Family Day

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EXT. PARK -- DAY

The park is heavily wooded and mostly deserted. Traffic noise indicates a nearby road. A picnic table is covered with the aftermath of a meal - dirty plates, unfinished meals and containers of food. Four children play on nearby playground equipment, supervised by Belinda, 33, who nurses her newborn son Cameron. At the table with the rest of the adults, Peter, 34 and clean cut, calls to the eldest child.

   PETER
   Anna, I've got something for you.

Anna, a bright and happy 8 years old, comes over to him.

   ANNA
   What is it?

   PETER
   Here.

   ANNA
   Wow, a camera! Thanks, Uncle Peter!

   PETER
   No problem, sweetie. Go take pictures.

Anna runs off. Maggie, 36 and dressed sexy casual, shouts after her.

   MAGGIE
   Don't go too far!

   ANNA
   I won't, mom!

Anna's dad Jason, 36 and untidy, pushes his plate away.

   JASON
   You shouldn't have given her that.

   PETER
   It's point-and-click and I set the f-stop so everything will be in focus.

   JASON
   I mean, you shouldn't be buying her things all the time.

   MAGGIE
   Jason, give it a rest.

   JASON
   You want her to grow up spoiled?

   MAGGIE
   Don't be an ass.
PETER
It's no problem. I can afford it.

JASON
And I can't, is that it?

MAGGIE
Oh, for God's sake.

JASON
He's been rubbing it in my face ever since we got here, Maggie.

Max, 31, intervenes.

MAX
Okay, let's not do this. Family day, right? Let's be the family that gets along for a change.

JASON
Talk to Mr Success over there.

PETER
I'm just trying to help out.

JASON
I don't need your God damn help!

MAGGIE
Jason!

MAX
Jason, please.

JASON
You heard him! "Look at me, I'm the successful one".

PETER
I've worked hard to get where I am.

JASON
So have I.

PETER
And where are you, Jason? Unemployed.

JASON
Don't you dare start with me!

MAX
Enough!

Peter and Jason face off.

PETER (standing)
I'm going to go across the road and get the children some dessert.
Peter leaves.

MAGGIE
Well done, genius.

JASON
Maggie, why don't you try not being a bitch today. Just for something new.

MAX
Can you two please...

MAGGIE
If you could get that chip off your shoulder maybe you could carry some of the load in this marriage.

JASON
What the hell am I supposed to do? There's no work. I'm not the only guy downsized out of a job, but you treat me like I'm responsible for the global financial crisis.

MAGGIE
My income is the only thing keeping us fed, Jason.

JASON
Would you stop throwing that at me? You're keeping us alive, I get it! What do you want me to do?

MAGGIE
You could show some God damn gratitude, for a start!

JASON
Well, thank you! Thank you for being the breadwinner. Hey, since you do that so much better than me, maybe you could be the one to get a new job. A better paying one. Dressed like that, you could stand on street corners and meet new and richer people.

Maggie is so mad she doesn't immediately know how to respond.

MAGGIE
I should never have stayed with you. I'm going to find Anna.

Maggie leaves. Max and Jason sit in uncomfortable silence.

JASON
Say it.
MAX
I wasn't going to say anything.

JASON
No, you probably weren't. Peter couldn't resist. Neither could I, I guess. You've always been the level-headed one.

MAX
You're too much like Dad was. Both of you.

JASON
Dad did all right.

MAX
So do you.

JASON
Jesus, Max. I got fired. My wife supports me by waiting tables.

MAX
You were laid off. Along with many others.

JASON
You've kept your job. Peter Perfect's business just keeps getting better.

MAX
Jason, it's not a contest.

JASON
If it's not a contest, then why am I such a loser?

Max chooses not to respond.

JASON (CONT'D)
Are you happy, Max?

MAX
Yeah, I am. I have a wife and four gorgeous kids that I love very much.

Max looks towards Belinda, who smiles and waves.

JASON
I don't know if Maggie and I are going to make it this time.

MAX
You managed last time.

JASON
That was different. We got our miracle last time.
Anna runs up to them, waving the camera.

ANNA
Daddy, look at my photos!

JASON
Show me, honey.
    (scrolling through)
Wow, they're beautiful. What's this one?

ANNA
That's a bird.

JASON
That's great, precious. Show your Uncle Max.

MAX
(looks)
Hey, they're really pretty. Just like you. Anna, sweetie, I think your mom is looking for you. She went that way.

ANNA
Okay.

Anna scampers off.

JASON
That's our miracle girl.

MAX
She's beautiful.

JASON
Maggie wanted children so badly. When we found out how unlikely it was, she kind of... disappeared inside herself. There was nothing left to hang the marriage on. Anna saved us.

MAX
You'll get through this, too.

JASON
She's working nightmare hours and we spend all our time snapping at each other. I don't know how to fix this, Max. I don't know if I even want to.

MAX
Do you love her?

JASON
I don't know. She's not the person she used to be.
MAX
Are you?

JASON
No, I guess not. Since the layoff, I feel useless.

MAX
You're a great father.

JASON
That doesn't pay the bills.

MAX
What I'm saying is that work isn't the only measure of success. Anna is a great kid. Be proud of that.

JASON
She's the greatest thing that ever happened to me. And I can't even support...

Jason trails off, fighting tears.

JASON (CONT'D)
I hate this. Tell me what to do, Max.

MAX
I think you need a plan.

JASON
I don't know where to start.

MAX
Start in the most important place. At home.

JASON
(thinking)
Home. Yeah. I guess I could finally fix the back window. There are enough chores around the house to keep me busy while I'm looking for work.

MAX
And that would help Maggie to see you're putting in an effort.

JASON
Maybe it would. I guess I have been kind of prickly lately. She deserves better.

MAX
New plan, new man.

JASON
Worth a shot. Thanks, Max.
They shake hands. Anna runs up, camera in hand.

ANNA
I took more photos, Daddy.

JASON
(scrolling through)
That's terrific, sweetie. Where's your mother?

ANNA
Don't know.

MAX
She must be getting worried if she's still looking for you, kiddo. Maybe we should go look for her.
(Jason is silent)
Jason?

But Jason has gone still and tense. He hands Max the camera.

JASON
I don't think she wants to be found right now.

MAX
(off picture)
Oh, shit.

JASON
Anna, go play with your cousins, okay.

ANNA
Can I take my camera?

JASON
Not right now. I want to show your pictures to your mother.

ANNA
Do you think she'll like them?

Jason doesn't answer.

MAX
Go on, honey. We'll call you soon.

Anna runs to join her cousins. Jason takes the camera back.

JASON
Did you know about this?

MAX
Jason, we don't know what "this" is.
JASON
I think it's pretty God damn obvious, don't you?

MAX
You had a fight. This doesn't mean anything.

JASON
We'll know soon.

Peter and Maggie return. Peter carries a bag full of ice-cream blocks.

PETER
Just desserts.
(off their expressions)
What?

Jason hands the camera to Peter. He sees the photo and goes still.

JASON
Nothing to say?

PETER
Good camera. Even the background is in focus.

JASON
Don't. Joke. About. This.

MAGGIE
What the hell are you playing at now?

She grabs the camera, sees the photo and goes white.

JASON
Explain.

PETER
Jason...

JASON
Not you. Her.

MAGGIE
I was upset, okay? Jesus Christ, after the way you acted I needed a bit of comfort, that's all. Peter happened to be there.

PETER
It was...

JASON
(to Peter)
Shut up.

(MORE)
JASON (CONT'D)
(to Maggie)
You haven't kissed me like that since we dated.

MAGGIE
When we dated, you actually cared about me! You haven't touched me in months, and God forbid you should utter a kind word to me. Since you lost your job, you've been so wrapped up in your misery you haven't had time for anything else. You've been a complete asshole, and I've had enough of it.

JASON
How long?

MAGGIE
Long enough.

Jason digests this.

JASON
I was just saying you deserved a new man. I didn't realise you already had one.

MAGGIE
Don't you go all self-righteous, you jerk. This was your fault. I tried to be understanding, but you'd already gone. When your job vanished, so did you.

JASON
You know, before Anna, I was terrified you were going to leave me. The day you told me you were pregnant was the best day of my life, because I knew we were going to be all right.

MAGGIE
You're so God damn self-centred. Whenever something threatens your manhood, you sink into this black depression. It's just like the last time. I'm not going through that again.

JASON
I knew Peter was a prick but I didn't expect this from you. There's no way you could have hurt me more. We're better off without you.

MAGGIE
Oh, no you don't. Anna stays with me.
JASON
Cold day in hell, Maggie.

MAGGIE
You don't have a job, Jason. How are you going to support her?

JASON
I'm not the unfaithful one.

MAGGIE
The courts will take my side!

JASON
She's my daughter!

PETER
No, she isn't.

Everyone is blindsided by this statement.

JASON
What did you say?

MAX
Oh, shit.

MAGGIE
Peter, no.

PETER
There was no miracle, Jason. You were told you couldn't father children, and you can't.

JASON
You asshole!

MAX
Oh, shit.

MAGGIE
For God's sake!

PETER
It's past time, Maggie. This needs to be said. Tell me the truth.

Jason can't trust himself to speak. Everyone waits on Maggie. She gathers herself, and addresses Jason.

MAGGIE
It was just one time. We were in trouble and I was lonely and Peter was there. That was the only time.

JASON
Until now.

MAGGIE
Until now.
JASON
Anna?

MAGGIE
I don't know. That's the truth, Jason. I never tried to find out.

PETER
Testing will prove it. She's not yours.

JASON
If you say another word, I will break you in half.

PETER
Not going to happen.

Jason goes for him. Max intercepts.

PETER (CONT'D)
Violence is going to look really good at the custody hearing.

MAX
He's right, Jason! Stop! It's not worth it!

Jason quivers with the effort of refraining from hitting Peter.

PETER
Just one more way for you to be impotent.

Jason goes for him again. Max stops him again.

MAX
Jason, no! Back off! You can't touch him!

PETER
Damn straight.

(MAX (turning on Peter)
I, however, don't have that problem. So if you say anything else, Peter, I swear to you the next two things you see will be my fist, followed by a paramedic.

PETER
You'd never...

Max raises a fist.

PETER (CONT'D)
All right! Jesus!

MAGGIE
I'm sorry, Jason.
JASON
I'll bet. New plan, new man.

MAGGIE
Go to hell.

JASON
No thanks. I'd rather stay out of your neighborhood.

Anna rejoins the group.

ANNA
Did you like my photos, mommy? Mommy?

The adults make an effort to be normal.

MAGGIE
They're beautiful, honey. Come on, let's go home.

ANNA
Can't we stay for a bit longer?

MAGGIE
No. It's over. Give your father a hug.

ANNA
Why?

JASON
I'm going to be staying with Uncle Max for a little while, sweetheart.

ANNA
Are you in trouble, daddy?

JASON
No, sweetie. I just have to help Uncle Max around the house for a while.

ANNA
Okay.
   (she hugs Jason)
Bye.

JASON
I love you, baby girl.

ANNA
Love you, daddy.

Anna takes Maggie's hand and they walk away. Peter looks at Max and Jason. He leaves without saying anything.

MAX
Well, that's quite a kick in the balls.
JASON
It is that.

MAX
You okay?

JASON
I think so, yeah. The odd thing is that already I can see the upside.

MAX
You must have 2020 vision to see it from here.

JASON
Don't get me wrong, I still want to smash the prick. But this is a definite end. We've been hanging on so long there's a kind of relief in it. And she can't bring me lower than this. There's nowhere to go but up.

MAX
New man, new plan.

JASON
Something like that.

MAX
I admire your attitude, big brother. What about Anna?

JASON
She's my miracle girl. And no accident of genetics is going to change that.

Max nods his agreement. They reflect on the situation.

MAX
You know, there's one more really good thing to come out of this.

JASON
What's that?

MAX
We get to eat their ice-cream.

Max grabs one for each of them and calls to his kids to partake of the bounty.

FADE OUT: