

MAY DECEMBER

Story by

Samy Burch & Alex Mechanik

Screenplay by

Samy Burch

Draft: December 20th, 2019

Ben Rowe & Gabrielle Lewis  
Grandview  
323-297-3440

EXT. THE OUTDOORS-- DAWN

A monarch butterfly lands on the leaf of a milkweed plant.

Its thick black body curves up underneath and lays the smallest little white egg you've ever seen.

And then it flies away.

The delicate egg sticks to the bottom of the leaf impossibly.

A bit further back, we see there are hundreds more.

EXT. CAMDEN, MAINE-- DAY

Memorial Day. A beautiful small town on the coast. An area of New England that still somehow feels untouched. And pure.

American flags in store windows, young girls in baton twirling outfits readying themselves for the parade.

The houses are beautiful and old, but modest. Pastel colors, big yards, trees everywhere. A bright, breezy day.

INT. KITCHEN-- DAY

GRACIE ATHERTON-YU, 59, floats around her sun-drenched kitchen, spreading whipped cream on cakes and laying strawberries atop them in a pleasing way.

There's energy in the house, and in the backyard, which can be seen from the kitchen windows.

With her is RHONDA, 60s, who's filling up deviled eggs with a piping bag.

RHONDA  
This one or this one?

She holds out two metal tips.

GRACIE  
The open star-- start in the center, end in the center.

Rhonda gets it.

MARY ATHERTON-YU, 18, runs through the kitchen with her friends.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
Where you going?

MARY  
The roof.

A hard look. And then a permissive nod.

GRACIE  
Go on. I will not be calling  
anyone's mother today to say  
someone broke their neck and died,  
do you hear me?

MARY (O.S.)  
We'll be so safe.

GRACIE  
Honestly.

She muddles up some fresh blackberries and drains the juice.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
The *actress* is coming.

RHONDA  
Today??

GRACIE  
Mm-hmm.

RHONDA  
Are you worried?

GRACIE  
Worried? Why would I be worried?

RHONDA  
Oh. I don't know. That's just where  
my mind goes I guess.

GRACIE  
I just hope she's polite. Not  
sitting there with big Jackie O  
sunglasses, too good for  
everything. If she's gonna be here,  
I want her to participate.

RHONDA  
I'm sure she will. Look at this  
beautiful day.

It is beautiful.

JOE YU, 36, comes in from the backyard and gently kisses  
Gracie on the cheek. He too is beautiful. Like a despondent  
aristocrat in a Dutch painting.

GRACIE

You just never know, I told you  
what happened when I met Judge  
Judy...

Joe takes a beer from the fridge and heads out.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

(to Joe)  
That's two.

An embarrassed smile.

JOE

Rhonda.

RHONDA

Joe.

Big smile back from Rhonda as he leaves.

GRACIE

But I'm sure you're right. I'm sure  
we'll be right as rain.

She hands Rhonda the paprika from the cabinet before she  
asked for it.

Then suddenly a dark cloud overtakes Gracie's expression,  
like something very terrible has just occurred to her.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

I don't think we have enough  
sausages.

EXT. BACKYARD-- CONTINUOUS

Joe mans the grill. There are so, so many sausages. Kids and  
dogs are running around playing. Adults drink. They're not *on*  
a lake but one feels close by.

He stands with his friend BEN, 40s, who kind of evokes "P.E.  
Teacher."

BEN

I saw a movie she was in, a really  
weird one, where she gets naked and  
does like a blood ritual. I  
couldn't follow it.

JOE

Where'd you see it?

BEN  
Just on TV.

Joe rolls his eyes.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Alright I looked up "Elizabeth  
Bryce naked."

A CHILD SCREAMS A BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM-- but then it's fine,  
he just fell.

JOE  
Why don't you go deal with that.

He flips the sausages, one by one.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- DAY

ELIZABETH BRYCE, 36, unpacks and reorganizes the room of the  
small town bed & breakfast. She wears all black, big chunky  
running sneakers, and talks through wireless headphones.

ELIZABETH  
Yeah... It's quaint...

She picks up a sand dollar and drops it in a drawer with  
disdain.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
It's very "Maine." Mm-hmm... Mm-  
hmm...

She looks out the window. Across the street is a middle  
school. Closed for the holiday but colorful remnants remain.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Mm-hmm... I'm listening! You  
said...

There is a slight pause but she gets there, has the recall of  
a trained bird.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
"I feel bad because I've canceled  
the last few times and she's so  
nice..." You know what I'm gonna  
say, I think you shouldn't do  
anything you don't want to do.

She notices a gift basket on the chair.

A note: *Ms. Bryce, We are so excited to you have here. We hope you fall in love with Maine. Best, Management (Bonnie & Jim). P.S. We are huge fans of "Animal Hospital"*

She rolls her eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
You know what-- tell her that  
you're having a birthday dinner  
that night and you were just about  
to invite her, and then you don't  
have to go to her party and you get  
the credit for inviting her to  
something. Even if you never would.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- A BIT LATER

Elizabeth rips the top blanket off and sits cross-legged on the bed. She opens a brand new (tiny) notebook. Page one.

She writes: *Gracie*

And then she underlines it. And then she thinks.

EXT. ATHERTON-YU HOUSE-- AFTERNOON

Now in a carefree summer dress, Elizabeth drives up in her rental car to the house. She looks different, has an ease. She carries a bottle of wine from the gift basket she was given.

No one hears her front door knock, so she goes around the side, following the playful noises.

EXT. ATHERTON-YU BACKYARD-- CONTINUOUS

The barbecue is in full swing. A touch football game going on, the teens sprawled out on the roof. Everyone wears red, white and blue. But in a subdued way. In a Maine way.

Elizabeth scans the crowd, where she finds Gracie already staring right at her. She waves.

ELIZABETH  
Hi.

She puts her hand to her heart.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
It's such a pleasure to meet you.

GRACIE  
Oh I don't know about that.

They hug.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
You're so tall!

ELIZABETH  
I'll try to work on it.

She offers the bottle.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
I cannot thank you enough for  
welcoming me into your life-- you  
didn't have to, and I so appreciate  
it.

GRACIE  
Well, of course! I want you to tell  
the story right, don't I?

ELIZABETH  
That's all I want. I want you to  
feel known--

Three large Clumber Spaniels rush up to protect Gracie. Big,  
sloppy white dogs that look like melted ice cream.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Oh wow.

GRACIE  
(to the dogs)  
It's okay, my boys, settle down.  
You can trust her.

Elizabeth tries to look happy petting them.

ELIZABETH  
Striking.

GRACIE  
They were bred to be hunting dogs.  
For kings.

Joe approaches.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
Here he is.

Elizabeth really takes him in. She knows she must remember  
this moment.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
Joe, Elizabeth.

They shake hands.

JOE  
Nice to meet you.

GRACIE  
Elizabeth-- so formal-- do you have  
a nickname?

ELIZABETH  
No, just Elizabeth. Growing up it  
was Betsy, but I sort of outgrew  
it.

Gracie doesn't follow.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
What a beautiful property.

GRACIE  
Thank you. Joe does all the  
landscaping.

ELIZABETH  
Lovely.

They all just stand there, admiring the shrubs.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Well, look, I don't want to be in  
your way, I certainly don't want to  
interrupt your party.

JOE  
Can I get you something to drink?

ELIZABETH  
I'm fine, thank you.

GRACIE  
You do what you gotta do, look  
around, talk to people, but first  
go get yourself a hot dog.

ELIZABETH  
(has literally never had a  
hot dog)  
Great.

EXT. BACKYARD-- A BIT LATER

Elizabeth wanders dreamily around like the ghost of this party.

She takes notes in her tiny leather book: *Americana*. *Is there something underneath?*

MARY

Hi.

Mary and her two best friends (MOLLY & SOFIA, both 18) hover by the back door.

ELIZABETH

Hello. Are you Mary?

MARY

Yeah.

They giggle.

ELIZABETH

You're the youngest, right?

MARY

Yeah, my sister's at college already.

The trio stares at Elizabeth, her make-up, her clothes.

MARY (CONT'D)

I've never met anyone who was on TV before.

ELIZABETH

Well, your parents.

MARY

Yeah but like, for real.

SOFIA

What is James Marsden like?

ELIZABETH

So sweet. Really nice guy.

MARY

I want to minor in Drama. We were all in the play together last fall.

ELIZABETH

That's wonderful-- which play?

MARY  
Macbeth.

ELIZABETH  
*"I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent,  
but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps  
itself  
And falls on the other."*

MARY  
Oh it was like, translated.

MOLLY  
We were the witches.

EXT. BACKYARD-- SUNSET

The party has settled into a nice lull. Everyone sits on picnic blankets or lawn chairs. Kids run around with sparklers.

Elizabeth sits next to Rhonda, but watches Gracie, who's curled up in Joe's arms. Her hand holds his tight.

RHONDA  
Sweet, aren't they?

ELIZABETH  
Very.

RHONDA  
It really feels like things just settled down. And now you're making a movie.

ELIZABETH  
It's a great, human story. And Roberto is such a thoughtful, kind-hearted director.

RHONDA  
Well, I won't get to sit on the lawn with Roberto. So I'm telling you: This is their real life. They've been put through the ringer, and have come out the other end of it.

ELIZABETH  
I know.

RHONDA

All the awful things people said.  
For a while there she lost  
everything. She's very strong, but  
there are limits.

ELIZABETH

I completely agree.

RHONDA

Just be kind, that's all.

Elizabeth nods as the fireworks start in the sky over the trees. She looks over, Gracie still grasping Joe's hand, knuckles white.

INT. ATHERTON-YU ENTRANCE-- NIGHT

Cleaning up, most guests have gone. Gracie fusses as Elizabeth gathers her things.

GRACIE

I was thinking you may want to come  
with me to my class tomorrow.

ELIZABETH

I'd love to.

Gracie opens the front door.

GRACIE

(calling upstairs)

Oh no. Joe!

Elizabeth peers over to see a barely taped together package. Gracie just shakes her head in a knowing way. Joe comes down.

JOE

What?

GRACIE

You're not gonna believe this.

JOE

I'll get a garbage bag.

Gracie puts on some colorful rubber gloves and takes the box inside-- she flips the lid.

GRACIE

I knew it. My goodness, we haven't  
gotten a box of s-h-i-t in I don't  
know how long.

Joe holds out a garbage bag, she drops it in. He wraps it up and heads outside. Routine.

ELIZABETH

Someone put... s-h-i-t in a box and delivered it here?

GRACIE

And on a holiday too.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- NIGHT

Elizabeth, in sleepwear, sits up in bed with a People Magazine from 1997.

Gracie, twenty years earlier, is on the cover in handcuffs, staring off into the distance in a dreamy way. We get a sense in pieces.

"Gracie Atherton pleads guilty to pet shop romance!" "13-year-old lover will be father of her child!" "Ouch mommy I hwurt my finger!" etc.

Picture of young Joe completely back-lit to hide his face. One of Gracie with lovely, soft curls, her pastel prison jumpsuit very flattering.

Elizabeth hits her light in the same way. The same martyred expression.

ELIZABETH

Who me?

Strikes the pose again.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I just want to go home, your honor.

INT. ATHERTON-YU DEN-- NIGHT

Joe is mindlessly scrolling on Facebook-- mainly made up of his incredibly active Raising Monarch Butterflies group ("Has anyone seen this before?" "What to do about frozen milkweed?" etc).

He hesitates but then types "Elizabeth Bryce" into youtube--

Interviews, weird montages set to music, her winning an MTV Movie Award.

He clicks on a commercial for a skin care line. It's Elizabeth, in like 2005.

ELIZABETH  
So pure, you can hardly tell its  
there.

She smiles, fresh and dewy. A SLOW MOTION shot of her splashing water on her face and smiling, her hands rising up in a way that feels oddly religious.

Joe rushes to turn the sound down to mute.

He replays it over-- Elizabeth splashing herself in the face, and loving it.

INT. ATHERTON-YU BEDROOM-- A BIT LATER

Joe quietly gets into bed, Gracie is facing the side, looks asleep.

GRACIE  
You smell like charcoal.

JOE  
... Smoke.

She turns suddenly.

GRACIE  
Excuse me?

JOE  
We have a gas grill, not a charcoal grill, so, you must be smelling just smoke.

Her ears move back in her head, and she stares at him blankly.

GRACIE  
Well you're stinking up the sheets.

JOE  
Do you want me to shower?

GRACIE  
No what I want is for you to have already showered, before you got in.

JOE  
I'm sorry.

She closes her eyes and tears start to immediately, quietly fall.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, Gracie.

He pulls her into his chest. She looks relieved, but then.

GRACIE  
More smoke.

He rips his shirt off, pats some bedside water on his chest.

JOE  
Okay?

She curls up in his lap, still gently weeping.

GRACIE  
Okay.

JOE  
Everything's fine.

GRACIE  
Okay.

He pets her hair as she falls asleep.

EXT. BACKYARD-- EARLY MORNING

It's quiet and still, the sun just rising. Joe tiptoes around his milkweed bushes, looking at each leaf really carefully.

When he finds one with tiny little pearlescent eggs he delicately clips it off the plant and lays it on his tray.

It's slow work, and deliberate.

INT. DINING NOOK-- A BIT LATER

Joe takes his leaves and puts them gently inside white mesh cages that are lined up on the table and chairs in the small room. It's a well-organized space, and his routine feels lived in.

He adjusts the shades and observes. Nothing is moving-- they're just eggs.

He gets out his phone and takes a picture of one leaf that has three eggs in a perfectly straight line.

He considers, but then texts it to MICHELA "MONARCHS" (as he has her listed in his phone).

*JOE*  
(texting)  
*Looks like "... doesn't it? Like  
they're about to text me something?*

She immediately starts writing back (...)

*MICHELA*  
*OMG so funny. I've never seen them  
in such a straight line before!*

*JOE*  
*I know, strange right?*

*MICHELA*  
*I wonder if it was one who laid  
them in a row, or just a weird  
coincidence.*

*JOE*  
*I know, me too.*

Pause. A natural time to put away his phone but he hesitates.

*JOE (CONT'D)*  
*How's your day going?*

*MICHELA*  
*Good, I just got to work. You?*

*JOE*  
*Peaceful.*

*MICHELA*  
*Great.*

(...)

*MICHELA (CONT'D)*  
*Enjoy it!*

He chews his lip and puts his phone away.

INT. WINDOWLESS COMMUNITY CENTER-- AFTERNOON

Gracie and Elizabeth share a table in the back of a flower arranging class. They both have a vase, a hunk of that green spongy stuff, and access to flowers.

There are a half dozen other women also at their stations, and a teacher (LYDIA, 60s, in a loose-fitting sunflower smock).

LYDIA  
That is lovely, Sheila.

SHEILA, 80s, blushes with pride. It's a gentle environment but people talk among themselves.

ELIZABETH  
How long have you been coming?

GRACIE  
A little over ten years now.

ELIZABETH  
Amazing. What draws you to this?

GRACIE  
(duh)  
The flowers.

ELIZABETH  
Right. But--

LYDIA  
Beautiful, Gracie.

GRACIE  
Thank you. Lydia, this is Elizabeth. She's playing me in a movie.

LYDIA  
How interesting.

GRACIE  
Trying to show her a good time.

LYDIA  
That I don't doubt.

Lydia strolls away. Gracie's arrangement is really tight and organized. Formal. Elizabeth (who does not care) is making one that's more breezy and natural.

GRACIE  
You want to start in the center and build outward.

ELIZABETH  
What's the reason for that?

GRACIE  
It's just the rule.

Elizabeth tries to copy Gracie's style and movements.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
My brother Scott, he's a Rear Admiral in the Navy, he always says, "Order is its own reward"-- No, like this.

She takes over her arrangement.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
See?

ELIZABETH  
Got it.

She distractedly places carnations in a row.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
... So did you have any classes like this in prison?

A harsh, flip of the head-- Gracie holds a rigid finger up at Elizabeth like you would a dog. They lock eyes until an Alpha is established (guess who won?).

GRACIE  
Not here.

Elizabeth sucks her teeth as she shoves handfuls of baby's breath in her stupid fucking vase.

INT. KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Elizabeth and Joe sit in their seats at the kitchen table as Gracie sets plates in front of them of meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

GRACIE  
Do you want milk?

ELIZABETH  
Milk? Um, no thank you.

JOE  
I'll take a beer.

ELIZABETH  
Water would be great.

She doesn't seem thrilled with either answer but brings them to the table.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Where's Mary?

GRACIE

She's at her friend's house,  
they're working on a project.

ELIZABETH

Well thank you for having me for  
dinner, I really appreciate it.

GRACIE

Of course.

They begin.

ELIZABETH

Mmm, this is wonderful, thank you.

GRACIE

An Atherton-Yu special.

ELIZABETH

It really is unlike any meatloaf  
I've had.

GRACIE

It's moose.

ELIZABETH

Is it?

GRACIE

I brought her home myself.

ELIZABETH

You... shot a moose, and ground up  
its meat and, that's this meatloaf?

GRACIE

(getting a kick out of  
this)

Yes.

JOE

Gracie hunts all the time.

Elizabeth strains.

ELIZABETH

Remarkable.

GRACIE

My daddy taught me, I started going  
with him and my brothers when I was  
really young. Four, five.

ELIZABETH

Wow. This was in Virginia?

Gracie raises her eyebrows, still not quite thrilled about research being done.

GRACIE

Tennessee, and then Illinois, and then Montana, and then Virginia.

Chew, chew, chew, swallow.

ELIZABETH

What was like to move so much? To have to uproot your life--

GRACIE

It was fine. I made friends everywhere I went. I always had my brothers. My childhood was exceptional.

Next topic.

ELIZABETH

Well, I do have a lot of questions for you both, please let me know if now's not the time.

GRACIE

Good a time as any.

Tight smile.

ELIZABETH

Great.

She gets out her tiny book and pen.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Do you remember the first time you met?

JOE

I don't.

GRACIE

I met Joe... let me think. It must have been his first day of Kindergarten I would think?

ELIZABETH

(acting casual)

Oh.

GRACIE

My son, Georgie, was the same year as Joe, and all the mother's would go for the first day of school. So that was probably the first time. We didn't talk or anything.

ELIZABETH

Of course.

GRACIE

And then I had processed the family, his dad was a tailor, I would go get dresses taken in, that kind of thing, and I'd see him at the recitals and the soccer games and all that.

Elizabeth takes studious notes.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

And then around sixth grade I think it was, Joe and Georgie got a little closer, and they were at the same pool parties, and slumber parties-- one of them was at my house! If you can believe that.

She laughs and takes a big gulp of her milk. Elizabeth also manages a laugh.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

And the next year, that next summer, he came in to the pet store and said he was looking for a summer job.

ELIZABETH

This was the summer after sixth grade?

JOE

Seventh.

GRACIE

And he started working there in the afternoons and on weekends. And that's when we... Got close.

ELIZABETH

Were you still friends with Georgie?

JOE

At the time, yeah. But not after...  
I really haven't ever talked to  
George, uh, ever again really.

GRACIE

Georgie is really sensitive, he was  
always a really sensitive boy.

ELIZABETH

What's your relationship like with  
him and his siblings now?

GRACIE

(suddenly harsh)

How is that relevant?

ELIZABETH

Um.

GRACIE

My understanding is that the movie  
is taking place in 1996-1998, why  
would you need to know anything  
really about my life after that?

ELIZABETH

Well sometimes things that exist  
inside people don't come to a head  
until later... And I'm looking for  
the seeds of those things. So... I  
feel it's my job to get to know you  
as best I can, and part of that is  
a bit of reverse engineering, I  
guess you would call it.

Gracie thinks about it, skeptical.

GRACIE

(cheery)

Alright...

Elizabeth and Joe both look relieved.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Yes I talk to George, I talk to  
Billy and Cassidy. We keep things  
pretty separate when we can.

JOE

Are you gonna tell her about  
graduation?

Gracie clears her throat.

GRACIE

Mary is in the same class as  
Cassidy's son Peter, my grandson.  
So we'll all be at the graduation,  
which you are welcome to come to if  
you're still in town.

A big smile.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Now who wants cake?

EXT. ATHERTON-YU HOUSE-- NIGHT

Joe takes the trash out as Elizabeth goes to her rental car.  
The moon looms large over their Kia Sedona.

ELIZABETH

Goodnight.

JOE

Goodnight.

She hesitates, doesn't get in the car.

ELIZABETH

Actually. I wanted to ask you.

She approaches the bins.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

How would you feel about me coming  
to work with you one of these days?

JOE

Fine.

ELIZABETH

Okay great. That's great.

He's giving nothing away but it is taking him a long time to  
deal with the trash.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Thank you.

JOE

It's no problem.

ELIZABETH

Great.

JOE

Good.

She stares at his face. Grasping.

ELIZABETH

I just realized that we're probably  
the same age.

JOE

Is that right?

ELIZABETH

I'm 36.

He nods.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Funny. I keep thinking of you as  
younger.

JOE

Makes sense.

ELIZABETH

But, only in the last few years  
have I been able to imagine having  
a baby, I can't imagine doing it  
when you did.

JOE

I was almost too young to know what  
a big deal it was, in a way.

ELIZABETH

Right.

They stand there.

JOE

I should probably head inside.

ELIZABETH

Of course.

JOE

But. I didn't mean to make it seem  
like I have any regrets.

ELIZABETH

Oh no, I didn't think that.

JOE

I really don't.

ELIZABETH

Hey, I mean, I have regrets.

JOE

I just think the way people have written about us in the past, it's like I'm a victim. And... we've been together almost twenty-four years now... like... why would we do that if we weren't happy? If you're together for that long it's because you're happy being together for that long...?

ELIZABETH

Makes sense.

A light goes on in a second floor window. They both notice it and pretend they haven't.

JOE

All right, well, get home safe.

ELIZABETH

Thanks, you too.

INT. COFFEE SHOP-- MORNING

Feels like the kind of place that was thriving in the '90s-- dark wall paint, fun lighting fixtures, fliers for bands.

Elizabeth finds TOM ATHERTON, early 60s, sitting a booth, waiting for her. He's aged since that 1997 *People Magazine* where he looked like the heir to a boat fortune, but he's a handsome, straight-forward man.

TOM

I ordered you a coffee.

ELIZABETH

I can't tell you how much I appreciate this.

TOM

(bashful)

It's just coffee.

ELIZABETH

No, I mean-- well, yes, thank you for the coffee. But meeting me. I'm sure it's not your favorite thing to talk about.

TOM

I don't mind. I think talking can  
feel... good.

ELIZABETH

Well, great. Me too.

TOM

Do you want anything to eat? They  
have quiche, and they even make  
crepes here with all kinds of crazy  
fillings. Kind of what they're  
known for.

ELIZABETH

I'm okay with just coffee.

TOM

An actress.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

TOM

Seems typical of an actress. I  
haven't met one before but it seems  
that way.

ELIZABETH

Yes. Ha.

She takes out her book.

TOM

That's small!

ELIZABETH

Yes, it's discrete.

TOM

I don't know, if I saw someone  
writing in that I'd think-- what  
are they writing?

ELIZABETH

Well, you'd just have to wonder I  
guess.

He waves to his friend who walks by the front window.

TOM

That's Carla from my dentist's  
office.

ELIZABETH

So, why don't you tell me about what Gracie was like when you first met?

TOM

Aw, Gracie was beautiful. We met at a party and I was really drunk, just blotto. And she took care of me.

*Nurtures the wrong men, she writes and quickly covers.*

TOM (CONT'D)

And then we dated for a bit. Gracie was in high school-- a senior, it was all, you know, *above board*-- and I was in college. And I graduated, and she graduated and I proposed and that was that. We had a really fun wedding with all our friends there, and then I got with the same company I'm with now, and we moved up here and started our family. It was kind of A, B, C... D, you know?

ELIZABETH

Would you describe your marriage as a happy one?

TOM

I would! I know later, she said that things weren't working but at the time I thought everything was normal. Couples fight sometimes. She would spend too much money, I would leave my shoes in the wrong place-- stuff like that. But our house was really organized and the kids are so fun-- will you meet them?

ELIZABETH

I'd love to.

TOM

Billy is such a ham, and Cassidy is beautiful and a real over-achiever, and George-- he's creative. But we had a great family I thought. I was shocked. Shocked. And then when I found out with who.

His jaw tightens.

ELIZABETH  
I imagine that was hard.

TOM  
It was just so strange. I started to feel like... I didn't even know Gracie. I didn't know what was going on in her head, you know? It used to make me really angry but I'm able to control it now.

ELIZABETH  
How did you find out?

TOM  
I found out with everyone else! After they got caught in that stupid stockroom, and she was arrested. The police came to my house to tell me. I was like... Uh, what?

*Not smart, she writes.*

ELIZABETH  
I'm so sorry, I can't imagine.

TOM  
It's okay. Ultimately it was for the best. I met Tina and we have such a nice life now-- she's a nurse.

ELIZABETH  
That's great.

TOM  
And I mean I don't really see them too much but her and the boy seem happy too.

*"The boy."*

TOM (CONT'D)  
All's well that ends well, I guess.

INT. HOSPITAL - X-RAY ROOM-- DAY

Joe puts that heavy blanket on an older man's bare legs and lines up the X-Ray machine.

MR. WOGENSEN  
It's cold.

JOE  
I know, Mr. Wogensen. It'll be over  
before you know it, I promise.

He goes into the other room. Click, it goes white.

INT. HOSPITAL - X RAY ROOM-- LATER

Joe lines up different x-ray slides of lungs. Scary pictures  
that he does not interpret, only takes.

INT. BRIDAL SHOP-- AFTERNOON

Gracie and Elizabeth sit on a plush bench in a sunny,  
feminine store for women.

Mary comes out from behind the curtain wearing a modest white  
dress with long sleeves and lace.

GRACIE  
Isn't that lovely!

ELIZABETH  
Beautiful.

MARY  
I feel like a bride.

GRACIE  
You look youthful-- like the first  
day of Spring.

MARY  
I just feel like everyone else is  
gonna be wearing like more summer-y  
dresses.

GRACIE  
And who cares about everyone else?

MARY  
Me, I, am saying I don't like it.

GRACIE  
Fine. Go try on the others.

She goes back behind the curtain.

ELIZABETH

Will they not be wearing robes?

GRACIE

They'll be wearing robes. It's for  
under the robe.

ELIZABETH

Does it have to be white?

GRACIE

No, I like white.

Elizabeth checks her phone. Mary comes back out in a white sleeveless number. She looks happy.

ELIZABETH

So cute.

MARY

I love it.

She's admiring herself in the mirror.

GRACIE

It's lovely-- I love the fabric.

MARY

I like how it flows.

GRACIE

Mary, I really want to commend you.  
For being so brave and showing your  
arms like that. I really mean it,  
that's something I've always wished  
I could do. Just not care about  
these unrealistic standards. You're  
a modern woman.

Elizabeth looks really uncomfortable, Mary straining to maintain her dignity.

MARY

I'm gonna try the other ones on...  
I really like this one but I think  
maybe it's too similar to the one  
Molly has.

GRACIE

Whatever you want.

She slinks off.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
I heard you saw Tom.

ELIZABETH  
Yes, for coffee.

GRACIE  
What'd you think?

ELIZABETH  
Handsome.

GRACIE  
He is.

ELIZABETH  
And I could see how being in a  
marriage with him could be  
isolating.

Gracie snaps her head towards her in shock. And then she  
smiles.

GRACIE  
Good.  
(beat)  
It's not my business who you talk  
to around here, go through the  
phone book for all I care, but let  
me know ahead of time so I won't  
have to lie to my neighbors.

ELIZABETH  
Understood.

GRACIE  
It's a small town.

Mary comes back out in a girlish baby-doll dress, sleeves to  
the elbows.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
How sweet is that?

ELIZABETH  
Really sweet.

MARY  
You like it?

ELIZABETH  
Very in.

Mary looks at herself in the mirror, was clearly just crying. They all pretend.

INT. PET STORE-- DUSK

The bells chime as Elizabeth peeps her head in. The sun is about to set on charming Main Street visible from the big glass windows.

ELIZABETH

Hi.

MR. HENDERSON, 70s, looks flustered behind the counter. Puppies and kittens whine and roll around in the front areas.

MR. HENDERSON

You must be Ms. Bryce.

ELIZABETH

Yes, so nice to meet you.

MR. HENDERSON

The pleasure is all mine. Do you want to, um...

He motions like-- "play with the puppies?"

ELIZABETH

So tempting, but no I'd rather just look around. If you want to show me... how the pet store works?

INT. PET STORE-- CONTINUOUS

Mr. Henderson gives Elizabeth a tour. Tidying things as he goes, trying to impress her.

Birds, Fish, Hamsters, Mice, Frogs, Lizards, Snakes. Some skittish, some lethargic, but they all seem to look at her like they know they're in jail.

MR. HENDERSON

So this is the bulk of the business.

He motions to the food aisle.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Pets are only about 10% of sales.

ELIZABETH

How long have you owned this place?

MR. HENDERSON

It was my mother's. She opened it up in 1972.

ELIZABETH

And she hired Gracie.

MR. HENDERSON

Yes. Her health was in decline. And Gracie had been a really loyal customer, they opened a K-Mart in Waterville.

Clearly a sore subject to this day.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

And Gracie-- have you met her dogs?

ELIZABETH

I have.

MR. HENDERSON

We don't carry specialty breeds like those-- usually we just have a golden retriever, and a lab, and something small and fluffy. But we work with customers to find breeders if they want something specific, like Gracie.

A pause as she writes.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Are you an animal lover, Ms. Bryce?

ELIZABETH

I grew up with cats.

MR. HENDERSON

Well that may kick in again for you at some point, I've seen it a million times.

ELIZABETH

We'll see I guess. So, at what point did Gracie start working here?

MR. HENDERSON

It was after mother's fall. That was... 1995, October. First she was just watching the store-- I wasn't living in town then.

(MORE)

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

And then she took on more and more responsibilities, balancing the books, orders... She's very organized, we still use some of the systems she put in place.

ELIZABETH

Like what?

MR. HENDERSON

Well like we have this.

He pulls out a huge dusty Rolodex.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

And instead of it being organized by name it's by date, so that we can call, say...

He picks one out, so slowly.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Mrs. Bundy, and remind her that she's almost out of bird feed, or that her flea medication is up in a month. That kind of thing.

ELIZABETH

Incredible.

She notices she's about to run out of pages...

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Did she have other co-workers?

MR. HENDERSON

No it was just her, the store wasn't open full time. And then in the summer of '96 she asked if she could hire a part-time helper for minimum wage and mother said yes and she put a little sign out that said, "Help Wanted" and we were all quite surprised to have been part of then what had happened.

ELIZABETH

What was that like?

MR. HENDERSON

"Henderson Pets" was suddenly in print in every major publication in the country.

(MORE)

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Our friends, the O'Connor's, brought us back a tabloid newspaper from Rome that even said it. We have it in a scrapbook somewhere-- "Il negozio di animali Henderson."

ELIZABETH

Bene.

MR. HENDERSON

But the journalists were relentless. The photographers swarmed right outside. Oh, I have--

He looks through a drawer and pulls out a photo of himself twenty years younger screaming in the center of a huge mob of media. "Henderson Pets" painted in the store window.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

That's when I still had hair!

She stares at the image, really does seem to be moved.

MR. HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Well I supposed you want to see the stockroom.

INT. STOCKROOM-- A BIT LATER

The door creaks open, and Mr. Henderson pulls the light on with a draw string. The light bulb swings.

Elizabeth steps inside.

MR. HENDERSON

I don't like to come back here honestly. I'll let you look around if you don't mind.

ELIZABETH

(barely noticing him)

Great.

He closes the door.

It's pretty big. And grey. Dark wooden floors, no windows. Some waist high shelves and a couple of aisles. Places to hide, places to duck.

Elizabeth walks around the space with bated breath.

The darkest corner is almost pitch black, a narrow aisle of fish tanks. They glow, and so do the creatures inside.

## INT. BACK OF THE STOCKROOM-- CONTINUOUS

She turns the corner and sees a private area with A COUPLE OF WOODEN STAIRS leading up to the furnace room.

On one side is a shelf of files and old leather books. On the other is a REFRIGERATOR with clear glass doors.

Inside are frozen mice, barely alive crickets. Things that tick with a tiny pulse. She runs her fingertip over the glass.

She sits on the stairs. Then she lies back. Tries to get comfortable. She puts one leg up on the book shelf. She covers her own mouth as if someone else is doing it. As if she's about to scream with pleasure.

Then she sits up, and nods to herself, like, "Yeah, that would do."

## INT. BUTTERFLY CAGES-- NIGHT

Progress has been made. The eggs have hatched and now the bottoms of the cages are full of thick, green caterpillars of various sizes.

They squirm on a bed of leaves and eat and eat to their hearts content.

Their meaty bodies writhe around in a hedonist swell.

## INT. ATHERTON-YU DEN-- NIGHT

Joe sits in a lounge chair watching the TV on low. "*This Old House*" on PBS-- a show where really calm older men explain how air conditioners work in extreme detail.

Upon closer inspection, he's antsy. Can't sit still, can't focus on the air conditioner.

He takes out his phone. It's 9pm. Pretty late. Or is it? Still prime time, no? Friends text other friends at all times.

JOE  
(texting)  
Up to twenty-five so far, how about  
you?

(...)

*MICHELA*  
*31 but I lost one tonight.*

*JOE*  
*Oh no, I'm sorry.*

*MICHELA*  
*I think it was the milkweed I*  
*bought at Lowe's-- they said it was*  
*organic but I don't trust them.*

*JOE*  
*It's crazy how untrustworthy they*  
*are.*

(...)

But then it disappears and nothing comes.

*JOE (CONT'D)*  
*How was your day?*

*MICHELA*  
*Kind of shitty-- between that and*  
*work.*

*JOE*  
*What happened?*

*MICHELA*  
*It's just really stressful because*  
*it's peer review week and I feel*  
*like I spend a lot of my day*  
*managing my boss's moods.*

*JOE*  
*That's hard. I know how that can*  
*be.*

*MICHELA*  
*But whatever, it's fine. I'm home*  
*now, gonna relax and take a bath.*

Joe hesitates. Stares at the word "bath" as if it's pulsating.

*JOE*  
*I'm sorry you had a rough day.*

*MICHELA*  
*That's sweet of you.*

*JOE*  
*I--*

GRACIE (O.S.)  
Joe where's the step stool!

He jumps so far, drops his phone down the side of the chair.

JOE  
One sec!

INT. KITCHEN-- A BIT LATER

Joe brings the step stool in. Gracie is in the middle of making several layer cakes.

GRACIE  
Where was it?

JOE  
I hung some netting for the caterpillars.

She takes the step stool and uses it to get down food coloring and a variety of sprinkles from the tall-person cabinet.

GRACIE  
What are you gonna do with your bugs when the Poversteins come over?

JOE  
I'll figure it out.

He heads back to the den.

GRACIE  
(calling after)  
Don't put them in our bedroom again.

Now back to the cakes. Well, she never really broke her stride or looked up at him to begin with.

She mixes dark red dye in with some batter. It ripples in a hypnotic way.

She smears chocolate, watches a strawberry jam bubble on the stove, whips cream.

All of the textures evoke a certain eroticism and she tastes with her finger as she goes. But she doesn't enjoy those tastes, it's scientific.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- NIGHT

Elizabeth sits in bed her robe (one from home, obviously).

She takes a few puffs of her asthma INHALER, and opens an e-mail that says "Joe - Pre-read Selects" and clicks a link.

It's a casting website with auditions posted. About ten 13 YEAR OLD BOY ACTORS.

She starts to click through.

BOY ACTOR #1

Benny Kim, 5'4", I'm 13 years old, my date of birth is September 8th, 2006, and I'm with Coast to Coast.

He smiles as the camera pans up his tiny body.

ELIZABETH  
2006, Jesus Christ.

The scene begins.

BOY ACTOR #1  
Do you need help?

READER (O.S.)  
That'd be great, Joe, thank you.

BOY ACTOR #1  
What should I do?

READER (O.S.)  
If you want to get the box of pinkies from the back-- I'm feeding the snakes.

BOY ACTOR #1  
Live mice?

READER (O.S.)  
They've been in the freezer so I don't think they feel anything.

BOY ACTOR #1  
Cool.

He fake looks in a fake box.

BOY ACTOR #1 (CONT'D)  
So small.

READER (O.S.)  
They're little babies.

BOY ACTOR #1  
Where is their mom?

READER (O.S.)  
In the mice tank with the other  
grown ups.

She skips to the next boy.

BOY ACTOR #2  
(super slick)  
Hi everyone, my name is Tyler Ko,  
I'm 5'6", I'm 14 years old--

Skips to the next. We see a few. None of them feel like Joe.

INT. HOSPITAL - X RAY ROOM-- DAY

Elizabeth watches as Joe lines up a lot of slides of broken  
arms. Even we can tell they're broken.

It's quiet and dark, besides the glow of the walls.

ELIZABETH  
Is this a bad one?

JOE  
Pretty average.

ELIZABETH  
How'd he do it?

He checks a chart.

JOE  
Skateboarding.

ELIZABETH  
Ah.

JOE  
It's usually something like that.  
Playing on the roof, falling from a  
tree. A lot of times their friends  
are filming it, so we sometimes add  
that to the report for the doctor.

ELIZABETH  
Can I see?

He shows her the file. There are pictures of a tiny boy. One of him on the skateboard (a screen shot) and one of his scratched up face).

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
He's thirteen.

She puts her hand up to one of his on the wall. It's so tiny in comparison.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Are these true to scale?

JOE  
Yeah.

ELIZABETH  
So small.

JOE  
I mean, skin adds a bit, but yeah.

She turns to face him. She stares into his eyes, neither say anything for a beat.

ELIZABETH  
It's peaceful in here.

JOE  
Very different than a movie set, I would think.

ELIZABETH  
That's true. It's not very peaceful when I'm working usually. Except right before we shoot and everyone has to be very quiet and perfectly still.

He just smiles. He seems very comfortable in silence.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Or backstage, when the play is going on. It's kind of like this.

JOE  
You act in plays?

ELIZABETH  
Sometimes. I should do it more. It's how I started.

JOE  
I've seen your show.

ELIZABETH

Oh, god.

JOE

It's very intense.

ELIZABETH

I've been very lucky to have it but  
I wish no one ever watched it.

JOE

I saw one where you had to operate  
on an elephant.

ELIZABETH

I'm so embarrassed, I'm gonna go  
jump off the roof with those boys.

She covers her face sweetly with the chart. It's easy to see  
why she's a movie star.

JOE

Was it a real elephant?

ELIZABETH

Part of the time it was, yes, her  
name was Lola, she was very smart.  
And then on the table it was like a  
huge slab of silicone that they  
filled with all kinds of disgusting  
goo I had to get elbow-deep in.

JOE

That's pretty gross.

ELIZABETH

It's not as romantic as one would  
think.

They hold each other's eyes for a moment too long, in the  
silence.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Thank you for taking me to work.

JOE

You think it helped?

ELIZABETH

I do. Because I can start to  
feel... what it was like. A little  
bit.

JOE  
What what was like?

ELIZABETH  
Sneaking around with you.

It's too dark to tell, but he is definitely blushing.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
I hope you don't mind my saying so.

JOE  
No. I don't.

ELIZABETH  
I'm glad.

A beat.

JOE  
Do you think she'll come off well?  
In the movie?

ELIZABETH  
I'm gonna do my best. I want the  
audience to understand her. To see  
what had been missing in her life,  
and what a relief it was. To find  
you.

(beat)  
And I'll smooth out any rough  
edges.

JOE  
Rough edges?

Uh oh.

ELIZABETH  
I just meant. Sometimes, I've  
found, she can be a little... Maybe  
harsh is too strong a word--

JOE  
I don't see her that way at all.

ELIZABETH  
And neither do I, that's all I'm  
saying. I want America to  
reconsider all that they thought  
they knew. And how badly they  
treated her.

JOE

Right.

He puts the file in the wall pocket, opens the door, and flips the little colored plastic switch on the frame.

JOE (CONT'D)

It's kind of lunch time now.

She nods and leaves.

EXT. RHONDA'S HOUSE-- DAY

Gracie unloads her minivan in front of Rhonda's sweet house.

RHONDA

Oh isn't that lovely.

It's a birthday cake for a young child. Sprinkles and spooky creatures.

RHONDA (CONT'D)

He will love it! Look at these little werewolves!

Gracie attempts to hide all pride. Only business.

GRACIE

There's the full moon in the middle. That's lemon curd.

RHONDA

I love it!

GRACIE

And here's your weekly coffee cake.

RHONDA

Mmm, Frank'll be thrilled.

Rhonda hands her about \$60 in cash.

RHONDA (CONT'D)

What are you doing now?

GRACIE

I still have a few more deliveries.

Rhonda looks around the empty street, steps closer.

RHONDA

(whisper)

How's it going?

GRACIE  
Just fine!

RHONDA  
Good, good. Is she participating?

GRACIE  
Why yes she is.

INT. DIVE BAR-- EARLY EVENING

Elizabeth sits down in the corner booth of a seemingly clam chowder-themed establishment. It has some sloppy, mellow live music playing.

Across from her is MORRIS SPERBER, 60s. He's a lawyer-- criminal defense attorney. Short, sweet smile, the kind of New York accent you don't hear anymore.

MORRIS  
I must say, you evoke her. You really do.

ELIZABETH  
Thank you.

She wipes away an old ketchup stain on her side of the table.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
What specifically?

MORRIS  
You just have a loveliness-- a brightness. It seems like there's not an angry bone in your body.

She gives a big smile, but dead eyes.

ELIZABETH  
That's very sweet.

Elizabeth has graduated to a yellow notepad.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
So when did you meet Gracie?

MORRIS  
My wife and kids and I had just moved up from New York. I had been doing some pretty high-profile cases, defending some pretty despicable men, as it were.  
(MORE)

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Sharon finally had had it, she said I'm moving to Maine, feel free to come with, I said fine. It was a change of pace, and it is beautiful.

He waits for her to agree.

ELIZABETH

It is.

MORRIS

Well it was funny really, because for all the rapists and murderers, blackmailers, frauds, hit men! Never did I end up on the front page of the New York Times. For Gracie, I ended up on the front page of the New York Times. Up in slow Maine. It was very funny, in that way.

He puts some oyster crackers in his soup.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

I get the call to go down to the police station. It's right after dinner. And I walk in and sitting there in this little flowery blouse is Gracie, and I look around-- I almost thought she was another lawyer. I said, "I think I know you." She said, "My name is Gracie Atherton, I'm your neighbor, I brought you a blueberry pound cake." And of course it was. I had moved into a house on her very block, and she had brought us a very wonderful pound cake, a few weeks earlier. So I said, "What can I help you with?" And that's when she told me.

ELIZABETH

How did she word it exactly?

MORRIS

She said, "I've been caught having an affair." And I said, Gracie, forgive me, but that's not illegal in this country, and if it were a lot of people would be in serious trouble. It was then that she started to cry.

(MORE)

MORRIS (CONT'D)

She said, "We're in love. I didn't mean for it to happen, but we fell in love."

ELIZABETH

So she was in denial, you would say?

MORRIS

She was... firm. Right from the beginning she didn't feel they had done anything wrong, she was head over heels, she trusted him completely. She didn't seem to believe she may be going to prison, she thought the judge would understand if they just explained it. It was a bit Romeo and Juliet, a bit starry-eyed.

ELIZABETH

When did it sink in?

He takes a sip of his cream soda.

MORRIS

Does it seem like it's sunk in now?

There's a big crash of the drum cymbals over in the live band. The LEAD SINGER is visibly drunk. 30s, blonde hair dyed pastel colors, wearing a wife beater.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

(motioning to him)

Have you met Georgie yet?

ELIZABETH

That's Georgie?

MORRIS

I had hoped things would turn out better for him, he was a very sweet boy. Very sensitive.

GEORGIE flings some Sprite onto his bandmate, who gets up and leaves the set in the middle of covering "Landslide".

Georgie scoffs, and his eyes suddenly snap into focus on Elizabeth and Morris. He drops the microphone and walks right over to them. (His drummer is left to sing, which to his credit, he does).

GEORGIE

Well look what the cat dragged in.

MORRIS

Georgie, how are you? This is  
Elizabeth Bryce.

GEORGIE

Oh I know who this is. I know  
perfectly well.

He stumbles, pulls up a chair and sits on it backwards,  
straddling. He taps his temple with his index finger, sizing  
her up.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

So how much are they paying you?

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

GEORGIE

Is it a lot? Are they paying her?

ELIZABETH

It's an independent film...

GEORGIE

Turn to the side?

She hesitates, but does it with contempt.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

You're prettier than her.

MORRIS

Well Georgie, we don't mean to  
interrupt your set--

GEORGIE

(to Elizabeth)

Look me in the eye and scream at me  
how selfish I am.

This really cracks him up.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

Then I'll tell you how close a  
match.

MORRIS

Let's get the check.

ELIZABETH

I'm glad this happened, I've been  
wanting to meet you.

GEORGIE  
Oh really.

He twiddles his fingers.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
What have you heard?

ELIZABETH  
That you're creative, and  
sensitive, and sweet.

GEORGIE  
They would say that wouldn't they.

ELIZABETH  
What are you then?

GEORGIE  
I'm a phoenix rising from the  
ashes, I'm a ghost.

He takes a little plastic cup of half & half and downs it  
like a shot. And then, yuck, regrets it.

ELIZABETH  
So tell me what you think I should  
know.

GEORGIE  
They're both liars, and they  
deserve each other.

ELIZABETH  
What did they lie about?

GEORGIE  
To me! They lied to me. He said,  
"oh I can't sleep over," blah blah  
blah. Or, "ugh, your mom's so  
tough, I have to work extra at the  
shop." And her! "Your friend seems  
a little fast, I don't want you  
going to that party, I don't want  
you renting *Mallrats*" on and on--  
and why not?? It was all fake, it  
was just lies.

He grabs a bottle of beer from a waitress's tray who's  
passing by. Gulps some.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
Ugh, kind of still tastes like the  
milk from before.

Morris motions for Elizabeth to let it go.

ELIZABETH  
Do you remember when you found out?

GEORGIE  
Of course I remember. Tommy sat me down in my room. And I thought he was lying to make me upset until I went and found my dad and he said it was true. He had slammed his fist down on his desk so hard that this part had split and was bleeding.

He stares at the fold of skin under the pinky, when clenching. His eyes struggle to focus a bit.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
It was right before my birthday. We forgot to cancel the party but only one guy came anyway and we just hung out in my room and ate so many warheads that I threw up, and we watched the portable TV until the sun was almost up and I gave him a handjob and then he never spoke to me again.

A beat where no one knows what to say. And then his band suddenly starts playing Leon Russell's "Tight Rope" (a fun, upbeat-sounding song that I think is about suicide).

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
Oh this is my favorite one, I gotta go.

He rushes over to the stage like a rag doll.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
(shouting back at them)  
See you around, nice to meet you!

He grabs the mic from his drummer and picks up singing in the middle of sentence.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)  
(singing)  
---tightwire! Linked by life and  
the funeral pyre,  
But the top hat on my head is all  
you see...

MORRIS

Well, as you can see, the situation  
is not without casualties.

ELIZABETH

Strange that him and Joe are the  
same age.

Morris shrugs as he pays the bill.

MORRIS

A lot more people in this town feel  
the way that he does, than the way  
I do.

ELIZABETH

From what I've seen, she's pretty  
well-liked here.

MORRIS

She has a community that takes care  
of her.

ELIZABETH

She seems busy with her business.

He hesitates.

MORRIS

You may want to check the names on  
those orders. It's a handful that  
repeat over and over, my wife's is  
one of them.

ELIZABETH

People are just ordering things to  
keep her busy?

MORRIS

It's a kindness. How many pineapple  
upside-down cakes could one family  
need?

INT. JOE'S CAR-- DUSK

Joe sits in the front seat, about to run into the grocery  
store.

MICHELA

(text)

*Just found out I've got some time  
off later in the year, I'm trying  
to decide if I should go somewhere.*

JOE

*That's exciting.*

MICHELA

*Where would you go?*

JOE

*I don't even know, I haven't gone anywhere in a long time.*

MICHELA

*I was thinking maybe Mexico, to the butterfly sanctuary in Piedra Herrada.*

She sends a picture-- so many orange butterflies line the trees that they look like fall leaves.

JOE

*Wow, I never knew this existed.*

MICHELA

*Amazing right??*

JOE

*Incredible.*

(...) and then it disappears, and then reappears a few times.

MICHELA

*Maybe we could make a trip of it.  
Like a field trip.*

He just stares at it. Then (...)

MICHELA (CONT'D)

*Finally see where all these butterflies we raise end up.*

He still doesn't write.

MICHELA (CONT'D)

*I'm sure you've got your vacation days allotted for family time though. It was just an idea.*

He puts his phone in his pocket and heads into the store.

INT. LAKE STREET INN BATHROOM-- DAY

Elizabeth puts her make-up on in the mirror, her phone propped up on speaker. She's on with her boyfriend AARON, 30s.

AARON (V.O.)  
So the two of them basically  
haven't spoken since Nana's  
funeral, and Aunt Judy has just  
gotten them both to agree to sit  
down together!

She's busy with precise eyeliner.

AARON (V.O.)  
Hello?

ELIZABETH  
Yes, that's great!

AARON (V.O.)  
Yeah it feels like a really big day  
for the family. I'm so relieved.

She rolls her eyes really far back in her head.

ELIZABETH  
(with a smile)  
A huge relief!

AARON (V.O.)  
How much longer do you think you'll  
be there?

ELIZABETH  
I'm not sure, I'm getting a lot of  
good work done.

AARON (V.O.)  
What are you doing today?

ELIZABETH  
Going to speak at the high school.

AARON (V.O.)  
As you or as Gracie?

ELIZABETH  
What? As me. How could I go speak  
as Gracie?

AARON (V.O.)  
Oh I don't know, like method  
acting.

ELIZABETH  
No. Her daughter asked me.

AARON (V.O.)  
Well stay away from the young boys.

ELIZABETH  
Excuse me?

AARON (V.O.)  
Because of your character.

ELIZABETH  
I get it.

A beat.

AARON (V.O.)  
You're starting to sound like her.

ELIZABETH  
I don't think you know what she  
sounds like at all.

AARON (V.O.)  
Only what you've told me.

She mutes her side and screams towards it.

ELIZABETH  
Well maybe I haven't given you a  
minute-to-minute report because it  
wouldn't really mean much to you  
anyway because you're a fucking  
podiatrist!

Un-mutes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
No, you're right, I'm sorry, I  
think I'm just really in it right  
now.

AARON (V.O.)  
Totally. I know how that can be.

She makes a ridiculous face.

ELIZABETH  
Thanks.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL-- DAY

In slow motion, Elizabeth walks down the crowded hallway of lockers. It's in between classes and there's a lot of movement.

The kids look so young.

Elizabeth locks eyes with a CONFIDENT FRESHMAN BOY as he jumps to tap the door frame to impress her.

She gives him a little nod like she is impressed.

INT. BLACK BOX THEATER-- A BIT LATER

Elizabeth sits on a painted black cube next to drama teacher MS. LABRIOLA, 40s, severe bob, chip on her shoulder. A co-ed class of about twenty (including Mary) sit in the stands.

MS. LABRIOLA

This is the first time in my experience, I've worked here twenty years, that a Juilliard-educated actor has sat in this theater. It's an incredible opportunity-- Cameron, quit it.

A kid named CAMERON stops fucking around.

MS. LABRIOLA (CONT'D)  
Ask questions.

A DOPEY BOY, 16, raises his hand.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

DOPEY BOY  
Have you acted in sex scenes?

MS. LABRIOLA  
You're staying late.

ELIZABETH  
Yes, I have.

MS. LABRIOLA  
You don't have to--

ELIZABETH  
No, it's fine. I have, and it is a strange part of acting.

DOPEY BOY  
Like what?

His friends giggle. She really thinks about it.

ELIZABETH

It can vary. Sometimes it's really mechanical, choreographed like a dance, where the only thing you can really think about is where you're supposed to be and when. And other times I've gone into kind of a fugue state. I forget where I am, I forget that I'm an actor, I forget that I'm a person, really. Just repetitive, hypnotic energy.

The boys have stopped giggling. A BLONDE GIRL raises her hand.

BLONDE GIRL

How did you become famous?

ELIZABETH

Well, I'm not that famous. Like, internationally my name doesn't mean that much, but, hmmmm. Well I trained, I learned a lot about myself and others. And I got a job right out of school. I think that's the unfair part, how much is chance. I think because I was pretty and went to Juilliard it was easier for me to get that first pilot. And then once you get one, it's easier to get the next, work begets work. And I've seen it now happen over and over with the young pretty girl from Juilliard, or Yale, or some interesting movie star's daughter, or even a writer's daughter. Just a short cut. "Who is that?" "Oh she's x, y, z." Even you Mary, "Oh she's Gracie Atherton-Yu's daughter" that would be enough to get you in some doors, but you'd have to be really careful. You're not starting necessarily at a fresh clean slate, there's more notoriety, you'd have to overcompensate by making only classy choices-- good directors, FX, HBO, A24-- you know what I mean?

DOPEY BOY

...What's a pilot?

ELIZABETH

It's the first episode of a TV show  
that they usually don't air.

DOPEY BOY

Why?

ELIZABETH

They like make the show to see if  
it works.

DOPEY BOY

Why can't they just read the script  
and imagine it?

ELIZABETH

I'm not sure.

MARY

How do you choose your roles?

ELIZABETH

When I have the choice, I want to  
play characters who are complex.

MARY

Do you always like them?

ELIZABETH

No.

INT. KITCHEN-- AFTERNOON

Gracie is in the middle of baking as the front door shuts  
loudly.

The spaniels bark really loudly as they enter but then settle  
down.

Mary clomps up the stairs, Elizabeth enters the kitchen, puts  
her purse down.

ELIZABETH

Hello.

GRACIE

How was it?

ELIZABETH

I think it went well.

Mary's door SLAMS from above.

GRACIE

Great.

(beat)

Why don't you give me a hand?

ELIZABETH

I'd love to.

She throws her an apron.

GRACIE

Do you bake?

She grimaces.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Okay, go get a stick of butter from  
the fridge.

She does.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Now heat up a cup of sugar over  
medium in that thick pot, yes that  
one. Stir it with that red spatula.

ELIZABETH

Just dry sugar?

GRACIE

(almost concerned)

It'll melt.

It starts to.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Just keep stirring.

It turn into an amber liquid.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Ok this all happens quickly.

She hands her a whisk.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Put the butter in and whisk  
constantly.

They both peer over the pot to see caramel starting to form  
and bubble.

ELIZABETH

Wow.

Gracie pours in some cream by sight. Elizabeth whisking furiously.

GRACIE

It's temperamental. You have to  
keep an eye on it every second or  
you could ruin it.

She adds a pinch of salt.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Alright now pour it into this pan.

Elizabeth grabs for the hot handles.

ELIZABETH

Fuck!

GRACIE

Well, use the mitts...

She does. Gracie scraps out every last bit.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Now line these up, and really do it  
nicely, it matters how it looks.

Elizabeth places dark red cherries in the caramel. Gracie mixes a batter and looks over Elizabeth's shoulder.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

That's very nice.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

They work in silence for a bit, side by side.

GRACIE

This is my brother Bill's favorite  
cake.

ELIZABETH

Is it for him?

GRACIE

No, he's in Minneapolis. He works  
for the Twins.

ELIZABETH

Which twins?

GRACIE

It's a professional baseball team.

ELIZABETH

Oh. Of course.

GRACIE

He played Varsity, and then college ball and now he's the assistant pitching coach.

Elizabeth keeps lining up cherries.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

It's pretty great.

ELIZABETH

Wonderful.

GRACIE

Growing up he was always really protective of me, even though he was younger. He was so big, in stature. Any boys that got near me he'd throw up against the locker and say, "What are your intentions!"

She laughs about this, lovingly.

ELIZABETH

What were their intentions?

Gracie gives her a side-eyed glance. She pours the batter in pan over the cherries.

GRACIE

This way, once it's baked we flip it and the caramel and cherries are on top. That's why they call it an upside-down cake.

Elizabeth watches her put the cake in the oven.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

You know Joe's slept with more women than I have men.

Elizabeth tidies up, tries not to look her in the eye, tries not to spook her.

ELIZABETH

Is that right?

GRACIE

Nobody really seems to remember that.

(MORE)

GRACIE (CONT'D)

But I had only slept with Tom  
before Joe. He had slept with two  
or three girls before me.

ELIZABETH

When he was in seventh grade?

GRACIE

Yes.

She mixes frosting for something else.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

He lead a very different kind of  
life than I did. I was very  
sheltered. My father had a lot of  
rules. And there were a lot of  
consequences for not obeying them.  
Joe, he had a lot of responsibility  
put on him very young. The oldest.  
He grew up fast.

She holds out a spoon of light blue frosting.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Does this look too blue? I don't  
like it when it looks artificial.

ELIZABETH

It's a... subtle blue.

GRACIE

For the Aaberg's baby shower.

ELIZABETH

How nice.

GRACIE

I wanted to show you something.

She hands her a poem, written by a child.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Joe gave that to me, back then. I  
just think it's lovely.

ELIZABETH

*"Peace is sitting by a lake in the  
summertime,  
Peace is a Coca Cola on a hot  
summer day,  
Peace is being with you."*

GRACIE

The assignment was "What is peace?"

INT. DEN-- AFTERNOON

Joe, home from work and in casual clothes, watches more "*This Old House*" on PBS.

The curtains are drawn but room has that warm, sickly afternoon glow.

On screen, TOMMY SILVA instructs a HOMEOWNER as she caulks her bathroom tile.

TOMMY SILVA

Push it in there, there you go, put  
your hand closer to the tip, keep  
the gun level...

The woman's hands move slowly along her bathtub, the sexual connotations obvious (though not to Tommy, completely innocent on his part, all my respect to Tommy Silva).

Joe seems hypnotized be the caulking.

GRACIE

Knock-knock.

Gracie and Elizabeth poke their heads into the den. It does oddly look like he's seeing double.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Sweetie, I was hoping you could  
clear your bugs out before Honor  
comes home tomorrow. And then pick  
up dinner, I'm swamped.

JOE

Sure.

ELIZABETH

I can help.

JOE

Sounds good.

TOMMY SILVA (O.S.)

Now that's a caulking that will  
stand the test of time.

INT. DINING NOOK-- A BIT LATER

Joe and Elizabeth stare into the mesh cages. His caterpillars have gotten even plumper, wiggling around eating leaves.

JOE

They're hungry this year.

He starts to carefully prepare them for a move into the den.

ELIZABETH

How long have you been doing this?

JOE

Four years I think.

ELIZABETH

What started it?

JOE

I saw an article on Facebook about how the Monarch butterfly population is dwindling dramatically, and they mentioned that people help raise them. I'm not the only who does this-- Gracie makes it seem that way, but all over the country people are doing this.

ELIZABETH

Do you send away for a kit or something?

JOE

No you just keep your eyes open. Look for the eggs, take them inside and protect them, so they have a chance to grow.

On this subject Joe lights up in a way we haven't seen before.

JOE (CONT'D)

We've actually made a significant impact, the numbers are up by the thousands.

ELIZABETH

Who's we?

JOE

People like me. I'm part of a Facebook group... I don't know, that sounds dorky when I say that.

ELIZABETH

Not at all.

JOE

It's really active. We have almost ten thousand members.

(beat)

My friend Michela, from the group, she's in Pittsburgh, she actually told me to put these little wooden sticks inside. They sort of act as ladders, to help them along.

Elizabeth nods.

JOE (CONT'D)

Anyway, I know it's boring.

ELIZABETH

No, I think it's amazing.

Joe blushes, as he takes the cages to the next room.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD-- A BIT LATER

Late afternoon, the sun still bright. Joe and Elizabeth take a walk through the neighborhood. Tall, old trees everywhere. Flowers, blue sky. Historic houses. Basically no one on the road.

ELIZABETH

This is a beautiful place to live.

JOE

Yeah, it's been really nice.

ELIZABETH

Do you think you'll stay here forever?

JOE

I'm not sure. It's the only place I've ever lived.

ELIZABETH

Have you traveled?

JOE

I've been to Boston, I've been to  
Portland... Other places in Maine.  
My sisters live more inland. And  
Gracie was in Warren, at the  
prison.

He picks a leaf off a tree and tears it up, absentmindedly.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'd like to visit other places.  
Korea, Mexico...

ELIZABETH

I went to Japan last year, it was  
gorgeous.

He nods.

JOE

Where are you from?

ELIZABETH

Right outside San Francisco. It's  
very pretty like this, but bigger.  
Not as much shrimp.

JOE

Right.

ELIZABETH

And then I lived in New York for  
five years, and I've been in LA  
since then. Except for some movies  
on location for little chunks at a  
time.

They walk along in agreeable silence.

JOE

What do you think of all this? Of  
us. It's hard to tell exactly.

ELIZABETH

I'm trying to approach this without  
judgement. My only obligation is to  
see and interpret what I believe to  
be true.

JOE

And what's true?

ELIZABETH

I think you have a nice family. I think you're both interesting people.

JOE

What else?

ELIZABETH

I think that even if I can understand her motivations, and her perspective at the time... what she did was wrong.

JOE

How can you say that?

ELIZABETH

You were really little.

He doesn't seem upset, just tired.

JOE

It's different in my memory.

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

JOE

I was a lot older than the kids around me.

ELIZABETH

I'm sure you were.

JOE

And I wanted it.

That kind of just hangs there.

ELIZABETH

Yeah... I guess, just as your friend, I would hope that you've dealt with it. With the past. If everything is great now, you're happy where you are, then that's all that matters. Mary's great, Honor seems to be thriving. I just know from my own past how things have a way of bubbling up.

JOE

I guess. I don't know.

A tight, barely passable smile.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Oh you may want to see this.

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE-- CONTINUOUS

Joe and Elizabeth trek through old trees to reveal a beautiful, natural swimming hole with clear water. Surrounded by plants and smooth rocks to sit on. A heaven. The sun streams in a lovely way.

ELIZABETH  
Holy shit. Is it safe?

JOE  
Yeah, kids swim in it all the time.

She touches the water.

ELIZABETH  
Should we dip our feet in?

JOE  
Sure.

They giggle as they take their shoes off at how cute and dumb it all is.

ELIZABETH  
I love it here.

JOE  
I do too.  
(beat)  
Gracie and I used to come here  
sometimes that first summer.

Elizabeth looks around and seems to mentally note all the places where one could have sex.

ELIZABETH  
I don't blame you.

She leans back, basking and stretching.

JOE  
What did you mean before, about her  
motivations?

ELIZABETH

I guess the way I see it, she  
wasn't getting what she needed at  
home, she saw something she wanted,  
so... she took it.

He looks at her, she's almost completely silhouetted by the sun.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You were both at a really sexually  
heightened phases in life.

JOE

Is that right?

ELIZABETH

Women reach their sexual peak at  
thirty-six. Did you really not know  
that?

JOE

I didn't.

ELIZABETH

I found that out in a *People*  
*Magazine* from 1997, but I looked it  
up to confirm.

JOE

Does it feel true?

She considers it.

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

They stare at each other, an energy between them.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Anyway, I just mean that I  
understand some of it. It's fun to  
have a secret.

JOE

Do you have secrets?

ELIZABETH

Yeah, I have a secret.

JOE

What is it?

ELIZABETH  
I can't tell you, or else it  
wouldn't be one, would it?

She kicks a bit of water in his direction.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Do you have any?

JOE  
Yeah.

INT. ATHERTON-YU HOUSE-- DUSK

Joe comes back into the house as the sun setting and can immediately tell something is amiss. All the lights are off. It's silent.

He drops his head like, "fuck."

INT. ATHERTON-YU BEDROOM-- A BIT LATER

From the doorway Joe can see Gracie silently weeping, laying flat on the bed. The last light from the window making the room feel pale blue.

JOE  
What happened?

Silent weeping, stillness. Finally some sniffling, words caught in her throat.

GRACIE  
Joyce Mercer called and cancelled  
her order, and all future orders.

He lets out an almost undetectable sigh of relief, sits on the bed.

JOE  
I'm sorry.

GRACIE  
And I told her I had already made it (!) and she said she'd pay for this one but that she didn't need it, and they were leaving town.

JOE  
Where are they going?

GRACIE

To visit her sick Aunt or something-- it doesn't matter! I wasted hours that I could have used, and I just feel stupid.

JOE

You couldn't have known.

GRACIE

I know but... She had called me yesterday and I didn't call her back.

JOE

It's okay.

GRACIE

I just hate making mistakes.

JOE

I know.

GRACIE

And now I have this cake that'll go right in the garbage.

JOE

You don't have to throw the cake in the garbage.

She starts to slow down. Turns her head to face him but is still lying down.

GRACIE

Where were you?

JOE

Oh I just took a walk, showed Elizabeth the neighborhood.

GRACIE

Elizabeth.

He treads very carefully. Starts folding the clothes that Gracie shed on her way to the bed.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

She's getting on my last nerve.

JOE

Why?

GRACIE

She's just everywhere I look. And  
for what?

JOE

I don't know. She'll be gone soon.

She examines his face for something, but doesn't find it. She gives a last sob, wipes her tears, sits up. She looks so tiny.

GRACIE

So do you want the cake?

INT. KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Gracie presents her cake to Joe. It's pretty sizable, three layers. Covered in frosting with mounds of shredded coconut.

She cuts him a big piece and smiles at him, expectantly.

He smiles back. He takes a big bite as she watches, chin on her hands.

JOE

Mmmm, so good.

GRACIE

There's a layer of butterscotch  
cream inside.

JOE

I can definitely taste that.

It looks very sweet. They sit in silence as he chews and she watches.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- MORNING

Roberto, Italian film director, is on the phone with Elizabeth, who is distracted and happens to be looking up the Sex Offender Registry for Maine.

ELIZABETH

I'm telling you, it's going great,  
I think I'll have all I'll need by  
next week.

ROBERTO (V.O.)

I'm very happy to hear this, but  
you're already over the amount of  
days that we budgeted for.

ELIZABETH

(with a smile)

Well it sounds like the crew wrap sweatshirts have just turned to crew wrap mugs, doesn't it?

They both laugh. She takes a few puffs of her inhaler.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I know you trust me, and I'm confident that all of this is going to enrich my performance, my sense memories, my physicality--

She finds Gracie's registry photo-- it looks like the ID for a country club. A big, toothy, confident smile and a bow in her hair.

ROBERTO (V.O.)

Ok, ok. I'll tell Carlo. Now, did you watch the "Joe" tapes?

ELIZABETH

I did.

ROBERTO (V.O.)

Wonderful.

ELIZABETH

Look, I'm sure they've seen a lot of people, but have they covered New York? Chicago? The kids I saw were cute, but they just weren't like, sexy enough. He has this certain quiet confidence, or something.

A pause on the line.

ROBERTO (V.O.)

I think... you need to come home.

EXT. AIRPORT-- DAY

HONOR ATHERTON-YU, 22, runs up to the car with her rolly suitcase. She has bleached hair, looks like she just pulled a few all-nighters.

Mary bounds out of the car to hug her.

Joe looks on so happily as he loads her suitcases.

She hugs him.

JOE  
I've missed you.

HONOR  
I've missed you too.

INT. JOE'S CAR-- A BIT LATER

They have a beautiful drive through town and to their house. The girls sit together in the backseat as Joe drives.

JOE  
How's the roommate?

HONOR  
She's fine, we got over it.

JOE  
I knew you would.

HONOR  
How's mom?

JOE  
Great. Busy.

Mary rolls her eyes and looks out the window. The girls hold hands gently.

Mary starts to trace letters on the back of Honor's hand. A secret way to communicate. T-H-E, a gentle pat for a space. A-C-T-R-E-S-S, space, I-S, space, A-N, space, A-S-S-H-O-- Honor starts to laugh and nod like she gets it.

Joe watches them from the rearview mirror but doesn't have a guess.

INT. SEAFARER'S-- DUSK

Gracie, Joe, Honor, Mary and Elizabeth sit at a the corner table of an upscale seafood restaurant. Outside the window is the bay. It's a busy night.

In front of each of them sits a giant, bright red lobster. Side dishes of melted butter, rolls. The girls have Shirley Temples, Joe has a beer, Gracie white wine, Elizabeth water. They hold their glasses up, mid-toast.

GRACIE

I am so glad that Honor was done  
with her finals in time to come  
watch our little Mary walk across  
that stage tomorrow. I couldn't be  
prouder of the both of you. And to  
Joe.

She gives him a big (maybe a little theatrical) warm smile.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

The love of my life. To entering  
this next phase of our life  
together. But as our little girls  
fly away from the nest, they know  
they can always come home.

They all click glasses, and start cracking into the lobster.

Elizabeth struggles a bit.

ELIZABETH

How's my technique?

HONOR

You don't eat lobster in Hollywood?

ELIZABETH

It's a rare treat. And never have I  
seen ones this big, my goodness.

GRACIE

Crack its claw like this-- there  
you go.

ELIZABETH

Delicious.

They eat (in a calm manner) but don't talk to each other.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I read that lobster used to be food  
for the poor before it became a  
delicacy.

GRACIE

Is that right?

ELIZABETH

There was such an overabundance,  
they fed them to prisoners.

She seems to have realized what she said right as the word  
left her lips.

GRACIE  
(smiling)  
How interesting.

Elizabeth nods. Becomes quiet. Slowly, she starts to copy Gracie's movements. Posture.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
Honor, when we get back home I'll show you what your dad and I got Mary for graduation.

HONOR  
Is it a scale?

GRACIE  
Excuse me?

HONOR  
When I went to college you bought me a scale.

Gracie's ears pull back in her head.

GRACIE  
That was just part of setting you up at your school, you know perfectly well that wasn't your graduation present.

HONOR  
Well it came wrapped with a bow.

GRACIE  
We got her a necklace! With her birthstone on it, just like we got you, although I see you're not wearing it.

Honor sucks her teeth.

Gracie eyes Elizabeth.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
Is this you trying to sit like me?

Completely caught.

ELIZABETH  
What? No. I just--

GRACIE  
How long does this usually take?  
This method acting.

ELIZABETH

That's not really what method  
acting is--

GRACIE

And you. I got you that scale, like  
I told you at the time, as a  
tradition, because that's what my  
mother gave to me when I graduated  
high school. And try going through  
life without a scale!

An indignant scoff.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

See how that goes.

WAITRESS

How are we doing?

They all say, "Great, thank you so much" in a scattered  
chorus.

INT. LADIES ROOM-- LATER

Elizabeth comes out of the stall to find Gracie washing her  
hands. She goes to the next sink.

The bathroom has a very distinct color scheme and odd, formal  
touches.

GRACIE

My brother, Mark, he still lives in  
Richmond. He always says to keep  
your expectations low and that way  
you'll never be disappointed. I  
always forget that.

ELIZABETH

(with disdain)

How many brothers do you have?

GRACIE

Four. Two younger, two older.

Elizabeth dries her hands.

ELIZABETH

So what were your expectations?

GRACIE

That tonight would go well. That my  
children would love me, that my  
life would be perfect.

She pops open her lipstick and applies it in the mirror,  
emotionless.

ELIZABETH

That's a little naive.

GRACIE

I am naive. Always have been. In  
some ways, it's been a gift.

She smacks her lips together.

ELIZABETH

When you started the affair, do you  
really mean to tell me you didn't  
know what would happen?

GRACIE

I knew I wasn't supposed to because  
of my husband. His age didn't  
factor into it.

She plops her things in her little purse and turns to leave.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Our house is closer than the inn,  
he'll drop us off and then swing  
back around for you.

The door closes behind her.

INT. JOE'S CAR-- NIGHT

Joe drives the empty streets with Elizabeth in the front.  
Elizabeth coughs.

ELIZABETH

I think she's had enough of my  
being here.

JOE

Maybe.

ELIZABETH

I don't blame her, I guess.

More coughing.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Ugh, the air feels different here.

JOE  
Yeah, it's clean.

ELIZABETH  
Sometimes I think it's the  
different pollen, or something.

JOE  
Are you asthmatic?

ELIZABETH  
Yeah.

She takes out her inhaler and puffs.

JOE  
My little sister is too.

She tips her inhaler to him like a top hat.

ELIZABETH  
It's been bad today.

JOE  
Do you have a nebulizer up there?

ELIZABETH  
You really do know about asthma.  
Yeah I think I'm gonna do that now  
actually.

He pulls up to the Inn. A big tree hangs overhead. It's very  
end-of-the-date.

JOE  
Do you need help?

ELIZABETH  
Do you mind?

JOE  
No, not at all.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- A BIT LATER

Joe enters Elizabeth's room stiffly. She immediately goes to  
set up her asthma breathing machine (rinsing tubes, getting  
out little plastic vials of liquid).

JOE

This is a nice room.

ELIZABETH

Isn't it?

They sit together on the floor. She drops the chemicals in and turns the machine on. It hums loudly and a chemical steam starts to come out the little mouthpiece, which she inhales. Her words are a bit muffled.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

This is funny. You're one of very few people I've nebulized in front of.

JOE

They haven't changed this machine since the 80's.

ELIZABETH

I know. Thank you for helping me, I get a little shaky afterwards.

JOE

What?

ELIZABETH

(taking away mouthpiece)

I get a little shaky usually.

JOE

Oh, yeah, of course. My sister had this so bad, thankfully she's mainly grown out of it. But I remember when she was really little she'd sometimes wake me up in the middle of the night she would be wheezing so much, it sounded like a duck or something. It was scary.

ELIZABETH

Where were your parents?

JOE

They usually woke up before the sun came up and would be working. I got my sisters and I ready for school most days.

ELIZABETH

How old were you?

He sighs, thinking about it.

JOE

Maybe nine? Something like that.  
And they were six and four. That  
sounds right.

She takes the mouthpiece away, chemical vapor pours out of her mouth like smoke.

ELIZABETH

You've always had so many responsibilities.

JOE

Yeah. But it's okay.

She puts her hand on his and keeps breathing. He stares at her.

JOE (CONT'D)

I wanted to give you something.

He hands her a tattered letter in a pink envelope. Several handwritten pages in feminine cursive.

JOE (CONT'D)

It's the only one I could save.

We can see bits of it:

*"My love..."*

*"I think about you all the time..."*

*"Please burn this, you know what could happen to me..."*

*"I think I've lost track of where the line is..."*

ELIZABETH

She knew what she was doing was wrong.

He chews on his thumb.

She turns the machine off. It's suddenly so quiet. She gets closer to him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You are so young. Believe me. You could start over.

JOE

If I left she would fall apart.

ELIZABETH

You can't give everything to her.  
She's taken a lot already.

She holds his hands in hers.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And honestly, she'll find someone  
to do keep her pieces in place,  
people like that always do.

JOE

What am I supposed to do? Where  
would I even go?

ELIZABETH

You can go anywhere.

JOE

You don't know what it's like.

ELIZABETH

Some of my friends are just now  
deciding what they want to do.

JOE

But the people you're around...  
It's just different. You're so much  
more together, you have  
opportunities.

ELIZABETH

Me? I'm a mess.

JOE

You seem... Perfect.

She laughs. Holds up her shaking hands from the Albuterol.

ELIZABETH

I'm not.

JOE

You're a movie star.

ELIZABETH

Ugh, barely.

JOE

You're beautiful, you're talented.

ELIZABETH

You're really kind to say those  
things.

JOE

How do you not see that?

ELIZABETH

I feel like... I keep trying to build a house on quicksand. And even though I know it'll sink, you think, well one of these days all the houses will have stacked up on top of each other and hit the bottom. *Then, maybe.*

Without warning, he kisses her. They look at each other and she kisses him back.

She leans onto the floor as he climbs on top of her. It's hurried and passionate.

Her position mimics the one on the pet shop stockroom stairs.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Wait, once second.

She grabs a condom from her suitcase on the floor next to them.

They fumble with it.

JOE

I've never actually used one of these before.

She laughs, but then a second later when his head is buried in her hair she makes an expression like, "what the fuck."

It doesn't last long but there's force. The tension between them finally breaking. If she's acting we can't tell.

He gets up and goes to the bathroom. Not embarrassed, not cold.

Once out of sight she scrambles to get her notebook, quickly writes:

*Loving, eye contact. Solid, strong. Smells like black pepper--*

JOE (CONT'D)

Should we get in the bed?

ELIZABETH

That's a great idea.

She slides the book aside and gets into bed with him. Lies her head on his bare chest.

JOE  
That was crazy.

She traces her fingers over his skin.

ELIZABETH  
I know.

JOE  
How's your breathing?

ELIZABETH  
It's good, thank you.

The trees outside the window sway in a comforting way.

JOE  
How much longer do you think you'll stay?

ELIZABETH  
Probably just until Sunday. I've been pushing it.

JOE  
Oh. Then where do you go?

ELIZABETH  
I'll go back to LA for a few weeks, and then we shoot this in Atlanta, yuck, and then I've got a little time before my show goes back in Vancouver. Thinking I may go somewhere with my boyfriend.

JOE  
You have a boyfriend?

ELIZABETH  
Yeah. You have a wife.

JOE  
Yeah, I know.

He picks at his nail.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Where do you think you'll go?

ELIZABETH  
I'm not sure, maybe Portugal. Maybe South Korea, actually. My friend's been working at a design studio there.

JOE

Wow.

He seems to be sinking, where she is perfectly at ease.

ELIZABETH

You know, if you do decide to leave  
Gracie, it would kind of be smart  
to wait until a time where it would  
really resonate.

JOE

What do you mean?

ELIZABETH

Like right before the movie comes  
out, or if it premieres at a  
festival. Like you could time it  
with something.

He sits up suddenly, she falls off his chest in the process.

JOE

I can't tell if you're joking.

ELIZABETH

Jesus, it was just a thought, you  
don't have to get to hysterical.

JOE

Do you even like me?

She rolls her eyes big time.

ELIZABETH

Calm down.

She gets a vape pen from her side table.

JOE

What kind of asthmatic are you?

ELIZABETH

It's just CBD, it's fine.

JOE

I feel like I don't know you all of  
a sudden.

ELIZABETH

I mean... you don't...? But it's  
okay. Really. Everything's fine.

JOE

Why did I do this?

He sits on the edge of the bed, stares at the nebulizer on the floor. She crawls up next to him, puts her lovely manicured hand on his leg.

ELIZABETH

If you want my honest opinion, I think you're trying to blow up your life.

JOE

I'm not.

ELIZABETH

And I don't think anyone would blame you.

JOE

That's a rotten thing to say.

ELIZABETH

It's true. She's a lot, and she took advantage of you, and she's still taking advantage of you.

JOE

Stop!

She stacks her pillows to a sitting position.

ELIZABETH

Alright, you know what? Go play with your bugs.

"Your bugs." He just stares at her as she takes out her phone and scrolls.

He dresses quickly.

JOE

I thought you were very different from this.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, well, I'm an actress.

He leaves. The pink envelope with the letter inside still sits on floor.

INT. ATHERTON-YU BEDROOM-- LATER

It's the middle of the night. Joe has showered and is sitting in the rocking chair of their dark room, watching Gracie sleep.

She's lying on her back, occasionally wincing from some dream.

Suddenly she snorts awake. Sees him in the corner.

GRACIE  
You're lucky I'm not jumpy.

JOE  
I'm sorry.

GRACIE  
What happened?

She turns the lamp on.

JOE  
I've just been thinking.

She adjusts her pillows and sits up in bed, the same as Elizabeth earlier.

GRACIE  
Okay.

JOE  
I think there are a lot of things that we haven't talked about in a long time. Maybe ever.

GRACIE  
What kind of things?

JOE  
Things about our relationship. How it started.

Gracie starts to tense up.

GRACIE  
Well I'm not gonna cross examine you, say what you want to say.

JOE  
I've just been remembering things, feeling strange, and creeped out.

He's struggling for composure.

GRACIE

What brought this on?

JOE

What does it matter?

GRACIE

Is it the actress? Did she say  
something?

JOE

No. I don't see what difference it  
makes, it's how I'm feeling.

GRACIE

Come sit by me.

He does. On the edge of the bed as she's still inside it. She  
rubs his back. It's very "Mom I had a bad dream."

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Now what's making you feel creeped  
out?

JOE

Just, that what if... What if I  
wasn't ready to be making any of  
those decisions and I've just stuck  
to them because of the girls, and  
because I was too... scared, of  
what it would mean if I didn't.

GRACIE

I don't understand what you're  
saying.

JOE

I'm saying what if I was too young.

She sits up straight.

GRACIE

You seduced me.

He just stares at her. Her formal nightgown, her sleeping  
headband.

JOE

I was thirteen years old.

GRACIE

Don't give me that.

JOE

But I was.

GRACIE

You weren't a typical thirteen year old, you know that.

JOE

Maybe not, but...

He shakes his head, confused, trying to work it all out. She rubs his back again.

GRACIE

(soothing)

I think because of this movie, it's drudging up old stuff, you're hearing voices that aren't yours and it's feeling confusing.

JOE

It's not that! It's not about the fucking movie.

She whips her arms away and crosses them.

GRACIE

Language.

JOE

I am your husband, we are in our bedroom, I am allowed to curse in here.

GRACIE

Oh really. You know I've been very sympathetic but you're starting to upset me.

JOE

You have not been sympathetic. Not for a second. You're not listening to me, you're not understanding. Why can't we talk about it? If we're really as in love as we say, if we have that... rare connection-- shouldn't I be able to talk about this with you?

GRACIE

"If we're really as in love as we say"?

JOE

You know what I mean! Gracie. I'm begging you. I'm feeling lost. I need you to help me. Please.

Her arms stay firmly crossed and she looks past him at the wall.

GRACIE

"If we're really as in love as we say"...

Shaking her head. He holds out for a moment but then gives up, hunches over. Looks to the floor.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

I'm taking a shower.

She brushes past him, but pauses at the bathroom door.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

And on Graduation.

She leaves. He lies down in their bed with his clothes on. Sick.

INT. LAKE STREET INN-- NIGHT

Elizabeth looks at herself deeply in the mirror. She seems different. The pink envelope and letter sit on the chest in front of her, already read.

Her voice has changed, her rhythm. The look in her eye.

She feels like Gracie. Not a cutesy impression, but something real, almost as if channeling.

ELIZABETH

My love. After you left tonight I thought about the kind of life we could have if things were different. If I had been born later, or you long ago. But who knows what we'd be like then, or where? Or what tragedies we'd have had to faced, or what bad luck along the way. This isn't ever what I would have wanted, but I'm so grateful that our paths have lead us to this road, no matter what the cost. I think about you all the time. And the feeling that I get when we look each other in the eye.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Do you feel that too? I know that you don't have much to compare it to (except those girls at your cousin's barbecue haha) but let me assure you that it's rare. I've gone my whole life without it, and now that I've found it, I can't imagine going back. And pretending. Sometimes I wish we hadn't met. Or, you hadn't gotten a job at the pet shop at least. Because I know that our lives will be forever changed because of this, no matter how it turns out. I know that my husband and my children, oh God... This will affect them too. My hope is that we can keep our secrets until at least there's no danger from the law. Maybe by then I'll have enough time to end things cleanly, and make sure my children know that I love them. Maybe by then we'll have figured out what to say. When this first started, I didn't know what to think. I knew we had crossed a line, and I felt in my heart we would cross it again. But now, I think I've lost track of where the line is. Who even draws these lines? All I know is that I love you, and you love me. And you gave me so much pleasure tonight. I hope I did the same for you. I'll see you on Saturday. Please burn this, you know what could happen to me if it were ever found. Good luck on your Algebra quiz. Your Gracie.

Damn she really did go to Juilliard.

INT. MESH CAGES-- DAWN

The sun is just rising out the window. A few dozen chrysalides (green pods with butterflies inside) hang from the tops of the white fabric cages. Each has a delicate rim of glowing, metallic gold.

We focus on one in the corner, who's the furthest along.

Gracie gets ready in the background, we can't see what she's doing but she moves from room to room, packing things.

The chrysalis starts to move. From the bottom, a nudging, as slowly a monarch butterfly nibbles his way out, leaving the clear shell behind him like dead skin.

EXT. BACKYARD-- A BIT LATER

We see now that Gracie was preparing to hunt. She's in full gear, and holds a rifle.

The sun is still low in the sky, and she heads out into the woods behind their home.

She whistles and her large spaniels follow her.

INT. ATHERTON-YU BEDROOM-- MORNING

Joe wakes up suddenly, surprised how bright it is. It's a few hours later and the room feels yellow and hot. He's still in his clothes, on top of the blankets. Gracie is gone.

He sits up and sighs, takes it in.

INT. KITCHEN-- A BIT LATER

Joe makes breakfast for four but he's the only one there so far. As he brings the plates to the table he notices movement in his butterfly nook.

INT. DINING NOOK-- CONTINUOUS

The one hatched butterfly flitters around the green pods. Joe bends down to meet him.

JOE

Oh, hi.

He unzips the cage, and puts his finger inside. The butterfly hops on.

INT. KITCHEN-- CONTINUOUS

Joe walks slowly with the butterfly perched on his hand. He goes over to the window and carefully opens it.

He reaches his hand outside, feels the wind.

JOE

Good luck.

It flies away. Simple as that.

MARY (O.S.)  
Hey.

Mary's in the doorway in the sweet, but childish, white dress.

JOE  
Wow, you look so great.

MARY  
Thanks.

JOE  
Are you hungry?

MARY  
No.

She sees the plates of pancakes.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Maybe coffee?

JOE  
Coffee. That's new.

She shrugs, he gives her a mug.

MARY  
When are we gonna leave?

He thinks about it.

JOE  
Uh, we... We'll leave in twenty minutes. I'll just run up and get changed. Is your sister up?

MARY  
Yeah. Mom's gonna hate her dress.

Joe laughs.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Where is mom?

JOE  
I don't know honestly, but there's no doubt in my mind that she'll be there. I bet she went to the hairdresser.

EXT. THE WOODS-- DAY

Gracie holds up her rifle, ready to shoot. Her dogs stand at attention.

She's making direct eye contact with an incredibly still BEARDED WILD TURKEY.

He's VERY fancy-- haloed by golden tail feathers, with a fat chocolate body, a bright blue head, and an impressive crimson wattle.

He looks like a mythical god of the land, and stands proudly as such.

But Gracie, too, stands proudly. And then she pulls the trigger and shoots him in the head.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD-- DAY

A clear blue sky silhouettes the handsome face of actor PATRICK DEMPSEY, 53. He smiles that crooked smile we can all picture, and scans the horizon with his sapphire eyes.

PATRICK DEMPSEY  
Today is a day of hope.

He speaks into a microphone, on a podium, at this high school graduation.

PATRICK DEMPSEY (CONT'D)  
As a proud Mainer, born and raised,  
I was honored to get the call to  
come and speak with you today.

Mary and her classmates wear robes and hats the color of blood. It pops against the sky in a way that's so pretty it almost makes your eyes hurt.

The crowd is placid.

In the very back row sits Elizabeth, Gracie and Joe. All wearing dark sunglasses, all looking tired. They stand out.

PATRICK DEMPSEY (CONT'D)  
As some of you may know, in  
addition to acting, I have spent  
the last ten years racing cars. And  
I wanted to share with you some  
lessons that I've learned from  
doing that.

As he speaks we focus on the three of them.

PATRICK DEMPSEY (CONT'D)

When you're driving, as I'm sure you've all learned to do by now, it's important not only to focus on what's directly on the road in front of you. But then again, as many of us do, it's easy to get caught up in what's way down the line. What we can't even see yet. Well I'm here to tell you that the key to a successful life is to find a balance in the middle. If you're too busy thinking long term, you'll miss the important things along the way. And if you get caught up in all the little details right in front of you, you'll have no idea where you're going. You have to find the middle ground, of the far and the near. This isn't easy to do, it took me years to figure it out. It may take you that long too.

He bows his head.

DOPEY BOY

(calling out)

McDreamy!

PATRICK DEMPSEY

Yes, that's right. To the Class of 2019 of Camden High School in the great state of Maine-- may you drive safely and enjoy the ride.

The crowd gives him a standing ovation which he humbly accepts.

GRACIE

Do you know him?

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

They sit back down.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD-- A BIT LATER

The kids walk across the stage as their names are called. Mary waves to Joe, they all cheer.

The class throws their red-orange hats into the air! There are so many of them, a swarm.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD-- A BIT LATER

It's over and everyone is excitedly milling about.

Mary hugs Honor and then she runs off with Molly and Sofia. Honor wears a short halter dress with a frayed hem.

Tom, Georgie, and Gracie's other two adult children (BILLY, 40, and CASSIDY, 38) walk reluctantly over.

Before they get there, Joe ducks away.

CASSIDY

Mom.

GRACIE

Wasn't that great?

Gracie hugs them, shakes Tom's hand.

TOM

(to Elizabeth)

Nice to see you again.

ELIZABETH

You as well.

GRACIE

What are y'all doing today?

TOM

Having a barbecue. How about you?

GRACIE

Also having a barbecue.

CASSIDY

Mary looked beautiful up there.

GRACIE

Thank you.

None of them look happy. Georgie, hungover and with bold fashion choices, has not looked at Gracie at all.

GEORGIE

Alright, enough of this, I can't.

He turns around and walks away.

TOM

Sorry about that.

GRACIE

There are a lot of people to see  
today.

She shakes hands goodbye with the rest of her old family.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD-- A BIT LATER

In a shadier area under some trees Joe sits with his father JOE SR., 70. He drinks from a little plastic cup of water that people have been passing out.

JOE

Did you like Patrick Dempsey's  
speech?

JOE SR.

I did. I didn't recognize him.

JOE

I didn't realize he was from Maine.

Joe Sr. nods, contemplatively.

JOE (CONT'D)

Pretty amazing. That Mary's off to  
college.

JOE SR.

It is.

JOE

Two adult kids.

JOE SR.

Yes.

There's a nice breeze.

JOE

Dad, did you suspect anything? At  
the time.

JOE SR.

Yeah.

JOE

Did mom?

JOE SR.

No, your mother thought I was  
paranoid.

He shrugs like, "We sure showed her."

JOE  
Why didn't you do anything?

JOE SR.  
What was there to do?

JOE  
Maybe, you could have talked to me  
about it.

JOE SR.  
Maybe.

JOE  
Even after, I don't really remember  
talking with you about it.

JOE SR.  
We were very busy. You, your  
sisters, and then a new baby in the  
house.

JOE  
Yeah.

Rhonda comes over with her pitcher.

RHONDA  
Would you like some more water Mr.  
Yu?

JOE SR.  
Thank you.

RHONDA  
Summer has arrived.

JOE SR.  
It has.

She scoots over to others.

JOE  
But did you ever worry about me?

JOE SR.  
About what?

JOE  
That was I too young. That I would  
be damaged.

Joe Sr. thinks about it.

JOE SR.

When I was growing up there was a lot to worry about. So much destruction. It's hard to look back on, but I can still feel it. I wanted your life to feel like fresh air. To not burden you with worry and fears. You seemed happy. I'm sorry if that wasn't the right thing to do.

Joe holds his hand.

JOE

It's okay.

JOE SR.

Okay.

They watch a family take a group picture. Smiles all around.

INT. FOOTBALL FIELD-- A BIT LATER

Elizabeth and Gracie stand next to each other but both scan the crowd. Honor sits on one of the folding chairs behind them, on her phone.

It's clear that a lot of people are whispering about Gracie. Little whispers, points, glances. Elizabeth sees it too.

Gracie holds her head high behind her dark round glasses. Ignores it all.

GRACIE

Are you leaving tomorrow?

ELIZABETH

Yes.

GRACIE

Good.

She nods. Surveys the land like an army general.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Insecure people are dangerous. They will do just about anything.

Elizabeth watches her but she doesn't look back.

GRACIE (CONT'D)  
*I am secure. Make sure you put that in there.*

ELIZABETH  
*I will.*

Gracie gives one last nod and marches into the crowd, her tiny body lost immediately.

Elizabeth sits next to Honor in the empty stands.

HONOR  
*Hi.*

*She still has her phone out. Is very blasé.*

ELIZABETH  
*Hey.*

HONOR  
*So this is really just the beginning for you, huh.*

ELIZABETH  
*I guess so. We start shooting in two weeks.*

HONOR  
*I really wish they weren't making this movie.*

ELIZABETH  
*Sorry.*

HONOR  
*I mean, it's more people than just you I would think.*

ELIZABETH  
*That's true.*

HONOR  
*And all the people that would want to see it. They're part of it too.*

ELIZABETH  
*But maybe you'll feel like the it had something to say. That we captured... the truth.*

Honor laughs.

HONOR

Doubt it.

ELIZABETH

He's a really good director.

HONOR

I just think it's too complicated, to really "get"-- my mom is... really complicated. Maybe for like a TV show, where you have a lot of hours. Or a novel, really. I guess I just see a movie being really bad. Like one of those things that comes out and you can tell everyone's wearing a wig and you're like ugh, no thanks. You know?

She looks her right in the eye. Smiles. There's a resemblance to Gracie that clicks in that moment.

ELIZABETH

Yeah. I know.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL-- A BIT LATER

Joe waits for his father to come out of the men's room. He takes out his phone.

He pulls up the thread with Michela, scrolls through. Since asking him to go to Mexico she's written a few times-- "Are you okay?" "I'm so embarrassed that I said that" etc. He hasn't responded.

JOE

(texting)

Hey.

He sends it immediately. An act of bravery, no going back.

JOE (CONT'D)

*I'm sorry I didn't get back to you before, it's been really hectic over here and I've been thinking a lot.*

He takes a deep breath.

JOE (CONT'D)

*Let's go to Mexico.*

(...)

Before he even sees her response, he smiles.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE-- DAY OR NIGHT (\*CREDITS\*)

As if watching dailies, we see the following scene over and over. Raw, with the clapper and fuck-ups.

The set is an exact replica of the pet shop stockroom.

Elizabeth, as Gracie, sits next to a YOUNG ACTOR, as Joe.

The costumes are a little broad. Gracie holds a striking, medium-sized snake.

ROBERTO (O.S.)

Action!

"GRACIE"

Are you scared?

"JOE"

No.

"GRACIE"

It's okay to be scared.

"JOE"

I'm not.

"GRACIE"

She won't bite.

"JOE"

How do you know?

"GRACIE"

She's just not that kind of snake.

He takes the snake from her, their hands intertwined.

ROBERTO (O.S.)

Still rolling, take it from the top.

And they do. Over and over and over.

ELIZABETH

(out of character)

Honestly, do we not have it? I'm hitting my limit.

100.

ROBERTO (O.S.)  
One more time, I promise. It's  
almost perfect.

THE END