



THE LAND OF STEADY HABITS

Screenplay by Nicole Holofcener

Based on the Novel by Ted Thompson

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HELENE HARRIS, 52, pretty and intelligent, is working in her sprawling, well-tended garden behind her lovingly restored Georgian Colonial.

The house is grand yet tasteful, painted in a dark green as if to blend into the historic trees that grace the New England property.

Helene is pruning and getting dirty while marveling at a rare bloom that defies the season. She turns to DONNY O'NEIL, 55, who has an open, kind face.

HELENE

See the little bell shaped red ones
- oh and next to those are - when
they bloom - they're gorgeous -
they're pink, they're called "Party
Dress."

DONNY

That's funny.

HELENE

This I planted those when I was
pregnant with Preston. They were
tiny little seedlings.
(joking)
They're thriving.

Donny caresses her sweaty hairline. He's completely taken with her.

HELENE (CONT'D)

And those are blueberries, and next
to them - to the right - the Korean
Gold - they turn this wonderful
color. Do you like blueberries?

ANDERS HARRIS, 55, attractive, unshaven and tired, wanders the aisles completely lost.

He stands stock still in the enormous towel department, surveying the stacks of every color, every size, every price. He's paralyzed.

He wanders into the coffee maker section and tries to make sense of it all.

He stands in the cosmetics section, looking over eye creams. He picks one up and opens it, roughly rubbing some under his eyes. After a beat, he puts it in his basket.

He fiddles with a toothbrush holder that has holes cut out for each toothbrush. Should he buy the one with four holes? Or six holes? He puts it down and looks at his choices. A cute woman, DANA, 40, pipes up.

DANA
Many choices.

ANDERS
(turning)
I don't need four holes.
(beat)
Only need one.

DANA
Maybe just buy a regular cup.

ANDERS
Don't want to do that. I want a
toothbrush cup.

DANA
I understand.

ANDERS
Gotta follow protocol.

DANA
(picking one up)
This one's really ugly.

ANDERS
(takes it)
Sold.

3 OMITTED

3

4 INT. DANA'S BEDROOM - DAY

4

Anders is having sex with Dana in her tiny, messy bedroom. As he thrusts, he glances at her night table.

There's a dusty candle, jewelry and a dog eared book - Living With Shame. He stares at it as he fucks.

5 EXT. ANDERS' CONDO - AFTERNOON 5

He walks up to his generic townhouse condo complex with a Bed Bath and Beyond bag. Each condo has its own front yard. He opens his mailbox and pulls out the mail.

6 INT. ANDERS' CONDO - CONTINUOUS 6

Restoration Hardware type furniture mixed with some framed prints, a shag rug. Some money has gone into this and it doesn't look half bad - but it still doesn't look quite like a home.

Anders sifts through his mail - bills, crap, a couple of letters marked URGENT from a mortgage company, and then what looks like an invitation.

He sits down at his new walnut dining table and opens it. It reads "IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN AND IT WOULDN'T BE THE SAME WITHOUT YOU!" There's a photo of the ASHFORD FAMILY, and it's signed Sophie, Mitchell, Charlie and Kat.

He kind of sneers at Sophie and Mitchell - attractive, well-preserved and blow-dried middle-aged parents, their teenage son Charlie, 17, who looks stoned, and his older sister Kat, 24, serious.

Anders walks over to his ornamental fireplace and places the invitation on the bare mantel.

7 INT. ANDERS CONDO - EVENING 7

Drinking red wine and listening to music, Anders is trying to make his large bookcase look fuller and more attractively spaced out.

He moves some books around but it still looks sparse. He takes a decorative wicker bowl that's on the coffee table and puts it on the shelf, considering.

8 INT. HELENE'S KITCHEN - EVENING 8

Donny is cutting vegetables while Helene sips a glass of wine, staring off out the window.

9 INT. ANDERS CONDO - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT 9

The empty wine bottle sits on the table beside Anders, who has fallen asleep in front of the enormous, blaring TV.

10 EXT. ADULT LEARNING CENTER - DAY 10

The street is run-down, the neighborhood is sketchy. But there, like a beacon of hope, is a storefront office with large signs that read: 'IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN TO READ!' 'HAPPY HOLIDAYS' and 'FELIZ NAVIDAD!'

11 INT. ADULT LEARNING CENTER/OFFICE - DAY 11

Preston Harris, 27, is seated in a cubicle helping an ESL MAN, 45, to read.

PRESTON
(enunciating)
Break-fast.

ESL MAN
(reading)
What do you want for break--fas.

PRESTON
See the T? Pronounce the T.

ESL MAN
Breakfast.

PRESTON
Very cool. You're doing good.
(correcting himself)
Well. You're doing well.

Preston pats him on the shoulder.

12 INT. ADULT LEARNING CENTER KITCHEN - LATER

12

Preston is pouring himself a cup of coffee when Helene comes in with a bouquet of hand picked flowers. She finds a vase.

HELENE
Can you believe these are still
blooming?
(beat)
I can put them in your room, if you
like.

PRESTON
It's okay.

HELENE
You don't want them?

PRESTON
I don't care.

HELENE
How's it going?

PRESTON
I'm tired.

HELENE
(annoyed)
It's only eleven, Preston.
(beat)
Are you at least enjoying it?

PRESTON

I am. I like it a lot, actually.

HELENE

So glad. You coming to the
Ashford's tonight? For old times
sake?

PRESTON

I'm good.

HELENE

What are you going to do?

PRESTON

Plans.

Disappointed, Helene is about to leave the kitchen.

HELENE

Is a mother allowed to kiss her
son?

He shrugs again and she gives him a peck on the cheek.

HELENE (CONT'D)

It's fun to have you here.

(beat)

I'm proud of you. Everyone likes
you.

PRESTON

They have to like me.

HELENE

That's not true.

13 EXT. WESTPORT MAIN STREET - DAY

13

A quaint, old-fashioned street with some newer fancier shops
lit beautifully for Christmas. Anders has parked the car and
is walking across the street to a shop.

14 INT. GIFT STORE - DAY

14

A colorful gift shop that sells baskets and reproductions and
soaps. Anders wanders around, picking things up, looking for
things to put on his bookshelves.

He lifts a large reproduction lobster trap. A saleswoman,
SANDY, 45 and attractive, moves toward him.

SANDY

I'm Sandy, if you need any help.

(beat)

Isn't that great?

ANDERS

Is it - real?

SANDY

Oh no, trust me if it was real you wouldn't want it. It makes a lovely decorative accent though, doesn't it?

ANDERS

I need some more stuff to put on my shelves.

SANDY

New place?

ANDERS

Yeah. Starting over.

SANDY

(beat)

And taking a break from work today?

ANDERS

I'm retired.

SANDY

At your age? How did you make that happen?

ANDERS

I grew a conscience. I worked in finance.

15

INT. SANDY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

15

Anders is having sex with Sandy on her bed. Her apartment looks just like the store - in fact - as he thrusts on top of her - he notices that she has the same lobster trap on her bookshelf.

SANDY

Are you - are you okay?

ANDERS

Yeah, just - maybe scoot -

SANDY

No, it's out.

ANDERS

It is? I think it's good -

SANDY

No, it's out.

ANDERS

(putting it back in)

Let me just -

He thrusts, but to no avail. She gently pulls herself out from under him.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I'm really sorry. This never happens.

SANDY

Never.

ANDERS

Jesus. I'm very embarrassed. I don't know what's wrong.

SANDY

It's okay.

ANDERS

Don't worry, it's not you.

SANDY

I didn't think it was me.

ANDERS

Well, good. Because it's not.

SANDY

I know.

16

INT. ANDERS' CONDO - EVENING

16

Entering with a small handful of mail and a shopping bag from the gift store, he opens the bag and places the lobster trap on his bookshelf. He regards it, sliding it over a couple of inches. Then, thinking better of it, he removes it from the shelf and puts it back in the bag.

Opening mail, it's another Christmas card, but it's just from his bank. Still, he walks to the mantel and places it next to the Ashford's invitation, studying their family photo.

17 EXT. ASHFORD HOUSE - EVENING 17

A large modern house, decorated with tasteful Christmas lights. GUESTS, including Anders, walk up the front path.

18 INT. ASHFORD HOUSE - EVENING 18

Anders enters, pausing tentatively as he takes in the festive, crowded party. He hangs his coat on long rack already filled with coats.

He lasers in on Helene - the reason he's here - as she mingles with an attentive crowd.

SOPHIE ASHFORD walks by, surprised and somewhat amused to see him. Sophie is pretty and fit and wound tight.

SOPHIE

Anders?

They give in to a tense hug.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

You came. That's a surprise.

ANDERS

Thanks for inviting me.

SOPHIE

Of course! Well, you pretty much know everyone here. Go get yourself a drink!

She pats him on the shoulder and gets away from him. She glances back at Helene who then sees Anders. Helene sinks a little bit, concerned.

An OLDER COUPLE pass Anders, smiling curiously. Are they smirking at him? He glances at the front door, wishing he never came.

19 INT. ASHFORD HOUSE - LATER 19

The well stocked, self-serve bar. Anders has finished his first drink and fixes himself another as WES THOMPSON, 50, refills his wine.

ANDERS

Wes.

WES

I heard you left Springer. I'm jealous.

ANDERS

Quit your job, Wes. That's all you gotta do.

WES

You make it sound so easy. I mean, you're a - relatively young guy. Why get out so early?

ANDERS

You really want to know?

WES

(unsure)

Sure. Let me have it.

ANDERS

I sold faulty home loans to people who could never afford them. And I knew I was doing it. That's the industry - save yourself, outsmart the other guy and don't worry about the consequences. It's a system of monstrous greed - and for what? More toys? Bigger houses? Trips to the goddamn Caribbean?

WES

So, you've got some big plans?

ANDERS

I'm doing a little decorating, you know, condo living.

WES

You enjoying that?

ANDERS

Not at all. Would you?

WES

I wouldn't retire.

ANDERS

Well, you know, I'm also getting involved in charity.

WES

Oh. Which one?

ANDERS

(beat)

Disease. Diseases.

(beat)

Cancer.

WES
(wandering away)
Same old Anders. Happy Holidays.

AA20 INT. LIVING ROOM / ENTRYWAY

AA20

Anders walks through the party, scanning the room for Helene but doesn't see her. He sees the family dog lying on a balcony behind a sliding glass door and he sees his escape. He grabs his coat off the hook and steps outside.

A20 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A20

Helene and Sophie bring in plates and glasses.

HELENE
I can't believe he came.

SOPHIE
I just saw him ear raping Wes Thompson.

HELENE
I sure don't miss that. His obsessive rants. Do you know how he used to complain about coming to this party? No offense. The one time he truly doesn't have to, shouldn't, in fact, and here he is.

SOPHIE
I shouldn't have sent him the invite. He's on the list. I wasn't paying attention.

HELENE
It's okay. He makes me sad.

SOPHIE
You look very pretty, by the way. You're having sex.

HELENE
True. I'm having sex.
(beat, quietly)
It's not that fun.

SOPHIE
Oh come on.

HELENE
I feel bad. I mean, it's good.

SOPHIE

Not as good as Anders?

HELENE

If I remember correctly.

SOPHIE

(beat)

I'm exhausted. Why do we do this every year? Our fucking kids don't even come.

HELENE

You have to do it. Where else would we all go?

SOPHIE

Kat's not even coming for Christmas.

HELENE

Awful.

SOPHIE

Why didn't Preston come?

HELENE

He had *plans*. God knows what.

20

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

20

Anders is out on the deck petting the large dog.

ANDERS

How you doing boy. Cold out here?

There are voices below him under the balcony. Suddenly they go quiet. Then a whisper, and a giggle.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Hello?

MALE VOICE

(beat)

Hello?

Some laughter.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)

Who goes there?

He leans over the balcony and sees a few TEENAGERS huddling together.

ANDERS

Hey.

BOY

Yo. What's going on?

ANDERS

Just getting some air. It's hot in there.

They all nod as if he said something very wise.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

What are you guys smoking?

They freeze, eyeing the gravel.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I won't tell. You're going to do it anyway.

BOY

Seriously? Because if you're one of my dad's friends who he sent to narc on me, then you can go back and tell him he's really predictable and sad because we were just looking at the constellations.

ANDERS

Charlie?

CHARLIE ASHFORD, 17, emerges from the group and looks up, squinting.

CHARLIE

Who is that?

ANDERS

Anders.

CHARLIE

Christ.

ANDERS

Don't worry. I'm not one of your dad's friends, first of all, and second of all...

(beat)

Anyway, enjoy your constellations.

CHARLIE

Wait, dude. Come down for a second.

Anders briefly hesitates and then goes down the stairs onto the dark packed dirt beneath the deck.

21 EXT. BELOW THE DECK - CONTINUOUS

21

The kids are suddenly taller than they seemed from above, all of them meeting his eye.

CHARLIE

Hey. That's Arnie, Gorbachov, and
Marlena.

They nod as Charlie fiddles with something that looks like a small deflated basketball.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

So, what do you mean, you're not
friends.

ANDERS

I'm not. My wife is. Ex-wife. She's
their friend. I can't stand them. I
never really could. I actually find
your parents unbearable.

The kids laugh.

CHARLIE

Seriously? All those summers? All
those shit ass dinners and blah
blah blah.

ANDERS

Yeah well, I walked away from all
that.

CHARLIE

So I've heard.

(beat)

Then what are you doing *here*?

ANDERS

That's a good fucking question.

Charlie reveals what he's holding.

CHARLIE

You know how to rip one of these?

It's a little pumpkin with a hollow pen jammed into the side
of it.

ANDERS

I don't even know what that is.

CHARLIE

This,
(handing it to Anders)
is resourceful.

Anders lifts the thing, looks at the kids and then takes a hit off of the pen.

ANDERS

(coughing)
Jesus Christ.

They all just stare at him as the drugs seem to overtake him.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

(really high)
The stench of your father's cigar
used to make me wish I was born
without a face.

The kids crack up, watching him.

ARNIE

How're you feeling?

ANDERS

(beat)
You know what? I feel great.
Joyful. I feel joyful! And sad.
Jesus, sadder than I've ever felt
before.

MARLENA

Yeah.

GORBACHOV

Pretty much everything is sad.

ANDERS

This grass is serious.

CHARLIE

Nah. That's the PCP.

ANDERS

Are you joking?

He sees that they're not joking.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Wait, what? I just smoked PCP?!

GORBACHOV

We don't technically know what it is.

MARLENA

It's more of a blend.

Anders looks at the kids, concerned.

ANDERS

You all smoked this? This is dangerous shit!

ARNIE

(teasing)

We feel joyful.

MARLENA

And sad.

ANDERS

(reeling)

I should get back to the party.

CHARLIE

Have at it.

22

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

22

Anders manages to climb the stairs and is about to re enter the party when MITCHELL ASHFORD meets him at the threshold. He's lighting a cigar.

MITCHELL

What're you doing out here, buddy?

ANDERS

(really high)

Getting some fresh air.

MITCHELL

You've had a big year. Surprised to see you.

ANDERS

Thanks.

MITCHELL

I was actually looking for my son. He disappeared earlier and that's cause for worry. He was supposed to be in his room studying.

(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Kid failed three of his exams at
his boarding school.

(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
(shaking his head)
Phases. Right now he's entering one
I call "brain-dead."

Barely listening, Anders looks over Mitchell's shoulder,
catching a glimpse of HELENE surrounded by FRIENDS.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
I mean, I'm so fucking sick of
worrying. I don't know whether to
kill him or let him kill himself.

Anders hears a door click shut beneath them, Charlie probably
having heard all of this.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
I mean, Christ - what am I talking
about? You know better than anyone.
After age ten, they're all
pathological liars. How did you get
through it? Seriously, with
Preston. You did a program, right?
Did they drag him into the woods or
something?

ANDERS
Or something.

Anders can't focus.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

He pushes past him, aiming for Helene.

23 INT. ASHFORD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

23

He approaches Helene's circle and immediately sees that she
is holding hands with Donny. Anders looks at him, startled.

ANDERS
Donny O'Neil?

DONNY
Well, look who it is.

Donny reaches out to shake but Anders doesn't move.

ANDERS
I don't get it.

HELENE
Let's go over here.

She pulls Anders off to the kitchen.

ANDERS

How long have you been seeing *that* guy?

HELENE

A few months.

Anders digests this.

ANDERS

You don't call me back.

HELENE

It's too much. Too many calls, Anders. Too many texts.

ANDERS

So, does he live here now?

HELENE

He's looking for a place. He wants to get out of the city. He's going to commute.

ANDERS

So, you've been sleeping together for what - a couple of years?

HELENE

Don't.

ANDERS

Don't what? We've been divorced, what, six fucking months?

HELENE

(beat)

Why did you come to this party? Do you notice the people here?

(beat)

They're too polite to say it, Anders, but they're wondering why you're here.

ANDERS

I was invited.

HELENE

Everyone's invited.

Anders realizes this is true. He doesn't know what to say, and then sees a LARGE (SIX INCH) TURTLE crawling toward the kitchen. It makes him laugh.

HELENE (CONT'D)

You think this is funny.

He shakes his head but it's too late to stop. He laughs harder. Is he imagining the turtle? He points.

ANDERS

That's funny. The reptile.

She turns just as the turtle crawls under a chair. She glares at him, confused.

HELENE

What's wrong with you?

(in close)

You're the one who wanted space. I am so through with this crap. I am done. It's not my job to baby sit you anymore, or make sure you don't embarrass yourself. Why would you come here? I mean, you were the one who wanted out, so for God fucking sake, *get out.*

MITCHELL (O.S.)

Somebody call an ambulance!

Mitchell Ashford comes through the living room dragging Charlie, unconscious, by his armpits across the floor. The entire room is silenced. Sophie runs to him.

SOPHIE

Oh my god.

Charlie's face is gray, his neck slack beneath his bushy head. The room snaps into action to help and Anders stares, stunned.

24 INT. ANDERS' CONDO - DAY

24

Anders is explaining to Preston (with great care) how to use the three remotes for his enormous new TV.

ANDERS

This changes the volume. This one here is if you want to watch something on the internet.

Preston is looking around the room.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

(beat)

You have to pay attention.

PRESTON

I don't know, dad. This place.

ANDERS

It's nifty. Isn't it? Not bad.

PRESTON

It's so not you.

ANDERS

Maybe this *is* me. The house was so your mother, so maybe this is *me*.

Anders goes to put on his jacket.

PRESTON

(annoyed)

What was wrong with our house?

25 EXT. ANDERS' CONDO - DAY

25

Very large, inflatable Christmas decorations are splayed out on the lawn, flat and ready to be assembled. There's a reindeer and a Santa and a group of carolers.

Preston joins Anders who is sorting through the stuff, getting ready to decorate the lawn.

Anders picks up a huge Santa Claus.

PRESTON

What about Charlie Ashford. Fucking angel dust! I heard they had him hooked up to tubes and machines. Mom says Sophie's a complete wreck.

ANDERS

I'm sure she is.

(beat)

He'll be okay.

PRESTON

How do you know? You never thought
I was going to be okay.

Anders inflates the Santa Claus.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Mom says the Ashfords are going to
sue.

ANDERS

(alarmed)

Who in Gods name would they sue?

PRESTON

The school. They think he got the
drugs there.

ANDERS

So let me get this straight. They
send their child away to boarding
school because he's mixed up with
drugs - And then blame his current
drug use on the school they shipped
him off to?

PRESTON

It's not like you don't know how it
feels. You did it to me.

ANDERS

I didn't fucking sue anybody. And
you went to rehab. Not boarding
school.

PRESTON

I feel bad for the kid.

ANDERS

So do I.

They work silently for a bit.

PRESTON

Heard you saw Mom. And met her new
boyfriend.

ANDERS

I already knew him.

PRESTON

You did?

ANDERS

Not well. We came up together as traders.

(beat)

Just tell me the guy isn't living in my house.

PRESTON

It's mom's house.

ANDERS

He's living in the house.

PRESTON

It's not your house anymore, Dad.

ANDERS

Well it certainly isn't theirs!

PRESTON

You gave it to her.

(beat)

Seriously. You gave it to Mom.

Right?

ANDERS

(beat)

Actually, it's no one's house.

PRESTON

What does that mean? Isn't it mom's house?

ANDERS

It was going to be. In a fit of generosity and stupidity I said she could keep it but I can't afford to retire *and* pay the mortgage.

PRESTON

Jesus.

ANDERS

(beat)

Don't say anything to your mother.

Let me do it.

PRESTON

Dad. How could you do that?

ANDERS

You know what, I provided for you and your mother in every possible way. Everything you both ever wanted, you got. Private school, A million piano lessons. Vacations.

PRESTON

I'm just saying. She's gonna freak. Where am I going to live?

ANDERS

You living there is temporary. And she should downsize anyway! Hell, let *Donny* pay the for it.

PRESTON

Well, maybe he can. He seems loaded.

ANDERS

I can't fucking believe he's living there.

Anders fusses with a string of lights, losing patience.

26

EXT. ANDERS' CONDO - DAY

26

Preston's in his jeep in front of the condo. The decorations are large and loud and pretty awful.

PRESTON

I don't know, Dad.

ANDERS

Nice, right? Festive.

PRESTON

It's like your own sad little Christmas parade.

ANDERS

You used to like a Christmas parade.

Preston drives off and Anders turns to survey his lit-up home.

A NEIGHBOR walks by to enter his own place. He looks up at the decor with obvious distaste.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Good afternoon.

NEIGHBOR #1
That's, uh, bright.

He walks on, leaving Anders self-conscious.

27 INT. ASHFORD'S KITCHEN - DAY

27

Sophie Ashford is on the phone when Helene enters with grocery bags. They nod hello as Helene, clearly comfortable here, starts putting things away.

SOPHIE
(on her phone)
Thanks so much. Of course I will.
Oh, you know it. He's going as soon
as he's out. We've found a good
place. I will. Thanks again.

She clicks off.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Oh, honey, you're so nice.

HELENE
Not that nice. I bought these.

She pulls out a box of donuts.

SOPHIE
I just couldn't imagine how many
people I'd run into at the market.

HELENE
You would have run into Marilyn
Erickson and Laura Abrams.
Separately.

SOPHIE
You're my savior.

They hug.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Oh, god. I thought we were through
with all this.

HELENE
It doesn't fucking end.

They pull apart.

SOPHIE

How long do you think Preston's
gonna stay with you?

HELENE

(miserable)

Jesus. I don't know. A part of me -
obviously a sick part - likes
having him there. Sometimes I
forget and I go to stroke his face
or something and then he kind of
backs away. It's like - 'oh yeah,
you're a *man*.'

SOPHIE

I know.

HELENE

(beat)

What did I do wrong? I probably
babied him too much.

SOPHIE

We probably did everything wrong.

HELENE

When do we know if our kids are
broken?

SOPHIE

Gee, let's see. What time is it?

28

INT. HOWARD'S OFFICE - DAY

28

Anders sits opposite HOWARD, 50-ish, his therapist. Danish
furniture, gentle lighting, framed prints.

HOWARD

So.

ANDERS

Why do I come here again?

Howard looks at him blankly.

HOWARD

Tell me about your week. The
holidays.

ANDERS

My week? Let's see. I got the condo
decorated. Preston helped. It looks
sharp - Christmas-y, I mean.

HOWARD

(surprised)

Preston helped. That must have been nice.

ANDERS

He can't stand me.

(beat)

I went to a holiday party. I don't know why I went. I went to see Helene.

(beat)

An awful night. I saw her, and I met her new boyfriend. He's living in my house!

HOWARD

Ah.

ANDERS

I ended up getting very loaded. It did not go well.

HOWARD

You got loaded.

ANDERS

I did a stupid thing. I got high with a bunch of kids and one of them ended up in the ER.

Howard is clearly disturbed.

HOWARD

You got high with the kids.

ANDERS

Stupid.

HOWARD

At this point, Anders, I should tell you. I was at the Ashford's party.

ANDERS

I'm confused.

HOWARD

Kathleen and Sophie Ashford are quite close.

ANDERS

I didn't see you.

(shifting)

So, you *know* what happened. Bury the lead a little, Howard. Jesus.

(beat)

I'm sure Charlie's going to be all right. I mean, it's probably not a big deal. Kids smoke dope.

HOWARD

It was more than dope, from what I heard. Maybe pills.

Anders shrugs, Howard leans in.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Do you know what drugs he was doing? What kind?

ANDERS

I don't know. It was some boarding-school stuff. I don't know, some blend. Maybe PCP.

HOWARD

(alarmed)

PCP?

ANDERS

He hands me this crazy thing - I thought it was grass. I know it was stupid. But he would've been doing it anyway.

HOWARD

Anders, that boy is hurt.

These words hit Anders over the head. He looks directly at Howard, but before he can continue, Howard's cell phone rings and he looks at the number.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm very sorry. It's urgent. Please excuse me.

Howard takes the call out of the office, closing a side door behind him.

Surprised by this, Anders sits there. Looks around. Checks the clock. Waits.

He gets up and peers out of the office door, but doesn't see Howard. He listens for his voice but hears nothing.

He goes back inside, puts on his coat and scarf.

ANDERS

Fuck this.

He looks around, wanting to take something. He grabs as many coffee table books he can carry, which it turns out, is quite a few - and they're heavy - a stack of decorative art books reaching all the way to his chin.

29 EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY 29

Anders stands outside of his car and reaches in, indiscriminately grabbing one of the art books.

30 EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY 30

Anders walks up holding the book. He passes Marlena, (one of the kids he got high with) and MARLENA'S MOTHER, and turns his head so she doesn't see him.

31 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY 31

Anders walks into Charlie's room, surprised to see him sitting up and drawing in a bound notebook.

ANDERS

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Hang on.

He's engrossed and doesn't look up.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

My parents aren't here.

ANDERS

My wife here?

CHARLIE

I don't see her.

ANDERS

How are you feeling?

CHARLIE

Awesome.

ANDERS

(relieved)

You look okay. Not so bad. The way people were talking I thought - I don't know.

CHARLIE

Do you have a balloon for me or something?

ANDERS

Here.

He hands him a large volume of Erotic Wood Carvings.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I thought you might like this.

Charlie takes the book and flips through a few pages of paintings.

CHARLIE

This is pretty sweet.

Then he flips to the back, where, Anders hasn't noticed a library slip taped to it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Did you lift this?

ANDERS
I - not from a library.

CHARLIE
You brought me an erotic, stolen library book.

Charlie is laughing.

ANDERS
I actually didn't know that. Give it back.

CHARLIE
I love it, dude. You show up at the hospital to give me a stolen sex book!

ANDERS
(reaching out)
Come on.

CHARLIE
No way, this is my favorite present by far. I love it.

Anders pulls out a business card and writes his phone number and new address on the back.

ANDERS
Look, kid. If you ever need anything, you know. Here. I moved.

CHARLIE
(reading the card)
So, what happened to you? You quit your fancy job?

ANDERS
(beat)
It's complicated. I couldn't do what I did for a living and feel like a decent human being.

CHARLIE
I can totally respect that.

ANDERS

And then everything kind of felt tied up together - my wife, and all the stuff that she felt like she needed - and - I couldn't take it anymore. Something had to change.

CHARLIE

(beat)

I have to go to rehab. My parents are Nazi assholes.

ANDERS

They're worried about you.

CHARLIE

They're embarrassed. There's a difference.

ANDERS

Well, you did a stupid thing.

CHARLIE

Seriously? I'm getting a lecture from you?

(beat, smiling)

You were as high as balls.

ANDERS

You tricked me into that. But I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

You were hilarious. 'I'm joyful, guys. I feel joyful'!

ANDERS

I need you to keep that between us.

CHARLIE

You're a trip, man. Don't worry about it. That's not my style.

ANDERS

Just tell me this. Do you have a turtle?

CHARLIE

Relic? You saw Relic?

ANDERS

Crawling across the living room floor.

CHARLIE

He likes to explore.

(beat)

My parents got him for me when I
was a kid - they had no idea he was
going to live this long.

Anders goes closer to see what he's drawing. It's a graphic
novel of sorts - of a space capsule with a huge control panel
and a tiny window. Strapped to the table in the back is a
little dog covered in sensors.

ANDERS

Is that Laika?

CHARLIE

(impressed)

It is. You know what the scientist
in charge of the project said forty
years later? He said "Nothing we
learned on that mission could
justify the loss of that beautiful
animal." He was the one that found
her in the first place. On the
street. She was a stray.

Anders takes the book and looks closely at the strapped dog,
the saddest look on its face.

ANDERS

That's heartbreaking.

CHARLIE

I know there's already a billion
books about her. But mine will have
a different end.

ANDERS

Oh yeah?

CHARLIE

Well, they lied and said she
crashed in the ocean but really she
burned alive in the atmosphere.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

But in my book, she's still out there and Oleg- that's the scientist - is old and poor and shit and one day he turns on the old equipment and hears Laika's heartbeat. She's still out there, waiting for him.

Anders flips through some more pages, impressed with his drawings.

ANDERS

So what happens?

CHARLIE

That's as far as I've gotten.

The door opens and Sophie comes into the room with a tall Starbucks.

SOPHIE

Anders.

CHARLIE

He brought me a book.

SOPHIE

Well, that was sweet.

ANDERS

He's quite an artist. I like his graphic novel.

SOPHIE

So do I.

CHARLIE

You don't even know what it is.

SOPHIE

It's about a dog.

CHARLIE

It's about a stray dog who is launched into space for reasons she can never understand. It's about being exploited by the people who are supposed to protect you.

SOPHIE

The Meadows isn't outer space,
honey.

CHARLIE

It's worse. It's Arizona.
(to Anders)
See what I'm dealing with here?

SOPHIE

I'm sorry, he needs to rest.

CHARLIE

He came here 'cause he's looking
for his wife.

ANDERS

Not true.

SOPHIE

I think she's at home.

CHARLIE

With her new *boyfriend*.

SOPHIE

Charlie.

CHARLIE

A lot of conversations between my
mother and your ex. About whether
things are moving too fast. A lot
of yackety-yack.

SOPHIE

You've made your point.

A32 INT. ANDERS' CONDO/BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

A32

Anders flops down on his bed, glancing at a framed photo of
Helene, Preston and himself on his night stand.

32 INT. ANDERS CONDO/KITCHEN

32

He's on his phone.

ANDERS

I know you won't pick up. But I
want some photo albums. I got
nothing here. It's only fair. And
some home movies.

(MORE)

ANDERS (CONT'D)

(beat, weaker)

Just a couple. Okay?

33

INT. MASTER'S SPORTS BAR AND GRILL - AFTERNOON

33

Anders is drinking a beer at the bar with his friend LARRY EICHNER, 50.

The bar is pretty empty, and sports newscasters scream their points of view on several TV sets spread through out.

LARRY

So you got out. Stop beating yourself up about it. Hell, it was the best thing I ever did.

ANDERS

Yeah, but you got out at the perfect time. You never have to work a day in your life.

(beat)

I need money.

LARRY

(surprised)

Huh.

ANDERS

It's wasn't the market. It's for Helene. During the divorce she asked for the house. I lied and said she could keep it, but I can't afford it. Not even close. I was full of bravado. Keep it, I said. That's all you want?

(beat)

What the fuck was I thinking.

LARRY

You were thinking you were done with the marriage so you were done with the house.

ANDERS

Sometimes I have this vision of my life as this web - this giant network of needs and wants and desires and dependence connecting me to other people, right? And I figured the more threads I had coming to me and from me, the more important I would be in the world. The harder it was to replace me.

(MORE)

ANDERS (CONT'D)

And the people with a million threads - you know, like a teacher who teaches a whole bunch of people to read, or I don't know, a doctor who's saved a bunch of sick kids - they were the ones who mattered the most because so many people relied on them. You know what I mean?

LARRY

I think so.

ANDERS

But it's really not the case. The web is being remade every second of every day - it's constantly revising itself. If you vanish, the people who are left behind will learn to rely on other people. The web will be remade and move on without you.

LARRY

Drink up.

(beat)

And celebrate! Because you got out of the web!

ANDERS

No. No. You don't get it.

LARRY

This whole place. This fucking town. It's a life of work and commuting and bullshit. That was one web I was happy to get out of.

ANDERS

I haven't paid the mortgage in six months.

LARRY

How much do you need?

ANDERS

I'll pay you back, every penny.

Larry stands up.

LARRY

What is it, Monday?

ANDERS

I guess.

LARRY

Let's have some fun.

ANDERS

(holding up his beer)
I'm already having fun.

LARRY

No, I mean real fun. Like forget-your-wife-fun. Want to go to a strip club or something?

ANDERS

I've had my fill of humiliation for one day.

(beat)

You go to those places?

LARRY

You don't?

Larry stares at him for a minute.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Come on. You need to see something.

34

OMITTED

34

35

INT./EXT. LARRY'S TOWN CAR / TRAIN STATION - EVENING

35

Larry pulls into the parking lot of the train station. There is a line of station wagons and luxury SUV's idling by the platform, cars loaded with women and their children, the map lights on as they read magazines and look at their phones.

ANDERS

What are we doing here?

LARRY

(beat)

This town used to be quaint. It's all changed. More crowded than ever.

(beat)

Did you see the three story GAP?

ANDERS

We almost stayed in the city. But this was a good place for a kid.

LARRY

How's Preston doing? He's at Northwestern, right?

ANDERS

Graduated. Living at Helene's.

LARRY

Oh Jesus. What was the point?

The tracks go bright and a silver train blurs into the station. The doors hiss open and spill dark coated people onto the platform like a gutted fish.

The figures rush past one another for the exits, then scatter, half of them speed-walking to their cars in the outer lot, half searching, chins up, for their rides.

The commuters look angry as they search for their spouses and children, and upon finding them, grimace and climb into their cars.

The cars disappear in a line, like a motorcade, and soon the station is quiet and dark again, and Larry's lights are the only ones shining in the lot.

Larry turns to Anders.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Miss *that*?

Clearly, Anders doesn't.

36 INT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

36

Anders and Larry sit at a small table, drinking and getting drunker.

Dancers in g-strings do lap dances and pole dancing on a stage.

LARRY

You should let me cook for you
sometime. I'm taking this Asian
fusion cooking class. It's a total
blast.

ANDERS

Really.

LARRY

And I'm not bad. I never would have thought but cooking is so relaxing. I put on some music, sip some wine, and hours go by, and I end up with this delicious meal. Unfortunately, I generally eat it alone, but it's delicious regardless. They have all kinds - Italian cooking, Gourmet cooking.

ANDERS

(teasing)

That's very sad, Larry.

LARRY

Fuck you. Only if you look at it that way.

A STRIPPER approaches the table and flirts with Anders.

STRIPPER

How about a dance?

ANDERS

(uncomfortable)

No, sorry.

STRIPPER

You sure?

ANDERS

Yes! Yes, no offense!

LARRY

Dude! Get a dance!
(to stripper)
He's newly divorced.

STRIPPER

Then you need a little TLC.

ANDERS

That might be true. But I don't want -

LARRY

I'll take a dance!

STRIPPER

All right! You got it.

She begins to climb onto Larry. Anders pulls his seat away, trying not to see what's happening in front of him.

37

INT. CLUB BATHROOM - NIGHT

37

Anders stumbles in and goes to the urinal and pees. After a minute he hears someone retching in the stall. He pauses, disgusted.

ANDERS

Dude. You okay?

Nobody answers so Anders makes his escape.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Wait.

He stops, surprised to hear a woman's voice. He walks to the stall.

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

Jesus. Am I in the men's room? It's fucking pink! Could you wet a paper towel for me?

He goes to the sink and does as she asks and then shoves it under the door.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thanks.

She opens the door, trying to stand. Anders grabs her purse for her and gives her a hand. She's about 50 years old, attractive. Not what he expected.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

(seeing his face)

That's right. I'm not a stripper.

ANDERS

You okay?

WOMAN

I haven't thrown up in a club since I was about twenty two years old. God it's disgusting, and I am very embarrassed.

She goes to the sink to throw water on her face, drink some too.

ANDERS

Don't drink from that.

WOMAN

Oh, you're right.

ANDERS

(beat)

What are you doing here?

WOMAN

What are you doing here?

He looks at her - curious.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I was stupid enough to come here on a date. Like, our third date. I'm sure he left, at least I hope so. I thought - sure - I'll be 'hip.' I can go to a strip club. But before I knew it I was on my third vodka and he was trying to buy me a fucking lap dance. How naive am I?

ANDERS

It's hip for a woman to go to a strip club?

WOMAN

I don't know.

ANDERS

If it makes you feel any better, I didn't actually want to come here either.

WOMAN

(rolling her eyes)

Yeah, right.

38 INT. STRIP CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

38

Anders looks around the club but there's no sign of Larry. The BARTENDER notices.

BARTENDER

Your friend went up there.

He points to some upstairs lair.

ANDERS

Thanks.

He heads for the exit when he notices the bathroom woman finding HER DATE about to get a lap dance.

39 INT./EXT. TAXI CAB / STRIP CLUB - NIGHT 39

Anders and the woman get into the back seat of a cab.

WOMAN
42 Maple Street, please.

ANDERS
112 Fisherman's Lane.

The cab drives.

WOMAN
I don't have enough money.

ANDERS
Don't worry about it.

WOMAN
Thank you very much. My name is
Barbara. I think.

ANDERS
Anders.

Anders closes his eyes.

WOMAN
You okay?

But he's drunk and half asleep.

40 EXT. HELENE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 40

The cab pulls up in front of Helene's house. Christmas lights
are tastefully draped on trees and on the porch.

41 INT./EXT. TAXI CAB / HELENE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 41

Anders seems surprised to be where he is.

BARBARA
Beautiful house.

ANDERS
(to driver)
Why are we here?

CABBIE
112 Fisherman's Lane. That's what
you said.

He fumbles for money and hands it to Barbara.

ANDERS

Take care.

He gets out and the cab takes off.

42 EXT. HELENE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

42

He stands there for a moment, not sure what to do. Then, with conviction he walks to the front, pulls out his keys and opens the door.

43 INT. HELENE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

43

Anders opens the freezer and stares at its contents. He doesn't recognize any of it.

ANDERS

(quietly)

What is all this shit.

44 INT. HELENE'S HOUSE/STUDY - NIGHT

44

Eating a popsicle, he weaves through the dark room and starts searching through the tall bookshelf. He pulls out a photo album as Donny appears behind him brandishing a golf club.

DONNY

(shouting)

Who the fuck is in my house!

Anders spins around, ducking.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ I almost took your head off.

He lowers the club as Helene comes up behind him.

HELENE

What are you doing here?

Preston appears, sleepy, behind Helene. Anders looks at the three stunned faces as they recover from their fright.

ANDERS

I came to get some things. Relax everybody.

They all just look at him.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
(re: popsicle)
Weird flavor.

HELENE
Are you kidding me?

ANDERS
It tastes like flowers.

HELENE
You can't just come in here like this!

DONNY
I almost fucking killed you, man.

Preston hangs back, just watching, upset.

ANDERS
I'm just getting some things that are rightfully mine.

HELENE
You're drunk.

He clumsily grabs a couple more photo albums off the shelf.

ANDERS
I should be able to have some of these at my place.

HELENE
(furious)
I got your message. I put a whole box of stuff by the door.

ANDERS
Then what are all these?!

HELENE
I gave you *half*.

Anders walks to the front door and sure enough there's a box filled with DVD's and photo albums.

ANDERS
Oh. Well, then thank you.

HELENE
Since when do you give a shit about family pictures that you have to break into the house in the middle of the night?

ANDERS
I did not *break in*.

HELENE
What is wrong with you?

ANDERS
I'm a little dizzy.

DONNY
Why don't you sit down there,
Anders.

ANDERS
Don't tell me what to do.

Anders sits.

DONNY
And now why don't you give me those
house keys you got there.

HELENE
Donny.

He holds out his hand.

HELENE (CONT'D)
Donny, you don't have to -

DONNY
We can't let this kind of thing
happen again.

PRESTON
You're not going to do this again,
right, dad?

ANDERS
(with a smile)
You know what? You never know.

He hands Donny the keys to the house.

HELENE
(beat)
Preston, please drive your father
home.

Anders, looking like hell - hung over, is making coffee as
Preston sits at the table eating toast.

ANDERS

So, she hired you? I thought it was all volunteers there.

PRESTON

She worked it out so I could get paid.

ANDERS

Takes a lot of patience. You like it?

PRESTON

I do. The pay is shit.

ANDERS

But you're saving to get your own place?

PRESTON

(not convincing)

Sure.

ANDERS

I mean, you can't like living there.

PRESTON

It's all right.

Preston gets up to leave.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

I gotta go.

ANDERS

Why?

PRESTON

Work.

ANDERS

What does she see in him?

PRESTON

I don't know. They seem kind of happy.

ANDERS

Bullshit.

PRESTON

You left her, remember? Jesus Dad.

ANDERS

You're mad at me about that.

PRESTON

(sarcastic)

No, I'm thrilled you wanted to get rid of mom. Thrilled you totally hurt her after a hundred years of marriage!

ANDERS

Things aren't that simple.

Preston goes to the front door.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I'm going to apologize to her for last night.

(beat)

But I worry about you.

PRESTON

You're worried about *me*?

ANDERS

Yes. I can be an idiot and still worry about you.

Anders goes to Preston and hugs him tightly.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Seeing Charlie in the hospital just makes me so thankful we lived through all that we did.

(beat)

Christmas eve. Why don't you stay here with me? We'll watch a movie or something.

PRESTON

Mom's planning the usual dinner. Sorry. She's already making a big deal out of it.

ANDERS

(hiding his
disappointment)

Oh sure, don't worry about it.

Preston heads out.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Have a good day. Go teach some poor
bastard to read.

46 INT. ADULT LEARNING CENTER/HELENE'S OFFICE - DAY

46

MR. BAPTISTE, 60, Haitian and wearing a suit, sits in an office waiting. Helene enters briskly and sits opposite him, behind her desk.

HELENE

Mr. Baptiste. I understand there's
been a dispute with your tutor?

MR. BAPTISTE

It's not a dispute.

HELENE

If you don't mind, would you
explain everything, including as
many specifics as you can.

MR. BAPTISTE

He stole from me.

HELENE

(upset)

Are you sure? How?

MR. BAPTISTE

On November the 20th, my tutor -
your son, told me about an
opportunity to make money.

HELENE

(beat)

What kind of opportunity?

47 EXT. ANDERS' CONDO - DAY

47

Anders exits his condo and is greeted by a female neighbor who is entering the complex.

NEIGHBOR #2

Hello.

ANDERS

Hi. Anders.

He goes to shake and she reluctantly responds.

NEIGHBOR #2
(with distaste)
Quite a set up you got there.

She looks up at Anders' Christmas decorations.

ANDERS
Fun, huh?

NEIGHBOR #2
(rude)
Fun.

She walks off.

ANDERS
(angry)
Don't you like a Christmas parade?
Where's your holiday spirit?

She enters her home, shutting the door behind her. He looks at his decorations, considering. After a beat, he goes back into his place.

Suddenly, all of the Christmas lights and Reindeer lights and carollers light up and the Santa chuckles and says HO HO HO.

Anders comes out of his house pleased with himself.

48 INT. HELENE'S OFFICE - DAY

48

Helene is collecting her things at her desk, getting ready to leave. A knock on the door.

HELENE
Come in.

Anders opens the door.

HELENE (CONT'D)
Oh.

ANDERS
I was drunk. It was a ridiculous,
obviously stupid thing to do.

HELENE
That's terrific, Anders. But at the
moment I have to find our moron of
a son - who has now fucked up the
only job he could get because his
mother gave it to him!

ANDERS

Where is he?

HELENE

I think I know.

(beat)

How could he do this to me? To himself?

ANDERS

What did he do?

HELENE

(whispering)

He took money from a client and *gambled* with it.

ANDERS

Jesus. I'm coming with you.

HELENE

I'd rather you didn't.

49 EXT. CEMENT BUILDING - DAY

49

Helene's car pulls up to a cement building. She gets out, followed by Anders.

50 INT. CEMENT BUILDING/BAR - DAY

50

They enter where an ASIAN MAN is smoking a cigarette and watching a tiny television behind a dirty counter.

HELENE

(awkward)

Hi. Is there a poker game going on here?

ASIAN MAN

Excuse me?

HELENE

I'm not causing trouble. We're just looking for our son.

She pulls out her phone and shows him a picture of Preston.
The man nods and gestures to a door.

51 INT. CEMENT BUILDING BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

51

They enter a smoky, depressing room where they see Preston among SEVERAL MEN, all ages and races, playing a quiet game of poker.

Helene and Anders pause for a second and take in their son, sitting in this lonely, creepy place in the middle of the day with strangers. Their hearts break a little more right then and there. Preston turns and sees them. Mortified, he quickly rises.

PRESTON

This is pretty impressive. Did you
have me followed?

ANDERS

You told me you were going to work.

PRESTON

There's more than one way to make
money.

ANDERS

Don't be an asshole.

HELENE

I had a very interesting meeting
today, Preston.

PRESTON

(rolling his eyes)
I didn't steal the guy's money.

HELENE

Two thousand dollars? From an illiterate man?!

PRESTON

I'm going to win it back. I thought you didn't like to use that word.

HELENE

That's hardly the point.

He looks at them.

PRESTON

Look at you two, a real team.
(beat)
He gave it to me.

HELENE

For you to gamble with?

PRESTON

Do I get to tell my side of the story? He had a broken truck and was thinking of asking some guy in his neighborhood for a loan, some creep who would end up breaking his legs if he didn't pay him back. He didn't understand how these things could end up. Then he said the other thing he might do is go to one of those car lots and take one of their jacked up financing options - and mom, I know. It's what he should of done. But he asked if I knew of anything else.

HELENE

And you thought 'oh, yeah, there's that underground poker game I'm involved with.'

PRESTON

Let's get this over with.

HELENE

Get what over with?

PRESTON

The firing. The sacking. I get it.

HELENE

Even if you meant well, Preston, it looks like nepotism if I don't fire you.

PRESTON

You don't have to explain it.

HELENE

You're fired. You have one week to move out.

PRESTON

(not looking at her)

Well, you should probably find a place, too.

HELENE

Excuse me?

PRESTON

Dad's not paying the mortgage.

She turns to Anders.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Hasn't in six months.

ANDERS

It's more complicated than that.

HELENE

(struggling)

You're still fired. And you're still moving out.

52

EXT. CEMENT BUILDING - JUST AFTER

52

Helene hustles to the car.

HELENE

You had to be the Big Man. 'Sure, take the house, no problem.'

ANDERS

I was attempting to be generous.

HELENE

But to be the Big Man, Anders, you have to be a *Big Man*.

ANDERS

Hey. I made a good living for everybody. *Everybody*. For years.

HELENE

So I could lose the house. To foreclosure.

ANDERS

Why do you even want it? It's a five bedroom house!

She looks at him, appalled.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I'm getting the money.

HELENE

How?

ANDERS

A loan. From Larry Eichner.

She can't believe it's come to this.

HELENE

That house is our history. *My* history. I *made* that garden. It *means* something.

ANDERS

I know it means something.

HELENE

Do you? Do you know what anything means?

ANDERS

I thought I did. But I was wrong. About many things.

She can't believe she's hearing this.

HELENE

You're supposed to be happy now, Anders. That's why you wanted a divorce. Remember?

(MORE)

HELENE (CONT'D)

We were all in the way of you being happy. The house - your career, me, the way of life. Remember all that?

53

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

53

Anders shops for food when Barbara walks by, looking at him. He recognizes her, but he's not sure where. They smile.

BARBARA

That's right. I'm the lady who threw up. We took a cab, remember?

ANDERS

Hi. I remember.

BARBARA

Listen, that cab was a fortune.

(beat)

Let me pay you back.

She fishes in her purse.

ANDERS

Oh god, no. Please don't.

BARBARA

I can afford it.

ANDERS

It's on me.

BARBARA

(beat)

Then, let me buy you lunch?

He's flummoxed.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I know. You probably just have to leave your house and women throw themselves at you.

Anders wonders if this is actually true.

ANDERS

Not at all.

BARBARA

Uh huh.

Starting to feel rejected, she moves off.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Don't worry about it. Thanks for the ride that night. You saved me.

She walks off with her cart.

ANDERS

Okay. Buy me lunch.

(beat)

A very, very expensive lunch.

BARBARA

How expensive?

ANDERS

At least twenty six dollars.

BARBARA

I don't know.

ANDERS

Okay, twenty four.

BARBARA

That I can do.

He hands her his phone.

ANDERS

Put in your number.

She takes it and types it in herself.

BARBARA

All I ask. Don't fucking text me.

54 INT. ANDERS' CONDO - NIGHT

54

Anders enters with grocery bags, a large pizza box and a six pack. He's about to put it down when there's a knock on the door.

Donny stands there with a small paper bag.

DONNY

This is for you.

Anders takes out a bottle of scotch.

DONNY (CONT'D)

The man at the store said if you're
a scotch lover then that's the one.

Anders examines the label and blows a layer of dust off of
what must be an incredibly expensive scotch.

DONNY (CONT'D)

You're a scotch lover, right?

ANDERS

Bourbon.

DONNY

Shit.

ANDERS

It's fine.

DONNY

You don't have to drink it now.

ANDERS

You don't want any?

DONNY

After sixteen years, you don't want
me to have any.

Anders goes to the kitchen and Donny follows, shutting the
door behind him. Anders pours himself a glass and extracts a
large, hot slice of pizza.

ANDERS

Help yourself.

DONNY

Listen. I'd like to apologize.

ANDERS

You?

DONNY

For the way that everything has
happened. I should have called you
in the first place. I mean, we were
friends.

ANDERS

We were?

DONNY

Well, acquaintances. And it's awkward.

(beat)

So I want to be completely up front with you now. Full disclosure. The older I've gotten, the more I've realized it's all about communication.

ANDERS

What's all about communication?

DONNY

(beat)

Relationships. People.

ANDERS

I was an idiot the other night.

DONNY

Believe me, if I had a dollar for every regrettable thing I'd done after I'd had a few too many...

(beat)

Sorry about the golf club. You hear someone in your house at that hour and well.

ANDERS

How is my house?

DONNY

Well, this is what I wanted to talk to you about.

(beat)

I know about the mortgage.

ANDERS

I have it taken care of.

DONNY

Look, I'm still working and things are going quite well for me right now. It doesn't make any sense for you to be burdened with it.

(beat)

I'll give you ten percent over market value.

ANDERS

Excuse me?

DONNY

I'm making you an offer.

ANDERS

The house isn't for sale.

DONNY

It means a lot to Helene. Her garden means even more.

(beat)

I can pay you today, right now.

Anders puts his glass on the table.

ANDERS

I'm not interested.

DONNY

For a guy who worked so long in finance, I'm a little surprised.

(beat)

Come on, you have to admit, this situation doesn't make sense for anyone.

ANDERS

How old are you?

DONNY

Same as you, why?

ANDERS

Seems like an unusual time to suddenly want a family.

DONNY

Anders, this crap has to stop.

Anders notices a pink ribbon pinned to Donny's jacket.

ANDERS

What's with the ribbon.

DONNY

I'm sorry?

ANDERS

(pointing)

That.

DONNY

(reluctantly)

It's in honor of my sister.

(MORE)

DONNY (CONT'D)
She passed away of breast cancer
recently. It's to raise awareness.

ANDERS
I'm sorry about that.

He pulls out his wallet.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Do you take donations? I'd like to
make one.

DONNY
Anders, don't do that.

He takes out some twenties - about one hundred dollars.

DONNY (CONT'D)
Please.

ANDERS
It's a gift. Here.

He fans the bills in his hand.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
I'm not going to beg you.

Donny doesn't move.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Going once... going twice...

Anders opens his hand and the money flutters to the floor.
They stand there a moment and eventually Donny bends down to
pick it up.

55 INT. CAFE - DAY

55

Anders is peering through the glass of the busy lunch place.
He enters, and sees Barbara sitting in the back.

BARBARA
Right on time.

ANDERS
The parking is crazy out there.

BARBARA
Christmas shoppers.

ANDERS
Oh god, I haven't even started.

BARBARA
Me neither. You have kids?

A WAITER comes over.

ANDERS
I'll have a Corona.

BARBARA
A Merlot, please.

The waiter leaves. Anders seems only mildly interested in Barbara, but not unhappy to be there.

ANDERS
I have a boy. A man, I should say.
You?

Barbara pulls out her phone and shows him a picture.

BARBARA
That's Rachel and that's Carmen.

He feigns interest.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Ha ha. I guess this will be over in
a minute. I just showed you
pictures of my kids.

ANDERS
(smiling)
They're nice.

BARBARA
(beat)
I always wanted a son. Boys seem so
much easier.

ANDERS

Oh, I don't know. Easier than girls?

BARBARA

I assume so. There was nothing easy about mine. God, the mind games, the lying - when they were teenagers. The drinking. They could be so mean to me.

ANDERS

And now?

BARBARA

Much better. Much more human.

(beat)

We're very close. Probably too close.

ANDERS

I wish I could say the same.

BARBARA

Oh. I'm sorry. What's the deal?

ANDERS

He's just kind of lost. And angry. Generally rude and immature. Frighteningly similar to the person sitting across from you.

BARBARA

Oh lucky me!

Their drinks arrive and they pick them up.

ANDERS

He can also be very sweet. He's a good person.

BARBARA

Like you?

ANDERS

Jury's out.

(beat)

I try.

BARBARA

That's all we can do, right?

Awkward. He nods. She attempts to lighten it up.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Can you believe how our town is
changing?

ANDERS

Don't even recognize it.

BARBARA

Have you been in the three story
GAP?

ANDERS

Not yet.

BARBARA

(guilty)

I actually kind of like it.

ANDERS

Really? Should I check it out?

BARBARA

I know it used to be that gorgeous old bank but I have more use for a three story Gap.

They sip quietly.

ANDERS

I haven't been on a date in thirty years.

BARBARA

Holy shit. How's it going?

ANDERS

Not bad.

BARBARA

Really? 'Cause you look pretty tense.

ANDERS

Oh yeah, I'm tense.

BARBARA

I'm pretty tense, too.

56 INT. MEN'S CLOTHING SHOP - NIGHT

56

Crowded with Christmas shoppers, Anders wanders among the cashmere. Loud, awful Christmas music plays. He has a little spring in his step.

He feels a sweater, then feels another. Pleased, he chooses a red one and tries it on. It's bright, like nothing he's ever worn, but he likes it.

57 EXT. ANDERS' CONDO - NIGHT

57

Anders carries several shopping bags up to his front door to find Preston sitting there, smoking a cigarette.

ANDERS

(disappointed)

You smoke?!

PRESTON

Yet another thing you can dislike about me.

Preston drops it.

ANDERS

Don't leave it there! Jesus!

He picks it up.

58 INT. ANDERS' CONDO - NIGHT

58

Anders puts the bags down and Preston looks into his refrigerator.

ANDERS

Did a little Christmas shopping.

PRESTON

You don't have anything to eat.

ANDERS

I got you a nice gift.

Preston pulls some cheese out of a package and sits at the dining table.

PRESTON

Since when do you Christmas shop?

ANDERS

(beat)

I even got your mother and her boyfriend a present.

PRESTON

Why?

ANDERS

It's the nice thing to do.

(in an adult voice)

'I'm cutting the crap.'

PRESTON

(beat)

He throws his money around. Acts so earnest.

ANDERS

I think he *is* earnest.

PRESTON

It's a five bedroom house and I can't live there.

ANDERS

You can't live there because you're twenty seven years old and its time you lived on your own.

PRESTON

So much for a nice Christmas.

ANDERS

Have you even looked for a job?

PRESTON

I got one.

ANDERS

That's good.

PRESTON

Oh yes! Spectacular!

(beat)

I'm delivering booze for Gil's liquor. At least I've still got my car.

ANDERS

Well, it's better than nothing. The tips will be good.

(beat)

You staying with friends, or what?

PRESTON

Or what.

Anders now notices how unwashed Preston is, how dirty his clothes are.

ANDERS

(concerned)

Where are you staying?

PRESTON

Not for you to worry about.

Anders opens one of the bags and pulls out a jacket.

ANDERS

Might as well take it now.

Preston holds it up.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Oh shoot don't look at the tag.

PRESTON
(looking at the tag, it's
pricey)
Whoa Dad, big spender.

ANDERS
I thought you needed something
warm. You like it?

PRESTON
Can I have the cash instead?

Anders looks at him.

PRESTON (CONT'D)
I'm just kidding!
(beat)
Thanks. What'd you get Donny?

Anders opens a bag and holds up a green cashmere sweater.

PRESTON (CONT'D)
Sweet. That was nice of you.
(beat)
So, can I crash here tonight?

ANDERS
You can't just "crash," Preston.
You have to think about tomorrow
night and the night after that! You
know I want you to stay here. But
you're an adult now. You have to
plan ahead.

PRESTON
Oh my god - can't I just fucking go
to sleep?

ANDERS
No. You have to *fucking grow up*.

They stare at one another until Preston walks to the front
door and slams it behind him. Anders sees he left the jacket
on the chair. He grabs it and opens the door.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Take the jacket - it's cold -

But Preston is gone.

59

INT. ANDERS' CONDO - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

59

Drinking the scotch from Donny's near empty bottle, Anders sits on his couch watching a HOME MOVIE on his TV.

Helene and Sophie are sitting on a sofa drinking wine. Charlie, an infant, is in Sophie's lap. Playing nearby are Kat, his older sister, and Preston, 10, holding onto an old stuffed animal. Mitchell walks through smoking a cigar. They're all relaxed and happy to be together.

Suddenly there's a light tapping on the window. Anders spins around, startled.

He gets up and tentatively and looks.

ANDERS

Preston?

A face appears through the glass. It's not Preston, it's Charlie Ashford.

CHARLIE

Evening!

60

INT. ANDERS' CONDO - JUST AFTERWARD

60

Charlie enters, wearing a camping head lamp and a backpack, which he removes.

ANDERS

It's two o'clock in the morning.

CHARLIE

I had a feeling you'd be up.

ANDERS

Are you all right?

CHARLIE

I was in the neighborhood.

ANDERS

Are you crazy?

CHARLIE

I had to make a quick escape.

Charlie notices Preston's young face frozen on the television. Then he looks around the room, taking it in.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's got that whole 'starting over' vibe. Kind of masculine but still homey.

(glances at the kitchen)

Magnets on the fridge. You're squared away.

He pulls the Paul Klee art book from his backpack.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I figured you're gonna want to return this. Shit's going to be expensive.

He puts it down on the coffee table. Charlie sprawls out on the sofa and Anders notices the pink hospital bracelet on his bony wrist.

ANDERS

Do your parents know where you are?

CHARLIE

Dude, if you're going to call them, I can just get out of here.

ANDERS

I'd really like to avoid doing that. Believe me.

CHARLIE

I need a favor.

ANDERS

(beat)

I can't let you stay here.

(beat)

I'd love to, since your parents annoy the shit out of me but they'd probably have me arrested.

CHARLIE

It's not me who needs to stay.

He reveals a shoe box and removes his turtle, shut in tight. He holds it out in his palm.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You remember Relic.

ANDERS

Why.

CHARLIE

Because he's basically my best friend in the world. And I need someone to watch him for me. Here, hold him. He's a kind old man.

Anders takes him.

ANDERS

You sure he's in there?

CHARLIE

Give him a second.

Soon enough the turtle pokes his head out from the shell.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

See? He likes you.

ANDERS

Why are you giving me your turtle?

CHARLIE

I'm *not* going to rehab. And my parents won't even feed him. They think he smells but that's only because they don't clean his tank. Anyway, I know they'd give him away. My parents are assholes.

ANDERS

Where're you going?

CHARLIE

I have a plan.

ANDERS

To Seattle? To your sister's?

Charlie looks down, letting Anders believe what he wants.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Sorry. Lucky guess.

Anders sits there, turtle in his hands.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Charlie, I've got to call your parents.

CHARLIE

For real? That's how you're going to play this?

ANDERS

I can't just watch you run away.

He takes out his cell phone.

CHARLIE

(disappointed)

I thought you were cool.

ANDERS

I am not cool.

CHARLIE

I should probably warn you that
you're not exactly their favorite
person right now.

ANDERS

(laughing)

Tell me something I don't already
know.

CHARLIE

They're suing you.

Anders stops.

ANDERS

For what?!

CHARLIE

What do you think?

ANDERS

(beat)

They know? How do they know?

CHARLIE

I swear to god I didn't tell them.

Anders looks down at the Erotic art book on the coffee table,
and realizes who probably told them.

ANDERS

So much for confidentiality.

CHARLIE

It's a really small town.

ANDERS

You know what? They can do whatever
they want. Tell them they can have
everything I own.

(beat)

I was tricked into smoking that
crap - you know that. You'll
testify or what have you, right?
You'll tell them the truth?

CHARLIE

(raising his right hand)

So help me god.

ANDERS

Jesus, what could they think of me?

CHARLIE

Wait, this gets to you? You said you hate my parents. How can you let people you don't even like have that much control over you?

ANDERS

(seething)

I don't.

CHARLIE

You gotta think about it the way my sister does. She says 'until they accept me for who I am, until they stop seeing my decisions as mistakes and my life as a phase, I will happily live without them in it.'

(beat)

You have the balls to live your life, man, you have the balls to do what you want, and that sets you apart in this village of zombies. You can't go halfway; you can't be you and stay in favor.

(beat)

Hell, I don't know anyone that could put all that Christmas crap on their front lawn and not be totally ashamed of themselves!

ANDERS

Damn straight!

(re: decorations)

Really? Is it too much?

CHARLIE

(beat)

What gets me, is that my parents hate you for totally dumping your wife but she's the one getting married again.

ANDERS

Excuse me?

CHARLIE

They're such hypocrites. She's the one doing a lot fucking better than you are! No offense.

ANDERS

What are you talking about?

CHARLIE

You don't know?

ANDERS

They're getting married.

CHARLIE

Oops.

(beat)

When my mom's on the phone she talks very loud.

ANDERS

Are you telling me the truth?

CHARLIE

The Big Island. It was maybe going to be Maui - a lot of back and forth about it.

(beat)

Hey. Give me some of that scotch.

Charlie looks at Anders' ashen face.

ANDERS

Actually, you wouldn't happen to have anything stronger?

CHARLIE
(big smile)
My man! It's all at my club house.
Let's hit it!

Charlie rises and Anders grabs his coat. Then, he sees Relic on the table.

ANDERS
(beat)
But you're not leaving that fucking
reptile with me.

61 EXT. ANDERS' CAR / MARINA - CONTINUOUS 61

Anders drives and Charlie is in the passenger seat. He parks it and they both get out.

CHARLIE
Follow me.

They walk between two rows of trailered boats whose hulls are wrapped in plastic for the winter.

62 EXT. MARINA - CONTINUOUS 62

Charlie leads them to a boat and climbs up the ladder, Anders just behind him.

Charlie unzips the plastic and disappears inside.

63 INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS 63

Christmas lights are strung across the low ceiling and the rest is leather cushions and chrome trim.

ANDERS
Quite the club house.

Charlie comes out of the bathroom holding a glass pipe and a lighter and several pieces of vaguely scientific equipment.

CHARLIE

I meant to tell you, I figured it out. It was the other reason I came by but I totally forgot. Oleg, the old scientist? He hears the dog's heartbeat out in space, right? So he goes to Moscow and tries to convince them they have to go get her. But of course there's no space program anymore and anyway nobody cares about a dog that symbolized the triumph of a country that no longer exists. So they laugh at him. Have a seat.

Anders sits and looks at the drug paraphernalia.

ANDERS

What is all that?

CHARLIE

So Oleg starts building his own rocket, out of whatever he can. But it's basically a suicide mission because there's no way he'll be able to reenter the atmosphere - So here's crazy old Oleg and his junk rocket - he does it - he shoots himself into space, and it's not until he gets out there that he hears it.

ANDERS

Hears what?

CHARLIE

(grins)

The sound everything makes in orbit. You know what that sound is? Buh-bum, buh-bum, like a heartbeat.

Charlie lights a pipe and takes a hit.

ANDERS

I don't get it.

CHARLIE

There was no Laika out there after all. Oleg was just hearing his conscience. His broken heart or whatever. And without knowing it, he gave himself the exact same end as that beautiful animal. It's irony. Or something.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I think how I draw it, you'll know
he also felt closer to her out
there, or like released from his
guilt.

(beat)

You don't like it?

ANDERS

I think it's really sad.

CHARLIE

I think it's pretty good.

He hands Anders the pipe and he takes a hit.

ANDERS

(coughing)

What the fuck -

(beat)

What an awful smell!

CHARLIE

We call it Peruvian Paradise, but
that's just because the kid I know
who makes it is from Peru.

Charlie takes a hit and Anders leans back, stoned.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I highly recommend removing your
shoes.

ANDERS

Why?

CHARLIE

Because the carpet will basically
feel like the greatest thing in the
history of the world. Kinda
orgasmy.

ANDERS

I'll keep them on.

CHARLIE

Also I should warn you that it
makes you really horny.

ANDERS

Great.

CHARLIE

It can be weird, but if you just
surrender to it, it's actually
kinda nice.

ANDERS

(really high)
What was that shit?

CHARLIE

Oh, you don't really want to know.

Anders lies there in what looks to be a state of joyful
paralysis as Charlie talks. He's briefly holding forth on
disjointed topics - wind farms, open-source code, a kind of
lizard that could run on it's hind legs across the surface of
the water - until, exhausted, Charlie falls back on the
banquette.

ANDERS

Helene's tits are kind of weird.

CHARLIE

Dude.

ANDERS

She got some new ones a couple of
years ago. They're okay - nice
even. But kind of hard.

CHARLIE

Seriously.

ANDERS

Sometimes they're all I can think
about. For hours.

CHARLIE

My mom has these veiny yoga arms.
Something about them totally makes
me want to cry.

ANDERS

I wish my son would want to see me.
You know, just want to hang out. He
has no interest. I feel like I'm
just this enormous nuisance.

(beat)

How can she get married so fast?
What is that?

CHARLIE

You know what my dad says all the time? Irregardless. Is that even a real word?

ANDERS

Absolutely.

CHARLIE

No. *Irregardless*. He uses it all the time. It's just gruesome.

ANDERS

My feet feel incredibly weird.

CHARLIE

Dude. I'm telling you. Pop off the shoes.

Anders does as he's told, experiencing the intense high, loving the carpet.

ANDERS

He had this stuffed animal. Preston did. It was like a soft, saggy little bear. And he had it for way too long. Long past the acceptable age to be hanging onto a stuffed animal. We got rid of it and pretended it was lost. We were so afraid he'd get teased or never grow up or some insane thing. He was traumatized. Heartbroken. Betrayed.

(beat)

How stupid to be a parent.

CHARLIE

It doesn't have to be. It's that you guys all think you *have to* worry. What is that? It's like you'll all feel bad if you didn't worry.

Anders looks at Charlie, seeing him for the naive teenager that he is. This sobers him up a bit, as if suddenly realizing where he is and what he's doing - some parental instinct kicking in. He reaches for his shoes. He's completely fucked up.

ANDERS

Come on. I'm taking you home.

CHARLIE

You serious?

ANDERS

Yeah, get your things.

CHARLIE

Dude, you're blazed out of your mind right now.

Charlie reaches into his jeans pocket and tosses a prescription bottle at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Take the edge off.

ANDERS

No. I'm not kidding. This is bad. Come on.

Charlie holds up his hands.

CHARLIE

Relax, all right? Just let me clean this crap up.

He starts gathering his things. Anders gestures to an orange plastic flare gun.

ANDERS

What's that for?

CHARLIE

Oh, it was a stupid idea. I just thought we might want to shoot it off.

ANDERS

I'll be in the car.

64 INT./EXT. ANDERS' CAR / MARINA - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT 64

Anders is waiting. He cranks up the heat. He beeps the horn - Charlie is taking his time.

65 EXT. MARINA - CONTINUOUS 65

Anders gets out and heads back toward the boat.

ANDERS

(shouting)

Charlie?!

He climbs down into the cabin.

66 INT. BOAT - CONTINUOUS 66

No sign of life.

ANDERS

Charlie?

He bangs on the bathroom door and when there's no response, he swings it open. There on the closed lid of the toilet, is the turtle.

A67 EXT. BOAT DECK - CONTINUOUS A67

Anders runs up to the deck and shouts.

ANDERS

Charlie!

He squints into the dark, not knowing where to look until high above the boats, at the edge of the horizon, a magnificent orange streak flares across the sky.

67 INT. GIL'S LIQUOR - MORNING 67

Preston is loading boxes of booze into a hand truck. GIL, 60 and weathered, helps.

GIL

Northwestern, huh? I heard you'd gone to college but didn't know that's where you ended up. Quite a school. What are you up to?

PRESTON

Loading boxes, I guess.

Uncomfortable, Gil hands him a computer print out.

GIL

Not too many stops. Might see some familiar faces.

Gil moves a hand truck to the car and Preston picks up two wooden cases of champagne.

PRESTON

Who's celebrating?

GIL

Everyone.

68 INT. PRESTON'S JEEP - A LITTLE LATER IN THE DAY 68

At a stop light, Preston checks off the deliveries he's already made. He looks at the next address, which gives him pause.

69 EXT. ASHFORD HOUSE - DAY 69

Preston drives up, parking on the street. He sits there a bit, reluctant to make this particular delivery.

The house is still tastefully decorated with lights and a few holiday touches.

70 EXT. ASHFORD HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER 70

The front door. Preston has put two cases of wine down and is ringing the bell. No answer.

He goes to the back of the house, lugging the boxes with him, and puts them down in front of the sliding glass door.

He peers in and sees Sophie sitting in a club chair in the dark room, smoking a cigarette and drinking a glass of red wine. Suddenly she turns, as if sensing him, and leaps up. She slides the door open.

PRESTON

Hi, Sophie. I've got your wine.

SOPHIE

You're delivering for Gil?

PRESTON

Looks that way.

SOPHIE

Leave it there. Come in.

PRESTON

I've got other deliveries.

SOPHIE

Oh for Christ sakes come in for five minutes.

(beat)

Is he paying you well?

PRESTON

Just in tips.

SOPHIE
Cheap bastard.

Only now does Preston see that she had been crying.

71

INT. ASHFORD'S KITCHEN - DAY

71

Sophie is pouring herself some more wine while Preston sits at the table. He glances at the clock - 11AM, and then back at Sophie, already sipping her second glass.

SOPHIE
I suppose you haven't seen Charlie.

PRESTON
No. Why?

SOPHIE
I hate his little guts. I thought he was in his room - packing for this rehab in Arizona.
(beat)
Not only wasn't he packing, he wasn't there. And that was yesterday.

PRESTON
I'm sure he's fine. He'll come back. Probably just scared to go. I was.

SOPHIE
You know, when I saw you at the window just now I thought you were him.

She drinks.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Tell me something. Are you living out of your car?

Preston looks down at the front of his sweater, wondering if it looked worse than he thought.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
I only ask because your mother thought you might be living out of your car and I told her that was preposterous but now that I see you, it sort of looks like you're living out of your car.

PRESTON
It's temporary.

SOPHIE
(aghast)
Oh my god. Do you park it
somewhere?

PRESTON
The Park and Ride.

SOPHIE
That's terrible! It's so cold.
(beat)
Do kids still hang out down by the
tracks and smoke pot?

PRESTON
I guess.

SOPHIE
Charlie used to. Or still does. Who
knows.
(beat)
Well, Jesus. Do you want a shower?
A sandwich?

PRESTON
I'm okay.

She pulls two slices of pizza from the fridge and throws them
in the microwave.

SOPHIE
It's good you're home. I know your
mother seems pissed, but the
holidays are about mothers and
children if they're about anything.

PRESTON
You wouldn't know it.

She gulps some wine.

SOPHIE
She's still insisting on a big
Christmas Eve dinner and I
guarantee that has something to do
with the fact that you're here.

She slides the pizza in front of him.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Eat.

He does what he's told.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
He's fucking with me. Isn't he?
He's pissed off that we're
insisting on rehab, so he's
throwing a tantrum. That's it,
isn't it?

PRESTON
(shrugging)
I don't know.

SOPHIE
But when you used to pull this
crap, that was it, wasn't it?

PRESTON
Yeah, pretty much.

She seems to relax a little bit.

SOPHIE
It's just to get a reaction.

PRESTON
For sure.

She picks up her cell and punches in a number.

SOPHIE
(sounding tough)
Hey, Buddy. Listen, if you're going
to pull this crap, we're going to
give away your smelly turtle. I'm
sick of cleaning the tank and
feeding that thing. So you better
come home and deal with what you
have to deal with. It's not
forever, and you know you need it.
Call me. Better yet, show up.

She clicks off and looks at Preston.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
That'll get him to call. He loves
that stupid thing. Now go take a
shower. You're filthy.

Preston comes down the stairs with wet hair. Sophie is lying
on her back on her yoga mat, legs up in the air.

SOPHIE
Your tip's by the door.

PRESTON
You don't have to tip me.

SOPHIE
Oh course I do.

PRESTON
Thanks for the shower. And
everything.

Preston takes the envelope and almost walks out.

SOPHIE
(kindly)
Hey. I'm sorry you have such a
disappointing dad. *That's* not your
fault.

73 INT./EXT. PRESTON'S JEEP / ASHFORD HOUSE - DAY

73

Preston opens the envelope. It's fat with cash and something
else - an old photograph.

In it, Sophie and Helene are sitting on a sofa. Preston, an
infant, is in his mother's lap.

Helene is beaming - her eyes alight with the pride of her
child. Preston stares at the photo, affected.

He sits there for a second and then dials a number in his
phone.

PRESTON
Hi Mom, it's me.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

He clicks off.

A74 INT. BARBARA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A74

Anders and Barbara are seated on the sofa in a modest but
cozy room. Barbara has put out a cheese and crackers plate.
Anders looks hung over and out of it.

BARBARA
She's a physicians assistant. She
kind of works for a jerk, though.
(MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

My other one teaches yoga. She's still kind of figuring it out.

ANDERS

Aren't we all.

BARBARA

Are you okay?

ANDERS

Me? A late night. That's all.

(glancing around)

This is a nice place. Cozy.

BARBARA

No, *your* place is nice. Gorgeous.

ANDERS

Oh. That, sadly, is no longer my place. That's my wife's.

BARBARA

Oh.

ANDERS

It's all right. We had some good years together in it.

BARBARA

Can I ask why you split up?

Anders thinks on this for a moment.

ANDERS

(beat)

You know what was the final straw?

BARBARA

You don't have to tell me.

ANDERS

No - it's ridiculous. We fought about this separate little oven thing that keeps food warm.

BARBARA

Grounds for divorce.

ANDERS

We just did all this work on the house - a new furnace, floor refinishing - a lot of plumbing problems.

(MORE)

ANDERS (CONT'D)

And when it was all done, when all the money was spent, she wanted a food warmer. I lost it. I was awful. Our last fight was meaningless.

BARBARA

Isn't that the way.

(beat)

We used to fight over chewing.

ANDERS

How so?

BARBARA

I don't know. He *chewed*.

(beat)

I have one of those food warmers, by the way.

(beat)

I never use it.

(beat)

She can have it.

Anders laughs.

B74

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

B74

They're having sex under the covers. It seems uncomfortable.

BARBARA

Is everything -

ANDERS

Fine. Let me just -

He puts himself back in and they try some more.

BARBARA

I think it's not working -

He quickly rolls off of her.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Don't worry about it. It's probably because we don't actually know each other.

He doesn't say anything - he's so distraught.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Listen, if I got upset every time I didn't have an orgasm -

ANDERS

Please, just stop talking.

She obeys, taken aback. He sits up and swings his legs over the side of the bed.

He looks at her night table - some magazines, a candle and the book LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE NOW. He picks it up.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

What is with you women and these books?

BARBARA

Excuse me?

ANDERS

Your Best Life Now. Does this work? Should I read this and I'll have the best life, now?

She sits up.

BARBARA

You're in my bed and you're making fun of my book?

She's so appalled, she's shaking. He sits there a minute, slowly realizing how awful he just was.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

You're a real dick.

ANDERS

I'm sorry. I am. You're right.

He puts the book down.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I'm very sorry.

Her face relaxes.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

(beat)

My life is a mess. And now I can't fuck.

(gently)

You deserve your best life now.

BARBARA

(with some irony)

I know. That's why I bought the book.

74 OMITTED 74

75 EXT. MCMANSION - THE NEXT DAY 75

Preston is standing at the front door, taking in the gaudy exterior, with three cartons of booze at his feet. He rings the bell, no one comes.

He looks around, sits on a step and lights up a cigarette. Suddenly the door swings open.

YOUNG MAN

Dude - I can smell that shit from inside.

Preston stands up, admonished.

PRESTON

Oh, sorry. I rang but no one answered.

He doesn't know what to do with the cigarette.

YOUNG MAN

Preston Harris?

PRESTON

(oh shit)
Malcolm Tandler.

He holds the cigarette away from them as they shake.

MALCOLM

Just stub it out there.

He stubs it out on the cement and leans down to get the boxes.

76

INT. MCMANSION - CONTINUOUS

76

Malcolm leads him through the garish house, both carrying boxes.

MALCOLM

(friendly)
So, how you been, man.

PRESTON

Do you live here?

MALCOLM

As of a couple of months ago.
Pretty sick, huh?

PRESTON

(looking around)
Yep.

MALCOLM

My wife's family is in LED's and I've been working with them for a couple of years now. Actually bought this fucker myself!

PRESTON

You're married.

MALCOLM

Baby on the way.

PRESTON

Whoa.

MALCOLM

Life happens.

(beat)

What about you? You want a beer or something?

They put the boxes down.

PRESTON

(backing up)

No, I gotta get going.

MALCOLM

Oh shit, I heard you did some time in rehab. I'm sorry, man. I actually have some nonalcoholic beer if you want.

PRESTON

Nope. On a clock.

(beat)

What are LED's.

MALCOLM

You know. Lights. The "green alternative."

PRESTON

(snide)

Is that fun? Is that stimulating?

MALCOLM

(defensive)

It's all right. I'm making a good living.

PRESTON

Sorry. Just never thought this was where you were headed.

MALCOLM

Excuse me? Where I was headed?

PRESTON

Never mind.

MALCOLM

You're delivering liquor.

(beat)

Come to think of it, this is
exactly where I figured you were
headed.

77

EXT. MCMANSION - DAY

77

Preston exits the front door.

MALCOLM

I would tip you except you're a
colossal dick.

Preston walks to the jeep, flipping him off as he goes. He
gets in the jeep and starts it up but it dies out. He tries
again, no luck.

He beats the steering wheel, unable to believe his shit luck.

Yes, Malcolm is still standing at the front door, chuckling
to himself. Finally, he goes inside and Preston makes a call.

PRESTON

Gil. My car just died... I know.
One more. I'll do it first thing in
the morning, I swear. No, I don't
have triple A. I can't help it -

He clicks off and gets out, slamming the door.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Fuck.

78-79 OMITTED (NOW SCENE A74 - B74)

78-79

80 EXT. TOW TRUCK - DAY

80

Preston sits up front with a DRIVER as he tows Preston's jeep. They pull into the PARK & RIDE lot, near a small train station. A few junky looking cars are already parked there.

81 EXT. PARK & RIDE - DAY

81

His car is parked near the other junked cars. Preston opens the hatch and comes face to face with the wooden case seared with the crest of a champagne vineyard.

Moments later, he's propped open the back of the jeep with a rusty ski pole and is attempting to jimmy the case with his pocket knife.

After a couple of tries he succeeds, and what he finds there, floating in a confetti of high-end packing peanuts, is the sort of joke-size bottle that seems to be used only to pour champagne into the Stanley Cup. He lifts it out and leans it onto the bumper.

There are cars idling at the stoplight and the drivers gaze at him. He heaves the jeroboam of champagne and carries it against his hip down through the brush and sticks to the big shale bed of the commuter tracks.

82 EXT. TRAIN STATION COMMUTER TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

82

SEVERAL TEENAGERS are in the distance - smoking weed, laughing.

Preston sits on the ground, hidden by trees and bushes. The foil comes off easily, and the wire case as well. He puts his thumbs under the lip of the cork and pushes. It squeaks and groans and then comes loose with a faint, bassy pop.

He stares down into the mouth of the bottle, seemingly filled with regret. The fumes, the bubbles, the stupidity of something so excessive.

As the noisy teenagers wander away, Preston tries to stuff the cork back in and wrap the foil around the neck. The more he tries though, the more the cork expands and the foil falls apart.

Behind him, the train tracks begin their metallic whinny and the overhead wires sway. He listens, and then hops up.

He hauls the bottle back up to the track and sets it down as gingerly as he can on a railroad tie.

The train's lights are on and it's hauling ass, so Preston retreats to safety.

The bottle sits so still, almost obedient, until an inexorable force blows past and an explosion of glass and foam and gold leaf, a magnificent spray that makes him jump up and down and whoop with laughter as the rest of the train gallops by.

There are shards of glass everywhere, puddles of champagne still fizzing, and down in the trees, he finds what is left of the bottleneck. He reaches for it, possibly wanting some kind of souvenir, when he notices a hurled sneaker.

But as he looks closer, he can see that the sneaker is attached to a foot, attached to a leg, and the leg to a person. Near the face, which is obscured by the leaves, lies various drug paraphernalia.

He turns to run but then stops himself, glancing down at the boy's pink hospital band.

83 EXT. PARK AND RIDE - DUSK 83

Ambulances and police cars and on-lookers crowd the lot. Preston sits on a curb and when Anders' car pulls up he stands.

Anders parks and runs to him. Preston falls with his whole body onto his dad, sobbing.

84 INT. ANDERS' CONDO - EVENING 84 *

PRESTON and ANDERS enter, in a grief-induced stupor. *

ANDERS *
Why don't you go lie down? *

ALT: No one says anything. *

Preston climbs the stairs and as soon as he's out of sight Anders leans against something - anything - that will hold him as he crumples inside. Maybe he sits on the stairs and puts his head in his hands. *

PRESTON (O.S.) *
Dad? *
(beat) *
Why do you have a turtle in your *
bathtub? *

ALT: *

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Dad, is Charlie's turtle in your
bathtub?

ANDERS is lifted out of his moment and is now filled with a
new challenge. He thinks for a bit, panicked.

85 INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

85

PRESTON stands beside the tub looking at Relic the TURTLE.
ANDERS enters, trying to pull himself together.

ANDERS

Yeah. That's Charlie's.

PRESTON

Huh?

ANDERS

He came over and left it with me.
He was going to rehab and wanted me
to watch it for him.

PRESTON

Why would he give it to you?

ANDERS

I guess he trusted that I would
look after it.

PRESTON

I don't get it. You were friends
with Charlie Ashford?

ANDERS

No. Of course not. I visited him in
the hospital - I suppose he thought
of me because he wanted an - adult,
or something.

PRESTON

So he was going to rehab.

ANDERS

(beat)

It's what he told me.

Maybe PRESTON sits on the edge of the tub. Maybe not.

PRESTON

Do you think it was on purpose?

ANDERS takes a second to answer this.

ANDERS
I doubt it.

*
*

PRESTON
He looked so dead.

*
*

ANDERS
Honey, I'm so sorry you had to see
that.

*
*
*

They're quiet for a bit. PRESTON looks down at the turtle and
then at his dad, confused.

*
*

PRESTON
But why *you*?

*
*

ANDERS can't answer this. He shrugs.

*

86 EXT. HELENE'S HOUSE - MORNING

86 *

Anders and Preston walk up to the house together. Helene, who's been crying, opens the door and throws her arms around Preston, squeezing him hard. Behind her, we hear Donny on the phone with someone discussing the tragedy.

As Helene pulls Preston inside, Anders moves to follow but the door literally shuts in his face.

87 EXT./INT. ANDERS' CONDO / ANDERS' CAR - MORNING

87

Anders sits in his car looking at his gaudy decorations as if he's seeing them for the first time. He gets out of the car and walks to the strung up lights and yanks some down, the relief immediate. Carefully, he dismantles them all.

Once done - he sits down on some steps, grief stricken.

NEIGHBOR #2, who commented on his decor before, walks past him on the way to her condo.

NEIGHBOR #2
Lord Jesus, *thank you*.

Anders sits there, looking up at the clouds.

ANDERS
(beat)
You're welcome.

88 OMITTED 88

89 INT. MASTER BATHROOM - DAY 89

Anders picks Relic up out of the bathtub.

90 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY 90

He speeds north on the interstate.

91-94 OMITTED 91-94

95 INT. HELENE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - MORNING 95

Freshly showered and in clean clothes, Preston stands at the sink peeling cooked yams. The counters are covered in the preparations for Christmas Eve dinner.

Helene, in pajamas, comes in. She looks tired and small.

PRESTON
Did I wake you up?

HELENE
Are you *cooking*?

PRESTON
Figured I'd help out. There's
coffee.

She pours some and sits down at the table.

HELENE

Thank you, Preston.

(beat)

I don't know why I'm still doing this dinner.

(beat)

Honey. I want to ask you something.

PRESTON

I wasn't with him, mom. I found him.

(beat)

I don't hang out with him. He's *seventeen*.

HELENE

I know that.

(beat)

Sophie was asking.

(beat)

If you weren't with him, though, what were you doing there?

PRESTON

I'm sure Sophie told you I was living in my car.

HELENE

She did.

PRESTON

The car died and I had it towed to the park and ride. But the heat didn't work so I was walking around just trying to stay warm.

She can't bear to hear this but pursues.

HELENE

(cautiously)

Were you using?

PRESTON

Using?

HELENE

Okay. No. Whatever.

PRESTON

I was completely sober. I just saw him. I wasn't *using*.

HELENE

And then you called dad. Who called the police.

PRESTON

Yeah.

HELENE

(beat)

I can't believe he didn't come to the funeral.

(beat)

When will I stop being surprised.

PRESTON

He left town.

HELENE

When?

PRESTON

Like a week ago.

HELENE

Where did he go?

PRESTON

He drove somewhere. I'm not sure. He said he was reachable.

HELENE

How odd.

PRESTON

Not that odd. Everybody hates him. Sophie hates him.

HELENE

She doesn't hate him. She's just protective of me.

Preston places a spoonful of yam into a hollowed out orange.

PRESTON

(beat)

I guess you didn't invite him for tonight.

HELENE

No. Why would I?

(beat)

Do you think he would want me to?

(beat)

He's not here, anyway.

Helene gets up to leave the kitchen.

HELENE (CONT'D)
Do me a favor?

PRESTON
Sure.

HELENE
Can you pick up some sliced
almonds? You can take Donny's car.
Do you mind?

PRESTON
No, not at all.

96 INT. DONNY'S CADILLAC SUV - MORNING

96

Preston gets into the car and tosses several packages of sliced almonds on the seat. He sits there for a beat, not driving.

A97 INT. HOLIDAY INN/ROOM - MORNING

A97

A simple, drab, room with two beds. Anders, who clearly hasn't washed in days, is lying on one of them watching a house renovation show.

The place is a mess - pizza boxes, beer bottles - clothes strewn about. He looks awful.

B97 INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

B97

Anders is pouring himself a complimentary coffee as a FAMILY is checking into the motel at the desk. They are a FATHER, MOTHER and TWO YOUNG GIRLS (ages 4 and 6). The girls are bored and stand near Anders, finding the swizzle sticks and sugar packets very interesting.

FATHER
(mildly annoyed)
Girls.

YOUNGER ONE
Can I have some of these?

She holds some sugar packets.

ANDERS
Here. Load up.

He hands her a bunch.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Take some of these.

He hands her some creamers.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
They're very good for stacking.

OLDER ONE
I want some.

ANDERS
Here's a bunch.
(beat)
And these are cool.

He gives her a batch of swizzle sticks.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
Hours of fun to be had.

Anders places a swizzle stick under his nose to make a mustache and then hands it to the younger girl.

MOTHER
Kids, put all of that back.

ANDERS
It's fine.

She looks at Anders.

MOTHER
It's not fine.

The HOTEL CLERK looks at Anders, also not wanting those kids taking all of the coffee stuff.

ANDERS
They're having fun. They're kids.

The girls stop moving, feeling the tension.

MOTHER
Those are not for playing with.

ANDERS
Ohhh. I didn't realize that.

Anders looks at the girls and mocks their mother.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I have apparently handed
you non-toys.

FATHER

Come here, kids. Come on.

(beat)

Don't talk to that man.

They obey their father and Anders walks back to his room.

C97

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

C97

Anders enters and goes back to the bed. His phone, resting on
the table, has a text. He reads it and anxiously looks around
at the mess.

97 OMITTED 97

98 INT. HELENE'S KITCHEN - DAY 98

Helene and Donny are preparing for the dinner. She is on the phone and we can hear Sophie's voice through it because she's talking loudly and almost hysterically.

Helene is distraught as she holds the phone from her ear and looks at Donny.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Oh, no, we're coming. We need it,
are you kidding? Besides, I've been
baking all morning!

HELENE

Baking.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

I made eclairs! And a chocolate
bread pudding.

HELENE

You don't have to do this, Sophie.
You don't have to do anything.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Oh, the smell! It's heavenly.
You'll be glad I've been doing
this!

HELENE

(hesitant)

Okay.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

See you soon.

HELENE

I love you.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

I love you, too.

She hangs up. She and Donny share an nervous look.

99 OMITTED 99

100

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

100

Anders is hugging Preston at the door. The room is spotless.

ANDERS

What a fantastic surprise. You
fixed your car?

PRESTON

I drove Donny's.

ANDERS

Well, come in.

Preston looks around.

PRESTON

What are you doing here?

ANDERS

Not much. You want to get something
to eat?

PRESTON

I want you to come back with me.
Have Christmas dinner with us.

ANDERS

Oh.

(beat)

That's very sweet. But I'm just
fine.

PRESTON

You're living in a Holiday Inn an
hour from your condo.

ANDERS

Sometimes - you just need a space
that's neutral. You know?

PRESTON

Not really. And I hate to tell you.
This place isn't neutral. This is
depressing.

ANDERS

Well, sometimes you need that too.

Preston notices something on the desk.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

That's actually the deed to the house. I'm going to let her keep it.

PRESTON

With what money?

Anders glares at him.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

That's not an unreasonable question, Dad.

ANDERS

The house in Westport will now belong to Donny O'Neil.

PRESTON

Huh?

ANDERS

He offered to buy me out.

PRESTON

And you said yes?

Anders nods.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Do they know?

ANDERS

They will. I was going to put that in the mail.

PRESTON

You're up here alone. Come back with me. Give this to mom yourself. And give them your presents.

ANDERS

I can't go back there.

101 INT. HELENE'S HOUSE - EVENING

101

Dressed festively, Helene answers the door to greet Sophie and Mitchell, both of whom are holding platters covered in tin foil.

HELENE

My friends.

The degree to which Sophie was hyper, she is now similarly depressed. Mitchell, drawn and pale, follows them inside.

HELENE (CONT'D)

You guys didn't have to *come*. *Let alone cook.*

SOPHIE

We couldn't stay in bed one more day. You're our family.

HELENE

(beat)

I'm glad you're here. But any time, if you feel uncomfortable or feel like leaving, please. Do what feels comfortable.

Donny appears holding a bottle of white in one hand and red in the other.

MITCHELL

I could go for some red.

SOPHIE

Honey. Not with the Xanax.

MITCHELL

I'd like some red.

SOPHIE

(beat)

Okay, me too.

102 OMITTED

102

103 INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

103

Donny and Helene are across from Sophie and Mitchell, who sit in silence, drinking. Donny tries to force a conversation.

DONNY

We're going to do it on the Big Island. They have the most options in terms of resorts.

(beat)

And of course no gifts. We're asking everyone to donate to the American Cancer Society, instead.

HELENE

Donny's sister passed away from breast cancer, so we're doing it in her honor -

MITCHELL

(interrupting)

Where's Preston?

HELENE

Excuse me?

MITCHELL

Preston. Where is he?

HELENE

I don't actually know - not unusual. But very annoying.

MITCHELL

I thought he lived here.

HELENE

I sent him on an errand hours ago.

SOPHIE

Interesting.

HELENE

When did Kat go back to Seattle?

MITCHELL

This morning.

He reaches for Sophie's hand and holds it. Helene looks at the both of them, realizing something has shifted.

Helene sees Sophie staring at the string of Christmas cards hung over the mantel, bearing the smiling faces of children and happy families.

HELENE

Why don't we go into the dining room?

104 EXT. HELENE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

104

Donny's car pulls into the driveway followed by Anders in his. They both get out. Anders is holding the deed in an envelope and some gifts. He pauses.

ANDERS

I don't know, kid. I'm not invited.

PRESTON
I'm inviting you.

105 INT. HELENE'S HOUSE/BACK DOOR / KITCHEN - NIGHT 105

Preston comes inside and sees Donny.

DONNY

There you are.

Then Donny sees Anders.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Okay.

Helene enters the kitchen.

HELENE

Oh Jesus.

(to Preston)

I don't think you should be here.

PRESTON

Why not?

HELENE

The Ashfords are in there and
they're kind of out of their minds
right now.

(to Anders)

You, too.

PRESTON

I thought it would be okay.

MITCHELL (O.S.)

Wow.

They all turn to see Mitchell, his face now a deep purple,
smoking a cigar.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

I had a feeling you might be hiding
people back here.

HELENE

They're on their way out.

MITCHELL

Oh, I hope not. Anders, you'll stay
for a drink, at least?

ANDERS

You know what, I'm going to take
off.

MITCHELL

Oh, bullshit. It's Christmas. Come here.

He goes to Anders and wraps him in a lengthy, tight hug. Finally Mitchell pulls away and Anders can see tears well up in his eyes.

ANDERS

(tentative)

Okay. I'll have a drink.

106 INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

106

Everyone comes back into the dining room.

MITCHELL

Look who I found hiding back there in the kitchen.

Anders startles when he sees Sophie, sitting at the table and staring at him like a tranquilized animal. He and Preston sit down and Helene puts down a setting for Anders.

ANDERS

Sophie, Mitchell, I've been away. That's why I missed the funeral. I'm so, so sorry. He was an exceptional kid. I always thought he was very special.

Sophie finally looks up.

SOPHIE

He admired you.

ANDERS

That's nice of you to say. I don't know why.

SOPHIE

I could never figure it out. I mean, why you? What's so much more acceptable about you?

(sips more wine)

And then I realized, you're the fucked up one. You're the one who threw everything away.

HELENE

Sophie.

SOPHIE

I want to know some things. I have some questions.

(looks at Preston)

For you. I have questions for you.

HELENE

He didn't do anything.

MITCHELL

Nobody said he did.

(beat)

Irregardless, I would like to know, what you were doing on the railroad tracks. It seems like an odd place to be taking a stroll.

HELENE

He was trying to get warm.

MITCHELL

Would you let the boy speak for himself?

PRESTON

I was trying to get warm.

MITCHELL

See, now I don't believe that. Why would you walk along frozen gravel with the wind -

PRESTON

I was going to drink - I had stolen this champagne, but I didn't -

MITCHELL

(smiling)

There you go. Now we're getting somewhere.

HELENE

Mitchell, that's enough.

MITCHELL

Now why would that be enough when we're just getting to the truth? You did drugs with my son, didn't you?

Preston is speechless.

HELENE

Look - this is not okay. Preston is not at fault here.

ANDERS

I was with him. I was with Charlie. Preston wasn't.

PRESTON

Dad.

MITCHELL

You were with him. Why would we believe that.

ANDERS

Because he came over to my house in the middle of the night. With his turtle. He wanted me to take care of it.

SOPHIE

No. He wouldn't bring you that. He wouldn't have done that. He loves that turtle. Why would he do that?

ANDERS

I gathered he was running away.

SOPHIE

When was he with you?

ANDERS

Earlier. That night. Earlier that night.

This is almost more than Sophie and Mitchell can bear.

SOPHIE

And you didn't call us? How could you not call us?

It's a good question and Anders doesn't know how to answer it.

ANDERS

I was going to. When I told him I was going to bring him home he ran off.

SOPHIE

(shaking her head)
It doesn't matter now.

ANDERS

No, it does matter. I should have done more. I should have called you.

SOPHIE

Even if you called us he would have run away. It wouldn't have done any good.

ANDERS

I did drugs with him.

Everyone looks up.

SOPHIE

What?

ANDERS

Before he ran off.

SOPHIE

No, you didn't.

ANDERS

I did.

PRESTON

You did?

SOPHIE

Why would you do that?

MITCHELL

Are you out of your fucking mind?

HELENE

Guys, we don't have to do this right now - we're all very upset.

ANDERS

But you should know. He was in a good mood. For sure it was an accident. He just didn't want to go to rehab.

SOPHIE

Don't talk to me about *my* son. How dare you. As if you know him.

ANDERS

(admonished)

I didn't know him. Not well.

SOPHIE

How dare you.

(beat)

The things I could tell you. The
things I know.

HELENE

Sophie, let's not do this.

SOPHIE

(pointing at Donny)

Your wife was screwing him! For a
year!

Anders almost laughs, but as he glances around the table at
all those averted eyes, he sobers up.

ANDERS

What?

Anders looks at Helene.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Is she serious? Is that true?

Without warning, Mitchell rises and pulls Anders out of his seat. He knocks him down on the floor and kneels over him, his fat cigar burning in his mouth.

MITCHELL

You smug little fuck. You did nothing! You let it happen!

He holds Anders's wrist to the floor with all of his body weight.

There's shouting and Preston tries to pull Mitchell off of Anders but he can't. Mitchell looks down at him, takes the cigar and burns him directly on the forehead, searing a wound so round and deep, it extinguishes the cigar completely.

107 INT. EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

107

The place is packed on Christmas Eve. Helene and Preston sit there among the sick and miserable. A NURSE waves them in and Helene rises, gesturing for Preston to stay.

108 INT. EMERGENCY ROOM CUBICLE - NIGHT

108

Anders lies on a gurney with his forehead bandaged, doped up. Helene walks in and looks at him with sadness.

She pulls up a chair.

HELENE

(gently)

How could you?

He squeezes his eyes closed, feeling so guilty and ashamed, he can't even answer. After a moment, she takes his hand.

ANDERS

Is it true, what she said?

Helene doesn't answer.

ANDERS (CONT'D)
I don't blame you.

Preston appears at the curtain and walks toward them.

PRESTON
I guess I should have left you at
the Holiday Inn.

ANDERS
Obviously.

Preston smiles and puts a hand on his dad's shoulder. Anders closes his eyes and the three of them stay like that for a while.

FADE INTO:

109 EXT. TRAIN STATION/SUMMER - EVENING 109

Summer has arrived in Westport. Leafy trees and the warm sun is just setting.

Commuters pour out of the train - men in suits, their jackets removed - walk to their waiting families in the crowded parking lot. Kids climb out and greet their fathers and the occasional mother.

FADE INTO

110 OMITTED 110

111 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY 111

A sunny day in Westport.

112 EXT./INT. HELENE'S HOUSE / DONNY'S CAR - DAY 112

Donny's Cadillac is parked in the driveway. The house is now painted a different color. Helene and Donny sit in the car for a beat and then Helene gets out.

113 OMITTED 113

114 EXT. GARDEN - DAY

114

A YOUNG WOMAN with a ONE YEAR OLD baby on her hip listens as Helene walks her through the garden.

HELENE

The black-eyed Susans will just take over the Shasta daisies but somehow they all survive. The perennials are relentless.

YOUNG WOMAN

That means they go all year round?

HELENE

Means they'll bloom each year. You don't have to replant them.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh! How easy!

HELENE

These daylilies should have stopped blooming a decade ago - and the bellflowers were here even before us!

YOUNG WOMAN

How long did you live here?

HELENE

A long time. We raised our son here.

(beat)

He's - a grown up.

(beat)

Mostly.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh.

HELENE

He's going to be starting graduate school. In the city.

YOUNG WOMAN

Nice.

HELENE

(beat)

We'll see.

YOUNG WOMAN

(beat, distracted)

Oh, we resolved that clicking sound from the broiler, thank you very much! But I wanted to ask you - it seems we have a lot of ticks in the plants - and wanted to know what you would recommend.

Helen has lost herself in the forest of flowers, touching them, smelling them, feeling the sun on her face, forgetting that she's not alone, forgetting that she no longer lives here.

HELENE

(beat)

Oh. Bug spray.

YOUNG WOMAN

Duh!

The young woman looks back at the house, distracted.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well, thank you so much for coming over and explaining this stuff to me. When I talk to the gardener I want to know what I'm saying!

Helene turns to the young woman and sadly realizes that the visit is now over.

HELENE

Okay. Right.

115 OMITTED

115

A116 INT. APARTMENT - SUMMER DAY

A116

The small place is mostly bare with just the essentials - sofa, bookshelf, a table and two chairs. Preston and Anders (with a perfect circular scar on his forehead), sit at the table finishing a take out lunch.

Preston is fiddling with the multiple remote controls for a new TV set that's perched on a table.

PRESTON

I think this one is volume.

ANDERS

No, *this* one is volume and power.
That one changes channels.

Anders glances around.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

You did good! This place is cute!

Preston glares at him.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Small. But, pleasant!

PRESTON

You're small but pleasant.

ANDERS

Well, part of that is true.

PRESTON

It's okay, Dad. It is what it is.

ANDERS

Oh, hey. I brought you some things
you might need - and some stuff to
decorate with, or whatever. Things
I didn't end up using. Use them,
don't use them.

He brings over two shopping bags.

PRESTON

Thanks.

ANDERS

Well, I gotta split.

PRESTON

Cool.

ANDERS

(nervous)

I have a date.

PRESTON

Someone should.

They hug good-bye.

ANDERS

I'll call you tomorrow.

Anders leaves. Preston looks around the room and goes over to the shopping bags, peering inside.

116 INT. GROCERY STORE - SAME DAY 116

Anders unloads his cart of groceries. The FEMALE CASHIER does a double take when she sees the scar on his forehead. He smiles at her, used to it.

117 INT. ANDERS' CONDO/KITCHEN - EVENING 117

He puts the finishing touches on a fairly elaborate meal, and is about to bring the plates into the dining room -

BARBARA (O.S.)
Explain the turtle.

118 INT. ANDERS CONDO/LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 118

We find Barbara standing before a large turtle habitat, looking at Relic.

ANDERS
One day.

He puts the plates on the table as he and Barbara sit. She admires the meal.

BARBARA
Wow. Where'd you learn how to do this?

ANDERS
I took some cooking classes with my friend.

BARBARA
How retired of you.

ANDERS
Thank you.

They eat. Anders smiles, attempting to mask his anxiety and loneliness. He almost succeeds.

119 INT. APARTMENT - EVENING 119

Preston is standing before his empty bookshelf, wondering if he's put the lobster trap in the right place. He moves it over an inch, and then turns to survey his new home with a mixture of fear and hope.

THE END