

A.C.O.D.

by

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April 30, 2008

FADE IN:

On super grainy 8mm footage. You've seen it a million times. This particular home movie would be called "Perfect Day at the Lake House." It features kids fishing, a barbecue on a lawn, tetherball, swimming with water wings, and finally --

A 7TH BIRTHDAY PARTY. A kid right about to blow out candles on his cake. But we miss it. Because our camera has picked up some other action in the background. It's a little fuzzy, but it appears two adults are SCREAMING at each other, gesticulating wildly. The camera gingerly pans back to the birthday boy. His name is CARTER.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Children of divorce experience
certain moments they never forget...

Our scene comes to life-- full technicolor, full sound-- as MOM and DAD go at it, setting be damned.

MOM
You motherfucking prick.

DAD
That's a nice fat fucking filthy
mouth you've got--

MOM
FUCK YOU!

Mom storms into the house. Dad looks back to the stunned table of children.

DAD
Blow out the Goddamn candles.

CLOSE ON CARTER. He just changed his wish.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Like the moment you figure out your
parents might not be right for each
other.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY - 1986

Court is in session. A 9-YEAR-OLD Carter is on the stand.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Like the first time you have to
make an adult decision.

LAWYER

Carter. It's up to you, son. Who do you want to live with?

On Carter's eyes darting back and forth. This sucks.

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT - 1988

Mom is helping a 12-YEAR-OLD CARTER pack his weekend bag.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Like being a foot soldier-- a spy-- a weapon-- in an all-out war.

CARTER

Do I have to?

MOM

I'm not asking you to steal his checkbook. A bank statement is fine.

(off his look)

Do you want to go to camp this summer or not?!?

INT. CARTER'S ROOM - DAD'S HOUSE - 1989

Carter in an impressive bedroom.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Like watching your parents use everything at their disposal to win your affection.

Dad walks in with an enormous, wrapped present.

DAD

Six months 'til Christmas!

(hands it over)

Open it. It's the greatest.

INT. CARTER'S ROOM - MOM'S HOUSE - 1989

In a less impressive bedroom, Carter assembles a Lego skyscraper. Mom sits on the bed, eyeing it.

MOM

I hate to be the one to tell you... but your father is a homosexual.

CUT TO:

Carter's dad making out with a STRANGE WOMAN. We are...

EXT. DAD'S BACKYARD - DAY

A barbecue. Carter and Trey barely know anyone there. Dad approaches with a shy 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL, all braces.

DAD

Boys, this is Chloe. She's going to be your sister from now on.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Having a parent marry for the second time...

INT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY - 1990

Rings are being exchanged. Carter can't watch. He looks away, locks eyes with Chloe. She looks just as miserable.

WOMAN (V.O.)

And in some instances...

INT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY - 1997

Rings are being exchanged. Again.

WOMAN (V.O.)

... a third.

Carter, a college student, looks on disinterested as his dad marries a woman that doesn't look that much older than he is.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT - 1997

WOMAN (V.O.)

Like the eternal struggle over traditional family events...

Christmas lights twinkle in the background. A CUTE GIRL in a college sweatshirt is curled up on the bed highlighting lecture notes. Carter is bent over his desk on the phone.

CARTER

I'm going to Alisa's for Thanksgiving.

MOM (O.S.)

It's my year.

CARTER

Right, I know, but--

MOM (O.S.)

But what? It's MY year. Why didn't you go to Alisa's last year?

CARTER

Um. I didn't know her.

MOM

Is this your father's way of
ruining my holiday?

Carter lowers his head. It's just not worth it.

CARTER

Can I bring Alisa?

MOM

(like nothing happened)
Love to have her!

He hangs up and heads for the bed. But we stay on the desk. On his cork board is the usual assemblage of college student ephemera. PUSH IN on a mess of pictures that are clearly separated into two sides: MOM'S and DAD'S.

WOMAN (V.O.)

*All of this has a profound effect
on the child of divorce as they
move into adulthood.*

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. ALLEY WAY - NIGHT

Two figures, silhouetted in the darkness, move close to each other. A stolen moment.

CARTER

Will you marry me?

Carter, now 33, looks down at his intended...

MIGUEL

Como?

MIGUEL, 46, is a five-foot-two Mexican dude in a doo-rag and dishwasher's uniform.

CARTER

Marry me. I will meet you at city
hall first thing in the morning.
Make this thing legal.
(off Miguel's terror)
Then fill out the paperwork.

MIGUEL

Pero, mi tio Jorge--

CARTER

Tio Jorge had a shitty lawyer. You want a green card? Your options are marry me or go through this process. I promise you-- the paperwork is more pleasant. I'm a selfish lover.

A metal door BLASTS OPEN, light and noise spill into the alley. MARGO, 29, pokes her head out.

MARGO

Carter? Striped jacket.

He follows her back into--

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Middle of the dinner rush. Bustling. Noisy. The food can't go out fast enough. A PASTRY CHEF intercepts Carter on his way through:

PASTRY CHEF

Comp for 46.

She hands him two plates. Carter barely breaks stride and he busts through the double doors into--

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

An absurdly crowded dining room. Carter spins to a nearby table and expertly lays the plates.

CARTER

These are on the house.

They thank him and he's on the move again, reaching the front. It's mobbed, people trying to get their names on the list. The place is total chaos, but Carter is immune to it, possibly even thriving in it.

He spots Mr. STRIPED JACKET. He looks mad. His WIFE is a full-step behind him, already embarrassed.

CARTER (cont'd)

Can I help you?

STRIPED JACKET

That table has finished their dessert, they've paid their bill, and they've been SITTING THERE for a half-hour!

CARTER

That's not your table. That is.

He points to a table just getting their menus. The man is about to erupt. Then Carter smiles. He's kidding.

GENTLEMAN

I get what you're trying to do here. You got a hot spot, make people wait. Let me tell you-- it's not working. You've got forty people crammed in here like veal--

CARTER

I am sorry for the wait, Sir. This is a neighborhood restaurant, and I don't want my neighbors to have to call two weeks in advance to get a table...

Carter catches a glimpse of a smiling BRUNETTE by the door. She flashes a half-wave. He looks back to the man...

CARTER (cont'd)

I'd be happy to call down the street and get you a table at Biscardi's. And I say this with no disrespect whatsoever-- their veal is fantastic.

The wife cracks a tiny smile. Then Carter slips past them to the brunette, SOPHIE. Sometimes it's just obvious there's a history.

CARTER (cont'd)

Hey, Sophie.

SOPHIE

I heard this was your place. I never knew you wanted a restaurant.

CARTER

I never mentioned it?

Awkward beat. She is with a STRAPPING OUTDOORS TYPE.

SOPHIE

This is Jerry.

Carter shakes his hand. Still awkward.

SOPHIE (cont'd)
(to Jerry)
Three years, he never said he
wanted a restaurant.

MARGO
Carter? Phone.

Carter excuses himself, heads for the hostess stand where
Margo hands him the cordless phone.

CARTER
Thanks for the save.

MARGO
No. It's really the phone. Your
brother.

CARTER
(into phone)
Hey Trey.
(beat)
No I'm not sitting down.
Because there is no place to sit
down. You're just going to have to
tell me while I stand.

His eyes go wide. He stops. Sits.

CARTER (cont'd)
No way.

CUT TO:

INT. DOORWAY - TREY'S APARTMENT (SORT OF) - NIGHT

The door opens on a beaming young Japanese-American girl--
KIEKO, 22. She flashes a smile and her HAND. Five slender
fingers and one SPARKLING ENGAGEMENT RING.

CARTER
NO WAY.

He hugs her, pushes into the apartment. It's actually a garage--
Carter's garage-- that his brother TREY (25) lives in.

TREY
You mean "congratulations?"

Trey is a looser, cooler version of Carter. He got the soft
edges in the family. Her cell phone RINGS.

KIEKO
It hasn't stopped!

She runs outside to talk on the phone. Throughout the rest of the scene we periodically hear SQUEALS and SCREAMS. Trey smiles, looks to his brother.

TREY
Wanna get high?

CARTER
Married??

TREY
I know.

CARTER
What's it been? Four months?

TREY
Something like that.

CARTER
That's a huge decision.

TREY
I guess.

CARTER
What about that whole thing... that she doesn't like to...

TREY
She's over it.

CARTER
And you really think you're ready for this? You kind of live in my garage. And don't have a check book.

TREY
(a beat, simply)
It just feels right.

Carter has an opinion about everything. But this isn't the time. Instead, he softens, gives his brother a hug.

CARTER
Congratulations.

TREY
Thanks. Will you talk to mom and dad?

CARTER

About what?

TREY

Coming to our wedding.

CARTER

You're not having a wedding.

Kieko SHRIEKS excitedly from the outside.

TREY

She really wants the whole she-bang. You know, a lot of women are into that stuff.

CARTER

Talk her out of it. Isn't there some kind of traditional Japanese thing you can do?

TREY

She's from Palo Alto.

CARTER

I know. But in the old country?

TREY

She's third generation.

CARTER

Trey.

TREY

C'mon. Mom and Dad listen to you.

CARTER

Because I patronize them.

TREY

I know! You're so good at it.

Carter sighs.

CARTER

Look, things are good. They're calm. You don't want to... poke a rattlesnake when it's sleeping or hibernating... or whatever they do.

TREY

It's my wedding. It doesn't get bigger than this.

(MORE)

TREY (cont'd)
They can put their differences
aside for a few hours. Can't they?

There's a reason these people haven't spoken in 20 years. But what is Carter going to say?

TREY (cont'd)
Thank you. Best man?

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Golden Gate Park glows in the late afternoon light. We hear the nonsensical blabber of a 4-year-old.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM - GOLDEN GATE PARK - DAY

Actually, it's two four-year-olds. Twins. Fraternal. TYLER and EMILY. Just potty-trained. Both in stalls.

CARTER
How we doing?

Emily comes out of the stall, fiddling with her pants.

CARTER (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Flush?

She turns and goes back in.

TYLER (O.S.)
I peed on the floor.

CARTER
That's okay. So did I.

Another FLUSH. Emily hurries to the sink. She can't reach. Carter helps her up. A FLUSH and Tyler joins them.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - GOLDEN GATE PARK - DAY

Carter and the kids walk hand and hand, past the jungle gym toward the parking lot, where a LEXUS pulls up. The kids let go of Carter and break for the car.

TYLER
Daddy!

HUGH, Carter's dad, climbs out of the driver's side and scoops up his kids. It takes some effort. He's 63.

CARTER
How was Rancho Wherever-the-Hell
You-Were?

HUGH
Great.
(unsure)
I got a manicure.

The passenger's side door opens and SONDRA, 41, climbs out. Hugh's third wife. A model of conspicuous consumption. Coiffed and taut and entitled. She's fighting back the very concept of aging itself. She flashes a perfunctory smile at Carter as she straps the kids into their car seats.

SONDRA
How were they?

CARTER
Good. They spent some time in an
ethnically diverse sandbox.

Sondra immediately looks to brush sand off the kids.

HUGH
Carter! Got you something.

He reaches into the car, tosses him a baseball hat. It says "Rancho La Puerta Spa" and it is profoundly ugly.

HUGH (cont'd)
They're the greatest hats.

CARTER
Okay.

HUGH
Put it on.

CARTER
I will.

HUGH
Put it on now.

Carter begrudgingly puts it on.

CARTER
Hey Dad, you talk to Trey?

HUGH
Yes! Great news! How about that
kid? Nice girl, too. Wish I could
pronounce her fucking last name.

CARTER

What do you think about them having
a wedding?

HUGH

You kidding? I can't wait.

CARTER

Really?

HUGH

Yeah! I told him whatever he
wants. Forget about the bride's
family pays for this or that -- I
might only do this once.

That's a dig at Carter. He absorbs it. Moves on.

CARTER

What about Mom?

HUGH

She can have her own wedding.

CARTER

Right. But we're probably not going
to have two weddings--

HUGH

Why not? I'll throw a first-class
party. And your mother and Captain
Fuckface can rent out an Arby's in
Fresno. They can charge admission
to cover the cost.

Pretty much what Carter expected. He looks away,
contemplating his next move.

MELISSA (O.S.)

I'm thrilled!!

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Carter sits at the kitchen table opposite his mom, MELISSA, late 50s. She skipped the "letting go" portion of anger management. GARY, 64, is Carter's pitch-perfect step-dad; mellow, supportive, manages Melissa with expertise. He has his toolbox out.

MELISSA

It's just one of those things a
parent dreams of. Their child's
wedding. Thank God one of my kids
has some balls.

Carter absorbs it. Again. Tries a different tack with her.

CARTER

It's too bad we won't be able to go to Trey's wedding. They're eloping.

MELISSA

Absolutely NOT. They are not eloping.

CARTER

You and dad aren't going to show up to the same party. Trey doesn't have a choice.

MELISSA

Then I'll go with them.

CARTER

Mom...

MELISSA

They'll want some family there. Especially if it's someplace beautiful, but impersonal. Like an island.

CARTER

If you go, it's not an elopement.

GARY

It's a destination wedding.

CARTER

Thank you, Gary. Not to mention, then dad has to go, and Sondra--

MELISSA

The Countessa is not coming to Barbados!

GARY

Carter?? Help me out a second?

Gary is tightening a hinge on a cabinet. Carter kneels down.

GARY (cont'd)

(a whisper)

Just hold this. She usually loses her train of thought in fifteen seconds.

Carter grins. Appreciates the save. Loves Gary.

GARY (cont'd)
The 14th. New moon. Halibut
fishing is tremendous the day of
the new moon. You in?

CARTER
Sure.

MELISSA
Fine. I'll go. I'll go to a wedding
with your father.

CARTER
You will?

MELISSA
Yes. If he pays me the \$783,000 he
owes me for my share of the lake
house.

(here she goes...)
Larry Ellis was waterskiing last
weekend. He said he saw a light on
in the house. Is your father using
it? He's not allowed to use it--

CARTER
He hasn't been there in 20 years--

MELISSA
Then he's renting it. Anything he
earns on that house, I get half.
Paragraph 4A, page 19 of the
settlement agreement.

(for the millionth time)
You know he refuses to sell that
house purely out of spite? Your
father is stealing from me. Doesn't
that bother you? Please tell me
that bothers you and you are not
your father's son. I stayed home
and raised you kids while he was
out there earning his "fuck you"
money. Carter? Are you listening?

He is not. He's already kicking himself for doing this.

CUT TO:

WHAM!! A round-house KICK hits a dummy! We are--

INT. DOJO - NIGHT

Welcome to Hop-Ki-Do, a Korean martial art. Twelve students
are in a ring, kicking ass.

This is their black-belt presentation. CARTER and his step-sister CHLOE, now 32, are in the audience, but not watching.

CARTER

We dropped a nuclear bomb on Japan.

CHLOE

Two.

CARTER

Right. And now we, like, trade with them. But my parents can't fake smile their way through one night?

(appalled)

I mean, please. Look at them.

Carter eyes a 50-ish COUPLE seated in the first row, holding hands, dreamily.

CARTER (cont'd)

Who holds hands at a martial arts presentation?

CHLOE

It's an act.

Beat.

CARTER

Oh. You know who came into the restaurant? Sophie Knight.

CHLOE

No way. I thought she was one of the "ones" for a while.

CARTER

Too smart.

CHLOE

Did you cheat on her?

CARTER

I don't cheat. I've never cheated on a single girlfriend--

CHLOE

Sorry. I forgot. You emotionally cheat. You check out and start looking around. You're an emotional cheater.

An AUDIBLE GRUNT comes from the ring as someone goes down. The audience erupts in applause. Carter and Chloe clap along. Then sit. That's when Carter notices...

CARTER
Are you okay?

A bit of blood has soaked through Chloe's shirt near her shoulder.

CHLOE
Oh. Yeah. I'm having the tattoo removed.

CARTER
That was fast.

CHLOE
I really like Marcus. I get that he's not into a tattoo that says--

CARTER
Todd?

CHLOE
They use a laser.

CARTER
There's other ways to show you care, you know.

CHLOE
Like sitting through this?

He looks back to the ring-- WHACK!-- where LAUREN, 29, is swinging a bo-stick with precision. She is petite, severely attractive and very good at whatever the hell she's doing in there. She sneaks a look at Carter. He gives her a thumbs up, though he has watched none of her performance.

EXT. DOJO - LATER

Lauren emerges from the locker room. Carter is there to give her a big hug and kiss. Chloe as well.

CARTER
You were great. That last move with the broom handle and the tackling dummy. That's going to come in handy.

LAUREN
Could kick your ass.

MR. STRINGER (O.S.)
There's my peaches and cream!

MR. AND MRS. STRINGER approach. Lauren's parents. They are the "perfect" couple we saw sitting in the audience. They hug Lauren, proud of her. They're proud of everything she does. Carter and Chloe exchange a glance.

CARTER
Hey Mr. and Mrs. Stringer! How's Fantasyland?

MR. STRINGER
Terrific. We just had her painted.
She'll be in the water next week.
Hey, Carter. That's some news about your brother.

MRS. STRINGER
Oh, yes. It's wonderful news.

Beat. Lauren looks to Carter.

CARTER
Yeah... it is. It's great.

LAUREN
What's great?

CARTER
I didn't tell you? Trey got engaged.

Another beat. Awkward. Volumes about their relationship have just been spoken. Lauren looks to Chloe.

CHLOE
He just told me.

MRS. STRINGER
I only heard because Kieko and I are Facebook friends.

ON CARTER. Everyone looking at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - DOJO - MINUTES LATER

Carter and Lauren are walking toward the car...

LAUREN

They've been together, what, four months?

CARTER

Something like that.

LAUREN

How long have we been together?

CARTER

Apples and oranges.

LAUREN

FOUR YEARS, Carter. And I don't even have a key to your apartment. I've been very patient, but seriously -- this is the last straw. How long do you expect me to wait around?!?

Crickets. Carter searches for something to say... her stare boring a hole in him. Until she starts to LAUGH. Her face untwists, and she laughs even harder.

CARTER

Jesus...

LAUREN

C'mon. If I cared about getting married, would I be with you?

Now Carter laughs, though that was another dig. Lauren is incredibly cool, however. He hugs her, kisses her.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DRIVING

Carter driving, Lauren in the passenger seat. She's playing with the radio, trying to find the right song.

CARTER

You know how sometimes you go to a banquet hall, or a hotel, and there's like, multiple weddings going on. I wonder if there's a way to split Trey's wedding into two. The Lincoln Room and the Washington Room. But maybe... don't tell anybody. Could that work?

She gives him an "Umm, no" look.

LAUREN

It's Trey's wedding. Maybe Trey
should plan it.

CARTER

Are you kidding? My mom and dad
will DESTROY him. He doesn't know
how to handle them. By the time he
gets to the aisle there'll be
people crying...but it won't be
from joy, I guarantee you that.

(wracking his brain)

I can figure something out.

LAUREN

I just don't know why it has to be
you.

CARTER

Because. That's the way it is.
The way it worked out. Somebody
had to take the reins, make the
most out of a bad situation. For
20 years, I have taken everyone's
shitty lemons and made lemonade.
That's my lot. Lemonade maker.
Not some roadside stand and a
handpainted sign. I am a lemonade
conglomerate. I am Countrytime.

Lauren studies him.

LAUREN

Have you ever talked to anyone?

CARTER

Like who?

LAUREN

Like a professional. A therapist...
like in college, when you were
doing too many drugs? Or stalking
an ex?

(beat)

Just me?

CARTER

I went a few times as a kid.

LAUREN

It wasn't enough. No offense. I
love you. But you deal with your
parents and step-parents and half-
siblings and...

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)
quarter-cousins more than any
reasonable person should have to.

CARTER
Yeah, and I've got them all under
control.

He said that with a hint of doubt. She looks at him.

LAUREN
You're the boss.
(a smile)
"Countrytime."

He can't help but smile too. They start to laugh.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - THE NEXT DAY

Miguel and Carter are at a table filling out paperwork.

CARTER
Don't forget that part about your
two sisters who are already
naturalized--

The door opens and Sondra enters. Carter quickly looks to
Miguel.

CARTER (cont'd)
(whisper)
Gimme your hat.

MIGUEL
What?

We see Miguel is wearing the hat Hugh gave Carter earlier.

MIGUEL (cont'd)
You said it was the greatest hat.

CARTER
Just take it off.

He hands him the hat back. Carter drops it under the table,
then heads to the front.

CARTER (cont'd)
Hey, Sondra. What brings you...

SONDRA
Did you hear Rite Aid is moving
into the neighborhood?

CARTER
No. Where?

SONDRA
Maybe here.

Carter's eyes widen. She sits. So he does.

CARTER
But we have a deal. A good one.

SONDRA
You have a good deal.

CARTER
Right. But... you don't need the
money.

SONDRA
I'm a businesswoman. I own the
building. I have to at least listen
to offers.

Carter is at her mercy.

CARTER
Sondra, this place is everything to
me. These people...they're my
family. You can't just...

SONDRA
I want you to hang my work.

CARTER
Your what?

SONDRA
My paintings.

CARTER
You paint?

SONDRA
I've been taking classes at the
Institute. My instructor says I'm
very good.

CARTER
We don't really have art on the
walls.

SONDRA
I've noticed.

CARTER

Yeah, I'm not going to do that.
Sorry, Sondra.

SONDRA

Rite Aid is offering \$25,000 a
month. Remind me what you pay me?

CARTER

(meek)

Nine-hundred.

(he has no choice)

One painting.

SONDRA

Seven.

A beat.

CARTER

Of the smaller pieces.

And we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - DAY

Carter sits, staring up at a piece of Sondra's "art." It's either a nude or a bowl of fruit. There's no way to tell.

Carter is irritated. And feeling very much not in control. He'd never admit it, but maybe Lauren was right.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Carter approaches a doorbell. Thinks to ring it, then thinks better of it, leaves. In seconds, he's back. Fuck it. He RINGS. Adjusts his collar, matts his hair as--

The door opens on DR. LORRAINE JUDITH, late-50's, California casual. Long skirt, big jewelry, weary eyes. This is a woman who had her time and place and it probably isn't right now.

DR. JUDITH

Omigod. Carter.

CARTER

Hi. Hey.

DR. JUDITH

Amazing! It's been so long. Come in, come in...

INT. DR. JUDITH'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Sprawling but cluttered. Carter is anxious, not sure what he's doing there.

DR. JUDITH

I was so happy to get your phone call. I've always wondered what became of you. You look fantastic!

CARTER

I am. I'm good.

She moves a pile of paperwork to make room for Carter to sit.

DR. JUDITH

Sorry about the mess. I've been busy. Lecturing. Here and there. "The modern family dynamic." Just got back from Northwestern. Louisiana. State.

(beat)

It's a junior college.

(beat)

Tell me about you! What do you do?

CARTER

Um... I have a restaurant.
"Whitegrass." In--

DR. JUDITH

--Bernal Heights. I've eaten there!

CARTER

Yeah?

DR. JUDITH

Didn't love it. But I would try it again.

(beat)

How is your mom? I always liked her. Very assertive woman. Is she still married to...?

CARTER

Gary. Yup. Good man.

DR. JUDITH

And your dad had a new wife.
Something Nordic?

CARTER

Elka?

DR. JUDITH
Elka!

CARTER
She's a goner.

DR. JUDITH
What happened to Elka?

CARTER
She aged. My dad's on wife #3.
Sondra. Not my cup of... anything.
No beverage that I would consume.

DR. JUDITH
So what brings you here, Carter?

Carter shuffles, his hands deep in his jacket pockets.

CARTER
Well... I thought I should check in.

DR. JUDITH
Check in?

CARTER
Yeah.

DR. JUDITH
The last time I saw you, you were
ten.

CARTER
Right. But nothing's changed.
With my parents, I mean. My
brother's getting married and
somehow I'm right back in the
middle of it all and--

DR. JUDITH
(catching his drift)
I can absolutely recommend a top-
notch therapist--

CARTER
Oh. No. I thought... you.

DR. JUDITH
Me?

CARTER
You know all the sordid details.
To have to explain it all to
someone new...

DR. JUDITH

Right. But, I'm not a therapist.
I haven't practiced in 35 years.

A blank stare.

CARTER

But you were... my... therapist.

DR. JUDITH

No. Of course not.
(a LAUGH... then realizes)
You didn't know that?

CARTER

No.

DR. JUDITH

You were part of a study. State-funded. On the effects of divorce on children. The court referred me to your mother because of the nature of your parents divorce. I wrote a book about it.

CARTER

A book?

DR. JUDITH

Yes! It was on *The New York Times* Best Seller list. For 38 weeks.

He glares at her. Shocked. Speechless.

CARTER

Wow.

(a long beat)
What's the name of that book again?

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Carter rushes through the aisles, scans the shelves. Hoping it's not there... hoping... shit! There it is...

"Children of Divorce." He grabs a book off the shelf. On its cover, **"The New York Times Best Seller... for 38 weeks!!"**

CARTER (CONT'D)

You've GOT to be kidding me.

CUT TO:

SLAP! The book lands on a desk. We are...

INT. DESTINATION MOON TRAVEL - DAY

An eco-travel agency in the Marina where Carter's mom works. He is standing in front of her, hands on hips.

MELISSA

I never told you?

CARTER

Mom.

MELISSA

Oh, relax. She didn't use your real name. You're like "Robert" or something--

CARTER

"Rick."

(steamed)

Why?

MELISSA

It was right in the middle of things with your father. He was running around with every 25-year-old coat check girl in the city. He was doing a lot of cocaine. He was manic--

CARTER

Mom?

MELISSA

I needed the money. I remember she was very nice. A little dike-y, but...

He puts his head in his hands.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Carter pulls up in front of his apartment. Looks for a parking spot. Nothing. He looks longingly toward his garage. The lights are on. Trey is home. He opens his glove compartment and a bunch of AUDIO BOOKS fall out. He's prepared for this. Like it happens a lot. Carter grabs "Moby Dick" as read by Burt Reynolds.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS of Carter trying to find a spot. Around the corner, he studies the parking sign. The hours aren't right. Another spot? Hydrant. A third? He has to get out to check-- the whole back is blocking a driveway.

As he gets back in... "But oh, *Shipmates! On the starboard hand of every woe, there is a sure delight.*" And we CUT TO:

EXT. TREY'S APARTMENT/CARTER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

KNOCK KNOCK. Trey opens the door.

CARTER
(gritting his teeth)
Twenty-six minutes.

TREY
Sweet.

He opens the door all the way. Lauren and Kieko are there, drinking champagne. Carter looks to Lauren.

CARTER
Sorry I kept you waiting...

LAUREN
It's fine. We're celebrating.
Kieko asked me to be a bridesmaid.
Isn't that great?

CARTER
Maybe.

TREY
And we picked a date. The 15th.

CARTER
Of?

TREY
Next month!

A total non-reaction. Somehow the room feels less buoyant.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In the bathroom, Carter is brushing his teeth.

CARTER
I didn't mean to "suck the joy out
of the room."
(he gargles and spits)
But six weeks? To plan a wedding?
What world are these people living
in?
(walks into bedroom)
(MORE)

CARTER (cont'd)
Did you know that Trey got rejected
by the Discover Card--?

Lauren is in bed, reading a book. DR. JUDITH'S BOOK.

LAUREN
Where'd you get this?

CARTER
It's... for Trey.

LAUREN
This guy "Rick..?"

CARTER
Yeah?

LAUREN
You got off easy.

CARTER
Who wants a massage?!?

He darts into the bathroom and returns with some moisturizer.

LAUREN
That's face cream.

CARTER
Not tonight.

She kind of laughs as he slips behind her, starts working on her shoulders. She relaxes, tosses the book to the side.

LAUREN
Mmmm. Carter.

Her eyes close, as she falls back against him, engrossed in the moment. But Carter is eyeing the book...

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S OFFICE - WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - DAY

Carter is reading carefully reading Dr. Judith's book.

CARTER
That is a gross over-simplification!

KNOCK KNOCK and Margo pokes her head in.

CARTER (cont'd)
I asked you not to disturb--

MARGO

A Dr...

(notices the book cover)

That doctor is here.

Carter jumps to his feet and walks out--

INT. RESTURANT DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There she is. Dr. Judith stands by the hostess stand.

DR. JUDITH

"Whitegrass." That some kind of an Indian name?

CARTER

I don't know.

DR. JUDITH

Why'd you pick it?

CARTER

Outside. Please.

He politely ushers her...

EXT. WHITEGRASS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

... to the sidewalk, away from the storefront, out of sight.

DR. JUDITH

I felt bad about yesterday. I sent you off without even trying to help--

CARTER

I don't need help. I had one moment of weakness, but I'm fine. I'm better than fine. I am certainly not the kid from that book.

DR. JUDITH

Of course not! Carter, you are clearly a successful, well-adjusted young man.

CARTER

Right. Exactly.

DR. JUDITH

Doesn't mean there aren't things we all want to improve in our lives.

(MORE)

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
I gave it some thought, and I would
be glad to sit down with you.
Actually, I'd like it very much.

Carter stares her down unsure about her turnaround.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
We can start casual. Grab a cup of
coffee. No offices, no
appointments. Just see how it
goes? Since I'm out of practice, I
won't even charge you.

Carter mulls it. And we--

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - THE NEXT DAY

Carter and Dr. Judith sit across from one another. She sips a hot tea, SCALDS the top of her mouth. Tries to hide it.

DR. JUDITH
Tell me, now that you are a mature
adult, what do you think of your
parents?

CARTER
They're super fucked-up. And lame.

He sips his hot coffee. SCALDS the top of his mouth. She's clearly looking for more.

CARTER (cont'd)
My mom is a good cook. And she's
manipulative. Equal parts
manipulative and cripplingly
dependant. And my dad? I guess
you'd say he's a classic narcissist-
- with A.D.D.

(considers)
It's a miracle I am not on a 19-
state killing spree.

DR. JUDITH
"Survivor mentality." It's an
entire chapter of my book.

He rolls his eyes. She checks out his ring finger.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
You're not married. What about a
Girlfriend?

CARTER

Lauren. She works with my step-sister... ex-step-sister-- Chloe. Elka's daughter.

DR. JUDITH

Poor Elka.

CARTER

But my dad and Sondra think I met Lauren in a bar.

DR. JUDITH

Not through Chloe?

CARTER

They don't know we're still friends. It's just easier than the headache if they knew. You should understand this. It's basic stuff.

Dr. Judith studies him momentarily. She seems... excited.

DR. JUDITH

Do you mind if I make some notes?

She pulls a napkin from the dispenser, jots notes down.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)

How long have you been together?

CARTER

Four years.

DR. JUDITH

Are you going to marry her?

CARTER

Why is that the first question anyone asks? You don't want to know where she's from? Or what she does for a living?

DR. JUDITH

What does she do for a living?

CARTER

She manages a clothing store.

DR. JUDITH

Fascinating. Why don't you want to marry her?

CARTER

I didn't say that.

(mildly annoyed)

Lauren is great. Smart, pretty. She's into kung fu, and eastern philosophy, which can be a little annoying, but... it's good. We don't fight. No chaos. I just... I'm waiting to feel that thing, y'know? That thing. Wake up one morning and feel like, yes, she's the one. Not to say that couldn't also happen with someone else, randomly, walking down the street, or in an elevator.

DR. JUDITH

Romantic.

CARTER

Reality. I'm not going to force it. My parents have spent their entire lives being hasty and irrational.

DR. JUDITH

So you worry about repeating your parents' mistakes?

CARTER

No. I worry about having to manage them until the day I die.

DR. JUDITH

I can understand why you're sick of that. You've been doing it since you're 8. It's a situation I call "Parentification"... in my book.

(he glares at her)

Parents turn to their children for emotional support at an early age. They become the children, and you the parent.

CARTER

Exactly. That's exactly right!

DR. JUDITH

But... you're not a kid anymore.

A beat. She's making total sense to him. Carter soaks it in, his mind racing. Dr. Judith is excited.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
We should do this again, yes?

Carter stopped listening. An idea is taking shape in his mind. A big one.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A determined Carter enters, searching for--

CARTER

Margo. What's the guy's name, the maitre'd you were sleeping with at Boulevard?

MARGO

David? Or Tommy?
(off his look)
It's a good-looking staff.

CARTER

So you can get me a good table?

MARGO

Only with Tommy.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOULEVARD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dressed in jacket and tie, Carter paces on the sidewalk. He checks his watch... then checks his reflection in the glass. Steels himself. Then--

MELISSA

You look very handsome. That's not my favorite jacket, but...

CARTER

Hey, Mom!

He gives her a warm hug and kiss hello.

MELISSA

Giving up a Friday night for your mother. Did you and Lauren break up?

Carter smiles. Nothing rattles him tonight. He just opens the door for her...

INT. BOULEVARD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Carter and his mother are seated at a prime table. The MAITRE'D hands them each a menu.

MAITRE'D

Here's a wine list. The sommelier's name is Renee. He's the humorless gentleman over there with the fancy corkscrew.

CARTER

Thanks, Tommy.

He winks at Carter and leaves them.

MELISSA

(so excited)

Carter, you're such a big shot sometimes. I can't remember the last time we had dinner like this together.

INT. COAT CHECK - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A man hands over his coat.

MAN

Put that on a good hanger.

COAT CHECK GIRL

All of our hangers are quite good, sir.

He slips her \$10 and turns-- it's HUGH.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Melissa is digging into her water glass with a spoon, removing all the ice.

MELISSA

It's better for you at room temperature.

INT. MAITRE'D STAND - CONTINUOUS

Hugh shows off his own bottle of wine to Tommy.

HUGH

'74 was a mediocre year. '75 was the year.

(MORE)

HUGH (cont'd)
You can't even get this stuff in
the States. I know a guy in
Languedoc.

TOMMY
Let me show you to your table, sir.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carter walks his mom through the menu. INTERCUT with Hugh, walking through a maze of tables, flashing a smile at an attractive woman. Back at the table, Melissa has made up her mind:

MELISSA
I'll have the branzino if you de-
bone it.

She shuts her menu, looks up and GASPS! Hugh is standing there. He sees her and FREEZES.

Mom and Dad are FACE TO FACE. Carter doesn't flinch.

CARTER
Hi, Dad.

HUGH
This must be a mistake.

A waiter darts in and expertly sets a third place.

TOMMY
Shall I open the wine?

MELISSA/HUGH
No!

Carter removes the wine from his dad's clenched fingers.

CARTER
It needs to breathe. Sit down.

Hugh looks around, plans his escape.

CARTER (cont'd)
SIT.

Hugh eyes the chair, but Melissa jumps to her feet.

MELISSA
Forget it. I'll go.

HUGH
Fine.

Hugh sits. But Melissa doesn't move. She knows if she leaves, he wins. Through clenched teeth...

MELISSA

No. You go.
(she sits back down)
I'm having dinner with my son.

By now, most of the restaurant is watching their game of musical chairs.

MELISSA (cont'd)

(to Carter)
You've ruined what I thought was
going to be very pleasant evening.

HUGH

(to Carter)
For Chrissakes-- this is
ridiculous!?!?

CARTER

Agreed. Look around you. The
universe isn't folding in on
itself. The building is still
standing. You are both in the same
room, yet life is continuing.

Carter lectures them like children.

CARTER (cont'd)

I brought you here tonight because
you've turned a nine-year marriage
into a hundred-year war. You've
made a mess of every holiday, every
graduation, the Gimelson funeral-

HUGH

I got there first.

MELISSA

They were my friends.

CARTER

It doesn't matter. You're done.
You will not be allowed to take
another memory hostage.

MELISSA

Oh, the drama...

HUGH

He's a fucking pain in the ass,
that's what he is.

CARTER

There. You agree on something!

(lays down the law)

Trey is getting married and we are going to have a wedding. You don't have to pay for it... or organize it-- but you are going to be there-- both of you. And for one night-- not even-- for a few hours-- you're going to be civil. You are going to walk your son down the aisle, smile for a few pictures, and give Trey the wedding he deserves.

Carter rises, puts on his jacket.

CARTER (cont'd)

Talk it out. Right here, right now. I ordered the tasting menu and paid for it so no need to call an arbitrator.

And he walks away without even look back. When he catches his breath, a tiny smile crosses his face. That felt great!

ON HUGH AND MELISSA. Shamed. Guilty. She picks up the wine and takes a swig. Then takes a good look at Hugh.

MELISSA

Did you have your face done?

CUT TO:

INT. WARFIELD THEATER - DAY

Once a vaudeville house, now one of the city's last great music halls. Carter and Trey stand in the back, talking. The theater is empty.

CARTER

They were speechless. Stunned into silence. It was awesome. Seriously, I felt a little like God. All due respect.

TREY

Unreal. So it's full speed ahead?

CARTER

Go for it. Anything you want.

Trey embraces his brother. Kieko runs in.

KEIKO

Alice Cooper bit off the head of a snake here in 1977.

TREY

Ceremony in the theater. Party in the lobby. What do you think?

Trey grabs her hand and they run off to further explore, ecstatic. Carter watches them and smiles. He feels a lightness he hasn't felt in a long time. Maybe ever.

CUT TO:

INT. "STRAPLESS" - A CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Chloe and Lauren are in the front window, working on a display. Chloe eyes one of the female mannequins.

CHLOE

Why does this mannequin have a package?

Lauren peeks in her panties.

LAUREN

You've got the ass on backwards.

Oh. They begin to dismantle the mannequin when there's a KNOCK on the window. It's Carter. They wave him in. He shakes his head, waves Lauren outside.

CHLOE

Is he losing his hair?

LAUREN

A little bit. It's cute.

Lauren slips out of the window and exits on to--

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Carter gives her a kiss hello.

LAUREN

This is a nice surprise.

CARTER

I brought you something.

He pulls out a TINY, CAREFULLY WRAPPED BOX with a bow on it. Lauren's eyes nearly EXPLODE OUT OF HER HEAD.

LAUREN
OH MY GOD, CARTER!

It looks like a RING BOX. In the window, Chloe is equally shocked.

CARTER
What?
(realizing)
NO! No, look--

He frantically tears open the box.

CARTER (cont'd)
It's a key. You wanted a key to my apartment!

A key dangles from a chain. Lauren's heart sinks just a little. But she LAUGHS it off. She looks to Chloe in the window, who is scowling at Carter.

CARTER (cont'd)
That's an antique chain.

CUT TO:

EXT. DR. JUDITH'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Carter bounds up the stairs. About to ring the buzzer, he sees a sign. A new sign: "Please come in and take a seat."

INT. DR. JUDITH'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

The foyer has been rearranged: magazines spread on a table, like a waiting area. A woman is waiting: MICHELLE, 31, striking, a little damaged. Her hair has undoubtedly been a number of colors. She looks at Carter with vague disinterest.

CARTER
I'm looking for Dr. Judith.

MICHELLE
Get in line.

CARTER
Are you... a... friend or something?

MICHELLE
Yes. Old friend. Camp friend.

She's fucking with him. Just then, the door to Dr. Judith's office opens and she sees them both.

DR. JUDITH
Carter? What are you doing here?

CARTER
I stopped by to thank you--

She walks him outside...

EXT. DR. JUDITH'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

... to the front stoop where they can talk in private.

DR. JUDITH
Thank me?

CARTER
Your advice. It was great. I sat my
parents down and--

DR. JUDITH
Terrific. I want to hear all about
it, but I have a patient waiting.

CARTER
Patient? I thought you weren't a
therapist.

DR. JUDITH
I'm not. But...
(excited)
After we talked, it struck me.
There's never been a definitive
study of ACODs.

CARTER
ACODs?

DR. JUDITH
Adult children of divorce.
That's mine.
(beat)
So I got in touch with the other
subjects from my book. And I am
doing a follow-up. A 20-year-
study. About a generation unique
to the American landscape--

CARTER
Hang on. I'm going to be in
another book?

DR. JUDITH
Yes!

CARTER
NO!

DR. JUDITH
Oooh. While I have you here...

She rushes back into the office. The door is open for a moment. Carter and Michelle make EYE CONTACT. Oh, she looks like damaged goods. Sexy damaged goods. Dr. Judith returns with a packet of paperwork.

CARTER
(re: Michelle)
Is she one of the book people?

DR. JUDITH
(re: paperwork)
Take this home with you, fill it out for Tuesday. Answer the questions honestly. My research depends on it.

And she shuts the door on him.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - DAY

A man in a SUIT is reviewing files. Carter sits opposite, studying Dr. Judith's questionnaire.

CARTER
Can you sue someone for writing a book about you without your permission?

SUIT
I'm an accountant.

We see he is going over the restaurant's books. Carter puts the questionnaire aside.

SUIT (cont'd)
Everything looks good. This place is a gold mine. Especially with your overhead so low. Remind me. Your stepmom owns the building?

CARTER
She took it from her first husband in the divorce. Hank Greene?

SUIT

"The Slum Lord of Bernal Heights?"

(impressed)

Tough woman. And the name?

"Whitegrass?" That's hers?

CARTER

No, mine. Just a name I like.

His cell phone rings. He looks at the caller ID.

CARTER (cont'd)

Speak of the devil...

(answers)

Hi, Sondra.

SONDRA (O.S.)

How is the father-son retreat?

CARTER

The what?

SONDRA (O.S.)

The retreat? When is your tee time?

A beat. Carter looks around, like someone is playing a joke.

CARTER

Um. Sondra. Where...are...you?

SONDRA (O.S.)

An artist's colony in Sedona. Put
your father on.

A long beat. He looks at the accountant.

SONDRA (O.S.) (cont'd)

Hello?!?

CARTER

Hi.

SONDRA (O.S.)

I told him to leave his phone on.

What if it was an emergency?

CARTER

You know what? He's in the pro
shop?

The accountant raises an eyebrow.

SONDRA (O.S.)

Get him.

CARTER
I'm... I can't. I'm... getting the
cart. I'm at the... cart shack.
It's far from the pro... shop.
Can he just call you back...?

SONDRA (O.S.)
Fine.

CLICK. Carter hangs up. The accountant smiles.

SUIT
I'll go.

He gathers his things. Carter looks to his phone, then dials another number. It goes straight to voicemail.

CARTER
Dad, call me.

Carter considers. Then dials another number.

INT. TREY'S APARTMENT - DAY - INTERCUT

Trey is blow-drying his computer keyboard. Shuts it off to answer the phone.

TREY
Dude, I know, email you the wedding list. But I spilled iced tea on my keyboard.

CARTER
Have you heard from dad?

TREY
I think he's home sick.

CARTER
You talk to him?

TREY
We were supposed to go tux shopping today for the "greatest tux ever."
But he called, said he was "shitting fire."

Carter looks away. Something is going on.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUGH AND SON德拉'S HOUSE - DAY

Carter pulls into the driveway and heads for the front door. He KNOCKS. No answer. MUSIC comes through the door. He tries the handle. It's open.

INT. HUGH AND SON德拉'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the foyer. "Frampton Comes Alive" is echoing through the house. "Do... you... DO?"

CARTER

Hello?!?

"Feeeeeel, like I do." He walks into the LIVING ROOM.

"Doooo... you, do."

CARTER (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Pops?

"Feeeeeel, like I do." He pushes through the door into THE KITCHEN and--

WOMAN

Oh, yeah. That's the stuff!

Hugh's bare ass is in mid-thrust on the kitchen counter.

CARTER

JESUS!!!

Hugh is startled. He rolls off the WOMAN and we can see exactly who he's fucking.

CARTER

MOM?!?

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - HUGH AND SON德拉'S HOUSE - 38 SECONDS LATER

Carter is pacing a hole in the driveway. Hugh comes out, tablecloth wrapped around his waist.

HUGH

Look--

CARTER

NO!

Carter continues pacing.

CARTER (cont'd)
THAT...
(beat)
What the hell was THAT!!

HUGH
Settle down...

Carter stops pacing, glares at his father.

HUGH (CONT'D)
We're just--

CARTER
STOP!

Carter points a finger at him, like he's about to scold him. But he doesn't even know what to say.

He storms to his car and speeds away. Hugh notices the newspaper in the driveway. He picks it up and heads inside.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S CAR - MOVING

Hands grip the steering wheel for dear life. Eyes locked dead ahead, barely on the road. He only saw it for a split second, yet the image is seared into his brain. We PRE-LAP a HUMMING SOUND and:

CHLOE (O.S.)
NO WAY!!

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Chloe is getting laser treatment on her tattoo. Carter sits beside her, completely confounded.

CHLOE
On the kitchen table?

CARTER
A little breakfast bar. By the
stove.

Chloe LAUGHS. The DOCTOR can't help but listen.

CARTER (cont'd)
You think it's funny? She didn't
just stop by there. She's never
been there. Never seen that house.
He had to give her directions, do
you understand? This was planned.

CHLOE
Guess that dinner went over better
than you thought.

Carter rubs his temples. This was NOT the plan.

CHLOE (cont'd)
I wonder if they used protection.
OUCH!

DOCTOR
Sorry.

CARTER
What do I do?

CHLOE
What can you do?

CARTER
Keep this between us. No one needs
to know.

He looks to the doctor. The doctor puts his hands up.

DOCTOR
Doctor-patient confidentiality.

CARTER
And don't tell Lauren.

CHLOE
Why?

CARTER
She'll think it's sweet. Or she'll
think she can help. I just need
to... think. Alright?

CHLOE
See what happens when you try to
make things better?

CARTER
What was I thinking...

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S OFFICE - WHITEGRASS - NIGHT

Carter in his office, trying to concentrate. He spots Dr. Judith's QUESTIONNAIRE. He pulls it out of the envelope. Studies it for a beat. Then--

He TEARS it into million pieces, dumps the pieces back in the envelope, seals it.

INT. WHITEGRASS - DINING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Carter sits at the bar, looking out at the dining room. But he's not watching the dinner rush. He's studying...

A FAMILY OF FOUR. A mom, a dad, two kids. Telling stories. Laughing. Sharing food. The way it ought to be. Someone steps in his view. It's his friend PAUL and his wife SARAH. They hate each other.

PAUL

Hey, Carter. Great meal.

SARAH

We're having a barbecue for Linus's birthday and want to invite you.

She hands him an invitation. It's in the shape of a giant "2." Linus is turning two.

PAUL

He doesn't want to come. Single people aren't into this shit.

SARAH

He can make up his own mind!

As they walk off, Paul looks back to Carter, mano-a-mano, and mouths "don't worry about it." Carter looks back to--

THE FAMILY FOUR. They come into clearer focus now. The dad turns and looks directly at him. Now the dad is walking toward him. It's his dad. Carter looks back to the table. Sondra and the twins. She is pointing out her artwork. Hugh sits down next to Carter, speaks in hushed tones.

HUGH

Just nod. I told her I needed to talk to you about the flank steak.

(a beat)

What you saw at the house... not that it's any of your business...

CARTER

You made it my business when you pretended to spend the day with me. Pretend to fake spend the day with someone else.

HUGH

Sometimes you have such an
unpleasant tone.

(beat)

Your mother and I saw each other at
dinner, thank you very much. Had a
few bottles of wine-- a Chateau
Yquem-- and certain feelings were
stirred. We never had a physical
problem. Sex was always fantastic--

CARTER

Dad!

HUGH

You're not nodding. Just nod.

(eyes Sondra)

We don't need to make a big deal
out of this Carter. It was a one
time thing. An accident.

CARTER

An accident is slicing off a finger
while speed-chopping carrots.

HUGH

Just forget it happened. For the
sake of everyone involved. Okay?

Carter nods. Hugh rises.

HUGH (cont'd)

And by the way, the flank steak
sucks.

He winks, and then waltzes back to his table, tussles his
son's hair. Hugh sits down with his family like nothing is
wrong. It makes Carter sick.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Carter opens his eyes after a bad night's sleep. The first
thing he sees is--

LAUREN, sitting on the floor, facing the window, in loose
fitting yoga-ish clothes. She in some kind of lotus position,
clearly at peace. A book about *meditation* lies next to her.
Carter finds this very annoying.

CARTER

Hey.

Her eyes pop open.

LAUREN
You're up. How'd you sleep?

CARTER
Like shit. I took one of your ambien in the middle of the night.

LAUREN
Those are birth control pills.

A beat. She LAUGHS.

LAUREN (cont'd)
Just kidding. I stopped taking my birth control pills a while ago.

She's joking again. He's not in a laughing mood.

LAUREN (cont'd)
You want to sit over here and do some breathing exercises? It might start your day in a better mood.

CARTER
I doubt it.

LAUREN
Someday we will go to The Pelangi's Transformational Self-Healing Workshop in Bali. And then you will sleep.

That's never going to happen. Lauren smiles, rises, starts undressing for a shower.

LAUREN (cont'd)
You need to wear a jacket today.

CARTER
To what?

LAUREN
The picture.

Carter stares at her blankly.

LAUREN (cont'd)
For my parents? The present?

CARTER

Oh. I'm not taking a picture. I
don't want to be on the credenza.

LAUREN

It's all they want for their
anniversary. A picture of us.

CARTER

Well... let's get them some shit to
put on their boat--

LAUREN

Carter.

CARTER

I'll do it later in the week. I'm
totally jammed today.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - TWO HOURS LATER

Carter is slumped on the couch, still in sleep clothes,
watching WOMEN'S BEACH VOLLEYBALL. In a stupor. The phone
RINGS. He ignores it. It RINGS again.

CARTER

(answering)

What?

EXT. CORPORATE OFFICES - DAY - INTERCUT

Dr. Judith passes through a revolving door, looking more put
together than ever, cell phone to her ear.

DR. JUDITH

Carter, it's Dr. Judith. Your
questionnaire was returned to me
accidentally ripped into a thousand
pieces--

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

CLICK. He tosses the phone back on the couch. Continues
watching volleyball. But in a matter of seconds, the phone
is RINGING again. Carter grabs it.

CARTER

Leave me alone.

GARY (O.S.)

Carter. It's Gary.

CARTER

Oops. Hey. Gary.

GARY (O.S.)

I'm double-parked. There's nowhere to park on your street. Ready to go?

Carter looks out the window. THERE'S GARY in fishing gear.

CARTER

Shit. The new moon.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO BAY - DAY

Carter and Gary sit in a simple boat, fishing.

GARY

Your mom. She's funny. We were supposed to have lunch yesterday, but she cancelled...

Carter blanches. If it weren't for the deadly currents, Carter might swim for shore.

CARTER

Really. Why?

GARY

Get this... to do pilates.

CARTER

Is that what they're calling it?

GARY

I don't think it's the best idea, with her hip. But she says it's the only way to get in shape for the wedding.

CARTER

OH! I had a bite...

His fishing rod didn't move. Carter hates lying to Gary. And hates his parents more for putting him in this position.

GARY

Listen. About the wedding. Your mom said you've taken on a lot the planning. I think she used the word "commandeered." But I want to help in some way...

He hands him an envelope. It's a check for \$20,000.

CARTER

Oh no.

GARY

No?

CARTER

No, I mean "oh" that's so nice of you. But it's not right. Not now.

GARY

Don't be ridiculous. You and Trey are my family. I would do anything in the world for you kids.

Gary is a good man. Carter has no choice but to take it.

GARY (cont'd)

Did you hear? Trey asked Glenn to officiate the wedding?

CARTER

He did?

GARY

Like I said. Family.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gary drops him off. As Carter heads for his apartment, he passes his car... and notices a parking ticket on the windshield.

CARTER

Goddamnit.

He looks up at the parking sign, exasperated.

INT./EXT. TREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carter KNOCKS. Trey opens and Carter hands him the ticket.

CARTER

Pay this.

TREY

Okay.

(noticing)
What'cha got there?

We see now that Carter is holding a tiny plastic bag.

CARTER

Halibut. Did you ask Gary's son to officiate the wedding?

TREY

Yeah. He's a pastor. Or a deacon. Or a Shriner. One of those things.

CARTER

He lives in Alaska. And you've never met him.

TREY

What a great way to get to know him.

CARTER

I wish you guys would just SLOW DOWN.

TREY

Why?

A beat. Now he's lying to Trey.

CARTER

I just don't understand why it all has to happen so quickly.

TREY

'Cause we've got the fever! Can't you feel it? We found a french horn player yesterday. There's like four of those in the city!

(remembering)

Oh. Can you meet dad at the tux place on Thursday?

Carter forces a smile and goes upstairs. Trey looks at the parking ticket and opens a drawer-- where a mess of parking tickets are piled up-- and drops it in.

CUT TO:

INT. TUXEDO SHOP - DAY

Carter is having a tuxedo jacket pinned by a elderly, be-spectacled TAILOR. He keeps looking around, then whispers to Carter so no one can hear:

TAILOR

Don't do it.

CARTER

What?

TAILOR

Don't do it. I've been married for 57 years. Haven't had oral sex in thirty.

CARTER

I'm not getting married. He is.

Trey is by the window on the phone. The tailor looks, shakes his head forebodingly. Trey hangs up, approaches.

TREY

Dad's phone went straight to voicemail. He's never this late.

(worried)

Maybe that shitting fire thing is like some kind of intestinal problem.

A beat. A thought runs through Carter's mind.

CARTER

Call mom.

TREY

Why?

CARTER

Just try her.

Trey shrugs. Dials.

TREY

(into phone)

Hey Lorraine, it's Trey. Is my mom around?

(beat)

Really? Wow. Okay, thanks.

Trey hangs up, looks to Carter.

TREY (cont'd)

Since when does mom do pilates?

CARTER

Goddamnit. GOD-DAMN-IT.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S CAR - DAY - MOVING

He's on the phone, speeding.

CARTER

Chloe. When my dad was cheating on
your mom with my step-mom, where
did she catch them?

(beat)

Great, thanks.

(about to hang up)

Wait! There was a name he used..?

CUT TO:

EXT. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL - DAY

Carter pulls up in front of a fancy hotel.

INT. FRONT DESK - FOUR SEASONS - DAY

Carter rushes up to the FRONT DESK MANAGER. This guy didn't
get in to the Cornell School of Hotel Management and is still
bitter about it.

CARTER

I need the room for.. Lafite
Rothschild.

MANAGER

I am sorry, sir. We do not give
out that information.

CARTER

Fine, fine, fine. Just tell me if
they're here.

The manager notices Carter's slightly wild eyes.

MANAGER

I am not at liberty to say.

CARTER

Give me a break. It's my mom. And
dad.

MANAGER

Well, then you should know what
room the Baron and Baroness are in.

CARTER

Listen, friend. Everybody knows
what goes on here.

(MORE)

CARTER (cont'd)
People check in and have dirty,
dirty sex-- and go back to their
lives, feeling a little less bad
because it happened at a Four
Seasons.

The manager starts shuffling papers, ignoring him.

CARTER (cont'd)
I hope you are proud of yourself.

Carter walks away, makes it a few feet before he sees--

MICHELLE from Dr. Judith's office. She's walking out of the elevator, toward the door.

CARTER (cont'd)
Hey.

She looks up, tries to place him.

CARTER (cont'd)
Carter. From Dr. Judith's...
home... office.

She looks around, uncomfortable.

CARTER (cont'd)
I've been trying to figure out--
are you "Claire" or "Marcy?"

MICHELLE
Sorry?

CARTER
In Dr. Judith's book.

MICHELLE
Why not "Yvette?"

CARTER
I don't know, I pictured her black.
(then)
I'm "Rick."

MICHELLE
(with great pathos)
Lake House "Rick?"

CARTER
It's not that bad. What about that
girl whose father ran away with her
gymnastics coach?

MICHELLE
(defensive)
What about her?

DING. The elevator opens and a older man walks out. He breezes up to Michelle.

OLDER MAN
Ready?

From their body language, this guy is definitely not her dad. An uncomfortable moment.

MICHELLE
Carter, this is Charles.

Carter shakes his hand, notices he's wearing a wedding band. Michelle sees Carter notice this.

MICHELLE (cont'd)
Carter and I know each other from a book... club.

CHARLES
(a total dick)
Terrific. I recommend "The Kite Runner." Let's go.

She smiles awkwardly and follows him out. Carter watches them go and we PRE-LAP the pleasing rhythms of some lame-ass eco-friendly world music CD...

CUT TO:

EXT. DESTINATION MOON TRAVEL AGENCY - DAY

Carter sits in a waiting area, arms folded. He checks his watch. The music isn't helping to calm him.

CARTER
Do you know how long a pilates class is? An hour. Hour and a half max. But my mom's been out for three hours? That's a long time. Anyone find that weird? Any consequences to that?

He talking to LORRAINE, the receptionist, a 50-ish earth mother. She shrugs, looks around at the very silent office.

LORRAINE
Things are slow.
(beat)
Our industry is dying.

DING! That's the elevator. He sits up straight. The elevator doors open to reveal his Mom. She sees him. She panics, STARTS PRESSING "CLOSE DOOR" with great fervor. Carter realizes what she's doing and jumps to his feet. But he gets to the elevator as the door shuts. To Lorraine:

CARTER
Stairwell?

She points. He dashes into the stairwell.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Carter emerges from the door to see his mother SPRINTING FOR HER CAR!!

CARTER (CONT'D)
What the--

He runs after her! But she's quick. She gets in her car and PEELS out of the lot before Carter can catch up. He stands there, out of breath, exasperated when his phone rings. He sees the caller ID, answers it.

CARTER (cont'd)
I'm on my way.

CUT TO:

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY

Carter rushes in. Lauren is already sitting on a stool in front of a backdrop. She's been sitting there for a while.

LAUREN
It's not even passive aggressive
for you to be this late.

CARTER
Sorry. Let's do this thing.

He sits down behind her, wraps his arms around her-- prom style-- and looks to the PHOTOGRAPHER.

LAUREN
You're sweating.

CARTER
Is that a woodsy glen behind us?

We see the backdrop. It's the woods. Very cheesy.

PHOTOGRAPHER

You two look great! Give me a
minute to adjust the lights.

He goes to work as Carter and Lauren sit there in their pose.
A beat.

LAUREN

I've been thinking about the "key"
thing. I appreciate the gesture,
but it's a little weak. Chloe said
I should have kicked you in the
nuts.

CARTER

She's sweet that way.

LAUREN

Why don't we just move in together.
(Carter raises an eyebrow)
People do it.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Okay, here we go!

FLASH! The photographer takes his first picture. Not a keeper.

PHOTOGRAPHER (cont'd)

Carter? How 'bout a smile?

CARTER

See, I gave you the key so you
could come and go as you please.

Big fake smile. FLASH.

LAUREN

Right. I got that. But I'm there
every night anyway. And my lease
is up in two months, so...

She does a fake smile. FLASH.

CARTER

This is something we should talk
about. Think about.

LAUREN

I have been thinking about it.

CARTER

Right. But not with me. And the last thing we need... is to be... impulsive.

FLASH. No one is smiling.

CARTER (cont'd)

Impulsive gets you in trouble.

LAUREN

(offended)

Right. Got it.

FLASH. The photographer is contemplating a career change.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A weary Carter keys into his apartment, alone, to find visitors. Trey and Kieko have taken over the living room with an elaborate series of charts and arts and crafts supplies. Trey looks up.

TREY

We were out of paper.

KIEKO

And pens.

CARTER

What's this?

TREY

This... is the big idea. This solves all our problems.

He gestures to the floor, where different colored papers are arranged in some kind of pattern.

TREY (cont'd)

Thirds. We seat everyone at the ceremony... not in two sections, but in three.

KIEKO

Originally, it was quadrants.

TREY

Right, but we've perfected it since then.

(MORE)

TREY (cont'd)

See, with a center section and aisles on either side, there will be three generations of Kobayashis blocking-- physically-- mom's side and dad's side. It guarantees they won't even have to make eye contact.

CARTER

Right. Can't have that happening.

TREY

This is totally gonna work!

Carter turns, walks into the kitchen. Thinks about SLAMMING his head against the wall. Notices the mail on the counter. Notices a particular package. He opens it.

Yet another copy of DR. JUDITH'S QUESTIONNAIRE, this one with a post-it note reading: "Carter, I'm counting on you!"

Carter is about to throw it out, but then... thinks better of it. He's got an idea. He grabs a pencil, sits down at the kitchen table and starts to fill it out. Vigorously.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. JUDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Carter sits opposite Dr. Judith, hands her the questionnaire.

DR. JUDITH

I'm so glad you reconsidered.

It's rumpled and covered with eraser marks and notes in the margin. She flips it open, scans it, then reads out loud:

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)

What's the worst thing you ever heard your father say about your mother? "Nigger-lover?"

(she looks up)

That's a spicy margarita.

CARTER

Right?

DR. JUDITH

(reads another page)

They tried to give each other chlamydia?

CARTER

True story. Wait 'til you get to
the hysterectomy conspiracy.
(she makes notes)
Oh. Can you use their real names?

Dr. Judith takes a second look at him.

CARTER (cont'd)
I've been thinking.

DR. JUDITH
I bet.

CARTER

You know how people-- authors--
publish excerpts before the actual
book? Like in a magazine? Or the
local paper? You should publish
some of this stuff. Immediately.

DR. JUDITH
What's the rush?

CARTER
It might get some buzz going on
your book.

DR. JUDITH
That's very thoughtful of you.

CARTER
And my parents need to be reminded
how much they hate each other.

DR. JUDITH
Why is that?

CARTER
Because I may have accidentally
gotten them back together.
(can't believe it)
I thought they were just sleeping
together. But it's worse. They're
having an affair.

DR. JUDITH
NO!

CARTER
Yep.

DR. JUDITH
Spectacular!

CARTER

Catastrophe! And we have to stop it, do you understand? They may think the last 20 years didn't happen, but it did. And it sucked. It was chaos and I am NOT going back to that.

DR. JUDITH

Interesting. Carter, have you ever tried to get a table at your restaurant?

CARTER

What's that got to do with anything?

DR. JUDITH

Seems to me that you and chaos are good friends.

CARTER

Are you going to help me or not?

DR. JUDITH

I'm sorry. I've just started my research. Soon, I might be ready to present in some kind of academic forum, but right now..? I'm sorry.

He SNATCHES the questionnaire back from her.

CARTER

Thanks for your help.

And is gone. SLAM goes the door. Dr. Judith sits for a moment, considering.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - DAY

Carter approaches the restaurant. There appears to be work going on in the street out front. A truck, some orange cones, a few helmeted workers stand around a large tripod.

Carter looks at what they're looking at. His building. Oh shit. These are SURVEYORS.

CARTER

What's going on here?

SURVEYOR

Re-zoning for conversion to retail.
I think for a Walgreens.

CARTER

(terrified to ask)

Or a Rite Aid?

SURVEYOR

Do I give a crap?

Carter looks back to the restaurant. In the window, he sees Miguel, Margo and the staff looking out, worried. His mind races to a horrible conclusion.

CARTER

Oh no. She knows.

SURVEYOR

Excuse me?

CARTER

It's happening.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ART INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Carter hustles down the hallway of a very well-appointed building, poking his head into various "classrooms." In one, a NUDE MODEL, with her back to the class poses, while a half-dozen "students" sketch her in charcoal. Carter finds...

CARTER

Sondra.

The whole class turns, stops what they are doing.

SONDRA

What are you doing here?

CARTER

I need to talk to you.

SONDRA

Not now, Carter. I am in the middle of an important study.

He glances at her easel. Then looks up at the model. Then back down at the easel. It looks like the charcoal threw up.

MODEL (O.S.)

Carter?

The model has turned to see what's going on.

CARTER
Hey, Marguerite.

Her eyes well with tears, her lip starts to quiver.

MODEL
Excuse me, I need a minute.

Too emotional, she grabs her robe and races out of the room. The whole class turns and glares at him.

CARTER
It was, like, six years ago. She was clingy.

EXT. HALLWAY - ART INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO - MOMENTS LATER
Carter has Sondra all to himself.

CARTER
I was hoping we could...talk... before things get... ugly. Try to work something out here.

She looks at him, confounded.

SONDRA
What is wrong with you? Are you bipolar?

CARTER
No.

SONDRA
I am convinced your father is bipolar.

CARTER
We should...get that checked out...
(beat)
So you don't know?

SONDRA
Know what, Carter?

CARTER
About the surveyors...

SONDRA
No.
(beat)
(MORE)

SONDRA (cont'd)
I wonder if they are looking at the
laundromat next door?
(beat)
I should find out what Chung is
getting per square foot. The
Chinese are very savvy
businesspeople, you know.

Carter needs to seize the initiative.

CARTER
Sondra. I want to buy you out.

SONDRA
You can't afford it.

CARTER
Sure I can. I've got money.

She's skeptical. But she's listening.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK - DAY

Carter sits across from a LOAN OFFICER who is reviewing a file. Flipping back and forth between many documents. Trying to figure something out. He finally looks up at Carter.

LOAN OFFICER
You don't have money. You have any
family that can co-sign?

CARTER
No.

LOAN OFFICER
Well, that's the fastest way to get
financing.

CARTER
Okay, what's the second fastest?

LOAN OFFICER
Do you know Warren Buffett?

CARTER
Come on, man. My restaurant is
doing great. My credit is rock-
solid. We can do this.

He looks back at the paperwork.

LOAN OFFICER
Let me see what I can do.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Carter drives away from the bank, notices something in the rear view mirror. A blue car.

EXT. CARTER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

He takes a left. The blue car takes a left. He pulls into a parking lot. It's still there. Carter jams on the brakes, gets out and stomps toward it.

CARTER
Mom! What are you doing?

MELISSA
(rolls down the window)
Get in.

CARTER
What?

MELISSA
Just get in the car.

He opens the door...

INT. MELISSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

... and gets in.

MELISSA
How are you?

CARTER
(playing along)
Fine. How are you?

MELISSA
Fine. I heard you and Gary caught a nice fish.

CARTER
Very nice.

MELISSA
Carter.

CARTER
Mom.

MELISSA

What were you doing at the Four Seasons?

CARTER

They have an excellent brunch.

MELISSA

Listen. Your father and I need you to give us a little space. We're going to figure this out.

Actually, dad wants to go up to Napa for the weekend to talk. I guess there's a jazz festival.

CARTER

(dumbfounded)

Did you get bashed on the head?

MELISSA

I beg your pardon?

CARTER

You have to stop this! You two are messing with people's lives.

MELISSA

Carter. You're not really in any position to judge.

CARTER

What's that supposed to mean?

MELISSA

You think you know what's best. For everybody. It's a trait you get from your father. But I've never seen you in a real relationship. How long have you been stringing that poor girl along?

CARTER

Don't turn this on me.

MELISSA

I'm just saying. At least I act on my feelings.

CARTER

I am not stringing!

MELISSA

Sweetie.

She reaches for his hand, with complete motherly sweetness. But Carter pulls away and gets out of the car.

CARTER
Fucking loon!

MELISSA
Wimp!

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Carter stands in front of the bathroom mirror, shaving. He holds the blade perilously close to his neck for a beat. Now he is front of a different mirror, in the bedroom, trying on a sweater. He tries on a Clash t-shirt. Then he tries on a sport coat. The point is... he's trying. PRE-LAP: A knife clinking on a wine glass.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUREN'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

Lauren's father, Mr. Stringer, stands to make a toast. It's the Stringer's anniversary and 16 friends and family are gathered around a table - 15 of whom are dressed casually, save for Carter. He is wearing a suit and tie.

LAUREN
You look very handsome.

He gives her hand a squeeze. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he spots THE CREDENZA. It is overwhelming. Every available inch of surface area is covered by a family photo. Husband, wife, husband and wife, children, school pictures, prom pictures, family portraits, etc. And there's the new picture of Carter and Lauren. It's not good. In fact, it's horrible. Fortunately, this credenza is all about volume.

MR. STRINGER
Carter?

Carter snaps out of it. Everyone at the table has their glass raised. He quickly raises his.

MR. STRINGER (cont'd)
I would like to make a toast to
thirty-five years of marriage to
the most spectacular woman in the
world.

He really means that. Who are these people? Why do they like each other so much? And why do they look like they just walked out of a Lands End catalogue?

MR. STRINGER (cont'd)
When Kate and I met, things were much simpler. I liked her, we dated, we got married.

He looks directly at Carter. Carter looks away, unnerved. No one else notices. They're just beaming, listening.

MR. STRINGER (cont'd)
To be here tonight surrounded by our dearest friends, and most of all, my children-- Cynthia and her incredible husband David-- Roger and the beautiful Maureen-- and Lauren... and Carter... if I were a religious person, I would say I'm blessed. Since I'm not, I'll just say I'm lucky.

THE TABLE
Awwwww.

Cheers! Everyone clinks glasses. Except Carter. He's already drinking.

INT. KITCHEN - LAUREN'S PARENTS' HOUSE - LATER

Carter and Lauren do the dishes. He looks around.

CARTER
Where's the dishwasher?

LAUREN
They got rid of it. They like doing the dishes together.

Carter might puke.

CARTER
That is...it's just...I have no words to describe that.

LAUREN
I think it's cute.

CARTER
Your dad was looking right at me, you know. During the toast.

LAUREN

He was looking around the room.
And you were in the room.

CARTER

He lingered on me. "Simpler time."
When? When there was segregation?
No anesthesia?

LAUREN

What is wrong with you?

CARTER

Nothing. I don't like being put on
the spot.

LAUREN

Well, you can understand my dad
wondering why I date someone as non-
committal as you.

CARTER

So he WAS looking at me.

LAUREN

Oh, for Godssakes.

CARTER

I am not going to be pressured into
doing anything before it feels
right.

LAUREN

(a little hurt)

You've made that perfectly clear.

CARTER

See? There it is. You make it out
like you don't care about getting
married. Or having kids. But you
do. You want it all. And you're
just laying in wait, hoping I come
around--

LAUREN

Carter, I'm not going to fight with
you.

CARTER

Why? We never fight. Fighting's
good.

LAUREN

Because there are fifteen people in
the other room eating *creme
caramel*.

A beat.

CARTER

Thirty-five isn't even a real
anniversary.

LAUREN

You're a dick, "Rick."

She throws the dish towel at him and goes back into the dining room. Carter stands a beat, aghast. Then goes--

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is standing around, drinking cognac. Studying pictures on the credenza. Carter is on Lauren's heels in a hushed WHISPER.

CARTER

You called me "Rick?"

LAUREN

Dr. Judith was right. She said you are hard-wired to sabotage true intimacy--

CARTER

You talked to her?

LAUREN

She came into the store. Bought jeans, then pounded me with questions for her book.

CARTER

BITCH.

Everyone looks toward them. That was too loud.

LAUREN

You should go. And I kind of think we could use a little break.

He realizes this is momentous. But somehow is more consumed with...

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING ROOM - DR. JUDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Carter walks through the waiting room, past the "IN SESSION" sign and right into--

INT. DR. JUDITH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She is with a patient, and furious that he barged in.

DR. JUDITH
Carter! I beg your pardon.

CARTER
Heard you've been shopping. Nice jeans.

MARK
You've got to be "Rick."

Carter looks to the patient. MARK has a writhing snake tattoo all the way up his arm, shoulder and neck. He's a bad-ass.

MARK (cont'd)
I'm Mark. Aka "Kevin."

CARTER
Kevin with the *au pair*? And the stutter?

MARK
Stutter's gone.

DR. JUDITH
Carter. Go, please. We can schedule an appointment if that's what you would like--

CARTER
I'm sorry-- are you trying to act professional?
(back to the patient)
Is she snooping around on you too?

DR. JUDITH
My research is very important.

CARTER
Now it is. Before I walked in that door, you weren't too busy. In fact, things were a mess around here.

DR. JUDITH
You should talk.

CARTER
I was fine.

DR. JUDITH
Ha! You were a disaster. A poster child of dysfunction.

CARTER
(blown away)
Isn't that a violation of some
psychiatric... hippocratic... code?
To say shit like that?

DR. JUDITH
I have never seen a stronger person
in a weaker position. Until now.
Now you are growing, and growth is
painful.

MARK
I'm growing too.

CARTER
Shut up, Kevin.

DR. JUDITH
Shut up, Mark.

MARK (cont'd)
I'll go have a smoke.

He hurries out. Carter looks to Dr. Judith, accusingly.

CARTER
You used me.

DR. JUDITH
Yes. But for a greater good. For
pioneering research with the
potential to help millions.

CARTER
You were supposed to help me!!

DR. JUDITH
I thought I could do both.

CARTER
Yeah? What do you call that in
your book?

He turns and leaves. We HOLD ON DR. JUDITH... betraying a
hint of regret.

CUT TO:

INT. CAKE SHOP - DAY

Kieko sits at a counter, takes a bite of wedding cake.

KIEKO
Mmmmm. Pretty good.

She slides it to the right. Reveal Trey sitting next to her, with four other plates of half-eaten cake in front of him. He clearly can't eat another bite. But he does.

TREY
(ranking it)
3, 1, 4, 2.

He slides it to the right. Reveal Carter sitting next to him. He looks drained. Carter takes a spoon-full, surreptitiously dumps it into a napkin.

CARTER
Tastes like cake.

TREY
(to Kieko)
Told you we should have gotten high
for this.

KIEKO
I did.

Kieko gives Trey a kiss, jumps up to deal with the proprietor. Trey leans in to Carter, conspiratorially.

TREY
What's up with you and Lauren?

CARTER
Why? What do you mean?

TREY
She called Kieko and basically pulled out of being a bridesmaid. That's sort of bad timing. Maybe you could suck it up for another couple of weeks--

CARTER
Trey.

Carter has had enough.

CARTER (cont'd)
It's over. The wedding is NOT going to happen.

TREY

Really? I mean, she can find
another bridesmaid--

CARTER

Mom and dad are having sex.

Beat.

CARTER (cont'd)

With each other.

TREY

Bullshit.

CARTER

I caught them.

TREY

I don't believe you.

CARTER

Why would I lie about that?

TREY

Because you think I'm making a
mistake. Because you always think
you know better. Because I live in
your garage and steal your cable.
And also your wi-fi.

A beat. Carter considers.

CARTER

Be ALL of that as it may, I'm
telling you the truth. I thought I
could make it go away. I really
did. But this is way bigger than
me. So, there it is.

A beat. Trey soaks it in.

TREY

Well, what am I supposed to do
about the wedding?

CARTER

I don't know. I've got my own
problems to deal with.

TREY

I already spent Gary's money...we
have a whole double aisle system...

Carter shrugs. Trey steams, realizes he's kind of screwed.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Typical night. Slammed. Kitchen going at hyperspeed. The pastry chef holds out a dessert and Carter grabs it in stride. He pushes through the double doors into--

THE DINING ROOM. He drops the dessert on a table, wishing them a half-hearted "happy birthday." Then he reaches the hostess stand, where Margo is besieged. Everyone wants their table NOW. When they see Carter, their pleading voices turn to him, a massive wave of upper-middle class entitlement.

"Carter! Robbie told us you would hook us up!" "I work with Lauren's cousin at Pixar!" "I was your orthodontist!" It SWELLS and SWELLS until Carter can't discern one from the other. And we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Quiet. The dining room is empty. Chairs are up on tables. Except for one, where Carter is nursing a drink. Margo is the last one there, closing up.

CARTER

I want to start taking
reservations.

MARGO

Really?

CARTER

Yes.

MARGO

But this is a neighborhood
restaurant, and--

CARTER

It's out of control. Get a book.

A KNOCK on the glass door. Margo waves the person off with a "we're closed." Carter looks up to see IT'S MICHELLE.

Carter nods to Margo to open the door. Michelle steps in. Margo sizes up the situation, confused.

CARTER (cont'd)

I'll lock up.

Margo smiles, slips out the door.

MICHELLE

I probably should have called. Dr. Judith told me this was your place.

CARTER

She's very professional.

MICHELLE

I wanted to clear something up. The other day... what you saw...

CARTER

What? You and the married guy?

She seems troubled over this.

CARTER (cont'd)

Don't worry about what I think. I am way more fucked-up than you.

A tiny smile. He pushes out the chair for her to sit down.

CARTER (cont'd)

Red or white?

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - LATER

A bottle of wine is almost empty. A cutting board has the remnants of some cheese and a broken loaf of bread.

CARTER

There were only five houses on the lake to begin with.

MICHELLE

And your parents rented houses on opposite sides of your house?

CARTER

Exactly. We had three of the five houses on the lake.

(she laughs)

They refused to see each other. So twice a week, my brother and I shuttled between mom's and dad's. Through the woods. Sometimes at night, in pajamas, with flashlights. This was right after that whole "In Search Of... Bigfoot" episode...

MICHELLE

Leonard Nimoy is gay.

CARTER

That's Sulu.

(anyway...)

One year, the main house-- the one that's been tied up in court for twenty years-- it had an electrical short. And they accused each other of trying to burn the place down.

MICHELLE

Best thing that could have happened.

CARTER

Right. That house was everything when I was a kid. The drive there-- we'd turn off the highway and you could smell it. The water tower that said "Come to US"-- somebody scratched off the Jesus.

(a heavy sigh)

It was perfect. At least that's how I remember it.

She smiles, a little buzzed.

MICHELLE

That guy you met? Michael? He's my ex-husband.

CARTER

No!

MICHELLE

I was 21. Thought I could do it better than my parents. I did it almost out of defiance.

CARTER

At least you guys are still... cordial?

MICHELLE

He calls, usually on Tuesdays, when he has meetings near my office in the Ferry Building. I don't even know if he really has meetings, but we...

CARTER

--got it.

MICHELLE

Not because I want him back. I
don't know. It's stupid. I'm an
ex-husband fucker.

CARTER

Okay, you are more fucked-up...

They both laugh. Carter feels comforted. Finally someone who gets it. He raises his glass for a toast.

CARTER (cont'd)

To our parents. Thanks for the
memories.

MICHELLE

At a certain point, you stop seeing
them as parents. They're just
people you'd never say a word to if
you weren't related to them.

CARTER

Until you need a bone marrow
transplant.

They touch glasses. CLINK.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

SLAM! Carter and Michelle are making out, kind of rough, up against a car. They bump along the side of the car, maneuvering around the side-view mirror.

CARTER

Ow.

She angles him over toward the front. It's clumsy, not sexy. She shimmies up on the hood.

MICHELLE

Let's do it on the car.

CARTER

What? Really?

She starts tugging at his pants when--

CHIRP-CHIRP--we hear the sound of an alarm being de-activated and see a conservative MAN IN A SUIT approaching.

MAN IN SUIT

I'm really sorry but... this is my
car.

They slide off and straighten themselves out. The man studies the hood. Is that a dent?

CARTER
We were just...

MAN IN SUIT
There is a park around the corner...with benches. But also crackheads.

As he gets in the car, he gives Carter a look. One that doesn't make Carter feel particularly good.

The car pulls away. The "moment" has been lost. Carter fills with something just short of regret.

CARTER
I should probably head home.

MICHELLE
Yeah.

But neither of them move. Something like longing is in the air.

MICHELLE (cont'd)
I'm not an answer to your problems.
I'm another problem.

He nods. She takes out some keys and hits a button. The car right next to them CHIRP-CHIRPS.

CARTER
That you?

She smiles. Then gets in and pulls away. Carter turns and heads down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER'S CAR - DAWN

Carter pulls up in front of his apartment...

CARTER
No way.

A parking spot. Right in front. He pulls in, turns the car off. But he doesn't get out. He just sits there, in silence. He hits a button on the cd player.

BURT REYNOLDS (V.O.)
"Towards thee I roll, thou all-
destroying but unconquering
whale..."

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

CLOSE ON the laser as it scorches the name "Todd" from Chloe's skin.

CHLOE
How's it look?

CARTER
Now it just says "odd."

The laser drones on. Carter sits beside her, watching on, morose.

CARTER (cont'd)
I'm turning into my dad.

CHLOE
Oh boy...

CARTER
I've done everything my entire life
not to. But it's just happening.

CHLOE
You're not turning into your dad.

CARTER
I am.

CHLOE
You're not turning into anything.

The Doctor switches the laser off.

DOCTOR
Oh-key-dokey. The nurse will be by
in a minute. I've got to go work
on a skinhead who's fallen out of
love with his swastika.

He walks out. Chloe smiles, but Carter is pensive.

CARTER
Have you heard from Lauren?

CHLOE

No. She quit the store. I'm a casualty of your stupidity.

CARTER

Great.

CHLOE

You know, when she said she wanted to take a break, you were supposed to protest.

Carter winces, knows she's right. His phone RINGS. He sighs, answers it.

CARTER

Hi, Margo.

MARGO (O.S.)

You better get down here. We're being evicted.

CARTER

What?

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS - DAY

Carter rushes into the restaurant. Two uniformed building inspectors. One city bureaucrat. A few lawyers. And a cop. Margo meets him at the door.

MARGO

They're saying multiple code violations, not having a proper lease filed--

Carter spots the source of it all. Sondra. She stands by the bar, directing traffic, hair pulled into a tight bun, eyes puffy, threatening to finish a cigarette with one inhalation. She sees Carter.

SONDRA

You knew! You thought you could sneak it by me!

He takes her by the arm, gently escorts into--

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

--where they are alone. Except for Miguel. Who quickly takes off the hat again. Then slips out the back door.

SONDRA

Your mother? Are you kidding me?

CARTER

Oh.

(the hammer falls)

That.

SONDRA

He could at least have the decency
to fuck a college girl!

CARTER

That would have been my guess.

Look, Sondra-- I know you're upset,
but let's not be rash here. I'm
sure my Dad feels... awful--

SONDRA

Please. He feels bad about getting
caught. How do you think we met? It
wasn't at a singles event.

CARTER

Okay. But there's still a chance
we can... you can work things out.

(a badly told lie)

You're good together.

SONDRA

You've hated me from day one. You
call me "The Cuntessa."

CARTER

(busted)

Who told you that?

She had enough and heads for the double doors.

CARTER (cont'd)

Hang on. I am prepared to buy you
out. I'm going to have the money in
like, days. Maybe less. Maybe
today. Maybe right now. I could
have it already...

A beat. She studies him.

SONDRA

Fine. I'll sell you the building.

CARTER

Really?

SONDRA

Yes.

CARTER

That's great! Thank you. Thank--

SONDRA

100 million dollars.

Beat.

CARTER

That's like, 98 million more than asking.

She steps toward him.

SONDRA

I made an effort with you for your father. That's the deal you make. But now? It's the one great thing about getting divorced. No more obligation to all the lousy, interchangeable losers that come with the people you marry. You have a week to vacate. Clock is ticking.

And she goes back into the restaurant. Carter hesitates, then BLASTS out the double doors--

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

--ready to counter-punch.

CARTER

Listen, bitch--

That's when he notices something he didn't see before. THE TWINS. Tyler and Emily. Sitting at a table. They have crayons in front of them, but the atmosphere is less than conducive to coloring.

They look scared. Unsure. Like Carter did many years ago.

CARTER (cont'd)

It's going to be okay.

It totally isn't.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

He trudges toward his apartment. He stops at Trey's door and KNOCKS. It opens. On a surprise guest.

HUGH
You dumb sonofabitch!
(into his cell phone)
I have to call you back, Len.

He hangs up.

HUGH (cont'd)
You know, there's a reason we've
been using you as a go-between all
these years-- your brother sucks at
it.

CARTER
He told her?

HUGH
He e-mailed me to see if what you
said was true... to the account I
share with Sondra.

CARTER
(ouch)
I would have never done that.

HUGH
(exasperated)
You don't end a marriage like this!
I could have made her miserable,
got her to leave me. It costs a lot
less.

He opens the door all the way to reveal... Melissa sitting on
the couch, arms folded, shaking her head like only a
disappointed mother can.

MELISSA
We were hoping to hold off on
telling anyone until *after* Trey's
wedding.

She looks to Trey. He's sitting on a milk crate.

MELISSA (cont'd)
Trey, honey, you understand we
didn't want it to be this way.

Trey looks to his older brother, angry.

CARTER

What are you looking at me for?

TREY

The wedding's off. Kieko's pissed.
She thinks you sabotaged the whole
thing...and I let you.

CARTER

What? I was trying to protect you!

HUGH

That's not your job.

CARTER

Right. It's yours.

(back to Trey)

Let me tell you something, Trey.
The only reason you're so clear-
headed about getting married is
because I shielded you from those
two your whole life, which almost
never happened. You were a last
ditch attempt to save their
marriage. "Have another kid. See if
that works." You're not even a
person-- you're a Hail Mary.

MELISSA

That's not true, honey. You were an
accident.

CARTER

And you know what? I hate Herman
Melville. Not a big Burt Reynolds
fan either, but I listen every day
so you can live rent free.

He looks back at his parents, addresses all of them.

CARTER (cont'd)

For 20 years I thought there was
some kind of obligation. Some
family code. Who I had to lie for,
who I had to look out for--

(stopping himself)

That's a major hurdle for ACOD's.

HUGH

A-cee-oh-who?

Carter realizes who he is channelling, goes with it anyway.

CARTER

I have become a caretaker to parents who use their own child for emotional support. Know what that's called? Parentification. That makes you... Parentifiers!

HUGH

You're an ass, Carter.

CARTER

I am done accommodating. All of you.

He slaps a button above the light switch. The electronic garage door RAISES and we see into the garage from outside - like a Price is Right model living room, complete with dysfunctional family.

CARTER (cont'd)

It's a fucking garage.

And he storms out.

CUT TO:

CUE "Sink to the Bottom" by Fountains of Wayne as we begin a MONTAGE...

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Watching TV. Women's volleyball. Watching sweaty women hug each other repeatedly isn't as fun as it used to be.

INT. EMPTY SPACE - DAY

A real estate AGENT shows Carter potential space for a new restaurant. It's total shit compared to what he had.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

He spots Lauren's meditation book peeking out from under the bed. He reaches for it, considers it... then begins to flip through it.

EXT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

He aims the garage clicker. The garage door slowly rises to reveal... IT'S EMPTY.

EXT. LINUS'S BIRTHDAY BARBECUE - DAY

Carter stand beside his friend PAUL, watching him cook some burgers. Paul's wife SARAH comes over.

SARAH
You're overcooking them.
(no response)
You listening to me?

PAUL
Will you go into the kitchen and
get the cheese?

SARAH
What kind of cheese?

PAUL
Doesn't matter.

She rolls her eyes and heads off. Paul moves aside a pack of buns to reveal a STACK OF CHEESE slices, smiles to Carter.

PAUL (cont'd)
It's the little victories.

Carter smiles along. He takes in the backyard: parents playing with their children. Couples nuzzling. A man putting his hand on his pregnant wife's belly.

CARTER
Hey, is Lauren coming by?

PAUL
C'mon, dude. Sarah called her. I
guess she's holed up at her
parents. I sent an ex-girlfriend
running to her parents once. That
was in college, though. Not in our
thirties. Nice work.

CARTER
We're not officially broken up.

PAUL
Well, somebody should make it
official. 'Cause we're in limbo
here. Friend limbo. We couldn't
have both of you at this event, and
that's one less present for my kid.

Carter nods. He knows what he's got to do. And worse still... where he has to do it. Pre-lap a DOORBELL RINGING.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAUREN'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens. It's Mr. Stringer. And he is somehow wearing the same look he had on during his toast. Disappointment. No, predictable disappointment. Carter smiles wanly.

MR. STRINGER
She's upstairs.

INT. LAUREN'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

Carter walks the gauntlet, past the credenza. His picture is GONE. That was fast.

INT. LAUREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lauren is at a computer when there's a KNOCK on the door and Carter enters. The room is as it was when Lauren went off to college. Single bed, slightly girlish decor... is that a "Friends" poster? A few bags sit semi-packed on the floor. Carter suddenly feels even worse.

CARTER
Lauren. I am so sorry.

LAUREN
It's okay--

CARTER
No, it isn't. You have done nothing but... try... and I've given you... nothing. Zero. I've just undermined us. Sabotaged us. And we can't go on like that.

He isn't remotely done.

CARTER (cont'd)
I mean, think about it-- it's so stupid. I should have told you about Trey and Kieko. That's good news. And we should share that. And I should have told you about my parents... because it's bad news. And it was freaking me out. And we're not anything if I'm not telling you... that. Or wanting to tell you that. The whole point of being in this... or something like this... is to actually share your life instead of... y'know. So... I guess what I'm saying is... I want to be... with you?

It felt good to say that. In fact, he may have finally just got the "feeling?" With more confidence:

CARTER (cont'd)
I want to be with you.

LAUREN
Wow. Carter. I have been waiting so long for you to... talk to me. Like that.

CARTER
I know!

LAUREN
It means so much to me. And if you had said any of that a month ago-- even a week ago-- it would have meant everything. But you've been off thinking and so have I. And... I'm leaving.

Beat.

CARTER
Where you going?

LAUREN
Bali.

CARTER
When are you coming back?

LAUREN
I don't know.

CARTER
Oh.

Beat.

LAUREN
I'm going to go do that meditation program. And travel a bit. Turns out I have a cousin in Darwin. That's in Australia. Australia and Bali. Maybe Thailand.

CARTER
Wait. No. You can't go. Not now.

LAUREN
I was always thinking about what's best for us.
(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)
Because I look at my parents and think that's how it has to be. But you and I are never going to be my parents. And I don't think I want that anyway. To be honest, I have no idea what I want anymore. Other than to go. To leave tomorrow on a 36 hour flight to Bali. And possibly Australia.

Carter looks to her, plaintively.

CARTER
Can I come?

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - DAY

It's empty. Stripped of all tables, fixtures and personality. Standing alone is Miguel in the middle of the room, wearing street clothes. Carter comes out the kitchen.

CARTER
Are you sure you don't want me to call Biscardi's? They got a double-barrelled sink over there...

Miguel smiles, says IN SPANISH:

MIGUEL
Screw that.
(holds up his green card)
I'm getting a dot-com job.

Miguel embraces him. Then leaves. Carter takes in the quiet of the empty space. Alone.

He walks to the window and tears away a small piece of paper covering it. He peers out one last time.

EXT. WHITEGRASS RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Carter's tiny face is nearly lost in a giant sign that says "RITE AID COMING SOON."

FADE OUT:

FADE IN ON:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

People are filing in to an auditorium.

INT. HALLWAY - SAN FRANCISCO STATE - DAY

A familiar voice echoes through the speakers. A posterboard by the door reads "San Francisco State Presents: Dr. Lorraine Judith: The 20-Year Study: Adult Children of Divorce (ACOD)."

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Dr. Judith stands strong at the lectern, delivering her findings with charm and confidence. The words and voice are the exact same as at the start of the movie...

DR. JUDITH

...having a parent marry for the second time, or in some instances, a third. The eternal struggle over traditional family events. All of this has a profound effect on the child of divorce as they move into adulthood.

The back door opens. CARTER steps in.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)

The follow-up to my landmark study of 20 years ago will be about a generation unique in history.

He looks around. There aren't many open seats.

MICHELLE

Psst. Hey.

He spins. There, in the back row, smack-dab in the middle, is Michelle-- with an empty seat next to her.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

You got my message.

CARTER

Yeah. Thanks. I think.

He tries to figure out how to get in to the seat. He decides to just climb over. It causes a bit of a COMMOTION.

DR. JUDITH

For this new work, I was able to reconnect with four of my five original subjects. The fifth is a pop star currently on tour in New Zealand. But I have been studying her lyrics and they are quite revealing--

Dr. Judith notices the COMMOTION and its source: Carter. It gives her pause. She had an entire lecture prepared. But seeing him sit down and look up at her, it makes her reconsider what she wants to say.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
Today, I am going to focus on one subject. I called him... "Rick."

PUSH IN on Carter. His jaw tightens.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
Adult "Rick" is charming... and successful... but is also... controlling and rigid... and lives in an emotional cave.

Carter is taken back. He looks to Michelle.

MICHELLE
No one's even paying attention.

He looks to the person on the other side, who is riveted. In fact, the whole room is.

DR. JUDITH
His parents divorce has become the defining event of his life, instead of just a milestone. But...

We PUSH IN on Carter. He is really listening now.

DR. JUDITH (cont'd)
(almost as an apology)
Rick is not alone in this. We all hold onto the shards of our past. That doesn't mean we need to carry them around and repeatedly stab ourselves in the thigh with them. Sometimes, they should just be buried in the backyard, with a marker if you choose.

Carter looks away for a beat.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. AUDITORIUM - SAN FRANCISCO STATE - DAY

Carter pushes through the doors, first one out, making a b-line for his car.

CUT TO:

INT. HOME DEPOT - DAY

Carter strolls through the massive aisles, shopping cart half-full of various provisions. Not sure what it all adds up to...

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Beautiful backroad northern California. Redwood trees, light slanting through the foliage.

Carter turns off a main road on to a ragged, dirt path. TILT UP to see the name of the street: "WHITEGRASS LANE"

The car bounces along and finally comes to a STOP. He gets out and looks up at something in front of him. We see for the first time...

THE LAKE HOUSE. A two story rustic log cabin set amongst the trees. Weeds grow around the porch.

He eases out of the car, takes a stretch, pops open the trunk and casually removes TWO CANS OF GASOLINE.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - UNDERNEATH

SPLASH. Carter douses the base of the house. When one can is empty, he moves on to the next. He even finds some old rags and soaks them. Perfect! Then...

A NOISE. From under the house he sees feet. Walking through the grass. Down the hill toward the lake.

He scrambles to hide the gas cans. Then slithers out from under the house, grabbing a rotted yellow wiffle bat, to vantage where he can see--

THE BOAT HOUSE. The door is OPEN. He starts down the hill.

CARTER

Hello?

More RUSTLING in the boat house. Then a figure emerges...

GARY

Carter?

CARTER

Gary!?!?

Carter's step-dad, decked in full fishing gear.

CARTER (cont'd)
What are you doing here?

GARY
Um. Your mother and I, we actually used to use the place.

CARTER
You did?

GARY
Yeah. All the time. I re-painted the canoe.

He notices the canoe in the water.

CARTER
Oh. Looks good.

GARY
I was just going to do some fishing. Clears my head.

CARTER
Gary... I'm sorry. I should have told you the truth--

GARY
You were in a tough spot.

CARTER
I still feel bad.

GARY
It's called morality. It's what separates us from voles.

Carter grins. Gary always was the good guy.

GARY (cont'd)
So what are you doing here?

CARTER
Well... um... I might be at the tail-end of a nervous breakdown.

Gary laughs. Doesn't know if he is kidding or not.

GARY
Want to come fishing?

CARTER
Um. No. But maybe I'll see you when you get back.

Gary smiles, climbs into the boat and pushes off. Carter waves to Gary. Gary waves back. Carter smiles.

SMASH CUT TO:

Carter walks back up the hill, muttering to himself, unsure what to do now.

CUT TO:

Under the house, Carter retrieves the gasoline can, collects the pile of rags.

CUT TO:

Carter's trunk flies open. He tosses all the evidence back in, slams it. And sighs.

CARTER (cont'd)
Stupid idea anyway.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - DAY

Carter washes his hands off in the sink. As he dries them, he looks around the beautiful great room decorated with rustic charm. He notices something underneath the coffee table. Pulls out a wicker basket filled with magazines. And two heavy duty FLASHLIGHTS. A nostalgic grin.

EXT. BACK DECK - LAKE HOUSE - DAY

Carter steps through double-doors on to a large deck and STOPS. We see it the way he sees it. THE LAKE, stretching out before him, glistening in the afternoon sun. It's calm, quiet, sublime. Better than he remembered it.

He takes a deep breath. A gust of wind rattles the trees. It's the only noise for miles around. And for the first time in 99 pages, he experiences something resembling calm.

He spots a lone Adirondack chair and sits. He nudges over the footrest. Up go the feet. He tilts his head up to the warm sun and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK DECK - LAKE HOUSE - FOUR HOURS LATER

Carter is OUT. Somewhere between a nap and a coma. Then VOICES stir him. And a SLAMMING door wakes him.

He pops up. Goes back to the double doors. Opens them...

INT. LAKE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...to find MELISSA AND HUGH taking off their jackets.

MELISSA
Carter? What are you doing here?

A beat.

HUGH
Your mother is talking to you.

CARTER
Um...

Now Trey and Kieko enter. They carry bags of groceries. They are shocked to see Carter.

TREY
Who invited him?

HUGH
He's just here.

CARTER
What's going on?

MELISSA
(explaining)
We came up for the night. A family getaway.

CARTER
Oh.

HUGH
No offense.

Carter is about to feel left out, except there isn't time. The back door opens and--

GARY
Carter! Hope you're hungry!

Gary enters through the back door with a fish in each hand. He sees everyone. They see him. A really awkward moment.

HUGH
What's he doing here??

CARTER
(re: Mom and Gary)
They've been coming here for years.

HUGH

They what?

MELISSA

No! We came up here once or twice--

CARTER

A month.

MELISSA

Carter! Don't stir!

HUGH

(to Melissa)

On the ride up here, you were
saying you barely remember the
place.

MELISSA

With you. I barely remember it
with you.

HUGH

You map-quested directions!

GARY

I should probably go.

MELISSA

Gary...

The front door OPENS. Everyone spins to see Sondra. She is appalled!

SONDRA

I knew it! Secure-a-tec called to
say the alarm had been tripped.

CARTER

There's an alarm?

SONDRA

We put it in two months ago.

Melissa looks Hugh. Everyone does.

HUGH

(re: Sondra)

It was her idea.

MELISSA

What other improvements have you
made to our house that you haven't
been to in twenty years?

SONDRA
(arms folded)
New septic system.

CARTER
(flabbergasted)
Am I the only one who hasn't been
coming up here?

Trey and Kieko look at each other. Confess...

KIEKO
We camped.

TREY
But we never came in the house.

SONDRA
I want you all out. Now.

MELISSA
Us?

SONDRA
You can go now or later. But this
is going to be my house.

MELISSA
This will NEVER be your house.

SONDRA
You haven't met my lawyer.

MELISSA
Fortunately, we know how to tie it
up in court. Don't we, Hugh.

GARY
Can I attempt to be a voice of
reason--

HUGH
Shut up, Gary--

MELISSA
Don't tell him to shut up.

GARY
Dick.

MELISSA
Gary!

SONDRA
He is a dick!

She pulls out her cellphone.

SONDRA (cont'd)
(re: Carter)
I had an injunction on his
restaurant in 12 hours. I'll have
all you out of here in six.

She storms out the back door to the deck to make a call.

Carter cannot believe what his peaceful idyll has become.

Long BEAT. No one knows what to say.

CARTER
(to Trey)
So, how's the wedding coming?

TREY
We're eloping.
(off Carter's reaction)
To Barbados.

MELISSA
In September. We'll all be there.

GARY
I probably won't.

TREY
Actually, we are going to invite
you.

HUGH
No you're not.

TREY
Shut up, Dad. We're doing what WE
want. Deal with it.

Carter looks at Trey, impressed. Hugh eyes Sondra on the
deck.

HUGH
She really does have an
unbelievable lawyer.

Carter turns toward the deck, then FREEZES. Panic rips
across his face. Sondra is talking a million miles a minute
on her cellphone, finishing off a cigarette. And like a city
gal, she is about to discard the butt where she pleases...

CARTER
WAIT!

She flicks it. What follows is an unmistakable WHOOOOSH!

GARY
Do you smell smoke?

Everyone looks at each other in PANIC. Sondra comes blasting through the door.

SONDRA
The house is on fire!

MELISSA
Someone get a bucket!

HUGH
We don't have a bucket.

MELISSA
How do we not have a bucket?!?

TREY
(rushing to the cabinet)
Here's some tupperware.

CARTER
That's not going to work.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - VERY LATE AT NIGHT

The house is in ashes. Fire trucks line the perimeter. The fire is out, but it's been a long night.

FIRE CHIEF
Well, the fire is contained. Five minutes later, 100,000 acres of redwoods would be gone.

A tiny muscle moves in Carter's face.

FIRE CHIEF (cont'd)
There's really nothing to salvage.
Except the boat house. Couple of canoes. Who's place is this?

A pregnant pause. Everyone looks at everyone else.

HUGH
Sondra. It's all yours.

He chuckles.

SONDRA

That's very big of you, Hugh. But I think it belongs in your family.

She laughs back. Now they all start to laugh. In relief and out of exhaustion, but also because it's kind of funny. The Fire Chief doesn't have a clue what's happening.

FIRE CHIEF

(trying to cheer them up)

You still got the view.

And he moves off. Everyone stands for a beat.

MELISSA

Funny how nature has a way of sorting these things out.

CARTER

Circle of life.

HUGH

I guess we're going back to the city.

They turn to go, but as they approach their cars, two are TORCHED. One is Hugh's...

HUGH (cont'd)

Not the Lexus!

The other is Carter's. He smiles to himself. Guess they'll never find those gas cans.

MELISSA

Hugh, me, Trey and Carter will go with...

She looks at Gary. That's not going to work.

HUGH

Carter. You and Trey and Sondra will go with...

Sondra doesn't seem to like that idea. Carter is about to step forward and intervene, but doesn't. He just watches-- as they all drift toward the remaining cars; Sondra and Melissa arrive at the same door, Melissa opens it for her, Sondra hesitates, then gets in. It took care of itself.

CARTER shakes his head in amazement. Two cars. Everyone fits. No one complains. One big happy family.

HUGH (cont'd)
Carter! Get the hell in the car!

Carter hurries into the backseat and they pull away. As the camera pulls up over the scene, we hear:

DR. JUDITH (O.S.)
We are bound to our family in ways
that we are bound to no other
people on this planet.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CSPAN'S "BOOKNOTES" - TELEVISION SHOW - DAY

A HOST interviews Dr. Judith. Her new bestseller--"A.C.O.D."-- is featured prominently on the coffee table between them.

DR. JUDITH
I myself have been married three times. I have five children. Two of whom are currently not speaking to me.

HOST
So do you follow your own advice?

DR. JUDITH
Oh, I don't give advice. I'm a terrible therapist. It's why I write books.

CARTER
She's right.

WIDEN to reveal Carter is sitting beside her. He is a guest on the show as well.

CARTER (cont'd)
She is a terrible therapist, but she did teach me one thing. People like me have no model to follow. Which can kind of suck, but... there's a certain freedom in that too.

DR. JUDITH
I couldn't have said it better myself.

CARTER
I know.

The host laughs.

HOST
The book is ACOD by Dr. Lorraine Judith. It's on bookshelves now.

Cheers ring out. Applause. We realize we've been watching this from--

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's a cocktail party. People gathered to watch the show and celebrate Dr. Judith's book. Chloe stands with Carter.

CHLOE
(re: him on TV)
That sweater does make you look gay.

People begin to disperse. In the crowd, we find Lauren, sporting a tan and a "vacation" braid. She's sitting on--

THE COUCH

--next to Michelle.

LAUREN
So Carter tells me you're in the book too?

MICHELLE
No.

LAUREN
Oh.

A beat. Michelle relents.

MICHELLE
I'm Yvette.

LAUREN
Really? I thought she was black.

IN THE KITCHEN

Carter is watching Dr. Judith talk to Hugh and Melissa. Well, really Melissa. Hugh is mopping up cocktail sauce with a piece of bread. Melissa notices, slaps his hand.

Trey comes up behind Carter. Stands beside him.

CARTER
They almost look human.

TREY

How long do you give them?

CARTER

It's best not to ask.

Beat.

TREY

Kieko's pregnant.

Carter turns to him, aghast.

TREY (cont'd)

Kidding. I think.

By the door, Carter sees Lauren putting her coat on. He moves toward her.

CARTER

You taking off?

LAUREN

Yeah. Been back a week and my parents are driving me nuts. I gotta start looking for an apartment.

Carter smiles to himself.

CARTER

Can we be friends?

LAUREN

Friend-ly
(a smile)
Michelle is nice.

CARTER

No she isn't.

LAUREN

I think she might like you.

CARTER

Unlikely. She's sleeping with her much older ex-husband.

LAUREN

Well... he better watch out then.

They look to the couch. Hugh is sitting down, introducing himself to Michelle.

Lauren gives Carter a kiss on the cheek. And leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CARTER'S APARTMENT - END OF THE NIGHT

People are just about gone. A few linger, including...

DR. JUDITH
A wonderful night, Carter. Thank
you for hosting this.

CARTER
Of course.

DR. JUDITH
Getting to know you as an adult...
has been a real pleasure.

CARTER
Thanks. Don't call me in twenty
years.

They embrace. And she leaves. Carter turns back to the apartment. Chloe is holding dirty plates.

CHLOE
Yes, I will help you clean up.

They walk into--

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Chloe starts rinsing plates in the sink, looks around for something.

CHLOE
Dishwasher?

CARTER
Nope.

CHLOE
Funny. I thought you had one.

He rolls up his sleeves, grabs a dish towel and joins her by the sink, drying the plates as she hands them to him.

CHLOE (cont'd)
Nicely thrown party.

CARTER
I think so.

CHLOE

Did I hear Bread coming out of your stereo?

CARTER

It was a mix. There may have been some Bread in there.

We begin a very slow PULL BACK.

CHLOE

They didn't recognize me.

CARTER

Who?

CHLOE

Your parents. Your mom, I understand. But your dad? Technically, I was his daughter for a few years.

CARTER

I'm thinking about moving.

CHLOE

Really?

CARTER

To the midwest. Everybody always goes west.

CHLOE

No one goes mid-west.

CARTER

Yeah. I probably won't go anywhere.

We've pulled back far enough that they are barely audible. But it doesn't matter what they're saying. The tableau is one of peace. Of calm. Shit man, it looks like Goddamn Norman Rockwell.

FADE OUT.

The End