

HEROES AND VILLAINS ENTERTAINMENT



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CONVERSION

by

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OVER BLACK:

Glasses clink. People laugh. Someone's playing an old Henry Mancini song on a piano.

Then we hear the sizzle of an old photobooth snapping pictures.

FADE IN:

INT. PHOTOBOOTH - NIGHT

Two handsome and All-American YOUNG MEN snap a silly photo inside a dive bar photobooth.

FLASH.

They pose like two, serious men.

FLASH.

The final pose reveals their truth: these people are in love.

One rests his head on the other's shoulder, and they stare at the camera.

Each holds a melancholy gaze, as if they know this moment will pass, but wish it would never end.

FLASH.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

The developed photos shoot from the slot and fall onto the bar floor.

SUPER: CONVERSION

FADE TO:

EXT. ATHENS, IL - DAY

Visitors are welcomed to town with a sign: WELCOME TO ATHENS. THIS LITTLE TOWN IS HEAVEN - DON'T DRIVE LIKE HELL THROUGH IT.

It's an overcast day in God's Country, and the porches of the mid-century homes are barren. Dead Christmas trees line the ditches. A few clumps of brown snow remain.

In a town this small there is one grocery store, three bars and six Christian churches.

EXT. CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

This enormous brick church boasts a giant cross on its steeple. The parking lot is crammed with Buicks, Fords, and Chevys. There are no foreign cars. Not here.

Today's church sign message is: GOD CAN MAKE ALL THINGS NEW - EVEN YOU!

INT. CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

A MAN (40's) in a fine suit commands the attention of a solemn, Anglo CONGREGATION. Veins pop from his forehead, sweat drips from his brow, but that doesn't diminish his wholesome good looks.

Meet Pastor DAVID WRIGHT.

DAVID

...A good tree cannot bring forth
evil fruit, nor can a contaminated
tree bring forth good fruit.

LIZ WRIGHT (40's), an icy woman with Stepford looks, sits in the front pew, her sad eyes fixed on David. As he shouts his proclamations, Liz stares. She couldn't blink if she wanted. She wouldn't dare.

DAVID (CONT'D)

False prophets shall rise and deceive
many, and the love of some shall
wax cold...

EXT. EXIT UP HEADQUARTERS - DAY

It's eerily quiet in the parking lot. The only decor is a stone cross sculpture in the courtyard. There are no plants, or flowers, or color here.

DR. ROY (50's), a Ted Haggard-ish looking therapist, stands next to a beautiful boy in painfully generic clothing. This is CHRISTIAN (19), one of the boys from the photobooth, but now all life seems drained from his once vibrant eyes.

A suitcase rests at Christian's side. Dr. Roy checks his watch as they wait, both keeping their eyes on the road leading to the parking lot.

INT. CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

Pastor David feeds his congregation wine and Jesus crackers at the head of the church. Liz is the first to take a swig of the dark wine poured directly from her husband's hands into her mouth.

Liz looks titillated as the wine oozes down her throat. Her tongue glides over her lip, catching a lingering drop before she smiles at fellow worshipers and returns to her seat.

EXT. EXIT UP HEADQUARTERS - LATER

Looking anxious and eager to please, Christian waits, watching as his parents, Pastor David and Liz Wright, shake hands with Dr. Roy.

DR. ROY

He's never fought us in ninety days.
Not once.

DAVID

We're so proud, son.

David extends a hand. Tears build in Christian's eyes as he takes it. A firm shake, and David releases his son's hand and turns to Dr. Roy.

DAVID (CONT'D)

We are forever grateful.

Liz squeezes Christian and runs her hand across his face. As he walks the family to their car, Dr. Roy rubs Christian's back and lingers a bit too long. Christian briefly flinches, but his parents don't notice.

DR. ROY

Enjoy your freedom.

As they part, Dr. Roy hands all three of them a copy of the EXIT UP POST-CARE GUIDEBOOK.

DR. ROY (CONT'D)

You're on your way.

EXT. HIGHWAY 55 - DAY

Rain pelts the desolate highway as David's late-model Buick cruises in the slow lane.

INT. DAVID'S SEDAN - DAY

Silence. As David drives, Liz sips from an environmentally friendly water bottle with the "Crossroads Christian Church" logo on it.

Each swig seems to burn -- burn so good, that is.

Christian sits in back staring at the passing farmland.

Ready to connect with her son, but unsure how to go about it, Liz makes eyes with Christian through the rearview mirror.

LIZ

We'll be excited to see you in the front row at church again, baby.

DAVID

Enough with the "baby" stuff, Liz. He is a man. Call him by his name.

She faces her son.

LIZ

Christian?

Christian smiles at his mother, an exhausted, world-weary smile.

LIZ (CONT'D)

We planned a little something.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, please...

DAVID

It's no big deal, chief.

RE: "chief", Christian scoffs, trying not to laugh.

CHRISTIAN

Then what?

DAVID

It's a surprise.

Christian sighs and once again turns to the cows, cornfields, and decrepit barns.

CHRISTIAN

Oh joy.

INT. RESTAURANTO ITALIANO - NIGHT

SINGING WAITERS and WAITRESSES belt the classically cheesy tune, "That's Amore".

Around the corner at the bar, Liz downs a martini while keeping her eye on the singing servers in the main dining room.

The song comes to an end. The DINERS applaud and return to their heaving plates of lasagna.

Liz leaves the bar and joins her family in the dining room. She sits next to David, who's sitting across from Christian and a bubbly gal-next-door, BETTY (19).

No one has touched their food.

LIZ

(slurring)

Long line in the little girl's room.

Christian just nods, embarrassed by his mother's slurred speech, but no one will speak of it.

A ginger-haired WAITRESS grabs Liz's empty wine goblet and slides her a fresh glass of bloody red.

WAITRESS

Sorry about the wait, Mrs. Wright.

LIZ

No worries.

Liz smiles and delicately sips her drink.

WAITRESS

Everyone else good?

DAVID

Dandy.

The waitress moves to another table.

BETTY

Shall we?

They close their eyes and bow their heads.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Be present at our table, Lord. Be
here and everywhere adored.

Some of the other diners look a smidge uncomfortable while Betty prays, but they're respectful and quiet.

THE WRIGHTS
Amen.

DAVID
Fantastic.

BETTY
Just a little something I picked up
from Dad.

Liz soaks in her son's presence, whips out her camera phone, and shoots.

LIZ
Just look at you two!

CHRISTIAN
Come on, mom.

David slides Christian a couple fifty-dollar bills.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)
What's this?

DAVID
Pastor Frank has already given the
OK, so if you want to catch a movie,
or whatever, feel free.

David winks at his son. Christian swallows nervously. Betty bats her eyes as Christian palms the cash.

BETTY
What a blessing.

EXT. RESTAURANTO ITALIANO - LATER

Happily buzzed, Liz squeezes Christian and Betty before walking toward David's car.

LIZ
Have fun tonight, darlings.

David is stone-sober as he helps his tipsy wife into the car.

BETTY
Thanks for dinner, Pastor, Mrs.
Wright.

DAVID
Give my best to your father.

Christian waves at his parents as they drive away.

BETTY
I've seen it all. Parents arranging
marriages in central-fucking-
Illinois.

Christian's eyes pop. Betty's a whole new girl now that the parents are gone.

CHRISTIAN
When the old man slid me the cash I
instantly flashed back to sixth
grade.

BETTY
What's next, dropping us at the
mall?

Christian laughs. Betty yanks Christian's hand and pulls him towards her new Ford Mustang.

INT. BETTY'S FORD - MOMENTS LATER

Betty cranks the wheel and speeds out of the restaurant's parking lot. She scrolls through her iPod, searching for the perfect playlist.

As Betty speeds down the road, Christian holds on for dear life in the passenger seat, but he's finally enjoying himself.

Betty pulls a joint from her console and offers it to Christian.

CHRISTIAN
Don't tell me you're testing me,
too?

BETTY
Christian, seriously.

CHRISTIAN
But, your dad --

BETTY
-- is a chauvinist asshole.

Christian glances at her, tries to figure her out.

BETTY (CONT'D)
I'll wear the mask. Play nice until
I'm in college, and then sayonara,
you know?

Christian nods, still skeptical of Betty. But she soldiers on and lights her joint, takes a hit, and passes it to Christian.

BETTY (CONT'D)
We're what - twenty minutes from
the capital city, and it's like
we're in a time machine. No
brownies, or Jews, or gays. I mean
you get me, right?

Christian nods. He gets her.

INT. THE WRIGHT HOME - NIGHT

The room is sea of beige with a baby grand piano tucked in the corner. It's silent as David reads scripture and jots down notes.

Liz sits next to him, with a book in her lap, but she's only pretending to read. Her cell phone is tucked in its pages, and she's flipping through the pictures she snapped of Christian and Betty at dinner.

LIZ
David.

David turns to his wife.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Should we have pushed this on him
so soon? This date?

DAVID

Dr. Roy said not to waste any time.
You have your guidebook.

LIZ

Yes, but shouldn't we just let him
find a girl on his own?

DAVID

We invested in Christian's treatment.
We musn't fiddle with their fine
work. We'll follow the guidelines
and pray for the good news to keep
on coming, for his continued success.

David gives his wife a stern glance.

LIZ

Of course.

David smiles and turns his attention to back to his book.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Honey?

David closes his book, tired of all the chatter.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Christian will be on his own soon.
College, probably out of state --

DAVID

And?

LIZ

Have you thought about adopting?
Maybe Haiti. All those poor children
orphaned after the quake.

DAVID

That's a bit premature.

LIZ

Christian is going to leave, and
then what?

David sees the worry, the anxiety in his wife's eyes.

DAVID
Maybe a mission, together. This
summer. Yes.

David pats Liz on the thigh.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Sometimes that little head of yours
conjures up some good.

Liz accepts David's patronizing gesture and reaches for the remote. Not so fast - David grabs it and flips the TV on. Liz accepts defeat and grits her teeth as Bill O'Reilly's face graces the TV.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

MUSIC BLASTS from Betty's Ford, parked on a desolate country road.

INT. BETTY'S FORD - NIGHT

Pot smoke fills the interior of the car while Christian and Betty massacre Madonna's "Like a Prayer".

CHRISTIAN
*Just like a prayer, your voice can
take me there --*

BETTY
*Just like a muse to me, you are
mystery --*

CHRISTIAN
*Just like dream, you are not what
you see --*

BETTY AND CHRISTIAN
*Just like a prayer, no choice your
voice can take me there!*

The song comes to an end, and Christian takes a swig of bottled water.

BETTY
I fucking love that song!

CHRISTIAN
Hush now. Don't sing a holy song
and then curse.

BETTY
 God doesn't mind if we smoke pot,
 but we can't say fuck?

CHRISTIAN
 God gave us pot.

BETTY
 And "fuck".

Christian laughs and reclines in his seat.

CHRISTIAN
 Feels good to laugh. To actually
 hear something funny and laugh
 without feeling obligated.

Betty casually smiles, having no idea how much this moment means to him.

BETTY
 We're kindred, us pastors' kids. I
 imagine your house is as "spirited"
 as mine.

Pleasantly high, Christian closes his eyes and leans back.

CHRISTIAN
 My father just wants to see me in
 Heaven. There are worse things,
 no?

Betty smirks and takes a hit. She inhales, reclines her seat and nudges Christian.

Christian takes the joint and gazes at Betty. As Betty's eyes close, she exhales a plume of smoke.

Christian takes a deep breath and leans toward her. He's ready to seize the moment and kiss Betty, but her iPhone VIBRATES, and the moment is lost.

BETTY
 (checking a text)
 Shit! I have to meet Caleb.

CHRISTIAN
 Caleb?

BETTY

My boyfriend. Fuck! I totally spaced it.

Christian is at a loss. He then smiles and looks at Betty, waiting for the punchline that never comes.

CHRISTIAN

Shut up.

She smiles, although she doesn't know why.

BETTY

You shut up.

Her thumbs dance across her iPhone. Christian watches, confused.

CHRISTIAN

I thought...you know. We were having fun.

Oblivious to Christian's embarrassment and intentions, Betty flips on the lights, whips out her compact, and touches up her face.

BETTY

We can hang tomorrow, get a coffee or something. Or you could come with tonight? You'll love Caleb.

CHRISTIAN

What about me? What's wrong with me?

Disconcerted, Betty turns to Christian. He's glaring at her, and she doesn't know why.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)

What was all of this?

Betty smiles and nudges him, trying to lighten the mood.

BETTY

Come on.

Christian just stares at her, and his gaze is getting severe.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Shit, Christian. I mean - eighties
night, Zoo Babies in the city?

Christian looks horrified. He can't even look at Betty now.

CHRISTIAN
I have no idea what you're talking
about.

BETTY
Zoo Babies! I use my sister's old
ID. I've seen you there like twelve
times.

Christian starts to panic. He is terrified and humiliated.

CHRISTIAN
I have no idea what you're talking
about.

BETTY
Seriously --

CHRISTIAN
Take me the fuck home!

Betty's smile fades. Instinctively, her hand grabs the door
handle.

Christian realizes he's scared this girl, so he collects
himself, turns away from her, and stares out his window.
There he spots a deer prancing along the side of the road.

He closes his eyes.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)
Please, just take me home.

EXT. THE WRIGHT HOME - NIGHT

As Betty's Ford pulls into the driveway, Christian's passenger
door flings open. He hops out.

BETTY
Christian, I'm sorry! I just thought
you knew that I knew --

Christian can't let her say the words. He slams the door
and marches up the walkway to his house.

As Christian enters his home, he purposefully avoids the sign hanging by the front door: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

INT. THE WRIGHT HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Christian oozes with disdain and dread. He tries to slip past Liz, who's sitting by the fireplace, drinking something clear and flipping through an old photo album.

LIZ

Honey!

Liz jumps up and waves a photo in his face. It's a nine-year-old Christian, a tiny boy, posing like a body builder.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Remember this?

Christian nods, anxious to leave and get some privacy.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Fourth grade, just a couple years before you realized you didn't need me anymore.

CHRISTIAN

Night, mom.

LIZ

Not so fast! Tell me all about your night.

CHRISTIAN

It's late.

LIZ

Five minutes with your old ma won't kill you.

Liz sits and pats the empty spot next to her near the fire. Christian takes a moment before giving in and sitting.

LIZ (CONT'D)

How'd we do?

CHRISTIAN

She's nice.

LIZ
She likes you.

CHRISTIAN
They all do.

LIZ
I saw her gazing into those baby blues.

Christian can't take anymore. He kisses his mom's forehead and rises.

CHRISTIAN
I'm spent, mom, really.

LIZ
So good to have you back.

CHRISTIAN
Yep.

LIZ
And I don't just mean at home.

Christian gives her a melancholy smile before heading upstairs.

LIZ (CONT'D)
(calls out)
Sleep tight.

He's gone.

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christian glances at his barren walls with a look of doom.

A lone suitcase sits by his bed. He opens his drawers and finds his clothes neatly arranged and tucked away. He half-laughs and sighs.

Christian plops at his desk where his EXIT UP POST-CARE GUIDEBOOK waits. He glances at the book for a second and then diverts his eyes to his laptop.

Christian logs onto his GMAIL and scrolls. Lots of SPAM, but one message grabs his attention.

Christian's breath grows rapid. He looks at the subject line: HEARTACHE. He gets up and looks out the window. He flips through channels on TV, but he can't keep his eyes off his laptop.

He returns to his desk and looks at the email's sender, IAN. Christian closes his eyes. He opens them, but IAN is still there. He can't escape Ian.

Christian clicks "DELETE" and "EMPTY TRASH".

Christian paces. He punches his bed. He wants to scream, but he can't.

He grabs his EXIT UP POST-CARE GUIDEBOOK and flips through it. His eyes pass a series of phrases: DEALING WITH URGES -- FREE FROM HELL -- MALE BONDING -- SMOTHERING MOTHER.

Christian throws his guidebook on the floor and reclines on his bed. Tears stream down his face.

INT. THE WRIGHT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Liz is sauced. Her eyes droop, but she manages to keep them open as David thrusts her. Neither makes a sound, Liz just keeps staring at the ceiling until David utters a slight moan, kisses her, and rolls over.

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Face puffy from tears, Christian reclines on his bed, staring at the photostrip: he's with the other beautiful boy, IAN (21).

Christian looks at the photo fondly - two lovers, posing in a bar photobooth. The bar's name, ZOO BABIES, is printed on the side of the strip.

Christian wipes his tears, takes a seat at his desk and types.

CHRISTIAN (V.O.)

*I'm sorry I took off without saying
goodbye. I don't mean to be trouble.*

Christian plops his suitcase on his bed, opens it and places the photostrip from Zoo Babies inside.

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

I can't help it. I still love --

Christian looks toward his open window as his printer shoots out one sheet of paper.

CHRISTIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*-- I still love the wrong way, and
I just don't feel comfortable living
in your house, shaming you.*

Christian closes his suitcase and sets it on the floor. He grabs the paper from the printer, closes his laptop and leaves the paper on his desk.

FADE TO:

INT. THE WRIGHT KITCHEN - MORNING

David sips his coffee while reading the morning paper, *The Menard County Review*. Liz tops his coffee off and hands him a fresh napkin before making herself a plate.

Liz glances at the empty plate next to them.

LIZ
How much longer should we give him?

David checks his watch and smiles.

DAVID
It's only nine. Let him enjoy his
own bed.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Liz taps on Christian's door.

LIZ
Rise and shine, son of mine.

Silence.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Christian, you'll sleep your life
away.

She knocks again. No answer, so she turns the knob and steps inside.

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liz gasps -- Christian's bed is made and empty. She shivers, hurries to the open window and pokes her head out.

Liz looks outside and sees nothing out of the ordinary. Both cars are in the driveway. All seems well.

Now bewildered, Liz spots the letter on Christian's desk, next to his EXIT UP POST-TREATMENT GUIDEBOOK.

Liz opens the letter and reads.

CHRISTIAN (V.O.)
*I know God will forgive me for
 leaving so soon, but He could never
 forgive me for having another impure
 thought.*

Liz panics.

LIZ
 No.

CHRISTIAN (V.O.)
*You've done your job as parents.
 You tried.*

Liz grabs the land line and rapidly punches a number. She hears a faint cell phone RINGING and follows the sound to the closet.

CHRISTIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*Take care of each other. Your son,
 your Christian.*

Liz drops the land line, but the cell rings one last time.

Liz stands at the closet door, terrified. She turns the nob and opens the door.

Liz SCREAMS.

SMASH CUT:

OVER BLACK:

LIZ (V.O.)
Christian!

FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

The parking lot is half full. It's a gray morning in central Illinois as MOURNERS walk toward a freshly dug gravesite.

WOMAN
Our Lord and His mysterious ways.

ANOTHER WOMAN
Poor boy died in his sleep. What
are we to learn from that?

Liz and David stand nearby. David remains calm and strong, but Liz can hardly keep her puffy eyes open as people shake hands and offer sympathetic looks.

David's brow furrows when he sees a slight boy approaching. This is IAN (21), the boy from the photobooth.

David gives him a look, but Ian won't retreat. He approaches David, offers his hand --

IAN
I just want to know what happened.

DAVID
Go. I won't say it again.

David and Liz step away from Ian and walk toward Christian's gravesite.

Ian remains with the parked cars.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

An ELDERLY PASTOR gives a somber speech to a small group presiding over Christian's open grave.

ELDERLY PASTOR
*He will wipe away from them every
tear from their eyes. Death will
be no more; neither will there be
mourning, nor crying, nor pain...*

Betty stands by her well-dressed PARENTS. In shock, she just stares at the coffin.

Liz is numb. Instead of watching her son's casket disappear into the earth, she watches the street where Ian stands by his car, alone and devastated, and staring right back at her.

INT. THE WRIGHT HOUSE - DAY

PEOPLE eat, drink, and try to be respectful.

From across the room, while pretending to listen to the onslaught of condolences, Liz watches David chat with a beautiful, corn-fed girl, ASHLEY (20's).

Liz watches until David catches her. Ashley immediately ends her conversation with David and approaches Liz with open arms.

ASHLEY

Mrs. Wright.

Liz remains dead in Ashley's embrace. David approaches.

DAVID

Ashley has generously offered to step in and pick up the slack.

LIZ

Of course she has.

ASHLEY

I can cook, do laundry --

Liz yanks Ashley's glass of wine right out of her hand and navigates her way through packs of mourners like she's in a funhouse maze.

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - DAY

Liz smells Christian's pillow, sheets, and blanket. She swallows the rest of her wine and sits on the floor with his suitcase. She clicks it open. Everything is still in it -- his shirts, socks, and his photo with Ian at Zoo Babies.

The doorknob turns, and Liz locks the photo back in the suitcase. David steps in, looking concerned.

DAVID

Liz.

LIZ

David.

DAVID

This isn't healthy.

LIZ

What would you prefer?

DAVID

We have a house full of people.

LIZ

How are you so wooden?

David is silent. He just stares at her, uncomfortable with all this raw emotion. He's ready to leave this room, but Liz squeezes Christian's pillow and he can't go yet.

LIZ (CONT'D)

My boy.

David watches, helplessly.

DAVID

Liz, he's in God's hands.

David sits with his wife and wraps an arm around her.

DAVID (CONT'D)

In some ways I think he was brave.

Liz pulls away, so startled she can no longer produce tears.

LIZ

What?

DAVID

No more temptations. He's free.

Liz just stares at David as if meeting him for the first time. Her eyes move to the EXIT UP post-care guidebook, and she grabs it.

LIZ

You said this would fix everything.

David rises.

DAVID
Join me downstairs when you've
collected yourself.

Fed up, David leaves the room.

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

With her glass of wine in one hand and the GUIDEBOOK in the other, Liz steps out of Christian's room and sits at the top of the stairs.

Liz takes a drink and watches people eat, drink, and speak in hushed tones. Disgusted, Liz takes the book and HURLS it down the stairs.

For a moment, everything stops. Liz sees the concerned looks on her guests' faces, but no one does or says anything. They glance at her. They glance at the book, and that's it.

Liz glares at David, who manages to keep a happy face. Like the others, he's carrying on like this is a cocktail party.

He's carrying on as if nothing happened.

FADE TO:

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - MORNING

Liz is passed out on the bed. Her eyes flutter when the blinds are pulled and the dark room starts to fill with sunlight.

Liz opens her eyes to find David, smiling and standing over her with a steaming cup of coffee.

DAVID
And how are we this morning?

Liz mumbles something incomprehensible. She's beyond groggy.

David hands her the coffee. She accepts the warm mug and takes a soothing sip.

David rubs the temples of her head. Upon his touch, Liz grimaces and pulls away.

LIZ

Don't.

DAVID

Let's get you out of here. I have
a bath running.

LIZ

I don't want a bath.

Liz does everything in her power to keep from looking into
his eyes.

DAVID

Come with me - I have a surprise.

David manages to lift Liz from the bed. She gives in and
follows him out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As David and Liz leave Christian's room --

DAVID

I wanted to tell you when you had a
clear head --

LIZ

Good luck with that.

DAVID

-- but since you insist on being a
grouchy goose I'll tell you now.

Liz takes a deep breath and an even deeper sigh.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Aus. It's a village in Namibia. I
pulled some strings. I'll run the
mission there. We leave tomorrow
night and come back in six weeks.

Liz stares at him in disbelief. If this situation weren't
so horrendous, she'd laugh.

DAVID (CONT'D)

It's exactly what we need right
now.

Liz freezes.

LIZ
We don't need a distraction, David.
We need answers.

David looks at his reflection in the hall mirror. He fixes some stray hairs, examines his pores, but he can't look at the photo of his son staring right at him.

DAVID
What else is there to know?

LIZ
(as if speaking to a
6th grader)
I want to know why my son hung
himself after therapy that was
supposed to cure him.

David turns to his wife and speaks to her so casually it's as if he's ordering dinner.

DAVID
When we go to Aus, you'll have an
entire village of children to tend
to.

LIZ
They are not my children.

DAVID
You're still my wife, and we both
have responsibilities to the church.

LIZ
If you go on a mission you're going
alone.

David stares her down, but Liz doesn't back off.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I'm not going, but I'm sure Ashley
will be happy to accompany you.

There's nothing David can say. Liz has won this battle, so she walks into the bathroom and slams the door.

INT. LIZ'S BATHROOM - DAY

The room is steamy. Liz's face is pressed to the small window, peering through the blinds.

Naked, she watches David fill his car's trunk with luggage. He gets in his car and is about to pull out of the driveway when he sees her. She pulls the blinds and steps away.

Liz wipes the condensation from the mirror and looks at her skeletal body. Her skin is flawless, with the exception of a scar on her lower abdomen.

She smiles as she runs her hand across the Caesarean scar. And then she remembers, and her smile fades.

EXT. EXIT UP HEADQUARTERS - DAY

With a fierce look of determination on her face, Liz strides toward the entrance of EXIT UP.

INT. EXIT UP HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Liz marches down the hallway, passing rooms full of YOUNG MEN deep into the process of Conversion Therapy.

MAN (O.S.)
Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom!

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Liz sees a dozen MEN (18-20's) like zombies, all lined up in metal folding chairs, watching an AWKWARD MAN (40's) pummel a pillow with a wiffle-ball bat.

With each hit the man shouts:

AWKWARD MAN
Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom!

Some men flinch. Others stare, looking comatose.

AWKWARD MAN (CONT'D)
Why, why, why, why?!

INT. ANOTHER MEETING ROOM - DAY

Here, Liz watches a similar group of homogenous MEN sit in an intimate setting. A KEN-DOLL GUY (40's) commands their attention with forced displays of machismo.

KEN DOLL
Only affirming our manhood, affirming
our place in the world of men, can
bring us peace.

The men listen hopefully as Ken Doll circles the group, squeezing shoulders and patting backs.

KEN DOLL (CONT'D)
Together, we'll heal our father
hunger and reverse the wounds left
by smothering mothers. We will
heal our sense of estrangement from
men and our own masculinity!

The hopeful men applaud.

INT. REC ROOM - DAY

Liz finally sees a lounge of sorts filled with stacks of Bibles and other reading material: JOURNEY INTO MANHOOD, MEN AT THE CROSS and DARE TO SOAR.

YOUNG MEN recline in pleather chairs with their eyes closed as a mantra plays:

MAN (V.O.)
*You are a man. You are strong.
You have proven yourself as a man
among men. You are whole. You are
a man. You are strong. You have
proven yourself as a man among men.*

INT. EXIT UP HALLWAY - DAY

A hand grasps her shoulder. Liz jerks, turns, and finds Dr. Roy.

DR. ROY
Mrs. Wright?

INT. DR. ROY'S OFFICE - LATER

Liz has mascara smudged around her eyes. She looked awful before, but her eyes are approaching Tammy Faye status.

As Dr. Roy speaks in an oblivious and matter-of-fact tone, Liz looks behind his sweaty mug at a framed TIME MAGAZINE COVER.

On the magazine cover Dr. Roy's arms are wrapped around a thick woman. The headline reads: EX-GAY?

DR. ROY

Like all of our patients, we tried to find the root of your son's condition. First we explored the father-son relationship as a possible cause for his SSA.

Liz looks lost.

DR. ROY (CONT'D)

Same Sex Attraction. Growing up, a great number of men have issues with their fathers that contribute to their SSA. Often the father-son relationship is marked by either actual or perceived abandonment, extended absence, or hostility.

LIZ

So you're saying...what are you saying?

DR. ROY

Like all human experiences, this is not universal, and we never thought Christian's relationship with his father contributed to his SSA. He never mentioned it, and nine out of ten of our patients fit into another group. Smothering Mother Syndrome.

LIZ

Smothering Mother?

DR. ROY

While some patients perceived their fathers as abandoning, it's common for them to become so dependent on their mothers they feel alienated from the male world and find comfort in female companionship. They then label women and femininity as superior to men and masculinity.

Silence. Liz takes a moment to process all she's heard and she looks horrified.

LIZ

I smothered my son?

Dr. Roy is silent.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I smothered my son and this is the
result?

DR. ROY
You're not alone --

LIZ
Then there are other casualties?!?

DR. ROY
That's not what I meant.

LIZ
Then what? That's what you tell a
mother who just lost her son?

DR. ROY
Mrs. Wright --

LIZ
What am I supposed to do with that?

DR. ROY
Please, he's in God's hands now.

LIZ
God's hands? Can't you men come up
with something better than that?
God's hands?

Liz jumps up and charges for the door.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I smothered my son!

Suddenly, she looks pale. She's silent, and then:

LIZ (CONT'D)
I killed my son?

FADE OUT:

OVER BLACK:

LIZ (V.O.)
You've reached The Wrights, please
leave a message and have a blessed
day.

BEEP.

MAN (V.O.)
Liz, please. Your mother is worried.

BEEP.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Hi, honey. It's Karen. We miss
you in church and Bible study.
Please just call, email -- something
to let us know you're okay.

BEEP.

DAVID (V.O.)
Liz. I'm in Aus. I'm in Aus and
I'm hearing things.
(sigh)
You're still representing our church.
Please, Liz, don't forget the church.

BEEEEEEEEEP.

FADE IN:

INT. LIZ'S HOME - DAY

Trash cans overflow with empty bottles of booze. This house
is a damned mess.

INT. LIZ'S BATHROOM - DAY

Liz is on the tiled floor, eyes closed and wearing nothing
but panties and one of Christian's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*
t-shirts.

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

Liz's eyes snap open, and it's instantly clear that her smooth
skin has been taken captive by dark circles and a sallow
tint.

In a daze, she plops onto the toilet, yanks her panties down and slides off. She can't sit on the toilet, and she pees all over herself.

Liz strips and looks in the mirror. She is horrified by what she finds: an emaciated, haggard woman.

She can't look at her reflection any longer, so she kills the lights.

INT. CHRISTIAN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Naked, Liz stumbles into Christian's room. It's still pristine, including a Bible that was so neatly placed on his bedside table - like a hotel.

She opens his closet and tears everything out, including his packed suitcase. She only stops when the suitcase opens and the photostrip of Christian and Ian at ZOO BABIES falls out and catches her eye.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD - NIGHT

Liz stumbles out of her sedan. It's "parked" on the curb and obstructing the sidewalk, but she doesn't seem to notice or care.

Liz takes a look at herself in the side mirror - she tries to smooth her hair, but gives up. This is as good as it's gonna get.

Liz looks at the old block of storefronts near the Capitol building that boasts a bronzed statue of Abraham Lincoln.

Across the railroad tracks, Liz sees a SKINNY KID (22) in a Unicorn T-Shirt smoking a cigarette with a long, plastic filter. He leans against a hole-in-the-wall bar, ZOO BABIES.

INT. ZOO BABIES - NIGHT

Liz takes a deep breath and saunters inside. This divey joint is empty except for an OLD QUEEN playing the piano and identical twins, RAMON and LAMON (20's), tending bar.

As Liz steps inside and searches, Ramon and Lamon size her up. She certainly doesn't fit here.

RAMON
Someone's lost.

Liz scans the joint, and her eyes fix on an old photobooth in the back corner of the bar.

LIZ
Grey Goose on the rocks. Tall.

RAMON
Girl's got a score to settle.

LAMON
Long day?

LIZ
Long life.

RAMON & LAMON
We hear you.

Lamon fills a tall glass with ice and Grey Goose and slides it to Liz. She takes a long drink before releasing a great sigh.

LIZ
Perfect.

LAMON
You can't really mess up vodka and ice.

LIZ
Start a tab, will you?

RAMON
You do know where you are?

LIZ
Zoo Babies?

RAMON
Yes, but you know you're not gonna pick up any men here.

LIZ
Perhaps that's why I'm here.

Ramon grins and snaps his fingers in agreement.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Does that photobooth work?

RAMON
It ain't for decoration.

Liz pulls a ten-dollar bill from her purse and slaps it on the bar.

LIZ
Be a doll and change this?

Lamon keeps a suspicious eye on Liz, takes her ten, and slides her singles.

LIZ (CONT'D)
If I'm not out in twenty minutes
call the National Guard.

She smiles and heads to the photobooth. Ramon and Lamon exchange amused glances.

INT. PHOTOBOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Liz pulls the curtain and pulls out the photo of Christian and Ian and feeds the machine a few singles and waits.

She takes a drink and reclines against the booth's wall:

FLASH -- Liz poses like her son in the first photo of his strip, goofy and carefree.

FLASH -- Liz poses like Christian in the second shot, serious and beautiful, a fierce pose.

FLASH -- Liz just stares at the final photo of her son and Ian, so very much in love. No posing, Liz's face reveals raw pain.

Liz downs her vodka and closes her eyes, head pressed against the back of the booth.

Her photos shoot onto the floor of the bar.

INT. ZOO BABIES - LATER

The bar is about half full of all sorts of guys -- young, old, cute, not-so-cute, butch, femme, and everyone in between.

The Old Queen on the piano is now singing Henry Mancini's "Moon River".

OLD QUEEN

(singing)

*Two drifters, off to see the world,
there's such a lot of world to see...*

Lamon manages the bar as Ramon carries a tall glass of Vodka on ice through the crowd.

OLD QUEEN (CONT'D)

(singing)

*...We're after the same rainbow's
end, waiting by the bend...*

As Ramon passes, the Old Queen spins him.

OLD QUEEN (CONT'D)

(singing)

*...my Huckleberry friend...Moon
River and me.*

The crowd claps, and the Old Queen takes a bow, grabs her cane and walks to the bar.

Ramon taps on the photobooth. Looking sauced, Liz yanks the curtains open.

RAMON

Listen, honey, I gotta liquor license
to keep. This is your last one.

Liz grabs the booze and shoves the photo of Christian and Ian in Ramon's face. She points at Ian (in the photo).

A flash of concern runs across Ramon's face.

RAMON (CONT'D)

Don't tell me you're Ian's mama?

LIZ

No. I'm a friend...of a friend.

Relieved, Ramon pulls Liz out of the photobooth and turns her toward the bar.

RAMON

Look no further, baby.

He points to the bar where Ian sits with a group of young MALE FRIENDS (20's). They're laughing and drinking and having a grand time chatting with Lamon.

LIZ

Ian!

A few patrons gawk as Liz stumbles toward Ian with open arms. The color drains from Ian's face as Liz steps up and tries to hug him.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Honey.

He pulls back. He's horrified.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I found this, and I thought you might want it.

She shows Ian the photostrip, but he can't bring himself to look at it.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Can we talk?

He can't look at her either. He takes a gulp of his Jack & Coke and stares at the floor.

LIZ (CONT'D)

You're the only one who can help me through this.

IAN

Help you?

LIZ

Please. I want to understand --

Ian's struggling, trying his damndest to remain strong and hide his pain.

LIZ (CONT'D)

You're the only one who really knew him.

IAN

Yes, before you sent him to that concentration camp.

LIZ

We were only trying to help him, trying to save him from years of heartache.

IAN

Well, you saved him from years of everything. Christian and I had to sneak around, and when he couldn't take it any longer, the lies, deceiving his beloved parents -- that was it. He was gone.

(beat)

The sick thing is, he loved you so much, both of you.

Liz listens, crumbling, as Ian speaks.

IAN (CONT'D)

Healthy nineteen-year-olds don't just die in their sleep. You want answers? Christian killed himself because of your husband, and your phony shrinks with their fake science, and your book, your big book of bullshit, Mom.

Liz closes her eyes. This is too much.

IAN (CONT'D)

At least you got to see him for a day, MOM. For me - no calls or emails. Not even a text in three fucking months. My best friend?

Ian's voice cracks, and he can't pretend any longer. He's breaking down.

IAN (CONT'D)

My love, and I didn't even get to say goodbye.

Ian can't hide his grief any longer and gathers his friends.

IAN (CONT'D)

I can't.

Ramon reaches out to Ian, locks arms, and stops him from leaving the bar.

RAMON

This is our house, honey.

Lamon takes Liz by the arm.

LAMON
Time to go, Misses.

Liz pushes Lamon away.

LIZ
Please, Ian --

LAMON
We get enough shit from the cops,
we don't need this, too.

LIZ
I don't mean any trouble --

LAMON
Get the fuck out!

Liz is scared silent. Lamon is clearly not playing with her. He glares into her frightened eyes and motions for the door. Liz takes one final, pleading look at Ian, but he turns his back.

Liz turns and walks out of the bar without realizing she's left the photostrip of Christian and Ian behind.

The photo remains on the floor with wadded up napkins, chewed gum, and cigarette butts.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD - MUCH LATER

Liz wanders the streets swilling a pint of cheap Vodka.

Around the corner a Lexus kills its headlights and parks behind a row of dumpsters.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

It's very dark, but the flickering street lamp provides just enough light to see a MIDDLE AGED DRIVER reclining in his seat.

DEZ (23), a slim kid with striking, dark features and a pseudo hipster hair cut, unzips the driver's pants and gives him a half-hearted blow job.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD - NIGHT

BAR HOPPERS dodge Liz on the sidewalks as she mumbles, slurs and sways. She's a mess.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Liz rounds the corner and ends up next to the Lexus. She starts to dry heave. She leans over to puke, but instead trips and falls flat on her face. She doesn't move.

Incomprehensible yelling and cursing spew from the Lexus. The passenger door SWINGS open, and Dez is PUSHED into the alley.

DEZ
I said fifty, you fuck!

The Lexus speeds into the night. Dez tries to chase after it, but it's too late. He's alone on the street with a twenty-dollar bill.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Fuck!

Dez kicks a dumpster. He turns and spots Liz, face-down in the alley. Before approaching Liz, he checks his surroundings. All is clear.

Dez crouches down and runs his hand under Liz's nose.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Still kicking.

He opens her purse, finds her driver's license. He glances at her photo and does a double-take. In the frozen image, she looks like an All American Mom, far from the face-planted drunk in the alley.

DEZ (CONT'D)
What a waste.

Dez pockets her only cash, a \$20.00 bill, and takes off. He gets about fifteen steps, but he can't keep going. He turns and looks at Liz. She's still there, face-down on a disgusting street with her dress hiked.

Dez returns to Liz's side.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Ah, fuck.

Dez pulls Liz up and lugs her down the street. Wrapped in Dez's arms, Liz's eyelids flutter.

LIZ
Christian?

DEZ
Naw. No Christian. Not here.
Where you staying?

Liz's eyes close again.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Hey. Wake up!

She SNORES in response.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Jesus.

Dez sighs and carries her down the street.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Working up a sweat, Dez struggles, but manages to get Liz around a corner to a shitty first floor apartment with a tattered EVICTION NOTICE hanging on the door.

He breezes past the notice without a glance. It's clearly been there awhile.

INT. DEZ'S PAD - NIGHT

This one-room apartment has an old couch that's missing its cushions. There is no refrigerator or stove, just a hot plate and a bunch of trash on the counters, and there are half a dozen sleeping SQUATTERS on the floor.

Dez carefully plops Liz on the couch and covers her with a an old quilt. He takes a spot on the floor, in the only corner without a warm body, and he closes his eyes. No blanket - Liz has his.

INT. DEZ'S PAD - MORNING

It's dark, but there are a few rays of light shining through the filthy blinds. A family of ROACHES scuttles across the stained, hardwood floor, just past Dez and the rest of the squatters. Dez is still asleep, blanketless, and in the fetal position.

Liz wakes up in a daze and slowly opens her eyes. She sits up, startled as she surveys the unfamiliar surroundings.

Her face is bruised and swollen from her fall. She sees the sleeping strangers and gasps. She covers her mouth, limps to the sink and PUKES.

The wretched sounds of Liz's heaves wake Dez. He quickly fumbles to the kitchen to help, but Liz SCREAMS.

DEZ

Hey, hey! Quiet.

Liz reaches for the first thing in sight - a plastic fork - and waves it at Dez. He keeps his distance and can't help but laugh.

SQUATTER

'the fuck, man!

DEZ

Sorry, Kurt.

LIZ

What is this place?

DEZ

Ssh. Slow down, sister, and listen to me.

LIZ

Who are you? Oh, dear God!

DEZ

Lady, I found your drunk ass face-down in an alley last night. You should be squeezing my sack for bringing you here.

Dez cautiously moves toward her. Liz backs into an overflowing trash bin.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Relax, Liz.

LIZ

You know my name?

DEZ

Your license. If I was going to hurt you, I would've done it six hours ago. Think.

She drops the plastic fork.

DEZ (CONT'D)
I'm Dez. Short for Dezmond.

Liz folds her arms, shivers, and glances at all the sleeping squatters on the floor.

LIZ
And they are?

DEZ
My tenants....

He takes a swig of bottled water and offers the rest to Liz.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Here.

She grimaces.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Like you haven't put your mouth on worse. Drink.

Liz gives in and grabs it. She takes it all down.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Do you know how you got that way?
Face-down in an alley?

LIZ
I don't know. I was in this bar
and then...?

She shrugs, clueless.

DEZ
It happens. One of your John's
probably roofied you up.

LIZ
My what?

Dez smirks at her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
You think I'm a hooker? Oh, God.
We didn't...?

Dez shivers in mock disgust.

DEZ

You wish.

Liz surveys Dez's pad and her trepidation returns.

LIZ

And you actually live here?

DEZ

No. I broke into this shithole to impress middle-aged roadkill.

LIZ

I'm barely forty, thank you.

DEZ

Whatev.

LIZ

No photos...

DEZ

That's intentional.

LIZ

Does that mean no family? Other than the fine folks on the floor here?

Dez shrugs.

LIZ (CONT'D)

So, you're an orphan?

DEZ

I guess.

LIZ

How old are you?

DEZ

What are you, a fucking census taker?

LIZ

Do you have to curse?

DEZ

No, but I like to.

LIZ

I just woke up in a strange apartment, I think I have the right to ask you some questions. How do I know you're not holding me for ransom, or are part of some kind of cult!

Dez moves out of the way and points to the front door.

DEZ

I'm sure you have somewhere to go, someone who's missing the shit out of you, so scoot.

Liz sighs and takes another look at his pathetic apartment.

LIZ

Thank you, Dezmond, for...whatever you did. Can I treat you and your friends to breakfast?

DEZ

They won't be up 'til noon --

POUND! POUND! POUND!

LIZ

What --

Dez covers Liz's mouth with his hand and gives her the international sign for SHUT THE "F" UP.

The doorknob jiggles.

Dez kicks each of the sleeping squatters on the floor. One-by-one they open their eyes, confused --

MAN (O.S.)

Goddamn it!

POUND! POUND! POUND!

The squatters grab their shit and hop through the ground-floor window.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I can hear you, you little faggot!
I want my fucking money!

Dez gestures for Liz to follow the squatters. Dez grabs his backpack, allows Liz to slip through the window first, and he follows.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The squatters run one way, and Liz is about to follow them, but Dez stops her --

LIZ
What about your friends?

DEZ
I prefer to eat in peace.

INT. COZ'S DINER - DAY

The wood-panelled walls are covered with St. Louis Cardinals and Illini Basketball memorabilia. The red-pleather booths and stools are filled with the butts of BLUE COLLAR folks.

Still there are a couple HUNGOVER HIPSTERS sprinkled in the mix, recovering from late nights at the bars.

Stuffed in a cozy booth, Liz sips a bloody mary and watches Dez create a peculiar concoction on his plate.

Dez cuts his toast into four squares. He then places broken strips of bacon, Tabasco sauce, and fried eggs on top of each square. As he prepares to eat it open-faced, he looks at Liz, who's staring at him.

DEZ
Don't you eat?

Liz picks at her eggwhite omelet and takes another sip of her bloody mary.

LIZ
There are tomatoes in this, no?

Dez dives into his mini breakfast sandwiches.

LIZ (CONT'D)
There has to be a story there...all
that work just to shove it down one
pipe.

Entertained by his culinary quirks, Liz watches Dez inhale his food.

LIZ (CONT'D)
How long have you lived in that
hole?

DEZ
Little over a month.

LIZ
You can't go back.

DEZ
I'll give him until sundown. He'll
be so fucked on oxy he'll forget I
exist. He does that song and dance
every few days.

LIZ
Where will you go when he's had
enough?

DEZ
Jesus, wherever the road takes me.

LIZ
You're a real rolling stone, eh?

DEZ
Rolling stone? How old are you?

LIZ
And your friends?

DEZ
Girl, they're not my friends.
They're squatters. They're fellow
tossaways, new to the game. It's
the least I can do.

LIZ
Tossaways? You mean their families
kicked them out?

DEZ
Ding, ding, ding!

LIZ
Your family tossed you away, and
now you take in others.

DEZ

Oh, God. Don't get all *Reader's Digest* on me. I've been on my own since I was sixteen. Lived with a guy until last year --

LIZ

What happened?

DEZ

I went through puberty, and suddenly he just wasn't that into me.

LIZ

Goodness.

Liz nods and sips her drink, careful to keep her eyes on Dez without intimidating him.

DEZ

When he left I had to figure shit out on my own. My parents didn't quite get it, so I never looked back. Hustled my way into that shitbox.

LIZ

So you're not an orphan?

DEZ

I got into some shit along the way. Got into the wrong car a couple times, you know, but I'm here.

LIZ

What do you do for money? How do you live?

DEZ

That's what I'm trying to tell you, Liz.

(singsong)

I'm a hustler, baby.

LIZ

And you like this life?

DEZ

Love it.

(MORE)

DEZ (CONT'D)
 (in a breathy, Scarlett
 O'Hara accent)
 When I was just a boy I dreamt of
 this very moment.

Liz reaches across the table and takes Dez's hand.

LIZ
 You're worth more.

Dez squirms before pulling his hand away.

DEZ
 I'm not the one who takes naps in
 alleys.

Liz pretends she didn't hear that.

LIZ
 I have a son your age, a little
 younger.

DEZ
 Is he cute?

LIZ
 He's away.

DEZ
 Okay...?

LIZ
 He had a fight with my husband.
 Haven't seen him since.

DEZ
 He'll be back.

LIZ
 Have you gone back?

DEZ
 No.

LIZ
 My husband left, but he's Namibia
 on a church mission. He's a pastor.

Dez nearly chokes on his breakfast. This is the distraction he needed.

DEZ
(mouth full)
You're a pastor's wife?

Liz tries not to react. She just tears napkins to keep from revealing too much emotion.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Holy shit!

LIZ
The point is - my home is free. So you can stay with me until you get back on your feet. It's the least I can do.

DEZ
Shit, you already bought me breakfast.

LIZ
I have a big house. Too big for just me.

DEZ
The pastor's wife bringing home a Mary she met on the street? What will the ladies who lunch think, or your son? Jesus, I do not need a beatdown by a Bible-toting quarterback.

LIZ
I'm a Christian. It's what we do.

Dez sits back and folds his arms. Now he gets it.

DEZ
I see what this is, and I happily decline. No Bible school for me. I'll find a Mark.

LIZ
Who's Mark?

Dez laughs at Liz's innocence. But then he says nothing and stares at her, trying to figure her out, to uncover a hidden agenda.

LIZ (CONT'D)
You saved me from God knows what.
Let me return the favor.

Dez finishes his last nibble of food and takes the final gulp of his coffee.

DEZ
Don't need saving. Good luck, church lady.

He takes off, leaving Liz at the table alone. Resigned, she holds up her empty glass and signals to the busy WAITER.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Liz stumbles to the sidewalk, searching, but there's no car. She circles the street and looks up at the sign: NO PARKING 8AM - 12PM. Liz stands in the street just staring at the damned sign.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD IMPOUND - DAY

Liz is at the head of a long line of ANGRY PEOPLE. As she makes it to the CLERK --

WOMAN (O.S.)
Liz?

Liz's look of dread reveals that she knows this voice, but she takes a deep breath and ignores it. She slides her license and credit card to the clerk --

CLERK
(checks the name on
her ID)
Think she's talking to you, Liz.

LIZ
Just get my car, it's a black 2011
Lacrosse.

The clerk gives her a sassy look, scans her card.

CLERK
One-fifty.

LIZ
Fine. Will they bring it to the
front?

CLERK
This ain't a Holiday Inn.

The clerk hands Liz keys and a receipt.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Next!

Liz grabs her keys, turns and faces a woman bathed in Ralph
Lauren, KAREN HENDRICKS (50), Liz in ten years...if she stops
drinking.

Karen does her best to stifle her gasp as she gives Liz a
once-over.

KAREN
Elizabeth, honey?

Liz sighs and addresses Karen as if she just now noticed
her.

LIZ
Karen. Did you park in a red zone,
too?

KAREN
Helping out one of the ladies from
the shelter.

She gestures to an EMACIATED WOMAN in line.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Honey, your face.

Liz gently touches the wound under her eye and remembers.

LIZ
I tripped, broke my heel in a
pothole. Guess it serves me right
for buying shoes from Kohl's.

KAREN
Elizabeth.

Karen squeezes Liz, who remains limp in her arms.

LIZ

Nice catching up with you, Karen.

Liz doesn't even give Karen a chance to stop her. She's already made it to the door, leaving Karen to gawk at her shadow and whip out her cell phone.

INT. DEZ'S PAD - NIGHT

Dez rummages through his apartment, shoving whatever he can into his backpack.

INT. DEZ'S HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dez quietly strides to the door at the far end of the hallway. There's a tattered sign on the door:

RENT DUE AT NOON 1st OF MONTH NO CEPTIONS!

Dez KNOCKS. He's careful to check his surroundings and look both ways as he waits.

He KNOCKS again. No answer, so Dez rattles the knob. It's locked.

Dez loosens his sleeve and reveals a small flathead screwdriver.

INT. LIZ'S HOME - NIGHT

The house is silent. The floors are covered with photos and tissues, and tiny vodka bottles. Liz is face-down on her couch and immobile.

The DOORBELL RINGS. No movement from Liz.

The DOORBELL RINGS again.

Liz wakes and pulls herself up. She tiptoes to her window where she peers outside but quickly pulls the shades.

The DOORBELL RINGS frantically.

Fed up, Liz cracks the door open and finds Karen Hendricks on the porch.

LIZ

Are you following me?

KAREN
Honey, I'm here to help.

Karen tries to push her way inside.

EXT. LIZ'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Liz steps onto the porch and closes the door behind her, blocking Karen from entering her home.

KAREN
You're not going to invite me in?

LIZ
On my way out.

KAREN
You look like you could use some company.

LIZ
Looks can be deceiving.

KAREN
Let us be here for you. We can pray the pain away.

LIZ
I just want to be left alone.

Karen flinches at the scent of Liz's breath.

KAREN
I can smell your problem, you poor thing.

Karen takes her by the arm, but Liz pulls back, which only makes Karen pull harder.

LIZ
Let me go!

Karen won't let up.

KAREN
Let's get you into the shower and fill that belly with a home-cooked meal. I told David I'd try. You can stay with me until he gets back.

LIZ
So you didn't visit out of the
goodness of your heart? Imagine
that.

KAREN
People talk. You know that.

As Karen tries to push her way into the house, Liz pushes back. In the scuffle Karen trips on a pair of Christian's shoes and falls down the stairs.

Liz stares at the shoes as Karen yelps in pain and rubs her ankle.

LIZ
I told you to go.

KAREN
My ankle.

LIZ
Does it hurt?

KAREN
Yes, Liz, please --

LIZ
Why don't you just pray the pain
away?

Liz marches to her car, slams her door and speeds out of her driveway. She leaves Karen in her yard, speechless with a throbbing ankle.

EXT. DEZ'S PAD - NIGHT

Parked across the street from Dez's Pad, Liz sits taking sips from a tiny bottle of Smirnoff. She perks up when she hears YELLING --

With blood trickling from his nose, Dez leaps off the stoop and plows right past Liz's car. She HONKS her horn, but he doesn't look back.

The LANDLORD, an enormous man in his boxers, plows through the front door and chases him with a bat.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

The Landlord wheezes as Dez's skinny ass trots down the dark alley. With his Landlord following close behind, Dez sees headlights coming right at him.

DEZ

Shit!

Dez ducks, but the car stops next to him. He can't believe his eyes when Liz rolls her window down.

DEZ (CONT'D)

You're deranged.

LIZ

My offer still stands.

DEZ

A deranged stalker.

LIZ

You have about six seconds to make a decision.

Dez looks behind him and sees his Landlord heading toward him, waving the bat.

DEZ

If you try and beat me with the Bible of yours --

LIZ

As long as you don't lecture me about anything, we're good.

Dez hops in Liz's car. As they speed into the night he pokes his head out the window and taunts his wheezing Landlord.

DEZ

Kisses!

He smooches and flips him off - hooting along the way.

In her side-view mirror, it's clear that Liz is scared, but also titillated by the crazy turn her life has suddenly taken.

INT. VILLAGE MARKET - NIGHT

Small town SHOPPERS gawk as Dez sashes through the aisle of this quaint market. As Dez floats past the pasta, it's like a ballet, or at the very least an artsy grocery store commercial.

Liz looks uncomfortable with the attention, but she's clearly amused by Dez's carefree attitude.

DEZ

Here we are.

Liz grins as Dez carefully reads the back of a box of arborio rice. Once satisfied with the arborio rice's ingredients, Dez tosses the box into her grocery cart that's already overflowing with booze and cleaning supplies.

They make their way to the CASHIER, a chubby gal (20's) with extraordinarily long nails and a smirk on her face. She eyes the booze in the cart and scoffs.

CASHIER

Having another one of your "parties",
Mrs. Wright?

Liz nods, embarrassed. She's about to speak --

DEZ

It's always a party at Pastor
Wright's place. Don't you know
that, girl?

CASHIER

I'm gonna have to see your ID.

LIZ

I'm paying.

CASHIER

Still. He don't look old enough.

DEZ

Why thanks, peach.
(whispers)
Botox.

Dez bats his eyes and whips his ID at the bewildered, small town girl.

INT. LIZ'S HOME - NIGHT

This house is overflowing with trash, mostly empty bottles of booze. As Dez steps inside, he struggles to hide his shock.

LIZ
No judgments.

DEZ
I didn't say anything.

LIZ
The maid's on a vacation.

DEZ
Well, let's put the food away and
roll up our sleeves.

Liz looks ashamed of the awful mess, evidence of her problem and her grief. Dez gives her a quick and understanding nudge.

DEZ (CONT'D)
No judgments.

Relieved, Liz smiles.

EXT. AUS - SUNSET

Pastor David's Girl-Friday, Ashley, is among a dozen sunburnt AMERICAN MISSIONARIES watching as the VILLAGERS perform a song and dance.

Ashley follows David's every move as he takes photos with the children, smiling like he doesn't have a care in the world.

David laughs with a Namibian girl. Then the girl takes his hand and makes David her dance partner.

The song comes to an end, and David leads the applause.

DAVID
God bless you all. We will see you
bright and early!

EXT. AUS - MOMENTS LATER

David and Ashley wave goodnight to the Missionaries as they each duck into their private huts.

One MISSIONARY, a wide-eyed kid with fair hair, skin, and eyes (18), follows David and Ashley on their path.

MISSIONARY

What a day.

David smiles and wraps a comforting arm around the young Missionary.

DAVID

Is your first mission all you hoped?

MISSIONARY

Oh, more than I can say. But do you ever worry that once we leave they'll forget?

ASHLEY

They'll convert. They always do.

MISSIONARY

But why Aus? Why now?

DAVID

God is always looking down on us and calling out, begging us to spread His word. It's up to us to listen. I heard the call and I said "Here I am, Lord. Send me." The rest is up to Him.

(beat)

Good night, son.

It's almost comical how Pastor David abruptly ends his proclamation. He smiles his million-dollar, trustworthy grin, and waves.

The young Missionary is transfixed as he ducks into his hut.

EXT. LIZ'S HOME - NIGHT

A couple NOSY NEIGHBORS have their faces pressed to their windows. Some stand outside, pretending to walk their dogs, others just boldly stare into Liz's back yard.

Dez and Liz look pleasantly sauced as they eat dinner on her patio. Their plates are almost clean, and there's a half-empty gallon of vodka in front of them.

The *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* soundtrack BLASTS in the background.

DEZ
I can't believe you have this!

Liz shrugs.

LIZ
One of my son's friends probably
left it.

DEZ
Hmm...I'm keeping my thoughts to
myself on that one.

Liz takes the final bite of risotto and closes her eyes, savoring the creamy concoction. Dez gives Liz an inquisitive look. She's quick to change the subject.

LIZ
Where on earth did you learn to
cook like this?

Dez shrugs.

DEZ
Home, but I never had access to so
much quality shit.

LIZ
You can run my kitchen any day.

DEZ
Fifty bucks I gain ten pounds while
I'm under your roof.

LIZ
You could use it.

DEZ
Shit. You're one to talk.

Liz grabs the vodka and pours some over ice before taking a refreshing gulp.

DEZ (CONT'D)
What's your husband going to say
about all this?

LIZ
He knows I enjoy a drink.

DEZ
No, silly. What's he going to say
about me?

LIZ
Oh. I couldn't say.

DEZ
Separate lives?

LIZ
For now.

DEZ
Africa. Shit, you must have been
all over the world together.

LIZ
I've never been on any of his
missions.

DEZ
Why the hell not?

LIZ
Duties at home. Responsibilities
with the church.

DEZ
And now?

LIZ
I guess I'm trying to figure all
that out, my next step.

DEZ
I'd give my left tit to go to Africa,
or Arkansas for that matter. I've
been stuck in the Central ILL my
whole life.

LIZ
That makes two of us.

DEZ
For me, there's really no choice.
(MORE)

DEZ (CONT'D)
It's criminal for you. A sin, my
dear Christian Soldier.

LIZ
You can go anywhere. You're young,
on your own, and you have no
responsibilities.

DEZ
Or family, or anyone to come home
to. Yeah, I get it.

LIZ
That's not what I meant.

DEZ
Shit, it's true. No one's waiting
for me to tiptoe up the stairs at
night.

LIZ
Now there is.

DEZ
We just met. What if I gut you in
your sleep, or make a skin suit out
of you?

LIZ
For such a sweet kid you have one
morbid sense of humor.

DEZ
Sweet?

Dez hops on the table, being showy and dramatic.

LIZ
You are. I'm a mom. We know these
things.

Dez hops down, disappointed his antics aren't getting a
response.

DEZ
Not all mothers are maternal.

LIZ

Sure, but your nature. It's kind,
or I wouldn't have brought you into
my home.

Dez is uncomfortable with Liz's gaze, so he changes the
subject.

DEZ

In some circles, "sweet" is a
euphemism for gay.

LIZ

How did you know you were a
homosexual?

Dez nearly chokes on his drink.

DEZ

So clinical, Christ! Subtle, too.
How did you know you were a
heterosexual?

LIZ

I don't know. I met a man and
married him. Did what my mother
did. Did what was expected of me.

DEZ

How long have you been married?

LIZ

We've been together since tenth
grade. Our parents introduced us.

DEZ

This is all so fascinating, like a
classic episode of *Dynasty* or
something.

LIZ

You're too young to reference
Dynasty.

DEZ

TV Land.

LIZ

What about your parents?

DEZ
What about them?

LIZ
Anything. Everything.

DEZ
Mom stayed at home. Dad wasn't
around most of the time. Worked a
lot. Next question, counselor.

LIZ
Do you think, perhaps, that your
mother overcompensated for your
father's abandonment?

DEZ
For fuck sake, I thought we were
having a nightcap, not a therapy
session. My dad didn't abandon me.
He drove a truck. Ever been honked
at by a creepy truck driver?

Liz nods.

DEZ (CONT'D)
That was probably my dad.

LIZ
You were home with your mom a lot.
You were all she had. Would you
say she smothered you?

Dez snorts at such a question.

DEZ
Smothered, Liz? Come on, my story
isn't special. Like I said before,
all those squatters - tossaways
like me. My parents didn't get me.

Dez pauses.

DEZ (CONT'D)
And I'd rather be an orphan than a
stranger in my own home.

This hits Liz where it hurts. She takes a drink.

LIZ

But did you ever tell your parents
how you felt?

DEZ

It wouldn't have done any good.
I'm an only child, the son. Fuck,
I tried. I dated girls, screwed a
couple to see if I liked it.

He takes a gulp of vodka.

DEZ (CONT'D)

I didn't. The whole time I was
wondering what Johnny Depp's tongue
tasted like.

LIZ

Nothing worked.

DEZ

It's not something you "work out".
(beat)
I had this friend in high school,
Jessica. Prom queen, youth group,
blah, blah, blah. Every time she
got a little booze in her she'd
suck face with another chick - didn't
matter who. On Monday she was back
with her jock boyfriend, and
eventually she got married. She
teaches Kindergarten.

LIZ

Your point?

Dez smirks.

DEZ

I can't say for sure, but I bet
when Miss Jessica has a girls' night
out she's gonna down on one of her
fellow teachers, and Monday morning
they'll all be back to playing the
good wife.

(beat)

I can do that, Liz. I could kiss
you right now and it would be fun.

(MORE)

DEZ (CONT'D)

It might even be hot because it's
so wrong, you know? And I'll wake
up with a hard cock, but it won't
be from you. I'll still be thinking
about Johnny Depp.

Liz just stares at Dez, speechless.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Why'd you really bring me here?
What're you gonna do with me?

Liz stares at him, trying to figure out what he means. He
takes another sip of his drink, keeping his eye on her the
whole time.

LIZ

I'll make up the guest room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dez follows Liz up the stairway and down the hall. While
making his way through Liz's beige house, Dez glances at the
family photos.

DEZ

Now this is America. Beautiful
wife. Handsome son. Proud papa.
Are you sure these aren't ripped
from a Ralph Lauren ad?

Liz says nothing. She can't even look at the photos. Then
Dez grabs the knob to Christian's room.

DEZ (CONT'D)

This it?

LIZ

Don't!

Dez freezes, his hand still on the doorknob.

LIZ (CONT'D)

That's my son's room.

DEZ

He's a private fellow I gather?

Liz collects herself.

LIZ

Yes.

Liz watches as Dez releases his hand from Christian's doorknob. Now she can breathe.

INT. DEZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dez's eyes widen at the sight of the king-sized bed covered with a mountain of pillows and a down comforter.

LIZ

It's not much.

DEZ

It's a real shit factory, Liz.

He throws himself on the bed.

LIZ

Knock if you need me. I'm next door.

Liz gives Dez a sweet glance as he continues immersing himself in his new bed. Just as she's about to leave the room --

LIZ (CONT'D)

Dezmond?

He pulls himself from under the covers and looks at her.

LIZ (CONT'D)

You never told me your last name.

DEZ

So?

LIZ

You're sleeping in my home, I don't think it's too much to ask.

DEZ

Jones.

LIZ

Dezmond Jones. Sounds like a movie star.

DEZ

From the seventies.

Liz smiles and watches Dez tuck himself into bed like a little boy.

LIZ
Good night, dear.

INT. LIZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A light flicks on. Liz is in bed, staring at the ceiling. She chews her inner cheek. She tries to keep her eyes closed for more than a second, but it's not working.

Liz slides to the side of her bed, hangs over and looks underneath. Her eyes pass a single running shoe, some loose change, and a few bobby pins.

Her eyes then fix on a nearly empty bottle of Vodka. There's about an inch left in the 1.75 liter of Smirnoff.

Liz stares at the vodka, as if waiting for it to speak to her or sprout legs and walk into her mouth. She closes her eyes for a moment, pulls herself up and walks out of the room.

INT. DEZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dez sleeps in the dark room. His window is open and a nice breeze flows through the curtains.

FOOTSTEPS tiptoe into the doorway. Liz stands, just watching Dez. She smiles - he bites his full lips in his sleep.

Liz carefully creeps into bed and slides behind Dez. She slowly wraps her arms around him, waking him up.

DEZ
Liz?

He keeps his back to her. Liz takes a moment before responding, trying to think of the right words to express what she needs.

LIZ
Is it okay if I just...

DEZ
Yeah. Sure. Whatever you want.

Liz holds onto Dez. He freezes for a moment, waiting for something else to happen, waiting for a hand to travel south...but nothing does. There are no wandering paws.

Liz is content just holding him.

Dez relaxes his body and closes his eyes. Liz closes hers, and they both drift to sleep.

FADE TO:

INT. LIZ'S KITCHEN - DAY

The sun shines through the gingham-curtained windows. The mood is light as Liz sips a bloody mary at the breakfast table. Dez takes the drink and slides her a plate with an eggwhite omelet.

DEZ

Solids first.

Liz takes a bite, and Dez joins her.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Good girl.

LIZ

You need your own restaurant.

DEZ

Shit. I need training, and training costs money. Besides, to truly understand food you have to travel and sample.

LIZ

You could find money for school.

DEZ

Umm, where?

LIZ

Financial Aid. Scholarships. You'll never know unless you try.

DEZ

Right, it's that simple! And life is full of rainbow omelets and fairies that burp butterflies.

LIZ
I think you're afraid.

DEZ
You fucking kidding me, Mrs.
Smirnoff? Your husband sees the
world while you're trapped in this
cave.

LIZ
What happened to "no judgments"?

DEZ
You can ask me fifty fucking
questions about my parents and being
a queer? All I know about you is
that your husband's a pastor.

LIZ
Yes, and?

DEZ
But what does that make you?

LIZ
A pastor's wife.

DEZ
What else?

Liz sits on this question...she doesn't have an answer.

LIZ
Maybe you should go.

But Dez stares at her as if challenging her to a duel.

DEZ
When you were my age, hell, when
you were a little kid, what did you
want to be?

Liz shrugs. She's not playing this game.

DEZ (CONT'D)
What was your favorite subject in
school?

Then she softens and smiles, getting lost in a memory.

LIZ
Chorus.

DEZ
You can sing?

LIZ
A little.

DEZ
Sing something.

LIZ
I'm rusty.

DEZ
Come on. We slept in the same bed,
I think we're past playing coy.

Dez gets up and hands Liz her drink.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Don't be mad.

Liz accepts the drink, takes a gulp, and sighs in relief.
Dez plops a photo album on the table - it's open to an old
pic of Liz - she's fresh-faced and stylish in her 1980's
garb.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Dayglo leggings! Well, Liz, I never.

LIZ
Why I ever let you loose in my house
is a mystery to me.

DEZ
I'm an early riser, what can I say?

Liz closes the photo album, but Dez flips it back open. He
points to the old photo of Liz.

DEZ (CONT'D)
What happened to this girl?

Liz takes a moment.

LIZ
She got married. She grew up.

Dez runs his fingers through her hair. It's starting to feel good, too good to Liz.

LIZ (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

Dez removes a bobby pin from Liz's hair, letting her locks fall against her face. Dez grabs a paper towel and wipes some of the dark lipstick from her lips.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Dez --

DEZ
Ssh.

He clears the smudges off her face and tousles her hair.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Perfect.

He takes Liz by the hand and leads her out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dez places Liz in front of her mantle where the family photos are on display. He takes the drink from her hand and places it next to the photos.

Dez steps behind Liz so she can only see herself in the mirror. Gone is the Stepford Wife.

DEZ
Look at you.

Liz does everything she can to avoid looking at the family photos of David and Christian. She looks at her reflection.

DEZ (CONT'D)
This is you.

Liz's eyes soften and she smiles. Dez moves out from behind Liz so they can both look in the mirror.

DEZ (CONT'D)
This is us.

He gives Liz a lingering kiss on the lips. She's so lost in the moment she can hardly open her eyes, but she manages.

DEZ (CONT'D)

You're more than a Pastor's Wife.

Liz looks at the bloody mary sitting on the mantle next to the photos. The drink is leaving a ring on the wood. The ice is melting into the tomato juice and vodka.

LIZ

Maybe.

DEZ

And I know things are weird with your kid, but trust me. He'll come back.

LIZ

And if he doesn't?

DEZ

Then you'll look for him.

LIZ

(staring into Dez's eyes)

Yes.

In search of a distraction, Dez's eyes move to the baby grand piano in the corner.

DEZ

Play for me.

LIZ

Come on, Dez.

DEZ

I'll warm up the keys.

Dez plops on the piano and plays "Chopsticks". Liz cringes.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Think you can do better?

Liz grins.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Just do the damn thang, girl.

Liz gently scoots Dez over and sits at her piano. She places her long, delicate fingers on the keys and takes a deep breath.

Liz begins her version of the bluegrass song, "I am Weary Let Me Rest".

LIZ
(singing)
*Kiss me mother, kiss your darlin',
lay my head upon your breast. Throw
your loving arms around me, I am
weary let me rest.*

Her voice doesn't sound at all like a "church lady", it has rasp, edge, and a lot of pain.

Dez listens in disbelief and true admiration.

LIZ (CONT'D)
(singing)
*Seems the light is swiftly fading,
brighter scenes they do now show.
I am standing by the river, angels
wait to take me home.*

The SONG continues:

EXT. CARPENTER PARK - DAY

Dez and Liz hike through the lush forest preserve. Out of breath, they stop on a cliff overlooking the Sangamon river.

LIZ (V.O.)
(singing)
*Kiss me mother, kiss your darlin',
see the pain upon my brow. While
I'll soon be with the angels, fate
has doomed my future now.*

As the spring birds soar above, Liz stands atop the cliff and takes a deep breath, absorbing all that surrounds her. She has a melancholy smile, so does Dez.

LIZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(singing)
*Through the years you've always
loved me, and my life you've tried
to save. But now I shall slumber
sweetly in a deep and lonely grave.*

Dez strips off his clothes and gestures for Liz to follow, but she won't do it. She shields her eyes from Dez's taut, nude body. When completely naked and shivering, Dez offers Liz his hand.

Liz just stares at it. She's not ready.

LIZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(singing)
*Kiss me mother, kiss your darlin',
lay my head upon your breast, throw
your loving arms around me...*

Dez is about to jump, but Liz slowly disrobes. She joins Dez at the edge of the cliff. She takes a deep breath and squeezes Dez's hand.

Hand-in-hand Liz and Dez leap off the cliff and plummet into the river below.

EXT. SANGAMON RIVER - DAY

Surrounded by the forest and cliffs, Liz and Dez float in the river as naked as the day they were born. They're on their backs, both silently staring at the clear, midwestern sky.

LIZ (V.O.)
(singing)
I am weary let me rest.

END SONG.

EXT. RURAL ILLINOIS - NIGHT

Liz's car ventures into the quiet countryside where the roads are lined with dogwood trees and signs that warn of deer.

INT. LIZ'S CAR - NIGHT

Liz drives. Dez sits in silence, staring out his window. With wet, matted hair and damp clothes, these two are still recovering from their impromptu swim.

Dez turns to Liz - sees a troubled look on her face.

DEZ
*I guess The Mister doesn't take you
skinny dipping much?*

Liz keeps her eyes on the road ahead.

LIZ
David is a very serious man.

Silence.

Liz drifts away for a moment, and the car starts to drift off the road.

DEZ
Liz!

Dez grabs the wheel and jerks it back.

DEZ (CONT'D)
Where did you go? Stop, let me drive --

But Liz ignores him and keeps driving.

LIZ
I was just thinking about Christmas Eve, two years ago. David was running late, "counseling" a worthy member of our congregation. My son, our son, was angry with us and refused to come home. I couldn't stand being alone in that house, so I put a little basket of goodies together for David and whoever he was counseling. But he wasn't at church. I came home and waited. He eventually showed up smelling like Dream Angels.

Dez looks lost. Liz keeps her eyes on the road.

LIZ (CONT'D)
His little helper, Ashley. I remember hugging her before church, Sunday after that Thanksgiving. She smelled like a department store whore. It took everything I had to keep from vomiting. Instead I asked what delightful scent she was wearing. "Dream Angels," she giggled.

Silence.

DEZ
Pull over, Liz, please?

EXT. ROUTE 29 - NIGHT

On the side of the desolate country road, Liz parks her car and gets out. Dez taps the hood and Liz joins him on her hood of her pristine car.

DEZ
So your husband's a cheat, you don't have to take his shit. Move on. Do your thing.

LIZ
It's not so simple.

DEZ
Your kid's how old?

Liz pauses before answering.

LIZ
Nineteen.

DEZ
And he took off, so now's the time to get out of this mess. You can tell Pastor David to fuck off and finally do something for yourself. You can travel, play your piano at bars or something.

LIZ
Me, playing piano for tips? What could be more humiliating?

DEZ
I can think of a few things.

LIZ
Like?

DEZ
Hiding from the world and pretending to be someone you're not.

LIZ
I'm not you, Dez.
(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)
 I can't just say and do whatever I
 want without consequence. You're
 young, but you know who you are.
 You're brave, kiddo.

Dez softens.

DEZ
 I'm not so brave.

Liz offers a dismissive smile.

DEZ (CONT'D)
 As a kid, every time my dad gave me
 shit about being "off" I played it
 like I was dumb or didn't care. My
 mom did a good job pretending, too.
 But when I locked myself into my
 room at night I'd pray...

He looks at Liz, waiting for the reaction that doesn't come.
 She's too intent on hearing the rest. No judgment here.

DEZ (CONT'D)
 Yeah, fuck, I prayed. Still do
 sometimes, but as a kid I prayed
 that I'd wake up a straight, butch
 pitcher for the Springfield Warriors,
 girls on each side of me, class
 President or some shit. Needless
 to say I've come a long way, baby.

Liz is cracking. She takes a swig of bottled water and then
 realizes her hands are shaking.

LIZ
 Dez, I've gone all day without a
 drink.

Dez nods, not wanting to make a big deal of it.

DEZ
 How's it feel?

LIZ
 Clearer.

INT. LIZ'S HOME - NIGHT

Liz and Dez are on the floor in front of the TV watching old home movies.

ON THE SCREEN: Liz, David, and ten-year-old Christian open Christmas presents. Christian beams when he gets a karaoke machine.

Something about this gets to Dez. He turns to Liz and watches her laugh and wipes her eyes.

LIZ
I never get to watch these when
he's home.

Liz catches Dez watching her and shoves a handful of popcorn in her mouth.

LIZ (CONT'D)
You are so going to be the next
Orville Redenbocker.

DEZ
Shit, this face on a box of popcorn?
America ain't ready.

The phone RINGS until the answering machine picks it up.

LIZ (V.O.)
You've reached The Wrights, please
leave a message and have a blessed
day.

DAVID (V.O.)
Liz, pick up.

Liz's smile fades.

DAVID (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If I don't get a call from you
tonight I'm booking the next flight
home --

Liz hurries to the cordless phone and grabs it. Dez watches, amused by the domestic drama unfolding before him.

LIZ
(into phone)
David, hi!

Liz vanishes around the corner with the phone.

LIZ (CONT'D)
(whispering)
No. I've not had strange men here.
You know how people exaggerate.
They're bored! No, David, listen
to me! I'm helping a boy.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Liz hurries up the stairs while harping into the phone. She walks inside the bathroom, carefully closing the door behind her. Dez rounds the corner and listens.

LIZ (O.S.)
Not a man, just a boy in need. Of
course we'll be in church this
Sunday.

Disgusted, Dez walks to Christian's door and turns the knob.

LIZ (O.S.) (CONT'D)
He'll see what life can really be
if he makes the right decisions...

Dez quietly steps inside Christian's room.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ear pressed to her cordless phone, Liz pulls the lid off the toilet and finds a small bottle of vodka inside. She takes a swig while listening to David.

LIZ
(into phone)
It's been arranged. This Sunday
I'll introduce him to the whole
congregation....

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dez is clanging dishes when Liz pops into the room.

LIZ
Don't clean up. I thought my little
gourmet was going to whip up a
chocolate something or other?

Dez huffs, but keeps his back to Liz.

DEZ

I'm just a poor boy. I need to do my part. Fucking Oliver Twist.

LIZ

Dezmond, come on.

DEZ

Don't call me Dezmond. You sound like my mother, and let's get one thing straight -- you are not my fucking mother.

LIZ

Dez, I had to get him off the phone.

DEZ

What is with you people? You gasp when I curse; you're appalled that I fuck guys, but you can lie to your husband and down a gallon of vodka a day?

Liz reaches out, but Dez has had enough. He finally turns to face her and reveals the EXIT UP POST-CARE GUIDEBOOK.

DEZ (CONT'D)

I thought my parents were bad, but this is where your son really is? Is your husband one of the counselors at EXIT UP?

LIZ

No!

DEZ

What am I to you? An experiment? Asking me all those inane questions about being gay, my parents and smothering mother! It's all in that book!

Liz freezes. She wants to speak, but she can't.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Your son isn't a lab rat. God, I wish I could warn him. Did you really think you'd convert me, too?

LIZ
No, Dez. You don't understand --

DEZ
Do you understand what they do to people at those places? They brainwash them. They shame them and force them to live a fucking lie, Liz. It's sick! It's torture - Nazi shit.

LIZ
I didn't know.

DEZ
I'm such a fucking idiot, but it all makes sense now. You pretend to be Mrs. PTA, Mrs. Jesus H Christ, while your liver is deteriorating. What's it gonna be like when hubby comes home?

He hurries out of the room.

INT. LIZ'S HOUSE - SAME

Dez grabs his jacket and his backpack. Liz tries to stop him, but he pushes her away.

DEZ
You're a fraud.

LIZ
Don't go. I'll leave him.

DEZ
I'm not going to be your security blanket. You have a life of your own. LIVE IT!

LIZ
Don't go back to that life, Dez.

DEZ
You think by keeping me here I'll never fuck another guy?

LIZ
No! I'll talk to your parents --

Dez laughs.

DEZ

You wonder why so many of us come
from broken homes, it's because
people like you break them. I
haven't seen my parents since I got
my driver's license. I ran away
because I knew they knew I was gay,
but they wouldn't talk about it.
Just like you, my parents would
rather pretend I was dead than gay.

Before he opens the front door Dez takes one final look back
at Liz, but she's too hurt to say anything. She just pleads
with her eyes.

DEZ (CONT'D)

I pity your son.

Dez takes off. Liz just stands in her living room, silent
and unable to move as the door SLAMS OFF SCREEN.

Silence.

Liz is alone in her big, beige house.

EXT. LIZ'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Dez walks past the homes in this idyllic neighborhood.
PARENTS and CHILDREN sit on their couches, looking like 1950's
commercial families watching reality TV.

Dez keeps walking, passing more homes. He sees a TEENAGE
BOY standing in front of a mirror, naked, staring at himself,
looking torn, worried, and confused.

Dez stops for a moment and watches the boy...and then keeps
walking until he vanishes into the night.

EXT. COUNTRY GAS STATION - NIGHT

A CLERK stands inside scratching instant lottery tickets.

The parking lot is abandoned except for Dez. He sits out
front, watching a rusty old Ford pull up.

The BURLY DRIVER gets out and fills up his tank. Dez makes
eyes with the burly guy as he walks inside the gas station.

Dez watches the guy pay for a pack of smokes and a couple scratch offs before walking outside.

Dez smiles and nods at the Burly Driver, who hands him a ticket.

BURLY DRIVER

Go ahead.

DEZ

What, you want me to scratch this now?

BURLY DRIVER

You look like you could use some good fortune.

Dez is not amused by this guy. He's exhausted.

DEZ

You give me a ride, you can keep the ticket.

BURLY DRIVER

Scratch. You win, you find your own ride. You lose, I'll take you wherever you need to go.

The Burly Driver hands Dez a penny. Dez takes the coin, the ticket, and scratches it against the gas station door. The Burly Driver watches with an uneasy smile.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The rusty old truck travels the winding, cornfield lined roads of Central Illinois.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

The Burly Driver plays old folk music while keeping one eye on the road and the other on Dez, who stares out his window.

BURLY DRIVER

Where on the north side you headed?

DEZ

Just drop me at the Long John Silver's on Sangamon.

BURLY DRIVER

How's someone so young end up like this?

DEZ

(humoring him)

Like what?

BURLY DRIVER

Young man out in the middle of nowhere, looking for a ride, looking for a handout?

Dez shrugs.

BURLY DRIVER (CONT'D)

You gotta get your stuff together, son, or you'll end up in prison...or worse.

DEZ

Thanks for the advice, pop.

BURLY DRIVER

I bet your daddy wouldn't be too keen on you hitching rides with strangers.

DEZ

My daddy? Jesus. Do they teach you to talk like that, or does it just come naturally out here?

BURLY DRIVER

You got one life, and you boo hoo your way through it, always blaming others. I've lived, boy.

DEZ

Look, I don't need a fucking lecture. If you're going to kick the shit out of me, or rape me or whatever gets you off -- just get it over with already. I've seen this movie.

The Burly Driver is stunned. He's silent for a moment, and then:

BURLY DRIVER

If you think that why'd you get in
my truck?

DEZ

I NEEDED A RIDE!

BURLY DRIVER

Boy, you keep going like this, sooner
or later you're gonna run out of
gas.

Dez is near tears. He's fed up, tired of running, and unsure
of his next move.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD - NIGHT

Dez walks the quiet streets of this modest, north end
neighborhood. He walks past a GUTTER PUNK panhandling outside
of Long John Silvers, then he looks at the middle-class homes
on the other side of the street.

Dez takes a deep breath and follows the sidewalk to the
residential side of the street.

Dez stops in front of a single-family home. He glances at
the work-boots on the steps and the chewed-up dog toys in
the yard. He's weighing his options, unsure if he should
really keep walking toward this house.

Dez takes another breath and follows the steps to the porch.
His hand hovers over the doorknob, but he lets go.

A dog BARKS. Dez hears MUFFLED VOICES and walks away, but a
middle-aged WOMAN in a robe with a cigarette in her mouth
opens the door, keeping the screen shut, keeping a barrier
between her and Dez.

Dez stops, his back to the woman.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Yeah?

Dez turns. The woman gasps.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN (CONT'D)

Dezmond!

Dez sighs as the door SWINGS open and his mother grabs him.

DEZ

Hey, ma.

FADE TO:

INT. LIZ'S HOME - DAY

The shades are pulled. Liz is in the fetal position on the floor of her living room. She's only wearing a wifebeater and panties, but she's covered with sweat and shaking violently.

We hear a deep SIGH. Liz opens her eyes. They're plagued by chronic dark circles and puffiness. Her skin is ruddy.

Liz finds David towering over her, and he looks absolutely disgusted.

DAVID

Where's the boy?

Liz tries to speak, but nothing comes out.

David's face fills with rage - he grabs her, shaking her - needing some sort of reaction.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Nothing's going on? Everything's fine?

LIZ

David...

DAVID

Where is he?!

She can barely answer. She's lethargic and dazed.

LIZ

Gone.

DAVID

Clean yourself up. We're going to meet with Deacon James in Shelbyville.

David kicks a path through the piles of empty bottles of booze and trash.

Liz cowers. She covers her ears with each SMASH.

DAVID (CONT'D)
For God's sake, Liz, who are you?

SMASH.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Do you realize all the
misunderstandings I'm going to have
to clear up with you and that boy?

SMASH.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Did you ever stop to think about me
when you were running around with
him? Didn't you think I'd find
out, or did you even care?

SMASH. SMASH. SMASH.

David faces her. He glares at her.

LIZ
I just wanted to feel better.

David picks Liz up and drags her up the stairs.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Liz lay motionless as David forces her into the bathtub and
turns the water on. She's mute, even as cold water hits
her.

David leaves the room. The water starts to steam. Liz has
no energy. She remains in the bathtub in her wifebeater and
boxers as the water rains over her.

David returns with a glass of wine and kills the water. He
hands the glass to Liz. She just stares at it. He pulls
her clothes off.

He takes the glass and pushes it, gently, to her lips.

DAVID
A little souvenir from Windhoek
Airport. Two-hundred US per bottle.
It was supposed to be for my parents.

Liz turns away from the booze.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Your body needs it. This will get
you through today.

Liz looks into David's eyes. He smiles. He looks sincere,
so Liz drinks the wine.

INT. HOLY FAMILY CHURCH - DAY

David's hand is firmly clasped around Liz's. She's wearing
makeup. Her hair is done, and she's dressed and in her
Pastor's Wife uniform. She's wearing the mask for now.

They sit across from a soft-spoken middle aged man in glasses,
DEACON BROWN.

DEACON BROWN
-- we don't say addict here. Each
meeting begins with a prayer,
followed by a hymn and testimony.

David squeezes Liz's hand.

DEACON BROWN (CONT'D)
We don't want you to be stuck in
some facility with vagrants and
Lord knows what else.

DAVID
We can handle this our way.

LIZ
And what is our way?

DEACON BROWN
Prayer, Mrs. Wright.

LIZ
What about detox?

DEACON BROWN
We want you with like-minded people.
We want to protect you.

LIZ
From what?

DEACON BROWN
People can be judgmental, you know
this.

LIZ
People, or you?

DAVID
Liz --

DEACON BROWN
It's okay.

DAVID
With everything that's happened we
don't think this should be public
knowledge.

LIZ
"Everything"...like the suicide of
our son?

The Deacon recoils.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Or your affair with that girl?

Disgusted, Liz gets up and leaves the room.

EXT. HOLY FAMILY CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Liz sits on the steps when David hurries outside --

DAVID
I'm only trying to help clean up
your mess.

LIZ
This isn't the help I need.

He keeps walking.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Look at me!

DAVID
What is wrong with you?

He stops walking and turns to her.

LIZ
Christian didn't need doctors or
three months of isolation, and I
(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)
 don't need a Deacon, or a Pope, or
 a Pastor.

DAVID
 I do not have an alcoholic wife.

LIZ
 Or a dead son or a wandering eye.
 Just because you say it doesn't
 make it true.

Liz stares at David, who looks broken. A sad look takes
 over her face.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 You're human. Me, too. Right? We
 fucked up.

DAVID
 Our home, our church, everything
 we've worked so hard to build --

LIZ
 We can't go back. I'm done
 pretending, and I don't blame you
 for moving on.

David stares at Liz, weighing his options, breathing heavily.
 Liz leaves him on the steps of Holy Family Church. She gets
 in the driver's seat of his car and waits for him to join
 her.

EXT. LIZ'S HOME - MORNING

David finishes loading a U-HAUL truck while Liz watches from
 inside the house.

From the glass of the front window, Liz makes eye contact
 with one of the neighbor WOMEN and softens her eyes, hoping
 for a smile, or a look of empathy. Instead, she gets a
 grimace, a look of disgust.

Liz pulls the shades.

EXT. TRANSITIONS - DAY

With a suitcase in hand, Liz stands in front of a sign:
 TRANSITIONS.

Acres of grass, trees and ponds provide a welcoming appearance to this treatment facility, but that doesn't make those few steps from the parking lot into the front doors any easier.

Liz stares at those looming glass doors. She closes her eyes, she opens them and channels Dez.

LIZ
Just do the damn thang, girl.

INT. TRANSITIONS - DAY

Liz walks through the glass doors and sees Counselor SID and DR. LAURENCE (40's). Sid opens his arms to her.

SID
Liz Wright?

Liz nods.

SID (CONT'D)
Welcome to Transitions. I'm Sid,
your counselor.

LAURENCE
I'm Laurence. I'll be helping you
through detox.

Liz hugs Sid, won't let go. Clearly, this woman needed a hug.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Liz sits with ADDICTS in a circle. Sid and Laurence sit among them. A thin, middle-aged MAN with sunken cheeks and a long, gray hair and a beard is in the middle of a story.

GRAY BEARD
-- when some drunk driver killed my
wife I went on a bender. I tried
to find him when he got released.
I was going to stab him, duct tape
him in the driver's seat of his
truck, and light his car on fire,
but I drove my Mustang into a
cemetery, knocking over God knows
how many graves. I finally realized
it was time to choose, death or
rehab.

Gray Beard stops and the group shuffles.

LAURENCE

Liz, why don't you share?

Liz shakes her head.

SID

You've been as good as furniture in these groups for two weeks now. We need you to participate.

LIZ

I like to listen.

The other addicts crack knuckles and sigh, disappointed and annoyed by her lack of participation.

LAURENCE

So you haven't lost anything as a result of your drinking?

LIZ

No.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

ADDICTS and STAFF dine on pastries, omelets, and coffee. Liz takes a seat by herself and picks at her food. She then smiles and cuts her toast into four pieces, placing a bit of omelet on each piece, just as Dez did when they first met.

Liz stops messing with her food when she looks around the room at the recovering addicts, as if she cannot believe she's here.

Then something catches her eye. Liz sees Sid and Laurence eating breakfast at the same table. She watches them interact with warmth and a bit of flirtation. This isn't an exchange between friendly co-workers. There's love at the table, and Liz sees it.

She watches Sid and Laurence, intrigued.

INT. SID'S OFFICE - LATER

Sid takes notes in a patient-progress journal when he hears THREE KNOCKS.

SID

It's open.

Liz steps in.

LIZ

Are you and Laurence together?

Sid looks a bit shocked, but also humored by her abrupt question.

SID

Have a seat.

She remains on her feet.

LIZ

How long have you been together?

SID

Ten years.

LIZ

So, you're in love?

Sid smiles.

LIZ (CONT'D)

And you're happy?

SID

This isn't about me anymore, is it?

LIZ

Do you believe in God?

SID

Sure.

LIZ

And Laurence?

Sid nods.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Why doesn't anyone go to church here?

SID

We do.

LIZ

Really?

SID

Good Shepherd Unitarian. We'll
take you anytime, just let us know.

(beat)

We can't read your mind. You have
to talk to us, Liz, or this won't
work.

LIZ

I'm following the plan.

SID

You're not just here to work the
physical stuff out.

Liz takes a deep breath and locks eyes with Sid. They
exchange a hopeful glance before she nods and leaves the
room.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - LATER

Liz sits in GROUP. Sid and Laurence are both here, as well
Gray Beard and the other addicts. EDMOND, a white collar
type, is mid-speech.

EDMOND

I went a year without a drop, but I
needed a test, so I tried to drink
a single shot of rum. I hate rum,
can't stomach the smell of the shit,
but I thought by drinking one shot
I'd prove that I had control over
booze. I drank the entire bottle
before passing out in my garage.
My daughter found me. She's six.
She thought I was dead. And that's
why I'm here. I owe her.

His eyes drop to the floor.

EDMOND (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Liz sits up and makes eyes with Sid. He gives her a "go
ahead" gesture.

LIZ

Well, all my life I've been focused on rules and appearances, so much that I betrayed my son when he confided in me. He just said, "Mom, I'm in love. Ian's his name. He loves me, too." He stared at me, waiting for my reaction, and when he sensed that I didn't approve or understand he panicked and begged me not to tell his father.

Liz lowers her head in shame.

LIZ (CONT'D)

If I had just kept my mouth shut, if he had just run away maybe I'd have been able to learn all that I've learned without losing him.
(beat)
We fought until we broke him down. We paid fifteen-thousand dollars to rid our son of his homosexuality, of his love for Ian.

Liz struggles to hold back tears, but she has to get through this.

LIZ (CONT'D)

And he was a star patient. He never challenged authority, he was always respectful and humble. Our boy behaved just as we raised him. We were so proud.
(beat)
He left therapy, said he was cured, and hung himself four hours later.
(beat)
I was too drunk and blind to save my son, and then I pushed everyone away until I found a boy.

Liz finally realizes.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I guess I just didn't know who I was unless I had someone to take care of. But now...there's no one left to save.

SID

Except you.

Liz is overwhelmed by the group of addicts staring at her. But there's no judgment. They watch with empathetic eyes.

Liz closes her eyes and takes too deep of a breath. She doesn't exhale until she's ready to open her eyes. And when she does, she looks at Sid and Laurence and nods.

FADE TO:

EXT. CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

The parking lot is crammed with late model American cars.

SUPER: 99 DAYS LATER

Today's church sign says: IN HIS DEATH WE WALK IN NEW LIFE.

INT. CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

The pews are full. LITTLE GIRLS wear pastel dresses and oversized hats. LITTLE BOYS wear light blue suits. MOTHERS and FATHERS wear their Easter Sunday best as Pastor David Wright preaches to his captivated congregation.

DAVID

...And after His resurrection he said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead. Behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen".

CONGREGATION

Amen.

David closes his Bible and steps away from the pulpit with his microphone in hand. He moves into the congregation, closer to his people, and stands in the center of the church.

DAVID

Easter is about rebirth, and today I'd like to take some time to pray for those of us who are in need of that extra push to get a fresh start.

He looks out into the pews, searching.

DAVID (CONT'D)

If you'd like us to pray for someone
in need, please stand up. Share
your story.

A proud WOMAN (50's) in white stands up and addresses the
church.

WOMAN IN WHITE

My Mother, Alfreda Jameson, just
finished her chemo, and we're praying
for her to beat this thing.

DAVID

God Bless Alfreda Jameson. May she
beat that awful cancer.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

A shy MAN in khaki stands and speaks with his head down.

KHAKI MAN

My son, Jake Gustafson, is in his
third tour of Afghanistan. We just
want him to come home safe.

DAVID

God Bless Jake Gustafson, and all
our brave soldiers.

People CLAP.

CONGREGATION

Amen!

Then a woman in a beautiful, buttery yellow dress and hat
stands up. David looks at her, and his face pales.

It's Liz. She looks awake, refreshed -- renewed.

DAVID

Thank you all for sharing your
stories --

LIZ

Wait.

Everyone turns and looks at her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
My son, Christian.

David returns to the pulpit.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Our son, Christian, was a beautiful
boy who just wanted to please his
parents, his community, and his
God. He was funny, kind, devout,
and in love.

David stands behind the pulpit with his hands clasped, his
eyes closed. He cannot face anyone.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I now know that God welcomes all
loving relationships, I only wish I
could have told this to my son.
I'm telling you in hopes that you'll
remember...if it ever comes up.

Silence.

Liz musters up the courage to finish:

LIZ (CONT'D)
God bless Christian Wright.

Liz gets up and makes her way through the packed pew.

The entire congregation, including David, is staring at her.

Liz makes it to the end of the aisle, and just as she's about
to exit the church she hears:

CONGREGATION
Amen.

Liz stops, but only for a second. Her back is still to the
congregation and David, but she heard them. She exhales a
lifetime of relief and exorcizes years of regret before
walking away from the church.

INT. COZ'S DINER - DAY

Reading the paper in her yellow dress and hat, Liz sits at
the same booth where she had breakfast with Dez months ago.

GUY (O.S.)
 Sorry for the wait, peach. Seems
 the Easter Egg Omelets are a hit.

Liz lowers her paper, removes her hat and looks up at Dez.

DEZ
 I'll be damned.

LIZ
 You're employed.

DEZ
 Saving up. Going south next month
 to try some regional cuisine.

LIZ
 That's good news.

DEZ
 Yellow's your color, I must say.

LIZ
 Do you have a break coming up or
 anything? I'd like to talk to
 you...if that's okay.

DEZ
 Give me a minute. Bloody mary?

LIZ
 Decaf and an Easter Eggwhite omelet.

Dez takes off, keeping his eyes on Liz the whole time.

Liz exhales a giant sigh of relief. Dez slides into the
 booth with two cups of coffee.

DEZ
 Omelet's on its way.

LIZ
 Sure you won't get into trouble for
 chatting?

DEZ
 Shit, no. I got the owner in the
 palm of my hand, if you know what I
 mean.

Liz laughs.

DEZ (CONT'D)
You finally got one of my innuendos!

LIZ
I have something to tell you.

Liz pulls Dez's hand into the center of the table and holds it.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I filed for divorce.

DEZ
I won't marry you, Liz.

Dez laughs, but Liz won't be swayed.

LIZ
This is serious, please. I'm ninety-nine days sober.

DEZ
Good for you.

Liz takes a deep breath.

LIZ
My son didn't run away. He killed himself after we convinced him to go to EXIT UP.

Dez's smile fades. He's shocked, confused, sad -- so many emotions hitting him at once.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I never wanted to change you. I just thought you should know.

Liz squeezes his hand and tries to pull it back, but Dez reaches across the table and gives her a long kiss.

Overcome with emotion, Dez and Liz part, both wearing glassy-eyes and melancholy smiles.

EXT. COZ'S DINER - LATER

Arm-in-arm Dez walks Liz past the DINERS shuffling in and out of the busy joint.

DEZ
-- it took all of like six-tenths
of a second for ma to hug me.

LIZ
What a gift you gave her.

DEZ
Dad came around. We're seeing how
it goes.

LIZ
It's not easy.

DEZ
Shit, you're telling me? We'll see
though. So what's next for Liz?

LIZ
I'm planning a trip of my own.

DEZ
Finally.

LIZ
I don't know where yet. I've never
really been anywhere. Just looking
for something --

She looks around at the American cars and the homogeneous
FAMILIES heading inside the diner.

LIZ (CONT'D)
-- else.

DEZ
You, my dear, need a night at the
opera. *La Boheme*.

LIZ
I don't speak Italian.

DEZ
You don't need to. It's about a
seamstress and a poet in a tragic
love affair. There's even a dramatic
reunion in the end.

Dez winks. They arrive at Liz's car, parked at the end of
the lot.

LIZ
We'll see.

DEZ
Good luck.

LIZ
Eat some soul food for me. You
still have my cell?

Dez nods.

DEZ
Good seeing you.

They hug. They part. Dez starts to walk away, but Liz
remembers something.

LIZ
Dez.

He turns to her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
This is silly, but while I was in
treatment we had a lot of time on
our hands, and I was looking up the
meaning of my family's names on-
line.

DEZ
Oh yeah?

LIZ
Christian means anointed one. Liz
means gracious plum.

DEZ
Let me guess, Dezmond means silly
fruit?

LIZ
No. Gracious protector.

Liz smiles a grateful smile at Dez and slips into her car.
Still hanging on Liz's words, Dez watches her car drive away.

EXT. RURAL ILLINOIS - DAY

An AMTRAK TRAIN speeds down the tracks alongside the cornfields of I-55.

INT. AMTRAK TRAIN - DAY

Dez sits with SOUTHERN CUISINE books piled in the empty seat next to him. But he's not reading, he's staring outside at the flatland of the midwest, the countryside of his home passing by. He smiles.

INT. OPERA HOUSE AUDITORIUM - DAY

La Boheme is in the fourth and final act. The audience is silent as the seamstress, MIMI, collapses. She lies on the stage, motionless. Her lover, RODOLFO, cries out in anguish and weeps helplessly.

Her intense gaze directed at Rodolfo, Liz watches the scene from a high balcony.

EXT. METROPOLITAN OPERA - DAY

COUPLES dressed in formal attire trickle out of the gorgeous building.

Wearing a gown to rival any twenty-something fashionista, Liz saunters out of the Opera House. She takes her time, absorbing the diverse NEW YORKERS, the city sounds, the unknown.

With a look of fear, uncertainty and hope, Liz Wright strolls down the sidewalk and disappears into the vast city.

FADE OUT.