

CUSP

by

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EXT. BUKIT GOMBAK PARK — DAY

A woman sits on a park bench and receives a text message: "Be there in 2! Sorry to keep you waitingggg". Her eyes glance down to read the message, without picking up the phone. The sun is bearing down on her but she seems to be unfazed, staring intently, almost as if she were trying to conjure into existence a memory --

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED BUKIT BATOK HILLSIDE PARK — DAY

Close friends, Naomi and Pei Jie are keenly observing a YouTube video describing how to navigate the abandoned park. Naomi has worked as a nurse for a couple of years while Pei Jie has just graduated and is to start work soon. The former sports a pastel yellow dri-fit shirt while the latter wears a pastel pink yoga top. Both 25 year olds, they have nary a clue about what life holds for them. Music plays in the background, nearly indiscernible.

NAOMI

And you said you passed some navigational exercise while you were in Brunei?

PEI JIE

You got to give me a break mate, that was literally 7 years ago.

NAOMI

And that's grounds for forgetting?
Only God can save the SAF now.

Pei Jie rolls his eyes, staring intently at the split in the trail before turning toward the left decisively.

NAOMI

(death-staring playfully)

If we end up at the same hut again, I will literally kill you.

PEI JIE

Oh, I have no doubt.

They begin walking in silence, Pei Jie ahead of Naomi, until they come across a hut with a dustbin in front of it. Pei Jie, pre-empting Naomi's snark cuts in with a comment of his own.

PEI JIE

This is a different hut! This one has a dustbin.

NAOMI

(looking into the dustbin)

Goodness, someone actually threw a Milo packet here recently --

PEI JIE

Eh Naomi, your Chinese is good, isn't it? Can you understand what is written here?

Naomi crouches down to read the poem. Pei Jie sneaks a glance at her. His eyes are drawn back to the poem just as Naomi looks up at Pei Jie waiting for a response, cocking her head to the side.

PEI JIE

You know that meant translate it for me, right?

NAOMI

What can you do, Pei Jie?

PEI JIE

(with a cheeky smile)

Bring you to explore an abandoned park in the neighborhood you've lived in your whole life.

NAOMI

(hearing what Pei Jie said but choosing to ignore him)

Well so the first line -- wait you know the characters are read top down, right?

PEI JIE

Yes, I'm not that stupid...

NAOMI

Had to check... Anyway, it loosely translates to "When I really loved you, / you were not serious about the love. / But when you deeply love (me), / I hate you deeply"

PEI JIE

(as Naomi stands up to take a seat on one side of the hut)

So basically, something something unrequited love.

NAOMI

(as Pei Jie moves to sit across from her)

Tale as old as time.

They sit in silence momentarily until Naomi asks:

NAOMI

How are you feeling by the way, about the whole thing with --

PEI JIE

-- You know that that was less unrequited and more being led on -
-

NAOMI

Precisely why I am asking.

PEI JIE

Well, the other day I stayed in bed binge watching Bridgerton so...

NAOMI

You, binge watching? That sounds bad... (pause) I'm really sorry you had to go through all that. I wish there's more I could say or do but --

PEI JIE

You did more than enough just showing up and being there for me that evening.

NAOMI

You need to learn to ask for help. Your self-reliance is admirable but only to a point. I don't want to see you in that place ever again.

Pei Jie looks at Naomi and nods lightly. Naomi acknowledges with a smile.

NAOMI

Right, it seems to me that we're finally on the right track - shall we soldier on?

PEI JIE

(gesturing)

After you, milady.

NAOMI

(looking amused)

Bridgerton? Really?

PEI JIE

Hey, it's not that bad...

EXT. (NEAR) CLEARING ATOP BUKIT BATOK HILLSIDE PARK — LATE
AFTERNOON

We CROSS-FADE through a sequence of Naomi and Pei Jie navigating the terrain: through the torii gates, past a well, up winding slopes and finally into a bamboo forest...

NAOMI

Such a cozy place. Well, whether by luck or design, you've redeemed yourself today.

PEI JIE

Dude, give me some credit at least please -- (noticing the clearing that Naomi hasn't yet) -- and the icing on the cake is right over there.

NAOMI

(seeing now what Pei Jie saw first)

Finally! (mock sprinting over to the clearing)

She takes in the view from the top. When Pei Jie joins Naomi, she remarks to him:

NAOMI

Hard to imagine that there are places like these left in Singapore... / untouched.

PEI JIE

/ untouched.

NAOMI

(chuckling at the synchrony of their thought)

Making our way up this hill reminds me of OBS back in the day. Lin was losing her shit...

NAOMI (CONT'D)

... over sleeping in the (gestures quotation marks in the air) "great outdoors".

PEI JIE

Who would have thought then that same girl, prank calling me every other day in secondary school --

NAOMI

(nudging Pei Jie with her elbow)

-- with the help of some top tier accomplices, don't forget --

Pei Jie rolls his eyes and Naomi laughs heartily at old memories.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Gosh, it's incredible how far we've come... how much has changed.

Naomi and Pei Jie stand in the silence pervades the clearing, pondering what is next. They do not notice that the music stopped playing.

PEI JIE

You really going to take that sabbatical?

NAOMI

I'm not sure... figuring everything out work wise will be an administrative nightmare. But I feel like one way or another I have to. I can't carry on this way for much longer.

(pauses)

It's like these BTOs across from us, you know. They're neatly built, will eventually overlook a...

NAOMI (CONT'D)

... beautiful park but it all feels a bit too planned, a bit... pre-fabricated. It's missing that-that- (trying to find the right word) that dash of magic.

PEI JIE

I get that completely but what if... you don't find it, that magic?

NAOMI

Well, that's just a risk I'm going to have to take.

PEI JIE

(laughing lightly)

We're very much alike, you know. I just don't have the same conviction as you. I am paralyzed by the fear that the most I will ever get is simply the promise of magic.

(quieter)

It'd be nice to have someone to come home to then.

NAOMI

You're not wrong... I mean, I'm not going to lie- whenever Lin tells me how she can't get enough of Dean's company, how they are designing their home together, and all that, I do... question myself. Why am I choosing to close the doors that I am closing? But if not now then when, right?

There's just so much out there I want to experience. Places to be, people to become. That's why I have never let anyone in.

PEI JIE

Or to quote our favorite Jo March,
"You love your liberty too well to
be in any hurry to give it up."

NAOMI

Exactly.

The pair fall silent. Pei Jie's eyes are firmly fixed on the vista ahead while Naomi's glance at him. And for the most fleeting of moments, she re-evaluates her convictions. This train of thought is broken when she gets a notification on her watch, and begins gathering her stuff.

NAOMI

(frantically)

Dude, I'm so sorry but actually I
don't think I can stay for dinner
--

PEI JIE

Naomi --

NAOMI

There's a crunch at the hospital
so they need me there tonight --

PEI JIE

Naomi, please. It's cool. Just...
take care of yourself, okay?

Naomi smiles appreciatively, picks up her bag and disappears off-screen. Pei Jie LINGERS.

NAOMI (O.S.)

It's a lovely view, isn't it?

PEI JIE

(nodding, turns around and
walks toward Naomi)

I was just thinking how it would
be really cool to have a slide
straight into the flats on the
other side.

Their voices fade as they walk away from the clearing.

NAOMI (O.S.)

Why can't you be normal for once
and suggest something legit...
like a bench! Singapore's very own
Angel's Knoll.

PEI JIE (O.S.)

Gosh, you and your penchant for
quaint things. Just imagine
sliding into your home!

CUT TO:

EXT. BUKIT GOMBAK PARK — DAY

We are back in the present day where we see Naomi sitting on a
bench waiting, as Pei Jie walks towards her from off-screen.

PEI JIE

It's a nice new park. Manicured to
be sure, but nice.

NAOMI

Just what the Hillside Park will
be too once they're done with it.

PEI JIE

Well, I'm glad we got to see it in
its natural state. While we could.

NAOMI

Dude, seriously, I told you not to
come down. It's a freaking Monday
morning.

PEI JIE

Me coming into work a few minutes late won't kill anyone. Besides, I couldn't not see my best friend in person once last time before she flies off.

NAOMI

But it's so out of the way from your --

PEI JIE

(playfully rolling his eyes) Well, someone had to choose a midday, weekday flight out. Ah come on Naomi, it's fine. It's a small thing.

NAOMI

You need to stop saying that. Nothing you've done has ever been a small thing.

PEI JIE

I'm going to miss having you around dishing out these words of wisdom, you know that? So, how are you feeling- ready to take on the world?

NAOMI

Ready and raring to go. You know how I shared with you my whole plan the other time? I tore it up last night.

PEI JIE

Wait, what?

NAOMI

Yep. New Zealand and the farm is still the first stop, of course. After that though, we'll see. I'm just going to go with the flow. See where it takes me.

PEI JIE

Well, hope you're still around the farm come the year-end because I plan on making a trip down under to visit.

NAOMI

Yes! That would be wonderful! Oh my gosh, you should totally bring Alia along too.

PEI JIE

(chuckling)

Alright, alright, let's not get ahead of ourselves.

NAOMI

I know everything that happened in the past has got you scared. But from everything you've told me about her and the time we met, she seems really sweet, and most importantly, genuine. Trust me, Pei Jie.

PEI JIE

Something something take a leap of faith, yeah?

NAOMI

(smiling in agreement)

Precisely.

A beat passes. There is an expectation of something unsaid finally having its day in the sun but the moment passes and Naomi gets a call which she declines.

PEI JIE

Guess your parents are done
loading the car.

NAOMI

I guess they are... I should get
going.

Naomi and Pei Jie hug, a hug that, despite their talk of
reuniting at the year-end in New Zealand, shouts "I can't be
certain when I'll see you again".

PEI JIE

I hope you find what you're
looking for out there, Naomi. That
magic. You deserve it.

NAOMI

As do you. As do you.

PEI JIE

Take care, friend. We will meet
again soon.

NAOMI

Indeed, we will.

Naomi and Pei Jie turn around and begin walking in opposite
directions when Pei Jie stops in his tracks to ask Naomi a final
question.

PEI JIE

Dude, so do you stay in Bukit
Batok or Bukit Gombak?

NAOMI

(amused by both Pei Jie and
the question)

At this point I have no clue, and
really who can tell? Take care,
Pei Jie. Let me know if you ever
figure out this mystery.

Pei Jie gives a thumbs up and waves Naomi goodbye. They resume walking in opposite directions. Naomi glances backward but sees Pei Jie continue to walk away and she is on her way. Pei Jie then glances backward as well, but sees Naomi continue to walk away and he is on his way too.

THE END