

JANUARY 29, 2018

THE POLITICIAN

"PILOT"

WRITTEN BY
RYAN MURPHY
BRAD FALCHUK
IAN BRENNAN

RYAN MURPHY TELEVISION

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. COPYRIGHT © 2018 TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION. NO PORTION OF THIS SCRIPT MAY BE PERFORMED, PUBLISHED, REPRODUCED, SOLD, OR DISTRIBUTED BY ANY MEANS OR QUOTED OR PUBLISHED IN ANY MEDIUM, INCLUDING ANY WEB SITE, WITHOUT PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT OF TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION. DISPOSAL OF THIS SCRIPT COPY DOES NOT ALTER ANY OF THE RESTRICTIONS SET FORTH ABOVE.

EXT. UPSCALE HOUSE -- DAY

A CHYRON READS: SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA. FALL.

Nice house, but not a mansion. A GARDENER MOWS the LAWN methodically. Finishes. The SPRINKLERS COME ON.

PRELAP -- sounds of SEX.

INT. RIVER'S HOUSE -- RIVER'S BEDROOM -- DAY

TIDY but also SPORTY. MASCULINE. Find RIVER, also tidy but also sporty and masculine. 17. Having sex with his pretty girlfriend, ASTRID. He's distracted by something. She calls his name. He keeps going, but studies her face. She opens her eyes to see him looking at her. They stop.

ASTRID

Are you okay? Did you finish?

RIVER

I've noticed that when we have sex, no matter what I do, you seem to really enjoy it.

ASTRID

Isn't that a good thing?

RIVER

It's just very hard to believe that would be possible. I know for me there are things that feel better than other things.

(then)

I feel like maybe you're faking it sometimes.

ASTRID

I am.

(off his look, sweet)

You're a 17-year-old boy. I don't expect you to know how a woman's body works until you're thirty -- but you're so thoughtful and giving, so I'm confident you will.

RIVER

But I don't like you pretending. Aren't we supposed to be generating intimacy?

ASTRID

Sure. But mostly we are giving you self-confidence so that you can become the man I know you can be. I know you watch porn, your brain is wired to enjoy sex that is presentational.

RIVER

I don't want presentational. I want authentic.

ASTRID

I'll do better at appearing authentic from now on.

RIVER

I don't want you to appear authentic, I want you to be authentic.

ASTRID

I don't understand. What's the difference?

River rolls off of her. Sits on the edge of the bed. She smiles. Comes up behind him. Cradles him.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Your problem is that you feel too much. The modern world isn't designed for men like you. I promise to be real from now on. But you also have to accept that you're the love of my life, but you will never be the fuck of my life.

She kisses him. Gets up and gets dressed. He just sits there.

RIVER

Where are you going?

ASTRID

I have a surf lesson. We're going back to Hawaii this Christmas and I refuse to let my father call me a Barney and vanquish me to the ankle busters. Let there be one place he doesn't see me as a disappointment.

RIVER

He thinks you're great.

ASTRID

He thinks I'm pretty and he likes pretty things.

The thought of her father makes her melancholy. She pushes the feelings away. Starts out.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to stop me? There have been two great white shark sightings off of Surf Beach near Vandenberg.

RIVER

Is that where you're going?

ASTRID

No. I'm going to Cojo Point.

He rolls on to the bed. Facing away from her. She watches him for a beat. Unsure what to make of him. Leaves.

River lays there. Then goes to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

While he pees he looks out the window. Sees Astrid getting into her CONVERTIBLE BMW and driving away. His face reveals nothing.

INT. RIVER'S HOUSE -- DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE on the STAIRS. River, in a ROBE, comes downstairs. He's out of view for a moment, then appears in the hallway and moves towards us.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

The MAID is cleaning. River walks down the hallway past the open kitchen door. Goes unnoticed.

INT. OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

River enters his father's office. Lots of woods and brown leather and red leather. Sports memorabilia. RIVER goes under the DESK. OPENS a TRAP DOOR in the floor to REVEAL a SAFE. He thinks. Then presses the DIGITAL CODE to open the safe. Inside is CASH. JEWELRY. And under all of that, the thing River is looking for. We don't see it yet.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

The maid still cleaning as River passes unnoticed again.

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

River enters. Closes the door. Sits on the bed. A beat, then he pulls out the HANDGUN he retrieved from the safe. Checks to make sure it's loaded. Looks around, almost cries then PUTS THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH. He takes a few quick breaths to get himself ready then...he hears a CAR SCREECHING IN to the driveway. Someone gets out. Slams the car door and starts BANGING ON THE FRONT DOOR.

River listens as the MAID opens the door and whoever just arrived starts SCREAMING at her. He hides the GUN under his PILLOW.

BANG BANG BANG! A fist SLAMS on the door then CRASHES open and PAYTON comes flying in, a volcano of rage, spit flying and tears streaking his face.

PAYTON

You TRAITOR!!! You son of a bitch!
You know how important this is to me! How DARE you run against me.

RIVER

I know. Just calm down and let me explain --

PAYTON

YOU calm down. SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU EVEN WANTED TO BE PRESIDENT??? This wasn't even your idea, was it???

RIVER

No! It was Astrid's idea -- !

PAYTON

Dammit, River --

RIVER (CONT'D)

But listen --

RIVER (CONT'D)

-- she said I had to do it if I was gonna have a shot at getting into Stanford and I had to do *something* to get my parents off my back!

PAYTON

(shutting him down)

SCREW. YOU. Do you not understand that you're going to beat me??? You're better looking than me, you're more popular, you're co-captain of the Lacrosse team --

RIVER

You're blowing this whole thing out
of --

PAYTON

(not letting up)

The moment you win I'm going to
tell *everyone* that we had sex and
that you're living a lie.

RIVER

(after a beat, stunned)

Payton.

PAYTON

I am WARNING you. DON'T SCREW UP MY
DREAM. I AM ON A SINGULAR PATH, DO
YOU UNDERSTAND ME? You are NOT
going to get in my way or I swear
to god, I'll make you pay. DON'T
MESS WITH ME, RIVER, ARE WE CLEAR?

Silence.

RIVER

I've never seen you like this.
I don't recognize this person...

PAYTON

I don't care! I am not a BOX. I
don't need to have four sides for
you to look at and approve of. I
have *FEELINGS*, Payton --

RIVER

These aren't feelings. This is just
rage --

PAYTON

THIS IS THE TRUE ME. This is who I
am. I am a WINNER. I will win at
ALL COSTS. I know what my future is
going to be and I know how to get
there and I will not be stopped.

Payton storms out as abruptly as he came in, leaving River
sitting on the end of the bed, stunned. He stares, alone,
trying to figure out what just happened.

TITLE CARD.

EXT. HARVARD CAMPUS -- DAY

Payton strolling through campus. Wearing a jacket and tie. Taking it all in. He's in love with the place.

PAYTON (O.S.)

It was a waking dream. The kind
that arrives in the twilight
between sleep and the real world.

He peeks inside windows to see a CLASS in session. The best and the brightest.

PAYTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That lucky out-of-this-world moment
when you can't tell the difference
between dreams and reality. I sat
straight up in bed and said out
loud --

INT. DEAN OF ADMISSIONS OFFICE -- DAY

Payton sitting across from DEAN LAWRENCE -- forties, horn-rimmed glasses, corduroy blazer. Right into lens:

PAYTON

I'm going to be President of the
United States.

Dean Lawrence sits back in his Harvard chair. Smiles.

DEAN LAWRENCE

That does seem to be the hot job
everyone aspires to nowadays. The
air of impossibility has been
removed.

PAYTON

I had that dream when I was seven
years old, Dean Lawrence. I've
spent my entire life studying the
lives of former presidents in order
to identify common experiences and
traits that led to their inevitable
election victories.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Such as?

PAYTON

I only went back as far as Ronald Reagan because as far as I'm concerned he created the modern presidency -- the presidency of television and celebrity. People think of their presidents as characters they see on TV -- most never actually see them in real life.

(then)

Reagan, Bush Sr. and Clinton were all presidents of their senior classes in high school.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Which I assume you are on your way to accomplishing.

PAYTON

I believe I have the election well in hand. Interestingly, Clinton, Reagan and Obama were born into poverty while the Bushes were both high-born.

DEAN LAWRENCE

How do you reconcile that with your master plan?

PAYTON

I have the good fortune of being born both rich and poor.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Your family has generational wealth.

PAYTON

True. My great-grandfather Adrien Hobart was one of the lesser known robber barons of the early twentieth century. While Rockefeller, Carnegie, J.P. Morgan and John Jacob Astor received most of the press clippings, Great-Great Grandpa Aiden was known amongst his peers for his unmatched ruthlessness and frugality.

(MORE)

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Yes, I am an heir to his name and at least a portion of his fortune, but I am also the only son of a cocktail waitress at the Landing Strip Gentlemen's Club in Laconia, New Hampshire.

DEAN LAWRENCE

You're adopted?

PAYTON

Yes. My birth mother was seventeen, undereducated. She belonged to what I like to call the vulnerable class of Americans who, by no fault of their own, are most likely to find themselves addicted to drugs, convicted of crimes or pregnant as teenagers. Mind you, my real mother was very careful to make sure that my birth mother -- who I like to call Marissa, even though I have no idea what her actual name was -- was drug free. Even more so, Marissa came from a family of ex-hippies who were well ahead of the curve in terms of nutrition and the avoidance of plastics, wifi and many of the other toxins that are known to negatively effect fetal health.

Dean Lawrence sits back. Takes a hard look at Payton.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Why Harvard, Payton?

PAYTON

To me, it's the obvious option and my only option. Harvard has produced more presidents than any other school -- seven.

DEAN LAWRENCE

I appreciate that. You're clearly a very well prepared young man. Polished.

PAYTON

Thank you, Dean Lawrence.

DEAN LAWRENCE

But I'm not here to see the polish.
If we were just looking at numbers
-- GPA, SAT, AP Test scores --
Harvard could just pick randomly
from the top thousand applications
and find a class of students who
all scored perfectly on every test
they had ever taken.

PAYTON

Are you concerned about my GPA?
Because I've been working very hard
to have Rumson Academy not include
physical education grades and I'm
being tutored in Mandarin...

DEAN LAWRENCE

I don't care about your grades, I
want to know you. The real you.

Payton doesn't quite understand. Dean Lawrence helps out.

DEAN LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Have you ever been compelled to go
meet your birth mother?

PAYTON

No. My real mother has always been
my greatest champion and closest
confidante. She's all the mother
I'll ever need.

DEAN LAWRENCE

When was the last time you cried?

PAYTON

I don't know. I never really do.

DEAN LAWRENCE

That's not possible.

PAYTON

I cried at the end of *It's a
Wonderful Life* last Christmas.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Everyone cries at the end of that
movie.

PAYTON

I know.

DEAN LAWRENCE

Did you cry because you were moved
or because you felt you were
supposed to?

PAYTON

Does it matter?

Dean Lawrence smiles. Not sure if Payton is joking.

INT. RUMSON ACADEMY AUDITORIUM -- DAY

A packed high-school auditorium. In the glare of the lights on stage, Payton and River each stand at a podium before a panel of STUDENT MODERATORS in the pit below. VICKI, a 17-year-old Megyn Kelly type, clears her throat.

VICKI

We have time for one more question each before closing statements. Payton. Mark Twain's classic novel *Huckleberry Finn* is part of this school's freshman year English curriculum. Do you believe racial epithets should be removed from *Huck Finn* before it is taught to students?

Payton clears his throat, then dives in.

PAYTON

First of all, thank you Vicki, for your many years of service as part of Yearbook Club. And thank you for such a thoughtful and provocative question.

(then)

There isn't an easy answer to that question, but I know that the office of President isn't about easy answers -- if a problem lands on the President's desk, that means it doesn't *have* an easy answer. So all I can give you is an *honest* answer.

(after a beat)

No. We should not be rewriting literary giants like Mark Twain.

(MORE)

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Mark Twain LOATHED racial inequality and through the eyes of Huckleberry Finn, he was attempting to shine a light on the heinous, shameful sin of slavery and the systemic racism that pervaded every aspect of life in the environment in which he was raised.

Nailed it. Payton takes a moment, pivots. He's got 'em in the palm of his hand. He goes full-on 'I feel your pain' mode.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

But make no mistake. The racism that Mark Twain wrote about has not been banished to the ash heap of history. It is with us in this room today. It's different, to be sure, more subtle -- but we have a long way to go towards true racial equality in this country and as student body President I will ensure that EVERY student at this school has an equal opportunity to succeed regardless of their religion, their socio-economic background or the color of their skin. I want each and every one of you to know that I do *solemnly* swear to stamp out discrimination wherever I see it -- whether it's based on color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, genetic information or disability. If you choose to honor me by electing me, I promise I will fight for *each and every one of you* and I won't give up so long as there is strength in me to fight. Give me your vote and help me lead this great school -- *into the future*.

Applause. Payton gives a satisfied sigh and smiles. Fucking SWISH. As the applause dies down, another moderator speaks. DAMIEN is 17 with premature hair loss.

DAMIEN

River. Last question. Should the school be able to limit the size of sugary drinks sold at Santa Barbara High?

A moment. River shakes his head, a little baffled. Payton clocks it, smelling blood.

RIVER
I mean...yes? No?
(then)
Who *cares*?

Laughter and applause rolls through the audience.

RIVER (CONT'D)
Honestly, Damien, thank you for that question, and I don't mean to sound rude, but I mean, come on. I think it's up to all of us to make smart choices about the food we eat but I hardly think that's the most *pressing* thing any of us are dealing with...

He seems to choke up a bit, like he's trying to find which train of thought to hop onto.

RIVER (CONT'D)
I mean, our parents are drinking too much or cheating on each other or getting divorced, we're staring down a future where we can't even hope to do better than they did, we'll be happy just to find a friggin' *JOB* -- we see our friends and neighbors are getting hooked on painkillers and getting caught pulling copper wire out of walls and stealing from their grandparents and *overdosing* on the floors of gas station bathrooms. I think teenagers today realize that this world is *dark*. It feels like the world is ending. So if a 42 oz. Mountain Dew makes you happy, I say *go for it*.

He chokes back a stinging lump in his throat.

RIVER (CONT'D)
Sometimes I think the only thing we share together is that we're all *alone*. And we take photos and we post them on our socials and we tweet and we Snap and we Insta and it all just makes it worse --
(after a beat)
I tried to kill myself last year.

The audience takes a collective breath. Payton's stomach drops into his shoes. WHAT THE FUCK. River fights the tears welling in his eyes.

RIVER (CONT'D)

I...I never told anyone that.

(then)

Yeah, I was feeling really depressed -- not depressed, really, just hopeless because I felt so alone and I was afraid I was always gonna feel like that. I stayed after lax practice to work out on my own, and something made me take a 45-lb. plate and walk over to the pool and the door was open, and I took the weight and I tied it to my ankle and I threw it into the deep end...

(wiping tears)

The second I did it, I regretted it. I was like "River, what did you just do," and I tried to untie the knot from my ankle and I couldn't lift the weight and I remember looking up at the surface of the water and thinking "no one is here to save you River, you are all alone."

(then)

The next thing I remember, I was floating at the surface -- good thing I was never in Boy Scouts where they teach you to tie a good knot because the rope just untied itself from the weight. If I were better at tying knots I'd be dead.

(then)

No one was there. And I don't ever want anyone else at this school to feel like that. I want to make sure we all look out for each other. No one should die alone. Every one of you should know that your lives have value and that you're important.

He bursts into tears, stepping back from the mic as the audience ERUPTS in support. He smiles, and nods, pulling himself together, feeling genuine love from a thousand of his peers. Through the din of the crowd:

VICKI

Thank you so much, River.
Candidates, it's now time for your
closing statements.

The audience not letting up, camera pushes EVER SO SLIGHTLY on Payton as he tries to focus. He steps to the mic and opens his mouth as we SMASH TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Payton angrily SLIDES all of the books and PAPERS off of a TABLE with a ROAR. The LIBRARIAN SHUSHES him.

MCAFEE and JAMES, senior couple, Payton's campaign managers and brain trust (ala Matalin and Carville) sit at the table, not surprised by Payton's outburst. Mcafee is dark and intense with sharp features; James is studious and brilliant and could be good-looking if he only cared enough to groom. Payton's girlfriend ALICE is there too. Puffing on a VAPE PEN. Alice is pretty, put together. A teen Hillary Clinton.

JAMES

We've spent most of last year sending ninth and tenth-graders out canvassing. Passing out and collecting questionnaires from the student body, collecting social media handles to create the most accurate polling process of any school in the state.

MCAFEE

People lie, numbers don't. River is ahead of you by ten points post-debate.

JAMES

And if you dig down into the tabs of the poll, he's leading you in looks, charisma and, most importantly authenticity.

MCAFEE

He's basically crushing you in that one. Especially after that master class he put on at the debate.

ALICE

Girls love it when a guy who looks like that cries. Not blubbery at all. More of a silent, sexy cry.

PAYTON

Fine! Why don't all of you go vote for him then?

MCAFEE

Our loyalty is with you, Payton. This is a plane. We're all headed to the same place. James and I are the navigators and you're the pilot. It's our job to tell you how bad the weather is up ahead, how much gas you have and if we may want to change course.

JAMES

Neither of us know how to fly like you can -- we need you to get us to the White House, but we wouldn't be doing our job if we weren't honest with you. If we don't tell it like it is we'll all crash.

PAYTON

So what is my next move?

JAMES

You need a running mate that softens you up. Someone undeniably real.

MCAFEE

My recommendation is that you find a student in the special ed class. I believe the proper modern vernacular term for them is "differently-abled."

JAMES

Your family once hired Pinkertons to bust up union organizers, you have three lesser Picassos in your housekeeper's room at home, Annie Leibowitz took your family Christmas card photo last year, you have a 4.3 GPA. You're untouchable. You need a running mate that can humanize you.

PAYTON

John McCain tried that. It was a historic disaster.

MCAFEE

You just need to find one that isn't mean spirited. They're usually extremely sympathetic and lovable.

PAYTON

Alice, what do you think?

She puts the vape pen down. Takes his face in her hands.

ALICE

I love you. Unconditionally. You are the frontman of my favorite rock band, you are the star of my favorite movie, you are my king of kings. Nothing is going to stop you from winning this election and turning this school upside down. But you've got to listen to your advisors. If they say you need a retard...

MCAFEE

Differently-abled.

ALICE

Then you get yourself the best retard in this place. But you have to go pick them yourself. You need to be comfortable with them.

Off Payton taking this in --

INT. SPECIAL ED DIVISION CLASSROOM -- DAY

Reveal Payton sitting across from MAGGIE HANSEN, Special Education Division head, as aides helps students in the background.

MAGGIE HANSEN

I mean, my special ed students have it so much harder than people realize. The other students at this school don't even talk to them -- they hardly even look at them -- so the thought that you'd be willing to consider one of them as your running mate, I mean, it just speaks volumes about what kind of a person you are, Payton. It is just so exciting. It could change the whole culture at this school -- it will change their lives.

(MORE)

MAGGIE HANSSSEN (CONT'D)
 So I promise, I will do *anything* it
 takes to help you out.

PAYTON
 Thank you.

MAGGIE HANSSSEN
 No. Thank *you*. God bless you,
 Payton. God *bless* you...

ANDREW (O.S.) (PRE-LAPPED)
 So you're going for the sympathy,
 vote, am I right?

EXT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL QUAD -- DAY

Payton walks alongside ANDREW CASHMAN, a sardonic sophomore
 with Cerebral Palsy in a motorized wheelchair.

PAYTON
 What do you mean?

ANDREW
 Well, it's not like we're *super
 good friends*. We've gone to school
 together for three years now and
 the most you and I have ever said
 to each other is 'hello.' So you
 obviously have some sort of
 strategy in mind...

PAYTON
 The only strategy I'm interested in
 is being a president for every
 student at this school, and that
 includes people like you who,
 traditionally, have not been well-
 represented in student government.

ANDREW
 What exactly does that mean?
 'People like me?'

Payton stops. Cut the shit.

PAYTON
 Come on. I mean someone with a
 disability. Someone who might enjoy
 sharing the spotlight for once and
 having a hand in changing the
 culture at this school. And
 'Student Body Vice President' looks
 pretty good on a college
 application...

Andrew consider this, then rolls on. Payton follows.

PAYTON (CONT'D)
So you're not even going to
consider it?

ANDREW
No, I'll consider it. But the
transcript thing isn't going to
help me. I got accepted into the
Engineering School at UC Santa
Cruz. They saw my prototype for a
robotic exoskeleton that could help
people like me to walk again.

PAYTON
That's -- that's *amazing*.

ANDREW
That was a joke. I didn't build a
robot skeleton. I just applied
early.

Payton smiles. He likes this kid.

PAYTON
Just think about it. I think you
and I could make a really good
team.

INT. SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION BUS -- DAY

Payton sits next to IVY, a girl with Down Syndrome as the bus
trundles down the road.

IVY
Joe Biden was Vice President. His
wife and his kids were killed in a
car accident.

PAYTON
That's right, but I -- I wouldn't
worry about that...

IVY
And then he found another wife and
then another one of his kids died.

PAYTON
That's...very true.
(changing the subject)
So what kind of music do you like?

IVY
Britney Spears. Insane Clown Posse.

PAYTON
Me too. So -- if you got the chance to stand up in front of the *whole* school, and you could say whatever you wanted, what would you say?

IVY
I don't know...

PAYTON
What do you want to get off your chest? Like, if you could change one thing, what would it be?

IVY
Everyone should quit being a faker.

Payton's a little taken aback. Didn't expect to hear that.

IVY (CONT'D)
Everyone pretends that they're nice, but they're all hiding something.

INT. SPECIAL ED CLASSROOM -- DAY

Payton sits with RICKY, a freshman with Asperger's, who stares down at the table where they sit in the corner of a special ed classroom doing self-contained study. Payton struggles with what to say.

PAYTON
So what do you make of Donald Trump?

RICKY
(too loud)
HE'S A DICK!!!

MAGGIE HANSEN (O.C.)
Shh. RICKY.

RACK TO: Ms. Hansen chiding him from across the room. Payton gives her a gamely smile. Then, turning back:

PAYTON
What about Barack Obama? Did you think he was inspiring --

RICKY
 (still loud)
 BORN IN KENYA! HE'S A MUSLIM!

MAGGIE HANSEN
RICKY.

Payton gives her a wave, like, "all good here!" Then:

PAYTON
 What about -- what kinda food do
 you like?

RICKY
 MUSLIM FOOOOOOOOD!!!

PAYTON
 O...kay.

MAGGIE HANSEN
 Alright, that's enough.

INFINITY ROSE (O.S. PRE-LAPPED)
 I'm just so happy to be alive!

INT. CAFETERIA -- DAY

Reveal Payton sitting across the table from INFINITY ROSE, a diminutive, seriously ill girl, 17. A pink head wrap covers her bald head and she speaks in the squeaky voice of a child half her age as she colors with a big box of crayons.

INFINITY ROSE
 I love when I can get outside into
 the *sunshine* and smell the *ocean* --
 OOOOOOO LOOK I DREW A TURKEY!!!

She giggles like it's Christmas morning. It's creepy, but Payton looks on, fascinated.

PAYTON
 Are you not eating lunch?

INFINITY ROSE
 No. With the chemo, I don't always
 have an appetite. My mom says I
 have to eat, but the medicine makes
 everything taste too spicy...

PAYTON
 (delicate)
 What kind of cancer is it?

INFINITY ROSE

All different kinds. I have multiple myeloma and non-Hodgkins lymphoma and then there are tumors all up and down my spine...

PAYTON

I'm so sorry to hear that. I can't imagine what that must be like. I mean, high school's hard enough as it is...

INFINITY ROSE

(brightly)

I just don't look at it that way. I feel like every day is a gift and every time I wake up, even if I have to go see Dr. Singhal for a platelet transfusion, I think to myself, a lot of kids around the world don't have the medical care I do, so if that's what I have to go through, then that's God's plan.

PAYTON

Wow. That's really inspiring.
(trying to pivot)
As you may know, I'm looking for a VP candidate because I'm running for student body President --

INFINITY ROSE

I know. I heard you were really good at the debate. Andrea said so. She's who takes notes for me when I can't be at school. I wish I could have been there but a lot of nice people heard about my chemo and paid for me to go to Disneyland with my nana and we got to skip all the lines and I got to meet Mickey and Minnie and Donald -- it was so much fun! Sometimes I wish I didn't have to grow up and I could stay a kid forever.

Payton takes in this creature, charmed. She notices.

INFINITY ROSE (CONT'D)

What? Why are you looking at me like that?

PAYTON

I don't know. I just really like
you, Infinity.
(then, wheels turning)
You're so *real*.

INT. OLIVE GARDEN -- NIGHT

Infinity sits in a wheelchair as she's rolled through an entryway lined with patrons holding those things that buzz and light up when your table is ready. PAN UP to find GRETA JACKSON, Infinity's grandmother, glamorous, beautiful, 65. She parks Infinity then walks to the hostess stand.

GRETA

Hi. We'd like a table for two?

HOSTESS

Sure. Do you have a reservation?

GRETA

Yes. Jackson. Greta and Infinity
Rose Jackson.

HOSTESS

(looking)

I'm sorry. I don't see a
reservation under any of those
names.

GRETA

Well that doesn't make any sense
because I definitely called.

HOSTESS

Sorry, we're fully booked until
9:30 -- would you like to make a
reservation for then?

GRETA

(outside voice)

Okay. I would like you to meet
someone.

She wheels Infinity over.

GRETA (CONT'D)

Infinity Rose? I'd like you to meet
Karen.

INFINITY ROSE

Hi, Karen!

HOSTESS
 (wanting to die)
 Hi...

GRETA
 You were really looking forward to
 eating here, weren't you?

INFINITY ROSE
 I sure was. I just got my feeding
 tube taken out and nana said we
 could come here to celebrate.

GRETA
 Why don't you tell Karen about your
 cancer.

INFINITY ROSE
 Yeah, I have really bad cancer all
 over my body.

GRETA
 Are you in pain sometimes?

INFINITY ROSE
 Yeah, but I try not to focus on it.

A middle-aged woman leans in, with her 8-year-old son.

WOMAN
 I'm sorry, I couldn't help but
 overhear --
 (re: her buzzer)
 We're ahead of you, but we'd really
 like you to have our table.

GRETA
 Oh, no, we couldn't...

WOMAN
 Please. I insist. And we'd like pay
 for your meal.

INFINITY ROSE
 Oh, that's so nice of you! Isn't
 it, nana?!

GRETA
 Thank you so, so much. I'm
 speechless...

WOMAN
 It's our pleasure.
 (to the mortified hostess)
 (MORE)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You really oughta be ashamed of yourself.

SMASH TO:

INT. OLIVE GARDEN -- NIGHT

INFINITY ROSE

So much food! It's so good!

GRETA

Don't eat too fast or you'll throw up. And remember, on Friday, we got free tickets to the Florida-Georgia Line concert. We'll be way up front in the handicapped section right next to the stage.

INFINITY ROSE

Free tickets? Wow!

GRETA

How was school today? I hope that biology teacher of yours didn't bother you about being behind in your schoolwork. I should have your radiologist give him a call and tell him you probably know more about biology than he does at this point.

INFINITY ROSE

School was okay. Payton asked me to be his Vice President.

GRETA

What? Who's Payton?

INFINITY ROSE

He's a boy who's running for school President and he asked me to be his running mate. He's rich I think, and he's really cute --

GRETA

(stunned)

Well, I hope you said 'yes!'

INFINITY ROSE

I said 'no.'

GRETA

What?! Why?!

INFINITY ROSE

I don't know. I felt like he was using me and I don't like to be used.

GRETA

Infinity *ROSE* --

INFINITY ROSE

I don't trust him. There's something about him --

Greta *SHOVES* the basket of breadsticks at her.

GRETA

You are going to finish your endless bread basket right now and then we are going right home and you are going straight to bed where I *hope* you will reconsider your decision.

INFINITY ROSE

But nana --

GRETA

Tomorrow you will march up to that boy and tell him, 'thank you very much, I will accept your offer.' This is something that could *CHANGE YOUR LIFE*. Do you *understand* me?

SMASH TO:

INT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- DAY

Payton eyes Infinity Rose standing at her locker, fumbling with the combination like a sad little shrunken elf. He approaches.

PAYTON

Hi, Infinity.

INFINITY ROSE

Oh, hi.

PAYTON

Listen, I was just wondering how your night was. I wanted to know if you've thought any more about my offer...

INFINITY ROSE

I've thought about it.

She turns squarely to him. Pointed:

INFINITY ROSE (CONT'D)
The answer is no.

PAYTON
Why?

INFINITY ROSE
I don't need to tell you.

She walks off, leaving Payton stunned.

MCAFEE (O.C.)
Payton!

McAfee and James spot Payton and run up.

JAMES
We have a problem.

EXT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL QUAD -- DAY

McAfee and James lead Payton as they run towards a crowd gathered around the steps. River is mid-announcement as he stands next to a bright-eyed African-American junior, SKYE.

RIVER
...but when you meet the right person, it just feels right. And suddenly you realize, this isn't a difficult decision at all. That's why I am proud to introduce my running mate, your next student body Vice President...Skye Leighton.

The crowd applauds as Skye steps forward.

SKYE
Thank you so much, River. And thank you for giving students at Santa Barbara High the *historic* opportunity to elect a gender non conforming African American to be their Vice-President. Now, I can't promise that I'm always going to agree with you -- I have a reputation for speaking my mind *loudly* when I disagree with someone...

Titters among the crowd as Skye continues her speech and McAfee and James turn to an unnerved Payton.

MCAFEE (O.S.)(PRE-LAPPED)
Yeah, this is a BIG problem.

INT. MEDIA ROOM -- MINUTES LATER

They're in full damage control mode, furiously typing into laptops and talking over one another as they rattle off data.

JAMES
For starters, she's wildly popular.
She's got over two thousand
followers on Instagram --

MCAFEE
-- now some of those are just
randos because she's got an
adorable Shar Pei --

JAMES
-- but still she's got a direct
line of communication to like half
the entire student body.

MCAFEE
Also, not to state the obvious, but
she's black.

PAYTON
So?

JAMES
So? Are you an idiot? What do you
mean, so?

MCAFEE
SO she's cooler than you'll ever
be. That's just a fact. Also, she's
sexually fluid and by her own
directive both genders, so she
ticks every single box.

Payton starts a downward spiral. Pacing. Panicking.

PAYTON
SHIT!

MCAFEE
There's more -- she got accepted
early to Stanford on a...
(reading)
Badminton scholarship?

JAMES

Where she intends to double-major in African-American Studies and Suffragete Studies...a little on the nose there...

PAYTON

Just shut up a second. I need to think...

MCAFEE

River is a genius --

JAMES

-- she's basically the perfect pick.

MCAFEE

And she'll get support from the faculty. She'll get every adult at this school to back River...

PAYTON

What the hell are you talking about? How do you know that?

JAMES

Because they're terrified of her. Remember how the field hockey coach got fired last year?

PAYTON

Yeah. He harassed one of the girls on the team...

MCAFEE

NO, he patted the *ass* of one of the girls on the team as a joke when she scored the winning goal in a practice match and the ass belonged to Skye.

JAMES

And then *this* happened.

He turns his laptop around where a video plays. Skye, surrounded by her field hockey teammates, berates a coach whose face we don't see, all he keeps saying is "I'm sorry." "You're right, I shouldn't have done that." "I was just joking, I didn't mean to offend you..."

SKYE

...yeah I just don't see how anybody could think that was funny.

(MORE)

SKYE (CONT'D)

Do you see anybody laughing? ANSWER THE QUESTION DO YOU SEE ANYBODY ELSE HERE LAUGHING. So am I, as a genderless person of color, expected to just let you do something like that? BEHAVIOR LIKE THAT GETS PEOPLE FIRED, COACH ROBINSON. NO NO NO NO NO I'M NOT GONNA LISTEN TO YOU BECAUSE YOU JUST MADE THIS AN UNSAFE SPACE. I DON'T HAVE TO STAND HERE AND LISTEN TO YOUR EXCUSES! WHAT EXACTLY AM I SUPPOSED TO LISTEN TO AFTER I'M VIOLATED LIKE THAT? YOU TELLING ME I'M OVERREACTING?? LET'S TALK TO THE SCHOOL BOARD AND LET THEM DECIDE WHO'S OVERREACTING...!!!

He closes the laptop. Silence and tension.

MCAFEE

Jesus that's hard to watch.

JAMES

Kitty's got *claws*.

MCAFEE

Yeah please don't say things like that. Skye got her friend to post the video and an hour later the dude was out of a job.

They turn to Payton, who FUMES. A beat.

JAMES

It sort of begs the question...what are we going to do?

A moment, then without a word, Payton STORMS OUT.

EXT. RIVER'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Payton races across the lawn to the house.

INT. RIVER'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Follow Payton bounding up the stairs crying out --

PAYTON

RIVER!!!

He WHIPS open the door to:

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The door slams against its hinges. River stands stock still at the window. Tears of rage streak Payton's cheeks.

PAYTON

Why are you doing this to me?!

RIVER

Doing what?

PAYTON

Don't act stupid. Skye Leighton.
Why did you have to pick her?

RIVER

Astrid said if I picked her, I'd
have the best shot of winning...

PAYTON

*And why are you listening to her?!
She doesn't want what's good for
you, she wants what's good for her!
She wants power and you're the way
she's going to get it -- she's Lady
Macbeth!*

RIVER

Payton, you have to calm down.

PAYTON

*She's jealous of us, can't you see
that?! That's why she's trying to
take this away from me!*

Payton tries to catch his breath. Pitiful, real:

PAYTON (CONT'D)

Why are you hurting me?

RIVER

Payton...

PAYTON

You don't even care about any of
this. You're gonna go to college
then join the Peace Corps -- this
isn't even going to help you!

A moment. River stands, taking Payton in. There's an oddly serene empathy in his voice -- for a moment, River totally understands him.

RIVER
You have so much pain.

Payton turns away, wiping the tears from his cheeks as River opens the drawer of his bedside table. When Payton turns back, he sees River looking back at him. He doesn't see the GUN in his hand.

RIVER (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I really did love you.

River puts the revolver to his temple and squeezes the trigger. BANG! Payton gasps in terror as blood SPLATTERS the room and we --

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. HOBART ESTATE BACK LAWN -- DAY

THUNK! An ARROW buries itself in the HEART of a LIFE SIZED FOAM ELK. A beat, then TWO MORE ARROWS fly in right next to the first. Perfect grouping.

QUICK CUTS as more arrows are shot into other GIANT FOAM ANIMALS. A BUFFALO. A BOBCAT. Even a TINY, LIFE-SIZED RABBIT.

We also see QUICK CUTS. EXTREME CLOSE UPS of the two men shooting the ARROWS from their COMPOUND BOWS. The strength of their arms as they pull back the BOWS. A BEAVER is struck with two arrows simultaneously and knocked into the air by the sheer force of the impact.

Reveal our two shooters giving each other an intense HIGH FIVE -- MARTIN and LUTHER HOBART, 22, blond, fit, handsome and IDENTICAL. These are Payton's twin older brothers.

A CHYRON READS: EIGHTEEN MONTHS EARLIER.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Payton is reading *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* at the table as his mother PAINTS with WATERCOLORS. GEORGINA is 40s, a beautiful bohemian ray of sunshine. Chicly dressed even when she's painting but not stuffy or trying hard. The TWINS enter. Grab Gatorade out of the fridge.

MARTIN

I want to bag a Shiras moose.

LUTHER

I want to bag a Bengal tiger.

Payton and his mother share a look.

MARTIN

I want to bag Margaret Edmund-Myers.

LUTHER

I already did! Full bush.

They exchange another high five.

PAYTON

First of all, it's illegal to hunt Bengal tigers, second when you talk about bagging things you sound like douchebags -- especially with your mother in the room.

LUTHER
You should totally come hunting
with us, Payton.

MARTIN
Then we can accidentally shoot you
in the back.

GEORGINA
That's enough.

They both give their mother a kiss on each cheek. Notice the
painting -- an ethereal TEN-YEAR-OLD ARABIC BOY.

MARTIN
That's good, Mom.

GEORGINA
It's for a series I'm doing to
raise money and awareness for the
Syrian war dead. Orhan was killed
in an airstrike earlier this year.

LUTHER
Bummer.

They start out.

GEORGINA
Will you be back for dinner?

MARTIN
No, we have that event in support
of eliminating net neutrality.

PAYTON
How can you be for eliminating net
neutrality?

LUTHER
This family holds fifty-four
million dollars worth of telecom
stocks.

MARTIN
He doesn't care. He's barely in the
will.

GEORGINA
Boys!

LUTHER
Why are you always defending him?

GEORGINA

Because you're bullies and
borderline psychopaths.

They laugh, high five. Exit.

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

Of course you're in the will --
same as them -- I made sure of it.

She pulls a pack of CIGARETTES out of her pocket. Opens the
window and lights up. Re: the cigarette --

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

Don't tell your father.

PAYTON

I read a study from Columbia that
it's impossible for a parent to
love an adopted child as much as a
biological one. Parents are
programmed to be drawn to the
children that look the most like
them. I would assume it has
something to do with protecting
bloodlines.

GEORGINA

I say that study is flawed because
I love you the most. Always have.

PAYTON

You're saying that because they
grew up to be such assholes.

GEORGINA

You're not wrong about that. You
can't teach kindness. I tried for a
long time but you can't do much
with small hearts. Hard ones maybe,
but not small ones. But it's not
just who they turned out to be.
Even when they were babies -- and
they were stunning babies -- I
never really jibed with them. For a
while I thought it was post-partum
depression but after a while I
realized that it was just how it
was going to be between them and
me. Don't get me wrong, I love them
but the love has edges, it doesn't
go on and on like my love for you.

PAYTON

You felt that way about me right away?

GEORGINA

Like you were a part of me. Like we found each other across the universe. It wasn't a meeting, it was a reunion. You had funny, dark Jewish hair and these big Disney eyes. You were alone in the world and maybe I felt the same way about myself.

(then)

Never listen to your brothers about who you are or what you're on your way to doing.

He smiles. The DOORBELL RINGS. She breaks into a big grin.

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

That must be your surprise.

They head out into --

INT. ENTRYWAY -- CONTINUOUS

-- to see the MAID letting RIVER inside.

GEORGINA

(in Mandarin with subtitles)

Welcome. I'm Georgina, we spoke on the phone.

They shake hands. River speaks in perfect Mandarin, too.

RIVER

Pleasure to meet you. Your Mandarin is perfect.

GEORGINA

We've traveled extensively in China. Collecting art.

River eyes Payton, who is clearly uncomfortable about River being here. To Georgina, in English --

RIVER

May I use your restroom, please?

GEORGINA

Of course, Theresa will show you the way.

He heads off. To Payton --

GEORGINA (CONT'D)
You could have said hello.

A nervous Payton starts UPSTAIRS. Georgina follows him.

PAYTON
What is he doing here?

GEORGINA
He's your new Mandarin tutor.
You're excelling in all of your
classes except languages. Well, and
P.E. I know you hate it when we all
speak Chinese at family dinner.

PAYTON
That's River Barkley, he's
incredibly popular at school.

GEORGINA
So are you.

PAYTON
Not his kind of popular. And he's
dating Astrid Klein -- who is my
arch-nemesis. She called me a fag
in second grade and I'm not even
gay!

They arrive at Payton's room.

GEORGINA
He comes highly recommended. Just
give him a try -- at least get him
to like you to piss off Astrid
Klein.

The warmth of her love and smile always calms him. Ok.

INT. PAYTON'S ROOM -- LATER

Payton sitting at his desk. River is looking at his
bookshelf.

RIVER
All of these books are
autobiographies. Lincoln, U.S.
Grant, Ross Perot, Tina Fey.

PAYTON

I think greatness is just the proper activation of inherent abilities. I like to read about how other's achieved their greatness so I can mimic what worked. Fake it until you make it.

(off River's look)

What?

RIVER

I fake it a lot too. People think I'm all calm but I don't know if I really am. It's like I'm feeling the whole world at once sometimes. I saw a psychiatrist, Joe Macintosh, and he said that I'm an empath. I react. I exist in relation to what other people need.

Payton is awed by his calm simplicity.

PAYTON

Where did you learn Mandarin?

RIVER

My dad works for Goldman. We lived in Hong Kong until I was ten. My nanny was a Buddhist Monk. He taught me karate and Mandarin and all of that Buddhist enlightenment stuff.

River sits across from Payton. In Mandarin --

RIVER (CONT'D)

Shall we begin? How are you?

PAYTON

(a little struggle)

I'm good.

RIVER

Me too. The weather has been nice. Sunny but not too warm. What did you do today?

PAYTON

*I **rested** for a trig test.*

RIVER

*I **studied**. Studied and rested sound similar.*

PAYTON

Studied.

River returns to English.

RIVER

Why are you so tense?

PAYTON

How do you know I'm tense?

RIVER

I just know. You don't seem happy.

PAYTON

Are you happy?

RIVER

I try to be.

PAYTON

I try to be too. I really try.

(starts to cry, single
tear)

It's so hard to have to try so hard
all the time.

River wipes away Payton's tear.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

That was weird. How did you get me
to be vulnerable like that? I'm
never like that.

RIVER

I don't know. That's just what I do
with people. It must have been what
you needed.

PAYTON

What do you need?

RIVER

(in Mandarin)

Can I kiss you?

Payton is stunned. River leans in. Kisses him. A long beat.
Then, River gets up. Collects his books and exits.

INT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY -- READING ROOM -- DAY

Payton sits at a table in a cavernous reading room. He looks
up to see ASTRID enter, scanning the room by the librarian's
desk. Her eyes meet Payton's.

LIBRARIAN

ID please.

She hands the librarian her ID and when she looks back to Payton, he's GONE.

INT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY -- STACKS

Payton walks into the stacks, trying not to look like he's hurrying. He looks behind him. He sees Astrid, who hasn't spotted him. He turns a corner, then stops. He lost her. He turns down an adjacent aisle and FUCK. She's standing right at the end, looking right at him. Payton gives a casual smile then has to pretend to look through the books that are right there like that's what he was trying to do in the first place as Astrid slinks up, icy. Re: the Mandarin-English dictionary in his hand:

ASTRID

Ni hau.

(then)

So I'm just gonna dive right in. I know what's going on between you and River. He told me what happened. I was mad at first but then I admired his honesty. River and I have complete transparency. I've always known he was fluid, I am too sorta. So if you're the way he deals with that side of himself, that's fine. But I want in, too. Come over to my house after school and let's all get it on.

Stunned, Payton doesn't know what to say except:

PAYTON

...okay.

She gives a tight smile that's half-sexy, half-'fuck you' then turns on her heels and struts off. Off Payton watching her go...

EXT. RIVER'S HOUSE -- NIGHT -- PRESENT DAY

Ambulance lights flashing. Find Payton, in shock, talking to a police officer, his clothes still splattered with blood and a blanket around his shoulders.

PAYTON

I don't know where the gun came from. I looked away and then he just had it in his hand and he shot himself...

A primal wail from inside the house. "No!!!!" It's River's mother. Payton turns to the sound...

POLICE OFFICER
Son, look at me --

PAYTON
(re: the wailing)
I've never heard a sound like
that...

POLICE OFFICER
-- I need you to focus and tell me
everything you remember.

A BMW slams into the curb. Astrid LEAPS out of the car and runs up to Payton.

ASTRID
WHAT HAPPENED???

POLICE OFFICER
Miss, I need you to calm down --

PAYTON
He killed himself.

Astrid's face goes white as her knees give out and she stumbles to the ground.

PAYTON (CONT'D)
I don't know how it happened...

RACK TO: A covered gurney is wheeled out the front door. River's mother wails as Astrid runs toward it. Payton stops her.

ASTRID
Let me go...

PAYTON
Astrid you have to calm down...

ASTRID
I don't want him to be alone!

He grabs her by the shoulders, suddenly totally focused.

PAYTON
ASTRID. Don't let his mother see
you like this. You can't go with
him. They won't let you. Right now
you need to sit down and you have
to breathe...

He sits her down. She watches River's mother climb into the ambulance and the doors shut behind them. The ambulance drives off. Her chest heaving, Astrid turns squarely to Payton, her eyes still wide with shock.

ASTRID

You.

A look of rage flashes across her face.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

He did this because of you.

She stands and walks off, leaving Payton standing alone in the flash of police lights.

INT. PAYTON'S HOUSE -- ENTRYWAY -- NIGHT

The FLAMING LIPS cover of "Can't Get You Out of My Head" plays as Payton enters. He's emotionless. Covered in River's BLOOD. The Maid is VACUUMING. Doesn't notice him as he heads up the stairs.

INT. PAYTON'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Payton turns on the shower. Takes off his bloody clothes. Steps inside and rinses his body clean. THE BLOOD swirls down the drain.

INT. PAYTON'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Payton puts on his pajamas. Gets into bed. Stares at the ceiling. Georgina enters. Sits next to him.

PAYTON

I should be crying. Why aren't I crying?

GEORGINA

That's not you. They told me that when you were born you didn't cry. You just looked at everyone in the room. Furrowed your brow.

PAYTON

Did I cry when I was a child?

GEORGINA

When you skinned your knee or bumped your head.

PAYTON

I'm worried that I don't have feelings like everyone else does.

(MORE)

PAYTON (CONT'D)

I see people having them and I can imitate them but it's like I'm the cover of a book but all the pages inside are blank.

GEORGINA

A lot of young people have that. Especially nowadays. Modern life isn't designed for feeling things. You learned to communicate with a machine between you and the other person. I see you guys hanging around texting the person sitting next to you. I understand why you need that protection. The world is throwing so much at you all the time. Information overload.

PAYTON

It's more than that for me. What if I'm just wired differently? What if I can't feel? They say sociopaths can't feel. What if all I will ever be able to do is pretend to feel?

GEORGINA

What does it matter if you can't tell the difference?

Payton just stares at the ceiling. Troubled. Georgina kisses his head.

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about River. He was a wonderful boy.

She stands. Exits.

INT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL -- CLASSROOM -- DAY

Quiet. You can hear the rub of fabric as Alice ties Payton's black tie. McAfee, who sits to the side with James, clears her throat.

MCAFEE

This is going to sound awful but I'm just gonna say it -- now that River is dead, you're running unopposed.

JAMES

Seriously?

ALICE

I cannot believe you just said that.

MCAFEE

I'm sorry. It's my job...

Alice turns to him. Private.

ALICE

You know you don't have to do this.

PAYTON

I want to.

(then)

Maybe I'll cry.

INT. SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM -- DAY

The camera floats past a framed photo of River, surrounded by a sea of flowers, the smattering of muffled sobs among the packed auditorium, past devastated family members to the PRINCIPAL, who speaks at a podium...

PRINCIPAL

...and while they ask that you respect their privacy at this time, River's family wishes to express their gratitude for the outpouring of support they've received in the last few days, and would ask that in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to River's favorite charities -- Doctor's Without Borders and Heifer International.

A sob as River's mother buries her face in her husband's arms, overwhelmed. The mic squeals.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

It's trying times like these where we, as a community, look to our student leaders for a way to move forward and begin to heal. Payton?

He walks off stage. A moment, then Payton walks onstage and steps up to the mic. Quiet, contained:

PAYTON

I didn't really get to know River until last year. He was my tutor, and then he became my friend, and then my opponent. We found ourselves running against one another, but River never made it feel like a competition. He'd say, "don't worry about it, Payton. Let the best man win."

(MORE)

PAYTON (CONT'D)

(then)

And now the best man can't win.

A string quartet walks out on stage and sits.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

River was active in the Drama Department, so I asked a few of his friends to help me sing something in his honor.

The quartet starts to play. Payton begins to sing Joni Mitchell's "River."

PAYTON (CONT'D)

"It's coming on Christmas, they're cutting down trees, they're putting up reindeer and singing songs of joy and peace. Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on. But it don't snow here, it stays pretty green, I'm gonna make a lot of money and quit this crazy scene. Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on..."

Payton looks out past the glare of the lights. It's cathartic. Kids start embracing one another, and sobbing, low. Payton's voice crescendos. It's stunning, as he tries desperately to summon the song's emotion, digging deep.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

"I wish I had a river so long, I would teach my feet to fly. Oh I wish I had a river I could skate away on. I made my baby cry. He tried to help me you know, he put me at ease, and he loved me so naughty it made me weak in the knees. Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on..."

Everyone in the auditorium seems to be crying. Except Payton. Nothing. The song gets quiet.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

"I'm so hard to handle, I'm selfish and I'm sad. Now I've gone and lost the best baby that I ever had oh I..."

The songs whispers to a finish. The audience is still, but for the murmur of quiet sobbing. Payton stands for a moment, gazing out at all this emotion -- feelings he can't summon.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

River's girlfriend Astrid has asked
to say a few words.

He walks off the stage and sits to the clip of Astrid's heels
as she steps to the podium.

ASTRID

Thank you, Payton. That was
beautiful, and I'm sure River would
have appreciated it.

(then)

You were right when you said the
best man can't win. There was only
one person in this race who was up
to the job, and now he's gone.
That's why I'm choosing to run in
River's place.

Payton's face goes numb.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

From the very beginning, I stood by
River's candidacy and we spoke
extensively about what his
presidency would be like -- the
ideas he had and ways we could
transform those ideas into real,
concrete policies -- so I feel I
have a unique responsibility to be
River's advocate and carry on his
legacy. Skye Leighton will stay on
as my running mate, and we will try
to become the first all-female
ticket in this school's history.

(then)

If you believed in what River stood
for, good. Because so did I. And if
you give me your vote, then
together we can keep River's memory
alive. Thank you.

The audience applauds. She walks off stage, passing Payton,
never looking at him. Off Payton, stunned, we --

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. GYMNASIUM -- DAY

Kids playing BASKETBALL as Payton sits pensively in the BLEACHERS. Alice is there. Fighting with McAfee and James.

ALICE

You should have seen this coming!

MCAFEE

I'm sorry if our advanced polling data isn't capable of reading minds and predicting the future.

ALICE

Isn't that exactly what polling data is supposed to do?

JAMES

This was a curveball none of us could have anticipated. We made a mistake. All of us.

ALICE

The candidate never makes mistakes. Payton does not make mistakes. You two are the ones who made a mistake.

McAfee glares at her, then --

MCAFEE

I'm sorry, but this is insurmountable.

PAYTON

Nothing is insurmountable. Losses are not failures of material or strategy. They are failures of imagination.

JAMES

Unless you can get us some imaginary votes, we can't beat them. You and Astrid are going to split the sympathy vote and Skye picks up three distinct special interests -- women, blacks and gays/sexual progressives.

MCAFEE

We could reclaim the non-lesbian
gays and bisexuals if Payton goes
public about his threesome with
Astrid and River.

JAMES

There is some wisdom in that.

ALICE

Wait, what threesome?

MCAFEE

He didn't tell you?

Alice is clearly hurt. Payton glares at McAfee. Then --

PAYTON

I will use River's memory to gain
the advantage only if it allows his
reputation to remain intact.

MCAFEE

This isn't the time to develop a
conscience.

PAYTON

Come up with something else!

JAMES

There is a failsafe. We could hit
the panic button.

(then)

Go to Astrid, offer her a deal --
she drops Skye from the ticket and
takes you on as her Vice
Presidential running mate. I'm sure
there are a number of U.S.
Presidents that were VP of their
high school.

PAYTON

Name one.

(they can't)

Vice presidents only have access to
power. What's the point of wanting
to make a difference in the world
if you have to ask someone else's
permission to do it?

JAMES

But this is all just a stepping stool on your way to a future out in the world where you can really make a change.

MCAFEE

Take on the system.

JAMES

Vice-stool will get you higher than no stool at all.

PAYTON

No. No. That's not at all what this is! I'm not a good person. But I'm also not a bad person. And that's the kind of man who makes the best political leader. Because I make all of my choices based on what is right or wrong *right now*. In this place. At this moment. Being good is no replacement for doing good. Yes I have a plan for myself, for all of us, but what's the point of any of it if we are not using our special gifts and talents to make things better right here and right now? I can make this school better. I know that. This is my chance to improve lives and I intend to take it. You think interviewing students from the special education class was just pure ambition? An egocentric lark? At the beginning, perhaps, but I am now illuminated. Do you think Astrid cares about them at all? She does not! I learned from them. I can help them if elected. More inclusion in school events, more qualified tutors, specialized lunch nutrition plans, I will implement those things for those people. Looking out for those with less, that's what we're about, people! I can make a difference here. Here first. The world tomorrow.

They all smile. His ability to inspire them is why they follow him.

ALICE

You're right. As usual. Tell us what to do.

PAYTON

The only deal I will make with Astrid is for her to drop out.

MCAFEE

Why would she ever do that?

PAYTON

She won't, so I have to find another way to beat her.

MCAFEE

We could kill her.

They all look at her. Is she serious? They can't tell.

PAYTON

We will follow the lead of the great allied commanders who liberated the European Continent once they secured the beachhead. One block at a time. One town at a time. One mile at a time. One step at a time. Our first step -- getting one of those special ed kids to be my running mate.

INT. HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

They all exit the gym. Payton stops Alice.

PAYTON

You're upset.

ALICE

She's very smart. And driven. Like a girl version of you in some ways. I understand why you would have been attracted to her.

PAYTON

I'm not attracted to her. Her femininity is cold. I'm drawn to warmth, like my mother.

ALICE

Do you think she's prettier than me?

PAYTON

It wasn't about being with her.

A beat. She understands. It was about River. She gathers herself. Plays strong again.

ALICE

It's okay. I'm sorry I reacted.
It's not my place to question the
steps you take on your journey to
greatness.

PAYTON

You're allowed to have feelings,
Alice.

ALICE

Feelings are small picture. I know
I'm allowed to have them. I just
never want me having them to be
your problem.

She can't hide how hurt she is. But she tries. She kisses him on the cheek. Walks away.

EXT. HOBART ESTATE -- GIANT FRONT LAWN -- DAY

INTERCUT -- Payton pulls into the driveway. Gets out of his car.

HIGH SPEED -- TIGHT. A HORSE chomps on its BIT. Its HOOVES move up and down in place. It's ready to run.

-- Payton grabs his things. Starts walking across the LAWN to the front door.

HIGH SPEED -- TIGHT. Martin and Luther, on HORSEBACK. Arm themselves with SUPER SOAKER WATER GUNS.

-- Payton moves across the lawn. Lost in thought.

-- The HORSE. TWO HORSES now break into a GALLOP. Head out across the LAWN. Payton senses something. Turns to see his brothers on their BEAUTIFUL MOUNTS. Riding right at him. He picks up his pace. Looks ahead to the front door. Will he make it before they run him down? He starts walking faster. Running. But they are almost on him. Finally, they gallop by him, making him flinch. They start to CIRCLE HIM. No escape.

PAYTON

Your continued abuse of me makes no
sense! We are family! We are
brothers.

MARTIN

(re: Luther)

We are brothers. You are a pigmy. A stain. One of those fish that attaches itself to the bottom of a shark.

LUTHER

A remora.

MARTIN

A parasite.

PAYTON

Mom loves me more than she loves you. She told me herself.

That upsets Martin. Holding back tears --

MARTIN

That's not true!

LUTHER

(to Martin)

Shut up, dude.

(to Payton)

We all know that Mother's love is not what you want. And it's not some pretty girl tickling your nuts and it's not a brass band playing "Hail to the Chief" every time you walk in the room. What you really want is to be us.

PAYTON

Who wouldn't secretly wish to be two giant pricks on horseback?

With the psychic connection only two twins have, the boys simultaneously ATTACK Payton with their super-soakers. Knocking him to the ground with the force of the water. They laugh hysterically and GALLOP away. Leaving him alone and wet.

INT. HOBART ESTATE -- ENTRYWAY -- DAY

Payton, soaking wet. Comes in to see his mother LABELING BOXES. SHOES. SUITS. COATS. Re: the boxes.

PAYTON

What's this?

GEORGINA

I'm collecting our old clothes to send them off to the Yemeni refugee camps. It's getting quite cold there.

(noticing)

You're all wet. Go up to your room and change. There's something we need to speak about.

INT. PAYTON'S ROOM -- DAY

Payton pulls on a ROBE as his mother enters carrying an ENVELOPE. They sit. Re: the envelope.

GEORGINA

This came today.

She hands it to him. It's from HARVARD ADMISSIONS. Payton is stunned silent.

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

Open it.

PAYTON

Schrödinger's cat. At this moment, before I open the envelope I both got in to Harvard and didn't get in. Multiple realities. Then I will open it and one will collapse on the other and my future will no longer be a possibility. It will just be.

GEORGINA

How long would you like to live in quantum superposition? Because the anticipation is killing me!

They share a smile. He loves how smart she is and how well she understands him.

PAYTON

Just a moment longer.

A beat, then he opens it. A deep breath, then he reads. HIGH SPEED as the LETTER FALLS FROM HIS HAND TO THE FLOOR.

TIGHT ON THE LETTER -- he's been "WAITLISTED." Payton falls backwards on to his bed. PUTS HIS HANDS over his FACE. Georgina picks up the letter. Confused.

GEORGINA

Waitlisted? Oh, sweetheart.

Payton SCREAMS INTO HIS HANDS.

PAYTON

A lifetime of focus and planning!
Carefully studying applications
that I obtained on the black market
to pinpoint the exact combination
of extracurriculars and test scores
to optimize my chances at
acceptance. Three years on that
stupid literary magazine, Model UN,
service-oriented summer camp in
Costa Rica, mother-fucking
Mandarin!

He takes the letter. TEARS it to PIECES in a FIT OF RAGE.

GEORGINA

They didn't say no.

PAYTON

This is worse than no! This is
let's wait and see if we find
anyone better! This is even if we
take you you were our second
choice! Why didn't they take me?
They took those morons on their
ridiculous horses.

GEORGINA

You told us you wanted to do this
properly. No giant donations to the
endowment, no new black box theater
or science library. Your father and
I bought their way in.

PAYTON

I can't get in like that. People
know it. It stays with you. It's
handing your opponent a negative ad
on a platter.

Payton slumps. Looks out the window. Crushed with sadness.
Georgina simply holds his hand. Softly --

GEORGINA

I'm so sorry, honey. I know how
important this was to you.

INT. ALICE'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NIGHT

The kitchen is MASSIVE. Alice is at the STOVE. Cooking like a
PRO. Payton sits nearby. Munching on CHEESE AND CRACKERS.

THOMAS, Alice's MANSERVANT, is carefully and masterfully CHOPPING AN ONION. Alice checks the results.

ALICE
Not fine enough.

Thomas nods. Goes back to chopping. Re: Payton --

ALICE (CONT'D)
Stop feeling sorry for yourself.
Waitlisted is not "no." And you're
going to get in. You're the most
exceptional human being I've ever
met.

PAYTON
Hold on. You must have gotten your
letter today, too.

She pauses.

ALICE
I'm sure they have an algorithm
that demands they take so many
women and so many applicants from
this group or that. I know it's not
politically correct to say so but
let's face it, being a rich, white
man in this modern world can be a
detriment. Yes, I got in.

PAYTON
Alice, please don't diminish your
accomplishments to soothe my ego.
You're going to be valedictorian,
you won a gold medal in fencing in
the Junior Olympics and you speak
six languages. No one deserves to
go to Harvard more than you. And
I'm so happy for you.

He gets up and hugs her. He is genuinely happy for her.

ALICE
Well, okay. We can celebrate me --
but not tonight. Tonight is about
getting you back on your feet, one
hundred percent so you can win the
election and make this world a
better place. Thomas, please go set
up your table in the massage room.
You're going to give Payton a
treatment as soon as we are done
here. Reiki, cups and acupuncture.

Thomas nods. Exits.

PAYTON
You are too good to be true.

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Giant table. Elegant room. Payton and Alice sit near each other at the corner. Eating.

ALICE
I have a plan to help you win. But first I need to ask you some questions. And I need you to answer me honestly. No judgment.

PAYTON
I swear.

ALICE
Did you kill River?
(off his stunned look --)
I won't judge you or turn you in. I just want to know. While you didn't anticipate Astrid jumping in to the campaign, you may have correctly thought that River dying would give you the clearest path to victory.

PAYTON
I didn't kill him.

ALICE
Okay. Let's talk about the threesome. What happened? Did you penetrate either of them? Did he penetrate you?

PAYTON
No one penetrated me. Well, a finger.

ALICE
Whose?

PAYTON
I can't be sure. I think it was Astrid's. She wears a ring.

ALICE
The one with the red stone.

PAYTON
I think it's a ruby.

ALICE

Did you enjoy it? Not just the
finger. The whole thing?

PAYTON

Yes. I enjoyed it a lot. I don't
think I'm bisexual, though. I don't
fantasize about other men or get
turned on seeing them naked.

ALICE

But River was different? Why?

PAYTON

He made me feel things.

ALICE

Sexual things?

PAYTON

Just things. That was his talent.
He knew it.

She sits back. Takes it all in.

ALICE

We need to break up.

PAYTON

You said you wouldn't judge me!

ALICE

Not really break up. We need to
pretend to break up in order for
you to win the election.

(off his confusion)

Right now you and Astrid are
splitting the sympathy vote. I'm
going to confess that I cheated on
you. It will be a scandal. You will
dump me and everyone will feel
sorry for you. I cleared it with
McAfee and James. They think it
will gain you six to nine points
depending on how magnanimous you
are about the whole thing.

PAYTON

But everyone will hate you. They
will call you a slut.

ALICE

I love you. This is what love looks
like, Payton.

(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

This is what sacrifice looks like.
This is what it takes to change the
world. I am your First Lady, today
and always. But there are rules.

PAYTON

Rules?

ALICE

We will break up for twelve weeks --
long enough for you to win and for
no one to suspect duplicity on our
parts. You will post photos of Big
Sur, California, the truffle french
fries at Hoagies Diner on Route 14
and cute dogs on your Instagram at
least once a day with captions like
"Wish I was here" and "Yummy" and
"Heart Emoji." When you do so I
will know you are thinking of me
and that you love me.

PAYTON

A secret code.

ALICE

Yes.

PAYTON

I love it.

ALICE

And, most importantly, when you
pass me in the hall you will not
pay me any mind, but as soon as we
are past each other you will turn
and look back. You have to do this
for me or I won't be able to
survive. This is going to be very
challenging for me. I love you so
much. I promise to keep my feelings
about it to myself but I am going
to need your help. Do you agree to
these terms?

PAYTON

You are the best thing that will
ever happen to me. Yes. I agree. I
agree.

He kisses her. Just then, Thomas arrives. Wearing a SPA
UNIFORM. He RINGS A TINY TRIANGLE to announce his presence
and let Payton know that he's ready for his treatment.

INT. ALICE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The faces of Alice, James and McAfee are each lit by laptop screens as they plot in the dim light of Alice's bedroom.

ALICE

I don't want to say "I'm overwhelmed with shame." That's too calculating. It sounds fake.

JAMES

It IS fake.

ALICE

No.

(reading)

"I broke up with Payton tonight. I guess you could say I cheated on him, though it's more complicated than that. I will not name the other party involved at this time out of respect to their family," period.

MCAFEE

That's good. Mysterious. Really makes you lean in.

JAMES

Post it.

Alice takes a deep breath. Looks at both of them, then down at the keyboard and hits POST. CLOSE ON the post. A comment immediately pops up. "Bitch."

Alice has to look away and closes the laptop, pained. James and McAfee are GLUED to theirs.

JAMES (CONT'D)

This is good...

MCAFEE

Jesus. People are frigging animals. These comments are brutal --

JAMES

Yeah, this is *really* good...

Alice dials her phone.

INT. PAYTON'S BEDROOM -- INTERCUT

Payton sits alone on his bed. He picks up, saying nothing.

ALICE

Hi. I didn't like doing that.

PAYTON

I know. It's the right thing to do.

James takes the phone from her.

JAMES

Hey, Payton. We're ready when you are, buddy.

PAYTON

'kay.

He hangs up, then looks down at the post he's written on his laptop. CLOSE UP it reads: "I'm heartbroken." He hits POST. A moment. A LIKE. Then, a LOVE. Several more comments. He hits refresh -- the number of likes goes from 4 to 56. CUT TO:

INT. RUMSON ACADEMY -- HALLWAY -- THE NEXT DAY

Phoebe Bridgers' "Funeral" plays as Payton walks down the hallway in SLO MO. A GIRL gives him a sympathetic "I'm sorry" wince and shrug. A couple DUDES in letterman jackets slap him on the shoulder, consoling him with words we don't hear. Payton spots a group of students dishing. Spotting him, they STOP. They were talking about HIM. Word has spread.

VOICE (O.C.)

Payton.

Payton turns to see his Mandarin teacher in a doorway.

MR. ANSELM

Hey, kiddo. Look, I know you've been struggling with Mandarin and River was tutoring you -- you must be going through a lot right now.

PAYTON

Yeah, I am...

He puts his hand on his shoulder and leans in, sotto:

MR. ANSELM

Just show up for the exams for the rest of the semester and I'll give you an A.

Payton nods, then heads off as James walks up. He gives him a huge hug, and so everyone can hear:

JAMES

Hey, man. I'm really sorry.

(whispers to him)

Numbers look great. This was a stroke of genius. I wish I had thought of it.

He walks off. Payton looks around at the sympathetic faces that pass him. He suppresses a wry smile. Then, RAMP BACK TO SLO MO as he spots ALICE at the end of the hallway, walking towards him. Her face is stony against the vicious looks and snickers as she passes. She holds her head up and does her duty, parading through the vicious throng.

Payton walks toward her. She plays the role she was given. Makes no eye contact as they pass. Onlookers clock this. WHAT A BITCH. A slap on Payton's back, an "I'm sorry, man." There's a glimmer in Payton's eye. This is working.

At the other end of the hallway, Alice follows the rules -- she stops and turns to look back at Payton.

And he DOESN'T TURN BACK. She watches his back as he rounds the corner out of sight, a punch right in the gut. She just stands there, speechless as we CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

Infinity Rose and her BOYFRIEND, RICARDO, on an OLD MATTRESS. Making out. Her WHEELCHAIR and HIS CAR are parked NEARBY. Ricardo is a little greasy. Appears to have a low IQ. But he's hot and he loves Infinity Rose. He pauses their kissing for a moment --

RICARDO

You think I should start collecting pigeons? People do it.

INFINITY ROSE

Why would you want to do that?

RICARDO

Because a man should have a hobby. I'm nineteen now. I think I should get more serious about my future.

INFINITY ROSE

Your kisses taste like Dr. Pepper.

He gets up. Suddenly MAD. Lights a cigarette. Grabs his can of Dr. Pepper.

INFINITY ROSE (CONT'D)

Did I say something wrong?

RICARDO

I don't want to do this anymore.
I'm done with this.

INFINITY ROSE

With me?

RICARDO

With making out in the woods on a
dirty mattress! I love you,
Infinity Rose. You're my whole
life. You got class. I mean, you've
been to Disney and seen Taylor
Swift live in concert.

INFINITY ROSE

I like it out here. It's quiet and
I can hear the birds and it smells
clean and wet.

He finishes his can of soda. Tosses it away.

RICARDO

It's your grandma! Your goddamn
grandma. She doesn't let you do
anything. She hates me.

INFINITY ROSE

She got upset by some of the text
messages you sent. About stuff you
wanted to do to me. Up my bum and
all of that.

RICARDO

Why did you show them to her? That
was private for us.

INFINITY ROSE

She always checks my phone and my
computer.

RICARDO

This is my point. How can we be
free and together if she's
controlling everything?

INFINITY ROSE

I'm very sick, Ricardo. I need her
to take care of me.

RICARDO

I can take care of you. I've seen how your feeding tube works and I can figure out all of your pills and I'm not afraid of needles so I can give you your shots. We gotta get away from her. Run away and maybe start a Subway franchise or something like that. Get settled. Have kids.

INFINITY ROSE

I don't know if I can have kids.

RICARDO

But we can try all day long. Would you do that? Would you run away with me? I swear all I would do is work to make you the happiest girl in the world.

Infinity Rose smiles. Moved.

INFINITY ROSE

Yes. But how?

RICARDO

We need some money. A lot of money. I figure like at least two thousand dollars. I don't know how we can get it but if we can I know we can get out of here and be happy.

INFINITY ROSE

Will you come kiss me some more?

He smiles. Starts making out with her again.

INT. JACKSON HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- LATER

Infinity walks in the back door and stops in her tracks.

GRETA (O.C.)

Well, Miss Fancy Britches --

Reveal Greta at the kitchen table with Payton.

GRETA (CONT'D)

I just heard that this young man who has gone through so much has invited you to be his running mate in the school election and you turned it down. Will you explain that to me?

INFINITY ROSE

(lying)

I just don't want all that attention...

GRETA

(vicious)

Oh, *don't you lie to me, young lady*. YOU were the one that asked me to call the Channel 13 news team to get you a free trip to Legoland and you just about wet yourself the second they turned the camera on you you were so excited --

PAYTON

Infinity, Mrs. Jackson, I've seen all the local news stories on you, and they're so inspiring, but I think this could be even bigger. I think this could be a *national* news story. Infinity, you could become the voice of a generation of handicapable children. You could be on *Good Morning America*, or Kathie Lee and Hoda, and at the risk of sounding vulgar...

(goes for it)

...it's worth remembering that you could parlay something like that into serious, regular income just off of Instagram *alone*.

Money for her and Ricardo. Infinity's wheels begin to turn.

GRETA

Wait. Do you seriously think we could get money from this?

PAYTON

I absolutely do.

(smelling blood)

Mrs. Jackson, as you may know, I come from a family of considerable means and I can't imagine how difficult it is raising a child on a single income, let alone a granddaughter with such acute medical issues. If it were at *all* helpful, I'd be more than happy to provide you with a cash loan that could be used for *anything* -- paying off medical bills, buying a new car...

Greta's breath is taken away, but Infinity pipes up, angry.

INFINITY ROSE

No. I know what you're doing.
You're just throwing money around
like it's nothing...

GRETA

Infinity ROSE --

INFINITY ROSE

He's a FAKE, Momma! I don't believe
ANYTHING he says!

GRETA

*That is NOT the way we speak to
guests --*

(to Payton)

I'm *SO* sorry --

PAYTON

(interrupting)

No, she's right.

A moment. What? Payton looks down at the table, suddenly distant. It seems like he's about to bare everything to them. Confess the whole game. Quiet:

PAYTON (CONT'D)

River died, and then my girlfriend
broke up with me and I...I don't
think I've processed any of it. I
keep acting like everything's
normal. I'm going through the
motions like nothing happened, but
it did. And I know it did. And
still...I can't *feel* anything.

A beat. Tears start to well in his eyes.

PAYTON (CONT'D)

You're right, Infinity, I am a
fake. You shouldn't believe
anything I say because I don't know
that I believe it, either. I think
that's why I want you for my
running mate. You're authentic and
real. And I can't face the truth
because the truth is...

He bursts into tears.

PAYTON (CONT'D)
 The truth is I loved him. *Oh god I
 I loved him so much and now he's
 gone!*

The emotions come pouring out of him, uncontrollable. He is overcome with wracking sobs. Greta tries to comfort him.

PAYTON (CONT'D)
I loved him! I loved him...!

Greta wraps her arms around him, but he cannot be consoled.

GRETA
 Oh, Payton...it's okay...

PAYTON
*RIVEEERR!!! I love you! I love you
 so much I'm so sorry!!!*

He dissolves into painful all body shaking, wailing. Infinity looks on, stunned. Moved. She steps toward him, and puts a hand on his trembling body.

INFINITY ROSE
 I'm sorry, Payton. I believe you
 now. I believe you.

Payton keeps crying, hysterical, as we SMASH TO:

INT. PAYTON'S CAR -- JACKSON HOUSE DRIVEWAY -- MINUTES LATER

SILENCE. Payton just sits behind the wheel, staring out at middle distance, a blank, unfeeling look on his face. What the fuck was all that, exactly? An act or real? A long moment, then he picks up his phone and dials. A muffled voice answers and he says, simply:

PAYTON
 We got her.

Prelapped CHEERING as Payton hangs up, turns the ignition and backs OUT OF FRAME AND WE SMASH TO:

EXT. RUMSON ACADEMY -- QUAD -- THE NEXT DAY

McAfee and James stand in a sizable crowd surrounding Payton, who is mid-announcement.

PAYTON
 -- because I think that's what life
 is all about, isn't it?
 (MORE)

PAYTON (CONT'D)

It's not about *avoiding* adversity, it's how we handle the tough times when they come barging into our lives, destroying everything we hold dear...

(getting real)

That's why I've got someone special with me today. This is a girl we've all met -- but she's someone I don't think a lot of us really know. And I think the reason I find her so inspiring is because I look at my life -- and what's happened in the past few weeks or even the past few hours does not COMPARE to the struggles that this young woman faces every moment of every day. But she looks at the future with hope, and optimism, and a sense of humor -- Infinity Rose, you *inspire* me. That's why I'm proud to introduce you today as my running mate -- the next Vice President of Rumson Academy, Infinity Rose Jackson!

Cheering as Payton helps Infinity up the stairs. She drinks it all in, the HAPPIEST DAY OF HER ENTIRE LIFE.

INFINITY ROSE

Thank you! Oh my gosh! Hi! Thank you!

ANGLE ON: Payton steps down off the steps and nearly trips over Andrew, the cerebral palsy kid in the wheelchair. He's taken aback.

PAYTON

Oh. Hey, Andrew...

ANDREW

Eric.

PAYTON

Right. Eric. Sorry.

ANDREW

You douchebag. My name IS Andrew.

ANGLE ON: Infinity is over the moon as she gives her speech.

INFINITY ROSE

I guess Payton's right -- my life hasn't always been easy.

(MORE)

INFINITY ROSE (CONT'D)
 But my nana always says, "Infinity
 Rose, you count your blessings,
 because there are people in this
 world who have it a lot worse than
 you." So I just want to say thank
 you to each and every one of you,
 this is so amazing...

ANGLE ON: Payton backpedals with Andrew as Infinity continues
 her speech...

PAYTON
 Look, I'm really sorry. I was
 actually *just* going to come and
 find you. I want you to know that
 this was a *really* tough decision
 for me --

ANDREW
 (interrupting)
 She's scamming everyone. You know
 that, right?

PAYTON
 What? Who?

ANDREW
 Infinity Rose. It's all a big scam.
 (then)
 She's not sick. She's faking it.

CLOSE ON Payton as Andrew wheels off. Stunned, he turns back
 to Infinity.

INFINITY ROSE
 ...so thank you, Payton -- and
 thank you Rumson Academy -- I'm
 gonna work my butt off for you!
 Let's go out and win this thing!

The crowd erupts. She holds her face in her hands like an
 overwhelmed little girl, reaching out to touch people's
 hands. She looks to Payton and gives a tiny little shruggy
 "yay!" cheer to him. Off Payton's look -- HOLY SHIT, what
 have I done -- we SMASH TO BLACK.

END PILOT EPISODE