

CHERRY ON TOP

Written by

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DANIEL (20) strolls a barren road, a smile smeared on his face.

Around him, GROUPS OF PEOPLE (18-21) walk ahead. Their joyous CONVERSATIONS AND LAUGHTER GROWING IN VOLUME. Dan's smile slowly fades.

A car horn BLARES, cutting out all noise.

Daniel turns around. He's met with GROUP MEMBER #1, facing away from him, their hand on his shoulder.

GROUP MEMBER #1
Hey man, lemme ask you something.
(beat)
Have you ever been someone's cherry
on top?

DANIEL
Have I... what...?

Other group members start to walk up, facing away from Dan.

GROUP MEMBER #2
Yeah, I'd say so.

GROUP MEMBER #3
Nah, never was, never want to be.

GROUP MEMBER #4
It's an odd way of putting it, but
yeah, I am.

The other group members chime in, talking over one another. They walk away, still conversing.

GROUP MEMBER #1
Well?

DANIEL
I, uhm... I... I don't know-

Group Member #1 is gone. Dan looks around for them.

He stands there, trying to catch up with the rest of the group. He walks in place.

The group conversations INCREASE IN VOLUME.

The car horn BLARES, lights on Dan. He turns back around.

The car HONKS again. LAYLA (20) sits in the driver's seat, dead set on Daniel.

Daniel stands frozen, the blistering headlights engulf him.

LAYLA (V.O.)
Where do you wanna go?

END DREAM SEQUENCE

2 EXT. CAMPUS WALKWAY - DAY 2

Daniel snaps out of his trance. Layla looks at Dan.

DANIEL
What-

Layla gestures ahead to a fork in the walkway.

He flusters, indecisive. Layla smiles.

LAYLA
Let's go left

DANIEL
Um, yeah- sure.

Dan nearly moves right, but Layla steers him left.

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LAYLA (V.O.)
No, you have to trill the uvula,
don't roll your tongue!

DANIEL (V.O.)
But it's so much easier!

3 EXT. CAMPUS WALKWAY - MOMENTS LATER 3

Dan tries to keep up with Layla's fast pace.

DANIEL
It sounds like I'm gargling
mouthwash.

He mimics gargling. Layla laughs.

LAYLA
But that's how it's done in German,
Dan! It's the same for French!

DANIEL

And I'm sure they're going to care a lot about that in Vienna.

LAYLA

Oh my God, is that why you're hounding me about my German? I'll be fine, it's just an abroad program-

DANIEL

Come on Layla, don't give me that!

LAYLA

Give you what?

DANIEL

You're graduating early, going to study in Austria, and you act like it's nothing.

LAYLA

It's not nothing, you just like to make everything a big deal!

DANIEL

Well it is! You're going places, and what am I doing? I'm stuck here, doing nothing, twiddling my thumbs, and you're-

LAYLA

Oh no no no, don't give me that.

Dan peers at Layla.

DANIEL

Give you what?

LAYLA

You gassing me up at your own expense. We've been through this routine.

DANIEL

Jeez, Layla, give me a little credit.

LAYLA

Dan, I read you like I read Byron and Shelley.

DANIEL

So way too often?

LAYLA
Dan, please-

DANIEL
I'm sorry, I can't help it. That's-

INSERT DAN STARING AT THE ONCOMING CAR.

Dan's smile disappears.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
That's just how I am sometimes...

His nervousness unveils, averting his gaze to the sidewalk below him, trying to mask it. Layla takes notice.

LAYLA
You wanna sit down for a sec?

DANIEL
Huh- oh, sure.

They move over to a bench, an OWL STATUE looming above Dan.

Daniel focuses on the setting sun.

Layla passively observes him. She bumps his arm.

Dan jerks his head.

LAYLA
So, how've you really been doing?
(jokingly)
And you can't back out of it this time.

He softly smiles.

DANIEL
Well, I've been doing kinda *eh* lately, not bad though. I think it's just finals that're bugging me out, y'know. But, it's just-

Layla reads Dan, seeing there's more left unspoken.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Okay, okay.
(beat)
Truth be told... I've been thinking about a lot of the choices I've made here. My worth, I guess.

He twiddles his thumbs.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I weighed my options, chose what I chose, and now I'm here. Everyone's proud of me, I've met a lot of great people, I'm grateful for everything, but...

Dan looks further down the walkway.

INSERT THE ONCOMING DREAM CAR FLASH.

His leg bounces.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I don't know, it all just feels wrong.

Layla looks at Dan, befuddled.

LAYLA

How so?

DANIEL

Well, I know what I'm doing amounts to something, but I don't know if what I'm amounting to is where I need go.

Layla thinks for a moment.

LAYLA

Well, where do you want to go?

Dan looks back at Layla. She awaits an answer.

DANIEL

I- where I want to go... it's-

He looks past Layla, seeking distraction. Eventually, he finds it in the form of ARNALDO (21).

Quickly, he hides his uncertainty in trade for a smile.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Hey, what's going on Naldo!

Layla turns around.

Arnaldo looks up from his phone and at the two of them. He waves.

ARNALDO

Yo! What's good Dan?

He rushes over to Dan and Layla.

Layla looks back at Dan, confused. Arnaldo reaches them.

ARNALDO (CONT'D)
How've you two been? It's been a
minute!

DANIEL
I'm doing alright, just trying to
finish out the semester. How about
you?

ARNALDO
Dealing with analytics and shit,
you know how it is. Layla, I heard
the news, congrats man!

She puts on a smile.

LAYLA
Thanks.

ARNALDO
Well, how do you feel?

LAYLA
It's uhm... unbelievable, I don't
know how else to describe it
really. Overwhelming, I guess.

ARNALDO
I can't imagine, being smart and
shit like that.

They all sit in awkward silence for a moment.

ARNALDO (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I don't mean to intrude,
I'll catch you guys later.

Arnaldo daps up Daniel and waves goodbye to Layla.

DANIEL
It's all good. See you later!

ARNALDO
(signaling off)
Peace bro!

Arnaldo walks away. Layla gives a feeble wave bye.

DANIEL
Sorry about that, what were we
talking about-

Layla's gaze drifts from Dan.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Hey what's wrong?

LAYLA
Dan, why did you want to walk
around tonight?

DANIEL
I... I just wanted to talk with
you, that's all.

LAYLA
About what though?

DANIEL
Well, I...

Layla awaits his answer.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to
sideline the conversation, I just
saw Naldo and it's been a while-

LAYLA
Hey, you don't need to apologize.

Layla gets up.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
(softly)
If you wanted to talk about
something else, you could've said
so.

She slowly starts to walk away.

DANIEL
No, Layla, wait- I just- I...

Dan stands and catches up with Layla.

He stutters and fumbles his words. Layla gazes, deflated. Dan
quietly gives up, walking alongside her.

4 EXT. CAMPUS WALKWAY - NIGHT 4

Layla and Daniel trudge silently along the curvy walkway.

Daniel takes in his surroundings.

INSERT FLASHES OF THE DREAM.

Dan attempts to distract himself.

INSERT OF LAYLA IN THE CAR.

He takes a deep breath and sighs.

DANIEL

Hey, Layla-

Layla looks at him.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Could we go sit down somewhere
again, just for a bit?

LAYLA

Yeah, sure.

They continue down the walkway. Dan nervously gazes ahead.

5 EXT. ENGINEERING HALL STEPS - LATER 5

Layla lays two steps above Dan, who's sulking.

Dan anxiously looks down at the pond, Layla gazes up at the
night sky.

DANIEL

Layla, can I ask you something?

Layla hesitates, shifting her sight to Dan.

He doesn't look at her.

LAYLA

Sure, shoot.

DANIEL

Have you ever been someone's cherry
on top?

LAYLA

(beat)

"Have you ever been someone's
cherry on top?"

Dan nods.

Layla looks back up, stifled. She sits on it for a moment.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
Have you asked anyone else this
question?

DANIEL
No...

They sit silent. She turns and sits up, looking down at Dan.

LAYLA
Well, why?

DANIEL
Why what?

LAYLA
Why the question? Did you just come
up with it or is this for something
else?

Dan doesn't answer.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
Is this what you wanted to talk
about?

His reflection ripples in the water.

Daniel sighs. He looks back at Layla.

DANIEL
It came from this dream I had.

Layla leans in.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
It began with me in the middle of
this empty road-

INTERCUT WITH:

6 DREAM SEQUENCE - EXT. EMPTY ROAD - NIGHT

6

DANIEL (V.O.)
I was walking alone, and then these
people started walking past me,
having the time of their lives.
Then, this car honks at me.

The car horn ECHOES through the empty road.

DANIEL (V.O.)

I turn around and there's someone standing there, looking away. They put their hand on my shoulder and asked me the question.

Dan's leg bounces.

DANIEL

I just stood there trying to think of an answer. And then the other people walk up again, giving their own answers, no hesitation.

The groups of people walk past Dan.

DANIEL (V.O.)

They all start to leave. The first guy disappears, and I try to catch up with the rest of the group, but I'm just walking in place. Then, that car honks again. I turn back and they're speeding towards me. It gets closer and closer, and the driver, sh-

Daniel looks up at Layla for a moment.

DANIEL

They... *they* stare at me, with these empty eyes.

The car approaches closer, the lights engulfing Daniel.

DANIEL (V.O.)

And just as they're about to hit me... they drive right by.

Layla peers out at Dan, dispirited.

Dan idles in the middle of the road, staring off at the car.

DANIEL (V.O.)

And...

END INTERCUT

DANIEL

That's where it ended.

Dan stares down. Layla soaks in the dream, sitting straight.

His tears well up.

Layla looks at Dan and plans her approach. She leans close.

LAYLA

I don't think you should take this dream as something negative.

Layla looks up at the sky.

LAYLA (CONT'D)

That question can mean a lot of different things. It can be positive, but it can be something negative too, like a flat tire being the "cherry on top" of someone's bad day.

Dan breathes unsteadily.

LAYLA (CONT'D)

You can ask anyone the same thing, but you'll never get the same answer. Just because some people in your dream had an answer doesn't mean you don't have one, or need one either.

Layla thinks for a moment.

LAYLA (CONT'D)

The driver, did you recognize them?

Daniel sits frozen, uncertain. Eventually, he nods.

Layla takes a deep breath. She MOVES DOWN A STEP.

LAYLA (CONT'D)

Maybe they're your cherry on top, maybe they aren't. Either way, they seem important to you if they're the only person you knew.

Dan rubs the tears away. He turns to Layla.

LAYLA (CONT'D)

Sure, they passed you, but where are you going?

Layla looks at him.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
 (jokingly casual)
 But, that's just my interpretation
 though.

Dan stares at Layla, his tenseness fading. HE MOVES UP A
 STEP.

He dawns a soft smile and rubs his eyes. He chuckles. Layla
 joins in.

They stop chuckling. A moment of silence. They hug.

FADE TO:

7 EXT. HOLLY POINTE - LATER

7

Layla and Dan stand by the entrance, embraced. They break
 from their hug.

DANIEL
 Thanks again for walking around,
 I'm gonna miss it.

LAYLA
 Hey, this won't be the last time.
 I'll be back to visit.

She opens the door and looks back at Dan.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
 I'll catch ya later.

They exchange nods.

As Dan turns, he freezes. He whips around, catching the door.

DANIEL
 Wait.

Layla turns around.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 Do you h-

He stops, thinking before finishing.

Layla patiently awaits his question.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 Do you... think you can send me
 pictures of Vienna while you're
 there?

Layla smiles.

LAYLA
Absolutely.
(beat)
Have a goodnight, Dan.

Walking down the hallway, she turns the corner, out of sight.

Dan softly smiles.

DANIEL
Goodnight, Layla.

Dan removes his hand from the door and moves to a bench.

He takes a seat. His leg bounces and his smile dims as he spaces out.

8 DREAM SEQUENCE - EXT. EMPTY ROAD 8

Layla waves goodbye to Dan, sticking her head back in the car.

Dan stares at her, idle. He waves back.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

9 EXT. HOLLY POINTE 9

He takes a deep breath and exhales. His leg ceases bouncing.

Dan slowly rises from the bench, looks both ways, and hesitantly walks right.

THE END.