



Illustration by Jennifer Stolzer

Segment 8: Mail Call

(Noon in the dining room of the Teachers' Commune; the teachers are each carrying a lunch tray [on which is a white bowl of beans & rice and a piece of fruit] back to their tables; before eating they sing a calming, prayer-like song)

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY

(lower voices begin singing)

LIVE, LET LIVE / LIVE, LET LIVE

(middle voices enter)

LIVE, LET LIVE / LIVE, LET LIVE

(upper voices join)

LIVE, LET LIVE / LIVE, LET LIVE

LIVE, LET LIVE, LET LIVE

(as they begin to eat, Malimu enters the room with a bundle of mail)

MALIMU

(shouts)

Mail Call!

(background chatter as everybody eats lunch; Malimu walks from table to table, delivering letters and packages to individuals while calling out their names)



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MALIMU (CONT'D)*(calling over to UNA)*

Una, here's a letter for Twimfina. From Canada! Can I give it to you?

UNA

Sure. I'll take it up to her room later.

MALIMU

Oh, here's a letter from Twimfina herself – addressed to all of us!

*(he hands the envelope to Una)***UNA***(stands, speaks loudly so all can hear)*

Hey everybody, we got a letter from Twimfina! Let's hear what our little scholar has to say.

*(the Community quiets-down to listen; they chuckle and make comments from time to time)**(reading from letter)*

"Dear Mom, Dad and Community. Just writing to let you know that my bicycle and I arrived safely in Columbia. I only have a little bit of news to report, some good, some bad."

ZERO

Oh no.

UNA*(continuing reading)*

"First the bad news. Yesterday I took my bike down to the Katy Trail to do some botanizing. On the way back my chain broke. I used it as a scooter for a while and then just gave it to a boy I found. He was really excited about it!

ZERO*(incredulously)*

What? She gave away her bicycle? Why didn't she just fix it?

UNA*(continues reading)*

"I wrote a note to his mother with a few dollars to buy a new chain. So, I no longer have a bicycle."

ZERO*(shouting back with some irritation)*

Oh, that's okay, honey! They grow on trees! We'll just pick you another one!

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY*(some quiet chuckles)***UNA***(continues reading)*

"Now for the good news. I have decided..."

(voice changes to horror)

...to not go to school this semester!"

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY*(concerned murmur)***UNA***(continuing with growing intensity)*

"I have decided to devote this semester to something far more important than barking for scraps of knowledge in some stuffy classroom."

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY*(bemused murmur)***UNA**

"I won't tell you exactly what I'm doing because it's a surprise. But I know you'll all be very proud of me. I'll write again at the end of the semester."

ZERO*(alarmed)*

End of the semester?

UNA*(continues reading)*

"Please don't worry about me. I know exactly what I'm doing. The world is my family – I'm not afraid. Love, Twimfina."

(stunned, thinking aloud)

This is a living nightmare...

ZERO

She'll contact us at the end of the semester?! What's that, four months from now?!

UNA

"Please don't worry about me. I know exactly what I'm doing." That's the line that worries me the most. Why would she say such a thing?

COACH*(soothingly)*

Well maybe, like she says, it's a surprise.

ZERO*(irritated)*

Oh, it's a surprise all right! Everything that girl does is a surprise!

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY*(stifled laughter)***UNA**

Isn't this ridiculous, having to dissect our own daughter's letters?

COACH*(soothingly)*

But she did say we'd be proud of her...

UNA

(firmly)

No! This talk about us being proud of her? Bogus. This talk about good news? Bogus. This talk about her making a surprise for us? Bogus. The only useful bit of information is that she won't be contacting us for four months and she is worried.

ZERO

(turning it over in his mind)

"The world is my family – I'm not afraid". Now why would she say that?

SISTER CLARE

(in a conciliatory tone)

We say it all the time, Zero. It's even the name of one of our songs.

ZERO

(loudly with realization)

And she gave away her bicycle! Una, Twimfina's not in Columbia anymore!

UNA

(with urgency)

Where's that letter from Canada?

(grabs envelope and tears it open)

There's another envelope inside of it! Strange stamp.

(shouting)

Enemia! This letter's from Enemia!

(As UNA tears-open the letter from Enemia, Zero anxiously shouts over to their treasurer, B.B.Brice)

ZERO

B.B., did Twimfina take any money with her?

B.B.BRICE

I don't know what she took, but a couple weeks ago she withdrew everything.

ZERO

(shouting)

Withdrew everything? You let an 18-year-old bubblehead withdraw all of her money?!

UNA

(reading letter from Enemia)

"Dear Twimfina. I was so happy to get your letter. Yes, I feel that I'm falling in love with you too."

ZERO

(shouting in defeat)

Oh great!

UNA*(continues reading)*

“...But now is not a good time for you to come to Enemia. It would be quite dangerous. The Nationalists here have a deep hatred of Americans. I’m sure they wouldn’t let you cross the border, much less travel all the way to Ko-Lat Village.”

ZERO*(interrupting)*

That’s where she is! We need to send an air ticket to this boyfriend’s address and demand that she come back. MALIMU, can you do that?

MALIMU

How? There’s a ban on everything that has to do with Enemia. Maybe we can go through Canada, like she did.

ZERO

Those idiots with all their bans! It’s just the opposite of what we should be doing!

(softer voice)

I’m sorry, Una, I interrupted you.

UNA*(continues reading)*

“...And there are a couple of other things I need to tell you, Twimfina. I’m so ashamed for having kept them from you:

We dreamt about living our lives together, teaching the poor. But I didn’t tell you that I myself am one of the poor. I didn’t tell you that my father and I live in a metal shack in a scrap-yard. Sometimes it’s a struggle just to find enough to eat.

And there’s something I regret even more. In the photograph I sent you, I am sitting in a chair. That’s because I cannot stand. I was injured when I was a child and I cannot control my lower body.

I’m sorry for keeping these things from you, Twimfina. I know that I don’t deserve to ever hear from you again. But please know that exchanging letters and dreams with you these past few months has brought me so much joy. I will hold you and your beautiful Community in my heart forever.
Love, Guru.”

TEACHERS’ COMMUNITY*(stunned silence; COACH shouts out: “We love you Twimfina!” and several others echo the shout)***ZERO***(softly)*

Yes, Mr. Guru, you DON’T deserve to ever hear from her again.

(pauses to regain composure)

But I can assure you, you will.

END OF SEGMENT 8