

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THE MONOGAMOUS DUCK

Written by

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EXT. VACANT LOT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

GRADY YOUNG (35) stands 50 feet away from a graffiti-covered wall. He fires a baseball towards the expanse of artwork in front of him, then fields the ricochet with all the flash and flair of a seasoned shortstop. He continues his back and forth with tenacity.

GRADY (V.O.)

The single most abused, misused...I would go so far as to say perverted word in the English language -- not that I'm any sort of authority on it -- but the single most abused and perverted word in the English language is the word "beautiful." It's a precious word is what it is, and we should reserve it for precious people: Your mother; your daughter; a girlfriend. And I do obviously realize that in the grand scheme of things, it's pretty much useless to have this at or near the top of your list of pet peeves, but still. Just break down the actual word. Beautiful. Beauty-full... full-of-beauty.

Grady sifts through a pocket, removes his "bullet." It's a small, portable device that delivers a tiny bit of cocaine.

GRADY (V.O.)

Now, it may be trivial, but I kinda hesitate at describing some random girl as being beautiful, full of beauty, when I find most girls to be full of something else. Most people.

He takes a hit.

INT. APARTMENT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Grady snorts a line of coke, then exhales his pain.

Turns his attention to a chessboard and his DEALER.

GRADY (V.O.)

The only other word that approaches "beautiful" in terms of its overuse is the word "genius." Every other conversation I have, someone's like, "Oh, you need to meet my friend Steven. He's a genius." I mean, not for nothing, but "beautiful" and "genius" are not words you just float around. There's a difference between being brilliant and being a genius.

(MORE)

GRADY (V.O.) (cont'd)

Brilliant smart people know that the capital of Burkina Faso is Ouagadougou, they know the literacy rate is 27%, the chief natural resource is manganese, and the percentage of arable land is whatever the fuck the percentage of arable land happens to be. "Genius" is deeper than that. Dorothy Parker and Rosalind Franklin were geniuses. Cristóbal Balenciaga was a genius. Fucking Greg Maddux was a genius. Some girl's friend Steven who did a watercolor of an apple on a table is just not. It takes more than that.

Grady takes out his wallet. Offers ten \$100 bills to Dealer. Dealer takes out his wallet, ostensibly to give change back.

Only Dealer shows Grady a detective's shield. UNDERCOVERS enter in Wrangler jeans and Timberlands. They lock Grady in handcuffs.

INT. PHOENIX HOUSE TREATMENT CENTER - DAY

From the start, Grady's been sitting across from DR. ROSEN.

DR. ROSEN

You're building a case for checking out of here, when you should be staying and figuring out why you are here. How you got here.

GRADY

But I've done that work. They gave me my mandatory six months, and I've done those six months. Besides, the most sensible solution to any given problem is often the least practical. Life plays itself out.

EXT. PHOENIX HOUSE - DAY

Grady and Dr. Rosen weave their way through a vegetable garden.

GRADY

You know how the little things in life are what's really important?

DR. ROSEN

Children making rainbows with garden hoses...their fascination with bubble wrap... It's all that matters, right?

GRADY

... The last time I remember having an identity outside of drugs, I was this dynamic, swashbuckling romantic.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

I had all the little things totally covered. Now I feel like I've woken from this long slumber, but I don't have anything basic to offer beyond the eternal affection sunshine shit.

DR. ROSEN

It's the icing on the cake.

GRADY

Right. But I'm missing the batter.

DR. ROSEN

And?

GRADY

And whatever, it doesn't look like I have any sorta shot at a normal life. I got like 17 dollars in the bank and a girlfriend that passed away four-and-a-half years ago. And I still can't deal with it.

DR. ROSEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRADY

Well...the thing that really sucks is that it's 17 dollars, and the minimum you can take out from an ATM is twenty.

(beat)

Except Citibank. Citibank lets you take out tens.

DR. ROSEN

... Do you have any goals? Long-term?

GRADY

Reconnect with that swash-buckling kid I used to be? That's short-term. I once had a book published. I wanna maybe use that as a way to get a job in sportswriting, but I don't have a degree or a résumé. And the book tanked, so...

DR. ROSEN

It didn't sell?

GRADY

It didn't sell the first month, so they did the same thing to the book that they would eventually do to my girlfriend.

DR. ROSEN

What was that?

GRADY

They buried it... The unsold copies were destroyed, they canceled the book tour, the whole nine... It made people sad, and people don't like sad books.

DR. ROSEN

I like sad books.

GRADY

... You're a psychologist.
(on Rosen's smile)
You literally have the word "psycho" in your job title.

Grady picks up a garden hose. He alternates between the hard stream and the gentle spray. The fine mist creates a rainbow.

DR. ROSEN

You'll stay with your family then?

GRADY

I'm actually gonna stay with my editor for a while.

DR. ROSEN

The editor for the book?

GRADY

It's tough to say "my editor" without sounding like an asshole, but yeah. We met in a mentoring program for at-risk teens. Then in my twenties, she was the reason I got a deal.

DR. ROSEN

And she's agreeable with you staying?

GRADY

Yeah. From 13 to 30, I more or less spent half the week hanging out with her and her husband. She got divorced last year and moved to California for work, so before I came in, we figured it might be good for the kids and all if I were there.

DR. ROSEN

And for you.

GRADY

And for me.

Grady fires water straight up, steps aside upon its re-entry.

DR. ROSEN

So she's excited you're coming. Good.

GRADY

Uh, I don't know if "excited" is how I would couch it. I may owe money on the second book. If I don't turn in a manuscript, my advance is due to the publisher. I already spent it, so...

DR. ROSEN

You spent the advance? How much?

GRADY

Like a hundred thousand?

DR. ROSEN

What did you spend it on?

GRADY

Like a hundred fifty thousand?

DR. ROSEN

What did you spend it on?

GRADY

What the fuck? Drugs. College basketball.

(beat)

The first book never got off the floor. It's their own fault for giving me a deal on the next one. Or for assuming I'd finish a next one... It's not easy to do, and it takes years to do well.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

An inclusive group of RESIDENTS sing. An ALTO flies solo:

ALTO

Hark the herald angels sing /
Glory to the newborn King!

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Grady cleans the toilet. Dr. Rosen stands in the doorway.

ALTO (O.S.)

Pleased as man / with men to dwell /
Jesus, our Emmanuel!

DR. ROSEN

Have you been with anyone since...

GRADY

Diane.

DR. ROSEN

How long has it been?

GRADY
Four-and-half-years.

DR. ROSEN
That's a long time.

GRADY
Depends on how you look at it... I don't know what it says in my file, but Dr. Bagla and I got along well. I'm not a drug addict, I just like drugs. But I went off the deep end.

DR. ROSEN
... So California.

GRADY
California. Manifest Destiny.
(beat)
"Go West, young man."

DR. ROSEN
Do you know the original quote?

GRADY
That's not it?

DR. ROSEN
Not exactly. It is the original quote, but it's incomplete. The actual quote...was "Go West, young man, and grow up with the country."

INT. AIRPORT (LAX) - DAY

On an escalator, Grady looks down. He sees an errant shoelace. Grady looks back up. After a moment, he bends over and wisely tucks it in his shoe.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Grady's editor, DARLA NATHANSON, walks to an entrance. She blows by Grady, who's leaning up against a pillar.

GRADY
Darla.
She stops. They face off.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Grady's elbow, awkwardly perched on two inches of raised glass. He looks at a salt-and-pepper notebook. Hits the window button.

GRADY

Hey, uh...Grandma: You wanna cut me a little slack with the child safety thing here?

Instead of lowering the window, Darla raises it. Grady hops off.

GRADY

How's Josh?
(beat)
Is he still dating that waitress?

DARLA

Massage therapist, and yes, thank you for asking.

GRADY

Well that's what I'm here for.

DARLA

And where were you when it counted?
(beat)
What was I supposed to tell Meghan? Mommy and Daddy are splitting up, but Grady can't take a cab uptown cuz he's too busy self-destructing?

GRADY

The truth never hurts, Darla.

Steamed, Darla glances over at him.

DARLA

Are you wearing your seatbelt?

As Grady casually reaches for his belt, Darla slams the brakes.

Grady flies into the dash. On the recoil, he's flung back into his seat. Darla grabs his earlobe as if he's an insolent child.

DARLA

The truth never hurts? The truth never hurts? The truth always hurts. Understand that, you shit.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Darla pushes a cart. Grady periodically drops in items.

Darla, in turn, casually removes them. Grady doesn't notice, and Darla doesn't care about re-shelving items in the wrong sections.

DARLA

Grady, you have a drug problem. As such, you will attend meetings. In addition, you will address any and all mental issues, gambling issues --

GRADY

-- A'right. First of all, I wouldn't have had any gambling issues if this guy on the Rangers, Joey Gallo? If Joey knew how to make contact with any incarnation of an off-speed pitch, gambling woulda never been a problem. Or -- or...if fucking way back in 2001, Jeremy Giambi figured out that it might be a good idea to maybe slide at some point in his career. Fuckin' Victor Conte forgot to put that one in the BALCO instruction manual.

Stressed, Darla shelves soda among nuggets, pasta among milk.

DARLA

You will attend meetings. NA, AA, GA, whatever the case may be. Learn the lay of the land, because you are here to shape up and write. By distracting me with something so pedestrian as baseball --

GRADY

-- Baseball is not pedestrian.

DARLA

... Hemingway said the only true sports were bull fighting, auto racing, and mountaineering.

GRADY

Yeah, well, what has Hemingway ever done for you?

DARLA

He's never let me down. That's what.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Darla drive home.

GRADY

How's your love life?

(beat)

Have you been dating at all?

(beat)

Have you been dating at all?

DARLA

Dating leads to love. And love is an illusion created by lawyers to perpetuate another illusion called marriage that creates the reality of divorce and the illusionary need for divorce lawyers.

GRADY

That's funny; can I steal that?

DARLA

I stole it from my friend Joel.
You'll get hit for plagiarism even
if it's in a paying homage context.

GRADY

... You know, people get divorced
every day, Darla.

DARLA

I don't get divorced every day. Have
you ever considered that? The fact
that I don't get divorced every day?

A beat. She sees his shoes on the dashboard.

DARLA

Get your feet off the car.

Grady complies. After a moment, he puts on his seatbelt.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

ANDREW KEILING (15) cleans a fish tank. Timidly, Grady enters.

GRADY

Hey. How have you been?

ANDREW

Good... What about you?

GRADY

I'm a'right. How's the new school?

ANDREW

Good.

GRADY

... Are you hungry?

ANDREW

Why, are you?

Grady nods.

GRADY

Should I make something?

ANDREW

If you're eating...yeah.

GRADY

What are you in the mood for?

ANDREW
 Anything... Actually, can you make
 your mac and cheese? The pot is in
 the cabinet behind you.

Grady opens the cabinet. Andrew heads for the cupboard.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady sits on the porch and holds a glass. A car stops out front.
 MEGHAN KEILING (9) emerges. The car leaves and Meghan approaches.

MEGHAN
 ... What are you drinking?

GRADY
 I think you know exactly what I'm
 drinking.

MEGHAN
 Cherry 7-Up? Can I get a sip?

GRADY
 Maybe I'll save some at the end...
 So are the rumors true? Mommy said
 you got a boyfriend.

MEGHAN
 Mommy doesn't know what she's talking
 about.

GRADY
 Is he cute?

MEGHAN
 ... He's alright.

GRADY
 What's his name?

MEGHAN
 Cary Volkman.

GRADY
 Cary Volkman. Now, when people refer
 to you guys, do they say Meghan and
 Cary or Cary and Meghan?

MEGHAN
 Meghan and Cary.

GRADY
 Nice. That's key. I've never been
 first myself, but whatever.

MEGHAN

Well you haven't really dated that many girls.

Grady smiles. Sips from his glass.

MEGHAN

Don't drink it all; you said you were gonna save me some.

GRADY

I said "maybe" I would save you some.

MEGHAN

And?

GRADY

And, did you ever think that "maybe" is just a nice way of saying "no"?

MEGHAN

Grady.

GRADY

Meghan.

MEGHAN

You're trying to push my buttons.

GRADY

I learned from the best.

(beat)

So are you just gonna stand there, or am I ever gonna get a kiss?

Meghan closes the gap. Pecks on the cheek morph into a hug. Then, at the height of sentimentality...

GRADY

A'right, get off.

The pair disengage. Grady hands over his Cherry 7-Up.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Grady, Meghan, and Andrew. They put the final touches on the fish tank Andrew was cleaning. Andrew has warmed up to Grady.

GRADY

Scissors?

Andrew places a pair in Grady's open palm.

ANDREW

Scissors.

GRADY

Thank you, Nurse Keiling.

ANDREW

You're welcome, Dr. Young.

Grady cuts leaves from a money plant, places them on the surface of the water. It's already covered in a lily pad-style formation.

Andrew handles a water-filled bag. He opens it, then introduces a fish into the tank. It swims around. Andrew opens another bag, cups something in his hands. He releases it onto the countertop.

It's an African frog.

Grady and Meghan watch the tiny frog hop. Andrew scoops it up again, then releases it into the tank. It swims to the bottom.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady opens a box, finds candlesticks. He places one aside.

He takes another, then takes a pen from the box.

Grady uses the pen to hollow out the core from the stick's base.

He takes the candle he set aside, then digs up its base as well.

Out fall two vials of cocaine.

Grady places one vial in the dug-out space from the second stick.

He takes the first stick. Melts it with the flame of his lighter.

He drips wax onto the other stick. It forms a seal over the vial.

That one now back in hiding, he puts the other one in his pocket.

INT. APT (FLASHBACK) - DAY

DIANE WARD-SIMS, fast asleep in bed. An EMT feels for her wrist.

Standard, yellow surgical tubing is tied tightly around her arm.

INT. DARLA'S BATHROOM - DAY

It's the next morning. Darla anxiously stands in front of a scale.

She toe-taps it. It turns on. Darla does nothing, so it turns off.

She toe-taps again. It turns on and calibrates. She climbs aboard.

DARLA

C'mon -- Big money-Big money-Big money... Oh, that can't be right.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - DAY

VANESSA KEILING (16) stands at the door. She watches Grady sleep.

His covers don't cover, they reach for the floor. Vanessa enters, begins to fix his sheets/tuck him in. Steps back/calmly observes.

VANESSA

I fucking hate you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Andrew works on a charcoal portrait of an unaware LYNDA CARR (15).

ROB HILDRETH (15) probes the back of Andrew's neck with a compass point. Reeling from the poke, Andrew mucks up the nearly finished drawing. He rips it from his pad, balls it up, puts it in his bag.

CAITLIN FOUNTAIN sits on her desk, bullshits with her BOYS, GIRLS.

GIRL 1

We just don't really understand.
How do you not have a boyfriend?

CAITLIN

Okay -- personal time is over. Lovely
as always, but let's get back to work.

BOY 1

I know the deal. You're a man hater.

CAITLIN

No, I love men. It's children I hate.

Kids laugh.

CAITLIN

So how are your essays coming along?
Any questions?

ANDREW

How long do they have to be?

BOY 1

Same stupid question every time. As
long as it takes to get the job done.

Caitlin shoots him a look.

BOY 1

He always slows us down. Dude,
you're not cut out for AP classes.
Your little twink ass needs to be
with the dumb kids in General Pop.

Laughs. Caitlin leaves her perch, casually approaches Boy 1.

CAITLIN

(to the class)

Write whatever you feel is enough.

Caitlin hovers in front of Boy 1. A moment ago, after rising from her desk, we saw Caitlin bring a sheet of paper with her. Now, she balls up the sheet of paper while finishing her lines.

CAITLIN

You guys shouldn't be able to sum yourselves up that quickly anyway.

GIRL 1

I have a huge Bio test. I don't know if I can write more than three pages.

CAITLIN

Look, I sympathize with the fact that your other teachers can't pass muster with the Board of Ed based on charm and charisma alone. They kinda hafta weigh you down with stuff like tests and homework. Greg, look behind you.

Boy 1 turns. Caitlin tosses the balled up paper at his face. Kids laugh. Caitlin leans into Boy 1/"Greg," quietly speaks.

CAITLIN

I don't care how much your folks pay in tuition, or if they can have me fired. You need to apologize to him.

She retreats back into place.

CAITLIN

Greg, do you have something to say?

GREG

I'm sorry.

CAITLIN

Louder.

GREG

I'm *sorry*.

CAITLIN

He has a name.

GREG

I'm sorry... Andrew.

CAITLIN

(to the class)

So. If I'm asking you to write a mock college essay, what I'm really doing is offering you a chance to go off the reservation and have some fun. If you're gonna whip up a personal statement and deliver it in front of the whole class, you might as well embrace the horror of it all. Plus,

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)

it's the only open assignment I get a chance to evaluate each year, so it's important to me on a personal level.

BOY 2

Jesus. No wonder you don't have a boyfriend.

Laughs.

LYNDA

Do you really not have a boyfriend, Ms. Fountain? You are so beautiful.

CAITLIN

Well I'm trying as hard as I can; believe me. I don't wake up like this. As for men? Slim. Pickings.

LYNDA

But aren't older guys so much more mature? College guys are so mature.

GIRLS murmur their approval.

Caitlin stares blankly. She turns around and calmly writes in small chalk letters: It Only Gets Worse. Laughter grows.

LYNDA

We should set you up with someone. What are you looking for in a guy?

CAITLIN

(beat, thinking)

Someone to go to garage sales with.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - DAY

As he sleeps, Meghan's eyes are right up against Grady's.

After a moment, his eyelids flutter open.

MEGHAN

Are you awake?

GRADY

... Shouldn't you be in school?

MEGHAN

I'm sick. I might have the flu.

Grady shifts away. A beat, and Meghan shifts closer.

MEGHAN

We have to pick up Vanessa later.

A beat. Meghan blows a soft stream of air at Grady's forehead. His hair dances in the wind.

Grady opens his eyes, then closes them. Meghan repeats the action. Grady's hair waves. He palms Meghan's face like it's a basketball.

GRADY

I will fucking...stab you.

Speaking through his hand, Meghan flatly says:

MEGHAN

We have all day for that. Let's go.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Our first real look at the brilliant, indomitable Vanessa Keiling. Also, JOCELYN FELDMAN (16), WILL HERZOG (16), KICKER, and a COACH. They lounge, no more than five feet from where Kicker boots field goals. Will/Coach have a mess of balls between them. Set up kicks.

JOCELYN

You going to the Art Show, Vanessa?

VANESSA

Yeah, my brother's gonna be in it.

Kicker pulls up lame. They're testing an injury.

COACH

That's it. No, that's it. We're done.

Kicker and Coach drift away. Will watches, but stays put.

WILL

Why are you eating McDonald's?

VANESSA

Because I love McDonald's. It's delicious and it tastes like America.

Aping bro culture, she and Jocelyn exchange casual high fives.

VANESSA

Can I have some fries?

WILL

That's disgusting.

VANESSA

You're disgusting.

WILL

Actually, I'm a vegan. It's a choice.

VANESSA

And I respect that choice. It bothers me that cows have to die in order for me to have a steak, but you know what?

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)

I'm still trying to figure out whether or not I give a shit. And I don't know if I do.

WILL

You should.

VANESSA

Sure. But people are just trying to get through their day. They don't have the ability to make huge life changes just like that. And people do their part: I spent 400 dollars of babysitting money sending body armor to a random soldier I read about.

WILL

Why, cuz it looks good for college?

VANESSA

No, cuz they hafta pay for their own body armor, and that's awful.

WILL

Meat turns your organs into shit.

VANESSA

Going vegan turns you into a pompous jerk. So there's that.

WILL

Fine, be ignorant. Live with that.

VANESSA

I'm gonna have to find a way. In the meantime, I'll keep doing my part by sending Kevlar to the Middle East, and you keep doing yours by eating dandelion roots and algae all day.

(gathering books)

Tell Coach I said thank you for having me.

She and Jocelyn head off.

WILL

Vanessa.

They turn around.

WILL

Just so you know? My dad's an active duty Marine... No one's impressed by the whole Support Our Troops, rah-rah bullshit. That whole body armor thing?

(smiling)

Don't strain your arm patting yourself on the back.

VANESSA

Excuse me?

WILL

Less is always more.

VANESSA

... Don't fuck with me, William.
You're out of your league.

WILL

... It's Will.

A teenager through-and-through, Vanessa pivots and leaves. As a confident, handsome boy who rarely gets challenged, Will smiles.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Meghan pull up in front of Andrew and Vanessa's school.

GRADY

Whaddaya wanna listen to?

MEGHAN

Metallica. "Enter Sandman."

GRADY

Meghan, there are better bands you
can be listening to than Metallica...

MEGHAN

What's wrong with Metallica?

GRADY

Nothing, but there are better ways
you can be spending your time.

MEGHAN

You're a music snob.

GRADY

I'm not a snob; I just have taste.

(beat)

I read *Pitchfork*.

MEGHAN

What's *Pitchfork*?

GRADY

It's a music magazine.

MEGHAN

... It sounds snobby.

GRADY

Well, it's not. Music snobs sneer
at *Pitchfork*. I'm not a music snob,
I'm actually the opposite of a

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 music snob. It's like *The New Yorker*. People like me read *The New Yorker*. Then someone will say, "You're a literary snob." I'm like, "I'm not a literary snob; literary snobs don't read *The New Yorker*. They look down on it. Literary snobs read *The New York Review of Books* and *The Paris Review* and stuff like that. Speaking of which, did you read that book I sent you?"

MEGHAN
 What book?

GRADY
The Color Purple.

MEGHAN
 Oh. I started and then I stopped.

GRADY
The Color Purple? Why?

MEGHAN (not pleased)
 Cuz it's not about the color purple.

GRADY
 It's not.

MEGHAN
 It's about slavery.

GRADY
 I'm glad that came across in the read. It's actually the 1930's.

MEGHAN
 Also, Mommy said I'm not old enough.

GRADY
 Mommy said you're not old enough?

MEGHAN
 Yup.

GRADY
 You're old enough to know all the moves from the booty-shakin' videos, but you're not old enough to read *The Color Purple*?
 (beat)
 What else have you been up to? Did Andrew introduce you to Tom Rosenthal?

MEGHAN
Are you serious?

Meghan, betrayed.

MEGHAN
I told you about Tom Rosenthal.

GRADY
That's right; you did.

MEGHAN
I told you about Tom Rosenthal.
I told you about him.

GRADY
That's so funny... I thought maybe
Andrew played him for me, then I
played him for you.

Grady steps out and rests his arms on the door to address her.

GRADY
Look at me. Don't go anywhere.

MEGHAN
I won't.

GRADY
I'm serious -- don't go anywhere.
The roads are different out here.

MEGHAN
I don't know how to drive.

GRADY
I know; that's what I'm afraid of.
Neither did your sister when she
was your age.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Ms. Caitlin Fountain (Andrew and Lynda's teacher) puts up flyers.
They advertise her services as a private tutor. At the bottom of
each flyer, sliced strips with her phone number sit side-by-side.
From the other end of the hall, Grady sits across an admin office.
NINA (17) and BRYAN (17) wait, lounging in chairs across from him.
Caitlin heads towards the admin office, and them. As she passes...

NINA
I love your shoes, Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN
Thank you.

NINA

Who made them?

CAITLIN

I don't remember.

NINA

Aw, you're just being modest.

BRYAN

They look expensive.

CAITLIN

Eh, they weren't that expensive.

Grady looks at Nina and Bryan.

GRADY

They were super expensive. They're Alexander Wang, and they're around two thousand dollars.

He smiles at Caitlin.

GRADY

Do you have like...a job interview at a better school or something?

Boy and Girl laugh. Caitlin smiles.

CAITLIN

They were a gift.

GRADY

Good for you. Awesome. I bet you wrote one heck of a thank you note.

CAITLIN (smiling)

I did. A student's mom was very appreciative of my help, so...

GRADY

Oh, cool. Nice. It's that kind of school. I can respect that.

Boy and Girl laugh.

CAITLIN

One, it's not "that kind of school."
Two, how did you know the designer?

GRADY

My uh...my boss has me organize her shoes a lot? So...

CAITLIN

Your boss.

GRADY

Well, she carries herself like she's my boss. We're technically colleagues, but...

CAITLIN

She's more of a boss.

GRADY

Right. She has about 500 shoes and 50 bags, and I've always had to sort of...index them.

CAITLIN

That sounds great. Anyway.

GRADY (deadpan)

It's funny you say that, cuz it's not great. It's actually pretty terrible.

Nina and Bryan, locked in.

GRADY

It's horrifying. She takes off her shoes and just throws 'em anywhere she pleases. It's inconsiderate and makes it that much harder for me. She also throws her tissues all around the garbage, and not actually in the garbage, but that's a whole other story.

Nina and Bryan laugh.

CAITLIN

I appreciate the peacocking and showing off the fact that you're the only guy in a 10-mile radius who knows who Alexander Wang is. Do you --

GRADY

-- Uh, I'm new here, but we are in Los Angeles. I can't be the only guy who's more curious about a woman's shoes than her legs.

CAITLIN

Yeah. That's not okay.

GRADY

That came out wrong.

CAITLIN

It sure as hell did.

INT. CAR - DAY

Perfectly still, Meghan listens to ear-splitting death metal.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

CAITLIN

If you wanna walk around, you can go through the door on the left to get the proper authorization.

GRADY

No, that's a 'right. I'm just gonna freelance it and check out the trophy cases or whatever.

CAITLIN

Are you here to pick someone up? Cuz you're being borderline weird right now, and we take potential threats to the children pretty seriously.

GRADY

Do I look like the kinda guy who's a threat to children?

CAITLIN

Textbook. White male, 30 to 40, five-foot-eleven...

GRADY (chuckling nervously)

Six foot? Six feet tall?

CAITLIN

It's always the clean-cut ones who have a little girl tied up in the basement with duct tape and jumper cables. With like a plastic bucket.

GRADY

Uh, that's a little too specific.

CAITLIN

I asked if you were here for someone.

GRADY

You think I'm borderline weird? Look at you and your...bucket, ya creeper.
(beat)

And yes, I am here to pick someone up.

CAITLIN

I meant a child.

Grady smiles.

GRADY

She's not answering her phone.

CAITLIN

I'm sure you get that a lot.
Describe her.

GRADY

Well, she's very bright, very pretty.
A little standoffish, but that's a
function of her intelligence and like,
The Invisible Hand of the Patriarchy
or whatever.

CAITLIN

Oh. You're one of those.

Caitlin heads to an admin office doorway.

CAITLIN

Mrs. Witter, can you be a dear and
help this gentleman find his child?

Caitlin takes off, never looks back. Grady watches. A moment,
until he rips off a flyer strip that advertises her services.

INT. GYM - DAY

When we left off with Vanessa, she was sitting in on a field goal
kicker's pre-practice session. Now, with her TEAMMATES firing leg
rockets as background, she plays soccer.

Vanessa sees Grady. He approaches with caution. They square off.

GRADY

Andrew said you're pretty mad at me.

VANESSA

I'm not mad at you.

GRADY

No?

VANESSA

I was. At one point I was... But now
I figure I should just accept you for
who and what you are.

Anticipating this confrontation for months, Vanessa lays into him.

VANESSA

We were watching 30 for 30 on ESPN,
and they were doing one on Darryl
Strawberry and Dwight Gooden. It was
weird, cuz both of them had New York
in the palm of their hands at a
really young age. Just like you did.
And both of them had their demons,
just like you did. And you know what
they did with the whole city in the

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)
 palm of their hands? You know what
 they said?

She extends her palm.

VANESSA
 Here. Take this... I don't want it.
 (beat)
 You know what the problem with having
 heroes is? They have a nasty habit of
 disappointing you.

GRADY
 Vanessa, stop. I fucked up, I know I
 fucked up, and no one knows I fucked
 up more than I know I fucked up. But
 I'm in a bad spot right now --

VANESSA
 -- Well boo-hoo, Grady. You put
 yourself in a bad spot.

GRADY
 That's not the point.

VANESSA
 You're right; it's not the point. The
 point is that people cared about you.
 I had shit invested in you.

GRADY
 There's --

VANESSA
 I'm speaking... I had shit invested
 in you. I'm an extension of you. Not
 by blood maybe, but something more
 important than that.

GRADY
 What's more important than blood?

VANESSA
 ... Love.

GRADY
 Oh, please.

VANESSA
 Oh-please-nothing.

GRADY
 Vanessa, for however long I'm here,
 I'm not gonna let you beat me up.
 I'm telling you that now. I'm not
 gonna allow myself to be held to a
 higher standard than your father's
 held. Now, I totally get it: He
 (MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 wasn't there for you, and I wasn't
 there for you. But he's your father,
 and I'm not. So now if I'm here for
 you, and he's still not here, that
 means I shouldn't get brow-beaten.
 I'm not your father, I'm your friend.
 I'm well into my 30's now, so I will
 not let you take me granted.

VANESSA
 I take you for granted? Wow. Wow.

Soccer balls fly across the gym.

GRADY
 I have to admit -- I was hoping
 for a more enthusiastic reception.

VANESSA
 Yeah? Well I was hoping for a little
 more humility.

EXT. L.A. - DUSK

Day turns to night. Commuters make their way home.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Darla enters, sees Grady at a desk.

DARLA
 So?

GRADY
 So what?

DARLA
 Did you get any work done today?
 Any writing?

GRADY
 I did.

DARLA
 Oh, yeah? What did you do?

GRADY
 Actually...I read the love letters...
 which Napoleon...sent to Josephine.

DARLA
 And?

GRADY (crinkling his nose)
 They weren't very good.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Andrew looks at the stars through a telescope. Grady joins him, salt-and-pepper notebook in hand.

ANDREW

What are you up to?

GRADY

Just wondering how I ended up here.

ANDREW

You and me both. I mean, what can you say about a place where the sun shines 365 days a year, yet there's a tanning salon on every corner?

GRADY

Really? It's seems awesome here.

(beat)

What's your girl situation like?

ANDREW

My shit doesn't really translate. Fine, it's California, but compared to your average New York girl, anything else is a step down.

GRADY

Yeah, well it's New York. Even the ugly girls are hot.

ANDREW

There is this one girl. Lynda Carr. I've never talked to her, but we're in the same English class. We have this mock college essay due soon, and we have to read them in front of the class, so I want to impress her. I just don't know what to write.

GRADY

Yeah. I gotta do a ton of work, too.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The pair explore a wall-to-wall collection of charcoal portraits.

Andrew has made portraits of each family member, plus Grady.

ANDREW

What was it like out there?

GRADY

It sucked. The ex-cons said it was worse than jail. I didn't believe it, but they said that in jail, you can

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 sleep the day away. In drug diversion programs, they make you do shit.

ANDREW
 Like work on yourself?

GRADY
 No, it's all cleaning. They make you clean. You clean a really disgusting tub for two full days. They make you clean it until it's gleaming white, and when you're done, they make you clean it again. Just to test you. The idea is, the outside world is gonna test you, and you can't turn to drugs or alcohol when you're faced with a challenge.

ANDREW
 Right.

GRADY
 You get six to nine months, and if you take off or can't make it through, you get whatever your minimal jail sentence would've been... They call it a "bid." A "bid" is a year in a jail.
 (beat)
 It's twelve full months.

ANDREW
 I listen to hip-hop; I know what a "bid" is.

GRADY (smiling)
 It was tough in there. I mean, I wasn't exactly a model citizen, what with the quote-unquote urinal fiasco and such, but like...I also think some of that behavior has to do with my general sorta...fucked up-edness. It's a vicious cycle.

ANDREW
 You mean a self-fulfilling prophecy?

GRADY
 That, too.

ANDREW
 ... What happens if you don't finish the book?

GRADY
 The book? You probably have a better idea than I do. I can't be the first
 (MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 writer who spent a big advance, only
 to never hand in the manuscript.

ANDREW
 Actually, no. From the conversations
 I have overheard, that's what makes
 your situation so unique, and so
 absolutely terrifying for everyone
 involved. You are the first writer to
 spend a huge advance, and then not
 even hand in the book.

(beat)
 I get that you were upset over Diane
 but like...how do you spend over 150
 grand in a couple of years?

GRADY
 Andrew, I'm a lower-middle class guy,
 but with upper-middle class problems.
 You're an upper-middle class guy with
no problems... I never had the tools
 to manage money in the first place.

ANDREW
 The due date for the draft is in two
 weeks, right?

GRADY
 Thirteen days. Then it's a breach of
 contract situation.

ANDREW
 Mom says you've probably been working
 on the same 20 pages for the past
 five years. I was kinda hoping you
 had your next two novels in a safe
 somewhere, all ready to be published.

GRADY
 Eh. Somewhere in-between.

ANDREW
 What does that even mean? Everything
 in life is somewhere in-between.
 (smiling)
 You're the King of saying everything
 without saying anything at all.

Grady comes across a painting of his ex-girlfriend Diane.

EXT. L.A. - DAY

The next morning. Darla commutes to work. Let the River Run.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Grady and Meghan wear green facial masks, stare in the mirror.

MEGHAN

You lost weight.

GRADY

I did. I had to go on a hunger strike a few times out there.

(on her look)

It's when you stop eating.

MEGHAN

Why would you do that?

GRADY

To prove a point. Couple of points, really.

MEGHAN

Knowing how you are, I'm sure you showed them a thing or two.

GRADY

Uh...actually, yeah -- it didn't really work out like that.

MEGHAN

Why not?

He takes a towel off her head and begins to brush out the knots.

GRADY

They had a lot of Kryptonite there, you know what I mean? A lot of smart people worked there. I think most of my little schemes woulda benefitted from...I dunno, a little more effort during the planning stages maybe?

MEGHAN

Oh, man. I think my skin is burning.

GRADY

Good. That means it's working.

MEGHAN

... So how come you use drugs?

GRADY

I dunno. People who do, who get in too deep, they're often trying to run away from something. And they don't like themselves very much.

MEGHAN

You don't like yourself?

GRADY

No, I do. I love myself, actually. I just...don't really like myself.

MEGHAN

I understand.

GRADY

Good. At least one of us does.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Vanessa, Jocelyn, Will, and HEATHER CHURCH. All at a table.

Heather leans on Will's arm, indicating that they're dating.

WILL

Okay, favorite Monopoly property.

JOCELYN

Favorite Monopoly property: States Avenue. No, wait...St. James Place.

HEATHER

Boardwalk.

Will, the slightest hint of disappointment.

VANESSA

I'm gonna say Baltic Avenue.

HEATHER

Why? Boardwalk is so much better.

WILL

But it's not fun. She's being ironic. Boardwalk's too obvious.

JOCELYN

What's yours?

WILL

I've always liked Marvin Gardens. It'd be a good name for band. You could see them playing on Saturday Night Live. "Ladies and gentleman, once again...Marvin Gardens."

HEATHER

I don't get it.

WILL

Anyway. I hate groupwork, so let's get this out of the way. Vanessa, you're gonna pull your weight, right?

VANESSA

Don't look at me; it's Jocelyn who's gonna fuck this up for all of us.

The others laugh. Vanessa and Will share a moment of eye contact.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

With Grady and Meghan seated in front of her, Darla holds court.

DARLA

I'm getting déjà vu. Feels like our revision meetings at Doubleday.

GRADY

Doesn't it?

DARLA

No, it doesn't, come to think of it. You've lost your innocence, and I'm getting old... Or maybe it's the reverse: I've lost my innocence... and you're getting old.

(beat)

You have some pages for me? I asked about getting the stay of execution if we can show them something, but...

GRADY

I don't have those, but do have this.

He slides the snippet of Caitlin's flyer across her desk.

DARLA

What's this?

GRADY

It's a tutor for Meghan. Flu or no flu, she's missing a lot of school. You don't want her to fall behind.

DARLA

Agreed. Now, NA meeting. Let's go.

GRADY

Can you not ruin this by --

DARLA

Ruin what? You owe me.

GRADY

For what?

DARLA

For failing me personally and professionally. That's what.

GRADY

Darla, if you pin your career hopes on a kid with issues, you can't be surprised when issues present... A tree fell in the woods, and no one was there to hear it. Good book, great editing, rave reviews, but you

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 can't take it personally when people
 don't wanna spend 19.95 on a sob story.

DARLA
You do.

GRADY
 What, take it personally?

DARLA
 Yeah.

GRADY
 How else should I take it?
 (beat)
 What about you? I don't think it's a
 big deal that you're not dating, cuz
 I know that the kids come first. But
 I do think it's a big deal that I
 can't even ask you about it. To me,
that's troubling. That's a concern.

DARLA
 This isn't about me.

GRADY
 I know; it's about me. It's always
 about me. That's half the problem.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Andrew crosses paths with Lynda, who's passing by with a friend.

LYNDA
 Hey. Don't let Greg get to you. He's
 like that with everyone.

Lynda continues on her way. Andrew, shocked by his good fortune.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Darla drives. Pulls up in front of a building.

INT. N.A. BUILDING - DAY

Grady walks down a hallway. Takes note of an EXIT sign.

As he nears the door to freedom, he looks into the N.A. room.
 Makes eye contact with a FACE that's been ravaged by meth use.

Enters. Sits by an ADDICT near a window. Addict whistles/leaves.
 Grady knows that Addict is about to make a deal. He follows him.

INT. DARLA'S CAR - DAY

Darla waits outside, wanting to be certain that Grady stays put.

EXT. N.A. BUILDING - DAY

Grady, through the door. Spots a shifty DEALER in a sketchy car.

INT. DARLA'S CAR - DAY

Satisfied that Grady is staying put, Darla drives out of the lot.

Before she can grab the pole position, Grady and Dealer pull out from around the building. Darla, Meghan end up right behind them.

INT. DEALER'S CAR (INTERCUT) - DAY

Grady places a rock into a glass stem, then prepares to smoke it. He and Dealer approach a light. Darla is about to pull up in the lane to their right...so she'll come window-to-window with Grady.

Grady sucks hard on the pipe. Darla slows to a crawl, her window about to match up with Grady's. And she so happens to be looking.

She reaches, the windows match up, but Grady is nowhere in sight.

There he is...laying low under the window-line. Darla, oblivious.

She looks again. Dealer meets her with his vacant, haunting eyes.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Vanessa and Jocelyn cross paths with large Samoan KIDS.

KID 1

Hi, Vanessa; I'm Jeff. I'm Will's friend. Um...I went to Lucky's at lunch and bought you some cookies. They're soft batch. And my girlfriend asked me to get her Peppermint Patties, so I got some for you, too.

VANESSA

What? I don't know if I need...

KID 1

I got 'em for you. Don't be shy.

VANESSA

(accepting the treats)
Thanks, I don't...

KID 1

I hope you like 'em. It was nice meeting you.

They take off before Vanessa can protest further.

VANESSA

What was that?

JOCELYN
Have you talked to those guys before?

VANESSA
I've never even seen them before.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Grady, sans Dealer, burns time and drugs until Darla arrives.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grady in a tub with lots of bubbles. Andrew sits on the edge.

ANDREW
She stopped me in the hall and like,
talked to me. It happened so fast.

Andrew produces a piece of paper and hands it to Grady, who hands it back. First dries his hands on Andrew's sweater. Then takes it.

GRADY
What am I looking at?

ANDREW
That assignment my teacher gave us.
That mock college essay I told you
about? She's all amped up about it.

Grady reads.

GRADY
These are like the writing exercises
your mom pushes on me. You should
introduce them.

ANDREW
Yeah, right. Over my dead body.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa searches through Grady's belongings. She goes through everything: Socks, papers, pictures...candles. She takes them.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

On her way to work, Darla drives through Los Angeles.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

Darla sits before two SUPERIORS. High on the org chart.

SUPERIOR 1
So I noticed that Grady came by.

DARLA
He did. You should've popped in.
(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

(beat)

I told him that if we at least show an outline, maybe he can get a stay of execution.

SUPERIOR 1

How is he doing?

DARLA

Good. Good.

SUPERIOR 1

... How is he doing?

Darla, fearing for her job.

DARLA

I don't know.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - DAY

After school. Soccer practice, outdoors this time. A scrimmage.

Vanessa plays D. The action is upfield. As such, she can stand near the sideline and "negotiate" with Will and the GOALTENDER.

WILL

I know you, Vanessa. You're bored.

VANESSA

You don't know anything about me.

WILL

You're bored. This is boring.

VANESSA

Uh, I actually enjoy football, but this is greatest sport in the world.

WILL

You have a football mentality. You're an intense girl; you want a challenge.

GOALTENDER

I have a football mentality!

WILL

Vanessa, we need you.

VANESSA

No, you don't. And tell your people to back off. I appreciate your friend Jeff and his candy, but this is creepy.

Across the field on the other sideline, COACH and some ASSISTANTS calmly watch the conversation. They're professional. All business.

They scout Vanessa's right leg. It's why Kicker tested his injury.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin grades papers. Andrew, perched on top of a front row desk.

ANDREW

We have a family friend staying with us. I showed him the assignment for the paper and he has some thoughts about it. He said to give you this.

CAITLIN

Excuse me?

Andrew hands her a sealed envelope.

Caitlin tries to open the envelope, but her finger gets caught.

CAITLIN

Is this a...wax seal?

ANDREW

He's kinda different. I got this really nice desk set from my dad. Unfortunately, it's the same one he got me last year. My friend's the kind of person who like, puts things to use. So he's been using the wax seal that came with it.

CAITLIN

What is he the Duke of Windsor?

ANDREW

No.

CAITLIN

Is he an Earl?

Andrew shakes his head.

CAITLIN

Is he a Count?

ANDREW

No, he's just...different.

CAITLIN

Apparently.

She reads the card.

CAITLIN

Oh, really...? Okay... I understand.

She puts it back in the envelope. Echoes Grady's earlier words.

CAITLIN

Your mother's friend thinks he's quite the humorist. Anyway. Time for you to

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)
run along and play Dungeons and
Dragons or...whatever it is boys do.

ANDREW
Dungeons and Dragons? I play Fortnite.

CAITLIN
Like there's a difference. I gotta go.

ANDREW
Anything fun?

CAITLIN
Nope. Tutoring session. Tutoring,
tutoring, tutoring. Tu. Tor. Ing.
(beat)
That's a funny word when you say it,
right? Tutoring. Tutoring. Tutoring.

ANDREW
You're killing it now.

CAITLIN
I do that. Sorry.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Andrew arrive at the house, only to find an unknown car
(Caitlin's) in the driveway. It's near an art project of Andrew's.
Andrew sees that a tire has ruined the base. He's beside himself.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ms. Fountain tutors Meghan. Grady appears. A moment of confusion.

CAITLIN
What are you doing here?

GRADY
What are you doing here?

MEGHAN
You know each other?

GRADY
We met at the school yesterday.

CAITLIN
Well this is awkward.

GRADY
Right? Especially for you.

Caitlin chuckles.

GRADY
So wait. What do you teach?

MEGHAN

English.

CAITLIN

Uh, that's Honors English, mind you. I've made the leap. *Gatsby*, *Catcher*, *Tale of Two Cities*... Cliff's Notes.

(beat)

It is "Cliff's" Notes, by the way, not "Cliff" Notes. Most people say Cliff Notes... It's Cliff's.

GRADY

Cool. Now we know.

Andrew enters and immediately plops face-down on a couch. As a result, he mistakes Caitlin's female form for his sister's.

ANDREW

Vanessa, tell your friend to move her piece of shit car.

Andrew flips over. His eyes lock right on Caitlin's.

Neither of them move a muscle for an eternity. Then:

ANDREW

What I meant to say...

Caitlin looks at Grady, then at Andrew. Then back at Grady.

She knows that Darla's friend with the wax seal...is Grady.

CAITLIN

Wait a second. Oh, no.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla, Grady, and the children hash things out.

DARLA

I'm concerned about boundaries. She never connected you and Meghan having the same last name?

ANDREW

There's also the separation of Church and State thing. I saw Mrs. Lampasona with her family at Dunkin' Donuts two months ago, and it's been weird ever since. She's definitely embarrassed, and I'm embarrassed for her.

VANESSA

It was a little uncomfortable. She was also wearing jeans, which made it more uncomfortable... But at the same time, Andrew, you adore Ms. Fountain.

ANDREW

I do. I do. Mom, can you cover your ears or go to the living room?

Darla heads for the room. Andrew turns to Vanessa.

ANDREW

Look, I need to be able to count on your vote on this one. I don't wanna be streaming porn while my teacher's here, much less have her peeing and pooping in the downstairs bathroom. Cuz you know that's the totally inevitable next step: Denial, Anger, Bargaining...what's next? Oh, that's right: Peeing and pooping in the downstairs bathroom.

Darla enters.

DARLA

You watch porn?

Andrew's jaw drops.

DARLA

You stream it?

ANDREW

You were listening!

GRADY

Darla, she should stay for pizza.

VANESSA

Are you trying to fuck Ms. Fountain?

DARLA

Vanessa, go to your room!

Post f-bomb, everyone freezes. Vanessa leaves. Darla eyes Grady.

Andrew exits. Comes back, takes Meghan. Darla, still with Grady.

DARLA

Well?

GRADY

Well what?

DARLA

Are you trying to fuck Ms. Fountain?

GRADY

Really? Really, Darla? You think as a writer, I would ever wanna date an English teacher? That's like dating your cousin. Also...she's not my type.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Caitlin's flawless face. Everyone waits on Darla and pizza.

CAITLIN

So Vanessa, you're a junior, right?
Have you thought about which schools
you might want to look at?

VANESSA

I've been thinking about it forever.
I'm applying early decision to Smith.

GRADY

What about Harvard-Princeton-Yale,
or schools like Wesleyan? Or even
Berkeley if you wanna stay out here?

VANESSA

I'm applying to Smith. Early decision.

GRADY

Smith, really?

CAITLIN

Do you have a problem with her
attending an all-women's college?

GRADY

No, I just wish she would check out
fucking Mount Holyoke or something.

VANESSA

(to Caitlin)

He's not like that. He's like other
things, but he's not like that.

GRADY

I want Vanessa to go to Harvard cuz
not everyone gets to go to college,
much less the top school in the world.

VANESSA

Ms. Fountain, my mom went to Harvard
and my dad went to Harvard. Then they
met at the Harvard Club in Manhattan.

CAITLIN

Oh, that's nice.

VANESSA

It's really not. It's embarrassing.

GRADY

I wish you could hear a recording
of yourself. I really do. Harvard
is racist to all those Asian kids,
they're racist to all those Indian

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
kids, and you're not gonna take
advantage of that?

VANESSA
I'm not going to Harvard. You can't
learn anything from smart people.

CAITLIN
Vanessa, ultimately it's up to you,
and I'm sure you'll get in, but what
about safety schools? Do you have a
safety school?

VANESSA
... Stanford.

Grady chuckles.

CAITLIN
So what about you? What do you do?

GRADY
I dunno, I like to play basketball,
I read...I go to the beach a lot...
Why, what do you like to do?

CAITLIN
I was asking what you do-do.

GRADY
Oh, what do I do. I mean...I don't.

CAITLIN
No, seriously.

GRADY
No. Seriously.

VANESSA
Grady plays baseball in Central Park.
He likes to freebase cocaine in the
locker room between innings. There's
supposedly some body/mind connection
that informs his writing, but really,
he just likes freebasing cocaine.

Andrew kicks Vanessa under the table.

Vanessa, in turn, fakes like she's going to throw a fork at him.
Andrew flinches. After settling himself, Vanessa hits him clean.
Andrew rubs his cheek, recovers. After an uncomfortable silence:

MEGHAN
I like your hair, Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN
Do you really?

MEGHAN

Oh, yeah. It's totally boss.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla gets soda out of the fridge and walks to the dining room. Andrew takes a pizza out of the oven, but drops it on the tile. He stares at it. Cheese side up. He looks longer, then exhales. Gingerly, Andrew picks up the pie and puts it back on its tray.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Meghan looks at Grady.

MEGHAN

I don't want pizza. Cook something.

GRADY

Cook something? What is this, "Charles in Charge"? Stop it.

CAITLIN

Do you really think it's a good idea to be so flippant when speaking to a small child like that?

GRADY

I'm sorry; who are you again?

Vanessa chuckles. Darla enters from the foyer, fills glasses.

VANESSA

Ms. Fountain, I apologize for him.

GRADY

Wait, why are you apologizing for me? You're the one who just laughed at her.

It's Caitlin who laughs this time. Vanessa tries to fight a grin.

Andrew enters with pizza, begins to serve. Caitlin rises to help.

DARLA

Sit down. You don't lift a finger in my house. I'm embarrassed it's pizza.

CAITLIN

Oh, please; don't be silly. I wasn't expecting lobster bisque.

GRADY

Actually, just so you're in the loop, eating lobster goes against Meghan's personal ethics.

CAITLIN

Why don't you like lobster?

MEGHAN

You tell her.

GRADY

She doesn't like to defend her position... Basically, lobsters mate for life. Did you know that?

ANDREW

Everyone knows that... Ms. Fountain, Grady's really cool, and then every so often he reminds you that he's in his 30's. He'll be like, Bro, do you know Monsanto? Do you know what GMOs are? They're like, really bad, bro.

GRADY

I didn't know lobsters were monogamous. Meghan didn't know... Anyway, when she found out a few years ago, that put a stop to lobster for all of us.

CAITLIN

Just lobster?

GRADY

Well a rabbit or a baby calf, they're cute, but they're not monogamous. They don't form that bond. But every time you eat a lobster, you're effectively robbing another lobster of its life partner.

MEGHAN

Isn't that sad?

GRADY

Mountain lions are monogamous, too. Foxes...wolves...ducks. We don't eat ducks, either, do we Meghan?

MEGHAN

Nope.

ANDREW

Prairie voles.

VANESSA

Marmosets.

GRADY

Bald eagles...other types of eagles...

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Vanessa, in the stacks of a large, chain bookstore. Will pops up.

VANESSA

Are you stalking me, William?

WILL

It's Will. And no, I'm here with my mom. We just came from practice.

VANESSA

You're here with your mom?

WILL

Yeah, everyone's waiting for me... Listen, you gotta help us out. We're 0-8, but we've lost three games by less than a field goal. It's about kicking under pressure, and no one on the boys' soccer team has the poise. Your coach thinks you can do it, our coach thinks you can do it, and as far as the guys go, everyone knows you have the best legs on the team.

Vanessa raises an eyebrow.

WILL

Leg. Singular. Best leg on the team.

VANESSA

I can't switch sports mid-season.

WILL

It's private school. You can do whatever you want.

VANESSA

Fine. I'm not gonna be "that girl."

WILL

No, you're not. And it's too bad.

(beat)

My mom's tired. Everyone's waiting.

Will leaves. Vanessa eyes books, then looks for Will at the door. He reaches his girlfriend Heather, MRS. HERZOG, FOOTBALL PLAYERS.

White, black, Latin. All bigger than Will, and even preppier and happier. All lacking the angst that Grady and Co. swim around in.

Will turns around. He raises a hand to wave earnestly at Vanessa.

Vanessa waves back, sarcastically, so as to counteract the almost off-putting kindness. It's her bright, hot girl defense mechanism.

Will's mom eagerly waves back, as do most of the Football Players.

Vanessa can't help but be charmed. A boy, his mom, and a diverse bunch of overgrown boys offering kindness when she needs it most.

LATER

Darla eyes a HANDSOME MAN. His PARTNER is obscured by the stacks.

HANDSOME MAN

Back when I lived in Chicago, I'd see a woman on the train with a ring on her finger. I had to superimpose myself onto her to figure out if she was married or not. Meaning, I had to imagine my body rotated 180 degrees to sit in the same position she was sitting in, so I could match up my left hand with her left to see if she was taken... I know it's not that hard, but it's hard for me.

A safe 10 feet away, Darla grins. Partner enters the frame.

It's clearly a date or g/f. Saddened, Darla bites her lips.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

As he did earlier, Andrew works on a portrait of Lynda.

INT. CAR/EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Grady sits in the front seat. He's covered in grease. Engine work.

Out comes a bag. Grady dips a key, sniffs product. But the moment he sniffs, Andrew lifts a door handle. Settles into the back seat.

GRADY

You working on the Art Show?

ANDREW

Yeah, but I need your help on the mock college essay for Ms. Fountain... What do you think about her?

GRADY

Whaddaya mean?

ANDREW

What do you think about her?

GRADY

... You mean her personality?

ANDREW

Yeah.

GRADY

Oh, I think she's terrific.

ANDREW

Do you like her?

GRADY

Do you want me to like her?

ANDREW

Yeah. And you want you to like her.

GRADY

I'm not exactly boyfriend material, Andrew. I took her number off that flyer because I'm lonely. I'm very lonely, and she was very cool and really fun when we met. But even if I weren't struggling, even if I were a best-selling author, I'm not ready to move on from Diane. She wasn't perfect, but neither am I.

Grady exits to work on the engine. Andrew shadows him.

ANDREW

You know, not to be whatever, but if Diane were still alive, she'd rather see you move on with your life.

GRADY

Probably. At the same time, I think a part of Diane woulda found it kind of romantic that I couldn't handle life without her.

ANDREW

... When you first met mom, you were getting high soon after that. Why?

GRADY

My parents did. Nature and nurture.

ANDREW

Why did Diane?

GRADY

I dunno. That's between her and God.

ANDREW

Uh, that's not good enough. You were sober, she was sober. She overdoses, you get arrested. Guess what's next?

GRADY

I overdose? Maybe I die?

ANDREW

No. You get AIDS from a bad needle, and you live for the next 50 years.

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

(beat)

I'm sorry your mom didn't love you,
but I don't have any friends and I
haven't seen you in a year... This
is hard for me, too.

GRADY

Who told you I've used needles?

ANDREW

I saw your boy Frankie downtown.

GRADY

Frankie told you?

ANDREW

Yeah. And that's not all he told me.

EXT. SOFTBALL FIELD - DAY

Next day. The family sits in the bleachers. A foul ball is hit.

TEAMMATES

Holy cow / the ball went foul /
Mooove it over / Hey-hey, whaddaya
say / Hit that ball the other way /
Hit it high, hit it low / Hit it down
to Mexico!

In the dugout, Meghan and her TEAMMATES sing further cheers.

TEAMMATES

We don't play with Barbie dolls /
We just put the bat to the ball /
We don't wear no miniskirts / We
just wear our pants and shirts / We
don't drink no lemonade / We stick to
our Gatorade.

Andrew notices Lynda across the way. She notices him, too.

TEAMMATES

Strawberry shortcake / Banana split /
We make your team / Look like / Shift
it to left / Shift it to the right /
Stand up / Sit down / Fight! Fight!
Fight!

EXT. STAND - DAY

Andrew, in line to buy a snack. Lynda saddles up to him.

ANDREW

Hey. What are you up to?

LYNDA

Practice. I'm on the Quiz Bowl team.

ANDREW

Oh, I tried out. I got eliminated on the question about John Brown's Raid.

LYNDA

John Brown?

ANDREW

Yeah. He was an abolitionist who spawned the bastard child more commonly known as the Civil War. I wrote that it occurred at Harpers Ferry, but I put an an apostrophe in "Harpers."

LYNDA

Hey, why didn't you come over and talk to me during the game?

ANDREW

What?

LYNDA

I saw you during the game. We know each other now; don't be weird.

ANDREW

I didn't say hello cuz Rob Hildreth was right there, and I don't wanna deal with that. Normally I'd be too embarrassed to admit that I'm being tooled on, but that guy's twice the tool I'll ever be. Like, no offense if you're like friends with his girlfriend or something, but she's not like...

LYNDA

She's really not.

ANDREW

She's not. It's ridiculous. Like, where does that kid even get off? Oh, that's right. All over my face. He gets off all over my face.

In front of them on line, a MOTHER turns around a bit.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady writes. Darla stands behind him, coffee in hand.

DARLA

I appreciate the homework help, but we need to have a conversation.

GRADY

I'm editing.

DARLA

You need to write; I can't cover you any longer. And they will sue you, Grady; there's no money in publishing anymore... You can't take their money and then not deliver the product. Corporate, white-shoe lawyers? St. Martin's has Ricky Dieudonne and Jed Daniel on retainer. Those two are like cops who never get to see any action. They're looking for a fight.

GRADY

What -- they're like, sharks?

DARLA

Yeah. And you're chum in the water. They can't wait to sue a piece of shit like you.

GRADY

I'm working on it. Though you can't sue someone who doesn't have any money, so...I don't know if I care.

DARLA

Okay, well, if you don't turn this book in, I'll get fired. And at my age, I don't know if I'll work again.
(beat)

Do you care about that?

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Field empty, Lynda underhands softballs to Andrew. He's awful.

LYNDA

Why don't you just stand up to him?

ANDREW

You know why? There's this whole after school special, propaganda bullshit about how all bullies are cowards, and if you stand up to them, they'll either back up or respect you for it.

LYNDA

Exactly.

ANDREW

No. Not exactly. It's a myth.

LYNDA

Just walk into school one day, first period, and punch him in the mouth. Maybe just walk into school, pick a

(MORE)

LYNDA (cont'd)
 random senior -- or someone who's a
 jerk -- and punch him in the mouth.
 No one will mess with you after that.

ANDREW
 Are you crazy? This isn't prison,
 Lynda, this is high school. This is
 real life.

LYNDA
 Girls want men, Andrew. Not boys.

ANDREW
 I'm fifteen.

LYNDA
 It's the principle behind it.

ANDREW
 ... If I ignore him and he doesn't
 stop, it fucking sucks, but I'll also
 feel like the better man.

LYNDA
 And that'll help you sleep at night?

ANDREW
 Yeah. It will.

LYNDA
 For now, maybe.

She underhands a softball. He hits it this time, but weakly.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

DOORBELL. Grady answers. It's Caitlin. Feigning unfamiliarity:

GRADY
 Hi, can I help you?

Caitlin offers an over-the-top, megawatt smile.

CAITLIN
 You know what your problem is?
 (still smiling)
 You're a fuckboy.

GRADY
 Oh, is that my problem?

CAITLIN
 It's one of 'em.

Grady smiles.

GRADY

Just so you know? Only Vanessa and I
are allowed to be funny in this house.

Caitlin brushes past him.

CAITLIN

Sorry, Slugger. There's a new Sheriff
in town.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Grady and Andrew plays "Asses Up" against the garage door.

ANDREW

"Girls want men, Andrew. Not boys."

GRADY

That's what she said?

ANDREW (rhythmically)

That is what / she fucking said.

GRADY

But you're fifteen.

ANDREW

Exactly. I'm too old for this shit.

GRADY

Andrew...the first time I ever got
arrested, you know what the cop who
took my prints said to me?

ANDREW

What?

GRADY

"This too shall pass."

ANDREW

I'm sure that was comforting.

GRADY

It wasn't, but in retrospect, it was
actually kinda profound.

ANDREW

Grady, everything's kinda profound
in retrospect... It's sucks, cuz I
have Lynda whispering advice in one
ear, Mom in the other, Vanessa --

GRADY

-- You told your mom about this?

ANDREW

Yeah, she's my friend.

GRADY

Hey, she's my friend, too. I'm just surprised you're still so...

ANDREW

I'm a Mama's boy; I haven't been able to cut the cord for as long as you've known me. You expected that to change?

GRADY

You're in high school now; I dunno.

ANDREW

I like my mom. I lucked out.

(beat)

Besides, I have nothing to hide.

Andrew throws the ball against the wall. Grady grabs it.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Grady works on a crossword puzzle. Darla prunes a plant. Enter Caitlin and Meghan.

GRADY

Ms. Fountain, you're Irish, right? I'm Irish.

MEGHAN

You're not Irish; you're Jewish.

GRADY

Woah. Ease up there, Fraulein; I'm half-Jewish. And don't say it like it's a bad thing.

CAITLIN

She didn't mean it like that.

GRADY

Maybe not, but the little Brown-shirt's tone was concerning, no?

(beat)

Anyway, I was just telling Darla about my best friend from rehab, this kid Rashaun Scantlebury. Rasuahn was obsessed with blonde-haired girls; that's all he ever talked about. Thing is, he was only interested in blondes who are Irish, cuz he thinks there's a sociocultural hierarchy of blondes, with Nordic girls at the top, German girls in the middle, and Irish girls at the bottom. Now, this is Rashaun speaking, not me. But his whole attraction was based

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 on his theory that that blonde
 Irish girls are like the n-words
 of blondes.

At the sink, an aghast Darla closes her eyes.

ANDREW
 You're a fucking asshole.

DARLA
 No, you're the asshole. Go to your
 room right now.

ANDREW
 I'm the asshole? I'm the asshole?

He gets up, then places his hand on Vanessa's shoulder as a
 means of dramatically addressing her.

ANDREW
 He just called my English teacher
 the n-word, and I'm the asshole.

Andrew leaves.

DARLA
 Was there a reason for relating that
 story? Did you want to know if she's
 Irish just to make her uncomfortable?

GRADY
 I didn't say the n-word, I literally
 said "the n-word."

DARLA
 But why is other people's pain fodder
 for your punchline?

GRADY
 I mean, Rashaun thought it was funny,
 I thought it was funny, and when I
 told you, you thought it was funny.
 You laughed.

DARLA
 I did not laugh.

GRADY
 Yeah, but you did that thing you do
 with your face.

Grady taps his pencil against the newspaper.

GRADY
 The reason I asked if I she was
 Irish was because of my crossword
 puzzle. What's an eight-letter
 word for "bagpipes"?

CAITLIN
Warpipes. And bagpipes are Scottish.

GRADY
They're originally Irish.

CAITLIN
They're originally Persian.
(beat)
And I am Irish, by the way.

GRADY
I thought so. I'm from Long Island,
which is -- you know -- everything
you've ever imagined and more, so...
I do know a few things when it comes
to Irish girls.

CAITLIN
Oh yeah?

GRADY
Yes, ma'am. Lemme tell you something
about Irish girls. Irish girls...are
always right.

A moment. Caitlin calls back.

CAITLIN
You went to rehab?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Caitlin/Grady leave the house, stand around the porch area.
Grady slaps his salt-and-pepper notebook against his hands.

CAITLIN
So, do you want to maybe...do
something tomorrow night?

GRADY
You don't mean like a date, right?
Cuz I'm not in a place where I --

CAITLIN
No, not a date, no... God no... Um, I
just don't get to spend time with
people my own age, and you're in that
same boat. And to be honest I'm bored,
and I think you'd be a fun person for
me to complain about things to.

GRADY
Thanks -- that's quite the compliment.
Um, it's Sunday tomorrow, and I gotta
go to Church... Maybe I can ask Darla.

CAITLIN
It was her idea.

GRADY
Oh.

CAITLIN
She gave me a primer on you when
you and Andrew were in the basement.
(beat)
Let me give you my number.

GRADY (re: flyer strips)
Uh, I already have it. I mean...I
don't have it, I just don't really
need it, cuz...Darla has it.

CAITLIN
Okay, so just give me a call or
shoot me a text when you're free.

GRADY
.... I'll call you.

Caitlin smiles, heads to her car. Once there, she turns around.

CAITLIN
One more thing... Date or no date?
(beat)
I'm a flowers and candy kinda girl.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family (Darla, Grady, Vanessa, Andrew, Meghan) eats dinner.

DARLA
This is nice. When was the last time
we all ate together?

VANESSA
So, there's a football game the same
night as the Art Show. Does anyone
wanna walk over after Andrew's done?

DARLA
I'll probably be tired.
(to Grady)
Do you wanna talk about the meeting?

ANDREW
You have to go to another meeting
tomorrow. It's an everyday thing.

DARLA
He's going... I read that 90% of
addicts relapse within 72 hours of
leaving a treatment center.

GRADY

It's less than that. I'm sure you read that somewhere reputable, but it's less than that.

His thinly veiled confession goes unnoticed.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Grady wanders the stacks until he arrives at Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos: Archives*. He pulls the book from the shelf.

LATER

Word-for-word, Grady copies a passage. Produces a glass vial. Stands up, heads to the bathroom. Once there, he enters a stall. He slides the metal slab lock.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Andrew and Vanessa play ping-pong.

ANDREW

Seventeen-Three, yours.

VANESSA

Seventeen-Two.

ANDREW

Fine, Seventeen-Two.

VANESSA

No, not "fine." I want you to understand that it's 17-2.

Andrew smiles. They hit. Vanessa effortlessly dominates.

ANDREW

That kid Will's into you, right?

VANESSA

William? Yeah.

ANDREW

He's really good-looking.

VANESSA

Eh. In a conventional sorta way.

ANDREW

Do you like him?

VANESSA

He's not my type.

ANDREW

You don't like him?

VANESSA
He's not my type.

Andrew stops.

ANDREW
He's really good-looking, Vanessa.

VANESSA
Okay, then you suck his dick -- he's not my type... I don't date athletes.

ANDREW
I just want you to be happy.

VANESSA
... You should come out with us.

ANDREW
You and Jocelyn? What are you doing?

VANESSA
We're just going to the pool hall.
(beat)
Your girl Lynda usually shows up.

ANDREW
Does she?

VANESSA
Yeah, come. We never hang out anymore.

She serves. They rally.

EXT. NATURE PRESERVE - DAY

Sunset. Grady picks flowers.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - DAY

Grady gets dressed for Caitlin. Meghan walks in and sits down.

MEGHAN
You should stick with your sneakers.

GRADY
I would, but you can't wear sneakers for something like this.

Vanessa walks in and sits next to Meghan. After a moment:

VANESSA
I don't like that shirt on you.

GRADY
You wouldn't like anything on me. Besides, you two don't know about the male perspective on this sorta thing.

Andrew appears at the door. Takes in the scene.

ANDREW

Is that what you're gonna wear?

Vanessa/Meghan laugh. Grady casually shuts the door on Andrew.

INT. CAITLIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Caitlin, all dressed up. The best possible version of herself.

She gets her bag, leaves. Walks a few feet, heads back inside.

Caitlin makes her way back to the bedroom, then closes the door.

We wait outside. In five long seconds, she comes right back out, as if nothing changed. However, she's replaced her fancy outfit with lazy Sunday clothes. It's what feels right and looks great.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - DAY

Darla in bed. A wet hand towel covers her face. Grady appears.

GRADY

Are you feeling okay? I can stay.

Darla sits up in bed.

DARLA

Grady... I'm fat.

GRADY

Oh, Christ. You're not fat, Darla, you weigh like a hundred-thirty pounds. And regardless, I mean... Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes.

DARLA

Are you insane? Women come in all shapes and sizes. Beauty is a much, much smaller category.

Grady sits in a chair. Changes course.

GRADY

I don't wanna go out tonight.

DARLA

You can't love yourself -- forget someone else -- until you let go of Diane. You have to let go somehow.

GRADY

Uh, I have let go. People have their issues and demons, Darla; you edited a manuscript about mine. My folks didn't give me what parents give their kids, so to put something down

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 on paper, that is conquering demons
 and yes, letting go. So now, allow
 me some self-pity over Diane, cuz
 for the last few years I've had
 demons on top of demons.

(beat)

You and your stupid books.

DARLA

You and your stupid you... And
 just so you know, Grady Young and
 Darla Nathanson are dinosaurs who
 have been selected for extinction.
 So any sense of urgency I may
 impress upon you is about money,
 not art. It's sad, but let's not
 conflate the two, cuz that's what
 got us in trouble last time.

GRADY

... I can respect that.

DARLA

You better. Like it or not, art is
 dead, cash is king. Back to basics.

INT. FOYER - DAY

DOORBELL. Andrew opens the door, sees Caitlin. Waits a second.
 He slowly closes the door, then stands there for quite awhile.

DOORBELL. Andrew open the door just a tiny bit. Peers through.
 Caitlin, none too happy, SLAMS it against him. Andrew recoils.

CAITLIN

Don't even front, Keiling. Know
 your role.

She enters. Meghan appears.

MEGHAN

Hey, boo boo.

CAITLIN

Hi, dollface.

ANDREW

Sweetie, her name is Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN

It's fine, Andrew.

ANDREW

No, it's really not.

CAITLIN

What's wrong? Are you jealous that
 your sister and I are like, total

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)
 bros? That we're growing close, and
 all you have is -- ha -- Grady?

ANDREW
 No. Not at all.

CAITLIN
 I won't bring him back too late.
 Don't be a jackass about it.

ANDREW
 You're a teacher. You can't curse.

CAITLIN
 A jackass is a donkey.

ANDREW
 (beat)
 You're a teacher. You can't curse.

Caitlin smiles, leans in. Softly says:

CAITLIN
 I can do whatever I want, pendejo.

Poker-faced, Andrew holds on her, then calls up the stairs:

ANDREW
 Hey, Grady? Ms. Fountain is here!
 (still holding)
 And don't keep her waiting; she
 totally changed her hair for you.

Mortified, Caitlin closes her eyes. Andrew exits, Grady enters.

GRADY
 You showed up.

CAITLIN
 Looks that way.

Caitlin notices the flowers. Touched, she drops her guard.

CAITLIN
 You got me flowers?

GRADY
 You told me to.

CAITLIN
 I was just being sassy. I didn't
 expect you to actually get them.

GRADY
 I know. That's exactly why I did.

He extends the flowers. Caitlin accepts them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Meghan and Caitlin at the table, Grady at the counter. He opens Tupperware that she brought. Inside are...

GRADY
Gingerbread men. Thank you.
(beat)
Are they laced with arsenic?

CAITLIN
Arsenic?

GRADY
Yeah, like *Flowers in the Attic*?

CAITLIN
Oh, I always wanted to read that.

GRADY
Have you? Great book. Great book.
But yeah, the mom poisons her kids by
lacing their gingerbread cookies with
arsenic. The kids figure it out after
one of the brothers dies, so they
escape from the attic and run away.
But...you know, not before telling
everyone at the reception how their
mom tried to murder them. It's a
really good ending. Really well-
executed.

MEGHAN
Hello, spoiler alert. You just ruined
the whole book for her.

GRADY
You can't spoil a book that came out
in 1979.

MEGHAN
She said she wanted to read it!

CAITLIN
Oh, I was never gonna get to it.

GRADY
See? Most people don't read books;
they read stuff online. They like
to own books and they do genuinely
appreciate them, but they don't read.

MEGHAN
I read.

GRADY
Yeah, but you're a little cutie-baby,
so you have lots of time. Grown-ups
(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

don't have the time or money to read; it became like golf and tennis at some point. It's almost a privilege to read... I'm a writer, I love books more than anything else in life, and I haven't read a book in three years.

CAITLIN

My favorite bookstore just got turned into a bank.

GRADY

Well, that I don't have a problem with. I say this tongue-in-cheek, but I hate bookstores. People who work in bookstores are the worst, because they judge me on the books I ask them about. I'll ask about *Gone Girl* or some other page-turner, and they have the nerve to roll their eyes at me. It's like, "Sorry I'm not asking for 14th century French poetry. Sorry I want a popular book and I'm not in your MFA program. It just so happens that I published a novel that sold about 12 copies, tops. I just wanna learn from my peers, become a best-selling author, buy a house, and start a family." So yeah: I used to like bookstores, but I hate the people who work in them. I hope all the bookstores get replaced by Citibanks, Capital Ones, and cute Japanese places that serve Ramen noodles and bubble tea.

CAITLIN

Bubble tea is Taiwanese.

GRADY

No one ever told me.

He puts the cookies away.

GRADY

I almost forgot. I made a special formula for the flowers so they stay fresh longer.

CAITLIN

What's wrong with water?

Grady gets a pitcher from the fridge, begins replacing the water.

GRADY

Water alone doesn't really cut it. You take a quart of water, add one
(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 tablespoon of vinegar, one teaspoon
 of sugar, one teaspoon of mouthwash,
 then just a little bit of dishwashing
 detergent. Liquid or powder, doesn't
 matter. And never put flowers in the
 fridge if there's fruit in there.
 Fruit releases ethylene gas, and
 ethylene gas makes them age faster.
 I read this all in *Reader's Digest*,
 by the way.

DARLA (O.S.)
 Hey Grady?

GRADY
 Hey Darla?

DARLA (O.S.)
 Do you think you could grab a hold
 of your sexuality and come here for
 a minute?

GRADY
 She's funny, right? That was a
 little sorta...inside joke between
 the two us and the kids and all.
 (beat)
 Darla's actually pretty cool as far
 as super serious people go. Which
 reminds me: She would like a word.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Darla pours wine. Caitlin eyes photos of Darla and writers.

CAITLIN
 Is this you and...Jeffrey Dahmer?

DARLA
 Ugh. Andrew puts that picture up
 every time I take it down. We did a
 book together in the 90's and my boss
 sent us to Wisconsin to visit him in
 jail. I did not wanna be in that shot.

CAITLIN
 A book? Like what, an autobiography?

DARLA
 Yeah. I voiced my opposition,
 believe me. Unfortunately, when you
 find yourself at the intersection of
 art and commerce, you recalibrate
 your moral compass and align yourself
 with some pretty loathsome creatures.

(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

(beat)

Publishing is ugly people doing ugly business. You don't want to know how the sausage gets made. Literally, in Jeffrey's case... Sit down, sit down. May I pour you a glass of wine?

CAITLIN

I don't know if that's appropriate.

DARLA

(nodding briskly)

Sit down.

Caitlin quickly sits. Darla sits as well.

DARLA

Ms. Fountain, do you know why I asked you to take Grady out?

CAITLIN

I thought it was because you wanted him to have...you know, a fun night.

DARLA

No, I just think he would be less inclined to use drugs if his peer group included people like yourself.

CAITLIN

Oh.

DARLA

But that's not why I really asked. At some point, Grady will be gone, and I don't know anyone in California. I was hoping that if you and Grady became friends, we could be friends, too.

(beat)

We could do, you know, fun things.

CAITLIN

Sure... What would we do for fun?

DARLA

Hm. That's a good question.

(beat)

What's the most expensive restaurant in Los Angeles?

CAITLIN

Oh, gosh. I know a lot of the names from reading about them online. That said... I'm not sure if price is the best indicator of quality.

DARLA (good-naturedly)

Well, it's gonna have to do.

CAITLIN

Okay, there's Providence, Urasawa...
um...there's a new L.A. outpost of a
San Francisco restaurant that's big.
I'm not quite sure how to pronounce
it, but it's Lamb...Lamb Bass...

DARLA

L'Ambassade d'Auvergne du Grenier
St-Lazare?

CAITLIN

(beat)
Uh, I'd have to check, but that
sounds right. There's also Melisse,
Mastro's, WP24 --

DARLA

Let's go there.

CAITLIN

Which one?

Darla waves a hand.

DARLA

All of them.

CAITLIN (smiling)

Okay. Well I look forward to that.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa makes allusions to Will/Heather as Grady irons her flannel.

VANESSA

Grady... Have you ever like...stolen
someone's girlfriend?

GRADY

Of course not.

VANESSA

You never stole someone's girlfriend?

GRADY

(long beat)
You can't steal someone's girlfriend.
That assumes that women are property.

VANESSA

I never thought of it like that...
Okay, so have you ever moved in on
someone's girlfriend?

GRADY

Oh, fuck yeah. All the time.

VANESSA

Shifting gears...what would you say
your favorite Monopoly property is?

(beat)

And please don't say Oriental Avenue.

GRADY

Uh, it's not really on my radar, but
I'd say Ventnor.

VANESSA

... What about Baltic?

GRADY

Baltic's great.

VANESSA

You don't like Boardwalk?

GRADY

I mean, if you're playing the game,
Boardwalk and Park Place are where
you wanna be. But they're not...cool.

VANESSA

Baltic's cool?

GRADY

Yeah, it's got street cred. Baltic
and Mediterranean are like the low-
income housing projects of Monopoly.

He finishes ironing her shirt, tosses it to her. She catches it.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Vanessa runs the table vs. Jocelyn. Sees Will, Football Players.

AT ANOTHER TABLE

Andrew plays (haplessly) with Lynda. Notices Rob Hildreth looming.

LYNDA

Your sister is really pretty.

ANDREW

She hates the attention. Sometimes
she dyes her hair weird colors cuz
she thinks people don't take her
seriously as an academic powerhouse.

LYNDA

I wish people wouldn't take me
seriously as an academic powerhouse.
Colors, not dyes, p.s.

As Andrew sets up his shot, Hildreth grabs the butt of his stick.

HILDRETH

What's going on, Baby Gap?

(beat)

You here with Lynda? She checks me out sometimes. Put in a good word.

ANDREW

I don't think you're her type.

HILDRETH

What's that supposed to be, some kinda back-handed compliment?

ANDREW

It's not supposed to be any kind of compliment.

Hildreth slaps Andrew in the face decent force. Andrew's stunned. Some KIDS notice. Will does. Vanessa doesn't, or fists would fly.

HILDRETH

Girls want men, not boys.

ANDREW

So I've heard.

HILDRETH

You're not even a boy; you're more like a girl. You're a little bitch.

Andrew calmly plunges a dagger:

ANDREW

And you have bad breath.

Laughs, as Hildreth is humiliated. He pushes Andrew into a table. More Kids tune in. Will finishes dessert, then slowly heads over. The universal "Fight! Fight! Fight!" chant breaks out.

Just as Hildreth's about to deliver a haymaker, Will steps in and grabs his wrist. Spins him around. Places him in a wrestling hold.

WILL

You're twice his size. Stop it.

HILDRETH

Get off!

WILL

We have an honor code and it applies everywhere. I'm disappointed in you.

Will applies pressure. Hildreth's face turns red. Will releases, Hildreth gasps for air. Will locates, puts an arm around Andrew.

WILL
Let's take a walk.

EXT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Instead of the "moment" we've come to expect, we're immediately treated to Will, sitting, as Andrew towers over/tears into him.

ANDREW
What is wrong with you, man? "I'm disappointed in you"? You're a linebacker, yet you act like you manage a Dairy Queen in Kansas!

WILL
Well you're not in New York anymore.

ANDREW
Oh, well thanks for the heads up, Mr. Cowardly Fucking Lion!

WILL
I'm not a coward, dude. I'm a stand-up guy.

ANDREW
I don't care if you're the Queen of Spain, ya damn hippy! Hit someone!

Andrew calms down. Will offers him a cigarette. It's declined.

ANDREW
I didn't figure you for a smoker.

WILL
If it means anything to you, I don't inhale.

ANDREW
Then why bother?

WILL
I don't smoke for the nicotine, I smoke because I'm insecure.

ANDREW
You're insecure?

WILL
Isn't everyone?

ANDREW
Not guys who date Heather Church.

WILL
You know each other?

ANDREW

I don't "know her" know her, but we're both in Chorus. She's nice.

WILL

This is Heather we're talking about?

ANDREW

I dunno; she seems nice. There's always a joke or two at my expense, but she's one of the people that doesn't end up laughing, so...

WILL

Listen, man, if she's not laughing, it's not cuz she's nice. It's cuz she doesn't get the joke.

ANDREW

Then why bother? Cuz she's pretty?

WILL

Nah.

ANDREW

Cuz you're insecure?

WILL

... Isn't everyone?

ANDREW

I don't get it. I do, but like...

WILL

Can I ask you a personal question?

ANDREW

Sure.

WILL

Why do people call you Baby GAP?

ANDREW

... You know the GAP?

WILL

Yeah.

ANDREW

Like the clothing store, GAP?

WILL

I from planet Earth, too, bro.

ANDREW

... They call me Baby Gap because I don't fit into a "Small." All my shirts are a "Youth Large." I wear children's clothes, so...Baby Gap.

WILL

... That's actually hilarious. I'm not laughing, but that's really good.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Caitlin drives Grady.

CAITLIN

I'm just curious as to how you're so inclined towards this feminine world of bunny rabbits and flowers and... oven mitts or what have you.

GRADY

My dad wasn't around much, so an appreciation for dance, or a passing familiarity with beauty and fashion, it was allowed to develop cuz things weren't really gender specific. I'm not saying I was sitting around contemplating third-wave feminism while watching the Jets shit the bed every Sunday afternoon, but there was Aunt Mary, Aunt Pat, Aunt Caroline... Speaking of Irish women, I'm sorry again about my friend Rashaun's whole spiel. I was trying to get you to laugh at yourself and it was hurtful.

CAITLIN

bell hooks had a lot to say about people who find that word funny. She'd be rolling in her grave if she heard your friend making you laugh with it.

GRADY

bell hooks is still alive.

CAITLIN

You know who bell hooks is?

GRADY (smiling)

Don't assume that the guys you meet are as boring as the guys you date.

CAITLIN

The men I meet are boring. The men I date are incredible.

(beat)

Speaking of which... I noticed that you forgot my candy.

Grady reaches into his pocket. Places something on the dash. He pulls his hand away to reveal two Hershey's Kisses.

Caitlin looks at them, then looks back at the road. She stops at a red light. Takes one of the Kisses.

Caitlin studies it, then places it back with the other Kiss.

CAITLIN

You fancy yourself as being quite smooth, don't you?

GRADY

Not really.

CAITLIN

Fancy, fancy, fancy.

GRADY

Why, do I tickle your fancy?

CAITLIN

Yeah, you tickle me. I don't know about my fancy, though.

EXT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Vanessa comes outside, joins Andrew and Will.

VANESSA

Were you guys having a moment?

WILL

Yeah, we had a moment. It was nice, right?

VANESSA

(to Andrew)

I think there's someone worried about you in there.

Before heading in, Andrew stops at the door.

ANDREW

Thanks for taking me out, Vanessa. I had a really fun night. I hope we can do this again sometime.

VANESSA

Stop.

WILL

Wait, is that your brother?

VANESSA

You didn't know that?

WILL

No. I would've let him get pounded a little longer if I knew he belonged to you.

VANESSA
That's cute, William.

WILL
It's Will. My name's Will.
(beat)
What are you guys doing right now?

VANESSA
Why?

WILL
I want you to come with us.

ANDREW
Where?

WILL
It's 8:00, so don't tell me your
parents won't let you go.

VANESSA
Go where?

WILL
Practice... Sunday night practice,
under the lights with my old team.
Not our team, our prep team, but my
local high school.

ANDREW
What are you guys talking about?

WILL
You need to see how the other half
lives, Vanessa. It's like, fun. You
met Loto and Jeff; they're awesome.
(beat)
It's not practice like we practice
here, it's like a block party. It's
this family affair on Sunday nights.

VANESSA
... Those Samoan kids will be there?

WILL
Six of us from our public school team
came to Pencey to play prep in 10th
grade. You're not the only new kids;
you're just the newest... I'm not
asking you to kick field goals, I'm
inviting you to a barbecue. And I
know you eat meat.

VANESSA
(calling back)
How does the other half live?

WILL

Well.

VANESSA

Where does the other half live?

WILL

... Watts.

VANESSA

I thought Watts isn't that bad.
You say it like it's the barrio.

WILL

A lot of guys live there. It's their
home, but it's not for everyone... I
just want you to feel safe.

VANESSA

I feel safe.
(beat)
Do you feel safe?

WILL

I do.

VANESSA

Good.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Will drives Vanessa, Andrew, and Lynda.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Grady and Caitlin balance on a see-saw. Eat ice cream cones.

CAITLIN

So this book... I heard about it from
Darla yesterday, bits and pieces from
Andrew, some from Meghan... I've just
never met a writer before.

GRADY

Darla's hosting a party for Jonathan
Franzen next month. You should come.

CAITLIN

Really? Wow, what's he like?

GRADY

He's great. I love him... Though, uh,
everyone else thinks he's an asshole.
(beat)Darla actually has a feud going with
Nicholas Sparks, cuz...she calls him
"Nick." And the only thing Nicholas
Sparks hates more than his own

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
fans...is being called "Nick." Darla knows this, so she just love to tweak him. She'll be like, "Oh, this is one of our top writers: Nick Sparks." He gets so mad; it really chaps his ass.

CAITLIN
 I wouldn't expect that from her.

GRADY
 Yeah, Darla can get loose... When she drinks, she calls him Dick-olas Sparks.
 (beat)
 Don't ever tell her I said that. She's very proper and formal about things.

CAITLIN
 ... I lied to you. I bought your book last night and read it in one sitting.

GRADY
 Wow. Thank you.

CAITLIN
 Then I returned it on the drive over.

GRADY
 Oh.

CAITLIN
 A few lines stood out... "I never understood how hard it is to be a woman until I realized how easy it is to be a man."

GRADY
 It's true.

CAITLIN
 Gag me with a spoon. No wonder no one bought your terrible book. Good lord!

GRADY
 I was only 30 when I wrote that.

CAITLIN
 Is that supposed to be a point in your defense? Don't tell people that.

GRADY
 The reviews were amazing. Glowing.

CAITLIN
 "When I was in middle school...
 (Grady mouths along)
 ...there was a boy named Clarence Scrubbs, and he almost deserved it."

GRADY

It's not Hamlet, but it's better than that Ethan Frome shit you're peddling. I mean...Silas Marner...Beowulf? Yuck.

Smiles. Caitlin's end of the see-saw on the ground, she quickly dismounts, sending Grady crashing down, elementary school-style.

EXT. DUCK POND - NIGHT

Caitlin and Grady feed the ducks.

CAITLIN

How did the book even come about?

GRADY

I met Darla through an after-school program. I first knew I could write well at around 7. She could tell at 13 that I had talent, so we bonded. That's how I became close with the kids, as they weren't even born yet. Then I wrote the book from 30 to 35, got a second deal along with the first, so it's time to put up or... get sued. And that would be fine, but I'll never get published again.

CAITLIN

So it's not exactly a dream come true.

GRADY

No. It's more like a nightmare you never wanna wake up from.

CAITLIN

Well, if it's any consolation, I hate my job.

GRADY

Why?

CAITLIN

You go in thinking you'll affect impressionable young minds, you'll have summers off, but then lesson plans get stale, you age in the face of youth -- which is the worst way to age, by the way -- and it just seems like teaching will end up being the perfect complement to one of those flat suburban marriages.

(beat)

I'm up for tenure, and I either get it, or I start over at another school. I'm scared it's gonna be the latter. I don't have the right stuff.

GRADY

Sure you do.

CAITLIN

I don't. It's a top private school. You need the right car, the right clothes, the right pedigree. And I don't have any of those things.

GRADY

At least you have skills.

CAITLIN

At least you have talent.

GRADY

I can turn a phrase, Ms. Fountain; let's not get carried away. It's not like I'm in a band or anything.

(beat)

You know...I don't know if I'll be around long enough for me to consider sleeping with you.

CAITLIN

I wouldn't be intimate with someone unless I was in a relationship. Boys I date don't qualify.

GRADY

(beat)

Ms. Fountain?

CAITLIN

Yeah?

He leans in.

GRADY

It's not a date.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Will, Vanessa Andrew, and Lynda make their way to Sunday night practice. We're treated to a MONTAGE of what Will talked up:

A tailgate of sorts. A cookout. Happy football families getting together without any sort of pretension. Charcoal briquettes and red wine, double dutch and dominoes.

The MONTAGE continues. While Players continue practicing at mid-field, our action now takes place around the field goal posts.

Folding chairs are set up behind the end zone. FAMILY MEMBERS sit in them. KICKERS attempt to launch field goals from ten yard line. Family Members in the chairs try to catch the successful kicks.

Each time a kick is flubbed or a ball isn't caught, a hat full of money is passed to the next chair. When Lynda is the one who finally catches a kick cleanly, it's cause for celebration.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Darla and Meghan walk from one end of the store, items in tow, while SINGLE DAD and SON walk towards them from the other end. Both pairs come to the middle check-out line. Our girls first. After Darla places items on the belt, Single Dad follows suit. The four of them wait. Son kicks Dad, then nods towards Darla.

SINGLE DAD
Interesting selection.

DARLA
Pardon? Oh, right. It's high fructose corn syrup night. A.K.A. Girls' Night Out. In, rather.

SINGLE DAD
Huh. We're having a Guys' Night.

Single Dad sees condiments, plus too many packages of hot dogs.

DARLA
Talk about your sausage fest.

Darla gets rung up, conversation stalls. Single Dad is too shy. Son nudges him. Dad stretches so he can see Darla's food items.

DARLA
I'm sorry; did I take something from your pile?

SINGLE DAD
Oh, no. I was just craning my neck to see if you had a wedding ring on.
(beat)
It's so hard to tell sometimes.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Vanessa and Will in the bleachers. Andrew and Lynda, nearby.

WILL
Do you miss New York?

VANESSA
I do. But there's also a love-hate relationship. New York is like the dirty uncle that molests you, but then pays your way through college.

Will smiles.

VANESSA

Our family friend came up with that. He grew up poor on Long Island, we grew up rich in New York and Long Island. My neighborhood was more like Beverly Hills, his was more like Watts. He wrote a book about the differences.

WILL

I wish I could write a book.

VANESSA

My mom used to work for Doubleday, but now she works for St. Martin's. It was kind of a lateral transfer.

WILL

What exactly is a lateral transfer?

VANESSA

It's a demotion.

(beat)

I can't kick field goals, William.

WILL

You can and you will.

VANESSA

I can. I won't.

WILL

The guys are all psyched about you.

VANESSA

Like who?

WILL

Everyone.

A true teenager, Vanessa again can't disguise that she wants Will to say "Me." And like a teenager, he can't lose face by saying it.

WILL

The game is the same night as the Art Show, and you said you're going. So come Wednesday, support your brother, then walk over to the field, warm up, kick or don't kick...and get back to your normal life. No one'll care. In 48 hours, whether you join us or not, we're gonna go out there, and we're gonna lose. Cuz that's what we do.

Vanessa, unmoved.

WILL

If you get a chance to kick, it's not gonna be some game-winner everyone remembers, it's gonna be in a third quarter blow-out with us already down 42-7. But if you do make it, you can check out the box score tomorrow and see your name in the newspaper.

VANESSA

... Is that why you play football? To get you name in the newspaper?

WILL

... I play football because I care about my teammates.

(beat)

You're so frustrating. And stop calling me "William." It's "Will."

Disappointed, he leaves the bleachers, heads to mid-field.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Grady and Caitlin, fishing in a rowboat.

CAITLIN

So, white elephant-wise, how'd you end up in rehab?

GRADY

Well I'm definitely a drug abuser, even if I don't act all strung out like one. Um...I got arrested, and the choice was either one month in jail or six months in a treatment center. It was Phoenix House, which isn't a rich kid rehab where they sing Kumbaya and play kickball at one o'clock.

CAITLIN

What did people say? Your friends, family...girlfriend?

GRADY

That was subtle.

CAITLIN (smiling)

Stop.

GRADY

My friends were supportive, and... I've only been in one relationship, really.

CAITLIN

How did it end?

GRADY

... It just sorta died one day.

(beat)

Ms. Fountain, I really like you. But don't get any ideas about me somehow turning into Mr. Right.

CAITLIN

Well no offense, but your life is kinda empty right now. But it is a blank slate, so I'm jealous of that. And regardless of what they might say otherwise, a lot of girls would settle for Mr. Right Now.

GRADY

Fortunately for them, I don't qualify as Mr. Right or Mr. Right Now.

CAITLIN

You don't. You're Mr. Not Right Now.

GRADY

That's funny.

CAITLIN

I'm funny. I know you don't know me, but if you asked people who know me superficially, they wouldn't say I'm all that funny. But it's sort of a not-too-secret secret that I'm really funny once you get to know me. Not funny, I guess, but witty. I'm witty. Like when I say things, people don't laugh necessarily? But it's funny.

GRADY

... How is a girl like you single?

CAITLIN

Oh, I don't know. I probably spend too much time at home making voodoo dolls out of people who ask, "How is a nice girl like you still single."

(beat)

You know why I'm single? Because guys are mean, ignorant and stupid. And then they go bald.

GRADY

(beat, smiling)

There are plenty of fish in the sea.

CAITLIN

... We have to stop telling people that there's plenty of fish in the sea, because that's not true anymore, literally or figuratively.

Grady smiles. Caitlin looks at him. He keeps smiling.

CAITLIN

What?

GRADY

I don't know if I'll ever get over the fact that you made me gingerbread men for our first date.

A moment. Caitlin draws closer, gives Grady a kiss on the cheek.

CAITLIN

It's not a date.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Will drives Vanessa/Andrew/Lynda. Lights go down in the city.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew works on his mock college essay. Grady appears.

GRADY

How's the essay coming along?

ANDREW

It's not. I really wanna impress Lynda with it, but it's not easy.

GRADY

Whenever I'm blocked, I just take a sentence from someone else. It sets me on my way, so then I delete that first sentence and replace it later.

ANDREW

Hey, how did it go by the way?

GRADY

I dunno. We didn't really do much... but I can't imagine having more fun than we did. You know what I mean?

ANDREW

I think I have a pretty good idea.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - DAY

Vanessa gets ready. Grady appears in the door.

GRADY
Where are my candles?

VANESSA
Don't talk to me like that.

GRADY
Where the fuck...are my candles?

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Grady with his candle vials. They're empty, and rest on the sink. He cuts up the cocaine with his credit card. Snorts up two lines.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Grady exits the bathroom smack into the middle of a meeting he's attending. Finds his chair. We assumed he was in a home bathroom.

LATER

It's Grady's turn to share with various ADDICTS.

GRADY
At Phoenix House, they have this definition of "character." They say, "Character is what you do...when no one is watching." It struck a chord. Cuz it's never about the drugs, it's about all the secrets and lies that are part of the package when you're dealing with people like us. Like me.
(beat)
I don't know how to tell them that...

ADDICT 1
I find the best way to tell someone the hard truth -- like the truth that you don't wanna tell, and they don't wanna hear -- I find the best way to tell them...is to just write it down.

Grady smiles, painfully.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The hustle and bustle of kids in the hall.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Andrew again works on a charcoal portrait of Lynda.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Vanessa/Will sit an the edge of a pond and collect water samples.

The CLASS employs eye droppers/microscopes in studying pond life.

WILL

Do you believe in fate? Or in God?

VANESSA

Uh, since there are no atheists in a foxhole, yeah, I guess I do.

WILL

Okay, you believe in God. Assuming there's a Heaven and there's a Hell, what's your idea of a personal Hell?

VANESSA

Is this a thing where you're only asking me a question so I ask the same question back...and then you have some cool answer ready to go?

Will studies her as she peers into her microscope.

WILL

It's called small talk, Vanessa.

VANESSA

Asking me if I believe in God is the exact opposite of small talk. Small talk is telling me how you messed up your math test because the Scantron sheet had bars instead of bubbles, and you really hate bars. And then you couldn't change answers cuz your pencil had one of those hard Chinese erasers that don't erase... Oh, hey: After we got home last night, Andrew told our mom about kicking. If --

WILL

-- I told him not to; she might not let you play... Why did he tell her?

VANESSA

I dunno. He tells her everything.

(beat)

So are you and Heather going to the Art Show before the game, or are you too cool for that?

WILL

We're taking a break.

VANESSA

Since when?

WILL

Since yesterday.

VANESSA

That makes sense. Long weekends give people too much time to think.

WILL

I bet there's a big spike in three-day weekend breakups. Like emergency rooms during Christmas or whatever.

VANESSA

Full moons.

WILL

Like emergency rooms during full moons or whatever... Heather's dad was a receiver in the NFL for a few years, so she's got this princess attitude cuz of it.

VANESSA

... Heather's dad is Robert Church?

WILL

You know who he is?

VANESSA

Of course I do. He never met a pass he couldn't drop.

WILL

Do you know Meredith Bachmann?

Vanessa shakes her head.

WILL

Heather didn't like that we hang out, but we go surfing before school on Wednesdays.

VANESSA

That's cool.

WILL

You wanna come with us tomorrow?

VANESSA

... I don't know how to surf.

WILL

Neither does Meredith.

(smiling)

That's not why I keep her around.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

Grady and Darla evaluate dust jackets hanging on clothespins.

GRADY

Football? Andrew said that? Football?
Did she ever even think about safety?

DARLA

I know. What if she hurts someone?
(beat)

They just want her for one game... He
said she's not interested at all, and
I believe it. She's won't compromise
her femininity in the eyes of boys.

GRADY

Vanessa does not care about that.

DARLA

She wants to make a name for herself,
but football isn't the answer.

GRADY

You're wrong.

DARLA

Listen: When you Google me, what
comes up?

GRADY

Book shit.

DARLA

And when people Google you, what
comes up?

GRADY

Book shit.
(beat)
And pictures of me with my shirt off.

DARLA

Pictures of you with your shirt off.
(beat)
What happens when you Google Vanessa?

GRADY

... Is that a trick question?

DARLA

Nothing comes up. She's a blank slate.
She's not gonna fill it with football.

Grady indicates one of the dust jackets on clothespins.

GRADY

It's weird how writers have no input
when it comes to the cover design.

DARLA

Andrew says you're gonna help him
with that girl Lynda.

GRADY

Yeah, I dunno. He wants to impress
her via the mock college essay thing.

DARLA

And you? How was the meeting?

GRADY

Be it here or Phoenix House, hearing
people tell their crazy drug stories?
It makes me feel like I didn't get as
much out of drugs as I could have.

DARLA

That's not cute.

GRADY

I'm being honest. There are things I
wanna tell you, but I don't know how.

DARLA

Well you'd better find a way.

INT. HALL - DAY

Vanessa at her locker with Jocelyn. Andrew walks past, taps her.

VANESSA

Hey, baby.

Andrew continues down the hall. Rob Hildreth crosses his path.

He casually knocks Andrew's hat off, and as Andrew bends over to
retrieve it, Hildreth knocks the books out of his hands.

Hildreth, to his locker. Opens it. Upon closing, Vanessa appears.

VANESSA

Your name's Rob, right? I'm Vanessa.

HILDRETH

I know you who are. We call you the
Long Island Lolita.

VANESSA

What's that supposed to mean?

HILDRETH

Don't tell people you're from New
York when you're from a New York
suburb. No one cares either way.

VANESSA

I'm from both. Either way, fuck you.

HILDRETH

Oh, shit. I guess you can take the girl out of Long Island, but you can't take Long Island out of the girl... You're stuck up, you think you're better than everyone else --

Pre-insult, Vanessa began twirling a flute like a majorette and her baton. Cuts off Hildreth by suddenly weaponizing it/bashing his face. SCHOOLMATES, Will and Andrew, notice. Their jaws drop.

Hildreth drops, too. Checks for blood. Andrew looks at Will, Will looks at Andrew. Andrew calls back to Will's pacifism by making a face: "See? That's how it's done!" Vanessa kneels down, leans in.

VANESSA

Now you listen and you listen good, cuz I'm only gonna say this once...

EXT. SHOE REPAIR STORE - DAY

Grady and Darla, now in the business district. A SUIT sits in a high chair while getting his shoes shined by a BUFFER.

Darla sits in a high chair, too, as Grady polishes her boots.

DARLA

I need to see pages. I'm nervous.

GRADY

What's that gonna prove, Darla?

DARLA

You have to somehow write 300 pages in 8 days, or however many days until the attorneys file suit... Maybe they file 90 days after deadline, maybe 180. Or maybe they file on deadline, exactly at the close of business.

GRADY

I'm editing. Editing and working.

The Suit and Buffer finish and clear out, offering privacy.

DARLA

Grady, writing is re-writing, but you're probably editing the same 50 or 60 pages over and over again.

GRADY

How would you know?

DARLA

You can't keep flogging yourself over Diane or she'll drag you down with her. I lost a husband to divorce, I'm

(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)
gonna lose the kids to college, but I
will not relinquish my grip on you.

GRADY
Oh, how sweet.

DARLA
It is sweet, you ungrateful brat.

GRADY
Whatever. Stop beating yourself up.
Divorce and college are not death.

DARLA
Well they sure as shit feel like it.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

CHRIS GEREMIA (JERA-MYAH) on the phone. Vanessa, opposite him.

INT. KITCHEN (INTERCUT) - DAY

As Grady washes dishes, he lies to Chris Geremia.

GRADY
The thing is, Vanessa's mom's in New
York on business and she's gonna be
gone for a couple weeks. I'm Darla's
brother-in-law, so my wife and I are
looking after the kids for her.

GEREMIA
I see. "In loco parentis."
(beat)
It means, "In place of a parent."

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady and Vanessa sit opposite Chris Geremia.

GRADY
She didn't cut his face up?

GEREMIA
No.

GRADY
So she didn't break the skin.

Geremia shakes his head.

GRADY
Oh, then it's nothing. Girls will be
girls. If you hit someone with a
blunt object and you don't cut them,
then you didn't hit them at all. A
(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
flute has those...things on it. That
network of like...metalwork.

GEREMIA
You mean keys?

GRADY
Sure.

Geremia reads from a report.

GEREMIA
"Miss Keiling proceeded to strike Mr.
Hildreth with the instrument, sending
him to the floor. She then stepped on
his neck, kneeled down, and allegedly
said, 'Now you listen, and you listen
good. Because I'm only gonna say this
once. Laugh at us as much as you like,
but people from Long Island run this
country. The rest of America is our
whore.'"

GRADY
Unacceptable. She has to be punished.

GEREMIA
Not so fast. Rob's parents are
reasonable people, and I did Vanessa
the favor of drafting an apology.

He slides a document across the table.

GEREMIA
As I understand it, the football team
has two injured kickers. And Vanessa
here has a very talented right leg.

Poker faces all around, until Vanessa signs. Grady watches.
Vanessa's flawless cursive reads: "Eat My Fat, Juicy Cock."

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Grady, Darla and Andrew.

DARLA
Let me see your pages.

Grades takes a square from his back pocket, hands it to Darla.

DARLA
What is this?

GRADY
My writing.

Darla reads, then name-drops Michiko Kakutani.

DARLA

I can hear Michiko now: "Grady Young's sophomore and sophomoric effort reduces his potential legacy in the annals of American Letters to that of a cut-rate hack with the prose style of a bright, but overly emotional high school student."

ANDREW

Why are you looking at me?

GRADY

I think there's something there.

DARLA

"Man is the hunter. Woman is his game. The sleek and shining creatures of the chase, we hunt them for the beauty of their skins. They love us for it, and we ride them down."

GRADY

No, you're right. When I read it, I knew I could do better, too.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew studies SAT words. He and Grady recap Darla's assessment.

ANDREW

Doesn't it bother you?

GRADY

It would bother me if I wrote it.

(beat)

You really think I would write that shit? "Man is the hunter, woman is his game"? It's a quote from Alfred Tennyson.

ANDREW

Wait, what?

GRADY

Do you know who Doris Lessing is?

ANDREW

No.

GRADY

Well, she's serious shit. I copied some stuff from her at the library.

ANDREW

You think mom will notice?

GRADY
Of course not.

ANDREW
... I think she'll notice.

GRADY
I've known her longer than you have.
She won't notice.

ANDREW
How do you know?

GRADY
Andrew, your mom is one of the great
editors of her generation. She doesn't
have time to sit around and read books.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Faint MUSIC plays. Darla fills a glass with water. Drinks it.
She notices the boys through the window. She pauses to watch.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Four socks slowly move back and forth, in time with music.
Andrew and Grady speak quietly and seriously, like lovers.

ANDREW
What if she tries to kiss me?

GRADY
Just close your eyes and follow her
lead... And less tongue is better
than more. People don't like being
slobbered on.

ANDREW
I should get a pen.

GRADY
Forget the pen, Andrew.

ANDREW
It's important stuff.

GRADY
It is important stuff.
(beat)
You know, there's a lot of nice
things you can do with a girl other
than making out and dancing.

ANDREW
Like what?

GRADY

I dunno. Hugging? Holding hands?
Okay, this is important: What's the
sexiest thing you can ask a woman?

ANDREW

If she'll touch your butt?

GRADY

Besides that.

ANDREW

I have no idea. What's the sexiest
thing you can ask a woman?

GRADY

... Her opinion.

They dance in silence.

ANDREW

Why do you think Rob fucks with me?

GRADY

He's probably got problems at home.
(beat)
Do you want me to kill him for you?

ANDREW

I do, but I know it'd get back to
me in about 12 hours.

GRADY

Listen, buddy; high school is one big
peanut gallery. And you know what...?
They don't boo nobodies.
(beat)
Life is about about being "here," and
wanting to be "there." And you hafta
reconcile the difference. It's tough,
but try not to worry so much.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Vanessa eats dinner with Darla and Meghan. Watches sports
programming. A HOST explains how to "cork" a baseball bat.

She half-watches the footage of "super balls" spilling from the
bat of Graig Nettles in 1974. Thinks nothing of it, focuses her
attention on dinner. Peas in a pod. Peas in a pod. Then, Eureka!

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa enters her room, heads for a drawer, retrieves Grady's
candlesticks. With one in each hand, she bangs them against her
dresser. They split down the middle.

Vanessa does it again. She sees vials amidst the wreckage.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa has just told Andrew. Confused, Andrew examines a vial.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sun, sand, and surf. As far as the eye can see. Vanessa, Will, and MEREDITH BACHMANN lay on their boards, float on the water.

LATER

Will surfs. Vanessa and Meredith sit on towels and watch.

MEREDITH

You know what I love about that kid?
He's nice. It's a lost art. He's just
a really nice guy.

VANESSA

He's a Republican.

MEREDITH

He hated Trump.

VANESSA

So did my dad. It's not saying much.

MEREDITH

It's a start.

VANESSA

For what?

MEREDITH

You know why he and Heather broke
up, right? I mean, I know you two
have been talking a lot lately.

VANESSA

Is that what he said?

MEREDITH

... It's just what I see.

VANESSA

Wait a second. Are you saying that
they broke up cuz of me?

MEREDITH

No. They broke up cuz of me.

VANESSA

Wait, what?

MEREDITH

Heather never understood why Will
wanted to spend so much time with
a fat girl. If he hung out with

(MORE)

MEREDITH (cont'd)
 Ashleigh Ceaderfield or someone
 like that, at least she could've
 reveled in the drama of having
 some decent competition. But the
 fact that I'm ugly meant she had
 no right to get upset, which ended
 up making her really upset.

Seagulls cry out.

VANESSA
 You're not ugly, Meredith.

Meredith smiles.

MEREDITH
 I know you mean well, Vanessa.
 But when ugly people have to hear
 beautiful people tell us that we're
 not ugly? It makes us feel even
 uglier.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Andrew sits a table with an issue of the literary journal *Granta*.
 He holds it open with his left hand. With his right, he copies a
 short story verbatim. The title page: "Freeport," by Grady Young.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Grady and Caitlin stand outside a door. Caitlin's nervous.

CAITLIN
 Tuck in your shirt. And put this on.

As Grady tucks, Caitlin produces a tie. Grady examines it.

GRADY
 This is a clip-on.

CAITLIN
 It's the best I could do. Act as if.

Grady affixes the tie. It's too short.

GRADY
 I look ridiculous.

CAITLIN
 No, it's perfect. You look like a
 math teacher.

On cue, a TEACHER walks by. Caitlin freezes. Grady acts as if.

GRADY
 So I said, "What do you get when
 you combine The Quadratic Equation,
 (MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
SOHCAHTOA, and the Pythagorean
Theorem?"

TEACHER (whipping around)
Wait, don't tell me. I know this one.

Caitlin rolls her eyes, pushes Grady through the door.

INT. ROOM - DAY

Grady, wide-eyed at plush furniture, elaborate food stations.

GRADY
Is this heaven?

CAITLIN
No. It's the teachers' lounge.

LATER

The pair eat. Caitlin picks from a box of Animal Crackers.

GRADY
So tell me something I don't know
about you.

CAITLIN
Okay...hm. There are 15 different
animals in the Animal Crackers cookie
zoo. There's a lion, monkey,
elephant, gorilla, tiger, giraffe...
cougar, kangaroo, seal, sheep, hippo,
zebra, camel...and bison.

GRADY
No ducks?

CAITLIN
There are also two bears. One is
walking, the other one is seated.

GRADY
That's impressive. Though telling me
about Animal Crackers is telling me
something I don't know, as opposed
to telling me something I don't know
about you.

CAITLIN
Well I'm not too good at this game.
(beat)
You've mentioned your dad not being
around much. What do your parents do?

GRADY
Uh, my father left when I was a kid.
He got re-married, and I think he
lives in Colorado now. My mom drinks
(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

way too much, so instead of clinging harder to me cuz of my dad, she more or less sees me as a reminder of him. I guess that's why the drugs started. Daddy jets, Mommy struggles, wah-wah, Grady's sad. And that's why Darla's looked after me... What about you?

CAITLIN

My dad was a dentist. He worked at home. My mom was a teacher too, so she obviously worked outside the home. And I guess when I was around 10 or 11, she began to think he might be cheating on her. So one day, when he was at home and she was at school, she sent him flowers with a card that said, "I love you." That's it. Just "I love you." Unfortunately, when she got home that night, the flowers were nowhere to be found. And he never said anything about them. And that's when she knew.

GRADY

Wow. You are good at this game.

CAITLIN

I guess I am, but I've had a lot of practice. The men in my life always seem to come equipped with more than one set of eyes.

GRADY

That's tough... I wish I could be a teacher and you could stay with Darla.

CAITLIN (smiling)

That'd be a good trade for both teams.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Vanessa practices with the team. Hangs out with Will.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady waits on a printer. His latest pages for Darla. He reads them over. Darla walks in. Waits in silence.

DARLA

In loco parentis?

GRADY

... It means "In place of a parent."

DARLA

... Parenting is not some concept or theorem that lies 20 years out on the horizon. It's happening in the here and now. It's not about finger-painting or tea parties with Meghan's stuffed animals, it's about what's happening here and now. And if you're not actively helping me, then you're actively hindering me... Is there something going on with you?

GRADY

Meaning what?

DARLA

Meaning anything.

GRADY

If something were going on, you wouldn't be suspicious. Whenever you've questioned me over the years, I've never actually been lying in any of those cases. When I do lie, you don't have any idea. That's what makes me good at it.

Grady hands her more fake pages. As Darla turns to leave:

GRADY

It's because her dad can't see her.

DARLA

What?

GRADY

Vanessa. The reason she doesn't wanna play football isn't cuz boys wouldn't like her or whatever else. It's cuz her dad can't see her... There's nothing more American than football. The whole sport is boys and their fathers, and she's the only one outta 60 kids who won't have her father in the stands. That's why she didn't want to play until her hand was forced.

DARLA

Did she tell you that?

GRADY

She doesn't have to.

(beat)

Are you hungry? Can I make you something?

DARLA
I actually am hungry.

GRADY
Come on. You can boil the water.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The Coach from early on walks with Vanessa and a smiling Will.

COACH
Vanessa, after tomorrow, it is of prime, fundamental importance that you realize our commitment to you extends beyond the field. If you ever need anything, anything at all, and I find out that you didn't come to me or my wife for help? Well, we will have two very heavy hearts. You call me, you call her. If you need money, food, or shelter...you just call us.

VANESSA
That's so sweet of you. Thank you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin at her desk. Locates Andrew in the back, drawing Lynda.

CAITLIN
Hello, Keiling.

ANDREW
Hi, Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN
Are you ready to meet your maker?

ANDREW
How come the meaner you are to me, the more I respect you?

CAITLIN
Um, I'm a role model, I'm cool... and I'm way smarter than you are.

ANDREW
Yeah, I guess you're right. Of course, in four months I'll be sixteen, and you'll just be...four months...older.

CAITLIN
(smiling)
Thank you, Keiling.

ANDREW

Four months older than however old
you are now, which is obviously...
nowhere near sixteen.

CAITLIN

(smiling)

Thank you, Keiling.

ANDREW

Nowhere near 26. 36?

CAITLIN

(still smiling)

I'm gonna count to three.

Laughs. Andrew trudges to the front of the class, reads his paper.

ANDREW

The expectations I have for love
are not often met, as the majority
who reciprocate my interest are
either exceptionally brilliant and
not particularly attractive, or
exceptionally attractive...and none
too bright. The precious few who
toe the median on both qualities
are invariably matriculated at
Spence or Sacred Heart. These, the
young women of high privilege and
low esteem, live with their families
in old money brownstones and hand-
me-down townhouses. By contrast, I
live in a three-bedroom walk-up with
one parent and two sisters, on 95th
Street between Park and Madison
Avenues. We make our home among
theirs, in the worst building with
the most tenacious roaches on the
wealthiest half-mile in America.

Caitlin looks at her desk. Finds the *Granta* which Andrew copied.
Her eyes spy: "Freeport," by Grady Young. An index finger moves
underneath the words as Andrew reads. It's practically verbatim.

ANDREW

After school on weekday afternoons,
the sidewalks of Carnegie Hill are
dotted with socialites and their
brood. These women, domesticated
attorneys and standard-issue wives of
the Seven Sisters among them, follow
their Percocet-sponsored naps with
late lunches at Daniel. Over my left
shoulder, a lone ingénue pretends to
consider bath and body solutions as
she poses for herself in the window

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)
of the L'Occitane boutique. And to my right, two Dalton girls wait on a sheet of brownies, as a third divides it with a plastic fork. Of the pair, one of them is gazing at me with a helpless, hopeless expression of both resignation and want. Slowly, a moment passes, until she turns away, aware that I have caught her.

Andrew looks up. Lynda smiles. Caitlin, meanwhile, is furious.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Caitlin drives to Darla's house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Meghan and Grady read. Caitlin appears, clearly out for blood.

GRADY
Can I talk to Ms. Fountain in private?

MEGHAN
We're almost finished with the book.

He gently pushes her head with his salt-and-pepper notebook.

MEGHAN
It's Nancy Drew! You love Nancy Drew!

GRADY
Nancy Drew is the biggest prude in the history of young-adult fiction, a'right? That's all you need to know.

MEGHAN
But she's about to crack the case!

GRADY
Meghan. If the girl dated Ned Nickerson from 1931 until 1985 without ever going past first base, she can wait fucking two minutes for me and Ms. Fountain to have a fight.

She leaves. Grady sees the cover: *The Secret of the Old Clock*.

GRADY
Hey.

Grady taps the cover, then calls back to *Flowers in the Attic*.

GRADY
The minute hand on the clock points to where the minister's body is buried. Bess and George figure it
(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)
 out and tell Hannah Gruen, Hannah
 Gruen tells Nancy, and Nancy pins it
 on the farmhand. He used a shovel, I
 think. I don't remember it that well.

MEGHAN
 I hate you!

Grady turns to Caitlin. Holds on her forever. Finally, in the
 distance, a door SLAMS SHUT. Embarrassed, Grady closes his eyes.
 He opens them and looks at Caitlin.

GRADY
 What's wrong?

CAITLIN
 Did you know about this?

GRADY
 About what?

CAITLIN
 Does he have any idea what he's done
 to himself? What he's done to me?

GRADY
 What are you talking about?

CAITLIN
 Does he think I'm so stupid that I
 wasn't gonna read everything you've
 written? I told you how I'm up from
 tenure and I'm not layoff-proof. If
 he gets kicked out of school, it's
 money out the door as far as the dean
 is concerned, and I'm the one who
 didn't set the tone for him.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady, hashing the situation out with Darla.

GRADY
 I copied the last batch of pages from
 Doris Lessing, and that quote you
 criticized was from Tennyson. Andrew
 knew and probably just ran with it.

DARLA
 ... You have to fix this.

INT. HALLWAY (INTERCUT) - NIGHT

Listening in on the other side, Vanessa presses her ear to the
 door, while Meghan enlists the aide of a tall drinking glass.

GRADY

Darla, *Granta's* circulation is like 50,000, and if you Google either me or the story, nothing comes up. He didn't think she'd have a copy of it.

DARLA

So if he cheated and got away with it, it would've been alright?

Grady makes a subtle gesture with his face and eyes.

DARLA

It would not have been alright you fucking dickhead!

Darla calmly walks backwards towards the door. Once there (and still facing Grady), she KICKS it with the bottom of her foot.

On the other side, Vanessa and Meghan go reeling.

DARLA

Do you know how much trouble he's in?
(beat)

Everyone laughs at me for believing in you. Here's a tip, Grady: Whatever the critics think about your writing, it doesn't matter. What Ms. Fountain thinks, it doesn't matter. What your mother thinks, it does not matter.

(beat)

Sales matter. Whatever the critics think or write, it does not matter.

GRADY

It's the only thing that matters!

A silence descends.

DARLA

I bought this house with my own money. Not with my family's money, and not with my husband's money... I bought this house with my money.

(beat)

Let this be the last time you dare raise your voice in it.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Andrew paints an oil-on-canvas. A sun sets over Long Island Sound.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady holds a vial. Busted by Vanessa. They finally speak civilly.

GRADY

I'm sorry.

VANESSA

No, you're not.

GRADY

No. I'm not... If you told Andrew about the candles, I guess that's why he plagiarized. Like, why not?

VANESSA

You didn't put him up to it?

GRADY

I just showed him how I was copying stuff myself. And you know how he is with keeping things from your mom. I bet the candles kept him up all night.

VANESSA

What do I do? I can't tell on you. I can't go to mom and just...tell her.

GRADY

I can.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

And now, Darla knows. She and Grady sit in silence.

DARLA

I'm surprised. I should be, but...

GRADY

It's what I do. Don't be surprised when shitty people do shitty things.

A beat.

DARLA

Why do you lie to me?

GRADY

... Because I care about you.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - DAY

The next morning. Andrew lies in bed.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Darla and Grady drive to the school.

DARLA

You will execute my strategy with painstaking precision and singular intent. You will go in, and you will
(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)
work your magic, Grady... Get
personal. Insult and demean them.

GRADY
I can tell you've given this some
thought.

DARLA
I have... I think if you disrespect
them, mention how horrid everything
they stand for is, they'll redirect
their rage at Andrew towards you. Be
your blunt/irreverent self. Trust me.

GRADY
You really think that's a good idea?

DARLA
You got a better one?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady, Darla sit in judgment of Geremia, Caitlin, ADMINISTRATORS.

GEREMIA
Well, well. What do we have here?

Tom holds steady on Grady. Darla turns to him. She speaks softly.

DARLA
He's asking you a question.

GRADY
No, he's not. It was rhetorical.

GEREMIA
Ms. Fountain tells us, Mr. Young,
that you are quite the writer. And it
seems as if Andrew agrees with her...
even if America does not.

Darla places a subtle hand over Grady's as a way of pacifying him.

GRADY
Can I say something before we get
into it? This isn't Andrew's fault.

GEREMIA
It never is. Ultimately, it's poor
parenting that leads a child down a
path such as this one. It's too many
women working outside the home, it's
the divorce rate... It's parenting.

Now, Grady places his hand over Darla's as a way of pacifying her.

GRADY

So...it's important that I begin by communicating the amount of respect I have for institutions such as this one. And maybe it's cuz I'm only half Catholic, but I don't feel entitled to criticize the Church the way others often do. The fact is, whether they cared for the experience or not, millions of great Americans have been shaped by Catholic school... I hold this institution in great esteem.

Darla turns a full 90 degrees. Grady can feel her stare. He turns as well, returning her blank face. Hers says, "This was not the plan, idiot. Be mean." They simultaneously turn to face the group.

GEREMIA

Mr. Young, I don't want Andrew to leave Pencey Prep. Do you know why?

DARLA

Is it because you don't want to lose twenty grand a year in tuition money?

GRADY

Darla?

GEREMIA

That's not why.

DARLA

Is it because you'll do anything you can to appease the board of directors? And expulsion requires an explanation?

GRADY

Darla?

GEREMIA

You're out line.

DARLA

Is it cuz you find my son desirable?

An elderly Administrator chuckles.

GRADY

Can you please stop? Sir, here's how it is... You brought up my first book. Our first book. And how it failed... It failed cuz readers wanted sex and drugs, and I gave them my unconcerned mother and absentee father. It was marketed as a book about drugs, and it was, but it was really a book about family. Readers wanted *Bright Lights*, *Big City*, and they got *Angela's Ashes*.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

(beat)

I've since written a second book, and it's the opposite. The first was about drugs, but really about family; this one's about family, but it's really about drugs... So, I've been carrying a secret the last three years of writing it, and Andrew's been carrying that secret as well. Maybe it's why he's fallen apart here, since he's been holding on to my lie and he usually tells his mom everything. He found out from my friend Frankie back in New York... I don't use drugs because of loss, I use because of guilt.

(beat)

Basically, I'm not in pain just cuz my girlfriend died. Um...I've shot cocaine intravenously maybe three times in my life, but that's how she always did it. It's better that way. Unfortunately, she asked me to shoot her up when she was too messed up to do it herself...and I gave her too much. I more or less killed her.

GEREMIA

You've written about this?

GRADY

It's all in the manuscript.

CAITLIN

I don't believe him.

GRADY

I don't expect you to.

CAITLIN

Okay, well, attach it to an e-mail and send it to us?

GRADY

I write in longhand and there's only one copy. I can only give it to Darla at this point.

(re: the chuckling Admin)

And her. She's cool.

CAITLIN

If he were telling the truth, he wouldn't make flippant jokes while discussing involuntary manslaughter.

DARLA

Actually, he would.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Grady and Darla walk to their car. They see Caitlin following.

DARLA
Make it quick.

Grady and Caitlin converge.

GRADY
How do you think things'll shake out?

CAITLIN
Does it matter to you at all that when he read it, I had to sit there like a fool and listen to your voice coming out of his mouth? It was like having you stand there and lie to my face, only in the form of my favorite kid.
(beat)

You know I'm struggling with this job, yet you managed to wipe out the only bit of joy I get from it. I'm probably not getting tenure, and I'll probably have to find a new school.

GRADY
I'm sorry.

CAITLIN
You live under this assumption that you're oh-so-unique, but you're no different than the rest of us, Grady. And that's not a bad thing, it's just ...you're not special.

GRADY
I never said I was.

CAITLIN
You implied it. That's worse.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Darla in the car.

DARLA
The Art Show was supposed to be cause for celebration. And then the football game. Now he might get expelled and we can't enjoy either.

GRADY
... I thought you'd be yelling more.

DARLA
I'm scared. I don't know what to do.

A beat.

GRADY
I'll book a flight outta here.

DARLA
... I have a lot of questions.

GRADY
I know. It's all written down.

DARLA
I'm with Ms. Fountain. I don't believe you, either.

EXT./INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

MONTAGE: Art entries being set up, Footballers being taped up.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Grady vacuums and shouts with Meghan. It's not cheerful, given recent events. Darla, in her doorway as she affixes an earring. Her phone RINGS. It's Single Dad. Grady and Meghan, still loud.

DARLA
Hello? Oh, hi... Good, how are you?
(beat)
I didn't expect you to call...
I dunno, I just didn't.

Darla does that whole bit where you talk on the phone and smile, all while holding eye contact with whomever you're sitting with. In the middle of smiling and chatting, and while holding the eye contact with Grady/Meghan, she nonchalantly swings her door SHUT.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

The shut door neatly transitions to a Footballer getting pasted. Grady/Darla/Meghan watch from bleachers. Vanessa/Will ride pine.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lynda checks out art exhibits. From an overhang, Andrew watches. Lynda comes to Andrew's offering, stops in her tracks. Confused, as she sees several neatly framed, charcoal sketches of herself. Andrew, smiles heads off.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lynda stops a STUDENT.

LYNDA
Have you seen Andrew Keiling?

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew walks. Lynda sees him in the distance, quickly follows.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

In uniform, Vanessa and Will stand next to one another.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

As Lynda closes the gap, Andrew feels her presence, turns.
Lynda's face is hardly the picture of happiness. A moment.

ANDREW
Did I do something wrong?

LYNDA
I saw the portraits you made of me.
(beat)
Why would you embarrass me like that?

ANDREW
... I thought you'd be flattered.

LYNDA
It was weird, Andrew; my parents are here. They saw it... Everyone saw it.

ANDREW
I was just thinking...

LYNDA
You think too much.

ANDREW
I hate when people say that... I just thought you liked me. I wasn't trying to be that entitled guy who assumes a girl he's friends with owes him or anything...but I thought you liked me.

LYNDA
I like guys who are confident.

ANDREW
You know who has confidence? Guys who have been successful with girls and sports since like, first grade... But I totally respect what you're saying; don't get me wrong. I just figured...

LYNDA
That I like you?

ANDREW
... Do you not think I'm cute?

LYNDA
Of course I think you're cute.

Lynda drops her payload.

LYNDA
I'm just not attracted to you.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Back with Vanessa and Will. The Coach who was friendly earlier? He now meets Vanessa's gaze. She smiles in response. He doesn't.

COACH
Keiling, what the fuck are you
looking at? We're driving towards
field goal range! Warm the fuck up!

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew sits against the lockers, head in hands. Someone approaches. Andrew looks up to see his bully, Rob Hildreth.

HILDRETH
Are you crying?
(beat)
I saw your stuff... You did a really
great job, man. It takes balls to go
out on a limb like that.

Hildreth offers his hand. Andrew takes it, and they shake.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Vanessa practices kicking. The OFFENSE nears the end zone. Jeff, one of the Samoans, sees a folding chair. Considers.

LATER

Jeff places the chair behind the end zone. Just like in Watts. Now with the family, Andrew sees Jeff. Then heads for a chair.

LATER

Seated in chairs, Andrew and Jeff await Vanessa's kick. The field goal unit assembles. Darla looks to Grady.

DARLA
Is this it?

GRADY

It's fourth and goal at the 20. It's
the toughest kick she'll get tonight.

Vanessa is ready. Everything slows down. The ball is snapped,
caught, and kicked. Vanessa's measured stride approaches the
football. It rises up and easily passes through the uprights.

Andrew and Jeff don't catch the ball, but do hug one another.

Footballers bang their facemasks against Vanessa's in approval.

Grady and Darla clap and cheer. As Vanessa walks off the field,
Folks congratulates her. Will, smiles, watches from a distance.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa, wet hair, post-shower. Exits the girls' locker room in a
professional, post-game outfit. Will is waiting in street clothes.

WILL

Stop the presses. How do you feel?

VANESSA

My name in the newspaper, right?

WILL

Doesn't it feel great?

VANESSA

Honestly? I'm glad you pushed me,
so don't you dare tell anyone this
...but it's a little anti-climactic.

WILL

What were you expecting, magic?

VANESSA

Kind of. Yeah.

WILL

Vanessa...I have a thing for you,
okay? I know you're not the type
who'd be crazy about the idea of a
guy who just broke up with someone,
but whatever. I think you're this
really tenacious, brilliant girl,
and I'm only mean to you cuz I
don't think you have any idea how
hard normal girls have it.

VANESSA

Are you wearing Abercrombie?
Everyone's wearing post-game shirts
and ties, and you're out here all
dated and basic.

WILL

... I can't afford a suit. I had one, but my brother wore it and stretched it out. I'm scared to tell my dad.

VANESSA

... I'm sorry. I didn't know that.

WILL

Then stop. I spent like a half-hour memorizing this; I don't wanna lose my train of thought. Um...I think it's ironic that society values you for your external beauty, when you're a model for what a girl should be like internally. You're incredible. Crotchety as hell, but incredible.

VANESSA

Okay, all this like, emo shit? I'm only interested in guys who are cold and dismissive. I'm sorry, but that's just who I am, Will.

He leans in and kisses her. For the first time, Vanessa smiles.

WILL

I like it when you call me William.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady packs up.

INT. MEGHAN'S ROOM - MORNING

Meghan holds one of Diane's old t-shirts. Puts it to her face.

MEGHAN

This was Diane's?

GRADY

Yeah. It was her favorite shirt.

(beat)

It was my favorite shirt, too.

MEGHAN

It still smells like her.

(beat)

Grady... Does it ever go away?

GRADY

Does what ever go away?

MEGHAN

Just...the way it feels when you miss someone... Does the pain ever go away?

Grady slowly nods his head.

GRADY

No.

They sit in silence.

GRADY

How are you doing out here?

MEGHAN

I like it. I miss my dad, though.

GRADY

... I miss mine, too.

A beat, until Meghan kisses his forehead.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - MORNING

Andrew holds a deer skull.

GRADY

When I ditched Phoenix House I had to walk along these train tracks to get to the closest station. There were all these deer bones by the tracks the whole walk there, so...

(beat)

I really don't know what to say.

ANDREW

Me neither.

GRADY

We'll figure something out.

ANDREW

We always do.

They share an elaborate handshake. (They need two tries.)

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - MORNING

Grady hands Vanessa a silver heart pin that says "Love."

GRADY

What's more important than blood?

VANESSA

Love.

(beat)

I gotta admit, I was hoping you were gonna get me a puppy.

GRADY

It's not real silver. Sorry.

VANESSA

You should be.

She stares at it for a while, then pins it on his shirt pocket.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Mirroring their first meeting, Darla/Grady head to the airport.

DARLA

I talked to Andrew. I asked him about this Frankie of yours.

GRADY

What'd he say?

DARLA

He said he ran into Frankie in Duane Reade and asked him what was up with you. And Frankie did say that you gave Diane too much coke.

(beat)

Where's the manuscript?

GRADY

I can't give it to you.

DARLA

I knew you were lying.

GRADY

I could go to jail, Darla.

DARLA

You're not going to jail. No one wants to open a case about your junkie ex-girlfriend.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin pushes papers. Andrew appears at the door.

ANDREW

I just want to apologize again.

CAITLIN

I don't want to hear it.

Mirroring Grady's initial note, Andrew retrieves a card, then places it on the desk. Handsome cursive reads, "Ms. Fountain."

ANDREW

Grady said that when he gets some money together, he'd give me five hundred dollars if I gave you a kiss on the cheek for him. I said I would never do it for less than a thousand, and he said, "Deal."

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

(beat)

Let's not and say we did. Or, you know, let's just not.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Grady and Darla stand in the same spot where they first met.

DARLA

Call me as soon as you land.

GRADY

... Have fun on your date.

DARLA

Thanks. Any advice?

GRADY

Make sure he's good to you.

DARLA

Obviously.

GRADY

Darla.

(on her look)

Make sure he's good to you.

DARLA

I will. Anything else?

GRADY

... Gingerbread. Can't go wrong.

A moment.

DARLA

You're my oldest baby. You know that, right?

(beat)

I love you, Grady.

GRADY

I love you, too, Darla.

For the first time, he begins to cry.

GRADY

When I was gone, I missed you so much.

(beat)

Now I'm gonna miss you so much more.

Grady puts down his stuff. They hug.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Darla arrives home. Andrew approaches the car. From her seat, Darla extends a salt-and-pepper notebook.

DARLA
My car is not your office.

ANDREW
How was it?

DARLA
Andrew...I expect housekeeping with Vanessa and Meghan, but I've never seen you make such a bad choice before. No matter how much you care about someone, you can't let them steer you off course.

ANDREW
It was stupid, but at least everything worked out in the end.

Andrew heads to the house.

On the passenger seat, Darla sees not one, but several salt-and-pepper notebooks. Darla picks one up, flips through the pages.

Flawless penmanship covers Page 1. Darla turns to Pages 2 and 3. Top to bottom, each one's filled.

She finds that the same is true throughout the entire notebook.

Darla looks at the cover. In the center is Grady's handwriting:

"The Amazing Adventures of the Monogamous Duck." Darla smiles, and we flash to four shots featuring salt-and-pepper notebooks.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

About to board, Grady sees a wall of phones. A GREETER smiles.

GREETER
Do visit us again.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Caitlin feeds her fish. She watches them swim. Her phone rings.

CAITLIN
Hello?

INT. AIRPORT (INTERCUT) - DAY

Grady at the bank of payphones.

GRADY
It's Grady.

CAITLIN
What do you want?

GRADY
Nothing. I'm sorry, I just...

CAITLIN
What?
(no response)
What?

GRADY
I wanted to call and say goodbye.
Also... I just wanted to know...

CAITLIN
What?

GRADY
I just... I don't know your name.

CAITLIN
What?

GRADY
I don't know your name... At first
it was cute to address you as Ms.
Fountain, but I just realized that I
never even learned your name. And
then I started panicking.

CAITLIN
... It's Caitlin.

GRADY
Caitlin?

CAITLIN
(steeling herself)
M-hm.

GRADY
... That's such a beautiful name.

Grady calls back to his opening, Page 1 declaration.

Ms. Fountain, in turn, is no match for her oncoming tears.

EXT. PHOENIX HOUSE - DAY

Dr. Rosen, in the same garden he and Grady first spent time in.

In the early going, an Alto sang "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

Now, a SOPRANO shines:

SOPRANO (V.O.)
Amazing grace, how sweet the sound /
That saved a wretch like me / I once
was lost, but now am found / Was
blind, but now I see.

Dr. Rosen sees a van pull up. Grady steps out.

INT. PHOENIX MEETING ROOM - DAY

Mirroring our opening, Residents pack the meeting room.

SOPRANO

'Twas grace that taught my heart to
fear / And grace my fears relieved /
How precious did that grace appear /
The hour I first believed.

Female Residents sing with the Soprano. Grady watches.

RESIDENTS

Through many dangers, toils and
snares / I have already come / 'Tis
grace hath brought me safe thus far /
And grace will lead me home.

Male Residents join the women. Grady looks on, hopeful.

RESIDENTS

Yes when this flesh and heart shall
fail / And mortal life shall cease /
I shall possess, within the veil /
A life of joy and peace.

THE END