

"THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THE MONOGAMOUS DUCK"

by

Neeraj Katyal

Neeraj Katyal
226 E. 14th St.
Apt. 3AI
New York, NY 10003
(646) 352-3973
neerajkatyal@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. VACANT LOT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

GRADY HERMAN (27) stands forty feet away from a graffiti-covered wall. He fires a baseball towards the expanse of artwork in front of him, then fields the ricochet with all the flash and flair of a seasoned shortstop. He continues his back and forth with tenacity.

GRADY (V.O.)

The single most abused, misused...I would go so far as to say perverted word in the English language -- not that I can claim to be any sort of authority on it -- but the single most abused and perverted word in the English language is the word beautiful.

Grady ranges to his right, snares the ball, then grinds to a halt.

GRADY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's a precious word is what it really is, and therefore one that should be reserved for precious people: your mother; your daughter; a girlfriend. And I do obviously realize that in the grand scheme of things it's pretty much useless to have this at or near the top of your list of pet peeves, but still -- just break down the actual word: Beautiful. Beauty-full...full-of-beauty.

He sifts through a pocket and removes his "bullet" -- a small, portable device that delivers the perfect hit of cocaine.

GRADY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

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

He takes a hit.

EXT. CITY PARK (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Grady, at a stone chess table. White lines all around.

He moves a Bishop, gets up and switches seats, then debates.

Playing against himself, he moves a Knight.

GRADY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now the only other word that approaches beautiful in terms of its overuse is the word genius. Every other conversation I have, someone's like 'Oh, you need to meet my friend Steven. He's a genius.' It's like 'Listen sweetie, beautiful and genius are not words you just float around.'

We see the name "Diane" spelled out in lines of cocaine.

Two COPS make their approach. Grady's busted.

Unfazed, he snorts the "A". A moment, and he rips the "N" as well.

GRADY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There's a difference between being brilliant and being a genius. Brilliant smart people know that the capital of Burkina Faso is Ouagadougou, they know the literacy rate is twenty-seven percent, the chief natural resource is maganese, and the percentage of arable land is whatever the fuck the percentage of arable land happens to be.

So high he's oblivious, Grady innocently offers his straw to the Cops as if to say, "Your turn."

Minus the "A" and the "N", "Diane" now spells out "Die".

INT. PHOENIX HOUSE TREATMENT CENTER - (PRESENT) DAY

As they sit in an office, Grady and DR. ROSEN are knee-deep in conversation. The former is a hipster/jock hybrid of sorts.

GRADY (CONT'D)

Genius is a little deeper than all that. Coco Chanel and Cristobal Balenciaga were geniuses. Dorothy Parker was a genius. Fucking Greg Maddux is a genius. But as much as it may tear at the heartstrings, some girl's friend Steven who painted a bag lady taking a shit on the side of the FDR Drive is just not. It takes more than that. I mean...I realize we live in an age of diminished expectations and the lowest common denominator, but the bar is set pretty high with me.

EXT. PHOENIX HOUSE TREATMENT CENTER - DAY

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

GRADY

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

DR. ROSEN

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

GRADY

Well the last time I remember
having an identity outside of drugs
I was this eighteen-year-old,
swashbuckling romantic. I had all
the little things totally covered.
Now I feel like I've awakened from
this long slumber, but I don't have
anything basic to offer besides the
eternal affection sunshine shit.

DR. ROSEN

Which is the icing on the cake.

GRADY

Right. But I'm missing the batter.

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

DR. ROSEN

And?

GRADY

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

DR. ROSEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRADY

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

(to himself)

Except Citibank. Citibank lets you
take out tens.

Grady picks up a garden hose, then alternates between the hard stream and gentle spray. The fine mist results in a rainbow.

DR. ROSEN
Do you have any specific ambitions?

GRADY
Re-connect with that swash-buckling kid I used to be? That's short-term...I guess my sophomore year I sold a manuscript to Doubleday. They never ran it, but like...

DR. ROSEN
They never ran it. Meaning it was never officially published?

GRADY
It was never published, no. They bought it, edited it...but then they did to it what they would eventually do to my girlfriend.

DR. ROSEN
Which is what?

GRADY
They buried it in a box.

EXT. CEMETERY (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Grady places flower petals against the glass of an 8 x 10 frame.

INT. APARTMENT (FLASHBACK) - DAY

A model's flawless cheekbone. It belongs to DIANE BAKER-SIMS.

A makeup brush, manned by Grady, sweeps its way across her face.

DIANE
You gave me a look. Seriously.
(beat, no answer)
You're getting the silent treatment for the rest of the day. Starting ...wait...wait...not yet...now.

Grady blends away as Diane's head remains at a tilt.

DIANE (CONT'D)
There was a distinct inhale then a shift of your eyes towards me like some...bad subject was about to be breached. Broached? Breached?
(MORE)

DIANE (CONT'D)
...You haven't been fucking Eastern European hookers again, have you?

GRADY
Other women, Diane? Hookers or otherwise? They do not, have not, and will not...ever exist.

DIANE
I love you very much, Mister.

GRADY
I know you do.

DIANE
How generous. Magnanimous, even.

GRADY
Well you never say I'm cute, right?
I mean you never...say I'm cute.

DIANE
That's because I'm not attracted to you.

GRADY
That's true...I thought you were giving me the silent treatment, by the way.

DIANE
...I am.

Grady eyes Diane. After awhile, he leans in and kisses her neck.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Sprawled on the floor, Grady cleans the toilet with a toothbrush.

DR. ROSEN
You'll stay with your family then?

GRADY
Well...I'm actually gonna stay with this woman I used to intern for in college. We're close, she's the reason I got set up at Doubleday.

DR. ROSEN
And that's agreeable to her?

GRADY
Yeah-no, I pretty much helped raise her kids.

(MORE)

GRADY (CONT'D)

I mean, from seventeen to twenty-six I more or less spent every day with her family. We all sorta grew up together. She separated awhile back, so before I came in we figured it might be good for the kids and all if I were there.

DR. ROSEN

And for you.

GRADY

And for me.

(beat)

They're actually not in New York anymore. They moved to California like a year ago.

DR. ROSEN

Hm...Have you been involved with anyone since -- Diane is it?

(beat, no answer)

And how long has it been?

GRADY

Four-and-a-half years.

DR. ROSEN

That's a long time.

GRADY

Depends on the way you look at it.

DR. ROSEN

...So California.

GRADY

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

DR. ROSEN

Interesting. Do you know what the original quote was?

GRADY

That's not it?

DR. ROSEN

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

INT. AIRPORT (LAX) - DAY

Grady's arrival in California. He rides a horizontal escalator.

He looks down. An errant shoelace.

He looks back up.

After a moment, he bends down and wisely tucks it in his shoe.

In front of him, the stunning and sensible CAITLIN FOUNTAIN (20's) is with a CHILD.

Grady notices her ridiculously expensive shoes.

GRADY

Hey...

Caitlin turns around.

GRADY

I really like the fake Christian Louboutins ya got there.

CAITLIN

...They're not fake.

GRADY

Well...yeah. It was a point of entry in starting a conversation.

CAITLIN

Insulting my shoes?

GRADY

No. Showing off the fact that I'm the only guy in a ten mile radius that knows who Christian Louboutin even is...And by saying they're fake I not only challenge you a little, I avoid a dead end conversation. If I just say 'Nice Christian Louboutins,' you'll be like 'Thanks,' and that'll be it ...Instead, we have this.

CAITLIN

Oh? And what exactly is 'this'?

GRADY

'This'...is something.

EXT. LAX (BENCH) - DAY

Later, Grady and Caitlin watch the Child play in front of them.

CAITLIN

He looks more like my mom than he does my sister...Do you have kids yourself?

GRADY

Ummmm...I don't think my lifestyle's really conducive to that.

CAITLIN

Why, what do you do?

GRADY

I don't.

CAITLIN

No, seriously.

GRADY

No...seriously. What about you?

CAITLIN

English teacher. Honors English, mind you. I've made the leap. Gatsby, Catcher, Cliff's Notes... It is Cliff's Notes, by the way, not Cliff Notes. Most people say Cliff Notes. But it's Cliff's.

They watch the Child play in front of them.

GRADY

I actually love kids. I wish I could have like seven or eight.

CAITLIN

Oh, is that right?

GRADY

Well I realize I'd have no say in it, I mean...inevitably that'll be the decision of whatever lesbian I end up figuring out the options with...I just want a family.

CAITLIN

So where do you live?

GRADY

...In the past.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Grady's old boss and mother-figure, DARLA KEILING (45), drives.

Window open, Darla's elbow rests on the door, while Grady's is perched awkwardly on the half-raised glass.

He fiddles with the window button.

GRADY

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

Darla ignores his request for quite awhile, then finally lowers the window. Grady keeps his arm in place as the glass drops.

GRADY

How's Ed?

(beat, no answer)

Is he still dating that nurse?

DARLA

Massage therapist, and yes, thank you for asking.

GRADY

Well that's what I'm here for.

DARLA

And where were you when it counted?
What was I supposed to tell Meghan
-- that you couldn't fly out cuz
you were too busy self-destructing?

GRADY

The truth never hurts, Darla.

She steals a glance at him, confirming something.

DARLA

Are you wearing your seatbelt?

As he reaches for his belt, Darla slams on the brakes.

Grady flies into the dash. On the recoil, he's thrown back into his seat.

Darla grabs his ear as if he were an insolent child.

DARLA

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

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Darla pushes a cart. Grady periodically tosses items in it.

Darla, in turn, nonchalantly removes them. He doesn't notice, and she doesn't care about re-shelving them in the wrong sections.

DARLA

Sweetie, you're not a drug addict per se. Everyone knows that. But we do have to address your mental issues, your gambling issues...

GRADY

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

Shameless, Darla shelves bananas among soda, milk among pasta.

DARLA

I didn't understand any of that.

GRADY

It was for my own amusement. I just wanted to hear myself say it.

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

GRADY

Have you spoken with Aunt Liz?
(beat, no answer)
Have you been dating at all?

DARLA

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

GRADY
...Did you just make that up?

They drive in silence. Noticing his shoes on the dashboard...

DARLA
Get your feet off the car.

Grady complies. After a moment, he wisely clicks on his seatbelt.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Grady sits on the porch and holds a drink. A car stops out front.

MEGHAN KEILING (8) emerges. The car leaves, she approaches.

MEGHAN
What are you drinking?

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

MEGHAN
Cherry 7-Up?
(beat, no answer)
Can I have some?

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

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

GRADY
Is he hot?

MEGHAN
(beat, then giving in)
He's cute.

GRADY
I bet. What's his name?

MEGHAN
Cary Volkman.

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

MEGHAN
Meghan and Cary.

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

MEGHAN
Well you haven't really dated that many girls.

Grady smiles, then takes a sip of his drink.

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

GRADY
I said 'maybe' I would save you some.

MEGHAN
And?

GRADY
And, did you ever think about the fact that 'maybe' is just a nice way of saying 'no'?

MEGHAN
You're a dork, Grady.

GRADY
I'm not a dork, you're a dork.
(beat)
So are you just gonna stand there or am I ever gonna get a kiss?

Meghan closes the gap, Grady stands on his knees, and pecks on the cheek morph into a hug.

Then, at the height of sentimentality...

GRADY
A'right, get off.

They let go. She kisses him, and he hands over his Cherry 7-Up.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

ANDREW KEILING (15) puts the final touches on a fish tank.

Andrew is mid-teen awkward, a cute little nerd boy with glasses.

ANDREW
Scissors?

Nurse to Doctor, Grady places scissors in Andrew's open palm.

GRADY
Scissors.

Andrew snips leaves from a plant that sits on the counter. He adds them to the water's surface, already covered in lily pads.

Andrew takes a water-filled bag and places it in the sink.

He opens it, then places a fiddler crab on top of a surface pad.

ANDREW
Five bucks says Meghan and Vanessa try to name him Sebastian.

GRADY
Why Sebastian?

ANDREW
The Little Mermaid?

They watch the crab do his thing.

ANDREW
We should name him Herpes.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady opens a wooden wine box. It's filled with keepsakes.

He leafs through letters. Reads a few paragraphs here and there.

He flips through pictures. The last one is of Diane.

Grady takes out a box of candlesticks. Examines each one closely.

He places one aside. Grabs another and takes a pen from the box.

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

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

Out fall two small bags of cocaine.

Grady sticks one bag in the dug out space from the second stick.

He takes the first stick, melts it with the flame of a lighter.

He drips wax onto the second stick, forming a seal over the bag.

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

INT. DARLA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Fresh from the shower, Darla anxiously stands in front of a scale. She taps it with one foot to turn it on, waits, then gets on. As the screen calibrates, she plays a game of Wheel of Fortune.

DARLA
C'mon -- Big money-Big money-Big
money...Crap.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grady and Meghan in the mirror. Each have green facial masques on. Meghan looks adorable in a bathrobe, hair wrapped in a towel.

MEGHAN
You lost weight.

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

Meghan needs further clarification.

GRADY
It's when you stop eating.

MEGHAN
Why would you do that?

GRADY
To prove a point. Couple o'
points, really.

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

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

MEGHAN
Why not?

He takes the towel off her head and brushes out the knots.

GRADY

They had a lotta Kryptonite there,
y'know what I mean? A lotta smart
people worked there. And plus...I
think a lot of my little schemes
woulda benefitted from like...I
dunno, some more effort during the
planning stages maybe?

Darla enters and places linens in the closet.

MEGHAN

Mom, my face is burning.

GRADY

Shut up, that means it's working.

Darla gives Meghan a kiss on the head and leaves.

MEGHAN

How long do you keep it on for?

GRADY

Whenever. As long as it takes to
make me beautiful.

MEGHAN

...I have to be in bed by ten.

She offers a smirk. It's returned with a smile.

MEG

(long beat)

So how come you use drugs?

GRADY

I don't really know. I know that
people who do, who get really deep
in...they're usually trying to
escape from something. And they
don't like themselves very much.

MEGHAN

You don't like yourself?

GRADY

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

MEGHAN

I understand.

GRADY

Good...good. At least one of us
does.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - DAY

Early next morning. VANESSA KEILING (16) stands at the door and watches Grady sleep. His covers don't cover, they're on the floor.

She enters and fixes the sheets, effectively tucking him in.

But after some more observing, she quietly says to herself...

VANESSA
Fucking hate you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin Fountain (Grady's LAX friend) draws a heart on the board.

Throughout the scene, Andrew creates a first-rate pencil sketch of LYNDA CARR, who sits twenty feet away.

School bully ROB HILDRETH dumps some lunch down Andrew's back.

CAITLIN
Okay. So I think that if we combine English Week with the fact that Valentine's is coming up, it'd be fun to have you guys write your own personal ads.

HILDRETH
That's kinda lame, isn't it?

CAITLIN
Hildreth, you're kinda lame.

Scattered laughter. Andrew cleans out the macaroni, then sketches.

CAITLIN (CONT'D)
Now when we're done, we're gonna keep them anonymous, read them out loud, and then try and determine whose ad is whose.

STUDENT #1
How long do they have to be?

STUDENT #2
Same stupid question every time.

CAITLIN
Barna, don't be a loser. I am sensitive to the challenge that presents you, but at least make an effort.

More scattered laughter. Student #1 kicks Student #2's desk.

CAITLIN

And you, Wilson. Try not to express whatever hidden feelings you have for Barna through violence. It's hardly an appropriate form of flirtation.

Big laughs all around. Caitlin Fountain is a very cool teacher.

LYNDA

Have you ever done a personal ad, Ms. Fountain?

CAITLIN

(echoing Hildreth)

No, they're lame.

LYNDA

So what are you looking for in a guy?

CAITLIN

(beat)

Someone to go to garage sales with.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - DAY

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

A moment, and his eyelids flutter open. Their eyes stay locked in on one another. He remains still as she stays right in his face.

MEGHAN

Are you awake?

No answer. Just the blink of an eye. Followed by another.

MEGHAN

We have to pick up Vanessa later.

(beat)

You look really old.

Grady palms her face like it's a basketball and holds it there.

GRADY

(gravel-voiced)

I will fucking...stab you.

MEGHAN

(speaking through his hand)

Well...we have all day for that.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Another classroom, where get our first real look at the brilliant and indomitable Vanessa Keiling. The class is divided into groups, with Vanessa joined by WILL HERZOG and JOCELYN AFRAME.

JOCELYN

So Will...are you and Heather going to the Valentine Ball?

WILL

I guess.

JOCELYN

(to Vanessa)
What about you?

VANESSA

...I think I have a date with Tavis Smiley and some Cheese Doodles.

WILL

I like 'Entertainers with Bryon Allen' more than Tavis Smiley.

VANESSA

Nah, Bryon Allen is fluff. Tavis Smiley is more like a black Charlie Rose. And plus...Byron Allen comes off as a bit of an Uncle Tom.

JOCELYN

You should come; a lot of us are going stag. Anyway. So are we gonna be Democrats or Republicans?

WILL

Does it matter?

VANESSA

How does it not?

WILL

Because the parties are a lot more similar than they are different.

VANESSA

Whatever.

WILL

'Whatever' is one of the last lines of defense for someone who's just lost an argument. Next you'll probably resort to name-calling.

VANESSA
...You're a dick.

WILL
Jocelyn, we can be Democrats if
Vanessa can gimme one example,
other than stem cells and partial
birth, of how Kerry and Bush had
different platforms in '04. Or
anyone -- Clinton/Dole, Rutherford
B. Hayes and friggin'...Samuel
Tilden...anyone. One example.

VANESSA
I won't justify your shit.

WILL
You won't...or you can't?

VANESSA
(beat, holding on him)
How 'bout we start with Energy?
Can we start with Energy?

WILL
Energy's great.

VANESSA
Great. Well...I can tell you that
Republicans support the funding of
new technologies, such as hydrogen
fuel cells, as well as the use of
domestic sources that include
drilling for oil in the ANWR. That
stands for Arctic National Wildlife
Refuge. Democrats on the other
hand, wanna increase research into
alternative and renewable fuels,
seek independence from Middle
Eastern oil reserves, and oppose
domestic drilling. Immigration:
Republicans favor a program that
would grant a three-year renewable
visa for immigrants who have jobs
in the U.S. and who also pay taxes.
Democrats favor citizenship for all
illegals who have worked in the
United States for five years, pay
taxes, and undergo an advanced
security screening. Health-care:
Democrats wanna extend coverage to
ninety percent of Americans. Plus,
they support the reimportation of
prescription drugs from Canada as a
way to lower costs.
(MORE)

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Republicans favor expanding
community health centers to treat
more of the uninsured. They're
also promoting medical-liability
reform to help control insurance
costs, and wanna use tax incentives
and health savings accounts as a
way for individuals to purchase
their own insurance, with or
without equity-based initiatives.

JOCELYN
...Okay. Democrats it is.

Vanessa hasn't broken her stone-faced hold on Will.

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

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

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

After he puts the car in park, Grady sorts through CD's.

GRADY
Whaddaya wanna listen to?

MEGHAN
Metallica. Enter Sandman.

GRADY
Meghan, Enter Sandman might be the
most played-out shit I can think
of.

MEGHAN
What about your hair?

Grady stares at her forever, not batting an eye. Still staring...

GRADY
Do you listen to those Prince tapes
I sent you?

MEGHAN
Vanessa does. Mommy says I'm not
old enough for Prince.

GRADY
Yeah, well Mommy's also oblivious
to the fact that kids your age
these days are partial to anonymous
oral sex in movie theaters.

MEGHAN
What?

GRADY
Kids your age -- maybe a little
older I guess -- they're having
anonymous oral at the movies.

After a moment, Meghan delivers a routine, non-comprehending...

MEGHAN
Okay.

Grady exits, puts on sunglasses, then rests his arms on the door.

GRADY
Look at me. Don't go anywhere.

MEGHAN
I won't.

GRADY
Seriously...don't go anywhere.

MEGHAN
I don't know how to drive.

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

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Grady walks through the school. Lockers and linoleum everywhere.

Ms. Caitlin Fountain will cross his path in about thirty feet.

Grady is looking down, so Caitlin feels safe to check him out.

She then looks down, and he, in turn, gives her the once over.

They pass, averting one another's eyes.

After ten feet, she looks over her shoulder, then turns back.

Five more feet, and Grady does the same.

Ten more, and Caitlin does an about-face.

CAITLIN
Excuse me, sir? Can I help you
with something?

GRADY
No, but uh...thanks for asking.

With a slow stride, Caitlin bridges the gap. No recognition.

CAITLIN
That's not what I meant.

GRADY
You don't mean what you say?

CAITLIN
That's...not it.

GRADY
You don't say what you mean.

CAITLIN
(beat, not amused)
What do you need?

GRADY
Well...I'm looking for a girl.
Very intelligent, very pretty. A
little standoffish, but the
standoffish-ness is only a function
of her intelligence, so ya can't
really fault her for that.

CAITLIN
Does this girl have a name?

GRADY
I dunno. Does she?

INT. CAR - DAY

Meghan listens to ear-splitting death metal.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

Vanessa, alone in the gym. She fires a lacrosse ball against a wall, catches it with her stick -- a chip off the old Grady block.

She spots him, and he slowly approaches. She ignores him.

GRADY
So I heard you were mad at
me. I mean obviously, right?

VANESSA
I'm not mad at you.

GRADY

You're not?

VANESSA

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

GRADY

What does that mean?

VANESSA

I'm not sure. I think some people in life are meant to fall by the wayside, y'know? Certain people are meant to fall off the path and serve as cautionary tales for the rest of us. Sign posts on the way.

GRADY

On the way to where?

VANESSA

Happiness.

Vanessa takes a moment to finish up, then turns to face Grady.

VANESSA

Who were your heroes growing up? Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden? Right? Cuz it occurred to me that like...both of them had New York in the palm of their hands at a really young age. Just like you did. And both of them had their demons. Just like you did. And y'know what they did with the whole world in the palm of their hands? Y'know what they said?

(beat, holding out her palm)
Here. Take this. I don't want it. ...Y'know what the problem with having heroes is, Grady? They have a nasty habit of disappointing us in the end.

GRADY

Vanessa, I am right now in the process of taking it in the ass from every angle that I can possibly conceive of. Now I know that's not the point, but --

VANESSA

-- Well boo-hoo you fucking tampon!
And you're right, it's not the
point. The point is that people
care about you. I had something
invested in you.

GRADY

Well there's --

VANESSA

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

GRADY

What's more important than blood?

VANESSA

(beat)

Love...What would Diane have
thought of all this? You were --

GRADY

-- Y'know what? I fucked up, I
know I fucked up, and no one knows
I fucked up more than I know I
fucked up. But a part of Diane
woulda found it borderline romantic
that I couldn't handle life without
her. So don't gimme some clichéd
bullshit about how when she died, a
part of me gave up and died, too.

VANESSA

I wasn't suggesting that at all.

GRADY

Then what are you suggesting?

VANESSA

...I think she's better off dead
than she ever was with you.

EXT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grady, in front of the vanity. He holds a toothbrush and paste in one hand. In the other, he fingers his small bag of cocaine.

He spreads a cylinder of paste along the length of the bristles.

Carefully opens the bag.

Dusts the surface of the paste with a healthy amount of cocaine.

Grady brushes his teeth. Normally, at first, but as his gums grow numb, his strokes become forceful. Furious. Violent.

He spits, and the spit has been colored by blood.

He pauses to look at it. Unfazed, he continues to brush.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Grady looks at the sky. Andrew joins him.

ANDREW
What are you up to?

GRADY
Just wondering how I got here.

ANDREW
You and me both. I mean what can you say about a place where the sun shines three-hundred sixty-five days a year yet there's a tanning salon on every corner?

GRADY
That's funny.

ANDREW
It is funny. It was a good line I read in an otherwise shitty book.

GRADY
What's your girl situation like?

ANDREW
My shit doesn't translate out here. And compared to your average New York girl, anything else is like a step down.

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

ANDREW
I think I might wanna go back and live with Dad. I haven't gone out like a single weekend night so far.

Andrew walks a few paces towards the house, then turns around.

ANDREW
I wanna show you something.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Andrew and Grady descend the staircase and find themselves in a wall-to-wall world of art -- ceiling, floor, stained-glass, etc.

GRADY
Andrew, I can't believe you don't have girls crawling all over you.

ANDREW
There is this one girl. Lynda Carr. I've never talked to her, but we got this assignment to write personal ads. I wanna like...I dunno, show her that we share the same airspace or what have you.

GRADY
That's a pretty cool assignment.

ANDREW
Well it's English week. We did a Social Studies week where we do war re-enactments, Art week's coming up -- I'm submitting for that -- but now we're in English week.

GRADY
...That's actually kinda lame.

ANDREW
(right on his heels)
Oh, it's totally lame.

Grady wanders around until he comes to a painting of he and Diane.

EXT. CEMETERY (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Again, Grady kneels in front of a headstone. He still works the picture frame, placing petals face down against the glass square.

INT. BATHROOM (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Grady pulls a messy tangle of hair from the drain.

Diane appears in the doorway, her face devoid of color.

GRADY

Y'know what commitment is? It's finding yourself on your hands and knees, pulling your girlfriend's grease-coated hair out of a drain.

DIANE

Aunt Liz called.

A moment. Diane then places a vial of cocaine on the vanity.

DIANE

I found it in the dog's mouth
...Grady, I can't stop you from going down whatever path it is you're going down. But I'd prefer that you not take Marcie with you.

(beat)

Why do you lie to me?

GRADY

...Because I care about you.

Diane walks out, leaving the evidence.

Grady gets up, examines the bag, then tosses it in the toilet.

He stares at it, then flushes the handle and watches the bag spin.

But quick as lightning, he plunges his arm into the bowl to retrieve his one, true love.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady talks on Darla's land-line phone.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WATSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

KERIANNE WATSON (40) is on the other end as she feeds her BABY.

WATSON

Mr. Herman, it's Kerianne Watson.

GRADY

Wow. Isn't this a nice surprise.

WATSON

Isn't it, though? Only by the grace of emergency contact numbers. Happy to hear from me?

GRADY

Of course, I love telling people I have a probation officer. You can't buy that kinda street cred.

WATSON

Listen...Phoenix House says you know the score: You get arrested within the next three years, and without the cover of a treatment center, there's no pleading to a lesser charge. You will go in.

GRADY

I totally understand that.

WATSON

Good. And also understand that your curfew has been set for nine o'clock. If you're not on the other end of this phone every night at nine, a bench warrant will be issued for your arrest...You might want to think about taking a chance on life, Mr. Herman.

GRADY

Oh yeah? And if I don't?

WATSON

If you don't...life might decide to take its chances with you.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

The next day. Vanessa sits in the packed audience.

Will Herzog stands behind a podium on stage.

WILL

Baseball. It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BATTING CAGE - DAY

Grady watches a HITTER rip line drives against 80 m.p.h. feeds.

WILL

The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoon and evenings.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Then, just as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone. You count on it, rely on it to buffer the passage of time, but just when the days are all twilight, when you need it most, it stops. Today, a Sunday of rain and broken branches and leaf-clogged drains and slick streets, it stopped, and summer was gone. Of course, there are those who were born with the wisdom to know that nothing lasts. I am a simpler man, tied to simple patterns and cycles. I need to think that something lasts forever, and it might as well be the state of being that is a game. It might as well be that, on a green field, in the sun.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The Caitlin/Andrew/Lynda group from yesterday. Andrew works on his latest sketch of Lynda.

CAITLIN
Who's next? Lynda?

Lynda approaches the bench. Andrew's interest is piqued.

Lynda grabs an essay, then heads to the front of the room.

As Lynda reads what will predictably turn out to be Andrew's ad, his pencil comes to a sudden stop. He then writes c-r-a-p-s-h-i-t-m-o-t-h-e-r-f-u-c-k-e-r-c-r-a-p-s-h-i-t-m-o-t over and over again.

LYNDA
Um...okay. The expectations I have for women are not often met, as the majority who express their interest are either exceptionally brilliant and not particularly attractive, or exceptionally attractive and none too bright. The precious few who toe the median on both qualities, and do in fact, have slight-to-moderate crushes on me, are invariably matriculated at Spence or Chapin. Or, as is equally the case, have children that are.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Andrew sits alone and watches Lynda talk with CUTE GUY #1.

LYNDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

These women, mothers and daughters alike, live with their families in old money brownstones and hand-me-down townhouses. I live in a three-bedroom walk-up with one parent and two sisters. Our home lies amongst theirs, in the worst building with the most tenacious roaches on the wealthiest half-mile in America.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

LYNDA (CONT'D)

After school on weekday afternoons, the sidewalks of Carnegie Hill are dotted with socialites and their brood. The women, domesticated attorneys and standard-issue wives of the Seven Sisters among them, follow their Percocet sponsored naps with late lunches at Daniel. Over my left shoulder, a lone ingénue pretends to consider bath and body solutions as she poses for herself in the window of the L'Occitane boutique. And to my right, two Sacred Heart girls wait on a sheet of brownies as a third divides it with a plastic fork. Of the pair, one of them is gazing at me with a helpless, hopeless expression of both resignation and want. Slowly, a moment passes, and she abruptly turns away, realizing that I have caught her.

CAITLIN

Andrew. New York? The point of the essay was to disguise yourself.

Everyone turns to Andrew. He calmly closes his sketchbook.

CAITLIN (CONT'D)

See me after class, Fitzgerald.

ANDREW

Will do, Zelda.

Wise-ass. Caitlin's eyes narrow. Engrossed, Lynda silently reads.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Will has finished his essay, and now it's Vanessa's turn.

VANESSA

Um...I'd actually like to read an entry from a yearbook. It's kinda cool cuz it was written by a girl when she was our age, but it's ten years old now. Um...anyway.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. DUCK POND - DAY

Grady's all contemplative as he feeds some ducks.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Dear Grady...I could sit here for days and never know exactly what I should say. And that's probably because I'll never know exactly what I feel. Still, I wanted to leave you genuine, heartfelt words, forever lasting. And it's tough. Not because of our feelings for one another, but because of all the billions of grayish shades that have been penciled into our hearts and minds over the last ten months.

Vanessa's next words gradually fade away, as the conclusion of her presentation/Diane's yearbook entry to Grady will continue later.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Vanessa, Jocelyn, Will, and his girl, HEATHER CHURCH, at a table.

WILL

Favorite Monopoly property.

JOCELYN

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

HEATHER

Boardwalk.

Will looks at her, disappointed.

VANESSA

Favorite Monopoly property. I'm gonna say...Baltic Avenue.

WILL

Nice.

HEATHER

Nice? Boardwalk's so much better.

WILL

But it's not funny. She's being ironic. Baltic and Mediterranean are like the low-income housing projects of Monopoly. It's funny.

JOCELYN

What's yours?

WILL

I've always liked Marvin Gardens. It'd be a good name for band. Like if they're introduced on Saturday Night Live? Ladies and Gentleman, once again...Marvin Gardens.

Vanessa, a slight smile on her face. The girls don't notice.

Will does. After a moment, he and Vanessa make eye contact.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Darla and Andrew sit across from the school principal, BURT EHMAN.

DARLA

Where did he plagiarize from?

(to Andrew)

Where did you plagiarize from?

BURT

It from a magazine called Granta. It's a prominent literary journal.

DARLA

I know what Granta is, thank you.

BURT

Right. Well the thing is, aside from Ms. Fountain being able to tell that the overall quality wasn't indicative of a tenth grader's abilities, she also happens to have a certain fondness for the short story in question.

(beat)

I guess you could say it was fate.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Andrew exits the office. After a bit, he crosses paths with Lynda.

LYNDA
Hey, I really liked your thing.

ANDREW
Thanks. You and Ms. Fountain both, apparently.

LYNDA
Walk with me. I actually read the Facebook pages of older girls all the time. I like to see how I stack up.

ANDREW
Really? I read older girls' too, but mainly to see what'll be coming down the pipeline in a few years.

LYNDA
Well if you've read one, you've read 'em all: 'I've traveled like ...all over, but my dream trip is an African safari, and I'd love to move to Bangkok for a few years.'

ANDREW
I know, right? 'Oh wow, you went to Bangkok? Congratulations, you bought an airline ticket. It's not like you discovered the place while sailing the spice routes for the Dutch East India company.'

LYNDA
That's funny. The best are the girls who say 'I like to have fun.' It's sorta like saying 'I see things with my eyes.'

Andrew spots Rob Hildreth, the macaroni salad bully, and stops.

ANDREW
Lynda, I gotta go this way. Maybe I'll see ya later.

He takes off. Lynda watches him, then turns to look at Rob.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Darla, about to wrap things up.

DARLA

My youngest has been out awhile.
She'll be back soon but I don't
want her falling behind, so I was
hoping you could recommend someone.

BURT

Well most of our faculty does home
tutoring, so on your way out --

DARLA

-- Wait...you said he plagiarized
the essay from Granta?

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Darla tears Grady a new one.

DARLA

Now did he copy it himself or did
you encourage him to use it?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

GRADY

Darla, Granta's circulation is like
fifty thousand, and if you Google
either me or the story, nothing
comes up. We didn't think she'd
know it.

DARLA

So if you cheated and got away with
it, it woulda been alright?

Grady makes a subtle gesture with his face and eyes.

DARLA

It would not have been alright you
fucking dickhead!

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

On the other side, Vanessa and Meghan go reeling.

DARLA

Do you realize the consequences of
this for him? I mean goddammit!

GRADY

...You're upset.

DARLA

Oh, am I? Well I'm glad you
noticed. I'm glad that surfaced on
your little NORAD radar screen, cuz
I've been walking around all day
under the distinct impression that
you were an asshole!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grady in the tub, lots of rubber ducks. Andrew sits on the edge.

ANDREW

She stopped me after I met with the
principal and we like...talked. It
was awesome. She's like Medusa: I
don't wanna look her in the eye cuz
I'm scared I'll turn to stone...Oh,
hey -- I told my teacher that I
didn't just steal the story and
that I know the author really well.
She said to give you this.

He fishes out a piece of paper.

GRADY

What is it?

ANDREW

I dunno. An act of war, I think.

Grady does a thorough job of drying his hands on Andrew's shirt.

He unfolds the note, then reads. A moment.

GRADY

She thinks she's quite clever,
doesn't she?

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY

The next day, after school. Will sits and fumbles with a guitar.

In full lacrosse attire, Vanessa approaches with her stick.

VANESSA
What are you playing?

WILL
The Indigo Girls.

VANESSA
You like The Indigo Girls?

WILL
I like a lot of things.

VANESSA
You like baseball.

WILL
Why, do you?

VANESSA
Love it. The Green Fields of the
Mind is a classic. Bart Giamatti
wrote that when he was at Yale.

WILL
Really? Jacqueline's was the best,
though. That girl is crazy smart.

VANESSA
Plenty of girls are smart, William.

WILL
Not the ones I know.

VANESSA
Whatever. Guys are mean, ignorant,
and stupid. And then they go bald.

WILL
Not all guys are like that. Only
the ones who you notice are, which
says a whole lot more about you
than it does about them.

Vanessa holds on him a bit, then walks away.

WILL
Hey...

She does an about-face. Then...

WILL
Call me Will.

Again, Vanessa turns and walks away. Will watches.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin grades papers. Andrew appears.

ANDREW
I just wanted to apologize again.

CAITLIN
It's fine Keiling, really. I'm
just glad you got caught.

ANDREW
Um...so I gave my friend that note.

CAITLIN
So soon?

He hands over an envelope.

ANDREW
Well he lives with us.

CAITLIN
The author does?

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

CAITLIN
Is this a...wax seal?

ANDREW
He's kinda different.

CAITLIN
What is he, the Duke of Windsor?

ANDREW
No.

CAITLIN
Is he an Earl?

Andrew shakes his head.

CAITLIN
Is he a Count?

ANDREW
No, he's just...different.

CAITLIN
I'll say. Freak.

Caitlin reads the note and puts it back in the envelope.

She looks at Andrew for a while, then echoes Grady's response:

CAITLIN
He thinks he's quite clever...
doesn't he? Anyway, go home; I
gotta run, too.

ANDREW
Hot date?

CAITLIN
Nope. Tutoring session. Tutoring,
tutoring, tutoring. Tu-tor-ing.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Grady and Andrew near the house. They arrive, and find Caitlin's car blocking a large art installation of sorts.

ANDREW
So were you able to write at all?

GRADY
Nah. I don't have anything to
write about, anyway.

ANDREW
Write about me. People might like
me.

Grady offers him a Mona Lisa half-smile: "People would like you."

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Caitlin shuffles papers. Grady enters. After a moment...

CAITLIN
I know you.

GRADY
You were the teacher in the pencil
skirt with the white linen shirt.

CAITLIN
You remember what I was wearing?

GRADY
Sure I do. You dress pretty well
for a girl who buys all her clothes
off the rack.

CAITLIN
Touché.

GRADY

Um...saying touché implies that you said something biting, then I said something even more biting back, so then you say touché. But you never ...said anything biting. I did.

CAITLIN

(beat, studying him)
Are you the guy from the airport?

GRADY

Wow, yeah. Huh. You were wearing glasses and had your hair up when we met the second time.

CAITLIN

And you had sunglasses and a hat on ...That wasn't a bad look for you, by the way. Kinda hides the fact that you don't have a twenty-two-year-old's hairline anymore.

GRADY

...Touché.

Andrew enters and immediately plops face down on the couch. As a result, he mistakes Caitlin's general female form for Vanessa's.

ANDREW

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

Andrew flips over, and his eyes lock right on Caitlin's.

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

ANDREW

What I meant to say...

Everyone's frozen. Andrew and Caitlin maintain eye contact.

ANDREW

Mooooom?

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

CAITLIN

Wait a second...Oh my God.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla, Andrew, Grady and Vanessa hash things out.

DARLA
Isn't that a conflict of interest?

ANDREW
Yes! Yes it's a conflict of
interest! It conflicts!

DARLA
She never connected you and Meghan
having the same last name?

ANDREW
I don't wanna be downloading porn
while my teacher's downstairs, much
less have her pissing and shitting
in our bathroom. Cuz y'know that's
the totally inevitable next step:
Denial, anger, bargaining...what's
next?...Oh, that's right -- pissing
and shitting in our bathroom!

GRADY
You should ask her to stay for
dinner. Maybe if you get tight
with her she'll drop the charges.

ANDREW
Uh-uh -- no way. Just cuz you two
are bonding over the story doesn't
mean doo-doo. Just give her an
autographed copy and send her on
her way. Chop-chop.

VANESSA
(to Grady)
Do you wanna fuck Ms. Fountain?

DARLA
Vanessa, go to your room!

The fuck/subsequent yelling freezes Andrew and Grady. Then...

ANDREW
I think I'm gonna go to my room.

He leaves. Grady and Darla are alone. She eyes him.

DARLA
Well?

GRADY
Well what?

DARLA
Do you wanna fuck Ms. Fountain?

GRADY
No! No...she's ugly.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

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

CAITLIN
So Vanessa, you're a junior, right?
Have you thought about what
colleges you might wanna look at?

VANESSA
Smith. Early decision.

GRADY
What about Wellesley? You should
apply to Wellesley, too. And
Barnard. Barnard's like the gold
standard.

VANESSA
Chill your penis...a'right? I'm
applying to Smith. Early decision.

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

VANESSA
(beat, holding on her)
Harvard.

CAITLIN
(to Grady)
And you? What do you do?

GRADY
Um...I dunno, I like to listen to
music, read...I go to the beach a
lot...watch Felicity re-runs...I
dunno. Why, whaddayou like to do?

CAITLIN
Well...I was asking what you do-do.

GRADY
Ohhhh, what do I do. Oh, I don't
do shit. I think I told you at the
airport; remember?

VANESSA

Grady likes to play tennis in
Central Park and freebase cocaine
in the locker room between sets.

Andrew kicks Vanessa under the table.

She, in turn, fakes like she's going to throw her fork at him.

Andrew flinches. After he settles himself, she nails him with it.

He rubs his face, then recovers. An uncomfortable silence. Then...

MEGHAN

I like your hair, Ms. Fountain.

CAITLIN

Do you really?

MEGHAN

Oh, yeah. It's totally boss.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Darla takes a pizza out of the oven, but drops it on the floor.

She stares at it. It's cheese side up.

She holds out her fist and counts to five, one digit at a time.

At the five-finger mark (hitting the five second rule), she picks up the pie and proceeds.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

MEGHAN

(to Grady)

I'm hungry. Cook something.

GRADY

Cook something? What is this,
Charles in Charge? Fuck a cook.

CAITLIN

Do you really think it's a good
idea to be cursing in front of a
small child like that?

Grady takes a sip of his drink, then calmly sets down the glass.

GRADY

I'm sorry, who are you again?

Things get quiet. Andrew throws daggers at Grady with his eyes.

MEGHAN
Do you like chocolate, Ms.
Fountain?

CAITLIN
Oh, I love chocolate, Meghan.

MEGHAN
You should get a chocolate shoe.

CAITLIN
I'm sorry sweetie, what?

MEGHAN
You should get a chocolate shoe.

CAITLIN
Why?

MEGHAN
Because you keep putting your foot
in your mouth.

Andrew chokes on his water and coughs.

VANESSA
I want seafood.

CAITLIN
There's actually a seafood place
down the road that has the best
lobster salad in Southern
California. My opinion.

Darla enters with the pizza. Begins to serve. Caitlin helps.

GRADY
Actually, eating lobster sorta goes
against our personal ethics around
here.

VANESSA
You have ethics?

DARLA
He does. They're just not rooted
in any sort of tangible logic.

CAITLIN
Well what's wrong with lobster?
Lobster's great.

GRADY

I know, that's the word on the street, but like...lobsters mate for life. Did you know that?

CAITLIN

I did not.

ANDREW

It came up on 'Friends' once.

GRADY

Did they? Shit, I thought I had like an original idea. But yeah, lobsters only have one mate their whole entire lives. I mean a rabbit or a deer, they're cute, but they're not...monogamous, I guess. So every time you eat a lobster, you're effectively robbing another lobster of their life partner. That's so sad...Mountain lions are monogamous, too. Foxes, wolves...

ANDREW

Eagles.

GRADY

Prairie voles...marmosets...Ducks are monogamous. I don't eat ducks, either.

CAITLIN

You're funny.

GRADY

You bet your fat ass I'm funny. How do you think I get girls, with my face?

CAITLIN

My ass -- excuse me, Ms. Keiling -- my ass is not fat.

GRADY

Maybe it is, maybe it isn't...I hadn't noticed one way or the other.

Meghan doesn't look up as she cuts her slice with a knife.

MEGHAN

Liar.

A beat. Darla chortles sharply through her nose. She then places her hand in front of her mouth, but a replica chortle escapes.

INT. CAR/EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Covered in grease, Grady sits in the car's back seat.

Out comes his bag. He dips a car key, then sniffs the product.

Later, Vanessa gets in the front and joins Grady in his silence.

VANESSA

What are you thinking about?

GRADY

Nothing.

VANESSA

It's never nothing...Tell me.

GRADY

Well, I was thinking about how when I used to see a girl on the subway with a ring on her finger, I had to like...superimpose myself onto her to tell if she was married or not. Like I had to imagine my body rotated 180 degrees to sit in the same position she's sitting in, so I can match up my left hand with her left to see if she's wearing it on the proper hand or whatever....I
(beat)

I don't know if that was the answer you were looking for.

VANESSA

You're cute...Grady, I'm sorry for being a brat. That's my apology.

Grady gets out. Vanessa follows. He resumes his engine work.

VANESSA

Mom was excited about you coming. Maybe not ideal circumstances on your end, but fuck it. She's just been pretty bad. I mean she's still figuring out the divorce and that's fine, but she spends so much time focusing on our happiness.

GRADY

Well what about your happiness?

VANESSA

I dunno. Andrew was so popular at Trinity, but now he's pretty much a social pariah. He wants to leave. Mom would totally die. Meghan...I just worry about her development without a father figure.

GRADY

And what about Vanessa?

VANESSA

What about Vanessa?

GRADY

Well she's sixteen years old and she's worrying about father figures and emotional development.

VANESSA

Whatever...So our school's in a magnet program where the smarties go to this prep school for senior year. All it means is a full year of eighty percent girls, then four years at Smith with all girls, so that's another five years without ever having a boyfriend. And then what? I move back to New York and end up with four cats and syphilis?

GRADY

I thought you were into girls.

VANESSA

Stop...That was just a phase.

(beat)

I really love you, Grady.

He wipes grease on her face and delivers a familiar line:

GRADY

I know you do. I just wish I could be better for you.

EXT. SOFTBALL FIELD - DAY

The next day. Grady and the family sit in the bleacher crowd.

A foul ball is HIT.

Vanessa and her TEAMMATES sing softball cheers in the dugout.

TEAMMATES

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

VANESSA

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

Andrew notices Lynda across the way. She talks to CUTE GUY #2.

TEAMMATES

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

LATER

The game's over. Andrew draws and sculpts on the infield dirt.

Lynda approaches.

ANDREW

Hey. What are you doing here?

LYNDA

I'm sort of on the Quiz Bowl team.

ANDREW

I know. I was cut last year on the
 Nathan Hale quote.

LYNDA

'I only regret that I have but one
 life to lose for my country.' He
 and John Brown are always tricky.

ANDREW

Who's John Brown?

LYNDA

John Brown's Raid? Harper's Ferry,
 Virginia? Militant abolitionist
 who spawned the bastard child more
 commonly known as The Civil War.

ANDREW
Lynda...do you...forget it.

LATER

Lynda underhands softballs to Andrew. He misses with each swing.

LYNDA
Can I ask you a question? Why
don't you stand up to Rob Hildreth?

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

LYNDA
Exactly.

ANDREW
No. Not exactly. It's a myth.

LYNDA
Girls want men, Andrew, not boys.

ANDREW
...I'm fifteen.

LYNDA
It's more the principle behind it.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

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

GRADY
Hi, can I help you?

Caitlin offers an over-the-top smile.

CAITLIN
Y'know what your problem is?
(beat, still smiling)
You're an asshole.

GRADY
That's not fair, only I'm allowed
to be funny in this house.

As Caitlin brushes past him...

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

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Grady, Vanessa, Andrew. Enter Meghan, Caitlin, and their books.

CAITLIN
 (to Grady)
 So what're your plans for tonight?
 Stealing books from the library?

GRADY
 Hi Meggie. Hey, show Ms. Fountain
 your Muhammad Ali impression.

MEGHAN
 Oh, yeah! Okay, ready?
 (beat)
 Ahm a baaaaad man! Ahm a bad man!

CAITLIN
 You're so cute, Meghan.

MEGHAN
 Cute? I ain't cute. Ahm mean.
 Ahm so mean I make medicine sick.

GRADY
 I'm sorry, what am I doing tonight?
 Um...probably the same thing I do
 every Saturday.

CAITLIN
 Which is what?

GRADY
 I dunno. Watch Cocktail on TBS and
 then cry myself to sleep maybe?

Darla enters, which reminds Grady of...

GRADY
 (to Caitlin)
 You're Irish, right? I'm Irish.
 I was just telling Darla about my
 best friend from rehab, this kid
 Rashawn Scantlebury. He was so
 obsessed with blonde-haired girls;
 that's all he ever talked about.
 (MORE)

GRADY (CONT'D)

Thing is, he was only interested in blondes who were Irish, cuz he was saying how there's basically this unspoken sociocultural hierarchy of blondes, with German girls being at the top, Northern Europeans in the middle, and Irish girls at the bottom. The whole attraction was based on his theory that blonde Irish girls are like the niggers of blondes.

Darla chuckles to herself.

ANDREW

(to Grady)

You're a fucking asshole.

DARLA

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

ANDREW

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

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

ANDREW

He just called my English teacher a nigger, and I'm the asshole.

Andrew leaves. Caitlin giggles.

GRADY

It's not my theory. Though I'm from Long Island, so I do kinda know everything there is to know about Irish girls.

CAITLIN

Oh, is that so?

GRADY

It is so. Lemme tell ya something about Irish girls. Irish girls... are always right.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Grady and Caitlin exit the house and stop on the porch.

CAITLIN

So listen....um...do you wanna maybe like...do something tomorrow night?

GRADY

Well I can't just come and go as I please; I would have to sort of ask and all. And you don't mean like a date, right? Cuz I'm obviously not in a place where I should be --

CAITLIN

-- No, not a date. No. God no. I just figured you don't have anyone your age to hang out with, and like...

GRADY

I'll tell Darla.

CAITLIN

Oh. Okay. Well then I'll call you tomorrow?

He nods. She walks to her car, then turns.

CAITLIN

Oh, and Grady? Date or no date? I'm a flowers and candy kinda girl.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Andrew and Meghan finger paint on easels.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The family, clad in PJ's, t-shirts and nighties, eat breakfast.

DARLA

Grady, I don't want to sound trite, but we're all very proud of your courage in dealing with this.

VANESSA

It's not trite, it's sweet. Eighty percent of addicts relapse within the first twenty-fours after rehab.

GRADY

...Eleven.

No one really notices Grady's thinly veiled confession.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Andrew and Vanessa play ping-pong.

ANDREW
Sixteen-Four, yours.

VANESSA
Sixteen-Three.

ANDREW
Fine, Sixteen-Three.

VANESSA
(smiling)
Ew, whatever; I don't need a hand-
out. Now I'm gonna beat you out of
spite you fucking bitch-ass bitch.

She serves, he returns, she rips a winner. Five times until 21.

VANESSA
You should come out with us
tonight.

ANDREW
Who's 'us'?

VANESSA
Me and Jocelyn. We're going to the
pool hall...Lynda usually goes.

ANDREW
Does she?

VANESSA
Yeah, come. We never hang out
anymore.

EXT. CITIBANK - DAY

Grady dips his card, enters his PIN, and is presented with his balance: \$17.28. Citibank, as we learned earlier, doles out tens.

He proceeds, and the ATM presents Grady his lone, single bill.

EXT. NATURE PRESERVE - DUSK

The perfect sunset. Grady collects flowers.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Darla in bed. A wet towel covers her face.

GRADY
Are you feeling okay? I can stay.

DARLA
Do you mean that?

GRADY
Yeah. Of course I do.

Darla lies there awhile, then removes the towel.

DARLA
Grady...I'm fat.

GRADY
You're not fat, Darla -- you weigh
like 120 pounds. And whatever; I
mean...beauty comes in all shapes
and sizes.

DARLA
Are you insane? Women come in all
shapes and sizes. Beauty is a
much, much smaller category.
(beat)
Y'know, I can't do this myself.
It's good to have you here.

GRADY
It's good to be here.

DARLA
I'm glad to hear you say that...So
have you thought about writing?

GRADY
There's nothing to write about.

DARLA
There's everything. Everything is
copy. Diane's copy. Aunt Liz is
copy...Ms. Fountain is copy.

GRADY
Ms. Fountain is not copy.

DARLA
You can't let go of Diane until you
open your heart to someone else.

GRADY
Did you really just say that? That
is quite possibly the corniest
thing you have ever said. And I've
let go, a'right? I've let go.

DARLA
...I know you have.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

DOORBELL. Andrew opens the door and sees Caitlin. He waits a bit. He slowly closes the door, then stands there for a long time. She RINGS. He opens it a bit, peering through a sliver of space. Caitlin, not amused, slams it against him. He recoils.

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

She enters. Andrew leaves, but in passing the stairs...

ANDREW
Hey Grady? Your girlfriend's here!

Caitlin winces. Grady comes down with her flowers, then pauses.

GRADY
You showed up.

CAITLIN
Looks that way.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Vanessa sits at the table, Grady stands at the counter.

He opens a Tupperware container that Caitlin brought.

GRADY
You made me gingerbread men?
That's so sweet of you. Are they
laced with arsenic?

CAITLIN
Arsenic?

GRADY
Yeah, like Flowers in the Attic?

CAITLIN
Oh, that's so weird, I'm reading
Flowers in the Attic right now.

GRADY
Are you? Great book. Great book.
But yeah, the mom poisons her kids
by lacing their gingerbread cookies
with arsenic.

She looks at him as if to say, "Thanks." Grady feigns ignorance.

GRADY

The kids figure it out after one of the brothers dies so they escape from the attic and run away, but... y'know, not before telling everyone at the reception how their mom tried to kill them. It's a really good ending. Really well-executed.

Grady moves to put the cookies away.

In doing so, he gives Vanessa a wink. She winks back.

GRADY

Oh, I almost forgot. I made a special formula for the flowers so they keep longer.

CAITLIN

What?

As Grady explains, he grabs a pitcher from the refrigerator, takes the flowers from Caitlin, then begins to replace the water.

GRADY

Water alone doesn't really cut it. You take a quart of water, add one tablespoon of sugar, one teaspoon of vinegar, one teaspoon of mouthwash, and then just a little bit of dishwashing detergent. Liquid or powder, doesn't matter. And never put flowers in the fridge if there's fruit in there. Fruit releases ethylene gas, and ethylene gas makes them age faster.

DARLA (O.S.)

Hey Grady?

GRADY

Hey Darla?

DARLA (O.S.)

Do you think you could grab ahold of your sexuality and come here for a second?

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - DAY

Grady heads for the phone that awaits him.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WATSON'S HOUSE - DAY

Officer Watson and her Baby. This time she changes a diaper.

WATSON

I just wanted to go over a few --

GRADY

-- Mrs. Watson? I have something I wanna do tonight, and I don't know if I'm gonna get in before nine. I'm obviously gonna try, but what if I'm a few minutes late?

(beat, no answer)

This is something I want to do.

WATSON

After nine, a bench warrant will be issued for your arrest. Mr. Herman, we all want things in life. Maybe it's time to start separating your wants from your needs.

GRADY

...This is something I need to do.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

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

GRADY

Well Darla used to be the Senior Features Editor at Harper's Bazaar.

CAITLIN

Really?

GRADY

Yeah. I interned there when I was a sophomore, and she sorta took me under her wing and put my writing out there. So I was over their apartment every day from the start.

CAITLIN

Interesting. I have to admit I've noticed certain parallels between the character in your Granta piece and this whole flower formula-slash-'I don't eat lobster' business.

GRADY
Well the character is me.

CAITLIN
No, I know. I'm just curious as to how you'd be inclined towards this world of bunny rabbits and flowers and...y'know...oven mitts or what have you.

With her end of the see-saw on the ground, Caitlin suddenly gets off, sending Grady (and his ice cream) crashing to the earth.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Caitlin chauffeurs Grady.

GRADY
Well because I was mainly raised by women, things like dance or beauty and fashion weren't really gender specific. Then again, I don't even know if I like women all that much. I mean I'm a big fan of Gloria Steinem and second-wave feminism, but I don't particularly care for ninety percent of the slits I do meet, and I certainly don't stick my cock in every two-eyed whore that looks my way.

CAITLIN
...Did you just use the word slits?

GRADY
I don't think so, no.

CAITLIN
You didn't say the word slits?

GRADY
No.

CAITLIN
I'm pretty sure you just referred to women as being slits.

GRADY
...It's possible I may have.

CAITLIN
I see. Now I have my suspicions, but what exactly do you mean when you refer to women as being slits?

GRADY
 (beat, holding on her)
 Do you deep condition your hair?
 (longer beat)
 It's derogatory slang for a vagina.
 (a final beat)
 Usually preceded by Vassar.

CAITLIN
 Usually preceded by Vassar. As in
 'I was out with my friend and we
 were being chatted up by these
 Vassar slits who were on break'?
 (beat, no answer)
 Right. I also noticed that you
 forgot my candy.

Grady reaches into his pocket, then places something on the dash.
 He takes his hand away to reveal two Hershey's Kisses.
 Caitlin eyes them, then looks back at the road.
 She slows down, puts the car in park, and takes one of the Kisses.
 She examines it, then places it back next to the other one.

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

GRADY
 Not really. Why, do I tickle your
 fancy?

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

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Vanessa plays with Jocelyn.

She also checks out Will on the other side of the room. Of course, when Vanessa's not looking, Will is.

AT ANOTHER TABLE

Andrew and Lynda. Andrew's conscious of the fact that Rob Hildreth lurks nearby, and it shows.

A skilled Lynda runs the table.

LYNDA
Your sister is really pretty.

ANDREW
Well she's never had a boyfriend.
And she hates attention. She used
to dye her hair brown cuz she thought
people didn't take her seriously as
an academic powerhouse.

Lynda looks over at Vanessa.

LYNDA
I wish people wouldn't take me
seriously as an academic powerhouse
...She looks like Kahlen from Cycle
Four of America's Next Top Model.

Andrew bumps into Hildreth.

HILDRETH
Fucking back up, douche.

ANDREW
Sorry.

Hildreth takes Andrew's glasses and tries them on.

Andrew makes a play for them, misses, and lands against Rob.

Hildreth then pushes Andrew.

Across the room, Will notices.

ANDREW
(under his breath)
Asshole.

Hildreth hears this and throws Andrew into a table -- viciously.
Will casually finishes a sundae, then slowly makes his way over.
With an odd sort of calm, like a varsity wrestler on Valium, he
drives Hildreth into the ground.

He puts a choke hold on Rob, who turns red.

CROWD
Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Will releases and stands up. He approaches Andrew.

WILL
Let's take a walk.

EXT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Will offers Andrew a cigarette. It's declined.

ANDREW
I didn't figure you for a smoker.

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

ANDREW
Then why bother?

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

ANDREW
You're insecure?

WILL
Isn't everyone?

ANDREW
Not guys who date Heather Church.

WILL
Oh, do you know Heather?

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

WILL
This is Heather we're talking
about?

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

WILL
Listen, Sparky. If she's not
laughing, it's not cuz she's nice,
it's cuz she doesn't get the joke.

ANDREW
Well again, then why bother? Cuz
she's hot?

WILL
Nah.

ANDREW
Cuz you're insecure?

WILL
...Isn't everyone?

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

Vanessa exits the hall and spots the pair.

VANESSA
Were you guys having a moment?

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

Andrew nods in faithful agreement.

VANESSA
(to Andrew)
I think there's someone worried
about you in there.

Before heading back in, Andrew stops at the door.

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

VANESSA
Ass.

WILL
Wait, is that your brother?

VANESSA
You didn't know that?

WILL
Jesus, no. I woulda let him get
pounded a little longer if I knew
he belonged to you.

VANESSA
That's cute, William.

WILL
It's Will. My name's Will.

EXT. DUCK POND - NIGHT

Grady's taken Caitlin to a duck pond. They feed, ducks eat.

CAITLIN

You realize most people have these things called jobs that they go to.

GRADY

A job? What's...what's that?

CAITLIN

Yeah, I don't know. Job. I think it's a verb. Like to 'job' someone? I remember I came across it when I was reading a book once, so I looked it up in the dictionary and copied down the definition in the margin, but I don't really remember what I wrote down...

Grady gently twists her wrist to see the time: 8:04.

CAITLIN

Y'know...if it's any consolation, I more or less hate mine.

GRADY

Why?

CAITLIN

You just go in thinking you'll affect young lives, you'll have summers off, but then you realize that lesson plans get stale, you're gonna be on autopilot for the next forty years, and it just seems like it'll end up being the perfect complement to one of those flat suburban marriages...I came out here because growing up in Wyoming, it's land-locked. I figured water equals change, metamorphosis... baptism, all those things. Problem is, the emptiness follows you.

(beat)

Plus it's really Midwestern and hokey, but I miss my family, and if you don't have loved ones around, there's no point in being anywhere ...I think if things are still stagnant in a couple years, it's back to Wyoming, tail between legs.

A long moment.

GRADY

Y'know...I don't know if I'll let
you stick around long enough for me
to consider sleeping with you.

CAITLIN

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

Grady mulls this over a bit.

GRADY

Caitlin?

CAITLIN

Yeah?

GRADY

It's not a date.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Andrew and Lynda play pool. Again, she runs the table.

LYNDA

So Carol and Eben are crashing the
Valentine Ball.

ANDREW

They are?

LYNDA

So are Megan Delage and Ryan
Muzzatti. It's tradition for
sophomores to crash.

ANDREW

That's cool.

LYNDA

Y'know what else it is?

She places the butt end of her stick in front of him.

LYNDA

It's your cue. It's your cue,
Andrew Keiling, to ask me to crash
the Ball with you on Thursday.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Vanessa and Will walk slowly down the street.

WILL

There's no Driver's Ed in New York?

VANESSA

Nah. My friend had a country house and she took me out once, but I almost totaled her brother's car trying to avoid a squirrel. Which is weird actually, cuz I think most people would peg me as the type to head straight for the squirrel.

WILL

You must miss it. Manhattan, I mean.

VANESSA

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

WILL

That's funny...So are you gonna do the whole magnet school thing at Pencey next year?

Vanessa stops her stroll. Will follows suit. She eyes him.

VANESSA

It depends.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Darla and Meghan walk from one end of the store, items in tow, while SINGLE DAD and SON walk towards them from the other end.

Both pairs come to the middle check-out line.

Our girls arrive first and load up: ice cream and other desserts.

Single Dad then loads his things.

The four of them wait. Son kicks his dad, then nods towards Darla.

Single Dad's not having it. But after a moment...

SINGLE DAD

Interesting selection.

DARLA

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

SINGLE DAD

Huh. We're having a Guys' Night.

Darla takes a look at what he's picked out.

DARLA

Looks like you'll be well prepared.

Single Dad gets a view of his food from a more objective perspective: condiments, and way too many packages of hot dogs.

SINGLE DAD

Oh. Right, well...

DARLA

Talk about your sausage fest.

Darla gets rung up, conversation stalls. Single Dad is too shy.

Son nudges him. Dad cranes his neck to see Darla's food items.

DARLA

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

SINGLE DAD

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

EXT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Andrew and Lynda sit out in the lot behind the pool hall.

ANDREW

So what do you like?

LYNDA

What do you mean?

ANDREW

Like what're the things you like?
Do you like unicorns, four-leaf
clovers, Archie comics...do you
like Little Debbie snack cakes more
than Drake's devil dogs and yodels?

LYNDA
I like Archie comics.

ANDREW
Me too. I like Mr. Weatherbee.
And I'd take Betty over Veronica.

LYNDA
Guys say they like Bettys, but they
always end up going for Veronicas
...What's your favorite movie?

ANDREW
Dead Poets...Benny and Joon...

LYNDA
What's your favorite book?

ANDREW
Love Story. Favorite band.

LYNDA
The Silvertones? This album Baja
Sessions they did is amazing.
(beat)
I also like you.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Grady and Caitlin wrap the night up.

CAITLIN
How come phone numbers never start
with the number one? Anyway.
Y'know what I was just thinking?

GRADY
I'm not gay, I'm just feminine.

CAITLIN
Well you're not good-looking enough
to be gay. You definitely have
some gay tendencies, though.

GRADY
No, I have gay qualities. That's
not the same as having gay
tendencies. Like knowing a lot
about makeup? Trish McEvoy and Jo
Malone, eyeliner and eye cream,
mascara, foundation...knowing that
the hardest thing to achieve is the
balance between too much eye shadow
and too little?
(MORE)

GRADY (CONT'D)
Knowledge of these things is a gay
quality...I don't know if I
elucidated that well.

CAITLIN
What does elucidate mean?

GRADY
To like...make clear? Explain?

CAITLIN
I know what it means you prick.

The pair stand uncomfortably for several moments.

GRADY
Y'know what?

CAITLIN
What?

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

A moment. Caitlin slowly draws closer and gives him an innocent,
two-second long kiss on the cheek.

She pulls back. Eye contact.

CAITLIN
It's not a date.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Grady enters. The phone RINGS. He's oblivious as he walks past a
clock -- 9:03. The phone RINGS again. He pauses mid-stride.

Then, a third RING. Grady bolts through the house, up the stairs,
and around a corner. His momentum sends him crashing into a wall.

Grady recovers, runs, picks up a baseball mid-run, then fires the
ball through the opening in Darla's door. It knocks the phone to
the floor as he continues his post-throw forward progress.

Grady bangs through the door and dives for the receiver. Calmly...

GRADY
This is Grady.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew browses an art catalog. Grady appears at his door.

ANDREW
Hey, how'd it go?

Grady leans on the doorjamb and sighs.

GRADY
Andrew...when ya look at a pretty girl's face...I mean really look at it...let's just put it this way: Never trust a girl who doesn't have pores. Y'know what I mean?

ANDREW
(beat)
I think I have a pretty good idea.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

The next day. Andrew paints, MRS. BENSON flips through papers.

MRS. BENSON
Andrew. You need to come to a final decision on your show submissions. Make a decision.

Andrew gazes at a distant wall. Walks over. Benson then joins him.

He sizes up a life-sized, full-color sculpture of George Bush. A gun is held to Bush's head by a similar sculpture of Uncle Sam.

Andrew bypasses the pair for a nearby, gigantic map of the world. The U.S. is blacked out, while 300+ metal pegs dot other nations.

MRS. BENSON
This is yours, too? No one knew who this belonged to; what is it?

ANDREW
Well...each of these little things are actually bullets that are for the smallest revolver in the world, the Swiss MiniGun. It's like six centimeters. Smaller than a pinky. And each bullet represents one of the three hundred six soldiers from around the world who died for us in Iraq. I glued each bullet to a pin, then stuck the pins in every one of their hometowns.

Andrew begins pointing to every country that has pins/bullets.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

You got 170+ from England, 1 Czech,
 33 Italians, 13 Bulgarians, 2 Thai,
 3 Romanians, 1 Hungarian, 1 Korean,
 5 Salvadoran, 18 Ukrainians, 22
 Poles, 3 Latvian, 7 Danes, 2 Dutch,
 2 Estonians, 1 Fijian, 1 Hungarian,
 1 Kazakh, 4 Slovaks, 2 Australians,
 and 10 Spaniards....And the names
 are engraved on the bullets.

(long beat)

I'll get my ass beat for being anti-
 American, but I guess I'm willing
 to suffer for my art. Maybe not.

He turns. Gestures towards several huge piles of sketchbooks.

ANDREW

I think for my second submission
 I'm gonna go with my architecture
 portfolio. It's the first pile of
 stacks, third from the top.

MRS. BENSON

Everyone loves your building
 schematics. Definitely consider
 them for your portfolio when it
 comes time for college apps, too.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Vanessa and Will eat lunch opposite one another.

VANESSA

You drink soy milk, William?

WILL

It's Will. No 'yum,' just Will.

She takes his milk carton, drinks some, then reads the label.

VANESSA

So are you and Heather going to the
 Ball or are you too jaded for that?

WILL

We're taking a break.

VANESSA

Since when?

WILL

Since yesterday. Long weekends
 give people too much time to think.

VANESSA
Wow...that's deep.

WILL
I bet there's a lot of three-day weekend breakups. Some sorta spike in high school break-ups over three-day weekends. Like emergency rooms during Christmas or whatever.

VANESSA
Full moons.

WILL
Like emergency rooms during full moons or whatever.

Will takes his milk back. Follows her sip with his.

WILL
Heather's dad was a receiver in the NFL for a few years, so she's got this princess attitude cuz of it.

VANESSA
...Heather's dad is Robert Church?

WILL
You know who he is?

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

WILL
That's funny...Do you know who Meredith Bachman is?
(beat, no answer)
Heather didn't like that we hang out, but we go surfing before school on Wednesdays. In the a.m.

VANESSA
That's cool.

WILL
You wanna come with us tomorrow?

VANESSA
Um...I don't really know how to surf.

WILL
Well neither does Meredith.
(beat, small smile)
That's not why I keep her around.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Andrew and Lynda sit in a tree, way, way above the ground.

LYNDA
How's Hildreth treating you?

ANDREW
Lynda...it's kind of emasculating
when you keep asking me about the
kid who steals my lunch money.

LYNDA
He steals your lunch money?

ANDREW
No. He's making progress, though.

LYNDA
I only ask cuz I'm your friend.

ANDREW
Have you ever considered the fact
that standing up to someone isn't
all about physical confrontation?

LYNDA
Well maybe it should be.

ANDREW
Maybe it should. But by ignoring
it, that is standing up for myself.
If I ignore him and he doesn't stop
it'll suck, but I'll also feel like
the better man.

LYNDA
And that helps you sleep at night?

ANDREW
Y'know what? It does.

LYNDA
For now, maybe.

INT. DINER - DAY

Grady joins Darla for lunch.

DARLA
Can I get a status report?

GRADY
All in confidentiality?

DARLA
As always.

GRADY
Meghan's eight, she's enjoying
eight...Andrew's getting picked on
a lot...and Miss Sweet Valley High
is very much her mother's daughter.

DARLA
And how are we doing?

GRADY
I'm a'right.

DARLA
Are you?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Vanessa takes books out of her locker. Jocelyn waits on her.

Andrew walks by and lightly punches his sister on the butt.

VANESSA
Hey, baby.

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

HILDRETH
Where's Will Herzog when ya need
him? Kinda like Superman, right?

He knocks Andrew's hat off, and as Andrew bends over to pick it up, Hildreth punches the textbooks out of his hands.

STUDENTS notice and chuckle. Vanessa offers her books to Jocelyn.

VANESSA
Hold these for a second?

Hands now free, she nonchalantly opens the French horn case that lies on the ground next to her.

She takes the shiny horn over to Hildreth, now at his locker.

VANESSA
Turn around.

Hildreth turns, and Vanessa bashes him in the face.

INT. DINER - DAY

Back with Grady and Darla.

DARLA
What did you and Caitlin do last
night?

GRADY
Drove around. Had some ice cream.

DARLA
Who paid?

GRADY
I did.

DARLA
Good boy...Did you kiss her?

GRADY
Darla, it's not like that.

DARLA
I see...So did you kiss her?
(beat, no answer)
Would you tell me if you did?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Burt Ehman on the phone. Vanessa sits across from him, pissed.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

As Grady washes dishes, he speaks on the phone with Burt.

GRADY
The thing is, Vanessa's mom's in
New York finalizing some divorce
proceedings. She left last week,
and she's actually gonna be gone
for a few months. I'm Vanessa's
brother-in-law, so I'm acting as
their guardian for now. My wife's
in New York for moral support.

BURT
I see. 'In loco parentis.'

GRADY
Right.

BURT
It means 'In place of a parent.'

GRADY
(echoing Darla re: Granta)
I know what it means, thank you.
(beat, not amused)
I'm sorry, I didn't catch your
name. Gideon, was it?

BURT
Burt.

GRADY
I'll be down there shortly, Gideon.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Grady and Vanessa sit opposite Burt Ehman.

BURT
I have five neutral students who
swear she tried to kill him.
Literally attempted murder. Then I
have her friends who claim she
wasn't even there, so someone on
her side is clearly lying.

GRADY
Clearly. She has to be punished.

BURT
Right. Now Rob's parents will take
a step back if she's appropriately
disciplined, and I did do her the
favor of drafting an apology.

He slides a document across the desk. Vanessa reads, then signs.

GRADY
I wanna thank you, Gideon, for --

BURT
-- Burt.

GRADY
Burt. I wanna thank you, Burt.
(beat)
Thank you.

Vanessa slides it back. Burt scans. It reads, "Eat My Cock."

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A bowl of Lucky Charms and pink milk. Grady loads the last cereal bits onto his spoon.

He eats them, and nothing but charms float on the milk. He then feeds Meghan the charms for the rest of the scene.

ANDREW

There's only one honorable thing to do at this point: I gotta confess.

GRADY

To Lynda?

ANDREW

I'm thinking I can cushion the blow-slash-impress her the night of the Ball when she sees I'm in the art show. They're the same night.

GRADY

Ohhhh, the old switcharoo.

ANDREW

Exactly. The old switcharoo.

GRADY

Sounds like a plan.

MEGHAN

Except...

ANDREW

Except what?

MEGHAN

Well...you don't know how to dance.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Faint MUSIC plays. Darla fills a glass with water, then drinks. She notices something through the window and stops to watch.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

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

ANDREW

What if she tries to kiss me?

GRADY

Just close your eyes and hope for the best. That's what I do. And less tongue is better than more.

ANDREW

I should get a pen.

GRADY

Andrew, there's a lot more cool shit you can do with a girl other than making out and dancing.

ANDREW

Like what?

GRADY

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

ANDREW

(eternally long beat)
If she'll lick your asshole?

GRADY

Besides that.

ANDREW

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

GRADY

...Her opinion.

ANDREW

...That's corny.

GRADY

It is. Don't tell Vanessa.

They dance for a while in silence. Then...

GRADY

Y'know...I think you're displaying all the signs and symptoms of unrequited love.

ANDREW

Great. That was quick.

GRADY

...Love usually is.

They continue in silence as the music PLAYS.

After some time, a couple of tears well up in Andrew's eyes.
Grady can't see this.

ANDREW
Grady?

GRADY
Yeah?

ANDREW
(long beat)
You left your cocaine in mom's car.
(another beat)
Probably not the best place for it.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sun, sand and surf. As far as the eye can see.

Vanessa, Will, and an obese MEREDITH BACHMAN lie on their boards as they float on the water.

LATER

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

MEREDITH
Y'know the thing about that kid?
He's nice. It's a lost art. He's
just really nice to people.

VANESSA
He's a Republican.

MEREDITH
He didn't like Bush.

VANESSA
Either did Nancy Reagan. It's not
exactly a litmus test.

MEREDITH
It's a start.

VANESSA
For what?

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

VANESSA
Did he say that?

MEREDITH
He doesn't have to.

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

MEREDITH
Um...no. I'm saying they broke up
cuz of me.

VANESSA
Wait, what?

MEREDITH
Heather never understood why he
wanted to spend so much time with a
fat girl. If he hung out with
Ayesha Rehman or someone like that,
at least she coulda reveled in the
drama of having some decent
competition. But the fact that I'm
ugly meant she had no right to get
pissed, which only ended up making
her seriously pissed.

VANESSA
You're not ugly, Meredith.

Meredith smiles, albeit a painful one.

MEREDITH
I know you mean well, Vanessa, but
when ugly people have to hear
beautiful people try and tell them
that they're not ugly, it makes
them feel even uglier.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Grady and Darla make dinner. A phone RINGS.

Darla runs out of the kitchen (thinking it's Single Dad). RING...
Upon her return...

GRADY
What was that about?

DARLA
Nothing.

GRADY

What could be so important to have
you sprint to the phone like that?

DARLA

Nothing. Aunt Liz called for you,
by the way.

GRADY

Aunt Liz called?

DARLA

Caitlin did, too. What's going on
with you guys?

GRADY

...Nothing.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Andrew and Lynda fire paint balls at splattered targets.

LYNDA

What?

ANDREW

I didn't write the personal ad. I
just wanted to impress you.

(beat, no response)

It's your turn to say something.

LYNDA

Andrew...it's one thing to have no
backbone. It's another thing to be
totally full of shit.

She hands him her gun and leaves. Andrew watches.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Grady and Caitlin sit on a rowboat and fish.

CAITLIN

Let's play a game. Tell me
something I don't know about you.

GRADY

Like what?

CAITLIN

Well first of all, white elephant-
wise, how'd you end up in rehab?

GRADY

I dunno. I had a lotta problems in high school. Got a full ride to Columbia, failed out of Columbia, lied my way into great jobs, self-destructed my way out of them. Then I bumbled around a bit. Petty crime, not so petty crime...I'm definitely an addict, even if I don't act all coked up like one, but I actually went to address the underlying psychosis or whatever. And I didn't want to go to some rich-kid-rehab where they sing Kumbaya and play kickball at one o'clock, so I voluntarily went to this place Phoenix House that's basically a get-out-of-jail-free card for mandated felons. It was a tough scene. I did ninety days before jetting cuz they wouldn't let me see a psychiatrist until I was half-way out the door.

CAITLIN

What about your relationships?
Friends, family, girlfriend...

GRADY

I have like three friends. And the last time I was in a relationship I was pretty awful, so...

CAITLIN

How did it end?

GRADY

...It just sorta died one day.
(beat)
Caitlin, I really like you. But don't get any ideas about me one day turning into Mr. Right.

CAITLIN

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

GRADY

Yeah, well fortunately for them I don't qualify as Mr. Right or Mr. Right Now.

CAITLIN
I know you don't. You're Mr. Not
Right Now.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

They sit barefoot on the edge of a bridge that overlooks the lake.

GRADY
A'right, your turn. Something I
don't know about you.

CAITLIN
Okay, well....um....okay. There are
fifteen different animals in the
Animal Crackers cookie zoo.
There's a lion, monkey, elephant,
gorilla, tiger, giraffe...cougar,
kangaroo, seal, sheep, zebra,
camel, hippopotamus...and bison.

GRADY
No ducks?

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

GRADY
I can see why they gave you tenure.
Though telling me about Animal
Crackers is telling me something I
don't know, as opposed to telling
me something I don't know about
you. Right?

CAITLIN
Well I'm not too good at this game
...So what do your parents do?

GRADY
Well...my father left when I was
little. He got re-married and I
think he lives in Colorado now. My
mom had diabetes, and she died when
I was in junior high, so my Aunt
Liz looks after me. Her and Darla.

CAITLIN
Oh.

GRADY
Oh.

CAITLIN
I didn't mean it like that.

GRADY
No one does...I guess that's why
the drugs started. Daddy jets,
Mommy dies, wah-wah, piss-moan.
But then when other shit happened,
it got worse. Quickly, too.

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

GRADY
Wow. You are good at this game.

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

Caitlin stands, preparing to jump in the lake. Grady gets up, too.

GRADY
You ready?

CAITLIN
Yeah...Wait.

She casually takes his hand in hers, fingers interlocking and all.

GRADY
Jumping into a lake in February.
This is the kinda thing I'd be
missing if I were in New York right
now.

CAITLIN
You'd be missing a lot of things if
you were in New York right now.

She jumps, sort of pulling Grady with her, as he wasn't ready.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

9:07. Grady speaks with Watson. She strokes the Baby in his crib.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WATSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

WATSON

In other news, a little birdie told
me that you've made a new friend.

GRADY

That bird's a sweetie-pants, right?

WATSON

I dunno, it depends. To which bird
are you referring?

GRADY

...Spending time with a girl isn't
in violation of anything.

WATSON

It should be.

GRADY

Well it hasn't gotten me in any
trouble.

WATSON

...It will.

She hangs up. Grady contemplates. After awhile, Darla appears.

Grady waits for her to speak. For some time, she doesn't. Then...

DARLA

In loco parentis?

Caught off-guard, Grady waits for a long time as well.

GRADY

It means 'In place of a parent.'

Again, they face off in a battle of dramatic pauses.

DARLA

I'm not so sure that this is where
you wanna be. Maybe you should
take a look at that.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Andrew stands amidst his ocean of artwork, which, save the ping-pong table and floor, covers every square inch of the basement.

He studies the room for a while, then walks over to some paint cans and removes a lid. It's jet black.

He grabs a brush. Carries the paint over to a watercolor.

Andrew dips the brush. Methodically paints an "X" through it.

He does the same with another painting.

After a moment spent studying the two "X's", he launches a major offensive against the entire collection, going through his paint reserves and heaving colors with the aid of anything he can find.

Andrew fills a glass with paint, shatters the mess against one piece, throws an entire gallon can at another, etc.

After destroying most everything, he comes to a happy painting of his and Grady's crab. Rather than destroying it, he finds a new brush and makes a tiny adjustment.

A moment. Grady then reveals himself.

GRADY
Andrew...I'm sorry.

ANDREW
...No you're not.

Grady slowly shakes his head.

GRADY
I know.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew goes through Grady's things and finds a box of note cards.

He leafs through them, picks one, then seats himself at the desk.

EXT. CAITLIN'S ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Caitlin's on the phone with Grady.

CAITLIN
Y'know I told my mom about you?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - NIGHT

Grady sits on the roof of his car and takes in the view.

CAITLIN (CONT'D)
I told her I met the guy who wrote
the Granta story. She's the one
who originally got me into it.

GRADY
So what did she say?

CAITLIN
She said I should keep my distance.

GRADY
Nice. Now all I need is a scar
under my eye and I'll be pretty
much irresistible.

CAITLIN
Grady...if ya wanna be a writer and
you're nineteen, that's great. But
when you're twenty-seven it stops
being a 'When I grow up' kinda
thing. You look up one day and
your peers are achieving those
goals. So you get to this point in
life where what you are...it's what
you're gonna be.

GRADY
...I don't think we should hang out
anymore.

CAITLIN
Who says we're hanging out?

GRADY
I don't mean hanging out-hanging
out. I mean hanging out period.

CAITLIN
Listen...I'm not gonna get all
melodramatic with you before you
hightail it outta here to Vancouver
or Montana or wherever you end up.
But I care about you, okay? I
think I have since before we ever
met. And yeah, if you were more
stable, you might be the kind of
guy I...play a little footsie with.

GRADY
Thanks.

CAITLIN

Thanks.

GRADY

Well whaddaya want me to say?

CAITLIN

Nothing, I was just hoping someone with your verbal skill set would have something a little more... poignant to offer than that.

GRADY

...I don't think we should hang out anymore.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew writes Lynda's card.

He finishes, strikes a match, then lights a candle.

Finally, he drips wax on the envelope. It dries.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The next day. Vanessa and Will sit back-to-back and toss rocks at their respective soda can targets.

WILL

Y'know, I'm not going either, so...

VANESSA

Oh, I'm going, I'm just grounded.

WILL

How are you gonna swing that?

VANESSA

I dunno. But I love Valentine's Day; I'm not missing it.

WILL

Huh. You don't seem like the type.

VANESSA

No, actually it's New Year's that gets me down. Valentine's Day, like half the people are miserable anyway, but on New Year's, a) it seems like everyone has someone, and b) it's a new year, which just stinks in principle, obviously.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Vanessa and Will walk further into the woods.

LATER

They sit on the edge of a creek and collect water samples.

The pair employ eye droppers, slides, and microscopes as they study tiny organisms and such.

WILL

Do you believe in fate? Or in God?

VANESSA

Um...I guess. I mean given the proper context, yeah, who doesn't?

WILL

Okay, so then assuming there's both a heaven and hell, what's your idea of a personal hell?

VANESSA

I dunno, a DH in the National League? Why, what's yours?

WILL

To spend all eternity in the Louvre with Caravaggio's Amor Victorious -- but with a blindfold on.

VANESSA

So hell would be -- at least as you conceive it -- hell would be you, in a museum, blindfolded.

WILL

With a painting.

VANESSA

With a painting. That's it. No fire and flames, no reptile/snake action, no masturbating babies, none of that. Just...

WILL

Well there's other things, I mean ...being trapped in a library with four million copies of The Da Vinci Code?

VANESSA

You hate The Da Vinci Code? That's awesome; I hate it, too.

Will studies her as she peers into her microscope.

WILL

It's Heather's favorite.

VANESSA

What does a kid who cuts class to play with microscopes see in a girl like that? Why did you like her?

WILL

Proximity...Proximity and chance. That's how you end up with people.

A moment. Will peers into his microscope, and she watches him.

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Grady drives around. After awhile, he stops at a red light.

He looks to his left and sees a cemetery.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Andrew walks down the hall. Lynda spots him and jogs to catch up.

LYNDA

Hey. Listen, I'm sorry I took off like that. Well...I'm not, but --

ANDREW

-- We're both wearing black. Is that by design?

LYNDA

You think too much.

They stand there awhile. Lynda walks away. Andrew watches. Then...

ANDREW

Lynda.

She turns. Andrew thumbs through a book, finds the card he wrote.

He approaches and offers it to a confused Lynda.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Vanessa plays with matches. Burns leaves, etc. Grady approaches.

GRADY

Listen. I had lunch with Mom, and
I think she's worried about you.
Not worried-worried, but like...
Vanessa, why are you so angry?

VANESSA

...Have you ever heard the phrase
'Beauty is an accident'?

GRADY

Yeah, I've heard it. I mean...I've
never heard it, but I'm familiar.

VANESSA

Guys only like me for how I look.

GRADY

That's self-indulgent. It's also
bullshit; there's plenty of great
guys out there.

VANESSA

I agree, but it's not even about
that...Nobody's ever gonna like me
for how I make them feel.

GRADY

...You're probably right.
(beat, echoing Watson)
But you might wanna take a chance
on life. Love, too.

VANESSA

Oh, really? And if I don't?

GRADY

If you don't...love might decide to
take its chances with you.

Vanessa gets up, then hands Grady her matches.

VANESSA

Here. Do something productive with
these.

She walks away.

Grady looks at the matchbook cover. It features a red heart.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Meghan and Caitlin read. Grady appears.

GRADY
Meggie, can I talk to Ms. Fountain
in private?

MEGHAN
No, we're about to finish my book.
(beat, feeling the heat)
But it's Nancy Drew. You love
Nancy Drew.

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

MEGHAN
But she's about to crack the case!

GRADY
Meghan. If the girl dated Ned
Nickerson from 1930 until 1979
without ever going past first base,
she can wait fucking two minutes
for me and Ms. Fountain to have a
fight.

Meghan sighs and closes the book.

She approaches Grady, smacks him in the butt with it, gives it up.

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

GRADY
Hey.

Meghan turns around. Grady taps the clock on the book's cover.

GRADY
The minute hand on the clock points
to where the minister's body is
buried. Bess and George figure it
out and tell Hannah Gruen, Hannah
Gruen tells Nancy, and Nancy pins
it on the farmhand...He used a
pitchfork, I think. I don't
remember.

Meghan squints her eyes, then leaves the room.

CAITLIN

Are you gonna see Andrew's stuff
tonight?

GRADY

I dunno, I think I might head over
to the batting cages.

CAITLIN

What's with this family and sports?

GRADY

Cuz sports aren't about thinking;
they're about action and reaction.
You can disappear in the moment and
just...live. And they need that.

CAITLIN

Y'know, you think you're so unique,
but you're no different than anyone
else. And that's not a bad thing,
it's just...you're not special.

GRADY

I never said I was.

CAITLIN

You implied it. That's worse.

GRADY

Caitlin, are you aware of the fact
that my best friend in this world
is an eight-year-old girl? All we
have to talk about is makeup and
skateboarding. And y'know what?
There's only so much I know about
fucking skateboarding!

CAITLIN

Y'know...there's a reason why you
haven't had a girlfriend in four
years.

GRADY

Four-and-a-half years.

CAITLIN

Whatever. I just wanted to be your
friend. I would never think of you
that way.

GRADY

Four-and-a-half...years.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Grady, ready to make a change, sits across from an OLD WOMAN.

OLD WOMAN
What are you in for?

GRADY
Me? I dunno...chronic truancy?

OLD WOMAN
Truancy?

GRADY
And despair. Don't forget despair.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Grady and DR. LEE do their best imitation of Grady and Dr. Rosen.

GRADY
The only reason they finally gave me some face time with the doctor was cuz my shit was packed. And while my requests were probably denied due in large part to the fact that I wasn't exactly a model citizen what with the quote-unquote urinal fiasco and such...I also think some of that behavior has to do with my general sorta...fucked up-edness. It's a vicious cycle.

DR. LEE
You mean a self-fulfilling prophecy?

GRADY
(right on his heels)
That too.

DR. LEE
What do you want out of life?

GRADY
(long beat, changing gears)
It's my impression that when you go for analysis, it's not this thing where the doctor tells you what's wrong with you and what to do. It's more them asking questions so you can draw your own conclusions and find your own answers.

DR. LEE
That's fair.

GRADY
Well...I'm starting to figure out that these people I've spent nine years with, for five-six days a week, they're basically my de facto family. That void has been filled. But the question is, I may not want to use because I don't want to hurt them, but what's going to keep me from using? It's always been a two-part question. And the discovery is that I think Caitlin was healing some of the wounds left by Diane.

DR. LEE
But what makes her so special?

GRADY
...She likes what she sees.

Dr. Lee holds on him. Forever. And ever. Repeating...

DR. LEE
What do you want out of life?

GRADY
(long beat)
Hope.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa, under the covers. The clock reads 7:02.

A rhythmic knock on her door. It opens. Andrew's hand appears.

It offers a sharp, deliberate, military-style "point" sign, as if they're proceeding with caution down a hallway, ready to ambush some unseen enemy. He follows it with a similarly sharp "OK" sign.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Vanessa heads for Darla's SUV and climbs into the back space.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

A loud Grady, Andrew, and Meghan carry on.

Darla stands in her doorway as she puts on an earring.

Her cell phone RINGS. (It's Single Dad.) The kids are still loud.

DARLA
Hello?...Oh hi...I'm great; how are
you? I didn't expect you to call
...I dunno; I just didn't.

Darla does that whole bit where you talk on the phone and smile, all the while holding eye contact with whomever you're with.

In the middle of smiling and chatting, and while holding the eye contact with the kids, she nonchalantly swings her door shut.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Darla and the kids are on school grounds, behind another car.

The lead car moves, and our gang sees a speed bump.

MEGHAN
Grady drives fast over the bump.

DARLA
I'm not your playmate, sweetie, I'm
your mother.

ANDREW
C'mon, mom. Live a little.

Darla slowly progresses forward, then stops and waits.

ANDREW
What's wrong?

Darla puts the car in reverse and backs up about twenty feet.

She then floors it and nails the speed bump.

This comes much to the delight of her kids. Vanessa, however, goes flying against the tailgate and cups her nose in pain.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

On his way to the art exhibits, Andrew walks down an empty hall.

Caitlin appears at the other end, behind him.

CAITLIN
Hey!

Andrew turns around. They slowly walk towards one another.

CAITLIN
You look nice.

She straightens his tie and smoothes his blazer.

CAITLIN
Is uh...is Grady here?

ANDREW
No, he's probably listening to The
Sound of Silence right about now.
Maybe Morrissey. Why, were you...

CAITLIN
No. I was just hoping for a sign.

ANDREW
Well I'll be sure to tell him that.

She ruffles his hair, then walks away.

ANDREW
Ms. Fountain?

She turns around.

ANDREW
Happy Valentine's Day.

CAITLIN
...Happy Valentine's Day, Andrew.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa's nose bleeds. She stuffs it with toilet paper.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The Ball is in full swing.

IN ONE CORNER

Jocelyn and other GIRLS dance with one another, sans dates.

Vanessa arrives and pokes Jocelyn, whose jaw drops.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

An open medicine cabinet. A hand reaches for a small bottle and turns it. We see a mouthwash label.

The hand takes the bottle and twists it open. After a swig is taken, the bottle is placed back. The hand closes the cabinet.

Will's reflection in the mirror. He swishes, rinses, then stares.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Grady has a chair pulled up to the ping-pong table as he eyes the blank page on a typewriter. He writes:

GRADY
 The most inspired choice a man can make is to wander the path towards a woman's heart.
 (beat, then resumes)
 Unfortunately, much time has passed since I have last been out for a walk.

Grady evaluates. He removes the page and starts anew.

The words appear fast, letter-by-letter, resulting in levity.

GRADY
 Why, oh why, have not the Chinese ever invented a sandwich?
 Thousands of years of innovation and progress, and not one of those Ming dynasty dickfucks could think to slap some meat between some bread? Every culture I know of has a sandwich of one kind or another, and all these people can do is chop everything into bite-sized pieces.
 (beat, then resumes)
 Damn, wouldn't a General Tso sandwich hit the spot, if it used a whole breast of chicken, and was put on some tasty bread? But no, I won't be having that tonight, because some aforementioned Ming dynasty dickfuck thought it more important to polish jade all day instead of inventing a sandwich. No wonder they're all a bunch of communists. Sandwich = Democracy.

Unsatisfied, he once again removes the page and starts over.

GRADY
 A kiss on the cheek from the right girl will make you reconsider everything you hold to be true and certain.

Grady mulls it over. Satisfied, he hits "Enter."

INT. ART ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew and Mrs. Benson. The latter appears on the verge of tears.

MRS. BENSON

It's all my fault; I am so sorry, Andrew. They already decided by the time I got here. I couldn't --

ANDREW

What happened? I mean...

MRS. BENSON

I left a note for Mr. Kahn that your book was third from the top on the first stack, but he used your second book. Andrew, I'm sorry; everyone knows Joelle isn't half the artist you are. Your building schematics would have won; I know.

INT. LYNDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lynda flips channels, but after awhile, turns the TV off.

She eyes her backpack. Gets up, rifles through it, finds Andrew's card: "Miss Lynda Carr." She breaks the seal, studies the print.

She opens the card. It says, quite simply, "Nine o'clock."

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew sits against some lockers, head in hands.

Someone approaches. Andrew looks up to see Rob Hildreth.

HILDRETH

Are you crying?

Long silence.

HILDRETH

I uh...I saw your stuff. You did a really great job, dude. Seriously. It took balls to go out on a limb and do something like that.

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

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

As he did on Page 1 (minus the cocaine), Grady the shortstop works his skillful back and forth magic as he disappears in the moment.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The crowd dances.

Will appears in street clothes. He scans the gym for Vanessa.

He spots her, then cuts through the crowd.

He taps her on the back and she turns around.

WILL

Let's dance.

VANESSA

...Together?

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lynda, also in street clothes, pulls up on her bike.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Now everyone's slow dancing. Vanessa and Will, too.

With their heads side-to-side so they can't see one another...

WILL

Listen...I have a thing for you, okay? I know you're not the type who'd be crazy about the idea of a guy who just split up with someone, but whatever. I think you're this really tenacious, brilliant girl, and I'm only mean to you cuz I don't think you have any idea how hard normal girls have it.

VANESSA

Are you wearing Abercrombie? It's kinda bourgeois, no?

WILL

Shut up. I spent like a half-hour memorizing this; I don't wanna lose my train of thought.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)
Um...I think it's ironic that society values you for your external beauty, when you're a model for what a girl should be like internally. You're incredible. Crotchety as hell, but incredible.

VANESSA
Y'know, all this like...emo shit? I need you be cold and dismissive. Girls like that. Treat us like crap and we'll love you forever. ...That's how it goes, Will.

He pulls back. They stare. He then leans in and kisses her lips.

WILL
I like it when you call me William.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lynda checks out the art show.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Andrew makes his way to the nearest exit.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Vanessa and Will, still slow dancing.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Back to Lynda, checking out exhibits.

She comes to one and stops in her tracks.

She turns around and looks at the opposite wall.

She turns back to the first wall, and sees a ton of neatly framed, black-and-white pencil selections from Andrew's sketchbook.

They are all portraits of her.

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Andrew exits through doors that lead to green fields, then walks through the darkness.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lynda accosts STUDENT #3.

LYNDA
Have you seen Andrew Keiling?

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lynda walks out the doors.

She peers through the darkness, then spots Andrew in the distance.

She hurriedly walks after him.

As Lynda closes the gap, Andrew feels a presence and turns.

Lynda slows down, walks the last ten yards, then hugs him upon her arrival. They continue their hug as music PLAYS in the distance.

Their hug morphs into slow dancing.

They pull back a bit, and Lynda moves in for a kiss.

They make out, then hug some more.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Vanessa and Will, also making out.

EXT. DUCK POND - NIGHT

A pensive Caitlin sits at her and Grady's duck pond.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Grady stares at the burning fireplace.

EXT. CEMETERY (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Grady and the frame, flowers on glass. He sets down the fasteners with a coin, then finally flips the frame over.

The background is done in pink petals, while the foreground, a heart, is done in red ones.

The headstone reads, "Elizabeth Herman 1953-1991."

Underneath the dates it reads, "Daughter of Two, Mother of One."

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

A weak Diane in bed. Monitors and machines blink and flash.

Grady watches over her as she drifts in and out of consciousness.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. DUCK POND (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Page 31: Grady's all contemplative as he feeds some ducks. We now pick back up again with Vanessa's speech/Diane's yearbook entry.

DIANE (V.O.)

What can I say to someone who I have both despised with every ounce of my being, but have also loved more fully than I have ever known or thought possible? There has always been some indescribable pull that has drawn me to you, despite the fighting, despite the hurt, despite the tears. And regardless of everything, we share undeniable, intense emotions. They are powerful and volatile, sentimental and strong. And they are for one another. Two people can feel everything for someone else, larger than themselves. I have told you before, and will tell you again. I Love You. (Grady, I think I do.) We have both almost ruined one another, but we have also had some absolutely amazing moments. You fascinate me: your smile, your voice, your hands, your lips. I think I made a promise to myself never to fall in love in high school. Too late, I suppose. Because these feelings cannot be denied. We both know, however, that others will come along, and our feelings will undoubtedly shift. But know this: In my heart there will always be this warm place no one else's anything could ever touch. It's filled with incredible words and wonderfuls. You fascinate me, captivate me, mesmerize me. With a part of myself I never knew I had, I feel this flame and fire for you.

(MORE)

DIANE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And you frustrate me and make me
break and bring me to sobs, but I
don't care. I don't care. I have
thought it over, analyzed my
faults, rejected it all. And yet,
time and time again, I take one
look into your eyes, and yes, I am
in love. Again. Maybe you'll look
back at this and laugh. Why?
Well, why not? But maybe, just
maybe, you'll save some tiny,
minuscule spot in your heart and
memory for me.

(beat)
Maybe. I love you, always. Diane.

A few moments pass. Grady leans in and gently kisses her lips.

DIANE
Talk about the kiss of death, huh?
(long beat)
I cheated on you. With the art
director from the Zac Posen go-see.
(beat)
I'm so sorry...I love you, Grady.

GRADY
...Of course you do.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Darla, Andrew, and Meghan exit the SUV and make their way inside.
Vanessa waits, then does the same.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grady, in front of the toilet -- just like he stood after his face-off with Diane on Page 27.

He fingers the bag, and for a long time. He examines it up close.
Grady then drops in the bag, flushes, and watches it go down.
It disappears. He stares at the still, clear water.

INT. MEGHAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Meghan in pajamas. Grady sits behind her, making French braids.

GRADY
So when am I gonna meet Cary
Volkman?

MEGHAN

He's gonna come over and play on
Tuesday. That's when I go back.

GRADY

Cool...Meghan, how are you doing
with being out here and all?

MEGHAN

I like it. I miss Daddy, though.

GRADY

I know. I miss mine, too.

INT. GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady plays with a phone. Darla pops in.

DARLA

Who are you calling?

GRADY

No one. I'm just dialing the phone
numbers of girls from high school.
360-8093, 584-2016, 724-5974...

DARLA

Are you pranking their parents?

GRADY

No, I'm just listening to the sound
it makes when you dial. The tones.

DARLA

I used to do that sometimes.

GRADY

You did?

DARLA

Yeah...I used to do a lot of
things.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Again, Grady at the fireplace. Wine box on lap, he reads letters.

After awhile, he gets up and feeds them to the fire, one by one.

Next, he throws in his candles, then watches them melt.

Finally, he adds the box, then watches it burn.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Grady turns on the lights.

He looks around, then finds a hose of sorts.

He opens the car's gas flap, unscrews the cap, inserts the hose.

INT. MEGHAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Grady sits on the side of Meghan's bed. He shakes her awake.

GRADY

Andrew has that paint. That white
paint? Where did you move it?

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Grady rummages around the garage. A sleepy Meghan enters.

MEGHAN

Grady, what are you doing?

GRADY

I'm going to Ms. Fountain's house.

MEGHAN

Why?

GRADY

She's looking for a sign.

MEGHAN

Does Mommy know?

(beat, no answer)

I'm coming with you.

GRADY

Go to bed, Meghan.

MEGHAN

I'm coming or I'm telling Mom.

Grady saunters over and lowers his face down to hers.

GRADY

What are you trying to say?

MEGHAN

...I think I just said it.

GRADY
Sweetie, I'm not letting you come.

MEGHAN
Why not?

GRADY
Because it's the right thing to do.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Focused and on a mission, Grady drives.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

On the street in front of Caitlin's house, Grady lies on his side.

He uses a brush to paint a large white line.

LATER

He paints in red.

LATER

It's been a couple of hours now. The painting continues.

LATER

Grady oh-so-carefully pours liquid over the white lines.

LATER

He surveys his work, then pulls a phone out of his pocket.

INT. CAITLIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The phone RINGS. From under the covers, Caitlin's arm appears.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Out of Grady's pocket comes the book of matches Vanessa gave him.

He rips them all from the cover and strikes them up.

Grady crouches by the white outline that he covered with gasoline.

He drops the matches on the white.

Whoompfh! Flames rise up and travel all along the line.

INT. CAITLIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caitlin, phone in hand, walks to the window.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Caitlin sees two enormous red hearts outlined in white, both of which are similarly outlined in flames.

The second heart's flames come full circle just as she realizes what's she's looking at.

Grady is nowhere to be seen.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Grady drives. After a bit, he pops in a CD. Morrissey and The Smith's "Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want" PLAYS.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Morning coffee.

GRADY

I just think it's time...Aunt Liz,
y'know? I'm all she has. She's
all I have.

DARLA

Do you really believe that?

GRADY

No.

DARLA

...I sure hope not.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM - DAY

Andrew holds a deer skull. Grady sits next to him.

GRADY

When I ditched Phoenix House I had
to walk along these train tracks to
get to the closest station. There
were all these deer bones, so...I
really don't know what to say.

ANDREW
Me neither.

GRADY
Well...we'll figure something out.

ANDREW
We always do.

INT. VANESSA'S ROOM - DAY

Grady hands Vanessa a silver heart pin that says "Love."

GRADY
What's more important than blood?

VANESSA
...Love.
(beat)
I gotta admit, I was hoping you
were gonna pull out a Birkin bag.

GRADY
It's not real silver. Sorry.

VANESSA
You should be.

She looks at it for quite awhile, then pins it on his shirt.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Grady and Meghan camp out for the night in a tent.

Meghan holds one of Diane's old t-shirts. She puts it to her face.

MEGHAN
It smells like her.
(beat)
Grady...does it ever go away?

GRADY
Does what ever go away?

MEGHAN
The pain.

He holds on her, then slowly nods his head, indicating a "Yes."

GRADY
No.

They sit in silence. She kisses his forehead.

EXT./INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Darla drives Grady to LAX, a matching bookend to their first meet. After awhile, he wisely clicks on his seatbelt.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Grady, his bags, and a small fishbowl with his and Andrew's crab.

DARLA
Call me as soon as you land. Have
Aunt Liz call, too.
(beat)
I love you, Grady.

He pauses before the moment of truth, then finally delivers.

GRADY
I love you too, Darla...Good luck
on your date. Love is an illusion,
right?

DARLA
We'll see. Any advice?

GRADY
...Gingerbread.

DARLA
You're my oldest baby. You know
that, right?

Grady puts down his things. They hug.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Caitlin pushes papers. Andrew appears at the door and approaches.

She looks at him, then returns to her work.

Andrew retrieves a card and places it on the desk.

She looks over at it and breathes deeply. Andrew then leans across the desk and kisses her on the cheek for one long, awkward second.

Caitlin freezes. Andrew pulls away and resumes his position.

Caitlin doesn't look at him, and she doesn't move for quite a bit.

Finally, she does look up.

ANDREW

Grady said that when he gets some money together, he would give me fifty dollars if I gave you a kiss on the cheek for him...Um...I said I would never do it for less than a hundred, and he said 'deal.'

EXT. DUCK POND - DAY

Caitlin walks over to a boulder.

Once there, she climbs aboard, then examines Grady's card.

The envelope reads, "Ms. Caitlin Fountain."

She breaks the wax seal, opens, reads, then looks across the pond.

She reads once more.

Black calligraphy says something that we can't see.

Again, she looks out across the pond.

A small smile.

EXT. LAX (BENCH) - DAY

Grady, joined by an OLD MAN, sits on the same bench from Page 8.

OLD MAN

What's in New York for you?

GRADY

I dunno. Home, I guess.

OLD MAN

I lived in New York for a while. Chelsea, Hoboken, Murray Hill... One thing I realized is that New York isn't really anyone's home. It's a port city. Always will be.

The Old Man offers a subtle smile.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Home, you see...it's where the heart is.

A nod towards the pen Grady's been fiddling with.

OLD MAN

Looks like a Dear Jane letter.

GRADY

Oh, no. I wanna write a book. I literally just started a few days ago, so....maybe in a couple years.

OLD MAN

What's it gonna be about?

GRADY

I dunno. Love, death...life.

(beat)

I was thinking about calling it
The Amazing Adventures of the
Heterosexual Makeup Artist.

OLD MAN

The Amazing Adventures...

GRADY

The Amazing Adventures of the
Heterosexual Makeup Artist. Maybe
about like a twenty-something who's
a makeup artist, and all his little
dating adventures with girls.

OLD MAN

Art imitating life, is it?

GRADY

Nah. And it's just one idea. I
don't know what I'll write about or
what to call it, but those things
tend to sort themselves out.

OLD MAN

Well good luck.

GRADY

(long beat, wry smile)
I don't need it.

FADE OUT.

THE END