

VENISON

By Christopher Adams

C/O Alex Rusher
Independent Talent Group
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For Brad

In the creative state a man is taken out of himself. He lets down as it were a bucket into his subconscious, and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach.

E.M. Forster

“Have you ever noticed,” he said... “that gay people secrete everything in each other’s presence but tears?”

Andrew Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance*

Setting

In an unspecified county outside of Charlottesville, Virginia, USA.

Characters

TRISTAN
BOB BRAINWRIGHT
FATHER
MOTHER
LANYARD
KYLE
PROMO VIDEO
CAROL
EDWARD
LOU-ELLEN
WEATHER PRESENTER

Suggested Casting

Actor 1: male, late 20s/early 30s
Tristan

Actor 2: male, mid-20s
Kyle

Actor 3: male, 40s-60s
Bob Brainwright, Father, Promo Video, Edward

Actor 4: female, 40s-60s
Mother, Lanyard, Carol, Lou-Ellen, Weather Presenter

Acknowledgement

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Prologue

A cabin. In the woods.

The cabin is rustic. It hasn't been updated since c. 1974.

Tristan sits in a chair.

After a moment – off stage: a gunshot.

Tristan looks up. Considers.

Beat.

Sounds of footsteps at the front door.

Then, the door opens.

Standing in the door is Kyle.

He carries a hunting rifle.

Tristan looks at Kyle.

Kyle tries to speak

Can't.

Tries again.

KYLE
I shot her

TRISTAN
Where?

KYLE
In the woods

A single shot

It felt

Powerful

I feel

I feel

TRISTAN
Competent?

KYLE
Yeah

Beat.

TRISTAN
What's wrong?

No response.

Kyle?

KYLE
I don't think she's dead

Tristan gives Kyle a look.

Blackout.

I

Tristan, alone.

TRISTAN

Kyle and I met
In a way typical
For men who like other men
To meet

At a far-right rally

A far-right rally.

Kyle was there
Because he's a regional reporter
Or was
I was there
Because my parents were going
And I wanted to make sure
They had a voice of reason
Also
(And I'm not proud of this)
The advertisement for this rally
Said that there was going to be a raffle
With prizes awarded by

BOB BRAINWRIGHT

Bob Brainwright
Representative for the Third Congressional District
I want to Make America Great Again!

TRISTAN

Third prize was

BOB BRAINWRIGHT

A \$50 gift certificate
From Guns N' More
Compliments of Bill and Gabby Alton

TRISTAN

Second prize was

BOB BRAINWRIGHT

A one-on-one hunting expedition
With me
Representative for the Third Congressional District
Bob Brainwright

TRISTAN

And first prize was

(I swear to God)

BOB BRAINWRIGHT

An AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle!

TRISTAN

Obviously I had to go

So we get to the rally
And because this is America
And I haven't been back to America
In a few years
It's all a bit overwhelming
Everyone is wearing
Red white and blue
And there are flags everywhere
And political signs
And hamburgers and hotdogs
Which I hate
Because they're always charred
And it's July
And this is Virginia
And it's boiling hot
And it feels like
Your body is dissolving
Into the humidity
Like there's no barrier
Between you and the air and everyone around you
Which is kinda awful
Because I don't want my body molecules
Dissolving into the body molecules
Of far-right nutjobs
Even if they are my parents

So I'm milling around
I've bought my raffle tickets
Five of them
For five dollars
And I'm watching my father
Talk to everyone he knows

FATHER

Hi Jim

Good to see you

How's the new ground pump working for you?

Oh no beer for me thanks

I'll stick to lemonade

TRISTAN

And I see my mother

Primp her hair

Hoping someone will notice
She's just had it coloured

MOTHER
Jill
Don't you look a dream

Oh bless you
Just had it coloured
But I don't know if it suits me

TRISTAN
Everyone looks kinda the same
In their ill-fitted T-shirts
And shorts that are too big

Which is why
When I see him
For the first time
Kyle stands out

Kyle appears. Almost as if in a vision.

He's wearing a white linen button-down shirt
Untucked
And navy-blue shorts
That hug his legs
And make his ass look

Woah

He appears a few years younger than I am
He has a little moleskin notebook
In which he's jotting down notes
And I see around his neck
A lanyard
That says

LANYARD
Reporter

TRISTAN
But the lanyard is also

LANYARD
Rainbow

TRISTAN
It's a strange feeling
Falling in love
At first sight

How do I explain it?
It's the satisfaction I experienced
When I first understood the concept
Of right angles
No that's stupid
Like okay
I didn't drink
Until I was twenty-one
Because we never had alcohol in the house
Because my grandfather was kinda an alcoholic
And then my dad had a reaction to that

But shortly after I turned twenty-one
I had a dream
That my granddad was trapped in some kind of
Purgatory
And I was there
And he was crying
And I was crying
And then he reached out
And offered me
A goblet
Like an actual chalice
Of red wine
And I took it
And I drank it
And some of it spilled out of my mouth
And onto the ground
And made the dirt wet
Into a kind of mud
Which I dipped my finger into
And spread on my grandad's face

And then I woke up from the dream
And I somehow knew
That my grandfather
Was suffering unbearable agony
But also
That I liked the taste
Of red wine

So I tried some
And I did

That is what
Falling in love at first sight
Feels like

It's the feeling of
Knowledge

Knowledge that is
Certain
And unalterably true
But also
Agonising

Beat.

So there I am at the rally
And I am instantly in love

I check that my parents aren't watching
Because there's nothing more awkward
Than hitting on another guy
While your parents are around
And then slowly walk up to him
Trying to think of ways to indicate
Subtly
Coolly
That I too
Am a member of the rainbow community
And also
Not a fascist

Unfortunately
The way I choose to do this
Is by pointing my fingers
Into little guns
And shooting them back and forth
While saying

Hey
You're a reporter!

Kyle stares.

KYLE
Uh huh

TRISTAN
That's so cool

KYLE
Are you here to support the local representative?
Do you mind if I interview you?

TRISTAN
Oh
Ha
HA
No

I mean
You can if you want
But
I'm not
Like
I'm just here with
Um

I don't want to tell him
I'm here with my parents
Because I don't want him to know
That I'm living with them
That I have in fact
Had to leave my creatively fulfilling
But financially unrewarding
Career in England
To move back here
And that I'm working
For the family company
Which may sound charming and nice
But is slowly killing me

So instead I say

I've been dragged along
By my family
I'm visiting them
For a while

KYLE
Oh

Where from?

TRISTAN
England?

KYLE
I've always wanted to go to England
I almost went one summer
During J-school
(Sorry)
(Journalism school)
(Columbia)

TRISTAN
You went to Columbia?

KYLE
Yeah
But I got an internship

Down in Richmond instead
Which was lucky
Since it's how I landed this job
Did you like it over there?

TRISTAN

Yes
But it's nice to be back
See family
Friends
And the men

KYLE
The men?

TRISTAN

The men are more attractive here

KYLE
Oh
I
Uh

Kyle blushes.

I'm glad you think that

TRISTAN

I'm Tristan
By the way

KYLE
Kyle

TRISTAN

Good to meet you
Kyle

I like your lanyard

Kyle smiles. The sunlight glints off of his teeth.

Tristan gasps.

KYLE
Are you okay?

TRISTAN

Yeah
I'm just

You have very nice teeth?

KYLE
Excuse me?

TRISTAN
Sorry
I've been living in a country
Where everyone has a barbed-wire fence for a mouth
And
Wow
I'm embarrassing myself
I'm gonna go find my parents
Before they start donating to the
Save the Confederate Statues Fund

What am I doing?
I don't want to go back to my parents
I want my body molecules to dissolve
Into this man

But that is when
Fate
Intervenes

A cheer from the crowd.

BOB BRAINWRIGHT
And first prize goes to
Ticket number
Five hundred thirty-three!

TRISTAN
Oh my god

KYLE
What?

TRISTAN
It's my number
I won a *gun*!

BOB BRAINWRIGHT
Here you go son
Shoot it with pride!

Bob Brainwright presents Tristan with a gun.

TRISTAN
I've hated guns
Ever since my grandfather

Taught me how to shoot one
But at the same time
There is something
Very powerful
About a gun
It gives you confidence

Which is why
After being presented the gun
I find Kyle

Hey you
I've really enjoyed talking to you
How about I sell this assault rifle
And use the money
To take you on a date

KYLE
Are you saying our date
Will be funded
By weapons trading?

TRISTAN
Do you have moral objections
Going on a date
With an arms dealer?

KYLE
Not at all
Here's my number

Kyle writes his number on a page of the notebook, tears it out, and hands it to Tristan.

II

TRISTAN

On the day of my date with Kyle
I am at work at the family business

PROMO VIDEO

We're Fellowes' Well & Pump Company
We're a local
Family-run business
Originally established
By Fred Fellowes in 1972
Before being passed on
To his son John

In addition to installing
Pumps and wells
We've expanded in recent years
To also installing
Septic tanks
Water filtration systems
Hydrofracturing
And agricultural irrigation
We now work across five counties
In the Blue Ridge and Shenandoah Valley region
Do you have a water issue?
Give us a call today!

TRISTAN

Of course
I don't actually install any of it
My dad
And a woman named Carol
And a guy named Kevin
And now
Me
Do the business side of things
Talking with contractors
Liaising with customers
We work from an office
In a rural part of the county
The vinyl siding
Of the office building
Is a shade I like to call
Steamed meatloaf
I'm currently working in procurement
My father thinks it's important
I learn all of the facets of the business
So that I too
Can one day
Take over the company

At 4:45
I tell my father

Ahem
Dad
I need to leave early today?

FATHER
Working hours are until 5?

TRISTAN
I realise that
But also
This is the first time I've asked to leave early
In the three months
That I've been working here

FATHER
And what's so important
That you need to leave early?

TRISTAN
I'm going to meet a friend

FATHER
Which one?

TRISTAN
Seriously?
I'm almost thirty years old

FATHER
Sorry
But make up the fifteen minutes tomorrow

TRISTAN
I already took a shorter lunch
Also
Can I borrow the car?

FATHER
How am I supposed to get home?

TRISTAN
Ask mom to pick you up

Father gives a displeased look.

Please dad?

Father begrudgingly hands over the keys.

FATHER

Don't stay out too late

TRISTAN

Later

I arrive at the address Kyle's given me

It's a condo

Kyle is waiting outside

He's even more handsome than I remember

In an All-American way

Like a Mormon

Or a Boy Scout

I want to peel the clothes off of his body

Like peeling the plastic wrapping

Off a Kraft Single slice of cheese

He climbs into the car.

Tristan laughs to himself.

KYLE

What's so funny?

TRISTAN

I was just thinking

You look like a Boy Scout

KYLE

I am a Boy Scout

TRISTAN

Really?

KYLE

Eagle

TRISTAN

Oh

I mean

My dad wanted me to be a Scout

But I wanted to focus on photography

And he was like

You should be able to do both

And then we got into an argument

And I shouted at him

Nothing I do

Is ever good enough

For you

And he responded

Good
It's better that way

Like he's happy about it
And

Oh god I'm talking too much
Tell me about you
Do you get on with your father?

KYLE
My father's dead

TRISTAN
I'm sorry

KYLE
It's okay
It happened a while ago

TRISTAN
I'm being an idiot
I'm an idiot when I'm nervous
Which happens to be
All the time
Especially when
I'm in the presence
Of a handsome man

KYLE
And who would that be?

TRISTAN
You
Doofus

KYLE
Did you just use the word
Doofus?
Am I going on a date with a twelve-year old?

TRISTAN
Guilty

KYLE
You'd better call the cops

TRISTAN
We do this stupid car banter
For the next fifteen minutes
And I learn the following facts about Kyle
He's from

KYLE
New Jersey

TRISTAN
He is

KYLE
Twenty-six years old

TRISTAN
The person he's closest to is

KYLE
My mother
Look she's texting me right now
Asking how the date is going

TRISTAN
What'll you tell her?

KYLE
I'll text her later
With a detailed account

TRISTAN
His immediate plan for the future is

KYLE
Get noticed by the DC office
I want an East Coast profile within three years
National profile within five

TRISTAN
And the final fact I learn about Kyle
Is that he earned a lot of merit badges in Scouts

How many?

KYLE
Guess

TRISTAN
Twenty?

KYLE

You have to have at least twenty-one for Eagle
Guess again

TRISTAN
Thirty?

KYLE
Keep going

TRISTAN
Thirty-five?

KYLE
Seventy-three

TRISTAN
Seventy-three!

KYLE
I like the feeling
That I'm achieving something

TRISTAN
Favourite?

KYLE
Camping

TRISTAN
(Trying to joke)
You mean camping it up?

Kyle gives Tristan a look.

Tristan clears his throat.

And least favourite?

KYLE
Fishing

TRISTAN
Why's that?

KYLE
We had to gut a fish

TRISTAN
Fair enough

Five minutes later

I pull into the parking lot
Of the hiking and biking trail
That I have carefully chosen
As the location of our first date

Here we are
I brought bikes

KYLE
I love cycling

TRISTAN
We set off
The lightest breeze blows through Kyle's hair

When we reach a flat patch of road
We cycle side by side

KYLE
The scenery is always so beautiful up here

TRISTAN
Isn't it?

KYLE
How far are we going?

TRISTAN
Feeling tired already?

KYLE
I can ride for ages

TRISTAN
I bet you can

KYLE
Was that a cycling innuendo?

TRISTAN
Would that be a problem
If it were?

KYLE
You're funny

Tristan starts pedalling faster.

Hey
What're you doing?

TRISTAN
Can you keep up?

KYLE
I'll race you
The rest of the way!

TRISTAN
You're on

We start pedalling
Faster
And faster

I can see
That his legs
Are built for this
But I've been cycling this trail
For longer than he has

I pull ahead

Ha!
Slowpoke

But then
I see a look in his eye
Something certain
Focused

I shift down a gear
He draws closer
I let him overtake me

KYLE
Who's the slowpoke now!

Kyle breezes by Tristan.

Kyle reaches the end of the trail.

Woohooo!
I won!

TRISTAN
Kyle looks ecstatic
Joyful
His smile
As clean and uncomplicated
As a suburban lawn

Tristan and Kyle are both winded.

KYLE
That was

Good

TRISTAN
Yeah
C'mon
Let's park the bikes here
And walk onto the hiking trail
I know a spot
Where we can eat

We walk about ten minutes to a secluded area
Overlooking the valley
I've made us a picnic

KYLE
Mmm
This sandwich is amazing
I love pickles

So
Tell me more about yourself

TRISTAN
What would you like to know?

KYLE
You're British?
But not?

TRISTAN
I've lived there
For just over eight years
I went to study
And got a job in food photography
Advertisements
Cookbooks
Worked with some bloggers
Sorry this is boring

KYLE
No it's fascinating
How do you do it?

Tristan gives Kyle a look. Considers.

TRISTAN

That sandwich for instance

Tristan reaches into his backpack. He pulls out his camera.

Looks like a normal sandwich

But here

Hold it up to your mouth

Kyle holds the sandwich up to his mouth.

KYLE

Like this?

TRISTAN

A little closer

Tristan places his hand on Kyle's.

Adjusts the position of the sandwich.

There

So let's say I want to draw attention

To the sandwich itself

If I adjust the focus

And get a shallow depth of field

It blurs the background

While sharpening the sandwich

Giving the whole shot

A dream-like quality

Tristan takes a photo. Then another.

That's useful for suggesting that this sandwich

Is some kind of ideal

Something perfect

Tristan makes adjustments to his camera.

But if I wanted to convey

For instance

The pleasure you have in eating that sandwich

I might go for a deeper depth of field

Go on take a bite

KYLE

Really?

TRISTAN

Yeah

KYLE
Put my teeth on it?

TRISTAN
No take a bite
Go on

Kyle takes a bite.

Tristan takes a photo.

Keep eating

KYLE
I feel ridiculous

TRISTAN
You're doing great

Kyle takes another bite.

Tristan snaps more photos.

Now smile for me

KYLE
My mouth is full of sandwich

TRISTAN
It'll be charming
You have amazing teeth remember?

Kyle smiles.

Tristan takes a photo.

Tristan looks at the camera screen.

KYLE
How do I look?

Tristan shows Kyle the camera screen.

Tristan leans against Kyle.

TRISTAN
See?
Your smile does all the work

Although

KYLE
What?

TRISTAN
You have some egg salad
On your chin
Let me wipe it off

Tristan wipes off the egg salad.

His hand lingers on Kyle's face

A moment.

Then pulls away.

So that's how you stage food

KYLE
And you make a living from it?

TRISTAN
I won some awards

KYLE
It's a shame you're going back to England

Tristan looks downcast.

Beat.

Did I say something wrong?

TRISTAN
No

KYLE
Then why do you look so upset?

TRISTAN
...

KYLE
Do you have a boyfriend?
Oh my god you have a boyfriend

TRISTAN
I don't have a boyfriend
I have an ex-boyfriend
We broke up six months ago

We had tried to be open
But then it got weirdly competitive
About who could shag the most guys

KYLE
Then are you worried about starting something
That can't go anywhere?
I don't know how much time you have left
On this side of the Atlantic
So you may not want to
It's just that the dating pool around here
Is so small
And you're the first guy
I've been on a date with in ages
And though we may not have a lot of time together
I'd be interested in seeing where this goes

TRISTAN
I'm not going back to England

Beat.

KYLE
I'm confused

TRISTAN
I'm not visiting Virginia
I'm kind of
Living here
Permanently

KYLE
But you seemed to suggest that

Beat.

TRISTAN
I've moved back in with my parents

KYLE
Oh

Okay?

TRISTAN
So you can move on

KYLE
Why would I move on?

TRISTAN

Because you're this
This
Amazing reporter
Covering things like far-right rallies
You have so much talent
And you want things like
An East Coast profile
And you live by yourself
In your
Oh god
You own your own condo
Don't you?
And here I am
Nearly thirty years old
Moving back in with my parents
Because when I broke up with my boyfriend
He owned the flat and I had to move out
London's so expensive
And I couldn't make enough to cover my costs
And now I live in the middle of rural Virginia
Working this really
Embarrassing job
And –

KYLE
What's your job?

TRISTAN
I work for my father

KYLE
Why is that embarrassing?

TRISTAN
We build
...
Wells

KYLE
Wells

TRISTAN
Exactly
Wells
It's boring and embarrassing and

KYLE
Tristan
I think you're misunderstanding
You seem to think it's a bad thing
That you're living here

Whereas I am
I am
Over the moon

TRISTAN
You are?

KYLE
You live here?
That's
That's
Amazing
And you work in a family business?
You're like
A legacy
That is
So cool

TRISTAN
Is it?

KYLE
Wait
Wells
As in Fellowes' Pumps & Wells?

Tristan nods.

You guys installed my water pump
When I bought my house

TRISTAN
See I knew it

KYLE
I think it's amazing you work for your dad
My family were always the poorer relations
My mom was a secretary
My dad was a mechanic
I'd always wished I'd had more
Family history
Always wished that there was someone
Who would've passed down something to me
I think you're really lucky
You have a steady job
In a solid business
You get to spend lots of time with your family
And better still
You're not leaving

TRISTAN
I mean I guess –

Before Tristan can speak any more, Kyle kisses him.

KYLE
Sorry
Should I not have done that?

Tristan kisses Kyle.

They kiss again.

TRISTAN
I fell for you the moment I saw you

KYLE
I am so into you
You're like the prize
For winning the cycle race

TRISTAN
I'm glad I let you win then

KYLE
I won fair and square

They kiss again.

You know I could never be
With a guy who was faster than I am

TRISTAN
Kiss me again

They kiss.

III

TRISTAN

When we have sex for the first time
We're at his condo
We're being tentative with each other
A lot of

Is that good for you?

KYLE

Yeah

TRISTAN

How does that feel for you?

KYLE

Uh-huh

TRISTAN

It's extremely
Boringly
Consensual

I do not want to be having
Boring sex
With an incredibly attractive man
Who I am madly in love with

I have to change things up

What do you like?
Whatever it is
I want to do it

Kyle hesitates.

KYLE

There is something

TRISTAN

What was it?

Kyle whispers in Tristan's ear.

KYLE

That's what I want you to do

TRISTAN

Are you sure?

KYLE
Yeah

TRISTAN
And because we are
Sexing
And I am on top of him
And inside him
And going back and forth
And it feels good
God it feels so good
So I start saying

Competent

Oh my god
You are so

Competent

KYLE
Oh yeah
Say it
Say it again

TRISTAN
You are fucking
So fucking

Competent

KYLE
Oh yeah

TRISTAN
And as I'm saying this
I can see he's getting
Harder and harder
And like
Enormous

So I keep going

You're the most
Fucking competent
Person I know
So
So good at

KYLE
My job

Tell me I'm good at my job

TRISTAN
You're so fucking
Good at your job
You're gonna get

KYLE
Promoted

TRISTAN
Promoted
You're gonna get so promoted
You're gonna be

KYLE
On podcasts

TRISTAN
On podcasts

KYLE
National!

TRISTAN
All over the country
Cause you are
So
Fucking
Competent

KYLE
Ah!

TRISTAN
Ah!

After a moment, they relax.

KYLE
You're really good at that

TRISTAN
Some may even call me
Competent

Kyle laughs.

They kiss.

IV

TRISTAN

The relationship
Between Kyle and me
Progresses rapidly

Every day at work
I look at the clock
The moment it hits 5
I'm out of there
Even though I can feel
My father's disapproval
But I don't care
By date five
I spend the night at Kyle's house

By month three
I'm secretly hoping
He'll ask me to move in
Not because I'm desperate
To escape living with my parents or anything

Tristan and Kyle.

Look
I'm not saying this
Because I'm desperate to escape living with my parents
But I've noticed
I've been staying over
More and more nights
My parents are
Getting concerned
I've joined a cult or something

KYLE

You have
Mentioned me
To your parents
Haven't you?

TRISTAN

Of course

Which was true
Barely

Two days before
My mother had cornered me
While my father attended a men's Bible study
She insisted we make pastry dough together

MOTHER

You always had such deft fingers

TRISTAN

What do you want to talk to me about?

MOTHER

Why do you think

I want to talk to you about anything?

Isn't it nice

To spend time together?

You were away in England

For so long

And I know I'm being silly and sentimental

But I missed times like these

Just the two of us

Mother and son

Beat.

But since you *did* mention about talking

Maybe you have something

You'd like to discuss?

TRISTAN

Not really

MOTHER

You enjoy working at the business?

Your father's not being too hard on you is he?

TRISTAN

It's fine

MOTHER

What does he have you doing?

TRISTAN

Procurement

MOTHER

Has he made any contracts

Your specific responsibility?

TRISTAN

Not yet

Though I am thinking

About approaching him about something

I've been looking at our website

I want to suggest to him
That I do a redesign
New videos
Less text
Better user experience
More photos

MOTHER
Arty ones?

TRISTAN
Just better ones
Do you think he'd let me?

MOTHER
You know how he is with the business
He's very cautious about change
But it's worth a try dear

Beat.

And your social life?
Any new
Friends?

TRISTAN
Mom if you have something to ask
Why don't you just ask it?

MOTHER
I'm only making conversation
Now that I have someone other than your father
To make conversation with
It was very lonely here
The years you were away
Well not lonely
There were your father's sisters
And his brother
And their families
Oh and of course your cousin Megan had the twins
And then all of your father's business associates
And here I am
Hosting them all
(Not that I minded)
(A wife is a helpmeet to her husband)
So it wasn't lonely
But I felt alone
Because they're all your father's people
But God in His wisdom
Only gave me you

But I have noticed
That you haven't been at home recently
You're always out and about
And I don't really know who with
Since you didn't have many friends in the area
And not that it's my business
But believe me when I say
All I want is to see you happy
And that means that if you've
Met
Someone here
I hope you know that
Despite
The past
I'd be happy for you

Beat.

TRISTAN
I'm
I'm kind of

Seeing someone

MOTHER
How lovely
Is

TRISTAN
He

MOTHER
He
A nice young man?

TRISTAN
He is

MOTHER
Oh good
Well
I hope you feel
You can introduce him
To me
And I suppose
To your father
When

TRISTAN
When I'm ready

MOTHER
Of course

Tristan

It really is good to have you back
It was very different while you were gone
Your father puts so much pressure on himself
About the business
And I know he would never say this
But it was such a relief to him
When you decided to return
He knows that the business
Will be in good hands
When you take it over

Tristan does not respond.

There
Doesn't that look nice

Tristan and Kyle.

TRISTAN
So you see
Maybe it wouldn't
Be so bad
If the two of us
Considered
At some point
Living together
But only
When you're ready

KYLE
Maybe
You should introduce me
To your parents first
And then we can talk about it

Tristan takes a large gulp of wine.

TRISTAN
Deal

V

TRISTAN

On a Saturday evening
We meet my parents
At their suggestion
At the Cracker Barrel
Just outside of town
I'm unsure
If they chose this location
Because they like the food
Or because they associate it in their minds
As a place
Where major gay life events happen
Such as the time
A decade ago
When I came out to them
At this very restaurant
And they cried
And I cried
And as we were driving back home
My dad pulled over at a gas station
Ran inside
And shouted at the attendant

FATHER

Give me a copy of *Playboy*!
My son's just told me he's a faggot!

TRISTAN

He came back to the car
My mother still sitting quietly in tears
And opened the magazine
To the centrefold

FATHER

Look at her!
Look at her for god's sake!
How can you not like that?

TRISTAN

That was when
I decided
It might be best for me
To move abroad

I haven't told Kyle
Any of this

I arrive with my parents
My father has been quiet

The entire drive over

Kyle has already arrived
And put our name
On the waiting list

He's dressed even more conservatively than usual
He looks as square
As the captain of a debate team

Mom
Dad
This is

Kyle shakes Father's hand.

KYLE
Kyle
An honour to meet you sir
I admire what you've done with your business
In addition to your roles on the school board
And the work on behalf of the chamber of commerce

Father looks taken aback.

And you must be Mrs Fellowes
I love the shade you've chosen for your hair
It brings out the natural colour of your eyes
I also hear congratulations are in order
Since you were recently awarded
Volunteer of the Year
For the county's Meals on Wheels programme
If I'm not mistaken?

MOTHER
Oh you!
How can you be from New Jersey
But have such Southern charm!

KYLE
Any charm I have
I owe to my mother

Mother giggles, rather girlishly.

Tristan stares in a mixture of amazement.

LOUDSPEAKER
Fellowes
Party of four
Your table is ready

TRISTAN

As it turns out
We are seated
At the exact table
We were seated at
Over a decade ago
My family
Being my family
Chooses to ignore this fact

MOTHER

What a lovely table
Very sturdy

Now Kyle

This is our treat
So you order whatever you like

KYLE

That's very kind of you ma'am

MOTHER

You're the first person
Tristan has introduced to us
So we're very excited to meet you

Aren't we dear?

FATHER

Mm

MOTHER

Waitress!

Hello darling

I'll have a sweet tea
And he'll have a half-and-half
And this one

TRISTAN

I'll have a beer
Make that two

Father gives Tristan a look.

MOTHER

And you?

KYLE

I'll have a Coke please

MOTHER

Well

Isn't this nice?

John?

John isn't this nice?

FATHER

Oh

Yes

MOTHER

I must say Kyle

You're handsomer

Than I expected

He looks a little like you John

Doesn't he?

When you were younger?

And slimmer?

Oh I hope that's not inappropriate to say

What I'm trying to express is

Father clears his throat.

FATHER

Kyle

Why don't you tell me

Where you see yourself

In five years?

A brief uncomfortable silence.

KYLE

Well Mr Fellowes

I'm very ambitious about my career

FATHER

As a reporter?

KYLE

Yes sir

FATHER

You covered the rally with

Representative Brainwright?

KYLE

Yes sir

FATHER

I suppose you had *opinions* about it

KYLE
Actually sir
My role as a reporter
Is simply to convey the facts
And let people make their own judgments

FATHER
Well
You know how the mainstream media

KYLE
Likes to caricature good
Honest voters
And paint a picture of rural communities
As backwards and against progress?
Yes sir I do
And that's why I take my job very seriously
To give a true picture of this area and the people in it
Now you asked about my five-year plan
In the immediate term
I'd like to get noticed by the DC office
I want an East Coast profile within three years
And a national profile within five
You should be able to look back on this dinner
As the moment you met one of the most prominent
News anchors in the country

Kyle smiles.

FATHER
Well that's
That's
Very sensible

KYLE
So tell me sir
More about your business
How long has it been in the family?

Father clears his throat.

FATHER
My father set it up
Fifty years ago
When he passed
I took over the business
We were going through a
Rough patch
At the time
Financially I mean

But now we're the biggest well and pump company
In the Blue Ridge and Shenandoah Valley
When Tristan moved away
I was afraid I'd have to sell the business
(My cousin's wanted to wedge his way in for years)
But then God brought Tristan back
And in time
Provided Tristan learns all he's supposed to
The business will go to him
And then eventually his own children
Should he choose to have them
How do you feel about children Kyle?

Tristan almost chokes on his drink.

TRISTAN
Dad

FATHER
What?
All sorts of people are having children these days
Didn't Kyle just say
We're not backwards here?

KYLE
I've always thought children
To be a great blessing

MOTHER
Oh look our drinks

The drinks arrive.

TRISTAN
The conversation continues in this way
For the next few minutes
As we order our food

FATHER
I'll have the country fried steak
With coleslaw and collard greens

KYLE
Make that two

MOTHER
Grilled chicken salad for me please
Tristan?

TRISTAN
I'll have the chicken n' dumplings

No sides

When the food arrives
My father
Extends his hands

FATHER
Kyle
In this family
We pray before our meal
Do you have a problem with that?

KYLE
No sir

Father bows his head.

FATHER
Dear Father God
We thank you for the blessings
You have bestowed upon us
Thank you for bringing us together
And for introducing us to Kyle
Bless this food to our nourishment
In Jesus' name we pray
Amen

MOTHER/KYLE
Amen

TRISTAN
Amen

They begin to eat.

MOTHER
So tell us more about you
How did you come to be a journalist?

KYLE
I worked two jobs in high school
To put myself through college
And then worked full-time
While also doing a master's in journalism at Columbia

MOTHER
(*To Tristan*)
Isn't Columbia where you wanted to go?
To study photography?
It's a shame they didn't admit you
If they'd admitted you

You never would've had to go to England

TRISTAN

Yes

KYLE

Three years ago I did an internship in Richmond
Which led to a job with an agency based in DC
They sent me here last year
To be their regional reporter

MOTHER

And your parents?
How do they feel about having
You so far from home?

KYLE

My mother's gotten used to it
Though I speak with her frequently
And go home every other month

MOTHER

Do you hear that Tristan?
Even though he's away from home
Kyle visits his mother
Every other month

TRISTAN

I was living across the Atlantic Ocean
I couldn't exactly visit very easily

MOTHER

And your father?
What does he think?

Beat.

KYLE

My father died
When I was eight
In a car accident

Mother places her hand on Kyle's.

MOTHER

I am so sorry to hear that
And at such a young age
That must've been very difficult for you
Isn't that right John?

Everyone looks at Father. A tense silence.

FATHER

The bond between a father and a son
Is a blessing from God
And for you to be deprived of that
Saddens my heart
Tristan and I have many fond memories
Of doing activities together
Camping in the woods
Fishing
Hunting
I've seen this one right here
Take down a buck
On the run
Have you ever been hunting?

TRISTAN

Kyle's from Jersey
And I'm not sure if guns are really –

KYLE

I earned my rifle and shotgun merit badges
But that only required hitting targets
I've wanted to go hunting ever since I was a boy
But never had the opportunity

FATHER

Merit badges?

KYLE

I was a Scout

FATHER

And what rank did you achieve?

KYLE

Eagle

FATHER

I've been talking to a fellow Eagle Scout
This entire time and not known?
Why didn't you say so?
Tristan
Why didn't you tell me that Kyle was an Eagle Scout?

Tristan tries to answer, but Father carries on.

And how many merit badges did you earn?

KYLE

Seventy-three

FATHER
Seventy-three

But you've not been hunting?

KYLE
No sir
I've always wanted to
I imagine it's a very humbling experience
Knowing you have
Another creature's life in your hands

FATHER
I've been looking for a word
To describe hunting
My whole life
And that's it
That's the word

Humbling

You know son
Our family has a cabin
Up in Highland County
You'd be welcome to use it
If you wanted to try hunting

TRISTAN
I don't think Kyle's one for –

KYLE
A cabin?

FATHER
It's where Tristan learned to hunt and fish
Of course he wasn't a Scout
But his grandfather and I did our best
To teach him everything we knew

TRISTAN
I thought you were selling the cabin

FATHER
Cousin Bill persuaded me to keep it
He still goes there on occasion
Maybe now's a good time
That it starts getting some use again

TRISTAN
Kyle's very busy with work

KYLE

That's a very kind offer sir
I'd love it if we could go sometime

FATHER

Here
Take my card
It has my number on it

TRISTAN

Excuse me
I need to use the bathroom

Tristan gets up and walks apart.

Hi

May I get another beer?
Thanks

In the bathroom
Instead of taking a piss
I stand at the sink
Looking at the mirror
I seem scrawny
Diminished somehow
But I have a knot in the pit of my stomach

It grows into a ball of fury
When I return to the table
And I overhear my father saying

FATHER

It was at this very table in fact
Wasn't it Margaret?
Where Tristan told us
And we were surprised of course
And a little startled
I was worried
Because
Well
You know how the world
Might not always
Be the most accepting of places
And you
You don't want your child
Having to face that
But we made sure
Tristan knew
That we loved him
No matter what

KYLE
I'm so pleased
That you two
Have been so accepting
Of your son
He's very special
Extremely talented
And intelligent
And kind
You must be proud of him

An awkward silence.

Father coughs.

FATHER
If you do go to the cabin
Get Tristan to tell you the story
About the well on the property
It's the first well my father ever sank
And not that I believe in magic
But it does have a legend attached to it
It's a pretty special story

KYLE
Of course Mr Fellowes
I'll do that

Tristan
We were just waiting for you
To order dessert
Do you want to split a –

But Tristan stops Kyle speaking by kissing him.

He continues to kiss him. Pointedly.

Father and Mother start to look uncomfortable.

Finally, Tristan breaks the kiss.

Father clears his throat.

FATHER
Yes
Well

Like I said
Let me know about the cabin

VI

TRISTAN

The following Monday at work

I am in the break room

Putting in a kettle

Carol

Who never seems to have emerged from 1987

Walks in unexpectedly

Enter Carol.

CAROL

What's that?

TRISTAN

A kettle

For boiling water

For tea

CAROL

I've heard about those

They have them

Over there

TRISTAN

In England

Yeah

They're great

Very convenient

CAROL

Well bless your heart

We're all coffee drinkers in the office

But I suppose

If the son of the business owner

Likes his hot tea

Mm

TRISTAN

Mm

CAROL

Mm

Carol leaves.

TRISTAN

A moment later

My father walks in

Hi dad

FATHER
Son

TRISTAN
Kyle said he enjoyed meeting you

FATHER
He's a very upright young man

TRISTAN
Interesting what you said to Kyle
About when I told you I was
—
That's not how I remember it

FATHER
It's all in the past now
Water under the bridge

Father clears his throat.

I have something I'd like to discuss
You've been here six months
Doing largely routine work
But now I think you're ready
For something more complicated

TRISTAN
Funnily enough
I was thinking the same thing
I have a proposal to put to you

FATHER
All right
Let me hear it

TRISTAN
As part of my photography training
I also took classes in marketing
I've gone over our website
And our promotional material
And I have some ideas
I've created some mock-ups
Here

Tristan hands Father a folder.

Take a look
And let me know what you think

FATHER

Not sure that's the highest priority
Of the business right now
But I'll take a look

In the meantime

I'd like you to handle the Jennings contract

Here's the file
It's only two sites
But it'll be good experience
And if you do a good job
We can talk about expanding your responsibilities
Maybe even look at giving you a raise

TRISTAN

If you think I'm ready

FATHER

I do

TRISTAN

So I set to work
Making calls
Lining up the contractors
The work isn't as bad
When I have more responsibility

When I tell Kyle
He says

KYLE

That's amazing!
And good news about the raise
It sounds like you're being
Competent

TRISTAN

About the same time
I get a call
From a contact in London
Who has now moved to New York

EDWARD

(In an English accent)

Tristan
Darling
It's Edward
How are you?

Everyone feels dreadful
You had to leave London
And you didn't even wind up in New York
How is
Virginia?
I would come to visit
But do the trains operate that far south?

TRISTAN

We have an Amtrak station in—

EDWARD
DC really is as far as I'll go
Even then
What a dull city!
If the city ever gains statehood
Its state flag will be a giant rectangle of beige
But anyway
I'm calling about a job
Happy family around a big bowl of pasta
That sort of thing
Been desperate to find someone
Willing to do the shoot for the wages being offered
And I thought of you

Interested?

TRISTAN

I'm busy at the moment

EDWARD
The family business is it?
Charming
You know I saw Callum only a few weeks ago
He's worried about you darling
He says you haven't called

TRISTAN

I have nothing to say to him

EDWARD
He feels terribly guilty
He had no idea you were so financially
Precarious
He blames himself that you left England
He thinks moving back in with your parents
Is one giant act of self-sabotage

Mother, unnoticed, enters.

TRISTAN

It wasn't self-sabotage
It was my only choice
We don't all have parents
Who buy us our own flats

EDWARD
Are you sure you're not interested in the job?
I know the wages are low
But the advertising exec is very well connected
He said he's looking for a long-term collaborator
This would be a perfect way
To establish yourself in New York
After your disastrous exit from London

Beat.

TRISTAN
Send over the details
And I'll think about it

EDWARD
Good boy
Ta ta!

Tristan hangs up the phone.

Turns.

Sees Mother.

MOTHER
Everything okay?
I didn't mean to overhear
But that sounded
Tense

TRISTAN
It's fine
It was just a call about work
A photography job
In New York

MOTHER
New York?
Well good thing you have
All the employment you need here

Tristan does not respond.

You're not thinking of taking it
Are you?

TRISTAN

No

No

MOTHER

Good

TRISTAN

But

It could help establish me there

MOTHER

But you're established here

TRISTAN

No but

If I wanted to move

MOTHER

Why would you want to move?

TRISTAN

So I could have a career

MOTHER

Hasn't your father given you more responsibility

At the business?

TRISTAN

Yeah but

MOTHER

What would you have up there

That you wouldn't have here?

You have your life

Your job

Kyle

Kyle is here

How do you think he'll feel about this?

He's very

Impressive

Intellectually

And physically

Why would you want to jeopardise your relationship

With someone so impressive?

TRISTAN

It was only a thought
Forget I mentioned anything

MOTHER
If you two are serious about each other
Then you can't run off whenever it suits you
A relationship requires commitment
Sacrifice

TRISTAN
You would know
Wouldn't you

MOTHER
Excuse me?

TRISTAN
Never mind

MOTHER
You clearly have something to say

TRISTAN
I only mean
Dad made you move here
So he could work for Grandpa
Dad asked you to empty your savings account
To save the business
But maybe not every relationship
Should be about one partner sacrificing for the other

MOTHER
Your father did not 'empty my savings account'
I gave that money to him
Because if I hadn't
We would not be living in this house
We would not have been able
To help you through college
Let alone college in England
Why can't you for once
Show a little gratitude
Instead of making everything about yourself?
You are my only child
And I want the best for you
But you need to learn
That this place you come from
Is not your enemy
It is the source of your strength
And the sooner you stop trying
To turn your back on it
The faster you'll discover

That there are people here
Who love and care for you

TRISTAN
Mom

MOTHER
I'm sorry
I'm sorry
It's the thought of you leaving again

TRISTAN
Really it's only a short job
And the pay isn't great
I'm not even sure I want to do it
I just need some time
To work things out in my head

MOTHER
Of course darling

TRISTAN
In the meantime
Can you not mention it to dad?
Or to Kyle?
I don't want them knowing
Until I'm sure

MOTHER
If that's what you think is best

Tristan nods.

But remember dear

Source of strength

VII

TRISTAN

That weekend

I spend the night at Kyle's house

I've slowly been moving my stuff in

When we're in bed

About to fall asleep

Kyle says

KYLE

Is everything okay?

You've been kinda quiet

Like you have something on your mind

TRISTAN

Just thinking

KYLE

About?

TRISTAN

The future

KYLE

Sounds ominous

Wanna talk about it?

TRISTAN

Not yet

Maybe tomorrow

KYLE

Alright

Goodnight

TRISTAN

Kyle turns over

And shuts his eyes

But I lay there thinking

What if I took the job

In New York

Tried it out

At worst it's just some extra cash

But maybe the job will lead to another

And then another

And I could move there

And I could have a career

And people would respect me

(Not my parents)
(They wouldn't understand)
But I
I would respect myself

KYLE
I can hear you thinking

TRISTAN
Sorry

KYLE
Get some sleep

TRISTAN
Sleep well

The lights go down.

The night passes.

The next day.

Kyle and I wake up on Saturday morning
We're horny
But instead of having sex
Kyle turns to me and says

KYLE
Let's go to the gym
And do a workout
And then run home
But the run home
Will be a race
And whoever makes it home the fastest
Can ask for whatever they want
In bed

TRISTAN
Are you sure
You want to make this a competition?
You might not win

KYLE
I'm faster than you are

TRISTAN
We'll see

As we're getting dressed
Each into a pair of

Appropriately short
But not too short
Shorts
Kyle laughs

KYLE
Ha!

TRISTAN
What's so funny?

KYLE
I've been teaching your father about memes
Look at this one he sent me
About pickleball

Kyle shows Tristan his phone.

TRISTAN
Oh
Yeah
Hilarious

KYLE
He and I are scheduled to play next week
He's promised to go easy on me

TRISTAN
When we arrive at the gym
We behave
Cool
Chill
Like two dudes
Just working out

KYLE
Check out that guy doing squats
He's doing them all wrong

TRISTAN
We go to the bench press
We do our warm-up
And then our working weight
He goes first
Breezes through his ten reps
Makes them look easy

It's my turn
I lie on the bench
Feet flat
Heels grounded

Core tight
Grip the bar
Push off the rack
Shit
It's heavy
I bring it down slowly
Explosive push up
One
Breathe
Do it again
And again
Until ten reps

Then we switch
Three sets of ten
On the last set
Rep six
I feel my arms tiring
Rep seven
Arms are screaming
Rep eight

Ah!

I try one more
But
I can't
My arms are caving in

Take it
Take the bar

KYLE
I got it
I got it

Nearly made it
It's all about the mental attitude
You have to push through

TRISTAN
Yeah
Thanks
I was

KYLE
Just saying

A mobile phone rings.

Kyle answers the phone.

It's your dad
Be right back

TRISTAN
I go over to the triceps station
Work them out
Until I'm exhausted
My eyes from time to time
Glance to the water fountain
Where Kyle
Ear to his phone
Is pacing back and forth
Occasionally laughing
Like
Throwing his head back
And laughing

KYLE
Ha ha ha

TRISTAN
When the call ends
He comes back over

What was that about?

KYLE
Your dad wants me
To do a profile of the business
Family legacy
Local connections
That sort of thing
He has an interesting angle
Says I could even
Make it more of a personal piece
Look at masculinity through the generations

TRISTAN
My dad used the word
Masculinity?

KYLE
Well
No
That's more my own thought
But it's not a bad idea
Your dad says it might help
Promoting the business too

TRISTAN

I'd made suggestions for the website
And promo materials
Last week
Maybe they've had an influence

Are you going to do it?

KYLE
I'm thinking about it

TRISTAN
Right before we leave
Kyle goes up to the guy
Doing squats earlier

KYLE
Hey dude
Just wanted to show you about the squats
If you keep doing them like that
You'll blow out your back
Let me show you
You gotta go down
Like you're sitting on a box
But like
In a swimming pool

Kyle squats. He exaggerates the extension of his bum

TRISTAN
We should head back

KYLE
Just one more
Like this

Kyle squats again.

Got it?
Good

TRISTAN
Why were you doing that?

KYLE
What?

TRISTAN
Interfering with his workout?

KYLE
I was showing him proper form

TRISTAN
He didn't ask you to

KYLE
He was going to hurt himself

TRISTAN
He looked angry

KYLE
He would look angrier
If his back collapsed

TRISTAN
Okay whatever
Let's run home

KYLE
We're racing
Remember?
Winner gets to ask for whatever they want
In bed
And
Additional rule
If I win
You have to tell me
What you were thinking about last night

TRISTAN
You seem very confident

KYLE
I was my school's champion

TRISTAN
Oh your Jersey Public School 12

KYLE
All right Virginia country boy
I'll have you know
I ran the mile in under five minutes and fifteen seconds

TRISTAN
What was your fastest time?

KYLE
5:09

TRISTAN
That's good

Ready?

KYLE
Three
Two
One

TRISTAN
We each take off
Like a bullet from a gun

For the first minute or so
I let Kyle run ahead
Once or twice
He looks over his shoulder
Smiles tauntingly at me
But at the halfway point
I level with him

What's the matter
Can't keep up?

And then without a second thought
I burst ahead
And not just a little ahead
A lot

Tristan runs ahead, leaving Kyle behind.

I arrive at his door
A full forty-nine seconds
Before he does

What took you so long?

KYLE
(Winded)
How
How did you run so fast?

TRISTAN
C'mon
Up to the bedroom

KYLE
Why?

TRISTAN
I'm gonna fuck you

KYLE

But

TRISTAN
Winner gets to decide

In the bedroom
I shove Kyle
Onto the bed

Get on your face

KYLE
Oompf

TRISTAN
So you won a race at your school?
Unfortunately for you
You're about to get fucked
By the Virginia District champion
My winning time
Was 4:17:57

I fuck him
I keep his face
Pressed firmly into the pillow

Sound of sex.

Tristan climaxes.

Kyle does not climax.

Tristan leaves Kyle facedown on the bed.

I go to the bathroom
To clean myself off

He leaves the room.

KYLE
Hey
Aren't you going
To finish me off?

Beat.

TRISTAN
You should've run faster

VIII

TRISTAN

One week later
My father has ordered a deep clean
Of the entire office in preparation for the news piece
I've still not told Kyle about the job offer
Edward is harassing me for an answer

When the day of the interview arrives
My father shows Kyle
Around the business site

FATHER

We moved to this location in 1987
When the business was established enough
To require an office

KYLE

You mentioned a rough patch?

FATHER

My father died suddenly
Fifteen years ago
At the time
Some creditors were calling on the business
We were also feeling the pinch
From big conglomerates
Who were trying to move in
But they didn't have the local touch
It took some work
But we're financially solid today

TRISTAN

Following my father around
Is a woman with a camera around her neck

Who's that?

KYLE

Lou-Ellen
She's our photographer for the piece

TRISTAN

I could've taken photos

KYLE

The agency assigned her
I didn't have a say

TRISTAN

Lou-Ellen snaps a photo
Of me and my father
Standing together

When no one is looking
I ask her for her business card

I'm a photographer too
Looking to make connections

LOU-ELLEN
Isn't working the family business
Your full-time job?

TRISTAN
Never mind

Kyle and my father
Are now standing by the front door

I look at the steamed meatloaf vinyl
The digging equipment
Carol who has had her nails done
And Kevin who has worn a tie and a cardigan
And then my father
Who seems
Somehow
To be weeping
As he tells Kyle

FATHER
How proud it makes me
To be part of a family legacy
And to know
That the business
Will stay in the family

Tristan steps aside.

He pulls out his phone and dials.

TRISTAN
Edward?
Hi it's Tristan
About the job
I've made up my mind
I'll do it
What do you need from me?
When do I start

EDWARD

Oh Tristan
Bad luck darling

TRISTAN
What do you mean?

EDWARD
Exec has just found someone

TRISTAN
What are their credentials?

EDWARD
Does it matter?
They're young and ambitious
And crucially they live in New York

TRISTAN
Well
Well
Will there be other jobs?

EDWARD
Who can say?
Look darling gotta run
Ta ta

TRISTAN
Ta

Tristan holds the phone, a bit dumbfounded.

After a moment, Kyle walks up.

KYLE
Ready for your interview now?

TRISTAN
Yeah
Sure
Whatever

When the piece comes out
It does really well
It's heartfelt
An ode to families
Last bastions of community businesses
Fighting to stay afloat
Against the rising tide
Of corporate interests

Kyle is pleased

KYLE

I'm pleased

I hope the head office likes it

TRISTAN

My mother is pleased

MOTHER

I'm pleased

Look how the photographer captured my hair

You've never captured my hair like that

TRISTAN

But most of all

My father is pleased

FATHER

I'm pleased

Kyle's got the tone just right

And did you know he's a superb

Pickleball player?

I'm going to print the article

And frame it

TRISTAN

He prints it out

On his inkjet printer

And frames it

On the office wall

Where I have to look at it

Every time I glance at the clock

Which is frequently

Since even though the Jennings contract

Has gone well

I have the increasing feeling

That I am watching my life

Slip away from me

Tristan knocks on the office door.

Dad?

FATHER

What do you need son?

TRISTAN

I've finished the Jennings contract

FATHER

It's not supposed to be done
Until the end of the week

TRISTAN
I got them to finish early

FATHER
Did you have to pay them overtime?

TRISTAN
No
I made sure they were efficient

FATHER
Oh

Good

TRISTAN
You mentioned
If the Jennings contract went well
We could discuss a raise

FATHER
I said I'd think about it
We've had some ups and down this quarter
Ask me in six months

TRISTAN
But you said

FATHER
I'm thinking of the business
If you were a regular employee
Carol or Kevin or one of the men
I wouldn't hesitate
But you're part of the family
When you take over
You'll understand too
The needs of the business come first
And it's my judgment that the business
Can't afford to give you a raise at the moment

TRISTAN
On my lunch break
I take a walk into the woods

Tristan screams.

IX

Tristan and Kyle at home.

Tristan looking on his laptop. Kyle doing a workout.

The buzz of a phone.

TRISTAN
Your phone

KYLE
I'll get it in a minute

Kyle continues his workout.

Did I tell you that NPR shared the article?

TRISTAN
Really

KYLE
And you'll never guess who liked it

Tristan does not respond.

Ari Shapiro

Tristan does not respond.

Did you hear what I said?
Ari Shapiro
Gay media icon second only to Anderson Cooper
He liked the story

TRISTAN
Uh huh

KYLE
My friend Roger
Had a threesome with Ari Shapiro and his husband
But personally
If given the choice
I'd choose Anderson Cooper
His mother was a Vanderbilt

Tristan does not respond.

Kyle finishes his workout.

Tristan?

No response.

Tristan?

TRISTAN
Uh huh

KYLE
Are you okay?
You've been very quiet
Ever since the piece came out
You liked it
Didn't you?
Please say that you liked it

TRISTAN
Yeah
It was great

KYLE
You don't sound very enthusiastic
Did something in it offend you?
Did your dad say something to you about it?

TRISTAN
No
It was well written
You captured the situation perfectly

KYLE
Why do I feel like you're lying to me

Kyle moves to his phone and picks it up.

TRISTAN
I'm not lying to you
I'm just not
Stroking your ego more than it needs

Kyle gives a look.

It's a good piece
That's all

KYLE
'Stroking my ego'?

TRISTAN
That's not what I meant
It's a good piece

I promise

KYLE
What's going on?

Beat.

TRISTAN
Look
Kyle
There's [something I need to tell you]

Kyle glances at his phone.

KYLE
Oh my god

Tristan gives a look.

Oh shit
Oh *shit!*

TRISTAN
What?

Without answering, Kyle makes a call on his phone. Tristan looks on.

KYLE
Grace?
I just saw your text
Are you serious?
They want a meeting?

Oh my god
Are you sure?

Oh that's
That's

Kyle starts to get teary.

Thursday
Noon
I'll be there
Of *course* I'll be there
I love you I love you I love you

Kyle ends the call.

TRISTAN
That was your boss?

KYLE

She says the business editor at the national office
Has read my piece
And really liked it
She apparently passed it to the whole team to read
The feedback is it shows
New maturity in my writing
And
And
I've been called to a meeting in DC
To discuss my future
Grace says they want to promote me
Isn't that amazing?

TRISTAN

Yeah

Amazing

When is it?

KYLE

Thursday
Which is just in time for
Okay I was going to surprise you
But since I'll be gone
You'll need to do some of the packing
But don't worry
I've made a spreadsheet

I spoke with your father

We're going to the cabin at the weekend!

It'll be great
The two of us
Alone
Fresh air
We can bring the bikes
Go hiking

You could take me hunting
If we bring a gun

TRISTAN

Yeah

Great

KYLE

What's wrong?

TRISTAN
Nothing's wrong

I just

Wished you'd asked me

KYLE
Your dad says you love the cabin

TRISTAN
Loved
I loved the cabin
When I was a kid

Don't worry about it
Yes
Let's go
It'll be good to get away
And celebrate your promotion

KYLE
Do you really think
I'll get promoted?

TRISTAN
Why else would they
Call you to DC?

KYLE
I'm going to get promoted
I've been waiting for this
For years
And it's all thanks to you
And your family

Kyle gives Tristan a hug. Then a kiss.

TRISTAN
I have one request though

No gun
No hunting

KYLE
Whatever makes you happy
We're going to have a great time

X

TRISTAN

On the day that Kyle is in DC
I am at work

The fight with my dad
Starts unexpectedly

I've been sitting at my desk for an hour
Processing invoices
When I decide to take a tea break

I go to the tiny kitchen
Reach to grab the kettle
But the kettle isn't there

I go back into the office

What happened to the kettle?

CAROL

Oh sorry Tristan
It was getting in the way
And no one was using it

TRISTAN

I was using it

CAROL

I asked your father
And he said it could go

TRISTAN

I knock on my dad's office

Tristan knocks.

FATHER

Come in

Tristan

Just the man I wanted to see
I have a question to ask you

TRISTAN

What happened to the kettle?

FATHER

Chucked it

TRISTAN
Why?

FATHER
We're all coffee drinkers here
Also
Carol's in charge of kitchen equipment
You should've asked
If she was okay with the kettle in the first instance

TRISTAN
Oh my god
I bought that kettle
With my own money

FATHER
Please do not take the Lord's name in vain
Especially at the office
And why did you spend your own money?
The tea kettle is a business expense
That should've been put through procurement

TRISTAN
I am procurement

FATHER
Then you didn't follow
Your own rules

TRISTAN
Why are you getting at me?

FATHER
I'm not getting at you
You need to lower your voice

TRISTAN
You need to grow the fuck up

FATHER
Excuse me?

TRISTAN
Sorry I –

FATHER
If people hear you
Using those words
You'll quickly find
No one in the county will work with you

Now
I'm glad you're here
Because I have a question

TRISTAN
But the kettle

FATHER
Drop it
Okay?

And wipe that frown from your face
You're going to like this
I promise

It's about advertising
And promotion

TRISTAN
You looked at my photographs
And my plan for the website?

FATHER
Hm?
Oh
No
That's not what I want to talk about

TRISTAN
Why not?

FATHER
What's eating you today?
You're in a foul mood

TRISTAN
I gave them to you weeks ago

FATHER
Would you let me finish?
It's about Kyle

TRISTAN
What about him?

FATHER
Ever since that article appeared
I've been thinking
How useful it was
It's had a good response
Caused discussion

I'd like to hire Kyle
To do some freelance work for us
Write a few more articles
Help us target some podcasts
Nothing too often
Just once a quarter
Ask him for me would you?

TRISTAN
Have you not looked at
The photographs I did?
The suggestions for redesigning the website?

FATHER
I don't think they're suitable

TRISTAN
Why not?

FATHER
They're very

Arty

They'll make people think they can't afford us
We're a simple business that provides a simple service
And people need to know that they can trust us

TRISTAN
They'll make people
Take us seriously

FATHER
They'll lose us business
Trust me
I know our customers
We can't risk doing anything that would harm the business
Now
Would you ask Kyle
If he'd like to freelance for us?

TRISTAN
Kyle's a reporter
That's his career
He's at a meeting today
With his agency in DC
They're probably going to offer him a promotion

FATHER
There's still time then

Could you try to persuade him this weekend?
I could make it worth his while

TRISTAN
You can afford to give him work
But not me a raise?

FATHER
His work would be about
Investing in a long-term development for the business

TRISTAN
I can't believe you're asking this

FATHER
I'm trying to help you out here
I know we've had our differences
Over your
Your lifestyle

TRISTAN
Please do not use that word

FATHER
But what I'm trying to do
If you and Kyle are serious about each other
Which your mother thinks you are
Is to find some kind of set-up
That we can all tolerate
And that would be good for the business
It would be a real coup
If someone like him
Were to work for us
He went to Columbia you know?
Why can't you be happy about what I'm asking?
Why can't you say to me
'Thank you father for trying to find a solution'?

TRISTAN
Because there isn't a problem

FATHER
Now you're being selfish
And putting your hurt feelings
Above the needs of the business

TRISTAN
Why the hell
Do you think Kyle
Would want to work here
In this dumpster tip of a building

With a bunch of people
Who only have a high-school education
Who think that a kettle
Is some kind of communist European plot
And who are too stupid to know
That God doesn't exist
And even if he does
He wouldn't care about their sad little lives?
Get real dad
I'm only working here
Because I have no other choice
But Kyle is going places

FATHER

Don't you ever criticize the people you work with
Don't you ever think for one moment
Just because I've given you an education
And let you waste your life
On the other side of the ocean
That you are more accomplished than these people

TRISTAN

But I am accomplished
I was a district-level runner
I was an honourable mention
For the student photographer of the year award
I lived abroad
In a whole new country
For eight years
But because those are not things
That you like to do
Or are concerned about
You don't pay any attention to them

When I was living in England
I was winning awards
Images I took
Were on posters all over the London Underground
Hundreds of thousands of people saw them

Did you ever come over and visit?
Did you even know what I was doing over there?

FATHER

The business occupied my time

TRISTAN

You wouldn't have been so occupied
With the business
If you hadn't have nearly destroyed it
In the first place

I know how you've been presenting yourself to Kyle
I read what you told him in the article
A 'financial rough patch'

FATHER
Keep your voice down

TRISTAN
You're the reason
The business was in trouble
And you're the reason
Grandpa died

FATHER
Your grandfather
Was a very sick man

TRISTAN
Don't try to shift the blame

FATHER
You know nothing about what it was like
Trying to work for him
And you never will
Because all you ever do
Is shirk your responsibilities
Look at you
Calling me up
Asking to move back in
To your childhood bedroom
Instead of being a man
And making your own way in the world
You're still relying on me
Like you always have done
And do you know why?
Because you're lazy
And weak
And want everything handed to you
And don't for one moment
Think this has anything to do
With your
Lifestyle
Look at Kyle
He's pulled himself up
By his own bootstraps
He's a hard worker
He has ambition
And frankly
It would've been a lot easier
If God had made him my son
Instead of you

Now
Get back to work
Before I have to fire you

TRISTAN
You can't fire me

I quit

XI

TRISTAN

On the car ride
To the cabin
I fail to mention the fight with my father
Or the fact that I no longer have a job
It's hard to get a word in edgewise
Because Kyle can't stop talking
About his trip to DC

KYLE

I know I can't stop talking
About my trip to DC

TRISTAN

He can't believe it

KYLE

I can't believe it

TRISTAN

They loved the piece

KYLE

They freakin' loved the piece
And everything else in my portfolio

TRISTAN

He throws out words like
Plans

KYLE

Big plans
Congressional beat
Podcast host
Public profiles
They want me to try it all
The world's my oyster

TRISTAN

The world's his oyster

KYLE

Funny though
I don't actually like oysters
Speaking of which
Did you pack the salt grinder?

TRISTAN

Yes I read the spreadsheet

KYLE

I'm glad we're doing this
I'm looking forward to spending the weekend with you

TRISTAN

Uh huh

KYLE

Are you okay?
You seem distracted

TRISTAN

Just thinking
That's all

KYLE

If it's about my taking the job
And moving to DC
I don't want you to worry

TRISTAN

I can't take any more of his chatter
So I flick on the radio

WEATHER PRESENTER

Severe weather warning
For the northwest part of the state
An 'arctic dome' is scheduled
To descend on the region from Monday
More updates at 10 o'clock

KYLE

Good thing it's not until Monday

TRISTAN

Turn here
On the left

KYLE

This is so remote
Where's the nearest grocery store?

TRISTAN

Back in Monterey

KYLE

And your closest neighbour?

TRISTAN

Seven miles?

We drive some more
Down twisting roads
And over a narrow bridge
That spans a creek

Eventually
The cabin comes into view
It has a slanted roof
It sits alone in a small clearing

The car pulls up into the driveway

Kyle immediately gets out

KYLE
Oh
My
God
Look at the view
And the trees

This is all your family's?

TRISTAN
My grandfather bought it
In the 70s
When land was cheap

KYLE
And look at the cabin
It's perfect
C'mon
I want to see inside

Tristan sits.

Hey

TRISTAN
Give me a minute

KYLE
What's wrong?

TRISTAN
I haven't been back here
In a long time
That's all

KYLE

Why not?
If I had a place like this
I'd come here all the time
And

Kyle spots something.

Woah

A well.

KYLE
Is this
The well?

TRISTAN
Yeah

KYLE
When your dad mentioned a well
I thought it'd be an industrial thing
But this
It's like
The epitome of a well
Stone circle
Little pointed roof
Handle to crank
How deep is it?

TRISTAN
Deep

KYLE
What did your dad say
About a legend?

TRISTAN
I'll tell you later

Come on
Let's get everything inside

A few moments later
We step through the door

KYLE
So
Retro

Tristan breathes in. Breathes out.

Clean though

I thought you said
Your family doesn't come here

TRISTAN
We don't
Apparently my dad's cousin Bill maintains it

KYLE
I like it

Kyle points to a stag's skull, with branching antlers, mounted on the wall.

And look at that!

Resting on an antler is a hat.

Did one of you shoot it?

TRISTAN
I did

It was my first kill

KYLE
Impressive
Who's is the hat?

TRISTAN
My grandfather's

We're here
In this bedroom
Normally when we came as a family
I was in the loft
But as it's just the two of us

KYLE
(Approaching)
Just the two of us indeed

Kyle kisses Tristan.

They kiss for a moment.

Then Tristan pulls away.

What?

TRISTAN

I don't feel like it

KYLE
But we're all alone
Don't you want
To tie your big strong muscley woodsman
To the bed and ravish him?

TRISTAN
Not tonight

KYLE
Oh

TRISTAN
Sorry
It's been a long week

Kyle takes out his phone and snaps a picture.

What're you doing?

KYLE
Going to send it to your dad
Show him we arrived
What's the wifi code?
I can't get signal out here

TRISTAN
There's no internet
And certainly no signal

KYLE
What do you do if you need to contact someone?

TRISTAN
There's a landline
But I don't know if Bill pays the bill

KYLE
But what if the DC people try to contact me?

TRISTAN
It's the weekend
Why would they?

KYLE
I dunno
Just in case

TRISTAN

It must be nice
To be so in demand

KYLE
What's that supposed to mean?

TRISTAN
Never mind

We need to switch on the electricity
And make sure the propane tank is loaded properly
There're these two burners to cook on
It's all quite basic

C'mon
Let's unpack and then make dinner

Tristan and Kyle set about putting things away.

Later that night
After we eat
We lie on the sofa
Watching a VHS tape
Of *Free Willy*
Kyle asks

KYLE
What about the well?
What's the legend?

TRISTAN
It's not a legend really
So much as a story
That my grandfather told

He brought my grandmother here
To propose to her
Had the ring in his pocket
Or so he says
And as he's about to pop the question
He realises the ring has gone missing
Tears the place up looking for it

Because he hasn't proposed yet
My grandmother doesn't know what's going on
She's pissed off at him
They steam in each other's company
For the rest of the day
Until it's time to fix dinner

My grandmother goes out to the well

To draw water
(This was before water was installed in the cabin)
And as she's turning the handle
That brings the pail out of the well
She notices something glinting

The engagement ring
Inscribed inside
With her and my grandfather's names

No one knows
How it got down there
But ever since then
My grandfather swore
That if someone was ever
Truly in need
On the property
Then the well would provide

That's how the story goes

KYLE
You sound dubious

TRISTAN
It's too convenient

KYLE
You think he staged it?

TRISTAN
He hated anything
Being out of his control

Or maybe it is true

In any case
It's why he decided
To start a well drilling business

He took it as a sign from God

XII

TRISTAN

The next morning
I am woken up
By the smell of frying eggs
And Kyle holding out
A steaming mug of tea
Directly in my face

KYLE

Morning sleepyhead

TRISTAN

How long have you been up?

KYLE

Since six
Went for a run
Did some yoga
God I love it here
Growing up in Jersey
The closest I came to something like this
Was through Scouts
We'd go camping
In the state parks
But the Jersey state parks
Are crap

Are you hungry?
Spreadsheet says we can each eat two eggs
The fifth goes in the meal tonight

TRISTAN

Give me a moment

KYLE

And then we can go on a hike

TRISTAN

I kinda wanted to relax today
And it looks cold outside

KYLE

We're here in these amazing surroundings
And I know it's all boring and familiar to you
But I really want to go
Please go on the hike with me

TRISTAN

The hike?

KYLE
I've got it planned out
Please
You'll love it

TRISTAN
What's that look?
What have you been planning?

KYLE
What look?
I'm completely innocent
But hurry up
Get dressed
Let's eat
And then we'll head out

TRISTAN
We eat our spreadsheet-regulated breakfast
After we shower and shave
We bundle up
Put our hiking boots on
And trek into the wilderness

Tristan and Kyle hike through the woods.

KYLE
I love it out here
It's so peaceful

TRISTAN
Hold up a moment
I want to take a photo

Tristan takes a photograph.

KYLE
You know what made me fall for you?
Your camera demonstration
You were so confident
I thought to myself
'That's a man who knows what he's doing'

TRISTAN
Well maybe you could
Tell my dad

KYLE
Did something happen?

TRISTAN
I just wish he would
Ah
Never mind

How much farther?

KYLE
Not long

TRISTAN
We walk another mile
Then another
I'm cold
And I'm getting hungry

KYLE
Nearly there
Here
Have this energy bar

TRISTAN
Is it spreadsheet-approved?

KYLE
Technically it's for the walk back
But I'll allow you to have it

TRISTAN
Thanks for your generosity

Kyle stops suddenly.

He gasps.

KYLE
Look
Look at the view!
The whole expanse
Isn't it amazing!
See the lake
The small lake below
It looks frozen over
Ah
I love it up here
I love the air
And the trees
And the sunlight
And

You

I

Love

You

Beat.

Oh god I'm sorry
Should I not have said that?
I've been wanting to say it
For a month or so
Have I gone too fast?
I wanted to say it
Because I wanted to reassure you
That even though I'll be moving to DC
I want our relationship to continue
I'm going to have to sell my house here
To afford even a shoebox in DC
But I was thinking weekends you could stay at mine
And sometimes I could stay with you
Work from your parents'
Or from your family's business office
If your dad wouldn't mind
But most of all
I don't want you to worry
This promotion won't change anything
I love you
And I was wondering

Do you love me?

Beat.

TRISTAN

What if I move with you to DC?

KYLE

Excuse me?

TRISTAN

What if I move with you to DC?

KYLE

And commute back to your family to work?
Won't that get exhausting?
It's a two-hour drive each way

TRISTAN

There's nothing keeping me at home

KYLE

The family business that you run?

TRISTAN

My father runs it

KYLE

Okay the family business

That you work for

And will inherit someday

And don't think I don't notice

How you're avoiding my question

If it's too soon I get that but –

TRISTAN

But what would you think

If I moved to DC with you?

KYLE

Why would you do that?

Beat.

Tristan

What's going on?

TRISTAN

Kyle I—

I quit my job

KYLE

...

TRISTAN

...

KYLE

How is that a response to

'Do you love me?'

TRISTAN

I quit my job

KYLE

You work for your family

You can't quit your family

TRISTAN

I didn't quit my family

Just my job

KYLE

Why would you quit?

TRISTAN

Because I can't stand
Working for my father
Nothing is ever good enough for him
You know that raise he talked about?
He isn't giving it to me

KYLE

Did you not meet your performance targets or something?

TRISTAN

Why would you think that?

KYLE

Because your dad doesn't seem
Like that kind of guy

TRISTAN

I met his conditions
And then he changed them
If you knew him better
You'd know that's his classic pattern

KYLE

Yeah but

TRISTAN

But what?

KYLE

Nothing

TRISTAN

No tell me
You clearly have an opinion

KYLE

You clock in at nine
You leave at five

TRISTAN

That's what I'm paid to do

KYLE

If you want to get ahead
You have to show

You're willing to go the extra mile
Put in the work
I've slogged on this regional reporting
For years before the agency has finally noticed
And now they've offered me this promotion

TRISTAN

Are you taking his side?

KYLE

Maybe?

Maybe I'm confused

Because I tell you I love you

And the response I get is

You quit your job

TRISTAN

Don't you see?

This is perfect for us

I can move to DC with you

We don't have to worry about a commute

Or only seeing each other at weekends

KYLE

And we'll what

Live off my salary?

TRISTAN

For a little while

Until I can find work

I've been looking at jobs

I still have contacts

DC isn't exactly a hub for photography

But it's close to New York

I'm sure in six months or so

I could re-establish myself

KYLE

Six months?

DC's really expensive

TRISTAN

I'm used to living

In expensive cities

KYLE

Isn't the whole reason

You moved back here

Because you couldn't afford

To live in London?

TRISTAN

Because I broke up with my boyfriend

KYLE

So the only way you can afford to live
Is by leeching off of other guys?

TRISTAN

I turned down a photography job in New York last week

Beat.

I didn't tell you because I didn't want to upset you
And your vision of me
As this
I don't know
Family legacy?
Stable home?
Off-the-shelf family
That you can slot into
Because you don't have one of your own?
People want to work with me
I just need time to build contacts
And get back in the game
If you're worried about me helping to pay the bills
I'll work at Starbucks or something while I sort it out

KYLE

I do not want the guy fucking me
To be making lattes
At Starbucks
I want the guy fucking me
To be someone
Who is going to inherit
A family business

TRISTAN

Why are you so obsessed with my family business?

KYLE

Because family is important

You've got everything
A father
A mother who cooks for you
A stable home
I would kill
To have the privileges
You've had in life
But you do nothing but complain about them

TRISTAN

We can't all be journalists
Who went to Columbia
And have ambitions for a national profile

KYLE

I have worked hard
For everything I have earned
I deserve the success coming to me
And if you can't keep up
That is not my problem
I'm not going to sit around
And provide for you
You little bitch

Tristan shoves Kyle.

Without hesitating, Kyle shoves Tristan back.

Then Tristan rushes at Kyle.

Tristan and Kyle fight.

Kyle lands a punch.

Tristan recoils in shock.

Tristan
I'm –

But before he can finish: the sound of a thunderclap.

Then the sound of a great storm descending.

They both look up at the sky.

What's that?

TRISTAN

The storm
It's come early
The temperature is dropping

C'mon
We have to get back

Kyle stands still.

Kyle!
Run!
Now!

Tristan takes off running. Kyle follows behind.

The storm descends.

Howling winds.

Distortions.

*Radio chatter – storm of a generation – roads closed – car pile-ups – emergency services
overwhelmed – power cuts – days of chaos – possibly weeks – stay in your homes – do not go out –
do not go out – do not go out –*

Static.

XIII

Later that evening.

Tristan and Kyle in the cabin. Various objects around them.

KYLE
An axe

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Firewood

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Box of matches
Make that two

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Cutlery
Kitchen knives
Two cooking pots
Frying pan
Towels

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Toolbox
Hunting knife

TRISTAN
Yes
Yes

KYLE
Three pair underwear
General clothing
Two backpacks

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Two iPhones
Two iPhone chargers

TRISTAN
Signal?

KYLE
None

One bag flour
Confirmed rancid

TRISTAN
Other food?

KYLE
One meal remaining

TRISTAN
Yes

KYLE
Would've been more if you hadn't eaten
The bread
And the peanut butter

TRISTAN
Well excuse me
For wanting to console myself
After being punched in the face

Beat.

KYLE
Propane tank
Half empty

TRISTAN
Or half full

Kyle gives Tristan a look.

KYLE
Wood-burning stove
Pack of cigarettes
Pack of chewing gum

TRISTAN
Date?

KYLE
Unknown

Wooden box with

Is that?

Kyle holds out the box for Tristan to smell.

TRISTAN
Must be Bill's

KYLE
One box with circa five grams of weed
Quality unknown

TRISTAN
Anything else I should record?

KYLE
First Aid kit
Rope
Twine
Scissors
Playing cards
Random books
Landline telephone

TRISTAN
Confirm
Non-operational

KYLE
Non-operational

TRISTAN
Electricity

KYLE
Non-operational

TRISTAN
Battery-powered radio

KYLE
Non-operational
Pack of batteries
Corroded

TRISTAN
Anything else?

KYLE
This box of bullets
But there doesn't seem to be a gun

Beat.

TRISTAN
Well we won't freeze
We can heat the cabin
For two or three weeks
More if we chop some firewood
We can melt snow
In a pot on the stove
For drinking water
Food
Though
Might be an issue

KYLE
Are you sure there's no gun in the cabin?

TRISTAN
I'm sure

KYLE
It's just it's odd
That there's a box of bullets
But no gun

Didn't you say
You used to come up here
All the time
For hunting?
Wouldn't you keep guns in the cabin?

TRISTAN
We cleared them out
A few years ago

KYLE
Sure

TRISTAN
If you don't believe me
Look through the cabin a second time
I'm telling you
There is no gun
That's just the way it is

KYLE

All I'm saying is
There're two feet of snow outside
The roads are pure ice
Even if the weather does change
It'll take time for that to melt
We're going to need to get food
And that would've been a good option

This morning
I saw some deer
Out in the woods
Quite a lot of them
Actually

I thought they'd be easy to shoot

Tristan gives Kyle a look.

Sorry I mentioned it

TRISTAN
Anything else you'd like to apologise for?

KYLE
You shoved me first

TRISTAN
You called me a little bitch

KYLE
If we're going to survive
We have to work as a team

TRISTAN
After what you did
There is no team

I am going to the bedroom

Do not come in

Tristan walks away.

XIV

Tristan sits in one space.

He opens the box of weed.

He gets out some paper.

Puts the weed in the paper.

Rolls it.

Kyle clears another space.

He puts himself flat on the floor.

He does push ups.

He gets up.

He does squats.

He corrects his form.

He does more squats.

The light passes.

The light passes again.

Tristan sits smoking.

Kyle performs another routine.

More light passes.

Tristan looks over.

Sees Kyle doing his routine.

Almost goes to him.

Looks away...

At the same time that Kyle looks over.

Watches Tristan.

Almost moves...

Is distracted.

Misses Tristan's glance.

Finishes his routine.

Gets up.

Leaves.

The light dims to night.

Deep night.

Tristan, alone.

He puts the weed away.

Changes into his night clothes.

Prepares for bed.

Deepest night.

Suddenly: a disturbing light.

Tristan, seemingly in a trance, wakes up.

He wanders into the living room. He sees a sleeping Kyle.

Tristan moves to the kitchen.

He reveals a knife.

A sound – slipping, grating – it grows more intense.

As the sound reaches a climax, Tristan stabs at an object. We can't see what it is. He stabs and stabs. Blood – but not blood. The sound stops. Now, only the sound of Tristan's breathing, and then:

Tristan laughs. Joyfully.

XV

Afternoon.

Tristan, sitting, playing solitaire with a pack of cards. Seemingly unaffected by the events of the previous night.

After a moment, Kyle enters.

TRISTAN

Afternoon sleepy head

KYLE

You're talking to me now?

Tristan shrugs.

What time is it?

TRISTAN

Two

KYLE

I haven't slept this late
Since I was in college

TRISTAN

You needed it
Clearly

Beat.

Tristan hums to himself as he plays cards.

KYLE

Why are you in a good mood?

TRISTAN

No reason

KYLE

What did you do this morning?

TRISTAN

Went for a walk
Then sat in the car trying to pick up the radio

KYLE

Any news?

TRISTAN

No

Kyle thinks for a moment.

KYLE

Last night

I thought I heard you cry out

TRISTAN

A dream

That's all

Want something to drink?

Kyle nods.

Tristan pours Kyle some water.

Kyle sips it.

He makes a face.

KYLE

What's this?

TRISTAN

I found some nettles

When I was out walking

Thought I'd try to make a tea

KYLE

It's pretty awful

TRISTAN

I thought you liked

Living off the land

Mr Eagle Scout

KYLE

When we get out of here

I want to eat a massive burger

Three of them

TRISTAN

There was a guy at our church

Who fasted for the forty days of Lent

No food

No juice even

Only water

He lost about fifteen pounds

But when you fast that long
Your metabolism shuts down
He made the mistake of thinking
He could restart it right away
On Easter Sunday he ate
Three chocolate eggs
And a rack of lamb ribs

An hour later he was in the emergency room
He nearly died
Had to get an IV
And a feeding tube
Apparently you're only supposed
To eat something small and plain
Like a single boiled potato

KYLE
That's what we have to look forward to
Boiled potatoes?

TRISTAN
Potato
Singular

Kyle sighs.

You want to play rummy?
Go Fish?

KYLE
Not really

TRISTAN
Read a book?
I finished this one

It wasn't very good

KYLE
No thanks

TRISTAN
We need to find some way
To distract ourselves
Keep our spirits up

KYLE
You *are* in a good mood
Did something happen?

TRISTAN

No
Just feeling
Perky

Kyle gives him a suspicious look.

KYLE
I'm going to go outside
See if I can get signal

TRISTAN
You tried it yesterday
And the day before

KYLE
DC is waiting for an answer from me
And I can't contact them
What if they give the promotion to someone else?

TRISTAN
It's a once-in-a-generation storm
They'll understand

KYLE
You don't know these people
They want answers quickly
Maybe I can placate them
By pitching a story
'My week trapped in a cabin'

TRISTAN
I don't understand why
You're being so intense about this

KYLE
There's so much pressure to get it right

TRISTAN
And if you don't?

KYLE
I have to

After my dad died
My mother fell apart
Everything became about grief
She couldn't hold a job
We had to move out of our house
And into an apartment
Had to give away our family dog
I had to work two jobs

During high school
So we could pay the rent
I thought going away to college
Would be a relief
But she kept needing money
Wanted me home at the weekends
I could be much more advanced in my career
If I hadn't had her weighing me down

There's so much pressure when someone is relying on you

Beat.

TRISTAN
Is that why
You freaked out when I suggested
Moving in with you in DC?

Kyle nods.

I'm sorry
I shouldn't have asked

I was looking for a way out
I know that
Deep down
I can't work with my father
We're too different
And it's not what I want

I want my father to be proud of me
But I know he never will be
And it's time I found a way
To accept that fact

Beat.

KYLE
Did you really turn down a job in New York?

TRISTAN
Sort of
I hesitated too long
And by the time I decided I wanted the job
It was too late
I should've told you about it
I'm sorry

Kyle goes to Tristan.

Sits next to him.

KYLE
I've missed you

TRISTAN
I've missed you too

KYLE
Truce?

TRISTAN
Truce

Kyle puts his head on Tristan's shoulder.

You're very handsome
The most handsome man
I've ever been with

I fell in love with you
The first moment I saw you

KYLE
You're just saying that
Because you haven't eaten in four days
And you're starting to hallucinate

TRISTAN
It's true

Beat.

Kyle?

KYLE
Yeah?

TRISTAN
Would you hold me?

Kyle looks at Tristan.

Kyle holds Tristan.

They stay like that for a moment.

Then Kyle kisses Tristan.

They kiss.

Then – Kyle pulls away.

KYLE
What's that?

TRISTAN
What?

KYLE
Your mouth
You taste

Kyle backs away.

Is that
Is that fish?

No response.

Have you been eating fish?

Kyle sniffs.

Oh my god
I can smell it now
What are you doing eating fish?
Did you cook something?

No response.

Tristan?

Beat.

TRISTAN
I
I
I had a feeling
Early this morning
I had a feeling I should go out
I went walking
And I went down to the creek
It's frozen over
But there was a small hole in the ice
And the fish had leapt out
It was still alive
So I picked it up
And brought it back
And killed it
I wrapped it in foil
Stuck it in the stove
Waited for it to cook

KYLE
And?

TRISTAN
And then I ate it

KYLE
All of it?

TRISTAN
Yes all of it

KYLE
And you didn't think to wake me up?

TRISTAN
You were ignoring me for the last four days
And being a massive dickhead

KYLE
You fucking piece of shit
How the fuck dare you
We're supposed to look out for each other

TRISTAN
I told you we weren't a team

KYLE
I can't fucking believe you
This is the most selfish thing you could've done

TRISTAN
Telling me you love me
And then calling me a failure
When I ask to move with you
Is pretty fucking selfish

KYLE
That has nothing to do with this
We are trapped
We are starving

TRISTAN
We won't starve
You say you're a Boy Scout
But if you knew anything about wilderness survival
You'd know that the human body
Will be fine without food for a long time
You're just upset
Because your precious little muscles are starting to shrink

KYLE
I can't stand it in here
I'm going out

TRISTAN
It's cold outside
Take a jacket

KYLE
Leave me the fuck alone

Kyle leaves.

XVI

Outside.

Kyle storms out.

He looks around.

Huffs.

Puffs.

Sees the well.

Kicks it.

Kicks it again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

He puts his face down the well and screams.

KYLE
AH!

The sound echoes and echoes.

Quickly – Kyle is exhausted.

Kyle leans against the well.

Slumps against it.

Rests.

Looks around.

Considers.

But then – something concerns him.

He gets up.

He peers back down into the well.

He gets out his phone.

Flicks the light on.

Examines.

Looks back up.

Kyle starts to turn the handle.

Kyle turns the handle faster – faster.

He keeps turning.

Something long and thin and metallic begins to emerge from the well.

It is the barrel of a gun.

Kyle keeps turning the handle.

A hunting rifle rests in the pail.

Kyle stops turning the handle.

He flicks the latch.

Kyle grips the barrel.

Pulls out the gun.

Looks at it.

Tristan enters.

TRISTAN

Kyle

Kyle come back inside

Tristan sees Kyle holding the gun.

KYLE

You said there wasn't a gun on the property

TRISTAN

Where did you find that?

Kyle looks to the well.

No

Kyle nods.

Put it back

Kyle reaches into his pocket. Pulls out the box of bullets.

KYLE
The bullets
Are they for this gun?

TRISTAN
Throw them away

KYLE
We're not a team
Remember?
I don't have to listen to what you say

TRISTAN
I'm sorry for eating the fish
I should've saved some for you
Please put the gun back

KYLE
I found this
In the well

The well wants me to have it

TRISTAN
You don't know
What you're talking about

KYLE
I'm going to go hunting
I'm going to do
What I should've done
A long time ago

Provide for myself

TRISTAN
You've only ever shot targets
You don't know what you're doing
Put the gun back

KYLE
Then you do it
Go hunting for us

TRISTAN
No

KYLE
Why not?

Can't?
Too afraid?
Not man enough?

Beat.

TRISTAN
That's my grandfather's gun

He shot himself with it

Here

On the property

That's why we stopped coming

So please

Put it back

Beat.

Kyle gives a defiant look.

And then Kyle exits with the gun.

Tristan, alone.

XVII

Tristan in the cabin.

Smoking.

The light passes.

The light dims.

Tristan watches a memory.

Fifteen years ago.

The family home.

Mother paces, looking worried.

After a moment, Father enters.

Mother goes to him. They hug.

MOTHER
John

FATHER
Margaret

They pull apart.

MOTHER
Where's Tristan?

FATHER
Still in the car
I told him to wait there
Until I talked with you

But, unknown to them, Tristan has entered.

MOTHER
John
John

FATHER
It's my fault
It's all my fault

MOTHER
Sit down

Tell me what happened

Beat.

FATHER

We arrived at the cabin
Friday night

We went out hunting early Saturday morning
But it was no good
We didn't get anything
So Daddy was in a bad mood

And then later that night
I got a phone call on the landline

And Daddy got upset

MOTHER

Because someone called?

Who called?

FATHER

Bill

Beat.

I had to tell Daddy
About the investments

MOTHER

You said you weren't going to tell him
What you'd done with the investments unless you had to

I had to tell him

MOTHER

Tell him what about them?

FATHER

(mumbling)

I lost them

MOTHER

Hm?

FATHER

I said I lost them

MOTHER

You *lost* them?
What do you mean you lost them?

FATHER
They're gone

MOTHER
Where did they go?
Did they hire a car and run away?

FATHER
It was always going to be risky

MOTHER
You said there was no risk
You said they were good
Solid
Investments
And you're telling me
That they've
That all that money
Has disappeared?

FATHER
Bill promised me
That they were safe

MOTHER
Bill said
Bill said
I knew he couldn't be trusted
Why did you convince me
This was a good idea?

FATHER
If you want to grow a business
You have to take risks

Daddy won't expand
He wants the business
To remain five trucks
And his best friends
And I had to do something
I couldn't sit around my whole life
Waiting for him to realise
He was keeping me stuck here
We have plans
You want a bigger house
With a nice kitchen
Tristan will need money for college
Those things cost money

I have a vision for what this business could be

MOTHER

You said your father was upset

FATHER

He didn't say anything

Not at first

But I could tell

He had a drink

And then another

And another

MOTHER

He promised me

He wouldn't drink

Around Tristan

FATHER

He said he was going out

He took his gun

I heard the front door shut

When he wasn't back after an hour

We went searching

And that's when

MOTHER

Where?

FATHER

In the woods

He did it there

So he knew we would have to go looking for him

MOTHER

How did you find him?

FATHER

I didn't

MOTHER

Then who did?

Father glances in the direction of the car.

Mother covers her mouth in horror.

John

John

FATHER

Your daddy's inheritance

I need you to give it to me
Or they'll take the business

MOTHER

You let our son
Find his grandfather
Like that
And now you're asking me
To give you my money?

FATHER

Please Margaret
Please
I've messed up
I've messed everything up

Tristan lets out a sob. Mother and Father see him.

MOTHER

Tristan
Baby

FATHER

What are you doing here?
I told you to stay in the car
What have you heard?
What have you heard?

MOTHER

Tristan
Get back in the car
We're going to go
To Grandma Corbett's house
And stay there for the week
She's been wanting to see us
For months now

TRISTAN

Mom

MOTHER

Don't argue

Get in the car

Tristan turns to go.

FATHER
Tristan

Tristan turns. Gives Father a look.

A gunshot.

The memory disappears.

Back in the cabin: sounds of footsteps at the front door.

Then, the door opens.

Kyle stands in the door.

KYLE
I shot her

TRISTAN
Where?

KYLE
In the woods

A single shot

It felt

Powerful

I feel

I feel

TRISTAN
Competent?

KYLE
Yeah

Beat.

TRISTAN
What's wrong?

No response.

Kyle?

KYLE

I don't think she's dead

XVIII

The forest.

Tristan and Kyle walking, at pace.

KYLE

It was a single shot
Somewhere near her heart

There
That's where I was hiding
Crouching very still
I was looking this way
And she came into view

And I lined up the aim
And pulled the trigger
It was like shooting a target

She fell over
But then
She started moving
She got up
And ran

TRISTAN

Why didn't you take another shot?

KYLE

The trigger jammed
It's not working any more

TRISTAN

There's blood
A trail of it

KYLE

We need to find her

TRISTAN

Come on

Tristan starts to run off.

KYLE

Tristan
Tristan
Slow down

TRISTAN

Hurry up

KYLE
How could she
Have gotten this far?

How could she –

Tristan stops walking.

TRISTAN
Quiet

There

Tristan points.

Not far away: a doe.

Lying on her side.

Bleeding.

But still alive.

KYLE
Oh god

TRISTAN
Shh

KYLE
She's alive

TRISTAN
You wounded her

The doe makes a bleating noise.

She's suffering

KYLE
What do we do?

Tristan reaches into his backpack.

He pulls out a hunting knife.

He holds out the hunting knife to Kyle.

What's this for?

TRISTAN
Cut her throat

Kyle shakes his head.

It's the only way
If you don't do something now
She could stay like that
For hours

KYLE
I want to go back to the cabin

TRISTAN
You started this
And you're going to finish it

KYLE
Please don't make me

TRISTAN
This is what you wanted

KYLE
Maybe we can help her

Clean the wound
You could clean the wound
Take the bullet out

TRISTAN
You shot that animal
And now you have a responsibility to it

The doe bleats again.

You say you want to go hunting
You say you want to be a man
Well this is what being a man means
Take the knife

Take it

Kyle shakes his head.

Take it!

Kyle takes the knife.

Kyle slowly walks toward the doe.

Kyle leans down.

He rests the blade of the knife against the doe's throat.

TRISTAN

Hurry up

Kyle is about to use the knife.

He can't.

He shakes his head.

Kyle drops the knife.

Tristan, without hesitating, marches over.

Tristan takes the knife.

Fine

Tristan kneels down.

He places his hand on the doe's head.

He whispers into its ear.

Shhh

Shhh

Shhh

Tristan slits the deer's throat.

The doe bleats.

Tristan makes another cut.

It's horrible.

Truly horrible.

Excruciating.

Kyle shuts his eyes and covers his ears.

The doe takes a long time to die.

Tristan stands.

He is covered in blood.

Kyle stands up.

Vomits.

Tristan watches.

Impervious.

Kyle recovers.

Have you ever skinned a deer before?
I'll walk you through the steps
Step one
Using a very sharp knife
Make a shallow cut along the underside of the belly
From the anus to the jawbone

When starting at the anus
Be careful not to puncture the guts
Otherwise you'll ruin the meat

KYLE
Stop

Please stop

Tristan makes the cut.

He works quickly, expertly.

TRISTAN
Then make a similar cut
From the anus to the right leg
Down to the knee

He cuts.

Now we really should have a saw
So we can saw off the leg at the knee
But we don't have a saw
So I'm going to proceed to the next step
Which is to take the skin off
Grab here

Kyle!

I said
Grab here

Tristan holds out a flap of skin.

Kyle takes it.

I'm going to slip the knife under here
And you pull
Okay?

No response.

Okay?

Kyle nods.

Good

Tristan starts cutting.

Now it's going to make
A kind of ripping noise
Like tape being pulled off a roll

Keep pulling

Tristan continues to cut.

Kyle pulls the skin away.

Now set that half of the skin here

Kyle lays aside a flap of skin.

If we were doing this properly
If we were being respectful
We'd do the other side
But we don't have all the tools
And we just need some of the meat

So now I'm going to take the knife and

KYLE
Stop

Please

Tristan gives Kyle a look.

TRISTAN

I'm going to take the knife
And cut along the belly
To open up the animal

Tristan cuts.

The knife should be sharp enough
That when it reaches the ribs
It should not face much resistance
But I'm not sure
The last time this knife was sharpened
So I'm going to stop here
And open her up

Tristan separates the two sides of flesh.

You want to feel?

She's still warm
And

Tristan stops, suddenly.

Oh

KYLE
What?

Tristan reaches into the deer belly.

What are you doing?

Tristan pulls out a sac.

What is that?

The sac is an embryonic sac.

There is a gestating foetus inside.

TRISTAN
She was pregnant

Tristan holds out the sac.

It moves.

KYLE
Oh my god

Tristan puts the sac on the ground.

We have to save it

Give me the knife

Tristan only shakes his head.

Give me the knife

Kyle grabs the knife.

TRISTAN

You can't save it

Kyle slices open the sac.

Liquid spills out.

It's not had enough time in the womb

Kyle reaches into the sac.

Pulls out the foetal deer.

Kyle tries blowing into its mouth.

The foetal deer is very small.

Too small to survive.

KYLE

No

No

No

No

Tristan looks on.

Kyle, defeated.

TRISTAN

Come on

We need to pack the meat

And return to the cabin

XIX

Evening.

The cabin. The gun in the corner.

Tristan puts a plate in front of Kyle.

KYLE

I don't want it

TRISTAN

Eat it

Kyle shakes his head again.

You need to keep up your strength

The sky is clearing

The temperature is rising

We'll need to pack the car

And drive down the mountain

KYLE

You knew exactly what needed to be done

TRISTAN

Go on

Eat

KYLE

You were so

Competent

But I was frightened of you

TRISTAN

You're right

It is frightening

This is what they instilled in me

I'm scared too

When it comes out

Tristan picks up the gun.

He begins dismantling it.

KYLE

Why are you doing that?

TRISTAN

I don't want it any more

Eat

Kyle looks at the food.

Kyle takes a bite.

Chews.

Swallows.

How does it taste?

KYLE
Gamey

What will you do when we get back?

TRISTAN
Tell my parents I'm moving to New York

Beat.

KYLE
You could move to DC
With me

Beat.

TRISTAN
I don't think that's for the best

You'll always be a little frightened of me

KYLE
I know

But I was hoping

Suddenly – Kyle starts to cry.

I don't want to be like this

I want to be different
From how I am now

I want to be a man
But also

Not a man

Is that possible?

Is that possible for us?

Tristan looks at him.

Tristan gets up.

TRISTAN

Eat

The ice is already
Beginning to thaw

Tristan goes outside.

Kyle watches from a distance.

Tristan stands by the well.

He drops the pieces of the gun, one by one, down the well.

A moment.

Light begins to glow from the well.

Blackout.