

Dear Daphne (An excerpt from Act 1)
Based on a true story

This story takes place in Malaysia in a town called Butterworth. The film will be performed in Mandarin and Malay with English subtitles.

Note: SPM is an abbreviation used for the national high school examination. Most buildings such as classrooms and apartments are unsealed (open-air concept) due to the hot weather.

FADE IN

EXT. RESIDENCE FLAT - EVENING

JIM (17), a short boy with a pale face and thick black-rimmed glasses stands in a dirty elevator. His hands are trembling as he slowly lifts his finger to press the button for the 20th floor. He crouches to the ground and hugs his knees to himself.

When the elevator doors slide open, Jim squints at the brightness of the evening sunset. He pulls himself up with the help of the sidebars and walks out in a stiff manner.

Standing by the outdoor veranda railings, he starts to sob uncontrollably as he takes his cellphone out of his pocket and types a text. Then, he puts his backpack onto the floor.

He looks down from the building and sucks in a sharp breath.

A SERIES OF SHOTS

A) A rapid descending view of the residence flat - floor by floor.

B) The ground is magnified and grows blurry.

C) Everything fades into darkness.

EXT. LANDSCAPE VIEW OF SCHOOL - DAY

FADE IN

Within the compounds of metal gates and high brick walls are four long triple-story buildings facing each other. Beside the classroom buildings, there is a full-sized rectangular track field and a basketball court.

(CONTINUED)

HEADMASTER (V.O)

(solemnly)

Today, we mourn the tragic news of Jimmy Wang's death. Let us honor his memory with a moment of silence.

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - DAY

A grand hall is filled with 400 students dressed in similar uniforms. The boys are wearing white button-down shirts with army-green knee length pants, while the girls are wearing a bright blue pinafore over white button-down shirts.

All the students are sitting in rows on the floor. The headmaster (46), a tall and plump man, stands at the podium in front of a microphone on a black stand.

HEADMASTER

The question is - what did you learn from the SPM trials?

He pauses to scratch the mole beside his lips.

HEADMASTER

(continuing)

Those of you taking 11 credits know that 9 A's aren't good enough. I strongly advice you to double your efforts and be as diligent as you can. Make the best out of the remaining three weeks for the sake of your future.

He purses his lips and nods solemnly at the vast crowd of silent students.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY

Students are lined up in rows as they walk toward the classroom buildings.

DAPHNE (17), a petite framed girl with a pixie bob steps out of the line to tie her shoelaces.

When she stands up from a kneeling position, her eyes widen as she almost bumps into ISAAC (17), a tall boy with thick eyebrows and a buzz cut. He stares at her and gestures her to join the line.

(CONTINUED)

BOY #1 (O.S)
Will someone move already?

Daphne flashes a polite smile and cuts in front of Isaac.

DAPHNE
(quietly)
Thanks.

Isaac lets out a low grunt in return and walks close behind her. Daphne constantly tugs at the hems of her pinafore.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Daphne steps into the classroom labeled "A2". She pauses to look behind her before she moves to her desk. Around 40 students continue to take their seats in class.

Amidst the loud chatter, some students are looking over their notebooks while others are talking in groups. Daphne has a piano score sprawled out on the table.

GIRL #1 (O.S)
Are you attending Mr. Lee's Physics
intensive?

Daphne picks up a blue and yellow highlighter and starts circling parts of her score.

GIRL #2 (O.S)
Duh! Everyone knows he leaks
authentic SPM questions. I'd pay
fifty ringgit if I had to!

BOY #1 (O.S)
Why do we try so hard anyway when
we know only a limited number of
Chinese students get in?

A hand taps Daphne on the shoulder and she jumps slightly. CODY (18), a boy with spiky hair and big brown eyes stands beside her. He has a huge grin on his face.

CODY
Did I scare you?

Daphne raises her eyebrows and gives Cody a lopsided grin.

CODY
(continuing)
Come sit with me for a sec.

(CONTINUED)

She walks with him to the desks at the back of the class. Cody pulls out a bundle of handmade paper flowers from the desk compartment and thrusts them toward Daphne.

CODY

(nervously)

I had some leftover paper, I mean I bought the colored paper so I could make - fold them for you. I know they're not good enough, but I just wanted you to know that I care.

He clears his throat.

Daphne giggles and accepts the origami flowers. She pretends to smell them. A shy smile is fixed on her lips.

DAPHNE

(whispering)

Thank you, I'll make it up to you some day.

Daphne looks around quickly and leans in to give Cody a awkward peck on his cheek.

A nerdy-looking boy walks past them and snickers rudely.

NERDY STUDENT

You better keep those flowers in your bag and your hands to yourself before Mr. Cheng comes in.

Cody pulls a funny face as the student turns away.

Daphne laughs as she returns to her seat.

WEI (17), a pale and scrawny girl who sits beside Daphne, leans over. Wei's blinks her big watery eyes as she sees the paper flowers. She starts giggling uncontrollably until they well up with tears. Daphne pulls a Kleenex out of her pencil case and hands it to Wei.

Wei stands up without warning and and points at a dark-skinned boy seated near the window.

WEI

(whining)

He looked into my window last night and would not go away!

Daphne quickly grips Wei's left wrist. Her skin is dry and flaky.

(CONTINUED)

DAPHNE

Please sit! It's not what you see,
remember? Look, I have something
for you!

Daphne thrusts a comic book at Wei. Wei stares at Daphne blankly and pulls her wrist back.

WEI

(confused)
You're lying.

DAPHNE

(calmly)
No, you're not. You told me you'd
try to trust me.

A group of girls start looking at Wei and Daphne's direction. They are giggling and whispering to each other.

GIRL #3

Her meds are definitely not
working. Her mom should just take
her out of school.

BOY #2

Hey, Thomas, go over there and give
your bride a hug!

THOMAS (17), the boy Wei was pointing at, frowns at them.

THOMAS

Shut up man!

As Wei starts to leave her seat, a male teacher, MR. CHENG (43), walks into the class with a folder tucked under his left arm, and a bamboo cane in his right hand. Someone clears his throat loudly.

Daphne yanks the skirts of Wei's pinafore. Wei sits down with a reluctant look on her face.

The class monitor, YOON (17), a girl in a red tie announces in a monotonous voice.

YOON

Stand up!

The class gets to their feet. Feet shuffling and some groaning is heard.

(CONTINUED)

CLASS
(chanting in unison)
Good afternoon, sir!

Mr. Cheng nods and everyone takes their seat again. He pulls out a stack of test papers from his folder. A round of collective groans go around the classroom.

Outside the windows of the classroom, Isaac is pressed against the wall looking at Daphne from behind.

INT. ORCHESTRA ROOM - EVENING

The student orchestra is rehearsing *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. There are 35 students in the orchestra room playing their instruments. The conductor (35), a short man with bright red glasses is standing on a tiny stage. He is wildly waving his baton. Daphne is playing the cello. Her small frame is almost hidden under the big instrument.

The conductor does a sharp cut-off and the music stops. He wipes sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief.

CONDUCTOR
That's it for today. Make sure you work on all the transitions in your sectionals tomorrow. Dress rehearsal will be at five sharp in the hall on Friday.

While students are busy putting instruments away, Karen(10), another cellist with a lanky figure and big brown eyes, walks up to Daphne with her instrument in her hands. She pokes Daphne roughly in the shoulder.

KAREN
(spitefully)
I know what you're trying to do.

Daphne puts her music stand down and turns around.

DAPHNE
(confused)
Huh?

KAREN
First, I'll be section leader, not you. Second, will you leave my brother alone already?

Karen looks Daphne up and down rudely.

(CONTINUED)

KAREN

(continuing)

I know what girls like you try to do. Our mother would never let Cody go out with a slut like you anyway.

She saunters off to the exit.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - EVENING

Daphne is sitting with Cody on a school bench beside the cafeteria. His hands are rested on hers.

As a teacher dressed in a suit walks by, they immediately make space between each other.

When the teacher is out of sight, Cody and Daphne smile sheepishly at each other.

DAPHNE

So...

CODY

My parents promised that I'd be allowed to drive after the SPM is done. We won't have to do this in school anymore.

Daphne blushes and looks down at her watch.

DAPHNE

It's not that bad...at least we can still hang out in class, right?

Cody lifts his eyebrows.

CODY

Sometimes I wonder why you're so darn obedient and perfect.

Daphne swats him playfully on the arm.

CODY

(continuing)

Oh, I think your ride's here.

They stand up and walk toward the school gates.

INT. DAPHNE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A study table and a tall bookshelf sits beside the window. There is an old brown piano with a huge toy dog sitting on it. A cello sits on a stand beside her bed. There is a wooden desk at the corner of the room.

Daphne hops onto her bed and flips open her laptop. A conversation log pops up on the screen. A small picture of Isaac's face appears.

ON THE SCREEN, Isaac's words appear:
"Why don't you ever look at me anymore?"

BACK TO DAPHNE
"What do you expect?"

ON THE SCREEN, Isaac's words appear:
"Do you actually like him?"

Daphne looks at the backyard view of her window and sighs. The laptop beeps again.

ON THE SCREEN, Isaac's words appear:

"I meant what I said. I don't want to live if I can't have you."

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Isaac stands in the bathroom facing the mirror. His face is pale with a yellowish shade. He turns on the tap and splashes his eyes with water. He stares at his reflection for a while.

He walks into his bedroom and pulls open his closet. Isaac rummages through his closet. There are mostly black baggy shirts and jeans. He pulls out a few old looking shirts and tosses them back in.

Out of frustration he slams the closet shut and turns off the light.

ISAAC
Fuck Cody and my fucking life.

He stands up, removes his shirt, and tosses it onto the floor. He puts something small on the windowsill and walks away. There, a small knife is gleaming in the moonlight.

INT. DAPHNE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Daphne is studying at her desk. There are papers scattered all over the surface.

There is a knock on her door.

DAPHNE

Come in!

JENNIFER (45), a woman with long brown hair in a business suit, walks in. She hands a portable phone over to Daphne.

JENNIFER

It's for you. Make it quick!

DAPHNE

Thanks, Mom.

The door creaks as Jennifer shuts it behind her. Daphne puts the phone to her ears.

DAPHNE

Hello? Daphne here.

A woman's voice is at the other end of the line.

WOMAN (O.S.)

(over phone, filtered)

Hi, we don't know each other, but I'm Isaac's mother.

Daphne has a solemn look on her face. She furrows her eyebrows.

WOMAN (O.S.)

(continuing)

Recently I've noticed Isaac acting...strange. When I was cleaning out his room, I found a stack of letters addressed to you. There was also your photo, your contact information, and a girl's hanky - which I assume would be yours.

Daphne switches the phone to her left hand and starts fidgeting with a pen.

WOMAN (O.S.)

(over phone, filtered)

(continuing)

Are you still there?

(CONTINUED)

DAPHNE
(into phone)
Yes, I am. Go on.

WOMAN (O.S.)
(over phone, filtered)
I'm even embarrassed to say this,
but they were filled were mindless
love-sick nonsense and some
disturbing comments about what he
would do if, you know...

DAPHNE
(into phone)
If I didn't like him back?

WOMAN (O.S.)
(over phone, filtered)
So you know about this.

DAPHNE
(into phone)
Yes, it's starting to worry me. I
didn't know who to go to about
this.

WOMAN (O.S.)
(over phone, filtered)
This stays between us, do you hear
me? Stay away from my son, and keep
this a secret. You will do as I say
if you want to save your
reputation. I have a feeling that
we will have to meet in person
soon. I think I hear him, goodbye.

The phone clicks.

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Isaac leans over and picks up his table lamp. He flicks it on and moves it toward him. He shifts his web-cam until a blurry image of himself appears on-screen. He hits a red button on the screen and sits on the edge of his bed.

ISAAC
(blankly)
This is how much I love you,
Daphne.

He lifts his left wrist and presses a penknife against his skin. He lets out a low grunt as he makes a cut.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

11.

ISAAC
(calmly)
It'll be Cody's turn next.

FADE OUT