

JACKSON

I'm not going to do that. I'm just saying, it's painful to watch something that gives us joy -- as the flute does for me -- be treated like it's a noise weapon for crowd control.

RYAN

I don't even want to play, my parents make me.

JACKSON

Yes, your music is alive with that indifference.

RYAN

So... should I start again?

JACKSON

Please.

Jackson plops down in his chair as Ryan begins.

START

INT. NEW YORK RESTAURANT - THAT EVENING

Malcolm sits across from Jackson at a restaurant they can only afford because the company is paying.

Jackson, not used to eating this well, hungrily tears into his beautifully prepared meal. On closer inspection we see that each food group on his plate, chicken, potatoes, peas, have been carefully separated so as not to touch.

MALCOLM

(re: Jackson's plate)
Careful, that pea is rolling into your potatoes.

JACKSON

I see it, thank you.

Jackson pushes the pea back where it belongs.

MALCOLM

I've always wondered, if you can't have your foods touch, how do you eat meat sauce on spaghetti?

JACKSON

Because sauces go on foods-- they're part of the food. Like a condiment. You wouldn't eat mustard separate from a hot dog.

MALCOLM
Maybe you should.

JACKSON
(fighting the thought)
Oh, God, don't say that.
(then)
So did my father send you to give
me a hard time about how I eat?

MALCOLM
Your father didn't send me, you
paranoid food-separator. Not
everything is about him.
(then)
So, how have you been?

JACKSON
Okay. It's been a little hard since
my mom--

MALCOLM
Actually, Anna sent me and it is
about him.

JACKSON
I knew it. Why is everything always
about Ellis?

MALCOLM
Well, he is an extraordinary man. A
genius and a visionary who's also
kind, ridiculously handsome, an
excellent swimmer--

JACKSON
I see him more as a judgmental,
spectrum dwelling narcissist who
almost drowns when he attempts a
backstroke and trades on his B+
looks.

Malcolm scoffs.

MALCOLM
Pfft. B+. Do you even hear
yourself? Speaking of your dad, as
you are, have you spoken to him
since your mom's memorial?

JACKSON
Once or twice. Why?

MALCOLM

How'd he seem?

JACKSON

Not great. He just talked about some side project he's working on to make himself invisible. The man literally wants to disappear. I think a shrink might have something to say about that.

MALCOLM

The board got him a shrink. The guy shadowed Ellis for a few days then disappeared. And I don't mean he turned invisible. He just vanished. Again, not invisible.

JACKSON

Look, he's my dad--

MALCOLM

--Great, we leave in an hour.

JACKSON

What?

MALCOLM

Anna wants you to come to L.A. Help get him back on track.

JACKSON

I don't think that's a good idea. All he ever does is try to mold me into being more like him. Now that my mom's gone, there won't even be a buffer. Being around him is just going to make me anxious.

MALCOLM

I'm hearing you... but in fairness, everything makes you anxious. In the third grade you were overwhelmed by Crayons.

JACKSON

They were used by a lot of other children, one of whom, Billy Berman, put them in-- what he called-- his "body hiding holes."

Malcolm looks at Jackson a moment, speaks sincerely.

MALCOLM

I know he's not an easy father. But he is a good man. And he's hurting. Or spiraling, which only goes in one direction. And now you're the only family he has.

JACKSON

Ugh, please don't humanize him.

MALCOLM

(sees an opening)

He's suffering, Jackson. Your father-- who in spite of not seeing very often, you still love-- is suffering. Suffering, suffering--

JACKSON

All right. I'll go for twenty-four hours. But that's it.

MALCOLM

Excellent. You'll regret it.

JACKSON

You mean I won't regret it.

MALCOLM

No, I'm lowering your expectations so you won't be as anxious.

JACKSON

Of course it won't go well. Why am I doing this?!

MALCOLM

Perfect.

END

INT. ANNA'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Anna works at her desk. There's a knock on her door.

ANNA

Come in.

Jackson enters carrying a small backpack.

JACKSON

Hi, Anna.

ANNA

Jackson! You made it!