UNTITLED AISHA MUHARRAR PROJECT

"Pilot"

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COLD OPEN

INT. ZORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Typical teen bedroom. Pink walls, a ONE DIRECTION poster, a clearly PHOTO-SHOPPED ONE DIRECTION poster with ZORA in it.

PJ (O.S.)
Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Zora. And from the moment she was born, her mother knew there was something different--

But we also see posters of Joan Didion, Oprah Winfrey, and Sheryl Sandberg, as well as an OVERFLOWING BOOKCASE and several TROPHIES and RIBBONS like "Science Fair First Place," "A+ Hospital Volunteer," "Student of the Month" for every month, and "Best Trophy Display."

PJ (O.S.) (CONT'D)
-- about her. Because this baby didn't close her eyes. Not for twenty-four hours. You know why?

We settle on ZORA WOODSTEN (12), a curious, idealistic go-getter and her mother PJ BREARLEY (late 30s), a smart, staid pragmatist -- the kind of woman who always wears a ponytail.

PJ (CONT'D)
Because Zora was so excited to see the world, she couldn't stop taking it in.

ZORA
Because Zora was so excited to see the world, she couldn't stop taking it in.

ZORA
Yeah, there's no way that happened.

PJ
Yes, it did!

ZORA
You should be able to Snopes personal anecdotes.

PJ
It happened.

ZORA
How much pain medication were you on?

PJ
My drug-induced state trumps your non-existent newborn memories.

ZORA
I looked it up and if I did that as a baby, I'd have serious brain damage.

PJ
Who's to say you don't?

Zora rolls her eyes as PJ laughs at her own joke.

PJ (CONT'D)
Okay, see you tomorrow, almost-birthday girl.

PJ leaves. Zora waits until she hears PJ's footsteps down the hall, then she turns on a reading lamp and goes to her window.

ZORA (V.O.)
As far as origin stories go, mine makes sense in theory. All my life, I've been fascinated by people. Like how everyone is so different, but also we're kind of exactly the same?

She watches as CARS pull in to driveways. NEIGHBORS walk into their homes. Everyone has similar routines..

ZORA (V.O.)
I always wonder -- what do other people think about?
(looking at her posters)
Like what is Oprah thinking right now?
("Oprah voice")
I should double check I locked the door and then say good night to Sted-mannnn! Poor Stedman. Always a groomsman.
(then)
All I want to do is figure out people. And help them. Because I'm a pretty positive person, but every now and then I have this sneaking suspicion that life just totally--

PJ (O.S.)
Go to bed and stop spying on our neighbors!

ZORA (V.O.)
Sucks.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. ZORA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Zora's asleep, but wakes suddenly and BOLTS OUT OF BED, with a giant smile on her face. This is it.

She sticks her head out her window.

ZORA
I'm thirteen!

ISAAC
Great! Now, shut up!

Zora looks down to see ISAAC (24), a pseudo-confident, blunt pessimist who hides all emotions behind jokes. That guy.

ZORA (V.O.)
Isaac's our neighbor's
(doing an impression)
"goddamm millennial layabout expects the world on a platter" son.

ZORA
It's my birthday and it's the first day of school. This is like the ultimate blank slate!

Isaac aims the water hose at her.

ISAAC
Can you mute the Disney princess routine? This is my me time.

ZORA
Watering our plants is your me time?

ZORA (V.O.)
I think we are solely responsible for Isaac's income. He's our gardener, computer guy, baby-sitter -- not that I even really need one --

ISAAC
When you live with your mom, you take any quiet time you can get.

ZORA
I live with my mother too!
(needling him)
Oh my God, we're totally the same!

Zora SHUTS THE WINDOW. We hear a voice out of nowhere:

DANIELLE (O.S.)
Happy Birthday!

Zora heads to her laptop, with a video chat with her friend DANIELLE (13), cute face, deadpan energy. People often have to ask Danielle if she's being sarcastic. She is. Always.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Yeah, as someone who's already thirteen, I can tell you it's a real game changer. Like before I had no breasts. But now, it's getting really weird that I have no breasts.

ZORA
Thirteen is going to be awesome.

INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

PJ finishes frosting a birthday cake.

PJ
Thirteen is going to be horrible.

JOHN SHAW(40), PJ's friend, affable, charming -- he looks like he was once the high school quarterback. And he was.

JOHN
Why? Zora's a good kid.

PJ
Yes, a good kid. I turned into holy hell when I became a teenager. Last night, she was already trying to stay up later. I just wanted to grab her and scream, "Never grow up! Just stay like this forever."

JOHN
Aww, thanks for reaffirming my choice not to have a family.

Isaac walks through the kitchen door and immediately rifles through the cabinets.

ISAAC
Where's my cereal?

PJ sets the cake on the table. Isaac tries to steal some frosting. She swats his hand away.

PJ
Maybe new rule? No free food unless you've actually lived in my uterus.

Zora walks in.

PJ (CONT'D)
Speaking of, there she is! Happy birthday, honey! So, tonight after the party, we'll go to Collins Cabana for your special super duper sundae and then...

ZORA
Super duper sundae, really? I feel like that's kinda for babies.

Zora doesn't notice how this crushes PJ. John does.

PJ
But you go every year. It's a tradition.

ZORA
Slavery was a tradition. Should people have kept doing that?

PJ
You found a way to equate ice cream sundaes with slavery. Well done, but not fair.

ZORA
I'm excited about my party though.
(explaining to John)
It's more of a cocktail thing. Professors, artists, luminaries...

John gives her a blank look. He wants to understand, but...

ZORA (CONT'D)
Think Oprah's Legends Ball.

JOHN
What?

ZORA
Think Gwyneth Paltrow's GOOP soiree.

JOHN
Right. What?

ZORA
Think about a nice party with people dressed up and eating good food.

John nods.

ZORA (CONT'D)
What percentage of that nod is, "Yes, I understand " vs. "I want out of this conversation."

JOHN
About 30/70.

ZORA
That's the highest it's ever been!

They HIGH FIVE. Zora quickly cuts a slice of cake.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Oh and Mom, I thought of the perfect gift you can give me. Remember that question I asked you awhile back? You always said you'd tell me when I was old enough, and I'm pretty sure I'm old enough.

PJ
(nervous)
Well, I don't know if I would define thirteen as --

ZORA
Super excited for that gift. Bye!

She rushes off. PJ looks terrified.

PJ
It begins.

<u>INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY</u>

Zora, reading from a list, walks with Danielle.

ZORA
...and rescue a baby tiger. So, that's everything I want to accomplish this year. Let me see your list.

DANIELLE
I didn't make one.
(off Zora's look)
I attempted bangs last year. That's enough for a lifetime.

ZORA
Eighth grade's going to be big for us.

DANIELLE
No, it’s going to be just like seventh grade. We’ll still be weirdos.

ZORA
We’re not weirdos. Tina Jeffreys is a weirdo.

TINA JEFFREYS, a girl wearing all gray and KNITTING as she TALKS TO HERSELF walks by. Behind her is JESSICA BREARLEY, Zora's twenty-two year old cousin.

JESSICA
Get to class, weirdo!

ZORA
Hey, there’s my cousin! She just started working here.

Jessica is pretty, ditzy, and self-absorbed. She’s a lot more like the average teen than Zora and Danielle.

JESSICA
What up, nerd?

Zora notices Jessica’s orange vest.

ZORA
Are you a lunch aide? You told my mom you were a teacher here.

JESSICA
No, I told her I <u>teach</u> here. And I do. I may be a lunch aide, but I'm handing out lessons on the daily.

She points out an blemish-ridden STUDENT.

JESSICA (CONT’D)
Never too early to start using concealer, sweetheart.

She makes a motion like “see?” to Zora and Danielle.

<u>EXT. SHAW’S CONVENIENCE - DAY</u>

A one-stop shop for the town’s needs. In front is a giant CARDBOARD CUT-OUT of a high school John in a football uniform with a speech bubble: “At Shaw’s, <u>you’re</u> the MVP!”

<u>INT. SHAW’S CONVENIENCE - EMPLOYEE OFFICE - DAY</u>

PJ sits at her desk. We see her desk plate: “Accountant.”

JOHN
What's the question Zora wanted answered? Is it the sex talk?

PJ
No, we already had that talk. We watched *Dirty Dancing* a few years ago and it kind of forced my hand. All I remembered was the dancing!

JOHN
So what does she want to know?

PJ
Why her dad and I got a divorce.

JOHN
This is a fun day for you! You get to panic that your only child is growing up, revisit wounds of the past, and talk to Mrs. Green.

PJ
Who?

JOHN
She's the customer I need you to talk to. I'm no good with old women. No sexual tension. What's my angle?

PJ
Okay, Isaac and I can do the rest of these party errands on my lunch break.
(reading off list)
"E-mail performance artist." Can you believe the performance artist has a rider?

JOHN
Go back a step.

PJ
Can you believe we invited a performance artist?

JOHN
There it is.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

We see how Zora's day goes. All of her classmates are slack-jawed and uninterested, while she's enthralled.

ZORA (V.O.)
What's the point of zoning out at school? If you have to be there, shouldn't you ... be there?

A QUICK MONTAGE of DIFFERENT TEACHER asking questions. And each time, no one raises their hand. Neither does Zora, but she clearly knows the answer.

ZORA (V.O.)
It wasn't easy being the one in class who always knew the answers. A lot of times, I pretended I didn't just to give someone else a chance --

Zora looks around, waiting for someone else to step up. It seems like a DUMB-LOOKING GIRL is about to raise her hand --

DUMB-LOOKING GIRL
I have to go to the bathroom. My glitter eyeshadow got in my eye. Also, am I blind now?

ZORA (V.O.)
-- but eventually, it just got to be uncomfortable and I'd have to say something.

In every situation, Zora reluctantly raises her hand.

ZORA (V.O.)
Then I'd feel like no one was raising their hands because they all knew something I didn't and that was the real test. And I was failing. But also, I totally knew the answer, so why shouldn't I say it? Plus, Ms. Chu gives candy when you got it right.

MRS. CHU hands Zora a Snickers.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - LOCKERS HALLWAY - LATER

Zora opens up her locker and a MOUND OF CANDY falls out.

INT. MR. SCOTT'S CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. SCOTT, a handsome young teacher, writes "JOURNALISM - MR. SCOTT" on the blackboard.

In his dreams, he's Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*. In reality, he's the teacher from *Peanuts*.

MR. SCOTT
This is the one elective that also counts as an extra-curricular. That means I expect your commitment not just during 3rd period, but when you're outside the classroom as well.

KID
(whispers to a friend)
I thought this class was supposed to be an easy A.

ZORA (V.O.)
I love high expectations. It makes it even more fun to surpass them!

MR. SCOTT
I expect you all to have five story ideas by the end of the day.

Zora turns to Danielle.

ZORA
I'll do one better. Number one on my goals list is write an awesome human interest story for the paper.

DANIELLE
(reading)
Number two is "be the first teen to win a Pulitzer." You don't want to put any steps between those?

ZORA
Nah, it'll all fall into place.

INT. MR. KELLY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Danielle and Zora watch their math teacher, MR. KELLY, drone through a lecture.

DANIELLE
Has there ever been a mass death caused by extreme boredom?

Zora motions for Danielle to be quiet.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
What do teachers like Mr. Kelly even do when they go home?

ZORA
(now interested)
Good question. It's so weird whenever you see teachers outside of school...

DANIELLE
I know, it's like why are you wearing skinny jeans, Mrs. Bronstein? What made you think that trend applied to you?

ZORA
(gasps)
That's what my story should be about! It's perfect. What are teachers like outside of school? The real people behind that.

She points to Mr. Kelly, who digs into his ear and wipes the wax on the chalkboard.

ZORA (CONT'D)
It's time to live up to my 7th grade superlative as "the next Oprah."

DANIELLE
That was a category you created and nominated yourself for last year.

ZORA
I stand by it.

I/E. JESSICA'S CAR - DAY

Zora and Danielle ride with Jessica.

JESSICA
I can't believe I didn't know there was a nails place near school.

ZORA
Take a left.

JESSICA
Why has this car been in front of us the whole time? Oh my God, is it reverse-tailing us?

DANIELLE
That's not a thing. And we're following Mr. Kelly. How have you not picked up on this?

JESSICA
We're turning back.

Zora spots Mr. Kelly getting out of his car.

ZORA
(to Jessica)
You're in it now and if you tell on me, I'll tell your mom you have HPV!

JESSICA
How do you even know that?

ZORA
Your Facebook says, "I got HPV, y'all!"

EXT. FITNESS CENTER - DAY

Zora stands with Mr. Kelly. Danielle and Jessica are nearby.

MR. KELLY
Zora, why aren't you in school? Why aren't any of you in school?

ZORA
I'm writing a story about you and wanted to see what you do at lunch. We know so little about teachers. Like I had no idea you just joined a gym!

MR. KELLY
I've been going for two years.

ZORA
(eyeing his paunch)
Really?
(then)
Can I ask you a few questions?

MR. KELLY
No. Get back to school.

ZORA
Can I interview you there?

MR. KELLY
Fine. Only because you're my one student who actually pays attention. Danielle, I'm looking at you.

DANIELLE
(not paying attention)
What?

INT. MR. KELLY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Zora and Mr. Kelly.

ZORA
Did you always want to be a teacher?

MR. KELLY
Actually, I wanted to be a radio DJ. A shock jock like Howard Stern.

ZORA
What made you change your mind?

MR. KELLY
I didn't. I kind of just fell into teaching.

ZORA
("newscaster voice")
Fell into it how?

MR. KELLY
I guess I haven't thought about it in awhile...

As he prattles on...

ZORA (V.O.)
Jackpot. I'd go for the dream deferred angle. It would be like a scared straight for students. Behold your future.
(looking him over)
A useless gym membership, loafers older than Miley Cyrus, and tuna permanently stuck in your teeth. Should I tell him about the tuna?

INT. PARTY SUPPLY STORE - DAY

PJ walks through, picking up items for the party. There's a lot of black and white -- very classy. Isaac runs up with a motion-activated DANCING SUNFLOWER.

ISAAC
Look at this sunflower. Man, people will do anything to numb themselves to reality.
(beat)
Should we get it?

PJ
Doesn't fit the theme. Gotta stick to the list. Oh, but it is really cute.

EXT. SHAW'S CONVENIENCE - DAY

PJ, in a bit of a fugue state, pulls up. She unloads bags filled with things like the cute sunflower: pink streamers, cartoon gift bags, etc. John comes out.

JOHN
What did you do?

PJ
I don't know what happened. I knew it was wrong, but I just kept grabbing more cute kid stuff. I mean, this could be the last time I get to buy stuff like this for her. At least until she's in her late twenties and only appreciates it ironically.

JOHN
You have to return all this stuff and get what she asked for.

PJ
I know. I'm totally returning it.

PJ acts like she's getting back in the car, then GRABS a bunch of stuff and tries to pass John. He CLOTHESLINES her.

INT. PEER COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

Zora sits in a small classroom with KEL, a fellow student. Numerous inspirational and conflict resolution posters line the walls. Danielle texts on her phone in the background.

ZORA
I started this so students could have a safe space. You can trust me.

KEL
Well, lately, I've been waking up in the morning after these dreams and things are different, you know... down there ...

ZORA
Your feet? Many people think our body chakras are connected to mental ailments, so I'd have to check the chart on feet.

DANIELLE
He's not talking about his feet.

ZORA
Ankles?

Before Kel can answer, we hear over the loudspeaker:

MR. TUCK (O.S.)
Would Zora Woodsten please report to the principal's office?

KEL
My peer counselor's going to the principal's office? Cool!

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Zora sits across from MR. TUCK, an all-business kind of man.

ZORA
Well, it's pretty unorthodox for the principal to make someone editor-in-chief of the newspaper, but good news travels fast I suppose.

MR. TUCK
What?

ZORA
This is about my scoop, right? My awesome story on Mr. Kelly.

MR. TUCK
It is about Mr. Kelly. He quit.

Zora GULPS.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. SCHOOL - END OF THE DAY

Zora, still processing the news, with Danielle.

ZORA
Now I'm in trouble for sneaking off campus and the school has to get a substitute for who knows how long. And Mr. Tuck kept looking at me with this weird expression. It was like the opposite of proud?

DANIELLE
Disappointment. I get it all the time.

A KID walks by.

KID
Heard you got Mr. Kelly to quit. Sweet. He was the worst.

Another KID (#2) passes and gives Zora a high five.

ZORA (V.O.)
Apparently what upset adults made my peers love me. I wish I had figured this out back in my third grade tattle-tale phase.

MARY CHASENDER (13), a cool girl, but not a mean girl because when you're that naturally popular, people just fall in line.

MARY
Oh my God, it's so cute that you got Mr. Kelly to quit.

ZORA
I just helped him find his purpose. Did I save his life...?

Zora pauses for a BEAT as she looks at Mary and Danielle.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Yes. I really did.

MARY
So, I hear you're having a party?

INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - DAY

PJ, John, and Isaac set up.

ISAAC
Where should I set up the bar?

PJ
The bar? The guest of honor can't drink for eight years.

ISAAC
Yeah, but it's Zora. Most of the guests are adults.

Zora busts in with Danielle at her side.

ZORA
The entire eighth grade class is coming to my party.

ISAAC
I'll get rid of the bar.

ZORA
Mary Chasender invited herself over and that made everyone else want to come over, so now everyone's coming.

JOHN
Of course they are. I knew this would happen. You're smart, you're charming -- you <u>should</u> be popular. Back in my day, this town worshipped me.

He puts his arm around her.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I owe 60% of my current business contracts to my 1990 high school championship.

ZORA
You're the rare popular jock who ended up a cool person. It gives me hope for Dylan Deane.

DANIELLE
(to PJ)
She likes Dylan Deane now.

PJ
Dylan Deane who used to eat rocks?

ZORA
When he was like five!

PJ
Right. And that was almost a decade ago because you're both older now and time is a manipulative, backstabbing bi--bitty. She's a bitty, that Time.

ISAAC
I don't know about this Dylan. Eating rocks at any age is pretty damming.

INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

The party is underway. It's divided into two groups like a middle school dance, but instead of boys and girls, it's kids and academics.

The PERFORMANCE ARTIST, carrying two sandbuckets, prances by and stops in front of Zora and Danielle. She wears green and purple face paint and a skin-tight leotard.

PERFORMANCE ARTIST
(dramatic)
If meat is murder, then salad is aggravated assault.

She plops down on the floor, dumps out the buckets, and begins making a sand castle.

DANIELLE
Still feels like two different parties.

ZORA
I'll find a way to get them to mingle.

She heads off.

DANIELLE
(re: performance artist)
How do you get out of that leotard?

PERFORMANCE ARTIST
How do you get out of your limited world view?

CUT TO:

Zora with a trio of sophisticated women, including KELLY.

KELLY
I don't know. If I read one more thing about Jane Austen ...

Zora notices a classmate, JAMIE, going by.

ZORA
Jamie, you love Jane Austen right?

JAMIE
Is she that weird girl who's always trying to get us to sign petitions to bring "Firefly" back.

ZORA
No, that's me.

TWO KIDS pass by.

KID #1
There are teachers at this party?

KID #2
There are teachers who aren't even <u>our</u> teachers at this party?

<u>INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT</u>

Zora sees PROFESSOR KRIMBY, a sophisticated, poised woman walks over with GRAY BAKER.

PROFESSOR KRIMBY
Happy Birthday!

ZORA (V.O.)
Professor Krimby is a psychology professor. She's one of my seven mentors and the reason most people agreed to come to this party. My dream is to wake up and I just <u>am</u> her. These are the type of things you can never say aloud.

PROFESSOR KRIMBY
This is --

ZORA
Gray Baker? Yes, I know who he is. I loved your new self-help book. I have so many questions -- ahh...

Zora's distracted by DYLAN DEANE, a simple kid, but there's something beneath those eyes. Or he just has nice eyes.

DYLAN DEANE
Hey, Zora, does this party have any cheese puffs?

ZORA
I love cheese puffs!

DYLAN DEANE
Cool. Do you have any?

ZORA
Um, let me check. Give me one second.

Zora rushes over to Isaac.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Where's my mom? She needs to go get cheese puffs.

ISAAC
Why?

ZORA
Because Dylan Deane is here!

ISAAC
The Dylan Deane? I gotta see this.

Isaac looks over to where Zora is pointing.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Yeah, he's hot. Did I just say a twelve-year-old kid is hot? I need to stop hanging out with you. But also, seriously, nice pull.

ZORA
Just go tell my mom! Go!

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

PJ and John wander the aisles.

PJ
First, it's impressing a boy with cheese puffs, and then it's impressing him by making out with your friend Shelley in the backseat.

JOHN
I'd pay to see that.

PJ
People did. It was a crazy night.

JOHN
So, have you figured out what you're going to say to her?

PJ
Kind of. Want to role-play it out with me? I'll be me, and you be --

JOHN
Kevin Costner. What? We can't just pick any character?

PJ
You're Zora. So, honey, I'm glad you asked this question.

JOHN
Lying right out the gate. Good.

PJ
The divorce had nothing to do with you. We both love you so much. I mean, probably I love you a little more because I have a greater capacity for empathy than your father -- shoot, already bad-mouthing him.

JOHN
Except for that, it's going well.

PJ
We realized it was best to part ways.

JOHN
(as Zora)
Why?

PJ
Because sometimes relationships end.

JOHN
(as Zora)
Why?

PJ
Can you stop saying why?

JOHN
I was being Zora! She's always asking why. She's a curious kid.
(switching voices)
Look, it's all water under the bridge. *Waterworld*, that is.

PJ
What are you doing?

JOHN
I switched to Kevin Costner.

PJ
That's your Kevin Costner? Who even does Kevin Costner?

JOHN
Exactly. There's no bar. Maybe I'm the best at it.

INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Zora walks toward Gray Baker.

GRAY
Zora, I was hoping to see you. I know being hostess is a challenging job.

ZORA
I wanted to talk to you too. You basically have my dream job.

MARY (O.S.)
Zora!

Mary waves at Zora to come over.

MARY (CONT'D)
It's important! Hurry!

ZORA
Excuse me.

Zora runs over to Mary.

ZORA (CONT'D)
What is it?

MARY
I just wanted to save you from talking to that old guy. Snoozefest, right? Listen, we all thought it was so great what you did to Mr. Kelly.

ZORA
Yeah, I hope he finds --

MARY
So, could you get Mr. Scott to quit?

ZORA
Mr. Scott? Well, I think it would kind of be a conflict of interest to write an article about him because he's the advisor for the newspaper. Then again, maybe that's just the type of controversy our school needs.

MARY
No, we want you to get rid of him. Journalism is supposed to be an easy class. My sister had it when Ms. Crane taught it and you only had to write one article about your hobby.

ZORA
An article about <u>yourself</u>? That goes against every code of ethics --

MARY
Can you just get rid of Mr. Scott? Look, that Italian lady over there was a model. She's going to introduce me to an agent. I could be a model, thanks to <u>you</u>. Now it's time for me to repay you by doing <u>you</u> a favor.

ZORA
But aren't you asking me for a favor?

Suddenly Mary SHRIEKS. The performance artist has POPPED UP right behind them.

PERFORMANCE ARTIST
Someone just said the most ignorant thing. I have the perfect response, but I need butane, women's lingerie, and a sign that says, "Not my President."

<u>INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT</u>

Zora is with Danielle and Jessica.

DANIELLE
Mr. Scott is your favorite teacher.

ZORA
But if he'd be happier doing something else, then I should help him, right?

JESSICA
As the adult here, I feel like I have to say: do anything you can to be popular. I mean, I've seen you at school. If you have a chance to be accepted, grab on and never let go.

Zora waves down PROFESSOR GRIMALDI passing by.

ZORA
You're a professor of ethics, right?

PROFESSOR GRIMALDI
Yes. Professor Krimby invited me. I was under the impression this was an adult gathering.

ZORA
It is. Now, help me figure out what I should do to get this popular girl to like me. I have a moral quandary.

PROFESSOR GRIMALDI
Since man was created, his every moment has been a moral quandary. However, if you believe in moral relativism...

ZORA
Okay, no one has time for your life story. I gotta go talk to Mr. Scott.

She rushes off.

<u>INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT</u>

Zora sits with Mr. Scott.

MR. SCOTT
This Mr. Kelly article is great. I think I'll barely have to edit it.

ZORA
Thanks. You know, speaking of Mr. Kelly, he didn't even realize that he shouldn't be teaching. He was just so caught up in the day to day, he never stopped to think about his dreams.

Zora rests her head on her propped arm in a "penny for your thoughts" pose.

ZORA (CONT'D)
What are your dreams?

MR. SCOTT
Sorry?

ZORA
I mean, what have you always wanted to do with your life?

MR. SCOTT
I thought about becoming a journalist and even had a few bylines in the *Wall Street Journal*, but ultimately there's no greater joy in my life than teaching the next generation to question authority and seek the truth.

ZORA
That's perfect. You're a man who's doing exactly what he wants. Dammit.

INT. BREARLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Zora approaches the center of the room.

ZORA
Everyone? I'd like to say something. My mission in life is to help people. I want to tell their stories. Sure, some people call me the next Oprah...

Everyone is silent.

ZORA (CONT'D)
But really, I'm me. And I have to be true to myself. I'm not going to ruin someone just to help you get easy grades. I mean, don't we want to work for our achievements? And if that's all you wanted from me, then --

MARY
That's all we wanted from you!

All of the kids except Danielle storm out.

ISAAC
Why are they just huddled by the door?

We see the kids on their phones by the door.

JESSICA
Kind of hard to storm out when you can't drive yet.

ZORA (V.O.)
Why couldn't I have gone with the flow and not been such a goody two-shoes for once in my life? Maybe it wasn't too late. Maybe I could save it.

A SINGING CLOWN busts in, HONKING HIS HORN.

ANGLE ON: PJ and John. Oh no.

PJ
I forgot to cancel the clown.

JOHN
When did you get a clown?

As PJ rushes over to stop the clown:

PJ
There was a sign-up at the party store. I forgot to cancel it when we returned everything!

CLOWN
(singing)
Someone is the birthday girl, the little birthday baby -

PJ pulls him away, but kids are already LAUGHING at Zora. As she does, he hits the closet door, REVEALING all the stuff PJ claimed she returned, including the DANCING SUNFLOWER.

The performance artist holds up the sunflower.

PERFORMANCE ARTIST
Flowers represent femininity! Are females just entertainment for the patriarchy?

She LIGHTS the DANCING SUNFLOWER on FIRE.

Everyone SCREAMS, runs for it. Zora and PJ stand in shock.

ZORA (V.O.)
No, it was definitely too late.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Zora, Jessica, and Danielle wait outside the office.

ZORA
Okay, you were right. We are weirdos.

DANIELLE
(sincere, sympathetic)
No, Tina Jeffreys is a weirdo.

They watch Tina Jeffreys walk by, wearing pink galoshes and drinking from a gallon of milk.

ZORA (V.O.)
Sometimes, when you're feeling self-pity, you have to reach out to those less fortunate than you because it's the good thing to do. Also, it makes you feel better about yourself!

ZORA
Hey, Tina, want to hang out with --

TINA
Fuck off nerds.

She walks off. Danielle laughs. Zora does too.

ZORA
Of course.

PJ walks down the hall.

ZORA (CONT'D)
He called my mom?

PJ
Once again, I'd like to apologize for inviting a clown to your party.

ZORA
Once again --

Zora ignores her and walks into the principal's office.

DANIELLE
You kind of deserve that.

PJ
Don't you have a class to get to? And Jessica, I know you're not teaching here. But I'm just proud you have a real full-time job.

JESSICA
Aww, thanks Aunt PJ.

PJ walks into the office.

DANIELLE
If you give me ten bucks, I won't tell her you only work 11-2, have no benefits, and you're already on probation for driving us off campus.

Jessica hands her the ten bucks.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Zora and PJ sit in front of Mr. Tuck.

MR. TUCK
I got a lot of complaints about Zora's birthday. Several students are home sick after a failure to understand the ingredient "sweetbreads." The rest are having recurring nightmares about a performance artist.

PJ
And we apologize for that. And I'll call every parent.

MR. TUCK
This is the second time in two days Zora's been in here. I think she may need to slow down, have some boundaries. She's a child, after all.

Zora's face falls. PJ holds up her hand.

PJ
Mr. Tuck, let me stop you there. I wonder if Zora's growing up too fast. But if the worst she's done is try to expose her classmates to some culture, then ... that's good news. And she's not a child. She's an extraordinary young woman.

Zora looks at PJ and smiles.

PJ (CONT'D)
Also, may I add that several of the kids at the party tried to peer pressure my daughter and --

ZORA
(to PJ)
Mom, no snitching.

INT. PJ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zora writes at her desk.

ZORA (V.O.)
I think I helped Mr. Kelly. I know I didn't help Mary. It all kind of led to this net neutral I've come to expect --

PJ walks in.

PJ
Writing in your diary?

ZORA
A diary? Please. I'm working on my memoir. Don't worry. You come off favorably.

PJ
(sarcastic)
Phew.
(then)
So, how was your birthday?

ZORA
Fine, I guess? I mean, I thought I had grown up, but I embarrassed myself in front of my adult guests because I was busy dealing with middle school drama.

PJ
Growing up is a process, not an event. And you're already further along than you realize. Look at Isaac and Jessica. Technically, they're adults, but, well, you've seen their lives.

Zora laughs.

ZORA
Mom, you never told me what I asked. If you don't want to --

PJ
No, I actually am an adult, so let's do this. You are old enough to know.
(rambling)
When you're in a marriage, you try to grow together, but sometimes you end up growing apart. So, at that point, the good thing to do -- for you and for us -- is to say maybe we're not meant for each other. And that's why we got a divorce.

ZORA
That's not what I asked you.

PJ
I know. You asked: why did we stop loving each other?

She takes a beat, thinking.

PJ (CONT'D)
I don't know. That's the kind of question that even being my age doesn't give you the answers to.

Zora looks at PJ. This is clearly a tough subject for her.

ZORA (V.O.)
Wow. Being an adult sucks just as much as being my age.
(beat)
So, why was I in such a rush?

INT. COLLINS CABANA - NIGHT

Zora, PJ, John, Isaac, Jessica, and Danielle in a booth. A WAITRESS takes orders.

ZORA
I'll have a ... super duper sundae!

PJ
Me too.

ZORA
Ooh, jukebox!

Danielle and Zora rush over, as Isaac and Jessica follow. PJ and John hang back.

JOHN
So, how'd it go?

PJ
Surprisingly well. I forgot the only thing harder than raising a teenager is being one.

JOHN
...you told her everything?

PJ
No, I didn't mention you. It was a long time ago. And it's not like you were a homewrecker -- our marriage was already over.

They share a look.

JOHN
Old history.

PJ
No need to ever talk about it.

JOHN
Once were lovers, now we're friends.

PJ
You using words like "lover" definitely sped it up.

They laugh.

OVER BY THE JUKEBOX: Zora notices a family arguing nearby.

ZORA
Ahh, the bittersweet discord of kinship that we all know so well. I'm going to head over and --

JESSICA
Meddle.

ZORA
To see how I can --

ISAAC
Interfere.

Zora heads over.

ZORA
I noticed you were arguing. I'm a peer educator and on my school's newspaper.
(MORE)

ZORA (CONT'D)
Some people say I'm the next Oprah, it's not a huge deal or anything, but it kind of is. So, how can I help? Sibling rivalry?
(nudges one of the brothers)
Oedipal complex?

MOTHER
This one's hogging the ketchup.

ZORA
I know just how to help.
(wisely nods)
You can have our ketchup.

ZORA (V.O.)
Man, I'm good.

And as she walks off, she hears:

KID
His bottle has more ketchup!

KID #2
I wish you were dead, Tyler!

Danielle rushes over to Zora and pulls her into their booth.

DANIELLE
Hey, listen to this.

She motions to a WAITRESS who turns on the radio.

MR. KELLY (O.S.)
And this is Raw Dog K, coming at you from WBLI. This song goes out to a birthday girl named Zora.

ZORA
Oh my God.

RADIO DJ (O.S.)
Yeah, normally our callers don't introduce themselves with nicknames.

MR. KELLY (O.S.)
Sorry, just practicing. Just wanted to give that shout-out. The girl saved my life.

ZORA
See?! Did you hear that? Did everybody hear that?

Everyone GROANS. Danielle throws a napkin at Zora. And “Happy Birthday” by Stevie Wonder plays as we FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW