yourself in five
years? When you started teaching.

Anne sits up, slides off the car into her shoes.

ANNE

Here. I love my job.

Lottie doesn't move.

LOTTIE

I thought I'd be gone by now.

ANNE

Doing what?

LOTTIE

I couldn't ever decide.

Dante emerges from the bushes, leaves in his hair, a tear in
one sleeve, coat slung over one shoulder.

ANNE

You survived your first day! And
the hike to the back forty. You
must be good.

DANTE

I'm here.

Lottie hauls herself upright as he nears.

DANTE

Thanks for taking me on. I don't
want to get in your way, but I
don't know what I'm doing.

LOTTIE
No one does at first.

DANTE
And I know who MacGyver is. Just--
they're so--

Anne slings her bag over her shoulder.

ANNE
We know. Go to bed early tonight.

Dante looks to Lottie.

LOTTIE
It's always a good idea. Do it
while you still can.

Jim staggers out of the bushes, more disheveled than anyone.

JIM
One more year. One more! I can move
up to the next lot next year!

He staggers to his car.

Dante's concerned.

DANTE
How long has he been here?

ANNE
Fourteen years. Night!

Lottie tries to hide her amusement at Dante's panic. She
bends to pick up her things.

LOTTIE
She's pulling your leg. It's only
been nine.

Appalled silence.

Should she break it?

Nah. He'll learn.

EXT. HASTINGS, 1066 - DAY

HAROLD GODWINSON, 40s, grizzled, once-handsome, king by right both legal and proven, battle-axe in hand, stands atop a bluff overlooking the deceptively-peaceful field. This is his last battle and he knows it.

BOUDWIN

Bretwalda!

Harold turns a weary head, revealing a freshly-tended battle wound above his brow.

HAROLD

Report.

This is not news Boudwin wants to share.

BOUDWIN

Several thousands assembled, most horsed and heavily armed.

This part especially.

BOUDWIN

All fresh.

Harold knew this before he asked.

HAROLD

Feasting in the halls of the thegns of Kent, no doubt. How long have they been on our shores?

BOUDWIN

At least two weeks, perhaps more.

HAROLD

William hasn't chosen this place at whim. He will have the best ground.

(off Boudwin's despair)

Have faith, noble thegn. Harold Hadrada had the best ground, did he not? Did we not run him to ground like a scared rabbit?

BOUDWIN

Very like, bretwalda.

HAROLD
Than we shall do the same to
William. See that the men are ready
and well-armed.

It's the kind of bluster you put on before the school bully
when you're the 95 pound weakling, and both men know it.
Neither is willing to admit it, either.

BOUDWIN
Aye, bretwalda.

As he starts off, Harold drops the act.

HAROLD
Did the men eat well today,
Boudwin?

Boudwin can't bring himself to tell the truth.

BOUDWIN
Aye, bretwalda.

HAROLD
Good. That is good at least.

Boudwin goes, leaving Harold to survey the last of his
kingdom he will ever see.

It's crawling with Normans.

EXT. HASTINGS, 1066 - DAY

Harold, glorious in battle, golden torc gleaming at his
throat, battle axe raised, howling like an ancient lion,
charges at the head of his army toward William's camp.

The noble vestiges of a dying culture hurl themselves at
William's knights, desperate, hopeless, but fighting anyway.

Horses rear.

Swords slash.

Arrows sail.

Bodies fall.

The Anglo-Saxons are losing, and losing quickly.

But Jonah's there, walking through the battle, oblivious.
Knights wheel to miss him, but he doesn't notice.

Harold surveys the fall of his kingdom.

A Norman knight spies him. Wheels his horse.

Gallops toward Harold, who doesn't notice, Harold whose eyes are on his dying men.

The knight's sword rises, glints in the late morning sun.

Jonah watches, bored.

Harold falls, a deep gash in his leg.

JONAH

Ms. MacGyver? What year?

Both Harold and the knight look up in confusion. What the hell?

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Lottie's look mirrors Harold's. Behind her on the whiteboard in ridiculously big red letters is written

"NORMAN CONQUEST - 1066"

Jonah waits for an answer, his hand still hanging in the air.

JONAH

What year?

So much for making it interesting for them.

LOTTIE

What does it say on the board?

Half the kids giggle. Half of them notice it for the first time. One of them wakes up from her nap.

Jonah dutifully records the date.

JONAH

So who won?

This time Lottie just points.

"WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR"

Yes, "conqueror" is underlined. Twice.

INT. TEACHERS' LOUNGE - DAY

Cheap sugar spills into a cup of what should be coffee, but looks more like tea.

Lottie brings the cup to her lips. It's not what she wants, but it'll do.

BELL RINGS.

Lottie turns to go.

JOLLY

Lottie!

Too late.

JOE JOLLY, 40s, is that kind, good-hearted counselor you want all your kids to have. The irony of his name is lost on him, and he's completely unaware of anyone's schedule but his own.

JOLLY

You got a minute?

LOTTIE

Actually, the bell--

JOLLY

I just got off the phone with a parent. She's concerned about her son's grade.

LOTTIE

Aren't they all?

JOLLY

(without irony)

No, not really. I set up a meeting for us after school today. You're available as soon as the bell rings, right? My office?

She's not.

But he knows that. He's really just being polite.

LOTTIE

Who is it?

JOLLY

Jenkins. The youngest one.

LOTTIE

Of course.

As if from nowhere:

ANNE

He's still here? I thought we
kicked him out.

JOLLY

We did. Twice.

ANNE

Needed the tuition, did we?

JOLLY

No, everything here is free.

And he's gone in the wake of their amusement.

LOTTIE

I think you made his day much
better.

ANNE

That was my goal. So you're meeting
the dragon lady?

LOTTIE

I love to end my day with a little
fire and brimstone.

ANNE

You should bring the greenhorn
along. He looks like he needs the
fear of God put in him.

Dante is, indeed, laughing at someone's joke by the copier.
He is by far the cheeriest person in the very gloomy room.

LOTTIE

I don't know that I want to chum
the water for Jenkins.

ANNE

Ooh! hum! I like it. Sounds
friendly, mean undertone. Rhymes
with Dante. Take him anyway.

Dante's nearly falling over he's laughing so hard.

LOTTIE

Yeah. He needs seasoning.

INT. JOLLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Battle lines are drawn in the cramped, cheerful office. The walls are covered with painfully bad drawings only a father can take pride in, and the kind of eclectic, saccharine gifts parents assume all educators might enjoy.

TRINA JENKINS, 50s but trying to look like her teenage son's girlfriend, radiates hostility from across the table. Her Glen Garry Glen Ross act is especially funny surrounded by stick figures of purple horses with six legs.

Lottie meets Trina's gaze, professional and confident.

Jolly shifts through his notes.

Dante sits on the impossible couch, knees in his chin, clearly terrified of Trina, awed by Lottie.

JOLLY

So today--

TRINA

Matthew tells me you haven't entered a single assignment he's turned in. He's spoken with you several times.

LOTTIE

I'm afraid I don't have any record of that, Ms. Jenkins. When did--

TRINA

He says he did. Are you calling my son a liar?

Of course she is.

JOLLY

Let's get down to the core issue here, today. Matt--

TRINA

Are you blaming my son?

Of course he is.

JOLLY

Of course not. I'm just looking at his record, and I see Matt has had some trouble with his work in several of his classes--

Trina's about to pounce. Lottie heads her off at the pass. This back and forth is a well-rehearsed routine for Lottie and Jolly.

LOTTIE

I've looked over Matt's grade, and if he wants to pass the semester, he'll need to buckle down and make sure he gets his homework in, study hard for the final, and there's an extra credit project he can do next week. I have some study sessions planned--

TRINA

After school?

LOTTIE

Yes, every day--

TRINA

He can't come. Baseball. You'll need to meet with him at our house later in the evening, after he's had a chance to have dinner.

Yeah. That's going to happen.

DANTE

Ma'am, it's the off-season. He can miss a few practices.

Lottie and Jolly don't get to him in time. Trina's on it.

TRINA

The off-season?! He plays club baseball, young man. He has to keep up! It's not like knowing who won the American Revolution is going to help him make it to the majors! How dare you?

Dante cowers on the couch.

Lottie and Jolly would love to leave her ranting alone, but they can't. Trina drones on. Jolly doodles in the margins of his notes.

Lottie starts writing her lesson plans under guise of taking notes.

INT. INDIAN PALACE, 300 BC - DAY

KAUTILYA, 40s, austere, princely, bitter at his subordinate position stands over the room like an emperor.

Unfortunately his empire is a couple of bratty PRINCES. They're fighting, tooth and nail, for a piece of fruit.

There's a lot of fruit on their table. That doesn't seem to matter to them all that much.

KAUTILYA

Education, my princes, is the key
to your future. You will rule this
kingdom someday--

When the thrown mango hits his face, he really wishes that weren't true.

KAUTILYA

But beyond that, my princes, you
must have sense. Sense is key--

More flying fruit. Time for something new.

KAUTILYA

Once upon a time, there were four
scholars, who were the best in the
land.

Nothing.

KAUTILYA

They had the power to raise the
dead.

The fruit almost hangs in midair.

KAUTILYA

One day they came across a dead
lion.

He has them.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Just like Lottie has hers.

LOTTIE

So what do we learn from Kautilya?

An explosion of hands.

JONAH

It's really stupid to bring a lion
to life without taking cover first?

LOTTIE

Obviously! What else?

The class is confused. Maybe they need lunch or something.

At Lottie's desk, her TA, PATTY, a senior far more brilliant
than anyone (including her) will ever know is dawdling over
her work. She's laughing at the freshmen.

LOTTIE

Help us out, Patty!

PATTY

Knowledge doesn't mean anything if
you don't have wisdom.

Non-stop flight for the freshmen.

LOTTIE

What do you mean?

PATTY

If you don't know how to use your
knowledge, you could end up
destroying yourself. Like the lion.
They were too excited about showing
off to listen to the one person who
warned them. So you probably
shouldn't ignore people just
because you think they're not
important. Or smart.

The freshmen are listening to her, really listening. Lottie
can't believe it. This is teaching!

A hand goes up.

LOTTIE

Arazue?

ARAZUE

How do you know if you're using
your knowledge right? I mean, what
if you think raising the lion's a
good idea or something?

The class is on the edge of its collective seat.

And, of course:

P.A. SYSTEM

Teachers, please excuse the interruption. We have some very important announcements before the end of class. Please listen carefully and double check and make sure your students are listening. If they miss this announcement, bad things will happen. Is everyone listening?

The secretary actually waits for confirmation.

P.A. SYSTEM

Junior honors chemistry students must see Mr. Shamanski by 3:00 today to get their stoichiometry packets. Freshman girls softball team released at 10 am for their 3pm game. You can do it this time, girls! You can score a run!

So much for the teachable moment.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - GOLDEN HOUR

Lottie's silhouette perches atop a picnic table on the edge of the school's football field. Light spills around her. She's caught in its spell.

The sun nears the horizon, spotlighting an ancient oak on the edge of the field. It's breathtaking in the way only a Texas hillcountry sunset can be.

Another silhouette approaches.

DANTE.

Slow. Weighed down.

Lottie knows who it is without looking.

LOTTIE

You're still here.

Dante's not so sure.

DANTE

I'm breathing if that's how you're defining it.

LOTTIE

Small victories, Dante, small
victories.

Dante sets himself on the picnic table. For a moment, they're
both enrapt in the setting sun.

LOTTIE

A week from now and we won't be
able to sit here at this time.
(off his glance)
Football games. Cheerleading
practice. Drill team, band. Enjoy
it while you can. Once basketball
season's here and no one cares
about sports anymore, we'll be
back.

DANTE

How long did it take you to figure
everything out?

LOTTIE

I haven't figured any of it out. I
just keep running into cheerleading
practice and bad band routines when
all I want is a great sunset.

Silence falls again. The CICADAS are out in full force. The
sunset only gets wilder.

The sun slips beneath the horizon in an instant.

A flash of green.

DANTE

Whoa! I thought it only did that on
the ocean.

LOTTIE

Where are you from?

DANTE

California. But I didn't live at
the beach.
(off her glance)
Everyone always asks that. Everyone
thinks people in California all
live at the beach and surf all day.

LOTTIE

Actually, I don't think about
California at all.

Dante's taken aback. Lottie stands.

LOTTIE

Let's get you some barbeque. Come on! Everyone could use brisket at the end of a long day.

Dante gets up.

LOTTIE

First, though.

She stands, facing the sun, and applauds.

LOTTIE

Deserved it, didn't it? You can't not clap for a show like that.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Students march down the hallway in various degrees of confidence.

The hipsters slouch down the hall, unaffected, completely self-conscious in their nonchalance.

The too-much-money and too-few-brains crowd preen and prance.

Jocks jostle freshmen, nerds cower and look on the masses with disdain.

They're all unique, just like everyone else.

Anne and Lottie stride through the sea of people, Dante in tow. They're on the lookout.

ANNE

Gum in the trash, Higgins!

LOTTIE

There's no way that shirt is in dress code, Miss Smith. Put on your sweater.

ANNE

Hat!

As they walk, they collect items.

LOTTIE

The solution to bullying isn't a paintball gun, young man.

ANNE

Hat!

LOTTIE

Gum. Trash.

ANNE

Put on a sweater!

LOTTIE

If you're going to use that for a balance beam, your friends should have a mop handy.

ANNE

Mr. Galenski! Ms. Judor! If I'm not getting any, neither are you. Get to class.

LOTTIE

Dante!

DANTE

Yes ma'am!

Time stops. Everyone heard it, from the lowliest freshman to the loftiest senior. And everyone finds it hilarious.

Anne and Lottie feel it. Poor guy.

ANNE

Get to class you treacherous micreants!

The kids scatter like roaches.

ANNE

Lottie, did you have a question for the epic Italian poet?

This wasn't worth the embarrassment. Dante's ears were red.

LOTTIE

Just wanted to know if he had any questions about school disciplinary procedures.

DANTE

I don't.

LOTTIE

Good.

DANTE

Now I'm going to go try and teach.
If you hear screams and wailing
from my room, please send someone
to extract me.

He's off.

ANNE

At least he's trying to have a
sense of humor about it.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Impossible piles of student work scatter the coffee table and floor. There's no way students can do that much work. There's no way a teacher would be dumb enough to assign it.

A nearly-empty bottle of wine sits on the floor.

The TV BLARES across the table.

Lottie sits, papers on her lap, pens stuck in her hair, wine glass at the ready, staring ahead. She wants to grade, but she can't. She couldn't tell you what was on the tv if her life depended on it.

Her gaze keeps straying to

A PHOTO

on top of the tv.

INSERT

It's nice but not special. She's grinning stupidly in front of an obviously blue-screened Egyptian pyramid.

BACK TO SCENE

It would be funny, but there's something so wistful and sad about how she looks at it, to laugh would be obscene.

INT. CHARLEMAGNE'S PALACE - NIGHT

The great king CHARLEMAGNE, defender of Christendom, champion of the pope, warrior king of all warrior kings should be on his throne, at the head of his army, somewhere heroic.

He's not. He's at a desk in his room, lit by one meager taper, parchment before him, pen in hand.

He dips the pen in ink.

He touches it to paper. Stops.

What next?

His hand moves. Slow. Scratches awkward letters.

His tongue sticks out of his mouth in concentration.

The king can't read or write. And he really wants to, badly enough to stay up nights and try.

SOMETHING FALLS outside the door.

Charlemagne glances up.

He's being watched by a nervous SERVANT.

The spell's broken. His valiant struggle is now an embarrassing vulnerability.

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - DAY

Lottie's concentration mirrors Charlemagne's as she pours over the paper in front of her.

Students mill around her, engaged in typical lunchtime shenanigans, blowing off steam from their early classes.

A SANDWICH

FLOPS next to her, breaking her reverie. She doesn't look up.

LOTTIE

You know, Charlemagne spent his whole life trying to learn how to read and write. The man conquered most of Europe, pushed back Muslim invasions, sparked a renaissance and established an empire, but considered himself a failure without literacy.

DANTE

How do you always know it's me?

LOTTIE

I don't. I spout historical anecdotes to anyone foolish enough to come near me.

Dante flops into the chair beside her.

DANTE

What's that?

More than Lottie's concentration mirrors Charlemagne.
Embarrassed, she hides the form.

LOTTIE

So, I don't see any teeth marks.
They haven't eaten you alive yet?

Ah. They're not real friends yet.

DANTE

Not for lack of trying.

LOTTIE

I've got some good literature on
classroom discipline if you want to
take a look. You can swing by my
room at the end of the day and pick
it up.

DANTE

Thanks. I'll do that. Do you think
there's anyway we could meet, too?
(off her glance)
I've just-- lots of questions. No
time for books. There could be
teeth marks if we're not careful.

A nearby senior snickers. Dante's mortified.

LOTTIE

Yeah, you gotta be careful of that
kind of thing out here.

She doesn't mean to glance at the form in front of her.

LOTTIE

Meetings would be good. Mondays
after school?

Dante tries not to look at the form.

DANTE

Thanks. That'd be great.

The senior's still loitering nearby.

LOTTIE

Waiting to pick up something you
can use to look clever later,
Patrick? Be careful, we might be
tempted to teach you something.

The senior beats it. Fast.

LOTTIE

Of course men and women can be
friends, Harry.

DANTE

What?

LOTTIE

Go to class.

INT. TEMPLE OF HEAVEN, 220 AD - DAY

The EMPEROR OF CHINA, ancient, regal, robed in blue, kneels
before the high altar.

It's a sacred ceremony, guarded from the eyes of even the
highest of priests. The emperor alone faces the gods.

The emperor bows. Over his shoulder, in the far corner of the
temple, Jonah takes notes.

EXT. EGYPTIAN TEMPLE, 1230 BC - DAY

In the light of the rising sun, the small entourage stands
before the unfinished monument.

The combined red and white crowns of Egypt make a distinct
silhouette atop one tall man's head.

RAMSES THE GREAT, not as young as he'd like others to think
but glorious in charisma and power, surveys his own tomb.

It's good to be a god.

INT. SAPPING TUNNEL, 780 BC - NIGHT

Three ASSYRIAN GUARDS huddle beneath the walls of the city
they will shortly destroy. They are heavily armed, awesome in
the ferocity of their appearance, the forerunners of Persia's
feared Ten Thousand Immortals.

Today, they're mortal, but their siege will end in the fires of immortality.

A soft CALL.

There's the signal.

Swords unsheath.

A torch sets the pile of twisted wood around them ablaze.

Flames flicker over teenaged handwriting: notes.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The flames fade but the notes remain, now lit by the much less romantic light of a fluorescent bulb.

SADIE, 14 going on 20, looks up from her bubbly handwriting.

Her hand goes into the air.

LOTTIE

Sadie?

SADIE

What happened next?

LOTTIE

Same ol', same ol'. Death,
destruction, pillaging.

The class, decked in their Hallowe'en best, is genuinely amused. Lottie, Cleopatra for today, has hit her stride.

LOTTIE

Alright! For tonight, I want you to
read the next ten pages in your
book. Pay attention to names,
dates, things that happen. Hint
hint. Nudge nudge. Wink wink.

The groaning's good-natured. A heavily hinted pop quiz is better than the alternative.

Lottie glances at the clock.

LOTTIE

Wait for it. And--

The BELL RINGS.

LOTTIE

Eat too much candy tonight! You
can't pull this scam off much
longer!

Pirates, the latest hip teen movie characters, a select
number of decidedly hip cartoon characters, and the odd anime
character tumble out of the room.

Lottie scribbles notes at her podium as

ANNE

Emily Dickinson for the day, stands in the doorway.

LOTTIE

I wandered lonely as a cloud--

ANNE

That's not me.

Lottie puts the pencil down.

LOTTIE

You know I'll sing Dickinson's
poems to the Yellow Rose of Texas.

Anne enters the room.

ANNE

Emily's going to rise from the
grave just to wreak revenge on you
for ruining them.

Lottie looks at Anne for the first time. Anne's face says her
heart isn't in the joking today.

LOTTIE

What?

ANNE

I don't know. Hallowe'en got me, I
guess.

LOTTIE

What did they do?

ANNE

Oh, just censored again.

LOTTIE

Which book this time?

ANNE
Catcher in the Rye.

This old song and dance. Lottie erases the board.

LOTTIE
That's just a teenage boy whining.
They experience that every day.

Anne sits on a nearby desk, the picture of dejection.

ANNE
I don't know how long I can take
this.

LOTTIE
You say that every year. Right
about this time, too.

ANNE
That's because every year they
whittle another piece of my soul
off my book list. How do you stand
it?

LOTTIE
They don't whittle me.
(off her glance)
Come on, Anne. I teach history.
They hire football coaches to teach
this. Who cares what I say? They
think I just tell the kids what
happened.

ANNE
So you could teach Catcher for me?

LOTTIE
If I wanted them to start paying
attention to what I do, sure.

Anne kicks at the ground.

LOTTIE
Come on. You're taking your costume
too seriously this year.

Anne jerks herself out of her reverie.

ANNE
How else do you take an Emily
Dickinson costume?

LOTTIE
Good question.

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - NIGHT

A tame Hallowe'en party is in full swing at the school. As kids whirl around in packs, it seems the point for the boys was to look as cheesy or buff as possible. The girls apparently wanted the opportunity to wear as few clothes as possible.

EXT. SCHOOL ROOF - NIGHT

Lottie 'Cleopatra' watches the action from the roof. She actually has a roster of names on a clipboard and a pen to record infractions. She's not into it.

DANTE (O.S.)
Catch anyone yet?

Dante 'Dracula' joins Lottie at the edge of the roof.

LOTTIE
Jonah really wants to make out with Sadie, but she's not having any of it. And you know, if I was going to jump in to help one of them, I think it'd have to be Jonah. Sadie'll kick his butt if he tries to pull anything.

DANTE
Ah, young love.

LOTTIE
So, no date? Usually youngsters like yourself come with some pretty young thing in tow.

DANTE
Couldn't convince her that standing around at a high school dance would be a good way to spend the evening.

LOTTIE
Can't imagine why if you pitched it like that.

Dante glances over the ledge.

DANTE

Lottie? I think you might be needed
down there. Jonah tried to pull
something.

LOTTIE

Really?

DANTE

I'm serious. I think Sadie's drawn
first blood.

Lottie glances down.

LOTTIE

Oh crap!

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - NIGHT

'Cleopatra' slumps atop a picnic table surrounded by bloodied
gauze and other first aid paraphernalia.

The night is winding down, the kids getting tired, the
teachers trying to stay awake until they can kick them out.

'Emily Dickinson' collapses next to her friend.

ANNE

Hey.

LOTTIE

Yeah.

Anne surveys the damage.

ANNE

Jonah gonna be okay?

LOTTIE

I think he might not date again
until college, but he'll live.

ANNE

Ah, young love.

LOTTIE

You know, you're the second one to
say that tonight. I don't think
there's much love to it. Just
young. Stupid. Wasteful--

ANNE
Reliving the past, much?

LOTTIE
Stupid boys.

Speaking of, two of the more stereotypical members of the football team stumble by, giggling like schoolgirls about something that can't be in line with school conduct guidelines.

LOTTIE
You wanna?

ANNE
Jolly's on it.

Indeed, Jolly has cornered the boys. They're handing something over already.

ANNE
Did you invite greenhorn to the BL?

LOTTIE
I was going to just turn in.

ANNE
Now what self-respecting high school dance chaperone can face her uneventful, single life without a really badly-made martini on a Saturday night? Huh? Huh?

INT. BRANHAM LOUNGE - NIGHT

It's not the kind of place you mention to your parents when they call to see how you're doing. It's not even the kind of place you admit you actually like. Velvet wallpaper, crotchety old guys leering from dark corners, and far too loud BIGSCREEN TVS BLARING.

A slumming drinker's paradise. And an unlikely place to run into students. A teacher's haven.

Dante wishes he hadn't chosen Dracula as his alter ego for the evening as he reaches for his martini.

There's a chip in the glass's rim.

He sips. He sours.

Anne laughs.

ANNE

Haven't ever come here have you?

DANTE

Man, I thought I knew what a dive was, but you have reached new levels of scuzz here.

ANNE

Keeps us in our place. Lottie comes here quite often.

Dante's a little horrified. So's Lottie.

LOTTIE

Not regularly.

The BARMAID, ancient and yet still trying to pull off slutty, slaps a glass down on the table.

BARMAID

Your regular, Lottie. Extra cherries this time.

Lottie knows her cover's blown.

LOTTIE

I only ever order a double old fashion. It's the only drink she knows how to make.

Dante's not buying it, but he'll play along.

DANTE

Why didn't you warn me?

ANNE

And miss that priceless look on your face when you took the first sip? Dante, have we met?

A scantily clad girl oozes by their table.

DANTE

Teaching's getting to me. Why do I feel like I should look away?

ANNE

Because you should, you cad.

LOTTIE

Cad?

ANNE

Still channeling Emily. It'll be over at midnight. Somewhere there will appear a very depressed pumpkin.

DANTE

Aren't those some of our students?

At the bar, two peach-fuzzed guys are ordering drinks.

LOTTIE

You want it or me?

ANNE

I think it's your turn.

Lottie shoves her drink aside, straightens her wig, and strides forward carrying the authority of the god-kings of ancient Egypt to the bar.

Anne and Dante make an eager audience, and Lottie doesn't disappoint. Exaggerated gesture, shrill tone, and the absurdity of her elaborate costume make quite a scene.

The kids' faces get progressively paler as they realize who she is and what kind of trouble they're in.

As if it's choreography, the barmaid shouts into the back. A burly man in the typical bouncer uniform black shirt emerges.

The kids' eyes don't fit on their faces anymore.

Hands big enough to circle their necks seize their shirt collars.

The door flies open.

The kids tumble through it.

Applause. Cleopatra takes a bow. And heads back to her seat.

ANNE

Nice.

Lottie takes a dainty sip of her drink.

LOTTIE

Well-practiced.

DANTE

Does that happen often?

ANNE

The kids think this place is too much of a dive for any adults they know.

LOTTIE

They obviously think a significant portion of their tuition goes toward faculty salaries.

ANNE

So what were they after?

She can hardly bear to say it.

LOTTIE

Bud Lite and Jager.

DANTE

Amateurs.

ANNE

The propensity of teenagers to risk legal action for ridiculously inferior alcoholic beverages boggles the mind.

DANTE

As does too much of this.

He sets the undrinkable martini back on the table.

The barmaid glares across at him.

Dante meekly picks it back up, takes a sip, smiles weakly.

The barmaid raises an eyebrow.

Rats. Dante takes a bigger sip.

She turns away.

Dante chokes.

Anne and Lottie haven't been this amused in awhile.

INT. GYM - DAY

Yet another pep rally. Lottie's on back door duty, guarding against prearranged sixteen-year-old trysts. At this point in the semester, not many kids are trying it anymore, so she's free to watch

Jonah stay exactly two steps behind Sadie, too scared to venture closer, but craning his neck to look at her.

Patty glowers through the crowd on her way to her seat. Pep rallies are not, and never have been, her thing.

Dante corners a couple gum chewers. Yes, he does want them to spit it out in his hand. Greenhorn has guts.

Jim minces his way through the sea of bodies like a nervous bird, head darting, spotting plenty of rules violators but clearly in no state to deal with them.

The crowd settles into its seat.

The cheerleaders start their whatever.

Someone's huddled under the bleachers.

The crowd's mirth distracts everyone from the form.

Except Lottie.

It's a freshman. Girl. Crying.

At a dance, this wouldn't be unusual. At a pep rally, it's unheard of. Lottie knows she's leaving her post unguarded, but decides that a couple teens swapping spit won't kill anyone.

INT. GYM - UNDER THE BLEACHERS - DAY

Lottie stumbles a little over the mess of metal beams that form the thick jungle of struts under the bleachers. It's dark, and she hasn't done this in a long time.

The girl is harder to see now. Lottie could call, but she wouldn't be heard over the din of the crowd.

And she trips. Ouch.

It's a good thing it's dark and no one saw it.

Someone did. In the dark, the girl chortles.

Thank heavens she's still there.

 LOTTIE
 I'm here all week.

Crickets. Dang it.

Lottie settles next to the girl.

LOTTIE
Everything alright with you?

No.

SADIE
I'm hiding under the bleachers at a
pep rally.

Lottie recognizes her.

LOTTIE
Sadie? Sweetie, what's wrong?

SADIE
I just hate pep rallies.

That's not it.

LOTTIE
Didn't I fill out one of those
cheerleader applications for you
last month?

SADIE
It was a joke.

No, it wasn't.

SADIE
A friend dared me.

No, one didn't. Her excuses are getting more desperate.

SADIE
Why would I want to be there?
Those girls are so plastic.

LOTTIE
Yeah, they are.

Sadie wasn't expecting that.

LOTTIE
My job is to try and turn you
barbarians into human beings. I can
tell when I've failed.

Sadie really wasn't expecting that.

LOTTIE

But they win when you hide under
the bleachers.

(beat)

I have no idea why. Why should they
care? But they do. So I guess you
can get up and sit on top of the
bleachers and prove them wrong. Or
maybe you could stay here and defy
them.

She can tell she's getting to Sadie.

LOTTIE

Both could be fun.

Sadie weighs her options.

SADIE

If I sit up there, I'll have to
watch them jump around.

LOTTIE

True. Frightening.

SADIE

But if I stay down here, I might
get in trouble.

LOTTIE

You walk a fine line there,
daredevil.

More contemplation. Teenaged angsty contemplation amuses
Lottie, but she hides it well.

SADIE

I'm going to stay here.

LOTTIE

More power to you.

Lottie turns to go. She's picking her way over the struts
intentionally slowly. She knows what's coming.

SADIE

Ms. MacGyver?

Yup.

LOTTIE

Yeah?

SADIE

If you stayed here, the
administration wouldn't get so mad
at me, would they?

Of course not.

LOTTIE

Maybe I could talk them down a bit.

She settles next to Sadie.

Crickets for awhile.

Through the slats of the bleachers,

THE CHEERLEADERS

are at it again. One of those stupid routines that are really
just five eight counts of the same arm motions repeated three
times set to unrecognizable snippets of songs.

Lottie checks on her charge.

Sadie's face is wistful. She really wants to be out there,
and she really wants to deny it.

The cheerleaders stunt. They fall.

Both Lottie and Sadie snort.

Awkward silence.

Uproarious laughter, fortunately masked by the cheers of the
crowd encouraging the recovering cheerleaders.

INT. TEACHERS' LOUNGE - DAY

Another break, another very bad cup of coffee. Sugar crystals
spill into the dark liquid in a desperate attempt to make it
palatable.

Lottie makes a face. Not enough to mask the flavor of mass
production. She shakes another packet.

Anne squeezes by with her cup and tea bag and reaches for the
hot pot.

ANNE

Jim made coffee again, eh?

LOTTIE

How he manages to make it both too strong and too weak at the same time is the great mystery of science. Which he teaches, oddly. Maybe he's secretly conducting experiments on us.

ANNE

I see you're going with the theory that enough sugar will kill whatever's growing in there?

LOTTIE

My life is measured in sugar packets.

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

It's too early for Eliot.

Elizabeth sweeps in to snag the powdered creamer.

Anne drops the hot pot.

ANNE

It's never too early for Eliot!

ELIZABETH

It's always too early for Eliot.

ANNE

Blasphemy!

She looks to Lottie for support. Lottie just raises her cup to her lips.

LOTTIE

You made light of my sugar consumption. Fight your own battles, Darcy.

ANNE

Traitor.

Lottie savors another sip of coffee. Soooo good.

Anne raises an eyebrow and doctors her tea. Elizabeth seems to be filling half her cup with powdered creamer.

ELIZABETH

We might all be fighting our own battles soon.

ANNE

A sudden rash of poet heretics hit
the campus this year?

LOTTIE

Well, it's getting on toward
Christmas. That's poet heretic
season, you know.

ELIZABETH

Seriously, guys.

And then she pretends to withhold information. Content that
half a cup of powdered creamer seems right, she starts in on
the sugar, four packets at a time.

LOTTIE

Seriously what?

Elizabeth takes her time. Lottie and Anne are used to this.
They decide to humor her.

ANNE

I haven't heard anything. But you
know me. I never hear anything.

LOTTIE

I'm so out of the loop.

Elizabeth adds a dribble of coffee to her cup. That's all
there's room for. Anne quietly gags.

ELIZABETH

I was talking with Jolly the other
day, and it seems we're much
further down on enrollment than
anyone thought. Quite a few
families pulled their kids last
month, and more will at Christmas.

It's ice water in the face. Anne and Lottie are all ears.

ELIZABETH

Apparently there's talk of program
cuts. Lay offs. All that fun stuff.
New hires first.

She stirs her coffee and heads for the door, right past

DANTE

seated and frantically studying notes for his next class.
Dante, oblivious to the impending doom.

Anne and Lottie stare for a minute. Poor kid.

Anne flicks her tea bag into the trash can as she leaves. Glad it's not her problem.

Dante smiles at her as she passes him.

It's Lottie's.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

It's Ugly Christmas Sweater Day of Christmas spirit week, and it looks like a 1980s Hallmark shop threw up all over the room.

Lottie couldn't bring herself to participate. Her sweater is plain, but green. She writes on the whiteboard "ALEXANDER THE GREAT?"

JONAH

Ms. MacGyver? Why aren't you wearing your ugly Christmas sweater?

LOTTIE

I don't have one.
(off his skepticism)
I've always been this cool, Jonah.

From Lottie's desk, Patty snorts. She's dressed in black, head to toe.

LOTTIE

Where's your ugly Christmas sweater, Patty?

PATTY

Oh, I've always been cool too, Ms. MacGyver.

LOTTIE

That's what I thought.

She turns back to the board. Underlines the word "GREAT". Circles the question mark.

LOTTIE

What do you think this means we're going to do today, guys?

Good-natured groans from the students. They like these lessons, but they'd never admit it.

CLASS

Debate.

LOTTIE

Exactly! So get into groups of four
and take out--

The door opens.

LOTTIE

Am I ever going to get to teach a
class without someone barging in?

Then she sees who it is.

Heaney. He doesn't look amused.

Oops. She tries a sunny approach.

LOTTIE

Hi, boss! What can we do for you
today?

HEANEY

I need to speak with you for just a
moment.

Yikes. She hides her concern.

LOTTIE

I thought pulling the fire alarm
the other day was a mistake.

The class laughs.

LOTTIE

Get into your groups. Start reading
up on Alexander in your books and
remember how we defined nobility
the other day.

(before Jonah gets the
chance)

The character trait, not the social
class, Mr. Higgins.

Heaney's smile is for the students. Patty nods to Lottie.
She'll keep them in line.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Heaney doesn't want to be here.

Lottie knows what's going on.

 LOTTIE
This time?

It pains him to even mention it.

 HEANEY
The hair.

Lottie's hair is pulled into a messy ponytail like usual.
Seriously?

 LOTTIE
The hair?

Heaney really doesn't want to say it.

 HEANEY
The superintendent's secretary
feels it could be more...
professional was the word.

He gropes for what to say next. Gives up. This is an old song
and dance for them.

 LOTTIE
Does the superintendent's secretary
know what subject I teach?

 HEANEY
Lottie--

 LOTTIE
Has she once graced this hallway
with her presence? Can she name a
subject anyone in this school
teaches? Can she name a single
class on our course list?

Heaney wishes he could join her rant. Ah, the suffering of
privilege.

 HEANEY
Just do something different
tomorrow.

 LOTTIE
Aye aye, sir.

Awkward.

HEANEY

Just be glad you're employed in this market. Tough time out there, especially in public education.

That reminds her...

LOTTIE

Boss?

HEANEY

Heaney, but how many times have I tried to get you to call me that?

LOTTIE

Are the rumors true?

Much more awkward silence.

HEANEY

You know I couldn't tell you even if I knew.

LOTTIE

So they are.

Yeah.

Lottie looks through the window at her class.

LOTTIE

Nothing we can do to keep as many of the kids here as possible? Just til their parents can figure things out?

Heaney didn't expect that.

HEANEY

That's your concern?

LOTTIE

Should I be concerned about anyone else?

She's called his bluff. He knows it.

LOTTIE

Dante's doing very well. Most new teachers have lost control of their students at least twice by now. He hasn't done it once yet.

HEANEY

I thought they tied him to a chair.

LOTTIE

He was demonstrating, um, something from history when someone was tied to a chair?

That earns genuine amusement.

LOTTIE

Seriously, boss, he's great. The kids like him and he cares.

HEANEY

I know.

He glances into the classroom.

HEANEY

You should get back in there before your TA has them scrubbing the floors til they shine like the top of the Chrysler building.

Lottie looks.

Patty is drill sergeant to their recruits. Their heads are bent over their desks, pens scribbling furiously. Jonah sneezes, then stands to get some kleenex.

Patty's glare freezes him in his tracks.

He sinks to his seat and picks up his pen again, desperately willing his nose to stop running.

LOTTIE

I'm so proud I could cry.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Another day. Finals week. The final day of the term.

Jonah's PENCIL SCRATCHES a hole in his scantron sheet. He's never concentrated so hard.

All the students are in the same zone. PENCILS SCRATCH. An ERASER RUBS. SNIFFLES. SHUFFLING PAPER.

Lottie's perched on a stool at the front of the room. She pretends to grade papers.

She's a hawk in a room full of mice.

INSTRUMENTAL CHRISTMAS MUSIC lilts from speakers on her desk.

ARAZUE

is stuck on one question. Her pencil droops. She TAPS the ERASER against the desk.

LOTTIE

has an eye on her.

Arazue's gaze drifts toward Sadie's paper.

Lottie coughs strategically.

Arazue's eyes dart back to her paper.

Lottie caught her. Arazue knows it. Neither will ever speak of it.

Lottie looks at the clock. Ten more minutes.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

An empty hallway, fluorescent lights shining on sterile linoleum, lined by lockers.

The calm before the storm.

The BELL RINGS.

A ROAR - A CHEER from hundreds of STUDENTS.

Doors fly open.

Students swarm into the hallway.

Papers flutter through the air. Books get kicked among the stampeding feet. Student hug, exchange gifts, and rejoice in the end of finals week.

LOTTIE

stands in the door of her classroom, watching the joyful chaos. Tickled. She loves this.

Across the hall

ANNE

stands in her doorway, arms laden with papers.

They exchange tired amusement.

INT. TEACHERS' LOUNGE - DAY

The room's packed with panicked teachers scribbling grades on essays, running scantrons through the machine, entering grades on laptops. It's a frenzy, but a festive one.

A MASSIVE PILE OF CHRISTMAS TREATS

grace the table. Bribes from students with low grades.

An OVERWEIGHT OFFICE LADY piles an assortment of home-made Christmas goodies on a tiny paper plate as she chats with her OVERWEIGHT FRIEND.

OVERWEIGHT OFFICE LADY
Stan said not to do it, but I
renewed anyway. If I don't have
that gym membership, I don't know
how I'm going to drop this extra
weight!

OVERWEIGHT FRIEND
Stan's being ridiculous. Of course
you need it. Have you tried those
new Slim Down cookies?

OVERWEIGHT OFFICE LADY
The ones with chocolate and
caramel? I love them!

OVERWEIGHT FRIEND
Oh, and the peanut butter bars!

Both women are still piling food worthy of Buddy the Elf's diet plan on their plates.

Anne can't help it. Laughter escapes.

The ladies look.

Anne hides behind her laptop screen.

It's taking every ounce of determination Lottie has to continue entering grades.

Dante decides it's time for another cup of coffee.

EXT. TEACHER PARKING LOT - DAY

Dante pushes his way through the bushes to see

THE PARKING LOT FULL OF TEACHERS

having what looks like a tailgate party. In fact... yes, that's a little hibachi grill Anne and Lottie are crouching over in the cold wind. Failed matches litter the ground.

Elizabeth's reasonably priced car has all four doors open, CHRISTMAS MUSIC BLASTING from its tinny speakers. Elizabeth is doing what she must think dancing is by the hood.

Other teachers sit in lawn chairs, on cars, munching goodies from the teachers' lounge stash, sharing ridiculous student stories, or reveling in the rare company of adults.

Dante's been spotted.

ANNE

Get over here, student of Virgil's!
You been through the Inferno - help
us get this thing lit!

He's exhausted. He hasn't seen his bed for more than four hours at a time in months. He can't wait for a cold beer and his couch and some mindless tv.

But he's game.

DANTE

What are you harpies trying to
light it with?

Lottie holds up an empty carton of lighter fluid.

DANTE

That's not enough to get charcoal
going.

ANNE

It was full when we started.

Dante steps back.

LOTTIE

Ha, ha, greenhorn.

DANTE

What are we grilling anyway?

Lottie nods toward the cooler on her car's trunk. Dante
peeks inside, sees

RIBS, SAUSAGE, CHICKEN, THE WORKS.

LOTTIE
(off his surprise)
Nothin' but the best for my
protégé.

DANTE
This a normal thing with y'all?

LOTTIE
(laughs)
I know you're in Texas now,
California boy, but you need a
little more practice before you go
throwing a word like "y'all"
around.

Anne hands him what looks like a beer bottle.

ANNE
'Sides, ain't nothin' normal 'bout
us.

Dante takes a swig. What?

LOTTIE
Root beer, greenhorn. School
property.

Not to be outdone, Dante downs the whole bottle, tosses it
aside with one fluid motion, then settles down to attack the
grill. Anne and Lottie watch with admiration as he manages to
set the coals ablaze without losing any eyebrows.

DANTE
You forget something, ladies?

Lottie takes a quick informal inventory. Plates, meat, veg,
drinks, extra charcoal. All there.

Dante's enjoying her turn to be confused.

DANTE
How do you plan to flip the meat
once it's on the grill?

Oh. That. She double checks. Not a grill tool in sight.

Drat.

ANNE

Shall I?

LOTTIE

I'll break it to them.

(raises voice)

Hey guys, bad news.

(off their questions)

No bbq tools.

Jim leaps forward.

JIM

Wait!

He dashes for his car.

ANNE

You keep bbq tools in your car?

JIM

(muffled)

No, but--

He emerges, triumphant, arms full of empty coke cans. Huh?

He hurries to the grill, drops his armload, takes a utility knife from his pocket and gets to work. Dante sees what he's doing first. He's impressed.

DANTE

No way, Jim.

Anne catches on.

ANNE

Let the master work!

In almost no time, Jim's fashioned a spatula out of a couple coke cans. He tosses it to Dante, then starts in on another.

Lottie leaps atop her car, root beer in hand. Like a victorious soldier toasting the king who led her into battle, she raises the bottle.

LOTTIE

To Jim!

ALL

Jim!

It's Jim's first moment of public triumph, possibly in his life. He can barely take it. He focuses on his task, head down, but his ears are bright red.

Lottie surveys the gathered teachers. These are dear friends, sometime annoyances, fellows in a great struggle to beat down ignorance and give their students a future. Seeing them so happy makes her day. Except

ELIZABETH

No longer dancing. Moping. An over-dramatic pitiful gaze aimed at

DANTE

King of the grill, flipping a chicken with Jim's coke tools.

EXT. TEACHER PARKING LOT - LATER

The lot's quite a few cars emptier, the grill's a mess, and most food's been devoured. Teachers take their leave and trickle away to home, family, and holiday plans.

Anne, Lottie, Dante, and a few others remain, plopped in lawn chairs. They're singing Christmas carols at the top of their lungs. The sweet release of two weeks off is better than any liquor, and just as intoxicating.

DANTE

This is good. This is exactly what I needed.

ANNE

That's why we do it, greenhorn.

DANTE

You know, I've been here for half a year already. When are you going to stop calling me that?

ANNE

No telling. When did we stop calling Jim that?

LOTTIE

(considers)

Three years later? No, four.

Dante gives up. He's making a game of tossing the wasted matches into the warm coals.

It's getting cold. Lottie tucks her scarf into her coat, willing it to warm her better.

LOTTIE
You liking it here so far?

Dante takes careful aim with a match.

DANTE
Never thought I would, but I am.

He lets fly. The wind catches it, knocks it aside.

DANTE
Can't beat the company.

Anne gives Lottie a look. You know the one. Lottie brushes it off.

ANNE
Yeah, the students are pretty great. All that deep conversation.

DANTE
I like you too, Anne.

He throws another match.

DANTE
Sometimes.

ANNE
Don't get mushy on us, big guy.

Dante's already ignoring her again. This game requires some concentration.

Lottie picks up a match, measures the distance to the grill.

LOTTIE
Think this is for you, then?

Dante's match hits the grill.

DANTE
I think so. Do you? Think it's for me, I mean? Or I'm for it?

Lottie tosses her match. Almost.

LOTTIE
I think you've got it.

Anne nearly drops her drink. Lottie never, never thinks this about her mentees. She looks over. "Seriously?"

Lottie picks up another match. Takes aim.

Anne sits back. Okay, then.

ANNE

Got any plans for Christmas, Dante?

Dante's toss goes wide.

DANTE

Dante?

ANNE

Shut up. You got plans with that pretty girl of yours? Family?

DANTE

Funny you should put it that way.

He pulls a small box from his pocket.

Anne and Lottie know exactly what it is. Anne looks to Lottie in concern.

Lottie's hiding her dismay well. There's something more than concern for Dante's future employment to it.

ANNE

You keep it in your pocket?
(off his shrug)
How are you going to do it?

DANTE

I've got a couple ideas, but I thought I'd ask on Christmas Eve. You know, wrap something stupid, get her a little mad, then this is hidden inside. Her folks said they'd help me out.

ANNE

That sounds perfect.

Lottie's throwing matches one after the next.

DANTE

Yeah? I'm worried it's a little cheesy. Should I--

LOTTIE

There's nothing cheesy about
proposing. Do it however you want.
She'll say yes.

Lottie throws the rest of her handful at the grill, stands,
and starts gathering things.

Dante looks to Anne in confusion. Anne shakes her head. Not
now.

DANTE

How about you, Lottie? Big
Christmas plans?

Anne tenses. That was exactly the wrong place to go.

But Lottie surprises her. Big smile. Carefree tone.

LOTTIE

Yeah. Big family stuff. In fact,
I've got to get the house ready. I
should get going. Have a great
break, y'all! See you in January.

And she's sweeping everything into her car.

INT. ANNE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Anne and her rambunctious sisters, nieces and nephews, and
parents have a rollicking good Christmas Eve.

INT. DANTE'S FUTURE IN-LAWS' HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a storybook proposal - family gathered around the tree,
piles of brightly wrapped gifts all around. Her dad has a
video camera. She's wearing the ring. Crying. Dante's waiting
for her inevitable 'yes.'

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Same mess. No tree. Just Lottie, the pile of things she
carried home from school that last day, and a soon-to-be-
empty bottle of wine.

There aren't any tears. They don't come anymore. But the
picture's out.

INSERT

A picture. The one with a younger Lottie, maybe college-aged, in a bear hug from someone on his way to the People's Sexiest Man Alive award. They grin like idiots, the way all lovers do.

There's a ring on her finger.

BACK TO SCENE

Lottie brings her wineglass to her lips. Sips without tasting. Her eyes aren't on the photo, but she's seeing every detail.

On the coffee table, surrounded by graded papers and notes and cards embellished in fifteen-year-old handwriting is a simple sheet of paper.

AN APPLICATION to graduate school. Partially filled out.

It's what she was working on but hid from Dante earlier in the year. She's been trying to fill it out since she started teaching at this school.

Tonight's the night.

The wineglass sloshes to the table. Lottie's fingers find the pen she set out just for this occasion.

She takes a breath.

THE PEN

glides across the paper. Effortless. This is the right decision.

THE PHOTO OF HER IN FRONT OF THE BLUE-SCREENED PYRAMID

looks down from the top of the tv in approval.

Her other hand reaches for the wine glass.

HEANEY (V.O.)

Welcome to the new semester.

INT. TEACHERS' LOUNGE - DAY

Heaney addresses the gathered teachers. It's far too early, no one's ready for their Christmas break to be over yet, and the coffee pot's broken. A fabulous start to the new year.

Still, Heaney tries to put a good face on it, despite his general aversion to cheeriness.

HEANEY

I see by your bleary eyes none of you is excited to be here. You see by mine, neither am I. I'm sure our students don't share our sentiments.

(off mild laughter)

Some of you may have heard some rumors toward the end of last term.

Anne and Lottie can't help glancing at each other. They know what's coming.

Elizabeth tries to catch their eyes to give them a knowing look. She fails.

Dante's still walking on clouds after his successful proposal.

HEANEY

I'm sorry to say, the rumors are largely true.

Smug look from Elizabeth. The girls caught that one.

HEANEY

We've lost several families to this economic downturn, and we expect to lose quite a few more as the term continues. Lost tuition is lost revenue, and we'll need to start making cuts.

ANNE

(sotto voce)

Start?

Lottie agrees but doesn't want to annoy Heaney. Yet.

HEANEY

You've already taken a hit on your salaries, I know, but I'm afraid it's going to get worse before it gets better. We're going to be revising every department budget this month--

(gasps of frustration)

--and we may be looking at consolidating classes. Which means job cuts.

He lets it sink in.

Everyone's calculating how long they've been there compared to everyone else. Job cuts mean seniority counts.

Dante doesn't notice when most people in the room try very hard not to look at him.

Lottie doesn't have to try. She's locked on Heaney. He's trying not to look at her.

HEANEY

Try not to worry too much. We're planning a few extra recruitment events for the spring. We could be surprised and have better numbers for next year.

That's not likely or comforting and he knows it.

HEANEY

You all do an excellent job here. Keep doing it. I'll schedule a meeting to let you know as soon as I know anything new.

LOTTIE

We will, boss.

Her tone says she's lightening things up. Her eyes say she dares him to take her on. She'll defend Dante's job any way she can, and tangling with her is like trying to wrestle a tornado to the ground.

Heaney chooses to ignore the challenge.

HEANEY

Get to it, then. Copiers haven't jammed yet this morning. Someone's bound to set them off any minute.

Things settle a bit back to normal as Heaney heads for his office. Teachers go for coffee out of habit, remember the machine's broken, settle for tea.

Jim attempts to use the copier. It jams on the first copy.

Dante steps beside Lottie.

DANTE

How serious is it?

ANNE

As bad as I've seen it, but I've only been here seven years.

Gulp.

 LOTTIE
 No one's losing their job. I
 promise.

EXT. GAUL BATTLEFIELD, 55 BC - DAY

JULIUS CAESAR, 40s, hammer of the Gauls but not yet emperor of Rome, sits at a camp table overlooking a battlefield with fresh scars in the mud. He hasn't changed out of his armor.

The strategy map that covers the table is blanketed in handwritten papers.

MARC ANTONY, 20s, the dashing, unstable, ferocious soldier named a member of Caesar's personal staff, reports.

 MARC ANTONY
 The Helvetii send message, sir.
 They wish to surrender on good
 terms.

This amuses the great general.

 JULIUS CAESAR
 Good terms? They've killed a few
 hundred of my men.

Antony's just as amused.

 MARC ANTONY
 Even so, my liege, they await you.

Caesar hands Antony a freshly written page.

 JULIUS CAESAR
 Think they'll agree to this?

 MARC ANTONY
 (reads)
 "On the conclusion of the Helvetian
 campaign the leading men of tribes
 in almost every part of Gaul came
 to offer Caesar congratulations.
 (MORE)

MARC ANTONY (cont'd)
They realized, they said, that
although his motive in fighting the
Helvetii was to punish them for
their past injuries against Rome,
what had happened was just as much
to the advantage of Gaul as to the
Romans." That sounds very much like
what I heard on the battlefield
today, Caesar.

He tosses it back to his cousin.

JULIUS CAESAR
That's what I thought I heard, too.
(deadly serious)
Send messengers to all the tribes.
Make sure the tribute they offer is
worthy of us this time.

SADIE (O.S.)
What?!

Caesar drops his quill. Antony's hand goes to his sword.
They turn to see

SADIE

Stalking toward them in full-blown fifteen-year-old fury, a
pen in one hand, notebook in the other. She jabs her pen at
Caesar like a dagger.

SADIE
You liar!

Caesar actually jumps back. He looks to Antony, who is no
help at all. Who is this tiny tyrant?

SADIE
You can't write it down like that.
That's not how it happened! You're
supposed to be writing history!

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The image of Julius Caesar looms over the classroom from the
screen at the front of the room. The students had been
dutifully taking notes from Lottie's lecture, but now all
eyes are on

SADIE

who's furiously jabbing her pen at the image on the screen.

SADIE
Why are we learning about this guy,
Ms. MacGyver?

Lottie's loving it.

LOTTIE
What do you mean?

Sadie can't believe she has to explain this. Neither can the other students.

SADIE
He wrote history the way he wanted
it to be, then he made it happen!

Good. Keep going.

LOTTIE
What's wrong with that?

Sadie sputters, speechless. Arazue jumps in to help.

ARAZUE
It's lying!

LOTTIE
Didn't it happen the way he said it
would?

JONAH
Because he made it happen that way!

The whole class is ready to take up arms. Excellent!

LOTTIE
Glad to see you're alive, Mr.
Higgins.

JONAH
Dodging the question!

LOTTIE
Why's it wrong that Caesar wrote
the history of the Gallic Wars
himself and didn't put his name on
them?

Patty looks up from the picture she's sketching. She'd never admit it, but she really likes watching moments like this.

The students are thinking. Hard. Maybe for the first time.

Lottie's focused on Sadie. Come on, girl. You can do it.

SADIE

He could make history anything he wants. Just by writing it.

Yes!

LOTTIE

And?

Hands shoot into the air.

She waves them off. This is Sadie's moment.

SADIE

He can make anything sound like it was destined to happen. He could make anything he did sound like it was right.

She drops her pen. She's connecting the dots for the first time in her life. Her mind is waking up. It's a wondrous thing to behold.

SADIE

That's why they killed him!

Yes, it is. Lottie can't hide her glee.

LOTTIE

Why?

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - DAY

Faculty patrol the quad in search of rules violators, gum chewers, and a few glorious moments of sunshine unfiltered by the fluorescent lights of a classroom.

Students scream and run through the crowded quad. Food and random items fly through the air. Innocent victims dodge the projectiles. It's not a battlefield, it's lunchtime.

Lottie strolls across the sunny quad, eyes open for trouble, but enjoying the students' rambunctious fun. Dante falls in step beside her.

DANTE

Lottie! What's the score today?

Lottie checks the collection in her hand.

LOTTIE

Three hats, an ipod and a couple
packs of gum. You?

He's trumped her this time and he's proud.

DANTE

Three hats, a couple packs of gum,
an ipod and
(produces it with a
flourish)
an X Box.

Lottie's genuinely impressed.

LOTTIE

An X Box?

DANTE

They were set up in Jim's room.
Tried to tell me they were a
biology study group.

LOTTIE

Poor things never saw it coming.

DANTE

Nope. Hey, we still on for
mentoring sessions this term?

LOTTIE

Name the place and time. Still need
them?

Dante hands her the X Box and fiddles with something in his
pocket.

DANTE

Saved my butt last term. I'm not
taking any chances.

LOTTIE

What?

Dante pulls a black cloak from the inside pocket of his
jacket. He tosses it over his shoulders and fishes for
something else.

LOTTIE

What are--?

Dante pulls a small metallic item from his pocket. Flashes a
grin.

DANTE
Watch yourself.

He flips open a blue plastic lightsaber like Luke Skywalker himself. He flips a switch. It lights up.

DANTE
Dangerous people about.

Around the quad, brown cloaks sweep into view. Lightsabers illuminate. About twenty senior boys transform into Jedi.

Dante winks at Lottie and pulls a Darth Vader mask over his face. He jumps forward with a roar to charge the Jedi.

A massive battle ensues.

DANTE
Tomorrow after classes!

LOTTIE
If you survive!

DANTE
I will!

She has no doubt.

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - DAY

Lottie sits alone at an abandoned picnic table. School has long since ended. A couple kids linger, waiting to be picked up from sports practice.

An envelope is in her hands. A thick one. The kind that means you got into the school you applied to.

Lottie's trying to be oblivious to that. She's not opening it. She's not even looking at it.

PATTY (O.S.)
Ms. MacGyver?

Instinct tells Lottie to stash the envelope. Only years of classroom experience keep her from panicking. She tries to look natural.

LOTTIE
Patty?

Patty dumps her backpack on the picnic table.

PATTY
Why are you here?

LOTTIE
I live here, Patty.

PATTY
I knew it!
(beat; something's
bothering her)
But seriously. Why?

LOTTIE
It's easier to grade papers here
before I go home and get distracted
by CSPAN--

PATTY
No, not here now. Here teaching.
That's not what she expected at all.

LOTTIE
What?
Patty rolls her eyes. Stop playing along.

PATTY
You're too smart to teach high
school. Everyone knows it. That's
why no one signs up for your
classes.

LOTTIE
Plenty of people sign up for my
classes!

PATTY
Why are you here?
Lottie really doesn't know at the moment. She launches into
her old script.

LOTTIE
Teaching's what I do, Patty. You
saw what it was like with Sadie the
other day. That's the dream. I want
you to start to think for
yourselves, because you won't make
it through any other way.

PATTY

That's what you say. But it seems--
I don't think I could hold out for
a minute like that once a year.

LOTTIE

(intrigued)
You thinking of teaching?

PATTY

I don't know. Maybe. I don't know
what I want. I mean, I want to do
something important, but how do I
know if it's-- I mean, I'm looking
at all these colleges and they all
seem right but every time I learn
about a new major that seems--
(beat)
Only if it's worth it. Is it?

Her eyes tell Lottie she's serious. She's desperate for an
answer she can accept, but she doesn't expect one. She'll
take what she can get.

Lottie doesn't have an answer.

LOTTIE

Why are you here so late?

It's a dodge and Patty knows it. Patty lets it go.

PATTY

Swim practice.

LOTTIE

What slavemasters your coaches are.

It's a lame joke. Patty doesn't bother to joke back.

PATTY

Yeah.

She's unconvinced. It's getting late, anyway.

Lottie watches her go. Her fingers are already teasing the
envelope open.

She doesn't realize she's holding her breath as she pulls the
letter from the envelope.

She checks for nearby students. All clear.

She almost wishes it weren't. Moment of truth.

Lottie reads the opening sentence.

It's good news.

INSET: "We are pleased to inform you..."

Lottie closes her eyes.

Drat.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

A couple members of the cross-country team skim around the track in the warm afternoon. Three slackers lounge in the grass, sharing snide comments about the runners.

Papers swirl away from the picnic table where Lottie sits. The change of scenery isn't helping her focus on grading. Neither's the wind.

Lottie disentangles herself and starts shifting piles from her lap so she can chase the papers. Just as she frees herself

A HAND

thrusts the papers to her. She looks up to see

DANTE

snatch the last of the renegade papers from the ground.

LOTTIE

Thanks.

DANTE

No worries. Thought we were meeting today.

They were. Lottie sags.

LOTTIE

I'm so sorry.

Dante tries to arrange the papers he's recaptured. It's sweet, but there's no way he'll guess her system.

LOTTIE

Don't worry about it.

She takes the papers.

DANTE
So, should we reschedule?

LOTTIE
Nah. Have a seat.

She goes to rearrange the ocean of papers surrounding her, but there's no where to put neat piles. She shoves a chunk off the table.

DANTE
That's one way to do it.

LOTTIE
Once upon a time, I had a system.
(switching gears)
So. How's it going?

Dante sits.

DANTE
Fantastic. I can't get a word in edgewise in class, I haven't slept a full night since my first day here, I'm reminded every minute of the day that I don't know anything at all, and I don't have time to go cake tasting with my fiance because I'm too busy grading papers my students didn't spent more than two minutes writing.

LOTTIE
It's great, huh?

Big grin.

DANTE
(genuine)
Best job I've ever had.

She knows the feeling. Him reminding her of it all the time isn't making her decision any easier.

LOTTIE
So where do we start?

Dante doesn't want to ask this, but he has to.

DANTE
You'd tell me, right?

LOTTIE
Tell you what?

DANTE
If there was a target on my back.

She doesn't want to do this.

LOTTIE
People been talking?

DANTE
I know you're not happy about my
engagement.

Huh?

DANTE
I don't know what's going on there,
but you have to know this job's
important to me, especially now.
Everyone's asking me if I really
want to be a teacher or giving me
these pitiful looks when they think
I'm not looking. I know I'm first
to get the axe.

LOTTIE
There's not going to be an axe.

DANTE
Of course there will. I just-- you
have my back, right?

Of course she does.

She grabs a pile of papers.

LOTTIE
Let me show you a trick for grading
faster so you can see that girl of
yours once in awhile.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lottie's place is more of a wreck than usual. The piles of books and students' papers line the walls, and the middle of the room is littered with precut chunks of wood and screws.

Lottie sits in the midst of the chaos, squinting at the instructions without success.

ANNE (O.S.)

Any luck?

No. Lottie looks at the screwdriver next to her like it's an artifact from an alien culture.

LOTTIE

You know, if I had to translate this from Latin and use it to figure out if Rome or Carthage is to blame for the Second Punic War, I'd be done by now.

Anne emerges from the kitchen with two beers.

ANNE

Do you have any idea how insufferably nerdy you are?

She hands Lottie a beer and swigs her own.

LOTTIE

Then you try.

ANNE

I have a policy against doing things I know I'm bad at in front of other people. Or at all.

Lottie turns back to the instructions.

LOTTIE

Remind me why I thought inviting you over would be helpful?

ANNE

Because my heckling inspires you to prove me wrong?

LOTTIE

Yeah. That really enhances my natural cabinetry skills.

ANNE

You're assembling a prefabricated coffee table.

LOTTIE

Shut up.

Lottie swigs her beer, then dives in with new devotion.

ANNE

So how are things going with
youngblood?

LOTTIE

He's doing fine. Only wrote ten
referrals last week.

Anne wanders to the tv, examines the photo of Lottie in front
of the pyramid. She guesses more than she lets on.

ANNE

So what about you?

LOTTIE

I haven't written a referral in two
years.

ANNE

Yeah, that's what I was asking.

Lottie's very interested in the instructions.

ANNE

Come on, Lottie. You're long
overdue for your semi-annual
existential crisis. What was it
last time, joining the Peace Corps?
Or was it that research trip to Qin
Shihuangdi's tomb?

LOTTIE

Qin was two years ago.

ANNE

Still. What's up?

Lottie searches for the right piece of wood. It takes her
full concentration.

Anne looks at the photo. The pyramid. She gets it.

ANNE

You applied, didn't you? You
finally did it.

Lottie's very busy putting the leg of the coffee table
together.

Anne settles next to her.

ANNE

And?

Nothing.

ANNE

I know you've heard back by now.

Lottie's silence affirms it. It takes Anne a minute and another swig to ask the next question.

ANNE

You going?

Lottie can't answer that one.

ANNE

Of course you are. You're brilliant. And far too smart to turn down a PhD if someone's offering it. Just do me a favor.

Lottie can barely look at her.

ANNE

If you go, do it for you. Do it because you need that adventure, or next chapter, or because you just can't face another kid asking you if she has to take her notes in cursive. But whatever you decide, don't do it because of David.

(off her objection)

I don't care. I saw your face when Dante pulled out that ring. You don't ever get over what David did to you. Not completely. I know how Dante's engagement made you feel. Just don't run away because he dragged up some ghosts, okay?

Silence.

Lottie grabs her beer, swigs, then snatches the screwdriver.

LOTTIE

You don't have any idea how it made me feel.

INT. SCHOOL - HEANEY'S OFFICE - DAY

The desk of a principal is so unlike a teacher's desk. Its surface is pristine, there are no piles of papers, and sunlight from the window glints off the polished surface.

Heaney sits behind his desk, king of his castle, overseeing a few moments of fragile peace.

THE DOOR

swings open. Lottie explodes into the room clutching a memo.

The tornado's arrived.

Heaney steels himself.

HEANEY
Ms. MacGyver?

LOTTIE
Are you serious?

HEANEY
About what?

He knows what. She knows he knows what. She'll play anyway.

LOTTIE
This can't be how you tell us! A memo?! You promised a meeting.

HEANEY
There was no need for a meeting. There's nothing we can do. Better to get the news out quickly and calmly--

LOTTIE
You don't believe that. You just wanted to avoid a scene.

Heaney's had it.

HEANEY
Yes I did, Lottie. This is what I wanted to avoid.
(off her surprise)
Sometimes I can't do anything. I know you want Dante to stay. He's not a spectacular teacher, but he cares, and that's usually enough. But not this time.

LOTTIE
It needs to be.

HEANEY

There's no money, Lottie. Until you can change that--

LOTTIE

I'll take a salary cut.

HEANEY

You can't afford that.

LOTTIE

We'd all do it. We're already getting paid less than our contract. What's a couple more percent?

(off his exasperation)

Or we could take turns bringing in our own coffee to the lounge. Or--

Heaney reaches into his desk, takes out a notebook, and hands it to her.

HEANEY

I've gone through every possible scenario. We just can't find the money.

She flips through the notebook. It's full of figures and lists. He's right. He's gone through every possibility. Lottie's tornado fury dissipates.

LOTTIE

No chance we're going to convince the upper echelon to forgo repainting the entire school every year to find that money?

Heaney holds his hand out for the notebook. She hands it over. He tucks it away.

HEANEY

Why this one?

Lottie doesn't really know. She plops into the chair in front of the desk usually reserved for trouble students.

LOTTIE

He cares. It's hard to find these days, even here.

Heaney SLAMS the DRAWER shut.

HEANEY

It's not. I've had five other teachers come in here and go to bat for this kid. None quite so dramatically as you did--

LOTTIE

Sorry.

Heaney softens.

HEANEY

I've already talked to him. Keep fighting if you want, but we've already lost.

She won't admit it, but she really loves him for saying "we've."

INT. DANTE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Dante stands by the whiteboard. It's Mayan history day. For once, he has their full attention. Nothing like bloody human sacrifices to keep the attention of a room full of teens.

DANTE

See, the Maya believed that all of existence was like a great tree.

He draws a ceiba tree on the board - very tall, foliage spread out at the top, root system mirrored beneath it.

DANTE

The roots are the Underworld, and the leaves are the heavens. We live on the trunk.

Lottie watches from a chair in the corner of the room, taking notes for her observation. He's doing a great job. She doesn't need to be there.

DANTE

They thought the sap of the tree bound everything in the universe together. They called it 'itz.'

The students laugh.

STUDENT 1

Gesundheit!

More laughter. Dante joins in. Nice.

DANTE

Funny you should say that. The
Maya believed that itz was body
fluids.

Uh oh. Danger zone for high school freshmen. 'Body' and
'fluid' only conjures one thing in their little minds. Lottie
can tell they're all going there. She waits to see what Dante
will do.

STUDENT 2

(suggestively)

Body fluid?

Dante's got it.

DANTE

Yeah, Danny. All kinds.

The raised eyebrow's all he needs. Everyone knows what he's
talking about without him saying it, and he's just put
himself in on the joke. Classic diffusion.

Lottie's really impressed.

DANTE

What kind would be most valuable?

Some giggles. No one wants to say what they're thinking.

DANTE

You're close. Think more Twilight.

Ooh! They know this one! The girl wearing the Team Edward
shirt jumps in first.

TWILIGHT FANGIRL

Blood?

DANTE

Exactly. Someone connect the dots
for us. If blood's the most
valuable itz, and its runs through
the world tree, and we know they
practiced human sacrifice, why did
they do it? What's the point?

They're thinking hard, especially Twilight Fangirl. Dante
can't hide a grin as he catches Lottie's eye. He's doing a
great job and he knows it.

Lottie's proud. And thinking of her conversation with Heaney,
it makes her heart hurt.

EXT. ORLÉANS, 1429 - DAY

Tired, grubby FRENCH SOLDIERS trudge away from the English stronghold, death in their faces. They are hungry, spent, and lack proper equipment to lift the siege.

A grizzled infantryman looks up to see

A GIRL

18 or 19 years old, dressed in blazing white armor, a lance in her hands, marching to them across the muddied field.

It is JOAN OF ARC, the Maid of Orléans on the eve of her greatest triumph.

She raises the lance and cries out in a voice that rings across the field.

JOAN OF ARC
For Charles the Dauphin, for
France, and for Saint Michael and
all the saints!

The men stand up straighter. They clutch their weapons. New life is in their eyes. They turn to follow Joan as she leads them into the thick of battle, leaving

SADIE

standing in the field behind them, alone, eyes shining with excitement.

The BELL RINGS to end class.

Sadie doesn't hear it. She stares after the saint in armor.

A hand falls on her shoulder. She looks up to see

LOTTIE

eyes shining like hers. She wants to follow Joan, too.

LOTTIE
Class is over, Sadie.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Sadie holds Lottie's gaze for a moment, then nods and closes her notebook.

Lottie goes back to her desk with a pile of freshly-acquired homework. She sees Sadie's taking her time. Lottie takes hers, too. She knows that look.

SADIE
Ms. MacGyver?

LOTTIE
Hm?

SADIE
How'd you know you wanted to be a teacher?

LOTTIE
I couldn't think of any other way
I'd get paid to talk about history
all day.
(off her laugh)
You think I'm joking.

Sadie tucks her notebook in her bag.

SADIE
You're a really good teacher. I
never liked history before.

Lottie doesn't want to hear this. Not after getting accepted to grad school.

LOTTIE
You just never learned history from
someone as crazy as me before.

Sadie slings her bag over her shoulder.

SADIE
It's a good crazy.

LOTTIE
Thanks, Sadie.

But no thanks. You're not making this any easier.

Sadie heads off to her lunch. Lottie tries to remember what she was just doing. She reshuffles her notes. Then looks.

"Joan of Arc"

She has an idea.

INT. SCHOOL - SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Nervous, Chuck Taylored feet scuff the carpet. A hand reaches down to pick at crack in the rubber of the sole. It rises to scratch a freckled nose. A different hand reaches over, grasps it.

TWILIGHT FANGIRL (O.S.)
Stop it, Danny.

Danny drops his hand. He sits on a couch sandwiched between the Twilight Fangirl and Jonah. They're all wearing much nicer clothes than usual, and all fidgety.

Lottie watches them from a chair across the office. Notes on her lap.

Joan of Arc's fire in her eyes. She's even wearing white.

LOTTIE
Claire, did you need any notecards?

Claire the Twilight Fangirl shakes her head.

CLAIRE (TWILIGHT FANGIRL)
No, I know what I'm saying.

LOTTIE
You still with us, Jonah?

A snort of indignation. He was dozing off, but still resents the implication.

LOTTIE
Just checking.
(nervous energy)
And Danny, you'll tell about the lesson on the Maya?

DANNY
Yes. Jonah's got the basketball coaching.

Now the kids are eyeing her in concern.

CLAIRE
We've got this, Ms. MacGyver. No one's getting rid of Mr. Scott.

Their assurances are endearing. Lottie manages to look grateful instead of amused.

SECRETARY (O.S.)

The superintendent is ready to see
you, now.

Lottie nods, stands, straightens her shirt. She looks over
the students once more.

Ah, well. They look something resembling respectable. That's
the best she can hope for from fifteen-year-olds.

She looks at the door leading into the inner sanctum of the
superintendent's office.

Deep breaths.

She squares her shoulders, hoists her notebook like a lance,
students marching behind like Joan and her soldiers.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

An empty field. The stadium lights cast spotlights on the
patchy turf and the litter from that afternoon's track meet:
a few water bottles, some candy wrappers. And

LOTTIE

Alone, sitting atop the lone picnic table.

Defeated.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lottie's hand sweeps the rickety coffee table clear of
student papers. She slides a fresh sheet of paper onto the
empty space.

A GRAD SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FORM.

Fishes the special occasion pen from a collection of red pens
in a cup.

And then she stares.

And stares.

She can't do it. She puts the pen down. Her gaze falls to

SADIE'S ESSAY

On the floor beside her. It's titled "The Shining White
Armor: Joan of Arc and the Battle of Orléans".

THE PYRAMID PHOTO

stares down from the tv.

The photo and Dante win.

She picks up the pen.

THE PEN TIP

glides across the paper. Signs her name.

She sits back. Stares. Can't believe she's done it.

She stuffs it in an envelope and seals it before she can change her mind.

EXT. TEACHER PARKING LOT - DAY

The closer it gets to summer, the longer it seems to take everyone to get to school, teachers included. The parking lot's bustling with hurried educators, all rushing to reach the teachers' lounge first to snag a copier.

Anne waves good morning to Lottie and slams her car door shut. She starts to walk over, but Lottie's looking for someone else. She spies

DANTE

trudging up the path. Unhappy.

Lottie hurries over.

Anne falters a moment. Somehow she knows that Lottie made her decision, and she knows what it is. She looks at Dante, and she realizes Lottie's plan.

Lottie doesn't have time to explain. She has good news.

LOTTIE

Dante!

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD - CONTINUOUS

Students mill around, enjoying their last few minutes of warm sunlight before plunging into the over-air-conditioned cave of the school for the day.

Dante threads his way through the crowd, snatching a couple hats from students' heads on the way. She's taught him well.

LOTTIE
 (catching up)
 Dante!

He's avoiding her.

She won't let him. She jogs forward.

LOTTIE
 Good news, Dante!

He slows as they near the door to the teachers' lounge. He doesn't want to do this here.

She doesn't notice.

LOTTIE
 So, I applied to this PhD program in Egyptology that I've been too scared to try for for years. And I got in! Thing is, it's in England, so I can't keep teaching here, so I filled out my intent form yesterday and now the department's down a teacher. You can stay!
 (off his silence)
 Too early for you? Did you hear--

DANTE
 I'm not coming back, Lottie.

What?!

LOTTIE
 Look, I know what Heaney says and Lord knows your students tried to make your case to the superintendent--

DANTE
 I'm not coming back.

That shuts her up. He hates this.

DANTE
 Jenny's dad offered me a position in his firm.
 (off her silence)
 I-- I'm getting married. I had to know I would have a job. I promised him I'd have a job. And this is great and all, but, you know, we'll want a house, a dog--

LOTTIE

A life.

Oh good. She's not mad.

DANTE

Yeah. I-- yeah.

There's nothing more to say. He opens the door, holds it for her. She's not ready.

LOTTIE

I'm gonna go get, um, you know--

DANTE

Breakfast?

LOTTIE

Yeah.

So she's not okay.

DANTE

Okay.

He goes inside.

Lottie stands outside the door, students spilling around her on their way to class.

Now what?

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

PENCILS SCRATCHING. Students hunkered down over their papers. It's final exam day in history class.

And it's a good thing. Lottie's having trouble doing much more than stare at the clock. A pile of papers sit untouched in front of her. She doesn't notice

A HAND

Raised. Jonah's hand. It's been up for awhile. He's still working, hand in the air.

Time passes.

Other students begin to notice, even if Jonah's forgotten it's up there. Arazue coughs.

Nothing.

From the teacher's desk, Patty coughs louder.
Lottie jerks up, looks. Sees Jonah. Walks over.
He doesn't notice her approach.
She stands by his desk. Waits.
Nothing.

 LOTTIE
Jonah?

He blinks up at her for a minute.
She nods toward his arm.
He looks as if seeing it for the first time.

 JONAH
Oh! What does--
 (he flips back a couple
 pages; squints at the
 page; finds his question)
--this mean?

Lottie looks. Really?

 LOTTIE
Serenity?

Yes.

 LOTTIE
It means calm.

Jonah thinks it over a minute.

 JONAH
Calm, like skinny?

Lottie can't help it. All the tension for the past few weeks
bursts. She laughs. And laughs.

The class titters nervously.

That only makes Lottie laugh harder. She manages to gasp out
an answer.

 LOTTIE
It means not excited. Peaceful.

She giggles her way back to the podium.

She sits. Looks at her

BEWILDERED CLASS.

She waves them back to their exam. And laughs some more.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

School's out for summer. As of about ten minutes ago. The campus is eerily quiet. Abandoned papers skitter across the field and come to a stop at

ANNE'S FEET.

She's in a lawn chair on the fifty yard line, soaking up some sun. Her bag's on the ground beside her, empty of papers to grade for the first time this year.

LOTTIE'S BAG

PLOPS beside it, contents spilling.

LOTTIE'S SHOES

THUD next to it.

A LAWN CHAIR

SCRAPES open, hits the grass.

Lottie settles into it.

They sit for awhile in silence.

ANNE

Didn't think you were coming.

Lottie puts sunglasses on.

LOTTIE

Where else would I be?

ANNE

Not going, huh?

LOTTIE

You know what happened today? Jonah asked what serenity meant. I told him calm, and--

She can't make it. She's laughing again.

Anne lets her.

ANNE
Can't leave 'em, huh?

LOTTIE
Egypt's not going anywhere.

Lottie reaches into her bag and extracts two cans of coke.

LOTTIE
Interested in some contraband?

ANNE
Straight from the superintendent's
private stash?

LOTTIE
Would I bring you anything less
than that?

ANNE
Not after this year.

Anne accepts. They pop the tops. Anne raises hers.

ANNE
To Dante.

After a long minute.

LOTTIE
To Dante.

They settle in for a long nap in the sun.

ANNE
Margaritas later?

LOTTIE
Oh yes.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

A coffeepot percolates alone on a clean counter. For once, the kitchen is actually recognizable as a room in which someone might sometime use it to cook something.

A PHONE BEEPS.

Lottie sweeps into the room, faithful notecards in hand. She glances at the time on the phone.

Yikes!

She dumps coffee in a travel cup.

Remembers to flip off the coffeepot.

INT. LOTTIE'S APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - DAY

The apartment is the cleanest its ever been. A row of shoes lines the little hallway near the door.

LOTTIE'S FEET

slide into a pair of shoes.

She catches sight of herself in the mirror in the next room.

Professional. Hair up, makeup nice but not heavy. Ready to go conquer another group of barbarians.

Notecards in hand.

LOTTIE (V.O.)

For if I write good things of good
men, then the reader is encouraged
to do what is right.

INT. LOTTIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The room's full of a group of students who somehow look much smaller to Lottie than the last group. It's like starting the whole thing over - blank stares, nervous giggles, sincere attempts to pay attention.

It is starting all over. Lottie does this every year.

LOTTIE

Bede thought that was the point of
history. To help us know that
virtue is rewarded, and vice is
punished. But how will we know who
to believe? Why are we studying
this at all if these people could
be lying to us through the pages of
history?

She waits. It's heavy. Needs time to sink in.

LOTTIE'S CLASS

is half-asleep.

A HAND

rises.

Here it comes.

LOTTIE

Yes?

(glances at roster)

Danielle?

Maybe this time it'll be a real question...

DANIELLE

Do you want us to write in cursive?

... no.

She gets to do it all over again. The whole process of taking them from barely awake to on fire and thinking.

Lottie smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.