

THE CHAIR

Written by

Amanda Peet
and
Annie Julia Wyman

EXT. LITTLE SCHOOLHOUSE - MORNING

A charming New England elementary school. Drop-off is over, so it's deserted out here.

Suddenly a CAR barrels into frame and SCREECHES to a halt outside, one wheel up on the sidewalk.

SEO-YUN KIM, 40s, Korean, gets out and runs to the entrance, turning back to her seven-year-old, MARY, ambling behind.

SEO-YUN
You're killin' me!

INT. LITTLE SCHOOLHOUSE - HALLWAY/CLASSROOM - DAY

Seo-yun ushers Mary into her classroom, then turns and rushes back out. A TEACHER, 40s, rushes after her.

TEACHER
(calling after her)
Dr. Kim?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Seo-yun and the teacher sit with a PRINCIPAL, 50s, artsy necklace.

TEACHER
We thought you should see this. As soon as possible.

She puts a child's drawing on the desk. We don't see it.

SEO-YUN
Jesus.

TEACHER
In seventeen years of teaching I've never seen anything this disturbing.

SEO-YUN
Is that -- supposed to be me?

They nod.

TEACHER
She said you're crying because --

She looks to the principal.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Seo-yun charges up the stairs.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

Chairs around several tables pushed together, one of which has a lectern on it. Standard coffee situation in the back. A dozen PROFESSORS -- almost all white men, 50+, blazers, buttondowns -- greet each other and mingle.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

A turning of heads as Seo-yun makes her way to the lectern.

SEO-YUN

Sorry I'm late. Welcome back,
everyone!

A ripple of judginess in the rows. PROFESSOR BROWN, easily the stuffiest, frowns at her.

PROFESSOR BROWN

You're going to stand at the
lectern?

Seo-yun looks for a supportive face among the old-guard white male assholes and finds YASMIN MCKAY, late 20s, black, chic linen overalls and a septum piercing.

YASMIN

Chair sits with us for faculty
meetings.

SEO-YUN

Thank you, Yasmin.

YASMIN

(joking)
Dr. McKay.

Seo-yun pushes the lectern aside and sits.

SEO-YUN

All right. Let's try this again.
It's lovely to see you all. The
first order of business is --

PROFESSOR REINHARDT

(piping up)
Bill isn't here.

PROFESSOR SHEPHERD
What else is new?

PROFESSOR WARREN
Here we go again.

PROFESSOR DRAKE
What's the statute of limitations
on this thing?

At this Seo-yun holds up her hand.

SEO-YUN
Bill is sending his daughter off to
college. He'll be here any minute.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL GATE - DAY

BILL DOBSON, 45, white, looks more like an aging slacker surf punk than the award-winning literary scholar he is.

His face falls as SADIE, AKA Doodles, his 17-year-old daughter, extracts herself from his goodbye hug and looks him right in the face.

DOODLES
Get. Your shit together.

Then:

DOODLES (CONT'D)
I'm gone now, and that's the way
it's going to be. For the rest of
your life.

BILL
You're not *gone*.

DOODLES
Yes, I am. You're on your own. And
what happened *happened*. The time
when people were like leaving pies
and casseroles and whatever at the
house? It's over.

BILL
Okay, Doodles --

DOODLES
No. You gotta find a way to get on
with it.

INT. AIRPORT BAR - LATER - DAY

Bill, crestfallen, watches Sadie's plane pull back from the jetway. He downs a shot and signals for another round:

SEO-YUN (PRE-LAP)
I'm not going to sugarcoat this.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SEO-YUN
We're in the middle of a major shakeup. Enrollments are way down. Lots of schools are going through cuts. But I want you to take a good look around this room.

As she speaks, we FIND Yasmin and two other odd ducks: Elliott Rentz, 60s, white, fun bowtie; John McHale, mid-80s, white, in a motorized wheelchair.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
We are the English department. We few, we happy few!

PROFESSOR COMPTON
(bursting out)
I'm scared!

PROFESSOR RENTZ
They shut down the English department at Haverford.

PROFESSOR DRAKE
They're phasing people out so they can eliminate --

SEO-YUN
Shhhh. No. Nobody's getting fired.

PROFESSOR WARREN
If they shut down the whole department we'll all be out of a job!

SEO-YUN
Okay. Let me just -- not too long ago, English was the most powerful discipline in the Humanities. We ruled the roost and we didn't have to defend ourselves.

INT. AIRPORT BAR - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Bill pours, then leans over to slurp an overflowing beer. His NEIGHBOR side-eyes him as booze dribbles down his beard.

SEO-YUN (PRE-LAP)

In these precarious times, we've
got to have faith in the values and
traditions of our profession.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT - AISLE C - DAY

Bill walks under an AIRPORT PARKING sign.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

Remember. Our lineage stretches
back thirteen hundred years --

He looks around, then slips between two cars.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

-- from the first monks who wrote
in Anglo Saxon to everywhere
English is now spoken.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT - SAME

Bill URINATES between the cars as a heretofore unseen PARENT
ushers her GAWKING KID in the opposite direction.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

In thinking, this morning, about
our tech-addled culture --

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING - SAME - DAY

Bill, puzzled, stares down a very long row of cars.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

How our students are hyperconnected
twenty-four hours a day --

Bill walks, pointing his key fob methodically at each car.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

I was reminded of something Harold
Bloom wrote. "Information is
endlessly available to us."

Bill stabs the air with the fob in every possible direction.

SEO-YUN (V.O.)

"Where shall wisdom be found?"

Bill spazzes out like a crazy person.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SEO-YUN

I want to close by making you a
promise. I will not allow this
department to be ransacked --

The door flies open. This is PROFESSOR JOAN HAMBLING, late
60s, throwback hippie with Renaissance Fair accents.

JOAN

(panting)

They moved my office to the fucking
basement of the football stadium!

General consternation, even panic.

PROFESSOR PLUM

Why would they do that?

JOAN

They didn't give me a reason --
just all my things were gone and
the Dean's assistant said that's
where I am from now on --

PROFESSOR POLLACK

I heard a rumor they're trying to
fire everyone over fifty-five.

EVERYONE

What? Oh my God? No! That's age
discrimination!

SEO-YUN

(over the melee)

People, let's try not to panic!

JOAN HAMBLING

Easy for you to say, you're only
fifty-one.

SEO-YUN

I'm forty-seven.

JOAN HAMBLING

(dumbfounded)

Really?

Seo-yun faces the room once more.

SEO-YUN

I'm going to protect you. You have
my word as chair.

CUT TO:

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - LATER - DAY

Bill gets out of a taxi and drags himself to the front door of a modest New England home.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - NIGHT

The house is fully furnished but doesn't look lived in. Bill enters. From the hall, he clocks the empty living room. Empty dining room. Empty kitchen.

The SILENCE is deafening. All of it's emptier than ever without Sadie.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SEO-YUN

Thank you, and have a great first
day tomorrow.

The profs filter out, MUTTERING. We FIND Yasmin as she heads back to the coffee stand and takes a plastic bag out of her tote, then surreptitiously crams it full of muffins.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Yasmin and McHale are last to exit. He pops a wheelie and rolls back to let her through.

MCHALE

After you, cutie.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

We FOLLOW Yasmin as she heads down the hallway toward reception. She passes Rentz, who is standing in front of a large bulletin board.

RENTZ

You.

YASMIN

Uh -- me what? Did I -- do something?

Rentz points.

CLOSE ON A CLASS FLYER: "UNSEX ME HERE: WHO GIVES A F*CK ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE??" Below the title is a bust of Shakespeare with four dildos pointed at his face.

RENTZ

"Unsex Me Here?"

YASMIN

Uh, yeah, that's my class?

RENTZ

You're taking students away from me using the cheapest possible means.

YASMIN

It's a course about sex. It should have sex in the title.

RENTZ

You're doing it to inflate your enrollments!

YASMIN

Actually, I'm not? Gender studies is my subfield.

RENTZ

It's crass. And degrading. What kind of --

Two students pass by and pause to look at one of the flyers.

STUDENT #1

Check it out.

STUDENT #2

That's lit.

Off Rentz --

EXT. UNIVERSITY HALL - SAME TIME - DAY

Seo-yun girds herself at the bottom of a grand expanse of worn stone steps -- a small, nervous figure about to have her first confrontation with her new overlords.

INT. DEAN KIMBER'S OFFICE - LATER - DAY

DEAN MORTY KIMBER, 60s, white, a hulking war historian.
Seated across from him is PROVOST PETERS, 60s, white, jovial.

SEO-YUN

You told me I was going to have the fall semester before you'd make any moves? Before we started early retirement packages.

PROVOST

Nobody's been offered an early retirement package.

SEO-YUN

You put Joan Hambling into some kind of subterranean shithole! Her whole library is missing! What am I supposed to say to her?

PROVOST PETERS

This pains me, Dr. Kim, especially because I'm very fond of Joan. But nobody cares about Milton anymore.

SEO-YUN

I do.

PROVOST PETERS

That makes three of us.

SEO-YUN

Morty?

DEAN KIMBER

I --

PROVOST PETERS

And no one's majoring in English anyway.

SEO-YUN

We *just* went over this. Less than a month ago! English helps students learn to manipulate culture. That means jobs in law. Advertising. Google is recruiting humanists.

PROVOST PETERS

You have two instructors for every one major in your department. Those are the numbers. You can't argue with the numbers.

(not unkindly)

Can you?

SEO-YUN

But what happened between when we discussed this last and --

DEAN KIMBER

The Board of Trustees want to move more quickly than we initially thought.

SEO-YUN

It's shopping period!

PROVOST PETERS

And at the end of the week, when enrollments are finalized, we need to zero in on an instructor whose classes are undersubscribed. As you know, we're also looking at stalled or irrelevant research.

DEAN KIMBER

And conduct.

PROVOST PETERS

Doesn't have to be Joan. But keep in mind: tenured faculty are not exempt.

DEAN KIMBER

The endowment is underperforming. Belts have to tighten. We're just asking you to help us with --

SEO-YUN

A kill list? Right? I mean, that's what this is. It's a kill list.

PROVOST PETERS

Dr. Kim. No one's getting killed.

Then:

PROVOST PETERS (CONT'D)

All we need is one name.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. UNIVERSITY HALL - MOMENTS LATER - EVENING

Seo-yun stands at the base of the steps again, shoulders slumped. That first confrontation? A rout.

As if on cue, she notices Rentz wheeling a bike up the walk, McHale at his side; Joan brings up the rear.

As the dusk hits them just so, we shift to slow motion, over P.M. Dawn's "REALITY USED TO BE A FRIEND OF MINE."

A FRISBEE falls at Joan's feet as they approach. She picks it up, gestures for a STUDENT to go deep, tosses it. It veers into an open window across the quad.

VOICE (O.S.)

Fuckin' -- ow! What the fuck --

Seo-yun winces and hurries off toward the department.

EXT. RENTZ HOME - LATER - NIGHT

Rentz rides up to a very modest home, then folds up his unbearably nerdy commuter bike and heads inside.

INT. RENTZ HOME - EAT-IN KITCHEN - LATER - NIGHT

Rentz and his wife, Moira, 60s, hunch over Yasmin's flyer.

MOIRA

The bottom line is she's just an adjunct. You're tenured. You have protected status. She doesn't.

RENTZ

The bottom line is: Crabbed age and youth cannot live together.

CUT TO:

INT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - LECTURE HALL - DAY

The rows are packed. STUDENTS talking, texting, full of first-day expectation. LILA, 25, Bill's TF, looks at her watch.

STUDENT

(raises hand)
What's the deal?

LILA

He's on his way.

Lila slips her phone out, sends a text. ON HER SCREEN:

Lila: are you coming? it's 9:50?

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - SAME TIME - DAY

CLOSE ON Harry Styles's face as it comes slowly into focus. We're in BILL'S POV, in Doodles's room, looking up at a poster of ONE DIRECTION as he wakes from a fever nap.

BILL

Shit.

He scrambles out of bed.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Bill runs out to his driveway, but stops short. No car.

JOAN (PRE-LAP)

Welcome to *Paradise Lost*.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Joan finishes off her first-day introduction.

JOAN

Milton gave us the most beautiful exploration of theodicy in western literature -- of the problem of evil in a world supposedly created by God. Why would God let bad things happen to good people?

EXT. TOWN - STREET - DAY

Bill walk-jogs as fast as he can.

RENTZ (PRE-LAP)

As we all know, orthography shifts over time. In Shakespeare's day, t-h would have been written as a y.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - CLASSROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

RENTZ

The letters i and j were interchangeable, as were u and v.

He has TWO STUDENTS. One is already drifting off to sleep.

EXT. TOWN - STREET - DAY

Bill walks by one of those Bird scooters.

EXT. TOWN - DIFFERENT STREET - DAY

Bill turns, hesitates, then walks back the way he came.

EXT. TOWN - FIRST STREET - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Bill starts down the street on the scooter. He's okay for a small stretch but then comes to a downhill. He picks up speed and panics. He wobbles, weaves, trying to right himself --

He SLAMS into the curb and flies ass over elbows into a bush.

DAPHNE EISENSTADT, 18, white, pretty, wearing a Star of David necklace, pulls over in her Prius. She leans out the window:

DAPHNE
Professor Dobson? Are you okay?

Bill crawls out of the bushes, twigs sticking out of his beard. He looks up at Daphne.

YASMIN (PRE-LAP)
"Unsex me here!"

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - LECTURE HALL - DAY

GENERATION Z KIDS pack Yasmin's lecture, which spills out into the hallway. Unlike most of the faculty, the undergrads are diverse: every configuration of identity and class --

YASMIN
What does she mean?

She points right at a kid in the front row.

KID #1
She doesn't want to have to act like a woman -- or, like be one --

YASMIN
Yes! Fuck that! How else can we phrase that?

KID #2
She wants to escape from conventionally constructed gender roles. To be queer?

YASMIN

Yes! Why should Lady Macbeth be confined to meekness by her biological sex?

KID #3 (O.S.)

Balls, said the queen, If I had two I'd be king!

CHEERING in the lecture hall.

YASMIN

Yes! Who said that?

A FEW KIDS

Someone in the hallway. She's outside.

YASMIN

Come on in, whoever said that!

A girl, Saskia, 19, white, in Doc Martens makes her way in. She steps over piles of kids, holding hands as she makes her way in --

YASMIN (CONT'D)

Make yourself known! Everybody squish!

INT. DAPHNE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Daphne double-parks near the entrance to the quad.

DAPHNE

Here ok?

Bill looks at her.

SEO-YUN (PRE-LAP)

In that moment, a whole range of possible futures cross his mind.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Seo-yun stands in front of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" projected onto a pull-down screen.

SEO-YUN

What might the images in the speaker's mind be?

NERDY STUDENT #1
Kissing someone.

SEO-YUN
Hm. Definitely not in the poem.
What else?

Joan Hambling KNOCKS on the classroom window. Seo-yun looks over at Joan, then points at her watch like, Just one second.

INT. DAPHNE'S PRIUS - CONTINUOUS - SAME TIME - DAY

DAPHNE
My brother told me you were the reason to come here. He'd always be like, Professor Dobson said this, and Professor Dobson said that. I tried to get into Modernism and Death but it was full.

BILL
What's your brother's name?

DAPHNE
Jesse Eisenstadt. You remember him?

BILL
Uh --

DAPHNE
In our family you're like a rock star. You've got like icon status.

On Bill: slumped, dirty and hungover.

BILL
"I grow old, I grow old..."

DAPHNE
"I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

In spite of himself, he looks at her -- a flicker of something between them.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
What? I read.

INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY

Joan and Seo-yun head through the dank belly of the home of the Marylebone Saints. AMBIENT WEIRD CLANKING as they walk.

Around the corner, a MYSTERIOUS GLOW.

And then: training room doors with windows. Inside, muscular boys pump iron under bright fluorescents. Beads of sweat trickle down the abs of scantily clad J.Crew-grade Adonises --

JOAN

I can't hear myself think.

SEO-YUN

Yes. This is terrible.

For a beat, they stand and stare like stray dogs at a butcher shop window --

CUT TO:

INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - JOAN'S OFFICE - DAY

An iron folding chair and a tiny desk under a bare bulb.

JOAN

They're putting me out to pasture.
What else could this possibly be?

Seo-yun looks up at the ceiling, snaps a cellphone picture.

SEO-YUN

This is a Title IX lawsuit waiting
to happen.

Joan hugs Seo-yun, squishing her face against her chest.

JOAN

Our first female chair!

SEO-YUN

Don't thank me yet.

JOAN

I didn't.

Then:

JOAN (CONT'D)

Now we just need to find out what
those S.O.B.s did with my books.

EXT. ENGLISH DEPT - SEO YUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Seo-yun drops her keys on her desk, then goes to the window. It's Professor McHale. He's towing a crew of skateboarders around the quad at extremely high speeds.

KID
(faintly)
yeeeeeeeet

Seo-yun shakes her head: both fond and concerned.

INT. SEO-YUN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

QUICK CUTS as Seo-yun carefully unpacks manila folders from a giant expanding file.

NAMES OF PROFS, including RENTZ, SHEPHERD, and HAMBLING are stuck to them with labelmaker tape.

She pulls one -- BILL DOBSON -- and opens it. A printed CV, a photo of Bill kneeling onstage to accept a humanities medal. Another in which he shakes hands with Michelle Obama.

Then she lingers on a photo of her and Bill in full commencement regalia: two peas in a pod.

On Bill's other arm is an attractive WHITE WOMAN in ordinary clothing: SHARON, who we'll never meet --

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - LECTURE HALL - SAME TIME - DAY

Students hush as Bill enters as if he were a rock star. Murmurs: "He's here" and, "Is that him?" Here and there, kids angle their phones to record the lecture.

Bill unpacks at the lectern.

BILL
(to Lila)
You have my dongle?

LILA
Your dongle's in your hand.

BILL
How did that happen?

LILA
I put it there.

BILL
Where've you been all my life?

He types for a second on his computer and then crouches down to retrieve some papers. Meanwhile OLD FOOTAGE OF A BEAUTIFUL, NAKED, PREGNANT SHARON COMES UP ON THE PROJECTOR.

IN THE VIDEO:

BILL (CONT'D)
(O.S.)
Show me your tits.

She flashes the camera, laughing, then turns her back.

In the rows, students GASP. A NERDY KID covers his eyes while a JOCK angles his phone to try to get better video.

BILL (CONT'D)
Wait.

BILL (V.O.) SHARON
Wait, wait wait -- I didn't Ya snooze ya lose.
get --

LILA
Um. Professor Dobson?

BILL
Yup, shit.

He shoots up at the lectern and punches something else into his computer. The screen goes blank. A horrible beat.

BILL (CONT'D)
Okay! This is -- come on up here.
This is Lila, my outstanding TF.
Welcome to Contemporary Lit.

LILA
(aside)
This is Modernism and Death.

BILL
(hairpin turn)
Welcome to Modernism and Death!

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - SEO-YUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Rentz's file is now strewn across Seo-yun's desk. She's flipping through one of his early books. His author photo is on the back cover.

She flips to the dedication. It reads: "FOR MY STUDENTS."

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - HALLWAY - DAY

A STUDENT stops Seo-yun as she hustles down the hallway.

STUDENT
Professor Kim, can I ask --

SEO-YUN
Not now --

Seo-yun proceeds two feet, then swings right back around --

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
Hey, wait. Can I just -- do I have
anything in my teeth?

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - BIL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Seo-yun now KNOCKS on a half-open door. She pops her head in.

BILL
Sorry I missed your first meeting.

SEO-YUN
Yeah, it's okay. I defended you
against the hordes of actual
attendees.

She slips into the room and sits down.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
How'd it go with Doodles?

BILL
I'm officially an empty nester. She
read me the riot act.

Then:

BILL (CONT'D)
Apparently she wants me to -- the
fact is: I'm on my own.

SEO-YUN
That's not true. I'm here.

Awkward beat.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
I mean, we're all here. I know it's
just work, but --

Seo-yun looks for something to bury this moment.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
Speaking of which, can you talk to
Rentz?

BILL
About?

SEO-YUN
Someone has to bring him up to
speed on the 21st century.

BILL
What'd those dipshits say to you?

Nothing.	SEO-YUN	BILL (CONT'D) They're not trying to get rid of him, are they? *
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SEO-YUN
No. It's just --

It's important for the health of the department.	SEO YUN	BILL I mean, he's tenured so they can't. *
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BILL (CONT'D)
Right?

SEO-YUN
No.

BILL
No?!

SEO-YUN
No, right. They can't. Just --
everyone needs to be, you know,
current. With their pedagogy.

He knows her well enough to be suspicious.

SEO YUN
What?

BILL
Don't let them railroad you.

SEO YUN

I'm not.

BILL

Yasmin should do it.

SEO-YUN

They hate each other.

BILL

Yeah, it's your job as chair to see that they don't.

SEO-YUN

He's not going to listen to her.

BILL

It's your job as chair to see that he does.

SEO-YUN

Is it also my job as chair to punch you in the fucking face?

BILL

My face is my fortune, baby.

SEO-YUN

So you're flat broke?

BILL (CONT'D)

'S why I'm totally broke.

*

They LAUGH, embarrassed to find themselves on the same wavelength.

She gets up to leave.

SEO-YUN

And, hey: no more rides from female students.

BILL

What?

Off her look:

BILL (CONT'D)

My car's impounded! I'm getting it back this afternoon. What're you, a spy?

SEO-YUN

What're you, a moron? Surveillance cameras are all over. Some flunky at the Dean of Students emailed me.

Then:

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
 You know that was Daphne
 Eisenstadt? Eisenstadt like the
 Board of Trustees Eisenstadt.

BILL
 Oof.

As she stands to leave, she points at him.

SEO-YUN
 I need everyone to be on their best
 behavior.

After she heads out, he rolls in his desk chair to the
 doorway.

BILL
 (calling after her)
 Is this what you're going to be
 like?

He rolls back into his office. Then he does something he's
 never done before: he shuts his laptop, goes to the window
 and watches her distant, determined figure cross campus --

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPUS WALK - LATER - DAY

Seo-yun now zeroes in on Yasmin, who's on the steps outside
 the student café surrounded by hangers-on.

As Seo-yun walks up, Saskia offers Yasmin a bite of sandwich.
 Holding onto her wrist, Yasmin takes it.

SEO-YUN
 Hi hi. My office?

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - SEO-YUN'S OFFICE - LATER - DAY

Yasmin and Seo-yun sit in her office.

SEO-YUN
 Would you consider sending your
 extra students to our other
 Shakespeare person? The old white
 guy?

YASMIN

Honestly I was going to ask *you* to open another section for me to teach.

Beat.

YASMIN (CONT'D)

Elliott makes ten times more than I do. I get \$3500 a course per term. That's \$15k a year. Before tax.

SEO-YUN

I'm sorry. I didn't -- they don't tell us that number.

YASMIN

Well. That's what it is. So instead of asking for more pay I should do a favor for someone who basically told me to my face that I don't --

SEO-YUN

It's not a favor for him, it's a favor for me. Can you at least talk to him?

Off Yasmin's dubious look:

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

I'll make sure your contract gets renewed next semester.

YASMIN

I could also use an office.

CUT TO:

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A box of books on the floor. Joan peers down the hallway, then sneaks forward and rummages through it. A GRADUATE STUDENT comes out of a nearby office.

GRADUATE STUDENT

Hey! What're you doing?

JOAN HAMBLING

What're *you* doing?

GRADUATE STUDENT

These are Professor Warren's.

JOAN HAMBLING

You don't leave people's books lying around in the hallway where anyone could just *abscond* with them.

GRADUATE STUDENT

I was standing right there. He's back from sabbatical -- I'm unpacking his stuff.

JOAN HAMBLING

Yeah, well --

Joan backs away, slowly, pointing at him.

JOAN HAMBLING (CONT'D)

You're lucky I got here when I did. Shit disappears around here. Whole libraries: poof!

As she turns away we FIND Yasmin at the end of the hall, about to knock on Rentz's door --

CUT TO:

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - PROFESSOR RENTZ'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Dusty armchairs, a miniature Globe Theater on the desk: general stuffy vibes. Yasmin now sits across from Rentz.

YASMIN

Seo-yun asked me to observe your class. To give you some feedback. I wanted to make sure you were -- apprised of the situation?

PROFESSOR RENTZ

That won't be necessary.

Rentz crosses to get his coffee from the bookshelf. It's in a novelty mug that reads "KICK-ASS GRANDPA."

YASMIN

That's what I told her you'd say.

As he takes a sip, Yasmin sees that his hands are shaking.

YASMIN (CONT'D)

Hey. This is what happens when a scarcity mindset gets imposed on us. I'm not your enemy. Really.

(MORE)

YASMIN (CONT'D)

The enemy's the administration.
This corporate bullshit? Where we
all have to prove our value in some
bizarro market --

PROFESSOR RENTZ

I'll pass on the vulgar marxism,
thank you.

Yasmin nods, like: point taken, I'm out. She heads for the door but pauses.

YASMIN

It's just about having a more
student-centered pedagogy. I try to
sit with my students sometimes? If
you stay behind the lectern the
whole time you're -- they want to
see that you're asking yourself:
what's the most maximally anti-
oppressive thing I can do?

PROFESSOR RENTZ

If something's maximal it's already
the most.

A stare-down.

YASMIN

You could also try incorporating
more technology. I knew a professor
who had the students tweet what
they each thought was the most
important line in Moby Dick.

He isn't giving an inch.

YASMIN (CONT'D)

"Call me Ishmael" tied with "...
from hell's heart I stab at thee."

Then:

YASMIN (CONT'D)

I'll tell her we had a nice talk.

PROFESSOR RENTZ

Tell her, Fuck you I'm tenured.

CUT TO:

EXT. FACULTY PARKING LOT - LATER - DAY

A DUMPSTER.

FACULTY AND STUDENTS pass right by. Joan passes, then comes back. She stares at it.

Then she stands on her tippy-toes to get a look inside.

JOAN'S POV: In the dumpster, lodged in a bunch of garbage, is a copy of Milton's PARADISE LOST: JOAN HAMBLING, EDITOR. It's thick with sticky notes: her copy of her own edition.

She LAUGHS. She looks around to see if anyone can share this cosmic joke. She points to the dumpster to help people understand -- but she has no words.

This makes her laugh more.

Then, with some effort, she manages to swing a leg up over the side. She hoists herself up and falls in with a flurry and a YELP.

EXT. FACULTY PARKING LOT - SAME TIME - DAY

The same dumpster. QUIET, SEEMINGLY EMPTY.

Joan slowly rises up until she's standing in the dumpster, waist-high, holding PARADISE LOST to her chest.

Students go about their business, ignoring her.

JOAN

(loud, to everyone)

"Me miserable! Which way shall I
fly / Infinite wrath and infinite
despair? / Which way I fly is hell;
myself am hell; / And in the lowest
deep a lower deep, / Still
threat'ning to devour me, opens
wide."

Beat.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Mm-k, someone get me outta here.

EXT. HABI'S HOUSE - FRONT STEPS - DUSK

HABI, 77, Korean, Seo-yun's father, opens the door of a small house for her. They greet each other in Konglish.

INT. HABI'S HOUSE - HALLWAY/KITCHEN - SAME

JI HO, 40s, Korean American, sits with Mary playing a board game. He stands up to greet Seo-yun.

HABI

This is Ji Ho. His home pastor asked me to introduce him to our community.

JI HO

Hi.

SEO-YUN

Hi. Nice to meet you.

Seo-yun clocks the dining table, set for four: uh oh.

JI HO

Your father tells me you're the first female chair in your department. Congratulations, this is a huge achievement.

HABI

Most Koreans are not in the humanities.

Then:

HABI (CONT'D)

Ji Ho is on sabbatical from MIT.

SEO-YUN

How great.

Then, to Mary:

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

You ready, Little One?

HABI

You're not staying for dinner?

SEO-YUN

We can't.

EXT. HABI'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Habi and Seo-yun speak in Korean so Mary can't understand.

HABI

What's wrong with him?

SEO-YUN

Nothing.

Off his look:

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

What?

HABI

You wasted too much time pining for a married man. And now he's a widower. You can't compete with his dead wife. Trust me.

SEO-YUN

Oh my God, Bill is my *friend*. He's-- we're friends.

HABI

I don't want you to end up alone, Seo-yun.

SEO-YUN

This is a time where I really need you to show that you're -- that you believe in me. Instead of, you know, always trying to change me.

Habi looks at his daughter and nods, full of love. He puts a hand on her shoulder.

HABI

Are you gay?

INT. SEO-YUN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mary and Seo-yun eat takeout in silence.

INT. SEO-YUN'S HOME - MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Seo-yun tucks Mary into bed. She lies down on the floor next to her so they can hold hands while Mary falls asleep.

Beat.

MARY

Why're you a doctor?

SEO-YUN

Because I -- wanted to study and read and write for a long time.

MARY

But you never *help* anyone.

A beat. In the darkness, Seo-yun shuts her eyes.

EXT. FACULTY PARKING LOT - LATER - NIGHT

A SECURITY OFFICER TAPS on the window of a lone shitty car.

OFFICER

Hey. You can't park here overnight.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - LATER - DAWN

The same P.O.S. now sits by itself. Nearby, a hapless TEEN in a vest chases a loose cart across the parking lot.

Inside the P.O.S, Yasmin sleeps, her head on a pillow, half her face smushed up against the glass.

INT. DARLINGTON ELEMENTARY - LATER - DAY

A CHILD'S CRUDE DRAWING: A small person stabs an adult's torso with a knife.

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)

We're pretty sure this is a cry for help.

In crude handwriting, it reads: "THIS WILL HAPIN TO YOU."

SEO-YUN

No, I'm -- I agree.

PRINCIPAL

And Dr. Kline is excellent, and available.

SEO-YUN

Thank you for the referral.

PRINCIPAL

Especially with adopted children? Sometimes they need a bit more --

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

I'm sure you know.

SEO-YUN

Yes, no -- of course.

PRINCIPAL

Maybe some extra quality time's also in order?

For a second she looks away, and down. And without thinking he reaches out and tilts her chin up.

She startles in the same heartbeat he does.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
What are you -- ?

BILL
(covering)
Chin up, kid.

SEO-YUN
Oh. I -- thanks --

She hurries off. Bill makes it only a few steps before his face changes: What was that?

INT. MARYLEBONE CAMPUS - FACULTY CLUB - DAY

White napkins, nice silver. Seo-yun and Rentz pick at salads.

SEO-YUN
How's Moira?

Rentz nods.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
(clearing her throat)
The university's not going to pay
instructors who have less than five
students in their seminars.

RENTZ
Fewer.

SEO-YUN
Pardon?

RENTZ
Fewer than five students. For
countable things it's fewer.

RENTZ (CONT'D)	SEO-YUN
Less is for singular mass	Elliott --
nouns.	

RENTZ
I supported you. For chair.

SEO-YUN
I know.
(a beat)
(MORE)

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

But I'm going to have to put you on
this -- list.

RENTZ

Tell them I'll do it without
compensation.

SEO-YUN

Yasmin said you didn't --

RENTZ

If they want to cut my pay, they
can cut my pay. Just don't let them
take away my teaching.

INT. BILL'S OFFICE - LATER - DAY

Bill reviews his lecture notes. He gets distracted, flips his
pencil, picks up his phone, puts it down.

He starts to work again and then the motion-sensor lights
CLICK OFF. He waves his arms around. They CLICK ON.

But his concentration is broken. He leans back in his chair
until it tips and falls. He just lies there. Closes his eyes.

Above him the lights CLICK OFF. And then the door opens.

SEO-YUN

Bill?

She turns to leave.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

Fuck.

BILL

(unseen, from the floor)
Right here.

She goes over to him.

SEO-YUN

Lila just called me. You're late.
Again. Is your fuckin' phone dead?

EXT. CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Seo-yun and Bill rush across campus.

SEO-YUN

She also mentioned there are some holes in your syllabus. It has TBD for the next eight weeks.

BILL

-- ?

SEO-YUN

The kids keep asking her what they're you know, actually going to study?

BILL

I'm on it.

Seo-yun nods, not sure whether to leave it at that. Then she stops him.

SEO-YUN

I don't know how to say this so I'm just going to say it: get. Your shit together.

BILL

Funny. That's *exactly* what Doodles said. The two of you must be --

SEO-YUN

There's nothing funny about it, Bill. Pay attention in your own class. You enroll high because you're checked out.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

Please no more coasting.

BILL

Wow. Okay. Really?

*

BILL (CONT'D)

When I was chair I didn't ride your ass like this.

BILL (CONT'D)

I didn't walk around campus with --

SEO-YUN

You didn't have to.

*

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)

I wasn't a fucking embarrassment.

As she turns to go, he stares after her.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - LECTURE HALL - LATER - DAY

Bill now stands behind the lectern. Suddenly it all seems different: distracted, disconnected students in the rows -- for an instant, he freezes.

And then he pushes his notes aside.

BILL
(clearing his throat)
How many of you did the reading? I mean, honestly.

No response.

BILL (CONT'D)
How many of you are drunk right now? Or stoned?

Two students raise their hands, to SNICKERS.

BILL (CONT'D)
See? That's fine.

He goes to the board and writes "ABSURDISM" at head height, then pauses to look at it, arm still extended, chalk in hand.

BILL (CONT'D)
Life isn't what you think. It'll never be what you think.

Confused faces. But curiosity, even dawning respect on some of the smarter ones.

Underneath "ABSURDISM" he writes "FASCISM."

He taps under the words with the side of his hand, leaving his arm at an angle similar to that of a Sieg Heil salute.

FASCISM:

BILL (CONT'D)
All meaning is ascribed to the state.

ABSURDISM:

BILL (CONT'D)
There is no meaning.

Then:

BILL (CONT'D)
Heil Hitler!

If there's a ripple, he doesn't pick up on it. He's back at the lectern:

BILL (CONT'D)

The idea that we exist in a purposeless universe came about after two world wars. 85 million dead, including the camps. What did Camus and Beckett have in common?

STUDENT

They both fought in the Resistance?

BILL

Yep. For two people who were convinced that there's no cure for being on this earth, that there's "nothing to be done" --

Rapt faces now: the mojo is back. As he continues we PULL BACK SLOWLY through the window, holding on Bill as he lectures, beautifully, his face lit --

BILL (CONT'D)

They still tried.

Eventually we've PULLED BACK to a full view of campus: the clocktower, the trees turning.

EXT. FACULTY PARKING LOT - LATER - DAY

Bill opens the door of his car. And then he shuts it and heads back to the department at double speed.

He only makes it a few feet before Lila waylays him.

LILA

Hey. We really, really need to --

BILL

Do I have something in my teeth?

LILA

No.

He runs off.

LILA (CONT'D)

Bill!

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - SEO-YUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill barges in, out of breath.

BILL
You were right.

Seo-yun looks up.

BILL (CONT'D)
I'm going to --

SEO-YUN
About what? That the humanities are
dying? That you're all going over
the cliff? And I'm standing here
like -- the fuckin' Korean catcher
in the rye --

Then:

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
And my poor kid. She's the one who
actually -- I waited my whole life
to get her, and now that I have
her?

Beat.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
What if I got a lemon?

BILL
Then -- you'll --

SEO-YUN
Don't tell me to fuckin' make
lemonade. I hate people who say
that.

BILL
Me, too. You know what you could do
though?

SEO-YUN
What?

BILL
Make hay while the sun shines.

Seo-yun rolls her eyes but she's smiling.

SEO-YUN
Nope.

He tilts his head at her. She tilts her head the same way.

BILL
You want to have dinner some time?

SEO-YUN
What do you mean?

He shrugs, flirty.

BILL
What do you mean what do I mean?

SEO-YUN
What's wrong with you?

BILL
I think you know most of it.

SEO-YUN
Okay, for starters: I'm your boss.

BILL
Want to have dinner, Boss Lady?

A small smile from Seo-yun.

INT. STADIUM - JOAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Joan Hambling frowns down at her laptop. LOUD CHEERING AND FRATTY LAUGHTER seep through the door. She stands up.

INT. STADIUM - MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Joan turns a corner. A bunch of HALF-NAKED YOUNG MEN are messing around.

JOAN
Excuse me? Could you keep it down?

NAKED FOOTBALL PLAYER #1
What?

JOAN
If you could just keep it down? I'm trying to write a book.
(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

Books are these things with letters that make up words and some of them form universal statements about humankind and if your brains hadn't been concussed within an inch of their lives or saturated in Jägermeister and god only knows what else you might actually experience *reverence* for something other than your own fucking navels.

NAKED FOOTBALL PLAYER #2

I'm in your class.

JOAN

Pardon?

NAKED FOOTBALL PLAYER #2

17th Century Ethics and Aesthetics?

Then:

NAKED FOOTBALL PLAYER #2 (CONT'D)

I love Milton.

JOAN

(barely audible)

Me too.

Joan clears her throat but is still barely intelligible.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Monday, then.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Tina sleeps sitting up. She doesn't stir as Mary removes her glasses from her hands, then the phone from her purse.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - SEO-YUN'S OFFICE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Seo-yun heads out through the darkened department. But as she reaches the department's glass door she's stopped by Lila.

LILA

Professor Kim. You have a minute?
It's about Professor Dobson.

SEO-YUN

What about him?

LILA
 Things got a little weird in
 lecture --

SEO-YUN
 Listen, I'm going to have to put a
 moratorium on complaints about
 Professor Dobson. He's trying his
 best. I heard about his -- goof.
 And in the context of what he's
 going through --

LILA
 I don't think --

SEO-YUN
 (holding up her hand)
 He never would have meant for his
 class to see a video of Sharon, let
 alone a video in which she was --

LILA
 No no no. I'm talking about --
 something else. Here.

As Lila digs for her phone, Provost Peters appears.

PROVOST PETERS
 There you are.

SEO-YUN
 Provost Peters. I'm glad to see
 you. I --
 (to Lila)
 Can we revisit this?

LILA
 Um, I'd visit it right now. He's
 gonna get legit cancelled.

PROVOST PETERS
 Who?

LILA
 Professor Dobson.

PROVOST PETERS
 What happened?

LILA
 In lecture today, he --

SEO-YUN
 Bill's been working his TA
 too hard.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
 Lila, please let me know if you
 need extra help. We can spare Tina
 to do copies. Anything you need.

Seo-yun stares at her, pleading. Lila adjusts her totebag.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
 Goodnight.

Lila heads off down the hall.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - HALLWAY - SAME TIME - NIGHT

SEO-YUN
 Grad students. They're --

Seo-yun makes a head-exploding gesture.

PROVOST PETERS
 You've always had a soft spot for
 him.

SEO-YUN
 (caught off-guard)
 What? No, I haven't.

PROVOST PETERS
 Not just you. Everyone.

BEEP BEEP: a text alert.

SEO-YUN
 Sorry.

ON HER SCREEN: **Tina:** Hi MOMmy . Try to find me. I left.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
 Oh, God. This is my daughter -- I'm
 going to have to run. I can --

PROVOST PETERS
 I understand. I just wanted to
 apologize for the meeting Monday.
 It may have been rough on you. We
 understand that.

SEO-YUN
 Thank you. I thought you wanted me
 to give you the name. The person
 to, you know, let go.

PROVOST PETERS
Well, that too.

SEO-YUN
I can't. There's no one to cut in
this department.

The BEEP of her phone again. And again. She turns to go --

PROVOST PETERS
(shaking his head)
We have to modernize, Dr. Kim. And
we'd really hoped to keep you here
at Marylebone through it all --

SEO-YUN
(turning back)
What does *that* mean?

PROVOST PETERS
Go. Your daughter's more
important. We'll get to this.

INT. ENGLISH DEPT - FRONT STEPS - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Seo-yun sprints down the steps to find Mary.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Daphne walks up Bill's steps holding a white pastry box.

INTERCUT BETWEEN SEO-YUN'S HUNT AND BILL'S HOUSE

-- Seo-yun runs up the stairs of a different building.

-- Daphne walks down the steps of the porch.

-- Seo-yun opens the door of a lecture hall:

SEO-YUN
Moo Moo?

Nothing.

-- Seo-yun opens the door of another lecture hall.

SEO-YUN (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Mary?!

Nothing.

-- Bill steps out on his porch. On his doorstep: a white pastry box. He looks up. No one's there.

INT. SACKBUTT HALL - YET ANOTHER LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Seo-yun enters. She notices the blackboard. It reads "PROFESR POOP" in large, childish letters.

She opens the door wider and Mary jumps up from behind the lectern wearing Tina's glasses:

MARY

Boo!

Seo-yun SCREAMS --

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

-- as Bill opens the box. It's a pie. He opens the note taped to the inside of the box.

In girly handwriting: "Do I dare to eat a peach?" x.

Bill steps back. His face goes white.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. COX MEMORIAL LIBRARY - NIGHT

DAPHNE'S FACE, cheeks flushed from her escapade, as she passes through a turnstile. Her phone BUZZES.

She checks it as she heads into a cathedral-like reading room full of STUDENTS. And stops dead.

ON HER SCREEN: a meme of Bill sieg-heiling over and over.

We PULL BACK. BUZZ after BUZZ as notifications and texts start to spread around her. Students reach for their phones.

PULL BACK and BACK to find that hundreds of cellphones are BUZZING at the same time.