

CHASING WARREN REMEDY

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CHARACTERS

CH. ACTION'S AMBITION (JACKSON), seven. An aging Wire Fox Terrier and single minded champion dog.

TOM "TUGBOAT" SWINEHEART, mid-forties. Jackson's owner and trainer. A great coach in the style of Bill Belichick or Bear Bryant. Winning is the only thing.

SISSY SALZBURG, mid-forties. A down-and-out veterinarian seeking redemption.

NATALJA SWINEHEART, early twenties. Tugboat's daughter and failed athlete.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS/ NOTES ON DOUBLING

THE MAILMAN should all be played by the same actor playing Tugboat

If performed live, ANNOUNCER and DR. CRITTEN can be played by Sissy and Jackson, respectively. Ideally, a recording would be utilized for these parts, with the actor playing Tug portraying all additional characters. The casting of Tug in all of the additional roles serves to emphasize the characters self destruction

**This piece must be cast with diversity and inclusion in mind.
This play should never be produced with an all white ensemble.**

PLACE

Phoenicia, NY. A small modest home with a fenced in back yard.

TIME

The present.

“Show me a gracious loser and I’ll show you a failure.”
-Knut Rockne

PROLOGUE

ABSOLUTE PITCH BLACK SCARY DARKNESS.

From somewhere far away we hear a lone dog barking. Then another from somewhere else. Like a rising tide in surround sound, the barks become louder and grow in number, until finally, they seem to be coming from all around us- a cacophony of indecipherable shouts into the void. Slowly though the chaos- the sound shifts. It almost sounds like cheering. An enthusiastic crowd. An adoring audience. A chant emerges...

CROWD

Tugboat! Tugboat! Tugboat!-

The sound cuts off abruptly. The silence in the theater should make you hold your breath.

Then, like honey dripping onto your shoulder, we hear a soothing baritone...

TUGBOAT

Capitalism works so well in America because, in America, every single stupid, useless, anthropomorphic McRib in a pair of sweats and Big Dog tee-shirt honestly believes in his deep fried little heart- *the same heart that will literally kill one in every four people in this country*- that they're a millionaire who just hasn't made their millions yet. It's a country full of drowning people who won't learn to swim because each one thinks, one day, they're gonna own a yacht. A country full of people who think they're chosen. A country full of losers who think they're winners. A complete lack of self awareness. Americans. Are. Losers.

I was born in Canada, of course. Moved here when I was five years old with my dad to a greyhound farm in New Hampshire- are you writing this down?

LIGHTS UP.

We're backstage at last years Westminster dog show.

A large stair case is at center stage, leading up and out of sight.

Tom “Tugboat” Swineheart, wearing a perfect tuxedo, is lecturing to Jackson, his competition Wire-Fox Terrier. Jackson is sitting in rapt attention.

Well?
TUGBOAT

What?
JACKSON

Are you writing this down?
TUGBOAT

Oh- (no)
JACKSON

Jackson pats around his body as if searching for a pen. He stops.

I don't have thumbs.
JACKSON

Don't mess up your coat.
TUGBOAT

JACKSON
It's all good though, I have an excellent memory. You said McRib and... swim- (...)

TUGBOAT
I know you know this speech. Not exactly our first time here, is it?

Tugboat peeks through the curtain towards the crowd.

JACKSON
It's not. It's our...(?)

TUGBOAT
Third.

JACKSON
Third.

TUGBOAT
They're coming back from commercial.

A red light above Tug suddenly flicks on. It says LIVE in bright blood-red letters. It's Jackson's cue, he exits to the left.

Tugboat checks his phone. No messages. He contemplates making a call-

ANNOUNCER (OFF)

Welcome back we're broadcasting live from Madison Square Garden on ESPN...? Sorry, yes, ESPN 7. It started with over 2,800 dogs, 200 breeds, from 50 states, all narrowed down to seven elite canines. Only one will be named the best in show-

JACKSON (OFF)

Let's fucking GO!

Jackson re-enters, wiping his nose. Tugboat throws his phone the ground and grabs Jackson's shoulders.

TUGBOAT

Jackson. Jackson, look at me. This is it. Warren Remedy's legacy. We can catch her. Everything we've worked for has come down to this razor thin moment in time. If we do this right you're gonna live forever. Nothing else matters. Nothing. It's all shit. You understand me? Shit. We enter this world as nothing. It's up to you to define who you are. To become something. You have to fight and claw your way to the top if you want to find meaning in this struggle. You're only as good as your legacy. If you're not the best, you're nothing. You're nothing. Don't be a McRib. Eat the McRib.

ANNOUNCER (OFF, QUIETER)

Ladies and gentleman, introducing the seven group winners competing for best in show at the 141st Westminster Dog Show. The winner of the herding group, German Shepherd, Lockenhaus' Rumor Has It V Kenlyn. The winner of the Hound group, Norwegian Elkhound, Vin-Melca's Daggarwood Delight. The winner of the Toy group, Pekingese, Pequest Pickwick. The winner of the Non-sporting group, Miniature Poodle, Danfour Avalon As If. The winner of the Sporting group, Irish Setter, Vermilion's Sea Breeze. The winner of the Working group, Boxer, Mephisto's Speak Of The Devil....

JACKSON

Fuck yeah. I love you Tug.

TUGBOAT

I love you too. You're my best friend. Game face.

JACKSON

Right.

TUGBOAT

Three, two, one-

JACKSON

Three, two, one-

Tug and Jackson plaster on disturbingly cheerful smiles.

ANNOUNCER (OFF, LOUDER)

And the winner of the Terrier group, and returning two-time-Best-in-Show-Champion, competing now to tie the record for most-all-time best in show victories... ladies and gentleman, give it up for Champion Action's Ambition!

"One Moment in Time" By Whitney Houston plays as they run up the stairs and out of sight. The set transforms from a backstage area to TUGBOATS kitchen.

WHITNEY HOUSTON

*Each day I live / I want to be
A day to give / The best of me
I'm only one / But not alone
My finest day / Is yet unknown
I broke my heart / Fought every gain
To taste the sweet / I face the pain
I rise and fall / Yet through it all
This much remains
I want one moment in time
When I'm more than I thought I could be
When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away
And the answers are all up to me
Give me one moment in time
When I'm racing with destiny
Then in that one moment of time
I will feel / I will feel eternity*

Tug slowly reemerges the top of the stairs. He's walking back down slowly, taking off his tuxedo to reveal sweatpants and a Big Dog tee-shirt...

SCENE ONE

Tug reaches the bottom of the stairs.

Tug puts the Tuxedo in a cabinet under the sink and takes out a bucket. He sits in the middle of the room and sticks his fingers down his throat. The song stops abruptly as he heaves.

TUGBOAT

Come on... come on..

He sticks his fingers in even further no avail.

TUGBOAT (CONT.)

Do I... do I not have a gag reflex?

One more BIG TRY!... Nothing.

TUGBOAT

God damn it.

Glass CRASHES off stage.

TUGBOAT (CONT.)

JACKSON!

JACKSON (OFF STAGE)

Nothing!

TUGBOAT

What was that?

JACKSON (OFF)

A bird! Flew in and broke the vase.

TUGBOAT

Are you kidding me?

JACKSON (OFF)

Get out of here bird! Oh shit Tug! He peed on the rug up here too!

TUGBOAT

Just get in here. We need to talk.

JACKSON (OFF)

Talk? About what? That sounds serious.

TUGBOAT

It's... about... your gait.

JACKSON (OFF)

My gait? What? My gait is fine.

TUGBOAT

Fine? Sorry- It's *fine*?

JACKSON (OFF)

I mean it's great.

TUGBOAT

Well you *said* it's fine, and fine isn't fucking great. It's fine.

JACKSON (OFF)

Yeah, I know.

TUGBOAT

Just get in here.

JACKSON (OFF)

Coming.

Jackson enters.

TUGBOAT

How'd you knock over the vase?

JACKSON

I'm sorry man. Really. Don't be mad. I honestly just didn't see it.

TUGBOAT

You didn't *see* it?

JACKSON

I swear.

TUGBOAT

What do you mean you didn't see it?

JACKSON

I don't know.

TUGBOAT

And did you say you peed upstairs? You haven't done that since you were a puppy.

A beat.

JACKSON

I had an absolutely bonkers dream last night.

TUGBOAT

Two weeks Jackson. Two weeks.

JACKSON

I was in this big desert with my father- and I think I'd murdered him or something because I was digging this big grave for him-

TUGBOAT

Jackson, listen to me-

JACKSON

-but my dad was still talking to me, I knew he was dead but he was still *talking* to me. Lecturing. He just looks at me digging and digging and digging and he says, "When I buried *my* father, the grave I dug was three times as deep as that one."

TUGBOAT

(with growing concern)

So, when you were going like this-

(Tugboat does the doggy paddle)

-last night, you weren't dreaming about running?

JACKSON

I was doing that?

TUGBOAT

Yeah, I thought you were sleep running.

JACKSON

No, I wasn't running. I guess I was digging. That's funny-

TUGBOAT

Fuck.

JACKSON

What, I have to train in my sleep now too?

TUGBOAT

Oh fuck me lord. Just fuck me dead.

JACKSON

Tug?

TUGBOAT

Huh?

JACKSON

I have to train in my sleep? Is that what you wanted to talk about?

TUGBOAT

Oh. Yeah, well, Warren Remedy trained in her sleep.

JACKSON

That's such bullshit.

TUGBOAT

No, Jackson, that is historical fact.

JACKSON

How would you even know that?

TUGBOAT

I read. Something you wouldn't know anything about.

JACKSON

Whatever.

TUGBOAT

What do you think you're doing?

JACKSON

Getting breakfast?

TUGBOAT

No. *No.* Jackson, *Sit.*

Jackson closes the refrigerator.

JACKSON

Are you kidding me?

TUGBOAT

You can have breakfast *after* you work on your gait.

JACKSON

Tugboat, my gait is perfect-

TUGBOAT

-Perfect?

JACKSON

Yes, perfect! I didn't win three years in a row with a bad gait-

TUGBOAT

Perfect doesn't make perfect, Jackson, *practice* makes perfect. If perfect made perfect then they would just breed the same line of dogs all the way down and the same line would win Best in Show every year.

JACKSON

No they'd be deformed from inbreeding. Ever seen a pug? What's going on there? When I meet a pug, I swear I don't know which end to sniff.

Tugboat GRABS Jackson by the scruff.

TUGBOAT

You got a real smart mouth this morning don't you?

JACKSON

Ow- shit Tug, you're hurting me.

TUGBOAT

You're hurting *me* Jackson! You're hurting me.

JACKSON

I'm sorry. I'd do anything for you. You know that.

TUGBOAT

Then show me that gait. Trot-

Jackson starts to trot around the room.

TUGBOAT (CONT.)

FIVE! SIX! SEVEN! EIGHT!

JACKSON

Look at this top-line

TUGBOAT

We're chasing history here. Four consecutive Best in Shows.

JACKSON

I want it Tug. I'm sorry. I love you.

TUGBOAT

But there's a window. Warren Remedy was half your age when she won her last ribbon, retired when she was five and was dead at seven. You're on the wrong side of seven years old right now, Jackson.

JACKSON

Don't even talk like that Tug. I'm the fucking best!

TUGBOAT

Yeah?

JACKSON

Yeah!

TUGBOAT

Yeah?

JACKSON

YEAH!

TUGBOAT

Go start your stretches.

JACKSON

Sir, yes sir!

Jackson runs up the stairs.

Tugboat watches him go and stays fixated on the top of the stairs. He reaches up-

Each day I live-

WHITNEY HOUSTON

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

The trance is broken and he crosses to open the door.

It's NATALJA. She's in her early twenties and wearing a U-ALBANY softball uniform.

She is soaking wet.

Hey Dad.

NATALJA

Natalja?! What're you doing here?

TUGBOAT

Dad. I was at practice- and-

NATALJA

Are you okay? Is everything okay? Are you hurt?

TUGBOAT

I should have called but my phone-

NATALJA

Natalja takes her phone from her pocket, it drips like a wrung sponge.

Do you have any rice?

NATALJA

Tug hugs Natalja.

...Fuck. You are soaking wet. Why are you so wet?

TUGBOAT

She laughs nervously.

Yeah.

NATALJA

Is it raining?

TUGBOAT

No. NATALJA

What's going on? TUGBOAT

Jackson enters.

JACKSON
Is that my seamless? I ordered an Acai bowl cause you were being such a big-
(shock upon seeing Natalja)
BITCH!

Jackson. NATALJA
(bitter)

Natalja- here can you get her a towel? TUGBOAT

Jackson looks Natalja from head to toe.

...I don't have thumbs. JACKSON

How'd you order the Seamless- NATALJA

I got it, here- TUGBOAT

Tugboat takes his tuxedo jacket from under the sink and wraps it around Natalja.

Sit down, honey. TUGBOAT

Is this your tuxedo? NATALJA

What's a tuxedo, really? Just a fancy suit. TUGBOAT

I mean- yeah. NATALJA

TUGBOAT

Come here- sit down, get warm.

She sits.

JACKSON

What happened? You smell like Hudson river-

NATALJA

I know you've been busy-

TUGBOAT

Westminsters in two weeks-

NATALJA

So you know I wouldn't come home unless-

TUGBOAT

Oh my god. Honey- did you get the call? For the pros?

NATALJA

Dad...

JACKSON

Natalja? The pros?

NATALJA

-Actually yes. I did.

JACKSON

You did?

NATALJA

I got invited to the combine.

TUGBOAT

That's incredible! Natalja! I knew you could do it! I knew you were a winner!

NATALJA

Thank you.

TUGBOAT

When are they?

NATALJA

Two weeks.

Oh- TUGBOAT

Yup. NATALJA

That's when Westminster- TUGBOAT

Oh dang! Well that's okay. You don't need to like- be there or anything. So- NATALJA

You know I would- TUGBOAT

What bad luck. NATALJA

That is a bad luck coincidence. JACKSON

Hate to see it. NATALJA

But why are you wet though. JACKSON

Why am I wet? NATALJA

Oh yeah- why are you so wet? TUGBOAT

Funny story. NATALJA

I bet. JACKSON

When I got the call, my team was so excited they just dumped our water-thingy all over me. Like when people win championships. NATALJA

And the water you drink at practice smells like literal garbage? JACKSON

NATALJA

You know how those budgets are- the men's sports get all the money.

TUGBOAT

This is incredible. I am so proud of you honey!

NATALJA

Thank you. It is HOT in here. *Phew.*

TUGBOAT

Jackson likes it humid. Keeps his coat curly-

JACKSON

Like Warren Remedy.

NATALJA

I like your natural look Jackson. It's like Stray-Chic.

JACKSON

I think you mean tres chic.

NATALJA

I didn't.

TUGBOAT

Want me to turn the heat down?

NATALJA

How about some coffee?

TUGBOAT

Oh. Of course.

Tugboat turns and fiddles with the coffee machine.

NATALJA

Milk and sugar please.

TUGBOAT

Yes. Jackson.

JACKSON

Huh?

TUGBOAT

Come here and help me with the coffee machine. He's a wizard with this thing. Same with the TV. All those HDMI's and different remotes.

Jackson joins Tug.

NATALJA

Is the water thing full? You have to make sure to refill it before you try to brew.

Jackson joins Tug, Natalja walks over to help as well.

JACKSON

Yeah I checked it. Hey, I got it.

TUGBOAT

Stupid thing-

Jackson turns to Natalja, backing her away from the coffee machine.

JACKSON

I guess I should ask you how you are?

NATALJA

I'm great. Dad, try turning it off then on again-

Jackson blocks Natalja from the machine.

JACKSON

You know Tug, sometimes you have to run it without the pod in there to get rid of the calcium build up.

TUGBOAT

I just cleaned the stupid thing with a paper clip yesterday.

NATALJA

Did you mess with the auto brew settings?

JACKSON

Got it!

NATALJA

Damn!

Jackson turns smugly to Natalja.

JACKSON

It wasn't plugged in.

TUGBOAT

It's brewing now.

NATALJA

Dad can we talk?

TUGBOAT

You wanna talk?

NATALJA

We need to talk.

Natalja looks at Jackson. Tugboat looks at Jackson.
Jackson stares back at both of them.

TUGBOAT

How's class?

NATALJA

Good. Fine.

JACKSON

Fines not great.

NATALJA

It's great. Dad can we-

TUGBOAT

Jackson go lie down.

JACKSON

Tug it's almost five. You gonna brush me?

TUGBOAT

Just go lie down, I'll be right there.

Jackson exits.

TUGBOAT (CONT.)

He's a champion.

NATALJA

Congratulations on the ribbon.

TUGBOAT

Ha. Thank you. Congratulations on the call. I'm proud of you.

NATALJA

Thank you.

TUGBOAT

Natalja I know I haven't been... the best... you know.

NATALJA

Oh that doesn't matter.

TUGBOAT

It's just hard for-

NATALJA

Dad I was wondering if I could stay here.

TUGBOAT

Oh.

NATALJA

Just for a little while.

TUGBOAT

Natalja- Westminster...

NATALJA

I know. I won't get in the way. I just-

TUGBOAT

Natalja stop.

NATALJA

What?

TUGBOAT

You always were so theatrical. I remember your high school did a really weird version of Grease, and you got the lead. No lines, but unmistakably the lead.

NATALJA

Dad that was a demonstration of a drunk driving accident put on by students against drunk driving.

TUGBOAT

I just don't get theater.

NATALJA

It wasn't theater it was a PSA.

TUGBOAT

Here's a PSA... I love you.

NATALJA

I... I love you too.

TUGBOAT

But you can't stay here.

Tugboat boops Natalja on the nose.

NATALJA

Wait please dad. Just for a little while-

TUGBOAT

You need to be at school focused on your training. You want to go pro don't you?

NATALJA

I- yes! That's it! I do-

TUGBOAT

And I'm busy training for Westminster-

NATALJA

No dad that's it! You're the best. You've always been the best. That's what I need! I need to be around a winning atmosphere again.

TUGBOAT

I can't train you- I have Jackson-

NATALJA

I know! And I can help! I won't get in the way I promise. Please. Dad. Please.

TUGBOAT

Okay. But Natalja, are you really... I haven't seen you in so long. And you stopped posting to your SnapChat story.

NATALJA

No one uses... I've been busy.

TUGBOAT

I know. Me too.

NATALJA

Look. We lost a lot of games, okay? I didn't want to text you unless we won and we just kept losing.

TUGBOAT

Isn't the season still going?

NATALJA

Right. Yes. We continue to lose. Sorry.

TUGBOAT

You can text me when you lose.

NATALJA

And disappoint you? I'd rather die.

Tug nods.

TUGBOAT

Well none of that matters now. This is why I've always hated team sports. Other people will always only ever let you down. You just need to focus on those tryouts.

NATALJA

Right. Of course. *I* won't let you down dad.

TUGBOAT

Westminster is in two weeks. This is the big one.

NATALJA

I know.

TUGBOAT

You understand that's where my priorities are, right?

NATALJA

Right.

TUGBOAT

In that case. I don't see why you can't join in on some of Jacksons workouts.

Okay

NATALJA

But we go hard..

TUGBOAT

Real hard.

JACKSON (OFF)

Jackson I said go lie down!

TUGBOAT

Jackson enters.

JACKSON

Come on this pertains to me. Plus, I can hear everything in this house.

Tugboat pats Jackson on the head.

TUGBOAT

You're right this does involve you, sorry buddy, I love you-

NATALJA

I'm in.

JACKSON

Are you sure? It's really hard.

TUGBOAT

Let's do it!

NATALJA

Really?

JACKSON

Really? I said how hard it was right?

TUGBOAT

Yeah fuck it. Family business. Like me and my dad, and his dad before us.

NATALJA

Wow. Okay, and you're sure I can stay here?

TUGBOAT

But it's not gonna be easy!

Of course not!

NATALJA

It's really not!

JACKSON

And you can't...

TUGBOAT

What?

NATALJA

Quit. You can't quit.

TUGBOAT

We can't stand quitters.

JACKSON

I won't.

NATALJA

Awesome. I'll set up the couch for you.

TUGBOAT

The couch?

NATALJA

It's a futon... yay! Father and daughter back together! Coaching!

TUGBOAT

What happened to my room?

NATALJA

Oh that's... that's Jackson's room now.

TUGBOAT

Seriously?

NATALJA

What- he's supposed to sleep on the floor?

TUGBOAT

Wait- are you joking? I literally can't tell-

NATALJA

TUGBOAT

Look if you don't want to do this-

NATALJA

No I do. I'm sorry.

TUGBOAT

Ahem.

NATALJA

I'm sorry Jackson.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE TWO

Lights rise to a dramatic dim- the set has transformed into an AGILITY COURSE.

Jackson and Natalja run through WEAVE POLLS!

Over a SEE-SAW!

Through a TUNNEL!

ETC.!

Between each obstacle Tug blows a WHISTLE and yells out words of encouragement.

Jackson finishes the course, visually out of breath, Natalja is fine.

LIGHTS UP.

NATALJA

Woo- how was that, dad?

TUGBOAT

Jackson, you okay?

NATALJA

Dad?

TUGBOAT

You were great honey- Why don't you take another lap.

NATALJA

Around the yard?

TUGBOAT

Jackson, you okay?

JACKSON

Great. I need a water.

Natalja grabs a water bottle from her bag.

NATALJA

Here take this one!

JACKSON

Thanks.

He drinks it. Natalja watches.

TUGBOAT

Looked a little slow there. You sure you feeling great?

JACKSON

I said great didn't I?

NATALJA

Make sure to stay hydrated Jackson.

TUGBOAT

Excuse me.

(re: Natalja)

Sorry, did I stutter? Make it two.

Natalja starts jogging around the yard.

Tugboat takes Jackson over to the side and lies him down. He starts to give Jackson a pliability massage.

TUGBOAT

You looked a little slow yesterday too.

JACKSON

Yeah you mentioned that.

TUGBOAT

Just cause the show's in two weeks now. TWO WEEKS Jackson.

JACKSON

Thanks for the reminder.

TUGBOAT

Maybe you're feeling like you need a little-

JACKSON

No.

Okay. TUGBOAT

Why? JACKSON

Just cause- you know. You seemed a little- TUGBOAT

I'm a *little* nothing. I go big on everything, alright? That's what being the best is. JACKSON

Hey alright- okay, calm down. TUGBOAT

I am calm. JACKSON

Natalja stops running.

Everything okay over there? NATALJA

Yeah can you just give us a little privacy? TUGBOAT

Can I grab some water? NATALJA

Here- JACKSON

Jackson tries to return Natalja's water-bottle.

That's alright I'll get some from inside. NATALJA

Natalja exits.

I never needed that stuff. JACKSON

Of course not. TUGBOAT

JACKSON

I can do it with out it.

TUGBOAT

I know you can.

JACKSON

I've been doing it with out it all year. I killed at the AKC show and that was just a fucking formality.

TUGBOAT

I know.

JACKSON

It's just a little extra thing. It was. I'm fine with out it, okay?

TUGBOAT

Jackson-

JACKSON

Great. I'm great with out it- Jesus Christ!

TUGBOAT

Okay great. That's what I wanted to hear.

JACKSON

Yeah, well. Okay.

TUGBOAT

Okay.

JACKSON

...Why? You got some?

TUGBOAT

No.

JACKSON

Fuck man- Then why'd you bring it up?

TUGBOAT

Well I'm just saying... maybe if you feel like you *need* it I can try-

JACKSON

Bro.

TUGBOAT

Bro-

JACKSON

I don't need it. I don't WANT it. Don't you think I can do it without it? That I'm the GOAT?

TUGBOAT

It's just- you ran directly into that last weave pole- if you did that at Westminster we'd be done right there.

JACKSON

That has nothing to do with- that's just- I have a headache.

TUGBOAT

A headache?

JACKSON

No. I mean I'm just a little out of it.

TUGBOAT

What do you mean out of it? Talk to me-

JACKSON

Just. Gimme a little pep talk. Help me get in the zone. Stop talking about this and that- who cares. Who cares? *Who cares?*

TUGBOAT

Okay- um... They say it can't be done.

JACKSON

Who said that?

TUGBOAT

The haters. The doubters. The sore losers.

JACKSON

I see them.

TUGBOAT

They say we can't win again. That we're finished.

JACKSON

Oh they can fuck right off.

TUGBOAT

But they don't know who we are.

JACKSON

Who are we?!

TUGBOAT

We're the best, baby!

JACKSON

We're a team?

TUGBOAT

We're a team!

JACKSON

When I see the competition, I just picture them all wearing mailmen uniforms. Really gets me fired up.

TUGBOAT

Jackson, we talked about this. The mailman is not your enemy.

JACKSON

You know what going postal means?

TUGBOAT

Yeah it means like going crazy.

JACKSON

(suddenly intense)

I'M NOT FUCKING CRAZY!...Sorry, I didn't get much sleep last night. These dreams man. I'm straight up seeing demons.

They laugh.

JACKSON

I see demons.

TUGBOAT

Yeah well. Let's call it a day then. I think you need a break.

JACKSON

Yeah?

TUGBOAT

Yeah. Maybe go blow off some steam.

JACKSON

Alright. I'm gonna go stare out the window and just fucking bark at whatever walks by.

Jackson exits.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP.

A spotlight on TUG down stage left. He's on the phone.

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

Hello?

TUGBOAT

Dr. Critten? Tugboat.

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

Wrong number.

TUGBOAT

No- wait please don't hang up! I'm desperate-

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

Listen, stranger, I don't know who you're trying to get in contact with but I can assure you-

TUGBOAT

-Look I'm just calling about your- uh... your legs.

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

What about them?

TUGBOAT

Are they still...

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

Crushed?

TUGBOAT

Crushed, yeah.

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

Yes. Unfortunately, my legs remain completely and utterly crushed.

TUGBOAT

So- what does this mean? For us. For Jackson.

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

It means that I can be of no assistance to you sir

TUGBOAT

Wait! Jackson needs you. He's not right. He needs your treatment. I think something's wrong-

DR. CRITTEN (OFF)

That is quite enough. Now I am certain you have the wrong number. Please don't ever call here again. Au revoir

TUGBOAT

Please! Just let me come by-

DR. CRITTEN

I said au revoir!

TUGBOAT

... It's in two weeks Doc. Two weeks. I'm so close.

DR. CRITTEN

My legs were crushed for gods sake! Do show some decorum!

TUGBOAT

Critten PLEASE.

DR. CRITTEN

Listen, stranger. You might be able to find someone who might be able to help you. Go to Murray's Karaoke Bar- sing Cheeseburger in Paradise by Monsieur Buffett and wait for Breeze.

TUGBOAT

Breeze? I can't do that. Is that a drug deal-

DR. CRITTEN

AHEM! AHEM! Sorry you're breaking up. Adieu!

TUGBOAT

I can't do that- wait, wait! Shit!

The line goes dead.

Tugboat leans over a trash can and jams his fingers down his throat- but nothing is coming out. Just DRY-HEAVES.

Natalja enters, as the lights rise fully. We're in back in the KITCHEN.

NATALJA

Everything okay?

TUGBOAT

No. I mean- yes! Nothing is okay. I mean- everything is nothing. Nothing. Okay. Fuck! Everything is- Nothing is *wrong*. Everything is *okay*.

NATALJA

What's wrong?

TUGBOAT

...Nothing.

NATALJA

What can I do?

TUGBOAT

Anything you want.

NATALJA

I want to help.

TUGBOAT

Let's play catch.

NATALJA

Dad come on. You just tell me what's wrong. Let's communicate. My therapist says-

TUGBOAT

Therapist. Conmen who prey on the weak and get them hooked on their own trauma like crack. Which I have never bought because it's illegal and terrifying-

NATALJA

What?

TUGBOAT

Can't you just go down to the pond and skip some stones while you push that stuff deep down inside- like we used to do when I was a kid?

NATALJA

Dad-

TUGBOAT

I just need people who understand what it takes to win! No one is willing to do what it takes. I have to do everything! I'm surrounded by fucking quitters and cowards. Jackson, Dr. Critten-

NATALJA

Mom?

TUGBOAT

What?

NATALJA

Do you think mom was a quitter?

TUGBOAT

Whoa. Stop right there.

NATALJA

She swallowed my entire prescription of sleeping pills... then shot herself in the head. We never talk about it. Like what the fuck? Just pick one. It's literally overkill. You know how hard that was? After she took all my sleeping pills? I couldn't sleep for weeks!

TUGBOAT

God you and your pills.

NATALJA

What's that supposed to mean?

Natalja hands go to her throat.

TUGBOAT

I don't know. I don't want to talk about your... I don't want to talk about that. That's the... Nothing. Everything. Is okay, I mean. Everything is fine.

NATALJA

Dad I'm not a quitter.

TUGBOAT

That's not enough- It's not enough to not quit- you have to win. That's all that matters. You have to be willing to do what it takes to WIN. Not quitting is the bare minimum!

NATALJA

I think it takes a lot of courage just to not quit- I think sometimes, for some people, just having the courage to keep trying is enough-

TUGBOAT

It's not enough for me.

NATALJA

Yeah well nothing is, is it?

Natalja exits. Slamming the door.

TUGBOAT

FUCK! What am I gonna do? No. Stop. You're a winner. You're not gonna let this stop you. You're not a loser. You're a winner. Think. Come on.

Tug slaps himself in the face. He crosses to his trophy case and removes his three massive Best in Show ribbons, draping them delicately over his body.

TUGBOAT

You're not a loser. You're not a loser.

Previously hidden under the larger Best in Show ribbons hangs a small gold medal. Tug takes it and gently puts it around his neck. He seems at peace for a moment before suddenly getting up and slamming the Best in Show ribbons on the table.

TUGBOAT

Jackson! I'm going to the bar!

LIGHTS OUT. From the darkness..

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

Hello? Who's there? Who turned out the lights?

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

I did you stupid fucking dog. Ya' big dumb dope.

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

Who's there?

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

Dumb bitch. Stupid lil bitch boy.

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

Stop that!

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

Oh you're an absolute freak. A total fucking freak. You're a coward. You're crazy. You're a bad, bad, boy.

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

I'm not a bad boy!

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

Oh, that's right. You're not bad. You're fine. Just fine. Just. Fine.

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

Hey! I am GREAT!

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

Ol' long nose having, floppy ear-head, big ass ugly ass dog looking mother fucker. Looking like a three legged goat ass stupid ass.

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

Who ARE you?

VOICE (IN DARKNESS)

I'm your worst nightmare!

JACKSON (IN DARKNESS)

THE MAILMAN!

SCENE THREE

A KARAOKE bar later that night. The place is EMPTY but for Tugboat. Colored disco lights move slowly around the bar.

An instrumental version of *Cheeseburger in Paradise* plays. While Tug is singing A woman (professionally dressed, desperate) walks in and watches him.

TUGBOAT

(singing into mic)

*Tried to amend my carnivorous habits/
Made it nearly seventy days/
Losin' weight without speed, eatin' sunflower seeds
Drinkin' lots of carrot juice- Oh fuck.*

Tug notices the woman, when he turns to face her she suddenly becomes drunk.

SISSY

Hey, don't stop!

TUGBOAT

No that's okay. Um. Are you...Mr. Breeze?

SISSY

What?

TUGBOAT

Nothing. Never mind.

SISSY

Where do I know you from?

TUGBOAT

No where. I'm sorry. Forget it.

SISSY

No I definitely know you! You're Tom Swineheart!

TUGBOAT

Uh- look, I'm sorry. I know this is wrong, I shouldn't have-

SISSY

Yeah, you know, the Chumbawumba song.

SISSY

Chumbawumba? Is that a joke?

SISSY

No it's...

(Singing into mic)

I GET KNOCKED DOWN/

TUGBOAT

Got it!

SISSY

Yeah, you don't wanna hear that.

TUGBOAT

Well if you don't mind I'm waiting for a friend-

SISSY

This place waters down everything. I bring my own mix.

Sissy pulls a flask from her purse.

TUGBOAT

What are you a bartender or something?

SISSY

No.

Sissy takes a large swig.

TUGBOAT

What do you do?

SISSY

Nothing. It's a long story but...I used to...sorry it's just hard to talk about but...agh, the memories are flooding back now. DiFranco was supposed to be going home that day. I can still hear his last words.... "the light!"...poor bastard.

TUGBOAT

Jesus.

SISSY

Sorry. I'm a vet.

Sissy swigs her flask.

TUGBOAT

Oh well, thank you for your service.

SISSY

Oh- no I meant vet like veterinarian

TUGBOAT

Oh.

SISSY

Oh yeah- no.

TUGBOAT

It's just you really-

SISSY

Sorry did I make it sound like-

TUGBOAT

Just the whole bit about the memories flooding back- and DiFranco's last words-

SISSY

DiFranco was a parrot I was treating that flew into the ceiling fan in my office. I tried to yell out but he just "*(squawks) the light!*" and FWOOSH!... Business has just been really bad.

TUGBOAT

I should probably be getting home to my dog.

SISSY

Wait no! Fuck that parrot! I'm a great vet. It's just. That story got out and people ran with it. It's luck. You know? Bad luck.

TUGBOAT

I don't believe in luck.

SISSY

Oh well of course not. Not for you- I'm sure you work really hard for everything. It's me. Sometimes I feel like God's urinal cake.

TUGBOAT

Look I'm sure business will pick up.

SISSY

Well I'm sure your vet has tons of other clients. They just put, ya know, "Primary Care for Best in Show winner" in the phone book or...facebook or whatever.

TUGBOAT

Look, Dr. Critten has been working with Jackson since he was born.

SISSY

Wow, so he's like Doogie Howser or something?

TUGBOAT

Since Jackson was born.

SISSY

So Jackson is your champion dog? The one I saw? Or do you train a whole bunch?

TUGBOAT

No, he's *the* dog. The only one.

SISSY

Are you gonna be in this years show?

TUGBOAT

Um. It's complicated.

SISSY

How so?

TUGBOAT

It just is.

SISSY

Tell me about it.

TUGBOAT

It's Critten. There was an accident and I'm not sure we're going to be able to keep seeing him.

SISSY

Oh so you ARE looking for a new vet?

TUGBOAT

No that wouldn't work.

SISSY

Why not?

TUGBOAT

It just wouldn't. Don't worry we're gonna be fine. I'll figure it out. We'll get number four. No matter what.

Tug thinks he sees Mr. Breeze.

TUGBOAT

CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE!

SISSY

What?

TUGBOAT

Sorry I thought I saw someone... so, tell me more about yourself. You're a vet, but you're not a vet-vet.

SISSY

That's right, um, I've got two kids. They're great, both in college. So I'm alone at the house now. All the time. Um, I love dogs.

TUGBOAT

Me too.

SISSY

I'm single

TUGBOAT

Me too.

SISSY

Will the similarities ever stop?

TUGBOAT

Divorced?

SISSY

Dead.

TUGBOAT

Same!

SISSY

Wow. I wonder if they know each other.

They laugh.

SISSY

Sorry- Just trying to- I don't know. Bond I guess?

TUGBOAT

No, yeah, we can bond.

(into mic, like James Bond)

Bond. Emotional Bond.

SISSY

So why dogs?

TUGBOAT

My father trained greyhounds.

SISSY

That's cool-

TUGBOAT

Not really. He was really cruel to those animals. Ruthless.

SISSY

That's awful.

TUGBOAT

I couldn't do what he did. But I still wanted to work with dogs, and I couldn't shake that competitive spirit- So... Dog Shows.

SISSY

Is that one of your Best in Shows?

Tug notices he's still wearing the small gold medal from earlier.

TUGBOAT

This? Oh no- I forgot I was even wearing this. That's embarrassing. No- this is Coach of the Year, 2012. For softball.

SISSY

You coach softball?

TUGBOAT

I used to. My daughter's team.

SISSY

Ah, how old is she?

TUGBOAT

Twenty-one. She's a senior at U-Albany where she plays D1.

SISSY

Any temptation to coach again?

TUGBOAT

It's complicated. She's always had difficulties. I love her. I really do but... She got invited to the professional combine. It's her senior year so I mean better late than never. But... You know. I'm proud but... She's got difficulties.

SISSY

Like what?

TUGBOAT

God everything. They got her on Lexipro, Xanax, Adderall, you name it.

SISSY

Oh god- Adderall. Be careful with that, my son got into that his first year at school. It's like prescription cocaine.

Tugboat gets an idea.

TUGBOAT

What? That's... horrible. Adderall, you say?

SISSY

Yeah. It's huge on campuses, gets the kids all amped up to learn or whatever.

TUGBOAT

A shame...

SISSY

So does your daughter live with you?

TUGBOAT

I didn't say anything about my daughter! I mean. No. I think she went out with some friends.

SISSY

Empty house?

TUGBOAT

Yeah sorry. So, where were we? Do you like to...fucking read? Or whatever-

SISSY

Wanna get out of here?

TUGBOAT

Oh. Um.

SISSY

Maybe I could come over and... See the ribbons.

TUGBOAT

Oh, well I mean. Yeah. Yeah of course. Anything for a fan.

SISSY

And I can meet your big famous champion dog.

TUGBOAT

He's really little- but I mean- wait. Yeah you're gonna love him. High energy.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE FOUR

LIGHTS UP on Jackson in the kitchen. Tugboat is sitting at the table, FACED AWAY.

JACKSON

Hey Tugboat. How'd you sleep last night?... Tugboat?... Hey!

Jackson walks up to Tugboat and grabs his shoulder- but it's not Tugboat it just a large sack- full of LETTERS!

JACKSON

OH MY GOD! No! Tugboat what's happened!? You've been turned into a sack of letters? Is that what happened? Tell me!..

Jackson starts to read through the letters, throwing them to the ground.

JACKSON

What the-... To LOSER at 101 Failure Street? Mailman! You son of a bitch!

The mailman laughs manically- it echos demonically through the kitchen as the light flicker. Jackson grabs his head in pain and drops to the ground- he begins to paddle his arms wildly- his body shaking violently as he makes his way out of the kitchen- we hear him collapse off stage.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP.

Sissy and Tugboat stumble in, making out sloppily. Tugboat locks the door to the rest of the house.

SISSY

I never usually do this.

TUGBOAT

Me neither.

They kiss some more.

It's just I've been really lonely.

SISSY

Me too. Hold on-

TUGBOAT

Tug takes off the Coach of the Year medal.

Okay.

TUGBOAT

Its just that I think I need a little intimacy in my life- you know what I mean?

SISSY

Tug spins Sissy around, pushing her onto the table doggy style.

Totally.

TUGBOAT

You do?

SISSY

I do.

TUGBOAT

You understand me?

SISSY

I do.

TUGBOAT

You think I'm still hot-

SISSY

Yes-

TUGBOAT

Even though I have a total mom-hair-cut-

SISSY

Yeah-

TUGBOAT

And crows feet?

SISSY

Yeah- TUGBOAT

And pretty much exclusively wear capri's- SISSY

Oh yeah- TUGBOAT

That I bought at Macy's- SISSY

YEAH! TUGBOAT

-ON SALE?! SISSY

-FUCK YEAH! TUGBOAT

Tug crosses to the sink and splashes some water on his face.

Sissy stands up and fixes her capris.

Want some water? TUGBOAT

Yes, please. Whew... Macy's. Who knew? SISSY

Yeah, love a good sale. TUGBOAT

So can I meet Jackson? SISSY

Oh right. Yes of course. TUGBOAT

Let's see this little champion. SISSY

Jackson! Come in here... Jackson! Come!... One second. TUGBOAT

Tugboat walks to the door and opens it-

Jackson?... JACKSON!
TUGBOAT

Tug runs off-

What's wrong?
SISSY

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP.

Tugboat sits alone in the corner, but stands when Sissy enters from the other room.

So? Is he okay? What the hell's going on?
TUGBOAT

I'm having him rest now.
SISSY

On the floor? He should be in his bed.
TUGBOAT

Tom, exactly how old is Jackson?
SISSY

He's seven, going on eight.
TUGBOAT

Hmm... That's not that old for a Terrier.
SISSY

What's wrong with him?
TUGBOAT

I'm not really sure. I can't give you an accurate diagnosis without doing a tissue biopsy, or-

A tissue biopsy?
TUGBOAT

SISSY

Yes.

TUGBOAT

Why the hell would you need to do that-

SISSY

Tom, I think Jackson might have a brain tumor.

TUGBOAT

What?

SISSY

Has he been experiencing any seizures? That's the most common indicator.

TUGBOAT

Uh, no I don't think so.

SISSY

You know, in his sleep, any of this-

TUGBOAT

Oh fuck- the other night he was sleep digging. You really think it could be a brain tumor?

SISSY

Like I said, I can't know for sure unless I do a tissue biopsy-

TUGBOAT

That's a surgery right?

SISSY

Yes. And I am totally qualified. I can do it.

TUGBOAT

Fuck.

SISSY

Look, we might even want to skip the biopsy and go straight into treatment-

TUGBOAT

What are you talking about?

SISSY

Well putting a sick dog like this under anesthesia twice-

TUGBOAT

A sick dog?

SISSY

Look we can check first if you want but I should definitely take Jackson over to my office-

TUGBOAT

Oh, I see what you're doing. What? Is this your big plan? *Local Vet Saves Dying Champion Dog, Business is Saved, Everyone Forgets Dead Parrot?*

SISSY

First off that is WAY too long for a headline and second...

TUGBOAT

Nice try you absolutely unscrupulous hack.

SISSY

Wait- no I'm serious. Jackson is sick. He needs surgery. Please let me be the one-

TUGBOAT

Fine. He'll do it after Westminster

SISSY

He's not gonna make it to after Westminster- you need me to diagnose this thing now.

TUGBOAT

That's a risk we'll have to take.

SISSY

Tom-

TUGBOAT

Westminster's in two weeks. We do not have time to be messing around-

SISSY

Messing around?

TUGBOAT

I'm sorry. It can wait two weeks can't it? I mean, this year is it. We're so close. This is the year, the last year. This is what it's all about. Four Best in Shows.

SISSY

Tom I understand the dog show is important to you but I'm talking about something really serious here-

TUGBOAT

You're talking about your career.

SISSY

I'm talking about his life.

TUGBOAT

So am I. Does he know? You didn't tell him did you?

SISSY

Not yet-

TUGBOAT

Don't you dare-

Natalja bursts in.

NATALJA

(drunkenly singing Beyonce)

I've been drinking, I've been drinking...uh...I've been drinking, I've been drinking

TUGBOAT

Natalja? Oh wow- what time is it?

NATALJA

It's night.

TUGBOAT

Honey, please come inside.

NATALJA

Don't be mad, but I ate a piece of pizza after I dropped it. Cheese side down.

TUGBOAT

Sweetheart.

NATALJA

It had a rock in it and I think I ate the rock cause I saw it one second and then the next second-

TUGBOAT

AHEM

SISSY

Hello.

NATALJA

Oh, I'm sorry I didn't see you - Oh- Oh my god. Oh were you? I'm sorry. *Dad*. I'm sorry. I can. I'll go.

TUGBOAT

No- that's fine. Natalja, this is Sissy. Sissy, Natalja. My daughter.

NATALJA

Hi.

SISSY

Hello.

TUGBOAT

Sissy's a vet.

NATALJA

Oh. Well, thank you for your-

TUGBOAT

No, a veterinarian-

NATALJA

Oh! Oh um, do you think that rock is gonna- like... you know...pass?

SISSY

Your father just called me asking for help with Jackson so-

NATALJA

Jackson died?

SISSY

I'm afraid Jackson may have a brain tumor.

TUGBOAT

HAHA! We don't know that. We don't know that.

NATALJA

Oh- thats great. I mean that hes not dead. Not that- I guess that's horrible. This is horrible. I'm sorry for what I said-

TUGBOAT

That's enough.

NATALJA

About passing the rock. I didn't realize this was so series. Serious. So serious. Not that the rock won't be series. Serious. That's hard to say.

SISSY

Natalja- maybe you could help me talk some sense into your father- I need to perform a tissue biopsy.

TUGBOAT

She wants to operate on Jackson. To take him out of the competition.

SISSY

As you can see his priorities are a bit fucked up-

TUGBOAT

You're the one that's fucked up! Sissy drinks from her own flask like she's fucking Mad Eye Moody!

SISSY

You didn't seem to mind when I was pouring you a drink!

TUGBOAT

Yeah well, Dr. Sissy was just leaving. How about that?

SISSY

Excuse me?

TUGBOAT

Yes. Thank you for everything. I'll be in touch.

Tug ushers her out.

TUGBOAT

So... I didn't know you liked Beyonce.

NATALJA

Jackson has a brain tumor?

TUGBOAT

No. He's completely fine. It's nothing. I'm just being extra sensitive because the show is so close.

NATALJA

Dad what is going on here?

TUGBOAT

I could be asking the same question.

NATALJA

I had like three drinks.

TUGBOAT

Don't you have practice tomorrow?

NATALJA

Why are YOU up? With a LADY? Aren't you supposed to not have sex before a competition.

TUGBOAT

That's boxers.

NATALJA

All dogs! And people too. Series-ly. That should just be what the word is.

TUGBOAT

Forget about all that. I'm sorry about earlier. I'm just stressed about the competition. I'm glad you're here. I don't want to push.

NATALJA

You're just always-

TUGBOAT

It's just that the show is in-

NATALJA

Two weeks, yeah. I know. I want to-

TUGBOAT

You can help.

NATALJA

It was all the stuff about-

TUGBOAT

I know. Trust me. I need you now. Hey- look at me. I'm series.

They hug.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE FIVE

LIGHTS UP.

Natalja is in the kitchen on the house phone. She's talking with a deep voice.

NATALJA

Yes she's doing great. We're handling it. Thank you for your concern. Bed rest. Lots of... running, weaving, things of that nature. No we're not concerned with her mental state. Her mental state is very good. It's great. Honestly we're weirded out it's so normal. No need to send anyone. Please stop calling.

Natalja hangs up. She smashes the phone a couple times on the receiver in frustration.

She crosses to the drawer and takes out a steak knife, holding it for a moment before crossing back to the phone and cutting the line. She then walks over to the large DUFFLEBAG sitting in the corner and takes out a pill bottle and takes some.

Tug enters. They both freeze awkwardly, Natalja hides the knife behind her back.

NATALJA

I was just leaving.

TUGBOAT

For the day?

NATALJA

Yes.

TUGBOAT

Shouldn't you... Brush your teeth?

NATALJA

Right! Of course! I have to brush my teeth.

Natalja throws the bottle and the knife into her bag and exits.

Tug waits a moment then runs over to the bag- pouring out some pills into his hand.

He sees the knife.

TUGBOAT

Natalja...

JACKSON (OFF)

GOOD MORNING!

Tugboat drops the knife back in the bag.

He then takes the pills over to the counter and puts them into a blender with some bananas and other ingredients.

He turns it on.

TUGBOAT

(singing some more Cheeseburger in Paradise)

*I like mine with lettuce and tomato/
Heinz 57 and french fried potatoes*

Jackson enters.

TUGBOAT

Oh Jackson, it's you. How're you feeling?

JACKSON

Little slow.

TUGBOAT

Don't worry- mixing you up a little protein shake here, get you feeling good.

JACKSON

For who?

TUGBOAT

It's for you bud. For your coat.

JACKSON

Does it have cheese, like I like?

TUGBOAT

You know it!

JACKSON
Oh yum!

TUGBOAT
We're gonna be back on track, don't worry.

JACKSON
You think we've been off track?

TUGBOAT
No. Just-

JACKSON
You think it's me?

TUGBOAT
Did I say that?

JACKSON
No.

TUGBOAT
Yeah, so.

JACKSON
Cause you know I haven't changed right? I still want to win for you. More than anything.

TUGBOAT
I know.

JACKSON
More than anything.

TUGBOAT
Anything?

JACKSON
Yeah. Oh- by the way, 'nother whacked out dream last night Tug.

Tugboat returns to the shake.

TUGBOAT
Put it in your journal.

JACKSON
You know how Mailmen have those big sacks of letters-

TUGBOAT
Jackson I don't want to hear about your dream.

JACKSON
Do you smell burnt toast?

TUGBOAT
Oh god- Jackson-

JACKSON
What?

TUGBOAT
Oh wait shit, the *toast!*

Tugboat runs to the toaster and pulls out some now crispy toast.

JACKSON
Who's the toast for Tug?

TUGBOAT
Natalja.

JACKSON
Natalja's still here?

TUGBOAT
Yeah- She's staying with us, remember?

JACKSON
You sure that's a good idea?

TUGBOAT
I... don't know.

JACKSON
Tug- I told you. I don't need no fucking special help from no fucking-

Natalja enters.

JACKSON
Natalja! My old friend!

Jackson runs up to her and jumps on her- wagging his tail like crazy.

Jackson! Down! TUGBOAT

Oh- haha. Good boy. That's fun. NATALJA

Rub me! JACKSON

Jackson, show tape. TUGBOAT

Awww- do I have to? JACKSON

Go. TUGBOAT

Jackson goes.

Good morning. TUGBOAT

How is he? NATALJA

What do you mean? TUGBOAT

His brain. NATALJA

He's fine. We went for a run this morning. TUGBOAT

Why didn't you wake me up? NATALJA

Thought I'd let you sleep in. I don't want to over work you. TUGBOAT

Well maybe I can work with him through the weave polls later? NATALJA

TUGBOAT

Not if that's too much for you. I don't want to push you.

NATALJA

What do you mean?

TUGBOAT

I just mean if you're feeling overwhelmed, with- you know... try outs and everything.

NATALJA

I'm handling it.

TUGBOAT

You're not thinking of... quitting?

NATALJA

No. Why? You haven't talked to anyone at my school have you?

TUGBOAT

No- should I?

NATALJA

No.

TUGBOAT

Look I just want to make sure that you're good.

NATALJA

Dad, I'm good.

TUGBOAT

Because I love you Natalja. I do. I really do. And I need you here. I can't stress enough that I couldn't handle-

NATALJA

Oh my god are you making breakfast shakes?

TUGBOAT

Huh?

Natalja grabs the shake from Tug.

NATALJA

One of your famous protein shakes?

TUGBOAT
No-

NATALJA
You used to make these all the time- can I?

TUGBOAT
No.

NATALJA
Just a taste. I haven't had one of these since high school.

TUGBOAT
Wait, Natalja!

Natalja takes a large sip of the shake.

NATALJA
Oh my god.

TUGBOAT
I can explain.

NATALJA
Dad. Is there... cheese in this?

TUGBOAT
Oh-OH yes. Whoops. Cheese? My mistake. I'll just take that.

Tugboat grabs the shake.

TUGBOAT
I'll just give that to Jackson and make you a new one.

Natalja notices the Coach of the Year medal hanging on the wall and crosses to it.

NATALJA
What is this?

TUGBOAT
They rolled out and so I just picked them up-

Tugboat sees Natalja holding the Coach of the Year medal.

TUGBOAT

-And hung them up. Hung it up. That medal is what we're talking about.

NATALJA

You still have this? And it's out in front of your Best in Show ribbons?

TUGBOAT

Of course.

NATALJA

Wow. High school. Regionals senior year- that was the last championship I ever won.

TUGBOAT

Your college coaches didn't know what they were doing.

NATALJA

We had quite the staff in high school. You and mom-

TUGBOAT

I remember.

NATALJA

Is it gonna be like that again?

TUGBOAT

Honey.

NATALJA

Does it just keep getting worse.

TUGBOAT

Is there something you want to tell me?

NATALJA

Do you believe in me?

TUGBOAT

Of course I do.

NATALJA

You think I could be great? A champion?

TUGBOAT

Of course I do! I'm sorry I haven't been super helpful with your training

NATALJA
Right. For the try outs.

TUGBOAT
It's just that Jackson-

NATALJA
Jackson. *Jackson, Jackson, Jackson.*

TUGBOAT
Westminster-

NATALJA
Dad. I've been thinking about last night... What if he really does have a tumor?

TUGBOAT
He doesn't. Sissy's practice is practically closed. She *wants* him to have a tumor.

NATALJA
But maybe you should let her check. What if you took him out of the competition. Then you and I could-

TUGBOAT
End of discussion.

Tug picks up the Coach of the Year medal from the table.
He hangs it around Natalja's neck.

NATALJA
You're giving this to me?

TUGBOAT
Trust me. I love you.

NATALJA
I love you too.

TUGBOAT
I'm happy you're here Natalja.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE SIX

A WHISTLE BLOWS!

Dramatic “training” dim ,cheesy-but-triumphant-music.
We’re at the obstacle course again.

WEAVE POLLS!

SEE-SAW!

TUNNEL!

ETC.!

Between each obstacle Tug blows his whistle.

Jackson finishes the course, he’s killing it.

TUGBOAT

That was amazing buddy!

JACKSON

Yes it fucking was. Wanna see my stack?

Jackson stacks.

JACKSON

You like that?

TUGBOAT

Perfect. You’re not shaking at all.

JACKSON

Steady as a cucumber.

TUGBOAT

I cant believe that lady would lie just to save her practice.

Tugboat pours more of the protein shake into Jackson’s
bowl and hands it to him.

JACKSON

What? Who?

TUGBOAT

Oh- everything. You're just amazing man, look at you!

JACKSON

I finally feel like myself again. I like it like this.

TUGBOAT

Like what?

JACKSON

Just us. She's getting in the way.

Jackson starts to drink the shake from the bowl.

TUGBOAT

Slow down pal.

JACKSON

My mouth is numb.

TUGBOAT

Did I say everything earlier? I meant nothing.

JACKSON

I just don't like some brat coming in here and telling me what to do. She's a kid.

TUGBOAT

Yeah and you're seven. And a dog. So shut up.

JACKSON

Sorry.

TUGBOAT

What do you want me to do? Kick her out?

JACKSON

Hey! That's a good idea. You're so smart Tug.

TUGBOAT

She's fine. She said she's fine.

JACKSON

You're not scared she might... quit on you?

TUGBOAT

Watch it.

JACKSON

I think she wants to steal our glory cause she can't get it on her own. She's a loser.

TUGBOAT

She's not a loser.

JACKSON

Oh right sorry, I forgot you can lose every game of the season and still be a winner. How stupid of me.

TUGBOAT

It's a team sport.

JACKSON

Can you hear yourself right now? Aren't you afraid?

TUGBOAT

I can do it right this time. We're gonna win, and then I can focus on our relationship and on being better. I can be better. After we win, and I'm full, I can be better.

JACKSON

I heard her crying the other day. She can't hang bro, I'm telling you.

TUGBOAT

I made her cry?

JACKSON

She wasn't reading *A Little Life*.

TUGBOAT

So I want her to strive for a little goddamn success in this world. So I don't just hand out affection like participation trophies

JACKSON

No way.

TUGBOAT

You gotta work for it.

JACKSON

I know that.

TUGBOAT

You gotta work for everything in this world.

JACKSON

Every damn thing.

TUGBOAT

Every damn day.

JACKSON

Nothing's free.

TUGBOAT

Nothing.

JACKSON

You gotta work for all of it.

TUGBOAT

Every single thing.

JACKSON

But maybe not some stuff? Maybe some stuff we can just have? Like, share, like? Rubs?

TUGBOAT

What do you mean?

JACKSON

Nothing.

TUGBOAT

Nothing?

JACKSON

Nothing. Everything. Get off my dick man- Why don't you just SHUT THE FUCK UP.

TUGBOAT

Whoa.

JACKSON

Ah-I'm sorry- I didn't mean to- snap like that. I've been feeling sort of... On edge... I can tell you're being weird around me. I can feel it.

TUGBOAT

Jackson-

JACKSON

I know you think I'm too old. That I can't do it. But you saw the training has been getting better. Hasn't it? You just saw me run that course. And I'm stacking like usual again.

TUGBOAT

Right. Here relax.

Tugboat starts to rub Jackson's belly.

JACKSON

It's just annoying. Yeah, I'm an old dog. But I'm the best, you of all people should know that.

TUGBOAT

Jackson, believe me-

JACKSON

No, you believe *me*. I am going to win this show. My age isn't a problem. I can take the fans doubting me, but not you. I need your support Tug, you're my best friend. My rock.

TUGBOAT

I'm sorry. You're right... it's Natalja. She's been bringing up a lot of... it's just hard to focus with her here.

JACKSON

Kick her out.

TUGBOAT

She came here because she believes in me. The dad I used to be. I can be good.

JACKSON

Don't be weak. Not now. Not again.

TUGBOAT

Let's focus on what's important. Westminster. Two weeks.

JACKSON

Yeah. Right- hey how about another shake?

TUGBOAT

You've had enough today.

JACKSON

Alright. I'm gonna go drink out of the toilet then.

TUGBOAT

Jackson, no.

JACKSON

That seat better not be up- Or I'm doing it!

TUGBOAT

How many times do I have to tell you-

JACKSON

If the seats up I'm doing it Tug. It's on you at that point. You're responsible.

TUGBOAT

Yeah.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE SEVEN

Natalja is in the kitchen making herself a sandwich.

Tug's cellphone rings on the counter, she looks at it. The answers.

NATALJA

Hello?... No. She's good. Seriously. She's doing great. We don't need- no. Thank you.

Natalja hangs up then throws the phone on the ground hard. She picks it up and throws it even harder then stomps on it a couple times, before picking it up and checking to make sure it's broken.

Jackson enters.

NATALJA

I dropped your phone- oh. It's you.

JACKSON

C'est moi.

Jackson casually takes a seat at the table.

JACKSON

So...what's next for you? Big picture, I mean. Maybe go back to school? Or start the ol' job hunt?

NATALJA

What do you mean what's next? Softball is next.

JACKSON

Right, I mean *after* the whole softball thing. I mean it's fun now but-

NATALJA

What's that supposed to mean? Jackson, I'm going to be a professional player. That's been the plan since high-school.

JACKSON

You mean when you peaked?

NATALJA

Oh. My. God.

JACKSON

I didn't mean it like that-

NATALJA

Oh really? How did you mean it?

JACKSON

I was joking! I don't use the right words all the time, alright?

NATALJA

Try ever. No, try never.

JACKSON

I don't use all the right words never?

NATALJA

Shut up.

Natalja goes to her bag and takes out her pills. She inspects them. Are there less than normal? She walks back to her sandwich and continues working with her back turned.

JACKSON

So Tug wants you to strive for a little goddamn success in this world. So he doesn't hand out... Uh- what did he say?

NATALJA

You've always been such a stuck up little prick.

JACKSON

You've always been a loser. L O...Z?-

NATALJA

You have no idea what I've been through. You don't know what it's like to work for anything. You were bred. You were practically made in a lab. You're like Ivan Drago. I'm a hard worker. I'm Rocky.

JACKSON

Fuck you, I'm Rocky.

NATALJA

No, I'm Rocky.

JACKSON

Fine, you can be old melted Rocky, and I'm Creed. The new, hot ,young, Michael B. Jordan Creed.

NATALJA

Oh fuck- Oh wait, I wanna be Creed. I'm Creed.

JACKSON

Nope. You're just old, sad, flabby Rocky. Wearing a dumb fucking fedora, old as balls. Your best days behind you, and- and the stuff that used to come so easily is getting harder and, and you think you might be dying and that Tug doesn't even love you! That's totally who *you* are.

NATALJA

That's just a movie Jackson.

JACKSON

I know.

NATALJA

Jackson I think you should tell dad you don't want to compete. Tell him you want out, please-

JACKSON

No way. I'm all in.

NATALJA

Why are we like this for him?

Natalja gives her sandwich to Jackson and walks out of the room.

Jackson is left alone in the kitchen. He devours Natalja's sandwich as soon as she's gone. He then goes to his food bowl and licks the remnants of the last shake from the bowl. Taking some on his finger and rubbing into his gums.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

It's Sissy. Jackson let's her in.

JACKSON

Can I help you?

SISSY

I'm looking for Tugboat. Is he here?

JACKSON

Yeah, but he's in the shower.

SISSY

I tried calling but your landline is dead and I think Tug gave me the wrong cell number. Can't imagine why!

JACKSON

...You can wait if you want. Coffee?

SISSY

Yeah coffee would be great. Thank you.

Jackson makes coffee.

SISSY

So you don't remember me?

JACKSON

No. I can't say we've... I'm sorry, have we met?

SISSY

Yes. We did but you weren't quite yourself.

JACKSON

What?

SISSY

I want to help you.

JACKSON

Excuse me?

SISSY

We can help each other. My practice hasn't been doing so well Jackson. I'm going out of business.

JACKSON

I don't see what that-

SISSY

You're a winner Jackson. A champion. People love champions.

JACKSON

So I've been told-

SISSY

But you're sick Jackson. You're sick and only I can help you- and only you can help me. Don't you see?

JACKSON

Am I dreaming right now?

SISSY

No- you're awake, calm down.

JACKSON

I am calm bitch. Who are you?

SISSY

My name is Sissy. I'm a veterinarian.

JACKSON

The vet! I HATE THE VET!

Tugboat rushes in, wearing a towel.

TUGBOAT

What the hell is going on in here? Sissy?

JACKSON

Ah- sorry, Tug- I'm just feeling a little on edge. The competition and everything.

SISSY

I came by to talk to you-

TUGBOAT

Jackson why don't you go lie down.

JACKSON

Good idea Tug.

Jackson walks out of the room.

TUGBOAT

What did you say to him? Why's he all riled up?

SISSY

Tug... increased aggression is a symptom-

TUGBOAT

What did you say to him? Were you provoking him? He's stressed out right now, that's all.

SISSY

Tug I came over here because I cannot in good conscience allow that dog to go another day without getting tested-

TUGBOAT

*Shhhhh*ut up- Sissy. I told you we don't need your services. I want you to go.

Natalja enters.

NATALJA

Is everything okay in here-

TUGBOAT

It's fine Natalja- could you just give me and Sissy some privacy.

SISSY

Jackson is in desperate need of medical attention.

NATALJA

Desperate need?

SISSY

I haven't told anyone Tug. We can help each other! Let me be Jackson's vet-

TUGBOAT

We're satisfied with Dr. Critten

SISSY

Dr. Critten?! I did a little digging into this Dr. Critten- the guys a charlatan- he had his license suspended five years ago- he's sketchy-

TUGBOAT

Hold your tongue. The man's legs were crushed for gods sake.

SISSY

Because he gave cocaine to an Elephant!

NATALJA

What?

SISSY

Your dad is lying to your Natalja- he's been drugging Jackson-

TUGBOAT

Sissy killed a parrot!

SISSY

That parrot killed himself!

TUGBOAT

What's your problem? Showing up here unannounced and just walking in?

NATALJA

You've been drugging Jackson?

TUGBOAT

I want you out of here. Now.

SISSY

You're a sick and twisted kinda guy. You know that?

TUGBOAT

Yeah, well. That's your opinion.

NATALJA

Why doesn't everyone just calm down-

SISSY

No. I am not letting that dog die- just because you want to win some competition. Are you such an ego-maniac-

TUGBOAT

You don't care about Jackson you care about your practice!

SISSY

That you would let your own dog die just to, what? You really need another little ribbon to hang on your pathetic little wall?

NATALJA

Hey- My dad is a champion, you take that back!

SISSY

Your dad's a sociopath!

TUGBOAT

That's not what this is about- this is about letting him do what he wants to do- this is about letting him do what he loves-

SISSY

This is about you treating a living thing as a means to get what you want.

TUGBOAT

You're one to talk!

SISSY

I'm not going to let you kill that innocent dog.

TUGBOAT

GET OUT.

Tugboat grabs Sissy's arm and leads her to the door, just as Jackson enters the kitchen-

JACKSON

What's going on in here Tug?

SISSY

Let go of me you fucking psycho!

Sissy pushes Tugboat away from her, Tugboat stumbles back and falls over.

JACKSON

HEY!

Jackson springs at Sissy and bites her face.

She screams.

The lights go out with a spotlight on Jackson.

The mailman enters wearing devil horns and begins whipping Jackson.

MAILMAN

YOU'RE A LOSER! LOSER! LOSER!

JACKSON

NO!

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE EIGHT

LIGHTS UP.

Tugboat's kitchen. The floor is covered in a pool of BLOOD.

Natalja holds Jackson stage left. Tugboat sits with Sissy stage right, he holds a towel to her face occasionally taking it away. Her face is *fuuuucked up*. Tugboat is on the phone, finishing a call.

SISSY

MY FACE!

TUGBOAT

Where's my phone?

SISSY

AHHHHH!

JACKSON

I didn't mean to do that. Is she gonna be okay? I didn't mean to do that.

TUGBOAT

Jackson, shut up. Sissy can you hear me?

SISSY

I can't see.

TUGBOAT

But can you hear?

NATALJA

Dad you need to take her to the hospital.

TUGBOAT

I need to find my phone so I can call an ambulance!

JACKSON

That's a lot of blood.

NATALJA

Use Sissy's!

JACKSON
But she's gonna be okay, right?

Tugboat takes Sissy's phone from her purse.

TUGBOAT
I don't know her code! Wheres is my fucking phone?

JACKSON
I didn't mean to do that.

SISSY
My face- agh.

NATALJA
Use the facial recognition!

TUGBOAT
The *what* Natalja?!

JACKSON
Can I help? I want to help.

SISSY
Arghshhsa...

Tugboat holds Sissy's phone near her face to unlock it. It doesn't work

NATALJA
Dad.

Natalja points to a spot on the floor.

Tugboat holds the phone in front of the spot. **It unlocks.**

He dials 911.

TUGBOAT
Hello. There's been an accident.

SISSY
Accident!?

JACKSON
They happen! Let me help-

TUGBOAT
This woman's face. It uh. Well, it fell off.

SISSY
FELL OFF!? YOU MOTHER-

JACKSON
I'm gonna help.

Jackson gets free of Natalja and walks towards Sissy-

JACKSON
Hey-

SISSY
Get that thing away from me!

JACKSON
Sissy- I'm sorry.

NATALJA
Whoa!

SISSY
That thing needs help. It's sick in the head.

JACKSON
I need help? You're the one without a face!

TUGBOAT
Natalja, GRAB HIM!

Natalja moves to grab Jackson's arm but he barks at her-
she recoils.

TUGBOAT (CONT.)
Hey! What the hell, man?

JACKSON
Whoa- I'm sorry. I'm just- my adrenaline is-

TUGBOAT
Go upstairs. Right. Now.

JACKSON

Yeah. Fine, okay.

Jackson exits

SISSY

You better lawyer up because I am going to destroy you!

TUGBOAT

Let's everybody calm down. Nobody needs to sue anybody. I'll pay for all of your medical bills and everything-

SISSY

What?

TUGBOAT

-You're just gonna need a couple stitches.

SISSY

A couple stitches? Your dog ate my face! I'm going to need reconstructive surgery!

TUGBOAT

He didn't eat it.

Tugboat looks to the Spot.

SISSY

I'm gonna be a monster!

NATALJA

Sissy, no!

SISSY

I cannot believe this. I warned you- that dog is sick.

TUGBOAT

He's fine- he just got a little agitated, that's all.

SISSY

A little agitated? He's violent and unstable. He's unsafe. It's his brain. It's all fucked up from the tumor.

NATALJA

You really think it's a tumor?

TUGBOAT
There's no tumor.

SISSY
It's a tumor.

TUGBOAT
(Arnold impression)
It's not a tumor!

A beat.
SISSY
I am *not* joking. Does this look like a joke to you?

NATALJA
Hey who is Dr. Critten exactly- Dad? Huh? What was he doing for Jackson?

TUGBOAT
That has nothing to do with this.

NATALJA
I don't see how that can have *nothing* to do with this-

TUGBOAT
BECAUSE I CHECKED! I said can this stuff give you a brain tumor- and he said no-. He said no. He said no. It's a coincidence.

NATALJA
What stuff?

SISSY
Jesus Christ.

NATALJA
If it's not a tumor then what is it?

TUGBOAT
We don't know.

SISSY
He's violent, half blind, seizing regularly. It's a fucking tumor.

TUGBOAT
Maybe it's not.

SISSY

Yeah maybe it's not. Let me operate and I'll tell you!

TUGBOAT

We need to focus on the show- it's in five days.

NATALJA

The *show*?

SISSY

Can somebody get my face? Put it on ice?

Tugboat opens a drawer and pulls out a spatula.

NATALJA

Sissy I am going to make sure Jackson gets looked at.

TUGBOAT

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Jackson is *my* dog.

NATALJA

I'm evoking my right as co-trainer,

TUGBOAT

Co-trainer? You're like an intern at best

NATALJA

Excuse me?!

TUGBOAT

Natalja just go keep Jackson calm for when the paramedics get here. Okay?

NATALJA

Fine.

Natalja exits.

SISSY

That *vet* you've been taking him to is killing him. Critten's another old white man who should be in jail for what he did but instead is still working with animals and prescribing them god knows what. I'm tired of being ignored. I'm going the Humane Society and I'm reporting you.

TUGBOAT

Sissy, wait! They'll kill him.

SISSY

That's... that's not my problem.

TUGBOAT

Yes it is. Because you're his vet.

SISSY

What?

TUGBOAT

You're Jackson's vet.

SISSY

I am not.

TUGBOAT

This is your fault.

SISSY

Excuse me?

TUGBOAT

If you report this- Jackson gets put down and it's another failure for Dr. Sissy. For your practice. I'll tell everyone it was your fault. Your word against mine. Who do you think they'll believe?

SISSY

You wouldn't.

TUGBOAT

I would.

Tugboat takes a frying pan off the stove.

SISSY

So... what are you proposing?

TUGBOAT

You go to the hospital. Get your face patched up. Stay quiet about all this. We compete and win and you get the press.

Tugboat uses the spatula to scrape the Spot off the ground and flip it into the frying pan. He offers it to Sissy.

TUGBOAT

Think of the headline:, *Dog Wins Fourth Ribbon, Local Hero Vet Saves Champion Dog's Life, Local Vet's Business Booms, Parrots Death Ruled Suicide*

SISSY

I don't think you know what a headline is.

TUGBOAT

Don't be stupid Sissy. Be a winner. This is an opportunity.

SISSY

So if he wins... You'll say I was his vet? And then you'll let me operate right away?

TUGBOAT

Yes.

SISSY

But if he dies before that?

TUGBOAT

It'll be like we never met.

SISSY

And all I have to do is not report him?

TUGBOAT

That's all.

SISSY

I need some time- I can't think straight.

An ambulance's lights flash in the window. Sissy stands up.

SISSY

I'll be back in three days.

TUGBOAT

Sissy.

Tugboat hands her the frying pan. She takes it.

Sissy turns and walks directly into the wall, leaving a red face splatter. She steps back and walks out without a word.

TUGBOAT

FUCK! Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. That crone. Oh man, the *nerve*.

Natalja re-enters.

NATALJA

Dad, what's going on?

TUGBOAT

I don't know but I just bought us three days to figure out how we can still win this.

NATALJA

Still win this? Dad, you know I want to do everything I can to help you win this but this is too far.

TUGBOAT

I'm thinking about what's best for Jackson. He wouldn't want to know-

NATALJA

How could you possibly know that?

TUGBOAT

Because he's just like me. We're winners. He wants to win. He would rather die a winner than live a little bit longer as a loser- actually no- a quitter. Which is the WORST type of loser.

NATALJA

Can you hear yourself right now? You already won the last three.

TUGBOAT

We're still tied for the most-

NATALJA

How many fucking ribbons do you need?

TUGBOAT

Four!

NATALJA

You're unhinged. You're talking about a *dog show*. Grown men and women skipping around in a circle.

TUGBOAT

An oval.

NATALJA

Somehow worse-

TUGBOAT

I'm talking about being the greatest of all time. I'm talking about having a place in history. You can't even begin to understand what that means.

NATALJA

Okay, I know what it means to want something-

TUGBOAT

Natalja, you don't understand. You're not, built for this. And that's okay-

NATALJA

I quit ONE thing- chess club in like 9th grade and you STILL bring it up

TUGBOAT

Oh yeah? How's soccer going? Or lacrosse? Or basketball?

NATALJA

I quit that stuff cause I wasn't good at it and so you didn't bother to show up to any of my fucking games!

TUGBOAT

This isn't a game. This is his life. This is my life.

NATALJA

What happened to you to make you like this?

TUGBOAT

Nothing *happened* to me.

NATALJA

So obsessed with winning. It's like a disease or something.

TUGBOAT

Winning is not a disease. It's the opposite of that. It's the cure.

NATALJA

So you admit that there's something wrong?

TUGBOAT

Oh man, let me get you a spatula, since you sure do love FLIPPING shit.

NATALJA

You admit that winning does something to make you feel better?

TUGBOAT

Of course it makes me feel better, Natalja. Of course it does. It's the only thing that makes me feel anything. Okay? Happy? Oh, really stumbled upon quite the revelation there didn't you?

NATALJA

Dad. You take Jackson out of the competition. It's gone too far. You won't be able to live with yourself if he dies. I know you.

TUGBOAT

Natalja. Look, I know you think you know everything about the world, and so you think you know everything about what's right. It's all so clear to you, these hypothetical problems.

NATALJA

That's not what I think-

TUGBOAT

No, shh, listen. Sometimes what's right for certain people- or animals- in certain situations isn't so easily prescribed. There's a grey area, in morals and ethics or whatever.

NATALJA

No, Dad, there's not. Dr. Kim say-

TUGBOAT

Oh my god! You're a kid! You're a kid! Shut up!

NATALJA

If it wasn't wrong then you wouldn't be hiding it from Jackson.

TUGBOAT

No- that's a part of it. That's half of it. Like- telling him would mess everything up. It would-

NATALJA

You're afraid he won't want to do it. Deep down you know he wouldn't want to compete if he knew.

TUGBOAT

He's a fucking dog.

Beat.

NATALJA

You're a monster-

TUGBOAT

I'm a winner. This is why you're never going to be great. You don't understand what it takes.

NATALJA

I know what it takes! What it takes from you. What you have to give. What it feels like to fall short when you're entire sense of self worth is completely knotted up with winning or losing!

TUGBOAT

No you don't.

NATALJA

I got cut from the team and I tried to kill myself.

TUGBOAT

You... what?

NATALJA

I filled an equipment bag with softballs, tied it around my neck, and jumped into the Hudson River.

TUGBOAT

Natalja...

NATALJA

But softballs fucking float. They pulled me out, accused me of damaging team property and cut me right there. I knew they were going to. I was trying to end it before they could, but I ended up giving them the perfect excuse.

TUGBOAT

Why didn't you tell me this?

NATALJA

Cause I want you to love me!

TUGBOAT

Stop, Natalja. Just take a breath.

NATALJA

There're no try outs. I just- I didn't want you to think I was a fuck up. I had no where to go- they were gonna send me to a psych ward if I didn't have a stable place to stay. Then you started talking about tryouts, And you were so proud of me- and were getting back to old times- and Jackson was just getting in the way.

TUGBOAT

I can't believe this. After everything.

NATALJA

I don't care about softball. I just did it cause it made you happy. And when you were happy so was mom and so was I. And I let that feeling get all caught up in softball and I let that take over my life.

TUGBOAT

You never liked softball?

NATALJA

No dad, I hate it. I hate it. I've been trying to work through it. To put my head down and just grind like you always tell me to but nothing's working.

TUGBOAT

You know Natalja, I was a loser my whole life. First off I was born in Canada. I try to pretend like that doesn't bother me, but it does. It does. I tried training greyhounds- but my dogs couldn't run for dick. Softball was your mom's thing. She got you started and when the team started winning she let me take credit. So I could have something. And you ate it up. I just wanted to be the best at something and I finally was. I was the best dad, the best husband.

Tugboat crosses to Natalja's bag and starts going through it, taking out all her pills and putting them in his pockets while he talks.

TUGBOAT

Then your mother just got worse and worse and then she... I tried to love it away. To save her. But it turns out I actually sucked at that too. It turns out I wasn't actually the best at anything and I lost everything. Everything. Nothing.

NATALJA

What're you doing?

He takes out the knife.

TUGBOAT

I found this the other day.

NATALJA

Dad no- that was- I was using that to cut the phone line so the school couldn't call and-

TUGBOAT

I'm taking all this crap. I'm not letting you do what she did.

NATALJA

Dad you can't kill yourself with Lexapro- or Adderall- dad! Stop!

TUGBOAT

You stop!

NATALJA

I'm not gonna do it dad! I tried and failed and I'm scared and I just want this all to stop! I'm sorry for what I did to Jackson- I didn't know it was gonna make him go crazy! It was just a little bit at first. Just enough to ease his-

TUGBOAT

Just a little what?

NATALJA

Lexapro. It's not lethal. It couldn't have- there's no way-

TUGBOAT

You've been giving him Lexapro!?

NATALJA

It was to calm him down- I was trying to help him! Can't you see what pushing him has done?

TUGBOAT

You fucking idiot.

NATALJA

When Jackson started getting off his game a little bit, I saw something in you. For a moment I thought you changed, I thought you wanted to change. That you were ready to be vulnerable, to share.

TUGBOAT

Your mother killed me when she killed herself. Opening yourself up like that. It's weak. It's how to lose. I don't know what I was thinking letting you in here. You're toxic.

NATALJA

I'm toxic? Me?

TUGBOAT

I need to focus on the show.

NATALJA

You're insane.

TUGBOAT

I'm not letting you do this to me too.

NATALJA

You're doing this to yourself.

TUGBOAT

I look at you and all I see is her. I couldn't save her, and now you...

NATALJA

What are you saying?

TUGBOAT

When God gives you a bad hand, you fold. You're a bad hand.

NATALJA

So you're choosing Jackson? Over me? You're gonna choose a mentally ill show dog over your own daughter? Cause what? You're afraid?

TUGBOAT

You don't understand. *This* Natalja. Jackson. I actually am good at that. For the first time I really am the best.

NATALJA

What are you saying?

TUGBOAT

I'm done losing.

NATALJA

Me too.

Natalja exits. Tugboat looks towards the stairs.

WHITNEY HOUSTON

*I've lived to be / The very best
I want it all / No time for less
I've laid the plans / Now lay the chance
Here in my hands*

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE NINE

A WHISTLE BLOWS!

Lights rise to dramatic “training” dim ,cheesy-but-triumphant-music. We’re at the obstacle course again. Jackson is alone.

WEAVE POLLS!

SEE-SAW!

TUNNEL!

ETC.!

Jackson stops and holds his head. Dizzy. He’s fast, but it hurts. He picks up a softball from the yard in his mouth and chews on it.

LIGHTS UP FULLY.

JACKSON

Shit...

Natalja sneaks into the yard. She’s holding her softball bat. Jackson lies down. He’s in a lot of pain.

NATALJA

Hey Jackson. Where’s my dad?

JACKSON

Natalja? Hey- he’s inside. I haven’t seen you in...

NATALJA

Three days. Have you seen Sissy?

JACKSON

No. Why?

NATALJA

You don’t look so hot.

JACKSON

I'm fine- just... you know. Working hard.

NATALJA

He does work you pretty hard doesn't he Jackson.

JACKSON

That's what it takes to be a champion.

NATALJA

Oh yeah. I bet. I bet he works you like a fucking dog. You know that expression? It means he treats you like your worthless. Dog being synonymous with worthless.

JACKSON

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

Natalja drags the tip of her bat along the grass.

NATALJA

You know, when I was growing up, I always thought my dad loved his dogs more than he loved me.

JACKSON

Dogs?

NATALJA

Oh yeah. There were tons of them before you. He was always searching for his perfect little winner. But they couldn't cut it. First there were the greyhounds. When they would lose he would just sell them off. No second chances. They were duds. He needed a winner. Then when my mom died he switched to dog shows. To you. And you were lucky. You won. What do you think's gonna happen when you stop winning?

JACKSON

That won't happen. I'm the best. The greatest of all time. Or I will be. Just one more show-

NATALJA

But he doesn't give a shit about you.

JACKSON

Excuse me?

NATALJA

He doesn't care about you at all. He's going to let you die.

JACKSON

Everybody dies Natalja. Even dogs.

NATALJA

He's going to kill you.

JACKSON

You're sounding pretty crazy right now.

Jackson returns to chewing on the softball but Natalja grabs it out of his mouth.

NATALJA

I'm crazy? You think I'M crazy?

JACKSON

Yeah!

NATALJA

Tell me about those dreams of yours Jackson.

JACKSON

Which ones?

NATALJA

And the headaches.

JACKSON

Um.

NATALJA

And the seizures? The increased aggression? How it's hard to get up? Hard to see?

JACKSON

What the hell are you trying to say? Huh?

NATALJA

You're dying Jackson! And I don't mean it like everybody dies, I mean you're dying right now.

Natalja throws softball at Jackson. It softly bonks him on the head and rolls away.

JACKSON

Ow! What the heck, dude? What are you doing!?

NATALJA

AH! I'm sorry- I'm trying to White-Fang you. You have to leave here. It's for your own good.

JACKSON

What are you even talking about?

NATALJA

You've got a brain tumor you shmuck. You're going blind. You're going crazy. You're gonna die. And my dad knows.

JACKSON

Tug knows?

NATALJA

Well no one knows- but we won't let you get tested. But Sissy said you had one and he's not going to do anything about it. Because he just wants to win- he just wants-

JACKSON

Oh thank god.

NATALJA

What?

JACKSON

He won't take me out of the show then, right? I can still compete?

NATALJA

You don't care.

JACKSON

I want to win. I would die to make him proud of me. I love him. And he loves me.

Natalja looks at the house. She takes out the Coach of the Year medal from her pocket and places it around Jackson's neck.

JACKSON

He does love me right? Natalja? He loves me right?

NATALJA

Goodbye Jackson.

JACKSON

You're giving me a headache.

Jackson takes out a bottle of pills.

NATALJA

-What's that?

JACKSON

They're for my headaches. Tug gave them to me-

NATALJA

That's my Adderall!

JACKSON

I'VE BEEN TAKING MYADDERALL!?

NATALJA

Adderall.

JACKSON

I'VE BEEN TAKING Adderall?!

NATALJA

Do you know what that is?

JACKSON

Is it not for headaches?

NATALJA

My dad's been giving you these?

JACKSON

Is it not for headaches?

NATALJA

It's like a stimulant- performance enhancer.

JACKSON

A what?

NATALJA

I thought he was trying to save me. He's sick. He's really lost his mind.

JACKSON

He thinks I need a performance enhancer?

NATALJA

No you don't need Adderall or Lexapro-

JACKSON

Lexapro?

NATALJA

Never mind! It doesn't matter.

JACKSON

Tug wouldn't do anything to hurt me. He loves me.

NATALJA

I'm going to the police. Jackson, stay here. I'll be back. I'm going to get the police.

Natalja exits.

JACKSON

HE LOVES ME RIGHT?

Tug walks back out from the house wearing a suit and holding a pair of scissors.

JACKSON

Oh- hey! Today's workout went pretty well don't you think?

TUGBOAT

Who were you talking to?

JACKSON

Myself.

TUGBOAT

Right. Come here, I need to clean you up.

Jackson crosses to Tugboat and Tug starts trimming his coat.

JACKSON

So... we're pretty close, huh?

TUGBOAT

Tomorrow.

JACKSON

Can't believe it.

TUGBOAT

So close.

JACKSON

I also can't believe how good I've been- with out any... ya know. Help.

TUGBOAT

You've been great.

JACKSON

It's almost unbelievable. One almost can't believe it.

TUGBOAT

What's that?

JACKSON

Huh?

Tugboat notices the medal around Jackson's neck. He takes it off and looks at it.

TUGBOAT

She's just a kid. She doesn't understand the pressures of adult life. What it means to work for something. To earn something. You have to make certain sacrifices.

JACKSON

Yeah. Of course,

TUGBOAT

You understand that right? That you have to make sacrifices to achieve greatness.

JACKSON

You tell me that all the time.

TUGBOAT

Right but- you believe that. Don't you? You believe that's true.

JACKSON

I don't understand the question? If you believe it I believe it Tug. That's all I need. I just wanna make you happy.

TUGBOAT

Right. We're winners.

JACKSON

You're my best friend man.

TUGBOAT

We're soon to be four time consecutive best in show winners.

JACKSON

Yeah! Then we can rest and stay at home and relax and hang out like this all the time, right? Cause that will be enough, right?

TUGBOAT

Enough?

JACKSON

I just mean, once we win- you'll be proud of me, right? I want to make you happy. I love you. You love me too right? That's why we're doing all this.

TUGBOAT

Jackson. Once we win, we'll be the greatest of all time. Of course I'll be proud of you.

JACKSON

Yeah, oh- right of course.

TUGBOAT

Come here.

They hug. It lingers.

JACKSON

Uh, haha... shit, what we were talking about? Pussy?

TUGBOAT

Huh? Uh no-

JACKSON

Right. We're just two bros crazy about pussy...

TUGBOAT

Right.

A car pulls into the driveway.

JACKSON

Who's that? Hello?!

TUGBOAT

Hey why don't you go inside for a bit. I have to take care of something.

JACKSON

Oh- okay. You sure you're okay?

TUGBOAT

I'm fine.

JACKSON

Fine's not great.

TUGBOAT

I'm great.

Jackson nods and enters the house. Tugboat locks the door behind him.

SISSY (OFF)

Hello?

TUGBOAT

I'm in the back yard. Come around.

Sissy comes up behind the fence, Tug opens a gate and shuts it after her. Her face is completely wrapped in gauze, like a mummy.

SISSY

Hey.

TUGBOAT

Hey.

SISSY

Nice suit.

TUGBOAT

We're taking photos later. Before the show.

SISSY

Listen Tug. I thought about it and... I just can't let you do this. I need to operate.

TUGBOAT

Sissy... think of your practice.

SISSY

I don't care. I started that damn practice to save lives.

TUGBOAT

You'll never save another animal again. You'll have your license revoked. I'll make sure of it.

SISSY

I've made up my mind.

TUGBOAT

So that's it. You're gonna operate on him now. Right before the competition.

SISSY

We have to give him the best shot to live. It can't wait.

TUGBOAT

Fine.

SISSY

Fine?

TUGBOAT

Just. There's always next year right? It's not like this is the only window.

SISSY

Yes! Exactly. Now you're thinking like a champion.

TUGBOAT

You didn't tell anyone about this did you? About Jackson biting you? Or about you coming here?

SISSY

No I haven't. My colleagues think I fell on a rake. You're doing the right thing Tug. Jackson will thank you.

TUGBOAT

When I was growing up, we had a big kennel behind our house, in New Hampshire, and you know greyhounds- they're so skinny. Horrible show dogs. They shake.

SISSY

Well life's not all about the show-

TUGBOAT

In the spring, when we would compete- he would run them into the ground. You know they've got those skinny little legs.

SISSY

I'm a vet.

TUGBOAT

Well when they come around the corners- if the ground is wet, or slippery... They break real easy, and so he'd have to put them down. He would suffocate them. Put a plastic bag over their heads and then a couple of those industrial rubber bands around their neck. Then he'd just bury them like that.

SISSY

JACKSON?! Come out here.

TUGBOAT

My dad was real traditional, hard core kind of guy. About everything. He was a military guy, you know? Tough son of a bitch. So, training the dogs was no different. He never talked to them. Just at them. Hell, he didn't even talk to me. He kept them muzzled. He would just *yell* at them. He didn't take the time to understand them.

SISSY

JACKSON COME!

TUGBOAT

I did. I would talk to them. I would go down to the kennel and talk to them... And you know what? They fucking respected him. They all thought he was a true fucking general, and they were his loyal troops. He bred winners.

SISSY

He tortured innocent animals.

TUGBOAT

I'm just sorry it had to come to this. We're so close.

Tugboat reaches out and wraps the Coach of the Year medal around Sissy's neck, choking her. She fights back and the two of them thrash around the yard.

TUGBOAT

You should have listened to me. I don't know why you insisted on fucking up my life.

Sissy tries to scream but it just comes out as a gurgled mess.

TUGBOAT

You just had to get in my way. You just had to try and stop me. You don't understand what it takes to win. Neither did my wife, or my daughter. It's not my fault she's a fuck up. I didn't do anything wrong. None of you understand what it takes. And I know what you're thinking. Okay? The stuff I get from Dr. Critten didn't give him that fucking tumor alright? He said so. It helps him. So that's not my fucking fault either. Who doesn't need a little edge to win? He said it was fine. IT'S FINE.

Sissy stops kicking.

She stops moving all together. Tug tucks the medal into his pocket.

From off we hear police sirens.

Tug grabs sissy and drags her off.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE TEN

LIGHTS UP.

The sirens are getting closer.

Tugboat's kitchen. Tugboat enters dragging Sissy's body across the stage.

TUGBOAT

*Makin' the best of every virtue and vice/
Worth every damn bit of sacrifice/
To get a cheeseburger in paradise;
To be a cheeseburger in paradise*

Police lights flash in the window.

Tug exits and deposits Sissy's body off stage.

Jackson enters clutching his head.

Tugboat re-enters with a bit of Sissy's face gauze stuck to his foot like toilet paper.

TUGBOAT

Jackson? How are you? Look I need you to go upstairs and let me handle this.

JACKSON

Get out of here.

TUGBOAT

We're so close buddy. So cl-

JACKSON

MAIL MAN!

Jackson jumps on Tugboat and bites his throat ripping it out. Tugboat stumbles back- and slumps over to his knees. He goes to speak but instead coughs up BRIGHT RED BLOOD all over the floor.

He turns and starts to walk up the stairs. He gets up two then collapses to the side.

Jackson stands over him snarling madly. He starts to bark. Then another dog barks from somewhere else. And yet another. More and more mad dogs join the chorus. Like a kennel of muzzled greyhounds have suddenly been set free. Jackson runs off.

Tug stays lying still in his pool of blood.

The police lights flash.

TUBTHUMPING by Chumbawamba plays really loudly

END OF PLAY.