

POKERNIGHT



A Film Project by Stephen Fox & Brian Ellison

POKERNIGHT



A Film Project by Stephen Fox & Brian Ellison

ELEVATOR PITCH	2
CONCEPT	2
THEME	2
tone	2
CHARACTERS	3
STORY OUTLINE	7
SCRIPT	10

ELEVATOR PITCH

Three best friends struggle to continue life and a life-long poker game in the face of their fourth player's unexpected death.

CONCEPT

Fifteen years ago Zach, Sam, Daniel, & David played their first poker game together. That game continued every week until last year when Daniel, David's brother, fell ill and died a short time later. The story of Poker Night focuses on David and the friendships that remain after Daniel's death. As Poker Night begins, David finds himself lost in the spiritual and emotional wake of his brother's death.

Will David withdraw and lash out as he always has, or will Daniel's legacy inspire him toward something better?

THEME

What happens to faith and friendship when the limit of our strength is tested? The purpose of Poker Night is to avoid the trite "go-to" answers about faith and suffering, and instead focus on real thoughts and conversations about the most agonizing parts of life. In the wake of Daniel's death, his brother David is in the worst pain he's ever known. Only after nearly destroying his friendships with Sam and Zach will he ultimately find wisdom in the form his brother's angsty fifteen year old daughter. Poker Night is more than a story about three friends dealing with the death of a friend; It's a collection of sincere and universal conversations that aren't often shared with an audience. Above all, Poker Night mourns the hard realities of life, and celebrates the odd-shaped blessings that take us by surprise, and transform who we are.

TONE

More than anything, Poker Night is sincere. The story is about real people, asking real questions, and making tremendous mistakes along their way. There are dozens of "Faith Based Films" that cheer-lead faith to the faithful. Poker Night isn't a Christian film, it's a film about Christians. David doesn't struggle with harsh language to be shocking, he struggles because he's a human working his way through faith and his own cynicism. Christianity isn't about articulating faith to the converted, it's about engaging in honest conversation about the universal difficulties of life, and the example Christ offers even in those moments.

CHARACTERS

David Duncan *played by Chip Ramsey*

David is a rugged, working class mechanic. He and Daniel were at one time incredibly and intentionally close. Around fifteen years ago, the two had a falling out that caused both of them to re-evaluate their relationship. Despite the distance that had grown between the brothers, David has always been loyal to, and had faith in, Daniel. Daniel loved and trusted David's heart, even when he didn't agree with or understand him. As a result of that faith, David becomes the caretaker of Daniel's two daughters; Rae and Beth.

David puts family in a different category than the rest of the world. At times, David can be brutal and difficult to deal with—but not with his family. His home and family are a refuge; an uncommon moment of vulnerability.

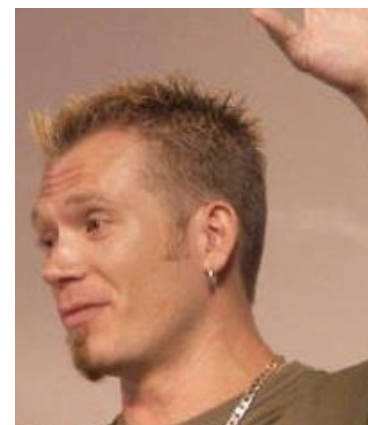
When David deals with difficulty, his first impulse is retreat or compartmentalize. When neither is an option, he attacks the people that remind him of his failure or problem.



Daniel Duncan *played by Matthew Stark*

At first glance, Daniel seems to be the moral compass of Poker Night. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes incredibly clear that Daniel's wisdom has been bought with pain. Over the years, Daniel has been a teenage father, lost his parents and wife, and been diagnosed with a terminal disease. Through each test, he's become a man who better understands himself and his beliefs.

Daniel isn't perfect. He's made mistakes and paid the consequence for short-sighted decisions. What makes Daniel different isn't his righteousness, it's his desire to be honest about life and support those around him. Even though Poker Night is a story that unfolds after Daniel's death, it's the reality of his life that allows many of the characters to move past losing him.





Sam Perro *played by Steve Flanigan*

Sam is a brilliant and opinionated man who isn't afraid to have a contrary opinion. Of the group, he is far and away the most financially and professionally successful. Working as a published author, the only thing standing in Sam's way of being a truly impressive individual is his own arrogance. Sam is organized, adjusted, and timely—unless there's a woman involved.

Sam's "womanizing" stems from a deep desire to forget his problems. As a subplot, Sam is struggling with his own family problems in the form of a rebellious daughter named Dani.

Even though Sam and David are both outspoken, good men; they often operate as counterweights. Both men have deep flaws, and both are eager to hold the other to account.



Zach Lee *played by Justin Harvey*

Zach is lazy; In all other ways, he's just as capable as his friends. Zach spends as much time as possible day-dreaming about aliens, superheroes, & mutants in an effort to escape an otherwise mundane life. For years he's fancied himself a writer, but for some reason he just can't piece together a complete story. Full of excuses and frustration, Zach is a thirty year old living the life of a teenager with a salary.

While Zach's weakness is his lack of focus, his strength is his heart. Zach is always willing to forgive, even when he's slow to forget. Despite being stubborn, Zach is capable of being very honest about himself and his lot in life.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Rae Duncan *played by Audrey Jordan*

Rae is Daniel's oldest daughter, and the person that knew him best. Rae has a lot in common with her uncle David. In any circumstance, she's willing to be brutally honest. The only thing that matches her cunning sarcasm is her courageous heart. Just like any other teenager, Rae struggles with faith, family, and identity.

For Rae, Daniel was a rudder. They didn't always agree or understand one another, but no matter what they knew each was unshakably loyal to the other.



Beth Duncan *played by Miriam Todd*

Beth is Daniel's youngest, six year old daughter. She's very socially aware, and loves to aggravate people that take themselves too seriously. In the midst of tension, Beth's bright personality disrupts awkwardness.

While Beth seems to have coped with her father's death, it is something that is constantly and silently on her mind. Many times, she'll serve as an abrupt reminder of Daniel's legacy—especially when David behaves inappropriately.



Dani Perro *played by Allee Sutton Hethcoat*

In most situations, Dani is a fresh perspective. Never happy to settle for simplicity over quality, Dani has been misunderstood and marginalized most of her life—most often by her own family. Years ago, Dani and her father Sam stopped talking when Dani wouldn't accept “common sense advice.” Since then, Dani has survived as a veterinarian's assistant just fine; aside from missing her big brother.

Dani enjoys finding special things that other's ignore or under-appreciate. Zach is one of those hidden treasures. Dani enjoys Zach's writing, wit, and honesty.

Symbolically, Dani is Daniel and David. She's both a rebellious loner, and a patient peacemaker. Her arrival in the script signifies the moment David is forced to accept his brother's death...and all it's fallout.



Karen Duncan *played by Megan Alexander*

Karen is David's wife. In the face of David's direct and brutal nature, Karen is quiet and sturdy. In crisis she is a calming presence. While she's not a very prominent member of the story, she serves as an important reminder that David values people who are meek and sincere. She's also a very natural mother, despite her children actually being her nieces.



OUTLINE

Scene 1: Bad Hand – (About a year ago) Daniel has just learned that he's dying. He exits the hospital, and begins a difficult drive home. Once he arrives, he's greeted by his brother, and two daughters. His daughters don't know exactly what's going on. His brother, David, can sense things didn't go well. Instead of breaking the news, Daniel takes his family out for a spaghetti dinner at "Michaelangelo's."

Scene 2: Prepping the Table – (Present day) David (Daniel's brother) is shopping for snacks before a poker game. It turns out this will be the first poker game the guys have played since Daniel died. David talks to Sam on the phone and a few seeds are planted about each of the main characters. (Daniel liked candy corn; Sam is chronically late; Zach has dumb friends.) When David tries to leave the grocery store, he finds that his starter has completely died. He tries to call Sam—who doesn't answer. He's stuck getting a ride from Zach.

Scene 3: Jonathan – (Present day) Zach arrives at the grocery store to pick up David, and brings along a friend to audition for the fourth spot at the poker table; he's named Jonathan. Jonathan is an uncompromising, socially awkward, oblivious jerk. He and David immediately clash and things only get worse when Jonathan (NOT Jon) corrects David's niece (Daniel's daughter) in an unkind tone.

Scene 4: The Pair – (Flashback) David, Daniel, Zach, & Sam are playing poker in Daniel's hospital room. Everyone is laughing/joking around...except David. David is falling apart inside, and he resents everyone's effort to have a good time in spite of things. He and Daniel have a very awkward, but very direct exchange. Daniel is dying and David isn't interested in pretending to be happy. David storms out of the hospital room leaving his friends a little bewildered.

Scene 5: Clean Up/Fallout (Present day) – After their first game back, it becomes obvious that Jonathan isn't a great fit. The guys sit around talking while David cleans up. Unfortunately, David is still frustrated and he takes it out on his friends.

Scene 6: Promises, Promises – (Flashback) After David storms out of the poker game from scene 4, Sam, Zach, and Daniel have a conversation about Lord of the Rings that takes a serious turn when Sam asks Daniel for something to remember him by—a promise. Daniel can choose anything he wants. Hesitantly, he makes his choice. Zach ends the scene by turning and asking "What about me?"

Scene 7: Folding (Present Day) It's the guy's second game back together. The game is at Sam's house; David is bringing the fourth player. Zach brings the food (White Castle) which doesn't agree with Sam's refined tastes and stomach. David's friend Mike is an old, super-boring mechanic who falls asleep mid-game. The scene ends as the game and evening unravel into an awkward mess.

Scene 8: Bedside Manners – (Flashback) David returns after his angry exit in scene 4. Daniel lies asleep in his bed and David sits next to him drawing. After a moment, Daniel awakes. David apologizes, and the two talk candidly about their lives together, suffering, and accepting death. The scene ends with the two of them embracing.

Scene 9: Dani (Present Day) David arrives at Zach's apartment for the group's third game. Zach was supposed to clean his apartment and get ready for the night. David is irritated to discover the apartment is an absolute wreck. Anticipating Sam's late arrival, he begins cleaning up the mess with Zach. The scene ends with Sam and a girl named Dani arriving just outside Zach's door.

Scene 10: Bad Things and Good People – (Present Day) Here, the pattern of alternating flashbacks with present day is broken. Continuing the previous scene, David tries to apologize to Sam. Sam accepts the apology but then offers further criticism of David's behavior. David doesn't take it well. Initially, he begins to leave in an awkward but uneventful stride. Ultimately, Sam and Zach aren't willing to be dismissed. The result is a vicious exchange that essentially detonates David's relationship to Sam and Zach. In the process, David assumes Dani is another "idiot girl" Sam has been dating. He and the audience are shocked to discover she's actually Sam's formerly estranged daughter. (The reunion is the direct result of the promise Sam made Daniel.)

Scene 11: Fair – (Flashback) David is visiting Daniel. The two are having a good time talking, watching crappy karate movies and goofing off. Daniel appeals to David to take him out to another spaghetti dinner. David resists, and then finally agrees the two will wrangle friends and family together and go the next night. Early the next morning, Daniel dies.

Scene 12: Thanks – (Present Day) David pulls into his driveway after the last poker game in scene 10. He's remorseful, but not sure what his next step should be. Luckily, Rae hears David walking up the driveway and meets him. The two sit on a swing in the front yard and remember Daniel. The moment begins with the two confiding in one another and quickly becomes a counseling session with Rae offering wisdom she gained from her father. The lesson is to be grateful for the time they each had with Daniel instead of wallowing in the sorrow of his loss. David realizes he's been doing what he always does—running and lashing out. David is faced with a decision. Can he let go of his anger and bitterness?

Scene 13: What He Did – (Flashback) Rae remembers a night with her father just after her mother died. This is the moment Daniel taught Rae to accept blessings while they're around instead of rebelling when they're taken away.

Scene 14: Parting Gifts – (Flashback) This is Daniel's funeral. David, Rae, & Beth are all reeling. Sam and Zach swoop in and take care of the family as best they can. They've painted Rae & Beth's rooms and taken care of groceries for the next several weeks. Zach has saved the prettiest flowers from the funeral for Rae & Beth to keep. Beth asks if they can take one of the flowers to their mother's grave.

Scene 15: Re-deal – (Flashback/Present Day) This scene is somewhat symbolic of what David has been doing. Thus far, the story has been segregated between two distinct and orderly time-lines. In this scene, we begin by exploring the spaghetti dinner from scene 1 (when Daniel discovers his prognosis). Daniel shares a story about his deceased wife and each character has a quick moment before they all fade away like ghosts...except David. David is back at Michaelangelo's. He sits alone at the table, the reality of losing his brother finally a permanent part of his life. He doesn't want bitterness anymore. He isn't willing to run away anymore. Outside, Sam and Zach discuss if they're willing to give David another chance. Slowly, everyone that was at the original spaghetti dinner joins David at the table. David uses the opportunity to humble himself and elegantly apologizes. The scene ends with David presenting a drawing he did to honor Daniel. The drawing features everyone in the group except Daniel. "I just wanted to draw something that would make him smile."

Scene 16: Smooth Plans – (Flashback) Now that the story is coming together, this scene explores the origin of poker night and the group's first game together. It turns out, the game was initially established as an olive branch to David, who had left home due to massive family argument. He'd been MIA for months until Zach found him and persuaded him to come home for one night. As the game unfolds, it becomes clear that David has never really known how to deal with intense loss or pain. The scene ends with the guys each choosing a card to identify themselves by. Daniel doesn't choose. Ironically, David does.

Scene 17: Big Blind – (Present Day/Flashback) David visits Daniel's grave. It's the first time he's been back. He gives a verbal update, and says goodbye in his own way. He remembers the night of the first poker night, just after Sam and Zach had left. In flashback, David and Daniel have a brutally honest exchange that ends with an explanation and apology from both brothers. Daniel chooses his card, the two of diamonds, which is symbolic of his feelings for his brother. David promises Daniel he'll never leave again. "No matter what, we're going to be old men together."

Scene 18: Last Hand – (Present Day) Everyone assembles at David's house for one more try at poker night. Dani has become the official fourth player and unofficial "Zach's girlfriend." While tension is still present, it's obvious that David is trying. The feeling is optimistic without being a perfect bow.

Scene 19: Beauty from Ashes – (Flashback) The final scene returns us to David and Daniel after the first poker game and their reconciliation. The two talk and reconnect. David asks Daniel about something their mom said...it turns out, Daniel's girlfriend is pregnant (with Rae). Daniel is regretful and somewhat self-loathing for having a baby with someone he knows isn't right for him or his daughter. David pauses in shock and then responds with happiness. As the script closes, David shares a bit of wisdom that is almost exactly what Daniel will teach his daughter Rae. The realization for the audience is, Daniel wasn't perfect. David wasn't always bitter. In the end, we need each other to stay on course and combat the bitterness that life heaps on us.

POKERNIGHT



By

Stephen L. Fox
Edited by Brian Ellison

EXT. Hospital - Morning.

DANIEL comes walking out of the lab portion of a hospital. He's a very typical looking man in his mid-thirties. He's holding a few folded pieces of paper. He climbs inside his 4Runner and slaps the papers down in the passenger seat. On top of the stack is a business card for a grief counselor.

Daniel starts the car, and drives. His expression is blank.

After a minute of driving, Daniel comes to a red light. He stares at the light as if he's willing it to change. It doesn't.

DANIEL

Change...

Beat.

DANIEL

CHANGE.

Daniel becomes progressively more angry. The light seems frozen.

DANIEL

CHANGE! CHANGE! CHANGE! YOU
STUPID--

Daniel begins pummeling the steering wheel in a blind child-like rage. In the middle of the fit, The horn breaks and won't stop honking. His head thumps against the steering wheel in surrender. A few seconds later, the light changes and other cars begin honking. In the middle of the chaos, his cell phone vibrates; he's getting a call from DAVID LEONARD.

Daniel's overwhelmed with all the thoughts and emotions--the noise bombarding him at this moment. He takes short, labored, panicked breaths. The scene snaps to an end mid-breath.

EXT. David's house - DAY.

Daniel pulls into his brother DAVID's driveway. David's House is an older brick one-story; very modest in size. The horn is no longer blaring. Daniel exits the vehicle, and makes his way to a swing in the front yard.

He quietly sits, gently rocking back and forth for a minute. His cell rings again. It's David again. He slides the phone back in his pocket.

(CONTINUED)

Gazing forward, his face is drained empty. He sits with his hands folded in his lap. He pulls out a small wallet size photo of himself, RAE (his fifteen year old daughter), BETH (his six year old daughter) & Sarah (his deceased wife). He sort of caresses the photo it in his fingers; life has changed so much since that picture.

For a minute, Daniel's face contorts as he battles to keep his emotions in check. His body jerks as it all just pours out in a sort of dry, angry cry.

Daniel furrows his brow, closes his eyes and refocuses.

DANIEL

Help.

Daniel lowers his head. He knows he's helpless.

The front door opens, Beth comes bounding out. She has a big smile on her face. She runs toward Daniel with her arms open. Rae walks out casually, fiddling with her smart phone as she walks.

BETH

Daddy!

RAE

Hey dad.

Beth lays on her father's shoulder and chatters.

RAE

Uncle David and I watched Ninja Turtles. He said his favorite was Raphael, but mine is the purple one.

David is about to join everyone outside, but he hesitates. Instead, He watches Daniel with his daughters.

A tear rolls down Daniel's face. He squeezes Rae and strokes her hair. He loses his composure for a second when he and Beth make eye contact. David sees the the truth in Daniel's face, and his heart breaks as he stands in the doorway.

BETH

Dad? What's wrong?

Daniel sits Rae on the swing and looks deep in Beth's eyes.

DANIEL

Nothing if you give me a hug.

Daniel smiles a wide, sincere smile. He's so glad to see Beth and Rea. Rea hugs her dad. She presses her head under his chin.

BETH
You're such a cry-baby.

DANIEL
You wear too much eyeliner.

David stands alone on the other side of a glass door. Daniel sees him and waves for him to come out. David obliges.

DANIEL
Hey, I have an idea! Why don't we go out? We can all have a big spaghetti dinner and then go out for ice cream. Maybe David and Karen can come?

BETH
Yay!!!

RAE
(surprised)
uh...okay.

David looks at Daniel with a questioning expression.

Daniel looks back with disappointment in his eyes. He nods "no." David almost starts to cry until Daniel very gracefully moves his embrace from his daughter to his brother. He whispers to David as they hug.

DANIEL
(whispering)
I promise we'll talk later...

Daniel steps back. Rae knows something isn't right, but she doesn't want to push.

RAE
Are you sure you're okay?

DANIEL
I was just thinking it'd be really great to have an old fashioned family night.

3

PREPPING THE TABLE

EXT. Local grocery store - Evening.

TITLE OVER: ONE YEAR LATER

DAVID(ON THE PHONE)

Yeah, Karen says our place is fine.

No, don't bring all that shi--

Crap. Don't bring all that CRAP.

INT. Grocery Store.

Customers bustle around a busy grocery store. David is one of the herd, meandering around avoiding other people as best he can. He's on his cell phone. The camera is behind him. He's a muscular guy, with thick hands and a shaved head.

As David walks, he grabs various snacks off the grocery shelves.

DAVID(ON THE PHONE)

No, no, no. Just bring pretzels or something...**I don't know Sam**, it's really not that important. It's four guys--or three guys and whatever Zach decides to bring.

David continues to zip through the store. A random guy bumps into David's shoulder, hard. The other guy spins a little and reacts aggressively.

RANDOM GUY

Hey moron, watch--

David shoots a stern glance at the guy. Random guy changes his mind and turns around to walk away.

DAVID

Yeah...yeah. Well, he's been playing online for the last six months. I think he's planning some kind of retribution or shiiii--

BEAT.

David stops suddenly midway down the candy aisle. He sort of stares at the corn candy as if he's debating himself.

DAVID

...stuff.

He grabs a bag from it's hook and presses it in his hand while he thinks for a second. He ignores the chatter on his phone.

Finally, he tosses the bag back on the bottom of the shelf.

The camera stays with the candy as David walks away.

DAVID
What? Say that again... Alright,
I'll see you at six o'clock--Yeah,
regular people time.

Cut to outside, David is getting into his old red pickup. He puts the groceries in the back, and slides in the driver's seat.

He turns the key, and the ignition sputters. He turns it again, same. HE stops, takes a deep breath, and tries again.

SFX
Sp-Spu-Sputter!

DAVID
DA--! Stupid AS--! Son of
a...AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!!!!

David punches his steering wheel several times and half curses, half growls. After a quick tantrum, he's breathing heavy but his fury has subsided.

he reaches into his jacket pocket and dials his cell.

DAVID
...Come on...***COME ON.***

Beat.

DAVID(UNDER HIS BREATH)
Dang it, I JUST talked to him...

David hangs up, rolls his eyes and dials again.

DAVID
...Zach? Hey man. Yeah, yep. He
knows--YES, he knows it's tonight.
Yeah...yeah...YES. Good Lord, yes.
List--listen...***LISTEN.***

Beat.

DAVID(IRRITATED)
My starter finally stopped. I mean,
completely...

Beat.

DAVID
yeah...*ya think?* Yeah, maybe I
should get it fixed...Can you come
get me?

Beat.

DAVID
Kroger...Thanks, man.

David sits in the back of ZACH's car. It's old and
overflowing with garbage. David sits in the back, pushing
the trash around to make a place to sit.

ZACH
Seriously, it's a comic about
redneck superheroes. It's pretty
hilarious.

JONATHAN
It sounds really dumb.

Jonathan turns to David in the back seat.

JONATHAN
Your starter just **wouldn't ignite?**

DAVID
Nope. Just did the clicking thing.

JONATHAN
Normally starters don't go out all
at once. They usually break down
slowly.

Beat.

JONATHAN
...give you some **warning**.

Beat.

JONATHAN
Didn't yours **give you some warning?**

Zach has a nervous expression. David is getting irritated.

DAVID
You could say that.

JONATHON
Why didn't you fix it when it first
started sputtering? That seems kind
of thoughtless.

Beat.

An awkward few seconds pass as Zach looks at a glaring David
in his rear-view mirror.

DAVID
Hey Zach? Have you explained my
smartass know-it-all rule to your
friend?

JONATHAN
Rule?

Zach eagerly turns into David's driveway. As he does, his
license plate is visible. It says "AceSpds."

ZACH
We're here!

EXT. David's House - Evening.

Zach's beat-up sedan pulls into David's driveway. Zach,
David, and Jonathan pile out of the car.

INT. David's House - Evening.

KAREN sits on the couch, folding laundry. BETH, an energetic
6 year old, runs around the living room. REA, a 15 year old
girl with too much eyeliner sits on the couch with her arms
folded. She has a "don't talk to me" look on her face. The
door unlocks and opens. David, Zach, & Jonathan enter.

David immediately sits down the bags of groceries and kisses
Karen.

DAVID
Man, I missed you today. You guys
okay?

Karen smiles at David and gives him a hug.

KAREN
Yeah, Rae's in a mood, but
otherwise...

(CONTINUED)

DAVID
Is it a mood if it lasts for 15
years?

David throws a bag of candy at Rae. She's irritated until
she sees what it is.

RAE
Hey! Ooooh, Skittles!

Beth pops out from behind a recliner.

BETH
RAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!

Karen winces a little, David smiles big and scoops her up.

DAVID
Hey, baby! How were you today? Were
you sweet...or were you feisty?

David sits Beth down, and she immediately begins rummaging
through grocery bags. After a minute she looks up at Zach.

BETH
I was good...Hi Zack!

Zach makes a sad face.

ZACH
That's too bad, I kinda like
feisty-Beth.

Beth looks at Jonathan with a curious/judgemental glance.

BETH
Who's he?

DAVID
That's mister Jon, baby. Say "hi."

David wanders into the kitchen and unfolds a poker topper
onto a small dining room table in the middle of the kitchen.

BETH(SHYLY)
Hi mister Jon.

JONATHAN
Jonathan. Please don't call me Jon.

Beth giggles.

BETH
I'm sorry, mister Jonny-Jon.

David begins loading the snacks into his refrigerator. On the outside of the fridge there's an abbreviated list of profanities hanging by a magnet.

KAREN
Beth, be nice...

DAVID
Yeah Beth, don't pick on Johnny.

Jonathan gets down on one knee and talks eye level to Beth. Zach sees what's about to happen and tries to intervene.

ZACH
NO.NO.NO. Don't do that...

JONATHAN
Little girl, It's not good manners to ignore what an adult says. I already told you once not to call me Jon.

David's head snaps up as he hears Jonathan's condescending tone.

DAVID (GROWLING)
HEY!

4 JONATHAN

INT. David's House - Dining Room/Kitchen - Night

David, Jonathon, and Zach sit awkwardly around the poker table which is covered in various snacks.

David turns his wrist and looks at the time. He shakes his head, irritated. Zach tries to diffuse the tension.

ZACH
So...Jon loves Star Trek. Don't you like Star Trek, David?

DAVID
What? Yeah, especially the new movies. Did you see the new one?

JONATHAN
I wish I could unsee it. It was idiotic tripe. No science, no moral
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN (cont'd)
message, or hint of the thoughtful
soul that was once the hallmark of
original Star Trek.

David looks flatly at Jonathan. He's just decided he doesn't
care what "Jon" thinks of him.

DAVID
You mean it was fun.

JONATHAN
If your idea of fun is discarding
decades of continuity and replacing
it with brainless fight scenes. It
was Star Trek for sheeple.

DAVID
...

DAVID
...Sheeple?

Zach clears his throat and awkwardly elaborates.

ZACH
It's a combination of "Sheep" &
"People."

DAVID
Of course...home schooler?

Sam knocks on the front door. David pushes a few toys out of
the way to let him inside. Sam grins and holds up container
of sushi.

SAM
Hey man, sorry I'm--

DAVID(FLATLY)
C'mon, man.

SAM
What?

David turns and heads back to the table.

DAVID
You're an hour late after promising
you wouldn't be **half an hour late**.
I'm sure whatever happened; she's
very pretty. If I weren't so
overwhelmingly glad you're here to
(MORE)

DAVID (cont'd)
buffer me from *Zach and his plus*
one, I'd be really angry right now.

SAM
You're right, I'm sorry dude.

David takes a long, tired breath and waves Sam to follow him to the table. Sam feels guilty.

SAM
I brought sushi? Does that help?

The guys settle in around the table and start to play. They each pull out a stack of nickels. Sam has his in neat stacks. Zach has his in a ziplock bag. Jonathan has his still rolled. David's are in a messy pile.

SAM
Okaaaaay, I guess I'm small blind.

ZACH
I thought you were big blind this time?

JONATHAN
Aren't we playing Omaha?

DAVID
We're playing poker. Plain ole'
poker.

JONATHAN
Oh man, we should play Omaha. It's
a lot better than Texas Hold 'Em.

DAVID
...

David rubs his forehead and takes a deep breath.

DAVID
None of us are pros, Jon. We just
play the same poker a million guys
play all over the planet.

ZACH
He's right David, Oma--

DAVID
We're already starting nearly an
hour late. Can we just play?

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

But it's just a few different rules, plus you don't have to hassle with blinds. You can play longer.

SAM

I've only got an hour or so. I don't think--

DAVID

An *hour*? Are you serious?

SAM

You know I have like seven deadlines this week.

DAVID

But you can show up almost an hour late?

JONATHAN

I don't really understand why you'd play at all if you aren't going to take it seriously.

DAVID

Jon...athan. Shut. Up.

David stands and glares at the guys.

DAVID

You guys talked **me** into this and now you don't have the time for it? Not to mention Zach bringing Mr. Autocorrect. **No chance** he's coming every week.

ZACH

Oh come on, he's not that bad!

SAM

Yeah, he's pretty bad...No offense Jon.

JONATHAN

For the fifth time, it's Jonathan.

Jonathan is frustrated and Sam is confused.

SAM

I'm sorry?

David interrupts, frustrated.

DAVID
It's a whole damn thing.

Jonathan scrolls through email on his phone to escape David's glare.

DAVID
I went out of my way to make sure we could play tonight. I left work early to get food. I bought a new poker table. I asked my already overworked wife to watch the kids for a few more hours so I could play a **game**.

Sam & Zach sit silently. David stands up puts his plate in the trash along with his food. *Note, this should be subtle. This isn't a tantrum, despite David being upset.

DAVID
I thought this was important to you guys, and now you're treating it like it's a pain in ass? This sucks.

Beth wanders into the kitchen.

BETH
(disappointed)
You cussed.

David calms down and sits so Beth can get in his lap. He scoops the little girl onto his leg.

BETH
You promised dad you wouldn't cuss.

David pauses. He realizes he's overreacted--There's nothing to do but apologize.

DAVID
I know. I know, baby...you're right. I'm really sorry.

BETH
But you did it twice.

JONATHAN
Three times, actually.

David glares at Jonathan. Jonathan gets the message.

5

THE PAIR

EXT. Large hospital. Night

INT. Daniel's hospital room. Zach, David and Sam sit in chairs around Daniel's bed. They're playing poker.

Everyone's in a joking mood except David.

SAM

They just kept saying "phenomenal!"
It felt like one of those
stereotypical Hollywood meetings.
Fold.

DANIEL

(sarcastically)

Well, you have been to a lot of
Hollywood meetings.

SAM

You know what I mean. It's like
that chick on that show "Twenty
Twelve"...yunno, the brainless P.R.
chick.

ZACH

It's your turn David. Daaaaaavid.

David stares out the window. His expression is frustrated
and pensive. Daniel tosses a piece of candy corn at David.

DANIEL

Hey, Mr. Sunshine...it's your bet.

DAVID

Huh? Oh, right.

David stares at his cards for a second and then stacks them
together.

DAVID

I think I'm just gonna go.

SAM

What's wrong, man. You afraid I'll
clean you out?

David looks at Sam blankly.

DAVID

Yep. That's it--you figured me out.

David puts his jacket on and starts to leave.

DANIEL
Hey, what are you doing man?

David doesn't know what to say. He just stares at Daniel.

DANIEL
Come on man, just play out this
game.

David feels cornered. It's not a feeling he enjoys. After a second, he relents just to end the awkwardness. He sits his jacket on the bed next to him.

DAVID
Fine. I'll see your 15¢ and raise
95¢.

Daniel looks at David, frustrated.

DANIEL
Come on, man. Don't play like that.
That takes the rest of us all in.

David looks David in the eye and reasserts his challenge.

DAVID
So **go** all in.

Beat.

Daniel's face tenses.

DANIEL
All in.

ZACH
Great. Fold.

DAVID
Call.

Beat.

David shows his cards (but doesn't lay them down). He has four of a kind (three twos, minus the two of diamonds). Daniel lays down his hand. He has nothing.

DAVID
I know when you're bluffing,
Daniel.

Daniel laughs. The other guys feel the room grow tense.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
(smirking)
I guess it's not my year to play
the odds.

DAVID
Don't do that.

Sam gestures to Zach. They start gathering their things to
leave the room.

SAM
I think we might see if this place
has any snacks. Want anything?

DAVID
Just wait.

DANIEL
What?

David's frustrated. He struggles for his words for a moment
before he starts.

DAVID
You guys are trying so hard to act
like everything's normal--like it's
just another poker night. I know
it's easier to pretend like
everything's just like it always
is--I know the last thing any of us
wants is to treat Daniel like he's
dying.

Beat.

David's frustration turns to hurt. Tears start to fill his
eyes.

DAVID
But he is.

Beat.

DAVID
You **are** dying.

Tears begin to well in David's eyes.

DANIEL
...David...

DAVID
If you make one more damn joke
about it--

Daniel starts to understand why David is upset. His face softens.

DANIEL
Okay, okay...I just--

DAVID
I know.

Beat.

DAVID
I don't either.

David grabs his jacket and puts it on. In the process, he knocks his cards off the table they sit on. He doesn't notice.

The cards sit face up on the floor.

6 CLEAN UP/FALL OUT

INT. David's house - kitchen. Night.

David, Zack, Jonathan & Sam sit around the kitchen table. All the cards and chips are stacked neatly.

David starts to clean up the last of the mess.

SAM
How's the comic going?

ZACH
Not too bad. My artist flaked on me, but I'm almost done with the script.

SAM
Don't you have to finish the script before you find an artist?

ZACH
I had enough for him to get started.

SAM
I dunno, man. It seems like that's backwards. I don't think I'd like that if I were an artist.

(CONTINUED)

Zach exhales slowly.

ZACH
It's just the way I do it, man.

David turns from the sink and looks at Zach.

DAVID
Would it kill you to take Sam's
advice for once?

ZACH
What?

SAM
Hey, don't do that. That's not what
I was saying.

David turns around.

DAVID
(attempted sincerity)
Sam's had a ton of stuff published,
but you act like his advice is
irritating.

ZACH
I do not. I just have my own way of
doing things.

David turns back around.

DAVID
Sorry I said anything. If I were
you though...

SAM
What are you doing, man? That's
really not cool.

DAVID
Yeah, well I'm just trying to keep
the night consistent.

The three friends sit in awkward silence.

JONATHAN
So you guys want to try Omaha?

In the background, Beth is looking in the kitchen. David
tosses a towel on the counter.

DAVID
What a stupid ass night.

SAM
Wow. Really?

DAVID
This was fun for you? I guess
nothing's too bad for an hour,
right?

Zach and Sam gather their things and walk toward the door.
Jon takes a cue and stands, still staring at his phone.

SAM
You say whatever pops in your skull
and act like somehow that makes you
brave. There's a reason we don't
just spit out everything we think.

SAM
We're friends...

Beat.

SAM
...or we used to be.

Karen watches from a nearby doorway. Beth stands in front of
her, staring at David.

SAM
G'night, Karen.

Karen smiles, awkwardly.

Zach carefully closes the door.

David stands alone in the kitchen. He slumps into one of the
chairs around the poker table. An overhead light sort of
spotlights him sitting there alone.

Beth slowly walks into the kitchen. She's crying.

DAVID
What's wrong, baby?

BETH
(angry)
You don't even care.

David looks back at her with a hurt expression. He reaches
for her.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

What do you mean?

Beth's face is heartbreaking.

BETH

You promised, but you won't stop.

You did it again. **TWICE.**

David knows what she's talking about. Shame covers his face.

DAVID

Really?

Beat.

DAVID

I guess I did...

David scoops Beth in his arms and sits her in his lap. He kisses her head and just holds her for a few moments.

The camera tightens on David's face. He's hurt and remorseful. He slowly closes his eyes as if praying.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

7

PROMISES, PROMISES

INT. Daniel's hospital room. Evening.

It's immediately after David stormed out of the room. Zach and Sam sit next to Kevin. They've rigged a DVD player to the television and the three guys are watching "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers." It's the scene where Gandalf returns to turn the tide of the battle.

SAM

I know this is classic literature, but Tolkien really wrote some nonsense with Galdalf.

ZACH

He's the prototype for generations of mentor characters? What in the world did Tolkien get wrong?

DANIEL

How about that whole summoning giant eagles thing? Why couldn't the eagle just fly all of them straight to Mordor?

SAM

Not to mention, when you have a character that comes back to life, you've effectively neutered any threat you can create.

ZACH

You guys are out of your mind. Gandalf is an allegory for Jesus. If you read the Silmarillion...

SAM

HOW is he an allegory for Jesus? He's never born. He never suffers at the hands of the people he's trying to save. He doesn't have disciples, or miracles.

ZACH

Doesn't have mirac--he's a wizard!

SAM

Right. Which means the "miracles" he performs are common among an entire class of people thus making them the opposite of miracles. Not to mention, his magic is so undefined and diverse, the only real restriction it has is the plot.

Zach is gobsmacked.

ZACH

How--Wah--Are you kidding? He's GANDALF?!

SAM

Right. He's also the biggest deus ex machina in classic fiction.

ZACH

But...Tolkien.

Zach returns to the movie with sad-face. Sam turns to Daniel; his foe vanquished.

SAM

I've been thinking.

DANIEL

A dangerous pastime.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

I know.

Beat.

SAM

Seriously. I've been thinking about...everything. I love you, and you're probably the wisest guy I know.

DANIEL

Go on...

SAM

I want you, to make me, make you, a promise.

DANIEL

What kind of promise?

SAM

One to remember you by.

SAM

Think of it like planting a seed. I know you won't ask me to do anything immoral, and you know I'll do anything else.

DANIEL

I'm a near-sighted thirty-something guy that lives in his parents' old house, has no job, and few months to live. I'm not that guy.

SAM

Don't pretend like you're stumped. You already know what you'd pick. Just pick it...I'm asking you to.

DANIEL

I don't think--

SAM

Just pick.

Daniel thinks for a moment. Like Sam said, he knows what to choose, he's just considering his words.

DANIEL

Sometimes I wish you'd spend a little while alone. Life beats you

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (cont'd)
up and you fall in love. It's like
your form of therapy. You're
brilliant, just be alone and listen
to the static for a while.

SAM
Okay...anything else?

DANIEL
I know you miss Dani. No
relationship in the world can
replace a brother or sister. It's
just the blessing and curse of it
all. If I were you I'd find a way
to at least know what's going on
with her.

SAM
Wow. I was thinking something along
the lines of drinking less
coffee...

DANIEL
(smiling)
What can I say--you're a wreck.

Sam sits silently thinking through his new list.

DANIEL
You know I don't really expect--

SAM
It's a promise.

Zach turns around from the television.

ZACH
What about me?

8 FOLDING

INT. Sam's house. Night

Sam's house is hip and modern. Everything is tidy, and in
it's place. Sam's chopping garlic. The doorbell rings; it's
David. In his hand he has Dorito's & beer.

DAVID
So...I know I have a knack for
cultivating extremely unpleasant
conversation.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
Is that an apology?

Sam walks back to his chopping board and resumes his cooking.

DAVID
C'mon man, don't make it weird.

Sam shakes his head; not satisfied with the apology, but not willing to fight either.

SAM
What'd you bring?

DAVID
We have Dorito's. We have beer.
Zach's bringing dinner. What are you doing?

SAM
I figured I'd supplement Zach's dinner choice.

David looks at Sam with a doubtful expression.

SAM
Trust me, it's good--A little spicy, but you guys are gonna love it.

David picks up a recipe card. The title is "Spicy Korean Slaw."

DAVID
Korean slaw. Zach is gonna love Korean Slaw?

SAM
Oh yeah. It's delicious. Add a nice, thinly sliced flank steak...

There's a knock on the front door.

David slides off his stool and strolls over to the door. As it swings open, Zach juggles Mountain Dew, several White Castle bags, and a bunch of comics.

DAVID
Zaaaaach. How's it going man? Oh!
Are those this week's comics?

David takes the Mountain Dew and sits them on the counter. Zach tosses the comics on the table in front of David who immediately begins flipping through one.

ZACH

It's good. I brought--

Zach looks over at Sam. His expression is confused and a little offended.

ZACH

You cooked?

SAM

Nothing special. I had some steak that was about to expire. I just thought I'd--

ZACH

Oh...

Zach looks hurt. He slowly sits the rest of his stuff on the counter.

ZACH

I thought it was my turn. I got White Castle. Did I screw up?

SAM

No way, man. I just thought we'd have extra.

ZACH

It's just--I mean...I kind of went out of my way. I know you guys really like White Castle.

SAM

Absolutely, man. I'll just put this in the fridge.

ZACH

You sure?

Sam looks longingly at his slaw and steak.

SAM

Yep. No problem.

David laughs and takes a sip of his beer.

ZACH

What?

DAVID

Nothing, man.

ZACH

What?

DAVID

Look at this place. When do you think was the last time it saw a White Castle bag? Sam's sphincter is probably quivering just from the smell.

Sam slides his food into the fridge.

SAM

I'd be happy if I never heard another word about anyone's quivering sphincter...especially mine.

ZACH

I thought you guys liked it.

DAVID

You thought we liked Sam's quivering sph--

SAM

(interrupting)
Seriously. DISGUSTING.

ZACH

Really, if you don't want what I brought...

Sam stares frustratedly at David.

SAM

No way man. I'll grab some plates.

DAVID

Calm down Sam. Zach knows I'm kidding. Right, Zach?

Beat.

There's another knock at the door. Zach drops the White Castle bag in the trash as he answers it. Sam rushes over to pull it out of the trash.

(CONTINUED)

On the other side of the door stands Mike, an older guy in his late 50s. His posture is crooked and his expression apathetic. Above all, he looks tired.

DAVID

Mike!

David puts his arm enthusiastically around Mike. Mike yawns and stumbles in the door.

DAVID

Hey guys, this is Mike. He works at Garrett's with me. Best spot-weld in three states, right Mike?

MIKE

Guess so. Ain't never been to the other forty-seven.

David laughs too hard and slaps Mike on the back.

Mike silently raises his hand to lazily say "hello."

Cut to the guys sitting around the kitchen table. White Castle wrappers litter the kitchen counters behind them. Each player has his coins displayed in the same way as before.

Mike holds his nickels in his hand and sort of shakes them every now and then. The sound of the knocking coins irritates Zach. Meanwhile, Sam's stomach is rolling. He looks ill.

SAM

Do you get to do any interesting repairs?

MIKE

Like what?

SAM

Classic cars or off the wall stuff?

MIKE

Like what?

Mike has an apathetic expression on his face. Sam holds back a snippy comment.

DAVID

Good Grief. Small blind's already 25¢?

(CONTINUED)

MIKE

Too rich for me. Fold. I did have
this transmission I had to replace.

ZACH

But you're small blind. You have to
put in as long as--

DAVID

Don't sweat it. He's still
learning.

MIKE

The guy tore every tooth off that
thing. Took the better part of the
day to pull the drive shaft and
find a replacement. I called four
or five places...

Sam's stomach causes him to grimace; he's about to spew. Sam
shuffles away from the table and hurridly makes his way to
the bathroom.

SAM

Don't deal me out!

MIKE

Fold. I called Jimmy's...he didn't
have it. I called
Pick-a-Part...they didn't have
it...

ZACH

You still have to put the blind in.

DAVID

Zach, don't sweat it.

MIKE

Finally, I just broke down and
called the dealer. They had it.

Mike's eyes look very heavy.

ZACH

That's not fair. You got mad at
Jonathan for wanting to change the
rules, now you're ignoring them
when it's your friend?

Sam yells from the bathroom. His voice sounds sickly.

SAM
I'll be right there...don't deal me
out yet..

DAVID
Jonathon was a condescending jerk.
Mike has never played poker.

David looks at Zach for a second and then gives in.

DAVID
Okay, okay. Sorry. Mike, you have
to cough up small blind when it's
your turn even if you--

David gestures to Mike. Mike is asleep in his chair in your
typical "old man" position. Sounds of Sam violently vomiting
fill the house.

SAM
BLLLLLLLLARRRRRRRRGGGGHHHH!!! oh
Lord...don't let me die from White
Castle...

David and Zach stare at one another, speechless.

9

BEDSIDE MANNERS

INT. Daniel's hospital room. Night.

Daniel is asleep in his bed, David sits in the chair next to
him. He's sketching an old-fashioned superhero by the light
of a small lamp.

David looks out the window next to him and his mind drifts.

DANIEL
Hey...How long you been here? is
that ThunderMax?

DAVID
Just a while. Yeah. I felt
nostalgic. Can you believe we came
up with this guy fifteen years ago?

DANIEL
Wow...I guess the goggles and
ponytail are a little dated.

The two laugh for second; Daniel winces, takes a deep
breath, and sits up in his bed.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
You okay?

DAVID
I'm sorry, Daniel.

DANIEL
I know. I understand.

DAVID
I want to laugh with you
guys...It's hard.

Beat.

DAVID
The last few hours, I've been
sitting on a bench thinking about
when we were kids. When you were
little, mom and dad put your crib
in the room with me. They didn't
ask me; I begged them to...there
was something about you. I wanted
to be close to you. I wanted to be
your favorite person...

Beat.

DAVID
Every night when we went to bed I'd
pretend to shoot at you from across
the room.

David makes his hand into a gun and points it at Daniel.

DAVID
P-choo!

Daniel laughs a little.

DAVID
(smiling)
It used to make you laugh.

Beat.

DAVID
I always felt like a messed up kid.
I got picked on a lot; dad and I
never clicked. I kind of felt in
the way a lot. You laughing
though...

David gets a little choked up.

DAVID

You laughing was like someone knew I was worthwhile. It was like I did something right. Night after night, we'd play guns in our room. Every single night you'd giggle. I was scared if I ever stopped you wouldn't play with me anymore. Every night I'd look over at your sweet little face through the slats of that crib and I'd say: "Good night, partner." You'd grin and then drift to sleep.

Beat.

DAVID

One night, you said it back.
"Pa-nah!"

David pauses for a second, relishing the memory.

DAVID

You never said it again, but to this day I can hear it...Since I came back all those years ago--things have been different. We both know we aren't as close. I just wanted "us" back. I wanted to hear you laugh the way we used to. You were the first person that really believed in me; I thought one day we'd be those little boys again. That's who you are to me, Daniel. You're not just a man. You're my brother. You're my partner.

Beat.

DAVID

Losing you isn't ever funny.

DANIEL

I don't think it's funny...I just want to leave behind some shred of dignity. When I'm alone, I get angry. I get scared. I think about all the things I'm going to miss. Picking on Rae...tickling Beth. Going to breakfast every Saturday and listening to them argue the whole way. I had it in my head

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (cont'd)
losing Sarah would be the last
tragedy of my life--our lives. We'd
paid our dues.

Daniel pauses for a second, and then he lets out a
combination of words and agony.

DANIEL
I'm going to miss my daughters'
lives. I want to stop thinking
about it all so I don't cry every
second of the day, but I'm afraid
to. I don't know how much more time
I have to think about them. It's
easy to be bitter. Sometimes that's
all I am. The one thing that helps
is that even though I'm leaving
this great life; at least I had it
for a little while. It's been hard.
It's been confusing...but it's also
been Sarah and Rae and Beth and mom
and dad...and you. If this is all I
get, it was still more than I
deserved.

10 DANI

INT. Zach's Apartment. Evening.

Zach sits on his couch playing a loud and violent video
game. Crap surrounds him on the couch and floor. He's
wearing his headset and can't hear the banging on the door
through the music he has blaring.

On the other side of the door, David stands glaring. He
closes his eyes, takes a labored breath, and hammers the
door again.

DAVID
Take it easy...Deep, calm breaths.
I will **not** be a jerk tonight.

Zach jumps a little at the sound of the banging. He jerks
the headset off and runs to the door; kicking a few pieces
of garbage out of the way as he moves. He opens the door
with a nervous smile.

ZACH
Oh...hey David. Is it six already?

David smirks and raises his watch.

DAVID
Six fifteen. I figured I'd save
myself a little sitting around
time.

Zach and David enter the apartment. David scans the filth as
they meander toward the couch. He's stunned.

DAVID
I guess the "cleaning day" had it's
hitches?

Zach collects bits of trash while he and David talk.

ZACH
Actually, I got a lot done.

David walks to the kitchen, takes off his jacket, and starts
rummaging under the sink.

ZACH
What are you looking for?

DAVID
Trash bags. If I know Sam we have
another half hour to kill.

ZACH
Gotcha. I don't buy trash bags. I
just reuse Wal-Mart bags.

David exhales slowly. Zach **really** gets on his nerves
sometimes.

DAVID
That's very...thrifty of you. Sam
tell you who he's bringing?

ZACH
Yeah, he's bringing Dani.

DAVID
(sarcastically)
I didn't think Sam knew any men.

ZACH
Dani's not a guy--you remember
Dani, right?

David is looking around for a broom to no avail.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Of course he'd bring a woman...Do
you have a broom around here?

Ext. Zach's Apartment. Night.

Sam and his sister DANI are walking to Zach's door. Dani is
around 25 years old and has a general "spunk" to her. She
tends to move constantly; shaking legs, rocking on her
heels...she's not great at sitting still.

SAM

Okay, so this place is going to be
a little rough. You may see and
smell things you've never seen or
smelled.

DANI

Not everyone can be so Metro...is
"Metro" still a thing?

SAM

I'm just saying...Zach is
very...bachelory.

Beat.

SAM

Another thing; David is kind of...

DANI

Edgy? Feisty? Tempermental?

Sam smiles slightly.

SAM

Yes.

DANI

It's okay. I've dealt with my share
of bull-headed guys.

Dani elbows Sam playfully.

Sam knocks on the door.

11 GOOD THINGS AND BAD PEOPLE

Int. Zach's apartment. Night.

The four players surround a poker table one more time. Their stacks are the same as always. Dani pulls out a zip-lock of nickels and begins arranging them almost architecturally. Circles of coins build into tiny structures in front of her.

Everyone sits in silence. David shuffles the deck and slides it to Sam to cut. David clears his throat, takes a deep breath and begins to deal. He's doing his best to act civil.

DAVID
I know I've been hard to get along
with lately.

SAM
That's definitely true.

David takes the barb with a tense smile.

DAVID
I'd really like to apologize.

SAM
Thanks, man.

ZACH
We all know how hard things are
right now.

The guys sit silently for a minute. It's almost awkward.

DAVID
So, with that out of the way...

David begins dealing.

DANI
What's for dinner? I'm starving.

Sam smiles at Dani and shakes his head.

SAM
(smiling)
That's no indicator, you're always
starving. I don't know how you're
still so tiny.

David rolls his eyes, a little nauseated by the sweetness.

DAVID
Pizza and wings. I brought some of
that fancy beer you like so much
too--kind of a peace offering.

Sam's genuinely surprised and appreciative.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

That was really kind of you man.

Zach heads toward the fridge.

ZACH

It might be cold, I'll pop it in the oven for a bit.

DANI

I can help!

Dani hops up cheerfully. She and Zach occupy the tiny kitchen. It makes Zach a little self-conscious to be so close to Dani.

ZACH

Oh! It--it's no problem at all. There's really not much to do?

DANI

That's okay. I haven't seen you in forever.

ZACH

That's true. How have you been?

DANI

Working a lot. I like it though. Dogs and cats are my jam. If I could work baby-holding into my job duties I'd be all set!

Zach smiles genuinely. He'd forgotten how much he enjoyed being around Dani.

ZACH

Wow, you're still at the vet? That's really great.

DANI

What about you? I know you're still writing; is that going okay?

ZACH

(smirking)

How do you know I'm still writing? Maybe I gave into the crippling parade of criticism and rejection?

DANI

I've read it all--unless little goblins posted those short stories on your website?

Zach has a surprised look on his face.

ZACH
I didn't think anyone knew I had a
website.

As David deals, Sam fiddles for a second. He wants to say something, but he's not sure it's wise.

SAM
So, if we're being totally
honest...

DAVID
Is that what we're doing?

SAM
You know what I mean--If we're
really trying to make amends, I
just want to be totally honest.

David stacks the cards neatly and slides them aside. He clasps his hands and gives Sam his undivided attention.

DAVID
Okay. Shoot.

SAM
I really appreciate what you're
trying to do. It means a lot to me
that you want to try and really--

DAVID
(interrupting)
Okay, okay...enough disclaimers.

SAM
You don't talk to Zach and I like
peers. The problem isn't that we
have disagreements, or even that
you tend to be way too harsh--it's
that you talk to us like kids that
won't take advice from their older
and wiser brother. We're all
screwed up in different ways; we
don't have to agree to get along...

David doesn't say anything. He looks tired.

SAM
Do we?

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Nope.

David puts his cards down and walks toward the kitchen. Sam stands to follow.

SAM

Does that make sense?

DAVID

Yep. See you later, Zach.

David heads toward the door, but stops to find his jacket.

SAM

What are you doing, man?

DAVID

I'm going home. I'm worn out.

SAM

Don't do that. Sit down, man.

DAVID

No, I just need to go home and get some sleep. I can't do this right now.

SAM

So you're just leaving? I guess that's kind of your thing.

DAVID

I'm trying to be nice, Sam. I just don't have another *honest* conversation in me tonight.

Zach's eyes show his rising anxiety.

SAM

(irritated laughter)

Why start now? You might not've said anything yet--grinding your teeth every time one of us says or does anything--that doesn't equate to "trying" if you ask me.

DAVID

What do you want from me, man? I apologized.

SAM

Acknowledging you're an ass isn't the same as apologizing for being an ass.

DAVID

(mocking)

I am very sorry for being an ass.
Does that match your criteria?

David stares back at Sam and Zach. He's frustrated and feels cornered. He sort of vents while he looks around for his jacket; which is on Dani's chair.

DAVID

Do either of you know how hard it is for me to do this?

ZACH

Yeah, man. We all know you-

DAVID

NO. Not that.

DAVID

I leave work early every time we do this. I leave work so I can sit around whoever's house for 45 minutes until you can squeeze us in for long enough to say you did it.

Beat.

DAVID

My family just increased by two, and I'm giving up extra money so I can be one more person waiting for Sam to be where he said he'd be.

Sam didn't expect David to have a point.

SAM

I'm sorry. I never--

DAVID

Yeah, I know know you never. That's because you're too busy chasing whatever idiot girl you're passingly interested in. I'm glad you didn't have to interrupt a date for this. Heaven knows you need to get laid more than I need to pay bills.

(CONTINUED)

Beat.

DAVID
Where's my damn jacket?!

Dani throws David's jacket toward him.

DANI
Why don't we all just sort of hit
"reset" on the last few minutes? It
can't be all that bad. It was
actually my fault Sam was late this
time...

DAVID
Look Tinkerbell, I appreciate you
having thoughts and feelings all at
once--you're not exactly a seasoned
perspective.

Dani's jaw drops. Sam becomes instantly angry.

SAM
Watch it. She doesn't have anything
to do with all this.

Beat.

DAVID
And yet you brought her, and she
still managed to make you nearly an
hour late. It's funny how you being
inconsiderate is never as bad as my
brutal honesty.

Sam looks back at David with hurt and confusion.

SAM
I thought we were friends.

DAVID
You keep saying that.

David stops walking and turns to Sam. He wants to be sure
Sam understands what he's about to say is pre-meditated.

DAVID
We don't like each other; we never
have. If it's not a dimwitted girl,
it comes second in your book. We're
friends when it's time for plan B.
You're an arrogant ass who can only
ever find the courage to tell *me*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (cont'd)
off. Never mind your inability to be honest with Zach about even the simplest of topics. You love to be offended by the things I say even though you're thinking the exact same things. Zach's a thirty year old man that's still using the tired excuses he came up with in high school.

David opens his arms gesturing to Zach's mess of an apartment.

DAVID
How in the world do you live in this place? You've had all day and thirty-three years to clean up this garbage. Here's a summary of reality for you Zach: You're not published because you're lazy. You spend all your time eating Cheetos and criticizing other writers. You think maybe these writers you hate so much are successful because they actually **write** things? You're both condescending liars. Say what you want about me--no one ever has to wonder how I feel about them. You two constantly tip-toe around each others' feelings and pat yourselves on the back for being "kind".

DAVID
You thought we were friends? No. You guys were Daniel's friends. That's the thing I respect most about both of you. That's why I agreed to keep the game going. It's not worth it though. I know I'm not perfect, but I'm tired of the way you guys look at me. All you see are the ways Daniel was better. You treat me like his ass brother, so I treat you like his idiot friends that didn't deserve him.

David glares at Sam & Zach as if to assess the damage. Zach is holding back tears.

ZACH
You're right.

David looks Zach in the eyes. His demeanor softens a bit.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Zach...

ZACH

I am a lazy guy. Sam is a condescending jerk. We're both painfully aware of those things. The reality is--neither one of us wear our failures like a badge of honor. You do. Every time I'm in a room with you my stomach tightens up. What did I forget? What's going to be the thread that unties David's hateful, angry mouth?

Beat.

ZACH

Maybe you're right. Maybe we've never been friends. Maybe Daniel was the only thing that connected us. No matter what, I don't want this anymore. Daniel asked me to keep the poker game going because he thought it would be a good way to make sure you didn't pull away from life again. He wouldn't have wanted this, though. We all have our rough edges--our lifelong problems. This whole thing used to be a refuge. It used to be a place where we all took care of each other under the guise of a game. Lately though, it's just torment.

Dani very quietly picks up her things and leaves. Sam stays behind, glaring angrily at David.

SAM

By the way, she's not a date.
That's **Dani**.

David stares blankly back at Sam.

SAM

My **sister**.

Beat.

SAM

(under his breath)
Stupid jerk.

Sam exits the apartment door.

13

FAIR

INT. Hospital-Hallway. Night.

David stares blankly at a vending machine. His face is limp, until he sees something in the machine. He laughs, and makes a selection.

INT. Hospital-Daniel's Room. Night

David strides into the room, smiling. He has a bag of candy corn in his hand.

DAVID

You'll never guess what I found in
the vending machine. I don't think
I've ever seen--

David notices his brother is asleep. He quietly sits the bag of candy corn on his tray and sits down in the chair next to the bed.

He picks up the pad he's left on the table and sketches a little.

DAVID

Yunno...when we were kids, you used
to pretend to be asleep so you
could hear us talk about you.

Beat.

DAVID

I know you're right. I know I'm
being selfish. I don't know how to
fix it though. I pray. I do my best
to stay calm. No matter what I do,
I always wake up the same asshole.

Beat.

DAVID

I don't think I'll make it through
this, Daniel. I'm losing it
already.

Beat.

DAVID

I don't know if I'll **ever** get over
losing my brother--losing you. No
matter what though...I'll always be
grateful for you. I'll never forget

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (cont'd)
laughing ourselves to sleep; or
wrestling until mom made us
stop...Waking up at five o'clock on
Christmas morning. The way your
real laugh looks like you're
suffocating.

Beat.

DAVID
I'll never forget the kind of
father...brother... you are. The
way you put yourself last every
chance you get. Your faith. Your
heart. Most of all though...

David opens the bag of candy corn and pours it all over
Daniel.

DAVID
I will never understand how you eat
this disgusting candy.

Daniel jerks up, laughing. He shakes off the candy.

DAVID
Faker.

DANIEL
It would have been so awkward if
I'd opened my eyes half-way
in...you know you're going to have
to clean up the ones on the
floor--I'm an invalid.

David scoops up a few pieces of candy and throws them away.
Daniel collects the remnants from his blanket and begins
eating them.

DANIEL
You know what I could go for?

DAVID
You have candy corn and I brought
Steven Seagal movies...what else is
there?

DANIEL
Spaghetti. I'd really love some
spaghetti--**right. now.**

DAVID
Michaelangelo's? I dunno, man.
You're not really roadworthy, are
you?

DAVID
...I could pick it up for you;
swing it by after work?

DANIEL
(half-hearted)
...yeah, okay.

David looks back at Daniel. He senses disappointment.

DAVID
Come on, man. You know we can't
leave the hospital.

DANIEL
Why not? I think worst case
scenarios are pretty limited at
this point.

David pauses for a moment, thinking.

DAVID
Yeah, okay.

DANIEL
Really?

DAVID
Yeah. What the hell, right? I'll
pick the girls up from school and
we'll have a dinner just
like...yunno. Like last time.

Daniel smiles.

DANIEL
Thanks, man. That sounds great.

DAVID
Tonight though...

David slides a DVD into the player. Previews from 10 years
ago begin to play.

DAVID
It's strictly past their prime
martial arts stars and disgusting
candy.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
I love you, brother.

David grabs Daniel and hugs him hard.

DAVID
You. are. the best. I love you too,
Daniel.

Fade to black.

Int. Daniel's Hospital Room. Day.

It's the next morning. David is asleep next to his brother's bed.

A nurse gently nudges David. She has a distressed expression.

DAVID
What?

The nurse slowly nods "no." David is shocked.

DAVID
WHAT?! Stop shaking your head and
tell me what's going on!

NURSE
I'm so sorry...

David stands up, and turns to Daniel. Daniel is dead. The hospital staff begin moving his body.

DAVID
Daniel?

DAVID
Daniel!?

David stands staring at Daniel's empty bed. He's hollow. Tears fall from his expressionless face.

DAVID
DANIEL.

12 THANKS

Ext. David's house. Night.

David sits in his truck with some soda he grabbed while driving around, thinking. The driveway is lit by a single lamp post near the house.

It's finally dawned on him that he's doing what he always does; pushing people in an effort to push away pain.

David takes a deep breath and opens the door. He slides out of his truck and walks down the loud gravel driveway. Halfway down the drive, he hears the front door of his house open. Rae carefully closes the screen door behind herself.

DAVID

What are you doing up?

Rae walks to a swing that's between she and David, just on the edge of the walkway.

Rae shrugs.

RAE

I heard your truck.

For about 10 seconds, David and Rae just sit on the swing in silence. They rock back and forth slowly.

RAE

Crappy night.

DAVID

Yeah, me too.

Beat.

DAVID

You're so young--It's not fair.

Beat.

DAVID

I wish I knew how to make things better for you and your sister. I guess I'm still sorting it all out myself.

The two of them swing in silence for a few minutes. Rae fidgets a little.

RAE

When mom died, It took a few weeks for dad to wake up without crying. He used to make fun of himself...it helped though--to know he missed her so much.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

If he hadn't had you guys...I don't know what he would've done.

Rae stares off at the sky, remembering.

RAE

For about a month, he'd sit in the rocking chair in my room. Beth would lay next to me and we'd all talk until we fell asleep. Usually he'd sleep there; in that stiff old chair. It must've been hard to go to bed alone. I don't think he knew where else to go. Really though...

13 WHAT HE DID

INT. Daniel's house--Rae's bedroom. Night.

RAE

(voiceover)

...I think he was taking care of us the only way he knew how...

Daniel rocks in an old rocking chair in Rae's room. Beth is asleep on Rae's shoulder in the bed. On Rae's nightstand, there's a picture of the whole family, including Sarah, her mother.

DANIEL

Is Beth asleep?

RAE

(smiling)

Yeah, she passed out when we stopped talking about princess movies.

Daniel smiles and then looks at Rae thoughtfully.

DANIEL

Are you guys okay?

RAE

Not really. We will be though, right?

DANIEL

I hope so. I keep thinking I'm past the worst of it, and then there's a sinkhole in the next breath.

RAE
God is so confusing.

DANIEL
He is.

RAE
Do you ever wonder why--why does He
let this stuff happen?

Rae looks at Daniel with tears in her eyes.

DANIEL
I know baby. None of us really know
how it all works.

RAE
I don't understand why he cares if
we're good--he can just ignore
someone like mom when she needs
him? How can he ask us to do
anything when he sits back and just
watches good people suffer?

Beat.

RAE
It's not fair.

Daniel listens for a second.

DANIEL
It's not fair--God's not
necessarily fair. He doesn't always
save us--he **usually** doesn't save
us.

RAE
If he loves us, isn't that part of
it? If you could protect me, you
would. He's GOD.

DANIEL
That's all I think about when I'm
alone. I want it all to be fair--to
make sense. What would it take
though, to make life fair? Even
without disease or disaster, what
about the terrible things **people**
do? No free will--Is that a God you
want?

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

This world can be terrible; that's not new. Some are born and their only choice is to suffer. It's easy to want God to be a genie. He's not about that though--he's a refuge. He's the sunset you experience once, and cherish for the rest of your life. Suffering and evil live in the moment; Things from God are permanent and perfect and just for you.

DANIEL

I had twelve years with your mom. I kissed my favorite lips, heard my favorite laugh, held my favorite hand for twelve years. We raised two baby girls together--How much of that did I earn? How long before it would have been fair?

Beat.

DANIEL

Life--this world is chaotic. We make smooth plans and live like they're promises. It's not unfair, it's just not enough.

Cut back to Rae and David on the swing.

RAE

He believed in you.

DAVID

I wish I did.

RAE

You know he asked us.

DAVID

...

RAE

He asked Beth and I who we wanted to be with. He didn't make us come here.

DAVID

I'm glad.

A few seconds pass. Rae looks down at her hands, remembering her dad.

RAE

He used to say I was like you.

DAVID

(laughs)

I'm sorry.

RAE

One day my friend, Lee, was eating his lunch at school, and a couple of guys started giving him a hard time. He hadn't done anything. There was no reason for them to pick on him. They did though. At first they just made fun of him. His hair. His clothes. Lee just kept eating. He never even raised his head. That made them really angry.

Beat.

RAE

I grabbed Lee by the arm and tried to leave the table. Lee stood up and politely said "excuse me," to the tallest guy. Kurt laughed and shoved Lee so hard he hit the chair and slid to the floor. He broke his tail bone. It hurt so bad he couldn't help but cry. Kurt dumped his tray on him, and laughed. He **laughed.**

Beat.

RAE

They tormented him for no reason at all. My heart was thumping so hard I couldn't feel my hands. I wanted to beat all three of them until **they** cried. Instead, I punched Kurt as hard as I could. I guess I caught him off guard; we both fell down. I was there on top of him and just started hitting and hitting and hitting...finally 65 year old Mrs. York pulled me off. She was so surprised when she saw it was me. I just started bawling. An hour or so later dad came to get me. I didn't want to see him, really. I knew he was going to yell and fuss about it
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RAE (cont'd)

all. He didn't. He hugged me and told the teachers he'd come back and talk to them tomorrow. He carried me to the car in his arms like I was a little girl, and sat me in the seat. He took me to get a soda, and we just sat in the car for a while. After a bit, he asked me what happened. I told him--still scared he'd be upset. He brushed my hair behind my ear and kissed my head. "I know you. I trust you. You need to make sure though, that what you do makes a difference, and doesn't just make **you** feel better. It's pretty rare that throwing a punch does that." he said. A few minutes passed, and he smirked and said "You're a lot David."

DAVID

I got in a lot of trouble growing up, that's for sure.

RAE

That's not what he meant. He knew I didn't hit Kurt for revenge. I did it because he broke my heart. Dad always believed in my heart, even when I did something stupid. Do you know why he wanted us with you?

DAVID

I don't know. Sometimes I think he sent you to take care of me.

RAE

You knew him so well. Why would you **ever** think that? He didn't send us here as favor to you. He did it because he believed in you. He knew you'd love us, teach us, protect us. No matter how bitter you are right now, you have to fight.

REA

This isn't the guy you want to be. Dad always said you were ferocious when it came to what you knew was right. He knew--You're a fighter. That's what you have to be now. You can't just wallow when your heart

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REA (cont'd)
is broken-You have to press through
and find a better way.

David looks more confused than ever.

DAVID
Saying that is easy. Deciding to be
better, is harder...maybe
impossible.

RAE
When Jesus was dying, he prayed the
people who tormented him would be
forgiven. They had just hammered
nails in his hands a few hours
before.

Beat.

RAE
We wreck ourselves with the grudges
we keep; against ourselves, God,
even the people that are gone. One
of my friends said I needed to "let
go." That's so stupid. I'll never
let go of mom or dad. I cry every
day...but I smile every day too.
They're a part of who I am, and
that's better than forgetting why
it hurts. The only part you have to
let go of is bitterness. It always
feels justified--it's just poison.

The two continue to swing. A few quiet seconds pass.

DAVID
I love you, Rae.

RAE
(smirking)
Yeah, you're okay.

Rae hugs her uncle around the neck.

DAVID
Why don't you take your dad's
place--at the poker game?

RAE
That's okay.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

I'm serious. You could hang with any of us.

RAE

Every other Friday night? Spent with three sweaty, moody, bratty, thirty-year-old men?

Beat.

RAE

I think I've been through enough, don't you?

The door to the house opens. Beth come stumbling toward the swing, half asleep.

DAVID

Babydoll, what are you doing up?

Beth just shrugs and keeps walking. She climbs up in David's lap and the three start to swing again. Beth closes her eyes and curls up to fall asleep.

BETH

You smell like daddy.

15 PARTING GIFTS

EXT. Spring Hill Funeral Home - Day

Rae sits alone next to Daniel's fresh grave.

David and Beth approach.

DAVID

Hey.

Rae doesn't move or speak. Beth runs over and wraps her arms around Rae. They're both upset. Rae lifts Beth into her lap. David sits down next to them. Karen is talking to family in the background. She occasionally sends over a concerned glance.

Sam puts his hand on David's shoulder. David stands and the two meet Zach a short distance away.

SAM

Both of the girls' rooms are done. Zach finished painting last night, and I unpacked and organized all

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)
their stuff this morning. We went
ahead and grabbed some groceries
too. Neither of us have ever
shopped for a family, so...

Sam digs in his coat pocket and produces a grocery gift
card.

DAVID
Are you serious? You guys must've
been up all night?

Sam hands the gift card to David.

SAM
We did our best, but I'm sure you
guys will need other stuff. This'll
fill the gaps.

DAVID
I don't know what to say, Sam.

SAM
Your brother was my best friend. I
wanted to pull off some grand
gesture before he
passed--everything happened so
fast. Maybe having a couple of
legitimate bedrooms will help Beth
and Rae settle in a little easier.

David hugs Sam. Zach pats David on the back and walks over
to the girls.

DAVID
Thank you.

SAM
Let me know what else you guys
need. I know life insurance can
take a while--If there's any way I
can help in the meantime...

Zach sits down next to Beth and Rae. He hands them two very
pretty flowers.

ZACH
They were the most beautiful of the
bunch. I read one time that if you
hang flowers upside down, they'll
dry really pretty.

(CONTINUED)

BETH

Thank you, Zack. Can we get one for
momma too?

Zach pulls holds up a purple flower.

ZACH

I got a purple one; wasn't purple
her favorite?

Rae hugs Zach around the neck.

ZACH

If you want, I can come by tomorrow
and take you guys to breakfast? I
know your dad always did that on
Saturday. I mean, I'm not trying
to--

RAE

(interrupting)

That would be great.

The three sit silently for a minute.

BETH

Can we visit mom's grave--and take
her flower?

Zach looks back at Beth's tiny face. He chokes up for a
second. David watches from a distance.

ZACH

Of course.

16

REDEAL

INT. Michaelangelo's Restaurant

Michaelangelo's is a rustic, charming Italian restaurant.
The lighting is dim except for lights at individual tables.

David, Daniel, Rae, Beth, & Karen sit around a table.
They're eating and laughing--except David.

DANIEL

I'm not sure why, but the nurse
didn't believe her. She'd press on
Sarah's stomach, and sort of nod.
She kept saying it would
pass...like Sarah was exaggerating.
I don't think I've ever seen Sarah
so frustrated.

Daniel pauses. He's remembering; cherishing the memory.

DANIEL

Anyway. It was like 12 hours after the c-section and they finally gave her...yunno...a stool softener. About an hour later, she popped awake and I helped her up and to the bathroom. I could've sworn it was like three seconds later she came out with this expression that was simultaneously guilty and relieved. She didn't say a word. I went in, and dear heavens it was the biggest I'd ever seen. It was so huge I was actually proud of her. All she could say was "I think it's stopped up..."

RAE

Oh, man...ew.

BETH

What was so big?

Daniel smiles at Beth and continues.

DANIEL

We buzzed the nurse station, and that same mean old lady came. She took one look in the bathroom and her whole demeanor changed. She moved us to a clean room and called the janitor. I think Sarah would have been humiliated if she hadn't felt so justified.

Rae slugs her dad on the arm. She has a disgusted look on her face.

RAE

Dad...you're so gross.

SAM

Do you realize how many of your stories have to do with poop? Good grief man.

ZACH

It's kind of a comedy gold mine.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

I don't think I've ever heard that one.

RAE

That's because mom would've killed him for telling it.

DAVID

I'm sorry brother.

Daniel looks over at David. David's having a hard time keeping it together.

Slowly, as David looks back at Daniel everyone else fades away.

DANIEL

It's okay. Rainbows don't last forever, right?

Daniel lingers a moment longer, and then disappears.

David sits alone at a large round table. It's present day. The table has a bread basket, three half empty glasses and a children's cup sitting on it.

Next to David, a picture frame is leaned against wall, image away from view.

EXT. Michaelangelo's Restaurant - Evening

Sam sits in a black sedan outside the restaurant. His hands grip the steeringwheel tightly as he glares at the front door. He's not sure he wants to go in. In the passenger side of his car is a note from David. "I'm a jerk" is scrawled in big letters.

Suddenly, a loud knock on his window interrupts his trance. It's Zach. He's laughing at the way Sam flinched. Behind him, Dani is rocking on her feet.

Zack slaps a note on Sam's window. It's similar to the one in Sam's passenger seat.

ZACH

(through the window)
I assume you got the memo?

Sam rolls his window down.

SAM
Why are we here?

ZACH
Massicists?

SAM
I'm serious. Yesterday I'd moved on
and written him off. Today...

SAM
It's not fair. I shouldn't want to
be here. He doesn't deserve it.

ZACH
What does he deserve, Sam?

Zach opens Sams door.

ZACH
Quit being such a baby.

Sam looks back at Zach with incredulity.

ZACH
Seriously. All the two of you ever
do is make dramatic moments more
dramatic. You're like actors in
self-absorbed little plays. What's
it going to be, Sam? Are you ready
for another lifelong grudge?

INT. Michaelangelo's

Karen and the girls make their way to the table David is
sitting at.

KAREN
Okay...mission potty time is
complete.

David half smiles.

KAREN
You know, they're probably still in
traffic. You know how Lebanon Pike
is after six.

DAVID
It's okay. I don't blame them.

Karen rubs David's back. David raises his eyes to see Sam,
David, & Dani entering the restaurant.

(CONTINUED)

Sam, Zach, and Dani approach table. David stands and humbly extends his hand toward Sam.

DAVID
Hi Sam, thanks.

Sam just glares at David. He's not "over it."

ZACH
It's okay, he's mad at me too.

RAE
Hi Sam! Hi Zach!

Sam smiles warmly and picks Beth up.

SAM
Hey blue eyes!

Everyone stands around awkwardly.

SAM
Why don't we all have a seat?

Everyone sits, but the tension continues.

BETH
Can I take off my shoes, aunt Karen?

KAREN
In the restaurant?

Beat.

KAREN
Sure. Why not.

Sam sits Beth on his lap, and takes off her shoes.

David sits quietly, hands folded passively.

SAM
There you go.

ZACH
So is this place fancy enough for your sphinct--

SAM
(interrupting)
Don't start that.

A server approaches the table.

SERVER

You guys know what you'd like to drink?

ZACH

That depends...are we here so David can ridicule us en masse, or...

SERVER

I'll just give you guys a few minutes.

David takes the barb, and clears his throat.

DAVID

I guess that's my cue.

David shuffles a bit and stands. He starts to talk--loses confidence, and then reaches into his jacket pocket. He pulls out folded piece of paper, takes an uncertain breath, and begins to read.

DAVID

I haven't drawn since Daniel died.

Beat.

DAVID

It used to be my favorite thing to do. I almost always did it with or because of Daniel. We'd talk, and the inspiration would bubble until I couldn't help but pick up a pencil. When we were little, we'd spend every rainy day laying belly down on pillows with our two dollar art pads sitting in front of us. We'd do that all day. Every time I do anything but write with a pencil, I expect him to be there next to me.

Beat.

DAVID

We used to watch martial arts movies on Friday night. We went to the comic shop every Wednesday. We rode to church together every Sunday.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

We talked each other through bullies and girlfriends and doubts. We prayed together. We understood each other. We believed in each other. Every big thing that happened to one of us; happened to the other. Every memory I have--his footprints are there. I've spent the last six months with a hole in every part of me. It aches more than I ever imagined anything could.

Beat.

DAVID

In the middle of all this, I wake up every day and make breakfast for someone who has the sweetest brown eyes and real, earned wisdom.

David turns to Rae.

DAVID

I brush the teeth of an infectious little smile on a sincere little girl.

Turns to Beth.

DAVID

I talk movies with a man who has a tremendous heart--a courageous heart that only fights when it's the last right thing.

Turns to Zach.

DAVID

I argue with a guy that's every bit as stubborn as I am. A creative guy that I don't believe in enough.

Turns to Sam.

DAVID

...and I go home to the only person left that completely understands me.

Stares at Karen.

DAVID

Everywhere I look, Daniel looks back. In the past, when things hurt me, I'd push them or run away. It's just easier to erase the mess than sort it out.

Beat.

DAVID

I can't do that. I won't do that. In the end, there's no amount of pain that's worth forgetting my brother or losing any of you. Right now It feels as if every second I'm sorting through a stack of pictures I don't want to look at...It's funny how bitterness and anger can make a box of your favorite things torment.

David folds the paper and puts it back in his pocket.

DAVID

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for breaking my word. I'm sorry for pushing you all away, and beating you into submission. I'm sorry I ever resented the memory of Daniel. It's all wrong. It's all a lie I've been telling myself so I wouldn't have to accept something so painful. The worst part is, I promised him something better...

DAVID

Last night I started drawing again. Daniel wasn't there...but he was. I just wanted to draw something to remember him by; something that would make him smile and help me remember how lucky I am to still have him in all the ways and people I still have him.

David picks up the frame he had sitting next to him. It's a drawing of Rae, Beth, Karen, Sam, & Zach.

David looks at Sam and Zach.

DAVID

We're friends. We always have been; not because we're

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (cont'd)
compatible...Daniel and I weren't
compatible. We're friends-we're
family because life has been great
and life has been awful...and there
you are...even when I'm not.

DAVID
I'm sorry.

17 SMOOTH PLANS

INT. David & Daniel's Parents' house - Fifteen years ago.

It's fifteen years earlier. The guys are sitting in David & Daniel's parents' basement. Wood paneling covers the walls and terrible carpet covers the floors.

The guys are sitting around an old coffee table, getting ready to play poker. The same snacks they always have are all around them. An old tube television has a random bit of 90s television playing on it. Daniel shuffles the cards.

DANIEL
Okay, so a small blind is half the
size of the big blind?

ZACH
Right. The player to the left is
small blind, and the next left
player is big blind.

David uncomfortably fidgets with his jacket while Daniel and Zach talk.

ZACH
We could play 3 man until Sam gets
here if you want.

David stands up. He's looking for an excuse to leave.

DAVID
I'm just gonna go. I need to talk
to Joe anyway...

DANIEL
We'll have fun, I promise.

David fumbles around trying to figure out how to say he doesn't want to be there.

DAVID

I just don't think I'm ready to
dive right in, yunno?

ZACH

Sam'll be here in just a few
minutes. Seriously.

DANIEL

Just stay. We all want you here,
man.

DAVID

I don't even know if Mom and Dad
want me here.

DANIEL

Please.

David smiles at Daniel and relents.

DAVID

Yeah, of course.

DANIEL

Great! If you'll go grab the root
beer, we'll set the table up.

DAVID

Gotcha.

David walks upstairs. He opens the door, and his mom (David
& Daniel's mom) stands in the kitchen. She's an older woman
in her late 60s.

She and David exchange a tense gaze for a minute. DOROTHY
grabs David and hugs him tight around the neck. She holds
him for a minute.

DAVID

Hey mom.

Dorothy grabs her son around the neck and hugs him hard.

DOROTHY

Don't ever do that again.

DAVID

I'm sorry...I just didn't know what
to say.

(CONTINUED)

DOROTHY

You don't always have to know what
to say, David. But if you ever
disappear like that again...

Dorothy presents a very stern look. She means business.

DOROTHY

I mean it. Don't you ever do that
to me again.

David starts to fall apart a little.

DAVID

I wrecked everything. I just
thought you all hated me.

Dorothy lightly slaps David on the chest.

DOROTHY

Don't you dare say that. You know
better than that.

Dorothy holds her son again.

DOROTHY

Listen to me, and listen good...

DOROTHY

Your father and you may never see
eye to eye. I don't see eye to eye
with either one of you. That
doesn't have anything to do with us
loving you

DOROTHY

Did you make a bad decision?

DAVID

Yes.

DOROTHY

Was it selfish and short-sighted?

DAVID

Yes.

DOROTHY

Did you hurt the people you love?

DAVID

Yes.

DOROTHY

So have we all. Do you think you're the only one--or you've done anything that hasn't been done before? You should ask me about your great grandfather sometime.

DOROTHY

You're going to have to learn how to handle people being angry, disappointed, and confused by you. It's not the end of the world, it's just part of life. We're all a wreck in our own way. Jesus didn't come because we're all doing fine. That being said, you need to extend the same grace to the rest of us. We don't just love you, son. Do you know what it's like to have the baby you tickled and cried and prayed over just disappear? It feels like a curse. You can't stop thinking about them. The idea that being away from you gives them peace is just awful.

DOROTHY

I'd rather just fight.

David stares at the floor. Dorothy lifts his face.

DOROTHY

I love you, David.

Dorothy pulls David to her arms length and looks him dead in the eye.

DOROTHY

I mean it. Never again.

David nods silently.

DOROTHY

Say it.

David laughs dismissively.

DOROTHY

I mean it. Say it.

DAVID

I won't leave again.

(CONTINUED)

Dorothy smiles and caresses David's cheek. She turns to finish cleaning dishes.

DOROTHY
He'd never tell you, but you just
about broke your brother's heart.

DAVID
Is he okay? He seems...different?

DOROTHY
He is. He needs to explain it all
to you himself; It's not really for
me to tell you.

DAVID
Great. That's not ominous.

DOROTHY
Oh, it's not like that. It's good
news--It's just...complicated.

Dorothy looks straight in David's eyes. She smiles in a way that breaks your heart.

DOROTHY
I'm so glad you're here.

DAVID
Thanks, mom. Me too.

David grabs the rootbeer and heads downstairs.

DAVID
Actually, it was Zach that found
me.

Cut to later that same night. It's 10:49pm. Sam sits with a pile of nickels in front of him. He's decimated everyone else. Zach looks gobsmailed.

ZACH
How do you do that?

SAM
What?

ZACH
Your first game, man. You suck so
much.

DANIEL
That was fun. A lesson in opposing
Sam in any way, shape, or
form...but still fun.

DAVID
(smiling)
Yeah, it really was. Who knew Zach
was such a terrible liar.

David nudges Zach with his elbow.

SAM
Obviously I had fun. I'll be
rolling my mighty nickel mountain
for at least the next twenty
minutes.

DAVID
Why don't we play every week or so?

Daniel smiles optimistically.

DANIEL
Yeah, that **would** be great!

The guys start packing their stuff, getting ready to head to
their prospective homes. David puts his hand on Zach's
shoulder. Zack is fiddling with the deck.

DAVID
Thank you.

ZACH
Yeah, man. Three man poker's no
fun.

Zach has what he considers a brilliant idea, gets a goofy
grin, and stops everyone. He holds up the Jack of Diamonds.

ZACH
We should all pick a card, and
that'll be YOUR card. It'd be like
our poker identities!

Beat.

ZACH
I'll be the Jack of Spades...I've
always loved that card. The Jack
looks awesome. Plus "Jack of
Spades" sounds like a superhero
name.

(CONTINUED)

Daniel and Sam sort of roll their eyes and smile condescendingly.

DAVID
Seven of hearts. Seven's just a
tough number...and I hear I can be
a hair emotional.

Daniel and Sam stop smirking. They're surprised.

SAM
Five of diamonds. Because I'm even
tempered; and I'm seriously
considering a future in wealth.

DANIEL
We are such dorks.

Zach grins.

ZACH
You've been outnumbered, son. Pick
a card.

DANIEL
I'll have to think about it. Such a
big decision shouldn't be made
lightly.

Zach nods disapprovingly at Daniel.

ZACH
You don't make peer pressure easy,
you know that?

Zach and Sam head to the door.

SAM
See you guys around!

ZACH
Yeah, next Friday at the latest,
right?

DAVID
Sure thing, Jack.

David and Daniel start to clean up the mess left behind. At first they're silent.

DANIEL
It's really good to have you back.

David smiles appreciatively.

DANIEL
I still don't agree with everything
you did.

DAVID
I know. Neither do I.

Daniel stops and stands up.

DANIEL
Some of the things you said to me
still hurt. It didn't feel like we
disagreed--It felt like you wanted
to hurt me.

DAVID
You're right, and I did.

DANIEL
You wanted to hurt me?

DAVID
At the time, yeah. I didn't even
know that's what I wanted. I just
felt cornered. You didn't respect
me. You talked down to me; that
made me angry.

DANIEL
You think I wanted to fight? I just
wanted you to get away from her.
She was cruel. She made you cruel.

DAVID
She didn't do that. I don't need
help hurting people. I'm kind of a
natural.

Daniel is frustrated by the answer. He angrily shoves trash
into a bag.

DANIEL
So you just cut us all off?

DAVID
It wasn't like that.

DANIEL
Yes it was! I was on this side of
things. You wouldn't answer the
phone. You didn't tell anyone where
you went or why. It felt like you
just made a decision for everyone
involved.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

I did.

DANIEL

It's not what we wanted! You don't get to do that to family. You don't get to just tell me I can't fight with you. You can't just decide for me that you won't be there...

Beat.

DANIEL

You abandoned me.

DAVID

I wish I hadn't. I don't know how to make it better.

David sits down on the couch.

DAVID

Growing up with you, I always thought certain things were unbreakable. I thought you and I were in fixed positions. I was the older, adventurous brother. You were the younger, innocent brother. I'd always protect you, and you'd always admire me. My whole life I've had people make judgment calls about me. Friends and family just assume I'm a messed up twenty-something that can't balance a check book or keep down a job--Not you. You always thought I could do any of it--that life just wouldn't give me a chance. You adored me...and then you didn't. For the first time you questioned me and not in a quiet little brother sort of way. You were honest; brutally so. I was alone. I felt pathetic.

DANIEL

You know that's not what I was thinking.

DAVID

It didn't matter, the whole thing hurt me in a way I've never felt before. I just wanted everyone to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (cont'd)
understand how little I needed
their smug opinions; My judgmental
brother most of all. Almost this
whole time I've been so angry at
you. I couldn't understand how **you**
could abandon **me**. A couple of weeks
ago, Zach came into Garrett's and
it was like a flashlight in the
middle of the night. He didn't say
anything especially
powerful...really it was one thing.
"Daniel needs you."

Beat.

DAVID
I'm sorry. I can't tell you how
sorry I am. I don't agree with you
on everything either. I don't
understand you sometimes. Sometimes
you make me angry. That's not who
you are though. This isn't who we
are. You're my brother.

Beat.

DAVID
I don't ever want to be without you
again. I'm sorry Daniel.

Daniel continues packing trash into the bag. David stops him
with a hand on his shoulder.

He looks directly at Daniel; making a vow.

DAVID
No matter what else happens, I'm
never leaving again. You're stuck
with me--we're going to be old men
together.

18 BIG BLIND

Ext. City Cemetery - Near Daniel's plot. Evening.

David walks through the cemetery quietly. He's carrying his
jacket in his hand.

David bends down and sweeps Daniel's headstone clean. He
leans back and sort of falls into a seated position. He
starts to cry and takes a deep breath to reel it in.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Beth prays for you before she falls asleep. I was walking back to her room with some water and heard her. She asks Jesus to give you a squeeze and let you know she loves and misses you.

David takes a breath and smiles to himself.

DAVID

Talking to Rae is a lot like talking to you. She's a smart kid--maybe even smarter than you. She still hurts a lot, but she's got her head on straight.

David pulls out two pictures of Daniel and he as kids. He kisses one and leans it on the headstone. He slides the other into his coat pocket.

DAVID

I apologized to everyone. It was difficult, but I meant it. They were all very gracious.

David places a bag of corn candy next to the photo.

DAVID

Sam could have been a little more gracious...

David pulls out a playing card and just stares at it.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

19 INT. DAVID & DANIEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.

Cut back to David & Daniel's conversation from when they were younger.

DAVID

No matter what else happens, I'm never leaving again. You're stuck with me--we're going to be old men together.

Daniel hugs David and walks over to the table where the playing cards sit.

DANIEL

Want to know the card I pick?

David seems a little apprehensive.

DAVID

Okay...

DANIEL

Did you know diamonds were originally acorns? Parisian card-makers changed the suit when they realized how popular the cards were with royalty. So the diamond, is actually a plain old acorn in disguise. It's kind of poetic if you ask me. People love diamonds because they sparkle...Acorns are pure, beautiful potential. They hold an entire oak tree wrapped in a tiny, unassuming nut. An oak tree. There's nothing more beautiful or humbling to me than a million leaves rustling in a breeze. There's just something genuine and sweet and calm about an old oak tree. There's poetry in a diamond too, I guess--It's just not the same.

Daniel sifts through the card deck, looking for a specific card.

DANIEL

We're not the sort this world notices. We'll live and die and only the people around us will know who we were...but the people around us will know who we were.

Daniel looks David in the eye.

DANIEL

You're impossible sometimes. You're stubborn, angry, and vicious. You've hurt me more and deeper than anyone I've ever known. You're also honest. You're strong. You're loyal, ferocious, and ambitious. You'll never quite be what this world wants, but that doesn't mean what you are isn't enough. We're brothers for a reason. If we have

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (cont'd)
to fight, we'll fight; and when
it's time to laugh we'll laugh
harder than anyone else. I know
you, David. There are things about
you I don't like; things I don't
understand. You really think that
means I don't respect you--I don't
want you around?

Beat.

DAVID
I don't love you because you
sparkle.

Daniel lets go. His posture release any performance or
pretense it held. If he could show David his heart, he
would.

DANIEL
I love you.

Daniel hands David a two of diamonds.

END FLASHBACK:

David looks down at the two of diamonds for a moment
and puts it back in his wallet.

20 LAST HAND

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - EVENING.

Sam and David's cars are all the driveway. Zach pulls in,
Dani is in the passenger side.

INT. David's house. Kitchen.

The microwave display's 6:00pm in David's kitchen. The poker
table is all set up and everyone is hanging out. It's a much
different vibe than the first game at David's house. Sam is
arranging the deck by suits. David is doing dishes.

DAVID
Sorry, man...I didn't realize how
late it was. I meant to have the
dishes done before you guys got
here.

SAM

I think assuming I'd be late is a safe enough gamble.

DAVID

Thanks--for being early.

SAM

It's only a fresh start if it's different, right?

David dries his hands and looks at Sam directly.

DAVID

It will be.

David opens the door. Zach and Dani enter.

DAVID

Hey man, thanks for coming...I appreciate you giving it another try.

ZACH

Yeah, man...we all act like jerks...I mean not to that level--but still.

David smirks and hands a small present to Dani.

DAVID

Hey, this is for you.

Dani looks at David, confused. She unwraps the box; inside is a small framed drawing of a dog. Dani smiles really big.

DANI

Holy crap! It's my dog!

DAVID

Sam said you just had a birthday...I figured I kind of owed you an extra apology...yunno...for the whole "tinkerbelle" thing.

Dani side hugs David.

DANI

It's really sweet, thank you.

Dani and David join the table where Sam and Zach are already bantering.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

Like I was saying; they're dumb books. I can't help it--they're fun.

DAVID

What? The twilight movies?

Dani elbows Zach. They've had this discussion before.

DANI

You told them?!

ZACH

Ow!

SAM

I wouldn't say they're dumb, they're just...fluffy.

ZACH

I don't know man, "Here There Be Dragons" was legitimately good. I thought it was up there with some of the best TNG episodes.

DANI

What in the world are you people talking about?

ZACH

I think a thorough explanation is the only thing that could make this conversation geekier.

Dani looks at the cards with a confused expression.

DANI

We're missing a card.

ZACH

Really? Which one?

David smiles, but it's more a knowing grin.

DAVID

Two of diamonds. It's been missing a while.

ZACH

Oh...maybe we should change decks?

DANI
I brought a new deck if you guys
need it...How'd you know which card
was missing?

David opens his wallet and pulls out the card. It's tattered
and bent. He slides it carefully to the center of the table.

SAM
Daniel's card.

David starts to laugh.

DAVID
Ten years.

Sam cautiously wonders...

SAM
What's so funny?

DAVID
We've been playing ten years with a
short deck. I knew the whole time
and never said anything.

ZACH
Wow. That's kind of neat.

Everyone sits around the table quietly for a moment.

DANI
I say we keep this deck.

SAM
This might be nosey...

DAVID
(smirking)
It always is.

SAM
Did Daniel's check ever show up?

David knods.

DAVID
Yeah. It's weird to feel so
relieved and so guilty all at once.

Sam deals the cards. Beth wanders into the kitchen dressed
in her pajamas.

(CONTINUED)

BETH

Can I have a snack?

DAVID

Sure, baby.

David grabs some goldfish and a juice box. He sits them on the table, and Beth climbs in his lap; as she does, she knocks David's cards and drink onto the floor along with her snack and juice.

The cards should mirror an earlier moment when David stormed out of Daniel's hospital room. Same cards, arranged in the same way. Beth starts to panic.

BETH

I'm sorry, David.

DAVID

Baby, calm down. It's a mess, but we can clean it up...

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

21 BEAUTY FROM ASHES

INT. DAVID & DANIEL'S PARENTS HOUSE - FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.

Continuing the flashback from SCENE 18.

David & Daniel sit together in their parent's basement after the poker game. They're both drawing ThunderMax, a character of their creation.

DAVID

Are you sure about the goggles? Why would an invincible guy need goggles?

DANIEL

I dunno...I kind of love them. Can we give him a sci fi story? I love those old science fiction epics; Dune, John Carter...maybe mix it with Superman?

DAVID

That sounds cool...he could be an alien? His dad could be kind of a refugee hiding his son on earth...I think we should each get a "veto". Yunno, say one of us thought a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (cont'd)
particular piece of eye wear were
ridiculous looking?

DANIEL
Oh man, it could be so cool when
the alien race shows up to find
him; he'd have to figure out his
powers in the middle of this crazy
alien invasion...Sure, one veto
each sounds fair...I preemptively
veto your veto of the goggles.

DAVID
...touché. I veto the ponytail.

The two stare at each other in disagreement. It's not a big
enough deal to dwell on, so they don't.

DAVID
So mom said something big was going
on with you.

Daniel doesn't look up. He continues sketching, but it's
obvious he's thinking.

DANIEL
I'm going to be a dad.

DAVID
Are you serious?

DANIEL
Yeah. Terry and I.

Guilt covers his face. He's not sure what else to say.

DAVID
Terry. Why in the world would you
risk that with Terry of all people?

DANIEL
Yeah. I really screwed up this
time. She's the last girl on earth
I should have a baby with...

Beat.

DANIEL
That poor baby.

Daniel gets upset at the idea of sharing a baby with someone
he doesn't believe in. His whole posture is regret.

(CONTINUED)

David's face goes from shock to certainty.

DAVID

Hey.

Daniel looks up. As David speaks, his posture is compassionate, despite his words being very direct.

DAVID

Don't do that. You can beat yourself up. You can regret the whole damn mess--and it is a big damn mess. Cry, scream, wallow--whatever you need to do, do it now and get it out the way. Soon, you'll have a baby that'll need that giant Daniel heart.

David puts his hand on Daniel's shoulder. Daniel looks awful.

DAVID

I'm here to help, whatever it takes. Garrett's been offering me a job for two months. If we have to work like dogs and take turns like an old married couple, that's exactly what we'll do. It'll be tough, no doubt about it. In the middle of all the crap though, you'll have this sweet little ray of light.

DAVID

You know I understand. Honestly, it all sounds like something I would do. I know it's tough, and I know you want to guilt yourself out of joy; you can't. All the stress, all the bills, all the frustration, failure and pain...what is that compared to the chance to hold your **baby**? The world has a funny way of turning beautiful things into problems we have to hurdle. Yeah, you should've waited for a wife, or at least a decent woman. What are going to do now, though? This kid is a sunset, brother. All the pain you feel right now, no matter how chaotic it is, you can't forget that beautiful baby will be at the end of it all. All the guilt and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

83.

DAVID (cont'd)
hard choices are temporary. Being
that kid's dad? No matter how it
turns out--it's a gift from God.
Things from God are permanent,
perfect, and just for you. I'm here
man. Good, bad, whatever. I'll
always be here.

David hugs Daniel.

END FLASHBACK.

FADE TO BLACK.