

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

You Deserve Nothing

Alexander Maksik

WILL 38 Years Old

I'm waiting for my first period sophomores. There are classes like these – students possessed of grace and kindness and intelligence, all thrown together for the year. They arrive and you know. You become a family. It is a kind of love affair.

At the far end of the school they're streaming out of the auditorium from assembly. Mr. Spencer has already wished them a good summer. He's read them something – a quotation, a poem he's found inspirational. Mr. Goring scratches the back of his head as he reviews the day's schedule. He reminds them that all lockers must be empty. There will be trashcans in the halls. Please use them. Respect your school, students. Do not run. Please, no running.

Released, they come up the hallway, some wave as they pass my room.

"What up, Mr. S?"

"Have a good summer, Mr. S, try not to party too hard."

Julia comes in pulling her blond curly hair back into a ponytail.

She's the first.

"Last day of school," I say.

"Oh really? Is it?" She rolls her eyes.

"That's what I've heard. Pretty sad."

She nods.

I sit on my desk and sort through a stack of exams until I find hers.

"So," I say.

"So, listen Mr. S. I'm going to miss you this summer and I want you to know that I really loved your class and that I think you're a great teacher." She blushes. "So, thank you for everything. You kind of changed my life this year."

"Thank you, Julia. I've loved having you as my student."

She looks at the floor.

Steven Connor struts into the classroom, short and bluff and pushing his chest out.

"Mr. S!" He says, extending his hand, a little businessman. "How you doing, Mr. S. You know I'm going to miss this class, dude. Why don't you teach juniors? You suck. What the hell am I going to do next year?"

He cocks his head to the side and looks me in the eye. We shake hands. Then he notices Julia.

"Wait, am I like, interrupting something?"

Julia giggles. "No, Steve."

Mazin, a thin, grinning Jordanian, runs into the room and throws his arms around me.

"Dude, Mr. S. Dude. Are we going to hang this summer? Because I'm so going to miss this class, man. But it's cool, you're coming to my party right? You got the invitation?"

"I'm coming. I'll be there. Sunday night. I'm there."

The classroom slowly fills.

I sit on the edge of my desk as I always do. I look around the room and face them. They expect something from me, some conclusion, some official end to the year.

I push myself from the desk and stand.

"Last day of school. A few minutes left in our year together. I have your exams and I'll give them to you before you leave but I want to tell you a few things first. I want you to know that it isn't often that I have a class like yours. I was very lucky this year. You're exceptional. You've been honest, kind, funny, adventurous, open and

generous. You've been passionate and interested and you have come here day after day after day always willing to consider the things I've said to you. My dream as a teacher has always been to walk into my classroom, sit down and participate in an intelligent, exciting discussion of literature and philosophy. We are smart people sitting in a room talking about beautiful things, ugly and difficult things. You've been that class. I'm grateful to you. You've reminded me of why I'm here and I've loved teaching you."

Julia begins to cry. Mazin looks at his desk.

"You know what I believe is important. You know what I'll say to you about choice, about your lives, about time. You remember, I hope, the discussions we've had about "Ode on a Grecian Urn." "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which was written by whom, Mazin?"

There's a long pause. "John Keats, Mr. Silver," he says proudly.

"John Keats." I smile at him. "You'll forget most of what we've discussed in this classroom. You'll forget Wilfred Owen and The Grapes of Wrath and Thoreau and Emerson and Blake and the difference between romance and Romanticism, Romanticism and Transcendentalism. It will all become a blur, a swirl of information, which adds to that spreading swamp in your brain. That's fine. What you must not forget, however, are the questions these writers compelled you to ask yourselves – questions of courage, of passion and belief. And do not forget this."

I stop. It is very quiet. A locker slams in the hallway. Classes are shortened today and I know the bell will ring soon. I look at them. I mean it all, but teaching is also performance.

"What?" Steven asks. "Dude, we don't have time. What? Don't forget what?"

"This. Don't forget what it felt like. All of us here. What happened in this room. How much you've changed since you walked through the door, morons that you were, nine months ago."

They laugh.

"Thank you. Thank you for all of it." There is the moment of quiet and then, as if orchestrated, the bell rings.

They stay in their seats. There are other students in the hallways. Lockers slamming closed. I pick up their exams and call their names. They hug me. Mazin first. He pushes the side of his head against my chest. They thank me. They wish me a good summer. I can't speak. They file out into the hall and disappear into the summer.

It was, I think, my best year.