

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 or anything obviously -- 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. Alexander McQueen was a genius. Fucking Greg Maddux was a genius. Some girl's friend Steven who did an oil-on-canvas 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

And 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... It's been eight months I'm only mandated for six. You know I really like you, but I'm just looking to sign and initial.

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. I had all the little things totally covered.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

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 seven dollars in the bank and a girlfriend that died four-and-a-half years ago. It's...

DR. ROSEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRADY

Well...the thing that really sucks is that it's seven bucks, and the minimum you can take out from an ATM is ten.

(beat)

Except Sun Trust. Sun Trust lets you take out fives.

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...

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

The story 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. When I got older, 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 bonus is due to the publisher. I already spent it, so...

DR. ROSEN
You spent the bonus? 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."

GRADY
I'm in my thirties.

DR. ROSEN
That's my point.

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
How's Josh?
(beat)
Is he still dating Sephora Girl?

DARLA
He is, yes. And thank you for asking.

GRADY
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 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.

GRADY
Listen, I know I'm in thin ice here,
okay? And don't get me wrong; I'm
totally grateful. But why am I here?
Why am I being given this chance?

DARLA
Because we love you.

GRADY
Yeah, and also because I've done just as
much for you as you've done for me. How
many Friday nights did I sacrifice over
the years? How many of Meghan's diapers
did I change? Who taught Andrew how to
shave? Who held Vanessa's hand during
her period of all things...? I fuck up.
You know this. I don't know what to do.

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.
(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

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 Yankees, 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 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.

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, Grady because you are here to shape up and write. By invoking 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

Darla and Grady 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 alright. 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 cute.

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.

GRADY

Quality over quantity, dollface.

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
You're a dork.

GRADY
You're a dork. Dorkus Malorkus.
(beat)
So?

MEGHAN
So what?

GRADY
Are you just gonna stand there or are
you gonna give me a hug and a kiss?

Meghan closes the gap, and they offer one another alternating pecks on each cheek -- a total of four -- as if it's the same routine they've been doing for years. It morphs into a hug.

GRADY
I'm really sorry, kiddo.

MEGHAN
It's okay.

GRADY
I'm so sorry.

MEGHAN
It's okay. I don't care.

Still hugging. Eventually, at the height of sentimentality...

GRADY
A'right, get off.

They disengage. She kisses him; he 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.

GRADY
Scissors?

Andrew places a pair in Grady's open palm.

ANDREW
Scissors.

GRADY
Thank you, Dr. Keiling.

ANDREW

You're welcome, Nurse 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 grabs another, then takes a pen from the box. Grady uses the pen to hollow out the core from the stick's base. He then takes the candle he set aside. Digs up its base as well.

Out fall two vials of cocaine.

INTERCUT WITH:

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. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

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. 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. Price is Right-style:

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 (30s/40s) at her desk, chats 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 head. Kids laugh. Caitlin leans into Boy 1/Greg, whispers in his ear.

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, 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 large 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)

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. After a moment, 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 ten feet from where Kicker boots field goals. Will/Coach have a bag of balls between them. Set up kicks.

JOCELYN

You going to the Art Show, Vanessa?

VANESSA

Yeah, my brother's gonna show stuff.

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

COACH

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

Kicker and Coach drift away. Will joins the girls on the grass.

WILL

I thought you'd be the vegan type.
Why are you eating McDonald's?

VANESSA

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

She and Jocelyn exchange casual high fives. Jocelyn, to Will.

JOCELYN

Didn't you get fired from McDonald's?

VANESSA

Wait, what?

WILL

I was stealing too many hamburgers.
They caught me eating them in the
bathroom while sitting on the toilet.
I wasn't using it or anything, but
still... Anyway, I forgot to lock the
door and then my boy Hector pulled up.

VANESSA

What defines too many hamburgers?
Doesn't every McDonald's have 80
thousand there at any given time?

WILL

Do you know Ronald McDonald?

VANESSA

Obviously. He's terrifying.

WILL

Especially the newer versions
they've introduced over the years.
Anyway, Ron has a rival who cosplays
as a prisoner. You know him as the
Hamburglar.

VANESSA

I know who the Hamburglar is.

WILL

I know you know. That's why I said, "You know him as the Hamburglar." And believe me, McDonald's corporate? They take hamburger theft seriously. They do inventory at night/roll call in the morning, and if even a single hamburger isn't present and accounted for? They get so pressed about it. Like someone escaped from Alcatraz.

VANESSA

You can't blame them.

WILL

And I don't. They didn't even try to embarrass me in front of everyone by confiscating my ID and escorting me from the building. My manager was just like, "Yo -- Fuck outta here, Will."

VANESSA

That's a convenient story... But also kinda sad. A million senior citizens, parents, and high school school kids who actually do need the money can't get a job at McDonald's. But for you, it's just a funny story to tell on a field trip when you're trying to act cool in front of some senior bros on the lacrosse team.

WILL

Jesus, Vanessa. You must be a real tomcat in bed.

Jocelyn chuckles.

VANESSA

Excuse me?

WILL

"That's a convenient story"? Who're you, the blonde chick we're reading in English?

VANESSA

... Jane Austen?

WILL

Jane Austen. Exactly.

VANESSA

"The blonde chick we're reading."

WILL

Yeah, she's cute. Talented, too.

VANESSA

"The blonde chick we're reading."

WILL

Relax. Life is incredible. You're so nice to everyone else, but I say one stupid thing and you crawl up my ass.

VANESSA

'One' stupid thing?

WILL

Yeah. Every Tuesday, it's like, "Oh, great, I'm lab partners today with Little Lisa Simpson over here."

Jocelyn puts her face down, slowly pounds the grass in approval.

VANESSA

One, Jane Austen had brown hair.

WILL

Whaddayou follow her on TikTok? How would you know? She lived like, 600 years ago. Was Shakespeare Dominican? Cuz Todd Lopez swears he was, and I trust him way more than I trust you.

VANESSA

(beat, calmly furious)

Jane Austen died in the early 1800s at 42. I don't follow her on TikTok, because they had paintings back then. My mom's an editor. Shakespeare was not Dominican. I know what he looks like, because what do they call them again? Oh, now I remember: paintings.

(beat)

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

WILL

... That's really cool your mom's an editor. My dad's a greeter at Walmart. And he said Shakespeare wrote maybe three sonnets, tops. That it actually might've been three women who did most of the heavy lifting for him: his cook, a seamstress, and a chambermaid.

VANESSA

Are you finished?

WILL

Did you know that Mark Twain once wrote about wanting to dig up Jane Austen's corpse, and beat her over the head with her own shin bones?

(beat)

You didn't. That's why your mom pays 60 grand a year for tuition, and the scholarship kids get paid to go here.

Calmly, Vanessa stands up, gathers her things, and walks away.

WILL
Oh, and Vanessa?

She turns around.

WILL
No one calls me 'William.' 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 music snob. It's like *The New Yorker*. People like me read *The New Yorker*. Then someone will say, "You are 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 shit like that... Speaking of which, did you read the book I sent you?

MEGHAN

What book?

GRADY

The Color Purple.

MEGHAN

Oh. I started then I stopped.

GRADY

The Color Purple? Why?

MEGHAN (not pleased)

Because 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 was actually the 1930s.

MEGHAN

Also, mommy said I'm not old enough.

GRADY

Mommy said you're not old enough?

MEGHAN

Yeah.

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)

Has she taken you to any of those trendy new parties? Forgot the name.

MEGHAN

You mean little girl parties. Is it called "Fresh as a Daisy?"

GRADY

Doesn't sound familiar, no.

MEGHAN

Is it..."Social Butterfly"?

GRADY

Oh, now I remember... Book Burning parties. Has she taken you to any Book Burning parties? The ones way out in the woods? They are all the rage. Literally, in fact: All The Rage... And guess what? I saw on the news that *The Color Purple* is known to makes appearances.

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 even 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
Oh, I don't know.

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 cost over a thousand dollars.

He looks 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

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

GRADY

Oh, nice. It's that kind of school.
Sure. 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, that's fore sure.
Technically, were colleagues, but...

CAITLIN

She's your 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

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

Nina and Bryan, locked in.

GRADY

She takes off her shoes and just
throws them anywhere she pleases.
It's inconsiderate and makes it that
much harder for me.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

She also throws her tissues all around the garbage, and not actually in the garbage, but that's a whole other can of worms.

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 around 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 Metallica.

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 alright. 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 scary right now, and we take potential threats to the children 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

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

Yeah. That's a little too specific.

CAITLIN

I asked if you were here for someone.

GRADY

You think I'm borderline scary? Look at you and your...bucket, you weirdo.

(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

Ohhh... 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 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 in the end.

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, you fucking shithead. 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. Fuck yourself.

GRADY

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

(beat)

I'm not your father, I'm your friend. And I won't let you take me granted.

VANESSA

I take you for granted? Wow. Wow.

Soccer balls fly across the gym.

GRADY

I gotta admit: I was hoping for a more enthusiastic reception.

VANESSA

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

Vanessa joins her team.

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?

GRADY

I did.

DARLA

Yeah? What did you do?

GRADY
 Actually...I read the love letters...
 that 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
 I got a ton of work, too, but let's
 see if I can help.

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 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 mandated months, and if you can't make it through, you get whatever your jail sentence would've been... They call it a "bid." A "bid" is a year in a jail. 12 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, 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.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

I can't be the first writer who spent a big bonus, only to never hand in the manuscript.

ANDREW

Actually, no. From the conversations I've 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 bonus, and then not even hand in the book... It's impressive.

(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

13 days. Then it's a breach of contract type-deal.

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.

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

ANDREW

I remember that day. We had fun.

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... 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... Indiana Avenue.

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

It's Jocelyn who's gonna weigh us down. It's like clockwork with her.

JOCELYN

That's funny.

VANESSA

Watch, she'll ask to go nurse a lot. Keep an eye out -- Head on a swivel.

Some chuckles. 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
Doubleday revision meetings.

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
can't take it personally when people
don't wanna spend 26.95 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.

JOCELYN

What was that?

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 pants. 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 for anything fun.
Finds S.I., examines. Takes it. Spots his candles. 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.
(beat)
I told him that if we at least show an
outline, maybe we can buy some time.

SUPERIOR 1
How is he doing?

DARLA
He's doing well.

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. Cuz 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
You don't. And tell your people to back off. I appreciate your friend Jeff and his candy, but this is too much.

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.

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

No.

CAITLIN

Is he a Count?

ANDREW

No, he's just...different.

CAITLIN

Apparently.

She reads the card.

CAITLIN

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

She puts it back in the envelope, drops it in the garbage.

CAITLIN

Your mother's friend thinks he's quite the humorist. Anyway. Time for you to run along and play Dungeons and Dragons or...whatever it is boys do.

ANDREW

Dungeons and Dragons? I play Magic the Gathering.

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 school yesterday.

CAITLIN

Okay, so... Yeah. This is awkward.

GRADY

Right? Especially for you.

(beat)

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... Cliffs Notes.

(beat)

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

GRADY

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, your friend's piece of
shit car is blocking the net.

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

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

ANDREW

See, 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

How do we move on from this.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla, Grady, and the children hash things out.

DARLA

(to Andrew)

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

GRADY

Teachers have a million things on their mind, probably. But Darla, when you made the tutoring appointment, didn't you know she was Andrew's teacher from like, parents' night and parent-teacher conferences or whatever?

DARLA

Oh, I don't go to those things.

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

Mom, 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 and go to the living room?

Darla heads for the room.

ANDREW

Are you covering your ears?

He waits for a response Gets none. He 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 pissing and shitting in the downstairs bathroom. Cuz you know that's the totally inevitable next step: Denial, Anger, Bargaining...what's next? Oh, that's right: pissing and shitting in the downstairs bathroom.

Darla enters. After a moment...

DARLA

You watch porn?

Andrew's jaw drops.

DARLA

You stream it?

ANDREW
You were listening!

GRADY
... Darla, she should stay for pizza.
It would be funny.

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? Pillow talk about
fucking adverbs? Yeah, that's sexy.

DARLA
Grady, she's stunning.

GRADY
I suppose. In a conventional way.
(beat)
If you're into that sort of thing.

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'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. That's your early decision.
Smith. Hitching your wagon to Smith.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

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

VANESSA

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

Really? That's pretty darn special.

VANESSA

It's tragic.

GRADY

I wish you could hear a recording of yourself. I really do. Harvard is racist to all those East Asian kids, they're racist to all those South Asian kids, and if someone's gonna benefit from that gross miscarriage of justice, they would at least want it to be you.

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. Soccer scholarship.

Grady chuckles.

CAITLIN

So what about you? What do you do?

GRADY

Um, I like to play basketball and baseball; I go to the beach a lot. I like to dance. I collect stamps.

(beat)

I'm also really into plants. Um... 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.

Caitlin, apprehensive.

ANDREW

Grady also likes bird watching.
(softly)
He likes *cooking...and baking*.

GRADY

Why would you tell her that!

All laugh. Caitlin, too. 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.

MEGHAN

I like your outfit, 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"? Fuck a cook.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

... I'm sorry, who are you again?

Laughs. Darla enters from the foyer, fills glasses.

Andrew enters with pizza, serves. Caitlin rises to help.

DARLA

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

CAITLIN

Oh, 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. Especially at the Point.
Basically, lobsters mate for life.
Did you know that?

ANDREW

Everyone knows that... Ms. Fountain,
Grady's really cool, but then every so
often he reminds you that he's in his
30s. He'll be like, "Bro... You wanna
know something crazy I read...? Did
you know that there's like, a lot of
plastic in the ocean? It's like, a
real problem. We should do something."

GRADY

I am not anything like that.

VANESSA

It'll be 3 a.m. on a Tuesday and you'll
hear this: "Vanessa, wake up. We need to
talk. I have been doing further research.
Did you know that sometimes? Sea turtles?
The ones that swim in the ocean? I've
seen pictures on the Internet. And the
turtles get caught in plastic.

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)

They get trapped in the plastic from six-packs. Plastic from six-packs...of beer."

GRADY

Stop it. This is absurd. This is parody.

VANESSA

It's parody? Uh, yeah it's parody. That's why they call it "parody."

GRADY

I didn't know lobsters were monogamous, and neither did Meghan. Whatever... Ms. Fountain, when she found out one day, it 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 pair 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. Foxes...wolves...ducks. We don't eat ducks, either, do we Meghan?

MEGHAN

No. They're also more greasy than chicken. I do like chicken. Fried chicken... Ducks are cuter than chickens, too.

GRADY

That factors in?

MEGHAN

Yeah.

ANDREW

Prairie voles are monogamous.

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 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 goods.
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.

VANESSA

Freudian slip?

WILL

No.

VANESSA

No? I have "the best legs on the
team"? You didn't mean "leg"?
Singular? "Best leg on the team"?

WILL

I meant what I said. You have the
best legs on the team. Your kicking
leg...? And your plant leg. Best legs
on the team. I said what I meant, and
I meant what I said.

VANESSA

What are you, Popeye now?

WILL

(exasperated)

Whatever. Sure. My mom makes a lot of
spinach with vinaigrette and my
biceps are enormous.

VANESSA

I can't switch sports mid-season.

WILL

It's private school. It costs 65
thousand a year. We can do whatever
we want. You're a junior. I'm a
junior. If we cut class tomorrow, we
could walk into the teachers' lounge,
have this conversation there, and no
one would bat an eye. It's private
school. It costs 65 thousand a year.
We can do whatever we want.

Vanessa wants to smile, but given Daddy issues, suppresses it.

VANESSA

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 girlfriend. Darla bites her lip.

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 essay for Ms. Fountain.

(beat)

What do you think about her?

GRADY

She's nice. I see why you get along.

ANDREW

She's "nice"?

GRADY

Yeah, she's nice... She's a sensible woman.

ANDREW

... Grady, she's ridiculously pretty.

GRADY

Okay.

ANDREW

She's the second-prettiest teacher in our school... Do you like her?

GRADY

Of course; I like everyone. You know that. Even people I don't even like.

ANDREW

It seems like she liked you.

GRADY

She doesn't. I know when a girl likes me, and she doesn't. I think we could be good friends, but physically, like, honestly? She is way out of my league.

ANDREW

All kidding aside. Do you like her?

GRADY

... "Like" is a strong word.

(beat)

Do you want me to like her?

ANDREW

Yeah. And you want to like her, too.

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 super cool and lots of 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

No. 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.
(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. That's not all he told me.

GRADY

I only used them a few times. And they were clean. You know how much I hate germs. I'm not even kidding.

ANDREW

I know you're not, but needles, dude? Seriously?

GRADY
I know, dude. It's bad.

ANDREW
It's definitely not good.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Meghan, in uniform, blends a protein shake for her ballgame.

EXT. SOFTBALL FIELD - DAY

Later, 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.
(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

I wrote that it occurred at Harpers Ferry, but I put 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 insanity. 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. Corporate, white-shoe lawyers? St. Martin's has Dan Falatko and Brendan Sweeny as in-house counsel. Those two are like rookie cops who haven't seen any action. They're looking for a fight.

GRADY

So they're slick? They're 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

You'll be blackballed from publishing, even if you write The Great American Novel.

GRADY

... But I already did.

DARLA

Grady, if you don't turn this book in, I'll get fired. And kiddo...at my age, I don't know if I'll work again.

(beat)

Do you care about that?

GRADY

Darla... I don't like upsetting you.

DARLA

(beat, softening)

That's a nice shirt.

GRADY

Hm. I think so. Glad to see I'm not the only one. See...I was thrifting with Vanessa in Silver Lake. Have you ever been there? We saw this --

Darla tosses the last bit of her coffee at him.

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 off or respect you for it.

LYNDA

Exactly.

ANDREW

No. Not exactly. It's a myth. It only makes 'em more vicious.

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

As the victim here, I can tell you that we take the past of least resistance cuz it works.

LYNDA

Just walk into school one day, first period, 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 more the principle behind it.

ANDREW

If I ignore him and he doesn't stop, it fucking sucks, but I'll also be 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 a megawatt smile.

CAITLIN

You know what your problem is?

(beat)

You're a fuckboy.

GRADY

Is that my problem?

CAITLIN

It's one of them.

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. Rashaun 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 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 an 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's Irish
was because of my crossword puzzle.
(to Caitlin)
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 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... You're in the same boat, and to be honest, I'm bored. Plus, I think you'd be a good person for me to complain about things to.

GRADY

Thanks -- that's not a bad compliment. But...maybe I can ask Darla.

CAITLIN

It was her idea.

GRADY

Oh.

CAITLIN

She gave me a primer on you when you guys were in the basement.

(beat)

Let me give you my number.

GRADY (re: flyer strips)

Oh, 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 with Jocelyn over the house.

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.

JOCELYN
What's going with you and Will?

VANESSA
William? He's not really on my radar.

JOCELYN
He's really, really cute.

VANESSA
Whatever. Beauty's only skin deep.

JOCELYN
Oh, my. It certainly is. Chef's kiss.

ANDREW
You and Will could do damage together.
And it would would like, "buttress" my
already burgeoning social prospects.
(beat)
"Buttress" means "support," right?

VANESSA
Yes.

ANDREW
Hang out with Will. It's not a thing.

VANESSA
William? He is not my type.

JOCELYN
You don't think he's cute?

VANESSA
He's not my type.

Andrew stops.

ANDREW
He is really good-looking, Vanessa.

VANESSA
Okay, then you suck his dick. He's
not my type.

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)

(beat)

You should come out with us tonight.

ANDREW

What are you guys 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, sits down.

MEGHAN

Why don't you wear your sneakers?

GRADY

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

Vanessa enters, sits with Meghan. After a moment:

VANESSA

I don't like that shirt on you.

GRADY

You wouldn't like anything on me. Besides, you guys lack the male perspective of this sort of thing.

Andrew at the door. Takes in the scene.

ANDREW

Is that what you're gonna wear?

Vanessa/Meghan laugh. Grady slowly 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 on 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-five 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 want to 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 demons, Darla. You edited a book about mine. My folks didn't give me what parents give their kids, so to then write a book? That's conquering demons and yes, letting go. So now, allow me some self-pity over Diane, because over the past four 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 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.

CAITLIN

Hey, chica.

MEGHAN

Hey, girl friend.

ANDREW

Meghan, her name is Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN

It's fine, Andrew.

(beat)

What's wrong? Are you jealous that your sister and I are like, total bros? That we're close, while all you have is Grady? Who's also my friend?

ANDREW

That's great; I just I don't want you infiltrating my entire family. You've got your claws sunk into everyone and now I don't have anyone to hang out with on Friday nights.

CAITLIN

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

ANDREW

Excuse me?

(beat)

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

CAITLIN

A jackass is a donkey.

ANDREW

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

Caitlin smiles, leans in.

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!

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)
 (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 sees the flowers. 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. Delighted accepts them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

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

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. So well-executed.

MEGHAN
 Uh, hello? Spoiler alert. You just
 ruined the whole book for her.

GRADY

You can't spoil a book that came out in 1979. She was never gonna read it.

CAITLIN

I was definitely gonna read it.

Grady 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 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.

DARLA (O.S.)

Hey Grady?

GRADY

Hey Darla?

DARLA (O.S.)

Do you think you could grab a hold of your sexuality and have Caitlin come here for a second?

GRADY

... She's funny, right? That was a little...inside joke between me and the kids and all.

(beat)

Darla's actually pretty cool as far as super serious people go.

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.

(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

We did a book together in the 90s and my boss sent us to Wisconsin to visit him in jail. I did not want to be in that shot.

CAITLIN

A book? Like what, an autobiography?

DARLA (nodding)

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 pret-ty loathsome creatures.

(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 as well.

DARLA

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

CAITLIN

I figure it was because you wanted him to have...I dunno, 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 asked. At some point, Grady will be gone, and I don't know anyone in Los Angeles. 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

Good question... Okay, what are the most expensive restaurants in town?

CAITLIN

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

DARLA

Wellllll, 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

... I'd have to check, but that sounds about 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

Okay. I look forward to that.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

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

VANESSA

You missed a crease. By the collar.

Stone-faced, Grady looks up at the wall...then back to the shirt.

VANESSA

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

GRADY

What? That's stupid; of course not.

VANESSA

You never stole anyone's girlfriend?

GRADY

(beat)

You can't steal someone's girlfriend. That assumes that women are property.

VANESSA

I never thought of it like that.

(beat)

Okay, so have you ever...moved in on anyone's girlfriend?

GRADY

Oh, fuck yeah. All the time.

VANESSA

... Okay, shifting gears... Monopoly. What would your favorite property be?

(beat)

And please don't say Oriental Avenue.

GRADY

I'd say St. James Place. It gets a little love, but not nearly enough.

VANESSA

Are you taking about me?

GRADY (exasperated)

No, dickless, I'm talking about St. James Place... No one gets excited about landing on St. James Place. They want the fucking Greens.

VANESSA

... What about Baltic Avenue?

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

But you think 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.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Vanessa runs the table v. Jocelyn. Watches Will, Football Players.

AT ANOTHER TABLE

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

LYNDA

Your sister is incredibly pretty.

ANDREW

That's the feedback I get. But she hates the attention. Sometimes she dyes her hair gross colors cuz she thinks girls in LA don't take her seriously as an academic powerhouse.

LYNDA

Girls in LA said what?

(beat)

I wish people wouldn't take me seriously as an academic powerhouse. And it's "colors," not "dyes," p.s.

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

HILDRETH

What's goin' on, Baby Gap?

(beat)

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

ANDREW

I will. I'm sure you're her type.

HILDRETH

What? Is that supposed to be like a back-handed compliment?

ANDREW

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

Hildreth slaps Andrew in the face with force. Andrew's stunned.

Some KIDS notice. Will does, Vanessa doesn't.

ANDREW

Stop! Just leave me the fuck alone!

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... We all bond over it... Would you like to know your nickname? Because trust me, you so fucking don't. Never ever ask anyone. It'll break your spirit, the same you broke mine... I'd tell you, but today I'm the better boy? And tomorrow I'll be the better man.

Hildreth, humiliated. In the distance, a voice:

VOICE

Yo, Andrew: "A" for Effort? But yo -- that shit was mad corny, yo.

Furious, Hildreth 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.

HILDRETH

I'm choking!

WILL

We have an honor code and it applies everywhere. I am 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

Will sits on a milk crate. Little Andrew rips into him.

ANDREW

Fucking what in the fuck did I just fucking watch? "I'm disappointed in you"? Will: you are a linebacker, but 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, Andrew. I'm a stand-up guy.

ANDREW

I don't care if you're the Queen of Spain, you damn hippy! Hit someone!
(softly)

Are you having problems at home?

Andrew calms down. Will offers him a cigarette.

ANDREW

I didn't know you smoke.

WILL

Well, if it means anything to you, I never inhale.

ANDREW
Of course you don't.

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

ANDREW
Ain't that a bitch. You're insecure?

WILL
Isn't everyone?

ANDREW
Not guys who date Heather Church.

WILL
You know her?

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

WILL
Sure you're talking about Heather?

ANDREW
I dunno; she seems nice. There's
always a joke at my expense, and
she's the only person who doesn't
laugh at me, so...

WILL
Honestly? If she's not laughing,
it's not because she's nice. It's
because she doesn't get the joke.

ANDREW
So why bother? Cuz she's pretty?

WILL
Nah.

ANDREW
Cuz you're insecure?

WILL
... Isn't everyone?
(beat)
Can I ask you a personal question?

ANDREW
Sure.

WILL
Why do people call you Baby GAP?

ANDREW
... Do you know the GAP?

WILL
Yeah.

ANDREW

Like the clothing store? The GAP?

WILL

I'm from planet Earth, too. Yes.

(beat)

And it's not 'The GAP.' It's just GAP. I used to work there, and my manager hated it when we did that. He'd go Mr. Ward to Apeshit? Fast.

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.

(beat)

It's okay if you need to laugh.

WILL

I don't.

ANDREW

... I do.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Caitlin drives Grady.

CAITLIN

I'm just curious as to how you're inclined towards this feminine world of flowers and bunny rabbits and... show tunes 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 that whole Rashaun spiel. I was trying to get you to laugh at yourself, and I aimed too high... Or maybe I aimed too low... It was cruel.

CAITLIN

You forgot something.

GRADY

I'm sorry.

CAITLIN

... bell hooks had a lot to say about people who find that word funny.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)

She'd roll in her grave if she heard a black man and a cis while male --

GRADY

What did you just call me?

(beat)

What I truly hope too understand...is that... Fuck it -- I'll just tell you. Santa Clause is not a thing, and are we ready for this? bell hooks is still alive.

CAITLIN

... I have to Google it.

GRADY

You don't. I'm here now.

CAITLIN

... You don't look like a writer.

GRADY

Eh. You don't look like a teacher.

CAITLIN

So, that's the thing. I really do.

(beat)

How do you know who bell hooks is?

GRADY

(beat)

Never assume that the men you meet are as boring as the boys you date.

CAITLIN

Seriously? Did you practice that in your head last night, or was that a freestyle made just for me...? I'm sorry; I'm just curious; I don't mean to pry... Sorry. Where are my manners?

GRADY

I feel like you left them at the house.

CAITLIN

Oh. I almost forgot. I noticed that you forgot my candy. It's fine; I obviously was kidding and the flowers were...yeah.

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
We were. It was nice, right?

VANESSA
(to Andrew)
I think there's someone waiting for
you in there.

ANDREW
It's not Hildreth, is it?

Before heading in, Andrew stops at the door.

ANDREW
Thanks for taking me out, Vanessa.
I had such a magical night. Maybe
we can do this again one day.

WILL
Wait, that's 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 is Will.
(beat)
What are you guys doing right now?

VANESSA
Nothing.

WILL
You should come with us.

VANESSA
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.

VANESSA

You lost me.

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 cookout. 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 home, but it's not for everyone... I just want you to feel safe.

VANESSA

Thanks. I feel safe... Do you?

They hold their eyes one another.

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 your book: I heard about it from Darla yesterday... I've never met a writer before.

GRADY

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

CAITLIN

I'd love to. What's he like?

GRADY

Jon'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 fans... is being called "Nick." Darla knows this, so she just loves to tweak him. She'll be like, "Oh, this is one of our top writers: Nick Sparks." He gets so, so angry. It really chaps his ass.

CAITLIN

I wouldn't expect that from her.

GRADY

Yeah, Darla can let 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 yesterday, and read it in one sitting.

GRADY

Wow. Thank you.

CAITLIN

I mean.... I didn't say it was good.

GRADY

Lovely. Want me to sign it for you?

CAITLIN

I returned it on the drive over. So...

GRADY

It turned out to be a beautiful day.
This is heaven. I can't believe how
much fun we're having... Ms. Fountain?

CAITLIN

So, 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

I wrote it by myself.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

I was only 28 when I wrote that.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

The reviews were glowing. Rapturous.

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 fucking Flannery O'Connor, but
it's better than the trashy-trash you
guys peddle. *Ethan Frome*? Why? *Silas
Marner*? Why? At least *The Scarlet Letter*
had a point. I'm not saying it was a
blast to read, but at least there was a
message there.

Smiles.

CAITLIN

... That Clarence Scrubbs line is
from *Confederacy of Dunces*, right?

GRADY

How would you know that?

CAITLIN

I'm a teacher. I'm an English teacher.
I mean, I thought we established that.
(beat)
What would you write about me?

GRADY

I don't know. I don't know you.

CAITLIN

Take a stab. First impressions.

GRADY

So...you're a high school teacher.
(beat)
What were you like in high school?

CAITLIN

The same way I am now. Just wiser.

GRADY

I would say to Darla or anyone back in New York that you're like... I'd say "Let's put it this way... She's the kind of girl who would kiss you under the bleachers, as long as you promise not to tell anyone about it."

More smiles. They continue to rock up and down on the see-saw.

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 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 started writing a manuscript at 26, it sold at 30. I got a first deal tied to a second. Usually you just get an advance, but I also got a bonus. So, it's time to put up or...get sued. And that'd be fine, but I'll never be published again.

CAITLIN

So it's not exactly a dream come true.

GRADY

It's more like a nightmare you never want to wake up from.

CAITLIN

If it's any consolation, I hate my job. You go in thinking you'll mold 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.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)

(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. Sorry, but boys I date don't qualify.

GRADY

... Ms. Fountain?

His bedroom eyes. She 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
Same. 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 this. 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's 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 get out there, and we're gonna eat shit. It's what we do best.

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 your name in the newspaper?

WILL

You're better than that. You are.

(MORE)

WILL (cont'd)

(beat)

And again: Please stop calling me
"William." It's "Will."

He leaves the bleachers, heads to midfield.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Grady and Caitlin fish for fish. Sitting...close to each other.

CAITLIN

So 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.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

That was subtle.

CAITLIN (smiling)

Stop.

GRADY

Friends were supportive, I've only
been in one serious relationship...
The others were platonic friends
that became whatever the opposite
of platonic is... Non-platonic.

CAITLIN

The word you're looking for is
"romantic..." How did it end?

GRADY

... It just sort of died one day.

(beat)

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

CAITLIN

I wouldn't worry about it. No offense,
but your life is empty. But it's a
blank slate, so I am a little jealous.
And regardless of what they may
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 always laugh? But I have a reputation for being clever.

GRADY

(beat)

How is a girl like you still single?

CAITLIN

Oh, I don't know. I probably spend too much time 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

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

Can I use that in my book?

CAITLIN

... Yes.

Grady smiles in the wake of her stern, teacher's response.

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.

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

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

Never talk to me like that. Ever.

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, albeit painfully.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The hustle and bustle of Kids in the Mall.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Again, Andrew works on a charcoal portrait of Lynda.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Vanessa/Will sit on 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

Nah. But the no atheists in a foxhole crowd has some strong points.

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 that thing where you're only asking me a question so I ask the same question back? And then you have an answer that's cooler than mine?

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.

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)

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 never 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)

Are you and Heather going to the Art Show?

WILL

We're taking a break.

VANESSA

Since when?

WILL

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 smiles.

WILL

Do you know Meredith Bachmann?

(MORE)

WILL (cont'd)

(beat)

Heather didn't like that we hang out, but we go surfing before school on Tuesdays. Wanna come?

VANESSA

I don't know how to surf.

WILL

Neither does Meredith. That's not why I hang out with her.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

Grady and Darla evaluate dust jackets hanging on clothespins.

DARLA

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

GRADY

Right? Like what if she hurts someone? You're gonna be in enough financial trouble once you lose your job.

DARLA

Andrew said she's not interested at all, and I believe it. She's won't compromise her femininity in the eyes of boys.

GRADY

Uh, Vanessa does not care about that.

DARLA

She wants to make a name for herself. Fine. But football is not 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... 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.

GRADY
It's weird how writers have no input
with 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 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.

VANESSA

I'm from both. Also? 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. Because 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 some pages.

GRADY

What's that gonna prove, Darla?

DARLA

You have to somehow write 300 pages in x 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.

DARLA

Grady, writing is rewriting, 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 gonna lose the kids to college, but I will not relinquish my grasp on you.

GRADY

That's sweet. Your best work yet.

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, 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."

GRADY

Is that right? No one ever told me.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady and Vanessa sit opposite Chris Geremia.

GRADY

She didn't cut his face?

(beat)

Did she 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. And a flute has all those...things on it. That network of like, fine 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

Right. So... There's a lot to unpack here. I think we all could've done without the last line. We'll talk about that at home. Now punishment.

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 diamond of a right leg.

Poker faces all around. Vanessa then 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 pocket, hands it to Darla.

DARLA

What is this?

GRADY

My writing. I write. I'm a writer.

Darla reads, then name-drops Michiko Kakutani.

DARLA

I can hear Michiko now: "Grady Young's sophomore and sophomoric effort reduces a once would-be 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 misogynistic shit? "Man is the hunter, woman is his game"? It's a quote from Alfred Tennyson.

(on his look)

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. Girls don't like being slobbered on.

ANDREW
I should get a pen.

GRADY
No pens. We've talked about this.

ANDREW
It'll only take a second.

GRADY
Many times, Andrew. We've talked about this many times... No pens.

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 you can borrow money...? 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

Do you want me to kill him for you?

ANDREW

I do, but I know it would get back to
me in about 8 to 12 hours.

GRADY

Lots of reasons. But ya gotta realize,
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 have
to somehow reconcile the difference.

ANDREW

It stinks because I'm such a cliché.
Hildreth isn't a meathead stuffing me
into lockers, he's a dirtbag... And
things are going great with Lynda, so
I should be on cloud nine.

GRADY

You should but like, no one is on
cloud nine. I don't ever expect to be
happy, I just want to be content.

ANDREW

You should write a memoir.

GRADY

Only assholes write memoirs.

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. Vanessa, Will, and MEREDITH BACHMANN (16) lie 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. Except for the
whole abortion and gay rights thing,
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

I have eyes, Vanessa.

VANESSA

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

MEREDITH

No. They broke up because of me.

VANESSA

I'm confused.

MEREDITH

Heather never got Will wanted to
spend time with a fat girl.

(MORE)

MEREDITH (cont'd)

If he hung out with Ashleigh Ceaderfield or someone like that, at least she could've enjoyed the drama of having some competition. But the fact that I'm ugly? It meant she had no right to get upset. And that ended up making her really upset.

VANESSA

You're not ugly, Meredith.

Seagulls cry out. 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... I know what I am. It's fine.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Andrew sits at 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, 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 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've had a lot of practice. The men in my life always seem to have 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

"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.

(beat)

Is 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 high school football. Half the sport is boys and their fathers, and she's the only one outta 40 kids who won't have her father in the stands. That's why she didn't want to play until her hand was forced.

(beat)
She already has her problems with him, do you think this has made it better?

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
Cool. 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.

(MORE)

COACH (cont'd)

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 sweet of you, Coach. Thanks.

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 dope... 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 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 reading. Can it wait?

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 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 know 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 doesn't matter.

(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

(beat)

Unfortunately, sales matter. Whatever the critics say, 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 shouldn't be, but...

GRADY
It's what I do. Don't be surprised
when shitty people do shitty things.

DARLA
May I ask you a question?

GRADY
Obviously.

DARLA
Why do you lie to me?

GRADY
... Because I care about you.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - DAY

The next morning. Andrew lays in bed.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Darla and Grady drive to the school.

GRADY
What should I do?

DARLA
I don't know. Just play it by ear.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Grady and and Darla walk the hallways, peering here and there.

GRADY
They have a pool here.

DARLA
They have two.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady/Darla sit in judgment of Geremia, Caitlin, ADMINISTRATORS.

GEREMIA
Well, well. What do we have here?

Geremia holds on Grady. Darla turns to him. 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 the reading public does not.

Darla places a hand over Grady's as a way of calming 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 the parenting.

Now, Grady places his hand over Darla's.

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 a high esteem.

Darla turns a full 90 degrees. Grady can feel her stare.

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 65 grand a year in tuition dollars?

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.

She's locked in on Geremia, discomfort on his face.

DARLA

Red, rosy cheeks and peach-plum lips.
(beat)
Perhaps you find my son... Desirable.

GRADY

Quit while your behind, Darla! Sir? Here's the deal... You brought up my first book. Our first book. And how it failed.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

It failed becuz readers wanted sex and drugs, and I gave them my some pretty downer material: 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*.

(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 the lie, when 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 them 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. So I more or less killed her.

GEREMIA

And you've written about this.

GRADY

It's all there. All of it.

CAITLIN

... I don't believe him.

GRADY

I don't expect you to.

CAITLIN

Good, because I don't expect anything from you at all.

(beat)

No one does. No one ever will, and no one ever has... Just because your parents didn't take care of you and love you doesn't mean the world has to pick up the slack.

Grady holds on her, emotionless.

CAITLIN

That was bad. I should not have said that. It was ugly of me... I'm sorry.

GRADY

Don't apologize... I hope... I just hope this can be...a teachable moment.

CAITLIN

Motherfucker! I knew he would say that!

Silence. Grady winks at an ELDERLY ADMIN. She blushes.

GEREMIA

Let's all breathe. We'll all be fine.

CAITLIN

Uh, no we won't. Not me, definitely not him. Have you even met this guy? Do you even go to this school? This is fascism.

(beat)

Respectfully? Is someone paying you off?

GEREMIA

Who's someone?

CAITLIN

Anyone.

GEREMIA

Respectfully...? In a word...? No.

DARLA

That's not what I heard.

GEREMIA

Grady... Your confession of sorts. This manuscript. If, in fact, the Devil is in the Details --

CAITLIN

Oh, but he is. He is in the details. I've seen him up close. I've looked him in the eyes. They were gorgeous.

ELDERLY ADMIN

Is there something going on between you two that I should know about?

GRADY

No.

CAITLIN

Yes!

GEREMIA

If the manuscript can serve as an alibi, attach it to an email and send it to us.

DARLA

Excuse me; I'm sorry. If it's alright with you two, I wouldn't mind seeing it first. It's fine; I'm just curious.

GRADY

(to Geremia)

I write slowly. I write in longhand.

DARLA (to herself)
You savage.

GRADY
There's only one copy. I can only
share it with Darla at this point.
(to the Admin)
And her. She's cool.

GEREMIA
If you were telling the truth, you
wouldn't make flippant jokes while
discussing involuntary manslaughter.

CAITLINF
Actually, he would.
(beat)
He doesn't have a heart.

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 will 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 looks down.

CAITLIN
You live under this assumption that
you're oh-so-unique, but you're no
different than the rest of us. And
that's not a bad thing, it's just...
You're not special. 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.

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.

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 guy who assumes a girl he's friends with owes him 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!

LATER

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 see 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. 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 good job, dude. It takes balls to go out on a limb like that.

Hildreth offers his hand. Andrew takes it, and they shake.

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

Do you need help with anything?

VANESSA

I'm alright. I'm glad you pushed me, but don't you dare tell anyone this. It did feel a little anti-climactic.

WILL

What were you expecting, magic?

VANESSA

Kind of. Yeah. It woulda been nice.

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 because I don't think you have any idea how hard normal girls have it.

VANESSA

Why are you dressed like a farmer? Everyone's wearing post-game ties and jackets, and you look like you're about to gather the eggs. Who did this to you?

WILL

... I can't afford a suit. I had one, but my brother stretched it out.

VANESSA

... I didn't know that.

WILL

Then stop... Let down your guard a little and people will surprise you. You're a pretty cool girl. Not to be a dick, but I can tell, because I'm pretty cool guy... I think it's funny how people like you for your outside beauty, when you're a model for what people should be like on the inside. You're incredible... I'm just being honest. You're incredible... But you have let down your guard a little.

VANESSA

Okay, all these like, emo tears? I'm only interested in guys who are cold and dismissive. I'm sorry, but that's who I am, Will. So...love it leave it.

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's my favorite shirt, too.

MEGHAN

It still smells like her.

(beat)

Grady... Does it ever go away?

GRADY

Does what ever go away?

MEGHAN

The way it feels when you miss someone... Does it go away?

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.

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 it out.

ANDREW
We always do.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - MORNING

Vanessa examines a silver heart pin that says "Love."

GRADY
What's more important than blood?

VANESSA
Love.
(beat)
I'm not gonna lie. 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 spoke with Andrew. I asked him about your friend.

GRADY
Frankie? What did he say?

DARLA

He said he ran into Frankie in Duane Reade, then asked what was up with you. And Frankie did confirm 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, approaches.

ANDREW

I just want to apologize again.

CAITLIN

I don't want to hear it.

A moment passes. Then, Andrew leans down and kisses her on the cheek. Wide-eyed, Caitlin freezes. Andrew resumes his position beside her. Caitlin doesn't look at him, and doesn't move for quite a bit. Finally, she does look up.

ANDREW

Grady said that when he gets some money together, he would give me five hundred dollars if I gave you a kiss on the cheek for him.

(beat)

I said I would never do it for less than a thousand, and he said, "Deal."

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. What else?

GRADY
Gingerbread men. 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.

Grady puts down his bags. They hug, and Grady begins to cry.

GRADY
When I was gone, I missed you so much.
(beat)
Now I'm gonna miss you so much more.

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. 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 picks up another notebook.

She finds that the same is true with this one as well. Darla looks at the cover. In the center is Grady's handwriting...

"Books and Cocaine." Darla smiles, and we flash to four previous shots/scenes 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. Watches them swim. Her phone rings.

CAITLIN

Hello?

INT. AIRPORT (INTERCUT) - DAY

Grady, alone by the gates. He takes out his phone, dials.

CAITLIN

What do you want?

GRADY

Hi.

CAITLIN

What do you want?

GRADY

Nothing. I'm sorry, I just...

CAITLIN

What?

(beat)

What?

GRADY

I just needed to say goodbye.

(beat)

Also... I really want to know...

CAITLIN

What? What do you want to know?

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... I only now just realized that I never asked you your name. So then I started panicking.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

(beat)
What's your name?

CAITLIN
... It's Caitlin.

GRADY
Caitlin?

CAITLIN
(steeling herself)
Yes.

GRADY
Caitlin Fountain.
(beat)
That's such a beautiful name.

Grady calls back to his Page 1 beautiful/genius statement.
Ms. Fountain, in turn, is no match for the 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.