

In Praise of Doubt

Written by

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ACT 1

FADE IN:

EXT. A LOCAL BOOKSTORE - AFTERNOON

The scene opens on barren trees. There is a light chill in the air, orange and brown leaves crunch beneath the feet of BEN, 37, about 6 feet tall, slightly large build, with thinning hair. He is a Professor of Sociology, he is sipping coffee from a local coffee house. He enters a local bookstore.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - AFTERNOON

The camera focuses on various titles, and religious gifts. Ben tilts his head and reads titles. We see him pull a few out and slide them back into place. At last he selects a title by Thich Nhat Hahn titled *You Are Here*.

BEN

Hmmm, this looks good.

As Ben approaches the check out desk, the cashier recognizes him. It is a former student, JANELLE, 27, dark complexion and braided hair, short. Janelle waves her hand.

JANELLE

Professor Schnell? Is that you.

BEN

It is me Janelle, and you're welcome to call me Ben.

JANELLE

What did you find today?

BEN

Just some writing by a pretty well respected buddhist, from what I've heard.

Janelle looks a little surprised.

JANELLE

My uncle used to say, you can rub buddhas' belly all you want but he won't answer none of your prayers.

Ben has heard this joke before, growing up. It's an old evangelical favorite.

BEN
Different religions believe
different things, right? That is
certainly something we talked
about, if you remember.

Janelle continues to ring out Ben's purchases.

JANELLE
I do remember, just saying. That'll
be 42 dollars 80 today Mr. Schnell.

Ben pays her with cash. He takes his bags and leaves the bookstore with a pocket full of change.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S STUDY-EVENING

AUSTIN, 40, short with a graying beard and glasses, is playing an acoustic guitar. He is looking at an iPad. Scrolling songs, he comes across an old church song. He thinks about it for a moment, but he's put off by it

AUSTIN
(strumming the guitar)
No thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. A SUBURBAN BEDROOM - EVENING

MONICA, Austin's Wife, 37, tan with shoulder length bleach blonde hair is putting earrings on and sprays a little perfume. She's a stay at home wife and we see it, in how she carries herself.

MONICA
(Loudly)
Honey! Can you put that up and
start getting ready to go?

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S STUDY-EVENING

Back in the home office Austin opens his guitar case to place his guitar inside, a photo of four friends, including Monica and himself falls out. He picks up the photo, looks intently at it and places it back into the guitar case.

CUT TO:

INT. A DIVE BAR - NIGHT

GLORIA, 37, average build, short blue hair, leather jacket clad with shorts and tights on, is drinking heavily at a dive bar. We see her downing shots. She is singing punk rock songs loudly. She goes into the bathroom. She is throwing up, and crying. She is a mess.

CUT TO:

INT. A DIVE BAR BATHROOM- NIGHT

BAR GIRL
Honey, are you okay?

Gloria is puking, and wiping her mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben is cooking dinner. He listens to music loudly. He is dancing while stirring rice noodles and chopping vegetables. He is full of life, and seems very happy. He is listening to a indie rock band and singing along.

CUT TO:

I/E. A NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Monica and Austin are at a fine restaurant. They smile at each other. Austin fidgets with his napkin and his glass a little. The waiter approaches...

WAITER
Are we ready to order? Can I get
you two more wine?

AUSTIN
More wine and more bread please.
And just a little more time to
decide.

WAITER
Certainly, I'll be back with more
wine and bread in a moment.

The waiter walks away.

MONICA
What's wrong honey?

Austin looks up, directly at Monica. He reaches for her hand.

AUSTIN
(Quietly)
I, I just feel like work has been
taking so much of my time
lately...I wish we could take a
vacation or something.

Monica shifts in her seat a bit.

MONICA
That could be nice. We could go
somewhere warm.

AUSTIN
Yeah, like Cancun?

Monica scrunches her face.

MONICA
Mexico?

Austin looks down again at the cloth napkin on his lap.

MONICA (CONT'D)
What about Duck Key?

AUSTIN
Where the hell is Duck Key?

Monica laughs at his ignorance.

MONICA
It's a luxury spot in Florida.

AUSTIN
Florida's not really my thing...but
maybe we could look into it.

Monica pulls Austin's hand to her lips. She kisses his hand and rubs it.

MONICA
Florida. Maybe next year?

AUSTIN
Maybe.

The waiter approaches once again.

WAITER
Are we ready to order folks?

AUSTIN
Yes.

INT. A DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Gloria is back out on the floor of the bar. She is taking a shot. Across the bar we see the girl from the bathroom talking to the bar tender.

GLORIA
(under her breath)
Fucking bitch

BAR-TENDER TYLER, 25, walks over to Gloria who is waiting at the bar.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
(Slurring her speech)
Another Jameson shot please!

BAR-TENDER TYLER
Sorry Gloria, you're cut you off.

Gloria knows she won't win this battle. She shrugs.

GLORIA
(slurs)
What the fuck ever Tyler, I'm just going to be "social"

BAR-TENDER TYLER
Sure, feel free. Just don't get into trouble Gloria.

GLORIA
(Laughs manically)
I am trouble!

She starts a conversation shortly after with an older man at the other end of the bar. The bar is too loud to hear their conversation, but she leaves on foot with the stranger.

INT. A SMALL UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM - DAY

Ben is teaching one of his sociology classes. They are discussing death and grief rituals in different cultures.

BEN

So a lot of cultures have this ritual where people mourn through the physical ritual of tearing clothes. Or by covering oneself in ashes.

STUDENT

(snickers)

That sounds like a brutal party.

SECOND STUDENT

(lightly laughs)

Right, right like let me just wreck my fit for my dead friends.

STUDENT

Sounds like something you do after a break-up.

BEN

Well, that's kind of telling something about you.

The students all laugh.

BEN (CONT'D)

Okay...okay. He is right though, love can drive us to do irrational things, that don't make sense to societies norms. That brings us to a deeper question. Is ritual response to events rational? Do we expect anyone to be rational in the face of death or loss of loved ones?

Ben begins coughing a little. He get's a sip of water.

STUDENT

Yo, Mr. Schnell, you don't have covid or something do you?

BEN

No, Jeremy. I have had this nagging cough for a few days. It's probably just a summer cold. I took a test...negative.

STUDENT

Good, I can't afford to have you taking time off. I've got you this semester and next semester. Stay good.

Ben catches his breathe, rubs the center of his chest a bit, and clears his throat.

BEN

That's my plan. Let's continue with our discussion.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Gloria wakes up in a strangers apartment. He is no where to be found. She begins to gather her things from the floor and the night stand.

GLORIA

(quietly)

What happened to making better choices Gloria?

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Austin has several mock up items around his office. We see a picture of his wedding day on the wall. It is clear by the size of, and views from the office, he has a higher position in the firm.

Austin is working on a dual screen system. His office phone rings. He picks it up.

AUSTIN

Hello this is Austin Mesning, how can I help you.

The secretary from MR. GLENDUSER is on the line.

SECRETARY (O.S)

Mr. Mesning, Mr. Glendauser is on the line, transferring now.

Austin immediately straightens up in his chair. He clears his throat.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

Mesning! You're still working on that new project for The Silver Campaign?

AUSTIN

Yessir. I'm nearly finished, I just need a day or two.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

I hope that you'll need less time on this next client.

Austin blushes. He feels flustered already getting another new large project. The Silver campaign took nearly three quarters of the year to complete and already he has another assignment lined up?

AUSTIN

Next client, sir?

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

This one is going to take a lot of long nights Mesning. Think you've got your shit together enough to take on Artists Gala?

Austin nearly falls out of his chair. That assignment is a huge profit generator for the firm.

AUSTIN

Yessir, I have the time for that account!

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

Good. Because their deadline is the end of the forth quarter. It's a new campaign rolling out first quarter next year.

AUSTIN

Understood.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S)

Good. We'll send the file over to your office.

(beat)

(MORE)

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S) (CONT'D)
 You pull this off and they'll be
 big things happening in your next
 review. Good day.

The call ends, and Austin mouths "my god" silently.

INT. DIVE BAR - LATE MORNING

Gloria bangs on the window from outside the bar. Tyler
 working early today, recognizes her voice.

GLORIA
 (muffled through the
 glass)
 Ty, let me in. You guys have my
 keys and my I.D.

Tyler walks to the door, unlocks it and let's Gloria in.

TYLER
 Good morning Gloria

GLORIA
 What's up Tyler.

TYLER
 Are you trying to square up on your
 tab today?

GLORIA
 Yeah, yeah...let's do it.

Tyler reaches behind the bar, retrieves Gloria's keys and
 wallet. He can tell Gloria is extremely groggy. He passes her
 belongs to her.

TYLER
 How about we get you some coffee? I
 have some from the place down the
 road.

GLORIA
 Sure. Sounds great.

Gloria begins to pick through her pockets. She pulls out a
 slip of paper, put in her pocket by the stranger, which has
 his name and number on it.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
 (embarrassed)
 Ohhhh, Ty....I slept with someone
 named Gary

TYLER
I suppose you did.

Gloria puts her hands on her hair, and rolls her eyes.

GLORIA
What do I owe you today Ty?

Tyler looks up her tab on the wall, while she dumps 3 tablespoons of sugar into a 12oz cup of coffee.

TYLER
You owe the bar...

Tyler is reviewing her receipts.

TYLER (CONT'D)
(tutting with his mouth)
One hundred and forty four dollars.

GLORIA
Jesus! Tyler don't let me do that again!

Gloria hands over her card. Tyler is running it when Gloria sees the clock.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Ohhh shit, is that clock right?

TYLER
Yes, it is.

Gloria chugs the coffee burning her mouth and spilling a little. She quickly signs her name and runs out the door.

TYLER (CONT'D)
Okay, bye Gloria.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Monica is washing dishes and sipping a glass of wine. There is a man in his fifties sitting at the table. Monica's phone rings. She signals to the older man, placing her index finger over her lips. She picks up her phone.

MONICA
Hi honey, how is your day going?

AUSTIN (O.S.)
It's been absolutely crazy.

MONICA

What do you mean sweetheart?

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Mr. Glendauser is giving me the Artists Gala account!

Monica's eyes go wide.

MONICA

Oh my god Austin, that's a huge deal!

Monica knows that the better Austin does in his career, the better her life will be.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

It is. It's just that it's going to mean more time in the office and more time working at home on the weekends.

MONICA

Of course.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

So you're okay with me taking on this work?

MONICA

Duck Key isn't going to pay for itself.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Yeah, sure Duck Key.

Austin sounds annoyed.

MONICA

Get it babe!

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

Gloria is at work. Her supervisor approaches her.

CHRISTINE

Gloria, you're late again.

Gloria is irritated, but tries to explain

GLORIA
I'm sorry I was...I

CHRISTINE
No. No excuses. Also you smell like
you've been drinking.

Gloria turns beet red.

GLORIA
Ohhh, uhm...

CHRISTINE
H.R. is waiting for you.

Gloria gets up and tries to collect herself. She walks down the rows of cubicles until she reaches the elevator. She hits the up arrow. Her level of discomfort is visible to all around her.

CUT TO:

INT. HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE - DAY

The conversation about the tardiness and the alcohol is concluding...

H.R. CATHY
So, with all this considered. You
can accept our terms to you today,
or you can offer your resignation.

Gloria is crying, she knows she has hit rock bottom. She needs this job. She feels it's the only thing she's good at. She concedes to their request.

GLORIA
(Sobbing)
So what are your terms?

H.R. CATHY
You are going to be put on two
weeks unpaid leave, and will be
required to show you have begun
alcoholics anonymous or some
treatment program that is similar.

GLORIA
But, I...

H.R. CATHY
No buts Ms. Meris. You go, or you
find another job.

GLORIA
Okay, I'll go.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ben is watching a documentary on skateboarders and artists. Feeling hungry he gets up from his chair. He walks to the kitchen. He starts looking through cabinets. He begins coughing violently.

BEN
(wheezing)
Oh fuck.

Ben collapses onto the kitchen floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S HOME - EVENING

We see EMS workers going through Ben's door. The exterior of the house is well kept. Ben's car sits in the drive way.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN

The EMS workers are entering his kitchen. He's sitting on the floor, blood on his head and hands.

EMS WORKER
Ben, hello my name is Seth. I'm going to get you assessed and by the looks of the blood there, we'll be taking you to the hospital okay?

BEN
(groggy)
Okay Seth

EMS SETH
Can you tell us what was going on before you fell?

BEN
(regaining composure)
I was watching T.V., I got up to get something to eat.
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

I just kept coughing and couldn't catch my breath.

The EMS team evaluate Ben, taking his blood pressure, checking the response of his pupils to light, using a pulse-ox on him. They talk as Ben sits stunned still.

EMS SETH

Alright Ben, we're going to get you on this stretcher. Are you able to stand up?

BEN

I think, yes.

They help him up, and he slowly gets adjusted on the EMS stretcher.

EMS SETH

Is there anyone you would like us to call for you Ben?

BEN

No. It's just me.

FADE TO:

INT. STRIP MALL CHURCH - NIGHT

A medium sized congregation of evangelical Christians are singing and playing tambourines. They wave purple flags. They speak in tongues. On the edge of the crowd we see Monica. She is clapping and swaying to the guitar and drums.

PASTOR JIM

GOD! God has a plan. He is doing a new thing today in our nation. We are seeing the falling away of the non-believer.

CONGREGATION

Amen Pastor!

PASTOR JIM

God, is moving believers into positions of power, that they might have dominion over the darkness
amen!

CONGREGATION

(louder)
Amen!

PASTOR JIM

Have no doubt! Have no doubts! God
will not be mocked!

CONGREGATE

That's right!

The congregation is "on fire" for their god. Monica is lifting her arms and speaking in tongues. Notably, Austin is no where to be found.

FADE TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Ben is visiting his primary care doctor. DR. CARR, aged 48, short black hair, thin, and wearing light aviator style frames shakes Ben's hand as she enters the exam room.

DR. CARR

Hello Ben. It's always nice to see
you, although not in this
condition.

It's been a week since Ben got out of the hospital.

BEN

So, any ideas of what happened?

Dr. Carr sits across from Ben. She makes direct eye contact.

DR. CARR

So, yes, we have some new
information for you.

BEN

Okay. Lay it on me Dr. Carr.

Dr. Carr scrolls on the computer next to where Ben is sitting. She types a few things into the computer.

DR. CARR

Ben you have a few tumors in your
abdomen.

Ben puts his head down. He rubs his hands and his scalp. He winces when he touches the fresh scar from where he busted his head open.

DR. CARR (CONT'D)

Ben, this doesn't mean we can't
treat you.

Ben lifts his head up

BEN

So what does that mean, do I have cancer or something?

Dr. Carr, truly the professional practicing great bed side manner.

DR. CARR

Well, we don't know anything definitively yet Ben. We are going to have you get a few more tests and some bloodwork done before you leave the campus today.

Ben, is visibly upset. But he understands that he could be a wide range of things. He is intelligent enough to know not to jump to conclusions...

BEN

So, how long does the blood work usually take to get back if I go after this?

DR. CARR

Usually we get blood work back the same day.

Ben shifts in his seat. He's obviously nervous...

BEN

Okay. I'll go when we're done.

Dr. Carr points to the examination table. She looks calmly at Ben.

DR. CARR

Okay, let's get a listen and a look quickly for you here.

Dr. Carr, listens to Ben's heart and lungs. Her face gets serious as she is standing behind him listening. She regains her composure.

DR. CARR (CONT'D)

How's the appetite been Ben?

BEN

It's been alright, just struggling in the last few weeks with eating enough.

Dr. Carr looks at his chart again on the computer. She scrolls to his weight.

DR. CARR

Yeah, so Ben, it appears that you have lost like 12 pounds since our last appointment in the Spring.

BEN

That was the annual physical?

DR. CARR

Yes.

Ben tries to lighten the topic.

BEN

Wow, time really passes by so quickly the older you get.

Dr. Carr, still scrolling on her computer

DR. CARR

Yes, yes it certainly does.

Dr. Carr, begins to get up. They leave the exam room and walk down a narrow hall where she gives Ben some information. As she passes the paperwork to him

DR. CARR (CONT'D)

Ben, are you still publishing your work on religion and society this Fall?

Ben, always appreciates when Dr. Carr brings up his work

BEN

Yes, Dr. Carr. I just submitted my book to the editors last Friday.

Dr. Carr, genuinely excited

DR. CARR

That's wonderful Ben, I cannot wait to read it. I'll call you tonight with any pressing results okay?

BEN

Okay, that sounds good. Thank You.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S HOME - EVENING

Austin goes to pull in the driveway. He notices several cars on his street, and two in his drive way. Slightly irritated, he drives up a bit further, about 6 cars distance from his house, on the street. Walking to his house he remembers

AUSTIN

Shit, today is Thursday.

Austin approaches the door, it's locked. The ring camera chimes. Monica speaks through the RING camera

MONICA

Hello honey, were you working late?

Austin, more irritated, because he just told her less than 10 hours ago, that he was offered Artists Gala.

AUSTIN

(fake smiles)

Yes sweetheart. I got that new account, remember?

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Monica is surrounded by about 9 people. There are kids playing in a corner with simple toys. Bibles sit on laps, and we see an acoustic guitar and a cajun drum is underneath, the neighbor, JERRY, 52, who gets up as Monica waves her hand towards him.

MONICA

Oh, yes of course, we had talked about that big client you landed.

The way Monica says what Austin already knows, is ridiculous. It is of course a status symbol in her church for your husband to be successful.

AUSTIN

Yes. The conversation we had at one o'clock this afternoon.

MONICA

(laughs daftly)

Okay honey, we're going to be in the basement, we saved some roast for you in the crock pot.

AUSTIN

Yum, yu...

As Austin finishes his thought and is fishing out his keys, Jerry opens the door.

JERRY

Hey A-town!

Jerry's stupid nickname for his neighbor.

AUSTIN

Hi Jerry. How are you doing?

Austin fakes interest in anything Jerry has to say.

JERRY

Doing real good. God's been really blessing my family and my business.

AUSTIN

Oh, yeah sure. What's the name of the import business again?

JERRY

Zion Collections.

AUSTIN

That's right. You get all those food products from Israeli farmers.

Jerry is visibly excited that Austin remembered that detail. Austin is opening a cold beer pulled from the fridge.

JERRY

That's right. You remembered.

(beat)

So, hey, still playing the guitar?

AUSTIN

Yeah man. In the precious little free time that I have.

They begin to walk towards the basement steps.

JERRY

Are you joining us?

Austin, still carrying the beer, looks at Jerry.

AUSTIN

No, Jerry. I just want to say hello to my wife, and grab something for work.

JERRY

Ohhh, yes, yes of course.

They open the basement door and walk down.

MONICA

Hi honey! It's so nice to have you here with us.

Monica sees the beer, and her eyes shoot daggers at Austin, all the while she is still smiling.

AUSTIN

Hi everyone!

BIBLE STUDY GROUP

(In unison)

Hi Austin!

AUSTIN

Don't let me interrupt your study of god's word. I just wanted to say hi to my wife and grab a file.

Monica gets up and walks over, hugging Austin. Her back to the tiny congregation in the basement.

MONICA

(whispers)

If you ever bring a beer down to my bible group again, you will be sleeping on the couch for a month.

Austin smirks a little, but then sees that she is genuinely upset.

AUSTIN

(whispers)

Sorry dear.

Monica turns back around without missing a beat. As Austin pulls a file from the cabinet behind the couches and folding chairs, Monica exclaims loudly

MONICA

(loudly)

Everyone, just today, Austin was blessed with an opportunity to work with Artists Gala.

Austin looks back over his shoulder.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP

(Unison)

Ohhhhh!

BILLY, 17, Jerry's step-son, who always likes to talk to Austin on the rare occasions Austin goes to a neighborhood event, or on the rarer occasions that he goes to Monica's Church speaks up, as he is the only one who knows what that actually is

BILLY

(Excitedly)

Mr. Mesning does that mean that you'll be working with the artists and musicians at all?

AUSTIN

Well, it depends on if they like my proposal. That's the hardest part of public relations work.

(beat)

It is, but it's a lot of work, honestly.

Billy nods. Austin lifts the file he came to look for. It's the past campaigns for the Artists Gala.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I suppose I better get to my homework everyone.

Austin walks up the stairs, as Jerry pats him on the back.

CUT TO:

INT. UNION WORKERS HALL - NIGHT

Gloria's back is facing the camera. She is seated in a circle. Camera zooms out and we see the group she is sitting with, this is her regular meeting with AA. STANLEY, 62, balding with a pony tail and a soft white beard, glasses gently pats Gloria on the back. He ceremoniously hands her a three month chip.

STANLEY

We celebrate 90 days of sobriety for our friend Gloria this evening!

A.A. GROUP

Congratulations Gloria!

Gloria has been working her way through the steps, but she is still struggling a bit with the past. She blushes, and takes the chip. Holding it in her palm, she smiles slightly.

GLORIA

Thank you so much everyone. This group has really been so helpful with getting my life back.

Gloria has been struggling with sobriety lately, but has remained strong.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I have to be honest, it's been difficult lately, but with your support things have been easier

The group claps. The meeting is concluding, but there are donuts, coffee, cider and water on a table at the rear of the hall. Gloria and others are congregating around the sugary treats. JANE, 26, multicolored hair, and poke and stick tattoos on her arms and legs, whose only two weeks into her journey, turns to Gloria

JANE

You are so awesome Gloria. I mean, I'm struggling on the daily, and you are doing it

Gloria turns around, she looks at Jane's hair colors this week, it is darker. Something about Jane reminds Gloria of her younger days.

GLORIA

Well, thanks Jane. You know, you are probably doing great working towards that three week chip. Let's celebrate that too.

Gloria raises her cup of cider and 'clinks' Jane's water. Jane blushes. She wants to connect with Gloria.

JANE

Awww, thanks Gloria. I just feel like I can't help but fuck it up every time I've tried. But that was before the group.

Gloria nods her head as she takes a drink.

GLORIA

Well, I definitely wouldn't be doing as well without the group and my sponsor.

Jane, seeing an opportunity to bring up the topic

JANE

So, uhhh, would you want to hang out sometime? Maybe catch a movie or get some lunch?

Gloria, blushes again, she looks down at her feet, then up at Jane, this time in her eyes

GLORIA

Jane, I would love to hang out sometime.

The two exchange phone numbers. Gloria and Jane walk to the exit, they embrace and they go their separate ways.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ben is reading on a tablet. He skips around a bit to different health and medical sites, primarily the ones where people try to make sense of their doctor's jargon, to figure out if they are going to die or not. He has been waiting for Dr. Carr to call him back. His phone rings as he begins to fall asleep.

BEN

(Sleepy still)
Hello, this is Ben.

DR. CARR (O.S.)

Hello, Ben, this is Dr. Carr calling with some results for you.

Ben gets himself off the couch he was stretched out on. He puts the iPad that was beside him down. And silently yawns. He begins to make some tea.

BEN

Hello Dr. Carr. What news do you have for me?

Dr. Carr clears her throat.

DR. CARR (O.S.)

Well, Ben, I'm going to be upfront with you.

(beat)

You have several large-than-average masses in your chest cavity.

Ben's shoulders feel heavy. He puts his hands down on the sink before him, his head drops. He turns off the water he was running into a kettle.

BEN

What does that mean specifically
Dr. Carr?

DR. CARR (O.S.)

Well, Ben. They could be benign or malignant. There's going to be more tests to determine the status of these growths.

BEN

Alright. Whatever you think is best. Will you be scheduling those tests or do I have orders in?

DR. CARR (O.S.)

Yes, I will schedule those tests, and we'll send you directions for the day. I'll also need you to start following up with an oncologist. He will support you through these processes.

Ben seems confused. He is back on his couch. He is sipping his tea finally. But puts his cup down on the coffee table before him.

BEN

Dr. Carr, why do I have a tumor? I mean I only smoked for like 3 years, and I was an infrequent smoker at that. I eat fairly healthy. It just doesn't make much sense.

DR. CARR (O.S.)

It doesn't always make sense Ben. There are many other factors we can determine, along with some we cannot that could have produced these masses.

Ben retrieves a notepad from the side table beside the couch and pulls a pen out of a smaller drawer on the side table.

BEN

What's the oncologist name?

DR. CARR (O.S.)
Doctor Argelino. And you'll have a meeting with a case worker if you'd like as well.

BEN
I would like that very much Dr. Carr. Thanks.

Ben looks over at the manuscript for his book.

BEN (CONT'D)
Dr. Carr, can I ask you a question?

DR. CARR (O.S.)
Absolutely, although Dr. Argelino will have more...

BEN
No, it's not about the cancer. I wanted to ask you, if you think I should still go through with my book?

DR. CARR (O.S.)
Well, from a clinical point of view, it could require a lot of you. Your energy levels might be better off, putting a pin in that.

BEN
Yeah, I guess that's true

DR. CARR (O.S.)
But, from my personal point of view, I believe your work is important and has much to offer those who are interested in the subjects you discuss.

Ben is by the thick paper manuscript.

BEN
I guess there is no reason to wait. Besides, they always seem to have decent receptions for release parties.

DR. CARR (O.S.)
(laughs lightly)
Take care Ben. I'll reach out to you again once you've touched base with Dr. Argelino

BEN
Good night, Dr. Carr

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben's room is filled with bookcases. A lot of titles regarding sociology, politics, economics, religion, and a few fictional titles mixed in. His bed is a king size with green and blue blankets. His night stand has several books on it. Ben pulls a photo album off the shelf in his closet. He flips through, until he comes across a photo, the same one that was in Austin's guitar case. He looks at the picture for some time before he goes back to his desk in the living room.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben picks up the pen from the coffee table. Walking to his home printer he picks a few sheets of blank paper off the printer. He sits down at his desk and begins penning letters.

We see him writing the letters as his kettle continues to sit with steam pouring out of the open spout

BEN
(Narration)
Dear Austin, I am writing to invite you to my publication day party at the university. I have been working to explore the way religion influences society and individuals. While I know this topic is hard to discuss, I assure you, there will be no discussion that we'd have to participate in. My participation in this effort is merely academic, and the food and drink are usually pretty top-shelf at these sorts of gigs. I'm sorry I haven't written in a while. I love you brother, I hope to see you soon. Sincerely, your best man, Ben. P.S. I hope Monica is well, give her my love.

Ben then gets into side desk drawer. He pulls out a postcard and places them in an envelop. He puts the letter and the postcard in a mailer. He goes back to his writing desk...

BEN (CONT'D)
(narration)
Dear Gloria...

At this point the music and scene fade out, we do not learn what his letter to Gloria entails.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. A ZEN CENTER - EVENING

Ben is surrounded by practitioners on zafus. Some of the people shift around. There is incense burning. There is a Buddha statue in the center of the room. Rows of people on each side of the hall. Ben feels physically uncomfortable, but he wants to be there, in meditation, doing nothing but sitting.

The sound of a bell rings. We see SAMMI, 62, shorter in height, white haired, and a little chubby, wearing glasses, move from a bell in the corner area to the center of the meditation group.

SAMMI

And we take a deep breath in. We remember we are here with our bodies, in this moment.

Ben smiles and then winces a little.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

And we breath out. Remembering that this moment is all we need for living.

The practitioners come to Ben's side and help him get up from the Zafu he's been sitting on. They are careful with him and treat him gently.

BEN

Thank you very much.

Everyone walks towards a meeting hall at the front of the building.

INT. ZEN CENTER MEETING ROOM - DUSK

We see the sun setting through the windows. It is beautiful. There are small statues around the meeting room. Sammi is in the corner kitchenette area. They are turning on a small electric kettle. They walk over to the small cabinet against the wall, they pull out a jar with tea leaves, as well as sugar, honey, and non-dairy creamer. they procure several wooden spoons. As they are walking back to the small seating area, one of the practitioners is unwrapping cookies they made to share. This time is for discussion.

SAMMI

So what do we want to talk about
today friends?

Ben looks around. No one is responding to Sammi's questions.
He sees a lot of new faces in the crowd.

BEN

Uhm, what about letting go?

Sammi looks over at Ben and lifts her eyes and face slightly.

SAMMI

Letting go of what Ben?

BEN

The past?

Sammi looks at Ben, they know he is dealing with a lot, and
has expressed struggling with past regret and pain before.

SAMMI

Ok, Ben.

(beat)

Is everyone okay with that.

The group nods in unison. Sammi walks back over to the kettle
that is now whistling. They bring the kettle back over to the
table. They place it on top of a small woven potholder.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

If anyone would like some tea,
please feel free.

A few practitioners begin to fill up tea balls with tea
leaves. Others then fill up cups with hot water. The
practitioners do this in somewhat of an assembly line.
Filling cups, passing cups. Passing raisin filled cookies.

The group is fond of this ritual, they welcome it with every
meditation session.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

So are ready to start our
conversation folks?

The group all nod.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

So Ben, since you were the one who
brought up the topic of letting go
of the past, do you want to tell us
why you feel that is important?

Ben, who has only been a part of the group for several months, feels a little awkward being put on the spot. But he opens up.

BEN

I just feel like so much of the past can cause suffering. For myself anyway.

Sammi senses that Ben may be talking about this now, because of the present time.

SAMMI

Do you think it's a memory or a person that's the source of this suffering?

Ben takes a moment to think about his response. It's a really good question.

BEN

I would say it's religious people. And all these questions about god, and eternal life that they constantly talk about...but it's really just trivial and vain.

Sammi feels that Ben has a history with organized religion. Their suspicion is correct. They don't interrupt him, but lets him continue sharing his thoughts...

BEN (CONT'D)

And that's just religious people. Then you have the christian-right types.

(beat)

They spend their lives inflating their gender, race, and politics into their thin belief in a god who would reward already privileged people, while He, and it's always He, believe me, denies the basic necessities to the wretched of the world. He who works so hard for wall street and the military-industrial-complex, and callously condemns a billion humans, created, mind you in his very image, to desperate poverty or the living hell of war.

Sammi begins to understand that Ben is unloading, they feel it might be good to intervene something into Ben's anger, but others in the meditation group begin to agree.

GROUP MEMBER ONE

It's like they can always justify the most horrendous stuff.

GROUP MEMBER TWO

And they think that any other religion or spiritual beliefs are either of satan, or some kind of joke fodder.

Sammi, begins to deeply listen. We see an ah-ha moment pop into their mind, as they look around and nod slightly.

BEN

The worst part of it, I mean the absolute worst part of it, is that it's as if they took the bible, and just decided to teach, for centuries, the opposite of what the prophets and the very figure-head of that religion, Jesus Christ, lived and died for according to their holy book.

Sammi waits for Ben to take a breath.

BEN (CONT'D)

I just can't wrap my head around it. It's all these so-called leaders making a killing off of convincing people that they are personally tied to some bastardized version of god, and the reality is they embody the deadliest transgressions against love and peace and hope.

Ben finally stops. His face has become red. Sammi speaks up. Sammi walks over and gently touches Ben's hand. They gently squeeze his hand.

BEN (CONT'D)

(exasperated)

I'm sorry I know it's not the right time to unload all my hate.

SAMMI

Well, Ben. I don't accept that you have hate in you. I accept that you are hurt. I can understand that you are traumatized from something, but I don't believe it's from all those who claim to be Christians.

(MORE)

SAMMI (CONT'D)

I would like to believe it's people, and their fractured understanding that has caused your suffering.

(beat)

Ben, I think we are touching on something that seems to have affected many of us here today, more than I truly understood. I think we have something that we can vote on regarding the next retreat.

The group begin talking amongst themselves. The general census seems to be agreement.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Alright friends. Let's have a vote.

GROUP MEMBER TWO

A secret vote!

Sammi looks at those, who are looking back eagerly at them.

SAMMI

Yes, of course! Let me gather paper and pencils.

Sammi walks to a different cabinet in the rear of the meeting area. They retrieve several pieces of construction paper and a few small golf pencils. They pass them out. The group votes.

GROUP MEMBER ONE

Well, Sammi, it looks like religious past lives is the winner.

SAMMI

So, I think we can continue this discussion with the clarity that being able to sit with it for a bit brings. We'll discuss this topic further at a retreat, soon.

That information seems to satisfy Ben and the other practitioners who are worked up now. Ben's pain resonated with a lot of their own personal pain and grievances.

CUT TO:

INT. PR FIRM MEETING ROOM - MID MORNING

Austin is giving his big presentation to the directors of Artist Gala. He is nervous, but not letting it show enough to effect his presentation.

AUSTIN

So with the new ad style, paying homage to the 1920's, the birth of so much of technology and literature that influences our world today, and with the 100th anniversary just a mere seven years away, I think everyone would welcome this type of gilded age appeal.

One of the directors raises his hand.

BOARD MEMBER STEVENS

I like what you're going for here son. I'm just not sure about including the words, gilded age in your campaign pitch.

Austin looks down. Did he blow the pitch? The biggest client he's ever been assigned, and one phrase blows the whole thing out of order.

DIRECTOR MACKIE

Well, with the exception perhaps of a few phrases, I think your pitch landed perfectly. The anniversary is an important season, and it is fast approaching. I think this campaign might be better designed for the campaign seven years out. Are you up for that task?

Austin is taken back, his pitch didn't just land, it was laser guided to a bullseye.

AUSTIN

Well, I mean, I would love to take on that campaign.

BOARD MEMBER STEVENS

(rudely)

Let's not get ahead of ourselves here Mackie. We still need a viable campaign and theme for this year.

At this point, MR. FRANK GLENDUSER, 70, director of the firm, short, stocky, balding, with a thick mustache enters the room.

DIRECTOR MACKIE

Welcome in Frank, it's nice to see you join our very lively discussion.

MR. GLENDUSER

How's my boy doing up there gentlemen?

DIRECTOR MACKIE

He's doing very well, even with Stevens trying to pin him in a corner.

MR. GLENDUSER

Well, I wouldn't expect anything less...so Austin get me up to speed.

Austin begins to explain to Mr. Glendauser, what he is picturing for the future campaign. Glendauser, doesn't know what he's talking about...Austin's excitement gets the best of him

MR. GLENDUSER (CONT'D)

What the hell do you mean the century campaign Mesning? You're getting a little ahead of yourself aren't you?

Director Mackie interrupts Mr. Glendauser, with a thump of his hand on the table

DIRECTOR MACKIE

(shouting)

Frank, he's talking about the century campaign, because I offered the century campaign to him!

Mr. Glendauser immediately backs down.

MR. GLENDUSER

Ohhh, well, if Artists Gala would like to contract for the next seven years, we'd be glad to draw up a contract for the century campaign and the remaining campaigns between next year and then.

Austin begins to sweat, but remains silent.

DIRECTOR MACKIE

Well, let's see what your man comes up with for this years campaign first. Then we'll discuss the next seven years.

Frank Glendauser's eyes go wide. It worked, his pitch hit the target. But now, Austin Mesning must pull through, and with only weeks time.

MR. GLENDUSER

Well, Mesning, are you up for such a challenge as this?

AUSTIN

Sir, I believe

All of a sudden, Austin begins to feel his watch vibrate, his computer shows an incoming call, from an unknown number. Austin is flustered because he forgot to turn off notifications. He quickly slaps his hand over his smart watch.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

(laughs nervously)

So sorry about that gentlemen. I seem to have forgotten my settings adjustment prior to our meeting.

Glendauser locks eyes with him. Austin knows he might have gotten himself in trouble. It's one of the rules of the firm. Austin quickly recovers

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Sir, I believe that I can deliver a proposal for the current campaign, and beyond.

Frank Glendauser, now impressed. Looks favorably at Austin.

MR. GLENDUSER

Okay, Mesning, you're on the assignment.

Austin feels relief spread throughout his anxiety ridden body,

MR. GLENDUSER (CONT'D)

But, I'll decide if you do the campaigns for the next six years.

The meeting concludes. As the Board of Artists Gala exit the room. Frank Glendauser holds on to Austin's shoulder as the room clears.

MR. GLENDUSER (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

You know the rules for meetings. Do not let that happen again. I don't care if it's your sick wife calling from home.

Austin silently exhales.

MR. GLENDUSER (CONT'D)

Excellent job on securing the contract for the partners of this firm.

Austin smiles. This meeting went so much better than he could have envisioned.

AUSTIN

Yessir. It won't happen again. And thank you sir.

CUT TO:

INT. GLORIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gloria has just returned home from work. She retrieves the mail from her box and walks upstairs to her apartment. She enters. Her roommate Jane is watching T.V. and eating snacks on the couch. Jane's boyfriend, DERRICK, 28, tall and lean, blonde shaggy hair, with lots of tattoos is on the couch as well. Jane's dog is wagging her tail as greets Gloria at the door. SHELBY, a golden retriever jumps up to say hello to Gloria.

GLORIA

(in a baby voice)

Hello Miss Shelby. Did you have a good day. Did you go for walkies. Did you eat all the treats?

Derrick and Jane raise their hand as in unison.

JANE

Hey Gloria! How was your day

Gloria finishes petting Shelby and is looking through the mail. She stops sorting and she drops the rest of the mail on the couch next to Derrick and Jane.

GLORIA

It was good, it was fine, uhm. I'll be right back.

Gloria goes into her room and shuts the door. She opens the letter. It's a letter from Ben.

BEN

(narration)

Dear Gloria, I am writing to you with the hope that this letter receives you well. I have thought about you and the times we spent together. I have thought about everything we went through so many years ago. There is no easy way to tell you this, but I have cancer. There is no way to know how far it has progressed. The doctor says I need to see oncology soon. I want to see you again. I invited Austin and Monica, because you can't have one without the other, to come back home. I must be honest, I invited them back for a different reason. I asked them to come here for a book release. I don't want them to know I've come down with this sickness. And, I hope you'd be proud to know I took the experiences we shared as god's rejects and channeled that into writing a collective book about religion and society. Anyways, I asked them to come out at the end of the month. I don't know how California has been treating you, but I would love to have you with us in Ohio again, perhaps for one last time. I've included a plane ticket for the twenty first. Come if you can, please. With all the love in the world, Ben.

Gloria bursts into tears. The letter isn't something poetic or beautifully written, but the weight of reading Ben's words, She can feel it. She bursts through her bedroom door, and waves the letter in front of Jane and Derrick. Jane is startled.

JANE

(surprised)

What's wrong Gloria, what's going on?

Gloria begins to read the letter back to Jane. Jane at this point knows the whole backstory of Gloria's faith, friendship, and fall from the church's good graces.

GLORIA

(sobbing)

I'm going. I'm sorry, I'll pay the next month of rent in advanced. But I'm going okay.

JANE

Of course you're going! You have to go. Will you be okay out there.

DERRICK

Out where? What's going on?

Jane, turning to Derrick puts her finger over his mouth.

JANE

Shhhh babe. I'll explain later. But she's going back to Ohio.

Gloria and Jane embrace.

JANE (CONT'D)

Go be with him Gloria. We'll be okay.

Gloria goes into her room. She finds the same picture that Ben and Austin had been looking at. She holds it to her heart.

GLORIA

(quietly, sobbing)

I'm coming home Ben. I'm coming.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Austin is excited to tell Monica his news. He quickly gathers the mail from the box. Without examining it, he jaunts inside of the house. Monica is finishing up dinner.

MONICA

Hi honey.

AUSTIN

I have huge news to tell you babe.

Monica is sipping wine, while flipping through a catalog. Her eyes get huge.

MONICA

What's that hon'?

AUSTIN

I landed the century campaign for
A.G.!

MONICA

That's amazing honey! But that's
not for another decade right?

Monica fails to see how big a deal this is for Austin...

AUSTIN

Babe, my pitch went so well, that
they contracted me for this year
and the century campaign.

Austin continues to talk as they walk through the house, he
begins to undress to take a shower. Monica smiles with
delight. She's so happy that Austin is doing so well in his
career. She is genuinely happy for him.

MONICA

God is good! All the time!

Austin, put off, would rather get credit for the hard work he
did then just chalk it up to god, but sure

AUSTIN

Yeah...uhm...all the time.

Austin gets in the shower. He is listening to upbeat music,
basking in the good news and dopamine his body has been
producing since his meeting.

MONICA

Well, honey I think we ought to do
something nice for ourselves
tonight.

Austin can barely hear Monica over the music and the shower.
Monica continues to walk back to the kitchen, she is flipping
through the mail and sees the letter to Austin and herself.
She recognizes the return address.

MONICA (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Austin! Austin! You should come out
here!

Austin hears her yelling, he turns down the water. Grabs a
towel, and walks to the kitchen. Dripping water, but in a
slight rush.

AUSTIN
(anxiously)
What is it Monica? What's going on?

Monica picks up the rest of the mail from where she dropped it. She hands Austin the letter. Austin takes the letter from her. He looks at it. He opens it rapidly.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
It's from Ben!

Monica shakes her head in agreement. Austin is holding the letter up. He is reading it.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - NIGHT

Ben is watching the sunset outside of the Zen Center. He is thinking about his life. In his hand are some prayer beads, he received from Sammi. Ben's phone rings and vibrates in his pocket. He sees who it's from

BEN
Hello Austin?

AUSTIN
Hey bud! How are things going?

Ben now knows that Austin received his letter. This makes him very happy.

BEN
Well, things have been pretty good
as of late.

Ben is not mentioning his health to Austin intentionally. It bothers him to do this, but he doesn't want to bring his friend down with such hard facts.

AUSTIN
(in a funny voice)
So you've got a book release party,
is it a party you have for that
kind of thing?

Ben and Austin laugh a little.

BEN
(Back in a silly voice)
It's uhhhh. It's a little shindig.
You know, nothing crazy.

They both start giggling. Ben starts coughing a little.

AUSTIN
You okay there pal?

Ben clears his throat and tries to speak, he struggles to stop wheezing for a minute.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
(calmly)
Ben, are you sick or something.

BEN
Yeah, no, just a little cough with the seasonal changes.

AUSTIN
So Ben, I got your letter. I wanted to let you know that I can do my best to get sometime away from the office.

BEN
Okay.

AUSTIN
I want to come see you, I do. I've just got a huge assignment, I just started working on. This project is called The Artists Gala. A big deal for Chicago musicians and artists, and every year they have a huge party where they give rewards, host live music, have tremendous amounts of local food.

Ben smiles. He's proud of his friend for doing something so big. He always believed Austin was capable of doing something amazing in the world.

BEN
So a bigger party than mine?

Austin lets out a little laugh, then a sigh.

AUSTIN
Let me talk to Monica, and let me talk to the firm.

BEN
Fair enough. Just let me know Austin.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S PATIO - EVENING

Austin watches as Monica comes out of the back door on to the patio. She is holding a glass of red wine. Monica looks at him with a slight pensive look on her face.

MONICA

Well, what did you tell him?

Austin is poking at a fire pit getting ready to set a new fire. He lights a match and throws it on some tinder.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I uh, I told him I'd talk to you and talk to the firm.

MONICA

(Sarcastically)

Talk to me? About what? The insane idea that you'd take time off work for a book party?

AUSTIN

(Irritated)

Honey, we haven't even back home since the wedding. Would it really be so bad to visit Ben? Maybe see some old friends?

Austin is frustrated and taking it out on the fire.

MONICA

Honey, be careful with that.

They look at each other. Austin lets go of his anger.

AUSTIN

(snickers)

Yeah, okay. Sorry.

Monica sits down.

MONICA

I mean it would be nice to see my Mom, and to see Ben.

Austin brightens up.

MONICA (CONT'D)

But, you've just landed the most important assignment you've ever been offered.

AUSTIN

This...this is true. But what if Mr. Glendauser let's me work on the project remotely?

MONICA

Well, I thought they got ride of remote work after Covid started to clear up.

AUSTIN

Well, they might be more inclined to make an exception for me, since this assignment comes with another six years of revenue.

Monica looks surprised. What do you mean?

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

When I presented the idea of "the gilded age" to the board of A.G. they want it for the century campaign, and they are willing to sign with Glendauser & Sthill for the next six campaigns.

Monica gets so excited she practically jumps on Austin!

MONICA

Ohhh my god honey.

She chugs the rest of her wine down.

MONICA (CONT'D)

They're going to make you a partner.

Austin smiles.

AUSTIN

You think so.

MONICA

(emphatically)

I mean, yes, absolutely!

Austin enjoys the supportive nature of this conversation. But his enjoyment is underpinned with knowing how much work he will have to put into the projects. And his knowledge that Monica is celebrating more, because he'll have job security and a much, much higher pay. He's the provider in the family of two.

AUSTIN
So, I mean, that's why I think I
have some sway.

MONICA
Ohhh yeah babe. You've got some
power now!

Austin finally sits down next to Monica. He reaches for her
hand and holds it.

AUSTIN
So what do you say about going home
in two weeks?

MONICA
If you want to do dear, we can go.
But only if, work will allow it.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben is home now. He's holding his prayer beads in his hand
again. We see medications strewn about his dresser. He is
undressing, and putting on pajama bottoms and a white shirt.
He picks up his phone. He calls Gloria's last known number.

GLORIA (O.S.)
Hello?

BEN
Gloria?

GLORIA (O.S.)
(elated)
Ohhhh my god! Benny? Is that you?

BEN
It's me Benny.

GLORIA (O.S.)
(chocking up)
I got your letter Ben. I, I don't
know what to say

BEN
Just tell me you can come back home
for a little while

Ben is getting teary eyed. Hearing the voice of the woman he
adores, whom he hasn't spoken to in years, is a relief of
sort.

GLORIA (O.S)
I'm coming Ben. You can count on
it. I'm sorry, it's been

BEN
Gloria. I know. It's okay. You had
to get away from this place. I get
it.

Ben takes a few pills and takes a gulp from a large glass of
water.

GLORIA (O.S.)
I just want to see you again.

BEN
And I want to see you. So two
weeks?

We hear Gloria sobbing on the other line.

GLORIA (O.S.)
Yes, of course.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Austin is gathering himself, before he goes to Mr. Glendauser
and Mr. Sthill. He knows he is asking something that runs
counter to the way they operate their firm. But he has yet to
take a vacation in the past two years. In fact he rarely
takes time off. Austin's office phone beeps.

AUSTIN
Hello, Austin Mesning's office.

It's the executive assistant on the other end.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Mr. Mesning, I have Mr. Glendauser
and Mr. Sthill on the line for you.
Please hold.

AUSTIN
Okay, thanks.

The phone clicks and beeps. Mr. Glendauser and Mr. Sthill are
now on the line

MR. STHILL (O.S)
Austin. Are you there? Frank?

Unlike Mr. Glendauser, Mr. Sthill almost never uses last names or formal titles.

AUSTIN
I'm here sir.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)
I'm here Sthill.

The three of them begin their meeting. A meeting that is taking place at Austin's request. He knows he has precious little time to sway them.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
So, Mesning, I hope this has something to do with Artists Gala current campaign.

Austin swallows hard.

AUSTIN
Well, I'll be quick gentlemen. I am requesting something that isn't regular practice here.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)
Alright, well, what is it?

AUSTIN
I am requesting that I might work remotely for the first week of October, possibly into the second week.

We can hear Glendauser getting frustrated, by his sighs and grunts.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)
Well, that's just not possible

Mr. Sthill interjects...

MR. STHILL (O.S.)
Hold on now Frank. Let's hear him out. Son, for what reason should you be able to work remote?

Austin understands this is his window.

AUSTIN
Well, gentlemen, as you know, I'm from Ohio originally. And I've not seen my wife's family or my closest friend in years.
(MORE)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

In fact, I've not taken a vacation in over two years. I was invited to Ohio for a week, perhaps two, in order to attend an important event for my closest friend.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

Mesning, it's not on us that you've not taken a vacation in two years, you've not asked and now

MR. STHILL (O.S.)

And now you are asking at a very important time for permission to work remote, so you can visit this friend, and attend this important event.

Austin senses that Sthill is leading him to an easy affirmation.

AUSTIN

Well, yessir. And it would also be an opportunity for my wife to see her mother.

Mr. Glendauser laughs heartily.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

Notice, Sthill how he doesn't say it's an opportunity to visit his mother-in-law, but rather his wife's chance to see her.

MR. STHILL (O.S.)

(laughing)

That's funny.

Austin braces himself for another objection from Glendauser.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)

Well Mesning. You are on the verge of landing us the largest account we've ever secured. That's nothing to scoff at. So

MR. STHILL (O.S.)

So, Austin, you keep up the good work and we'll look forward to seeing your work in a few weeks?

AUSTIN

Yessir. I will give it all I have.

MR. GLENDUSER (O.S.)
 Well, that's all we are asking. You
 land that pitch in October and we
 might just be talking about
 partnership next performance
 review.

Austin perks up. He is grateful his request has been granted,
 and hopeful that Glenduser's suggestion is genuine.

AUSTIN
 Thank You sir. I won't drop the
 ball.

MR. STHILL (O.S.)
 You're one of the best we've had
 come through our doors Austin.

AUSTIN
 Thank You Mr. Sthill.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S HOUSE - DAY

The couple are packing up their bags. Monica seems distracted
 by her phone. She keeps looking down at it. She's nervous
 about seeing her mother again. And she's nervous about Austin
 not being able to complete the assignment before him.

AUSTIN
 Are you okay honey? Are you waiting
 for your mother to call you?

Monica lies through her teeth.

MONICA
 Yeah, just hoping she's not
 overwhelmed by our coming there.

Austin tries to be reassuring...

AUSTIN
 Well, we can probably stay with Ben
 a day or two during our visit. I
 didn't talk to him about it, but
 I'm sure he'd be okay with it.

MONICA
 Yeah, that's probably true.

CUT TO:

As they are packing up the remainder of their possessions into their car, a green 2018 Subaru Hatchback. Jerry walks over.

JERRY

Hey neighbors. Where are you headed off to?

MONICA

Oh hi Jerry, Austin and I are headed to Ohio to visit family and some friends.

JERRY

Ohhh wow. That sounds like a good trip.

Austin sees Jerry approach him from the side.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You know A-town, I could keep an eye on the house for you guys while you're out of town.

Austin immediately turns him down.

AUSTIN

Thanks, but we'll be okay with our security system and Ring camera.

Jerry tries to get more details.

JERRY

So how long will you guys be in the Buckeye state?

MONICA

We'll be gone ten days.

Austin looks at the bags in the car. He shuts the trunk as Jerry gets out of the way and walks towards Monica.

JERRY

Well, we'll miss you at church.

Austin gets in the car, and is waiting for Monica.

AUSTIN

Alright, see you Jerry.

We see the car taking off down the street. Followed by a series of shots of the car on the highway. A welcome to Ohio sign. And finally we see the University in view.

Followed by a quick shot of a small building with a church sign in front of it. The sign reads "Praise The Lord Church" and "You're never far from God". Finally Austin and Monica pull up to Ben's home. As they get out, Jerry is texting Monica.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S HOME - AFTERNOON

JERRY
(text message)
Radio Silence?

Monica is still sitting in the car, as Austin gets out and approaches the front door.

MONICA
(texting back)
Yes.

Monica deletes the messages. And puts on her best fake smile for Austin and Ben who is now at the door of his home. He embraces Austin with a huge, bear hug.

BEN
My god, you're looking really old man.

Austin laughs.

AUSTIN
Yeah my dude, I'm starting to get up there. I guess we both are.

BEN
Well, at least you look healthy.

Ben greets Monica as she is getting out of the car.

BEN (CONT'D)
Hi Monica!

MONICA
(waves back)
Hi Benji.

Ben hates this nickname. He turns to Austin.

BEN
(quietly)
So, she's not as excited to be here as you, is she?

AUSTIN
No, she's okay. She's just been
caught up in church in Chicago.

BEN
(whispering)
Ohhh god, how do you deal.

Monica is getting her bag out of the hatchback now.

AUSTIN
(whispers)
I work, just work a shitload.

The two men cover their mouths as they try not to laugh in front of Monica. The three of them enter Ben's home. Where Ben has been certain to hide his medications and notes on his lab work.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben has purchased tickets for Touché Amoré and Planos Become The Teeth at a concert venue.

BEN
Well guys, I hope you're in the
mood to rock and roll tonight!

Austin's eyes light up as he reads the tickets that Ben hands over to him.

AUSTIN
Are you serious! They're playing
tonight?

BEN
Bro, come on you know me. I didn't
ask you to come all this way just
for a book release.

AUSTIN
(overjoyed)
This is amazing!

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDIUM SIZED CONCERT VENUE - NIGHT

As Austin pulls his car up to park near the venue. We see a line of young people outside the venue.

They park the car and walk a short distance to the venue, where waiting in line a student of Ben's sees the three friends approach. JEREMY, 25, tall and dark skin, average build greets Ben, Austin, and Monica.

JEREMY

Hey! Professor Schnell. You're a big fan of Touché Amoré too?

Ben shakes his hand.

BEN

Oh yeah Jeremy. I've been a huge fan since "Is Survived By".

This delights Jeremy.

JEREMY

That's amazing. I would have never thought

BEN

You would have never thought I'd partake in this social ritual?

(beat)

These are my friends Austin and his wife Monica.

Jeremy shakes their hands and smiles at Ben.

JEREMY

(laughs)

Well, I guess I should never assume anything about the lives of teachers outside the classroom.

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT VENUE - NIGHT

The bands are playing and Ben and Austin are scream singing along towards the front. The bands are switching sets at the end of the song. The two of them go back to the bar to get another drink. Ben approaches the bar. Austin approaches Monica who is drinking a hard seltzer. Ben waves down the bar tender.

BEN

(catching his breath)

Can I get a water and a Juiced to Jupiter?

Austin walks back over with Monica.

BEN (CONT'D)

I just got you a Fat Head's.

AUSTIN

Oh, right on. What are you drinking tonight man?

BEN

Ohhh, I'm just sticking to water. My doctor wants me to watch my alcohol intake. You know, getting old.

AUSTIN

(sighs)

Well, yeah.

Monica pulls out her phone. Jerry is texting her again. She excuses herself, after tucking her phone into her purse.

MONICA

Excuse me guys, I need to use the restroom.

They clear a path for her.

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT VENUE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Monica calls Jerry back.

MONICA

What the hell are you doing calling me right now. What don't you understand about radio silence?

(beat)

Well, you need to remember I'm here because I'm married, and my husband wants me here.

(beat)

Okay, well, take care of it yourself. Goodbye, and don't call or text me again.

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT VENUE - NIGHT

Austin and Ben are still at the bar. The next band is mic-checking in the background. Ben leans over to tell Austin something in his ear.

BEN

Gloria is coming here tonight.

Austin looks at Ben surprised.

AUSTIN

Here? Like this show?

BEN

No. Here, like Ohio.

AUSTIN

Tonight?

BEN

Tonight Austin. You've gotta go with me to pick her up at 4am.

Austin just laughs at it all. This is exactly how he remembers his younger days. Loud music and late nights.

AUSTIN

Of course! Why wouldn't we pick her up at 4am.

BEN

Just, you know, just don't tell Monica.

Austin knows why.

AUSTIN

Yeah. Trust me, I won't say anything.

CUT TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA AIRPORT - MIDNIGHT

Gloria is getting a mock tail at the restaurant near the gate she is scheduled to take for her flight. Her nerves are working overtime.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

What else can I get you? Another mock tail?

GLORIA

Yeah. That'd be great.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

So, where are you headed?

GLORIA

Ohio.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

Hmmmm, why Ohio?

GLORIA

Well, someone I love is there, and they could be dying.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

Jesus Christ. I'm sorry. Someone in your family?

Gloria takes a drink of her mock-tail and looks down a little.

GLORIA

No, it's a friend. Probably the best friend, I've ever had.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

And you have a history with this man?

GLORIA

Something like that.

The announcement for the flight to Cleveland, Hopkins International Airport by way of Denver International Airport blares on the P.A. speakers. Gloria pushes the plate of food and the drink towards the bartender.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

See you later.

AIRPORT BAR-TENDER

Good luck!

GLORIA

(mouthing)

Thank You.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

It's roughly 3:30am. The house is quiet, except Ben who is watching world news online with headphones on. He is tired, but running off of adrenaline and coffee. He shuts his laptop and approaches the guest room door. He quietly opens the door to see Austin and Monica sleeping on the guest bed.

BEN
 (whispering)
 Austin. Hey Austin, wake up bro.

Austin doesn't move. Ben walks over and nudges him a little.

AUSTIN
 (barely awake)
 What, what's up man?

BEN
 (whispers)
 It's about that time. For that
 thing we talked about.

Austin looks at his phone.

AUSTIN
 (whispers)
 Ohhh yeah, okay. Let me get up.

The guys are careful not to wake Monica. They get shoes on
 and head out the door. They are taking Austin's Subaru.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Does she know you're meeting her at
 the airport?

BEN
 Oh yeah, she is expecting us.

CUT TO:

EXT. OHIO AIRPORT - EARLY MORNING

The guys approach the airport. Ben's phone rings. Gloria's
 plane just landed. Austin pulls the car up to park in a pick
 up spot.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - DAWN

The sun is starting to peak through the darkness outside.
 Gloria is on her phone, waiting for Ben to pick-up. He
 answers.

GLORIA
 Hello Ben! My flight just landed.
 We're just waiting to disperse.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)
 Okay, I'll meet you at the luggage
 claim.

Gloria lets out a little giggle. People on the plane begin to disembark.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT LUGGAGE CLAIM - EARLY MORNING

Gloria is getting her bags, when she turns around at the sound of a familiar voice.

BEN
 Gloria?

She screams and jumps on Ben, wrapping her legs around him and taking them both to the floor.

GLORIA
 (Laughing and smiling)
 BENNY! My Ben! I'm so happy to be
 here with you!

BEN
 Right here in this moment?

GLORIA
 Yes!

They get up and Ben catches his breath after coughing for a moment.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
 Ohhh god, I forgot.

AUSTIN
 Forgot what?

Ben waves his hand, and says nothing, but Gloria remembers.

GLORIA
 I, uh, forgot something in
 California.

AUSTIN
 Oh. Well, we can go to the store if
 you need something.

Ben looks at Austin and then at Gloria.

GLORIA
 What?

The guys start laughing. Austin pats Gloria on the shoulder.

AUSTIN

Hi Gloria. Ummm, Monica doesn't know you're here. She's at Ben's sleeping.

GLORIA

So let her sleep, it's okay.

They all share a laugh, as they walk with Gloria's luggage to the exit. We see Austin's car traveling the highway. We hear them rocking out to music as the sun rises.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Monica is just getting up and walks into Ben's living room. As she sits on the couch with a blanket and a coffee. Suddenly the doorknob starts moving. Austin comes through the door, saying something inaudible to Ben & Gloria.

AUSTIN

Ohhh, good morning honey.

Monica is annoyed.

MONICA

Where have you been Austin?

Gloria and Ben come through the door. Monica's eyes get huge and she sets down her coffee and walks into the guest room.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Austin, can I please talk to you in the other room?

Ben and Gloria are trying not to giggle. Austin taps back at them.

AUSTIN

Coming honey.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S GUEST ROOM - MORNING

Monica is not happy that Gloria is there. This caught her by surprise and she is not looking forward to being around Gloria.

MONICA

(whispers)

What the hell is she doing here?
Wasn't she off in California
wrecking her life?

AUSTIN

(whispers)

She's here for Ben honey, okay? And
she said she's been doing better
out there.

MONICA

(whispers)

So what, I'm just supposed to be
her friend for the next week?

AUSTIN

(whispers)

Well, ten days, and yes, if you're
able to do that.

MONICA

(whispers)

Fine. But don't expect me to act
happy about it.

AUSTIN

Duck Key?

MONICA

Okay.

Their silent agreement, and Austin's compromise suffices to let them continue with their morning. They come out of the guest room and find Gloria and Ben reading a part of Ben's book.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

AUSTIN

Hey, I want to read it too.

Monica emerges. Slightly fake smile.

MONICA

Hello Gloria. How are you?

GLORIA

I'm good. Hi Monica. It's been a
minute huh?

Ben walks over to change into a hoodie.

MONICA
Yeah, it has.

Beat.

MONICA (CONT'D)
So what is the plan today Ben?

Ben is gathering a few items. Including a pill pack.

BEN
Well, I thought we'd get breakfast at the breakfast goat. Then kind of go from there? I was thinking we could stop at the University so I can make some preparations. Then maybe hit up the local Zen Center for meditation and discussion.

Monica looks a little more than uncertain. But she wants Austin to be happy.

MONICA
Ohhhh, alright.

They leave on foot from the house and start their walk to the breakfast cafe.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCAL CAFE - MORNING

The friends go into the cafe. They are given a table by the window. Gloria and Ben sit next to each other while Austin and Monica sit across from them. Austin facing Gloria, and Monica facing Ben. The waitress brings the friends waters, and gives them sometime to order. After ordering the friends are waiting for coffee and meals, and Ben takes his pill pack out of his pocket. Ben pops about 10 pills. Austin and Monica look at him but Gloria, who is trying to play it off diverts her eyes.

BEN
Vitamins, you know. My doctor told me to start watching my alcohol and to have plenty of vitamins.

Austin seems skeptical. But Monica reassures him and Ben.

MONICA

Yeah, they say that the right amount of certain vitamins can really help keep you healthier in to your later years.

BEN

Yeah, that and eating right. Avoiding a lot of the greasy shit.

Austin shrugs.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I guess that's pretty important at our age.

Monica targets Gloria.

MONICA

Do you feel better when you're not drinking Gloria? Or is there ever a time when you're not doing that?

Gloria feels ashamed and hurt that Monica would treat her so unkindly, so early in the morning too.

GLORIA

Actually. I've been stone sober for going on six months.

Gloria holds up her last chip, a five month chip.

AUSTIN

That's awesome. You're working through the program then?

MONICA

What do you know about it Austin?

BEN

Well, I mean a lot of people I work with know the steps and stuff, just because some of them have been through the program.

Austin looks at Gloria. Who is clearly trying to be polite, despite being called out.

GLORIA

Yeah, it's actually been super beneficial. Sometimes it reminds me of church.

Monica audibly scoffs at this.

MONICA

Uhhh what? A bunch of struggling addicts is not a church. I'm sorry to tell you.

Ben comes to Gloria's defense.

BEN

Ease off Monica, she's just saying the program has it's foundations in christianity. Is it so bad that she made a comparison.

Monica shakes her head.

MONICA

I mean, it's whatever. I just don't see how you can compare one to the other.

AUSTIN

Well not all churches are sanitized mini malls babe. Some churches are full of broken and hurting people.

Ben taps his foot against Gloria's.

GLORIA

Yeah, no. I was just making an observation.

Monica goes on the defensive.

MONICA

So does that A.A. stuff give you some kind of good feeling about all the shitty stuff you did when you were in your teens?

This is the last jab that Gloria will take...

GLORIA

(angry)

Fuck you Monica! You self-righteous bitch. You don't know what I've been through, you only know what happened to me before I left.

Monica looks surprised. She looks at Austin as Gloria gets up and walks out of the restaurant. Ben goes after her. Austin looks at Monica sternly.

MONICA

What? I'm just asking an honest question?

AUSTIN

You're being ruthless and mean and you know it.

Austin waves over the waitress, and tells her to bring the check and everything in to go boxes. He pays the bill, and gathers up the bags of food.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Way to ruin breakfast.

Monica only shows the slightest sign of remorse.

MONICA

Sorry. I guess.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN COLLEGE TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

Austin and Monica are looking around to see if they can find Ben and Gloria. They have slipped into a record store. Austin calls Ben's phone.

BEN (O.S.)

Hello.

AUSTIN

Hey man, I'm really sorry about that. I think Monica is just having trouble with letting go of stuff.

BEN (O.S.)

It's not cool to target Gloria like that, just because she lead a different life. You know?

Austin looks at Monica who is texting someone on her phone.

AUSTIN

I know Ben. I'm sorry. Monica still goes to church and is pretty judgey sometimes. She doesn't think about how she comes off at times.

Monica is completely involved in her phone, she takes no notice of what Austin said.

BEN (O.S.)
Okay, I'll talk to Gloria. Do you
guys want to meet us at the
University?

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE - DAY

Ben is signing a handful of copies of his book and placing them back into a box. The others are simply browsing. Ben's department chair comes in to say hello. DR. CROSS, 68, with a thick head of wavy grey hair, shorter, with a pride wristband on and a gold watch chain sticking out of his vest. He looks a train conductor crossed with a college professor.

DR. CROSS
Ohhh, hello Professor Schnell. It's
nice to see you on campus once
more.

Ben turns to his three friends.

BEN
Everyone, this is the Sociology
department chair. Dr. Cross.

Austin shakes hands with Dr. Cross. The ladies simply say hello, and Gloria extends her hand out.

DR. CROSS
Well it is certainly nice to meet
some friends of Ben's.

AUSTIN
It is a pleasure to meet you sir.

They continue with lite conversation, while Ben and a student set up a table right outside the bookstore. The three friends look surprised when Ben takes off his hoodie and places a blue suit jacket on, and sits down behind a table.

MONICA
Ben, what are we doing here.

Austin looks at Ben, equally intrigued and confused.

AUSTIN
Yeah, bro, what's going on?

Gloria is browsing titles in the Spirituality and Personal Growth Section.

BEN

I just have to sit for this meet
and greet thing for like two hours.
But you guys can go roam around
town or the campus if you'd like.
We got a bagel place that's
amazing. Since you know, Monica
ruined breakfast.

Gloria laughs and snorts a little.

AUSTIN

I guess Monica and I will walk
around campus a bit. And we can
meet back at your place before
meditation?

Ben nods. The first few customers, mostly students as well as
some older visitors approach.

BEN

Yeah, that's perfect Austin.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - AFTERNOON

The friends are getting ready to go into Meditation at the
Zen center. Monica is anxious. She doesn't believe in going
into places of "false gods". Ben tries to reassure her.

MONICA

I just don't know if I can do this.
I know you study religion Ben, and
I'm sure this place has meaning for
you. I just, I can't be here.

Gloria wasn't expect anything less from Monica.

GLORIA

Just go visit your Mom or something
Monica. It's clear you've got some
problem with Ben and I.

Monica shakes her head in agreement but doesn't say anything
in response.

AUSTIN

Maybe, it would be better, honey,
if you visited your Mom?

Monica is angry that Austin doesn't include himself in the
plan to leave and visit her mother instead.

MONICA

Fine Austin. Enjoy your time.

Monica takes Austin's car keys and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. ZEN CENTER MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben, Gloria, and Austin are sitting around listening to a discussion about gratitude. Everyone is asked to share something about what they are grateful for today.

BEN

I'm grateful to have my wonderful friends here, all the way from California and Chicago.

Gloria notices they have an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at the center twice a week.

GLORIA

This seems like a safe place to share this.

(beat)

I'm grateful to be here with Ben and Austin. And I'm grateful for the will power to be three days short of six months sober.

Austin is next in the sharing circle.

AUSTIN

I am so grateful for a chance to be with friends and to be here. I've never tried meditation.

SAMMI

We are glad to have you.

Sammi digs a little deeper into how Austin and Gloria know Ben.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

How did you all meet?

Ben and Austin laugh. Gloria is late to laughter.

GLORIA

We met at church. At my Dad's church.

SAMMI

Oh. Well that can be a good place to meet people.

Sammi prods a littler more.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

What is the name of your father's church?

GLORIA

It's Praise The Lord Christian Church, Pastor Gary Meris.

The meditation group beings to chatter. Sammi puts a hush on them.

SAMMI

That's okay. It's okay everyone.

Gloria hates that people equate her with her father's work. She hasn't lived with the old bastard since she was 17, and now even coming back to this town reminds her that his legacy stains her name to this day.

BEN

She's nothing like her father, friends.

Sammi turns to the crowd. She tries to get them back on the topic of gratitude.

SAMMI

Ben, I would love to talk more with your friends after we dismiss the group. Perhaps they might be interested in the coming retreat?

BEN

Certainly. I think they'd be interested in that.

Austin and Gloria nod politely. They aren't sure what Ben and Sammi are talking about, but they are genuinely enjoying themselves, with the exception of the brief discomfort Gloria experienced disclosing her relationship with Pastor Gary Meris. She might as well say her father is a Grand Imperial Dragon. The P.T.L. church is not looked at favorably by the outside community.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - LATER

Austin is finishing a conversation with Sammi just inside the Zen Center, while Ben and Gloria are outside. Gloria feels better after the talk.

GLORIA

This place is pretty cool Ben. How long have you been a buddhist?

Ben laughs and waves his hand in the air.

BEN

I'm not really a buddhist, per se. I just really enjoy the meditation and the talks. I have been contemplating fully embracing it though.

Gloria smiles and hugs Ben.

GLORIA

Do whatever makes your heart bright.

Ben loves her so much. She's quoting one of his favorite songs. And he is so filled with joy that she met the community he found here, in a town, where he was exiled from the last community. Austin is coming out of the side of the building now, with Sammi following closely behind.

SAMMI

Thank you all for coming tonight. It was so wonderful to meet you two.

GLORIA

It was wonderful meeting you Sammi. I'm sorry for all the horrible things that my father has probably said about your faith and your group.

Sammi shrugs.

SAMMI

The children of men will not be punished for the sins of their fathers. Right Ben?

BEN
(smiles)
That is roughly it Sammi.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S BACKYARD - LATER THAT EVENING

The four friends are back together at the table in Ben's back yard. Monica is barely looking at Gloria or Austin. The whole dinner is awkwardly quiet. Ben finally breaks the silence

BEN
So, Monica, how is your Mom doing?

Austin looks at Monica. He tries to catch her eyes.

MONICA
She is fine, she's just getting ready to retire from the bank next year.

BEN
Well that's good. I know I enjoy getting to catch up with her sometimes when I go to the bank.

Monica looks at Ben, and then at Austin, and finally at Gloria.

MONICA
Gloria, I'm sorry. Guys, I'm sorry.

Gloria is taken back by the genuine apology.

GLORIA
It's okay. I know I fucked up a lot of stuff back wh-

Monica cuts her off.

MONICA
No, you were young and you wanted to live life on your terms.

She looks to Austin and Ben.

MONICA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I flipped out at the buddhist temple Ben.

Ben lets out a heavy sigh, and then a little smile crosses his face.

BEN

It's a Zen center. And it's okay. I forgive you. We all understand where you're coming from.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I think I remember something about not letting the sun go down on your anger.

The friends finish their meal together. The sun is setting.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Austin is up early. He is working on this year's campaign for Artists Gala. He is nearly complete with the campaign that is looming over his head. Ben enters the room from his bedroom, Gloria is still sleeping on the couch, but slowly awakes. Monica is still in the guest room. Ben begins to make a pot of coffee. He has to take his meds soon too.

BEN

Good morning man.

Austin is sorting emails.

AUSTIN

Morning.

Ben can tell Austin is in work mode.

BEN

Really getting after those emails eh bud.

Austin snaps out of it for a moment.

AUSTIN

Yeah, just trying to review some surveys and demographics.

Gloria is now rising to greet them.

GLORIA

Ohhh hey, good morning guys.

Gloria rubs Austin, and then Ben's back a little. Her hair is wild and untamed. She yawns and reaches for a cup of coffee from the fresh pot.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

That Zen Center was pretty cool huh
Austin?

Austin is still focused on his work. But tries to be engaging while distracted.

AUSTIN

Yeah, it was interesting. I enjoyed
the meditation.

Austin is receiving an invite for a video conference. He's still in a tee shirt and shorts that he slept in.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Guys, I have to take this video
meeting real quick.

Ben sees how serious Austin is.

BEN

Use the desk in my room Austin.
Just move the books off my desk
onto my bed.

AUSTIN

Thanks Ben.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Austin is moving books from Ben's desk. Something Ben forgot was on his desk, is now visible to Austin. A copy of Ben's discharge paperwork from his latest scan. Austin looks at it for a moment. Then his computer begins to ring.

MR. GLENDUSER

Mr. Mesning

Austin quickly moves the paper on to Ben's bed. And then turns to the camera.

AUSTIN

Yessir. I'm here.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Ben, Gloria, and Monica are sitting around the island in Ben's kitchen.

They are eating fruit and listening to a podcast on low volume. They seem to be getting along. Austin enters the room.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry guys. I was just on the call with one of my bosses. Good morning honey.

He walks over and gives Monica a kiss on the forehead.

MONICA

What was the meeting about.

AUSTIN

Artist Gala wants to move up the meeting for this years campaign.

MONICA

To when?

AUSTIN

Uhhh, well, that's the thing. They want to meet in three days.

Ben is flipping through photo albums with Gloria at this point on one side of the island.

GLORIA

So, tell them you can't do it.

Monica looks sharply at Austin, then barks at Gloria

MONICA

He can't do that!

GLORIA

Ohhh sorry. I mean, do what you need to do.

Ben looks up at Austin.

BEN

What does that mean, Austin?

Austin is already packing up his computer and files.

AUSTIN

It means, I have to go back to Illinois today Ben.

(beat)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Ben, I'm sorry man. This is just one of the most important opportunities I've ever had.

BEN

No, I get it. It's something that you need to do.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

Austin and Monica are heading back to Chicago so that Austin can present his campaign proposal. Ben locks his home up, as the four friends embrace and Gloria and Ben see Monica and Austin off. They decide to go for a walk.

BEN

So, how has California been treating you Gloria?

Gloria really only thinks about California when she thinks about her roommate and how she might be doing without Gloria there.

GLORIA

It's alright. Just a lot more expensive and a lot more crowded than here.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAISE THE LORD CHRISTIAN CHURCH - LATER

As they walk they pass Praise The Lord Christian Church. The building looks rough. Like they've lost the ability to pay for upkeep. The friends cross the street as Pastor Gary pops out the front door. PASTOR GARY MERIS, 70, heavy-set, with large glasses and a short white beard, short in stature, approaches Ben and Gloria

PASTOR GARY

Gloria! Gloria, are you here to give your life back to the Lord!

Pastor Gary recognizes Ben.

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)

Now, Benjamin, you just steer clear. You let my baby girl come see her daddy, you hear me.

(MORE)

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)

I know you drew her away from me
with your vile and satanic ideas.

Ben sees Gloria is visibly upset. He wraps his arm around her shoulders, and whispers something to her.

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)

Lies!

BEN

Let's get out of here Gloria.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben is sitting on his phone. He is finishing a phone call with the oncologist Dr. Argelino. He is receiving test results. Gloria is sitting across from him. She is rubbing his feet.

BEN

Okay, alright. So I'll start that
treatment and see where things go
from there?

(beat)

BEN (CONT'D)

Thank You Dr. Argelino. You too.

Gloria looks at Ben, who is holding back tears.

GLORIA

What's wrong?

Ben turns to Gloria and hugs her. The news is something he's not really ready for.

BEN

I'm going to have to start
chemotherapy. The tumors are
inoperable.

Gloria holds onto Ben tightly. They share a tenderness.

BEN (CONT'D)

Gloria?

GLORIA

Yeah?

Ben wipes tears from his face.

BEN

Can you stay with me? Here in Ohio?

The question presents some challenges to Gloria, but she takes little time to think about her response.

GLORIA

(quietly)

Yes Ben. I'll stay.

They embrace again.

CUT TO:

INT. ZEN CENTER - LATER THAT EVENING

Ben and Gloria are listening to a guided meditation at the Zen Center. They get up and move towards the meeting hall. As they walk with the other practitioners, Sammi approaches Ben and Gloria.

SAMMI

I'm so glad you will be joining us
for the retreat Ben and Gloria.

Ben is taken back. He didn't sign up for the retreat, although he was interested in it.

BEN

What do you mean Sammi? I never
signed up for the retreat?

SAMMI

No, no you didn't. Your friend, the
gentleman from Chicago signed four
people up, you two, his wife, and
himself I believe.

Ben is shocked. The retreat was expensive.

BEN

When did he do that?

SAMMI

Last week. When you all came here.
Although his wife was absent if I
recall.

Ben nods his head. He turns to Gloria.

GLORIA
I can't believe he did that, how
kind.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA ZEN CENTER - NIGHT

We find the four friends meeting up months later outside a monastery in Pennsylvania. It's late summer. They are attending a meet and greet with tea, pastries, and introducing themselves. The friends all introduce themselves as the group rounds. The scene opens with them congregating around tea and oranges.

BEN
Austin, I just wanted to say thanks
again. I am so glad to be here with
all of you and these other folks
too.

AUSTIN
I'm glad I'm here too. I really
hope to get something out of this.

Monica looks slightly uncomfortable, likely because she still believes largely in the same things she's always believed in. She remains quiet.

BEN
It's great that work let you take
this time off.

Austin looks around and nods.

AUSTIN
Well, they weren't happy, but after
I submitted the A.G. campaign for
this year

MONICA
(abruptly)
He secured 6 more years of
contracts for Glendauser & Sthill!

Ben is proud of his friend's hard work.

BEN
Wow. That's incredible Austin.
They've got to be considering you
for a partnership now right?

Austin shrugs, silent about what he knows is likely true.

AUSTIN

We'll see.

A fellow retreat participant overhears the conversation. ANDREW, 38, tall, with heavy dark glasses, and a unkept beard, walks over.

ANDREW

I'm sorry, I don't mean to ease drop. But, I was curious, what kind of work did you say you do again?

Austin is slightly taken back. Monica, not so much, she'll take any opportunity that presents itself to brag about Austin's career.

MONICA

He's in Public Relations.

AUSTIN

Yeah. But I really focus a lot more on marketing.

Andrew is intrigued by this information. He fishes out his card. He is the executive director for an institution that helps empower teens through music and art.

ANDREW

Well, I'm not sure if this is the appropriate place, but I'd love to pick your brain sometime. My card.

Austin doesn't have a card with him, he wasn't expecting to network at a retreat in Western Pennsylvania. He writes on the back of a receipt in his wallet. He hands the paper to Andrew and extends his hand.

AUSTIN

My name is Austin Mesning.

ANDREW

Andrew Porter.

AUSTIN

I'm working for Glendauser & Sthill, in Chicago currently. I'd be willing to start a dialogue and see what we can do for you.

ANDREW

Excellent.

Sammi sees the exchange of cards and pleasantries.

SAMMI

Gentleman, I understand that you have your business, but you must not discuss these matters during the retreat.

Ben, seeing that Sammi is just trying to be cautious of the environment steps in.

BEN

We understand Sammi, we'll drop it.

ANDREW

Yes, my apologies.

Sammi redirects the group towards their rooms for the retreat.

SAMMI

Friends, your rooms are this way. We'll retire there for the evening. And please refrain from modern distractions.

The group disperses. Gloria and Monica go into a room, while Ben and Austin go into another. The monastery is a beautiful one, and the calm that permeates the grounds resonates with the group, except for Monica.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Austin is asleep on his bed. There are small night stands with water pitchers and cups at each bed side. Ben has an alarm set on his watch for his medication. He gets out of bed, goes through his bag and takes the meds. He turns on his phone, it chimes a few times.

BEN

Ohhh shit!

He quickly turns his phone on silent. He scrolls through his email and sees he has new lab results. He has had multiple rounds of treatment by now, in the hope that something will help cure him. No luck so far. He's reading an email from Dr. Argelino. The prognosis is not what he had hoped for...

BEN (CONT'D)

(silently crying, whispers to himself)

Ohhh god, I can't.

Ben says a silent prayer. He then begins a meditation exercise.

BEN (CONT'D)

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.

(beat)

Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.

Ben continues to meditate in this way until he finally calms his mind, he falls sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY MEETING ROOM - DAWN

The group is meeting for the second day of the retreat. They will be sharing their stories while being prompted to reflect on the experiences that shaped them. The meeting room is large and has several paintings on the walls and a buddha statue in a corner. We find the four friends talking in small groups with others.

GLORIA

Well, I guess growing up, we always learned that there is only one god, and his son, and that if we don't repent and like, stop bad behaviors, you'll spend eternity in hell. I don't know, it just seems so punitive to me.

VICKI, 50, petit with dark skin and a raspy voice shares next.

VICKI

Honey I think about that too. Like why is God so about punishment so often? And how do we know it's not just some story that everyone bought into? What kind of place is heaven if it's full of people who needed someone to save them from simple mistakes?

GLORIA

I don't know, but it doesn't sound like a paradise.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ben is sharing his experience with a small group, while maintaining his composure considering the news he is holding back.

BEN

I think that's the part that worries me the most about organized religion, is when it gets very unstable and independent of love and kindness. How can we blindly believe that so called leaders, men of god, are without fault, are without their own secrets and sins.

Ben shakes his head and speaks from a hard place

BEN (CONT'D)

It feels like some people will always stand in the way of others free will. Some people just sacrifice their minds up to whatever these leaders want. I just can't see having faith without doubt. I can't see believing in the mystery of a god or the universe and not showing reverence towards ones own ignorance. I don't know, I just can't get past that.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONASTERY - EVENING

Monica is outside sneaking a call on her phone. She is talking to Jerry. She is whispering.

MONICA

(whispers)

What do you mean Billy knows?

JERRY (O.S)

I mean he must have seen my phone or heard me talking to you!

Monica starts to panic. She has let this affair carry on for too long, but she doesn't know how to end it.

MONICA

(whispers)

Does Rebecca know about us then?

JERRY (O.S.)

No, but it's only a matter of time.
The kid is blackmailing me for a
new car and a phone.

Monica puts her hand over her face.

MONICA

(whispers)

Okay, that's your fault, deal with
it. I'll find an excuse to leave
tonight. You realize that it's
going to take me a day of driving
to get back?

JERRY (O.S.)

Just get here as soon as you can.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

The friends are discussing the aim of religion with others in
the group. Monica is ready with her excuse to leave...

SAMMI

Is the purpose of religion to
liberate or to control? Isn't that
ultimately part of the questions we
should be asking ourselves this
evening?

The group talks amongst themselves. Andrew responds

ANDREW

So, we kind of believe that
religion in practice should be
about liberation. I'd argue that
liberation theology, as the name
implies, was correct in a lot of
it's assumptions about the nature
of the Christian Church, but it
seems that control has always been
most prominent in the West.

BEN

So much of our lives seem to
revolve around control, don't they?

Sammi nods, they agree with the perspective Andrew and Ben
are sharing.

SAMMI

So much of life focuses on materialism, and management of our world, ourselves. Rarely do we let things be as they are...

Monica speaks up...

MONICA

(hastily)

I'm sorry, I need to use the restroom.

Monica steps out to use the bathroom, then comes back into the hall and pulls Austin, Ben, and Gloria aside.

AUSTIN

What's going on honey?

MONICA

Sweetheart, they are having a lot of issues with the church building. They need someone to be there to help with the contractors. I've got to go, it's part of my outreach hall project.

Austin is somewhat taken by surprise, he doesn't attend the church enough to know anything about it, but it's an odd time for them to need Monica, but he has come to the realization not to argue with her when it comes to her church things.

AUSTIN

Okay, honey. I mean they can't find someone to be your proxy or whatnot?

MONICA

No, honey, I'm the one with the plans and I'll have to get them together for the contractors to make corrections.

AUSTIN

Okay, I guess take my car and I'll try and fly out of Cleveland, that is if I can ride to Ohio with you two.

BEN

Absolutely buddy. We'd be happy to help.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY ROOM - MORNING

The third day of the retreat is for focused meditation on letting go of the past, of accepting that we only have the present. Ben and Austin have split off to discuss their pain from the past and meditate.

AUSTIN

I just feel like, the church was made to feel like some kind of home, like

BEN

Like a family that you never had?

AUSTIN

Yeah in a way, I guess that was a part of it.

Austin is feeling upset, and Ben is doing what he can to be there for his friend.

BEN

Do you feel like they preyed on us, being that we were so young, so vulnerable and uncertain of who or what to trust?

AUSTIN

They were opportunists. They practically made us the same way. I just can't stomach it.

Ben understands where Austin is coming from. He gets up to take his meds. Austin recalls seeing the scan on Ben's desk.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Ben, what's up with all these vitamins?

Ben shrugs off the question. And continues to talk about the church, about their shared trauma.

BEN

They just help my immune system.
(beat)
Anyway, do you think there is room to forgive and move to the present moment?

Austin sits for a moment in silence

AUSTIN

Yeah, I suppose so. I mean they are just people with their own reasons for propagating these ideas and that form of control.

Ben and Austin share a moment of silence.

BEN

I hope we can start really living without this weight on us.

CUT TO:

INT. DIFFERENT MONASTERY ROOM - EVENING

Gloria is now working through things with Vicki and TRISHA, 44, heavier set, big hair, and a slight speech impediment. Trisha comes from a strict religious background, she was part of a teen ministry that used to travel and she was assaulted during a missions trip.

TRISHA

I just think we've got to hold people accountable you know? I was just doing what I thought God had intended for me to do, and this man took advantage of me. I was his disciple and he took advantage of my naiveté.

VICKI

Men in religious leadership roles are the worst aren't they?

The statement resonates with Gloria. We can see it on her face...she's holding back something.

GLORIA

Yeah, like my father. His favorite message to preach about was always wives submitting to their husbands. It's like his mantra.

Vicki is sitting for a minute. She watches Gloria get more frustrated...

GLORIA (CONT'D)

And when my Mom wouldn't submit, he beat her. Like, what the fuck is that?

Trisha sympathizes with Gloria

TRISHA

Let it out Gloria

GLORIA

He beat my Mom to the point where the police showed up to the church office, and gave him a restraining order, and all these men in the church knew that it was happening, even some of the nice ones. Like Ben's Dad. But they didn't do anything to confront him, to tell him how vile what he was doing to my Mom was, it was like they didn't care about her, they only cared about losing their position in the church. I fucking hate that.

VICKI

Gloria, did your Dad ever hit you?

Gloria goes silent. She doesn't want to talk about it, but she eventually opens up.

GLORIA

He did. Many times. Until I got big enough to fight back.

Gloria begins to cry. She is shaking slightly as she continues to tell her story...Vicki and Trisha are comforting her.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

(crying)

My Mom left him, and he would take it out on me. My brothers had already gotten out of the house by the time I was 15. And at 17 years old I dropped out and moved, alone, to California.

(beat)

I did things I regret while I was trying to find my way when I first got there. I'm so tired of feeling shame for my past. I'm so tired of making excuses for people who spend their whole lives pretending they are sorry. It feels like I can't move forward.

VICKI

Honey, you are moving on. Think about that, you're here, practically on the other side of the country from California, and you're doing good with your sobriety and you are with your friends. You've come so far.

Gloria stops to acknowledge this. It helps her focus on the present and she is grateful for these two women to talk her through her pain.

GLORIA

(wiping her eyes)

You know something Vicki, you're right. I am doing so much better. I've come pretty god damn far.

VICKI

Pay no mind to your father honey. Some people you just have to let go of.

CUT TO:

INT. MONASTERY MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

It's the last evening of the retreat. The group is gathered and talking about their final take aways. Gloria is standing beside Ben. Austin is talking with Andrew in a corner. Ben is visibly upset, but isn't really saying why

GLORIA

Benny, what's wrong?

BEN

Well, even with the chemotherapy, Dr. Argelino told me that the cancer has progressed too rapidly to be helped.

GLORIA

What does that mean?

BEN

It means they will explore any studies available in the U.S. that I can start trials for, but otherwise

GLORIA

Oh god. No Ben. Something will come along.

Austin notices the cracking in Gloria's Ben's voice. He excuses himself from his conversation with Andrew.

AUSTIN

Excuse me, Andrew.

Austin walks over to Ben and Gloria. Who are embracing one another.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

What is going on you two?

Ben wasn't ready to face this, and he knows that it's hard for his friends too. He embraces Austin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ, just tell me what's wrong!

BEN

I have cancer Austin.

AUSTIN

Okay, I figured as much. With all the vitamins and the scan results I found on your desk. So what does that mean? What's happening?

GLORIA

Wait, what? How did you know?

AUSTIN

The scans were similar to what Monica had when she had ovarian cancer. This isn't my first time having someone go through this.

BEN

Austin, I've got an inoperable cancer. And I've been on chemo since the last time you saw me. It's not working.

AUSTIN

You're certain, I mean, the doctors are certain? It's only been, like two months?

BEN

I got results back with diagnosis the first night we were here. I smuggled my phone into my bag, just like Monica did.

AUSTIN

But, wait...how long have you known about the cancer? Why the hell didn't you just tell me?

Ben starts sobbing. His reservations about telling Austin may have been unnecessary.

BEN

I just know how much you had on your plate, and I didn't want to bring you down man.

Austin is upset, but tries to remain cool and collected.

AUSTIN

Ben, you're like a brother to me. I don't care about my fucking promotion. I don't care about a rich lifestyle. This is your life man!

(beat)

What do you need from me. I can try to move things around at work if that would help.

BEN

There's nothing to be done Ben. I'm going to start hospice.

AUSTIN

Hospice? Don't give up Ben!!

GLORIA

They're going to look for treatment trials that he might be able to participate in, but

AUSTIN

Gloria, did you know about this the whole time? Since we picked you up from the Airport?

GLORIA

Well...

BEN

I wrote her a letter the same night
I wrote Monica and you a letter.

(beat)

That's why she has been staying
with me in Ohio.

Austin is slightly hurt and sad about the whole night. He turns away, walks for a few moments, then turns back around...

AUSTIN

Okay, well what do you do now?

BEN

I'm going back to Ohio.

Gloria butts in.

GLORIA

I'm going with Ben, I'm staying
with him.

Austin gets flustered.

AUSTIN

Well, what should I do?

BEN

We can take you to Cleveland, if
you want. There's nothing to do
Austin. Things just have to run
their course.

Austin is not satisfied with this response.

AUSTIN

Okay, well, that's fine. I'll just
book a flight to Chicago. If you
don't need me, I'll just go
straight home.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONASTERY - NIGHT

Gloria and Ben are saying goodbye to Austin and Sammi and the Zen Center group that is leaving in their vehicles.

AUSTIN

(crying)

Well, you call me when you get back
to Ohio.

(MORE)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

And I'll let Monica know whats going on. This can't be the last time we see each other.

(beat)

You hear me Ben?

BEN

(stoic)

I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner Austin, I was hoping things would have turned around with the chemo.

AUSTIN

(sadly)

Just keep fighting. Keep fighting Ben.

Austin gets in a ride share car and waves as he leaves. He yells through the window

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

(yelling)

I love you Ben!

CUT TO:

EXT. MONASTERY - MOMENTS LATER

Gloria is helping Ben pack the car. She is walking around the car to get into the passenger side, fighting back her tears. The past four days have taken a toll on her emotionally and mentally, but she feels a level of relief. Ben shuts the trunk and gets in the car. Gloria is crying.

BEN

Gloria, are you okay?

Gloria grabs Ben and pulls him close to her, they embrace, as Ben pulls away from Gloria, she grabs his face and kisses him on the lips. They kiss for a moment.

GLORIA

I love you Ben. I'm sorry I've run for so long from you. I just didn't know how to deal with my father, and Kent. It was all just too much to stick around. But I left you, and I'm sorry. You never did anything but loved me, and accepted me for exactly who I was.

(beat)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

You let me be who I am. With all my
shit and my past.

(beat)

And you still treat me with love.

BEN

It's because I love you. I always
have Gloria.

They embrace. We see their car pull away towards a main road.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

We enter Dr. Argelino's office. There are several post modern paintings on the walls. A few graphic informative posters about different stages of cancer in cells and tissue. We see through the window, the leaves are turning once again. DOCTOR ARGELINO, 54, stocky build, with jet black hair and olive skin, is on his way into the office with the social worker, DIANE BARTELLA, 28, short blonde hair, with glasses and is always friendly. Ben and Gloria are sitting in rather uncomfortable chairs. This is the day they find out if any studies are available for Ben's diagnosis.

GLORIA

I hope they have good news.

BEN

Yeah, I hope so.

Dr. Argelino and Diane Bartella enter the room, after giving a small series of knocks.

DR. ARGELINO

This must of course be Gloria?

GLORIA

Yessir, it's very nice to meet you.

Gloria shakes Argelino's hand and shakes hands with the social worker as well.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

And you must be Diane Bartella?

DIANE

You're correct. It's nice meeting you Gloria, and Ben of course.

Diane extends her hand to Ben.

They all sit down. Dr. Argelino and Diane gather chairs. They begin the appointment.

DR. ARGELINO

Well, Ben, I like to get the hardest news out of the way first.

Ben braces himself for what he was fearful of, but expecting in a way as well

DIANE

I'm sorry to tell you Ben, but with the advancement of your cancer to it's current state, there are no clinical trials available for you to participate in.

Ben's head drops. Gloria starts crying silently.

GLORIA

(mournfully)

So, is that it? What is he supposed to do now?

Gloria is rubbing Ben's back.

DR. ARGELINO

We have, options.

Ben lifts his eyes.

BEN

What options?

DIANE

Ben, you can stay in the hospital for awhile and try to maintain a level of comfort and maybe even prolong your life for a bit...

GLORIA

Or what?

Diane sighs.

DIANE

Or, he can begin home hospice. He'd be visited by a nurse every day to check on his vitals, to help manage his pain and

DR. ARGELINO

And to verify once Ben expires.

BEN

(laughs)

Expires. Like I'm milk.

Gloria looks at Ben, her eyes are flooded with tears.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's okay. I have to die one day.
We all do.

Ben is wiping his eyes. He let's out a little laughter.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ms. Bartella, when would I be
contacted by the hospice nurse?

DIANE

You would contact her this evening,
and she will come visit you
tomorrow. Her name is Sherri
Madden.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S HOME - THE NEXT NIGHT

Ben and Gloria are saying goodbye to the hospice nurse.
SHERRI MADDEN, 43, short, petite, dark curly hair, is on her
way out for the evening following her initial visit.

SHERRI

Well, it was nice meeting you both.
I really love the way you two
interact. You can feel the love.

BEN

It was nice meeting you Sherri. I
appreciate you going through this
with me.

SHERRI

Certainly. And don't forget Ben, if
you start to experience a lot of
discomfort, cannabis is your
friend.

BEN

Yup. Got it. I'll pack a bowl
later.

Gloria laughs.

SHERRI

Whatever you want hon.

GLORIA

Have a good night Sherri.

Sherri is loading a Volkswagen Beetle with her nurses bag and jacket, she turns back around.

SHERRI

Gloria, you have my card, right?

GLORIA

I do.

SHERRI

Go ahead and put my number in Ben's phone too.

Sherri gets in her car, and drives away. Ben and Gloria go inside.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ben walks over to the bag of medications and snacks that Sherri prepared for him. Gloria is sitting on the couch, drinking a soda, and watching a cartoon. Ben pulls out a pack of cannabis gummies from the care package left by Sherri.

BEN

Look what I found...

Gloria has been sober for nearly eight months. She looks at Ben.

GLORIA

Well, you enjoy yourself Benny.

Ben wants her to partake with him, but doesn't want to be pushy. He takes a whole gummy.

BEN

You want one?

Gloria watches, eyes wide as he takes a second gummy.

GLORIA

Ben! Have you never taken a gummy?

BEN

No, why...

He is lying, but with the intention of making her laugh, he starts to take a third one. Gloria grabs his arm.

GLORIA

Jesus, Ben, you're taking too much.

Ben offers Gloria the one that is in his fingers.

BEN

Hmmm?

Gloria looks at Ben, thinks about what it means to be taking a substance to enjoy herself with her love. She accepts the gummy. She ingests it.

GLORIA

Okay, okay.

(beat)

I mean, technically this is called California sober.

She takes the gummy. The couple start to enjoy their gummies. They are sitting together.

BEN

I really love you Gloria. You're the best.

Gloria rubs Ben's face, rough with stubble, she kisses him.

GLORIA

I love you Ben. You're my best friend, and I have always loved so much about you.

They kiss again, they continue to kiss. They begin to make out. The making out leads to them taking their shirts off, the shot fades out

FADE TO:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ben and Gloria are lying shirtless in Ben's bed. We can see the pill bottles are now fewer. Ben looks at Gloria.

BEN

You know, I never thought about dying until recently.

Gloria looks at Ben's face, she sees his eyes are almost shut.

GLORIA

I hope you know, I'll always feel your love.

BEN

Gloria

GLORIA

Yeah

Ben looks around, at the books he's collected, at the photographs of friends, colleagues, and parties.

BEN

I hope that there is a god. I mean...

(beat)

I hope that the universe has some greater purpose for all of this.

Gloria is holding back her tears.

GLORIA

(somberly)

I think there has to be a reason we are here right? If it's just to live and die, that's pretty hard to swallow, right?

BEN

I hope if there is a heaven. I hope wanting to make this world a better place is enough to get me in.

Gloria starts silently sobbing.

GLORIA

I think you'll have a place Benny.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ben is sitting in his chair. Gloria is still asleep in his bed. He feels so at peace this morning. He's watching a documentary and waiting for his coffee to finish brewing. His phone rings. He answers it

BEN

Hello, this is Ben

SHERRI (O.S.)

Ben, it's Sherri.

BEN

What's going on Sherri? Thanks for the care package. Gloria and I enjoyed some of it last night.

SHERRI (O.S.)

Glad to share Ben. I do have to tell you, I'm calling to let you know that your labs came back from the start of the week. It looks like the cancer is progressing faster than we first thought.

BEN

So, what does that mean?

Sherri let's out a heavy sign that we can hear over the phone.

SHERRI (O.S.)

It means you've likely got a little less time then we had hoped.

Ben doesn't get upset.

BEN

Okay. I'll cope. I can't fight it.

Gloria walks into the kitchen, the coffee pot is fresh and smells great. She sees Ben on the phone. She's got a blanket around her and her hair and make up are a mess.

GLORIA

What's going on?

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S BACKYARD - THE NEXT DAY

Gloria sneaks out while Ben is sleeping to call Austin. There is a light coat of snow on the ground. She's sad but is trying her best to cope. She calls Austin.

GLORIA

Hello Austin?

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Gloria?

Austin is preparing for his partnership consideration meeting with the board of directors and the partners.

GLORIA

Do you have a minute?

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Yeah. Just a few. What's going on?
Gloria?

Gloria is trying to gather her nerve.

GLORIA

Ben. He didn't get into any clinical trials. He's doing home hospice.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Hospice?

Gloria sits on the concrete slab that is supposed to be a porch.

GLORIA

Yeah, and I don't know how to tell you this Austin

Austin's office phone starts beeping.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

One second Gloria.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Austin puts his cell phone down, while picking up his office phone.

AUSTIN

Hello, this is Austin Mesning.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT (O.S)

Mr. Mesning, you are needed in the conference room.

AUSTIN

Okay, thank you. Please tell the board and the directors I'll be there in just a moment.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Okay sir.

Austin gets back on his cell phone with Gloria. He's trying to wrap things up with her, but feels like he needs to hear her out. He is checking himself out in a mirror as he gets ready to go to his meeting. He picks up the cell phone

AUSTIN

What do you mean, hospice? Like he has a few months to live?

Gloria feels like she's not getting the point of her call across...

GLORIA (O.S.)
(firmly)
Weeks, maybe even days. You need to come now, and say goodbye.

Austin shuts his office door for a moment, it was open from his last meeting. He is very receptive.

AUSTIN
We'll leave tonight. Monica and I should get there by mid morning tomorrow. Let Ben know, I'm coming.

Austin hangs up the phone. He finishes getting ready for his meeting. He straightens his suit sleeves, and heads down the hall towards the board room.

CUT TO:

INT. PR FIRM MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Austin walks into the board room of Glendauser & Sthill. He sees the two founders Frank Glendauser and REGINALD STHILL, 71, tall, thin, with dark skin and greying black hair, clean shaven, are sitting at one end of the table with three board members sitting further down towards Austin. Austin goes to take a seat in a large leather chair sitting near the table.

MR. GLENDUSER
You'll want to stay standing for this son. You've not been coronated for that chair...yet.

Mr. Sthill is trying not to giggle. He gets up to shake Austin's hand.

MR. STHILL
We are very glad to be having this meeting Austin.

Austin remains standing, he has been waiting a long time for this meeting. He has wanted to be a partner for such a long time, and this meeting, and the offer letter will make him apart of one of the most well respected public relations and marking firms in the midwest.

MR. GLENDUSER

We have watched how you have grown from an intern, designing business cards and commercial campaigns, to one of the most skilled negotiators and I'd say one hell of a spin artist. You've spun bad news into gold for many important people.

Mr. Sthill laughs at this.

MR. GLENDUSER (CONT'D)

You have shown what it means to look to the future...

Mr. Glendauser moves his hand towards Mr. Sthill

MR. STHILL

And the future is what we have been thinking about. We're concerned with who will take the reigns when we kick the bucket. When we're pushing up daisies, we want to be certain, all of this

Mr. Sthill gestures towards the office and the grand window in the room...

MR. STHILL (CONT'D)

All of this is not for nothing. We've worked hard to build this firm over the last 40 years, and we've never come close to finding a partner that matches our sensibilities and our style.

Mr. Glendauser cuts in

MR. GLENDUSER

Someone as ruthless and hard working...

MR. STHILL

Someone as ambitious as you.

MR. GLENDUSER

Together we would like to present you today with an offer.

They slide an 8x11 envelope towards him. Austin lifts it from the table, and opens it. His eyes go as wide as possible. We see what the document says over Austin's shoulder. Partnership. 25% stake in the company, for life. A two million annual salary.

Another 25% stake in the company once Mr. Glendauser or Mr. Sthill passes away. It's a grand deal. But Austin has reservations.

AUSTIN

Gentlemen. I have been waiting for nearly two decades for this opportunity to present itself. The first day I stepped in the doors here, I thought to myself, "one day, my name will be on the lobby sign. My name will be on the stationary, the business cards.

Austin loosens up a bit.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

But, you know, with everything that has happened in my life recently. Learning that my best friend has cancer, and feeling my own time outside of work slipping from my hands, I just don't know that I can accept this generous offer.

Mr. Glendauser slams his fist down on the table.

MR. GLENDUSER

Are you fucking insane? Is this some kind of stupid joke Mesning.

AUSTIN

No sir. I've thought about things for months, and I just feel I'm working just to earn this, but what's after that? What does a higher salary matter if I can't be with the people I love? What does it mean to gain all of this, and yet leave nothing behind but money?

MR. GLENDUSER

If you're serious. If you think this opportunity will ever present itself again, you'd better think a little more about what you say next...

MR. STHILL

Austin, we did not offer this on a whim, it's been all your work, all your hard work, you've earned this...just take a moment.

Austin, stops Mr. Sthill

AUSTIN

I don't need a moment. I'm offering
my resignation.

Mr. Glendauser and Mr. Sthill get up, in almost a menacing
way, if they weren't so old.

MR. STHILL

We don't accept.

AUSTIN

Effective immediately.

Austin walks out the board room door. He loosens his tie and
grabs a bankers box. He puts his personal belongings in it
and heads to his car.

CUT TO:

EXT. PR FIRM - AFTERNOON

Austin is looking up at the building. He feels a pit in his
stomach, but he knows he is doing the right thing.

AUSTIN

It's been real guys.

He get's in his car and calls Monica. No answer. He starts
driving his Subaru down a busy street, towards the suburbs.
He tries to call Monica again. It goes to voicemail.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Monica, where the hell are you? I
have something important to tell
you, I'm on my way home. Be ready
to go when I get home, pack a bag
for a week. And call me back or
text me to let me know you got this
message. I love you, see you soon.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S DRIVE WAY - AFTERNOON

Austin pulls his car into the drive way. He looks at the
house, something feels off. He walks to the back of the
house, Monica isn't on the patio or in the yard. He goes
through the back door. Monica isn't there.

He uses "Find Me" on his phone, only to find out that it has been disabled by Monica. Maybe she's at church. He tries her phone once more.

CUT TO:

INT. JERRY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Billy is just coming in from school. He has a lanyard with the Honda emblem on it, a car key and his house key. He is swinging them around. He hears moaning in the distance. He walks to the kitchen table. Monica's phone is vibrating on the table. Billy sees the name across Monica's phone...it's Austin.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

AUSTIN

Come on. This is bullshit.

Austin carries his phone into the bedroom and grabs a suitcase from the closet, he is stuffing the suitcase with enough clothes to last a week. His phone rings. It's Monica, he immediately picks it up

CUT TO:

EXT. JERRY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

AUSTIN

Hello, Monica

Billy is walking around the house towards Austin and Monica's place.

BILLY

Hello, is this Mr. Mesning?

Austin is furious. He already knows what is happening, but he remains calm with Billy.

AUSTIN

Billy, why do you have my wife's phone?

Billy takes a deep breath, he hesitates to say anything. Then decides to.

BILLY

Mr. Mesning, I think Mrs. Mesning
is having an affair with my Step-
Dad, with Jerry.

Austin sees Billy coming towards his house. He steps outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTIN & MONICA'S DRIVE WAY - MOMENTS LATER

Austin waves to Billy, and hangs up his phone.

BILLY

Here's your wife's phone. I think
they're doing it right now. I heard
some sex noises.

Austin is furious, but he isn't surprised. We see Austin
marching with a quick steady pace towards Jerry's home.

CUT TO:

INT. JERRY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Austin is coming through the back door. He hears the moaning
and follows the noise to Jerry's bedroom, calling out

AUSTIN

(yelling)
Monica!

CUT TO:

INT. JERRY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Austin walks through the bedroom door. He surprises Monica,
who is on top of Jerry. She turns around and wraps a sheet
around her. Jerry sees Austin.

AUSTIN

You holier than thou motherfucker.
I knew something was going on, I
had my intuition this whole time,
nagging me.

JERRY

Austin, I'm sorry but I need you to
leave.

Monica is crying.

MONICA

(crying)

Honey, I'm sorry. I wanted to tell you...

Austin throws Monica's phone at the wall.

AUSTIN

I'm leaving. Ben is dying. He'll be lucky to make it through the end of the year.

Austin looks at Jerry with disgust.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

You fucking hypocritical asshole. You can have her. I'm done with all of this.

Austin looks at Monica.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

How long has this been going on?

Monica is sobbing. She makes no excuses, and sees no point in lying.

MONICA

Just a year.

AUSTIN

Ohhh, yeah, just a year.

Austin is over it, he's over her and the marriage.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Don't let me stand in your way. I'm fucking done. I'm heading to Ohio. You can stay at the house and pack your shit. You'd better be gone when I get back.

MONICA

Where am I supposed to go?

AUSTIN

I don't know, I don't care. You made a decision, live with the consequences. Try praying for forgiveness, you won't get it from me.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S STREET - THE NEXT DAY

It's mid afternoon. Austin is pulling down Ben's street. He's exhausted, and has been trying to call Ben and Gloria all morning with no success. As he pulls up to Ben's house, he sees an EMS vehicle and a police car in the driveway. Gloria is sitting on the frozen ground outside. Gloria spots Austin's car. She runs towards it as Austin parks across from Ben's house. Austin get's out. Gloria embraces him, tears running down her cheeks.

AUSTIN

What happened? Where's Ben?

Gloria starts sobbing heavier, and muffling her speech in Austin's shoulder. She pulls back and looks at Austin, her eyes are waterfalls of tears. She struggles to get the words out...

GLORIA

Austin, he's...he's dead.

Austin's heart sinks. He looks at Ben's house, and embraces Gloria.

AUSTIN

Oh god Gloria, when did this happen?

GLORIA

I found him in bed after lunch. He laid down to take a nap, and I was watching a show. I went in to check on him at like 2:12 and he was in there all blue.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Austin and Gloria are sitting in Ben's living room. They have his bedroom door closed. Gloria is holding onto a photo. It's of the four friends. The photo from Austin's guitar case, and from Ben's photo album, the photo from Gloria's apartment.

AUSTIN

I just can't believe that he's gone. I can't believe his life is just over.

Gloria's eyes are red from crying throughout the day. She is wearing a sweatshirt of Ben's. It's a Frightened Rabbit hoodie.

GLORIA

I, I can't do this Austin. I can't be here without him. What am I going to do. I've got to get to a meeting tomorrow. I need you to keep me out of the liquor.

Austin walks over to Gloria.

AUSTIN

Alright. We'll get through this. We'll figure this out.

It finally hits Gloria, that Monica is not there.

GLORIA

Where's Monica? Why isn't she here?

AUSTIN

Monica has sleeping with this old guy from her church. He's married too.

Gloria scrunches her face up.

GLORIA

Gross. I mean, I'm sorry.

Austin laughs a little.

AUSTIN

It was gross, really gross. I walked in on them. And well, it was gross. His step son found out and told me.

Austin looks around Ben's living room. There's a photo of a young Ben with his parents.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Did Ben's parents know he was sick?

Gloria gets sad again.

GLORIA

They told us, they told us that

Gloria starts sobbing

GLORIA (CONT'D)

They told us that it was god's judgment and that my Dad told them to stay clear of Ben and I.

Austin's rage flares up.

AUSTIN
I swear to god, I'm going to put
him in his place.

GLORIA
No, just let it go. It doesn't
change anything now.

Austin appeases her.

AUSTIN
Okay. Alright.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Austin is getting ready to go somewhere. He is dressed in a suit. He's put dark glasses on and has shaved his beard off. Gloria emerges from the bathroom. She has just taken a shower and is getting ready to go to the Zen Center. Gloria takes the towel off her head, her hair has grown over the months.

GLORIA
Where are you headed Austin?

Austin looks at Gloria.

AUSTIN
I'm headed to church.

Gloria looks with disapproval at Austin. He looks back at her and shrugs.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Where are you going Gloria?

GLORIA
I'm headed to the Zen Center. I
need to talk with Sammi.

Austin nods his head.

AUSTIN
Okay, would you like a ride?

GLORIA
Sure, I would love that. Can we
grab coffee too?

Austin straightens his tie and puts on a brimmed hat.

AUSTIN
Sure thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - LATER THAT MORNING

Austin is dropping Gloria off at the Zen Center. A light snow begins to fall. Gloria gets out of the car. She looks in at Austin.

GLORIA
Austin, behave, okay.

Austin winks from behind his sunglasses.

AUSTIN
Yeah. Sure. I'll behave for you
Gloria.

Gloria shuts the door and walks into the zen center.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAISE THE LORD CHRISTIAN CHURCH - LATER

Austin pulls his car into the church parking lot carefully. He's being calculated, so as to not drawl attention to himself. He carefully keeps his eyes down and his hat a top his head, fighting with the wind.

CUT TO:

INT. PRAISE THE LORD CHRISTIAN CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Austin is walking down the center aisle. He picks a seat in a row near the back of the church. He spots Pastor Gary Meris, Gloria's father and head pastor of P.T.L. Church approaching the pulpit. Austin sits quietly, even as feelings of anger stir inside him.

PASTOR GARY
Today, we turn to the book of Luke,
chapter 15, verse 11.

Austin knows where this is going.

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)
And he said...

Pastor Gary goes into his sermon and reading of the Gospel of Luke. The prodigal son parable.

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)

He says to the one son, you're
always with me, I know you are
mine, amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen!

PASTOR GARY

But to the prodigal, he shows
favor! For god is a merciful,
loving god, who waits for all of
his children to heed the call of
their hearts, and return to him.
Amen!

CONGREGATION

Amen Pastor!

Austin is simmering.

PASTOR GARY

Do we have any lost sons and
daughters here today?

Austin recognizes what this service must be...

SENIOR CONGREGATE

Any sinners looking to repent and
return to God today?

Pastor Gary waves his hands towards the band. They start
playing overly emotional music.

PASTOR GARY

The alter is open this morning
folks.

CUT TO:

INT. ZEN CENTER MEETING ROOM - SAME TIME

Gloria is sitting with Sammi. She is crying and telling Sammi
about the last morning with Ben. Sammi is sad, and is trying
to maintain their composure as well. Sammi lights an incense.

SAMMI

I can't imagine the suffering this
is causing you Gloria. Ben was a
good man. He was a good human.

(MORE)

SAMMI (CONT'D)

His work on religion was fascinating, and he lived his life trying to show people that change starts with individuals. That it starts with greater understanding.

Gloria is sobbing heavily. She feels so incredibly drained.

GLORIA

I just loved him so much. I wish I would have never fled to California. I wish I would have just stayed and made a life with him.

Sammi embraces Gloria.

SAMMI

The past is the past. If you let regrets flood your mind, you'll sink to the bottom of an endless ocean of despair.

Gloria looks around, she wipes her tears on her sweatshirt.

GLORIA

I don't know what to do Sammi. Where do I go? I can't see going back to California, but I can't stay here.

SAMMI

We can work through this.

CUT TO:

INT. PRAISE THE LORD CHRISTIAN CHURCH - MORNING

Austin is ready to make his move. He stands up, and is one among about half a dozen people walking towards the front.

SENIOR CONGREGATE

Come on down brothers and sisters.

Austin makes it half way down the center aisle and takes his hat off.

AUSTIN

Don't fall for this. This is all for show.

The congregation turns and looks directly at Austin.

PASTOR GARY
Who is that?

Pastor Gary signals for them to turn down the lights on the stage.

PASTOR GARY (CONT'D)
Bring up the lights, now!

The lights go from dim show time lights to blaring shopping center lights. Austin is on the offensive.

AUSTIN
You tell this story about the prodigal son, but what about your own daughter? Do you know what's she's been through?

Pastor Gary sees who it is.

PASTOR GARY
Austin Mesning! How dare you come into this house

AUSTIN
How dare you spew this bullshit!

Pastor Gary signals to the men in the congregation near the front. They start to move towards Austin. Austin dodges them.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
You speak about mercy and forgiveness? You don't know how many lives you ruined do you? You never see the fallen or exiled, do you. You sit on your fucking high horse and you keep your little secrets.

PASTOR GARY
Watch, your mouth now son. Take it easy. Let's talk this out.

AUSTIN
You don't want the truth coming out, do you?

Pastor Gary is sweating. He is trying to get the band to start playing over Austin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
No...don't play over me. You know...
(beat)
(MORE)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Did you all know that he was beating his first wife. That's why she left. The story about her getting into witchcraft is all bullshit. Some of the elders know this.

Pastor Gary goes on the defensive...

PASTOR GARY

You have no proof of that. That's a devil's lie.

AUSTIN

Is it? Your daughter took a few beatings from your hand too, huh, Gary?

PASTOR GARY

Gloria has been confused for a long time now.

Austin is running around, trying to catch his breath. Some of the men in the congregation get ahold of him, they are dragging him out

AUSTIN

Gary, and his whole leadership are hypocrites. No one should believe anything out of their fucking mouths.

PASTOR GARY

Throw him out of here. This is God's house.

AUSTIN

The bastardized version of god, you worship, you god damn vultures.

(beat)

I know, Gary! I know everything you did.

SENIOR CONGREGATE

I'm calling the cops.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAISE THE LORD CHRISTIAN CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

They throw Austin onto the concrete sidewalk outside the church. He scrapes his hands up.

AUSTIN

Call them, I'll report you all for assault.

Austin walks to his car. His phone is inside the car. He gets in and turns the key. He pulls out of the parking lot hastily. He calls Gloria.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - NOON

Gloria is saying bye to Sammi for the time. She embraces Sammi and is walking on the sidewalk. Her phone rings.

GLORIA

Hello Austin.

Austin is trying to catch his breath. There is small smears of blood on his steering wheel.

AUSTIN

Hi Gloria. Where are you now?

GLORIA

I'm right outside the Zen Center.

AUSTIN

Hang tight. I'm headed to you.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZEN CENTER - LATER

Austin pulls his car up and sees Gloria sitting at the stoop of the Zen Center.

AUSTIN

Hey, get in.

Gloria sees Austin and gets in his car.

GLORIA

You want to grab lunch?

Gloria takes inventory of Austin's current state. He's got blood on his hand, and his suit looks roughed up.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

What the hell happened to you?

AUSTIN

Ohh, this? I confronted your Dad at the church. The congregation got a little defensive.

Gloria shakes her head.

GLORIA

You don't have to go to war with him you know Austin. He's never going to change. He's stubborn and believes he has God's favor. Karma catches up to us all, eventually.

Austin is at a stop light. He takes a deep breath, in and out.

AUSTIN

I suppose you are right, there's no point in

BOOM! As Austin is driving through a green light, someone runs the red and clips Austin's front passenger fender. The car violently spins, glass, metal, and plastic go everywhere.

GLORIA

(groans)
Ohhhh fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Austin and Gloria are sharing an E.R. room. Austin has already been looked at, his shoulder has a sling on it. Gloria's leg in bad shape. They are running a blood check.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have gone to confront your Dad. You are right. Ben lived his whole life in this town, and never felt the need to confront your Dad. I need to just let this all go.

Gloria rubs her hip, and her right shoulder.

GLORIA

Yeah man. You've got so much more to do with your life than getting caught up in this shit hole town with those idiots.

AUSTIN

Well, yes, and no. I don't know what I'm going to do when I get back to Chicago.

Gloria is confused.

GLORIA

Wait, what do you mean? I thought you were on your way to gaining partnership with your firm? I mean I know that shit with Monica is horrible, but you'll be okay, right?

AUSTIN

I left that job Gloria. I don't want to spend the rest of my life just working for a legacy in marketing and spin. I don't know, I guess I'll reach out to this Mr. Porter and see if he still needs my help.

We hear a knock on the sliding door.

GLORIA

Yeah, come in.

A physician's aid comes in and starts examining Gloria.

PHYSICIAN'S AID

Gloria, are you aware that you are pregnant?

GLORIA

I mean I guess that's possible.

Gloria begins to sob.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Austin, it's Ben's baby.

Austin embraces Gloria. They are embracing as the camera pulls up.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

EPILOGUE

INT. GLORIA'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Gloria is coming in from work. She puts her bags down and we see Jane, and ELLA, 2, sandy brown hair, chunky, and wearing a pride shirt and a diaper run to Gloria. Jane, follows Ella into the kitchen to greet Gloria. Gloria and Jane embrace and share a quick kiss.

GLORIA

Hello my child! Hello sweetheart!

JANE

Hey Gloria, are you jumping on a call tonight?

GLORIA

Yeah, he's probably finishing up with dinner.

Gloria gets out her laptop. She finds Austin's name on her list of contacts. The baby, Ella, sits on her lap and looks around. The screen rings two times

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Austin now lives in a small Philadelphia apartment, working for a medium sized non-profit. We can see on his shirt a logo for a non-profit.

AUSTIN

Hello Gloria. Hello Ella.

CUT TO:

EXT. A GRAVEYARD - AFTERNOON

An man stands over a grave that reads Benjamin J. Schnell. The man places flowers on the tombstone.

BEN SCHNELL SENIOR

(sobbing)

I'm so sorry my son.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

