

Finding His Path

Written by

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FADE IN

EXT. ALLEYWAY BESIDE LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

JON VORNHOLT, 15, tall, stick-thin, hollow-cheeked, in pure primal id rips into a black garbage bag atop the pile.

Jon crams a pizza crust into his mouth, gags, chews, swallows.

SUPER: Winter, 2000

Jon presses in on his stomach, grimaces against the cold air.

Jon turns, grabs another bag, tears into it with even more ferocity, widens his eyes at the food that spills out of it.

Jon misses catching the disgusting mixture of wilted salad awash in runny dressing and in old noodles and sauce.

Jon drops down onto his knees, frantically scoops those leftovers up off the pavement, stuffs them into his mouth.

INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - SAME

The restaurant exudes warmth, charm, ambience. You can smell the garlic and red wine. Vivaldi pipes from the speakers.

MIKE WITTROCK, 60, smiles at his wife, MARJORIE WITTROCK, 58.

Mike lifts his wine glass, holds it up in a toast.

MIKE

Thirty-three years ago, our first date, in this very booth.

Marjorie smiles back at him, clinks her wine glass to his.

MIKE

I love you, Marge.

Marjorie grins warmly as her eyes brim.

LUIGI PATRIONELLI -- who invites the question, "Who trusts a skinny chef?" -- walks up to their booth.

Mike indicates the shiny new plaque on a nearby wall: "Detroit's Best Chicken Marsala for the Year 2000".

MIKE

Too true, too true. Guido outdid himself tonight.

LUIGI
 (thick Italian accent)
 He knew tonight was special.

Luigi smiles.

LUIGI
 So, now, of course, Valeria's
 tiramisu and *due espressi*.

Mike glances at Marjorie, then back to Luigi.

MIKE
 We're fine, Luigi. Just the check.

Luigi looks as if Mike has wounded him to his core.

LUIGI
 Did I not just say tonight was
 special? No check, *mi amici*.

Mike and Marjorie laugh.

MARJORIE
 Valeria's tiramisu it is, then.

EXT. OUTSIDE LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - SHORT TIME LATER

Marjorie and Mike hustle down the sidewalk, embracing each other against the cold winter night.

As they cross the mouth of the alleyway, Marjorie stops.

She points.

MARJORIE
 Mike, look. Oh, my God, that boy,
 he's eating out of the trash.

Jon looks up fast when Mike and Marjorie approach him.

Jon straightens, plasters a grin across his face.

JON
 Hey. Got a few bucks? Help a guy
 get a burger?

Jon regards Mike with a smirk.

JON
 Hey, mister, I'll fuck your wife
 for fifty bucks. You can watch.

MIKE
What?!? Hell, no!

JON
I'll fuck you for twenty-five.

MIKE
Son, how old are you?

Jon spits on the ground, strikes a languid pose. He takes out his pack of cigarettes, pinches one between his lips.

JON
(deepens his voice)
Eighteen.

Jon catches Marjorie looking at him sternly.

JON
Fifteen.

MIKE
Why aren't you home? Don't you have school tomorrow? Homework?

Jon returns the cigarette to the pack, rolls his eyes.

JON
You going to fucking help me score or what? Look at you two, you got it. You people over here at Wayne State, you're all rich.

MIKE
Absolutely not we're not helping you score.

Mike takes a step toward Jon.

Jon narrows his hard eyes at him, stands his full height, brings his fists up. He clenches his teeth, breathes hard.

JON
I'll fuck you up. I mean it!

Marjorie puts a hand on her husband's arm. Mike steps back.

Jon only slowly drops his fists. His eyelids droop. He looks as if he's going to cave in under the stained and torn sweatshirt that reads Northwestern High. He grabs the wall.

MARJORIE
When's the last time you ate?

Jon glances down at his vomit of the disgusting salad/noodles mixture, looks back up, glares at her.

JON

When the fuck you think, lady?

Marjorie takes out a ten-dollar bill.

MARJORIE

Go down to that all-night store and get yourself something to eat.

JON

Fuck food, bitch. I need a fix. Ten bucks ain't gonna buy me shit.

His bottom lip quivers as he stares at Marjorie, sees tears spring to her eyes.

JON

I'm sorry, lady. I shouldn't have talked to you like that.

Jon looks at Mike.

JON

You can belt me for that, mister.

Jon turns his head to present his left cheek to him.

JON

Hard. It's okay, I'm used to it.

Mike frowns, shakes his head.

MIKE

Looks like you've already taken a pounding from someone tonight. Looks like it hurts.

JON

Everything hurts, mister.

Marjorie holds the money out to Jon.

MARJORIE

Do we have your word you'll use this ten dollars to buy food at that store and not go score?

Jon nods stiffly. He takes it, exits the alleyway.

Marjorie and Mike follow him, watch as Jon enters the store.

Hardly moments later:

TONY, the store's clerk, bursts out onto the sidewalk with Jon by the scruff of his disgusting jacket. Jon writhes.

TONY

Hey, Professors! Did this punk jack
you two just now?!

MARJORIE

No! We gave him that money, Tony!

Jon yanks himself from Tony's grip, glares at all of them.

JON

ASSHOLES!

Jon takes off down the sidewalk.

EXT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Mike and Marjorie walk up to the restaurant's ornate door.

They glance at each other, grin.

Jon stands up straight from leaning back against the jamb.

He drops his cigarette, grinds it out.

JON

Hey. Got a few bucks? Help a guy
get a burger?

MARJORIE

No, but we'll share a large pizza
with you. All the toppings you
want. Sound good?

Jon hides his excitement under a noncommittal shrug.

MIKE

Took three days, but you came back.

JON

Guess so, mister.

They enter the restaurant.

INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

The large pizza pan sits empty, as does Jon's plate.

The Wittrocks have taken only token bites of their slices.

Jon slurps the last of his large drink through his straw.

The WAITRESS brings the check.

Marjorie places two twenty-dollar bills atop the check, then another twenty in front of Jon after the waitress leaves.

Jon stares down at it, then only slowly up at the adults.

JON

Wh-what do you want for this?

MARJORIE

Nothing.

JON

I'm just gonna use this to score.0.

MIKE

One less time you have to get on your knees in a public bathroom.

Jon darts his eyes between them, settles them on Mike.

MIKE

I'm a social worker, Jon. I know what you kids have to do to survive on the streets.

Jon frowns back at them, stares down at the money.

Jon puts his fingers on the twenty-dollar bill, slides it out of sight under the table. He looks directly at Marjorie. He barely whispers:

JON

Um...thanks.

INT. ALL-NIGHT STORE ON 8 MILE ROAD - NIGHT

Jon, with a small grin, grabs a comic: Captain America.

EXT. SAME ALL-NIGHT STORE ON 8 MILE ROAD - NIGHT

For 6'1", Jon has himself remarkably scrunched down into a human ball as he sits in the entrance, reads the comic book.

INT. JON AND CORDELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jon's breath wafts in vapor as he shivers.

Jon goes to his room's closet, pulls out a small box, carries it to his bare mattress where he props the box on his lap.

Jon opens the box, takes out a little stuffed bear, puts it to his nose, sniffs. He pulls out some handwritten letters, then a bent photograph of a young smiling woman holding a baby. He runs his finger over the photo.

JON

I miss you, Mom.

He takes out some sports medals, grins with a hint of pride.

Jon pulls the three comic books from under his jacket, tucks them and their receipt into the box. He quickly returns his "treasure chest" to its hiding spot, piles trash atop it.

Jon stretches out on the mattress. He slips his hand inside the front of his filthy, threadbare jeans, starts to breathe hard as his eyelids droop.

INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Mike and Marjorie hurry into the restaurant, quickly hang up their coats and scarves.

Mike gives Luigi a quick look.

MIKE

Thanks for calling us.

Luigi gives him a nod, a wink, and a grin.

Mike and Marjorie slide into the booth across from Jon.

MARJORIE

Where's your jacket, honey? It's freezing outside.

Jon shrugs.

Luigi brings them three mugs of steaming coffee.

Jon wraps his hands around his mug, lifts it to his lips. He takes a long sip. His shivering starts to subside.

JON

I'm in trouble. I mean, big trouble.

JON (CONT'D)

This guy, Ferret, he's a real psycho. Dad stiffed him some drugs. Now, he's after me, and he's got this gun, big motherfucker. I can't go home, I can't go back to 8 Mile, I can't go nowhere.

Jon stares into the coffee.

JON

Fuck, I'm really dead this time.

Jon pounds back against the booth.

JON

'Bout damn time too.

MARJORIE

C'mon, Jon, you don't wish to die.

JON

Fuck yeah I do! But Dad's right: I'm too much of a goddamn pussy to take his gun and do it.

MARJORIE

You can go somewhere. With us. To our home. We've got lots of room. We want you there.

MIKE

He can? We do?

Jon narrows his eyes at Mike.

JON

Fuck you, asshole.

Jon's frown deepens.

JON

Can't you slip me four, five hundred bucks, maybe a thousand? That'll get me to Chicago or Phoenix or L.A.

MIKE

Fifteen years old and you live on the streets of L.A.?

JON

I'm fifteen years old and I live on the streets of Detroit. Big diff, motherfucker.

Mike shrugs.

MIKE

Suit yourself, punk. You got it all figured out.

Mike motions to his wife.

MARJORIE

(to Jon)

It's been nice meeting you, Jon. We really hope your situation turns around. We really do.

Marjorie and Mike start to get up from the booth.

JON

I told you, I don't have anywhere to go. I mean, you're teachers. Teachers help kids, right?

MARJORIE

They help you at your school, Jon?

Jon sighs, shakes his head.

Mike thinks for a moment, takes out a business card. He scribbles on the back of it, hands it to Jon.

MIKE

Do you know the MOTS shelter?

Jon nods.

MIKE

Go there, give them that card, tell them you talked to me, Dr. Michael Wittrock. That should get you a cot for at least tonight.

JON

What are you, fuckin' shitferbrains? I can't go to MOTS, man. Ferret knows about that place, pushes a ton of drugs there every fuckin' night, asshole.

MIKE

Which one is it, Jon? I'm an asshole, a shitferbrains, or a motherfucker?

The teenager stares at them wide-eyed. He gulps hard, darts his eyes from one adult back to the other.

JON
 (voice quivering)
 Jesus Christ, please help me.
 Please! Ferret's gonna kill me.

Mike stares at him, gulps. He bites on his lower lip for a moment before hardening his expression. He shrugs.

MIKE
 Sorry, kid. Wish we could. Just get
 outta here and leave us alone.

Marjorie and Mike rise from the booth, head toward the counter, their backs to the boy.

Marjorie shuts her eyes, grabs and squeezes her husband's hand. Mike squeezes it right back.

They slowly turn around.

Jon stands there, directly behind them, shivering.

JON
 Your place, I bet you keep it real
 warm, huh?

Marjorie nods, grins.

MARJORIE
 Yeah, Jon, real warm.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT

Jon scans the whole condo with one sweep of his keen eyes.

JON
 Wow! All this is yours? You people
 are hella rich.

Mike chuckles, turns, hangs up his jacket, turns back around.

MIKE
 Whoa! Jon, what are you doing?!?

Jon, his belt undone, unbuttons, unzips his stained jeans.

JON
 Suck my dick, or I suck yours. I
 don't care.

Marjorie walks in.

JON

Sex with your wife, you watch?
Don't worry, I've fucked women, not
just men. And girls. Guys like to
watch that while they wank off. You
can do that, or you can fuck me
while she watches.

His eyelids droop.

JON

I'm just too fuckin' tired to care.

MIKE

Jon, do your clothes back up.

MARJORIE

C'mon now, Jon. Please.

Jon's hands shake as he complies.

JON

What the fuck do you want? Everyone
fuckin' wants something, goddammit.

Marjorie steps forward.

MARJORIE

We don't. We just...don't.

JON

That's some kind of fucking joke,
right, lady? I don't get jokes.

His eyelids droop more. Jon wavers where he stands.

MARJORIE

Jon, you're safe here, we promise.
You'll always be safe here.

Jon looks at her hard. He asks her, with a hint of hope:

JON

Yeah?

Marjorie nods earnestly.

JON

There's nowhere safe, just places
less bad.

MARJORIE

Get a good night's sleep. We're going to have a lot to talk about in the morning.

JON

Sleep? Where?

MARJORIE

Guest room upstairs. A soft bed. You'll have your own bathroom. You can take a long shower, however long you want. By the time you get out, I'll have pajamas you can wear tonight, and Dr. Wittrock will be back by then with new clothes for you to put on in the morning. That'll be nice, won't it? Brand new stuff that's just yours alone?

Mike and Marjorie watch him, waiting.

JON

Dad's gonna really fuckin' beat me this time for talking to you two.

Jon stands his full height, his eyes, which had softened for just a hint of a moment, harden again.

JON

I'm garbage and always will be.

Marjorie leads Jon upstairs while Mike grabs his car keys.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Mike and Marjorie knock on the guest room door, wait for a response, knock again a little louder.

After one more try, they let themselves in.

No strung-out, drugged-up, starved teenager, just untouched high-quality new clothes in two piles atop the dresser.

A beautiful, new, expensive leather jacket hangs on a hook.

Mike checks the windows. Locked. He knits his brows.

MARJORIE

Mike, do you hear that?

They both step over to the closet. Mike opens it.

Jon, curled up tight in the back of the closet, fully dressed, his body twitches as he groans, makes noises.

Marjorie reaches in, takes the boy's pulse with one hand, puts the back of her other hand against his forehead.

Mike regards his wife sternly.

MIKE

We're both mandated reporters.

MARJORIE

If we report this, they'll just take him away and we'll never get him back.

MIKE

He's not a stray puppy we picked up off the street, Marge. And who said anything about us getting him back? You saying we should keep this kid? Look at him. He's totally feral!

Marjorie just stares at Mike as she strokes Jon's forearm.

MIKE

A kid? Marge, you've never talked about a kid since --

Marjorie puts her finger in his face.

MARJORIE

Don't you bring that up, Mike. Don't you do that to me.

MIKE

Marge, you're not less of a woman -

Mike cuts himself off, looks at her, softens his expression.

MIKE

I'm sorry.

Marjorie strokes Jon's arm more, pushes sweaty hair out of his eyes twitching under his closed lids.

MARJORIE

We are mandated reporters, but we do have seventy-two hours.

Mike sighs.

MIKE

Okay.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Mike and Marjorie sit in the living room, look up at Jon.

Jon sweats, shakes, can barely stand, his eyes wild.

Both adults stand, walk over to him.

JON

I've got to go score.

MARJORIE

We know you do, Jon.

JON

I'm not comin' back. You'll just call the cops.

Jon puts his hand on the outside of his right jeans pocket that has something in it that it hadn't before.

MARJORIE

Jon, we're not going to do that.

JON

Yeah, right. People lie all the time. That's all they do.

Jon blinks at them.

JON

Tell you what, I bring a bunch of kids over here, rob you nice folks blind, beat the shit outta you.

MIKE

We're trusting you won't do that.

JON

Trust? You two are fuckin' chumps.

MARJORIE

It's freezing outside. Why don't you put on that new jacket Dr. Wittrock got you?

JON

It'll just get jacked.

Marjorie walks all the way up to Jon.

MARJORIE

Jon, please come back. Please promise you'll do that.

JON
 Something like me hanging around
 you, lousing up your lives?

Mike takes a jacket out of the closet, brings it over to him.

Jon widens his eyes at him, raises his arm in front of him.

Mike slows his step. He holds the jacket out to him.

Jon takes it, slips in on.

JON
 You're never getting this back.

MIKE
 I don't care about the jacket. I --
 we care about you.

Mike puts his arm around Marjorie's shoulders.

MIKE
 You don't come back, you're going
 to break this wonderful woman's
 heart. You ready to do that, Jon?

Jon locks eyes with Marjorie and gulps, again and again,
 sweat pours down his face.

Jon disappears out the door, slams it closed behind him.

EXT. A RANDOM ALLEYWAY - DAY

Jon yanks his belt hard in order to tourniquet his bicep.

Track marks, interspersed with burns where someone has spent
 years putting cigarettes out on him, pockmark his forearms.

He grits his stained and chipped teeth, yanks the belt even
 harder, he slaps his forearm, viciously.

JON
 C'mon, you motherfucker! C'MON!

The vein finally does, Jon slams the needle into it, draws
 dark, angry blood up into the syringe, then slams the plunger
 to make the mixture explode into his tortured body.

Jon topples over onto his side, wraps his arms around his
 midsection. He moans, spits, cries.

JON
 Break her heart? What about mine?

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT

Jon stands in the foyer, shivers despite Mike's big jacket.

JON
Cops?

MARJORIE
No. We promised.

Marjorie looks him in the eyes.

MARJORIE
Kids?

Jon sniffs, shakes his head, looks at Mike.

JON
May I please, sir, go upstairs?

MIKE
Of course you may.

Jon has mounted three steps up the stairs when Marjorie:

MARJORIE
Thank you for coming home, Jon.

The boy stops, shoulders stooped, head down.

He keeps his back to them, then continues to the top of the stairs, out of sight.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Jon, skin scrubbed clean, hair dry and soft, slips into the seat across from Marjorie at the table in the breakfast nook.

Jon catches both adults regarding him suspiciously.

JON
Okay I put these new clothes on?
They've just been sitting there the
last three nights.

Jon returns their suspicious looks.

JON
You said it was mine, all for me.
Damn. Fuck it, I'll take 'em off.

MARJORIE

Yes, Jon. It's all for you. It's yours. It's perfectly okay.

Jon absently fingers the cuff of the soft flannel shirt.

JON

It's...ah...new. I've never had anything new before. It's always just been Good Will.

Marjorie smiles at him, regards him keenly.

MARJORIE

You're so handsome, Jon. Wow.

Jon gulps, suddenly looks immensely sad, moves to rise.

Marjorie and Mike both watch him with knitted brows.

MARJORIE

Where are you going? You just sat down. Aren't you hungry?

JON

Folks that call me handsome or pretty boy usually just want sex.

Jon shrugs.

JON

These clothes, the food, this place, I knew it was all a gyp.

Jon hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON

On the couch? Upstairs? Right here on this table? You can watch, Pops.

MARJORIE

No, Jon. My God, no.

Marjorie shakes her head.

MARJORIE

You don't ever have to have sex if you don't want it. Nobody has the right to do that to you.

JON

Yeah, right. What fuckin' world you live in, lady?

JON (CONT'D)

I'm just a fuckin' piece of meat, a fuckin' dildo with a pulse. I know what I am.

Marjorie thinks fast, sits up, plasters on a grin.

MARJORIE

Mike, look at the intelligence in those beautiful blue eyes. Handsome and intelligent. And I'm sure he's athletic -- look at him. What a combination.

Marjorie regards her husband with impatience.

Mike finally gets the message.

MIKE

Yes! Yes, indeed. For sure. And cleans up like a new penny. So many wonderful qualities.

Jon darts those intelligent eyes from one adult to the other.

JON

Tell my school. They got me in all the stupid kids classes. Doesn't matter -- I never show up anyway.

Jon frowns.

JON

Why would I? I hate all that classwork bullshit. I just want to do sports. And I would be athletic if Dad would sign off on any of it, but he says I gotta mule for him.

Jon regards them forlornly.

JON

I love basketball. I want to play baseball and football and go out for swimming and track. Hell, I even want to try golf and tennis. I want to do it all. But I know my grades aren't good enough to be on a team. Anyway, who would want me?

MIKE

People just might surprise you.

Jon narrows his eyes at Mike.

Jon reaches for the plate of toast, then withdraws his hand.

JON

May I please, sir, have some?

MIKE

Of course you may. Jon, you may eat anything you want, all you want. With no conditions.

JON

No conditions? There are always conditions, asshole. You're sure fuckin' stupid for a professor.

Mike narrows his eyes, flares his nostrils a bit.

Marjorie pats Mike's hand, Mike takes a deep breath, calms.

Jon takes a piece of toast, then scoops out some scrambled eggs onto his plate.

Jon stoops his shoulders, stares down at the table.

Marjorie and Mike glance at each other again, return their focus to the boy.

Not looking up, his voice quivering:

JON

May I please begin eating, sir?

Mike frowns. He sighs, nods.

MIKE

Yes, of course you may.

Jon grabs his fork, starts shoveling his food into his mouth. He hardly bothers to chew. Egg dribbles down his chin.

Marjorie pours Jon a glass of orange juice. Jon washes down his food, puts the empty glass down, grins at Marjorie.

JON

Thanks, Dr. Wittrock, ma'am.

Mike chuckles.

MIKE

It's nice to see you grin. You really are, son, a good-looking young man.

Mike holds his hand out towards the hair in Jon's eyes.

Jon immediately tightens back up, flinches, shrinks away from Mike, Jon's eyes those of a scared, cornered rabbit.

Jon has his arm up in front of his face, he swallows and swallows, stares at Mike from behind his arm.

Mike blinks, opens his mouth to say something. He looks at his hand, withdraws it immediately.

Jon narrows his eyes at him. He sneers at Mike as he shoves his plate away, slams back in his seat, crosses his arms.

Marjorie puts her fork down, takes a deep breath.

MARJORIE

We need to start establishing some rules around here, or we're never going to start trusting each other.

Jon shifts his narrow-eyed glare from Mike to Marjorie.

JON

Rules?

MARJORIE

Yes. Rules. It's called something you've clearly never been exposed to: a civilized society. If you want to sleep here, Jon, eat with us, bathe here, here are the rules. Real world, Jon.

Jon narrows his eyes even more at her.

JON

So much for that bullshit about no conditions. Goddamn hyp-oh-crytes.

MIKE

It's "hypocrites", and, no, we're not. And frankly, young man, I'm fed up with you taking the Lord's name in vain.

JON

Oh, yeah? Well, He can --

MARJORIE

Jonathan, do not finish that sentence.

Mike looks at him.

MIKE

No more asking me if you can eat. You want an apple, you don't have to horde them in the back of your closet. Food is a fundamental human right.

Marjorie nods.

MARJORIE

And now that you've done it the first time, we expect you to come down freshly-washed and clean and in fresh clothes each morning.

Jon says nothing, just continues to glare at them. He tightens his arms across his chest. His nostrils flare. He looks angry enough to bite through a pipe.

MARJORIE

I'll tell ya what. We'll go out today, get you a nice haircut, then we'll do some more clothes shopping for you. How about a nice pair of boots to go with your new jacket? There's a great western-wear store on Farmington Road.

Marjorie looks at Mike.

MARJORIE

Whadaya think, dear? "Cowboy Jon"?

Mike nods, smiles.

Jon unfolds his arms, curls the corner of his mouth upwards.

JON

Yeah? Really? Like, for me?

Marjorie nods.

JON

That does sound pretty fuckin' sweet. Fuck yeah. Fuckin'-A! I've always wanted a pair of those fuckers. They're so fuckin' expensive, and those goddamn stores, they make 'em too fuckin' hard to jack from. Fuckin' assholes! Can suck my dick.

MARJORIE

Um...Jon. Your language. We must come to an understanding about the language you persist in using.

JON

What the fuck's wrong with my fuckin' language?

MARJORIE

Honey, we need you to stop using bad language, especially that one word. We both find it offensive.

MIKE

Very offensive.

JON

What word? What the fuck you talkin' about?

MIKE

Are you doing that on purpose?

JON

Doing what? What the fuck?! Fuckin' old people.

Jon glares directly at Mike.

JON

Suck my big one, you fuckin' old man. Fantasizing about it right now, huh? Gettin' your rocks off, creamin' your shorts.

Jon sneers at Mike.

JON

If you can even get it up anymore.

Mike looks fit to explode.

Marjorie goes to pat his hand again.

MIKE

Marge! Enough! I've been insulted enough in my own home this morning by this little punk.

(to Jon)

Our home is not some underpass over on 8 Mile Road. Do you hear me?

Jon, breathing hard, stares wide-eyed at Mike. His body visibly shakes. He can't stop swallowing hard.

MIKE

I said, young man, do you hear me?!

JON

Y-y-yes, sir.

A heavy silence hangs among the three of them for a moment.

MARJORIE

Jon, look at me.

Jon can't take his wide-eyed stare off Mike.

MARJORIE

Jon.

Finally Jon looks at her.

MARJORIE

Stop using the f-word, at least around us in this house. It's that simple.

Jon blinks at her, nods just slightly.

MARJORIE

Obscenity -- swear words -- is the retreat of small minds and small intellects, and you have neither.

Mike blows a long, deep breath, sits back.

MIKE

(to Jon)

We do not steal from each other.

Jon widens his eyes at him. He opens his mouth, closes it.

MARJORIE

Thank you for paying us the respect of at least not denying that you removed a hundred-dollar bill, a fifty-dollar bill, and a twenty-dollar bill from my billfold the first night we brought you home.

JON

You hate me.

MIKE

We hate what you did.

JON

You're gonna beat me, beat me hard.

Jon closes his eyes for a moment.

JON

My nose just started feeling better.

Jon looks immensely sad.

JON

Can I take this shirt off first? I don't want it ruined like the old one. And this nice new T-shirt too? I like my stuff that it's new.

Mike falls back in his chair.

MIKE

Oh, my God. This poor boy.

Marjorie squeezes Jon's hand.

MARJORIE

The stealing was bad, but today you did something way worse.

MIKE

Jon, don't ever, ever use drugs in this house ever again.

MARJORIE

Why else aren't you dopesick right now, able to hold your food down?

Marjorie frowns.

MARJORIE

You don't think I didn't notice the second you sat down how dilated your pupils are and the tremors and pruritis you've been displaying?

JON

The what? I'm stupid, lady.

Mike points at him hard.

MIKE

Listen, you: you are anything but. Ignorant? Sure. Stupid? Oh, no.

Jon pounds his fists on the table as he jumps to his feet.

JON

Just beat me already! That's the hardest part, waiting for it. I can take it, but just do it!

MIKE

I will never hit you. I promise.

JON

Promises don't mean shit, old man.

MARJORIE

Jonathan. Jon.

Jon slams his fist down on the table, looks at her hard.

JON

What?!

MARJORIE

How 'bout never being dopesick ever again? You'd like that, right?

Jon tightens his fist.

MIKE

We have a place for you to go to for ninety days to get off all the drugs you're addicted to.

MARJORIE

You don't have to live like this. This doesn't have to be your life. Do you like the life you're living?

JON

I hate myself -- I hate how I'm living.

Jon raises his eyes enough to look Marjorie in the eye.

JON

Ninety days?

Marjorie nods.

JON

When?

MIKE

We'd like to bring you today.

Jon jumps up, races over to the foyer, pulls on a pair of snow boots, dashes out the front door without a jacket.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Marjorie stares out the window beside the front door.

She turns to Mike.

MARJORIE

Where is he? It's freezing out there, snowing.

Mike squeezes her arm. He watches as she mounts the stairs.

Marjorie enters the guest room. The unmade bed. The rifled-thru new clothes. The leather jacket untouched on its hook.

Marjorie walks into the bathroom, widens her eyes.

Marjorie steps over to the pile of Jon's clothes, wrinkles her nose, makes a gagging noise.

She grabs a towel, uses it to pick up the sweatshirt, then the ripped T-shirt.

Then she picks up the jeans, she puffs out her cheeks, blinks several times. She presses her hand to her nose against the rancid stench of piss, shit, cum, sweat, and city filth.

Marjorie fights back sobs as she grabs a plastic bag from under the sink, viciously shoves all Jon's clothes, including his boxers, socks, and treadless high-top Keds, into it.

She slams out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and into the kitchen, where Mike finishes loading the dishwasher.

Mike looks up, stiffens at the expression on her face.

Marjorie shakes the bag.

MARJORIE

This goes to the incinerator!

Tears freely flow down her face.

MARJORIE

A parent! God blesses a parent with a child, and he does this -- ?!

Marjorie shakes the bag.

MARJORIE

-- this to him?!

Mike rushes over to her, wraps her in his arms. He gently presses her cheek against his shirtfront. Marjorie sobs.

INT. JON AND CORDELL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jon clutches his "treasure chest" box as he stares down at CORDELL, 29, passed out in the ragged chair in front of the table strewn with needles, dirty cotton balls, drugs.

JON

I -- I -- I hate you!

Jon leaves the apartment, never to return.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Marjorie stares into Jon's eyes, brushes hair out of them.

Jon doesn't flinch.

MARJORIE

Jon, my beautiful great blue heron,
I knew you'd fly back to us.

Mike cocks his head as he stares at his wife.

Jon knits his brows at her so they almost touch, but curls the corner of his lips up. He cautiously glances at Mike.

Mike breathes a deep sigh, nods.

MIKE

Thank you.

INT. HAZELDEN TEEN DRUG REHAB - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jon, Marjorie, and Mike sit across the cluttered desk from JACOB C. ROWSEY PHD.

Marjorie glances up at the custom-framed doctoral degree in psychology from Pennsylvania State University.

Beside the diploma hangs an 8x10 framed photograph: "Gulf War Jan '91".

Three darkly-tanned young soldiers -- labeled in handwriting as "Deathstrike", "Slick", and "Shitferbrains" -- beam perfect smiles and strike cocky poses, hold their rifles, pinch cigarettes between their lips.

A deadly-looking helicopter acts as their backdrop.

Three young-dumb-full-of-cum 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagle" badasses.

Marjorie looks from that skinny kid "Shitferbrains" to this baby-faced 34-year-old, trim but strong, across from her.

SUPER: Spring, 2001

Jon, his skin clear, his eyes bright, regales the adults.

Jake sinks back in his chair, watches Jon's performance with a deep, deep frown, shakes his head.

Jake sits up, does the time-out gesture.

JAKE

(Texas drawl)

Jon, Jon, you don't have to cram everything about your three months here into one exit interview.

Marjorie puts her hand on Jon's.

MARJORIE

We have the whole flight home.

JON

Sorry.

JAKE

Hey. What did we say about "sorry"?

Jake winks at him, looks at Mike and Marjorie.

JAKE

He's working his program. It's imperative he attend meetings every day, starting tomorrow. We call it "ninety-in-ninety".

Jake catches how Marjorie stiffens, squares her shoulders.

JAKE

And psychotherapy, just as imperative. I've already put together a list for you.

Jake catches how Marjorie squeezes Jon's arm at this.

JAKE

Hey, Jon, I'm gonna talk for a bit alone with these two. How 'bout you go finish packing, saying goodbye?

Jon shrugs, stands, slips his hands in his pockets.

Jon doesn't have the door all the way shut before he hears:

MARJORIE (O.S.)
 He's so much better. Thank you.
 Just -- thank you. What a relief.

JAKE (O.S.)
 "Better"? He's just scratched the
 surface. Dr. Wittrock, Jon's one of
 the most ego-injured kids I've ever
 encountered or researched. Ever!

Jon closes the door, hard enough for them to know he heard.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Jon laughs with Marjorie, drops his bags down in the foyer.

MIKE
 Hey, my joke wasn't that bad.

JON
 Dr. Wittrock, it kinda was. But
 what do I know, I never get jokes.

MARJORIE
 It's so wonderful to have you home.
 You look so good.

Jon ducks his head abashedly.

MARJORIE
 I thought you were so handsome
 before. You could be doing
 commercials or ads.

Jon blushes.

Marjorie quickly holds up her hand.

MARJORIE
 Remember what we promised you about
 no conditions.

Mike hangs up their jackets, hooks his thumb toward the
 living room.

MIKE
 C'mon. We have some exciting stuff
 to discuss with you.

Mike and Marjorie sit on the couch in front of the coffee
 table strewn with brochures and pamphlets and printouts.

Jon pulls off his western boots, plops down on an easy chair.

JON

Whassup?

Marjorie, practically giddy, tightly grabs Jon's hand.

MARJORIE

We'd like you to be part of our family. Full-time. Please, Jon?

Jon gulps. He darts his eyes at Mike.

Mike grins, nods.

Jon breathes a shuddering breath. He looks at both of them.

JON

You're not -- you're not lying. Right? You really do want me?

Marjorie squeezes his hand more tightly.

MARJORIE

We're not lying.

Jon wipes at his nose. He nods slowly.

Marjorie breaks out in a wide smile, looks at her husband.

MARJORIE

Oh, Mike!

MIKE

Thank you.

JON

What's all this shi-stuff?

MARJORIE

You know those tests Jake gave you?

JON

Doc? Those crazy tests? Yeah. They were stupid. Any six-year-old could have answered those. What I told him, waste of my time, man.

MIKE

Those were intelligence tests.

MARJORIE

You tested off the charts, honey.

JON

Whadaya mean, "off the charts"? Why are you surprised? I told you before, I'm stupid.

MIKE

You were wrong, and that's not what "off the charts" means.

MARJORIE

You're very smart, very smart, you just haven't had a good education.

JON

Always treated me like an idiot at school. And I felt the same way right back. I made a new teacher cry once, she quit right that day.

Jon curls up the corner of his mouth, chuckles.

MARJORIE

Well, young man, I'm sure you know now how wrong that was to do that.

Jon shrugs.

JON

Felt pretty fu-dang sweet that day.

Marjorie frowns, sighs, then plasters a grin on her face.

MARJORIE

Well, you're very far from an idiot, and you should have a special school to nourish your intelligence. We found these for you to matriculate at.

JON

"Matriculate"? Sounds raunchy.

Marjorie sputters, rubs her forehead, glances at Mike.

MARJORIE

First thing we're getting him is a dictionary.

Marjorie returns her attention to Jon.

MARJORIE

You'll love these schools.

Marjorie hands him a full-size brochure, which he opens.

MARJORIE

That's The Cranbrook Schools. One of the nonpareil private schools in the entire nation, it happens to be just thirty minutes up I-75.

Jon flips a few pages. His eyes widen.

JON

Wow! They have a football stadium, two huge gymnasiums, and something called a -- a -- a natatorium.

(shrugs)

Huge soccer field. Baseball diamonds. A cross-country track!

Jon looks at both of them.

JON

Whoa!

Mike chortles.

MIKE

Yeah, they have these things called classrooms, too.

Marjorie impatiently waves him down, smacks his arm.

Jon ventures a small, cautious grin.

JON

Thirty minutes? You're gonna drive me there and back, each day? Man.

Mike wrinkles his brow.

MIKE

Huh? Oh! No, Jon. No. It's a boarding school. You'll live there.

Jon's incipient grin immediately disappears. He widens his eyes at them. The color drains from his face.

Marjorie smiles, looks at Mike.

MARJORIE

I knew he'd be excited.

MIKE

Kiddo, you're gonna love it. You'll make friends, join clubs. You can play every sport you want.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Maybe join the Drama Department.
Jake said you really took to doing
that.

Jon breathes fast, gulps, looks ready to bolt off the chair.

JON

Wh-what?!

Marjorie and Mike stiffen, glance at each other, look at Jon.

MARJORIE

Jon? Honey?

Jon clenches his hand in his lap into a fist.

Jon looks in horror at all the materials covering the table.

JON

Everyone promises! And everyone
lies! Why?! You brought me all the
way back here just to get rid of
me. Fuck you!

Jon slams his stocking feet onto the carpeted floor, grabs
his boots, pulls them on.

MIKE

Marjorie! Oh, my God! What have we
done?

(to Jon)

Jon! Wait!

Jon stands, pounds over to the coat closet, bangs it open.

Marjorie and Mike rush over as Jon dons his leather jacket.

Marjorie puts her hand on his arm.

Jon yanks his arm away. He grabs his bag, puts his hand on
the front door's knob.

MIKE

Jonathan Sean Vornholt, don't you
dare go through that door.

Jon stands ramrod straight, his back to Mike.

MIKE

Turn around, and get back here.
Right now, young man.

Jon turns, narrows his eyes at Mike, opens his mouth.

Mike raises a finger at him.

MIKE

If you call me what I think you're about to, three words: you better not. We do not talk to each other like that in this house. Rules, Jon. Remember those?

Mike points at the easy chair.

MIKE

Hang that jacket up or don't, but sit! We're gonna talk this out like a family. That's what families do.

JON

You say you want me in your family, but really you don't.

MARJORIE

Yes, we do. We really do. We didn't mean to scare you. We didn't think.

JON

Well...excuse my language, ma'am, but that was a pretty dick thing you did to me just then.

Marjorie nods glumly.

Mike takes a deep breath.

MIKE

C'mon now. Do as I told you.

Jon hangs up the jacket, joins them back in the living room.

Marjorie hands him a new brochure for the University Liggett School. Jon takes it, but his frown remains rigidly in place.

MIKE

Nothing but a ten-minute walk.

MARJORIE

And flip to page six, check out all the sports teams they offer.

Jon stares at them, his eyes still hard, but he does open the brochure to page six. His expression softens -- a little.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY

Jon, 16, sheds his bookbag and leather jacket onto the floor.

He knits his brows, straightens, cocks his head.

MIKE (O.S.)

Did you see that tuition payment from Liggett?! I wrote the check but...dammit!

MARJORIE (O.S.)

I've always hated that about you! Penny-pincher and neat freak -- really, Mike!

MIKE (O.S.)

I see you got him a fifth pair of boots. Those things aren't cheap, especially the ones you buy the boy -- three hundred bucks a pair.

MARJORIE (O.S.)

This from the guy who just bought his latest vintage Mustang.

MIKE (O.S.)

And how much sports equipment does one kid need?!

Jon stands there, frozen, widens his eyes at the pause.

MIKE (O.S.)

What about this? Huh?!

MARJORIE (O.S.)

It's too early.

MIKE (O.S.)

When isn't it going to be too early? We've already let him miss half of those ninety-in-ninety meetings! We're spoiling the boy rotten!

MARJORIE (O.S.)

OF COURSE we're spoiling him! He's had a rotten life! You heard Jake! You saw him when we found him! He was eating out of the trash, Mike!

Jon walks into the kitchen.

JON
I'm sorry I cost so much.

Mike, clutching Jake's list of therapists, spins around.

MIKE
Dammit, boy, how long you been
standing there?!

MARJORIE
Michael!

Marjorie comes around the kitchen island, approaches Jon.

Jon pulls out a chair, sits, starts yanking off his boots.

JON
I'll leave everything upstairs.
Maybe you can sell it all, get all
your money back.

Mike steps up to him.

Jon immediately leaps to his feet, slams himself against the wall, raises his fists, narrows his eyes at Mike. His chest heaves, his heavy breath hisses through his gritted teeth.

Jon can barely croak out his words:

JON
I don't want to go back to the
streets. Anything, not that.

Mike bites his lower lip, then breathes a shuddering breath.

MIKE
Jon, calm down. You're not going
anywhere. I promise.

Jon darts his wild eyes from him to Marjorie, back to him.

MIKE
I'm sorry. I get upset, I say
things, I hurt people. I don't mean
to. I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry.

JON
I won't eat anything anymore. I
know how to hustle food, it's okay.
I'll go back to Northwestern. I
won't cost you people anything.

Jon darts his eyes from Marjorie to Mike, back to Marjorie.

JON
Just don't put me back on the
streets. Please! Anything!

Jon squares his shoulders, hardens his expression. His tone
ice-cold:

JON
(to Mike)
Do what the fuck you want, fuckin'
asswipe. Suck my big one.

Marjorie glares at her husband, then softens her ire at Mike
a little as she witnesses the shame in Mike's eyes. She
focuses her attention on Jon.

MARJORIE
Rules, Jon. Language. Remember?

Jon only reluctantly turns his hard stare from Mike to her.

MARJORIE
Know why we have those rules?
Because this is your home, too.

Marjorie reaches out slowly, carefully, puts her hand on
Jon's fists, gets him to lower them.

MARJORIE
This will always be your home.

Mike folds the list of therapists, slips it into his pocket.

The three of them stand silent.

MARJORIE
I don't know about you two, but I
don't want to cook tonight.

JON
Dr. Wittrock, ma'am, I really
appreciate all these fancy places
you take me, I really do, but --

Mike takes one careful step forward.

MIKE
Y'know, I really could go for a
greasy, sloppy fast-food burger.

MARJORIE
And a super giant size french
fries!

JON

And milkshakes. Those really big ones. Chocolate! Extra syrup!

MIKE

Three thousand calories, every single one of them artery-clogging. Disgusting. Totally unhealthy.

Jon manages a slight grin, presses in on his tight six-pack stomach under his tailored dress shirt.

JON

Dude -- um, Dr. Wittrock, sir, that sounds great!

MARJORIE

Hey, you two, I'm still a nurse.

Mike grabs his car keys.

MIKE

Not tonight you're not. C'mon!

INT. THIRD JUDICIAL COURT OF MICHIGAN - FAMILY COURT - DAY

Jon, stiff in his new suit, silk tie, and dress shoes, faces JUDGE MATILDA SIMMONS, 56, from the well.

SUPER: Summer, 2001

Jon smiles nervously, which reveals his new braces.

Mike and Marjorie beam big smiles.

JUDGE SIMMONS

It is the judgement of this bench that Cordell Michael Vornholt, who has clearly elected not to contest these proceedings, has thereby surrendered all parental rights to the minor Jonathan Sean Vornholt. Custody of the minor Jonathan is henceforth awarded to Michael and Marjorie Wittrock, who have met all requirements of adoption beyond all expectation. So says this bench.

She bangs her gavel.

JUDGE SIMMONS
 Congratulations, Doctors Wittrock.
 You have yourselves a very fine
 young man there.

Jon looks at the grinning judge, then turns, looks at his...
 his...his parents.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Marjorie and Mike accept their playbills for The Wonderful
 Wizard of Detroit, an "absurdist original musical".

SUPER: Spring, 2002

They excitedly take their places amongst the packed seating.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - LATER

Jon, 17, jumps, prances, sashays around the stage, set as a
 twisted mirror-universe version of Detroit.

8 Mile Road stands in for the Yellow Brick Road.

The Wizard's subjects cower at his feet.

Jon looks equal parts ridiculous and fantastical in his
 crazy, wild costume: gold and tasseled epaulets on a
 glimmering silver jacket with giant whirlygig lollipops for
 buttons, tie-dyed jodhpurs, rainbow-sherbet-themed clown
 shoes, all of it topped off by a two-foot Santa Claus hat
 from the end of which dangles a miniature disco ball.

Jon belts out lyrics in a maniacal tone:

JON
 ALL YOU THINK I BUILD IS CARS/TO
 SAVE YOU DUMB CLUCKS FROM THE WRATH
 OF MARS?/GO BACK, YOU MICHELINKINS,
 TO YOUR BARS/AND LEAVE THE WIZARD
 TO HIS UNDER PARS.

Jon pantomimes swinging a golf club, then does a sideways
 two-step down the line of cowering "Michelinkins", kicks off
 each of their polka-dotted hats.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The audience leaps to their feet, applauds, whistles, cheers.

They truly go wild when Jon's castmates take a collective step backwards, leave him front and center.

Jon, his eyes wide, a beaming smile, looks out across the auditorium. He takes a deep bow, stands up straight, takes another bow with the entire cast.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY

Mike enters Jon's bedroom, groans.

Clothes, clean and dirty, strewn everywhere.

Hockey sticks in one corner, lacrosse sticks in another.

Football pads. A jockstrap hangs off a closet door handle.

Mike glances into the bathroom, shudders.

MIKE

I've warned that kid about picking
up this sty.

Mike, as he picks up clothes, glances around at the stacks and stacks of books: fiction -- from classics like Watership Down tattered from repeated readings to trash YA dystopia -- to non-fiction -- history, theater, Cosmos, A Brief History of Time.

The Complete Calvin and Hobbes sits tossed on his bed, along with thick volumes of Sudoku and New York Times crosswords.

Mike walks over to the bed, reaches for the disheveled comforter when a magazine under the bed catches his eye.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Mike walks up to Marjorie sitting on the couch, reading.

He hands her the magazine: Out.

Marjorie takes it, looks up at him.

MARJORIE

C'mon, Mike. It's not like we
didn't know.

Mike takes a seat in the recliner.

MIKE

Yeah, but what if he thinks it's because of what all those monsters put him through, starting with his father?

MARJORIE

We'll help our son to understand God doesn't make mistakes.

Marjorie regards her husband sternly.

MARJORIE

Y'know, it was a real breach of his privacy, your poking around his room like that.

Mike hangs his head.

MIKE

The door was open and I saw in by chance. I really just went in there to pick up the mess.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - NIGHT

Jon rushes into the house, his "Luigi's Pizzeria" apron still cinched to his tight waist.

Mike and Marjorie respond to his smile with their own.

JON

Ma! Pop! Mr. Patrionelli gave me my first paycheck.

Jon pulls a small wad of cash out of the pocket of his sauce-stained white T-shirt.

MARJORIE

That's great, honey!

Jon solemnly takes a twenty, a fifty, and a hundred, and holds the bills out to her.

Marjorie eyes them, then her son, makes no move to take them.

JON

Ma, these are for you.

MARJORIE

I'm not taking those.

JON

Ma, please. You gotta take them.

MARJORIE

No, I don't. And I'm not going to.

Jon stares at her, his nostrils more and more flare.

He slaps the bills on the corner of the coffee table.

MARJORIE

Those will stay there for as long
as you take to take them back.

JON

They'll stay there forever then.

MARJORIE

That's entirely up to you.

Jon clenches his hands into fists, glares, sneers at Mike.

JON

I hate you, you know that, you
fuckin' old man. I hate you!

Mike glares wide-eyed at Jon, slaps his book closed.

Jon darts his eyes back at Marjorie, spins around, pounds up
the stairs, slams his bedroom door.

Mike stands up abruptly, stalks over to the door to the
garage, which he lets slam behind him.

Soon, Marjorie hears Mike smash open and closed the drawers
of his huge mechanic's chest.

She darts her eyes from the garage door to the stairs. She
looks at the money, frowns.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - GARAGE - NIGHT

Jon, showered, changed into sweatpants and a T-shirt, quietly
enters, walks up to Mike bent under the hood of the Mustang.

JON

Pop.

Mike comes out from under the hood, straightens, turns to
face Jon, wipes his greasy hands on a rag.

MIKE

Let's go back to you calling me
"Dr. Wittrock".

JON

P-Po-Po -- Dr. Wittrock. Sir.

MIKE

Oh, now that you know you royally
screwed up, I get the honor of
being "sir" again. Not "asswipe"?
Or "shitferbrains"? Or
"motherfucker"? Or something else,
Jon, to tear me to shreds from the
inside out? Huh?

Jon stares into Mike's brimming eyes.

MIKE

I love you. Maybe you don't give a
crap about that, but that's a big
part what gets me up each morning.

Jon straightens, hardens his gaze.

Mike erupts.

MIKE

Fine! Go all blank and hard. See
how far that gets you, but plan on
being really, really lonely, Jon.

Jon rushes out of the garage.

Mike slams his fist on the workbench.

INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY

Mike rushes into his home office.

Jon, bookbag over his shoulder, grabs his jacket.

Marjorie is looking hither and yon for something.

MARJORIE

Has anyone seen my keys?!

JON

On the coffee table!

Jon watches as his mother walks over to the coffee table,
picks up the three bills laid atop the keys, drops her keys
in her bag, returns the bills to the corner of the table.

Jon storms into the living room.

JON

Just take the money, will ya?! This has gotten way past dumb, Ma.

MARJORIE

Yeah. Yeah, it has. Do you know that money, invested, could've been maybe \$250 by now?

JON

Ma, you got to take it. It tears me up every time I see it sitting there.

MARJORIE

Good!

JON

I've learned my lesson, awright?!

MARJORIE

Oh, no, you haven't.

JON

I feel bad. You want me to feel bad, that's it.

Mother and son stare each other hard in the eye.

JON

Oh! AWRIGHT!

Jon throws up his hands, bends over, swipes the bills viciously off the table, pockets them.

Jon looks from her to Mike, who has walked up to them.

JON

I'm gonna blow this on something really stupid. You watch me.

MARJORIE

Hey, you worked hard to earn it. You want to waste it, waste it.

JON

A dozen cakes. I'll eat them all at once -- till I explode. Everywhere!

Mike snorts. His tone deadpan:

MIKE

I'm a neat freak, but I'm not cleaning that up.

Jon pounds his fist against his forehead several times, shoves past them, slams out of the house.

Mike and Marjorie, smiling, high-five each other.

EXT. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROJECT - DAY

Jon, 23, carpenter's toolbelt strapped on, walks up to the table laden with coffee and donuts.

SUPER: Summer, 2008

Jon darts his eyes at HARVEY STRATHMORE, also 23.

Jon holds out a mug of coffee to Harvey.

JON

You look like you could use some.
Coffee in the summer, go figure,
but this stuff is nuclear-powered,
it'll perk ya right up.

Harvey takes it, smiles. He blinks his bleary eyes.

HARVEY

Thanks. They work us slaves long
hours down at the firm.

Jon pours a second mug, then holds out his hand to Harvey.

JON

Hi. Name's Jon.

Harvey shakes Jon's hand.

HARVEY

Harvey. Everyone calls me Harv.

Harvey releases his hand. Jon grits his teeth, shakes it out.

JON

I've never seen you at one of these
Habitat projects before.

HARVEY

I'm new at the firm. We're
sponsoring the family who's getting
this house.

Harvey indicates the "Weaver/Payne & Associates - Public Advocacy" emblazoned in big, bold letters on the grey T-shirt stretched tight across his powerful chest and rippling abs.

Jon rakes him up and down with his eyes.

JON

I volunteer for Habitat but I'm also here as a representative. DPS.

Harvey knits his brows.

HARVEY

"Department of Public Safety"?

It's Harvey's turn to rake Jon up and down.

HARVEY

You're a cop? You're a fireman? No offense, but you're a little --

JON

"Skinny-ass"? You can say it, but I do prefer "strong but wiry". I do work out, every day.

HARVEY

Sorry. Foot-in-mouth disease.

JON

Detroit Public Schools. I teach art and English at Frank Cody High. I'm trying to start a drama program.

Harvey regards him with a grin, nods.

Jon shrugs.

JON

Yeah, I'm no policeman or fireman, but, trust me, I never thought I'd end up a teacher, either. Didn't think I'd end up anywhere.

Jon shakes himself out of his momentary melancholy.

JON

Let's just say I've had two terrific role models. Long story.

HARVEY

Man of mystery. You'll have to tell me that long story someday. Somewhere more private.

Jon suddenly has a frog in his throat. He coughs, hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON
I better get back. They need me.

HARVEY
I'll come with ya.

Harvey slaps his big hand on Jon's shoulder.

Jon practically collapses under the blow.

EXT. RIVERFRONT TRAIL - DAY

Jon, 24, holds Harvey's hand as they walk and marvel at the incipient sunset broken by puffy clouds.

SUPER: Summer, 2009

They both break into smiles at the whooshing sound of the broad wings of a great blue heron that takes flight nearby.

JON
Ma calls me her beautiful great blue heron. I have no idea why.

HARVEY
That is so sweet. I'll sure as hell agree with the beautiful part.

Harvey leans in, kisses Jon. They let the kiss linger, then continue their walk.

JON
You've never told me about your folks. You never talk about them.

Harvey, his expression immediately angry, releases Jon's hand, turns, leans in to Jon, his finger in Jon's face.

HARVEY
I don't want to talk about my parents. I don't ever want to talk about my parents. You got that?

Jon stares back at him.

HARVEY
I said, Jon, do you got that?

JON
Yeah, yeah. Sure, Harv.

They resume their walk, and Harvey lets Jon take his hand.
Harvey stops them.

HARVEY
You've been itching to ask me
something all evening.

Jon clears his throat, says nothing.

Harvey flashes a sly grin, starts tickling Jon.

Jon fights bursting out laughing, darts his eyes at
interested passersby.

JON
Harvey! Stop!

HARVEY
Not till you spill.

JON
Awright, awright!

Harvey stops tickling him, Jon gets his breath back.

JON
Let's move in together?

Harvey stares at him.

JON
That was dumb, forget it.

HARVEY
Will you shut up? Of course let's
move in together.

Jon grins, his eyes sparkle, he takes Harvey's hand again,
they continue their walk.

INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Harvey opens the door to Mike and Marjorie. He strains to
muster a grin. He leans his head against the jamb.

SUPER: Spring, 2010

Marjorie gives Harvey a big hug, Mike gives him a tight,
powerful handshake.

MARJORIE
How long's he been at it?

HARVEY

Since before I got home.

MARJORIE

Know what he's relapsed on?

HARVEY

Coke. Meth. He took a thousand bucks out of our account this afternoon. Like we can afford that. There goes rent. Not like we weren't already two months behind.

Harvey wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

HARVEY

Oh, man. Your son's self-destructing, I'm bitching about money. Marjorie, Mike, I'm sorry.

Mike pats Harvey's powerful shoulder.

They follow Harvey into the living room.

The apartment of a poor lawyer and an even poorer teacher.

A sheet of paper from DPS HR marked "Notice of Non-Renewal of Contract for Upcoming Academic Year" sits under a couple of beer cans which are leaving rings.

Jon, 25, sits on the couch, his stockinged foot propped up on the edge of the coffee table strewn with coke, pot, and meth. His knee doesn't stop bouncing. Sweat streams down his face.

Jon turns his crazed eyes to Harvey, sneers.

JON

The 'rents, Harv? Really? You called in the 'rents? A'course you did, you fuckin' pussy.

Jon smashes the mouth of the vodka bottle to his lips, takes a swig. He pulls a long draw off his cigarette, then viciously grinds the butt out in an overflowing ashtray.

HARVEY

Jon, we just want to help you.

Jon jumps unsteadily to his feet, walks up to his parents.

JON

Ah, Doctors Michael and Marjorie Wittrock, out to save the world by shoveling up the shit off the Detroit streets one pile at a time.

Jon sneers at them.

JON

Well, shovel all you want. I'm garbage and always will be.

Marjorie looks pained. Mike rolls his eyes.

JON

Ma, still ignoring your drug-addict niece you can't save?

Jon looks at Mike.

JON

And, Pop, didya spit on your dad's grave the last time you ever bothered to visit it?

HARVEY

Jesus, Jon! My God, man, just shut the hell up, willya? Those are your folks. They love you. God, man!

Harvey's massive chest heaves. His face red with rage:

HARVEY

You have no idea how lucky you are.

MIKE

Tell me, Jon, getting drunk and high tonight, does that prove your father right or prove him wrong?

Jon darts his eyes immediately at Harvey, leans in to Mike.

JON

Listen, you fuckin' old man, I've proven my father wrong, plenty. How dare you bring him up?! Especially in front of Harvey. Fuck you!

Both Mike and Marjorie catch the funny look that comes across Harvey's expression.

MIKE

What?

HARVEY

Um...ah...I know a lot happened to Jon growing up, a lot of it must have involved his father.

Harvey sighs.

HARVEY

I don't know a single detail. He never talks about any of it, ever. I try to get him to, it starts as an argument, and, well,...Jon...I know he didn't --

MIKE

"Mean it"? Harvey, really? You're gonna use that tired old line? What's next? "My boyfriend beats the crap out of me every day, broke my nose, but I deserve it 'cause I didn't sweep the floor right."?

JON

You mention anything, anything at all to him about Dad, and I swear to God -- !

Jon looks directly at Marjorie.

JON

I swear to God this great blue heron will fly away and you'll never see me again!

Marjorie looks cut to the quick by his words.

JON

Clean and sober, for what?

MIKE

You have any idea the self-righteous prick you're being right now, you selfish brat?

JON

See, I knew you hated me.

MIKE

We love you. Very, very much. Why do you think we're here?

Jon looks at Marjorie, at the tears brimming in her eyes.

MIKE

Your contract wasn't renewed for next year. So what? You can teach anywhere. You know the cases I was handling last night?

Jon stares at him.

MIKE

I helped one of my social work students deal with a crackhead mom who thought it would be just hilarious to take a blowtorch to her five-month-old's face.

Harvey looks like he might throw up right then and there.

MIKE

The kid died. But not immediately. That was after the call I assisted on with another one of my students who needed help figuring out the paperwork to handle reporting a father who had rammed his dick so far and so hard up his seven-year-old's ass that the boy had to have surgery to repair all the damage. He didn't die, which means he gets to spend the rest of his life fighting the demons of what he ever did to his dad to make the man hate him so much.

Mike takes a step toward his son.

MIKE

Sound familiar, Jonathan? Huh?!

Jon clenches his fists, raises them. His chest heaves.

JON

Step back, old man. I'm warning you. Get out of my face. You know I'll fuck you up.

Mike takes a step even closer to his son.

MIKE

Go ahead, do it. Fuck me up. You've told me so many times you'll do it. You've called me every name in the book. You've told me so many times you hate me. Then fuck me up, do it. You pussy, do it.

Mike explodes:

MIKE
DO IT!!!

Jon's entire body shakes. He white-knuckles his fists. His chest heaves. His teeth clench so hard, he might crack them.

MIKE
These past ten years we've given
you everything.

JON
I don't owe you shit, old man.

MIKE
But you owe yourself. Look at you.
Does this look like owing yourself
anything?

Mike takes a deep breath, collects his composure.

MIKE
Oh, by the way, that boy, he'll --

JON
(his tone icy)
Listen, I understand better than
you ever will what that boy --

MIKE
You're not telling us anything we
don't already know.

JON
I'm more than a goddamn CPS file!

MIKE
We know you are! Much more! So stop
acting like you're just another one
of my statistics!

Jon drops onto the couch, buries his face in his hands.

JON
Oh, God. What's happened to me?

Jon starts breathing funny, puts his hand over his heart.

MIKE
Ma. Ma, it hurts.

Marjorie rushes over to him. She takes his pulse.

MARJORIE
Harvey, call 9-1-1.

Harvey, his eyes full of terror, stands rooted to the floor.
Marjorie unbuttons Jon's shirt, starts prodding him.

MARJORIE
Jon, honey, look me in the eye.
Look me in the eye. Good. Tell me
anywhere it hurts.

Marjorie scans the coffee table, looks up at her husband.

MARJORIE
I think you better call the police.

Mike looks immediately at Harvey.

Harvey shakes his head grimly.

HARVEY
I'm an officer of the court. It'll
be better the call comes from me.

Mike and Marjorie nod.

MIKE
I'll call 9-1-1.

Mike steps out onto the front porch.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

Mike opens the front door.

Harvey pulls Jon back by the back of his shirt.

HARVEY
You've been avoiding them long
enough.
(to Mike and Marjorie)
He's been avoiding you.

MIKE
We figured. C'mon in.

As Mike shuts the door, Jon hands flowers to Marjorie.

MARJORIE
They're beautiful. Let's sit down.

They all sit. While Marjorie gets the flowers into water, Jon stares at his hands.

Jon. Pallid. More gaunt than usual. Bags under his eyes.

Finally he looks up.

JON

We went to the courthouse today.
They say you posted my bail. You
only did that to get me to that
meeting.

MARJORIE

Yes, we did.

MIKE

Yes, we did.

JON

Otherwise, you'd've let me cool my
ass in a jail cell. A day. A week.
A whole month, for all you care.

HARVEY

I told him that was ridic --

MIKE

Yes, ...
(rolls his eyes)
...we'd've.

JON

My principal had me in his office
today. I'm on administrative leave
until he and the district decide
what to do about the arrest report
they received. Dr. Hammons says I
might lose my license to teach.

Jon narrows his eyes at the two of them.

JON

I love teaching. I worked so hard
for that license. For a long time I
didn't even think I deserved it.

MIKE

(his tone neutral)
Administrative leave. With or
without pay?

JON

Without.

Jon doesn't stop looking at them.

MARJORIE

The answer's no. Absolutely not.

Mike nods in agreement with his wife.

JON

I'm living paycheck to paycheck.
And now no paycheck.

MIKE

Behaviors have consequences.

MARJORIE

The days of us spoiling you have
been over for years.

JON

But I'm back on the wagon.

MIKE

Do ninety meetings in ninety days,
maybe we'll actually believe that.

Mike looks at Marjorie.

MIKE

Right?

MARJORIE

Absolutely.

JON

I don't believe this. You don't
believe I'm sober.

MIKE

No, we don't.

MARJORIE

No, we don't.

MIKE

You're just another lying junkie.

HARVEY

(under his breath)

Wow.

JON

Why are you being such hardasses?

MIKE

We do care about you, very deeply.

Jon sits back in a huff.

Harvey looks at him.

HARVEY
There's my salary.

Jon shakes his head.

JON
You make peanuts. They treat all
you junior associates down at that
firm like slaves.

HARVEY
(miserably)
We'll get by. Somehow. Maybe.

Jon glares at his parents.

JON
You're serious about this?

MARJORIE
Whenever it's come to your health,
welfare, and happiness, when have
you ever known us to be otherwise?
Get real, Jon. You know us better
than that.

Jon shuts his eyes for a long moment, then opens them again.
His knee bounces. He balls his left hand into a fist. His
chest heaves as he breathes hard in and out of his nose.

MIKE
Don't get mad at us. You put
yourself in this position.

Jon looks at Harvey.

JON
Your folks, Harv, maybe you --

Harvey hardens his expression.

HARVEY
Don't even go there. How dare you?!

JON
I should never have said that.

HARVEY
No! You absolutely shouldn't have.

Jon takes Harvey's hand, but Harvey pulls it back.

JON
I'm sorry.

Jon glares at his father.

JON

I may have to sell my motorcycle.

MIKE

Okay.

JON

My bike, my really sweet ride, the one I love like you love your Mustangs. Y'know, the one you two got me, because you were so proud of me. You used to be proud of me. Do you actually remember that?

Marjorie looks at Mike, then slowly and deliberately back at their son.

MARJORIE

Jonathan Sean Vornholt, are you actually trying to guilt us?

JON

Is it working?

MIKE

Do these two pissed-off faces look like it's working?

JON

No, sir.

Jon suddenly stands.

Marjorie, Mike, and Harvey do so too.

JON

(to Marjorie and Mike)

You can't trust me anymore? Okay. Awright. There's gotta be a meeting somewhere in this rotten city.

(to Harvey)

You, Mr. Never-Says-Anything, Mr. Goddamn Perfect, you going to drive me or hang out here with the enemy?

HARVEY

What are you busting my chops for?

Jon looks to the heavens, throws up his hands, storms out of the condo, leaves the front door open.

Harvey just stands there, blinking.

The impatient honking of a car horn emanates from outside.

All three of them roll their eyes.

HARVEY

I don't think I'm telling you two anything you don't know, but your son is an overgrown five-year-old.

Mike and Marjorie nod vehemently.

MARJORIE

Childhood he never got to go through the first time.

They walk with Harvey to the open door. Mike pulls a folded check from his pocket, hands it to the young lawyer.

Harvey unfolds it, then looks at them.

MIKE

I signed it. Pay your back rent, this month's rent, and the next three months' rent. Don't tell Jon.

Harvey sags his strong but tired shoulders, closes his eyes, sighs deeply.

MARJORIE

You didn't do anything wrong.

Harvey pockets the check, reaches out his hand. He shakes hands with both of them. He nods at them, leaves.

INT. OFFICES OF TREVINO, CARLSEN, AND VONDEREN - DAY

Harvey, 32, steps off the mahogany-paneled elevator, walks past ceiling-to-floor windows.

Outside stretch the Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan.

SUPER: Fall, 2017

Harvey watches as Jon, 32, hands a Golden Retriever puppy to ELIJAH STEPP, 28.

Elijah, dark eyes, perfect teeth, perfect hair, a granite gym-honed physique underneath his sharp business attire, giggles with abandon as the puppy licks his face.

DAVID LAZER, 22, comes from around the ornate reception desk.

DAVID

Lemme hold her. Lemme hold her.

Elijah looks at Jon, who nods, Elijah hands the puppy over.

David laughs as the puppy licks him, Elijah scratches the puppy's head.

DAVID

My girlfriend's on me for us to get a puppy. Our landlord's being a real asshole about it.

Harvey rushes up to the desk, looks around frantically.

HARVEY

(to Jon)

What are you doing here?

JON

I wanted you to meet Daphne.

HARVEY

"Daphne"?

DAVID

(giggling)

Oh, she's definitely a "Daphne".

HARVEY

(to Jon)

I've only been here a week. What if one of the senior partners comes walking by?

JON

Then they'll see you have fantastic taste in boyfriends and pets.

Elijah chortles.

ELIJAH

Oh, yeah. Brent and I are throwing a party Saturday for everyone new to the firm. Address in the e-vite.

Elijah takes Daphne from David, beams a huge smile as she licks him.

JON

Can we bring her?

ELIJAH

A'course you can bring this
pwecious wittle ding.

HARVEY

No, we can't bring the pwecious
wittle ding, because we're not
keeping her.

JON

We're keeping her, Harvey.

HARVEY

We'll discuss it when I get home.

ELIJAH

How can you be so hard-hearted?
Look at her.

Elijah plops the puppy into Harvey's arms, she immediately starts licking Harvey's face and depositing hair on his expensive suit.

Harvey does all in his power not to relax -- or relent.

HARVEY

(to Jon)

You really think a tiny apartment
in downtown Chicago is any place to
raise a puppy?

JON

We're keeping her, Harv.

Daphne doesn't let up her licking.

HARVEY

I said we'll -- oh, alright.

Harvey looks toward the glass door opposite the lobby from the elevator, his eyes go wide.

David races back around the reception desk, sits, grabs the phone receiver, which has not rung.

DAVID

Trevino, Carlsen, and Vonderen, how
may I direct your call?

Elijah reaches the door to the stairs in four, long strides, bangs the door open, disappears from view.

Harvey pushes Jon, holding Daphne, toward the elevator.

HARVEY

I'll see you at home tonight. Now
get out of here, will ya?

Harvey turns, races to get the glass door.

HARVEY

Mr. Vonderen, sir, I was just
coming to your office with my
report.

EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A beautiful spring early afternoon. Jon and Harvey, both 38,
both in their Sunday best, ride the country highway on Jon's
motorcycle, Harvey's arms wrapped around Jon's tight waist.

SUPER: Spring, 2023

They ride across a long iron bridge. The motorcycle's
saddlebags bulge.

Jon pulls the bike down the small hill, cuts the engine.

They hop off, remove their helmets.

Jon plants his lips on Harvey's. They linger, Harvey runs his
fingers through Jon's thick hair.

Jon pulls away, lies down on his back on the grass, props the
black combat boots he's breaking in on the motorcycle's seat.

Harvey slips off his suit jacket, tosses it aside, lies down
on his belly beside Jon. He brushes hair out of Jon's eyes.

HARVEY

Great church service this morning.
Father Frank gave a great sermon.

Jon nods, grunts something noncommittal.

Harvey nudges him.

HARVEY

It really spoke to me. Did it you
too? Seriously, Jon. Did it?

JON

I guess so. Yeah.

HARVEY

Really? 'Cause I'd like to --

JON

Thanks for finding us a church that
doesn't have a problem with us.

Harvey frowns, sighs. He lets himself relax, leans in, plants
his lips on Jon's.

Jon reaches under Harvey, cups Harvey's crotch, massages him.

Harvey grits his teeth, grunts.

Jon reaches out, frantically undoes Harvey's tie, starts to
unbutton Harvey's snow-white tailored shirt.

At last, Harvey grabs Jon's wrist.

Jon stares wide-eyed at his boyfriend, gulps. Jon frowns.

HARVEY

Jon, we don't have to go so heavy
all the time. I feel like we don't
make love, but we're jackhammering
the fucking sidewalk.

JON

You're mad.

HARVEY

I'm not mad!

Harvey takes a deep breath.

HARVEY

I'm not mad. I'm frustrated.

Jon clenches his teeth.

JON

Fuck this. And, while we're at it,
fuck you. Let's just get back on
the bike, and I'll drop you off at
Elijah's. You two can spend the
afternoon fucking each other.

Harvey rolls his eyes.

HARVEY

What a broken record you are. I've
been telling you for years, at the
firm, Elijah and I are just
workmates, and outside the firm,
Elijah and Brent are our friends,
our good friends, Jon.

Jon tries to roll over to sit up.

Harvey holds Jon in place with his powerful grasp.

HARVEY
Fuck you right back.

Jon watches a car pass over the iron bridge.

HARVEY
Jon, look at me!

Jon only reluctantly does so.

HARVEY
Talk to me. Please. Let me help
you. Jon, please. I love you.

Jon just stares upwards.

HARVEY
Stop walling yourself off to me.

Harvey grabs Jon's wrist, unbuttons Jon's cuff, pushes up the sleeve, reveals the scars of Jon's track and cigarette marks.

HARVEY
I see these every night as you toss
and turn all night long. It makes
me sick I can't help you. It makes
me sicker you won't let me.

Jon shakes his head, struggles again to get up.

Harvey won't let go of Jon's wrist. He makes Jon look at him.

HARVEY
Talk to me. Please!

Jon lifts his arm, looks at the scars. He stares upwards through the leaves. He keeps his gaze hard and distant.

QUICK FLASH

Mike erupts.

MIKE
Fine! Go all blank and hard. See
how far that gets you, but plan on
being really, really lonely, Jon.

Jon rushes out of the garage.

END QUICK FLASH

JON
You'll hate me.

HARVEY
Never.

JON
You promise?

HARVEY
I do.

Jon stares up through the leaves of the tree to the beautiful blue sky beyond. To himself he says quietly:

JON
Father Frank's sermon...

Jon takes a deep breath, lets it out, turns his head, looks Harvey in the eyes.

JON
Dad did things to me, Harv, and made me do things. He pimped me out, men and women, and used me as his mule. He hit me and hurt me and said things to me.

Harvey regards Jon with growing rage.

JON
He broke my arm and my cheekbone and knocked out my teeth and he beat me every night.

Jon swallows hard, closes his eyes.

Harvey puts his hand on Jon's shoulder, squeezes gently.

Jon puts his hand atop Harvey's, Jon opens his eyes.

JON
He let people use me as target practice for kicks, laughed with them when I pissed and shit my pants, he let people shove me against the wall and go down on me like I didn't even exist.

Harvey openly cries as he clutches Jon's hand.

JON
He starved me, Harv.

Jon's chest rises and falls heavily.

JON

I -- I -- I ate out of the garbage.
Have you ever tasted meat that was
a week old in the summertime you
had to fight the maggots for it?

Harvey shakes his head.

JON

The drugs made me numb to it all. I
sucked a guy's cock, and I just
didn't give a fuck.

Jon continues to speak with a hollow, hard tone.

JON

Some random guy sucked my cock, and
I just didn't give a fuck. About
anything. Especially about living.

Tears stream down Harvey's cheeks.

JON

I didn't want to live. I begged God
every night to not make me wake up.

Harvey's powerful chest heaves as his nostrils flare.

Jon stares at him with horror in his dark eyes.

JON

See! You do hate me.

HARVEY

What? No! Jon, never. I promised.

Jon frowns miserably.

Harvey suddenly looks ready to explode with anger.

HARVEY

I hate Cordell Vornholt!

Jon stares up through the boughs of the ancient oak.

JON

Trust me, I hate him enough for the
both of us.

EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - SHORT TIME LATER

Harvey, with exquisite slowness, unbuttons Jon's vest, then unknots, removes Jon's tie.

Jon stares into Harvey's eyes with a warm grin as he unbuttons Harvey's shirt.

Soon, the two boyfriends lie naked and make love under the old oak's boughs through whose leaves the sun dapples them.

EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

Jon slips on his boxers and his pants, then dons Harvey's snow-white shirt, leaves it unbuttoned.

Harvey already has his own boxers and pants on. Without warning he snatches up Jon in his powerful arms, heads for the tributary the iron bridge spans.

JON

Harvey! Harvey, you better not!
You're gonna ruin these pants! Ma
loves me in this suit!

Harvey, laughing, tosses Jon in the water.

Suddenly Harvey yelps, presses his elbow into his left side.

Jon splashes, thrashes, tries to get his footing. He finally stands, soaked from head to toe. He shivers wildly.

Harvey has his smile plastered back on his face.

JON

Harvey! You better be glad my
wallet's in my jacket pocket! And
you're buying me a new suit.
Dammit, Harv, this was tailored!

Harvey is laughing so hard he puts his hands on his thighs.

Jon cracks a smile.

JON

You...you...jerk!

Jon splashes Harvey, then starts walking out of the water.

EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

They lie on one of those oversized beach towels, Harvey at a right angle to Jon with his head on Jon's stomach.

Remains of a hefty late lunch lie discarded nearby.

Jon and Harvey enjoy the beautiful blue sky and puffy clouds.

Harvey chuckles.

HARVEY

I heard a new joke.

JON

Oh, c'mon, Harv. You know I don't get jokes.

HARVEY

How 'bout some cheese with that whine?

Harvey clears his throat.

HARVEY

What do you get when you combine a rhetorical question with a joke?

Harvey exaggerates a protracted silence.

Jon plops his hand on top of his head, screws up his expression.

JON

Huh?

Harvey remains silent.

Jon wrinkles his brows even more.

HARVEY

Rhetorical question. Get it? You know. A question that's rhetorical. That's why I paused for so long.

Jon remains silent.

Harvey laughs.

HARVEY

Jon, jokes don't just go over your head. They flutter there gently like butterflies, in total safety.

JON

Wha'?

Harvey laughs even more, shakes his head.

HARVEY

God, I love you, you feather head.

Harvey jerks, cries out, grits his teeth. He presses his hand in against his abdomen, breathes in gasps.

Jon sits up, makes Harvey do so.

JON

Okay, Harv. This has been going on all week.

Harvey nods as he massages under his right shoulder blade.

Jon runs his fingers over Harvey's rippling abs, along veins so swollen they're visible under the skin.

JON

This can't be right. I mean, right? You're the one super into fitness. You know. First thing tomorrow morning, Harv, the doctor's office.

HARVEY

Bullshit! Doctors are for pussies. I look like I need a doctor?

Harvey cries out, grits his teeth, presses in on his abdomen.

JON

Ah...Yeah! You definitely look like you need to see a doctor. Okay, you're "The Lawyer with the Lats" on YouTube, but you think you're Superman or something?

HARVEY

I pulled a few muscles. I've been exerting myself too hard lately. I'm not as young as I used to be.

Harvey's face suddenly pales, he quickly rolls over onto his side, just in time to spew a torrent of vomit.

Jon soothes Harvey as he rides out the wave of nausea.

Jon massages Harvey's right shoulder, Harvey cries out in pain, Jon stops immediately.

Harvey spits several times, then flops onto his back. He stares back up at those puffy clouds and that blue sky.

HARVEY

Yeah, maybe we had better be there first thing in the morning.

INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - THAT NIGHT

Harvey stumbles out into the living room, has both arms clasped around his stomach, his face a mask of pain.

Fresh vomit drips down his T-shirt and his left pajama leg.

Jon tosses his smartphone aside, jumps up off the couch, rushes over to Harvey. He helps him to the recliner.

Daphne worriedly sniffs at her two daddies, pants, and paces.

Jon brushes sweat-soaked hair out of Harvey's eyes.

HARVEY

Jon.

Tears streak down Harvey's chiseled cheeks.

HARVEY

I think we better get to the ER.

Jon moves to retrieve his phone. Harvey grabs Jon by his arm.

Jon shudders as he looks into Harvey's dark, watering eyes.

HARVEY

Jon, I'm scared. I'm really scared.

INT. NORTHWESTERN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY

The Department of Hematology and Oncology has been decorated to be bright, cheery, almost homey.

Harvey, Jon, Elijah, and BRENT DALEY, 33, occupy four chairs.

Harvey suddenly leans forward.

HARVEY

Ah, God, I'm gonna puke again.

Harvey wipes his upper lip with his hand.

Jon rubs his back.

Elijah pats his arm.

ELIJAH
Deep breaths, buddy. Deep breaths.

RAYMOND WILLIAMS, M.D., 57, a balding, slender man with bushy grey sideburns, walks up, a tablet computer under his arm.

The four of them stand.

Harvey turns to Elijah and Brent.

HARVEY
Thanks for being here.

Elijah grins broadly, winks at him.

ELIJAH
What kind of pals would we be if we were anywhere else?

HARVEY
You'll be here when we're finished?

Elijah puts his arm across Brent's strong shoulders.

ELIJAH
We're not going anywhere.

INT. DR. WILLIAMS'S OFFICE - FEW MINUTES LATER

Dr. Williams places the tablet onto his desk, sits.

DR. WILLIAMS
Harvey, the only way I can give you these results is straight up.

Jon squeezes Harvey's hand tight.

DR. WILLIAMS
You have stage 4 hepatocellular carcinoma. There is no stage 5, there is no cure, but there are several treatments available that will keep the disease progression and symptoms under control.

HARVEY
"No cure"?

DR. WILLIAMS

We can start with one regimen. If it doesn't work, or if you cannot tolerate it, we can try another one next. We will have to monitor how you feel by talking to you and checking your blood work weekly, and how you respond to treatment by repeating scans every six to eight weeks.

HARVEY

You're saying I'm going to die.

DR. WILLIAMS

Harvey, we're all going to die. Nobody knows exactly when. With HCC, average survival rate is 50% at two years, 10% at five years.

JON

Those survival rates fucking suck!

DR. WILLIAMS

Yeah, those numbers are not promising, but new treatments, either approved or experimental, become available every day. We will be monitoring your progress and availability of trials or new medications constantly. Can't promise that it will be easy, can't promise it will work, but I can promise that we will do everything we can to help you.

Harvey leans forward, brings his hands up to his forehead.

Jon and Williams wait for him.

Harvey looks up.

HARVEY

I'm not ready to die. Dammit, don't I get a say?

Harvey looks at Jon, grabs his hand.

Jon fights grimacing at how much Harvey is crushing his hand.

INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jon stands beside Harvey's deathbed. Jon grips Harvey's hand.

SUPER: Fall, 2023

Jon looks across the bed, over Harvey's body, at his parents.

JON

Ma. Pop.

Both Marjorie and Mike openly weep.

A glance towards the door reveals the HOSPICE NURSE watching the scene sympathetically, clutching a clipboard of forms.

Jon reaches out, brushes his fingertips over Harvey's permanently closed eyelids.

Jon looks at the copy of John Grisham's The Rainmaker, bookmarked near the end, sitting on the small table piled deep with prescription bottles. Jon squeezes Harvey's hand.

JON

Harv, I haven't finished reading to you. Harv, c'mon, man, we gotta finish it, you and me. C'mon, man.

Jon squeezes Harvey's hand anew.

Nothing.

JON

But, Harv, you promised.

Jon lets Harvey's hand slip out of his, land on the bed.

Jon slips his hands into his pockets.

He sweeps a cold gaze over the emaciated carcass.

JON

I guess we just get rid of it now.
Throw it away. Right?

Marjorie looks at her son as she wipes tears off her face.

MARJORIE

My great blue heron, please don't.

Jon stares back at her, then moves his eyes to meet his father's. Mike returns the stare into his son's blank eyes.

Jon turns, walks out of the bedroom, his western-booted steps loud on the wooden floor.

Jon stops a few feet into the living room.

MIKE (O.S.)
He doesn't have to go this alone.

MARJORIE (O.S.)
Yes, he does.

Jon grabs his leather jacket, slams open the front door, slams it closed behind him.

EXT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Jon flips up the collar of his jacket against the late-night Chicago cold. He lights up a cigarette, takes a long drag off it, blows a billow of smoke through his nose.

He glances sidelong at the windows of their apartment -- of his apartment alone now, narrows in on the bedroom windows.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. CHURCH - DAY

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD JON stands up on his tiptoes to gaze inside the plain pine casket stamped "Property of Wayne County".

His mother, AMELIA, 23, lies inside, her head turned away.

Jon blubbers as tears flow down his cheeks and drip down onto the front of his cheap Good Will suit jacket.

Cordell grabs his son by his little arm, yanks Jon away from the casket. Cordell shakes Jon violently.

CORDELL
Crying? You a sissy? A pansy-ass? A
little faggot in the making?

Jon darts his eyes at the casket. Continuing to cry:

JON
I want my mom back.

Cordell smashes his hand across Jon's face.

CORDELL
Stop crying! Right now!

Jon's tears refuse to stop.

Cordell smashes his hand across Jon's face again.

Jon's tears won't stop.

Cordell goes to smash his hand across Jon's face yet again.

Jon, blood gushing from his nose, his lips split in half a dozen places, his left eye already swelling and bruising, clenches his little fists as he wills the tears to stop.

Jon stares at the casket, then back at his father.

Cordell smashes his hand across Jon's face again, curls up the corner of his mouth when Jon doesn't cry.

CORDELL

Will I ever see you cry again?

JON

No, sir.

CORDELL

I do, this will seem like tickling.
(with disgust)

I can't believe you made me hit you like that. No pedos are gonna want you today, your face like that.

Cordell sneers.

CORDELL

You fucking ugly little shit.

Jon's little shoulders sag as he stares at his father.

CORDELL

Get out of my sight!

Jon heads to the door, has to reach for the knob. He looks back at the casket, mouths the words "Goodbye, Mom."

It's hard to imagine any seven-year-old's expression as hardened as Jon has hardened his at that moment.

END FLASHBACK

Jon stares with those same hard eyes. All that's changed is that his face has grown from a child's to an adult's.

Jon disappears into the dark night.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY

The dining room table practically groans under the Thanksgiving feast. Certainly, their three plates do.

Jon sits there, his chin in his fists, stares at the fourth chair, his eyes empty and hollow with bags under them.

Jon pushes his chair back, stands, walks out of the room.

Marjorie and Mike look at each other as they hear the front door open and close.

EXT. RANDOM DETROIT STREET - NIGHT

Jon takes a drag off his cigarette, flicks the butt away, clasps his hands, blows into them.

He narrows his eyes when he sees CALLUM, 14, short, thin, wild-haired, a cigarette dangles from his lips. Even from here, Jon can see Callum shivers under his ratty Army jacket.

Jon ducks into a nearby all-night store, comes out with a sandwich and a quart of milk. He walks up to the kid.

Callum stiffens, tosses the cigarette away.

Jon holds the sandwich out to him.

JON

Not exactly Thanksgiving dinner,
kid, but it'll at least take the
edge off your stomach caving in.

The teenager darts his eyes to see around Jon, then grabs the sandwich, rips into it. Callum devours it in three bites.

Jon opens the milk, hands it to him. Callum slams the mouth of the carton to his lips, guzzles. Milk dribbles down his chin, down the front of his threadbare shirt.

Callum finishes the milk, tosses the carton aside.

The kid sags his bony shoulders, an immense sadness reflects in his green eyes, green like jade.

JON

Bet you get a lot of business,
those beautiful eyes of yours.

Callum shrugs.

CALLUM

Whatever. Who gives a fuck why
people want the business as long as
they pay for it.

Callum cocks his head to the restroom in the public park across the street.

CALLUM

I need the money up front, so you better fuckin' have it out before you walk in. I blow you, it's fifty bucks, you blow me, that's twenty-five, you want to fuck me up the ass, that's an even hundred. And no discount for the free food.

Callum turns, crosses the street, enters the park, heads into the public restroom.

Jon digs his hands into his jacket pockets, stares across the street at the restroom entrance.

INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT

Jon walks in, shuts the door softly behind him.

Marjorie and Mike exchange glances, stand up from the couch, watch their son.

Jon, never meeting their eyes, mounts the stairs, enters his old room, shuts the door just as softly.

Marjorie turns, falls into Mike's arms, the two embrace tightly, desperately.

EXT. INTERLOCHEN CENTER FOR THE ARTS - DAY

Jake, Jon's counselor at Hazelden all those years earlier, now 58, crosses the parking lot up to Jon, 41.

Jake smiles, extends his hand.

SUPER: Spring, 2026

Jon shakes Jake's hand.

JON

God, Doc, you look great. 'Course, you never did look your age.

Jake shrugs, puts his hand on Jon's shoulder, leads him toward the main building.

JAKE

Thanks for coming up. I hope you take the position.

JAKE (CONT'D)

These kids really need you. You'll understand when you meet 'em.

JON

Thanks for telling me about it. Hearing from you like that was, well, great, but...how'd you even know I was a drama teacher?

Jake grins at him slyly.

JAKE

I've kept up with your folks about you here and there.

JON

Ma and Pop never stop worrying.

JAKE

And never will.

JON

They finally drilled into me I needed a change of scenery. That apartment with all those reminders of Harvey. And my principal was right, that I've done everything with that drama program I could.

Jon grins at Jake.

JON

I think I'm ripe for a new challenge.

Jake chortles mischievously.

JAKE

You might regret saying say.

INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - DAY

SAMANTHA BRENNER, 39, cringes as she escorts Jon into the main auditorium -- the "Arts Academy" -- of the Drama Department.

STUDENTS hoot, chase each other with props around the stage.

Two TEENAGE BOYS, one lanky, one plump, fence with authentic-looking foils, constantly shout "En garde!" at each other.

A group of GIRLS costume each other from bolts of cloth, wield professional-grade scissors with dangerous abandon.

Jon cocks a brow when he sees a GIRL and BOY seated in the first row, kissing, his hand fondling her breast through her blouse, her hand massaging the crotch of his dark jeans.

SAMANTHA

Mr. Vornholt, I am so embarrassed.
The drama teacher who just left
could at least control these kids.

Samantha looks up.

SAMANTHA

Mr. Wagner! Please get control of
these young people! We're paying
you to substitute for a reason.

BOB WAGNER, who seems barely older than any of these students, regards her with a stricken expression.

MR. WAGNER

I really am tryin', Mrs. Brenner.

JON

Hey, Wagner!

Jon waves the substitute over. When Wagner arrives:

JON

I need a bucket or some kind of
container. I need a pad of paper,
and I need a pen. Quick!

Wagner rushes off.

JON

(to Samantha)

A trick I picked up when I was a
student teacher. That drama teacher
would love to know I'm paying it
forward. Man, she'd be in her 80's
by now.

Wagner returns with the items, hands them to Jon.

Jon furiously scribbles out little notes, folds them, drops them in the bucket.

Jon rushes around the auditorium, gets each student to reach into the bucket and pull out a slip at random.

Jon tosses the bucket aside, rushes to the center of the stage, where he throws up his arms and dons an expression as the pose and the mask of the Mad Conductor.

At the top of his lungs he belts out the opening line of the signature tune from the Broadway hit The Music Man:

JON
SEVENTY-SIX TROMBONES LED THE BIG
PARADE!

Jon points at the kids, pantomimes playing a trombone, then enthusiastically waves at them to fall in step behind him.

JON
SEVENTY-SIX **TROMBONES** LED THE BIG
PARADE!!

The students pick up on Jon's intent, and certain ones fall in line behind him and pantomime playing the trombone.

Jon starts marching around the stage, the impromptu trombone section really starts to get into their roles.

JON
WITH A HUNDRED AND TEN **CORNETS**
CLOSE AT HAND!

The "cornet" kids fall into step behind the trombone section and stomp and stride to outshow and outdo their classmates.

JON
THERE WERE OVER A THOUSAND
REEDS/SPRINGING UP LIKE WEEDS!

The reeds section finishes the impromptu marching band.

Jon brings the spontaneous Broadway number to a close with a great flourish, his arms outstretched. His smile and those of the young people light up the entire Arts Academy.

Samantha points at him, shouts:

SAMANTHA
Vornholt, you're hired!

INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

Jake sits in the back row, unseen and unnoticed, in the dark.

Jake stares hard at Jon. Jake couldn't wear a deeper frown.

JAKE
Oh, my God. Marjorie, Mike, you
were right. Oh, God, Jon, I'm so
sorry. I'm so sorry I let you down.

While Samantha excitedly discusses employment details with Jon up on the stage, Jake slips out unseen.

INT. INTERLOCHEN - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jon sticks his head in the door.

JON
Hey, Doc, got a sec?

SUPER: Fall, 2026

Jake nods, waves him in.

Jon glances at the doctoral degree, then at the 8x10 of the three desert 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagle" badasses. The two custom-framings remain paired after all these years.

Jon takes a seat.

JON
I got this kid in Acting Technique,
Keith Brin. Something's not right.

JAKE
Yeah, I know. I've called his home,
all I ever get is phone tag with
his folks. Dad's a doctor, Mom
works second shift nurse, Keith has
a younger brother to take care of.
The brothers are really close.

Jake frowns.

JAKE
Do you think someone's hitting him?

JON
That's not my vibe. But something's
definitely going on with the kid.

Jon leans forward, rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands.

JAKE
How's it going with you and Paul?

JON
I kicked him to the curb last week.
I just couldn't take it anymore.

Jon growls something ugly under his breath.

JON
Sonofabitch emptied out my bank
account. So much for fucking
trusting people.

Jake eyes Jon. Jake sits up.

JAKE
Hey, how 'bout you come over
tomorrow, we catch the game?

JON
Shelly won't care?

JAKE
She's with her folks the whole
weekend. Just us bachelors.

JON
Sure, Doc. Sounds great. Wait. What
about Keith?

JAKE
It's been a long week. Go home,
relax. We can talk about it
tomorrow over beers and chips.

JON
Ah...Doc, I'm sober. Remember?

JAKE
I get to have the beers, you get to
have the chips. Seems fair.

Jon nods, rises, heads for the door.

Jake watches Jon leave. Jake sits forward, leans on his
elbows. He frowns, shakes his head.

JAKE
Get it right this time, Rowsey.

INT. ROWSEY RESIDENCE - DAY

Jon walks into the living room, sees the flatscreen's off, no
music's playing, there are no bowls of chips on the counter.

Jon takes his pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket.

JAKE
Hey, hey, hey. I have to smoke
outside, you have to.

Jon looks at him as he slips the pack back into the pocket.

JON
We're not going to watch the game,
are we, Doc?

JAKE
No, we're not.

JON
We're not going to talk about
Keith, right?

JAKE
Not directly, no.

Jon tightens his hand into a fist.

Jake laughs.

JAKE
You thinking about decking me? I
could have you facedown with your
arms pinned behind your back and
your shoulders popping out of their
sockets faster than you could say,
"I'm a pussy." 101st Airborne
"Screaming Eagle" -- Hooah!

Jon unclenches his fist.

JON
Just leave me alone, Doc.

JAKE
Everyone leaves you alone. Big, bad
Jon Vornholt growls, everyone goes
running.

Jake takes a step toward Jon.

Jon takes a step back.

JAKE
Twenty-seven years ago, two
incredible people gave you a second
chance.

Jake narrows his eyes right into Jon's.

JAKE
When the fuck are you finally going
to take it?

Jon turns to step toward the front door.

Jake hurries to block Jon's path.

JON

Doc, I'm warning you --

JAKE

I screwed up helping you at Hazelden. I knew you should have stayed another three months, even another six, but those days, when I didn't have my head firmly up my ass, it was still back in Iraq. Besides, Marjorie was so convinced you were better.

Jake steps toward Jon, which makes Jon step several paces back into the living room. Jon blanks his expression.

JAKE

Great strategy: just shut down. That way you don't have to do the work of growing and changing.

Jake smirks.

JAKE

You lazy pussy! What makes you so special?

(chuckles)

Oh, yeah, that's right, your dad was really rough on you growing up, he smacked you around, made you go hungry sometimes.

Jon, mouth agape, stares at Jake wide-eyed.

JON

You know it was way worse than that. You told me yourself it was unimaginable what Dad did to me.

Jake shrugs, rolls his eyes.

JAKE

Frankly, I thought you'd come a lot further along. Instead you get here, I vouch for you, and you're the same fake asshole hustler you were the first time I met you, slicker than snot. You haven't changed at all.

Jake snorts, sneers at Jon.

JAKE

Harvey's turning in his grave.
Yeah, you fall off the wagon for a
minor hiccup in your career. But do
the same when you lose the love of
your life? No fuckin' way. That
would take something you're not
capable of: feeling.

JON

Don't you dare mention Harv.

JAKE

Oh. Struck a nerve? How? You don't
give a fuck.

JON

I give a fuck. That's it, I'm
getting outta here. I don't need
this shit from you. From anyone!

Jon moves for the door again. Again, Jake impedes him.

JAKE

What shit do you need? I'm a Ph.D.
psychologist. I've got worthless
shit in spades.

Jake looks Jon long and hard in his eyes.

JAKE

It's all been a front, hasn't it?
Every smile, every laugh, every
frown, every sneer, all of it.

JON

What, you thick? Don't you get it?
I'm garbage and always will be!

Jon stumbles back, into one of the living room's chairs.

Jake sits on the end of the couch nearest Jon. Jake nods, his
expression easy, noncommittal.

JAKE

"Garbage"? Oh. Really? Okay. So
Harv was a real moron.

JON

I told you not to talk about him.

JAKE

Well, he musta been. Loved a guy
who was garbage. Not only garbage,
but always was, always will be.

Jake thinks for a moment.

JAKE

Your principals. You sure fooled
all of them. You sure must give one
helluva job interview.

Jake laughs.

JAKE

And your students. What suckers
they are. And, hell, Mike! What a
fuckin' chump he turned out to be.
He loves you, but he's wrong.

Jake narrows his eyes at Jon.

JAKE

And that stupid bitch, Marjorie.
You fooled her most of all, huh?

JON

Don't you ever, EVER talk about Ma
like that!

JAKE

Why, Jon? If you're this bottomless
bag of garbage, this endless sack
of shit, why do all of us care
about you so much, love you so
much? Mike and Marjorie. Why, Jon?

JON

(barely above a whisper)
I don't know.

Jon moves to get up, Jake clamps both his hands down on Jon's
forearm, forces him to stay put.

JON

All of you, you're always talking
in riddles. Even when you're not
saying a word. I never understand
any of you people. I want to
understand, but I never can.

JAKE

Feeling isn't understanding.

Jake's chest starts to heave, his nostrils start to flare.

JAKE

Let me let you in on a secret: none
of us understand shit.

Jake's chest really starts to heave.

JAKE

Understanding's not even the point.

His teeth clenched:

JAKE

Let me tell you the fucking point.

BEGIN FLASHBACKS

EXT. IRAQI VILLAGE - DAY

Small arms fire. .50-cal fire. Mortar explosions.

A cacophony of orders shouted in both English and Arabic.

Soldiers -- U.S. Army 101st Airborne and Iraqi Army
conscripts -- yell out for their sergeants, for their
buddies, or for their mommas as they're wounded and killed.

Jake -- "Shitferbrains" in the photograph -- takes up the
rear of a four-man "stack" at the door of a building.

Each soldier has his M16A4 rifle raised, locked and loaded.

The TEAM LEADER tries the door, finds it unlocked, tosses a
flashbang inside. After a deafening roar, no command is
needed as he and his team flow inside.

Dazed Iraqis hold their AKs aloft, others lie prostrate on
the floor, their hands on their heads, weapons tossed aside.

The Iraqis dart their eyes at these Americans terrifying in
their full battle kit compared to their own shabby uniforms.

Jake's teammates fan out.

Jake kicks the Iraqis' weapons away, within seconds Zip Ties
the Iraqis in efficient succession, rejoins his team.

The four Screaming Eagles ascend to the second floor,
immediately begin to clear it.

The scene explodes into chaos. Mortar and small-arms fire
tears through a hallway, ripping apart an outer wall.

Jake's team returns fire from what's left of windows.

Jake points his rifle, pulls the trigger. Click. Nothing.

Click. Nothing. Click.

Nothing.

JAKE

Oh, shit!

Jake, in total muscle memory, drops to a knee and tries, hyper-focused, to fix his weapon's jam.

The team leader orders his small group to break contact, everyone goes cyclic before bounding back to the end of the hallway and into the safety of an internal room.

Jake fixes his malfunction, brings his rifle to bear, goes cyclic himself.

JAKE

MOTHERFUCKERS!

Bullets, sounding like enraged hornets, zing past Jake.

The incoming fire stops as fast as it started.

Jake leaps to his feet, blinks, gulps, his chest heaves.

The room rings, even seems to vibrate, with the silence.

Jake darts his eyes all around the room. No one, nowhere.

JAKE

Oh, shit. Oh, fuck. Oh, shit.

Jake runs after his compatriots, rounds a corner.

WALEED, maybe 18 -- his Iraqi Army uniform tattered, his jet-black facial hair close-cropped, his eyes obsidian -- rounds the corner from the opposite direction, slams into Jake.

Jake growls, grits his teeth, thumps the muzzle of his rifle into Waleed's chest.

Waleed grimaces, grits his teeth, narrows his eyes at Jake, grabs the barrel of Jake's rifle, tries to stay on his feet.

JAKE

Surrender, you motherfucker! Just surrender!

Waleed's a caged animal. He pulls even more ferociously on the barrel of Jake's rifle.

Waleed finally pulls Jake down.

They tumble and roll on the floor.

Jake gets the upper hand.

JAKE

Damn, you're strong.

(shouts)

Let up! Just let me take you prisoner! Let up! You don't have to die, you stupid kid!

Jake pulls out a Zip Tie, grabs Waleed's wrist.

Waleed shoves Jake off him, slams his fist in Jake's face.

Jake grits his teeth, narrows his eyes at the Iraqi, Jake lets out a yell of pure primal rage, tackles the teenager.

Jake's on top of his enemy, he pummels his gloved fist into the Iraqi's face. Again. Again. Again.

Waleed, his nose gushing blood, once more throws Jake off, then shuffles to his feet, squints his eyes at Jake.

Jake, as Waleed starts to shakily raise his AK, gulps and stares back into the teenager's hate-filled eyes.

Jake finally gets his bearings and tries to sit up fast, tries to point his own weapon.

A burst of small arms fire thunderously fills the room.

Waleed's obsidian eyes go wide; his body jerks as three bullets blow straight through him.

Waleed crumples dead, first to his knees, then onto his side.

Jake looks up.

GARY RIFKIN, 22 -- "Slick" from the photograph -- lowers his rifle, reaches out, helps Jake to his feet.

GARY

God, Jake, that guy almost had you.
What the hell you doing in here
alone, man?

Jake stares down at Waleed, watches the big pool of blood that quickly forms under the teenager's still body.

JAKE
 (barely above a whisper)
 You weren't supposed to die. You
 stupid kid.

Gary grabs Jake by the front of his kit, makes him face him.

GARY
 Hey, hey, look at me, look at me.

Jake stares at him.

GARY
 Not like last night, huh?

Jake shakes his head, gulps.

JAKE
 Gary, I can't stop shaking.

GARY
 (quietly)
 We'll talk.

Gary lets go of Jake, rushes downstairs.

Jake glances back at Waleed, then rushes after Gary.

They exit the building, both squint against the bright sun.

Jake and Gary see their team leader and the fourth member of their stack, the two soldiers glance back them nervously.

Gary cracks a grin.

GARY
 (to Jake)
 Fuck. I'd steer way clear of Sgt
 Collins for a while if I were you.

Jake closes his eyes, blows a shuddering breath, opens them.

Jake cracks his own grin.

JAKE
 Nah. Sarn is cool.

SGT STEPHEN COLLINS, 28 -- "Pocket Hercules" to anyone with the testicular fortitude to risk the sergeant hearing him -- saunters by, relaxed despite a bloody slash on his upper arm.

SGT COLLINS
 Not that cool.

Sgt Collins steps off to the side a short way.

SGT COLLINS

Rowsey!

Jake and Gary exchange looks.

GARY

Nice knowin' ya, buddy.

Sgt Collins beckons Jake with fingers waving.

Jake hurries over.

Sgt Collins points at the ground in front of him.

Jake plants his boots on that exact spot.

Sgt Collins, bloodshot eyes and a big bottom lip of dip, leans in to Jake.

SGT COLLINS

You ever pull a fuckin' stunt like that again and survive, you don't want to know what I'll do.

Jake fights grimacing as the sergeant's dip-stained spittle sprays his face.

SGT COLLINS

Letting yourself get alone like that!

Jake raises his hand toward his face, immediately snaps it back at his side.

The sergeant's eyes blaze.

SGT COLLINS

Rowsey! Basic Training one-oh-one! No wonder they call you Shitferbrains. Here I thought you were the smart one.

JAKE

But, Sarn, my weapon, it jammed, I --

Sgt Collins narrows his eyes at Jake.

SGT COLLINS

What, Specialist, you don't particularly like being alive?

SGT COLLINS (CONT'D)
You want to be shipped home from
this sand shithole in a body bag?

JAKE
No, Sgt Collins.

SGT COLLINS
Well, keep pulling stunts like the
one today, and you will. You stay
with your team at all costs. I
don't care your weapon jams or you
got your dick in your hand.

Sgt Collins hocks a big loogie of chaw-black spit.

He takes a long, deep breath.

SGT COLLINS
Jake, we're in this together.
That's not only the only way you're
going to get through this war, over
here, but everything in your life.

Jake looks the 5'6" man in his eyes, nods slowly.

JAKE
Yes, Sgt Collins.

Jake clears his throat.

JAKE
Thanks, Sarn.

Sgt Collins cracks a small grin that immediately disappears.
He narrows his eyes at Jake, spits another loogie, right onto
Jake's boot.

SGT COLLINS
Now, get the fuck out of my sight.
And wait till you see the shit
duties -- literally -- you have
coming, Specialist.

Jake skedaddles.

EXT. IRAQI ROAD - NEXT DAY

Sgt Collins leads his squad on patrol.

Each squadmate maintains several meters distance.

Gary walks point.

Gary glances to his left, over at Jake.

GARY

When this is all done, I'm getting
my ass back to civilization and get
myself some.

Gary takes his two hands, makes the universal motion for
sexual intercourse.

Everyone laughs.

SGT COLLINS

Finally gonna get some, Slick?
'Bout time.

KA-BOOM!

Where Gary had been standing a moment before now billow smoke
and sand.

When the smoke and sand clear, a crater remains where Gary
had been standing, and Gary litters the vicinity in pieces.

SGT COLLINS

Drop and freeze!

Each soldier drops to one knee and lifts his rifle into
firing position, scans for targets and threats.

Sgt Collins hears gurgling sounds, races to Jake, who lies on
the road, digs the heels of his combat boots into the earth
as he claws at his neck.

Blood oozes between Jake's fingers.

Sgt Collins takes a compress out of his bag, presses it to
Jake's wound.

SGT COLLINS

Hold this down, Jake. I'm gonna
check the rest of you.

JAKE

(croaks)
Gary!

SGT COLLINS

Specialist Rowsey, hold that to
your throat or you are gonna bleed
out. You're gonna live, son, but we
need to get you outta here.

Sgt Collins straightens up.

SGT COLLINS
(to the RADIO OPERATOR)
Get the LT on the horn. We need a
cas-evac.

Soon, an approaching helicopter sounds in the distance.

END FLASHBACKS

Tears soak Jake's cheeks as he stares at Jon.

JAKE
Gary was my best friend, Jon, my
brother-in-arms, we told each other
everything. The night before that
kid and I slugged it out in that
room, we thwarted an ambush, the
first time I was shot at in combat.
I told everyone else the bravado
bullshit. Gary's the only one I
told the truth, how I was so glad
it was a nighttime firefight,
'cause I had the biggest shit-
eating grin on my face.

Jake looks Jon hard in the eyes.

JAKE
That night, the ambush, it was like
a video game, I was a kid in an
arcade with a bagful of quarters.
Well, that next day, that was no
video game. I thought I'd be ready
to watch what bullets do to a man.

Jake sniffs, wipes the tears off his cheeks.

JAKE
I wasn't. At all.

Jon watches Jake intently.

JAKE
I lay in a field hospital that
night, pieces of Gary's bone
shrapnel permanently in my neck and
leg, wondering what kind of man I
was. Gary saved my life just the
day before. He was my best friend!
But I thanked God Gary was on point
that day, not me.

JON

Doc, you didn't do anything wrong because you're still here.

JAKE

You bet I'm still here. I've got a beautiful wife, two kids I'm incredibly proud of, a great job, wonderful colleagues, even more wonderful friends. And Gary would want all that for me.

Jon nods noncommittally.

JAKE

Don't you see what tears me up inside? It's what I want for him.

JON

Yeah, sounds like a decent dude.

Jake snorts, shakes his head, sniffs, wipes his nose.

JAKE

You sonofa --

Jake clears his throat.

JAKE

Listen, I still don't understand why that young Iraqi had to die, or why Gary had to step on that landmine, or any of the rest of the complete waste I witnessed. But I never dealt with it until I finally asked others to help me, together, to feel it. And you know what, Jon?

Jon looks at him, shrugs.

Jake explodes:

JAKE

It felt! Fucking! BAD!!

Jon stares wide-eyed at Jake's barely-contained rage.

JAKE

Gary died. That easily could've been me. That stupid, misguided Iraqi kid died. I didn't let him kill me. None of that makes that kid, Slick, or me a bad person.

Jake narrows his eyes even harder into Jon's.

JAKE

Life's shit sometimes. Grow the fuck up, Vornholt!

Jon stares back at Jake. Jon tries to keep his shoulders thrown back, rigid, he tries to keep his expression hard, emotionless, stone, but the entire façade crumbles. Jon sinks into the chair, his breathing comes in gasps.

JON

Harv died, Doc.

Jake softens his expression, takes Jon's hand into his.

JAKE

I know he did, Jon. I know.

JON

Why did he have to die?

Jake gives a sad grin.

JAKE

Because people die, Jon. We all die. We don't want to. Harvey. That Iraqi kid. Gary. And not because of our own mortal oblivion, but because we know it's going to hurt the ones we love.

JON

I love Ma and Pop, but those years with Harv, that was the only time I felt whole. I felt safe, I felt... peace.

Jon struggles to continue.

JAKE

Go ahead. Something else you felt. Put the word to it. You can do it.

JON

I felt...connected. And I'm never going to get that back. Ever!

Jake squeezes Jon's hand, tight.

JAKE

You feel this?

Jon nods.

JAKE

You're connected, you're connected
more than you can ever imagine.

JON

Yeah?

JAKE

Oh, yeah. And, Jon, it's only
together any of us can get through
anything.

Jake squeezes Jon's hand even more tightly.

JAKE

Please, stop going it alone.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jon tosses his jacket and keys down, yanks off his boots.

He starts upstairs, stops at the door of a deep closet.

Jon pulls out a box, sits cross-legged beside it.

He removes the top -- Magic-Marked in Marjorie's writing:
"For Jon -- when he's ready".

Jon breathes a shuddering breath. He reaches out a black
scarf and a floppy warlock hat.

QUICK FLASH

Jon and Harvey each wear matching scarves and warlock hats.

Harvey musters a grin as Jon presses his cheek to Harvey's.

As Marjorie snaps a pic of them, Jon beams a huge smile, his
expression radiates optimism, but exhaustion fills his eyes.

END QUICK FLASH

Jon sets these items aside, pulls out a maroon sweatshirt
emblazoned with TREVINO, CARLSEN, AND VONDEREN.

QUICK FLASH

Harvey shivers uncontrollably despite being swallowed up in
the huge maroon sweatshirt.

Harvey grabs Jon, wraps Jon's arms around himself.

Harvey presses himself into Jon's shirtfront.

Jon runs his hands up and down Harvey's back.

END QUICK FLASH

Jon puts the sweatshirt to his nose, breathes in deep.

He sets the sweatshirt aside, peers into the box, knits his brows. He pulls out the hardback of The Rainmaker. He runs his fingers over the tattered cover.

Jon narrows his eyes as he sees a folded slip of paper protruding from a random page. He removes it, unfolds it.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Jon, I only have a few minutes left. Don't waste one minute worrying about me. I got everything out of life I wanted, most of all I got you. Feel, Jon. Feel big things, feel a lot of things. And don't ever stop. And most of all, be happy. Yours for eternity --
Harv

Jon runs his fingertip over Harvey's signature.

Jon's eyes widen.

He reaches up to his cheek, feels the tear running down.

Jon blinks his eyes.

One tear drops down his cheek, then another tear down his other cheek.

Then Jon bends over, utterly, totally overcome with sobbing.

JON

But, Harv, it feels! Fucking! BAD!!

Jon sobs and sobs.

JON

Make it stop. Please, God, make it stop!

Then Jon looks up, he begs through his sobs:

JON

No, don't make it stop. Please, God, don't make it stop.

Jonathan Sean Vornholt cries the tears of a lifetime.

Jon wipes his nose, then his cheeks. He goes to get up, then he knits his brows.

JON

What do you get when you combine a rhetorical question with a joke?

Jon widens his eyes as a huge, huge smile erupts on his face. He starts laughing, with a joy, a joy that just won't stop.

JON

I get it, Harv. I get it.

He jumps to his feet, runs to his front door, throws it open.

JON

Everybody! I got it! I GOT A JOKE!

QUICK FLASH

Harvey looks at Jon, laughs even more, shakes his head.

HARVEY

God, I love you, you feather head.

END QUICK FLASH

INT. JON'S DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

KEITH BRIN, 16, sits in a chair next to Jon's cluttered desk.

Keith, trim, strong, not thin, doesn't look Jon in the eye.

JON

Keith, all semester, you don't raise your hand, you sit back there in silence, you always look like your dog just died.

KEITH

I'm sorry, sir. I'll do better.

JON

I'm not asking you to do better, son. I'm trying to figure out what's wrong. Can you talk to me?

Jon takes a deep breath.

JON

You're a really sad kid. I know a thing or two about being a sad kid.

Keith narrows his eyes at him, bites his bottom lip.

JON

When I asked you to roll-play
Stanley Kowalski in the "Streetcar"
skit, why didn't you want to wear
that tank top or roll up your
sleeves?

Keith narrows his eyes at him even harder.

KEITH

It's just that jerk Tom. Thinks he
can make everyone feel like crap
just because he's a dancer and he's
got the build of one.

Jon sits back, regards him, taps his fingers on his desk.

JON

Bullshit.

Keith darts his eyes anywhere but at his teacher.

Jon reveals his forearm for Keith to see it.

JON

If you pushed your sleeve up, I'd
see something like this, right?

KEITH

Track marks?! Plenty of jerks
around here do drugs, but I don't.

Keith looks at him, panic-stricken.

KEITH

Have you told Dad you think I do
drugs?! Holy shit, Mr. Vornholt.
Oh, fuck -- I'm dead!

JON

Hey, hey! Of course I don't think
you do drugs. But I'd see something
on your arms, wouldn't I?

KEITH

No!

JON

Look me in the eye and say that.

Keith doesn't do either.

JON
You're cutting yourself, right?

KEITH
Fuckin'-A, Mr. V., that's a sissy
girl thing.

JON
You're cutting yourself, right?

Keith eyes his teacher's bare, scarred forearm. He pulls on the cuff of his right sleeve, pushes the sleeve up past his elbow. He turns the revealed forearm for Jon to see.

Slashes crisscross Keith's smooth skin, from scars to scabs to some pretty fresh.

Keith stares into his lap.

JON
Who's hurting you, Keith?

KEITH
I can't tell you that. Do you know
what he'll -- ?

Keith stares at Jon.

Jon clears his throat, speaks slowly, calmly:

JON
Does your dad hit you? Hit your
brother?

KEITH
Hit us? Leave actual evidence
people can see how much he hates
us? Dad's not stupid, Mr. V..

Keith runs his shaking hand through his thick, dark hair.

KEITH
Do you know how fast he would yank
me out of here if I dropped any of
my academics below my 4.5 GPA? He'd
put me in a pre-med specialty high
school so fast. He's said a hundred
times he's got one picked out.

Keith viciously slaps a tear off his cheek.

KEITH
All I've ever thought about, my
whole life, is the stage.

KEITH (CONT'D)

Do you know the dream come true it was when Interlochen accepted me?

JON

I imagine.

KEITH

Dad's so ashamed of me, he doesn't even try to hide what an embarrassment I am to him. I bring home trophies and ribbons and certificates, and he just grunts.

Keith breathes harder and harder.

KEITH

I've got to be everything to everyone. I've got to protect my little brother, stay Mom's little boy, my girlfriend wants to go all the way. Mr. V., I can't let her see my cutting. All the clubs I'm an officer in, all the teams, sports and academic, I captain or co-captain.

Keith can barely get his words out.

KEITH

I'm so exhausted. I have seven, eight hours of homework every night. Every night, Mr. V.. Everything I have to do for church Sundays and Wednesdays. And through it all I got to keep that smile going, when inside I'm dying.

Jon stares at the boy.

KEITH

A couple of Saturdays ago, I asked Dad if I could take the Porsche, attend a party. I wanted to show off. I just wanted to be with my friends, throw back some beers, laugh for real.

Keith almost explodes:

KEITH

Fuckin' relax! Y'know?

Keith breathes a long, shuddering breath.

KEITH
 Know what Dad said?

Jon shakes his head.

KEITH
 (through clenched teeth)
 "When's the last time you did
 something for your family?"

Keith fights back sobs.

KEITH
 I feel like I'm going to fly apart
 into a million pieces any second.

Jon rolls his chair from in front of his desk to in front of
 Keith. Jon looks the boy directly in his eyes.

JON
 We're going to make things better.
 We're sorry, Keith, we're so sorry
 we made you have to go through all
 this alone. No one should have to.

Jon glances at the wall where he's hung a family portrait of
 himself with his Ma and Pop -- the three of them, together.

INT. HENRY FORD HOSPITAL - DAY

Jon enters Marjorie's room, walks up beside her bed.

SUPER: Spring, 2027

Marjorie slowly turns her head.

Her tired eyes brighten, she smiles.

Jon takes her hand.

Marjorie reaches her other hand up to his face, brushes his
 tears with the back of it. Her smile broadens.

MARJORIE
 You don't know what those tears
 mean to me. I've never seen you
 more beautiful.

Jon gulps, nods. He slips three bills out of his pocket.

JON
 Remember these? They've gotten
 kinda old and ratty.

MARJORIE
Sure do remember those.

JON
You never took them.

MARJORIE
And I was never going to.

Jon laughs, sniffs.

JON
You never wanted this money. You
just wanted the simple words, "I'm
sorry."

Jon clenches the bills in his fist, then relaxes his fingers.

JON
I'm sorry.
(quickly)
I me --

MARJORIE
Sssh!

Marjorie squeezes his hand.

MARJORIE
Thank you.

She jerks, spasms, squeezes her eyes shut, releases his hand.

JON
Ma?!

Marjorie opens her eyes.

MARJORIE
Jon, go get your pop.

His boots remain rooted to the linoleum floor.

JON
No! Don't go! There's always
something more they can try. Doc
Williams said that about Harv to
the very last moment.

MARJORIE
But I've already told them I don't
want them to.

JON
I'm not ready for you to go.

Marjorie's placid smile chisels through her mask of pain.

MARJORIE
Yeah, but, honey, I am.

Marjorie squeezes his hand anew.

MARJORIE
My son. My beautiful, beautiful
great blue heron. Go get your pop.

Jon walks over to the door, locks eyes with Mike as he takes his father's hand and draws him into the room.

EXT. GETHSEMANE CEMETERY - DAY

Jon and Mike stand before the coffin, each wears his best dark suit.

A large crowd of Marjorie's family, friends, colleagues, and students walk solemnly back to their cars.

Tears fall down Jon's face, gather on his chin, drip off.

JON
I was her great blue heron.

Jon sniffs.

JON
Her beautiful great blue heron.

Jon glances sidelong at Mike.

JON
She'll never call me that again.

Jon looks at Mike directly.

JON
Why me?

MIKE
Dammit, why not you?!

Jon stares at his father wide-eyed.

JON

Do you know how many beaten,
abused, starving kids there are
eating out of God knows how many
alleyways?

MIKE

We didn't come across all those
other kids in all those other
alleyways. God gave us you.

JON

I get this life, and all those
others don't? How's that make any
sense, Pop? Huh?

MIKE

Did Marge ever tell you why she
called you her great blue heron?

Jon shakes his head.

Mike sniffs, wipes his nose, clears his throat.

MIKE

When the doctor told us Marjorie
couldn't conceive, I watched that
destroy her. This beautiful woman,
the strongest person I'd ever met,
crumbled inside herself.

Mike looks at the coffin.

MIKE

The pain never left her. She could
never talk about it.

Mike returns his attention to his son.

MIKE

Several months later, a gorgeous
spring morning, just like this one
actually, we were walking
Riverfront Trail. A great blue
heron flew right over us, continued
on its way, right across the
sunrise. It was -- breathtaking.

Tears flow as Jon listens intently.

MIKE

Marge looked at me, the pain still
in her eyes, but for the first time
in months, I saw her smile.

MIKE (CONT'D)

She told me that was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

Mike cries just as freely.

MIKE

You see, son. I saw you that night, and all I saw was a kid I needed to get into the system.

Jon nods stiffly.

MIKE

She saw you, filthy and thin and track-marked, hollow-cheeked and hard-eyed and angry at absolutely everyone, and she saw all over again the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. There was no power on Earth that was going to take you away from her.

JON

But I stole from her, swore at her, made her life a living hell. It took me twenty-seven years and her dying to apologize for any of it.

Jon gulps several times. He puts his hand on his chest.

JON

(his voice quivering)
I never let her in.

Jon looks at the coffin.

JON

I never let her in, not ever. Not really. And now it's too late.

Mike lets go of Jon's hand, he grabs the lapels of Jon's suit jacket, makes his son face him.

MIKE

That is not true. You let her in from the very start. Even I could see that, and it's taken me a long time to see you, see you for real.

Mike's lips quiver.

MIKE

I'm sorry, my beautiful boy, it's taken me so long.

JON

Pop, I've told you I respect you,
I've told you thank you, I've told
you I'm afraid of you, I even told
you I hate you. But I've never told
you I love you.

They grab each other in a tight embrace. Mike presses his face into Jon's shoulder, weeps, his whole body quakes.

Jon puts his lips to his father's ear.

JON

I love you, Pop.

Jon looks at the coffin again and...smiles. His eyes fill with joy and happiness at the same time that they flow anew with tears, all of this in the best, most raw and authentic display of the ecstatic agony of the human condition.

EXT. RANDOM DETROIT STREET - DAY

Changed into their street clothes, Jon and Mike make small talk as they amble down the cracked sidewalk.

Jon perks up as he narrows his eyes across the street and down to the far corner.

JON

Pop, wait here. I'm gonna try to
get you to meet someone.

Jon darts across the street, approaches Callum.

The wild-haired teenager narrows his hard eyes at Jon.

Jon raises his hands, palms outward.

Callum darts his green eyes all around Jon.

CALLUM

You're that guy who didn't come
into the restroom that night. I sat
there half an hour. What the fuck?

Jon lowers his hands.

JON

You deserve better.

CALLUM

I don't deserve shit, mister. And I'll tell you, asswipe, I don't run no fuckin' tab.

Jon hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON

You see that old man back there? He and his wife found me same age you are when I was in exactly the same situation you're in right now.

Callum shrugs.

CALLUM

So? What the fuck I care? Unless you and Pops are ready to let me suck your cocks for fifty bucks each, get the fuck outta my life.

JON

They helped me, and I'd like to help you. That "pay it forward" shit and good karma, all that.

Jon slips the bills out of his pocket. Callum eyes the money.

JON

I don't want anything from you for this hundred and seventy bucks. But if you just need to talk, if you need a hot meal.

Jon slips a small notepad and a pen from the inside pocket of his leather jacket. He scribbles quickly, rips off the sheet.

Jon holds the sheet and the bills out to the boy.

CALLUM

You fuckin' liar. You want me to suck you for that.

JON

No. You're worth more than that. Trust me, I know. C'mon, take this.

Jon emphasizes the sheet of paper.

JON

The top, that's my name and my number. The bottom, that's my father over there.

Jon smiles at the boy.

JON

C'mon! There's a great pizzeria we love, been going there for years. Let us get a hot meal inside you. We can talk. Pop can help. He cares. He really, really does.

Callum snatches the money and paper, takes off out of sight.

Jon's shoulders sag, slips his hands into the pockets of his jacket, turns, heads back to his father.

Mike puts his hand on Jon's shoulder, pats it solidly.

Jon grins wanly at him, puts his arm around Mike's shoulders.

JON

C'mon, old man. Let's go home.

As they start down the sidewalk, Mike glances heavenward, winks, gives a thumbs-up.

INT. JON AND MATT'S INTERLOCHEN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jon glances down as his phone rings.

SUPER: Epilogue

Jon crinkles his brows at the number. He glances at his boyfriend, MATT FINGERHUT, 41.

Matt looks up from his laptop, smiles warmly at Jon.

Jon scratches Daphne's head as he answers the phone.

INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Jon bounces his knee as he darts his eyes from the clock -- 8:58p -- to the door, to Luigi (still thin, but grey-haired and balding on top), who looks back at him and frowns.

Jon looks at Mike across from him in their favorite booth.

Mike pats Jon's hand, grins reassuringly at his son.

Jon nods, returns his glance up at the clock. 9:01p.

Jon looks at Luigi, who frowns more deeply as he pulls keys out of his pocket, starts to come from behind the counter.

Jon shuts his eyes, his shoulders sag as he shakes his head.

The door chimes.

Jon pops his eyes open.

Callum stands there: wild-haired, hard, broken, but --

-- there!

Callum glares at Jon with eyes that are green, green like jade.

Jon breathes a huge sigh, smiles, stands, carefully and slowly approaches the boy.

FADE OUT