

The Amazing Adventures of the Monogamous Duck

Written by

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EXT. VACANT LOT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

GRADY HERMAN (30/40) stands 60 feet away from a graffiti-covered wall. He fires a ball at the expanse of artwork in front of him, then fields it with the flash and flair of a seasoned shortstop.

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 can claim to be any sort of authority on it -- but the single most abused word in the English language is the word "beautiful."

Grady produces a "bullet." Takes a hit of cocaine, resumes play.

GRADY (V.O.)

It's a precious word, 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.

INT. NYC PARK (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Grady inhales coke, exhales pain. Plays chess with his DEALER.

GRADY (V.O.)

It may be trivial, but I 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.

Undercover COPS approach. Wrangler jeans, beige Timberlands. They arrest Grady and Dealer without any pushback.

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, "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.

INT. PHOENIX HOUSE TREATMENT CENTER - DAY

RESIDENTS sing, as per their ritual. An ALTO flies solo.

ALTO

Hark the herald angels sing, glory
to the newborn king! Pleased as man,
with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel!

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Grady has been sitting across from DR. ROSEN (60). Jacket on and bag in hand, he's checking out. Alto SINGS off-screen.

GRADY

There's a difference between
being brilliant and being a genius.
Brilliant/Smart people know that
the capital of Burkina Faso is
Ouagadougou, they know the literacy
rate is 34%, 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 guy named Steven who painted
an apple on a table is just...not.

EXT. PHOENIX HOUSE - DAY

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

GRADY

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

DR. ROSEN

Children making rainbows with
garden hoses...their fascination
with bubble-wrap...sure.

GRADY

Well 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. Now I feel like I've awoken
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

But I'm missing the batter.

DR. ROSEN

You wrote a book. That's something.

GRADY

A book no one bought or read doesn't mean much. I got like 17 dollars in the bank and a girlfriend that died four years ago... I still can't get over it, and don't know if I want to.

DR. ROSEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRADY

Well... The thing that sucks is that it's 17 dollars, and the minimum you can take out of an ATM is 20. Anyway. They did the same thing to the book that they did to my girlfriend.

Dr. Rosen gestures.

GRADY

They buried it. The book was sad, and people don't like sad stories.

DR. ROSEN

... You'll stay with your family?

GRADY

I'm actually gonna stay with my editor. It's hard to say "my editor" without being insufferable, but yeah. We met in a mentoring program for at-risk teens when I was a teen-at-risk.

DR. ROSEN

And she's agreeable with you staying.

GRADY

She got divorced last year and moved to California for the job. 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 picks up a garden hose. He alternates between the hard stream and gentle spray. The mist creates a rainbow.

DR. ROSEN

So she's excited you're coming.

GRADY

I don't know if "excited" is how I would couch it. I owe money on the second book; it was a two-book deal. If I don't show a second manuscript, the bonus is due back to house.

DR. ROSEN

How much?

GRADY

I spent it. 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

I dunno, drugs. College basketball. The book never got off the floor; that's my fault. But it's their own fault for assuming sales would catch up with the reviews on this next one. Or that there would be a next one.

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

DR. ROSEN

So, California.

GRADY

California. Manifest Destiny. "Go West, young man."

DR. ROSEN

Do you know the actual quote?

GRADY

That's not it?

DR. ROSEN

The full quote...was "Go West, young man...and grow up with the country."

INT. LAX - DAY

On an escalator, Grady looks down. Sees an errant shoelace. He looks back up. After a beat, he bends down, tucks it in.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

DARLA NATHANSON (50s) walks. Radiating competence and warmth, she carries herself with little effort, but high regard.

GRADY

Darla.

She sees Grady, leaning against a pillar. They face off.

INT. CAR - 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 Ed? He still dating that nurse?

DARLA

It takes ambition to be a nurse. Try "Trixxi," spelled with two Xs.

(beat)

Ed is Ed. I appreciate you asking.

GRADY

That's what I'm here for.

DARLA

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

GRADY

The truth never hurts, Darla.

DARLA

... Are you wearing your seatbelt?

As Grady reaches for his belt, Darla SLAMS the brakes. Grady flies into the dash. On the recoil, he's flung back into his seat. Darla then grabs his earl as if he's an insolent child.

DARLA

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

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

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

DARLA

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

GRADY

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

Darla shelves soda among nuggets, pasta among milk.

DARLA

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

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 going...? Have you been dating at all...? 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
 People get divorced every day, Darla.

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

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

Darla's middle child, still growing into his mind and body,
 is ANDREW NATHANSON (15). Enter Grady, timidly.

GRADY
 Hey. How have you been?

ANDREW
 Good. What about you?

GRADY
 I'm okay. How's the new school?

ANDREW
 ... Jury's still out.

GRADY
 Are you hungry?
 (off a nod)
 What are you in the mood for?

ANDREW
 Anything... Actually, can you make
 mac and cheese?

Andrew opens a cabinet. They ease into their familiar ways.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady sits on the porch. A car stops out front. Out steps
 Darla's youngest, MEGHAN NATHANSON (9). A CLASSMATE waves
 as the car leaves. A subdued 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
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
You haven't dated that many girls.

GRADY
Quality over quantity.

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 trying to push my buttons.

GRADY

I am... So are you just gonna stand there, or am I gonna get a hug?

She closes the gap. They embrace.

GRADY

I'm really sorry.

MEGHAN

It's okay.

GRADY

I'm sorry.

MEGHAN

It's gonna be fine.

GRADY

... A'right, get off.

She kisses his cheek. He gives her his Cherry 7-Up.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady opens a box, finds candlesticks. Places one aside. He gets another, takes a pen from the box. Hollows out the core from the stick's base. He then grabs the candle he set aside. Digs out its base as well. Two small vials of cocaine emerge.

Grady places one vial in the dug-out space from the second stick. He takes the first stick, melts it with a lighter's flame. Next, he drips wax onto the other stick. It forms a seal over the vial. That one back in hiding, he places the other one in his pocket.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - MORNING

Darla's eldest, VANESSA NATHANSON (16), stands at the door. She watches Grady sleep. His covers don't cover; they reach for the floor. Vanessa enters, fix his sheets, tucks him in.

VANESSA

I fucking hate you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Andrew works on a portrait of an unaware LYNDA CARR (15). Meathead ROB HILDRETH (15) pokes the back of Andrew's neck with a compass. Andrew jams up the nearly finished drawing. He rips it from his pad, balls it up, sticks it in his bag.

Teacher CAITLIN FOUNTAIN (30s) is at the head of the class.

GIRL 1

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

CAITLIN

Okay. Personal time is over.

BOY 1

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

CAITLIN

No, I love men. It's children I hate. So how are your essays coming along?

ANDREW

How long do they have to be?

BOY 1

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

(off Caitlin)

He slows us down. Andrew, you're not cut out for AP classes. Get with the dumb kids in General Pop.

CAITLIN

Write whatever you feel is enough.

Caitlin approaches Boy 1. Casually balls a sheet of paper.

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 a page.

CAITLIN

Look, I sympathize with the fact that your other teachers can't pass muster with the Board of Ed based on a charm offensive alone. Greg -- behind you.

Boy 1/Greg turns. Caitlin hits him with the balled up paper. Kids laugh. Caitlin speaks into Boy 1's ear.

CAITLIN

I don't care how much Daddy pays in tuition, or if he can have me fired.
(retreats)
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

The assignment: By asking you to write a mock college essay, I'm allowing you to go off the reservation and have fun. Since you're presenting it in front of the class, you might as well embrace the horror of it all. Plus, it's the one creative assignment I get to grade every year, so it's important to me on a personal level.

BOY 2

No wonder you don't have a boyfriend.

Kids laugh.

LYNDA

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

CAITLIN

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 approval. Caitlin stares. She then turns around, writes in large, chalk letters: It Only Gets Worse.

LYNDA

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 might have the flu.

Grady moves away. After a moment, Meghan moves closer.

MEGHAN

We have to pick up Vanessa.

A beat. Meghan blows air at Grady's forehead. His eyes open. Then close. Meghan blows again, and Grady palms her face.

GRADY

You were adopted.

MEGHAN

So were you.

GRADY

I wasn't. But more or less, yeah.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

The first real look at the indomitable Vanessa Nathanson.

Also, JOCELYN FELDMAN (16), WILL HERZOG (16), KICKER, and COACH. They lounge, close to 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

My brother's gonna present.

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

COACH

That's it. We're done here.

Kicker and Coach head off. Will joins the girls on the grass.

WILL

I thought you were a vegan. Why are you eating McDonald's?

VANESSA

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

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

JOCELYN

Didn't they fire you?

WILL

I was stealing too many hamburgers.

VANESSA

What's "too many"? Don't they have thousands in the back?

WILL

Do you know Ronald McDonald?

VANESSA

Obviously. He's terrifying.

WILL

Especially the newer version they introduced last year. So, Ron has a rival who cosplays as a prisoner.

VANESSA

The Hamburglar. We know.

WILL

Well, McDonald's HQ in Illinois? They take hamburger theft seriously.

VANESSA

This will be a stupid story. A story as convenient as it is precious. And 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

"A story as convenient as it is precious"? Who are you trying to impress? You sound like the blonde chick we're reading in English.

VANESSA

"The blonde chick we're reading in English"? Jane Austen?

WILL

Relax.

VANESSA

One, don't tell me to relax. Two, Jane Austen had brown hair.

WILL

How would you know? She lived 1000 years ago. Was Shakespeare a man?

VANESSA

Jane Austen died at 42 in the 1800s. My mom's an editor; Shakespeare was definitely a man. We know these things, because we have paintings.

(beat)

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

WILL

It's cool that your mom's an editor. My dad's a greeter at Walmart. And he said Shakespeare is a conspiracy. That it was probably three women who did the heavy lifting: His cook, a seamstress, and a chambermaid.

VANESSA

That's funny. Are you finished?

WILL

There's a reason your parents pay 60 grand a year, while scholar-athletes pay nothing.

Vanessa gathers her books, heads off.

WILL

Vanessa: No one calls me "William."
It's just "Will."

Regarding Kicker/Coach testing a leg, Will turns to Jocelyn.

WILL

I think she can kick.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Meghan pull up to Andrew and Vanessa's school.

GRADY

What do you wanna listen to?

MEGHAN
Metallica. "Seek and Destroy."

GRADY
 There are other bands out there.

MEGHAN
 What's wrong with Metallica?

GRADY
 They're gods, but there are better ways you can be spending your time.

MEGHAN
 You're a music snob.

GRADY
 Did you read the book I sent?

MEGHAN
 What book?

GRADY
The Color Purple.

MEGHAN
 I started then I stopped.

GRADY
 Why?

MEGHAN
 Cuz it's not about the color purple.

GRADY
 It's not.

MEGHAN
 It's about slavery.

GRADY
 I'm glad that came across in the read.

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

GRADY
 Mommy said you're not old enough?
 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*?

Grady steps out, rests his arms on the car.

GRADY
 Look at me. Don't go anywhere.

MEGHAN

I won't.

GRADY

The roads are different out here.

MEGHAN

I don't know how to drive.

GRADY

That's what I'm afraid of. Neither did Vanessa when she was your age.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Ms. Caitlin Fountain (Andrew's teacher) puts up flyers. They advertise her tutoring services. At the bottom of the flyers are sliced strips with her phone number on them.

At the end of the hall, Grady sits across an office. GIRL (16) and BOY (16) wait, sitting in chairs across from him. Caitlin heads towards the office, and them. As she passes:

GIRL

I love your shoes. Who made them?

CAITLIN

I'm not sure.

BOY

They look expensive.

CAITLIN

They weren't that expensive.

GRADY

They were very expensive, and they're Proenza Schouler... Do you have a job interview at a better school?

CAITLIN

No, and they were a gift.

GRADY

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

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

Oh, nice. It's that kind of school. Sure. I can respect that.

Boy and Girl laugh.

CAITLIN

It's not "that kind of school." And how would you know the designer?

GRADY

My boss has me organize hers, so...

CAITLIN

Your boss.

GRADY

She carries herself like she's my boss, that's for sure. Technically, were colleagues, but...

CAITLIN

She's your boss.

GRADY

Right. She has 500 shoes and 50 bags. And she always makes me...index them.

CAITLIN

That sounds great.

GRADY

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

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

CAITLIN

I appreciate the peacocking and showing off the fact that you're the only guy in a ten-mile radius who knows who Proenza Schouler is.

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 girl's shoes than --

CAITLIN

Yeah. That's not okay.

GRADY

That came out wrong.

CAITLIN
It sure as hell did.

INT. CAR - DAY

Motionless, Meghan listens to ear-splitting death metal.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Back with Grady/Caitlin. Boy/Girl, loving every moment.

CAITLIN
If you want to walk around, you
have to get proper authorization.

GRADY
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? We
worry about threats to the children.

GRADY
Do I look 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. Maybe a red plastic bucket.

GRADY
That's a little too specific.

CAITLIN
I asked if you were here for someone.

GRADY
I'm a threat to children? Back to you
and your red plastic bucket, creeper.
And yes, I'm here to pick someone up.

CAITLIN
I meant a child.

GRADY
... She's not answering her phone.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

Well she's very bright. Very pretty. A little standoff-ish, but that's a function of her intelligence and like, The Invisible Hand of the Patriarchy.

CAITLIN

Ohhhh... You're one of those.

Caitlin heads to the office doorway.

CAITLIN

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

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

INT. GYM - DAY

Previously, Vanessa was sitting in on Kicker's practice.

Now, with her soccer TEAMMATES kicking in the background, she sees Grady. He approaches, they converge.

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 realize I should accept you for who and what you are.

Anticipating this for a year, Vanessa lays into him.

VANESSA

I was watching the 30 for 30 about Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden. They both had New York in the palm of their hands at a young age. Just like you. And both they had their demons, just like you... And you know what they did with the 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... 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 put the rest of us 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

Vanessa, for however long I'm here, I'm not gonna let you beat me down. I'm not your father; I'm your friend. And you're not gonna take me granted.

VANESSA

I take you for granted? Wow.

Soccer balls fly across the gym.

GRADY

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

VANESSA

... I was hoping for a little more humility.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Darla enters, sees Grady at a desk.

DARLA
Did you get any work done today?

GRADY
I did.

DARLA
Yeah? What did you do?

GRADY
I actually 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 got here.

ANDREW
You and me both.

GRADY
What's your girl situation like?

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

GRADY
Well, it's New York. Even the ugly
girls are hot.

ANDREW
There is one girl. Lynda. I've never
talked to her, but we're in the same
English class.

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

We have this mock college essay due, and we have to read them in front of the class. I want to impress her, but I don't know what to write.

GRADY

Let's see if I can help.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

They look at Andrew's portraits: Darla, Vanessa, and Meghan.

ANDREW

What was it like in rehab?

GRADY

It's all cleaning. You clean toilets, and they make you clean them again to test your patience. The idea is, the world's gonna test you, so you can't turn to drugs when you're frustrated.

ANDREW

What happens if you don't hand in a manuscript?

GRADY

I can't be the first writer who took the money, and didn't turn a book in.

ANDREW

You would be. From the conversations I've overheard, that's what makes your situation so unique, and so terrifying for everyone involved.

GRADY

The draft is due in two weeks. Then it's a breach of contract type-deal. I have to check.

ANDREW

Mom says you've probably been working on the same 50 pages for the past two years. I was hoping you had the final draft in a safe somewhere.

GRADY

Eh. Somewhere in-between.

ANDREW

Everything in life is somewhere in-between. You're the king of saying everything, without saying anything.

They see a painting of Diane, Grady's late girlfriend.

ANDREW
We had fun that day.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

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

MEGHAN
You lost weight.

GRADY
I had to go on a hunger strike.
(off her look)
It's when you stop eating.

MEGHAN
Why would you do that?

GRADY
To prove a point.

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

GRADY
Yeah. It didn't work out like that.

MEGHAN
Why not?

He takes a towel off her head, brushes 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 would've benefited
from...I dunno, a little more effort
during the planning stages, maybe?

MEGHAN
My skin is burning.

GRADY
That means it's working.

MEGHAN
... So how come you use drugs?

GRADY
People who get in too deep, they
often don't like something about
themselves. Their past...present...

MEGHAN
You don't like yourself?

GRADY

I love myself. I just don't always
...like myself.

MEGHAN

I understand.

GRADY

Good. At least one of us does.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Vanessa, Will, Jocelyn, HEATHER CHURCH (16). All at a table.
Heather leans on Will's arm, indicating that they're dating.

WILL

Okay, favorite Monopoly property.

JOCELYN

Indiana Avenue.

HEATHER

Boardwalk.

VANESSA

... I'm gonna say Baltic Avenue.

HEATHER

Why? Boardwalk's 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 group work, so let's
get this out of the way. Vanessa,
you're gonna hafta pull your weight.

VANESSA

It's Jocelyn we have to worry about.
Watch: She'll ask to go nurse a lot.

Will smiles. He and Vanessa hold eye contact.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

Darla holds court. Grady and Meghan sit in front of her.

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 I've lost my innocence, and you're getting old... Do you have pages for me?

GRADY

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

He hands her the strip from Caitlin's flyer.

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 failed me personally and professionally.

GRADY

A tree fell in the woods, and no one was there to hear it: Good book, great editing, rave reviews. 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?

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

(beat)

What about you? I don't think it's a big deal that you're not dating, cuz I know 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.

LYNDA

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

She continues on her way. Andrew smiles.

INT. CAR - DAY

Darla drives Grady. Pulls up in front of a building.

INT. NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS - DAY

Grady walks down a hall. Takes note of an EXIT sign. As he nears the door to freedom, he looks into the NA room. Sees a face that's been ravaged by drugs. Grady enters.

He sits by an ADDICT near a window. Addict whistles/leaves. Grady knows Addict is about to make a drug deal. He follows.

INT. DARLA'S CAR - DAY

Darla waits, wanting to be sure that Grady stays put.

INT. NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS - DAY

Grady, through the door. Sees a sketchy DEALER in a car.

INT. DARLA'S CAR - DAY

Satisfied, Darla drives out of the lot. Before she can grab pole position, Grady and Dealer pull out from around the building. An unsuspecting Darla pulls up behind them.

INT. DEALER'S CAR (INTERCUT) - DAY

Grady puts a rock in a stem, prepares to smoke. He and Dealer reach a light. Darla's about to pull up in the adjacent lane.

Grady hits the pipe. Darla pulls up, windows align. When she looks, Grady's nowhere in sight. He lays low under the window-line. Darla, oblivious. Dealer looks at her with haunted eyes.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Vanessa and Jocelyn cross paths with football PLAYERS.

KID 1

I'm Jeff; I'm Will's friend. I got
you some cookies from First Street.
(off Vanessa)

Don't be shy.

Vanessa accepts.

KID 1

Let me know if you like them.

They head off.

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

Lynda stopped me in the hall and
talked to me. I don't believe it.

Andrew produces paper, hands it to Grady, who hands it back. He first dries his hands on Andrew's pants, then takes it.

GRADY

What is this?

ANDREW

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

GRADY

These are like the writing exercises
your mom gives me. Juvenile busywork.
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 candy, takes it. Finds his cocaine candles, takes them.

INT. ST. MARTIN'S PRESS - DAY

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

SUPERIOR 1

I noticed that Grady came by.

DARLA

He did. You should've popped in.

(beat)

I told him that if we 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. Vanessa plays defense. The action is upfield. As such, she stands near the sideline and negotiates with Will.

WILL

Play football with us. I know you. You're bored.

VANESSA

You don't know anything about me.

WILL

You're intense; you want a challenge.

VANESSA

I appreciate your friend and his candy, but I'm not interested.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin grades papers. Andrew's perched on a desk.

ANDREW

We have a family friend staying with us. I showed him the assignment, and he said to give you this.

He hands her a sealed envelope. Caitlin tries to open it.

CAITLIN

Is this a wax seal?

ANDREW

He's different.

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...creative.

CAITLIN

(reading)

Oh, okay... Really...? I understand.

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

CAITLIN

Time for you to run along and play Dungeons and Dragons or...Weeknite. 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.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grady and Andrew arrive home, only to find an unknown car (Caitlin's) in the driveway. It's near Andrew's hockey net. Andrew sees that a tire has ruined the base.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ms. Fountain tutors Meghan. Grady appears.

CAITLIN

What are you doing here?

GRADY

What are you doing here?

MEGHAN

You know each other?

GRADY

We met at school yesterday.

CAITLIN

This is awkward.

GRADY

Right? Especially for you... So what do you teach?

MEGHAN

English.

CAITLIN

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

(beat)

It is "CliffsNotes," 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.

He flips over. Eyes lock on Caitlin's. Neither of them move.

ANDREW

What I meant to say...

Caitlin looks at Grady, then back at Andrew. The wax seal.

CAITLIN

How do we move on from this?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla, Grady, and the children hash things out.

DARLA

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

GRADY

When you made the appointment, you didn't know she was Andrew's teacher from like, parents' night and parent-teacher conferences?

DARLA

No one goes to those things.

ANDREW

There's also the separation of Church and State factor. I saw Mrs. Bell with her family at Costco a few months ago, and it's been weird ever since. She's embarrassed, and I'm embarrassed for her. Plus, she was also wearing jeans.

VANESSA

You adore Ms. Fountain.

ANDREW

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

Darla leaves. Andrew turns to Vanessa.

ANDREW

I need to be able to count on your vote on this one. I don't wanna be streaming AI porn while my teacher's here, much less have her pissing and shitting in the downstairs bathroom. Cuz you know that's the next step: Denial, Anger, Bargaining... What's next? Oh, that's right: Pissing and shitting in the downstairs bathroom.

Darla enters.

DARLA

You watch AI porn...? You stream it?

ANDREW

You were listening.

GRADY

She should stay for pizza.

VANESSA

Are you trying to fuck Ms. Fountain?

DARLA

Vanessa, go to your room!

Vanessa leaves. Andrew leaves. Comes back, takes Meghan, too.

DARLA

Well?

GRADY

Well what?

DARLA

Are you trying to fuck Ms. Fountain?

GRADY

You think as a writer, I'd ever like an English teacher? Pillow talk about split infinitives? Past participles?

DARLA

She's stunning.

GRADY

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

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Caitlin's flawless face. Darla and pizza arrive mid-scene.

CAITLIN

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

VANESSA

I'm applying to Smith. Early decision.

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.

GRADY

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

Wow. That's wonderful.

VANESSA

It's tragic.

GRADY

I wish you could hear yourself talk. Harvard is racist to all those Asian kids and all those Indian kids. And if anyone's gonna benefit from that gross miscarriage of justice, my Asian friends would want it to be you.

VANESSA

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

CAITLIN

Ultimately it's up to you, and I'm sure you'll get in. But what about safety schools? Do you have one?

VANESSA

... Stanford. Soccer scholarship.

CAITLIN

And you, Sir? What do you do?

GRADY

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

CAITLIN

I was asking what you do-do.

DARLA
He's been minimizing shareholder
value since 1987.

CAITLIN
No, seriously.

DARLA
No. Seriously.

VANESSA
Grady likes to play baseball in
Central Park. He freebases cocaine
in the locker room between innings.
He claims there's a body/mind energy
that informs his writing, but really,
he just likes freebasing cocaine.

ANDREW
He also likes cooking...gardening...

GRADY
Why would you tell her that!
(to Caitlin)
I don't want to put you on the spot.
I have a question for you...and I'm so
curious to hear your perspective. As
a teacher... What've you noticed about
Andrew that makes him special?
(beat)
I'll start.

Caitlin, not expecting an earnest, kind-hearted question.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Andrew takes pizza from the oven. Drops it, cheese side up.
He stares at it. Decides to put it back on the serving tray.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Vanessa looks at Grady.

VANESSA
I can't eat pizza. Cook something.

GRADY
There's a way to ask, fuckgirl.

CAITLIN
There's also a child in the room.

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

Darla enters, fills glasses. Andrew enters with the pizza,
serves. Caitlin stands up to help.

DARLA

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

CAITLIN

Don't be silly. I wasn't expecting lobster bisque.

GRADY

Eating lobster goes against Meghan's personal ethics. She lives by a code. Listens to a lot of dude-bro podcasts.

CAITLIN

Why don't you like lobster?

MEGHAN

You tell her.

GRADY

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

VANESSA

Everyone knows that.

GRADY

I didn't know; neither did she. Sue us.

DARLA

Please do not. It's a sore spot lately.

GRADY

Anyway, when Meghan found out, it put a stop to lobster for all of us.

CAITLIN

Just lobster?

GRADY

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

MEGHAN

Isn't that sad?

GRADY

Mountain lions are monogamous. Foxes ...wolves...ducks. You don't eat ducks, either, do you Meghan?

MEGHAN

No. They're also more greasy than chicken... They are cuter, though.

CAITLIN

That factors in?

MEGHAN

I think so.

ANDREW

Prairie voles are monogamous.

VANESSA

Marmosets.

MEGHAN

I like your outfit, Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN

Do you?

MEGHAN

Oh, yeah. It's totally boss.

Feeling at home, Caitlin smiles.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Vanessa is in the stacks. Will approaches.

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

I have the best "legs" on the team?

WILL

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

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 MRS. HERZOG, FOOTBALLERS. They're smiling and carrying on. They lack the angst that her family is steeped in.

Will turns, waves. Vanessa waves back sarcastically, so as to counteract the almost off-putting kindness. Will's mom thinks Vanessa is waving to her, as do Footballers. So they all wave. Vanessa can't help but be charmed.

LATER Darla eyes a HANDSOME MAN. His PARTNER is obscured.

HANDSOME MAN

When I used to see a woman with a ring on her finger, I had to superimpose myself onto her to figure out if she was married or not. I had to imagine my body rotated 180 degrees to sit in the same position she was in. Then I could match up my left hand with her hand left to see if she was single.

Darla smiles, until his Partner appears. 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, covered in grease. Engine work.

He takes out a vial. Grady dips a key, sniffs coke. Soon, Andrew appears. He settles into the back seat.

GRADY

You working on the Art Show?

ANDREW

I need your help with the mock college essay for Ms. Fountain.

(beat)

What do you think about her?

GRADY
She's a thoughtful person.

ANDREW
She's ridiculously pretty.

GRADY
I'm not moved by a girl's appearance.

ANDREW
Oh, God. That's something chads say
when they date the prettiest girls
in the world. I think she likes you.

GRADY
... "Like" is a strong word.

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

ANDREW
If Diane were still alive, she'd
want you to move on with your life.

GRADY
Maybe. She'd also appreciate that I
can't just move on from her so easily.

ANDREW
... Why did you get into cocaine?

GRADY
It helped focus the writing.

ANDREW
When did you get into cocaine?

Concerned, Grady wipes his dirty hands with a rag.

ANDREW
In New York, I saw your boy Frankie.

GRADY
... What did he say?

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Meghan, in uniform, blends a shake for her softball game.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

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

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

In the dugout, Meghan and her TEAMMATES sing more 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 sees Lynda across the way. She sees 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's in line to buy a snack. Lynda saddles up to him.

LYNDA

Hey. Why didn't you come over to me?

ANDREW

What?

LYNDA

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

ANDREW

I didn't say hello cuz Rob Hildreth
 was right there. I don't wanna deal
 with that... I would be embarrassed
 to admit that I'm being bullied, but
 he's probably hurting inside... Also,
 if he messes with me and I ignore it,
 he won't get bored and move on to
 the kids who can't handle it.

EXT. SOFTBALL FIELD - DAY

After Meghan's game, Lynda underhands softballs to Andrew.

LYNDA

Why don't you just stand up to him?

ANDREW

There's a lot of after school special,
 propaganda bullshit about how all
 bullies are cowards. And if you just
 stand up to them, they'll respect you.

LYNDA
Yeah. Just walk into school, first period, and punch him in the mouth.

ANDREW
This isn't prison, this is high school. This is real life.

LYNDA
Girls want men, Andrew. Not boys.

ANDREW
I'm fifteen.

LYNDA
It's the principle behind it.
She underhands a softball. He hits it, but meekly.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady reads from a marble notebook. Enter Darla.

DARLA
We need to have a conversation.

GRADY
I'm editing.

DARLA
You need to write, cuz they will sue you. St. Martin's has hungry, in-house counsel. Their lawyers like desk duty cops who haven't seen action in years.

GRADY
They're sharks?

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

GRADY
... I always wanted to be a lawyer.

DARLA
You'll be blackballed. Even if you write the Great American Novel.

GRADY
What if I already did?

INT. FOYER - DAY

DOORBELL. Grady answers. It's Caitlin.

GRADY
Hi, can I help you?

Caitlin offers a megawatt smile.

CAITLIN
You know what your problem is? You
have a lot of unearned confidence.

GRADY
Is that my problem?

CAITLIN
It's one of them.

GRADY
Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit.

Caitlin brushes past him.

CAITLIN
Sorry, slugger. There's a new Sheriff
in town.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

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

ANDREW
"Girls want men, Andrew. Not boys."

GRADY
That's what she said?

ANDREW
That is what. She fucking said.

GRADY
But you're fifteen.

ANDREW
I know. I'm too old for this shit.

GRADY
When I got arrested, you know what
the cop who took my prints said?
(off Andrew)
"This too, shall pass."

ANDREW
I'm sure that was comforting.

GRADY
It wasn't. But in retrospect, it
was kinda profound.

ANDREW

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

GRADY

You told your mom about this?

ANDREW

I'm a Mama's boy; you know that.
(beat)
Besides. I have nothing to hide.

Andrew throws the ball against the wall. Grady fields 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 Lashaun Scantlebury. Lashaun 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 says 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 Lashaun 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, Darla closes her eyes.

ANDREW
You're an asshole.

DARLA
You're the asshole. Go to your room.

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.

DARLA
Grady, what was the point of that?
To make her uncomfortable?

GRADY
I'm sorry.

DARLA
You're not. And why is people's
pain fodder for your punchline?

Grady taps his pencil against the newspaper.

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

CAITLIN
(beat)
Warpipes. And bagpipes are Scottish.

GRADY
They're originally Irish.

CAITLIN
They're originally Persian... 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... Irish girls...are
always right.

Caitlin calls back to Lashaun.

CAITLIN
You went to rehab?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady and Grady exit the house, stand on the porch. Grady slaps his salt-and-pepper notebook against his hands.

CAITLIN
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
Not a date, no... God no... 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. Also... You seem like a good person for me to complain about things to.

GRADY
I'll ask Darla.

CAITLIN
It was her idea. She gave me the skinny on you when you were in the basement. Let me give you my number.

GRADY
I have it... I mean, I don't have it, I just don't need it. Darla's got it.

CAITLIN
Cool. Call or text when you're free.

GRADY
I'll call you... I'll call at three.

Caitlin sees he doesn't play games. Heads to her car. Turns.

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

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family eats dinner.

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

VANESSA
... 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 a daily thing.

DARLA
He's going... I read that 80% 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. Arrives at Doris Lessing's
Canopus in Argos: Archives. He pulls it from the shelf.

LATER Grady copies a passage. He soon produces a vial, heads
to the bathroom, and enters a stall. He slides the slab lock.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Andrew and Vanessa play ping-pong with Jocelyn.

ANDREW
17-5, yours.

VANESSA
17-4.

ANDREW
Fine, 17-4.

VANESSA
No, not "fine." I want you to
understand that it's 17-5.

They volley.

JOCELYN
What's going with you and Will?

VANESSA
William? He's not on my radar.

JOCELYN
He's so cute.

VANESSA
He's not my type.

ANDREW
He's really down-to-earth, Vanessa.

VANESSA
I don't like down-to-earth. I want
a boy with their head in the clouds.
With dreams... Come out with us.

ANDREW
What are you doing?

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

ANDREW
Does she?

VANESSA
Come. We never hang out anymore.

Under Grady's influence, the siblings are growing closer.

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.

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 shuts the door on Andrew.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - DAY

Darla's in bed. A hand towel on her face. Grady enters.

GRADY

Are you feeling okay? I can stay.

DARLA

Grady... I'm fat.

GRADY

Jesus Christ; you're not fat,
Darla. You weigh like a hundred
thirty-six pounds. Besides: 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.

GRADY

I don't want to go out tonight.

DARLA

You can't love yourself until you
let go of Diane.

GRADY

People have their demons. You edited
a book about mine. My parents didn't
give me what parents give their kids,
so to write a book? That's conquering
demons, and yes, letting go. Allow me
some self-pity over Diane, cuz over
the years, I've had demons on top of
demons... You and your stupid books.

DARLA

You and your stupid you... The two
of us are dinosaurs that have been
selected for extinction.

(MORE)

DARLA (cont'd)

So any urgency I convey is about money, not art. It may be sad, but let's not conflate the two, cuz that's what got us in trouble the 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 open the door a tiny bit. Peers through. Caitlin SLAMS it against him. Andrew recoils.

CAITLIN

Don't even front. Know your role.

She enters. Meghan appears.

CAITLIN

Hey, chica.

MEGHAN

Hey, girl friend.

ANDREW

Her name is Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN

Are you jealous that your sister and I are like, bros? While all you have is...Grady? Who may become my friend?

ANDREW

You got the claws sunk in. I see you.

CAITLIN

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

ANDREW

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

CAITLIN

A jackass is a donkey.

ANDREW

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

Caitlin leans into his ear.

CAITLIN

I can do whatever I want, pendejo.

Andrew holds on her, calls up the stairs.

ANDREW

Hey, Grady? Ms. Fountain is here!
 (beat)
 And don't keep her waiting! She
 totally changed her hair for you!

Mortified, Caitlin closes her eyes. Grady comes down.

GRADY

You showed up.

CAITLIN

Looks that way.

Caitlin sees a vase. 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.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

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

GRADY

Gingerbread men. Thank you. Are they
 laced with arsenic?

CAITLIN

Arsenic? Like *Flowers in the Attic*?
 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...not before telling everyone at
 the reception how their mom tried to
 kill them all. It's a really good
 ending. Really well-executed.

MEGHAN

You ruined it for her.

GRADY

She's got tons of unread books at home. Oh, I almost forgot. I made a special flower formula so they stay fresh.

CAITLIN

What's wrong with water?

Grady begins replacing the flowers.

GRADY

Water alone doesn't 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 send Caitlin over?

GRADY

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

That's right. We did a book together in the 90s. Doubleday sent us to Wisconsin to visit him in prison. Believe you me, I did not want to be in that shot.

CAITLIN

A book? Like what, a biography?

DARLA

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

(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

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

CAITLIN

You wanted him to...get some air?

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 leave, 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

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.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)
That said... I'm not sure if price is
the best indicator of quality.

DARLA
Welllll, it's gonna have to do.

CAITLIN
Okay, there's Providence. Urasawa.
There's an LA outpost of a French
restaurant. Lamb... Lamb Bass...

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

CAITLIN
... I'd have to ask, but that sounds
about right. There's also Melisse,
Mastro's, WP24 --

DARLA
Let's go there.

CAITLIN
Which one?

DARLA (waving a hand)
All of them.

CAITLIN
Okay. Well I look forward to that.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady irons Vanessa's shirt. She considers her involvement
in a potential love triangle involving Will and Heather.

VANESSA
You missed a crease. By the collar.

Annoyed, Grady looks at Vanessa. Then back at the shirt.

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

GRADY
What? Of course not. That's terrible.

VANESSA
You never stole someone'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

Shifting gears: Monopoly. What would
your favorite property be?

GRADY

St. James Place. It gets a little
love, but not nearly enough.

VANESSA

Are you taking about me?

GRADY

I'm talking about St. James Place. No
one gets excited about landing there.

VANESSA

I like 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

Baltic's cool?

GRADY

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

He finishes ironing her shirt, tosses it at her.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Vanessa runs the table vs. Jocelyn. Sees Will, Footballers.

TABLE

Andrew plays with Lynda. Sees his bully Hildreth, looming.

LYNDA

Your sister is really pretty.

ANDREW

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

LYNDA

I wish people wouldn't take me seriously as an academic powerhouse.

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

HILDRETH

What's up, Baby GAP? You here with Lynda? She checks me out sometimes.

ANDREW

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

HILDRETH

Is that supposed to be a back-handed compliment?

ANDREW

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

Hildreth SLAPS Andrew. Will notices, Vanessa doesn't.

ANDREW

Stop.

HILDRETH

Stop? You're such a bitch.

Andrew calmly plunges a dagger.

ANDREW

And you have bad breath. We all bond over it. Would you like to know your nickname? Trust me, you fucking don't. Never ask anyone. It'll break your spirit. The same you break mine.

Hildreth, humiliated. In the distance, a voice:

VOICE

Andrew. "A" for effort? But that shit was mad corny, yo.

Andrew smiles. Hildreth, however, pushes him into a table. More Kids notice. Will calmly heads over. A "Fight! Fight! Fight!" chant breaks out.

Just as Hildreth's about to hit Andrew, Will 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
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
Thanks for the heads up, you cowardly fucking lion.

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

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

Andrew calms down. Will offers him a cigarette.

ANDREW
You smoke?

WILL
I do a lot of things... If it means anything, I don't inhale.

ANDREW
Of course you don't. So why bother?

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

ANDREW
You're insecure?

WILL
... Isn't everyone?

ANDREW
Not guys who date Heather Church.

WILL
You know her?

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

WILL
We'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.

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

ANDREW
Why do you like her? She's pretty?
(beat)
Because you're insecure?

WILL
... Why do people call you Baby GAP?

ANDREW
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.

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 gender specific. 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. She'd roll in her grave if she knew a black man and a cis white male --

GRADY

What did you just call me?
(beat)
By the way, bell hooks is alive.

CAITLIN

She died in 2021. You can Google it.

GRADY

I don't. You're here now. It's fine.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

You don't look like a teacher.

CAITLIN

Things have changed since you were young... How do you know bell hooks?

GRADY

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

CAITLIN

Did you write that in your special book, or was that a freestyle made just for me? I'm sorry; where are my manners?

GRADY

I think you left them at the house.

CAITLIN

Ooh! I noticed you forgot my candy. It's fine. I was obviously kidding. And the flowers were...appreciated.

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. She examines it, then places it back next to the other Kiss.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

Not really.

CAITLIN

Fancy, fancy, fancy.

GRADY

Hm. 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.

Before heading in, Andrew stops at the door.

ANDREW

Thanks for taking me out, Vanessa.

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)

I had such a magical night. I hope we can do this again sometime.

WILL

Wait, that's your brother? I would have helped him with Hildreth before.

VANESSA

It's fine, William.

WILL

It's "Will"... What are you doing right now? You should come with us.

VANESSA

Where?

WILL

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

VANESSA

You lost me.

WILL

You need to see how the other half lives, Vanessa. It's like, fun. You met some of the guys; they're great.

(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 kids with the candy are there?

WILL

Six of us from our public school team came here to play prep in 9th 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

... How does the other half live?

WILL

Well.

VANESSA

Where does the other half live?

WILL

Watts.

VANESSA

I thought Watts wasn'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

I feel safe... Do you?

They hold eye contact.

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 real 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 adore him... But yeah, 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 does it to tweak him. She'll be like, "This is one of our top writers: Nick Sparks." He gets so upset. It really chaps his ass.

CAITLIN

... I lied to you. I got your book yesterday. I read it in one sitting.

GRADY

Thank you.

CAITLIN

I didn't say it was good.

GRADY

Want me to sign it for you?

CAITLIN

I returned it on the drive over.

GRADY

Okay.

CAITLIN

A line stood out. "The most inspired choice a man can make...is to wander the path to a woman's heart... Sadly, much time has passed since I have last been out for a walk."

GRADY

I made it myself.

CAITLIN

No wonder no one bought your book.

GRADY

The reviews were glowing.

CAITLIN

Gag me with a spoon.

GRADY

It's not Jennifer Egan, but it's better than the trash you peddle. Ethan Frome? Why? Silas Marner? How?

CAITLIN

... What would you write about me?

GRADY

I don't know you.

CAITLIN

Take a stab. First impressions.

GRADY

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

CAITLIN

Use your imagination.

GRADY

(beat)

"Ms. Fountain is the kinda girl who would kiss you under the bleachers... as long as you promise not to tell anyone about it."

They go up and down on the see-saw. With Caitlin's end on the ground, she quickly dismounts, sending Grady crashing down, grade school-style.

EXT. DUCK POND - NIGHT

Caitlin and Grady feed ducks.

CAITLIN

Is being a writer a dream come true?

GRADY

It's more like a nightmare I never want to wake up from. And teaching?

CAITLIN

Teaching is rough. You go in thinking you'll mold these young minds. But it ends up being a perfect complement to one of those flat, suburban marriages.

(beat)

I'm up for tenure. I either get it, or I start over at another school... I don't think I have the right stuff.

GRADY

I'm 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; let's not get carried away. It's not like I'm in a band or anything... You know, I don't think I'll be around long enough for me to consider sleeping with you.

CAITLIN

I wouldn't be intimate with someone unless it's something real. Boys I date don't qualify.

GRADY

Ms. Fountain?

(beat)

It's not a date.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Will, Vanessa, Andrew, Lynda. Walk to Sunday night practice. A tailgate of sorts. Happy football FAMILIES get together. Charcoal briquettes and red wine, double dutch and dominoes.

While PLAYERS practice, action occurs at the field goal posts. Folding chairs are set up behind the end zone. FAMILY MEMBERS sit in them. KICKERS attempt field goals. Family Members in the chairs try to catch the kicks.

Each time a kick misses, a hat full of money is passed to the next chair. When Lynda catches a kick, everyone celebrates.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Darla and Meghan shop. SINGLE DAD and SON walk towards them. Both pairs come to the 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, 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.

Darla sees condiments, plus packages of hot dogs.

DARLA

Talk about your sausage fest.

Dad smiles. Soon, he angles to see Darla's food.

DARLA

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

SINGLE DAD

Oh. I was just craning my neck to see if you had a wedding ring on... 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 it's a love-hate relationship. New York is like the

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)
dirty uncle that molests you, then
pays your way through college.

(off his smile)

Our family friend came up with that.
He grew up poor on Long Island, we
grew up well-off 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 a lateral transfer.

WILL

What's a lateral transfer?

VANESSA

It's a demotion... I can't kick
field goals, William.

WILL

The guys are all psyched about you.

VANESSA

Like who?

WILL

(avoids saying "Me.")

The game's 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 lose. It's what we do best.

Vanessa, unmoved.

WILL

If you get to kick, it's won't be a
game-winner we all remember. It's
gonna be in a 4th quarter blow-out.
But if you do kick a field goal, you
can check the box score tomorrow and
see your name in the paper.

VANESSA

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

WILL

I play for my teammates... And stop calling me "William." It's not cool.

He leaves her in the bleachers, walks to midfield.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Grady and Caitlin fish for fish. Sit close to one another.

CAITLIN

How'd you end up in rehab?

GRADY

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 dodgeball before lunch.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

That was subtle.

CAITLIN

Don't flatter yourself.

GRADY

Friends are supportive. I've only been in one serious relationship. What was your last boyfriend like? What did you like about him?

CAITLIN

You tell me. He was reckless and aimless. Not "aimless," per se, just not fulfilling his potential... What did you like about your girl?

GRADY

She was not "my" girl. She was "a" girl, but she was not "my" girl.

CAITLIN

But what did you like about her?

GRADY

I mean... It wasn't one thing.

CAITLIN

I can imagine.

GRADY

That's just it. You can't.

CAITLIN

Well. Now I feel like I have to know.

(beat)

Seriously, what'd you like about her?

GRADY

... How much time do you have?

CAITLIN

Sounds like she was a special girl.

GRADY

She was... Granted, it was New York;
they're running around everywhere.

(beat)

Can I ask you a serious question?

CAITLIN

Is there any other kind?

GRADY

What's the best part about your job
and the worst part about your job?

CAITLIN

Why do you want to know? You're a
writer, so you like small talk and
big talk.

GRADY

You're funny.

CAITLIN

I don't like funny people. At least
people who make it their whole
personality. But I am 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 legit funny once you get to
know me. When I say things, people
don't always laugh? But I'm witty.
I have references.

GRADY

How is a girl like you still single?

CAITLIN

Hm. I probably spend too much time
making voodoo dolls out of people
who ask "How is a girl like you
still single"?

GRADY

There are plenty of fish in the sea.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

Can I use that in my book?

She turns to him.

CAITLIN

Don't ask. Just go in for the kill.

A moment.

GRADY

I dunno if I'll ever get over the fact that you made me gingerbread men on our first date.

Caitlin gives Grady a kiss on the cheek.

CAITLIN

It's not a date.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Will drives Vanessa/Andrew/Lynda. Lights go down in L.A.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew writes. Grady enters.

GRADY

How's the essay coming along?

ANDREW

I'm not a writer.

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

Not sure. We didn't really do much. But I can't imagine having more fun than I did. Do you know what I mean?

ANDREW
I know the feeling.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - MORNING

Vanessa gets ready for school. Grady appears, upset.

GRADY
Where are my candles?

INT. N.A. BATHROOM - DAY

Grady sniffs lines. He exits the bathroom...

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Right into the middle of a meeting he's attending.

LATER It's Grady's turn to share with ATTENDEES.

GRADY
At Phoenix House, they gave us this definition of "character." They say, "Character is what you do...when no one is watching." It struck a chord. Because it's never about the drugs, it's about the terrible behavior that's part of the package when dealing with people like us. Like me.
(beat)
I don't know how to tell people the truth. I want to, but don't know how.

ADDICT 1
I find the best way to tell someone the truth...is to just write it down.

Grady smiles, albeit painfully.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Again, Andrew works on a portrait of Lynda. Vibrant colors.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Vanessa and Will collect water samples at a pond. The CLASS employs microscopes and eye droppers.

WILL
Do you believe in God?

VANESSA
Now that I'm older, I definitely do.

WILL
Assuming there's a Heaven and Hell, what's your idea of a personal Hell?

VANESSA

What's wrong with you?

WILL

It's called small talk.

VANESSA

Small talk is saying how you messed up your Math test cuz the Scantron had bars instead of bubbles. And how you couldn't change answers cuz your pencil had one of those hard, Chinese erasers that don't erase... After we got home last night, Andrew told our mom about kicking field goals. If --

WILL

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

VANESSA

He tells her everything... Are you and Heather going to the Art Show?

WILL

We're taking a break.

VANESSA

Since when?

WILL

... Heather's dad was a tight end in the NFL, so she acts like a princess 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

You know Meredith Sims? Heather didn't like that we hang out. 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? Did she 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

Vanessa does not care about that.

DARLA

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

GRADY

You're wrong.

DARLA

(beat)

When you Google me, what comes up?

GRADY

Book shit.

DARLA

When I 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 covers. You did great with mine.

DARLA

Andrew says you're giving girl advice?

GRADY

He wants to woo her with his writing.

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've.

DARLA

That's not cute.

GRADY

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

INT. HALL - DAY

Vanessa at her locker with Jocelyn. Andrew walks by, taps her, continues walking. Hildreth crosses his path. He knocks Andrew's hat off. As Andrew bends over to get it, Hildreth knocks the books out of his hands.

Hildreth to his locker. Vanessa follows, confronts.

VANESSA

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

HILDRETH

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 Long Island.

VANESSA

Fuck you.

HILDRETH

You're not better than anyone else. You're pretty...but...you look old.

Vanessa had been twirling a flute like a majorette weaponizing her baton. Vanessa BASHES Hildreth's face. He DROPS. Vanessa kneels down.

VANESSA

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

EXT. SHOE REPAIR STORE - DAY

A SUIT sits in a high chair while getting his shoes shined. Darla's in a chair as well, with Grady polishing her boots.

DARLA

We need to see pages.

GRADY

I'm editing; be patient... I'm also kinda sad. Diane's birthday is soon.

The Suit and Buffer finish and clear out.

DARLA

You can't keep mourning Diane. I lost my husband to divorce, and I'm going to lose the kids to college... I won't lose my grip on you.

GRADY

That's sweet. Your best work yet.

DARLA

It is sweet, you ungrateful fuck.

GRADY

Divorce and college are not death.

DARLA

They sure as hell feel like it.

GRADY

Your happiness isn't determined by college...or marriage.

DARLA

You don't know anything about either of those things.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

JOHN GEREMIA (60) on the phone. Vanessa sits opposite him.

INT. KITCHEN (INTERCUT) - DAY

As Grady washes dishes, he lies to Principal Geremia.

GRADY

Darla's away on business, so.
I'm looking after the kids.

GEREMIA

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

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Soon, Grady and Vanessa sit opposite Principal Geremia.

GRADY

No blood? She didn't break the skin?
(off Geremia)
So it's nothing. Girls will be girls.

Geremia reads from a sheet of paper.

GEREMIA

"Vanessa proceeded to strike Robert with the instrument, sending him to the floor. She then stepped on his neck, knelt down, and said, 'Listen up, and listen good. Because I'm only going to 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

So, there's a fair amount to unpack here. I think we all could have done without the last line. We'll discuss 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.

GEREMIA

As I understand it, the football team has two injured kickers. And Vanessa has a proven leg on the battlefield.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Darla works. Grady and Andrew enter.

DARLA

Let me see what you have.

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

DARLA
What's this?

GRADY
My writing.

Darla reads.

DARLA
I can hear Michiko now: "Grady Herman's sophomore and sophomoric effort reduces a fine follow-up in the annals of American letters... to that of a cut-rate hack with the prose style of a bright, yet 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
You're right. When I read it over, I knew I could do better, too.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew and Grady recap Darla's assessment.

ANDREW
Doesn't it bother you?

GRADY
It would bother me if I wrote it. You think I would write that shit? "Man is the hunter, woman is his game"? It was a quote from Tennyson.
(beat)
Do you know who Doris Lessing is?

ANDREW
No.

GRADY
Oh, she's a total fucking demon. I stole a passage from her at the library to get your mom off my ass.

ANDREW

Will she notice...? 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

MUSIC plays. Darla notices the boys through the window.

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. Less tongue is better than more.

(beat)

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 hottest thing you can ask a girl?

ANDREW

... Her opinion.

GRADY

Nice. I like "How was your day."

They dance in silence.

ANDREW

Why does Hildreth mess with me?

GRADY

They don't boo nobodies.

ANDREW

He isn't a jock stuffing me into lockers, he's a dirtbag. Things are going great with Lynda, so I should be on cloud nine.

GRADY

No one is on cloud nine. I don't ever expect to be happy. I just want to be.

ANDREW

... You should write a memoir.

GRADY

I've been told that.

(beat)

Do you want to know the truth?

ANDREW

Yeah. Tell me.

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 watches footage of "super balls" spilling from the bat of Graig Nettles in 1974. She puts two and two together.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa enters, grabs the candlesticks she stole from Grady.

She BANGS them against her dresser. They split in the middle. She does it again. Sees cocaine vials amidst the wreckage.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa has told Andrew about Grady's use. He studies a vial.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sun, sand, and surf. Vanessa, Will, and a chubby MEREDITH SIMS (16) relax on their boards. They float on the water.

LATER Will surfs alone. Vanessa and Meredith sit on towels.

MEREDITH

You know what I love about that kid?
He's just so polite. It's a lost art.

VANESSA

I could see maybe being his friend.

MEREDITH

It's a start.

VANESSA

For what?

MEREDITH

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

VANESSA

... Did they break up because of me?

MEREDITH

No. They broke up because of me.

VANESSA

I'm confused.

MEREDITH

Heather didn't get why Will wanted to spend time with a fat girl. If he hung out with you, she could enjoy the drama of having competition. But me being fat? It meant she had no right to get upset. And that ended up making her seriously upset.

VANESSA

You're not fat, Meredith.

Seagulls cry out.

MEREDITH

I know you mean well, but when fat girls have to hear pretty girls tell us that we're not fat... It makes us feel ugly.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Andrew sits with a copy of the literary journal *Granta*. He plagiarizes/adjusts a story. The byline: Grady Herman.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Caitlin smuggled in Grady. They furtively enter a space.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Grady looks around. Admires fine furniture.

GRADY

Is this heaven?

CAITLIN

No. It's the teachers' lounge.

LATER Caitlin picks from a box of Animal Crackers.

GRADY

Tell me something I don't know about you.

CAITLIN

There are 15 animals in the Animal Crackers cookie zoo. 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

Telling me about Animal Crackers is something I don't know...as opposed to something I don't know about you.

CAITLIN

I'm not too good at this game... You mentioned your dad not being around much. What's the story there?

GRADY

My father left when I was a kid. He got re-married, and I think he lives in Colorado now. My mom drinks a lot, and she sees me as a reminder of him. I guess that's why the drugs started. Dad jets, Mom struggles, Grady's sad. That's why Darla has looked after me.

CAITLIN

My dad was a dentist. He worked at home. My mom was a teacher, too, so she 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 my dad never mentioned them. And that's when she knew.

GRADY

Jesus. 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

I'm sorry. I wish I could teach,
and you could stay with Darla.

CAITLIN

It'd be a good trade for both teams.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Vanessa practices with the team. Spends time with Will.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady edits. Darla enters, references Principal Geremia.

DARLA

In loco parentis?

GRADY

It means "in place of a parent."

DARLA

... Parenting isn't a theory that's
20 years on the horizon. It's about
what's happening here and now. And
if you're not actively helping me,
then you're actively hindering me.
Is there anything going on with you?

GRADY

Meaning what?

DARLA

Meaning anything.

GRADY

Whenever you've questioned my honesty,
white lie or otherwise, I've never
been lying in any of those instances,
I've been telling the truth... When I
do lie, you don't have the faintest
idea. That's what makes me good at it.

He hands Darla more fake, plagiarized pages. She leaves.

GRADY

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

(beat)

The reason Vanessa doesn't want to
play football is cuz her dad won't
be there to see her play. Half the
sport is fathers and sons bonding.
That's why she didn't agree to play
until the principal forced her hand.

DARLA

She told you that?

GRADY

She doesn't have to. She's my friend, and we've both been there.

(beat)

Say something.

DARLA

I'm giving grace to your unprocessed emotions.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Coach walks with Vanessa and Will. Welcomes her aboard.

COACH

Vanessa, after tomorrow, it's vital that you realize my commitment to you extends beyond the field. If you ever need anything, and I find out that you didn't come to me or my wife for help? We will have heavy hearts.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

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

CAITLIN

Are you ready to meet your maker?

ANDREW

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

CAITLIN

I'm a role model, I'm fun...and I'm as clever as almost anyone you know.

ANDREW

You're right. Of course, in four months I'll be 16. And you'll be four months older.

CAITLIN (smiling)

Thank you, Andrew.

ANDREW

Four months older than however old you are now. Nowhere near...26?

CAITLIN (smiling)

Thank you, Andrew.

ANDREW

Nowhere near...36?

CAITLIN (still smiling)

I'm gonna count to three.

Laughs. Andrew heads to the front. Reads "his" college essay.

ANDREW

The expectations I have for love are not often met, as the majority who express their 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, and express slight-to-moderate interest in befriending me, are invariably matriculating at St. Ann's or Stuyvesant. Or, as is equally the case, have children who are. These mothers of high esteem and higher privilege, live with their families in old money brownstones and hand-me-down townhouses.

Caitlin grabs the *Granta* that Andrew plagiarized/altered. Finds "Freeport" by Grady Herman. A finger follows along.

ANDREW

I live in a three-bedroom walk-up with one parent and two sisters. Our home lies among theirs, in the worst building with the most tenacious roaches on the wealthiest half-mile in America. After school on weekday afternoons, the Village sidewalks are dotted with socialites and their loved ones. The women, domesticated artists and standard-issue wives of the Seven Sisters among them, follow their Percocet sponsored naps with late lunches at Babbo. 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, a mother and daughter wait on a sheet of brownies, as a nanny divides it with a plastic fork. Of the trio, one of them is gazing at me with a helpless, hopeless expression of both resignation and want. Slowly, a moment passes, and she turns away, aware that she's been smiling.

(beat)

I'm not going to college. I'm going back to New York... Who's with me?

A beat. Lynda smiles, raises her hand. Caitlin is furious.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Meghan and Grady study. Caitlin appears, out for blood.

GRADY

Can I talk to Ms. Fountain in private?

MEGHAN

Can it wait?

Grady pushes her head with his marble notebook.

MEGHAN

But it's Nancy Drew! You love Nancy!

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

Meghan.

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!

She leaves. Grady holds on Caitlin, raises a finger. Soon, a door SLAMS in the distance. It opens, then SLAMS again.

CAITLIN

Does Andrew know what he's done to himself? What he's done to me?

GRADY

What are you talking about?

CAITLIN

Did he think I wasn't gonna read everything you've written? I told you how I'm up for tenure. How I'm not layoff-proof. If he gets expelled, I take the blame.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady, hashing out the situation with Darla.

GRADY

I copied the last batch of pages from Doris Lessing. The 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 on the other side, Vanessa presses her ear to the door, while Meghan enlists the aide of a tall drinking glass.

GRADY

Granta's circulation is 50,000. And if you Google me or the story, nothing comes up. He didn't think she'd get a copy of it.

DARLA

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

Grady thinks.

DARLA

It would not have been alright you fucking dickhead!

Darla walks backwards towards the door. Once there (still facing Grady), she KICKS it with the bottom of her foot. On the other side, Vanessa and Meghan go TUMBLING down.

DARLA

Do you know how much trouble he's in?
(beat)
I'm in trouble for believing in you. What your mom never said about your writing, it doesn't matter. What Ms. Fountain says, that doesn't matter. Unfortunately, sales matter... What the critics say, it does not matter.

GRADY

It's the **only** thing that matters!

A silence descends.

DARLA

I purchased this house with my own money. Not with family money, and not with my ex-husband's money. I purchased this house with my money.

(beat)

Let this be the last time you dare raise your voice in it.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Andrew paints a final oil-on-canvas of Lynda.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady's been busted by Vanessa. She holds up a coke vial.

GRADY

If you told Andrew about the candles, I guess that's why he plagiarized. Like, why not? He gets it from me.

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.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Darla knows. She and Grady sit in silence.

DARLA

I'm surprised. I shouldn't be.

(beat)

Why do you lie to me?

GRADY

... Because I care about you.

INT. SCHOOL - MORNING

Caitlin transforms a chalky blackboard with a wet sponge.

INT. CAR - DAY

Darla drives Grady to school to address Andrew's plagiarism.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady, Darla sit before Geremia, Caitlin, ADMINISTRATOR.

GEREMIA

Ms. Fountain tells us that you're quite the writer. It seems Andrew agrees... Even if readers did not.

Darla places a hand over Grady's to calm him.

GRADY

This isn't Andrew's fault.

GEREMIA

I's lazy, laissez-faire parenting. The decline of the nuclear family.

Now, Grady places his hand over Darla's.

GEREMIA

Ms. Nathanson, we don't want Andrew to leave our school. Do you know why?

DARLA

Because you'll do anything you can to appease the board? And expelling my son is a strain on the endowment?

GRADY

Darla?

GEREMIA

That's not why.

DARLA

Academia needs its boot-licking, bean counters, too. I know the score.

GRADY

Quit while your behind, Darla. Sir? Here's the deal. You brought up my first book. It was sold as a story about drugs, but it was about family.

(beat)

I've have a new a manuscript that's the opposite. A story about family, but it's really about drugs. I've been keeping a secret while writing it, and Andrew's been keeping it, too. He found out from my friend in New York -- Frankie -- that I never used drugs cuz I lost my girlfriend. I use them because I've always used them. I met Darla as my mentor when I was 15, and I used them back then.

(MORE)

GRADY (cont'd)

(beat)

With Andrew and his sisters, since they were born, I've left stuff in their rooms, forgot to pick 'em up, everything. People in my life know. Everyone but Darla knows the truth.

GEREMIA

You've written about this.

CAITLIN

I don't believe him.

GRADY

I don't expect you to.

CAITLIN

Good, cuz I don't expect anything from you at all... No one does, no one ever has, and no one ever will. Maybe you were a shit kid from the start, and your mom could sense it.

(beat)

That was unfair of me... I'm sorry.

GRADY

Don't be sorry. I just hope...this can serve as...a teaching moment.

CAITLIN

Goddamnit! I knew he would say that!

Grady winks at an ELDERLY ADMIN. She blushes.

GEREMIA

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

CAITLIN

Not me, and definitely not him. Have you even met this guy? Do you even go to this school...? Respectfully: Is someone paying you off?

GEREMIA

Respectfully? In a word? No.

DARLA

That's not what I heard.

GEREMIA

Grady, your confession. A manuscript. If the Devil is in the details --

CAITLIN

The Devil is in the details!
I saw the Devil up close. I looked him in the eyes. They were gorgeous!

ADMIN

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

No. GRADY Yes! CAITLIN

GEREMIA

If the manuscript can serve as an
alibi to explain Andrew's actions,
show it to me.

DARLA

I'm sorry. I apologize for my
behavior. Partly. Now, if it's
okay with you, I wouldn't mind
seeing that manuscript first.

GRADY

Sir, I write slowly. 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, well, sordid behaviors.

CAITLIN

He would. He can't help himself.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Grady and Darla walk to the car. See Caitlin following.

DARLA

Make it quick.

Grady and Caitlin converge.

CAITLIN

When Andrew read it, I had to sit
quietly like a fool and listen to
your voice coming out of his mouth.
You lied to my face, and who cares,
but you did it through my favorite
kid. You know I struggle with this
job, yet you ruined the only joy I
get from it.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (cont'd)

(leans in)

I can probably kiss tenure goodbye.

(beat)

You live under this assumption that you're unique. But you're just like every other guy: You're very common. That's not a bad thing. You're just not special.

GRADY

I never said I was.

CAITLIN

You implied it. That's worse.

INT. CAR - DAY

Darla drives Grady.

DARLA

The Art Show was supposed to be cause for celebration. And the game.

GRADY

I thought you'd be yelling.

DARLA

I don't know what to do.

GRADY

I'll book a flight out.

DARLA

I have a lot of questions.

GRADY

It's all written down.

DARLA

I'm with Ms. Fountain. I don't believe you, either.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Art entries are set up. Uniformed Footballers walk through.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Kids clean. Darla gets ready. Phone RINGS. It's Single Dad.

DARLA

Hello...? Good, how are you?

I didn't expect you to call.

(beat)

I don't know; I just didn't.

Grady and the kids observe. She calmly swings her door SHUT.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

The game is underway. A Footballer gets TACKLED hard. Grady, Darla, Meghan watch from bleachers. Vanessa, Will ride pine.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lynda wanders art exhibits. From a distance, Andrew watches.

Lynda comes to Andrew's work, stops in her tracks. She sees colorful, vibrant paintings of herself.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lynda stops a STUDENT.

LYNDA

Have you seen Andrew?

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew walks. Lynda spots him in the distance, 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

I saw the paintings you made of me.

ANDREW

You did?

LYNDA

Why would you embarrass me like that?

ANDREW

... What? I thought you'd like them.

LYNDA

It's too much. My parents are here. They saw them... Everyone saw them.

ANDREW

I thought you liked me.

LYNDA

Why? 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...

(MORE)

ANDREW (cont'd)
 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

Vanessa and Will. The kind, overly friendly Coach sees her.

COACH
 The fuck are you looking at; we're
 moving the chains! Warm your ass up!

LATER Vanessa practices kicking. Offense nears the end zone.

A Footballer looks at a folding chair. He places the chair
 behind the end zone, just like in Watts. Andrew, now with
 his family, notices and heads over.

Seated in chairs, Footballer and Andrew await Vanessa's kick.
 The field goal unit assembles. Darla looks to Grady.

DARLA
 Is this it?

GRADY
 It's 4th and goal at the 16. It's
 a tough kick: 33 yards.

Vanessa's ready. The ball is snapped. She strides and KICKS.
 The ball is drilled through the uprights.

Andrew and Footballer hug. Facemasks BANG against Vanessa's.
 Grady and Darla CHEER. Will quietly watches from a distance.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew sits on the floor. Back against a locker, head in hand.
 Someone approaches. Andrew looks up...sees bully Rob Hildreth.

HILDRETH

Are you crying?

(beat)

I saw your stuff. You did good.

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

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa exits the girls' locker room in a professional, post-game outfit. Will is waiting in street clothes.

WILL

Hey, champ. How are you feeling?

VANESSA

My name in the newspaper, right?

WILL

Do you need me to carry anything?

VANESSA

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

WILL

What were you expecting, sparks?

VANESSA

Kind of, yeah.

WILL

... I have a thing for you, okay? I think you're a tough, brilliant girl, and I'm only hard on you cuz don't think you have any idea how hard normal girls have it.

VANESSA

(beat)

Why are you dressed like a farmer? Everyone's wearing post-game ties and jackets... 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

Do you feel stupid now?

VANESSA

Yes.

WILL

Don't feel stupid... Let your guard down and people will surprise you. People admire you for the way you look, when you're a model for what people should be like on the inside. You're the best... I'm just being honest; you're incredible... But you have to let your guard down a little.

VANESSA

... I'm only interested in guys who are cold and dismissive. I'm sorry, but that's who I am, Will. Love it or leave it.

A beat. He kisses her. For the first time, Vanessa smiles.

WILL

I like it when you call me William.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Grady packs his things.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - MORNING

Andrew holds a deer skull.

GRADY

When I left Phoenix House, I had to walk along these train tracks to get to the Montauk station. There were deer bones along the tracks, so...

(beat)

I 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... You keep it.

GRADY
It's not real silver. I'm sorry.

VANESSA
I know. I believe you this time.

She stares at it for a while, then pins it on his pocket.

INT. MEGHAN'S ROOM - MORNING

Meghan holds one of Diane's t-shirts. Puts it to her face.

MEGHAN
This was Diane's?

GRADY
It was her favorite shirt.

MEGHAN
It still smells like her.
(beat)
Does it ever go away?

GRADY
The scent?

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

GRADY
No.

They sit.

GRADY
How are you doing out here?

MEGHAN
I like it. I miss my dad, though.

GRADY
I miss mine, too.

INT. CAR - DAY

Darla and Grady drive to the airport.

DARLA
I want to read the manuscript.

GRADY
You can read it when I'm gone.

DARLA
Print me a copy.

GRADY
... There's nothing to print.

DARLA
I knew it.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin pushes papers. Andrew appears, approaches.

ANDREW
I just want to apologize again.

CAITLIN
I don't wanna hear it.

A moment. Then, Andrew leans down, kisses her on the cheek. Caitlin freezes, wide-eyed. After a beat, she looks at him.

ANDREW
Grady said that when he gets some money together, he'd give me \$500 if I gave you a kiss on the cheek for him. I said I'd 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
Any advice?

GRADY
Make sure he's good to you.

DARLA
Obviously.

GRADY
Darla.
(beat)
Make sure he's good to you.

DARLA
I will. What else?

GRADY
Gingerbread men. Can't go wrong.

DARLA
You're my oldest baby. You know that,
right...? I love you, Grady.

GRADY
I love you, too.

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

INT. CAR - DAY

Darla arrives home. Andrew approaches her window.

ANDREW
How was it?

DARLA
Things tend to work out in life.

She extends a marble notebook, assuming it's his.

ANDREW
That's not mine.

He heads inside. On the passenger seat, Darla sees several marble notebooks. She then picks one up, opens it. Grady's writing covers page one. Darla flips pages. They're filled from top to bottom. She picks up another notebook and sees: More writing. Darla closes the notebook, looks at the cover. *The Amazing Adventures of the Monogamous Duck*. Darla smiles, and we flash back to four scenes featuring marble notebooks. Grady was always finished, just editing like he said he was.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

About to board, Grady sees a wall of phones. GREETER smiles.

GREETER
Come see us again.

GRADY
I will.

Soon, Grady stops boarding. He takes out his phone, dials.

INT. APARTMENT (INTERCUT) - DAY

Caitlin answers her phone.

CAITLIN
What do you want?

GRADY
I'm sorry, I just...

CAITLIN

What?

(beat)

What?

GRADY

... I don't know your name.

CAITLIN

I don't understand.

GRADY

I don't know your name... At first it was cute that I called you Ms. Fountain. But then I realized that I never asked you your name.

CAITLIN

... It's Caitlin.

GRADY

Caitlin Fountain. 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 stands near the garden he and Grady walked in.

Previously, an Alto sang, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

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.

A van pulls up. Grady steps out.

INT. PHOENIX HOUSE - DAY

Residents, packed in the meeting room. Grady observes.

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 join the Soprano.

RESIDENTS

Through many dangers, toils and
snares / I have already come / 'Tis
grace hath brought me safe thus far /
(MORE)

RESIDENTS (cont'd)
And grace will lead me home.

Male Residents join the women. A hopeful Grady smiles.

RESIDENTS
Yes when this flesh and heart shall
fail / And mortal life shall cease /
I shall possess within the veil /
A life of joy and peace.

THE END