

The Maestro

By

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1 INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL OFFICE-MIDDAY

1

Open on JOANIE MCCARTHY (50) staring forward with a look conveying a mix of shock and powerlessness. Joanie has curly black hair, and looks like a real middle-aged woman who has two kids and doesn't quite sleep enough. She looks down slowly.

A wrinkly, older woman's hand reaches across a desk and grabs Joanie's wrist comfortingly.

We follow the hand up to the NUN it belongs to, and she smiles at Joanie.

NUN

Obviously, no one is happy about this, Joanie, but I'm sure you understand.

As the nun says this, the Catholic school PRINCIPAL walks into the office wiping his face with a WET WASH CLOTH.

PRINCIPAL

There are students we can handle and students we can't. Surely, you understand, Joanie.

Joanie sighs sadly.

JOANIE

Where is he?

CUT TO:

2 INT. CATHOLIC SCHOOL HALLWAY-DAY

2

A teenage boy with Down Syndrome is being marched down the halls of the Catholic School by his AIDE. This is Joanie's son JASON (14). He is short for his age, and his brown hair is carefully trimmed. He's not quite chubby yet, but he's getting there. Jason is non-verbal and has comorbid autism, but his curiosity and mischievousness are more defining than any diagnosis.

His aide remains stoic as she guides him, holding him by the elbow, and while the whole scene evokes someone being led to the firing squad, he just looks confused by this change in his normal school routine.

As they walk down the hall, various children with disabilities come to the doorways to watch him go. A girl with down syndrome waves sadly, crying openly. A boy with

autism waves while looking in the other direction.

3 EXT. CATHOLIC SCHOOL-CONTINUOUS

3

Jason's processional reaches the front doors of the school. Joanie waits at the bottom of some stairs, and Jason gets excited to see her. He picks up speed and his aide struggles to hold on to him as he makes it down the rest of the steps to hug her. Joanie half-smiles with a mix of happiness to see her son and unhappiness about the circumstances.

Jason stops hugging her and goes expectantly to her SHITTY SUV parked out front. Jason's aide hands a bag of Jason's things to Joanie.

AIDE

I'm gonna miss the little guy. I guess we didn't really know what to do with him.

Joanie takes the bag and pats the aide on the shoulder reassuringly. Her eyes are starting to well up, but she doesn't actually cry.

JOANIE

Thanks, Carol.

Carol goes over to say goodbye to Jason. She leans in to give him a hug, but he gently head butts her and laughs. Joanie tenses up, but Carol laughs too.

JOANIE

You okay?

CAROL

He's just giving me something to remember him by.

Joanie cracks a small, sad smile.

CUT TO:

4 INT. JOANIE'S HOUSE-DAY

4

Jason enters through the front door of his house. He kicks off both shoes and barrels through the kitchen to the living room. Whenever he runs anywhere, he holds his arms up and bent sort of like a T-Rex. He passes a REFRIGERATOR that is absolutely COVERED WITH SCHOOL PICTURES OF HIM AND HIS

BROTHER, MARK, AND MAGNETS WITH BAD JOKES AND MOTIVATIONAL MESSAGES, ALSO BAD.

Joanie follows him, but stops at a DOOR to her basement. Jason gets confused as to why his mom stopped, and circles back to her. She hands him an iPad from the bag his aide gave her. She tussles his hair.

JOANIE

Give mum a minute.

He takes his iPad and runs off to the living room. Joanie takes a deep breath and then gives the door three loud KNOCKS.

JOANIE

Brian!

She opens the door revealing a steep staircase. A man's voice replies from somewhere in the basement.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Joanie? You're back already? Do you think you're going to make lunch?

JOANIE

Can you come upstairs?

BRIAN (O.S.)

Jeez, Joanie, couldn't you come down here?

JOANIE

(trying not to yell)

I had to leave school, Brian. What on Earth are you doing that you couldn't pick him up?

BRIAN (O.S.)

I'm *tired*, Joanie. I worked all night, and now you're yelling at me? I can't win.

Joanie slams the door shut. She calls to Jason.

JOANIE

Go get your shoes, bud. We're going out.

BRIAN (O.S.)  
 (yelling from the basement)  
 Joanie?! Lunch?!

Jason returns holding his shoes looking proud of himself.

CUT TO:

5 INT- OFFICE-DAY

5

Joanie's sister, CHRISTINE (55), is sitting in her office talking into her phone. Christine is shorter than Joanie, has brownish hair, and a bit more of a manic energy. She talks quickly and occasionally lapses into a sort of sing-songy inflection.

CHRISTINE (INTO PHONE)  
 Kicked him out? Just for the day?

INTERCUT TO:

6 EXT- PLAYGROUND-CONTINUOUS

6

Joanie is pushing Jason on a swing set with one hand and talking into her phone with the other. Jason's face is pure joy as he swings.

JOANIE  
 For good.

CHRISTINE  
 What happened?

JOANIE  
 It wasn't really his fault.

Joanie thinks for a moment and then takes a deep breath.

JOANIE (CONT.)  
 I think he just threw shit at the wrong person.

This is delivered and received very calmly.

CHRISTINE  
 Well, that wasn't very polite.

JOANIE  
 I think it was the principal.

CHRISTINE

It's like he's never had shit thrown at him before. What. a. wimp!

JOANIE

Believe it or not, Chris, some people aren't used to it like we are.

CHRISTINE

Oh, you know I saw a thing on Google, and some people are very used to it.

JOANIE

What?

CHRISTINE

Wait, why couldn't The Lump pick him up?

JOANIE

*Chris-*

CHRISTINE

Sorry, sorry. Couldn't  
(not even trying to contain the  
disdain )  
*Brian* pick him up?

JOANIE

He worked last night. That's something at least. He *is* trying in his way.

CHRISTINE

He's not Frank Sinatra, Joan. Maybe his way isn't good enough.

Joanie thinks for a moment, not responding. Chris feels like maybe she went too far.

CHRISTINE

Do you want me to come over after work?

JOANIE

That'd be great. See ya soon.

CHRISTINE

Love ya, sis.

They hang up.

7 INT- OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

7

After they hang up, stay with Christine first. She smiles to herself.

Zoom out to reveal a man in a business suit who has apparently been there the whole time.

Christine suddenly seems to remember he's there and seems kind of annoyed.

CHRISTINE

Oh yeah, Roberts. Anyway, the point is you're fired.

CUT TO:

8 EXT- PLAYGROUND-CONTINUOUS

8

A younger, stressed out MOM approaches Joanie.

MOM

You've been on this swing set for a really long time.

Cut to shot of Jason swinging again. His enjoyment has not diminished.

JOANIE

Yup.

MOM

Don't you think it's time someone else had a turn?

Joanie looks at Jason, allows herself a smile at how happy he is, and then turns back to the other mom.

JOANIE

Nope.

She stares down the mom. Long slow beat. The mom walks away.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. HIGH SCHOOL-MID-AFTERNOON

9

Two high school boys, MARK (16) and LUCAS (16), still in their cross-country uniforms wait to be picked up after practice. Mark is tall, dark-haired, and awkward, but the running has been slowly burning off his baby-fat and he's

starting to look like more of a real person. Lucas is shorter, chubbier, and more pre-pubertal. He has big glasses that make him look even younger somehow. He's thinking of something, and Mark waits patiently.

LUCAS

Sean Callahan's says Tracy Donegan gave him a blumpkin in the boy's bathroom.

Mark is unamused.

MARK

That's not true. No one has ever given anyone a blumpkin.

LUCAS

(high school boy defensive)  
You're not even listening. Tracy did. Sean said so.

MARK

(laughing at his dumb friend)  
Christ. I bet if you shake your head hard enough you can hear your little brain bounce off the sides.

LUCAS

Yeah, well me and my brother were gonna go down to the quarry later, and smoke a couple bowls. I was gonna invite you but if you're gonna be a douche about it then forget it.

MARK

Your brother?

LUCAS

Yeah, Tommy knows a guy from Brockton.

He looks around to make sure that no one is listening.

LUCAS

(conspiratorially)  
A *black* guy. So you know the weed's good.

MARK

Jesus, do words actually run through your brain before they come out your mouth?



He laughs.

MARK(CONT.)

Anyway coach says you shouldn't fuck  
with your lungs.

LUCAS

Cigs fuck with your lungs, dummy;  
pot's good for you cuz it comes out of  
the ground.

Mark sees his ride O.S and hits Lucas to shut him up.

MARK

Shh, my mom's here.

A SHITTY SUV pulls up to the school. Joanie is driving and Jason is sitting in the back, rocking gently and smiling to himself. He wears a special vest in the car that serves as a harness to keep him from getting out.

Mark opens Jason's door first and gives him a big hug.

MARK

Hey, buddy! Wasn't expecting to see  
you today.

Jason claps his hands, his way of saying he wants a high five. He and Mark do an ELABORATE SECRET HANDSHAKE.

JOANIE

(from the front seat)

Oh, hi, mom, how was your day? Fine  
thanks, Mark, I love you, too.

Mark smiles as he finishes high-fiving his brother.

MARK

Hey, Mom.

He tussles Jason's hair and walks around the car to get in on the other side of the backseat next to Jason.

10 INT - JOANIE'S CAR-AFTERNOON

10

Joanie turns to talk to Mark, while he gets himself buckled in and Jason demands more high fives.

JOANIE

How was running practice today? You  
figure out how to run yet?

MARK

I'm almost getting there. Coach says you have to use your legs.

JOANIE

That's why he's the coach. I never would have thought of that.

She smiles and starts the car.

MARK

So did Jase's extended day at school get canceled?

Joanie stops smiling and shuts the car back off. She sighs. She turns around to look Mark in the eyes. She knows he needs to hear it straight.

JOANIE

Mark, Jason got kicked out of school today. For good.

MARK

What?!

He stammers angry half-thoughts for a bit, too young to really process the emotional weight of this. Very different response than Christine.

MARK

But they can't do this! That's not fair! Isn't that like against the law or something? I thought *this* school was supposed to be better!

JOANIE

(annoyed)

So did I.

(back to mom tone)

But your brother's not easy. You know that as well as anyone, and they said they didn't have the staff to deal with him.

MARK

But they're a school for special needs kids?! Isn't that like the one thing they should have!

He seethes for a moment. Jason seems to notice he's upset and tries to nuzzle his head on Mark's arm. Mark softens up a

bit, tickles Jason, and then turns back to his mom.

MARK

Was it because of the shitting?

JOANIE

Language!

MARK

Sorry.

JOANIE

But yeah it was the shitting. Well...  
it was a lot of things. But mainly the  
shitting.

MARK

(voice occasionally cracking)  
They *told* you they would work on  
toilet training. They *told* you that,  
Mom. You can't let them kick him out  
because they couldn't do their jobs.  
That's like paying a plumber to unclog  
a toilet and him saying he can't cuz  
there's shit in there. Shit's part of  
the job!

JOANIE

(soothing)

Honey, *I* don't disagree with you. But  
it's not up to me. I've got a meeting  
with Jase's advocate tomorrow, and  
she'll tell me what the next steps  
are.

She thinks for a moment

JOANIE

I'm probably going to have to take  
some time off work, but we'll figure  
something out. Oh! And your Aunt  
Christine is going to come over and  
help out tonight.

Mark is noticeably happy to hear his aunt's name.

MARK

That'll be good.

(beat)

I can drop out.

JOANIE

What?!

MARK

Of school. I can drop out. And work. I'm sixteen now, so I can get a job to help out if you have to take time off work.

JOANIE

Doing what?

MARK

I don't know. Digging ditches or something.

JOANIE

What is this, the Great Depression?

MARK

You know what I mean.

JOANIE

(playfully)

You can't even do your own laundry, how are you gonna help me? You can't show up to dig ditches with the crust cut off your sandwiches.

Mark's resolve is deflated.

JOANIE(CONT.)

If you drop out of school, I've gotta take care of two boys. You wanna help, Markie, finish high school, go to college and find a cure for autism. Or make enough money that we don't have to worry about taking care of Jase. Until then, you've just gotta trust me.

She holds out a comforting hand.

JOANIE

I've got this.

Mark smiles and is a little bit more at ease.

MARK

Okay, Mom.

He takes her hand and gives it a squeeze.

Joanie turns back around and starts the car again. Linger on her face for a moment, she does not have this.

CUT TO:

11 INT - JOANIE'S HOUSE-EVENING

11

Jason barrels through the front door much like before. Joanie and Mark follow after Jason, holding pizza boxes. They place them on the counter of the kitchen. Mark gives his mom a hug and disappears to his room.

Joanie walks to the living room. There are two BULKY SONY TV SETS from the early 2000's, one on the ground and one elevated on an entertainment center. Jason is sitting and rocking 2 feet from the one on the ground holding a big stuffed animal.

Joanie turns on his TV set for him, and a SESAME STREET SONGS DVD begins playing.

She turns on her TV, and the news plays muted. Linger for a second on the absurdity of a grim news story about war casualties, with the audio of "Put Down the Duckie" playing over it.

Joanie sits down to grade papers taking a rare moment for herself.

There are a few LOUD, ARHYTHMIC KNOCKS on her front door and then:

CHRISTINE(O.S.)

Ring, ring!

Joanie starts walking over to get the door.

JOANIE

(re: the knocking)

You know we actually have a bell, right?

She's now at the door.

CHRISTINE

(through the screen)

Oh, but I thought you'd like to hear my lovely voice!

Joanie unlocks the screen door for her, a Jason precaution. Christine enters carrying two separate floral print TOTE BAGS in the crook of her elbow and a DOLLAR STORE bag in her hand. From the moment she enters she is a whirlwind of good intentions and non-sequiturs. She gives Joanie a big hug, bags swinging wildly.

CHRISTINE

Hello, my sister!

JOANIE

Hi, Chris. What's all-

CHRISTINE

I figured that since I was in the area I would pick up a few things.

She rummages through her dollar store bag.

CHRISTINE (CONT.)

I got you diapers and ham.

JOANIE

You know how to spoil a girl.

CHRISTINE

(laughing)

You never know! I was thinking about that barbecue you had six years ago, with the little finger sandwiches, and I just thought what about some ham! The diapers are for Jase though, so don't get jealous.

JOANIE

I'll do my best.

Hearing his mom and aunt talking, Mark emerges from his bedroom into the kitchen.

MARK

(copying Christine)

Hello, Auntie.

CHRISTINE

(without a trace of irony)

Oh hello, Nephew!

She looks him up and down.

CHRISTINE (CONT.)

You're getting taller by the day. I'd say you'd have to be beating the girls off with a stick, but they call that *domestic violence* now on the news and it's very bad so don't you be doing it. Now give your auntie a hug.

They hug. When the embrace ends, Christine claps her hand.

CHRISTINE

Where's the boy?

JOANIE

Watching his video.

Christine goes into the LIVING ROOM to see Jason. Joanie follows behind with Mark, who has grabbed himself a slice of pizza.

CHRISTINE

Hello, Maestro!

She gives Jason a hug from behind. He gets annoyed at having his video interrupted and grabs a handful of her hair without even looking.

JOANIE

Shit. Jase be nice!

MARK

Coming!

Christine waves them off with one hand and works at breaking Jason's grip with the other.

CHRISTINE

Oh hush, it's my fault for bothering him.

(to Jason)

This is just your way of saying, "Oh, auntie, what lovely hair you have!"

Why thank you for the compliment. You are...

(struggling)

...too kind.

With that, she breaks his grip. He still has a handful of her hair, but he turns around and really notices her for the first time. He smiles and gives her a hug. She turns back to Joanie and Mark as if nothing has happened

CHRISTINE  
Pizza, anyone?

She goes to the kitchen with Mark, and Joanie goes over to Jason. Joanie makes the ASL sign for food to him, and he replies with the sign for more and gets very excited.

Jason gets up and goes to sit at the kitchen table. Joanie sits next to him, Mark and Christine come back with pizza for themselves and plates for Joanie and Jason. They chat while Joanie cuts up Jason's pizza into smaller pieces for him. This is a happy moment.

CUT TO:

12 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM-DAWN

12

Everyone has fallen asleep wherever they ended up last night. Joanie is on one couch next to Jason who is only wearing his diaper. Christine is asleep on the recliner. The first rays of sun are only just starting to come out.

Jason is the first to wake up. He sits up suddenly and gives a big yawn. He rolls off the couch and runs to the kitchen excitedly.

Joanie and Christine wake up more slowly and much less excitedly. They look at each other and do a quick rock, paper, scissors. Best two out of three naturally.

Joanie loses and gets up groggily. Christine rolls over and goes back to sleep.

Joanie walks up to Jason, who is rocking excitedly from foot to foot in front of the refrigerator. She tussles his hair, opens the fridge, and pulls out a VANILLA PROTEIN SHAKE, his favorite.

As soon as Jason sees the shake, he runs happily off-screen through the kitchen towards the bathroom. He passes a stove-top clock that reads "5:00 AM". Joanie follows behind him. This is their morning routine

CUT TO:

13 INT- BATHROOM- CONTINUOUS

13

Jason sits in the bathtub. Joanie sits next to him holding his protein shake. She has placed a plastic straw in it and holds it to Jason who takes huge gulps from the straw.



Joanie smiles at her son bemusedly and pats him on the back. He looks up at her and smiles letting all the protein shake fall out from between his teeth into the bathwater.

JOANIE  
 (laughing)  
 If you weren't so cute, you'd be disgusting.

He claps his hands and she gives him the same secret handshake as Mark.

CUT TO:

14 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN-MORNING

14

Jason runs back into the kitchen with a towel wrapped around him locker room style. The clock now reads "6:40AM". Joanie follows him into the living room.

Christine is awake now, sitting up in the recliner.

CHRISTINE  
 Good morning!

JOANIE  
 Morning!

Jason runs by her and sits in front of his TV. Joanie goes to turn on his video.

JOANIE (CONT.)  
 (to Christine)  
 Cup of tea?

CHRISTINE  
 (vaguely fake British)  
 Tea sounds lovely, darling.

Joanie pats Jason on the head as the same video from before begins playing, and together the two sisters get up and head to the kitchen.

Joanie and Christine chat as they bustle in the kitchen.

JOANIE  
 Last chance. You're sure you don't mind watching Jason by yourself? We could all go to the advocate together.

CHRISTINE

No, no, it'll be good to have some personal time with the boy. Plus I don't like lawyers. They're never nice and handsome like on Perry Mason. They're all fat, bald guys.

JOANIE

(teasing)

Mine's actually one of those new-fangled *lady* lawyers.

CHRISTINE

Oh, no. Fat and bald does *not* look good on a lady.

The tea kettle goes off. Joanie pours them each a mug.

JOANIE

Cheers.

CHRISTINE

(fake British again)

Charmed, I'm sure.

They clink glasses and each take a sip.

CHRISTINE (CONT.)

Anyways, lady or not, I think lawyers are all suspicious. Like magicians.

JOANIE

Magicians?

CHRISTINE

Oh yes. What's that behind your ear? It's a subpoena!

They laugh.

JOANIE

Breakfast?

CHRISTINE

Ooh we can use the ham!

Close up of some ham thrown onto a skillet. It SIZZLES.

15 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN-LATER

15

Time-lapse cut to the ham now cooked. A hand picks up the

skillet and scrapes some of the ham onto a plate of eggs and home-fries.

Zoom out to show Joanie working her way around the fully set kitchen table putting ham on plates.

Christine comes out from the kitchen with a carton of orange juice and three empty glasses.

CHRISTINE

So, that's why their marriage is crumbling. Always nice to catch up with old friends.

JOANIE

Aw, I thought Greg and Carol would make it.

CHRISTINE

I didn't. Greg always talked with his mouth full. Once in a while, you don't mind. But a lifetime? I'd blow my brains out.

(beat)

Some people just aren't marriage material.

JOANIE

(tensely)

Chris, don't start.

Mark comes in all dressed for school with a big backpack on, breaking the tension. Typical high school boy, he's slept in and rushing.

JOANIE

(to Mark)

Good morning, sleepyhead. Have some breakfast!

He goes to the pantry in the kitchen.

MARK (O.S)

Can't. I'm gonna miss the bus.

He comes back with an unwrapped packet of PopTarts in one hand and one PopTart dangling from his mouth. He takes it out to talk.

MARK

Thank you though. Love ya.

He hugs his mom and kisses the top of her head.

He then goes to his brother and gives him a big hug. Jason swats him away for interrupting his video. He starts walking toward the door.

CHRISTINE

And what am I? Chopped liver?

He goes back and gives Christine a hug too.

MARK

Love you too, Auntie.

He heads out the door.

Joanie looks a little sadly at the plate she had made for Mark. Christine goes over and puts her hand on her shoulder.

CHRISTINE

Hey, more for us!

JOANIE

Nah that's okay, I can put it in the freezer for when he gets home.

(noticing her watch)

Anyway, we should get going too. Busy day ahead!

She starts clearing the table. Christine helps her.

CHRISTINE

I was thinking while you were meeting with the fat, bald lady, Jase and I would go to the mall off exit 7. You know the one where what's-his-name that handsome boy who was in our eighth grade science class?

JOANIE

Jimmy Malone?

CHRISTINE

Yes! The mall where he was kidnapped. Do you need anything while we're out?

JOANIE

Oh, that was sad.

(barely a beat)

But if you go to Target, do you mind getting some of those kale chips they

mentioned on Dr. Oz? They go really good with hummus.

CHRISTINE  
Ooh *Mediterranean*. Fancy.

They finish putting the dishes away. Joanie has plastic wrapped Mark's food and put the plate in the freezer.

JOANIE  
Shall we?

She gets another protein shake from the fridge and together they go to get Jason. Joanie taps him and holds up the protein shake to distract him from his video.

JOANIE  
Come on, buddy. Let's get you dressed and earn your shake.

CHRISTINE  
Lucky you, you get to spend the day with your auntie!

Jason gets up and runs off-screen.

CUT TO:

16 EXT. DRIVEWAY- MORNING

16

Jason and Joanie are coming down the last step of the front staircase while Christine waits by the car. Jason holds on to the railing and his mom. He can do it, but he's not super-coordinated.

JOANIE  
(to Jason)  
Alright, buddy. Give mum a hug.

They have a big hug, and then she walks him over to Christine's car.

JOANIE  
(to Christine)  
You ready?

CHRISTINE  
I've got the back seat all set for him. I know all his tricks.

She opens the backseat door and reveals that it has one of

those PLASTIC COVERS that old people like to put on their couches. Jason starts climbing in excitedly.

JOANIE

Thanks again, Chris.

CHRISTINE

(more serious than usual)

Hey, it's nothing. Good luck, out there. Okay, sis? You can do this.

JOANIE

I can do this.

CUT TO:

17 INT. JOANIE'S CAR- DAY

17

Joanie is a little fidgety with anticipation as she drives. On the radio is a Christian motivational speaker.

RADIO (V.O.)

And if you let God in, he will provide. But you have to open the door.

JOANIE

(to herself)

You have to open the door.

INTERCUT TO:

18 INT. CHRISTINE'S CAR- DAY

18

Christine is listening to Top 40 radio, and singing along to Taylor Swift, but devoid of tune, tempo, and pitch.

She takes her eyes off the road to turn to Jason and sing to him and tap him on the leg. They both seem happy.

Someone HONKS at her for almost swerving into the other lane.

CHRISTINE

Some people!

19 INT. WAITING ROOM-DAY

19

Joanie is sitting in a little waiting room, trying to take deep breaths without making it too obvious.

The office door opens, and LISA (32), Jason's advocate steps

out. She is professionally dressed and the difficulties of her job have not worn down a generally upbeat demeanor. She is in the process of putting her hair up in a bun.

LISA

Ms. McCarthy! Come right in!

She notices Joanie is by herself.

LISA (CONT.)

No Jason?

JOANIE

No. My sister's watching him for the day.

Lisa lets her hair down then. She knows Jason well.

LISA

How nice! And your husband?

Joanie shakes her head sadly.

LISA

Well, come on in!

Joanie gets up and follows her into the office. The door slams shut after her.

20 EXT. MALL PARKING LOT- MORNING

20

Christine opens the backseat door of her car, and works on unbuckling Jason from his harness vest.

CHRISTINE

Now I know when you go shopping with your mom she lets you sit in that wheelchair you got, but today we're going to try to walk because you are getting tub-tub-tubby from those damn shakes.

He reaches to pull her hair but she blocks him first.

CHRISTINE

Too slow!

As she says it, he gets her with his other hand.

CHRISTINE

Son of a bitch!

21 INT. LISA'S OFFICE-DAY

21

Joanie sits in front of Lisa's desk looking small. Lisa comes back from a filing cabinet and puts a folder on the desk in front of her. It has a picture of a younger, more cherubic Jason paperclipped to the front. She takes a seat opposite Joanie.

LISA

Joanie, I'm not going to sugarcoat this. Your- your situation does not look great.

JOANIE

(taking it in)

Okay.

LISA

The Sisters of Mercy are definitely not taking him back.

JOANIE

Okay.

LISA

And because it's the middle of the school year, it's going to be really difficult to get him in anywhere else.

JOANIE

I thought public schools had to take anyone. I mean the kids I teach, they're not shitting themselves, but it's only just barely.

LISA

The last time Jason was in public school, he needed at least three aides watching him to get through the day, and-

JOANIE

But he *got through* the day! I know it wasn't fair to the other kids for him to have all the help, but I give them a lot of credit for not letting him get away with anything there. Sisters of Mercy were too forgiving, I think. They never pushed him enough. I love my son but left to his own devices he's a very lazy boy.



22 EXT. MALL PARKING LOT- MORNING

22

Jason's out of the car and Christine is holding on to his arm and trying to march him to the mall. He keeps trying to jerk her back toward the car, getting more and more frustrated.

CHRISTINE

I told you, you've got two good legs on ya, I'm not getting that wheelchair.

Jason finally lets out a big sigh and sits on the ground almost taking Christine with him.

CHRISTINE

Are you kidding me, Maestro? Get up, you big thing. There are cars around.

She tries to pull him up by his hands but he does not budge.

CHRISTINE

Jase, I'm looking out for you here. I know walking's a hassle, but you've got to do it. No girls are going to want to go out with a guy who can't even be bothered to stand up.

She circles around and tries to lift him from behind. No luck.

CHRISTINE

Christ, my back.

She gives up.

CHRISTINE

Alright fine, let's get the dang chair.

Upon hearing this, Jason scrambles to his feet excitedly. Christine looks at him with a mix of bewilderment and a little bit of pride at his listening.

CHRISTINE

You remind me so much of my mother.

23 INT. LISA'S OFFICE-DAY

23

In the interim, Joanie's calm demeanor has really started to fall and a lot of pent-up emotions are coming out all at once. Even when emotions run hot, they should never get

maudlin. This is not a LifeTime movie.

LISA

(calming)

I am *not* saying it's okay. I'm just saying that I don't think you'll win a lawsuit against them and that even *if* you won, the money you'd get would barely cover the costs. Plus how are you going to get him into a new school, if you're in court all day fighting the old one?

This strikes a chord with Joanie and she calms a bit.

JOANIE

Okay, okay. No lawsuits. What do I do? The state has to give me *something*, right?

Lisa looks a little pained to deliver the next bit of news.

LISA

I've gotten the state to agree to cover three days a week of ABA therapy, and-

JOANIE

Three days! How am I supposed to teach?

LISA

As a teacher, you're entitled to take some paid time off for family emergencies. I'm happy to sign off on any paperwork you need me to. I-

JOANIE

(on the brink of tears)

Family emergencies are usually my kid broke a leg and I need to be with him for the first week. I don't have that timeline. Jason's not going to suddenly stop being Jason. When do I get to know he'll be alright without me?

This question hangs in the air, as both women realize she's not just talking about school placement.

Lisa puts a helpful hand on Joanie's arm.

LISA

I know I've mentioned it before, but have you given any more thought to residential care?

Joanie's whole demeanor suddenly turns to ice. She is on the verge of totally losing her temper.

24 INT. TARGET-DAY

24

Upward angled shot of Christine pushing Jason in his RED WHEELCHAIR through the brightly lit aisles of the mall Target. He looks like a little king. He always sits cross-legged in the wheelchair and he never wears his shoes inside.

CHRISTINE

Ooh a bargain bin.

Christine wheels Jason to the side of a big crate in the middle of the aisle haphazardly crammed with C-list DVDs.

Christine starts pawing through DVDs and keeps a running commentary going which is, in theory, directed at Jason, who is clearly not interested.

CHRISTINE

Ooh Austin Powers 3. I always liked that Robert Wagner. They say he probably murdered his wife, Jason, but let me tell you, I don't buy it. She was good in West Side Story though.  
 (suddenly singing)  
*Guys and dolls la la la guys and dolls*  
 (speaking)  
 Of course that's from South Pacific, but I always liked that one more.

A CURLY-HAIRED CHILD walks by them, and Jason makes a lunge for the curls, but Christine gently swats his hand away without breaking her commentary.

CHRISTINE

Oh ho, you're getting predictable, maestro.

25 INT. LISA'S OFFICE-DAY

25

Lisa is now on the defensive.

LISA

A residential facility really is the

best option for someone like Jason.

JOANIE

There's no way I'm going to  
*institutionalize* my child like we're  
still in the 1950s.

LISA

Joanie, I understand how you're  
feeling, but these facilities have  
come a long way. They have full time  
therapists, tons of trained staff,  
activities, you could visit whenever  
you wanted.

JOANIE

You're not supposed to *visit* your  
baby. He's not a dentist!

LISA

Joanie, Jason *needs* constant  
attention. You can't do it by  
yourself, but that's what going to  
happen if he can't get into a school  
soon.

JOANIE

I'm not just going to throw my hands  
up in the air and write him off as a  
lost cause!

LISA

Nobody wants-

JOANIE

(barreling on)

And he's got so much potential you  
don't always see at school. If I say  
"Jason, shut off the lights" he gets  
up and does it, without me even  
pointing at 'em. And he helps me with  
the dishes. He *needs* to be in a school  
so he can use those skills some day,  
not sitting in some institution and  
rotting.

LISA

You're right, Joanie. Jason is not a  
lost cause, but he'- he's a square  
peg. He *does* have skills, but he  
doesn't really fit into any school's

curriculum.

JOANIE

There's no way he's the only kid who has his challenges! There *has* to be schools that can handle him.

LISA

(also getting frustrated)

A residential place could work on his basic skills much more intensely than a school, and then when he's ready to go back to school, he'll be able to do much better. At least think about it. Please.

JOANIE

I like you, Lisa. You've been very helpful, and I'm trying my best to be polite but I think I've made myself clear on where I stand on this subject.

Long uncomfortable beat as the two women stare each other down.

26 INT. MALL- DAY

26

Christine pushes Jason down a mall corridor, passing sulking teenagers and old-people in jogging-wear doing their mall-walking. Christine has a bag from Target in the crook of her elbow.

Something catches her eyes and she backtracks to the store she just passed. On the window is a poster that says "AUTISM SPEAKS RECOMMENDS!" with pictures of children on beanbags.

CHRISTINE

You wanna go in, buddy?

27 INT. YOGIBO-CONTINUOUS

27

Christine wheels Jason into the store. It is very yuppy-ish. Brightly-colored, blobby designer beanbags and pillows surround them.

Jason excitedly gets out of the wheelchair and runs over to a bean bag and plops down on it.

A nervous-looking, young EMPLOYEE comes up to them.

EMPLOYEE

Um, he can't be on the merchandise without shoes.

CHRISTINE

He doesn't like wearing shoes inside. I thought you hippies liked being barefoot.

EMPLOYEE

If he doesn't put on shoes he has to leave. I'm really sorry, but it's store policy.

CHRISTINE

Oh you're gonna kick out a kid with autism for using the autism beanbag? Great advertising.

EMPLOYEE

He has autism? I thought you couldn't have that and down syndrome. Like a catch-22.

CHRISTINE

He can be two things. Like how I'm getting quite upset but still being so pleasant.

EMPLOYEE

Please just leave, ma'am. I don't make the rules.

CHRISTINE

Fine, fine, what if I just buy the damn thing? How much is it?

EMPLOYEE

Well, the hypoallergenic model he's got his feet on costs \$300.

CHRISTINE

Three hundred bucks for a beanbag?

EMPLOYEE

(well-rehearsed)

Ma'am. That's not a bean bag. It's a Yogibo.

CUT TO:

28 INT. SALVATION ARMY-DAY

28

Close up on a middle-aged WOMAN with a Salvation Army sash. Rows of old or useless things stretch out forever behind her.

WOMAN

Well, the previous owner was stabbed to death and buried in a pauper's grave, but yes. We do have beanbags.

Pan to reveal Christine and Jason.

CHRISTINE

Thank you very much.

CUT TO:

29 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM-DAY

29

A beat-up old BEANBAG with duct tape over some of its holes is thrown on the ground. No sooner than it hits the ground, does Jason plop down on it. He's as happy as he was in the store.

Christine watches behind him, arms folded and proud of herself. A small victory.

The doorbell RINGS.

JOANIE (O.S)

Knock, knock!

Christine goes to the door and lets her sister in.

CHRISTINE

I got you those kale chips you asked for. Christ, Joanie, I'm exhausted though. I don't know how you do it. Let me show you the new bean bag.

JOANIE

What?

Christine takes her into the living room and they both look at Jason.

CHRISTINE

Look at him happy as a clam. How'd things go with the advocate?

JOANIE

It was... okay. She kept trying to get me to -

She suddenly stops and starts sniffing the air.

JOANIE

Do you smell something?

CHRISTINE

Not p-poop, is it?

JOANIE

(gravely)

I think so.

The two sisters gingerly approach Jason where he sits rocking on his beanbag. Joanie uses one finger to peek into his diaper and recoils. Christine looks worried.

Joanie first tries diplomacy with Jason.

JOANIE

Hey buddy, do you wanna get up and go to the toilet?

She makes the sign for bathroom and Jason signs back "all done" angrily.

Joanie sighs deeply.

JOANIE

(to Christine)

You get the legs, I get the arms?

CHRISTINE

Okay.

Christine circles to the other side of Jason.

JOANIE

One, two, three...

Joanie and Christine grab Jason by the arms and legs and try to pick him up. When they grab him, they do so very precisely in order to move him without hurting him or overly-restraining him. He immediately starts squirming and flailing, hitting each woman hard and indis-

criminately. This whole sequence should be shot in a shaky hand-held style like a scene in a war movie.



They wrestle Jason off the bean bag, making their way to the kitchen.

CHRISTINE  
Watch his hands!

Jason has managed to get his hand down the back of his pants and he comes back swinging. Joanie dodges and he smears shit on the wall. She grabs him by the wrist and now has to contend with moving him forward and keeping that hand off of anything.

They come stumbling into the kitchen knocking things off shelves and the counter and they fall to the floor still wrestling.

After a moment of them struggling to get him off the kitchen floor, suddenly BRIAN (52, tall, overweight), Joanie's husband, walks into the kitchen wearing only his briefs and a stained undershirt. He looks at the commotion on the ground.

BRIAN  
Typical Jason!

He then proceeds to open the freezer and take out the PLASTIC WRAPPED PLATE of Mark's breakfast and starts eating it cold like an animal. He just walks away.

Horrible beat of the two sister's reactions as they still struggle with Jason. Christine looks livid, but Joanie looks defeated.

CHRISTINE  
I've said it before: if you want me to kill him, I'll do it. You don't even have to pay me. Hell, I'd pay you.

Joanie doesn't want to hear it. Suddenly all the fight goes out of Jason. He sits bolt upright, stands up, and walks into the bathroom.

There is a moment of stunned silence. The sisters look at each other and suddenly burst out laughing. Fade out.

CUT TO:

30 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM-LATER

30

Jason is sitting back on his bean bag watching his video He has clearly been given a bath. He is just wearing a fresh, white diaper and his wet hair has been lovingly tussled.

Pan to Joanie and Christine wearing extra long t-shirts and sweatpants. They should vaguely resemble John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson's outfits after they have to clean up the murder car in Pulp Fiction.

JOANIE

He seems to like the bean bag.

CHRISTINE

The boy does love to lounge.

JOANIE

Sorry, we had to throw out your shirt.

CHRISTINE

I didn't exactly want it back.

She smiles at her sister.

CHRISTINE

You gonna be okay if I head home?

JOANIE

I think so.

Christine leaves.

Linger on Jason watching his video and Joanie watching her son for a moment. Fade out.

31 INT- JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM- MORNING

31

Joanie's morning ritual again but this time a series of quick cuts.

MONTAGE:

-Jason surging awake and Joanie groggily opening her eyes.

-A hand opening a refrigerator.

-Jason running excitedly past the stove toward the bathroom.

-Joanie feeding Jason his shake in the bathtub.

-Jason running by the stove again in a towel toward the living room.

-A hand putting Jason's SESAME STREET DVD into the player.

-Eggs being cracked over a skillet.

-Joanie and Jason eating the eggs. Mark comes rushing in Pop-Tart in mouth. He takes it out and kisses his mom on the forehead and rushes out.

Joanie feeds Jason another bite of eggs, covered in ketchup. She sits for a moment and sighs.

CUT TO:

32 INT-MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE- MORNING

32

DOUG (56, former marine), the principal of Joanie's school, sits at his desk. He and his desk take up the whole frame and give him a looming, intimidating presence. He takes a long sip from a mug that says "Student's Tears" on it.

DOUG

Hmm. Three months seems like an awfully long time.

Pan to Joanie sitting across from him. Jason is sitting next to her in his wheelchair, playing with an iPad. Throughout the entire scene, he plays the first 20 seconds of "Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift, gets really excited, and starts the song over again giving the whole scene a surreal quality. Joanie always keeps a comforting hand on him, but maintains an unwavering gaze at Doug. She seems smaller and more on the defensive.

JOANIE

(nervously)

Well hopefully I'll be able to come back sooner, much sooner, but I think it's wise to take precautions.

Doug fiddles with papers on his desk as he mulls this over. He seems troubled.

DOUG

It's just such short notice, Joanie. It's very unprofessional...

Joanie looks crestfallen, but she stands her ground.

JOANIE

I didn't exactly plan for this, Doug! It was short notice for me too, and I- Are you crying?

When we pan back to Doug, he is pushing up his glasses with his hands and trying to swivel in his chair to hide the fact

that he has started to cry.

DOUG

It's very unprofessional of *me*! I didn't have time to make you a card or anything! I want my teachers to know their school cares about them, damn it. I'm so sorry, Joanie.

Joanie is totally taken aback by this reversal.

JOANIE

Oh, that's okay. You- You couldn't have known.

DOUG

It is not okay, Joanie! He's such a wonderful little boy, and I can't believe those... those... *bastards* could kick him out. I'm sorry for cussing. I'm just distressed.

He gets overwhelmed with emotion and pulls out a handkerchief from his pocket to cover his tearful face.

JOANIE

(total mom tone)

Hey, hey now. What's done is done, but we'll find something for him.

She grabs Doug's wrist with the hand that isn't holding Jason.

JOANIE

We're gonna be okay.

DOUG

(pulling himself together)

Oh, I hope so! Take as much time as you like. We'll miss the hell out of ya, but we'll manage.

JOANIE

Thank you so much, Doug. It really means a lot.

She starts getting up to leave. Doug stands up too, awkwardly trying to appear a bit more formal.

JOANIE

Really it does.

Doug's formality breaks instantly.

DOUG  
Oh, bring it in.

He suddenly walks around his desk and gives a surprised Joanie a big hug.

DOUG  
You are so brave!

Joanie awkwardly pats him on the back.

CUT TO:

33 INT. OFFICE BREAK ROOM- MIDDAY

33

Two office workers, DEB and NOREEN, are making idle chit-chat in the break room.

NOREEN  
And if I can barely afford her kitty  
insulin as it is!

Christine walks in and starts making herself coffee.

DEB  
That's awful! You know I'd cat-sit for  
you if I could but I have to get a  
mole removed that weekend. Could be  
cancer.

Christine tries to chime in helpfully.

CHRISTINE  
(cheerfully)  
Oh, you'll be fine, Deb. I've had so  
many moles, it's like my skin's saying  
"Help Me" in braille. Only about half  
of them are cancers.

Somehow this is not particularly comforting to her co-worker.

DEB  
Uh, thanks, Christine.

Christine takes a sip of her coffee and then turns her helpfulness on her other co-worker.

CHRISTINE  
Couldn't your sister watch your cat,

Noreen?

Noreen sighs knowingly as if this is a regular conversation.

NOREEN

You've gotta know your family isn't normal, Chris. My sister can't just come watch my cat whenever. She's got her own shit to deal with.

With that, the two workers leave and Christine stays behind for a moment letting those words sink in.

CUT TO:

34 EXT. COUNTRY CLUB-ESQUE ESTATE - MIDDAY

34

An elegant granite sign reading "COMPSON ACADEMY" marks the entrance to a beautiful well-manicured school grounds. We hear the voice of a very prim and proper TOUR GUIDE.

TOUR GUIDE (V.O.)

-the same kind of excellence that consistently leads to Compson Academy being named a world leader in special education.

CUT TO:

A close-up shot of Joanie's face, mouth agape with awe as she takes in the scenery.

Zoom out to show her pushing Jason in his wheelchair, as the tour guide, just as put together as her voice would suggest, leads them around the immaculate campus.

TOUR GUIDE

And beyond academics, we pride ourselves in our extra-curricular activities.

As she says this, a GIRL with Down Syndrome rides up to them on a HORSE.

GIRL

Hi, Ms. Mary.

TOUR GUIDE

Oh, hello Doris. Can you say hi to our guests?

GIRL

Hello, very pleased to meet you.

She gives them a little nod of her riding helmet.

JOANIE

Horse. That's- that's a horse.

TOUR GUIDE

Oh yes, we pride ourselves on our hippotherapy.

JOANIE

But she's actually riding it!

TOUR GUIDE

You'd be amazed what our students can do. Has Jason ever tried archery?

Joanie doesn't even know how to respond.

CUT TO:

35 EXT. ARCHERY FIELD - CONTINUOUS

35

An arrow strikes a bullseye. Pan to reveal that the archer is a young boy with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair. He looks proud of himself but modest in victory.

Pan to reveal the tour guide clearly showing off, Joanie looking amazed, and Jason looks happy to watch the excitement.

TOUR GUIDE

Very good, Douglas. Excellent form. Do you think Jason would like to try?

JOANIE

I'm really not sure that's-

TOUR GUIDE

Nonsense! Come help our guests, Harold.

An aide who was working with the previous archer gently takes Jason's hands and leads him out of his chair.

TOUR GUIDE

Our staff specializes in adapting to every ability level.

The man guides Jason's arm and helps him set up an arrow and shoot it. He giggles the whole time at the novel situation

It lands far from center but still on target.

TOUR GUIDE

(disappointed)

Not a bullseye.

(back to chipper)

But it could be! I really think Jason could do very well here. And of course, there are scholarships-

As she says this, Jason walks back over to his chair still really worked up from the excitement of shooting the arrow.

The tour guide bends over to address Jason directly and an EXPENSIVE NECKLACE dangles in front of him.

TOUR GUIDE

Wasn't that fun, Jason?

The words are barely out of her mouth before Jason has grabbed the necklace and ripped it from her neck. He laughs like for him this is a continuation of the fun game that started with the arrow.

Joanie is quick into action and gets the necklace out of his grip with one hand while making calming circles on his back with the other.

Joanie hands back the necklace.

JOANIE

So sorry about that.

A dark expression flashes across the tour guide's face before she forces herself back into her normal demeanor.

TOUR GUIDE

No problem at all.

She takes a measured beat as if she were thinking of something.

TOUR GUIDE

Shall we continue the tour?

CUT TO:



36 INT. QUIET ROOM-CONTINUOUS

36

A dark, gray, windowless room with no wallpaper or carpeting.

TOUR GUIDE (O.C.)

This is our quiet room.

Pull back as she shuts the door revealing an overly cute SIGN on it that says "Quiet Room".

TOUR GUIDE

We find this really helps keep our students on their best behavior. What do you think?

Joanie looks horrified.

JOANIE

What do I *think*?

CUT TO:

37 INT. JOANIE'S CAR- CONTINUOUS

37

Close on Joanie talking into her phone.

JOANIE (INTO PHONE)

I guess I didn't have to call her a heartless bitch.

INTERCUT TO:

38 INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

38

CHRISTINE (INTO PHONE)

Well, she has no heart and she's a bitch so...

JOANIE

I just don't like swearing in front of Jase.

CHRISTINE

He was probably thinking it too. He's a very good judge of character.

JOANIE

It scares the hell out of me. He wouldn't be able to tell ya about something like that.

CHRISTINE

Then again maybe he wouldn't mind it.  
 (slight beat)  
 I've seen the boy put ketchup on  
 brownies.

JOANIE

True. Thanks for listening, Chris.

Christine isn't quite ready to let the conversation go and resume being at work.

CHRISTINE

Hey, you know what could cheer you up?  
 I've got a group-on for buy one get  
 two pedicures at the mall salon.

JOANIE

Who'd be our third?

CUT TO:

39 INT. NAIL SALON-LATER

39

Close on Jason's face barely containing his excitement. Pull back to show him sitting in a salon chair getting a pedicure. Joanie and Christine are in the chairs on either side of him holding his hands to keep him from getting too worked up.

The SALON WORKERS absolutely fawn over him. He loves the attention, and he becomes a little flirt knowing when to give them a big smile.

SALON WORKER #1

He's so cute!

SALON WORKER #2

How old is he?

JOANIE

Fourteen.

CHRISTINE

Fourteen.

SALON WORKER #2

He's such a little man!

JOANIE

He's going to expect this every time  
 we come here now.

CHRISTINE

Don Juan!

CUT TO:

40 INT. MALL - LATER

40

Joanie, Christine, and Jason in his chair exit the nail salon. Suddenly a VOICE calls out in a very matter of fact tone.

VOICE

Jason!

Everyone turns to look at another older boy with down syndrome, BEN (16), and his mom, RUTH (47). Ben is pointing at them.

BEN

Jason!

To everyone's surprise, Jason gets out of his wheelchair and starts running over to Ben excitedly.

Jason raises up his arms as he gets closer to Ben. Joanie and Christine tense up, worried that Jason will pull his hair and not quite quick enough to stop it.

Instead, Jason gives Ben a big hug. Ben doesn't really return the hug but pats Jason on the back gently and smiles at him.

Joanie and Christine are stunned, but shake out of it and walk to meet Ruth.

RUTH

I guess these two must know each other.

JOANIE

I've never seen him play this nice.  
I'm Joanie by the way. And he's Jason.

CHRISTINE

And *I'm* his favorite auntie.

RUTH

I'm Ruth.  
(to her son)  
And who are you?

BEN

Benjamin Thomas Peterson. 14 Robin  
Brook Lane. This is Jason.

CHRISTINE  
 (supportive)  
 He knows his stuff!

JOANIE  
 I'd hate to break them up. Where were  
 you heading, Ruth?

CUT TO:

41 INT. MALL ARCADE- CONTINUOUS

41

Establishing shot of a mall arcade, dimly lit except for various flashing games. Small children run around excitedly while exhausted parents stare dead-eyed at nothing in particular.

Jason and Ben are at a Virtual Roller Coaster game. The screen shows first-person POV animation and the reclined seats move along with the footage. The boys are in total sensory overload and loving it. They hold hands.

Joanie, Christine, and Ruth look and quickly refill the machine whenever it runs out of quarters.

A mom with a small child walks by and gives them all dirty looks. Christine makes a shoo-ing gesture to her.

CHRISTINE  
 Like her kid's so great.

RUTH  
 I always forget they're not still that  
 little.

JOANIE  
 Right! When did they become *teenagers*?

RUTH  
 God, I wish I knew. He's so much  
 moodier now. And has Jason started  
 (mom whisper)  
 masturbating  
 (normal tone)  
 yet? It's the worst.

Joanie and Christine nod knowingly.

CHRISTINE  
 The boy loves his penis.

RUTH

And how do you convince them not to do something they love? Maybe Jason getting kicked out is a blessing in disguise, I've been looking for residential places for Ben.

Ruth and Christine keep talking but as soon as Ruth says "residential" we stay on Joanie's face and slowly zoom in as we see her really doubt herself for the first time.

RUTH(O.S.)

I think he just needs people that never think of him as a baby. Like he's getting to the age where me helping him all the time is holding him back.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

You gotta kick the baby birds out of the nest sometimes. Unless they're penguins of course. Or ostriches. Right, Joanie?

Joanie's moment of introspection passes.

JOANIE

Yup. Of course.

CUT TO:

42 INT.SUBURBAN HOUSE- EVENING.

42

Mark and Lucas are finishing up some chicken broccoli ziti at a cross country pasta party. Mark is wearing a nice-ish polo, while Lucas is wearing a too-big t-shirt with characters from Sesame Street and text that reads "Street Gang".

LUCAS

And then they all just cream on her face.

MARK

Sounds like a modern classic.

LUCAS

It was like the Star Wars of porn.

MARK

A long, long time ago, in an ass far, far away...

Lukas snorts.

LUCAS  
Fuck, I think a ziti went up my nose.

Mark looks at his phone.

MARK  
Shit, I've gotta go.

LUCAS  
Already?

MARK  
Yeah, my mom's here. Gotta get home  
before Jason's bedtime.

LUCAS  
But dude! The rest of the guys were  
all gonna blaze and make prank phone  
calls. I've been working on my Asian  
accent for weeks.

MARK  
Yikes. As much as I love the idea of  
having my ears bleed, I think I gotta  
head out.

LUCAS  
Dude, Ricky just got his license. Ask  
your mom if you can stay.

MARK  
Maybe next time.

LUCAS  
Alright, but I expect to smoke you up  
by the end of the month. If anyone  
else pops that cherry, I'll cut a  
bitch.

43 EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE-EVENING-CONTINUOUS

43

Mark waves goodbye to his friends and teammates and starts walking toward Joanie's car. Joanie rolls down her passenger window.

JOANIE  
Hey, Markie. Did you have fun with  
your friends?

MARK  
Yeah, but sharing the legos and coloring books was pretty tough.

JOANIE  
(playfully)  
You know Jason never talks back to me like that.

MARK  
Because when I think of Jase, I think role model.

Mark smiles but as he goes to sit in the back seat he pauses.

MARK  
Um, Mom...  
(beat)  
He's naked.

Shot of Jason sitting naked (nudity tastefully obscured by staging) but with his vest still on.

JOANIE  
How?!

She hurriedly gets out of the car and walks around to try to get Jason's clothes on.

Mark takes a step back and wistfully looks back at his friends' house.

JOANIE  
What a little Houdini!

MARK  
Mom, Houdini escaped things. He didn't just take off clothes and leave the chains on.

JOANIE  
Give me a hand, would you?

Mark laughs a little to himself and then opens the other side door to help his mom.

CUT TO:

44 INT. JOANIE'S HOUSE-NIGHT

44

Joanie, Jason, and Mark all enter the house in relatively

high spirits.

Mark goes over to give Jason their secret handshake.

MARK

Have a good night buddy.

Without warning the good atmosphere is pierced by Brian yelling from downstairs.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Joanie!!!

Joanie sighs.

JOANIE

(to Mark)

Can you get him ready?

Mark is clearly holding back some strong emotions.

MARK

Sure, mom.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Joanie!!!

MARK

Mom, you don't-

JOANIE

Don't forget to brush Jase's teeth.  
Okay, Markie?

He nods, takes Jason by the hand, and walks him toward the bathroom. Joanie knocks on Brian's basement door.

JOANIE

I'm coming down now, Brian.

45 INT. BRIAN'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

45

The basement is horrible. Long-abandoned workout machines, books about conspiracy theories, and half-eaten food cover almost every inch of floor space. Brian is sitting on a couch in his underwear watching *Ancient Aliens* on a much nicer TV than the two upstairs.

As Joanie enters into the space, her nose wrinkles at the unpleasantness. When she and Brian speak, the tension is palpable.



JOANIE  
What's wrong, Brian?

BRIAN  
You're home later than I was  
expecting. I had to make my own  
dinner.

He motions to THREE MICROWAVE PIZZAS on the table.

JOANIE  
You know Thursdays are Mark's pasta  
parties. And Christine and I bumped  
into one of Jason's friends at the  
mall. Guess we lost track of time.

BRIAN  
Hmph. You could have told me you'd be  
late. It's Christine trying to turn  
you against me. She's always had it  
out for me.

JOANIE  
I'm sorry you feel that way.

BRIAN  
If you were sorry, you'd call when  
you're going to be late.

JOANIE  
I guess I'm not sorry then.

BRIAN  
And you monopolize the laundry.

This catches Joanie off guard.

JOANIE  
What?

BRIAN  
It's bad enough I have to make my own  
dinner, but every damn time I try to  
do my laundry you have the washer and  
drier monopolized with your things.  
And don't act like Christine's things  
aren't mixed in. It's the only reason  
she spends so much time here. She's  
using us, Joanie.

JOANIE

What world are you living in?

BRIAN

The one where I'm your husband and I should be able to do my laundry!

JOANIE

Your son still shits himself!

BRIAN

That's always your excuse!

JOANIE

I think it's a good one. When you get shit on your work clothes, you can have the laundry to yourself.

(beat)

You are going to work tonight, right, Brian?

BRIAN

How can you talk to me like this in my house?

JOANIE

Your house?! You're lucky I don't charge you rent!

BRIAN

(pathetic, melodramatic)

You'd kick out your own husband? Some example you are for the kids. And do you think anyone else would want to be with you if you left? I *need* you, Joanie.

(beat)

I'd die on my own.

( )

He is like a helpless child. Her anger melts into sadness and pity.

JOANIE

Is there anything else?

BRIAN

I do love you, Joanie.

JOANIE

(obligatory w/out feeling)

I love you too.

46 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM/ KITCHEN-CONTINUOUS

46

Joanie emerges from the basement. Mark is sitting on the beanbag playing with Jason (who is now wearing pajamas), but it is clear that he was listening the whole time.

MARK

Mom-

He tries to stand up dramatically, but Jason gets annoyed that he's breaking up their game and starts trying to pull his brother back.

MARK

Mom, you-

He gives Jason a quick secret handshake and a pat on the head and Jason lets him stand up.

MARK

Mom, you can't let him say that shit to you!

His emotion has not diminished but it's not the big moment he was hoping for.

JOANIE

Language.

MARK

Mom!

JOANIE

You'll underst-

MARK

Don't even. I'm old enough to understand now. He's *not nice* to you.

JOANIE

(defeated)

It doesn't matter how he is to me, Markie. He's your father. You have to love your father.

MARK

You say that like it's easy. Grampa was nice to all of you! How am I supposed to-

JOANIE

This isn't a discussion, Mark. You have to love him.

MARK

Why?! He doesn't love us! He doesn't even look at Jason.

This stings for Joanie, but Jason perks up at hearing his name mentioned and requests another handshake. Mark obliges but the conversation continues unimpeded.

JOANIE

He loves you both in his way. I know he doesn't always show-

MARK

He drove me to Disney once ten years ago! What has he done since?!

JOANIE

He's your father.

MARK

That's not enough!

JOANIE

That's just how it is.

MARK

I can't... I can't-

Mark is too worked up and seems close to crying. He just shakes his head and storms off to his room. Joanie doesn't know what she can say to him.

She goes over to Jason and hugs him close.

JOANIE

Hey, baby.

At first, Jason hugs her back nicely, but then his arm shoots up and pulls her hair and he laughs like this is a fun game for the two of them. Joanie sighs sadly but doesn't do anything to free herself. Pull back on the two of them on the beanbag and fade out on the day.

47 INT- JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM- MORNING

47

Joanie's morning ritual once again but this time a series of quicker cuts than before.

MONTAGE :

-Jason surging awake.

-A hand opening a refrigerator.

-Jason running excitedly past the stove toward the bathroom.

-A hand turning on the bathtub faucets

-Jason running by the stove again in a towel toward the living room.

-A hand putting Jason's SESAME STREET DVD into the player.

-A hand grabbing yogurt from the fridge.

Joanie and Jason sit at the kitchen table and she feeds him yogurt. Mark comes in and goes to kiss his mom on the head like he usually does but then recoils.

MARK

Umm... Mom?

JOANIE

Yeah, Markie?

MARK

I don't really know how to say this...

JOANIE

What?

MARK

You've... uh.. You've got shit in your hair.

Joanie's reaction is a mix of alarm and annoyance, but this is not as shocking a statement as it would be to anyone else.

JOANIE

Oh, gross.

She looks at her watch.

JOANIE

Jason's new therapist is coming and you have school, I don't know if there's time to-

MARK

Go shower. I can watch him.

JOANIE

You'll miss the bus...

MARK

Mom, I'll text someone from cross country to pick me up. It's fine.

JOANIE

Alright, alright.

She hands Mark the spoon she was using to feed Jason.

JOANIE

Thanks, Mark.

She goes to take a shower. Mark pulls a chair up close to Jason.

MARK

Hey, Buddy.

Jason slaps him in the face, and then giggles. Mark is caught totally off guard.

MARK

Dude, what the hell?

Jason smiles at him and claps his hand for a secret handshake. Mark shakes his head in disbelief.

MARK

You're like a sour patch kid.

Jason claps his hands again, and Mark gives him a secret handshake.

CUT TO:

48 EXT. JOANIE'S HOUSE- MORNING

48

Close on KELLY (26), a young, peppy behavioral therapist stands in Joanie's driveway. Her reddish-brown hair is down to her shoulders.

KELLY

So this is Jason.

Pan to Joanie and Jason. Jason is sitting in his wheelchair

and keeps trying to scoot forward.

JOANIE

Here he is. Thank you so much for coming down.

KELLY

I'm so excited! He's my first official client.

JOANIE

Oh wow, I thought you seemed young, but-

KELLY

Not to worry, Mrs. McCarthy. I did a lot of hours of shadowing.

JOANIE

(trying to sound upbeat)

Oh wow, that's- that's great. But Jase might be a little... different than what you're expecting.

KELLY

Oh, he's such a little cutie, I'm sure we'll be fine.

Jason gives her a look, sizing her up. Joanie seems a little nervous.

JOANIE

Still, you *might* want to put your hair up.

KELLY

(oblivious)

I just kinda like it down.

Joanie doesn't push it and kneels down to talk to Jason.

JOANIE

Have fun with Kelly, buddy, and be nice. Mum'll be back before you know it.

She gives him a hug, which he half-heartedly returns. As soon as she lets go, he tries to scoot away some more.

JOANIE  
 (to Kelly)  
 Alright, good luck! He looks like he's  
 ready to move.

Kelly comes over to push Jason in his wheelchair.

KELLY  
 See you when you come back!

Kelly starts pushing him out for a walk.

49 INT. JOANIE'S CAR- CONTINUOUS

49

Joanie gets into her car and pulls out of the driveway. She waves at Kelly and Jason as she goes by.

JOANIE  
 Oh, she doesn't stand a chance.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 And here on your right is our music  
 room.

CUT TO:

50 INT. SCHOOL -CONTINUOUS

50

A cheerful, shorter middle-aged woman (TOUR GUIDE #2) in teacher-y earth tones leads Joanie around a school that looks like it used to be an old rec center. She is holding two young children in her arms and other children with disabilities are running around everywhere. Unlike the first tour guide, she is upbeat in a way that feels natural and not overly rehearsed.

TOUR GUIDE #2  
 But unfortunately, our most recent  
 music teacher has passed on.

JOANIE  
 Oh gosh, he's dead?

TOUR GUIDE #2  
 Finance. We're still looking for a  
 replacement.

JOANIE  
 Jason loves music.

A young BOY comes running up to the tour guide.



BOY

Ms. Linda, Thomas hit me!

The tour guide looks at him skeptically.

TOUR GUIDE #2

Did you deserve it, Jerry?

Joanie looks horrified, thinking this will be a repeat of the first school. The tour guide acknowledges her discomfort and gives her a comforting wink and a smile.

BOY

No, but-

TOUR GUIDE #2

But?

BOY

But I was only *trying* to bite him. I didn't *actually* bite him.

TOUR GUIDE #2

Well, you tell Thomas that you're sorry for trying to bite him, and then maybe he'll say sorry for hitting you. Okay?

BOY

Okay, Ms. Linda!

He runs off pleased with this solution. Joanie seems pleased too.

TOUR GUIDE #2

Where were we?

JOANIE

The music room.

TOUR GUIDE #2

Right. Well, we try to divide our students' time fairly evenly between life skills, academics, and arts slash play. In that corner, we normally have a swing set, but right now it's being cleaned because someone covered it in oatmeal.

JOANIE

This all sounds really great, but I

can't help but notice I see a lot more students than staff.

The tour guide sighs.

TOUR GUIDE #2

We've been having a lot of turnover lately. Well not lately. Turnover's pretty consistent.

JOANIE

That doesn't bother you?

TOUR GUIDE #2

(jokingly)

Welcome to Human Services!

(matter of fact)

Hard work, low pay, high burn out.

JOANIE

Hmm, must be tough.

TOUR GUIDE #2

We get by.

JOANIE

Do you think you have room for Jason?

TOUR GUIDE #2

Ms. McCarthy, I hate saying this-

Stay on Joanie's face as she quietly swallows her disappointment.

TOUR GUIDE #2 (O.C.)

But the truth is we're not projecting any openings for another six months.

JOANIE

Oh. I see.

Close back on Tour Guide #2's face

TOUR GUIDE #2

We would love to have Jason though, and I'm sure he's a wonderful kid.

CUT TO:

51 EXT. JOANIE'S DRIVEWAY- AFTERNOON

51

Almost identical close on Kelly's face.

KELLY

Today was the hardest day of my life!  
Look at this!

She holds up a handful of her own hair.

Pan to Joanie barely containing a slight smirk.

JOANIE

I did try to warn you about the hair.

KELLY

I just didn't realize he'd be so  
strong! I'm not sure I'm cut out for  
this.

JOANIE

Please, Kelly. Jason always tests new  
people. Stick around at least one more  
time.

KELLY

Oh, I'm not gonna let him win that  
easily. Next time, I'm bringing a  
headband.

JOANIE

Thank you, Kelly.

Kelly starts to leave but then turns around.

KELLY

Um, I should probably also say I kept  
hearing weird noises from the  
basement. Jason didn't want to go down  
there with me so I couldn't check it  
out, but I think there might be  
something living down there. Maybe a  
raccoon or something.

JOANIE

(sadly)  
I'll be sure to check it out.

Kelly leaves, and Joanie starts to scowl. She turns to Jason.

JOANIE

What am I gonna do with you, buddy?

She pats him on the head.

JOANIE

Let's get out of here.

CUT TO:

52 EXT. WOODS- AFTERNOON

52

Mark and Lucas are in the middle of a cross country meet. Mark is very focused, but Lucas doesn't care at all.

LUCAS

So how about after the meet?

MARK

What?

LUCAS

Post-meet blunt.

MARK

You know if you can talk right now, you're not doing this whole running thing, right?

LUCAS

Wait. You care about running? I'm just trying to get a six-pack, so Karen Roberts will blow me.

MARK

I hate you so much.

CUT TO:

Joanie and Jason (in his chair) are on the sidelines of a cross country track. Joanie is talking on the phone and waves at Mark as he runs by. Jason claps.

JOANIE(INTO PHONE)

I'm feeling a little discouraged.

INTERCUT TO:

53 INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

53

CHRISTINE (INTO PHONE)

So you went to watch high schoolers running? Like that's not depressing.

JOANIE

I'm serious, Chris. What if I can't find someplace?

CHRISTINE

You're not going to like my answer.

JOANIE

Brian?

CHRISTINE

You can't do it all, Joan. I'll help when I can, but sooner or later, Brian's going to have to help out. You can't have two babies in the house.

Joanie takes this in.

JOANIE

I'm worried that if I push him too much now that he's finally trying a little, he might just give up.

CHRISTINE

It's sentences like that that make me suspect he might not be good enough for you.

Joanie sighs, annoyed with the criticism even if it's fair.

JOANIE

I think Mark's finishing up now. I'll talk to you later, Chris.

CHRISTINE

Joanie,-

JOANIE

Talk to you later. Love ya.

CHRISTINE

(disgruntled)

Love you too.

Joanie hangs up as an exhausted Mark walks over to meet them.

JOANIE  
You did so well!

MARK  
Mom, the team lost by a landslide.

JOANIE  
Who cares about them? I was just watching you.

He's close enough that she tries to give him a hug.

MARK  
Don't. I'm all gross and sweaty.

JOANIE  
Believe me, I've hugged worse.

They both laugh, and he lets her give him a hug. He bends down to give Jason a high five.

MARK  
I like that you brought your chair to watch us all run. Sometimes I think you've got it all figured out, maestro.

Jason gives him a big smile, that might just be knowing.

JOANIE  
You boys want ice cream?

CUT TO:

54 EXT. ICE CREAM SHOP-EVENING

54

Joanie, Jason, and Mark sit at a picnic table eating soft-serve ice cream. Jason is out of his chair and sitting with them. He's so excited about the ice cream, that he is feeding himself without Joanie's help and it is all over his face.

MARK  
I was thinking today-

JOANIE  
That your mom is too great?

Mark rolls his eyes.

MARK  
Jason's technically a freshman now. If

he - We'd be in the same school.

JOANIE

It's funny to think about.

MARK

It'd be so different. Do you think about that a lot?

JOANIE

Now and then, but different doesn't always mean good. Some people hate their brothers. You might have learned to change diapers too early, but at least you two love each other.

MARK

Yeah.

He cleans some ice cream off of Jason's chin. The two brothers smile at each other.

CUT TO:

55 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM/ KITCHEN-LATER

55

Jason runs into the house with Joanie and Mark following behind him.

Joanie is the first to turn towards the living room, and she seems surprised.

JOANIE

Brian? What are you doing up here?

Pan to Brian sitting on the upstairs couch watching an episode of *Ancient Aliens* on the upper tv but with the volume un-muted.

BRIAN

I got hungry while you were at the meet. There's mini-pizza in the microwave.

(yelling offstage)

You gonna say hello to your father, Markie?

MARK (O.S)

(begrudging)

Hey, dad.

Jason sees his dad and goes over to hug him. Brian puts his arms up and keeps Jason at an uncomfortable distance.

BRIAN

Hey, Jase!  
 (barely a beat)  
 You gonna get him, Joanie?

Joanie sighs and goes to get Jason and lead him to his beanbag. He waits patiently for his video while Joanie turns it on for him.

JOANIE

(to Brian)  
 Do you mind turning your show down?

BRIAN

I'm in the middle of it.

Jason's Sesame Street songs video starts playing, clashing with Brian's show.

Jason can tell something is wrong and looks up at Joanie anxiously.

JOANIE

Brian, please.

Brian turns the volume up. Jason looks more distressed, like he is about to cry.

JOANIE

Brian, are you listening?

BRIAN

No, Joanie. No! You listen. Jason's gotta toughen up. What, am I not supposed to watch tv in my house? You baby him too much. Y'know I bet he wouldn't even have Down syndrome if you didn't coddle him.

MARK (O.S)

Are you *fucking* kidding me?

Pan to Mark standing to the side looking furious. Joanie is too surprised to comment on his language. Jason is really looking stressed out.

MARK

I can't fucking believe you. You.



don't. do. anything! Mom does *everything*. And you're just mean to her. This is the first time I've seen you upstairs in *months*, and I didn't even care.

Joanie quietly shuts off Brian's TV and pulls a now crying Jason into a comforting embrace.

BRIAN  
You can't talk to me like that.

MARK  
Fuck you!

BRIAN  
Mark-

MARK  
We'd all be better off without you!

He looks to Joanie to back him up. Joanie can't make eye contact.

JOANIE  
Mark, I know you're angry, but he's your fath-

MARK  
Mom!! How can you defend this shit?

He starts tearing up too.

JOANIE  
(no feeling)  
Families shouldn't fight. He's-

MARK  
Fuck this!

Mark runs out of the house.

JOANIE  
Mark!

CUT TO:

56 EXT. STREET-NIGHT

56

Mark is running down his street, wiping his tears with one hand and calling someone on the phone with his other.

MARK (INTO PHONE)  
Yo, Lucas.

CUT TO:

57 EXT. LUCAS'S HOUSE- NIGHT

57

Mark knocks on the door to Lucas' house. Lucas opens the door revealing a really nice, middle-class house. The two adolescent boys don't really know how to talk about feelings.

LUCAS  
Hey, dude.  
(awkward beat)  
Sorry your dad's like a dick-wad.

MARK  
Thanks, man. I just had to get out

LUCAS.  
Yeah.

LUCAS' MOM (O.S.)  
Honey, either go out or come in!  
You're gonna let bugs in.

Lucas rolls his eyes.

LUCAS  
You believe this shit?

Suddenly he gets an idea.

LUCAS  
I know what'll cheer you up.

CUT TO:

58 EXT. WOODS-NIGHT

58

Lucas is leading Mark to his smoking spot in the woods.

LUCAS  
Are you fucking psyched for this?

MARK  
Yeah, of course. You're sure this is  
like a safe spot?

LUCAS  
Dude, calm your nut. You're about to

enter...  
 (pause for effect)  
 The Danker Zone.

MARK  
 Danker Zone?

LUCAS  
 Like Danger Zone. But Dank. Look.

Pan to a tree that Lucas has carved "Danker Zone" into in very child-ish script.

MARK  
 So what do I do?

Lucas starts packing a bowl.

LUCAS  
 You smoke it, dumbass.

He lights his pipe and takes the first hit. Mark watches intently. Lucas hands the pipe to him.

LUCAS  
 Go with God, my son.

Mark takes a long look and then breaths in before the flame goes out.

He nearly takes the full hit but then starts coughing. Almost immediately a police siren goes off and lights up the woods.

LUCAS  
 Oh, farts.

CUT TO:

59 INT. JAIL CELL- NIGHT

59

Mark sits on a bench in a little jail cell looking dejected. It's a small-town jail though, so it looks almost like a dentist's waiting room minus the bars on the window.

LUCAS (O.S.)  
 Fuckin' pigs, man.

Mark looks up to see his friend sitting across from him trying to act tough.

LUCAS  
It's like weed's basically legal now  
anyways. This is such bullshit.

MARK  
Lucas?

LUCAS  
Yeah, buddy?

MARK  
Just shut up okay.

Lucas nods.

A police officer comes to their cell.

POLICE OFFICER  
O'Brien, your ride is here.

Lucas gets up to go.

LUCAS  
Hey, I'm really sorry, Mark. If you  
need me to like smuggle you a shiv or  
something just let me know.

MARK  
Thanks.

Lucas looks at him apologetically and then leaves.

Mark now all by himself takes a deep breath, silent tears  
welling up in his eyes, and puts his head in his hands.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)  
McCarthy, you too. Get up.

CUT TO:

60 INT. JAIL LOBBY-CONTINUOUS

60

Mark follows the police officer into the lobby and sees  
Christine.

CHRISTINE  
Ooh, John Dillinger. I'm bustin' you  
out.

Mark looks at his shoes rather than make eye contact.

MARK  
Hi, Auntie.

CHRISTINE  
(to police officer)  
And you're sure we can't get a copy of  
his mugshot? I just think it would  
look so nice in the Christmas card.

Mark sighs, and starts to walk out of the building.

CHRISTINE  
He's an angsty little convict. Thank  
you so much, Officer. I'll be sure to  
keep paying my taxes.

The officer cracks a half-smile.

POLICE OFFICER  
You have a goodnight, ma'am.

61 EXT. POLICE STATION-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

61

Mark walks out into the night with Christine close behind.

CHRISTINE  
Mark! Hold on a sec, will ya?

Mark turns around and looks like he's trying hard not to cry.

MARK  
My mom, is she-

CHRISTINE  
She's not mad, Markie. She's not happy  
either, but she would've come if the  
maestro hadn't fallen asleep.

Mark nods. Christine pats him on the shoulder.

CHRISTINE  
You'd have to do a lot worse than  
smoke a little pot to make your mom  
not want to see you, pal.  
(beat)  
But don't get any ideas.

They reach Christine's car.

CHRISTINE  
Your chariot awaits.

62 INT. CHRISTINE'S CAR- CONTINUOUS

62

Christine and Mark get into the car. Christine turns on the radio and "Lucy in The Sky Diamonds" by the Beatles comes on.

CHRISTINE

Ooh, I love this song!

MARK

It's like all about drugs though.

CHRISTINE

Oh, I don't think they'd do that kinda thing.

Mark smiles unsure if she's kidding or not. Christine looks over at him and turns off the radio, suddenly a little more serious.

CHRISTINE

Look, Mark. I'm just gonna say this because I think it's important, okay?

MARK

Okay.

CHRISTINE

You are not your father.

MARK

What?

CHRISTINE

When you get to be my age, you hear a lot of people say things like, "Oh, my father's an alcoholic now I'm doomed to be one too!" or "My dad loved the Grateful Dead so now I live in a van." But it's a load of baloney. You're a good kid, Markie.

MARK

Christine, I -

CHRISTINE

Let me finish. You're good. You're good to your brother and your mom. You see, everyone in our family, Markie, is a born sap. Through and through.

MARK

I get it, I just-

CHRISTINE

I know, I know listen to me drone, but you've got to hear this. All of us, Markie, we look out for each other and we help people and we don't always get a whole lot in return. Sometimes that can really suck, but it's worth it. There's a lot of people out there like your dad, who'll take advantage of saps like us. But you're not one of them. I just want to make sure you know that.

She gives him a long look and then flips the radio back on.

CUT TO:

63 INT. JOANIE'S KITCHEN-NIGHT

63

Mark walks into the house, Christine following behind.

MARK

Mom, I'm-

Christine nudges him to be quieter.

CHRISTINE

Shh. The Maestro.

Joanie comes running in from the living room and pulls Mark into a huge hug.

JOANIE

My baby. Nobody hurt you down there, did they?

MARK

I was just at the police station mom. There was like one drunk guy and Lucas, not a bunch of prison gangs.

CHRISTINE

Oh *all* the gangs wanted him on their team. But I got there right in the nick of time, and I said listen up. He has to go home to his mom and his brother. They were very disappointed.

Joanie has to stop herself from smiling a little.

JOANIE

Don't joke about this, Chris.  
(to Mark)

You go to bed. We can talk about all  
this in the morning. You must be  
exhausted.

MARK

Thanks, Mom.  
(beat)  
I love you, you know.

JOANIE

I love you too.

Mark walks to his bedroom and closes the door.

JOANIE

Thanks again for getting him, Chris. I  
would have, but you know...

She looks over at Jason who is sleeping peacefully on the  
couch in the living room.

CHRISTINE

You know it's no problem.  
(beat)  
Do you wanna talk about what happened?

JOANIE

Maybe in the morning. I'm pretty  
tired.

CHRISTINE

I really think we should talk now.

JOANIE

I *really* don't want to have this  
conversation.

CHRISTINE

You never want to have "this  
conversation"!

JOANIE

Maybe that's a hint.

CHRISTINE

I just picked up your son from *jail*!



This seems to break through Joanie's defenses, and she is momentarily speechless.

CHRISTINE (CONT.)

Joan, I love you and I've always tried to respect your decisions, but I can't keep dancing around this. Brian's gotta go.

JOANIE

You know I can't do that.

CHRISTINE

(throwing her hands up)

Yes, you can! I just wanna shake you right now.

JOANIE

Chris-

CHRISTINE

If you had a lump in your breast you'd cut it out. You've got one ten feet from your breast and it's the same thing.

JOANIE

I have no illusions about my husband.

CHRISTINE

I'd say maybe a few.

JOANIE

I can't just walk away, Chris. You don't know what it's like to be married.

CHRISTINE

Neither do you! This isn't a marriage, Joanie, it's a daycare service.

JOANIE

It's not like that...

CHRISTINE

It's worse! He's... He's abusive, Joan. There's no other word for it.

JOANIE

Brian's never hit me.

CHRISTINE

Only because that would require standing up.

This stings.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry.

Tears start coming out of Joanie's eyes, but she stands her ground and acts like she doesn't notice.

JOANIE

So I'm just supposed to raise the two of them on my own like it's that easy. I know Brian doesn't do nearly enough, but he doesn't do nothing. And as long as *I'm* not working, I'll need his income. I can't do this alone, Chris.

CHRISTINE

You're not alone!

JOANIE

You can't do it either. What would you do? Leave your job?

Christine pauses. A thought hits her but, she seems nervous to voice it.

CHRISTINE

Jason could go residential.

Joanie throws her hands up.

JOANIE

Not you too!

CHRISTINE

You could at least *look* at a place!

JOANIE

You could at least support my decisions!

CHRISTINE

Joanie, I've tried. And I'm sorry I've been so selfish.

This catches Joanie off guard.

JOANIE

What are you talking about?

CHRISTINE

You're all I got. Helping you with the maestro is the only time I really, truly feel important. And I've let that get in the way of being a good big sister. Real support is noticing someone's driving off a cliff and pushing them out of the damn car. Jason *has* to go residential.

JOANIE

He *has* to be with his family!

CHRISTINE

He needs to be somewhere where he doesn't just watch the same video over and over. Someplace that will be able to take care of him when he gets big enough to really hurt someone. Look at us, Joan, we're no spring chickens.

JOANIE

I am *not* going to just abandon my child.

CHRISTINE

Maybe you all need to go residential! You can't stay in this house with that dud in the basement! It's driving you all nuts.

JOANIE

Chris-

CHRISTINE

You can move in with me!

JOANIE

Why don't you get your own life instead of meddling in mine!

Christine is surprised by this.

CHRISTINE

Jesus. You don't mean-

JOANIE

I'm sorry. You're my sister and I love

you, but I really think you need to go home now.

CHRISTINE

Joan-

JOANIE

Just go.

Christine nods and turns to leave. Joanie stands by the counter for a moment processing her emotions. Fade out.

64 INT. JOANIE'S LIVING ROOM-MORNING

64

Montage again of Joanie's morning routine.

-Jason surges awake, and Joanie wakes up after him a little groggier than usual.

-Joanie's hand grabbing a milkshake out of the fridge.

-Jason running to the bathroom.

-Jason running from the bathroom.

-Joanie's hand putting Jason's Sesame Street DVD into the player. The Player closes slowly.

-The TV starts to play the tape but then starts skipping and becoming scrambled.

Joanie looks concerned and tries to spin Jason around in his bean bag before he notices the TV.

She is too late, and Jason keeps trying to turn back to watch his video. Joanie tries to give him a high five to keep him from looking, but he pushes her away and manages to turn around.

Jason looks annoyed and tries to take Joanie's hands and bring her to the TV to make her fix it.

JOANIE

I can't do it, buddy. How about a different video?

She goes to a shelf behind the TV and pulls out a Kids Songs DVD, but Jason starts crying. This is not part of his routine.

JOANIE

(almost pleading)

Buddy, the video is all done. Let's just get out of here. Go for a walk.

She uses the sign language for walk, but Jason is only getting more upset. He starts hitting his own head.

Joanie rushes over to him and gives him a big hug. She puts one hand on his forehead to block his hits, but he keeps trying and squirming to get out of her embrace.

JOANIE

Shh. Jase, it's okay. It's okay.

Jason squirms harder and harder. He makes a big lunge and unintentionally slams his head into Joanie's.

A squirt of blood hits the TV.

Joanie reflexively lets go of Jason and puts her hands to her face. When she lets her hands down, it is clear her nose is bleeding profusely and possibly broken.

Jason looks at his mom and is shaken out of his tantrum. He starts crying again, but more out of sadness than frustration. He lunges towards Joanie again but this time gives her a big hug.

She hugs him back tightly, and also starts crying the tears leaving streaks in the blood.

Mark walks into the living room, still in an early morning daze.

MARK

I heard crying is everything, okay?

He finally takes in the full situation.

MARK

Oh, shit.

CUT TO:

65 INT. HOSPITAL-DAY-LATER

65

A doctor, his back to the camera, is busying himself examining Joanie's face.

DOCTOR  
I think that should do it.

He steps back revealing Joanie with a small splint on her nose.

DOCTOR  
Probably felt a lot worse than it was,  
but on the plus side now you know your  
son could have a prominent career as a  
bouncer.

He laughs at his own joke, but Joanie is unamused.

DOCTOR  
Give it time. You can check out  
whenever you're ready.

He leaves. Once he's gone, Mark wheels Jason, in his chair,  
into the room.

MARK  
Hey mom, how ya feeling?

JOANIE  
Aw it's nothing. Thanks for asking.

Jason tries to grab her splint, looking confused. Mark blocks  
his hands and holds them gently.

MARK  
Jase and I got you something at the  
gift shop.

He pulls out a get well soon card.

MARK  
We both signed it.

He opens the card, and there is one signature and one giant  
scribble. Mark points to the signature.

MARK  
That one's mine.

Joanie cracks a smile.

JOANIE  
Thanks, Mark.  
(beat)  
Don't think just cuz you've been so

helpful, you're totally off the hook here.

MARK

I know.

JOANIE

Good.

Mark thinks about what he's going to say next and then goes for it.

MARK

I, uh, I heard everything you and Christine said last night.

JOANIE

You did?

MARK

Yeah, I couldn't sleep.  
(slight beat)  
She's probably right, you know.

Joanie takes this in and sighs.

JOANIE

Yeah. She probably is.  
(beat)  
But don't tell her I said that, she'll never let me hear the end of it. Could you pass me my phone?

Mark reaches into Joanie's purse on a chair to the side of the hospital bed.

INTERCUT TO:

66 INT. LISA'S OFFICE-DAY

66

Lisa, Jason's advocate, is filling out some paperwork when her office phone rings. She picks it up.

LISA

Hello?

JOANIE

So you're sure if he goes to one of those residential places, I can visit him whenever I want?

LISA  
 (taken aback)  
 I'm sorry, who is-

She recognizes the voice and begins to smile.

LISA  
 Mrs. McCarthy! Yes, yes, I am sure you can visit. You might have to call ahead, but do you want me to email you information on places I can recommend? Arrange a visit?

JOANIE  
 (slightly begrudgingly)  
 Yes, that would be nice. I'm still not sold on the idea, mind you. But an email would be very helpful.

LISA  
 I drafted one months ago. When would you like me to try to arrange a visit?

JOANIE  
 How soon could you get one?

CUT TO:

67 INT. HELPING HANDS CENTER- LATER

67

Jason peddles a special bicycle adapted for children with disabilities around a mid-sized recreation room. He has the same unrestrained joyful look as when he is on the swingset.

Joanie, Mark, and Tour Guide #3 (40, professional but not formal) watch him go with a mix of pride and amusement.

JOANIE  
 I had no idea he'd ridden a bike before.

MARK  
 I feel like I've never been that happy about anything.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
 Our residents get rec time for at least an hour every day. So if he likes that bike so much, he should get plenty of time with it.



JOANIE

More exercise couldn't hurt.

TOUR GUIDE #3

Do you want to see more of our facility?

JOANIE

Hmm, he seems so happy. I'd hate to take him off.

TOUR GUIDE #3

Who said anything about taking him off?

CUT TO:

68 INT. HALLWAY- CONTINUOUS

68

Joanie, Mark, and Tour Guide #3 follow Jason in his bike down a hallway of the residential facility. Mark holds a little bar on the back of the bike to steady it, while the two women chat.

TOUR GUIDE #3

(pointing)

Over there we have our skills training rooms.

JOANIE

Would they work on toilet training?

TOUR GUIDE #3

(reassuring)

It's a common one.

JOANIE

Oh, that sounds nice. But I don't like the idea of him not being in school.

TOUR GUIDE #3

Understandable, Mrs. McCarthy. But intensive skills training is only intended to be temporary. We actually have a partnership with local schools and job placement programs for when our residents are ready.

JOANIE

That's something.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
Do you have any questions for me?

Joanie thinks for a moment.

JOANIE  
You don't- You don't have one of those... quiet rooms, do you?

TOUR GUIDE #3  
We do actually!

JOANIE  
Oh.

She looks crestfallen. The tour guide notices.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
I'm not sure it's what you think it is.

CUT TO:

69 INT. QUIET ROOM- LATER

69

The Tour Guide opens a door to a softly-colored room with PADDED WALLS and a BIG BEANBAG.

Jason excitedly rushes past the tour guide and plops onto the beanbag.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
We like to have a space where residents can come when they're feeling stressed out. It's completely voluntary! And look...

She turns off a light switch and the room becomes illuminated by several glow in the dark stars forming little constellations on the walls and ceiling.

JOANIE  
Wow.

Jason looks up from his bean bag and starts laughing.

MARK  
I think he's got the right idea.

Mark gets down and tussles Jason's hair.

MARK  
Move over, bud.

He tickles Jason to get him to scoot over on the bean bag. Jason laughs hard and swats at his brother, but still moves over. Mark lies on the bean bag next to him.

Joanie and the tour guide watch the two boys and share a peaceful moment.

CUT TO:

70 INT.HELPING HANDS CENTER- LATER

70

The tour guide puts away the bike Jason was riding back in the rec room.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
Thank you again for your visit.

JOANIE  
No, thank you. It definitely wasn't what I was expecting.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
I should probably tell you before we go that we don't currently have any openings right now.

Joanie can barely contain her disappointment.

MARK  
You couldn't have said that before the tour?

Joanie slaps him on the arm.

JOANIE  
Don't be rude, Mark.  
(to tour guide)  
But he does have a point.

TOUR GUIDE #3  
The tour is as much a chance for us to get to know you as it for you to get to know us. And the good news is, having gotten to know Jason, he's really at the ideal skill level to benefit from the Helping Hands Center.

JOANIE

How's he going to benefit if there's no room for him?

The tour guide laughs comfortably.

TOUR GUIDE #3

Maybe I made it sound worse than it is. A lot of our residents either move back home or into more independent living. We don't have any openings now, but we're hopeful to have more in the next couple of weeks.

JOANIE

You said some residents go back home?

TOUR GUIDE #3

Of course! If they're ready, we're not trying to keep them locked in.

JOANIE

That's good to hear. And his advocate says I'd be able to visit any time?

TOUR GUIDE #3

That's right.  
(beat)  
After the first month.

Joanie looks like she has been slapped in the face.

JOANIE

Sorry?

TOUR GUIDE #3

It's important for us to establish new boundaries and routines with our residents, so we ask that parents try to give us a full month before visiting. It's hard, but that distance can really go a long way.

JOANIE

No- nobody told me about this.

TOUR GUIDE #3

Do you think that will be okay, Mrs. McCarthy?

Close on Joanie's face as she expresses a mixture of fear and

uncertainty.

CUT TO:

71 INT. OFFICE BREAK ROOM- MIDDAY

71

A cell phone buzzes. Christine picks it up and sees that Joanie is calling. She hesitates but then puts the phone in her pocket without answering.

Her co-workers Deb and Noreen seem shocked.

DEB

I don't think I've ever seen you not take a call from your sister.

NOREEN

Ever.

CHRISTINE

How do you know it was my sister? It could have been one of my many suitors.

NOREEN

It's always your sister.

DEB

I think you two were supposed to be conjoined twins but you were just born at the wrong time.

CHRISTINE

Yeah. Well, we had a fight, okay. Is that what you wanted to hear?

NOREEN

Ooh trouble in paradise.

DEB

You okay?

CHRISTINE

Yeah, I'm fine. It'll be good to have some time to myself.

(beat)

Are you two doing anything after work?

Deb and Noreen exchange furtive glances.

DEB

Um...

NOREEN

Well...

CHRISTINE

Margaritas are on me.

DEB

We're free.

NOREEN

Sounds good!

CHRISTINE

It'll be a fiesta!

CUT TO:

72 EXT. HELPING HANDS CENTER PARKING LOT- MIDDAY

72

Joanie frustratedly hangs up her cell phone.

JOANIE

C'mon, Chris.

Mark is pushing Jason around in circles in his wheelchair.

MARK

What are we gonna do, Mom?

Joanie thinks for a moment, and then she makes a decision.

JOANIE

Get his vest on. Let's go for a drive.

CUT TO:

73 INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

73

Christine sits in her office filling out paperwork. There is a knock on the door.

CHRISTINE

Johnson, I swear if you've stapled another memo to yourself...

Instead of whoever she was expecting, the door swings open and in bursts Jason.

CHRISTINE

Maestro?

He runs over to her smiling, and gives her a hug.

CHRISTINE  
You drive here yourself?

Joanie walks in kind of sheepishly, with Mark following her.

JOANIE  
Hey, Chris.

CHRISTINE  
(a little cold)  
Joan.

Suddenly she notices the splint on her nose.

CHRISTINE  
Jesus, what happened?!

JOANIE  
(smiling)  
I guess I can't even go one day  
without you.

CHRISTINE  
Oh, Joanie, if I'd known... I'd-

JOANIE  
It's okay, Chris.  
(beat)  
You were right, you know. About  
everything.

CHRISTINE  
Well, I'm glad you finally realize  
that.  
(beat)  
But I'm sorry if I wasn't exactly  
sensitive.

JOANIE  
We got you something.

Mark puts a small pastry box on her desk.

MARK  
Here you go, Auntie.

Christine opens the box.

CHRISTINE  
Ooh, carrot cake! Weight watchers  
isn't gonna be happy about this.

JOANIE  
I can take it back.

CHRISTINE  
I didn't say that.

They smile at each other.

CHRISTINE  
Thanks, Joanie.

JOANIE  
Thank you for everything, Chris.  
(beat)  
Now there's something, I've got to ask  
you about.

CUT TO:

74 EXT. JOANIE'S DRIVEWAY-AFTERNOON

74

Mark helps Jason out of his vest and lifts him out of the  
car.

MARK  
Oof, you've gotta lighten up on the  
milkshakes, bud.

Jason claps his hands for a high five. Joanie wheels Jason's  
wheelchair over to them.

JOANIE  
Hey, Markie, would you mind taking  
Jason for a walk around the block?

MARK  
Ummm sure. Wh-

JOANIE  
Just don't leave him in the woods so  
you can go smoke pot with your  
friends.

MARK  
Jesus, seriously?!

She starts walking toward the house.



JOANIE

Have fun!

CUT TO:

75 INT. JOANIE'S BASEMENT-CONTINUOUS

75

Joanie starts walking down the basement stairs, letting the door slam behind her.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Joanie, is that you?

She turns the corner at the bottom of the stairs and finds Brian unsurprisingly sitting in his briefs on the couch watching TV.

BRIAN

Oh jeez, what happened to your nose?  
You look terrible.

(beat)

Does this mean you're not cooking  
dinner?

JOANIE

Brian.

She waits for him to look up from the TV and stare at her.

JOANIE

I'm taking the kids to stay with  
Christine for a bit.

BRIAN

You're what? You're leaving me to fend  
for myself?

JOANIE

You're 52, Brian. That's just what you  
do.

BRIAN

Are you coming back?

Joanie takes a deep breath and then lets it out.

JOANIE

Eventually. Her place isn't really big  
enough for us. But I expect big  
changes around here before we come  
back.

BRIAN

I'm trying to watch TV here, Joanie.  
What makes you think you can come down  
here and start bossing me around?

JOANIE

You've been a horrible husband.

BRIAN

How-

JOANIE

And a pretty terrible father.

BRIAN

But-

JOANIE

But somehow I don't hate you as much  
as I should. I *am* leaving, Brian. When  
Jason turns 18, I'm signing the  
papers, and this is over. There's  
nothing you can do at this point that  
will change that.

BRIAN

Joanie-

JOANIE

But how you act now can change how  
that leaving goes. I want you to be  
able to still be a part of the kids'  
lives, if they'll talk to you. And I  
don't want to have to kick you out  
onto the street. But like I said, I  
expect some big changes around here.

Brian is actually silent for a moment, maybe even apologetic.

BRIAN

What kinds of changes?

JOANIE

First of all, you've got to clean up  
this basement. Pigs would be ashamed  
to live like this.

Brian nods. Joanie gets a little more confident.

JOANIE

And I think you'll have to start

asking for more hours at work. Jason could still be out of school for months, so we shouldn't be taking any chances.

BRIAN

And what if I don't make any of your changes? You'd take my kids away from me.

JOANIE

Brian...

(beat)

I'll take everything away. And none of it will be unjustified.

BRIAN

You've got some nerve! You really think any court will side with someone who talks to their husband that way.

Joanie shakes her head sadly.

JOANIE

Yeah, I really do.

BRIAN

This isn't *fair*. What gives you the right-

Joanie turns around and starts to walk away. Brian starts to move like he'll actually get off the couch, but then he just sits back down.

BRIAN

(angrily)

You know I never signed up to raise a retarded kid!

The word "retarded" stops Joanie in her tracks.

BRIAN

Other guys would have left, but I stuck around!

Joanie turns back to face him.

JOANIE

But if you left who would've taken care of you?

(beat)

I'm done, Brian.

She turns and just keeps walking.

CUT TO:

76 EXT. JOANIE'S DRIVEWAY-AFTERNOON

76

Joanie walks down her outside stairs with a slight spring in her step just as Mark and Jason are getting back from their walk.

JOANIE

Good walk?

MARK

Walk might be a strong word for one of us. Everything okay?

JOANIE

Yeah, everything's okay. You wanna go in and get a bag ready?

MARK

Okay.

(beat)

I'm really proud of you, Mom.

Joanie looks like she might cry.

JOANIE

Thanks, Markie.

He runs upstairs into the house, and Joanie goes over to Jason.

JOANIE

I really hope I'm making the right decision, buddy. I can't remember the last time I was away from you for more than an hour.

Jason looks up at her and puts an arm up to try to bring her in for a hug.

They hug and then Jason gently puts his head on her forehead, very different from the headbutt that gave her her splint.

CUT TO:

77 EXT. CHRISTINE'S APARTMENT-LATER

77

Joanie's SUV pulls into a parking lot outside Christine's apartment complex. Christine is already outside waiting for them in the parking lot.

CHRISTINE

Welcome to my humble abode. Well, actually I don't own the whole thing. If I did, I'd probably dress a little snappier.

She snaps her fingers to accentuate the point.

CHRISTINE

Oh this is going to be so exciting it's like a slumber party! And I've even Jason-proofed the whole place.

CUT TO:

78 INT. CHRISTINE'S APARTMENT

78

Christine opens the door on to her apartment. It is small, and sparsely decorated except for PICTURES OF JASON AND MARK everywhere, and the obligatory NEW ENGLAND FAKE SHIP'S WHEEL in the corner. All the furniture is covered in more of those plastic covers old people put on couches.

CHRISTINE

Maestro, do your worst.

Jason comes barreling into the apartment and immediately turns a corner toward the bathroom.

JOANIE

Where'd he go?

CHRISTINE

Straight for the tub.

JOANIE

Of course.

CHRISTINE

That boy treats clothes like I treat spiders.

(pantomiming brushing off spiders)

Ah get 'em off me!

Joanie and Mark get a chance to fully enter and put down

their suitcases. Joanie goes into the bathroom to check on Jason.

CHRISTINE

(to Mark)

Come here and give me a hug, my little druggie. Sleeping over your auntie's, what more could a high school boy want?

Mark goes to give Christine a hug.

MARK

Everyone at school is going to be so jealous.

CHRISTINE

Oh, I know. If only there were more of me to go around. You're sleeping on the couch, go make yourself comfortable.

Mark goes and sits on the couch causing a little plastic crinkle. Christine goes to check on Joanie and Jason.

Jason is sitting in the tub with Joanie sitting on the toilet seat, putting shampoo in his hair.

JOANIE

He really knows how to make himself at home, huh?

CHRISTINE

It's good!

(beat)

I'm glad you guys are here.

JOANIE

Me too.

Christine suddenly remembers something.

CHRISTINE

Ooh, I'm gonna head out in a bit because I promised the girls at work margaritas, but I wanted to show you something.

She runs out of the room but keeps talking as she does.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

I found this while I was going through everything I thought might break and hiding it from Jase. I couldn't believe I still had it.

She comes back and shows Joanie a framed photograph of them as kids. Young Joanie is riding a bicycle and Young Christine is holding her steady on it.

JOANIE

Oh my god! I can't believe you still have this.

CHRISTINE

Look at how thin we were!

JOANIE

We were kids!

CHRISTINE

Still.

JOANIE

I loved that bike.

CHRISTINE

Yeah.

(beat)

Sorry for taking the brakes off to make it go faster.

JOANIE

(nostalgic)

I broke three ribs.

She looks up from the photo and focuses on Christine.

JOANIE

But I was pretty darn fast.

CHRISTINE

I love ya, Joanie.

JOANIE

I love you too, Chris.

Their tender moment is interrupted by Jason, who feels like they have gone too long without focusing on him. He splashes a big wave of bathwater at both of them.

They turn to him and can't help but laugh.

JOANIE  
Feeling left out, buddy?

CHRISTINE  
If only *anyone* gave you attention.

Joanie tussles his hair, and Christine splashes him back.

Mark comes into the bathroom.

MARK  
Everything okay in here?

CHRISTINE  
Oh come in and give your brother a bath! It's a party!

Mark joins his aunt and mom and high fives his brother. With Mark in there as well, Christine's bathroom is cramped, but everyone seems happy.

Close on Joanie's face echoing the first shot of the film except now she's smiling. Things aren't perfect but for now, they're okay.

FADE TO BLACK

"Come On Up to the House" by Tom Waits plays over the closing credits.

THE END.