(CROOPER and CHLOE, both 16. Nature sounds, the light, tell us that we’re up on a hill. There’s a discarded bouquet of flowers on the ground.

They stare out at the town below them.

This is the moment after a break-up.

Crooper tries to contain his grief. Chloe’s natural mien is gruff, and she doesn’t soften it too much now, thinking perhaps that a little edge might make this easier for Crooper.

CROOPER

Can we still be friends?

CHLOE

No. That’s always a bad idea.

(This starts the tip into tears.)

CHLOE

I’m gonna let you be alone.

CROOPER

Is it something I did?

CHLOE

No.

CROOPER

Well, is there a reason?

CHLOE

I don’t see this as a romantic thing. (beat) I’m gonna go down the hill now.

CROOPER

No, please!

CHLOE

Come here. You know something I hate about myself? It’s that, when people cry, I dislike them. STOP CRYING!
(This does not have the effect she hoped it would. He tips into snot-nosed meltdown.)

CHLOE

That new girl likes you. Jessica.

CROOPER

I don’t like her. Can we talk about this at least? I could change.

CHLOE

You know why people like love stories? It’s because in a love story, you can make someone fall in love with you, but in real life you never can. (beat.)You don’t need me here for this.

(She starts to leave. BARK comes running in. He’s carrying a vase.)

Crooper hides his grief.)

BARK

There he is! I knew I’d find you here. — (a little less happy:) hey Chloe (to Crooper) I brought you something. You know, you said you hadn’t gotten around to buying a Mother’s Day gift and I’d already gotten mine taken care of and I was at Leona’s Bric and Brac and I thought, “hey that’s a nice vase” and you wouldn’t have to pay me back and you wouldn’t have to tell your mom that I’m the one who bought it.

(He notices the discarded flowers on the ground.)

BARK

Hey!

(He picks them up, puts them in the vase.)

BARK

Look, it’s perfect!

(Something about how close Chloe and Crooper are standing makes Bark realize.)

BARK

... Are you guys dating? That’s great!

But then it dawns on Bark that something is wrong.)
Are you OK? Is he OK?

Bark, it would be better if you left.

But he hasn’t even see the vase.

Please leave.

But you should look to see if you want it.

We want you to leave.

He doesn’t.

Yes I do! Please go!

(Bark is stung. He’s unsure what to do with the flowers. Finally, he sets them back down on the ground where he found them, leaves with the vase.)

How about just one more date?

No. There are reasons you should go out with a lot of people when you’re our age. Mathematical reasons. You should ask out the new girl.

(She leaves, taking the flowers.)

(Time passes. The temperature drops. Crooper, now composed, stands alone, reading a text he’s just written.)

Hey Jess! I’m up on our hill, which means I’m thinking about you. I’m also thinking about math. Devon was telling me about something called the Fry algorithm.
It’s a mathematical way to make a choice. The basic idea is that if you’re choosing something, you estimate how many things total you’re going to have to choose from, and you examine a third of those to figure out what you like and don’t like. Then, after that, you choose the first one that was better than all the ones you looked at already. (beat.) Jessica, this has been such an amazing five months. But unfortunately, we’re not a third of the way into our dating lives, so it’s too early to settle on someone.

(He corrects this to:)

CROOPER
It’s too early to decide on someone. I wish the math of this was better for us. (Even reading this is hard for him.) I asked Marla to the All Hallow’s Eve parade. Sorry for the late notice. I know we’ll always be friends.

(And he hits:)

CROOPER
Send. (But it doesn’t. Something has gone wrong.) Send. Sennnnd. SEND!

(Jessica enters out of his line of sight, wearing a Halloween mask. She carries a small bag.)

JESSICA
Hey hey!

CROOPER
Hey!

JESSICA
I knew you’d be up here. (She takes off the mask, looks out at the town.) I never get tired of this view. Even the Costco looks good from up here. I thought you might need an after-school snack.

(She takes out grapes.)

CROOPER
Thank you.

JESSICA
Red. And green. I was in the grocery store thinking, how do I not know your grape preference? And...

(She takes out a second mask.)
JESSICA
And ... Happy All Hallows Eve! Try it.

(He puts the mask on for a moment. She holds up a mirror to let him see his reflection.)

JESSICA
It’s good, right?

CROOPER
It’s great.

(A long moment. )

JESSICA
Do have something you want to say to me? (beat.) You haven’t even wished me a happy birthday.

CROOPER
Happy birthday.

JESSICA
Did you forget, or is there a surprise later?

CROOPER
I didn’t forget.

JESSICA
I knew you didn’t.

CROOPER
(a tad abrupt) I’ve been thinking about math. Devon was explaining a math way to make a choice.

JESSICA
Is this the stupid Fry thing? I made so much fun of him. It might be a good way to choose an apartment but trying to use it to choose a girlfriend is very ... male.

(Crooper is feeling a little stressed.)

JESSICA
What’s the matter?
CROOPER
Did you know this is where Chloe broke up with me?

JESSICA
Chloe? I didn’t know you dated Chloe.

CROOPER
Yeah. She thought it was a good place to break up because it’s beautiful and—

JESSICA
You dated Chloe?

CROOPER
Yeah. And it was a really easy break-up cause—

JESSICA
How did I not know this?

CROOPER
It was just six dates.

JESSICA
Why would you date someone that angry?

CROOPER
She’s not that angry once you get to know her.

JESSICA
And the card thing. I thought it was a joke at first. “I said Hi, I’m Jessica.” And she was like, (A grand presentation.) “My card.”

CROOPER
I liked her. She kept a journal mostly to list all the ways that she could improve herself.

JESSICA
I do that.

CROOPER
I liked the way she broke up with me; it was clear and simple. She just said, I don’t see this as a romantic thing. (Straight at Jessica.) I don’t see this as a romantic thing.

JESSICA
(missing it). I think it’s better to give reasons.

(They stare down at the town.)
JESSICA
Do you ever—do you ever have something you want to say, and it shouldn’t be that hard but—it’s like jumping off the high dive—you’ll know it’ll be fine, but it’s still scary to do?

CROOPER

Yeah.

JESSICA
Let me see your hand.

(He holds out his hand, probably face up, as though she were going to drop something in it.

JESSICA
Close your eyes.

(She turns it over, slides a ring on it. This takes some doing.)

JESSICA
I am crazy about you.

CROOPER
Oh wow.

JESSICA
Do you like it?

CROOPER
It’s beautiful.

JESSICA
I decided to call it a “ring of closeness.” Is it too tight?

CROOPER
No it’s perfect. It looks expensive.

JESSICA
Not in the long run. It’s a way of saying— well here goes—(It might or might not be clear that this has been memorized.) This is an offering from my heart. I know it’s too early at our age to think that we might spend the rest of our lives together, but it kind of seems like we will.
CROOPER
(again, a little abrupt) You know something I really like about you? I think you’re really strong. Like, if something bad happened to you, you’d just take a deep a deep breath and then a month later it’s like, OK, that’s in my past.

JESSICA
I’m so glad you think that. At my last school, I dated this guy named Chip Chip for about—it wasn’t even that long—not even three months. He broke up with me totally out of the blue. BY TEXT! And... at first I thought I was fine—I was sad but I thought I’d just snap out of it. But I didn’t. It seemed like the world changed, like everybody could suddenly tell that I was a fraud. I stopped going out, I lost weight. My parents didn’t say it, but I think was part of why we moved here, to give me a fresh start.

(Crooper’s on the verge of a panic attack.)

JESSICA
Parade’s starting. We should get down there.

CROOPER
I kind of already asked Mad Cat to the parade.

JESSICA
(beat) Mad Cat?

CROOPER
I’m so bad at breaking up with people.

JESSICA
When did you ask her?

CROOPER
Kind of a while ago.

JESSICA
You’re breaking up with me? Why?

CROOPER
I don’t know. The reasons a person tells you they break up wth you are never the real reason.

(This sends her into grief.)

CROOPER
A lot of guys in this school want to date you.
JESSICA
I don’t want those boys! We could make this work.

CROOPER
You know why people like love stories? It’s because in a love story, you can make someone fall in love with you, but in real life you never can.

(A long moment.)

CROOPER
Are you OK?

(She doesn’t answer.)

CROOPER
I have to get down there. Sorry.

(He tries to take off the ring, but it’s too tight.)

CROOPER
I can’t get this off, but I’ll use soap and water on it tonight.

(He starts to leave.

We hear the sound of a text being sent from Crooper’s phone. A moment later, we hear Jessica’s text notification.)

JESSICA
Was that you? (reads) Hey! I’m standing on our hill, which means I’m thinking of you...

(She reads silently for a moment.)

JESSICA
“I wish the math of was better for us.

(Some expression of disgust.)

JESSICA
This is so badly written!

Math—A—matical with an “A.” Do you ever even read?

“We’re” is supposed to have an apostrophe!”
“I know we’ll be always be friends.” (Some expression of revulsion.)

Crooper, we’re gonna be classmates for two more years. I’ll be here when your crappy study habits catch up with you. I hope your application to UCSB gets lost and then mysteriously found and then you still don’t get in! I’ll know when Mad Cat breaks your heart, because that’s gonna happen, don’t ask me how I know. And when she breaks your heart, I hope that it crushes your spirit and that you...

(She gets emotional)

JESSICA

I don’t hope that. Go away.

CROOPER

You know what I hope? I hope we can still come up to our hill sometimes.

JESSICA

This isn’t our hill. It’s my hill.

(Time passes. Jessica pulls herself together, becomes delightful, confident, staring out at the city.

Bark enters, holding a bag.)

BARK

I thought I’d find you here! I waited for you outside of study hall, but somehow you slipped by me.

JESSICA

Yeah, I had to leave a little early.

BARK

I brought you something.

(He hands her:)

JESSICA

A taillight!

BARK

You know you said yours was out and we were in Hemet and I thought, “hey, I bet Jessica didn’t get that taillight yet.”
JESSICA
Thank you, Bark. You didn’t have to do that.

BARK
No. I didn’t.

(A moment of courage gathering ends without courage.)

BARK
If you’re gonna head down the south path I can drive you home.

JESSICA
I don’t mind the walk.

BARK
Where do you live?

JESSICA
Right by exit 237.

BARK
That’s a good area. You can walk to the car wash. So, what are you up to?

JESSICA
I should get home. I have a ridiculous amount of work.

BARK
Me too. Maybe we could study together.

JESSICA
I actually need complete silence when I work.

BARK
Oh. So. One question. Would you maybe want to go to a movie or dinner or something with me?

JESSICA
Bark, that’s so nice, but I’m not actually dating at the moment.

BARK
That’s my point. Shouldn’t we fix that?

JESSICA
No, thank you though.
BARK
When you start dating again, can I reserve the first slot?

(A moment as she thinks of the gentlest way to be honest.)

JESSICA
Probably not.

BARK
If you change your mind, could we have a signal?

JESSICA
It won’t happen.

BARK
Like a good one would be that I sort of lean my head to the side, and then just by instinct you lean your head onto mine.

JESSICA
Bark, that will never happen.

BARK
You don’t know for sure.

JESSICA
You know why people like love stories? It’s because in love stories, you can make someone fall in love with you. But in real life, it never ever happens.

BARK
Next time I ask you out, I’m going to do it way better.

JESSICA
You did it fine.

BARK
I’m practicing. I asked another girl out.

JESSICA
Great!

BARK
Thanks.
JESSICA

And?

BARK

I’m still deciding.

JESSICA

Deciding what?

BARK

If I want to go out with her.

JESSICA

Wait, what?

BARK

I have to figure out if I’m going to go out with her.

JESSICA

What did she say when you asked her?

BARK

She said OK.

JESSICA

Then you have to go out with her.

BARK

No.

JESSICA

Yes. Bark, that’s the rule. If you ask a girl out and she says yes then you’re committed.

BARK

But I don’t even like her.

JESSICA

Why did you ask her out?

BARK

I was practicing.

JESSICA

Who is it?
I was practicing for you.

Who’d you ask out?

Chloe.

Chloe!?

Exactly.

What were you thinking?

I was sure she’d say no!

She must like you.

But I don’t like her. (Revulsion.) The card thing. “My card.”

Well, you’re gonna go out with her.

You can’t make me.

You’re gonna go out with her and you’re gonna be nice. You won’t be glum. You’re not gonna text.

I wouldn’t do that. I wouldn’t go on a date and be a dick.

I know you wouldn’t.

We don’t have anything to talk about.
JESSICA
Tell her you know she writes in a journal.

BARK
How do you know?

JESSICA
Cause I know her type of girl. I guarantee you she writes ideas for self-improvement in it.

BARK
So I tell her about her journal and then we stare at each other for two hours.

JESSICA
Here’s what you do. You go for a walk.

BARK
A walk.

JESSICA
Yeah. A walk is a really good date because it takes the pressure off. It’s OK to just be quiet and enjoy the hills.

(And now Bark and Chloe are on their walking date. Chloe’s hair has been fancied.)

They walk for a long, long moment in kill-me-now silence. This conversation is full of awful please-fill-this-moment silences.

BARK
You know, the good thing about walking for a date is, it’s OK to just be quiet and enjoy the hills.

CHLOE
That’s true. That’s smart. (Pause.) This is a really good banana.

BARK
Bananas are clones.

CHLOE
They are?

BARK
Yeah. They’re all genetically identical.
CHLOE

Well. Thanks anyway.

BARK

I thought you might be hungry after school.

CHLOE

I was.

(A moment of walking.)

BARK

You seem like the kind of girl who keeps a journal.

CHLOE

How’d you know that?

BARK

I know some things. (beat.) I bet you use it to keep track of things you want to improve on.

CHLOE

Who told you this?!

BARK

Nobody. I don’t think you’re that hard to get to know.

CHLOE

I’m not.

BARK

Mean and competent. You’re very well branded.

CHLOE

Oh that’s so irritating!

BARK

Sorry!

CHLOE

There’s people who do things and people who say “thank you” when it’s done. And the people who say “thank you” think that’s their whole job. And God forbid the people who are, whatever, building the pyramids or whatever get a little snarly once in a while! We’re still the ones building the pyramids!

(A moment of walking.)
I have some feedback for you. Are you open to hearing it?

Feedback.

Yeah.

No, I don’t want your feedback!

It’s good feedback though.

I have no interest.

But I think you might really like it!

No absolutely not! I have no interest in your feedback, none!

But it’s so good.

FORGET IT! (beat) Is it about my hair?

No. What happened to it?

It came out different than usual.

I’m just going to give you my feedback.

I don’t want your feedback!

You’ve got to lose the cards.
No.

People think it’s weird.

You’re not allowed to talk to people about weird!

But yours is so fixable!

Mean and weird. Why did you even ask me out? Was it some kind of dare?

No.

Then why?

I don’t really think you’re mean. It was a joke. Sometimes I’m funny on purpose. (beat.)

So do you accept my feedback?

STOP TALKING!

But it would make a difference for you!

It’s not fixable and I don’t want to talk about it.

Why not?

My family is private about medical things.

I won’t tell anyone.
CHLOE
You say that now, but someday ... you’re talking with someone and the conversation runs dry...

BARK
That never happens to me.

CHLOE
And suddenly, “you can’t tell anyone but here’s the thing about that girl with the cards....”

BARK
It’s medical?

CHLOE
Yeah.

(This had some regret in it.)

BARK
You’re right. It’s private.

CHLOE
(beat) You remember that story about the guy hiking in Joshua Tree who fell off a cliff, but then they were thinking that maybe the wife pushed him, but they couldn’t prove it?

BARK
Yeah.

CHLOE
That’s what’s going to happen to you if you tell anyone.

BARK
I won’t.

CHLOE
When I was a kid, I stuttered. I mean, just crazy. I couldn’t get through a sentence. And ... we tried all these things, and the one that worked for me was, I’d go like this.

(She puts her hands over her ears.)

CHLOE
If I talked like this it created a feedback loop and for some reason that helped. Over time I got so I didn’t have to use my hands. Now I almost never stutter.

(And this is hard for her.)
CHLOE
Except -- it’s the craziest thing ... I can’t say my own name.

BARK

Oh.

CHLOE

Yeah.

BARK

You can’t say Chloe?

CHLOE

No.

BARK

Try it.

CHLOE

No.

BARK

Please?

(She just shakes her head.)

CHLOE

That’s why I carry the cards.

BARK

(beat) Well, we should totally hang out.

CHLOE

You think?

BARK

Yeah. You stay close to me, and when people ask your name, I’ll say it for you.

(They walk together for a moment.)

CHLOE

All right. You’re my boyfriend.

BARK

No I’m not.
CHLOE
That’s so cute.

BARK
I don’t think of you that way.

CHLOE
I’ll fix that.

BARK
But I like someone else.

CHLOE
That’s not gonna happen. What time are you picking me up for the All Hallow’s eve parade tomorrow?

BARK
We’re not going to the All Hallow’s Eve parade?

CHLOE
Yes we are, cause we’re a couple.

BARK
We’re not a couple.

CHLOE
Then why are we going to the All Hallow’s Eve parade together?

BARK
We’re not.

BARK
You know why people like love stories? Because in love stories, you can make someone fall in love with you, and in real life you never can.

CHLOE
Who are you quoting?

BARK
Nobody.

CHLOE
Yes you are. You didn’t think of that.

BARK
Why, cause I’m not smart enough?
CHLOE
No, cause you don’t believe it. You’re mine now.

BARK
I don’t feel that way.

CHLOE
Not right now. But it’s red light green light, Barkerino. You look and I’m way off in the
distance, barely even there. But then ... green light. You look away. Red light. I’m closer.
Green light. You’re doing your regular life .... red light. Oh, I’m even closer. And it keeps
heart and you never even saw me move.

BARK
Could I have a bite?

CHLOE
Yeah.

(A small moment of banana etiquette.)

BARK
It is good.

CHLOE
Told you.

(And they stroll in silence, experiencing all the emotions
that accompany the start of a romance: shock, giddiness,
joy, confusion, fear. This is mostly done separately
because they’re pretending to look out at the hills.

Finally Bark goes for it. He puts his head down on
Chloe’s shoulder. After a long moment she leans her head
on the top of his.)