

PRODIGAL

an original screenplay by

Chris Courtney Martin

WGA Registration: 1819628

Chris Courtney Martin  
(267)235-7272  
chriscourtneymartin@gmail.com

FADE IN.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

A team of EMTs push a gurney through the wing. The patient--

ALEX PARKER, white, 30. Longish hair. Five o'clock shadow. Crudely beautiful, even with a breathing tube and face full of gore.

ZORA(V.O.)

Oscar Alexander Parker died on the fifteenth of February. The day after Valentine's Day. The day after he turned thirty.

His hand twitches.

He FLATLINES.

ZORA (CONT'D)

It was messy, tragic and a little poetic. Not unlike how he lived.

An EMT glances down at Alex, shouts something inaudible over his shoulder.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I can't start from the beginning. The early details escape me. But I can start from the beginning of the end: the return of the Prodigal Son.

His head lolls to the side.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Three months ago.

A dignified three-story home in East Falls, Pennsylvania.

DING DONG.

BRENDA BILLINGS lies asleep on the chaise. She's 52, white, gracefully aged everywhere but around her eyes.

Her foot twitches, barely taps the half-empty wine bottle on the floor.

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

DING DONG.

RICHARD BILLINGS slams his index cards down on his desk. He's black, 58. Reminiscent of a menswear mannequin in looks and demeanor.

DING DING DING DING--

RICHARD

Does nobody hear the door? Anybody?

He stands, crosses to the door of his study.

ZORA(O.S.)

I got it, Daddy!

ZORA BILLINGS, black, 24, zips by the study door. She's heavyset, sports a short-cropped afro and too many conflicting patterns.

He shakes his head, retakes his seat.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

DING DING DING--

ZORA

HOLD ON! Jesus Chri--

She opens the door.

Alex leans against the door frame, backpack slung over his shoulder. He clutches a tattered hardcover of *Othello*.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Alex.

ALEX

Zora. Where's Mascha?

Zora plays with the hem of her sleeve.

ZORA

She retired last year. Daddy figured we didn't need to replace her.

ALEX

Hmm. Fiscally conservative. So, who washes the windows, now? Or do you do that, too?

Alex slips past her.

ZORA

Can I help you with your bags, or..?

ALEX

Shouldn't I be helping YOU with your bags? Richard would spring an ulcer if I were anything less than gentlemanly to his sweet pearl of the world.

Zora shrugs.

ZORA

I don't have any bags. I live here.

Alex smirks.

ALEX

Joking. Besides, all I've got to my name is this one bag. And Willie Shakespeare, here, of course. Where is he by the way?

ZORA

Stratford-upon-Avon, if I remember correctly.

He blinks.

ZORA (CONT'D)

That was a joke.

ALEX

Hmm. Well, good to see you're getting better at those.

Zora frowns, clears her throat.

ZORA

Your mother's on the couch--

ALEX

Passed out.

She shifts her weight.

ZORA

Sleeping.

ALEX

And Cecilia?

ZORA

She's with the au pair.

Alex laughs.

ALEX

I can see we're not so fiscally conservative that Brenda actually has to be a mother.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex walks past his sleeping mother without a glance.

Zora follows him to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Alex slings his bag over the back of a chair.

ZORA

You, uh, you look really good.

Alex goes in the fridge, pulls out a beer.

ALEX

Not exactly the hot junkie mess you remember, huh?

He cracks into the beer.

Zora stares at him.

ZORA

Should you be--

ALEX

Relax. I was addicted to coke, not pale ale. You won't catch me sucking dick on the corner for a Yard's, okay?

ZORA

I mean, aren't you on medicine or--

Alex pulls a face.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--

ALEX

Here.

He crosses to her, sits the beer in front of her.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You could probably use this more than me.

ZORA  
Oh, no, thank you. I don't really  
drink.

Alex sits across from her, smiles.

ALEX  
Don't drink, don't smoke. What do  
you do?

Zora looks up at him.

He reaches across the table, grabs the beer, takes a sip.

ZORA  
Well, I do grad school. Speaking of  
which, I've got some work to get out  
of the way before I help Brenda with  
the food.

She stands.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Excuse me.

Zora heads out of the kitchen.

ALEX  
Hey! Hey, hey, Zora--

He jumps up, heads after her.

Zora turns to him.

Alex pulls her into an awkward hug.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
It's good to see you.

She hesitates, taken aback.

ZORA  
I-- You, too.

Zora returns the embrace.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Welcome home, Alex.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Zora chops parsley at the cutting board. Beside her--

NADIA, 24, washes vegetables in the sink. She's black, petite, well-put-together. Stunning in every way. Her engagement ring is just as stunning.

NADIA

He's never hugged you before?

ZORA

No. I mean, not that I can remember.

NADIA

Really? Damn. I knew your family had issues, but--

Zora throws a sprig of parsley at her.

NADIA (CONT'D)

I'm kidding! Kidding!

ZORA

Speaking of families, why aren't you with yours?

NADIA

Damn, girl. I thought we were family.

Zora dumps her chopped herbs in a bowl.

ZORA

You know exactly what I mean.

NADIA

Well, this is the first Thanksgiving where my family and Chris's family are doing the whole together thing.

Nadia shakes out another handful of parsley and sets it on the cutting board.

ZORA

And you're avoiding the hell out of it.

NADIA

Yes, ma'am.

ZORA

How else would I get you to submerge that small country on your left hand in veggie water?

NADIA

That's not the only reason why. Who else was gonna help you prep, Zora-rella? Not Miss Brenda.

ZORA  
(chopping)  
She's under a lot of stress with  
this campaign.

NADIA  
Honey, please. Your father is the  
one running for office, not her. I  
guess it's for the best. Otherwise  
y'all might be eating a half-done  
turkey seasoned with just salt, pepper  
and white privilege.

Zora holds back a laugh.

ZORA  
Stop it!

She swats Nadia with a dish towel.

Nadia sprinkles water on Zora.

Zora SQUEAKS.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - SAME

Alex sits on the bed, book in his lap. On the cover--  
Two lines of coke. He snorts one with a rolled up receipt.

KNOCK KNOCK

ALEX  
HOLD ON!

He licks up the second line, stashes his baggie under the  
pillow along with the receipt.

The door opens.

Brenda comes in, closes the door behind her.

BRENDA  
I'm sorry if I disturbed you, sweetie.  
Were you resting?

ALEX  
Reading.

BRENDA  
Oh, that's nice.



ALEX

I didn't want to wake you when I was coming in.

He rubs his nose.

BRENDA

Honey, you could have woken me. I would have loved to see you when you got in.

ALEX

Well, you see me now.

Brenda steps forward, timid.

BRENDA

Can I have a hug?

Alex lifts his arms.

ALEX

Sure you can.

Brenda wraps him in a tight hug, kisses his forehead and cheek. He returns the embrace half-heartedly.

BRENDA

Oh, I missed you.

She strokes his hair, brushes her knuckles across his stubble.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

You look good. You look so healthy.

ALEX

Healthy. Isn't that what you say when someone's gotten chunky?

Brenda laughs, tears well up in her eyes.

BRENDA

No, baby, you look great.

ALEX

Thanks, Brenda.

She sits beside him.

BRENDA

You know, Alex, I was sort of hoping that maybe you'd call me "Mom." Since we're working on things.

ALEX

I don't know. Old habits die hard. I might have to go back to rehab for that one.

Her smile falls a little.

BRENDA

Don't worry about it, okay?

ALEX

Okay.

He lies back against the pillows.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAWN - DAY

Feature: Richard's grinning face on a lawn sign. "BILLINGS FOR GOVERNOR."

Multiple signs form a semi-circle on the manicured yard. In the center--

Alex lays out shirtless on a blanket. He reads *Othello* through dark sunglasses.

A shadow sprawls across Alex's face. He lifts his gaze to--

Richard. He frowns, disgusted.

RICHARD

Was the backyard not dramatic enough for you?

Alex lifts his shades.

ALEX

If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were ashamed of me, Councilman.

RICHARD

It's the end of November.

ALEX

Tell that to global climate change.

Alex rolls out of the shadow.

ALEX (CONT'D)

And Gore called this "inconvenient."

He stretches, flexes his abs.

Richard averts his eyes, crosses his arms.

RICHARD

Why don't you, uh, make yourself useful and go help Zora in the kitchen?

Alex sits up.

ALEX

But, Richard-- Aren't I already useful? Isn't that why I'm here? So the whole jolly Brady Bunch can follow our fearless leader along the campaign trail?

RICHARD

Alex, I've got a lot of work to do and I really can't spare any time for this. So, please, get up and help your sister in the kitchen.

Alex stands.

ALEX

Don't call Zora my sister. Because, you, see, that would imply that you're my father and we both know how you feel about that.

They stare each other down, cold.

Alex strides off toward the house.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Zora, Richard, Brenda, Alex and CECILIA (6, biracial, a doll of a child) sit around the table.

Dress is semi-formal. They eat in almost complete silence.

THUD. THUD. THUD.

Zora gently nudges Cecilia.

ZORA

Hey! Cut that out, Lug Nut.

Cecilia stills.

Zora steals a pea off her plate, winks.

Brenda gathers mashed potatoes on her fork.

BRENDA

You know, Zora, honey-- I love that headpiece you have on. You look adorable.

Zora touches a hand to her Dutch wax headband.

ZORA

Oh-- thank you.

RICHARD

You do look lovely, baby.

He cuts into his turkey.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Though, the hair is still going to take a little getting used to.

Zora stops chewing.

ZORA

I thought you'd be used to it by now, since this is the way it grows out of my head.

RICHARD

I know. It's just that you haven't had it that short since you were a baby. You always wore it straight. That's all.

ZORA

Daddy, Lupita Nyong'O and Viola Davis wear their hair like this.

Alex swirls his fork around his gravy streaks.

ALEX

Well, just because it's good enough for two of the most beautiful women in the world--

BRENDA

Alex.

RICHARD

It's a good thing neither of them have to find a job in the real world, isn't it? That's all I'm saying.

ZORA

Let's just-- Can we not?

RICHARD

I was just saying. Fine. I won't speak.

Zora picks at her food in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Zora puts away leftovers.

Cecilia darts in, barefooted.

Zora sits down her cling wrap.

ZORA

Lug Nut!

She stoops down, scoops Cecilia up.

ZORA (CONT'D)

What are you doing up? You should be in bed.

CECILIA

I think your hair is beautiful, Zizi.

Zora melts a little.

ZORA

And I think your everything is beautiful, CiCi.

She gives her butterfly kisses.

Cecilia giggles.

Alex stands in the doorway.

ALEX

I think your hair is beautiful, too. Do I get one of those?

Their eyes meet.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Cecilia wanted to see if she could grift another piece of pie out of you. And I AM the bad influence, after all.

Zora smiles down at Cecilia.

ZORA

So, that's why you're being so nice to me, huh? You know how Daddy feels about you eating after a certain hour, especially sweets.

She sets her down with a kiss.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Go on up to bed. G'night.

Cecilia pouts, trudges away.

ALEX

Cold world.

ZORA

Tell it to your stepfather. He saw an episode of Maury with obese kids and now he's the sugar police. If he can save one of us, right?

She places a tray in the fridge.

ALEX

No offense-- None to you, anyway-- but you don't have to ride your own ass when Richard's not here to do it.

ZORA

Oh, stop it. I was joking.

ALEX

Were you?

ZORA

Look. I know you don't like my dad, but he's not the devil, okay? He comments because he cares.

ALEX

That's the same logic that abuse victims use.

ZORA

You know, neglect is a form of abuse. But I don't stick my nose in your relationship with Brenda.

Alex laughs, taken aback.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

ALEX

No, you're not. Nor should you be.

He slips out of the doorway.

Zora leans against the counter, watches him go.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Zora pulls her mug out of the Keurig, adds a dash of creamer. She wastes a little on her robe.

ZORA

Crap.

Brenda sweeps in, fully dressed.

BRENDA

Good morning, sweetheart.

ZORA

Brenda. You're up.

BRENDA

Of course I am. Remember? It's Black Friday.

Zora reacts.

ZORA

Right. And we're doing that thing where we elbow people for merchandise.

BRENDA

If you don't want to go-- I mean, I thought it would be nice--

ZORA

No, no, I want to go. I do.

BRENDA

Well, great. It'll be great.

Zora forces a smile, takes a sip of her coffee.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. BRENDA'S CAR - LATER

A pretty SUV. Newest model. Just a couple of small dents on the body.

They crawl in traffic.

Brenda looks over at Zora from the passenger's seat.

BRENDA

I really appreciate you driving.  
It's just my migraines--

ZORA

I know, Bren. It's fine, really.

Her hands tighten on the steering wheel.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I just thought you might want to  
hang out with Alex today or something.

Brenda scoffs.

BRENDA

But would Alex want to hang out with  
me?

A beat.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

You know, thirty years and I'm still  
not quite sure where I went wrong.

ZORA

Brenda...

Brenda fiddles with her purse.

BRENDA

Every time he calls me "Brenda" I  
swear to God, I just want to scream  
a little bit. When Cecilia learned  
to say "Mommy" it was one of the  
happiest moments of my life. Just to  
be called that again.

Brenda opens her bag, digs for a tissue.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

He was such a beautiful little boy,  
Zora. You should have seen him. Face  
full of freckles and these big,  
sparkly eyes. I'm sure I've got a  
picture back at the house.

She dabs at her eyes.

ZORA

Well, he's still beautiful.

Brenda blinks.



ZORA (CONT'D)

I mean, he's been through some stuff, obviously. And he's messed up over the years but he's still that little boy somewhere inside, right? He's your son. And whether you know it or not, whether he knows it or not, he loves you.

Brenda places her hand on Zora's shoulder.

Zora pats it.

CUT TO:

INT. MALL - LATER

Zora picks at a cheese-stuffed pretzel in the food court. To her left--

A STRAIGHT COUPLE, late teens, slides into line at the Sbarro. He looks like a Pacsun model. She is probably an Instagram queen. They kiss.

Zora rolls her eyes, swivels her chair in the opposite direction.

A LESBIAN COUPLE, mid-20's. They share the same seat, eat from each other's Chinese food plates.

Zora sighs, wraps up her pretzel, pushes it toward the center of the table.

Brenda plops her bags on the table.

Zora starts.

BRENDA

So, I got your father's present taken care of and picked up something for my mother. But I wanted to ask you, what's the name of that little show CiCi likes? With the horses?

ZORA

My Little Pony?

BRENDA

Duh! Of course!

She smacks herself on the head.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Did you see anything cute with their faces on it?

Zora shakes her head.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
Well, I'm sure we'll find something.

Brenda looks up from her list.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
Where are your bags, sweetie?

ZORA  
I did all my shopping online.

BRENDA  
Really? If I'd have known, I wouldn't have bothered you about coming out with me. But I'm just glad we get to spend the time.

She kisses Zora on the forehead.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
Want to do Macy's?

Zora forces a smile, rises.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

A spacious backyard. Mostly grass and trees, but some flowers and shrubs dot the area around the porch.

An old swingset stands several yards out from the house.

Nadia and Zora straddle the swings, facing each other.

Zora rests her forehead on the chain.

Nadia picks at her split ends.

NADIA  
And then his mother straight up asks me if I'm a virgin. Like, what the fuck?

ZORA  
Well, she's a minister, Nadia. It comes with the territory.

NADIA  
So is my dad but he didn't ask Chris about his body count during half-time.

ZORA

But your dad is a cool minister.

NADIA

Just because he has praise mimes in his church doesn't mean he's cool. He's just somewhat sensitive to social norms. Unlike Mother Dawn.

A beat.

NADIA (CONT'D)

I can't believe I'm marrying into this family. You're so lucky that you're a long way off from this kind of shit.

Zora reacts.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Oh, come on. You know what I mean, Z. You're getting a Master's Degree. And knowing you, you'll probably get your Ph.D. Between that and publishing books you'll be so beyond all this. You're tuned out of the black, Christian, petite-bourgeoisie status quo.

ZORA

Are you saying you're marrying Christopher because of the status quo?

NADIA

No, I'm just saying my life looks a lot like my mother's. And my grandmother's.

Zora takes Nadia's hands in hers.

Nadia looks down at their hands.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Alex, in just his boxers, cuts himself a piece of pie, plops it on a napkin.

Richard enters, grabs a bottle of water from the fridge. He glances at Alex over his shoulder.

RICHARD  
Would you mind putting on some  
clothes?

Alex licks his fingers.

ALEX  
What is it about my body that makes  
you so uncomfortable, Richard?

RICHARD  
My daughters live here. A young lady,  
a family friend, is visiting with  
Zora right now. Anybody is liable  
to drop by.

ALEX  
It's just skin. Besides, we're all  
family, right?

Richard cracks open his water.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
And if anyone else happens to see  
me, well, send me a fruit basket to  
say "thanks" for the spike in your  
popularity rating.

Alex strides past him.

Richard grabs his arm.

Alex jerks away from him.

The pie PLOPS to the floor.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Don't you touch me. Don't you FUCKING  
touch me again.

Alex storms off.

Richard sighs, stoops to pick up the mess.

ZORA  
Daddy?

Richard looks up.

She stands in the doorway to the backyard.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Everything okay?

RICHARD  
Peachy and keen, Princess. Peachy  
and keen.

Zora rushes to his side, gathers up the rest of the pie.

RICHARD (CONT'D)  
Nadia went home?

She smiles over at him.

ZORA  
Mmhhh. I could drill you on your  
platform?

Richard laughs.

RICHARD  
You don't need to drill me on my own  
beliefs.

He rises, grabs a Lysol wipe, hands it to Zora.

ZORA  
But I can drill you so that you  
articulate them in the best way.

RICHARD  
Isn't this a holiday?

ZORA  
We're just under a year from  
elections.

She wipes up the streaks of pie filling.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Abortion.

RICHARD  
Every woman has a right to choose  
and that right should be protected  
on a federal level.

ZORA  
Higher Education?

Zora tosses the wipe away.

RICHARD  
We invest in our community  
colleges, but insist that they freeze  
tuition.

ZORA  
And gun control?

Richard folds his arm.

RICHARD  
Well, you know I've always kept protection in this house. A push for anything more than a moderate reform would be a little hypocritical--

ZORA  
Do you remember which party you're in?

Richard laughs.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Daddy, you're not Richard Billings, Protective Suburban Dad. Or even Richard Billings, City Councilman. The minute you announced, you became Richard Billings, Gubernatorial Candidate. You can't sit on the fence about anything anymore.

He pulls Zora in for a hug.

RICHARD  
When did you get so smart?

ZORA  
Sometime between you cutting the cord and the doctor smacking my butt.

They share a laugh, tighten the embrace.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Brenda lies out on the chaise, half-conscious.

Cecilia tugs on her hand, pouts.

CECILIA  
Mommy. Mommy, you promised.

BRENDA  
Baby, can't you get Layla to take you?

CECILIA  
Layla's not here.

BRENDA

What?

CECILIA

She went home.

Brenda leans up on her elbow.

BRENDA

I'm sorry, but Mommy has a really, really bad headache. Why don't you ask your sister, okay? Go ask Zora.

Alex peeks his head in the doorway.

ALEX

What's she want?

Cecilia jumps up and down.

CECILIA

The park! The park! The park! The pa--

BRENDA

Cecilia, PLEASE.

She touches and hand to her temple.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

She wants me to take her to the park, but I'm just not feeling up to it.

Alex shrugs.

ALEX

I can take her to the park.

BRENDA

Really?

Cecilia hops toward Alex.

CECILIA

The park! The park! The park!

ALEX

Yeah, sure.

He scoops her up.

BRENDA

I don't know, maybe you should ask Zora to go with you.

ALEX

What, do you think I'm going to sell  
your baby for drug money?

BRENDA

Alex! Don't say that in front of  
her.

Alex holds Cecilia out, pretends to examine her.

ALEX

With all this hyperactivity, I think  
I could only fetch a couple grand  
for this one. The Jolie-Pitts are  
gonna love you.

Cecilia giggles.

BRENDA

Oscar Alexander--

ALEX

Are you really going to give me such  
a hard time about doing you a favor?  
Listen, if you want to be serenaded  
by the sounds of a screaming child--

He lowers Cecilia to the floor.

She WHINES.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Good luck with your, uh, migraine. I  
hear a greasy breakfast helps.

Brenda waves her hand.

BRENDA

Fine, then. Don't take Zora. I don't  
care.

Zora comes in from the kitchen with a mug of coffee.

ZORA

Don't take Zora where?

ALEX

Family outing.

CECILIA

The park! The park!



ZORA

I don't know-- I've got a lot of work to do. I have a project that's due right after break and--

Cecilia whispers in Alex's ear.

ZORA (CONT'D)

What?

ALEX

A certain someone seems to think you're a bit of a nerd and you should probably loosen up before a pocket protector grows out of your chest.

Cecilia giggles.

ZORA

She did not say that.

ALEX

Never said it was her.

Alex carries Cecilia off into the foyer.

Zora rolls her eyes, follows behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Zora and Alex walk on either side of Cecilia. Each hold a hand.

Cecilia crunches every leaf they pass under her purple Uggs.

ZORA

(to Alex)

I thought you didn't want me to come.

ALEX

What I didn't want was a chaperone. I'd never let anything happen to the kid. What, am I gonna put crack in her applesauce? I'm an asshole not a monster.

Zora shoots him a look.

ALEX (CONT'D)

She's wearing actual earmuffs.

ZORA

Nobody thinks you're a monster. I'm just used to handling her. They say she's got ADHD. It can be hard.

ALEX

I had the same thing, supposedly. Anyone who moves too fast for Brenda and her migraines...

Cecilia sets eyes on the jungle gym. She breaks free, runs straight for it.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Thank God Cecilia has you.

ZORA

And she has you, too, now. Right?

ALEX

Trust me, she doesn't want me.

ZORA

Don't be ridiculous, she loves you. I've never seen her take to anyone so fast.

Alex shrugs, plops down on a bench.

ALEX

I gotta admit, it's kind of nice to have someone in the house who doesn't look at me like I carry all the plagues of Egypt.

Zora reacts.

ZORA

I don't look at you like that.

Alex meets her eyes.

ALEX

Only like I just escaped from Area 51.

ZORA

That's not true. At least, I don't mean to.

ALEX

You always looked at me that way. If it were conscious, you'd have noticed by now.

ZORA

You never talked to me, Alex. How was I supposed to look at you like anything other than a mystery? Our parents have been married for, what fifteen years? You've said more to me over this break than the entire time we've been family.

ALEX

You were a kid. The difference between ten and fifteen feels a lot bigger than the difference between twenty-four and twenty-nine. Now, we're both in that limbo where everyone is supposed to have their shit together but no one really does.

ZORA

I don't know, I'd say I'm pretty together.

Alex pulls a pack of Marlboros and a Zippo lighter from his pocket.

ALEX

I'm sure you would.

Zora eyes him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm downwind.

He lights a cigarette.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Want one?

ZORA

I've got enough problems, thank you.

He raises his eyebrows.

ALEX

Do you really?

ZORA

I do, actually. Academia at the graduate level is incredibly stressful. I'm trying to decide whether to pursue my Ph.D. and where. Not mention supporting my dad through his campaign and my best friend through her wedding.

ALEX

I'm just saying, those sound like  
some pretty cushy problems to me.

ZORA

I'm a single black woman in America.  
Of all the adjectives to describe my  
life, "cushy" isn't exactly the first  
that comes to mind.

Alex takes a drag, amused.

ALEX

Touche.

ZORA

Indeed.

THUD.

Cecilia WAILS in the distance.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Damn it!

They take off running toward her.

EXT. PARK - LATER

Alex carries Cecilia on his shoulder.

A small cut mars her bottom lip, but she sleeps peacefully.

Zora walks beside them.

A JOGGER, 50's, stops in her tracks on the sidewalk. She  
smiles, warm, pops out one of her earbuds.

JOGGER

(softly)  
Oh, my-- She's precious.

ALEX

That, she is. Thank you.

Zora looks between them.

JOGGER

Of course! Y'all enjoy your night!

She jogs off.

ZORA

(calls after her)  
She's not ours!

Zora turns to Alex.

He shrugs.

ZORA (CONT'D)

You've got issues.

ALEX

Well, you're the one who let me knock you up. Darling.

Zora fights a smile.

ZORA

Nasty.

She speeds up.

Alex maintains his pace behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Organized chaos.

Clothes litter the floor, but in designated areas.

Papers and books tower dangerously on the desk beside Zora's open laptop.

Zora gazes at herself in the full length mirror. She's a vision in violet, draped in a floor-length, empire-waist gown.

Richard stands in the doorway. He smiles.

RICHARD

You look just like your mother.  
Beautiful.

Zora spins around, smooths the skirt of the gown.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Is this what you'll be wearing to the fundraiser?

ZORA

This is what I'll be wearing to Nadia's wedding.

RICHARD

Well, why not get your money's worth out of it?

They share a laugh.

He pulls her into a hug, kisses her forehead.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Any telling when Nadia will be the one in the bridesmaid dress?

ZORA

Daddy...

RICHARD

I know, I know. I am very proud of the work you're doing and have yet to do. Living up to your namesake and all that. But, I'm not getting any younger. I'm just wondering when I might hear the pitter-patter of little feet.

Zora sits on the bed.

ZORA

You mean, other than your six-year-old's?

Richard sits beside her.

RICHARD

Fatherhood is a beautiful thing but grandfatherhood is a whole new frontier.

ZORA

Maybe Alex will--

Richard gives her a look.

RICHARD

I don't wish that on any child. If he doesn't have a couple waiting to jump out of the woodwork already.

ZORA

He's not a bad person.

RICHARD

As much as I admire and even envy your ability to see the best in people--

ZORA

He really seems like he's trying. He's so good with Cecilia.

RICHARD

Truth be told, I'm not so sure I want him around Cecilia. Or you, for that matter.

ZORA

Then, why is he here? Is it about the campaign?

Richard narrows his eyes.

RICHARD

Has he been telling you that?

ZORA

No, I just--

RICHARD

Zora, Alex is here because I love Brenda and Brenda loves Alex. That is it. There's nothing else to it.

A beat.

ZORA

When did it get like this? You guys used to be okay. Didn't you? What happened?

RICHARD

I want you to promise me you'll try to keep your distance, all right?

Zora scoffs.

ZORA

Dad, this is crazy. We live in the same house.

Richard holds Zora's face in his hands.

RICHARD

Listen to me. The boy is all charm and good looks and he knows it. He's a manipulator. Don't get sucked in. You have your whole life ahead of you and if you let him, he WILL interfere just to entertain himself. Or to piss me off.

ZORA

Daddy...

Zora takes Richard's hands, pulls them from her face, slow. She clasps them tight.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
 Nothing's interfered yet, has it?  
 Has it?

Richard smiles.

Zora kisses him on the cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. MAYOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

A black-tie Who's Who of Pennsylvania Democrats.

LIVE MUSIC fills the air, courtesy of a STRING QUARTET.

Zora nurses a glass of water, just a couple of feet from--

Richard and Brenda. They schmooze with MAYOR TOWNSEND (50's)  
 and his wife LESLIE (early 40's).

TOWNSEND  
 You know, Colby is at Penn now. He  
 just started his first year.

RICHARD  
 I bet he's doing just fine, but if  
 he ever needs anything, I'm sure  
 Zora would be happy to offer him  
 some advice.

Zora looks up from her glass, smiles.

ZORA  
 Of course. Absolutely.

TOWNSEND  
 Richard, Brenda, you must be  
 incredibly proud, living under the  
 same roof with a future Pulitzer  
 Prize winner.

ZORA  
 That's incredibly kind of you, Mayor  
 Townsend-- Let's hope!

Leslie places her hand on Zora's shoulder.

LESLIE  
 Just look at you-- Already dressed  
 to receive it. You look fabulous!

ZORA  
 Oh, thank you--



Leslie runs her hand over Zora's hair.

LESLIE  
This ethnic look is so chic, I love  
it.

Zora gapes.

ZORA  
Please excuse me.

She sidles out.

Richard frowns.

Brenda takes Leslie's arm.

BRENDA  
You know, that Faberge on the  
mantelpiece is marvelous. Where did  
you find such a beautiful...

Across the room--

Alex leans against the wall in close conversation with a  
handsome male INTERN (mid-20's). They flirt.

INTERN  
My boss would kill me if I dipped  
out early, but...

ALEX  
But?

INTERN  
But if she saw you, I'm sure she'd  
understand.

Alex laughs, runs a hand through his hair.

ALEX  
Should I do a quick walk-by, then?

Zora darts past them, toward the kitchen.

Alex catches a glimpse of her from the corner of his eye,  
does a double-take.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
You hold that thought, okay? I'll be  
right back.

He follows after her.

EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Zora rushes down the back stairs.

Alex stands in the doorway.

ALEX  
Whoa! Hey, Cinderella--

Zora stops, spins around. Her face is wet with tears.

CUT TO:

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

Zora and Alex sit next to each other.

He puffs on a Marlboro.

She wipes her face with a crumbling tissue.

ZORA  
I hate these people.

ALEX  
That's the most honest thing I've  
heard all night. Why do you do it  
to yourself?

ZORA  
Do what?

ALEX  
Show up to this shit.

ZORA  
Why did you?

ALEX  
Fuckin' free seafood, man.

Zora laughs, a couple more tears fall.

Alex pulls his satin handkerchief from his suit jacket, dabs  
lightly at her face.

Zora looks at him.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
You want to get out of here?

ZORA  
More than anything. But I can't go  
home, now. Dad would kill me.

Alex scoffs.

ALEX

Home? Who the hell said anything about "home?" It's only after ten and we look too damn good.

Zora stares at him, questioning.

He grins.

CUT TO:

EXT. I-95. - LATER

A road sign: "WELCOME TO NEW YORK. The Empire State."

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE CLUB - LATER

A packed club in Manhattan.

EDM BLARES on the speakers. All other sound is null.

Zora and Alex tear up the dance floor, side by side. Their sweat glistens under the black light.

She holds a tall, near-empty glass in her hand.

A PETITE CLUB GIRL grinds with Alex.

Zora dances with a RAVER, dotted with glow-in-the-dark paint.

The Club Girl pulls a baggy of powdered MDMA out of her pocket. She sprinkles it on her tongue, pulls Alex in for a sloppy kiss.

Zora grabs Alex's face, turns him toward her.

They kiss.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - DAY

Zora lies sprawled on her bed, a hot mess, still dressed in last night's formal wear.

Richard stands in the doorway.

RICHARD

We called the police.

She stirs, moans, half-asleep.

ZORA

Hmm?

RICHARD

When we came home and neither of you were here, and you didn't return our calls, we called the police. They were here. The cops were here.

Zora sits up.

ZORA

What? Daddy, why? Why'd you do that?

RICHARD

Because I never would have thought you would pull something like this. And when the police suggested that maybe you two were out somewhere else, I said, "No. I know my daughter. She doesn't do that." Even when I remembered we had that silly Find Friends app and I saw that you were in New York-- I just knew something awful had happened because you answered none of my calls, none of my texts, and that just wasn't you. You don't cross state lines on a whim without telling anybody.

He rubs his temples.

ZORA

Dad, we were just--

RICHARD

JUST WHAT?! Just what were you doing that was more important than the most critical fundraising event of my career? What were you doing that I found him in here this morning, passed out with you, face smeared with your lipstick? Tell me, what were you JUST doing?

ZORA

Nothing happened.

RICHARD

And how would you know that? You were out cold.

ZORA

I'm not doing this, Dad, I'm going back to bed.

He SLAMS his hand against her dresser.

RICHARD

You ARE doing this! WE are doing this. Right now! You live under my roof, eat my food and go to school on my dollar-- We'll do what I say we do, whenever I say.

Zora clenches her jaw.

ZORA

You let that woman say that to me and pet me like an animal in a zoo!

RICHARD

Don't pin this on me. You're probably still drunk, or high, or whatever else--

ZORA

No, Daddy, we're DOING this, remember? I looked so quaint and "ethnic" last night, didn't I?

RICHARD

She meant it as a compliment and you know that.

She stands.

ZORA

In what world is that a compliment? Are you really so desperate to win this race that you'd sell my dignity--

RICHARD

Look at you-- WHAT DIGNITY?!

A beat.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I warned you about this. About everything. About Alex. About walking around making a-- a statement or an Afrocentric spectacle of yourself--

ZORA

What?!

RICHARD

And I was the bad guy for it, and look how you got treated. Like a spectacle.

Zora comes toward him, tugs at her hair.

ZORA

A SPECTACLE?! THIS IS ME, DAD! THIS IS MY HAIR! This is how it grows out of my head! Or did you forget that you made the mistake of marrying a black woman the first time?

RICHARD

You stop that--

ZORA

Good thing there's that "til death do us part" clause, huh? At least you got it right the second ti--

He slaps her.

Zora holds her face, frozen in shock.

RICHARD

He turned you against me. You have him to thank for that.

Richard walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. BRIDAL SHOP - DAY

Nadia stands on a stool, eyes trained on her reflection in the tri-fold mirror.

She's doll-like in her white gown.

Zora watches her.

Nadia sucks in her abdomen.

NADIA

I'm gonna need to lose a couple pounds before the wedding.

ZORA

Yeah, I mean one-hundred-and-sixteen pounds-- That's just venturing into whale territory.

Nadia spins around, steps off her stool.

NADIA

What is the matter with you? Not everything everyone says is a personal critique on you, Zora.

ZORA

Just a general critique that applies to me.

NADIA

Zora.

She steps closer.

Zora rises.

ZORA

I need to go, I have some work to finish.

NADIA

Do you expect me to believe that?

ZORA

That I'm incredibly busy? Yes, by now, I do. I'll call you.

Zora hugs her, kisses her on the cheek.

ZORA (CONT'D)

You look beautiful.

Nadia watches her leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Zora sits on the swing, types furiously on her laptop.

She stops, takes a look at what she just wrote, deletes the whole paragraph.

Alex comes up beside her, straddles the other swing.

Zora looks over at him.

He raises his eyebrows at her.

ALEX

Don't mind me. Keep calm and carry on.

ZORA

Plan on it.

She resumes typing.

ALEX

I'm sorry if I got you in trouble.

Zora scoffs.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Seriously, I am.

ZORA  
I'm twenty-four years old, I shouldn't  
be "in trouble." Especially not for  
hanging out with my...

ALEX  
Your..?

ZORA  
You.

A beat.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
He told me to stay away from you.

ALEX  
I'm sure he did. But, like a moth to  
a flame--

ZORA  
Hush.

ALEX  
You did kiss me, after all.

ZORA  
Did, I really?

ALEX  
Yes, you did. Really. Which is why  
you haven't spoken to me in something  
like three days.

ZORA  
Or I've been working.

Alex nods to the computer.

ALEX  
On that same blank page. For three  
days.

ZORA  
Nosy.

ALEX  
The proper term is "Perceptive  
American."



ZORA

Really.

She closes her laptop.

ZORA (CONT'D)

What else do you perceive about me?

ALEX

Where do I begin? Well, first of all--

He rocks on the swing.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You're a lot cooler than you seem.

ZORA

Whoa, whoa, whoa. "Than I seem?" Do I not seem cool?

ALEX

Zora. I thought ours was a relationship built on honesty and trust.

ZORA

It is. And you're not as much of a James Dean wannabe-- with your sunglasses and your white boy problems--

Alex laughs.

ALEX

Ouch! You've been hanging onto that one for a long time.

He stands.

ZORA

C'mon, I was kidding. You're not leaving, are you?

ALEX

Nope. We are.

He extends his hand to her.

She hesitates a moment, then takes it.

ZORA

Lead the way, James.

He pulls her up.

ALEX  
YOU lead the way. We're taking your  
car, Eartha.

He sticks out his tongue.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING - LATER

A clearing in Fairmount park. A nice picnic spot.

Zora and Alex lay out on a blanket.

Alex sits up just long enough to take a long hit from his  
bowl. He passes it to Zora.

She takes a healthy hit, lets it out slow.

ALEX  
You most certainly are not a virgin.

Zora laughs.

ZORA  
I might have tried it once. Or twice.  
In undergrad.

He gives her a look.

ALEX  
Now, what kind of ruffians were you  
hanging out with in college?

ZORA  
Just one ruffian, really. Preacher's  
daughter.

ALEX  
Naturally.

ZORA  
Nadia.

ALEX  
The sexy one?

Zora hits him.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
What? Is she not a very attractive  
woman?

ZORA

Of course she is. But all our lives,  
she's been The Sexy One.

ALEX

That doesn't mean you're not sexy.

Zora locks eyes with him.

ZORA

That's not what I meant.

She sits up.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Everyone assumes I'm jealous or I  
resent her, that's not it. She's not  
just The Sexy One. And I'm not just  
The Fat One. We're both more than  
that. Everyone can believe I'm smart,  
because, what else would I have going  
for me? I gotta compensate somehow,  
right? But people take a look at  
those long legs and that perfect  
skin and she's not extended the  
benefit of the doubt. Why would she  
need to use her brain? She's  
surrounded by men to do that for  
her.

Alex leans up on his elbows.

ALEX

You want to know what I think?

ZORA

You're going to tell me anyway.

ALEX

It sounds a lot less like you resent  
her, and lot more like you want her.

Zora stares him down.

ZORA

What?

ALEX

You never thought about it?

ZORA

Thought about what? Nadia?

ALEX

Sex. With Nadia.

Zora shifts, uncomfortable.

ZORA  
I'm not gay.

ALEX  
Me, neither. I'm bisexual. So are many other people in this world.

ZORA  
Congratulations. I'm not.

ALEX  
Pansexual?

ZORA  
I'm not even sure I know what that is.

ALEX  
Means that skilletts make you moist.

She bursts into a giggle fit.

ZORA  
It most definitely does not mean that.

A beat.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
I have thought about it. Briefly. Everyone has.

He lays his head on her chest.

ALEX  
Acceptance is the first step to recovery.

ZORA  
Recovery? What am I addicted to?

ALEX  
Pussy.

They erupt into giggles.

She swats him.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
There are worse things, trust me.

Zora takes another hit.

Their smoke mingles against the night sky.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are out.

Zora sits cross-legged on her bed, illuminated by the glow of her laptop.

In the search bar: "LITEROTICA.COM."

Zora scrolls, transfixed.

She bites her lip, closes the laptop.

Moonlight streams through her window, casts the top drawer of her bedside table in an enticing glow.

She sets the laptop on the foot of the bed, glances back at the side table, goes for it.

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A steady, muffled BUZZ.

Zora's panties rest on the floor.

She lies under the covers, eyes closed.

The BUZZING FADES.

A figure rises under her covers. The duvet falls back--

Nadia straddles her, pulls her into a kiss.

Zora flips her over, deepens the kiss. When it breaks--

Alex lies beneath her.

Zora hesitates.

He grabs her hips, guides her to ride him.

Zora tosses her head back.

Nadia's hand slides up her back.

Zora looks back down, sees her face once again. They flip over.

Alex stares into her eyes, rocks into her slow.

His hand runs through her hair.

Nadia's hand grips her thigh.

They're a tangle of limbs and lips. Writhing, pulsing. A rainbow of flesh.

Zora seizes, rises from the bed. Her world stops.

She exhales.

Zora melts onto the bed, alone.

The BUZZING resumes, obnoxious.

She pants where she lies, dazed and limp.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

An artisinal coffee shop. Fair trade, French press.

Zora and Nadia sit across from each other at a small table.

Nadia stares at her.

Zora frowns down at the designs in her latte.

NADIA

I had no idea any of this was going on. Why didn't you tell me?

ZORA

You've got enough on your plate with the wedding.

NADIA

I can't believe he hit you. He had no right.

A beat.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk to my dad about it?

ZORA

No. I don't want to talk to anyone else about this. I shouldn't even be talking about it in public.

NADIA

Screw the campaign. You're a grown woman, he has no business going around slapping you. Does he put his hands on Brenda?

ZORA  
No, of course not.

NADIA  
Of course not. He'd never lay a hand  
on his precious snowbunny.

Zora sighs.

Nadia takes a sip of her coffee.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
Don't hate me for what I'm about to  
say.

ZORA  
Don't say it.

NADIA  
His approach-- way out of line. But  
maybe he wasn't wrong about you  
staying away from your stepbrother.

ZORA  
What?

NADIA  
Hear me out. This guy has been in  
and out of jail and rehab and mental  
hospitals for, what, ten years? And  
your parents won't even tell you  
why. So, obviously, they know  
something about him that you don't.  
I mean, he's trouble, Zora.

Zora scoffs, shakes her head.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
I'm just saying, baby girl. Ever  
since he came home, you haven't been  
acting like yourself.

ZORA  
You mean, I haven't been acting like  
your sidekick.

NADIA  
No, I mean, you're always on Defense.  
Look at you now. Smoke coming out  
your ears just because I'm speaking  
the ugly truth about Alex.

A beat.

NADIA (CONT'D)

If I didn't know any better, Zora,  
I'd think this was about more than  
familial loyalty.

Zora laughs.

ZORA

You two have a lot more in common  
than you'd think.

Nadia eyes her a long moment.

They drink their beverages in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Zora sits on the couch with Cecilia in her lap. She plaits  
the last section of her hair.

CARTOONS play in the background.

Cecilia giggles at the TV.

Alex lounges on the chaise, reads his copy of *Othello*.

Zora glances over at him.

ZORA

How many times have you read that  
thing? It looks older than you.

ALEX

I figured you of all people would  
understand the value of this book.

ZORA

I'm more of a *Macbeth* girl, myself.

CECILIA

Who's *Macbeth*?

ALEX

She's the girl who makes your Happy  
Meals.

Zora laughs.

ZORA

He lies. It's a book. A play.

Cecilia hops up.



CECILIA  
I want to play!

ZORA  
CiCi!

Cecilia bounds off.

ALEX  
Let her go, let her go.

Zora stands, stretches.

ZORA  
No wonder she loves you so much, you  
let her do whatever she wants.

ALEX  
Well, I inherited my mother's laissez-  
faire parenting style. As well as  
her eyes.

Zora moves behind the chaise, peeks over his shoulder.

ZORA  
You doodle in the margins.

ALEX  
Your inner bibliophile is ready to  
shit bricks, isn't she?

ZORA  
No, I think it's cool.

She takes a closer look.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
These are good. Actually, these are  
really good.

He hands her the book.

ALEX  
Save my page.

She folds the corner to mark his spot, then flips through.  
Zora stops, smiles.

ZORA  
This kind of looks like me.

ALEX  
I'd hope so, that is you.

ZORA

On the page where Desdemona gets  
strangled?

He tugs the book from her.

ALEX

Chill. I don't plan on wearing your  
face as a mask. It's the last time  
we see her. And she reminds me of  
you.

ZORA

The victim?

ALEX

The daughter of an overbearing  
politician who does her own thing,  
no matter how hard he stamps his  
feet.

ZORA

And pays for it with her life.

ALEX

She wouldn't have really been alive  
otherwise.

He eyes her.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You should pose for me.

ZORA

What?

ALEX

Pose. So I can properly draw you and  
not something that "kind of" looks  
like you.

ZORA

Draw me like one of your French girls?

ALEX

Canadian, maybe.

They share a laugh.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Yeah?

Zora nods.

ZORA  
Yeah. All right. When?

ALEX  
What are you doing now?

ZORA  
I'm changing my clothes and getting  
my picture drawn.

She runs upstairs.

His eyes follow.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - LATER

The curtains are drawn. Sunlight washes in, illuminates--

Zora, regal. She reclines across the head of the bed, as still as possible.

Alex sits at the foot of the bed, sketch pad in his lap. He works with a nub of black chalk pastel. He draws his outlines with feverish strokes.

Zora wets her lips.

He slows around the curve of the mouth, takes extra care.

His forefinger blends out the shadows around her breasts, the line of her jaw.

The door opens.

Richard glares daggers at Alex, but addresses Zora.

RICHARD  
Aren't you supposed to be watching  
Cecilia?

ZORA  
I thought she went up to her room,  
is something wrong?

RICHARD  
She got into Brenda's nail polish,  
it's all over her.

Zora hops off the bed.

ZORA  
Crap.

She runs out.

ALEX  
God forbid you look after your own  
child.

RICHARD  
I'm a very busy man.

ALEX  
Oh, I'm sure.

RICHARD  
But one thing I do is look after my  
daughters.

Richard slides onto the bed, leans in close.

RICHARD (CONT'D)  
If you touch Zora, all bets are off.  
Forget the campaign. Forget how much  
the people love a big, happy family  
or a redemption story. I will drag  
you back to that crack den in Brooklyn  
where they found you last time.  
Better yet, I'll call your parole  
officer and tell her about your little  
out-of-state escapade. My hands are  
clean of you.

ALEX  
You couldn't clean your hands with  
Borax, old man.

RICHARD  
Do. Not. Touch. Her.

ALEX  
Don't you think it's up to Zora to  
decide whether she wants to be touched--  
WHO she wants to touch her, and where--  
How many times, on what surfaces--

RICHARD  
Alex. I will kill you.

Alex eyes him, disbelieving, then shaken.

Richard rises coolly, walks out.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Christmas tree stands by the staircase, trimmed with  
just the lights and a scattered few bulbs.

Zora helps Cecilia place a homemade popsicle stick ornament.

Brenda sifts through a large box of ornaments on the couch. She pulls out a pink garland, frowns.

BRENDA

You know, I vaguely remember there being some sort of theme or color scheme each year, but when you open these things up, you'd never know.

ZORA

We don't really need a theme, do we?

BRENDA

Oh, yes, we do. Especially now.

Richard emerges from his study.

RICHARD

I have a theme.

Zora goes stiff.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

"Beautiful, Heartfelt Family Decorates Tree the Way They Do Everything-- Beautifully and From the Heart."

He crosses over the Brenda, kisses her.

BRENDA

I still think we should pick two complimentary colors and stick with them.

ZORA

CiCi, you want some cocoa? I'm gonna go make some.

Zora runs off into the kitchen.

Brenda frowns.

BRENDA

Hold on, honey, I'll help you.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Zora plops a pot on the stove, fills it halfway with whole milk. A can of cocoa rests to her left.

Brenda grabs four mugs.

BRENDA  
Did you get the cocoa out?

ZORA  
Mhm.

She lifts the can for Brenda to see.

BRENDA  
Okay.

A beat.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
You know, I know that nobody would  
really think it, but I do notice  
things.

Zora turns around.

ZORA  
Like what?

BRENDA  
Like the fact that you haven't spoken  
to your father in weeks. Not since  
New York.

ZORA  
Is he torn up about it?

BRENDA  
Distraught.

ZORA  
Did he tell you that?

BRENDA  
Well, yes.

ZORA  
Good.

Zora picks a large spoon out of the drawer, stirs the milk.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Did he tell you that he hit me?

Brenda reacts.

BRENDA  
What?

ZORA

He slapped me across the face. Because I've been getting to know your son, who he thinks is the devil incarnate. I just thought I should let you know what you're about to defend.

Brenda pulls a bottle of pomegranate juice from the fridge.

BRENDA

When things got bad with Alex, you were young.

ZORA

Nobody's bothered to explain them to me in the six years I've been a legal adult.

BRENDA

It's complicated and not the kind of conversation you want to have while trimming the tree.

A beat.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

I love my son. I love my husband. And I love you.

Brenda crosses to her, cups her cheek.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

And I can't stand to see you this way.

Brenda pulls away, moves to the cocoa tin. She dumps a couple of scoops into the milk.

Zora stirs the pot.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Honestly? Alex and Richard are a lost cause. I know that. But you and your father are not.

ZORA

Thanks, Brenda.

BRENDA

Of course, honey. And off the record-- I would do anything for Alex to love me the way you love your father. Well, at least I've got a couple more chances.

ZORA  
Wait. A couple?

Zora frowns.

Brenda smiles.

Zora touches Brenda's stomach.

Brenda nods.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
What?

BRENDA  
Don't say anything, okay? Not yet.

ZORA  
I mean, isn't it a little dangerous?  
Since you're, uh, mature?

BRENDA  
That's why I'm not telling your dad  
until we're completely out of the  
woods.

ZORA  
Yeah, I won't say anything. I promise.

Zora smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - LATER

Brenda dresses Cecilia in her snowsuit.

Alex leans against the wall.

BRENDA  
Honey, you sure you don't want to  
come see Grandma Betty with us?

ALEX  
Oh, quite.

BRENDA  
You know she says things she doesn't  
mean, that's just how old people  
are.

CECILIA  
She said I'm made of chocolate!

She licks the back of her hand.



Alex gives Brenda a look.

BRENDA  
Baby, she was kidding. She was telling  
a joke.

ALEX  
Grandma Betty. What a jokester.  
You two have fun.

BRENDA  
Wait a minute.

Brenda reaches in her pocket.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
I know it's not Christmas yet, but--

She pulls out an Audi key fob.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas.

She places it in his hand, closes his fist around it.

ALEX  
This-- This is a lot.

BRENDA  
It's not, really. It's not brand  
new. It's to my Audi. But, I drive  
the SUV now and Richard has the Lexus.  
I haven't been in this one since  
Cecilia was born. Anyway, it'll get  
you around.

ALEX  
I don't know what to say.

He hesitates, then hugs her.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Thanks, Mom.

Brenda smiles, awestruck.

BRENDA  
You called me "Mom."

Cecilia tugs her hand.

CECILIA  
Let's gooooo! Bye, Alex!

ALEX

Bye, Squirt.

He swats the pom-pom on her hat.

Cecilia and Brenda leave.

He locks the door behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A cute, modish apartment. Color-blocked and super coordinated.

A Christmas movie plays on the flat screen.

Nadia frowns, a piece of popcorn falls from her mouth, rolls down her pajama top.

NADIA

Ew.

ZORA

Don't "ew" my little brother or sister.

NADIA

No, I'm "ew-ing" the fact that Richard and Brenda are still having sex.

Zora grabs a handful of popcorn from the bowl. She wears a seasonal onesie.

ZORA

Come on, I'm sure you and Christopher will be active until everything stops working.

NADIA

I won't know that until after I'm already sworn to him forever.

ZORA

You knew this abstinence thing came with the package, right?

NADIA

Don't say "package."

ZORA

I'm sorry. I just didn't think it bothered you so much.

NADIA

It doesn't.

A beat.

NADIA (CONT'D)

It didn't. I've just been thinking lately-- There's so much we haven't done. Not just in bed, but in our lives. As people.

ZORA

You guys are still young. Just because you're getting married doesn't mean your youth's gone.

NADIA

But, I mean-- Like-- Chris always wanted join the Peace Corps, right? We're not going to get married and then spend two years continents apart.

Nadia leans back on the couch.

NADIA (CONT'D)

I don't know. Regrets just seem like the first step to resentment.

Zora pulls her in for a hug, kisses the top of her head.

ZORA

It'll be okay.

NADIA

Yeah, I know, I know.

They cuddle up together.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Richard waits for his coffee at the Keurig.

Alex strolls in. No shirt, no shoes. Just jeans and his sunglasses atop his head.

RICHARD

Why are you here?

Alex grabs the bread from the top of the refrigerator.

ALEX

Some people need food to sustain themselves, Councilman. Not all of us can live on coffee and megalomania.

He pulls out the peanut butter from an overhead cabinet.

RICHARD

I mean, why are you here in the house? Why aren't you at Betty's with your mother and Cecilia?

Alex spins on his heels.

ALEX

Well, if you must know-- Grandma Betty is a miserable old cunt. And if I have to hear her call my little sister a "mulatto" one more time, I'm going to set her on fire.

Richard shrugs.

RICHARD

Fair enough.

ALEX

Exactly how much do you hate being alone in the house with me, Richard?

Alex unscrews the lid.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Almost as much as you used to love it?

RICHARD

You disgust me.

ALEX

Really? Because you used to be into some pretty disgusting things.

He licks the peanut butter from his fingers.

RICHARD

I was sick.

Alex saunters over to him.

ALEX

According to your version of events, I was the sick one, wasn't I? Sexual aggression. Homoerotic delusions.

Richard turns to face him.

RICHARD  
That was over a decade ago.

ALEX  
And my life's been a shit show ever since.

RICHARD  
I didn't make you into a junkie.

Alex gets in his face.

ALEX  
No, you only fucked me and sent me away to cover it up.

They stare each other down.

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Zora twirls her fingers through Nadia's hair.

Nadia watches the movie, head on Zora's chest.

Zora stares into space, a million miles away.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

RICHARD  
You gave me no choice.

ALEX  
Bullshit!

RICHARD  
You would have ruined me! All because, what, you thought I'd just leave your mother for you and we'd ride off into the sunset?

ALEX  
Fuck you.

RICHARD  
You were old enough to know better. You knew what it was.

ALEX  
No, I didn't. But I know now.

Alex grabs Richard by the collar.

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Nadia looks up at Zora.

Hey. NADIA

Hmm? ZORA

You okay? NADIA

Zora swallows.

Nadia frowns, concerned.

Zora kisses her.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Alex pulls Richard into him, kisses him.

Richard succumbs to the kiss.

They push, shove, grab each other. Fall against the fridge.

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Nadia pulls away, confused.

Zora blinks, horrified.

Nadia, I'm sor-- ZORA

Nadia silences her with a kiss.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Alex drops to his knees in front of Richard.

Richard closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Nadia and Zora roll around on the couch, then off of it.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Alex and Zora face each other on the swings.

He looks up from his phone, raises his eyebrows.

ALEX  
Seriously? How was it?

Zora shrugs, at a loss for words.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Nails weren't trimmed?

Zora smacks his knee.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Well, allow me to be the first to  
congratulate you. Your membership  
card and starter cut-off flannel are  
in the mail.

ZORA  
Jesus-- Shut up, Alex.

ALEX  
Fine, we'll change the subject.

ZORA  
Please. What'd you end up doing last  
night?

Alex bites his lip, looks back down at his phone.

ALEX  
Same old thing.

ZORA  
Are you texting "Same Old Thing"  
right now?

She goes for his phone.

Alex holds it out of reach.

ALEX  
No, I'm texting a friend.

ZORA  
Are they cute?

Alex pulls up a photo on his phone, shows it to Zora.

Pictured: Alex, a few years younger, arm around a handsome East Asian guy, mid-20's. They grin at the camera.

Zora raises her eyebrows.

ZORA (CONT'D)  
Okay, so, that's a yes.

ALEX  
That's my boy, Nikko.

He slips his phone in his back pocket.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
And he's just as straight as his teeth are, so-- You know, in case those big brown eyes started turning green.

Zora avoids his gaze.

ZORA  
Don't be weird.

ALEX  
Don't be defensive.

A beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
He's like my Nadia. Minus the whole sex thing.

ZORA  
I hate you.

ALEX  
Bullshit.

He smirks.

She rolls her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - MORNING

Cecilia bounces on Zora's bed.



CECILIA  
ZiZi! Wake up! ZiZi! PRESENTS!

Zora groans, rolls over.

ZORA  
Okay, baby, okay. Go downstairs.  
Just let me pee and wash my face.

Cecilia kisses her on the face, then darts out of the room.

Zora whines.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Zora trudges to the bathroom, half-asleep. She goes for the door.

A pillar of steam greets her, then Alex. He's wet from the shower. The towel hangs dangerously low around his hips.

Zora's eyes rove, she catches herself.

ZORA  
Y-you're up early.

ALEX  
It's Christmas.

ZORA  
It is.

He steps out of the doorway, leans in close.

ALEX  
I'll give you your present later.  
Okay?

She nods slowly, watches him all the way down the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Christmas dinner.

The family eats with zeal.

Cecilia picks her ham apart with her fingers, munches on it happily.

CECILIA  
Yum, yum, yum, yum.

Zora laughs.

RICHARD

Your ham gets the Cecilia seal of approval.

ZORA

I bet anything would taste good after all the toys you got today, huh, Lug Nut?

Zora lightly tugs on one of Cecilia's curls.

RICHARD

No, you ladies really have outdone yourselves.

Richard slices into his turkey breast.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

And this bird came out perfectly, Zora.

ZORA

Actually, Brenda did the turkey this time.

ALEX

It's a Christmas miracle.

RICHARD

Well, it's terrific, Bren.

Alex nods.

ALEX

The dark meat just melts in your mouth.

Richard stops chewing, clears his throat.

Alex takes a sip of his water.

Brenda looks between the two of them.

DING DONG.

ZORA

Who could that be?

Brenda rises.

BRENDA

I'll get it.

She heads for the foyer.

The family continues to eat in silence.

BRENDA(O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Nadia! Merry Christmas, come on in!

Zora catches Alex's glance.

He quirks his eyebrows.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zora closes the door behind them.

NADIA  
I'm sorry to drop by like this, it's  
just you haven't been answering my  
calls.

ZORA  
I've just been trying to process,  
well, everything. Plus, Christmas--

NADIA  
No, no, I get it. I just had to see  
you.

Nadia closes the gap between them, kisses Zora.

Zora pulls away.

ZORA  
My family's right downstairs.

NADIA  
I broke up with Christopher.

Zora blinks.

ZORA  
What?

NADIA  
Today.

ZORA  
Because of what we did.

Zora sits on the bed.

NADIA  
Zora, if I should be marrying anyone--

ZORA

Whoa. Hold on.

Nadia sits beside her.

NADIA

I don't mean, tomorrow. But we've known each other our entire lives, Zora.

ZORA

Did you tell him? What happened between us?

NADIA

Not in so many words.

ZORA

Nadia. You need to go home and you need to call Christopher and you need to apologize and ask him to take you back.

NADIA

Why would I do that? Why would you tell me to do that? Don't you want to be with me?

A beat.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Or had you not gotten that far when you slept with me?

ZORA

Please-- PLEASE keep your voice down.

Nadia stands, scoffs.

NADIA

If you just wanted to experiment-- or whatever the fuck what was, Zora-- you find some chick in a bar or on Tinder. You don't do that with your best friend who is getting married.

Nadia slumps against the wall, loses her breath.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Oh, my God. I was getting married.

ZORA

(hushed)

Nadia, I didn't plan on this. I never said it was an experiment. But you didn't give me any time to figure out what it is.

NADIA

The time to figure it out, Zora, was before you fucking came at me with your dykey bullshit!

ZORA

Excuse me-- My WHAT?

NADIA

Fuck you.

Nadia stomps out.

Zora falls back on the bed, closes her eyes. The tears come anyway.

LATER.

Her eyes open.

Alex sits beside her in bed.

ALEX

(whispering)

Hey.

She leans up on her elbow.

ZORA

Alex? Damn it, I must have passed out.

ALEX

Exhaustion does that to you. Especially the emotional kind. I figured when your friend ran out of here as fast as those little heels could carry her, there must've been a lover's quarrel.

Zora holds up her hand.

ZORA

Alex. Not now. Please.

ALEX

Say no more.

He sits flat gift-wrapped box on her lap.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas. Or belated Christmas.

Zora glances at the clock: 1:26 AM

She opens the box--

A framed picture. Alex's drawing of her, in vibrant color.

Her eyes light up.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I hope it looks a bit more than "kind  
of" like you.

Zora bites her lip, admires it. She shakes her head.

ZORA  
I'm not nearly this pretty.

Alex stares at her.

ALEX  
You really have no clue, do you?

ZORA  
About what?

He takes her face in his hands, kisses her slowly. His lips trail to her ear.

ALEX  
I share a wall with you. And every  
time I hear you pull that thing out  
of the drawer, it's all I can do to  
stop myself from coming in here and  
ruining it for you forever.

Her breath hitches.

ZORA  
W-Why do you stop yourself?

ALEX  
Because Richard owns a gun and I'm  
just beginning to value my life.

ZORA  
But...You won't really be living  
otherwise.

He kisses her again. Then rises, locks the door.

Zora watches him all the way, wets her lips.

Alex turns to her. He plucks the sunglasses from the neck of his t-shirt, sits them on her dresser. Sheds his shirt, sinks down on top of her.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Alex leans against the counter. He eats a large bowl of cereal.

Zora stops just past the doorway.

They exchange knowing looks, smile.

ALEX  
Good morning.

ZORA  
Morning.

She reaches for a mug in the high cabinet.

Alex comes up behind her.

ALEX  
Let me get that for you.

He reaches over her shoulder, presses against her body subtly.

Zora giggles.

ZORA  
Alex.

She faces him.

ALEX  
What?

He hands her the mug.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
You're welcome.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - DAY

Zora sits cross-legged on the bed, laptop open in her lap.

She types a few sentences, stops, closes her eyes.

Her fingertips play idly along her collarbone.

She bites her lip.

Zora shakes herself from her reverie, types a couple more words.

She sighs, closes the laptop.

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - SAME

Richard scratches down notes at his desk.

He stops, frowns at what he's written, crosses it out.

He rests his chin on his fist, stares out his open door, contemplating. Through the door--

Alex passes by, oblivious to Richard.

Richard follows him with his eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Brenda sits on the chaise, a large comb in her lap. Barrettes and hair ornaments are scattered everywhere.

Cecilia plays with a brush on the floor. Her hair's half plaited. The finished side is done poorly.

Brenda lifts her bottle of juice to her lips, stops.

She rises, walks into the kitchen. From within--

The CLINKS of a bottle and a glass.

The cork POPS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAYOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

New year's eve.

A smaller, more intimate affair than the fundraiser. Less formal, still chic.

PARTY-GOERS fill the garden, drinks in hand, draped in novelty glasses and beads.

Richard holds Brenda close to him. Her headband reads:  
"2016."

The countdown begins.



ALL  
TEN! NINE! EIGHT! SEVEN!

Brenda holds Richard's face.

ALL (CONT'D)  
SIX! FIVE! FOUR!

INT. MAYOR'S MANSION - SAME

Zora and Alex steal away into a powder room, hand-in-hand.  
They fling themselves into a desperate kiss.

EXT. MAYOR'S MANSION - SAME

ALL  
THREE! TWO! ONE! HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The Townsends kiss.

So do Brenda and Richard.

RICHARD  
Happy new year, baby.

BRENDA  
Happy new year.

They peck each other's faces.

Brenda giggles.

CUT TO:

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - LATER

Richard frowns at his computer, scrolls.

Alex passes by the door, loose bowtie hung around his neck.

Richard jumps up, leans in the doorway, calls after him.

RICHARD  
Er-- Could I speak to you a moment?

Alex raises an eyebrow, enters, cautious.

Richard closes the door behind them. He gestures for Alex to take a seat, then takes his.

ALEX  
What?

RICHARD

It's just that we haven't spoken since--

ALEX

Since we fucked.

RICHARD

If you must be crude-- And I wish you would keep your voice down. Please.

Alex gives him a look.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I just wanted to touch base with you, to make sure it wouldn't be like before.

ALEX

I'm not so sure I follow you, Richard.

RICHARD

I'm making sure that you won't ask anything more of me than I can give.

Richard looks at him, expectant.

Alex erupts into laughter. Hysterics.

Richard watches, quizzical.

ALEX

What makes you think that I want anything from you? Anything at all.

Richard lowers his voice.

RICHARD

The other night--

ALEX

I've got my shit together. I'm in the prime of my life. You have only a few good years left in you before you can't even get it up anymore and you're still in denial about what you are and what you like. You're on the decline, Richard.

RICHARD

That's not-- It's much more complicated than that.

ALEX

Actually, it's simple. You're weak. I'm strong. I'm Alpha. You're Beta. You want me and you will always want me. You'll go to your grave wanting me. And I can't say I'll blame you, but you will never have me. Never again.

Richard rests his head in his hands.

RICHARD

You are a piece of work. And I'm done playing your sick games.

ALEX

Oh, you haven't even begun to play my sick games, Daddy. You haven't even opened the box.

Alex stands.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm not seventeen anymore, Richard. Fuck you and your sunset.

Alex opens the door.

Brenda stands there.

He brushes past her.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Alex yanks open his underwear drawer, rifles through it.

He pulls out a USB cable, stomps over to his bedside table, plucks up his sunglasses.

He grabs his phone, hooks the cord up to it.

Alex flips the glasses over. On the bottom of the left stem--

A small rubber flap. He lifts it, reveals--

A micro-SD port.

He plugs it into the cord.

A dialog box pops up on the phone: "IMPORT VIDEO?"

He hits "YES."

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Alex sits on the top step of the back porch, a lit cigarette hangs from his lips.

Brenda knocks on the door before stepping out. She smiles.

BRENDA

Hey.

ALEX

Hey.

BRENDA

Do you mind if I sit?

Alex scoots over.

Brenda settles beside him.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

It's cold out here.

ALEX

Winter will do that to you.

BRENDA

How do you stand it?

ALEX

What's a little frostbite between friends?

He takes a drag.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Me and nicotine are old friends.

Brenda nods.

BRENDA

How old were you when you started smoking? Seventeen?

ALEX

Seventeen.

BRENDA

You know, I know that was a really rough year for you.

ALEX  
Brenda?

BRENDA  
Hmm?

ALEX  
Don't start that conversation unless  
you're really ready to have that  
conversation. Okay?

Alex flicks the cigarette in the yard, goes back in the house.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Zora and Alex make out on the bed. She straddles him.

He kisses her neck.

She looks over at the clock.

ZORA  
When are they supposed to be back  
from the thing?

ALEX  
I don't know-- Seven? It's over at  
six.

ZORA  
Shit! That's in like ten minutes!

Zora rolls off of him.

Alex grabs her hips.

ALEX  
We can do the abridged version.

ZORA  
Alex!

ALEX  
What?

ZORA  
I don't know, you just act like you  
want to get caught sometimes.

ALEX  
I can't say I wouldn't be relieved.

Zora stares at him.

ZORA

Are you crazy?

ALEX

You're not tired of sneaking around?  
Stealing moments like we're doing  
something wrong?

A beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Unless, you do think we're doing  
something wrong.

Zora runs her hands through her hair.

ZORA

No, it's not wrong. We're not really  
siblings.

ALEX

Okay, so?

ZORA

So, it's a shitstorm that I really  
don't want to have to deal with right  
now.

ALEX

A shitstorm from who? Do you really  
think Brenda gives a fuck? Give her  
her a Valium and a glass of wine and  
she'll plan the whole goddamn wedding  
herself. Of course, that leaves  
Richard-- The end all and be all of  
every decision that you make.

ZORA

That's not true. How would we explain  
this to Cecilia?

ALEX

The same way you explain anything to  
a six year old? Fuck it! I'll make  
her a coloring book!

ZORA

You know what, maybe I do care what  
my father thinks. Is that really so  
bad?

ALEX

No, Zora, what's really bad is that  
you're a grown woman and you live  
your life for his approval.

Alex climbs off the bed.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But here I go, forgetting my place  
in the family. The junkie, the whore,  
the nutcase.

ZORA

You know that's not how I feel.

ALEX

Then, how do you feel, Zora?

She searches for the words.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Exactly. Without him here to tell  
you, you don't even know.

He leaves.

Zora curls up on the bed.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Richard lounges on the bed, types on his iPad.

Brenda sits at the vanity in her robe, brushes her wet hair.

BRENDA

I think it's great that they're  
hanging out. It could be good for  
them both. I mean, Zora's definitely  
a good influence and maybe Alex can  
help her loosen up.

He looks up from his tablet.

RICHARD

Loosen up?

BRENDA

Yeah, you know. Help her have some  
fun.

RICHARD

The kind of fun that Alex has--

BRENDA

Come on, Richard! He's been doing  
great--

RICHARD

You know what Zora finds fun? Writing and making excellent grades. And that's what has got her on track for success.

BRENDA

He's not poison, Richard.

He sighs.

RICHARD

Let's not argue about this, okay? Especially when I'm about to make you an offer that you cannot refuse.

He rises places one hand on her shoulder, presents his tablet to her.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What do you think?

Brenda examines the web page, taken aback.

BRENDA

I think it's a beautiful suite, honey. What's it for?

RICHARD

Valentine's Day.

He kisses her cheek.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I figure things have been so tense lately, with the campaign and everything else, we could get away to the Poconos. Do a little skiing, a little bit of something else.

BRENDA

Well, honey, that sounds lovely but we can't go away for Valentine's Day.

RICHARD

Why not?

BRENDA

That's Alex's birthday.

Richard rolls his eyes.



BRENDA (CONT'D)

It's his first birthday home in a long, long time. And it's his thirtieth.

RICHARD

No, of course, I understand.

BRENDA

Do you? Because it doesn't really sound like it.

RICHARD

Yes, dear, I understand. I understand that you will kill yourself to show that boy love and he will never appreciate you for it.

BRENDA

He's my son.

RICHARD

He won't even call you "Mom."

BRENDA

I never said our relationship was conventional.

RICHARD

It's not a relationship at all! It's him doing everything in his power to hurt you. It's you cutting yourself open, and him laughing while you bleed.

Brenda stands.

BRENDA

Well, at least I never hit him.

RICHARD

Maybe that's where you went wrong!

BRENDA

Tell me, is Zora speaking to you yet?

Richard clenches his jaw.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

I always support you, Richard. Always. Even when I know you're wrong, I support you. I may not be able to work a room like the other wives in  
(MORE)

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
the party, but I am always there.  
Let me be there for my son.

She stomps over to her walk-in closet, flips through the racks.

Richard watches a moment, then tosses the tablet on the bed. He throws his hands up, leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Zora washes her hands, turns off the tap, shakes them dry. She stares at herself a moment in the mirror.

KNOCK KNOCK.

ZORA  
I'm coming right out!

She quickly wipes her hands, opens the door--

It's Alex.

ALEX  
Hey. Can I talk to you a minute?

ZORA  
In here?

ALEX  
Yeah.

He steps in, closes the door behind them.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I lost it the other day.

ZORA  
No, I'm sorry-- I've just been so stressed lately. You're right, it's really, really hard sneaking around. On top of that, I'm back from break and Nadia still isn't speaking to me.

ALEX  
Nadia?

ZORA  
Yeah. Honestly, I wish you never planted that seed.

ALEX  
Well, you watered it.

ZORA  
Why'd you push me in her direction,  
anyway? If you wanted me?

ALEX  
Maybe I like to cause trouble.

He holds her hips.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Or, maybe I want your truth. All of  
it.

He kisses her.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
And I want you to have mine.

He digs in his pocket, pulls out a small baggy of coke.

ZORA  
What is that?

ALEX  
My stash. I haven't touched it since  
the day I got here. Haven't even  
looked at it.

ZORA  
Why are you showing me this?

ALEX  
I'm about to flush it, but I wanted  
you to see what you replaced.

ZORA  
As your vice?

ALEX  
As the thing I would die for.

He drops the whole thing in the toilet, flushes it.

Zora puts down the lid, pushes him to sit.

He pulls her into his lap, rests his forehead against hers.

Her hand slides down his chest.

He takes her bottom lip between his teeth.

Brenda pushes the door open, freezes.

BRENDA

I thought someone left the light on.

She backs away, shuts the door.

ZORA

Fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Brenda loads the dishwasher.

Alex enters, leans against the counter.

ALEX

How long do we have?

Brenda ignores him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Before Richard finds out-- how long?

Brenda slips in the last plate.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I just figured we should have a head's up.

She closes the dishwasher.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Brenda.

Brenda spins around on her heels.

BRENDA

"Mom." It's "Mom." I am your mother, goddamn it.

ALEX

Now's a convenient time to decide that.

BRENDA

I won't answer to anything else.

ALEX

Fine. How long do we have, Mom?

BRENDA

Well, Alex, that's up to you. If you stop this-- this-- whatever this is, he won't have to. Not from me, anyway.

ALEX

What if we don't want to stop it?

BRENDA

It's disgraceful, Alex, going around the house like that. Cecilia could have walked in on you two.

ALEX

It's pitiful how you're only concerned about your kids when it benefits you. I guess not much has changed.

BRENDA

You know what, I am done, Alex! I'm done letting you punish me.

ALEX

Punish you? I WAS THE ONE WHO GOT SENT AWAY!

BRENDA

The things you were saying, the claims you made-- They were heinous. You needed help.

ALEX

WHAT I NEEDED WAS FOR YOU TO PROTECT ME! What I needed was for you to believe me.

Tears well up in his eyes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Yeah, I was a messed up kid. But only because HE--

BRENDA

He never touched you, Alex! Even though you might have wanted him to.

ALEX

Fuck you, Brenda.

BRENDA

You were having delusions--

ALEX

FUCK YOU!

He smacks the paper towel rack off the counter.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I hope you lose that baby. God knows, it'll be better off.

Brenda clutches her stomach.

BRENDA  
Zora told you.

ALEX  
Zora didn't tell me anything. There's  
no other reason you'd put down the  
bottle for a whole month. Or at  
least, pretend to.

He crosses to the back door.

BRENDA  
Whatever you're trying to do to hurt  
me or Richard, you leave Zora out of  
it, you hear me?

He exits down the back steps.

Brenda stands in the doorway.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
She's a good girl! You leave her  
out of it!

She slams the door.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - DAY

Richard comes in through the front door. He balances a pile  
of flowers and a bag of boxed chocolates in one arm.

Cecilia runs in from the living room, all decked out in red  
and pink hearts.

CECILIA  
Daddy!

RICHARD  
Pumpkin!

He stoops, pulls her in for a one-arm hug. He pecks her on  
the forehead.

RICHARD (CONT'D)  
Hi, my baby.

She grabs at the loot.

CECILIA  
Is this for me?

RICHARD

Some of it, yes. Where's Mommy and Zora?

CECILIA

Mommy's on the couch, she has a migraine. Zora went to get the cake.

RICHARD

Cake?

CECILIA

Mhm, for Alex's birthday. He was born on Valentine's Day.

RICHARD

Was he? Because I thought he was born on ValentINE's Day.

CECILIA

That's what I said!

She bounces off into the living room.

Richard follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RICHARD

Wait, wait--

He holds out a single carnation attached to a small teddy.

Cecilia takes it.

CECILIA

Thank you, Daddy! Happy Valentine's!

RICHARD

Happy Valentine's, indeed. I'll put your candy up for later.

Brenda lies asleep on the chaise.

Richard sets the big bouquet of roses by her feet. He balances a heart-shaped box of chocolates on her wine glass.

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Richard sets a bouquet of pink carnations on Zora's pillow. He takes the last box of chocolate from his bag, sets it beside the flowers.

He crumples the bag in his hands, poises to drop it in the waste basket.

He stops, squints, leans a little closer. His expression falls.

In the basket: Three used condoms.

The bag drops from his hand.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The lights are out.

Richard sits at the table, a mug of coffee clasped in both hands.

Brenda stands in the doorway, smiles.

BRENDA  
My funny valentine.

He forces a smile.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
Thank you for my flowers, and my  
chocolate.

She wraps her arms around him from behind, kisses his cheek.

Richard pats her hands.

RICHARD  
Of course. You are quite welcome.

Brenda pulls out a chair, sits.

BRENDA  
Are the kids home? The big kids, I  
mean.

RICHARD  
I haven't seen Alex. Zora's out  
getting him a cake.

BRENDA  
Hmm.

A beat.

BRENDA (CONT'D)  
We should have gone to the Poconos.

Richard grabs her hand, kisses it.



RICHARD

I've got some work to do tonight,  
but why don't you take Cecilia to  
see a movie, or something?

BRENDA

That's a good idea. It's the only  
time she's quiet.

They share a laugh.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Are you sure you can't come?

RICHARD

I wish I could, but I have to go  
back over some platform stuff before  
the website update.

BRENDA

Well, I better go see what's playing.  
I hope it's not one of those Pixar  
things, they just make my temples  
throb.

Brenda heads for the living room.

CUT TO:

EXT. BILLINGS RESIDENCE - DAY

Richard stands on the front porch, narrows his eyes--

Alex pulls into the driveway. He grabs a brown Wine & Spirits  
bag from the passenger seat, carries it up the stairs.

Richard blocks his entry.

RICHARD

Wine.

ALEX

Perceptive. Can I pass?

RICHARD

Do you plan on sharing that with my  
daughter?

ALEX

You caught me. Such a shame you had  
to find out this way.

RICHARD

The way I found out was happening upon three of your soiled condoms in her trash basket.

ALEX

And how do you know those are mine? Did you lick them or something?

He tries to push past Richard.

Richard blocks him.

RICHARD

I warned you.

Richard steps aside.

Alex jams his keys in his pocket, slides past him and into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex tosses his jacket over the back of the chair, runs upstairs.

Richard comes in behind him.

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Richard steps over his coat rack, digs in the pockets of his long wool coat for a pair of leather gloves. He pulls them on.

He moves over to a Romare Bearden print, pulls it off the wall, reveals--

A safe with a digital lock.

He punches in the code, opens it.

Inside the safe: a revolver and an 8-ball of coke.

He grabs the coke, walks out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Richard pulls the keys from Alex's jacket pocket.

EXT. BILLINGS RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Richard unlocks Alex's car, plants the coke in his arm rest.

INT. RICHARD'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Richard holds a heavy pewter paperweight in his hand.

He exhales--

CRACKS it against his left jaw.

He grits his teeth through the pain, tosses the weight in the safe, locks it in, rehangs the painting.

Richard swipes all his belongings off his desk, overturns a tall bookcase.

Alex stands in the doorway.

ALEX

What the fuck are you doing?

RICHARD

What I'm doing shouldn't be of any concern to you. It's what YOU'RE doing that's important.

Richard kicks over the lamp.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Right now, you are assaulting a civil servant in his own home. You're in violation of your parole, and most importantly, you are going straight to jail. Do not pass go, do not collect two-hundred dollars.

ALEX

They'll know you did this to yourself. There's not a scratch on me.

RICHARD

Alex! I didn't stand a chance! I'm on the decline. You're the Alpha. I'm the Beta. You're young. I'm old. You are a deeply troubled young man. And I am the future governor of Pennsylvania.

ALEX

Motherfucker.

RICHARD

Daughterfucker.

Alex bolts.

EXT. BILLINGS RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Alex hops in his car, speeds off.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. - ALEX'S AUDI

He dials Zora at a red light.

ALEX

C'mon. C'mon, c'mon, c'mon. Pick the  
fuck up.

He holds the phone to his ear, taps the wheel with the other  
hand.

The light turns green.

He floors it.

The call goes to Zora's VOICEMAIL.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Zora, it's me. Listen, you need to  
call me as soon as you get this.  
Richard is fucked up. He's lost it.  
Don't go back to the house. Call me  
right away.

He hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. BOUTIQUE - SAME

Zora places a lacy lingerie set on the counter.

Her phone VIBRATES in her bag.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. ALEX'S AUDI - CONTINUOUS

Alex glances down at the fuel gauge.

It approaches "E."

ALEX

Fuck!

He bangs on the steering wheel.

CUT TO:

EXT. SERVICE STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Alex stands at the pump, tries to feed a twenty-dollar bill into the machine.

It doesn't take it.

ALEX

Motherfuck--

He kicks the side of the car, stomps inside to the service station.

CUT TO:

INT. SERVICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Alex leans on the counter.

ALEX

It's not taking cash.

The CLERK (a squat lady, 50's, West Indian) looks up from the register.

CLERK

What's that, sir?

ALEX

The pump, it's not taking cash and I really need to fill up my tank. Can I just pay in here?

CLERK

It's pay-at-pump, sir. Do you have a credit card?

ALEX

No, I do not have a credit card--

EXT. SERVICE STATION - SAME

Two cop cars pull up around Alex's car, box it in.

INT. SERVICE STATION - SAME

CLERK

Mister, I am just asking--

ALEX

Well, I'm telling you I don't have a fucking credit card--

CLERK  
Sir, do not curse at me I'm trying  
to assist you--

The flash of blue and red lights flicker across their faces.  
Alex glances out the window. His eyes widen.

ALEX  
FUCK!

He dashes through the store, out the back loading entrance.  
Alex runs like hell.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. ZORA'S CAR - SAME

A hard-top convertible. Roof up.

Zora straps herself in, plugs her phone into the AUX.

The screen lights up: "SIX MISSED CALLS."

She frowns, dials Alex back.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - SAME

Alex ducks between two apartment buildings, picks up his  
phone.

INTERCUT BETWEEN ZORA AND ALEX.

ZORA  
Alex, what the hell is going on?  
What happened with my dad?

ALEX  
You have to come get me.

ZORA  
Where are you?

ALEX  
I'm on foot, they got my car.

ZORA  
Who got your car?

ALEX  
The cops, Zora! The cops! He set me  
up!

ZORA  
Tell me where you are, Alex.

ALEX  
I'm on, uh--

He glances around.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I don't know, around fifty-first,  
fifty-second and Germantown?

ZORA  
I'm on my way.

She pulls off.

END INTERCUT.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. ZORA'S CAR - LATER

The car is parked just by the alleyway.

Alex sits in the passenger's seat.

Zora leans forward on the wheel.

ALEX  
I know how this sounds.

ZORA  
Crazy, that's how it sounds. I know  
he hates the idea of us together. I  
know he does. But it doesn't make  
sense, Alex. He wouldn't--

ALEX  
You don't know him, Zora!

ZORA  
He's my father! Of course I know  
him!

ALEX  
Did you know he used to fuck me?!

Zora blinks.

ZORA  
What?

ALEX

When I was seventeen, he started sleeping with me. I threatened to tell. And he had me spirited the fuck away.

ZORA

You were mentally ill.

ALEX

I might have been, after what he did to me.

ZORA

Don't lie to me.

ALEX

Zora!

Alex reaches for her hand.

She jerks away.

ZORA

Don't touch me.

He stares at her a moment, destroyed, then gets out of the car.

The door SLAMS shut.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Alex pulls out his phone, dials a contact.

ALEX

Nikko. Shit's hit the fan, man. If I don't call you by midnight, leak the video.

He glances over his shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - LATER

Zora comes through the door.

ZORA

Brenda? Dad?

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Zora stands in the doorway, awestruck.



The study is destroyed.

She steps over flipped papers, broken glass.

The desk is bare, save for a stack of note cards and fountain pen.

She picks up the cards, shuffles through them, gasps.

They flutter to the floor.

Richard enters behind her.

RICHARD

Thank God you're safe.

She faces him.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

When you didn't come home, I thought he might have--

ZORA

He? Alex?

RICHARD

Yes.

ZORA

Did he do this, Daddy?

Richard nods, steps toward her.

RICHARD

He attacked me. Destroyed my study, my work. He's dangerous, baby.

Zora backs away.

ZORA

Not all of it. The notecards. Your platform. I like the part about mental health. Rehabilitating addicts. That's new. You work quick.

RICHARD

I had to do something. When this gets out, if I don't spin it just right--

Richard points to his swollen left jaw.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Look at what he already did to me. I  
won't let him do that to the campaign.  
We've worked too hard for this.

Zora crosses to him, cups his face in her hands.  
She runs her right thumb across his swollen jaw.

ZORA

He really did this to you?

Her right hand falls to her side.

RICHARD

He jumped me out of nowhere. He  
must have been high. Can you believe  
it?

Zora turns the right side of Richard's face, unmarred, toward  
the light.

Her other hand drops.

ZORA

No. I can't. Alex is left-handed.

Richard's expression falls.

Zora leaves the study.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Richard grabs her, shakes her.

RICHARD

Can't you see what he's doing to  
this family? He's trying to destroy  
me! He's using you to destroy me!  
He used you!

Zora wrenches herself from his grip.

ZORA

You destroyed this family. You did  
that.

She darts out the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

A dark, cruddy motel not meant for more than one hour of  
use.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Alex launches off the bed, opens the door.

It's Zora.

She flings herself into his arms, chokes up.

ZORA

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

He strokes her hair.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry for what he did to you  
Alex, I'm--

She looks up at him, tears in her eyes.

Alex kisses her, pulls her onto the bed, strips off her jacket.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - HOURS LATER

Alex and Zora lie naked and spent in each others' arms.

He kisses the top of her head.

ZORA

Where do we go? Where do I take you  
until we figure this out? New York?

ALEX

No, that'll be the first place they  
look.

ZORA

What if we stay here in the city and  
figure this out? That way, you've  
never actually broken parole.

ALEX

It doesn't matter if I actually break  
it, I'm as good as fucked either  
way. They'd never believe me.

ZORA

But they'll believe US.

ALEX

Honestly, I'm more confident taking  
our chances in Canada.

Zora plays with his hair.

ZORA  
Virginia, maybe. That's as far as I  
go. Canada-- that's a little too  
crazy.

ALEX  
Well, don't they say people in love  
do crazy things?

She looks up at him.

ZORA  
Is that what we are? In love?

ALEX  
We're definitely in SOMETHING.

She laughs.

ZORA  
Insane, maybe.

He kisses her.

ALEX  
In deep shit.

They deepen the kiss.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Insatiable...

He rolls on top of her.

She moans.

LATER.

Zora sleeps against Alex's chest.

He holds her with one arm, types on his phone with the other.

The clock: "11:54."

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Alex rolls over in bed.

Zora's gone.

His eyes open, confused.

ALEX  
Babe?

He sits up.

On the side table, a note: "WENT FOR BREAKFAST. LEFT PHONE CHARGING. IF NEEDED, SEND SMOKE SIGNAL. LOVE, Z."

He smiles, flicks on the TV: The morning news.

CUT TO:

INT. DONUT SHOP - SAME

A mom-and-pop place. Could be cleaner.

The morning news plays on a TV mounted in the corner.

Zora pays for her breakfast at the counter.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex paces the room, screams into his phone.

ALEX

WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN? WHAT THE  
FUCK DO YOU MEAN, NIKKO? I TEXTED  
YOU-- NO, I FUCKING TOLD YOU TO CALL  
IT OFF!

NIKKO (V.O.)

(through the phone)

I just put it up a few minutes early--

ALEX

No-- "Midnight" doesn't mean "a few  
minutes early," Nikko! "Midnight"  
means "MIDNIGHT!" FUCK!

He kicks the bed.

CUT TO:

INT. DONUT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Zora takes her change off the counter.

TV SCREEN:

A female news ANCHOR (30's) speaks.

ANCHOR

...Disturbing footage featuring  
Pennsylvania Democrat, Richard  
Billings and his family leaked onto  
(MORE)

ANCHOR (CONT'D)  
the internet from an unknown source  
this morning.

Zora's eyes shoot up.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)  
Please be advised. These images are  
of a very graphic nature, and are  
not suitable for children.

Zora's bag SPLATS on the floor.

Her change flies in every direction.

She stumbles out the door, knees weak.

EXT. DONUT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Zora PUKES in the shrub outside the door.

CUT TO:

INT. /EXT. ZORA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Zora has the steering wheel in a death grip, queasy.

She comes to a rolling stop at a red light, guns it through  
the intersection.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - SAME

Alex sits on the bed, face wet with tears. He sobs into the  
phone.

ALEX  
Everything is fucked, man! I fucked  
up! Jesus--

NIKKO (V.O.)  
(through the phone)  
I'm sorry, bro! You sent the second  
video. I didn't know, man.

Alex wipes his face with his hand.

ALEX  
What the fuck am I gonna do?

On Alex: The door CREAKS open.

His eyes widen.

The phone PLUNKS to the carpet.

                                NIKKO (V.O.)  
                                (through the phone)  
                                Alex?

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Zora's car swings into the parking lot, she hops out.

She does a double-take at--

Her father's black Lexus.

She runs up to the room, bursts in--

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex is backed against the bathroom door.

Richard stands by the foot of the bed.

                                ZORA

                        Dad!

He pivots to face her.

His revolver is trained on Alex, wild eyes trained on Zora.

                                ZORA (CONT'D)

                        Dad. Daddy, we can fix this. We  
                        can fix this, please--

BANG!

Zora jumps.

Alex clutches his hands to his chest. Tendrils of blood  
seep between his fingers.

He slides down the door.

Richard cocks the gun.

Zora looks at Richard, pleads.

He sticks the revolver in his mouth.

Zora shakes her head.

                                ZORA (CONT'D)

                        No. Dad--

BANG!

Blood spatters across Zora's face.

She SCREAMS.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

A team of EMTs push a gurney through the wing.

Alex lies on top of it. He's intubated, face smeared with blood. He fades.

ZORA(V.O.)

Oscar Alexander Parker died on the  
fifteenth of February. The day after  
Valentine's Day. The day after he  
turned thirty.

His hand twitches.

ZORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

His death was messy, tragic, a little  
poetic.

He FLATLINES.

An EMT glances down at Alex, shouts something inaudible over his shoulder.

ZORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But most poignantly--

Gloved hands press defibrillator pads on his chest.

EMT

Clear!

ZORA (V.O.)

Dubious.

Alex INHALES.

His eyes open.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A private room in the ICU.

Alex lies in bed, hooked up to I.V., monitors. He stirs.

Zora sits at his bedside. She looks like she's been dragged through hell.



She watches him stir, stone-faced.

Alex opens his eyes, swallows, throat dry.

He lies still, takes in as much of his surroundings as he can without moving.

His head tilts to the side, slow.

Zora meets his eyes.

His copy of *Othello* sits in her lap.

ZORA

Brenda wanted to be here when you woke up. She's been here all week, but she had to look after Cecilia. The nanny never came back from vacation. You can imagine why.

Alex grunts.

ALEX

Richard.

A beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Zora. That video of you and me-- I never meant for anyone to see that.

ZORA

Not the public, you mean. But, what about my father? You telling me you wouldn't have loved it, just a little bit, to see the look on his face?

Alex closes his eyes.

ALEX

I--

ZORA

You what? Never meant to hurt me? Didn't expect me to fall for you? Didn't mean for any of this to happen? You've got a barrel of bullshit to pick from, so choose wisely.

ALEX

It's not bullshit.

He wets his lips.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I was going to say I'm sorry.

Zora looks away from him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry!

Zora runs her hands over the cover of the book.

ZORA

I was just like Desdemona, wasn't I?  
Just a casualty.

ALEX

No. Zora, I love you.

Zora places the book in his lap.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Zora. Zora!

He grabs her hand.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Look at me. I. LOVE. YOU.

She pulls away, floats out the door.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Zora! ZORA!

He rips the I.V. from his arm, the monitors from his chest.

Three NURSES rush from the bay.

Alex slides out of bed, all his weight is on the rail.

The book FLOPS to the floor.

The chalk pastel portrait of Zora falls from its pages.

NURSE 1

Sir! Mr. Parker, get back into bed-

ALEX

ZORA! ZORAAAA!

The nurses restrain him.

NURSE 2

Oscar, you need to settle down.  
Right now.

They hold him down on the bed.

INT. ICU - CONTINUOUS

Zora walks down the hallway, deaf to his screams.

ZORA (V.O.)

Maybe Alex did love me. Maybe he never meant to record us making love. Maybe he had, but regretted it the minute he lost me. Either way, I was thoroughly through with what I meant to everybody else.

She turns a corner.

CUT TO:

INT. ZORA'S ROOM - DAY

Zora stands in her mirror, smooths her hands over her conservative black dress.

She slips on a black peplum blazer, turns on her heels to go.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - LATER

Just a scattering of mourners.

Richard's political acquaintances are nowhere to be found.

Zora stands beside Brenda and Cecilia.

Nadia watches her from the other side of the grave. She holds onto CHRISTOPHER, 25, clean-cut and handsome.

Brenda rests her head on Zora's shoulder, heavily self-medicated.

Cecilia is in a daze.

BRENDA

(whispers)

You know, your father always loved you in this jacket.

She runs her hand over the shoulder pad.

ZORA

I know he did.

Brenda rubs her back.

CUT TO:

INT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

A school building, in the austere style of the Ivy League.

Zora still wears her funeral attire.

Her heels CLICK severely against the tiles.

She holds a thick manuscript tight to her chest.

Zora stops in front of a closed office.

A black, wire basket hangs on the door.

She drops the paper there.

Close on the title: "Desdemona In Her Grave."

Zora spins on her heels, CLICK CLACKS out.

EXT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Penn's campus.

Zora descends the stairs, crosses to her car.

The top is down. It's loaded with everything she owns.

She climbs in, starts it up, adjusts her rearview, stops.

Zora strips off her jacket, tosses it into the street, pulls off.

THE END.