

Cupcake

by

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INT. CHEERFUL DINING ROOM - DAY

Colorful balloons and birthday streamers fill the room. Unwrapped presents and wrapping paper are strewn everywhere.

A large group of giggly 12 YEAR-OLD GIRLS sit around the table finishing their pink frosted cupcakes, presided over by the attentive Birthday Mom.

BIRTHDAY MOM

Okay, finish up and go change into your bathing suits.

The girls squeal with delight and scurry off. All but one. A very chubby girl, JENNY, in garish homemade bead earrings lingers at the table. The swimming pool glistens in the sun through the sliding glass door. She eyes it with reluctance.

The Birthday Mom tidies up a bit.

BIRTHDAY MOM (CONT'D)

You don't have to go swimming if you don't want to.

Through the sliding glass door, Jenny spies several young girls in CUTE BATHING SUITS roaming the patio. Jenny squirms. She finishes her cupcake.

BIRTHDAY MOM (CONT'D)

Have as many as you want, sweetie.

Jenny's eyes widen.

JENNY

Thanks, Mrs. Adams.

The Birthday Mom gathers some used paper plates and cups and whisks them away. Jenny grabs several cupcakes, quickly unwraps them and shoves them into her mouth.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - DAY

TONY ROSSETTI, (50s) Italian-American, sits on his bed putting his shirt on. A sumptuous tanned blonde, KIM, (a fit 40) lays beside him tangled in sheets. She has a post-coital glow.

KIM

Ah. I needed that.

Tony pulls on some old well-worn jeans and a sloppy shirt. She gazes around the room. It's a bit shabby. Not very well decorated. Tony fits in. She doesn't.

She sits on the side of the bed. Slips into her designer clothes. Tony flops on the bed. Tries to nuzzle her, but she's shifted gears.

TONY

You wanna go get something to eat?

She bristles a bit and leans away from him.

KIM

Can't.

TONY

Okaaaay. How about we-

Time to nip this in the bud.

KIM

Tony, this was great. As usual. But I don't see us "hanging out" together. I'll just see you downstairs, okay?

She scoots away from him to pick up her high heels from the floor. Tony uses a light tone of voice to lift the mood.

TONY

It's kind of like walking on eggshells with you.

Kim takes a long, loathing look at the room.

KIM

The correct term is *eggs*, Tony. "Walking on eggs." Not eggshells.

EXT. BIRTHDAY HOUSE SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Jenny approaches the pool, still in regular clothes. All the other little girls are swimming.

A small group of girls whisper and laugh while looking in Jenny's direction. A pretty blonde girl, TAMARA, jokes.

TAMARA

She probably can't fit into a suit.

The BIRTHDAY GIRL waves Jenny in to the pool.

BIRTHDAY GIRL

Aren't you coming in?

The snickering group all look at Jenny. A solitary lump with smudges of pink frosting on her face.

JENNY

No.

She points down to the water.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Chlorine causes cancer, ya know.

The little girls look at each other, alarmed.

INT. CHEERFUL DINING ROOM - DAY

The Birthday Mom clears the shredded wrapping paper from the floor around the table. She glances at the table, shocked.

A DOZEN DISCARDED CUPCAKE WRAPPERS sit on Jenny's plate.

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT OF BAKERY

The bakery is in a nice area of Old Town, Pasadena. The bakery is old, but now surrounded by hip shops and boutiques.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony's bakery is bustling. Several bakery EMPLOYEES wait on constant streams of customers taking home baked goods and hot drinks. Some sit-down customers take their espressos and pastries to the light-filled seating area.

The glass case is full of luscious goodies and breads.

Tony is behind the counter putting some finishing touches on his latest masterpiece, a large tray of glazed pear tarts with pecan sauce. Gorgeous.

Kim sits with her group of upscale housewives sipping lattes and fiddling with their iPhones.

Her group steal carnivorous glances and sly smiles at Tony as he wields his baking tools.

Tony does his best to ignore them, but the turning heads of the women distract him. His normally steady hand slips. This pear's creme piping isn't so perfect.

One of Tony's employees is an earthy tie-dyed college student, SETH. His attention is caught by something in the seating area. Tony looks too.

Kim is holding her empty latte cup up and waving it at Tony. Seth stares at her rude gesture and laughs.

SETH
(to Tony)
Does she think we have table service?

Tony and Seth stare at her in disbelief for a few seconds.

KIM

Excuse me.

She waves her empty cup at Tony again.

Tony puts his cake decorating tools down, wipes his hands and treks out to her table. She hands him her empty cup.

KIM (CONT'D)

Can I get another one please? Thanks so much.

Tony stands rooted to the spot. After no further introductions happen he returns behind the counter.

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - LATER

Tony bursts out of the front door, a large white paper bag in hand. Walks to his late '90s model car. Nothing special.

INT. BIRTHDAY HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Tony follows the Birthday Mom into her cluttered kitchen.

BIRTHDAY MOM

The cupcakes were to die for. I sneaked one myself before the party. Shh, don't tell the girls.

She giggles. Tony beams with pride.

TONY

Thanks.

BIRTHDAY MOM

(shouting)

Jenny! Your dad's here!

TONY

I'm really sorry I couldn't have done a nice sheet cake for you.

She shakes her head and waves away his protest.

BIRTHDAY MOM

No, no. Don't be silly, I didn't give you enough fair notice. Besides, the cupcakes were a big hit. And much easier to serve.

TONY

Still, I felt bad. Made you these.

Tony hands her the large white paper bag. She peeks in and gasps, as though seeing the Holy Grail of baked goods.

BIRTHDAY MOM

Oh my gosh! Those look scrumptious.

She takes them out of the bag and lays them on the counter. Six or seven stunning looking pastries.

BIRTHDAY MOM (CONT'D)

You must sell lots of these.

TONY

Actually this is the first batch. Brand new. You got 'em all.

She gasps in marvel. They do look amazing.

BIRTHDAY MOM

You simply must take a few home for yourself.

Tony laughs at the idea.

TONY

No, it's fine, we have more than enough things at home -

But she's already slipped a few back into the bag and handed it to him. He graciously accepts it. She becomes suddenly secretive and leans in close, drawing him in closer.

BIRTHDAY MOM

Could I just mention something?

INT. CHEERFUL DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the adjoining room, Jenny gets her prize bag and favors. She pops another cupcake into her mouth. When she hears the Birthday Mom speaking in hushed tones, she hangs back and stays hidden. Listens.

INT. BIRTHDAY HOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

BIRTHDAY MOM

Now I know at birthday parties the kids tend to overdo things a bit. I'm certainly guilty of having way too much ice cream and cake and candies here today...but....

She leans closer to speak. Tony leans closer to hear.

INT. CHEERFUL DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jenny leans closer to hear.

INT. BIRTHDAY HOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Now it's a whisper.

BIRTHDAY MOM

Not that I normally count such things,
but I noticed that Jenny ate about 15
cupcakes.

Tony lets this sink in, dazed.

INT. CHEERFUL DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jenny fumes silently. But before the adults can continue,
Jenny forces a cheerful appearance in the doorway.

JENNY

Hi, Dad. Ready! Let's go.

EXT. BIRTHDAY HOUSE - DAY

Jenny hops into their car. Tony walks around to the driver's
side, but stops before opening his door.

He closes the white paper bag and rolls the top down. He rolls
it down so far, so hard his knuckles turn white. Cream and
rich raspberry mush seep through the paper bag.

As he gets into the car he surreptitiously shoves the mangled
mess into the side pocket of the door.

INT. TONY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Tony squirms uncomfortably as he drives.

TONY

Was the party fun?

JENNY

Uh huh.

TONY

You go swimming? Hair looks dry.

He pats her hair to check it. She shakes her head.

JENNY

Didn't want to.

TONY

Mrs. Adams said you liked my cupcakes.

She rolls her eyes.

JENNY

Smooth, Dad. Yes, I ate some cupcakes.

Tony uses the lightest tone of voice he can.

TONY

She said you had quite a few.

JENNY

(quietly, almost
to herself)

She lied.

TONY

Now why would she lie to me?

JENNY

Not to you. To *me*. Said I could have
as many as I wanted, then snatched on
me for it.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony is hard at work kneading dough when the perfect distraction appears: Tony's cousin FELIX (late 30s) saunters in through the back door. Flak jacket and greasy hair, Felix looks like he hasn't slept all night.

TONY

Hey. Run out of shampoo?

FELIX

No time for that. I'm a busy man. Out
making connections, finding leads...

TONY

Tasting beer, bothering women...

FELIX

This guy I know, his dad runs a plumbing
company. Says he'll hire me. Their
plumbers make up to \$300 a day!

Tony's heard it before.

TONY

Uh huh. "Up to."

Felix follows Tony around as Tony unloads loaves of bread from wall ovens.

FELIX

No really. Says I can start whenever I
want.

TONY
Just one problem, Felix.

FELIX
Yeah, I'm not a plumber. Yet.

Jenny passes through.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Hey, Cupcake, what's up?

TONY
(quietly to
Felix)
Funny you should call her that.

Jenny pulls a note from her schoolbag. Hands it to Tony.

JENNY
Hi Felix. Dad, Miss McIntyre wants to
see you.

FELIX
How was school?

JENNY
Not boring, but super boring. We had
to diagram sentences.

Both Tony and Felix groan together and laugh.

FELIX
Yuck!

TONY
They still teach that stupid stuff?
When on earth does anyone use that?

Felix pushes her hair back to see her earrings better.

FELIX
Stunning use of color, Cupcake.

Tony reads the note from the teacher. Frowns a bit.

INT. 6TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

Tony inspects a student's hand-drawn book report covers that's
been tacked to the wall. He's all alone.

TONY
Nice coloring. Strong style.

He checks the student's name on the inside cover.

TONY (CONT'D)

Nice job, Randy.

He scans the empty room. Loads of classic literature, some students' work is still on the blackboard.

He notices a large educational poster about Alice in Wonderland. It shows Alice talking to the Cheshire Cat. Tony shivers and is creeped out.

TONY (CONT'D)

Ech.

He's full of nervous energy. His foot taps super fast.

GINA (40s) is a bundle of explosive energy who bursts into the room already mid-sentence. Tony snaps to attention like the ex-Catholic schoolboy that he is.

GINA

...these damn staff meetings always run late. And why? Because we are discussing invigorating and exciting new curriculum?

Tony is stunned silent. Is he expected to answer?

GINA (CONT'D)

Or effective ways of bringing down the absences? Or techniques for keeping the students interested?

She dumps a pile of papers and books on her desk.

GINA (CONT'D)

No. Because we started so late due to an extensive discussion regarding whether or not to use yellow chalk or white chalk exclusively. Apparently we can save like eight cents if we use yellow only. Like who cares, right?

She stares straight at Tony, full of shock and mild rage.

GINA (CONT'D)

These are the teachers teaching your children!

He shoves his hands into his jacket pockets and shifts his weight on his feet.

TONY

Um. I only have *one* child.

His comment stops her cold. Then she laughs.

GINA

Sorry. I get so caught up. You must be Jenny's dad. I'm Gina McIntyre, Jenny's English teacher.

She offers a casual hand across her desk. They shake. Tony still stands at attention like a student being called on. Again she laughs.

GINA (CONT'D)

At ease, soldier. Take a seat.

Tony tries to act casual.

TONY

Sir, yes sir.

They both sit. She eyes him. Was that a joke or a jab?

GINA

Sorry, I tend to sort of bulldoze my way into conversations and scare people. Don't worry, I won't let you drown in my tears.

He can't help but furrow his brow in confusion.

GINA (CONT'D)

Sorry again. I've got Alice in Wonderland on the brain. We're putting the play on and so I've re-immersed myself in it. Alice nearly drowns the animals in her tears... nevermind.

TONY

I *hated* that book. Gave me the creeps.

GINA

Yeah, I guess it is a bit weird.

TONY

I'm so glad I never have to deal with Alice in Wonderland again.

She clears her throat and switches to official teacher mode.

GINA

I've asked you here to talk about Jenny.

TONY

Well that's good, 'cause if you brought me here to talk about somebody else's kid I probably wouldn't be very interested.

A fake polite laugh from her. He grins smugly.

GINA

Then I guess it's a good thing I'm interested enough for all of them. Even if I do inflict 'stupid sentence diagramming' on them.

Busted! He slinks down in his chair.

GINA (CONT'D)

Keeping the kids interested is hard enough without you telling my students that what I am teaching them is 'stupid.'

TONY

One kid! I said that to one kid! Like sentence diagramming is important. I've never used it.

A long thoughtful pause from her.

GINA

I'm sure you haven't.

A standoff. "Shall we keep going?" No, enough.

GINA (CONT'D)

Nevertheless...I pride myself on the fact that I feel responsible for these kids. Not only their education, but their emotional well-being, their self-esteem. Their futures.

Her build-up is worrying.

GINA (CONT'D)

As I'm sure you know, as well as teaching English I'm in charge of the headphone rental in study hall --

TONY

Nope. Didn't know.

She purses her lips tightly before continuing.

GINA

Well I am. If they want, they can listen to books on tape for a small fee. We find it helps to hear it spoken for some of the kids who have trouble reading.

Tony still isn't following.

GINA (CONT'D)

Anyway. Each child gets a turn taking the money and assigning a walkman and a CD to the student. Jenny didn't mention this to you?

Tony shakes his head no.

GINA (CONT'D)

I have no concrete proof, but I have very strong suspicions...

Tony leans forward...waiting...

GINA (CONT'D)

Jenny seems to be stealing money when it's her turn.

He's relaxed now. He laughs.

TONY

Oh come on. Jenny? No way. Why would she do that?

GINA

I'm very serious, Mr. Rossetti.

TONY

She's too smart for that.

GINA

Ah, but you see, that's the thing.

She hops up, comes around to the front of her desk and sits on the edge of it, closer to Tony. He steals a quick up and down glance. Not bad.

GINA (CONT'D)

It's actually quite clever the way she does it.

FLASHBACK TO JENNY IN THE ACT

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She waits until it's her turn to man the cash box.

Jenny sits with a petty cash lock-box, reading while she waits. A student approaches.

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She lets a few transactions go by normally.

The kid gives her two bucks. She writes it on a ledger and stamps his hand. He goes to his seat and listens to his CD.

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She needs *some* money in the cash box,
 otherwise it'd look suspicious.

A few more kids come over, pay her the fee. She writes it down and puts the money in the box.

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But then every other transaction or
 so...she takes their money...

A kid hands her his fee. She takes it and puts it aside.

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But she doesn't write it up.

JENNY
**We're all out of receipts. Here, let
 me just stamp your hand...**

She stamps his hand. He takes his CD and walkman.

GINA (V.O.)
 But the kid doesn't care. He's getting
 the service he paid for. And she gets
 two bucks.

She takes the money, and surreptitiously slips it in her pocket.

GINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And no one's the wiser since there's no
 way to inventory things.

END FLASHBACK

TONY
 Oh my God.

Tony covers his face with his hands.

GINA
 Quite clever actually. I'm not sure if
 I should be worried...or impressed.

He's mortified.

GINA (CONT'D)
 Um...but there's a bit more.

TONY
 Oh God.

Gina hops off her desk and walks to a small student's desk.
 Tony swivels to watch her. She crouches down.

GINA

I think I know what she's spending the money on.

She reaches into the storage space under the seat. She pulls out a huge wad of very crinkly, noisy papers. Tony squints. What is it?

A huge pile of EMPTY CANDY AND SWEET TREAT WRAPPERS.

He stares at the pile, wide-eyed.

FLASHBACK

Echoey flashback of a much younger Tony walking into the bakery's storage room. The sound of CRINKLY WRAPPERS turns into GLASS BOTTLES CLINKING. A pretty young WOMAN is frantic. She piles several half-empty vodka bottles into her arms from a hidey hole.

Tony freezes. She turns to him, her eyes full of tears. Her voice is distant, echoey, full of hurt.

WOMAN

How many other hiding places are there?

Gina's voice snaps him back to the present.

END FLASHBACK

GINA

These wrappers are just from the past few days.

A knife into his heart.

JENNY (O.S.)

We're all out of receipts. Here, let me just stamp your hand...

GLASS BOTTLES CLINK LOUDLY, NEVER ENDING, SO LOUD UNTIL --

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

It's quiet and still. The bakery is closed. Tony is working feverishly, drenched in sweat, but not slowing down.

The bread display case is filled to the brim. An extra display basket on the counter is also overflowing with loaves. And there are more loaves stacked on the work tables.

Tony pulls more loaves out of the ovens, one after another. Bread is piling up everywhere.

The back door SLAMS. Felix appears in the baking area. He takes in the scene, the overabundance of loaves.

FELIX

Ut oh. What happened?

Tony finally stops, exhausted.

FELIX (CONT'D)

The Baking Fiend is back!

Felix snatches a fresh loaf.

TONY

Careful, they're hot.

Felix rips the bread open and digs out a chunk. He yelps in pain from the hot bread.

TONY (CONT'D)

Did I mention it was hot?

Tony catches his breath while Felix devours the fresh bread.

FELIX

Why the baking therapy? Got any butter?

TONY

No, we're a bakery, what would WE be doing with butter?

Tony tosses him an industrial size tub of butter. Felix dips the hot bread straight into it.

TONY (CONT'D)

You think I'm the first addict in the family?

Felix's bread halts mid-dip.

FELIX

Huh?

TONY

In our family...like blood-wise I mean. My dad wasn't, your dad isn't. Our mothers aren't.

FELIX

Oh, you mean your mother upstairs with more lions and warthogs in her room than on the entire African continent?

TONY

You can't count that.

FELIX

No?

TONY

You think?

Felix shrugs.

TONY (CONT'D)

I figured she was just going through some delayed childhood thing. Never had much of a childhood in Italy.

FELIX

Yeah, maybe. But she's definitely addicted to 'em.

Tony considers this, then shrugs and returns to his loaves.

TONY

Hey, whatever keeps her happy.

INT. MRS. ROSSETTI'S BEDROOM - DAY

An exquisite hand-carved antique dresser dominates one corner of the bedroom.

MRS. ROSSETTI (O.S.)

This one is rare. See the crown? Hard to find.

The massive dresser *would* look elegant and old world, except for the fact that it is absolutely covered with hundreds of tiny plastic Lion King figures.

All neatly categorized, all of the Simbas are together, all of the Rafikis, all of the Scars. A huge landscape of the Lion King world.

A spry, tiny figure, MRS. ROSSETTI (early 80s) proudly dusts her collection. Jenny lays on the bed, a polite hostage.

JENNY

I know, I know, you almost never find a Simba with a crown.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Did you see this one? It's Rafiki, but his fur is lighter than all the other Rafikis.

There's quite a trace of an Italian accent in Mrs. Rossetti.

JENNY

Yes, Grandma, I was with you when you bought it, remember?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Oh, that's right.

JENNY

Jeez, Grandma, your memory's going.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Yes, I know, don't remind me!

Mrs. Rossetti's joke was unconscious. Jenny stifles a laugh.

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)

Jenny, don't wallow on the bedspread.

JENNY

Wallow?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Are you ready to go?

JENNY

(laughs)

Wallow? What the heck is wallow?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Get up, don't be lazy. Thrift store?

JENNY

Yeah!

Jenny rolls off the bed.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Jenny skips through the bakery with Mrs. Rossetti in tow. There is still way too much bread. As they pass Tony, Jenny simply shouts her destination at him.

JENNY

Thrift store!

Tony waves goodbye.

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

As Mrs. Rossetti shuts the door behind her the handmade sign in the window shifts.

"BUY ONE LOAF, GET THREE FREE!"

INT. THRIFT STORE - DAY

Gobs of tiny toys have been sorted and put into clear plastic bags. Mrs. Rossetti holds a bag up, shakes it so she can get a good look at everything. She spots something of interest.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Ooh. Is that a Simba?

She sees the price tag is \$2, but it's for the entire bag. She tosses it back onto the pile.

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)

Why don't they just sell these separately?

EXT. PASADENA STREET - DAY

Tony waits his turn to buy a newspaper from a newsstand. As he waits, he scans the magazines in front of him.

A women's magazine with a voluptuous cover model. He scans the article titles. "A FIRMER BUTT IN TEN DAYS" and "SCALPEL-FREE FACELIFTS". But one in particular catches his eye. "WHY WE OVEREAT: FILLING THE VOID."

As casually as he can, Tony takes the magazine and skims through it until he finds the article.

INT. DUKE'S CAFE - DAY

Tony finishes his lunch while perusing his new magazine. As his CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (50s) approaches he hides the magazine in the folds of his newspaper.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

No dessert, right?

He shakes his head and smiles.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Nope, you never get dessert. We got some real good cherry pie.

TONY

No, thanks.

She slaps his check down on the table.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

I'm always pushing the pie, huh?

Her bubbly laughter is contagious and Tony chuckles too.

TONY

You are a persistent pie pusher.

She is an easy laugh. She giggles with delight.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

More coffee before you go?

He nods in acquiescence. She pours.

As she walks back to the counter he watches her go. Then he slides the magazine out and continues to read.

INT. ROSSETTI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mrs. Rossetti gives Jenny a big scoop of mashed potatoes. Tony picks at his food.

TONY

How's school today?

Jenny shrugs.

TONY (CONT'D)

C'mon, a real answer please.

JENNY

S'okay. Science was kinda cool. We added some gross smelling stuff to a thing of clear liquid and it changed color.

TONY

Oh. Well I'm glad you remembered all the technical terminology. That's what's important.

JENNY

Who gives a crap about all that anyway?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Jenny! Don't use the C word!

JENNY

The C word? Cancer? Crap isn't the C word, Grandma. Besides, I don't need all that science stuff.

TONY

Oh really? And why not?

JENNY

I'm going to be a writer.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Writer? What does that pay? That sounds...*artistic*.

Artistic...a disdainful word.

TONY

Since when do you wanna be a writer?

She shrugs.

JENNY

Or an actress. Or maybe I'll go into business and make tons of money. They teach that in DECA.

MRS. ROSSETTI

DECA?

TONY

It's like a club that teaches kids how to handle business.

MRS. ROSSETTI

That sounds better.

TONY

What type of business?

JENNY

Jeez, I don't know, Dad. Why are we playing twenty questions tonight?

TONY

I'm just interested, that's all! Maybe we could get you into some type of...

Jenny waits. And waits.

JENNY

Type of....?

TONY

I don't know! A club, a group? A writer's club? Do they have those?

JENNY

Yeah, they're called English class.

TONY

I just thought maybe you might have some sort of...

Jenny waits. Mrs. Rossetti waits.

TONY (CONT'D)
 ...uh...in your life there may be...for
 many reasons...maybe because your mother
 left, or whatever...a bit of a *void*.

It was worth the wait. Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti bust up
 laughing.

JENNY
 A void? You mean like a black hole?
 'Cause my mom left? Can't miss what
 you never knew.

MRS. ROSSETTI
 What are you talking about, Tony? Eat.

Tony's serious tone is lost on them.

JENNY
 Dessert?

Tony sighs.

TONY
 ONE thing.

She is happy now.

JENNY
 Oh! Speaking of English class! I was
 taking a test today and Miss McIntyre
 was standing by the door talking to
 Miss Kearny. I went up to turn my test
 in, and I heard her say "Oh I met Jenny's
 dad the other night." Miss Kearny says
 "What's he like?"

Tony cringes. He suddenly finds his potatoes fascinating.

JENNY (CONT'D)
 And she said "He was so cute I just
 wanted to nibble on him."

Tony seems a bit excited to hear this.

TONY
 Really?

He's all smiles, then covers it with feigned indifference.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Well...hmmm.

INT. JENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jenny's bedroom is a little girl room that she is on the brink of outgrowing. She sits at her dressing table looking in the mirror. She takes a bite of a chocolate eclair.

JENNY

So when did you realize you had a gift?

She's talking to her reflection. A glob of Bavarian cream squishes out of the eclair as she takes a few more bites.

JENNY (CONT'D)

(mouth full)

Well, I was very young when it was brought to my family's attention that I had gifts in many areas.

Her eclair is gone. She puts on her homemade earrings.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Without bragging I can say I was the envy of the school.

She leaves the mirror and goes to her closet.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I starred in all of the plays.

From the deep recesses of her closet she pulls out a white paper bag.

JENNY (CONT'D)

And I started my own line of jewelry while still a teenager.

Back to her interview mirror. She pulls out another eclair from the bag.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I wrote my first novel when I was 18 --

A quick KNOCK on her door. She freezes.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Yeah?

Tony pops his head in.

TONY

Time for bed.

He points to her eclair.

TONY (CONT'D)
Just the one, kiddo.

JENNY
Yeah, Dad! Okay!

INT. 6TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS - AFTERNOON

Students trickle out of Gina's classroom. Tony scoots inside the door.

GINA
Anyone who watches "The Merchant of Venice" on PBS tonight gets extra credit!

The last student exits.

GINA (CONT'D)
Oh hey, Mr. Rossetti. We meet again.

TONY
How do you know if they watched it or not? For the extra credit.

GINA
Honor system.

TONY
Ah. Middle school kids and the honor system...good strategy. Hey, I was wondering if I could ask you something.

GINA
Ut oh...are we going down the rabbit hole?

He tries to catch her meaning, but nothing comes.

TONY
Rabbit hole?

GINA
Alice in Wonderland. C'mon Mouse, I figured you'd get that one!

TONY
Oh, I'm a mouse now?

She gathers her things, and they head out.

GINA
Not a mouse, but Mouse. That's his name. You seemed a bit skittish the other day. When Alice first meets the Mouse, he's skittish and she scares him off.

He nods, not quite getting it.

GINA (CONT'D)
In Alice and Wonderland.

TONY
Ah.

GINA
I know how you love that book.

Her smirk is a little too cocky.

TONY
Yeah, I DO actually. I love the Mouse.
He's so cute I just want to nibble on
him.

This stops her dead in her tracks. He grins at her. She smiles sheepishly. 'Okay, we're even now.'

She switches off the light, and they exit.

GINA
Note to self, never say ANYTHING out
loud again.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Tony follows her as she walks to her car.

TONY
I was reading something yesterday...

GINA
"Through the Looking Glass"?

He's lost again.

GINA (CONT'D)
Yeah, the sequel to...nevermind. You
really worried about something?

TONY
Yeah.

GINA
About Jenny?

TONY
Yeah...

He can't get the words out.

GINA

Listen, Mouse, you wanna go get some coffee?

He's relieved.

TONY

Yeah.

Her eyes light up.

GINA

Or how about bowling?

TONY

How'd you go from coffee to bowling?

GINA

There's this cool bowling alley over near Hudson...they turn the lights off and you bowl in the dark. The pins are all glow in the dark, the ball too. I heard it was awesome. Or maybe not glow in the dark, but black light or something - I know they use special paint for that and -

TONY

No, no. Coffee's fine.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Gina and Tony sit in a booth, coffee in front of them.

TONY

Jenny's mom left when Jenny was about two. Jenny doesn't even remember her. Gail, my wife, was much younger than me, and then she wanted to wait to have kids. So here I am past 50 with a middle-schooler.

Gina puts her hands up, a gesture of "I'm not touching this one."

TONY (CONT'D)

Do you think...?

GINA

She overeats because her mother left? So, what's the solution? Bring her mother back? You think the link is that direct?

TONY

No, of course not. But why is she addicted to sugar?

GINA

Addiction's a funny thing.

Tony nods and points to himself.

TONY

Yeah. I know.

GINA

Oh! Uh...I didn't...

TONY

Been in AA for nine years. Totally sober.

GINA

Good for you.

They sip their coffee, deep in thought.

GINA (CONT'D)

You want to know why Jenny eats? Well let me ask you this. Why did you drink?

He nods. Yeah, good point.

TONY

Like I said, I was reading something about why we overeat. They mentioned having a void in your life.

GINA

Who mentioned?

TONY

I think it was a...medical journal or psychiatrist's report or something.

She nods thoughtfully.

GINA

So...you want to know...if I've notice any...?

TONY

Actually, I was wondering if there was anything in school you think she might be suited for. Like clubs or special groups. Something to...

GINA

Fill the void?

TONY

Yeah.

She doesn't look convinced.

TONY (CONT'D)

Look, I know it's a long shot, but I don't know what else to do.

She takes a big gulp of coffee.

GINA

Hmm. She's good at creative writing. But there's not really a club or anything for that.

TONY

She mentioned DECA...what about that?

She shrugs.

GINA

I suppose. I think you need three teacher recommendations to get in. Seems good, teaches kids to prepare for the harsh business world of adulthood.

TONY

Would you recommend her?

GINA

Yeah, of course. If she asks. I'll try and steer her that way. I'll help her learn whatever topic she's interested in. "Ambition, distraction, uglification and derision."

He looks sideways at her.

TONY

Is that another Alice quote?

Now *she* looks sideways at *him*.

GINA

I thought you said you read it. Here I am constantly quoting it to creep you out and you don't seem to...

He can barely meet her eye.

TONY

I did. But...I meant the kid's picture book. You know, from the Disney movie.

GINA

Oh.

TONY

Never read the actual book.

She nods.

GINA

Ah.

Awkward pause for them both.

GINA (CONT'D)

You know, Tony, I bet hardly anyone's read the actual book. I'm just a literature geek.

He finally smiles.

TONY

Yeah, you are a bit geeky.

They are okay again. Then it sinks in.

TONY (CONT'D)

Wait. You were trying to creep me out on purpose?

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Jenny, alone as usual, strolls down the hall. A wall of flyers catches her attention. A large red DECA notice tries to entice members. She goes toward it. But it is the flier below it that she is aiming for. "TRYOUTS FOR ALICE IN WONDERLAND, FRIDAY THE 25TH, 3:30. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER."

JENNY

Let's go down the rabbit hole.

INT. 6TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

As the class leaves, snotty little Tamara and her two sidekicks end up shuffling down the same aisle as Jenny. The other three girls wear the same type of delicate necklace. Jenny notices.

Gina notices that Tamara and her cronies exchange disdainful looks at Jenny's jewelry then leave her behind. Jenny approaches Gina at the desk to turn in her paper.

GINA

Hey, I really like your earrings.

JENNY

Thanks.

GINA
They're really unusual. Where'd you
get them?

JENNY
I made them.

Gina looks impressed.

GINA
You did? Wow. That's great. I noticed
you wear lots of cool earrings. You
must really like them.

Jenny shrugs.

JENNY
Earrings always fit.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Felix, Tony, and two other blue collar workers, RUGGED OVERALLS
and GREASE MONKEY sit playing poker at a folding card table.

FELIX
I'm telling you, plumbers make great
money!

TONY
Felix, we know that. It's just that we
don't really see you *doing* this.

FELIX
Why? I already finished trade school!

Tony deals.

RUGGED OVERALLS
But you ain't licensed yet. Ante up.

GREASE MONKEY
Heard that's a bitch of a test to pass.

FELIX
Thanks for your faith in me, guys.

RUGGED OVERALLS
What do you want with plumbing anyway?
It's dirty and stinky.

FELIX
And pays well!

GREASE MONKEY
Missed you at last week's meeting, Tony.

FELIX

So much for the 'anonymity'!

TONY

S'okay, everyone here knows I go to AA.
He's my sponsor.

(to Grease Monkey)

Had to go to a parent-teacher meeting.
Dealer takes two.

GREASE MONKEY

What about the week before that?

TONY

Had to stay late for a delivery.

The hand is played out. Felix wins.

FELIX

Victory is mine! Riches are mine!

He sweeps the large pile of poker chips into his arms.

RUGGED OVERALLS

You do realize the chips are only a
nickel each?

TONY

He just doubled his life savings.

GREASE MONKEY

Well, gentlemen, I gotta get home.

RUGGED OVERALLS

Yeah, me too. Got any day-olds?

TONY

Yeah, box by the back door.

Rugged Overalls digs through a large box of the day's donuts
on the floor by the back door. He finds treasure.

RUGGED OVERALLS (O.S.)

Alright, score! Chocolate rules!

He picks out a few donuts and leaves with Grease Monkey.

TONY

Shit. He's right.

FELIX

Yeah, I do appreciate a bit of chocolate
now and then. Did you know it wasn't
introduced into the western world until -

TONY

No! I mean, I skipped my last two AA meetings.

Felix stops stacking his chips.

FELIX

You aren't...slipping are you?

TONY

Nah. But I could be doing better.

FELIX

How do you mean? Isn't 'not drinking' the ultimate goal? You haven't had a drink in nine years.

TONY

Well, yeah, but...there's more.

FELIX

Your steps?

TONY

Yeah.

FELIX

Which step are you on?

TONY

Nine.

FELIX

Weren't you on...?

TONY

Yeah, yeah! I was on step nine two years ago! Take your winnings and leave.

FELIX

Which one is step nine?

TONY

(by rote)

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

FELIX

Oh, the amends. Well, that list can't be that long. You hurt your wife by drinking, but she's gone. You hurt that one guy at the party after you thought he was sitting on your coat.

TONY

No, no, no. You don't just apologize for anything you've done wrong due to your drinking. You have to make amends to everyone you've ever wronged...ever.

FELIX

Oh shit. You can't mean *everyone*.

Tony nods.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Like, if you skipped out on paying a tab in a restaurant ten years ago...?

TONY

Yup. Write a check and send it to them.

FELIX

Even if your 'wrong' had nothing to do with drinking?

TONY

Yup.

FELIX

Holy shit. That's gotta be a big list.

Tony's offended look makes Felix back-pedal.

FELIX (CONT'D)

No, not just you. I mean with anyone. Every single thing you've done wrong. Wow. They add up.

TONY

Yup.

FELIX

Hey, wait a minute. Weren't they supposed to leave money? What the hell good are plastic chips?

He seems seriously distressed.

TONY

You need some money?

Felix sighs. Pushes all of his chip piles over.

FELIX

How about I help out for a few days?

TONY

Sure. Seth is taking a few days off,
you can cover for him.

Felix scoops his worthless poker chips off the table and back into their container. Tony cleans the cards and snacks from the table.

TONY (CONT'D)

You think addictions are inherited?

Felix gives this some deep thought as he folds up the chairs.

FELIX

No. Not genetically.

TONY

By example?

FELIX

Maybe. You see your parents dealing with problems by drinking or gambling, maybe it's a learned behavior. On the other hand, there are families with no addictions and then a kid'll end up severely addicted to heroin or pills or anything he can get his hands on, so who knows? Maybe genetics AND environment? It's complex. Millions of variables involved. This about Jenny?

TONY

Uh huh.

FELIX

Oh man, she's not sneaking drinks is she? She's only twelve.

TONY

No. Sugar. Eating.

FELIX

Ah. A sugar junkie. But what kid isn't?

Tony shakes his head slowly.

TONY

I think hers goes beyond that.

FELIX

You've had your bottle under control since she was like, what, two or three? I doubt she picked up on much at that age.

TONY
And now I make her live in a bakery.

FELIX
ABOVE a bakery.

Tony folds up the table and tucks it away. Felix and he move to the front of the closed bakery.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Tony brings two cups of coffee to a little table where Felix waits. Then he scoots back behind the display case.

TONY
Cake? Muffin?

FELIX
Sure, sugar pie.

Tony ignores Felix's joke.

TONY
Which?

Felix turns his attention to the display case.

FELIX
Uh...lemon pound cake actually. Aren't you ever going to tell her?

TONY
Who? What?

FELIX
Jenny. About AA.

Tony brings chocolate cake for himself, and pound cake for Felix.

TONY
My mother will shit if I tell Jenny.

FELIX
So what?

TONY
I've been sneaking out to meetings for nine years. Telling Jenny it's a weekly poker game.

Tony picks at his cake. Felix practically inhales his.

FELIX

You don't want her to know you're an alcoholic, so you cover it by pretending to be gambling addict?

TONY

Ma didn't want her to know. Didn't think it was "appropriate."

FELIX

So what? Cut the cord, dude. So what if mommy doesn't approve? YOU are Jenny's parent. Damn that was good. I need another.

TONY

Jesus, you eat fast!

FELIX

I'm a growing boy.

Felix raids the display case.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Think I'll try something else.

Felix brings a small fruit tart to the table. It's a gorgeous display of bright fruit with a glossy sheen of coats and coats of sugary glaze.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Man, you are an artist with fruit.

TONY

That's a compliment?

FELIX

Yes!

TONY

Maybe I should tell her. Here I am hiding it. That's hardly a good example, is it? I haven't been doing my steps.

Felix listens, enjoying his fruit tart.

FELIX

They have Overeaters Anonymous, right? Could she go to that?

TONY

Oh yeah, that'll make her feel more normal!

Tony stares down at his cake.

TONY (CONT'D)

Shit. At least I can cork the bottle.
She's gotta let the tiger out of the
cage three times a day.

FELIX

You do realize we're sitting here talking
about her sugar addiction while we scarf
down several desserts.

Tony stabs his cake with his fork repeatedly.

TONY

Fucking sugar.

INT. ROSSETTI KITCHEN - DAY

Tony leans on the counter making a grocery list when Mrs.
Rossetti peers over his shoulder.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Since when do you need a list?

TONY

Since I'm buying some new things.

He turns his attention to Mrs. Rossetti.

TONY (CONT'D)

Listen. I'd like Jenny to start eating
more healthy foods. Maybe more fruits
and vegetables.

Mrs. Rossetti is on the verge of being offended.

TONY (CONT'D)

Not that you don't cook healthy foods.
But perhaps...a little less starches,
less fried foods?

Mrs. Rossetti considers this, then nods in agreement.

TONY (CONT'D)

And of course I'm curbing her on the
sweets, too. But I'd appreciate your
help with the meals.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Of course.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Tony and Jenny cruise through the produce section. She sips
soda through a straw.

TONY

Mm, pears look good, huh?

Jenny shrugs, indifferent.

TONY (CONT'D)

Get some.

She grabs a bag and puts a few pears in.

TONY (CONT'D)

And bananas. They go good with pears.

She looks at him with suspicion as she grabs a bunch of bananas.

JENNY

You're not going to try to pass off fruit as dessert again, are you?

TONY

What's the matter with that? Fresh fruit is a great dessert.

JENNY

So how come you don't serve it in the bakery then?

Touche.

TONY

Smart ass.

JENNY

Better than being a dumb ass.

She gets to the bottom of her soda, loudly sucking up the last drops of soda.

TONY

I just thought we could maybe try to eat a little more healthy lately.

She continues to make the God-awful "bottom of the cup" sound. Tony grabs her empty soda cup, tosses it in the cart.

TONY (CONT'D)

You know, get a little healthier.

JENNY

I'll have a fruit tart then.

Tony bags a few bunches of grapes.

TONY

They serve fresh fruit at school?

She squints in confusion.

TONY (CONT'D)

Don't you have a snack bar at school?

JENNY

Yeah right, Dad. And they serve fresh fruit. And wheat grass shakes.

TONY

You eat there a lot?

JENNY

Sometimes.

TONY

But I don't give you money for that.
Where do you get -

Just as Tony is tap-dancing nearer to the heart of the matter, she changes gears.

JENNY

Oh! That reminds me! Guess what I'm going to do at school!

Now he's cruising down the cereal aisle. She trudges alongside.

TONY

Join the swim team?

JENNY

Oh, come on, Dad. Seriously.

TONY

Hm. Seriously. Hm. Oh, I know. You're captain of the football team now.

JENNY

We don't even have a football team, Dad. That's high school.

TONY

Oh, right. Joining the Mathletes?

JENNY

Ew, math, no. Gross.

He tosses a healthy-but-boring-looking cereal into the cart.

TONY

What then?

JENNY

I'm going to play Alice in Wonderland.
I'm going to star in the play!

He tries to be excited, but his confusion is stronger. He smiles through it.

TONY

Uh, what? What do you mean? You...
already tried out?

His excitement builds. She won the part?

JENNY

No, but I will. I'm trying out this
week. I'm going to be Alice! I'm going
to star in the play!

She hops up and down, grinning ear to ear. He tries not to let his sheer terror show through.

TONY

Great!

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Tony leans against his car, head hung down in despair, hands jammed deep in his pockets.

Gina and a group of other teachers reach the parking lot, chatting amongst themselves. She spots Tony and immediately breaks off from her group and heads over to him.

GINA

Hey, Mouse. We've got to stop meeting
like this.

He doesn't return her smile.

TONY

You got a minute?

GINA

For you? Two minutes.

Still no smile from him.

TONY

I need your advice.

GINA

All out of witty repartee, huh?

He nods, still trapped in his own concerns.

GINA (CONT'D)

Ut oh, you're serious.

TONY

Jenny is convinced that she's going to be in the school play.

GINA

Ah, your favorite. Alice in Wonderland.

He nods. She gazes off, considering the idea.

GINA (CONT'D)

Being in a play would be a good thing for her to get involved with. Isn't this kinda what you were asking for?

He shrugs.

GINA (CONT'D)

What part does she want?

TONY

Alice.

Gina's scrunched up face up says it all.

TONY (CONT'D)

Oh man! I knew it! She has no chance, right? Shit.

GINA

Now wait a minute, I didn't say that.

They both stand in silence, thinking. Weighing the scenes that lie ahead.

GINA (CONT'D)

So...how set is she on this?

TONY

She's sure she'll be cast.

GINA

Yikes. Okay, let's not be defeatist.

TONY

Be honest. Is there any chance in hell she could get the part?

GINA

Sure.

Tony paces between the cars.

TONY

We can rehearse her audition scene until she's got it down perfect.

GINA

Which scene does she have to do?

TONY

I dunno, something with the Queen of Hearts I think.

GINA

Ah yes, the Queen of Hearts. The biggest bitch in literary history.

TONY

I mean, she has just as much of a chance as the other girls that try out, right?

GINA

Well, sure. I guess.

Even Gina doesn't seem too convinced. He watches her face for a sign of confidence, but doesn't get one.

TONY

Oh shit. This is the kind of rejection she does not need.

He slumps face down over the hood of his car in despair.

GINA

Think of it this way. Lots of girls are going to try out, and all but one of them are going to be rejected too.

She goes to his crumpled, disheveled form. She puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

GINA (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's go somewhere sedate and talk this out. I know just the place.

SMASH CUT:

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

A huge CLATTER as a bowling ball SMASHES the pins down.

The bowling alley is alive with music, noise and cheers. With daylight blocked out, the lanes are in near darkness. The pins and balls are illuminated in bright day-glo colors.

It's Gina's turn. She has no idea what's she's doing. She lofts her ball with a great thud and cheers as it makes its slow way down the lane.

Tony laughs at her excitement over her horrible throw.

TONY

Have you even been IN a bowling alley before?

GINA

Ha! Mark that down, Tony! Three, count 'em, three pins!

She throws her arms up in victory.

GINA (CONT'D)

Don't cheat. Give me my three points.

He throws his hands up in futility and laughs.

TONY

The computer keeps track of the score, not me!

She looks up at the projected score.

GINA

Oh. You're kind of killing me, huh?

Tony hops up and readies his bowling ball. She sits, and marvels at his focus.

GINA (CONT'D)

Wow, ladies and gentleman. Look at that form. Look at that focus.

He's just about to go.

GINA (CONT'D)

This is the famed Rossetti concentration that has garnered Tony legions of fans.

TONY

Shut up.

GINA

(whispers)

Tempers flare as the tension builds.

He slams the ball down the lane. A strike.

GINA (CONT'D)

Wow. You really are good at this.

TONY
Of course. This is the blue collar
man's sport of choice.

Pride or self-deprecation? Hard to tell.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY SNACK BAR - NIGHT

Gina and Tony sit on barstools at the counter.

GINA
Do you mind if I get a drink?

He shakes his head no.

GINA (CONT'D)
You sure? Being in AA and all?

TONY
Nah. Go for it. Doesn't bother me.
Mm, nachos look good.

She studies the overhead menu for a moment.

TONY (CONT'D)
Buffalo wings! Yes! This is my kind
of place!

GINA
Hm. I don't suppose such an
establishment would have a 1969 Dom
Perignon?

Tony shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Suddenly aware of the
cheesy decor and greasy menu items.

GINA (CONT'D)
Or a 1991 Robert Mondavi Cabernet
Sauvignon?

TONY
Um...they just have beer.

She frowns slightly. He finally is able to meet her eye.

TONY (CONT'D)
Do you want to go somewhere else?

Her frown morphs into a big goofy grin.

GINA
I'm just kidding, you dork! We're in a
bowling alley, of course I want a beer.

His whole body relaxes. They ad lib their orders to the SNACK BAR WAITRESS.

GINA (CONT'D)

Okay, devil's advocate...let's say Jenny tries out, doesn't get the part. End of the world?

TONY

No. But she's finally interested in something at school. Getting to play Alice, lord knows how she got it in her head that that's what she's meant to do, but it sure would...

GINA

It sure would show those snotty little bitchy girls?

He laughs.

TONY

Gina! You're their teacher! I thought you cared about each and every student.

GINA

Oh I do. But let's face it. Those little girls are self-esteem butchers.

Gina is getting steamed just thinking about it.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why shouldn't Jenny get the part? Why should the pretty little rich girls always get everything?

TONY

Have we stumbled onto a raw nerve here? An old memory? You were the shy bookworm who never got asked to the dance?

GINA

Oh please. There's girls like this in every single little girl's past. It's inescapable.

TONY

So who's casting this thing? Should I bribe her?

GINA

Him. Mr. Mensch. Drama teacher. He's a sweetie. He'll be fair. Hell, he might cast her if she really is good!

She is getting enthused over this now.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why the hell not? If Jenny wants to play Alice, why shouldn't she go after it? She's as entitled as anyone else.

TONY

Easy, tiger.

GINA

Can she be ready? When are the auditions?

TONY

This week I think. Couple of days?

She digs in her satchel, pulling out thick manuscripts and file folders.

GINA

I've got a school schedule in here somewhere.

Tony spies the manuscript.

CLOSE UP: "Moscow Stories by Gina McIntyre"

He picks it up.

TONY

You wrote a book?

She instantly stops rummaging in her bag.

GINA

Oh! Um, yeah. A grammar book. You know me, Miss Grammar Geek.

She tries to snatch it back from him, but he doesn't let go.

TONY

For those who didn't get enough sentence diagramming in school. Does the world really need another grammar book?

GINA

No, probably not.

The tug-of-war continues.

TONY

Well let me see it!

He wins the tug-of-war, opens it and leafs through it. She watches his face as he skims the pages.

TONY (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I had walked holes straight through my own shoes, and was relieved to see that there were many new shoe stores in Moscow at this time. Unfortunately no one was actually allowed to go *into* them."

He looks up at her.

TONY (CONT'D)

What's this?

GINA

The grammar book was a front.

TONY

A front?

She nods.

TONY (CONT'D)

(continues to
read)

"It was only recently that Russia began to import shoes from the Western world. And the Muscovites were mad for them. European shoes were worth their weight in gold. I approached the door to a shoe store only to find it blocked with a velvet rope and a very large guard that quite possibly could have been ex-KGB, I'm judging this by his jovial nature."

She waits for his reaction.

TONY (CONT'D)

Hmm.

He flips through the book, looking to see if the whole thing is like this. It is.

TONY (CONT'D)

(reads)

"He put an arm out to stop me from entering. Only when I spoke and he heard I was an American did his attitude change and I was welcomed in. Russians were not allowed in. It occurred to me later that this experience summed up the ridiculousness of life in Moscow sometimes. You can look at the pretty new Western shoes, but you aren't allowed to try them on." Wow. That was great.

She smiles, truly eating it up.

GINA

Yeah?

The waitress brings their food, they dig into it.

TONY

Yeah. When were you in Moscow?

GINA

A few years ago. I taught English there to adults. I just wanted to experience living there. And I had such an amazing time, I wanted to...

She lowers her eyes and tries to hide behind her nachos.

GINA (CONT'D)

...you know, maybe write a book.

TONY

Why are you embarrassed? That's a great idea. That shoe story was charming.

GINA

I feel like such a cliché. "I'm an English teacher, but what I really want to do is be a novelist." Ick. Am I really that pathetic?

He laughs at her sudden switch from confident to self-conscious.

GINA (CONT'D)

Actually, you're the first one to read anything from it. And...

Again she's suddenly struck shy and timid.

GINA (CONT'D)

I would really value your opinion if you wouldn't mind reading it.

He's dumbstruck.

TONY

Me?

GINA

Yeah. Oh, unless you don't want to. Or don't have time. I understand. It's a lot of reading, and I'm not even sure it doesn't totally suck and you might not even want...

TONY

No. I'd be honored.

EXT. BOWLING ALLEY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Tony and Gina walk to their cars. Simply happy, bouncy. He carries her manuscript under his arm.

TONY

That was fun. Thanks. Got my mind off of things for a while.

GINA

My pleasure.

TONY

Sorry my supreme bowling skills totally crushed your spirit and left you with no will to go on living.

GINA

I'll find the courage to go on somehow.

They have reached that point when their separate parking places force them to part ways. They slow down.

TONY

I guess I'm going to help Jenny prepare for the big audition.

He stops. So she does too. He looks her in the eyes.

TONY (CONT'D)

That's all I can do, right?

GINA

That's all she needs. The support of her dad. Life sucks and it's hard. Funny thing is, one of the main themes of Alice in Wonderland is the perils of childhood and how hard it is growing up. So ironically she really IS suited for the role.

TONY

I know she's gotta get used to living in the harsh world. But I wish I could cushion the blows for her a little longer.

She nods her sympathy.

GINA

Night.

She kisses him on the cheek. He's taken by surprise. By the time he says...

TONY

Yeah, goodnight.

...she is already at her car and unlocking the door.

She hesitates before she gets in.

GINA

You know what, Tony? I wish my dad had been more like you.

She hits him with one last sincere smile before she gets in and heads off into the night.

INT. ROSSETTI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jenny, Mrs. Rossetti and Felix eat dinner as Tony rushes in.

TONY

Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.

He kisses Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti.

FELIX

What, no kiss for me?

TONY

Thought I'd be home earlier.

MRS. ROSSETTI

You didn't miss much. It's not like I haven't made peppers and sausage before.

Tony slides into his seat.

TONY

(to Felix)

You live here now?

Felix is glancing in a book as he eats.

FELIX

I was invited. By my loving aunt.

Mrs. Rossetti beams at Felix's sly charm.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And my beautiful niece.

JENNY

Oh please. You're here almost every night anyway.

Jenny is wearing a new pair of God-awful homemade earrings.

FELIX

Hey, those your newest creations?

Jenny tilts her head to show them off.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Gorgeous!

JENNY

I can make you a pair if you'd like.

FELIX

Sure. But in red please. Purple's not my color.

Jenny giggles. They all dig into the food.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Oh Felix, you didn't get your ears pierced did you? I see that on TV now. Men wearing as much jewelry as women.

FELIX

Uh, no, Aunt Rosa. I was just kidding.

TONY

So Jen, I was thinking I could help you with your audition.

This perks her up.

JENNY

Really?

TONY

Sure. You have the scene you'll be doing yet?

JENNY

Yeah, they gave us some pages so we could practice.

FELIX

Who you trying out for?

JENNY

Alice. I'm gonna be the best. I'll get it.

Felix sneaks a glance at Tony. Tony gives a conspiratorial "yes, encourage her" nod.

FELIX

Cool! I can't wait. I'll be in the front row.

MRS. ROSSETTI

We'll all be in the front row, Jenny.

Mrs. Rossetti pats Jenny's hand.

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)

You're going to be the best Alice ever.

Mrs. Rossetti doesn't have to fake it. She believes it.

TONY

Tell you what. We'll start tonight.

Jenny grins.

JENNY

Cool.

FELIX

(to Jenny)

Come on, ask me again.

Jenny takes Felix's book and quizzes him.

JENNY

In residential structures what is the minimum amount of wall space required to install a toilet?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Oh, kids, stop doing that at the table.

FELIX

No, wait, I know this one.

JENNY

No you don't. You get it wrong every time.

FELIX

No, I got it this time. In residential buildings it's 36 inches.

JENNY

Nope. Thirty inches. It's 36 inches for commercial buildings.

FELIX

God damn it!

MRS. ROSSETTI

Felix! Good Catholics don't swear.

Tony gets up and prepares food at the counter.

TONY

Since when is he a good Catholic?

FELIX

Since when am I Catholic at all?

Mrs. Rossetti gasps.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Okay, half Catholic.

JENNY

What's the other half? What are Canadians?

FELIX

Um...we worship hockey.

JENNY

That's not a religion.

TONY

It is to a Canadian!

JENNY

You need to study way more. When's this test?

FELIX

Next week.

Jenny makes a face.

JENNY

You are so screwed.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Jenny! Don't say the S word.

JENNY

The S word is shit, Grandma.

Mrs. Rossetti claps her hands over her ears. Tony brings the dessert to the table. Everyone gets a bowl of cut up fruit. Jenny wrinkles up her nose.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Oh jeez, I thought you kidding with this fruit thing.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Jenny, don't take our Lord's name in vain.

JENNY

I said jeez, not Jesus.

FELIX

Jeez was his nickname. I believe his close friends called him that. Right, Jen? Right, Tone? "Come on, Jeez, let's go down to the temple and shake things up."

The downstairs buzzer BUZZES. Tony leaves.

MRS. ROSSETTI

More sausage, Felix?

FELIX

(putting on for
Jenny)

Is it *Italian* sausage?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Of course!

FELIX

Okay. Or wait...maybe I want Canadian bacon instead. I can't decide.

Jenny laughs. Mrs. Rossetti doesn't get it.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Kim saunters through the kitchen area of the bakery as Tony stands watching.

KIM

My husband took the kids to a movie. I feigned a headache.

He crosses his arms across his chest.

TONY

Uh huh.

She touches and toys with various baking utensils and tools. She holds up one interesting looking utensil.

KIM

Wonder what we could do with this?

TONY

My family is upstairs having dinner.

She glances up the stairs.

KIM
Perfect. They'll be too busy to notice
you missing for a while.

TONY
No, not so perfect actually.

She puts the utensil down. He's resistant. Hm, a challenge.
She wanders into the back storage room.

KIM
What's back here?

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

She scopes out the place as he follows her. The stacks of
poker chips. The portable radio. A few magazines.

KIM
So this is your little den?

TONY
Of course not. It's a storage room.

KIM
I see.

He looks around. Metal storage racks. Mop bucket and mop.
Stacks of pallets. Broken down cardboard boxes. He winces.

TONY
You think this is my den? Where I hang
out?

KIM
Oh, don't be offended.

She motions for him to come over to her. He doesn't. He looks
at the pallets, the baking supplies, the grimy decor.

He still doesn't go to her. She gives in and approaches him
instead. She drapes herself on him.

KIM (CONT'D)
Hey, it doesn't bother me.

She whispers in his ear seductively.

KIM (CONT'D)
In fact, it's sort of a turn on.

She's gorgeous. And sexy. He can only resist for so long. He relents and kisses her. He picks her up mid-kiss and lifts her onto the table.

KIM (CONT'D)

Put on that baker's coat you wear.

That stops him cold.

TONY

What? Why?

She does her best to continue the foreplay.

KIM

Put it on.

Her skilled touch lures him into her passion game.

KIM (CONT'D)

That uniform thing. Put it on.

He is fully committed to their passion game now, doesn't want to stop.

TONY

No, no, it's upstairs.

He is hot and heavy now, but she stops him abruptly.

KIM

Go and get it then.

He tries to distract her with his kisses.

TONY

We don't need it.

She turns her head and bristles.

KIM

I do.

He stops cold. He looks at what they're doing. Where they are. He backs away from her.

KIM (CONT'D)

Come on. It's fun. It's role play.

TONY

And I always play the same role.

She laughs. It's no revelation to her.

KIM

Oh, baby, come on. Did you think it was some great romance?

She self-confidently continues her seduction.

KIM (CONT'D)

You thought I came to your bakery and seduced you because I appreciate your vast knowledge of the different types of French pastries?

He's stock still.

KIM (CONT'D)

Oh, come on. You can't tell me you don't get a secret thrill screwing the wife of the man who owns every office building on this block.

He nods. He finally gets it.

TONY

I'm your dirty little secret.

She revels in this.

KIM

Yeah, baby.

He stops cold. All the desire leaves him. He pushes her out to arm's length.

TONY

I don't think so.

She pulls her blouse on and buttons it. Her face is red. She heads toward the front of the bakery. He puts his arm out to block her.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'll let you out the back door.

INT. JENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jenny uses her floor space as a stage. She has added some more jewelry for her practice audition. Tony is stretched out on Jenny's bed. He reads the Queen of Hearts' lines.

TONY

"No, no! Sentence first, verdict afterward."

JENNY

"Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the sentence first!"

TONY

"Hold your tongue!"

JENNY

"I won't!"

TONY

"Off with her head!"

JENNY

"Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!"

She stops.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Dad, what does that mean? I don't get it.

TONY

You said it right. Got every word right.

JENNY

But I don't understand. A pack of cards? Why do I call her that?

Clearly Tony doesn't either.

TONY

Um, maybe it's symbolism.

JENNY

For what? Why am I saying it? How can I be convincing if I don't even know what I'm saying?

Tony shifts his position, stalling for time.

TONY

Well. Let's see.

He quickly scans ahead in the script, looking for clues.

TONY (CONT'D)

You know what? It's, uh, complex. So why don't we save it for tomorrow and I'll explain it to you? We can go out to Duke's Cafe.

JENNY

Just you and me? Cool.

INT. DUKE'S CAFE - NIGHT

Tony sits at his regular table with the Alice in Wonderland book, and the school script. He's looking at the Cliff Notes for Alice in Wonderland.

TONY

What the hell? This guy was nuts.

Tony switches from Cliff Notes to the book, and back again.

The Chubby Redheaded Waitress approaches him with a coffeepot.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Refill, darling?

She is a welcomed excuse to look up from his studies.

TONY

Keep it coming.

She giggles and pours.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Got a midterm coming up?

TONY

Ha ha. I wish. Wouldn't it be great to be back in school again?

She frowns.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Uh, no. Not really.

But she isn't down for too long. She smiles again.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Anything else?

TONY

Nope.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony puts the finishing touches on a sheet cake. Though the cake looks marvelous, his very last curlicue isn't absolutely perfect. He takes a small spatula and expertly extracts it. He does the curlicue again. Perfect.

TONY

There we go.

Felix saunters through the bakery. He stops to admire Tony's cake. Felix spots a tempting swirl of icing and his finger gets dangerously close.

TONY (CONT'D)
You want to lose that finger?

FELIX
Sorry, Martha.

TONY
How goes the studying?

FELIX
Eh. Okay I guess.

TONY
That sounds encouraging.

FELIX
How goes the amends?

TONY
Eh. Okay I guess.

FELIX
That sounds encouraging.

Tony washes the icing off his hands. Felix munches on a stray muffin swiped from a display basket.

TONY
Actually I've done most of them. Lots of little ones, you know? But I have three left.

Tony goes to the storage room. Felix follows him.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

FELIX
Just three? That doesn't sound too bad.

TONY
Yeah well, there's a reason I've left them this long.

FELIX
Ut oh. That bad, huh?

Tony nods.

FELIX (CONT'D)

So you mean just three amends left to make and then you're totally done with step nine? After all these years?

TONY

Yup.

FELIX

Good God, man, just do it! Just find the person and say "look, sit down, there's something I need to say to you."

Tony dries his hands on a towel.

TONY

Look, sit down, there's something I need to say to you.

FELIX

Exactly. Great muffin by the way.

Tony throws the towel aside and pulls out a chair for Felix.

TONY

No. I mean, *Felix*, there's something I need to say to you. Have a seat.

Felix stares at the offered chair. With a mouth full of muffin he says...

FELIX

Ut oh.

Felix sits. Tony finds himself a chair too.

TONY

Back before my dad retired he and ma sat me down and that's when they told me their plans.

FELIX

Yeah. Weren't they going to move to Florida? Works hard his whole life, retires, and he dies four months later. There's a lesson to be learned there.

TONY

Before he and Ma gave it to me, they talked it over with me. To make sure I really wanted the business, could I handle it, and so on.

FELIX

Uh huh.

TONY

Well, originally their plan was to leave me only half of the bakery.

Felix stares. Blinks. Wheels are turning.

TONY (CONT'D)

They wanted to leave the other half to you. Half of this was going to be yours.

Felix glances through the storage room door and out into the bustling bakery.

TONY (CONT'D)

But I talked them out of it.

Felix's look flings back to Tony. Wide-eyed.

TONY (CONT'D)

I said I could handle the whole thing myself. Convinced them that it should stay in the immediate family.

Felix sits stunned.

TONY (CONT'D)

But the real reason was that I was selfish. I wanted the bakery for myself. And I'm sorry, I apologize to you for my actions.

Tony waits for a reply. Still Felix is silent.

TONY (CONT'D)

Okay, this is the part where you speak.

Felix is speechless.

EXT. PASADENA STREET - DAY

Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti walk together. They pass a McDonald's.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Don't French fries sound good?

JENNY

Now? Before dinner? Really?

Mrs. Rossetti shrugs.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Why not?

Jenny nods vigorously. They turn and head into McDonald's.

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)

I have an idea. How about we make this our little secret tradition? French fries after the thrift store. Let's not even tell your father.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Felix is no longer speechless.

FELIX

So you're saying that after a decade of me struggling and floundering that I should have been co-owner of this thriving, lucrative business?!

TONY

Lucrative? Oh hardly. We do okay, but it's not like we're swimming in money. And that's with 100% of the profits. You would be living on half that.

FELIX

Which is a hell of a lot better than I'm doing now!

TONY

Well that's not my fault!

FELIX

You've got this old business that just happens to now be smack dab in the middle of yuppieville. Oh, and it just happens to have a free house above it! I'm in a tiny studio apartment paying \$850 a month!

TONY

So you're saying that you would have wanted to live here in this apartment with your cousin, his daughter and his mother?! Where? In the back closet? The pantry?

FELIX

I don't know. But it would have been nice to have the option! I could have sold my half to you.

TONY

So it's not about the bakery. It's just about the money.

FELIX

Well, yeah. I've barely been keeping my head above water all the while you've had the bakery.

TONY

Right, and you've gone through what, five careers already? That's hardly my fault.

FELIX

So I'm an irresponsible fuck up. That's why you didn't want me to own half the bakery.

TONY

I didn't say that, Felix.

FELIX

But that's it, isn't it? You wanted it all for yourself 'cause you knew I'd screw it up?

TONY

Now you're putting words in my mouth. All I sat down to do was apologize for what I did ten years ago. Hell, I wasn't even sober then.

Felix is silent again. He pops out of his seat. Strides into the bakery. Tony follows.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Felix takes in the whole scene. The bakery is full of customers. They sit eating their tasty treats and sipping their expensive espressos and lattes. They carry out boxes of goods.

He looks at the staff. The expensive gleaming stainless steel baking equipment. The large clean kitchen. The pretty plant-filled dining area. He sighs.

Tony hangs back a bit.

Felix takes it all in. Then charges out the front door without a word to Tony. Tony lets him go.

Through the windows Tony can see Felix run into Mrs. Rossetti and Jenny. A brief awkward exchange and then Felix rushes off.

Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti come in.

JENNY

Jeez. What's his problem?

MRS. ROSSETTI
He's been studying very hard.

EXT. PASADENA STREET - DAY

Felix strides down the street, still pissed off. He sees a bar. He goes in.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Jenny is helping out, grinding nuts in a large mortar and pestle. Tony watches her having fun smashing them to bits.

A HARRIED MOM with a CRANKY TODDLER gets Tony's attention. The staff is pretty busy, so Tony waits on her. Her arms are full of packages. The toddler clambers for her attention.

TONY
Hey, Tina.

HARRIED MOM
Hi, Tony. You have any of those mini raspberry tarts? I need a dozen.

Tony does a quick count in the display case.

TONY
Yup. Got 15.

Her toddler suddenly screams for attention and tries to climb up her leg. She almost drops the packages she's balancing.

HARRIED MOM
Let me go take these to the car, and get a juice box for Sammy. I'll be right back.

She quickly escorts her toddler out. Tony goes to the back storage room. Jenny tires of smashing nuts, hops off her stool and heads upstairs.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Tony dials a number, waits. Hears a message and the beep.

TONY
Hi, it's Tony. I just wanted to tell ya that I made the amends to Felix. He flipped out and left. Man, I thought amends were supposed to make you feel better. I feel like shit. This just felt like something I should tell my sponsor so...there you go. No need to call me back. Bye.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Tony comes out of the storage room as the Harried Mom returns, this time hands-free and with her toddler quietly sucking on a juice box. Tony puts on a happy face for his customer.

TONY
Aw, that's better, huh?

HARRIED MOM
Thank God for juice boxes. I'll take a dozen of those tarts.

TONY
Alrighty.

As he puts them into a box, he stops to recount. Counts what's in the box, what's left in the display case.

TONY (CONT'D)
(to Seth)
You just sell some of these?

SETH
No. Not since this morning.

With dread he looks over to the stairs that lead upstairs.

TONY
(to Harried Mom)
Sorry. I miscounted. Eleven enough?

HARRIED MOM
Sure.

INT. JENNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jenny sits in her closet, scarfing down the raspberry tarts. She freezes when she thinks she hears a noise from the hallway. She hides the remaining tarts. Nope, just a noise from downstairs. She retrieves her loot. Bites into another one.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Tony trudges down the hallway. He slows and stops in front of Jenny's door. He listens for a moment, but it's quiet inside her room. He turns and leaves.

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony and Jenny head for his car parked on the street.

TONY
Before we go to Duke's I want to show you something.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER MEETING ROOM - DAY

Tony and Jenny enter a room with about ten people milling around. Grease Monkey is there, and when he sees Jenny with Tony his eyes get big. Tony nods, "Yeah, she's here."

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER MEETING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is seated in a circle. Jenny is still quietly shocked at where she is.

JOVIAL JIM

Hi, I'm Jim, I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP

Hi, Jim!

JOVIAL JIM

Thanks for letting me share. This week I did real good. Next week I'll get my six month chip.

A smattering of applause.

JOVIAL JIM (CONT'D)

Thanks. Maybe because it's just a turning point for me, such a big deal that it started messing with my mind a bit. Like some self-destructive part of me was saying 'you'll never make it Jim, you might as well have a shot of whiskey now and get it over with.' Well, I'm happy to say, I didn't listen to that little voice.

Jenny rolls her eyes, but everyone else applauds.

GREASE MONKEY

Hi, I'm Joe, and I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP

Hi, Joe!

Jenny is confused to see someone she knows admit this.

GREASE MONKEY

First of all, I'd like to say I'm happy to see my sponsee back in the fold.

Tony subtly nods his acknowledgment. Jenny catches this interaction and steals a curious sideways glance at her dad.

GREASE MONKEY (CONT'D)

As most of you know, I've been trying to get a job. Well, I guess some of you are newer and haven't heard me speak. Three years ago I had a great job and for various reasons, mostly my own fault, I lost my job.

Everyone gives him their complete attention. Except Jenny. She notices there are light refreshments nearby. Cookies and coffee and tea.

GREASE MONKEY (CONT'D)

I had a job interview this week, but because of the nature of my line of work, without a glowing recommendation from my previous boss, which of course I haven't got, I can't get work. I lost my house last year. Living in a little one bedroom apartment now. Unemployment's long gone. Savings gone.

He puts his head down in his hands.

GREASE MONKEY (CONT'D)

I just can't seem to get back on my feet. I had a great job and I fucked it up.

The woman next to him sympathetically pats his back.

Jenny leans over and whispers to Tony.

JENNY

Are those cookies for anyone?

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER MEETING ROOM - LATER

SAD SACK SUSAN stands. Jovial Jim hands her a plastic chip, kisses her on the cheek, and they all clap. Jenny half-heartedly applauds too.

SAD SACK SUSAN

Oh my gosh, I'm so incredibly happy. A one year chip, my goodness. I can't believe I did it.

She lovingly caresses her plastic chip.

SAD SACK SUSAN (CONT'D)

This is such a great day. And my only regret is that it took me so long to get to this place. And me being a nurse, I feel like I should have known better. I know the damage I've done to my liver.

(MORE)

SAD SACK SUSAN (CONT'D)

But I guess they say everything comes
in its own time, right? Thanks you all
for your support over the past years.

They all applaud and she sits.

JOVIAL JIM

Great work Susan. We're proud of you.

Jenny rolls her eyes again.

JOVIAL JIM (CONT'D)

Anyone else want to share before we
move on?

Jenny is startled when Tony's hand go up.

TONY

Yeah, I'll go. Hi, I'm Tony and I'm an
alcoholic.

Jenny's eyes go a bit wide.

GROUP

Hi, Tony!

TONY

I brought my daughter Jenny as a guest
today for the first time.

GROUP

Hi, Jenny!

Jenny manages a confused wave hello.

TONY

I've never really shared the fact that
I go to AA with Jenny until today. But
I wanted her support in dealing with my
addiction and I'm glad I could share
this with her. That's all I wanted to
say. Just glad she's here with me.

They all applaud. Jenny is stunned into silence.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER PARKING LOT - DAY

Jenny and Tony walk to the car.

TONY

So. What'd you think?

JENNY

About what?

TONY

The meeting.

JENNY

You shouldn't hang around with them.
What a bunch of losers.

Tony stops in his tracks, but Jenny keeps walking.

TONY

Jenny. I'm one of them.

JENNY

No, you're not.

TONY

(stern)

Yes. I am.

She stops, turns to him.

TONY (CONT'D)

This is my group, I belong here. I'm a
recovering alcoholic just like they
are. I'm one of them.

She almost starts to cry.

JENNY

No.

He catches up to her, kneels down. Wipes her tear away.

TONY

Yes. I've got an addiction. But it's
okay, I've had it under control for
nine years. I don't drink anymore.
But it's okay to admit to having a
problem with something.

She struggles to take it all in.

JENNY

If you don't drink anymore, why do you
still come here?

TONY

I guess because an addiction is something
you've always got have your eye on. It
never goes away, but you can keep it
under control if you try.

JENNY

How come...why...why did you drink?

TONY

Well, that's a good question. Maybe it's genetics, maybe it's some behavior I accidentally acquired growing up. Who knows? Some coping mechanism that got to be worse than the original problem. Hard to say. But people have different kinds of addictions. It's perfectly okay to ask for help dealing with them.

JENNY

You've been coming to these meetings?

TONY

Yup. For nine years. Tell you what. Let's head back. And on the ride back you can ask me absolutely anything you want about it, okay?

JENNY

Okay.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony lies in bed reading Gina's manuscript. He chuckles. Then he gives an interested "Hmm." He's enthralled.

At one point he reaches for a dictionary on his bedside table to look up a word. Then he goes back to the manuscript.

The phone RINGS, he quickly answers it.

KELLY (O.S.)

Hi Tony, it's Kelly.

INT. KELLY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

KELLY, Kim's cohort-in-slumming-with-blue-collar-workers sits in her elegant living room.

KELLY

Haven't seen you in a while.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN TONY AND KELLY

TONY

Oh yeah.

He's immediately uncomfortable. Intimidated.

KELLY

I was thinking about you today.

TONY

Yeah?

KELLY

Was having a party catered and remembered that time you catered the dessert reception for the Book Club. Remember what we did in the back room?

She laughs seductively. Tony winces.

TONY

Uh, yeah. That probably wasn't the right thing to do.

KELLY

Don't be silly. I was divorced by then.

TONY

Yeah, and as I recall I asked you out on a date a few days later and you wouldn't go out with me.

KELLY

Well no. But we had fun again when you catered the desserts for my gallery's open house, didn't we?

TONY

Oh I see. You'll screw the help, but you won't date them.

She's still in seduction mode.

KELLY

Sounds like a good deal for both of us.

TONY

Wrong.

He hangs up. Her mouth hangs open as she stares at her phone.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony picks the phone back up immediately. He dials.

GINA (O.S.)

Hello?

TONY

Gina? Tony.

GINA (O.S.)

Oh, hi Mouse. Is Jenny okay?

TONY

Yeah, she's fine. Do I only ever talk to you when I'm going through a crisis?

GINA (O.S.)

(laughs)

Sorry. No, not really.

TONY

Yeah, I guess I do. Actually I was wondering if you might want to do something. With me. Non-crisis-related.

GINA (O.S.)

Do something? You mean a date?

He takes a deep breath.

TONY

Yes. A date. Would you like to go out on a date with me?

GINA (O.S.)

Sure. What'd you have in mind?

TONY

Well, a proper date. Something classy. How about a nice dinner? Maybe a movie?

GINA (O.S.)

Okay. Or...

EXT. MAGIC MOUNTAIN - ROLLER COASTER - NIGHT

Tony is screaming his throat raw as he and Gina hurtle 100 miles an hour on a steep and curvy roller coaster. She is next to him, laughing uproariously at the extreme ride.

INT. THRIFT STORE - TOY SECTION - NIGHT

Mrs. Rossetti is rifling through the clear plastic bags full of tiny toys. With eagle eyes, she slowly turns the bags, shakes them a bit, looking for precious Lion King treasure.

INT. THRIFT STORE - JEWELRY SECTION - NIGHT

Jenny sorts through strands of old necklaces. Suddenly there it is, a necklace just like the her schoolmates were wearing.

EXT. MAGIC MOUNTAIN - LATER

Gina and Tony are wobbly and giggly as they leave the roller coaster ride. A good excuse to have his arm around her -- for balance, of course.

INT. THRIFT STORE - TOY SECTION - NIGHT

Mrs. Rossetti gasps when she spies the holiest of Lion King figurines in one of the bags. It's swimming in amongst dozens of other small unwanted toys.

After a surreptitious look around, Mrs. Rossetti pokes her gnarled old lady finger into the plastic until there's a soft POP. She fishes out the tiny figurine, pockets it, and carefully places the bag back into the pile.

JENNY (O.S.)

What'd you find?

Mrs. Rossetti gasps, startled.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Jenny, you scared the life out of me. Nothing. I'm not buying a whole bag for one little thing.

JENNY

Don't you have enough Lion King things anyway? Jeez, it's like you have an addiction or something.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Don't say such a thing!

JENNY

Why? Dad says a lot of people have addictions and it's okay to get help. That's why he goes to his AA meetings.

Mrs. Rossetti stops in her tracks.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Where did you hear that?

JENNY

Dad told me. He took me.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Took you to a meeting?

Mrs. Rossetti is mortified.

JENNY

Uh huh. This necklace is only a dollar. Can we get it?

Mrs. Rossetti is still speechless.

EXT. MAGIC MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Gina and Tony walk away from a vendor's cart with hot dogs.

TONY

Well, I did promise you a classy dinner.

GINA

This is fantastic.

TONY

I think I need some frozen yogurt to soothe my throat. I screamed so much on that last ride.

GINA

That was fantastic too!

Gina laughs heartily, genuinely enjoying herself.

EXT. MAGIC MOUNTAIN - LATER

Tony and Gina sit on a bench eating frozen yogurt.

TONY

I have to bring Jenny here. She'll love it.

GINA

Next time maybe.

Next time? He smiles.

GINA (CONT'D)

So how's she doing?

TONY

Better I thought. Then I realized that now she's sneaking food.

GINA

Ut oh.

TONY

Yeah. She's not getting better, she's getting sneakier.

GINA

She's a smart girl, Tony. Maybe too smart for her own good.

TONY

I took her to my AA meeting yesterday.

GINA

Oh, she knew you went to AA?

TONY

Nope. Was quite a revelation for her I think. I hope.

Suddenly his yogurt loses its appeal. He stares at it.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'd sell the bakery and find a new career if I thought it'd help.

Gina leans in closer, whispers almost.

GINA

You are the sweetest man. I could just nibble on you.

This almost makes him laugh, but he's still in worry mode. She takes his mind off it with a sweet, gentle kiss. Nothing 'slumming' in her actions at all. She licks her lips after kissing him.

GINA (CONT'D)

Mm, mint chocolate chip.

Now he's cheered up. He kisses her back.

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Jenny stands next to the box of day old donuts by the dumpster. She picks a few up and looks over the fence into the neighboring yard. She tosses a few over the fence.

In the yard next door is an old, overweight dog. As each donut drops, he wolfs it down. Jenny keeps feeding him.

EXT. JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Jenny is putting her books into her locker. She wears her new necklace, which is of course a bit tighter on Jenny than on the other girls.

Tamara is suddenly in Jenny's face.

TAMARA

Why are you trying out for Alice?
Everyone knows I'm going to get the part.

Jenny keeps her cool, keeps her attention on her locker.

JENNY

You don't know that. We haven't even had auditions yet. Mr. Mensch will pick the best one.

TAMARA

Yeah, like he's gonna pick you. You won't even be able to fit into the Alice costume.

SNOTTY GIRL

You could be Tweedle Dum.

TAMARA

She could be Tweedle Dee AND Tweedle Dum!

The little girls laugh. Jenny tries to maintain composure.

JENNY

You just watch! Mr. Mensch is going to pick me to be Alice, because I'm going to be the best! Just because you have long blonde hair doesn't mean you automatically get to be Alice! My dad said that in the original book she didn't even HAVE blonde hair, it was brown!

TAMARA

Oh, your dad says that, huh? My mom said your dad is only good for one thing. And it ain't reading!

Jenny slams her locker doors and whirls around to face the two little bitches. Jenny looks like she's about to say something back, but instead she suddenly belts Tamara in the face.

JENNY

I'm gonna be Alice in Wonderland! Just you watch! You'll see.

Tamara is caught off-guard, and nearly knocked off balance. She nurses her wounded nose. The other kids in the hall gather around, including a few of the little bitches' click.

TAMARA

You are going to be in so much trouble!

Tamara runs off. The remaining little girls stare at Jenny.

SNOTTY GIRL

By the way...

She points to Jenny's too-tight necklace before walking away.

SNOTTY GIRL (CONT'D)

...that's supposed to be a necklace,
not a *choker*.

Jenny tries to hold back the tears in front of the other kids.

EXT. JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Tony fumes as he makes a beeline to his car. Jenny follows.

TONY

Very nice. Getting kicked out of school
for fighting.

JENNY

Just for the rest of the day.

He yanks the door open and jumps in the car.

INT. TONY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Tony has a deathgrip on the steering wheel. Stares straight.

TONY

What the hell were you thinking? Hitting
a little girl? This is what I've taught
you? You gave her a bloody nose!

Jenny isn't reacting to Tony's angry intensity. She oh-so-causally puts on her seatbelt and gives her explanation.

JENNY

She deserved it.

Tony stares at her, amazed. With the air of being so put upon by her naive dad, she explains.

JENNY (CONT'D)

She was being an asshole, so I hit her.

It's hard to argue with that logic. He suppresses his laugh, feigns angry again and turns to her.

TONY

That's no excuse.

JENNY

She said something very mean about my
dad. So I smacked her.

He doesn't know what to say to that. Proud or upset?

INT. DUKE'S CAFE - DAY

Jenny sips chocolate milk through a straw.

TONY

So it's not symbolism. The Queen of Hearts is literally a playing card.

Jenny lays her head down on her arm, her eyes are heavy.

TONY (CONT'D)

Hey, come on, sit up. Her whole court, the King, the Knaves...they are all playing cards, you see?

She drags herself upright again and struggles to pay attention.

TONY (CONT'D)

This story deals with childhood and about the physical size changes kids have to go through. She's still tiny after eating the mushroom and she's terrified of this total bitch the Queen of Hearts.

She sucks on her straw, drains the last of the chocolate milk.

TONY (CONT'D)

But she starts to grow big again, up to her original size. And she looks down at the Queen and her court and realizes that they are just a pack of cards. Nothing to be afraid of. And that's when Alice wakes up from her dream.

Jenny's attention is gone, she's sleepy.

TONY (CONT'D)

Jenny, pay attention. So that's when she says...

He waits for her to finish the sentence.

JENNY

Uh. "Why do you...you're a deck of..."

Her concentration fades away.

TONY

Come on, Jenny! You know this! "You're nothing but a *pack* of cards."

Tony's frustrated attempt to prompt her is interrupted by the Chubby Redheaded Waitress.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

How you doing? You need anything else, sweet peas?

JENNY
Another chocolate milk.

TONY
No. No more.

JENNY
But I'm thirsty.

TONY
You JUST had a huge chocolate milk.

Jenny frowns at the idea of no more chocolate milk.

Not wanting to get in the middle of a family tiff, the Chubby Redheaded Waitress nods and leaves.

TONY (CONT'D)
Your audition is coming up.

Jenny slumps down. Leans her head back against her chair.

TONY (CONT'D)
I think you can get this part, but you've got to pay attention. If you don't have these lines down...

JENNY
We don't have to have them *memorized*, Dad. We can read from the script.

TONY
Okay, but you have to be really good. There's going to be other girls there...

Jenny's eyes are closed, head back. Practically asleep.

TONY (CONT'D)
Jenny!

She snaps to attention. He's incredulous.

TONY (CONT'D)
Why are we even here? You want to take a nap?!

He slams the script closed.

TONY (CONT'D)
Let's just go.

JENNY
No, Dad, I want to keep practicing.

TONY
You obviously don't.

He gets up.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Tony trudges into the bakery from the back area. He watches Jenny saunter up ahead of him.

As she passes the display case on the way to the stairs, she expertly snatches two donuts without even breaking her stride.

He clearly sees this. He throws her script onto the table.

INT. ROSSETTI'S DEN - NIGHT

Mrs. Rossetti watches Jenny go down the hall, into her room and shut her door. As soon as the door clicks shut, Mrs. Rossetti darts over to Tony as he plops on the couch.

MRS. ROSSETTI
I suppose you thought that was a wise thing to do.

TONY
What?

MRS. ROSSETTI
Taking Jenny to your drinking thing.

He's tired of walking on eggshells. Or eggs.

TONY
It's not a 'drinking thing' Ma, it's called Alcoholics Anonymous. And yes, I did think it was a smart thing to do.

MRS. ROSSETTI
Exposing a child to your drinking group, how could that be a good idea?

She turns her attention to tidying up the nearby table.

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)
(softly, to herself)
She develops a drinking problem now, we'll know why.

Tony hears this, is off the couch in an instant and puts himself between Mrs. Rossetti and her tidying chore.

TONY

Yes, actually, if she develops a drinking problem, or any other type of addiction, we WILL know why! Because I was stupid enough to listen you all these years!

Mrs. Rossetti tries to back away, grasping at any nearby magazine that is askew and in need of her tidying attention. But Tony doesn't let her out of his line of fire.

TONY (CONT'D)

I kept my AA meetings a secret from her. All that taught her was that addictions are shameful things to keep secret. And now that she's got an eating problem, we can only hope that she's not going to be filled with shame and guilt and secrecy.

She is finally forced to face his rage.

TONY (CONT'D)

Because I gotta tell ya, living with people who instill that in you is hell!

Jenny pokes her head out of her door and yells down the hall.

JENNY

What's the matter? Why are you yelling?

MRS. ROSSETTI

(calmly)

We're not yelling, sweetheart. Your dad is just really excited about...the soccer game on TV.

TONY

I'm pissed at Grandma, that's why I'm yelling!

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Felix sits at his cluttered kitchen table. His study guide is open in front of him, but his attention is on a cereal box.

FELIX

"Mr. Kellogg, known as King of the Corn Flakes, used his vast fortune to set up foundations to promote child welfare, health and education and raised Arabian horses as a hobby." Hmm. Interesting.

He forces himself to tip the box over, out of his reading range. He reads from his study guide.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm ready to study. "When threading gas pipe, 12 threads are required on each end to ensure a solid seal."

His head slowly lowers and he repeatedly bangs his head on the table in futility and frustration. He leaves his head down.

After a moment he perks back up again, takes a deep breath and tries again.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Okay. I can do this. It's quite interesting. "The decline rate for sewage lines must be a quarter inch per each foot in..."

He can't even make it to the end of the sentence before reaching his breaking point. He screams in frustration.

FELIX (CONT'D)

ARG!

After this catharsis, he is calm again. He realigns his focus, closes his eyes and chants a mantra.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Three hundred dollars a day. Three hundred dollars a day. Three hundred glorious dollars a day.

He opens his eyes and returns to his study guide. He reads very slowly and deliberately with great emotion, as if to force his interest in the subject.

FELIX (CONT'D)

"The decline rate for sewage lines must be a quarter inch per foot..."

EXT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - BACK ENTRANCE - DAY

Tony wears his white baking smock, now covered in icing, flour, and various baking goo. He sits on a stack of pallets taking a break from the noise of the busy bakery inside.

Grease Monkey strides through the back gate to the bakery.

GREASE MONKEY

Hey there. Got your message.

TONY

Thanks for coming. Didn't pull you away from anything I hope. I said it could wait 'til later...

Grease Monkey smiles amiably.

GREASE MONKEY

No, no problem. That's what sponsors are for. You need me, I'm here.

Then a sheepish smile.

GREASE MONKEY (CONT'D)

Actually I was glad for the excuse to steal away from Linda for a while. I think I've really been getting under her feet being at home so much now.

Grease Monkey leans against the fence.

GREASE MONKEY (CONT'D)

So what's up? Fallout from bringing Jenny to the meeting?

TONY

No, she's okay with it.

GREASE MONKEY

Your mom freak out?

TONY

Well yeah. But I expected that. Actually I'm wanting to show Jenny that 12 steps groups work, and I guess the best way to do that is to set a good example. I've been on step nine for a long time now.

GREASE MONKEY

Yeah. But you'll get there when you're meant to get there.

TONY

Actually, I started my last three amends.

GREASE MONKEY

Did you? Excellent Tony. I'm proud of you! They're not easy, I know.

TONY

One down, two to go.

Grease Monkey nods in approval and respect for Tony's progress.

GREASE MONKEY

Well, let me know if I can help. I'm here for you.

TONY

Yeah. Which is why I asked you here...

Tony hops down from the stack of pallets. Straightens up and 'formalizes' his stance.

TONY (CONT'D)

I need to make amends to you.

GREASE MONKEY

To me?

TONY

Yes.

Tony clears his throat, he's got a practiced speech coming.

TONY (CONT'D)

I want to make a sincere apology to you for something I did three years ago.

Grease Monkey chuckles.

GREASE MONKEY

Three years ago? That's a while ago.

Tony nods, watches Grease Monkey ...waiting for it to sink in.

TONY

Yes, *three* years ago.

It clicks.

GREASE MONKEY

Three years....?

TONY

I didn't feel right knowing that other people's lives could have potentially been endangered by -

GREASE MONKEY

You're the one who snitched on me?!

TONY

I sincerely apologize that my comments to your boss led to you being dismissed from your duties -

GREASE MONKEY

"Led to my being dismissed"?! You fuckin' told on me and I got fired. Do you have any idea how hard it's gonna be for me get that kind of work again?

Grease Monkey's sponsor composure is gone. Tony tries to retain his cool.

TONY

Yes. That's what I'm making amends for. I am sorry.

Grease Monkey lets his fury out -- he kicks the fence repeatedly. Tony watches, lets him vent, even though it's destroying his fence.

GREASE MONKEY

I don't fucking believe this! And here I've been helping you all this time!

TONY

Yes! Wasn't this the point? To come clean? To finish my last three amends?

GREASE MONKEY

You destroyed my life!

TONY

No, YOU destroyed your life!

Grease Monkey takes a few more furious flying kicks at the fence. He steps up to Tony -- too close. Threateningly close.

TONY (CONT'D)

So what, you're gonna hit me? You want to punch me out?

Grease Monkey breathes hard, stares at Tony. Inches away.

TONY (CONT'D)

I said I was sorry for what I did, and I am sorry. But that doesn't change what you did. If it wasn't me that stopped it, it would have been somebody else.

Grease Monkey is so livid he cannot speak, still right up in Tony's face.

TONY (CONT'D)

But I am sorry.

Grease Monkey's rage subsides enough for him to step back a bit. He sizes Tony up. Then puts his hands up, "we're done."

GREASE MONKEY

You are a loser.

He storms off without another glance back.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Tony is alone in the bakery. Loaves of bread are everywhere. He's kneading dough with a violent intensity. Slams the dough onto the table, kneads it, picks it up, slams it down again.

A timer BUZZES. He uses a wooden paddle to retrieve even more loaves from the oven. More loaves are ready to go in.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - LATER

Lights are off. Baskets of fresh bread are everywhere. He heads upstairs, now physically exhausted.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony finishes the last page of Gina's manuscript with a satisfied smile. He picks up the phone. Almost dials. Then puts it back on the nightstand.

INT. JENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She opens the door for Tony. He hands her the manuscript.

INT. 6TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

Jenny hands the manuscript to Gina.

JENNY

My dad said to give you this.

Gina is almost a bit let down.

GINA

Oh.

She covers her disappointment.

GINA (CONT'D)

Great, thanks.

Jenny leaves, Gina glances at the note paperclipped to it.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON NOTE:

"Wonderful work! You should be very proud of yourself."

That's all?

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Gina ventures into the busy bakery. Tony spots Gina in line. She gives her order to Felix. Tony prepares her order, gestures to Felix not to charge her, that he'll handle it.

He brings her order around and takes it to a table where they both sit. He unconsciously tugs at his smock. Tries to brush off the crumbs and goo. She's all smiles.

GINA
I got your note. Thanks.

TONY
Note?

GINA
Yeah, about my book.

TONY
Oh right. Yeah, it was great. Much better than a grammar manual.

She takes a bite of her lemon mousse confection.

GINA
Oh, my GOD, this is fantastic! Baking is really your calling.

He nods.

TONY
Yeah, I know. My lot in life.

GINA
Lot? You make it sound like a bad thing. Don't you enjoy baking?

He considers this question seriously.

TONY
Yeah, I do actually.

GINA
You're lucky. Most people never end up doing something they love for a living.

TONY
You should be a writer. You ARE a writer.

She shrugs.

GINA
Well, I'm hoping.

TONY
No, you are. That book was smart, literate, cultured, funny. Clever. You could really make it in the literary world. I'll stick to making pies.

She stops mid-bite.

GINA

Tony? What's wrong with making pies?

TONY

Nothing. Somebody needs to make the pies. Bake the bread. Ice the cupcakes. Others write great literature. We all have our station in life.

GINA

Tony, why are you...? I'm not saying...I just stopped by because I was wondering why you...

TONY

What?

GINA

I don't know, I just thought it was a bit weird that you had Jenny bring my book back. Kinda thought maybe we'd see each other in person.

TONY

Well, you know...

GINA

No. What?

TONY

Um...I'm not really...this probably isn't a good time for me...I should probably just be alone for a while.

She can't believe what she's hearing.

GINA

Tony, what the hell happened?

TONY

Nothing. Honestly. Nothing to do with you. You're going to do great.

He abruptly gets up from the table.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'm sure I'll see you on Oprah someday discussing your book. You're really talented Gina. And passionate. You'll make it.

She tries to grab his arm as he tries to leave.

GINA

Tony, would you please sit down and tell me what the hell is wrong with you? Why are you just walking away?

TONY

I'm working, Gina. I've got a store full of customers.

She looks around. The staff have things well under control.

Tony's back behind the counter in a heartbeat, then disappears into the back. Gina sits, stunned, with her lemon mousse.

INT. ROSSETTI LIVING ROOM - LATER

Tony watches Jenny rehearse her scene. She's pretty good.

JENNY

"Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the verdict first!"

She stops when the phone rings.

TONY

(on the phone)

Hello?

(beat)

What?! Are you in jail?!

He glances at Jenny. She nods and mouths the word...

JENNY

Felix?

INT. THRIFT STORE BACK OFFICE - DAY

Tony wearily appears in the doorway of a grimy back office.

TONY

I'm here to pick up the master criminal.

Mrs. Rossetti sits on a hardback chair, eyes down.

The overworked thrift store manager looks up from his paperwork.

WEARY MANAGER

Ah, Mr. Rossetti. You'll vouch for Mrs. Rossetti here?

TONY

(to Mrs. Rossetti)

What did you do?

MRS. ROSSETTI

It's wrong to have to buy a whole bag.

TONY

What?

WEARY MANAGER

Mrs. Rossetti was observed opening bags of merchandise, picking out what she wanted and placing it in her purse.

He points to a tiny Lion King figurine on his desk.

MRS. ROSSETTI

For one tiny little figure they make you buy the whole bag!

WEARY MANAGER

Ma'am, that's how they come. That's how they must be purchased.

MRS. ROSSETTI

(to Tony)

I've tried to get them to sell me one little figure, but they said that without a price tag they can't sell me anything. So I tried to buy it and they refused!

Tony's tired and worn down.

TONY

(to manager)

So what do we do here? She's an old lady, she stole a five cent toy. I'll pay for it.

WEARY MANAGER

As she mentioned, we cannot sell the toys individually once we've divided them up and ascertained which toys go into which bags -

TONY

Oh for Christ's sake! You randomly dump of bunch of worthless toys into a plastic bag and charge two bucks for it. Here.

He digs in his pocket and tosses two dollars on the desk.

TONY (CONT'D)

(to Mrs. Rossetti)

Ma, say you're sorry and let's go.

Tony helps her up.

MRS. ROSSETTI
(insincere)

Sorry.

Tony ushers her towards the door. The Weary Manager attempts to assert his authority.

WEARY MANAGER
I'm afraid I'm going to have to ban
Mrs. Rossetti from the store.

TONY
Yeah, yeah.

She gasps in horror.

MRS. ROSSETTI
Banned? I can never come back?

TONY
Jesus, there's six more thrift stores
within walking distance. You'll survive.

Tony and Mrs. Rossetti are practically gone.

WEARY MANAGER
A lifetime ban!

INT. THRIFT STORE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Rossetti stops in her tracks just outside the office.

MRS. ROSSETTI
Wait! You just paid him for it, that
Simba is mine!

She turns to reenter the office, but Tony's pulls her away.

TONY
Jesus!

EXT. THRIFT STORE PARKING LOT - LATER

It's hard for Tony to walk at Mrs. Rossetti's slow pace. He stops and starts, circles back in his agitation as Mrs. Rossetti makes the long trek to the car.

TONY
Stealing?!

MRS. ROSSETTI
(ignoring his
comments)
Tony, you paid for that Simba, go back
in and get it!

TONY

And you say I'm a bad influence on Jenny taking her to AA?

MRS. ROSSETTI

He had tiny jewels on the crown. I've never seen one like that! Finding one with a crown is rare, but the jewels are usually painted on. This one had real tiny crystals!

TONY

What's Jenny going to think about you being banned for stealing?

MRS. ROSSETTI

It was a once in a lifetime find.

(realizes what
he just said)

Oh, no. Please don't tell Jenny.

TONY

How are you going to explain it when she wants to come back here? Don't you guys come here all the time?

She nods sadly.

TONY (CONT'D)

Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

MRS. ROSSETTI

What does that mean?

TONY

Nothing.

INT. TONY'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Rossetti won't look at Tony, she keeps her gaze on the view outside her window. He hasn't even turned the engine on yet.

TONY

I'm trying to set a good example for Jenny.

Nothing from Mrs. Rossetti.

TONY (CONT'D)

It would help if you wouldn't be teaching her to steal!

A light bulb goes off over his head.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Has she seen you do that before? Is
 that where she got it?

MRS. ROSSETTI
 Got what?

TONY
 Ma, does Jenny know you steal?!

MRS. ROSSETTI
 Of course not! I don't steal.
 (off Tony's
 look)
 I tried to buy a single piece but they
 don't let me. Ridiculous.

Tony sighs, gives up.

TONY
 I took Jenny to my AA meeting so that
 she can learn that addictions are
 something that can be dealt with.

MRS. ROSSETTI
 Jenny doesn't drink!

TONY
 Addictions come in all forms.

She's clueless.

MRS. ROSSETTI
 You paid for that Simba, Tony. I do
 wish you'd go back and get it.

One last plea...

MRS. ROSSETTI (CONT'D)
 It had tiny crystals, Tony!

TONY
 Jesus!

He hops out and slams the door.

INT. THRIFT STORE BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The Weary Manager still sits at his desk. Tony marches in.
 He snatches the tiny Lion King figurine off the desk.

TONY
 I paid for this!

He storms out. The Weary Manager is past caring.

INT. ROSSETTI'S DEN - NIGHT

Jenny performs her scene one last time. She doesn't even need the script anymore, it's pretty much memorized. She's pretty damned good. Tony and Mrs. Rossetti watch, amazed. They burst into applause when she finishes.

TONY

Wow!

Jenny takes a deep bow.

MRS. ROSSETTI

You'll win, Jenny! You'll be the best.

Mrs. Rossetti kisses Jenny on the cheek and shuffles to the kitchen.

TONY

Seriously though, kid. Listen.

She stands in front of him, looks at him intently.

JENNY

What, Dad?

TONY

I want you to know, you're really, really good. You ARE Alice. But life is funny, you never know what's gonna happen. So if Mr. Mensch ends up giving the part to someone else, I want you to know that you are an excellent Alice. I'm proud of you, no matter what happens.

She rolls her eyes.

JENNY

Cornball.

TONY

Yeah, I know it's corny. But it's true. And you're a brave girl for going after what you want. Not everyone does that.

JENNY

Now you want to hug, right?

He laughs and makes a lunge for her, wraps her in a great big bear hug that makes her giggle.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Can I go over to Felix's for a while? I never see him anymore. I was gonna help him study.

TONY

Sure. I have somewhere to go, so I'll drop you off.

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Felix opens the door, welcoming arms wide open.

FELIX

Alice! Welcome to Wonderland!

INT. TONY'S CAR - NIGHT

Tony's car is parked, but he doesn't get out. He takes some deep breaths.

TONY

Last one, Tony. Last one.

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - LATER

All of Felix's study guides are open on the table. But Felix and Jenny are not at the table. They are over at the computer on a small desk.

FELIX

See? This is Lewis Carroll. He wrote this story for three little girls that he knew. In fact it was a little girl named Alice Liddell that encouraged him to write down the stories he told them.

JENNY

How come you haven't been coming over?

FELIX

Miss me?

JENNY

Are you mad at us?

FELIX

No! Well, I was mad at your dad.

JENNY

For what?

FELIX

It's a long story. Okay, listen, this is interesting. "In the Victorian times when Alice in Wonderland was written..."

JENNY

Shouldn't you be studying?

FELIX

Nah, don't worry. I have plenty of time to cram. Hm. In the Victorian times many hatters went mad from the exposure to mercury that was used in shaping felt hats.

JENNY

Oh, is that why he's called a Mad Hatter?

FELIX

Yup. Plenty of Mad Hatters running around England back then I guess. Interesting time in history, so many changes.

JENNY

Felix? How come you don't want to study history instead of plumbing? You really like it and you're good at it.

FELIX

What the hell would I do with a history degree?

JENNY

What the hell would a history expert do with a plumbing license?

INT. DUKE'S CAFE - NIGHT

Tony is at his usual table. The Chubby Redheaded Waitress appears with his usual coffee order.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Hiya, sweets.

TONY

Hi.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

What'll it be tonight?

TONY

I was wondering. Do I look familiar to you?

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Of course! You're always in here. You never get dessert.

TONY

No, I mean from before.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Before what?

TONY

Can I talk to you? Somewhere private?

She's confused, but compliant.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Uh, I got a break in ten minutes.

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Felix is still completely engrossed in his historical Alice in Wonderland venture. Jenny drains the last of her large soda.

FELIX

So when the Victorians realized this, they began to...

JENNY

Can I have another one?

He eyes the huge empty glass she just sucked down.

FELIX

Sure, Cupcake.

INT. DUKE'S CAFE, BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Tony and the Chubby Redheaded Waitress sit alone in a tiny little break room. She is looking at a school photo of Jenny from Tony's wallet.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Yeah, she's just precious. I remember her from the other night.

Tony looks at pictures of her cats.

TONY

How many do you have?

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Just the two now. Had three but Petey died a few months ago.

She hangs her head in reverence.

TONY

Sorry.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

He was a great cat. Feline kidney failure. Very common among cats I'm afraid.

He hands the photo back to her.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

So you were in Mrs. Eagen's class?
That's probably why I don't remember.
I was in Mr. Chapman's class. That was
what, third grade?

He nods. She gently puts Jenny's photo down on the table.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Well this is a nice surprise! Why on
earth didn't you say something earlier?

TONY

The thing is, I'm in AA now, and part
of recovery is making amends.

She is truly confused now.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Amends?

TONY

Yes. I need to make an amends to you.
To apologize for something I did in the
past.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Apologize?

She laughs.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Oh my goodness, that was so long ago.
What could you possibly have done? We
were just kids. I don't even remember.
You're forgiven, sweets.

TONY

No, I need to do this formally.

She giggles and pats his hand.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

Oh alright. Whatever you need, darling.

TONY

I want to apologize to you, Renee. One
day at recess I was on the swings with
my friend Tom.

She still doesn't recall.

TONY (CONT'D)

You were there too, and you were waiting
your turn.

She's concentrating, trying to remember.

TONY (CONT'D)
And you were wearing a pink dress...

She's horror-struck.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS
Pink dress. That was you?

TONY
Yeah. Me and my friends were pretending we were drunk. For some reason we thought that was fun. Or funny.

Her bubbly demeanor is gone. She's stock still.

TONY (CONT'D)
You were just standing there, waiting your turn.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS
I wasn't bothering anyone. Just waiting my turn on the swings.

TONY
I know. And you remember what I said?

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS
Yes. But I never knew who said it.

TONY
It was me.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS
Right in front of everyone.

TONY
I know. I'm so sorry.

Tears well up in her eyes.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS
(mimicking him)
"Wow, I must really be drunk! Look, there's a pink elephant!"

A tear rolls down her face.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)
"Pinky! Pinky! Look, it's a pink elephant!" I was afraid to ever wear pink again.

Tony is mortified, ready to crawl under the table.

TONY

I know! I was awful! I don't know why I did it. Just an awful thing a stupid kid says. But I'm sorry it hurt you.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

I never said an unkind word to anyone.

He throws his head down into his hands.

TONY

I'm so sorry. I can't imagine what kind of emotional damage that must have done to a ten year old girl.

She is steely now.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS

No. You can't.

She gets up abruptly.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

But you know what? That --

She points to Jenny's photo.

CHUBBY REDHEADED WAITRESS (CONT'D)

-- that is justice. Serves you right.

Perfect bull's eye - a dagger in his heart.

INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, BACKSTAGE - DAY

Jenny is backstage at the audition. Gina approaches.

GINA

Good luck, Jenny.

Jenny doesn't hear, despite the fact that Gina is right in front of her.

GINA (CONT'D)

Jenny?

Jenny snaps out of it.

JENNY

Oh, what?

GINA

Good luck. Or break a leg I guess is what I'm supposed to say.

Jenny seems lackluster.

JENNY

Yeah. Thanks Ms. McIntyre.

Gina mistakes Jenny's tiredness and confusion for nerves.

GINA

Hey, nothing to be nervous about.

JENNY

I'm not nervous.

GINA

Oh well...that's good then. I'll be in the audience.

INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, ONSTAGE - LATER

Kids mill around backstage and in the audience waiting their turn. MR. MENSCH, a kindly old ex-actor sits in the audience taking notes on the last performer.

MR. MENSCH

Jenny Rossetti. Your turn, love.

Gina perks up, nervous. Watches. Jenny strides confidently onstage. There are girlish giggles in the audience. Gina glares at the gigglers.

MR. MENSCH (CONT'D)

Whenever you're ready, Jenny.

TAMARA

Nice earrings.

More giggles. Jenny doesn't react to their comments. She stares straight ahead. For a long moment.

MR. MENSCH

Okay, start when you want.

She finally gets her bearings. She has her script, but doesn't need to look at it.

JENNY

"If any one of them can explain it I'll give him a sixpence.

She hesitates. She's said this line a million times. She's quiet. A bit dazed.

MR. MENSCH

(prompting her)

"I don't believe there's..."

She seems to jolt her out of her fog.

JENNY

Oh, yeah. Right....

Gina cringes.

JENNY (CONT'D)

"I don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it."

INT. TONY'S CAR - DAY

Tony sits in his car. Unable to drive. On the verge of tears.

INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, ONSTAGE - DAY

MR. MENSCH

(reading the
other character)

"...that must be what he did with the tarts, you know.."

Jenny's fading fast. The girls giggle. Gina is in agony. Mr. Mensch repeats his line with more urgency.

MR. MENSCH (CONT'D)

"That must be what they did with the tarts, you know."

She swallows hard. A dry throat. Everyone waits.

MR. MENSCH (CONT'D)

Jenny, if you're not prepared to audition, you'll have to leave the stage.

Everyone waits. Jenny stands, dazed.

MR. MENSCH (CONT'D)

Jenny, please leave so someone else can audition. Maybe you can help with props or something.

Jenny faints and hits the floor hard. Gina rushes onstage.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Tony, Mrs. Rossetti and Gina are waiting. Mrs. Rossetti is straightening the magazines on the table.

Gina puts a soothing hand on Tony's hand.

GINA

Diabetes isn't a death sentence, you know. You can deal with this.

TONY

I know. But I feel horrible. The signs were there. Always thirsty, tired. And I yelled at her for it.

GINA

My God. You carry an immense amount of guilt on your shoulders everywhere you go.

TONY

Yeah, hi, have we met? I'm Tony. Recovering Catholic.

She rubs his shoulders.

GINA

Maybe this will help.

It does, for the time being. He allows himself to be soothed by her touch.

TONY

So. The audition. Was it bad?

She's behind him, not sure how to respond.

TONY (CONT'D)

You're nodding back there, aren't you?

GINA

Yeah. She passed out right in the middle of it.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Felix visits with Jenny who is in her hospital bed. Tony sits at the foot of the bed.

FELIX

Well kiddo, you're lucky. You've got the kind that doesn't need shots.

She nods.

FELIX (CONT'D)

You can control it with diet. If you eat right, it's no problem.

Too much for Tony to bear hearing.

TONY

(to himself)

Jesus.

EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Gina stands by the elevator. Tony is exhausted and worn down.

GINA
If you need anything, call me.

TONY
Thanks for everything.

He pushes the button for elevator and backs away from her.

GINA
Tony. She'll be fine.

He plays it cool. Distant. She won't have any of it. She forces a hug, awkward at first, but then he melts into it.

The elevator doors open. She eventually kisses him on the cheek and gets into the elevator.

He stands there, numb.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Tony reenters and sits down again. Jenny is asleep. Felix is still there.

FELIX
I was really pissed at you.

TONY
I know.

FELIX
When I left you that day, I was really upset.

TONY
I know.

FELIX
I started to go home, and ended up in a bar. Got drunk, picked a fight.

They both watch Jenny sleep for a moment.

FELIX (CONT'D)
When I get upset, I get drunk and stumble home. When you get upset, you bake bread. I think the right cousin is running the bakery.

They finally look each other in the eye. Their nod and smile is all the apologies needed.

FELIX (CONT'D)

No need to walk on eggshells around me.

Tony chuckles.

FELIX (CONT'D)

What?

TONY

Nothing. It's "walk on eggs," not "eggshells."

FELIX

Is it?

TONY

Apparently.

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Felix staggers in, exhausted. Checks the clock. 2:24 am.

He opens his studying materials. He's in hell.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Mrs. Rossetti trails through the bakery with Jenny in tow.

JENNY

But they have the best jewelry. Let's just go real quick.

MRS. ROSSETTI

No, Jenny. I don't like that store.

JENNY

Don't like it? Since when?

MRS. ROSSETTI

Since now. We'll try the one on Lake Street tomorrow.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - LATER

Tony is in the back taking a break. He's still reading Alice in Wonderland.

Jenny saunters in.

JENNY

Why you still reading that?

TONY

Once I started reading it I got interested. Now I want to finish it.

JENNY

They say the guy who wrote it was a child molester.

TONY

Who told you that?

JENNY

Felix.

TONY

So do you know who got the part?

She shrugs. She worms her way onto his lap.

JENNY

Nah. Didn't look.

TONY

Maybe you got a smaller role.

She's not interested.

JENNY

I'll check. They posted the cast list today.

TONY

This diabetes thing, it's going to be okay you know.

JENNY

I know.

TONY

You don't need the shots. But you'll have to be careful about what you eat. Or it could get bad. I need you to take this seriously.

JENNY

Yeah, I know, Dad. I looked it up on the internet. "Controllable with diet."

TONY

Good girl.

He gives her a mushy kiss. She squirms out of it.

JENNY

Dad!

She trots back through the bakery area. Tony watches her go. She passes the display case. Tony leans over in his chair,

almost tips over to keep his eagle eye on her. She doesn't sneak any food.

TONY
(whispers)

Good girl.

INT. 6TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

Kids leave the classroom. Gina approaches Jenny.

GINA
Hey kiddo. I heard you got a part in the play!

JENNY
Yeah. The Dodo. Mr. Mensch heard about why I passed out. I guess he felt sorry for me, so he gave me a part.

GINA
Hey, the Dodo is an important role.

JENNY
I only have five lines.

GINA
There are no small roles, only small actors.

JENNY
I'm certainly not a small actor.

Gina can't help but laugh at her mature humor.

GINA
So that hospital thing, that was kinda scary, huh?

She shrugs.

GINA (CONT'D)
The type of diabetes you have, it's controllable --

JENNY
With diet, I know.

GINA
If you need to be sipping on some water during class, that's okay. I know you're thirsty a lot.

JENNY
Okay. Oh hey, I have this thing....

She digs in her backpack, pulls out a paper.

JENNY (CONT'D)
I need three teachers' signatures to
get into DECA. Would you recommend me?

GINA
Oh Jenny, of course! That's great.

She takes the paper and signs it.

GINA (CONT'D)
DECA, huh? That'll be fun.

JENNY
Yeah, I guess.

INT. ROSSETTI'S DEN - DAY

Tony looks at the caller ID as the phone rings. He doesn't
pick up, and finally his machine answers.

GINA (O.S.)
Hi Tony, it's Gina. Good news. Jenny
just asked me to recommend her for DECA,
so of course I did. I tried to talk to
her about the diabetes thing. She seems
fine about it. Strong little girl.

Tony listens.

GINA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Anyway, I know you've got a lot happening
right now, but...I hope you can find
some time for me.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Jenny is helping in the bakery, sneaking licks and bites of
sweets from the bowls.

TONY
Jenny, for the tenth time, stop it!
You can't do that anymore!

JENNY
Jeez, Dad, it was just a lick.

TONY
Yeah, and lick after lick after lick
adds up! Did you not hear the doctor?
You've got diabetes, and it can get
very serious if you don't control it!

JENNY

Dad, I had diabetes last week and you let me lick the bowl then. Nothing's changed. Why the big drama?

He's reached his limit. He drops what he's doing and goes into the back room.

INT. STORAGE ROOM OF ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Tony rifles through some paperwork, finds a list, picks up the phone and dials. Waits.

TONY

Hi, it's Tony. From the Wednesday night group.

(beat)

Great, thanks. Actually, I was wondering if you could help me.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - LATER

Jenny is heading toward the stairs.

TONY

Get your coat, Cupcake. Come with me.

JENNY

No, I can't, Grandma's taking me to a new thrift store.

TONY

Tough! You're coming with me.

His stern expression makes her stop and follow him.

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL OFFICE - DAY

Sad Sack Susan opens her door with a smile.

SAD SACK SUSAN

Hi Jenny. We met at the AA meeting, remember?

JENNY

Uh huh.

SAD SACK SUSAN

Come in.

Jenny cautiously enters, looks around the office. Tony hangs back, staying in the doorway. Posters and charts of diabetes fill the walls. Her specialty. Tony pulls Sad Sack Susan aside and whispers in her ear...

TONY
Scare the hell out of her.

Sad Sack Susan tries to replace her cheerful smile with a serious scowl.

SAD SACK SUSAN
(ominously)
So Jenny. I've got some things to show
you.

The door shuts with Jenny and Sad Sack Susan inside, leaving Tony in the hallway.

INT. FELIX'S TINY APARTMENT - DAY

Felix fries himself an egg.

FELIX
Minimum measurement of wall space for
installing a toilet? In residential
structure, 30 inches. In commercial
structure, 36 inches.

He expertly flips the egg onto a plate, proud of his egg, proud of his knowledge.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Water lines must be buried 12 inches
below the frost line.

He looks at his fried egg.

FELIX (CONT'D)
"Walk on eggshells...."

He thinks about it. Tries again.

FELIX (CONT'D)
"Walk on eggs...?"

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Tony flips through a magazine, uninterested. Finally the office door opens. A dazed Jenny emerges followed by Sad Sack Susan.

SAD SACK SUSAN
Now for the tour. Care to join us, Tony?

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL DAY ROOM - LATER

SAD SACK SUSAN
(whispers to
Tony)

I managed to round up all my diabetes patients and get them all in one room.

TONY

Nice set up.

SAD SACK SUSAN

Wasn't easy.

Jenny takes in the awful scene. Amputees and old blind men.

SAD SACK SUSAN (CONT'D)
Jenny, this is Len. He was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 23.

He is obviously blind and both feet are missing.

SAD SACK SUSAN (CONT'D)
You loved your sweets, didn't you, Len?

LEN
Yes, ma'am. I still do.

Jenny is mortified at his condition. Tony is very uneasy. She is trying not to cry.

INT. TONY'S CAR - NIGHT

Jenny is still sniffing, obviously been crying, scared as they sit in the car. Tony is putting on a stern face, but clearly upset that he has to upset her.

TONY
If you don't get things under control, you're going to be in bad, bad shape. Did you see those men in there?

She nods.

TONY (CONT'D)
You want to be like them? Because that's the road you're heading down. This has to stop. Now I'm not saying you can't occasionally have something sweet, you can. But we have to learn moderation.

She suppressed a whimper.

TONY (CONT'D)
Is this getting through to you?

She nods.

TONY (CONT'D)
You could end up in coma, Jenny!

She starts to cry, seriously scared. He holds it together, needing to be stern.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Tony and Jenny pass through, both silent. Jenny is still teary. She goes straight upstairs.

Tony almost follows, then turns back. He takes his coat off, puts on his baker's smock. He pulls out a huge ball of dough from the refrigerator and slams it onto the kneading surface.

He stares at his therapeutic ball of dough. Not good enough this time.

He whips off the smock, puts his coat back on and flies out the back door.

EXT. GINA'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Gina opens the door to find Tony, almost in tears.

TONY
I'm an *excellent* father!

She lets him vent.

TONY (CONT'D)
I just scared my daughter until she was in tears.

She steps out onto the porch with him, but doesn't interrupt.

TONY (CONT'D)
I took her to the VA hospital. Showed her all the amputees, the blind guys. Basically told her, "you're next!"

Gina listens intently.

TONY (CONT'D)
I didn't know what else to do. I needed to wake her up! Jesus, she could have ended up in a coma!

GINA
But she didn't, she's fine. She'll be fine.

TONY

Will she?

GINA

Yes. You did what you needed to do.
Scaring her probably saved her life.

TONY

Oh my God, it felt horrible.

She hugs him.

GINA

Of course it did. It's never fun to be
the rule enforcer. I know. I'm a teacher.

They sit on the steps.

TONY

I barely got my own addiction under
control. Now I've got a kid with one.
How am I supposed to deal with that?

GINA

Yeah. Females and weight issues...
it's a touchy subject at best.

TONY

Thanks. That helps. I have no idea
how to deal with this.

GINA

Jenny's smart, that's a plus. Think of
it this way, at least you can relate to
her problem. She's a lot like her dad.

TONY

No kidding! Did I teach her this?

GINA

Bottom line? It's not about you, Tony.
It doesn't matter if you inadvertently
taught her this behavior or not. It is
what it is. Now you just need to think
about how to put her onto the right
path. And that's what you did today.

TONY

It's not about me.

GINA

Right. Sometimes I want to knock that
Catholic guilt crap right out of you.

TONY

You wanna smack me, huh?

GINA

Sometimes. She may take after you with this addictive pattern, but she's also sweet like her dad. Kind like her dad. Smart like her dad.

TONY

Maybe she gets that from her mother. Jesus, it's been a hell of a week. What with the amends and the diabetes and the fight with Felix. My mother was caught shoplifting.

GINA

Does diabetes run in your - wait, your mother was caught shoplifting?

TONY

Yeah. Don't ask. She tried to steal a plastic toy worth about five cents.

Gina finds this uproariously funny.

GINA

Fantastic!

TONY

My ex-wife's mother had diabetes, and one of her cousins. So I guess it does run in her family.

GINA

Thank God.

TONY

Huh?

GINA

If Jenny got the diabetes from your side of the family I'd be talking you in off a ledge right now.

He laughs and nods.

GINA (CONT'D)

And the amends? You finished them?

TONY

Yeah. And they just about finished me.

GINA

Your sponsor must be proud.

TONY

That's not exactly the case. Did the last three this week.

GINA

So is that where you disappeared to? Thought maybe it was something I said. I scared the Mouse off again.

TONY

Scare me off? Is that what happened?

GINA

I don't know.

She scoots over closer to him. Links her arm through his.

GINA (CONT'D)

You tell me.

TONY

I've never been the most overly confident guy to begin with. Never think I'm good enough. And lately a lot of people have been agreeing with me.

GINA

Hmm. And these people...how well do they know you? Who was your last amends?

TONY

A woman I went to school with.

GINA

Back in college?

Tony's look reminds her that he of course never went to college.

GINA (CONT'D)

Oh. High school?

TONY

Uh, no it was like the third grade. A girl I used to see at recess.

She is surprised almost to the point of amusement.

GINA

The third - Jesus! Was she even in your class? Did you know her?

TONY

Not really.

She laughs.

GINA

So you run into someone you only vaguely interacted with on the playground in third grade and you take her opinion of you to heart?

He shrugs it off. She leans her head on his shoulder.

GINA (CONT'D)

Oh, Tony. Maybe Jenny *does* get her smarts from her mother.

This finally makes him laugh.

TONY

You always make me feel better. How do you do that?

She shrugs.

GINA

I have a gift for knocking that Catholic guilt crap out of people.

They kiss.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why don't you come inside?

She stands up, pulling him with her. He doesn't resist when she leads him inside.

INT. ROSSETTI'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Tony bounces up the stairs right into the middle of a normal breakfast scene. Mrs. Rossetti cuts a banana into Jenny's cereal, stopping only when Tony appears.

MRS. ROSSETTI

Good morning, Tony.

Felix has his mouth full, he waves hello. Jenny gives Tony's abrupt entrance only the slightest notice.

JENNY

Hi, Dad.

He takes in the scene. All is well. No drama. Everyone's fine. A pleasant surprise.

TONY

Hm.

As casually as possible he saunters to the table.

TONY (CONT'D)

(to Jenny)

I got up really early this morning and went...out. Just now getting back.

JENNY

Yeah, right, Dad. We're that naive.

FELIX

Go change your clothes.

Tony cringes. He slinks away.

MRS. ROSSETTI

He didn't get up early?

JENNY

Wait, Dad.

He looks to Jenny. She smiles and nods her approval.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I really like Ms. McIntyre.

Relief washes over him.

Felix finishes his breakfast, takes the dishes to the sink, though Mrs. Rossetti intercepts. That's her job.

FELIX

Okay, wish me luck! I'm off to take my licensing exam!

MRS. ROSSETTI

Good luck, Felix! You'll do great!
You'll make a wonderful plumber.

JENNY

(sing-songy)

Booor-ing. You're gonna hate it.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEST ROOM - DAY

Felix sits in a sea of soon-to-be plumbers. Some are taking last minutes looks at their notes. Others are talking amongst themselves. Felix listens.

SOON-TO-BE PLUMBER ONE

You use that that fitting called The Shark Bite yet? You can use it on any material, any size pipe diameter.

SOON-TO-BE-PLUMBER TWO

No, but I heard about it. It's expensive though, isn't it?

SOON-TO-BE PLUMBER ONE

Yeah, but it's way faster than soldering,
so you save money in the end. And it's
a really tight seal.

Felix turns his attention to other soon-be-plumbers.

SOON-TO-BE-PLUMBER THREE

...but what I'd like to eventually do is
specialize in commercial refrigeration.

SOON-TO-BE-PLUMBER FOUR

...man, you know those little elbow
joints for going around exhaust pipes?
If you solder them first....

Felix is bored out of his skull.

INT. DECA ROOM - DAY

Jenny sits in DECA orientation. A Mousy DECA Teacher drones
on about the oh-so-fun world of business. She points to the
banks of computers lined up against the wall.

MOUSY DECA TEACHER

...and the school has given us this
room and five computer stations so that
kids can come here and use the computers.
We have wireless now, too.

Jenny listens, nothing too difficult.

MOUSY DECA TEACHER (CONT'D)

Your job will be to facilitate this
process. In addition to selling computer
time, students can also purchase items...

She picks up a cute novelty pen on the counter as an example.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony is icing a cake, but stops mid-frost when he hears a
familiar cackle. Kim sits sipping espresso with her gaggle of
snotty moms.

He tries to pay her no mind. He refills the display case. He
busies himself. Eventually he walks past her close enough
that they must acknowledge each other. They nod coolly.

She clears her throat self-consciously.

KIM

I heard about Jenny. She's okay?

TONY

Yeah. She's fine, thanks. Heard Tamara is going to play Alice.

She nods.

KIM

Yes.

He smiles and nods his congratulations. They got through the exchange pleasantly enough, but she just can't leave well enough alone. As Tony leaves he hears from behind him...

KIM (CONT'D)

Of course she is. Was there ever any doubt?

He turns to face her. A big warm smile.

TONY

Actually there WAS some doubt. Sometimes people want more substance than just pretty blonde hair can deliver.

KIM

Say, listen, why don't you go back behind your little counter and do your little baking. That's what you do best. Leave the literary endeavors to those of us who can read and write.

He has no reply for that. He heads back, slightly beaten.

KIM (CONT'D)

You know, it's too bad Jenny didn't get the part of Tweedle Dee or Tweedle Dum. Tony could have really helped her out with that part. Given her some real life experiences as a dimwit.

Tony stops in his tracks. The group titters with delight. He smiles. Turns and makes a slow, delicious b-line for Kim. His confident smile unnerves her.

TONY

You never read the book.

KIM

What? Of course I did. It's a literary classic.

He shakes his head.

TONY

No. You didn't. Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee?

KIM

Yes, genius. They are the dimwitted twins that Alice runs into before going to see the Queen of Hearts.

The gaggle of moms all nod their heads in snotty agreement.

TONY

Yes, I know who they are. And unlike you I also know that they are NOT in Alice in Wonderland.

The women exchange looks. Is he nuts?

TONY (CONT'D)

Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dum are not in Alice in Wonderland. They are in the sequel, "Through the Looking Glass."

Blank looks from the women.

TONY (CONT'D)

They ARE however, in the Disney animated version of the 'literary classic'.

He bursts out laughing.

TONY (CONT'D)

Your complete oh-so educated knowledge of this 'literary classic' comes entirely from watching the kid's movie with your daughter!

Kim can't breathe. The others look at her for direction. She has none.

Tony laughs again, backs up and takes a long hard look at the group of beautiful women now gawking at him.

TONY (CONT'D)

"You're nothing but a pack of cards!"

He doesn't waste another second on this deflated group.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEST ROOM - DAY

Felix is in the middle of taking the test.

FELIX (V.O.)

"What is the minimum amount of wall space required for installation of a toilet in a residential structure?"

He scans the room. Everyone is scribbling answers. He stares at the test in front of him. Finally he begins to write.

INT. DECA ROOM - DAY

Jenny sits behind the counter. Mousy DECA Teacher watches her handle a transaction.

MOUSY DECA TEACHER

Nicely done. You're a natural at this.

Jenny smiles and nods. Kids sit at the computers. A GEEKY YOUNG GIRL inspects a jar of cute pencils on the counter, looking for the prettiest one.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEST ROOM - DAY

Felix hands in his test. He is beaming as he leaves the room. The PROCTOR glances at his test. He squints in confusion as he reads Felix's test...

FELIX (V.O.)

"What is the minimum amount of wall space required for installation of a toilet in a residential structure?"
Although the exact place and date of the invention of plumbing is unknown, it is largely believed that Jerusalem was the first city to use the aqueduct.

He flips through the entire test. It's full of Felix's historical ramblings.

FELIX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In 97 AD Frontinus was elected Superintendent of the Roman Water Works and built 9 aqueducts in Rome and is considered the Father of Modern Plumbing.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE OFFICE - DAY

Felix strides to the counter. A STUDIOUS WOMAN helps him.

FELIX

Quick question. How would I go about transferring some of my credits to a degree program?

STUDIOUS WOMAN

What discipline are you going into?

He beams.

FELIX

I'm going to get my degree in history.

INT. ROSSETTI'S BAKERY - DAY

Tony puts on his jacket and tells Seth as he passes...

TONY

I'll be back later.

Tony passes Kim. He only pauses long enough to toss something onto her table: his CLIFF NOTES for "Alice In Wonderland."

TONY (CONT'D)

Here. You'll probably need this.

INT. DECA ROOM - DAY

Jenny's holding down the fort brilliantly. She is in her element. She's got full access and control over the computer usage fees and the inventory behind the counter. She's really good at this, she's found her place.

But a SLOW REVEAL eventually shows that in addition to the few other things that are for sale on the counter are, behind her, BOXES AND BOXES AND BOXES OF CANDY.

A NERDY KID approaches the counter and gives her a few dollars.

NERDY KID

Hi, I wanna use the internet for an hour.

Jenny unleashes her old routine...

JENNY

Okay. **We're all out of receipts though.**
Here, let me just stamp your hand...

Echo of GLASS BOTTLES CLINK LOUDLY, NEVER ENDING, SO LOUD UNTIL --

Black.

Credits roll.