

BETHESDA FRIENDS AND LOVERS

PILOT

Written by

Elliot Connors

05/01/2023

elliottconnors.com
elliottnadeauconnors@gmail.com
(203) 299-7018

ACT 1

INT. BFL CLASSROOM, NIGHT

A boisterous PTA meeting. Chaos, crossfire, parents frothing at the mouth. At the center of it all, HEADMASTER MARK (51, slovenly yet exuberant), the founder of Bethesda Friends and Lovers, an alternative private school twenty-three minutes from our nation's Capitol.

MARK

I really didn't mean for this to get political.

Behind him, a chalkboard: "Agenda: 1. Welcome Back! 2. Homecoming Dance Planning, 3. School Shooter Awareness Week."

LIBERAL MOM

Of course it's political. It's our kids' *reproductive rights*.

PRAGMATIC DAD

Reproductive rights-- Christ, we're talking about a few rubbers in a punch bowl--

BRIAN'S MOM

For the last time, *no rubber*. Brian's allergic to latex.

SNARKY MOM

Like Brian'll need a condom.

BRIAN'S MOM

(earnest)

What's that supposed to mean?

GRANDFATHER

(in wheelchair)

The kid can borrow some of my lambskins. People say they expire, but I've never heard any complaints.

LIBERAL MOM

Natural condoms don't stop STD's.

GRANDFATHER

(beat, then)

Ok, so I've heard a *few* complaints...

PRAGMATIC DAD

Let's be real, if and when that kid shoots his load, we're going to need something a whole lot tougher than lambskin--

CONSERVATIVE MOM

For the love of-- Can we *please* stop talking about our children's genitals?

LIBERAL MOM

Oh so *now* you want to stop talking about children's genitals...

PRAGMATIC DAD

Kevlar maybe, but not lambskin. The boy's going to fire like a pistol.

LIBERAL MOM

(to Conservative Mom)

...yet when it came to all-gender bathrooms, someone couldn't wait to talk about our kids' genitals...

SNARKY MOM

(to Pragmatic Dad, about Brian's Mom)

It doesn't help that little miss thing here is always fluffing him.

BRIAN'S MOM

What's *that* supposed to mean?

CONSERVATIVE MOM

(to Liberal Mom)

Don't make me sound like a pervert. All I wanted were a few cameras in there so I could get a good look...so we could get a good look--

SNARKY MOM

(mocking Brian's Mom)

"Who's mommy's handsome boy? Who's mommy's handsome, *engorged* little boy?"

MARK

Can I say something please? As an educator?

(off sudden, unexpected quiet)

I've had success recently with a brand "ribbed for her pleasure"--

Room erupts again.

CONSERVATIVE MOM
God help us.

GRANDFATHER
Her pleasure? What's that got to do with anything.

MARK
Success in a loose sense. My partner has yet to climax, but the ribbing has restricted blood flow to my penis in a way that's...prolonged the experience.

GRANDFATHER
Christ, what ever happened to a good old-fashioned hand jibber in the restroom?

TREASURER
I just ran the numbers. "Ribbed for her pleasure" is going to put us over budget.

LIBERAL MOM
If we penny-pinch, they're just going to go bareback.

CONSERVATIVE MOM
For the love of-- we're a *P.T.A.*, not a Planned Parenthood.

GRANDFATHER
Especially with these wheelchair stalls they've got now. Like a G.D. hotel room in there.

CONSERVATIVE MOM
Why not bring in some strippers while we're at it. Teach the kids how to snort Plan B off their--

GRANDFATHER
One hand on my member, the other on the grab bar, holding on for dear life...

CONSERVATIVE MOM
I mean seriously, what's next? Abortions at the coat check?

Room suddenly goes silent. Awkward fidgeting.

CONSERVATIVE MOM (CONT'D)
(trying to explain)
I just meant...because of the
hangers...

Our protagonists, BECCA SKILLINGS (39, stern, business casual) and her husband HENRY FOSTER (38, scruffy, socks and sandals) look on, shellshocked. Becca leans over to Henry.

BECCA
(speechless, whispered)
I think-- I think I want to leave.

Mark whips around and looks at her. Parents' eyes follow.

MARK
What was that?

BECCA
Sorry?

MARK
(sly)
You'll find that Bethesda is no
place for secrets, young lady.
(off Becca's confused
look, to room)
Ladies and gentleman, we have a new
family joining us this year. Becca
and Henry Foster. Their daughter
Alex will be starting with us
tomorrow as a sophomore.

Tight smile from Becca. Halfhearted, ironic salute from Henry. Murmuring amongst parents.

MARK (CONT'D)
Now I know it's unusual for a
student to join us midway through
their educational journey. And at
such a hormonally fraught age, no
less...
(beat, off weird looks)
But Becca's mother and I go way
back. Way back. In fact, she was my
high school reading teacher. The
educator that made me want to
become an educator, just as my own
hormonal fruits were beginning to
ripen.

HENRY
(whispered to Becca)
Did he say "high school reading?"

MARK

So when Becca's mother asked me to educate her granddaughter, I was reminded of why I founded BFL in the first place. In the year of our lord 2008. After I'd lost everything: my *job*. My *house*. My *pension at Lehman*...

TREASURER

(to Pragmatic Dad)
He worked at Lehman?

MARK

I founded BFL because when I looked around Washington for a school to send my children to--

SNARKY MOM (O.S.)

You don't have children.

MARK

-- to send my hypothetical children to, I couldn't find a single non-denominational institution grounded in the Quaker values that made me the man I am today. An institution where Friends -- in the Quaker sense -- could become friends in the secular sense, and friends in the *secular* sense could become *lovers* in the *sexual* sense.

Taps the Bethesda Friends and Lovers crest pinned to his blazer, over his heart. A snake coiled around a ribcage.

MARK (CONT'D)

But look at us now. Felled by the very divisions we'd hoped to transcend. By a culture that pits religion against rationality. And God against His *children*.

BECCA

(whispered to Henry)
I don't get it, is it religious or is it not religious--

MARK

-- such that once again, I find myself praying for a messiah to return and bring us all together --

An Audi lock chirps outside the window and the room suddenly falls dead silent. The slow click of heels on asphalt, then on linoleum, like a clock ticking. Parents look down, hands folded over their laps, totally silent. Becca and Henry look around confused. As heels continue to click, Becca has a split-second intrusive thought:

INT. CHICKEN COOP, NIGHT, FLASHBACK

The dark interior of a chicken coop. Chickens and roosters totally still, silent. A silhouetted man in the doorway, a rooster tether dangling from his hand. Clicking stops.

INT. BFL CLASSROOM, NIGHT

With a blink, Becca returns to the present, only to find, in the doorway of the classroom: JACQUELINE NOVAK (53, regal, severe, think Cate Blanchett). Big, ominous smile.

JACQUELINE

What did I miss?

Beat. Then, the crowd goes wild. They're ravenous for her. Haven't seen her all summer. Hugging amongst the women. Mark rolls his eyes. Becca examines her, intrigued.

Jacqueline's husband, THIERRY NADEAU (37, French, stunning) is greeted similarly by the men, who dab him up. Henry examines him, intrigued.

MARK

Jacqueline. Finally. How nice of our *president* to make an appearance.

JACQUELINE

(amidst greetings)

Always the martyr, Mark. But I'm sure you managed fine without me.

MARK

Actually, we've reached something of an impasse, vis à vis condoms at homecoming.

JACQUELINE

I thought you were still shooting blanks?

Parents snicker. Mark goes completely red.

MARK
Shooting blanks--

JACQUELINE
Have a sense of humor, Mark.
(coy)
As for the kids, I thought we had a
way of settling these things...

Parents look at each other: "Why not?" Mark realizes...

MARK
Oh please, not again--

Cut to Liberal and Conservative Moms locked in a vicious arm
wrestle. Parents going crazy. Liberal mom triumphs. Factions
erupt in cheers, sighs of defeat. Jacqueline revels in the
chaos.

JACQUELINE
Condoms it is.

Parents go back to chatting, catching up about their summers.

MARK
(trying to corral them)
Wait-- We haven't even talked about
School Shooter Awareness Week!
(off no reaction, louder)
Or the *Marissa Tomé vigil* tomorrow--

No one hears him except Jacqueline, who gives him a look:
"Really?". He returns it: "Really." The two of them know
something everyone else doesn't. Becca registers this.
Meanwhile, Henry is self-consciously transfixed by Thierry,
holding court amongst the men.

INT. BFL BATHROOM, NIGHT

Becca barges into the bathroom, throwing open the doors.
Rounds the corner fast but stops in her tracks when she finds
Jacqueline washing her hands. Close up: they're covered in
tiny cuts, invisible from afar.

BECCA
Sorry--
(double take)
I thought this was a family stall--

JACQUELINE
All-gender.
(looks at her, smiles)
The more the merrier.

BECCA
 (awkward, lying)
 I just-- need to wash my hands.

JACQUELINE
 Say no more. I always feel filthy
 after those things.

Jacqueline turns off the sink and goes to dry her hands as Becca assumes the vanity and starts vigorously washing her hands, almost pantomiming.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)
 (off Becca's silence)
 It's a lost art, isn't it?

BECCA
 What's that?

JACQUELINE
 The girls' trip to the bathroom.
 Now they just come in here to vape.

BECCA
 (nervous chuckle)
 Tell me about it.

Jacqueline realizes Becca doesn't want to talk. Smiles and leaves. As soon as she's gone, Becca turns off the faucet. Stares at herself in the mirror. Brings a vape to her lips without breaking eye contact. Long, desperate pull.

Then, the sound of a flush. Becca holds her breath. Grandfather wheels out of the handicapped stall, buttoning up his pants. Leaves without washing his hands. Becca watches him go, concerned. Then, looks at herself in the mirror again, still holding her breath, into...

INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, NIGHT

Becca in pajamas now, sitting on the windowsill of the ensuite bathroom, profile in the mirror. Long exhale of smoke out the window. She looks at a massive white pagoda tree blooming in the distance, ethereal in the dark.

HENRY (O.S.)
 It's hard for me to see you like
 this....

He's in glasses, in bed, peering over a copy of Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*. Henry will often be seen reading; it will always be *Freedom*. Henry will never finish *Freedom*.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Especially as I'm beginning my own
journey with sobriety...

BECCA
(turning to look at him)
Your what?

HENRY
I haven't smoked since we got here.

BECCA
Since when do you smoke?

HENRY
Since when do I smoke-- Becca,
we've talked about this. Ever since
Alex started puberty...

BECCA
Are you talking about weed?
(shakes head, hits vape)
And you've got to stop attributing
your, fucking, midlife crisis to
our daughter starting puberty.

HENRY
You wouldn't understand. It's the
plight of a stay-at-home parent.

BECCA
Enlighten me.

HENRY
One day she's daddy's little girl,
the next she's out for scalps--

Becca shoots daggers, stopping him cold. Intrusive thought:

EXT. NEW YORK SOCCER FIELD, DAY, FLASHBACK

Silent. Henry and Becca on the sideline, cheering. Then their
faces fall. They've just seen something horrifying.

INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, NIGHT

Becca blinks, softens, hits the vape. Stares at the pagoda.

BECCA
I fucking hate it here.

HENRY

It's not so bad. It's quaint.

BECCA

Of course, it's quaint. Everyone's lobotomized.

HENRY

You said the same about New York.

BECCA

I said everyone in New York *needs* a lobotomy.

HENRY

Can't have it both ways, can you...

More silence, more vaping.

HENRY (CONT'D)

This'll be good for us. A fresh start. You'll find a new job, and I'll--

(beat)

I'll find something that gets me out of bed in the morning.

BECCA

Like a job?

HENRY

No. Not a job...

(beat, pondering)

Something just for me.

BECCA

Maybe we should ask your parents for more money.

HENRY

Money's the least of our problems. We're poor in *purpose*.

BECCA

(under her breath)

Easy for you to say. You're not the one living with your mother.

JANE (O.S)

What's that supposed to mean?

Becca's mother JANE SKILLINGS (76, old yet cherubic) stands silhouetted in the threshold of their bedroom. A startled Becca throws her vape out the window.

BECCA
Jesus Christ, Mom, how long have
you been there?

JANE
Since Henry started getting riled
up about Alex's womanhood.

HENRY
Please don't say her "womanhood."

Becca frantically brushes her teeth to guise what she was
doing in the bathroom.

JANE
How was the PTA meeting?

HENRY
Entertaining. In a bloodsport kind
of way.

Becca steps out of the bathroom, still gargling mouthwash.

BECCA
What's with the principal?

JANE
Don't worry. He's all bark, no
bite.
(sigh)
I should know. I'm fucking him.

Becca spittakes her mouthwash, choking on it.

JANE (CONT'D)
What? You don't have to call him
Daddy or anything...

HENRY
So you're the one getting ribbed
for her pleasure...

JANE
(coyly)
Like *Eve*.

BECCA
I'm going to vomit.

HENRY
Weren't you his teacher?

JANE
Kinky, right?

BECCA

Him?

JANE

(defensive)

He's running for City Council.

BECCA

Lucky us.

JANE

I'm glad you think so. I told him
you'd be his campaign manager.

BECCA

(long silence, processing)

I'm sorry?

JANE

You said you wanted another job in
politics...

BECCA

Another job in politics-- Mom, I
was running a *gubernatorial*
campaign...

HENRY

Operative word "was."

Becca shoots daggers at him.

JANE

You have to start somewhere.

BECCA

(losing her cool)

Start somewhere-- Christ, Mom, I
did *start somewhere*. I started
here, and then I left, because I
was *fucking successful*. Despite
everything I had to deal with, I
made it out, only for that little
shit to blow it all up again--

Jane and Henry look at her with pity as she recomposes. Close
up on Becca's fingers, powerful, cracking knuckles one-handed
to calm down. Cracks her neck and takes a deep breath.

BECCA (CONT'D)

(resigned)

How much does it pay?

JANE
\$50K a semester.

BECCA
A semester?

JANE
Alex's tuition. Why else would Mark
have given her a scholarship?

BECCA
Jesus-- I thought that's where the
"you *fucking him*" came in.

JANE
Oh come on, Rebecca. What do I look
like? Some kind of slut?

Henry and Becca just stare at her in her nightgown.

JANE (CONT'D)
He wants to meet with you tomorrow.
Get the juices flowing.

HENRY
Are we sure he was talking about
Becca?

BECCA
Can't we just send her to Bethesda
High? I turned out fine.

JANE
Did you?
(off Becca's look)
Besides, the last thing that girl
needs is more public schooling.

HENRY
Can we-- can we keep it down?
(nervous, ominous)
We all know how she gets without
her sleep.

They're all silent, still, afraid, considering this, as the
ominous drum patter of Mingus's "Solo Dancer" plays into...

EXT. JANE'S FRONT YARD, MORNING

A modest 2-story colonial. On the right, a garage door rises
slowly, ominously, revealing a pair of gangly legs, then a
gangly torso. Right as we're about to see a face, cut to...

EXT. BACKROADS, MORNING

A close shot of those legs pedaling a bike to Mingus's beat. Another close shot of some powerful-looking fingers curling one by one, ominously, around a handlebar...

EXT. MAIN ROAD, MORNING

A lifted pickup barrels towards the camera, when suddenly, the bike swerves in front. Still no face, just a teenage body on a flimsy road bike in front of a huge pickup grill. The driver lays on the horn but the biker just gives him the finger before swerving back out of frame. Music crescendoes as the horn continues to blare into...

EXT. BFL PARKING LOT, DAY

Click of a bike lock and the music suddenly stops. Pan up to see the face of ALEX FOSTER (16, androgynous), sheeny with sweat but hardly out of breath. She takes out her earbuds and pockets them, then takes out a vial of lip balm and applies absent-mindedly. Mid-application, Alex notices JULIETTE NOVAK (16, high femme), perched on the hood of her Audi, surrounded by her clique. Alex and Juliette make eye contact. Then Juliette and her clique snicker and head into school. Alex, non-plussed, finishes applying lip balm, then hikes up her backpack and follows them inside.

INT. BFL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE, DAY

Alex slouched in an armchair as RAZ SCHLUTTER (27, boyish, handsome) sits behind a desk and reviews her paperwork, bare feet on his desk. He has a nascent case of Athlete's Foot.

RAZ

(gesturing to feet)

So as you can tell, I'm not like most guidance counselors...

ALEX

Because of the Athlete's Foot?

RAZ

(suddenly concerned,
brings foot to face)

Athlete's Foot-- You've got to be kidding me. Pedro was supposed to clean the showers.

(taking feet off desk)

(MORE)

RAZ (CONT'D)

No, not because of the Athlete's Foot. Because I'm a *chiller*. Hell, I'm practically your age.

ALEX

Gross.

RAZ

Please. Don't flatter yourself.
(gestures to himself)

Gay.

(off Alex's disinterest,
reading paperwork)

My point is, all this bullshit. No *me importa*. Honor Roll. Jazz Ensemble. First-team all-state...

Raz does a double take and reads again, serious now.

RAZ (CONT'D)

You were first team all state? As a freshman?

ALEX

That's what they tell me.

RAZ

I coach the girls' team here. We won counties last year.

(off Alex's disinterest)
Tryouts are tomorrow...

ALEX

(sighing)
I don't play anymore.

RAZ

What do you mean?

Alex shrugs. Raz gives her a long look. Then looks back at the paperwork. Intrigued, reaches for phone.

RAZ (CONT'D)

There's something here I don't understand. Let me call Mark.

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

Mark, eager, and Becca, defeated, sit in two armchairs. MARK'S ASSISTANT (14, professional) approaches with a phone.

MARK'S ASSISTANT

Raz on line 1 for you.

MARK

Tell him to hold, Mikey, thank you.

Becca watches assistant leave.

BECCA

Is that a student?

MARK

Indeed. Waste not, want not.

WAITER (23, metrosexual, annoying) approaches.

WAITER

Welcome to Starbucks! What can I
get started for you?

MARK

You know me, Sebastian. Something
expensive with chocolate on it.

WAITER

Say no more.

BECCA

(to herself)

They do table service here?

WAITER

And for you, young lady?

BECCA

Just a coffee, thanks.

WAITER

Sorry...a coffee?

BECCA

Yeah, just a drip coffee.

Waiter gives her a strange look, leaves. Becca's confused.

MARK

So your mother tells me you have a
bit of campaign experience.

BECCA

More than a bit. I've been doing it
for 15 years.

MARK

15 years. And then, just like
that...

Mark snaps his fingers. His assistant hurries into frame.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Not you, Mikey.
 (off assistant's exit)
 Of course, your mother told me
 about the incident.

Becca is stoic. Split-second intrusive thought:

EXT. NEW YORK SOCCER FIELD, DAY, FLASHBACK

Henry and Becca horrified on the sideline. Henry runs onto the field while Becca stands back, shellshocked.

MARK (V.O.)
 Of course, I think it's ludicrous
 you were fired...

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

MARK
 The sins of the child are *not* the
 sins of the parent.

BECCA
 (exasperated)
 That's not a thing, it's the other
 way around--

MARK
 But for my own edification, where
 does she get her...*short fuse*? You?
 Your husband? Or perhaps it's
 intergenerational?
 (leans in, quiet, scared)
 I've noticed your mother has
 certain...*proclivities* in bed--

BECCA
 My husband. It's from my husband.

MARK
 Really. And what does he do?

Becca looks at him, trying to decide how to respond.

INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, DAY

Henri butt-naked, face-down, half-asleep on top of sheets.

JANE
(increasingly loud as
Henry doesn't respond)
Henry...Henry...Henry--

HENRY
(startling awake, voice
muffled by pillow)
I'm up. I'm up.

JANE
What's your plan for today?

HENRY
(beat, thinking)
I'm going to go for a run.

JANE
I'm sorry, what--

HENRY
(petulant)
God, a run. I'm gonna go for a run.

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

After a long pause, Becca responds.

BECCA
He's a stay-at-home dad.

MARK
A stay-at-home dad? Bit effete, no?

Waiter approaches with a miniature chocolate croquembouche.

WAITER
For the monsieur, a miniature
chocolate croquembouche.

MARK
Divine, thank you, Sebastian.

BECCA
(to herself again)
What kind of Starbucks is this?

WAITER
And for the madame...a drip coffee.

Waiter again gives Becca a look, leaves. Becca's confused.

MARK
(mouth full of choux)
Where were we?

BECCA
(annoyed)
Why don't you tell me why you want
to run for...what is it again?
County executive?

MARK
City Council. And that's an
excellent question. Do you want the
short answer or the long answer?

BECCA
The short one is fine.

MARK
(settling into chair for a
long story)
Ok, so skipping past my parents'
childhoods, etcetera, etcetera, my
earliest memory was of my father
shooting a gimp horse between the
eyes...

Becca bites her tongue and takes a sharp inhale.

INT. BFL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE, DAY

Raz is still on hold, waiting to talk to Mark, staring at
clock, clearly anxious to be somewhere else. Finally...

RAZ
Alright, you know what Mikey, you
can just tell him to shove it.

Raz hangs up angrily. In the doorway, JUSTIN TOMÉ (16,
enigmatic, sad) clears his throat, announcing his arrival. He
has a saxophone case on his back. Raz turns and sees him.

RAZ (CONT'D)
Justin! Perfect timing.
(to Alex)
Alex, meet Justin Tomé. One of
BFL's finest. Top of his class, not
to mention a world-class, uh,
trombone--

JUSTIN
Saxophone--

RAZ
 Saxophonist! And all that despite a
 pretty...gnarly situation at home.
 (getting up to leave)
 Anyways, Justin's going to show you
 around the joint while I go get
 this pesky foot checked out.
 (rushing out the door)
 But I'll see you at tryouts
 tomorrow. Hope you're in shape!

Alex and Justin look at each other, intrigued, as we hear the
 sound of coughing, into...

EXT. JANE'S BACK YARD, DAY

Henry in running clothes, coughing, trying to catch his
 breath, hands on his knees, buckled over. We think he's just
 out of shape, until we zoom out and see he's not running at
 all. He's smoking in Jane's backyard. Brings a joint to his
 lips and hits it again, guilty. In his other hand, a phone.

HENRY
 (on speaker with an
 addiction hotline)
 It's almost like, to cope with her
 losing her innocence, I'm forcing
 myself to lose mine...

HOTLINE OPERATOR (O.S.)
 Sir, this hotline is really meant
 for opiate addicts--

HENRY
 The website said substance abuse...

Then, over the fence, he notices the top of a head he
 recognizes -- Thierry's -- before it dips back down behind
 the fence. The sound of wheels whirring on concrete.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 I have to go.

Henry hangs up the phone and ashes the joint. Curious, he
 grabs the top of the fence and attempts to do a pull-up to
 see over it, but he's not strong enough.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE, DAY

Now Henry's walked all the way around to the abandoned house
 behind Jane's. Hears whirring of wheels and laughter.

He wanders through the house to the backyard, where he finds three middle-aged men -- Thierry, Pragmatic Dad, and Treasurer -- skateboarding in an empty swimming pool. They're really good. Henry stands watching them in awe, unnoticed, until Raz comes running in behind him, holding a skateboard.

RAZ
 Sorry I'm late, Little Miss Priss
 kept me on hold for half an hour--
 (notices Henry,
 standoffish)
 Who are you?

Raz tries to drop into the pool with a flourish, but eats shit. Starts rolling around in hysterical pain. The skateboarders just look at him. This has happened many times before. Then they look up at Henry for the first time.

HENRY
 I'm Henry. I was at the PTA meeting
 last night.

PRAGMATIC DAD
 Oh yeah. New guy.
 (beat, remembering)
 Hormonal daughter.

HENRY
 Don't get me started.
 (off awkward silence)
 Sorry, I'm kind of high.

TREASURER
 (shrugging)
 Us too.

RAZ
 (still rolling around)
 You guys smoked without me?!

Henry stands there, not sure of what to say. Forced smile. Everyone looks at Thierry, the arbiter. Finally...

THIERRY
 (thick French accent)
 So...do you skate?

Henry's face falls a bit. He doesn't.

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

Mark is boring Becca with an incredibly long story.

MARK

...little did I know, my ninth birthday would pale in comparison to my tenth, in terms of suffering--

MARK'S ASSISTANT

(into Mark's ear)

Mother Hen at 11.

Becca turns to see Jacqueline and her clique (Liberal Mom, Conservative Mom, Brian's Mom) enter the Starbucks.

MARK

(standing up)

Well, I should get going. But to be continued. And listen, I want you at this Marissa Tomé vigil after school. It'll give you a sense of my public speaking.

BECCA

Oh yeah, you mentioned that last night. What happened to her?

MARK

(eyeing Jacqueline)

That's the million-dollar question.

(gathers things to leave)

Never a dull moment here, is there?

BECCA

(resigned)

Not with the right gossip.

MARK

(smiles, pops one last pastry into his mouth)

I'll see you tonight.

Mark hurries out with his assistant. Becca looks at him confused. Takes a beat, then tries one of the choux pastries. Surprisingly good. Gets up to leave, when suddenly...

JACQUELINE

Rebecca!

Jacqueline gestures for Becca to come over to where they're sitting. Becca looks confused: "Me"? Jacqueline waves her over again and Becca approaches.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

Don't tell us Mark's ensnared another eligible young bachelorette.

BECCA
I'm sorry?

JACQUELINE
(about Brian's mom, coy)
Heather here's been wrapped around
his finger for *months*.

BRIAN'S MOM
(quiet, concerned)
He preys on lonely women.

BECCA
Well that checks out. He's actually
fucking my mom.

They all stare at her. Then, Brian's Mom bursts into tears.

BRIAN'S MOM
I'm fine. I'm fine.

BECCA
(moving on, awkwardly)
While I have you guys, what do you
know about this vigil later?

Jacqueline's face darkens, almost imperceptibly, before she
recomposes. Takes a sip of her drink and smiles at Becca.

JACQUELINE
What's there to know?
(to group)
Times are changing, ladies. Women
can leave their families whenever
they please.

LIBERAL MOM
Amen to that.

CONSERVATIVE MOM
God help us.

They scowl at each other.

BECCA
So she left?

BRIAN'S MOM
(quiet, still recovering)
I heard she was last seen on a
bridge.
(even quieter)
At *dusk*.

JACQUELINE
Wherever she went, she could've at
least left a note.
(MORE)

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

Saved us all the trouble.

(affected dismay)

And that poor boy. As if he wasn't tortured enough already.

(beat, then suddenly

recomposes, gestures for

Waiter, ending convo)

Sebastian?

Becca gives her a confused look, then turns to leave as Waiter swoops in and takes their orders.

INT. BFL HALLWAY, DAY

Justin and Alex walk the halls of BFL lethargically, Alex with her backpack, Justin with his saxophone case.

JUSTIN

That's the relaxation room.

ALEX

Relaxation room?

JUSTIN

It's got like a sandbox that you can rake to calm down-- I don't know, no one goes in there.

(arriving at band room)

And this is the band room. I've got rehearsal now, but I feel like the rest is pretty self-explanatory.

They look in through the window to see a big band warming up.

ALEX

Are you guys good?

JUSTIN

(looks at her, intrigued)

Yeah. Why? Do you play?

ALEX

(looking at keyboard)

Not on a Nord I don't.

JUSTIN

Don't get me started. The PTA blew \$30K on a sandbox but won't get us an upright. There's a Steinway grand in the auditorium, though.

Alex looks intrigued. Juliette and her clique pass them in the hall. One of them bumps into Justin's saxophone case and they all laugh. Alex tracks them over her shoulder.

ALEX

What is with this bitch?

JUSTIN

(ruefully)

Like mother, like daughter...

Juliette looks back and makes eye contact with Alex. Alex cracks her knuckles one-handed to calm down, just like her mother. Powerful fingers...

INT. BECCA'S CAR, DAY

Car door slams shut with Becca's hand white-knuckling the handle. Deep breath. Then unwraps a new vape from the glove compartment and hits it, fucking exhausted. Takes a beat.

In the distance, sees the back of her old high school's scoreboard. Starts the car with a new resolve. Cranks the stereo. Upbeat music -- "You Make My Dreams" -- plays into...

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE, DAY

Montage of skateboard dads teaching Henry how to skate. Upbeat music. Laughing, more smoking. Pragmatic Dad steals Raz's board and runs around with it, taunting him. At one point, Thierry puts his hands on Henry's waist to steady him as he rides. Henry blushes and smiles. Raz looks on jealous. Moment interrupted by school bell ringing in the distance.

EXT. BFL PARKING LOT, DAY

Students filter out. Alex goes to unlock her bike. Watches Mark and his assistant setting up for the vigil, Mark standing on the stage pointing to where his assistant should set up each chair: always right next to the last one.

Then, suddenly, an Audi screeches to a stop in front of her. Juliette with her clique.

JULIETTE

Need a ride?

ALEX

I'm good tha--

But the Audi has already screeched away, girls laughing. Alex watches them drive in the other direction, past the soccer field, which she walks towards, intrigued.

EXT. BFL SOCCER FIELD, DAY

Arrives at soccer field, empty. Picks the lock on the equipment room with her bike lock key (those nimble fingers) and steals a ball. Tosses it onto the field. Stares at it for a second, like a tiger stalking its prey, then she attacks. Dribbles down the field, juking imaginary defenders. Ferocious. Reaches the goal and winds back for a shot...

EXT. A DIFFERENT HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER FIELD, DAY

Soccer ball whooshes into net. Pan up to see Becca standing in the bleachers of her old high school soccer stadium, vaping. Looks out on the field, where the current team is practicing. Has a vision of her old self out there, sprinting, dominating. Then she looks up at the press box on top of the opposite bleachers. Intrusive thought:

Her high school self in the press box, looking at her present self through the glass, a shadowy man pressed up behind her.

Becca blinks back to the present. Contemplates for a second, then takes a picture of the press box. Opens Messages and types a phone number by memory into the "To:" bar. She's deleted this contact many times before. Texts this unknown number the photo of the press box. Waits a beat. Almost immediately, little dots. Then a response: "Back in town?"

Becca stares at it. About to respond when she gets a message from a contact named "Career Suicide": "Where r u???" Then, "Vag about 2 start." Then, "***Vig" Then, "Vig = Vagisil." Then, "Vig = VIGIL!!!!" It's Mark. She sighs. Deletes the conversation with the unknown number. Hits the vape one more time with a blank stare.

EXT. BFL PARKING LOT, DAY

Becca standing with a blank stare behind mostly empty chairs. Mark is speaking at a podium next to the BFL Big Band.

MARK

(Obama-like)

Frightening times in Bethesda.
Frightening times. Women
disappearing left and right. Not to
mention inflation. I spent 27
dollars at Starbucks today.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

27 dollars. And I didn't even get a coffee...

(beat, letting it sink in)

It's times like these that we're reminded of the importance of local government. With a big City Council election coming up and a thin field of candidates. This town is primed for a dark horse run.

He winks at Becca. She avoids eye contact.

MARK (CONT'D)

Marissa Tomé deserves to come back to a *Bethesda better than the one she left*.

(starts clapping, trying to start an applause)

Because come back she shall. And what better way to bring her back than through the power of song.

(gesturing to big band)

I've asked one of our finest, Justin Tomé, to arrange a classic in honor of his mother. So without further ado...

Mark steps onto the conductor's stand. Big band starts to play Justin's arrangement. They're really good, it's a very complex arrangement. They crescendo to a caesura, at which point, Mark spins around with a flourish, holding a wireless microphone. He's not only the conductor, he's the vocalist.

MARK (CONT'D)

(stunning voice, Sinatra's "My Way")

And now, the end is near / And so I face the final curtain

BECCA

(to Snarky Mom)

Weird song for a vigil, right?

SNARKY MOM

Can we just enjoy something for once? Please? I'm so tired of criticizing everything.

Becca gives her a weird look. As band continues to play, a sweaty, bloodied Henry sidles up to Becca, puts his arms around her, tries to give her a kiss.

HENRY

Hey beautiful.

BECCA
What the hell happened to you?

HENRY
(looks at bloodied elbows
and knees)
Oh shit, I didn't even notice.

BECCA
Are you high?

HENRY
(defeated)
I need help, Beccs.

Becca shakes her head. Justin rips a tenor solo.

EXT. BFL SOCCER FIELD, DAY

A sweaty Alex listens on from the soccer field, impressed.

MARK (V.O.)
*Yes, there were times, I'm sure you
knew / When I bit off more than I
could chew*

EXT. NEW YORK SOCCER FIELD, DAY, FLASHBACK

Silent. Large marching band is playing. Suddenly stop, dropping their instruments in horror.

MARK (V.O.)
*But through it all, when there was
doubt / I ate it up and spit it out*

EXT. BFL PARKING LOT, DAY

Band crescendoes to big finale. Becca looks around and notices Jacqueline's not there.

BECCA
(to Snarky Mom)
Where's Jacqueline?

SNARKY MOM
Celebrating privately.
(shaking head)
Another scalp.

Again, Becca looks at her weird. Close-up of Mark gripping the microphone, his lips whispering the final refrain.

MARK

*I faced it all, and I stood tall /
And I did it my way*

On final note...

EXT. NEW YORK SOCCER FIELD, DAY, FLASHBACK

A horrified referee meekly puts up a red card. A close-up of Alex's hand holding up a scalped pony tail, triumphant.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2**INT. BECCA'S CAR, DAY**

Becca driving, vaping. Turns on stereo, same upbeat music from yesterday, immediately turns it off. Passes a kickboxing studio, where out of the corner of her eye, she sees Conservative Mom and Liberal Mom going at it with mouth guards. Jacqueline watches on, barking at them. Becca does a double take over her shoulder to get a better look, but it's too late, she's already past it. She stares back ahead, curling her fingers around the wheel and accelerating.

INT. BFL CAFETERIA, DAY

In the background, a "School Shooter Awareness Week" banner. Alex slides into a seat across from Justin, who's sitting alone eating a sandwich, listening to music. She waves aggressively to get his attention until he takes out his earbuds and looks up.

ALEX

You guys sounded good last night.
(jazz parlance)
The bones were a little flat.
Fucked up your re-harm.

JUSTIN

You were there? I didn't see you.

ALEX

So you were looking for me...

Justin rolls his eyes and takes a bite of his sandwich.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about your mom.

JUSTIN

(stops chewing)
Thanks.
(mouth full, off Alex's expectant look)
I don't...really want to talk about it. Sorry.
(swallows, beat, then)
Are you coming to auditions today?

ALEX

Who said I was going to audition?

JUSTIN
(beat, reverse psychology)
Probably for the best. Rob has been
locking it down lately.

ALEX
(sarcastic)
Sure he has.

Alex mimes the pianist's comping, mocking him. Stops when she
hears witchy laughter; turns to see Juliette and her clique
huddled around a laptop at one of the nearby tables.

JUSTIN
Bitches Brew...

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

Becca enters to find BRETT (35, suit) already seated.

BRETT
Look who the cat dragged in.

BECCA
(hugs him)
You sure you can be seen with me in
public?

BRETT
I'll just tell everyone you're my
stalker.

BECCA
(sits down)
How're things at State?

BRETT
Better than campaigning for a
handsy geriatric.

BECCA
Oh please. "Handsy."
(leaning back in chair)
Show me on the doll where he
touched you.

BRETT
All in the past. Look at me now.
When one zipper closes...

BECCA
Nice to be a man, isn't it?

BRETT

Oh please.

BECCA

What's your secret then, guru?

BRETT

(sly)

I domesticate my kids.

Becca bites her tongue, cracks her knuckles, forced smile.
Waiter approaches.

WAITER

Welcome to Starbucks! What can I
get for you-- Oh.

(recognizes Becca)

Different man every night with you,
isn't it?

BECCA

It's noon.

WAITER

(whispered into her ear)

If you break Mark's heart, I'll
kill you.

Waiter walks away with a death stare.

BRETT

What the hell was that?

BECCA

Don't engage.

(looking around)

They're all rabid for the gossip.

BRETT

Give me a taste.

BECCA

A woman skipped town so now they're
accusing the PTA president of,
fucking, disappearing her. Like
we're in a Banana Republic.

BRETT

Think they prefer Tory Burch.

BECCA

(shaking her head)

Stay-at-home moms.

BRETT
Speaking of, how's Henry?

Becca stares at him thinking of how to respond.

INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, DAY

Jane comes to check on Henry...

JANE (O.S.)
Henry--

...but finds the bedroom empty, bed perfectly made.

INT. SKATE SHOP, DAY

Henry walks into a skateboard shop and approaches the stoned, 23-year-old attendant. Puts hands on counter triumphantly.

HENRY
Today is the first day of the rest
of my life.

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

BRETT
I always thought he looked like
Guevara.

BECCA
I don't want to talk about Henry. I
want to talk about my next move.

BRETT
Buy me dinner first.

BECCA
(ignoring him)
I only took the Robbins job because
I thought he was going to get
tapped for State. I'm so fucking
done with campaigns. I want
something invisible. Something
where I can actually get shit done.
No more politics.

BRETT
So you came to D.C.?

BECCA
You know what I mean.

BRETT

Becca, there's no such thing as invisible when your kid's face is plastered across the tabloids.

BECCA

It'll blow over. Henry's Dad pulled some strings with the DA so he'd drop the charges. And we already settled with the family. Cleaned us out, but it's over.

BRETT

I suppose I could cash in a few favors.

BECCA

That would be a fucking lifesaver--

BRETT

(takes out phone)
Let's talk about it more over dinner. They've got me at the Sofitel while I look for something permanent. There's a nice French place in the lobby.

BECCA

(beat, confused)
I'm sorry--

BRETT

(looking at calendar)
I could do 9?

BECCA

(beat)
You're trying to fuck me.

BRETT

(beat, then looking up)
Excuse me?

BECCA

You think I'm going to fuck you for a job? What do I look like? Some kind of slut?

WAITER

(loudly, from across room)
Yes.

BECCA

Christ, why is everyone trying to fuck me all of a sudden. Did I get hot or something?

BRETT

Becca--

BECCA

Or are you all just horned up hearing about my hellcat daughter?

BRETT

Jesus Christ, Becca.

BECCA

Oh, fucking, spare me.
(gathering things,
gesturing to his crotch)
I'm the one who's had to look down
the barrel of your semi for the
last hour.

BRETT

(looking at his crotch,
putting hands over it)
Is this because of Henry? I thought
you guys were on the outs.

BECCA

Just because Henry's not man enough
to fuck me doesn't mean you are.

As Becca barges out of the Starbucks...

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE, DAY

Henry barges into the abandoned house in knee pads, elbow pads, and a helmet...

HENRY

Who's ready to shred--

...to find a Mexican crew working on the renovation.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Oh. Sorry.
(trying to communicate
with them, starts miming)
I'm looking for the men on boards?
In the swimming pool?

CONTRACTOR
(perfect English)
Why are you talking like that, man?

Henry flushes red, embarrassed. Awkward silence.

INT. BFL HALLWAY, DAY

Alex is at her locker. She fishes some crumpled sheet music out of her backpack and skims it over, preparing for her jazz audition, when suddenly, a hand reaches over her shoulder and snatches the paper.

Alex turns around to find Juliette and her clique in soccer gear. Juliette furrows her brow, ironically pretending to study the music, before sticking her gum in it, crumpling it up, and tossing it in the garbage. She smirks at Alex, then spins forward and walks away with her clique, snickering. Alex doesn't move, just looks at them. Then, she looks inside a classroom and sees scissors on the teacher's desk...

EXT. BFL SOCCER FIELD, DAY

Alex walks onto the field, having cut her jeans into shorts and her shirt into a tank. Raz is leading warmups. He looks at her, pleased. Juliette, looks at her, also pleased.

RAZ
Rachel, give her your cleats.

A pissed girl unlaces her cleats and hands them to Alex, along with her pinny. Raz blows his whistle, and the girls begin to scrimmage, Alex (forward) and Juliette (center defense) on opposite teams.

Almost immediately, Alex scores a goal and smirks at Juliette as she jogs leisurely back to her side. After a bit more play, Alex is threatening net again. But this time, Juliette slide tackles her, clipping her ankles. Alex yelps in pain, but no whistle.

Play continues as Alex gets to her feet and shakes it off. Like a missile, she zeroes in on Juliette, who's dribbling the ball downfield. Chases her down.

We cut to Raz's face watching intently, excitedly. Then, we hear a yelp of pain from Juliette. Raz grimaces and whistles the game dead. Runs out to get a better look. Something bad's happened. A shot of just Juliette's eyes, alight.

INT. BFL HEADMASTER'S OFFICE, DAY

Becca is slouched, seething, deadeyed, listening to Mark.

MARK

...weirdly enough, 9/11 didn't move me. But when Bush got up on that mound and threw a perfect strike...

(shaking his head, moved)

The power of politics.

RAZ (O.S.)

Get a grip, Mikey, you're not the secret service--

(pushing past Mark's

Assistant into the room)

Chief, we've got a bit of a situation...with the new girl...

Mark and Becca look at each other, concerned.

INT. BFL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE, DAY

They follow Raz in to find Thierry and Jacqueline standing behind a bloody-nosed Juliette, and Henry standing behind a sulking Alex.

BECCA

Christ, not again.

MARK

Rasmus, I made it very clear in her file that she's not to play contact sports!

RAZ

You call this clear?

Raz holds up Alex's file with Mark's crudish drawing of two stick figures, one pulling the other's pony tail, encircled by a red Ghostbusters "cancel" sign.

MARK

I am a *visual communicator*.

BECCA

She knows she's not supposed to, she just doesn't care.

MARK

That she gets from your mother...

(whispered, scared)

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Why even have a safe word if you're just going to ignore it.

HENRY

(whispering to Thierry)
You guys weren't at the pool today.

THIERRY

We're kind of over it.

HENRY

(crestfallen)
Totally.

RAZ

(annoyed)
Care to share, boys?

JULIETTE

Can everyone just chill. She was going for the ball.

Alex looks at her, intrigued by her nonchalance.

RAZ

Listen, I know things got heated today. But if these two can learn to work together, it could be a season for the history books.

BECCA

(sarcastic)
No way. A season for the history books?

Thierry snorts. Raz scowls at her.

MARK

Unfortunately, there's some crucial context that you all are missing--

JACQUELINE

(rubbing temples, annoyed)
Oh please, you don't think we know? It's Bethesda. Everyone googles everyone.

Becca, Henry, and Alex look at her intrigued.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

But Bethesda isn't New York. We're not so prudish, are we?

(smiling)
Girls will be girls.
(MORE)

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

I'm sure Rebecca and I both have stories from our glory days of passion getting the better of us.

(off Becca's weird look)

Listen, we're hosting a team shindig on Sunday. I'm sure a little quality time will help to iron all this out.

MARK

(exasperated)

It's up to her parents.

All look at Henry and Becca. Then Henry turns to look at Becca, knowing she'll make the call. She looks pissed into...

INT. BECCA'S CAR, DAY

Becca still looking pissed, driving. Henry in the passenger seat, Alex in the back, head lolling against the window.

HENRY

So...do we want to talk about it?

Continued silence. Becca sighs.

BECCA

What's there to talk about? That we haven't talked about already.

(continued silence)

Actually, I have one. Why are you so angry, Alex?

(off silence)

Seriously, I want to know. Where does all that anger come from?

ALEX

You tell me.

BECCA

I was never angry like you.

ALEX

Of course you weren't. You repressed it. And now it's bubbling up as this weird, like, midlife resentment.

BECCA

(looking at Alex in rearview mirror)

What do you know about my life?

HENRY

Becca--

ALEX

This is exactly what I'm talking about. You have this complex that no one could ever possibly understand you. Like you were the first person in history to have a kid at 25.

BECCA

23. But go on.

ALEX

No one made you have me.

HENRY

Jesus, Alex-- Your mother *wanted* to have you.

BECCA

It wasn't that simple.

HENRY

Becca--

BECCA

She wants to be treated like an adult, let's treat her like an adult.

ALEX

You know what I think? I think you had me because you knew you were going to fail regardless. And at least with a kid, you'd have an excuse.

HENRY

Don't talk to your mother like that.

ALEX

What about you, Dad? Did you also see my birth as the death knell of your career?

BECCA

What career?

HENRY

Becca--

BECCA

No, seriously. And she has the audacity to psychoanalyze *my* career anxiety-- like some kind of, fucking, incel.

(beat, shaking head)

That's a luxury of your generation. The fear of failure. We didn't have a choice.

ALEX

God, it must have been so hard. Growing up in the munitions factory.

BECCA

You girls don't know what it's like to look at a miserable, homebound mother and think, "God I *really* don't want that life."

ALEX

I know exactly what that's like.

Becca stares at her daughter in the rearview mirror.

HENRY

(alarmed now)

BECCA, STOP!

Becca looks ahead to realize she's about to plow into Jane in the driveway. Slams on brakes. Jane, in gardening clothes and gloves, holds up the used vape that Becca tossed out the window the night before. Shakes her head, disappointed. Becca closes her eyes, wishing she was anywhere but here.

INT. BECCA'S CAR, NEXT DAY

Henry driving, Becca in passenger seat holding a bottle of wine, Alex in back. Everyone in Sunday best.

HENRY

(to Alex)

Mommy's not going to drive for a little while.

BECCA

In that case...

Becca unscrews the top of the wine and takes a glug. Henry looks at her concerned. Alex is non-plussed.

EXT. JACQUELINE AND THIERRY'S COMPOUND, DAY

The Fosters approach the guarded, gated entrance to Jacqueline and Thierry's compound.

BECCA
This is their place?

HENRY
(to guard in booth)
We're here for the soccer party?

Guard smiles, presses a button and the gates open.

BECCA
What the fuck are they hiding? The
Bethesda Nuclear Codes?

They make their way down a long, flat driveway, lined with trees, leading up to a massive antebellum home.

INT. LIVING ROOM, DAY

A knock. Jacqueline opens front door to reveal Becca, Henry, and Alex awkwardly standing on the porch. Becca holding the partially emptied bottle of wine.

JACQUELINE
The Fosters! So glad you made it.

Jacqueline hugs each of them as they enter. Other mothers are bickering in the gorgeous, sprawling salon of a living room.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)
Any trouble getting here?

BECCA
Just the border control out front.

JACQUELINE
Ridiculous, right? Thierry's such a pussy. He can't sleep without it.
(off Fosters looking around amazed)
Despite my best efforts, we've broken off into cliques. The girls are in the basement and the boys are in the pagoda.

Out the sliding glass back doors, a surreally stunning backyard with different pockets of landscaping and architecture.

In one corner, a massive white pagoda tree -- the one Becca was looking at through the bathroom window earlier -- shadowing a miniature pagoda structure.

Henry, entranced, immediately goes outside. Jacqueline smiles at Alex until she takes the hint and heads to the basement.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)
 (taking wine out of
 Becca's hands, smiling)
 And the slightly older girls are
 having a bit to drink.

Jacqueline goes to sit as Becca takes it in, shellshocked.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

Alex descends stairs to find a sprawling basement covered in astroturf. The girls are huddled in the corner in front of a massive projection screen. They're looking at a text message conversation between Raz and a catfishing account they've made using Thierry's picture. Juliette is controlling from her phone, with a cat in her lap. She looks over her shoulder, noticing Alex, then turns back around, nonplussed.

ALEX
 (noticing Raz's picture)
 Is that Raz?

JULIETTE
 (without looking at Alex)
 He's in love with my dad. So we're
 catfishing him.

ALEX
 (beat, processing, then
 looks at astroturf)
 What's with the turf?

JULIETTE
 (annoyed)
 My parents made, like, a kids'
 soccer field down here. It's a rich
 person thing-- will you just come
 sit down? We're cooking here.

Alex reluctantly sits down. Raz texts: "Can't we just talk?" Girls start to murmur with suggestions -- "Talking would only make it worse." "What's there to talk about? I love you." "Send nudes." -- but Juliette shushes them. Takes a second, then responds: "No." Girls snicker. Alex looks on, concerned and thrilled.

INT. PAGODA, DAY

Boys -- Thierry, Raz, Pragmatic Dad, Treasurer -- are hotboxing the pagoda. Raz looks up from his phone, concerned, at Thierry, who is also on his phone. Henry enters and starts coughing because of the smoke.

HENRY

Jesus, how long have you been here--

THIERRY

(wags his finger at him)

Too high. No talking.

(taps phone aggressively)

Phone time.

Treasurer hands Henry a joint.

HENRY

I'm worried you guys are a bad
influence on me.

The boys don't look up. Henry takes a hit of the joint.

INT. LIVING ROOM, DAY

Muffled, banal conversation. Becca's ears ringing from the banality of it all. Her head is swimming with other people's voices: Brett's ("There's a nice French place in the lobby"), Mark's ("I felt nothing on the day of 9/11"), her mother's ("You don't have to call him Daddy"), and her daughter's ("I know exactly what that's like"). Becca furiously cracks her knuckles, getting worked up, until--

BECCA

I'm just going to get some air for
a second.

Becca wanders outside. As moms keep talking, Jacqueline watches Becca, intrigued.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

Girls are still catfishing. Raz texts: "I just want to be alone with you." Juliette thinks for a second, then responds: "Why?" "This is the best part." "You can look but you can't touch." Smiles, pleased with herself, then nuzzles her face against the cat's. Girls snicker. Alex watches, intrigued.

INT. PAGODA, DAY

Raz is hyperventilating. Thierry finally looks up from his phone and stretches.

THIERRY

Is anyone else, fucking, hot?

Thierry takes off his shirt and goes back on his phone. Raz looks tortured. Henry, meanwhile has gotten very high. He's looking at the ornamental ceiling of the pagoda.

HENRY

This ceiling is amazing.

(beat, has an idea)

I'm going to lie down and look up at it.

TREASURER

Watch out for the koi pond.

HENRY

There's a fucking koi pond?

Henry looks and finds that, indeed, the boys are all sitting around a koi pond, shrouded by the smoke. The fishes' orange backs glimmer in the light. Henry is amazed.

EXT. JACQUELINE AND THIERRY'S HOUSE, DAY

Becca looks at smoke coming out of the steeple of the pagoda. Shakes her head, then pulls out her vape and hits it, exhaling her own spiral of smoke. Moment of peace. Then...

She hears squawking from another corner of the yard. Intrigued, she listens closer, and realizes it's chickens. Follows the sound until she arrives at a chicken coop. Scared but intrigued, she unlatches the door and steps in.

INT. CHICKEN COOP, DAY

Becca enters to find rows of chickens and roosters, all squawking loudly. It's triggering for her. She has the same split-second intrusive thought she had at the PTA meeting: *the shadowy man in the doorway, holding a rooster tether.*

Cracks her knuckles and shakes off the intrusive thought, but when she returns to the present, the chickens have gone eerily silent. She turns to find Jacqueline in the doorway.

BECCA
(jump scare)
Jesus Christ.

JACQUELINE
(smiling)
I see you found our coop.

BECCA
Sorry, I was just--

JACQUELINE
You apologize too much, Rebecca.
You have to stop apologizing.

BECCA
(beat, then reflective)
I had an ex with one of these--
I've always had a bit of a morbid
fascination.

JACQUELINE
Why morbid?

BECCA
Well, he raised them for-- you know
what, it's not important.

JACQUELINE
We have our own little menagerie.

Jacqueline takes a palm full of feed from a trough and feeds
one of the roosters.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)
It's calming, isn't it? To tend to
something weaker than yourself.

BECCA
(forlorn)
Alex was never weaker than me.

JACQUELINE
(chuckling)
Nor was Juliette.
(looking fondly at
rooster, pets its neck)
But feed these ones and they'll
follow you anywhere.

Becca observes this moment of tenderness.

INT. PAGODA, DAY

Henry dips a tortilla chip in the water, and soon, a koi comes to the surface and nibbles on it, its little face delighting Henry. Thierry observes this moment of tenderness and smiles. Raz notices this and starts furiously texting.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

Girls stare at the screen with bated breath. Then a long paragraph appears from Raz: "I don't know what fucking games you're playing with me, especially with this NEW GUY, but I'm a HUMAN BEING..." The rest of the message is collapsed.

ALEX

New guy?

JULIETTE

(to Alex)

Is he talking about *your* dad?

They all look at Alex. Beat, then she bursts out laughing.

INT. CHICKEN COOP, DAY

Jacqueline gestures for Becca to feed one of the roosters too, and Becca does.

JACQUELINE

Not much of one for the salon conversation, are you?

BECCA

(beat, exasperated)

I don't know. I've always had a bit of trouble with stay-at-home moms.

(beat)

Not that I have anything against you guys, it's just-- my life is so different--

JACQUELINE

(chuckling)

I'm not a stay-at-home mom.

BECCA

(beat, processing)

No, I know you all have your little projects and stuff--

JACQUELINE

Rebecca. I'm a defense contractor.

BECCA
 (long beat, processing)
 I'm sorry?

JACQUELINE
 My company. We're a military
 services contractor. For the State
 department, the DOD. Stuff like
 that.

BECCA
 I don't understand.

JACQUELINE
 (pedantic)
 Have you heard of Blackwater?

BECCA
 (duh)
 Yeah, I've heard of Blackwater.

JACQUELINE
 It's like that. But smaller. More
 invisible.

Becca gives her a very intrigued look.

INT. PAGODA, DAY

The koi tires of Henry and goes back under water. Henry's
 face falls. Yet again, he's lost his sense of purpose.

HENRY
 But...how do I get her back?

PRAGMATIC DAD
 Her?

Thierry is intrigued by Henry's tenderness. Raz seething.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

The girls have left Raz on read. Dots appear.

JULIETTE
 Holy shit, he's double texting.

Alex watches on with bated breath.

INT. CHICKEN COOP, DAY

Becca is looking at Jacqueline in a new light.

BECCA

But you spend so much time with the
moms...

JACQUELINE

Everyone needs a release.

(beat)

The girls have soccer. The boys
have, whatever the fuck they do all
day. And we have our little games.
Just for fun.

BECCA

(sarcastic)

Private DOD contracts aren't fun?

JACQUELINE

No. But they're important.

BECCA

(beat, then)

What kind of games?

JACQUELINE

Nothing serious. Just things to get
the blood pumping.

Jacqueline looks out through the door of the chicken coop,
all the way through the back glass windows of her home, where
the stay-at-home moms are having a shouting match.

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

They're fun to play with, these
girls. Full of rage without an
outlet. Lost.

(smiling)

But if you feed them...

BECCA

What about Marissa Tomé?

JACQUELINE

(beat, lost in thought,
watching moms fight)

Lost. Like them. But smart. Like
you.

(looks at Becca now)

Bethesda's not for everyone. You're
either in or you're out.

(recomposing)

(MORE)

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

What do you say? Shall we get back
to the party?

Jacqueline leaves. Becca watches her go. *A flash of the man with the rooster tether, walking away from her.* But then he's gone.

INT. PAGODA, DAY

Thierry kneels down by Henry and puts his hand, palm up, in the water. Suddenly, all the koi, all 15 of them, are at the surface. Thierry smiles. Henry looks at him amazed. Raz storms out texting.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

Girls huddled around screen. Raz finally sends: "It's either me or him." Girls burst out laughing.

JULIETTE

What do we say?

Alex gestures for the phone. Juliette, intrigued and excited, hands it to her. Alex sends a message: "May the best man win." They look at each other, eyes alight.

The games have begun.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3**INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, MORNING**

Becca and Henry in bed, turned away from each other. Henry snoring, but Becca's been awake in bed for hours, thinking. Finally gets up. Walks over to Alex's room to check on her and reconcile, but finds an empty bed. Looks out the window to see Alex getting in the back seat of Juliette's Audi.

MARK (O.S.)

They grow up so fast.

Becca turns to see Mark in his boxers, also staring forlornly out the window.

MARK (CONT'D)

(sighing)

Say, mind if I have the first shower? In the interest of transparency, I feel filthy.

BECCA

(exasperated)

Don't you guys have your own shower?

MARK

In the interest of transparency, that's filthy too.

Mark walks towards Becca and Henry's shower. Becca just stares dead-eyed ahead.

INT. BFL CAFETERIA, DAY

Alex enters the cafeteria with Juliette and her clique, laughing, but peels off when she sees Justin sitting alone, eating a sandwich. Juliette watches her, intrigued.

Alex goes behind Justin and takes out his earbuds for him.

ALEX

Stop being antisocial. You know it's School Shooter Awareness week, right?

JUSTIN

(realizing it's her)

You weren't at auditions Friday.

ALEX

I told you. I don't play on a Nord.

Justin starts clucking like a chicken: "Bawk bawk bawk."

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'll show you. On the Steinway.

JUSTIN

It's only for concerts.

ALEX

Then let's have a concert. Tonight.

Justin takes a bite of his sandwich, non-plussed.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Enough with the sandwich. What is it with you and the fucking sandwiches?

JUSTIN

(mouth full of sandwich,
about the piano)

It's locked up. In a cage.

ALEX

So?

Justin looks at her, intrigued. Alex smiles coyly.

INT. STARBUCKS, DAY

Becca and Mark sitting in armchairs, staring at each other.

MARK

Can we just address the elephant in the room?

(off Becca's silence)

Fine, I'll say it. I thought we were going to carpool.

BECCA

Can we just-- please--

MARK

(reluctantly moving on)

I want to announce my campaign tonight. We can use the vigil stage, Pedro never took it down.

BECCA

You have a speech?

MARK
(tapping BFL lapel pin
over his heart)
It's all in here.

BECCA
What's the rush?

Jacqueline and her clique enter. Mark's Assistant leans in.

MARK'S ASSISTANT
(whispered to Mark)
Mother Hen...

MARK
(looking at Jacqueline)
Time is of the essence. It's now or
never.

Mark scurries out, his assistant concealing his face with a folder, right as Waiter swoops in carrying a miniature, fully-functioning chocolate fountain adorned with strawberries. He looks crestfallen that Mark has left early, then stares accusingly at Becca. Becca stares right back, then approaches him, dips a strawberry in the chocolate, and eats it. Waiter looks horrified. Becca approaches Jacqueline.

JACQUELINE
Rebecca! Still doting on Mark?

BECCA
Are you questioning my loyalties?

JACQUELINE
(smiling)
You can tell him we don't bite.

BRIAN'S MOM
(staring at the door)
Speak for yourself.

Brian's Mom bites her lip with longing. Becca looks at her weird, then turns to Jacqueline.

BECCA
Could we talk for a second?

JACQUELINE
Of course.

Becca stares at clique expecting them to leave, but they don't. Jacqueline looks unfazed, so Becca continues...

BECCA

Okay, well, I just wanted to let you know...I'm in.

JACQUELINE

(beat)

I'm sorry?

BECCA

I'm in. You know. For whatever this is. For Bethesda.

JACQUELINE

(beat, then laughs)

We're not a cult, dear.

BECCA

(confused look)

Sorry. I guess what I'm saying is, I'm available. Personally, professionally. Professionally, especially.

JACQUELINE

(smiling pedantically)

I appreciate that. I'll let you know if I think of anything.

BECCA

The sooner the better, Mark's driving me up a wall--

JACQUELINE

All in due time, dear.

(waves over Waiter)

Sebastian?

Waiter comes swooping in, giving Becca a triumphant look as Jacqueline and her clique try his strawberries. Becca looks crestfallen, then resigned. Walks out.

INT. BECCA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM, LATE AFTERNOON

Henry in bed depressed. Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* laid over his eyes like a sleeping mask. Jane comes to talk to him.

HENRY

Please, Jane. I had an emotional weekend. I just need to rest.

JANE

It's 4 o'clock. And you have some friends here to see you.

Henry is confused, then gets up and looks out the window to find Thierry, Pragmatic Dad, and Treasurer on the porch, holding skateboards. Thierry waves. Henry smiles.

EXT. BACKROADS, EVENING

All the guys are now skating down the street. Henry's wearing all the skateboarding gear he bought.

HENRY

I thought you guys were over it.

THIERRY

That was yesterday.

HENRY

Where's Raz?

Thierry shrugs.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Also where are we going--

EXT. BFL DUMPSTERS, EVENING

The boys roll up to meet the 23-year-old skateboard shop attendant and his posse. The two skate gangs nod at each other with mutual respect and dab each other up. Henry acts cool, leans in to whisper to skateboard shop attendant.

HENRY

Thanks for hooking me up. I really needed it.

THIERRY

(to the group)

So...you guys have the stuff?

SKATE SHOP ATTENDANT

(holds up baggie of weed)

Only the finest for our elders.

THIERRY

No, we need, uh...*stronger* for tonight.

SKATE SHOP ATTENDANT

(processing, then nodding)

I got you.

HENRY
 (to Pragmatic Dad)
 Is he talking about, like, a
 Sativa...because I don't want to be
 up all night.

In the distance, Mark wailing something indiscernible.

THIERRY
 Let's get out of here.

Skate Shop attendant palms Thierry something as they dab
 goodbye. Older boys skate away, Henry struggling to keep up.

EXT. BFL PARKING LOT, DUSK

Mark, Becca, and Mark's Assistant have been waiting for hours
 for people to show up, but no one has. Becca slouched on a
 chair, defeated. Mark lying down on the stage.

MARK
 (getting up, shaking off)
 Nothing like a good cry.

BECCA
 That was you *crying*?

MARK
 I'll just send out an email.
 (looking in the distance
 at the white pagoda tree)
 She may have won the battle, but
 we'll win the war.
 (beat, recomposing)
 Come on, Mikey. I'll give you a
 ride home.

Mark and his assistant slouch off. Becca too looks at the
 pagoda tree, looming over Bethesda. She sighs in defeat, then
 types out a text to the unknown number: "Press box tonight?"
 Just as she's about to send it, gets a text from a different
 unknown number: "Come to mine -J." Intriguing.

EXT. BFL AUDITORIUM, DUSK

Alex bikes up, finds Justin and two other boys peering around
 the corner at Becca. Justin looks back at Alex.

JUSTIN
 I think your mom's here.

ALEX
(seeing Mom)
How'd you know it was my mom?

JUSTIN
You guys look alike.

ALEX
Fuck me.
(beat, notices other two)
Who are they?

JUSTIN
Rhythm section.

ALEX
Why's he wearing a ski mask?

BOY IN SKI MASK
(through ski mask)
Stealth.

ALEX
(exasperated)
Jazz used to be cool, you know.
They used to do heroin.

Justin leads them in through the back door of the auditorium.

INTERCUT BECCA / ALEX:

INT. BECCA'S CAR, DUSK

Becca takes a deep breath in her car, readying herself. Then throttles the engine.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, DUSK

Dark. Then Justin flips a switch. Concert lighting. It's a stunning auditorium. Alex is in awe.

EXT. JACQUELINE AND THIERRY'S COMPOUND, NIGHT

Becca pulls up to Jacqueline and Thierry's compound, only to find the guard station abandoned, gate ajar, almost inviting people in. Nothing to hide. Strange.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Alex picks the lock of the piano cage, as others set up their instruments. Lock clicks open. They all look at her.

EXT. JACQUELINE AND THIERRY'S HOUSE, NIGHT

Becca stands outside, still, hearing loud muffled sounds from basement. Intrigued, but also scared.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Alex settles in at the piano, looks at other members. Everyone waiting with bated breath. Then...

ALEX
(counting off)
1, 2, 1 2 3 4

Rhythm section launches into an excellent, fast-paced rendition of the ominous classic "A Night in Tunisia." Alex is a prodigy. Music plays over all of the following...

INT. BASEMENT, NIGHT

Becca slowly descends into the basement, step by step, as the sound of a crowd crescendoes.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Shot of Alex's feet stamping rhythmically on the piano pedals.

INT. BASEMENT, NIGHT

Becca enters the basement to find a throng of parents. Confused, she pushes through to find...

A cockfighting ring. On the basement turf. Two roosters going at it, their fight projected on the big screen where the girls were catfishing Raz earlier. The inner ring of faces are the usual suspects: Thierry, Pragmatic Dad, Treasurer, Conservative Mom, Liberal Mom, Brian's Mom, Grandfather in his wheelchair, the guard from out front. Everyone but Jacqueline.

Becca looks horrified. Henry comes up to her.

HENRY

Thank God, you're here. I took something and I'm freaking out.

Becca ignores him, staring at the cockfighting ring.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Band is on fire. Justin smiling at Alex, amazed. He rips into the melody.

INT. BASEMENT, NIGHT

One rooster triumphs: the other one is left twitching on the ground, not yet dead. Jacqueline comes out of nowhere with a manic grin, and crowd goes crazy. She holds up the vanquished rooster -- the same one she was feeding and petting earlier -- like a trophy as the crowd erupts.

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Close up on Alex's hands crescendoing furiously now.

INT. BASEMENT, NIGHT

Close up on Jacqueline's hands, one gripping the bird's twitching talons -- this is where the tiny cuts come from -- the other on the bird's neck, which she suddenly twists. Right before we hear it crack...

INT. BFL AUDITORIUM, NIGHT

Band caesuras. Shot of Alex's hands lifting off the piano; everyone has stopped playing except for the bassist who continues to play the bass line ominously. Stay on Alex's hands as she furiously cracks her knuckles, awaiting her next entrance.

INT. BASEMENT, DAY

As bass line continues to play, we see Jacqueline smiling manically. Becca looks past her and sees the shadow of the unknown man she's been texting, the man in the press box, the man with the rooster tether. But then she blinks, and he's gone.

END OF EPISODE