

Popular: Senior Year
"The Quality of the Competition"
by
The Wild Pikachu

POPULAR: SENIOR YEAR

THE QUALITY OF THE COMPETITION

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

Outside the Novak: Lily comes walking up just as Natalie is exiting the restroom. Without missing a beat, Lily grabs Natalie by the arm, neatly spins her around, and propels her back through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS' RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside the Novak door, Lily confronts Natalie, arms akimbo.

LILY
Natalie, we have to talk.

NATALIE
(amiably)
Okay.

Lily seems greatly put off by Natalie's nonchalant attitude.

LILY
"Okay"?! What does that mean,
"okay"?!

NATALIE
(slowly)
Okay...fine...all right...sure
thing...you know—okay?

Lily throws her arms up in frustration.

LILY
Argh! Natalie!

NATALIE
Did you want me to say something
else?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILY
How can you stand there and act
like nothing happened?!

NATALIE
(confused)
What, did something happen?

LILY
Natalie!!

NATALIE
What?! You said we had to talk,
but I don't know what about?

LILY
Last weekend?! The ski trip?!

NATALIE
Oh! Hey, that was fun. Real
honest-to-God snow, great skiing,
plus I made a friend—

LILY
(sourly)
Sam.

NATALIE
Well, remade, I guess. And I got
this really cool new job.

LILY
And you told Brooke you were going
after Harrison!

NATALIE
Oh, yeah, but that's between me and
Brooke. I thought you meant
something between us.

LILY
(exasperated)
Natalie! How am I supposed to
stay uninvolved?!

NATALIE
(frowns)
Well...you don't get involved with
all that stuff between Brooke and
Sam.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LILY

Only technically. These days Sam has other reasons to be mad at me, apparently.

NATALIE

I could talk to her, if you want.

LILY

No!

(considering)

Well, maybe it could—

(back on track)

No! Natalie, this isn't about me and Sam! It's about you and Brooke!

NATALIE

(biting)

I tried, Lily. I tried several times. For my trouble I got insulted and screamed at. So forgive me for not continuing to beat my head against the wall that is Brooke McQueen.

LILY

But, Natalie! Using Harrison?!

NATALIE

I am not! I like Harrison! I think Harrison and I could be good together.

LILY

But Brooke—

NATALIE

What, I'm supposed to forget about Harrison just because Brooke was there first? The way I hear it, Harrison and Sam were like that—

(crossing her fingers)

—for ages, and it didn't stop Brooke from swooping in and snatching him for herself.

Lily opens her mouth for a rebuttal, until she realizes she doesn't have one, and snaps it shut again.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

So why can't I do the exact same thing to her?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LILY

Is that what this is, Natalie?
Revenge on Sam's behalf?

NATALIE

(despairing)

You're not listening to me! I
like Harrison! Maybe more than
like, I don't know! But I'm going
to find out. And I'm not going to
let Brooke—or anyone else—stop
me.

LILY

What about Harrison?

NATALIE

(thoughtful)

I think he likes me. He could like
me, if he got the chance.

LILY

So, you're just going to offer
yourself up...

NATALIE

Stop it! You make it sound...
dirty.

LILY

Sorry. This is just really weird.

NATALIE

All I want is a fair shot. A
chance to let Harrison choose who
he wants to be with.

LILY

What if he chooses Brooke?

Natalie shrugs faintly.

LILY (CONT'D)

(incredulous)

So it's just, what, may the best
woman win?

NATALIE

(considers)

Yeah. And, Lily?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(pause)

That would be ME.

WHITE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. CHEMISTRY CLASS - MORNING

Moments before the bell rings. Most of the class is already in their seats. Then Sam breezes in, cell phone in one hand, PDA in the other, fully loaded shoulder bag tucked under one arm.

SAM
 (into the phone)
 Yes, I got that part...no, I understand that...

Miss Glass, lounging in her chair, leaps up at the sound of a student having the nerve to use a cell phone in class.

GLASS
 McPherson!

Sam stops in her tracks, turns around, and—as best she can—holds up a finger.

SAM
 (into the phone)
 Hold on, Mr. Krupps.
 (to Miss Glass)
 Yes, Miss Glass?

The realization that Sam is on the phone with Principal Krupps—and that therefore there's nothing she can really do about it—results in Miss Glass rolling her eyes and skulking away.

GLASS
 (disgusted)
 Nothing.

Dismissing her instantly, Sam returns to her call:

SAM
 (into the phone)
 I'm back... Okay....

While she's talking, she dumps her shoulder bag on the table in front of her stool.

SAM (CONT'D)
 ...Sure, I can take care of that...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She fishes a couple of papers out of the bag.

SAM (CONT'D)

...No, it's no problem...

Sam trots to the front of the room, lays the papers down in front of an unsmiling Miss Glass, and heads back to her seat.

SAM (CONT'D)

...Uh-huh... Can I see that report?... Great...

As she hops onto the stool, the bell rings.

SAM (CONT'D)

...Yeah, gotta go, that's the bell... Okay...

(laughs)

...You too, Mr. Krupps.

She snaps the phone closed and tucks it away, then turns her attention to Miss Glass, who seems to be steaming just under the surface. She picks up the papers Sam had left and scans them.

GLASS

Are these your chapter reports, McPherson?

SAM

Uh-huh. I did them last night.

GLASS

(snorts)

You did this in one night? This oughta be fun.

She promptly tosses the papers to one side.

GLASS (CONT'D)

All right! Today's lesson: how to build your very own hydrogen bomb. Just kidding! Wanted to get a rise out of Little Miss Peacenik over there.

Lily stonily refuses to be baited.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GLASS (CONT'D)

Don't worry! By the time you get done studying hydrogen isotopes, you'll wish you had your own H-bomb, just to put yourselves out of your misery! Ha!

She slaps the table merrily.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Harrison is traversing the corridors warily, looking around and behind him at frequent intervals, then dashing up the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Upstairs, the hallways are less crowded. Harrison goes to the end of the hall, takes one more furtive glance around, and ducks into a secluded alcove—where Natalie is waiting, pacing the narrow width of the space nervously. Her anxiety only seems to increase when she sees him.

NATALIE

Thanks for coming.

HARRISON

(holding up a hand)

The only reason I'm here is to say I'm not interested.

Natalie seems to crumble inside, though she tries to put on a brave face.

NATALIE

(cracking)

Well...I guess that saves me a lot of talking, huh?

HARRISON

Natalie...

NATALIE

New Year's Eve, what was that? Was it nothing? You can't stand there and tell me it was nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON
(struggling)
I...I don't know what it was.

NATALIE
(almost whispering)
You know what it could be.

Harrison puts his fingers to his temples, as if trying to ward off a headache.

HARRISON
Argh! I can't do this! I went through this once, with Brooke and Sam. It was pure hell. There's no way I'm going through it again with Brooke and you.

NATALIE
And that's it? Without even giving yourself a chance to find out how you really feel?

HARRISON
I know how I feel. I'm committed to Brooke.

NATALIE
(muttering)
Insert straightjacket joke here.

Harrison glares at her.

NATALIE (**CONT'D**)
Okay! Fine! You tell me on New Year's Eve you felt nothing, that it was all in my over-active stalker imagination—and I'll go away, and you'll never have to worry about me again.

For a moment, it looks like Harrison is struggling with the temptation to do just that.

HARRISON
(capitulating)
I can't...say that. You know I can't say that.

Natalie looks up at him intently.

NATALIE
I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRISON

No! Natalie... I have to think of Brooke, how she feels. Don't you care about that? She's supposed to be your friend—or at least she was.

NATALIE

First of all, I'm pretty sure she's not my friend. And anyway, I'm not acting any differently than she did. She knew how Sam felt about you, and she didn't care—and now I don't care how she feels.

HARRISON

Yeah, I heard about your little declaration.

NATALIE

(groans)

Okay, I wasn't being diplomatic then—I was just pissed! I was tired of listening to Brooke's holier-than-thou attitude, thought she deserved some of her own back for a change.

HARRISON

Brooke's not—

NATALIE

Oh, she is so! Selfish, self-centered, egomaniacal, possessive, insanely jealous...

HARRISON

(incredulous)

Where are you getting this from? Brooke's not anything like that. She's—

But Harrison doesn't get the chance to rattle off Brooke's qualities—he is cut off by an angry shout:

BROOKE

NATALIE!

They turn to see Brooke standing there, steaming. She marches forward and pushes Natalie away from Harrison.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NATALIE

Hey!

BROOKE

I see you couldn't wait to start
throwing yourself at my boyfriend.

She steps towards Natalie menacingly, crowding her against the wall.

HARRISON

We were just talking.

Brooke doesn't spare him a glance.

BROOKE

Stay out of this, Harrison.
(to Natalie)
Remember your first day?

Backed against the wall, Natalie looks up at Brooke, fists clenched.

NATALIE

You don't have your posse with you
now.

BROOKE

(grinning)
That's okay—I can kick your ass
all by myself.

Then Harrison is standing at Brooke's shoulder.

HARRISON

Natalie, get out of here. Brooke
and I need to talk.

NATALIE

I don't need—

HARRISON

Natalie, go!

Natalie slides away from Brooke with as much grace as she can muster, then takes off down the hallway. Brooke starts to take a step after her, but Harrison catches her firmly by the arm.

BROOKE

Harrison!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

HARRISON

(smoldering)

Brooke, do me a favor, okay? The next time I'm telling someone that you're NOT egotistical, possessive and jealous, try to cooperate, huh?

BROOKE

Oh, no. You don't get to get out of my being mad at you by being mad at me.

HARRISON

Come again?

BROOKE

I'm the one who's mad here, dammit! I can't believe you were talking to her!

HARRISON

Yeah, the operative word there is "talking".

BROOKE

I don't care!

HARRISON

Well, I do. And I hope you're not thinking of ordering me not to talk to Natalie. Remember that little chat about trust?

For a moment Brooke looks like she's going to explode; then she leans against the wall, fists balled not in anger but frustration.

BROOKE

I... It's so hard, Harrison. So hard. I don't want to be like this, I hate being like this... I just...know she wants to take you away from me. Just standing there...watching... I...

Brooke trails off, exhausted and sniffling. Harrison gathers her up in his arms.

HARRISON

Shhh...she's not taking me anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

BROOKE
(plaintive)
Promise?

HARRISON
Promise.

BROOKE
You don't feel anything for her?
Not at all?

Doubts flicker across Harrison's face, out of Brooke's sight.

HARRISON
(soothing)
Not at all.

CUT TO:

EST. THE QUAD - AFTERNOON

Students dispersing after class.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Sam and Krupps are walking briskly down the corridor. Sam is loaded down with her shoulder bag, and Krupps is carrying a thick binder.

SAM
I'm really sorry about this, Mr. Krupps. I know you wanted to go over some ideas. I don't know why Mr. Doyle wants me at the paper so early—all I've been doing is shadowing other people, watching them work. "Studying", Mr. Doyle keeps saying.

KRUPPS
Well, I have no objections to your studying, Sam. Besides, you're getting paid for it. You should enjoy it.

SAM
Oh, I do! I just wish...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRUPPS
 (chuckling)
 You're eager. Another fine quality. In fact, perhaps just a touch too eager. This report can wait, you know.

SAM
 No, no.

She holds out her hand expectantly; he hands over the binder.

KRUPPS
 I don't want to overburden you.

SAM
 Don't worry about it. I'll look at this in the car.

Without pause, they march through the double doors at the end of the hallway.

CUT TO:

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Sam and Krupps head down the sidewalk to the curb.

KRUPPS
 We'll teleconference later.

SAM
 It might be late...

KRUPPS
 (reproachfully)
 Sam.

SAM
 Okay, okay. But if I wake you up, it's your fault.

They've reached the parking lot. Sam looks back and forth expectantly.

SAM (CONT'D)
 (under her breath)
 Come on, Jaycee, where are you?

KRUPPS
 Perhaps I could—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Krupps is cut off by the sound of a gunning engine. Jaycee's convertible tears into the parking lot and screeches to a stop in front of them. Sam tosses her shoulder bag in the back and climbs into the passenger seat, balancing the binder on her lap.

SAM
(to Jaycee)
To the paper, quick!

JAYCEE
(throwing up a hand)
Javohl, mein kommandant!

Sam slaps her hand down, then looks up at Krupps as Jaycee pulls away.

SAM
(calling back)
I'll call you!

Krupps watches them go, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

The corridor is deserted, except for Natalie, who is rummaging through her open locker. As she steps back and closes the locker door, a hand comes to rest on her shoulder. Instantly, she spins and throws a body blow—which catches Harrison square in the midsection.

HARRISON
Oof!

As Harrison doubles over, Natalie's hands fly to her gaping mouth in shock.

NATALIE
Oh my God! Oh my God! Harrison,
are you okay?!

HARRISON
(wheezing)
Me...? Yeah...sure...any day
now...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Distraught, Natalie leads Harrison—who is still bent in the middle—through a nearby door.

CUT TO:

INT. A CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Natalie guides Harrison into the empty classroom and settles him into a chair.

NATALIE
(bending over him)
I'm so sorry. I thought you might
be Brooke.

Still gasping, he looks up at her warily.

HARRISON
Forget about...protecting you...
from Brooke... I oughta be...
protecting her...from you...

NATALIE
Aww, Harrison! Were you trying to
protect me? That's so sweet!

She promptly takes his face in her hands and kisses his forehead.

HARRISON
(groans)
This is hopeless.

NATALIE
No, it's not, Harrison. You're
protective of me. That means a
lot.

Harrison is sufficiently recovered to scoot away a bit.

HARRISON
No! No, it doesn't mean a lot!
Believe me, it means little!
Very, very little!

NATALIE
Don't be shy about it. This is a
really good sign.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON
 (desperate)
 Natalie, no! It's not a sign!
 It's no kind of sign!

NATALIE
 You see? I knew if you gave
 yourself a chance, your feelings
 for me would come out.

Harrison just buries his face in his hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTY ANNEX - AFTERNOON

Coincidentally, the same building where Sam's New Year's Eve adventure took place. Krupps' car pulls into a spot near the front door, and Krupps gets out. He seems distracted, and just before he gets to the doors, they open and Mr. Osbourne comes out, also looking distracted. They barely manage to keep from bumping into one another.

OSBOURNE
 Oh! Excuse me, Mr. Krupps.

KRUPPS
 Erick! Fancy meeting you here.

OSBOURNE
 Indeed. Just researching old records.

KRUPPS
 Yes, I'm here on a sort of research mission myself.

OSBOURNE
 Another of the Board's... esoteric...demands?

KRUPPS
 No, no...just some information for a personal project.

The exchange stalls awkwardly.

OSBOURNE
 Well... I won't keep you.

KRUPPS
 I'll see you tomorrow, Erick.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OSBOURNE
Tomorrow. Of course.

Osbourne steps aside, allowing Krupps to enter the building.

CUT TO:

INT. MCQUEEN DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Brooke, Lily and Carmen are gathered around the dining room table, amid various books and papers: a study session.

LILY
(standing up)
I'd better go, guys.

Jane happens to walk in, catching Lily's statement.

JANE
Oh, Lily, honey, why don't you stay? You can call Josh and have him come over for dinner. Mike's bringing home pizza.

LILY
Thanks, Mrs. McPherson, but there's a veggie casserole waiting.

The phone rings. Brooke jumps up.

BROOKE
(brightly)
I'll get it!

As Brooke jogs into the kitchen, Jane turns to Carmen.

JANE
Are you staying, Carmen?

CARMEN
Sure, I can always go for pizza. Mom's at a meeting anyway.

JANE
(to Lily)
Are you sure I can't convince you to stay? I'm sure we could make one of those pizzas vegetarian.

LILY
It does sound tempting—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly there is a crash in the kitchen, startling everyone. Jane makes a rush for the kitchen, followed closely by Lily and Carmen.

CUT TO:

INT. MCQUEEN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jane and the girls find Brooke backed up against the refrigerator, her hands clamped over her mouth, horror plainly visible in her eyes. The telephone is swinging from its cord; the crash apparently was Brooke dropping it.

JANE
(rushing over)
Brooke! Brooke?! What is it?

As Lily and Carmen crowd around Brooke, Jane makes a grab for the phone, hauling it up by the cord.

JANE **(CONT'D)**
(into the phone)
Hello? Hello!... No, I'm... I'm
his wife. What's— Oh, God... Is
he...? We'll...be right there.

She manages to hang up the phone.

CARMEN
Mrs. McPherson? What is it?

Jane is struggling to keep her composure.

JANE
There's, uh...there's a fire. In
Mike's building...

LILY
Oh my God. Is he okay?

JANE
They...don't know... We have to
go.

She fumbles for her purse, then puts an arm around Brooke.

JANE **(CONT'D)**
Honey, I don't know if—

BROOKE
(panicky)
You can't leave me here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARMEN
(interposing)
We'll watch Mac.

Jane stops to pat Carmen's hand in appreciation.

JANE
Thank you. Just...call Miss
Feeley if it...gets too late.

She guides Brooke gently towards the patio doors, while Lily and Carmen trade worried looks.

CUT TO:

EST. L.A. SKYLINE - DUSK

Actually, just a part of the skyline: a cluster of mid-rise office buildings, one of dozens of such clusters that are scattered throughout the L.A. basin. Against the smoggy sunset, a plume of black smoke is clearly visible.

CUT TO:

EXT. A PARKING LOT

A scene of barely-controlled chaos: fire trucks, along with what seems to be miles of hose, are scattered across the side of the lot closest to the burning building. A throng of onlookers and others crowd the other side of the lot, held back by police barricades. The street beyond is a mess—cars abandoned across all the lanes.

Jane's car creeps up the street, inching along the curb as far as it can. The moment Jane stops the car, she and Brooke hop out. They run across the street towards the crowd, weaving around the abandoned cars.

JANE
Mike?! Mike!!

BROOKE
Dad!!

They frantically cross along the front edge of the crowd, calling and trying to scan the sea of faces, until suddenly Mike appears, looking slightly disheveled but otherwise none the worse for wear.

MIKE
Brooke! Jane!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brooke, who is a couple of steps closer, throws herself into her father's arms. Jane is just a moment behind, joining in the clinch.

MIKE (CONT'D)

It's okay! I'm okay!

He manages to maneuver Brooke and Jane into an embrace that's not quite as bone-crushing.

BROOKE

Daddy, I was so scared...

MIKE

I'm fine, sweetheart. It wasn't close.

BROOKE

What happened?

MIKE

Don't know what started it. But it was three floors above us. I was never in any danger.

A strobe of light illuminates them for a moment: the wayward spotlight of a television camera, one of several clustered at the far edge of the lot.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I've been staying away from the media. They've been going after anyone who was in the building.

JANE

You're sure you're okay?

MIKE

(laughing)

I'm fine! I may have to work from home for a while, but—

The sudden sound of screeching brakes makes them all turn. At the corner, a late-arriving TV van has just been cut off by a white compact. The compact swerves around the van, and comes closer to the lot than most of the other cars by jumping the curb, driving down the sidewalk and nearly toppling a sapling tree planted at the edge of the lot.

BROOKE

(peering)

Is that—?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The driver's-side door—which has the L.A. Chronicle logo painted on it—opens, and Sam clambers out.

JANE

Sam?

Plainly she doesn't see them. She pulls a pad and pencil out of the car, and pins a press badge to her blouse. Then she jogs up to one of the officers manning the barricade. The McQueen family watches, just out of earshot, as Sam and the policeman have a brief exchange. The officer points, then moves the sawhorse barricade enough to let Sam slip through.

MIKE

(confused)

Do interns do that?

Jane can only shrug helplessly, watching as Sam conducts an interview with one of the fire department officials, jotting notes on her pad.

JANE

(reluctantly)

I guess...if she's working, we shouldn't bother her.

BROOKE

(shaking her head)

I don't believe this... Like, taking over the school wasn't enough—now she's everywhere. It's a curse, I keep telling everyone.

Jane looks at her strangely.

JANE

What do you mean, taking over the school?

Brooke's mouth drops open as she considers how to explain that.

BROOKE

If we can get out of here, I'll explain in the car.

MIKE

We might as well. I'll have to pick up my car in the morning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

So, with one last longing glance back from Jane, they head for the car, leaving Sam oblivious to their presence.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARRISON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It could be a coal mine, thought—it's pitch black. The phone rings. Twice. Three times. The light snaps on; Harrison struggles to sit up in bed, and grabs the phone.

HARRISON
(half-asleep)
H'lo?

NATALIE (V.O.)
(over the phone)
Hey, Harrison. Did I wake you?

HARRISON
Uh-huh.

NATALIE (V.O.)
Oh. Sorry. I just wanted to say thanks for protecting me. And sorry for...you know...hitting you.

HARRISON
(still not awake)
Natalie? Can we talk about this tomorrow?

NATALIE (V.O.)
Well...sure. I just thought... with Brooke and all...

The mention of Brooke wakes Harrison up; his eyes snap open.

HARRISON
Uh, uh, wait! Natalie, you're not going to tell Brooke about this, right?

NATALIE (V.O.)
(thinking)
I...dunno. Why? Brooke might be happy to hear that I hit you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON
 (groans)
 No, please, Natalie, don't tell
 Brooke.

NATALIE (V.O.)
 Okay, Harrison, don't worry. I
 won't tell Brooke a thing.
 (beat)
 Thanks for protecting me.

HARRISON
 Natalie, go to sleep.

NATALIE (V.O.)
 Okay. Sweet dreams, Harrison.

The line goes dead. Harrison groans again, hangs up the phone, and buries his head under his pillow.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

From what can be seen, a finely decorated room. Krupps is wearing a classic red smoking jacket, sitting up in his four-poster bed, reading by the light of a bedside table lamp. The phone rings; he picks it up before it can ring again.

KRUPPS
 (into the phone)
 Calvin Krupps.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sam is pacing around her little table.

SAM
 Oh, Mr. Krupps, did I wake you?

INTERCUT BETWEEN KRUPPS AND SAM

KRUPPS
 Of course not. I've been
 expecting your call.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Oh God, you haven't been sitting there waiting for me to call, have you? I didn't mean to be so late, I swear!

KRUPPS

(soothing)

Sam, you worry entirely too much.

(pause)

Is something wrong? You sound... agitated.

SAM

I'm sorry, Mr. Krupps, it's just been...such a night. Really. Unbelievable.

KRUPPS

Unbelievable in a good way or a bad way?

SAM

Oh! In a good way. A very good way!

KRUPPS

Well. You've piqued my interest. What about this night is so unbelievable?

SAM

Well, I was— Wait. What about the report? We were going to go over ideas?

KRUPPS

Oh, but this is so much more interesting. The report can wait—tell me all about your evening.

Sam settles on her bed.

SAM

Okay—when I showed up at the paper, Mr. Doyle said that I'd done enough shadowing, and it was time for me to cover something real. On my own.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM (CONT'D)

So there I was, just sitting and
listening to the police scanner...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EST. MCQUEEN HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Just before sunrise at the McQueens'.

CUT TO:

INT. MCQUEEN KITCHEN

Jane is sitting at the kitchen table, disconsolate. On the table before her sits a steaming cup of coffee, untouched. Brooke comes down the stairs.

BROOKE
Morning, Jane.

Jane gives something barely coherent as a response. Worried, Brooke comes over and crouches down beside her.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
Are you all right?

Jane shakes her head mutely. Then Mike walks in, carrying a section of the newspaper.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
Dad—

But Mike is distracted as well. He lays the newspaper section down on the table.

MIKE
I think you should see this.

INSERT: THE NEWSPAPER

The front page of the Metro section, top fold. The headline across the top reads "BLAZE ERUPTS IN D'TOWN MID-RISE". A color photo takes up most of the width of the page, with the text running along the left side and continuing underneath. The byline reads:

SAMANTHA MCPHERSON
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Jane takes hold of the paper weakly, but then pushes it away, shaking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE

There should... She should be here... She should be with her family... Instead of...of...

Brooke puts a supportive arm around Jane's shoulder.

JANE (CONT'D)

(to Mike)

What are we going to do about Mr. Krupps?

Just like that, Brooke's supportiveness dissolves; she bangs her head against the table softly.

BROOKE

I shouldn't have said anything.

MIKE

Brooke, of course you should have. This is something Jane and I needed to know about.

Frustrated, Brooke leaps to her feet, pacing angrily.

BROOKE

No! You two...you're just going to...mess everything up again!

MIKE

(sharply)

Brooke!

She picks up the paper and waves it at them.

BROOKE

Do you remember that you tried to get Sam fired from this job? What are you going to do now? Try to get Mr. Krupps fired? Take Sam out of school? What?!

JANE

Brooke, I don't understand. When you were telling us this last night, you made it sound like you hated it.

BROOKE

Well, I do! It's totally awful—but not that way! God! Even I know they're not doing anything. And Mr. Osbourne says—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIKE

Osbourne. He's that social studies teacher of yours?

BROOKE

—he says that it's not, you know...romantic, or anything. And he knows a lot more about people. He's got a master's and everything.

MIKE

Still, it sounds like this man has an undue influence over Sam...

BROOKE

You weren't listening very close. Sam's the one with the influence.

JANE

I know it may seem that way, but—

MIKE

(breaking in)

Look, we're just trying to help Sam.

BROOKE

No, I'M trying to help Sam! Why won't anyone believe me?!

MIKE

We believe you, honey.

BROOKE

You won't help Sam by making her have everyone even more than she already does!

With that, Brooke runs back up the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE QUAD - MORNING

Throngs of students heading for school. Among them is Harrison, walking along the sidewalk casually—until Natalie scurries up from behind and matches his pace.

NATALIE

Hi!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON
(pointing)
Okay, you're stalking me.

NATALIE
(laughing)
I am not stalking you! We go to
the same school. How can I be
stalking you?

HARRISON
I don't know, but...but you are!
And if Brooke sees you—

NATALIE
I'm not afraid of Brooke anymore.

She throws a shadow punch that makes him flinch.

HARRISON
Yeah, what's up with that?

NATALIE
After that first day, I thought I
ought to take a self-defense
course.

HARRISON
Karate? Taekwondo?

NATALIE
Streetfighting. Down and dirty.
Breaking bones and stuff.

HARRISON
Oh.

NATALIE
Don't worry. I won't do anything
terrible to Brooke. Just kick her
ass if she comes after me.

HARRISON
I really wish both of you would
stop talking like that.

NATALIE
Okay, okay, no more talk.
(innocently)
Wanna go behind the bleachers and
make out?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRISON
Natalie!

NATALIE
I'm kidding! Jeez, Harrison,
you're so sensitive!

Harrison stops walking; Natalie follows suit. He turns to face her.

HARRISON
Natalie, please, please, just...

NATALIE
Just what?

HARRISON
I need to not be walking with you
right now.

NATALIE
Harrison, if you want me to go
away, just say so.

HARRISON
(swallowing hard)
Natalie...go away.

Clearly, she hadn't expected him to actually say it; she deflates dramatically.

NATALIE
(unsmiling)
Okay, Harrison.

Without another word, she veers off, cutting across the grass, shoulders slumped. He hangs his head in guilt before walking on.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS' RESTROOM - LATER

The door bangs open, and Natalie storms in, her mood having shifted from hurt to angry. She stomps over to one of the stalls and locks herself in, brooding. But a moment later, the Novak door opens again, and Brooke steps inside.

BROOKE
(calling through the closing door)
I'll be right there!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brooke goes to the mirror and starts fussing with her hair. Meanwhile, in the toilet stall, Natalie has a thought. She quietly reaches into her bag and pulls out her cell phone, putting it to her ear but leaving it turned off.

NATALIE

(loudly)

...Really...? Me, too... No, I was just talking to Harrison... Of course I'm not telling Brooke... Harrison asked me not to say anything last night...

Brooke, who can't help but overhear Natalie's "conversation", is steaming.

NATALIE **(CONT'D)**

...oh, we talked a couple of times...here and on the phone... No, we're not having phone sex!
(laughs)
Not yet, anyway...

On cue, Natalie stands up and unlatches the stall door.

NATALIE **(CONT'D)**

Okay, I have to go... Bye.

As she steps out of the stall, she flips the phone shut and puts it away. She puts on a show of acting surprised to see Brooke. For her part, Brooke looks like she wants to throw down then and there.

BROOKE

You little bitch.

NATALIE

(smug)

You know, you really shouldn't eavesdrop.

Brooke takes a threatening step forward.

NATALIE **(CONT'D)**

I'd love to kick your ass, Brooke, but Harrison wouldn't approve.

The door opens, and Sam walks in. Sizing up the situation, she goes and stands beside Natalie, glowering at Brooke with arms crossed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM
(to Natalie)
Are you okay?

NATALIE
Yeah. I was just telling Brooke
that Harrison doesn't want any
violence.

SAM
He's not the only one.
(to Brooke)
You looking to get suspended?

Brooke holds her ground for a moment, then grabs her bag and storms out.

SAM (CONT'D)
She always was a coward.
(turning)
Hey, I need you at lunch. We have
budget reports to go over.

NATALIE
Okay.
(pause)
Hey, Sam? There's something I
want to talk to you about.

As Natalie and Sam sit on the tuffet—

CUT TO:

INT. GYM - LATER

A bunch of kids, including Lily, file into the gym at the start of P.E. class, taught by Coach Krupps, who is standing next to a rack of basketballs and holding a clipboard. Lily is too preoccupied to notice much around her, until—

COACH KRUPPS
Lily Ford!

Lily starts, finding Coach Krupps standing next to her. He hands her a hall pass.

COACH KRUPPS (CONT'D)
You're wanted. Principal's
office.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She opens her mouth as if to ask for an explanation, but decides against saying anything. Instead, she shrugs slightly and walks back out of the gym.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Lily walks into the outer office, which for the moment is deserted. She looks around, and starts to sit on a bench along the back wall; but a side door swings open, and when Lily looks over, she sees Sam standing there, beckoning. Sam has to beckon again, urgently, before Lily slowly walks over.

Sam pulls her through the doorway.

CUT TO:

INT. SIDE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sam shuts the door behind Lily. They are alone in a small, narrow room, dominated by a table in the center and file cabinets along the walls.

LILY
(hushed)
Sam! Principal Krupps wants to see me.

SAM
(casually)
Oh, don't worry. I did that.

LILY
You forged a hall pass?!

SAM
It's no big deal. I wanted to talk. In private.

At Sam's urging, Lily takes a seat at the table. Sam sits across the corner of the table from her. But once they are sitting there, Sam doesn't seem to know what to say.

LILY
(prompting)
Sam?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
(uncomfortable)
Lily, I...think I owe you an
apology. I've been coming down on
you—

LILY
Actually, you've been ignoring me.

SAM
Right. Anyway, I was doing it
because you've been hanging out
with Brooke. Which is wrong. And
I'm sorry.

LILY
(hesitantly)
But, Sam...that's not the only
thing between us.

SAM
I know.

LILY
(at a loss)
Sam... I...I'm sorry, I just...

SAM
No, I'm sorry. I've been kind
of...selfish.

Clearly that wasn't what Lily was expecting to hear.

LILY
I don't think...

SAM
It's true. I never bothered to
look at where you were coming
from.

LILY
It's just, I don't know what to
do. I want to be a good friend, be
supportive, you know I do—

Sam lays her hand on Lily's.

SAM
You are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LILY
But I'm NOT! I know you're...
doing—

SAM
Lily...

LILY
—and I don't know how to help!
I've read all the literature,
but...

SAM
(squeezing Lily's hand)
You help just by being here.

LILY
But, Sam—

SAM
I don't have a problem.

Lily is obviously torn.

LILY
I want to believe you...

Sam's expression becomes desperately hopeful.

SAM
Could you pretend to believe me?

Lily reaches up and wipes away the tear that's started to form in Sam's eye.

LILY
Sam, if you ever, ever need to
talk, about...or anything...

Sam nods eagerly, leaning over and hugging Lily over the table.

SAM
(laughing awkwardly)
God, I've missed you! I'm so glad
Nat woke me up.

LILY
(shifting slightly)
Natalie?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SAM

Yeah...she said I was being unfair to you. That I ought to think about what kind of position I was putting you in.

LILY

(surprised)
She said that?

SAM

(surprised in turn)
Yeah. You know how much she likes you.

LILY

Well, I...guess so...

SAM

I'm telling you, it's SO good to have someone I can really talk to!
(awkward pause)
Uh, besides you, I mean.

LILY

It's okay, Sam. It's good to be able to talk to you again, too.

SAM

Hey, wanna hang out here til next period? I'll just stamp the pass and drop it in Coach Krupps' box.

Lily looks at her severely.

LILY

Sam... I know you're Principal Krupps'...whatever, but can you really get away with stuff like this?

SAM

(shrugs)
I am, aren't I? Come on, stay. We'll talk.

Lily finally shrugs her assent, bringing a delighted smile to Sam's face.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Between periods, the corridors are crowded. Natalie is walking along warily when Lily comes jogging up from behind.

LILY
(calling)
Natalie!

Natalie stops and turns, allowing Lily to catch up.

LILY (CONT'D)
I just wanted to say thanks.

Natalie looks confused for a moment, before connecting the dots.

NATALIE
Oh—did you and Sam make up?

LILY
We...yeah.

NATALIE
Well, good. Sam needs friends.
Looks like you and I are it for
the duration.

LILY
(quietly)
I hope not.

NATALIE
I wouldn't hold out hope for
anyone else. Carmen—? Maybe.
But Mary Cherry? Brooke?

LILY
(under her breath)
Harrison...

NATALIE
What?

LILY
Oh, uh, nothing. I just
remembered something I have to do.

Lily runs off.

LILY (CONT'D)
(calling back)
Talk to you later, Natalie!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Natalie watches her go, mystified.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - NOON

Harrison is waiting in the lunch line when Lily comes out of nowhere and smacks him on the arm. Hard.

HARRISON
(rubbing his arm)
Ow! What was that for?

LILY
(accusing)
You haven't talked to Sam, have you?

HARRISON
(fumbling)
I—

LILY
You haven't even tried to talk to her!

She smacks his arm again.

HARRISON
Hey! For a pacifist, you're being awfully violent.

LILY
For Sam's best friend, you're being awfully stupid!

HARRISON
That's not fair!

He takes her by the arm and leads her to a relatively quiet corner of the cafeteria.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
What, exactly, would you want me to say to Sam?

This time it's Lily who fumbles for an answer.

LILY
Ah... Well, you're her best friend, Harrison! You're supposed to think of something!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON

(caustic)

Oh, I'm supposed to think of something. Just like that. Look, I don't even know if Sam wants to hear from me. Last I heard, she hated my guts.

LILY

That doesn't matter! She needs help! She need you!

HARRISON

(bitterly)

I don't think so.

LILY

But—

HARRISON

Come on, Lily! We both know what I did! I hurt Sam. I betrayed Sam. I was going with Sam, and sleeping with Brooke. There is no reason in the world why Sam would ever want to be around me again. So just drop it, okay?

With that, Harrison storms off. Lily watches him go, forlorn.

LILY

(to the air)

You're wrong, Harrison. There's one reason.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LIBRARY - NOON

A typical high school library. What's not so typical is Sam and Natalie walking in, carrying lunch trays.

NATALIE

(whispering)

Isn't this against the rules?

SAM

Not for us. The cafeteria's too noisy to work in.

They set their trays down at one of the tables and sit down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

And you don't have to whisper.
There's nobody here.

NATALIE

Sorry. Habit.

Sam takes a bite out of an apple, and reaches for a thick stack of papers piled nearby. She plucks off the topmost part—a thick, stapled bundle—and passes it to Natalie.

SAM

Take a look at this.

Natalie lays the papers next to her tray and starts to leaf through them.

NATALIE

Sam, I think I ought to mention that I don't plan on being an economics major. I mean, I do okay in math, but...

SAM

You'll do fine. It's not that complicated.

Natalie begins to read and eat at the same time.

NATALIE

(off-hand)

I saw Lily earlier.

SAM

Yeah, we talked. Did I thank you for getting on me about her?

NATALIE

Yes.

SAM

Then I'm doing it again. Thanks.

NATALIE

(shrugs)

Like I told Lily, you need friends.

SAM

(wistfully)

This is true. A few good friends are all I need.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The door opens, and Mr. Krupps comes in. Natalie straightens up in her chair, looking as though she's been busted for something; Sam, relaxed, waves casually. Krupps holds up his hands to calm the waters.

KRUPPS

Sorry for interrupting, ladies—I know this is a working lunch. I need to borrow Sam. Just for a few minutes. I hope you don't mind, Miss James?

NATALIE

You're the principal.

KRUPPS

(grins)

I like that attitude. Sam?

Sam gets up.

SAM

(to Natalie, mock-serious)

Don't touch my potato chips.

Then Krupps ushers Sam out the door. Natalie watches them leave, then idly reaches across the table, takes a potato chip from Sam's tray, and pops it into her mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens, and Krupps escorts Sam inside.

SAM

...come on, give me a hint, please?

KRUPPS

It's...something useful. And emerald green.

SAM

(looking around)

One of my favorite colors? Is it here?

KRUPPS

(shaking his head)

It's not in here. I'll show you your surprise in a minute.

(MORE)

CONTINUED

CONTINUED:

KRUPPS (CONT'D)
But there's something I want you
to do for me first.

SAM
Okay.

Krupps reaches behind his desk and pulls up a picture frame. He lays it flat on the desk, and Sam gasps when she sees her article beneath the glass.

SAM (CONT'D)
(touched)
Mr. Krupps...

He works at the edges of the frame, releasing it and setting it aside so that the article and its backing lay exposed. Then he opens his desk drawer, pulls out a marker, uncaps it, and hands it to Sam. She takes a moment to puzzle out what he wants.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh... Mr. Krupps, this is...very
strange.

KRUPPS
I have a feeling it will become
familiar in the future, Sam.
Please?

She takes the pen, leans over the desk and scrawls her signature across the page. Exuding happiness, Krupps reassembles the frame and sets it carefully aside before taking the pen back.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)
Thanks you, Sam. That means a
great deal to me.
(claps once)
Now! For your surprise. I hope
it makes you as happy as you've
made me. It's outside.

Sam frowns, but at his gesture precedes him out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Krupps leads Sam to the edge of the side lot where the staff parks. There he stops and waits expectantly. Sam stops as well, looking around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
(bewildered)
Where are we going? It this thing
off-campus somewhere?

Krupps is positively enjoying himself.

KRUPPS
No, we're here.

SAM
We're...?

She looks around again. Krupps laughs and gestures emphatically. It takes her a moment to realize that she's standing in front of a bright green compact car which is parked at the curb. Even then, it takes her a few seconds to put everything together; she gasps sharply and her mouth drops open at the realization.

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Exactly where we left off. Sam turns to Krupps, and despite herself, she seems ready to burst with excitement.

SAM

No. Mr. Krupps, you can NOT give me a car!

KRUPPS

Well, technically, I'm not. I did some research on ethics laws and such, and it turns out you're right. So, legally, I'm leasing the car. You're just...borrowing it. For the foreseeable future.

Sam follows this in a kind of detached way, her eyes open wide.

SAM

Okay, but, still... Mr. Krupps, you can NOT give me a car!

Krupps laughs again, and drapes an arm across her shoulders.

KRUPPS

Sam, I know you have your license. It bugs me that you have to depend on other people for rides. With your jobs and all your responsibilities, you need reliable transportation.

He dangles the keys in front of her.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

(cajoling)

Come on. You know you want to.

Mesmerized, she reaches out and takes the keys, holding them in front of her face as if she expects them to disappear. Then, completely without warning, she wraps him up in a silent bear hug. After a second she breaks away, embarrassed, looking around self-consciously and smoothing her clothes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

(easily)

It's all right, Sam. "Thank you"
would have done fine.

The troubled look in her eye magically disappears as soon as she refocuses on the car.

SAM

(anxiously)

Can I?

KRUPPS

Well, you're a senior, and you're
entitled to go off-campus for
lunch.

He checks his watch.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

And there's forty minutes left in
your lunch period, so...

He makes an affirmative gesture.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

If nothing else, drive it over to
the student lot.

Trance-like, Sam moves around to the driver's side of the car.

SAM

Mr. Krupps, I...I...

She shakes her head in frustration at her inability to
express herself.

KRUPPS

(smiling benignly)

Go.

Sam gets into the car, looking everything over before starting the engine. Krupps leans down, gives her a little wave and then a shooing motion. After a moment, she motors away; Krupps straightens up and watches her go.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS - NOON

Brooke is wandering aimlessly around Mr. Osbourne's classroom, idly eating an apple. Osbourne is behind his desk as usual, watching her.

OSBOURNE
Yes, Miss McQueen?

BROOKE
(distant)
Huh?

OSBOURNE
Your...disquiet...is plain.
Something is troubling you?

BROOKE
(grimacing)
You want the list?

OSBOURNE
Perhaps just those items relating
to Miss McPherson.

BROOKE
(laughing bitterly)
Don't you know by now? Sam and I
are so intertwined, everything has
to do with her. All roads lead to
Sam. Take Natalie.

OSBOURNE
Miss James?

BROOKE
"Miss James" is after my
boyfriend. Sam's probably the one
who set her off sniffing around
him. She and Sam are acting like
life-long buddies all of a sudden.

A thoughtful look passes across Osbourne's face briefly.

OSBOURNE
Hmmm... I complement you on the
quality of your competition. But
I'm afraid I'm not qualified to
give romantic advice.

BROOKE
Sorry, I didn't mean—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OSBOURNE
It's quite all right. But
something else is on your mind?

BROOKE
Well, there's...this.

OSBOURNE
"This"?

BROOKE
(gesturing)
This. Me. Here. Now.

OSBOURNE
Indeed?

BROOKE
For one thing, it seems like
we're...plotting, or something.

OSBOURNE
We are strategizing, which could
be viewed as "plotting" under
certain circumstances. Certainly
Miss McPherson would think so.

Brooke wanders to the front of the class where her lunch tray
sits, and sets her half-eaten apple down on it.

BROOKE
I keep thinking about Principal
Krupps. And Sam.

OSBOURNE
I've been looking into that, and I
believe I've made progress in
deciphering that arrangement.

BROOKE
(not paying attention)
I'm just...wondering...

Osbourne gathers her meaning.

OSBOURNE
Whether or not you find yourself
in a similar situation?

BROOKE
(shrugs)
Sam eats lunch with Mr. Krupps.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I eat lunch with you. Is there a difference? Really?

OSBOURNE

Oh, yes. I believe the distinctions are subtle in appearance, yet profound in nature.

He gestures for her to pull up a chair and sit, which she does, listening attentively.

OSBOURNE (CONT'D)

(lecturing)

Distinct or "special" relationships between instructors and individual students are not uncommon—though more so at the high school level. Although there are certain standards of decorum which should be maintained—the very standards which the Principal is steadfastly ignoring, I might add—it's my belief that it is the motivation which ultimately determines the appropriateness of the relationship. If, for example, the instructor merely finds the student physically attractive—

BROOKE

(venturing)

Sexy. Wants to get into her pants.

Osbourne raises a critical eyebrow, but nods.

OSBOURNE

—then the relationship is obviously inappropriate. If, however, an instructor discovers a student who is bright, capable, resourceful, if he believes she has the potential to fulfill her dreams, if he feels bound to help her on her way however he can...

Brooke senses that Osbourne is no longer speaking theoretically; she drops her eyes.

BROOKE

What about Mr. Krupps?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OSBOURNE

Ah. The Principal is a rare case.
However, I'm afraid the details
are...rather private.

BROOKE

(holding up her hands)
I don't want to be your Sam.

OSBOURNE

(dryly)
Given the dynamics of that
particular relationship, that
hardly seems likely. If I should
ever give you the password to my
grading program, you may feel free
to worry.

Brooke shares a brief chuckle with him; then she turns
serious again.

BROOKE

And you're sure? About Mr. Krupps
and Sam? They're not...?

OSBOURNE

(confidently)
Yes. Before, I relied upon mere
intuition. However, knowing what
I know now, I believe I can say
with near-certainty that there is
no romantic component of any sort.
(beat)
This is only a personal opinion,
but...it appears to me that much
of what transpires between them
is...a sort of playacting.

Brooke jumps up, excited.

BROOKE

That's exactly what I thought! I
told Lily they were doing that
stuff deliberately. Just messing
with everybody's minds.

Osbourne mulls that over.

OSBOURNE

(nods)
I agree with that assessment, to
some extent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Despite her earlier jitters, Brooke seems pleased as punch that she and Osbourne apparently think alike.

The bell rings, signaling the end of the period. Brooke turns and picks up her tray.

BROOKE
I guess I'd better go.

OSBOURNE
(rising)
You have my thanks for your assistance, Miss McQueen. If anything else should occur to you—

BROOKE
I'll come running.

Osbourne goes to the door and hold it open for her, watching as she carries her tray down the hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL WALKWAY - AFTERNOON

After school. Natalie is walking along one of the covered walkways when Lily crosses her path, veers sharply, and joins her.

LILY
Hey, Natalie. Have you seen Josh recently?

NATALIE
Did you lose him? He's kinda hard to misplace, with those crutches.

LILY
(smiling)
Oh, he's around somewhere. I just don't know where.

NATALIE
Have you seen Sam?

LILY
Did you lose her?

NATALIE
We were working at lunch, and Mr. Krupps came and grabbed her.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(shrugs)

We don't have any classes together
in the afternoon.

LILY

Well, she was in my history class,
so she's around somewhere, too.
Unless she left already.

(beat)

Maybe Josh is telling her the
mountain lion story.

NATALIE

(pointing)

Nope.

Lily follows her finger, and sees Josh slowly making his way
towards them.

LILY

I'll call you later.

Lily jogs off to meet Josh. Natalie continues on her way,
until she spots Harrison, standing with his back turned. She
walks up behind him lightly, and taps him on the shoulder.
He spins around.

NATALIE

(waving)

Hi.

CUT TO:

INT. SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS

Mike and Jane are seated at Mr. Osbourne's desk in what looks
like an ordinary parent-teacher conference.

JANE

We really hate to put upon you,
Mr. Osbourne. But we need to know
what's going on.

Osbourne waves her concern away.

OSBOURNE

Too many parents take too little
interest in their children. Your
concern is laudable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE
I have to admit, we haven't
handled Sam very well.

OSBOURNE
(bluntly)
Yes, I know.

MIKE
How—?
(realizing)
Brooke.

Osbourne gives him an "of course" look.

OSBOURNE
Miss McQueen and I have discussed
Miss McPherson extensively.

Mike and Jane look a bit discomfited at that.

JANE
So...you know...?

OSBOURNE
Inasmuch as your daughter is
concerned, I believe you may
safely assume that I know
everything Miss McQueen knows.

MIKE
You probably know more than we do,
then. Brooke's been pretty
uncommunicative lately.

JANE
Except to tell us how we're going
to screw up yet again, of course.

OSBOURNE
Lest you believe I have some sort
of magical solution, I must admit
that I, too, have handled Miss
McPherson's...situation badly.

JANE
I don't...understand.

Osbourne sighs, and leans forward in his chair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OSBOURNE

Miss McQueen revealed Miss
McPherson's problem to me...some
time ago.

MIKE

(suspiciously)
"Some time ago"?

OSBOURNE

Some...weeks ago.

JANE

Weeks—?!

MIKE

And you didn't do anything?!

OSBOURNE

I...came to believe that Miss
McPherson could be convinced to
seek help voluntarily. Your
daughter can be quite persuasive.

MIKE

But not with Sam.

OSBOURNE

Unfortunately not. I believe that
all of Miss McPherson's friends
have attempted to reason with
her— to no avail.

(beat)

By the time it was clear that more
drastic action was necessary, the
situation had become...
complicated. As I said, poor
judgment on my part. I apologize
for that.

JANE

By complicated, I'm guessing you
mean by Mr. Krupps.

OSBOURNE

By Miss McPherson's relationship
with Principal Krupps, yes.

MIKE

I have to tell you, we're very
concerned.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OSBOURNE

No doubt. If I may be frank?

JANE

Please.

OSBOURNE

Then...I can say with absolute certainty that the relationship is in no way sexual. That's the best news I can deliver on the subject.

JANE

I'm sorry, but...are you sure? We've heard...some things.

OSBOURNE

I'm quite certain. Miss McQueen and I are in agreement that these...public displays are just that—displays. For show only.

MIKE

I don't understand. Why would they do that?

OSBOURNE

(shrugs lightly)

Perhaps to provoke some sort of reaction? Or simply some visceral thrill? Perhaps they themselves are uncertain as to their motives.

JANE

But it's all fake?

OSBOURNE

Most assuredly, Mrs. McQueen. Window dressing aside, the relationship is essentially a mentoring one, which theoretically need not be improper, and can indeed be beneficial. Though there are other issues involved...

He realizes that he's drifting into things he doesn't want to reveal, and pulls himself back to the subject at hand.

OSBOURNE (CONT'D)

In any event, Miss McPherson's position of influence makes it correspondingly more difficult to deal effectively with her problem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JANE

If you have any suggestions, Mr. Osbourne... We'd be very grateful.

OSBOURNE

I'm not certain— However, for what it may be worth, I believe Miss McPherson may gradually be growing less...obstinate.

MIKE

What does that mean, exactly?

OSBOURNE

She's admitted her drug use, privately, to me. I also believe she's ceased her blanket denials, at least to a few people.

JANE

But...if she admitted it...can't you...?

Osbourne cuts her off with a definite shake of the head.

OSBOURNE

She would simply deny it. It would again be my word against hers.

MIKE

A drug test...?

OSBOURNE

My word, unsubstantiated, would not be probable cause. The law, and District guidelines, are quite clear on this.

Before the conversation can proceed any further, there is a discreet knock at the door.

OSBOURNE (CONT'D)

Excuse me a moment.

Osbourne gets up, goes to the door and cracks it open. After a few moments of conversation, he opens the door fully to allow Brooke to come in.

BROOKE

Dad. Jane.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

They are considerably surprised to see her.

MIKE
Brooke, what—?

Jane reaches out and touches his arm to quiet him, as Osbourne returns to his seat behind the desk, and Brooke takes up a symbolic position, standing at the side of the desk facing them.

JANE
We decided to talk to Mr. Osbourne. Before messing up again. See, we can be reasonable, just like normal people.

Brooke can't help but relax a bit.

OSBOURNE
(to Brooke)
There's no need to stand.

Brooke takes a chair, but carries it over to the side of Osbourne's desk before sitting down. Mike and Jane exchange a glance, realizing the extent to which Brooke is in her own mentoring relationship. Mike seems more disturbed by this than Jane.

MIKE
(forced)
So, Brooke... Mr. Osbourne told us how much you've been...helping. With Sam.

BROOKE
(coolly)
I'm trying.

JANE
(intervening)
Maybe we should talk about Sam.

Brooke and her father look at each other uncomfortably.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Harrison is walking down the corridor, with Natalie on his heels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATALIE

Oh, come on, Harrison. You won't even talk to me now?

HARRISON

Natalie...

NATALIE

(catching his arm)

Harrison, please!

HARRISON

I don't know what you want from me!

He shrugs her off, and continues walking.

NATALIE

Stop running away from me!

HARRISON

I'm not running.

NATALIE

(wailing)

Harrison!!

Natalie's voice has risen to a level where the other kids in the hall are staring; spurred by embarrassment or guilt—or both—he grabs her arm and pulls her through a nearby door.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harrison shuts the door; he and Natalie are alone.

HARRISON

Okay, this has to stop.

NATALIE

No! Harrison—

HARRISON

(snapping)

I can't deal with you now!

Natalie stumbles back a step, struck through the heart.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

(backtracking)

This, I mean... The situation.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON (CONT'D)

I don't know how to deal with the situation.

NATALIE

No, it's me... You...

HARRISON

Natalie, I'm not sure where these feelings you think you have are coming from—

NATALIE

(on the edge)

Think?! I don't think! I have these feelings, and nobody believes me—!!

HARRISON

(taken aback)

Wait, I-I never said that—

Practically hysterical, Natalie spins away, pacing erratically.

NATALIE

I've never been in love. Not ever. It's supposed to be...but all it does is hurt, and I just want it to go away, and I wish I'd never come here and I wish I'd never met you—!!

Suddenly she shoves him backward with the palm of her hand, yanks the door open and runs out.

HARRISON

Natalie!

After a moment, Harrison recovers, and rushes to the door.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Harrison runs out into the corridor, looking left and right, but the hall is deserted. He picks a direction and runs, but as he rounds a corner, he runs full tilt right into Sam. He has to grab her to keep them both from falling, leaving them in an unintentional clinch.

(CONTINUED)

60.

CONTINUED:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

For a long moment, Sam and Harrison just stand there, in each other's arms. Then Harrison breaks away, embarrassed.

HARRISON
(muttering)
Sorry.

He turns away, but she puts out a hand to stop him.

SAM
Wait.

Harrison turns back, clearly surprised.

SAM (CONT'D)
(laughing nervously)
Hey, it's okay. Really.

HARRISON
Sam...you hate my guts? Remember?

Sam just shakes her head.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
What do you mean—?

And he mimics her gesture to finish the question.

SAM
Harrison...what you did...you and Brooke... Yes, I was unbelievably pissed at you. But...we've been through so much... You don't think I could ever really hate you, do you?

HARRISON
(nods)
Uh-huh. Sure you could. Easy. Come on, Sam I saw it in your eyes. Absolute burning hatred, one hundred-percent pure.

Sam fidgets uncomfortably.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Okay, I did hate you, yes. Along with Brooke, and Mom, and Mike, and Carmen, and even Lily. I'm just tired of it.

(gently)

Look now. Do you still see it? Absolute, burning hatred?

HARRISON

(awkwardly)

No.

SAM

(eyes downcast)

Look, I know nothing can fix all the things that have happened... what we had, we can never get back. I'm just tired of hating you. Tired of fighting with you.

HARRISON

I don't want to fight with you either, Sam.

Sam looks relieved—momentarily.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

But...I may not have a choice.

SAM

(confused)

What's that mean?

Harrison braces himself.

HARRISON

Sam...I know.

Sam's only reaction is a bewildered shake of the head.

SAM

You know?

Sam waits patiently, then holds out her hands and shrugs.

SAM (CONT'D)

Know what?

HARRISON

(growing impatient)

Sam—I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM
Know what?

HARRISON
SAM!

SAM
WHAT?!

HARRISON
I know about the drugs!

Sam looks around hastily to see if anyone is within earshot, but they seem to be alone.

SAM
Shhh!

HARRISON
No, Sam, I will not shh! Brooke, Lily, Carmen... I'm tired of people lying to me!

SAM
I'm not— Wait. What do you mean, Brooke?

HARRISON
Uhhh...

SAM
Brooke lied to you?
(creeping sarcasm)
That seems so...unlike Brooke.

HARRISON
Sam, please.

SAM
Okay, okay. So you and Brooke had a tiff? That's why you're running through the halls, I guess— chasing after her?

HARRISON
(defensively)
No, Brooke and I are fine, thank you. I was chasing after Natalie.

SAM
(surprised)
Nat? You're fighting with Nat?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HARRISON

It wasn't really... I said some things I shouldn't have.

SAM

(shaking her head)

What is it with you and girls, Harrison?

HARRISON

I don't know! I swear, sometimes I think I ought to just become a monk!

Sam literally doubles over laughing.

SAM

Whatever you say, "Brother" Harrison...

HARRISON

Anyway, I don't want to talk about me. I want to talk about you.

Sam sobers instantly.

SAM

I don't.

HARRISON

Sam, I... You're the smartest, most sensible person I know. Drugs? How could you?!

SAM

Harrison, shut up!

HARRISON

No! I can help you, if you'll let me!

SAM

(hissing)

I don't...have...a problem.

She turns and walks away; he follows stubbornly.

HARRISON

Yes you do!

Sam looks up and down the corridor to make sure they're alone, then pulls him close so that he can hear:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SAM

(low)

Look, I don't know what you think, or what Brooke told you, or didn't tell you, but it's not like that, okay? I'm not snorting powder up my nose, or shooting up in some crack house. They're just pick-me-ups. They give a boost so I can handle everything. That's all.

Harrison gives her a withering, skeptical look.

SAM (CONT'D)

Okay, sometimes I take something to make me feel good. There's no harm in that.

HARRISON

(incredulous)

No harm? No harm?! You don't know what this stuff is doing to you! Not to mention the little fact that it's illegal?!

Sam shrugs indifferently, conveying what she thinks about both issues. Harrison's expression turns to stone.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

(flat)

You don't care.

SAM

(casually)

Should I?

Harrison takes a step back, shaking his head in resignation.

HARRISON

I'm sorry, Sam.

Puzzlement is clear on her face.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

I thought I could help, but...the Sam I know...the Sam I fell in love with...she'd never not care.

As Sam's puzzlement turns to consternation, Harrison turns and simply walks away. Sam watches him go, her mouth hanging open; it isn't until he's disappeared around a corner that she starts to recover.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SAM
(distant)
Harrison? Harrison, wait—

She lets out a heavy sigh, shoulders slumped.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Mike and Jane are walking down the hall purposefully, with Brooke flitting behind.

BROOKE
Would you guys just stop and let
Mr. Osbourne try to handle this?!

MIKE
He didn't handle it very well
before. He even admitted that.

BROOKE
That was my fault! If you're
going to blame somebody, blame me!

JANE
We're not blaming anyone, honey.
And I can appreciate you not
wanting to get Sam into trouble.

MIKE
Mr. Osbourne shouldn't have let
himself be influenced like that.

BROOKE
(bitter)
Oh, he should've been more like
you, and decided in advance that I
couldn't possibly have anything
worthwhile to say.

JANE
That's not fair, Brooke.

BROOKE
It's totally fair!
(to Mike)
You think I'm some little girl
with nothing but empty space
between her ears!

Mike stops, genuinely hurt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIKE

That's not true, Brooke. It's never been true.

BROOKE

It's always been true. You've never taken me seriously. I've just been the basket case you had to take care of after Mom left.

Mike turns white. He opens his mouth to respond—but Jane steps between them, outraged herself.

JANE

Brooke! That was an incredibly vicious thing to say! And you know it's not true! You apologize to your father right now, or—

BROOKE

Or what, you'll ground me till I'm eighteen?

Mike, by this time, has settled into an interesting shade of red.

MIKE

You listen, young lady, as long as you're living under our roof—

But Brooke isn't backing down one inch.

BROOKE

Sam found a way around that. Maybe I should, too.

Possibly recognizing the thin ice upon which they've moved, Jane holds up her hands to restore peace.

JANE

I think everyone needs to calm down. We'll talk about this later, at home, okay? Right now we have to meet with Mr. Krupps.

With Jane taking the lead, they resume walking. Unfortunately, defusing the more volatile confrontation does nothing to solve the original one.

BROOKE

You don't have to meet with Mr. Krupps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANE

We have an appointment, dear. We can't just not show up.

BROOKE

You have—?

(shaking her head)

You never intended to listen to Mr. Osbourne. You had your minds made up from the start.

MIKE

Of course not, Brooke.

JANE

We hoped Mr. Osbourne could help us figure out what to say to Mr. Krupps.

(sighs)

But I'm afraid I still don't have much of an idea.

They have reached the office; Mike opens the door and they file in, effectively cutting off Brooke's response.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The only person behind the counter is Krupps' secretary, Shirley, who steps up upon seeing them.

MIKE

Hello, we're Mr. and Mrs. McQueen. We have an appointment with Principal Krupps.

SHIRLEY

Of course. Mr. Krupps is running a little late. He'll be with you shortly if you'll just wait here.

JANE

Thank you.

Mike and Jane sit together on the back-wall bench; Brooke pointedly stands in the corner, arms folded, glowering.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Sam walks down the deserted hall, a melancholy air about her. She stops at a small, unmarked door, unlocks it with a key from her ring, and steps through.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' BACK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A dim, crowded space that looks more like a janitor's storeroom than anything else, though there are signs that Sam has reclaimed some of the cluttered surface area, including an old desk that takes up much of the available space. With a little sigh, she sits on the edge of the desk and surveys the cramped room. That's when she notices that the door to Krupps' main office is cracked, just a bit. She gets up and goes over to close it—but then she hears faint voices, and instead presses her ear to the crack to listen.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Krupps and Mr. Osbourne are in the middle of an interesting conversation. Both men are standing and on the move, almost as if they are sparring.

KRUPPS

Eric, I do sincerely appreciate your concerns. But, as I've said before, I'm just not bothered by the opinions of others.

OSBOURNE

Yes, but—

KRUPPS

My relationship with Sam is completely legitimate, and that's the bottom line.

OSBOURNE

Still, I feel I must question the propriety of the more...personal aspects of that relationship

KRUPPS

There has never been inappropriate conduct between Sam and myself.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRUPPS (CONT'D)
Beyond that, it's not your
concern.

OSBOURNE
With all due respect, Sir, the
Board may feel that it's their
concern.

KRUPPS
(quietly)
Is that a threat, Eric?

Osbourne waves a hand dismissively.

OSBOURNE
Your conduct with Miss McPherson
has been quite public—
intentionally so, I might add.
The Board hardly needs to rely
upon a single instructor for
information.

KRUPPS
You're right, of course. I
apologize.

OSBOURNE
Frankly, I have as little regard
for the Board as you do. My
concern lies solely with Miss
McPherson's well-being. I
continue to believe that this
relationship may ultimately prove
detrimental to her.

KRUPPS
(shocked)
How can you say that?! I only
want the best for Sam!

OSBOURNE
Yes, Sir, I do know that.
However, I strongly advise you to
closely consider your motivations
regarding Miss McPherson.

KRUPPS
My motivation is simple: I want
to help Sam succeed. At school,
in life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OSBOURNE

That's obvious. Sir. What wasn't as obvious was the reason why you so desperately wanted this.

KRUPPS

Why? Because I wanted to. Isn't that enough?

OSBOURNE

Except that isn't the real reason, Sir, is it?

KRUPPS

(warily)

I don't know what you're talking about.

OSBOURNE

Sir, I feel extremely diffident about prying into someone's private life. But I felt it my duty as an educator—and my obligation to Miss McPherson.

KRUPPS

Prying? Into whose private life?

OSBOURNE

Yours, Sir. Unfortunately. The records are obscure, but not hidden. I know, Sir. About Amanda.

At that, Krupps freezes, and looks at Osbourne with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

KRUPPS

Excuse me?

Osbourne reaches for Krupps' desk, picks up a photograph: a protrait of a little girl, three or four years old.

OSBOURNE

(gently)

She would have been...fourteen this month, yes? She was a lovely child.

KRUPPS

You're treading on very dangerous ground, Eric. If you're suggesting—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OSBOURNE

My apologies, Sir. As I said, I am extremely diffident about all of this. However, to be perfectly blunt, yes, I am suggesting. You saw Miss McPherson, whose father had passed away. You knew that she was estranged from her mother and stepfather. And you saw an opportunity—a second chance, as it were. To take on, in a way, the role of father which had been denied you. And in turn, Miss McPherson could act as the daughter you had lost.

(beat)

She doesn't know, of course.

KRUPPS

About Amanda? Of course not. It would just confuse her.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' BACK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where, still listening at the door, Sam indeed looks quite confused and out-of-sorts. She steps away, shaking her head bleakly.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

KRUPPS

Listen, Eric, I can see how it might look that way. I can even concede that, subconsciously, some of what you're saying might be subliminally true. But, dammit, I do not think of Sam as a replacement for my daughter!

OSBOURNE

Still, I believe that...taking Miss McPherson under your wing in these circumstances is highly dangerous emotionally. For both of you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The intercom on Krupps' desk buzzes, interrupting the conversation. Krupps goes behind the desk and picks up the phone.

KRUPPS
 (into the phone)
 Yes, Shirley?... Yes, please tell
 them I'll be right out.

He hangs up, and looks at Osbourne across the desk.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)
 My next appointment is waiting.
 Sam's mother and stepfather.
 (ironic)
 I wonder what they'll have to say?

With that, he guides Osbourne to the door.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)
 Eric...about Amanda...

OSBOURNE
 You have my word, Mr. Krupps, that
 I'll not discuss your private life
 with anyone.

KRUPPS
 Including Sam.

OSBOURNE
 Including Miss McPherson. Though
 I believe you owe it to her to do
 so at some point.

KRUPPS
 (non-committal)
 I'll have to think about that. In
 any case, thank you for your
 discretion.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The McQueens—all three of them—are quite surprised to see Osbourne walk out of Krupps' office along with the principal. Mike and Jane get up and step forward. Krupps' eyes take them all in, finally resting on Brooke.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRUPPS

Mr. McQueen, Mrs. McQueen. So
sorry to keep you waiting.
(to Brooke)
Are you joining us, Miss McQueen?

MIKE/JANE

(simultaneously)
No.

BROOKE

(a half-second later)
No.

JANE

It's Sam we need to talk to you
about.

Meanwhile, Brooke and Osbourne share a look, and a barely-perceptible shake of the head by Osbourne. Brooke looks from Osbourne to Krupps to Mike and Jane, apparently coming to a decision. Then she takes three quick steps to Krupps' side and goes up on the tips of her toes for a moment.

BROOKE

(in Krupps' ear)
Watch Sam's back.

She flashes Mike and Jane a furious, wrathful glance, then turns to Osbourne. With her back to the others, she mouths "call me" to him silently. He nods fractionally, and she spins and walks out of the office.

OSBOURNE

Well. I'll leave you to your
business.

And Osbourne follows Brooke out. Krupps gestures for Mike and Jane to follow him.

KRUPPS

Please, come in.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Sam is sitting on the floor, huddled up against the door to Krupps' back office, head half-buried in her arms. She's so lost in her own little world that she doesn't notice when someone walks up, stops in front of her, then squats down for a closer look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRISON

Sam?

He reaches out to touch her hair. That's when she looks up, long enough to recognize him, before ducking her head again.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Sam, are you okay?

No glance up this time; just a slight shake of the head.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Aw, man...

He sits himself down on the floor next to her.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

It's this bad habit I have, making girls cry. I don't mean to. It's just a gift. A perverse gift. Listen, about what I said before—

SAM

It's not you, Harrison.

HARRISON

(surprised)

It's not? Well, uh...in that case I stand by everything I said before.

That manages to drag a rueful chuckle out of Sam, before she settles back into her gloom.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Sam, what is it? What's wrong?

No response.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

C'mon. You can tell me.

Silence.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Besides, if you can't tell me, who can you tell?

Nothing. Harrison gives up, leaning his head back against the wall with a sigh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM
(muffled)
What if...?

HARRISON
(riveted)
What? Sam?

She lifts her head clear of her arms.

SAM
What if...you thought someone
liked you for one reason, but it
turned out they liked you for a
totally different reason?

HARRISON
I don't think I understand.

SAM
I mean...what if you found out
someone liked you because you...
reminded them of someone else?

HARRISON
I guess, uh... Are you sure this
person likes you, not this other
person?

SAM
I'm pretty sure. Yeah.

HARRISON
And they really like you?

SAM
Yeah. Definitely.

HARRISON
(uncertainly)
Well...then maybe...maybe it
started one way, and just changed
to something else. I mean, if
you're the one this person really
likes...it is really all that
important?

Sam hauls herself to her feet.

SAM
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HARRISON

(standing)

Yeah, right. I mean, look at me,
giving advice? You should
probably run in the opposite
direction as fast as you can.

Suddenly Sam turns and hugs him tightly for a second. Before he can react, she releases him and slips through the office door, locking it behind her. Harrison is left to stand there, shaking his head, completely bewildered.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' BACK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sam goes back to the desk and again perches on its edge. She digs into her pants pocket and pulls out two blue pills. For several long moments, she just holds them in her palm, staring down at them indecisively. She casts a long, indecipherable look at the outer door; finally she pops the pills into her mouth and swallows them. Then she again steps to the door to Krupps' office, perhaps to see if the principal and Osbourne are still talking.

CUT TO:

INT. KRUPPS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mike and Jane are sitting at Krupps' desk—again, the appearance of a normal conference. But it's already starting to get out of hand.

JANE

...Mr. Krupps, we're not trying to
accuse you of anything.

MIKE

(muttering)

...cavorting around with teenage
girls...

Jane squeezes Mike's hand to quiet him.

KRUPPS

I'm thankful for that—and any
accusations would be groundless
anyway.

Mike scoffs; Jane hushes him again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE

You understand, we're just very concerned about Sam.

KRUPPS

Of course you're concerned for Sam's welfare. So am I. I've done everything possible to ensure her well-being.

JANE

We appreciate the things you've done for Sam—

Mike scoffs again; this time Krupps turns his attention his way.

KRUPPS

(carefully polite)

Is there something you'd like to add, Mr. McQueen?

Mike looks at him like he's a serial killer.

MIKE

Look, I don't know what you're doing, carrying on with Sam, or what you expect to gain from plying her with favors—

KRUPPS

"Plying"? "Favors"?

MIKE

(derisively)

You're going to sit there and tell me Sam gets treated like everyone else.

KRUPPS

Of course not. As Treasurer of the Student Body Fund, as well as someone whose input I value, Sam has access and privileges that other students don't. As for gain, I gain great satisfaction in watching Sam succeed.

At this point, Jane tries to reinsert herself into the conversation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANE

But, Mr. Krupps, we're worried about other things...like the trip last weekend.

KRUPPS

An extra-curricular activity. Sam and I engaged in casual conduct. Casual does not mean improper.

JANE

I'm sorry, but— From what we heard, it...appeared to be more than just casual.

KRUPPS

Appearances can be deceiving.

Mike leaps from his chair.

MIKE

Aha! You admit that you've involved Sam in some twisted game—

Krupps stands as well; the two men face off across the desk.

KRUPPS

In whatever we have done, Sam has involved herself. I have never coerced her to do anything against her will.

MIKE

She's a child!

KRUPPS

She's an extremely capable young woman. More than capable enough to make her own decisions.

MIKE

You've manipulated her—!

KRUPPS

I don't think Sam is the type to be easily manipulated.

MIKE

—managed to get her under your thumb—!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KRUPPS

(icily)

Pardon my bluntness, but if you really think I have Sam "under my thumb", then you truly have no idea of her strengths.

MIKE

I know your type. How long before Sam gets invited back to your place for the weekend?!

But Krupps has no chance to respond to that. The door to the back office flies open, slamming into the wall with a crash that makes everyone jump. Sam comes storming in, nearly apoplectic, fairly radiating waves of fury.

SAM

HOW DARE YOU?!!

She marches up to Mike, eyes blazing.

SAM (CONT'D)

You have no right to stand there and judge Mr. Krupps!!

JANE

Sam, we're just worried—

SAM

Ha! You're worried I might have a life away from your clutches! So you come here to try to steal it, or ruin it, like you've tried to do with everything else!

MIKE

That's enough! We're your—

He never gets the word "parents" out: Sam overrides him in a voice so loud and so enraged that Jane actually winces at it.

SAM

(booming)

YOU—ARE—NOT!!!

Her arm comes straight out, shaking in rage like the rest of her, finger pointing unhesitatingly at Krupps.

SAM (CONT'D)

He is more of a father to me than you could ever hope to be!!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Sam's thundering declaration dies away into a moment of silence; Krupps uses that moment to take hold of Sam's outstretched wrist.

KRUPPS

Sam...

Turning to face him, she transforms instantly: the rage melting away, her expression becoming apologetic.

SAM

Mr. Krupps, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to eavesdrop... I couldn't...just let him...

He moves his grip from her wrist to her hand, squeezing it reassuringly.

KRUPPS

(soothing)

It's all right, Sam. I can handle this.

SAM

(wavering)

You're sure?

KRUPPS

I'm sure. You're stressed. Go home. Unwind.

Jane and even Mike hang back cautiously, unwilling to provoke Sam again.

SAM

You won't...let them...?

KRUPPS

I won't. I promise. Everything will work out.

Sam hesitates, lingering.

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

(gently)

Go.

Finally Sam lets go of Krupps' hand, stepping quietly through the back door and closing it behind her, without so much as a glance back at Mike or Jane. Krupps watches her go, then turns back to them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

KRUPPS (CONT'D)

Well.

Jane starts to try to get the conversation going.

JANE

Mr. Krupps—

He holds up a hand to forestall her.

KRUPPS

Let's cut to the chase, shall we?
You can file a complaint against
me with the Board if you wish. I
can tell you now that it'll go
nowhere. I personally think that
if you do anything of the sort,
all you'll get from it is an
expedited emancipation hearing, at
which Sam will legally sever all
ties to you.

Jane looks as if she's just been told she has a terminal illness.

JANE

You'd...help her do that?

KRUPPS

I'd do everything in my power to
keep her from doing it. Sam needs
her mother, whether she wants to
admit it to herself right now or
not.

Mike, meanwhile, is seething over being excluded from this exchange. But Jane doesn't seem to notice.

CUT TO:

INT. OSBOURNE'S CAR - MOVING

While maneuvering through traffic, Osbourne puts on a headset attachment to his cell phone, then reaches out and punches out a number.

CUT TO:

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The phone rings twice before Brooke breezes in, kicking the door shut behind her, and picks it up.

BROOKE
(into the phone)
Hello?

INTERCUT BETWEEN OSBOURNE AND BROOKE

OSBOURNE
(into the mic)
Good afternoon, Miss McQueen.

BROOKE
Mr. Osbourne! Did something happen? Dad and Jane aren't home yet?

OSBOURNE
I expect they will be shortly. I saw them leave just before I did.

BROOKE
(breathlessly)
So? What happened?

OSBOURNE
Apparently Miss McPherson interrupted the meeting, in rather spectacular fashion.

Brooke sits down on the edge of the bed.

BROOKE
Okay... What's that mean?

OSBOURNE
(dryly)
I heard her, and I was in the hallway.

BROOKE
(eyes wide)
Ohhh... What'd she say?

OSBOURNE
I couldn't quite tell. But judging from your father and stepmother's bearing, I doubt she took their side. I believe she...told them off, as it were.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROOKE

(sighs)

Great. They'll be in a lousy mood, then. Maybe I oughta go to the mall. I haven't been getting along all that great with them myself, you know.

OSBOURNE

So you've said. I would certainly think it prudent to avoid the subject of Miss McPherson.

Brooke stands up and goes to the door.

BROOKE

I think it's prudent to avoid them completely. I'm locking my door as we speak.

And, indeed, she does just that.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

So, is there any other news on the Sam front?

Unseen by Brooke, Osbourne purses his lips in thought.

OSBOURNE

Hmmm.

Brooke flops back onto her bed.

BROOKE

What kind of answer is "hmmm"?
Come on, spill.

OSBOURNE

(arching an eyebrow)

"Spill", Miss McQueen?

BROOKE

Okay, now you're just teasing me.
I can tell.

OSBOURNE

I? Tease? Never.

(beat)

Very well, though it's not news, exactly. Before I left campus, I had an interesting conversation with a friend of mine who works in the District office.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He pauses dramatically.

BROOKE

And??

OSBOURNE

He told me that, lacking an ironclad case, the Board would be predisposed against taking any action against Principal Krupps. Or so people are quietly saying, anyway.

BROOKE

(musing)

I've seen the Board, and they're not very reasonable. But that just sounds weird.

OSBOURNE

Indeed. However, it does tend to support a hypothesis of mine.

BROOKE

(prompting)

Hypothesis?

OSBOURNE

That the charade our principal and Miss McPherson have engaged in—

BROOKE

Trying to make everyone think they're fooling around.

OSBOURNE

Creating a suggestion of intimacy, yes. Its ultimate purpose may simply be to prove a point.

BROOKE

(frowning)

What point? Just to show he can? Or rub the Board's noses in the fact that he's untouchable, for whatever reason?

OSBOURNE

My thoughts as well. Your powers of deduction are excellent as always, Miss McQueen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Brooke can't help but grin at that; a grin that disappears when she hears a noise outside. She leaps off the bed and peeks out the blinds of her window.

BROOKE

Uh-oh—the parental units are here. My powers of deduction tell me if I hide under the bed, they might not find me.

OSBOURNE

Miss McQueen...

BROOKE

I'm kidding. I think. See you tomorrow?

OSBOURNE

Of course. Until tomorrow, then, Miss McQueen.

BROOKE

Bye, Mr. Osbourne.

Brooke hangs up the phone. She flips up her bedspread and takes a peek underneath, apparently sizing up the space. Then she lets the covers fall back, and settles for sitting on the floor against the bed, bringing her knees up and folding herself into as small a space as possible.

CUT TO:

INT. MIKE'S CAR

Having just pulled into the driveway, Mike turns the engine off. But instead of getting out, he just sits there, zombie-like. Jane has undone her seatbelt and unlatched her door before she notices that he's not moving.

JANE

Mike? What is it? You haven't said a word since we left school.

(beat)

She didn't mean it, Mike. She's just mad as hell. And then there's Principal Krupps—

For the first time, Mike responds.

MIKE

Principal—? Oh...Sam.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE
(realizing)
You were thinking about Brooke.

For the briefest of moments, there might be a hint of resentment in Jane's face. But then—if it was ever there—it's gone.

MIKE
I know Sam is just confused.
Brooke...

She lays a comforting hand on his shoulder.

JANE
She didn't mean what she said,
either. You have to believe that.

Silence follows.

JANE (CONT'D)
Mike, please talk to me.

MIKE
I'm just thinking about...losing
control.

JANE
(laughs ruefully)
Over our daughters? We've sure
managed that.

But Mike is shaking his head.

MIKE
You're supposed to lose control of
your teenage children. I read
that somewhere. I meant...losing
control of myself.

JANE
Yourself? What do you mean?
You'd never do anything to
Brooke...

Mike starts to choke up.

MIKE
Oh, you don't know, Jane. When
Brooke...when she said...about
having to take care of her...I...I
almost...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He wipes his hands over his face, unable to go on.

JANE

I know you. No matter what you think... You'd never lay a hand on Brooke.

Mike shakes his head miserably.

MIKE

No... I almost...I almost told her she was the reason Kelly left.

Jane's mouth drops open.

JANE

Oh, Mike...

Mike turns to her, tortured by the thought.

MIKE

Can you imagine that? Blaming Brooke for our divorce? For my mistakes? Oh, God, Jane... I—I never would have been able to take it back. I would've lost her. Forever.

JANE

You didn't, Mike, you didn't.

MIKE

I almost did... If you hadn't have jumped in... I came that close to losing it. To doing... something I would have regretted the rest of my life. That scares me, Jane. It scares the hell out of me.

Jane leans over and hugs him tightly.

JANE

I'm here... We'll get through this. We'll fix things with Brooke. And with Sam. We'll be a family again, I swear...

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE SAM'S APARTMENT - LATER

Sam comes down the hall towards her apartment door, but just as she gets there, she notices that Jaycee's door, across the hall, is slightly ajar, and she makes a sharp left turn.

SAM
(calling)
Hey, Jaycee! You left your door
open!

No answer. Sam hesitates, then cautiously pushes the door open.

CUT TO:

INT. JAYCEE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sam steps inside the apartment, looking around.

SAM
(calling)
Jaycee?
(pause)
Jaycee, are you here?

Silence.

SAM (CONT'D)
Reyanna? If you guys are here
and, uh, doing anything...just—
moan, or something...

She looks towards the closed door to the bathroom. But then she hears a faint noise form beyond the far side of the bed, where she can't see. Curious, she walks around the bed.

Jaycee is sprawled on the floor next to the bed, unconscious, beaten to a bloody pulp.

Sam sees her, and screams.

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

THE END