

FIRE HOUSE RULES

"DUMPSTER FIRE"

Written by

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DUMPSTER FIRE

NOUN: Dumpster fire; plural noun: Dumpster fires

- 1. A complete disaster.*
- 2. Something very difficult that nobody wants to deal with.*

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(CHARACTER INFO

FIRE HOUSES

WESTLAKE

Chief Louis Wilson
 Jamie Wilson (son)
 Steven Henri (son-in-law)
 Terri Brady
 Mason Donovan (secret son-in-law)

NORTH STATE

Chief Maddox Henri
 Marlene Henri (née Wilson, daughter-in-law)
 Rosie Wilson (Marlene's sister)

FAMILY TREES

THE HENRI FAMILY

Chief Maddox Henri - 60s, FATHER, WIFE DECEASED
 Steven Henri - 30s, SON, MARRIED TO MARLENE
 Marlene "Mare" Henri, née Wilson - 30s, DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
 Isabel Henri - 9, STEVEN AND MARLENE'S CHILD
 Dexter Henri - 16, STEVEN AND MARLENE'S CHILD

THE WILSON FAMILY

Chief Louis Wilson - 60s, FATHER, MARRIED TO ALEXANDRA
 Dr. Alexandra Wilson - 60s, MOTHER, MARRIED TO LOUIS
 James "Jamie" Wilson - 30s, SON, MARRIED TO BEATRICE
 Beatrice Wilson - late 20s, MARRIED TO JAMES, HAVING TWINS
 Marlene Henri, née Wilson - 30s, DAUGHTER, MARRIED TO STEVEN
 Rosie Wilson/Donovan - 20s, DAUGHTER, SECRETLY MARRIED TO MASON
 Mason Donovan - 30s, SECRETLY MARRIED TO ROSIE

THE BRADY FAMILY

Terri Brady - late 20s, MOTHER, HUSBAND DECEASED
 Sara Brady - 10, DAUGHTER

THE MIDDLETON FAMILY

Carol Middleton, 40s - MOTHER/MAYOR, DIVORCED
 Lily Middleton, 17 - DAUGHTER OF MAYOR

TEASER

EXT. JUNIPER VILLE BELTWAY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A battered four lane highway encircles the town of Juniper Ville, Texas. Cracks. Potholes. Bent guard rails.

WHOOSH. A dark GREEN CHEVY SUV speeds by.

INT. HENRI CAR - DAY

In the review mirror a pair of bright brown eyes appear, staring daggers behind her...

MARLENE

Boy, did you hear what I said?

The eyes belong to **MARLENE "MARE" HENRI**, our main character, Black, 30s, fit, tough exterior, sweet smile. But, right now she's not smiling... she's yelling to her son **DEXTER HENRI**, 16, Mixed - Black and Latino, awkwardly handsome.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

Don't make me pull this car over.

DEXTER

Fine.

Dexter gives a weighted sigh, before putting down his cellphone, just long enough to put on his seatbelt.

TEE HEE. A giggle escapes from the opposite side of the car where **ISABEL HENRI**, 9, Mixed - Black and Latino, cherubic, sits in her booster seat across from her brother.

DEXTER (CONT'D)

Shut up.

MARLENE

Talk to your sister that way again.

DEXTER

Why can't you just drop me off at the picnic.

MARLENE

Because it's time you learned about civic duty.

ISABEL

What's civic duty?

MARLENE

Giving a shit about somebody other than yourself, baby girl.

ISABEL
You said a bad word.

MARLENE
I'll put money in the swear jar
later--

RRRR.. The car hits a huge pothole. As the truck fishtails, Marlene turns into the skid, sending Dexter's cellphone flying. Marlene gets the truck under control and comes to a halt on the side of the road.

MARLENE (CONT'D)
Ya'll okay.

Marlene turns to check her kids. They both shake their heads yes. Off Marlene's grateful look, we cut to...

EXT. JUNIPER VILLE, TEXAS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

It's cook-an-egg-on-the-ground hot as we sweep down "OLD TOWN" Juniper Ville. Juniper's a place in transition. Too big to be called a town and too small to be called a city.

On Main Street: classic mom & pop stores sit next door to their newly built hipster cousins. We push past a pond the town pretends is a lake.

All this bucolic charm leads us to the Henri SUV pulling into a parking spot. Marlene hustles the kids out.

MARLENE
Come on, baby girl. Dex, phone in
your pocket, or it goes in the wood
chipper when we get home.

Dexter puts his phone in his pocket, annoyed. Marlene and the kids head up the stairs to the COMMUNITY CENTER.

MARLENE (CONT'D)
Come on, ya'll, before there ain't
no seats left.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Marlene opens the door to the community center, and as she suspected, it's PACKED to the rafters with PEOPLE. She looks up and down the aisles for some place to sit, waving at folks she knows in the process. Dexter looks like he'd rather fall through the floor than be here. Then suddenly Isabel dashes away from her family.

MARLENE (CONT'D)
Isabel come back here.

But the girl isn't listening. She's racing toward...

ISABEL

Pop-pop!

MADDOX HENRI, 60s, White and Latino, Marlene's father-in-law.

MADDOX

There's my little angel!

He picks the little lady up and swings her around.

MARLENE

If she start puking up grits on you Maddox, I don't want to hear it.

MADDOX

She can puke on her old grandpa. Can't ya baby? Hiya doing Dexter?

DEXTER

(mumbled)

Hi.

MARLENE

Got enough room for us?

MADDOX

Always. Steven coming too?

MARLENE

He's setting up for the picnic with Dad and James.

DEXTER

(sarcastic)

Or so he says.

Marlene cuts her eyes at Dexter so hard, he instantly zips his lips.

As Marlene takes her seat, Isabel is off running again. This time she nearly tackles **ALEXANDRA "ALEX" WILSON**, 60s, Black, no-nonsense southern woman with a heart of gold. She kisses Isabel and then grabs a seat next to Marlene.

ALEXANDRA

(to Marlene)

Hey honey.

MARLENE

Mama.

Alexandra sits next to Mare, and puts Isabel on her lap.

ALEXANDRA

(waving to the others)

Hiya, Maddox. Dex, you keep slumping like that you gonna get scoliosis.

But Dexter isn't listening to a word his grandmother says, his attention is on **LILY MIDDLETON**, 17, Mixed - Asian and White, the mayor's awkwardly pretty daughter. She's sitting on the other end of the row, oblivious of his gluttonous gaze.

A DOOR opens at the back of the auditorium and in walks **MAYOR CAROL MIDDLETON**, White, 40s, southern belle with a steel underbelly. By her side is her assistant **VIRGINIA**.

A hush spreads over the entire auditorium as the mayor makes her way toward the podium.

CAROL
(through clenched smile)
I thought you said changing the
time would keep the numbers down.

VIRGINIA
I guess they're not going to let
the firehouse go without a fight.

CAROL
Thanks for the vote of confidence.

Carol takes to the podium.

CAROL (CONT'D)
How you doing this morning,
Juniper?

A roar from the crowd fills the air with claps and boos.

CAROL (CONT'D)
It's great to see all ya'll's
smiling faces. Today's our final
town hall meeting on the proposed
closing of Westlake Fire Station.

Violently booing erupts. Carol looks concerned.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Now I know some of ya'll think this
is hasty, but saving two million
dollars in retrofitting isn't
nothing to sneeze at. Not to
mention the extra one million
dollars in equipment costs. All of
which could be used to fix Highway
15, repair our schools, and --

The doors to the auditorium swing open. A DOZEN FIREFIGHTERS (in uniform) appear. All heads turn as the FIREFIGHTERS pool into the auditorium.

The mayor freezes for a moment. She tries to mask her annoyance but clearly isn't happy about this interruption.

A tense standoff as the crowd looks back and forth between the two opposing sides.

TIME CUT

The meeting is over. The air is thick with disagreement as tempers flare. Carol looks worse for wear as she exits.

The family starts gathering their things to go.

ALEXANDRA
Well that was a shit show if I've ever seen one.

ISABEL
Swear jar, Nana!

Alex grabs a dollar, then hands Isabel a twenty instead.

ALEXANDRA
Here, baby girl. Nana's gonna have a few more choice words before the day is out. That's for damn sure.

LILY (O.S.)
Dex?

Dexter turns to find Lily making her way down the aisle towards him. Dexter instantly turns red and tries to cover.

DEXTER
Oh, hey Lily.

ON MARLENE:

Alexandra saddles up to her and whispers.

ALEXANDRA
You're still letting your son hang out with the devil's spawn?

MARLENE
Dexter can choose his own friends.

ALEXANDRA
But, the mayor's daughter, Mare?

Marlene rolls her eyes.

DEXTER
(pointing to a refreshment table in the back)
Mom, gonna grab a snack with Lily.

MARLENE
(calling after her son)
We're leaving in five minutes with or without you.

But, Dexter's already halfway down the aisle.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - LATER

Marlene, Maddox, Alexandra, and Isabel walk outside into the baking sun.

A few feet ahead of them are the mayor and Virginia. Carol and Marlene make tense eye contact before Carol heads to her waiting vehicle.

MARLENE
(to Maddox)
There must be something we can do.

MADDOX
We'll figure it out, I promise.

ON DEXTER:

Dexter and Lily eat ice cream on the curb, watching the crowd leave the meeting.

LILY
Sorry my mom is such an asshole.

DEXTER
She's just doing what she thinks is right, I guess.

LILY
No, she's trying to undo my father's legacy. Take over the mayor's seat. Check. Change every policy he set. Check Check. It's pathetic.

DEXTER
(hopeful)
Hey, you going to the bonfire?

LILY
Can't. Tiger mom's on a war path. Maybe we can go up to Rogers Park next week though.

DEXTER
(playing it cool)
Sure.

A moment crackles between them. HONK! Carol pulls up.

CAROL
I was looking everywhere for you, young lady. Get in.

Lily dutifully obliges, giving Dexter a sad wave as she goes.

ON MARLENE:

She clocks the goodbye between Dexter and Lily. She's none too happy about the brewing development.

MARLENE
(to herself)
So it begins.

Isabel gives her mother's shirt a somber tug, her eyes filled with tears.

MARLENE (CONT'D)
You okay, bug?

ISABEL
If the mayor closes one of the
firehouses, does that mean you and
dad lose your jobs?

Marlene, Maddox and Alexandra share a look, and for the first time we realize -- this family is a Fire House Family. Off Marlene, struggling to find words to soothe Isabel's fears.

TITLE CARD: FIRE HOUSE RULES

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. JUNIPER VILLE CITY PARK - DAY

The annual FIREHOUSE PICNIC is in full swing. Football and soccer games. Cornhole. BBQ. Kids racing around.

A PHOTO BOOTH with a professional photographer, snapping pictures of FAMILIES under the JUNIPER VILLE FIRE banner.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Chen Family. Please come to the
photo booth for your portrait.

In the center of the park are tables. Food on one. WOMEN chat at another. MEN play dominoes at the farthest table.

SLAM! A domino crashes hard on the wooden table.

STEVEN
Bolts and screws make a bicycle
move, fools! Domino, muthaphukkas!

Everyone throws their hands up in annoyance at **STEVEN HENRI**, 30s, Hispanic, handsome to a fault, and he knows it. Next to him is **MASON DONOVAN**, late 30s, grizzled cowboy, White.

MASON
Damn it Henri! You cheating!

STEVEN
I'm schooling ya'll is what I'm
doing! Now, gimme my money and wash
them dishes!

Steven drums on the table while his fellow players all dish out money. He pulls in his winnings like a champ.

JAMES
Keep flapping them gums, Steven.
You gonna get yours soon.

JAMES "JAMIE" WILSON, 30s, Black, built like a linebacker, Steven's brother-in-law.

STEVEN
James, you can't beat the king!

Then Steven stuffs the money in his pocket and races away.

JAMES
Where you going?

STEVEN
Duty calls.

Steven heads toward Marlene's SUV which is pulling into the parking lot. Isabel pops out of the car first and races toward him.

ISABEL
Papa, Papa!

Steven gives her a bear hug.

Dexter just walks right past his father, like he was made of glass, heading over to his friends. Then Isabel runs off too.

Steven heads over to the car where Marlene is grabbing FOOD for the picnic (several bottles of wine, Tupperware, etc).

STEVEN
Hey darling, you need some help?

MARLENE
Don't call me darling.

STEVEN
It's just an expression, Mare. Jeez
what's got in your craw.

Marlene thrusts bags of food into Steven's chest.

MARLENE
(angry whispers)
For starters, you forgot to put the
damn sofa bed away this morning!

STEVEN
(re: the kids)
Did they see?

MARLENE
No. But they could have.

STEVEN
I'm sorry.

MARLENE
I'm sick of this.

STEVEN
We agreed to --

MARLENE
I don't fucking care what we
agreed! Three months of lying. To
the kids. To our families. To
ourselves. This isn't working.

STEVEN
What does that mean?

MARLENE
I'm done. With all of it!

STEVEN

(hurt)

You... don't mean that.

MARLENE

Don't tell me what I mean.

STEVEN

So, what you want a divorce?

Marlene doesn't answer, which makes Steven's heart sink. A heavy silence falls over them.

MARLENE

I don't want to fight today, okay.

Marlene walks away, leaving Steven to take the hit.

We track Marlene over to Alexandra, who stands shaking her head as she watches in horror while two men cook nearby. Marlene saddles up to her.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

Hey Mama.

ALEXANDRA

Would you look at these damn fools.
Twiddle dumb and dumber.

We finally notice what she's seeing. The first man we met earlier... Maddox Henri. The second man is **LOUIS WILSON**, 60s, Black, fit as hell, Marlene's father.

The two men have a PORTABLE GENERATOR hooked up to DEEP FRYERS, which they're lowering turkeys into.

MARLENE

Let's just hope they don't repeat last year's fiasco.

ALEXANDRA

Who would ever believe these two Darwin award winners are Fire Chiefs? Or worse, that I married one? I swear your daddy is trying to give me a heart attack.

MARLENE

They was out of pecan pie at the store, so I got wild berry.

ALEXANDRA

Umkay honey.

(to her husband)

Sweet baby Jesus. Louis! I didn't bring the whole damn hospital with me, so don't go killing yourself.

Marlene heads toward a table of arguing women.

The cabal of ladies is in the midst of a heated argument led by **BEATRICE WILSON**, late 20s, pregnant.

BEATRICE
Just hear me out now.

ROSIE
Ain't nothing to hear. That woman
is hell-bent on ruining this town.

ROSIE WILSON, 20s, Black, firecracker.

BEATRICE
Spending money on roads and schools
is ruining the town now?

ROSIE
By putting the lives of every
citizen in jeopardy? YES!

BEATRICE
She ain't proposing getting rid of
firefighters.

ROSIE
Just scrapping an entire station.
We barely keep up with the calls we
get now.

BEATRICE
But most of them ain't fires.

ROSIE
And?! We are medic-trained. We deal
with all issues: fire, medical,
electric, gas. We need MORE people
not less. Especially seeing as we
constantly getting calls from
Clarksville cause their volunteer
fire station just closed.

A third woman, **TERRI BRADY**, late 20s, White, salt of the
earth Texan, wades into the argument.

TERRI
Clarksville don't pay no damn taxes
around here; them folks need to get
they own house in order.

ROSIE
Fine, but what about the new prison
being built outside of town? A
thousand beds gonna need guards,
medics, and other folks to work
there. Not to mention all them
that's gonna come to visit the
jail. And where you think those
people are gonna come to stay?

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Here! More people equals more
problems for us to handle.

BEATRICE
That prison is three years away,
Rosie. My classroom ceiling fell
down in the middle of a lesson. Or
how about the fact that them kids
nearly blew up the school cause our
science room's gas pipes been
leaking? We need that money now.
You can hire more firemen later.

ROSIE
That's damn easy for you to say!

ON STEVEN AND JAMES:

The pair sip beers and watch the women argue.

JAMES
Look at them going at it like a
couple of bulls over a red flag.

STEVEN
Your wife is holding her own.

Steven perks up as he watches his wife walk over to the
ladies table.

MARLENE
(playful)
Hey now, don't be yelling at no
pregnant lady.

Marlene kisses Beatrice on the head and sits next to her.

ROSIE
Well your favorite sister-in-law is
ready to throw your and my job down
the toilet, just like the mayor.

BEATRICE
That ain't what I said!

Steven's face sours as Terri saddles up to Marlene. Terri
hands a bottle of wine to Marlene.

TERRI
Hey Mare, lookie what I brought!

MARLENE
Girl, yes!! Rosé all day!

Steven's jaw tightens, as the two women open the bottle of
wine and pour two healthy glasses and share a laugh.

STEVEN

I swear if that bitch touch my wife
one more time, I'ma break her hand.

JAMES

Why's she even here? Ain't no other
medics here.

STEVEN

I'm nipping this shit in the bud.

Steven finishes his beer and heads over. James follows.

ON MARLENE AND LADIES:

Isabel and her friend **SARA BRADY**, White, 10, walk by.

MARLENE

Isabel Danielle Henri. Get over
here.

Isabel comes over to her mother.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

You're filthy as ten pigs. What in
God's name have you been doing?

ISABEL

Collecting chips. Dexter said he'd
pay us 20 dollars each.

Isabel holds open a filthy bag. Off Marlene's growing anger.

TIME CUT

Marlene marches into the middle of a soccer game. Isabel and Sara stand on the periphery, watching as Marlene snatches Dexter out of the game without warning.

DEXTER

What the hell, Mom?

MARLENE

Boy, I like to tan your hide. Did
you really send your sister out
there to collect cow shit?!

Dexter starts laughing. Marlene smacks him in the mouth; it's light, but has the desired effect. Steven walks up.

STEVEN

What the hell is going on?!

MARLENE

Just your great parenting at work!

Marlene drops the bag of cow chips into Steven's outstretched hand and storms off, taking Isabel and Sara with her.

ON TERRI AND JAMES:

Terri pulls sodas out of a cooler when James corners her.

JAMES
What are you doing here?

TERRI
My husband was a firefighter too.

JAMES
Was, is the operative word, Terri.

TERRI
It's just for one day, James. Sara wants to hang out with her friends.

JAMES
Didn't I make myself clear?!

TERRI
Crystal.

JAMES
(conspiratorial)
Then why did I see your name on the work schedule for tonight?
(getting dangerously close)
Opposite shifts. That was the deal.

TERRI
I know that. But, your father asked me to cover for Marsh. I couldn't exactly tell him no. Unless you want me to tell him why I can't go.

JAMES
Fifty yards away from me and my family! You hear?

Terri's defiant stare makes James' blood boil.

ON STEVEN:

Steven has Dexter hemmed up next to a tree.

DEXTER
It was just a joke, jeez.

STEVEN
Ain't nothing funny about this!
That's your baby sister. You're suppose to look out for her!

DEXTER
Fine! If you're done playing father of the year? I got a game to play.

Steven looks could murder his son right now, then...

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 (over the loud speaker)
 Will the Henri and Wilson families
 come to the photo booth.

Steven drags Dexter over toward the photo booth.

STEVEN
 This ain't over, ya hear?

The Henri and Wilson families start to assemble by the banner. Louis nuzzles into Alexandra, who shoos him away. Maddox stands alone, watching enviously. James hugs Beatrice while throwing daggers in Terri's general direction.

CHIEF WILSON
 James, where is your sister?

JAMES
 Stealing all of Mason's money.

Angle on Rosie at the table with Mason, playing cards.

CHIEF WILSON
 Rosie!!!!

Rosie holds up a finger for them to wait.

JAMES
 Oh she's about to take him to the
 cleaners in three, two, one.

ON ROSIE:

A CRY OF DISTRESS from Mason as Rosie puts down her cards.

ROSIE
 Full house, buddy.

Mason hands her a wad of cash, as Rosie throws him a wicked smile before heading off to her family.

ON PHOTO BOOTH:

CHIEF HENRI
 Is that everybody?

The Henri and Wilson families start to line up for one big family portrait; according to their own family tree.

Alexandra and Louis, snuggle into one another. James rubs Beatrice's belly lovingly. Rosie flies solo. Steven, Marlene, Isabel and Dexter smush together. Steven tries to get close to Marlene, but she places Isabel and Dexter between them. She's in no mood to make up.

Last we find Maddox, alone.

As everyone squeezes together, ONE BIG FAMILY. FLASH! FLASH!

CU ON MADDOX: He watches his extended family, with sadness in his eyes.

PRELAP: KNOCKING.

EXT. SUBURBAN JUNIPER VILLE - LATER

An upscale neighborhood. Large Ranch Homes. Trees.

We find Maddox knocking on someone's front door. He looks behind him nervously. Finally, the door swings open... the house belongs to the mayor, Carol.

MADDOX
We need to talk.

As she lets him inside, we cut to...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. CAROL'S HOME - STUDY - DAY

The doors to the study hang open as Maddox walks in. Lily's loud music plays o.c.

Carol shuts the doors behind them. Locks them. Then she launches herself into Maddox's arms and kisses him passionately. He gives in for a moment, then pushes her away.

CHIEF HENRI
This isn't why I came.

CAROL
But maybe the reason you'll finally stay the night.

CHIEF HENRI
Carol. We can't.

CAROL
(re: the music)
She won't hear anything.

CHIEF HENRI
I mean. You can't close Westlake.

This finally gets Carol to stop.

CAROL
You want to talk about work?

CHIEF HENRI
I just spent all day with families that will be out of jobs. My family included.

CAROL
When you're safety commissioner you'll just have to find them new jobs then.

CHIEF HENRI
I'm serious.

CAROL
So am I. I'm sick of skulking around. And once you're an elected official and not an appointee...

She kisses him deeply.

CHIEF HENRI
You and I both know Louis is more qualified to be commissioner.

CAROL

Louis is a lifer. Second, he's gonna have to take over as Chief of North State. And third, can we stop with the shop talk, when all I really want is some pillow talk?

This woman is intoxicating, and Maddox can't help himself.

EXT. JUNIPER VILLE CITY PARK - DAY

The picnic is over. Marlene packs up a table alone.

Steven comes over to help. She ignores him. He tries to get close to her, but she starts to walk away.

Finally Steven wraps his arms around her waist to keep her from leaving. She fights him at first, before finally giving in to his embrace. But she refuses to meet his eyes.

STEVEN

Look, I'm sorry. Ok. I know all this is my fault.

MARLENE

Damn right it is.

STEVEN

Just gimme a chance to fix it.

MARLENE

(exasperated)
What do you think I've been doing?
I'm tired, Steven.

STEVEN

I know. I know, baby. It's just. Can we please try to work this out between us? Without our family's interference. Just me and you?

MARLENE

I hate secrets.

STEVEN

They get involved and there's no going back.

MARLENE

I know that.

STEVEN

I'll do whatever you want me to.
Even see Dr. Khan.

Marlene finally looks at him. She wants to believe Steven, but she's just not sure. Tears well in her eyes.

Before she can answer, Dexter walks up and clears his throat. Marlene breaks Steven's embrace. She covers her face to wipe away the tears without Dexter seeing.

DEXTER
 (to Steven)
 Grandpa said your shift starts in
 30, so hurry it up.

STEVEN
 Tell him I'll be there in a minute.

DEXTER
 Fine, whatever.

Dexter heads away.

STEVEN
 (calling after him)
 Dex.

Dexter stops. Steven goes to him.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 Look, I'm sorry about earlier.

DEXTER
 It's fine.

Dexter walks away. Off Steven, seeing the hurt he's caused all the people in his family today.

INT. ROSIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lips on skin. Hands in hair. Moans and groans as tangled bodies reach a fevered climax, then relax. Rosie smiles.

ROSIE
 That's one way to relieve stress.

We pan back to see who she's talking to: it's Mason.

MASON
 How about another round?

ROSIE
 Don't you got to be at work soon?

MASON
 I can be a little late.

ROSIE
 If my father kills you, don't look
 at me for saving.

MASON

(pointed)
He wouldn't kill his son-in-law.
(off her guilty look)
I should've been up there today,
holding your hand in that picture.

ROSIE

I know, baby, but when the time is
right, we'll tell them.

MASON

And when exactly is that gonna be?

ROSIE

A lot's going on right now. And do
you want to be the one to tell my
dad, your boss, that you had a
shotgun wedding to his baby girl?

MASON

Wasn't no shotgunning about it.

ROSIE

You know what I mean.

MASON

We can't keep lying to them.
Especially if they go through with
closing Westlake. Spouses can't be
in the same fire house.

ROSIE

Ain't lying. Just omitting.
Besides, they got real lax on
letting family members and in-laws
work together. I am sure iffing
this boneheaded closure goes
through, they'd have to make some
kinda deal on spouses.

MASON

They'd also have to KNOW we was
hitched for that to work, darling.

Rosie snuggles further into Mason.

ROSIE

I know. I know. But--

MASON

What? I ain't good enough for them?

ROSIE

You know that ain't true. But
they'll ruin everything like they
always do. Meddling until you up
and run away.

MASON
You're making excuses.

ROSIE
(emphatic)
Janet. David. Brandon. Michelle.
Hell, even Lucille didn't survive
their scrutiny. And they loved her.

MASON
I ain't like the other folks you
been with darling.

ROSIE
For once in my life I've got
something, somebody ALL TO MYSELF.
You ain't tainted by all my crazy
family nonsense.

MASON
I know I'm new in town, but
newsflash I already work with them,
sugah. You ain't got to tell me
they're crazy.

ROSIE
I know.

MASON
We're gonna have to tell them soon
enough. Seeing as we're about to
become a family of three.

Mason kisses Rosie's flat belly. Off Rosie, worried.

INT. HENRI HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

ISABEL (O.S.)
I. Am. St..ruu..ong. I am Strong.

A child's BOOK rests in Marlene's hands. She points out words
as Isabel reads. Loud music is heard in the b.g.

ISABEL (CONT'D)
Stronger than I know. Stronger than
you think. I am strong.

MARLENE
You're doing good, bug.

ISABEL
Danny Winston said I'm stupid cause
I can't read good.

MARLENE
It's read well, and you're not
stupid. Lots of people have trouble
reading. Don't mean nothing.

ISABEL
Really?

MARLENE
Really.

ISABEL
Mama, why don't we go to church?

MARLENE
You want to go to church, bug?

ISABEL
Sara and her mama go. She really likes it, plus she say it helped her mama after her daddy died.

MARLENE
If you want to, we'll go.

ISABEL
Okay. I just figured it might help you keep from crying in your bathroom at night, is all.

Isabel goes back to her book, oblivious to how her words hit her mother like a lightning bolt. Marlene steels herself. The music outside gets louder. Marlene goes to the window.

EXT. HENRI HOME - BACKYARD - SAME TIME

Dexter sits on the side of the pool. Music on. Graphic Novel in his hand. Towel over his lap. Feet in the pool. But, Dexter isn't reading his graphic novel or listening to music. No. His eyes are glued to the upstairs window next door where Lily tries on dresses. As Lily slips off one dress and tries on another, Dexter slips his HAND under his towel.

MARLENE (O.S.)
Dex, turn that racket off!

Dexter quickly removes his hand from his pants. He looks up to see that Lily looking down at him. She waves hello. He turns pink with embarrassment but waves too.

MARLENE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I know you heard me!

DEXTER
Sorry.

MARLENE
You finish cleaning your room?

DEXTER
Almost.

MARLENE

Almost doesn't count. Get in here.

The boy reluctantly grabs his things, wraps the towel around his waist and hops off the unfinished side of the deck.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

(re: the deck)

You're seriously testing my patience, boy. What did I tell you?

DEXTER

It's sturdy enough.

MARLENE

I don't want you up there until your father finishes the deck.

DEXTER

How long is that gonna take?

MARLENE

Dex.

DEXTER

It's hot. I wanna swim.

MARLENE

Just... clean your room.

Dexter stomps off as Marlene takes in how her sweet boy has become a full-on angsty teenager.

As she looks out the window again, she sees a glimpse of Chief Henri leaving Carol's house. Off Marlene's questioning face we fade to...

EXT. WESTLAKE FIRE HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

This place didn't get nicknamed the "Old Fire House" for nothing. It's clearly not built for modern times. The antique shell's crammed chockablock with modern technology, but renovations have made it workable.

INT. WESTLAKE FIRE HOUSE - DAY

We move inside, past the fire trucks, equipment, etc. and up the stairs. A wave of LAUGHTER greets us, as we move into...

INT. WESTLAKE FIRE HOUSE - MESS HALL - DAY

SLAM! A domino crashes on the table. Steven wins again.

STEVEN

Ya'll never learn!

CHIEF WILSON
Cut out all the dad-blasted noise.

He walks in carrying items from the picnic.

JAMES
Pops is on one today.

CHIEF WILSON
I'm gonna be on your head if you don't get your tails over here to help clean up.

JAMES
Yes.

James takes the box from his father.

CHIEF WILSON
Yes, what?

JAMES
Yes, Chief Wilson.

CHIEF WILSON
Don't think because you're grown I won't take you over my knee in front of your friends.

A roar of laughter from CREW. This shit-talking between James and his father is clearly their usual MO.

EEEEEE! The Fire Station ALARM goes off. In a flash, the CREW is on their feet and racing into action.

EXT. HOUSE ON FIRE - DAY

ROAR! The blare of the engine and siren pierce the air as Steven and James hop off the FIRE TRUCK.

Everything is frenetically fast -- hoses untethering, hydrants unscrewing, and firemen setting up. Steven's the nozzle man pulling the hose toward the burning domain when...

BOOM! A front window explodes. Everyone ducks. BAM! The front door of the house flies open. A **BURNING MAN** runs into Steven.

Steven attempts to wrestle the man to the ground but can't. Burnt flesh adheres to Steven's visor blinding him. He loses a GLOVE trying to push the man away.

BAM! JAMES tackles the man to the ground. Starts rolling back and forth to put out the fire. The rest of the crew is five seconds behind. They use extinguishers on James and the man. We fade out amidst the chaos.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. STREET - AMBULANCE - DAY

Steven and James sit on the back of an **AMBULANCE**. Steven's hand is being looked at by a **PARAMEDIC**. But James is focused on Terri -- who watches him from across the street. James glares at her and Terri looks away.

STEVEN

Can't you just tape it up good and let me go?

PARAMEDIC

(incredulous)

That's a second, possibly third degree burn. You're gonna have to go in.

JAMES

(to Medic)

Just take us to Trinity Hospital. My mom can fix that up.

They load into the ambulance. Off Terri's worried face.

INT. HENRI HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marlene sets the table for dinner. She puts out a fourth plate and then immediately puts it back.

MARLENE

Dinner's ready!

Dexter races in, followed by Isabel holding her stomach. *

ISABEL *

My stomach hurts, Mama.

MARLENE

Not gonna work tonight, bug. You need to eat more vegetables.

Isabel looks at her plate with contempt. Dex digs in. *

INT. TRINITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Steven's on a GURNEY in the ER. James sits on a chair.

WHOOSH! The curtain swings back suddenly to reveal Alexandra in her medical scrubs.

ALEXANDRA

Lookie what I've got here.