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ME & MEAN MARGARET

“Pilot”

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ACT ONE

SCENE A

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - UPPER EAST SIDE - AFTERNOON
(BEN, CHARLES)

BENJAMIN PAYNE [27, WHITE, UPBEAT, CHARMING], IN A SUIT AND TIE, WALKS WITH HIS BEST FRIEND, **CHARLES CAMP** [28, BLACK, QUIRKY, CEREBRAL]. CHARLES CARRIES A VIOLIN CASE.

BEN

Autumn in New York. Is there anything better? (TO PASSING STRANGER) Good morning, friend!

STRANGER

Shove it up your ass, pansy!

BEN

Love this town. (BREATHES IN) You smell that, Charles? You know what that is?

CHARLES

(SNIFFS) Urine.

BEN

(SNIFFS) Yes. Urine, but also--

CHARLES

(SNIFFS) Some kind of meat. Maybe lamb?

BEN

Right, but I'm talking about--

CHARLES

And anxiety. I'm definitely smelling anxiety. And just a hint of racism.

BEN

Potential, Charles. It's the smell of potential, and I am feeling it today.

CHARLES

You're very excited about this meeting. Who is this guy?

BEN

Tom DuVay. Hedge fund zillionaire. He's our firm's biggest client, next to that Saudi Prince. But no one knows we're representing him. We don't represent him. There is no prince.

CHARLES

So you're going to be this guy's lawyer?

BEN

Sort of. He just became guardian of his elderly mother, and my boss, Eli, wants me to advise her. He picked me for it, over all the other associates, so you know what that means.

CHARLES

Low man on the totem pole.

BEN

Promotion. He's grooming me, Charles. This is why I've been working my butt off, so I can make partner.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Then Adina and I can get married, and with a two lawyer income -- we get a killer apartment. See-through Sub-Zero fridge, heated floors. A boba machine.

CHARLES

Yeah, I've seen your dream board. Didn't know about the boba, though. Nice add.

THEY STOP OUTSIDE A LUXURY RESIDENTIAL TOWER.

BEN

Alright. This is me.

CHARLES

You're meeting him here? The Geiger Building?

CHARLES WHIPS OUT HIS PHONE, STARTS SEARCHING A SITE.

BEN

Yeah, the penthouse. (THEN) Okay. Don't wait up. I'm taking Adina to Del Posto tonight. She's been working a lot of late nights, too. It's created this distance between us, which I'm hoping to bridge with two hundred dollar spaghetti. And sex.

BUT CHARLES ISN'T LISTENING. HE'S FOCUSED ON THE BUILDING.

CHARLES

Let me run up with you. I've got to pee.

BEN

(LAUGHS AT HIS "JOKE") Okay.

CHARLES

I'm serious. I'm giving a lesson eight blocks away. I can't hold it.

BEN

No way! Besides, you don't need to pee. You just want to check the place out. It's your real estate obsession.

CHARLES

No, I need to pee... (OFF PHONE) "In this city's finest example of post-war art nouveau revival."

BEN

You're obsessed. I've got to run.
(SNIFFS) Yeah... that ain't lamb.

BEN EXITS INTO THE BUILDING.

CHARLES

I'm not obsessed. I just appreciate a well-appointed apartment. (OFF PHONE)
"With over fifty-two hundred square feet of living space and wrap-around terrace." Oo! And a bidet.

CHARLES MOVES TOWARD THE ENTRANCE, SNAPPING PHOTOS, AS WE:

CUT TO:

SCENE B

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER
(BEN, CHARLES, TOM DUVAY, LETTY)

BEN WAITS IN THE EXQUISITELY DECORATED PENTHOUSE. **OLUWALETI (LETTY)**, 26, THE NIGERIAN HOUSEKEEPER, STEPS UP.

LETTY

Mr. DuVay will be with you shortly.

BEN

Thank you.

SHE EXITS. BEN SPOTS A BOWL OF MUSEUM TCHOTCHKES. CURIOUS, HE PICKS ONE UP, BUT DROPS IT WHEN HE HEARS SOMEONE COMING. HE QUICKLY GATHERS THE PIECES AND RE-ASSEMBLES IT CLUMSILY AS **TOM DUVAY ENTERS**. GOOD-LOOKING, CONFIDENT, WITH ALL THE EASE AND CHARM OF A 40-YEAR OLD WITH TOO MUCH MONEY.

TOM

Benjamin Payne. Tom DuVay.

BEN GOES TO SHAKE HANDS, ABSENTLY OFFERING THE TCHOTCHKE.

BEN

I hope you don't already have one.

TOM

You shouldn't have. (LAUGHS, THEN) So, Ben, what has Eli told you?

BEN

Not much. Just that your mother's had some legal issues, and she's under your care now. Is she well?

TOM

"Is she well?" My mother is... How do I describe her...? She's awful.

BEN

I hear ya. My mother is, too. She's constantly calling me. "How do I get the cloud on my internet?"

TOM

Yeah. My mother's a *little* different. Like, when Anna Wintour didn't invite her to the Met Gala, Mother ran her over with her limo. Or when Kathy Hilton ignored her at Le Bernadin, she kidnapped her manicurist and kept her in our steam room for four days. My favorite, though, was last month. Mother found out Avana DuVay was getting married.

BEN

Avana DuVay? Your...?

TOM

Step-mother. Ex-step-mother. Avana was the reason my father left my mother. So when she found out Avana was engaged, she lured Avana's Pomeranian out of her apartment and shipped it to a chicken processing plant in China.

BEN ISN'T SURE HOW BEST TO RESPOND.

BEN

So, it sounds like your mother needs--

TOM

Prison. But instead, the judge placed her in conservatorship, which means--

BEN

You're now her legal guardian.

TOM

For the next 90 days. But I don't want to be her guardian. I want you to be her guardian.

BEN

I don't understand.

TOM

Look, I love my mother... ish. I just can't be around her. She scares me, Ben. In a very real, bone chilling sort of way. She tried to poison me. It's true. Shaving cream shouldn't burn like that. She's evil, Ben. Pure, unbridled evil! (THEN, BRIGHTLY) But you're going to love her! She used to be a famous actress. Margaret Manley?

BEN

Margaret Manley... I thought she was--

TOM

Dead? No. (HATE) She's still alive.

TOM LEADS BEN TO A CLOSED DOOR AND KNOCKS.

TOM (CONT'D)

Go ahead. She's expecting you.

BEN

You're not coming in?

TOM

I've got to be on Rihanna's boat in six hours.

BEN

So... wait. I'm starting now? It's five o'clock on Friday. I have plans.

TOM

If she pulls another stunt, she will go to prison. I can't have that. You've got a bright future, Ben. Don't throw it away for dinner and a movie.

BEN

We were probably going to have sex...

TOM

You'll be fine. Just don't ever let her out of your sight. Oh, and never feed her after midnight.

TOM PATS HIS SHOULDER AND EXITS. THE ELEVATOR OPENS AND CHARLES STEPS OUT. HE TAKES IN THE SURROUNDINGS, IMPRESSED.

CHARLES

Sweet.

HE TAKES A CARAMEL FROM A BOWL NEARBY, POPS IT IN, AND WANDERS OFF SNAPPING PHOTOS AS WE:

CUT TO:

SCENE C

INT. MARGARET'S LIVING SUITE

(BEN, MARGARET)

WHERE TOM'S DECOR IS MODERN, MARGARET'S IS MORE PARIS FLEA MARKET AND VINTAGE DECO. **MARGARET MANLEY**, IN A HOUSECOAT, IS AT A MIRROR FIXING HER HAIR AS BEN ENTERS, WARILY.

BEN

Ms. Manley? Benjamin Payne, from your son's law firm.

SHE GIVES HIM A DISMISSIVE ONCE-OVER, RETURNS TO PRIMPING.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's an honor to meet you, ma'am. I've heard such... things about you.

HE NOTICES A SHELF OF AWARDS, INCLUDING THREE OSCARS.

BEN (CONT'D)

Whoa! Now that's a trophy case. May I?

HE PUTS DOWN HIS CELL PHONE AND PICKS UP AN AWARD.

BEN (CONT'D)

Heavy. (READS PLATE) "A Woman of Means." Didn't see it. I'm not much of a movie guy. My girlfriend, though, Adina? She loves movies. We just saw something on cable... Frozen. Not the Disney cartoon, the one where they all die on a chair lift. It was okay.

MARGARET

May I have your shoes?

HE REMOVES HIS SHOES.

BEN

You're a no shoe house. I get it.
People track in all kinds of stuff
from the street. Meat, urine. Racism.
(THEN) So, I realize this must be
difficult for you, having to give up
control of your life. That's why I'm
here, to help. But don't think of me
as your guardian. Think of me as your
guide. A legal guide, to help keep
manicurists out of your steam room and
you out of the state pen. (LAUGHS)

MARGARET

Would you bring them to me?

BEN DOES. MARGARET OPENS THE DOORS TO THE TERRACE.

BEN

And I'll just add, I have no problem
being around older people.

SHE GESTURES FOR HIM TO STEP OUT, WHICH HE DOES.

BEN (CONT'D)

My Grandma Jo, who turns 85 in June --
I'm always helping her. Getting out of
the tub, making her toast, taking her
to doctors' appointments. So whatever
you need, I am at your service.

MARGARET THROWS BEN'S SHOES OVER THE TERRACE.

BEN (CONT'D)

My shoes!! Why'd you do that?!

MARGARET DRAMATICALLY WHIPS OFF HER HOUSECOAT TO REVEAL SHE IS WEARING A DARK, ELEGANT EVENING GOWN. LIKE MALEFICENT.

MARGARET

I'm going to say this once, so listen well. You are only here because Judge Henry J. Okata, an Oriental, believes I need a guardian, a notion my son is all too eager to accept seeing how he lacks the sack to deal with me directly. You mail one tiny dog to a foreign country and suddenly you're a national threat? The dog was returned, you know. True, he was mechanically separated and formed into patties, but that does not mean I need a "guide". I'm quite capable of getting out of a bath, I can butter my own toast, and the only doctor I frequent is Dr. Phillip de Vant, professor of Russian literature at Columbia, a man whose tongue is so vigorous, so enthusiastic, it renders me inert two times a month and every Easter Sunday.

MARGARET PICKS UP AN ORNATE LETTER OPENER ON HER DESK.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

So I suggest you take your big boy suit,
hop on your scooter, and run. For if I
catch so much as a glimpse of your sun-
starved white skin, I will take this
letter opener given to me by Francois
Truffaut, carve the organs out of your
flaccid, baby body, and mail them to
your Grandma Jo for her 85th birthday in
June. Now hold tight. It gets windy.

SHE SHUTS THE FRENCH DOORS ON HIM AND TURNS THE LOCK. WITH
BEN TRAPPED ON THE TERRACE, SHE EXITS, AS WE:

RESET TO:

SCENE D

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM

(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, CHARLES, LETTY)

CHARLES, STILL SUCKING HIS CAMEL, ADMIRES A PAINTING.

CHARLES

Is that...? Kandinsky! Incredible.

HE GETS UP CLOSE TO IT, WHEN HE HEARS A WOMAN'S VOICE SINGING. IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL, HE STOPS SUCKING HIS CANDY TO LISTEN. SUDDENLY, HE STARTS TO CHOKE. HE COUGHS, SENDING THE CAMEL SPLATTERING AGAINST THE CANVAS. *SHIT!* HE TRIES TO REMOVE IT, BUT SMEARS THE PAINTING. THAT'S WHEN HE SEES THAT THE OWNER OF THE VOICE, LETTY, HAS ENTERED. BUSTED!

MARGARET ENTERS. LETTY QUICKLY EXITS. CHARLES FREEZES.

MARGARET

(CALLING) Coco! I'd like to leave now.

MARGARET'S DRIVER, **HELMUT**, A MUSCULAR GERMANIC MAN, ENTERS WITH HER COAT AS BEN RUNS OUT, IN SOCKS, AND OUT OF BREATH.

BEN

Okay. Not a great first meeting, but hey -- every client's different. Some like hard copies of their documents, others like to lock their lawyers on a freezing balcony 52 stories above the earth. (NOTICING) You going somewhere?

COCO, [26, ASIAN] ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN CARRYING A LARGE BOX. SHE'S COVERED IN SIGNS OF A MESSY BAKING PROJECT.

COCO

Try to keep it upright.

SHE HANDS THE BOX TO HELMUT. MARGARET PEEKS IN.

MARGARET

Did you prepare it as we discussed?

COCO

Yes. Now it's 5:30, I'm done. I just want to go to my room and watch Deadliest Catch. I'm three episodes behind and crab season just started.

MARGARET

Funny, I can't imagine there's anything about catching crabs you don't already know.

THEY START FOR THE ELEVATOR. BEN RUSHES TO BLOCK THEIR PATH.

BEN

Stop!

MARGARET

Perhaps I wasn't clear.

BEN

No, I got the whole carving-me-with-a-letter-opener thing. But your son told me to keep an eye on you. So if you're going somewhere, I need to go, too.

MARGARET

Very well. You'll need shoes, though.

(POINTING) There's a pair.

BEN TURNS AWAY TO SEE WHAT SHE'S POINTING AT. AS HE DOES, MARGARET CLOSES THE ELEVATOR DOORS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Enjoy your night. I know I will.

AS THE DOORS CLOSE, SHE GIVES A SLIGHT VICTORIOUS SMILE.

BEN

She is not a nice lady!

COCO

Lady? At this point, she's just a bag of bitterness held together with spite.

COCO TURNS AND HEADS UP THE STAIRS. BEN GRABS HER ARM.

BEN

Wait. You have to help me.

COCO

I don't even know you.

BEN

Sorry. I'm Ben. Ms. Manley's new... handler, I guess. I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to do.

COCO

Whatever it is, you're crushing it.

SHE STARTS UP AND AGAIN, BEN STOPS HER.

BEN

Wait! I'm not like this. I'm usually very responsible and organized.

CHARLES STEPS FORWARD.

CHARLES

It's true. He's very capable.

BEN

What're you doing here?!

CHARLES

I have no answer that will make you feel good. (TO COCO) Hi. Charles.

BEN

He's not with me. I mean, we live together, but he's not here with me.

CHARLES

We're here separately.

BEN

No. We're not. I had a meeting, you broke in. (OFF HER LOOK) He didn't break in. He just likes real estate.

CHARLES

Question: Mr. DuVay's art collection. Would you say he's very familiar with what he's got, somewhat familiar, or not at all familiar? Asking for a friend.

COCO

Whatever your guys' jam, have at it. I've got to go watch crusty bastards catch shellfish.

SHE STARTS UP. BEN STOPS HER AGAIN.

BEN

Wait! "Coco," right? Look, my job's on the line here. Just tell me where she's going. That's all I ask.

COCO

(SOFTENING) The Carlyle Hotel.

BEN

Thank you! (THEN) Come with me.

COCO

I'm around that rose-scented dragon
all day. You want my self-esteem to go
lower?

BEN

But you know her. You're her cook.
Please, I can't do this alone. Besides
-- The Carlyle? On a Friday night in
The Big Apple?

COCO

You have an optimism and wholesomeness
you don't find in a lot of people.
It's really effin' creepy. (THEN)
Fine. I could use a drink anyway.

BEN FISTS PUMPS, YES! HE AND COCO STEP INTO THE ELEVATOR.

BEN

(TO CHARLES) Shoes! Gimme your shoes!

CHARLES QUICKLY THROWS THEM IN AS THE DOORS CLOSE. HE
EXHALES, CONTENT WITH THE WORLD. THEN HE SEES THE PAINTING.

CHARLES

Oh, right.

AND HE'S SUDDENLY BACK TO BEING WORRIED.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE E

INT. THE CARLYLE HOTEL - BAR
(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, PAUL)

BEN AND COCO ENTER, LOOKING AROUND. BEN'S DISTRACTED.

COCO

She usually sits by the door. It's got the best view. And she can trip people on their way in. (THEN) You okay?

BEN

I can't find my cellphone. And I need to call my girlfriend, Adina, and cancel dinner. She will not be happy.

COCO

She a big eater? Big-boned girl? Baked potato with lots of cheese?

BEN

No. I had to cancel before because of work and it didn't go well. Now it's 'cause I have to babysit some demented old diva.

COCO

(NOTICING) And thar she blows.

ANGLE ON: MARGARET ENJOYING A COCKTAIL AT A TABLE. A WOMAN PASSES. MARGARET STICKS OUT HER FOOT. THE WOMAN FALLS O.S.

MARGARET

Oh, suck it up. The world loves a victim.

SHE SIPS HER DRINK, DELIGHTED, AS BEN AND COCO APPROACH.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Good work, Nancy Drew! Law school has trained you well. And Coco, out in the world! And I love the ensemble. Did you have to chase the meth addict far to get it?

BEN

What are you doing here, Margaret?

MARGARET

Having a cocktail. Sit, join me.

(CALLS) Waitress. (TO BEN) Sit.

THEY SIT DOWN, BUT BEN'S NOT IN THE MOOD.

BEN

You know, you're under a legal conservatorship. So unless you want to be trading cigarettes with Crazy Eyes, as your legal advisor, I have to be with you at all times.

MARGARET

My! Someone went through puberty on the cab ride over. Tell me, are you growing hair in strange places?

COCO

Ease up, okay? He's having relationship trouble.

MARGARET

Ah! Well, now you're speaking my language. I've had nothing but relationship trouble, and I can tell there is but one remedy -- liquor.

THE WAITRESS STEPS UP.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Yes, I will take another one of these. The gentleman in skateboard shoes will have an Old Fashioned. And for the lady, a bucket of gin and a hairbrush.

THE WAITRESS EXITS. BEN TAKES IN THE ROOM.

BEN

This is nice. I've never been here.

MARGARET

The Carlyle is the epitome of New York. Every first meeting I ever had with a director, I had right here in this room.

COCO

And every second meeting she had, she had in the bathroom stall just outside this very room.

MARGARET

Oh, Coco. With that wit and personality, you almost have a wit and personality.

COCO

You're old.

BEN

You must be one helluva cook if she lets you talk to her like that.

MARGARET

Coco's not my cook. She's my granddaughter.

BEN

Your granddaughter?! So, wait--

COCO

My mom's Chinese. Dad has an Asian fetish. The more exotic the better. His last girlfriend had that surgery to look like a cat. She was a mess, and she ruined all the furniture.

BEN

So Tom Duvay is your dad, she's your grandmother, and you all live together, one big happy family?

COCO

Trust me, we're not really a family.

MARGARET

And none of us is happy.

THE WAITRESS RETURNS. SHE SETS DOWN A GIANT MUG OF VODKA IN FRONT OF COCO... AND A HAIRBRUSH. MARGARET SMILES, AMUSED, AS COCO ROLLS HER EYES AND DRINKS.

CUT TO:

SCENE H

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM
(CHARLES, LETTY, ALFREDO)

CHARLES IS EXAMINING THE RUINED PAINTING WHEN LETTY ENTERS.
THEY SEE EACH OTHER. LETTY RUNS.

CHARLES

Wait! I just want to talk!

HE CHASES. THEY PLAY CAT AND MOUTH THROUGH THE ROOMS UNTIL:

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(WINDED) Please. I play the violin. I
don't have the quad strength.

LETTY

I don't want to get fired.

CHARLES

You won't. You can't. It was my fault.

LETTY

But I am responsible for the house, so
it is my fault.

CHARLES WALKS OVER TO THE PAINTING, LETTY FOLLOWS.

CHARLES

Well, let's look at it. I mean, it's
not a huge spot. Maybe if we changed
the lighting, or just removed it and
spread the other ones out. I'm sure
there's some way to fix it.

THAT'S WHEN **ALFREDO**, THE RESIDENT HANDYMAN, ENTERS,
CARRYING A SMALL CAN OF PAINT. HE GOES TO WORK TOUCHING UP
A SCUFFED BASEBOARD. CHARLES LOOKS TO LETTY, AND SMILES.

CUT TO:

SCENE J

INT. THE CARLYLE HOTEL - BAR
(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, PAUL)

HAVING DRINKS. MARGARET HANDS BEN HIS CELLPHONE.

MARGARET

You left this in my room, by the way.

BEN

Yes! Thank you! I was freaking out.

(OFF PHONE) Oh, no...

COCO

Your girlfriend?

BEN

(READS) "You have no right to treat me
like this. We need to re-think
things." Because I haven't called?!

PAUL, A HOTEL EMPLOYEE (AND MARGARET SYCOPHANT), STEPS UP.

MARGARET

Paul. Tell me. How did it go?

PAUL

Ms. DuVay loved the cake. Loved it.

MARGARET

Good. And she won't know it's from me?

PAUL

I said it was a gift from the hotel,
our way of thanking her for having the
wedding here.

MARGARET

Aren't you a clever little gay?

BEN

Wait. Avana DuVay? The woman whose dog you stole? You gave her a cake?

PAUL

This woman. She calls me last week and says, "Paul, I'd like to provide the cake for Avana DuVay's wedding, my way of forgiving her for stealing my first husband, Jeffrey, and destroying my marriage. And to apologize for mailing her little dog to China." And she does it anonymously. "Hello, karma? I'd like to be cleared." "Okay!"

BEN

And she did it to apologize...?

BEFORE BEN CAN DIG IN, MARGARET STANDS TO GO.

MARGARET

We can go now. Paul, thank you again.

PAUL

My pleasure, Ms. Manley. I am forever your humble servant.

HE BOWS, TAKES HER HAND, AND STARTS KISSING IT.

MARGARET

(PULLING AWAY) Stop touching me!

SHE MAKES A QUICK EXIT. CONFUSED, BEN AND COCO FOLLOW. PAUL LEANS INTO THE CHAIR AND INHALES MARGARET'S LINGERING SCENT. HEAVEN.

CUT TO:

SCENE K

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME
(CHARLES, LETTY, ALFREDO)

CHARLES AND LETTY WATCH ALFREDO FINISH THE PAINTING.

CHARLES

Not bad, Alfredo.

ALFREDO

I still don't like the mountain tops.
Maybe we try a Swiss Coffee, or Ralph
Lauren Picket Fence flat interior.

HE REACHES FOR A PAINT CAN. CHARLES AND LETTY STOP HIM.

LETTY / CHARLES

No! It's fine. / It's done, it's done.

CHARLES

Except, it's a little crooked.

CHARLES GOES DOWN THE STAIRS TO GET A GOOD VIEW. ALFREDO
MOVES THE FRAME AS HE DIRECTS.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Tilt the bottom right corner up.
There. It's still off. I think the
angle of the stairs is throwing me...

HE BACKS UP... MORE... UNTIL HE'S AT THE TALL SCULPTURE.

LETTY

Charles--!

TOO LATE. HE BACKS INTO THE SCULPTURE, SENDING IT CRASHING
DOWN, THE PIECES SCATTERING ACROSS THE FLOOR. A BEAT.

CHARLES

How are you with a glue gun?

CUT TO:

SCENE 1

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER
(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, HELMUT)

RIDING HOME. BEN IS STILL PROCESSING WHAT HAPPENED.

BEN

So, you have Coco make a cake for the woman who stole your first husband, and you give it to her, anonymously, on her wedding day. And you do it why? To forgive her? (THEN) I don't know...

MARGARET

What don't you know? Whether I'm capable of feeling remorse? Of making amends? Of being human?

AS HE SAYS THIS, COCO IS DYING INSIDE, DEEPLY CONFLICTED.

BEN

It's just, an hour ago I was thinking, "You are the nastiest, most spiteful, devious, vile creature I've ever met."

MARGARET

That's sweet of you to say.

BEN

But you proved me wrong. Guess people can change, and for the better.

COCO

(BURSTING) I put peyote in the cake! I didn't want to, but she made me! A lot of it! A lot of peyote!

BEN

Peyote?

MARGARET

From a vision quest I did in '74 with Brando and Gloria Vanderbilt. A very strange weekend, though Gloria did come up with the idea for the jeans.

BEN

I'm going to lose my job. 'Cause of you. (THEN) I've got to get that cake!

WHILE THE LIMO IS STOPPED, BEN OPENS THE DOOR AND RUNS.

MARGARET

Do not! You get back here!

COCO MAKES A DECISION, TOO. SHE OPENS THE DOOR TO GET OUT.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

COCO

I'm tired of being dragged into your nasty little games. It's not right! It's not me. You don't control me!

MARGARET

Leave your jacket. You know how your moustache sweats when you over-exert.

COCO DUTIFULLY DOES AS HER GRANDMOTHER COMMANDS AND REMOVES HER JACKET. THEN SHE RUNS OUT.

FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

SCENE M

INT. THE CARLYLE HOTEL - OUTSIDE FUNCTION ROOM
(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, AVANA)

WE'RE IN THE PUBLIC AREA OUTSIDE THE FUNCTION ROOM. A SIGN ON AN EASEL READS: "AVANA DUVAY & JAMES NORMAND." BEN AND COCO RUN IN AND PEEK INSIDE. WE HEAR A STRING QUARTET.

BEN

(SOTTO) They're doing the vows.

(NOTICING) And there's the cake!

COCO

They've got it turned around! Why would the rosettes go in the back?! We need to get it facing the right way.

BEN

Right, 'cause when you're freaking out because your hands have turned into giant squids, what you most want is an aesthetically pleasing cake.

COCO

(SMALL) I would.

BEN

What are you even doing here? You knew what you were putting in that cake.

COCO

I know! I can't explain it. I think I've been around her so long her bitterness and cruelty have rubbed off on me. And not in a good way.

BEN

So move out.

COCO

And go where? I'm not like you, okay?
I don't have my life all figured out.
I don't have a ten-year plan I'm
moving through. (CHECKS "BOXES") Job.
Career. Marriage. Dentist.

BEN

You don't have a dentist?

COCO

(NO) Yes. (THEN) But I'm done being
part of her nastiness. It's not me.
I'm a really nice person.

A COUPLE APPROACHES, LATE TO THE WEDDING.

COCO (CONT'D)

This is a private conversation, a-
holes!

THEY RUN, SPOOKED. SHE CALLS AFTER, CONTRITELY:

COCO (CONT'D)

Are you a friend of the bride or...?

BEN

Look, I'm sure you're nice, Coco. But
right now, I have to get that cake out
of that room, then find some way to
save my relationship or there will be
no boba in my future!

BEN TURNS TO PEEK THROUGH THE DOORS WHEN MARGARET RUSHES IN AND BRINGS HIM DOWN WITH THE WHACK OF AN UMBRELLA.

COCO

Grandma!

MARGARET

This is none of your business!

BEN

I'm your legal advisor, so it is my business. No one is eating that cake!

MARGARET

Over my dead body.

BEN

Let's hope.

HE GETS UP AND CHARGES. SHE BLOCKS. THEY BOB AND WEAVE... BUT MARGARET'S FAST. SHE GRABS HIS HAND AND TWISTS.

BEN (CONT'D)

(IN AGONY) Why are you this strong?

MARGARET TWISTS BEN'S HAND HARDER. IT'S EXCRUCIATING.

BEN (CONT'D)

(TO COCO) Do something!

COCO DARTS AROUND LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO USE AGAINST MARGARET. A LAMP -- PLUGGED IN. A PICTURE ON THE WALL -- BOLTED. FINALLY, SHE SPOTS A VASE. SHE REMOVES THE FLOWERS, BUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE WATER? NOWHERE TO SPILL IT OUT, SHE STARTS TO DRINK IT. BAD IDEA. INSTANTLY, SHE SPITS IT OUT.

COCO

Gross.

BEN

Let. Me. Go!

HE STOMPS MARGARET'S FOOT. SHE YELPS, STUMBLING BACK.

MARGARET

(AGONY) I just had bunion surgery!

BEN

Oh my God. Margaret, I'm so sorry--

HE GOES TO COMFORT HER -- BUT MARGARET SURPRISE ATTACKS,
PUTTING HIM ON THE FLOOR.

MARGARET

Ha! There are no bunions on me!

SUDDENLY, THE DOORS OPEN AND **AVANA DUVAY STEPS OUT**. 50,
STATUESQUE, DRESSED IN A CLASSIC WHITE DRESS. A FEW OTHERS
POKE THEIR HEADS OUT TO SEE.

AVANA

What is going on?! Margaret Manley...?

MARGARET

Hello, Avana.

AVANA

(TO OTHERS) It's okay, I've got this.

THEY GO BACK IN.

AVANA (CONT'D)

What are you doing here? I'm getting
married. (LOOKING AROUND) We should do
it in here. Everything's in bloom!

BEN AND COCO EXCHANGE A WORRIED LOOK.

BEN

Avana? Did you, by any chance, have
some of the wedding cake?

AVANA

I snuck a taste. The frosting was like
blue infinity. (THEN) Wood sprites!

SHE SKIPS OFF CHASING WHATEVER SHE THINKS SHE SEES.

COCO

I'm on it.

COCO GOES AFTER HER. BEN WHEELS ON MARGARET.

BEN

You happy? Is this what you wanted?

MARGARET

I was hoping we would've gotten a look
at her hysterectomy scar. (DELIGHTED)
It was botched, you know.

BEN

So you dose her wedding cake, you ruin
her wedding, all for something that
happened... what, *thirty* years ago?

MARGARET

Her actions cannot go unpunished!

HER INTENSITY CATCHES BEN.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Jeffrey and I... We had a marriage
only poets could describe. It was
perfect. Then *she* came along, with her
twenty-four year old boobs and her
bubble ass, and ruined it all.

IN B.G., AVANA LICKS THE WALLPAPER. COCO GENTLY REDIRECTS
HER AWAY... THEN PAUSES, CONSIDERS THE WALL, AND GIVES IT A
LICK HERSELF. NOTHING.

BEN

So a younger, prettier girl came along. That can't be what broke up your marriage. I'm sure there were other problems.

SHE SLAPS HIM.

MARGARET

I never said she was prettier.

BEN

(STINGING) How insensitive of me.

MARGARET

You don't know, you're a child. And I'm finished talking about this!

SHE TURNS FROM HIM, HE FOLLOWS, NOT LETTING HER OFF.

BEN

I may be young, Margaret, but at least I have the emotional maturity to know you can't go around poisoning everyone who pisses you off. It's delusional.

MARGARET

It's honest! I speak my truth.

BEN

Yeah, that's why you're in a legal conservatorship.

MARGARET

Petty acts of gutless fools. I say: No apologies, no regrets. Can you say the same?

BEN

No! Because I care about what effect my actions will have in the world.

MARGARET

No, you care about how well others will like you. So you suck up and kowtow, and that makes you weak. It's the reason your girlfriend dumped you.

BEN

Okay. You want some truth? I'll give you some truth. You ready? (WEAKENING)
You sure? Maybe now's not the best--

IN THE B.G., COCO, STILL WITH A TRIPPING AVANA, SHOUTS:

COCO

Say it! Please God someone nail her once and for all! (THEN) Continue.

BEN

Okay. You're not angry at Avana. Or Kathy Hilton, or any of those other people. You're angry at you. At your life. I looked you up, Margaret Beatrix Manley. Four failed marriages. The last guy stole everything you had.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Children you don't talk to, grand-children I'm guessing you don't know. (INDICATING) That's Coco, by the way. She's pretty awesome if you bothered to notice. Your last film role was 15 years ago. You burned every bridge you had there. Are you seeing a common denominator here?

MARGARET

I'm hardly to blame for all of that.

BEN

No, but you're doing something to attract it. My God, your son had to hire an attorney to babysit you because no one else wants anything to do with you!

MARGARET HANGS HER HEAD, FEELING THE STING OF HIS WORDS.

MARGARET

Well. That certainly is honest.

NOW BEN FEELS BAD. HE TRIES A SOFTER APPROACH.

BEN

Look, I don't know a lot about relationships. I only just started using emojis. But I do know that when you start out, you have all these expectations about what your life is going to look like together.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Then when it doesn't happen, it sucks.
But you can't control what the other
person's going to do. And you can't
blame anyone but yourself. We make our
lives what they are. No one else.

AVANA CROSSES THROUGH, THIS TIME ON ALL FOURS, STARING AT
THE PATTERN ON THE RUG. COCO FOLLOWS BEHIND.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'm going in there, and I'm going to
get that cake. You okay with that?

AVANA

It's like a tiny paisley universe...

MARGARET NODS TO BEN, CONSENTING. AVANA RUNS OFF.

COCO

For the record, this is way better
than watching crab fishermen. I'm
still going to watch it, though. There
is a storm coming.

COCO RUNS AFTER HER. BEN STARTS INTO THE FUNCTION ROOM.

MARGARET

Benjamin...?

HE TURNS. IS SHE ACTUALLY GOING TO THANK HIM?

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I'll have Helmut bring the car around.

BEN NODS. THAT'S THE BEST SHE CAN DO. AS HE SLIPS IN, WE:

CUT TO:

SCENE PINT. LIMO - LATER

(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, HELMUT)

A QUIET, TENSE RIDE. COCO HOLDS THE CAKE ON HER LAP.

BEN

I'm not weak, you know. I speak my truth when I need to, I just don't always feel the need to. (BEAT) That, by the way, is why I wanted to take Adina out tonight -- to tell her how I feel. To talk about our future. But she's the one freezing me out. She won't speak her truth. I simply passively allow it to happen, so... (THEN) Oh, God. I'm weak. I'm so weak!

COCO

So stop cryin' and do something about it.

BEN

Like what? She's at a party. I don't even know where it is --

COCO

(RE: PHONE) 7306 3rd Avenue, Bay Ridge. It's called Facebook. (THEN) Whatcha gonna do, counselor?

BEN

Driver, take us to Bay Ridge! (THEN) Please, if it's not too much trouble.

CUT TO:

SCENE RINT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

(CHARLES, LETTY, ALFREDO)

LETTY HANDS A SCULPTURE PIECE TO CHARLES, WHO HANDS IT TO ALFREDO, AT THE TOP OF A LADDER. HE PLACES IT ON TOP OF THE RE-ASSEMBLED SCULPTURE EVER-SO-GINGERLY... CAREFUL... THERE! LETTY AND CHARLES EXHALE. THEN, ALFREDO TAKES OUT A POWER DRILL AND SCREWS IT IN PLACE ROUGHLY. AS THEY GET ALFREDO ANOTHER PIECE, LETTY HUMS.

CHARLES

Ah, the song that launched a thousand
caramels. Who is that?

LETTY

Tim McGraw.

CHARLES

Country! I never would've taken you
for a high-bootin', hay-kickin', cow-
tippin' kind of girl.

LETTY

I love it. It's so American, that idea
of "Go for it," and "Stand tall."
"Make love to my pick-up."

CHARLES

Not sure about that last one, but you
definitely have a beautiful voice. You
should do something with it.

LETTY

No. Music is just something to fill
the space. I am a housekeeper, and
that is fine.

CHARLES NODS, BUT TAKES OUT HIS VIOLIN, AND START TO PLAY. IT'S A DIFFERENT TIM MCGRAW TUNE, "IT'S YOUR LOVE." LETTY RECOGNIZES IT, SMILES, SHAKES HER HEAD. HE'S FUNNY.

LETTY (CONT'D)

(SINGING) *Dancin' in the dark/Middle
of the night/Takin' your heart/And
holdin' it tight/Emotional touch/
Touchin' my skin/And askin' you to
do/What you've been doin' all over
again/Oh, it's a beautiful thing/Don't
think I can keep it all in/I just
gotta let you know/What it is that
won't let me go...*

ALFREDO JUMPS IN, SLOWLY DESCENDING THE LADDER.

ALFREDO

*It's your love. It just does something
to me. It sends a shock right through
me. I can't get enough.*

LETTY

*And if you wonder/about the spell I'm
under/it's your love...*

THE THREE CONTINUE, ENJOYING THEIR SURPRISING NEW FRIENDSHIP, AS WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE S

EXT. ROOFTOP POP-UP PARTY - LATER
(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, ADINA, ELI)

WE'RE ON THE ROOF OF A DIVE-Y CHINESE RESTAURANT SOMEWHERE IN BROOKLYN, WHICH HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HIPSTER PARTY: CHINESE LANTERNS, CHINESE POP MUSIC, ETC. BEN, COCO, AND MARGARET ENTER AND TAKE IN THE CROWD.

MARGARET

Good God. Is there some ordinance that forbids anyone living off the island of Manhattan from showering?

BEN SPOTS ADINA, 27, TALKING WITH A FRIEND.

BEN

There she is. That's Adina. She's so beautiful, isn't she?

BOTH COCO AND MARGARET MAKE A FACE: MEH.

BEN (CONT'D)

Okay. How do I look?

COCO

Good. But stop doing that twitchy thing with your mouth.

BEN

It's only when I get nervous.

COCO

Well, it makes you look like you escaped from a lab. Be confident. Have some balls. This is the girl you love. Go get her. No apologies, no regrets.

BEN

Right! (THEN) You can be really tough
when you want. Must be a family thing.

EMBOLDENED, BEN TAKES A BREATH AND CROSSES OFF, LEAVING
MARGARET AND COCO TO CONSIDER THAT LAST THOUGHT.

MARGARET

I'm going to the bar. Can I get you
something? (OFF HER SILENCE) No? You'd
rather stand there and despise me? Fine.

MARGARET CROSSES OFF, BUMPING INTO A BEARDED HIPSTER.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Out of my way, you urban hillbilly!

ANGLE ON: BEN

AS HE APPROACHES ADINA, CHATTING WITH FRIENDS.

BEN

Adina.

ADINA

Ben?! What're you doing here?

BEN

I couldn't let things end. Not like
that, with some angry, random text. I
love you. I want us to have a future
together. You're the center of my
dream board. Well, Tom Brady's in the
center. But you're right there.

ADINA

It's a little late for that, after
that text you sent.

BEN

What text? I didn't send you a text.

SHE HOLDS UP HER PHONE FOR HIM TO READ:

BEN (CONT'D)

"Thinking of you... tied to a subway track. I'm done with you. This is Ben." I didn't write that! I didn't even have my cell. It left it at--
(REALIZES, THEN) Be right back.

ANGLE ON: COCO

AS MARGARET RETURNS WITH A LARGE SOLO CUP.

MARGARET

All they had was cheap, Chinese beer.
Though I suppose with "Chinese",
"cheap" is just gilding the lily.

COCO

Here, I'll get rid of it for you.

SURPRISED, MARGARET HANDS THE CUP TO COCO, WHO DOWNS IT.

COCO (CONT'D)

Oof, you're right. That is cheap.

MARGARET

And you would know, you're Chinese.

MARGARET GIVES COCO'S HAND A SQUEEZE, COCO SMILES. THE FROST BETWEEN THEM JUST STARTING TO THAW.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Or is it Korean? Is there even a difference?

BEN MARCHES UP, PISSED OFF.

BEN

Did you text Adina from my phone
telling her I wanted to break up?

MARGARET

Is that what the whole junior high
school is saying?

BEN

You know, I'm thinking you do these
things not 'cause you're sad about your
crappy life. I think you're just mean.

MARGARET

She was no good for you. It had to end.

ADINA APPROACHES.

ADINA

Ben--

BEN

You don't even know her!

MARGARET

I made a career from understanding the
nuances of character. She is shallow
and self-interested, and you are far
too decent a person for that.

ADINA

She's right, Ben. You're too nice for
me.

BEN

What do you mean? I'm not nice. Look.

HE KNOCKS OVER A STACK OF CUPS ON A TABLE. A BEAT, THEN HE PICKS THEM UP, FEELING BAD.

ADINA

It doesn't matter. Things have changed.

BEN

Like what? What's changed?

AT THAT, **ELI** (40'S, GOOD LOOKING, WHATEVER) STEPS UP AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND ADINA.

ELI

Hello, Ben.

BEN

Eli? Oh, come on. Really? You're banging the boss?

ELI

Take it easy, champ.

ADINA

We've been attracted to each other for a long time. And he has that see-through refrigerator you like.

MARGARET

(TO BEN) You see? Shallow.

COCO

It's a really nice fridge.

BEN

Well, this worked out real nice for you, didn't it? You got to screw me over and keep your "integrity".

ADINA

Grow up, Ben. We're lawyers.

BEN

But you're also people. And that is not how people behave.

ELI

It is how they behave. Otherwise, why would they need lawyers?

BEN

Have fun together. You both suck.

ELI

And buddy? You're fired.

MARGARET STEPS FORWARD, HAN SOLO STYLE.

MARGARET

He most definitely is not.

ELI

Ms. Manley--

MARGARET

My son is your firm's most important client, I am his mother, and your name is not on the letterhead. Ben stays.

BEN

Yes!

MARGARET

He will also receive a ten percent raise effective immediately.

BEN

(TO ELI) In your FACE!

MARGARET

Furthermore, for the next ninety days,
I will be his sole client. He will
report to me, every day, and carry out
whatever task I so desire.

BEN

Okay, hang on. Lots of ideas here--

MARGARET

Do I make myself clear?

ELI

(WITH A SMILE) Crystal.

MARGARET

Good. Benjamin, I'll leave you to rub
your victory in their mundane faces.

SHE EXITS. BEN TURNS TO A SMUG ELI AND ADINA.

ELI

Congrats. This is the kind of gig that
puts you on a fast track to partner.

MARGARET (O.S.)

Oh, my! What a gorgeous cake!

BEN

Can I get you each a slice?

OFF ELI AND ADINA, NODDING, INTERESTED, WE:

CUT TO:

SCENE T

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

(BEN, MARGARET, COCO, CHARLES)

BEN ENTERS OFF THE ELEVATOR, READY FOR A NEW DAY, AS CHARLES CROSSES FROM THE KITCHEN CARRYING SNACKS.

BEN

Charles?

CHARLES

Hey. Have you seen Letty?

BEN

I don't know who that is.

CHARLES

Oluwaleti. I'm helping her work on some music. Did you know she sang in the state choir back in Nigeria?

BEN

That's amazing. (THEN) Who is this?

COCO ENTERS FROM MARGARET'S QUARTERS, CARRYING A TEA TRAY.

COCO

Guys, my Grandma and I just made a huge breakthrough. She warned me there was Ajax in the Earl Grey before I drank it. (RE: HEART) Family.

SHE STARTS TO CROSS TO THE KITCHEN. BEN STOPS HER.

BEN

Hey, Charles and I are meeting up with some of his chamber orchestra friends tonight.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

They're all socially inept, but there will be drinks. If you're interested. I know there's a duck hunting marathon on tv, so...

COCO

I'd love to.

BEN

Cool.

HAPPY, COCO EXITS. MARGARET ENTERS FROM HER ROOM, SEES BEN.

MARGARET

I spoke with my son. I told him I'll allow you to serve as my conservator for the duration of the term.

BEN

It's funny how you thought this was your decision.

MARGARET

That is funny. But so we're clear: this arrangement exists only because the court orders it. When the ninety days are up, I expect you to be far, far away. If not, on the ninety-first day, I will poison you.

BEN

Lady, if I'm still here after ninety days, I'll drink that poison.

CHARLES APPROACHES WITH A PIECE OF PAPER AND A PEN.

CHARLES

Excuse me, Ms. Manley. My brother and his boyfriend are huge fans. Could I ask for an autograph? His name's Ezra.

HER EYES STILL FIXED ON BEN, SHE TAKES THE PEN AND PAPER.

MARGARET

You understand what I'm saying, though?

BEN

I get the gist. Do you understand what I'm saying?

MARGARET

Not one word.

THEY SHARE A SMILE. ADVERSARIES? FRIENDS? WHO KNOWS? SHE GIVES CHARLES BACK THE SIGNED PAPER.

CHARLES

Thank you! (NOTICING) Oh. I'm sorry, I think "faggot" has two g's.

MARGARET MAKES THE CORRECTION THEN EXITS INTO HER QUARTERS.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I'm going to hit the sauna. Let me know when Letty's on break, will you?

CHARLES EXITS.

BEN

I don't know who that is.

BEN EXHALES, THEN NOTICES THE (REPAIRED) PAINTING. WEIRD. THEN, THE (RE-ASSEMBLED) SCULPTURE. WEIRDER. HE EXITS. AS HE DOES, THE SCULPTURE SLOWLY STARTS TO FALL AND WE...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW