

LESSON 9:

TEMPTATIONS

The urge to do something you know you shouldn't.

Wednesday January 5, 2000

Nathan walked out of his bedroom with his skateboard in one hand, his cell phone in the other, and a cheesy grin on his face. He woke up to a text from Natsuki that read “Hiiiiii Nathan,” followed by enough <3 emoticons to hit the 150 character limit. He stared at the message as he walked through the house.

On his way out, he came across the garbage can in the kitchen. It was open and on top of the pile of trash was a torn up document. It was the Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps Student Code of Conduct and Parent Consent form. Nathan had filled out the form entirely the night before, all that was missing was his father's signature.

Nathan wasn't surprised by Lucas' refusal to sign the form. Nor was he ready to give up. “We're not done with this, old man.” If Lucas hadn't left for work already, Nathan would've told him that to him in person.

At school, Nathan broke off from Will and Ashley and headed to his homeroom class early. He wanted to give them some more alone time. On the walkway, he came across a trio of girls standing against the guardrail and talking among themselves. It was easy for him to ignore the girls until he came closer to them and got a whiff of the perfume the girl in the middle was wearing. The smell of orange blossom, violet, and jasmine struck Nathan like a 10-car pileup. He couldn't help but turn his head to the right and stare at the girls as he walked by.

The girls looked up and saw Nathan walking by. They smiled and waved at Nathan. The girl on the right said, “Hi Nathan,” in a tone he found to be seductive. The girl in the middle whispered to the girl

on the left about how cute Nathan was. Convinced that he was, the girl on the left motioned to Nathan to come closer. That's when time stopped and the scene around Nathan became gray.

Nathan's devil, dressed like the bass guitarist in a black metal band, popped up on his left shoulder and urged him to give in to his temptations. "Dude! Look at those chicks eyeballing you! They totally want you! Don't be a wuss. Get over there and make a move."

Nathan took a single step toward the girls when his angel, dressed like the bass guitarist in an alternative rock band, appeared on his right shoulder. The angel pleaded with him to resist his urges. "What are you stupid, dude? You finally get a new girlfriend after all that trying, and you want to throw it away first chance you get? And for what? Some chicks who thought you were a loser a few months ago?"

The devil argued, "That's only because the Stone Family charm hadn't kicked in yet. Now that it's in full gear, chicks are gonna be all over you, dude. This is exactly what you've been begging in your bedroom alone at night for! You'd be a dumbass to pass this up."

The angel countered, "Dude, you've already got a chick all over you. Her name's Natsuki. And if she even thinks you're cheating on her, she's going to be all over you with those punches and kicks. Then her mom's going to finish you Mortal Kombat style."

Nathan's devil only comeback was, "Ah hell, the pansy's right. M will kill you." Both the devil and angel disappeared in puffs of smoke. Time resumed and color returned to the scene. A piece of paper was stuck on the left side of his face. The girls giggled at Nathan and walked away. One of them blew him a kiss as a goodbye. He blushed, and his face felt warm enough to melt snow. He waved back and quietly and reluctantly said to himself, "Bye, girls." It showed that he wasn't entirely immune to their charms. He avoided giving in this time, but he wasn't confident he'd be able to the next time. And something in his mind told him there would be several next times.

Nathan peeled the flyer off his face and glanced at it for a few seconds. The slogan, "Vote for Vanessa today, or don't complain tomorrow," was printed in a font that was typical for a high school

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flyer. Everything else, however, appeared totalitarian in design. Vanessa stood arrogantly in the middle of the flyer. She pointed at the reader, imitating the historic Uncle Sam poster. Uncle Sam's facial expression and posture suggested he was making a request, whereas Vanessa's suggested she was making a demand.

Some students might've saw Vanessa's campaign ad and assumed she'd run the student government like something out of Orwell's *1984*. Nathan saw the flyer as garbage and chucked it into a nearby trash can. The only politics he was ever interested in were the ones that happened backstage on wrestling shows.

In his homeroom class, Nathan approached his teacher, First Sargent Davis. Because Wednesdays were Uniform Day for the army JROTC, Davis was in his service uniform. So were a handful of students in the class. 1SG Davis said to him, "I don't see a signed DD3203 in your hands, Stone. Going to take that as your dad saying no to you joining JROTC."

Nathan replied, "He tore up the form and threw it away." I'm not giving up, First Sergeant. I'll get the old man to come around!"

Davis encouraged him. "I know you will. Now get to your desk. School news is about to go live."

There was a change in the school news host line-up. Marissa had two co-anchors instead of one: her closest friends, Devin and Kimberly. They weren't anywhere as good as anchors as Marissa. Kimberly mispronounced a few words and Devin gave some inaccurate details regarding an upcoming event. But Marissa was more forgiving with them. Not only because they were friends, but because Marissa's rage ran off all the other co-anchors.

Devin announced, "*The JV Basketball team will take on Roosevelt High in the gym after school today. Come show your support for our Eagles!*"

There wasn't much excitement for that news. The team lost to Fillmore yesterday 63 to 48 and it was their third straight loss. With

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the star player Shawn Franklin still benched, everyone believed they'd lose this game too.

Marissa, sitting in the center of the news desk and swelling with pride, announced, *"Student council elections are coming up. Recently, I sat down and talked to one of the candidates for president, Krystal Harper."*

The school was about to watch what Marissa believed to be her crowning achievement as an anchor. The broadcast faded out and transitioned to a pre-recorded interview. Marissa, wearing her signature news blazer and holding a microphone, sat next to Krystal in the empty bleachers inside the empty gym. Krystal wore her best sweater vest and pleated skirt combo.

With her professional demeanor as a journalist, Marissa opened with, "I'm here with Krystal Harper, student council treasurer and presidential hopeful. Krystal, why do you want to be president?" She put the microphone close to Krystal and waited for her answer.

Krystal clasped her fingers and placed them on her lap. Then, she clearly gave her reason for running. "Washington High is rotting from the inside out. Our classmates are losing out on opportunities, and I want to put a stop to that before they have nothing left."

Krystal's answer left Marissa intrigued. She scooted closer to Krystal, and as a journalist would, asked her a follow-up question. "How do you plan on doing that?"

Krystal laid out her platform. "By making sure all of our extracurriculars are funded evenly and fairly. And by working to reopen all of the clubs that had to shut down because of lack of funding."

Marissa asked, "Even the macramé club?" There was a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

Krystal asserted, "Even the macramé club." She elaborated, "Every club is important to me, Marissa. Each one gives students a chance to develop outside the classroom. A chance to discover themselves and make friends with people just like them. Those

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chances are being snatched away from them because of mismanaged funds. No more.”

Marissa was impressed so much, she briefly broke away from her professional demeanor. “You really out here trying to make a change. Okay, go ‘head girl. I see you.” Krystal smiled back; she was happy to know she had another supporter.

Marissa cleared her throat and returned to journalist mode. She said, “You’ve got a solid platform, but are the people behind it? The poll on the school website shows your opponent, Vanessa Neuendorff, in the lead with 32 votes to your 22. What’s your plan to close that gap?”

Krystal could’ve taken that moment to attack her opponent, to reveal some of the dirty secrets she knew about Vanessa. Secrets so scathing that it would’ve brought Vanessa’s campaign to a crushing end if they ever got out. At the time of filming the interview, the thought of letting one or two of those secrets slip crossed her mind. The look on her face implied that she was fighting herself to keep those secrets inside. She chose restraint, and to stick to her principles and run a campaign free of mudslinging.

Krystal answered, “No offense, Marissa, but you really can’t go off of what’s said on the internet. You can’t verify that everyone who voted in that poll was even a Washington student. I’m going to win our classmates’ approval the old fashioned way. I’m going to talk to them in person. Get a feel for their concerns and complaints and come up with solutions that make their time here much better. Solutions, that unlike the ones our current president promised, are actually doable.

Krystal clenched her left fist and proudly repeated her slogan, “I got...”

Suddenly, the interview was cut off. The broadcast was interrupted by a commercial that looked to be well-produced. It showed a montage of photos and videos of Krystal in unflattering moments. Ominous music played in the background.

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A narrator voiced over the montage. *“Krystal Haper is not who she makes herself out to be. She says she wants to save your clubs. But she was the one that shut them down in the first place.”*

The commercial showed several photos of Krystal inside various rooms where clubs once were held. The photos were taken without anyone’s knowledge or permission. The photographer, whoever they were, took clear pictures of Krystal giving the leaders the paper that showed that their budgets were being slashed. This included a photo of Krystal delivering the news to the drama club last October. The photographer took extra care to focus on the upset looks on the club members’ faces as Krystal delivered the news.

The narrator continued, *“Krystal Harper is lying to you. She will not improve your life at Washington. She will only make it worse. Don’t let Krystal destroy our school with her lies. Vote Vanessa Neuendorff for student council president today. Or don’t complain tomorrow.”*

Vanessa appeared on screen to end the commercial with, *“I’m Vanessa Neuendorff, and I approve of this message.”* She stood on the right side of the screen with her arms folded and looking as arrogant as she did on her campaign flyer. A graphic saying, “Vote For Vanessa,” appeared on the right side.

The sudden interruption, and the commercial itself would’ve raised a few eyebrows. That is if any student or teacher were actually paying attention to the news. The broadcast resumed with Devin and Kimberly sitting at the news desk. They both looked stunned, not sure how the interview got hijacked by the commercial, or how to respond to it. The only thing that could be heard was Marissa yelling and cussing off screen, demanding to know who was responsible for the hijack. What she was saying was obscene, but fortunately, she didn’t say any of the words that would’ve gotten the school a fine from the FCC.

The director ordered Devin and Kimberly to sign off while trying to get Marissa under control off screen. With a nervous smile, Kimberly spoke loud enough to barely overpower Marissa’s shouting. *“That’s all for today’s news. For Marissa Thomas, I’m Kimberly Campbell.”*

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Matching Kimberly's volume, Devin said, "*And I'm Devin Brooks. Until next time...*"

The two co-anchors proudly shouted together, "*Soar, Eagles! Soar!*" The broadcast ended immediately without any credits rolling. That was done to cut off Marissa, who was still cussing up a storm in the background.

Krystal spent the rest of homeroom period dumbfounded. Her eyes were wide opened and her jaw was dropped. She stared at the TV in the corner in the classroom long after her teacher turned it off. Her classmates tried calling out to her and poking her. But no one could snap Krystal out of her stupor. Krystal knew about Vanessa's upbringing. How she was raised around a politician and learned how to play the game. She knew Vanessa would do whatever it took to win, including stealing her time in the spotlight. And yet, she was still shocked to see Vanessa go this far and wondered how much further she'd go.

After class, Krystal, still in a state of shock, walked a few steps through the hall prepared to address any and all questions her peers might've had regarding the attack ad. But there were none; similar to the reaction in her class, nobody seemed to care. Tyler Lowe, editor for the film club, ran up to Krystal and took a moment to catch his breath. In between breaths, he testified, "Nobody in... film club had anything... to do with... hijacking... your interview."

Krystal said, "I know you didn't, because if you did, Marissa would've already killed you."

Back to normal, Tyler provided more evidence to his claim. "That commercial was way too highly produced. Looked like a Super Bowl ad. Far above anything we can do in film club. Vanessa must've thrown a lot of cash into it. Must've paid that fool on the news team more to air it in the middle of your interview."

Krystal replied, "I hope it was enough to fix their face after Marissa gets done rearranging it."

The two shared a laugh which lightened Krystal's mood. That was until they heard a loud groaning coming from nearby. Krystal

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turned around and saw student council secretary Greg Louie sitting on the floor and against a locker. Neither knew Greg was there until he announced his presence.

Greg complained, “Welp, that’s it. It’s over. Vanessa’s going to be president. She’s going to make me do so much work.” He shuddered at the thought of all of the tasks Vanessa was going to give him.

In a determined tone, Krystal said to Greg and Tyler, “I’m going to win. I got this.”

Greg slid up against the locker and asked Krystal, “Does that mean you’re ready to get dirty? You ready to do what you have to do to win?” He showed her the notebook that he tempted her with when she first decided to run for president. The notebook he used to document all of Vanessa’s dirty deeds. This time, he opened to a random page to further lure her into taking a peek.

Krystal hesitantly reached out to the notebook with her left hand, slowly giving into the desire to fight fire with fire. Her fingers were about to touch the edge of the notebook when her right hand grabbed her left wrist and pulled her hand back. She slapped the notebook out of Greg’s hand and cried out, “No! I’m not going to stoop to her level. I’m going to run a clean campaign. I’m going to win the right way.”

Greg smiled and sarcastically responded, “Sure you will, Krystal. Sure you will.” He didn’t get her to break then, but he walked away knowing he put another chink in her armor.

To reassure herself she did the right thing in turning down Greg’s help, Krystal said to herself, “I got this.” This time her tone wasn’t one of determination. It was one of bitterness and frustration. It suggested that she made the right call but was already regretting it.