

Begins

(Cassidy exits upstairs. Rhys is left with the photo album. He goes over to the couch and sits down with the photos. He starts looking through them. Beat, in which he looks at the photos, sort of distractedly. After a while, he puts the open photo album to the side and stares into space, thinking. Rhys tries to sleep. He can't. He takes out his phone. He clicks around on it. Suddenly, the sound of two men having sex is heard coming from the phone. Embarrassed, he puts his phone on mute quickly, checks to see if anyone heard, then, keeping his eyes on the screen, he puts his hand down his pants and starts masturbating. The open photo album is uncomfortably close. This goes on for a little bit before Franz enters from upstairs, pulling out a cell phone. Seeing Rhys, he freezes on the steps. There is a moment of confusion, panic and embarrassment, which traps Franz on the stairs. Franz tries to escape back upstairs but, in the process, steps on a step which creaks loudly. Rhys, hearing it, freezes. Franz steps on another step. It creaks even worse. Rhys stops what he's doing, scrambles to hide his phone, craning around to see who's coming. Franz, pretending to not have seen anything, is forced to commit to coming down the stairs, making a big show of doing so.)

Hello?

FRANZ (*Fake blasé, pretending to be on his phone*): ... Oh, hey, Rhys.

RHYS: Hey—hey. What's up?

(Franz comes downstairs over the following and stands next to Rhys, examining the scene.)

FRANZ: River said your mom came home, wanted to see if I could catch her. Is she here?

RHYS: Uh, yeah ... She went to bed.

FRANZ: Oh ... okay ... Looks like you're feeling better.

RHYS: Yeah. Just ... just trying to get some sleep.

FRANZ: ... You sleep sitting up, or ...?

RHYS: Ha, no! I was just thinking.

(Franz notices the open photo album next to Rhys. Beat.)

FRANZ (*Awkward*): Are those the ... pictures?

RHYS (*Lying, casually flipping through them*): Yeah ... I was ... just, um, looking at them.

(Beat, in which Franz puts something together which is not altogether accurate. He seems to struggle internally for a second. Rhys, not quite comprehending, notices.)

Everything all right?

FRANZ: Yeah, sorry. I'm trying to decide the right thing to do here ...

... Hmm. (*Beat*) Okay, so listen: I want you to know that I'm not a judgy person—I don't judge you—at this point in my life, I've seen a lot of different things and met a lot of different people—but I feel like I have to be ... an uncle for a sec and ... Let's say I saw what you were doing just now ... (*Off Rhys's reaction*) Right. And it seems, just based on the vibe coming off you—it's something you have complicated feelings about, right? There's a little ... shame there, right? (*Rhys nods*) Would you say that this is, like, a regular thing for you?

RHYS: I ... uh ... / I—

FRANZ: Actually, you know what? You don't have to answer that. How could it be, right? Or, actually, I don't know, but listen—again, not judging you—but I want you to know I think that what's happening here—all this dark stuff—is all just about ... pain. It's about being in pain. There's a pain inside you that's leading you to do things like this that make you feel like this. Is this sounding familiar? (*Off Rhys's nod*) And you've got to figure out the source of it in order to

free yourself because these bad things you're feeling ... they can kill you. They can ruin what should be a very beautiful part of life.

RHYS (*Confused*): Sorry, what are we talking about?

FRANZ: ... We're talking about your looking at the pictures, dude.

RHYS: Oh ...

FRANZ: What did you think I was talking about?

RHYS: I ... Sorry, go ahead ...

(Rhys tries to recalibrate, though still not getting it.)

FRANZ: Listen, obviously I'm not the most articulate person ... but, okay, so your mother's told me a bit about your issues with school and the drugs and stuff and I'm not sure if you know this, but I had some similar problems when I was here, so I feel like I'm starting to put some things together about what's maybe going on with you. It's feeling familiar. I'm going to share a little something with you, okay? Maybe it will help.

RHYS: ... Okay?

FRANZ: So the source of *my* pain was that I never felt like ... a grown-up. Inside, I always felt like a stunted kid, you know? Which meant I only felt like I was good at ... connecting ... with other kids—or, like, young people and that led me to some dark places where I did ... well, now I recognize them as the wrong things but at the time I was just ... lost and ... so lonely, I didn't really ... I was sort of left to my own devices to figure out what ... meant what—my desire, my pain, my feelings—and what I really needed was for someone to sit me down and talk about feelings, to tell me, “*You* are bigger than how you feel about yourself in any given moment—bigger than your momentary desires—bigger than your shame. Feelings are fleeting — and if you want to, you can really *will* yourself to feel different.

You don't have to feel trapped. You can rewire yourself.” So I guess that's what I am trying to do for you.

RHYS (*Not really sure what's going on*): Uh-huh ...

FRANZ: But maybe you can't hear that because you're still ... young.

You're still inside the thing. (*Beat*) But I want to help you. God, what would River do? (*Thinks, then*) You know what? Give me the photos.

RHYS (*Not sure what's going on*): What?

FRANZ (*Pointing to the photos*): I'm gonna take these. Because I want you to know you're not alone. Whenever you think about this or doing anything like what you were just doing, I want you to remember that you've got someone in your corner and you're not alone and you're still young and you can change and you don't have to feel trapped.

RHYS (*Completely confused*): Yeah, sure. I mean ... I'm supposed to put them in Mom's car so ...

FRANZ (*Taking the photos*): It's okay ... I'll take care of them ... (*Beat*) You remember me, right? From when you were a kid—

RHYS: Yeah—at Christmas you would come ...

FRANZ: Do I seem different to you?

RHYS: Uh, not really. Maybe you look a little older.

FRANZ: Okay ... Yeah, okay.

(Franz exits. Alone, Rhys is confused, mortified, any number of things. He lays down on the couch and pulls the quilt up over himself, trying to figure out what just happened. He eventually puts it together.)

RHYS (*Quietly*): No ... No? ... No, no, no ... No ... No ... No, no, no, no, no—

(It's painful. Curtain. Cicadas.)