

ZU × ORI

Episode 1

"Zu"

Adapted Screenplay

by

SOV

INT. JACK'S COFFEE - MORNING

A quaint New York City coffee shop bathed in the soft light of dawn. The murmur of early risers, steam billowing from coffee machines.

Seated by the large window, a young girl, ZU (16, Asian, purple hair), sketches on her digital tablet. Her eyes are a deep pool of thoughts, emotions swirling within.

Her hand dances over the tablet, each stroke unraveling a part of her soul.

ZU (V.O.)

My name is Zu. And I have a story to tell.

Zu's brush shades a grasshopper.

ZU (V.O.)

The weird thing is - I'm not sure what it is. All I know is that it's an amazing story.

Her eyes shine, as they reflect the images on her tablet - the grasshopper, a stone palazzo, a young boy's face, the silhouette of a girl.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Maybe that's how all storytellers feel. But this feels like *my* story, which is strange because I'm only 16, and I haven't done anything too impressive. But in this story inside me, I can feel all the passion, the people, the drama and the tragedy, the heartache.

(pause)

The love.

She swipes through other images - more grasshoppers, roses twined around a rapier, a robed figure, a damp shrouded stairway to a tomb.

All drawn in grey charcoal.

ZU (V.O.)

Sometimes I wonder. Where did this story come from? Did all this come from my imagination? Or somewhere else?

Across the café, a BARISTA prepares a cappuccino at the bar. The steam rises, blurring our view momentarily.

ZU (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It doesn't matter. I'm the one who
has to tell it.

She continues sketching, barely noticing her surroundings.

ZU (V.O.)
My teacher, Professor Lauren,
likes to say, "Your story will
find you."
(pause)
So I keep drawing.

She returns to her grasshopper.

ZU (V.O.)
I let the pencil guide my hand.
And bit by bit, the story begins
to surface. Like broken pieces of
a puzzle.

Zu sits back from her tablet. She is emerging from her imagination. She puts down her stylus.

For the first time, she gazes outside.

ZU (V.O.)
Until two weeks ago, I lived my
whole life in Hong Kong. I wasn't
sure I had the courage to move so
far away.

FLASHBACK

EXT. HONG KONG SKYLINE - MORNING

Panoramic view of Hong Kong's iconic skyscrapers towering over the city. Beautiful beaches and lush hillsides complete the landscape.

INT. ZU'S HONG KONG BEDROOM - MORNING

Zu (with un-dyed, black hair) is dressing for the day in front of a vertical mirror. She examines herself in her school uniform, a casual short-sleeve shirt with a dark pleated, mid-length skirt.

Her gaze is clear, with hints of sadness. The night before, she learned she is moving.

ZU (V.O)
 Zu's actually my nickname. It's short for Zhu, my last name, which non-Chinese speakers can never pronounce. My friends started calling me Zu - because I hated my real first name.

She moves to her desk, sliding her tablet between books in her backpack.

ZU (V.O)
 What is it?

She quickly heads downstairs.

ZU (V.O.)
 (exasperated)
 Oh God. I'll only tell if you promise never to tell anyone.

Zu breezes through a white-tiled kitchen, picking up a transparent water bottle and pineapple bun without breaking stride.

ZU (V.O)
 Did you promise?
 (quick pause)
 Okay. It's Agnes.

She crosses an open, airy living room, passing behind her MOTHER, who sits motionless at a large desk, her back to Zu.

The two do not interact.

ZU (V.O)
 Can you believe it? My parents named me Agnes! Agnes Zhu.

Zu pushes through the ground-floor lobby doors of the apartment building where she lives.

Outside it's a clear day.

ZU (V.O)
 No offense to anyone named Agnes. But I felt I'd been handed a one-way bus ticket to the past. And I wasn't getting on board.

INT. HONG KONG SUBWAY - MORNING

Zu walks through the subway station. It is lightly crowded at the hour. She waits on the platform for the train to arrive.

ZU (V.O)
 My mom likes to remind me that
 Agnes means "beautiful and pure."
 (pause)
 I don't care.

She stands inside the train, by the door. The seats are filled, and several people stand in the aisle. Zu observes them casually.

The windows flash by darkly.

ZU (V.O)
 Anyway, Zu fits me better. There's
 just something about it that feels
 like me.

Her eyes reflect inward.

ZU (V.O)
 Something about the sound.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - MORNING

Zu approaches a complex of similarly-designed school buildings. It's the K-12 school she's attended her whole life.

ZU (V.O.)
 At the International School I went
 to, I had friends from everywhere.

Now every step reminds her that she is moving. How will she tell her friends?

Her stomach turns to lead.

INT. INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Zu is surrounded by a diverse group of classmates, Chinese and non-Chinese. They listen with pained expressions.

Zu meets each of their faces.

ZU
 My dad took a job. In New York
 City.

Zu's FRIENDS stare back, disbelieving.

FRIEND
 (downcast)
 Can we come?

ZU (V.O.)
It was super hard to leave them.
But I knew I had to go. More than
anything in my life.

INT. HONG KONG FERRY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Zu, looking one year younger, sits aboard the ferry leaving Tsim Sha Tsui. She stares across the vast Victoria Harbour.

ZU (V.O.)
You see, a year before - something
happened. Something I've never
told anyone. Because it doesn't
make any sense.

Her backpack rests in her lap. She's taken this ferry a dozen times, but today, something passes in her eyes. She pulls out her tablet and begins sketching rapidly.

ZU (V.O.)
That day on the ferry, I made a
drawing. A special one.

Her hand moves instinctively, as the charcoal sketch of the young boy emerges on the tablet.

Her eyes focus as she draws.

ZU (V.O.)
That day, my imagination had no
doubt. I remember every line,
every curve.

The sketch of the boy unfolds - his hair, his chin, his captivating eyes. They are only digital charcoal, but the boy's eyes seem to hold a mystical power, drawing Zu in.

ZU (V.O.)
It was just a sketch. But there
was something that captured me.

Zu gazes at the face on her tablet, a mix of wonder and mystery in her eyes.

ZU (V.O.)
There was a power that seemed to
see right into me. As if this was
someone I knew.
(pause)
Or someone who knew me.

Her hand rests on the tablet screen.

Zu stands up. She slowly walks toward the front of the ferry. The Hong Kong (Central) skyline rises before her.

Her eyes lock onto the city's skyscrapers.

ZU (V.O.)
In that instant, I knew. My life
was leading me elsewhere.

INT. INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Zu sits distracted in class. She glances down at the dark screen of her tablet, protruding from her open backpack.

ZU (V.O.)
The drawing kept bringing me back.
Between classes, or on the bus, or
before I went to sleep.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Zu, sitting by the window, looks out at the passing scenery, lost in thought.

ZU (V.O.)
I'd sneak glances at this face -
this boy I had drawn.

INT. ZU'S HONG KONG BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zu lies in bed, tablet in hand, studying the boy's sketch with an intense curiosity.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)
And look into his eyes.

Her face is lit only by the tablet.

INT. INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Zu walks amidst a bustling crowd of students, seemingly in her own world.

ZU (V.O.)
It was the strangest feeling. That
I knew this person, better than
anyone. My parents. My friends.

Zu opens her locker door. She takes a moment to gaze at her drawing.

ZU (V.O.)
(intently)
Anyone.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - FIELD - DUSK

At the edge of the soccer field, Zu separates from her teammates. Standing alone, she stares into the low setting sun.

ZU (V.O.)
(vulnerable)
And I felt this sadness I'd never
felt before.

EXT. HONG KONG STREET - DAY

Zu walks through a neon shopping district, her eyes observing the strangers she passes.

ZU (V.O.)
I started to wonder, if somehow -
this person was out there.
Somewhere.

She sees a group of STUDENTS, from another school, chatting outside a storefront.

ZU (V.O.)
So I looked.

Zu makes cautious eye contact with one of them.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)
In people's eyes. That's how I'll
know, I told myself.
(confident)
By the look in their eye.

The STUDENT looks away, timidly.

INT. HONG KONG CAFÉ - DAY

Zu sits with a friend, sipping bubble tea. A boy she doesn't know joins them. Zu seeks his eyes.

ZU (V.O.)
Whenever I met someone - I would
look them directly in the eye.
(pause)
That's how I'll know.

The boy responds with a friendly glance.

INT. ZU'S HONG KONG APARTMENT - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Zu's FAMILY are greeting dinner guests. Her mother and father welcome another couple into their home. With them is their daughter, a girl of Zu's age.

Zu and her younger brother stand behind their parents. When she is introduced, Zu steps forward.

She exchanges smiles with the guests.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)
So now, everyone thinks I have
very good manners, because
whenever I meet them, I look them
straight in the eye.

Zu looks the adults politely in the eye. She greets the teenage girl with a penetrating gaze, her eyes reflecting her search.

ZU (V.O.)
But they don't know why.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Zu (now with purple-dyed hair) looks out of the airplane window as she leaves Hong Kong. Her face reveals no emotion.

ZU (V.O.)
It wasn't long before my dad was
offered the job in New York City.

She watches a ray of sunlight move across the cabin. Her FATHER sits beside her, reading on his own tablet.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)
We had to wait a whole year
because of the virus. But now I'm
here.

INT. JACK'S COFFEE - MORNING

Zu remains looking out the large window. The same place where we left her.

Her grasshopper is finished.

ZU (V.O.)
So I'm at Trinity Rose, in my
second week. Trinity is like an
art school, but they're into
science and technology too. Mostly
it's about being creative -
expressing who you really are.
Whether that's playing the cello,
building a robot army, or in my
case, drawing stories.

INT. TRINITY ROSE HIGH SCHOOL - MONTAGE - DAY

Zu works on her laptop with other students, sits in the student orchestra, and in a lab soldering parts. At lunch, Zu sits with a couple other girls at a large table.

ZU (V.O.)
I've made a few friends. But I
still feel pretty new.

A young teacher approaches Zu in her class. She engages Zu in a friendly way.

ZU (V.O.)
Luckily I have Professor Lauren as
my advisor. She teaches theater
history, and for whatever reason -
we just connect. In some weird
way, she's almost like family.
She's helping me adjust to New
York and takes an interest in my
drawings.

END FLASHBACK

INT. JACK'S COFFEE - MORNING

Zu remains looking out the large window. The same place where we left her.

Her grasshopper is finished.

She reviews the art on her tablet. She focuses on a face we haven't seen before, a fierce-eyed person with a hard mouth and eyes.

Her brow furrows somewhat.

ZU (V.O.)
The faces are the most striking.
It's like they have a life of
their own, beyond my pencil and
tablet.

Zu returns to the figure wearing a robe. Their hands are outstretched on both sides, like an act of penance. Then finally at a mysterious young girl gazing into a mirror.

ZU (V.O.)
As if by drawing them, I am
actually coming closer to them.

Her phone's ALARM interrupts her thoughts.

Zu snaps out of her reverie and hastily packs her tablet and belongings into her backpack.

INT. JACK'S COFFEE - COUNTER - MORNING

She approaches the young barista at the counter, ready to collect her order.

BARISTA

Matcha latte?

She looks the barista directly in the eyes.

ZU (V.O.)

I let myself be completely open,
waiting to see how they will
respond. To see what connection
we'll make.

The barista meets her gaze, reciprocating with a polite but ordinary smile.

Zu collects her drink.

ZU

(muted disappointment)

Thanks.

She heads briskly out the door, anticipating the school day ahead of her.

INT. NEW YORK CITY BUS - MORNING

Zu sits in the aisle seat. The bustling streets of New York City pass outside the window. It's a different kind of busy than Hong Kong, but she admires it. Zu listens to MUSIC in her earbuds, watching people getting on and off the bus.

At her stop, she exits the bus.

ZU (V.O.)

What else can I tell you?

She walks the final block to Trinity Rose. The autumn sunlight is falling on her face though the leaves.

ZU (V.O.)

Oh! I almost forgot. I have a
really great sense of smell. It
might be the most special thing
about me.

EXT. TRINITY ROSE - MORNING

Trinity Rose is a gothic brownstone nestled among houses in the neighborhood. Modest banners outside the building display the name "Trinity Rose" beneath a three-rose emblem.

Zu gazes up at the building.

ZU (V.O.)
This summer my friend made a
lychee bubble tea inside her
apartment. I smelled it a block
away.

She observes Trinity's brownstone exterior, its first
and second-story windows wrapped in crawling green
ivy.

ZU (V.O.)
Everything has a smell. The scent
of sunlit ivy.

She gazes at the walkway beneath her.

ZU (V.O.)
The rich aroma of granite.

Beside her are other students, walking together. The
autumn tree branches extend above their path. Zu lifts
her eyes slightly upward.

ZU (V.O.)
The dusty musk of autumn.
(pause)
And clothing. The smell of denim,
dozens of deodorants, soaps and
shampoos. Smelly socks, dirty
shoes.

The scents of her peers surround her. She makes a
face, as if bracing herself.

She absorbs the diverse mixture of fragrances found in
their clothing and grooming products.

ZU (V.O.)
A whiff of day-old gum stuck to
the back of a wooden bench.

Zu heads for the main entrance.

To her right, she passes the wooden bench. Visibly
attached to the back of the bench is a gob of hardened
white gum.

ZU (V.O.)
Most people underestimate the
power of smell. Think of it this
way: If you're in a room with me,

I can smell you. I don't mean in a bad way, but just - the way you smell.

Zu moves among the crowd of students, funneling toward the school entrance. Her eyes glance discreetly right and left.

ZU (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Everyone has their own unique scent, and it actually says a lot about you. It's like how animals can smell fear. Emotions, and other parts of our personality, have a smell.
(pause)
It's our smell.

Zu stares ahead, deadly calm.

ZU (V.O.)
Anyone with a great sense smell, you know what I mean. It's called hyperosmia.
(chippy)
My mom got me diagnosed.

Zu reaches to open the school doors, when she is abruptly jostled from behind. She whirls around to see KIMMO, a bubbly, dark-haired girl.

ZU
(relieved)
Kimmo!

KIMMO
What did you draw?

Kimmo peers into Zu's backpack, playfully.

KIMMO
(teasing)
Crickets again?

ZU
They're grasshoppers.

Zu gives Kimmo a friendly look.

KIMMO
Lemme see.

Kimmo lifts out Zu's tablet, thief-like. She pretends to scrutinize it.

ZU (V.O.)
I met Kimmo my first day. She's
kind of quirky and smells faintly
like jasmine. And she knows
everyone.

Zu and Kimmo enter the school together, through the
double-doored entrance. Zu observes Kimmo among the
throng of students.

ZU (V.O.)
Who knows? Maybe that's why I'm
drawn to her. Her jasmine scent
makes me smile.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - HALLWAY - MORNING

Kimmo and Zu walk up the lightly-crowded hallways.
Students meander around them, heading into classrooms
or congregating in small groups. Lockers clang shut,
footsteps echo.

Zu lets her gaze sweep over the faces around her,
almost automatically.

It's become a habit.

ZU (V.O.)
My eyes move from face to face. I
ask myself: Are you the one?

The students stream by. A few of them find her gaze,
their expressions a mix of curiosity, indifference, or
of faint recognition.

ZU (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Are you the one I drew?

A boy with curly hair and an innocent face swings his
locker shut. He turns, and his open, unguarded eyes
collide with Zu.

She peers into his gaze.

ZU (V.O.)
How will I know?

She is taken aback by his openness. There's a certain
sweetness and kindness behind his eyes, and a shy
curiosity.

But it only goes so deep.

Zu blinks away, shifting her attention with the
swiftness of practiced routine.

ZU (V.O.)
 It will only take two seconds.
 That's all I need.

A girl with straight, blonde hair, possibly a freshman, approaches Zu from up the hallway. Their eyes clasp for a moment, there's a spark, almost electric.

ZU (V.O.)
 Because this person, if they even
 exist - will know me.
 (serious)
 In their eyes, I will know they
 know me.

But the spark never really ignites. Zu's expression remains unchanged as she continues walking, the blonde girl now behind her.

She's not the one.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - CONCOURSE - MORNING

Zu and Kimmo cross Trinity's main concourse, a high, light-filled space adorned with slanted skylights. Banners hanging from the ceiling are marked "Trinity Lights."

KIMMO
 Are you ready for The Lights?

ZU (V.O.)
 The Lights. That's what everyone
 calls it.

A vertical translucent VIDEO, superimposed on the physical school, appears. It's a promotional video for The Lights.

A Trinity student is speaking, enthusiastically.

VIDEO
 It's time for our big event.
 Trinity Lights is back for the
 fifteenth year. It's a performance
 night and fundraiser, and anyone
 can enter. Five minutes for an
 expression of your choice. As long
 as it's yourself. Remember, it's
 our Time to Shine.

The video morphs into a montage of past events: a dancer in mid-leap, a singer hitting a soaring note, the crackle and hiss of a science experiment unfurling

with smoke, a student magician in a tuxedo, tipping a top hat with flourish.

The images shift to a girl at a laptop, standing before a stage-high video display.

On the screen, a satellite blinks to life, initiating GPS tracking on a wandering kitten. An echo of laughter from the audience.

VIDEO

Tickets are sold out, and everyone who's anyone will be there. So, embrace your moment! See you on Sunday.

The video, neatly finished, disappears.

Zu and Kimmo look up at the banners. Others students go about their business.

KIMMO

Last day for signups.

ZU

Are you gonna do it?

KIMMO

Nah, no talent.

Zu regards Kimmo with puzzlement. Kimmo is an enigma, always brimming with ideas and eccentricities.

Why would she say that?

The two girls head to separate classes. Kimmo continues up the hall, while Zu makes a right into geometry class.

MS. MEHTA stands before a whiteboard.

MS. MEHTA

(enthusiastic)

I hope everyone is ready for polyhedrons.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - GEOMETRY CLASS - MORNING

Zu sits with her tablet in front of her, the screen tilted as she silently sketches. On one half of the screen are her polyhedra, while on the other, her own drawings come to life.

MS. MEHTA is giving the geometry lesson, while Zu draws roses on a vine, twisting in the cracks of a house.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - THEATER HISTORY CLASS - MORNING

Zu sits attentively in Professor Lauren's theater history class. Lauren, a young and passionate teacher, stands near the students, captivating them with her discussion of theater.

ZU (V.O.)

Third period. Theater history with Professor Lauren. There's something calming about Lauren's presence.

Lauren holds two plaster masks, one portraying tragedy, and the other, comedy.

LAUREN

The original idea for theater was to give audiences an experience of something greater than everyday life. So they told stories of the gods, or myths - or a tragedy that connected people to their feelings.

(pause)

Or by using laughter - in the comedies.

Lauren illustrates her point, holding up both masks, one in each outstretched hand - a gesture nearly identical to the robed figure in Zu's drawing.

LAUREN

The goal was to heal or purify through an experience of the soul. The Greeks wanted to guide the imagination of the audience toward a grand vision of life. They called this *theama*. That's why we call it "theater."

Zu listens, drinking in Lauren's words.

After her lecture, Lauren strolls among the tables of students.

LAUREN

(to the class)

For the rest of class, we'll work on our project: writing our personal dramas.

Zu is the only student not writing.

She stares at the table.

ZU (V.O.)

I have nothing to write about. At
least not in words.

Lauren approaches Zu's table, leaning over gently. She
smells like warm, earthy rose. Zu is absently drawing
a bare-branched tree.

LAUREN

How's it going, Zu?

ZU

Fine.

LAUREN

Can I see your drawings?

Zu pauses her unfinished sketch, enveloped in Lauren's
rosy scent. She flips to her next sketch. It's the
fierce-eyed person with the hard mouth.

ZU (V.O.)

Lauren has been helping me explore
the people I'm drawing, and what
they mean to me.

Lauren taps her finger beside the sketch.

LAUREN

What is his story?

ZU

I don't know.

LAUREN

He doesn't look happy.

ZU

(realizing)
No, he's angry.

LAUREN

What's he angry about?

Lauren stands there, regarding Zu. She lets the
question linger, allowing Zu the space to ponder it.

Zu raises her eyebrows.

ZU

I have no clue.
(longer pause)

He's holding a grudge. He wants
some kind of revenge.

LAUREN

Can I see another?

Zu swipes sideways, revealing more drawings. There are
two more sketches of the angry person, then a page of
roses and fountains.

LAUREN

Wow. I haven't seen these.

Zu keeps swiping. She pauses at the drawing of the
robed figure with outstretched hands. Lauren quickly
reaches down, swiping past the robed figure to the
next drawing.

LAUREN

(curious)

Who's this?

Zu hesitates.

It's her drawing of the boy.

ZU

I'm not sure -

She's never shown it to anyone.

She tightens up, unsure how to respond. Lauren peers
into the drawing. She seems just as absorbed by the
drawing as Zu.

Zu gazes up at Lauren's face, noticing.

LAUREN

Is he part of the story?

Zu stares at the drawing of the boy, confronted.
Lauren's questions are leading her deeper than she is
comfortable.

ZU

(vulnerable)

I think he's the main character.

LAUREN

Tell me about him.

Zu inhales again. She's never had to describe her
drawing to a real person.

ZU

(cautiously)
He's - independent. He doesn't
like being told what to do. Or how
to be.

(pause)
And he's in pain.

Zu looks down sadly. From where Lauren stands, she
can't see Zu's reaction.

ZU (V.O.)
Again I feel the sadness washing
over me. The tsunami wave.

ZU
He lost something.

LAUREN
Does he have a name?

Zu builds a mental wall. Wherever these questions are
taking her, she won't go there. But already she can
feel the sound of a name. On the tip of her tongue.
Almost ready to roll off.

There's a power in the name.

She's not ready for it.

ZU
(closing)
No name.

Zu switches off the tablet - she's done. The screen
goes black. Lauren steps back from the table, ending
the moment.

LAUREN
Well, I like what I'm seeing. Have
you considered The Lights?

ZU
(shocked)
The Lights?

LAUREN
It might help you flush out your
story.

Zu sits stone-faced, frozen.

ZU (V.O.)
Or give me a panic attack. No
thanks.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - HALLWAY - MORNING

Kimmo finds Zu at a hall crossing. They're joined by AISHA, a girl they both know. Kimmo takes the lead, pulling Zu along.

KIMMO

Come on! We're heading to rehearsal.

INT. TRINITY ROSE - AUDITORIUM - MORNING

The three girls enter the auditorium. They can see groups of students gathered near the stage, practicing for the upcoming Lights event.

Zu, Kimmo, and Aisha take seats several rows from the stage, near the aisle.

On stage, a girl maneuvers a robot with a remote control. The robot delicately retrieves an orange, then a grape, from a silver platter before exploding and filling the stage with smoke.

Other kids take the stage. There's an a cappella singer, followed by a juggler.

ZU

You could do that.

KIMMO

I don't juggle.

ZU

No, but something else.

KIMMO

Such as?

ZU

I don't know. Just talk?

Kimmo turns to Aisha.

The two start discussing Trinity gossip.

But Zu isn't listening. She stares straight ahead, captivated by what she is hearing. It's a SOUND she doesn't yet understand, a kind of melody barely recognizable as words.

LANDON (O.S.)

(words difficult to hear)

"If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle fine is this.."

Zu stares ahead blankly, entranced by the words. She can't tell who's speaking.

LANDON (O.S.)
(words becoming clear)
"..my lips, two blushing pilgrims,
ready stand to smooth that rough
touch with a tender kiss."

Something begins to awaken in Zu's eyes. Her expression remains blank. She turns her head toward the sound.

On the stage stands LANDON, an older boy, tall and strongly built, with a commanding presence.

Kimmo turns, noticing Zu's attention.

KIMMO
That's Landon. He's a senior.

Zu and Kimmo observe Landon silently. Beside Landon, another GIRL ON STAGE is speaking.

GIRL ON STAGE
"Good pilgrim, you do wrong your
hand too much, which mannerly
devotion shows in this; For saints
have hands that pilgrims' hands do
touch, and palm to palm is holy
palmer's kiss."

Zu blinks, watching the two performers. Her expression furrows, and confusion washes over her. Landon continues speaking.

LANDON
"Have not saints lips, and holy
palmer's too?"

Something is off.

Zu's expression becomes pained. The warmth in her heart turns cool. The way Landon is speaking is too cold, too harsh.

She stands up abruptly.

ZU
You're doing it wrong!

The auditorium goes deadly silent.

Everyone stops what they're doing. All eyes focus on Zu. She feels the attention of the auditorium, but her eyes remain on Landon.

She stands in her row, fearless.

ZU
(nearly as loud)
The way you're saying it. It's
just not right -

Her voice trails off. Landon steps forward on the stage, confronting Zu. He's annoyed and surprised at this interruption.

LANDON
Do you have a better idea?

Zu stands frozen.

ZU (V.O)
I do. But I can't explain it.

GIRL ON STAGE
Ignore her, Landon.

Landon is studying Zu, intrigued.

LANDON
Why don't you come up here and
show me?

Zu stares directly at Landon - she's gotten ahead of herself. She weighs her next move. Go on stage? Or back down? Everyone in the room is watching her.

A shadow of doubt crosses her eyes.

ZU
(backing down)
Just try - doing it more gently.

She eases out of her gaze with Landon. Then sits down in her seat, timidly.

Kimmo stares at Zu in astonishment.

Zu gets up immediately and heads toward the aisle. She hurries out of the auditorium, pursued closely by Kimmo.

KIMMO
I didn't know you were such a fan.

ZU
A fan?

Her voice carries a surprising edge.

KIMMO
Of Shakespeare? The scene they
were doing? It's like super
famous.

Zu keeps walking up the aisle. She doesn't wait, but
Kimmo manages to catch up.

ZU
I've never heard those words in my
life.

KIMMO
Then what were you so upset about?

ZU (V.O)
That's what unsettled me.

Her eyes appear turbulent.

Zu continues straight for the auditorium exit. Kimmo
accompanies her, quietly. Zu maintains her focus, eyes
ahead, trying to steady herself.

EXT. TRINITY ROSE - COURTYARD - LUNCH

Zu, Kimmo, Aisha, and JADEN sit together at an outdoor
courtyard table, under an urban expanse of sky. It's a
tranquil place for lunch.

Jaden leans forward, toward Zu.

JADEN
I heard you called out Landon.
Everyone is talking about it.

Zu shies away slightly. She's not embracing the
spotlight.

ZU
I didn't call anyone out.

Kimmo holds up her phone, live-streaming the group's
lunch. Zu doesn't engage. She nibbles on a cucumber
sandwich.

Landon appears across the courtyard. He is talking to
his friends. Before long, he turns away from the other
boys, gazing toward Zu.

KIMMO
Uh oh.

AISHA
Here he comes.
(to Zu)

Did you know he was Hamlet last year?

Landon approaches, flanked by his friends.

As Landon crosses the long courtyard, Zu looks up slightly. They observe each other from a distance.

Technically it's eye-contact.

ZU (V.O.)
So here's the deal.

Landon continues confidently toward Zu.

ZU (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And trust me — I know what I'm talking about. Sure, anyone can make eye contact from across a football field. And yes, it's eye-contact. It's a connection. But to really get a sense of someone, you need to be in their presence.

Landon has nearly arrived where Zu sits. She lets her gaze drop, down to her sandwich.

ZU (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So it's not really eye-contact.
It's eye-presence.

Zu's friends all observe Landon.

ZU (V.O.)
That means you need to be close.
Like 5 or 6 feet. Max.

Landon stops in front of Zu — close enough to be close. She takes a small bite of her cucumber sandwich, not ready to look up.

KIMMO
Hi Landon.

Landon gazes in the direction of Kimmo. It's unclear if he knows her.

LANDON
(to Zu)
So, I was thinking about your suggestion.

Landon is facing Zu directly. Stillness falls over both groups of friends. Zu stops chewing her sandwich, in mid-bite.

LANDON

Why don't you help me rehearse for
The Lights? Help me get it right.

Aisha and Kimmo stare at Zu, awaiting her response. Zu doesn't move. Her hands hold her cucumber sandwich, her heart racing.

ZU (V.O.)

What is happening? And what
happened - in the auditorium? The
last thing I want to do is The
Lights.

Zu doesn't look up.

ZU

What about your acting partner?

LANDON

Vanessa? She'll get over it.

Zu stares down at the concrete. She notices the rectangular patterns and squares. The spaces between the squares. There's a part of her that's coming alive, a part she doesn't know.

It won't stay quiet.

ZU

Okay.

It just slips out. Landon is pleased.

LANDON

Great. Same time tomorrow?

Zu finally looks up.

Her eyes lock with Landon's eyes.

For a brief moment, everything disappears as Zu and Landon connect. His eyes radiate warmth, surrounding her. Zu feels a shiver, running up her back. She does something she rarely does.

She allows herself to HOPE.

ZU (V.O.)

After looking so many people in
the eye, I almost never hope.
After so many eyes, I've lost some
expectation.

One second passes.

Landon's eyes have a bright, beautiful charm. And there's a friendliness. Landon smiles at her.

ZU (V.O)

But every once in a while. I hope.

She lets her eyes be open.

ZU (V.O)

Are you the one I drew?

Landon keeps looking at Zu. Zu keeps looking at Landon. But they've reached a barrier. Something in Landon's eyes isn't able to go deeper. Remains on the surface.

Landon broadens his smile.

ZU (V.O)

Something is missing. I don't feel anything.

(pause)

Not really. Landon's eyes are beautiful. But after the first shiver, that initial rush, I feel empty. There's no depth to our connection. There's no power to it.

Two seconds have passed.

ZU (V.O)(CONT'D)

It barely touches me. Two seconds have passed. And I'm never wrong.

Zu still holds Landon's eyes. But it's just politeness now - he's not the one. She aware of Landon's scent, vaguely spice-like.

Zu notices his ears, nose, brow-line.

ZU (V.O)

I guess I overlooked it. But Landon has a smell that's vaguely like cinnamon.

(pause)

Or nutmeg.

Landon keeps smiling, by himself.

ZU (V.O)

Landon is looking at me - but he's not with me.

She breaks off their gaze. She looks down at her sandwich, disappointed.

ZU
 (answering Landon)
 Same time. Tomorrow.

Landon looks satisfied. One of his friends grabs him from behind, pulling him away. He briefly glances back at Zu before heading across the courtyard.

Kimmo raises an eyebrow at Zu.

With Aisha and Jaden, they walk away from the courtyard, along an outdoor walkway.

AISHA
 That's exciting, Zu!

ZU
 Um, yeah.

KIMMO
 Zu, it's super cool. Everyone knows Landon is gonna win The Lights. He came in second twice before.

EXT. TRINITY ROSE - WALKWAY - LUNCH

The group proceeds along the walkway. Framed photographs, posters, and paintings line the wall of the walkway.

KIMMO
 These are from The Lights.

Zu notices a digital display ahead. On the display are drawings of clothing, morphing into each other and glitching into rainbow-colored static, then changing back to clothing again.

She pauses in front of the display, captivated by the beautiful colored clothing.

Aisha steps up behind her.

AISHA
 That's Ori.

Aisha admires the display, beside Zu.

ZU
 (distracted)
 What?

AISHA

Orion. He won The Lights the last two years. These are his costumes, from the school play.

Zu steps toward a second display.

This one contains only the image of a single white dress. The display slowly zooms toward the dress, glitching again as if broken, before the screen fades to black.

Zu stares, transfixed.

She waits for more, but the screen remains black. She steps forward, as if drawn toward the display. She looks into the black screen.

She feels a chill, as if the temperature has dropped twenty degrees. She wraps her arms across her chest, pulls her sweatshirt close.

Images flash through her mind.

Too quick to catch.

KIMMO (O.S)
He was Lauren's protégé. They were
super close. Inseparable.

ZU
(looking around)
Are you cold?

Kimmo and Aisha exchange glances.

KIMMO
Um, no.

The white dress reappears on the screen. The display begins its loop again. Zu is fixated - she doesn't know why. It's like seeing a ghost.

She takes one step closer.

She sees the courtyard begin to fade, like a fainting spell. Her vision goes white. Then black.

The images appear again. In her mind.

This time she sees them, in crystal clarity. In quick succession: a green grasshopper, a thimble. Then they vanish, as quickly as they came. Like the glitches in the digital display.

Her sight returns.

She is staring at the white dress.

She hears Kimmo's voice, distantly.

KIMMO

Zu, are you okay?

She steps backward, blinking. She breaks her gaze from the dress. Looks down at the ground.

ZU

Yeah.

(recovering)

I just - I got a chill.

She turns again to the white dress, trying to reorient herself. Kimmo and Aisha are scrutinizing her carefully.

She turns to them.

ZU

Lauren never mentioned him.

KIMMO

That's cause she's mad. Ori went against her by dropping out.

ZU

Dropping out?

Zu looks at Kimmo, puzzled. She feels her mind trying to work, but she's still lightheaded.

AISHA

Did he really drop out?

JADEN

I heard he transferred -

AISHA

Or graduated early -

JADEN

To an art school in Italy.

AISHA

Or was it an internship?

Zu watches their discussion. Her body temperature is returning to normal. She looks over the faces of the others, strangely calm.

ZU (V.O.)
 They seem to know so much - about
 someone they know so little.

The group moves on down the walkway.

JADEN
 Hermes would know.

ZU
 Who's Hermes?

JADEN
 His best friend.

AISHA
 Are they just friends?

KIMMO
 You don't think?

AISHA
 I'm just saying. Ori never had a
 girlfriend.

Zu looks back once more at the digital display. It has gone black again. The group arrives at the double doors at the end of the walkway.

Aisha pulls open the door.

A dove flies out, just above their heads. They duck, then watch the dove flying above the courtyard, landing in a high treetop.

INT. TRINITY ROSE CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Zu sits in Chemistry class. She has her elbow on the desk, chin leaning on her palm. She looks out the window at the hazy September day.

The sounds of the classroom are a garbled murmur. In the blurry background, the TEACHER takes a step toward her from the whiteboard.

TEACHER
 (faraway)
 Zu?

Zu doesn't hear the teacher. She stares out at the trees in the street.

TEACHER
 (faraway)
 Zu.

She keeps staring outside.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - STREET - AFTERNOON

Zu skips the bus after school. She passes its open door, crossing the street in front of it.

She has her earbuds in, listening to MUSIC. She's never walked home before. She takes in New York one block at a time. She observes the traffic and various storefronts on the street.

She avoids eye contact with anyone.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Zu arrives at her apartment building. She takes the elevator up to the 32nd floor. Inside her apartment, her dad is packing to leave for a conference in Boston. They have dinner together, at the end of a dining table that seats eight.

DAD
How was school today?

ZU
Okay.

DAD
Meet anyone new?

ZU
No.

DAD
I'm sure you will. It just takes time.

Before he leaves for the airport, they make their daily video call with Zu's mom and brother back in Hong Kong.

Zu and her dad sit together on the couch. Zu holds the laptop. On the screen, her mother faces away, scolding her brother in the background. Her mother turns around, re-engaging.

MOTHER (O.S.)
You're studying hard?

ZU
Of course, Mom.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE - EVENING

Zu hugs her dad tightly at the door. Gradually she lets him go. He picks up his travel bag.

DAD
Sorry to miss the party.

ZU
(rolls her eyes)
Right.

Zu closes the door after him. She pauses, then turns to face the empty apartment.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Zu stands at the sink, washing dishes from dinner. The water runs from the faucet.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Zu sits at the bare dining room table, wearing white headphones. She spreads her school materials around her on the table.

She tries to do some homework, writing in her notebook. But her mind is preoccupied with today. She stops writing.

Zu looks up across the table.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DUSK

She enters the living room.

She hears the MUSIC in her headphones. She pauses, surveys the room in a glance. It has an unattached, newly moved-into look. Zu walks calmly across the room in a straight line.

She stops at the end of the living room, in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Outside New York City is the darkest blue dusk.

She gazes outward at the buildings and lights, hearing the MUSIC in her headphones. She feels like she's the last person on earth.

INT. ZU'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Zu takes a short shower.

She puts on an old t-shirt, combs her hair. Zu gazes at herself in the mirror. She makes a few faces, then squints hard.

As if deciding who she really is.

INT. ZU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zu gets into bed.

She leans back on a large pillow, then turns off the light on the nightstand. She faces the darkened ceiling.

But something nags at her.

She sits up straight.

She leans over her nightstand, turns on the lamp and grabs her tablet.

Her eyes shimmer, excited.

She starts typing. Her fingers tap "Orion" into the search bar.

The first results are pictures of the famous constellation and a NASA spacecraft of the same name. Zu hesitates for a moment, her fingers hovering over the screen.

She types "Orion Trinity Rose."

The results are various - some random sites about Trinity Rose, a few odd videos, and a couple of unrelated images.

She scrolls the videos. She finds one called "Trinity Lights - Costume Design."

ZU
(softly)
Two years ago.

She taps on the video.

It enlarges, footage of a theater stage, a row of students in elaborate costumes walk across it. Zu watches, her eyes absorbing everything. At the very end, a figure in a blue hoodie quickly appears on stage, waves, and exits.

Zu re-watches the ending, focusing on the person in the hoodie. Their face is hidden from view.

She taps on another video.

This one is "Trinity Lights Backstage." It's a collage of student clips and video footage of busy hallways and backstage.

STUDENT NARRATOR (O.S.)

(excited)

We go live backstage at Trinity
Lights, where all the real action
happens.

The camera pans backstage, where students group together leisurely. The person in the blue hoodie stands among the other students. Their back is to the camera.

Zu quickly scrubs the video, forward and back. There are no other appearances of the person in the hoodie. Only the single shot.

She lingers on it, stuck.

Zu follows a few related videos, arriving on a page with a channel named "Orion."

It has a red "LIVE" banner.

She skips a breath.

Taps in.

Zu enters the livestream.

ZU

(puzzled)

What - ?

It's just a plain room. A worktable, a sofa, and hanging from a stand - a white dress. It looks like the dress from the Trinity display.

There's no one in the room.

She zooms into the white dress.

She can see the details of the dress. Confirming it's the same dress she saw at school.

She zooms out again.

It's just the plain room. She scans the screen: 1597 subscribers, 4 watching, started streaming 7 hours ago.

She watches, waiting.

Seconds pass, nothing happens.

She contemplates closing her tablet, when a FIGURE enters the frame.

They wear a blue hoodie, their face obscured. They cross the room directly to the white dress and stand in front of it.

Zu leans closer to the screen. Her breath is stopped. She watches the screen, entranced.

The figure in the hoodie adjusts the fabric of the dress. They crouch lower, examining the hem.

Then they freeze.

For a few seconds, they don't move at all. Zu tilts her tablet - is the screen frozen? She taps on the LIVE button. The figure doesn't move.

Then, slowly, they turn their head.

Toward the camera.

They stare straight into the camera - like they know they're being watched. The person in the hoodie rises slowly to their feet. They start walking toward the camera.

Zu doesn't move at all. She watches the person in the hoodie step closer. Their eyes are covered, and the lights from the ceiling hide their face.

A shock registers on her face.

ZU
(panicked)
Wait - is my camera on?

She pulls the tablet closer, inspecting it. Then composes herself. The camera is OFF. She returns the tablet to its original distance.

The figure hasn't moved. They stand right before the camera. Their shadowed face fills the center of the screen.

She's frozen, she can't do anything. She looks into their face, but the glare and the hoodie hides their eyes.

The figure seems to wait.

Zu's finger hovers over the chat box. Should she type something?

Anything.

On the tablet, the person peers closer.

ZU
(whispers)
Come on.

Her finger hovers over the keypad.

Above the letter h.

She moves toward the a.

ZU
(to herself)
Say something.

Zu takes a last breath.

She stares at the screen, her finger poised to type.
The person in the hoodie stares back.

Zu closes her eyes, summoning courage.

She opens her eyes, hesitates - and loses her nerve.
She flicks the app closed, slams her tablet face-down
onto the bed. Then she lies flat on her back,
motionless. Heart-racing.

After a moment she reaches over, switches off the lamp
and lies on her back in the dark.

Her eyes are wide open.