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Not my son

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NOT MY SON

A Thesis

by

Cynthia Marie Lopez

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2015

Major Subject: Creative Writing

NOT MY SON

A Thesis
by
Cynthia Marie Lopez

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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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This screenplay is an intimate and honest exploration of the nature of various relationships between fathers and sons. It explores how fatherly expectations can make lasting impacts, both helpful and detrimental, on their sons that can ultimately drive a wedge between them if the sons think they have failed their fathers or if the fathers think that the sons have not lived up to their potentials.

The screenplay also lightly explores the quest for perfection and what ultimately is the price of that quest, especially for those who cannot meet those unrealistic expectations imposed on them by their parents and/or society due to circumstances beyond their control, such as disabilities.

DEDICATION

I would not be anywhere near where I am today without the unwavering support of my family: my father, Diego Lopez, my mother, Margie Lopez, and my brother, Mark Lopez. Their belief in me and my ability to accomplish this goal is exactly what made it happen. I would also like to thank my loving and dearest friends, Sara Mora, Addy Lopez, Victoria Cantu, Belinda Munoz, Kayla Guerra, and Lymaira Reyes for also never doubting me, and for understanding when I had to disappear down the writing rabbit hole for a while. Lastly, I would like to thank every child with Autism I have ever had the privilege of working with, because without them I would be a far more selfish and impatient person. With deepest love and gratitude, I thank you all.

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I will forever be grateful to Dr. Phillip Zwerling, whose honesty, unconditional support, and highly-respected expertise guided me along this journey with light and ebullience that would have otherwise been dark with confusion and self-doubt. His unerring patience and ever-present encouragement are what saw me through and I will never be able to thank him enough.

Also an equally large thanks to Dr. Eric Wiley and Mr. David Cameron for being two additional honest and supportive voices during this process. Their gently delivered constructive criticisms were much needed and appreciated. My ever-lasting gratitude belongs to them as well for the giving of their time and assistance.

I would also like to acknowledge my great friends, peers, and colleagues in the UTPA English Department who took the time to read my script, offer advice, or just be an ear to listen to my concerns, struggles, and triumphs. Thank you for keeping me grounded during this process.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

It was a hot Texas afternoon when the power gave out in our little elementary school in the tiny town of San Carlos. I never got the full details about the incident, but I heard something about ‘transformer’ and ‘explosion’ and before I knew it the fire alarm was going off and I was leading a gaggle of two hundred children out of the cafeteria to the safety of the soccer field. We ended up having to gather them and the rest of the school into the gym with the windows and doors open to keep from slow roasting. It was the middle of the day, half the staff including myself hadn’t eaten, and neither had half the kids. We were all hot. We were all hungry. We were all miserable.

So it came as no surprise when the student with autism I worked with for two years started throwing a fit. I couldn’t blame him really. The surroundings were driving his sensory issues crazy and he couldn’t really understand why we couldn’t just go back into the school where it had been nice and cool twenty minutes ago. I tried everything to calm him down, but he ended up trying to kick me and then stalked away to a corner of the gym. I let him cool down and tagged his teacher in to continue the calming attempts. I was too hot and weak from hunger and just couldn’t deal anymore. I needed a corner to cool down too.

Later, after he calmed down he asked me if I could take him to the restroom. I’m one of the few adults he trusted, and though he never said as much because his autism left him with very limited abilities to express his emotions, I could just tell by a few simple gestures. It was those gestures that I clung to when I was just as frustrated with him, and they allowed me to

forgive him quickly for almost using my shins as soccer balls and take him to a restroom that was in the closed building but accessible through the outside where we were temporarily housed. It was dark, of course, and a little bit eerie even for me. He refused to go in. I offered to shine a light with my phone and guard the open door to brighten up the room. He still refused, and when he bent over in the grass I was sure another tantrum was coming. I frantically tried calming attempts before his emotions could escalate, but to my relief he popped up in a happy mood and then did something that surprised me to no end: he presented me a flower.

Such a gesture was common from the other students I worked with that were disability free. I was often flooded with flowers and drawings and stickers from the children who liked me. But one of the unfortunate side effects of autism is that it impairs social skills and makes it difficult for those kids to be understood by people who don't know how to look for less obvious signs that you've made a connection with them. Gift giving isn't something they would think to do, especially if they're on what's known as the lower functioning level of the autism spectrum. This boy that I worked with was towards the lower end, and for a long time all I had were the little ways that he showed me he trusted and liked me. Until that day, when he surprised me with such a rare gesture that I nearly cried.

Fast forward three years later and I still remember that day like it was yesterday, not only because it was so personally touching, but also because I feel that it is a day that perfectly sums up what it is like to work with children with autism or other disabilities. They can drive your patience to the breaking point, but one little gesture of a love that is not so easily earned it and all unpleasant memories get pushed to a place where you can ignore them. It's what keeps you going in the face of overwhelming challenges that require a saint's worth of patience and unconditional love.

Working with those children was probably the most emotionally compelling experience of my life thus far, so when it came time to officially decide on a project on which to invest the next chunk of my life, I knew that the world of autism is what I wanted to explore. In the beginning it was going to be the sole focus of my screenplay and it started off as a family drama that centered on parents dealing with a son with autism. I don't have a child with a disability myself, and though I worked with those children extensively I still thought I needed to consult some sources that would give me more insight into that common yet still mysterious world.

One such source is a book by Ian Brown entitled, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son*. It chronicles the trials and tribulations of a father who cares for his young boy, Walker, who has an extremely rare genetic disorder known as cardiofaciocutaneous syndrome. It is a condition so rare, in fact, that only about two to three hundred cases have been found throughout the entire world. This rarity makes it difficult to find a cause, much less a cure for the syndrome, meaning that Brown's extremely disabled son is likely to stay that way for the rest of his life. But instead of discouragement, Brown offers a deeply honest and intimate look into his life that somehow manages to be unapologetically realistic and yet vaguely hopeful all at once. As any typical father would, he does often ask himself terribly conflicted questions about what value his son's broken life has since it is "a life lived in twilight, and often in pain" (Brown 3) and even admits that "life with him and life without him [are both] unthinkable" (Brown 68). Life with Walker puts tremendous strain upon his life as well as the life of his family, to the point where Brown even considered committing suicide. In the end though, he couldn't do it because his family "needed a good example—the standard chant of a well-meaning father" (Brown 224). But beyond that, Walker also challenges his father to look at himself and become a better person, simply by understanding his son better

and by getting to know disabled people better. This way he can “not [want to] fix them or even save them, but merely to be with them until [he stops] wanting to run away” (Brown 286). It is the first book I picked up when beginning my research for my thesis, though I did so hesitantly at first because it wasn’t directly related to autism. But after reading it, the beginning of what would later be a revelation began to take shape in my head. The brutally honest thoughts Brown shares drew me in and made me see that beyond simply telling an account of what a family living with a disabled person goes through, it is really the relationship between father and son and how a disability affects it that is the most compelling part of Brown’s account. I began to think that maybe I should aim to study that aspect rather than just focusing on the disability itself.

With that goal in mind, I referred to another book about a father/son relationship affected by a disability that relates to the one I choose to explore in my screenplay. The book is called *Not My Boy! A Father, a Son, and One Family’s Journey with Autism*. Though arguably not as brutally honest as the selection from Brown, it does work better in the way that it deals directly with the topic of autism that is essential to my own work. The book tells the story of famed professional football player, Rodney Peete, and his own struggle to understand and accept his son who had been diagnosed with autism at a young age. Like many fathers, Peete expects and feels an instant connection with his son after he is born because “you see them and look in their eyes and know that they are a part of you” (Peete 20), and also like many fathers he couldn’t help but imagine all of the skills and life lessons he would be able to impart to his son once he was old enough. He describes how those dreams come crashing down when his son is ultimately diagnosed. Quickly after that he goes into denial and “became defensive, refusing to accept what was right in front of [his] eyes” (Peete 124). He does eventually come to accept his son for who

he is, and realizes that he “had to let go of a lot in order to grab on to the reality of [his] child and of [his child’s] world” (Peete 231) in order to finally become the father his son needs him to be. Peete supposes that his initial struggles were because once their child is diagnosed with autism, Rodney and “many fathers see their child’s diagnosis as their own personal failure” (Peete 225), as if they are less of a man somehow because they weren’t able to produce the perfect child. This thought also largely influences the direction which my screenplay ultimately took, though I didn’t really see that that was where I was going to end up at the time. The belief that children are somehow expected to be shinier, vastly improved mirrors of their parents even though they are separate human beings intrigued me deeply. After reading these two amazing books, I turned to various films that also feature people with autism as one of their main characters to further study how they interact with the other characters around them, especially parents if that type of relationship was present.

I began with a biopic about arguably one of the most widely-known and successful persons with autism, *Temple Grandin*. Temple Grandin is a woman who struggles to achieve her dream of attending college and leaving her mark on the world while coping with autism in a society that can be cold and unforgiving. She ultimately succeeds, but not without the encouragement and sometimes forceful nature of her mother, who never allows her to let her disability stand in the way of what she knows her daughter can accomplish. Grandin’s mother champions her daughter’s rights to attend a regular school, largely because in spite of her autism, or perhaps because of it, Grandin is highly intelligent in ways that others aren’t. It allows her to see the world in new and interesting angles, which her mother insists make her “different, but not less” (*Temple Grandin*). Though the immediate correlation of a father/son relationship is not present between my screenplay and this film, I was still able to observe how various types of

people reacted to Temple Grandin and her plight with autism, ranging from the sympathy and understanding she receives from her mother and her mentor, to the scorn and impatience she faces from other students at her school and from the other professionals of the business she is trying to enter.

Similarly, a film called *Adam* provided me with more opportunities to study relationships between a person with a disability and those around him who are considered “normal”. The plot revolves around a young man named Adam who deals with Asperger’s Syndrome, a less severe form of autism. Throughout the film, Adam must contend with everyday activities that become a much greater challenge due to his mental condition. Living on his own, maintaining a job, falling in love with a woman, all are done by Adam with different degrees of success. In the end, Adam does attain his dream job, but unlike other films, he does not stay in love with the woman who shows him understanding and compassion as the audience probably expects. He comes to rely on her too heavily for social cues because “one thing about [Asperger’s syndrome] is not knowing what people are thinking” (*Adam*), which often results in misunderstandings and angry outbursts on his part. Because of this, she ends up leaving him after she claims that it is not her that he really loves, rather he is just afraid to be without her. It is a painfully realistic portrayal of how difficult it can be for people with any form of autism to maintain healthy romantic relationships, and it is one of the first times I have seen that portrayed in any film.

Another film that focuses on a character with autism is a 1986 film entitled, *The Boy Who Could Fly*. Out of all the films I viewed for knowledge, this film is the least realistic by far. It tells the tale of a boy with autism who is befriended by his new neighbors who have recently suffered the loss of their father. The boy, Eric, is often misunderstood not only because of his autism and non-existent verbal skills, but also because people in his school and around his

neighborhood have seen him do strange things, leading to the rumor that he can literally fly. Eventually the neighbor girl, Milly, begins to believe it, and at the end of the film she and Eric prove to everyone that the rumors were true by leaping off a building and flying through the neighborhood in front of large crowds. Scientists and news reporters swarm in after Eric flies off to speculate how he was able to pull off such a feat, but the popular theory was that he had “always dreamed of flying, so maybe if you wish hard enough and love long enough, anything is possible” (*The Boy Who Could Fly*). That fantastical turn at the end of the film did nothing to contribute to my screenplay, which was always meant to be a more realistic portrayal of the world of autism, but before the notion of literal flying came into the picture, the film did have its merits in its depiction of Eric and his life with autism. A large percentage of children with autism are non-verbal and have difficulties in school the way Eric does. Because of this, a large number of these children have a hard time making emotional connections to anybody around them, including those who want to assist them. This is accurately portrayed in the way Eric had no friends before Milly came along, and how not even his teachers really know how to help him perform well in school.

The aforementioned three films may not have been directly related to my own screenplay, even in the beginning when it did largely focus on my main characters’ son’s autism more than anything, but each film is helpful in that it sheds light on how the interpersonal relationships that are so basic to us as a species can so easily become affected by of a disability. I could feel my thoughts start to shift. I began to realize that it was the aspect of familial relations that were more intriguing rather than continuing to have my plot be centered too much on autism, to the point where the drama slipped away from me and my screenplay started to read more like an educational video about the world of autism. I was even told as much on numerous occasions.

So through my own revelations and through the advice of others, I realized that it would be the relationships between the characters that would carry the piece and could highlight the plights of autism without pointing it out in too obvious of a fashion. For that reason, I turned to films that didn't necessarily deal with plots revolving around disabilities but rather about tensions in what should be naturally loving relationships. I tried to keep it to father/son relationships, since that is still where I wanted to the focus to remain in my screenplay at this point.

The first film I saw was 1986's *Parenthood*. This film centers around one large family and therefore deals with many different types of relationships between different family members, though all are highly dysfunctional. I chose to limit my focus to the relationship between Steve Martin's character, Gil, his father, Frank, and his son, Kevin. Gil and Frank's relationship is strained due to Frank's lackadaisical and often callous attitude towards Gil when he was young, prompting Gil to worry that he will fail his own son in much the same way, especially considering how anxious and unconfident Kevin is in life. Frank eventually admits that Gil is a much better father than he ever was, and he says that it was because Gil was so sick as a child that he was an absentee father. He tells Gil that he "hated having to care, having to go through the pain, the hurt, the suffering" (*Parenthood*) because it just wasn't for him. Though tragic, this aspect of the film did largely influence my own explorations between my main character and his father in the way that lack of empathy from a parent can largely influence how that person wants to raise his own child, in either a beneficial or a destructive way depending on the person.

Another film I studied that emphasized this generational impact is a film called *The Place Beyond the Pines*. It revolves largely around two men on different sides of the law whose sons cross paths years later and have to live under the large shadows left behind by their fathers. Though not immediately relatable to my screenplay, one character does bring up an interesting

point when he desperately tries to spend time with his son to provide a better future for him, stating that he “wasn't around [his] Dad and look at the... way [he] turned out” (*Place Beyond the Pines*), which is to say that he doesn't think highly of himself after turning to a life of crime. It showed the belief that parental relationships possess the power to either vastly improve or irrevocably destroy the lives of the children involved no matter how much of a separate person that child tries to be. Similarly, a film entitled *The Skeleton Twins* focuses around two fraternal twins whose lives are damaged due to their father who committed suicide and their free spirit of a mother who shows little interest in spending time with them. Some of the poor choices the twins make throughout the film include attempted suicide, adultery, and deception, prompting one of the twins to state that maybe they were “doomed from the beginning” (*Skeleton Twins*) thanks to their dad and that maybe “all [their] problems came directly from him” (*Skeleton Twins*). How true this statement may be is partially a matter of opinion, but the belief that the presence of a strong paternal figure in the lives of children can make a large difference continues to be a theme.

Another film that explores this in perhaps a more thorough fashion is 1979's *Kramer vs. Kramer*. In this film, a man must care for his young son on his own for the first time after his wife becomes unhappy and leaves them both. His bond with his son is tenuous at best in the beginning of the film, mostly because he was too busy wrapped up in his work life to spend much time with his family. Immediately after his wife leaves, he attempts to bond with his son over things like cooking and picking him up from school but finds it difficult initially. At one point he yells at his son harshly, telling him he is “a spoiled, rotten little brat” (*Kramer vs. Kramer*) and even that he hates him after his son screams that he hates him first. Eventually their relationship is repaired, to the point where when the mother returns to take her son back, his

father fights to keep him. All three of these aforementioned films treat the absences of fathers in different ways and with different degrees of importance to their overall stories, but all of them still largely influence how my own screenplay deals with the presences of fathers in the lives of their children and how detrimental that relationship can be to the well-being of the child, whether the father is completely absent or if he was a constant and yet destructive presence in their life.

Ultimately, going down that road with my screenplay led me off into yet another direction which I thought would be a more compelling angle for my plot to tackle. As I was exploring the notion of fathers having profound impacts on their sons' futures, I began to wonder why that was the case. Is it because men truly do see their sons as miniature versions or perhaps extensions of themselves? Does this put on the added pressure to produce a perfect offspring to show the world that not only are you a worthwhile human being but that you can leave part of your worthiness behind as well? I suspected the answer to these questions would come by studying films that dealt with these issues rather explicitly, and the first relevant movie I came across a 2013 Japanese film entitled, *Like Father, Like Son*. In this film, a couple finds out that their perfect prodigy of a son is in fact not their real son, but instead he belongs to another couple who had given birth to a baby boy the exact same day and at the exact same hospital where a nurse maliciously switched the babies to deceive the parents. The main character, Ryota, is a very driven and successful businessman who must make the difficult decision to either keep the boy they had raised or reclaim their "natural" son. Throughout the film, both families attempt the switch but struggle with the situation the whole way. As Ryota gets to know the family that raised his biological son, he begins to question himself as a father and wonders if he had been putting too much pressure on the son he raised to be the perfect child, just as he is a perfect businessman. Ryota's wife, at one point in the film, accuses Ryota of being happy with

discovering that their son is not biologically theirs because then it gives him the excuse as to why their son could never fully live up to his high expectations. In the end, both families discover that biology isn't nearly as important as the bonds created between parent and child so they decide to keep the one they raised, and Ryota vows to be a less demanding and more understanding father to the boy he has come to know and love.

The Judge, produced in 2014, is another film that deals with the repercussions of a father and his warped expectations of his son. The plot centers around a lawyer, Hank, who returns to his hometown after a very long hiatus to attend the funeral of his mother and then to defend his father Joseph, a judge in his own right, who is accused of vehicular manslaughter after running over an old enemy. It is clear early on that the relationship between the two is strained, but the reasons don't become clear until their attempts to work together dissolve into a very bad argument, where Hank laments that Joseph was never there for him and was only ever "proud of fucking strangers" (*The Judge*). Joseph fires back by saying that Hank was going down the wrong path, what with his drug use and violent ways, and accuses him of ruining his brother's life when he got them into a car crash. Joseph insists that he sent Hank away to a juvenile detention center for his own good, so that he may finally turn his life around and become something, which he eventually did. Hank still accuses him of being too absent, never attending any of his graduations or telling him how proud he is of him that he graduated in the top of his class from law school. Joseph still insists on being correct and leaves it at that, still not understanding Hank's need for more support from his father. Later, however, just before he passes away from cancer, Joseph finally praises Hank by telling him he is the best lawyer he has ever known. Both this film and *Life Father, Like Son* feature fathers who come to understand

their habits of self-projecting on their sons and vow to be more understanding, a notion that is explored in my own screenplay, though with different results.

The film that ultimately makes the largest impact on my screenplay, however, is 1980's *Ordinary People*. This one tells the rather simplistic yet emotionally harrowing story of a seemingly perfect family trying to overcome the tragic death of the oldest son, Buck. The central character, Conrad, is his younger brother who blames himself for his brother's death and had tried to commit suicide because of it. He tries to work through this issues with his therapist, and with the support of his loving father, Calvin. It is the mother figure, Beth, and her relationship with Conrad that has the greatest influence on my screenplay, however. Though it is not the father/son dynamic that I have been exploring, this relationship is still powerful enough to translate over because throughout the entire film it seems that Beth partially blames Conrad for the death of Buck too, and therefore acts like a cold and distant mother who only adds to Conrad's guilt. She claims that "mothers don't hate their sons" (*Ordinary People*) but throughout the entire film she never does anything to show that. Ultimately she ends up leaving after Calvin admits that he doesn't know who she is anymore and that he probably doesn't love her. The relationship between her and her remaining son never gets repaired because in the end she can't admit that there was anything wrong with it. This emotionally raw and tragic ending plays a great part in where my screenplay eventually ended up after numerous rewrites. It is this kind of powerful parent/child dynamic that I wanted for my story because in its brutal honesty lays a highly effective and memorable conflict. All of the aforementioned films and books play pivotal roles in the inception and development, but *Ordinary People* really brought my screenplay to its dramatic climax.

After reading all the books and watching all the movies I chose, I had in my hands a screenplay that, if he passed his original on the street, they would walk right on by without recognizing each other. From a story about a man and a boy with his autism sprang a generational family drama about high expectations and the prices of not meeting them. The autistic character is still present because I still wanted to honor the passion that had sent me off on this particular journey, but now my screenplay is something that I couldn't have predicted it would be in the beginning but of which I am ultimately very proud. It may not be the best of the best, but I tried to add my own original spin on subjects that have been explored time and time again and ultimately I think I was able to put my own stamp on it in a few ways.

One such way is by differentiating my young character with autism from those in the first films I studied. In those films, and a lot of other films not mentioned, the character who has autism is often romanticized in some way, possibly to depict what often is a debilitating disorder in a more flattering light. If the issue of autism is addressed in films at all, the character tends to be on the higher functioning side of the autism spectrum. They are often idiot savants, capable of great things and only mildly inconvenienced by their conditions. In other words, the less pleasant issues are hardly ever shown.

Even in its earliest drafts, I did not want that to be the case for my screenplay. I wanted a more honest portrayal of the harsh realities of living with and caring for a person with autism, simply because it would not only allow the audience to empathize with the parents who deal with it daily, but it would also raise awareness of a disorder that now affects about one out of every sixty-eight children in the United States. Working with these children myself opened my eyes to just how misunderstood they and the disorder are to those who have had no exposure to this particular situation. They were never almost kicked by an autistic child only to be given a flower

ten minutes later. It is my hope that if I give a more honest portrayal of a child suffering from autism, something which I am pretty well authorized to do after years of first-hand experience, maybe I can educate a wider audience to their needs and arouse their empathy. It became too much of a public service announcement as I mentioned before, which I guess is pretty easy to accidentally do when you're too personally involved in a subject. Conflict of interest, you could call it. But even so, I kept the intent of presenting my young character with autism as true-to-life as possible. For far too long, autistic characters in the media have been glamorized, presumably to not make people as uncomfortable as they tend to be in real life with people with disabilities. I did not want to contribute to that glamorization.

To do this, I showed the crueler, more frustrating side to caring for a person with autism in many scenes of my screenplay. The film opens up with my autistic character, Dylan, throwing a violent tantrum as his parents struggle to find the appropriate way to end it. Dylan is a newly diagnosed child and the parents are inexperienced in these situations, and in my real life experience with those children, in the early stages of getting to know the child it is largely trial and error. A vast majority of autistic children, even those that are considered to be on the more intelligent and higher functioning end of the spectrum, have certain ticks and quirks that can result in tantrums if not dealt with correctly. Despite what the media may show or omit, violent tantrums are not exclusive to small children when it comes to autism. I've seen 12-year-olds taller than me throw themselves to the floor, or tear a room apart, or attempt to hurt themselves over something as minor as a bad grade or too much homework. It is a stimuli issue, and something that most films don't address for reasons that I can only guess, but I would assume it is because the truth is harsh and unpleasant. I was willing to depict that unpleasantness if it meant a more sincere portrait of the daily struggles of living with a disability.

I also stayed away from having my autistic character suddenly accomplish a seemingly impossible task. Dylan does have a natural talent for playing piano like a great many savant characters have had in other films. It is a talent that a lot of children with autism have in real life, since objective activities like playing music tend to be within the realm of their abilities to understand, unlike subjective subjects such as writing. Showing them as savants is not really an issue in other films. What does become a bit too idealistic, however, is when the film shows them excelling at that talent and the world readily accepting them because of it. It can happen and has I'm sure, but more often than not even the most talented of autistic children are not given the opportunities to use their talents because they are held back by social stigmas. Their difficulties with things like speech, empathy, and understanding social cues often prevent them from establishing the correct connections to get jobs or to attend schools that cultivate specific talents. That is why, in keeping with this arguably tragic fact, I decided not to show Dylan miraculously excelling at his audition for the prestigious school his father Marcus desperately wants him to attend, just as most other traditional films probably would. In truth, a high pressure atmosphere would more than likely trigger Dylan or most other autistic kids into a fit of nerves, which would probably then dissolve into a tantrum if they were already prone to them. It may be the crueler, more pessimistic way to go, but overly-optimistic, happy films about someone triumphing over a disability have been done many times before. I think that by keeping with the honesty, I have added a bit of a fresh perspective to a topic that has been explored many times before.

Another way I attempt to differentiate my script is by mixing up the notion of that generational cause-and-effect dynamic that so many previous works explored through poor father/son relationships. As I mentioned in the analysis of my chosen films, a lot of them tackled

the notion of the son's life either succeeding or failing, depending on the kind of influence their fathers had on their lives when they were young. If the father was absent completely, the son tended to be a lost soul drifting through a life full of mistakes and regrets. If the father was present physically but absent emotionally, the son more than likely succeeded just to spite him, but they also grew up to be bitter, resentful young men who struggle to prove their worthiness to the world and crave that fatherly praise well into adulthood. These are compelling portrayals, but as I said they've been done before. To change up my screenplay, I decided to mix in a bit of both of these reactions into Marcus and then shake up the cruel father/tortured son dynamic.

I made Marcus attempt to be a success in order to both spite his father and to try and finally earn his approval. He teaches at a university, which would be considered worthy of praise by most people, but Carl remains steadfast in his disappointment. He sees this occupation of studying philosophy for a living as impractical, and something that does not contribute some valuable service to the community. Carl himself is, or was before being forced to retire, a CEO of a major corporation. He wanted these practical goals for his sons as well, both of whom instead turn out to be nothing but dreamers who would never truly make an impact on the world, in Carl's eyes at least. Carl resents both of his sons for not following in his footsteps and becoming reflections of him, and this breeds an animosity between him and Marcus that escalates to a boiling point. And yet, despite wanting so desperately to prove himself to his father, both to show him that he is wrong and to earn his praise, Marcus continues to make horrible life decisions as if he can't help it. In his drive to succeed, he completely ignores the realities of his home life, to the point where his wife is driven into the arms of another man and he is completely disconnected from a son who himself needs a father to help him with his struggles with autism. Marcus simultaneously wants acknowledgement from his father and

wants to avoid becoming him, but in his blind ambition to achieve that, he ends up becoming his father anyway.

I also wanted to change the more traditional angle films take when depicting an emotionally damaged son with a cold-hearted father. Usually in films that explore that, the son either finally does something to make his father proud or reveals to him the error of his ways through an impassioned speech about how the father was never there for him. Then the father realizes that he's been wrong all along, and vows to be a better, more understanding father to his son. The two establish a tighter emotional bond and the film ends happily. In order to steer clear of imitating that, I instead have Carl basically use Marcus to claw his way back to his former, better life, leaving Marcus broken by the wayside. Carl was a cruel, absentee father, yes, and part of him probably realizes it. But instead of acknowledging his shortcomings and attempting to connect to Marcus in a way he never has before, he simply uses him as a pawn to gain back the life he was so proud of. In my screenplay, Carl himself makes many mistakes as well and falls from grace. He goes from being the CEO of a large corporation with a beautiful, young wife to a jobless man on parole who loses his license and has to attend a recovery program for alcoholics just to regain his independence. His efforts to take back his life are almost thwarted by his own hand several times, either by drinking when he knows he shouldn't or by almost getting into an altercation that would have landed him in jail for sure. In all of these instances, it is only Marcus that prevents him from losing it all. Instead of being thankful, Carl abuses his help and then watches when Marcus falls victim to his own vices in almost the exact same way Carl would have had Marcus not stopped him. Marcus ends up losing it all while Carl reclaims everything he once had. It is a dark take, but it is also my attempt to show the dangers of putting too much stake into a father's expectations. Carl may be partially responsible for the destruction

of Marcus, but in the end it is Marcus who destroys himself by wanting something from Carl too much even though part of him realizes that Carl will never give it.

Another way I tried to set my film apart from the ones I studied is to move away from making my main character a sympathetic hero who grows at the end. Most films, and lots of other story-telling mediums for that matter, usually have a protagonist that starts off as an unsympathetic figure for reasons that are either personal or due to some outside force that is making them that way. While this a great story-telling device to get the audience to care for the plight of the character, I decided to go more in the direction of the anti-hero in order to create a character that hasn't often been seen in a film dealing with a family-oriented story. A modicum of empathy can still potentially be felt for Marcus, as there are many people who struggle with caring for a child with autism and who have difficult relationships with their parents, and Marcus also faces many conflicts that move along his story along to keep with the drama. But he is not the typical good guy that would usually be seen in a dramatic piece centered on family, nor can any other character really be seen in that light. This makes for some pretty unsympathetic characters, but to be different I think that serves me well. It also helps me achieve another goal of mine, which is to show the far less pleasant side of family dynamics and reveal some of the awful things people are capable of doing to each other when put in high pressure situations. The abandonment of Dylan at the end is unfortunately based on a true story, and is just one of those awful things that happens in our world. But showing it in a brutally honest way, it is my hope that if sympathy cannot be felt for the characters, then at the very least my audience will be appalled by the actions taken by these selfish people and do their best to avoid becoming them in a world full of so many like them.

The last way I attempted to distinguish my screenplay is by doing something drastically different with the ending. In these kinds of stories, the characters usually go through an arc from ignorance to knowledge, which ultimately leads to a happy ending for most, if not all, of the characters. The child with autism may not get everything they ever dreamed of, but they find acceptance either in one other person or the community at large. They find their place in the world and they are happy. The father realizes how harsh and wrong he's been to treat his son as merely an extension of his own dreams and goals, and instead learns to value his boy as a separate human being with good things to offer the world. Meanwhile, the son learns to stop living for this father and start valuing his own life. Maybe he even realizes that he was being the same kind of poor father to his own son that his father was to him. He vows to change for the better, usually around the time when his father comes to the same conclusion. They reconnect and live happily ever after. It's been done many times before, and if done right it's a kind of ending that can no doubt be emotionally effective and incredibly powerful. But I think that it is time for a change, no matter how brutally truthful that change may be. I had to give up the fear of turning audience expectations on their heads if I wanted to even hope to contribute something slightly fresh instead of producing another pale imitation of the greats.

So to do this, I decided to go with an ending that, as I mentioned before, is partially inspired by a true life event that happened several years ago. In my screenplay, Marcus loses it all after his father comes and drastically alters his life. His wife leaves him, he loses his job, his father moves out still believing he is a failure, and he is left with a son whose disability does nothing but serve as a reminder that Dylan will never live up to any high expectations that Marcus would have liked to set for him. This becomes the breaking point for him. Instead of coming to any realization about the role he played in the destruction of his own life, he decides

to run away from it. He packs up Dylan, gets him one last meal, drops him off in a hospital waiting room, and leaves, never intending on looking back.

It is so far from the typical, Hollywood happy ending that I've hardly ever seen it done in any film about any subject, but the harsh reality of modern society is that things like that happen all the time, often to people who deserve it the least. By showing the crueler side of the world we live in, it was my hope that not only would it better serve the honesty I am aiming for, but also that it will arouse empathy from an audience without having to preach to them about the evils of expecting too much from your children or mistreating people with disabilities. Marcus, Carl, and Erika are not sympathetic characters, though they are the characters around whom the story revolves. Dylan is arguably the only truly innocent character of the screenplay, and though he has his difficult moments, it is due to something that is beyond his control. By making the people around him nearly unlovable and keeping the ending dark and tragic, it is my hope that empathy will transfer over to Dylan in a much subtler way rather than having the story focus entirely on his autism as did the first drafts. And as I previously mentioned, it was also my hope to keep the audience from seeing the ending coming as they so often do with other films. If they can be done right, happy endings are just fine, but surprising the audience at the very end is also an effective way to hopefully leave lasting impressions.

Above my desk where I type this sits a class picture of my very first kindergarten class, where I was first introduced to the boy with the flower. Next to it is another picture from another elementary school, a special Christmas photo where the special education teacher I worked with had gathered all the children in our special education program to pose for us. Their ages and disabilities vary, but all smile sweetly as I drape my arms over the shoulders of every one of them I could reach. The memories are powerful, and the emotions they stir within me are even

stronger. Perhaps a little too strong now that I think back to all the first drafts of my screenplay that were too “Lifetime movie”, as a beloved advisor pointed out. I was too personally invested and, much like Marcus, too blinded by my own ambitions to see the much more dramatically compelling forest through the too preachy trees. It was a long road to get to this point, and I’m sure it will be longer still as I continue to develop this story, but I think any sized step forward is a step in the right direction. After my own studying, taking the advice of others, and trying to give an audience more to see, it is my hope that I have added something a little new to a film canon already filled with so many valuable screenplays. In that way, we as writers can ensure that the future of films will be just as bright and thought-provoking as its past.

NOT MY SON

A Screenplay

by

Cynthia Marie Lopez

OVER BLACK we hear the sound of a child SCREAMING.

FADE IN:

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MARCUS MCGUIRE is sitting cross-legged floor of his living room holding a screaming DYLAN MCGUIRE in his lap. ERIKA MCGUIRE is standing by.

ERIKA

Look Dylan. Look sweetheart. Your favorite movie is on T.V.

Dylan is still screaming and squirming in Marcus' arms, trying to get out of his hold.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Marcus, turn him towards the damn T.V.

MARCUS

I'm trying, but he won't let me.

Marcus tries to grab him to turn them both around to the T.V.

ERIKA

You're going to end up hurting him that way.

MARCUS

Do you want to try holding him? Be my guest.

ERIKA

What is he screaming for anyway?

MARCUS

How the hell should I know? One minute he was fine, the next he was banging his head against the floor.

ERIKA

Well did you check the book?

MARCUS

When the hell would I have had time to check the fucking book, Erika?

ERIKA

Well where is it?

MARCUS

I don't know, it's here somewhere.

Erika is searching frantically around the living room. Dylan has not stopped screaming. Finally she picks up a book called 'The First Year: Autism Spectrum Disorders'.

ERIKA

How many months has it been since his diagnosis already? Eight?

MARCUS

Six.

She pauses briefly then flips open the book. She reads a little then throws it down.

ERIKA

This one's useless, all it talks about is getting the right services at school.

MARCUS

A lot of good that does us when he's already in school.

ERIKA

Did you try setting the timer?

MARCUS

Did I try, did I try, why is this solely my responsibility? Why don't you set the Goddamn timer, Erika?

ERIKA

Don't talk to me that way.

Dylan squirms more violently in Marcus' arms.

MARCUS

Would you just get the timer,
please?

Erika stomps over to the shelf and retrieves the timer. She bends low to be face-to-face with Dylan.

ERIKA

Dylan. Dylan, look at Mommy.
Dylan has one minute to stop
screaming or he's going to bed
without T.V. time.

DYLAN

No.

ERIKA

Yes. One minute, Dylan.

She twists the timer to one minute and holds it up for him to see.

MARCUS

God, I already know this is going
to be the longest minute of my
life.

ERIKA

Don't squeeze him so hard.

MARCUS

I'm not squeezing him hard, I'm
just trying to prevent him from
head-butting me like we're in some
Goddamn WWE smackdown.

ERIKA

Well wrap your legs around his.
Maybe that'll keep him from
kicking.

MARCUS

He wouldn't be kicking if you
weren't holding the timer right in
his face.

ERIKA

This is the only way he'll pay attention to it.

The timer dings and Dylan has not stopped screaming.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Alright that's it. Dylan's going to bed.

DYLAN

No. No. No. Movie.

MARCUS

Nope. Dylan didn't stop screaming so now no movie for Dylan. Let's go.

DYLAN

No, no, no, no.

Marcus lifts Dylan in his arms still kicking and screaming. He exits the living room to the stairs with Erika trailing behind.

CUT TO:

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus kicks open the door with a thrashing Dylan and deposits him on the bed.

MARCUS

Bedtime for Dylan.

DYLAN

No. No bedtime. Movie. I hate you. No.

Marcus ignores him as deposits him on the bed. Dylan jumps up and off and goes to hit Marcus. Marcus exits quickly and shuts the door.

CUT TO:

INT. MCGUIRE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Marcus leans against the wall and looks at Erika. Dylan can still be heard yelling and pounding on the door.

ERIKA
How long should we give him?

MARCUS
'Til what?

ERIKA
'Til we try something else.

MARCUS
What else is there?

ERIKA
Maybe we should call Jeff.

MARCUS
It's the middle of the night,
Erika, we can't bother Jeff
every time we run into a little
snag.

ERIKA
You call this a little snag?

MARCUS
He'll stop, we just can't give him
the attention he wants with these
outbursts. If we ignore him, he'll
calm down and go to bed.

ERIKA
Are you certain?

MARCUS
Yes. Come on. Let's go to bed.

Marcus and Erika walk to their room.

INT. MCGUIRE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marcus and Erika are lying in bed side by side staring at the ceiling. Dylan is heard yelling O.S.

ERIKA
Marcus-

MARCUS

No Erika.

ERIKA

No what?

MARCUS

No I'm not going to go check on him like you were about to ask me to.

ERIKA

How are we supposed to get any sleep then?

MARCUS

He's been at it for twenty minutes, he can't keep up the yelling much longer.

ERIKA

Are you sure about that?

MARCUS

(beat)

No.

Marcus and Erika continue to stare at the ceiling as the yelling persists.

INT. MCGUIRE KITCHEN - DAY

Marcus and Erika are sitting across from each other at a small table silently eating breakfast.

MARCUS

What are your plans for today?

ERIKA

I have a little more research to do, then I can begin to wrap up the last chapter.

MARCUS

The last chapter of what?

ERIKA

The novel I've been working on. I told you about it, remember?

MARCUS

(beat)

Oh yes, the novel.

ERIKA

You don't remember, do you?

MARCUS

Forgive me, dearest, but this is about the fourth new novel I've heard about in a year. It's hard to keep track of them at times.

ERIKA

That isn't true. The other ideas were just things I was spitballing around. This is the one I've been focusing all my energies on for months now. It's almost done.

MARCUS

Well I look forward to reading the completed draft.

ERIKA

What makes you think I'd want you to read it?

MARCUS

Why wouldn't you want a University philosophy teacher to offer you assistance?

ERIKA

Because this book has nothing to do with his field of study, maybe?

MARCUS

I've had experience with writing, Erika-

ERIKA

So have I.

MARCUS

Yes, but a few sessions at a fiction writing workshop does not the next Hemingway make.

ERIKA

Neither does your philosophy degree.

MARCUS

Fine. But you can't say I didn't offer.

(beat)

Have anything else on the agenda for today?

ERIKA

Nothing in particular. Are you sitting office hours today?

MARCUS

It is Tuesday, isn't it?

ERIKA

Is it?

MARCUS

Last time I checked.

Erika suddenly hops up from the seat and begins clearing the table rapidly.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

ERIKA

I forgot today is Jeff's day to take Dylan to school.

MARCUS

Why are you suddenly putting on the Martha Stewart routine? He knows what our house looks like.

ERIKA

That doesn't mean we have to keep it looking like a sty.

Erika looks down at herself.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Oh God, I haven't even had time to shower yet. Would you please help clean up in here? I'll be right back.

Erika rushes out of the kitchen. Marcus sighs, moves to get up, but then changes his mind and continues eating. The doorbell rings. Marcus goes to answer it.

CUT TO:

INT. MCGUIRE FOYER - DAY

Marcus opens the door to JEFF, a young, handsome respite care worker.

JEFF

Good morning, Dr. McGuire. How are you this morning?

MARCUS

Fine, just fine, Jeff, come on in.

Marcus ushers JEFF in and leads him into the kitchen.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

How've you been? Would you like something to eat? There's plenty.

JEFF

Oh no thanks, I had a pretty big breakfast before I got here.

MARCUS

Well at least have a seat and I'll pour you some coffee.

JEFF

Thank you, sir.

Marcus gives Jeff a cup and pours him some coffee.

MARCUS

How's working with Dylan been treating you so far?

JEFF

Oh just great, sir, just great. It really teaches me a lot about patience and unconditional care.

MARCUS

Yeah, trying living here sometime.

JEFF

What was that, sir?

MARCUS

Nothing, Jeff, nothing.

Erika suddenly rushes into the kitchen, dressed but still a little disheveled.

ERIKA

Jeff, hello.

Jeff stands up and smiles warmly.

JEFF

Good morning, Mrs. McGuire. How are you?

ERIKA

Oh I'm just great. I'm sorry the place is such a mess.

JEFF

Oh not at all. If you want to see a mess you should take a look at my apartment one of these days. I'm afraid I'm pretty hopeless when it comes to house care.

ERIKA

Well it's a good thing you have so many other talents.

JEFF

Sure is.

There's a beat where Erika and Jeff smile at each other while Marcus looks on. The silence is broken by a scream from upstairs.

ERIKA

He was at it all night last night too. He didn't calm down enough to go to sleep until about three hours ago. I'm not quite sure he'll even make it to school this morning.

JEFF

Yikes. Want me to see if I can handle it?

ERIKA

Would you please? We ran out of options the moment the book didn't tell us exactly what to do.

JEFF

Don't worry, a lot of parents feel the same way. Let me see if I can go figure out what's bothering him. Excuse me.

Jeff leaves the kitchen. As soon as he does, Marcus snorts.

ERIKA

What?

MARCUS

"It's good that you have some many other talents, Jeff." Don't you have even a modicum of decency that tells you not to flirt with a man fifteen years your junior?

ERIKA

I was not flirting.

MARCUS

Believe me, it may have been a while since I've seen her myself, but I'd know a flirtatious Erika anywhere.

Erika pouts and goes back to cleaning.

ERIKA
You're delusional.

MARCUS
I very much hope so.

Marcus gets up and pecks Erika on the cheek.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
I'm off to work.

ERIKA
Have a good day.

MARCUS
I'll try.

Marcus exits the kitchen as Erika continues cleaning.

INT. MARCUS' OFFICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - DAY

Marcus is sitting at his desk grading a stack of papers. Classical music plays in the background. A young, enthusiastic professor, DR. TOM JACOBS, walks by but then doubles back and leans against Marcus' threshold.

TOM
Hey Plato, how's it hanging?

MARCUS
God, you know I hate that nickname.

TOM
Why do you think I use it?
Something's got to snap you out of
that overactive brain of yours.
Annoyance seems like a good a
tactic as any.

MARCUS
Well, you'd be the best damn
strategist in the field if it was
an occupation.

TOM
Seriously though, you look
stressed. Your papers can't be

that bad, can they?

MARCUS

It's not so much that they're bad,
it's just that they're all my
thoughts and opinions spewed back
to me in different word order. My
students must see me as their own
little baby bird, the way they
regurgitate this stuff back to me.

TOM

I wouldn't blame them too much.
You're probably the most brilliant
philosophy professor we have here.
It makes sense that they'd like
your ideas. Either that or they're
just trying to impress you.

MARCUS

Well it's not working either way.

Marcus holds up a paper covered in red markings.

TOM

Dear God, did you bleed all over
it?

MARCUS

Something to that effect.

TOM

Well, aside from the baby bird
feedings, how are things going for
you?

MARCUS

Just swell, thanks.

TOM

No interesting news lately? Juicy
University tidbits perhaps?

MARCUS

(beat)

Alright, what is it that you're up

to exactly? Are you trying to weasel some confidential information out of me again?

TOM

Why Dr. McGuire, I am shocked and frankly appalled that you would think me capable of such nefarious deeds. Can't one friend take an interest in another friend's life when the friend is concerned about that friend-

MARCUS

You are, aren't you?

TOM

Well, yeah...

MARCUS

You're despicable.

TOM

No, I'm a philosopher. They go hand-in-hand.

MARCUS

Well philosophize elsewhere, would you please? I have no juicy tidbits for you today. And frankly I don't see why you think I would let you be privy to my personal happenings even if I did get some advanced notice.

TOM

Come on, Marcus, I'm dying over here. How am I supposed to rest easy at night when the whole damn department could lose their jobs after the merger?

MARCUS

They didn't say that every professor and lecturer would be let go, they just said that everyone

from both departments needs to reapply so they can have a fair, unbiased rehiring session. You have nothing to be worried about.

TOM

That's easy for you to say, you're the damn associate professor we have. Unless Karl Marx comes walking through that door and demands a teaching position, they'll bump you up to full professor for sure.

MARCUS

I think you're extolling my virtues a little too biasedly, since I got you this job and all

TOM

And it is my sincere hope that you'll let me keep it.

MARCUS

Doesn't the fact that I'm not worried tell you anything? I don't have tenure yet either, you know.

TOM

Nothing will ease my mind 'til I know for sure. Please, just throw me a bone here. Do they have any ideas about who they're keeping or letting go yet?

MARCUS

Tom I told you, I honestly don't know. Just because I have some friends in high places doesn't mean they have to tell me everything. And even if they did, I'd keep it strictly confidential until the appropriate time.

TOM

I ain't too proud to beg, sweet

darlin-

MARCUS

Stolen, lyrical flattery will get you nowhere.

TOM

Fine, be a mean old curmudgeon.

MARCUS

As long as you promise to continue being a stubborn, young prick.

TOM

Deal. Now how about some lunch? I've got a two hour break before my next class and I'm starving.

MARCUS

What, that nubile little wife of yours didn't pack your lunch like every other day? The honeymoon over already?

TOM

Yeah, six months is apparently the limit. We've moved on to the boring old married couple phase already.

MARCUS

Just wait 'til you've been married as long as I have.

TOM

So yes to the lunch then?

MARCUS

Sorry, no can do. I have a lunch date.

Marcus gathers his papers and belongings into his attaché case.

TOM

Oh? With which of your students? The big-breasted blonde with the

toddler-sized shirts?

MARCUS

Funny. And no, it's just with a friend.

TOM

A big-breasted friend?

MARCUS

Can you think of nothing but breasts? It's just a friend and I'm already late, so if you'll excuse me.

Marcus walks out of his office past Tom. Tom calls after him.

TOM

I'm a philosopher. It's my job to over-think every topic.

MARCUS

I'll be sure to testify to that at your eventual harassment suits.

Tom laughs and goes back to his office. Marcus disappears out the stairwell door.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Marcus walks into an austere looking office building.

INT. CARL'S OFFICE - DAY

CARL MCGUIRE is sitting at his desk going over a long list of figures. Marcus emerges and pauses at the threshold. Carl looks up only briefly from his work.

CARL

Well are you going to come in or aren't you?

Marcus enters wordlessly and takes a seat in the chair across the desk.

MARCUS

Hello Dad.

CARL

Hello. What brings you here on this particular afternoon?

MARCUS

Oh, I just dropped by to say hello. It's been a while since we chatted.

CARL

And you interrupted my work for this?

MARCUS

I'm sorry, I didn't realize crunching numbers for a major corporation ranked amongst heart surgery and firefighting on the list of jobs that cannot be interrupted.

Carl glares but says nothing.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Besides, this seems to be the only way I can ever reach you these days.

Carl sighs and puts down his paperwork.

CARL

Fine, you have five minutes of my time. What did you want to talk about?

MARCUS

Oh you know, any old perfunctory topic will do. Weather, sports, the decline of human civilization-

CARL

Look Marcus, if you just came here to be cute-

MARCUS

How's Janine?

CARL

(beat)

She's fine.

MARCUS

Just fine, that's all you're going to tell me? Come on Dad, it's not every lucky little boy who gets an ex-beauty pageant winner who's twenty years his junior as a stepmother. There's gotta be something interesting going on in that palatial townhouse of yours.

CARL

Nothing that concerns you.

MARCUS

Yeah, it never does, does it?

(beat)

Well I know my five minutes aren't technically up, but I imagine I wasted enough of your time. I just came by to say hi. Oh, and to give you this.

Marcus gives Carl the small gift he had in his hand.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Happy Birthday, Dad.

Carl takes the gift slowly.

CARL

You...actually remembered.

MARCUS

Of course I did, it's exactly two months before mine. Oh, but you wouldn't really know that, would you?

CARL

I-

MARCUS

No no, it's alright. I understand perfectly. Being a big time

CEO must get pretty time
consuming.

CARL

At times, yes.

MARCUS

Yeah, well, like I said, I figured
as much.

(beat)

So, I hope you like the gift and
I'll...see you around.

Carl stands up and awkwardly shakes Marcus' hand.

CARL

Yes, well I sure hope so. And
thank you for the gift.

MARCUS

You're welcome.

Marcus begins to walk out of the office.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Dad.

CARL

Goodbye....son.

Carl turns back to his paperwork immediately. Marcus lingers at the door for a beat but then leaves. Another man approaches his door.

MAN

Carl. Carl, it's time for you to
go.

CARL

You said I had 'til the end of the
day.

MAN

That was when I thought you'd be
packing, not working. Come on.

Carl sighs and gets up.

CARL

You're making a mistake. I'm the best damn CEO you got.

MAN

Who's overstayed his welcome by about eight years. Come on. Time to enjoy retirement.

The man puts his hands on Carl's elbow to guide him out the door. Carl jerks back.

CARL

Keep your fucking hands off me. I'll leave at my own pace.

Carl picks up a box in the corner of the office then slowly makes his way out.

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus walks in after returning home from work. Erika and Jeff are sitting side by side on the couch while Dylan practices his piano.

MARCUS

Good evening, everyone.

ERIKA

Hello, honey. You're home earlier than I thought.

JEFF

Welcome home, Dr. McGuire.

MARCUS

Jeff.

He goes to Erika and gives her a lingering kiss then turns back to Jeff.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You're here a little late, aren't you?

JEFF

Yeah, sorry about that. It's just that Dylan had a pretty rough day today, I wanted to make sure he was

alright.

ERIKA

You don't need to apologize for anything, Jeff. I appreciate all you did to help me today. Usually I have to deal with these things on my own.

JEFF

It was my pleasure, Erika.

MARCUS

Erika? I didn't realize we were all on first name basis' around here.

JEFF

It just started today, actually. At Erika's insistence.

MARCUS

Well then I insist that you call me Marcus.

JEFF

Okay...Marcus. Wow, that's going to take some getting used to.

MARCUS

Yes, well, if you'll beg our pardon, Jeff, but I have had a rather long day-

JEFF

Say no more, I'm gone. Good night, Marcus. Good night, Erika.

He goes to Dylan.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Bye Dylan. Behave for Mom and Dad, okay?

Dylan ignores him as he continues playing. Jeff smiles and stands.

JEFF

I'll see you both on Thursday.

ERIKA

I'm looking forward to it. Good night.

MARCUS

Yes, good night.

Marcus ushers Jeff out of the living room then turns back to Erika.

ERIKA

You didn't have to be so rude, you know.

MARCUS

I'm sorry, it was just...a trying day.

ERIKA

That's no excuse.

MARCUS

What was he doing here so damn late, anyway?

ERIKA

He told you, Dylan was having a really bad day today. He calmed down barely an hour ago. Jeff just wanted to make sure things were okay before he left.

MARCUS

Yes, I'm sure that was the reason.

ERIKA

What is with you today? You're snappy even for you.

Marcus sighs and flops down on the couch.

MARCUS

It's my dad's birthday today so I went to see him at his office.

Erika sits down next to him.

ERIKA

Ah, now it's all starting to make sense.

MARCUS

The old bastard didn't even have the decency to open the gift I got him. He just set it aside on his desk like it was some cheap trinket.

ERIKA

What did you get him?

MARCUS

A Gucci watch. I figured he was still wearing that same damn thirty year old watch he's too cheap to replace. Turns out I was right.

ERIKA

Gucci? God, that must have cost a small fortune.

MARCUS

We can afford it.

ERIKA

Do you think it's really wise to be spending that much money when you might not have a job come the fall?

MARCUS

Et tu, Brute? Everybody at work except for Tom is convinced that we're all doomed to unemployment. I'm one of the best in my field, I'm sure the hiring committee will see it too.

ERIKA

Still, I don't really think now's the time to be buying 900 dollar

watches for people we hate.

MARCUS

It was 750, they were having a sale. And I don't hate him exactly-

ERIKA

Mmm hmm.

MARCUS

Look, it was a one time thing for his 70th birthday, and he made it pretty clear that he's not going to go out of his way to see me again so it's probably the last birthday I have to worry about. It's over.

ERIKA

If you say so.

MARCUS

How's the piano playing coming along?

ERIKA

Really good, actually. It's almost like he's a...a...

MARCUS

A savant.

ERIKA

A what?

MARCUS

It's what they call people with disabilities who are incredibly talented at one specific thing.

ERIKA

Well then he's one of those alright. In fact, his piano teacher gave me this the other day.

Erika picks up a pamphlet and shows it to Marcus.

MARCUS

The Special Music School? You mean special as in....?

ERIKA

No, special as in really gifted musical kids. It's supposed to be a really good school. She thinks Dylan could make it in.

MARCUS

Would they take him?

ERIKA

She says they would probably help him if he proves that he's talented enough. Clearly he is.

MARCUS

It says here he has to audition.

ERIKA

Yeah, that's pretty much the only down part.

MARCUS

Anyway around it?

ERIKA

I already called, they said no.

Marcus throws the pamphlet down.

MARCUS

Well that's that then.

ERIKA

Are you sure?

MARCUS

Erika, you know as well as I do that Dylan can't get up in front of crowds like that. He'll embarrass himself for sure.

ERIKA

Yeah, I guess you're right.

(sighs)

I'm going to go take a shower.

Watch Dylan for a while, will you?

MARCUS

Fine.

Erika gets up to leave the living room. Marcus leans back against the couch and sighs.

INT. MARCUS' OFFICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - DAY

Marcus enters his office and see a box on his desk with a note attached to it. He picks up the box and sees that it's the Gucci watch he gave his dad. He picks up the note.

INSERT - THE NOTE

"Marcus, though the gesture is appreciated, I can't accept this watch. I'm sure in your profession this kind of money could be put to better use..."

Marcus crumples up the note.

MARCUS

Arrogant prick.

He tosses the note in the trash and picks up the watch. After a beat he decides to put it on. He admires it for a second then gets to work.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

A very drunken Carl is shoved out of a bar into the parking lot by an angry BAR OWNER.

BAR OWNER

Get the fuck out of my place, old man.

CARL

Don't you push me, you stupid queer. You don't know me. You don't know what I've been through.

BAR OWNER

Yeah, yeah, go bitch about it to
someone who cares.

The bar owner goes back inside. Carl stumbles to his parked car.

Carl struggles to get the keys into the keyhole. He finally succeeds.

Carl gets into the car and speeds out of the parking lot.

Not far from the parking lot, Carl's car veers off the road and rams straight into a tree.

INT. MCGUIRE HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcus returns home late from work. He finds Erika and Dylan in the living room. Erika is reading and Dylan is mesmerized by a science documentary.

MARCUS
Hello, McGuire family.

Erika doesn't look up from her book.

ERIKA
How was your day, dear?

Marcus plants a kiss on her head and flops down on the couch.

MARCUS
Long and tedious. How was yours?

ERIKA
Similar.

MARCUS
Hmm.

Marcus leans his head back against the couch and closes his eyes. Dylan's movie ends but he gets up as the credits are rolling and hits replay on the dvd player. The movie starts again.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
He's watching this documentary
again? How many times has he
watched it?

ERIKA
Too many times to count.

MARCUS

How many times has he watched it today?

Erika still hasn't looked up from her book. There is a beat while she reads.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Erika.

ERIKA

(looks up)

What?

MARCUS

How many times has Dylan watched this today?

ERIKA

I don't know, I guess this would be his third time.

MARCUS

And you've just let him sit in front of the T.V. all evening?

ERIKA

It wasn't a matter of letting him, Marcus, he was having a bad day again and this was the only way to calm him down.

MARCUS

And what about those techniques Jeff showed us for letting him know that he can't always get his way? Did you try any of those?

ERIKA

I wasn't exactly in the mood to hold down a slithering eight-year-old when you aren't around to help me.

MARCUS

You could have at least attempted them, Erika. How is he ever going

to learn right from wrong if you just give in to him?

ERIKA

It wasn't a big deal, Marcus, he didn't even do anything that horrible. It was just another "I want everything my way" episodes, he got over it.

MARCUS

Because he got his way.

DYLAN

Sssshhh. Can't hear the movie.

ERIKA

Sorry, sweetheart.

She gets up and gestures for Marcus to follow her out of the living room.

CUT TO:

INT. MCGUIRE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Erika storms into the kitchen with Marcus on her heels.

ERIKA

Do you really have to start an argument right in front of Dylan?

MARCUS

I'm sorry, but I stand by my thought that you should have at least attempted to be firm with him instead of just giving him anything his little heart desires.

ERIKA

For your information, his tantrum wasn't even a major one, and even if it had been I didn't have time to deal with it. I was very busy today-

MARCUS

Oh yes Erika, you looked so busy reading that great Noble prize worthy piece of literature you have there in your hands.

He snatches the paperback book away from her and looks at the cover.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

'Ruthlessly Bedded, Forcibly Wedded'. Oh Erika, don't you have even a modicum of decency left in you? '50 Shades of Grey' would have been more respectable.

Erika snatches the book back.

ERIKA

For your information, I had just sat down not even ten minutes before you walked in assuming I had been doing nothing but reading trashy novels all day. Between running errands and writing and dealing with Dylan's meltdown-

MARCUS

I thought we had established that you didn't deal with Dylan's meltdown.

ERIKA

(beat)

You have no idea what it is I have to deal with around here. How could you when you're never around to see it?

MARCUS

Oh here we go with this old song and dance, again. Don't you think it's time you learned a more original tune, Erika?

Marcus is interrupted by the house phone ringing. He tries to talk over the shrill noise.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Look, I don't really think it's fair for you to be harping on me when you're not exactly winning any mother of the year awards yourself.

The phone stops ringing.

ERIKA

At least I'm here.

MARCUS

Having someone else do all the work.

ERIKA

It's Jeff's job to help.

MARCUS

Is it also his job to let you check out his ass in those ridiculous skinny jeans he insists on wearing?

The phone rings again.

MARCUS

Oh for Christ's sake.

Marcus picks up the phone off the counter and answers it.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Hello. Yes, this is he. Yes, he's my father. What? When? Okay, where is he now? No, I know where that is. Yes, I'll be right down. Thank you. Goodbye.

Marcus begins to search around for his wallet and keys.

ERIKA

Marcus, what was that all about?

Marcus doesn't answer her, instead he leaves to the hallway. Erika follows.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Marcus, where the hell are you going?

MARCUS
The police station.

ERIKA
Why?

MARCUS
My dad was taken there. He was drunk and crashed his car into a tree.

ERIKA
What?

MARCUS
I need to go.

ERIKA
Wait, is he okay? Where-

MARCUS
Erika, can we wait to play twenty questions 'til I get back? I have to go.

ERIKA
Marcus, wait-

MARCUS
I have to go.

Marcus leaves and slams the door. Erika slams her fist against the door angrily.

INT. POLICE STATION LOBBY - NIGHT

Marcus enters the police station and looks around the waiting room. He spots his brother, JOHN MCGUIRE, pacing around and goes to him.

MARCUS
John.

John turns and embraces him.

JOHN
Hey bro. They called you too, huh?

MARCUS

Yeah, where's Dad? Is he okay?

JOHN

Yeah he's fine, just some cuts and bruises. They have him in the back. Apparently he's still a little drunk.

MARCUS

Are they going to keep him overnight?

JOHN

No, I posted bail. They're setting a court date for him though. He's going to need to show up for sentencing.

MARCUS

What, like jail time?

JOHN

Depends on what the judge decides, I guess.

MARCUS

John, when the hell did he start drinking again?

JOHN

I don't know, but my guess would be ever since Janine left him.

MARCUS

Janine left him?

JOHN

Yeah, about two weeks ago. Right after he lost his job.

MARCUS

He lost his job?

JEFF

Yeah. Well he didn't so much lose it as they forced retirement on him. You didn't know?

MARCUS

No, Dad and I aren't exactly bosom buddies. How'd you find out?

JOHN

A friend of mine works with Janine, he overheard her bragging about it. Said she took him for everything he had.

MARCUS

Ouch.

JOHN

Heartbreaking, ain't it? And here I thought they were going to be the next Hugh Hefner and Crystal Harris.

MARCUS

God, don't even put that image in my mind.

John chuckles then gets serious.

JOHN

What are we going to do with him, Marky?

MARCUS

What do you mean 'we'? He's a grown ass man, he's perfectly capable of taking care of himself.

JOHN

Clearly not. Supposedly he's been living in seedy motels for that past two weeks. Janine left him with almost nothing. And she's demanding alimony. The monthly payments of those knockers alone-

MARCUS

Mortgage payment hefty would be my guess.

JOHN

Plus they suspended his license so he's going to need to be driven around.

MARCUS

So what are you suggesting?

JOHN

Well you do have that spare room and all.

MARCUS

I'm fairly certain Dad would rather rot in jail than rot in the mediocrity that he insists permeates my life.

JOHN

Well if that's true then do you really think he'd come live with me in my studio apartment surrounded by the art he's always hated? Hell, when he passed by with the cops earlier he introduced me as his gardener.

MARCUS

John, you know Erika and I are already dealing with a lot with Dylan's diagnosis. I don't think the stress of taking on an old, bitter alcoholic will really help the matters.

JOHN

Well maybe being around family is just what he needs right now. He always did kind of soften up around Dylan whenever he was around him.

MARCUS

That was twice and it was before we knew he had Autism.

JOHN

Even more of a sympathy card, I say.

MARCUS

John-

JOHN

Look Marcus, we can't just toss him out on the street with no license, no wife, and a reoccurring love of the drink. Besides, you could be like his inspiration.

MARCUS

Yeah? How so?

JOHN

How long has it ben since you almost O.D.'ed?

MARCUS

Eleven years.

JOHN

How long have you been clean already?

MARCUS

Ten years.

JOHN

See? That's Lifetime movie worthy right there, bro, and just what Dad needs to help kick his own habit. A walking, talking PSA about how the clean life is possible. Wouldn't you love to show him that?

Marcus is quiet for a beat. Carl enters escorted by a POLICEMAN.

POLICEMAN

Which one of you is taking him

home?

MARCUS

I am, sir. He's coming home with me.

CARL

Like hell I am.

MARCUS

Dad-

Marcus approaches him and tries to take him by the elbow. Carl jerks away and stumbles drunkenly.

CARL

Take your fucking hands off me. I'd rather rot in the street than stay there. Your house probably smells like Lemon Pledge and bullshit theories.

POLICEMAN

He's still pretty intoxicated.

CARL

Shut up, Porky Pig, I can speak for myself.

Marcus looks at John. John shrugs.

MARCUS

Dad, you don't really have any other choice.

CARL

Hotels work just fine for me.

MARCUS

Not unless you want to go begging back to Janine to give you some of your money back so you can pay for them.

CARL

Fuck no.

MARCUS

Then?

CARL

I don't know, I'll find a way.

MARCUS

Dad, go get in the car.

CARL

Don't you tell me-

POLICEMAN

Sir, either you go with your son or
I hold you here overnight.

Carl stares for a beat then stumbles out of the police station, grumbling on the way out. Marcus turns to John.

MARCUS

John-

JOHN

Yeah, I'll wrap things up here and
let you know the court date, don't
worry. Just try not to murder each
other, okay? And call me if you
need anything.

MARCUS

I will.

Marcus rushes out after his father.

INT. MCGUIRE FOYER - NIGHT

Marcus enters with a still drunk and raging Carl. Marcus shushes him and whispers.

MARCUS

Please Dad, just go on up to bed.
We'll talk when you're feeling
better.

CARL

I'm fine, Goddammit.

MARCUS

Sssh-

CARL

Don't you fucking shush me. If I have to stay here I'll talk as loud as I Goddamn please.

Erika comes rushing down the stairs.

ERIKA

Marcus, be quiet, you're going to wake up Dylan.

MARCUS

It's not me.

CARL

Who the fuck are you?

ERIKA

Carl, it's me. Erika. Your daughter-in-law.

CARL

So no chance of getting you in the sack, huh?

ERIKA

Oh God...

MARCUS

He's still drunk.

ERIKA

Obviously.

MARCUS

Help me get him into bed, will you?

Erika loops her arm through Carl's left while Marcus takes the right.

CARL

Where are we going?

MARCUS
Sssh. To bed.

CARL
I'm not tired.

MARCUS
Nobody gives a shit.

Marcus and Erika half drag him up the stairs.

INT. MCGUIRE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Erika is preparing for bed. Marcus enters and looks around.

MARCUS
He's finally settling down. We got
any extra pillows lying around?

ERIKA
Marcus, are you really serious
about him staying here?

MARCUS
What else do you suggest?

ERIKA
Anything else. We're already
dealing with enough, don't you
think?

MARCUS
That's what I told John, believe
me.

ERIKA
And yet your father is here anyway.

MARCUS
It'll just be for a little while.

ERIKA
How long?

MARCUS

Not very long if he ends up going to jail.

ERIKA

Marcus, that's awful.

MARCUS

Oh come on, Erika, I was just kidding. They wouldn't put an old man like him in jail. Especially not after his first offense. It's not like he killed anybody.

ERIKA

Well what if they don't send him to jail? What will we do with him then?

MARCUS

Look, the court date is tomorrow afternoon. Let's just get there and deal with whatever happens after that.

Marcus grabs two pillows.

ERIKA

Those are mine.

MARCUS

Just take some of mine then.

ERIKA

Then take him yours.

MARCUS

It's the same Goddamn-

Marcus stops and takes a deep breath.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Alright, you're right. I'll take him mine.

Marcus switches out the pillows then exits the bedroom. Erika lays down in bed.

INT. MCGUIRE KITCHEN - DAY

Erika and Carl are eating breakfast in silence. Marcus enters cheerfully.

MARCUS

Good morning, Dad. Good morning,
dear.

Marcus bends down and kisses Erika. She looks at him suspiciously.

ERIKA

Good morning.

CARL

Morning.

Marcus sits at the table.

MARCUS

How did you sleep last night? Any
back pain?

CARL

No.

MARCUS

Those Serta mattresses work
wonders, don't though? Costs a
pretty penny with all those added
features but I think it's a worthy
investment.

CARL

I suppose.

MARCUS

Erika and I have one in our bedroom
too. It has setting to adjust each
side to your own personal level of-

CARL

What are you doing here so late in
the morning? Don't you have a job
to get to?

MARCUS

Actually I cancelled my classes for today. I'm going to take you to your appointment with the court.

CARL

What for?

MARCUS

To be there to support you, of course. Plus it's not like you can exactly drive yourself there...

CARL

I'll take the bus.

MARCUS

Oh and what? Walk all the way from here to Manhattan?

CARL

If I have to.

MARCUS

I'm taking you, Dad. You're just have to deal with it.

CARL

Fine. I'm going to go take a shower.

Carl gets up to leave.

MARCUS

The bathroom room is the first door on-

CARL

I remember, I remember.

Carl leaves the kitchen.

ERIKA

Well wasn't that a lovely Cleaver family breakfast.

MARCUS

He'll come around.

ERIKA

To what?

MARCUS

(beat)

I honestly don't know, I've never
seen the other side.

Marcus gets up to clear his dishes.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

But he's stuck with us for awhile
either way. With any luck he'll
become slightly less of an asshole
with some family around.

ERIKA

Somehow I doubt that.

MARCUS

Pessimism serves no one.

ERIKA

Neither does blind optimism.

MARCUS

That's not what this is.

ERIKA

Then what is it?

MARCUS

(beat)

Nevermind. I'm going to get
dressed.

Marcus exits the kitchen. Erika continues eating for a moment but then hears the door ring.

ERIKA

I'll get it.

Erika runs out of the kitchen.

INT. MCGUIRE FOYER - DAY

Erika hurries to the door and opens it quickly.

ERIKA

Jeff. Right on time as always.

JEFF

Good morning, Erika. Looking lovely as always.

ERIKA

Thank you. Come on in. Dylan should be waking up very soon. Would you like some breakfast while you wait?

Erika lets Jeff in and closes the door.

JEFF

No thanks, I ate on the way.

ERIKA

One of these days, Jeff, I'm going to get you to eat something in this house.

JEFF

Are you sure you're brave enough?

ERIKA

Why, are your table manners that bad?

JEFF

No, but I could potentially eat you out of house and home if you let me.

ERIKA

Oh, a guy with a hearty appetite, huh?

JEFF

Yes ma'am. For lots of things.

Carl comes down the stairs and stops at the bottom of the staircase. He clears his throat and Erika turns, surprised.

ERIKA

Oh Carl, I didn't hear you come down. This is Jeff, our respite care nurse for Dylan. Jeff, this is Carl, my father-in-law. He'll be staying with us for a while.

JEFF

Pleasure to meet you, sir.

Jeff extends his hand. Carl does not take it.

CARL

Mmm hmm. What was your name again?

JEFF

Jeff.

CARL

And what did you say you do?

JEFF

I'm a respite care nurse, sir.

CARL

What the hell does that mean?

JEFF

Well I, uh, come over and help take care of Dylan when he needs me.

CARL

I see. So you're just here taking care of Dylan then?

JEFF

Um, yes sir.

CARL

Mmm hmm.

Carl keeps staring harshly at Erika and Jeff until Marcus comes down the stairs.

MARCUS

Good morning, Jeff. I see you met my father.

JEFF

Good morning, sir. Yes, we were just having a rather...interesting conversation.

MARCUS

I bet.
(to Carl)
Ready to go, Dad?

CARL

Yeah yeah, let's just get this over with.

Carl opens the door and heads out.

MARCUS

There's that remorseful spirit I was looking for.

(to Jeff and Erika)
Jeff, it was good seeing you.
Honey, I'll call you later.

ERIKA

Okay.

JEFF

Have a great day, Marcus.

Marcus waves over his shoulder and exits after Carl.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Carl is sitting at the prosecutions table of the courtroom, waiting for the judge for sentencing. Marcus sits directly behind him in the audience area. JUDGE PEARSON presides.

JUDGE PEARSON

Mr. McGuire, you have been charged with driving while intoxicated. Is that correct?

CARL

Yes ma'am.

JUDGE PEARSON

Since this your first offense, this case is classified as a misdemeanor. And considering your blood-alcohol level on the night of the incident, you were very fortunate that things turned out the way that they did. Wouldn't you agree, Mr. McGuire?

CARL

Yes ma'am.

JUDGE PEARSON

Still, even first time offenses are punishable with up to six months of jail time.

CARL

I will take whatever punishment the court sees fit, your honor.

JUDGE PEARSON

Well sending first time minor offenders to jail really isn't my preference, Mr. McGuire. But mark my words, I will if this problem with alcohol of yours continues to cause trouble.

CARL

I understand.

JUDGE PEARSON

With that having been said, you are hereby sentenced to mandatory attendance of alcohol abuse rehabilitation meetings, in which said attendance will be reported to the court every month until completion of the program. You are also required to pay a fine of \$2,500. Failure to pay said fine within the next 90 days or failure to report proof of attendance to

A.A. meetings will result in a jail sentence. Have I made myself clear?

CARL
Yes ma'am.

Judge Pearson bangs her gavel.

JUDGE PEARSON
Court is adjourned.

Marcus stands and goes to Carl.

MARCUS
Well that went a little better than I expected.

CARL
Mmm.

MARCUS
(beat)
That's it? Not even a little excited that you avoided jail time?

CARL
Mandatory A.A. meetings might as well be jail time.

MARCUS
Come on, Dad, a pretty guy like you in jail? You wouldn't last a day.

CARL
Can we just go back to your house, please? I need a stiff one.

Carl begins to leave the court room. Marcus follows.

MARCUS
That's not funny, Dad.

CARL
It wasn't meant to be.
Marcus sighs and follows Carl out of the court room.

INT. MCGUIRE FOYER - DAY

Marcus and Carl enter the house. Carl heads for the kitchen. Marcus walks into the living room. Erika stands up from the sofa when he does.

ERIKA

Well?

MARCUS

No jail time, just mandatory A.A. meetings to avoid jail time.

ERIKA

Well that's good.

MARCUS

I suppose.

ERIKA

And, uh, where will he be staying while he attends these meetings?

MARCUS

(beat)

I better go see if our new house guest has enough towels in his bathroom.

ERIKA

Marcus-

MARCUS

For a little while, Erika. Just for a little while.

ERIKA

Til when?

MARCUS

Long enough to keep him out of prison.

ERIKA

And not a moment longer?

MARCUS

Not a moment longer, I swear.

ERIKA

God I hope you know what you're doing.

MARCUS

So do I, honey, so do I.

Carl pops his head into the living room from around the corner.

CARL

What the hell is wrong with your boy?

ERIKA

What do you mean?

CARL

He's here in the hall spinning like a freak.

Marcus goes around the corner into the....

INT. – MCGUIRE FOYER – DAY

Marcus sighs. Dylan is indeed spinning.

MARCUS

It's just his Autism, Dad, sometimes he spins to make himself feel better.

CARL

And you just let him?

ERIKA

It keeps him calm.

Carl snorts and walks to the living room with a glass of water in hand.

CARL

In my day, we didn't have fancy diagnoses like that. We just called things what they were, being a spoiled little brat.

MARCUS

(sighs)

Dylan, come on son. That's enough spinning.

Dylan ignores him and continues spinning. Marcus gets him by the shoulders and steers him into the living room.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Dylan, come on. Come show Grandpa your piano playing.

DYLAN

No, I don't want to.

Marcus sits Dylan down on the piano bench.

MARCUS

Come on, Dylan, Grandpa's never heard you.

(to Carl)

Did we tell you, Dad? Dylan's going to audition for the Special Music School?

ERIKA

Marcus?

CARL

Special as in retarded?

ERIKA

Carl.

MARCUS

No Dad, the Special Music School is one of the most prestigious private schools in New York for musically gifted children. They only let about 15 kids in a year. Dylan's music teacher thinks he has a real shot.

CARL

Is that so?

MARCUS
Yeah. Show him, Dylan.

Dylan stares at the piano but doesn't move.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Come on, buddy. Play just one
simple song for Grandpa then you
get extra ipad time.

Dylan smiles and begins to play. It is short but complex piece and Dylan plays it well, but Carl remains unimpressed. When he is done, Marcus looks at Carl.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
That was great, Dylan. Go take the
ipad and play in your room.

Dylan takes the ipad and leaves.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Well Dad, what do you think?

CARL
He's good.

MARCUS
Good enough to get into SMS?

CARL
You honestly believe they'll let
him in with his fucked up brain?

ERIKA
Carl, honestly. That's your
grandson you're talking about.

CARL
Well it's the truth, ain't it? It
won't matter how good he can play
the piano if he can't even sit
through a Goddamn class without
spinning like a yo-yo.

MARCUS
We've talked to the teachers,

they're more than willing to make accommodations.

CARL

Yeah well, let's just see how willing they are after the first time he bites a kid.

MARCUS

Dylan doesn't bite....anymore.

CARL

Mmm hmm.

Marcus sighs and leaves the living room.

INT. MCGUIRE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Erika and Marcus are getting ready for bed.

MARCUS

Can you fucking believe that guy?
Even after hearing how talented Dylan is he still has no faith that he can make it into that school.

ERIKA

What I can't believe is you. Since when did we decide that Dylan is going to audition for that school after all?

MARCUS

We never said no indefinitely.

ERIKA

You know how Dylan gets in front of crowds. What happens if he gets up on that stage for the audition and embarrasses himself like you said he would?

MARCUS

That won't happen.

ERIKA

How do you know?

MARCUS

Because I'm going to work with him 'til he learns 'Waltz of the Flowers' perfectly. He won't have any reason to be nervous.

ERIKA

Tchaikovsky? You can't be serious.

MARCUS

Why not? It's the perfect show-off piece, it'll get him accepted for sure. Plus it's just fast enough for his manic little hands to master.

ERIKA

The audition's already next month. He can't learn it in time.

MARCUS

He picks up on melodies fast, he'll be fine.

ERIKA

I hope you know what you're doing, Marcus.

MARCUS

I do. Trust me.

ERIKA

Do I have any other choice?

They stare at each other for a beat before finishing readying the bed.

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus and Dylan are sitting at the piano. Marcus is playing a tiny section of 'Waltz of the Flowers'.

MARCUS

See, buddy? It's not that hard. All you really have to do is play

that little piece for the people
and they'll love it.

DYLAN
It's-it's too hard.

MARCUS
Not for you. You're great at this.

DYLAN
No I'm not.

MARCUS
Of course you are, Dylan.
Everybody thinks so.

DYLAN
My brain is too broken.

MARCUS
Who told you your brain is broken?

DYLAN
I do. It doesn't work like
everyone else's.

MARCUS
Maybe not, but that doesn't matter.
Come on, show me what you got.

Dylan raises his hands to the piano and plays a tiny piece of the song. He hits a wrong key and slams his hands down on the keys.

DYLAN
Too hard.

Marcus stills Dylan's hands.

MARCUS
No no, none of that. We don't quit
when we make a mistake. We just
start again and try harder.
Remember that.

Dylan sighs and starts again. He hits a wrong key, growls and pulls at his hair. Marcus grabs his hands.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

No. Again.

Dylan begins again and plays for a bit longer. He hits a wrong key later and stops but doesn't get frustrated.

MARCUS

Very good. See? All it takes is practice. You'll get better and better everytime.

Erika walks into the living room.

ERIKA

Marcus, what are you doing here?

MARCUS

I live here, remember?

ERIKA

Where's your car?

MARCUS

What do you mean where's my car?
It's parked right outside.

ERIKA

No it's not, I just came from outside.

MARCUS

Well it has to be there, I haven't....shit. Shit shit shit.

Marcus bolts up from the piano bench to the foyer. Erika follows.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Where are your keys?

ERIKA

Next to the door. Marcus, what?

MARCUS

My dad. My dad took my car.

Marcus grabs the keys and runs out the door.

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Marcus is driving in Erika's car looking for his up and down the roads. He spots in driving down an empty neighborhood road.

In a quick move, Marcus speeds up, gets in front of Carl and cuts him off.

Carl stops Marcus' car abruptly and gets out.

CARL

What the God's name do you think you're doing? You want to fuck up the only two cars you got?

MARCUS

What am I doing? What do you think you're doing? Your license is suspended, remember?

CARL

So?

MARCUS

So? Are you trying to get yourself thrown in jail? It isn't as fun as 'Orange is the New Black' makes it seem.

CARL

Fuck off, Marcus. I've got to do this on my own.

MARCUS

Do what? Where is it that you have to go that's so damn important?

Some of Carl's anger dissipates into resignation.

CARL

Janine called. She wants my stuff out before she gets home this afternoon.

MARCUS

Oh.

(beat)
Look, that sucks and I'm sorry.
But that doesn't mean you can go
gallivanting around town in a
stolen car with no license.

CARL
I was borrowing it.

MARCUS
Whatever. Get in, I'm driving.

CARL
Fuck no. I'll let you come if I
have no choice but just because
they take away my license doesn't
mean my ability to drive is
suddenly gone.

Carl heads for the driver's side of the car.

MARCUS
Dad, for God's sake-

CARL
Look, you can either get in the
passenger's side and ride along or
go home. It's up to you.

MARCUS
Fine, just let me park Erika's car.

CARL
Well hurry the fuck up. According
to my ex-bitch's instructions, I
haven't got all day.

Marcus parks Erika's car on the side of the road and reluctantly gets in with Carl.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Marcus clutches the armrests while Carl drives quickly down the road.

MARCUS

Would you slow down, at least?

CARL

I'm not looking for a new wife,
son, so quit fucking acting like
one.

MARCUS

I'm just saying, there could be
cops around.

CARL

Quit being such a pansy, we're
fine.

MARCUS

So I guess it's really over then,
huh?

CARL

What is?

MARCUS

Your marriage.

CARL

No shit, Sherlock.

MARCUS

Will you miss her?

CARL

I'll miss her ass.

MARCUS

Come on Dad, I'm trying to...oh
shit.

CARL

What?

MARCUS

That cop. He just pulled a U-ey
behind us.

CARL

Coincidence.

MARCUS

Now I bet he'll...yup, he's lighting up. He's definitely following us. Great, just great.

CARL

Would you calm your girl tits, please?

MARCUS

Dad, he's going to throw your ass in jail. I told you to slow down.

CARL

And I told you to mind your own Goddamn business. I didn't ask you to be here, you know.

MARCUS

You never do, and yet here I am.

Carl pulls over to the side of the curb and waits for the cops to do the same.

CARL

They'll probably just give me a warning.

MARCUS

Not after they ask to see your license. Christ Dad, this is bad.
(beat)
Switch seats with me.

CARL

What?

MARCUS

Quick, before he gets out of his car. Hurry up.

CARL

Fuck that, I'll take what I have to like a man.

MARCUS

You're not going to have the same

attitude when you become someone's girlfriend in jail.

CARL

Those are fucking clichés.

MARCUS

Dad, switch with me

CARL

Marcus-

MARCUS

Just do it.

Carl grumbles as Marcus hurls himself over Carl. Carl slowly crawls over to the passenger's side. Marcus settles in the driver's side and buckles in just as the COP approaches languidly chewing gum.

COP

License and proof of insurance, please.

Marcus hands the documents to him.

COP (CONT'D)

Do you know how fast you were going, sir?

MARCUS

Uhh...too fast?

COP

Don't try to be cute, son.

The cop looks at Carl.

COP (CONT'D)

Say...wasn't it you that I saw driving before?

CARL

No, you're mistaken.

COP

No, I could have sworn it was you

when I turned around...

CARL

You probably saw our reflections.

COP

Oh...yeah, I guess that must have been it.

(to Marcus)

I'm letting off with a warning this time, but next time you won't get off so easy. Understood?

MARCUS

Yes, sir.

The cop leaves. Marcus sighs and starts up the car again.

CARL

Thanks for saving me, son. Don't know how I would have outwitted Wyatt Earp back there.

MARCUS

Dad?

CARL

Yeah?

MARCUS

Shut up.

Marcus and Carl drive on in silence.

INT. CARL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus is sorting through stuff in Carl's former home and putting things into boxes while Carl sits looking at a photo album. Marcus holds up a book.

MARCUS

How about this one, Dad? Yours or hers?

CARL

Hers.

Marcus picks up another book.

MARCUS
How about this one?

CARL
Mine.

Marcus puts it in a box and picks up another book.

MARCUS
How about-

CARL
Jesus Christ, Marcus, why don't you
just let me do that?

MARCUS
Because if I let you do anything
we'll never get anything done.
That's your break since we've been
here.

CARL
I'll get to it when I get to it.

MARCUS
Fine Dad, whatever you say.

Marcus moves to get up but then hears a car pull up outside.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Oh shit, that can't be Janine
already. Didn't she say she'd be
gone all afternoon?

Carl doesn't answer. He instead stares out the window towards the front of the house.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Dad? Dad.

CARL
Motherfucker.

Carl gets up out of the chair suddenly and heads for the door. Marcus runs after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARL'S FORMER HOME - DAY

JANINE is getting out of the car with her boyfriend, LUKE, when Carl storms out of the house.

JANINE

Carl. What are you still doing here? I thought you'd be gone by now.

CARL

Technically it's still my house, Janine. I was the one who paid for it.

JANINE

Well that's just too fucking bad, ain't it? Because the court agreed that the house is mine now.

CARL

What, just so you and this fucking Gerber baby you left me for don't have to play grown-ups and find a house of your own?

(to Luke)

How old are you, anyway? I never did get a chance to find out. I mean, can you rent a car or do you still have to be listed as an additional driver?

LUKE

Come on, Carl, can't we just move past all this.

MARCUS

Dad, maybe we should go...

CARL

No, it's alright. We're all friends here. Aren't we, Luke? I mean, we shared my wife for the past year and a half, if that's not a close relationship, then I don't

know what is.

JANINE

Carl, just leave.

MARCUS

Dad-

CARL

Does it make you proud, Luke? Does it make you feel like a big boy, stealing another man's woman?

LUKE

You can't steal what comes to you willingly.

CARL

Is that what you tell yourself to be able to sleep at night without having nightmares and wetting the bed?

LUKE

Oh for Christ's sake...

Carl begins to push Luke.

CARL

Come on, Luke-y boy. Take a swing at me.

LUKE

What?

CARL

Yeah. Let's show our darling little Janine here who the real man is.

MARCUS

Dad, don't.

JANINE

Carl, if you touch him, I'm calling the cops.

LUKE

Carl, I'm not going to hit you.

CARL

What's the matter, Luke? Afraid your mommy will be disappointed?

LUKE

No, I'm just afraid I'll break your hip when you don't have your Life Alert button on you.

CARL

You son of a whore.

LUKE

I'd rather be that than a old, worthless limp dick who can't even satisfy his woman.

CARL

Bitch.

Carl launches himself at Luke, knocks him to the ground, and begins punching him. Luke doesn't fight back, only shields his face with his arms to defend himself. Janine and Marcus are yelling.

JANINE

Carl, stop it. I'm calling the cops.

MARCUS

Dad. Dad, cut it out. You can't afford to do this right now. Dad, stop.

Marcus goes over and pulls Carl off of Luke. Marcus pushes Carl a few feet back and blocks him from going after Luke again.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Dad, stop. You're on fucking parole, Dad. If Janine calls the cops, you'll go to jail for sure.

CARL

I don't care.

Carl lunges again at Luke. Marcus pushes him back.

MARCUS
Go get in the car, Dad.

CARL
Get out of my way.

MARCUS
Dad, get in the fucking car.

Carl glares at Luke but then turns and heads towards the car.

LUKE
(to Carl)
Yeah, walk away, Bengay.

CARL
Yeah, yeah, good luck with your
'Toddlers and Tiaras' audition.

Luke just gives Carl his middle finger as Carl gets in the car. Marcus turns to Janine.

MARCUS
Janine, I'm sorry this got out of
hand. I'll come back for his stuff
later.

JANINE
Just get out of here, Marcus.

Marcus leaves quickly after that.

INT. MCGUIRE KITCHEN - DAY

Marcus and Carl storm into the kitchen. Carl goes and grabs a water bottle. Marcus knocks it out of his hand.

CARL
What the fuck?

MARCUS
How long, Dad?

CARL

How long what?

MARCUS

How long have you been sneaking
Vodka in your fucking water
bottles?

CARL

That really was water, you fucking
idiot.

MARCUS

I smelled alcohol on your breath,
Dad. You've been lying. To all of
us. After we've taken you in and
giving you a fucking home. Why do
you want to fuck all that up?

CARL

Pfft. What's their to fuck up?
This glorious life I'm living?
Some jobless nomad holing up in
corner room in his son's house?

MARCUS

Dad-

CARL

No. They can take away my license
and you can trap me here in this
hellhole, but you can't tell me how
to deal with my own shit. It's my
life and if I want to fuck it up,
no one has the right to stop me.

MARCUS

What about your family? We all
lo-....care about you, Dad. Does
that mean nothing?

CARL

Don't try to guilt me into
anything. I'm a grown ass man, I
can take care of myself.

Carl walks out of the kitchen. Marcus follows him into the foyer.

MARCUS
Where are you going?

CARL
None of your Goddamn business.

MARCUS
You can't take my car.

CARL
I'll walk.

MARCUS
Dad, just please-

CARL
Just go back to exploring your
bullshit theories and leave me
alone.

Carl slams the front door shut. Marcus growls in frustration and goes upstairs.

INT. MCGUIRE BATHROOM - DAY

Marcus storms into the bathroom and opens the cabinet in front of the sink. He rifles through pill bottles and finds the one he's looking for.

INSERT - THE PILL BOTTLE

"Erika McGuire. Tricyclic
antidepressants."

Marcus shakes the bottle and dry swallows one pill from his palm.

Marcus pours out one more into his palm. Then five more after that.

Marcus looks at the pills in his hands. After a beat he shakes his head and dumps them back in the pill bottle.

Marcus sighs, replaces the bottle and leaves the bathroom.

EXT. BAR - DUSK

Carl has walked to a small local bar. He pauses at the door.
Carl takes a step to go in and hesitates.

After a beat, Carl shakes his head, turns around, and heads back home.

INT. MCGUIRE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marcus is pacing the kitchen when Carl walks in.

MARCUS

For God's sake, Dad, where di you go? I was actually starting to get worried.

CARL

I went to a bar.

MARCUS

Dammit Dad, what did I-

CARL

I didn't go in.

MARCUS

(beat)
You didn't?

CARL

No.

MARCUS

Why not?

CARL

It just didn't have any...appeal.
Not anymore at least.

MARCUS

Dad, look. I know things are bad right now but you're just going through a rough patch. You'll get your life back.

CARL

I don't need your sympathy.

MARCUS

And I'm not giving it to you. I'm just not willing to see you throw

your life away on a jail sentence
just because of a few fuck ups.

CARL

Maybe I should just get a shitty job
in a convenient store or something,
move into a seedy motel.

MARCUS

What? Dad, no. Come on. Sitting
around here moping is what's going
to screw you over. What you need
is a hobby.

CARL

What, like knitting? Playing
Scrabble? Yelling at kids to get
off my lawn?

MARCUS

No, like...why don't you help Dylan
rehearse his audition piece for
SMS.

CARL

What?

MARCUS

Yeah. You used to love to play the
piano for Mom, remember? And from
what I recall, you were pretty damn
good.

CARL

I gave it up years ago.

MARCUS

Come on, Dad. Dylan needs someone
with your skill if he wants to get
into that school. Plus it'll keep
you busy. Far too busy for much
thinking.

CARL

Fine. But I seriously don't see
how this is going to help any of

us.

MARCUS

It will, trust me.

Marcus leaves the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carl and Dylan are sitting at the piano. Marcus is working on his laptop on the couch and watching.

CARL

Okay look, just watch Grandpa one more time.

Carl plays the most difficult part of 'Waltz of the Flowers' expertly.

DYLAN

It's too hard, Grandpa.

CARL

Bullshit.

MARCUS

Dad.

CARL

I mean, horse hooley.

Dylan laughs.

DYLAN

(laughing)

Hooey...

CARL

Look, my boy, this intro part is the hardest part of the song, but even that's easy if you figure out its the same notes in different places. After that you just play a bit of the main part and you're done. Try it again.

DYLAN

I don't want to.

CARL
Go on, again. You'll never get it
if you don't try again.

DYLAN
I'm tired.

MARCUS
Dad. Tell him what he gets if he
finishes the piece.

CARL
Why should I? He should just do as
he's told.

MARCUS
Dad...

CARL
Fine.
(to Dylan)
Your dad promises to take you to
the candy store if you finish
playing your song.

DYLAN
(to Marcus)
Candy store?

MARCUS
Right after this. Now listen to
your grandpa and finish playing.

Dylan turns around and begins practicing again. Marcus smiles as Dylan gets the piece right and Carl nods his approval.

INT. CANDY STORE - DAY

Marcus and Dylan are in line about to pay for a bag of candy. Dylan is looking at the display of keychains.

DYLAN
Dad, keychain.
MARCUS
What, you want one?

DYLAN
Yes please.

MARCUS
(beat)
Fine, but only because you've been practicing your piano so hard.

Dylan browses for a second then picks a star key chain with a smiley face that is missing one eye.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Oh not this one Dylan, look. It's broken.

DYLAN
I want this one.

MARCUS
Even though it's broken?

DYLAN
Yes.

MARCUS
Why?

DYLAN
Because if I don't take him home, nobody else will.

The CHECKOUT LADY charging and bagging their groceries overhears.

CHECKOUT LADY
Oh isn't that sweet?

Marcus smiles, embarrassed.

MARCUS
Yeah, he's a thoughtful kid.

Marcus tosses the star keychain on top of the rest of the groceries.

CUT TO:

EXT. CANDY STORE - DAY

Marcus and Dylan exit the grocery store when Tom walks up to them.

TOM

Well if it isn't Plato himself.

MARCUS

Tom. What are you doing here?

TOM

My wife has a craving. Plus isn't that the best part of adulthood? Being able to buy candy whenever you want.

MARCUS

I would say so. How've you been?

TOM

Great. How've you been? I haven't seen much of you around campus lately.

MARCUS

Oh I've been pretty busy at home. Things haven't fallen apart without my regular appearances, have they?

TOM

Absolutely burned to the ground.

MARCUS

Good, I'm glad to hear it.

TOM

No, but really, some of your students were asking for you the other day. Said they haven't been seeing you in person much anymore.

MARCUS

Did you tell them to check their emails?

TOM

I did. I guess they just miss

seeing you in person. I can't imagine why, if I was free of that mug of yours more often I'd be pretty relieved.

MARCUS

(laughs)

Same reason I've been avoiding you.

Tom laughs but then falls serious.

TOM

You sure everything's okay, Marcus? I mean, I know you're still keeping up with your classes online but I don't know if now's really the time to disappear what with the merger and all-

MARCUS

I haven't disappeared, Tom. I've cleared my schedule with the right people, they get that I have a lot on my plate. I'm not going to lose my job if that's what you're worried about.

TOM

I'm not worried.

(beat)

Okay, maybe a little. I just can't imagine the place without you. You're the light of my life, the wind beneath my wings, the fruit of my loom-

MARCUS

Are you done?

TOM

Only because you're little partner here seems to be getting impatient.

MARCUS

Yeah, I guess we better go.

TOM

Okay, it was good seeing you. I hope it happens more often on campus too.

MARCUS

It will, don't worry. See you around.

TOM

Bye.

Tom walks to the store and Dylan and Marcus head to their car.

INT. MCGUIRE FOYER - DAY

The doorbell is ringing repeatedly as Erika rushes over in workout gear to go answer it. She yanks out her earbuds.

ERIKA

Jeff. Gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't hear the door. Have you been ringing it long?

Erika ushers him in and he follows her into the living room.

JEFF

Nah, not at all. I was just getting a little worried something had happened to you.

ERIKA

What, like I fell and broke a hip or something?

JEFF

No, nothing like that. It's just that a beautiful woman home alone most of the time, there's no telling what could happen.

Erika smiles enigmatically.

ERIKA

No need to flatter me, Jeff, you already have the job.

JEFF
Who said I was just flattering you?

ERIKA
(beat)
Um, well, I guess you have a reason
to now. Look at this.

Erika picks up a letter and hands it to Jeff. Jeff scans it and grins widely.

JEFF
You got published?

ERIKA
Yup. The first copies are set for
release in August.

JEFF
God, Erika, I didn't even know you
had finally sent the book off.
Congratulations.

Jeff sweeps her into a tight hug. They pull apart but don't separate completely.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I'm so happy for you.

ERIKA
Thank you.

They hold each other a beat longer then Erika pulls away.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
And what do you mean finally? I
feel like I accomplished this
pretty fast.

JEFF
You did. I just meant that you've
been working so hard on it for a
while, I bet it was a relief to
finally send it off.

ERIKA
It's more of a relief to finally

see it all worthwhile. Finally I have something that's all me, that I did. God, I can't tell you how many times I've been introduced as 'Dylan's mom' or 'Marcus' wife'.

JEFF

I never call you that.

ERIKA

Only because I insisted you call me Erika.

JEFF

No, because I don't see the mom or the wife.

Jeff looks her up and down.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I just see Erika.

Erika and Jeff stare at each other until Marcus and Dylan enter the living room.

ERIKA

Hi there. You boys are bit late, aren't you?

MARCUS

Sorry, unscheduled stop by the store.

ERIKA

(to Dylan)

Did you have a good day at school, sweetheart?

DYLAN

Yes. Look what I got at the store.

Dylan holds up the star key chain to Erika.

ERIKA

Oh what a cute key chain. Why does it only have one eye?

MARCUS
He lost it in the war.

ERIKA
(to Marcus)
Cute.
(to Dylan)
Dylan, honey, it's time for you and
Jeff to go work on your lessons.
Then afterwards....

DYLAN
Spongebob hour.

ERIKA
That's right, Spongebob hour. Go
with Jeff to your room, sweetie.

Dylan leaves the living room. Jeff lingers near Erika.

JEFF
Congratulations again, Erika. I
can't wait to see the first copy.

ERIKA
I can't wait to autograph it for
you.

Jeff laughs and leaves the room. Erika turns to Marcus.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Carl told me about the fight.

MARCUS
Yeah, it was like living an episode
of Maury for a second.

ERIKA
Are you sure Janine won't press
charges?

MARCUS
Nah, my dad didn't even get a
chance to make a dent in her
boyfriend's newborn baby skin
before I stopped him.

ERIKA

I never saw you as the
fight-stopping type...

MARCUS

I never had a reason to be.
So what was all that about
congratulations with Jeff in there?

Erika grins and hands him the letter she had been holding.

ERIKA

My book got accepted for
publication.

MARCUS

Seriously?

ERIKA

No, jokingly. Of course seriously.
Oak Tree Press. It's one of the
biggest publishers of romance
novels and they loved it.

MARCUS

So I see.

ERIKA

Well? Is that all you have to say?

MARCUS

Oh, um, congratulations.

Marcus pecks her on the cheek.

ERIKA

I was hoping you'd be a little
happier than that.

MARCUS

I am happy for you.

ERIKA

Well you have a strange way of
showing it. It's because it's a

romance novel, isn't it?

MARCUS

No, of course not. I'm just...surprised is all. But a good kind of surprised. We're going to have a published author in the family.

Carl walks into the living room.

CARL

Who's a published author?

MARCUS

Erika is now, Dad, her book got published.

CARL

Really? Well congratulations, Erika.

ERIKA

Thanks, Carl.

MARCUS

I've got an idea. Why don't we have a cocktail party Friday to celebrate?

ERIKA

A party? For me?

MARCUS

Of course. It's not everyday someone gets their first book published. It should be celebrated. Shouldn't it, Dad?

CARL

I suppose so.

MARCUS

We'll invite all our friends and my colleagues from work. We can have it Friday after Dylan's audition.

Then we'll have two things to
celebrate.

ERIKA

Marcus-

MARCUS

I'll start making some calls. It's
going to be great, Erika, I promise
you. Congratulations again, honey.

Marcus kisses her longer this time.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I'm so proud of my author wife.

ERIKA

Thank you, Marcus.

Marcus leaves the room.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Marcus and Carl are walking through Central Park.

MARCUS

Beautiful day, isn't it?

CARL

I suppose.

MARCUS

How are the meetings coming along?
You never talk about them.

CARL

Just fine, I guess.

MARCUS

Any slip-ups since last time.

CARL

Not a-one.

MARCUS

Well then I say the meetings must

be going pretty good.

CARL

Why are we here again?

MARCUS

I don't know, John said to meet him
at this exact spot at one.

John comes running over. He hugs Marcus and waves at Carl.

JOHN

Guys. I'm so glad you made it.

MARCUS

You're in a good mood.

JOHN

Oh hell yeah I am. And soon you'll
know why. Look over there.

John points to the New York skyline.

MARCUS

At what?

JOHN

There, right there.

MARCUS

John, I don't see anything.

CARL

Would you just hurry the hell up
and tell us what this is about
already?

JOHN

You see that expanse of blue sky
right there between those two
buildings?

MARCUS

Yeah.

JOHN

Well you're looking at the future

site of the new apartment complex
I'm helping design.

CARL

You got a job as an architect?

JOHN

I guess my degree didn't go to
waste after all, huh Dad? Got the
practical job you always wanted me
to get.

MARCUS

John, how? I thought you just
wanted to paint.

JOHN

That was before I met my boss. He
liked my paintings so much that he
bought three of them to hang in his
main office. He wants me to help
design the building then commission
so more paintings to hang in the
lobby and rooms.

MARCUS

John, that's...that's incredible.

Marcus hugs John fiercely.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Congratulations. I'm so proud of
you.

JOHN

Thanks, Marky Mark.

John turns to Carl.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well Dad...what do you think?

CARL

Your going to help make a new
building?

JOHN

Well help design it, yeah.

CARL

That's....very fine work, my boy.
Very fine indeed.

John beams and is speechless for a beat.

JOHN

Thanks, Dad. That-that means a lot
coming from you.

(beat)

Well I have a ton of meetings to
attend before this project gets
underway. Life of a busy,
successful architect I'm now
finding out.

MARCUS

Okay, now you're just bragging.

JOHN

You're damn straight I am.

(laughs)

I'll see you guys later.

John runs off. Marcus and Carl turn around to head back where they came.

MARCUS

Well it looks like this a pretty
great time for our family, don't
you think, Dad? I'm a college
professor. Erika's a published
author. John's an architect. And
next up, Dylan is going to be a
musical prodigy at an elite school.

CARL

Yeah, about that....

Both men stop walking.

CARL (CONT'D)

I don't think he should do it.

MARCUS

What? What are you talking about, Dad? The audition's already tomorrow.

CARL

I don't think he can do it.

MARCUS

But he's good. You said yourself that he's good.

CARL

Yeah but look at all that it takes just for him to be good. Timers, bribes. You honestly think some elite school is going to take the time to do all that for him, no matter how talented he is?

MARCUS

They said he would.

CARL

They have to say that, Marcus, so people like you won't sue them.

MARCUS

I knew I was an idiot to think you were actually helping. I should have guessed you would try to shit on everything I'm trying to do again.

CARL

I'm not the one shitting on it, Marcus. I'm just warning you that that's what the outside world is going to do. To your son. In public. You really want that?

MARCUS

He can do it.

CARL

Oh for Christ's sake, would you

quit being so delusional about everything?

MARCUS

Delusional? What am I delusional about?

CARL

This audition, for one.

MARCUS

And for two?

CARL

You're delusional if you think your marriage is still good.

MARCUS

What are you talking about? Erika and I are fine.

CARL

Yeah. And there's nothing going on between her and your houseboy.

MARCUS

Her and Jeff?

CARL

Yeah.

MARCUS

There isn't.

CARL

Oh come on, my boy, I didn't raise you to be that ignorant.

MARCUS

You didn't raise me at all.

CARL

Ooo, that one stung.

Marcus angrily begins to walk away.

CARL (CONT'D)

I'll let it slide though, you've got enough to deal with. What with your wife fucking another man and all.

Marcus stops and whirls on Carl again, then breathes deeply to calm down.

MARCUS

You're the one that's delusional, old man, seeing fucked up shit where it's only you self-projecting. Tomorrow Dylan's going to audition and he'll make it in. Then we'll see who gets the last laugh.

Marcus turns around and stomps away.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Marcus, Erika, Jeff, and Carl are standing with Dylan in the audience, waiting for auditions to begin. Dylan is nervously flapping his hands and pacing.

DYLAN

Can't play, don't want to.

MARCUS

Dylan, buddy, don't worry. You're going to do great.

DYLAN

Too many people.

Dylan covers his ears.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Ugh, too loud.

ERIKA

Marcus, are you sure we should make him do this?

MARCUS

He's going to be fine once he gets on this stage. He knows his song

by heart.

Marcus grabs Dylan's twitching hands.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Save some of that energy for the stage, son.

DYLAN

Too loud. Too many people.

CARL

Forget it, Marcus, he's too nervous. I told you he's going to fuck up.

MARCUS

Dad, would you please keep your opinions and filthy language to yourself for once?

CARL

I'm just saying what everyone is thinking.

JEFF

Why don't I take Dylan for a walk to calm him down?

ERIKA

Yes, good idea. Go for a walk with Jeff, honey. He'll bring you back when it's time.

The lights in the auditorium blink as Jeff and Dylan walk out. Marcus, Erika, and Carl sit in the audience.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

I have a terrible feeling about this.

MARCUS

He can do it, Erika. I know he can.

An ANNOUNCER steps out on stage.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to the Winter auditions for the Special Music School. I'm glad you could all be here with us today. Unfortunately, our process is very selective and we can only take 15 of the dozens of very talented youngsters we have here today. Each child will only get one chance to show off their skills to our judges. Names of the accepted children will be posted immediately following the auditions.

A box is brought out to the man.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Now, in order to keep the process fair and unbiased, we will select the order in which the children will be auditioning at random. Our first little maestro will be-

Marcus shakes his head nervously.

MARCUS

Please, please not first.

ANNOUNCER

Dylan McGuire.

CARL

Christ, the kid should buy a lotto ticket.

ANNOUNCER

Where is Dylan McGuire?

Jeff appears from behind the curtains on stage right holding Dylan's hand.

JEFF

He's here, sir.

ANNOUNCER

Ah, very good. Please proceed.

The man leaves the stage as Jeff leads Dylan over to the piano and sits him down. Jeff sits next to Dylan and whispers encouragements. Marcus wrings his hands in the audience.

MARCUS

Come on, son, you can do it. Show them that you can do it.

ERIKA

(whispering to Marcus)
He's as white as a sheet.

MARCUS

He can do it. Look.

Dylan lifts his hands to the piano and begins to play 'Waltz of the Flowers' while three judges in the audience watch. Marcus smiles, sighs with relief, and leans in to Carl.

MARCUS

See, Dad? I told you he could do it.

CARL

Uh huh.

Dylan continues to play but then hits a wrong key. He freezes, then attempts to play the same measure again but hits the same wrong note.

ERIKA

Shit.

MARCUS

Oh no, please no.

A third time produces the same thing. Dylan growls and begins hitting his head repeatedly.

DYLAN

No, no, no, that's not right.

JEFF

Dylan, Dylan, it's okay, buddy.

DYLAN

No, it's wrong. I can't. Too many people. The notes are wrong.

JEFF

Come on, buddy. Just try it one more time.

DYLAN

No, no, no more. No.

Dylan gets up off the bench and throws himself to the floor, crying and screaming. Jeff gets up and attempts to soothe him.

ERIKA

Marcus, go get him.

Marcus runs up on the stage to talk to Dylan.

MARCUS

Dylan, don't do this to me, pal.
Get up and go back to that piano.

DYLAN

No, no piano. No.

From the audience, a judge on the panel clears his throat.

JUDGE

Sir, what seems to be the problem?

MARCUS

He just gets a little frustrated sometimes. He'll calm down.

JUDGE

Sir, we do have many more auditions we need to get through.

MARCUS

Just give him a minute, please. He knows this song like the back of his hand.

JUDGE

I'm sorry, I'm afraid we can't-

MARCUS

Please, if you just wait-

JUDGE

Sir, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you and your son to-

MARCUS

I said just give us a Goddamn minute.

JUDGE

(beat)

Sir, remove yourself and your son from this stage immediately or I will call security to have you forcibly removed, is that understood?

Marcus sighs and looks at the audience just in time to see Carl get up and leave. Dylan is still crying but softer and Jeff has picked him up. A security guard appears and moves to grab Marcus, who shrugs him away.

MARCUS

Don't touch me. We're leaving.

Marcus gets off the stage. Jeff follows with Dylan in his arms.

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The cocktail party is in full swing and guests are milling about. Marcus is dressed in a suit and standing in a corner while drinking a scotch. He's watching Jeff and Erika talk and laugh. Tom approaches him.

TOM

What are you doing here standing in a corner all by yourself? Hoping that some handsome gentleman will ask you for a dance?

MARCUS

Not particularly.

TOM

Well you're in luck, because this handsome gentleman just wants to know how you're doing.

MARCUS

Fine.

TOM

If you mean 'fine' as in trying to conceal thinly veiled rage, then I believe you.

MARCUS

Tom, can I just...be alone for a while?

TOM

Come on, man, you've been alone all evening. I'm trying to get you to snap out of whatever put you in this murderous mood. What's wrong?

MARCUS

Nothing's wrong.

TOM

I don't buy that. Did something go wrong during Dylan's audition this afternoon?

MARCUS

Who told you?

TOM

Told me what?

MARCUS

About Dylan's audition. What did you hear?

TOM

Nobody told me anything about it. I just asked because you told me it was today and it seems-

Marcus cuts him off by roughly grabbing Tom by the lapel and bringing him in closer to his face.

MARCUS

It was my dad, wasn't it? That son of a bitch is telling everyone

about it, isn't he?

TOM

Marcus-

MARCUS

Isn't he?

Tom eases out of Marcus' hold on him and tries to soothe him.

TOM

Hey, hey, just calm down, alright?
You're going to explode that
geriatric heart of yours.

MARCUS

You shut your Goddamn mouth, Tom.

TOM

I'm just trying to lighten the
mood. Maybe it's time from a break
from the hard stuff, huh?

Tom tries to take Marcus' drink but Marcus downs it in one gulp.

MARCUS

Where is that son of a bitch,
anyway?

TOM

Who?

MARCUS

My father. Where is he?

TOM

Last time I saw he was in the
dining room. Marcus, wait-

Marcus charges towards the dining room.

INT. MCGUIRE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Carl is talking to a party guest when Marcus storms in.

MARCUS

Who the fuck do you think you are

telling everyone our business?

CARL

Excuse me?

MARCUS

Just had to go bragging about my failures again, didn't you?

CARL

Marcus, would you lower your voice before you embarrass yourself?

MARCUS

I don't give a fuck about embarrassing myself anymore, or you for that matter. What have you been telling everybody?

Erika rushes into the kitchen.

ERIKA

What is going on?

CARL

Nothing, your husband is piss-ass drunk and making a fool of himself.

Marcus throws his glass against the wall.

MARCUS

Goddammit old man, you answer my Goddamn question.

ERIKA

Marcus, calm down. You're making a scene in front of our guests.

Marcus looks around and notices guests peeking in the entrance to the dining room and staring at him.

MARCUS

What the hell are you all looking at, huh? This is none of your Goddamn business. In fact, the party's over. Everyone get the

fuck out of my house.

ERIKA

Marcus, no.

MARCUS

Everyone out. Now.

Marcus starts waving everyone out the doors while Erika follows the crowd out of the dining room and pleads with them to stay. Marcus turns back to Carl.

MARCUS

Now that our audience is gone,
maybe you can tell me exactly what
you've been telling them.

CARL

For God's sake, Marcus, I still
have no fucking clue what you're
talking about.

MARCUS

Dylan's audition. You've been
telling them about it, haven't you?
Telling them about how sure I was
that he was going to make it in.
How horribly disastrous the whole
audition went. How I failed yet
again.

CARL

You don't need me to spread rumors
about your failure.

MARCUS

What the fuck does that mean?

CARL

I think you know.

Marcus growls in frustration.

MARCUS

God, what is it you want from me?
What is it going to take to get you
to-to...

CARL

To what, Marcus? Take you on my knee? Pat your little head and tell you how proud I am of you? What a good little boy you've been?

MARCUS

No.

CARL

Bullshit. That's what you've always wanted, isn't it? That's what you've been keeping me around for, haven't you? So I can coddle you and squeeze you and put you back altogether again? Well I can't do that. I've never been able to. I don't know why the hell you're still begging for it after all these years.

MARCUS

You never saw me. I just want you to see me. Just once. I don't care for how long, I just want you to see me.

CARL

I do see you. That's the problem.

Marcus lunges forward and pushes Carl up against a wall, fist cocked.

MARCUS

Fuck you, you worthless piece of shit. I should have done this a long time ago.

CARL

Then do it. What are you waiting for?

Marcus rears back with his fist ready to strike. He hesitates for a beat then lets go of Carl.

CARL (CONT'D)

I knew you couldn't do it. I told

you, I see exactly who you are.
Probably more than you see
yourself.

Marcus opens his mouth to reply but then hears talking coming from the next room. He leaves Carl to investigate.

CUT TO:

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus walks in to find Erika and Jeff talking quietly. Erika sees him.

ERIKA

Marcus, what the hell was all that-

MARCUS

(to Jeff)

What the fuck are you still doing
here?

JEFF

I was just sticking around to make
sure everything was okay.

MARCUS

Bullshit.

ERIKA

Marcus-

MARCUS

Is it true, Jeff?

JEFF

Is what true?

MARCUS

Are you fucking my wife?

ERIKA

Marcus.

JEFF

What?

MARCUS

You heard me. Are you fucking my wife?

JEFF

Marcus, no, we're just-

MARCUS

How dare you stand here in my house and lie to my face?

JEFF

Marcus, I'm not lying. We're not sleeping together.

MARCUS

Liar.

Marcus lunges at Jeff and both land hard on the floor. Marcus savagely begins punching Jeff before Jeff has a chance to defend himself. Erika is screaming.

ERIKA

Marcus. God, Marcus stop, you're going to kill him.

Carl enters nonchalantly from the dining room and leans against the threshold. Erika turns to him.

ERIKA

For the love of God, Carl. Stop him.

Carl does nothing but sip his water. Erika rushes over to the phone.

ERIKA

Yes. I need help. My husband is beating up someone.

Marcus is still punching Jeff ferociously. Erika's voice can be heard dimly in the background as he continues his assault.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Marcus is sitting in the middle of an empty jail cell, staring blankly ahead. A guard approaches the bars and unlocks the door.

GUARD
You made bail, Doc.

Marcus gets up and walks out of cell, still staring blankly.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION LOBBY - NIGHT

Marcus walks out into the lobby where John is waiting.

JOHN
I guess I should have made myself
clearer. I didn't want you to kill
anybody, not just Dad.

Marcus walks silently past him and out of the police station. John follows.

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Marcus sits in the passenger seat staring ahead while John drives silently.

MARCUS
How is he?

JOHN
From what I could gather from
Erika, he'll live. In the
hospital, of course, but nothing
too critical. You might even get
away with just aggravated assault
instead of attempted murder via
fists of steel.

(beat)
That was meant to be a joke.

MARCUS
Funny.

JOHN
(beat)
Want to talk about it?

MARCUS
(beat)

No.

JEFF

Okay. But if you ever do, you know-

MARCUS

Yeah, I know.

Marcus and Jeff continue to ride in silence.

INT. MARCUS' OFFICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - DAY

Marcus is sitting in his office chair. His colleague, DR. MATTHEWS, stands before him.

MARCUS

I'm sorry, what did you say?

DR. MATTHEWS

(beat)

I said it looks like they're not hiring you as a full professor.

MARCUS

Are you sure?

DR. MATTHEWS

I heard it straight from the hiring committee.

MARCUS

So instead I'm-I'm being let go?

DR. MATTHEWS

(beat)

It would seem so.

MARCUS

I-I don't understand.

DR. MATTHEWS

It's nothing personal, Marcus, I assure you. It's simply budgetary. The University feels that with this merger it just makes fiscal sense to go with a smaller

staff.

MARCUS

And with someone younger who will do the work for cheaper, am I right?

DR. MATTHEWS

Times are tough everywhere, Marcus. Why just last year a professor got fired for merely being rude to a student. The market is highly competitive-

MARCUS

Competitive? Is competition what this position boils down to?

DR. MATTHEWS

For lack of a better word, I guess.

MARCUS

Then in what part of the University's fucked up mind does that mean I'm the one that gets the ax?

DR. MATTHEWS

Marcus-

MARCUS

I'm one of the best fucking professors this university has to offer. I've been published in highly respected magazines all of the country. I've served on boards. I've done everything I should do and this is how you treat me?

DR. MATTHEWS

Marcus, you haven't published anything in years. That article you've been promising us has floated in limbo for over a year now.

MARCUS

I told you there were personal issues that-

DR. MATTHEWS

It's not just that. You've been cancelling your classes left and right these past few months, you're rarely in your office for your students anymore, and on top of all that you're now going to have a criminal record.

MARCUS

You know as well as I do that plays little to no part in-

DR. MATTHEWS

No, but it certainly doesn't help any decisions either. Look, I'm no happier about any of the decisions they're making either, believe me. Half this damn department is going to be made up of lecturers and T.A.'s if they have their way completely. But what's done is done. I'm sorry, Marcus.

Marcus is silent for a beat then gets up and begins gathering his things into a box.

DR. MATTHEWS (CONT'D)

Marcus, there's no need to do that. You know as well as I do that you can appeal-

MARCUS

And what would be the fucking point of that?

DR. MATTHEWS

Marcus, I understand that you're upset.

MARCUS

Upset? Upset? Why would I be upset? I mean, it was nothing

personal, right? Just weeding out the old criminal who they can't afford to keep around anymore. What's personal about that?

DR. MATTHEWS

You're a talented teacher, Marcus, I'm sure you won't have trouble finding another position elsewhere.

MARCUS

As an adjunct at a rinky dinky community college, no doubt. Every scholar's dream.

DR. MATTHEWS

Marcus, please don't leave this way. You were a valuable asset to this University. We appreciated your hard work and your dedication these previous years. We-

Marcus grabs a coffee mug and throws it against the wall.

MARCUS

Shut up. Just shut the fuck up. I don't need your meaningless platitudes or recommendations. I'm done with all of this. I'm done with all of you.

Marcus takes his box of things and storms out into the hallway. Tom approaches and sees the box.

TOM

Marcus? What's going on?

MARCUS

You were wrong. I've been let go.

TOM

What?

Marcus pushes past him. Tom follows him down the hall.

TOM (CONT'D)

What do you mean they let you go?

What happened? Are you okay?

MARCUS

No Tom, I'm pretty far fucking removed from okay.

TOM

They can't do this. I'll fight them. I'll get them to change their minds somehow.

MARCUS

I always did admire your delusional optimism.

Marcus stops abruptly and turns to Tom.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Forget it, Tom. It's politics, and not even the power of youth and innovation can stop that. You want my advice? Fuck the system as much and as discreetly as you can for as long as you can, before it fucks you right back. Because I guarantee you, eventually it fucks everyone.

TOM

Marcus-

MARCUS

See you around, Tom.

Marcus takes his box and leaves.

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus walks in with his box of office things, dumps it on the couch, and collapses next to it. Erika walks in.

ERIKA

Where have you been?

MARCUS

Out.

ERIKA
What's all that?

MARCUS
My things from my office.

ERIKA
Why would you-

MARCUS
I got fired today, alright?

ERIKA
(beat)
Well, I guess it's just par for the
course where you're concerned these
days, huh?

MARCUS
I swear to fucking God, Erika, if
you start-

ERIKA
I saw Jeff in the hospital today,
speaking of.

MARCUS
How is he?

ERIKA
Conscious, finally. And he's
definitely pressing charges.

MARCUS
Surprise, surprise.

ERIKA
The subpoena will probably be
coming soon.

MARCUS
Woop-de-doo.

ERIKA
Don't you even care?

MARCUS

The act of caring is slipping
further and further away from my
grasp these days, it seems.

ERIKA

Typical.

MARCUS

What's that supposed to mean?

ERIKA

It means that you're doing what you
always do when things get tough.
You shut down.

MARCUS

Well if that isn't that the
despondent pot calling the
dead-inside kettle black.

ERIKA

Everything I've done has just been
in response to you, Marcus. You've
all but disappeared ever since
Dylan's diagnosis and you only came
back because of your dad. You
haven't really looked at me since I
can't remember when. Now I'm
wondering if you ever saw me at
all.

MARCUS

I've been busy, Erika. University
classes don't teach themselves.
Nor do bills pay themselves just
because the wife decides she'd
rather play happy homemaker slash
mommy porn author.

ERIKA

Well maybe I wouldn't need to write
mommy porn if a certain professor
knew how to please a woman.

MARCUS

He would if there was a desirable woman around to please.

Erika slaps Marcus hard across his face.

ERIKA

Fuck you.

Erika starts to leave the kitchen but stops at the door.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Oh, and your dad was right. I have been fucking Jeff.

Erika leaves the kitchen. Marcus follows.

CUT TO:

INT. MCGUIRE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Erika enters first and gets a suitcase out of the closet then throws it on the bed. Marcus rushes in.

MARCUS

What are you doing?

ERIKA

You're the one with the PhD, you figure it out.

MARCUS

You're leaving?

ERIKA

Very astute, Doctor.

As Erika speaks, she begins packing clothes. Marcus goes over to the suitcase and begins throwing the things she packs back out.

MARCUS

No, you can't just leave, Erika.

ERIKA

Give me a one good reason why not.

MARCUS

What about Dylan? How am I

supposed to look after him on my own?

ERIKA

You're a smart guy, I'm sure you'll figure it out.

MARCUS

I can't believe you would be the kind to abandon their child.

ERIKA

I'm not abandoning him, I'm abandoning you.

MARCUS

No, you're not leaving me.

Marcus grabs the last of her stuff out of the suitcase and throws it in on the bed.

ERIKA

Marcus, stop it.

Marcus grabs her by her upper arms.

MARCUS

Erika, please, not you too. I don't know if I can take losing something else this week. Please.

ERIKA

God, Marcus, listen to yourself. None of that was even about me. Besides, it's over, Marcus. There's nothing to play at anymore.

Erika frees herself from her grip and repacks.

MARCUS

What about Dylan?

ERIKA

(beat)

You know as well as I do that everything good about that boy came from Jeff or his teachers. I-I was

never any part of it. Jeff's not going to want to come around here anymore to help him, it would be just you, him, and me. I think it'd be best if I leave now before I just manage to fuck him up worse than I think I already have.

Erika finishes packing and sighs.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Maybe...maybe I'll come visit him someday. Right now I'm going to go stay at Jeff's apartment 'til he gets out of the hospital. Then from there...we'll see.

Marcus sits on the bed as Erika grabs her suitcase and begins to leave. She stops at the bedroom door.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

I-I did love you once, you know.

MARCUS

Yeah, I know.

ERIKA

(beat)

Goodbye, Marcus.

Erika leaves. Marcus stays sitting on the bed.

INT. MCGUIRE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus is sitting on the couch staring at pills in his hand. He pops them in his mouth and downs them with a scotch. Carl walks in.

CARL

Ah to be young and alcoholic again.

MARCUS

What do you want?

CARL

I'm moving out.

MARCUS

Is that so?

CARL

Your brother found me a place near the new complex he helped design. I'm going to stay with him 'til I can get settled in. By that time I should have my license back too.

MARCUS

Sounds like all your dreams came true, Cinderella. Now please leave your evil stepmother alone with his drink.

CARL

You really shouldn't be drinking that stuff so early in the day, you know. You're just trading one damn vice for another.

MARCUS

Who said anything about trading?

CARL

(beat)

You're using again.

MARCUS

Why not? I have nothing else to occupy my time.

CARL

(sighs)

Well, I can't say that any of it is surprising. I'm just going to go grab a few things. John will be by to pick up the rest.

Carl walks out into the foyer to climb the stairs. Marcus follows him and stops him.

MARCUS

What the fuck is your problem?

CARL

My problem?

MARCUS

Your oldest son admits to drinking
and using drugs and all you can say
is that it's not surprising?

CARL

It isn't.

MARCUS

How do you do it?

CARL

Do what?

MARCUS

Your life was shit when you got
here and yet, never once, never
once did you stop acting like the
self-righteous asshole that you
are.

CARL

I don't have to listen to this.

Carl begins to climb the stairs but Marcus grabs his arm roughly.

MARCUS

Oh yes you will listen. For once
in your fucking life you will hear
me. You will hear what I have to
say.

CARL

Let go of my fucking arm.

MARCUS

No. Just tell me. Tell me what I
need to do. What will it finally
take to get you to listen to me?
To look at me?

CARL

Nothing.

MARCUS

Why?

CARL

Because-

Carl wrenches his arm out of Marcus' hand forcibly.

CARL (CONT'D)

Because even when my life was a Goddamn joke I still had the memories to cling to. I had your mother's love, and I have at least one son who's a fucking success even if it took him a while. And I had a good career, one that actually accomplished things.

MARCUS

I had that too.

CARL

No you didn't. You never had any of that. And now you never will. Look at you. Lost a job that just had you thinking and spinning fucking nonsense to brats all day. Reeking of alcohol at 2 in the afternoon. Wife run off with some sniveling cabbage patch kid. Broken son spinning in circles upstairs like some demented ceiling fan. You're the fucking joke now.

MARCUS

Fuck you. You can think what you want about yourself, but you don't a job or a wife either. You're just as worthless as I am.

CARL

Maybe for now. But at least I was something. And being a 'was something' is a hell of a lot better than being a 'never was'.

Carl gestures upstairs.

CARL (CONT'D)

Or a 'never will be'.

Carl heads upstairs. Marcus downs the rest of his drink and begins to head back to the living room. The doorbell rings and Marcus answers the door to a cab driver.

CAB DRIVER

Did someone call for a cab?

CARL (O.S.)

That was me.

Carl comes down the stairs with one large suitcase.

CAB DRIVER

Would you like for me to help you with that sir, or is your son here going to help you?

Carl turns to Marcus.

CARL

He's not my son.

Carl hands the suitcase to the cab driver and follows him out.

CARL (CONT'D)

Actually, I'm heading over to my son's place right now. He's an architect and a successful artist.

CAB DRIVER

Is that so?

CARL

A couple of his paintings were just purchased for the-

Marcus cuts him off by slamming the door shut. He goes back to the living room. Marcus slouches on the couch. Light fades rapidly, going from day to night. Dylan enters the living room.

DYLAN

Dad, hungry.

Marcus picks up his head and stares at Dylan for a beat.

MARCUS

Hungry. Hungry, yes. We must feed you. Come on. Let's go get some burgers. You want some McDonald's?

DYLAN

Yes.

Marcus gets up off the couch.

MARCUS

Good. McDonald's first.
Then...then we'll see.

Marcus grabs his keys and Dylan's hand and leaves the house.

INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Marcus is driving and staring blankly ahead. Dylan is eating a burger silently.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Marcus pulls the car into a parking spot at a local hospital.

INT./EXT. CAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

MARCUS

You done with your burger, buddy?

DYLAN

Yes.

MARCUS

Good.
(beat)
Dylan. Dylan, look at me. I need you to promise me something.

DYLAN

Okay.

MARCUS

Promise me you'll be a good boy,

okay?

DYLAN

Okay.

MARCUS

Good. Good.

Marcus pulls out his cell phone.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Here. You can play that game you
like so much.

Dylan grabs the phone and begins playing, quickly becoming oblivious to the world. Marcus stares for a beat then gets him out of the car.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - NIGHT

Marcus leads a distracted Dylan by the shoulders over to the waiting area of the hospital. He sits Dylan down in a chair, looks around the empty lobby, then begins to leave. A nurse comes out of a hallway and stops him in front of the exit.

NURSE

Sir. Sir, is that your kid that
you're forgetting over there?

Marcus turns to Dylan.

MARCUS

No.
(beat)
No. He's not my son.

The nurse looks around then heads over to Dylan in confusion. Marcus watches for a second, then leaves the hospital.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Marcus gets to his car, hesitates at the door, then gets in and drives away.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cynthia Marie Lopez, preferably referred to as Cyndy, was born and raised in Edinburg, Texas. She has always had a natural affinity for and a great love of writing, but didn't consider pursuing it professionally until her senior year at Edinburg High School, where one media technology course changed her life for the better. After graduating, she attended the University of Texas Pan American, where she pursued her Bachelor's in English and a minor in Theatre, eventually graduating Summa Cum Laude in 2010.

After graduation, Cyndy took a year off from school to find herself, or a job, whichever came first. She did find a job soon after, which not only afforded her the opportunity to return to graduate school at UTPA in the fall of 2011, but also changed her personal life for the better. In her job as a teacher aid at an elementary school, she got the chance to work with many children with various disabilities, enriching her own life with a greater understanding of patience and unconditional love. This would eventually become the inspiration for her thesis, as well as the beginning of a lifelong goal towards bettering her community and herself as a person.

In 2014, Cyndy was hired as a teacher's assistant for the UTPA English department, becoming a writing teacher to young college freshmen and giving her the ability to pass on her own love of the craft through engaging lessons and encouraging words. She earned her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing in May of 2015, and she plans to continue fostering the love of writing and the enriching of young minds in any way she can. She can be reached at 2112 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX 78539.