

PERSONAL USE ONLY

we are continuous
By
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CHARACTERS
(1W, 2M)

SON
MOTHER
HUSBAND

TIME
Now

PLACE
Here

PERSONAL USE ONLY

"Sometimes the best stories aren't the most sensational stories. Sometimes the best stories live within what we have grown to think of as mundane."

—Ahomefule J. Oluo

"Don't talk about it like it's the past tense. It's not over."

—Hector in *Christodora* by Tim Murphy

"Add 'em up."

—Peter in *Company* by Sondheim & Furth

1.

Lise rise to reveal SON.

He takes in the table.

He speaks out.

SON

Growing up

My mom always set the table the same way

She'd start with the plates

"The china"

She called them.

Then the silverware.

At an early age, I knew to put the fork on the left

And the knife and the spoon on the right.

The glass at one o'clock.

"This is the way the table must be set"

My mom would say.

MOTHER appears.

SON collects plates from the hutch.

The same way

Every time

For every meal.

Order out of chaos.

SON hands the plates to MOTHER.

[BLACK]

2.

MOTHER begins to set the table.

She speaks out.

MOTHER

I have never imagined my son in bed with another man.

He *is* a homosexual and so it would follow that if I were to imagine him – *in flagrante*, as it were – it would be with a man.

He has never shared such information with me, never volunteered the intimate details of his associations, but, well – a mother knows.

If I were the imagining kind

(which I'm not)

I certainly had opportunities.

Simon has always had close male friends—all through grade school and high school—and in college he would mention boys on the phone.

He even brought a few home, *not all at once*, but for the holidays once or twice.

“They don't have any place else to go,” he'd say.

And I'd say, “The more the merrier.”

My big-hearted son.

When they visited, Simon and whichever friend, they'd share a room – his old room – though I do not know the details of their sleeping arrangements.

I assume that Simon was quite young when he realized he was gay.

I have never asked him, “When did you know,” but kids today seem to know things so much earlier than we did when we were their age.

Their likes and dislikes.

Who they think they are and what they think they want to be.

And they seem so sure.

I should point out that “when did you know” is not at all the same as “when did you tell.”

The two things are rarely immediately connected.

Simon *told* us, his father and me, when he was sixteen.

We were on the front porch and I asked him how his day had gone and he said, “I think I'm gay.”

Just like that.

The band-aide was ripped off before either one of us had known that there was a band-aide

Or even that there was a need for a band-aide or—

No.

No, that's not true.

Not entirely, anyway.

I'd known.

Or not known known, but suspected.
 But not because he'd said anything.
 I *knew* because a mother knows.
 And Hoyt said, "You *think* you're gay," with the emphasis on think, hopeful, perhaps, that it implied a phase, that homosexuality was something that Simon was simply trying on.
 Like a hat.
 Or a British accent.

But Simon said, "No, I pretty much know."
 There was no 'think' about it after all.

And Hoyt said, "Do you want to see a therapist?"
 (A friend of ours is a Christian therapist)
 And Simon said, "No, thank you."
 And then Hoyt said, "Maybe don't tell anyone."

SON appears.
MOTHER doesn't see him.

MOTHER
 And I remember Simon got this look on his face.
 This look like something had just ended or broken, maybe?
 And then he said, "Fine," and went inside the house.
 And we've not spoken about it since.

SON
 I knew I was gay when I was six.
 I didn't have a name for it, at the time
 For how I felt
 For what I was
 But I knew that I was different.
 That I *liked* differently.

I remember there was this one boy, Andy, who was new to my school in second grade
 He was white
 And athletic
 And he had a gap between his front two teeth
 And a mullet
 An honest to God mullet
 And I liked him so so much.

I wanted to be close to him
 Close enough to smell him
 To lick him
 To bite him
 I especially wanted to bite him.

Or for him to bite me
Whichever...

He gets lost in this thought for a moment and then—

SON

Anyway,
We would play this game at recess
(Maybe you played it, too?)
Where the boys would chase the girls around the yard
And if they caught them
If they caught *up* to them
They'd push them to the ground
Not hard enough to cause any real physical damage
But hard enough for the pushed to know that the pusher had a crush.
And I remember playing the game and wishing that Andy would push me.
But he never did.

And really
The thing I wanted more than anything
Was a best friend.
Or, well, a best friend who was also gay who wanted to have sex with me.

I wanted someone to give me a sign
Or a significant look
Or an 'accidental' brush of a shoulder or a fingertip
Or a note in my locker
'I'm like you'
Or even better
'I like you.'

But no one signaled
And no one looked
And no one brushed or wrote

So I turned to the internet
(Like you do)
To Craigslist classified ads
And chat rooms
Where I typed dirty things with a vague idea of what they actually meant.
I watched porn
(Not a lot, but some)
And near the end of my senior year I gave a guy a blowjob in the front seat of my parents'
station wagon.

I asked Jeeves,
 “How do I avoid using my teeth while giving head?”
 And “What are poppers?”
 And “Who is Kylie Minogue?”
 (very specific)
 And then
 (more generally)
 “How do I be a gay man?”
 And “What things should a gay man know?”
 And “What do gay men do?”
 Which, as you can probably imagine, yielded *colorful* results.

MOTHER

Oddly enough, I’m often asked intimate details about my son.
 Mostly by gossipy white women of a certain age with homosexual sons of their own.
 (It seems that every white woman of a certain age has a homosexual son these days)
 They ask if he’s single, if he’s looking, if he’s a top or a bottom, questions, which, I find presumptuous and rude, and the answers, frankly, none of their business – or their sons for that matter.
 And while I may have a general sense of Simon’s relationship history (thanks to Facebook)
 And my own suspicions about his sexual positioning, I have refused to answer.
 They ask and I politely decline.
 Because, in truth, I have nothing to say.

I have nothing to say on the subject of my son’s sexual proclivities because it is something that I do not want nor need to know more about than I already do.

I don’t know about you, but that’s how I was raised.
 Raised to believe that other peoples’ business was just that, their business.
 Raised to believe that information was provided on a need-to-know basis and that some information was not worth sharing at all.

And so I do not know what my son does in bed because I have never asked him.
 And I have never asked because my son’s sex life is his business.
 Well, his and whomever he chooses to spend his time with, no matter how I might feel about it.
 Agree.
 Disagree.
 With his choice of partner or whatever.
 It doesn’t matter.
 It is his.
 Theirs.
 Not mine.
 I am not interested.
 And I assume that he is equally uninterested in *my* sex life.

SON

Oh yeah

One hundred percent.

MOTHER

I assume that all children are uninterested in the sex lives of their parents.

I was certainly never curious about mine.

SON

I did find this one page in my internet searching

It was called “Man Cuddle and Spoon.”

And it was a collection of photos of men just, well, cuddling and spooning.

I spent a lot of time there

Scrolling through

Looking

And envying the little spoons.

Envyng them being held.

The intimacy of that.

MOTHER

As a parent you’re constantly being smacked in the face by your child’s development.

By change.

You leave the house and people comment on it.

“He’s getting so big” and “He looks more and more like you every day” and “I almost didn’t recognize him,” a statement, which, though probably genuinely meant, has always rung a bit false to me.

Forced.

Theatrical.

They say things like, “This can’t be little Simon,” and you think to yourself, because it would be impolite to say it out loud, “Who the fuck else would it be?”

It all happens so fast.

I mean, it does and it doesn’t.

I mean, it takes years, years for them to grow up, to grow beyond you.

But by the time they do, by the time they’re grown – well, grown-ish – it feels like almost no time has passed at all.

And even though you’ve been there the whole time, watching from the front row, nothing prepares you for the moment when it happens, for the gut punch you feel when you realize that it *has* happened.

Clear and unexpected, like a bolt of lightning out of a cloudless blue sky.

Your little boy has become a man.

I remember the moment it happened to me.

It was many years ago now.

Simon was in middle school.

And I was folding laundry.
And I had a rhythm going.
And I had just folded a pair of briefs.
And I reached out to put them into a basket.
And that's when it hit me.
I had no idea whose underwear I had just folded.
Not a clue.
I sat there, holding these briefs in my hand, and I didn't know which basket to put them in because somehow (and I still couldn't tell you when it happened) my husband and my thirteen-year-old son were now wearing the same size underwear.
And it was not size small.

That night in bed, I told Hoyt about my realization, hoping to commiserate or to at least share a laugh.
I said, "Can you believe it?"
Meaning our son and the underwear and their apparent shared bigness.
And he got very quiet.
And after a few moments he said, almost under his breath, "I don't think I'm comfortable with that."

And what I should have said was, "Hoyt, nothing about being a parent is comfortable. Comfortable isn't the point."

But I didn't.
Because I didn't know to say it then.

[RESET]

3.

HUSBAND pours himself a glass of wine.

He speaks out.

HUSBAND

The thing is, when somebody asks you how you met your significant other, you want to be able to say that you met the old-fashioned way.

You know, in person, at a party.

Or in a bar.

Or in an airport.

Or in an airport bar.

You want to be able to say that you were set-up by friends.

Or by a co-worker.

Or by your parents, even.

You want to be able to say, I spotted him across a crowded room, our eyes met, and we knew, love at first sight.

That's what you want to be able to say.

But in this age of online hookups and online dating, most of the time it's less "love at first sight" and more "intrigue at first click."

SON

I'd been in Minnesota for maybe two weeks when my roommate, this cool gay guy from Philly, said, "Simon, man, up here it's key that you find yourself some warmth."

And he looked at me like, "You get what I'm saying, right?"

And it took me a second to understand that he was talking about bodies and friction and heat.

The cold, he asserted, merited companionship – or, at least, a consistent hook-up.

HUSBAND

And yes, I know that society today is largely automated and automatic.

We are chrome and steel.

We're living in a cyber age.

But as far as I can tell our hearts are still blood pumping muscles.

That hasn't changed.

They are blood pumping muscles that still – even with so much progress – fundamentally ache for human connection.

For kismet.

Which, frankly, is a fucking hard thing to achieve through a screen.

SON

The thing my roommate didn't know, was that I'd made myself two promises on the plane from New York to Minneapolis.

The first, no men.

And the second... no men.

And I intended to keep them both.

And so I laughed and thanked him for the advice
(A polite brush-off)
And he said, “nah, trust me.”
And he passed me the bottle of bourbon that we’d been nursing all evening and said, “drink,”
and I did.
And then he opened his laptop and clicked a few buttons and asked me to describe myself.

I went on three dates.
Abe was the third.
He said hi first.

HUSBAND
He made fun of my profile picture.

SON
I made fun of his profile picture.

HUSAND
And almost immediately, actually, before we’d even had a real conversation.
He was like, “What’s up with the sunglasses?”

SON
How are you gonna be on a dating app and hide your face?

HUSBAND
It wasn’t my only photo.

SON
No, right, he also had one where he was holding a duck.

HUSBAND
It was a good photo.

SON
A duck!

HUSBAND
It was taken on a farm!

SON laughs.

HUSBAND
What?

SON
You’re just lucky I liked your smile.

HUSBAND

Yeah, well, you're lucky I liked your snark.

SON

Anyway, we made plans to meet for drinks. *Just* drinks.

HUSBAND

Gives you an out. Just in case.

SON

You know, in case your date is crazy.

HUSBAND

Or boring.

SON

Or like really, really, white. You know, better safe than sorry.

HUSBAND

So we'd decided on Happy Hour, to which we were both running early.

SON

I texted him, "Making better time than I anticipated."

HUSBAND

And I texted back, "Me too," which, was, admittedly, a little odd for me.
The running early part.

SON

He's late for everything.

HUSBAND

Typically, yes – jerk – typically, I *am* late for everything, but it's not because I mean to be.
I'm just easily distracted.

SON

I hate being late.
Like even the idea of it makes me break out in hives.
Like I'm breaking out in hives right now just thinking about it

HUSBAND

I texted him back, "The munificence of the transit gods have smiled upon us."

SON

And I'd never heard the word munificence before.
I had to look it up.

HUSBAND

Munificence is defined as “great generosity.”

SON

“The quality or action of being lavishly generous.”

HUSBAND

It’s engraved on the inside of our wedding rings.

You can’t see it from there, but it is.

“Great generosity.”

SON

Beautiful.

HUSBAND

Yeah.

SON winks at HUSBAND.

SON

So I got to the restaurant early, and he was already there sitting at the bar.

HUSBAND

We like sitting at bars.

SON + HUSBAND

Better service.

SON

He looked just like his picture – the one where he’s holding the duck not the one where he’s wearing sunglasses.

I couldn’t see his face in the picture with the sunglasses.

HUSBAND

I liked him, the look of him, as soon as he walked in the door.

He had a great smile.

Still does.

SON

I loved his laugh.

So freaking loud.

HUSBAND

Like my mother’s.

SON

Like his mother's.

I always know when she's in the audience at one of my plays.

She has one of those laughs that gives other people permission to laugh.

It sets them at ease.

It's infectious.

HUSBAND

Drinks became appetizers became dinner.

SON

They had this incredible burger.

I dreamt about that burger for weeks after our date.

HUSBAND

I liked that he liked to eat.

SON

I liked that *he* liked to eat!

HUSBAND

Isn't that all anyone really wants?

Someone to eat with?

Someone who you like who also likes to eat?

I should have put that in my profile.

SON

We kissed outside the restaurant.

HUSBAND

We *did* do that.

SON

He kissed *me*.

Simple.

Sweet.

Pretty fucking perfect.

HUSBAND

It was.

Pretty fucking perfect.

SON

And then we went our separate ways.

Me to the number 21 bus heading to Uptown in Minneapolis.

HUSBAND

And *me* to the 21 heading back to downtown St. Paul.

SON

I texted him on the ride home, "That was great."
And he texted back, "When can I see you again?"
And I did something I wouldn't ordinarily do.
I typed, "How about now?"
And I sent it.

HUSBAND

I got his text, "How about now?"
And I did something I wouldn't ordinarily do.
I typed, "Come over."

SON

And I did.

HUSBAND

And he did.

SON

He had a cute studio apartment on the third floor of a building that had once been a shoe factory.
It had floor to ceiling windows along one wall.

HUSBAND

We sat on the couch and drank and talked and watched the sunset.

SON

It was romantic.

HUSBAND

It was.

SON

And then we started kissing.
Because... why not?

HUSBAND

Right. Why not?

SON

We kissed on the couch.
And then we kissed our way to the bed.
And then we kissed on the bed with clothes.
And then... without.

HUSBAND

And we were in the middle of things.
In the middle of tangled sheets and heavy breathing and tongues and fingers everywhere.
Smack dab in the middle of naked newness and wonder when I got a bloody nose.

SON

A bloody fucking nose.

HUSBAND

It was summer, but early summer, and they hadn't turned on the A.C. in my building yet so the whole thing was wet.
Wet with sweat.
Wet with –
Well, let's just say we were already slick when I started to bleed.
And I was on top at that point so –

SON

And at first, he didn't notice cause his eyes were closed, which was honestly fine with me because frankly I find eye contact during sex to be a bit creepy.
And also, I wasn't quite sure what it was, the liquid dripping onto my face –

HUSBAND

And I mean, maybe I felt a little something?
Something trickling?
But I'm thinking that it's sweat cause it's hot as balls in my apartment and we're both of us sweating like pigs and so it's not until he starts sort of... sputtering, you know, that I look down
And—

SON

And it's massive, this bleed.
It's like someone turned on the tap full tilt or opened up a hydrant.
Like a full-on full-out gush.
Like—

SON gestures.

HUSBAND

And then he's yelling
And pushing me off of him
Panicked.
And I'm seeing red
Literally
On him
On me
On the sheets.

And I'm thinking "fuck, things were just starting to get good and now this"
 And
 "Fuck, he's going to leave and never come back"
 And then I'm not just thinking it, I'm yelling it, "fuck, fuck, fuck!"
 And I'm running to get him a towel
 To get both of us towels
 And fuck it's a mess
 A bloody fucking naked sweaty mess.

SON
 It's truly fucking awful.

HUSBAND
 Truly fucking awful.
 And well, gross.

SON
 Mm-hm.

HUSBAND
 Frankly, it was gross.
 And unsanitary, in so far as sex is a sanitary act.
 And yeah, obviously, obviously, it was incredibly horrifyingly embarrassing.
 But then...

HUSBAND remembers.

HUSBAND
 This... jerk... started to laugh
 Like hysterically
 Maniacally almost
 Unhinged

And because he's laughing
 At the blood
 And the mess
 And the... fucking situation
 I start laughing, too

I start laughing
 And we're both of us laughing
 And suddenly
 There's no emergency
 No crisis
 There's just...

SON
Us.

HUSBAND
Yeah.
Making a memory.
And then we're kissing.

SON
Again

HUSBAND
Right, again
And our hands are everywhere
SON
Again

HUSBAND
And then we're back on the bed
And he says with a slight smile,

SON
"Take two?"

HUSBAND smiles, remembering.

HUSBAND
He moved in three months later.
Which is like five years in gay time.

[RESET]

4.

MOTHER

People often ask me if we're close.

That's how they ask it, too, "Are you and your son close?"

And, honestly, I'm never quite sure how to respond.

I'm never quite sure because, at least to my mind, it depends on a number of factors.

For example, the scale.

How are you defining closeness – or measuring it, for that matter?

What proofs of closeness qualify?

And if closeness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, what does it look like to you?

I mean, it's an impossible question to answer without clear criteria.

"Are you and your son close?"

What I *will* say is that he calls pretty regularly and leaves me messages, long ones, actually.

Funny ones.

Sometimes he sings to me through the phone because he knows that I like it.

Sometimes he texts "thinking about you" or "love you, mom," just because.

And he picks up the phone when I call him if he can.

I like to see him while we talk, so usually we FaceTime, which I know isn't his favorite, but he indulges me.

I know where in the world he is most of the time.

And I have a more than vague idea of what he's doing there.

But is that, all of those things, closeness?

Or am I missing something?

Because I know that there are things that other mothers do that I just don't.

Can't.

Never have.

Like photographs, for example.

I have never been the kind of mother to carry around photographs of my child, even when he was a baby, when it's at least understandable.

Back then people would ask, "Do you have pictures?"

And I would answer, "Actually, no,"

And they would look at me like, "Oh, that's weird."

Like "What kind of mother doesn't carry photographs of her child?"

And in my head, I would say, "Me, bitch."

But only in my head.

I remember, early on, I would occasionally run into other mothers in the grocery store or while filling my tank at the gas station and I would smile and say hello – like you do – and they would invariably flip open their wallets in search of the most recent snapshot of their child.

And I would “ooo” and “ahh” politely.

I would say things like, “Oh my god, would you look at that” and “Isn’t she darling?”

And when they would ask to see mine, I would say, “Oh, he looks just like his father”

And they would assume, because of the smile on my face, that that was a good thing.

And I will say that Simon does, in fact, favor his father.

He has his nose.

And his smile.

All of the Yarbrough men have this fantastic smile.

Wide.

Toothy.

Like a hug.

A truly defining feature.

Yes, he favors his father in most things cosmetic.

Except the eyes.

He got *my* eyes.

But is that closeness?

Physical resemblance?

She considers and then—

We make each other laugh.

That is maybe my favorite thing about our phone calls.

The laughter.

But is that a mark of closeness?

The ability to laugh together?

Because, if so, then yes.

If laughter is an indicator, if it’s proof, then I would say that my son and I are very close.

[RESET]

5.

SON, MOTHER and HUSBAND have gathered at the table.

SON

So when I was a kid, I loved to perform.

HUSBAND

Still do.

MOTHER

Mm-hm.

SON

Hush.

It started with church plays.

At Christmas time mostly.

And then summer theater.

And my mom made all my costumes.

MOTHER

Had me up 'til three in the morning—

SON

She swore she couldn't sew, but every time I was cast, she'd make that Singer hum.

And my shit always looked tight.

I remember she made me this plaid outfit when I played Ali Hakim, the peddler man, in *Oklahoma*.

Orange and red pants with a lime green vest.

HUSBAND

Lime green?

MOTHER

Lime green.

SON

I stepped out on stage for my first entrance and I got a standing ovation.

Or, well, my costume got a standing ovation.

Literally, every person in the audience got to their feet and clapped.

They hooted and hollered for those pants.

For that lime green vest.

You remember that?

MOTHER

That was the show you straightened your hair for.

SON

That was the show I straightened my hair for.

MOTHER

This one wanted a finger wave.

HUSBAND

No!

MOTHER

Oh yes.

SON

And she said, okay, even though she must have known it was a bad idea.
 And I sat in a chair in the kitchen and I leaned back against the sink while she applied the chemicals to my head and made sure they didn't burn my scalp.
 And six months later she held me while I cried because my hair was still straight, long after my scheduled senior picture appointment.
 "This is just what happens when you have good hair, baby," she said.
 "It takes."

MOTHER

It's true.

SON

I don't think I gave away a single photo; I was so embarrassed.
 My mom, in typical Ora Yarbrough fashion, hung the largest of the portraits on the wall in the living room.
 "I think it's beautiful," she said.
 "I think *you* are beautiful."

HUSBAND

I want that picture.

SON

No.

MOTHER whispers to HUSBAND.

MOTHER

I got you.

SON

And, see, my mom was the best kind of stage mom because she wasn't a stage mom at all. She was like, "you wanna do this theater thing, fine. I will support you, but I will not hound you and I will not do the work for you."

MOTHER

Never.

SON turns to MOTHER.

SON

She was remarkably hands-off while still always having my back.

I remember my senior year I was cast as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Atticus fucking Finch, y'all.

And people went crazy, and not in a good way, bumping me in the halls, and saying crappy things like, "Atticus Finch is white. Everybody knows that."

And "you're gonna ruin the book."

And "who the hell do you think you are?"

There was even an op-ed in the local newspaper, "The Desecration of a Classic Text."

I told my mom that this was happening, that people were angry with me, *at me* – though, clearly, I hadn't cast myself – and she was like, "fuck 'em."

I mean, she didn't say "fuck 'em."

My mom doesn't say "fuck," but essentially, that's what she said.

And she went to the school and gave the principal an ear full.

And she went to the school board and gave them an ear full.

And she wrote to the local newspaper and gave them an ear full.

And folks shut up.

Because my mom is fucking scary.

MOTHER

I can be.

SON smiles.

SON

You can be.

And because she was right.

And I was really good as Atticus.

Like really, really, good.

Like standing ovation good.

And not for my costume either.

HUSBAND

What did Hoyt think of *Mockingbird*?

SON

He didn't come.

HUSBAND

Oh.

SON

To that show

Or to *Oklahoma*

Or to any of my other performances as far as I know.

He was busy.

Or tired.

Or uninterested—

MOTHER

Simon—

SON

All I know is that I'd always look for him in the lobby afterward

I'd come out of the dressing room and scan the crowd

And I'd see my mom

Beaming

Which I always appreciated.

Which I *still* appreciate.

But she was always alone.

MOTHER considers her SON'S version of the story and then—

MOTHER

I think Hoyt took it personally

Now whether that was an appropriate response to Simon's artistic pursuits

That's not for me to say

But it felt to him, at least, like a kind of punishment

A punishment for...

Well, I couldn't say.

But for years Simon had played soccer.

HUSBAND

Wait, soccer?

MOTHER

And he'd been good

A real talent

And my husband had been one of his first coaches.

And Simon and his teams had done well under Hoyt's instruction.

And it had been something they could do together.

Something they'd both enjoyed.

But when Simon was in the fourth or fifth grade
He told his father that he didn't want him coaching his team anymore—

SON
Okay, ma—

MOTHER
He didn't like how Hoyt singled him out
Expected more from him than he did from the others
He'd said, "I'm the best player on the team. Why do you yell at me the most?"

And Hoyt had said, "I yell because you're the best. And because you can always be better.
And because you listen."

And Simon had said, "You don't have to yell at me to get me to do that."
And then he'd cried.

And then Hoyt had said, "Fine, if that's what you want."
And quit coaching the team.

And then Simon quit soccer altogether
And asked to sign up for a ballet class instead
Which...

beat

And Simon's father was...
Well, it's no wonder to me that he took it personally.

HUSBAND
Did you...?

SON
What?
Do it on purpose?
No.
No!

A look from MOTHER.

SON
What?
I didn't.
I was ten.

MOTHER
Old enough.

beat

SON
Why are we even talking about this?!

MOTHER
Because you make agreements
You make vows
To your husband
To honor them
To stand beside them
To stand *up* with them

Ephesians 5:22-24.

SON
Jesus, mom—

MOTHER
Ephesians 5:22-24.

HUSBAND
What's Ephesians 5:22-24?

MOTHER looks at SON.

SON
The husband is the head of the household.

HUSBAND
Oh.

MOTHER
Which is in no way a diminishment.

HUSBAND
Right.

MOTHER
In no way.

SON
Yeah, ok, mom.

MOTHER
Simon—

SON
Here's the thing,
"Honor your father and mother"
That's the verse that gets me.
And "Children obey your parents for this is good."

People think that honor means agree, that obey means yes, you're right, whatever you say, I'll do, but it doesn't.
It doesn't mean that.
It doesn't mean that at all.

beat

MOTHER
Well
I guess we'll just have to agree to disagree.

SON
Yeah

slight beat

Yeah, I guess so.

[RESET]

6.

MOTHER

I think your father thought that you would major in something practical.

In college, I mean.

Practical.

Or at least something with a more defined career path.

SON

Like law—

MOTHER

Or history.

You always liked history.

I think he thought that maybe you'd teach

Get a PhD

Be a professor

You know, something with a more assured outcome.

So when you decided to major in Drama...

SON

Which I'd promised not to do.

MOTHER

It wasn't so much about the promise.

SON

It was one hundred percent about the promise.

MOTHER

He just didn't understand

He said to me, "But he's so smart, he could do anything."

And I reassured your father as best I could, that you *would* be fine.

That you would succeed in whatever you chose to do because you were smart

Are!

I told him, "he'll find his way."

And you did.

Far, far, away from us.

After graduation, Simon moved to San Francisco.

And then after two years on the West Coast, he got into grad school, a playwriting program in

New York, and he moved there.

We found out later, that he'd met a man

And that they'd moved in together

And that that man had stabbed him.

Which I only knew because Simon called two weeks after it happened to tell us that he was “okay” and that we didn’t “need to worry.”
Children have an uncanny ability to break your heart.

SON

The Dean of the school strongly recommended that I go home.
She said, “you’ve suffered a trauma and I’m not sure that this is the best place for you right now.”
And I told her I couldn’t go home.
I told her that I was scared that if I went back to Kansas I would never leave.
That I’d be trapped in my hometown with you and dad for the rest of my life, which I know was a bit dramatic, but in the moment, the possibility of that, of being stuck, felt very, very, real.

Eventually, the dean relented.

She said, “you will go to therapy two times a week and you will come see me and report on your progress monthly.”
And I agreed to her terms.

I failed every one of my classes that semester.
Every single one.
Me, who had never failed anything.
Me, who had never received a grade lower than a B.

And then you came to New York.

MOTHER

You told me I didn’t have to come, but I insisted.
I booked a flight into LaGuardia and took a cab to your apartment.

SON

I buzzed you into the building and waited by the door.

MOTHER

When I arrived, he couldn’t look me in the face.
I asked to see where he’d been hurt and he undressed and showed me the scars.
I asked if I could touch them, and he nodded “yes,” and I did.
I ran my fingers over the keloids.
Like hills.
Like mountains on his skin.
And I kissed them.
All six.
Like I used to when he was a boy and he had an owie.
“All better,” I’d say.
I kissed all six
And the numerous defensive wounds on his hands and arms.
All six stab wounds in places where knives should never go.

SON

You started to cry
 And I grabbed a roll of toilet paper from the bathroom because I didn't have any tissue
 And you blew your nose and wiped your face.
 I remember I asked if you were hungry
 And you looked at me like you'd never heard of food before
 Like you'd forgotten you even had a stomach.
 I said, "I know a place"
 And you said, "All right"
 And I found my keys
 And you grabbed your purse
 And we went out for Indian food.

[RESET]

MOTHER

My husband's response to Simon's... misadventure... was to read and pray.
 He went to the Christian bookstore in town and bought everything he could find on the subject of homosexuality.
 He went online and found people, Christian people, who were talking about homosexuality, and he met with them.
 He went to conferences where he met men who had slept with other men, men who had at some point in their lives believed themselves to be homosexual, but who had since found God and repented of their sin.
 He started a group at our church for these men and men like them, men who were struggling with their sexuality and their faith.
 He talked with them.
 Got to know them.
 Invited them to our house for dinner.
 Gave them rides.
 Answered their late-night calls.
 Cried with them.
 Laid hands on them.
 And tried to understand our son.

SON

They'd call
 And I'd answer
 But we never had much to say to each other.

My mom would ask about school
 Or the apartment.
 She'd ask if I'd seen anything good lately on
 "The Broadway."

My father would ask about the weather
 Or about the books he'd sent
 Books with titles like *Healing Homosexuality*
 And *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*
 And my personal favorite, *You Don't Have to be Gay*.
 Seriously?!
You Don't Have to Be Gay?!

MOTHER

My husband told me that many of the men he'd met who had engaged in sexual acts with other men had been abused when they were young.
 That some man, usually older and often a family member or some other trusted person, had taken advantage of them, guilted them or forced them... seduced them into...

He told me that he believed that Simon had been abused, that he couldn't think of any other explanation, any other reason why our son could believe himself to be gay.

SON

I went home for a visit.
 It was maybe Thanksgiving?
 And I remember the weather was awful.
 And my dad was like, "let's go for a drive."

MOTHER

I told Hoyt that I didn't think it was a good idea.
 But he wanted to talk to Simon and he wanted to do it in private
 So they left in the car with ice falling from the sky.

SON and MOTHER'S lines in this section are simultaneous.

SON

I'm sitting there in the passenger seat
 And my dad is talking.

MOTHER

He's telling our son about how he'd been laying gas pipe in the neighborhood
 And how they'd had to use jackhammers on the ground...

SON

Saying things.
 Words presumably.
 In English even.

MOTHER

...because this was after the first freeze of the season

And how they'd found rock on the way down and how that was going to cost the developers a pretty penny.

SON

Words I'd definitely heard before, but that in that moment, meant nothing to me.

MOTHER

And then my husband ran out of things to say about the pipe and the rock and so he moved on to the thing he really wanted to say, which was—

SON

Where did it happen?

Was it at church?

Or at school?

Was it one of your teachers?

Or a youth group leader?

A coach?

And all I want to do is unbuckle my seatbelt.

All I want to do is unbuckle my seatbelt and unlock the door and run, to get the fuck out of that car and away from my father who has literally never misread a situation so badly – and he's a classic mis-reader of situations.

All I want to do is escape, but it's raining down ice outside, like the fucking eleventh plague, and I have no clue where we are because he has literally driven me to a neighborhood that might as well have been at the end of the fucking earth!

MOTHER

I heard the front door slam.

And then feet on the stairs, too fast to be my husband's.

And I called up

I called up, but you didn't answer—

SON

No shit, I didn't answer!

MOTHER

So I pulled on my coat and I went out and I slid in next to Hoyt and I asked him if everything was all right

And he just stared out the windshield at the bullets of ice buffeting the hood of the car.

And that's when he said it.

“He wasn't touched.”

He turned his head toward mine and took my hand.

There were tears in his eyes—

SON

Tears, mom?

Really?

MOTHER

There were tears in his eyes.

And he said,

“Simon says he wasn’t touched.”

A beat and then SON exits.

MOTHER and HUSBAND look at each other, then HUSBAND exits.

After a long while, MOTHER sits.

[RESET]

PERSONAL USE ONLY

7.

HUSBAND

It's weird when you meet someone and you like them.

You like them a lot.

And you're getting to know them, but there are parts of them that you just don't understand.

Can't understand, really.

And I mean, you try.

You listen, right?

And you try to be sympathetic – empathetic even, to the extent that you can be – but it's like...

It's like there's this chasm.

Or... no.

Chasm's too harsh.

It's like...

It's like that one channel on your TV that doesn't quite come in clearly.

And so you keep moving the rabbit ears, you keep wiggling them around, because you know that there's a combination of angles that's going to work, that's gonna clear things right up...

but it never quite does.

You think, okay, so his parents don't believe in homosexuality.

Or, well, they know it's a thing, but they think it's a sin.

And they've never accepted him – or, well, that part of him anyway – and they've never acknowledged any of his boyfriends, but they're gonna love you!

That's what you tell yourself.

That they're going to love you because they'll see how much he loves you and how much you love him.

You tell yourself that that will change everything.

But it's not that easy.

beat

When Simon met my parents, it was like...

Well, he fit right in.

We went for dinner at their house and he brought my mom flowers from the farmer's market.

Ranunculi.

She loved them.

And I could tell by dessert that they loved *him* too.

Or, well, not loved, but, well, you know... *liked* him.

I could tell that they could see what *I* liked about him.

MOTHER appears.

She straightens the table.

HUSBAND

I met *his* parents a year later.

It was summer and Simon had just gotten back from a writing residency on the east coast.

He'd been gone for four weeks and it was early enough in our relationship that four weeks away from each other still felt like an eternity... so his return was a big deal.

And we'd celebrated with cocktails and takeout and sex.

Lots of cocktails, lots of takeout and lots of sex.

So we were both pretty out of it.

So out of it, in fact, that when his phone started to ring at two in the morning it took two cycles to rouse us.

So out of it, that Simon neglected to check the number before he answered the phone.

I remember him saying, "Hello?"

And then, "Mom, what's wrong?"

And then, his voice – up an octave – "What do you mean you're here?"

And the thing is, we'd known that they were coming.

His parents.

They'd been at a family reunion in Chicago that weekend and they'd called a few days earlier to say that they were thinking about stopping by to see us – well, him – on their way back to Kansas.

And we'd made plans to meet them for breakfast, but that wasn't supposed to be for another eight hours.

And I remember hearing Simon say, "Yeah, of course, of course. I'll be right down."

And then he hung up the phone and I said, "What's going on?"

And he said, "My parents are here."

And I said, "What?"

And he said, "They're downstairs."

And I said, "What!"

And he said, "Did you really not hear me?"

And I said, "Holy fucking shit."

And then we were both pulling on clothes

Frantically

Dementedly

Pulling on clothes

And then I was stripping the sheets off the bed

And stashing the lube

And hiding the empty liquor bottles – of which there were many – while he went down to retrieve Ora and Hoyt.

By the time Simon returned with them in tow I'd re-made the bed, tidied the kitchen and combed my hair.

beat

I remember my first thought was that he looked like his dad.
 Like... just like his dad.
 Their faces.
 The shape.
 And they had the same smile.
 Wide and toothy.
 Warm.
 Like a hug.
 They could have been twins, almost, except for the eyes.
 He definitely got his eyes from his mom.
 Anyway, they stepped into the apartment and Simon said, "guys, this is Abe."
 And I extended my hand and said, "It's so nice to finally meet you. Please, make yourselves at home."

We gave them the bed and we slept top-to-toe on the couch less than twenty feet away – one of the drawbacks of a studio.

I say slept, but what I mean is, not a wink.
 I say slept, but what I mean is, we counted down the minutes until we could stop *pretending* to be asleep.
 The minutes until his parents would climb into their car and pull away from the curb and our life could go back to normal.

At breakfast, later, Simon's father insisted on saying a prayer.
 We held hands, which I couldn't help but feel a bit self-conscious about, and Simon and his mother bowed their heads.
 Hoyt began, "Dear Heavenly father..."
 He went on for five minutes.

I don't remember what we talked about after the prayer
 Though I do remember what *wasn't* discussed.
 Namely me.
 Namely us.
 They didn't ask a single question about my family or my work.
 About how Simon and I had met.
 Or about our plans for the future.
 His father just... talked about the weather.
 I remember that.
 And I also remember that when we were done with the meal, Hoyt ordered a cinnamon roll "to go."

beat

When we decided to get married, Simon told me that his parents probably wouldn't come to the wedding.

He said it would go against everything they believed in – the Biblical idea that marriage is a union between one man and one woman.

He said, “we don’t have to invite them.”

But I couldn’t not.

It just... didn’t seem right.

For them not to know.

For us not to tell them.

For them not to get to make a choice.

And so, we did.

We sent them an invitation.

And we didn’t hear back.

The RSVP deadline passed and we needed to confirm our chair order with the rental company so Simon called.

And his father answered.

And they said their hellos.

And then Simon asked him, “Are you and mom planning on coming to the wedding?”

And there was a long pause.

And I thought for a moment that maybe Hoyt hadn’t heard him or that the connection was bad or that he’d accidentally dropped the phone.

I had a hundred thoughts. More, maybe.

And Simon said, “Dad, are you still there?”

And after a moment, I could hear his father say something back, though I couldn’t make out the words.

And Simon nodded.

And after a while, he said, “Okay, good to know.”

And then he hung up the phone.

I asked him, “So what did he say?”

And Simon turned to me and in a perfect imitation of his father he said, “Yeah, I don’t think we’re gonna be able to make it to that.”

beat

It’s possible that it was for the best, them not coming.

Because if they had then Simon would have spent the whole day watching them, wondering about them, worrying about them, about their feelings and their faces, and not enjoying what the day was supposed to be about... *us*.

Me and him and our commitment to each other.

“For better or worse, in sickness and in health.”

He would have missed all of that.

So, in the end... I’m glad they stayed home.

MOTHER

They went to Paris for their honeymoon
 Which I only know because I'd requested Abe as a friend on Facebook and he'd accepted.
 I'd been surprised, actually, because we'd only met the one time and it had been late and for
 most of the visit, we'd been asleep.
 And then breakfast had been rushed because Hoyt had wanted to get back on the road...
 And then we hadn't gone to their wedding, which...

And even though it had been on principle, our decision to not attend, I'd have understood if
 Abe had declined.
 He didn't owe me anything after all.
 He was not my child.
 But he didn't decline.
 And I was grateful for that.

beat

Simon called us on New Year's and Hoyt put him on speaker.
 (He'd just figured out how to put people on speaker.)
 When Simon said, "Mom, dad, Abe and I are engaged," the first word out of Hoyt's mouth was
 "No."
 And Simon had said, "Excuse me?"
 And Hoyt had quoted scripture into the phone.

Months later, we received the invitation in the mail and I'd stuck it on the refrigerator with
 the rest of the announcements.

beat

I'd be lying if I said that I hadn't thought about my son's wedding day.
 That I hadn't seen it in my mind's eye the way that mothers see their children's futures, full of
 success and every good thing.
 And I'd be lying if I said that I hadn't imagined it differently.

I'd imagined the woman who would love my little boy.
 The woman that my little boy would love.
 And I'd prayed for her every day.
 From the day Simon was born, I'd prayed that she would be patient and kind, strong and
 compassionate.
 That she would be a woman of God.

And even when he told us he was gay, that he *thought* he was gay, and I'd known, I'd known...
 But I'd kept praying because... well, because right is right and wrong is wrong and a belief isn't
 a belief unless you hold tightly to it even when it's hard.

MOTHER looks at HUSBAND.

MOTHER

And it's not that you hadn't seemed nice.
 You had.
 You'd seemed like a very nice young man.
 Tall.
 Polite.
 White.
 Which I didn't have a problem with.
Don't have a problem with.
 White people.
 Some of my best friends are white.
 And Simon grew up with white people.
 Surrounded by them.
 And it was never a problem.

None of the boys that my son had brought home in the past had been a problem.
 The "friends" that he'd brought home at holidays because they didn't have anywhere else to go.
 They'd all been white—

MOTHER corrects herself.

MOTHER

Nice!
 I mean, they'd all been nice.

But...

Well, it's just...

It's just not what I'd...

beat

We'd discussed it, Hoyt and I, the wedding, the same way that we'd discussed everything in our marriage – money, hopes and dreams, parenting styles – though I'd already known what the outcome of that particular conversation would be.

I'd known that Hoyt would say "no" to going.
 That he would say, "It's not right."
 And that I would... acquiesce.
 Because he was right.
 Because I knew he was right.

Still, I felt...

Well...

I felt.

Cause a mother can't help but feel.

beat

After we declined the wedding invitation we didn't speak.

Me and Simon.

Simon and his father.

Not for many months.

No calls.

No texts.

No Facetime.

He was angry.

Understandably.

Unfortunately, but understandably.

And Hoyt was stubborn.

So very stubborn.

And I...

And I requested Abe friendship on Facebook because Simon rarely posted and it was the only way for me to see what was going on in his life.

So that's how I knew you'd gone to Paris.

[RESET]

8.

HUSBAND

He was out of breath for most of that trip.
Our honeymoon.

We were staying in Montmartre
And he had trouble going up and down the hills
And climbing stairs
And, frankly, walking for more than twenty minutes at a time.
And he was always cold
In the apartment, even though we cranked up the heat
And outside, even though the temperature was mostly in the fifties and sunny and he wore three layers at all times.

Two weeks in he developed a cough
Fifteen minutes of hell every morning.
He took Dayquil to keep it under control and popped a shit ton of ibuprofen.

I told him, "Babe, you need to go to the doctor."
And he said –

SON

"I don't like doctors."

HUSBAND

And I said, "But you like the cough?"
And he said –

SON

"It'll go away, just like the shingles."

HUSBAND

Right
I forgot to mention that he'd had shingles before the cough and the difficulty breathing and the chills
Like a year or two before.

And it probably should've been a tip off
A red flag that something wasn't right.
The doctor probably should have thought, "Hmm, a thirty-something year old man with a virus normally attributed to people over sixty, maybe he's got a compromised immune system."
But she didn't.
And because *she* didn't neither did we.

And, to be fair, he *had* gotten better
 The pain had subsided
 And the blisters had faded
 And so we hadn't thought any more about it.

But then it just got worse.

By the Spring, he couldn't breathe without coughing.
 And by the fall, it was starting to get in the way of his teaching
 (He was filling in for his former playwriting teacher)
 And he couldn't concentrate long enough in the evenings to grade
 And he could barely climb the flight of stairs to his office.
 He told me later that some mornings he'd had to crawl up them on his hands and knees.

And then the shingles came back.
 Not as bad as they'd been the first time, but they were bad enough.
 And everything together, the cough and the shingles and the struggle to breathe and the general
 crappy feeling he was feeling almost every minute of every day, eventually forced him to go to
 the doctor.

SON

I wasn't surprised... by the diagnosis.
 Or, well, I wasn't not *not* surprised.

I don't think that there's a gay man in America, in the world maybe, who hasn't thought about it
 at some point, who hasn't thought about what it would be like to have it, to be told that you have
 it.

And so in a way it felt... not inevitable, but... I don't know.
 In a way it felt like it had been waiting for me for a very, very, long time.

beat

Abe knew the moment I stepped out into the waiting room.
 He saw my face and he knew.
 Which I knew because his face went all screwy, the way it gets when he's trying not to cry,
 which never works because he always cries.

And I said, "let's get out of here," because I really didn't want to be there anymore and
 because crying in a place like that was pretty much a cliché and I try to avoid clichés.
 And he followed me out to the car and we got in and we sat there staring out the windshield,
 knowing something, something we'd never wanted to know, but kind of mostly already did, even
 before I'd scheduled the appointment.

And after a long time, I said, "well, at least now we know."
 And he said, "yeah."
 And I said, "you should get tested."

And he said, “yeah.”
And that’s when I started to cry.

And see, I was cool.
Or, well, okay, not cool, but like okay with me being sick because I could handle it.
Because, I don’t know, I’m Black, right?
And whether you like it or not there’s a kind of toughness that comes with that, a toughness that you have to have even if you don’t necessarily want to have it.
It’s yours.
Because of who you are and the skin that you’re in and because the world we live in is shitty and fucked up that way.

I knew I could handle it.
But him?
So I cried.
And he cried.
Right there in the car in the parking lot of the clinic.
Two clichés.
Justified, perhaps, but still...

And then at some point we stopped.
We dried our tears and we turned on the car and we drove to Kroger and bought tortilla chips and cheddar cheese to make nachos.
And we didn’t cry about it again.

[RESET]

HUSBAND
We didn’t tell anyone.
That was Simon’s decision.
He’d said we’d tell people once it was under control
Once we’d settled into a rhythm with the pills
And started to see improvement
Once we knew that he was going to be okay.
And I’d agreed that that was the best course of action.

So when we left Ohio to drive to Kansas to spend Christmas with Simon’s parents, a plan we’d made before his diagnosis, we weren’t planning on telling them.

Telling wasn’t even...
Well, it wasn’t even a thing.

But we woke up that morning, the morning we were supposed to leave, and the house was freezing cold.
The power had gone out at some point during the night and there was no heat – no hot water,

no fridge – so we decided to leave early, hours earlier than we would have otherwise, and so certain things were rushed that shouldn't have been rushed.
 Things that should have been thought about didn't get thought about, didn't get thought through.

Like the pills.

We should have thought through the pills.

SON

The doctor prescribed Genvoya and two others to bolster my immune system.
 Because I was teaching and we weren't sure about the side effects of the meds, we'd decided that it would be best to wait to start taking them until the beginning of Christmas break.
 That way, whatever the reaction, I'd have a few weeks to acclimate before returning to class.
 So that morning – the no heat morning, the cancelled ten am class morning – we decided to leave for Kansas early.
 And I swallowed all three medications as we headed out the door

HUSBAND

And maybe twenty minutes into the trip, Simon started to squirm in the passenger seat.
 I asked him, "is everything okay?"
 And he said, "I think something's wrong."

SON

The skin on my arm had started to burn.
 Or, well, at least that's what it felt like.
 Like burning.
 Like someone had set fire to my arm.
 The right one first and then the left.
 And then it spread to the rest of my body.
 To my shoulders and my thighs.
 To the top of my head.
 Even the palms of my hands felt like they were burning.

And then I started to itch.

This was on top of the burning.

I started to itch.

And it was like a million tiny creepy crawly things were swarming over every inch of my body.

Like I was covered in ants from head to toe, from fingertip to fingertip.

Like they were under my eyelids and my armpits.

Inside my ears and my nose and my mouth.

Like my flesh was crawling on itself, over itself, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

And I couldn't get comfortable.

No matter what I did I couldn't get comfortable.

HUSBAND

He was all over the place.
Sitting up.
Reclined.
Slouched to the right.
Then to the left.
Then his body was pressed against the door.
Then his head was out the window.

SON

Nothing helped.

HUSBAND

And I watched him writhe.
Watched him suffer in the seat to me.
And I asked him, “Simon, do we need to turn around? Do we need to go back home?
Simon!”
And all he would say was—

SON

I don’t know, I don’t know—

SON + HUSBAND

I don’t know—

SON

And that’s when my stomach... exploded.
Well, not – I mean, it didn’t literally explode.
But there was a sharp pain, like a kick, to my mid-section, like a blade ripping through flesh and hitting bone.

HUSBAND

And then he screamed.
Sudden and loud.
And I was so surprised that I swerved into the left lane, into on-coming traffic, and then, realizing my mistake, swerved back, and nearly launched us off the highway.
And he yelled, “Shit, Abe!”
And I yelled back, “Sorry, sorry! Fuck!”

beat

SON

We drove in silence for a while after that.
Letting the shock subside.

HUSBAND

And then he started to moan.
 Like... And I'd never heard anything like it before.
 Like that moan.
 And I said, "we're turning around."
 And I started to look for an exit.
 "We have to turn around."
 And he said –

SON

There's no heat at the house.

HUSBAND

And I remembered the power outage.
 And how cold the house had been when we'd left.
 And how the school had sent out an email saying that they were doing their best to restore the power, but that they weren't sure how long it would take.
 Maybe all weekend.
 And I thought to myself, "how the fuck are we going to do this? How the—?!"
 And Simon said, "I'm fine. I'll be fine. Just keep driving."

beat

SON

I made it seven hours.
 Seven.
 Curled up on the passenger seat before I told Abe that we had to stop.

HUSBAND

And I pulled off the highway and we got a room.
 I ran him a hot bath.
 We ordered food, but he barely ate.
 We turned on the TV, but he barely watched.
 I rubbed his back.

SON

Abe said, "Well, at least, now we know."

HUSBAND

And Simon said, "I can't believe that this is my life."
 And he cried himself to sleep.

beat

The next morning, Simon said, "I think we have to tell them."
 And I said, "Are you sure?"

And he said, “No, but I don’t think we have any other choice.”

I said, “Okay, so what’s the plan?”

And he said, “If they take it badly, and they might take it badly, then I think we should leave.”

And I wanted to ask him what taking it badly would look like.

I wanted to ask, “How will we know?”

But instead, I just said, “Okay.”

[RESET]

PERSONAL USE ONLY

9.

*The room is transformed.
 Christmas tree.
 Christmas lights
 A Christmas wreath on the wall.
 Red napkins on the table.*

MOTHER

I'm putting the finishing touches on dinner when they arrive.
 Hoyt calls out, "They're here," and I wash my hands and join him at the front door.
 We watch them climb out of their car.

HUSBAND

I grab the suitcases from the trunk and help Simon up the stairs.

MOTHER

I can tell that something is wrong.

SON

We step inside the house and my mom gives me a hug.

MOTHER

Something is definitely wrong.

SON

And it's infinite, this hug.
 Or, well, infinite feeling.

HUSBAND

She holds onto him like she's never letting him go.
 Like she's never gonna let him go.

SON

And after maybe twenty seconds of hugging my dad says something like, "What are you trying to do, Ora? Squeeze the boy to death?"

HUSBAND

And it's a joke
 Or, an attempt at a joke
 And so we all chuckle, a nervous kind of chuckle
 And then Simon's mother untangles herself from Simon and we move into the dining room.

SON

The table's been set.
 Plates

Glasses
Silverware
Everything in place
There are red and green napkins for the holiday.
It looks beautiful.

MOTHER

I've made little place cards even though there are only four of us.
Simon and Abe are next to each other on the right side of the table
Hoyt is at the head
And I'm directly across from him.

HUSBAND

We all sit.
(His mother's made place cards)
And Simon's father says, "shall we pray?"
And Simon says

SON

Before we do that

HUSBAND

And I think to myself, "oh, shit, we're doing this now."

SON

Mom
Dad

HUSBAND

"We're fucking doing this now"

SON

I'm HIV positive.

HUSBAND

And the barometric pressure in the room plummets.

MOTHER

The words hit me like a slap.
Like a slap to the face or a punch to the gut, and I lose my breath.

SON

And I didn't want to tell you over the phone because this doesn't feel like the kind of thing you tell someone over the phone.

MOTHER

There isn't enough air.

SON

I went to the clinic with a cough and they took my blood and they ran tests and my white blood cell count was low

Like really, really, low

And they prescribed me meds

Which I took for the first time yesterday

And the side effects were awful.

Truly awful.

HUSBAND

And that's when Simon's father stands.

Pushing back from the table so quickly that his chair clatters to the floor.

MOTHER

It's sudden and ill timed

And I say, "Hoyt?"

And he waves his hand at me, "I'm still listening."

And crosses to the window.

HUSBAND

He crosses to the window

And I wonder if this constitutes them "taking it badly."

MOTHER

And I'm thinking two things

I'm thinking, I knew it, I knew something was wrong.

And I'm also thinking, no, more like willing Hoyt to sit back down.

SON

The doctor said that if things don't level out in two weeks, we'll try a new approach.

HUSBAND

At this point, Simon is squeezing my hand so tightly my fingers are turning blue.

MOTHER

I tell myself not to look away.

Even though I feel bludgeoned, I tell myself not to look away.

I tell myself to fix my face.

To blink.

To breathe.

All the involuntary things, I tell myself to do.

SON

I want you to know that I'm okay.

HUSBAND

Simon says that, he says, "I want you to know that I'm okay," and his father puts his hand on the glass.

SON

I'll be okay.

MOTHER

And in that moment, I'm jealous of him, of my husband, standing at the window, his back to me, to our son, to our son's friend...

MOTHER corrects herself.

MOTHER

Husband, to his husband, to his announcement.

Jealous because he's always been able to do that, somehow, to turn away.

And furious because that always meant that I couldn't.

HUSBAND

And then I'm alternating between watching Simon's father's stiffening back and the war that's raging on Simon's mother's face and wondering which one is going to break first and what would that break look like and simultaneously strategizing the quickest escape route to the front door when Simon says,

SON

Abe's taking good care of me so you don't have to worry.

MOTHER

And he says that.

He says, "you don't have to worry," and I can't help but think about the last time he'd said those words to us.

How he'd said them after he'd been stabbed six times.

HUSBAND

And it's quiet.

Like silent.

Like no one's even breathing.

When his father clears his throat.

beat

SON

And it's hilarious, really.
His timing.
Hilarious.
And also, not hilarious at all.

MOTHER

Hoyt clears his throat and I'm thinking, "No, Hoyt. No, no, no. Now is not the time or the place for whatever it is that you're about to say."
Because I know my husband.
Because I've been knowing my husband and my son and all the things for a long, long time.

SON

And my mom has this expression on her face like, "please."
This look like, "be gentle."
And I realize that I've seen that look before.

MOTHER

I feel my face getting hot.

SON

I saw it after I quit the soccer team.

MOTHER

And I can feel myself start to shake.

SON

I saw it after I told my parents I was gay.

MOTHER

And I realize that I'm shaking because I'm afraid.

SON

I realize that my mom has been giving my dad that look for years.

MOTHER

I'm afraid that whatever Hoyt says next, that whatever *we* say next, will end us.
That whatever closeness we have – that I have to Simon, with Simon, that he has to me, to his father – that it is tenuous at best.
Weakened by years of, I don't know, an unwillingness to bend.
An unwillingness to see our son, to truly see him, and not the way we *want* to see him, but the way he *needs* to be seen.

SON

And I'm looking at my mom who is looking at my dad who is looking out the window
And none of us is saying anything or moving or breathing even.
And Abe is holding my hand.

HUSBAND

And I'm looking at Simon
And I'm sending him messages with my mind, "I'm not letting go."

SON

He's still holding my hand.

MOTHER

And I'm thinking about the day that our son told us that he was gay, and how he'd done exactly what we'd taught him to do.
He'd been honest.
And how we had met his honesty with, "Do you want to see a therapist?"
And "Maybe don't tell anyone."

HUSBAND

"I'm never letting you go."

MOTHER

And I wonder if before that moment, we'd been the kind of parents that he'd felt he could confide in
And if, in that moment, we'd shattered his trust.
Had he needed us to say that it was okay?
Or knowing that we *couldn't* say that – that we *couldn't* say that it was okay – had he just needed us to say that we loved him?

HUSBAND

And it's been quiet for a good minute, maybe two, when Simon's dad turns.
He turns away from the window and he looks at Simon's mom at the foot of the table and at me and Simon on the right.

MOTHER

And I feel my face getting wet.

SON

I feel Abe's hand in my hand.

MOTHER

And I realize that I'm crying.

SON

I can feel his pulse.

MOTHER

And I see that Hoyt is crying, too.

HUSBAND

I watch as Simon's dad licks his lips

SON

And I realize that our hearts are beating together.

HUSBAND

He opens his mouth to speak when Simon's mother yells—

MOTHER

Stop!

Just...

Stop!

MOTHER breaks a plate.

[BLACK]

PERSONAL USE ONLY

10.

*The room is slightly illuminated.
Everything is as it was at the end of the last section.*

MOTHER (V.O.)

I remember we used to play this game when he was little.

Me and Simon.

Or, well, I guess it wasn't really a game

So much as a thing?

You know

Like a thing we did.

SON (V.O.)

Like a bit.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Yeah, like a comedy routine.

Only it wasn't really a routine

It was just

Well

SON (V.O.)

Us.

MOTHER (V.O.)

It was just the way we were with each other.

He'd say—

SON (V.O.)

You tell me your secret and I'll tell you mine.

MOTHER (V.O.)

And he would always say,

"I love you."

(That was always his secret, "I love you.")

HUSBAND (V.O.)

So cute.

SON (V.O.)

And *she* would always say—

MOTHER (V.O.)

I love you back.

SON (V.O.)
Which actually wasn't a secret
Like at all really.

*MOTHER moves to SON.
She embraces him.
They embrace each other.*

SON (V.O.)
Because I knew that she loved me.
That you loved me.
I knew.

MOTHER (V.O.)
I should hope so.

SON (V.O.)
And you knew that I loved you.

*MOTHER extends her arm.
HUSBAND joins the embrace.*

MOTHER (V.O.)
I did.
I still do.

*MOTHER, SON and HUSBAND embrace.
An act of munificence.
Until—*

BLACKOUT.

—END OF PLAY—