

THE SECOND ACT

Written by

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Sun spills over clutter. Sticky notes flutter from the fridge: "TURN OFF STOVE." "TAKE YOUR PILLS." "AUDREY'S LUNCH."

HENRY CHEN (80s, gruff but warm) squints at a battered recipe card, whistling. He fumbles an egg. It slips.

SPLAT. Yolk pools on the linoleum.

AUDREY KEANE (13, wiry, watchful) is already there with a towel, sweeping it up before he can bend for it. She's done this before.

AUDREY

I got it, Gung Gung. Scrambled or fried?

HENRY

Surprise me, Chef Audrey. Long as it's got pepper.

She cracks another egg. Confidence in the way she whisks.

At the table, Henry lines up his pills in a row. Audrey slides him a glass of water, then counts the row with one finger. Reaches the end. Goes back and counts it again.

A worn Bible sits tucked by the breadbox, spine cracked white.

Henry catches her looking. Smiles.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(softly)

Funny. Used to be you needed both my hands to reach the counter. Now you're running the show.

AUDREY

You're still the boss. I just do the heavy lifting.

The eggs sizzle. Dust drifts through the light. Henry glances out the window at the old swing, rope frayed.

HENRY

You counted those pills twice.

AUDREY

You count them twice.

HENRY

I count them twice because I
forget. You count them twice
because you're waiting for one to
be missing.

Audrey doesn't answer that.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Anybody can count what's gone, kid.
Takes a grown-up to count what's
still on the table.

(beat)

And you do it out loud, or you'll
cheat.

AUDREY

(dry)

That's not a real rule. You made
that up just now.

HENRY

I made it up about forty years ago
and it has held.

The eggs sizzle. He lets it sit.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Your dad used to say, when life
gets too big, you hand the hard
parts over. You just talk to God.
Even when you're mad.

Audrey's stirring slows.

AUDREY

I did that.

HENRY

And?

AUDREY

(flat)

Dad's still dead.

A long beat. Henry doesn't flinch, doesn't correct her. He
sets his weathered hand over hers, a tremor in it, but
steady.

HENRY

Then tell Him that. He can take it.

Audrey says nothing. But she doesn't pull her hand away
either.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 (lightening)
 Alright, Chef. Let's eat before my
 brain forgets what breakfast is.

Audrey almost laughs. For a moment the world is right in this little kitchen.

2

INT. RICKY'S OFFICE - DAY

2

Floor-to-ceiling glass, blazing with Los Angeles light. RICKY DELGADO (50s, suit razor-sharp, eyes colder) reclines behind an immaculate desk.

DANIEL KEANE (late 40s, film-geek nerves behind a thrift-store blazer) sits with his materials clutched white-knuckled. Beside him, VAL RHODES (30s, restless wit, ambition crackling), one foot going like a metronome.

RICKY
 "Paper Sons." Floor me. Give me the
 pitch again.

Daniel swallows, searching.

DANIEL
 Kowloon Walled City. The rain glows
 neon. Tight alleys. Kai. Red Knife.
 He's a legend, vanished into myth.
 Until his brother, a straight-arrow
 cop, gets gunned down. That's when
 Kai crawls back out. Not for triad
 politics. This is blood and grief.
 He's hunting the men who made him a
 monster, and losing pieces of
 himself every time he pulls the
 trigger.

Ricky raises an eyebrow. Unsmiling.

RICKY
 So it's revenge. Why should anyone
 care about another gangster?

Val jumps in.

VAL
 Because it isn't bullets and body
 counts. It's Hong Kong noir through
 a cracked lens. Every kill pushes
 Kai closer to erasing himself. He's
 not chasing justice.
 (MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

He's chasing redemption, and he knows he might never get it.

RICKY

Redemption's cheap. Triads are old news. What's the heartbeat? Why this story, now?

Daniel's hands tremble, but he leans forward. Raw.

DANIEL

Because we all inherit things we never asked for. Family. Shame. The world puts a name on you and dares you to scrape it off. Kai's fighting to be more than what somebody else wrote on him.

(beat)

Isn't that what any of us want? To matter.

A slow burn as Ricky studies them. Then a flicker. Maybe approval.

RICKY

Alright. You want my money? Here's the deal. Half the budget, real, in the bank. And a Hong Kong name people line up for. Give me that, I finish the raise. You get theatrical in China and the States. Otherwise it's words in a folder.

He slides his card across the desk. It glints like an invitation and a threat.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Clock's ticking. Kids.

Dismissed. Daniel and Val stand. Unsteady, burning.

VAL

Time to wake some legends.

CUT TO:

3

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - AFTERNOON

3

Retro chrome. Pies under glass. Sun beating on cracked red vinyl. Val and Daniel hunched in a corner booth, laptops and notebooks scattered like battle plans.

Val picks at her fries, eyes sharp.

VAL

So walk me through it again. How do two broke idiots convince Asia's biggest action star to do our movie?

DANIEL

We don't. We convince Kelvin Li's ego. Remind him who he was before the world knew his name.

VAL

And you know him. Not DM-him-on-Instagram know him.

Daniel's gaze drifts out the window. A freight train blares somewhere.

DANIEL

Fifteen years ago. My brother and I, Seth, we did Hong Kong on a shoestring. Kelvin was a stunt kid trying to make rent. Same hostel. We snuck into a karaoke bar we had no business being in.

(beat)

That trip is where "Paper Sons" started. The alleys, the neon, all of it. Seth lived it. I just wrote it down.

Val softens. Curiosity threaded with caution.

VAL

Seth. That's Audrey's dad. Your niece.

Daniel nods. The mug trembles in his grip.

DANIEL

Seth's ex was May. She left right after Audrey was born. Couldn't do it. Just gone. She's in Hong Kong now, runs a gallery for the ultra-rich. Audrey stayed with Seth. When he died she went to her grandfather.

(beat)

Kid's been passed around like an heirloom.

A silence. Val absorbs it. Not backstory. A wound.

VAL
It's not just a movie for you.

DANIEL
Because if I can get it made, then
all of it meant something. Seth,
the twenty years, all of it.
(beat)
And if I can't, it was just a guy
who died and a guy who didn't
finish anything.

Val pushes her laptop aside. Conspiratorial now.

VAL
Okay. We go to Hong Kong. We find
Kelvin. If he bites, his company
comes with him. Money, clout,
everything Ricky wants.

She slides him a napkin, draws a map on it. Messy, bold.

VAL (CONT'D)
Then let's make him a star in
Hollywood.

She checks her watch, already halfway out of the booth.

VAL (CONT'D)
I gotta go. Marcus has been holding
dinner an hour and he does this
thing where he doesn't say he's
mad.

Daniel laughs, the first easy sound he's made all day.

DANIEL
Fifteen years and he still hasn't
figured out you're never coming
home on time.

VAL
He knew what he signed up for. So
did you.

They clink mugs. Outside, the city pulses. The plan is real
now.

A cramped one-bedroom pretending to be more. Movie posters
over peeling paint. Camera gear stacked in the hallway.

KELLY (late 30s, razor-sharp, still in work clothes) pours two glasses of wine. Daniel slumps on the couch, laptop bag tossed aside.

KELLY
How'd it go with Ricky?

DANIEL
He wants half the budget up front.
And a name.
(beat)
But he's interested. He's actually
interested, Kel.

She hands him a glass, slides in beside him. Searching his face. Hopeful. Wary.

KELLY
That's huge.

DANIEL
Yeah. Just Kelvin Li and half a
budget. Piece of cake.

Kelly laughs, kisses his cheek.

KELLY
Maybe this is it. Maybe we finally
get out of here.

She looks around the apartment. Smile wistful.

DANIEL
Real kitchen. Maybe a balcony.

KELLY
To escaping the shoebox.

They toast. For a beat, it's perfect. Then...

KELLY (CONT'D)
Your niece's grandfather called the
house phone. Twice.

Daniel stiffens, gaze dropping to his glass.

DANIEL
They're fine. Henry's slowing down,
but Audrey's tough. She's always
been tough.

KELLY
He sounded a little off.
(beat)
(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

But I'm glad you're focused. We need this. You deserve it, after all these years.

She laces her fingers through his. Gentle. Firm.

The phone BUZZES on the table. "HENRY" lights the screen.

Daniel looks at it. Turns it face-down.

He lifts his glass and toasts again, his hand shaking, just a little.

5

EXT. HENRY'S BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

5

Sun slants gold over a tangle of wildflowers. Henry kneels by a patch of tomatoes, hands in the dirt. Audrey, knees muddled, wrestles a stubborn weed.

HENRY

Give it a twist, not a yank. Roots run deep, like secrets.

She twists. The weed comes loose. She grins, triumphant.

AUDREY

Got it. You think Dad ever pulled weeds?

HENRY

Your dad? I don't know. But your mom was the best weed-puller in four counties. Never too proud to get her hands dirty.

AUDREY

(hard)

Yeah, well. She left.

HENRY

She was stubborn. Like you. And she was in a lot of pain.

(beat)

She left me too, kid. All of us.

He pulls something from his shirt pocket. A battered silver compass, dulled with age.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Your mom gave me this. She was about your age.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Her mother had just died and I was not doing so good, and she handed me this and said it would help me find my way.

(beat)

Truth is she needed me and I was only thinking about myself. Grown-ups do that.

He presses it into Audrey's hand.

AUDREY

It doesn't even work right. It just points at one thing.

HENRY

That's the whole job. Everything else moves. That doesn't.

He closes her fingers around it.

HENRY (CONT'D)

North isn't where you're going, Audrey. It's how you find out you've drifted.

She turns it over. The back is worn nearly smooth from somebody's thumb.

AUDREY

Sometimes it feels like the stories are all I have left of him.

HENRY

Stories keep people alive. Every time I tell one, I see them. Clear as day.

(beat)

You close your eyes and listen close, you'll see him too.

She looks up, hope flickering.

HENRY (CONT'D)

And if anything ever happens to me, you'll be okay. You're tough like your dad. And you've got my compass.

Audrey shakes her head, blinking hard.

AUDREY

Nothing's happening to you.

HENRY

I'm not planning on it. But life's stubborn. Like those weeds.

(beat)

Sometimes it yanks when you least expect it.

He squeezes her shoulder. A breeze rolls through the wildflowers. Her small hand closes tight around the compass.

6 INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - MIDDAY

6

Sunlight over cluttered counters. The radio hums oldies, half static. Henry shuffles, buttering toast. Audrey at the table, hunched over a library book.

He stirs instant coffee. His hand SHAKES. Dark liquid slops over the rim.

HENRY

Damn it. Clumsy old man.

Audrey glances up, grabs a towel, dabs his sleeve.

AUDREY

It's just coffee, Gung Gung.

(beat)

I'm going outside.

Henry smiles. She bolts.

7 EXT. HENRY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

7

Audrey bounces a half-deflated soccer ball through the wildflowers, her own play-by-play under her breath. Henry watches through the kitchen window.

She kicks it too hard. It ricochets off the fence, rolls toward the house.

8 EXT. KITCHEN WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

8

Audrey stoops for the ball. As she straightens, her gaze flicks up to the window.

HER POV: through the glass, Henry at the counter. His hands fumble a mug. He lifts it. Then his whole right side sags. The mug slips. Shatters.

He crumples out of frame.

Audrey doesn't see it. She's already turning away, dusting off the ball, launching into commentary against an imaginary team.

9 INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 9

Silence. The radio fizzles in and out. Henry sprawled across the linoleum. Spilled coffee spidering toward the fridge.

10 EXT. BACKYARD - LATER 10

Audrey drops into the grass, breathless, legs akimbo. She spins the compass in her palm and watches the clouds.

A breeze gusts. She sits up. Squints at the house. The kitchen window stares back, blank.

She frowns. Stands. Pads toward the back door.

11 EXT. BACK DOOR - MOMENTS LATER 11

She pushes it open.

AUDREY

Gung Gung? You wanna see my goal?

She rounds the corner. Stops cold.

HER POV: Henry, motionless. Face waxy. Eyes barely open. The mug shattered by his outstretched hand.

The room is suddenly, enormously quiet.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

...Gung Gung?

CUT TO BLACK.

12 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY 12

Sterile light. Antiseptic. Daniel bursts in, phone crushed to his ear.

DANIEL

(into phone)

Yeah, I just got here. No. I don't know anything yet.

He spots Audrey slumped in a vinyl chair. Eyes red. Compass clenched in her fist.

Guilt flickers across his face.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Call you back.

He pockets it, approaches. Sits two seats away.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Hey. Hey, kiddo.

Audrey looks up. Says nothing. The silence thickens.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
They, uh. They called me. You okay?
(beat)
Dumb question. Sorry.

A DOCTOR (50s, calm, grave) appears, clipboard hugged tight.
Daniel scrambles up.

DOCTOR
Mr. Keane? What's your relation to
Mr. Chen?

DANIEL
He's my brother's father-in-law. My
niece's grandfather.
(beat)
We're family.

DOCTOR
He's stable. But he's had a stroke,
and it was severe. He'll need
ongoing care.

Daniel's head drops. He glances at Audrey. Knuckles white on
the compass.

DANIEL
How long will he be here?

DOCTOR
A few days, then a specialty rehab
facility. Recovery will be
difficult. For now it's day by day.

The doctor moves off. Daniel's hands shake.

A SOCIAL WORKER, MADELINE (30s, brisk, kind underneath),
steps up with a folder.

MADELINE
Mr. Keane. Can we speak privately?

He follows her half a step.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Audrey came in with her grandfather. We need to know she has somewhere to go tonight. Mr. Chen is her legal guardian, is that right?

DANIEL

(voice thin)

Her mother gave up custody when she was a baby. After my brother died she went to live with Henry.

(beat)

She can come home with me. My wife and I can take her in the interim.

MADELINE

Good. If you weren't available we'd be calling CPS tonight and arranging emergency foster placement.

She presses the folder into his hands.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Take this. Mr. Chen is still her guardian, but given his age and his condition, you should think seriously about filing for guardianship yourself. There's a number for the court in there.

(beat)

You have a little time. Not a lot.

Daniel stares at the folder. Trapped.

DANIEL

Thank you.

She goes. He looks over. Audrey, small and silent, holding her whole world in one fist.

He is completely, utterly unprepared.

Machines hum in the fluorescent gloom. Henry lies motionless, tubes snaking from his arms, chest rising shallow.

Daniel stands in the doorway, swallowed by it. The years drop off his face. Just a boy again.

He crosses like a man on thin ice. Takes Henry's hand, paper-thin, cool.

DANIEL

Hey, Henry. I always figured you'd outlive all of us.

(beat)

You gotta pull through. Audrey needs you.

(beat)

And I need you, which is the part I'd never say to your face.

He hesitates. Bows his head. Almost sheepish.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

God. It's been a while.

(beat)

If you're listening, just help him. Help us. Please.

The monitors keep their jagged song. Nothing else answers.

A SOFT CREAK. Daniel glances back. Audrey in the doorway, compass dangling, eyes wide.

AUDREY

Is he gonna be okay?

Daniel swallows the lump and musters a smile so bright it almost fools him.

DANIEL

Absolutely, kiddo. He's sleeping is all. Gung Gung's tough as nails.

Audrey nods. Steps in. Takes his free hand.

They stand together, a fragile chain, as the machines pulse and the world outside recedes.

City lights flicker in puddles from a recent rain. Inside, silence thick as concrete.

Audrey, puffy-eyed, stares out the window, tracing the rim of the compass. Daniel grips the wheel, searching for a foothold.

DANIEL

So, uh. You want music? Or... are you hungry? I've got leftover Thai, I think.

Nothing. Her gaze stays on the passing neon.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Your Gung Gung used to say, when the boat gets to the bridge, it straightens itself out.

The words flail and die.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

(awkwardly)

Probably sounds cooler in Cantonese.

(beat)

We could stop for ice cream. Or not. Whatever.

A whisper, brittle:

AUDREY

When can I go back to Gung Gung's?

Her eyes never leave the window.

Daniel stares at the road. Jaw tight. A pause, too long.

DANIEL

He needs the hospital for a while, Audrey. I'm sorry.

AUDREY

But after. When he gets better.

Daniel's lips part. Nothing comes.

Audrey curls tighter, compass tucked to her chest. Every mile heavier.

15

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

15

Script pages across the coffee table. Camera gear blocking the hall. Kelly leans against the counter with a wine glass, watching Daniel wrestle a sofa bed open between tripod legs.

DANIEL

So. You get the couch. It folds out. Not glamorous, but it's soft.

(beat)

(MORE)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Sorry about the mess. We're not
really used to guests.

Audrey stands in the doorway, backpack hugged tight, eyes
skimming the chaos.

KELLY

Hey, Audrey. Remember me? Aunt
Kelly. It's been a bit.

AUDREY

Yeah. I remember.

Silence. Awkward. Heavy.

KELLY

Well. It's good you're here.
Really.

AUDREY

(monotone)
You sure?

DANIEL

(hurried)
Bathroom's down the hall. Kitchen's
open. Cereal, Pop-Tarts, whatever.

Audrey slips past, shoulders brushing a tower of DVDs. Kelly
studies her wine, avoiding everything else.

16

INT. DANIEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

16

Daniel hunched at his laptop, script pages scattered like
casualties. Through the thin wall, a stifled sob, tiny and
aching.

He closes his eyes. Pinches the bridge of his nose.

A knock. Kelly in the doorway, arms folded, exhaustion carved
deep.

KELLY

You're really just going to sit
there.

DANIEL

She doesn't know me. She doesn't
know either of us. She's scared out
of her mind.

KELLY

So are you. That's not a reason to leave her alone out there.

Daniel manages a ragged laugh.

DANIEL

What do I even say? I can't fix this.

KELLY

She doesn't need you to fix it, Daniel. She needs you to show up.

A heavy silence. Kelly perches on the edge of the bed.

KELLY (CONT'D)

How long is she staying?

DANIEL

I don't know. A week? Two. Until Henry can take care of her again.

KELLY

And if he can't?

Daniel struggles. Kelly watches him.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You're about to get everything you've worked for. How do we do this and keep our lives from going off a cliff?

DANIEL

I don't know. I wish I did.

Kelly's voice softens. A plea under the anxiety.

KELLY

Her mother's alive. Is that an option?

DANIEL

May's a continent away. She left after Audrey was born. Never sent a birthday card. Henry's the only parent this kid remembers.

KELLY

But she is her mother. Maybe that's what she needs, instead of two panicking adults and a pullout sofa. Maybe May's changed.

DANIEL
Or maybe she hasn't.

Kelly leans forward. Gentle. Insistent.

KELLY
You have that meeting in Hong Kong.
Take Audrey. Find May. At least
try.
(beat)
Because whatever we're doing right
now isn't enough.

Daniel glances away. Shame burning.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You get to choose who you want to
be. Her uncle, her parent, her
safety net.
(beat)
But you have to choose what's right
for her, not what's easiest for
you.

A long silence. Then, quieter:

DANIEL
I prayed at the hospital today.

Kelly looks at him. Not unkind. Just honest.

KELLY
Did it help?

DANIEL
I don't know.

Kelly is quiet for a moment.

KELLY
I stopped, you know. Not on
purpose. It just got thin and then
it got quiet and then I noticed it
had been a year.

DANIEL
Kel.

KELLY
Eleven years I've been asking for
one thing, Daniel. One.
(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

And I keep getting told to wait,
and I have waited, and I am so
tired of waiting that I can't hear
myself do it anymore.

She wipes her eyes with the back of her wrist, annoyed at herself.

KELLY (CONT'D)

So don't ask me to be encouraged
that you prayed once at a hospital.
(beat)

Ask me tomorrow. Ask me with her at
the table and we'll do it out loud
like grown-ups, and maybe I'll find
my way back into it.

Daniel looks at her.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Because that's what she had. Every
night at that house, somebody said
something over her food.

(beat)

And she's out on our couch right
now and nobody's said a word over
her since the ambulance.

She stands. Pauses at the door.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I'm not asking you to fix that
either. I'm telling you she can
hear us through this wall, so pick
something to say.

She goes. Daniel sits with it.

Then he rises, unsteady, and lets himself move toward the
sound instead of away from it.

17

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

17

The microwave shrieks. Burnt toast in the air.

Daniel, wild-haired, juggles eggs with a phone wedged at his
shoulder. A pan CRASHES. He bites back a curse.

Audrey at the table in a wrinkled hoodie, earbuds in, locked
on cartoons. Crumbs form a little barricade around her plate.

Kelly stalks through in a blazer and one heel, hunting keys.

KELLY
(to herself)
Keys. Come on, keys...

She spots Audrey. Forces her voice gentler.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Morning. Did you sleep alright?

No response. Juice slurps. Cartoons blare.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Any plans today? We could get
donuts after my meeting. If you
want.

Audrey pulls an earbud. Flat.

AUDREY
I'm not five. I don't need a donut
to survive.

KELLY
Right. I just thought, maybe
something special.

AUDREY
Special would be going back to Gung
Gung's. Is that possible, or am I
asking too much?

Daniel goes still over the pan.

KELLY
Audrey, I get it. I do. This isn't
easy for any of us. But we're
trying.

AUDREY
I don't want you to try. I want
Gung Gung. Not a sleepover in a
closet.

She gestures at the mess. At Kelly. At everything.

Kelly's jaw tightens. She kneels, searching for something to
offer.

KELLY
We're family, Audrey. Like it or
not.

AUDREY
(small, blunt)
You're not my family.

Kelly reels. Hurt flares, then masks over. She stands, turns to Daniel, brittle.

KELLY
Did you call? About what we discussed?

DANIEL
(eyes on the pan)
I'll handle it today.

Kelly grabs her bag and goes. The door clicks shut, too gently, like she expects to be overheard.

Audrey jams her earbuds in harder. Curls tight.

Daniel flips the eggs. A yolk bursts, runs yellow across the pan.

He stands alone with the sizzle and the weight of what he can't fix.

18 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

18

Machines. Afternoon light through half-closed blinds. Daniel sits with a paper cup of coffee gone cold hours ago.

On the bed, Henry's hand MOVES. Just fingers.

Daniel is up so fast the coffee goes over.

DANIEL
Henry? Henry, hey...

Henry's eyes open. Not all the way. They track slowly across the ceiling and land on Daniel, and there is somebody home in there.

HENRY
(barely, slurred)
...Danny.

DANIEL
Yeah. Yeah, it's me.

Daniel jams the call button with his thumb, three times, four.

HENRY

Where.

DANIEL

Hospital. You had a stroke. You're okay.

Henry's brow moves. Working at something.

HENRY

Audrey.

DANIEL

She's fine. She's with us. She's at the apartment, she's safe, she's fine.

Henry's eyes close. Daniel grips his hand harder.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

No. Hey. Hey, stay with me a second. Henry.

The eyes come back. Just barely.

MADELINE appears in the doorway with a NURSE, already reading the room. She's got a slim folder under her arm and she does not waste the window.

MADELINE

Mr. Chen, my name is Madeline, I'm with the hospital. Can you hear me?

Henry's head moves. A fraction.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Audrey needs somebody who can sign for school and for a doctor. That's Daniel right now. I have a form that says you know that and you agree.

(beat)

It doesn't take anything away from you. You're still her grandfather.

She sets the folder on the tray table. Uncaps a pen. Puts it in Henry's right hand, the good one, barely.

Henry's hand shakes so hard the pen skates.

Daniel steadies his wrist. Just steadies it. Doesn't move it.

Henry signs. It's a scrawl. It's nothing like his handwriting.

Madeline takes the folder and steps back, and something in her face says she's done this a hundred times and it hasn't gotten easier.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Thank you, Mr. Chen.

She turns to Daniel and lowers her voice, and now she's talking to the adult in the room.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

That's a caregiver's authorization.
Twelve months, or until a court
says otherwise, whichever comes
first.

(beat)

It gets her into a school and it
gets her seen by a doctor. That's
the whole list.

DANIEL

And if somebody wants to argue
about it?

MADELINE

Then it's a piece of paper, Mr.
Keane. It does not make you her
guardian and it will not hold up
against anybody who decides to
fight you for her.

She clips her pen to the folder.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Which is why I gave you the number
for the court.

Henry's eyes are already going. But he pulls at Daniel's sleeve. Gets him closer.

HENRY

(a whisper, mangled)

Don't... make her small.

DANIEL

What? Henry...

HENRY

Everybody makes her small. So she's
easy.

His grip fails. The eyes close.

The nurse moves in. Daniel steps back out of the way, holding nothing.

He stands there in a room full of people working, saying the only thing he's got.

DANIEL
(under his breath)
Okay. Okay.

19

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - AUDREY'S ROOM - DAY

19

The house holds its breath. Dust in the light. A cereal bowl still on the counter down the hall.

Daniel moves through a kid's room like a trespasser. Soccer trophies. A drawing of three stick figures and a house. He folds shirts badly into a duffel.

He opens the nightstand drawer for socks and stops.

Inside: a rubber-banded stack. Audrey's passport, expired library card, immunization records. All of it squared and labeled in careful block letters.

Underneath, a manila folder. He opens it.

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES. PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF SUCCESSOR GUARDIAN. Henry's handwriting, filled halfway down page one, then stopping mid-sentence.

Clipped to it, a yellow legal pad. One line, pressed hard enough to dent the page:

"IF I CANT... WHO?"

Daniel sits down slowly on the edge of a child's bed.

He looks at the passport in his hand a long moment. Then puts it in his jacket pocket.

And he does not put the folder back in the drawer.

20

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - 2 AM

20

Blue dark. The TV off. The sofa bed pulled out, blankets thrown back, empty.

Audrey sits on the floor with her back against it, knees up, wide awake.

A shape in the hall: Kelly, in a robe, holding a glass of water. She stops when she sees her.

Neither of them says anything for a while.

KELLY

Do you want me to go back to bed?

A beat.

AUDREY

I don't care.

Kelly comes in. Sits on the floor too, a careful six feet away, back against the opposite wall. The glass of water between her knees.

Long silence. City noise through the window.

KELLY

I used to do this. Sit on the floor at two in the morning. When I was about your age.

AUDREY

Why?

KELLY

The bed was where you had to pretend to be asleep. The floor was where you didn't.

Audrey looks over at her for the first time.

AUDREY

Was your house bad?

Kelly considers lying. Doesn't.

KELLY

Yeah.

AUDREY

Mine wasn't. Mine was good.

Her voice doesn't break. That's what makes it hard to listen to.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

That's the part nobody gets. Everybody keeps being sorry for me like something bad happened at my house.

(beat)

(MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Nothing bad happened at my house.
It just stopped.

Kelly closes her eyes for a second.

KELLY

That's worse.

AUDREY

(surprised)

Yeah.

Silence. Kelly doesn't move closer, doesn't reach out, doesn't offer anything.

KELLY

I'm not going to tell you it gets better. I don't know if it does.

(beat)

I can tell you the floor's usually free.

Audrey almost smiles. Almost.

They sit there. Two people awake in the dark, not fixing anything.

After a long time Audrey lies down where she is, on the rug, and pulls a corner of the blanket off the sofa bed over herself.

Kelly stays until she's asleep. Then quietly, awkwardly, she takes a cushion and puts it under the kid's head.

And goes back to bed.

21

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

21

Daniel hunched over the laptop, face lit pale blue. An empty ramen cup. Henry's folder open beside him, untouched.

ON SCREEN: a search bar. His fingers hover. He types: MAY CHEN HONG KONG.

He scrolls, breath shallow.

LinkedIn: MAY CHEN, Executive Director. Hair razor-sharp, smile sculpted for success.

Instagram: May radiant at gallery openings. Gold light. Vivid canvases. Arms linked with strangers in designer clothes.

Worlds away from this kitchen.

He clicks a video. May onstage, unveiling a mural, the crowd erupting. Her bow is effortless.

Daniel sits back, raked.

DANIEL
(soft, doubting)
She's not surviving. She's flying.
(beat)
Real schools. Real family.
Everything I can't give her.

He closes his eyes. Guilt and relief at war.

Then he opens a new message. Types with shaking hands.

ON SCREEN: "May, it's Daniel. We need to talk. About Audrey."

His finger hovers over SEND. Everything hanging in that heartbeat.

From the hallway, the faint sound of Audrey breathing, steady and childlike.

Daniel squares his jaw, forcing himself toward the easier thing, because the right thing feels impossible.

CLICK.

He stares at the cursor. Silence closing in.

Then a CHIME. Faster than it should be.

ON SCREEN, a reply: "I'm in Hong Kong until the 30th. Bring her. I want to see her. May"

Daniel reads it twice. Something in his shoulders comes loose. It looks like relief and it isn't.

22

INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY

22

A roll-up door rattles open on fifteen years: pelican cases, light stands, a jib arm, boxes labeled in Sharpie by production and year.

Daniel and Val stand looking at it.

VAL
How much do you need?

DANIEL
Two flights and a hotel. Three if
Audrey comes.

VAL
And you have?

DANIEL
Eleven hundred dollars and a credit
card that thinks it's funny.

Val exhales. Steps into the unit. Runs a hand along a case.

VAL
The Angénieux.

DANIEL
That's four grand on a good day.

VAL
It's four grand today. I know a guy
in Burbank who's been circling it
for two years.

Daniel doesn't move.

VAL (CONT'D)
Danny.

DANIEL
Seth and I bought that lens with
money from a wedding video. Two
weddings.

VAL
I know.

A long beat. Daniel picks the case up. It's heavier than he
remembers.

DANIEL
If Kelvin says no, I've sold a lens
to fly to Hong Kong and back for
nothing.

VAL
If Kelvin says yes, you'll buy it
back.

He looks at her.

VAL (CONT'D)
(quieter)
And if he says no, you'll have
flown a kid nine thousand miles to
meet her mother.
(MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

Which is either the best thing you
ever did or the worst, and I
honestly can't tell yet.

Daniel carries the case out into the sun.

Behind him, Val pulls the roll-up door down over everything
else.

23

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

23

Machines hum, casting green and gold over Henry, gaunt in
white. Streetlamp light stripes the bed.

Daniel sits hunched, turning the compass in his hands. He
barely whispers.

DANIEL

Hey, Henry. It's me.

(beat)

Audrey's hanging in there. She
won't let go of your compass. Says
it keeps the monsters out. I almost
think she's right.

Henry doesn't stir. The monitor ticks, relentless.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I found your folder. At the house.

(beat)

You started it and you stopped.
I've been trying to figure out why,
and I think it's because you got to
that line and you couldn't think of
a name.

He wipes his eyes.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I'm taking her to Hong Kong. To see
May. May wrote back... she wants
her there.

(beat)

I know you'd lecture me. But she
needs something I can't give her.
I'm not Seth. I wish I was.

(beat)

You called me last week. Twice. I
didn't pick up.

He leans closer, voice shaking now.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

There's no manual for this. I just want to get it right for her. Once.

The door opens. Kelly enters, arms full of vending machine snacks. Audrey trails behind with an orange soda. Small. Wary.

KELLY

Hey. I brought you the entire Cheetos aisle.

Daniel can't look at Audrey.

DANIEL

Hey, kiddo. We were just talking about you.

Audrey's eyes are glass. Her voice trembles but it's sharp.

AUDREY

You're sending me away.

Daniel recoils, groping.

DANIEL

No. Audrey, that's not... your mom's in Hong Kong. And I thought maybe you'd want to see her. See where you come from.

(beat)

Have an adventure.

Kelly kneels to Audrey's height.

KELLY

She wrote back, honey. She asked for you.

Audrey's voice breaks, hurt blazing through the calm.

AUDREY

Is that it? I just get passed around? Dad's gone. Gung Gung's sick. Now you.

(beat)

Just another stop on the way to nowhere.

Daniel's facade collapses.

DANIEL

No. I swear. I just want you to have a real shot.

(MORE)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I don't know if I'm enough. I'm
scared I'll mess it up for you.

Audrey squeezes the can until it dents. She doesn't cry. She just shakes.

KELLY

(soft, fierce)

You're not alone, Audrey. We're not
walking away.

Audrey turns to the window, spine rigid, voice small.

AUDREY

It's never my choice. Is it.

She pulls away. Daniel watches her go, empty. Kelly lays a hand over his.

The heart monitor ticks on. Unbearable. Steady.

FADE OUT.

24 EXT. LAX - CURBSIDE - DAY

24

Traffic, horns, jet trails overhead. Val hauls bags from a trunk. Daniel fumbles passports, nearly drops a boarding pass, catches it.

VAL

If we miss check-in I'm blaming you
forever.

Audrey lingers at the edge of it, watching a jumbo jet climb.

25 INT. AIRPORT GATE - DAY

25

Val paces, arguing in hushed Cantonese, growing fierce. Daniel sips burnt coffee, eyes hollow. Audrey sits cross-legged, compass spinning on her knee, watching the world move without her.

26 INT. AIRPLANE - IN FLIGHT

26

Three in a row. Val types furiously across time zones. Daniel stares at the seat back, lost.

Audrey presses her face to the window, city lights falling away below. Tears glinting, unspilled.

The plane rattles. Daniel reaches across the armrest. Audrey takes his hand and holds on until she drifts into uneasy sleep.

27 EXT. HONG KONG - NIGHT 27

Neon bleeds down glass towers. Ferries cut the harbor. The city is enormous and indifferent.

28 INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT 28

Cramped, dated, two beds and a rollaway. A window full of a skyline they can't afford.

Val drops bags. Daniel sets his laptop on the desk like it's an altar. Audrey stands in the doorway, hoodie up, taking in nothing.

VAL

Okay. Kelvin's people said tomorrow, two o'clock, and "tomorrow, two o'clock" in this town means we sit in a lobby until somebody feels like it.

DANIEL

He'll show.

VAL

Uh huh.

She glances at Audrey. Lowers her voice.

VAL (CONT'D)

And her? What's the plan there?

DANIEL

Her mother runs a gallery in Central. We go Thursday.

VAL

That's the plan. "We go Thursday."

Daniel doesn't answer. Val lets it drop.

Audrey climbs onto the rollaway fully dressed, shoes on, and turns to the wall. The compass stays in her fist.

Daniel crosses to the window. He has wanted to be standing exactly here since he was thirty. It feels like nothing.

29

INT. TAXI - MOVING - DAY

29

Hong Kong blurs past, riotous color, the city's pulse. Val calls out landmarks, phone pressed to her ear. Audrey traces the compass, watching the world remake itself outside the window.

Val's face changes. She jams the phone on speaker and holds it out.

KELVIN (V.O.)
(tinny, warm)
Danny Keane. They told me a ghost
was in my building.

Daniel laughs, startled, boyish.

DANIEL
Kelvin.

KELVIN (V.O.)
I have your script on my kitchen
table and I am not going to talk
about it on a telephone.
(beat)
Kowloon. My gym. Two o'clock. Bring
whoever wrote the roof scene.

The line clicks off. Val stares at the phone. Then at Daniel.

VAL
Was that a yes?

DANIEL
That was a room. That's not
nothing.

Val drums the seat back anyway. The driver eyes them in the mirror.

In the back, Audrey watches her uncle light up, brighter than she has ever seen him, over something that is not her.

30

INT. TRAINING HALL - KOWLOON - DAY

30

A working room, not a showpiece. Mats, mirrors, heavy bags, a wall of trophies nobody dusts. Half a dozen young STUNT PERFORMERS run a fight beat over and over while a coach counts.

KELVIN LI (50s, compact, gray at the temples, moves like the floor belongs to him) is barefoot in the middle of it, walking a kid through a fall.

Daniel comes in with Val, and with Audrey, who is holding her backpack in front of her like a shield.

Kelvin sees them. Stops the room with one raised hand. Crosses.

He looks at Daniel for a long second. Then hugs him, hard, the way men do when it's been fifteen years.

KELVIN
You got old.

DANIEL
You got rich.

KELVIN
I got old too. I just paid somebody about it.

He turns to Val, shakes her hand properly. Then he sees Audrey and something in him resets entirely.

KELVIN (CONT'D)
And who is this.

DANIEL
This is my niece. Audrey. I didn't have anywhere to...

KELVIN
(to Audrey, ignoring him completely)
Do you know that your uncle owes me two hundred Hong Kong dollars?

Audrey blinks.

AUDREY
...No.

KELVIN
Fifteen years. I have not forgotten. He borrowed it for a taxi and he told me he would pay me Tuesday.
(beat)
Which Tuesday, Danny? I have been very patient.

Audrey almost laughs. Almost.

Kelvin claps once. The room resets behind him; the coach starts the count again.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Sit. Watch. They're doing a three-hit and a rail bump and the third one is always ugly.

He steers Audrey to a bench at the mirror. She sits. She watches. She is, for the first time, interested in something.

31 INT. TRAINING HALL - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

31

A cramped room off the floor. Photos going back thirty years. Kelvin drops into a chair and puts his feet on a milk crate. Daniel and Val perch.

KELVIN

I read it on the plane back from Seoul. Then I read it again in my kitchen at four in the morning, which is not something I do.

Daniel says nothing. Doesn't dare.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

The hostel is in there. The lady who charged us for the fan.

DANIEL

Mrs. Poon.

KELVIN

Mrs. Poon is in your movie, Danny. Under a different name, but she is in there.

He looks at the ceiling for a moment.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Your brother's in there too.

Daniel's jaw works.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

The whole first act, Kai and the brother, that's you two. On the roof with the beers, arguing about whether it's better to be good or to be known.

(beat)

I remember that argument. I was on the roof.

VAL

Which side were you on?

KELVIN

(instantly)

Known. I was twenty-three and I was hungry and I would have sold my mother.

(beat)

It took me about twenty years to find out it was the wrong answer.

He drops his feet off the crate. Business now.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

So. Here is what I can do. I'll attach. My company will send a letter your money people can put in a bank.

Val makes a sound she immediately regrets.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Get me on a call with your financier. I'll say the words in front of him.

DANIEL

Kelvin...

KELVIN

Don't. If you say thank you I'll ask about the two hundred dollars.

Through the office window, on the floor, Audrey is standing now, close to the mats, watching the stunt kids fall and get up and fall again.

Kelvin follows Daniel's eyes.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

She's very quiet.

DANIEL

She's had a rough month.

KELVIN

What's it about? Your movie. What would she say if I asked her.

Daniel opens his mouth. Nothing comes.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

(no cruelty in it at all)

Ah.

He gets up, claps Daniel on the shoulder, and goes back out to his room.

32

INT. GALLERY - CENTRAL - DAY

32

Vast white walls. Vivid canvases. Money moving quietly in expensive shoes.

Daniel and Audrey stand in the middle of it, wildly out of place. Audrey has been made to wear her one clean shirt.

Across the room, MAY CHEN (early 40s, immaculate, magnetic) directs two assistants with a flick of her hand. She's magnificent. She's untouchable.

She turns. Sees them. Every professional muscle in her face holds, and something underneath it doesn't.

She crosses. Stops three feet short.

MAY

Daniel.

DANIEL

May.

Her eyes go to Audrey. Down. All the way down.

MAY

(carefully)

You're tall.

AUDREY

I'm thirteen.

MAY

I know how old you are.

A silence that could crack the floor.

MAY (CONT'D)

(to Daniel, bright,
brittle)

You should have called first. I'd
have cleared the whole afternoon.
I'm hanging a show, it's chaos,
it's...

(beat)

Are you hungry? Do you eat? Of
course you eat.

Audrey stares at her. Says nothing. May turns to a canvas instead, safer.

MAY (CONT'D)

This one's mine. Not painted by me.
Found by me. Which is harder.

Audrey looks at it. Ten seconds.

AUDREY

It's a big orange square.

A beat, and May LAUGHS. Real. Surprised out of her.

MAY

It is. It's a very expensive big
orange square.

For one second the two of them are almost something.

Then an assistant materializes with a tablet. May's face
closes like a shop.

MAY (CONT'D)

Dinner. My place. Eight.
(to Audrey, softer)
Please.

She's already walking away.

33

INT. MAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

33

High above the harbor. Glass, stone, and art worth more than
Daniel's entire life. It is beautiful and nobody lives here.

The table is mostly cleared. May at the head, face calm.
Daniel across. Audrey's chair empty. She's on the balcony,
back to them, a shape against the lights.

MAY

She hasn't said forty words.

DANIEL

She said four hundred to her
grandfather every day for six
years.

That lands. May turns her wine glass by the stem.

MAY

How bad is he.

DANIEL

Bad. There's a facility. He's not
going home.

Silence.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

May, I'm not here to make you feel anything. I'm here because there's a form on my kitchen table and a line on it for a name, and you're the only person alive with a better claim to it than me.

MAY

That's not true.

DANIEL

It's exactly true. You're her mother.

MAY

(quietly)

I was her mother for eleven weeks.

She sets the glass down. Goes to a drawer. Comes back with a leather folio and lays it on the table like a closing argument.

MAY (CONT'D)

I've thought about this since the moment you emailed. I want you to hear the whole thing before you say anything.

She opens it. Papers. A pen. A checkbook.

MAY (CONT'D)

There's a school in Switzerland. Girls, boarding, eleven through eighteen. Three of my clients send their daughters. I called them Tuesday. They have a spot in January.

DANIEL

May...

MAY

I'll cover it. All of it. Tuition, flights, the holidays, university after. She'll have languages, she'll have a passport that opens doors, she'll never worry about money for one day of her life.

She writes. Tears the check out. Slides it across.

MAY (CONT'D)

And this is for the interim. For you and Kelly. So it isn't a hardship.

Daniel looks at the check. Doesn't touch it.

DANIEL

You made a spreadsheet.

MAY

I made a plan. It's what I'm good at.

DANIEL

I didn't fly nine thousand miles for a plan. I flew here so she could look at her mother and have her mother look back.

MAY

(sharp)

And then what, Daniel? I take her to brunch, I buy her a coat, I let her get used to me... and in four months she finds out what I actually am.

Her voice cracks, the first crack in the whole apartment.

MAY (CONT'D)

I know what I'm capable of. I've had thirteen years to study it. I am not going to do it to her twice.

Daniel stares at her.

DANIEL

So you'll pay for her. You just won't have her.

MAY

I'll give her everything I have.

DANIEL

You're not in the list.

Behind them, a SOUND. Small.

They both turn.

Audrey is standing at the balcony door. How long she's been there is written on her face.

She looks at the check on the table. Then at May.

Nobody moves.

Then Audrey does something none of them expect. She comes into the room.

AUDREY

Do you have a picture of him?

May blinks.

MAY

Of...

AUDREY

My dad. From before. You knew him when he was young and I only ever got him when he was tired.

(beat)

I've got four. I've counted them. I know all four.

It is the first thing she has asked anyone for and it costs her everything to ask it.

May's face opens. For one second she is going to say yes.

Then it closes, and she reaches for the folio instead.

MAY

I'll have my assistant go through the storage inventory. Some of it's in Kowloon, some of it went to the house in Repulse Bay, so it may take a few days to...

She hears herself. She keeps going anyway, because stopping would mean facing what she just did.

MAY (CONT'D)

...I'll email you a list. That way you can pick.

A silence.

Audrey nods. Slowly. Like she's filing something away permanently.

AUDREY

Okay.

She walks past both of them, down the hall, and closes the guest room door without slamming it.

Which is worse.

Daniel stares at May.

DANIEL
She asked you for a photograph.

MAY
(barely)
I know what she asked me for.

34

INT. MAY'S APARTMENT - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

34

Audrey sits on the edge of a bed she hasn't touched. Perfect white sheets. A window full of the most beautiful city on earth.

She squeezes the compass until the rim bites her palm.

AUDREY
(low, furious)
Okay. Fine.
(beat)
You took my dad. You put Gung Gung
on the floor. And I asked You for
one thing. One.

Her voice breaks and she shoves it back down.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I asked her for a picture of my
dad. That's all. One picture.
(beat)
And she said she'd send me a list.
(beat)
So either You're not listening, or
You are and this is what You
picked.

She waits. The city hums. Nothing.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
He's got this rule. Count what's
still on the table. Out loud, so
you can't cheat.

She opens her hand. The compass sits in it.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
(out loud, hard)
Okay. My dad. Gone. Gung Gung, on a
floor, in a bed, gone in about a
week. My mom's a checkbook.
(MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

My uncle's a guy with a plane ticket.

(beat)

That's the table. That's everything on it.

Her hand closes.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Gung Gung said You could take it.

(beat)

Take it, then.

She lies back on top of the covers, shoes on, fist closed, and stares at the ceiling.

35

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATE EVENING

35

Val on the bed with her laptop, a room service plate of fries between her and Audrey, who sits cross-legged at the foot with a soda.

Daniel's not here. Neither of them mentions it.

VAL

Okay. Rate them. That's the game. One to ten, no explaining.

She turns the laptop. On screen: a paused frame of the stunt kids from the gym.

AUDREY

The girl in the gray shirt is a nine.

VAL

She is a nine.

AUDREY

The tall one lands like a table.

VAL

(delighted)

Like a table! I'm using that.

Audrey takes a fry. Almost relaxed.

AUDREY

Can I ask you something.

VAL

Depends how mean it is.

AUDREY

Is my uncle a good writer or does everybody just say that.

Val considers the question seriously, which is why Audrey asked her.

VAL

He's very good. Not the best. Very good.

(beat)

The best ones I know are mostly monsters. He isn't one, which is why he's poor.

Audrey turns that over.

AUDREY

He never told me what his movie's about.

VAL

(carefully)

Did you ask?

AUDREY

No.

(beat)

He never told my dad either. Dad used to say Uncle Danny's writing the same movie he's been writing since I was born.

Val's face does something complicated.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Is that mean?

VAL

It's a little mean.

(beat)

It's also true, so.

A pause. Audrey pulls her knees up.

AUDREY

You've known him a long time.

VAL

Fifteen years.

AUDREY

Do you think he wants me?

Val stops chewing.

She could give the easy answer. She doesn't, and Audrey watches her not do it.

VAL

I think he's terrified of you.

(beat)

And I've known him fifteen years
and I've never once seen him not
run at something that terrified
him.

(beat)

That's not the same as wanting you.
But it's not nothing either.

Audrey nods slowly. Takes another fry.

AUDREY

The tall one still lands like a
table.

VAL

Like a TABLE.

36

EXT. HONG KONG STREET - NIGHT

36

Neon shimmers in puddles. Crowds hustle past as Daniel and Audrey drift along, clutching greasy McDonald's bags. Audrey trails behind, hoodie up.

DANIEL

She's not... Audrey, what she said
in there, that's not about you.
That's about her being scared.

Nothing.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Grown-ups get scared and then they
build these big complicated
machines so they don't have to feel
it. The school, the money, the...

AUDREY

I know what a check is.

Daniel stops walking. She keeps going three steps, then stops too, back to him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You emailed her.

DANIEL

I did.

AUDREY

Before you asked me.

He has no answer.

Audrey turns around. Her face is dry and terrible.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Everybody keeps deciding where I
go. Dad decided. Gung Gung got
sick, that decided. You decided.
She decided.

(beat)

I'm not a dog. Or a suitcase.

A tram rattles past, throwing light across both of them.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You want to send me somewhere.
Fine. Just say it out loud so I can
hear it in your voice instead of
finding out.

Daniel opens his mouth. Closes it.

DANIEL

I don't want to send you anywhere.

AUDREY

Then why is there a school in
Switzerland?

He has nothing. She turns and walks.

Across the throng, for half a second, Daniel sees a familiar
figure in the neon: SETH, smiling the way he did in old
hostel photos.

Daniel blinks. A stranger walks past. Nobody there.

37

INT. MAY'S GALLERY - AFTER HOURS - NIGHT

37

Half the lights on. Crates and bubble wrap. May alone with a
clipboard, doing work that doesn't need doing at eleven at
night.

Her phone sits face-up on a crate. She looks at it.

She picks it up. Scrolls to a contact: AUDREY (D'S PHONE).
Her thumb hovers.

She sets it down.

She picks it up again. Dials. Puts it to her ear.

It rings. And rings.

DANIEL (V.O.)
(filtered)
May.

MAY
Is she awake?

DANIEL (V.O.)
It's eleven o'clock.

MAY
That's not what I asked.

A pause on the line.

DANIEL (V.O.)
She's awake. She's been awake since
we left your building.

May closes her eyes.

MAY
Put her on.

DANIEL (V.O.)
And say what, May?

MAY
I don't know. That's why I'm
calling instead of writing it down
first.

DANIEL (V.O.)
(evenly)
She watched you write a check with
her name on the memo line.

MAY
I know what she watched.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Then you know that a phone call at
eleven at night is for you. Not for
her.

Silence on the line. May stands in a half-lit gallery
surrounded by objects worth more than most people's houses.

MAY

You always did think you were the good one.

DANIEL

(filtered)

I'm not the good one. I'm the one who's here.

The line goes dead.

May lowers the phone. Stands very still.

Then she picks up the clipboard and goes back to counting crates, because it is the only thing she knows how to do at eleven at night.

38

INT. HOTEL SUITE - EVENING

38

Daniel on the edge of the bed, phone in both hands. Val at the desk, laptop open, script pages fanned.

VAL

Kelvin's people want a call with Ricky Thursday morning. Their time. Which is Wednesday night, our time, which is tomorrow.

Daniel doesn't look up.

VAL (CONT'D)

Daniel. This is the thing. This is the actual thing we came for.

DANIEL

She offered to pay for a boarding school.

Val stops typing.

VAL

...Okay.

DANIEL

And I sat there. I sat there and for about four seconds, V, I thought about it. I thought, she'd be safe. She'd be set. And I could go home and get my life back.

He looks up, wrecked.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

What kind of person does that make me.

Val crosses. Sits down next to him. Doesn't touch him. Just sits.

VAL

The kind who says it out loud afterward.

(beat)

Four seconds is four seconds. You didn't take the check.

DANIEL

I didn't give it back either.

A long beat. Val exhales.

VAL

Then give it back Thursday. After the call.

Daniel says nothing. Val goes back to the desk. But she's watching him now.

39

EXT. MAY'S BUILDING - MORNING

39

Glass and doormen and a lobby that smells like money. Daniel carries an overnight bag. Audrey walks beside him with her backpack and does not look at it.

May is waiting inside the doors, dressed down as far as she knows how.

DANIEL

(to Audrey)

She's got the whole day cleared.
And there's a room.

Audrey looks at the overnight bag in his hand. Then up at him.

AUDREY

How long.

DANIEL

Just tonight. See how it goes.

AUDREY

(flat)

See how it goes.

She takes the bag out of his hand before he can carry it in for her.

DANIEL

I've got the thing with Kelvin's people at seven. If I don't pick up, it's because I'm on it.

AUDREY

Okay.

DANIEL

Audrey.

AUDREY

I said okay.

May comes forward with a key fob and holds it out with both hands, like it might be refused.

MAY

It's the front door and the elevator. You don't have to ask anybody for anything.

Audrey takes it. Puts it in her hoodie pocket without looking at it.

Daniel crouches to her height, which is a mistake at thirteen, and stands back up.

DANIEL

One night.

He goes. Audrey watches the doors close behind him for slightly too long.

40

EXT. HONG KONG - DAY - SERIES OF SHOTS

40

May and Audrey on the Star Ferry, wind whipping. May points at something. Audrey looks where she points.

A noodle shop. May, incongruous in linen, eating standing up. Audrey almost smiles at that.

A shop window. May holds a coat against Audrey's shoulders. Audrey lets her.

A bench above the harbor. The two of them side by side, not talking. It is the closest they get.

41

EXT. HARBOR PROMENADE - LATE AFTERNOON

41

May and Audrey on the bench. The coat is in a bag at Audrey's feet, unworn.

MAY

Your grandfather taught me to swim
in a public pool in Alhambra. He
was terrible at it. He mostly
yelled.

Audrey looks at her.

AUDREY

He still yells. About the stove.

MAY

(a small laugh)
Of course he does.

Silence. May works up to something. Then she takes a flat parcel out of her bag and holds it out.

MAY (CONT'D)

I couldn't find a photograph.

Audrey doesn't take it.

MAY (CONT'D)

Open it.

Audrey does. Inside: a small framed kid's drawing. Three stick figures and a house.

MAY (CONT'D)

Your father mailed it to me. You'd
have been five. No note, just a
tube with a Los Angeles postmark.
(beat)
It's hung in my storage room for
eight years. I want you to have it.

Audrey looks at it a long moment.

AUDREY

It's mine. I made it.

MAY

Yes.

AUDREY

So you couldn't find a picture of
him, and you brought me a picture I
drew.

May's arm stays out. Then, slowly, comes down.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 That's the whole trip. You keep
 handing me stuff. Money, and a
 coat, and now this.
 (beat)
 I asked you for one thing.

She sets the drawing on the bench between them.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 (even)
 You don't want me. That's the
 reason. Everything after that is
 just words you put in front of it
 so it sounds nicer.

May's mouth opens. Nothing comes out.

Audrey stands, picks up the bag with the unworn coat in it,
 and sets that on the bench too.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 Thanks for the ferry.

She walks toward the road.

May sits alone above the most beautiful harbor in the world
 with a coat and a child's drawing on the bench beside her.

42 INT. MAY'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

42

The fob beeps. Audrey lets herself in through the door of an
 apartment that is not hers, into rooms that hold no evidence
 anybody lives in them.

She stands in the entry a moment. Then takes her shoes off
 and sets them neatly against the wall, in a spot that is
 clearly wrong, because there is no right spot.

She goes down the hall to the guest room, sits on the end of
 the bed with her backpack still on, and takes out her phone.

She looks at it for a long time and does not call anybody.

43 INT. MAY'S GALLERY - STORAGE - DUSK

43

A steel door. Climate-controlled dark. Racks of canvases in
 slotted shelving. It smells like nothing at all.

May stands in the aisle with the drawing in both hands and the empty hook on the rack in front of her, where it hung for eight years.

She does not put it back.

44

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

44

Laptop open. On screen: RICKY, split-frame with KELVIN LI. Daniel and Val crammed into the webcam's view, wearing their best shirts.

RICKY

(on screen)

Mr. Li, I gotta say, my week just got a lot more interesting.

KELVIN

(on screen)

I've read the script three times.
I'll tell you what I told Danny.
It's the only one in ten years that got Hong Kong right.

Ricky's face does something Daniel has never seen it do. It opens.

RICKY

(on screen)

Okay. Okay. Then let's talk about a number that...

Daniel's phone BUZZES face-up on the desk. AUDREY.

He glances at it. Silences it.

RICKY (CONT'D)

(on screen)

... that gets us to a start date in the spring, because if we're doing this I want...

BUZZ. AUDREY. Again.

Val's eyes flick to the phone, then to Daniel.

BUZZ. A text. Daniel reads it. Whatever it says drains him white.

DANIEL

I have to go.

RICKY
(on screen)
You have to what?

VAL
(low, urgent)
Daniel. Daniel, look at me.

Daniel is already standing. He is already out of frame.

DANIEL
(off screen)
V, I'm sorry...

The suite door SLAMS.

On the laptop, two of the most powerful men in his professional life stare into an empty chair. Val turns slowly back to the camera, alone, and puts on a smile that costs her everything.

VAL
So. Spring.

45

INT. MAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

45

The door is open. May stands in the middle of her perfect living room, phone in hand, genuinely rattled.

Daniel comes in fast.

DANIEL
Where is she.

MAY
She's in the guest room. She's fine. Daniel, she's fine...

DANIEL
She sent me four calls and a text that said "come get me."

MAY
I know what she sent you. I was standing right here.

Daniel starts down the hall. May's voice stops him.

MAY (CONT'D)
I found one.

He turns.

May holds up her phone. On the screen: a photograph. Two people in their twenties on a hostel roof in Kowloon, laughing at whoever's holding the camera.

MAY (CONT'D)

It was on an old drive. It took me four hours.

(beat)

I knocked on the guest room door and I told her I had it. And she said no thank you.

Daniel stares at the screen.

MAY (CONT'D)

She said, "you don't get to try me out."

(beat)

She's thirteen and she's already decided what I'm worth, and she's not wrong, and I can't do anything about it because I taught her that myself.

May sits down on the arm of a chair. All the architecture gone out of her.

MAY (CONT'D)

She's thirteen.

DANIEL

She's had a lot of practice.

Down the hall, the guest room door opens. Audrey comes out with her backpack already on both shoulders.

She goes straight to Daniel. Stops in front of him.

AUDREY

Are we going?

Daniel looks at her. Then at May. Then back.

DANIEL

Yeah, kiddo. We're going.

Audrey nods once and heads for the door.

Daniel reaches into his jacket. Takes out the check. Sets it on the entry table.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

For what it's worth... I don't think you're a monster, May.

(MORE)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I think you're a coward with
excellent taste.

(beat)

Henry's still alive. You could call
him.

He goes.

May stands alone in all that beautiful empty space, looking
at the check.

46

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATE NIGHT

46

Val stands by the window, phone in hand, face pinched. The
laptop is closed. Daniel comes in with Audrey; Audrey goes
straight past both of them into the bathroom and shuts the
door.

Val doesn't turn around.

VAL

Kelvin waited nine minutes. Ricky
waited four.

DANIEL

V...

VAL

I needed you. We needed you. That
was the meeting, Daniel. That was
the one.

She turns.

VAL (CONT'D)

And I sat there by myself doing a
bit. Doing a bit! For the biggest
movie star in Asia and the only man
on earth willing to give us money.

DANIEL

My niece was panicking.

VAL

(interrupting)

You think I don't give a damn about
Audrey? You think I wouldn't have
run?

(beat)

This was supposed to be us. You and
me. I can't pitch this thing alone,
I've never been able to, that's the
entire reason there's two of us.

She squares up, eyes wet, furious.

VAL (CONT'D)

How do I know you won't do it again? Next time it's not Audrey. Next time it's just hard, or scary, or you get spooked... how do I trust you to stay?

Daniel's voice is a whisper, gutted.

DANIEL

It wasn't about choosing between her and the film, Val. She's my family.

(beat)

She wasn't in danger. Nothing happened. She asked me to come get her and I went.

(beat)

That's the whole reason. I know how it sounds.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

A silence, heavy and raw.

VAL

I'm your family too, asshole! Fifteen years... I'm the sister you actually picked.

(beat)

That's the problem, Daniel. You ran. No heads-up, no warning, just... gone. You left me to drown.

She grabs her jacket, breathing hard.

VAL (CONT'D)

Figure your shit out. I'm going for a walk.

She slams the door behind her. Daniel flinches.

Behind the bathroom door, the water is running. It has been running the whole time.

Val stalks through neon-lit crowds, hands jammed deep in her pockets. Rain slicks the pavement. She passes shuttered noodle shops, bakeries and shops beneath sagging lanterns.

Her face is tight, wounded, alone among the press of strangers.

She stops at a street musician playing a mournful erhu, the song raw and aching. She drops a coin. Lingers. Walks on into the dark.

48

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

48

Val at the desk with her phone on speaker, a legal pad covered in crossed-out names. Daniel on the edge of the bed.

VAL
(into phone)
Right. And when would be a good
time to... okay. Okay. Thank you.

She hangs up. Draws a line through another name.

VAL (CONT'D)
That's his agent's assistant's
assistant. Third day running.

DANIEL
And Ricky?

VAL
Ricky sent me one word. "Wow." Just
wow. Nothing since.

She swivels.

VAL (CONT'D)
Kelvin's people have a word for
what you did. Their word is
"unprofessional," and they've used
it to me four separate times in two
days.

DANIEL
Let me call him.

VAL
Absolutely not.

DANIEL
V...

VAL
You are the last person on earth
who should be dialing that number
right now.

She rubs her face with both hands.

VAL (CONT'D)

Here's the part that's actually
killing me. They know about Audrey.

DANIEL

What?

VAL

You brought her to his gym, Daniel.
He sat her on a bench and made her
laugh. His assistant knows her
name.

(beat)

So this isn't a mystery to them.
They know exactly why you left. And
they still called it unprofessional
four times.

Daniel goes cold.

VAL (CONT'D)

Because in their world you don't
get both. You bring the kid to the
gym, that's charming. You leave the
room for her, that's a man who
can't be relied on for eleven weeks
in Kowloon.

(beat)

They liked her fine. They just
watched you pick her.

Daniel sits with that.

DANIEL

So we go home with nothing.

VAL

We go home. The nothing part I'm
still working on.

Her phone BUZZES on the desk. She looks at it. Her whole
posture changes.

VAL (CONT'D)

It's him.

DANIEL

Ricky?

VAL

(reading)

Kelvin. Direct. Not his office.

She reads it twice. Then a third time, and her face changes.

VAL (CONT'D)

"The girl from the gym. Was that who called."

A beat.

DANIEL

What do I say?

VAL

Nothing. He didn't text you.

She sits down slowly, thumbs already moving.

VAL (CONT'D)

He's not asking what happened. He watched you not be able to answer a question about her in his office and now he wants to know if you'd actually stand up for her or if she's luggage with a good story attached.

(beat)

That's a test, Daniel. That's a man deciding something.

DANIEL

Then let me...

VAL

No. If it comes from you it's a pitch.

(beat)

Go check on your niece. I'll be a while.

49

INT. HOTEL SUITE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

49

Daniel sits alone on the floor with his back against the bed, city lights painting his face with ghosts.

Through the bathroom door: the sound of a kid trying very hard not to be heard crying.

Daniel gets up. Crosses. Slides down to sit with his back against the door.

He doesn't knock. He doesn't say anything. He just sits there.

After a long moment, on the other side, the crying stops. And stays stopped.

50

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

50

Cheap, bright, half-empty. Daniel already in a booth, two cups in front of him.

Val slides into the seat across from him, silent. She sets her phone down. No armor this morning, just two friends, raw and tired.

VAL
Kelvin's still in.

Daniel looks up, stunned.

VAL (CONT'D)
I texted him back at two in the morning. I said yes, it was the girl from the gym. I said she'd been left with a mother who'd offered to buy her a boarding school, and she called him four times, and he went.
(beat)
He didn't answer for six hours. Then he wrote: "In my office he could not tell me what his film was about. Last night he could."
(beat)
And then, "That's the movie."

Daniel's face does something complicated.

VAL (CONT'D)
Ricky's a different story. Ricky's Ricky. He'll want blood.

DANIEL
V, I...

VAL
I'm not done.

She wraps both hands around her cup.

VAL (CONT'D)
You've been trying to give that kid away since the day you got her. And I've been helping, because it kept you free to work.
(MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm not helping anymore.

Daniel looks at her.

VAL (CONT'D)

Whatever you decide about her,
decide it on purpose. Don't just
let it happen to you and call it
bad luck.

Relief floods Daniel. He reaches across and clutches her
hand. Forgiveness, partnership, restored.

DANIEL

Okay.

VAL

Okay.

(beat)

Now drink that, it's terrible and
you're paying for it.

51 EXT. HONG KONG AIRPORT - DAY

51

Glass and light. Daniel, Val, and Audrey move through the
terminal with their bags.

Audrey stops walking.

Ahead, at the edge of the security queue: MAY. Coat over her
arm. No assistants. She's been standing there a while.

Audrey doesn't run to her. She doesn't run away either. She
waits.

May comes forward. Kneels, awkwardly, in expensive clothes,
on an airport floor.

MAY

I'm not going to ask you for
anything. I just wanted to say one
true thing before you got on a
plane.

Audrey's face gives nothing.

MAY (CONT'D)

I was in my twenties and I was
drowning and I convinced myself
you'd be better off.

(MORE)

MAY (CONT'D)

And I have spent thirteen years
building a very beautiful life so I
would never have to find out if
that was a lie.

(beat)

It was a lie.

A long moment.

Then Audrey takes out her phone. Holds it out, screen up,
unlocked.

AUDREY

Send it.

May doesn't understand for a second. Then she does.

Her hands shake so badly it takes her three tries.

Audrey watches the photo arrive. Two people in their twenties
on a roof in Kowloon. She looks at it for a long time.

Then she puts the phone in her pocket.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Okay.

That's all. She turns and walks toward the queue.

May stays on her knees a beat too long. Daniel offers a hand.
She takes it, gets up.

DANIEL

Call your father.

He goes.

May stands in the middle of the terminal, watching her
daughter disappear through security without looking back.

Something in her face hardens into a decision.

52

INT. AIRPLANE - IN FLIGHT

52

Three in a row. Val flips through script pages, phone
glowing. Daniel stares at the seat back.

Audrey's head rests on Daniel's shoulder, compass tucked in
her palm. Asleep, or pretending.

Daniel looks down at her. Doesn't move. Doesn't want to wake
her.

Below, the ocean goes on forever.

FADE OUT.

53

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

53

Bags dumped in the hall. Jet lag hanging in the room like smoke.

Kelly comes out of the bedroom, already reading their faces.

KELLY
(carefully)
How was...

AUDREY
She's not coming.

Audrey says it plainly, walking past to the sofa bed, and it lands harder than any speech.

Kelly looks at Daniel. Daniel gives a small shake of the head.

Audrey sits on the folded-out mattress and starts unpacking. Shirt. Shirt. Toothbrush. Compass on the pillow.

Kelly crosses and sits on the arm of the couch. Not too close.

KELLY
There's cereal. The kind with the
marshmallows. I bought it Tuesday.

Audrey keeps unpacking.

AUDREY
Okay.

KELLY
I bought it Tuesday because I
didn't know if you were coming
back.

That stops Audrey's hands.

She doesn't look up. But she doesn't move away either.

54

INT. LOS ANGELES SUPERIOR COURT - FILING WINDOW - DAY

54

Fluorescent light. A line of exhausted people. Daniel at the counter with Henry's manila folder open in front of him.

Audrey sits on a bench along the wall with her backpack in her lap.

He's transferring the information onto a clean form in his own handwriting. Careful. Slow.

He reaches a line and stops, then copies it out.

INSERT: "CURRENT GUARDIAN, FULL LEGAL NAME." And under it, in Daniel's hand: HENRY WAI-KEUNG CHEN.

Audrey has come to stand at his elbow. She reads it upside down.

AUDREY

Henry?

DANIEL

That's his name.

AUDREY

His name is Gung Gung.

Daniel looks at her, and then at the form, and realizes she is not joking.

DANIEL

He went by Henry. Forty years at the water district. It's on everything. His license, his mail, the mug in the cabinet.

Audrey stares at the paper for a while.

AUDREY

Nobody ever said it in front of me.

DANIEL

You were the one person who didn't have to use it.

She sits back down on the bench with that.

Daniel reaches the line Henry stopped at.

INSERT: "PROPOSED SUCCESSOR GUARDIAN: FULL LEGAL NAME."

Daniel's pen hovers. A long moment.

He writes: DANIEL KEANE.

He slides it under the glass. The CLERK stamps it without looking up.

CLERK
Hearing gets set within thirty
days. You'll get notice. Next.

Daniel steps aside, hands shaking, and stands in the middle of a government hallway having just done the bravest thing he's ever done, entirely alone.

55

INT. MAY'S GALLERY - OFFICE - NIGHT

55

Eleven days since the airport. The drawing is propped against a monitor, brought up from storage and never delivered. May sits in front of it with her coat still on, the way she has most nights since.

On the desk: a laptop open to a flight-tracker page from a week and a half ago. LAX ARRIVED.

Her phone buzzes. She looks at it.

INSERT: a message from an unknown number. "Ms. Chen, Dr. Sandhu asked me to update you. Your father's condition has declined. Please call when you are able."

May reads it twice.

A KNOCK at the gallery's street door. A COURIER in a helmet, holding a flat envelope and a signature pad.

She signs. She opens it standing up, in the doorway, with the door still open.

INSERT: SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES. NOTICE OF HEARING. PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON. MINOR: AUDREY LIN KEANE. PETITIONER: DANIEL SETH KEANE.

And below, in a box, a line of small type: PARENT ENTITLED TO NOTICE: CHEN, MAY LIN.

May stands in her own doorway reading the word PARENT.

She goes back inside. She stands up so fast she has to catch the chair.

She scrolls. Finds a contact: WILKINSON, T. (FAMILY LAW). Dials.

It rings. She paces. Her free hand is shaking.

MAY
(into phone)
Tom. It's May Chen.
(MORE)

MAY (CONT'D)

I know what time it is.

(beat)

I've just been served notice of a guardianship petition on my daughter. My brother-in-law filed it in Los Angeles. My father is dying and the hearing is in three weeks.

(beat)

Tom, it lists me as a parent entitled to notice. After thirteen years it still lists me as a parent.

(beat)

So tell me what that's actually worth and how fast I can use it.

She listens for four seconds.

MAY (CONT'D)

Then file both. The objection and my own.

She listens. Whatever he says, she talks over it.

MAY (CONT'D)

I don't want to talk about whether it's a good idea. I've had thirteen years of good ideas.

(beat)

File it.

She hangs up. Stands in her office, breathing hard, in front of a child's drawing of three stick figures and a house.

56

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

56

Ricky already there, jacket off, no assistant. Something is wrong with the picture.

Daniel and Val slide in across from him.

RICKY

Kelvin Li's attorneys sent a deal memo. Real one. Numbers on it.

VAL

That's... Ricky, that's enormous.

RICKY

It is. And I can't fund it.

Silence.

DANIEL

What?

RICKY

My people were never my people. I had a soft commitment from a fund in Irvine and the fund got their capital called. Three weeks ago.

VAL

Three weeks ago? We were in Hong Kong three weeks ago.

RICKY

(shrugging)

And you got me Kelvin Li. That's leverage I can walk into other rooms with. Which is what I'm doing.

Daniel stares at him.

DANIEL

You let us fly around the world on a maybe.

RICKY

I let you fly around the world on a hustle, same as I do everything. That's the business. You've been in it, what, twenty years? And you still thought there was a version where somebody just hands you money because the script is good.

He says it without malice, which is worse.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Here's the part you're not going to like. Kelvin's attached to the material, not to you. If I bring in a producer with a real balance sheet, first thing they do is bring their own writer.

VAL

Over my dead body.

RICKY

Over your signature, actually. Or not... you can keep it, and it stays in a drawer, and you can tell people about it at parties for the next fifteen years.

He drains his cup. Stands. Puts on the jacket.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Look, Danny. You're talented.
Genuinely. But talented and
unfundable is the most common thing
in this town. It's practically the
water supply.

(beat)

Think about it. Don't think too
long.

He goes.

Val and Daniel sit in the wreckage.

VAL

Say something.

Daniel is very still. When he speaks it's almost wondering.

DANIEL

Fifteen years.

(beat)

I gave this thing everything. I
gave it my marriage half the time.
I gave it a phone call from a dying
man I didn't pick up.

He looks at his hands.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I made it into something it was
never going to be. I made it into
the thing that was going to fix me.

VAL

(quietly)

Yeah.

DANIEL

And it can't. It was never going
to. It's a stack of paper.

A long beat. Val watches him come apart and doesn't try to
stop it.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I have a hearing in eleven days.

VAL

I know.

DANIEL

I don't have a job, V. I have gear
in a hallway and a stack of paper.

Val reaches over and takes his hand.

VAL

Then get a job.

57

INT. CORPORATE TRAINING OFFICE - DAY

57

Beige. Cubicles. A wall clock. Daniel in a borrowed tie sits
across from an HR MANAGER (40s, pleasant, bored).

HR MANAGER

It's mostly compliance modules.
Safety videos. Onboarding. Not
exactly cinema.

DANIEL

No.

HR MANAGER

Frankly, with your background I'd
expect you to be gone in six
months.

Daniel looks at the wall clock. At the beige. At the whole
rest of his life.

DANIEL

When can I start?

58

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

58

Dishes in the sink. Audrey's door closed down the hall. Kelly
still in her work clothes at eleven at night, going through
mail she isn't reading.

Daniel comes out of the bedroom with the tie undone.

KELLY

Did you know she has a dentist?

DANIEL

What?

KELLY

Audrey. There's a card. She's
overdue for a cleaning.

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

Somebody in Alhambra has been her dentist since she was four and I found out from a postcard.

She drops it on the pile.

KELLY (CONT'D)

There's a whole child, Daniel.
There's a dentist and a pediatrician and a school with a records office and a soccer league that still has her father's email on file and keeps writing to him.

DANIEL

I'll handle it.

KELLY

You keep saying that. Do you know what "handle it" has meant for three weeks? It's meant me. It's meant me leaving work early on Tuesday because there's nobody else.

Daniel stops.

DANIEL

I didn't ask you to...

KELLY

No. You didn't ask me anything.
That's actually the problem.

She turns around finally.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You filed. You went down to a courthouse and you put your name on a form and you told me afterward. In the car.

DANIEL

You said...

KELLY

I said she could stay a couple of weeks!

It comes out louder than she meant. She checks the hallway.
Lowers it.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I said a couple of weeks, and then you flew her to Hong Kong without telling me what you were actually doing, and then you came back and signed a document that changes my entire life, and you told me in a Prius on the 101.

Daniel has nothing.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I'm not saying I don't want her here. I'm saying you have made every single decision in this house alone for a month and then looked around wondering why you're doing it alone.

A long silence.

DANIEL

(quietly)

I thought if I asked you, you'd say no.

KELLY

I might have.

(beat)

That was mine to say.

She picks up her bag. For a second it looks like she's leaving.

She isn't. She just goes to the bedroom and closes the door quietly, which is worse than slamming it.

Daniel stands alone in a kitchen full of somebody else's mail.

59

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

59

Daniel loading camera gear into cases in the hallway. Kelly watching from the kitchen doorway, arms folded.

KELLY

You're selling it.

DANIEL

Most of it.

KELLY

Daniel...

DANIEL

The retainer for the guardianship attorney is four thousand dollars.

Kelly comes into the hall. Sits down on a case.

KELLY

I need to say something and I need you to let me finish.

He stops.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I have been waiting eleven years for the version of our life that starts after the movie. And there is no after. I've known that longer than you have.

(beat)

So this isn't me giving up something for her. There was nothing to give up. That's the part that's been killing me.

Daniel sits down on the floor across from her.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I don't know how to be somebody's mother. I wasn't raised by anyone who knew how.

DANIEL

Neither was I.

KELLY

(a wet laugh)

That's not comforting.

She wipes her face with the back of her wrist. Then, steadier:

KELLY (CONT'D)

Put my name on it too.

Daniel looks up.

KELLY (CONT'D)

The petition. If we're doing this, we're doing it. I'm not going to be the woman who let her husband raise a child in the next room.

He can't speak. He just nods.

Down the hall, unseen, Audrey stands in the dark with a glass of water, listening.

60 INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - DAY 60

A knock. Daniel opens the door to a PROCESS SERVER, who hands him an envelope and leaves without a word.

He opens it in the doorway.

Two documents, clipped together.

INSERT, the first: OBJECTION TO PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF GUARDIAN. OBJECTOR: CHEN, MAY LIN, MOTHER.

He turns to the second, and it is a great deal worse.

INSERT: COMPETING PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON, AND IN THE ALTERNATIVE FOR RETURN OF CUSTODY TO PARENT. PETITIONER: CHEN, MAY LIN.

Attached to it, a declaration running eleven pages. A tab. A second tab.

Daniel reads the second one twice.

DANIEL
(to himself)
She didn't just say no.
(beat)
She filed her own.

61 INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING 61

A different kind of tense. Kelly straightening cushions that are already straight. Daniel putting a bowl of fruit on a table that has never had fruit on it.

Audrey watches them from the hall.

AUDREY
Why is there fruit.

KELLY
There's fruit because there's
fruit.

The buzzer goes. Kelly's hand goes to her collar.

MADELINE enters with a bag and a clipboard, and it's immediately clear this is a different Madeline, pleasant, thorough, and taking notes.

MADELINE

Mr. Keane. Mrs. Keane. This is the court investigator's home study. It goes in a report the judge reads before the hearing, so I'm going to be nosy and you're going to let me.

She's already looking past them at the apartment.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Where does Audrey sleep?

A beat. Daniel gestures at the folded-out sofa bed in the living room.

Madeline writes something. Nobody can see what.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Is that permanent?

KELLY

(too fast)

No.

DANIEL

(at the same time)

For now.

Madeline looks up. Writes again.

MADELINE

I'd like to speak with Audrey alone for about twenty minutes. You two can wait in the kitchen. Or outside. Outside is usually better for everybody.

Kelly and Daniel look at each other.

62

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

62

The two of them on a concrete walkway, three floors up, not talking.

KELLY

She wrote something when you said "for now."

DANIEL

I know.

KELLY

Why did you say "for now"?

DANIEL

Because it's true. Because I'm not
going to lie to a court
investigator about where a kid
sleeps.

Kelly presses the heels of her hands into her eyes.

KELLY

I gave her the couch, Daniel. Three
weeks ago I gave a grieving
thirteen-year-old a couch in a
hallway and I've walked past it
every day since.

DANIEL

We don't have another room.

KELLY

We have an office with your gear in
it.

(beat)

Had.

A long silence. Below them, traffic.

KELLY (CONT'D)

We should have given her the
bedroom.

DANIEL

(quietly)

Yeah.

Neither of them says anything else. Twenty minutes is a long
time.

63

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

63

Henry is awake. Thinner, drawn, the left side of his face
slack, but his eyes are his.

Audrey is folded into the chair beside him, close as she can
get without climbing in.

HENRY

(slurred but clear)

You got tall again.

AUDREY

It's been nine days.

HENRY
Nine days is a lot at your rate.

She laughs. It surprises her.

AUDREY
When you go to the rehab place I'm
coming every Saturday. I already
looked up the bus.

A pause. Henry's eyes move to Daniel, then back to her.

HENRY
Sure, kid.

Audrey goes to fill his water cup at the sink. Henry watches her go.

Then, low, to Daniel, without turning his head:

HENRY (CONT'D)
They stopped talking about the
rehab place.

DANIEL
What?

HENRY
Two weeks ago it was every day. The
lady with the clipboard, the
paperwork, when's the bed, which
facility.
(beat)
Now nobody says anything. They just
stop saying it.

Daniel has no answer. Henry doesn't need one.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Don't tell her that. She's got a
bus route.

Audrey comes back with the water. Henry takes it in his good hand and drinks like it's the most ordinary morning of his life.

Daniel stands at the foot of the bed, holding the court papers, unsure whether to say it.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Say it.

DANIEL
May's contesting. She filed.

Henry closes his eyes. When he opens them, they're wet.

HENRY

Good.

DANIEL

Good? Henry, she left. She wrote a check and she let her walk onto a plane.

Henry's good hand moves, finds Daniel's sleeve.

HENRY

You remember the story Jesus told? About the two sons. The one who took the money and ran.

DANIEL

(flatly)

I remember it.

HENRY

Everybody remembers the running. Nobody remembers there's two of them.

(beat)

The one who stayed did everything right. Never missed a day. And when his brother came up the road, he wouldn't go in the house.

Daniel's jaw sets.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That's the part I always got stuck on, Danny. He was right. He was right about all of it.

(beat)

And he was still standing outside.

Silence. The monitors tick.

DANIEL

She doesn't get to just come back.

HENRY

No. She doesn't get to. Nobody gets to.

He looks at Daniel a long moment.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That's what makes it worth something.

64

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

64

Low light. The machines doing their quiet work. Henry asleep, or close to it.

Audrey is in the chair with a paperback, reading out loud, badly, fast, stumbling over names.

AUDREY

"...and the sword was heavier than she expected, which was the first honest thing anyone had told her all day."

(beat)

That's a good line. That's like something you'd say.

Henry's eyes are closed. His breathing is even.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Kelly bought me this. She got the wrong one. It's book two, so I have to pretend I know who anybody is.

(beat)

I didn't tell her. Don't tell her.

She turns a page.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

The math is stupid there. It's the same math but they write it sideways.

She reads a bit more, silently, then gives up on it.

She watches him breathe.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Gung Gung.

Nothing.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I'm not mad at you. I just want you to know that. In case you can hear.

(beat)

I'm mad at pretty much everybody else.

She puts the book down. Leans her forehead against the bed rail, the way her mother did in the same room, and neither of them will ever know it.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
You can wake up whenever. There's
no rush.
(beat)
I'll be here Thursday. I'm here
every day.

The NURSE looks in from the corridor. Taps her watch, kindly.

Audrey gathers her book and her backpack. At the door she stops.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Bye, Gung Gung.

And she goes.

HOLD on Henry in the low light. Breathing. Even.

Nothing happens. That's the point.

65

INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

65

Audrey at the table with a worksheet she isn't doing. Kelly across from her with a mug, not pretending to work.

KELLY
You've been staring at problem four
for twenty minutes.

AUDREY
I hate problem four.

KELLY
Problem four is objectively
terrible.

A beat. Audrey puts the pencil down.

AUDREY
Are you going to fight her?

KELLY
Yes.

AUDREY
Why?

Kelly sets the mug down. Takes her time.

KELLY
 Because I asked your uncle to send
 you to her. In this apartment.
 Before Hong Kong.

Audrey looks up sharply.

KELLY (CONT'D)
 I did. I told him she was your
 mother and maybe she'd changed and
 it would be better for you.
 (beat)
 I said it because I was scared and
 it would have been easier.

Audrey's face is unreadable.

KELLY (CONT'D)
 I'm not going to lie to you to be
 liked. You've had enough people
 manage you.

A long silence. Then Audrey picks the pencil back up.

AUDREY
 (not looking up)
 Problem four is x equals eleven.

KELLY
 ...Is it?

AUDREY
 It's been x equals eleven for
 twenty minutes.

Kelly laughs, startled out of her, and Audrey lets herself
 smile at the table.

66

INT. CORPORATE TRAINING OFFICE - EDIT BAY - DAY

66

A windowless room. Two monitors. On screen: a stock-footage
 warehouse worker lifting a box correctly, then incorrectly.

Daniel scrubs the timeline. Adds a title card: PROPER LIFTING
 TECHNIQUE: MODULE 4.

Behind him, a YOUNGER EDITOR (20s, earbuds, friendly) leans
 in.

YOUNGER EDITOR
 You're doing the handles wrong.
 There's a template.

DANIEL
There's a template?

YOUNGER EDITOR
There's a template for everything.
That's kind of the whole thing
here.

He drops a file into the folder and goes.

Daniel sits looking at it. Then applies the template. The
title card snaps into somebody else's font.

He watches the worker lift the box correctly, then
incorrectly. Correctly. Incorrectly.

He looks at the clock. 2:40.

He picks up his phone and texts. INSERT: "Pickup at 3?"

Three dots. Then: "I'll be out front."

Daniel puts the phone down and goes back to the box.

67

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

67

May stands in the doorway in a coat she's been wearing too
long. No armor. She looks like she hasn't slept since the
airport.

Henry turns his head.

HENRY
Ah.

MAY
Ba.

She doesn't come in.

HENRY
Twenty-two hours on a plane and
you're going to hold up the door
frame.

May crosses. Sits. Her hands are shaking.

MAY
I filed against Daniel.

HENRY
I heard.

MAY

I don't know why I did it. I got to the airport and I watched her go through security and I thought, if I don't do something right now, that's it, that's the whole rest of my life.

(beat)

So I did the only thing I know how to do. I got a lawyer.

Henry almost laughs.

HENRY

You always did bring a hammer to a conversation.

May breaks. All of it at once.

MAY

I was twenty-four. She wouldn't stop crying and Seth was working nights and I sat on the bathroom floor and I thought... I am going to be my mother.

(beat)

So I left before I could be. And I told myself it was the brave thing. For thirteen years, Ba. Thirteen years I have been telling myself it was the brave thing.

Henry reaches for her. She takes his hand and puts her forehead down on the bed rail.

HENRY

You want me to say it was.

MAY

I want you to say anything.

Henry strokes her hair with a hand that barely works.

HENRY

When you were small and you'd break something, you'd hide it. Under the bed, in the yard. And I'd find it and I'd yell, and you'd say sorry so fast it didn't mean anything.

(beat)

This one you can't hide and you can't say sorry fast. So don't. Say it slow. Say it to her.

May lifts her head.

MAY
And if she won't take it?

HENRY
Then you'll have said it.

He's tiring. His eyes drift and come back.

HENRY (CONT'D)
May. Whatever you do on Thursday.
(beat)
Do the thing that's good for her.
Not the thing that makes you feel
like a mother.

May sits with that. It's the hardest thing anyone has ever
said to her.

MAY
Okay.

HENRY
Okay.
(beat)
Now tell me about the paintings. I
want to hear about the paintings.

And May, laughing through it, wrecked, tells her father about
the paintings.

Later. She gathers her coat. She is almost out the door when
he says it.

HENRY (CONT'D)
May.

She turns.

HENRY (CONT'D)
I wrote you. After Seth's funeral,
and before that. Nine years, off
and on.

MAY
I know.

HENRY
You never wrote back.

Silence.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'm not saying it to make you feel bad. I'm saying it because I don't think I get to ask you again.

He works at getting the words out with a mouth that isn't cooperating.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I drove you out of my house. Not with my hands. With my face.

(beat)

Every time you did something I hadn't approved, I looked at you a certain way. And you were nineteen and you had nowhere to put it, so you went and found somewhere.

(beat)

Forgive me, May.

May stands in the doorway.

This is the thing she has wanted for thirteen years, and now that it is in front of her she cannot make her hands close around it.

MAY

Ba. You're tired.

HENRY

May.

MAY

(too bright)

I'll come back in the morning.

We'll talk about it in the morning.

Henry looks at her for a long moment. Then he nods and lets her have it, because that is also a kind of love.

HENRY

In the morning.

She goes.

HOLD on Henry, alone in the low light.

He does not look like a man who believes there is going to be a morning.

68 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

68

A CODE tone. Feet. A crash cart wheeled fast through swinging doors.

Daniel comes around the corner with two coffees and stops dead.

Down the hall, through the glass, figures moving over a bed.

Audrey is standing in the corridor in her socks.

Daniel drops both cups.

69 INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - LATER

69

The specific fluorescent silence of after.

Daniel sits with his elbows on his knees, staring at nothing. May stands at the window with her arms wrapped around herself.

Audrey sits apart from both of them, upright, the compass in her lap.

A NURSE comes, says something quiet to May. May nods. The nurse goes.

Nobody speaks for a long time.

Then Audrey stands up.

AUDREY

I prayed.

Daniel looks up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

In Hong Kong. In her white room with the stupid sheets. And on the plane. And every night on the couch.

Her voice is completely level, which is the frightening part.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I asked for one thing.

She holds up the compass.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

He said tell Him even if you're mad. He said He could take it.

(MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

(beat)

So I did. Every night. And He took
it and He did nothing.

Daniel stands. Comes toward her. She steps back.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Don't. Don't say the thing where
it's part of a plan.

Daniel stops.

And instead of explaining, he sits down on the floor of a
hospital waiting room, in his coat, next to a vending
machine.

DANIEL

I'm not going to say that.

AUDREY

Then what.

DANIEL

(rough)

I prayed for him too. First time in
about twenty years. And I got the
same answer you did.

Audrey stares at him.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I don't have the part that comes
next, kiddo. I don't have it. I've
got... I've got that I'm still
here, and I'm not leaving, and
that's the entire list.

A long, long beat.

Audrey doesn't come to him. But she sits down on the floor
too, three feet away, back against the wall.

Across the room, May watches the two of them on the linoleum
and does not come any closer, because she knows she hasn't
earned it.

Not a sanctuary. A side chapel with forty folding chairs and
maybe twenty people in them. An urn. A photograph of Henry,
thirty years younger, squinting into sun.

Front row: Audrey between Daniel and Kelly, in a dress somebody bought her yesterday. Val at the end of the row.

Back row, alone, coat still on: MAY.

A PASTOR (60s, unhurried) stands without notes.

PASTOR

Henry asked me a question once, in this room, about ten years ago. He wanted to know whether it was too late for him.

(beat)

He'd done some things he couldn't take back. He wanted to know if there was a version of the arithmetic where it came out even.

A few knowing sounds from the folding chairs.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

I told him no. There isn't. That's not how it works and he wasn't going to like it.

(beat)

Because the whole point of the thing we believe is that the books don't balance. No person has ever balanced them. Christ balanced them, once, and He did it for people who hadn't asked and mostly weren't sorry yet.

Audrey is listening. Not comforted. Listening.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

So we are not here to tell you Henry Chen earned this. He'd have thrown a shoe at me.

(beat)

We're here because he was forgiven anyway. And because he spent the back half of his life trying to hand that same forgiveness to every person he could reach.

He looks at the urn.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

He didn't reach all of them. There's people in this room he was still trying to get to.

(beat)

That's the part that hurts.

(MORE)

PASTOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Let's pray.

Heads go down across the room.

Two rows do not. Audrey, who is looking straight ahead at the photograph.

And in the back, May.

71

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

71

Wind. A slope of grass and flat markers. The last of the cars pulling out.

May stands alone at the plot. Everyone else has gone.

She doesn't kneel. She doesn't cry. She just stands there for a while.

MAY

You asked me. And I stood in a doorway and I said in the morning.

The wind takes some of it.

MAY (CONT'D)

I have told that story for thirteen years, Ba. To Seth, to my therapist, to a man in a bar in Wan Chai. My father was hard. Nothing was good enough. He had to run everything. That's why I went. That is the whole story and I have never once had to look at it.

(beat)

And the one time you put it down in front of me and asked me to take it, I said you were tired.

Her voice goes.

MAY (CONT'D)

I'm you. I'm exactly you. I just did it from further away, and I called it a career.

A long moment. Then something in her face changes, and it is not grief. It is arithmetic.

MAY (CONT'D)

She's going to be thirteen years
old asking somebody for something I
never gave you.

She takes out her phone. Scrolls. Stops on WILKINSON, T.
(FAMILY LAW).

She doesn't dial. She stands in a cemetery holding it,
looking down the slope at where the cars were.

72 INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 72

The apartment after a death: casseroles nobody ordered, a
phone that keeps buzzing, and the specific silence of adults
talking in another room.

Audrey sits on the floor by the coffee table. Henry's manila
folder is on it, where Daniel left it weeks ago and never
moved.

She opens it.

INSERT: the half-finished petition, Henry's handwriting
stopping mid-sentence.

She reads it all the way down. Her face doesn't change.

She turns the page.

INSERT: the yellow legal pad sheet. "IF I CANT... WHO?"

Audrey looks at it for a long time.

From the kitchen, low: Daniel and Kelly, talking about
lawyers.

Audrey folds the page in half. Then in half again. Then puts
it in the pocket of her hoodie.

She closes the folder and squares it back exactly where it
was.

73 EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - PICKUP LINE - AFTERNOON 73

A river of SUVs. Daniel in the Prius, third from the end,
still in the tie, watching the doors.

Two days since the funeral, and one until the hearing. The
world has declined to stop.

Audrey comes out alone, backpack on both shoulders, scanning. She sees the car. Something in her shoulders drops half an inch.

She gets in. Slams the door.

DANIEL
How was it.

AUDREY
Fine.

DANIEL
Did anybody say anything? About
Gung Gung.

AUDREY
The office lady did. In front of
everybody.

Daniel winces.

He pulls out. They drive.

DANIEL
Anything happen?

AUDREY
No.

A block. Two.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
A girl asked why my uncle picks me
up.

DANIEL
What'd you say?

AUDREY
I said because he does.

Daniel's hands tighten on the wheel. He doesn't say anything, because there's nothing to add to that.

They drive. Then she takes a folded page out of her backpack and holds it up without looking at him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
This was due Friday.

Daniel glances over.

INSERT: a school permission form. At the bottom, in the parent signature box, his own name in a careful, wrong hand.

He pulls to the curb.

DANIEL

Audrey.

AUDREY

The office already took it. It's fine.

DANIEL

That's my name.

AUDREY

I know. I practiced it off the thing you signed at the doctor.

He stares at her.

DANIEL

Why didn't you just ask me?

She looks out the window.

AUDREY

It was in your hand for four days.

(beat)

It's not a big deal. I did it for Gung Gung too. The pharmacy one.

And there it is. Daniel is not the first adult she has quietly covered for. He is only the current one.

He wants to be angry. He tries for about two seconds and can't get there, because she isn't wrong.

DANIEL

I'm supposed to be the one doing that.

AUDREY

Okay.

She says it the way you agree with somebody to end a conversation.

Daniel pulls back into traffic. Both hands on the wheel. Nothing fixed.

74

INT. STORAGE UNIT - NIGHT

74

The roll-up door open on a bare concrete box. Sodium light from the row outside. A broom leaning in the corner. One pelican case left, and a stack of flattened boxes.

Daniel stands in the middle of fifteen years of nothing.

He sits down on the last case.

A shape in the doorway: SETH, as he was, easy in his own skin, half-smiling.

SETH

You sold the Arri.

DANIEL

I sold everything.

SETH

Mom would've had a stroke.

(beat)

Sorry. Bad week for that joke.

Daniel laughs, a broken, grateful sound.

DANIEL

I can't do this, Seth. Tomorrow I stand up in a room and a stranger decides whether I'm allowed to be somebody's father. And I've got nothing. No job worth the name, no house, no idea what I'm doing.

(beat)

She forged my signature on a school form. Your daughter forged my name because she'd already worked out I wasn't going to do it.

(beat)

Two days after we buried her grandfather she went to school and handled it herself, and she didn't tell me until we were in the car.

Seth crouches in front of him. Looks at him the way only a brother can.

SETH

Audrey doesn't need perfect, Dan.

(beat)

She just needs you not to quit.

Daniel looks up.

The doorway is empty. Just a concrete box and a roll-up door and the hum of the lights outside.

Daniel puts his head in his hands.

Then he gets up, pulls the door down, and snaps the padlock shut.

75

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

75

Institutional benches. Daniel and Kelly on one. Val two seats down in the best blazer she owns, there because there was never a question.

Across the hall, May sits alone with her attorney's briefcase beside her and no attorney in it.

Daniel gets up. Crosses. Sits down next to her. She doesn't look at him.

MAY

I sent him home.

DANIEL

Your lawyer?

MAY

An hour ago.

Daniel absorbs that.

DANIEL

May, I need to say something before we go in there and I only have about four minutes to get it right.

She waits.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I have hated you for thirteen years. Comfortably. It was one of my favorite things.

(beat)

Every time I was a bad uncle, every birthday I forgot, every time I sent a card instead of showing up... I got to think, well, at least I'm not her.

May's eyes close.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I used you. You were the thing that let me off the hook.

(beat)

The pastor said something at the funeral and I haven't been able to put it down. He said the books don't balance. That nobody ever paid what they owed and it got paid anyway, for people who weren't even sorry yet.

May looks at him.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

And I sat there in a folding chair doing the math on you. Thirteen years of it. What you owed, what you'd have to do before I'd let you off.

(beat)

Somebody tore up a bill I couldn't have paid in nine lifetimes, and I've been standing in a hallway with a calculator.

He rubs his face.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

So whatever happens in there, I'm done doing that. You don't have to accept it. I just needed to stop carrying it into a room with our kid in it.

A long silence. May opens her eyes.

MAY

"Our kid."

DANIEL

Yeah. I heard it too.

The door opens. A BAILIFF leans out.

BAILIFF

Chen. Keane. Judge is ready.

Not a courtroom. A crowded office: shelves, a conference table, a window with bad blinds. JUDGE RIVERA (60s, unhurried, entirely unimpressed by everyone) at the head.

Daniel and Kelly on one side. May on the other. Audrey in a chair against the wall with Val beside her.

JUDGE RIVERA

Sit. This is a hearing, not a trial, and my chambers are small, so nobody make speeches.

Papers. Reading glasses.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Mr. Chen passed Monday. That vacates the existing guardianship, which is why you all got a phone call instead of a notice.

(beat)

Mr. Keane's counsel filed an amended emergency petition Tuesday morning. I signed a temporary order the same day so this child wasn't in legal limbo over a weekend, and I shortened time for notice, which I don't like doing and did anyway.

(beat)

So nobody in here is getting the hearing they prepared for. You're getting this one.

She looks over the glasses.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

And before anybody gets comfortable, we're going to be clear about what room this is.

She sets the papers down.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Mr. Keane. You are this child's uncle. Ms. Chen is her mother. Nobody has ever terminated her parental rights, and relinquishing custody thirteen years ago is not the same thing, whatever anybody in this room feels about it.

(beat)

Which means she is not the one who has to prove anything today. You are.

Daniel's face changes.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

For me to hand a child to a non-parent over a parent's objection, I have to find that placing her with that parent would be detrimental to her. Not worse. Not sadder. Detrimental.

(beat)

That is a high bar, Mr. Keane, and it was built high on purpose, and you are standing at the bottom of it.

Silence in chambers. Kelly reaches over and takes Daniel's hand.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Ms. Chen. From Hong Kong you filed two things. An objection to Mr. Keane's petition, and your own competing petition, in the alternative asking me to simply return this child to her mother.

(beat)

So there is no version of today where I hand her to nobody. Somebody in this room leaves with her.

(beat)

And you have now appeared without counsel.

MAY

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE RIVERA

That's your business. Mr. Keane. Petition's yours.

She takes off the glasses and looks at Daniel for the first time.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

I've read your filing. It's competent. Your wife co-signed, which I noted. Your employment is nine days old.

(beat)

Here's my question, and I want the answer, not the version you practiced.

Daniel waits.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Four days after her grandfather's stroke, you put this child on a fifteen-hour flight to Hong Kong.

(beat)

Tell me why.

The room goes very quiet.

Daniel glances at Audrey. Then back.

DANIEL

Because I was trying to give her away.

Kelly's head turns. Val's eyes close. Audrey doesn't move at all.

JUDGE RIVERA

Go on.

DANIEL

I had a meeting there. That's the honest order of it... I had a meeting, and her mother was in the same city, and I told myself it was for Audrey.

(beat)

It wasn't. I was scared, and I wanted somebody else to take her, and I built a good reason on top of it so I wouldn't have to look at it.

JUDGE RIVERA

And did somebody else take her?

DANIEL

No, Your Honor. Her mother offered to pay for a boarding school in Switzerland.

(beat)

And I sat there and I thought about it for about four seconds.

May's face doesn't change but her hands do.

JUDGE RIVERA

You understand you're arguing against your own petition.

DANIEL

I understand that if I stand here and tell you I've been good at this, you'll know I'm lying, and then nothing else I say counts.

(beat)

I've been bad at it. I ignored two phone calls from a dying man because I was chasing a movie that was never going to happen.

(beat)

But I came back. And I filed. And I sold everything I own that mattered to me and I took a job making safety videos, and I would do all of it again tomorrow.

Judge Rivera writes something. Says nothing.

JUDGE RIVERA

Ms. Chen. Your petition says you're prepared to assume full custody and relocate the minor to Hong Kong. Eleven pages of declaration say you can afford to.

MAY

That's what it says.

JUDGE RIVERA

Is it what you want?

May stands. Nobody asked her to.

MAY

Your Honor, I need to withdraw both of them.

A beat.

JUDGE RIVERA

Sit down, Ms. Chen, nobody's on a stage.

May sits.

MAY

My lawyer has told me four separate times that I would probably win.

(beat)

I understood him. I want that on the record, because I don't want anyone in here deciding later that I didn't know what I was giving up.

Judge Rivera's pen stops.

MAY (CONT'D)

I stood in an airport eleven days before I filed anything and watched my daughter walk through security without turning around.

(beat)

And when your court sent me a piece of paper that still had the word parent next to my name, I had a lawyer on the phone inside of an hour.

(beat)

I filed because I couldn't stand what I was. Not because of anything she needed.

She turns and looks at Audrey directly for the first time.

MAY (CONT'D)

My father told me to do the thing that was good for her instead of the thing that made me feel like a mother.

(beat)

That's the first instruction he's given me in thirteen years and I'd like to follow it.

Judge Rivera regards her a long moment.

JUDGE RIVERA

I'm going to make you do this properly, Ms. Chen, because in eleven months you may want to tell yourself you were railroaded.

(beat)

Your objection to Mr. Keane's petition.

MAY

Withdrawn.

JUDGE RIVERA

Your competing petition for appointment as guardian.

MAY

Withdrawn.

Against the wall, Audrey has stopped looking at the floor.

JUDGE RIVERA

Your request in the alternative for
return of custody to the parent.
That's the one you'd have won, if
you were going to win anything.

A pause. This is the one that costs her.

MAY

Withdrawn.

May keeps her eyes on the judge. She does not look at her
daughter once through any of it, because she has not earned
the right to be watched doing this and she knows it.

Audrey watches anyway.

JUDGE RIVERA

Withdrawals noted. All three.

She sets down the pen. Looks around the room. Then at the
small person against the wall.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Now. Everyone in this room has told
me what they want.

(beat)

The one person I haven't heard from
is Audrey.

Every adult starts to speak. Judge Rivera raises one finger
and they all stop.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Not you. Not you. Not any of you.

(to Audrey)

Come sit up here where I can hear
you.

Audrey gets up. Crosses the room. Sits in the chair beside
the desk with her feet not quite reaching the floor. The
compass in her fist.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Do you know what happens in here
today?

AUDREY

You decide where I go.

JUDGE RIVERA

That's right. It's not fair and I'm
not going to pretend it is.

(beat)

(MORE)

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

So before I do it, I want to hear what you think. You don't have to be nice. Nobody in here has been.

Audrey looks at the floor for a long moment.

AUDREY

My grandfather made a list.

She takes a folded paper out of her pocket. Henry's yellow legal pad page, worn soft along the creases from being folded and unfolded a great many times.

Daniel goes rigid. He had no idea she had it.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

It's not a list. It's one line. It says "IF I CANT... WHO?"

(beat)

He didn't finish it. He couldn't think of anybody.

She sets it on the desk.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Everybody's been really busy deciding about me. My mom made a spreadsheet. My uncle made a plan. You've got a whole folder.

(beat)

Nobody ever just... stayed.

She looks up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

He sat on the floor. At the hospital. When Gung Gung died, he sat on the floor next to the vending machine and he didn't say anything smart. He just sat there.

Her voice wobbles for the first time.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

That's the only thing anybody's done that I believed.

She looks at May.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I don't hate you.

May's composure finally, completely goes.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I just don't know you. And I don't want to move to a country to find out.

She turns back to the judge.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

So that's my answer. I want to stay with him.

(beat)

I want to stay where somebody sat on the floor.

Silence in chambers.

Judge Rivera picks up the folded page.

She reads the one line. Then she turns it over.

INSERT: the back of the sheet. Four words pressed clean through the paper, standing up off the surface where an old man leaned on the pen harder than he meant to.

Judge Rivera runs her thumb across it. Once.

She does not say what she's looking at. Nobody in the room asks.

She turns it back over and sets it down, squared to the edge of the blotter.

JUDGE RIVERA

Thank you. That was better than anything the adults gave me.

She picks up her pen.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

Ms. Chen's filings are withdrawn, which means I am no longer weighing a parent against a non-parent, and the detriment finding is off my plate. I want the record to show I never made it.

(beat)

Guardianship of the person of Audrey Keane is granted to Daniel and Kelly Keane, effective today. Reviewable in twelve months.

(beat)

Ms. Chen, I'm ordering supervised contact at the minor's discretion. Hers, not yours.

(MORE)

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

If she wants a phone call, you take it. If she doesn't, you wait.

MAY

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE RIVERA

Mr. Keane.

Daniel looks up.

JUDGE RIVERA (CONT'D)

For the record, I've had four of these this month. You're the only one who walked in here and told me the worst thing about himself before I could find it.

(beat)

Don't make me regret liking that.

She stands. The hearing is over in the least dramatic way possible.

77

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

77

They spill out. Kelly's hands over her mouth. Val gripping Daniel's shoulder hard enough to bruise.

Audrey walks a few steps and stops.

May comes out last, alone.

Audrey turns around and goes back to her. Holds out the compass.

AUDREY

He said you gave it to him.

May takes it. Turns it over. Her thumb finds the worn place on the back where her own used to sit.

MAY

I was thirteen.

She holds it a moment. Then presses it back into Audrey's hand and closes her fingers around it, exactly the way Henry did in the backyard.

MAY (CONT'D)

It's yours. It was always going to end up yours.

She straightens. And then, because she has decided not to leave without it:

MAY (CONT'D)

Your grandfather asked me to forgive him. Three days before he died.

Audrey goes still.

MAY (CONT'D)

He said he drove me out of the house when I was nineteen. He asked me straight out, and I told him he was tired, and I said we'd talk in the morning.

(beat)

There wasn't a morning.

Audrey says nothing.

MAY (CONT'D)

I'm not telling you that so you'll feel sorry for me. I'm telling you so you know exactly what I'm about to ask you for.

May's hands are shaking. She doesn't hide it.

MAY (CONT'D)

I'm asking you for the thing I wouldn't give him.

A long silence in a courthouse hallway.

Audrey looks at the compass in her fist. Then at her mother.

AUDREY

I'm still mad at you.

MAY

Yes.

AUDREY

Like, I don't think that's going away. I'm not going to stand here and tell you it's fine, because it isn't fine.

May nods. She has no argument. She wasn't going to make one.

And then Audrey says it, in the flattest voice in the world, the way you'd read something off a page.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 But I'm not doing what you did.
 (beat)
 So, okay. You're forgiven.

May makes a sound she has been holding for thirteen years.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 That's not the same as fine. It's
 just not the same as no.

A long beat. May gets herself back.

MAY
 Can I call you? Sometime. Not soon.

AUDREY
 Sometime.

That's all May gets. She takes it like a gift.

78 INT. DANIEL AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - EVENING - WEEKS LATER 78

The gear is gone from the hallway. In its place: a bookshelf, badly assembled, and a pair of soccer cleats.

And on the shelf, in a cheap frame from a drugstore, a printed photograph. Two people in their twenties on a hostel roof in Kowloon.

Five now. She's counted.

Beside it, Henry's Bible. Spine cracked white. A grocery receipt sticking out of it for a bookmark.

Val at the stove doing something ambitious and unwise with a wok. Kelly setting four places. Audrey doing homework at one end of the table, refusing to move for the plates.

Daniel comes in with mail, still in the tie from the beige office.

VAL
 Kelvin's people called me. Again.

DANIEL
 V.

VAL
 He wants to do it small. Actually
 small. His company, Hong Kong crew,
 a fraction of Ricky's number.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

He said, and I'm quoting, "the
version where nobody gets rich."

Daniel sets the mail down. Something moves across his face
and it isn't what Val expected.

DANIEL

When would it shoot?

VAL

Spring. Eleven weeks on the ground.

A beat. Audrey has not looked up from her worksheet and is
very obviously listening.

AUDREY

(to the worksheet)

Eleven weeks isn't that long.

Daniel looks at her.

DANIEL

It's eleven weeks.

AUDREY

(still not looking up)

I know how long eleven weeks is. I
can count.

(beat)

You'd come back.

It isn't a question. It's the first time she's ever said it
that way, and it costs her something to say it.

Daniel is quiet for a moment.

DANIEL

Yeah. I'd come back.

(beat)

I'm not going.

Audrey's pencil stops.

VAL

Daniel...

DANIEL

I've got a twelve-month review with
a judge who liked me by about one
inch.

(beat)

And that's not even the reason.

He pulls out a chair and sits down across from Audrey so she has to look at him.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I spent fifteen years wanting that.
And about a month ago I found out
it was never going to fix me, and
I've been waiting to feel bad about
it, and I don't.

(beat)

So I'm not going to go stand in an
alley in Kowloon for eleven weeks
to prove something I already know.

He turns to Val.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

You go.

Val stares at him.

VAL

Go as what?

DANIEL

As the director.

Silence in the kitchen. Kelly stops with the plates in her hands.

VAL

That's not... Danny, that's not a
thing you can hand somebody.

DANIEL

It's not a gift. You've been
running this thing since Hong Kong.
You worked Kelvin when I was
useless. You pitched it alone on a
laptop while I ran out the door.

(beat)

And you've wanted it since I met
you, and you've never once said it
out loud, because there was always
me.

Val's eyes are wet and furious about it.

VAL

And you'll do what, exactly.

DANIEL

I'll write it. Properly, this time.
Then I'll come home at six and pick
her up at three and drive out to
you if you need a body on set.

(beat)

It's your movie, V. It's been your
movie for a while.

Val puts down the wooden spoon because her hands aren't
reliable.

VAL

If you're doing this because you
think you owe me...

DANIEL

I'm doing it because you're better
at it than me and I finally don't
care.

A long beat. Val laughs, wrecked, delighted, furious.

VAL

I'm going to be so good at this.

DANIEL

I know.

AUDREY

(to the worksheet)

Can somebody explain what just
happened.

KELLY

Your uncle gave away his movie.

AUDREY

(finally looking up)

On purpose?

DANIEL

On purpose.

Audrey studies him for a second. Then goes back to her
worksheet.

AUDREY

Okay.

(beat)

That's good.

Audrey closes the worksheet. Reaches over to the shelf and
takes down the Bible.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I've been reading Gung Gung's.

Nobody knows what to do with that, so nobody does anything.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
He wrote all over it. It's kind of
a mess. There's a grocery list in
Philippians.

She finds the receipt. On the page beside it, one line
underlined twice, hard enough that the ballpoint went
through.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
This one he did twice. So I figure
he meant it.
(reading, careful)
"And we know that in all things God
works for the good of those who
love him."

She looks up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I read it about four times because
at first I thought it was saying
the bad stuff was good. Which would
be a really stupid thing to say to
somebody.
(beat)
It doesn't say that. I checked a
different one at the library. It
says He's working. Like, right now.
Present tense.

Daniel has stopped moving entirely.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
So I don't think it means Gung Gung
dying was good.
(beat)
I think it means He didn't waste
it.

A silence in a small apartment with four plates on the table.

KELLY
(not steady)
Sit down, all of you. Before this
gets cold and I take it personally.

They sit. Four plates. Val reaching for the rice.

Audrey puts her pencil down and holds out both hands.

Everyone stops.

AUDREY

It's what we did at Gung Gung's.

A beat. Then Kelly takes one hand. Daniel takes the other. Val, after a second, takes Kelly's.

Audrey bows her head.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Gung Gung had a rule. Anybody can count what's gone. Counting what's still on the table is the hard one, and you do it out loud or you'll cheat.

(beat)

Okay. Out loud.

She keeps her eyes shut. Around the table, nobody moves.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

There's four of us here and in March there was one of me. Val's not related to any of us and she came anyway. My mom called Sunday and I picked up, and it was mostly about nothing, and that was okay.

(beat)

I've got five pictures of my dad. I had four for six years.

Her voice catches. She goes on anyway.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I don't know why You took Gung Gung. Henry. That's his real name and I only found out in a courthouse, so I'm going to use it once.

(beat)

I asked and I didn't get anything and I'm not going to stand here and say it's fine, because he'd know I was lying and so would You.

(beat)

But he said count what's on the table.

A long beat.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

It's a lot. It's actually a lot.

(beat)

Thank You for the food. Thank You
for the people.

(beat)

Amen.

Kelly is crying and trying very hard not to be caught at it.
Daniel's jaw is set. Val stares hard at the rice.

Audrey lets go of their hands and picks up her fork.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Okay, that's it.

And dinner starts, loud, ordinary, unremarkable in every way.

Daniel watches it happen around him, and doesn't say
anything, and doesn't need to.

AUDREY (V.O.)

Gung Gung used to say a compass
only tells you one thing, and
that's enough. I used to think that
meant it would take me somewhere.

(beat)

It doesn't. It just tells you where
you're standing.

(beat)

It doesn't tell you why you're
standing there, either. I asked
about that a lot. I still do.

(beat)

The pastor at his funeral said the
books don't balance. That nobody
ever paid what they owed, and Jesus
paid it anyway, for people who
weren't sorry yet.

(beat)

I don't understand most of that. I
think you're allowed to not
understand it and be walking
anyway.

(beat)

Because I'm not lost. That's the
thing I keep landing on. I know
exactly where I'm standing.

(beat)

In March there was one chair at my
table. Now there's four, and a
phone that rings on Sundays, and I
did not build any of it, and
neither did they.

(MORE)

AUDREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

I don't know why it had to cost
what it cost. I don't think I get
to know that part, and I've stopped
waiting up for it.

(beat)

But God didn't waste it. He took
the worst year of my life and He
made me a family out of it.

(beat)

That one I believe all the way.

HOLD on the table. The noise of a family that isn't very good
at it yet.

FADE OUT.

THE END