

REINVENTING THE WHEELERS

Written By

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. ATLANTA SKYLINE. NIGHT

PAN ACROSS the modern skyline of Atlanta, punctuated by its tallest landmark, The Bank of America Plaza, as MUSIC begins:

INT. STEVENS RESIDENCE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT

Madeline Peyroux's "I'm All Right" mingled with a snore that could summon small dogs. CAMERA drifts through the master suite, taking in the old school Southern elegance. Underneath a fluffy comforter and several pounds of paperwork is ANNIE STEVENS: early 30s, pretty without trying, and the source of the snore. She lies flat on her back, the giant bump of her pregnant belly protruding through the blanket. She's deep in sleep until suddenly, her eyes POP open:

ANNIE

Whoa.

She struggles to sit up, keeping one hand on her belly.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Okay. Nobody panic.

She turns on the bedside lamp, patting her husband's pillow:

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Hal? Wake up. I think it's time...

The light comes on, revealing... NO HAL. Annie sighs, annoyed but not surprised. Before she can fully process this emotion, she is hit with another contraction:

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Mother of GOD!

So labor is gonna be fun.

INT. ANNIE AND HAL'S KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

Annie waddles into a kitchen that would make Paula Deen jealous. She carries a travel bag and is attempting to drape a pashmina over her nightgown, while dialing her cell phone:

ANNIE

Hal, it's me. I guess you're still at the office, so when you get this, come straight to the hospital. Little Andrew McCarthy is trying to drop-kick his way out of my body. See you soon.

She hangs up, then calls out:

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Caroline!!

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Coming! I'm coming!

Annie opens the all-purpose kitchen drawer and pulls out one of her emergency lipsticks. As she begins to apply, we hear a *WOOSH!* Yup. That would be the sound of her water breaking. Annie considers it for a moment, goes back to the lipstick.

CAROLINE, early 20s and not the brightest bulb on the tree, rushes in. She, too, was in a deep sleep, as her bed-head and smooshed-up face suggest. She sees the mess on the floor:

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Did you have a spill, Mrs. Stevens?

ANNIE
That would be my amniotic fluid.

CAROLINE
Oh.
(beat, then)
Should I use the Swiffer on that?

ANNIE
You can deal with it later. Right now, I need you to drive me to the hospital. We'll take my car.

CAROLINE
(excited)
Really? Can we put the top down?

ANNIE
Maybe not on the way there.

CAROLINE
Good thinkin'. If the baby decides to pop out early, we don't need all of Atlanta seeing your who's and what's.

ANNIE
I think the goal should be to get to the hospital before anyone pops out of anywhere. Let's make that our number one priority, okay?

CAROLINE
Sure. Should I get Mr. Stevens, or --?

ANNIE

Mr. Stevens is gonna meet us there.

Annie starts towards the door. Caroline picks up her travel bag, trailing behind her.

CAROLINE

This is so exciting. I've never driven a stick shift before.

ANNIE

It's a big day, Caroline.

CAROLINE

(noticing)

Your pashmina is sticking to your butt a little bit...

ANNIE

I know.

As Caroline closes the door behind them...

INT. GRADY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. LABOR AND DELIVERY UNIT. NIGHT

Annie and Caroline enter through the sliding glass doors; Annie is back on her cell phone. She motions to Caroline to find someone to help them as she wraps up a call.

ANNIE

... And see if you can move Friday's court date to Monday. Oh, and Marcus? If you get a whiff that they're gonna try to reassign Geneco, call me. Hal already warned me that without that case, I won't make partner this year. He's doing his best to keep me in the loop, but I don't want it to look like he's playing favorites...

Another contraction, which causes her to double over in pain.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(to her stomach)

Would you please stop doing that while I'm on the phone?!

(into phone)

I'll call you later, Marcus.

Annie hangs up and heads over to Caroline, who has finally made contact with a NURSE at the front desk.

CAROLINE

Good evening, ma'am. My name is
Caroline Honeybaker --

ANNIE

Do this part faster.

CAROLINE

This-is-Mrs-Annie-Stevens-who's-having-
a-baby-right-now-and-needs-her-room--

ANNIE

And the drugs. I need the drugs.

CAROLINE

And the drugs. She needs the drugs.

The nurse gets up to get a wheelchair for Annie, who is dialing
another number on her cell phone.

ANNIE

(then, into phone)

Hal? Me again. We're here --

NURSE

No cell phones past the waiting room
area. You're gonna have to turn that
off, ma'am.

ANNIE

(into phone)

Hurry up.

She hangs up, and grabs Caroline's arm as she lowers herself
into the wheelchair.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

You're coming with me. If Hal doesn't
make it in time, I'm gonna need
something to bite on.

As the three of them make their way through the double doors...

INT. ANNIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM. LATER

Annie is in full-on labor. Caroline stands beside her, a
perfect coach in that she seems completely unfazed by the
event. DOCTOR SWANSON is in position between Annie's legs.

DOCTOR SWANSON

You're doing great, Annie. Almost
there...

ANNIE

Stop--
 (huff)
 Distracting--
 (puff)
 Me.

Suddenly the cell phone rings. Caroline blithely picks it up.

CAROLINE

Annie Stevens's phone. Oh, hi, Mr. Stevens! How are you?

ANNIE

Gimme...

DOCTOR SWANSON

You need to turn that off --

ANNIE

Just keep doing what you're doing,
 Doctor. This will only take a minute.
 (into phone)
 You better be on your way.

INTERCUT WITH:INT. HAL'S OFFICE. SAME TIME

Where HAL is clearly not on his way. He's throwing out some takeout containers on his desk, looking ruffled and frazzled.

HAL

I'm at the office. My phone was off...

ANNIE

Please tell me you're alone.

Hal looks towards his door, where an equally ruffled WOMAN stands, looking guilty. Hal sighs. Annie instantly knows.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

You're not alone. You're with Kirsten, aren't you? I knew it... I KNEW it!

HAL

Let's not talk about this right now --

ANNIE

Why, because I'm having your child?
 Does that make it a weird time for you?
 (huff, puff)
 God, I'm an idiot! Although pregnancy does shrink the brain by 3 to 5 percent, so maybe that explains how I let this happen to me. AGAIN.

CAROLINE
 (to the nurses)
 It does explain why she keeps losing
 her keys...

DOCTOR SWANSON
 I see the head! Push, Annie!

ANNIE
 You hear that? Your son is inching his
 way out of my vagina right now, so I
 suggest you inch on out of hers and get
 down here pronto.

HAL
 Look, I'm sorry! It's not like I knew
 the baby was coming tonight --

ANNIE
 (huffing, puffing)
 Oh, was I supposed to put that in your
 palm pilot? "Wife going into labor.
 Please clear month of September."

CAROLINE
 (re: the head)
 Bushy little thing, ain't he?

DOCTOR SWANSON
 One more, Annie!

HAL
 I'm on my way --

ANNIE
 I can't believe you did this...

Annie drops the phone on the floor and SCREAMS, welcoming
 Andrew McCarthy Stevens into the universe. Doctor Swanson
 holds the crying baby up for his mother to see. Annie looks at
 him. Amazed. Exhausted. Empathetic.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 (off his crying)
 Tell me about it, kiddo.

She drops her head back onto the pillow and looks up at the
 blinding fluorescent lights, which blur into...

EXT. INTERSTATE 520. DAY. ONE WEEK LATER

The white-hot sun beating down on the Bobby Jones Expressway,
 taking us out of Atlanta and into the heart of Savannah.

Annie is cruising down the interstate in her convertible pink cadillac. Luggage in the passenger seat. Baby in the carseat. Amos Lee's "Southern Girl" on the radio.

EXT. DRAYTON STREET. SAVANNAH. DAY

Straight through to the cobble-stoned, Spanish Moss lovin' streets of the historic district. Annie pulls up to a two-story antebellum townhouse. She leaves her luggage in the car, awkwardly disentangles her baby from the carseat and heads towards the house. She pauses at the street level red door, where a hand-painted sign reads: "WHEELER FAMILY LAW." Sigh.

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. MAIN ENTRANCE. CONTINUOUS

First thing Annie notices is the sweaty pitcher of mint juleps waiting by the door with a sign that says "Help Yourself!" But nothing is more peculiar than the woman in her 50s standing on top of the reception desk, seemingly talking to herself while dusting a chandelier. This is CLAIRE. She is Ya-Ya-tastic.

CLAIRE

... Now you wanna make sure the shrimp is peeled and deveined! I'm not wasting any more time than I have to pulling the little buggers apart--

MEG (O.S.)

Hold on, hold on...

CLAIRE

And you better make it twenty pounds instead of ten. You know how your father loves his gumbo. That man better be double dosing his Lipitor, I tell you what...

Enter MEG. Early 20s and generally confused. She attempts to scribble down what Claire is saying onto a notepad.

MEG

Lipi-what? You gotta go slower, Mom. I can't write as fast as you talk --

Meg looks up from her notepad, which is when she notices Annie standing in the doorway, a wry smile on her face.

ANNIE

This is a place of business, right?

MEG

Omigosh!!!

CLAIRE

Annie -- ?

Meet Annie's family; the female half, anyway.

CLAIRE

Is that my grandson? Hand him over!

ANNIE

Not until you get down off that desk.
Which is a weird thing to have to say...

As Claire shimmies off the desk and Annie hands her the baby:

MEG

I didn't know you were coming today.
Nobody tells me anything around here...

ANNIE

It was a spur of the moment decision.

CLAIRE

Will you look at these cheeks? I could
just bite 'em off right now...

ANNIE

Try not to.

MEG

Wow. He's all small. Hello, small,
yellow nephew.

ANNIE

He's not yellow. He's got jaundice.
Which is totally normal and goes away.

CLAIRE

'Of course he's normal! Now what in the
world are y'all doing in Savannah? I
told you I was gonna fly out next week --

MEG

You came for Daddy's birthday, didn't
you? I knew you'd come!
(to Claire)
I told you she'd come.

For a flash, we see Annie totally forgot this.

ANNIE

Well, it is a big birthday.

MEG

Are you kidding? It's huge! And Daddy
put me in charge of the whole thing. I
swear, planning this party has been
like a full-time job. You cannot
imagine how exhausted I am.

ANNIE
You're right. I know nothing of
exhaustion.

CLAIRE
Is Hal with you?

ANNIE
Nah, he couldn't make it.

A quick exchange between Annie and her mom makes it's clear they've been here before. Before Claire can ask anything else, the door flies open. Enter JOEY, late 20s, too pretty for his own good. He rushes past the women like his ass is on fire.

JOEY
Outta the way! Move, move, move!

But Claire grabs him by the arm and forces him backwards.

CLAIRE
What's wrong with you? Don't you see
your sister's here? She just drove all
the way from Atlanta --

Which is about when we hear the DOGS BARKING. Angry dogs.

MEG
What in the world -- ?

MEG'S POV: THREE DOBERMAN PINSCHERS running towards them:

JOEY
Can we run now?

Hell yes. They all rush away from the front door, following Joey directly into...

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. JOEY'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS

... where he SLAMS the door, just before the dogs get inside. As Joey catches his breath.

CLAIRE
What is going on?

JOEY
It's nothing. Don't worry about it.

ANNIE
What are you talking, nothing? There
are dogs chasing you!

JOEY
 (suddenly noticing Annie)
 Damn. You got fat.

ANNIE
 This is not fat. I just had a baby.

She points at Andrew, who is still being held by Claire. Joey nods, impressed for a moment, then:

JOEY
 Baby's out of you now. So technically,
 that's just fat.

ANNIE
 Shut up.

Suddenly, we hear a sharp WHISTLE from the other side of the door. Barking immediately ceases. And then:

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (furious)
 Joseph Scott Wheeler! I know you're in there, and you can stay in there for all I care. But I am warning you, as God as my witness, if you don't take care of this, I will teach these dogs how to chew through wood just to finish off your sorry behind. You hear me?

MEG
 Leanne? Is that you?

LEANNE (O.S.)
 (sweet as pie)
 Oh, hi, Meg! How are you?

MEG
 I'm good! How are you?

LEANNE (O.S.)
 Oh, fine, fine...

JOEY
 (whispering, to Annie)
 That's my girlfriend, Leanne. Hot.

Claire gives him a smack on the back of the head.

JOEY (CONT'D)
 Ow! Watch the hair, Mom!

LEANNE (O.S.)

Mrs. Wheeler? Are you in there, too?
Gosh, I'm sorry to be interrupting
y'all's workday like this!

CLAIRE

Don't you worry about that, sugarpie.
A woman's gotta do what she's gotta do.

JOEY

Leanne, why don't we talk about this
tonight in a civilized manner?

LEANNE (O.S.)

I can't be civilized with you because
you ain't a civil person! Just do the
right thing, or my father will be over
here next. And he's a lot meaner than
these dogs. Trust me.

(then)

Y'all have a nice day.

We hear another whistle and the sound of the dogs shuffling
away. Annie exhales. She's already exhausted and she's only
been in Savannah for five minutes.

JOEY

Was that a fresh batch of mint juleps I
saw out there?

Joey opens the door, and they all file back out into the...

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. MAIN ENTRANCE. CONTINUOUS

The baby starts to CRY and bedlam ensues. Over the following:
Joey adds bourbon to his drink, Annie searches for her diaper
bag, Claire bouncy walks the baby and Meg remains confused.

ANNIE

Andrew McCarthy, what's wrong now?

JOEY

I can't believe you named your first
born after a member of the Brat Pack.

ANNIE

I can't believe you're still acting
like a member of the Brat Pack.

MEG

I still like Emilio the best, even
though it makes him sound Italian.

CLAIRE
Annie, I think we have a
diaper situation...

ANNIE
Shoot. Where did I put my
bag..?

MEG
Does this mean Leanne's not
coming to the party?

JOEY
I don't know what she's doing.
She's obviously lost her
mind...

Suddenly, we hear SCREAMING from the back offices, which
causes everyone to quiet and freeze:

SCREAMING WOMAN #1 (O.S.)
I want what's entitled to me!

SCREAMING WOMAN #2 (O.S.)
You're not entitled to jack!!

JOEY
Oh crap. What time is it?

Joey rushes towards the back office. They all follow...

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. TOM'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS

Joey opens the door. Inside are TWO SCREAMING WOMEN (one
African American, and one Caucasian) attempting to claw each
other's eyes out. The ever-charming, larger than life man that
is TOM WHEELER, holding them apart:

TOM
Ladies, I need y'all to calm down...

He senses an audience upon him and looks up. Shocked to see:

TOM (CONT'D)
Annie?

Annie feels a little embarrassed, suddenly the focal point of
the room. She blushes. Gives a small wave.

ANNIE
Hi, Daddy.

Tom gives and "I'll be damned" belly laugh, and goes over to
give Annie a giant hug, causing Joey to squirm with envy. When
he pulls back, he regards her. Pride. Love. And then:

TOM
Put on a few, did ya?

Welcome home, Annie Wheeler.

END ACT ONE

FADE OUT.

ACT TWOINT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. MAIN ENTRANCE. A LITTLE LATER

SLOW PAN from Tom's office, (where the meeting has resumed, now with Joey), OVER TO the couch area where Annie sits, awkwardly trying to bottle feed Andrew. Claire watches from her desk, trying not to backseat mother.

ANNIE

Was that Tina Connor in there?

CLAIRE

(distracted the feeding)

Hmm? Oh, that's right, you two know each other from Girls Scouts. I forgot about that...

Annie notices her mother looking pained, but "trying" not to.

ANNIE

What. What am I doing wrong?

CLAIRE

Nothing...

ANNIE

Then why is your face exploding?

CLAIRE

It's just, if you tilt your elbow --

ANNIE

Am I not supporting his neck?

CLAIRE

You are. But all that noisy sucking is his way of telling you he's getting too much air. You wanna hit that 45 degree angle. C'mere, lemme show you...

Annie hands the baby over to Claire, who handles him effortlessly. Annie can't help but notice. A beat, then:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

So, was it a fight? With Hal, I mean.

ANNIE

We don't need to talk about it.

CLAIRE

Okay, but how long are you staying this time? Another two weeks?

ANNIE

I don't know. I need to get back to the office sooner rather than later, and don't say "this time" like it happens so much, Ms. Passive Aggressive.

CLAIRE

I thought we weren't talking 'bout it.

TOM (O.S.)

Talking 'bout what?

The conversation stops as soon as Tom walks in. He is followed by TINA CONNOR, African American, normally very self-possessed but today is not one of her good days. She's pissed.

ANNIE

Tina! I thought that was you...

TINA

Annie! I'm so embarrassed you caught me yellin' like that. You couldn't pick a day to drop by when I wasn't about to kill my sister-in-law?

HEATHER CONNOR, aka - Screaming Woman #2, walks up.

HEATHER

Did everyone hear that? I believe I was just threatened.

Tom holds Tina back who is ready to pounce again.

TOM

Let's not start up again...

HEATHER

You tell your brother I want my five thousand dollars or he won't even get to say goodbye to his son.

TINA

Don't you pack a single toy. I swear to God, Heather, if you take my nephew out of Savannah for even one second --

HEATHER

I can move that boy wherever I want. I didn't do anything wrong. And you can't prove otherwise.

Heather gives a smug smile before sauntering out.

CLAIRE

You know what they say about women with chicken legs? They're always crooked.

TINA

"You can't prove otherwise." You know she's just egging me on, Tom...

ANNIE

What's going on?

TINA

My brother got himself into another mess. Divorcing that woman is gonna be like getting out of Iraq. Bloody, ugly, and it's gonna take forever.

ANNIE

But why are you here? Where's Sean?

TINA

Oh, he's in a rehab clinic out in Tybee. Seven years after the fact, but hey. Better late than never, right? You know, if she was decent, she'd have checked herself in. I've seen that woman toss back a bottle of Wild Turkey like it was Kool Aid. And she thinks she's getting sole custody? My ass...

TOM

Just be patient. Custody battles don't get solved overnight. Even if she moves out of state temporarily --

TINA

She can't move! She's not stable -- !

TOM

Temporarily. One battle does not the war win. Joey's talking to her lawyer now, trying to push back the court date. Meanwhile, I'm gonna see if we can't get a sit-down with Sean over at Clear Haven tomorrow. I need his deposition. You should probably go, too, if you can. Make sure we're not missing anything...

Tina nods, suddenly scared and overwhelmed. She gives Tom a grateful hug; he's clearly her savior right now. Annie remembers what it was like to see her dad that way.

TOM (CONT'D)

We're gonna fix this. I promise.

TINA

(nods; then, to Annie)

It's good to see you. I wish we had more time to catch up, but I hear everything's going well. The job, the baby. Your dad brags on about you...

Annie blushes; both for her father's boasting and because at the moment, none of it is true. But all she can say is:

ANNIE

Just lucky, that's all. You take care of yourself, Tina.

They share a hug, and Tina walks out. A moment passes:

CLAIRE

That poor girl. It breaks my heart...

TOM

She's taken on a lot. You know, Annie, I could use your thoughts on this--

ANNIE

You already got Joey's thoughts, and since you pay him for those, I bet they're worth more than mine. Besides, I'm in mergers and acquisitions, Dad. I don't know beans about custody 'cept what I learned from Judge Judy.

Before Tom can argue, she grabs her bags and walks out...

EXT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. CONTINUOUS

Tom and Claire follow up the stairs to the door of the main house. (The office door is street level. Common to Savannah.)

ANNIE

I'm gonna put my stuff away and take a quick bath. Mom, can you mind Andrew a bit longer?

CLAIRE

Just remember, Meg took over your room when she moved back home, so you girls will have to share tonight. I'll clean out the guest room tomorrow. Dinner will be ready in about an hour.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 (to Tom, a bit formal)
 You're welcome to stay if you'd like.

TOM
 Thanks, but I can't. Poker night.
 We'll catch up over breakfast, Annie.

CLAIRE
 Does that mean you're coming over for
 breakfast then?

TOM
 (laughing)
 I gotta make an appointment to come to
 my own house?

CLAIRE
 Since we separated, this technically
 isn't your house anymore, Tom. The
 offices downstairs are one thing...

TOM
 Tell you what, as long as I'm paying
 the mortgage, it's all my house...

Ah, the dance of separated parents - like a tango without the
 rose. Annie heads into the house, leaving Tom and Claire to
 continue bickering outside...

INT. WHEELER HOME. MEG'S BATHROOM. A LITTLE LATER

Annie lies in the tub, trying to relax amidst all the bubbles.
 It's almost working, too. Until Meg bursts in. Bye, bye, calm.

MEG
 Whoo! That baby of yours sure can cry.

ANNIE
 I know. He's yellow. He cries a lot.
 I gave birth to some kind of colicky
 banana. What do you want from me?

Meg takes a dramatic breath. She sits at the floor of the tub,
 chipping off her toenail polish as she speaks.

MEG
 I have a HUGE problem.

ANNIE
 Can it wait until I'm not naked?

MEG

No, because Mom will be waiting for us downstairs and this is a Mom-related problem. So, you know how I'm in charge of Daddy's birthday party?

ANNIE

You've mentioned it a few times.

MEG

And you know how he's always adding things he wants last minute. Like, three days ago he suddenly wanted the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and I was all "*Daddy, that's impossible!*" But he wanted it, so I had to figure out how to get it, which was not easy --

ANNIE

Get to the problem, Meg.

MEG

Okay. So NOW all of a sudden he wants to bring his girlfriend to the party.

ANNIE

So?

MEG

So the party is here. At Mom's house. I mean, isn't that gonna be awkward? Am I supposed to tell Mom she's coming? But if I don't tell her, and the girl shows up and Mom freaks out --

ANNIE

Why isn't the party at Dad's new house? Or at that place Garibaldi's he loves?

MEG

Mom offered to have it here and Dad thought that would be nice, because they are both insane.

ANNIE

I thought you were in charge.

MEG

I am in charge. But you know how Mom likes being helpful. You want me to deny her small pleasures at this fragile point in her life?

(MORE)

MEG (CONT'D)

I think she may be going through the change. I swear, the woman is always hot...

ANNIE

Just tell her the truth. Mom's a grown-up. She should be able to handle it.

MEG

Yeah. Peter said the same thing...

Suddenly, a large elephant is in the room. Meg blushes:

MEG (CONT'D)

Sorry. Is it still too -- ?

ANNIE

Nope. I'm fine.

MEG

'Cause I know we haven't had a chance to talk about it yet--

ANNIE

I don't need to talk. Unless you do.

MEG

I don't need to talk.

ANNIE

Okay.

MEG

Good stuff.

With that, Meg walks out. Annie takes a moment before sinking underneath the bubbles. Drowning sounds nice.

INT. WHEELER HOME. DINING ROOM. NIGHT

Dinner is in full swing, with Baby Andrew asleep in a bassinet next to Annie. Joey, Claire, Meg and Annie pass around the catfish and the Zinfandel. It's informal and easy.

CLAIRE

... Go on now. Just feel it.

ANNIE

Yup. That is one thick paper plate.

CLAIRE

You could eat a hot squash casserole off these babies, with a heavy sauce.

JOEY

(to Annie and Meg)

Hey, you guys wanna go in on Dad's birthday present together?

MEG

I don't need to get him a present. I'm planning the whole party.

JOEY

(to Annie)

What about just me and you then?

ANNIE

I don't know. Aren't we a little old for the chip-in?

JOEY

(shrugs, feigning blasé)

Doesn't matter to me. I just thought he'd like it...

ANNIE

Hey, Meg, when do you start Emory? I could dig up some of my old textbooks if you wanna get a jump start --

MEG

That's okay. I deferred again.

ANNIE

Again? They let you do that?

JOEY

The girl got a 172 on her LSAT's. She can defer 'til she's forty.

CLAIRE

Which she won't...

ANNIE

Hold up, you got a 172 on your LSATs?

JOEY

Call the papers. Someone beat Annie.

MEG

(changing the subject)

So what made Leanne release the hounds on you today, bro? Those were some scary pooches...

CLAIRE

Whatever you did, just apologize. I like that girl.

MEG

Yeah, she's definitely the best one you've had in the last few months.

ANNIE

How many have there been?

MEG

What is it? Four, five?

CLAIRE

Four. I don't count the puffy one.

Annie can't help but roll her eyes, which Joey notices.

JOEY

What's your problem?

ANNIE

Nothing. I just can't believe you're still pulling the same crap you did in high school. You know, it stops being cute once you hit thirty --

JOEY

Here we go --

CLAIRE

Who wants dessert?

Claire gets up, attempting to curb the fight. It doesn't work.

JOEY

What do you care if I have a lot of girlfriends?

ANNIE

I don't. I care how you treat them--

JOEY

Because you know how I treat them?

ANNIE

Not that hard to figure out, Joe. Most women don't go purchasing attack dogs unless you're screwing around on 'em --

JOEY

And you're the expert there.

Annie blanches. Joey gives her the hard stare.

MEG
I'm confused.

JOEY
Where's Hal? Stayed home again, huh?

CLAIRE
Joseph!

MEG
What is he talking about?

JOEY (CONT'D)
You know, the only person who hasn't changed since high school is you. You're still as judgemental as ever, without knowing a damn thing. You don't see me making assumptions about why you're here.

MEG
She's here for my party.

JOEY
'Course she is. And thank God for that, 'cause we all know Dad doesn't care if the rest of us show up.

CLAIRE
Now, Joey...

MEG
That's not true.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Thanks for dinner, Mom.

With a drop of his napkin, he walks out. Meg helps herself to the pound cake, used to the drama. Annie looks to her mom:

ANNIE
Did I do that?

CLAIRE
He's just off lately. I don't think he's been sleeping much...

Speaking of which, the baby begins to cry. Annie sighs.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Sweetheart, you look ready to drop. Why don't you go on up to bed and I'll take care of Andrew tonight.

ANNIE
Really? You wouldn't mind?

CLAIRE
Mind? We'll have loads of fun.

ANNIE
You are the best. Thank you, mom.

Annie kisses Andrew on his head before going upstairs. Meg scarfs down the rest and starts to follow, until:

CLAIRE
Help me clean up, Meg.

MEG
(dramatic sigh)
It's always me...

INT. WHEELER HOME. MEG'S BEDROOM. MOMENTS LATER

A night breeze sails in through the open window. The room is as eclectic as Meg. Annie looks through her sister's books as she pulls on her pajamas. Behind her, we see a MAN climbing through the window. Annie hears the noise, turns and SCREAMS! Which causes the man to fall. Which is when she realizes:

ANNIE
Peter? What the hell--?

PETER
Annie?

ANNIE
You scared me half to death!

PETER
What are you doing here?

ANNIE
What are you doing climbing through windows at your age?

PETER
I'm not fifty.

ANNIE
You're not sixteen anymore either.

PETER
(noticing her size)
Neither are you.

ANNIE
 (defensive)
 I just had a baby! What is up with
 everybody and the rudeness?

PETER
 You had a baby?

Annie suddenly feels inexplicably awful. The moment is
 charged with history, tension and icky-ness.

ANNIE
 Look, Peter, we should talk before--

But Meg walks in, disrupting the moment. She freaks when she
 sees Peter, closing the door behind her.

MEG
 What are you doing here? Didn't you
 get my text?

PETER
 I was having dinner with my folks...

MEG
 Oh. Well, you can't stay over tonight.
 Annie's sleeping in here.

ANNIE
 You know what? I'll sleep downstairs --

PETER/MEG
 No!

MEG
 You can't do that...

PETER
 I'll just go home...

ANNIE
 Please. Stay. You just climbed a
 tree. I'll be fine on the couch.

MEG
 You can't. Mom still doesn't know he
 sleeps over --

ANNIE
 Don't worry. I'll just tell her your
 snoring was driving me crazy.

MEG
 I don't snore.

PETER/ANNIE

Yeah, you do.

Peter and Annie look at each other. Horrifying.

ANNIE

Alrighty then. This was fun. G'night.

As Annie lets herself out...

INT. WHEELER HOME. FAMILY ROOM. NIGHT

Annie drags a comforter into the family room, and faces the couch. She throws the pillows off, and attempts to pull the couch into its sleeper form. The couch tries to eat her. She gets it about halfway out before she gives up, exhausted.

She wraps the comforter around her, and wanders around the dark, quiet room. She moves towards the entertainment center, which showcases a billion family photographs. CAMERA lingers over the photographs with Annie. The requisite Sears family portrait. One of Annie and Joey when they were little. A newer one of Meg and Peter. An older one of Claire and Tom.

Finally, Annie lands on her own wedding portrait. A glossy 8x10 in a heavy, silver frame. She picks it up. After a moment, she hears the FAINT CRY of Andrew upstairs. She looks at the picture again and starts to cry out of fear, exhaustion, and just about everything.

Off Annie, truly shaken for the first time...

FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREEINT. WHEELER HOME. FAMILY ROOM. MORNING

TIGHT ON: Annie, fast asleep and snoring away. We hear:

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Annie. Wake up.

Annie's eyes slowly open and come into focus. HER POV: A gurgling, drooling baby Andrew sitting on top of her.

ANNIE
What the...?

PULL BACK to reveal Claire propping him up in the sit position.

CLAIRE
Isn't he just an angel? Couple months he'll be doing that on his own.

ANNIE
Sitting on my face while I sleep? Super.

CLAIRE
You talk to Hal yet?

ANNIE
No, and I don't want to talk about not talking to him 'cause there's nothing to talk about, okay?

CLAIRE
Fine. I have my slow-burn fitness class to get to anyway. Your father is waiting to have breakfast with you downstairs. Do not let him put Andrew in a football hold, he's too small for that. And don't forget to wish him a happy birthday. I put extra diapers in your bag, and there's a bottle in the fridge but you shouldn't need it for at least another hour.

ANNIE
So much information. So little coffee.

Claire gives Andrew a zerburt on his back and walks out. Annie smiles at her son. He looks back at her: "You again?"

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Hi.
(off his silence)
Still not talking, huh?

Her cell phone rings. She checks it and quickly answers:

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Hit me, Marcus... You're kidding. Did you explain to Arthur--? And Hal didn't say anything in the meeting...?

As Annie's anxiety levels rise, Andrew starts to cry.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Now what's wrong? Did you go poopie?
(into phone)

Not you, Marcus. Look, I gotta go. I can't deal with this right now.

She hangs up and attempts to rock Andrew, but he won't stop.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I know. I want Mommy, too.

This does not bode well for a healthy mother/son relationship.

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. TOM'S OFFICE. MORNING

Annie, carrying Andrew in a kangaroo sack, walks in. An impressive spread of food sits on the big table. Both Tom and Joey are there, making plates of food for themselves.

TOM

Good morning, Sunshine! How's my beautiful grandson today?

ANNIE

Gosh, did our casual father/daughter breakfast suddenly get turned into a staff meeting? That is so unlike you.

TOM

I'm a productive man, Annie. Where do you think you got it from?

Joey rolls his eyes. Before Annie realizes it, Tom casually takes Andrew out of the kangaroo sack. She freaks out.

ANNIE

Wait! He's not a football!

Tom and Joey look at her like she's crazy. Which she is.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(utterly defeated)
Just... watch his neck.

As Annie helps herself to some food:

TOM

Now I wanna hear all about your life and whatnot, but first I wanna hear your thoughts on the Connor case.

JOEY

That's my case.

TOM

Never said it wasn't. I just want to hear what Annie thinks, that's all.

ANNIE

I think two alcoholics equals one bad marriage. Someone was bound to leave, and the mother usually gets preference on custody, right? Seems pretty standard to me. Ooo, biscuits...

JOEY

Heather isn't just leaving Sean. She wants to leave Savannah. She's talking about moving to North Carolina as early as next week.

ANNIE

(mouth full o' biscuit)

Yeah, but aren't there laws about that stuff? You can't just move out of state with a kid. Don't you need a guardian ad litem or something?

TOM

You do, but the fact that Sean is an alcoholic hinders his ability to take advantage of the rules designed to protect innocent spouses.

ANNIE

She didn't sound innocent to me. Not from what Tina was saying yesterday. Should be a case of he said/she said.

JOEY

Woulda been. If Sean hadn't checked himself into rehab before hiring us.

ANNIE

Oh right. The rehab...

TOM

Son of a gun just admitted to the whole world that he has a problem.

JOEY

So? I can use it. Here's a man trying to fix his life for the sake of his child. What's more noble than that?

ANNIE

Winning. Which is gonna be hard. If Heather's lawyer is halfway decent, he'll jump all over this. Have her claim she's a choir girl who's been emotionally abused by her alcoholic husband all these years.

TOM

She already filed the restraining order last week.

JOEY

Which she obviously did 'cause she knew she wanted to leave town! She was just putting her ducks in a row so she could take Cody without any interference.

TOM

And how you gonna prove that?

Joey doesn't have an answer. Tom turns to Annie:

TOM (CONT'D)

Still seem like a standard custody battle to you?

ANNIE

I just feel badly for Tina.

JOEY

You don't feel badly for Sean?

ANNIE

Sean got himself into this mess. I understand he's trying to clean up his act, and you can do your best to help him, but I don't see a shortcut here.

TOM

Probably not. But I want you to head down to Tybee with your brother this afternoon and meet the man yourself. See if that sparks anything.

EXT. WHEELER HOME. BACKYARD. DAY

The backyard is in its pre-party stage. Claire is unfolding a seemingly endless stack of folding chairs, when Meg walks into the yard. Once again, the poor girl looks confused.

MEG

Did the rental guys come already?

CLAIRE

What rental guys? Gimme a hand here...

MEG

I rented bridge chairs for the party.

Claire stops unfolding and faces her daughter.

CLAIRE

Why would you do that when I already got fifty of 'em stacked in my garage?

MEG

How would I know you keep fifty bridge chairs lying around? That's not normal.

CLAIRE

Because I told you. Honestly, I wish you'd learn how to be more organized...

Meg is annoyed, which gives her good reason to drop the G bomb.

MEG

Look, the chairs are not such a big deal. We're gonna have plenty of extra people coming tonight. I know of at least one extra person --

CLAIRE

One extra person hardly accounts for --

MEG

Dad's girlfriend.

This stops Claire for a second. Instantly, Meg regrets it.

MEG (CONT'D)

So that's, like, one...

But Claire bounces back quickly, and with an edge.

CLAIRE

Well, good. She'll have plenty of chairs to choose from --

MEG

I'm sorry. Do you wanna talk?

CLAIRE

I don't have time to sit around chatting, Meg. If I were you, I'd call the rental company and see if you can get at least a partial refund, and head over to Kroger's so I can start cooking my gumbo! I swear, you work so slow it's a wonder anything ever gets done.

Meg being 24 makes her forget bigger pictures. Hence:

MEG

I never asked you to make the gumbo in the first place! I never asked you to do any of this stuff! If you would've just let me handle it by myself from the get go, maybe things wouldn't have gotten so disorganized because I wouldn't have had to triple check everything with you!

CLAIRE

You wanna do it yourself? Go for it.

Claire drops the chair and stomps into the house. Meg looks around at the mess that is now hers. A RENTAL GUY appears.

RENTAL GUY

Where should we set up the chairs?

INT. JOEY'S CAR. DAY

The radio is on, Joey drives a sleek, grey Audi with red leather interior. Annie tries to break the tension.

ANNIE

You wanna talk about it?

JOEY

Talk about what? The fact that I'm a cheater or that I'm a bad lawyer?

ANNIE

Nobody said you were a bad lawyer.

JOEY

You're right. Dad just wanted you to come along because of your deep, personal connection to Tina, who you haven't seen in over fifteen years.

Annie is silent for a moment. Her father's blatant favoritism is a topic she doesn't enjoy. She tries to lighten the mood:

ANNIE

How 'bout we talk about your cheating?

Joey turns UP the radio, getting angrier.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I'm kidding! Have a sense of humor...

JOEY

It's not funny. I don't cheat.

ANNIE

Okay.

Joey looks at his sister; turns off the radio.

JOEY

(slowly)

I did not cheat on Leanne.

From the look on his face, she knows he's not lying. She also realizes that her assumption has hurt him. She feels badly.

ANNIE

I'm sorry. You're right. I don't know anything about your life these days --

JOEY

It's fine. I don't know anything about yours either.

ANNIE

So tell me what happened with Leanne.

JOEY

Tell me why you're really here.

Beat. She searches for a neutral topic:

ANNIE

Did you know Dad is bringing a girlfriend to the party tonight?

JOEY

Aracelli? Yeah, I figured he would...

Annie nods, and then stops nodding. What's that now?

ANNIE

Wait. Not... Aracelli Macko?

JOEY
That's Dad's girlfriend.

ANNIE
Aracelli Macko from high school?

JOEY
(enjoying this)
That's right, you guys were the same year. Wasn't she the one who pointed out your excessive amount of arm hair in front of Mr. Runyon's biology class?

ANNIE
First of all, I do not have an excessive amount of arm hair. It's simply darker than the rest of my hair for reasons which only God can explain. And second of all, yes she is.

Joey laughs. Annie seethes. A beat, then:

ANNIE (CONT'D)
He's seriously dating Aracelli Macko?

JOEY
(mocking)
You wanna talk about it?

No. Annie snaps on the radio. Talking is so overrated...

INT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW. MAIN ENTRANCE. DAY

Claire is sitting behind her desk, Andrew in the bassinet. Her bad mood tempered by tabloid magazines. The front door chimes. She looks up and is clearly surprised by what she sees.

CLAIRE
Well, look at what the cat dragged in.

REVERSE ANGLE ON: HAL. Standing at the door.

HAL
Hello, Mrs. Wheeler.

It's about to get interesting, folks...

FADE OUT.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUREXT. CLEAR HAVEN. VISITING AREA. DAY

Tucked away in a reclusive area, this high-end rehab facility has a calming, zen-like appearance. We come upon Annie, Joey and Tina being led down a grassy lawn by SEAN, who is trying to process all the new information. He's clearly upset.

SEAN

I can't believe she wants to move to North Carolina! You know what's there, don't you? Her drug dealing ex. I bet that's where they're gonna live...

JOEY

Can you prove he's a drug dealer?

SEAN

Absolutely! I bought dope off him a couple years ago.

ANNIE

TMI, honey. Too much information.

SEAN

(realizing)

Oh. Right. Shoot...

JOEY

Try to be patient, Sean. You're doing everything right. When you finish the 30 days here, we'll find you an outpatient program. The judge will probably ask for random testing --

TINA

Why doesn't Heather need to get tested?

JOEY

Because unfortunately, we can't prove Heather has a problem.

TINA

This is such crap...

SEAN

Tina --

TINA

How can someone take a child out of his school, away from his friends and his father and everything he knows? What about Cody's rights?

JOEY

By filing the restraining order, Heather has essentially told the judge that she and Cody aren't safe around Sean. He thinks he is protecting Cody's rights.

TINA

That's ridiculous. Sean's not a threat--

SEAN

Maybe not now, but I was. Heather may be lying about herself, but it's not like she's lying about me. I wasn't a good enough father. The things I've done, what Cody has been through on my account... I sometimes wonder if there's a power high enough to save me.

ANNIE

(slowly realizing)

You don't need a higher power, Sean. You need a white knight.

All heads turn to Annie. Huh? Joey is clearly annoyed.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

A white knight is a term used in corporate takeover situations. When a vulnerable company is being targeted for a hostile takeover, it can maintain some of its power by allowing itself to be rescued by a white knight. There was a big case recently, Harbinger vs. Multisoft. Made all the papers...

JOEY

She's from Atlanta. She's very impressed with herself...

ANNIE

Multisoft was a poorly run company. They were innovative but they were also negligent in their spending. Harbinger wanted to buy out Multisoft, exploit their resources and re-staff from top to bottom. Multisoft wasn't in a position to fight them on their own, so they found a third company to help them out. In the end they still got bought, but they were part of the negotiations so they were able to keep some of their own management in place.

SEAN

I drank a lot of bourbon, so I may have lost some brain cells, but... what?

TINA

I don't understand what this has to do with Sean...

JOEY

Let's move on to the deposition...

ANNIE

Sean is Multisoft! A weak company who can't win this fight on his own merits.
(to Sean)
You said it yourself. You messed up. Which left you vulnerable to being attacked on the open market.

TINA

Hold on now. My brother may be a lousy company, but little Miss Harbinger isn't any better.

ANNIE

True. And we could spend a lot of time and money trying to prove that. But even if we get the judge to believe us, then what? Where should he place Cody? We need a third option to offer him. We need a white knight.

Joey looks at his sister, understanding what she means.

JOEY

You want someone to sue for temporary guardianship of Cody.

Bingo. A slow beat, all eyes turn to Tina, who looks nervous.

TINA

Um, do I look white to you?

Now Joey's wheels are spinning...

JOEY

It's interesting. Winning guardianship is a long shot, but the threat alone might be enough to stop her from leaving Savannah.

SEAN

Why?

JOEY

It's not like she has endless resources for a long, drawn-out custody battle. She's got a good poker face on now, but once she finds it's no longer your word against hers, she might feel less secure. You're a crappy witness, Sean, but a judge will listen to your sister.

ANNIE

That's true. Smart...

Both Annie and Joey are enjoying riffing off each other. But Tina is clearly nervous. Joey senses it, and addresses her:

JOEY

But I need you to think about this, Tina. Taking on a little boy is a lot to ask. No one questions your dedication, but you gotta consider your life. And your husband's life. Are you prepared to sacrifice everything you know, turn your whole world upside down... all for your brother?

Annie looks at Joey, impressed by his compassion, but knowing that if she were in Tina's position, the answer would be no.

EXT. WHEELER HOME. BACKYARD. DAY

The backyard is a mess with too many chairs and a jazz band in need of a stage. Frazzled Meg is dealing with the BAND LEADER:

MEG

You never said you needed a stage!

BAND LEADER

Where did you think we were gonna play?

MEG

Is that attitude rolling off your eyebrow, Mister? I don't need that. Lots of people bring their own stage. I bet Madonna brings her own stage. Maybe I should've hired Madonna!

Which is about when Peter walks up, allowing the Band Leader to slip away from the crazy lady.

PETER

What's going on?

MEG

Everyone is an idiot, that's what's going on. I got a band leader giving me eyebrows. I got cake people delivering cakes SIX HOURS EARLY with no thought towards refrigeration!

(to the cake people)

How am I supposed to stick birthday candles in a melted cake? Huh? Y'all think of that?

PETER

Where's Claire?

MEG

Oh, she decided to have another hot flash on me. I took Annie's stupid advice and told her about Aracelli, and now Mom won't lift a finger to help.

PETER

That hardly seems like Annie's fault--

Say what? Rewind, Peter. Rewind time immediately.

MEG

Are you taking her side?

PETER

What? No. But you said you wanted to be in charge of this party --

MEG

And now you're mocking me?!

PETER

Huh?

MEG

Like I'm just getting what I asked for, is that it? You know what, Peter Hudgins? I don't have time for your nonsense right now. If you'll excuse me, I have to go build a stage.

Meg stomps off. Off Peter, still looking for that time machine...

INT. WHEELER HOME. MAIN ENTRANCE. DAY

Claire is straightening up when Annie walks in, still on a high from the meeting. Claire notices:

CLAIRE
Look who's all peppy.

ANNIE
I think Joey and I might have come up
with an interesting fix on the Brown
case. It was a productive meeting.
(then, noticing)
Where's Andrew McCarthy?

INT. WHEELER HOME. KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

Claire leads Annie into the kitchen where Hal sits, attempting
to feed Andrew. Annie's good mood instantly evaporates.

ANNIE
What are you doing here?

CLAIRE
He's here for your father's birthday
party, isn't that right, Hal?

HAL
Um. Okay.

Andrew starts crying, and Annie instantly takes him from Hal.

ANNIE
You're doing it wrong. Gimme...

It's painfully tense. Claire pretends it's not and runs over
the moment with her overwhelming and inappropriate cheer.

CLAIRE
Why don't y'all let me take him so you
can freshen up? Guests will be
arriving any minute. Go on now...

Annoyed, Annie heads out. Hal is hot on her tail:

HAL
Annie, we need to talk...

ANNIE
Not now we don't. You can freshen up
in your car.

HAL
I flew here.

ANNIE
Then stay ugly.

Once they're both gone, Claire looks at Andrew.

CLAIRE
 (baby-talking)
 Your daddy is a jackass. Yes he is.
 Oh, yes he is...

EXT. SAVANNAH STREETS. DUSK

Night falls. The sounds of Dixie jazz fill the air...

EXT. WHEELER HOME. BACKYARD. NIGHT

It's perfect. The backyard is packed with people. Twinkly lights have been draped with abandon, as have Cherokee roses and wild orchids. Tables filled with food, and pitchers filled with Long Island iced teas. The ODJB makes music on foot, winding its way through the party like a conga line, with a drunken Tom leading the fray.

CAMERA finds Annie, looking the most beautiful we've seen her yet. She stands by the drinks table, ladling herself a glass of punch, when she hears:

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Well, if this don't beat the band!

Annie gulps the drink before turning to face:

ANNIE
 Hi, Aracelli.

ARACELLI MACKO. Blonde, boobed, and botoxed. The three B's. She gives Annie a warm hug, much to Annie's dismay.

ARACELLI
 Your dad told me you were coming, but I didn't believe him!

ANNIE
 Well, he's a hard man to trust --

ARACELLI
 And look at how pretty you look!

Annie is momentarily thrown by what appears to be her first compliment regarding her appearance.

ANNIE
 Thanks. Actually, I just had a baby...

ARACELLI

I heard, and don't worry. Your body should bounce back. 'Course I had my girls when I was in my twenties, so the weight literally dropped off. But older women look better with some fat in their face anyway.

ANNIE

We're the same age.

ARACELLI

I know! Isn't that amazing?!

Before Annie can respond:

PETER (O.S.)

I see you're still windier than a bag of assholes, Aracelli.

Both women turn to find Peter looking dapper in a sport coat and jeans. Talk about a white knight. Aracelli cackles again, as if the joke weren't made at her expense.

ARACELLI

Peter! Isn't this just like old times? I swear, stick a riverboat behind y'all, scrape twenty pounds off Annie and it's like I'm staring at your prom picture.

ANNIE

And if I knew back then you'd be sleeping with my father, I might've jumped off that boat.

Aracelli takes a beat, then cackles again.

ARACELLI

Annie! You always were a funny one.

She walks off, leaving Annie and Peter alone. Suddenly there's a new kind of tension between them. Was he being a Southern gentleman just now, or was it something more?

ANNIE

You look nice.

PETER

Thanks. So do you.

ANNIE

How's it going with Meg? Six months now, right? Must be kinda serious...

PETER

It is.

Something catches his eye behind Annie. He turns abruptly:

PETER (CONT'D)

Actually, I should find her...

ANNIE

Peter, wait --

But he's already gone. Annie turns around to figure out what he was looking at, and discovers Hal approaching.

HAL

Who was that guy?

Annie watches Peter take her sister's hand. A beat, then:

ANNIE

No one. Just an old friend.

INT. WHEELER HOME. KITCHEN. A LITTLE LATER

A misty-eyed Claire is absentmindedly stirring a pot of gumbo, watching the party through the window. Andrew sleeps in the bassinet. Meg walks in surprised to find her mom.

MEG

What are you doing inside? Does Annie have you baby-sitting again?

CLAIRE

I'm just making a small batch of gumbo. I know you don't need my help, but...

MEG

It's going great, isn't it? Maybe I should give up law school and go into party planning. Be the next Martha Stewart, minus the ankle bracelet.

Meg isn't totally kidding, but Claire doesn't even register it. Which is how Meg realizes something is very wrong:

MEG (CONT'D)

Hey. Are you okay?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry I tried to take over your night, baby girl. I just...

(a beat, then)

I guess I wanted to plan this party.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Thirty years of being married to that man outside, I always thought I'd be the one making his 60th. And that he'd be making mine. I sure didn't think we'd wind up separated, or that I'd be hiding out in my own kitchen watching him play hide the salami with some thirty-year-old floozy whose breasts are the size of my ass.

Meg stops being 24 for a moment and understands.

MEG

I'm sorry, Mom.

CLAIRE

You didn't do anything wrong, angel.

MEG

I know. I'm sorry Dad's a dick.

Claire smiles. She dumps the gumbo into a bowl, hands it to Meg. (NOTE: The burners on the stove were NOT on.)

CLAIRE

Why don't you bring that outside and I'll meet you in a minute.

MEG

Take your time.

She grabs the bowl and we follow Meg outside...

EXT. WHEELER HOME. BACKYARD. DRINKS TABLE. CONTINUOUS

... as she passes Joey. We stay with him as he pours himself a healthy tumbler of scotch. Tom and Aracelli walk up beside him. Tom having reached the loud part of being drunk. Unfun.

TOM

Son, have you ever seen a more resplendent woman than this little lady I got beside me right now?

Aracelli faux-blushes. Joey tries to maintain his cool.

JOEY

Actually, I have. Her name is Mom and this is her house we're in, so you might want to show a little respect.

Tom wasn't expecting that. And it suddenly feels a bit quieter. Annie walks over, attempting to defuse the situation:

ANNIE

Is it time for coffee?

ARACELLI

I see gumbo. I'm gonna grab me a bowl of that...

Aracelli wanders off, leaving the family alone.

TOM

(to Joey)

Where's that pretty girlfriend of yours? Left you already, did she? That didn't take much time...

ANNIE

Dad, don't --

JOEY

Why are you asking after Leanne? You looking for an even younger model? You must be triple hitting that Viagra...

Meg wanders over now, trying to be subtle:

MEG

This is happening louder than you think. Just so you know...

TOM

I don't need drugs, son. That's another thing you and I don't have in common. One of many.

JOEY

Thank God for that --

TOM

You know what your problem is? You can't hold on to your women.

MEG

Daddy --

TOM

It's true. He's got no problem reeling 'em in, but when it comes to keeping 'em? Huge failure. He's like his momma that way...

That's all Joey needs to throw a PUNCH. It was meant for his dad's face, but winds up hitting him somewhere in the shoulder.

ANNIE

Joey!

Tom lunges back and thus begins one of the dumbest looking drunk fights ever. The sisters attempt to pull them apart.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Hey! Stop hitting weird body parts!

MEG

Open hands! Open hands!

ANNIE

Why open hands?

MEG

I don't know. I saw it on TV...

Finally, Hal shows up just as Joey makes his first good connection - WAM! Right in Hal's face.

ANNIE

Hal!

Hal goes down. Tom starts laughing. Aracelli wanders over, looking a bit green.

ARACELLI

Does anyone else think this gumbo tastes off?

Meg looks in the bowl.

MEG

Oh my God. The shrimp is raw.

(yelling out)

Peter! Grab the gumbo!!

And with that, Aracelli promptly throws up. Off, well, everyone...

FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVEINT. WHEELER HOME. MEG'S BATHROOM. A LITTLE LATER. NIGHT

Hal is tending to the cut above his eye, applying a Band-Aid. Annie stands a few feet behind him, attempting concern.

ANNIE

Do you need some Neosporin?

HAL

It's okay. I got it...

ANNIE

(beat, then)

Hal. I can't do this anymore.

Hal looks at her through the mirror. This isn't a bathroom conversation. She walks into...

INT. WHEELER HOME. MEG'S BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS

Hal follows her. It's tough to know who goes first.

HAL

Annie...

ANNIE

It was bad enough the first time. I am not gonna become one of those women --

HAL

I don't want you to --

ANNIE

Then stop doing this!
 (composing herself, then)
 I don't ask a lot of you. I don't expect roses every day. We both work hard, and I'm just as exhausted as you are when I get home at nine o'clock. You think I want to spend the rest of the night fighting with you? I don't. I didn't leave the first time this happened, because I saw the bigger picture. I know we have a good life, and I wasn't gonna let you mess it up. But we have a son now. I need you to be better for him. I can't keep running home every time you decide to act out --

HAL

I know --

ANNIE

No, you don't know. I haven't gotten a stitch of work done since I've been here. Arthur is trying to take me off the Geneco case, and you know that's gonna make me partner --

HAL

Annie...

ANNIE

But I know, that's not the point, I know. I'm intending to put Andrew first, which is why I am asking you to do the same. I'm ready to come back to Atlanta. If you want to try the counseling thing, I'm open to it. I'm not sure if either one of us has the time right now, but maybe we should.

Hal looks at Annie, who suddenly appears very vulnerable and scared. Which makes this next part even harder.

HAL

I owe you an apology, Annie. I am truly sorry for what I've done. You don't deserve it.

ANNIE

I know I don't...

HAL

But I'm not leaving Kirsten.

Excuse me? Annie looks up. Hal is suddenly fidgety.

HAL (CONT'D)

I didn't expect it to happen this way. At first I thought it was gonna be, you know, like the first one. But then... I fell in love with her.

ANNIE

You did what now?

HAL

I love her. And it's in that way. The way where I want to give her roses every day, and hold her hand when I fall asleep.

Annie is silent, attempting to process. She's in shock.

HAL (CONT'D)

All these years I thought I wasn't capable of being that kind of man. Of loving that way. You made it so easy for me 'cause you didn't need that much. Or want that much. And I was grateful for that. But when I met Kirsten --

ANNIE

Hired Kirsten.

HAL

Whatever. Point is, everything changed. It's like, my heart just opened up and I realized I wasn't living up to my full potential. I am a romantic bastard, can you believe that?

Annie is having a hard time believing any of it, but her silence is giving him the chutzpah to actually smile.

HAL (CONT'D)

I know it sounds crazy. But I want you to find this kind of happiness. Which is partially why I asked Arthur to take you off Geneco --

ANNIE

You did what?!

HAL

Because I knew it would be too much to handle right now. But I'm gonna help you make partner. Might not be this year, but... Well, like you said. It's not important. All in good time.

(exhales, then)

I gotta tell you, I feel loads better.

Annie looks at him, seemingly with understanding. Slowly, she stands up and then... SLAP! Right across the cheek.

ANNIE

You know what? Me too.

With that, she walks out.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Joey walks into his empty bachelor pad. Pool table in lieu of a dining table. Things that require woofers. Typical boy fare. He hits PLAY on his answering machine as he grabs chips and beers from the fridge. A deck of cards...

LEANNE (V.O.)

It's me. I'm coming over tomorrow to pick up the rest of my stuff. I expect my five hundred dollars to be waiting for me. In cash, Joey.

BEEP.

BANKER (V.O.)

This is Dalton Newsom from Washington Mutual. This is your final reminder about your money market account. If you don't make a deposit by the end of the week, we'll have to close it down. Call me back if you have any questions.

BEEP.

LEANNE (V.O.)

I would also appreciate it if you'd leave the gray sweatshirt. I realize it's yours, but I like it and I think I should get to keep it considering your thievery and whatnot. Jerkface.

BEEP.

MAN'S VOICE

Joe, it's Alan. I need that two grand back, my man. Call me. I'm serious.

By now, Joey has set up a poker table. A knock at the front door. Joey goes to answer it, TWO DUDES wait outside:

JOEY

C'mon in, guys...

Catherine Feeney's "*I Come Home*" begins to play as we:

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. WHEELER HOME. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY. NIGHT

Annie stands at the window, looking outside. ANNIE'S POV: Hal going into a taxi and driving away. Annie watches until the cab is out of sight. And for a few moments after that...

EXT. WHEELER HOME. BACKYARD. NIGHT

Meg is walking around with a trash bag, starting to clean up the mess. Peter comes up behind her, takes her hand and kisses it. She leans her head against his shoulder, grateful.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM. NIGHT

Tom sits in the waiting room. He looks tired and smaller than he has seemed so far. Aracelli walks out from the double doors, and he rises to meet her. Too old for this shit.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Joey in the middle of a poker game and is losing badly. As he pushes his chips further towards the center, falling deeper into debt but unable to stop himself...

INT. WHEELER HOME. CLAIRE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Claire is asleep. A crib is set up at the foot of her bed for Andrew. The door opens, and Annie sneaks in. She walks over to the crib, gazing at her son asleep inside. Behind her, Claire's eyes open, sensing Annie in the room. She watches her daughter for a moment; wishing she could erase her pain. As the song FADES OUT...

CLAIRE

Is he gone?

Annie simply nods.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

This time she shakes her head. No. A small silence, then:

ANNIE

When I left home six years ago, I knew everyone thought I was crazy. I did. But I thought that if I stayed here, kept seeing Peter and worked for Dad... It all seemed too easy. In a way, I guess I thought I'd be settling.

CLAIRE

It took courage to do what you did.

ANNIE

Maybe. But it didn't matter. I wound up settling anyway.

CLAIRE

Well. It happens.

Annie takes a deep breath, looks towards Andrew:

ANNIE

He knows I'm a bad mother.

CLAIRE

He's barely a week old. The child
can't even feel his own spit.

ANNIE

Doesn't matter. He already likes you
better than me.

CLAIRE

That's 'cause I've spent more time with
him than you.

ANNIE

It's not that I don't want to spend
time with him. I just don't want to
break him. Or kill him on accident.

CLAIRE

You're not gonna kill him. You gotta
trust your maternal instincts.

ANNIE

Yeah. Do they sell those online?

CLAIRE

(smiles, then)

Your problem is that you underestimate
yourself. Always have.

Annie looks at her mother, feeling the subjectivity of that
sentiment as it washes over her. She shakes her head.

ANNIE

Is it possible, in light of everything
that's happened, that maybe you've been
overestimating me?

Claire takes a moment and really considers it. Finally:

CLAIRE

Nope.

ANNIE

(a smile, then)

I still cannot believe you poisoned
Aracelli Macko.

And with that, the two women burst out laughing. Off mother
and daughter, finding humor in spite of everything...

FADE OUT.

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIXINT. WHEELER FAMILY LAW, TOM'S OFFICE. MORNING

Tom, Annie and Tina sit at the large table. They're all clearly waiting for the fourth, and after a long beat:

TOM

Maybe we should get started --

ANNIE

No, let's wait. This is Joey's case.

He throws her a look, which she chooses to ignore. The first of many standoffs to come. Suddenly, the door opens:

JOEY

Sorry I'm late...

TINA

Please, I'm the one who's sorry for having y'all come in on a Saturday. But you know how when you make a big decision, you feel like you can't do anything else until you act on it?

JOEY

(anticipating)

You want to do it.

Tina nods, a weight off her shoulders.

TOM

Do what?

ANNIE

Sue for temporary guardianship of Cody.

In an instant, Tom processes the idea.

TOM

Interesting. Aggressive.

TINA

Dan and I talked about it all last night, and we couldn't think of a good enough reason not to. In a lot of ways, I'm somewhat responsible for what happened to Sean.

JOEY

That's not true. You shouldn't make this decision because you feel guilty --

TINA

I'm not. I wouldn't take on something like this as a form of apology. I'm doing it for me. Do you know I talk to my brother every day now? I forgot how much he cracks me up. And last night, I spoke to my nephew for over an hour and I realized, I missed most of his life. I don't want to miss any more.

TOM

You realize the likelihood of you being awarded guardianship is slim. I don't want you getting your hopes up.

TINA

I know. But I have to try. I need to know that for the first time in my life, when it came to my brother, I did everything I could. Can you help me?

TOM

I'm not sure yet. Legally, Joey and I can't represent both you and Sean.

TINA

Could Annie represent me?

TOM

Would that she could, but --

ANNIE

Actually, I could.

TOM

What?

JOEY

'Scuse me?

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I mean, technically. My schedule has recently opened up and if it makes things easier... That is, if you want--

TINA

I do! Oh, that would be so great!

Tina couldn't be more thrilled. Unless she were Tom, who is practically dying from all the happy. Joey... Not so much.

JOEY

Well, good. This all sounds real good. If you'll excuse me...

Joey lets himself out of the office. Annie moves to follow:

ANNIE

Joey...

TOM

I'm gonna call Heather's lawyer right now. He is gonna flip his lid! Annie, stay put. I need you and Tina to fill out some paperwork while I do this...

Tom picks up the phone. Annie pauses for a moment, conflicted over whether or not to follow her brother...

TOM (CONT'D)

Glenn? Tom Wheeler here. I have some new information on the Connor case...

Tom gestures for Annie to sit back down. She does, still unsure if she made the right decision...

INT. WHEELER HOME. KITCHEN. A LITTLE LATER

Claire is cleaning up the breakfast dishes, minding Andrew, when Annie walks in, on a mission:

ANNIE

Have you seen Joey?

CLAIRE

A little bit ago. Said he was heading over to Wet Willie's.

ANNIE

Dammit...

CLAIRE

What happened?

Tom enters, still wearing a grin the size of Georgia.

TOM

I'll tell you what happened. Annie just reclaimed her birthright and joined Wheeler Family Law, that's what happened! And it's about time...

CLAIRE

What?

ANNIE

Oh, calm down. There was no claiming of any birthrights of any kind. All I did was take on a case while I figure out what I'm doing with my life. Don't get all epic about it.

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

And if you think you can start a meeting with a client of mine without me present, I'll walk faster than you can pluck your nose hairs. If you'll excuse me, I gotta go find my brother.

She starts to walk out, then circles back, picking up her baby and all the gear that accompanies him.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

C'mon, Andrew McCarthy...

And with that, she kisses her mom on the cheek and exits. Tom grabs a mug of coffee, his mood shot to shit.

TOM

(muttering)

Don't get all epic... You know, that daughter of yours is a pain in my ass.

Off Claire's growing smile...

EXT. RIVER STREET. DUSK

Annie (and Andrew) walks down River Street; looking weary and ready to give up when she spots Joey sitting on a bench outside, talking on his cell phone. She walks over.

ANNIE

I have been looking all over for you...

JOEY

(shushes her, then into phone)

That sounds good. I'll call you Monday and we can set it up. Bye now.

He hangs up, scooches over to make room. She sits. They're both quiet for a beat, looking out at the Savannah River.

ANNIE

Thanks for punching Hal in the face.

JOEY

No problem. I take it you guys --

ANNIE

We're done. Which explains my sudden need to relocate. But if working with you and Dad is gonna make our relationship worse than it already is --

JOEY

It's fine. It'll probably help get him off my back for a while. Plus it's obviously good for business.

ANNIE

How so? I mean, duh. But how so?

JOEY

That was Heather's lawyer on the phone just now. He wants to set up a mediation next week. My bet is this whole thing gets solved out of court.

ANNIE

You're kidding? That's great!

JOEY

And she's gonna bring Cody to see Sean on his next visitors day. I guess the thought of Tina talking to a judge must've scared the crap out of her.

ANNIE

Wow. So you were right.

JOEY

I'm a good lawyer, too.

ANNIE

I know you are.

He nods. It's a little better, but the distance remains.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

When did you start hating me, Joe? We used to be friends. Or something like friends. We used to talk, anyway.

JOEY

I don't hate you. I just got tired of trying to be you.

ANNIE

Exhausting, isn't it? And that's without all the arm waxing...

Joey smiles, then:

JOEY

When you left, I figured I had a shot, you know? Finally make some headway with Dad.

(MORE)

JOEY (CONT'D)

Get him to notice me for once. But obviously, that's not meant to happen. Not in this lifetime.

ANNIE

You gotta stop needing his approval.

JOEY

You gotta stop telling me what to need.

Andrew begins to whimper. Joey and Annie look at him.

JOEY (CONT'D)

What's his problem?

ANNIE

I don't... well... hold on...

Annie reaches into her Mommy Purse, pulls out a pair of socks, and puts them on his feet. He stops crying. Annie freaks.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I don't believe it. I did it! I actually did it!

JOEY

How'd you know his feet were cold?

ANNIE

I guess... I must have instincts?

(to Andrew)

You're gonna live! How psyched are you?

Annie takes his little hands and begins to raise the roof with them. Joey shakes his head. Women are weird.

JOEY

So where you guys gonna live?

ANNIE

Good question. I can't live with Mom and Meg. The whole Peter thing is still a little too weird. And I don't see me moving in with Dad and Aracelli Macko. I suppose I need to find my own place, but the thought of it is so overwhelming just now.

JOEY

You could move in with me.

Annie looks up at her brother. Shocked.

ANNIE

Really? That would be amazing, Joey.
And I'd pay whatever you need, chip in
on rent, food, everything.

JOEY

I was hoping you'd say that. Seeing as
I owe about three grand and have no way
of paying it off.

Again, Annie is shocked. But she's smart enough not to ask any
questions about that one.

ANNIE

I can cover the rent.

Another moment passes, this one more comfortable. A weight off
both their shoulders. And then:

JOEY

So are we gonna find a hot baby nurse
to move in with us, or what?

As Annie gives her brother a smack on the back of the head...

INT. WHEELER HOME. MEG'S BEDROOM. DAY

Meg and Peter are hanging out, being couply and cute. Peter is
scrolling through her iPod, choosing music.

MEG

Nope. Next. I cannot make out to that
old people music.

PETER

You just called U2 "old people music."
I'm gonna go kill myself now...

Annie walks in, and is a little weirded out by the image. Meg
is oblivious to it. Peter isn't, but he doesn't shift.

ANNIE

Sorry. Just grabbing my things...

MEG

No problem. Hey! Mom just told me
you're moving back home? Is that true?

ANNIE

It is for now. We'll see what happens.

MEG

That's so cool! Isn't that cool?

PETER

So cool.

Or the opposite of that, but whatever. Ah, triangles...

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Meg! Set the dinner table, please.

MEG

(dramatic sigh)

It's always me...

Meg is about to get up, but Annie stops her.

ANNIE

I'll do it. You stay.

MEG

Really? Thanks, Annie. You're the best sister in the world!

Annie smiles, and lets herself out...

INT. WHEELER HOME. HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS

... She is about to close the door, but can't help but take one last look inside.

ANNIE'S POV: Through the sliver in the doorway, she glimpses the closeness between Peter and her sister. This is the first time Annie has seen them kissing and canoodling.

We HOLD on Annie as her stomach does a little flip. And then we PUSH IN as she realizes her stomach did a little flip. She leans against the wall.

ANNIE

Oh crap...

Off Annie, feeling like the worst sister in the world...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW

