OF SOUND MIND

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FADE IN:

EXT. HILLS - HOGARTH ESTATE - DAY

A black Mercedes sedan slowly rolls along a green, grassy hill. The car approaches a wooded area.

The car stops. Four people exit.

FRANKLIN PEAKE, 55, emerges from the driver’s door. He wears a finely tailored navy suit. Franklin has receding gray hair, piercing blue eyes, an air of distinction.

HILDA HOGARTH, 54, exits from the passenger side. She wears a black dress. She looks good for her age, but it appears Botox and scalpels had a part in that.

GRAYSON HOGARTH, 30, climbs out of the back seat. He wears a navy blazer, khaki pants, striped tie with white shirt. He has curly brown hair. His mouth has a natural sneer to it.

MIRANDA HOGARTH, 28, emerges after her brother. She also wears a black dress. She is portly. Her dress is low cut and too tight. She bulges everywhere.

Grayson looks into the woods. Behind him, the rolling green hills seem to go on forever.

GRAYSON
I haven’t been to this part of the estate since I was a kid.

Miranda turns to Franklin.

MIRANDA
Franklin, are you sure we have to do this here? Wouldn’t your office be more appropriate?

FRANKLIN
These were your father’s specific wishes, Miranda. The will is to be read at the clearing and only there.

Franklin walks to the back of the car, opens the trunk. He retrieves an old-fashioned picnic basket made of wicker.

GRAYSON
A picnic basket. How gloriously droll.
HILDA
Grayson, please. Respect your father’s wishes.

GRAYSON
Oh, spare me, Mother.

FRANKLIN
Now, Edgar left this basket at my office two weeks ago. I haven’t opened it, per his request. All he told me was to have the family enjoy a picnic together at the clearing before I play the dvd.

Franklin reaches into the trunk with his other hand, pulls out a laptop computer.

Hilda wipes away a tear.

HILDA
This was his last attempt to...to bring us together.

Miranda rolls her eyes.

FRANKLIN
Shall we go?

The four of them walk into the woods.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

They reach a small clearing in the woods. In the center of the clearing is a round, wooden picnic table. It looks very old.

HILDA
He used to come here all the time. To think about things.

She wipes away another tear.

They walk to the table. Franklin sets down the basket, reaches in, pulls out a white linen tablecloth.

Grayson traces his finger along two small letters carved into the table. The letters are “GH.”

GRAYSON
I carved this here when I was seven years old. Father was furious. I told him it was the chauffeur, Gregory Hodges.

(MORE)
GRAYSON (CONT'D)
Father slapped me for lying. Then, he fired the chauffeur. Typical.

Franklin spreads the cloth over the table. He reaches into the basket and pulls out a box of wheat crackers and a small wheel of cheese.

Miranda picks up the cheese.

MIRANDA
Chauvignon Brie. Father always liked the best.

Hilda reaches into the basket, pulls out a bottle of wine. She reads the label and her eyes widen.

HILDA
Fifty-eight Margaux?

Grayson takes the bottle from her, inspects the label.

GRAYSON
My God, this was his pride and joy.

HILDA
You see? This is Edgar’s way of making amends. Now, let’s all sit down and enjoy this. Franklin, you too.

LATER

Franklin pours the last of the Margaux into Hilda’s crystal glass. Everyone else has a nearly empty glass in front of them.

HILDA
Now, wasn’t this a wonderful idea? The wine, the fresh air, the--

GRAYSON
(to Franklin)
Can we play the dvd now?

Franklin looks around the table.

FRANKLIN
Is everyone ready?

Miranda nods. Hilda wipes away a tear, then nods.

Franklin opens the computer at the edge of the table, inserts the dvd. He taps a few keys.
Within moments, EDGAR HOGARTH, 66, appears on screen. He looks old, withered and sickly. Nearly completely bald with a white moustache. He wears a suit, looks directly into the camera.

EDGAR

To my family, my daughter Miranda, my son Grayson, my wife Hilda...

thank you for coming. I hope you enjoyed the picnic. Then again, I knew you parasites could never say no to a free meal.

Grayson looks to Hilda.

GRAYSON

Making amends, huh?

Hilda lifts her hand to quiet him.

EDGAR

You’re sitting in one of my favorite places on earth. I used to sit at that table, listen to the wind whistle through the trees, watch the leaves fall, think about where I went wrong.

Edgar breaks into a spastic coughing fit.

EDGAR

Pardon me. I’ve been quite ill for some time now, as you are all well aware. I’m dying, and I know it.

Edgar clears his throat.

EDGAR

Ah, better. Before I read my will, I’d like to address each of you. Miranda.

Miranda leans forward.

EDGAR

I hope you left some cheese for the others. I could always count on you to clean your plate, as well as any other plates in the immediate vicinity. Like your brother, you’ve never married. That’s probably a good thing.

(MORE)
Undoubtedly, any person willing to marry either of you is simply after the family money. For a while, I truly wanted to have some grandchildren. Then, I realized they would only be smaller, louder versions of you.

Miranda grimaces in anger, glances around the table.

EDGAR
Grayson. What a monumental disappointment you have been. Since the time you were a child, I tried to provide you with everything. I sent you to the best boarding schools. And they inevitably sent you back to me. Sometimes for fighting, sometimes for blackmailing teachers, but usually for your sheer stupidity. By the time I was thirty, I had built up and sold three corporations. You, on the other hand, have accomplished the staggering feat of bankrolling a failed chain of dog kennels. With my money, of course. After all these years, I still had to provide you an allowance. How pitiful.

The corners of Grayson’s lips rise in anger, adding to his already natural sneer.

EDGAR
Ah, my dear, dear Hilda. You are everything a man could ever want in a wife. Except looks, a heart and a desire for sex more than twice a year. As old as I am, you somehow always made me feel older.

Hilda balls her hands into fists. She glances at Franklin, who looks away in embarrassment.

Edgar lets out another series of hacking coughs.

EDGAR
Very well. I’ll get to the will. This is why you’re here, after all. Look at you, you...grinning wolfpack. So eager to gorge on my carcass.
Edgar looks down, then holds up a piece of paper.

EDGAR
I, Edgar Allen Hogarth, being of sound mind, hereby decree this to be my final will and testament. To my daughter Miranda, to my son Grayson, and to my wife Hilda, I leave...absolutely nothing.

Edgar lowers the paper, stares into the camera.

Miranda, Grayson and Hilda stare blankly back at the screen.

EDGAR
Ah yes, the sound of jaws scraping the ground. Well, pick them up. My entire estate, including all my personal wealth and belongings, are to be donated to various charities of my choosing. The details are on these papers, which I have entrusted to my other attorney, Martin Gabriel.

Franklin furrows his brow in confusion.

GRAYSON
This is ridic--

EDGAR
Why? Right about now, you are all asking yourselves why would I do such a thing. My reasons are several. Grayson, Miranda...I know it was you that poisoned me.

MIRANDA
What?

GRAYSON
This is insane!

EDGAR
I found it odd how these strange symptoms of mine began to accumulate over the last year. Being a naturally paranoid and suspicious man, I had my doctor do a full tox-screen. They found an extremely high level of strychnine in my blood. Such a level could only be attained through slow, but constant exposure.
Hilda looks at her two children in shock.

GRAYSON
Mother, don’t believe a word he says!

Edgar holds up a small tape recorder, hits the play button. It is a tape of a phone conversation between Grayson and Miranda.

GRAYSON (V.O.)
Jesus Christ, Miranda, how long is that twisted old bastard gonna hold on?

MIRANDA (V.O.)
It won’t be much longer. I put an extra big spoonful of sugar in his oatmeal this morning. Just wait it out.

Edgar hits the stop button.

Grayson and Miranda look frozen.

EDGAR
The man I hired to investigate this matter is very good. Unfortunately, the doctors tell me that the poison has caused too much damage to my system, and that I shall not recover. So, to that end, it appears you two perpetual idiots have finally succeeded at something.

Hilda and Franklin stare at Grayson and Miranda, who gawk at each other like two trapped animals.

EDGAR
Hilda, my dear, I know you had nothing to do with my death.

Hilda smiles slightly at the screen.

EDGAR
But, since you and your lover, Franklin Peake, have been siphoning money from me for years, I suppose there was no need for you to kill me.

Hilda lets out an audible gasp. Grayson and Miranda whip their heads up in disbelief.
EDGAR
Yes, yes, I have all the
distasteful photos of the two of
you in various motel rooms,
bungalows and one particularly
sordid interlude at a highway rest
stop. I must say, Hilda, I never
knew you were that flexible.

Grayson and Miranda groan in disgust.

HILDA
He’s, he’s lying, we never, I mean,
we didn’t--

EDGAR
Franklin, I should tell you that I
have the number of the Swiss
account you’ve been transferring my
funds into. I didn’t realize your
power of attorney privileges
extended to outright theft.

Franklin’s face goes white. Beads of sweat have formed on
his brow.

EDGAR
As I said, the man I hired for this
matter is very good. If you were
to check on the status of that
account, Franklin, I think you’d
find it quite empty.

The four of them stare in shocked silence at the screen.

EDGAR
Yes, what a truly regrettable bunch
of human beings we are. I was a
bad husband and an even worse
father. Perhaps I even deserve
this fate that has befallen me.
But, as Grayson so eloquently put
it, I’m also a twisted old bastard.

Edgar coughs for several seconds.

EDGAR
There have been quite a few
revelations here today, but I have
yet to share my secret with you.
The fact is, my secret is inside
all of you.

Edgar grins.
EDGAR
Did you enjoy the Margaux? I’m sure you did.

The four of them look at their empty glasses.

EDGAR
An exceptional vintage, with a very special added ingredient.

Miranda winces in pain, grabs her stomach.

EDGAR
Some might say that the ultimate revenge would be to leave the four of you leeches penniless and destitute. I am not one of those people.

Grayson, Franklin and Hilda double over in pain. Miranda groans, falls to the ground, crawls toward the trees.

EDGAR
It won’t be much longer, I assure you.

Franklin grabs his chest, keels over. Hilda reaches toward him, but collapses face first into the brie.

EDGAR
I’ll be holding four seats for you in Hell. Just ask Satan for the Hogarth table.

Grayson falls backward onto the ground.

The clearing is still. A soft wind blows through the trees.

EDGAR
Yes, that was always one of my favorite places on earth.

The computer monitor goes black.

FADE OUT.

THE END