

SHOWFLAT

Written by

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ACT 1

EXT. CONDOMINIUM SHOWFLAT - DAY

We open on a showflat indistinguishable from any of the others in recent years. This was is a sleepy neighbourhood but the showflat area is a hive of activity. Agents mill about tents with badges marking their agency affiliation; cars slowly roll by in search of a parking spot along the double yellow lines now that the showflat carpark is full; buyers queue in the heat that bears down relentlessly. In that queue, we spot a young adult, searching for someone.

She is 32 years old with a face worn down by and familiar with rejection. She carries a tote from which papers peek out the top. She hears a voice behind call her name and she spins around.

JUN JIE

Miss Jia Hui?

JIA HUI

Oh! Hi Jun Jie! Sorry I could not spot you - I didn't expect this launch to be that popular.

JUN JIE

The last one in this area for some time and also...

(in a whisper)

The last one before the expected next round of ABSD hikes.

JIA HUI

Not like that's going to stop Singaporeans from snagging up property under their children's names for their own sakes, would it?

JUN JIE is unsure of how to react. He hasn't met any other prospective property buyer make such a critical remark before. They are usually the jolly kind, but something about JIA HUI's disposition seems off. He shakes the comment off with a chuckle. They inch at a snail's pace towards the front of the queue, in silence.

JUN JIE

Will your fiance be reaching soon?

JIA HUI

Ah, he's actually busy today so he can't join us.

JUN JIE

(surprised)

Oh, hmm - then do you want to come back another time? Especially since this is your first showflat, it would be good to start on the same page.

JIA HUI

That's very thoughtful of you. But no worries, with the popularity of this development its best that I at least take a look at it first.

JUN JIE

(slightly annoyed)

Hmm... you both are serious buyers, right? Because I really don't have time for just see-see look-look.

Some people in the vicinity of the duo secretly cast glances. JIA HUI begins to feel conscious and considers leaving. The audience doesn't notice that there is a solitary someone who has been taking in their exchange the whole time, and has now begun walking toward them.

FARHAN

Surprise babe!

Just as JIA HUI's confusion begins to show on her face, FARHAN hugs her. FARHAN is a few years younger than JIA HUI, the 20s plainly apparent in the little extra spring in his step.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Just run with it.

FARHAN releases JIA HUI from his embrace.

JIA HUI

Oh my gosh babe, what are you doing here! I thought you were out with your uni friends?

FARHAN

Did you really think that I'd prioritize my friends over this important decision for our future?

FARHAN (CONT'D)
(turning to JUN JIE)
I'm just kidding. It was only cause
she was so mad at me last night did
I realise I messed up. Nice to meet
you bro!

JUN JIE
Really glad you could make it. I
promise it will be worth your time.

JUN JIE notices the queue has not budged in a while.

JUN JIE (CONT'D)
Wait here a moment. I'll see if
there's anything I can do to get us
in quicker.

JUN JIE walks away towards a crowd of real estate agents and
disappears into the mass. Once out of earshot, JIA HUI turns
to FARHAN.

JIA HUI
Eh! What are you doing!

FARHAN
Relax, relax. I overheard your
conversation and thought maybe I'd
help.

JIA HUI
Bold of you to think I needed it.

FARHAN
Honestly, you looked like you
did... Or think about it this way:
this is like a scene out of a
romcom, isn't it? Not that I am
trying to hit on you anything.

JIA HUI looks thoroughly unamused.

FARHAN (CONT'D)
Okay but in all seriousness, I know
I'm overstepping, it's not my
place. I'm sorry. I really only
just wanted to help.

JIA HUI
What is it with people wanting
things to be like something out of
the movies?

FARHAN

You don't want your life to be similar to something out of the movies?

JIA HUI

At least I know better than to think that life can be like a movie.

JUN JIE is walking back towards the couple, looking visibly brighter than he has been in the last ten minutes.

FARHAN

Alright, I'll make a move once he's back.

JIA HUI

No! You can't just leave now! I would look ridiculous and he won't let me in.

FARHAN

Okay, okay, I'll stay. By the way, what's his name?

Before JIA HUI can respond, JUN JIE is within earshot.

JIA HUI

Any luck, Jun Jie?

JUN JIE

Well, it's probably out of pity since I haven't closed a home in months but my boss agreed to let you both have direct entry since you're a young couple. Just put these stickers on.

JUN JIE hands them the large, unimpressively designed stickers declaring them Propfirst VIPs.

FARHAN

Thank you so much Jun Jie, your extra effort means a lot to us.

JUN JIE walks away towards the relative comfort of the air-conditioned showflat.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

Damn, that's as generic a Singaporean Chinese name as it gets lol.

JIA HUI
My name is Jia Hui.

FARHAN
Fuck. Me.

JIA HUI finishes applying the sticker and walks off too.
FARHAN rushes to do the same and catches up with her.

JIA HUI
This isn't a movie so don't do
anything to make this setup more
believable or whatever.

FARHAN
Trust me when I say that with you
even if I wanted to, I wouldn't.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

INT. CONDOMINIUM SHOWFLAT

The showflat is packed to the rafters. They buzz through the showflat in a fixed pattern. Starting from the giant map underscoring the neighbourhood's excellent offerings from schools to amenities, onward to the model of the development itself with laser pointers dancing on the balconies, and then to the dolled up model units themselves. Buyers impressed enough then make their way to the tables-only section to get down to the real business.

It is at the giant map that we reunite with our faux-couple.

JUN JIE

And I know kids is probably not even on the cards yet but if you want them, you'll have the pick of the lot when it comes to schools. And if you want to move elsewhere after MOP, the same schools will help you find a buyer willing to pay a premium.

JIA HUI

(seemingly talking to FARHAN but actually to herself)

I always wanted our daughter to be a St. Nicks girl too. Maybe this home would give us a chance.

FARHAN

(to JUN JIE)

Look at her deciding which school our kid will go too.

(to JIA HUI)

So what happens if we have a son?

JIA HUI

(snapping back to the present situation)

Huh what? Oh, son. Ugh, of course I'll love it but I pray with all my heart that I'll have a daughter.

FARHAN

It... Well, I can get behind a daughter, especially if she blossoms into a St. Nick's lady just like you babe.

JIA HUI is completely distracted and doesn't hear FARHAN talking to her.

FARHAN (CONT'D)
 Anyway, what would you want to name
 this hypothetical daughter of ours?

JIA HUI
 (still lost)
 Sorry, what did you say, Charlotte?

FARHAN
 Charlotte?? Damn, are we still in
 Victorian times?

JIA HUI
 Fuck you.

JUN JIE is unsure how to make sense of their exchange, whether it is genuine bickering between the couple or a playful exchange. He gives yet another chuckle and shuffles them along to the next stop, the development model.

JUN JIE
 So, as you can see here, just three
 blocks, so its a relatively small
 development. And the frontage to
 the park is the biggest of the four
 projects here.

JIA HUI
 (under her breath)
 More of the same...

Both FARHAN and JUN JIE pretend not to have heard her but immediately try to salvage the situation: JUN JIE trying to recover the client relationship, FARHAN trying to make up for her impropriety.

JUN JIE
 One unique thing about this
 development is that the sky terrace
 runs across both these two blocks,
 offering more open-air space access
 for residents.

FARHAN
 These Wellspring Coves sure are
 beautiful.

JIA HUI
 Nothing I haven't seen before at
 other showflats.

(MORE)

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

Same thing, different names. Can we go ahead and see the model units please?

A hint of suspicion crosses JUN JIE's face.

JUN JIE

Wait, have you seen other showflats already? I thought this was your first?

JIA HUI

Oh, sorry no actually I- I- just meant that like- I have seen these features in other condo site plans online before.

JUN JIE

Ah okay, I see. Let's take a look at the 2-room flat layout.

FARHAN

Why so paggro all of a sudden?

JIA HUI is irritated and ignores FARHAN, instead shuffling off to catch up with JUN JIE. FARHAN tails closely behind her. JUN JIE notices that there is tension in the air.

JUN JIE

Everything ok? Do you want to take a break?

JIA HUI

Ya, everything is good. Actually, we need to make a move soon. Family matters. Can we just see the four-room unit please?

JUN JIE

(as annoyed as he has been all day)

Oh, sure but might that be slightly out of your budget range?

JIA HUI

Are you trying to say we cannot afford it?

JUN JIE

Oh no, not at all! That's not what I meant-

JIA HUI
(angrily, with tears
welling up)
Then what exactly did you mean, Jun
Jie? Because I know exactly what I
can and cannot get.

People start looking in JIA HUI's direction furtively again, just as they did while they were queuing outside. JIA HUI, having had enough of being stared at, storms out of showflat. FARHAN and JUN JIE are lost for words. A few moments later, FARHAN finally speaks.

FARHAN
Thanks for your time, Jun Jie. Let
me go talk to her. Thanks again.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

EXT. BUS STOP IN FRONT OF TEMPORARY SHOWFLAT CARPARK

There is a steady stream of cars coming to and leaving from the showflat site. Only one public bus halts at this particular stop but no one seems to ever alight, or board. JIA HUI is on the floor, back slumped against the information board displaying the solitary bus' route. FARHAN walks towards the stop and sits down to her right, on the bench in front of the board. JIA HUI pretends not to notice. FARHAN waits for her to speak. He eventually gives up when JIA HUI does not so much as stir. He begins talking, looking straight ahead.

FARHAN

Everywhere I look someone around me seems to be buying a house.

FARHAN sighs. Then deciding it didn't matter whether or not anyone heard what he had to say, he continues speaking to no one in particular.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

MOP, TOP, HLE, ABSD... So many bloody acronyms. I found it hard to keep track of them all. But mostly I found it hard to keep up with my friends. Whether it was BTO-ing with their partner or allowing their parents to use their name to buy a property for investment, almost every conversation with every friend seemed to invariably involve buying a house.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

Wanting to be on the same page as my friends, yet not wanting to look stupid in front of them, I decided maybe I'd come to this showflat to learn a thing or two myself directly. Of course, my naivety showed me up anyway because, as it turns out, you can't just walk in to a showing at one of these major launches. You have to make an appointment, look the part of someone able to get a loan for a million dollars.

(MORE)

FARHAN (CONT'D)

It was almost as if one morning everyone woke up and decided the conversation was no longer about what to eat for breakfast or which concert tickets to spend our meagre internship stipends on.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

And I didn't get the memo.

More silence ensues. A bus arrives at the stop and halts. JIA HUI's eyes dart up, contemplating standing up to board and leave. She does not.

JIA HUI

You watch athletics?

FARHAN

(taken aback, both by the tangential question & by JIA HUI's voice)

Not really. Why?

JIA HUI

It's like that moment in a long distance race where the pack... dissipates, so to speak. In almost like a blink of an eye, the tight pack becomes a long thread. Yes, we all run our own races but that doesn't change the fact that the pack will never again exist.

FARHAN

True... Well, at least until the race ends. And the next one begins.

JIA HUI initially rolls her eyes, but then gives the impression that she is mulling the statement over. FARHAN cannot see this happening, only the audience can. FARHAN figures that perhaps there is no conversation to be had with JIA HUI. He decides to leave, gently slapping his hands on his thigh to signal so. Just then-

JIA HUI

I guess you're right. You're right.

(pauses)

It's just hard in the middle of everything, you know?

FARHAN

Yeah. That it is...

(pauses)

(MORE)

FARHAN (CONT'D)

Why *did* you come here today, Jia Hui?

JIA HUI tilts her head to look at FARHAN, and he reciprocates. FARHAN stands up and sidles up next to her on the floor, maintaining a small but respectful distance.

JIA HUI

Charlotte and I used to visit these showflats all the time. She was the one that proposed doing it in the first place, actually. Name maketh the person people say. Sure she was dainty but that belied her true persona. She was always the one coming up with these crazy ideas.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

And so she said we could pretend to be friends looking to invest together. That way we could get past the questions of these nosy agents. And so that is what we did. I know she proposed it because she thought walking around these showflats would spark new inspiration for my work.

FARHAN

Figured you were some kind of creative.

JIA HUI

What gave it away?

FARHAN

Very few people still use a pencil today. Let alone keep one accessible by clipping it up their jacket sleeve.

JIA HUI

(breaking out into a small smile reflexively)

Hmm. Attentive.

FARHAN

Aww, that's the nicest thing you have said to me all day.

JIA HUI

(laughing a tad more heartily)

(MORE)

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

I'm really sorry. I've been such an ass to you.

FARHAN

It's alright. I'd be an ass to me too if I were in your shoes, to be honest... So you're an architect or an interior designer or something else?

JIA HUI

Interior designer, yes.

FARHAN

(glancing at JIA HUI's bag with the edge-worn sketches)

Mind if I took a look? At your sketches?

JIA HUI

Eh, why not.

JIA HUI hands over a small stack of delicately sketched rooms. They run the gamut of spaces: living room, dining, kitchen and more. Some sheets are cleaner than the rest, while others are littered with annotations. JIA HUI watches FARHAN thumb slowly through the pages, observing his reactions.

FARHAN

Wow, these are brilliant.

JIA HUI

You are too kind.

FARHAN

And you most certainly are not to yourself.

(pointing at some of the comments on the sketches)

JIA HUI

Heh. Just my process, I suppose.

FARHAN

Maybe you can try a different process?

JIA HUI

Don't push you luck, ah.

FARHAN

Thought it was a worth a shot. No but seriously, this is amazing work. Each design has its own indomitable character.

JIA HUI

If only more of my clients thought that way.

FARHAN

They don't like distinction?

JIA HUI

Surprisingly not. Most of my work blurs into one another.

FARHAN

So those showflat visits didn't help then?

JIA HUI

Well, because they're all so monotonous, they actually did. I have now distilled Japandi to its essence. I never told Charlotte that these visits had diminishing returns.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

Because these visits, they- they eventually became something entirely different for us. It felt like an outlet for us to begin imagining what a shared home - a shared future - for us would look like.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

(voice cracking, getting teary eyed)

God, the number of times we had to restrain ourselves cause we got too loud, too excited. We were like kids. Here in this country where there isn't a real place for people like us, these visits were like an escape to an alternate reality.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

And when things in our relationship became rockier, for reasons that had nothing to do with our love for each other, we clung to these visits like our life depended on it. It almost felt like if were to stop going, our relationship would too.

(pauses)

Our relationship did end eventually, even though we never stopped going. And clearly neither did I.

FARHAN remains silent. There is nothing he could say that could meet the moment, and he doesn't bother to try.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

(quickly wiping away tears)

Ugh, I've said too much. I'm sorry for dumping all of this on-

FARHAN

No, no, you haven't-

JIA HUI

Nah, this was not it. I should go. Sorry.

JIA HUI gets up hastily, and walks over to the curb looking out for one of those solitary buses that serves the stop. There's not a bus in sight. FARHAN just watches her do whatever she's doing. JIA HUI walks back to the information board and examines it.

JIA HUI (CONT'D)

Aiya, what kind of a place is this that only has one bus serving it?

FARHAN

(as he stands up)

The atas kind. You think the folks buying this condo are ever going to be taking a bus?

JIA HUI

I mean, what about the kids?

FARHAN

Think about your St. Nicks classmates, did they all not get picked up by their parents in their fancy cars? Even you?

JIA HUI

I'll have you know I took the bus everyday. The rest though... yeah, fair enough.

FARHAN

I have a friend who didn't even know how to take the public bus to school until Sec 3. Couldn't tell what the nearest MRT station to his house was either.

JIA HUI

Damn, that's insane. Meanwhile I was taking public transport from P1 itself. And this was in a time when Singapore only had 2 MRT lines.

FARHAN

Don't worry, I didn't need that info to roughly place your age.

JIA HUI

Oi!

Amidst the light banter, they both notice a bus coming towards their stop at long last.

FARHAN

I guess that's you then.

JIA HUI

I guess so... What about you? Are you actually one of those people with the fancy car?

FARHAN

Does it look like I am one of those people? Nah, I think I might just mill about the showflat for a bit more. Make use of this bad boy
(pointing to the Propfirst sticket on his shirt)
properly.

JIA HUI

Fair enough. But what are you going to tell Jun Jie?

FARHAN

What's there to tell? He doesn't need to know anything.

JIA HUI

That's true... Hey, thanks for listening just now, Farhan. It's not right to dump but I do feel lighter. I don't think I realised how much I needed to say all of that to someone.

FARHAN

Nah, you're good. I feel like these days our bar for what's considered dumping is too low. Beside, it's just easier with a stranger sometimes.

JIA HUI nods. The bus is about to pull into the bus bay. Even after all this time, they are the only ones there.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

I don't know when or if this country will have space for you. But I hope there comes a day where your heart has healed enough to make space for someone new.

JIA HUI

Mhmm. And I hope it's easier to bear when the pack separates in whichever race you run next. It does get easier, at least in my experience.

FARHAN

Meh, I think I want to rest my legs for a while.

JIA HUI

At your own time.

FARHAN

At *our* own time.

JIA HUI

I'll see you when I see you.

FARHAN

Certainly not around one of these, that's for sure.

JIA HUI laughs as she boards the bus. Once on, she looks out the window at FARHAN, carrying the first proper smile she has had all day. He returns it and watches the bus as it exits the bay and travels down the road, contemplating something.

Once it is out of sight, he turns around, peels the Propfirst sticker off his shirt, and throws it in the bin. He begins walking in a direction that leads him away from the showflat.

The bus stop is empty again.

END OF ACT 3

THE END