

Popular: Senior Year  
"Should Auld Acquaintance Be  
Forgot?"  
by  
The Wild Pikachu

POPULAR: SENIOR YEAR

SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brooke is sitting on the edge of her bed, looking morose, while Harrison paces back and forth in front of her, looking even more morose.

BROOKE  
Will you at least tell me what's  
wrong?

HARRISON  
(snappish)  
I don't know. It just seems  
like—like it's not working.

BROOKE  
What? What's not working?

HARRISON  
(shrugs)  
Us.

BROOKE  
Us? How are we not working?

HARRISON  
I don't know.

By this time Brooke is feeling a little annoyed herself.

BROOKE  
You don't know. Oh, that's very  
insightful, Harrison.

Harrison stops and turns to face her.

HARRISON  
Don't you feel it, too?

BROOKE  
(earnestly)  
No!

Harrison resumes his pacing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON  
It just feels...old.

Brooke's eyebrow goes sky-high.

BROOKE  
Old?!

HARRISON  
What I mean is— It's almost New Year's. Tomorrow's New Year's Eve. It just—it's the whole concept: "New." "Year's." A new year. It feels like it should be this whole grand beginning of something. Us...it feels like we're stuck—

BROOKE  
(deadly)  
Harrison, if you say we're stuck in a rut, I swear I'll slap you into next year right here and now.

Harrison sits down next to Brooke.

HARRISON  
Admit it—we didn't exactly have the most joyous Christmas.

BROOKE  
Yeah, but that was because of the malevolent spirit of Sam McPherson, not because of us.

HARRISON  
Come on, Brooke—

BROOKE  
I'm sorry. I'm trying to be understanding—

Suddenly Brooke leaps off the bed and throws her hands up.

BROOKE (CONT'D)  
You know what? I'm not sorry, and I'm tired of trying to be understanding! Okay, I get it, we hurt her, I acknowledge that. But I don't see why that should mean she gets to keep hurting us back forever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRISON

Keep— Brooke, she didn't even DO anything!

Brooke's eyes narrow at him.

BROOKE

Oh, you bet she did something, with that stupid little Christmas ornament, all guilt-tripping everyone over her being the missing prodigal runaway daughter, and everyone trying to be cheery—

HARRISON

(breaking in)

You are making so little sense it's scary.

BROOKE

You know what I mean!

HARRISON

Trust me, Brooke, I'm clueless.

She shoots an "obviously" glance at him.

BROOKE

Still think we're stuck in a rut?

HARRISON

No, I'd say we've gone right off the road and into the ditch.

BROOKE

So, is that better?

HARRISON

No! I don't understand how you can be so cavalier about this!

BROOKE

Well, excuse me for not thinking there's a problem—except for Sam!

HARRISON

I know what the problem is! You're jealous of Sam!

Brooke's mouth drops open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

4.

WHITE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. AN OUTDOOR MALL - DAY

Amongst the throngs of post-Christmas shoppers walk Lily and Natalie. Lily is carrying several small bags; Natalie is empty-handed.

NATALIE  
I never figured you for a shopping fool.

LILY  
Oh, Josh'll love these.

NATALIE  
(snorts)  
Right, I always had Josh pegged as a embroidered-cow-doily kind of guy.

Lily gives Natalie a mildly annoyed look.

LILY  
Why haven't you gotten anything?

NATALIE  
This, it's all just...kind of weird.

Lily shrugs her question.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
(abruptly)  
How do you have Christmas without snow? It's just...unnatural, that's what it is.

Lily laughs good-naturedly.

LILY  
It's L.A.

NATALIE  
Like I said...weird.

Lily starts to say something else, but suddenly something in a store window catches Natalie's eye, and the rest of the world fades away...

FLASH CUT TO:

## DREAM MONTAGE

Harrison decked out in a tux and diamond cufflinks, seemingly at some glittery event. Then Natalie there as well, dressed in a glamorous evening gown. Finally, as Harrison leans in ever closer—

FLASH CUT TO:

## THE MALL

Something pulling on Natalie's sleeve snaps her out of her reverie.

NATALIE

What?!

The "something" turns out to be Lily.

LILY

That's what I was asking! "What?"

Natalie just stares at her, dumbfounded.

LILY (CONT'D)

(nodding)

I hate diamonds. You wouldn't believe the conditions the miners live in.

In the shop window, we see a mannequin in a tux, with those diamond cufflinks attached.

DISSOLVE TO:

## INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sam is doing nothing in particular when, without warning, the front door opens and Jaycee pops her head in.

JAYCEE

Hey, girl! Rave tonight!

Sam arches an eyebrow in Jaycee's general direction.

SAM

Again?

JAYCEE

It's the holidays, man!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM  
You need a holiday to rave?

JAYCEE  
No, but it sounds more festive.  
Aww, c'mon, Sam!

SAM  
Okay, okay...

JAYCEE  
There ya go! You'll meet new  
people—you have GOT to make new  
friends.

The door closes.

SAM  
(to herself)  
Yes. That I do.

CUT TO:

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Picking up right where we left off.

BROOKE  
You think I'm what of who?

HARRISON  
I don't get it. I'm here, you're  
here, she's not here. Why are you  
the one who's jealous?

BROOKE  
(flabbergasted)  
That's what I'm saying! Why would  
I be jealous?

HARRISON  
That's a good question.

BROOKE  
Harrison, I'm serious. I will  
strangle you.

HARRISON  
Look, I'm not the one who's always  
acting like Sam is sitting here  
between us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROOKE

But she is! Every time I turn around, it's Sam this or Sam that, or "I wonder what poor Sam is doing," or...

Harrison reaches out and grabs an increasingly hyper Brooke by the shoulders.

HARRISON

Just stop it! This is crazy!

She shrugs him off.

BROOKE

Admit it, Harrison. There's a big white elephant in the room with us, and the elephant's name is Sam McPherson. You wanna know what the problem is? It's her.

HARRISON

No, it's not. She's not even here. you're the problem.

Brooke's eyes narrow dangerously.

BROOKE

Don't call me a problem. you're the problem, with your ruts and your ditches!

Harrison throws up his hands.

HARRISON

Fine. I'm outta here.

He walks out of the room in a huff. For a moment Brooke looks like she might call after him—but she doesn't.

CUT TO:

INT. JOSH AND LILY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Lily comes into the living room to find Josh looking disapprovingly at what can only be described as an extremely odd holiday display.

JOSH

Lil, how long is this thing going to stay like this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILY  
(a bit confused)  
Like what, Josh?

JOSH  
You know...up.

LILY  
What's wrong with it?

JOSH  
Well, first off, it's not a tree.  
Or even very Christmas-y.

LILY  
Baby, we've been through this. The  
idea of chopping down a defenseless  
pine tree just so it can be  
displayed like some floral-cidal  
trophy is morally repugnant.  
(gesturing)  
Besides, these are Christmas-y.  
They just happen to also be non-  
discriminatory and religion-  
neutral.

JOSH  
But it's already five days after  
Christmas!

LILY  
So?

JOSH  
(pointedly)  
In my home, all the Christmas  
decorations are down by noon on the  
twenty-sixth.

Lily stands before him, hands on hips.

LILY  
And why do you want our home to be  
like your home?

Josh stops in mid-rant, finger raised.

JOSH  
You know, that's a good point.

LILY  
(grinning)  
I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Josh gets a mischievous gleam in his eye, and suddenly sets upon Lily with an attack of tickling fingers.

JOSH

Oh, you do, do you? Huh? Huh?

Shrieking, Lily falls back into the sofa, followed closely by Josh.

CUT TO:

INT. A RAVE - NIGHT

Hundreds of ravers crowd the floor of an old warehouse, and in their midst are Sam and Jaycee, dancing up a tempest of epic proportions for the entertainment of those around them. Soon Jaycee spots a smoldering blonde wearing next to nothing, and beckons provocatively. The pair become a trio, though Sam is too amped up to really notice.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sam shuffles listlessly into the kitchen area, the victim of severe morning-after pains. She takes the mini coffee pot and pours a cup of coffee into a mug—except that nothing comes out, because the pot is empty. Sam puzzles over this for several long seconds, peering into the pot from above; then finally holding it over her head, tipping it and examining it from below. After finally accepting that no coffee will be forthcoming, she sets the pot down and heads for the door.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The door to Sam's apartment opens, and Sam appears, still looking like death warmed over. She makes the long, ten-foot trek to Jaycee's door, and knocks feebly.

No answer.

Visibly mustering a burst of energy, she knocks again, loudly.

Still no answer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a few more seconds of deliberation, she tries the door, and finds it unlocked.

CUT TO:

INT JAYCEE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sam walks into Jaycee's place cautiously, but the apartment seems to be empty.

SAM  
Jaycee—?

The bathroom door opens behind Sam, and when she turns around, she sees the blonde from the rave standing in the doorway naked—though Sam obviously doesn't recognize her.

SAM (CONT'D)  
(flustered)  
Uhhh...

The blonde, however, seems completely at ease with the situation.

REYANNA  
Hey! You're Sam, right? From last night. I remember you.

Sam is obviously still three steps behind.

SAM  
I, um...

Reyanna steps forward, holding out her hand.

REYANNA  
Man, I guess you really were flying last night, huh? I'm—

SAM  
(breaking in)  
Nude.

Reyanna looks down at herself, laughing.

REYANNA  
Kinda dumb taking a shower with clothes on, huh? I'm Reyanna.

Sam shakes her hand, more because it's there than anything else.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM  
Hi. Sam. So—

Suddenly Jaycee appears in the bathroom doorway, also naked.

JAYCEE  
Babe, I thought you were gonna—?  
(catching sight of Sam)  
Oh, hey, Sam.

SAM  
(lamely)  
Hey.

Jaycee pulls out a towel from somewhere behind her and wraps it around herself.

JAYCEE  
You remember Reyanna, from last night, right?

REYANNA  
No way, Jay, she had her sights set on other things, huh?

SAM  
(trying to keep up)  
Huh?

JAYCEE  
Yeah, huh?

REYANNA  
(to Sam)  
I saw you scoping that Latino rock, huh?

SAM  
Uhhh...

JAYCEE  
Rey..."rock"?

REYANNA  
Hey, just because I don't eat sausage doesn't mean I can't watch how it's made, huh?

Jaycee concedes the point with a shrug. By this time Sam has turned beet red.

SAM  
I, um, just... I came... I mean, I'm here because...uhhh...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Sam gives up trying to talk and flees the apartment. Reyanna shrugs at Jaycee, who looks vaguely worried.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MALL - DAY

New Year's Eve: The mall is still moderately crowded, and Natalie is out shopping again, solo this time. Also different: she's carrying two small bags. Suddenly someone knocks into her from behind, making her stumble forward a couple of steps.

NATALIE

Hey!

She turns around and sees Harrison standing there, embarrassed.

HARRISON

Oh! Sorry, sorry!

NATALIE

(annoyed)

Harrison, watch where you're going!

But something in Harrison's hang-dog expression makes her anger melt away.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you?

Harrison just shakes his head, demurring.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

It is...Brooke? Are you guys...?

HARRISON

(tired)

We're ALWAYS...

NATALIE

Oh. I'm...sorry. Is it...?

HARRISON

I don't know what it is. She thinks it's Sam.

A long moment of silence.

NATALIE

(prompting)

And?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Harrison shrugs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
You don't know?

HARRISON  
Oh, I know. The only interfering  
Sam is doing between us is in  
Brooke's over-active imagination.

NATALIE  
You're sure?

HARRISON  
She's not around. She lives—I  
don't know exactly. Downtown,  
somewhere. How much can she  
interfere when I don't even know  
where she lives?

Natalie thinks that over for a moment.

NATALIE  
Well...you still see her at school,  
right?

HARRISON  
Not hardly. I'm not even sure she  
goes anymore.

NATALIE  
Ummm...yeah. I guess I'm not  
going to be seeing her much  
either, after—

Belatedly sensing that she's on dangerous ground, she breaks  
off. Harrison isn't willing to let her off the hook, though.

HARRISON  
After what?

NATALIE  
(covering)  
Oh, uh...nothing.

HARRISON  
Did you guys have a fight?

NATALIE  
Uh, yeah. That was it.

Any hope Natalie has that Harrison might let the subject  
drop, though, are quickly dashed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRISON

About what?

NATALIE

About what? Uh, uh, just...girl stuff.

HARRISON

(laughs)

This is Sam we're talking about. She doesn't know what "girl stuff" is.

NATALIE

I mean, nothing important. We had an argument, and she got mad at us, end of story—

HARRISON

Wait, wait, wait. Who's "us"?

NATALIE

Oh! Ah...me and...Carmen.

HARRISON

(slowly)

You and Carmen...had a fight with Sam.

Natalie gives up, backing away.

NATALIE

I think...yeah, I have to go now.

Before Harrison can stop her, she turns and runs off.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - LATER

Sam is pacing the floor next to her bed, while talking on the phone.

SAM  
 (into the phone)  
 ...but... Yes, I know, but it's...  
 No, Sir, of course I'm not doing  
 anything, it's New Year's Eve...!  
 But...  
 (defeated)  
 Yes, Sir... I'll be right there.

Sam puts down the phone and falls back onto the bed, arms over her face.

There is a knock at the door.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 (unmoving)  
 Come in!

The door opens, and Jaycee steps inside.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 (peeking out)  
 I have a sadistic boss from Hell,  
 and he wants me to work! Today!!

JAYCEE  
 I thought you said this Fleischer  
 guy was okay.

SAM  
 He's on vacation.  
 (groans)  
 I got loaned out to some Assistant  
 Editor. From Hell!

JAYCEE  
 That sucks.

SAM  
 Yeah...

After a moment, Jaycee goes over and stands over Sam.

JAYCEE  
 Sam?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Mmm?

JAYCEE

We need to talk.

Sam peeks out from behind her arm again and, on seeing the expression on Jaycee's face, sits up and arranges herself into a lotus position on the bed.

SAM

What's going on?

JAYCEE

(hesitantly)

Look, about this morning—

SAM

Oh! I am totally sorry about barging in like that. I had zero coffee, my brain was officially dead...I just thought you might have a pick-me-up handy. I so did not mean to invade your privacy.

JAYCEE

That's not what I meant. I was talking about Reyanna.

SAM

(growing subdued)

Oh. I guess she...stayed over last night.

JAYCEE

Look, I'm sorry if you've got a problem with me being the way I am, but I'm not gonna make any apologies for who I want to have sex with, or what gender they are—!

Meanwhile, Sam has started waving her arms frantically.

SAM

Whoa, whoa, hang on! What makes you think I have a problem?!

Jaycee, who has worked up a pretty good head of steam, falters.

JAYCEE

Well...you seemed pretty freaked out this morning...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM

I told you! Rave last night, no coffee, no brain! I am totally not judgmental about you being gay! We went through this whole gay awareness thing last year at school. We even started a support group for gay and lesbian students.

JAYCEE

(sincerely)

Wow... I'm impressed. So, I guess there's no problem...

SAM

Absolutely no problem.

JAYCEE

(relieved)

Great, then. So we're good.

SAM

We're good.

JAYCEE

Good. Oh, and it's bi.

SAM

Excuse me?

JAYCEE

I'm bi. Rey's gay.

Sam suddenly stifles a giggle.

JAYCEE (CONT'D)

(mildly annoyed)

What?

SAM

"Rey's gay"?

Jaycee catches on to her impromptu rhyme, and starts giggling herself.

SAM (CONT'D)

(between giggles)

...today on... "Horny Sesame Street"...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Jaycee collapses on the bed as the two girls dissolve into a complete giggle-fest.

CUT TO:

EST. THE CHRONICLE BUILDING - LATER

Jaycee's convertible pulls up to the curb outside the Chronicle, with Jaycee driving and Sam in the passenger seat.

CUT TO:

INT JAYCEE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

SAM

Thanks for the ride.

JAYCEE

Hey, no problemo, man. Sorry you gotta work.

SAM

Yeah, there must be a thousand old articles that need re-filing.

JAYCEE

Well, I'll be thinking about you when I'm, you know, not working.

SAM

(wryly)

You are such a good friend, Jaycee.

Jaycee gives Sam a playful shove.

JAYCEE

Go on. I've delivered you to the gates of Hell.

(pause)

Hey, rave tonight?

SAM

Again??

JAYCEE

(shrugs)

I dunno. Maybe we'll party in. Now go already, before I get a ticket.

Sam opens the door and starts to climb out, but Jaycee grabs her arm, and slips a few pills into her pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAYCEE (CONT'D)

In case of emergency.

SAM

Thanks.

Sam climbs out and closes the door behind her.

CUT TO:

SPLIT SCREEN

The LEFT SIDE of is a close-up of Harrison; the RIGHT SIDE is black. Harrison picks up his phone and dials. There is the sound of a phone ringing, and after a moment, the RIGHT SIDE of the screen wipes to a close-up of Carmen, picking up her phone.

CARMEN

Hello?

HARRISON

Carmen? It's Harrison.

CARMEN

Oh, hey, Harrison! How's your holidays?

HARRISON

What's up with Sam?

CARMEN

(caught off-guard)

Uh—huh? Sam?

HARRISON

I know you and Natalie had a fight with Sam.

CARMEN

How'd you—? I mean, I don't know what you're talking about.

HARRISON

Oh, I have ways, Carmen. I have ways. Now are you gonna tell me what's going on with Sam?

CARMEN

Ummm...I'll call you back.

Carmen pushes the disconnect button on her phone, and the LEFT SIDE of the screen wipes to black.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Carmen dials a number, a different phone rings, and the LEFT SIDE of the screen wipes to show Natalie picking up her phone.

NATALIE

Hello?

CARMEN

Natalie, we have a problem. A serious, Grade-A genuine problem!

NATALIE

My God, what is it?!

CARMEN

Harrison somehow found out about that fight we had with Sam last week!

NATALIE

(wincing)

I know.

CARMEN

Did he call you, too?

NATALIE

Not...exactly.

CARMEN

Then how—?

(realizing)

Natalie! You didn't!

NATALIE

It was a slip!

CARMEN

Well, we have to nip this in the bud, right now!

NATALIE

I'll call Lily. She'll know what to do.

Natalie clicks off the line, and the RIGHT SIDE of the screen wipes to black. Natalie dials, there is yet another ring, and then the RIGHT SIDE of the screen wipes to show Lily with her phone.

LILY

Hello?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NATALIE

Lily, it's Natalie. I did something really dumb today. I mean, really, really, stupid.

LILY

Natalie, I'm sure that whatever it was, it's not that bad.

NATALIE

I accidentally let Harrison know that me and Carmen had a fight with Sam.

LILY

Natalie! How could you?!

NATALIE

It was an accident! Anyway, now Harrison's calling around asking questions.

LILY

All right, let's not panic. I know who he'll go to. Don't worry, just let me handle it.

Lily hangs up, and the LEFT SIDE of the screen wipes to black. She punches her speed dial, and the LEFT SIDE of the screen wipes to Brooke picking up her phone.

BROOKE

Hello?

END SPLIT SCREEN - INTERCUT between Lily and Brooke.

LILY

Hey, Brooke, it's Lily. Listen, have you and Harrison been talking about Sam?

BROOKE

(rolling her eyes)

When haven't we been talking about Sam? It's this constant drone. It's the McPherson Curse, that's what it is.

LILY

Brooke! Has Harrison asked about Sam's...problem?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BROOKE

What?! No!! Oh my God, he doesn't know, does he?

LILY

No...not yet. He found out she had a fight with Carmen and Natalie. I'm afraid if he snoops around long enough, he'll start asking why.

BROOKE

(hyperventilating)  
Oh, God, oh, God...

LILY

Brooke, breathe, okay? Maybe he won't ask. But I have to tell you, I don't know what I'll say if he does come right out and asks me. You know how I feel about lying.

BROOKE

(frantic)  
No, Lily, you have to lie to him! Harrison can never know that Sam's doing drugs!

And as she says that, we see Harrison standing behind her in her bedroom doorway, steaming. He slams the door shut behind him, making her jump and spin around.

HARRISON

Sam's doing WHAT?!

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harrison is still standing there, glaring at Brooke, waiting for an answer to his question.

HARRISON

Well?!

BROOKE

I—I—I said...RUGS! Yeah, Sam's place is pretty bare, so she's the whole rug thing.

Brooke tries to laugh it off, but Harrison isn't buying it.

HARRISON

That's not what you said. You said she's doing drugs!

He advances on her, until she starts backing away.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

What do you mean, she's doing drugs?! Huh?! Tell me!!

Brooke hits the edge of her bed and sits down hard, actually cowering as Harrison leans over her.

BROOKE

Harrison, please...

HARRISON

TELL ME!!!

BROOKE

She's popping pills!

With it said, Brooke buries her face in her hands.

HARRISON

No...it's a lie. Someone's just making this up.

BROOKE

No...

HARRISON

Yes! Come on, you know Sam! You know she'd never take pills! Or any other drug!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROOKE  
It's true, Harrison.

HARRISON  
No! Whoever told you—

BROOKE  
I saw her buying from a dealer,  
okay?!

That seems to take the steam out of Harrison; he sits down heavily on the bed beside her.

HARRISON  
Maybe...maybe you just saw it  
wrong. Maybe she was...maybe she  
researching a story! Right?

BROOKE  
(shaking her head)  
I'm not the only one. Natalie,  
Lily, Carmen...we've all seen her.

Harrison takes this in, and stands up again.

HARRISON  
And you've all been lying to me.  
You most of all.

BROOKE  
What? Harrison, no—!

HARRISON  
Oh, I think so! I just heard you  
telling Lily to lie.

BROOKE  
That's not—I meant—I just didn't  
want you to—

HARRISON  
To what?! What didn't you want me  
to do?!  
(pause)  
I'm going to find Sam and get to  
the bottom of this!

Harrison storms out of the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BROOKE  
 (to the empty room)  
 That was it.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHRONICLE ARCHIVE ROOM - LATER

Sam is immersed in a Byzantine array of filing cabinets. She is moving file folders from one cabinet to another in a bizarrely robotic fashion.

Without warning, Rick Doyle, one of the editors—a burly, rotund man in his 50's—steps up to the edge of Sam's space.

DOYLE  
 Hey!

Startled, Sam looks up, banging her head on one of the cabinets.

SAM  
 Ow!

DOYLE  
 You're Fleischer's girl, right?

SAM  
 (carefully)  
 I'm Mr. Fleischer's...intern.

DOYLE  
 Good! Come with me.

Doyle turns on his heel and walks off; after a moment of confusion, Sam scrambles to her feet and follows him.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRONICLE NEWSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Doyle walks into the newsroom with Sam trailing on his heels. The large bullpen space is about as empty as it ever gets.

DOYLE  
 (disgusted)  
 Look at this! How am I supposed to get anything done when nobody's working?

SAM  
 Uh, Sir? It's New Year's Eve?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He rounds on her.

DOYLE  
You think news stops happening on  
New Year's Eve?

SAM  
N-no, Sir. I don't. Sir.

DOYLE  
Damn straight! You can write,  
right?

SAM  
Huh? I mean, yeah. Right. Uh,  
yes. Sir.

DOYLE  
Good!

He picks up a pad and pen off a nearby desk and shoves them at her.

DOYLE (CONT'D)  
There's a Redevelopment Commission  
meeting at the County Annex at  
four o'clock. Go cover it.

SAM  
Uh—huh?? I, uh—

DOYLE  
I don't need a five-part series,  
Kid. Nothing ever happens at  
these things, especially over the  
holidays. Just show up, and on  
the off-chance they do vote on  
something, write a blurb on it.  
Do you think you can do that?

SAM  
Oh—yes. Yes, Sir.

DOYLE  
Good!  
(shooing)  
Well?! Go, go, go!

Spurred to action, Sam turns around and rushes out.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHRONICLE BUILDING - LATER

Sam is standing on the curb, her laptop slung over her shoulder, trying to figure out the best way to get to the County Annex, when a Chronicle minivan pulls up in front of her. In the driver's seat is Matt Watney, a fresh-faced boy not much older than Sam. He leans over and rolls down the passenger-side window.

MATT  
Going to the Redevelopment  
Commission?

SAM  
(confused)  
How'd you—?

MATT  
Want a ride?

As Sam stands there, undecided—

MATT (CONT'D)  
I won't bite. Promise.

Finally Sam opens the passenger door and climbs in. Matt pulls out into traffic.

CUT TO:

INT. THE COMPANY MINIVAN - MOVING

MATT  
You're McPherson, right? Mr.  
Fleischer's pet project?

SAM  
(exasperated)  
Is that all anyone knows me as?

MATT  
(shrugs)  
People talk. High-school whiz-kid,  
in line for a staff position...

SAM  
What?!

MATT  
Didn't know that? You are.  
You're kind of like the prodigal  
daughter around here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM  
(muttering)  
Just great.

As the conversation peters out, she turns around in her seat and spies a mass of camera equipment in the back.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Photographer?

MATT  
Me? Yep.

SAM  
(grinning)  
Cub?

MATT  
You have no idea how glad I am that  
phrase is passé.

SAM  
(gesturing)  
Hey—wombat here.

MATT  
Oh...yeah. Photography interns  
don't get called that, just  
journalism ones. Never did get it.

SAM  
You mean, no one ever told you why  
"wombats"?

Matt shakes his head.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Well, the way it got told to me...

CUT TO:

EST. L.A. COUNTY ANNEX BUILDING - AFTERNOON

A typically utilitarian, two-story concrete-and-glass structure, probably built in the 60's. The L.A. Chronicle minivan pulls into an empty diagonal parking space in the front lot.

CUT TO:

INT. THE COMPANY MINIVAN

As Matt puts the car in park, both he and Sam are apparently recovering from a serious belly laugh.

MATT  
...no, really? Serious?

SAM  
I swear! Hey, it was before my time, okay? I woulda thrown them off the roof.

MATT  
(still laughing)  
Think of the nickname you would've gotten then.

SAM  
Oh, my God...maybe "wombat" isn't that bad.

MATT  
(checks his watch)  
I'd better get in there. I have to set up. You can take your time—hardly anyone comes to these things.

Sam takes a look in the back again.

SAM  
Oh, I can help carry stuff.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMISSION MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Matt is setting up a tripod in the back of the room, while Sam sets a shoulder bag down. Except for them, the room is mostly empty: only a couple of the audience chairs are occupied, and the only official-looking person in evidence is a clerk sitting off to the side, going through a stack of notes. Matt starts to unpack and mount his camera equipment.

SAM  
So, how come you have to be here?

MATT  
The paper updates its file photos of all the minor county officials at the beginning of each year.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT (CONT'D)

Nothing meetings like this are a good way of getting some of them.

SAM

(guessing)

And, it's something nobody else wants to do.

MATT

(deadpan)

Are you kidding? Fires, rescues, sports—even the guys on the Lifestyle beat snapping kids in the park—they're all saying, "Man, what I wouldn't give to be shooting portraits of county flunkies right now!"

SAM

Yuh-huh. Never mind. I can see exactly why you're here.

MATT

Is that an insult, wombat?

Sam just raises an eyebrow at him.

MATT (CONT'D)

Go. Sit. Before all the good places are taken.

She gazes over the nearly-empty audience chamber, makes a mildly rude noise at him, and goes to find a seat.

INSERT: WALL CLOCK

A typical civil-service clock, found in government buildings everywhere. It reads "3:04", then dissolves to read "5:15".

Someone behind the commission bench is droning on, but Sam isn't listening: she's slumped over in her chair, snoring softly. A hand touches her shoulder, and she starts awake. Matt is crouching in the row behind her.

SAM

(half-whispering)

Did I miss anything?

MATT

(snorts)

Yeah, they voted on world peace about fifteen minutes ago.

(beat)

It didn't pass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM

I'm sorry, my brain is too numb to appreciate sarcasm. Please try your call again later.

MATT

Here.

He brings up a container with a plastic lid and hands it to her. She peels a corner back and takes a sip.

MATT (CONT'D)

Thought you could use some coffee.

SAM

Thanks.

She takes another sip.

SAM (CONT'D)

Did you say world peace didn't pass?

MATT

Nope. Got shot down five-to-two.

SAM

(absently)

Huh.

After Matt pats her on the shoulder and moves off, she drops a hand into her pocket, surreptitiously pulls out a couple of pills and pops them into her mouth, washing them down with a swig of coffee. Then she straightens up and tries to focus on the bureaucratic droning.

Just then the commission chairman, sitting behind the center of the bench, stops talking, and unnecessarily bangs a little gavel.

CHAIRMAN

That concludes the commission's scheduled business. The floor is now open to public comment, if there is any.

His tone suggests that he doesn't believe there will be any, and since there are only a couple of people besides Sam in the audience, it looks like a safe assumption. The Chairman is halfway to calling the meeting adjourned when a figure rises from the back, catching everyone off-guard. Sam turns in her seat and sees a rather burly man coming down the short center aisle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MAN

Yeah, I wanna talk.

The Chairman seems flustered, as though this has never happened before—which might just be the case.

CHAIRMAN

Oh—ah, of course, Mr., uh, Mr.—?

MAN

Campbell. Buck Campbell. And what I gotta say, I gotta say to him.

The man—Campbell—is pointing to the Chairman's immediate left, causing another stir of surprise. The most surprised-looking person is the one being pointed at; an undistinguished fellow with a receding hairline.

CHAIRMAN

(confused)

I'm sorry—you want to address Mr. Jesper? A-a-a comment on his, uh, proposal?

CAMPBELL

(picking up volume)

The only proposals I wanna talk about are the ones he's been makin' with my wife, LeAnn!

At the mention of the name "LeAnn," Jesper goes pale and scoots away from the bench. Campbell reaches into his plaid hunting jacket with one beefy hand, and everyone—including Sam—gasps. But instead of a weapon, out comes a fistful of photos, which he waves in front of Jesper.

CAMPBELL (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's right! I hired a private eye to get the goods on you two. Remember the Sunset Motel?! Huh?! REMEMBER, YOU LOUSY S.O.B.?!!

Campbell launches himself across the bench, grabbing Jesper. In the process, the photos go flying; one of them flutters to the ground at Sam's feet. After looking at it for a moment, wide-eyed, she snatches it up. As the conference room dissolves into chaos—or at least as much chaos is possible, given the number of people there—Matt has grabbed his camera off the tripod and is busy snapping pictures.

The two men grapple at each other for a few moments, before a couple of security guards finally pull Campbell off. The Chairman pounds his gavel on the bench repeatedly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CHAIRMAN  
Quiet! Quiet! Everyone calm  
down!

Meanwhile, Sam has made her way to the back of the room and is standing next to Matt. That's when the Chairman spots them.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)  
(pointing)  
Hey! Hey, you!

Rather than take their chances, Matt and Sam hurriedly gather up their equipment and rush out of the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

The front door opens and Harrison comes out, looking both unhappy and preoccupied. So preoccupied, in fact, that he nearly runs into George while coming down the steps.

GEORGE  
Hey!

Harrison looks up sourly.

HARRISON  
Oh, you too, I guess!

GEORGE  
Excuse me? Look, I don't know  
what your problem is, Harrison—

HARRISON  
(heatedly)  
My problem is everyone knowing  
Sam's using but me!

George takes a step back, and from the look on his face Harrison realizes the truth.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
You...didn't...

GEORGE  
(catching up)  
Sam's using?! As in drugs?!

Instead of answering, Harrison sits down on the steps. After a moment, George sits beside him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEORGE (CONT'D)  
Did she deny it?

HARRISON  
She's not home. Took me all  
afternoon to find out where she  
lives, and she's not even here.

A long pause.

GEORGE  
What did you mean, everyone knows?

HARRISON  
The girls...Brooke, Carmen, Lily,  
Natalie... I only found out  
because I overheard Brooke talking  
about it.

GEORGE  
I can't... Are you sure?

HARRISON  
(nods glumly)  
Brooke saw her buying.

GEORGE  
(struggling)  
Well...maybe she's just...

HARRISON  
—working on a story?

Harrison shakes his head, once. Tears start welling up in his eyes.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
They've seen her high.

George just shakes his head, unable to say anything. There is another long moment of silence.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
This is my fault. I drove her to  
this.

He sneaks a glance over at George.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
Feel free to join in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GEORGE

(exploding)

Man, you are so full of yourself it's unbelievable! You know there's nothing I'd like better right now than to lay this on you. But we both know that's not true, don't we? You don't start doing drugs because you had a bad day, or you blew the big game—or because your boyfriend's cheating on you. This isn't on you. Or Brooke. Or anyone else. It's on Sam. She did this to herself.

HARRISON

I could've been there for her.

GEORGE

(rises)

You got that right.

George walks off, leaving Harrison to sit and wallow in his own misery.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRONICLE MINIVAN - MOVING

The minivan is careening through traffic; Matt is hunched over the wheel like some manic race car driver, while Sam sits in the passenger seat, furiously typing on the laptop balanced on her knees.

MATT

(wildly)

Wow! Do you believe that? A real fight!

SAM

(not looking up)

Just drive!

SLIDE CUT TO:

INT. CHRONICLE NEWSROOM - LATER

Doyle is reading a paper copy of Sam's story, while Sam stands nearby, barely able to contain herself. Finally, he looks up, his face scrunched.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOYLE

Kid...this ain't news.

Sam's ebullient expression crumbles.

SAM

But—but—this guy attacked—

DOYLE

Nobody, kid. He attacked a nobody. If this was the mayor, yeah, it'd be news. Or a county supe. This is just a nobody member of a nothing commission nobody cares about. He's having an affair? So what? There's a million people having affairs in this city. In fact, I guarantee there's ten thousand people out there having adulterous sex right this second.

Sam pales slightly at the thought of that. Doyle folds his arms.

DOYLE (CONT'D)

Now, kid...what did I tell you to do if something happened at the meeting?

SAM

(sighs)

Write a blurb.

DOYLE

Good! So give this to me in a blurb. Right now.

SAM

(thinking)

Uh... "A man attacked a County Redevelopment Commission member at a Commission meeting last night, accusing him of having an affair with his wife. After a brief scuffle, order was restored, and no arrests were made."

DOYLE

Good! Write that up, right now.

Dejected, Sam sits at one of the empty terminals and types for a few seconds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM  
(heavily)  
There. Now what?

Doyle comes over and reads over her shoulder.

DOYLE  
Good! Now—Fleischer never took  
you through this?

Sam shakes her head numbly.

DOYLE (CONT'D)  
Well, Jeez Louise!

He goes to a nearby terminal and starts tapping keys.

DOYLE (CONT'D)  
Okay, listen up, kid. Every  
contributor to the paper's got  
their own code... What's your  
name?

SAM  
Sam McPherson.

Doyle punches a few more keys.

DOYLE  
Here you are. You're S-M-C-P. In  
the box where it says "Contrib"  
you put that. Then click "Submit"  
and "Confirm".

Sam dutifully follows these directions, and the terminal beeps  
in response. Doyle straightens up, satisfied.

DOYLE (CONT'D)  
Good! You're done.

SAM  
Uh, I am?

DOYLE  
Go home, have a happy new year.  
(pause)  
Oh, and, kid!

Sam, who has started to gather her things, stops and waits  
expectantly. Doyle picks up her original story and waves it.

DOYLE (CONT'D)  
This is a great story!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The expression on Sam's face clearly shows that she's totally lost again.

SAM

Huh? But—I thought you hated it!

DOYLE

(incredulous)

Hate it? I love it! I just can't use it! But this writing—crisp, balanced, nuanced—I wouldn'ta had to change more than a half dozen words. When you get your hooks into a story that's real news, write it up exactly like this.

(pointing at her)

You're gonna be an editor's wet dream, kid.

Sam blushes at that. Then she thinks of something else.

SAM

Oh! What about the photos?

DOYLE

That photo kid's shots of the fight? We might run one, if there's a hole in Metro somewhere.

SAM

(shaking her head)

No, no, the photos the guy had, of his wife and the commissioner.

She digs out the photo she had snatched and shows it to him. Doyle in turn, snatches it away, holding it as though it were a chunk of gold.

DOYLE

(bug-eyed)

There's dirty pictures? And you got one?! Jeez Louise, now I really wish this guy was a somebody!

He hands the photo back to her.

DOYLE (CONT'D)

Souvenir, kid. No doubt about it—you've got the Touch.

SAM

The wha'?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DOYLE

Reporter's Touch—right place,  
right time. Can't wait for you to  
start beating the bushes for real,  
see what you dig up then. Oh,  
you're going places, kid. Don't  
know what Fleischer's doing  
wasting you with filing.

SAM

Well, I—I do research, too.

DOYLE

(scoffs)

Research! I got a dozen airhead  
coeds doing research! Okay, I've  
heard enough.

He reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out a business  
card, which he hands to Sam.

DOYLE (CONT'D)

From now on, you're working Metro,  
for me.

SAM

(flummoxed)

But, uh, Art, I mean, Mr.  
Fleischer, won't he—?

Doyle fixes his gaze on her.

DOYLE

Kid. He's a columnist. I'm an  
editor. Which one of us do you  
think is higher on the food chain?

SAM

(carefully)

Ah...you. Sir.

DOYLE

Damn straight, Kid. My office,  
Monday morning.

With his business done, Doyle turns and starts to walk away.

SAM

(calling)

Uh, Sir? I have school on Monday.

He stops and turns back, with a pained expression on his  
face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

DOYLE  
(rubbing his temple)  
School. Right. You're in high  
school.

SAM  
(helpfully)  
I'm a senior.

DOYLE  
(sighs)  
You're killin' me, kid. Monday,  
after school, my office.

Then he turns and walks away, vigorously this time.

SAM  
(to his back)  
Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir!

For a long moment Sam just stands there, trying to process  
what's just happened.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. MCQUEEN LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Brooke is curled up on the couch, chin plopped on her forearms, in the mother of all funks. She doesn't stir when Mike gingerly sits down beside her.

MIKE

Brooke, sweetie, what's wrong?  
You barely touched your dinner.

BROOKE

(mumbling)  
Wasn't hungry.

Resolutely, Mike tries to cheer her up.

MIKE

Honey, maybe you'll be hungry by  
midnight. We'll make popcorn,  
and—

BROOKE

I think I'm just going to bed  
early.

MIKE

Brooke, why? You've always stayed  
up on New Year's Eve, even when  
you were a little girl.

She briefly turns a bleak face his way.

BROOKE

This has been the worst year ever.  
In the history of ever.

Jane has come into the room; she kneels down next to Brooke.

JANE

I know it's been rough. But  
tomorrow is a whole brand new  
year. It's going to get better,  
trust me.

BROOKE

(shaking her head)  
It's not getting better. It's not,  
it's not, IT'S NOT!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly Brooke leaps off the couch and goes running up the stairs, with Mike and Jane looking at each other helplessly.

CUT TO:

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Brooke is lying face down on her bed, crying, when a gentle tapping comes at the door. She doesn't respond, but the door opens anyway, and Jane steps through cautiously.

JANE

Brooke?

Brooke gives no sign of acknowledgment at all. Jane carefully makes her way over to the bed, and sits on the edge. She reaches down and strokes Brooke's hair soothingly.

JANE (CONT'D)

Honey...I think this is about more than New Year's.

Brooke's heaving continues unabated.

JANE (CONT'D)

For a while now, Mike and I have both felt that...well, that you've uncomfortable around us.

Still nothing from Brooke.

JANE (CONT'D)

I think I know what it is. Mike doesn't, but that's because it's not about him, is it? It's not even really about me.

(beat)

It's about Sam, isn't it?  
Something about Sam we don't know.  
Right?

Brooke turns over, and her face is such a mask of complete anguish that Jane recoils for a moment.

BROOKE

(sobbing)

No, no, no...please...I can't...  
don't make me...

Brooke instinctively curls herself around Jane's form and, startled, Jane tries to comfort her, holding her hand and ever-so-gently sweeping the hair away from her face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE  
 (cooing)  
 Shhh...shhh...it's all right...  
 whatever it is, it all right...

BROOKE  
 (barely coherent)  
 I said...I—I—I said...b-but I  
 c-can't...

JANE  
 There, there, Brooke...don't worry,  
 everything will work out...

BROOKE  
 ...Wh-when Sam...S-Sam...ran  
 away... I-I said...but...

Jane shifts just slightly, as she pieces together Brooke's meandering words.

JANE  
 (very, very softly)  
 When Sam ran away, you said "no  
 more lies." It is something about  
 Sam. Something you don't want to  
 tell us. I was right.

Impulsively she pulls Brooke closer.

JANE (CONT'D)  
 It doesn't matter, honey...  
 whatever it is, it'll be all  
 right...

Without warning, Brooke tears herself away from Jane, rolling off the bed so that she is standing before her stepmother, looking seriously crazed.

BROOKE  
 Stop! Stop saying that! It's not  
 going to be all right! You don't  
 know!!  
 (shrieking)  
 YOU DON'T KNOW!!!

With that one burst of energy, Brooke seems completely spent. Now she is just trembling and hugging herself, as though she were trying to keep herself from physically coming apart. Meanwhile, Jane regards her carefully, as if she were something very fragile (which seems to be a good idea).

Finally, Jane reaches out tentatively.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANE

Brooke...whatever it is, it's  
okay. I swear.

(slowly rising)

Honey, I give you my word, nothing  
will happen if you tell me. You  
know I wouldn't lie to you, right?  
Brooke?

Instead of responding, Brooke seems to withdraw further  
within herself. Jane puts on a brave face, and tries a  
lighter tack.

JANE (CONT'D)

(trying to sound light)

Come on, Brooke. How bad can it  
be, really? Sam's already moved  
out, cut us off. I mean, it's not  
like she's become a drug addict  
or—

But at the sound of those magic words Brooke's head snaps up  
like a shot, her eyes wide as saucers. An instant later Jane  
realizes what that means; she sits back down weakly, hand  
clamped over her open mouth. Overcome by the trauma of  
having let the truth slip out—however it happened—Brooke  
turns and flees the room, while Jane, paralyzed by shock, is  
powerless to stop her.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - LATER

Sam, Jaycee and Reyanna are having a party, more or less; so  
far, only beer seems to be in evidence. Sam is sitting up on  
her bed, back against the wall. Reyanna is flopped across  
the bed's foot, head half hanging off the edge. Jaycee walks  
over, carrying a fresh beer.

JAYCEE

So, you got a promotion?

SAM

(frowning)

Yeah. I guess. Maybe. I dunno.

JAYCEE

Well, that clears it up.

SAM

I just hope Art doesn't mind.  
This guy just kinda stole me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REYANNA

Hey, the only thing you oughta care about is, is it good for me, huh? I wouldn't mind getting stole. Not by a guy, though.

By chance, Jaycee has ended up standing near Reyanna's head. Reyanna reaches out, wraps a hand around Jaycee's bare leg, and pulls her a step closer, so that she is more-or-less looking up Jaycee's short skirt.

JAYCEE

Behave, Rey.

Sam holds up a hand.

SAM

Guys, please, don't feel weirded out around me. I hate that. Just act the way you normally would.

REYANNA

(grinning)

Hey, she's cool, huh?

Reyanna promptly slides her hand all the way up Jaycee's leg and under her skirt.

JAYCEE

(rolling her eyes at Sam)

You shouldn't have said that.

She slaps Reyanna's hand away.

JAYCEE (CONT'D)

I mean it. Behave—or no sex tonight.

Reyanna pouts, while Sam makes an expression of mock sympathy.

SAM

Sorry.

REYANNA

It's cool. Jay's worth it.

(pause)

But...I could be in someone else's bed tonight, huh?

JAYCEE/SAM

(simultaneously)

Huh?

In response, Reyanna half-turns and looks up at Sam lazily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

REYANNA

What d'ya say, Sam? I could show  
you some things, huh?

Jaycee and Sam are both wide-eyed at this point.

SAM

(throwing her hands up)  
Uh, uh, thanks, really, but—

Before Sam or Jaycee can do anything, Reyanna runs her hand  
idly up Sam's leg.

REYANNA

Sure? Be fun with a virgin.

SAM

Um...I'm...

Somewhat recovered, Jaycee sits on the bed next to Sam,  
watching Reyanna's hand with a kind of detached interest.

JAYCEE

(sotto voce)  
She means with girls.

SAM

Yeah, I just figured that out.

Sam seems just tipsy enough not to take Reyanna's advances  
too seriously. Still, as Reyanna's hand makes its way up to  
her calf, Sam shivers involuntarily.

At that, Jaycee rouses herself out of her reverie, slapping  
her thigh, rolling off the bed and pulling Reyanna up after  
her.

JAYCEE

Okay, that's enough out of you.

Reyanna starts to protest, but a knock at the door cuts her  
off. Stretching, Sam climbs off the bed and pads to the door.

She looks shocked to find George standing there.

GEORGE

Sam—we need to talk.

Between George's bluntness and the alcohol in Sam's system,  
the air between them quickly drops to sub-arctic temperatures.

SAM

Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GEORGE  
Can we talk, please? Inside.

SAM  
(glacially)  
No.

Behind her, Jaycee comes up to the door, with Reyanna hanging on her shoulders.

GEORGE  
(eyes narrowing)  
Oh—having a party?

REYANNA  
Yeah. So? What's it to you, huh?  
Whoever you are.

SAM  
(quietly)  
George.

Recognition lights upon Jaycee's face.

JAYCEE  
Ohhh...I know about you. You're  
Dumping Boyfriend Number One.

GEORGE  
(unfazed)  
And you are?

Sam steps into his line of sight before Jaycee can answer.

SAM  
What do you think's going on here?  
You don't get to chat up my  
friends, George. You're not a  
part of my life anymore. Don't  
you get that?

GEORGE  
Sam, if you're in trouble—

SAM  
I'm not. Do I look like I'm in  
trouble?

GEORGE  
You look drunk. Or worse. And  
since you're underage, I'd say,  
yeah, I think you're in trouble.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SAM  
(dripping scorn)  
Oh, and you've never been drunk.

GEORGE  
Yeah, I've been drunk. You know  
that. But I've never been high.

Sam glares at him with such unrelenting hostility that it's a wonder he doesn't wither on the spot.

SAM  
Look, I don't know what people  
have been telling you, but—

GEORGE  
(doggedly)  
I just want to say, if you are in  
trouble, you can—

SAM  
(cutting him off)  
What? Come to you? Talk to you?  
(snorting)  
Tried that. You blew me off.

GEORGE  
(exasperated)  
Sam, that's not how it—

SAM  
George—just go away.

Sam ends the conversation by shutting the door in George's face.

CUT TO:

EXT. A BEACH - LATE NIGHT

A dark and completely deserted stretch of beach—deserted except for one blonde form lying asleep on the sand.

Brooke awakens fitfully, child-like, sitting up, rubbing her eyes, brushing sand off her clothes. She looks around, a bit disoriented, for several long moments before her attention is drawn by faint lights and sounds further down the shoreline. Finally, she pulls herself up and starts to walk in that direction.

CUT TO:

INT. MCQUEEN KITCHEN - LATER

Jane is huddled over the sink, where she's been crying her eyes out for some time. Mike comes up from behind and slips his arms around her, offering quiet support.

JANE

(shaky)

I don't understand... How did this happen? What...what did I do...?

MIKE

We. What did we do?

She turns in his arms.

JANE

She's my—

MIKE

(overriding her)

She our daughter. I agreed to take on the responsibilities of a parent to Sam. I'm not shirking those responsibilities now.

JANE

I used to hear other parents worry about their kids, and I always thought, thank God for Sam, she's so level-headed, and...

Mike cradles her as she trails off. Eventually she looks back up at him.

JANE (CONT'D)

Did you find Brooke?

Mike shakes his head.

JANE (CONT'D)

Oh, Mike, I'm so sorry. I should've...

He puts a finger to her lips.

MIKE

Brooke's a big girl. She keeps reminding me of that. So do you. She can take care of herself.

JANE

Like Sam?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mike gathers her close again.

MIKE  
We'll get through this. I  
promise.

CUT TO:

EXT. A BEACH - NEAR MIDNIGHT

This stretch of beach is populated by people gathering to watch a fireworks show, though by no means is it really crowded. Among the occasional knots of people, Harrison walks alone. His bearing seems more distracted than depressed—at least until he is spotted by a couple strolling in the opposite direction, hand-in-hand: Sugar Daddy and Carmen.

SUGAR  
Yo, Harrison! What's shakin', man?

Sugar Daddy pumps Harrison's hand vigorously, forcing him at least partially out of his doldrums.

HARRISON  
Hey! Look at...you guys!

CARMEN  
(hanging on Sugar Daddy's arm)  
We're making New Year's  
resolutions.

SUGAR  
Yeah, like we resolve not to let  
stupid stuff keep us from having  
fun together.

HARRISON  
(grinning)  
Well, good for you!

CARMEN  
So, where's Brooke?

Harrison's grin falters.

CARMEN (CONT'D)  
(dismayed)  
What happened?

He looks her square in the eye.

HARRISON  
I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Now it's Carmen's turn to falter.

CARMEN

I—I—I don't—

HARRISON

I know, Carmen. I know about Sam.

Carmen's face falls farther than Harrison's had been. Then Sugar Daddy steps in.

SUGAR

Hey, man, don't lay this on her.  
It was Brooke's call to keep you  
out of the loop.

HARRISON

(heated)

You knew, too?!

SUGAR

Like I said, it was Brooke's call.

HARRISON

(subsiding)

Yeah... I'm not pissed at you,  
Sugar. I'm just...pissed.

SUGAR

(sympathetically)

Word, man. This whole scene is  
whack, end line to end line.

CARMEN

Hey...we're gonna find a good spot  
to watch the fireworks.

(gestures with her head)

You wanna come with?

HARRISON

Naw.

SUGAR

Hey, it's cool, man. Serious. I  
feel real bad about Sam. She's  
good people.

HARRISON

Thanks, but... I think I need to  
be alone for a while.

CARMEN

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Sugar Daddy and Carmen head off towards an area of dunes where people are gathering; Harrison wanders vaguely in the opposite direction, into a more empty stretch of beach. After a long silence, a voice comes from behind him:

NATALIE

You're sure you want to be alone?

Harrison turns, ready to chase her off; but even in the darkness the sorrow on her face is sharp enough to still his words. Instead he goes and half-sits, half-perches on a low stone wall. A moment later, she adopts the same posture by his side—just a couple of buds, sitting on a wall.

HARRISON

I know.

NATALIE

I heard.

HARRISON

Brooke told you?

NATALIE

(shakes her head)

I heard you tell Carmen.

A long silence passes between them.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Don't blame Brooke. If you were my boyfriend, I'd have done the same thing.

HARRISON

(annoyed)

Boy, you all really don't trust me.

NATALIE

(quiet)

It's not about trust.

HARRISON

Then what is it?

NATALIE

Brooke knew—I knew—that if you found out what Sam was doing, you'd rush right off to save her, no matter what.

Harrison shakes his head, clearly not getting it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Some of us care about you too much  
to watch you do that.

Struck by the force behind Natalie's words, Harrison stares at her, astonished. Their eyes lock, and they more seem overwhelmed by the moment. She leans towards him, tilting her head, and they are about to kiss when Harrison's gaze strays past her, and he sees:

HARRISON

Brooke.

Natalie whips around, wide-eyed, to see for herself Brooke staring at them from perhaps a dozen paces away, an expression on her slack-jawed face that can only hint at absolute betrayal.

For a long moment, everything is frozen. Then Brooke breaks the spell, turning and running back the way she came.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

BROOKE!!!

He tries to get up and run after her—but Natalie pushes him forcefully. He has to grab at the wall to regain his balance; she takes advantage of the momentary delay to take off after Brooke herself.

CUT TO:

EXT. A BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Brooke is racing across an empty stretch of beach, with Natalie on her heels.

NATALIE

(calling, breathless)

Brooke! Brooke, wait! Please!

Suddenly, Brooke pulls up short. Natalie stops a respectful distance behind. But Brooke doesn't turn around.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(tentatively)

Brooke? I know what— I mean, I  
know that looked—but— I just,  
just want you to know— Brooke?

Her back turned, Brooke is heaving, but Natalie can't tell if she's huffing or sobbing. Then Brooke faces her, and Natalie is shocked to see her laughing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROOKE

(halting)

God...I am such a moron...I was...  
so obsessed with Sam...I never...  
 saw you coming. How funny is  
 that?

NATALIE

(stricken)

No...Brooke... It—it wasn't—  
 I'm not—

BROOKE

(cutting her off coldly)

You want Harrison.

NATALIE

(shaking her head frantically)

I—I never... I wouldn't...

BROOKE

You're going to deny it? To my  
 face? Nic wouldn't have.

Feet set, fists balled at her sides, Natalie summons every  
 last ounce of conviction she can muster:

NATALIE

I'M...NOT...NICOLE.

Tears brimming in her eyes, lips compressed tight, Brooke nods  
 curtly; but there is such a mix of rage and anguish on her  
 face that it's impossible to tell what the nod is supposed to  
 convey.

BROOKE

(choking out the words)

Keep trying. You'll get there.

Brooke turns and walks away, leaving Natalie to stand there,  
 shaking and holding herself, tears streaming down her cheeks.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT FOUR

THE END