SUPER







Lana Condor wraps up shooting for "To All the Boys: Always and Forever" in Seoul, South Korea. Super catches up with her in the popular 2D café in Mapo District. But Lara Jean Covey and her family visit plenty of landmarks and cool places in the city. —NETFLIX PHOTOS

Lessons from Lara Jean according to Lana Condor

By Ruth L. Navarra

Lana Condor wrote Noah Centineo a love letter when he finished filming "To All the Boys: Always and Forever," the actress confessed to Inquirer Super and the rest of the Asia-Pacific press in the room with her.

"I wrote him a friggin' love letter. I felt like it was appropriate. But basically, I said that I could not imagine being on this crazy journey with anyone but him. I stand by that. And I think the world of him," she said.

She continued, "We've always known where relationships stand and that's professional. Now I can say like he's a good friend of mine and I do love him a lot. I don't know what life would have been like if it wasn't Noah Centineo playing Peter."

Condor would continue to praise her costar saying that he is an incredible actor and a much more incredible person. She added that she bawled her eyes out when all his parts for "To All the Boys: Always and Forever" were wrapped up.

This is the kind of fearlessness and sincerity that we got from Condor when we met her at a suite room in Grand Hyatt Seoul, Sept. 2, 2019. She talked to us like we're her old friends, immediately putting everyone at ease. We all left the room feeling a little in love with her.

Meeting her in person will make you realize why she makes the perfect Lara Jean Covey in the Netlix Original trilogy "To All the Boys." The third film, "To All the Boys: Always and Forever," will start streaming on Feb. 12 as a Valentine's Day offering.

Condor doesn't put on airs and she gets excited over the simple things. For example, she was obsessed with the view of the iconic Namsan Tower from the hotel room.

"Would you look at that view! It's amazing" she said to the press as soon as she entered the room.

Condor was the one to break the ice at the start of the interview. She commented on the way we simultaneously took out our phones to record the conversation.

"I remember my first press roundtable. And I was so scared. It was for 'X-Men Apocalypse' and I have no idea what to expect. Then all of a sudden I see a million phones," she said making everyone in the room laugh and warming up to her instantly.

She would maintain a warm and bubbly tone throughout the interview, but she became very serious when she started talking about Hollywood inclusion. She said how she was recently asked to act like Hello Kitty in one audition.

She told the director that Hello Kitty doesn't have a mouth to say the lines and that she doesn't understand what it is she was being asked to do. She says that this is one of the things that Lara Jean has done. Her character showed that Asians can be more than just the stereotype.

In Seoul, she experienced a lot of things including shopping for fashion and beauty care and meeting other girls who love her character. She said she's been to a baseball game, but not to watch baseball.

"I went to a baseball game to eat fried chicken," she said as the room erupts in laughter. She was asked if she thinks Lara Jean will like K-pop.

"I do believe that Lara Jean would be a K-pop stan. I think she would absolutely love K-pop," she said. Her voice almost purrs when she points at her jacket, inspired by Kpop idols' fashion, and tells us that she bought it earlier that week from the streets of Seoul.

She took out her phone and teased us that we need to write down her next words. She said, "You guys, I absolutely love this song and I think Lara Jean would love it, too." She pressed the play button on her phone and the first few melodies of Blackpink's "Stay" plays.

We asked Condor what's special about the third movie and she said that it's about Lara Jean finding herself.

"The third movie... will really really show you her mind, her heart and who she will probably be for the rest of her life," Condor said.

Here are excerpts of the interview:

What is the biggest lesson you learned from Lara Jean?

Expect the fantasy love that you've always dreamed of when you were 4 years old. Lara Jean has taught me that pure love is very real and you can find that with the right person. And she's taught me to be unapologetic for who you are. Set your standards and your bar for love very high. Because at the end of the day like who you choose to give love and to receive love from like that needs to be topnotch.

She taught me how to bake. I like to cook but I don't bake. (Laughs)

What are the changes in Lara Jean in the third movie?

You will see her with an incredible friend group. I think that's the biggest change that you will see from her. She realizes she doesn't have to do everything on her own.

Is it true you had a contract with Noah Centineo about not dating each other before you started filming?

Noah and I have always had a proper understanding of our relationship. We worked so well together on set. When the director yells "rolling," the chemistry that I feel with Noah is unlike anything I've ever felt before. He is an incredible actor. He's very very giving.

(We have an agreement but) not on paper, not like signed, sealed and delivered. Noah and I have always really loved each other. And we are so fortunate to have each other to work with.

What's the difference between filming the first movie to the sequels?

When we did the first movie, our film didn't really have a home. We didn't know if it would have a theatrical release. And then the sequel came around, and we were at the beautiful home of Netflix and everything changed. So we had a little bit of money. So maybe the budget was different, but the heart stayed the same. We are working with a lot of the same people who worked for the first movie, which I believe maintains the integrity and the tone of the first.

What does Lara Jean mean to you?

Lara Jean is my life. I love her so much. I want to take care of her. I believe in her ability to be great. Being given these three movie opportunities to just like, be with her a little bit more and spend time with her has been the greatest opportunity of my life.

What's the best thing about being in Seoul?

Food. I'm a very food-driven human. The next thing that excites me is that in the first movie we only shot at a couple of locations and now for the third movie we've done, New York, Vancouver, Seoul. But I'm excited, most about meeting the girls on the street.

Every time I go out. I meet the most incredible young women who come up, and are just freaking out. That has been so amazing because the reason I'm doing this job is because I want to show the Asian culture as a three-dimensional human being that has a voice.

I want to show Hollywood that we're so smart and we're so prideful, and we are confident and we are brave, and we have so much more to give than a computer nerd. By the way, I am a computer nerd.

Do you think that "To All the Boys" followed a typical rom-com formula?

I think it's different. I think it's different because we have the first-ever Asian female lead ever in a rom-com. So, number one, very different. And we should be proud. There's something to be said that Asians only fall in love if they're lucky. Yes, we have an incredible culture but at the end of the day, like, I don't see why we can't fall in love with whoever we want.



SUPER SET VISIT

LARA JEAN COVEY GOES TO SEOUL

By Ruth L. Navarra

SEOUL—It was a gloomy day on Sept. 4, 2019. It had been raining the whole day and storm warnings were up. It was a stark contrast to the bright and sunny world of Lara Jean Covey.

Thanks to the light crane on the street of Yeonnam-dong, inside Greem Café (Mapo-gu, Yeonnam-dong, Seongmisan-ro, 161-10), it looked like a regular summer day. On that day, the café was the set of "To All the Boys: Always and Forever."

Inquirer Super, the rest of the Asia-Pacific press and author Jenny Han could monitor what they were doing from the restaurant across Greem. Businesses on the street were closed because they were being used as dressing rooms and places where the filming crew can check on the shoot.

Super was allowed to watch the filming from inside the café. Lana Condor (Lara Jean), Anna Cathcart (Kitty), and Janel Parrish (Margot) were shooting the opening scene. We watched two takes of the same scene: the girls teasing each other and, of course, taking photos in one of the most Instagrammable places in the Mapo District.

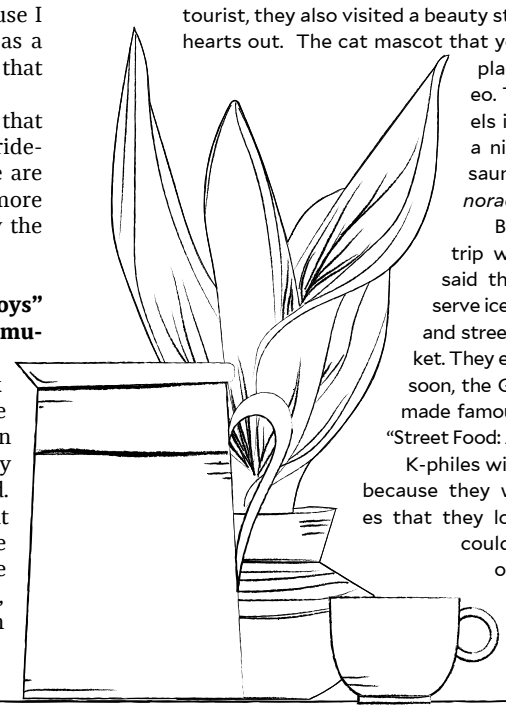
Watching the actresses in full color against the 2D background of the café felt like enjoying a cross between a webtoon and a K-drama. They each had a pretty cupcake, but they did not touch or eat them. A dozen more identical cupcakes were on display, ready as backup.

This café is not the only place Lara Jean Covey and her sisters visited while they were vacationing in Seoul.

They took photos in the "I.Seoul.U" typography installation in Yeouido next to the Han River. They also went biking there. Namsan Tower is a must-stop for first-timers and the Covey family did not dare skip it. Like any other tourist, they also visited a beauty store and shopped their hearts out. The cat mascot that you can find in marketplaces also makes a cameo. They walked like models in Dongdaemun, spent a night in a *jjimjilbang* or sauna, and sang songs in a *noraebang* (karaoke joint).

But the highlight of their trip was the food. Condor said that they had tall soft-serve ice cream in Myeongdong and street food in Bangsan market. They even met with Cho Yonsoon, the Gohyang Kalguksu chef made famous by the Netflix show "Street Food: Asia."

K-philes will surely enjoy this film because they will see familiar places that they loved and enjoyed but couldn't go back to because of the pandemic.



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