

Good Talk

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

ZACH MOON, Black, 35, burnt face, professionally dressed, glares in the pharmacy consultant window with a bored expression.

Zach scratches his face and takes a deep breath as he checks his watch.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Zach, stares into the window, seeing a PHARMACIST, 30s, checking prescriptions.

ZACH

Excuse me.

The pharmacist stares back. He reluctantly approaches the window.

PHARMACIST

What can I help you with?

ZACH

Sorry, it's just I've walked around the aisles like forty times, I can't seem to find burn cream, but for--

PHARMACIST

--It's in the third aisle next to all the other creams.

ZACH

Well, see, I checked over there and it's not there. The problem is my burn actually itches really bad, and it's not a sunburn--

PHARMACIST

--Dude.

Zach shakes his head, confused.

The pharmacist walks out of the push-door and strolls around the corner, searching, not very confident.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)

It's gonna be somewhere around...

ZACH

The bandage section?

PHARMACIST

Yeah, see it's gonna be in general first aid. It's right here.

The pharmacist pulls out a gel, handing it to Zach.

ZACH

Wow. I mean I had no idea it'd be here--

PHARMACIST

--Just check out the basics before you come to the consultation window. Saves a lot of time all around.

The pharmacist stares at him with an unimpressed look as Zach opens his mouth, clearly ready to say something, but doesn't.

The pharmacist protests off back to his desk.

ZACH

Right. Well thanks.

Zach taps the gel in his hand, looking up in confusion at the wall he found it in.

ZACH (V.O.)

Okay, are all pharmacists dicks or am I just an idiot?

INT. HOUSE - DAY

POV - CAMERA

We see images of the inside of a house, quietly roaming through hallways and walls, stalking around, continuing through as we hear Zach's voice along with a shower starting.

ZACH (O.S.)

You know one thing I noticed, too? Not just about pharmacies, but about people in general? Everyone is kind of shitty in their own way, no one's perfect. So why do we always ask other people for advice?

We now slowly approach a specific hallway where we hear a little speaker playing music simultaneously with the shower running.

A new song emanates from the speaker.

ZACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Ohh shit. I can't. 'Yeah this one
 right here goes out to all the
 baby's mamas, mamas, mamas, mamas,
 baby mamas, mamas.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

We turn into the bathroom where Zach is, in just his
 underwear, singing along to himself in the mirror.

ZACH
 'Yeah, go like this. I'm
 sorry Ms. Jackson. Oooo. I am for-
 real.'

Zach slips his underwear off and hops in the shower, closing
 the curtains to the beat.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 (projecting)
 So... I sell insurance, I'm an
 insurance salesman. But I'm also a
 big sports guy, hockey, football.
 Whatever. Yeah I know a couple good
 bars in the area. Fuck yeah, dude.
 Dude... yeah.

Zach lathers his hands with shampoo and rubs his head.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach, towel wrapped around his waist, looks at himself in the
 mirror, scratching his face.

He grabs his gel from the pharmacy and rubs it on the
 necessary spot.

ZACH
 (mocking)
 It's in the aisle right here. See..
 Right here. Where you wrap your
 broken leg. How could you possibly
 get that confused with the aisle
 that has literally every other
 cream and gel for your entire body.
 You 4 year, bachelor's degree
 having--

Zach stops his mocking voice in retort.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Well, guy. Sorry you had to get up
and do your job. Piece of--

INT. LOBBY - LATER

Behind a desk in a shoddy lobby with bland wood paneling like an underfunded high school, sits BEVERLY, 50s, Black, looking for something exciting.

BEVERLY

Shit. What're you dressed up for?

Across from her is Zach, texting, standing, in semi-casual attire.

ZACH

Debating whether or not I should
even bother.

He strolls over to a bulletin board, staring at a bunch of sign up sheets and advertisements.

There's groups to join, poorly done real estate marketing, too-lazy-for-craigslist ads, and profiles of people in the news.

BEVERLY

Well you're bothering me, you've
been pacing around the last 15
minutes.

Zach shoots her an annoyed look.

Beverly mocks him.

Zach musters up a walk through the doors into:

INT. GYM - SAME

A small banner displays "Loner's Club" across a booth.

INT. GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach sits in a chair, staring across two rows of people who look just as awkward as him.

ZACH

(to himself)

Shit.

Most people are dressed a lot more casual than Zach.

BRADY, 30s, in a button down, rolled up sleeves, finishes handing out pieces of paper to Zach. Everyone else already has one.

Stragglers come in at the last second.

Brady maintains his quirky, disingenuous smile as he fixes a CAMERA on a TRIPOD behind the center back row to face the front.

He finds his way to the front and takes a motivated pace back and forth as he speaks.

BRADY

Hey, hey, c'mon in. Grab a seat. Okay, let's get started while you guys settle down. There's sheets next to your feet. So.. I'm Brady, I'm a... I'm a business owner. I own my own brewery on the west side. And I'm here just like all of you guys, I don't exactly have the biggest friend group and I'm looking to just meet new people. But if you want to utilize this group for other purposes, life purposes, potentially that could be a positive. And I support that. My goal is to have everyone figure out what--

A GIRL, late 20s, chimes in.

GIRL

--So, this is a networking group then?

BRADY

Well, no. I mean, it's just whatever you want to make of it. But I promise you that you'll find everything you need in this group. From a social standpoint.

Everyone in the group looks around, skeptical.

BRADY (CONT'D)

(overexcited)

Right, anyways.

(MORE)

BRADY (CONT'D)

So we'll introduce ourselves and then maybe go around in a circle or maybe we'll just get some snacks after intro and then go around the room and mingle. I don't know! Let's just keep it free, let's see how we're feeling.

Zach scoffs to himself. The woman next to him laughs along with him. Her nametag reads ANGELA (late 20s).

BRADY (CONT'D)

Okay let's start on this side of the room.

Brady points to FAROUQ, late 30s, sitting next to Angela. He's dressed semi-formally, sweating.

FAROUQ

Oh um. Hi, I'm Farouq. I'm uhh. Well. I'm single. So.. That's a thing. Let's see. I'm in between jobs right now. 20 years experience at an old law firm downtown. I lost custody of my kids recently.

BRADY

Okay, hi Farouq. Maybe a little less date profile-y?

FAROUQ

Okay, yeah I just don't--I don't really know what to say here. Maybe if you gave a better example when you did it?

BRADY

Okay, does anyone else understand what we're doing here?

Brady raises a hand to see if anyone else copies him, but no one is responsive.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Uh. Okay, fuck it. Let's just break from this and try mingling.

Everyone slowly gets up.

BRADY (CONT'D)

(projecting)

Oh, and also! Feel free to self-promote!

(MORE)

BRADY (CONT'D)

I have a few copies of a book I just wrote that I'm pre-releasing in the back, just let me know if you're interested.

One or two people come up to Brady, inaudible.

INT. GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach wanders around with a solo cup in his hand and a finger sandwich.

A guy, AVERY, 30s, comes up to him to talk.

AVERY

Hey what's your name?

Zach, confused, points at his name tag.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Cool, I'm Rick.

Zach points at Rick's name tag, making fun of him, but Rick doesn't acknowledge it.

AVERY (CONT'D)

So, what do you do?

ZACH

I'm an insurance salesman. I've actually just recently got the hang of things at it, but for some reason--

AVERY

--Yeah, hey, that's cool and shit. But honestly, I hate insurance. Like, who would even want to work in that horse shit field? That's like the IRS. That's the cops. The feds.

ZACH

What are you--

AVERY

--For me? I've just settled as a school teacher. You know how cool it is to teach elementary as a guy? How many elementary school teachers you know are guys?

Zach sees Angela stop talking to someone. She's isolated. He quickly makes his approach, dodging Rick.

ZACH

Hey.

ANGELA

Hi.

ZACH

Is this quite possibly the worst club ever invented in the history of things?

ANGELA

Um. I mean, basically. I misread the form and thought it was a joke.

ZACH

Oh.. So you're... socially secure?

ANGELA

Hah, not exactly. But I was bored and thought this was a cool way to get free food and meet someone but apparently they don't allow alcohol at events for adults and this actually turns out to be a complete joke, just, unironically.

ZACH

That's why you have to pregame for things like this.

ANGELA

(intrigued)

Oh.

ZACH

Yeah. Anyways, you want to skip the next meeting and get dinner or something.

Angela stares at him.

Zach, confused, looks behind him, thinking she saw something.

ANGELA

No, sorry, I mean. Sure. Let's... get dinner?

ZACH

(impressed)

Alright.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Zach, in a suit, observes a group of people filing in.

ZACH
 Alright. Okay.

All the suits settle in, lazily.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 Hi, my name is Zach Moon. I'm a
 consultant for...

Zach offers a hand up to his presentation board, despite nothing being there. More of a nervous gesture.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 Well. Myself.

A BUSINESSWOMAN, 40s, dressed professionally interjects.

BUSINESSWOMAN #1
 So you don't represent any
 companies? How does that make you a
 consultant?

ZACH
 Well, I represent a few companies
 actually. It's hard to explain.

BUSINESSWOMAN #1
 How'd you get here then?

ZACH
 My... company arranged it.

The woman, along with several others look upon Zach,
 confused.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 There's a list... of firms like
 yourself. And see, I reach out to
 you guys. And. Um.

Zach maneuvers out of it, using his clicker to go to the next
 slide.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 So with these premium insurances
 above. These are going to be the
 ones. This is really exciting
 folks--

A BUSINESSMAN, 50s, gathers his things and walks out.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Okay, thanks for coming.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

Zach clicks the end of his slideshow presentation, staring at the remainder of people in the office.

Two BUSINESS MEN are literally playing the BOARD GAME Battleship in the back.

ZACH
I hope you have questions, because
I've got answers.

BUSINESSWOMAN #2
Okay, what's that supposed to mean
when you say the insurance has
separate paperwork every time?

ZACH
Well...

BUSINESSMAN #1
And E-5! That's game right?

BUSINESSMAN #2
Damn. Yeah, you're right.

ZACH
I... honestly, that's in the
written policy. I can answer more
logistical things if you want my
business card. It has all my
information on there.

BUSINESSWOMAN #1
I think we're good for now.

The rest of the room consists of diddling, doodling, and empty stares to the clock.

ZACH
Alright. Well, thanks for your
time.

INT. BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Zach sits in the lobby of the building on his phone.

ZACH

Hi, this is Zach Moon, I'm calling to get an update on my payment plan. Oh, no I've already completed all of that. I meant, when do I get my checks? I know you said payroll would take a bit.

(beat)

No, yeah I know, it's just it's been a while and I haven't really seen anything in the mail and... we've been over this I just want to get my money please. No I don't want to hold--

Zach catches his breath. Music plays through the phone.

ZACH (CONT'D)

(mocking)

"I saw the sign and it opened up my eyes"-- Yeah fuck off.

Zach hangs up.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Zach's cell phone presses against his ear.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - SAME

DENISE, 35, answers her cell phone as she chops some vegetables.

In the background is her husband, MIKE, mid 30s, a generally stoic, emotionally monotone look constantly expressed on his face.

And also in the background is their daughter, JENNY, 4, happy and frolic.

DENISE

Hey. How'd it go?

ZACH

Can I tell you about it over dinner or something? I'm starving.

DENISE
Oof, that bad? I'm actually cooking
right now.

ZACH
Oh...

Denise looks back at Mike who slowly shakes his head. She
rolls her eyes.

DENISE
Yes. You can head over. I feel like
it's been like a week since we
talked, anyways.

ZACH
Bet. Thank you.

DENISE
Just come quick, because I don't
want anything to start getting
cold.

Denise hears nothing.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Zach?

END INTERCUT

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - SAME

Zach sprints down the street to hop into his car.

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - LATER

Zach, still in his work attire, stands in the kitchen
drinking a bottled beer.

Mike, distracted, types on his laptop at the dinner table,
casually looking over as Jenny draws on the wall.

JENNY
Daddy, it's a marshmallow.

Mike mulls over.

MIKE
You did it. Daddy loves you.

Denise, also beer in hand, puts the finishing touches on dinner next to Zach.

DENISE
Can you cut the lemon slices?

ZACH
Yeah.

DENISE
I mean it's insurance. Can't your company give you something else to promote?

ZACH
(slicing)
I wish it was that easy.

DENISE
Did you finally call them about your paychecks?

Zach ignores it, making it obvious.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Is that even legal?

Denise gathers the lemon slices that Zach just sliced and arranges them in a bowl.

ZACH
Not being paid for six months?

DENISE
(laughing)
It's been six already?

ZACH
It's honestly not even funny.

DENISE
Dude, that's hilarious. Get wrecked.

ZACH
You're seriously the least supportive person I know.

Denise licks her fingers, organizing the food bowls.

DENISE

Well, you know, Andrea said she interviewed at that company like a year ago when it was really popular in this area.

ZACH

Investments Financial? Really? She didn't tell me that.

DENISE

Well it helps if you call her.

ZACH

I did. Wait she talked to you? What'd she say?

DENISE

(recovering)

Let's eat.

ZACH

Was it because I said she should meet my mom?

Zach smiles, clearly joking.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Shit.

DENISE

What?

ZACH

God, Denise. Mike, I'm sorry. I forgot I was supposed to meet my mom for dinner tonight.

DENISE

Go.

ZACH

I'm... that was my fault.

MIKE

All good, buddy.

Zach tries to find out where to put his beer.

DENISE

I'll get it, you're fine.

ZACH

Okay.

Zach twirls around, feeling himself to make sure he got everything and then rushes over to hug Denise goodbye.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Later, Mike. Keep up the job search!

Mike waves, closing his laptop. The family sits down as Jenny excitedly flips her spaghetti up, making a mess.

Denise laughs as Mike smiles, but the rest of his face says "kill me please".

INT. ZACH'S MOM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Zach, disheveled, arrives through the back door that leads to the kitchen.

The house has most of the lights on except for a dim kitchen light.

Zach's MOM, 60s, is in a night gown packing up the last trays of food to put into the refrigerator.

ZACH

Shit... Mom. I'm--

MOM

--It's fine. Leftovers are in the fridge.

Zach makes his way over.

MOM (CONT'D)

So. How'd work...

ZACH

Trash, as usual.

Zach finicks through the cabinets to find a plate and silverware.

ZACH (CONT'D)

I mean the clients just aren't interested in the product anymore. God forbid an office needs workplace insurance. I'm thinking about just cashing in at this point.

MOM

Cashing in?

ZACH

It's complicated, I'll tell you about it later.

MOM

Hmm. Well. I was about to go to bed soon. Even though it's early I have to get up tomorrow to run errands.

ZACH

Oh okay.

Zach walks up to the fridge and before he can open it, the photos on the fridge grab his attention.

It's various photos of him and his friends from when he was younger.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Oh wow, where'd you get this one?

Zach points to one of the pictures, a birthday party of some sorts it seems with several boys and a couple girls.

Mom pulls the picture off the wall.

MOM

I've always had this one. Just in the albums. Sometimes I like to replace these.

ZACH

(pointing)

Right, right. So, Chris Brooks, Jenny Salazar. And... there's Denise back there. Wait, is that Tristan Marks? I almost forgot we were friends even back then.

MOM

Yeah, I used to teach in a workshop with his mom. He works at some investment firm downtown I think is what she said. But I know he still lives around here.

ZACH

Really? God. You still keep up with these parents?

MOM

A lot of them. Yeah.

ZACH

I might have to hit him up. You think you could give me Tristan's number, if you have it?

MOM

I can ask his mom, sure.

ZACH

Thanks.

MOM

Mhm. I'm gonna head to sleep. Good night.

ZACH

Night.

Zach goes over to the counter to grab his plate of food, throwing it in the microwave to cook.

During the wait he gazes at the refrigerator.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Zach lies back on his couch, picking up his cell phone and dialing.

ZACH

Hello?

INT. TRISTAN'S OFFICE - SAME

TRISTAN MARKS, 34, answers his phone on his headset. He's in a closed office in a button down, slacks, and a tie.

TRISTAN

Yes, who's this?

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

ZACH

Hey. Tristan. This is Zach Moon. From...

TRISTAN

Oh Zach. What's up buddy? How you been? What can I do for you?

ZACH

Just wanted to catch up, see how you were doing--

TRISTAN

--Oh. Doin' great. Firm's great. You trying to get in on an investment plan?

ZACH

I was actually thinking about maybe we can grab lunch or something? It's been a minute.

TRISTAN

Right. Uhh... yeah bud, look, I'm pretty booked for the near future but I'll give you the extension to my assistant and we'll set something up.

Tristan makes a neck cutting gesture to his assistant through the glass doors.

ZACH

Yeah sure. That sounds perfect.

Zach lets out a mini fist pump.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Do you uh--

INT. TRISTAN'S OFFICE - COMMON ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tristan's assistant MARTHA, 20s, interrupts Zach.

MARTHA

--Hi, Zach? This is Martha, Tristan's assistant. He said you guys are booking a business lunch? Can you do one of the following days: the 16th, 17th, or 18th?

ZACH

(confused)

Oh, yeah any of those days. That'd be the 16th next Tuesday right?

Zach locates a pen and paper.

MARTHA

Oh. No. I mean of November.

ZACH
Yeah, September I said that.

MARTHA
No, I said November.

Zach picks up his pen.

ZACH
What? He can't just meet tomorrow
on Labor Day?

Empty silence.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Um... just ask him if he can do
sometime this week, I want to talk
to him about workplace insurance. I
work for a company in Bloom Heights
and I know your firm isn't on an
insurance plan list.

MARTHA
Not sure if that will make a
difference, since Mr. Marks is
booked for this upcoming week. I'll
relay the message, though.

ZACH
(quietly)
Well if I remember Tristan...

MARTHA
What was that?

ZACH
What?

MARTHA
I'm sorry I didn't catch that?

ZACH
Did you say September?

Zach quickly hangs up and tosses the phone to the side. He
flips his hands up, not knowing what to say.

END INTERCUT

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER

Zach rubs his face as the shower water badgers his body.

ZACH

You were the class clown, but c'mon man, still a douchebag? I mean what the--

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Zach sits across from Tristan in a classy restaurant. One with waiters that care, semi-dim lighting, etc.

ZACH

--Fuck. So, long time no see. Err, I guess it's been a while, right?

Tristan finishes off a text and puts his phone down, picking up a menu.

TRISTAN

Yeah, the food's pretty good here, not too pricey either.

ZACH

Right. How's business?

TRISTAN

Swamped.

ZACH

Same, sort of.

TRISTAN

That's actually what I've been meaning to talk to you about.

ZACH

That right?

TRISTAN

Yeah, I was actually reading up on your site. Workplace insurance. Always, always a necessity.

Tristan breaks through some toasted bread and butter.

ZACH

I'm sorry my site?

TRISTAN

I think our moms have been talking. Found out where you were working.

ZACH

Uhuh.

TRISTAN

So I figured I'd look it up your site.

The WAITRESS comes by to place two waters down.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

Um, excuse me, what's the special tonight? I usually get the rib-eye but I can't find it on here.

WAITRESS

The rib-eye was a limited time only entrée. Right now we have a T-bone steak that's better, quite frankly.

TRISTAN

Cool, we'll get two of those.

Zach edges up, confused at the quick decision.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

That fine? Their steaks are amazing.

ZACH

Fine with me. I love steak.

TRISTAN

Awesome. Thank you.

WAITRESS

Absolutely.

The waitress takes the menus and leaves.

ZACH

So--

TRISTAN

--So yeah, I read up on your business, it seems super legit and obviously has a nice bit of benefits. You think you could pitch to us soon? It'd practically be a guaranteed sale.

ZACH

I, I would.. Yeah, absolutely. The thing about sales is--

TRISTAN

--Perfect. Our insurance policies have always been shitty, so the bar's real low.

ZACH

Great. Yeah, we can work out the paperwork later I'm sure.

TRISTAN

Nice. Yeah, I'll have you work it out with HR.

ZACH

So are you married?

Beat.

TRISTAN

Nah. Haven't really taken, gone, that uhh... that route yet.

ZACH

You wanna hang out or something this Sunday? Watch the game?

TRISTAN

Ah, like I said, I'm pretty swamped.

The waitress comes back and sets down a new basket of dinner rolls.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

Thanks.

ZACH

Thank you.

Zach waits briefly.

ZACH (CONT'D)

What about Saturday?

Tristan, confused, takes a bite out of a roll.

TRISTAN

I think I'll be... I wanna say I'm out of town this weekend in general.

ZACH

C'mon dude.

TRISTAN

What?

ZACH

Is this our way of catching up?
Insurance deals over T-bones?

TRISTAN

Catching up?

ZACH

It's just been a little while--

TRISTAN

--Zach, I just thought this was a
business meeting. Isn't that what
you wanted too?

The distance between them seems so far from before.

ZACH

Yeah, no. Definitely. Just thought
I'd ask.

Tristan finishes off a roll, wiping his hands on a
handkerchief.

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - LATER

Denise walks into her kitchen as her answering machine goes
off.

ZACH (V.O.)

Sooo, get this. I met up with
Tristan Marks the other day. You
remember him, right? Anyway. I'm
headed off to get--need to talk
about that. Call me back. Bye.

Denise shakes her head.

Mike walks into the kitchen, depressed. He's dressed like an
old lady at a tea party.

MIKE

So... Zach?

Mike leans over the refrigerator, opens it, grabs some milk
and takes off the lid.

Denise waves her hands up in the air.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What?

Mike chugs from the jug.

DENISE

He's meeting up with people who used him in middle school. I don't know why he's so existential all of a sudden.

MIKE

Look, I don't know what you're talking about, but I think it's time you just take a step back and stop worrying. The guy is just going through a rough patch like you said.

Jenny runs into the kitchen, tapping on Mike's leg. He reaches down to give her the full jug of milk.

DENISE

He just isn't the kind of guy who goes through rough... patches.

MIKE

Why doesn't he just find a new group, like a support group or something if it's so serious. Most of the people in that thing have to know its a complete joke right?

Mike adjusts his spring tea hat.

Beat.

DENISE (CONT'D)

So what'd the recruiter from Burks say?

Jenny drops the jug of milk, spilling it all over. Mike and Denise don't even bat an eye.

MIKE

Got another interview tomorrow.

DENISE

Mike?? What??

Jenny tugs at Mike's hand.

MIKE

Sorry it's time for hors d'oeuvres.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Zach, in workout attire, runs along a trail, listening to hip hop music, ecstatic.

The backdrop is colorful trees and bushes bristling in the wind. Reds and oranges reflect off his white polyester.

Zach nods along to the music as he runs.

ZACH

"I can't be ridin' ridin' round
that open street. I need tints. I
need tints."

He turns around to run backwards and groove to the music.

As he turns back around to run forward again he crashes into another guy running.

They both topple over the side of the trail and roll down the hill.

Curse words flare.

INT. PHARMACY - LATER

Zach, cut up, looks through the consultancy window.

ZACH

Hellooooo. C'mon there's not even
a cashier and it says you guys are
open.

Zach taps on the window.

ZACH (CONT'D)

It's just a face wound.

Zach sighs, walking down the first aisle. He looks left and right, quickly searching.

He finds an ointment for cut relief and facial moisturizer.

ZACH (CONT'D)

(shouting)
I'm gonna take this.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Zach sits in well-dressed, semi-formal wear. His bump on his face is swollen.

The WAITER comes over to pour wine into their glasses.

Angela, dressed in similar formality to Zach, sits across from him.

ZACH

I heard this place has good steaks.

Angela barely acknowledges through her sip of wine.

ZACH (CONT'D)

So how long have you been, I guess, lonely? God that's such an awkward question, what a horrible name for a club.

Angela laughs it off, strangely.

ANGELA

It's fine. I mean, I realized after graduating from college, all my sorority sisters wouldn't stick around as long as I thought they would. I've tried community theatre, improv classes, actor's meet-ups, but nothing seems to--

Zach gestures to cheers with her and they clink their wine glasses.

ZACH

--I totally get you. My friend Denise and I have known each other since we were like five. She's pretty much it.

(beat)

But, okay. As an actor, I'm struggling here. How's it hard to find friends?

ANGELA

I'm not saying I don't meet people. I don't know. Do you ever feel like you don't have enough friends?

Zach tries everything he can to hold back.

ZACH

My only other friend is my mom pretty much, so...

Zach takes a sip of his wine.

ANGELA

Oh I know, I love my parents at this point but now that I think about it, that seems pretty fucking lame.

Zach's smile just seems disingenuous at this point.

ZACH

Right, right.

ANGELA

Oh my God, we should totally just have a get together with our parents or something, that would be so cool. Like, hey, my new friend Zach and I are having a game night or something, let's all chill, right?

Zach, can't even seem to nod along anymore.

ZACH

Hah, yeah.. That'd be really fun. You know, actually, my dad--

ANGELA

--Oh and you know what else would be fun? Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

ZACH

No, it's fine.

ANGELA

Sorry, I just wanted to say, I have this sorority thing next Friday if you want to come, maybe meet some of my friends.

ZACH

Oh, that'd be kinda cool. Wait but didn't you--

ANGELA

--Yeah, it just sucks at this point because they're basically all married, but I know the guys will all be there too, and ugh. It's gonna be a blast I bet.

ZACH

I bet.

The Waiter comes over and sets down a large plate.

ANGELA

Oh my God. I love chips and queso,
that looks so good.

Zach's wound bleeds out a little.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Oh, shit. Hey.

Angela points at his face.

ZACH

I know.

Zach stares into the distance and then back at her as she takes a bite from her dipped chip.

His forced smile is so ugly at this point he looks like a poorly posed yearbook picture.

EXT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Zach hands a BOUNCER his ID. The bouncer stares at him, ignoring the ID, and motions for him to go in anyway.

Farouq nods at the bouncer, walking in behind Zach.

ZACH

Pretty excited to see you perform,
man. Have you been to a lot of
these?

FAROUQ

Haven't done it in a while, but you
know what they say... Small
audience, small--

INT. COMEDY CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Zach and Farouq drudgingly filter in, heading to the bar area. Patrons gaudily decorate the club's crevices. It's a packed scene.

A lone microphone stand and spotlight embody the stage.

Zach and Farouq stand near an organizer, KIKO, 30s, with a clipboard and papers.

ZACH

Hi, my friend here wants to sign up
for the--

KIKO

--You checking in? Last name?

Kiko searches through some sheets.

ZACH

There's a check-in? For slam
poetry?

FAROUQ

It said on the website--

KIKO

--Website's out of date, you have
to follow us on instagram to see
the updates.

FAROUQ

Well, that's...

KIKO

So, you didn't sign up prior to
arriving?

ZACH

Clearly.

FAROUQ

Does this mean I can't slam?

Kiko tries not to laugh but breaks anyway.

KIKO

You can put your name down if you
want, sometimes people don't show.
But you'll be at the end.

FAROUQ

Hell yeah.

KIKO

And I can't even promise you a
spot.

Farouq shakes his fists in excitement, facing Zach who
lightens up a bit. They attempt and fail at a fist bump.

KIKO (CONT'D)

(eyeing)

Is that? Are those...?

FAROUQ

What?

Farouq looks at his outfit.

KIKO

No, in your hands. Those your poems?

FAROUQ

Oh. Yeah, why?

KIKO

Bruh.

(laughing)

You can't. Nah. Nah. I'm sorry, dude. This is an elite competition. If you can't recite off the top, you can't compete.

ZACH

Wait where does it say this is a competition? I thought this was an open mic basically?

People at the bar turn over to Zach, who's clearly making too much noise. Some of the other organizers tune in to what's going on.

KIKO

An open mic? At this point, I suggest you take a look at what we're actually about, instead of getting on a website that clearly hasn't been updated since 2015. I'm just trying to look out.

FAROUQ

Let's leave.

ZACH

What? No. Hold on. You said, look out?

KIKO

I don't need you waiting until the end just to get embarrassed in the first round.

ZACH

How do you know he'll get embarrassed? You don't know how good he is. You don't know him.

KIKO

Exactly.

Beat.

Zach takes it on the chin. He begrudgingly follows Farouq out.

ZACH

(turning)

His name's Farouq, by the way.

(unclear)

Trash ass organization.

Zach barges out through the doors, Farouq high stepping with him, just trying to avoid a barrage of stares.

Kiko huffs, turning back to the sheets of paper.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Zach, shirt off, paces around, throwing half-hearted punches at the air.

His mom wails through his speakerphone.

MOM

And so then what happened?

ZACH

I don't know. I don't know anymore.
It's the same thing over and over.
Except every once in a while, I
feel like I found it. I don't even
know what 'it' is, but it's there.
But then everyone just goes away.
So I really don't know anymore.
Bleh, sorry.

MOM

Can I tell you something you don't
want to hear?

Zach closes his eyes.

ZACH

Um. No--

MOM

--You need to call Dr. Reed.

ZACH

What? No, mom.

MOM

Yes, mom. Call Dr. Reed.

ZACH

Mom, wait no, you're missing the point.

MOM

How am I missing the point?

Zach lies on his back, performing sit-ups.

ZACH

I. Can't. Talk. To. Her.

MOM

Why not?

ZACH

It's not. An. Emergency.

MOM

Well, you've got no one else. You're not gonna bother her, because you never call anyway. She probably won't make you come in for a session.

Zach sits all the way up, resting.

ZACH

I doubt she'll answer though.

MOM

Well. I mean. Can't you say you're gonna kill yourself?

ZACH

MOM!

MOM

Okay, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Look, baby, I gotta to go, I got this book club thing. But just think about it.

ZACH

Right. Okay. I'll think about it.

MOM

Or don't think and just go ahead with it. The call, I mean.

ZACH

Mom. Bye.

Zach hangs up the phone. He twirls his head back and forth, getting tension out of his neck before he scrolls and dials.

Zach closes the door and heads outside.

EXT. ZACH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ZACH

Dr. Reed. Hi. I didn't expect you to answer.

INT. DR. REED'S OFFICE - SAME

DR. REED, 50s, organizes paperwork into manila folders. She's dressed casually, covering up the stress of her moderately cluttered desk.

DR. REED

And I didn't expect you to call so soon.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

ZACH

So soon? It's been a year.

DR. REED

Yeah. It's just a little earlier than normal this time. What's up?

ZACH

Um. I don't know. To be honest, I--

DR. REED

(coy)

--Is it an emergency? Because it doesn't sound like it.

ZACH

My life is in shambles, I'm constantly staring into the abyss of crippling self-doubt, the world is caving into my chest. And somehow the stars at night seem so far away and so deep in the sky that I can't even fathom--

DR. REED

--Zach.

ZACH

What?

DR. REED

Take a deep breath. Now, stop
bullshitting me.

ZACH

Okay. I can't figure out when my
next paycheck is coming because no
one takes me seriously at work. I
tried talking to these people at
this loser's meet and greet and
just found out I'm the coolest
loser there, surprise surprise,
where's my goddam trophy? I
haven't--

DR. REED

--Loser's meet and greet?

Dr. Reed looks like she's heard this routine before.

DR. REED (CONT'D)

Look, Zach, I need to finish up
these journals so I can go home,
but the best thing I can tell you
is you should consider scheduling a
session. But if you don't, then all
I can tell you is there's other
people like you and losers aren't
one of them. If you want to
schedule a session, come in next
Thursday.

ZACH

That was, I like that. But also
really quick... I've still never
figured out the difference between
people who are worth the trouble
and people who...

The ending of his statement is either becoming obvious or so
confusing it's impossible to capture in words.

DR. REED

You're one of my smartest patients.
Don't act blind. You'll figure it
out. Call me only if you have a
real emergency next time please.
Goodbye Zach.

END INTERCUT

Zach calmly brings the phone down and into his pocket.

He looks up at the sky, claps his hands together and slides one hand up to point casually at the clouds.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

1) Zach grills meats in his smoker on his patio, talking to himself in the daytime.

2) Zach runs with his headphones in, passing by a beautiful colored spread of trees along a trail during sunset.

3) Zach, dressed up, scoots over a few seats in an ornate playhouse.

4) Zach erupts in laughter, along with the rest of the theatre audience, spilling his popcorn in the process.

5) Zach mouths out the lyrics to a song with a fake microphone in hand in front of his mirror, smiling, laughing with himself.

EXT. GYM - NIGHT

Zach preps himself before entering.

ZACH

Oh, Angela, look, it's best we talk to other people in the group. You're sweet. Sweet. Fucking. Angel. God, okay. This never actually works. Let's just--

INT. GYM - SAME

Zach steps into the gym. He looks around the room and sees Angela's seat is empty.

BRADY

Come on in, Zach!

Zach, giddy, walks in and takes his seat.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Alright, so we're gonna try a bit of a different exercise this time.

INT. GYM - LATER

Zach sips from his solo cup. He takes a bite out of his finger sandwich.

ROGER, 30s, a little too normal-seeming, comes up and approaches him. He taps Zach on the shoulder.

ZACH
Oh hey I'm Zach.

ROGER
Oh hey I'm Roger.

ZACH
Fuck this exercise.

ROGER
Right?

ZACH
I didn't even want to come today.

ROGER
To be honest, same.

ZACH
Well shit, do you wanna hang out or something? You like sports?

ROGER
Dude yeah.

ZACH
Okay, maybe we can hang and watch the start of the season.

ROGER
For?

ZACH
The... NFL. You watch football?

ROGER
Totally. You can come to my place. I'll throw it on. Sunday, right?

ZACH
Alright then. Sunday, yeah.

ROGER
I think I have some guys coming over that day too. Maybe we can all hang?

ZACH
Oh sick, you have friends too?

ROGER
Of course.

Roger gently punches Zach on the shoulder awkwardly.

EXT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - EVENING

Zach is dressed in a long sleeve t-shirt and jeans. He has a twelve pack of beer with him.

He knocks on an apartment door.

Eventually, the door opens and Roger peeks his head out.

ROGER
Oh hey!

ZACH
What's up man? I brought beer.

ROGER
Noice. Yeah we can put that in
the fridge.

They step inside.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Roger takes the beer and places it in the refrigerator. He grabs two out and hands one to Zach.

ZACH
So, uh. Am I early or?

Roger wipes the cold perspiration from the beer slowly over his shirt.

ROGER
Nah, they should be here any minute
now. You wanna sit down? I was
gonna put on a movie or something.
Maybe for background til they get
here.

Zach heads towards a single sofa chair to nestle into.

ZACH
Hey so you remember that girl
Angela from the first meeting?

Roger walks over and stands near the TV, setting it up.

ROGER
Which one was that one?

ZACH
She was the...
(beat)
Anyways, so we went on this date
right--

Roger gets the pregame on and approaches Zach, sitting partially on his right leg and partially on the remaining wide spot of the single sofa.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Uh... what--

ROGER
Sorry my couch is about to get
fumigated. This is fine, right?

Zach uncomfortably shifts, unable to speak for a moment.

ROGER (CONT'D)
We can start already if this
commentary is too annoying.

ZACH
Start what?

Roger takes a seat on the carpet.

Zach sits down across from him as Roger pulls out a steel briefcase.

Roger opens it and reveals poker chips and cards - only taking out the cards.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Okay, I'm down. Haven't played
since I last went to Vegas.

ROGER
When was that?

ZACH
Probably like three years ago with
my friend Denise.

Zach waits awkwardly for an interruption but Roger nods along, listening.

ZACH (CONT'D)
And yeah it was fun. Have you ever
been?

ROGER
I go every year.

Roger deals the cards and lays out the set of Black Jack.
Another awkward pause.

ZACH
Cool. Cool.

Zach reads his hand and stays. Roger adds a card, ready to
flip.

They both flip and Roger has 21, Zach has 18.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Damn.

ROGER
Hah! Loser.

ZACH
Well clearly we're not in Vegas.

ROGER
So why don't you throw some money
down?

ZACH
You know, I normally would. I'm
just bad at blackjack. I don't mind
gambling on occasion though. I have
pretty decent luck.

Roger deals again.

Zach asks to hit and brings his hands up in disappointment:
he's got 25.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Wanna play Hold 'Em instead?

ROGER
How bout strip poker?

They both seem to mimic each other's expressions, which react
to the suffocation in the room.

ZACH
(finally)
That's kind of weird right?

ROGER

It's better than you not throwing
in cash. Couldn't even bring your
own snacks.

ZACH

Hmm, not sure how either of those
equate.

ROGER

C'mon we're both getting drunk
anyway, it's kinda funny.

ZACH

I've actually never felt more sober
in my life and I didn't start
drinking til I was 26.

ROGER

I'm a lightweight.

Roger bobs slowly side to side, finishing his beer and
slamming it on the top of the counter off to the side.

ROGER (CONT'D)

We won't even go all the way, just
like shirts and shit.

ZACH

Uh. Won't the other guys come in
and ask what the fuck we're doing?

ROGER

(adamant)

Oh, no. They texted me they'll be
here in 20 or 30. They're
carpooling too.

Zach debates for a brief moment.

ZACH

Alright. I'm feeling lucky, anyway.

ROGER

Me too.

Roger deals out the cards.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I'll be right back. You want
another beer?

Roger gets up and walks away.

ZACH

Sure.

Zach looks at his cards.

ZACH (CONT'D)

I'm gonna stay anyway.

Roger returns to the table and looks at his own, staying as well.

They flip. Roger has 21, Zach has 20.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Did you shuffle these at all?

ROGER

Of course!

ZACH

Alright.

Zach takes off his shirt.

ROGER

Haha, nice.

Zach buries himself in a huge gulp of beer.

ZACH

Alright, go.

Roger deals again. Zach hits, revealing another bust.

ZACH (CONT'D)

What the fuck!

ROGER

Hey.

ZACH

I know.

Zach takes off his shoes.

ROGER

Should go pants next.

ZACH

When I have shoes on?

Roger crawls over and takes a good look at his shoes then reaches for his jeans.

ROGER
These are coming off next.

Zach hyperventilates for a bit, not responding.

Roger deals again.

ZACH
Hey um. Wait.

ROGER
What?

Beat.

ZACH
Are those other guys coming?

Roger backs off.

ROGER
No, are you serious? Of course not.

ZACH
What?

Zach grabs his shirt and puts it on. He stands up and slides his shoes back on.

ROGER
Hey we don't have to do this
anymore if you don't want. We can
just watch a movie?

Roger gets up and approaches Zach as they meet at the door. Zach props it open. The awkward tension finally seems to fade.

ZACH
I know you're probably not doing
this intentionally. But clearly I'm
not... and even if I was man, the
whole point of me coming here was
just to watch a football game. Hang
out. You know...

ROGER
I think you might be overthinking
this.

ZACH
Probably not.

The door shuts firmly, not aggressively.

Roger buries himself in his beer.

INT. ZACH'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Zach shuffles in his car seat. He rolls down the windows then back up.

He pulls out his phone and calls.

ZACH

Hey Denise, it's Zach, call me back. Or actually, I dunno. I'll just tell you later. I'll text you. I'll text you.

Zach abruptly hangs up and scrolls in his phone, curling up in his seat.

His screen reads 'Mom', but he lets the phone lay idle in his hand.

He leans back in his own seat, pulling it down to recline, closing his eyes. He reaches up to lock his door.

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - DAY

Denise, dressed for work, walks into the living room to grab her bag and sees Mike, clearly exhausted, scrolling on his laptop.

She checks her phone before exiting the front door.

DENISE

You have any calls today?

MIKE

Nope. But I'm feeling good about an application I put in yesterday.

DENISE

An application. That's, that's good right? What about the one downtown, have you called them back?

MIKE

Out of 30 candidates left and they haven't responded for two weeks? I mean, I like your enthusiasm, but...

DENISE

Hold the fort down?

MIKE

Like always.

Denise opens the door and strolls to her car which is parked in the driveway.

EXT. DENISE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Denise brings her phone to her ear.

DENISE

Hey just got your messages. Um. I was thinking sometime later this week, maybe next week we can just sit down and talk about it? I really. Nevermind. We'll talk about it later.

Denise hangs up the phone and gets into her car.

INT. DENISE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Denise clenches her steering wheel abrasively.

DENISE

How do I even...

INT. TRISTAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Tristan slides around in his chair and waits, desk phone in ear.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Zach scrolls through some shows, in pajamas.

ZACH

(picking up)
Hello?

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

TRISTAN

Hey buddy, was just calling you back.

ZACH

Oh shit. Well, hey what's up man?

TRISTAN

So, talked to the other higher ups and it looks like we're a go for the sale, man. You made quite an impression with me.

Zach perks up, darting eyes.

ZACH

Oh, great! But, it's not much of an impression if we already knew each other right?

TRISTAN

Oh, I didn't mean you sorry. I mean the product impression. Your pitch. We fell for it.

ZACH

Oh, well that was just more of a detailed email, not really a pitch. I left out the statistics, the benefits of each package--

TRISTAN

--Doesn't matter, we're greenlit on our end.

ZACH

Um. Okay, well alright. So do we celebrate or something? Golf? Drinks?

TRISTAN

Sure man, I'll bring the guys. We've been going to this new place off uh, God what's the name. Redshack Avenue? God, what is it...

ZACH

Oh, no I meant like just us. You mentioned last time once your schedule clears. Deals go your way.

TRISTAN

Yeah, my guy. Look if it's alright with you, I feel like we should just keep this professional. I didn't mean to lead you on. Like this was a--I mean we can be friends I'm sure, but right now I'm.

Tristan edges to the end of his seat.

ZACH (V.O.)

No, I understand. Got it. Guess I read it a little wrong. But I'll let you go. Let's circle back?

TRISTAN

Let's circle back, yeah. And, I'll hit you up with the address to that bar if you want to come. Although workplace insurance isn't a huge purchase or anything in these corporate offices, so I doubt most of the guys would-- Hello? Zach?

Tristan turns around, hanging up the phone. He spins back around in his seat, facing the crystal clear window-view.

END INTERCUT

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zach, disheveled, paces while on the phone.

ZACH

Yeah mom, he's a dick. Anyways. Call me back.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER

Zach spiffs up his suit jacket, which overlays his yellow button down.

He brushes his already brushed hair a few more times.

ZACH

(semi-serious)

Hey, wassup dude. Sup. Zach, bro. Insurance? Yeah, I can hook you up with some sick premiums dude. Oh my boss? Nah, super private guy, doesn't even email me.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ZACH

(on phone)

Denise, what's up girl? Guess who's casual business friends with Tristan now?

Zach confidently nods, waiting for a few seconds.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Cool. Anyways, call me back.

Zach hangs up the phone and looks in the mirror.

ZACH (CONT'D)
There's gotta be another way.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Zach "listens" to Brady, a gift bag in his hand. He meddles in distraction, eyeing the room.

Brady, with the energy of a jazz player whose solo is coming.

BRADY
So, hopefully you guys will be excited for tomorrow. We have a SHIT ton of activities planned, I think. I don't know that's just me. And since this is the first year we're doing a retreat--well... scratch that, since we're a first year club, of course. Um. Where was I?

Brady continues to blabber, inaudible. Zach, rationalizing, realizing.

ZACH
Shit.

Zach peers over at KEITH, late 20s, black, great style, laid-back vibe, scrolling on his phone.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Hey bro, can I carpool with you tomorrow?

KEITH
What's up?

ZACH
Carpool, for the retreat.

KEITH
Oh, I'm not going.

ZACH
What? Everybody already paid though didn't they?

KEITH

Damn.

ZACH

Yeah... so we're supposed to partner up for the ride there. I mean we can take my car--

KEITH

--Nah, it's cool, I got it, G.

ZACH

Alright, then.

KEITH

I mean actually I guess I could take...

(observing)

Shorty with the--

Keith makes a motion with his hands like he has long, flowing hair.

ZACH

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

Keith eye-checks Zach.

KEITH

You smoke weed?

Zach stares at him, backing up.

INT. KEITH'S CAR - DAY

Zach blows out a fat puff of smoke and casually hands a blunt over to Keith. 50 Cent blares over the speakers.

ZACH

"We run New York!"

KEITH

"We run New York!"

They debrief in chuckles as Keith lowers the music to the dullest of roars.

KEITH (CONT'D)

Why we ain't never met before?

ZACH

We.. Have...

KEITH

But didn't you say you just usually hang out with other friends?

ZACH

Yeah if I had any, but... all my friends kinda quit, you know.

Keith takes another hit.

KEITH

I'm ready for this retreat man.

ZACH

You literally didn't even know about it 'til yesterday.

Keith looks back at Zach, a grim smile.

KEITH

What's this place supposed to be anyways?

ZACH

Guess we'll find out.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

Several tents are set up in an abysmal, knolly, woodside park.

Keith and Zach, backpacks on, meet up with the rest of the crew. Most of them are standing idly, as others settle into their abodes.

BRADY

(approaching)

So, guys, don't know if anyone told you yet, but just to get a good experience, we'll be switching from our carpool partners to new friends in our tent stay. So, Keith--

ZACH

--Hang on. Shouldn't the point be to get well acquainted with your partner? I thought that's what you said a couple weeks ago.

BRADY

Well yeah a couple weeks ago, but we're changing it up.

(MORE)

BRADY (CONT'D)

And um, I know this is kinda bad news or whatever, but we're one person short, and since you guys arrived last, one of you is gonna have to stay with Heather, and the other has to stay alone for the first night. But it's cool we'll rotate.

Zach stares at Brady as if he wants to beat his ass, but doesn't even have the energy to both restrain himself, or attack.

Keith and Zach look at each other. Zach, stale, cold, expression, motions forward like a crosswalk guard to Keith.

KEITH

You get the next night though.

ZACH

Nah, I love staying by myself, bro. King size tent, by the creek. That's gang shit.

BRADY

Zach, man I'd love for you to help me with our night activities if you're open?

ZACH

Oh hey, let me check my schedule.

Zach fumbles around with his backpack.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Yeah looks like I'm free from 6 til... Sunday.

Zach pats Brady on the back and struts down the trail.

EXT. WOODS - SUNSET

Brady sets up some pamphlets on some wooden log seats.

Zach attempts to set up a bonfire but the gas can is empty.

ZACH

Hey, Brady. I think we're gonna need more gas or...

BRADY

Sure. Yeah. There's another one in my tent.

Zach nods, slow jogging over.

INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Zach searches around a few supply crates. Brady's tent seems over-organized.

As Zach shuffles through one of the crates, he spots a couple hard-backs and takes them out.

One of the books reads "Rules and Terms of Social Engagement by Brady Bickerstaff".

Zach looks behind him to see if anyone's coming. He crawls over to zip up Brady's tent and continues skimming through the book.

Zach buckles down, the chapters and words like sharp knives cutting through his knees. He sets the book down to his side, appalled.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Everyone gathers around a campfire.

BRADY

So, Zach and I will demonstrate how this works, okay? I'm gonna whisper a secret into Zach's ear. Then he's gonna whisper it into Heather's ear. Then I'm gonna whisper a second one into his ear. And we'll see if everyone can remember both secrets by the end of the line.

HANK, 50s, interjects.

HANK

So, telephone? It's telephone.

BRADY

No this is a game I made up, it's not telephone.

HANK

I'm pretty sure--

BRADY

--I'm pretty sure... It's not telephone. Okay? So let's get started.

ZACH

Actually Brady I was hoping we could start with me.

BRADY

Well, okay yeah I don't... You understand the concept?

ZACH

Absolutely.

BRADY

Okay sure. I like this. Let's go for it. Everyone ready?

Zach leans into Brady's ear, whispering.

ZACH

I know you're a fraud.

BRADY

'Scuse me?

ZACH

I found your book. You... hire actors? Conduct social experiments on adults?

BRADY

(whispering back)
What the fu--

ZACH

Woah Brady! I think you're supposed to go down the line. Not back, right?

Zach and Brady hold a Mexican stand-off of looks.

BRADY

Actually why don't we take a twenty and just mingle?

HANK

Thank God. I knew this game would blow.

Everyone gets up. Zach stays sitting next to Brady, staring. Brady forces a few smiles to everyone as crowd control.

ZACH

Yeah, this game does kinda suck ass.

Zach gets up. Brady gazes at the fire.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - LATER

Everyone stands around the fire, water bottles in hand, poorly interacting. A lot of awkward standing.

HEATHER, early 30s, beautiful, bright mood, walks over to Zach who stares at the bonfire.

HEATHER

It's pretty incredible to see some of the people still here from the first meeting.

ZACH

It's only been a few weeks. How are you and Keith?

HEATHER

True. And um. It's fine, I guess. But you know...

Heather puts her hand on his shoulder.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

I really wanted you and me to bunk up together.

ZACH

(smiling)

Shut the fuck up.

Heather cracks up, Zach joining in.

HEATHER

Okay, I'm sorry.

ZACH

Dick.

HEATHER

I can be sometimes.

Zach's mood drops.

ZACH

Hey Heather you told me last time, but I forgot. You went to school for?

HEATHER

Performing Arts.

Beat. Zach closes his eyes.

Brady reluctantly comes over to them.

BRADY

Alright guys, feel free to keep mingling, but I'm shutting the lights out, gotta prepare for the trails tomorrow.

Heather turns over to Brady, but takes note of Zach's slouched, disinterested posture.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Can I actually talk to Zach alone really quick?

Heather obliges, trudging away down the beaten path.

Zach looks straight ahead, avoiding Brady - who also looks straight ahead.

BRADY (CONT'D)

It's not a social experiment if you're wondering.

ZACH

What about the actors?

BRADY

Yeah. Yeah they're... they're there.

ZACH

How many?

BRADY

C'mon Zach.

ZACH

Fuck you Brady. How many?

BRADY

Are you gonna tell anyone?

ZACH

No. No, I'm not going to tell anybody. You need to. At the hike tomorrow.

BRADY

I'm not saying I haven't made mistakes. I have.

(MORE)

BRADY (CONT'D)

I think I just wanted people to come see me talk at the Wade Center downtown. I wanted to impact lives.

ZACH

Don't. Don't do that. I'd probably respect you more if you just told me you wanted to sell more copies of your book, man. But uh, I'm tired. Gonna head back to my tent. See you tomorrow.

Zach pats him on the back.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Let me know if you need help setting up tomorrow.

Brady stares at the dirt.

EXT. WOODS TRAIL - DAY

Everyone is in hiking attire. Zach stretches as Brady comes up to him.

BRADY

Hey man. I'm gonna switch you out with Hank as your hike partner if that's cool.

ZACH

This one of your social strategies or something?

BRADY

How long is this gonna play out?

ZACH

I think if you really want to make an impact on these people, you should get rid of all the actors, cut the bullshit, and genuinely have everyone get to know each other. All these exercises, all this 'social discovery', this isn't what anyone actually wants. Two weeks ago I thought I might actually make one friend. ONE. Have you made any by doing these?

Brady takes a good look around.

BRADY

To be honest this is the first time
I've run a club like this.

Zach, mildly befuddled, harnesses in a retort as Hank walks over.

HANK

Hey, I guess we're partners today.

ZACH

Yep. Looks like it.

EXT. WOODS TRAIL - DAY

The group hikes up a fairly steep incline, all at different parts of the path.

Zach and Hank stay close knit.

ZACH

You're pretty in shape.

HANK

Yeah, well. Not much else to
do. No wife, no kids.

ZACH

No one to talk to?

Hank shoots him a look.

Brady looks up with a paper map.

BRADY

Hey so guys, I think we're going
the wrong way.

HANK

Let's just keep going, this is
obviously a trail.

BRADY

Well, but actually I had an
activity planned out for this
different path I think we skipped
about a half mile back. We should
turn around--

ZACH

Why? Everyone's enjoying
themselves, right?

Everyone just stares around, not making any motion one way or the other.

BRADY
Alright, fine.

Zach and Hank shake their heads.

HANK
So I guess I should ask it since we don't talk, but why are you here?

ZACH
Same reason. No one to talk to.

Hank spits off to the side, chugging a bit of water and stopping, letting people catch up ahead of them.

HANK
You remind me a little of myself.

ZACH
With more hair and a brighter personality?

HANK
What's your deal. Yeah, I've got no friends. Never really had them anyway. I was in my 30s once, where everyone else was either married, rich, broke, had kids, flew a thousand miles and never came back. I know.

ZACH
Is that why you always ignore me at every one of these functions?

HANK
I'm 56 years old. All I want is some company every now and then. But I realize not everyone wants to hang out with me. People got shit going on in their lives they have to deal with before they want anything to do with me. I see you give every single person in this group a chance. I don't want you to be like me. I don't want you to end up like me.

ZACH
Shit, Hank.

Hank hikes back up the trail again, Zach following.

HANK

But don't stop what you're doing. You'll die quick once you let the world know you're here and you don't give a shit anymore. This group is pretty garbage if you ask me, but hey, at least you and I are talking.

Zach takes a deep breath.

ZACH

Hank do you... You ever done community theatre or anything like that?

HANK

No, I play golf and work construction. Why you got Broadway tickets or something?

Zach shakes his head. Brady catches up to Zach and Hank.

BRADY

Hey guys.

ZACH

Dude, what's going on? What happened to what we talked about?

BRADY

Right, yeah, I was gonna just make an executive decision to cancel the hike.

HANK

For what?

ZACH

Think Brady has something to say.

BRADY

(projecting)

Guys let's turn back, I had an activity planned at that last turn but I think we can do it at base camp instead.

HEATHER

We can't do it here?

BRADY

Guys please, just help me make this better for you. For us. This is our retreat.

HANK

No this is *our* retreat.

ZACH

What's the deal Brady?

Everyone stares at Brady. The eyes like arrows coming from unknown directions.

BRADY

Nah, you know what? Fuck it. You guys are fake ass friends. You don't look me in the eye when we talk, you don't care about anything I've set up. I've done everything for this club to work. I did it. For what? So half of you could quit on me? You make fun of all the shit I do to make this thing fun and interactive. People stopped paying their fees so I can't even afford the club monthly anymore.

ZACH

Stop acting like a six year old. Tell em. Own up to it.

Brady's eyes laser in on Zach. He looks back at the group one more time while stepping away.

BRADY

I'm not paying the monthly to keep this thing running anymore. If anyone asks, this club might've died when people stopped caring. But Zach buried it.

Brady flips Zach off and hikes away.

BRADY (CONT'D)

You guys can leave whenever you want.

The group stands around like the upright trees surrounding them, speechless.

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mike listens on the phone in the kitchen, joyous.

Denise walks in and pours herself a cup of coffee.

MIKE

Yes. Yes ma'am. Will do. Talk to you soon Henrietta. Buh-bye.

Denise, curious, leans on the counter, staring at Mike.

Mike walks over and holds her close.

DENISE

Kind of early for a phone call?

MIKE

If you consider 11 am early.

Denise looks at her watch.

DENISE

Perks of having Fridays off.

MIKE

Yep. And guess who that was.

DENISE

Who?

INT. DENISE'S CAR - LATER

Denise, in casual attire, wiping tears from her face, clicks a button on her phone, turning down her sad radio music.

EXT. ZACH'S HOUSE - SAME

Zach grills food in his back yard. Tunes emit at a mild volume from a speaker.

ZACH

Hey what's up! What're you doing this afternoon?

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

DENISE

Not much, I think Mike and I are gonna go grab some lunch, maybe some wine.

ZACH

Oh okay. Well if you guys want, I'm grilling. My place.

DENISE

Oh. Yeah, I don't know yet.

ZACH

What's the occasion?

DENISE

What?

ZACH

You said lunch, and wine. You usually, you get those whenever you and Mike are celebrating. Mike like, never drinks.

DENISE

Oh, right. Mike actually got a job. Err, hired I mean. He's had a job. But, this one's in Denver, so.

Denise clears her throat.

ZACH

Oh that's great. Give him my best.

Zach walks around his porch with a spatula, sipping on a beverage wrapped in a brown bag.

DENISE

Yeah, and he's gonna be making a lot, it's great. Full benefits. Nice office. Nice neighborhood. HR department.

ZACH

Wait. Mike's been holding out for a remote position, I thought? He's gonna travel?

DENISE

Please don't make this hard.

Zach falls into one of his wooden seats.

ZACH

Oh shit.

(beat)

I um... I won't. Oh my God. That. Is. Definitely deserving.

(MORE)

ZACH (CONT'D)

I had a feeling actually he'd get that call any day now.

DENISE

He's starting on Tuesday. But he'll fly back and forth for a couple weeks til we lock down a place.

ZACH

Yeah.

A long beat. Zach gets up to turn his meats.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Oh um. I didn't get to tell you about the retreat!

DENISE

Oh how was it?

ZACH

Trash.

Zach settles back into his chair like before.

DENISE

Damn.

ZACH

Hey. Remember that time where I moved into that gross apartment? Years ago at the forest village? And you went to Europe for a month with Mike, I think for y'all's honeymoon. And um, I met that girl who lived in the building next to me and she was super weird and then we had sex... and she convinced me to go in unprotected and made me finish inside her.

Zach takes a deep breath, quickly.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Twice. And then didn't want to take plan B and said everything was gonna be good, stop worrying? Well, there was a feeling I got in my stomach for weeks... and I don't know if it's the Old E, or Tracy's mulch he left in his backyard yesterday, but I have that feeling again.

DENISE

I know. I remember that shit. But Zach--

ZACH

--I'm just saying. That was such a low point in my life and I didn't have you, but as soon as you got back a week later, you and I talked on the phone every day. I don't know if you know how much that meant to me.

Denise is visibly choked up, attempting to laugh a bit off.

DENISE

Zach I don't know if you remember, the best part about that story is the hours you spent training for that marathon, and how you got back into dancing. Didn't you learn Mandarin that summer? Like, there were a dozen things you did. Without me. Just then.

Zach closes the lid on his grill.

DENISE (CONT'D)

I think Mike and I are gonna grab lunch and then just come back here. You can swing by, always.

ZACH

I might just stick here for once. Food's almost done anyways. Talk soon?

DENISE

Yep.

END INTERCUT

Zach tosses the phone next to his chair.

ZACH

Dr. Reeceeed. Emergencyyyy.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Zach, hoodie on, calmly struts into the group circle to take a seat.

The room seems colder, not all of the lights are on, somehow the meeting is in the darkest part of the gym.

ZACH
Brady coming?

Everyone just kind of looks around.

HANK
I think we all might be wondering the same thing, obviously. But I'd like to throw something up for discussion. What'd he mean about not paying the monthly?

HEATHER
Could be some sort of deposit? But why monthly?

ISRAEL, 20s, looking like he just got out of bed for an 8AM class, pitches in.

ISRAEL
Monthly fee maybe?

ZACH
Guys I think we're all dodging the obvious question here.

HANK
Really?

ZACH
Yeah, I do, Hank. Let me finish. We all knew something was up with Brady. I can't say I didn't see this coming.

HEATHER
What was up with Brady, Zach?

Zach leans into a stare towards Heather, condescendingly.

ZACH
You should know, Heather.

HEATHER
Should I? I mean you were the one with him most of the time before his outburst.

ZACH
I was trying to help the guy out.

ISRAEL

Heather's right, Zach. I mean,
before all this, Brady seemed fine.
What'd he say to you.

Disappointed, hopeless looks descend upon Zach.

ZACH

Y'all ever heard of Rules and Terms
of Social Engagement?

Nothing.

ZACH (CONT'D)

By Brady Bickerstaff?

Some crickets. Some looks of disgust.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Brady conducted social experiments
on us. Hired actors to play
desperate club-goers.

Not a pen drop, but people clearly feel the fingers pointing
and the shoes shifting.

ZACH (CONT'D)

There's even a chapter where some
of us end up married, business
partners, sailing buddies.

HANK

Ah shit.

ZACH

I thought about it. Brady's not a
bad guy, his heart's in the right
place. But what the fuck, man?
We're all adults. Why is it so
complicated making friends?

Beat.

HEATHER

I guess that's why we're all here.

ISRAEL

So we're done?

ZACH

No. No we're not done. If you guys
are cool with it, I might try and
take over. Turn this franchise
around.

No one liked that joke.

ZACH (CONT'D)
But really. What've we got to lose
at this point?

HANK
More like what else do we have
goin' on a Wednesday night at 7:30?

Murmurs of "I don't know, kickball?" "I tutor my son."

ZACH
How bout it?

Some people throws in nods of approval in various forms. Zach
matches with a nod of his own.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Okay, but back to the question
before.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Zach fills out paperwork at the front desk. He makes a few
signatures and hands it back to Beverly.

BEVERLY
Okay, and the standard rate we have
is five hundred a month. I assume
you'll be paying by check?

ZACH
I'm sorry what?

BEVERLY
That's just until the first six
months get paid off. Then it's
free.

ZACH
How does that work, I thought this
was just a community thing?

BEVERLY
Um, you think I work here for free?

ZACH
Are you shitting me, Bev?

BEVERLY
I ain't shitting nobody.

ZACH

Damn, alright well I don't have that right now. And six months? How do you even come up with that number?

BEVERLY

We can't just have everyone and their momma registering their weird ass clubs.

Zach straightfaces her.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

No offense.

ZACH

How long can I...

Zach searches.

BEVERLY

We have a one month latency period to get the first fee, if you register it as a new club. Then you gotta be on time or else we'll cancel that shit.

ZACH

Please, are you--Okay.

Zach takes a deep breath.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Okay. That's fine.

BEVERLY

And you can't hold meetings until that first payment is received.

ZACH

You love stacking things on to ruin my day don't you?

BEVERLY

I'd love to get paid just to do that.

Zach shoots her a fake grin, storming off.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP PATIO - LATER

Zach sweats off the anger outside a coffee shop with a cup of joe whistling steam up into his face.

A buzz emits from his phone. Zach squints, eyes lining through the text. He brushes off.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Zach pulls out his cell phone and dials.

ZACH

(awkward)

Hi, this is Zach Moon, I'm one of your sales employees. Look, I know. Yes. I've called before, don't put me through to a representative.

Beat.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Dammit.

Zach takes out a business card of the company: Investments Financial. He runs his finger across the address at the bottom.

EXT. SHADY OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Zach double checks the address on his business card and looks up at a run down building.

He jogs up to the steps and sees neon-lit words on the front window: TICKETS, JAIL BONDS.

Zach opens the door.

INT. SHADY OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Zach enters to a small office space with a desk in front. The door makes a jingle when he closes it.

No one is at the front desk.

Zach modestly walks up to the front--impatient, however.

A WOMAN IN RED, late 20s, comes from a door in back of the desk. She's very casually dressed and has smeared lipstick.

WOMAN IN RED

What can I do for you?

ZACH

I'm Zach Moon, I'm here to get my check. You guys were supposed to send me a check. My money. I need to get it, so I figured it'd be better just to come down.

WOMAN IN RED

Zach Moon?

ZACH

Yes.

The woman types on the nearby computer, disappointed.

WOMAN IN RED

Yeah, you were removed from payroll almost a half a year ago.

ZACH

I'm sorry?

WOMAN IN RED

No, I'm sorry. You should've gotten a letter in the mail.

ZACH

A let--a letter? Of termination?

WOMAN IN RED

Yes well--

ZACH

No, no. I need my checks. I've made sales for you guys. I've been doing well. Why terminate me?

WOMAN IN RED

Sir. Listen. Please. The company went bankrupt at that time.

Zach pauses, clenching his fist that lay on the front desk.

ZACH

I. But. I was unemployed for a while, so I didn't know. I didn't know how these checks were distributed, you guys said you were a new company at the conference.

WOMAN IN RED

I don't know what else to tell you.
You should've received that letter
in the mail.

Zach mouths out nothing, speechless.

WOMAN IN RED (CONT'D)

(almost laughing)

So... you went six months without
getting paid and didn't come by the
office to double check?

ZACH

I tried to call. I called several
times, I figured I'd get it all at
once or there was some salary
distribution. The line just keeps
putting me through to a dead
representative.

WOMAN IN RED

Well, yeah. The company was
finished at that time, the phone
line should've been inoperable. Did
you get any money?

ZACH

I actually um... started about six
months ago. Five hundred dollar was
what I got for signing aboard this
"startup" bullshit. This is all
bullshit.

Zach breaths like he just ran a race.

ZACH (CONT'D)

You're gonna give me my money.

WOMAN IN RED

Sir?

ZACH

Who else can I talk to? There's Ted
right? Ted was who I first talked
to. He's the boss.

(yelling)

Ted are you in there!

WOMAN IN RED

Sir, calm down.

ZACH

Don't call me sir, I'm Zach. I'm calm I just want my money, lady.

Zach bobs up and down with angst.

WOMAN IN RED

He's not here. No one else is here. Everything you need to know is detailed in the letter, I can print one out for you right now.

ZACH

No, I don't want the letter. I wanna talk to my boss! Let me talk to Ted!

WOMAN IN RED

He can't talk he's not in.

ZACH

He's here... I know he's here. He just doesn't want to do anything about it. What is this place!?

The printer goes off and the woman skips over to grab the sheet and hand it to him.

Zach scoffs, his lips quivering. He turns and storms off.

INT. KEITH'S CAR - LATER

Keith and Zach chill in their respective seats. Keith, upbeat, puffs from his joint.

Zach, remissive, stares forward.

KEITH

Here.

Keith hands over the joint. Zach looks, taking it.

KEITH (CONT'D)

How you been? What happened after I dropped you off? After the retreat.

ZACH

Nothing really. What's been up with you?

Zach lazily toys with the joint, not smoking.

KEITH

You know, me and Heather, the next couple days. Well was it the next couple days? I guess yeah, last week probably--

ZACH

You know.

Zach interjects. A thudded, hard crash pause.

ZACH (CONT'D)

One thing I wanted to ask you.

Keith gestures forward.

ZACH (CONT'D)

So, we figure Brady's not coming back right? I know you missed the last meeting, but. The group. The group, some of the group and I decided that it might be wise to keep it going. And so I spoke to Bev--

KEITH

Bro, wait, let me. You're gonna replace him?

ZACH

Nah, not really. I mean, yeah.

KEITH

I don't get it. You were talking so much shit in the car about the club. Why would you make another one?

ZACH

It's not really another one. It's the same group, but it doesn't focus on trying to build some artificial friendship. Forget the therapy drills, the stolen AA meeting semantics, we're not fourth graders, Keith. It's a new opportunity.

Keith, unabashed, points.

KEITH

You gonna smoke it or let it die?

Zach doesn't address it.

ZACH
(vibrant)
C'mon.

Keith won't budge, throwing up his hands in question. Zach lets out a sigh. Fine. He passes the joint back.

KEITH
(puffing)
You know, I figured that's why we got along. You and me, we had something alike for once, out of all the people I met in this thing.

ZACH
Okay?

KEITH
I got friends. You can meet em. I think you're a cool dude, Zach. You have goals, you just let people misguide you sometimes, I feel like. I mean whatever, it's a dope idea if it works for you--

ZACH
--What?

KEITH
Hmm?

ZACH
So that's it you're just gonna shut it down? You're gonna admit you have friends, that this group didn't impact you in any way. That for whatever reason you didn't need it.

KEITH
All I'm saying is... I saw Brady giving a talk at a hotel I was staying at about 4 years ago. He and I had a good conversation. Maybe I thought what he was doing was right, but really it was wrong. Or maybe... I was searching for something I didn't know I really needed to find--

ZACH
--Nah man. Keith I don't think we are that alike, bro.

Zach, still can't believe it, takes a good look at his car window and suddenly opens the door to get out, all in one motion.

Keith, distraught, peers. He glances back at the end of his joint, grabbing a small ash tray from a hidden department and putting it out.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Zach, in a t-shirt, pants, and sandals, sits back on a park bench.

He raises his sunglasses up to the top of his head.

Tristan strolls up and waves to him, sitting down beside him with a coffee cup in hand.

TRISTAN

What's goin' on man?

ZACH

Hey. Tristan, I um. Got some bad news.

TRISTAN

What happened?

ZACH

I can't sell you the insurance.

TRISTAN

Why not?

Zach takes it all in.

ZACH

The company's not real.

TRISTAN

I'm--

ZACH

--It wasn't real. The "insurance policy" company wasn't real. None of it.

TRISTAN

Oh.

Tristan takes a sip.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

You mean you made it up to impress me?

ZACH

No, no. I legitimately worked for a... well maybe not legitimately. It doesn't, I guess the point is that the company was a scam. I didn't even want to sell you the insurance in the first place, man.

Tristan, taken aback, shrugs it off.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Aren't you mad?

TRISTAN

I mean, not really. It's not that big of a deal. We switch policies all the time, I just wanted the referral bonus.

Zach stares at him, visibly frustrated.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

When'd you find out?

ZACH

Tristan, I need to ask you a favor.

TRISTAN

Okay...

ZACH

So, I'm involved in this 'friendship' club, at the village comm center.

TRISTAN

Oh, dude, sorry. I'm not religious.

ZACH

God. What? No, I'm. It's just a social club for adults.

TRISTAN

Like a book club.

ZACH

(conceding)

Like a book club. Yes, exactly.

(MORE)

ZACH (CONT'D)

And, the club's been going through some rough times lately, financially.

Tristan sips his cup nervously.

TRISTAN

Is this an investment?

ZACH

Currently I don't have the rent.

TRISTAN

Have you asked for dues?

Zach takes off his glasses completely, putting them in his pocket, shaking his head.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

What does the person in charge think?

ZACH

He said he's gonna call up an old friend today.

Zach offers up a look of desperation, albeit determined.

Tristan shuffles in his seat, facing Zach.

ZACH (CONT'D)

I know this is something I want to do... Do you remember when we were kids? I mean back when we used to live a block away from each other.

TRISTAN

What is this--

ZACH

--I've known you my whole life, Tristan. We've been friends. I used to drive you to school in the mornings. I used to give you my bagels during lunch. I designed us that sick ass roller kart for the derby in 7th grade. What do you not remember about that?

TRISTAN

I don't know, Zach. I do remember, I guess. But people change, life throws you curve balls. Paths are chosen.

(MORE)

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

I mean, it sounds more like a donation than an investment, too, what's the ROI?

Zach gets up and casually walks away.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

I mean really.

ZACH

This club might not be worth saving, but the reason I asked was because I figured if you and I can't be friends, you'd at least like to see me make my own.

Tristan stonefaces Zach as he sits on the bench.

INT. DENISE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike makes fake gut groans as he's sprawled out on the bed with Jenny, who is punching him on the chest.

JENNY

No, daddy you're supposed to knock out.

MIKE

I am knocked out. You knocked me out.

JENNY

Well then be quiet, go to sleep.

MIKE

Oh, okay.

Mike feigns sleep.

However, a phone BUZZES next to them.

JENNY

Oh.

(yelling)

Mommy!

MIKE

Wait, Jenny, shh.

Mike holds up the phone.

He sees that it's Zach and hangs up.

Mike goes into Denise's contacts and edits the name of Zach's contact info into "Unknown Number" as the first and last names.

High heels make patterned clicks from the nearby hallway.

Mike ditches the phone to the side.

Denise, in semi-formal attire, fixes one of her earrings as she enters.

DENISE

Hey.

MIKE

Hey.

JENNY

Hi mommy.

MIKE

You ever block unknown numbers?

Denise sits down, grabs her phone, and scrolls.

DENISE

What's that?

MIKE

Like scammy prank calls. You block them?

DENISE

No, should I?

MIKE

I would.

Jenny runs away.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Also Zach hasn't been calling lately. You think he's adjusting?

DENISE

I know right! What's happening? Maybe his club is doing well.

MIKE

Oh, yeah. That club. You know he never really called me either.

DENISE

About what?

MIKE

The job, the move. This is big for us. Why wouldn't he--

DENISE

--Mike, c'mon. He's just as devastated as we are excited.

MIKE

Yeah, but to just ignore this whole situation.

DENISE

He's coping.

MIKE

Really? You're saying y'all were that close? But not close enough to properly say goodbye?

Denise gives Mike a brutal stare.

DENISE

I'm trying to do the best I can here. So is he. It's complicated. If the world just shat on you at every turn, you don't think you'd take some time to reassess the situation?

MIKE

Not too much time.

Mike looks up at her, smug smiling.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Zach paces back and forth on the phone.

MONTAGE

ZACH

Lauren, hey, how's the softball team? No, no not looking to join. I mean, well. Do you need? Oh no I can't pitch. Um. Actually I was calling about the group. What do you think about dues?

Zach stares longingly through his window blinds, peeping.

ZACH (CONT'D)

God that's horrible, Rick. Yeah. Hey, by the way, I've been asking around. Some people seem pretty down on donating for first month's rent. You think--what's that? Oh, yeah, like, uh Mortimer? He's real big on it. Oh, he's the new guy. You've never met him? That's a shame. He's a real chad, for shur dude.

Zach crosses off some names on a sheet of paper vigorously.

ZACH (CONT'D)

April! Oh... you're not? Well shit, we're gonna miss ya.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Tony... Tony, listen. Look I know it's a lot of money. Hey, hey, maybe we make a deal? You know Feraldi's on eighth ave? Yeah I sold the owner insurance, I can get you a steak. What do you mean what else? You want a Ferrari? You want the Sistine Chapel painted on your ceiling? C'mon Tony what the fuck.

Zach, in just his underwear, sits up against a wall in his room. The gentle, tinged, yellow light from the neighbor's yard flashes in and out.

END MONTAGE

INT. ZACH'S CAR - DAY

Zach pulls up in his car to an empty parking space. There are no other cars currently around him.

Zach takes out his earphones and opens his door. In front of him is a BANK.

EXT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

Zach dashes up to the front and halts.

The sign up at the front of the bank says: "Competitive APR at 5%".

ZACH

You're shitting me. Hell yes.

Zach casually walks up to the door and opens it.

The door doesn't budge.

He jiggles it. Nothing.

Another jiggle. A forced pull. A thrust, opposite direction. Zach's nostrils flare. He turns around.

The parking lot is still empty.

Zach lightly toggles his closed fist against the bank window.

Increasing force with every bang of his fist, Zach shouts.

ZACH (CONT'D)

C'mon.

Zach turns around again to observe the lot.

ZACH (CONT'D)

It's fucking Wednesday.

Zach turns back around and tilts his head to see inside.

He jogs over to the other side of the building and sees the hours displayed.

Everyday is normal bank hours, even Wednesday.

ZACH (CONT'D)

What?

Zach pulls out his phone and types.

He nods his head sarcastically.

INT. ZACH'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Zach collapses his head on his steering wheel.

ZACH

Why do I even try?

Zach puts his earphones back in with his head remaining on the wheel.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Beverly files through some paperwork, her phone up to her ear.

BEVERLY
 You kiddin' right? And then he
 what?

She flips through the folder that's labeled: 'Organizations'.
 Beverly opens it up, scrolling carefully through each page.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 I heard that, but did you know that
 uh--Yes! Yes! They are supposed to
 give you the money back.

A BASKETBALL PLAYER returns a ball to the desk in front of
 Beverly.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Thank you, sir.
 (beat)
 No. No.

Beverly looks up to check the basketball player out.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Actually no. Definitely no.

Beverly returns to her work and ruffles through the papers
 quicker.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Are you coming over Sunday? Malcolm
 is dying to see Aleesa. Yes. I told
 you.

Beverly stops on a sheet.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Well you better.

She runs her hand down and sees the title of the group:
 "Unnamed Loner's Group".

Further down she spots Zach's name and the words: "Fee due
 Nov. 14th. Status: Unpaid."

Her mouth opens.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Nayna. I'm gonna have to call you
 back.

Beverly hangs up the office phone and re-dials.

INT. ZACH'S CAR - SAME

Zach brakes to a red traffic light as he answers his phone and puts it on speaker.

ZACH
(coy)
Hey Beverly, what's up?

BEVERLY (V.O.)
You tell me what's up? I think we missed your fee.

ZACH
Oh did you? Yeah, I think I could've sworn I turned it in the other day.

BEVERLY (V.O.)
Zach.

ZACH
I was actually planning on getting the money today from the bank.

BEVERLY (V.O.)
On Veteran's Day?

ZACH
Is that what--

BEVERLY (V.O.)
--Look as long as you can withdraw today that's fine. We just need it in by the 14th, that's two days in case you haven't marked your calendar, which it sounds like you haven't.

ZACH
Right, yeah. It's not exactly a withdrawal.

BEVERLY (V.O.)
I'm sorry?

ZACH
What?

BEVERLY (V.O.)
What was that?

A HONK interrupts the conversation as Zach freaks out for a moment, stepping on the gas.

The car in front of Zach is yards ahead of him.

ZACH

Sorry.

BEVERLY (V.O.)

Don't be sorry just get it on time.

ZACH

Got it.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Zach dials on his cell phone, putting it on speaker.

RECEPTIONIST

Darfund Hotel.

ZACH

Hi, is Brady Bickerstaff there?

RECEPTIONIST

Brady Bickerstaff?

(beat)

No, but he should be giving a talk tonight around 6:30.

ZACH

Um. No, that's okay. Can I leave a message?

RECEPTIONIST

Sure.

ZACH

Okay, just tell him... Zach Moon called.

Zach, vexed, hangs up the phone, settling into the couch.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zach stands in front of his paper board.

A single corner standup lamp fills the room like a medieval castle at night.

Several candles are lit as Zach puts on classical Chopin in the background.

He makes several, slow swipes with his sharpie on the board.

We are unable to see what Zach is writing.

He scratches his cheeks over and over, his nerves clearly tweaking.

Zach throws the sharpie at the board aggressively and then turns away.

Now, we see the board, which is dozens of words crossed out, some of them with huge X's instead of just single lines.

Zach chugs water from a cannister next to him. He leans over and grabs his laptop.

Zach patiently logs into his emails. There is **one** new message: from Tristan.

Zach opens it swiftly and reads it aloud.

ZACH

"Dear Zach. I thought about what you said. It hit me pretty deep, to a degree I guess. I'm sorry I couldn't fund your club. I know you and I had our moments, a lot of them good after a memory jog. I even remember that time back in middle school when we used to ride our bikes down to Ms. Windsett's house on the corner of our block and collect all of our parent's credit card bills and throw it at her front steps to scare the shit out of her. To this day I still don't think she knew who it was."

(to himself)

Hmm, probably wouldn't have picked that one.

(back to reading)

"Hah, anyways. I feel maybe remorse or guilt or something so this is an explanation for what I sent you in the mail."

Zach looks around, paranoid.

He sees nothing and then returns back to the email, confused.

ZACH (CONT'D)

"We all have different concepts of what makes us happy, of what makes us live, get up in the morning. I'm glad you've found yours and I hope you can find the funds because I

(MORE)

ZACH (CONT'D)
 think it's really great. But I think I'm giving you a sincerely better option to reach your investment goal. So don't give up that hope, man. See ya around. Tristan."

Zach pauses for a moment. His eyes widen.

He sets the laptop aside and sprints off.

EXT. ZACH'S NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Zach runs quickly down the street and turns a corner.

He finally sprints up to a PO Box and pulls out his keys from his pocket.

He steps up and down with both feet as if he has to pee with anticipation. The cold air from his breath dissipating fast.

Zach pulls his mailbox open and takes out an **ENVELOPE**.

He reaches in the mailbox slot to see if anything else is there, but nothing.

Zach stares at the envelope, looking at the front and back, then the front and back again - he can't believe it's from Tristan.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach paces back and forth, staring at the envelope which lay upright on his couch.

ZACH
 No fuckin' way dude. There's zero chance. Zero chance this frickin guy.

He walks briskly towards it, picking it up and tearing it open.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 (happy)
 He totally did. That jokester really wrote a fat check.

He pulls out a thin paper packet and reads it.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 What?

Zach's eyes dart back and forth as his expression turns from excitement to bitter disappointment and near disgust.

The front of the packet says: JOB APPLICATION - BARNES INVESTMENT GROUP.

Zach turns the paper over and mutters.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Zero chance.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Basketballs hum from the hallway.

People in workout gear, semi-formal attire, and theatre costumes pass each other by in open space.

Zach walks through the doors, disheveled, five o' clock shadow, hung on himself.

He limps up to the front desk and Beverly sees him.

BEVERLY
What's wrong with you?

ZACH
Are there any extensions on that fee?

BEVERLY
Nope. It's a hard date. It's really not that crazy to finish if you're serious about the club. What happened with you? Why'd you take so long to pay?

ZACH
I just don't have the capital right now. It's hard to exp--wait. Pay?

Beverly raises her eyebrow and turns over to the side of her desk, picking up a couple pieces of paper stapled together.

She drops them in front of Zach.

He reads the papers and sees his name and the fee pay status: "Paid".

Zach, awestruck, glares at Beverly.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 Beverly. You... Oh my God. I won't
 tell anyone if you don't.

BEVERLY
 Hah. For you? Nah. Someone left the
 fee on the desk.

ZACH
 What?

Beverly remains quiet, typing at her desk.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 Beverly, explain.

BEVERLY
 I don't know. It was an anonymous
 donation. I wasn't even here when
 it was made.

ZACH
 Well who was here?

BEVERLY
 I don't know. I don't remember.

ZACH
 Please, I gotta know.

BEVERLY
 Look, I don't know. Why don't you
 turn the damn page and play
 detective on your own, they left a
 note.

ZACH
 Really?

Zach flips the page and sees a handwritten note. Zach reads
 aloud.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 "Dear Zach--

BEVERLY
 --Uh uh.

Beverly points for him to step away.

ZACH
 "Dear Zach."

Zach slowly walks to an open space to read quietly to himself.

ZACH (CONT'D)

"I wanted to help you out on this, but I don't want you to think that this is something I owe you or is a favor or anything like that. I figured this is a way to let you know I still care. Life is just a cycle and eventually you'll get the return you want from your efforts."

Zach pulls the paper down, thinking.

He mouths out the words and looks back at Beverly who continues to type on her computer.

ZACH (CONT'D)

You sure you--

BEVERLY

--No!

Zach opens up the note again.

ZACH

"I don't think many people are good at figuring life out. Something tells me you are, maybe I just overlooked it. Sometimes you get things that are real, and sometimes all you receive is a bunch of bullshit from a bunch of bullshitters. Sincerely, anonymous. Good luck with the club or guild or whatever."

Zach, still at a loss, meanders back over to Beverly's desk.

ZACH (CONT'D)

I think it might've been Brady.

BEVERLY

Heh. Wouldn't be my first or second guess.

ZACH

(smiling)

You wanna get coffee or something after work?

BEVERLY

Are you paying?

ZACH

Well, considering I don't have to
pay my fee anymore...

BEVERLY

I don't drink coffee.

Zach maintains his smile.

Beverly winks back at him.

ZACH

See ya around.

BEVERLY

Bye.

Zach lays the papers down in front of her and smacks it.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

By the way, you're still gonna need
to give me an official name by
tomorrow. Just so you know.

ZACH

Oh I knew. I, knew that one...

Zach points his hands at her as he's walking away.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Just leave it blank for now.

INT. ZACH'S MOM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The stove top shines with a gleaming glass container of
banana pudding.

An embroidered cloth with a large metal spoon lie near it.

Mom grabs the spoon and digs into the silky surface of the
dessert before SLAM.

Zach enters the kitchen through the garage door with a
container wrapped in tin foil.

MOM

Hey! Was just about to call and ask
where you were.

ZACH

Oh yeah, hah.

Zach sets his dish on the island counter and sees the banana pudding.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Wait, did you make?

MOM
Yeah, what'd you make?

ZACH
Coffee cake...

Mom laughs, clapping her hands together.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Well aren't we fat.

Mom embraces Zach, handing him her spoon.

MOM
Here.

ZACH
Do you have paper plates?

MOM
In the pantry.

Zach waltzes over.

ZACH
So hey, that club I was telling you about?

MOM
Yeah.

ZACH (O.S.)
It's finally happening, but to be honest I didn't expect it.

MOM
Why's that?

Zach comes out with several paper plates and plastic silverware.

ZACH
I don't know. Something just kept telling me that it wasn't meant to be.

Zach offers some of his plastic-wear to her and serves himself the pudding.

Mom gets herself a plate of coffee cake.

MOM
Well, all that matters is it's here
now.

Zach shrugs, cutting away.

They both stand in the kitchen across from each other,
staring as they devour their respective lumps of sugary
cake/pudding.

MOM (CONT'D)
Are you excited?

ZACH
Hell yeah, I'm excited. To me this
is a huge step forward.

MOM
Well what's the issue then?

ZACH
Can I ask you something?

Mom puts her silverware down.

ZACH (CONT'D)
And I don't mean to come off as
philosophical or--

MOM
--Mhm.

ZACH
Whatever the case may be.

MOM
Right.

ZACH
But.

MOM
It's fine. Go ahead.

ZACH
Maybe it's a little rhetorical.

MOM
Zach...

ZACH

How do other people interact with each other?

MOM

What do you mean?

Mom shifts over to the fridge, grabbing a gallon of milk and setting it on the table.

ZACH

Anytime someone asks something of me, I find a way to go do it for them the best way I can.

MOM

Okay.

Mom walks over to the pantry coming out with two plastic cups.

ZACH

But then whenever I ask someone to do something for me, it's like the world just asked them to save itself from the apocalypse.

Mom pours them both a cup of milk.

MOM

Yeah?

ZACH

So what I'm asking is how do other people get anything done?

Zach takes a sip of the milk.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Like how does the world get ANYTHING done? Is it just me? Is it other people like me? What happens when two people saving the world from the catastrophe have to ask each another to do something? What happens then? How'd the world even get this far?

MOM

Zach, you're 35 and haven't figured this out yet?

ZACH

I feel like it's never too old to ask what the meaning of it is. I'm apparently the only one that has the audacity and balls to step up to a situation and take the blow, even though my goal is to stop the conflict. But yet it's hooks to the dome, uppercuts, body shots. And all life does is look at me every once in a while and says: hey, here's what you ordered. Goodbye. Why can't it just say hello?

Mom grabs their plates and throws them in the trash.

MOM

I see what you're saying. And you're right, you can't always just get over it and keep moving forward. It's not as easy as that. But you did it. You're here. And your club is here. Now you have a real opportunity.

ZACH

Mom--

MOM

--No. I'm serious, this is your chance. Not all of us can be leaders like you are Zach.

ZACH

But how am I the leader? After what I just said... every time I'm just the person who stays in the ring, the trenches. And I organize, I stick with shit, I commit to things, I..

Zach raises his hands up, nothing else to say.

Mom tilts her head, implying.

MOM

Why don't you stop trying to get everybody to listen to you and just listen to yourself? At least that's what I think.

A deafening pause. Zach marinates.

ZACH

You know, um, I actually have to go, I have to prepare for the first meeting. Some quick things I forgot to take care of. Thanks for the pudding, that a new recipe?

Zach rushes quickly to the exit. Mom follows him slowly.

MOM

Sure. And no, it's still grandma's.

Zach approaches her closely.

ZACH

Um... that was good, Mom.

MOM

Yeah, I hope I could help.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM

A room of tables and chairs decorate a quiet room.

The tables stand next to each other with refreshments of water and soda.

Besides them on the other table is a sign in sheet. The chairs stand upright in a full circle.

Zach enters the room in a long sleeve t-shirt and casual pants.

He's jamming out to music in his earphones, hyping himself up.

ZACH

"Come and talk to me. I really wanna meet you. Can I talk to you? I really wanna know you--"

Farouq enters the room bashfully.

FAROUQ

Um.

Zach stops immediately.

ZACH

Oh hey! What's up dude?

FAROUQ

Oh thank God it's not Brady again.
Or are you guys like--

ZACH

Nope. Unless he's signed in. Feel
free to grab some drink, sign some
sheet. Get comfortable. Others...
should be coming.

Zach steps out of the room.

EXT. HALLWAY - SAME

Zach looks around and sees empty space. A light from the
hallways flickers.

He checks his watch, it's 8:17.

Zach shrugs, disappointed. He pokes his head back in.

ZACH

Hey did you see if anyone got lost
or in the wrong room or? Did anyone
else come in with you?

FAROUQ

Nah, just me. Wait isn't that sort
of the point or--

Zach slams the door.

He paces for a moment before quickly striding down the
hallway and into the restroom.

INT. RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach looks at himself in the mirror. He shakes his head and
then nods.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTROOM - LATER

Zach slams his hand on the restroom.

INT. RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach spin kicks the stall door and gets into boxing position.

He throws a few jab punches at the space between the open stall door.

INT. RESTROOM - LATER

Zach's eyes open from being closed in front of the mirror. He takes a deep breath in and out.

He looks at his watch: 8:29.

Zach jumps up and nods, exiting the restroom.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Zach slowly steps down the hall towards the room. Stillness in the area.

The broken light flickers again. He rubs his hands together before turning the corner to his room.

Moderate noises emit from the room. His eyes widen.

Zach opens the door abruptly and sees a room of people, and still plenty of empty seats. Everyone's suddenly quiet.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He prances in, trying to contain his excitement.

ZACH

Hey everyone. Glad you could make it.

Zach presents his hands to the sign on the wall: a glorified poster which is just like the paper board on his wall at home.

This time it has a name: "Good Talk (A Social Group)".

CUT TO: BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zach smiles at everyone who all smile back. Everyone looks at him intently.

ZACH

Let's go around our actual circle of a room and just say who we are and where we work, I'll go first. I'm Zach Moon and I'm freshly unemployed after working at a ponzi scheme for six months.

A majority of expressions in the room are worried. Some nod like it doesn't phase them.

ZACH (CONT'D)

Ah, don't worry. I never got paid.

They all sigh, relieved.

FAROUQ

I'm Farouq, I'm a lawyer... And a slam poet.

A handful of hey's come from the group. Farouq awkwardly waves back.

Zach and Heather spot each other, to Zach's surprise.

HEATHER

Hi guys.. I'm Heather, I'm a software engineer by day, actor by night. Just trying to live life without having to think about living life...

Awkward pause, momentarily, but--

ZACH

Same though.

Zach nods, getting everyone else to nod as well.

AMY, 30s, waves to everyone.

AMY

Hi I'm Amy. I'm a stay at home mom currently until I--well I'm just in between jobs right now. My husband works at the local pharmacy right across the street from here, but once I find a job then--

ZACH

--I'm sorry, you said your husband is the pharmacist at this one right here?

AMY

Uh yes.

Zach clenches his lips up.

ZACH

Yeah I think him and I have met a few times.

AMY

I was actually going to invite him.

ZACH

Did he ever respond?

Amy looks at him confused.

Zach nods over to the next person, JOSH, 24.

JOSH

Hey I'm Josh, I'm a grad student at Ebens Law.

ZACH

How's that?

JOSH

It's lame.

FAROUQ

Dude right? Like that shit sucks man.

ZACH

Awesome. Nice to have you.

JOSH

Yeah for sure.

ANDREA, 27, peeks in.

ANDREA

Wait did you go to Ebens for undergrad?

JOSH

Yeah.

ANDREA

I think I went to school with your sister.

JOSH

Oh wait--
 (embarrassed)
 We've met haven't we?

NATALIE, late 30s, points to Farouq.

NATALIE

--I was gonna say I thought I've
 seen you somewhere too, Farouq.
 Were you in Brady's group?

FAROUQ

Yeah that's how I met, Zach.

NATALIE

Wait, Zach you were in that?

ZACH

(playing off)
 For like... one meeting, or two.

BEN, 40s, and ALLYSA, 40s, giggle next to each other.

ALLYSA

Okay, we were just about to say, I
 hope this isn't another one of
 those meetings where we just all
 take turns talking in a circle.

BEN

Yeah I think we're both happy that
 people can just have a fucking
 conversation and not make it weird
 like everyone's staring at us talk.

POV - CAMERA

We slowly creep away from the room as everyone talks
 interchangeably. Their laughter and conversation barely fades
 in volume.

FAROUQ (O.S.)

Should we do this more often?

NATALIE (O.S.)

Don't you dare say once a week.

ZACH (O.S.)

Ugh, you guys are gross, we can't
 start finishing each other's jokes
 already.

VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Right? Can we at least say our
names first.

The camera turns away further from corner of hallway to
corner of hallway as we continue to hear the voices speak.

ZACH (O.S.)

Definitely. Also does anyone else
have friends they want to invite?

Pause. Laughter.

FADE OUT.