

Finding the Path

Written by

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**FADE IN**

**SUPER:**

## **Chapter One**

### **A Few Weeks, Maybe a Month from Dead**

#### **INT. JON AND CORDELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Few would consider this place fit for human habitation.

JON VORNHOLT, 15, picks his way through the trash.

The tall, stick-thin, hollow-cheeked teenager makes his way over to the kitchen. His breath wafts in vapor as he shivers.

Jon shoves aside empty bottles of cheap booze, finds a box of store-brand crackers, tests it for contents. It's empty.

He opens a cupboard.

JON

Jesus!!

A rat jumps out, onto his shoulder, then disappears.

Jon opens the fridge, frowns, shuts it, presses his stomach.

He looks up, gulps hard when the front door opens.

CORDELL VORNHOLT, 29, bangs in.

There's no mistaking who Jon's father is: Jon and Cordell could practically pass as twins.

RON "FERRET" TOMANIO, 31, rubs his hands together.

FERRET

Cold as shit in 'ere, Cordell.

CORDELL

Fuck you. I'll tell Detroit Gas to send you the goddamn bill.

FERRET

Speaking of bills. You owe me for that coke, asshole.

Cordell just stands there, says nothing.

FERRET

You fuck!! I knew you dragged me  
over to this dump for nothing!!

Cordell points at Jon, Ferret turns his weaselly eyes at him.

FERRET

Yeah, okay, I'll suck that and --

He turns his attention back to Cordell.

FERRET

-- call it even. But just this  
once. Next time I blow your fuckin'  
brains out.

He glares across the room at Jon.

FERRET

And sonny-boy's too. Hell, why  
wait? I need some target practice.

From his back waistband he produces a handgun, aims it right  
at Jon's terror-stricken face, cocks the gun's hammer back.

Ferret and Cordell both laugh as Jon darkens the crotch and  
left leg of his ratty jeans with urine.

Ferret releases the hammer, returns the weapon to his  
waistband.

FERRET

Not worth the bullet.

Cordell moves over to the chair in front of the coffee table,  
picks up a dirty needle. He glares up at the drug pusher.

CORDELL

You would've owed me a mule, you  
know. And not that new scrawny 12-  
year-old either.

Ferret flips him the bird. He walks up to Jon who stares  
vacantly at the far wall as Ferret gets on his knees in front  
of him, starts unbuckling the boy's belt.

**EXT. ALLEYWAY BESIDE LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT**

In pure primal id Jon tears into a black plastic bag, pulls  
out a pizza crust, crams it into his mouth. He gags, heaves,  
spits the crust out.

JON

Fuck!!

He looks up when he sees MIKE WITTROCK, 60, and MARJORIE WITTROCK, 58, approach him. Jon straightens, plasters a grin across his face.

JON

Hey. Got a few bucks? Help a guy get a burger?

He sniffs, wipes snot off onto the back of his hand. He breathes hard under his sweatshirt, he swallows hard.

JON

Hey, mister, I'll fuck your wife for fifty bucks. You can watch.

MIKE

What?!? Hell, no!

Jon grabs his forearm through the tattered and worn leather of his ratty jacket.

JON

I'll fuck you for 25. C'mon, man, 25. I can score for that. Jesus. Look at you two. You got it. I knew coming all the way over here to the university was worth it.

MIKE

Son, how old are you?

Jon spits on the ground, strikes a languid pose. He takes out his pack of cigarettes, pinches one between his lips.

JON

(deepens his voice)

18.

He catches Marjorie looking at him sternly.

Jon can't look her in the eye. He clears his throat.

JON

15.

Mike glances at his watch.

MIKE

Why aren't you home? Don't you have school tomorrow? Homework?

Jon returns the cigarette to the pack, rolls his eyes.

JON  
Are you going to fucking help me  
score or what?

MIKE  
Absolutely not!

Mike takes a step toward Jon.

Jon narrows his hard eyes at him, stands his full height,  
brings his fists up. He clenches his teeth.

JON  
I'll fuck you up! Don't think I  
won't! I'll suck your cock, but  
other than that, you stay the fuck  
away from me, old man! I mean it!

Marjorie puts a hand on her husband's arm. Mike steps back.

Jon only slowly drops his fists. His eyelids droop. He looks  
as if he's going to cave in under the stained and torn  
sweatshirt that reads Northwestern High. He grabs the wall.

MARJORIE  
When's the last time you ate?

Jon just glares at her.

Marjorie takes out a ten-dollar bill.

MARJORIE  
Go down to that all-night store a  
few doors down from the pizzeria  
and get yourself something to eat.

JON  
Fuck food, bitch. I need a fix.

His bottom lip quivers as he stares at Marjorie.

JON  
I'm sorry, lady. I shouldn't have  
called you that.

He looks at Mike.

JON  
You can belt me for that, mister.  
Extra hard, right in my face.

He turns his head to present his left cheek to him.

Mike frowns, shakes his head.

Marjorie reaches the money out to Jon.

MARJORIE  
I got your word?

Jon nods stiffly. He takes it, exits the alleyway.

Marjorie and Mike follow him, watch as Jon enters the store.

Hardly moments later:

TONY, the store's clerk, bursts out onto the sidewalk with Jon by the scruff of his disgusting jacket. Jon writhes as if a wild animal in Tony's muscled grasp.

TONY  
Hey, Professors! Did this punk jack  
you two just now?!

MARJORIE  
No! We gave him that money, Tony!

Jon yanks himself from Tony's grip, glares at all of them.

JON  
ASSHOLES!!!

He takes off down the sidewalk.

**EXT. 8 MILE ROAD UNDERPASS - NIGHT**

Jon has his belt strapped tight around his weak bicep as a tourniquet. Track marks pockmark his forearms. A cigarette dangles between his lips. He slips the needle into his vein.

Jon collapses down onto his side, curls into a ball.

JON  
God, please don't make me wake up  
tomorrow. Please. Dear God, please.

**EXT. 8 MILE ROAD UNDERPASS - DAY**

Jon pops his eyes open, just stares at the rumbling cement above him. He blinks as dust wafts down over him.

JON  
Fuck you, God.

He sits up, lights a cigarette, takes a long drag off it.

He pushes in on his stomach.

Stiffly Jon stands, picks his way down the slope.

**INT. PUBLIC PARK RESTROOM - DAY**

The BUSINESSMAN zips his pants, straightens his tie. Jon wipes his mouth, then rubs his hand on his filthy jeans.

The man stuffs money in the breast pocket of Jon's jacket.

BUSINESSMAN

Jesus Christ, kid, get yourself something to eat. And a fucking shower. Jesus, you stink!

The guy grabs Jon's chin, turns Jon's head first to the left, then to the right.

BUSINESSMAN

Why you hidin' those pretty-boy looks behind all that grime? If you cleaned up, you could really clean up, know what I mean?

The man shrugs.

BUSINESSMAN

What's wrong with me?! What the fuck I care about a fuckin' worthless piece of meat like you?

He leaves.

Jon rushes into a stall, dry heaves into the toilet.

**EXT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT**

Jon stands in the pizzeria's little doorway alcove, shoulders hunched, hands stuffed deep into the jacket's pockets.

Mike and Marjorie walk up to him.

Jon can't meet their eyes.

MIKE

Took three days, but you came back.

Jon shrugs.

JON  
 Got a few bucks? Help a guy get a  
 burger?

MARJORIE  
 We'll share a pizza. How's that?

**INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT**

The large pizza pan sits empty, as does Jon's plate.  
 The Wittrocks have taken only token bites of their slices.  
 Jon slurps the last of his large drink through his straw.  
 Jon sits back, stares at the both of them. He frowns.

JON  
 Ma'am? Sir?

Marjorie smiles at him.

MARJORIE  
 I'm Dr. Marjorie Wittrock, Paul,  
 and this is my husband, Dr. Michael  
 Wittrock. We both teach and  
 research here at Wayne State.

Jon chuckles noncommittally.

JON  
 Dr. and Dr. Wittrock. Must make  
 getting calls at your place fun.

MIKE  
 Trust me, Paul, we've heard all the  
 jokes.

JON  
 Ma'am...Um...Dr. and Dr. Wittrock?

They both look at him.

JON  
 I lied to you. My name's not Paul.  
 I don't know why I lied. I feel  
 bad, nice folks like you. My name's  
 Jonathan.

Jon's pronounced Adam's apple dances up and down his throat.



JON  
 You can call me Jon.  
 (quickly)  
 If you want to. I mean, you don't  
 have to. It's dumb. Forget it.

MIKE  
 We'd like that. Thanks.

MARJORIE  
 We'd really like that, Jon!  
 Thank you!!

The waitress brings the check.

Marjorie places two twenty-dollar bills atop the check. She indicates her purse to Mike, who nods. Marjorie removes another twenty, places it down on the table in front of Jon.

Jon stares down at it, then only slowly up at the adults.

JON  
 Wh-what do you want for this?

MARJORIE  
 Nothing. We just think you could  
 use some assistance, is all.

He narrows his hard eyes at them.

JON  
 I'm just gonna use this to score.  
 You gotta know that.

Both adults frown.

Jon frowns back at them, darts his eyes down at the money.

Jon puts his fingers on the twenty-dollar bill, slides it out of sight under the table. He looks directly at Marjorie. He barely whispers:

JON  
 Um...thanks.

**INT. ALL-NIGHT STORE ON 8 MILE ROAD - NIGHT**

The CLERK, arms crossed, frown deep, watches Jon as the boy peruses the comic book rack.

Jon, with a small grin, grabs a comic: Captain America.

**EXT. SAME ALL-NIGHT STORE ON 8 MILE ROAD - NIGHT**

For someone 6'1", Jon has himself remarkably scrunched down into a human ball as he sits in the entranceway, reads the comic book. Two more issues jut out from under his jacket, with a receipt for all three sticking out from one of them.

**INT. JON AND CORDELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Jon goes to his room's closet, rifles through the trash that fills it. Jon pulls out a small box, brings it over to his bare mattress where he sits, props the box on his lap.

He opens the box. He takes out a little stuffed bear, grins at it, puts it to his nose, sniffs. He pulls out some handwritten letters, then a bent photograph of a young smiling woman holding a baby. He gulps as his eyes well up as he runs his finger over the photo. He whispers:

JON  
I miss you, Mom.

He takes out some sports medals, grins with a hint of pride.

Jon pulls the three comic books from under his jacket, tucks them into the box. He quickly returns his "treasure chest" to its hiding spot, piles trash atop it.

Jon stretches out on the mattress, pulls his jacket tight around himself. He slips his hand under the front of his torn, filthy, threadbare jeans, starts to breathe hard.

**EXT. 8 MILE ROAD - NIGHT**

Two of Ferret's GOONS hold Jon as Ferret approaches.

FERRET  
Cordell doesn't like payin', huh?

He reaches around to his back waistband.

Jon uses how stick thin he is to his advantage, slips out of his ratty leather jacket, takes off at a dead run.

He spins around long enough to flip Ferret the finger.

JON  
Suck on me?! Suck on this, you  
goddamn faggot!!

Jon takes off at a dead run, soon out of sight.

Ferret knits his brows.

FERRET

Where the fuck's that kid going?!  
That's nowhere back to his place!

**INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT**

Mike and Marjorie slide into the booth across from Jon as he pushes himself up. Shivering, Jon stares at them.

JON

I didn't know where else to come.

MARJORIE

Where's your jacket, honey? It's freezing outside.

Jon shrugs.

JON

I'm always cold, even the summer.  
It doesn't matter.

LUIGI PATRIONELLI brings them three mugs of steaming coffee.

Jon wraps his hands around his mug, lifts it to his lips. He takes a long sip. His shivering starts to subside.

He darts his eyes at Mike, then settles them on Marjorie.

JON

I'm in trouble. I mean, big trouble. Ferret's a real psycho. Dad stiffed him some drugs. Now, he's after me, and he's got this big motherfuckin' gun. I can't go home, I can't go back to 8 Mile, I can't go anywhere.

Jon runs his thin, long fingers through his greasy hair. His breathing comes almost in gasps.

He stares into the coffee.

JON

I'm really dead this time.

He looks up at Marjorie again, narrows his eyes.

JON

And it's about goddamn time too!

Marjorie slides her hand across the table, places it atop Jon's. Jon slides it out from under hers, but slowly.

MARJORIE

C'mon, Jon, you don't wish to die.

JON

Fuck yeah! I'm just too much of a goddamn pussy to take Dad's gun and do it. Mom did it. Why can't I?

MARJORIE

You can go somewhere. With us. To our home. We've got lots of room. We want you there.

Jon catches Mike darting his eyes at his wife.

JON

I'm not fucking going anywhere with you two! I wake up tomorrow, you've harvested my organs. Fuck that!

His frown deepens.

JON

Can't you slip me four, five hundred bucks, maybe a thousand? That'll get me to Chicago or Phoenix or L.A.

MIKE

15 years old and you live on the streets of L.A.?

JON

I'm 15 years old and I live on the streets of Detroit. Big diff, asshole.

Mike shrugs.

MIKE

Suit yourself, punk. You got it all figured out.

He waves Luigi over.

MIKE

Luigi, let the boy order anything he wants, we'll pay for it later.

Mike looks at Marjorie.

MIKE

C'mon, Marge. Let's go home.

Luigi hands Jon a menu. Jon immediately pushes it aside.

JON

Wait! What? You don't want anything from me for this?

He taps the menu.

Mike taps the menu too.

MIKE

Listen, kid, we've never asked you for anything. We've been nothing but kind to you.

Marjorie puts her hand on her husband's shoulder.

MARJORIE

It's been nice meeting you, Jon. We really hope your situation turns around. We really do. I hope you trust our sincerity in that.

Marjorie and Mike start to get up from the booth.

JON

I told you, I don't have anywhere to go. I mean, you're teachers. Teachers help kids, right?

MARJORIE

They help you at your school, Jon?

Jon sighs, shakes his head. Tears well in his eyes.

Mike thinks for a moment, takes out a business card. He scribbles on the back of it, hands it to Jon.

MIKE

Do you know the MOTS shelter?

Jon nods.

MIKE

Go there, give them that card, tell them you talked to me, Dr. Michael Wittrock. That should get you a cot for at least tonight.

JON  
I can't go to MOTS, man. Ferret  
knows about that place, he pushes a  
ton of drugs there every night.

Mike huffs, shrugs.

The teenager stares at them wide-eyed. He gulps hard, darts  
his eyes from one adult back to the other.

JON  
(voice quivering)  
Jesus Christ, please help me!

Mike stares at him, gulps himself. He bites on his lower lip  
for a moment before he shrugs. His tone indifferent:

MIKE  
Sorry, kid. Wish we could.

Marjorie and Mike rise from the booth, head toward the  
counter, their backs to the boy.

Marjorie shuts her eyes, grabs and squeezes her husband's  
hand. Mike squeezes it right back.

They catch Luigi's gaze. Luigi grins, winks at them, then  
darts his eyes to the spot directly behind them.

They stop. Slowly turn around.

Jon stands there. Indeed, directly behind them.

JON  
Your place, I bet you keep it real  
warm, huh?

Marjorie nods.

MARJORIE  
Yeah, real warm.

JON  
You really won't mind me in your  
nice home? I bet it's real nice.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Jon scans the whole condo with one sweep of his keen eyes.

JON  
Wow! All this is yours? You people  
are hella rich!

Mike chuckles, turns, hangs up his jacket, turns back around.

MIKE

Whoa! Jon, what are you doing?!?

Jon already has his belt undone, his stained and torn jeans unbuttoned. He's in the process of pulling the zipper down.

JON

You want to suck my dick? Or you want me to suck yours?

MIKE

Uh...Um...Neither one.

Marjorie walks in.

JON

Oh. Do you want me to have sex with your wife then while you watch? A lot of folks like that. Or you can have sex with me while she watches.

His eyelids droop.

JON

I'm just too fuckin' tired to care.

Jon unzips his jeans, pushes them past his narrow hips. He slips his hand inside the fly of his piss- and cum-stained boxer shorts.

MIKE

Jon!!

Mike clears his throat.

MIKE

Jon, do your clothes back up please. C'mon now, son.

Jon darts his eyes from Mike to Marjorie.

MARJORIE

C'mon now, Jon. Please.

Jon's hands shake as he complies.

JON

I don't understand any of this. I don't understand you people. What the goddamn fuck do you want from me?! I don't care what you said back there.

JON (CONT'D)

You must want something!! Everyone wants something, goddammit!! Fuck!

Marjorie steps forward.

MARJORIE

We don't. We just...don't.

JON

That's some kind of fucking joke, lady? I don't get jokes.

His eyelids droop. Jon wavers where he stands.

MARJORIE

Jon, you're safe here, we promise. You'll always be safe here.

He looks at her hard.

JON

Yeah?

She nods earnestly.

He seems to think for a moment, the intelligence reflected in those haunting eyes grind away at Marjorie's statement.

JON

There's nowhere safe, just places less bad.

Marjorie squares her shoulders.

MARJORIE

Well...our home exists as one of those "less bad" sanctuaries then.

She clears her throat.

MARJORIE

Go upstairs and get a good night's sleep. We're going to have a lot to talk about in the morning.

The boy's tone drips with suspicion:

JON

What's upstairs?

MARJORIE

A soft bed. You'll have your own bathroom. You can take a long shower, however long you want.



MARJORIE (CONT'D)

By the time you get out, I'll have pajamas you can wear tonight, and Dr. Wittrock will be back by then with all brand new clothes for you to put on in the morning. That'll be nice, won't it? Brand new stuff that's just yours, yours alone?

Mike and Marjorie stand there, watch him.

JON

Dad's gonna beat me like he never has before, he finds out I've been talking to you.

He sniffs.

JON

How can I play basketball if he breaks my arm again?

His voice quavers.

JON

I lo-love basketball. I want to play baseball and football and go out for swimming and track. Dad won't let me do any of those.

Jon stands his full height, his eyes, which had softened for a moment, harden again.

JON

I'm garbage and always will be.

Marjorie leads the boy upstairs while Mike grabs his keys.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT**

The home crackles with silence. Jon explores the ground floor, keeps darting his eyes up the stairs.

He takes in everything: the furnishings, the decorations, shelves and shelves of books, the paintings, the custom-framed photos of extensive family -- no one, though, who screams these two people's own kids or grandkids.

Jon makes his way into the kitchen. It's clean, orderly, everything in its place. He shakes his head. No empty boxes of store-brand crackers.

He walks over to the huge refrigerator, opens it. His eyes bug out of his head as he beholds the food it contains. So much food the device threatens to explode with it all.

His chest heaves, he presses in on his stomach concave under his disgusting sweatshirt, as he narrows his eyes in on a bag of apples -- huge, red, beautiful apples.

Jon reaches out his hand, withdraws it, reaches it out again, grabs the bag, rips into it, removes an apple. He stares at it, then brings it to his mouth, takes a bite out of it that devours a full third of the perfect forbidden fruit.

Jon immediately looks toward the stairs. They must have heard that. All of Detroit must have. He waits, frozen in place.

Nothing. No doors open, no lights wink on.

Jon attacks the apple, soon nothing but the seedy core remains. Pulpy juice smears his lips, chin, cheeks.

He reaches for another apple, but Marjorie's bag, sitting on the counter, catches his eye in the refrigerator's light.

Jon picks up the bag, rummages inside it, takes out her purse, snaps it open.

JON

Wow!

Twenties. Fifties. A couple of hundred dollar bills. A royal flush of credit and debit cards.

Jon gulps, darts his eyes toward the stairs, looks back down into the purse and its precious contents.

He removes a twenty, a fifty, one of the hundreds, immediately stuffs them deep into his right jeans pocket.

His watering eyes reflect in the light from the refrigerator as Jon returns the purse, then places the bag back.

He goes into the bathroom off the kitchen, forces himself to wretch the apple.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike and Marjorie race into the guest room. No strung-out, drugged-up, starved teenager, just untouched new clothes on top of the dresser: jeans, a rainbow selection of flannel shirts, heavy socks and a couple of packages of boxer shorts.

A beautiful leather jacket sits draped over a chair.

Mike checks the windows. Locked. He crinkles his brows.

MARJORIE

Mike, do you hear that?

They both step over to the closet. Mike opens it.

Jon, curled up tight in the back of the closet, fully dressed, his body twitches as he groans, makes noises.

Marjorie gets down, reaches in, takes the boy's pulse with one hand while she puts the back of her other hand against his forehead.

Mike regards his wife sternly.

MIKE

We're both mandated reporters.

MARJORIE

If we report this, they'll just take him away and we'll never get him back.

MIKE

He's not a stray puppy we picked up off the street, Marge. And who said anything about us getting him back? You saying we should keep this kid? Look at him!

Marjorie just stares at Mike as she strokes Jon's forearm.

MIKE

A kid? Marge, you've never talked about a kid since --

She puts her finger in his face.

MARJORIE

Don't you bring that up, Mike!  
Don't you do that to me!

MIKE

Marge, you're not less of a woman -

He cuts himself off, looks at her, softens his expression.

MIKE

I'm sorry.

She returns to stroking Jon's arm through the sleeve of his disgusting sweatshirt. She pushes sweaty bangs out of his eyes twitching under his closed lids.

With equal parts confusion and amazement Mike watches her instantly care about, take to this broken boy.

Marjorie looks at her husband.

MARJORIE

We are mandated reporters, but we do have 72 hours.

Mike sighs.

MIKE

Okay.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike and Marjorie sit in the living room, look up at Jon.

Jon sweats, shakes, can barely stand, his eyes wild.

Both adults stand, walk over to him, keep a safe distance.

JON

Dr. and Dr. Wittrock, I've got to go score.

MARJORIE

We know you do, Jon.

JON

I'm not going to come back, because you're just going to call the cops.

Jon puts his hand on the outside of his right jeans pocket.

MARJORIE

Jon, we're not going to do that.

JON

What if I bring a bunch of kids back here and rob you two folks blind? Maybe even beat the shit of you two? You're too nice for that.

MIKE

We're trusting you won't do that.

Jon snorts, shakes his head.

JON

Man, you two are real chumps.

MARJORIE

It's freezing outside. Why don't you put on that new jacket Dr. Wittrock got you?

JON

It'll just get jacked.

Marjorie walks all the way up to him.

MARJORIE

Jon, please come back. Please promise you'll do that.

JON

I'm not coming back. You don't need something like me hanging around.

He looks at the both of them.

Mike takes a jacket out of the closet, brings it over to him.

Jon widens his stare at him, raises his arm in front of him.

Mike slows his step. He reaches the jacket out to him.

Jon takes it, slips in on.

JON

You're never getting this back.

MIKE

I don't care about the jacket. I -- we care about you.

He puts his arm around Marjorie's shoulders.

MIKE

You don't come back, you're going to break this wonderful woman's heart. You ready to do that, Jon? Do you have any possible idea how much you already mean to her?

Jon locks eyes with Marjorie and gulps, again and again, sweat pours down his face.

He disappears out the door, slams it closed behind him.

**EXT. ANOTHER RANDOM ALLEYWAY - DAY**

Jon yanks his belt hard to tourniquet his bicep. He grits his nicotine-stained and chipped teeth, yanks the belt even harder, makes sure it hurts and hurts bad. He slaps and slaps his forearm, viciously harder and harder.

JON

C'mon, you motherfucker!! Come to the surface! C'MON!!!

The vein finally does, Jon slams the needle into it, draws dark, angry blood up into the syringe, then slams the plunger to make the mixture explode into his tortured body.

Jon topples over onto his side, wraps his arms around his midsection. He moans, spits, cries.

JON

Her heart?! What about mine?! Huh?!

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Jon stands in the foyer, shivers despite Mike's big jacket.

JON

Cops?

MARJORIE

No. We promised we wouldn't.

He sniffs, nods stiffly.

JON

May I please, sir, go upstairs?

MIKE

Of course you may.

Jon is three steps up the stairs when Marjorie:

MARJORIE

Thank you for coming home.

The boy stops, doesn't turn around, continues to the top of the stairs, out of sight.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Jon, skin scrubbed clean, hair dry and soft, walks up to Marjorie and Mike seated at the table in the breakfast nook.

Jon wears a pair of the new jeans and one of the flannel shirts. He pads across the floor in a pair of the thick socks. He slips into the seat across from Marjorie.

Jon catches both adults regarding him suspiciously.

JON

I hope it's okay I put this stuff on. It's just been sitting there the last three nights.

MARJORIE

Of course. I told you: it's yours.

Jon absently fingers the cuff of the soft shirt.

JON

It's...ah...warm. And new. I've never had anything new before. It's always been Good Will.

Marjorie smiles at him, regards him keenly.

MARJORIE

You're so handsome, Jon. Wow!

Jon gulps, suddenly looks immensely sad, pushes his chair back, moves to rise.

Marjorie and Mike both watch him with knitted brows.

MARJORIE

Where are you going? You just sat down. Aren't you hungry?

He sniffs, gulps again.

JON

Folks call me handsome or pretty boy just want sex.

He shrugs.

JON

I was kinda certain. These clothes. All this food. This great place.

He just stares at her -- no, through her -- shrugs again. He hooks his thumb over his shoulder bony under the flannel.

JON

What, on the couch? Or upstairs?

Marjorie looks as if she's going to throw up.

MARJORIE

No, Jon. My God, no.

She narrows her eyes at this boy: tall, prominent Adam's apple, some stubble, but just a boy.

MARJORIE

You don't ever have to have sex if you don't want it. Nobody has the right to do that to you.

Jon snorts, shakes his head.

Marjorie sits up, plasters on a grin.

MARJORIE

You're also very intelligent. We can see that in your eyes.

Jon shrugs.

JON

Tell my school. They got me in all the stupid kids classes. Doesn't matter -- I never show up anyway.

He reaches for the plate of toast, then withdraws his hand.

JON

May I please, sir, have some?

MIKE

Of course you may. Jon, you don't have to ask all the time. All our food, it's yours too. You can eat all you want, I promise.

He narrows his eyes in on him, just as his wife had done.

MIKE

And there will never be any conditions on that. You have to trust us, there are no conditions on anything around here.

Jon darts those eyes, keen with intelligence, from one adult to the other. He snorts again, shakes his head.

JON

Professors, huh? You sure ain't too smart about how things really are.



Jon takes the plate of toast, takes a piece, puts it on his plate. He picks up the bowl of scrambled eggs, scoops out some, puts the bowl back down.

Jon stoops his shoulders, stares down at the table.

Marjorie and Mike glance at each other again, return their focus to the boy.

Not looking up:

JON  
May I please begin eating, sir?

Mike frowns. He sighs, nods.

MIKE  
Yes, of course you may.

Jon grabs his fork, starts shoveling his food into his mouth. He hardly bothers to chew. Egg dribbles down his chin.

Marjorie and Mike pick up their forks.

Jon looks at Marjorie. Whereby the moment before immense sadness had etched his demeanor, now he's almost jocular. He spits egg as he says to Marjorie:

JON  
Ma'am, you have to wait for him to  
tell you you can eat.

MARJORIE  
Oh, no, I absolutely do not!

Jon looks confused, then pastes on a slight grin.

Marjorie pours him a glass of orange juice. Jon washes down his food, puts the empty glass down.

Mike chuckles.

MIKE  
It's nice to see you grin.

Mike reaches his hand out towards Jon's bangs.

Jon immediately flinches, shrinks away from him, his eyes those of a scared, cornered rabbit.

Mike blinks, opens his mouth to say something. He looks at his hand, withdraws it immediately.

Jon narrows his eyes at him. He sneers at Mike as he shoves his plate away, slams back in his seat, crosses his arms.

Marjorie puts her fork down, takes a deep breath.

MARJORIE

We need to start establishing some rules around here, or we're never going to start trusting each other.

Jon shifts his narrow-eyed glare from him to her.

JON

Rules?

MARJORIE

Yes, rules. If you want to sleep here, eat with us, bathe here, here are the rules.

Mike looks at him.

MIKE

No more asking me if you can eat. You can eat anything you want whenever you want. You want an apple, you don't have to horde them in the back of your closet. Food is a fundamental human right.

Marjorie nods.

MARJORIE

And now that you've done it the first time, we expect you to come down freshly-washed and clean and in fresh clothes each morning.

Jon says nothing, just continues to glare at them.

MARJORIE

I'll tell ya what. We'll go out today, get you a haircut, then we'll do some more clothes shopping for you. You can pick out anything you want. How about a nice pair of boots to go with your new jacket? There's a great western wear store on Farmington Road.

She looks at Mike.

MARJORIE

Whadaya think, dear? "Cowboy Jon."

Mike nods, smiles.

Jon relaxes, unfolds his arms. The corner of his mouth curls upwards.

JON  
Yeah? Really? For me?

Marjorie nods.

JON  
That does sound pretty fuckin' sweet. I've always wanted a pair of those. They're so fuckin' expensive, and those goddamn stores, they make 'em too hard to jack from. Fuckin' assholes!

Marjorie and Mike glance at each other again.

MARJORIE  
Um...Jon. Your language. We must come to an understanding about the language you persist in using.

Jon knits his brows at them.

JON  
What the fuck's wrong with my language?

MARJORIE  
Honey, we need you to stop using bad language, especially that one word. We both find it offensive.

MIKE  
Very offensive.

JON  
What the fuck you talkin' about?

Mike frowns.

MIKE  
Are you doing that on purpose?

JON  
Doing what?! What the fuck?!  
Fuckin' old people!

He glares directly at Mike.

JON

Suck my big one, you fuckin' old man!! Fantasizing about it right now, huh?! Gettin' your rocks off!

He shoves his chair back.

MARJORIE

Jonathan, do not get up from that seat, young man! And don't you ever say such vile things to us again!

MIKE

Our home is not some underpass over on 8 Mile Road! Do you hear me?!

It's clear Jon wants to jump up, run away, but he stays put.

MARJORIE

Stop using the f-word, at least around us in this house. Is that crystal clear enough for you? Huh?!

Jon clenches his hand on the table into a fist.

Marjorie takes a deep breath, leans forward. Mike does too. They glance at each other, then both focus on Jon.

MARJORIE

We do not steal from each other.

Jon widens his eyes at her. He opens his mouth, closes it.

MARJORIE

Thank you for paying us the respect of at least not denying it.

Jon stares at the table.

JON

You hate me.

MIKE

We hate what you did.

Jon darts his eyes from one to the other. They watch him knit his brows at this statement, knit them deeply.

MIKE

The stealing was bad, but this morning you did something way worse.

Jon mutters:

JON  
Jesus, sorry I told you to suck my  
big one, mister.

Mike waves this aside.

MIKE  
Jon, don't ever, ever use drugs in  
this house ever again.

Jon really begins to shake.

MARJORIE  
Why else aren't you dopesick right  
now, able to hold your food down?

She frowns.

MARJORIE  
You don't think I didn't notice the  
second you sat down how dilated  
your pupils are and the tremors and  
pruritis you've been displaying.

JON  
The what? I'm stupid, lady.

Mike points at him hard.

MIKE  
You are anything but!

Eyes wide, Jon stares hard back at Mike.

Mike lowers his fingers, forces himself to relax.

MIKE  
I am not mad, and I will never,  
ever hit you. I promise.

JON  
Promises don't mean shit, old man.

MARJORIE  
Jonathan. Jon.

Reluctantly he looks at her.

JON  
Sorry 'bout the language.

MARJORIE

Forget about that for the moment.  
How 'bout never being dopesick ever  
again? You'd like that, right?

Jon tightens his fist.

MIKE

We have a place for you to go to  
for ninety days to get off all the  
drugs you're addicted to.

Jon starts breathing more heavily.

MARJORIE

You don't have to live like this.  
This doesn't have to be your life.  
Do you like the life you're living?

Hardly above a whisper he replies:

JON

I hate myself --  
(quickly)  
I hate how I'm living.

The three sit there, silent.

Jon raises his eyes enough to look Marjorie in the eye.

JON

Ninety days?

She nods.

JON

When?

MIKE

We'd like to bring you today.

Jon jumps up from the table, races over to the foyer, pulls  
on a pair of snow boots, dashes out the front door.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike walks up to Marjorie staring out the window beside the  
front door. He rubs her back.

She turns to him.

MARJORIE

Where is he, Mike? Where is he?!  
It's freezing out there, it's  
snowing. Is he safe? Warm? Oh, God!

He squeezes her arm. He watches as she mounts the stairs.

Marjorie enters the guest room, looks at the unmade bed, the rifled-through new clothes atop the dresser, the untouched leather jacket still draped over the chair.

She walks into the bathroom, widens her eyes. It looks as if a bomb had gone off in there.

She steps over to the pile of Jon's clothes. She wrinkles her nose, makes a gagging sound.

MARJORIE

Oh, God.

She grabs a towel, uses it to pick up the sweatshirt, then the ripped T-shirt that -- well, maybe had been white once? Then the jeans, and she puffs out her cheeks, blinks several times. She presses her hand to her nose against the rancid stench of piss, shit, cum, sweat, and city filth.

She grabs up the boxers, socks more holes than anything, and Jon's high-top Keds. She turns the sneakers over, grits her teeth in disgust at the lack of tread and the holes that offer no protection from rain and snow.

Marjorie fights back sobs as she grabs a plastic bag from under the sink, viciously shoves the clothes into it.

She slams out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and into the kitchen, where Mike finishes loading the dishwasher.

He looks up, stiffens at the expression on her face.

Marjorie shakes the bag.

MARJORIE

This goes to the incinerator!!

Tears freely flow down her face.

MARJORIE

A parent! Blessed with a child, and  
he does this -- ?!

She shakes the bag.

MARJORIE

-- this to him?!

Mike rushes over to her, wraps her in his arms. He gently presses her cheek against his shirtfront. Marjorie sobs.

**INT. JON AND CORDELL'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Jon clutches his "treasure chest" box as he stares down at Cordell slumped, passed out, in the ragged chair in front of the table strewn with needles, dirty cotton balls, drugs.

Jon clenches his teeth, his eyes water, a big tear drops down his cheek. He gulps, his breathing comes almost in gasps.

JON

I -- I -- I hate you!!

He leaves the apartment, never to return.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Marjorie stares into Jon's eyes as she brushes bangs out of them. She grins warmly.

MARJORIE

Jon, my beautiful great blue heron,  
I knew you'd fly back to us.

Hearing this, Mike stares at his wife.

Jon knits his brows at her so they almost touch, but curls the corner of his lips up. He cautiously glances at Mike.

Mike breathes a deep sigh, nods.

MIKE

Thank you.

**SUPER:**

**Chapter Two**

**Growing Up's a Bitch!**

**INT. HAZELDEN TEEN DRUG REHAB - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jon, Marjorie, and Mike sit across the cluttered desk from JAKE ROWSEY.



Marjorie glances up at Jake's custom-framed doctorate in psychology from Pennsylvania State University.

Beside the diploma hangs an 8x10 framed photograph: "Gulf War May '91". Three darkly-tanned, smiling young soldiers strike cocky poses as they hold their rifles and pinch cigarettes between their lips. A deadly-looking helicopter acts as their backdrop. Three young-dumb-full-of-cum badasses.

Marjorie looks from the soldier on the left to the baby-faced 33-year-old, trim but strong, across from her. She grins.

Jake smiles at Jon.

JAKE

So, how ya feelin' after making it through the medical detox?

Jon shrugs.

Jake's smile fades.

JAKE

Well, we're glad you're here.

Jon wears a blank expression, as if he's switched it off, which is precisely what he's done.

JAKE

Better'n the streets. Right?

Jake waits, shifts his attention to Mike and Marjorie.

JAKE

Well..Here's how our program works.

**INT. HAZELDEN TEEN DRUG REHAB - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jon, his skin clear, his eyes bright, filled out a little -- a little -- under his clothes, regales the three adults.

Jake sinks back in his chair, watches Jon's performance with a deep, deep frown, shakes his head.

Jake sits up, does the time-out gesture.

JAKE

Jon, Jon, you don't have to cram everything about your three months here into one exit interview.

Marjorie puts her hand on his.

MARJORIE

We have the whole flight home.

Jon ducks his head, blushes a little.

JON

Sorry.

JAKE

Hey! What did we say about "sorry"?

Jon nods stiffly.

Jake winks at him, looks at Mike and Marjorie.

JAKE

He's working his program. That's why it's imperative he attend meetings every day, starting tomorrow. We call it "90 in 90".

Jake catches how Marjorie stiffens, squares her shoulders.

JAKE

And psychotherapy, just as imperative. I've already put together a list for you.

Jake watches her squeeze Jon's arm at this. He cocks a brow.

JAKE

Hey, Jon, I'm gonna talk for a bit alone with these two. How 'bout you go finish packing, saying goodbye?

Jon shrugs, stands, slips his hands in his pockets.

Jon doesn't have the door all the way shut before he hears:

MARJORIE (O.S.)

He's so much better. Thank you. Just -- thank you. What a relief!

JAKE (O.S.)

"Better"?! He's just scratched the surface. Dr. Wittrock, Jon's one of the most ego-injured kids I've ever encountered or researched. Ever!

Jon closes the door all the way, hard.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Jon laughs with Marjorie, drops his bags down in the foyer.

MIKE

Hey, my joke wasn't that bad.

JON

Dr. Wittrock, it kinda was. But what do I know, I never get jokes.

MARJORIE

It's so wonderful to have you home. Wow, you look so good. I thought you were so handsome before.

She quickly holds up her hand.

MARJORIE

Remember what we promised you about no conditions.

Mike hangs up their jackets, hooks his thumb toward the living room.

MIKE

C'mon. We have some exciting stuff to discuss with you.

Mike and Marjorie sit on the couch in front of the coffee table strewn with brochures and pamphlets and printouts.

Jon pulls off his western boots, plops down on an easy chair.

JON

Whassup?

Marjorie, practically giddy, tightly grabs his hand.

MARJORIE

Would you like to stay here? We'd like you to stay full-time now. We'd like you to be part of our family. Please, Jon?

Jon gulps. He darts his eyes at Mike.

Mike grins, nods.

Jon breathes a shuddering breath. He looks at both of them.

JON

You -- you're not -- you're not lying. Right?

Marjorie squeezes his hand more tightly.

MARJORIE  
No, honey. No.

Jon wipes at his nose. He nods slowly.

Marjorie breaks out in a wide smile, looks at her husband.

MARJORIE  
Oh, Mike!

They both look at the boy.

MIKE  
Thank you.

Jon gestures at the table.

JON  
What's all this?

MARJORIE  
You know those tests Jake gave you?

JON  
Doc? Those crazy ones? Yeah. They were stupid. Any six-year-old could have answered those. Waste of time.

MIKE  
We asked him to administer those to you. They were intelligence tests. You tested off the charts.

MARJORIE  
You deserve a special school, and we found these ones for you to matriculate at.

Jon grimaces.

JON  
"Matriculate"? Sounds like taking a shi-crap. Which is just about exactly how I feel about school.

Marjorie smiles, picks up a full-size brochure.

MARJORIE  
Well, you'll love these ones.

She hands him the brochure, which he opens.

MARJORIE

That's The Cranbrook Schools. One of the nonpareil private schools in the entire nation, it happens to be just thirty minutes up I-75.

Jon flips a few pages. His eyes widen.

JON

Wow! They have a football stadium, two huge gymnasiums, and something called a -- a -- a natatorium.

(shrugs)

Huge soccer field. Baseball diamonds. A cross-country track!

He looks at both of them.

JON

Whoa!!

Mike chortles.

MIKE

Yeah, they have these things called classrooms too.

Marjorie impatiently waves him down, smacks his arm.

Jon ventures a small, cautious grin.

JON

Thirty minutes? You mean, you'd be willing to drive me up there each morning, drive me back? Really?

Mike crinkles his brows.

MIKE

Huh? Oh! No, Jon. No. It's a boarding school. You'll live there.

Jon's incipient grin immediately disappears off his face. He widens his eyes at them. The color drains from his face.

Marjorie smiles, looks at Mike.

MARJORIE

I knew he'd be excited.

Mike nods. They both return their attention to Jon.

MIKE

Kiddo, you're gonna love it. You'll make a ton of friends, join clubs. You can play every sport you want. Maybe join the Drama Dept. Jake said you really took to doing that.

Jon breathes fast, gulps, looks ready to bolt off the chair.

JON

Wh-what?! Jesus Christ!

Marjorie and Mike stiffen, glance at each other, look at Jon.

MARJORIE

Jon? Honey?

Jon clenches his hand in his lap into a fist. His eyes water.

He looks in horror at all the materials covering the table.

JON

Everyone promises! And everyone lies! Why?! I thought you two were better! You lied to me!! You brought me all the way back here just to get rid of me!! Fuck you!!

He plants his stocking feet on the floor, grabs his boots, pulls them on.

MIKE

Marjorie! Oh, my God! Jon!!

Jon stands, pounds over to the coat closet, bangs it open.

Marjorie and Mike rush over as he dons his leather jacket.

Jon straightens rigidly to his full height, glares at them.

JON

Thanks for the fuckin' charity!

He hooks his thumb toward the foyer.

JON

I'll grab my stuff, get out of your fuckin' lives, you want me outta them so bad.

He cracks his foot-thick armor for just a moment.

JON

I don't want to go back to the streets!

Jon squeezes his eyes shut, slaps the tears away. He opens his eyes again. He makes them harder than they've ever been.

MARJORIE

Oh, God. Jon, we're sorry. We're so sorry. We weren't thinking.

Jon trudges toward the foyer, and Marjorie rushes after him, puts her hand on his arm.

He yanks his arm away. He grabs his bag, puts his hand on the front door's knob.

MIKE

Jonathan Vornholt, don't you dare go through that door!

Jon stands there, ramrod straight, his back to Mike.

MIKE

Turn around, and get back here!

Jon turns, narrows his eyes at Mike, opens his mouth.

Mike raises a finger at him.

MIKE

If you call me what I think you're about to, three words: you better not! We do not talk to each other like that in this house. Rules, Jon. Remember those?

Jon's jaw muscles work furiously under the skin.

Mike points at the easy chair.

MIKE

Hang that jacket up or don't, but sit! We're gonna talk this out like a family. That's what families do.

MARJORIE

We're sorry. Really. We didn't mean to scare you or hurt your feelings.

JON

Well...you did. Excuse my language, but that was a pretty dick thing you did just then!

Marjorie nods glumly.

Mike takes a deep breath.

MIKE

C'mon now. Do as I told you.

Jon hangs up the jacket, joins them back in the living room.

Marjorie hands him a new brochure for the University Liggett School. He takes it, but his frown remains rigidly in place.

MIKE

Nothing but a ten-minute walk.

MARJORIE

And flip to page six, check out all the sports teams they offer.

Jon stares at them, his eyes still hard, but he does open the brochure to page six. His expression softens -- a little.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY**

Jon, 16, arrives home, drops his bookbag on the floor. He sheds his leather jacket, just drops it on the floor too.

He knits his brows, straightens, cocks his head.

MIKE (O.S.)

Did you see that tuition payment from Liggett?! That's per year, Marge!

MARJORIE (O.S.)

Stop being such a penny-pincer! God, I've always hated that about you! Penny-pincer and neat freak -- God, Mike!

MIKE (O.S.)

I see you got him another pair of boots! Another?! And how much sports equipment does one kid need?

MARJORIE (O.S.)

This from the guy who just bought his latest vintage Mustang!

Jon stands there, frozen, widens his eyes at the pause.

MIKE (O.S.)

What about this?! Huh?!



MARJORIE (O.S.)  
It's too early, Mike!

MIKE (O.S.)  
When isn't it going to be too  
early, Marge?! We've already let  
him miss half of those 90 in 90!  
We're spoiling the boy rotten!

MARJORIE (O.S.)  
OF COURSE we're spoiling him!! He's  
had a shitty life!! You heard Jake!

Jon walks into the kitchen. He can't stop shaking.

JON  
I'm sorry I cost so much.

Mike, clutching Jake's list of therapists, spins around.

MIKE  
Dammit, how long you been standing  
there?!

MARJORIE  
Michael!!

She comes around the kitchen island, approaches Jon.

Jon pulls out a chair, sits, starts yanking off his boots.

JON  
I'll leave everything upstairs.  
Maybe you can sell it all, get all  
your money back.

Mike hurries up to him.

Jon immediately leaps to his feet, slams himself against the  
wall, raises his fists, narrows his eyes at him. His chest  
heaves, his heavy breath whistles through his gritted teeth.

He can barely croak out his words:

JON  
I don't want to go back to the  
streets! Oh, Jesus Christ!

Mike bites his lower lip, then breathes a shuddering breath.

MIKE  
Jon, calm down. You're not going  
anywhere. I promise.

Jon darts his wild eyes from him to Marjorie, back to him.

MIKE

I'm sorry. I get upset, I say things, I hurt people. I don't mean to. I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry.

JON

I won't eat anything anymore. I know how to starve, it's okay. I'll go back to Northwestern. I won't cost you people anything.

Tears erupt down his cheeks, he pinches his lids shut. He opens his eyes, stares at them.

JON

(emotionally)

Just don't put me back on the streets. Please! Anything!

He squares his shoulders, hardens his expression, the tears stop as if he turns a spigot. His tone ice-cold:

JON

Do whatever the fuck you want.

Marjorie glares at her husband, then softens her ire at him a little as she witnesses the tears dropping down Mike's cheeks. She focuses her attention on Jon.

MARJORIE

Rules, Jon. Language. Remember?

Jon only reluctantly turns his hard stare from Mike to her.

MARJORIE

Do you know why we have those rules, insist on them? Because this is your home too.

She reaches out slowly, puts her hand on his fist, gets him to lower both of them.

Jon slowly calms his breathing.

MARJORIE

This will always be your home.

Mike folds the list of therapists, slips it into his pocket.

The three of them stand there. Marjorie breaks the silence.

MARJORIE

I don't know about you two, but I don't want to cook tonight.

Jon relaxes his tall, rigid frame just a little. He looks down at her.

JON

Dr. Wittrock, ma'am, I really appreciate all these fancy places you take me, I really do, but --

Mike takes one careful step forward.

MIKE

Y'know, I really could go for a greasy, sloppy fast-food burger.

Marjorie looks at him, grins.

MARJORIE

And a super giant size french fries.

Jon starts to relax all the way.

JON

And milkshakes. Those really big ones! Extra syrup!

MIKE

3000 calories, every single one of them artery-clogging. Disgusting. Totally unhealthy.

Jon manages a slight grin, presses in on his tight stomach under his tailored dress shirt.

JON

Totally. God, that sounds great!

MARJORIE

Hey, c'mon, you two, I'm still a nurse.

Mike grabs his keys.

MIKE

Not tonight you're not. C'mon!

**INT. THIRD JUDICIAL COURT OF MICHIGAN - FAMILY COURT - DAY**

Jon, stiff in his new suit, silk tie, and dress shoes, faces JUDGE MATILDA SIMMONS, 56, from the well. He smiles nervously, which reveals his new braces.

Mike and Marjorie watch nearby, clutch each other's hands. They beam big, happy smiles.

JUDGE SIMMONS

It is the judgement of this bench that Cordell Michael Vornholt will henceforth sever all parental rights to the minor Jonathan Sean Vornholt. Custody of the minor Jonathan is henceforth awarded to Michael and Marjorie Wittrock, who have met all requirements of adoption beyond all expectation. So says this bench.

She bangs her gavel.

JUDGE SIMMONS

Congratulations, Doctors Wittrock. You have yourselves a very fine young man there.

Jon looks at the grinning judge, then turns, looks at his... his...his parents.

**INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT**

Marjorie and Mike accept their playbills for The Wonderful Wizard of Detroit, an "absurdist original musical", and excitedly take their places amongst the packed seating.

**INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT**

Jon, 17, jumps, prances, sashays around the stage set as a twisted mirror-universe version of Detroit. 8 Mile Road stands in for the Yellow Brick Road, where the Wizard's subjects cower at his feet.

Jon looks equal parts ridiculous and fantastical in his crazy, wild costume: gold and tasseled epaulets on a glimmering silver jacket with giant whirlygig lollipops for buttons, tie-dyed jodhpurs pants, rainbow-sherbet-themed clown shoes, all of it topped off by a two-foot Santa Claus hat from the end of which dangles a miniature disco ball.

Jon belts out lyrics in a maniacal tone:

JON  
 ALL YOU THINK I BUILD IS CARS/TO  
 SAVE YOU DUMB CLUCKS FROM THE WRATH  
 OF MARS?/GO BACK, YOU MICHELINKINS,  
 TO YOUR BARS/AND LEAVE THE WIZARD  
 TO HIS UNDER PARS.

Jon pantomimes swinging a golf club, then does a sideways two-step down the line of cowering "Michelinkins", kicks off each of their polka-dotted hats.

**INT. UNIVERSITY LIGGETT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT**

The audience leaps to their feet, applauds, whistles, cheers.

They truly go wild when Jon's castmates take a collective step backwards, leave him front and center.

Jon, his eyes wide, a beaming smile, looks out across the auditorium. He takes a deep bow, stands up straight, takes another bow with the entire cast.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike enters Jon's bedroom, puts his hand to his forehead at what he beholds: teenage wasteland incarnate.

Clothes, clean and dirty, strewn everywhere. Hockey sticks in one corner, lacrosse sticks in another. Mike glances into the bathroom, shudders.

MIKE  
 I've warned this boy time and again  
 about picking up this sty.

He starts to do so. He glances around at the stacks and stacks of books: fiction -- from classics like Watership Down tattered from repeated readings to trash YA dystopia -- to non-fiction -- history, theater, Cosmos, A Brief History of Time. The Complete Calvin and Hobbes sits tossed on his bed. Thick volumes of Sudoku and New York Times crosswords.

Mike walks over to the bed, reaches for the disheveled comforter when a magazine under the bed catches his eye.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS**

Mike walks up to Marjorie sitting on the couch, reading.

He hands her the magazine: Out.

Marjorie takes it, looks up at him.

MARJORIE

C'mon, Mike. It's not like we didn't know.

He nods, takes a seat in the recliner.

MIKE

What if he thinks it's because of what that monster put him through? Or what he did with men on the streets?

Marjorie sits up.

MARJORIE

We'll help him to understand God doesn't make mistakes.

She pinches her lips together for a moment.

MARJORIE

Y'know, it was a real breach of his privacy, your poking around his room like that.

She frowns.

MARJORIE

Is his room being a bit of a mess really worth throwing away the trust you've worked hard to broker with him?

Mike frowns back at her, breathes deep, shakes his head.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Jon rushes into the house, his "Luigi's Pizzeria" apron still cinched to his tight waist. Mike and Marjorie, relaxing in the living room, respond to his smile with ones of their own.

JON

Ma! Pop! Mr. Patrionelli gave me my first paycheck!

He pulls a small wad of cash out of the pocket of his sauce-stained white T-shirt.

MARJORIE

That's great, honey!

Jon's expression becomes serious as he takes a twenty, a fifty, and a hundred and reaches the bills out to her.

Marjorie eyes them, then her son. She makes no move to take the money.

JON  
Ma, these are for you.

MARJORIE  
I'm not taking those.

JON  
Ma, please. You gotta take this.

MARJORIE  
No, I don't. And I'm not going to.

Jon stares at her, his nostrils more and more flare.

He slaps the bills on the corner of the coffee table.

Marjorie doesn't so much as flinch.

MARJORIE  
Those will stay there for as long  
as you take to take them back.

Jon huffs.

JON  
They'll stay there forever then.

MARJORIE  
That's entirely up to you, now  
isn't it?

Jon clenches his hands into fists, glares, sneers at Mike.

JON  
I hate you, you know, you fuckin'  
old man!

Mike glares his wide eyes back at Jon, slaps his book down onto his lap.

Jon darts his eyes back at Marjorie, spins around, pounds up the stairs, slams his bedroom door.

Mike stands up abruptly, stalks over to the door to the garage, which he lets slam behind him.

Soon, Marjorie hears him smash open and closed the drawers of his huge mechanic's chest.

She frowns as she darts her eyes from the garage door to up the stairs to the second floor.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - GARAGE - NIGHT**

Jon, showered, changed into his pajamas, quietly enters, walks up to Mike bent under the hood of the newest Mustang.

JON

Pop.

Mike comes out from under the hood, straightens, turns to face him, wipes his greasy hands on a rag.

Jon regards his father's expression, stiffens, gulps.

MIKE

Let's go back to you calling me  
"Dr. Wittrock".

JON

P-Po-Po -- Dr. Wittrock. Sir.

Mike's chest rises and falls as he clenches his jaw.

JON

I didn't mean to use that language.

MIKE

I don't care about the language!

He rolls his eyes.

MIKE

Of course I care about the  
language. Jon, just -- just go back  
to your room, go to bed.

Jon straightens, hardens his gaze at the man.

Mike snorts.

MIKE

Fine! Go all blank and hard. See  
how far that gets you. Plan on  
being really, really lonely, Jon!

Jon stares at him, breathes hard, his eyes water. He rushes out of the garage.

Mike slams his fist against the side of the car.



**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - NIGHT**

The party's in full swing. Jon, dressed to the nines, works the room, a butter-wouldn't-melt smile for everyone he serves drinks and finger food.

PETE SHIMODA, 57, watches the tall, lanky teenager, returns his attention to his best friend and colleague.

PETE

Mike, Jon looks great. You and Marge are doing a stupendous job with him. But he's still so thin.

MIKE

The doctor says he'll fight with being underweight all his life.

PETE

And what's with this "Dr. Wittrock" business? He calls you "Pop".

Mike sighs.

MIKE

We're working back to that.

Pete takes a sip from his flute of champagne.

PETE

He does look great, but why are you and Marge doing this to yourselves? You must lock your bedroom door every night.

Mike glares at him, rolls his eyes.

MIKE

No! Pete!

He shrugs. He returns to watching his son.

MIKE

He's a kid, he needs our help.

He turns his eyes to look at his wife, working the crowd too.

MIKE

As much as we both need his.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Mike, Marjorie, and Pete have settled on the couch.

Pete glances at the corner of the coffee table.

PETE

What's with that money?

Marjorie waves Jon over.

MARJORIE

Mr. Shimoda's curious what's up  
with that cash sitting there.

Jon glares at her, growls something ugly under his breath,  
pushes his way through the crowd, disappears into the  
kitchen.

**INT. MIKE, MARJORIE, AND JON'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike rushes into his home office.

Jon, the strap of his bookbag slung over his powerful  
shoulder, pulls the coat closet open, grabs his jacket.

Marjorie is looking hither and yon for something.

The usual morning commotion.

MARJORIE

Has anyone seen my keys?!

JON

On the coffee table!

Jon watches as his mother walks over to the coffee table,  
picks up the three bills laid stop the keys, drops her keys  
in her bag, returns the bills to the corner of the table.

Jon storms into the living room.

JON

Just take the money, will ya?! This  
has gotten way past ridiculous!!

MARJORIE

Yeah. Yeah, it has. Do you know  
that money, invested, could've been  
maybe \$250 by now?

JON

Ma, you got to take it. It tears me  
up every time I see it sitting  
there.

MARJORIE

Good! It should!

JON

I've learned my lesson, awright?!

She leans in to him.

MARJORIE

No, you haven't.

JON

I feel bad!! Awright?! You want me to feel bad, that's it!!

MARJORIE

No! Stop hiding behind easy fixes! If you ever hope to ameliorate your life, you have to finally have the courage to shine a spotlight on it.

Mother and son stare each other hard in the eye.

JON

Oh!! AWRIGHT!!!

Jon throws up his hands, bends over, swipes the bills viciously off the table, pockets them.

He looks from her to Mike who has walked up to them.

JON

I'm gonna blow this on something really, like really stupid! You watch me!

Marjorie shrugs.

MARJORIE

You worked hard to earn it. You want to waste it, waste it.

JON

A dozen cakes! I'll eat them all at once! Till I explode everywhere!

Mike snorts. His tone deadpan:

MIKE

Don't expect me to clean that up.

Jon pounds his fist against his forehead several times, shoves past them, slams out of the house.

Mike and Marjorie, smiling, high-five each other.

**SUPER:**

### Chapter Three

#### Launched Into a Wider World

##### EXT. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROJECT - DAY

Jon, 23, carpenter's tool belt strapped around his tight waist, walks up to the table laden with coffee and donuts.

He darts his eyes at Harvey, 23.

Jon holds out a mug of coffee to him.

JON

You look like you could use some.  
Coffee in the summer, go figure,  
but it'll perk ya right up.

Harvey takes it, smiles. He blinks his bleary eyes.

HARVEY

Thanks. Long hours.

Jon pours a second mug, then holds out his hand to Harvey.

JON

Hi. Name's Jon.

Harvey shakes his hand.

HARVEY

Harvey. Call me Harv.

Harvey releases his hand. Jon grits his teeth, shakes it out.

JON

I've never seen you at one of these  
Habitat projects before.

HARVEY

I'm new at the firm. We're  
sponsoring the family who's getting  
this house.

He indicates the "Weaver/Payne & Associates - Public Advocacy" emblazoned in big, bold letters on the grey T-shirt stretched tight across his powerful chest and rippling abs.

Jon rakes him up and down with his eyes. He quickly grins.

JON

I volunteer for Habitat but I'm also here as a representative. DPS.

Harvey knits his brows.

HARVEY

"Department of Public Safety"?

He looks Jon up and down.

HARVEY

You're a cop? You're a fireman?

JON

Detroit Public Schools. I teach art and English at Frank Cody High. I'm trying to start a drama program.

Harvey regards him with a grin, nods.

Jon shrugs.

JON

Yeah, I'm no policeman or fireman, but, trust me, I never thought I'd end up a teacher either. Just some cog in some factory somewhere.

He shakes himself out of his momentary melancholy. He locks eyes with Harvey, returns the man's warm, welcoming grin.

JON

Let's just say I've had two terrific role models. Long story.

HARVEY

Man of mystery.

Harvey Groucho-Marxes his thick, black brows.

HARVEY

You'll have to tell me that long story someday. Somewhere more private.

Jon suddenly has a frog in his throat. He coughs, hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON  
I better get back. They need me.

HARVEY  
I'll come with ya.

He slaps his big hand on Jon's shoulder.

Jon practically collapses under the blow.

**EXT. RIVERFRONT TRAIL - DAY**

Jon, 24, holds Harvey's hand as they walk and marvel at the incipient sunset broken by puffy clouds.

They both break into smiles at the whooshing sound of the broad wings of a great blue heron that takes flight nearby.

Jon looks at Harvey.

JON  
Ma calls me her beautiful great blue heron. I have no idea why.

HARVEY  
That is so nice. I'll agree with the beautiful part.

He leans in, kisses him. They let it linger, then continue their walk.

JON  
You've never told me about your folks. You've never even mentioned them.

Harvey looks at him hard, his expression immediately angry.

HARVEY  
I don't want to talk about my parents. I don't ever want to talk about my parents!

Jon stares back at him.

JON  
Um...sure, Harv.

They walk a few paces, Harvey stops them.

HARVEY  
You've been itching to ask me something all evening.

Jon clears his throat, says nothing.

Harvey flashes a sly grin across his face, reaches out, starts tickling Jon.

Jon fights bursting out laughing, darts his eyes at interested passersby.

JON  
Harvey! Stop!

HARVEY  
Not till you spill!

JON  
Awright, awright!

Harvey stops tickling him, Jon gets his breath back.

JON  
Let's move in together?

Harvey stares at him.

JON  
That was dumb, forget it.

HARVEY  
Will you shut up?! Of course let's  
move in together!

Jon grins, his eyes sparkle, he takes Harvey's hand again, they continue their walk.

**INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - DAY**

With taped-shut moving boxes everywhere, the painting party has devolved into a paintball match, just without the guns.

Jon, with a smile a mile wide, flicks his big paintbrush at BRUCE, 28, who retaliates by smearing his brush soaked with turquoise paint straight down Jon's entire face.

Marjorie and Mike enter, holding Luigi's Pizzeria boxes.

Jon, laughing, points at them, raises his brush, makes chase.

Marjorie drops her box, makes her escape through the door.

Mike looks at Jon sternly, points his finger at him, gets a faceful of paint for his trouble.

**INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

A big red "Happy Valentine's Day" balloon floats above a bouquet of red roses in a beautiful glass vase.

The big heart-shaped top of the container of Valentine's Day chocolates from which Jon and Harvey eat sits on the table.

Jon and Harvey are nestled into each other on the couch as they laugh at an episode of Soap as part of a marathon.

**INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Harvey opens the door to Mike and Marjorie. He strains to muster a grin. He leans his head against the jamb.

Marjorie gives him a big hug, followed by Mike.

MARJORIE

How long's he been at it?

Harvey runs a hand through his dark hair.

HARVEY

Since before I got home.

MARJORIE

Any idea what he's taken?

HARVEY

Coke. Meth. He took \$1000 out of our account this afternoon. Like we can afford that. There goes rent. Not like we weren't already two months behind.

He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

HARVEY

God, that came out so selfish. Marjorie, Mike, I'm sorry.

Mike pats Harvey's powerful shoulder.

HARVEY

There's some pills. He's drinking a fifth of vodka like it's water.

They follow Harvey into the living room.

This is definitely the apartment of a poor lawyer and an even poorer teacher.



A sheet of paper from DPS HR marked "Notice of Non-Renewal of Contract for Upcoming Academic Year" sits under a couple of beer cans which are leaving rings.

Jon, 25, sits on the couch, his stockinged foot propped upon the edge of the coffee table strewn with coke, pot, and meth. His knee doesn't stop bouncing. Sweat streams down his face.

Jon turns his crazed eyes to Harvey, sneers.

JON

The 'rents, Harv. Really? You called in the 'rents. A'course you did, you pussy!

He smashes the mouth of the vodka bottle to his lips, takes a swig. He pulls a long draw off his cigarette, then viciously grinds the butt out in an overflowing ashtray.

HARVEY

Jon, we just want to help.

Without warning, Jon jumps up and, unsteady on his feet, walks right up to his parents.

JON

Ah, Doctors Michael and Marjorie Wittrock, out to save the world by shoveling up the shit off the Detroit streets one shit at a time.

He sneers at them.

JON

Well, shovel all you want. I'm garbage and always will be. The supply doesn't end.

MARJORIE

Oh, my God.

He narrows his eyes at her.

JON

Ma, still ignoring your drug-addict sister you can't save?

He looks at Mike.

JON

And, Pop, didya spit on your dad's grave the last time you ever bothered to visit it?

HARVEY

Jesus, Jon! My God, man, just shut up, willya?! Those are your folks. They love you. God, man!

Mike pulls Marjorie close.

MIKE

Tell me, Jon, getting drunk and high tonight, does that prove your father right or prove him wrong?

Jon darts his eyes immediately at Harvey, leans in to Mike.

JON

Listen, you fuckin' old man, I've proven my father wrong, plenty! How dare you bring him up?! Especially in front of Harvey! Fuck you!!

Both Mike and Marjorie catch the funny look that comes across Harvey's expression.

MIKE

What?!

HARVEY

Um...ah...I know a lot happened to Jon growing up, a lot of it must have involved his father.

He shrugs, rolls his eyes.

HARVEY

I don't know a single detail. He never talks about any of it, ever, but it's left him with a lot to deal with. We argue sometimes, and, well,...Jon...I know he didn't --

MIKE

"Mean it"? Harvey, really? You're gonna use that tired old line? What's next? "He hit me, but I deserved it."?

JON

You mention anything, anything at all to him about Dad, and I swear to God -- !!

He looks directly at Marjorie.

JON

I swear to God I'll fly away and  
you'll never see me again!

He sees this cuts his mother to the quick, his eyes water.

JON

What the hell have I been staying  
clean and sober for? God, what a  
fuckin' chump I am!

Mike narrows his eyes back at his son.

MIKE

You self-righteous prick! You  
addicts really piss me off, you're  
so selfish. Okay, you've got a  
disease. So what?

JON

You know what happened to me  
growing up.

MIKE

Oh, boohoo, Jon. Cordell? Give me a  
break! My father drove into the  
ground a business with his drinking  
and never hesitated to make sure  
his kids knew it was their fault,  
that everything wrong in his  
miserable life was their fault  
right up to that moment he put that  
pistol in his mouth. You have the  
gall to feel sorry for yourself. Do  
you know the situation I spent last  
night helping one of my social work  
students deal with? A crackhead mom  
thought it would be just hilarious  
to take a blowtorch to her five-  
month-old's face.

Jon gulps, holds his stomach.

Harvey looks like he might throw up right then and there.

MIKE

The kid died. But not immediately. That was after the call I assisted on with another one of my students who needed help figuring out the paperwork to handle reporting a father who had rammed his dick so far and so hard up his seven-year-old's ass that the boy had to have surgery to repair all the damage. He didn't die, which means he gets to spend the rest of his life fighting the demons of what he ever did to his dad to make the man hate him so much.

Mike takes a step toward his son.

MIKE

Sound familiar, Jonathan? Huh?!

Jon clenches his fists, raises them. His chest heaves.

JON

Step back, old man! I'm warning you. Get out of my face. You know I'll fuck you up!

Mike takes a step even closer to his son.

MIKE

Go ahead, do it. Fuck me up. You've told me so many times you'll do it. Then do it. You pussy, do it.

Mike explodes:

MIKE

DO IT!!!

Jon's entire body shakes. He white-knuckles his fists. His chest heaves. His teeth clench so hard, he might chip them.

MIKE

These past ten years we've given you everything.

JON

I don't owe you shit, old man!

MIKE

But you owe yourself. Look at yourself. Does this look like owing yourself anything?

Mike takes a deep breath, collects his composure.

MIKE

Oh, by the way, that boy, he'll --

JON

(his tone ice)

Listen, I understand better than you ever will what that boy --

MIKE

You're not telling us anything we don't already know!

JON

I'm more than a goddamn CPS file!!

MIKE

We know you are!! Much more!! So stop acting like you're just another statistic!!

Jon stumbles back, drops onto the couch. He buries his face in his hands.

JON

Oh, God! What's happened to me?!

He starts breathing funny, puts his hand over his heart.

MIKE

Ma. Ma, it hurts!

Marjorie rushes over to him. She takes his pulse.

MARJORIE

Harvey, call 911.

Harvey, his eyes full of terror, stands rooted to the floor.

Marjorie unbuttons Jon's shirt, starts prodding him.

MARJORIE

Jon, honey, look me in the eye. Look me in the eye. Good. Tell me anywhere it hurts.

She scans the coffee table, looks up at her husband.

MARJORIE

I think you better call the police.

Mike looks immediately at Harvey.

Harvey shakes his head grimly.

HARVEY

I'm an officer of the court. It'll  
be better the call comes from me.

Mike and Marjorie nod.

MIKE

I'll call 911.

Mike steps out onto the front porch.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike opens the front door.

Harvey pulls Jon back by the back of his shirt.

HARVEY

Get back here. You've been avoiding  
them long enough.

Harvey looks at Mike and Marjorie.

HARVEY

He's been avoiding you.

MIKE

We figured. C'mon in.

As Mike shuts the door Jon hands flowers to Marjorie.

MARJORIE

They're beautiful. Let's sit down.

They all sit, Jon stares at his hands.

Finally he looks up.

JON

We went to the courthouse today.  
They say you posted my bail. You  
only did that to get me to that  
meeting.

MARJORIE

Yes, we did.

MIKE

Yes, we did.

JON

Otherwise, you would have let me  
sit my ass in a jail cell.

Harvey looks at Mike and Marjorie.

HARVEY

I told him that was ridic --

MIKE

Yes, we would have.

Harvey stiffens.

Jon clears his throat.

JON

My principal had me in his office today. I'm on administrative leave until he and the district decide what to do about the arrest report they received. Dr. Hammons says I might lose my license to teach.

He narrows his eyes at the two of them.

JON

I love teaching. I worked so hard for that license. For a long time I didn't even think I deserved it.

MIKE

Administrative leave. With or without pay?

Jon sniffs, wipes his nose.

JON

Without.

Jon doesn't stop looking at them.

MARJORIE

The answer's no. Absolutely not.

Mike nods in agreement with his wife.

JON

I'm living paycheck to paycheck. And now no paycheck.

MIKE

Behaviors have consequences.

Marjorie looks at him squarely.

MARJORIE  
The days of us spoiling you have  
been over for years.

JON  
But I'm back on the wagon.

MIKE  
Do ninety meetings in ninety days,  
and maybe we'll actually believe  
you are.

He looks at Marjorie.

MIKE  
Right?

MARJORIE  
Exactly.

JON  
I don't believe this. You don't  
believe I'm sober.

MIKE  
No, we don't.

MARJORIE  
No, we don't.

HARVEY  
Whoa.

JON  
Why you being such hardasses?

MIKE  
Because we love you.

Jon sits back in a huff.

Harvey looks at him.

HARVEY  
There's my salary.

Jon shakes his head.

JON  
You make peanuts. They treat all  
you junior associates down at that  
firm like slaves.

HARVEY  
(miserably)  
We'll get by. Somehow. Maybe.



Jon glares at his parents.

JON  
You're serious about this?

Marjorie leans forward.

MARJORIE  
Whenever it's come to your health,  
welfare and happiness, when have  
you ever known us to be otherwise?  
Get real, Jon. You know us better  
than that.

Jon shuts his eyes for a long moment, then opens them again.  
His knee bounces. He balls his left hand into a fist.

MIKE  
Don't get mad at us, you brat. You  
put yourself in this position.

Jon looks at Harvey.

JON  
Your folks, Harv, maybe you --

Harvey hardens his expression.

HARVEY  
Don't even go there! How dare you?!

Jon hangs his head.

JON  
I should never have said that.

HARVEY  
No! You absolutely shouldn't have!

Jon takes Harvey's hand, but Harvey pulls it back.

JON  
I'm sorry.

He glares at his father.

JON  
I may have to sell my motorcycle.

MIKE  
Okay.

JON

My bike. Y'know, the one you two  
got me, because you were so proud  
of me. You used to be proud of me.  
Do you actually remember that?

Marjorie looks at Mike, then slowly and deliberately back at  
her son.

MARJORIE

Are you trying to guilt us,  
Jonathan Sean Vornholt?

JON

Depends. Is it working?

Mike motions to himself and his wife.

MIKE

Do these two pissed-off faces look  
like it's working?

Jon breathes in deep.

JON

No, sir.

He suddenly sits up, clamps each side of his head in his big  
hands.

JON

God, you two drive me crazy  
sometimes!

He looks straight at them.

JON

You make me want to drink.

They look straight back at him.

JON

Don't worry. I'm not going to.

He stands, the three of them do too.

JON

I'll do your 90/90. I'll show you.

MARJORIE

Good.

JON

Just watch me!



Harvey just stands there, blinking.

Marjorie takes him into a big hug, Mike puts his hand on Harvey's powerful shoulder.

MIKE

Good luck.

Harvey pulls away from Marjorie.

HARVEY

Thanks. He hasn't touched anything since the hospital.

Mike winks at him.

MIKE

We know he hasn't. We know our son.

He squeezes the young man's shoulder.

MIKE

Harvey, you're being a terrific boyfriend. We know this is hard.

Impatient honking of a car horn emanates from outside.

All three of them roll their eyes.

They walk with Harvey to the door. Mike pulls a folded check from his pocket, hands it to the young lawyer.

Harvey unfolds it, then looks at them.

MIKE

I signed it. Pay your back rent, this month's rent, and the next three months' rent.

Harvey sags his strong but tired shoulders, closes his eyes, sighs deeply.

MARJORIE

You didn't do anything wrong.

Harvey pockets the check, reaches out his hand. He shakes hands with both of them. He nods at them, leaves.

**SUPER:**

**Chapter Four**

**Seven Years Later and Chicago Bound!**

**INT. OFFICES OF TREVINO, CARLSEN, AND VONDEREN - DAY**

Harvey steps off the mahogany-paneled elevator, walks past the ceiling-to-floor windows that provide from this height a breathtaking vista view of the Chicago skyline and of Lake Michigan which stretches to the horizon.

He walks up to the little bit of a crowd gathered around the front of the reception desk.

Harvey halts his step when he watches Jon, 32, stand with a Golden Retriever puppy clutched to his chest.

HARVEY

Jon!

Harvey glances at ELIJAH, the firm's young receptionist, and at two fellow junior partners, SUZANNE and JANEY.

HARVEY

What are you doing?! This is my place of work. I've only been here a week! Get that outta here!

The small crowd is oo-ing and ah-ing, Elijah begs Jon to let him hold the puppy. Jon does so.

JON

Yeah, but I couldn't wait for you to meet Daphne.

HARVEY

"Daphne"?

Jon shrugs.

JON

Yeah. Daphne. It suits her. Right?

Elijah laughs and giggles as the puppy mercilessly licks him.

ELIJAH

It sure does!

Suzanne leans in to Janey while scrutinizing Jon up and down.

SUZANNE

Janey, look at him! Why are all the great-looking, thoughtful ones gay? I sure as hell wish I could take that one home to test drive.

JANEY

Suzanne, you're married!

SUZANNE

I know! I can window shop, I just can't buy. Barry'll never know.

Janey points at Jon.

JANEY

Neither will he. Look who he gets to go home to.

SUZANNE

Oh, right. Shit!

Reluctantly Harvey accepts the puppy into his strong arms.

Daphne energetically licks his face.

Harvey fights breaking out into laughter and a smile.

He looks at his boyfriend.

HARVEY

You really think an apartment in downtown Chicago is any place for a puppy?

Jon cracks his best winning smile.

JON

Yes, I do. We're keeping her, Harv.

Daphne continues her relentless kissing him.

Harvey finally breaks out in the big smile.

HARVEY

I guess.

He hands the puppy back over to Jon.

HARVEY

Now could you please get her out of here before Mr. Trevino or Mr. Carlsen walks by? Or --

He glances at Suzanne.

HARVEY

-- my illustrious colleague here drags you into a janitor's closet and fucks you to within an inch of your life?

Suzanne grins at Harvey, winks at the both of them, then motions at Janey.

SUZANNE

C'mon, Janey. We've got window shopping to go do.

As Suzanne passes the receptionist desk, she finger-guns 22-year-old Elijah, whose both natural and gym-honed good looks, dark eyes, perfect teeth, perfect hair, perfect everything are no accident the first thing visitors to the firm see.

Elijah gulps, quickly sits back down behind the desk.

**SUPER:**

## **Chapter Five**

### **Now Eight Years Later**

#### **INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT**

The party fills the home decked out for Mike and Marjorie's 50th wedding anniversary. A big banner declares as much.

Harvey walks into the kitchen, carries a big silver tray.

Marjorie, slicing pineapple, slaps his arm.

MARJORIE

Put that tray down right now, get back in there, and enjoy yourself!

He gives her a peck on the cheek.

HARVEY

Stickbug's right: you are cute when you do the whole mother hen thing.

He opens the refrigerator door.

HARVEY

Marjorie, do you have any of those special pickles? I love those, and I can't find them in Chicago.

She points with the knife at the deep back corner. He retrieves the jar, shuts the door, starts unscrewing the top.

MARJORIE

When are you going to call us Ma and Pop?

HARVEY

Just as soon as your son accepts one of my marriage proposals.

MARJORIE

That boy still won't say yes?

Harvey shrugs. He lifts an entire pickle, drops it into his mouth, chomps down on it. His cheeks bulge.

HARVEY

He pulls that shutting-down crap.

She nods, hands him a napkin.

MARJORIE

Manners, young man.

He covers his mouth, gulps his food down. He grins abashedly.

HARVEY

Sorry.

Marjorie narrows her eyes at his hand. She puts the knife down, turns to him, takes his hand into hers.

MARJORIE

Honey, what's this big splotch? My God! It's a bruise!

HARVEY

Huh?

He puts the jar down, looks down at the top of his hand.



HARVEY

Well, I'll be damn -- darned.

He stares into her expression pinched with worry. He kisses her on the forehead, looks her in the eye, smiles broadly.

HARVEY

It's your 50th anniversary party.  
Stop being a nurse for one night.

MARJORIE

But, Harv, your hand. That looks serious. What did you hit that on?

HARVEY

It's nothing, I promise. I'm in perfect health, the best shape I've ever been in in my life.

He puts his powerful arm around her shoulders, ushers her towards the living room.

She looks up into his face earnestly.

MARJORIE

But Jon says you've really been complaining about your right shoulder lately.

HARVEY

You're impossible, you know that.  
No wonder where he gets that.

**EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY**

A beautiful spring early afternoon. Jon and Harvey, both 38, ride the country highway on Jon's motorcycle, Harvey's arms rapped around Jon's tight waist.

They ride across a long iron bridge. The motorcycle's saddlebags bulge.

Jon pulls the bike down the small hill on the other side of the bridge, pulls the bike to a stop in the lush green grass. He cuts the engine.

They hop off, remove their helmets. Both wear their Sunday best, Jon in particular: a three-piece charcoal suit with a navy-blue dress shirt and matching silk tie. Jon has topped off the outfit with the gorgeous brown leather jacket that continues to fit and become him perfectly.

Jon plants his lips on Harvey's. They linger, Harvey runs his fingers through Jon's thick hair.

Jon pulls away, lies down on his back on the grass, props the black combat boots he's breaking in on the motorcycle's seat.

Harvey slips off his suit jacket, tosses it aside, lies down on his belly beside Jon. He brushes bangs out of Jon's eyes.

HARVEY

Great service this morning. Frank gave a great talk.

Jon nods.

Harvey nudges him.

HARVEY

It really spoke to me. Did it you too? Seriously, Jon. Did it?

Jon shrugs.

JON

I guess so. Yeah.

HARVEY

Really? 'Cause I'd like to --

JON

Thanks for finding us a church that doesn't have a problem with us.

Harvey frowns, sighs. He lets himself relax, leans in, plants his lips on Jon's.

Jon reaches under Harvey, cups Harvey's crotch, massages him heavy and hard.

Harvey grits his teeth, not exactly the expression that says he's enjoying himself.

Jon reaches out, frantically undoes Harvey's tie, starts to unbutton Harvey's snow-white tailored shirt.

At last, Harvey grabs Jon's wrist.

Jon stares wide-eyed at his boyfriend, gulps. He frowns.

HARVEY

Jon, we don't have to go so heavy all the time. God, I feel like we don't make love, but we're jackhammering the fucking sidewalk.

JON  
You're mad.

HARVEY  
I'm not mad!

Harvey forces himself to take a deep breath.

HARVEY  
I'm not mad. I'm frustrated.

Jon clenches his teeth.

JON  
Fuck this!

He tries to roll over to sit up.

Harvey holds him in place with his powerful grasp.

HARVEY  
Stop running away. Stop running  
away from me. Look at me.

Jon watches a car pass over the iron bridge.

HARVEY  
Jon, look at me.

Jon only reluctantly does so.

HARVEY  
Talk to me. Please. Let me help  
you. Jon, please. I love you.

Jon just stares upwards.

HARVEY  
Stop walling yourself off to me.

He grabs Jon's wrist, unbuttons his cuff, pushes up the sleeve, reveals the scars of Jon's track marks.

HARVEY  
Jesus, man, you toss and turn all  
night, call out in your sleep. It  
makes me sick I can't help you. It  
makes me sicker you won't let me.

Jon shakes his head, struggles again to get up.

Harvey won't let go of Jon's wrist. He makes Jon look at him.

HARVEY  
Please! Talk to me!

Jon lifts his arm, looks at the scars. He stares upwards thru the leaves. He keeps his gaze hard and distant.

**QUICK FLASH**

Mike snorts.

MIKE  
Fine! Go all blank and hard. See  
how far that gets you. Plan on  
being really, really lonely, Jon!

Jon stares at him, breathes hard, his eyes water. He rushes out of the garage.

**END QUICK FLASH**

JON  
You'll hate me. You'll leave me.

HARVEY  
Never.

Jon closes his eyes, opens them.

JON  
Dad did things to me, Harv, and  
made me do things. He hit me and  
hurt me and said things to me.  
Things you can't imagine. Things no  
father should ever say to his son.  
Things no one should say to anyone.

Jon turns his head to look at his boyfriend.

JON  
He broke my arm and my cheekbone  
and knocked out my teeth and he  
beat me every night.

Harvey brushes Jon's cheek with his hand.

JON  
He starved me, Harv.

He bites down on his quivering lower lip.

JON

I -- I -- I ate out of the garbage.  
Have you ever tasted meat that was  
a week old in the summertime you  
had to fight the maggots for?

Harvey gulps, his watering eyes wide.

Jon lets Harvey see his forearm.

JON

The drugs made me numb to it all. I  
sucked a guy's cock, and I just  
didn't give a fuck.

A tear drops down his cheek.

JON

Some random guy sucked my cock, and  
I just didn't give a fuck. About  
anything. Especially about living.

He cries freely now, his breathing heavy.

JON

I didn't want to live. I begged God  
every night to not make me wake up.

Harvey's powerful chest heaves as his nostrils flare.

Jon stares at him with horror in his dark eyes.

JON

You hate me! You do hate me! See!!

HARVEY

What?! No!!

Jon frowns miserably.

Harvey suddenly looks ready to explode with anger.

HARVEY

I hate Cordell Vornholt!!

Jon stares up through the boughs of the ancient oak.

JON

Trust me, I hate him enough for the  
both of us.

**EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY**

Jon, all talked out, breathes calmly.

Harvey, with exquisite slowness, unbuttons Jon's vest, then unknots, removes his tie.

Soon, the two boyfriends lie naked and make slow, sensuous, gentle, mutual love under the boughs of the ancient oak through whose leaves the sun dapples them.

**EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY**

Jon slips on his boxers and his pants, then retrieves Harvey's snow-white shirt, dons it, leaves it unbuttoned.

Harvey already has his own boxers and pants on. Without warning he snatches up Jon in his powerful arms, heads for the tributary the iron bridge spans.

JON

Harvey!! Harvey, you better not!!  
You're gonna ruin these pants!! Ma  
loves me in this suit!!

Harvey, laughing, tosses Jon in the water. He then yelps, presses his elbow into his left side as he bends over a bit. He grimaces, looks up fast, plasters the smile back on.

Jon splashes, thrashes, tries to get his footing. He finally stands, soaked from head to toe. He shivers wildly.

JON

Harvey!! You better be glad my  
wallet's in my jacket pocket! And  
you're buying me a new suit!!  
Goddammit, Harv, this was tailored!

Harvey is laughing so hard he puts his hands on his thighs. He turns his head so Jon can't see him gritting his teeth.

Jon cracks a smile.

JON

You...you...jerk!

He splashes Harvey, then starts walking out of the water.

**EXT. ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY**

They lie side-by-side on one of those oversized beach towels.

Remains of a hefty late lunch lie discarded nearby.

Jon and Harvey stare up at the puffy clouds that dot the beautiful blue sky.

Harvey chuckles.

HARVEY

I heard a new joke.

JON

Oh, c'mon, Harv! You know I don't get jokes!

HARVEY

How 'bout some cheese with that whine?

He clears his throat.

HARVEY

What do you get when you combine a rhetorical question with a joke?

Harvey goes silent.

Blinking at him, Jon plops his hand on top of his head, looks at Harvey, his mouth agape.

JON

Huh?

Harvey remains silent.

Jon crinkles his brows even more.

HARVEY

Rhetorical question. Get it? You know. A question that's rhetorical. That's why I paused for so long.

Jon just continues to stare at him.

Harvey laughs.

HARVEY

Jon, jokes don't just go over your head. They flutter there gently like butterflies.

JON

Wha'?

Harvey looks at him, laughs even more, shakes his head.

HARVEY

God, I love you, you feather head.

Harvey jerks, cries out, grits his teeth. He presses his hand in against the top of his abdomen, breathes in gasps.

Jon props himself up on his elbow.

JON

Okay, Harv. This has been going on all week.

Harvey, the pain leaking through his expression, nods as he massages under his right shoulder blade.

Jon runs his fingers over Harvey's rippling abs, along veins so swollen they're visible under the skin.

JON

I've never seen anything like this on your body before. This can't be right. I mean, right? You're the one super into fitness. You know.

Harvey looks at him, shakes his head.

JON

We're going to be at the doctor's office tomorrow morning the moment they open.

HARVEY

Bullshit! Doctors are for pussies. I look like I need a doctor?

He grits his teeth, presses in on his abdomen again.

JON

Ah...Yeah! You definitely look like you need to see a doctor! Okay, you're the "Lawyer with the Lats" on YouTube, but you think you're Superman or something?

HARVEY

I pulled a few muscles. I've been exerting myself too hard lately. I'm not as young as I used to be.

Harvey's face suddenly pales, he quickly rolls over onto his side, just in time to spew a torrent of vomit.

Jon puts his hand on Harvey's shoulder as Harvey rides out the wave of nausea.



Harvey spits several times, then flops onto his back. He stares back up at those puffy clouds and that blue sky.

HARVEY

Yeah, maybe we had better be there first thing in the morning.

**INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Harvey stumbles out into the living room, clasps his stomach with both his arms, his face a mask of pain.

Fresh vomit drips down his T-shirt and his left pajama leg.

Jon tosses his smartphone aside, jumps up off the couch, rushes over to Harvey. He helps him to the recliner.

Daphne worriedly sniffs at her two daddies, pants and paces.

Jon brushes sweat-soaked bangs out of Harvey's eyes.

HARVEY

Jon.

Tears streak down Harvey's chiseled cheeks.

HARVEY

I think we better get to the E.R.

Jon moves to retrieve his phone. Harvey grabs him by his arm.

Jon shudders as he looks into Harvey's dark, watering eyes.

HARVEY

Jon, I'm scared. I'm really scared!

**INT. NORTHWESTERN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY**

A beautiful office in the Dept of Hematology and Oncology.

Jon holds Harvey's hand as each occupies a chair in front of the ornate desk.

They look up when RAYMOND WILLIAMS, M.D. enters, shuts the door. He rounds his desk, takes a seat, drops the thick record under his arm in front of him.

DR. WILLIAMS

Harvey, the only way I can give you these results is straight up.

Jon squeezes Harvey's hand tight.

DR. WILLIAMS

You have stage 4 hepatocellular carcinoma. There is no stage 5, there is no cure, but there are several treatments available that will keep the disease progression and symptoms under control.

Harvey stares at him.

HARVEY

"No cure"?

DR. WILLIAMS

We can start with this regimen. If that doesn't work, or if you cannot tolerate it, we can try this one next. We will have to monitor how you feel by talking to you and checking your blood work weekly, and how you respond to treatment by repeating scans every 6-8 weeks.

Harvey sits back.

HARVEY

Oh, my God.

He stares at the doctor.

HARVEY

You're saying I'm going to die.

Williams takes a deep breath.

DR. WILLIAMS

Harvey, we're all going to die. Nobody knows exactly when. With HCC, average survival rate is 50% at two years, 10% at five years.

JON

Those survival rates fucking suck!!

Dr. Williams keeps his attention on his patient.

DR. WILLIAMS

Yeah, those numbers are not promising, but new treatments, either approved or experimental, become available every day. We will be monitoring your progress and availability of trials or new medications constantly.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)  
Can't promise that it will be easy,  
can't promise it will work, but I  
can promise that we will do  
everything we can to help you.

Harvey leans forward, brings his hands up to his forehead.

Jon and Williams wait for him.

Harvey looks up.

HARVEY  
I'm not ready to die. Dammit, don't  
I get a say?!

He looks at Jon, grabs his hand.

Jon fights grimacing at how much Harvey is crushing his hand.

**SUPER:**

## Chapter Six

### When It All Goes Back to Shit

#### INT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jon sits beside the Harvey's death bed. Jon white-knuckle grips Harvey's hand.

Jon, tears streaming down his cheeks, his breathing coming in gasps, darts his eyes across the bed, across Harvey's body, at his parents.

JON  
Ma. Pop. Oh, my God!

Mike's eyes water, he sniffs. Marjorie openly weeps.

Jon stares into Harvey's pallid face, the crepe-paper skin -- mottled with bruises -- stretched over Harvey's skull. Jon reaches out, brushes his fingertips over Harvey's permanently closed eyelids.

Jon looks at the copy of John Grisham's The Rainmaker, bookmarked near the end, sitting on the small table piled deep with prescription bottles. Jon squeezes Harvey's hand.

JON

Harv, I haven't finished reading to you. Harv, c'mon, man, we gotta finish it, you and me. C'mon, man!

He shakes the shoulder obviously bony under the gown.

JON

Harv. Harv! HARV!

Nothing.

Jon narrows his eyes at that face, then relaxes them. He stiffens his own shoulders as he sits up ramrod. The tears stop as if Jon has thrown a switch. He lets go of Harvey's hand, which drops as dead weight onto the three blankets.

Jon stands.

Mike and Marjorie look in horror at each other, then quickly stand too, regard their son with beseeching in their eyes.

MARJORIE

Oh, please, Jon, don't! Please don't!

Jon stands there, slips his hands into his pockets. He's turned off not only his tears, but now his expression too.

He sweeps a cold gaze over the dissipated carcass. For a split moment he jerks, reaches out to the chair, but then resumes his rigid posture. He looks at Marjorie.

JON

I guess we just get rid of it.

She looks him up and down as she wipes tears off her face.

MARJORIE

Don't do what you're doing! Please!

Jon stares back at her, then moves his eyes to meet his father's. Mike returns the stare into his son's blank eyes.

JON

Why did you have to take me out of that alley that night?

MIKE

My God, Jon!

Jon turns, walks out of the bedroom, his western-booted steps loud on the wooden floor.

Jon stops a few feet into the living from the bedroom door.

MIKE (O.S.)  
He doesn't have to go this alone.

MARJORIE (O.S.)  
(barely croaking out her  
words)  
Yes he does.

Jon grabs his jacket, slams open the front door, lets it bang closed behind him.

**EXT. JON AND HARVEY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

Jon flips up the collar of his leather jacket against the late-night Chicago cold. He lights up a cigarette, takes a long drag off it, blows a billow of smoke through his nose.

He sidelong glances the windows of their -- of his apartment, narrows in on the bedroom's windows.

He stares his hard eyes straight ahead, disappears into the dark night.

**INT. PAYTON COLLEGE PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

Jon saunters into work.

TRISTEN KNOWLES, 32, comes out of the front office, intercepts him.

TRISTEN  
J-Jon?

JON  
Hey, Trist!

TRISTEN  
Um...Your parents called. Harvey did, um, pass last night. Yeah?

Jon shrugs.

JON  
Yeah.

Jon adjusts the strap of his backpack over his shoulder.

Tristen eyes him.

TRISTEN

Are you, are you...okay?

Jon bursts out with a big smile.

JON

Of course I am, Tristen! Jesus!

TRISTEN

Um...Okay.

Jon hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON

Bell's gonna ring soon.

TRISTEN

Jon, we're all here for you. You do know that, right?

The bell rings.

JON

Better get in there before they start eating each other alive.

**INT. PAYTON COLLEGE PREP - JON'S CLASSROOM - DAY**

Teenagers just being teenagers, their normal, rambunctious, first period on a Monday selves.

JIM, 16, sporting a Grizzlies Track & Field sweatshirt, leans in to his teammate and best friend, CHUCK, 17.

JIM

Horseshit! Coach isn't like that and you know it!

Three GIRLS regale each other, with little regard for volume, about their respective catastrophic Saturday night dates.

DANNY and VIC, both 17, the most popular couple in the school, work on the logistics of their newest bash. They laugh, hoot, holler.

JON

ENOUGH!!

He pounds his fist on his desk as he shoots to his feet.

JON

You spoiled brats! Do you know?! How much more there is?!?

JON (CONT'D)  
 Than your PETTY COMPLAINTS?!! AND  
 SCHOOL DRAMAS?!!!

Jon stares at the students -- his students -- who stare back as the room thunders with silence. He scans the group: some angry, some disgusted, some indifferent, most visibly upset.

Jon storms out of the room, slams himself against some lockers. He breathes a long, shuddering breath, closes his eyes, opens them. He returns to the room.

Jim stands in front of Jon's desk. The kid clears his throat.

JIM  
 Hey, uh, Mr. V., whatever we did,  
 we're, uh, sure sorry, man.

Jon narrows his eyes at the tall, lanky kid.

JON  
 Yeah, well, you fuckin' should be.  
 And get your goddamn gym bag the  
 hell out of the aisle, will ya? How  
 many times have I told you that?

Jim ducks his head, slinks back to his desk. He drops back down into his seat, scrunches down in it, stretches out his long legs. He crosses his arms, glares at "Mr. V."

SHEILA raises her hand.

JON  
 What is it, Sheila?

SHEILA  
 Mr. V. -- uh, Mr. Vornholt, sir.  
 May I leave?

Jon clenches his fist atop his desk.

JON  
 Everyone, just go to the Media  
 Center, work on your projects.

As the students file out of the classroom, Danny, glaring at Jon as he passes Jon's desk, mutters:

DANNY  
 Asshole.

**INT. PAYTON COLLEGE PREP - DAY**

Tristen storms out of his office.

TRISTEN  
Vornholt!! In here! NOW!!

Jon enters his principal's office, sits.

Tristen props himself up on a leg on the corner of his desk.

TRISTEN  
I got a lot of phone calls, texts,  
and emails last night.

He narrows his eyes at his teacher.

TRISTEN  
Did you really use the f word with  
a student yesterday morning? In  
front of a whole classroom of other  
students? Students who have  
parents? Angry parents?

Jon suddenly finds his hands in his lap fascinating.

TRISTEN  
What, don't like your job here?  
There are easier ways to get fired.  
Which I could easily do, you know.

Tristen takes a deep breath.

TRISTEN  
Do you know how hard it was to hire  
you and go to bat for you with  
those two felony possession charges  
from Detroit? Vornholt. Get. Your.  
Shit. Together.

Tristen stands, rounds his desk, sits. He leans forward on  
his elbows.

TRISTEN  
You're on bereavement leave from  
this nanosecond until I let you  
know otherwise. Are we clear?

Jon finally looks him in the eye, nods stiffly.

TRISTEN  
Jesus Christ, Jon, do you know the  
goodwill and rapport you threw away  
with those kids? You're never gonna  
be "Mr. V." again. Not with them.

Jon nods, even more stiffly. He stands, heads for the door.



TRISTEN

Jon, everyone grieves differently,  
but, buddy, grieve, will ya.

Jon doesn't look back at his principal, just leaves.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

Mike leans in to Marjorie who inspects the turkey she's pulled out of the oven. He whispers:

MIKE

Marge, he's so thin! His cheeks!  
It's like the day we found him.

She sidelong glances at him, nods.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - DAY**

The dining room table practically groans under the Thanksgiving feast. Certainly, their three plates do.

Jon sits there, his chin in his fists, stares at the fourth chair, the empty place at the table.

He pushes his chair back, stands, walks out of the room.

Marjorie and Mike look at each as they hear the front door open and close.

**EXT. RANDOM DETROIT STREET - NIGHT**

Jon takes a drag off his cigarette, flicks the butt away, pulls his pack out.

He narrows his eyes when he sees CALLUM, 14, short and wild-haired, a cigarette dangling from his lips. Even from this distance Jon sees him shivering under his ratty Army jacket.

Jon ducks into a nearby all-night store, comes out with a sandwich and a quart of milk. He walks up to the kid.

Callum stiffens. He tosses the cigarette away.

Jon reaches the sandwich out to him.

JON

Hungry, kid? You look it.

The teenager darts his eyes to see around Jon, then grabs the sandwich, rips into it, takes a bite that's a full half of it. He chews maybe two, three times before he swallows. He takes another ravenous bite. Another bite, it's gone.

Jon opens the milk, hands it to him. Callum slams the mouth of the carton to his lips, guzzles. Milk dribbles down his chin, down the front of his threadbare shirt.

Callum finishes the milk, tosses the carton aside into a corner already heaped with the city's discard.

The kid sags his bony shoulders, an immense sadness reflects in his green eyes, green like jade. He cocks his head at the city park across the street.

**INT. PUBLIC PARK RESTROOM - NIGHT**

Jon zips his pants up while Callum gets up off his knees.

Jon grabs the kid's chin, turns Callum's face so the buzzing light reveals the true extent of a vicious black eye.

The boy jerks his chin out of Jon's grasp.

CALLUM

Get the fuck off me, man! Asshole!!

Jon next grabs Callum's arm, pushes up the sleeve of the jacket, then the shirt, reveals track marks.

The teenager, his eyes narrowed, his chest heaving, shoves Jon, straightens the sleeves.

CALLUM

I said, get the FUCK off me!!

Jon shakes his head as he stares at this boy. This boy. He is just a boy.

Jon pulls out his wallet, digs out whatever bills he has in it, stuffs them in the breast pocket of the boy's jacket.

He watches as the stick-thin, hollow-cheeked teenager dashes out of the restroom to disappear into the cold night.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Jon walks up to Marjorie, wraps his arms around her, places his chin atop her head, closes his eyes. No words. No tears. No change in his foot-thick armor.

Marjorie wraps her arms around him, squeezes, squeezes as very tight as she can.

**INT. PAYTON COLLEGE PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

Jon stands in his classroom's doorway, looks at his students.

Jim spots him, who sits up fast.

JIM

Hey, Mr. V.! Everyone, it's Mr. V.!

Jon walks all the way in.

Jim stands, kicks his gym bag under his desk, glances all around him at his classmates before focusing on Jon.

JIM

Hey, Mr. V., man, all you had to do was tell us.

Jon nods stiffly. The left corner of his mouth curls upward.

Danny shoves back in his seat, crosses his arms, glares at him.

**INT. PAYTON COLLEGE PREP - RECITAL HALL - DAY**

The students -- Jon's students -- finish their opening-night performance of The Little Shop of Horrors and take their bow.

Jon, 39, Mike, and Marjorie join everyone else in leaping to their feet and giving them a standing ovation.

Mike sidelong glances his son, frowns.

**INT. MIKE AND MARJORIE'S CONDO - MIKE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Jake, Jon's drug rehab counselor from years earlier, shares a Zoom call with Mike and Marjorie.

JAKE

Guys, I talked to you about his recovery was going to be a roller coaster for him. I also told you it was going to be lifelong.

MIKE

Yeah, we know that, but this is...

He frowns, looks at Marjorie.

She leans in to the screen.

MARJORIE  
It's hard to put words to it.

She squeezes Mike's hand.

MARJORIE  
It's like he's still 15, it's still  
that night we took him out of that  
alleyway.

JAKE  
It's like he's stuck running in  
place.

MIKE  
Yeah!!

MARJORIE  
Yeah!!

MARJORIE  
And he's exhausted. I hear it in  
his voice every time I talk to him,  
I see it on his face every time I  
see him. It's heart-breaking, Jake.

Jake fills more of the screen as he leans forward.

JAKE  
Let me say something right off: you  
two have done nothing wrong.

Then:

JAKE  
(under his breath)  
Anyone's fault, it's mine.

Marjorie knits her brows.

MARJORIE  
Jake, what?

Jake shrugs, sits up.

JAKE  
People as profoundly ego-injured as  
Jon, it's like they wear a skin,  
it's like they're almost mimicking  
normal human emotions and actions.

MIKE  
Jesus, Jake, you make our son sound  
like a serial killer!

Jake cocks a brow.

JAKE  
It's a fine line.

Jake breathes in and out a deep breath.

JAKE  
Listen, I promise you, no one more than Jon wants to feel things for real, wants the act to stop. He just doesn't know how to.

He sits back quick in his chair, huffs.

JAKE  
And, of course, the loss of Harvey sure as hell didn't help anything.

He squares his shoulders.

JAKE  
You're right. In very many ways he is still 15 years old, he is still that feral kid in that alleyway.

Mike squeezes Marjorie's hand.

MIKE  
We've got to teach him he can take down that wall around his heart.

JAKE  
Exactly. But, guys, we can teach him, but he's gotta actually do it.

**SUPER:**

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Three Years Later, Clawing Out of the Pit**

#### **EXT. INTERLOCHEN CENTER FOR THE ARTS - DAY**

Jake, now 58, crosses the parking lot up to Jon, 41. Jake wears a huge smile on his youthful face. He extends his hand.

Shaking his hand, Jon looks the man up and down.

JON

God, Doc, you look great! You never did look your age.

Jake shrugs, puts his hand on Jon's shoulder, leads him toward the main building.

JAKE

Thanks for coming up. I hope you take the position. These kids really need you. You'll understand when you meet 'em.

JON

Thanks for telling me about it. Hearing from you like that was, well, great, but...how'd you even know I was a drama teacher?

Jake grins at him slyly.

JAKE

I've kept up with your folks about you here and there.

JON

Spying on me.

JAKE

Something like that.

Jon looks all around them.

JON

My God, Doc, this place is gorgeous.

JAKE

1200 acres of a little piece of Heaven. It's a very special place. You wouldn't believe what they provide for these special kids.

Jake holds the main door open for him.

**INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - DAY**

SAMANTHA BRENNER, 39, cringes as she escorts Jon into the main auditorium -- the "Arts Academy" -- of the Drama Dept.

Bedlam probably would be quieter and more orderly.

STUDENTS run around the large stage, chase each other with props while they hoot and holler.

Two TEENAGE BOYS, one lanky, the other plump, fence with authentic-looking foils, shout "En garde!" at each other.

A group of GIRLS costume each other from bolts of cloth, wield professional-grade scissors with dangerous abandon.

Jon glances down at the first rows of seats, where he sees a girl and boy kissing, his hand fondling her breast through her blouse, her hand massaging the crotch of his dark jeans.

SAMANTHA

Mr. Vornholt, I am so embarrassed.  
The drama teacher who just now up  
and left on us, she was at least  
able to control these kids.

She looks up.

SAMANTHA

Mr. Wagner!! Please get control of  
these young people! We're paying  
you to substitute for a reason!

BOB WAGNER, who seems barely older than any of these students, regards her with a stricken expression.

MR. WAGNER

I really am tryin', Mrs. Brenner, I  
promise.

JON

Hey, Wagner!

Jon waves the substitute over. When Wagner arrives:

JON

I need a bucket or some kind of  
container. I need a pad of paper to  
write on, and I need a pen. Quick!

The young man looks at his boss. Samantha nods urgently. Wagner rushes off.

JON

A trick I picked up when I was a  
student teacher. That drama teacher  
would love I'm paying it forward.  
Man, she'd be in her 80's by now.

Wagner returns with the items, hands them to Jon, who sits, furiously scribbles out little notes, tears them off the pad, folds them, drops them in the bucket.

Leaving both Samantha and Wagner dumbfounded, Jon rushes around the auditorium, gets each student to reach into the bucket and pull out a slip at random.

The students exchange looks, first with each other, then at this wacky new adult.

Jon tosses the bucket aside, rushes to the center of the stage, where he throws up his arms and dons an expression as the pose and the mask of the Mad Conductor.

At the top of his lungs he belts out the opening line of the signature tune from the Broadway hit The Music Man:

JON  
SEVENTY-SIX TROMBONES LED THE BIG  
PARADE!

He points at the kids, gestures for them to check out the slips of paper in their hands. He pantomimes playing a trombone, then waves the kids with the slips where he had scribbled "trombone" to come over, get behind him.

JON  
SEVENTY-SIX **TROMBONES** LED THE BIG  
PARADE!!

Slowly, hesitantly the appropriate kids approach him.

Jon starts marching around the stage, the impromptu trombone section falls in step behind him, really starts to get into their pantomiming their playing their instruments.

JON  
WITH A HUNDRED AND TEN **CORNETS**  
CLOSE AT HAND!!

The "cornet" kids fall into step behind the trombone section and clearly want to outshow and outdo their classmates.

JON  
THERE WERE OVER A THOUSAND  
**REEDS**/SPRINGING UP LIKE WEEDS!!

The last of the kids fall into their place among the impromptu marching band. As Jon marches them around the stage in perfect choreography, the students smile, glow with the excitement of at last doing again what they are there at this unique and wonderful school to do: be drama students, some of the best in the country, maybe the world.



Jon brings the impromptu Broadway number to a close with a great flourish, his arms outstretched. His smile and those of the young people light up the entire Arts Academy.

Samantha points at him, shouts:

SAMANTHA  
Jon Vornholt, you're hired!!

**INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS**

Jake sits in the back row, unseen and unnoticed, in the dark.

He stares hard at Jon. Jake couldn't wear a deeper frown.

He shakes his head, just keeps shaking his head.

JAKE  
Oh, my God. Marjorie and Mike, you were right. Oh, God, Jon, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I let you down.

While Samantha excitedly discusses employment details with Jon up on the stage, Jake slips out unseen.

**INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - DAY**

Jon's drama class STUDENTS sit cross-legged on the stage as he walks among them while holding a greasy tank top.

JON  
Okay, for our Streetcar practice skit, do you guys agree Keith would make a great Stanley Kowalski?

KEITH BRIN, 15, darts his hard eyes first at his teacher, then around at his classmates.

Jon starts chanting, then the whole group joins him: "Keith! Keith! Keith!"

Very reluctantly Keith gets to his feet. He gulps.

JON  
Stanley's a simple brute of a man, so you want to look the part.

Jon hands the teenager the tank top.

JON

You're perfect, Keith. Put this thing on, and it'll be like Brando lives again.

Keith tosses the garment back at Jon.

KEITH

No. I'll do the skit, Mr. V., but I'm not changing into that.

Jon grins warmly.

JON

C'mon, be a sport. If you're shy, go backstage and change.

Keith's expression darkens.

KEITH

I said no, Mr. Vornholt.

JON

Keith, I'm giving you an assignment. I want you to try pushing yourself. C'mon, kiddo.

Jon attempts to hand the tank top back to his student.

KEITH

How 'bout you try shoving that up your ass?! I don't need this shit!

Keith roughly moves his way through the group, speeds off the stage, up the aisle, bangs through the main door.

Keith's classmates oo and ah.

JON

Awright, awright, you jokers! Settle down!

**INT. INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY - DAY**

Jon eyes his students up on the stage as he has his smartphone pressed to his ear.

JON

Listen, Paul, I'm not going to argue with you the middle of a work day. Y'know, a paycheck. Good thing one of us is earning one.

He rolls his eyes as he listens.

JON  
All we've done for months is argue.  
Listen, I got to go.

He hangs up the call, slips the phone into his pocket. He closes his eyes, breathes a sigh, opens his eyes.

He hops up onto the stage. He waves all his students over to the back, where large sheets of muslin drape from above.

JON  
Okay, everyone, roll up your sleeves and let's dive into getting these backdrops painted.

He walks up and down as the kids roll up their sleeves, really jump into their fun new task.

Jon stops at Keith. His sleeves remain cuffed at his wrists.

JON  
C'mon, Keith, roll up your sleeves, get into it. Relax, have fun!

Keith just keeps dabbing the muslin with his paintbrush.

KEITH  
No.

Jon huffs.

JON  
Listen! I'm getting fed up with you telling me no all the time.

Keith glares at him, throws the brush down into the can of paint, splattering the legs of their trousers. He starts to take off.

Jon grabs his arm, but Keith yanks it out of his grip.

Keith runs off the stage, up the aisle.

JON  
Keith, get back here! Right now!!

He sags his shoulders as he watches the boy disappear out the auditorium's main door.

**INT. INTERLOCHEN - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jon sticks his head in the door.

JON  
Hey, Doc, got a sec?

Jake nods, waves him in.

Jon glances at the framed doctorate, then at the framed 8x10 of the desert badasses, still paired after all these years.

Jon takes a seat.

JON  
I got this kid taking Theatre 315,  
Keith Brin. Something's really up  
with him.

Jake leans back in his seat, takes a deep breath, nods.

JAKE  
Yeah, I know. I've called his home,  
all I ever get is phone tag with  
his folks. Dad's a doctor, Mom  
works second shift, Keith has a  
younger brother to take care of.

Jake frowns.

JAKE  
Do you think he's being hit?

Jon frowns back at him, shakes his head.

JON  
That's not my vibe. But something's  
definitely going on.

He leans forward, rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands.

JAKE  
How are you and Paul?

Jon looks at him.

JON  
He took off last week.

JAKE  
Shit! Sorry, man.

He sits up.

JAKE  
Hey, how 'bout you come over  
tomorrow, we catch the game?

Jon shrugs, nods.

JON  
Shelly won't care?

JAKE  
She's with her folks the whole  
weekend. Just us bachelors.

Jon snorts.

JON  
She know you talk like that?

Jake cracks a grin.

JON  
Sure, Doc. Sounds great. Wait. What  
about Keith?

JAKE  
It's been a long week. Go home,  
relax. We can talk about it  
tomorrow.

Jon nods, rises, heads for the door.

Jake watches Jon leave. He sits forward, leans on his elbows.  
He frowns, shakes his head.

JAKE  
You better get it right this time,  
Rowsey. That boy deserves you  
finally doing right by him.

He pounds his fist on his desk.

JAKE  
Dammit!

**INT. ROWSEY RESIDENCE - DAY**

Jon walks into the living room, sees the flatscreen's off, no  
music's playing, there are no bowls of chips on the counter.

He licks his upper lip, starts to take a pack of cigarettes  
out of his jacket pocket.

JAKE  
Hey, hey, hey! I have to smoke  
outside, you have to.

Jon looks at him as he slips the pack back inside the pocket.

JON  
We're not going to watch the game,  
are we, Doc?

JAKE  
No, we're not.

JON  
We're not going to talk about  
Keith, right?

JAKE  
Not directly, no.

Jon tightens his lips together.

Jake eyes Jon from his right hand into a fist.

Jake takes a step toward Jon.

Jon takes a step back.

JAKE  
27 years ago, two of the best  
people God put on this planet gave  
you a second chance.

Jon narrows his eyes at his former counselor.

JAKE  
When the hell are you finally going  
to take it?!

Jon turns to step toward the front door.

Jake hurries to block Jon's path.

Jon's chest rises, falls quickly.

JON  
Doc, I'm warning you -- !!

JAKE  
I'm not letting you out of here. I  
screwed up helping you way back at  
Hazelden.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I knew you should have stayed another three months, but I was so new and naive and Marjorie was so convinced you were better.

He takes a step toward Jon, which makes Jon step several paces back into the living room.

JAKE

Great little strategy you got there, Vornholt. Just shut yourself off, make everyone else do all the work you should be doing to grow and change. Nice!

Jake curls his lips up in disgust.

JAKE

You lazy pussy!

JON

God, man, why you bustin' my chops?

JAKE

Frankly I thought you'd come a lot further along. Instead you get here, I vouch for you, and you're the same fake asshole hustler the first time I met you, slicker than snot! You haven't changed at all!

Jake sneers at him.

JAKE

Harvey's turning in his grave. Yeah, you fall off the wagon for a minor hiccup in your career. But do the same when you lose the love of your life, the guy you held in your arms and watched wither and die for six months? No fuckin' way!

JON

Don't you dare mention Harv!

JAKE

Oh. Struck a nerve? That can't be, because that would mean you actually give a fuck. About anything.

JON

I give a fuck! That's it, I'm getting outta here. I don't need this shit from you. From anyone!

Jon moves for the door again. Again, Jake, remarkably strong for his size, impedes him.

JAKE

What shit do you need? I'm a Ph.D. psychologist. I've got worthless shit in spades.

Jake looks Jon long and hard in his eyes.

JAKE

It's all been a front, hasn't it? Every smile, every laugh, every frown, every sneer, all of it. 27 years of it. Right, Jon? Right?

Jon squares his shoulders back, narrows his eyes at Jake. He seems on the verge of hyperventilating.

JON

What, you thick? Don't you get it?! I'm garbage and always will be!!

Jon stumbles back, into one of the living room's chairs.

Jake sits on the end of the couch nearest Jon. He nods, his expression easy, noncommittal.

JAKE

"Garbage"? Oh. Really? Okay. So Harv was a real moron.

Jon looks at him sharply. Jake shrugs.

JAKE

Musta been. Loved a guy who was garbage. Not only garbage, but always was, always will be. God, what a dope and an idiot he was.

Jake starts ticking off his fingers.

JAKE

And your principals. You sure fooled all of them. You sure must give a helluva job interview.

He laughs.



JAKE

And your students. What suckers they are. And, hell, Mike! What a fuckin' chump he turned out to be!

Jake narrows his eyes at him. He can't stop swallowing hard.

JAKE

And that stupid bitch, Marjorie! You fooled her most of all, huh?!

Jon's entire body quakes. He breathes loud through his nose.

JON

Don't you ever, EVER talk about Ma like that!!

JAKE

Why, Jon? If you're this bottomless bag of garbage, this endless sack of shit, why do all of us care about you so much, love you so much?

Jon's expression contorts with rage, pain, hurt, terror.

JON

I!! DON'T!! KNOW!!!!

Jon moves to jump to his feet, Jake clamps both his hands down on Jon's forearm, forces him to stay put.

Jon, tears streak down his cheeks, he can barely croak his words out.

JON

All of you, you're always talking in riddles! Even when you're not saying a word, I never understand any of you people!!

He looks Jake directly into his eyes.

JON

And it's always scared the shit outta me, Doc!

Jake takes a deep breath, wets his upper lip.

JAKE

Feeling isn't understanding. Let me let you in on a secret: none of us understand shit.

He sniffs.

JAKE

I still don't understand why that young Iraqi insurgent forced me to slit his throat. But I never dealt with it, never stopped letting it eat me alive and cost me my right to my personal pursuit of happiness, until I finally felt it. And you know what, Jon? It felt! Fucking! BAD!!

Jake wipes his nose, holds up his arms.

JAKE

But look, I'm still here. I've got a beautiful wife, two kids I'm incredibly proud of, a great job, wonderful colleagues, even more wonderful friends.

Jake leans in to Jon, stares him hard right into his eyes.

JAKE

That kid died. I killed him. I lived. I didn't let him kill me. That doesn't make either him or me a bad person.

Jake narrows his eyes even harder into Jon's.

JAKE

Life's shit sometimes. Grow the fuck up, Vornholt!

Jon stares back at Jake. Jon tries to keep his shoulders thrown back, rigid, he tries to keep his expression hard, emotionless, stone, but the entire façade crumbles. Jon sinks into the chair, his breathing comes in gasps.

JON

Harv died, Doc.

Jake softens his expression, takes Jon's hand into his.

JAKE

I know he did, Jon. I know.

Jon shuts his eyes tight, tears squeeze out from between his eyelids. Jon snaps his eyes back open.

JON  
(voice shuddering)  
Why did he have to die?!

Jake grins a sad grin at him.

JAKE  
Because people die, Jon! We all  
die. We don't want to. And not  
because of our own mortal oblivion,  
but because we know it's going to  
hurt the ones we love.

Jon nods stiffly, sniffs, wipes snot off his top lip.

JON  
I love Ma and Pop, but Harv was the  
only time I felt whole, I felt  
safe, I felt...peace.

He grits his teeth as he struggles to continue to speak.

JON  
I felt...connected. And I'm never  
going to get that back. Ever!

Jon falls apart crying.

Jake makes Jon look at him, looks Jon hard right into his  
eyes. He raises Jon's hand he's holding in his own.

He squeezes Jon's hand, tight.

JAKE  
You feel this? Do you?!

Jon nods jerkily.

JAKE  
You're connected, you're connected  
more than you can ever imagine.

Jon gulps.

JON  
(nervously)  
Yeah?

Jake nods, smiles broadly at him.

JAKE  
Oh, yeah! You can trust, buddy!

**INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Jon tosses his jacket and keys down, yanks off his boots, rubs the back of his neck as his eyes droop.

He heads toward the bedroom, stops at a door, opens it. A deep closet yawns in front of him. He bends over, reaches in, slides out a box. He turns, leans his back against the wall, slides down it until he sits beside the box.

He stares at it. He licks his upper lip, gulps. He reaches a nervous hand out to it, withdraws it, reaches it out again. He removes the top -- which reads Magic-Marked in his mother's writing "For Jon -- when he's ready".

He breathes a shuddering breath. He reaches out a black scarf and a floppy warlock hat.

**QUICK FLASH**

Jon and Harvey each wear matching scarves and warlock hats. Harvey musters a grin as Jon, a hand on each once-muscled shoulder, presses his cheek to Harv's as his mom snaps a pic.

**END QUICK FLASH**

Jon sets these aside, reaches out a maroon sweatshirt emblazoned with TREVINO, CARLSEN, AND VONDEREN.

**QUICK FLASH**

Harvey shivers uncontrollably despite swallowed up in the huge maroon sweatshirt. Harvey grabs Jon, grabs Jon's arms, wraps them around himself. Harvey presses himself into Jon's shirtfront. Jon runs his hands up and down Harvey's back.

**END QUICK FLASH**

Jon puts the sweatshirt to his nose, breathes in deep. He squeezes his watering eyes tightly shut. He breathes in again, even more deeply. His expression pinches with anguish.

He sets the sweatshirt aside, peers into the box, knits his brows. He pulls out the hardback of The Rainmaker. He runs his fingers over the tattered cover, grins wanly as a tear drips down his cheek.

He narrows his eyes as he sees a folded slip of paper protruding from a random page. He removes it, unfolds it.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Jon, I only have a few minutes left. Don't waste one minute worrying about me.

HARVEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I got everything out of life I  
 wanted, most of all you. Feel, Jon.  
 Feel big things, feel a lot of  
 things. And don't ever stop. Yours  
 for eternity -- Harv

Jon runs his fingertip over Harvey's signature. One tear  
 drops down his cheek, then another tear down his other cheek.

Then he bends over, utterly overcome with sobbing.

Finally, the sobbing subsides, Jon wipes his nose. His chest  
 heaves, he stares straight ahead.

JON  
 But, Harv, it feels! Fucking! BAD!!

He wipes his nose again, then his cheeks. He goes to get up,  
 then he knits his brows.

JON  
 What do you get when you combine a  
 rhetorical question with a joke?

He widens his eyes as a huge, huge smile erupts on his face.

He starts laughing, with a joy, a joy that just won't stop.

JON  
 I get it, Harv! I get it!!

He jumps to his feet, runs to his front door, throws it open.

JON  
 Everybody! I got it! I GOT A JOKE!!

**QUICK FLASH**

Harvey looks at him, laughs even more, shakes his head.

HARVEY  
 God, I love you, you feather head.

**INT. JON'S DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY**

Keith sits down in a chair next to Jon's cluttered desk.

KEITH  
 I know this is about how I've been  
 mouthing off to you, running out of  
 class. I know you're gonna have to  
 give me detention.

Jon shakes his head.

JON

We'll talk about that later.

He takes a deep breath.

JON

Keith, all semester, you don't raise your hand, you sit back there in silence, you always look like your dog just died.

KEITH

I'm sorry, sir. I'll do better.

JON

I'm not asking you to do better, son. I'm trying to figure out what's wrong. Can you talk to me?

He takes another deep breath.

JON

You're a really sad kid, Keith. And I know a thing or two about that. And I know a thing or two about folks who helped me not be so sad anymore. A lot of folks.

Keith narrows his eyes at him.

JON

Why didn't you want to wear that tank top or roll up your sleeves?

Keith narrows his eyes at him even harder.

KEITH

It's just that jerk Tom. Feels like he can make everyone feel like crap just because he's a dancer and he's got the body of one.

JON

No. Kiddo, that's not it, and we both know that's not it.

Jon unbuttons the cuff of his shirt, pushes his sleeve up past his elbow, turns his forearm for Keith to see.

JON

If you pushed your sleeve up, I'd see something like this, right?

KEITH  
Track marks?! Plenty of jerks  
around here do drugs, but I don't!

Keith looks at him panic-stricken.

KEITH  
Have you told my dad you think I do  
drugs?! Holy shit, Mr. Vornholt!!  
Oh, fuck!!

JON  
Hey, hey! Of course I don't think  
you do drugs! But I'd see something  
on your arms, wouldn't I?

KEITH  
No!

JON  
Look me in the eye and say that.

Keith can't.

JON  
You're cutting yourself, right?

Keith sits there, his hands in his laps.

JON  
Right?

Keith eyes his teacher's bare, scarred forearm. He pulls on the cuff of his right sleeve, pushes the sleeve up past his elbow. He turns the revealed forearm for Jon to see.

Jon gulps as he looks at the slashes crisscrossing Keith's smooth skin, from scars to scabs to some pretty damn fresh.

Keith stares into his lap. Tears stream down his smooth cheeks, drip off his smooth chin.

JON  
Who's hurting you, Keith?

The boy looks up.

KEITH  
I can't tell you that! Do you know  
what he'll -- ?!

He stares at his teacher.

Jon clears his throat, speaks slowly, calmly:

JON  
Does your dad hit you?

KEITH  
Hit me?! Leave actual evidence  
people can see how much he hates  
me?! Dad's not stupid, Mr. V.!

Keith runs his shaking hand through his thick, dark hair.

KEITH  
Do you know how fast he would yank  
me out of here if I dropped any of  
my academics below my 4.5 GPA? He'd  
put me in a pre-med specialty high  
school so fast. He's said a hundred  
times he's got one picked out.

Keith viciously slaps a tear off his cheek.

KEITH  
All I've ever thought about, my  
whole life, is the stage. Do you  
know the dream come true it was  
when Interlochen accepted me?

JON  
I can only imagine.

Keith narrows his eyes, breathes hard.

KEITH  
(his teeth clenched)  
I hate him! I hate Dad so much!

JON  
No, kiddo, no! Don't do what I did  
and waste twenty years hating your  
dad. My father, he wasn't evil. He  
was just very very lost.

He looks Keith straight in the boy's pain-filled eyes.

JON  
Just as yours is.

**SUPER:**

**Chapter Eight**  
**Flapping Across the Rising Sun**



**INT. HENRY FORD HOSPITAL - DAY**

Jon, 42, stands outside the door to Marjorie's room.

Mike stands with him, his hands on his son's shoulders. Mike looks into Jon's eyes streaming with tears.

JON

I can't do this, Pop. I can't! I did it with Harv. Don't you remember what happened last time I had to say goodbye? I'm not strong enough, Pop.

MIKE

You are strong enough. Who do you think your mom wants to be one of the last people she sees?

He cups his son's chin.

MIKE

Do you think she's going to be happy if she doesn't say goodbye to her beautiful great blue heron?

Jon shakes his head, squeezes his eyes shut, opens them. The tears don't stop, he tries to control his breathing.

JON

It feels so bad.

He spits a laugh, manages a pained grin.

JON

But I'm feeling it, right?

Mike matches Jon's grin.

MIKE

Yeah! Yeah, you are.

Jon enters the room, walks up beside Marjorie's bed.

She slowly turns her head. Her eyes brighten, she smiles.

Jon takes her hand.

She reaches her other hand up to his face, brushes the tears off them with the back of it. Her smile broadens.

MARJORIE

You don't know what those tears mean to me. I've never seen you more beautiful.

He gulps, nods. He slips three bills out of his pocket.

JON

Remember these? They've gotten kinda old and ratty.

She chuckles.

MARJORIE

Sure do remember those.

JON

You never took them.

MARJORIE

And I was never going to.

Jon laughs, sniffs.

JON

That's for sure. That's my ma.

He looks from them to her, straight in the eye.

JON

You never wanted this money. You just wanted the simple words, "I'm sorry."

He clenches the bills in his fist, then relaxes his fingers.

JON

I'm sorry.  
(quickly)  
I me --

MARJORIE

Sssh!

She squeezes his hand.

MARJORIE

Thank you.

She jerks, spasms, squeezes her eyes shut, releases his hand.

JON

Ma?!

She opens her eyes.

MARJORIE

Jon, go get your pop.

His boots remain rooted to the linoleum floor.

JON

No! Don't go! There's always something more they can try. Doc Williams said that about Harv to the very last moment.

MARJORIE

But I've already told them I don't want them to.

The tears flow down Jon's cheeks, drip off his chin.

JON

I'm not ready for you to go!

Marjorie's placid smile chisels through her mask of pain.

MARJORIE

Yeah, but, son, I am.

She squeezes his hand anew.

MARJORIE

Go get your pop.

He nods stiffly, walks over to the door, locks eyes with Mike as he takes his father's hand and draws him into the room.

**EXT. GETHSEMANE CEMETERY - DAY**

Jon and Mike stand rigidly in front of the coffin, each in their best dark suits.

A large crowd of Marjorie's family, friends, colleagues, and students walk solemnly back to their cars.

Father and son shiver in the chill of the beautiful Michigan early spring day, the sky blue, the sun bright.

Tears fall down Jon's face, gather on his chin, drip off.

JON

I was her great blue heron.

He sniffs.

JON  
Her beautiful great blue heron.

He glances sidelong at Mike.

JON  
She'll never call me that again.

He looks at Mike directly.

JON  
Why me?!

MIKE  
Why not you?!

Jon shakes his head slowly.

JON  
Do you know how many beaten,  
abused, starving kids there are  
eating out of God knows how many  
alleyways?

MIKE  
We didn't come across all those  
other kids in all those other  
alleyways. We came across you.

JON  
I get this life, and all those  
others don't? How's that make any  
goddamn sense?

Mike takes his son's hand, squeezes it.

MIKE  
Did Marge ever tell you why she  
called you her great blue heron?

Jon shakes his head, his brows knit.

Mike sniffs, wipes his nose, clears his throat.

MIKE  
When the doctor told us Marjorie  
couldn't conceive, I watched that  
destroy her. This beautiful woman,  
the strongest person I'd ever met,  
crumbled inside herself.

Jon squeezes his father's hand back.

Mike looks at the coffin.

MIKE

The pain never left her. She could never talk about it.

He sniffs, returns his attention to his son.

MIKE

Several months later, a gorgeous late spring morning, we were walking Riverfront Trail. A great blue heron flew right over us, continued on its way, right across the sunrise. It was -- breathtaking.

Tears continue to drop down Jon's cheeks.

MIKE

Marge looked at me. The pain was still in her eyes, but for the first time in months, I saw her smile. She told me that was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

Tears freely flow down Mike's own cheeks.

MIKE

You see, son. I saw you that night, and all I saw was a kid I needed to get into the system.

Jon nods stiffly.

MIKE

She saw you, and she saw the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen all over again. There was no power on Earth that was going to take you away from her.

JON

I stole from her, swore at her, so often made her life a living hell. It took me twenty-seven years to apologize for any of it.

He gulps several times. He puts his hand on his chest.

JON

(his voice quivering)  
I never let her in.

Jon looks at the coffin.

JON

I never let her in, not ever. Not really. And now it's too late!

Mike lets go of Jon's hand, he grabs the lapels of Jon's suit jacket, makes his son face him.

MIKE

That is not true. You let her in from the very start. Even I could see that, and it's taken me a long time to see you, see you for real.

Mike's lips quiver.

MIKE

I'm sorry, my beautiful boy, it's taken me so long.

Jon sidelong glances at the coffin, then looks his father straight in the old man's wise eyes.

JON

Pop, I've told you I respect you, I've told you thank you, I've told you I'm afraid of you, I even a couple of times told you I hate you. But I've never told you I love you.

They grab each other in a tight embrace. Mike presses his face into Jon's shoulder, weeps, his whole body quakes.

Jon puts his lips to his father's ear.

JON

I love you, Pop. I love you.

Jon looks at the coffin again and...smiles. His eyes fill with joy and happiness at the same time that they flow anew with tears, all of this in the best, most raw and authentic display of the ecstatic agony of the human condition.

**EXT. RANDOM DETROIT STREET - DAY**

Changed into their street clothes, Jon and Mike make small talk as they saunter down the cracked sidewalk.

Jon perks up as he narrows his eyes across the street and down to the far corner. He returns his attention to Mike.

JON

Pop, wait here. I'm gonna try to get you to meet someone.

He darts across the street, down the sidewalk, slows his pace as he approaches Callum.

The wild-haired teenager narrows his eyes at him, coils his whole body in preparation to bolt.

Jon raises his hands, palms outward.

Callum darts his green eyes all around Jon.

CALLUM

What the fuck do you want?

Jon lowers his hands.

JON

Nothing.

He hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JON

You see that old man back there? He and his wife found me same age you are when I was in exactly the same situation you're in right now.

Callum shrugs.

CALLUM

So? What the fuck do I care?

Jon shrugs back at him.

JON

They helped me, and I'd like to help you. You know, that "pay it forward" shit.

He slips the bills out of his pocket. Callum eyes the money with equal parts longing and suspicion.

JON

I don't want anything from you for this. If you just need to talk, if you need a hot meal.

He slips a small notepad and a pen from the inside pocket of his leather jacket. He scribbles quickly, rips off the sheet.

Jon reaches the sheet and the bills out to the boy.

CALLUM

You fuckin' liar. You want me to suck you for that.

JON

No, no, no! That's never going to happen again. I apologize for that. I should never have done that to you. I should never have put you in that position. No one should. You're worth more than that. Trust me, I know. Now, c'mon, take this.

He emphasizes the sheet of paper.

JON

The top, that's my name and my number. The bottom, that's my father over there.

Jon smiles at the boy.

JON

C'mon! There's a great pizzeria we love, been going there for years. Let us get a hot meal inside you. We can talk. Pop can help. He cares. He really, really does.

Callum seems to lower his defenses for just a moment, then snatches the money and paper, takes off out of sight.

Jon sags his shoulders, slips his hands in the pockets of his jackets, turns, heads back to his father.

Mike puts his hand on Jon's shoulder, pats it solidly.

Jon grins wanly at him, puts his arm around Mike's shoulders.

JON

C'mon, old man. Let's go home.

As they start down the sidewalk, Mike glances heavenward, winks, gives a thumb's up.

**SUPER:**

**Epilogue**

**Hope?**



**INT. JON AND MATT'S INTERLOCHEN APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Jon glances down as his phone rings. He crinkles his brows at the number. He glances at his boyfriend, MATT FINGERHUT, who looks up from his laptop, smiles warmly at Jon.

Jon scratches Daphne's head as he answers the phone.

**INT. LUIGI'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT**

Jon bounces his knee as he darts his eyes from the clock -- 8:58 -- to the door to Luigi, who looks back at him, frowns.

Jon looks at Mike across from him in their favorite booth.

Mike pats Jon's hand, grins reassuringly at his son.

Jon nods, returns his glance up at the clock. 9:01.

Jon looks at Luigi, who pulls keys out of his pocket, starts to come from behind the counter.

Jon shuts his eyes, frowns, sags his shoulders.

The door chimes.

Jon pops his eyes open.

Callum stands there: wild-haired, hard, broken, but -- there!

Jon breathes a huge sigh, smiles, stands, carefully and slowly approaches the boy.

**FADE OUT**