

THE CANYON

Written by

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INT. FOXFIELD FOREST OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

ERIC DAVIDSON (30) scribbles a realistic sketch of a stoic bald man in a suit. This man, an HR REP (50s), sits across a conference table from Eric.

Surrounding them are several cardboard cut-outs of cartoon foxes, deer, and moose. The characters of the hit kids' show, "FOXFIELD FOREST". Behind the HR Rep, Farley the Fox wears sunglasses and a fedora and beams a cartoonish, toothy grin.

Eric's boss, MR. COHEN (40), enters the conference room and excitedly approaches the colorful cut-out of Farley.

MR. COHEN

(to the cut-out)

Thanks for meeting with us, Eric!

Mr. Cohen eyes Eric, pantomiming an exaggerated double-take. Eric plays along, pulling his sunglasses out from his bag.

ERIC

Haha! I just left the hat at home!

MR. COHEN

What? You're over there? I can't tell you two apart! That's how well you're bringing Farley to life!

Mr Cohen sits down at the conference table.

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)

The sponsors are so happy. What was the Crate & Barrel tweet last week? About redesigning your living room?

ERIC

"Get your paws down to Crate & Barrel and redecorate your den!"

Mr. Cohen grins at Eric with puzzled enthusiasm.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Like, the den in a house... and foxes live in dens.

Mr. Cohen erupts in boisterous laughter. The HR Rep stares back at him sternly. Mr. Cohen stiffens up in response.

MR. COHEN

Eric, we know you're focused on advancing with the show. Exhibiting more creativity.

(MORE)

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)  
So we're proud to announce you're no longer our Assistant Director of Social Marketing. You're our new Vice Manager of Social Accounts!

Eric stares back blankly. Crestfallen.

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)  
That's a promotion!

ERIC  
I, uh, thank you. But, didn't you get all the illustrations I sent?

Mr. Cohen releases a deep, sympathetic breath and nods.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Yeah, so I thought that's what this meeting was gonna be about.

MR. COHEN  
Well, that kind of is what this meeting's about. The illustrators are fully staffed this year. There's no space for you.

ERIC  
Again? But when I started, you always said I could transfer over. You knew that was my whole plan.

MR. COHEN  
That was six years ago, Eric. You were an intern. We weren't paying you. We had to tell you something.

Mr. Cohen slides a stack of papers across the table.

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)  
Foxfield Forest wants you focused on your new title. That's how we want you being creative. Because we got a big, new account.

Eric scans the paperwork. His boss nods emphatically.

ERIC  
EnerCron? The coal company? Aren't they like the world's leading agent of deforestation? How can I promote them with forest animals?

MR. COHEN

I dunno, Eric. But that's what you're good at! So go get 'em!

INT. FOXFIELD FOREST OFFICES - ERIC'S OFFICE - LATER

In his cramped office, Eric stares at the poster of Farley the Fox that covers his wall. Eric fixates on Farley's cartoonish grin. It taunts Eric.

He spins around in his chair and attacks his keyboard.

We get close-up flashes of Eric's jittery typing: "RABID", "SPONSORS", "INSUFFERABLE", "TARGET", "KIDS", "FOXES", "DIE", "HEYNUS". Eric deletes as red lines appear under the last word. He types "HYENA-US". He deletes again. "HEINOUS!!!"

INT. FOXFIELD FOREST OFFICES - OFFICE BULLPEN - LATER

Mr. Cohen stomps across the office bullpen, parting a sea of cubicles while frantically scrolling on his phone.

MR. COHEN

What is he doing? What the hell is he doing? Eric, delete those posts!

Dozens of interns bunkered in the gray cubicles pop their heads up. They offer Mr. Cohen only blank stares.

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)

Take them down now! Are you crazy?

Mr. Cohen grabs the doorknob to Eric's tiny office. Locked.

MR. COHEN (CONT'D)

Do you get some sick pleasure from scaring the shit out of hundreds of thousands of children?

INT. MODERN OFFICE BUILDING - ERIC'S OFFICE - MORNING

Eerily placid, Eric continues to post profane statuses. Farley's cartoonish grin looms over his shoulder.

MR. COHEN (O.S.)

Security is on its way. You're done, Eric! You're done!

At his messy desk, Eric calmly closes his eyes.

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - SIX WEEKS LATER

Eric stares at his shirtless reflection in the bathroom mirror. He pokes at the saggy-ness of budding man-boobs.

Eric's scowls at his weight, but he's more distressed to discover patches of wispy hair on his shoulder blades.

ERIC

Where the hell did you come from?

Eric sloppily dabs shaving cream on his back. He twists, struggling to see his reflection to shave his back.

He secures his phone to the towel rack with rubber bands, angling the camera to show his back in the mirror.

He makes awkward strokes with the razor, carefully watching his movement in the screen of his phone. But the phone changes from the camera to an incoming phone call. 'MOM'.

Eric's hand slips. The old plastic razor drags across his back. A red blob of blood grows in the white shaving cream.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Shit!

His Mom's voicemail plays as Eric towels himself off.

MARY (O.S.)

How's my little California boy?  
We're so excited to come see you  
and Amy and your sister and Kevin!

INT. MARY AND DONALD'S HOUSE - EAST COAST - MORNING

MARY DAVIDSON (60), short hair, well-dressed, crosses her bedroom. A phone's squeezed between her ear and shoulder.

MARY

Did you get the itinerary I emailed  
you? Three days until the big hike!

DONALD DAVIDSON (60), skinny, clean-shaven, and dressed in a track suit, jogs in the hallway outside of their bedroom. Glimpses of him appear only as he passes the doorway.

MARY (CONT'D)

Your father's been preparing like  
crazy. Gym after work. Jogging  
nonstop. Are you exercising?

DONALD

Make him guess how many miles I ran yesterday.

MARY

It's a message. He can't guess!

DONALD

You already asked him a bunch of questions!

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S APARTMENT - EXTRA BEDROOM - MORNING

On a desk littered with art supplies, Eric, still shirtless, sketches colorful cartoonish animals similar to the ones in his old office. Eric's clearly talented.

DONALD (O.S.)

Fourteen miles, Eric!

MARY (O.S.)

Fourteen miles all in here? We'll have to replace the carpet!

DONALD (O.S.)

Think you'll be able to jog fourteen miles when you're sixty?

Eric crumples up his sketches, dismayed, and stuffs them into a teeming trash can adorned with super heroes.

INT. MARY AND DONALD'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Donald scurries past Mary into the shower.

DONALD

Leaving for the airport in twenty!

MARY

I'm ready. I'm ready.

Donald enters the shower. As Mary packs her bathroom items, something catches her eye in Donald's open toiletry kit.

A prescription of VIAGRA in Donald's name. Mary playfully cocks an eye at his silhouette in the shower.

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Eric's girlfriend, AMY (27) a smart, attractive brunette, enters in a suit with a briefcase and a bag of take-out.

Their furniture is a mismatched collection of Amy and Eric's styles. With his framed animated cels and her framed diplomas. Suggesting a recent blend of their belongings.

AMY

Hi! I left right after my meeting and got us breakfast! How are ya?

ERIC

Well, I thought I found a carcinoma in my jawbone this morning. Turned out just to be a cankersore.

Amy rolls her eyes. His false self-diagnoses are routine.

AMY

What a relief. You send out your portfolio today?

ERIC

It's not ready yet.

Amy gives him a kiss and a supportive squeeze.

AMY

Your illustrations are great!

ERIC

But once they're out there, they're out there. No changes. No control. Just out there.

AMY

But once they're out there, other people will see how great they are. And you can get on a show. And then we can get out of this apartment!

ERIC

I like our apartment.

AMY

I know you do.

They smile at each other and kiss again.

AMY (CONT'D)

Well I am excited for my first Davidson family road trip! And to finally relax and take a vay-

Amy's phone emits a flurry of notifications. She groans.

AMY (CONT'D)

I gotta go back to the office. I'll meet you at your sister's place?

She hurries to the door. Eric hands Amy her briefcase.

ERIC

I love you.

AMY

-You, too!

Amy's out the door in a flash, leaving Eric standing alone with the bag of take-out. His phone rings. "MOM" again.

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - MORNING

Mary and Donald sit at their gate. Mary leaves another rambling message on Eric's phone.

MARY

Dad wants to know if they have Five Hour Energy drinks in LA. It's a yellow bottle of raspberry liquid except it doesn't taste like raspberries. You drink it, and I guess it gives you energy?

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Seated on his futon, Eric eats from both boxes of food Amy brought home. He rubs his back where he cut himself shaving.

MARY (O.S.)

Dad drinks half of one when he has to go to court, but now it's part of his exercise routine- Oh, Tessa's calling on the other line!

DONALD (O.S.)

There aren't "lines" anymore, Mary.

Eric searches 'staph infection' on WebMD. We see the many other diseases and disorders he's searched, "WEIRD SOUND WHEN URINATING", "CANCER FROM CHEESE?", and "REVERSE ALOPECIA".

MARY (O.S.)

You hear that, Eric? Your sister voluntarily calls us!

Eric gawks at nauseating images of pus and staph infections while chomping into a breakfast burrito.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Like a Pavlovian response to the on board 'DING', Donald and the other DC businessmen simultaneously fling open their laptops. Mary reads a thick novel in the middle seat.

INT. ERIC'S CAR - NOON

In an old sedan that looks destined to break down on the 405, Eric navigates the obstacles of LA traffic: potholes, back ups for left turns, abandoned shopping carts, and cyclists. He's familiar with the city.

Eric parks by a nice apartment building in Santa Monica. He searches 'FOXFIELD FOREST', grimacing at the top results: "MAJOR FOX UP" and "KEEP YOUR KIDS OUT OF THIS FOREST".

INT. AIRPLANE - NOON

Donald's attention is glued to his laptop. Mary rattles the ice in her cup of diet soda.

MARY

Isn't this great?

DONALD

What's that?

MARY

Gathering up all the kids, and you, for another a road trip. Feels like I never see any of you anymore.

Donald looks at Mary. He smiles and shuts his laptop.

DONALD

Sorry, I've been travelling too much recently. But, I did get you something special for the trip. Well it's sort of for *both* of us.

He looks at Mary with a wry grin. Remembering the VIAGRA she discovered that morning, Mary coyly smiles back.

MARY

I thought I saw something special this morning.

DONALD

Want me to give it to you now?

MARY  
 (whispering)  
 Donald! On the plane?

DONALD  
 What?

She blushes and looks away. Donald smiles confidently.

INT. TESSA AND KEVIN'S APARTMENT - NOON

Eric's sister, TESSA DAVIDSON (27), opens the door to her apartment. Tessa is blonde and tiny, but with a strong presence that defies her stature.

TESSA  
 Where's Amy?

ERIC  
 She had to go back to work. And  
 hello to you, too.

Eric awkwardly tugs their luggage into Tessa's apartment. Socks, old plane tickets, and a nearly empty bottle of hand sanitizer tumble out of an unzipped pocket in Eric's bag.

TESSA  
 Come on! You're a mess!

Tessa's color-coordinated apartment is the opposite of Eric's. Fresh flowers and family photos adorn every surface.

Tessa picks up his trail of trash and stuffs it in the bin by the door. Eric sees her grab the hand sanitizer.

ERIC  
 Whoa, whoa! I need that.

Plucking a tissue from a box, Eric wraps his hand and pulls the sanitizer from the trash. He squirts some onto his palms.

TESSA  
 How can you be a hypochondriac and  
 yet so filthy?

ERIC  
 I'm an enigma, I know.

Eric looks at a photo of Tessa and Amy. Tessa eyes her phone.

TESSA  
 Mom says they're picking up the  
 rental car and headed here.

Eric picks up a framed photo of what we can tell is their family many years earlier, posed on the rim of the Grand Canyon. They all have sour expressions. Tessa takes it from him and meticulously re-angles the frame on the shelf.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Amy's worried you didn't prepare for the Grand Canyon enough.

Eric points to the photo of them as kids at the Grand Canyon.

ERIC

I could've finished the hike fifteen years ago! And why is Amy even talking to you about that?

TESSA

That's what happens when you date my best friend. And she's right. The hike's twenty-two miles in one day. You should've been coming to CrossFit with me and Kevin.

ERIC

Have you noticed that the ropes and boxes for those workouts are the same things a zoo throws in the gorilla enclosure?

TESSA

So you're saying we have the physical strength of gorillas?

ERIC

I'm saying you have the mental strength of-

Tessa eyes her brother, knowing where his joke's headed.

There's a patterned knock at the door. Tessa jumps up and checks herself in the mirror. Eric tenses up.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Please don't mention work. Dad doesn't know I was fired.

TESSA

What? It's been six weeks!

ERIC

Mom promised not to say anything until after the trip. You can too.

TESSA

Tell him now. Get it over with!

ERIC

No, it'll be summers in high school all over again. He'll wake me up at dawn to search the Classifieds for jobs. I won't ruin this hike again.

Tessa's scowl at Eric disappears as she opens the door.

TESSA

Mom!

Mary pulls Tessa into a hug. Donald bursts in.

DONALD

Three days until the Grand Canyon!

INT. TESSA AND KEVIN'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Mary excitedly paces Tessa's apartment, scanning the room. Her attention lands on a large stack of bridal magazines.

MARY

The ring! How could I forget? Let me see! Let me see!

Tessa jabs her left hand into Mary's lap, showing off a dazzling engagement ring. Mary fawns over the ring.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's even more beautiful in person.

DONALD

That Kevin is a keeper.

TESSA

Yeah, Dad. That's the whole idea.

DONALD

Eric, how's work?

Tessa covers her face. Mary watches her son lie.

ERIC

It's... fine. But, you know, If I'm gonna be an illustrator, I should actually be illustrating. Maybe my position isn't right for me.

DONALD

Money. Making money is right for you. With the path Amy's on at the firm, she'll be raking it in soon. And no son of mine is gonna leech off his girlfriend.

Eric looks away, eager for the topic to change. Mary notices.

MARY

Let's have some wine!

DONALD

It's one o'clock.

MARY

It's vacation!

ERIC

How about two and a half hours of an energy drink?

TESSA

Sorry, Mom. Kevin and I cut out alcohol as part of training for the hike. Not a drop for seven weeks.

DONALD

I love that dedication!

TESSA

Although I think Kevin is hoping it's a sign that I'm pregnant.

On opposite sides of the room, Donald and Mary turn to Tessa.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Which I'm not!

Donald examines the back packs, boots, walking sticks, and other hiking gear that's resting by the front door.

DONALD

Eric, how have you trained?

ERIC

People hike the Grand Canyon all the time. I'm people. I'll be fine.

Donald looks at him dismissively.

TESSA

Just because you've kept dressing like a teenager for the last ten years, it doesn't mean you still have the endurance of one.

Eric fakes being hurt. Donald leaps up off the couch.

DONALD

Time to pack up! Let's go!

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Donald stacks luggage and hiking gear into the back of the bright red minivan they've rented for the trip. He pulls out bags and rearranges them to maximize space. Every Dad's favorite game of Tetris.

Tessa's fiancée KEVIN (27), a thin, aging hipster, has joined the group and helps Tessa carry luggage.

Donald pulls Eric aside and takes a check from his wallet.

ERIC

Dad, I don't need-

DONALD

Just don't tell your mother. I promised I'd be harder on you.

ERIC

Thank you. This means a lot.

Donald looks at him sternly.

DONALD

It's money. It *is* a lot.

Amy hurries to the car from around the corner.

DONALD (CONT'D)

There she is!

AMY

Sorry I'm late! Great to see you!

She hugs them all. As Amy is about to join Eric in middle row for the drive, Tessa intervenes.

TESSA

You get to spend every night with Amy. I'm stealing her back. Kevin, climb up there with Eric.

Kevin presses against Eric, giving him an exaggerated smile.

KEVIN  
Hey, brother!

ERIC  
We're not brothers.

KEVIN  
We're gonna be!

Eric squeezes the rest of his hand sanitizer into his palm.

INT. RENTAL CAR - EARLY AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

And they're off! They speed up a major highway north of Los Angeles. Eric unfolds a tattered road map.

ERIC  
Is this the same map from our first drive to the Grand Canyon?

DONALD  
Yep! I highlighted the route for the whole trip. Today through Sequoia Park. Tomorrow into Death Valley. Then a quick-as-possible stay at your aunt's house. And finally onto the Grand Canyon!

AMY  
Why didn't you guys do the hike the first time you drove out here?

ERIC  
We planned to, but once we got to the Rim, Mom forbid it because she didn't believe we could finish.

MARY  
And they've constantly reminded me for fifteen years. Like they're committed to proving me wrong.

DONALD  
It's not about proving you wrong-

Donald clarifies in a tone that *does* prove her wrong.

DONALD (CONT'D)  
It's proving what this family can do together!

MARY

The hike is dangerous! The kids were way too young.

DONALD

Well, no excuses this time.

Eric drops the map on the floor. Donald notices.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Hey! The directions!

ERIC

I'll just use my phone.

DONALD

But I taught you how to navigate with real maps. If you let your phone do all the work, you'll be dependent on that thing.

ERIC

Yet for the last fifteen years, you felt obligated to keep a two dollar map for a state you don't even live in? That sounds really independent.

INT. RENTAL CAR - AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

The minivan shoots up the 5 highway. The sweeping hills and desert vistas north of LA become wooded and green. Mary turns away from the landscape to her kids in the backseat.

MARY

California has stolen all of you away from me, huh?

TESSA

We didn't move to get away from you. We came for school and work.

MARY

You could teach back home. There's great schools in the suburbs.

TESSA

Don't act like we're the first ever deserters. You and Dad moved away from your home town.

MARY

We grew up in the middle of nowhere.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Either you left as soon as possible, or you sank in forever. DC has options.

TESSA

DC has politics, humidity, and everyone I went to high school with. California is great!

MARY

I lived in California once, you know.

TESSA

No you didn't. When?

MARY

I waited tables for a summer at my cousin's restaurant in San Diego, when your father was in law school.

TESSA

How could I not know this?

MARY

Oh, everyone has their secrets.

Mary looks away from the backseat and eyes Donald. He's focused on the road and doesn't notice her gaze.

EXT. RURAL GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

The minivan pulls into a gas station. Everyone exits the car, stretching and heading inside as Donald fuels up.

INT. RURAL GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Tessa, Mary, and Amy wander the aisles of the gas station store. Mary pulls a large diet soda from a fridge.

MARY

How are your students?

TESSA

Summer vacation is around the corner. The heat's kicking in. The hormones are kicking in. God, the kids smell awful.

AMY

Do you miss teaching, Mary?

MARY

I like improvising my days. But Donald's still so busy. Sometimes I wonder why I retired just to be by myself. I do miss the kids. The daily reminders to look at things from another perspective.

Mary stares into space.

TESSA

A fourth grader called me a MILF yesterday.

MARY

What did you do?

TESSA

I took him to the principal's office, and then I took my birth control.

Mary smiles as they stroll down the aisle.

MARY

Oh look-

Mary pulls three Three Musketeers bars from the shelf.

MARY (CONT'D)

Remember when I'd visit you two and I'd bring boxes of these for us?!?

Tessa rolls her eyes. Amy smiles.

TESSA

Come on, Mom. That was cheesy back then. You know how much sugar is in one of these?

Deflated, Mary puts the candy bars back on the shelf.

MARY

Fine. Too mature to eat chocolate with your poor mother. I get it.

TESSA

They're snacks, Mom. Don't get wistful about snacks.

Amy reaches around Tessa and grabs a couple of the bars.

AMY

I'll have one with you, Mary.

MARY

Well thank you! Glad someone's  
still willing to have fun.

Mary and Amy walk ahead to the register. Amy winks at Tessa.

EXT. RURAL GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Everyone waits outside of the locked car. Donald hurries back with a bag of his own snacks.

DONALD

Who wants a pickle?

ERIC

Dad! Not the pickle jar.

DONALD

We're already behind schedule.

KEVIN

What? I'll take a pickle.

Kevin claws one from the jar and mocks wiping the juice on Eric. Donald takes two pickles and chomps into them.

DONALD

No? Nobody else? OK, time to get  
back on the road!

Donald upends the jar, dumping the remaining pickles into a trash can. Mary appears from the other side of the car.

MARY

Donald, we're not doing the pickle  
jar. If someone needs to stop for a  
bathroom, we'll stop.

Mary gives Donald a sneer that no one would dare argue with. A puddle of yellow pickle juice sloshes around the bottom of the jar. Donald drops it into the trash.

INT. RENTAL CAR - AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

Driving up a smaller country road escalating in altitude, the surrounding landscape is vibrantly green.

DONALD

Eric, we saw your buddy Dougie  
Anderson at the mall the other day.

ERIC

He's not my buddy, Dad. We were on the same baseball team when we were, like, twelve.

DONALD

And he went on to be the star of your school. Scholarship to Virginia Tech. Almost made it all the way to the majors. And you were his back-up! With more persistence, that could've been you.

ERIC

I could've been my own back up?

DONALD

You had talent! You were an amazing bunter! Who knows where you'd be if you had Dougie's dedication.

MARY

That's enough, Donald.

Mary puts up a hand in protest of Donald's pestering.

DONALD

What's Dougie up to these days?

ERIC

Let's see, last time I saw Ol' Dougie, he was getting kicked out of our high school reunion for snorting coke in the handicap bathroom stall.

DONALD

That doesn't sound like Dougie.

ERIC

I don't know, Dad. He was really *dedicated* to the coke.

DONALD

Still. One hell of a shortstop.

Eric shrugs, eager for the approval Donald shows a stranger.

INT. RENTAL CAR - AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

The kids in the backseat are glued to their windows, watching the dense parkland develop. It's violently green compared to the dying palm trees and concrete they are used to in LA.

MARY

DONALD!

A group of elk darts across the road right in front of them. Donald slams on the brakes. The car skids to a stop.

Mary flings an arm across Donald's chest. An instinct to protect. She pulls it back as the adrenaline subsides.

DONALD

Sorry. Sorry, everyone!

MARY

Pull over if you want to look around. We'll wait.

DONALD

We're on a tight schedule.

MARY

Well, getting all of us killed is going to disrupt the...

Mary looks up. The large bull elk stands frozen in the center of the road. Its regal antlers loom in front of the minivan.

KEVIN

Why isn't it moving?

TESSA

The same reason we aren't moving.

ERIC

I feel like we're in a diorama at the Natural History Museum.

Everyone's fixated on the large male. But Mary eyes the cluster of smaller elk at the forest's edge.

MARY

It's a whole family of them.

Donald inches the minivan around the male and drives off.

ERIC

It's a gang.

AMY

What?

ERIC

A group of elk is called a gang of elk. Or a herd.

TESSA

How do you know that?

ERIC

From my show. I had to learn all the collective names for animals. They're crazy. A Gang of Elk. A Congress of Salamanders. A Kettle of Vultures. A Business of Ferrets. They all sound so made up.

KEVIN

Every word was made up by somebody.

ERIC

Thank you for that insightful addition, Kevin.

KEVIN

The names should at least have to rhyme. Like... a shelf of elk.

ERIC

You're off to a great start.

TESSA

How come only animals get special treatment? Why not other words?

Mary stares forward with a hand on her brow.

MARY

Pillows of Exhaustion.

Everyone in the car thinks for a second, and offers their own addition to the new group names, working around the backseat.

ERIC

A Trash Can of Illustrations.

KEVIN

An Embrace of Brothers!

Kevin reaches to the back seat and wraps Eric in a showy hug. Eric wriggles free with mock disgust.

TESSA

A Road Trip of Egos.

DONALD

A Family of Davidsons!

Eric and Tessa turn to Amy. She struggles to take part.

AMY  
I don't know...

TESSA  
Come on!

ERIC  
It can be anything.

AMY  
Uhh... Ecstasy of Pizzas.

DONALD  
Good one!

Surrounded by his family, Donald beams a wide grin.

INT. RENTAL CAR - SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST - AFTERNOON

The minivan putters by the entrance to Sequoia National Forest. Donald collects a brochure from the ranger.

ERIC  
So this is the first of three National Parks? Sequoia, Death Valley, and Grand Canyon?

Kevin turns around from the middle seat.

KEVIN  
Actually we're not in Sequoia National *Park* yet. This is Sequoia National *Forest*.

ERIC  
You know, just because you're marrying Tessa doesn't mean you have to adopt her obsession with every nit-picky detail.

KEVIN  
Just reciting the brochure!

INT. RENTAL CAR - SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST - LATER

A sweeping landscape of lush hills unfolds before them. Donald aligns the car so that a sign describing the view is in front of Mary. She reads it aloud with no prompting.

MARY  
"Sequoia tree rings tell a story of survival and adaptation."  
(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Cross-sections don't reveal a perfect array of concentric growth rings. There are scars, indicating fire damage or drought, and warped rings, growth on top of the scars."

Donald cranes his neck to scope the views. As soon as Mary stops reading, he shifts the car into gear and drives off.

EXT. SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Donald parks near an area populated with the massive Sequoia trees. The family walks by two frazzled parents struggling with their young son and daughter. The girl sneaks a punch on her brother when the parents aren't looking. Tessa smiles.

KEVIN

That's gonna be us!

Kevin wraps an arm around Tessa. She's confused.

TESSA

The brother and sister?

KEVIN

What? The parents. Toting around a carload of kids.

Kevin smiles at the parents and walks ahead.

MARY

He's really eager for kids, huh?

Tessa warily nods.

TESSA

Kids make you so... accountable. You can't mess up anymore.

MARY

Well I'll take that as a compliment to our parenting, but it's certainly not true.

Mary and Tessa join the others on short path leading into the forest. The trees dwarf everything in sight.

DONALD

Race you to the top of that rock!

Eric and Donald sprint toward a large boulder. Eric struggles to get a foothold as Donald steadily scales the other side.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Can't keep up, huh? Hope this is no indication of how much you're gonna struggle on the Grand Canyon hike!

Eric follows Donald's path up the rock. Donald tugs him up over the edge. Eric heaves deep breaths as they gaze into the lush forest.

ERIC

Remember how I had sports-induced asthma as a kid. And then in high school, a deviated septum? Do you think I'm working up the ladder? Like, lung cancer is next?

DONALD

That surgery repaired your septum. We re-viated it. You're fine.

ERIC

Yeah. For now.

Eric keeps breathing heavy.

EXT. SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Tessa, Amy, and Mary convene around a trunk of a massive Sequoia tree. Some of the thick trees are thousands of years old, majestically sky-rocketing hundreds of feet straight up.

AMY

It makes you feel so small.

Mary strolls the long path around the trunk's circumference.

MARY

Certainly humbling standing before something so massive and stoic.

Mary braces herself against the trunk, her fingers digging into the bark's wide grooves. She stares up, the trees seemingly recede into infinity.

MARY (CONT'D)

But it's also empowering, almost supernatural. Touching something that's been alive for a thousand years. It's like time travel. Or taking Communion.

AMY  
Inconsequential or miraculous.  
Tough to know how to interpret it.

MARY  
I'm right on the edge.

Mary strolls away, further into the forest.

TESSA  
She's acting weird.

AMY  
I think she's just a little lonely.  
But it's tough for me to tell.

TESSA  
What do you mean?

AMY  
Well in college she felt like a big  
sister, but ever since Eric and I  
have been together, it's like she  
reverted me back to that confused  
eighteen year old who was assigned  
to your dorm room.

TESSA  
Oh you're inventing that.

AMY  
I'm not! It's like I'm a threat to  
your family. So I have to be  
aggressively nice to compensate.  
It's exhausting.

TESSA  
She's just afraid anyone Eric and I  
see is gonna take us from her.

AMY  
But Eric and I are just dating. I  
get enough tension with my family.  
I don't need it around yours.

INT. RENTAL CAR - SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST - SUNSET

The setting sun makes the woodlands glow. Everyone in the car  
sits in hushed reverence as the forest fades to black. Theirs  
are the only headlights on the road.

On the center console, Donald's phone dings with a message.

MARY

I thought you told the office not to bother you this week.

DONALD

I did.

Donald reads the text and tucks the phone away in the compartment in his door. He gives an exaggerated shrug.

DONALD (CONT'D)

You know they never listen.

Donald stares ahead and reaches a hand to Mary's thigh.

INT. RESTAURANT - TABLE - NIGHT

The family's pulled over at a nice restaurant. Eric's the last to place his order.

ERIC

The venison, please. Medium-rare.

AMY

Venison? That's pretty far down the menu, huh?

ERIC

What do you mean?

Amy looks away from him, wishing she hadn't said anything.

AMY

It's just... haven't you noticed when we go out to dinner you always order the second item on a menu?

ERIC

It's always where they put chicken. I like chicken- if I feel good about the odds against salmonella.

AMY

And you're just trying something new tonight? OK. That's great!

Eric looks confused. Amy turns to the rest of the table.

AMY (CONT'D)

Donald, I missed you at the conference in Denver last week. Did you get stuck in DC?

MARY

Donald went to Denver.

DONALD

Yeah, I went. I was stuck in my hotel the whole time hammering out the details on that Peterson case.

AMY

Which case?

Shielding herself with her glass of wine, Mary suspiciously eyes Donald. Donald waves off Amy's questions.

DONALD

Peterson. Only a DC deal. But that reminds me, we've been paying close attention to your great work. Would you ever consider making the move to join us at the head office?

AMY

Really? I'd jump at the chance!

Amy's eyes light up with mention of the job opportunity.

AMY (CONT'D)

But LA has become a second home. Tessa and my college friends are there. Eric expects to stay there.

DONALD

Right. The drawing.

Eric stares at his dad, hurt by Donald's flippancy.

MARY

Eric, you haven't sent me any of your work lately.

ERIC

I can't finish anything.

AMY

His illustrations are great! I have some hanging in my office.

DONALD

Isn't it fantastic that we get to relive this family road trip, with two great new members! Raise your wine, your waters, your whatever, and cheers to the Grand Canyon!

Everyone clinks their glasses and drinks up.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Eric and Amy are asleep in the back row. Tessa leans forward in her seat, talking to Mary about her wedding planning.

TESSA

I'm considering infinity signs with our names as the logo for our Save The Date cards. I know it's kind of cliché, but infinity is what it's all about, right? Together forever.

Mary nods. The long day of travel is catching up with her.

TESSA (CONT'D)

What did you guys have on your Save The Dates? Mom?

MARY

We didn't have any. I don't think we even had invitations. I remember calling our families on the phone.

The minivan pulls into a parking lot for a chain hotel.

TESSA

How could that be?

MARY

We didn't have any money. Things have changed, sweetie.

DONALD

But that doesn't mean your mother and I aren't together for infinity!

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Eric, Donald, and Mary take luggage from the back of the car. Two attractive blondes walk by. Donald nudges Eric.

DONALD

I see why you like California!

Mary sees Donald gives the girls a wide smile and a wink. Eric, Amy, Tessa, and Kevin head inside the hotel.

From their carry-on bag Mary pulls out an electric toothbrush still in its box. She doesn't recognize it.

MARY  
What is this?

Donald's smile widens.

DONALD  
Your own electric toothbrush! It's  
your present! Well, *our* present.

MARY  
Wait. An electric toothbrush?  
That's the present to both of us?

DONALD  
Because you kept getting annoyed at  
me when I'd take the other one when  
I traveled. What? No good?

Mary stares at the toothbrush. She's processing the long day.  
Her grip tightens on the box. Her face sinks.

MARY  
You're doing it again.

DONALD  
What?

Mary covers her face with her hands. She can't believe it.

MARY  
You didn't go to Denver, did you?

DONALD  
What are you talking about?

MARY  
You have a prescription for Viagra  
which you're not home enough to  
use. And your gift to me is a  
fucking toothbrush?

DONALD  
Where'd you see Viagra?

Mary staggers back. Her color flees her cheeks.

MARY  
How dumb can I be? I thought the  
prescription was for us. But of  
course. I can't believe you're  
doing it again.

Mary rushes to the driver's seat. Donald hurries after her.

DONALD

Doing what, Mary? What's wrong?

Mary unlocks his phone and opens the messages. Her face sinks. Her bloodshot eyes frantically dart. She squirms away.

DONALD (CONT'D)

No, Mary! What are you doing?

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The kids are huddled inside the lobby, surrounded by their luggage as they wait for their parents to check in.

The lobby's automatic doors whoosh open. Mary enters with tears filling her eyes. The doors open again and Donald races in after her. Mary sees the kids and shrieks.

MARY

We're getting a divorce!

No one moves. Donald's face sinks. Bags fall from his arms.

TESSA

What the hell is going on?

MARY

He's seeing another woman! He was going to leave us.

ERIC

What other woman? Dad?

Mary bee-lines past them, pushing through the door to the stairs. Everyone else spins to Donald, who is motionless.

Beyond them, a group of kids and parents stand in wet bathing suits, on their way from the pool to the elevators. Other hotel guests stand agape. Smooth jazz trickles out of the speakers, the only sound in the lobby.

INT. HOTEL STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Mary's lumped on the stairwell's bottom step with her head buried in her hands, crying and shaking with anger. Tessa, pale and wide-eyed, rubs her mom's back.

The stairwell's halogen lights buzz and beam down on Mary as if she's confessing in a police interrogation.

MARY

He was texting her all day. In the car. With us. No wonder he's been traveling so much. God I'm dumb!

TESSA

Mom. Don't.

MARY

The messages just kept going!

Mary gestures scrolling through texts with a trembling hand.

TESSA

Do you know who she is?

Mary shrugs and leans against Tessa for support.

MARY

Her contact info had an email address from the firm. Some summer intern, probably.

TESSA

Do you remember her name?

MARY

Liz McKenzie.

TESSA

What a stupid name.

Tessa attacks her phone. Mary covers her face in her arms.

MARY

He sent her so many messages. He used those fucking *smiley face* things!

TESSA

I'm checking the firm's site. Here she is! Shit. She's... old.

Tessa shows Mary the picture of a woman in her 60s.

MARY

She's my age.

TESSA

Yeah...

Mary glares at her daughter.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Do you know her? Have you met her?

Mary re-examines the picture.

MARY

Yes. Christ, *you've* met her.  
Remember last year at that banquet  
for Dad? She was there when he got  
that award. They give *him* awards.

INT. DONALD'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Eric sits in the corner, white-knuckling the armrests of a chair. There's no eye contact. The TV flickers next to him.

Donald extracts two tiny bottles of Scotch from the mini bar. He empties them into two glasses and hands one to Eric.

Donald sits back down on one of the queen beds. After an intense silence, he motions to the TV with his glass.

DONALD

The Dodgers look good this year.

ERIC

Yeah... Bullpen needs another  
lefty... but playoffs probably.

DONALD

Good. Playoffs are good.

Donald and Eric eagerly gulp their Scotch. Eric grabs two more bottles from the mini bar and chugs both.

DONALD (CONT'D)

I didn't expect this, you know. We  
worked together on a case and...  
she's a lovely woman. You'd really  
like her. Whip-smart. Funny.

ERIC

Shit, Dad! Don't tell me about her.

Donald gulps his Scotch. They both look glassy-eyed.

DONALD

We shouldn't over do it. Don't want  
this stuff lingering in our system.  
Dehydrating us for the Canyon hike.

ERIC

We're not gonna do the hike, Dad.

DONALD

But we have reservations.

Donald can barely look up. Repercussions haven't sunk in.

INT. HOTEL STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Kevin inches into the stairwell. He holds their overnight bags and some of their hiking gear.

KEVIN

Hi... how are you? Is that a dumb question?

MARY

I'm not sure how I am. Sorry that you're marrying into such a mess.

KEVIN

Are you kidding? My family's really fucked up. You'll fit right in.

TESSA

Kevin!

MARY

That's oddly sweet. Thank you.

Tessa sits side by side with her Mom on the bottom stair.

TESSA

So what do we do now?

MARY

I don't know what to do with the next few days, let alone the next few years.

Mary sighs, conceding control of the moment. Tessa pounces.

TESSA

Let's go to Aunt June's house like planned. Just you and me. Unwind.

MARY

But this was supposed to be a family trip. Our last trip.

TESSA

But you should have some space.

Mary rises off the stairs.

MARY

No. I've had enough space. All I've had recently is space. Everyone's off doing their own thing, and I'm alone at home, stuck with space.

Mary fixates on Kevin's hiking gear.

MARY (CONT'D)

We've all wanted to go back to the Grand Canyon for fifteen years. You've trained. You've dieted. I won't be blamed for cancelling this hike again. I won't be the victim and the victimizer in all this.

KEVIN

No, it's fine. Really.

TESSA

We're not gonna go. That's crazy!

Mary's determined. She won't lose anymore control.

MARY

We're still gonna go.

TESSA

Let's talk about this tomorrow.

MARY

You can talk about it all you want tomorrow. We're still going.

TESSA

So Dad stays here?

MARY

No. No, he'll come. He trained and prepared, too. This is it. This is our last family trip. I know it'll be weird. It's weirdest for me.

TESSA

Mom, it won't be weird. It will be unbearable. Are we supposed to pretend like nothing happened?

MARY

No, you can be angry. Lord knows I'll be angry.

KEVIN

A car full of passive-aggression?  
This sounds exactly like one of my  
family vacations.

INT. DONALD'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

There's a knock at the door. Eric picks himself out of his chair, wobbling from the Scotch. Amy enters.

DONALD

There she is! How are you?

Donald gives her an awkward hug. Amy's resistant to Donald's touch but tries not to show it. She eyes Eric.

AMY

Tessa wants to talk downstairs.

Eric quickly follows her to escape the room.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eric crumples against the wall as they wait for the elevator.

AMY

What the hell? He's so normal.

ERIC

My dad is the king of pretending everything is OK. Wish I inherited that trait. I searched 'panic attacks' and the symptoms are way tamer than what I'm feeling.

AMY

I'm so sorry.

ERIC

Why did she have to tell us in a fucking hotel lobby?

AMY

I know. I know.

ERIC

Promise this will never be us.

AMY

Of course not. We're dating. We get to stay happy.

Eric looks sideways at Amy but doesn't press the issue.

AMY (CONT'D)

Since when do you drink Scotch?

ERIC

It's my dad's Bad News Scotch. For whenever he lost in court, or if we broke a bone, or when the Orioles missed the playoffs.

AMY

We better stock up for the rest of the trip.

INT. HOTEL - INDOOR POOL - NIGHT

Tessa, Eric, Amy, and Kevin stand around the indoor pool. The underwater lights shine up, painting the room an eerie teal.

TESSA

Mom wants to finish the trip. The drive. The Canyon. The hike.

ERIC

What? You're kidding.

AMY

Do we all get a vote in this?

TESSA

I don't know how this is gonna work. But she needs us.

They glance at each other. No one knows what to expect.

ERIC

Fuck!

His scream echoes around the dark, cavernous room, clashing with the tranquility of the still blue water.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I knew it! I knew something bad was going to happen to me. I assumed it'd be some multisyllabic fatal disorder. Not di-vorce.

Eric's enunciation highlights divorce's two syllables.

TESSA

How can you make this about you?

ERIC

I'm not! Mom knows how much this trip means to us. She could've waited to tell us or something.

TESSA

Are you seriously blaming her? Dad was fucking around. This is all on him. Talk some sense into him, Amy.

ERIC

Amy's on my side.

Tessa and Eric spin towards Amy. She stands in between them, torn between her best friend and her boyfriend.

AMY

You're not on different sides. You're both angry.

KEVIN

Let's get to bed, guys.

TESSA

Christ! How do we even do that?

AMY

Let your mom have her room. Tessa and I will split one. You guys OK bunking with your dad?

Eric reluctantly nods. Kevin walks over to him and puts an arm on Eric's shoulder. Eric wriggles out from under it.

INT. DONALD'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Eric and Kevin enter the dark hotel room they're sharing with Donald. Instantly they're smacked by Donald's loud snoring.

KEVIN

How was he able to sleep with two women when he sounds like that?

They change clothes and climb into the room's other tiny queen bed. Donald continues to produce a barrage of snores.

ERIC

Shut up!

KEVIN

Me or your dad?

ERIC  
Both of you!

Eric kicks at the covers. Kevin pulls back for the blanket.

KEVIN  
By the way, I snore too.

Kevin's snoring fills Donald's gaps. Noise is constant.

Eric scrambles out of bed with a blanket and a pillow. He takes them to the bathroom and lies down in the tub.

INT. MARY'S HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mary stands in the shower. The steaming water pelts her, turning her chest a fiery red. She pulls her wet hair back and leans against the shower's plastic basin for support.

INT. TESSA AND AMY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Amy exits the bathroom and joins Tessa on the bed. Tessa sits on the bed's edge, staring into space.

AMY  
How ya doing?

TESSA  
Did you ever play that game MASH as a kid? To predict your home and husband and stuff?

AMY  
Mansion. Apartment. Shack. House. Yeah, we'd play at recess a lot.

TESSA  
It's not like I thought the predictions were gonna come true, but I remember the future feeling stable back then. Like if you got the house, you kept the house. If the game matched you with the nerd, the nerd didn't cheat on you. Whatever you got is what you kept.

Amy shakes her head.

AMY  
No, I kept playing until I got the exact future I wanted.

(MORE)

AMY (CONT'D)

I knew things could change because of my parents. I went from a nice house to splitting two tiny apartments. So now I'm working for my mansion.

TESSA

At least you never got the shack.

AMY

No shack. Although, sometimes living with your brother...

Tessa envelops Amy in an big hug and turns out the lights.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Donald slides open the drab curtains. Sunlight spills into the room. Yesterday's lush forests have been replaced by the desert's gray ocher, as if everything's turned to stone.

Donald opens the bathroom door. Eric sits in the tub, groggy.

DONALD

Good morning.

ERIC

I doubt that.

EXT. HOTEL - PARKING LOT - MORNING

The steady sound of suitcase wheels rolling over the bumpy gravel parking lot. Mary stares forward, doing her best to appear unaffected as she leads her bag to the car.

She passes her kids loading up the car and meets Donald behind the minivan.

MARY

Let's get one thing straight. This is in no way a sign of acceptance of what you've done. As far as anger and embarrassment go, we are at the tip of my fucking iceberg. So I'm gonna ride back here with my family while we still have it.

Donald slowly nods.

DONALD

I got you a soda.

Mary rips the bottle of diet soda from his hand.

MARY

Well that makes up for everything!

Mary climbs into the backseat with Tessa. Eric and Amy take the middle seat. Kevin takes the passenger next to Donald. No one speaks. Eric eyes Tessa, unsure how to proceed.

DONALD

(meekly)

Two days until the Grand Canyon.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - MORNING

The minivan speeds by the entrance to Death Valley National Park. The terrain lives up to the park's name. Spires of black mountains loom. Heat emanates off the cracked desert.

Donald pulls into a scenic overlook and positions the car so an informative sign sits in front of Mary in the backseat.

After moments of idling, Donald turns around from the driver's seat and looks at Mary.

DONALD

You're not gonna read it?

MARY

No, I'm not gonna read it!

TESSA

Dad! What are you doing?

DONALD

Should I get out of the car so you can read it to everyone but me? Is that what you want?

When Mary doesn't respond, Donald exits the minivan and stomps around the car to read the sign. Mary reads the sign.

MARY

"Although the expansive lands before you appear barren, a variety of life teems within Death Valley..."

ERIC

Mom, none of us care what it says.

Donald dramatically stares into the distance and re-enters.

DONALD  
It's teeming with life out there.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NOON - TRAVELING

Everyone stares out the windows at the breathtaking deserts of Death Valley. Kevin reads National Park brochures.

KEVIN  
This Grand Canyon brochure specifically says not to hike from one Rim to the other Rim all in one day. Should that concern us?

DONALD  
No, they just have to write that in the brochure because there was a good lawyer involved at some point.

TESSA  
By 'good' lawyer, do you mean one who wins lots of cases in court, or one who doesn't cheat on his wife?

MARY  
Hey. Relax.

TESSA  
What? Why are you defending him?

MARY  
I'm not defending him. I'm defending the silence we had before right now. I'm defending my desire to stare at the desert's emptiness.

Silence spreads throughout the car. Donald's kept his eyes straight ahead on the road the whole time.

DONALD  
And Tessa, a good lawyer settles before a case even gets to court.

ERIC  
Dad! Shut up!

EXT. DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - NOON

A scenic overlook with another descriptive sign. Donald pulls over in front of the sign. He waits.

DONALD

Oh, right.

Donald exits the car and reads the sign. He scans the horizon with a hand shielding his eyes.

AMY

Is he gonna do this at every sign?

Mary nods and watches Donald with a satisfied grin.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - OVERLOOK - AFTERNOON

Donald parks in a small lot for a desert overlook. Dark mountaintops soar over the white expanses of desert. The sand appears to glow from the intense sun.

DONALD

Let's go check out the view from that cliff up there!

Eric and Tessa glance at one another and then back at Mary. Donald's smile deflates. He walks up to the overlook alone.

Eric, Tessa, and Kevin wander off in the other direction. Mary catches Amy before she follows them.

MARY

How's Eric doing?

AMY

Um, I don't think he's processed any of this yet.

MARY

Beyond this. Let me think about something other than *this*. How's he doing with losing his job?

AMY

It was a mess. Luckily he's in an industry where having a breakdown on your resumé might actually count as street cred.

MARY

Is he getting back to illustrating?

AMY

He wants to, but he's not submitting anything.

(MORE)

AMY (CONT'D)

He spends a lot of time researching rare diseases, convinced he's contracted them. It's like he's living a Choose Your Own Adventure book.

MARY

And disease is the adventure?

AMY

I think part of him believes it'll make him more sympathetic. Or marketable. Like people will be more interested in an illustrator with lupus.

Amy scans the family. Donald, Eric, Tessa, and Mary stand apart. Disjointed, like the horizon's spindly mountaintops.

MARY

He was always stuck on the idea that creativity relied on being tortured. I told him to look at our family. We have plenty of disasters for inspiration.

AMY

Well, maybe this trip will help.

Amy eyes Mary, unsure how she'll respond. As Amy is about to apologize, Mary reveals a thin smile.

MARY

Watch after him for me. You seem to be the only one he wants to spend time with anymore.

Mary's tone is equally sweet and threatening.

AMY

We've been meaning to visit more. It's just my job's really busy and-

MARY

I know. It's a busy job. I know all that it entails.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - OVERLOOK - AFTERNOON

Eric sits on a rock and traces his finger through the trail dust. He draws the landscape in the dirt as Tessa approaches.

TESSA  
Your next masterpiece?

ERIC  
Piece of something.

Eric sighs and rubs the dirt, erasing the drawing.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Tess, I don't know what I'm  
supposed to say to you right now.

TESSA  
That's fine. I don't know what I'd  
want to hear right now.

They sit side by side in the heat as they stare out together  
at the expansive desert and uncertain futures.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - OUTCROPPING - AFTERNOON

Alone on a rock outcropping, Donald looks over his shoulder  
at his family scattered around the overlook.

Donald tip-toes to the edge, eyeing the long drop. Gravel  
plummets off the rock as he inches closer to the edge. Donald  
looks down, sweating, swaying, as if he's considering a jump.

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL CAR - PARK ROAD - AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

Donald speeds along a road in Death Valley. Another of the  
informational signposts appears on the roadside up ahead.  
Donald streams past it. From the backseat Amy turns around  
and watches it disappear behind them.

AMY  
He missed one.

ERIC  
I guess he's in a rush to get to my  
Aunt's house. Can't imagine why.

EXT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - NEVADA - EVENING

The dirt-coated minivan parks in front of a terra cotta ranch  
house in the desert outside Las Vegas.

JUNE (55) is Mary's sister. She emerges from the front door with her husband, JERRY (60). June is tan with braided gray hair and a long dress. The look of a wealthy hippie.

They exit the minivan and Eric hugs June. Donald stands sheepishly by the car, as if he's waiting for judgment.

ERIC

Aunt June, this is Amy.

JUNE

She's beautiful! This is what lawyers look like now? My God! My lawyer looks like a foot.

June pulls Amy into a exuberant hug. Then she sees Kevin.

JUNE (CONT'D)

And is this the man who wants to marry my spectacular niece?

June sizes Kevin up, suddenly serious.

JUNE (CONT'D)

Are you unemployed?

KEVIN

No.

JUNE

You smoke drugs?

KEVIN

No.

JUNE

You ever vote Republican?

KEVIN

No.

JUNE

Great! That last one's the only answer that matters.

She gives Kevin and Tessa big hugs.

JUNE (CONT'D)

Now where is my much older sister?

Mary finally exits the minivan, smiling at June. They hug. June keeps her arm around Mary. They stride toward the house.

JUNE (CONT'D)

You look good. Adultery treats you well.

Mary smiles. June turns around to the others.

JUNE (CONT'D)

Come in, come in! Even you, Donald.

INT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - EVENING

The house is filled with typical ranch decor. Colorful paintings, native designs, cowboy regalia. June leads Mary upstairs. Mary clutches an overnight bag.

June opens a door to a spare bedroom. Mary fixates on the size of the single bed.

MARY

I suppose that's big enough.

JUNE

The kids can have the bedrooms downstairs. Where do you want me to put Don? Out in the barn?

Mary clutches her forehead.

MARY

No, he might actually enjoy that. Give him the couch by the kitchen.

JUNE

Jerry's up at dawn. It'll be noisy.

MARY

That's perfect.

They exchange smiles. June pulls her into a long hug.

JUNE

Now, how about the two of us go sit on the balcony. Wine?

MARY

There isn't a big enough glass.

INT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Donald, Eric, Amy, Tessa, Kevin, and Jerry are crowded around a circular dining table covered with plates of food and beer.

JERRY

Eric, how's work? Foxfield Forest  
is my grandson's favorite TV show!

Eric glances at Donald, considering continuing the lie.

ERIC

Actually Uncle Jerry, I was fired.

DONALD

What? From your job?

Donald looks dumbfounded. As if getting fired from a cannon  
would make more sense than his son not having a job.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me?

ERIC

I wonder where I got the idea to  
lie about something?

Eric stares at Donald. Their first moment of confrontation.

JERRY

Jeez, I'm sorry. What happened?

ERIC

I was the voice of Farley The Fox  
on social media...

JERRY

Yeah, yeah! The one with  
sunglasses, right? The cool one?

ERIC

Yes. I was the cool one.

Eric rolls his eyes and takes a long pull of his beer.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I posted 'fox facts' online about  
animals and forests for all the  
kids who watched the show. As we  
built up a big group of followers,  
our new sponsors wanted their  
brands incorporated more instead of  
actual facts. So I'd post statuses  
recommending shoes to little kids  
because their favorite fox wore  
them. Or an energy drink because a  
cartoon badger guzzled it.

AMY  
Which is totally perverted.

JERRY  
Even sounds illegal. Right, Don?

DONALD  
I don't practice cartoon law.

Eric leers at Donald. Jerry notices.

ERIC  
And after months of schilling crap to kids, and continually getting passed over for illustrator positions, I went a bit rogue.

TESSA  
He did the online version of going postal.

EXT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - BALCONY - DUSK

June and Mary sit on the balcony, admiring the dark desert. A bottle of wine and two full glasses sit on the table.

JUNE  
How are the kids dealing?

MARY  
They're walking on eggshells. Except Tessa. Whatever instinct I inherited from Mom to sweep things under the rug, it skipped a generation over her.

Mary stands up and leans against the balcony's railing.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Remember twenty years ago when everyone was getting divorced, like it was the trend? I imagined my response so often. Grow my hair out. Quit teaching. An apartment by the beach. But it was all supposed to be some alternate reality.

JUNE  
Were there signs? Aren't there supposed to be signs?

MARY

No... I don't know... I know when I had friends who were cheated on-

Mary sneaks a nervous glance at June that will be revisited.

MARY (CONT'D)

I wanted there to be signs. Signs my friends missed, so secretly I could look down on them, believing I was doing something better, being someone better, to prevent the signs from happening to me.

Mary paces the length of the balcony. Stars blanket the sky.

MARY (CONT'D)

But I'm the idiot. I'm an idiot for feeling surprised. Why would he have learned a lesson if there were no consequences the first time?

JUNE

What do you mean?

MARY

I caught him before. Cheating.

JUNE

What? When?

MARY

Right before his mom died. He was flying back and forth, spending all his time in the hospital. He was so stressed and alone.

JUNE

That's no excuse, Mary.

MARY

But it gave me some power back. Convincing myself that he was cheating because we weren't together enough, or having sex enough, it let me blame the circumstances. There was nothing wrong with me.

JUNE

You should've told me.

MARY

You and I weren't talking.

Mary looks away, referencing a dark period between them.

JUNE

I'm so sorry. Why didn't you do something back then?

MARY

The kids were in grade school. My allegiance was to them. I had a therapist suggest I try yoga. Yoga was brand new back then. It was supposed to do for our generation what Valium did for Mom.

JUNE

Yoga is like a thousand years old.

MARY

New to white people counts as new.

JUNE

Well, did it work?

MARY

It's fucking stretching. It did nothing.

June smirks and joins Mary at the balcony railing.

INT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

At the table with the others, Eric continues explaining why he was fired. Donald looks away, embarrassed by the story.

ERIC

So I posted some messages that I... shouldn't have.

JERRY

What did they say?

ERIC

They were idiotic. And they were quickly deleted.

TESSA

But I took screen shots!

On her phone Tessa opens pictures of the destructive rants Eric posted online. She reads some of the posts aloud.

TESSA (CONT'D)

"Fox Fax: Foxes eat Taterz Potato Chipz because they're omnivores. They'll eat anything. Trash. Flesh. Shit. A fox's endorsement is meaningless."

She scrolls to another.

TESSA (CONT'D)

"Fox Fax: In the UK, foxes were hunted to near extinction. What other species have humans hunted? Hint: Other humans count!"

JERRY

Why is 'facts' spelled like that? Didn't the kids think the fox was sending a fax?

AMY

No one on the internet knows what a fax is anymore.

ERIC

'F-a-x' is two characters shorter than 'Facts'. It lets you write more on Twitter. I actually got a raise for suggesting 'fax'.

TESSA

Oh, this one's my favorite, "Fox Fax: Foxes can't drink Blitz Energy drinks because they'll die. If you drink Blitz Energy drinks, you'll die. Everything dies."

JERRY

I guess you can't argue the facts of that one.

ERIC

I was feeling very manipulated at the time. Unfortunately I decided to express these feelings to a couple hundred thousand preteens.

Eric buries his face in his hands.

TESSA

Oh, don't worry. It's been six weeks. There's been a thousand dumber things done online since. It's forgotten.

Donald attempts to be consoling, but it's condescending.

DONALD

And that job wasn't really going anywhere, Eric.

ERIC

It was the highest rated kids show on TV. It wasn't something I was doing with buddies in the garage.

DONALD

I'm just saying that it's not too late for law school. Right, Amy?

Amy grabs her beer, eager to avoid eye contact.

ERIC

Stop telling me that!

Eric pushes away from the table.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Let me know when it's finally too late to go to law school. Then I'll know my future's officially ruined.

DONALD

I just want something for you that's stable.

JERRY

You know, I've actually heard that there are stable professions other than law. Hard to believe, huh?

Jerry scans the table, looking at Tessa and Kevin, who nod in agreement. He locks eyes with Amy.

AMY

Sorry. I'm an evil lawyer, too.

JERRY

You wear it a lot better.

EXT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - BALCONY - NIGHT

Mary and June stare out from the balcony.

MARY

I'm left with these swirling emotions.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

The familiar impulses of intimacy and this new flood of bitterness. Like today, I almost reminded him to put on sunscreen. But I caught myself, remembering everything. And I fumed the whole time we were in the desert. Imagining him with that woman, wishing he'd get burned.

JUNE

I want to remind you that when Jerry and I got together, he was already separated. Nothing happened when they were actually married.

MARY

I know that now. I'm sorry I didn't believe you back then.

JUNE

But as someone who's been considered the other woman, I can assure you there's suffering on all sides. There's so much guilt, even when there isn't cheating-

MARY

But I want more than guilt. He gets a new life? A new house? A new wife? I don't want to live this way, hoping for retribution through thousands of little sunburns.

JUNE

I know it seems impossible, but you'll move on.

MARY

Move on to what? Wife, mom, teacher. Everything that I've been for the last thirty years has vanished in a flash.

JUNE

You're allowed to start over, too.

MARY

I'm sixty years old for Christ's sake.

JUNE

So? There's never been an easier time for a sixty year old woman to meet someone.

(MORE)

JUNE (CONT'D)

Imagine Mom's options after Dad died. Hang around outside the Elk's Lodge? There's websites full of people eager to meet a woman like you.

MARY

And then what?

JUNE

You have fun. It works. It doesn't work. You have sex.

MARY

Sex? What's that?

JUNE

Oh, please. Every man in this damn desert would jump at the chance to be with you. You like your men toothless and gun-toting, right?

Mary smiles and stands up, yawning.

MARY

I'm flattered. And I'm exhausted.

June stands up with her and ushers Mary to bed.

INT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jerry, Tessa, Kevin, Eric, and Amy play poker. Donald sits at the table, scanning a stack of maps of the Grand Canyon.

JERRY

I want to come visit you guys in Hollywood? D'you know Beyoncé?

KEVIN

No, I think she lives in New York.

JERRY

So you know her a little bit, huh?

Everyone tosses their cards into the center of the table. Jerry deals out a new hand. He fans out his cards and groans.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Does Guy Fieri live in Hollywood? I wanna meet him.

TESSA

Why?

JERRY

I wanna punch him in the face.

KEVIN

You can definitely visit us in LA!

June enters the kitchen after taking Mary to bed. She puts a hand on Jerry's shoulder. He smiles from the familiar touch.

JUNE

How are we doing down here?

JERRY

They won't introduce me to Beyoncé!

JUNE

Come on. These guys are driving off to the Grand Canyon in the morning.

JERRY

Right. Tomorrow is the "big hike"?

DONALD

Driving there tomorrow to start at dawn the next day. We need the whole day. It's twenty two miles.

JERRY

All in one day? Did y'all lose a bet or something?

KEVIN

We've been training. It's gonna be amazing!

JERRY

You know they've got donkeys you could ride down into the Grand Canyon. And they don't even make the donkeys do it in one day.

DONALD

It's something we've been looking forward to for fifteen years. It'll be a special experience.

JERRY

Special doesn't mean good. When I passed a kidney stone last year, that was a special experience.

JUNE

Come on. Bed! Everyone!

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eric and Amy lie next to each other in bed. They are kissing. Eric reaches under her shirt, but Amy pushes his hand away.

AMY

Your dad!

ERIC

I don't get to have sex because my dad did?

AMY

He'll hear us!

Eric concedes and mashes his pillow.

ERIC

Your parents split up when you were in high school, right?

AMY

Yeah, everyone's did.

ERIC

I assumed the window for divorce had elapsed for my parents. No matter what happened, they'd just stick it out.

AMY

Welcome back to high school.

ERIC

Feels a lot like it. My parents are divorcing, family road trips, no job, and apparently I have no chance of getting laid.

Amy curls up against him and falls asleep. Eric stares up.

INT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jerry's in a robe, putting away last night's dishes. Donald enters the kitchen, dressed, shaved, and ready to go.

JERRY

Coffee?

Donald pours himself a cup. Everyone else is still asleep.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Sorry if I was undermining you last night in front of the kids.

DONALD

No, I'm sorry. Been a tough trip.

JERRY

Some advice?

DONALD

Sure.

JERRY

You're gonna have every opportunity in the world to cut and run. But you're not done being Dad. How you respond to all this is a big test.

Donald nods and stares into his coffee.

JERRY (CONT'D)

My kids suffered way too much when my first wife and I split. Don't miss out on them, just because it's easier.

INT. RENTAL CAR - JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Donald loads up the back of the car, Eric and Amy are seated in the back row. Donald talks to them through the open door.

DONALD

Is your résumé up to date?

ERIC

It's fine.

DONALD

Maybe Amy could talk to some folks? Bring you on as a paralegal? That'd be a good start to having you follow in my footsteps.

ERIC

That's not such an admirable thing right now, Dad.

Donald looks destroyed from the comment. He stumbles back and slams the tailgate.

AMY

He's right, you know. Not about the paralegal thing. But finding a steady job wouldn't be terrible.

ERIC

I just need some time to work through a creativity block.

AMY

That's fine. But I don't want to feel guilty spending the money I'm earning while you're... drawing.

Her comment stings Eric.

ERIC

I'll check job postings right now.

Eric searches "RATTLESNAKE VENOM SYMPTOMS" on his phone.

EXT. JERRY AND JUNE'S RANCH HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Mary stands with June. The others are all in the car.

JUNE

Wish you could've stayed longer.

MARY

Me too. We'll come back soon.

Mary catches the 'we'.

MARY (CONT'D)

Or, I'll come back soon? I don't know how this is gonna work.

JUNE

I'll come to you. I love you.

MARY

Love you too. Thank you.

Mary gets in the car, and they back out of the driveway.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DESERT HIGHWAY - MORNING

The minivan speeds along toward the Grand Canyon. They swoop by Las Vegas and enter into Arizona. The stress of the trip and the anxiety before the long hike has made everyone quiet.

The car hits a bump in the highway. A faint buzzing noise starts. Kevin is the first to notice.

KEVIN  
What's that noise?

The others keep staring out the windows. But the noise grows.

AMY  
Yeah. I hear it, too.

They all freeze, listening for the sound. Once they've all heard it, they rifle through their luggage and seats searching for the source. The noise grows louder. They fling clothes and hiking boots across the van.

TESSA  
Where is that coming from?

Kevin pulls the vibrating electric toothbrush from a bag.

KEVIN  
I got it!

MARY  
Who charged the battery?

DONALD  
I did. I plugged it in before I gave it to you.

MARY  
Well, how thoughtful!

The toothbrush continues to buzz in Kevin's hand as Mary and Donald scowl at each other.

KEVIN  
Should I turn it off?

ALL  
Yes!!!

Kevin turns it off, but now the tension is audible.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Donald parks near the rim of the Grand Canyon and hurries ahead. Eric taps at his phone, when he suddenly looks up.

ERIC  
Shit. Our Family Plan is over.

AMY

Um, what family are you planning?

Amy nervously eyes him. The word 'family' gets her on edge. But Eric points to his phone.

ERIC

Our Family Plan. I'll have to get my own phone plan now.

Amy looks relieved.

KEVIN

You're still on your parents' phone plan? Aren't you, like, thirty?

ERIC

Don't say my age like it's a such an adjective. We're together on a Family Plan because it makes it cheaper for everyone individually.

AMY

Except for your parents, who pay the entire bill.

ERIC

And they're not going to anymore!

A confused scowl spreads across Eric's face.

AMY

Come on, cranky. Let's see how grand this canyon really is.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - AFTERNOON

The Grand Canyon unfurls before them. The massive Canyon is overwhelmingly beautiful and expansive. Copper walls, glistening blue river, and pockets of lush forest. But the opposite rim looks unreachable.

ERIC

Was it always this big?

DONALD

Isn't it amazing!

Donald takes an exaggerated, appreciative deep breath.

DONALD (CONT'D)

That's millions of years of geology  
presented simultaneously for us.  
Can you see anyone hiking?

Donald scurries to a different vantage. The others wander off, leaving Eric and Mary staring across the Canyon.

MARY

And tomorrow night Amy and I will  
be standing right over there to  
meet you guys. What kind of beer  
should we have waiting?

ERIC

Just have lots of it.

Eric's fixates on the opposite rim of the canyon.

ERIC (CONT'D)

It's weird having time laid out  
this way. Like we could drop a  
bridge and walk straight to  
tomorrow.

MARY

It doesn't always feel like that?

ERIC

Not like crossing a bridge. Way  
less certain.

MARY

Are you OK?

ERIC

I've been in LA for eight years. I  
worked so hard to get to where I  
was, which wasn't even that close  
to being an illustrator, and I  
totally blew it. No matter how hard  
I work, I can't get to my goals.

MARY

That's our fault. All that 'Believe  
and Achieve' crap we were supposed  
to preach to your generation, as if  
the only things that matter are  
wanting something and hard work.

Mary rolls her eyes, reciting the mantras.

MARY (CONT'D)

'Hard work' opened every door.  
'Hard work' made anything possible.

ERIC

I still believe anything's possible, it's just that the older I get, the easier it gets to envision myself ending up with an *anything* that I never wanted.

Mary's saddened to hear her son so despondent.

ERIC (CONT'D)

How will I ever catch up to where you and Dad were at my age? Your careers, your house, your marriage?

MARY

We didn't always have that house. Those jobs. We tried to hide our struggles from you kids, but now I worry that made you think that we never struggled. Did you know that the first place we had in DC, we had to share a shower with the neighbors? This was when your father was interviewing with firms.

Mary picks her head off Eric's shoulder. An epiphany.

MARY (CONT'D)

I suppose I'll have to stop thinking of him that way.

ERIC

Mom, he'll still be our father.

MARY

I mean stop thinking of my life only in terms of how it matches up with his.

They swap unsure looks as the Canyon plummets before them.

INT. GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

The group enters a small grocery store to get supplies for the hike in the morning. Donald and Eric split off.

DONALD

We need water, protein bars, trail mix, and... jackpot!

A shelf of Five Hour Energy drinks. Donald examines two flavors as if he's comparing expensive bottles of wine.

DONALD (CONT'D)

You ever tried this stuff?

ERIC

Yeah, Dad. I went to college.

DONALD

I'm getting some for all of us. It works wonders! I might even drink a whole bottle tomorrow.

ERIC

You're a maniac.

INT. GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

Amy and Tessa stroll down a different aisle. Amy's pensive, taking measured steps down the center of the aisle.

TESSA

I'm gonna feel great planning a wedding now. Dragging Mom to shop for a dress with all she's going through. Rubbing our happiness in.

AMY

Does it make you question things?

TESSA

Question what things?

AMY

Like, what did you think when Kevin proposed? Did you worry at all about the things you'd never do by yourself again?

TESSA

Not really. I'm excited for what we can do together.

AMY

But isn't there an independent part of you that you're suppressing- with good intentions- but isn't it still disloyal to yourself?

TESSA

Is there something wrong between you and Eric?

AMY

No. We're good. Living together is going good. We're developing a good routine.

The rote repetition of 'good' alarms Tessa.

TESSA

You've been together almost two years. You love him, right?

AMY

Yeah, we say 'I love you'. But how do you know for sure that you found someone you love, or if you've just found someone who loves the same Thai restaurants and HBO shows?

TESSA

You're joking, right?

AMY

(stammering)

Yeah! I mean, with your parents and everything that's going on-

Donald and Eric pop into sight at the end of the aisle. Donald lifts a single Five Hour Energy.

DONALD

Tessa! I got you 'Very Berry'. You'll love it.

TESSA

Thanks...

DONALD

Come on! We gotta check into the hotel.

Amy hurries ahead of Tessa to stand by Eric.

INT. LODGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A nice dining room in an old lodge. Animal heads and stately paintings on the walls. The group's finished dinner, and Donald unfolds a trail map on the table.

DONALD

We need to be awake by 4:30 so your mom can drop us off at the trailhead at 5:30. She'll drive around the Canyon with Amy-

MARY

After going back to sleep...

DONALD

We follow this trail. By noon we'll have made it to Phantom Ranch, which is roughly the halfway point.

ERIC

The halfway point is called Phantom Ranch? Was the name You're Never Gonna Make It Ranch already taken?

Donald ignores him.

DONALD

After lunch, we follow this trail all the way to meet Amy and your Mom tomorrow around seven o'clock. Twenty two miles, and nine thousand feet in elevation change. Aren't you guys excited!

Everyone but Donald nervously eyes one another.

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Eric and Amy are in bed together in their dark hotel room. Eric waves his phone around, searching for a signal.

AMY

Do you think your parents still have sex?

ERIC

Obviously.

He looks up from his phone after a beat.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Oh, you mean with each other?- I don't want to think about it.

AMY

But if the whole issue is that your dad had sex with another woman. But your parents weren't having sex to begin with, does it lessen the severity of what he did?

ERIC

Don't turn my parents into a logic game. It's simple. He cheated.

AMY

But if they're weren't married, they could still be your parents together. Sorry, I'm just trying to observe it from every perspective.

ERIC

You're not researching a case. Stop preventing me from being angry.

AMY

Well it seems like you're not angry because your dad cheated or because your mom's hurt, but only because you have to deal with them.

ERIC

What do you mean?

AMY

You always dodge their phone calls. You hate it when they bother you!

ERIC

You don't know what I'm going through.

AMY

I know exactly what you're going through! Everyone knows. How you've managed to live this long in your bubble, that I don't know. But this is what happens to relationships.

ERIC

Don't be so jaded.

AMY

I'm not. I'm realistic.

Amy turns away from him in bed. She quickly spins back.

AMY (CONT'D)

Oh and just FYI, you don't order the second item on a restaurant menu because it's always chicken. You order the second item because it's always the second cheapest.

ERIC

That's not true.

AMY

It is! Unless your parents or my firm is paying the bill.

ERIC

I need to get to sleep.

Eric rolls over, facing away from her. Eventually his phone screen glows. He shakes it, groaning.

AMY

It doesn't work, remember?

Eric flips and twists all night. The glowing time on the bedside table's clock jumps forward as he can't sleep.

INT. ERIC AND AMY'S HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

At exactly 4:30 AM, the hotel phone rings.

DONALD

Morning, morning!

Eric moans incoherently into the phone and hangs up

There's loud knocking at the door. Eric staggers out of bed in a T-shirt and boxer shorts, and peeks out the door.

Donald's in the hallway resembling a mannequin for an outdoor clothing company. He wears a vest, hiking boots, shorts, high socks, and a floppy hat. More khaki than a Mormon's closet.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Leaving in five minutes!

ERIC

(yawning)

Yeah, yeah. Hiking. Yay.

EXT. GRAND CANYON NORTH RIM - TRAILHEAD - MORNING

The sun creeps up as Mary parks at the trailhead for the Rim to Rim hike. The North Rim is high in elevation, and pockets of snow accumulated from an overnight storm. They see their breath as they stretch by the minivan.

Kevin points out another sign that specifically warns not to attempt the hike in one day.

KEVIN

Still not concerned by this, huh?

DONALD

You can't chicken out now! That sign is only to deter people with heart conditions or the elderly.

Tessa, Eric, and Kevin eye him suspiciously.

DONALD (CONT'D)

I'm not elderly. Let's go!

Mary watches them stride down the trail in a tight pack.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - MORNING

The marathon begins! Twenty-two grueling miles of twists, boulders, switchbacks, and inclines stretch out before them.

The trail rapidly slopes down the wooded North Rim of the Canyon. The hikers nervously eye the large trees and dewy ground, stepping tenderly, as if they're afraid to wake a sleeping giant.

Donald's exuberance keeps them at a steady pace. Theirs are the first footprints on the trail that morning. With every step, there's the labored crunch of the ground breaking beneath their weight.

The trail twists into the sunlight and unveils the first vista of the entire Canyon from within. Rock walls tower above them, appearing to curl and enclose the hikers.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - MORNING

Donald and Kevin trod ahead, poking their walking sticks into the rocky ground for stability. Tessa opens her backpack and pulls out a collapsible walking stick. She assembles it and strides ahead. Eric tries to keep up.

They stop for water, leaning against the shady side of a boulder. Everyone breathes heavy and switches out of their long sleeve shirts. Eric's cheeks are red. He scrapes sweat from his face with grubby fingers.

ERIC

So was there ever a thought to say, "Hey Eric, we're all getting walking sticks for the hike, maybe you should too?"

KEVIN

Yeah, but then we all decided to collude against you.

Once they've caught their breath, they repack their bags and limber up to continue the hike. Eric stays seated.

TESSA

Hey Eric, we're all gonna keep hiking, maybe you should too!

Kevin snaps a low-hanging limb off a nearby evergreen.

KEVIN

Here you go.

The "walking stick" is crooked and thin. When Eric stands up, it barely comes up to his hip. Despite the tiny size, Eric uses the stick as they scramble over the rocky path.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - MORNING

The trail grows rockier with occasional stretches where they must tip-toe along the edge of a sharp drop-off. A fall would be disastrous.

Donald leads the group. Kevin and Tessa stride side by side. Eric lags in the back, poking along with his impromptu walking stick. He's beginning to struggle.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - LATE MORNING

The Canyon walls dwarf the hikers. Their faces reflect the miles they've already trekked. Pale and ragged, the group wobbles forward like penguins.

Unaffectedly chipper, Kevin uses his walking stick to point out rock formations and sights on the Canyon walls.

KEVIN

Look over there! See all the layers? How they've slid against each other and tumbled down?

ERIC

There's a lot of fucking rocks. We get it.

KEVIN

You know, maybe if you'd trained a little more, you'd be able to enjoy the hike more.

ERIC

I'm not trying to enjoy the hike. I'm trying to finish it.

INT. RENTAL CAR - PARK HIGHWAY - MORNING - TRAVELING

Mary drives the minivan as she and Amy make the long route around the Canyon to meet the hikers in the evening. Amy sips coffee and asks questions to sidestep the awkwardness.

AMY

Not a hiker?

MARY

I'd rather enjoy nature with air conditioning and a book in my lap than go stomping through it.

AMY

But Eric said all of your vacations were trips like this one. Parks and hiking and everything outdoors.

MARY

Right. Donald and the kids love it. It's good exercise without being too competitive.

AMY

Wasn't it annoying always waiting on them out there on their hikes?

MARY

I used to join them. But I worried I was holding them up. So I let them do their own thing.

AMY

How do you make it even?

Mary looks away from the road at Amy.

MARY

Part of parenting... marriage... is figuring out how to appreciate the things you don't enjoy, when it helps the family. Getting even isn't the best way to look at it.

AMY

So are you supposed to capitulate? Give up everything you want?

MARY

No, there's a line. But maybe I'm not the best authority on that subject right now.

Amy tenses up. She's been trying to avoid the family issues.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - MORNING

In the back of the group, Eric sweats and squints up ahead at the others. As he steps over a log on the path, he braces himself with the thin stick Kevin handed him earlier.

The stick snaps, and Eric tumbles to the ground. The others hear the commotion and head back to him.

TESSA

Are you all right?

Eric breathes heavy and fusses with the dirt in his hair. He labors to his feet with Kevin's help.

ERIC

I'm fine.

DONALD

Well let's go then. Pick up the pace. You're lagging behind!

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - MORNING

The trail narrows as the Canyon walls loom above them. They follow along a creek that will grow and eventually merge with the Colorado River at the hike's midway point. During a rest near the creek, Eric collapses against a boulder, panting and wincing.

Kevin happily sweats and exudes confidence about the rest of the hike. He smiles at Tessa.

KEVIN

You know, these packs aren't much more weight than you'd put on in a pregnancy.

In no mood to do anything but guzzle water and rest, Tessa stares daggers at him.

TESSA

Exactly how much weight do you envision me gaining for a baby?

Kevin looks back at her with a dumb, blank stare.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Which parts of my body will gain the most weight? Show me.

KEVIN

I feel like maybe this is one of those questions that I'm not actually supposed to answer.

TESSA

It's amazing how brilliant you've suddenly become.

Donald swigs water and ogles the Canyon walls.

DONALD

Isn't this place magnificent?

The others give him meager nods. Donald turns to Eric.

DONALD (CONT'D)

All this beautiful scenery, and you can't figure out what to draw?

Eric shakes his head, too tired to protest.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Just take a look around. You've probably never been to a place where fewer people have stood.

Their faces are flushed and sweaty. It's silent except for the trickle of the creek and their heavy breathing.

DONALD (CONT'D)

You can't get to this point without going through everything we've been through.

ERIC

Everything?

Eric stares at his dad. Donald ignores the comment and straps on his back pack.

Eric's the last to leave. He hoists on his pack, winces from the weight, and waddles off.

EXT. PHANTOM RANCH CAMPGROUND - NOON

Donald, Tessa, and Kevin reach the wooded Phantom Ranch campground. A series of small cabins and a large central lodge, the campground is the first sign of other people in hours. Campers, rafters, and a few other hikers attempting the Rim to Rim hike. The other hikers are all in their early twenties and seem far less weary.

Donald passes a team of penned up donkeys that are eating and resting from their walk down the Canyon. The riders sit and laugh at a large table.

DONALD

Grab a table in the shade. I'll get the lunches we ordered.

Tessa and Kevin drop their packs on an old picnic table underneath a crooked pine tree. Wide grins grow on their faces as they sit on the benches, relishing the feeling of resting their legs.

Donald emerges from the lodge with four plastic bags. The 'lunches' are a collection of granola bars, beef jerky, and other dry snacks. They savor the food like it's five star cuisine.

Eric staggers into the campground, and collapses on their picnic table.

KEVIN

Isn't this place great?

Eric groans and lies flat on the bench. Tessa places the lunch on Eric's heaving stomach.

EXT. NAVAJO BRIDGE - RIVER OVERLOOK - NOON

About halfway through the drive around the Grand Canyon, Mary pulls over in front of a historic bridge that spans the Colorado River, which the hikers are about to cross on foot many miles downstream.

Red, craggy mesas line the horizon. Mary and Amy exit the minivan and stroll to the middle of the Navajo Bridge, an intricate steel pedestrian bridge with beautiful panoramas of the river and the Canyon.

AMY

What are you gonna do after the trip?

MARY

Is there a way to sleep and drink wine at the same time?

Mary smiles as they pivot to the bridge's other side. They lean over the railing and stare down at the rushing water.

MARY (CONT'D)

I might spend some time away from home. At the coast.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

That's what I've been telling myself over the last couple days. Having faith in *time*. Convincing myself that time holds every cure.

AMY

Are there things you've wanted to do? Now that you have the time?

MARY

I'm not sure what my options are anymore. That's how quickly time becomes your enemy.

Mary gazes out intently, watching the river flood forward, curving and cutting through the Canyon walls before them.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm glad you were here for Eric and Tessa. I know they've really appreciated having you around the last few days.

Amy looks back at her, surprised.

AMY

Honestly I kind of felt like I was encroaching on your family.

MARY

Nonsense. All those years with Tessa and now with Eric? You're a part of this family.

AMY

Really?

MARY

Family's the traditions, the jokes, the fights. You're certainly a part of all that. Family is fluid.

AMY

In my experience, family is the most rigid thing that there is.

Amy bites her nails.

AMY (CONT'D)

When you got married, did you think you and Donald would always be together.

MARY

I thought so. I knew my parents didn't really love each other, they were just married. So I thought moving away with Donald, moving away for love, was the best form of rebellion I could imagine. But once we got married and settled down, I feared I wasn't really in love either. Or worse, that I was in love and that's all it is. Tedious, repetitive, a nonstop negotiation. Making that transition is tough.

Mary leans back from the railing. She stretches her arms and turns to walk back to the car.

MARY (CONT'D)

Ready to get back on the road?

Amy lingers in the center of the bridge. She seems uncertain about where things are headed in her life, split between the two banks of the river.

Eventually Amy turns and joins Mary on the slow walk back to the minivan. When they reach the car, she looks across the hood to Mary. A breeze rustles Amy's hair out of place.

AMY

Before you found out. About the cheating. Were you and Donald in love, or were you just married?

MARY

We were... together.

Amy accepts the answer for a moment before pressing further.

AMY

And isn't that the best case scenario? Together because of inertia?

MARY

That's very cynical.

AMY

I know. Sorry.

Amy cracks open the passenger door.

AMY (CONT'D)

But is it wrong?

Mary looks across the hood of the car, unwilling to answer.

EXT. PHANTOM RANCH CAMPGROUND - LATER

Kevin sits on a bench at the campground at the bottom of the Canyon, happily chomping through his lunch. He looks refreshed and ready to continue the hike.

ERIC (O.S.)

Hiking is just soooo easy for you.

Eric sounds like a drunk ranting. Kevin keeps a happy gaze.

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

You can do this all day, stepping along, no sweat.

Kevin crunches into an apple.

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

Nothing to say, huh? Yeah, just keep chewing you smug bastard-

TESSA (O.S.)

Are you OK?

Eric's stirred from the rant. He wasn't confronting Kevin. He's face to face with one of the donkeys grazing in the pen.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Come rest out of the sun.

Tessa leads Eric back to the bench. He looks dazed. Tessa hands him a bottle of water and Eric takes a long drink, pouring some on his head to cool down.

DONALD

Mileage-wise we're more than halfway. But now we've got the sun bearing down on us, and about five thousand feet to climb. The final leg of the hike is lots of switchbacks.

KEVIN

What's the name for a group of switchbacks?

Donald's happy to return to the game they'd played earlier in the trip, revisiting a time before the affair was public and he was the bad guy.

DONALD  
A swath! A Swath of Switchbacks.

Donald throws his pack over his shoulder and chugs an entire bottle of 5 Hour Energy, smacking his lips and wiping them clean with his forearm.

DONALD (CONT'D)  
Let's get going! Now the hike gets tough!

He pokes Eric with his walking stick. Eric flinches and glares at his dad with a shriveled face.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

They cross the Colorado River on a large metal footbridge. The South side of the Canyon is subject to direct sunlight. The trail carves into the arid, Mars-like Canyon walls.

Their pace slows, and their breaks are more frequent as they wind their way around the bank of the river and up the trail.

The rock walls have the color, heat, and precariousness of rusted-out steel.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Tessa waits for Eric at a bend in the trail. As they rest, Eric pulls out his phone from his backpack. No service.

TESSA  
How are ya doing?

Eric points to his sweaty, flushed cheeks as his answer.

TESSA (CONT'D)  
OK. How are you and Amy doing?

ERIC  
Good.

Tessa treads through the conversation lightly.

TESSA  
Do you guys talk about the future?

ERIC  
I want her to be my future. But she's convinced marriage dooms a relationship. So it's tough.

TESSA

And I'm sure Mom and Dad's current situation doesn't help.

Walking and talking, they get out of breath quickly. The climb is becoming extremely difficult. The sun scorches down.

TESSA (CONT'D)

But have you considered that maybe she's resistant for other reasons?

ERIC

What do you mean?

They reach Kevin. He puts an arm around Tessa, inviting her to lean against him for a rest.

TESSA

Just be sure that relationships are the problem. Not *your* relationship.

The exhaustion, and the looming miles, make the hikers testy.

ERIC

Don't act like you know Amy better than I do.

TESSA

I didn't say better. But, yes, I have known her *longer*. And she and I have conversations that maybe she wouldn't have with you. Getting everyone on the same page is always good. Kevin and I had a similar conversation before he proposed. Right, Kevin?

She flicks her gaze at Kevin. He recognizes the look.

KEVIN

Yeah. Totally.

ERIC

So now that you're engaged, you're some relationship master?

TESSA

No, I'm actually looking out for you. I'm sorry for helping.

They glare at each other aggressively. Exhausted from the hike, their emotions are raw, and battling for Amy's attention is a familiarly tense issue between them.

KEVIN

Whoa, check out that rock!

Kevin points his walking stick across the Canyon at a lone boulder balancing on another. Eric knocks the stick down with his hand and pushes them ahead of him.

INT. RENTAL CAR - PARK HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON - TRAVELING

Mary's eyes flick from the rearview mirror to Amy.

MARY

I hope you don't think that what Donald and I are going through, whatever your parents may have gone through, it's no indication of what will happen to you and Eric or to Tessa and Kevin.

AMY

But isn't it? Where are the examples to the contrary?

MARY

They are out there. For sure.

AMY

Maybe things were different when you were growing up. But nowadays if you get married without expecting to get divorced, you're a fool. And if you get married expecting to get divorced, you're even more of a fool.

MARY

As you get older, you'll be less concerned with being foolish.

AMY

Why?

MARY

Because it's an inevitability.

Mary loosens her grip on the steering wheel.

MARY (CONT'D)

That's a shitty answer. I'm sorry.

AMY

You don't have to be 'Mom' around me, you know.

MARY

It's comforting for me right now.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Donald, Tessa, and Kevin rest under the rare shade of a rock jutting out from the Canyon wall. They've caught their breath and are packing up as Eric approaches.

Eric unloads his gear with a groan and wipes his face with his shirt. The smeared sweat and red trail dust make him appear bloody.

Kevin and Tessa walk ahead, still tense from her earlier argument with Eric about Amy. Donald hangs back and stares out at the striking dynamics of the Canyon.

DONALD

Isn't this spectacular? Looks like we hiked to another planet!

ERIC

Aren't you enjoying this too much?

DONALD

I fucked up, son. Doesn't mean I can't enjoy anything ever again.

ERIC

But tone it down. Show some remorse.

Donald stretches his arms across the panoramic landscape around them.

DONALD

Do you see your mother around here? I see a river so strong it dug down through miles of rock. Walls that appear too high to climb. A day that started with snow and is now nearing one hundred degrees. I'm appreciating this place's *singularity*.

ERIC

But you didn't just fuck over Mom. It's all of us. The whole family.

DONALD

You act like I'm the only one pulling this family apart.

(MORE)

DONALD (CONT'D)

You and your sister move across the country. On your annual visit home, you spend all your time getting drunk with your high school buddies. You don't even call unless you need money. Is that what you're worried about? Now that I'm your sole source of income? I'll still send the damn checks.

Eric sneers at his dad.

ERIC

I'm not worried about money. I'm worried about Mom. I'm about what this means for me if you're supposed to be my role model?

DONALD

Role model? You're thirty! You know what my dad was doing for me when I was thirty? He was dead! I had a wife, a kid, and a job. And I didn't have a dad to fall back on.

ERIC

Is that your excuse? You thought you'd be dead? That entitles you to fuck around?

DONALD

No, there's no excuse. Look, I'm sorry things happened the way they did. When they did. Impacting all this...

Donald opens his arms to present the Canyon's size as his apology. His eye contact is intense, and Eric seems to reluctantly accept the apology. Donald moves closer.

Donald looks up at Tessa and Kevin, who stand together on a higher bend in the trail.

DONALD (CONT'D)

I can only imagine how much money your sister is gonna squeeze out of me for her wedding now, huh?

Donald smirks at Eric. But it's too soon for a joke. Eric looks away and hikes a few steps ahead.

ERIC

Enjoy this place's 'singularity' as long as you like, but when we finish this hike and meet up with Mom and Amy, don't have that fucking smile on your face.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - AFTERNOON

During another rest on the hike, Donald, Tessa, and Kevin all gulp water. Donald sweats heavily and looks red in the face. Kevin and Tessa stand up. It's the first time that Donald isn't eagerly ushering them back onto the trail.

KEVIN

Ready to move on?

Donald wipes his brow and enthusiastically swigs more water.

DONALD

Yep, yep. Let's go!

They march forward. But Donald's pace has slowed.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - AFTERNOON

From a wide vista of the interior of the Canyon, the sound of rapid, out-of-control breathing. It grows louder and louder, finally its source turns out to be Eric.

Staggering along by himself, Eric suffers from the worst the Canyon has to offer. The sun bears down on him. There's no shade. The temperature nears one hundred degrees.

He enters the portion of the hike that is all switchbacks. Like ceaseless staircases, the trail zigs and zags back and forth with no end in sight.

ERIC

A Swath of Switchbacks?

Eric reaches the bend of another switchback. He stares up. There's no progress.

ERIC (CONT'D)

A Shit-load of Switchbacks.

White sweat-stains are caked all over his face. He treks forward. The Canyon walls appear to grow around him.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Shit-load of Shitbacks.

He reaches the bend in a another switchback. The more ground he covers, the more the Canyon reveals how much distance remains.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Shit-shit of Shit-backs.

Eric's exhausted. With every step, his brain functioning seems to be leaking out with the sweat streaming down his brow.

He wheezes and winces, finally reaching what he thinks is the end of the section of switchbacks. As he continues down a flat stretch of trail, the trail suddenly bends into another endless regression of switchbacks.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Shit...

INT. HOTEL - GRAND CANYON - AFTERNOON

Mary and Amy walk into a hotel at the South Rim of the Canyon to check into their rooms. They walk side by side but do not exchange any words.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Drenched in sweat, Eric reaches a switchback where Donald, Tessa, and Kevin rest. They all look ragged and drained.

DONALD  
If the slow-poke caught up, it must  
be time to move on!

Donald and Kevin labor through strapping on their gear and hit the trail. Tessa waits behind.

TESSA  
Want me to rest with you?

ERIC  
(panting)  
No! I don't need a rest.

Annoyed with Tessa by their earlier conversation about Amy, and frustrated with his dad's relentless pressure, Eric forces his throbbing knees to push ahead.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - SWITCHBACK TRAIL - LATER

Eager to close the gap between him and the others, Eric fixates on his dad's footprints in the path as he marches forward. Eric lengthens his strides to land his feet in his dad's footprints. He makes sure to muck up his dad's tracks, replacing them with his own.

Eric nears Donald. Donald notices Eric catching up and accelerates his own strides to stay ahead. A chase develops.

An escalating rhythm of their pained grunting, deep exhales, and boots thumping on the trail. Grunts, exhales, thumps. Grunts, exhales, thumps. Grunts, exhales, thumps until:

Donald turns a corner and slips over the edge of the trail!

He slides down over the rocky embankment to the path below. His leg strikes a rock and awkwardly buckles.

TESSA

Dad!

Kevin and Tessa drop their packs and run down to check on Donald. Eric remains still as they run by him.

Donald reaches for his ankle. Covered in trail dust, it's tough for the other to determine the severity of the injury, but the ankle appears swollen and red.

KEVIN

Are you OK? What hurts?

DONALD

My ankle!

KEVIN

Let me take a look at it.

Donald swats away Kevin's hand.

DONALD

I'm fine. Only buckled a little.  
Get me up.

Kevin hoists Donald to his feet. Donald howls as he first puts weight on his ankle. Donald gingerly takes a couple of steps, trying to muffle his groans and winces.

Eric stands above, watching them tend to Donald.

ERIC

Are you OK?

DONALD

I'm fine! Worry about yourself.  
You've been lagging behind all day.

Frustrated by Donald's constant nagging, Eric turns and walks ahead.

TESSA

Dad, you sure you're all right?

DONALD

Yes, damnit. Let's go! The sun's  
about to set. We're behind  
schedule.

Tessa and Kevin watch as Donald hobbles forward. They give each other concerned looks and stagger ahead.

Eric disappears up the trail ahead of them.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - LATE AFTERNOON

Eric rests by himself, out of breath and sweating profusely. When he sees Tessa approaching up the trail, Eric gathers his gear and flings on his backpack.

The clouds have an orange glow from the lowering sun.

TESSA

Wait a second! I'm worried about  
Dad. I think he's really hurt.

ERIC

He looked fine to me.

TESSA

How do you know?

ERIC

I spend all day reading about  
injuries and illnesses.

TESSA

This isn't a disease you think you  
caught from sitting on a public  
toilet. It's bad. I think his ankle  
is broken.

Donald staggers up a bend in the trail. He's pale and hobbling, dragging the hurt ankle. Donald leans against Kevin, wiping sweat from his face. His voice is raspy and shrill as he growls from a distance.

DONALD

Let's go!

Tessa pulls Eric aside.

TESSA

He needs us.

ERIC

He'll be fine.

TESSA

No one is angrier at Dad than I am,  
but now isn't the time for karma.  
We're not gonna get out of here  
unless you help. Kevin and I can't  
carry him the whole way up.

Eric turns away and heads up the trail without answering.

TESSA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if I put doubt in your  
head about Amy.

ERIC

There's no doubt about Amy!

Eric marches ahead, creating much desired separation.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - SWITCHBACK TRAIL - AFTERNOON

The trail's switchbacks are insatiable. Eric's knees weaken.  
He slants forward, staggering with no rhythm, no momentum,  
against the steep path.

Eric pushes on without resting, constantly checking over his  
shoulder to ensure he's ahead of the others.

He finally gets a glimpse of structures on the South Rim for  
the first time. The Rim is only a couple of miles up the  
trail, but it's nearly sunset.

INT. SOUTH RIM HOTEL - HALLWAY - EVENING

Mary knocks on the door for Amy and Eric's hotel room. Amy  
slowly pulls the door open.

MARY

Ready to head over and meet the  
others at the Rim?

AMY

I don't feel so good. I think I  
might stay here.

Mary looks askew at her.

MARY

If something I said today-

AMY

Look, Mary, I just don't feel good.

Amy shuts the door. Mary slinks down the hallway, stung by  
the cold encounter.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - SWITCHBACKS - EVENING

Eric rests at the same spot. The sun is rapidly setting.  
Whether it's exhaustion or the daunting couple of remaining  
miles, something keeps Eric at that spot.

From his vantage point, he checks and re-checks the  
switchbacks for activity. Nothing. The South Rim is  
tantalizingly close. He's about to trek up the next  
switchback when...

Eric turns around and ventures back down the trail in search  
of the others.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - EVENING

Mary strolls alone through South Rim parking lot. She finds a  
bench near the trailhead. The overlook areas are packed with  
photographers mounting cameras on large tripods.

Mary watches groups of people walk down and out of the Canyon  
Rim. They are not Rim to Rim hikers, just tourists on short  
walks. Mary stares down at the people on the trail, expecting  
to see Donald, Tessa, Eric, and Kevin emerge from the crowd  
at any moment.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - SWITCHBACK TRAIL - EVENING

Eric hurries back down the trail, racing the setting sun.  
Eric retraces his labored steps. His knees and back throb,  
but he moves quickly down.

The sun sinks deeper into the horizon.

He finally sees the others collapsed, desperate for a rest, on a group of rocks. Pale and pouring sweat, Donald is hunched over in obvious pain.

ERIC  
How is he?

KEVIN  
It's bad.

Donald's eyes barely track Eric. Like he's fading in and out of consciousness. The others turn away from Donald to talk.

TESSA  
We're not going to make it!

KEVIN  
We can't spend the night in here.  
We don't have supplies.

ERIC  
I saw the top. It's not much further. Come on.

Eric and Kevin hoist Donald up. Donald braces his arms around their shoulders. Donald's injured ankle is on the side where Eric stands. Eric exchanges appreciative glances with Tessa.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Come on. Lean against us. Let's get out of this fucking hole.

The first few steps are awkward, they stagger forward, with Kevin, Eric, and Donald all wincing with every step up the switchbacks. Exhausted and with Donald weighing them down, they make a snail's pace.

DONALD  
Sorry. I'm sorry. I messed everything up.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - SUNSET

The canyon walls glow from the sunset. A gorgeous spectrum of pinks, purples, and oranges paint the sky's pillowy clouds. It's picturesque.

Clusters of photographers rattle off pictures. Mary stands alone, pacing the rim, and checking the time on her phone. They should have already finished. She grows more nervous.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - SWITCHBACK TRAIL - SUNSET

With Donald's arms propped on their shoulders, Eric and Kevin climb up the switchbacks. They groan and stagger, barely making progress. The sun sets quicker than they are moving.

Tessa hands them a nearly empty water bottle from her pack. It's the last of their water. This is it.

The sun dips below the horizon. Light quickly evaporates.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - NIGHT

The tourists and photographers have packed up. Mary wistfully gazes across the Canyon, seeing the lights of the lodges where they stood the night before. Mary calls Eric's phone. No signal.

She takes a few steps down the trail, but is wary of the unlit ledge. Moonlight floods the clouded sky, but it barely penetrates into Canyon.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - NIGHT

Eric and Kevin, with Donald wincing between them, lurch up the trail's twists. Tessa strides next to them. Their steps are slow and choppy, but in unison.

They rest, collapsing the center of the trail, too wary to lean near the uncertain edge. Eric looks at Tessa with genuine fear in his eyes.

ERIC

I don't know if we're gonna make it out.

The cloudy darkness prevents any sense of orientation. More and more trail looms above them.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - NIGHT

Mary steps to a lower bend further down the trail. Alone, she carefully leans over the edge. She stands with her hands over her face, watching the dark trail through the cracks in her fingers. She delves further in.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - NIGHT

Eric, Kevin, Donald, and Tessa have not moved. They sit on the trail, exhausted.

Donald looks ghostly white from the pain. With the sunlight extinguished, the chilliness returns. They shiver and shake, trying to stay warm.

As they stare off in every direction, there's an uncertain noise of something approaching. The hikers anxiously glance at one another. The way the day's been going, a bear or a mountain lion is more likely than anything positive.

But Mary emerges around the corner of the trail with water.

MARY

Where have you been? What happened?

ERIC

Dad fell. I think his ankle's broken.

MARY

What?!

She looks down at the badly swollen ankle and reaches a hand out. Old instinct directs the hand toward Donald, but she momentarily hovers and redirects the hand to Eric's side.

MARY (CONT'D)

Come on. Come on. We're almost there.

The hikers labor to their feet, and conjure the energy for one more push to the top of the Canyon Rim. Kevin and Eric lift Donald as delicately as possible, but his painful shrieks continue as they reposition him on their shoulders.

ERIC

Where's Amy?

MARY

At the hotel.

ERIC

Everything OK?

MARY

Yeah. I think so.

Eric and Tessa exchange wary glances.

EXT. GRAND CANYON TRAIL - NIGHT

Mary leads the group with the flashlight from her phone shining on the path before them. The trail's edge and the precarious drop loom next to them.

Finally the lodge's lights twinkle up ahead on the trail. Eric squints, assuming the elusive end is just another mirage in the trail.

But the trail widens. The lights grow brighter. Shapes of buildings materialize from the shadows. A metal railing leads to a concrete staircase.

After an entire, grueling day of being victimized by the natural world, they are giddy to stand on the asphalt of the parking lot and be done with the hike.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Without stopping their momentum, they continue to the minivan. They load Donald into the middle seat and carefully prop his leg on the armrest of the passenger seat.

TESSA

I guess you were totally right to disregard those warnings about not doing the hike all in one day.

Donald's wince turns into a smirk.

DONALD

We made those signs look pretty stupid, huh?

MARY

You guys look exhausted. There's a shuttle bus over there that goes straight to our hotel. I'll take him to the hospital.

Eric, Tessa, and Kevin put up a faint resistance.

MARY (CONT'D)

Go. Go on.

Tessa takes the room keys from Mary. They hug each other goodbye and head off to the shuttle stop.

EXT. GRAND CANYON RIM - SHUTTLE STOP

Eric, Tessa, and Kevin stumble up the final steps to the bench at the shuttle stop. They fling off their packs and lower themselves onto the bench. Trail dust puffs off them. They are filthy and sweaty, groaning and guzzling the water Mary gave them.

An older couple who have just come from a fancy, romantic dinner at the lodge stare at Eric, Tessa, and Kevin as if they're animals. The old couple slide further down the bench.

A shuttle bus appears, and the older couple hurry on. It takes Eric, Tessa, and Kevin a long time to get off the bench and climb the steps up onto the bus.

INT. RENTAL CAR - CANYON ROAD - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Mary speeds along a dark road, following the route on her phone's GPS. The minivan is the only car on the road. High beams cut into the evergreen forest.

Mary turns around and looks at Donald. He grits his teeth, squeezing the armrests.

DONALD

How did you know to come in looking for us?

MARY

You were behind schedule. I knew something must be wrong. I kept going down bends in the trail until I found my family.

Donald closes his bloodshot eyes. As he leans his head back, tears form at the edges.

DONALD

How far down would you have gone?

MARY

Back to the other rim.

Mary pulls into the Emergency Room entrance for the hospital.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Eric, Kevin, and Tessa stumble through the lobby of their hotel to elevator. They look completely spent. Dirty, sweat-stained, sunburned, and pale.

Other hotel guests stare in confusion at their dirty procession. But Eric, Kevin, and Tessa have been part of more embarrassing scenes in hotel lobbies.

INT. HOTEL - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Eric watches the numbers increase on the elevator's display.

ERIC

They should get one of these things  
for that fucking Canyon.

Dumb smiles grow on their faces as they relish the elevator  
doing the climbing for them.

INT. HOTEL - TESSA AND KEVIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tessa fumbles with opening the door. It takes her several  
attempts at inserting the key card into the lock. Her brain  
and her body aren't working together.

The door opens and Kevin sidesteps Tessa to the bathroom.  
Behind the shut door, there are instantly the violent sounds  
of him throwing up.

Tessa flops onto the bed. She rolls from pillow to pillow,  
leaving dirty silhouettes on the clean white linen.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - ERIC AND AMY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Eric opens the door for his hotel room. He staggers into the  
room and collapses on the bed next to Amy.

AMY

Hey. How was the hike?

Eric fiddles with his hiking boots, scraping at his laces,  
trying to get them off. One boot is off. Blood paints the  
heel of his white sock.

ERIC

Well, my dad's in the hospital.

AMY

What? What happened?

ERIC

He fell. Maybe broke his ankle.

AMY

Oh my god!

Eric pulls off his other boot, groaning. The other sock is  
also bloody. He tries to take it off but sweat and blood have  
glued the sock to his skin.

His face melts into a smile that shows how heavenly he feels  
to be off his feet. Amy looks back pensively.

ERIC

How was the drive with my mom?

Amy stands up, and we follow her enter the bathroom. The speed of her voice is very deliberate.

AMY

Your Mom and I talked for a while.  
It made me think about some things.  
Once we got here I needed to do  
some more thinking and...

Amy returns from the bathroom with a glass of water, and we see from her perspective that Eric is passed out asleep.

She places the water on the bedside table next to Eric, sighs, and turns off the light.

INT. HOTEL - TESSA AND KEVIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin waddles out of the bathroom after throwing up from exhaustion. He groans with each step and falls onto the bed next to Tessa.

TESSA

Let us know how it goes... Love  
you, too.

Tessa hangs up her phone and curls up next to Kevin.

TESSA (CONT'D)

My dad has to have surgery.

KEVIN

Wow.

TESSA

Mom's staying at the hospital and  
waiting with him.

KEVIN

Isn't that weird?

TESSA

It is most definitely weird.

Tessa shrugs, surrendering to the bizarre circumstances. Kevin puts his arm around her.

KEVIN

Promise me something. No matter  
what happens, when we're married  
and when we have kids...

TESSA  
*If we have kids.*

KEVIN  
...If we have kids. Let's never  
hike the Grand Canyon again.

TESSA  
Deal.

They fall asleep on top of the sheets with the lights on.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A curtained off hospital room. Donald sits in bed, his leg propped up. Pain killers and exhaustion have knocked him out. Mary sits in a chair near the bed. She watches the blips and numbers on the equipment monitoring Donald. A book sits in her lap, unopened.

A nurse enters to check on him. She smiles at Mary.

NURSE  
Are you the wife?

The words 'the wife' hang in Mary's head.

MARY  
Yes. Sort of...

NURSE  
What happened?

MARY  
He cheated.

The nurse cocks an eye at Mary.

NURSE  
Huh?

The nurse points at Donald.

NURSE (CONT'D)  
The ankle?

MARY  
Oh. He was hiking the Grand Canyon.  
He fell.

The nurse swats in the air at a familiar reason for patients.

NURSE

Why would anyone want to hike a canyon?

Mary smiles as the nurse moves on to continue her rounds.

INT. HOTEL - ERIC AND AMY'S ROOM - MORNING

In a room flooded with sunlight, Eric wakes up, groggy and alone. He sees his phone on the desk across the room.

He flings back the covers to get out of bed, but his legs won't bend. He massages, twists, and stretches his thighs. As he finally folds his legs over the bedside, Amy enters.

ERIC

There you are! Can you hand me my phone? I think I've got lockjaw in my legs. Is that possible?

She tosses the phone on the bed. He groans reaching for it.

ERIC (CONT'D)

How are you doing?

Amy anxiously paces the room without eye contact.

AMY

(curtly)  
I'm fine.

ERIC

OK...

Eric looks up from his phone, knowing something's up.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Tessa asked me if everything was OK between us. She said you two had talked about relationships.

AMY

Christ!

ERIC

What?

AMY

Bitching about your boyfriend to your best friend is a fundamental part of having a best friend. But I can't even do that with you two.

ERIC

Sorry. I won't listen to her.

AMY

It should be perfect, I know.  
Everyone loves each other.  
Everyone's close. But I feel so  
trapped.

ERIC

We'll get our own space! Believe  
me, I definitely need a break from  
my family.

AMY

But it will always be the same.  
There's too much on the line for  
me. I lose my boyfriend and my best  
friend if things don't work out.  
It'll be like my parents' split all  
over again.

ERIC

So what Tessa said is true? You are  
worried about us.

AMY

Of course! Aren't you afraid we'll  
end up like your parents? Like my  
parents? Like everybody's fucking  
parents?

ERIC

No. Because I love you. Don't you?

AMY

I'm not sure anymore. But even if I  
was positive, just loving you isn't  
enough. Love isn't some magical  
remedy that makes everything fine.

Eric stares at her, undeterred by anyone else's failures.

ERIC

Is it marriage or is it me?

AMY

It's both. There's too much to lose  
and losing is much too easy.

Amy enters the bathroom, grabs her various toiletries and  
stuffs them into her packed suitcase.

She starts crying.

ERIC  
Where are you going?

AMY  
To LA. I rented a car yesterday.

ERIC  
Already? You planned this while we were struggling with my dad?

AMY  
Don't say 'planned' like it's some evil scheme. I've considered this for months. Forever. I was always up front about my reluctance.

ERIC  
Yeah, that's why I'm shocked to see you suddenly so certain.

AMY  
I'm sorry.

She fights back more tears. She gives Eric a limp hug.

AMY (CONT'D)  
But I'm sure.

Her tears explode as she walks out the door and exits. Eric's stuck on the bed, frozen by the news and his locked up legs.

INT. HOSPITAL RECOVERY ROOM - NOON

Mary sits across the room from Donald. She's been with him the whole night and looks frazzled and worn down. His leg is in a cast and propped on his bed, post-surgery.

The nurse exits. Mary and Donald catch each other in a stare.

DONALD  
How are you?

Mary takes a long breath.

MARY  
Seeing you lying there, I have to keep reminding myself not to care about you.

Mary stands up, flings her hands to face, exasperated.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Do you know how embarrassed I feel?

DONALD

I'm sorry.

MARY

Stop. You keep saying that like apologizing will make any dent in the way I feel.

DONALD

But I mean it. I didn't intend this. You know how the last few years have been. After you retired, it seemed like all you wanted was for me to slow down. I wasn't ready for that.

MARY

Do not even try to put this on me.

DONALD

I'm not. I messed up. I own it. I wasn't happy, and it felt like I'd never be happy again.

MARY

Do you think you're the first person to feel discontent? Do you think that makes you special?

DONALD

It doesn't. I'm sorry.

The feeble "I'm sorry" makes her wince. Mary paces the room.

MARY

What do I do from here?

DONALD

I don't know.

MARY

Do you love her?

DONALD

I... don't know. I've been happy with her. Happier.

MARY

I can't be with you. Not again.

DONALD

I know.

MARY

But I'm not going to let our family be without you. You're not allowed to escape this fuck up by ignoring it. You'll do whatever it takes to keep the kids in your life.

Donald eyes her like a puppy getting scolded. He nods in agreement as Mary sits down.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - ERIC AND AMY'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Tessa knocks on Eric's door. After several knocks, Eric cracks the door open. He looks pale and drained, reminiscent of the way he looked during the hike.

TESSA

Hey, where's Amy? She's not answering my texts.

ERIC

She left.

TESSA

What do you mean?

ERIC

Left me. Left us. Left for Los Angeles.

Tessa pushes Eric from the doorway and enters the room. She checks the bed and corners and bathroom. No trace of Amy.

TESSA

What the hell? What happened?

ERIC

She's convinced marriage doesn't work. So she dumped me. She's gone.

TESSA

Without saying anything to me?

ERIC

She said she's afraid of getting too enmeshed in our family. And considering the state of our family, who can blame her?

Tessa spins around and points a finger sharply at Kevin.

TESSA

Don't get any ideas!

Kevin throws up his hands in innocence.

TESSA (CONT'D)  
What can we do?

ERIC  
I don't know.

Tessa hugs Eric. He falls out of the hug onto the bed, burying his face in his hands. Tessa and Kevin sit in the stiff arm chairs next to the TV stand.

The emptiness is apparent on Eric's face.

INT. HOTEL - ERIC AND AMY - LATER

Eric is still on his bed, deflated. Eyes red from crying. Tessa and Kevin sit in the corner.

ERIC  
Guess you were right. You do know her better.

TESSA  
I didn't want to be right.

ERIC  
I think knew things would never work long term. I just didn't want to hear it from you.

TESSA  
But with everything Mom and Dad are going through, I shouldn't have been antagonizing you, no matter what I suspected.

ERIC  
Are you kidding? If we can't pick on each other now, how are we gonna survive this?

Tessa smiles at him, wiping a tear from her eye.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
I just feel like a fucking idiot. You know that I was considering asking her to marry me? I looked at engagement rings and everything. It never would've worked.

TESSA  
Certainly seems that way now.

ERIC

No, because I'm broke. Amy's right about that. I'd never be able to keep up with her lifestyle. Do you know how expensive rings are?

Kevin gives an exaggerated nod.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Thirty, unemployed, and broke. Watch out ladies of Los Angeles.

Tessa leans in and consoles him with a shoulder rub.

TESSA

Don't worry. No one in LA actually has a job.

KEVIN

I know losing Amy feels like a major kick in the dick right now, but you guys were on shaky ground. Splitting up is progress.

Kevin beams a goofy, confident smile. Eric nods at him, reluctant to believe the advice, but appreciative. Eric wipes a tear from his eye and looks up at Kevin.

ERIC

I knew your guys' Netflix password. I'd log in and select soft core porn, hoping that Tessa would see the "Recently Watched" list and she'd get mad at you.

TESSA

What?

KEVIN

I didn't even know there was porn on Netflix.

ERIC

You really gotta dig deep. It's mostly teen sex comedies. I'm sorry, man. I just used to think you were kind of an asshole.

TESSA

Eric!

KEVIN

What changed?

ERIC  
Being kind-of-an-asshole is sort of  
this family's thing.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - ERIC AND AMY - LATER

Tessa opens the door and Mary enters with Donald trailing close behind on crutches and his ankle wrapped in a large white cast. Mary pulls Eric into a hug.

MARY  
I'm so sorry, sweetie. How are you?

ERIC  
Kinda in shock. Kinda saw it  
coming.

MARY  
I know the feeling...

This time Eric pulls his Mom into a hug.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Hey, at least he ended up in the  
hospital.

She gestures at Donald's crutches.

KEVIN  
This trip's been really tough on  
relationships, huh?

They eye Kevin. From someone else, it could have sounded like bragging that he and Tessa were the only ones to survive. But Kevin's goofy grin makes it go over smoothly.

ERIC  
Not so bad. A career one out of  
three batting average in baseball  
will get you in the Hall of Fame.

Donald smiles at Eric and joins him on the bed.

DONALD  
Sorry I pushed you so hard during  
the hike, during the whole trip.  
Things have been...

Donald struggles to express himself, embarrassed and unsure how to finish his thought.

ERIC  
Sorry I almost left you down there.

DONALD

I would've understood it. But you came back. I wouldn't have made it without you. Without any of you.

ERIC

How's the ankle?

Donald grabs Eric's arm and gives it an appreciative squeeze.

DONALD

Still attached. Think we're all going to need some Bad News Scotch later.

ERIC

In the meantime...

Eric wriggles out the bed, his legs and back still aching from the hike. He grabs two clear cups from the bathroom.

From the dusty backpack he used the day before, Eric pulls out a bottle of 5 Hour Energy. He splits it evenly between the two cups. He gives one to Donald.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Cheers.

Donald smiles and nods.

DONALD

Cheers.

They each swig half of a bottle of 5 Hour Energy.

INT. GRAND CANYON RIM - DUSK

Eric, Tessa, Kevin, Mary, and Donald exit the lodge near the Canyon Rim after having dinner. Donald struggles behind on his crutches.

Strolling away from the spot where they scrambled to a finish the night before, Eric stares across the Canyon from a secluded area away from any overlooks and tourists.

Donald hobbles over to him.

ERIC

I don't know what awaits me when I get home, but I'm sure ready to get away from here. That Canyon kicked our ass.

DONALD

What do you mean? We beat it.

Donald sweeps a crutch across the expanse of the Canyon.

ERIC

Look at us. Amy left. You're on crutches. Kevin puked all night. And that Canyon is just taunting us like a crooked smile.

DONALD

Are you kidding? Our sweat and blood's scattered all over that trail. If you ask me, we got it as good as it got us.

ERIC

That river keeps cutting through, tearing away dirt. Every day it deepens and grows. That Canyon doesn't care about us at all.

Donald pokes a rock away from the stone embankment with his crutch. He bends down, swaying, and picks up the rock.

DONALD

Well let's fill it up then.

Donald hands Eric the rock and gestures toward the Canyon.

Eric turns the rock over in his hand, contemplating everything that's happened in the last week. The family, the fissures, the pain. He cocks his arm back and tosses the small rock over the ledge.

The rock arcs through the air. Sunset intensifies the Canyon and the sky, as the rock bounces to the ground below them.

Eric picks up another rock and flings it into the Canyon as well. He's desperate for retribution and the act is giving him increasing satisfaction.

Kevin picks up a rock, cocks back, and rifles it into the Canyon, hollering...

KEVIN

I peed inside of you six times!

Donald leans his crutches against the stone fence and hobbles so that he can wind up and chuck the rock.

Mary walks to the edge and looks over into the Canyon.

MARY

Stop! What if there's hikers down there.

TESSA

There's no trails around here, Mom. And believe me, if you're hiking across that Canyon, the best thing that could happen to you is getting hit in the head with a rock.

Tessa and Kevin stand near each other chucking rocks over the ledge. Eric hands his dad rocks to throw. Mary watches.

MARY

Hold on.

Mary hurries away to the car. When she returns, she's holding the electric toothbrush Donald gave her. She turns it on and off quickly before heaving it into the Canyon with cleansing groan.

MARY (CONT'D)

That does feel good.

They continue to toss rocks over the edge as the sun sets. It's a cathartic and symbolic moment of unity, joining together against something massive and ancient. The family can still stand in the face of obstacles despite all that's transpired.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Donald stands by himself in the hallway. His suitcase leans against the wall. He knocks on the door with a crutch.

No response. He keeps knocking, growing concerned about what Eric might have done in response to his break up.

DONALD

Eric!

Finally the door swings open and Eric stands there.

DONALD (CONT'D)

What's the deal? I've been knocking for five minutes.

ERIC

Sorry. I was in a bit of a daze.

Eric holds the door open to allow for his dad to enter.

INT. ERIC'S HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Donald walks in on crutches, expecting to see the contents of the mini-bar littering the hotel room. But Eric's had a more productive response.

Spread across the bed, the dresser, and every other surface are pages of notebook paper with intricate illustrations.

DONALD  
What's all this?

ERIC  
Had an idea for a while, but could never get it down on the page.

DONALD  
Can I see?

Eric walks his Dad through some of the sketches. We see the drawings as Donald flips through the pages.

They are bold scenes of personified cells and amoebae standing together in groups. Scenes of the cells fighting infections, scenes of them watching TV.

ERIC  
It all takes place inside a body. A group of cells that grow up together. They battle infections and boredom and family issues.

Donald examines more of the illustrations.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
It would be like a superhero crime fighter type of thing mixed with... hypochondria.

Donald picks up a page that has the characters riding in a minivan together. The words 'THE FAMILY CELL' are underlined.

DONALD  
This title kinda makes it seem like family is a jail.

ERIC  
That's not entirely accidental.

Donald examines the sketches with long contemplative gazes.

DONALD  
Looks good. I wanna see more.

Donald gives his son a proud, hopeful look.

DONALD (CONT'D)  
Come on. Time to hit the road.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - MORNING

Donald points to luggage with one of his crutches, instructing Eric on how he should load the bags into the back of the minivan.

With help from Tessa and Kevin, Donald climbs into the back row of seats. Eric's in the passenger seat. Mary starts the car and pulls out of the parking lot.

INT. RENTAL CAR - CANYON ROAD - MORNING - TRAVELING

The drive home to LA begins along the Canyon. The road wraps around the South Rim. Occasional breaks in the forest reveal dynamic glimpses of the massive Canyon.

The family gazes down into the Canyon without the contempt from the day before, replaced with the pride of conquering the giant gorge.

The car putters by a National Park sign that reads 'THANK YOU FOR VISITING GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK'. We stay on the sign as the red minivan bends along the road, blurring with the lush evergreen forest in the distance.

THE END.