

TOXIC

"Episode 1: Dog"

by

Rob Jones

&

Ben Clifford

EXT. MCMANSION - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING SHOT

A beat-up sedan sits in front of a lavish mid-century home.

INT. TED'S CAR - NIGHT

TED (25) campy, awkward, and, at this moment, very anxious, sits in the driver's seat. He spies the house with great determination. All the lights are on with no one visible inside. Ted squirms in his seat.

FINALLY, Ted spots something. A mid-forties professional LADY parks a BMW in the driveway, steps out. Ted watches her intently as if she's the enemy.

She walks to the front door. Through the bay window, Ted watches her greet a man inside, MORGAN (40s) handsome. Finally, with a deep breath, a shaky Ted gets out of his car.

EXT. MCMANSION - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Ted rings the doorbell, then paces. The Lady answers.

TED
Um, yeah, is John home?

LADY
I don't know a John.

Morgan appears in the foyer, behind her.

MORGAN
Ted?

TED
John. I've been trying to get in touch with you.

LADY
Morgan, why is this kid calling you John?

TED
John, why is she calling you Morgan?

MORGAN
(sighs)
Ted, you have to go. You can't come here.

LADY
Who is this guy?

TED
Can I come in?

MORGAN
No.

She interrupts.

LADY
Tell me what's going on, Morgan.

A BABY WAILS somewhere in the house. Unsure, she peers at Ted and Morgan and then walks off to check on the baby.

LADY
I'll be back.

INT. FOYER

Ted steps into the fancy, expansive house.

MORGAN
Oh, god, please just leave.

TED
Tell me why you won't contact me.

MORGAN
(whispering)
Because I don't want to! *I don't have to!*

TED
But I love you.

Morgan is flabbergasted.

MORGAN
You can't possibly love me. We had sex twice. I told you a fake name. I mean, John?

The lady returns, a young BABY in her arms, falling asleep. She sighs, staring at Ted.

LADY
Morgan, I talked to you about this.

TED
Can I get a glass of water? I've been sweating a lot.

MORGAN
It's only like fifty degrees out.

LADY
The kitchen is just to the left

FANCY KITCHEN

Ted pours a glass of filtered water from a fancy contraption. Barely audible arguing is heard between the couple. Ted stares at a family portrait on the wall for a LONG TIME.

FOYER

Ted returns to the argument in progress. She turns to Ted, more understanding. She smiles at him as if he is delicate.

LADY
Ted, Morgan and I have an open relationship.

Morgan stares at his feet, ashamed.

TED
So you don't care?

LADY
He doesn't tell me about his, I don't tell him about mine.

TED
John --

MORGAN
Morgan --

TED
You told me you were gay.

LADY
Morgan's sexuality is fluid. The whole family is fluid.

TED
Even the baby?

MORGAN
Ted, just go.

TED
You said you're going to leave *her*.

MORGAN
(to his wife)
Baby, he's crazy. I didn't say that.

TED
You didn't say it with words!

MORGAN
How did I possibly say it?

TED
With your -- I don't know!

MORGAN
Having sex with you was a mistake.

TED
(desperate-sounding)
Because of your marriage?

MORGAN
No. Having sex with *you*,
specifically, was a mistake.

Ted stares at Morgan.

TED
Well...

Ted hands her his empty glass. She tries to hold the glass and the baby simultaneously.

TED
Thanks for the fancy water.

EXT. MCMANSION - NIGHT

Ted walks to his car. Cautiously, the couple watches him from the doorway. Ted turns and waves. They don't wave back.

INT. SEDAN

Ted sits in his car and watches as the front door closes. He frantically opens his phone, drafts an SMS.

INSERT SMS TEXT: Hey, John. Please don't block me.

Ted immediately receives a response.

INSERT SMS TEXT: Drive away **immediately!**

INT./EXT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Ted drives and stops at a set of lights in the suburban area. He seems serene, but then -- TED SCREAMS AS LOUD AS HE CAN.

BLACK SCREEN

The soothing voice of a professional women.

SUSAN (V.O)
Ted, you have borderline
personality disorder. And dependent
personality disorder. They're often
co-morbid. I'm telling you this
because I think it might help you.

INT. TRENDY COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Ted sits across from SIERRA (25) a woman of color, slim, and natural hair. She wears yoga pants. They both sip lattes.

SIERRA
What does "co-morbid" mean?

TED
It means they, like, go together.

SIERRA
Well, I mean... that's good, right?
It means you have an answer.

Ted nods, unconvinced.

TED
I've been Googling.

Sierra firmly shakes her head to say "that was a bad move".

TED
It doesn't seem good.

Sierra sighs. She reaches out to touch Ted's hand tenderly.

SIERRA
Ted. You're just you.
(beat)
Those are just words. Go to work.
Go home. I think you'll find things
will be right where you left them.

INT. ALICIA'S CAR - DAY

Alicia (mid-20s) thin, energetic, wearing a heap of makeup to cover up a horrible hangover, approaches the order speaker at a drive-thru coffee-shop.

COFFEE SHOP GUY (V.O.)
May I take your order?

ALICIA
I want it large and Black.

Alicia smiles to herself at the stupid, stupid joke. She scrolls through her phone, distracted.

She watches the Snapchat/Insta story of someone named "AbbyGirl1994".

THE STORY FEATURES A SERIES OF PHOTOS AND SHORT VIDEOS of a wild night out, most of them featuring Alicia herself: drunk, drugged, and wild. Not flattering.

Alicia cringes at the photos. She is startled by a HONK.

GUY IN CAR BEHIND HER (O.S)
Get off your phone, lady! The
line's moving!

INT. TAX OFFICE, TED'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ted sits at his desk, feigning work over a spreadsheet. COWORKERS pass by, he switches tabs to Google: he searches "borderline personality disorder".

Alicia, looking horribly hungover, approaches Ted's desk.

ALICIA
Teddy bear.

Back turned, Ted rolls his eyes.

ALICIA
T-Dog, my man.

Ted spins around in his chair and lifts his chin.

TED
Am I a bear or a dog?

Alicia places her fingers on her temples, cringing.

ALICIA
Ugh, nevermind. I have to talk to
you later about that project.

TED
(flatly)
Great.

Alicia walks off.

INT. TAX/ACCOUNTING OFFICE - BREAK ROOM

Alone in the break room, while everyone else works, Alicia talks on her phone, in a serious, whispered conversation.

ALICIA

Abby, you need to take it down.

ABBY (V.O)

Don't worry, it expires in a day.

ALICIA

I don't want it up for a whole day!
There's a Boomerang of us doing
coke!

ABBY (V.O)

I know, it's awesome! Just untag
yourself if it bothers you.

ALICIA

It's still me! I have a job.

ABBY (V.O)

Look, babe, I'm not letting you
dictate my social media anymore.

ALICIA

When have I ever done this before?

ABBY (V.O)

You're being super not chill and I
have a killer hangover.

ALICIA

Abby, I... you're just toxic. I
can't stand you sometimes.

ABBY (V.O)

I'm toxic? What about you?

ALICIA

Think of all the shit you put me
through. I drove you four hours to
a detox center last month.

ABBY (V.O)

You know my Dad's insurance is real
specific.

Alicia loudly sighs.

ABBY (V.O)

Fine. If I'm so toxic, stop hanging
out with me. I have other friends.

ALICIA
Fine. Me too. Tons...

ABBY (V.O)
Do you?

INT. OFFICE TOILETS - STALL

In a closed stall, Ted sits on the toilet. Outside the stall, the mid-boring-conversation voices of CO-WORKERS. The HAND DRIERS blow loudly. The door opens and closes.

Upon the silence, Ted pulls down his pants to his knees, revealing his scarred bare legs. From a shirt pocket, he produces a BOX-CUTTER.

QUICK MEMORY FLASHBACKS:

- An OLDER TEEN holds YOUNG TED down on a bed. He whispers something with hostility as he straddles Ted.

- Morgan and Leanne watch from their front door as Ted walks to his car.

- This turns to Young Ted and the older teen exiting a house as his MOM looks on from the front door.

MOM
Ted, show your cousin around the neighborhood.

END FLASHBACK

INT. TOILET STALL - DAY

Ted makes methodical, deep, cuts over the existing scars on his leg. He sits, leg bloody, and waits to feel better, it's not working today.

EXT. TAX OFFICE - DAY

Alicia smokes a cigarette near the entrance. CO-WORKERS glare at her as they enter, having to inhale her smoke. She flashes a sarcastic smile to them and brings her phone to her mouth.

ALICIA
Siri, where does an adult woman find friends?

SIRI (V.O)
Let me help you with that, Alicia.

Alicia scrolls through Siri's results -
adultfriendfinder.com, meetup.com, Tinder, etc.

ALICIA
Online dating? Shoot me, Siri.

SIRI (V.O)
Let me help you with that, Alicia.

With a determined look, Ted power walks out of the building.
Alicia tries to get his attention.

ALICIA
Teddy Bear! Hey?!

Ted ignores her, marching on.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
T-dog... The project? Ted...

He doesn't respond and leaves the lot. Alicia throws the
cigarette butt on the ground, re-enters the building.

EXT. WELLINGTON ROAD - DAY

Ted stands on the median of a busy road right by his office.
Traffic rushes on both sides of him. Ted takes a deep breath
and, looking determined -- PURPOSEFULLY STEPS INTO TRAFFIC.

END COLD OPEN

ACT 1

BLACK SCREEN

The sound of a camera shutter.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY

DONALD NGUYEN (23) handsome, Vietnamese, stands before a beautiful young married couple (HANK and ELIZA) holding a BABY in their arms. The couple poses in front of a scrim.

DONALD

One more...

SNAP. He takes another photo.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Okay. Relax now.

The couple immediately stops smiling, leaving their photo faces behind. Hank places the baby in a carrier, waves to Donald as he walks away. Eliza stops to talk to Donald.

ELIZA

Thanks for fitting us in.

DONALD

I'm not that busy.

ELIZA

Yeah, this is old fashioned. I know people don't do this anymore.

DONALD

They do. Or my parents wouldn't be in business.

She smiles and nods. There's a beat. Donald nods back.

DONALD

Well...

ELIZA

My cousin, you don't know her. It's kinda dorky... She's having a baby, and she wants photos, like, right in the hospital.

DONALD

(almost laughs)

That is a little dorky.

ELIZA
It's her first one; I told her,
it'll be gross, you'll be all doped
up, but there's no convincing her.

Donald laughs.

DONALD
Have her talk to my dad.

ELIZA
It'll be hard to schedule, she's
due soon. Dunno when it'll be.

DONALD
He'll sort it out.

ELIZA
Okay. It's good to see you, Donald.
I had been wondering what you'd
been up to since school.

DONALD
Still here.

ELIZA
You must love it.

DONALD
Yeah.

INT. STUDIO - DARKROOM - DAY

Donald and his father DO VAN NGUYEN (50s) pour over
developing photos in the red-lit room.

DONALD
Did she talk to you about booking
her cousin; the hospital photos?

Do Van ignores Donald as he holds a negative up to the light.

DO VAN
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
Donald, look at the light here.

DONALD
Hmm?

DO VAN
Do you see what happens with the
negative?

DONALD
I know how to develop them, *cha*.

DO VAN
Are you coming to your sister's
tonight?

DONALD
No. I have plans.

DO VAN
Doing what?

INT. GAY CLUB, BOOTH - NIGHT

Donald and TREVOR (20s) a flamboyant, tweaking young guy, sip
drinks in a booth surrounded by the music and club nightlife.

TREVOR
You could be a club photographer.

Donald furrows his brow and emphatically shakes his head.

TREVOR
You see that, like, *dossier*, that
got leaked by a photo guy here? The
"standards" for photos?

DONALD
What are you talking about?

TREVOR
Heat used to be really strict about
who their club photographers took
photos of. No twink, no Asians, no
Bears... gotta project a particular
image for their social media page.

Donald laughs.

DONALD
We wouldn't ever get in a photo.

TREVOR
Why? I mean, you're Asian, but are
you saying I'm an uggo?

DONALD
Shut up, loser.

TREVOR
Drink more.

DONALD
I'm driving.

TREVOR
You're about three drinks past
driving, my boy.

Trevor "subtly" points out a YOUNG GUY, dancing with his
friends across the club, who is looking their way.

DONALD
Is he looking at you or me?

TREVOR
I dunno. Quick, stand up.

Donald stands "subtly". The Guy's eyes follow him.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Donald sits in the driver's seat of his beat-up sedan, parked
in some dank street in the city night. The Guy performs
fellatio on him.

INT. DONALD'S CAR - NIGHT

Donald offers an empty, fast-food drink cup to the Guy, who
promptly spits in it. He looks up at Donald.

THE GUY
What are you doing later tonight?

Donald drunkenly yawns and answer with some slurred speech.

DONALD
I have a pretty big night planned.

INT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO - MORNING

It's a small yoga studio. Wood floors with mirrors on three
of the walls and abstract art on the other wall.

A small GROUP, mostly women, sit in the lotus position, eyes
closed. Sierra slowly paces the room and she speaks calmly.

SIERRA
This is a time to let go of all
your nuisance thoughts.

She whispers to an OLDER LADY as she strolls by.

SIERRA
Ruth, sit up straight.

Ruth sits as upright as possible. Sierra's phone vibrates.

SIERRA (CONT'D)
All the clutter in your head
dissolves away.

She ignores it as she walks to the front of the room and sits facing everyone. Her phone stops vibrating. She sits in the lotus position and closes her eyes. Her phone vibrates again.

INT. DONALD'S CAR - DAY

As sunlight streams in, Donald awakes in his car alone on the same street, which is now filled as COMMUTERS walk to work.

SIERRA (V.O.)
We might not always end up where we
want to be but in this moment we
are in our peaceful place.

EXT. DONALD'S CAR - DAY

A gruff COP knocks on the window, waking Donald.

COP
Buddy, you can't sleep here.

SIERRA (V.O.)
The stress of work and life just
melts away as we breathe in and
breathe out. In and out.

Hungover and still groggy, Donald politely waves and starts the car, pulling into traffic.

INT./EXT. DONALD'S CAR - DAY

Donald checks his phone, stopped at a red light. A series of texts from Trevor: "I'm going home if ure looking for me."

SIERRA (V.O.)
The world is in a constant state of
renewal. And we are changing the
world from the inside by looking
within and changing ourselves.

Another from "Dad", more recent: "Come hospital now. Baby being born - bring the Canon", followed by a series of inscrutable emojis.

SIERRA (V.O.)
We remain present, not up or down
but neutral. We accept everything
that comes our way. Every thought
as we breathe, we let it all pass.

Donald sighs.

INT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Sierra scans the room, everyone seems at peace. She turns her back to the meditating CROWD and opens her phone.

She scrolls through a flowery app of POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS: "You are doing right. You fit where you fit. You can only do so much.". Sierra legitimately breathes these affirmations in, before noticing - "One new voicemail".

Sierra, still not facing the meditators, listens to the voicemail. We don't hear the message, but Sierra is suddenly taken with shock and an urgent need to leave. She frantically turns back to her crowd, addressing them

SIERRA
(a little panicked)
Now it's time to...
(clears her throat and
quickly gathers herself)
Time to focus on your mantras. Your
peaceful place, in silence.

Sierra leans down and whispers to MARY (20s), seated up front. She hops to her feet as Sierra whispers again.

SIERRA (CONT'D)
It's Ted. Emergency.

MARY
Of course.

Mary stands in Sierra's spot as Sierra tries to exit "mindfully" while speaking in a forced calming voice.

SIERRA
Stay in your breathing, ignore the
outside world. Something came up
and Mary is going to guide the rest
of the session. I'm truly sorry.

She rushes to gather her things while trying to remain calm, she makes drastic hand motions as she speaks.

SIERRA
Continue breathing in and out.

Mary nods and they hug. Sierra rushes out. Ruth peeks out of the corner of her eyes as Sierra leaves. She slinks down with slumped shoulders again.

BLACK SCREEN

DR. MORSE (V.O)
You're lucky your psychologist has
some sway, or you'd be on a mental
health hold for two days.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ted, in a gown, sits on a hospital bed with Sierra by his side. DOCTOR MORSE (60s) stands near the door with a sea of INTERNS around him.

DR. MORSE
I'm going to suggest a change in
medication, starting today.

Ted nods.

TED
Can I get changed into my clothes?

DR. MORSE
Ted, I've reviewed your files.
Precipitating family factors,
childhood trauma. I'd be very
worried about seeing you here
again.

TED
I won't be back.

DR. MORSE
You won't have a choice when you're
dead.

Sierra wipes a tear from her eye. Dr. Morse softens.

DR. MORSE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. What is your
relationship?

SIERRA
Best friends. We live together.

DR. MORSE
So you don't live alone?

Ted shakes his head.

DR. MORSE (CONT'D)
Good. Miss, I'd like to talk to you
alone if that's OK.

TED
Talk to her alone?

DR. MORSE
You need someone to keep an eye out
for you. No subterfuge here, I
promise.

Ted stands. Grabs his clothes, semi-annoyed.

TED
Can I get some privacy?

Sierra leaves with the doctor. The Interns follow.

INT. MATERNITY SUITE - DAY

Donald SNAPS a photo of a semi-anesthetized WIFE her equally
tired HUSBAND, and their NEWBORN, red and screaming.

WIFE
How does it look?

Donald looks at the preview on the camera. Her eyes are
barely open, her husband is looking away, and the baby is red
as a tomato and completely unremarkable.

DONALD
Maybe one more?

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Ted sits on a bench in a busy hallway. He watches as Sierra
speaks to Dr. Morse down the hall, inaudible from here.

Camera in hand, Donald approaches, takes a seat. He unhappily
cycles through photos on his camera. Ted turns to Donald.

TED
What are you doing?

Donald doesn't look up.

DONALD
I'm trying to find a photo... that
doesn't look like a mortuary
portrait.

TED
Are you a hospital photographer? Is that a thing?

DONALD
No. And I don't think so.

TED
Oh.

Donald realizes he's being rude.

DONALD
Mostly family stuff, portraits. I had clients who wanted photos after birth.

TED
(disgusted)
Of the *after-birth*?

Donald chuckles.

DONALD
No. Like, smiling, holding the baby.

TED
You're young for a photographer.

DONALD
It's my family's business.

TED
It's cool you have a creative job.

Donald smiles politely. Ted anxiously looks up as Dr. Morse and Sierra still talk. He tries to distract himself further.

TED
I'm Ted.

DONALD
Donald.

TED
Aren't you interested as to why I'm here?

DONALD
I'm assuming it's personal.

TED
It is, but I'm on a lot of
sedatives and I'm thinking we won't
speak again.

DONALD
Okay.

TED
Yesterday, I ran into traffic.

DONALD
Oh my god.

TED
I'm fine. I didn't get hit or
nothing.

DONALD
Then why are you at the hospital?

TED
Well. I did it on purpose.

Donald looks confused, then realizes.

TED
I was on Wellington Road. Do you
know how busy that road is? How
much of a fuck-up do you have to be
to *fail* at that?

Donald smiles.

DONALD
Well, I'm sure everyone's glad
you're okay.

Ted gestures to Sierra and the Doctor.

TED
That's my roommate and the doctor.
Talking about me. He's telling her,
like, don't let me out of her
sight, hide the knives, whatever. I
feel like I'm sitting outside the
principal's office.

DONALD
(smiling)
You kind of are.

Ted stares at Donald.

TED
You're unflappable, aren't you?

DONALD
Huh?

TED
Here I am, trying to make you
uncomfortable, and you're laughing.

DONALD
Sorry. I don't mean to --

TED
I quite like it.

Donald nods.

TED
Can I have your number?

DONALD
I thought we wouldn't speak again.

Ted shrugs.

HOSPITAL MAIN LOBBY - DAY

Sierra and Ted slowly walk toward the exit. Sierra warmly
rubs Ted on the back.

ALICIA (O.S.)
Ted?

Ted stares at Alicia, who's just walked into the hospital.

TED
(cold, confused)
Why is a work person here?

He looks at Sierra. She shrugs.

ALICIA
You jumped into traffic right by
the office.

TED
Oh god, I hadn't even thought --

SIERRA
Um, hi, you work with Ted? Is this
really the right time to do this?

ALICIA

Right. Of course. It's just... I think I was the last person you spoke to before you, well, you know. And if you'd been successful... just... wow. I mean I think that means something.

Ted sits down on a bench, mortified.

TED

How can I ever show my face there again? I'm sure management wants me gone.

SIERRA

Let's not worry about that right --

Alicia interjects, in her own head.

ALICIA

It got me thinking, am I worthy of something like this? Should I be the last person anyone sees before they die? That's deep, right?

Ted groans in deep shame, not listening. Sierra watches Alicia having an epiphany of sorts whilst Ted melts down, and both are ignoring her.

ALICIA

The answer is: no. I'm not worthy of such a thing. Thank god you weren't flattened by a bus or anything.

TED

Uh-huh. Great. Thank you, random work person.

Alicia's eyes light up and she excitedly pulls out her phone.

ALICIA

I know how to handle work. I'll call H.R pretend I'm a compliance officer and remind her how important it is to look after employees' mental health and well-being. As a suicidal, heavily medicated employee, you have rights, you know

SIERRA

You don't need to do that.

ALICIA

(dials as she talks)

I did this in the midst of a brutal pain pill addiction and they had a meeting, management was super-sensitive to everyone for a bit.

TED

Uggh. I hated that meeting.

ALICIA

(to Sierra)

Shit, quick lookup the... EEOC mental health protections.

Sierra just shrugs, Googling on her phone. Behind her, a BOY gets his arm cast signed by a FRIEND.

ALICIA

(in her phone, fake voice)

Yes, this is...

(looks at the boy)

Pen... ne Cast. Ms. Penny Cast, I'm a compliance officer with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. We've been getting some complaints from employees of tax and accounting firms lately. There's a lot of stress and pressure with all the new tax regulations. We want to make sure you're well aware that...

She motions to Sierra for her phone. Sierra finds the page, gives Alicia the phone. Alicia reads from it as she talks.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Depression, PTSD, and MANY other mental health conditions are protected against discrimination and harassment in the workplace. There are expectations to give reasonable accommodations to help those employees that are struggling.

Ted looks to Sierra.

TED

Isn't it a crime to impersonate a government employee?

INT. TAX OFFICE HR DEPARTMENT - DAY

BELINDA, plump, uptight, listens and nods like she thinks someone is watching her.

ALICIA (V.O.)
Just calling as a reminder and to ask confidentially if there are any issues in your workplace that you feel could potentially be in a sort of a gray area or a violation?

She pulls her mouth away from the phone to clear her throat.

BELINDA
Absolutely not.

ALICIA (V.O.)
This is just sort of a heads up that your industry may come under the microscope if some of the reports we're getting are true.

INT. HOSPITAL - MAIN RECEPTION - DAY

As before. Alicia hands Sierra back her phone, smiling.

ALICIA
There. All fixed.

Ted looks to Sierra and speaks quietly.

TED
And now I'm an accomplice to felony impersonation.

ALICIA
So where are we off to now?

Ted looks to Sierra, his eyes get wide as to say get her away from me, now. Sierra pulls Alicia aside.

SIERRA
Ted is in a bad place right now. The Doctors want him to just rest up and be around people he knows and trust.

ALICIA
You know what I was saying, right? Maybe there was a reason he walked by me before he wanted to become human roadkill, right?

SIERRA
Well, everything does happen for --

ALICIA
(in her thoughts)
Oh my god, I used to tell this
loser in high school to go play in
traffic any time he tried to talk
to me. Maybe I should call him.

She looks to Sierra who doesn't know how to respond.

ALICIA
I need to clear my head.

She manically searches her pockets.

ALICIA
Shit and I'm out of cigarettes...

SIERRA
Well, actually, if you need to
clear your head...

ALICIA
Oh, score. You have benzos?

SIERRA
No. I just opened a little yoga
studio. Mindful yoga, we also have
mindful meditation sessions and
classes. There are all kinds of
spiritual events and good vibes
going around at all times.

Sierra gives Alicia a business card, warmly rubs her arm.

TED (O.S.)
SIERRA. I WANNNA GOO HOOOME.

Sierra ignores him. Alicia puts her phone to her mouth.

ALICIA
Siri, find me the nearest lawyer
specializing in discrimination in
the workplace.

SIERRA
Huh? What's going on?

ALICIA
Oh, I'm just going to leave a brief
vague message on their webpage
asking to call our office back.

Sierra's caught off guard as Alicia hugs her, whilst typing the message on her phone and reading Sierra's business card.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Thank you. I always thought this stuff was for weirdos. But I'm going to check this out with an open mind. I'm all about the good vibes, ya know? Yeah.

Alicia turns and marches away, proud. Sierra turns to Ted.

TED

Do not befriend her.

Sierra squints to him in confusion.

TED

She seems okay in small doses but she smells like stale cigarettes.

SIERRA

What did I tell you about judging others so harshly?

TED

It's just weird. She works with me. It's like your parents becoming friends with your... teachers.

SIERRA

None of those things are weird.

TED

Ugh.

END ACT 1

ACT 2

INT. TAX OFFICE, MARCUS'S OFFICE - DAY

Belinda sits with MARCUS (50s) the office manager, in his spacious office (it's the only room with a window).

MARCUS

I feel like attempted suicide on the job should be a fire-able offense. He basically said, I'd rather kill myself than work here for one more second. You're telling me we have to accommodate him?

Belinda starts to speak when Marcus's desk phone RINGS. He picks it up.

MARCUS

(to Belinda)

He abandoned his post, you know?

(in the phone)

Hello, this is --

POLISHED MALE VOICE (V.O.)

This is Ernie Shapiro from Shapiro, Shapiro, and Shapiro Law. I received your online inquiry.

Marcus looks confused, panicky and speaks loudly.

MARCUS

Lawyer?

He looks desperately at Belinda, she mouths "speaker". He puts it on speakerphone.

POLISHED MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Ernie Shapiro, I specialize in employee disputes and workplace discrimination.

Belinda shrugs and then mouths "HANG UP."

MARCUS

(into phone)

Um...

He hangs up.

BLACK SCREEN

SIERRA (V.O)
I don't think you should text him.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ted and Sierra sit on the couch, watching a streaming show on a laptop between them. Ted smokes from a vape pen.

TED
Why not?

Ted offers the vape to Sierra.

TED
Guy said it's indica, which is the good one.

SIERRA
I don't think you should be smoking that.

TED
Why? Did *The Doctor* tell you it's a bad idea?

SIERRA
Don't be bitter. If I didn't live with you, you'd be in the hospital.

TED
No one said that.

Sierra takes the pen, takes a drag, and exhales vapor.

SIERRA
I think if you text him...

TED
You think what?

Sierra sighs.

SIERRA
It's not good for you. You should take some time off... from everything.

TED
Everything? Might as well get back to work and get it out of the way. Just rip it off like a band-aid.

TED (CONT'D)

And maybe this guy is the one. What else am I doing?

Sierra stares at Ted.

SIERRA

I want you to think about what happened yesterday.

TED

It had nothing to do with Morgan slash John.

SIERRA

Wait, what?

INT. TAX OFFICE, MARCUS'S OFFICE - DAY

Marcus sits on the edge of his desk. He picks up the phone and goes to dial but then looks over to Belinda.

MARCUS

This is so awkward. I'm horrible at this stuff. H.R. should do it. It feels like it should be a woman talking to him.

He stops himself as his face gets a little more serious.

MARCUS

Is that sexist?

Belinda rolls her eyes. Marcus sighs and dials the phone.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM

Ted looks at his phone and lets out an exasperated sigh.

TED

It's work.

He reaches a finger out indecisively to answer the call and then pulls away.

SIERRA

Ted answer it. Tell them you need some time off.

TED

I can't say that.

He reaches out a finger again, indecisively.

INT. TAX OFFICE, MARCUS'S OFFICE - DAY

The phone at ear, Marcus speaks quietly to himself.

MARCUS
Please don't answer, please don't
answer...
(to Belinda with a smile.)
Got his voice mail.

He clears his throat to sound as concerned as possible. He shakes his head like Ted is there to see his fake sympathy.

MARCUS
Ted, it's Marcus. Sorry I missed
you. I really wanted to speak to
you man to man to say we here...
respect you and your whole deal.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ted and Sierra both listen to the voicemail, on speaker.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Please take a week off. We don't
care about any doctor's note or
discussions you're not comfortable
with. Just a take a good week... a
business week, five days. And if
you need anytime after, that's
fine, but with, um. You'll then
need a doctor's note. We're all on
your side buddy. No pressure here.
Take care, pal.

Sierra looks to Ted with a satisfied nod.

SIERRA
See?

TED
Yeah, good vibes. Whatever. I know.

SIERRA
I think you should come to my
mindfulness group this week.

Ted sits up. Lightbulb moment!

TED
You know what? I'm gonna do it.

SIERRA
Really? You'll come to my studio?

TED
What? Ew. No. Not that.

Sierra frowns.

TED
That Chinese guy at the hospital.
Like you say. "Everything happens
for a reason" I wouldn't have met
him, got his number if I hadn't --

SIERRA
You really shouldn't follow that
thought to its logical conclusion.

BLACK SCREEN

DONALD (V.O)
He texted me!

EXT. TREVOR'S APARTMENT - BALCONY

Trevor and Donald sit in chairs on the balcony, overlooking a
city view. They sip drinks.

TREVOR
Crazy boy?

DONALD
I forgot his name. What should I
save him in my phone as?

TREVOR
"Crazy boy" is very fitting.

Donald starts drafting a text.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Wait, you're replying?

DONALD
I mean, he was cute.

TREVOR
He is a psychiatric patient.

DONALD
He was very clear with me that he
was *not* a patient at the time.

They both laugh.

TREVOR
You can certainly do better,
Donald.

DONALD
I'm not like you.

TREVOR
What happened with the guy at *Heat*?

He gives a disgusted shakes of his head. Trevor finishes his drink and stands.

TREVOR
You're so repressed. Do whatever
you want.

INT. TAX OFFICE - DAY

Alicia and the STAFF walk past all the cubicles.

MALE COWORKER
I bet this is about Ted. I kept
saying this place is going to make
someone go crazy one day.

ANOTHER COWORKER
I hate these types of meetings.

MALE COWORKER
Is it crazier that he ran into
traffic or that we haven't yet?
Have we just accepted our slow
mundane relatively painless death?

ALICIA
I need a cigarette.

MEETING ROOM

The EMPLOYEES and Alicia sit at the back of the room. Marcus and Belinda hold up some generic depression hotline poster.

Belinda speaks in a disingenuously nice tone. Every few seconds Marcus gives an overdone sympathetic nod.

BELINDA
... These guidelines are posted in
the break room along with all of
the office and hotline numbers I
mentioned. And please, my door is
always open for anyone who wants to
discuss these things.

MARCUS

Nothing is more valuable than all
of you. Any questions or concerns?

Alicia raises her hand.

ALICIA

Ted is a good friend and I was the
last person he talked to before...
you know.

Management solemnly nods and Belinda is about to speak --

ALICIA

It's had a pretty big effect on me.
We didn't even get to talk before
he... you know. I feel because
there's so much pressure here I was
too busy focused on my cigarette
since we only get one smoke break
that I didn't notice how hurt my
friend and coworker was.

MARCUS

We hear you, Alicia.

ALICIA

What if he succeeded in... You
know? That would've eaten me up
inside. Would it have driven me to
suicide too? Probably not but all
I'm saying is I don't think it's
right that we only get one smoke
break per 8-hour shift. The
question I pose to you is, could an
extra smoke break have prevented
not just one but maybe two
potential suicide attempts?

Alicia looks around the room and then to management. Marcus
and Belinda look to each other nervously at a loss for words.

EXT. TAX OFFICE - DAY

Alicia, along with four other STAFF MEMBERS, take drags of
their cigarettes..

ALICIA

If I knew this was all it took to
get an extra smoke break I would've
swan dived into traffic when I
first started.

Alicia smiles. She looks to them for a reaction, no one even makes eye contact with her, let alone responds.

INT. DONALD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donald lays in bed, texting. This is his childhood bed, in his childhood room - Arctic Monkeys posters, a twin bed, etc.

DONALD texts: "How about Saturday night?"

A KNOCK at the door.

DONALD
Come in.

Donald's mother, KIEU NGUYEN (50s) enters.

KIUE
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
You missed your sister's yesterday.

Donald sits up. Kiue sits next to him on the bed.

DONALD
I know. Sorry.

KIUE
She had news. She wants to tell you herself, but I just...

Kiue smiles.

DONALD
She's pregnant?

Kiue nods, grinning widely.

KIUE
Don't tell her I said anything.

DONALD
You're going to be bà n?i!

She hugs him. Donald reacts with surprise, this is rare.

KIUE
Donald, your father and I love you.

DONALD
I know. I love you, too.

KIUE
College didn't work out. Okay. Job didn't work. That's okay, too.

DONALD
Ngu?i m?...

KIUE
You can't live here forever... But
I'm not asking you to leave.

DONALD
What are you asking?

KIUE
I'm asking you to start your life.

Kiue looks at Donald. She touches him on the shoulder, smiles uncomfortably, then departs.

INT. TED'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ted, dressed casual but nice, straightens and makes his bed.
He looks at himself in the mirror. There is a knock.

TED
Yeah?

Sierra enters.

SIERRA
We're heading out to the studio.

TED
(flatly)
Okay.

Sierra does not respond to his rudeness.

SIERRA
So... he's coming over?

TED
Yeah, we're gonna get UberEats.

SIERRA
You're not going out for dinner?

Ted shrugs.

TED
His idea.

Mary enters behind Sierra.

MARY
Hi, Ted.

TED

Mary.

MARY

Are you sure you don't wanna come with us? Hang out at the studio?

TED

Thanks, but I'm busy tonight.

Mary smiles politely, then steps towards Ted. She limply places a hand on Ted's arm.

MARY

I, um... heard what happened. I'm sorry. I know we aren't close, but, y'know, I know a little bit about depression. When I was in college. You can always talk to me.

TED

(coldly)

Thanks.

Sierra turns to Mary. Mary and Sierra wave and leave.

Ted sits cross-legged on the ground, before the full-length mirror, staring at his reflection. He SLAPS himself, hard, across the face.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ted and Donald sit on the couch. They share family-style Thai take-out and watch a cheesy movie on the TV.

TED

I don't even *make* the spreadsheets, I just Q.A. them.

DONALD

Uh-huh.

TED

So, I check for mistakes, in content, in formula, etcetera. That's all. That's my whole job. Every single cell on every sheet.

DONALD

That sounds...

TED

Mind-numbing.

Donald shrugs.

DONALD

Well, I work for my parents. What do I know?

TED

Yeah, but you get to *make* something. Who cares if you gotta spend some time with your parents?

DONALD

I live with them, too.

TED

Oh.

Donald nods.

TED

I couldn't live with my parents. Would drive me nuts.

DONALD

It's not that odd in my culture. I'm unmarried. Childless. They'll probably come and live with me when they get older. Well, more likely, with my sister.

TED

You have a sister?

DONALD

Yeah, just the one. You?

TED

No, no siblings. I have an older cousin who I was close with, lived with us for a while in high school.

DONALD

Oh, cool. Do you stay in touch?

TED

(firmly)

No.

There is a long silence.

TED (CONT'D)

You said earlier -- "married"?

DONALD

Yeah.

TED
Are you out?

DONALD
To my parents?

Donald emphatically shakes his head.

DONALD
No way.

TED
That's okay.

DONALD
It would be it just wouldn't work.

TED
I understand.

On the TV, a DOG is shown doing something or other on the show. Donald desperately looks for something to talk about:

DONALD
Aw, I love dogs.

TED
(too quickly)
Oh, me too. I've been thinking
about getting one.

DONALD
But you live in an apartment.

TED
Like, a small one.

A long silence as Ted gulps down his wine.

DONALD
I always wanted a dog growing up
but my parents, their culture. We
did have a cat.

TED
I'm allergic.

DONALD
If you're allergic to cats,
wouldn't you also be allergic to
dogs?

TED
No, I don't think that's right.

EXT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Sierra talks with Ruth, mid-conversation.

SIERRA

Yes, Kelly and I are good friends.
I've been meaning to visit her.

RUTH

It has Tibetan Bamboo wood floors,
brand new gorgeous marble
bathrooms, a fake fireplace...

SIERRA

I'm sure she spared no expense.
That's Motel 9 money, you know.

Ruth tilts her head, confused.

SIERRA

Her family founded Motel 9. In any
sketchy part of town anywhere
you'll find one of their motels.

Ruth nods off to the side.

RUTH

There's a vagrant in the alley
going number two.

SIERRA

So there is. I'll see you inside.

A loud voice startles Ruth as she turns to walk away. Alicia
approaches the entrance.

ALICIA

I'm here to get my meditation on.
Oh yeah.

Alicia motions like she's turning some turntables.

ALICIA

I have no idea why I'm pretending
I'm a DJ.

SIERRA

I'm glad you made it, Alicia.

Alicia looks through the doors, into the studio.

ALICIA

Looks like a decent sized crew
coming here already.

SIERRA

Yeah, I use Meet-up dot com. It's helped some.

ALICIA

(Holds back a laugh)

Oh, that's so cool. A friend of mine suggested for me to try that but ya know... maybe I'm not comfortable enough with myself for that yet.

SIERRA

Well, we're about to start in a bit. Want to head inside?

ALICIA

Imma smoke a cigarette first. I'm honestly a little nervous, never meditated before.

SIERRA

You have time. And don't worry about it. There's no judgment here. Just love and light.

Alicia nods as she lights her cigarette.

ALICIA

Love and light.

SIERRA

It can change your life. If you want to manifest positivity and the world you desire, you can't put any negativity or judgment out there.

ALICIA

You don't judge anyone or anything?

Sierra confidently nods with a smile. Alicia points O.S.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

There's a crusty homeless dude taking a power dump right next to your studio.

INT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Alicia mingles amongst the people before class. She looks at the artwork on the walls. She comes to a quote:

'All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone' - Blaise Pascal, 1662.

Alicia loudly coughs. She tries to clear the phlegm in her throat, rushes to the door opens it and hocks a loogie onto the sidewalk. At that moment, Sierra gathers the class.

SIERRA

I think it's time to get started.

SERIES OF SHOTS - Meditation Session

- Alicia loudly clears her throat as she takes a seat. She looks around to everyone and tries to mimic the way they sit.
- Sierra talks as Alicia squirms around on the mat changing positions to try and get comfortable. Her neighbors do their best to ignore her.
- The class starts with some yoga stretches. Alicia falls sideways next to her neighbor attempting a stretch.
- The lights go off, everyone shuts their eyes to meditate. It's peaceful for a beat. Alicia loudly sneezes which startles several people around here.

INT. TED'S BEDROOM - DAY

The lights are dim. On the bed, Ted takes off Donald's pants and his own shirt. They kiss.

TED

I'm a top.

DONALD

Yeah, okay.

Ted fumbles for a condom. He struggles to tear the package. It's very dark, and it's hard to see what's going on exactly. A squirt of lubricant.

QUICK MEMORY FLASHBACKS:

- A very rapid shot of childhood memories: the older teen (his cousin) forcibly grabbing his wrist and pulling him into a wooded area.

END FLASHBACK

Ted pulls himself away from Donald with a grimace.

DONALD (CONT'D)

What's up?

TED

I, uh--

Ted sits up. This is over.

DONALD
That's okay. It's fine.

Donald starts putting his pants on.

TED
You can still stay?

DONALD
Nah. My parents will... there'll be questions.

TED
Sure.

Donald stands.

DONALD
Sorry I didn't get to meet your roommate.

TED
Next time.

Donald smiles and nods.

TED
There will be a next time?

DONALD
Of course.

Donald turns to leave. Then, with a smile:

DONALD
Let me know when you get that dog.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Ted sits in a sofa chair before his young psychologist, SUSAN. Her office is bland and uninviting.

SUSAN
Your comment about the dog.

Ted furrows his brow.

SUSAN
You've never mentioned wanting a dog to me before.

TED
I guess I don't.

SUSAN
So why did you lie?

TED
I didn't know what else to say.

SUSAN
Let's reflect. A man you like tells
you he likes dogs. You immediately
talk of fictional plans to own one.

TED
I'm not going to get a dog, Susan,
if that's worrying you.

SUSAN
You're misunderstanding me. I think
if this Donald had said he liked...
boats, you'd say you're a
yachtsman.

TED
That's a broad assumption to make
about me.

SUSAN
You become whatever it is the
person you desire would like.
(beat)
Tell me I'm wrong, Ted.

INT. DONALD'S FAMILY ROOM - EVENING

Donald and his whole family: Kiue, Do Van, plus his sister
JANET (30s) sit around the family room in eager Vietnamese
chatter. Kiue pours everyone tea from a kettle.

KIUE
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
I told Donald the good news, Janet.

JANET
I knew you would.

Donald and Janet smile at each other.

DONALD
Congratulations. It's great.

DO VAN
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
Your mother cannot keep a secret.

Donald laughs.

JANET
Like I said, no surprise. I
expected you to last a little
longer than one night, though,
Ngu?i m?.

KIUE
(in English)
You keep bad news secret, good news
you tell everyone.

LATER

Janet and Donald sit on the sofa alone, still sipping tea.

JANET
Well, you met him at the hospital.

DONALD
I guess I admired the honesty.

JANET
Was it really that bad?

DONALD
We watched TV, actual network
television... for an hour, and then
he got drunk and took me to his
room. And even then, he couldn't do
anything.

Janet laughs.

DONALD
And then he like, guilted me, into
seeing him again?

JANET
Will you?

DONALD
No. I'm ghosting.

JANET
No, that's mean. You have to tell
him.

DONALD
Eugh. Maybe.

Donald finishes his tea.

JANET
You know, I feel bad for you.

DONALD
It was one date. I'll get over it.

JANET
No, I mean I met Bradley through church, through Mom, we got married, that was that. You...

DONALD
Please, Janet.

JANET
You've got to keep all this in.
Until when? They die?

DONALD
I don't want to think about it.

Janet hands Donald her empty cup of tea.

JANET
Eventually, you have to.

EXT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Sierra greets a PASSERBY in front of her studio.

ALICIA (O.S.)
What's up, C? You mind if I call
you C?

Alicia approaches lighting a cigarette.

SIERRA
My name begins with an S.

ALICIA
Oh, I know I said Si, the Spanish
word.

SIERRA
"Yes?"
(beat)
It's good to see you back, Alicia.
I thought maybe --

KELLY (O.S.)
Sierra. Is that you?

Sierra and Alicia turn to see KELLY (24) blonde, with a resting bitch face, but she's pretty so it's still cool. She wears expensive designer everything.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I found it. It took me awhile. I knew it was near a tattoo shop but there so many around here, all these run down buildings look the same.

SIERRA

Kelly, so nice to see you.

Kelly walks to the Yoga studio front window as Sierra talks. Kelly quickly peeks in and then turns around and hugs Sierra.

KELLY

Congrats, the place looks so... yeah. I'm proud of you.

SIERRA

Thank you. I --

KELLY

I was on my way to make a pad donation to the homeless shelter and I thought of you.

Alicia interrupts.

ALICIA

I'm sorry. "Pad donations"?

Kelly quickly loads up a photo on her own Instagram, uploaded minutes ago, shoving it in Alicia's face.

It shows Kelly, in a tank top, pass a milk crate full of (conspicuously branded) sanitary pads to a SHELTER WORKER (whose face is cropped from the photo). It has a million likes and hundreds of thousands of comments.

KELLY

Homeless women get their period too, friendo.

Alicia nods, exhaling smoke. She passes Kelly's phone back.

KELLY

It's great to give back. I'm just so proud of you! You did it, girl.

SIERRA

Thanks. And... you opened your own Mindful yoga and meditation studio two weeks ago. You never mentioned anything when I first told you my goal and plan six months ago.

KELLY

Oh. My thing's not just some yoga studio, it's a spiritual center. Not long after you told me your idea, during a lunch meditation session...

She makes an exaggerated motion with both hands in the middle of her forehead

KELLY

Right into my third eye came this vision of these imported Tibetan bamboo wood floors. It was like Buddha was speaking, saying Kelly, open a spiritual center.

Alicia blows smoke right in Kelly's face, but it only seems to make Kelly seem MORE mystical, ethereal.

ALICIA

Nice dress.

SIERRA

(playfully)

Seriously, that looks more expensive than my yoga studio.

KELLY

(dead serious)

It probably is. It's a Fendi.

Alicia frowns and Sierra forces a smile.

SIERRA

Do you want to come in --

KELLY

Well, I have to be going. You should check out my *spiritual center* sometime.

SIERRA

I had already planned on it.

Kelly turns and walks into another cloud of Alicia's cigarette smoke as she walks away.

ALICIA

You *do not* like her. I don't blame you. I'm pretty sure Buddha himself doesn't like her.

SIERRA

I don't hate her. I like everyone.

ALICIA

I didn't say hate, you said hate. It's okay to hate her Sierra. I hate her. I've only known her for two minutes and she's among the worst people I ever met, and I have pretty low standards.

SIERRA

I don't spend any of my time on hate or negative emotions. I'm above all that. Remember? No judgments.

ALICIA

It seemed like the bitch totally copycatted your idea but --

SIERRA

It does, doesn't it? And she's set for life. Her family is like the motel version of the Hilton family.

ALICIA

See, it's okay to judge people sometimes. I actually have so much more respect for you now that I think I can get a good meditation going this time.

Alicia turns and walks to the door. Sierra follows.

SIERRA

Not judging, just stating facts.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM

Ted browses Facebook on his phone as he paces anxiously. He tries searching on his phone -- "Donald Nyugen". Scrolls a few results. Searches again -- "Nyugen Photography". A business page pops up. It has an address listed.

SIERRA (O.S.)

Hey, babe.

He looks up and UNLEASHES upon Sierra as she enters.

TED
Why didn't you stop me?

SIERRA
Be more specific.

TED
Donald!

Before she can respond he points to himself, dramatically.

TED (CONT'D)
Look at me! I'm all sweaty, and he
won't text me --

SIERRA
I warned you, Ted. I warned you
very specifically.

TED
Whatever. You're supposed to --

SIERRA
What am I supposed to do? I don't
control you!

Sierra throws her purse by the door.

TED
Whatever. You're a shitty friend,
you know that?

SIERRA
(raises her voice)
I'm not in the mood for your
negativity right now.

Sierra storms to her room, closing the door. Ted follows her.

INT. SIERRA'S ROOM

Sierra takes off her bra from under her blouse and is
interrupted by Ted's entry.

SIERRA
Ted, get out.

TED
You know, I've been thinking.

SIERRA
I don't believe you.

TED

I think you should move out. I can afford this place on my own.

SIERRA

I think you need to take some time to calm down.

TED

No. I'm thinking clearly.

SIERRA

You *just* said --

TED

I don't need you.

SIERRA

The Doctor thinks --

TED

Fuck the Doctor!

Sierra sits down on the bed.

SIERRA

You know what? Fine. Mary said I can move in with her anyway.

TED

(a little deflated)
She did?

SIERRA

She and Nick broke up, she's paying full rent. Makes sense.

Things have calmed. Ted sits down on the bed next to Sierra.

TED

I don't really want you to move out. I'm trying my best here.

SIERRA

I know.

Sierra puts her arm around Ted, around his shoulders.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

Ew. You really are quite sweaty.

TED

It's involuntary.

Sierra sighs, quickly hugging Ted.

SIERRA
Wanna watch Golden Girls reruns?

TED
Sadly... I do.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM

Ted and Sierra share the laptop between them. On his phone,
Ted re-opens Facebook. The business ad is still there.

END ACT 2

ACT 3

INT. PET STORE - DAY

Ted approaches a pen full of various energetic, and very cute puppies. Blankly, Ted stares at the pen. A CLERK approaches.

CLERK

Can I help you with something?

TED

I want one of these yellow ones.

CLERK

The Golden Retrievers?

TED

Sure.

CLERK

Is this your first pet?

TED

Yeah.

CLERK

Okay, so I can't sell you one of these guys without discussing something with you.

TED

Like?

CLERK

Goldens are beautiful, loyal, dogs. But these guys are puppies. They need special kibble. They need lots of space, attention, and exercise, or they will become bored and destructive. Do you have a job?

TED

I think so.

CLERK

Well, you can't leave a puppy like this for a whole workday.

TED

My roommate might help.

CLERK

Does she work, too?

TED

Yeah.

CLERK

Are you sure it's the right time in your life for you to get a puppy?

TED

(scratches his head)

Where can I get an old dog?

EXT. MINDFUL YOGA SPIRITUAL CENTER - DAY

Sierra walks in a trendy neighborhood. Up ahead, Kelly talks to a few beautiful 30-SOMETHINGS. Kelly smiles at Sierra.

KELLY

Sierra, I'm so glad you dropped by.

They hug.

SIERRA

I thought I'd check out the place and maybe, uh take one of your sessions, see what it's like.

Kelly touches her heart.

KELLY

I am so honored.

They stand there quietly for a beat.

SIERRA

So, do you wanna head inside and give me a tour.

KELLY

I'd love to but we're actually about to start level 2 of my special inner engineering course.

SIERRA

Oh cool, I'll come in and check it out, participate.

Kelly gently touches her.

KELLY

I'm sorry now is a bad time.

SIERRA

What do you mean?

KELLY

You can't join this class because it's the second level course and it wouldn't be fair to those here who paid and completed the first level of my getting in touch with your divine feminine inner engineering program.

Sierra looks at a group of 3 GUYS and a WOMAN by the door. She gives a playful smile but Kelly looks very serious.

SIERRA

Kelly, I'm the one that got you into meditation freshman year. We've learned under the same yogi's... took the same courses...

Kelly scrunches her face up, disingenuously regretful.

KELLY

I'm sorry I can't do it. It just wouldn't be fair to the four people that already paid and completed the first level.

SIERRA

So, like Scientology?

KELLY

Maybe! What does that mean? I'll see you later!

Kelly and her clients head inside.

EXT. PET RESCUE CENTER - DAY

Ted triumphantly exits a rescue center, with an old, thin, greyhound dog on a leash. The dog's name is GOEBBELS.

INT. SIERRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sierra sits in the lotus position on her bed, mid-meditation.

SIERRA (V.O.)

There are no judgments. Everything in your life is here to teach you. You are present and ready for everything that comes your way.

HALLWAY

Sierra exits her room looking at her phone as she walks.

LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sierra text. She looks up and sees Goebbels on the couch. She screams and tosses her phone in the air.

SIERRA

What the...

Goebbels slowly turns his head to her and then slowly rests it back on the couch. He is just too old to care.

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes to compose herself and then marches down the hall.

SIERRA

Ted?!

HALLWAY

She whispers to herself as she marches.

SIERRA

You are in control of the situation.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ted and Sierra stare at the dog, who is asleep on their sofa.

SIERRA

What's his name?

TED

The last owners named him Goebbels.

SIERRA

Well, change it.

TED

It's the only thing he responds to.

SIERRA

Is it gonna die?

TED

One day like us all. He's not sick, he's just old. You're acting like you've never seen a dog before.

SIERRA
Where's it gonna stay?

TED
In my room. Or the laundry. I
haven't decided.

SIERRA
I'm not paying two hundred a week
to live with you and a Nazi dog.

TED
Fine, I'll reduce your rent.

SIERRA
Ted, I put up with a lot and I want
to be here for you...

TED
I know that look. What else?

SIERRA
You have to come to one of my
meditation class...

He groans before she can finish.

TED
It's just not my thing. I can't
just sit quietly and chant or
whatever. I told you I'd rather
kill my...

Sierra playfully cringes to him. Ted considers his thoughts.

SIERRA
My evening mindful meditation class
doesn't interfere with any of your
Susan appointments...

She enthusiastically eyes him. Ted sighs.

TED
I'll try it one time... in the near
future... just for you.

She hugs him.

TED (CONT'D)
Wait. What about Goebbels? He can't
be left here alone.

SIERRA
My friend Amy is a dog walker...
(to herself)
She's Jewish.

Sierra rubs her forehead while Ted casually shrugs.

TED
Well, it's not going to work out.
Like you always say, everything
happens for a reason.

SIERRA
Fine, your senile Nazi dog can
chill in the studio's break room.

Ted looks at his phone. Has a realization.

TED
I gotta go for a minute. Can you
keep an eye on... Goebbels?

Ted puts on a pair of shoes and exits. Gingerly, Sierra leans in, holds her hand under its snout to check it's breathing.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - RECEPTION

Donald sits at the reception desk in his family's modest studio. A CHIME as the front door opens. Donald looks up.

DONALD
Oh.

TED
Hey, before you say anything --

DONALD
How are you here?

TED
You said the name of the business
at one point.

DONALD
Look, you can't be here. My Dad's
in the darkroom.

TED
I just have to talk to you.

EXT. CITY STREET - LANEWAY

Donald leads Ted to a quiet lane-way by the studio.

DONALD
What did you want?

TED
Why won't you text me?

DONALD
Seriously?

TED
Seriously!

DONALD
Did you think we had a good time?

TED
(sighs)
No, not really.

DONALD
Well, there you go.

TED
But I don't think that's it.

DONALD
You don't?

TED
I asked you if you wanted to see me
again and you said yes.

DONALD
That's just a thing people say!

TED
(dejected)
I know that. But I just felt...

DONALD
I think you felt something I
didn't.

Ted considers this.

TED
I do tend to do that.

Donald nods.

DONALD
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt
your feelings.

TED
When do you finish work today?

DONALD
Five. Why?

TED
Do you wanna walk my dog with me tonight? In the park?

DONALD
You got a dog?

Ted happily nods. Donald looks around.

DONALD
Fine. I'll text you.

INT. MINDFUL YOGA STUDIO

Sierra sweeps up as Alicia talks to her.

SIERRA
You know what I like my place, this neighborhood. It has character.

ALICIA
Me too. And you know, I looked up Tibetan bamboo wood floors and it's not even like a real thing. It's just some label a few companies put on wood flooring to upcharge stuck-up douches.

Sierra shakes her head and grins.

ALICIA
What's up with you and Ted?

SIERRA
My best friend since high school. I was the new girl in a mostly upper-class conservative white area. He was the unapologetic gay teen.

ALICIA
So I'm guessing you were prom king and queen.

Sierra laughs

SIERRA
Something like that except the exact opposite.

ALICIA

There weren't burning crosses in your front yard, were there?

SIERRA

No, it was more subtle than that. A lot of people asking me where I can score drugs, if any of my family members could hook them up but people were overly nice for the most part. I learned from Ted that the popular ones being the fake nicest would call me the ghetto b or that new n-word.

ALICIA

People are fucked.

SIERRA

Meh, people are just people.

ALICIA

Exactly... fucked.

(beat)

And how has Ted been since... you know?

SIERRA

Actually, pretty upbeat. He's got a date slash new crush.

ALICIA

Oooh... Details?

SIERRA

(slight pause)

I don't know much... Met him at the hospital.

ALICIA

(big smile)

At the hospital, after the... you know?

Sierra nods.

ALICIA

What a pimp.

SIERRA

Donald, who is in the closest with a very conservative Chinese family... so... yeah?

ALICIA
I can't imagine how tough something
like that can be.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - EVENING

The sun is setting. Donald and Ted walk a struggling Goebbels
through the busy park grounds.

DONALD
He's kind of cute.

TED
I thought greyhounds liked to run,
but this is the fastest I've seen
him go.

Donald kneels to pet Goebbels, smiling.

DONALD
He's an old boy. I like him.

Donald stands and they keep walking.

TED
Yeah, he's alright.

DONALD
So, you gonna be walking him every
day?

TED
If he can manage. I'm worried about
the cold weather.

DONALD
Maybe he needs a sweater?

Ted smiles.

TED
Maybe you could join me again...

DONALD
(smiling)
Yeah. For sure.

Beat.

TED
Donald, I have to tell you.

Donald stops, turns to him. Ted stops.

TED
There's something wrong with me.

DONALD
I figured... when we met.

TED
No, I know, but... I like you.

DONALD
I appreciate that.

TED
It's hard for me. When I'm not well, and I like someone, it's like... I become this person. And I do things that aren't really healthy. And it's not an excuse.

Donald nods. Ted continues to walk. As does Donald.

TED
I don't expect you to say you like me back. But as long as we keep walking Goebbels together --

DONALD
Goebbels?

TED
Oh, yeah. That's his name.
(clears his throat)
As long as we're doing that, I want you to get to know me without all the... unhealthy stuff.

DONALD
I think I'd like that.

Ted smiles.

DONALD
I have to admit something, too.

TED
Oh?

DONALD
I totally forgot your name. What do I save you in my phone as?

TED
Ted. It's Ted.

Ted reaches out to shake hands. Donald smiles.

DONALD
It's nice to meet you, Ted.

Their hands linger there and they lock eyes for a moment.

DO VAN (O.S.)
Donald? What's going on.

Donald quickly releases hands and steps back a bit. His mom and Dad hold bags of groceries. Alicia comes around the corner just behind them.

KIUE
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
Who's this?

Donald is at a loss for her words with a look of guilt. Ted nervously starches his neck and then looks up as...

ALICIA
Hey, you never called me...

Ted opens his mouth unsure how to respond.

ALICIA
Donald.

She confidently approaches and stops standing just between Kiue and Do Van.

ALICIA
We had a great time on our date I
thought there was something there.

His parent's suspicions and confusion turn to relief and a slight smile. Lost for words, Donald looks at his parents and then her. Ted gets a big smile that he tries to cover up.

DONALD
Um... sorry?

ALICIA
(to Kiue and Do Van)
You must be his parents. He's said
so many great things about you?

Kiue looks to Do Van.

KIUE
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
She's not Vietnamese.

DO VAN
(in Vietnamese, subtitled)
I don't think we can be picky at
this point.

They look to her with a smile.

ALICIA
I'm so glad my... our mutual friend
Ted, introduced us.

Ted shakes his head with a smile.

TED
I figured you two might hit it off.

Alicia looks to the parents.

ALICIA
All three of us should come over to
eat sometime. Donald raves about
your traditional Chinese cooking.

Ted nods while Donald cringes.

TED
I love Chin...

DONALD
(speaks fast)
Vietnamese.

TED
Vietnamese food.

Unsure, Kiue and Do Van look to each other.

INT. ALICIA'S STUDIO - EVENING

It's small and almost gives off a hoarder vibe. Alicia, a
glass of red wine in hand, listens to a voicemail on her
cell. It's Abby's very playful, stoned female voice.

ABBY (V.O.)
Leesh, where you been? It's party
time. You better call me, bitch.

She snickers as she calls her back on speakerphone. It goes
straight to voicemail.

ALICIA
Guess what? I'm having a great time
without you. Yep.

She sets the phone down, talks while she pours another glass.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I got everyone a second smoke break
at work, made fun of some blonde
skinny trust fund bitch with my
good friend. I've become like a
meditation master, talk shit now.

INT. DONALD'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald warmly hugs his parents, both with their eyes glued to
Fox News as loud as the TV goes.

ALICIA (V.O.)

I helped my gay in the closet
friend connect with his uptight
parents.

They wave him off wordlessly as he heads to his childhood
bedroom to sleep.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ted and Sierra watch Golden Girls and pass the vape.

ALICIA (V.O.)

Everything is all good here.

Goebbels lays, in deep sleep on the floor next to them.

INT. ALICIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - EVENING

A knock at the door.

ABBY (O.S.)

Bitch, it's me. Open up!

Alicia walks to the door and talks without opening it.

ALICIA

Oh, my former friend.

ABBY (O.S.)

I'm sorry Alicia! Open the door.

Alicia opens the door.

ALICIA

If we're so toxic --

ABBY (25) Chinese descent, hugs her before she can finish.

ABBY

You know I love you girl. Plus, I gotta pee and you live nearby my stop.

Alicia smiles, shaking her head. Abby reaches in her pocket.

ABBY (CONT'D)

I got some weed. I got some coke. Benzos for tomorrow. Let's get fucked up... in one second.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- Alicia and Abby smoke a joint.
- They make silly faces to each other and laugh hysterically as Abby breaks out some liquor and shot glasses.
- Alicia sits in a meditative position, eyes closed with the joint in her mouth, and takes a hit. Abby cracks up.
- Alicia and Abby take a shot as they smoke a joint while they dance. Tipsy, Alicia sways onto the couch. They laugh.
- Abby lays out a few lines of coke. They snort them at the same time.
- Abby is on the phone.

ABBY

Get your asses over here so we can turn this party up a notch.

A LITTLE LATER

-- Two TATTED UP GUYS sit on a couch across from the girls. Alicia yawns and blinks as if she's trying to stay awake, very drunk.

Abby guy ties her arm off as one of the passes her a heroin needle, stoned out of his mind. Abby plunges the needle in her arm.

TATTED GUY

You're up, Alicia.

She rubs her face, still out of it, and looks to the guy. He reaches out his hand to give her his heroin kit.

FADE OUT.