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ELEANOR AND THE EGG

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ELEANOR AND THE EGG

by

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Report

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Dedication

To friendships that survive time and space.

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Abstract

ELEANOR AND THE EGG

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Andrew Shea

This report summarizes the script development, pre-production, production and post-production of the making of the short narrative film *Eleanor and the Egg*. This film was produced as my graduate thesis film in the department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Film Production.

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Introduction

“Exploration is in our nature. We began as wanderers, and we are wanderers still. We have lingered long enough on the shores of cosmic ocean. We are ready at last to set sails for the stars.” – Carl Sagan

The Story of Still Finding It

I come from a background of self-taught cinema. I didn't know that being a filmmaker was my dream until I was already doing it. Looking back, it seems obvious that I had a passion for storytelling, but lacked the confidence to claim it as my identity. Once, when I was about eight years old or so, I told my uncle that I wanted to be an artist. Being a practical man, who had gone into medicine, and eventually retired into his passion for farming, he simply replied, "Well, that's great, but you have to be really talented and lucky to really make it. What are you going to do about money?" A powerful question and reality that is still relevant to me today. But, as an eight year old, it put a pang of self-doubt, and made me question whether I was worthy to do something I truly loved.

As I grew up, I still did things I loved, but it always felt like there was a timestamp on it. I better enjoy this now, because it's not going to last. In sixth grade, the Greek play I wrote for a project was selected to perform in front of the school, and I got to direct it. In high school, I directed a documentary about the Japanese Internment Camps in America during World War II for my AP U.S. History class. And, when I started undergrad at the University of Washington in Seattle, I decided to treat myself and sign up for a fun class for my first quarter there – Intro to Film. Though the classes at UW were primarily studies, I took all three of the classes that offered production in some capacity, as well as signed up for a study abroad program that had a filmmaking component. I surrounded myself with friends that liked to make movies. When I wasn't in class or doing homework, I was on set for whatever latest sketch short we were making. After a while, it became obvious that filmmaking was where I was going to stay.

I was a late bloomer in taking charge of my voice, and in many ways, I'm still searching. I always wanted to direct and write, but I was also always naturally gifted at planning and organizing. It wasn't that my filmmaking partners weren't supportive of my voice, but for a good while they just had louder voices than I did. I started to get pigeonholed into producing and assistant directing. I enjoyed the work, but it always felt like something was missing. I started to feel creatively unfulfilled, but did not know what story I wanted to tell.

I graduated from University of Washington in June 2009. I was a bit lost, working in retail and still just doing other people's films on the side. The shorts we made were always meant for web based releases, never really made it to festivals, and while I loved making them with my friends, it was never *really* my voice. Though I had taught myself a lot when it came to how to produce and make a short happen, including crew hierarchy and breaking down scripts, I also could *feel* my lack of training in production a lot of the time. I had not thought about grad school in a long time, but needing a change in so many ways, I started thinking about it again. I was craving that structure of learning, and I liked the idea of teaching as both a way to become a stronger filmmaker and an alternative career.

Earlier that year, my grandmother, a woman who was such a huge part of my childhood, passed away. The heartbreak was unshakeable, and I took to writing to deal with it. I wrote a screenplay called *Kampai*, and my filmmaking partners were behind me one hundred percent in making it happen. This was really the first narrative film that I had written and directed completely on my own. I was lucky to have a talented team of people behind me. It was my first lesson in "You're only as strong as your collaborations." I called in all of my favors that I had built up over the years. We somehow got talented actors to work for free. And, it was really my first time working

with an editor as a director. We finished the film as I was applying to grad school. And, it premiered at the Seattle International Film Festival as I was leaving for Austin.

I was finally settling into my voice and in my identity as a filmmaker, and feeling comfortable that perhaps my style of storytelling was not like my friends, which was purely comedic parodies. When I try to be anything in particular when I'm trying to tell a story, writer's block immediately sets in. So, perhaps I need to tell stories that are more directly linked to things I have experienced – things that are based in an emotional truth or life event. Though even that lesson of where I draw my strongest stories from was a few films away from being learned.

Development

“I open at the close.”

On the morning of February 20, 2013, my beloved Aunt Theresa passed away. She had struggled for years fighting cancer. She left behind five devoted siblings, a husband and a daughter about to enter high school. Being from a close-knit family, of course the news weighed heavily on me. I have had family members pass away before, but none that had left so tragically young. I couldn't stop thinking of my cousin, Sarah. Being a teenager is difficult enough, but to lose a mother at such an impressionable age – what would that be like?

All of this happened in the midst of my Pre-Thesis Spring semester. Shortly afterward, I had to pitch a concept for my thesis film. I knew I wanted to write a coming of age story about a teenager being raised by a single father, but I felt that I was still too close to the loss. So, to counterbalance that, I aimed to tell this story with a comedic angle. I tend to lean toward comedy, but I also believe that even the most heavy and dramatic stories should have moments of levity to them.

The Writing Partner and Producing Everyone's Thesis: A Journey

Additionally, I decided to seek out a writing partner to help me keep some perspective on the topic still so fresh. Though I wrote my Pre-Thesis, *First Bike*, mostly on my own, I ended up bringing on my friend and colleague, Penny Cox (RTF M.F.A. Screenwriting) toward the end of my script development to help me tighten up structure and punch up dialogue. When we teamed up, I was well on my way to a solid script, but Penny helped me push it further. Her sharp understanding of character and story, no matter what the genre, is brilliant, and I found that collaborating with her made my best ideas better. I wanted that kind of partnership again.

Though Penny and I worked well together, she was heading off to L.A., and I wondered if it would be better to pair up with someone I could have in person meetings with. I ended up teaming with Philip Hoover, a M.F.A. Screenwriting candidate at the time. After seeing his comedy writing in a feature screenwriting class we took together in the fall of 2012, I knew he could write in a comedic tone I was initially interested in.

Summer 2013 arrived, and with various holidays abroad and out of state, our schedules barely overlapped. We may have met once over the summer to finish outlining, but that was it. Out of nowhere, classes started up again. Phil had his own thesis to write, and about six months earlier, I had signed on to produce Nathan Duncan's graduate thesis, *Leaves on Trees*, which was now facing principle photography in October. Though I managed to (finally) write my first full draft of *Eleanor and the Egg* for my Thesis Production class to workshop, for the most part, my own thesis fell by the wayside.

After successfully wrapping the first film I had ever fully produced for someone else, I moved swiftly into production and post-production for my Dogma film, +/- . From there, I went straight into producing Nathan Efstation's graduate thesis film, *Megan and Dan*, with Déjà Bernhardt in January 2014. I needed to start devoting time on my own film, but the opportunity to work with Déjà, who had a reputation of being a good producer, was appealing to me. I wanted to learn more and make more connections. I told myself, after this one, no more producing other people's films. I have to focus on *Eleanor*. But, shortly after wrapping *Megan and Dan*, Mariam Aziz approached me about producing her graduate thesis. Putting aside the fact that Mariam was one of my first friends in my cohort and in Austin, I've seen her grow into a beautiful filmmaker, and I fully believe in her voice and vision. I wanted to say yes. So, *Eleanor* was put off again.

Upon wrapping Mariam's film, *Who is Paloma Carter?* at the end of May, I departed again for another summer abroad to see my sister graduate from her program at

LAMDA. It may have seemed counterproductive to some, but after a year of producing three graduate thesis films, and I knew that if I stayed in Austin, I would be continued to ask to work on other people's films. I needed a break and time away from Austin in order to refocus on my own film. Though Phil and I were technically still writing partners, we had barely worked together all year on the script, and by the time I was settling back into writing, he was on his way to moving to L.A. to start a real world job. I eventually had to make the difficult decision to move on from our partnership.

Suddenly, I was facing writing *Eleanor* alone. I struggled for most of the summer, battling severe writer's block. I was lost. I had the bones of my story, but I couldn't see past that.

Then, I found Amanda Gotera.

We officially teamed up shortly after I returned to the States in August. Amanda started the production program a year after me, and we always had similar tastes in stories and films. So, a writing partnership was an easy transition. Writing with Amanda was like a breath of fresh air.

Our process of collaboration took on several forms. We would take turns writing passes, sometimes whole passes at a time, and some times partial ones depending on our schedules and if one of us was burnt out on the script. And, there were also some times when we would sit down in a coffee shop and work on the script together, especially when we got to scenes that we were both struggling with on our own. The only time I can recall us disagreeing on anything was when we had a table read with some friends and received some feedback. Even then, it wasn't even a conflict, but more a difference in people we completely trusted with feedback.

No matter what, I knew that she had my back, and she knew I had hers. It was incredibly freeing to be able to talk about character, structure, and the nuances of voice

over in such depth with someone who cared just as much as I did. It's one of the many examples of how any true partnership in filmmaking is such a gift to be cherished.

Finding the Story, and Then Finding It Again

Here's how the story went down:

Phil and I spent several meetings developing a story about a boy having trouble letting go of the past and growing up into his adolescence. His single dad was finally starting to date again, his childhood best friend was too busy with his new girlfriend to spend any time with him anymore, and he gets stuck with the weird girl at school for a science project. There was a lot going on for a short film.

The summer before my 3rd year, I struggled to find my voice in the story that Phil and I had crafted. I realized that up until this point, I had never really written a story with a male protagonist before. I wondered if that was why I dive into the main character's perspective. In fact, why am I writing a male protagonist again? I couldn't remember. So, as an exercise to try to get out of my writer's block, I decided to change the boy, Elliot, to a girl, Eleanor. And, it stuck.

As I continued to write outlines and drafts, I grew more confident that switching gender roles was the right choice. Up until that point, it was always important to me to have more women in leading roles, both on camera and behind the camera, but it wasn't until this film that I was consciously making choices for that reason. It's not only important to have more female voices, but also show different perspectives and experiences of women.

Moreover, I had forgotten the roots of the story I was telling. Going back to that, back to all the feeling of losing my aunt and the heartbreak I felt for my cousin Sarah, helped ground me again. I wasn't sure how much of that was going to be in the final

product, but I knew I couldn't shy away from it, and I couldn't forget whom I was making this film for. I realized that I was not only making this film for my cousin Sarah, but I was making this film for all of my cousins who were going through the awkwardness of becoming and being teenagers. So much changes and so quickly, and I wanted to make a film about letting go of any pains that life throws at them, letting new things in, and that through it all, it's all going to be okay.

Even from there, the script went through some crazy changes. In my first draft, Eleanor's ex-best friend Michael was secretly gay, and she was in love with him. In the earlier drafts, it felt organic and natural, but I continued to write, that aspect of his character started to feel tact on, and it started to complicate things. I eventually shed Michael's B-Story, as well as Eleanor's romantic feelings for him. I was tired of teen romantic comedies, and I wondered if I took the concept of a teen buddy movie, like *Superbad*, but made it about a complicated friendship between two people of the opposite sex.

Friendships between boys and girls seem to fracture so easily, especially when they hit adolescence. The combination of cooties, hormones, interest changes, and the development of different social pressures complicate things. Already, Eleanor and Michael might have probably followed that path, but the death of Eleanor's mom complicated things further. A lot of adults can hardly deal with death, so I certainly found it believable that a kid wouldn't know how to handle let alone relate to someone experiencing something so heavy and real.

With all of this in mind, I wanted to tie in a childhood love of space and stars to the depth of what Eleanor was going through. To me, Eleanor was someone who is wise beyond her years, and sees things differently than your average high school student. She has a depth to her both intellectually and emotionally. For a little while, I considered

playing with the performance and writing style similar to the film *Submarine* as well as films by Wes Anderson, such as *Moonrise Kingdom*, which I love and successfully portray and treat youth more like adults. But, in those drafts, I felt like a lot of the heart was missing and it didn't feel as genuine. A lot of people have their issues with voiceover, but I felt that this film called for it in order to really get into Eleanor's head.

I also chose to add (and keep) flashbacks, which some people dislike relying on. But, in a short, I felt that I needed a quick way of injecting some emotional and nostalgic backstory for the sake of character development. I did not want to do anything outrageous or complicated, but more so dip in and out of moments.

As the script changed (a lot), so did the relationship of the characters. There were several scenes and moments that I tried my hardest to keep. But "killing your babies," as they like to call it, is difficult. One of the things that ended up getting left behind is an element in the scene in the bathroom. In the very first draft, after the egg gets smashed over Eleanor's head, Michael goes into the girls' bathroom to check on her, and helps her wash her hair. I loved that scene. It was vulnerable and touching. However, as the falling out between the characters grew, it no longer felt natural for that to happen.

Writing a script is emotional. You lose yourself in it in the bliss of things working, and in the emotional despair of writer's block. Sometimes you lose sight of the original intent. But something that I always held onto was that no matter how my script turned out, I wanted to make a movie with heart.

Pre-Production

Creating the Team

Refining the nuances of a set dynamic is complicated, but important. Of course everyone wants talented people on your side, but people with good attitudes that go well together is what really makes or breaks a set atmosphere. Ideally, a set should have a combination of people technical ability, but who also won't shrink in the face of any inevitable problems that might pop up along the way. It's about balancing efficiency and seriousness with lightness and good senses of humor.

The first person I asked to join my production team was my director of photography. I wanted to work with Patrick Smith for a number of reasons. Should we pair up, he and I would have to work over long distance for most of pre-production (since he lives in L.A.). There was a brief moment where I considered working with someone else for the sake of having a partner in Austin for all of pre-production and location scouts, but I ultimately decided to go with my gut. Deb Lewis advised that it's rare to find someone who you collaborate so well with, and I agree. Patrick is the kind of partner you want in a D.P. On top of being talented, he is kind, and smart, and you can trust that he always has your back.

After having the experience of producing for three other thesis films, and seeing how helpful it is for a director's focus and process to have a producer they could trust, I knew I needed a good team. I initially approached Mitch O'Hearn, who at the time was wrapping up his first year in the grad program. I had really only had small encounters with him at that point, but enough to know that he was both interested in producing (which is key, and also scarce), and that we got along well. He has the kind of sensitive and generous personality that you want in a producer to protect you from things, as well as an approachable demeanor that helps with asking people for favors. I was relieved to have

him, but I also knew that with his own Pre-Thesis workload, I would need to create a team of producers.

The timing wasn't right to ask Déjà Bernhardt right away. She was just coming off of *Megan and Dan*, and almost immediately left the country for family vacation. But, it was clear I needed someone like her on my side. She is experienced, and I know I can trust her to make sure things are getting done. Though she and Mitch had never met, I could tell that their personalities would mesh well. Since she was no longer in school and had a number of personal projects going on, on top of being a mother, I was nervous I would not be able to get her on board. Once she agreed, I was absolutely confident that between her and Mitch, I was in good hands.

Shortly after adding Déjà to Team Eleanor, I found out my good friend and producing protégé, Sophia Yu was not only coming back to Austin after a stint at UTLA, but also staying for a while. I was over the moon and made sure to snatch her up immediately to assist Déjà and Mitch pick up any producing slack. And, thus, the “Panda Power” team, as we lovingly called ourselves, was assembled. They are an unstoppable force to be reckoned with.

Another important component to creating the world of Eleanor was not only a good production designer, but also the right production designer. All of the graduate students had started working with the same production designers over and over again, and they all were talented, lovely people to work with. But, some of my colleagues started running into the issue of production designers overbooking themselves, which led to them not being as present on set and replacing themselves with less than competent people. I needed someone who I could rely on being on set, watching frame and making sure the look was consistent. I started interviewing both designers that I had already worked with in the past, and ones from the MFA program at the UT Drama School. There

were initially a couple false starts with designers, ones that I almost started working with, but then schedule conflicts arose. It was looking pretty grim, and I wondered if I had set the bar too high, or was asking for too much. I was getting nervous.

Finally, I landed on Teena Sauvola, a UT MFA Production Designer (See Appendix D). She was someone I funnily enough thought of as a potential candidate about a year before when I was still developing the script. I went to the UT Design Show that they put on every year, saw her portfolio of work, and thought she might have the right aesthetic for the kind of film I was writing. And, as it turns out, I was right. She identified so much with Eleanor's character, being a kid who loved science and stargazing. For the most part, she "got it" when it came to aesthetic, though as her first time designing for film, I had to guide her every once in a while when it came to set protocol, etc. I also set her up with a talented art department team, Thoa Nguyen, Maria Situ and Nancy Lemus, all of whom I trusted. The four of them made a really good team!

When it came to wardrobe, I knew developing and finding the right look for each of the characters was important, but I had both never worked with a costume designer before nor knew any. Déjà introduced me to Hailley Lauren, who is actually usually an actress, but has an amazing sense of style and could sew. We had a couple meetings so I could give her references (mainly Lindsay Weir from *Freaks and Geeks*; See Appendix F). But for the most part, she took the concepts and ran with it, and only really texting me photo updates of things she was thinking about that need my approval. Not having to worry about that aspect of pre-production was incredible.

I also decided early on that I wanted to hire a professional location sound mixer. There just are not enough people in the department that are both interested in sound and good at it. I have been on countless productions where the sound department is a hodgepodge of people with varying levels of experience, which can lead to very

inconsistent levels and quality. That was one department that I wanted to make sure I didn't have to worry at all about, even if it meant paying someone. We ended up bringing on Landry Gideon, who was a delight to work with. He was professional, but helped keep the set light, and did not once worry about the quality of sound we were getting.

Casting

There was a combination of things that lead me to working with a professional casting director. Initially, in earlier scripts, Eleanor and Michael were much younger, and I wanted help with both finding young principle actors who felt natural, but also casting younger counter parts of the leads and actors who could pass as Eleanor's parents. In addition, I initially wanted to try to find actors that were ethnically diverse. At first, I was in talks with Vicky Boone, and at one point pretty much had her booked. But, in the end, a show she was working on was extended and she had to back out. She suggested working with Brock Allen, who I had worked with as a producer on two other projects. After a lot of thought and debating the options, I decided to approach them. They were really excited about the script, so I had high hopes that things would work out.

We talked about the pros and cons of casting the younger age that I wrote for Eleanor and Michael as well as aging them closer to being seniors in high school. After seeing a wide age range and a wide range of performances, I decided to cast for older in the end. This source of this decision ultimately came when Taylor Brock came in to read for Eleanor. She was this incredible combination of untraditionally pretty with the perfect Eleanor glasses, and a tough exterior with a genuine emotional vulnerability.

I ultimately got really strong actors that I'm very happy and grateful to have had the opportunity to work with, but on the other hand, I was unhappy that they did not bring me an ethnically diverse group of actors at all, and they did not bring in people I specifically asked for. They only brought in three options for Eleanor's Dad, one of

which was Taylor's actual father. Though the theory behind this choice made some sense – they both naturally looked alike – and though my casting directors clearly wanted me to head that direction, something was holding me back. Taylor's dad was a little too cool. I needed someone who could be loveably dorky. I also repeatedly asked to see Jacques Colimon, an actor I had seen in other grad films and had recently spent some time with on Jim Hickcox's *Slow Creep*. His coincidentally busy schedule during our auditions rub them the wrong way, and I never even saw a tape. So, in the end, I auditioned and cast both Jacques Colimon (Everett) and David Hess (Eleanor's Dad) myself.

Knowing that we did not have the budget to pay our extras, let alone paying Brock Allen to cast our extras, I brought on Maddison Hughes, a RTF undergrad, to cast the extras for *Eleanor*. Casting extras for the high school age range is one of the most difficult extras casting to undertake. You need both people that look young, and people who can be on set potentially during weekdays and/or late into the night for endless hours. Our casting calls turned out barely anyone. In the end, we pulled a lot of friends, and friends of friends from Facebook, and when we were on set, we would sometimes pull young looking crew to help fill in gaps. It was not ideal, but we made it work.

Locations

Setting can both reinforce character and story, as well as be a character itself. I knew that the right locations were going to be key in selling this world. The one location I was most concerned about was securing a high school. I did not necessarily want to pinpoint the location as a Texas high school, but I definitely wanted it to be a high school that took place in a smaller American town. I didn't want the high school to seem too well off either, but definitely someplace that felt more like a potentially run down public school.

All of those requests are all fine and good, but when it came down to it, my producers were running into a wall of endless fees coming from the different film friendly schools. For about four days of shooting, it was going to cost roughly \$3000, which included hourly rates on the rooms (depending on the room, the price changed), plus a faculty member and a janitorial staff member that would be required to be present for the entire shoot, both of which we would have to pay an hourly rate. Though we were assured we were getting student discounts, we were still floored that it was so expensive. We ultimately found LBJ High School after a tip off from my classmate Caleb Kuntz, who shot his thesis there the previous summer. It not only was cheaper (closer to \$2700 for all four days), but it had just the well-loved look of a public high school with a lot of character that I was hoping for.

In regard to the house locations, both Eleanor's house and the party house, we tried a number of strategies. We did everything between hoping to get some help from the Texas Film Commission or the Austin Film Commission, to searching homes on AirBnB. Both came up empty either because the look wasn't quite right, or they wanted just as much as the school did in terms of day rates. They wouldn't budge an inch on their rates, even with us being students. I was very fortunate that both Déjà, and Julia Hix (the mother of one of my actresses) were generously willing to open up their beautiful homes to us all for the low fee of paying for a maid service to come in at the end of the shoot.

The meteor shower location was a tricky one. It's originally based on a place near my hometown called Windy Hill, which had the most incredible view of the San Francisco Peninsula. I needed a place that had an open enough skyline and away from the city lights to "stargaze" (or for us to composite in stars), and also felt somewhat magical. This is Eleanor's special spot, her sanctuary. I looked into a number of "lookouts" in and around Austin, but none felt quite right. Then, on a scout in Emma Long Park where the

dirt bike trails are, I decided on a whim to drive all the way down to the end of the road to see where it would take me. When it opened up to the lake, and I stood out on those docks, I knew in my heart that this was the spot where I wanted to end my movie.

Production

Day 1-4: The High School

Out of nowhere, it was time to start principle photography. The first day was really a half-day, which was a nice way to ease into things. We kept it simple – just Eleanor and a couple of cutaways. And, for the most part it was simple, besides having to coordinate shooting at the front of the school right around the time classes let out for the day. One of the stipulations of being able to shoot during school hours was that we would avoid filming any student or faculty member. As more classes let out, it became more difficult to avoid people roaming in and out of frame. Let alone the terrible ambiance (in the scene Eleanor was supposed to be one of the last ones left at school), we were starting to lose light. I happen to step inside to use the restroom, and on my way out, I befriended the security guard that was stationed just inside the front doors. For the rest of the shoot, he helped stop people as best he could during our takes.

For the rest of the weekend, we pretty much had full run of the school since the district had Martin Luther King Jr. Day off. Partially because we really only had a half day to warm up, but additionally, in the second day we were adding two more principle characters and a whole slew of extras. My Assistant Director, Makena Buchanan, was new to ADing, and it had been a while since I worked with Patrick as a director. Needless to say, we were still settling into our groove. Things were a bit slow, and there were a few miscommunications. But for the most part, things were starting to move in the right direction.

Something I struggled with in my first weekend was the sheer number of crew on set. This was by far the largest production I had ever directed, both in crew and cast sizes. There were moments in the first couple days that I felt like my voice was starting to get drowned out. While I welcome collaborating on problem solving, it got to a point where

everyone started weighing in about what they thought was the best solution when an issue or question came up. It was overwhelming and it made it difficult to think about what I wanted to do, or what I thought was best. I started to get frustrated with everyone, which I didn't want to do and I didn't like, especially because it was all coming from a good place. I realized that something needed to change, and it needed to start with how we set up the next scene, and how Makena orchestrates the protocol. He and I started the habit of pulling each other aside for issues, rather than broadcasting it in front of groups of crew. We started sending Patrick and myself ahead of people to walk through scenes before bringing in G&E or other camera crew, because even that was distracting. It's a lesson I have relearned so many times – each set is different and you have to figure out what works best for that particular production.

There were several scenes where I had to split my focus between my principle actors and my featured extras. But I felt that devoting some time to the featured extras was also important. Even if we were about to shoot, I wanted to make sure the extras in the Health classroom scene had something to do or think about. I made sure to go around to each of them to give them a bit of backstory and motivation.

There were a few times that we really needed to nail the background extras' choreography to make sure movement felt balanced and natural. We specifically had to pay close attention to this in the Cafeteria scene, when we were shooting Hallway scenes and the scene in the Gym. I relied heavily on Makena (my 1st AD), Maddison Hughes (my 2nd AD) and Patrick to get things down. It had to feel full and bustling, but not orchestrated, and we had to do all of that with only a handful of extras. There was a lot of swapping out clothing, “young looking” crew and doing passing wipes of people directly in front of the lens.

Day 5-6: Eleanor's House

During our days off, I took Patrick to Julia Hix's house to do some preliminary blocking and walking through different scenes. When we were in "Eleanor's room," we discussed the flashback scene and the transition shots that I had planned out. We realized we might be able to get it in one take, and if done successfully, it would look really cool. Our plan was to move from the present day to the past by dollying and tilting up to a spinning mobile and in that time of the spinning, the art and set would change to the past and the young counterparts would step in and continue the scene – all without cutting. The thought excited both of us. I called Teena afterward to prep her since it would take a lot of production design coordinating, and she was completely game. In the end, it took ten takes and an incredible amount of teamwork to pull it off.

After coming back from a couple days off, we started things off easy with just scenes in Eleanor's room. The design of Eleanor's room needed to be extremely special. This is the closest glimpse into her personal world the viewer will receive, and it needed to reflect that. There were so many details that we never got close ups on, but that add up to make her room feel full and real.

In addition to casting David as Eleanor's Dad, I cast Peggy Schott as Eleanor's mom. To me, they were both close enough to be Eleanor's parents. What was most important to me was that they gave off the right energy and performance. Eleanor's parents needed to be kind and warm. They built a home for Eleanor that was safe and full of love. I didn't want teenage Eleanor's relationship with her parents to be the stereotypical strained and angry relationship. I wanted it rooted in happy memories. To me, that is a huge part of who Eleanor is and why she longs so much for the past.

Other than my Dogma film, where I worked with a one year old, this was my first time directing kids. When I casted them, Bella was by far the strongest performer, and I

knew that I needed whoever the Young Eleanor was to be natural and responsive to direction. Gabriel, though a bit green, had a natural talent that I felt and hoped I could pull out the right performance from him when the time came. On top of the already difficult task of communicating direction to kids, I put them in a crazy one-take shot. They took it on like champs though.

When it came time to do the first flashback scene, I struggled a bit with Gabriel's maturity. Unsurprisingly, as an adolescent boy, I could tell he felt a little uncomfortable sitting so closely next to Bella, though it wasn't for lack of liking it. He wanted to make jokes when they were adlibbing some things, which sometimes I let him and sometimes I asked him to pull back. For them, though of course getting a good and the strong performance is always preferred, it was also equally important to me that they have a good experience since they're kids.

On the last night at Julie's house, we had to shoot a scene out of order. We filmed the scene that was written to be directly after the bathroom scene, and half way through Eleanor and Michael's argument and eventual reconciliation. This potential issue wasn't raised until a day or so before we were supposed to shoot it. Déjà brought it up first; raising the concern that emotionally it might mess with their performance. But, we couldn't find any loopholes in our schedule and had to proceed, hoping that rehearsing beforehand would help.

As it turns out, it didn't, and after all those days directing hoards of extras, this day was the most difficult. It was our first half of night shoot, and it was a little cold. We had a slightly belligerent neighbor who might as well have stepped out of a John Hughes movie, tipsy and complaining as he walked his tiny dog in a bathrobe past our set. I tried running through the bathroom scene and argument that lead up to this one, I tried pulling each of them aside to give them notes privately, but I could not get Taylor and Colin to

focus and get serious. I feel like when you're directing, you can sometimes lose sight of what is working and if you actually got the performance you need. For the most part, I was able to talk with people like my script supervisor, Amanda Gotera, or with Patrick. And, at the time, we thought we got it in the end, but you never really know until you reach post-production.

Day 7-8: The Party

The next couple days were dedicated to all of the party scenes. These were the most difficult, and the ones I was dreading the most – mainly because I was least confident in our plan of shooting it, I am terrible at night shoots, and I had to coordinate tons of extras doing very important story beats. Generally, creating the look of the party was the easiest. There was a moment when we weren't sure we would have enough male extras, but luckily one more guy pulled through, and even adding the one made all the difference in the world.

I somehow got through both nights, and we somehow made it seem like it was a full party. Patrick and I carpooled to set every day, and I remember on our way home one of the nights he asked me how I was dealing with directing all those extras. To be completely honest, I had no time to worry about it. There was so much preparation that was consuming me and that led up to shooting that all of a sudden I was on set, and I needed to direct. It was one of those sink or swim moments, or fight or flight moments, which I supposed anytime you direct you have to face this on some level. You just have to dive into it and do it. And, so I did.

Day 9: The Meteor Shower

The biggest problem with shooting the meteor shower scene was time. We were only allowed to be in the park until 10pm, and the sun didn't go down until 6pm. On top of that, of all the days to hit terrible traffic, that was it. By the time Patrick, Caleb (our

Gaffer) and I got to set, we should have already been setting up. I didn't realize how tight we were going to be on time until we got there, and I immediately realized we had too many shots. So, I had to quickly reshot list. Amanda helped me since she was the other person on set who knew the story as well as me, being both the script supervisor and my co-writer. We got beautiful footage, but again, it was one of those director moments that though you might be pretty sure and happy with what you go, you still aren't entirely sure if you got what you needed.

Post-Production

Working with an Editor

Before I got to RTF, I had dabbled in editing, but was never very drawn to it, or proficient in any one editing platform. Since I had plenty of friends who thrived and actually enjoyed editing and post-production work, I just always worked with an editor. And I actually preferred the distance in handing over a project completely to an editor after wrapping a shoot. He would work on an assembly / cut that would reflect the script and then he would go on from there making his own creative choices as an editor, though still keeping my intent in mind. We would come together for notes, and work together through any major issues.

When applying and upon entering the program, I dreaded the fact that I had to edit my own work while I was here, mostly because I was afraid and didn't feel comfortable in any of the editing software. But, ultimately, I'm glad I was pushed to learn and face my own weaknesses and mistakes as a director. I certainly learned quickly from it, and had to relearn some things about directing, writing, producing, and really everything about the filmmaking process with every film I made. And, while I was happy to be growing as a filmmaker, I was also counting down the days until I could finally get a chance to work with an editor again for my thesis.

But, after about three years of being required to edit my own work, it felt strange to give my film to someone else when it came time to start post-production for *Eleanor*. Being able to throw myself into editing started to help fill that void that is left after principle photography is wrapped. Even more so this time around I felt at a loss of what to do with myself since I had spent so much of the past couple years developing and planning and having *Eleanor* be a part of my life. About two weeks in, I found myself in a panic, questioning whether or not I did the right thing.

I chose to work with Leah Griffin, one of my classmates from the very beginning of my time here. She and I always got along. She was different from the rest of our cohort. She learned things in a different way, and she always developed her stories and scripts in a way that was unconventional. But, she is also the kind of person that if you stick with her and take the time to understand where she is coming from, it usually ends up in an amazing place. Since my pre-thesis, I worked closely with her when it came to editing. She would sit with me and give me notes, and I could tell she was really getting how to finesse emotional cuts and hone structure. She is not shy about giving her opinion on what is not working, but on the other side of that, if something is strong and she likes it, you know she means it. As our partnership grew stronger, I knew I wanted her to edit my film, if the timing worked out.

For a while, it was uncertain that our schedules would allow further collaboration for *Eleanor*, but in the end, we were able to team up. And, though I suffered a bit from a sort of postpartum sadness after my film wrapped, after I was able to finally watch an assembly, I started to feel more comfortable again and was reminded why I chose to work with someone at this stage. I wasn't in this alone. I had Leah, as well as Andrew Hernandez, who was initially brought on as an assistant editor. He eventually became an editor too after he put in the work, as well as became much more of a partner to Leah.

Once I was able to fully let go, a weight was lifted and I felt a sense of freedom. Working with an editor again was amazing. Though Leah and Andrew had to endure my worst performances and my worst directing, it was worth having that extra barrier between being on set and cutting decisions.

The Importance of Sound

Brad Engleking is brilliant. I have always been charmed by the sound mix process, and had good experiences in the mix before, but I had not found a true

collaborator yet. It helped that he had previous relationships with Patrick and Déjà, so going into it I had a little bit of an in. But, he and I also just really hit it off. Of course, he's spot on when it comes to dialogue editing, placing Foley and ambiences. But, when we started to get into the nuances of moments, the film came alive. Directly after the second flashback, it shows a quiet scene where Eleanor and her dad eat pizza, and then she packs up her things for stargazing. The music swells as she says, "The truth is there's a lot of emptiness out there." He used a technique where he pushed the Foley and production sound to the background, and then allowed the voiceover and music fill the space to let the audience feel and get into the protagonist's head. It was a minor tweak, but enough to really let the moment and emotional pull rest and breathe, and now it's one of my favorite moments in my film.

Sound and music really played a crucial role in making scenes, moments and story beats work. Without something as simple as ambience, the scenes at school were so quiet and awkward, and the party scene, well, did not feel like a party at all. We had so many issues with the party scene to begin with. We didn't shoot enough coverage, we really didn't have a lot of extras on set, and the room layout made it difficult to sell that they didn't have time to stop the egg from being thrown. Once we got the edit just right to help create space, the music helped to set the tone and tie everything together. And even still, Brad took it all to the next level in adding effects and mixing everything to perfection.

Before getting into the mix, I worked with Elaine Hurt recording ADR and Foley and getting ready for my mix. I was hoping to work more on sound design before the mix and with Elaine, but we ended up running out of time as we ran into issues picture locking. Knowing that he has a better library and is more experienced, I feel that she

ultimately ended up not being as precise, and not getting to everything when she heard that Brad would be mixing.

Working with a Composer

Since John Hughes films were a big inspiration for this film, music was another component that I knew I had to nail. I had never worked with Nathan Efstation as a composer before, but after seeing his work in other people's films, and seeing him put together an entire pop album from scratch, I felt that he was a strong candidate to take on *Eleanor's* sound. Though *Eleanor* is not officially set in the 1980s, I wanted to be strongly reminiscent of that time and of films like *The Breakfast Club*. Nathan really took that idea and ran with it. I could tell he had some good things cooking even from the beginning when he was testing things out.

The toughest thing by far when working on the music was working long distance. Though L.A. and Austin are only two hours apart, there were several times when I really felt it. Nathan stays up late to work, and I tend to go to bed early. There were countless nights and even days when our lines of communication were delayed because of timing.

While he was in his studio working on things, he would text me songs, usually with picture, to check out and give notes (See Appendix H). Ultimately, that became a really efficient way to stay in communication about things. There were definitely a few nights, and one night in particular, where I would be lying on the couch waiting for the next round of samples that needed notes, and trying not to fall asleep. Or, falling asleep and then waking up to an extra loud text alert in order to give him notes. It was hard, and I definitely had my moments of worry, even though I had seen Nathan pull through countless times before.

And sure enough, Nathan delivered. I couldn't ask for more beautiful, perfectly toned music for my film. The music in the end makes me want to pump my fist in the air like John Bender at the end of *The Breakfast Club*.

The Importance of Color

So many things had to come together in the end to make Eleanor and the Egg feel like a whole world and a complete idea. All of the nods to John Hughes were there in small pieces, but it was not finessed yet. Bringing in music helped a lot and got us closer to that 1980s John Hughes feel. But, when we finally got to color grading, things really started to fall into place.

I worked with Simon Quiroz on color correction. We referenced three different looks for the film (See Appendix I). For the present day world of the film, our main inspiration was *The Breakfast Club*. It has a high contrast and rich saturation look. We wanted to create a dreamy, hazy memory look for the flashbacks that could contrast from the present day. We decided to look at images from a different era entirely, since the quality of film that people used changed over time. Our main focus landed on photographs from the 1970s. And, for the snapshots that Eleanor and Michael take with a disposable camera, we decided to look at what prints from disposable cameras looked like – which as it turns out can have contrast and saturation, but it tends to have a more faded look with vignette edging.

Even within the present day world, we took some liberties, especially when Eleanor went from spaces she was comfortable in, such as school and home, to places that were stressful and uncomfortable, such as the party. Simon took special care to color the bathroom scene with an almost neon green tinge, which is both a place where Eleanor is most vulnerable and a place where she is most out of place. And, in the scenes directly afterward, we go back to the higher contrast and saturated style. However, even at the

dock, it almost feels like a cross between present day coloring, and the 1970s photograph look for the flashbacks. This was more of a happy accident since the main source of light in the end scene is a streetlight, which gave off a very yellow tungsten quality. But, in the end, it was kind of a nice in between since Eleanor and Michael come back together in friendship after all those years.

To The Future

Looking back from where I began my journey to filmmaking, it is unsurprising to me that I was drawn to a coming of age story, because in so many ways the path to finding my voice and harnessing it has been a coming of age.

I came to film school wanting to learn and become a stronger director and writer. And, while I've been here I feel that I have accomplished that, though I know learning and growing is never ending. But, while here, I also rediscovered and claimed my identity as a producer. There is something empowering about all three – writing, producing and directing – all of which fulfill me in different ways.

I know producing is my strength, and I will most likely head down that track when I move to Los Angeles after graduating. But, I'd also like to think that *Eleanor and the Egg* is still just the beginning for me as a director. With the help of my colleagues and collaborators, for the first time, I feel that my voice is valid and deserves a chance to be heard.

Appendix A

The following is the shooting script for the principle photography of *Eleanor and the Egg*. The script supervisor, Amanda Gotera, lined this script during the shoot.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
COPY FOR LINING
DURING PRODUCTION

ELEANOR AND THE EGG

Written by

Kelly Ota
And
Amanda Gotera

Version 15.16

5407 Ave F, Austin, TX 78751
650-387-8822

IC inserts

INT. HEALTH CLASSROOM - DAY

An egg carton opens. A hand gingerly holds each egg up, and carefully stamps them one by one. Disposable cameras line up in a neat row. An organized stack of Egg Baby Project papers placed at the ready.

14 WIDE IE dolly on students
VARIOUS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS sit at their desks, paired up. Each couple holds an EGG.

MRS. LARSSON

This is your baby. You, your egg, and your partner are a family. You should record your family time together...

MRS. LARSSON (45) gives the egg back to the student sitting in front of her. She hands a disposable camera to each couple. Her glasses — arty frames with a long beaded string attached — sit low on her nose.

MRS. LARSSON (CONT'D)

...in your parenting journals and with these cameras. Both parents in the photos please.

14 Portrait 2-shot
An ARTSY COUPLE (16) have already doodled all over their Egg with colorful sharpie. One of them studies the camera closely and holds it up to take an angled shot of their partner and painted Egg.

16 Portrait 2-shot
A BORED COUPLE (16) slouch with an equally boring looking Egg. One of them smacks her gum and blows a bubble. It POPS.

17 Portrait 2-shot
An AFFECTIONATE COUPLE (17) sits leaning close together, barely paying attention to their Egg, which is plain white.

18 dolly on teacher
MRS. LARSSON (CONT'D)

You must consider the emotional bond you and your partner must maintain with your "baby"...

ELEANOR (17) wears purple-framed glasses, maroon Doc Martens, and a gray hoodie under a faded denim vest that's covered in patches and buttons.

MRS. LARSSON (CONT'D)

...as well as the support you must give to each other.

Mrs. Larsson pauses at Eleanor and her partner MICHAEL (17) as she hands them a camera. She smiles at Eleanor, then gives Michael a meaningful look.

2.

1K 1J
MRS. LARSSON (CONT'D)

I know this is just Health class,
but remember: you have to pass in
order to graduate.

Eleanor tenderly cradles the Egg to her chest and sits as far
away from Michael as possible. He wears a purple and white
letterman jacket and has perfect hair.

Michael examines the disposable camera. They make eye
contact, then quickly look away.

The bell RINGS.

2A 2B/4K
2 INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Eleanor navigates the crowded and noisy room. She squeezes in
between KIM (17), a boy crazy drama kid, and ANABELLE (17),
who is usually found in an ironic T-shirt. Eleanor flips
through a National Geographic: Beyond Our Galaxy Special
Issue.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
Everything in the universe follows
rules. Gravity. Relativity.
History.

On the page is an illustration of a spiral galaxy. It seems
to shimmer.

3 INT. ELEANOR'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Galaxies and clusters of stars swirl around on the walls of a
makeshift blanket tent. Light streams from a star projector
sitting between a YOUNG ELEANOR (11) and a YOUNG MICHAEL
(11).

ELEANOR (V.O.)
Powerful forces pull galaxies
together.

Light plays across their faces as they lay side by side
looking up. One of Eleanor's arms is tucked under her head as
she points up at the tent sky. Michael looks at Eleanor,
grinning. Plates of half-eaten pizza slices are forgotten.

In Eleanor's room, posters of Carl Sagan, Reading Rainbow's
LeVar Burton, and a hand-painted Tardis hang on the walls.

A mobile of the solar system hangs from the ceiling next to a
replica of the Starship Enterprise that seems to be flying
around the planets.

CUT?

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

3.

Light glimmers from inside the tent. Eleanor's MOM (35) and DAD (35) lean against the door.

DAD
Michael, your parents are here to pick you up!

ELEANOR (V.O.)
...and tear them apart too.

Michael rolls away from Eleanor out of the tent. She watches him leave.

4 INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Eleanor turns the page to a chart of meteor classifications.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
So it's inevitable that things collide.

MICHAEL (O.C.)
Hi.

Eleanor looks up to see an EGG with a drawn-on-face staring at her. It sits beside a disposable camera on an orange lunch tray held by Michael. The camera is labeled in black sharpie: EGG BABY PROJECT - GROUP #4.

ELEANOR
Oh, hey.

MICHAEL
We gotta talk.

Eleanor flips the magazine closed. Eleanor's friends stare at Michael blankly.

ELEANOR
I should say so.

The cafeteria CHATTER dies down a little when Michael slides onto the bench across from her, pushing some of her books out of the way with his tray. She furrows her brow at him. All eyes are on them.

MICHAEL
So, I guess we're partners.

ELEANOR
Glad you noticed. Look, I'm not failing this project.
(MORE)

Friends
leave

2B/4K 4A 4E
 ELEANOR (CONT'D)
 And I'm not going to do all the
 work myself either.

Eleanor's friends get up and leave. One of them pats her on
 the shoulder goodbye. She glances up to watch them leave. The
 room is humming with whispers.

MICHAEL
 Relax. This is my second time
 taking Health. I'm an old pro.
 Eleanor turns back to face him.

ELEANOR
 Great. Can we get an egg picture
 while you're here?
 She shakes the camera at him. Michael glances around. People
 are watching.

MICHAEL
 No problemo.
 He hands her the Egg. Notices a smudge of ketchup on it.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Oh, wait.
 He gently wipes off the Egg with a paper napkin and then
 picks up the camera.

ELEANOR
 I think you have to wind it first. 4C
 Michael throws his arm over Eleanor's shoulder as she
 awkwardly holds up the Egg.

The FLASH blinds Eleanor momentarily. When she can see again,
 a CLUSTER OF GIRLS in trendy clothes and flanked by smug
 JOCKS have descended boisterously on the table.

HEATHER (16), elegant and clearly in charge, taps Eleanor's
 shoulder.

HEATHER
 Can you scoot down a little? I
 really need to talk to Michael.

ELEANOR
 Oh, well --

HEATHER
 Thanks.

5.

44
Flustered, Eleanor scoots down. And keeps scooting down as the group tries to squeeze in, until she's at the very end of the table.

Eleanor looks down the table to Michael, who shrugs apologetically. Heather studies their interaction closely.

ELEANOR
I was leaving anyway.

TODD
Yo, you gonna eat that?

45
Suddenly TODD (17) reaches across several trays to take a handful of Eleanor's french fries. He knocks into her hard enough that the Egg goes spinning.

Eleanor lurches forward and catches it before it rolls off the table, her face gone white.

Someone smothers a snort of laughter. Heather clicks her tongue with pity.

Egg in hand and cheeks burning, Eleanor straightens up and marches out of the cafeteria.

Michael, concerned, gets up to follow her. He pushes Todd's head as he passes.

5A
5 INT. LOCKERS - DAY

EVERETT (17) slaps party fliers onto lockers, guffawing to himself, as he passes them. Since Eleanor is in front of her locker, he tapes one to her back. She glares at him and tears the flier off.

Eleanor opens her locker, which is decorated with SPACE THINGS. An old photo of the Perseids cut out from a science magazine, covered slightly with a photo of her and her friends. She gently places the Egg in front of her books. She frowns at the drawn-on smile.

5C
MICHAEL (O.C.)
Eleanor!

Michael trots toward her, dodging a couple of students in his way, disposable camera in hand.

ELEANOR
We have to be more careful with this Egg. It's supposed to be our child.

MICHAEL
I know. I'm sorry about those jerks.

ELEANOR
(deadpan)
But they're so charming. (ALT: Real charming friends you've got. ALT: You really know how to pick friends, don't you?)

Michael laughs at this, a little embarrassed. Eleanor shoves the egg at him as she stuffs her bag full of books. He takes it, surprised.

MICHAEL
So, I have wood-shop next and then football practice after school. Def off-limits for this little guy.

ELEANOR
It's a girl. But, right. So, like, relay parenting this afternoon?

MICHAEL
Yeah, I guess so.

Eleanor closes her locker with a sigh.

ELEANOR
Fine. As long as you can take it tonight.

★ She turns to march down the mostly empty hallway. Michael matches her pace effortlessly.

MICHAEL
What's tonight?

ELEANOR
I've got this thing at Windy Lake, and I can't ride my bike out there with an egg.

Michael leans in conspiratorially.

MICHAEL
Oh, like a hot date sort of thing?

Eleanor rolls her eyes.

ELEANOR
No. It's a meteor shower sort of thing. It starts at midnight.

50 Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

7.

He softens ever so slightly.

MICHAEL

Oh, nice. You're still into that stuff.

Eleanor shoots him a glare out of the corner of her eye.

But Michael doesn't notice as he gives a passing BRO (16) a high five. He turns back to Eleanor and slaps her hard on the shoulder. She buckles slightly, and grasps the Egg tightly to her chest.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I got your back. Practice is done at 5:30. Can you stick around?

Eleanor massages her shoulder.

ELEANOR

I'll miss my bus.

MICHAEL

I could give you a ride.

Eleanor hesitates.

ELEANOR

Fine.

Eleanor exits first

The bell RINGS. Eleanor watches Michael disappear in the flood of students that fill the hallway.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MONTAGE - DAY

An energetic montage, backed by pop music.

8 A.) HISTORY CLASS -- Eleanor taps her pencil against neatly handwritten notes. She stares at the Egg. It stares back.

7 B.) HALLWAY -- Eleanor hands the Egg to Michael. Snapshot: Michael tries to balance the Egg on his shoulder, Eleanor looking worried. Snapshot: Leaning against the lockers.

7 C.) SPANISH CLASS - The SPANISH TEACHER (35) animatedly conjugates verbs and Eleanor monotonously repeats along with her classmates, egg perched on her notebook. She looks to the clock -- the minute hand clicks by.

10 D.) GYM - Eleanor, in an ugly gym uniform, anxiously cradles the Egg on the sidelines. Michael is late. He rushes in, apologetic, and followed by Todd and Everett. A dodgeball rolls toward Todd and Everett.

Todd passes it hard to Everett, who laughs it off, then chucks it at Eleanor right when she hands over the Egg. Michael immediately hurls the dodgeball right at him. Snapshot: Michael throws his arm around a stiff Eleanor as Todd takes another photo.

Ev.
Caption =
108.1

12A wide
12 EXT. FRONT STEPS - DUSK

Eleanor stands on the front steps of the high school holding the Egg with both hands.

A couple of stragglers pass by. She looks up as a car pulls up to the curb. The one other student waiting to get picked up dashes to it.

She glances one way, then the other. No Michael.

She calls him. The phone RINGS.

13 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DUSK

The phone RINGS again as light grows dim on a quiet, empty hallway.

14A wide
14 EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DUSK

The phone RINGS a third time as the sun sets over the empty football field and bleachers. The stadium lights remain dark.

MICHAEL'S VOICEMAIL
You've reached the voicemail box
for...

MICHAEL
Mike.

15 EXT. FRONT STEPS - DUSK

Eleanor checks her watch.

12A/15B

MICHAEL'S VOICEMAIL
Leave a message --

medium
She hangs up, and glances around for Michael one last time, then begrudgingly digs the disposable camera out of her jacket pocket.

128/15A

ELEANOR

At least you have one parent who loves you.

Eleanor can't even fake a smile as she takes this Egg-selfie.

160 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eleanor, wearing her backpack and holding the Egg, lets herself in through the side door.

In the kitchen, her DAD (48) wears an apron that says "It ain't easy being so cheesy!" It's covered in flour.

DAD

Hey, where ya been, kiddo?

He pulls her into a side hug and kisses the top of her head, then dusts off some flour left in her hair.

ELEANOR

Oh, Dad, what happened in here?

He slams a mound of dough on the counter.

DAD

Homemade-ah-pizza-pie night! Wanna help?

ELEANOR

I can't, I have work.

He eyes the Egg tenderly clutched at her chest.

DAD

I've got some pictures of your mom holding you just like that when you were little. How's my grand-Egg-baby doing?

ELEANOR

A couple near spills, but not bad.

DAD

Isn't Michael supposed to be helping you out on this project?

ELEANOR

Key phrase: "Supposed to be."

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

10.

DAD

Why don't you invite him over for dinner? I haven't seen that kid in years. He loved pizza night.

He slams the dough on the counter and continues to knead it.

ELEANOR

I don't know if that's a good idea. I'm going to go do some homework.

DAD

But it's Friday! And you gotta choose your pizza toppings!

ELEANOR

Surprise me.

Eleanor's dad watches her stomp off. He picks up the dough and attempts to throw it in the air. It breaks when he catches it.

17 ?

INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - DAY

Eleanor closes her door behind her and leans against it. She checks her phone. No new messages.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

The thing about constellations is that they're just stories. We see bright lights and we draw lines connecting them.

She taps the still-hanging mobile of the solar system and Star Trek Enterprise with her index finger as she makes her way across the room. It spins.

T 19

INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - FLASHBACK

17B

Michael's hand reaches up to stop the spinning mobile. He ~~takes a bite of cold pizza~~, and throws on his sweatshirt.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

But in reality, the stars that make up a single constellation could be thousands of light-years away from each other.

19B

He passes Eleanor, who sits on her bed with a PVC pipe, lenses, coping saw, power drill and box cutter.

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

11.

ELEANOR
You're going?

MICHAEL
Come down to the park with us.

ELEANOR
I thought you were going to help me
build this.

MICHAEL
I will.
(beat)
I'll come back later.

Michael leaves.

18 INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Eleanor sets a table: a place for her Dad at the head of the table and a place for her to his right. She lingers at the empty chair and place setting on the left.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
The truth is there's a lot of
emptiness out there.

Her Dad brings out the finished pizza, proud and triumphant.

20

INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - PRESENT

200 Eleanor folds up the legs of her telescope, packs it in a carrying case. She stuffs a notebook, a star map, pens in a bookbag. *

200 Eleanor checks her clock. 10 PM. Two hours to the meteor shower. The date is circled in red on her calendar — this is important to her.

She looks at the Egg and softens at the sight of its goofy smile. She rubs the top of the Egg's head with her finger.

ELEANOR
You deserve better.

Eleanor grabs her unmoved phone off of her desk and dials. It RINGS and Michael picks up. LOUD MUSIC And LAUGHTER filter through the phone.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
Michael? Hello?

MICHAEL
Eleanor! Hey.

ELEANOR
Where are you??

A beat. He forgot.

MICHAEL
Look, I'm so sorry.

ELEANOR
You promised you would take the
Egg.

MICHAEL
I know. I'm at this party at
Everett's, sort of in your
neighborhood. Can you bring it
over?

ELEANOR
To a party?

MICHAEL
I'm sorry. I just can't really
leave right now.

ELEANOR
Fine.

She hangs up, begrudgingly stuffs her arms in a hoodie, grabs
her packed bag and huffs off.

21 EXT. EVERETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

BASS THUMPS as Eleanor dismounts and walks her bike up to a
nice-looking house. She leans it against a tree before
heading inside

22 INT. EVERETT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eleanor pushes through PARTY-GOERS holding red plastic cups
and COUPLES making out. One DRUNK GIRL (16) hears "her song"
and throws her arms up in the air. She tries to get everyone
to dance with her. A DRUNK JOCK throws his arm around
Eleanor's shoulders, which she promptly peels off.

She spots Michael, who has a seemingly-drunk Heather wrapped
around him. Eleanor stomps up to him.

22L 22A 22B 22C 22D 22P
Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

13.

MICHAEL

Eleanor!

He shoves Heather off of him. She doesn't notice, but instead sees a FRIEND and is seamlessly thrown into a hug.

ELEANOR

Here. You know you can't keep our Egg at a party, right? It could get...

Just then, a throw pillow come careening past Michael. He almost drops the Egg. In the background, a BEER PONG PLAYER (16) is collecting ping pong balls that are scattered around the room. One underneath a pillow. One on the floor.

MICHAEL

Not cool, man! I've got an Egg baby here!

Michael puts the Egg out of reach in a basket of potpourri on the fireplace mantel.

TODD

Uh, dude. I don't think you should really have yer baby at a party.

EVERETT

Yeah, man. Not great parenting.

MICHAEL

(deadpan)

Hilarious, guys. Thanks.

In the background, the Beer Pong Player passes the Drunk Girl now crying uncontrollably. He finds a ping pong ball in her cup.

ELEANOR

See? This is a terrible place for families.

MICHAEL

What do you want me to do? I can't leave.

ELEANOR

Why?

MICHAEL

I guess Heather's allergic to soy or something? I skipped practice to drive her to the hospital.

(MORE)

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

14.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Look at her.

Eleanor looks over at Heather and really sees her for the first time. Her face is puffy and blotchy.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She's on a bunch of meds that are making her real weird.

Heather is holding a huge bowl of cheese puffs and spitting them out at people passing her.

ELEANOR

She seems normal to me.

~~The Beer Pong Player comes by and begins picking through the clutter on the mantle.~~

MICHAEL

She made me bring her here, but I have to keep taking drinks away from her.

Heather spits a cheese puff right at Michael.

Eleanor sees the Beer Pong Player pick up the Egg. He's mistaken it for a ping pong ball.

ELEANOR

Wait, no, that's not—

The Beer Pong Player has already been swallowed up by the crowd and is heading for the beer pong table.

MICHAEL

Dude, no!

Michael and Eleanor try to dodge their way through the crowd, but they can't seem to catch his attention or catch up.

The Beer Pong Player reaches the end of the table, triumphant. He high fives his PARTNER and goes to throw the Egg first.

Michael motions her to the other end of the table. They split up.

Michael reaches out to the Beer Pong Player, but he's too late. The Egg goes flying. Eleanor reaches her arms out to catch it, but in the chaos, misses.

The Egg SMASHES all over her hair.

22P
15.
↑
Silence throughout the party. Everett looks stunned but Todd starts to laugh.
22H
22K
MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Dude, shut up.

Eleanor feels the broken Egg in her hair and runs off.

23

INT. EVERETT'S HOUSE PARTY - BATHROOM - DAY

Eleanor rushes into the bathroom and slams the door. Standing in front of the mirror, she frantically picks pieces of broken shell out of her hair.

ELEANOR
No, no, no, no...

She stops and stares down at the eggshells cupped in her palms, giving her own reflection a hard look.

Egg drips onto her shoulder. Her eyes fill with tears.

Eleanor turns on the faucet. She starts to wash her face and then sticks her whole head under.

A KNOCK at the door.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Hey, it's me.

ELEANOR
Go AWAY, Michael.

Michael opens the door and peeks in, face full of concern.

MICHAEL
You okay?

Eleanor glares at him through her wet hair.

ELEANOR
No. I'm not okay. Our Egg Baby is dead.

Michael steps in and shuts the door softly, closing out the party noise.

MICHAEL
I know. But are you okay?

ELEANOR
I have dead Egg Baby in my hair, Michael.

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

16. 23A

Michael smiles ruefully and grabs a towel off of the rack.

MICHAEL

It's just a grade, Eleanor.

Eleanor rings out her hair in the sink.

ELEANOR

But I have to pass. If failing
Health class keeps me from going to
CalTech next fall, I will just die.

Michael hands her the towel. She grabs it from him and starts
drying her hair.

MICHAEL

You already know where you're going
to school?

She peeks at him from underneath the towel.

ELEANOR

Yeah, I found out last week. Early
admission.

MICHAEL

That's... that's really great.
That's kind of far away, huh?

ELEANOR

Yeah, that's kind of the point.

MICHAEL

Look, we'll make it up with extra
credit. Besides, we have a whole
room full of witnesses who'll say
it's not your fault.

Eleanor frowns.

ELEANOR

Why are you being nice to me?

Michael stops for a moment.

MICHAEL

You think I'm such a jerk?

Eleanor stops drying her hair. She opens her mouth to speak
but thinks better.

ELEANOR

I don't.

GLASSES OFF

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

17.

23A
23C
Michael raises his eyebrows.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
Fine. Maybe I do.

MICHAEL
Why?

Eleanor twists the towel in her lap

GLASSES ON

ELEANOR
Because I needed you and you
weren't there.

MICHAEL
I said I was sorry about the Egg.

ELEANOR
I'm not talking about the Egg,
Michael.

Eleanor glances up at him.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
I was fine before this stupid
project. I was over it. I have
other friends now and it didn't
matter anymore that you just
vanished on me after my mom...

Eleanor trails off. Her shoulders shake a little.

Michael slumps back against the wall, stung. He gets it now.

MICHAEL
Eleanor.

Eleanor sniffs and glares down at her shoes, refuses to look
him in the eye.

A KNOCK and suddenly the door opens.

EVERETT
Whoops! Didn't know this was
occupado.

Eleanor yanks her backpack up from the ground. Her telescope
— which sticks out at the top — bobs as she ducks past
Everett.

24-25?
INT. EVERETT'S HOUSE PARTY - STAIRCASE - NIGHT 25A

Heather sits on the staircase. She's braiding an overwhelmed SKATER DUDE's hair and describing the plot of Little Women to him.

HEATHER

So Jo moves to New York because Laurie is a TOTAL SCRUB. And then she's like a nanny but also she's writing these totally Gothic stories on the down-low. And then she has to go home because ohmigod TRAGEDY. It's like the 1860s so Beth gets Scarlet Fever and then she DIES...

Michael comes through, attempting to follow Eleanor.

MICHAEL

Eleanor! Wait!

He notices Heather and effortlessly hauls her to her feet.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Okay, come on, you.

21B
I BIKE BEAT
I/E. MICHAEL'S CAR - EVERETT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

26A
Michael, in his car, drives slowly beside Eleanor as she struggles to free her bike, victim of a TP incident.

Heather, in the passenger seat, pulls a ping pong ball out of her shirt. She draws a face on it and kisses it.

MICHAEL

(to Eleanor)

Can we please finish talking, Eleanor?

Heather leans over him to wave the ping pong ball at Eleanor. Eleanor glares at it.

ELEANOR

I'm done talking. I don't have time for this.

26D
26C
MICHAEL 26B
Listen, I was a dumb kid. I didn't know what to say or do. I couldn't fix it.

↑ 26B
 ↑ 26C
 ↑ 26B
 ELEANOR
 All you had to do was be there. And apparently you still don't know how to do that.

MICHAEL
 Okay, well let me be there now.

ELEANOR
 What's the point? We're seniors. We're all leaving for college.

MICHAEL
 Maybe that's exactly the point. Today was awesome. I mean, not the Egg breaking in your hair. But you know, hanging with you. I don't want us to leave and never see each other again.

Eleanor stops and glares at Michael. Heather has tucked the ping pong ball inside the collar of his jacket and it peeks out at her.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Eleanor, I'm here now. Can I please give you a ride?

Eleanor gives him a long, hard look.

28 EXT. WINDY LAKE DOCK - NIGHT

Meteors STREAK across the sky. It's incredible.

Michael stares through the telescope, awed. Eleanor adjusts it for him. Heather sits on a blanket, devouring the last piece of pizza.

Eleanor smiles.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
 Did you know we're all made of the same stuff?

She looks up at the sky.

ELEANOR
 Every single molecule in our bodies was first formed inside a collapsing star.

↑ 26B
 ↑ 26C
 ↑ 26B
 ELEANOR
 All you had to do was be there. And apparently you still don't know how to do that.

MICHAEL
 Okay, well let me be there now.

ELEANOR
 What's the point? We're seniors. We're all leaving for college.

MICHAEL
 Maybe that's exactly the point. Today was awesome. I mean, not the Egg breaking in your hair. But you know, hanging with you. I don't want us to leave and never see each other again.

Eleanor stops and glares at Michael. Heather has tucked the ping pong ball inside the collar of his jacket and it peeks out at her.

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 Eleanor, I'm here now. Can I please give you a ride?

Eleanor gives him a long, hard look.

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Eleanor smiles.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
 Did you know we're all made of the same stuff?

She looks up at the sky.

ELEANOR
 Every single molecule in our bodies was first formed inside a collapsing star.

(This is from the day we were up to a scripty binder!)

EXTRA EMOTIONAL CUES

29A

ELEANOR, HEATHER &
MICHAEL WALK ALONG
THE FENCE TO THE DOCK

EXT. WINDY LAKE DOCK - NIGHT

27

Meteors STREAK across the sky. It's incredible.

Michael stares through the telescope, awed. Eleanor adjusts it for him. Heather sits on a blanket, devouring the last piece of pizza.

Eleanor smiles.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Did you know we're all made of the same stuff?

She looks up at the sky.

ELEANOR

Every single molecule in our bodies was first formed inside a collapsing star.

Michael steps back to let Eleanor to use the telescope. Their eyes lock. A beat. A bond.

Heather sways a bit as she leans her head back to look at the star-filled sky.

HEATHER

Whoa. You guys. Do you see what's happening up there? It's WILD.

28

EXT. WINDY LAKE DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Michael and Eleanor lay on a rock, looking up at the sky.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Eventually, we all go back to that. And that's kind of comforting to me.

Eleanor has one arm resting underneath her head and points up at the sky.

Michael follows where she points, then looks back down at her, grinning. Heather is passed out next to them, snoring a little, tenderly holding a ping pong ball with a smiley face drawn on it.

* + 16 CANDLES *
SHOT

2.

ELEANOR (V.O.)
Because galaxies form and galaxies
collapse, and then all that
celestial dust and debris just
makes something new. Something
different. Maybe something better.

Eleanor holds up the camera and takes one last photo.

CUT TO: BLACK

END CREDITS WITH PHOTO MONTAGE.

Appendix B

The following is the rewritten shooting script for the pickup shoot. This is a lined copy and also includes Director's Notes regarding performance notes and reminders.

ELEANOR AND THE EGG

Written by

Kelly Ota
And
Amanda Gotera

PICK UP SHOOT SCENES

- "Natural" take
- over the top take
- soft/quiet take
- take your time take

What just happened?

E - An egg just broke in front of me. ~~EVERYONE~~ All eyes were on you.

M - Did you just feel health again? E was clearly upset.

INT. EVERETT'S HOUSE PARTY - BATHROOM - DAY

30A

- This egg represents your friendship w/ Michael.

Objective: get out of there ASAP w/out being noticed.

Standing in front of the mirror, Eleanor picks pieces of broken shell out of her hair. She stops and stares down at the eggshells cupped in her palms.

30B

30E

30C

ELEANOR

Oh my God. Shit. I'm so sorry little Egg. As if you tried to

save a little ladybug, but accidentally squished it...

She gives her own reflection a hard look. Egg drips onto her shoulder. Her eyes fill with tears. Defeated, Eleanor turns on the faucet. She starts to gingerly wash her face and wets her hair with her hands.

30D

30F

A KNOCK at the door. Michael opens the door and peeks in, face full of concern.

MICHAEL

Hey, it's me. You okay?

Michael steps in and shuts the door softly, closing out the party noise. She throws her hands up into the air, egg still dripping from her hands.

Subtext:

our partnership didn't even last one day

ELEANOR

Well, our Egg Baby is dead. We didn't even last one day.

- she's being a little dramatic.

- objective: try to lighten the mood.

He laughs a little.

MICHAEL

Do you hear yourself? Calm down.

ELEANOR

It's not funny.

Michael watches Eleanor, struggling to get her hair wet. Pity her.

MICHAEL

Here. Let me help you with that.

Michael moves forward and tries to help her get all of her hair in the water. It's a mess.

ELEANOR

Don't touch me!

Water flies everywhere as she whips her hair around to face him. Michael backs off, throwing his hands in the air.

MICHAEL

Okay, fine, I won't touch you! Jeez, it's just an egg.

- You're used to getting along w/ ppl easily.

- To you, it was only yesterday that you two were close.

He's in your physical space + you're vulnerable right now.

He can't just flip his hair and think that will make everything better. It won't work on you.

↳ as if to say "we've known each other our whole lives, what's the big deal?"

Green (mm/dd/yyyy)

30E

30D

2.

30F

Eleanor wipes water dripping down her face. Michael can see the pain on her face.

*He doesn't get it.
Maybe he didn't come to the funeral.
He didn't hug you when you told him.*

ELEANOR
It's not just about the egg.

MICHAEL
You're right. I screwed up.

ELEANOR
Yeah, we're gonna fail.

MICHAEL
I shouldn't have disappeared when we got to high school.

*← You get it.
It's about your her mom. Guitt.*

Angry at self.

Oh, he does get it.

Eleanor sniffs and glares down at her shoes, refuses to look him in the eye.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I didn't know what to say to you when your mom...when she...

Angry at self.

He wavers and stumbles. Eleanor looks up.

ELEANOR
When she died.

MICHAEL
Yeah.

Eleanor sees Michael is shaken.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I was devastated. She was like a mom to me too. I should have called you. I wanted to call you and see how you were. But, I didn't know how to be brave for you. I was just a dumb kid. And, I still am, I guess.

*This wakes you up.
You don't like thinking about it.
She was the first person you were close with to die.*

Let this moment hang.

Eleanor softens as she studies Michael. Their eyes lock. She opens her mouth, about to say something.

BANGING at the door.

EVERETT
Dude, raging bladder persuasion out here.

You don't know what to say.

Avoid and objective. get to Meteor shower!

Eleanor grabs her stuff.

30E 30D 3. 30F

Wait- MICHAEL

ELEANOR
I gotta go.

Eleanor leaves.

Michael leans his head back against the wall and closes his eyes, and hits his fist against the wall. *objective: how can I make it up to her?*

EXT. WINDY LAKE DOCK - NIGHT

Meteors BURST and TRAIL across the blanket of night. *VFX already shot*

31A Eleanor looks up from her telescope and to the sky, teary. *This is something you shared with someone you love.*

Her mom would have loved this. *double take here.*

31B A car pulls up, Michael gets out and jogs over.

31C He approaches the blanket and plops down, and looks up.

31D Eleanor looks over at him, shocked.

MICHAEL
So, what are we looking at? *I'm sorry.*

Eleanor smiles.

ELEANOR
The Northern Taurids. *I forgive you.*

Michael pushes her shoulder a little.

MICHAEL
Hey, are we still partners?

Eleanor playfully pushes him back.

ELEANOR
Whatever, I guess I'm stuck with you. You're the worst partner ever.

He laughs, and looks back up.

MICHAEL
Whoa, that's pretty rad.

ELEANOR
Sometimes, during the Northern Taurids, there's a notable increase in fireball activity, so hopefully we'll see one.

30E 30D 3. 30F

Wait- MICHAEL

ELEANOR
I gotta go.

Eleanor leaves.

Michael leans his head back against the wall and closes his eyes, and hits his fist against the wall. *objective: how can I make it up to her?*

EXT. WINDY LAKE DOCK - NIGHT

31A Meteors BURST and TRAIL across the blanket of night. *VFX already shot*

Eleanor looks up from her telescope and to the sky, teary. *How can I get her back?*
Her mom would have loved this. *double take here.*

31B A car pulls up, Michael gets out and jogs over.

31C He approaches the blanket and plops down, and looks up.

31D Eleanor looks over at him, shocked.

MICHAEL
So, what are we looking at? *I'm sorry.*

Eleanor smiles.

1 for give you. ELEANOR
The Northern Taurids.

Michael pushes her shoulder a little.

MICHAEL
Hey, are we still partners?

Eleanor playfully pushes him back.

ELEANOR
Whatever, I guess I'm stuck with you. You're the worst partner ever.

He laughs, and looks back up.

MICHAEL
Whoa, that's pretty rad.

ELEANOR
Sometimes, during the Northern Taurids, there's a notable increase in fireball activity, so hopefully we'll see one.

ADD: Eleanor - "I'm glad
you came."
Michael - "Me too."

31E

4.

Michael stares through the telescope, awed. Eleanor adjusts it for him. Their eyes lock. A beat. A bond.

Meteors continue to STREAK across the sky. It's incredible.

VFX already shot

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Did you know we're all made of the same stuff?

31F

Michael and Eleanor lay on the dock, looking up at the sky.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Every single molecule in our bodies was first formed inside a collapsing star.

Eleanor has one arm resting underneath her head and points up at the sky. Michael follows where she points, then looks back down at her, grinning.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Eventually, we all go back to that. And that's kind of comforting to me.

Eleanor holds up the camera and takes one last photo.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

Because galaxies form and galaxies collapse, and then all that celestial dust and debris just makes something new. Something different. Maybe something better.

31G *

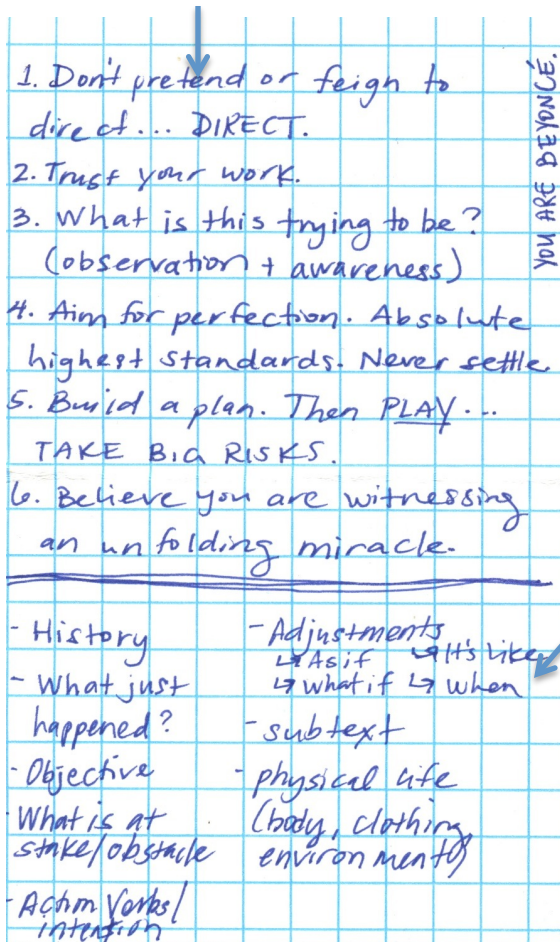
Michael and Eleanor sit cross legged directly across from one another. The telescope forgotten. They talk and laugh.

CUT TO: BLACK

Appendix C

The following is a personal note of reminders that I carried on my person during my pickup shoot. It contained further director's notes suggested by Micah Barber (a RFT lecturer that I taught with for three years), as well as one note that I added during a moment of frustration on set.

Micah's directing reminders.

- 
1. Don't pretend or feign to direct... DIRECT.
 2. Trust your work.
 3. What is this trying to be? (observation + awareness)
 4. Aim for perfection. Absolute highest standards. Never settle.
 5. Build a plan. Then PLAY... TAKE BIG RISKS.
 6. Believe you are witnessing an unfolding miracle.
-
- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| - History | - Adjustments |
| - What just happened? | ↳ As if ↳ It's like |
| - Objective | ↳ what if ↳ when |
| What is at stake/obstacle | - subtext |
| - Action/verbs/interaction | - physical life (body, clothing, environment) |
- YOU ARE BEYOND

An additional note to myself/ confidence boost.

Other directing reminders.

Reminders

Appendix D

The following are the Production Design Digital Renderings by Teena Sauvola. These were early concepts that we had discussed, but did not necessarily stick with since a lot of the color schemes depended on the locations we actually got.

Appendix D Continued

History Classroom



McCallum High School



Appendix D Continued

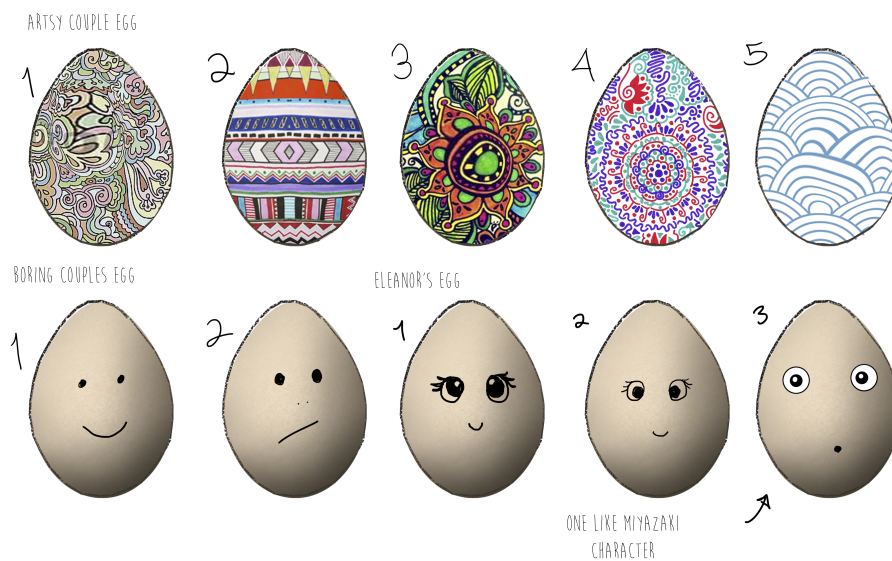
Eleanor's Room- Flashback



Eleanor's Room- Present



Appendix D Continued



Egg Concept Art - We ended up going with a combination of the anime mouth in 1 (bottom middle) and the eyes in 3 (bottom left).

Appendix E

The following are examples of early and continuing inspirations for the *Eleanor and the Egg* screenplay, tone, themes and look.



John Hughes films, especially The Breakfast Club.



The television series Freaks and Geeks.

Appendix F

The following are several inspirations for Eleanor's character.



Concept for Eleanor's vest



Lindsay Weir from Freaks and Geeks.



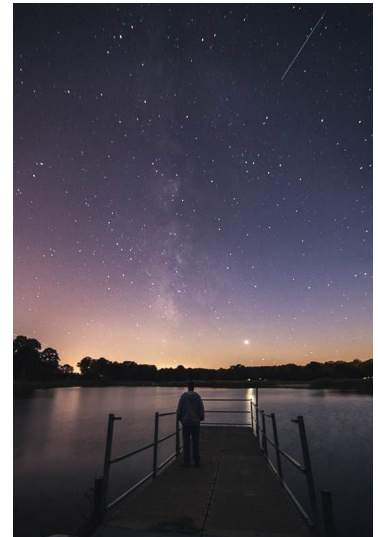
Carl Sagan and Neil deGrasse Tyson



Photographs of youth and teenagers from the 60s, 70s and 80s, especially "Hurt" (1972) by Joseph Szabo as a part of the series "Coming of Age in America."

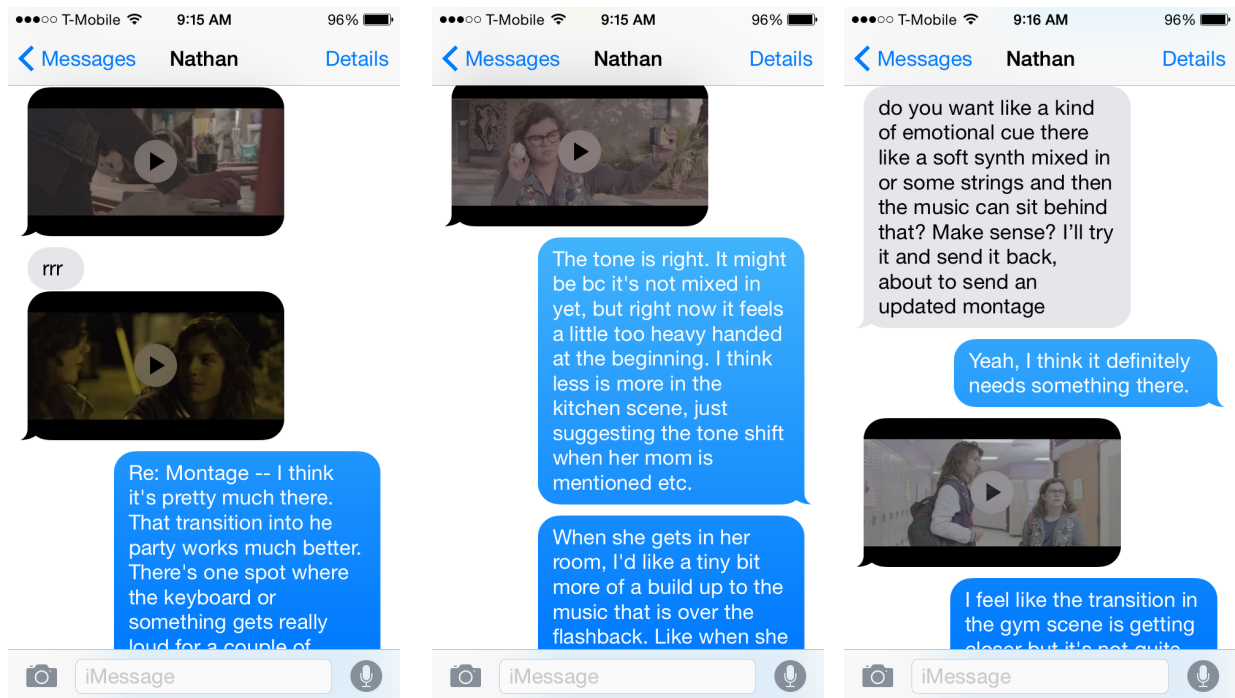
Appendix G

The following are images of different inspirations for the world of Eleanor and the Egg.



Appendix H

The following are examples of message exchanges between my composer, Nathan Efstation, and I. This is how we managed working at a distance.



Examples of exchanges between Nathan Efstation and I. We worked primarily through texting. He would send me samples and we'd go back and forth with notes. Occasionally, we'd touch base via phone.

Appendix I

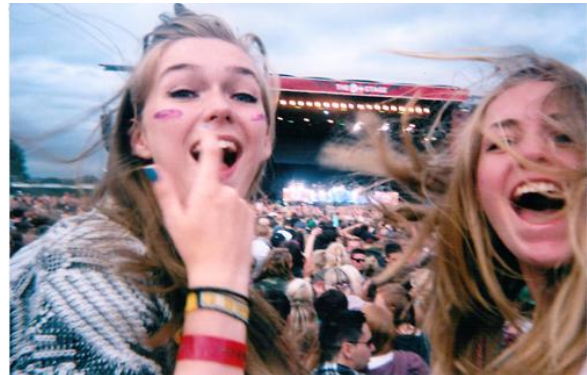
The following are examples of different color references that my colorist, Simon Quiroz, and I used when we were color grading.



Present day world: high contrast and saturation.



Flashbacks: Photographs from the 1970s.



Snapshots: Actual disposable camera prints. Contrast and saturated, but faded and with vignette edges.