

The Failson

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A One Act play

By Francis Rose

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## Cast of Characters

WINSLOW “WILL” STARVER III, 35: The titular fail son, a conflicted PHD candidate from Princeton.

WINSLOW “WIN” STARVER II, 60s: Will’s father, a wealthy, sadistic plastic surgeon and convicted rapist awaiting trial.

MELISSA “MEL” STARVER, 50s: Will’s step-mother figure and Win’s ex partner. She is an emotionally unstable family therapist whose license was recently revoked after an affair with a client.

HENRY “HAL” BORMAN, 60s: The lifelong best friend of Win and the executor of Win estate. He is the CEO of a successful concrete sales empire and speaks with an affected South Jersey/Philadelphia accent.

SARAH BORMAN, 50s: Hal’s wife and de facto PR manager. She is ruthless and relentlessly status conscious.

RICHARD “RICK” LEE, 40s: A slick but kind probate attorney who has been assigned to the Starver family by his law firm.

ANDREW “ANDY” MARROW, 50s: A coal miner from Delaware hired by Win and Hal to kidnap and threaten Will.

HOSTESS (V.O.), 9-1-1 OPERATOR (V.O.), FEMALE OFFICER: Any age, can be played by same actor.

HIKER I, HIKER II: Can be a couple or friends.

SADIE THE DOG

MALE OFFICER I, MALE OFFICER II: Any age.

SCENE I

Setting: (An overhead fluorescent light casts a flickering glow over the walls of an austere, grey brick prison room. In the middle is a barebones row of padded stools facing a buffed, plexiglass sheet. We cannot see who is on the other side of the plexiglass but we can hear the mechanical NOISES of someone operating a payphone punctuated by soft, helpless GROANS.)

At Rise: (Enter WILL, wan-faced and gaunt, in wrinkled flannel and faded chinos. He meanders awkwardly with his face buried in a brown leather notebook. He sinks onto the center stool. The stool rocks and CREAKS under his weight. Suddenly, a THUD echoes from the other side of the plexiglass. Will reaches towards the plexiglass and is met with the shadowy reflection of WIN, in an orange jumpsuit, cradling a payphone to his ears.)

WIN

Will?

Will swivels, turning his back to Win.

WIN

I never asked you to come.

WILL

I felt implicitly asked. What kind of a psychopath would I be if I abandoned you.

WIN

So move closer. You have ten minutes to take what you want out of me.

WILL

You said you were alone, frightened of yourself, and I could almost...I could commiserate with that feeling of metastasizing shame...

He runs his hands over his face.

WIN

Stop! You look insane. You came here to fill your needs. I'm finally offering to address them. This may be my last chance.

WILL

Why did you...I'm failing to understand...

WIN

Try harder.

WILL

I feel like a failure!

He swivels again and leans his forehead against the brick wall. Win laughs at him.

WILL

(Under his breathe)

But I guess I can never outcompete you.

WIN

That was a decent impression! You almost sounded like me.

Will wraps his arms around himself. Win leans towards him and smiles.

WIN

You know, I asked my chaplain the other day. Am I going to Hell? Guess what he said.

WILL

Now I have to doubt he said no.

WIN

According to his gospel, wherever I go, I'll be doing humanity a service...do you agree with that?

WILL

Do my thoughts matter to you?

WIN

Give me a straight answer. I'll tell whatever you want.

WILL

You'll tell me what you think I want to hear.

He balls a fist and POUNDS the wall.

WIN

That wouldn't be fair. I say we have at one another. With honest hate.

Will looks around the room.

WIN

No one will hear you. You're the only person who can cut me to size.

WILL

Well...I assume this existence is hellish...punative. Realistically, how long is your life going to have value to you? Your father died at eighty...that leaves fifteen years.

WIN

Little bastard! I'm proud of you.

WILL

Did you speak with your lawyer?

WIN

Jesus! That's what you start with? You have my testes on the edge of your sword. You're thinking about my well-being? You can't be that green! Or that bad a liar!

Will stands and begins pacing the room. He takes a pen out of his jacket. Beat. He returns to his seat.

WILL

I thought it was a polite opener.

WIN

Those forty-thousand a year schools raised you too damn well! They turned you into vanilla pudding! Rice pudding! Human mush with no consistency! That's what you are.

Will flips his notebook to a blank page.

WIN

You have to punch back lower. Nobody goes for the heart anymore. Everyone's brain is rotting, so going for the head is futile. You have to learn how to kick in the mud and not think twice if you hit the wrong body part-

CLICK. BUZZ. A light bulb flickers before blowing out. Will and Win are submerged in semi darkness. Win releases a frustrated HOWL. The light bulb BUZZES again, then flickers back on.

WILL

Fine. How many times did you meet-

Win holds up one finger, revealing cuffs around his wrists.

WIN

Only once. A paralegal came for a visit yesterday. I wish I had a picture. She looked like an albino beached whale in a red toupee!

Will shakes his head at Win.

WILL

I have four minutes left.

WIN

I know. I saw you check my watch when you came in. That was expensive. You should get the strap adjusted so it fits you. It'll go with your Brioni blue suit.

WILL

Why did you-

WIN

Sorry, the ginger beluga made me promise. I won't say anything over the phone.

WILL

That was my only question. Why take the risk?

WIN

I paid those schools to teach you critical thinking!

WILL

Did you enjoy someone else's pain?

CLICK. Win slams the phone receiver and turns his back to Will. The lights fade.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE II

Setting: (The curtain opens on a stuffy, vaguely colonial New England living room. Cabriolet furniture and chintz textiles self-consciously approximate a suburban take on an old money facade. The room is consumed by a central couch facing a mantle. On one end of the room is a credenza beneath two windows overlooking woods.)

At Rise: (Enter Will. He alternates between rolling up his sleeves and aimlessly flipping through pages of his notebook. He stops before a crackling candle on the coffee table and pauses flipping. Beat. He audibly SNIFFS.)

WILL

Why...why?

He leans closer to the flame.

WILL

It's a voyeuristic, fetishistic, sick...gimmick...God!

He licks his fingers and snuffs the candle. A puff of smoke clouds his face. He COUGHS. Beat.

A side door CREAKS open. Will quickly flips through his notebook before ripping off the top page. He crumples the page and lobs it into a decorative trashcan besides the credenza.

Enter flushed HAL, in tight jeans and a black leather blazer, swinging a beer can. Will anxiously chucks his notebook onto the sofa but otherwise doesn't acknowledge Hal. Hal KNOCKS on the doorframe.

HAL

Need a fucking gimmick? For weed around the baby boy? It's legal. Had to kill the smell in here.

He saunters over to slap Will's shoulder. Will visibly seizes up

HAL

You haven't played ring around the reefer?

WILL

(Through gritted teeth)

My intent wasn't an ethical invective against-

HAL

Hey, come on! Come on. Laugh at me. While you can. You're gonna crack into your vices. One day. Your dad would tell you...all the crap we started at 35.

WILL

Do you say it's for prostate cancer prevention, too?

He leans away to evade Hal's grasp. Hal laughs, squeezes Will's shoulder, then plunks on the sofa besides Will's notebook.

HAL

Still a kid! Can't pin you down!

WILL

(Measured, facing a side window)

You can.

HAL

You're avoiding.

WILL

I just thought we would operate on a presumption that we...none of us, came here to relitigate the last twenty years or therapize each other to suicide, if that's okay with you? There were some books he asked me to donate and-

HAL

(Snide, with a patronizing drawl)

That's right. You read books. Mel said you're writing. What're you, coming up to fifteen years at Princeton?

WILL

Non-consecutively.

Without visually acknowledging Hal, he slumps his shoulders and pivots to the doorway.

HAL

Man. Still. Dunno where you get that psycho-level patience! Bumming around one place? Like I'm always on the run. We just opened a third plant in Akron.

Dropped sixty-three mill on the full campus. For these six-fingered, ex-religious farm kids. They're the ones baking our cow dung slurry!

WILL

Wow.

HAL

Yeah. It's insane. But any case...bet my blue collar news isn't riveting to you, book man. I won't name drop all the parts-per-something of organic Ann Arbor shale mix we're batching, right?

He makes a point of swigging his beer and laughing at himself, as if to cajole a response from Will. Will doesn't reciprocate.

WILL

I don't benefit from the proprietary secrets of big midwestern concrete.

He attempts a cautious step towards the door. Hal pops up to standing and stretches his arms in a show of his full upper body, revealing his bulging stomach. He YAWNS.

HAL

Nah! You're running away again. With the last damn word. I'll take one for us. Bore me. What's Winslow III been up to?

WILL

The product of my bumming is due in May.

HAL

Heard. Your dad mentioned last summer. It's a dissertation?

He picks up Will's notebook, flips quickly, then SLAPS it on the coffee table. Will pulls out a cellphone from his pocket and makes a point of scrolling intently in front of his face.

HAL

Seriously. That's great. Proud of you. Finally getting outta school!

WILL

(mumbling)

Melissa's flight landed.

HAL

Don't worry. I'll call one of my buddies. His girlfriend's up near Newark. She can drop Mel at The Inn. Pay her sixty bucks. We got a few hours. May wanna-

Will spins around to stare down Hal.

WILL

I don't feel strongly that I should see him, right now.

HAL

No, no, don't do that. No! If anything, you better whip out the fucking "not my family" card. Like yesterday. With your face? He's haunting you. You cover your own hide. Bide your time.

He motions Will closer with a wave of his beer.  
Will hesitates before moving a hair closer to  
Hal. Hal drops his voice.

HAL

Sarah wants us on a one-on-one intro Zoom with the new guy tomorrow. It'll be like a quick pre-game for Monday.

Will tips his head side to side, lost in thought.

WILL

Considering actually legally questionable activities-

He rolls his sleeves again.

HAL

Whaddya think they buy the lawyer degree for! Pulling under the table bits. Anything in the name of helping their clients. And what he chooses to say off record? How 'bout, not our problem?

WILL

Assuming he knows the judge...

HAL

(Laughing)

Bingo! And listen. We're happy to split the call with you. Get a vibe off him. See if we wanna cut loose, try somewhere else. I did research. Tons of probate shops are closer in to the shore. Bell Mar area...everyone's dead!

WILL

What happened to...I saw the name was Peggy, I thought she was taking over.

HAL

Really think she's gonna let you touch *her* chance at partner?

Will self-consciously repositions a black and white photograph of a man (Win) on the mantle to face away from him.

WILL

Sure, the optics of making a her the mouth piece for pervert apologism wouldn't be-

HAL

Yep, mm-hmm, praise be to Jesus! She tapped out last Friday. Firm caved. They're giving us an actual adult in the room. Rich? Rick? Who knows...Dick? Lee? I saw on Instagram. He may be like a ra-ra MAGA, locker room type, which is...

WILL

It's to be expected...I wasn't asking for a feminist human rights attorney.

HAL

You think...?

Will paces, clearly distressed. Hal studies him with genuine surprise and bemusement.

WILL

(Rambling)

But maybe the upshot is neutral, because now we have sympathetic council? That would be, frankly, immeasurably better than the last two morons they paired us with.

HAL

Completely. Hundred percent.

WILL

At this point, I will gladly take advice from a sleaze with basic linguistic competencies who doesn't want me pilloried, too! It's just...the expectation that any sane, barred and unsanctioned professional will care about his...our case, our family...it's been decimated.

HAL

Right? People rarely don't disappoint.

WILL

(Nodding)

And chances are, he'll be delusional enough to come up with some passably nonmoral, fiduciary justification for protecting sex offenders' assets-

Hal shakes his head at Will.

HAL

Who cares! Long as he keeps the trust going. Eventually signs everything down on paper? You, Mel take a third and a third. I get a quarter for being married and needy? Leftovers pay the taxman. That's it. Low bar.

WILL

But I can't reconcile...is it naive to still expect decent service, discretion...?

HAL

Course not! What we need outta him is it's own pony trick. We want reputation management. 'Cause the money'll always be the same money. Since last decade. But that's not gonna matter. Nothing's gonna suck like being publicly tied to...I don't have to tell you. He's gotta see us as his guys. We're on the line. Not the bank account.

Will suddenly stops pacing.

WILL

Wait...you said, a third? There was-

HAL

Aw, you wanna count pennies, now? You're not six. Learning your fractions.

Will shrugs.

HAL

He told you already! It's enough. You can keep doing your ethics books. You're not gonna be the loser fuckup here.

WILL

(To himself)

No, he would have told me, why worry about what's already true?

Hal takes a final gulp of his beer and PLUNKS the bottle down on top of Will's notebook. Will notices and cringes.

WILL

Why...bother?

He steps closer to his notebook. Hal makes a point of lifting his beer bottle by the neck and holding it up in a faux apology. He nudges Will's notebook across the table with his bottle.

HAL

There ya go. But now you gotta stop, okay? Good why? Bad? Why what! Put it all outta your brain. 'Cause we're going down in the shitquake together. Whatever you wanna say to the universe for the next three days? Not leaving my mouth.

He lifts his beer bottle in a final promissory toast. Will sighs and shuffles his feet in place.

HAL

I give you my silence. As your dutch uncle.

WILL

Oh, no, I agree, this is our survivor's silo. I was remembering...I promised Mel I could be there...

He checks his cellphone again to underscore his point.

HAL

Go. Clear your head. We'll catch up later. Sarah's sending Rick an email.

WILL

For tomorrow?

HAL

You're so much better off. Taking the bulldozer approach. Setting the agenda early. That's how you put people you need to help you on notice. You're in the driver's seat. They exist for you.

WILL

That's not a little demanding?

HAL

It's what your dad would tell you to do. Just don't drag Mel in...bonkers what happened. How the Hell do those professional boards get away with kneecapping educated girls? In this day and age? MeToo? Who'd be stupid enough...

He intentionally trails off. Will softens his posture and lowers his voice.

WILL

I can't say. And I meant to thank you, from both of us, for the invite. We're still reeling...

HAL drops his voice.

HAL

Did you seriously not know what your own father was doing? It was that big a shock?

WILL

Not the act itself...not anymore. The violent, pathological pursuit of control isn't incongruous with his personality. No, my aftershock was the realization that some part of his rot is inside-

Suddenly, his cellphone BUZZES. His shoulders seize up again.

HAL

All right. She doesn't have cash for an Uber. Get lost!

Will swiftly raises an awkward hand goodbye to no one in particular and hurries through the side door.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE III

Setting: (A rustic, small town coffee shop back table.)

At Rise: (Will sits across from MEL, in jewel-toned linen and silvery jewelry, and her duffle bag. A few elderly, earthy crunchy patrons mill about. Between Mel and Will is a chipped red teapot and two mugs.)

MEL

...this kind of afternoon tea session was so baked into the indigenous Tajik culture...they still call their teapots samovars. I was such basic tourist, they were probably laughing at me. I always pretended like I was living out a Dostoyevsky peasant fantasy. When I would stay with these giant, multigen families living in caves off the mountainsides?

She takes out a flask from her duffle, dribbles liquid into her teacup, then holds the flask out to Will. He shakes his head.

MEL

Really great slivovitz from Croatia...it's a between meal thing.

She shoves the flask into the front pocket of her duffle.

MEL

But the kids loved just sitting for hours, talking about their trauma. They're fighting some brutal neofascist insurgency in...I can never remember which one of the Russian babies. Czechoslovakia's sticking in my brain for some reason...

WILL

Good thing Czechoslovakia wasn't there long enough for you to be drafted.

MEL

Heartless! I struggle with killing stink bugs. Not to be that white woman, but there's something to eastern karma...like the idea I could come back as our president, that makes sense to me!

Will shrugs coyly. Mel shakes her head. They share a mutual laugh. Beat.

WILL

What do we do now...

MEL

You have to lift your hand at a slight angle...it's an old grandma's mental trick to prevent spillage.

WILL

Look, in the interest of time, I don't think I can be more explicit about...

He gestures with his hands, grasping at empty air in silence.

MEL

(Slowly, as if translating Will's gesture)

Do we...want food? I'm totally open.

We can grab something light...I only had two of those freebie shortbreads on the plane. Ugh! And I asked for a takeaway Diet ice tea but the stewardess was...I'm choosing to assume she was going through some shit.

WILL

That's the Gottman Institute's diagnosis.

MEL

I'm on sabbatical!

Will turns back to the table and grips his head in his in hands. Beat.

MEL

I was waiting for you to try.

She tips her head at the teapot.

WILL

You want us to keep talking...at angles?

MEL

Forget it, I hate driving through rush hour. Here.

She pours the tea into her cup in an aggressive motion, taking care to spill droplets on the table. Will pushes his cup across the table.

WILL

But you don't have a license.

MEL

You shouldn't have to prove your bona fides with a license with when you have a doctorate from Yale School of Medicine. Do you ask a pro stunt driver if she has a learners' permit? That would be comical!

She makes a point of BANGING the teapot's spout against his cup and over-pouring.

WILL

Hal made reservations at six.

MEL

It's all about the iron fist with men...where and what does he want us to not eat.

WILL

Chancellor's Inn and Bar, so new gastronomic Americana cuisine?

MEL

Perfect for a barely legal, anorexic girlfriend.

WILL

Is that...uncharitable? She's his wife in her mid-forties. And he doesn't-

MEL

(Whispering, vicious)

The hotel off of I-95? He's been there! You've been to the rooftop roofie bar! Let's not forget Hal was a Borgata bouncer...he's touched below the mid-forties.

WILL

I meant to say, he doesn't know that the new druggable cocktail list is longer than the pre fix menu...and they don't require a neighborhood registration number to get in.

Mel clucks her tongue at him.

MEL

I wouldn't try standup if the PHD bombs.

WILL

That's not where it happened. He-

MEL

Hang on...they! I want *us* to stick with facts...Hal's not capable.

WILL

Believe me, I'm very committed to upholding ethical reality with you. I can't speak for Hal and company, but...

MEL

Then can we agree not to sugarcoat?

WILL

Where they, plural, three times, discounting the unextraditable Tongan cruise allegations, may or may not have occurred.

Mel SNORTS. She grips her teacup until it RATTLES on the table.

MEL

Oof, Tonga? Love it! And you're saying, one elevator ride to, ooh, the presidential suite? That makes all the difference to you? Because no one heard her say don't touch, is that...?

WILL

I never claimed that one elevator ride determines my perception of the line between Madonna and whore. See, I won't sugarcoat, as long as you won't sensationalize.

MEL

Don't even...that's just such a chauvinistic, Winslow cop out! After two decades on your dad's domestic partner payroll? There's no excuse I haven't let myself be gaslit and mindfucked with. So don't do it to me!

Will slumps down, almost childlike, and sips his teacup on the table. Mel unzips her duffle, pulls out a feminine pad and points it at him. Will raises his hands in mock surrender.

WILL

Did I pass the misogyny test?

Mel stalks off without responding.

WILL

(Calling after her)

He said he was always at that medical implants conference in Carson City. Commit all crimes on the opposite coast...that was how he shielded me.

MEL

(Without turning around)

At twenty-two?

Will closes his eyes and leans his head against the wall.

WILL

The time line started with my mother.

Mel pivots and heads back to the table to loom over Will.

MEL

He told you that? When did you see him. Recently?

WILL

What?

MEL

I'm not calling BS on you with half a day left.

Will takes another sip of tea. Mel sits back down. Will caves under her stony gaze.

WILL

Last weekend, he sent me an email saying...the word he used was frightened. I agreed to a five minute phone call, four minutes of which he sermonized about how the prison industrial complex is systemically rigged against only him. Out of all the putative, upper middle-class family man rapists in America! And then he asked me to check if off label beef tallow is medically allowed in supermax. That was his parting request-

MEL

Pathetic! Talk, talk, talk. How many more syllables...

WILL

I know and I wasn't specially validated as the chosen son or entrusted with private account passwords or-

He stops short as Mel violently crumples her feminine pad in a fist.

MEL

You're pathetic when you lie! I have no interest in his money...and I sure as Hell, hope you, of all people...you're so far above accusing me! I want this weekend to be about the victims...how can we help them...give them a voice? That should be our priority!

WILL

I agree.

Mel shoves her cup across the table until it CLINKS against Will's.

WILL

Cheers.

MEL

I'll be back.

Will turns to face the wall and waits for her to storm off for a beat. When she is no longer in sight, he leans over the table to riffle in her duffel's front pocket. Beat. He glances around, then pulls out her flask, dumps its contents into his tea cup, and sips.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

#### SCENE IV

Setting: (A grand home office now in a state of disarray.)

At Rise: (Hal and SARAH, in designer work out gear, survey the dismantled office. Half-packed moving boxes filled with paperwork/books create a minefield across the floor. Hal sits on a luxurious leather desk chair and feverishly texts on his cellphone, a cigarette between his lips. He occasionally stops texting to tap his cigarette on the admiral's desk. Sarah, on hands and knees, performs a cat-cow yoga move between boxes.)

SARAH

...last year, at that diabetic auction. She kept trying to educate me on why I needed to give my pronouns? I said, we're bidding on fucking vegan handbags. I wasn't aware but I'd feel bad if...is Melanie blind?

HAL

(Distracted)

Melissa, Mel. Her flight got in. Will's driving her down here.

SARAH

Tell them we're taking our car. We're not showing up in the back seat of a 2018 used hybrid. Honestly, for a surgeon's kid? Minimum he should be driving a Tesla...that's basic.

She digs through boxes indiscriminately,  
flinging papers, books, photos into messy piles.

SARAH

(Under breathe)

Where...you said a reddish brown notebook? There's nothing here...

HAL

(Ignoring her previous comment)

Nah. Car's a prop. Like the corduroy. And the L.L. Bean flannel. He's in his poor little neppobaby phase. Tax paying day jobs are for impotent, new money geezers!

SARAH

(Giggling)

Plenty of women his age are turned on by that big 401k.

She gazes up at Hal. He stares into his cellphone.

HAL

We'll drive down. It's already 5:10. They're gonna go straight to the Inn.

SARAH

But I don't want to find out they've been waiting. They'll talk.

HAL

Mel said they're stuck on the turnpike.

SARAH

What else would they talk about but us! She's completely a day drunk talker. You can see it in her crepey neck skin...that's from the alcohol.

HAL

Dunno, they've got..not calling it touchy-feely. But it's like the same weirdo-ness? There's a bond.

SARAH

They're artsy, pretentious-y, fair-trade people.

HAL

Exactly. Last time we did that Palm Beach rental with Win? No joke. They're buying tickets to a lesbian Canadian journalist book retreat! Together. Granted, that's twelve years ago now...

Sarah yanks from a box a brown leather notebook (similar to Will's notebook from Scene II). She flips through the pages.

Suddenly, her mouth falls open. Hal looks up from his phone.

HAL

Hmm? Was he dumb enough? Put all the passwords page one?

Sarah holds open a page. Hal places his cellphone down on the desk, then takes the notebook from her.

SARAH

Read it...bizzaire.

She takes the opportunity to stretch in a downward dog pose.

HAL

(Eyes scanning the page)

Oh! No! This was 2004. Every boy plays with antifreeze at some point. He's not a schizo...can I say that? Win had him psych medicated for decades.

SARAH

That's child abuse.

HAL

It was the trend. All the prep school kids had to catch OCD. For the Ivy league. Makes 'em creative when they can't golf.

SARAH

But how much do we bet he turned Win over. Remember? Asbury Press Anonymous who happened to know the license palte? That has to be him. He's obviously, mentally not in a good space...

BUZZ. BUZZ. Hal hands the notebook back to Sarah and checks his cellphone. She eagerly watches him read his texts for a beat.

SARAH

What does she...

HAL

Aw man! Neppo the Third already had a private talk with Win. Now, apparently, he's getting cagey about what exactly went down in their chat.

SARAH

Did I not call it?

HAL

I'll give it to ya.

SARAH

(Slightly judgmental)

I told you from the get go. He's pretending. Touching your wrist is a major body language red flag. I saw a Ted Talk on spotting lies from family narcissists? That's the most obvious-

HAL

What was I, supposed to mind read him? Said he's not comfortable. I bought it. He's too pure. Too innocent. That's always been his go-to, get outta jail move.

SARAH

Huh...ask Mel if she thinks the M.O. is money.

HAL

Nah. He's still blowing through cash from mommy's family. They felt bad. Gave him the full bank account when she passed. Set him up for life.

SARAH

He's never been employed. How much was it that it's lasting him...twenty years?

HAL

Trust me, he doesn't care. He's an intellectual. Writing deep books. He's gonna save humanity. From the evil corporate grind of his asshole ancestors, right?

SARAH

Just ask her.

Hal shrugs.

SARAH

College degrees mean nothing. They're not smarter than-

HAL

I know how he ticks! Win used to be exact same. It's an insecurity issue. Win always had to one up anything I said. That's why. I made a rule for myself. I won't talk. But I'll always do more than him. Look where we're at now?

SARAH

I can ask her at dinner, that'll be fun. Is Win still paying?

HAL

‘Cause you think Will’s gonna put a centurion on file? With his teenage dissertation?

Sarah rises and shoves the notebook under her arm. Hal slides off the desk and stumbles over a pile of photo albums towards her. Sarah steadies him with her free hand.

SARAH

Old geezer, I’m going to shower. Can you look through upstairs? Absolute worst case scenario, we go on the dark web. Apparently, you can reserve foreign hackers with these crypto tokens now?

Hal attempts to take the notebook from her. She clamps her arm down around it and stands on her tiptoes to kiss him.

HAL

(Muffled, between kisses)

Nah, my guy Jeff...his boy’s programming for one of those A.I. sweatshops...he’s in Bali but the company’s run outta Seattle? He’ll do it. Win’s old school. He’s got max, two broker accounts. No major portfolios.

Sarah starts DRUMMING her long, glossy nails on his shoulders. Her wheels are turning.

SARAH

You can text Jeff on the flip tonight. I bought us a red Motorola so we can keep track...it’s in my Dior bag.

Hal gently pushes her off of him.

HAL

Doesn’t hurt to keep snooping. Will put a backpack in the dining room. Probably where the nuke codes are.

He leans over Sarah and pecks her forehead. She smiles at him, then turns around and SIGHS, clearly disappointed.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE V

Setting: (The stage is transformed into a cavernous wine cellar. The walls are stacked high with translucent amber bottles. In the middle of the space is a wood carved alter-like table better fit for a negotiation than a party. Four gothic, clear plastic chairs are arranged on one side facing the audience. Above the table is an eerie chandelier made of twisted, glass ropes, knotted into a low-hanging ball.)

At Rise: (A door opens, revealing half of a curved, wrought iron staircase leading down into the cellar. Enter Hal and Sarah, dressed in cocktail attire. She clutches his arm while tottering downstairs in stilettos.)

SARAH

Are you not glad we left when we did? I knew going early was the right move.

HAL

They're on the turnpike now.

He checks an expensive wrist watch.

SARAH

You said they were at Exit 7 a minute ago! That's ten plus from here.

HOSTESS

(Calling from above, off stage)

Sir? I think...looks like your other guests...they're at the coat check.

HAL

Great!

Sarah shakes off Hal's arm. Hal, in a show of mock gallantry, pulls out a chair for her and makes a gesture with his hand. She plops in an adjacent chair and pouts. Hal SCOFFS, then sits in the chair he pulled out.

MEL

(Voice only, with an affected pomposity)

Did you catch that Cape Town reserve collection, my dear? They're serving us blood diamond wine!

WILL

(Voice only)

Genocidal wine. But then, why the quasi-inquisition aesthetic? I was imagining American Gothic...shaker furniture.

MEL

You don't see the symbolism? Off with our heads!

WILL

Oh, I forgot, there's no substantive food. Maybe we're the wounded prey to be served up?

Hal laughs. Sarah elbows him to stop. Enter Mel and Will, both underdressed. Mel is clearly tipsy and flushed.

HAL

Made it! How was traffic?

Mel takes the seat on Hal's other side.

MEL

Too light...

HAL

You look good, Mel.

MEL

I wish I could say the same.

Hal takes the dig in stride and winks at Mel, almost flirtatiously. Sarah pops up from her seat and forcefully pulls Will into a cheek kiss embrace as he approaches the table. Will recoils. Mel notices and snickers at them.

WILL

(Cold)

Excuse me.

Sarah giggles close to his ear and adjusts his flannel collar.

SARAH

You're fine!

Will quickly takes the seat next to Mel.

MEL

(To Sarah)

Sorry, but would you like someone to do that to you? If your parent was a molestor?

SARAH

Am I supposed to-

Hal physically jumps to Sarah's defense, positioning himself between the two women. Sarah GASPS.

HAL

(To Mel)

Whoah, you gotta full stop, okay? That's not what we're getting into, first thing.

MEL

Who are you? I have every right to say what I want.

HAL

Dig your grave.

MEL

What my criminal ex did was molest his subordinates. That's the main reason we're all here. You're free to disagree with me.

SARAH

(To Hal)

Wasn't the girl also a doctor? That's what we saw on LinkedIn.

HAL

(To Will, jerking a thumb at Mel)

Is she triggering...?

Will crosses his arms and addresses the table, head bowed.

WILL

I hope I'm not unconsciously demanding the kid gloves...because I don't anticipate using them. In fact, I'd much rather we acknowledge up front, the official charge list counted stalking, rape and penetrative sodomy with-

Hal grabs the knife at his place setting and STABS it into the table in front of Will. Will looks up to meet Hal's gaze without flinching.

MEL

What on earth!

SARAH

Hal!

HAL

For fuck's sake! You three wanna handle the fallout from here? Don't quote me, baby, in divorce court. But you'll always be a haggard housewife.

He sneers at Sarah. She shrinks herself in a show of performative submission.

HAL

Next up, we've got a broke therapist who screws her clients. That's how you keep 'em cumming, Mel. And bottom of the class? A useless, dickless fail son! I'll walk. Right now! Leave you three to it!

Sarah puts a hand on his wrist. It's Hal's turn to flick her off.

SARAH

(Whispering, to Hal)

Why don't we ask for regular menus...the prefix has pistachio fish. And they should bring us waters.

MEL

(To Will)

No nuts for her?

Without looking at Mel, Will picks up his fork and gently but firmly presses it face down before Hal's knife tip. Hal meets his gaze.

HAL

All right. Gang, what're we drinking? Malbec good? Or would you prefer white?

MEL

You're the racist drunk...

Hal shoves back from the table and shuffles his feet, scooting and SCRAPING his chair legs to the stairway entrance. He KNOCKS his chair over and climbs a few steps before disappearing from sight.

HAL

( Voice only)

Hey! Can you...mm-hmm. Get our waiter. We're doing that 2001 Malbec? Thanks. We don't need waters.

Beat. He THUDS back downstairs to the table but doesn't sit.

HAL

Round two. What color do we think her ass was?

MEL

(To Will, under her breathe)

Surprising, he doesn't know-

HAL

( To Mel)

I don't like what you're angling at! Go off on my other choices. I wanna help Win. Despite everything. He's been faithful to me, like a brother. But you're crossing a fucking gulf now. Throwing around accusations!

MEL

You can't accuse someone with facts.

HAL

It's enough! You make a comment like that and some girl power bitch hears you the wrong away? That's the end for me. Not for you! You can fuck a grad student bartender on your shrink couch. The higher ups give you paid summer vacation. 'Cause they're afraid of a law suit. I'm not that privileged!

MEL

You've done worse.

She rises to standing.

HAL

Not on this property. That's why you didn't wanna be here?

Will glances at Mel. She sinks back down.

SARAH

(Pleading with Hal)

Please...let's take a walk?

Hal silently holds out his arm. Sarah takes it. Bound together as an unsteady unit, they hobble around his chair and up the stairs, into the darkness. Mel and Will both look down at their place settings. Beat. Once alone, they huddle closer together.

MEL

Give him two minutes...we go. We passed a Biryani Palace...

Will shrugs. Mel stands up again and tiptoes to the staircase to peek around the corner. Beat. She turns back to Will.

MEL

Do you...?

Will calmly pulls from his pocket an earbud case. Mel grabs his fork from the table and raises her arm, ready to throw it at him. He abandons the earbuds, ducks down, and falls from his chair to the floor. Mel puts the fork back and stands over him as he takes heaving breathes.

MEL

Get up, I need you to participate! Yes? We're in an us, sane people, versus them...the evil idiot brigade. They're the scammy perverts with below zero self-awareness. The brainwashed bimbo and, mark my words, he's off. He did something...knows something.

Will closes his eyes and shakes his head like a defiant child.

MEL

Will? I didn't do what he-

Will GROANS in pain. He sounds eerily similar to Win from Scene I. Mel reaches down to help him to his feet. He lets her lift him back to a seated position.

WILL

I didn't object.

He takes his car keys from his pocket and holds them out to her.

MEL

I don't have any of my licenses.

Will rubs his head and looks up at her.

WILL

My mother once paid me to drive her to the airport with a concussion.

MEL

(Gently teasing)

You have experience!

Will folds his hands around the keys. Mel nods at the staircase. Together they ascend the stairs and fade from view.

MEL

(Voice only)

How did you get a concussion? I don't remember...you must've been a baby.

WILL

(Voice only, almost upbeat)

Junior Rubik's Cube Nationals in Arlington. I folded to Juan Carbajal, the top ranked North American seed from Guadalajara...we were both miserable.

MEL

Oh.

Beat.

MEL

If you ever want to tell me about her...your mother?

WILL

My student health plan doesn't reimburse out of network providers.

They laugh uneasily.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE VI

Setting: (Late night, back at the house, in the living room. Mel has transformed the sofa into a small pullout sleeper. Folded on top is an old quilt embroidered with the initials WS. )

At Rise: (By lamplight, Mel unpacks few items (a bag of coffee, a book, her flask ) from her duffle and lays them out on the credenza. Her cellphone, resting on the coffee table, BEEPS and flashes a yellow glow creating an ominous ceiling shadow (of the letters WS) hanging over her. She uncaps the flask and takes a sip.)

MEL

Ugh!

She shakes the empty flask, mouth face down, then stuffs it under a couch cushion at the sound of PATTERNING footsteps near the side door. Enter Hal from downstage. Mel doesn't notice as he sneaks up to her back.

MEL

Uhm...

She moves closer to the side door. Hal pounces on her. He wraps his arms around her waist and passionately nuzzles her neck.

HAL

Fun show, huh?

MEL

I wasn't performing.

HAL

It's that Juilliard training...you're damn good!

He smooths her hair. Mel sags into his arms and sniffs his jacket.

MEL

You're the couple who shares jackets. That's new! Does she dress you? Put you in scented diapers?

HAL

(Between nibbles at her neck)

No...I...can't...don't think about her...not for a while. Let me have...

He pulls Mel closer and spins her around into a hug. Beat. He paws at her blouse. She rests her head against his shoulder but her gaze tracks the mantle. She notices the photograph that Will repositioned in Scene II.

MEL

Hold on.

She disentangles her limbs from his and strides over to the mantle.

HAL

Win's seen us before. He knew and didn't care. That's the kind of friend he was.

Mel SLAMS the picture frame on the ground. The glass CRACKS. She bends over, carefully removes the picture from the broken frame, and turns it face down.

HAL

We'll get it later.

MEL

Why don't you take him up stairs. He can watch you eat your wife out.

HAL

Not what I want!

MEL

Do you ever think about what anyone else wants? What she would-

HAL

I don't wanna talk about her and-

A COUGH echoes from somewhere close outside the room. Hal frantically shakes his head.

HAL

Shh!

MEL

(Whispering)

I thought...but you were so quiet coming in...

HAL

(Nervously rambling)

It's that hallway. There's rot on the floorboard. Original oak parquet goes the fastest. I told him about it. Years ago, when he was fixing the master for you. Do some stone paving. Carrara? That's what I would've done-

MEL

She was sleeping up there when you left.

Hal raises both hands with crossed index and middle fingers. Mel can't help but smile and unbutton her blouse.

HAL

Slow down. That's my job...I get off on work.

He beckons Mel closer. Mel complies, willingly. This time, she saunters back over and pulls him to her. He drops his head between her breasts. She runs her fingers through his hair.

MEL

This is what I want.

In a tight embrace, they stagger over to the couch. Hal reaches a hand to pull the lamp cord. CLICK. A moonlit semi-darkness descends over the stage. Hal yanks the quilt over their bodies.

MEL

I like the beard. Win couldn't keep one going that long...

HAL

(Laughing)

You're making me feel dirty!

Beat. The side door opens silently. A faint light flickers from the hallway just outside. A tall shadow (clearly Will) emerges on the back wall besides the fireplace. Neither Hal nor Mel indicate awareness of his presence as they continue to kiss under the blanket.

MEL

Are you done tomorrow?

HAL

Mmm. At noon. I'll pick you up after lunch. We drive down about quarter to? That's when they get phone time. I found a guy from Dover. The cover name I'm supposed to use is the new probate lawyer...Rich. Not raising alarms. I take the check from Win. He makes the deposit. That's it.

MEL

Mr. Dover is-

HAL

He's doing seventy-something hour, wage shifts at a steel mill! This is a pretty solid deal for him. He's got three kids.

Will slinks further into the room and spies the broken picture frame.

MEL

And you're only the go-between...you have no further-

HAL

Nope. My guy's carrying the bulk of the job-

MEL

(Alarmed)

But it's all white collar bulk-

HAL

Shh!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**SCENE VII**

Setting: (Morning in the living room. Rain PATTERS echo against the walls.)

At Rise: (Sarah, Mel, and Will sit around the coffee table on the sofa (no longer a bed). Mel and Will are both in the same clothes they wore the previous day. Sarah wears a different workout set. The broken picture frame and photo of Win are notably missing from below the mantle. Enter bleary-eyed Hal, in a bathrobe.)

MEL

(To Will)

You want coffee?

WILL

No...thanks.

MEL

That's too bad, I bought us Turkish grinds infused with saffron. Basically, I smuggled them over the Bulgarian border. I won't mention where they had to hide for seven hours...

Hal locks eyes with Will. He cocks his head over at the credenza. Will takes the hint.

WILL

Actually, that sounds...if you wouldn't mind.

Hal slaps Will's shoulder on his way to the credenza.

MEL

Not at all.

She exits out the side door. Hal waits for a beat before opening the credenza door and peeking inside.

SARAH

Is that her brandy stash?

HAL

Found the modem. Wanted to check we're getting decent reception.

WILL

I meant to tell you last night...I recuse-

Hal SLAMS the credenza door.

HAL

No you're not! As the only son? You gotta have something to say! We don't wanna come off as...in the 90s they'd call you a wuss. Or worse! He's only working as hard as we demand, right? That's all determined with first impressions. And Zoom is ten trillion times harder...

Will walks up to the mantle where the picture frame fell and picks up a glass shard.

WILL

I would counter, we don't owe each other depositions. He should understand...I saw he read my message.

He presses the shard into his palm until he draws blood. Sarah and Hal notice and exchange a frightened glance.

HAL

(To Will, nearly shouting)

Twenty hours ago. You know crap next to nothing about him. You're taking private talks, now?

SARAH  
(To Hal, whispered)

She's listening.

WILL  
He can help redistribute any assets into donation trusts in my name, given I'm the default legatee if-

HAL  
What the Hell's that!

SARAH  
(To Will, giddy)  
Would we be splitting everything from you? With...her? What's a quarter plus half of a third?

She glances at the side door as if looking for Mel. Will shakes his head and sinks back into the wall in a daze.

SARAH  
(To Hal)  
You have your phone? Do the calculator.

Hal roves his fingers over the credenza top.

HAL  
(Thinking, to himself)  
Hang on...this is...it's something.

WILL  
(To Sarah)  
About forty-one percent.

HAL  
(To Will)  
You're gonna give to some womens' charity? You've gotta go public. I'd be in with you. Pool assets. Take half off the table, let's say. We'd find a way to make a statement. We're not standing with Win once his trial is full blown. On TV? I hear it. They're gonna lump us on fucking predator lists! That'll make people dig...

WILL  
There's no pressure to genuflect and prostrate with me...my decision is personal.

HAL

Can't be personal for us, too? We're not into domestic violence!

WILL

(To Hal)

Oh, by all means, I'm not claiming a monopoly on performative allyship.

RING. Sarah's red flip phone buzzes in her bra. She pulls it out and answers. Hal reaches for the phone but Sarah flails a hand at him and scratches his wrist with her long nails. Hal locks eyes with Will.

HAL

(Whispering to Will)

Never get married....

SARAH

(On phone)

This is she...oh, hi! Yes, thank you. Likewise...no, we're here. We could...uh-huh? Off the cul-de-sac. Greyish brick with the Ivy...looks like a castle. Absolutely, we'll see you then!

HAL

Rich's psyched out about going online too early? Figured it was a matter of minutes...

Sarah nods.

SARAH

And he's right around the corner. He has another client visit in Hamilton.

HAL

That works.

SARAH

(To Will)

Are you interested in speaking with him?

Will shrugs.

WILL

It's still my filial duty to buffer between Win and the implosive tragedy he's set off everyone else around him.

SARAH  
(Under breathe)

More riddles.

She glares at Hal.

HAL  
(To Will)

Good. You stay. Chat with us.

SARAH  
But we need to find a babysitter for...

She nods at the door again.

HAL  
(To Will)

Can you get Mel to that Audubon nature, mountain place? With the scenic point? Twenty minutes from here...it's got a watershed? Think it's the one national park they had to man build in New Jersey.

SARAH  
That's stupid! She's not hiking in the rain!

HAL  
She does it all the time! She's an actual 5k runner.

Sarah rolls her eyes. Enter Mel, sloshing two coffee mugs.

HAL  
Shit!

MEL  
Are we done...not done...discussing me?

Hal shoots Will a glance as Mel hands Will a mug. Sarah surreptitiously stuffs her phone back down her bra.

WILL  
(To Mel)  
Should we go to the dining room? There may be less of a presence...

He lifts the glass shard to his face to show her. She holds out a palm, acknowledging her understanding of his gesture. He hands her the shard. They walk out. Beat.

SARAH

What was that about! Do you think they're together?

HAL

Nah, my bet is he's on the fence. Closer to Liberacci. That's what Win thought. We saw. He had some poetry about lovers lost? Never heard the full story. Not that that's-

SARAH

Totally, no, that wouldn't be an issue! But he was staring at me last night. He was so nervous...adorable.

She adjusts her bra strap.

HAL

Who wouldn't be nervous. Around you.

He steps away from her. She reaches for him to no avail. He turns his back to her and faces the window.

HAL

What time did Rich say?

SARAH

Half hour. You should shave. The beard looks homeless.

She HUFFS and makes a dramatic exit out the side door.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE VIII

Setting: (Open on a traditional colonial family dining room filled with dusty, unused china in locked display cabinets.)

At Rise: (Enter Mel and Will.)

MEL

It's an emasculating tactic.

WILL

Well, thank you for being incensed on my queer behalf.

Mel and Will sit at opposite heads of expansive dining table. Mel keeps her back to the dark curtained windows. Will angles his chair towards a glass pocket door beyond which lies a sun room.

MEL

So. How are you? After yesterday...

WILL

I've never felt more alienated from humanity while surrounded by people.

He squirms and rocks back and forth in his seat.

MEL

Did they say something? Did something happen after we came in?

WILL

No. But I am curious...what do you make of Hal?

MEL

Are we comparing notes?

WILL

You should have more of an opinion than me.

MEL

Not necessarily...? I can't think of...

She takes a long sip from her mug.

WILL

I'm not in a physical relationship with him.

Mel INHALES sharply, spraying coffee and spittle onto the table.

MEL

Whoops!

WILL

There are facets of him I haven't seen.

MEL

You know what? That isn't untrue. I can admit my faults. How about we dissect why you were snooping on our personal conversation?

WILL

It was a logistics meeting.

Mel remains silent for a beat.

WILL

Am I misinterpreting?

MEL

Do you hear how disgusting you sound? You violated my bodily privacy. I actively treat you as my...you are my almost child! And you watched. You saw my nipples! What is that?

WILL

You were under a blanket, from what I recall...and I was planning to take a drive.

MEL

Bull! You came into the room. The picture is gone. Did you assume we wouldn't notice?

WILL

Yes and you didn't. I just find it disconcerting...maybe insulting that you think I couldn't intuit the sexual subtext of your deeply, intimate conversation about paying someone to... black mail me?

MEL

Why do you assume we were talking about you?

WILL

Win doesn't care about anyone else.

Mel folds and steeples her hands on the table.

MEL

Shall we both act like adults for once in your life?

WILL

Is it my final chance?

MEL

I'll say this now, in confidence...hoping you return the favor at some point.

WILL

Okay.

MEL

Win wants to move money to an account in Delaware before...ugh, the feds are starting pry, already. He's trying to preserve more...for all of us. The process of moving cash with the scrutiny level is a bit convoluted. That's why he and Hal...it was their call to keep us outside. I don't have all the details. Last night was only the second time I've heard-

WILL

You had a chance to tell me after the first time. That would have been the emotionally mature, very adult choice, no?

Mel hangs her head.

WILL

Wouldn't an adult admit that she's swayed by the money, at the end of the day? The silent victims came through for you...they aren't making enough of a public spectacle yet. You're not forced to pretend like you feel more for them than for yourself, and you're not willing to-

MEL

As if you're such a martyr...giving everything to charity! Your only objective is to piss Win off!

Will lifts his mug in her face, then rises.

MEL

I held that bag up my ass seven hours for you!

WILL

So ass musk is the rancid note. I wasn't sure if the flavor was an indigenous Bulgarian-

DING DONG. Mel leans back in her chair and pulls aside the window curtain behind her.

WILL

Take my spot. I shouldn't have to care what becomes of our family not quite a legacy.

MEL

I was never the wife. You're the son. The only person who matters.

WILL

That's what everyone here can't seem to...doesn't want to grasp! I don't belong to Win.

MEL

I wasn't-

WILL

I'm not willing to serve as his biological sopping rag. I'm tired of swallowing down the waste from his degenerate stream of misery and corruption and self-agrandizing human destruction! It isn't fair. That I have to bear the consequences of his failures? Alone? I asked nothing of him and I expect nothing from him! I didn't rape anyone!

MEL

Congrats.

She peeks out the window again. KNOCK.  
KNOCK.

WILL

(Whispering, to himself)

Why! Why? What did I do?

He SLAMS a fist on the table.

MEL

We can go through the garage...

WILL

I don't feel comfortable.

He sniffs at his mug.

WILL

I should've listened to Win. Never take a free drink from a stranger.

MEL

Please...I'm not your mother, I won't abandon you.

WILL

(Laughing)

I can believe it. You'll just hold on until my face turns blue.

Mel collapses into her chair, visibly distressed.

Will strides triumphantly out the side door.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE IX

Setting: (The living room.)

At Rise: (Enter sleek RICH LEE, in a suit, carrying a briefcase/laptop bag. He and Hal are engaged in animated conversation. Sarah trails behind them with three champagne flutes. Hal wears crisp chinos and a button down. Sarah plays the part of uptight housewife in a conservative shirt dress.)

RICH

...square footage for this area is unheard of. You could set the listing in the high three's. Then if you drop to stay competitive, I bet you'd still get minimum of three even.

HAL

Exactly where we're aiming. Plus an all cash offer.

RICH

That sounds doable. You may have to wait a few for the end of year housing market to bounce back. But a onetime two percent tax rate isn't leaving too much damage.

HAL

Sarah'll tell you. She more high-strung about the numbers. I'm not picky. No offense, you seem like a great guy...I'm waiting for the day when we don't have to meet again.

RICH

So I took a preliminary look to kickstart the process for you. Everything's essentially unchanged. I'll follow up today with our accountant. She can give more specific estimates and spread sheets.

HAL

Fantastic!

RICH

Fair warning, you're guaranteed to see some added legalese. Unfortunately, there's no getting around the unique situation of the assets when the client is incarcerated...we'll have a better idea of how to proceed after the trial...

Hal and Sarah nod vigorously. Sarah hands Rich and Hal champagne flutes. All three CLINK flutes in a toast.

HAL

Can't tell you how many hotshots we've been ghosted by. End up running their mouths. They make a stink about being scandalized. Then they don't wanna deal with us, even when we say we can pay.

SARAH

Well, and we're also victims! They forget. We're just very grateful for your help!

She coyly touches Rich's elbow. Rich plays dumb to her gesture's intent.

RICH

I feel for the position you two are in. It's hard enough to put together your backup support network...the minefield of limited options is one of our industry blindspots.

He opens his briefcase and takes out his laptop. The trio settles around the coffee table.

RICH

I've seen what you're talking about. The younger kids don't understand what our job requires. They think being a probate attorney is about giving advice, changing people's values. I tell my interns. We're in a high end service role and the guys at the top that you want to be dealing with? The guys who can offer you your worth? They only made it one way. They're hanging off mountains of bodies, debts, and secrets.

Right?  
 HAL

Suddenly, enter Will from downstage, still sloshing his coffee mug.

Will? Hey. Come meet-  
 HAL

Rich extends his hand. Will ignores him and barrels through the room to the credenza. He opens a drawer, grabs his notebook, then stalks out the side door leaving Hal and Sarah open-mouthed.

SARAH  
 (To Rich)  
 Sorry. We wanted to include him as our God son.

RICH  
 It's no problem. I'm close with my father, but I genuinely don't know how I would handle the same scenario.

HAL  
 Man! You're too good a pro, too nice! He's...whadda we call it?

He looks at Sarah.

SARAH  
 We've just noticed. When there's a high degree of stress, high pressure, he flares up?

HAL  
 Almost like he can't adopt a get shit done for the sake of the family mentality. He's hair trigger right now...tried to stab me with a fork yesterday.

SARAH  
 Yes! I forgot about that! We've been blocking out any added drama.

RICH  
 I'm happy to speak with him separately.

HAL  
 I'd hold off. Will'll give you the backstory. Will's not good managing big money. Very book smart. PHD and everything. Same time, he's got that spacey, couldn't tell ya what he spends on a latte, quality? As executor, I'll testify.

Win's not gonna want him too involved. Problem is, Will's already thinking about donations. It's skipping out on responsibility. He's gonna offload...

SARAH

(Sharp)

Not that the money should matter...we definitely want to put something aside, too.

HAL

Doesn't change that Win still wants him to learn accountability. He's gotta file taxes at some point.

RICH

(Uneasy)

I see...I should make a reminder...Win and I spoke briefly last Wednesday on a call. I felt bad pushing him to big disclosures with the pressure he's under. But he did give me some starting discussion points...I'll pull up my notes here in one second...

He busies himself with typing on his laptop.  
Sarah winks at Hal. Hal frowns at her. She puts  
a hand on his knee. He forcefully squeezes her  
hand back. She grimaces in pain.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE X

Setting: (Open on the Starver house backyard. A small, well manicured lawn surrounded by thick, untamed woods. To one side is an alcove with a molded stone bench.)

At Rise: (Rich closes a back door and surveys the lawn. From the woods, Will emerges and sits on the bench. Rich waves to him. Will waves back. Rich approaches.)

RICH

Your godparents warned me not to get involved.

WILL

I can lose your email, if that helps.

RICH

No need. Your family is the first five figure client I've walked out on. Day one.

WILL

We like setting records...for the prestige. Infamy. They're indistinguishable to anyone with a roman numeral after his name. We have to set ourselves apart.

RICH

(Laughing)

May I?

He nods at the bench. Will scoots to one side.  
Rich perches on the other end.

RICH

Your family is...any description is better left alone.

WILL

And what baffles me is that they're very aware. They have the capacity to laugh at themselves. They may even be leaning into their caricatures. Yet, they're so assured that they've successfully duped everyone, God, into believing that they're somehow good, honest victims of others' suffering...suffering that they could care less about!

RICH

Forget them. Find your own council. Just make the changes you want with your portion only. Leave them to follow their egos and they'll eventually hang themselves.

WILL

In an ideal world, I could bargain them into a collective donation...and I would feel...

He holds his head in his hands.

RICH

Never happening. As you said, they're actively primed to go for the worst possible choice. At every turn. That's part of their DNA. You aren't saving their souls when they're plotting to sell your house way over market value next month!

WILL

I know, but I feel vulnerable. I thought I'd have some control over the only domain I care about...the atonement process. Maybe it's selfish...I want them to cave!

RICH

Control here isn't worth your effort. Walking away from unfixable people isn't a failure. It's an act of pragmatism. No one would hold it against you...

Will folds even further.

RICH

To make it easier, I can send you some names. A couple of my former junior associates are in state. I'd trust any of them to help you.

Mel appears in a lower floor window wearing sneakers and sweats. Rich watches her.

RICH

I'd trust any of them to help you.

WILL

Thanks.

RICH

Of course. I'll send you an email.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### **SCENE XI**

Setting: (Same coffee shop from Scene III.)

At Rise: (Hal and Mel sit side-by-side in a booth.)

HAL

...you're overthinking. You say you went on a hike. Easy.

MEL

Does your wife know we're out?

HAL

She's on a mission.

Mel turns away from him. Hal wraps an arm around her, pulling her closer.

HAL

I talked her into finding another lawyer. She should be driving up to the shore. Speaking with my cousin. He's got a few legal friends. You heard. The guy this morning...what a two-faced nut job. Acting like we're literal thugs.

MEL

He spoke with Will.

HAL

After I said no. That's such a fucking time suck! Win's gonna throw a fit.

MEL

And what about Mr. Deposit...

HAL

Andy?

MEL

He gave you his name?

HAL

'Cause he's not a thug, either. I lent him that spare key I've been holding. He'll go through the basement. Do a last sweep. For checkbooks, account passwords, extra stuff, you know. He's meeting us in Philly next week.

MEL

Is that...safe? I didn't see Will leave the house.

HAL

Andy's gonna follow through. He was in Iraq. Armed forces. Those snipers? They don't question. They act.

MEL

What if he-

Hal pulls Mel into a kiss. She pushes him off.

HAL  
I need consent?

MEL  
What did you do to Will.

HAL  
If I tell you, you're stuck to me.

MEL  
That's not a threat...I've already stood by you...I don't need you to test me.

HAL  
Andy's cleaning up.

MEL  
Great...and I asked about what you did.

She presses her whole face into his shoulder. He  
kisses her hair.

HAL  
I'll call you a ride. You go to your place and don't call me. Don't the house. You're still  
in Jersey City, right?

Mel slowly lifts her face and kisses him. He  
holds her face in his hands.

MEL  
Stop withholding from me...I'm not worth protecting.

HAL  
You are to me.

MEL  
We deserve each other.

HAL  
Hey! You're gonna go back and-

MEL  
I need my bags...my wallet, passport, keys...everything's at the house.

HAL

(Whispering)

We'll go together. I'll grab 'em for you. You wait across the street.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**SCENE XII**

Setting: (The living room.)

At Rise: (Enter ANDY, burly in cheap, mismatched suit. Will stands at the mantle, sipping from his coffee mug. One hand clutches his diaphragm. Andy watches intently as Will begins to convulse. Beat. Will's hand unfurls, CRACKING his mug on the ground. He furiously wipes his now bleeding hand on his pants for a beat. He takes a step forward, CRUNCHING over the broken pottery and sniffs his palm before collapsing into a fetal position among the mug shards. )

ANDY

Damn it!

He squats down and inspects Will's comatose figure with laser focus. Beat.

SARAH

(Voice only)

She's insane! You have to see what she left in the garage-

Enter Sarah, carrying an uncapped, plastic anti-freeze jug. Andy rises. Sarah GASPS and splashes the jug at him. Pink liquid splatters the wall behind his head. He laughs at her.

SARAH

(Hyperventilating, horrified)

What happened! Is he-

Andy spins on his heels and lunges for her. Her face scrunches, prepared with a scream, but Andy hooks an arm around her neck before she can make a sound. He tightens his grip and smiles as she wordlessly chokes in his arms. Her eyes roll back while her body goes limp. He releases her body. Her head THUDS against the coffee table corner and leaks a rivulet of blood on Andy's sneakers. Beat.

Andy kicks Sarah in the head until she lays prone on the floor. Satisfied, he wraps Will in the WS quilt and slings the makeshift bodybag over his shoulders. He looks back once at Sarah's form before calmly exiting through the side door.

All is silent for a beat. Sarah's chest heaves and her eyes flick open. She gingerly uses the coffee table's edge to pull herself to a seated position.

SARAH

(Mumbling, rubbing her head)

Uh, uh...

She fumbles in her pocket but finds nothing, then frantically tosses aside items on the coffee table (remote, magazine, tissues). She spies her red cellphone, clutches it to her chest, and EXHALES before dialing on speakerphone.

SARAH

Hello? Hello, uh, hi?

9-1-1 OPERATOR

(Voice only)

9-1-1. What is your emergency?

SARAH

Is this...9-1-1?

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Ma'am? I'm going to have you take a breathe for me and then tell me what's going on.

SARAH

I don't have a breathe! The man...a man! He was here and he killed...he was...he choked me. Killed this...my husband's...uhm...

9-1-1 OPERATOR

He killed your husband?

Sarah looks around the room in desperation. She spies the crumpled photograph of Win sticking out of the trash bin by the credenza.

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Ma'am, are you still with me? Can you please provide your location?

SARAH

Okay, sorry, no. There was a man. I know my husband. He paid the man. To kill me. And our godson. He's dead. My godson...not the man or...I don't know where my husband went. He left-

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Ma'am, where are you located.

SARAH

235. Cherry Valley...two separate words. It's a...not a road. It's on a court...you go from the court...to a grey brick...it looks like jail.

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Somerset. 08540. Got it.

SARAH

Uhm, uhm...yes, I...I think...

A CREAK from outside the windows startles her.

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Ma'am, a dispatch is on route to your location. Are you in immediate danger? Is someone there with you?

SARAH

Yes, yes! Thank you! Yes, that's it! No...outside. I have to hang-

9-1-1 OPERATOR

Ma'am? Please stay on with me-

Sarah ends the call and crawls over to the windows. She leans against the credenza and gazes outside to watch the bird feeder sway ominously in the wind.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE XIII

Setting: (A ditch off the side of rocky outcropping in a thick, wooded forest. A distant sign posts reads: Audubon Trail 1.5 Miles.)

At Rise: (Will languishes, knees to chest, hands and ankles duck-taped, in the ditch. Andy sits cross-legged on the WS blanket facing Will. Besides Andy, are a water bottle, a bag of chips, and a cellphone. He opens the bottle and splashes Will in the face.)

WILL

Argh!

ANDY

I'm supposed to give you five minutes. But we've got time.

He polishes off the water, CRUMPLES the plastic bottle, and tosses it into the woods.

ANDY

Your dad wants a line from you.

WILL

(Breathless, in physical pain)

What does...he need me to affirm for him?

Andy POPS the chip bag and offers a chip to Will.

For me?

WILL

Andy nods and nibbles on a chip. Will shakes his head.

Right call...they're stale.

ANDY

He flings his half-eaten chip aside and drops the bag at his feet.

ANDY

He wants a goodbye. That's what he explained to me. He wasn't super clear.

He presses on his cellphone. A recording app BEEPS.

In exchange for...my life?

WILL

I can give you the choice. Swiss army or my arm.

ANDY

This is what he wanted?

WILL

Not really.

ANDY

WILL  
(Sarcastic, resigned)

He didn't want me to die before him...no, because I would be beating him to the finish line and he would never stand for that loss!

Andy smiles and laughs. Will nervously laughs with him.

ANDY

So your dad, he told me to buy a used Glock 43X. But I don't keep guns in my home. I think they're dangerous. Don't want 'em around my kids.

WILL

That's irrational. How is a Glock, in this context, different from a Victoironox. And Win doesn't know anything about guns...he'd go for nitrous oxide.

ANDY

Do me a favor?

WILL

I have no choice.

ANDY

This is the last thing you'll say.

He holds the cellphone in the air, closer to Will.

WILL

Am I...on the record?

ANDY

Yep...go for it.

WILL

I concede. But I don't forgive you.

ANDY

What?

Andy watches him with rapt attention.

WILL

I cannot absolve you. You asked if I agreed that you should go to Hell...that you're a terrible person? I do! I agree. And I am not, in good conscience, throwing away my last act as a sacrifice to preserving your existence!

He takes a powerful breathe. Andy leans closer.

ANDY

(Whispering)

Keep on...

WILL

If I have to face my futility and pointlessness and selfishness at your absentee hands? So be it! I know that I have left nothing of value to the world. But at the same time, I don't believe that my life is as damnation worthy as yours. Or that I don't deserve another chance to make amends. To do something kind for those you've hurt.

I won't lay down here and cower. I'm not begging for your approval...or your permission to live on and fight!

He breaks down into a sob. Andy stops recording and lowers his cellphone. He takes a Swiss army knife from his jacket. Will watches him for a tense beat. Andy reaches over and wraps an arm around Will's neck, hugging him. Will shakes and rocks in Andy's arms.

WILL

Is it too late? I want your arm.

ANDY

Close your eyes.

Will closes his eyes. Andy gashes Will's neck, drawing a thin red line of blood. Will grimaces. Andy pulls a different cellphone from his pocket and snaps a picture of Will's neck. Beat. He nudges Will's bound feet with his foot. Will doesn't stir. With his knife, Andy cuts the duck tape around Will's feet and hands.

ANDY

Wrong call. The arm is always worse.

Will remains frozen, eyes closed. Beat. Andy rises and leaves Will's body behind in the dirt.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

#### **SCENE XIV**

Setting: (Deep in a forest thicket. Through the trees, the setting sun glows an ominous pink.)

At Rise: (Andy squats at the head of Will's motionless body surrounded by a mote of bloody gravel and vomit. Besides Will is a large boulder on which is smeared a red palm print. With one hand, Andy presses two fingers on Will's neck. The other hand holds his cellphone flashlight up to the gash.)

ANDY

Fuck! Fuck!

He withdraws his hands and dials on his cellphone.

ANDY

(Into cellphone)

He's out...don't tell Win...no. No, out...as in lights fucking out...his pulse...why? He passed out, so I took him to the field. He tripped on a rock...dunno. I didn't mean to...no, I understood the assignment...yeah, he's not moving, he did it to himself. My hands are all over...they're on your wife, too! She was gonna...no, she was breathing after I kicked...I'm sorry...Hal? You there? I said I let him go. I thought...he was doing fine and...

He lowers the cellphone away from his ear.

HAL

(Voice only)

Psycho! You're a sick! Sick killer! You-

Andy clams up as a SIREN whines in the distance. He swiftly SMASHES his cellphone on the rock and buries it in Will's vomit. Beat. He lays down besides Will and wraps his hands around his own throat, squeezing until his eyes flutter.

WILL

(Mumbling, under breathe)

That was...sounds like a firetruck...

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**SCENE XV**

Setting: (The living room, now in disarray, fenced with crime tape.)

At Rise: (Hal is seated on the sofa facing two male police officers- OFFICERS I and II- scribbling on legal pads. Mel walks past him, guided by a female officer. She stares at him with a tear stained expression. He ignores her gaze.)

HAL

(Desperate, pleading)

What's my divorce have anything to do with anything? You can ask my lawyer. He'll explain. She's got the debt. She wants the cards. The accounts. That way she can afford to leave me 'cause we did a prenup. I'm here for my friend. And his son. You should talk to the kid. He's waiting for Win to kill himself. Told Win life's not worth living. After one nothing burger mistake! I'll never forget. First thing, Will...that's what we call the kid...he says to me, let's not drive each other to suicide. Then he's hiding around. Throwing out his notes with psychotic poems. Cutting up pictures of Win. He's writing about dying. Killing hope. That's a pretty clear message. Win needed defense. I owed it to him! I wasn't gonna bury him while my god son's in jail for his murder? What would that do for me? You know? Why...why would I want that? That makes no sense...why?

The officers exchange a glance and silently trade notepads.

OFFICER I

Mr. Borman, would you mind if we ask you about something he wrote in here?

He takes out Will's notebook from his pocket and flips to a recent page.

HAL

But I'm not a poet.

OFFICER II

This isn't about the poems. It seems like Will...see, yesterday, he wrote down here that he checked out his father's google calendar records. He believes that you and his father may have engaged in soliciting certain individuals for the purpose of sexual trafficking.

He has note about a specific incident at an adult entertainment club when you were together in Palm Beach. 2014? Sound familiar?

HAL

That's flat out made up. He's defaming-

OFFICER I

Well, sexual trafficking is a major, first degree felony in the state of Florida. So, before we discuss further any of the allegations made against you-

HAL

I'm calling my lawyer.

OFFICER I

Absolutely, it's your right to request that legal counsel be present with you. You can let them know that we do have the names of two witnesses-

HAL

You're wrong. Will's a suicidal schizophrenic. He doctored that calendar! It's so fucking juvenile but that's how his twisted brain thinks he's gonna pull a gotcha sting! You'll see. Call the witnesses...they're not real people! They're in his head!

The officers trade their pads again. Hal watches them with increasing anxiety.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

### SCENE XV

Setting: (Morning in the forest thicket from Scene XIV.)

At Rise: (Will lays in a fetal position. A few feet away, Andy's corpse is slumped against a tree stump. Will's ears prick up and he rises slowly at the sound of human voices.)

HIKER I

(Voice Only)

...you're borderline addicted. Stop reading those horror stories.

HIKER II

(Voice Only)

I'm freaked out. How many times do you hear about someone in a random, neutral context and then it turns out they're a wanted serial rapist? He could've been my sister's surgical oncologist! The creep factor!

HIKER I

That is...super odd. It's divine intervention they caught him before...

HIKER II

But I still think about it. The nurse said she was his final June appointment. He was making a special exception after seeing her boobs, which is-

HIKER I

Sadie? Sadie girl! Where're ya going? Slow! Slow down!

Their voices grow louder. SADIE THE DOG pants and BARKS. Wincing, Will pushes himself up to an upright position. He manages to stand and stagger a few feet before collapsing in pain.

HIKER II

Sadie? What's over there?

Sadie bolts onto the stage, carving out a path through the forest. As she nears Will, he holds out his hand.

WILL

(Breathy, exuberant)

Is it...Sadie?

Sadie slows down and gently nuzzles Will's extended palm. Will reaches up to pet her head. She curls protectively at his side.

HIKER I

I hear her. She's behind that rock.

HIKER II

She probably smells blood...maybe there's a dead animal?

The two hikers appear at a distance along Sadie's path. Sadie BARKS at them.

Will raises his hand. The hikers break into a run towards Will.

HIKER II

(Yelling)

Are you injured? We'll be right there!

WILL

(Yelling back)

I'm...sort of...I'm okay. Better than before!

He lays on his back and EXHALES, finally able to relax. Saddle affectionately licks his face.

(END OF SCENE)

(CURTAIN)













