

The Writer's Daughter

By

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ACT I

INT. NICE, UPPER CLASS RESTAURANT IN NM - AFTERNOON

Waitress shows MELANIE (40s, white, in a button down and slacks) and her father, WILLIAM (early 70s, white, in suit) through the crowded restaurant. WILLIAM slows down, distracted by a picturesque family laughing at a joke and MELANIE pulls him on.

WILLIAM

What? What's the rush?

MELANIE

(more joking than nagging)

We're already late, thanks to you.
Come on.

They enter a private room with a table set for 15 and the rest of their party (dressed semi formal) has already begun to mingle. William begins to drift towards the group but Melanie grabs William by the elbow and makes him stand next to her.

There is a slight pause and some whispers when the two enter, and two elegantly dressed guests in their 50s move toward them, but are interrupted by LOUISE (60, dressed to show her considerable wealth) tapping her knife against a wine glass.

LOUISE

I think we're all here! Please, everyone, choose where you'd like to sit. So glad everyone could make it - especially the Marchers, who had to make the drive from Placitas. And William, you're looking so well.

Silence, the party looks at Melanie and William for a response.

MELANIE

(Embarrassed)

Thank you so much... We're just happy to see everyone after... so long.

LOUISE

You're looking a lot better as well, Melanie, you've lost some weight, haven't you?

WILLIAM
 (before Melanie can answer)
 Congrats on surviving - how many years
 is it?

LOUISE
 60.

WILLIAM
 60! Holy shit.

Louise raises her eyebrows.

WILLIAM
 Happy birthday Louise!

Everyone starts to sit down, and Melanie pulls William, who did not move at first, to the end of the table.

STEVE and his wife, TANYA (late 50s, Hispanic, suburban) subtly push people out of the way to sit next to William and Melanie.

INT. SEATED AT THE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

TANYA
 Hi. I'm Tanya and this is Steve. We met at Mike's housewarming party a few months back.

MELANIE
 Oh, yeah, I remember! It was so awful I think we left after five minutes. So nice to see you again. How are you doing?

Melanie is distracted by her father, setting up his place at the table as William looks around, oblivious to the conversation

STEVE
 Just wonderful.
 (whispering)
 We were so sorry to hear the tragic news about your father... Especially since it means he won't be able to write more books, right?
 (raising his voice)
 Tanya and I absolutely devoured his novels - great guy.

William tunes into the conversation as Steve compliments him.

WILLIAM

Thanks, I appreciate--

MELANIE

--He's fine. He's doing fine. We're just... good.

Melanie puts a quieting hand on William's arm and he looks down at his plate, zoning out again.

TANYA

Must be so hard for you, you poor thing - you were a teacher out in California, right?

MELANIE

Yeah. Yes... (*choosing words carefully*) It was an easy transition, though. A few months back and it feels like I never left.

WE HEAR: cutlery clatter loudly and then

CLOSE ON: William's hand shakily messing with the cutlery until Melanie's hands reach over to still his and she gives him a reproachful glare.

MELANIE

And it's nice to spend time with Dad. I moved away right after high school, so we've had some catching up to do.

TANYA

But it's not the same, is it? I mean now that he's
(pointing to her own head)
not all there.

WILLIAM

I'm sitting right here, Tanya.

TANYA

Oh, I'm so sorry Mr. Marcher, I didn't--

MELANIE

--Dad, don't be rude.

STEVE

(pointed look at Tanya)
He's not being rude at all.

WILLIAM

I don't need you to defend me.

Melanie clenches her fist and puts the other hand on William's arm again, more forcefully than before. William unhappily sits back. The waiters enter with the salad as the guests sit in silence for a moment.

STEVE

So William, is it nice to have Melanie back? You're a lucky man, having a daughter that would give up, well not give up *everything*, per se, but uh, move back home for you. (*pause*) Or is the nest too full again?

WILLIAM

Oh yeah, sure. Nice to have her back for a few days. She always has to fly right back, though.

Steve and Tanya share a knowing look which Melanie sees, shamed.

MELANIE

(Trying to lighten the mood)
Not this time, Dad, remember? You're stuck with me... Why don't you start on your salad? It looks delicious.

As Melanie continues talking, William stares in confusion at his place setting.

TANYA

You know, we hate to be those people (*laughs*) but we heard your father was going to be here and we brought our favorite book for him to sign.

STEVE

(directed at William)
We really hate to be like this, but we couldn't see William Marcher and not ask. "The sun sets on the writer's life and he is alone, as he always so deeply desired. But he learned that to apologize is just to change, and to

change is to begin a new life. Every day, every choice sets a new intention, and all he can do is hope that he changed enough, and that one day his daughter would join him on his hill overlooking the city lights." Just beautiful stuff.

William smiles winningly at Steve but doesn't respond, looking back down and touching the cutlery, confused.

MELANIE

(glancing over at her father)
Maybe later.

STEVE

Oh, of course! No worries. We (pointed look at Tanya) should have waited until after we ate.

MELANIE

(quietly, to William)
You start with the outside fork.
(to the larger group)
Remind me, you have a son, right?

STEVE

Yup, a son and two girls. They're all out of college and living spread across the country.

WILLIAM

You gotta be careful with those girls.

STEVE

Huh?

WILLIAM

They're easily swayed. Men you know, wanna take advantage of them. You have to protect them, keep them close. Melanie, here, I always kept a close eye on.

Melanie, Tanya, and Steven are all at a loss.

MELANIE

Well, I moved away and I did just fine, didn't I? (*rerouting*) What does your son do?

TANYA

Our Chris is an accountant, Maria is working at Wells Fargo, and Elena is working for the mayor of a small town in Oklahoma.

MELANIE

Very impressive.

WILLIAM

Well the political system is all fucked, isn't it?

Eyes widen.

MELANIE

Dad, no it's not, I just think--

WILLIAM

--Sure is. You see all these different races running for office, trying to lead us. Well this is America and I'd like to be led by an American, not some know-it-all Negroes or uppity girls.

Silence. William keeps eating.

MELANIE

Oh my God. He doesn't mean that, he hasn't said things like that in ages.

Tanya raises her eyebrows but retains her sugary demeanor.

TANYA

Well, doesn't make it okay.

MELANIE

Of course not, I just mean he educated himself and grew out of these thoughts such a long time ago.

STEVE

Let's talk about something else.

TANYA

Do you think William will publish any more books? He still has such devoted devoted fans - myself and Steve included. (*laughs*)

WILLIAM
 (happily engaging)
 You know, I'd love to--

MELANIE
 --Oh, I don't know if a novel is
 realistic at this point. He's still
 writing though - nothing could get him
 to stop.

TANYA
 So sweet.

STEVE
 (jokingly)
 I'm sure all the money doesn't hurt
 either!

Melanie grimaces and forces out a laugh. William rolls his eyes and Melanie puts a hand on his arm to stop him from responding

TANYA
 (comprehending Steve's misstep)
 Sooo, tell us more about California.
 Do you have a boyfriend out there?

INSERT: Steve kicks Tanya under the table for bringing up the subject.

WILLIAM
 She better not. Too young for a
 boyfriend.

MELANIE
 (ignoring William)
 I did but - long distance
 relationships never... work out.

STEVE
 You gonna head back to Cali, after all
 this?

MELANIE
 (shooting a look at William)
 Uh, well, I'm not sure-

Melanie is interrupted by Louise standing up and clinking her glass as the waiters come and clear the salad plates from the tables.

LOUISE

Alright, I thought I might open some presents while we wait on the main course, if nobody minds?

In the background we see Melanie furiously whispering in her father's ear.

LOUISE

Oh, first gift is from William and Melanie. A novel! Thank you so much - if I ever get around to reading it! I'll make some time.

MELANIE

(flustered, rambling)

It takes place during WWII - I remembered Mom had mentioned that you were fascinated by the time period, especially in Europe.

LOUISE

Oh, you remembered. So sweet of you.

WILLIAM

WWII, huh? Sometimes makes you think the Germans had the right idea.

MELANIE

Oh my god, Dad, please.

WILLIAM

What? I'm just saying, if you look-

Williams stands up mid sentence and starts walking to the front of the room where Louise is standing.

WILLIAM

If you look at our country, wouldn't things be better if people stuck to their own kind? But God forbid if someone so much as mentions Hitler...

Melanie puts her head in her hands, Tanya puts her hand over her mouth and shoots a thrilled look at Steve, finding a perverse delight in the drama.

LOUISE

William, why don't you sit down?

WILLIAM

I think people should hear what I have to say.

Melanie stands up and goes to grab William.

INT. AT FRONT OF THE TABLE, CLOSE TO THE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM

You know, just the other day, I read that we're not allowed to say retarded anymore. That used to be the medical term for crazies, but I probably can't say that either. People are getting so soft, you can't even speak anymore. Well, I have a voice and I'm going to use it.

MELANIE

Sorry everyone, so sorry. Dad, please come, come with me.

WILLIAM

Get your hands off me bitch!

CAMERA PANS down the table showing shocked faces of guests.

Steve gets out his phone and goes to take a video but Tanya notices and slowly pushes his hand back down.

MELANIE

Dad, Daddy, stop embarrassing me.

LOUISE

Melanie, it's fine, we all understand, just leave him be. This isn't him.

MELANIE

No! He can't just act like this! He has to *control* himself.

WILLIAM

Stop talking about me like I'm not here. I'm here!

MELANIE

I'm sorry, I know, but-

TANYA

William, why don't you come and sit down?

STEVE
Honey, don't get involved.

TANYA
(hissing)
Don't tell me what to do.
(with a pointed glare)
Louise shouldn't have to deal with
this. She would *appreciate* us helping
out.

MELANIE
(holding onto William's arm)
We should go home.

WILLIAM
(angrily rips arm away)
Home? I'm not going home with some
hussy like you. Where's Angela?

MELANIE
Dad, Mom's dead.

Louise puts her hand over her mouth

MELANIE
We have to leave now.

WILLIAM
(shakes his head, blinking into
focus)
Oh yeah. Right. Of course. I'm so
sorry. I'm not sure what came over me.

MELANIE
We should go. I'm so sorry.

LOUISE
Not your fault, sweetheart.

Louise puts her arm around Melanie.

LOUISE
You're welcome to stay.

MELANIE
(gently shrugging off Louise)
No, we wouldn't want to ruin your day.
Come on, Dad.

Melanie grabs William's arm again, who hasn't moved from

where they stood at the doorway and his eyes have glazed over.

WILLIAM

No. I want to stay.

MELANIE

We can't stay. Come on.

WILLIAM

My own daughter can't order me around.

MELANIE

Fine! Fuck you! You don't want me to help you? I must have been out of my mind to bring you here. I felt bad because I knew you aren't going to see any of these people again but I should have known - no good deed, right? Fine. Do what you want. You're just the same deadbeat bigot you used to be. You haven't changed at all.

Melanie storms out of the room as patrons outside of the room stare. No one else moves. William quizzically watches his daughter leave but doesn't follow. Tanya realizes that Louise is upset and gets up to grab William, Steve rushes past her to grab him first.

STEVE

Why don't the three of us go outside really quick?

TANYA

(over her shoulder)

We'll take care of this Louise! You just keep being the amazing hostess that you are.

WILLIAM

Where are we going?

Steve and Tanya don't answer, Tanya pats William on the back like a child as he follows them out obediently.

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Melanie is sitting on the curb, crying. Steve and Tanya have led William outside, who immediately sees his daughter and walks over to her, as Steve and Tanya wait and watch by the door.

WILLIAM

Hey pumpkin, what's wrong?

Melanie looks up and understands that William has no idea what he's said. William sits down next to her and hugs her close.

MELANIE

Nothing. Nothing's wrong. Can we go home?

WILLIAM

Of course, Mel. You wanna drive?

MELANIE

(laughing)

Yeah. I can drive.

Melanie steps up and wipes away her tears before helping William onto his feet. Steve pulls out The Writer's Daughter from Tanya's purse and waves it in William's direction.

STEVE

(calling out)

Is it too late to ask for that autograph?

Both William and Melanie turn around in shock.

TANYA

(to Steve)

Oh my God... It's not the time.

MELANIE

Are you serious right now?

WILLIAM

Steve, was it? Steve, you're not gonna get a damn thing from me or my daughter tonight or any other night, so you can fuck right off.

William and Melanie walk to their car as Steve crosses his arms, chagrined, and Tanya seethes with anger.

STEVE

We're gonna miss the grilled chicken if we don't go back in now... Would have been cool to get an autograph from William Marcher even if he is fucking crazy. Whatever, we still need

to talk to Mike before he leaves and
get--

TANYA

--God, give it a rest! Let's just go
inside and finish our food. I can't
believe you embarrassed me like that.

Tanya stalks back inside and Steve trails behind her while
Melanie and William drive away in an 1985 BMW in the
background.

INT. CLEAN OLD MODEL BMW - CONTINUOUS

William fiddles with various things in the car's interior - a
box of mints, some spare keys, a match box. Melanie is
distracted by the noise and looks annoyed. She takes one hand
off the wheel and it looks like she's reaching for the match
box.

Then Melanie smiles and grabs William's hand. He drops the
match box to hold her hand back, smiles at her
absentmindedly, and turns up the radio.

ACT II

INT. SAME BMW - MANY YEARS PREVIOUSLY - AFTERNOON

The camera starts behind the front seats and moves forward to reveal a much younger William with a young teenage girl, Melanie, sitting next to him. She's dressed in obnoxiously colorful clothing, providing contrast to William's drab appearance. Melanie's arms are crossed and she's stubbornly staring out of the window.

WILLIAM

It's only for a week, just to give me some time to work things out.

MELANIE

You mean to throw out Mom's stuff.

WILLIAM

It's been months, pumpkin. Besides, you love hanging out with your cousins. It'll be like vacation! With school.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

William pulls the car up to a run down apartment complex. A woman, early 30s, is leaning against mailboxes and straightens up when the BMW pulls up in front of her. ANNIE is William's sister-in-law - she has dyed red hair and is always wearing makeup. Her clothes look more like Melanie's than an adult's. She opens Melanie's door and hugs her extremely tight before Melanie can unbuckle herself.

ANNIE

Hi sweetie.

MELANIE

(Muffled)

You smell weird, Annie.

ANNIE

Oh, it's my new perfume. It's called Baby Soft.

MELANIE

You smell like...

Melanie trails off, unable to explain her distaste for the scent.

WILLIAM

A hooker?

Annie shots William a look.

WILLIAM

What?

ANNIE

You're a real piece of work.

WILLIAM

Come on, Annie, it was a joke!

ANNIE

Whatever. Melanie, grab your bags and head on up. The girls are so excited that you're visiting.

Melanie slips past Annie and grabs a duffel bag from the backseat. She walks back to the passenger seat, as if waiting for William to get out of the car. William makes no move to say goodbye to Melanie, so Annie herds Melanie away from the car until Melanie stomps off towards the apartment building. A young black couple walks on the sidewalk towards Melanie and William leans out of his window.

WILLIAM

Hey!

Melanie turns around, excited.

WILLIAM

Watch where you're going.

Melanie's face falls but she ducks her head and moves away from the approaching couple.

Annie sits down where Melanie was sitting before but leaves the door open. Her face expresses her disapproval with what William just did.

ANNIE

How long does she think she's staying with me?

WILLIAM

A week.

ANNIE

Jesus, William.

WILLIAM

I'll just tell her things are taking a while.

ANNIE

You mean I have to tell her.

WILLIAM

Don't act like you're not being appropriately compensated.

ANNIE

God, it's not about the money - I can't believe Angela ever married you.

William suddenly leans towards Annie. He points his finger at her, hitting her in the chest.

WILLIAM

Don't you ever say that.

Annie knocks his hand away.

ANNIE

Or what? You're gonna beat me?

William shrinks back into his seat. He turns on the pitiable mannerisms, lowering his voice.

WILLIAM

She was my life.

ANNIE

And you barely had time for her, and now you still don't have five minutes to spend with her daughter.

WILLIAM

I need to be able to work. I can't raise a daughter and write at the same time.

ANNIE

Sure.

Annie rolls her eyes and exits the car. She slams the door behind her and waves in William's direction without looking as she walks away.

ANNIE

Sexist asshole.

INT. WILLIAM'S OFFICE - SIX MONTHS LATER - LATE AFTERNOON.

The golden light of the sun setting hits William's ornate wood furniture, turning it golden. William sits framed by a window towards the backyard. His desk is huge and messy, littered by dirty plates and half empty cups of dark liquor. Framed from below, he types furiously on his typewriter until there is a tentative KNOCK on the door.

William stops typing and closes his eyes, then reacts violently, throwing several pieces of paper off the desk as he bellows inarticulately.

WILLIAM

What do you want?

MELANIE

(muffled)

I'm hungry.

WILLIAM

Just open the fucking door.

Melanie opens the door slowly and peaks her head through, afraid.

MELANIE

I'm hungry.

WILLIAM

Go make yourself some cereal.

Melanie begins to pout.

MELANIE

I've had cereal all day.

WILLIAM

I can't cook for you. I can't interrupt the flow.

MELANIE

Please? Mom would make me french toast on Sunday nights.

WILLIAM

Part of the agreement of you coming back is that you wouldn't bother me, isn't that right?

MELANIE

Yes, but,

WILLIAM

My writing takes precedence.

Melanie backs out of the room and closes the door aggressively, which William pays no mind to as he goes back to typing furiously.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - 6 MONTHS LATER - AFTERNOON.

We follow Melanie in door as she returns home from school. As soon as the door opens, the sound of William YELLING can be heard. A mid 40s Mexican woman pushes past Melanie, carrying a bag of cleaning supplies, cursing in Spanish and throwing her hands up in exasperation.

MELANIE

Rosa?

Melanie turns to watch her housekeeper leave down the front stairs. She turns back and slowly enters the hallway.

MELANIE

Dad?

Melanie walks down the hallway, stopping in front of William's ajar office door. She opens the door a little wider, very tentatively. Melanie walks in to see the office in total disarray, William pacing back and forth while holding a newspaper in his hands. He goes to his desk to throw more papers on the floor. He hears the floor CREAK under Melanie's feet and turns around abruptly.

WILLIAM

Melanie? Is that you? Listen to this bullshit the New York Times had the audacity to put into type: "Despite his overt racism and sexism, Marcher has once again managed to create the humane characters and life-affirming story. One must wonder what mental gymnastics the author engages in to justify his politics while creating some of the most memorable and gut-wrenchingly real characters of all genders and skin tones."

MELANIE

Oh.

WILLIAM

It's so typical. The whole fucking literary establishment is trying to dismiss my book just because I express my views.

MELANIE

It kind of sounded like they liked Past the Wind, though.

WILLIAM

Of course they liked it, it's an amazing book. So why would they mention my politics?

MELANIE

What are your politics?

William squirms, trying to put his opinions into words.

MELANIE

Mom said you were old-fashioned, which my friend Rebecca says means you hate women and people who aren't white.

WILLIAM

That's bullshit. I don't hate anyone, especially not because of something as arbitrary as that. I just think there are certain people who are better suited to certain tasks. That's why hierarchies are created.

Melanie doesn't understand half of the words, but she tries to smile, glad that her dad doesn't hate her or her friends.

MELANIE

Okay.

INT. WILLIAM'S OFFICE - SIX MONTHS LATER - AFTERNOON

POV shot of Melanie as she pushes open William's slightly ajar door with a light knock. Melanie looks up at William, who sits at his desk, completely engrossed in a novel.

MELANIE

Dad?

WILLIAM

Oh. Hi there. Did you already get back from school?

MELANIE
Yeah, just now.

WILLIAM
Hm.

MELANIE
I wondered if you maybe wanted to see something?

WILLIAM
(sighing)
Let me finish this page.

MELANIE
Yeah, sure, of course.

The camera sits on Melanie, who is still wearing her backpack, clutching some papers in her hand and squirming as she waits for her father.

WILLIAM
Alright. What do you have for me?

MELANIE
We had homework to write something and I... I wrote a story.

WILLIAM
Okay.

MELANIE
Just like you do.

WILLIAM
(laughing)
Let's see about that.

William reaches his hand across the desk, taking Melanie's papers from her. He scans the page rather quickly while Melanie bounces up and down on her heels.

WILLIAM
I hate to say this, as you're my own flesh and blood, but I just don't think you have a gift for this. I mean, at your age I was-

Melanie tries to choke back a sob but it escapes anyway.

WILLIAM (CON'T)

Oh, Melanie, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that. This is a fine story. Really fine. Your talents probably just lie elsewhere. I bet you're really good at math.

William hands the papers back, which Melanie grabs rudely, stomping out of the office and slamming the door behind her. William is surprised by his daughter's hostility, but shrugs and goes back to his work.

INT. WARM, SUBURBAN KITCHEN - TWO YEARS LATER - MORNING

William is in a bathrobe and pajama pants, sitting at the kitchen table, drinking a cup of coffee while reading the news paper. It appears to be snowing outside. Melanie enters the room wearing a low cut sweater and a mini skirt with fishnets. She makes a lot of noise as she gets out milk from the fridge and cereal from the pantry. William finally looks up and he raises his eyebrows. But when Melanie turns around, he looks back down at his paper.

Melanie sits down on the opposite side of the table and slams down her bowl of cereal.

William looks up, sighs, and looks back down at his paper.

Melanie takes aggressive bites of her cereal and when William looks up, she shoots him a look daring him to say something about it.

William tosses his newspaper down in exasperation.

WILLIAM

Melanie?

Melanie barely looks at William as she stands up and puts her bowl in the sink.

MELANIE

I'm going to the mall after school today, so you don't have to pick me up. I'll catch a ride home.

Melanie doesn't spare William a second glance as she walks out of the kitchen, leaving William dejected at the empty table.

INT. BMW - MORNING - A MONTH LATER.

William is driving with Melanie in the passenger seat. He's messing with the radio with one hand, while Melanie listens to her walkman and looks out of the window. William turns the radio off after only hearing commercials and taps on Melanie's headphones. She takes them off and looks at her dad, waiting for his question.

WILLIAM

So whose house am I driving you to?

Melanie rolls her eyes at the banality of the question.

MELANIE

Chris. You wouldn't know her.

WILLIAM

Yeah, I don't know any of your friends.

MELANIE

Not like I was ever allowed to have them over so, it's kinda your fault.

William swallows his retort, and accepts the criticism with a nod of his head.

WILLIAM

Okay, well where on the South side does Chris live?

MELANIE

Down Coors, past the airport.

William looks over at Melanie sharply.

MELANIE (CON'T)

Grow up, dad, it's just the South Valley.

WILLIAM

Exactly what I'm worried about.

Melanie rolls her eyes and picks up her Walkman again.

WILLIAM (CON'T)

So, how'd she get into the Academy?

MELANIE

Dad, oh my god, just because she lives

in the South Valley doesn't mean she's poor and stupid.

WILLIAM

Clearly she's not stupid if she's at the Academy.

MELANIE

She could be smart even if she didn't go to a private school that only teaches kids how to cheat on tests without getting caught.

WILLIAM

Is she there on scholarship? I think it's really great what the Academy does, giving those opportunities to kids from the hood, even though they probably won't even make it to college.

MELANIE

What the fuck, dad?

WILLIAM

What? What did I say?

MELANIE

You're really ignorant, did you know that? You hide your good intentions and your humanistic writing, but you still somehow dehumanize real people just so you can justify your fancy life in the heights and not think about what people, like Chris and Rosa, have to go through every day.

WILLIAM

You're blowing what I said completely out of proportion.

MELANIE

Whatever.

Melanie puts her headphones back on.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry if I said something wrong.

Melanie turns back to the window.

EXT. WILLIAM'S GARDEN - SUMMER - 6 MONTHS LATER

An old, beat up, red car pulls up outside the house and Annie gets out of the driver's seat holding some grocery bags. She walks up the driveway balancing the bags and pushes the gate into the backyard. William is at the grill, wearing a white apron.

ANNIE

I can't believe you're having a
barbecue and forgot to buy the meat.

William spins around.

WILLIAM

Thank god.

Annie puts down the bags by the grill and awkwardly hugs William.

ANNIE

Oh, you smell like smoke.

WILLIAM

Hey, I'm doing my best here.

Both of them chuckle.

ANNIE.

Sure. Where's Melanie?

WILLIAM

Not sure. She took the car and said
she'd be back an hour ago.

ANNIE

You've got to get that girl a pager.
Or discipline her.

Annie goes to a cooler next to the grill and pulls out a beer.

WILLIAM

I can't.

ANNIE

(facetiously)
What? Afford a pager?

WILLIAM

Discipline her.

William wordlessly offers to take the beer and then pops the top off by hitting it against the edge of the grill. He hands the beer back to Annie.

ANNIE

Sure you can.

WILLIAM

I'm scared I'll push her away even more. And after everything I put her through after Angela died...

William grabs the packets of meat out of the bag Annie brought, keeping his back to her.

ANNIE

Yeah, you handled things pretty terrible. But that doesn't mean you don't have the right to tell your daughter how to behave.

WILLIAM

I wish she would see it that way.

Melanie appears by the open gate. She's wearing all black and a ton of layers despite the heat. The tips of her hair are dyed black.

MELANIE

See it what way?

ANNIE

Mel!

Annie goes to hug her niece tightly. Melanie clings onto her.

WILLIAM

Where were you?

MELANIE

Doesn't matter.

Melanie steps away from Annie and assumes a defensive position.

WILLIAM

Yes it does. You can't take the car and not tell me where you're going.

MELANIE

Wow. I'm back one second and he's

already interrogating me.

ANNIE

Sweetie, give your dad the benefit of the doubt.

MELANIE

Easy for you to say. You don't have to live with him.

WILLIAM

I'm just worried.

MELANIE

Don't worry, I wasn't in the South Valley.

WILLIAM

I said that before I met Chris and her family, who are clearly lovely people. Please let it go.

Melanie steps closer to William, defensiveness turning into aggression.

MELANIE

Why should I? If I have a dad who's a bigot, surely I can call him on it.

Annie steps in front of Melanie and puts up her hand.

ANNIE

You're taking it too far, Melanie.

WILLIAM

Let's just forget about all this and sit down and eat some burgers.

Melanie looks at William, and then at Annie, calculating her next move.

MELANIE

I don't eat red meat, Dad. I'll see you guys later.

Melanie walks into the house via the backdoor and slams it behind her. William watches her go and then sits down on a lawn chair.

WILLIAM

What am I supposed to do?

ANNIE

Kids always go through this phase. My girls wouldn't talk to me for a whole week when they were 15.

WILLIAM

What if she never gets out of it?

ANNIE

She will. You just have to keep trying.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - 3 YEARS LATER - MIDDAY.

There are several bags sitting by the front door. FOOTSTEPS THUNDER down the nearby stairway and a more mature Melanie, wearing jeans and a t-shirt, hair pulled back into a ponytail, emerges. She stuffs another shirt into an overflowing bag, and William comes down the hallway behind her. He's wearing jeans and a button down shirt - a relaxation of his previous style. He stands behind Melanie and puts a hand on her shoulder, making her jump.

MELANIE

Don't do that!

WILLIAM

Sorry. Won't happen again.

Melanie turns her gaze to the bags.

MELANIE

No it won't.

WILLIAM

I don't know why you need to go college out of state. Tuition is more expensive-

MELANIE

You can afford it.

WILLIAM

and it's not like you need a degree from UCLA to be a teacher-

MELANIE

Not the point of a good education.

WILLIAM

and I'm going to miss you.

Melanie stares at William.

MELANIE

Bit late in the game for that, isn't it? I mean, I missed you when you spent all those hours writing.

WILLIAM

So I stopped! I haven't published a book in years, just some short stories. We're basically still living off my royalty check for Past the Wind.

MELANIE

You know, that might sound more like a sacrifice if that book didn't put you on the Forbes list for richest authors. Other people would have retired after that.

WILLIAM

You would have wanted me to stop writing?

MELANIE

Yeah, if it meant you could have at least pretended to be a dad every once in a while.

WILLIAM

You really don't understand anything about me.

MELANIE

And I don't particularly care to. Have a nice life, Dad.

Melanie tries to grab some of her bags but there are too many. Finally she gives up and leaves two at William's feet as she carries the bags outside. William looks down and picks up the bags, following Melanie to her car.

EXT. CAFE/BOOKSTORE IN LA - 20 YEARS LATER - EARLY AFTERNOON.

Melanie sits at a small table outside of the hipster store front, drinking from a tiny cup of coffee. She's wearing business casual clothing with her hair pinned back. In front of her is a letter, addressed to Melanie Marcher, which is attached to a square package wrapped in brown paper. Melanie toys with the letter for a few moments before ripping it open

with her fingers and removing the fancy cardstock.

The card reads: Melanie, I hope you're well. It would mean more than you know if you would read this. Regards, William.

Melanie tears open the brown package to reveal a book: The Writer's Daughter by William Marcher. The cover is of a woman who is turning around, hair obscuring her face. Melanie opens the front cover to show a picture of her elderly father, her fingers brush across the picture. The front page has the dedication: To Melanie, my daughter. William has signed the page underneath the dedication. Melanie lingers on the page before slamming the book shut. She pulls out a flip phone and aggressively dials a number.

ANNIE

Hello?

MELANIE

Annie, it's Melanie.

ANNIE

Oh, sweetie, it's so nice to hear from you, how are you?

MELANIE

Did you give Dad my address?

Melanie drums her fingers on the book.

ANNIE

Well, yes, I did.

MELANIE

Why did you do that? You know I don't want contact with him.

ANNIE

I know. I really think you should read the book. I was in tears for most of it.

MELANIE

I don't really need to read about my dad exploiting my life for his career. I can see that enough in his interviews.

ANNIE

Listen, Mel, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but if you never read the

book, you won't find out.

Melanie flips through the pages without looking at any of them.

MELANIE

Find out what?

ANNIE

Your dad... he's not doing too well. He's probably going to have to go to a home within the next few months. This was probably his last book, and he knew that when he was writing it.

Melanie slams the book shut again.

MELANIE

Am I supposed to feel bad for him?

ANNIE

Yeah, you are. You're his daughter and he loved you. Of course he was screwed up, but frankly, so were you.

MELANIE

At least I grew out of it.

A black man, in his upper 40s, walks out of the store holding a coffee and a newly purchased book. CARTER sits down across from Melanie who shoots him a brief smile and a silent apology for being on the phone. He waves her apology off with a smile and starts reading his book.

ANNIE

So did he. He put a lot of work into correcting his wrongs, Melanie. It's all in the book.

Melanie regards the book.

ANNIE (CON'T)

I know your mom wouldn't have wanted him to end up in a home.

MELANIE

Really, Annie? The mom card?

ANNIE

The way I see it, Mel, you have a choice to make. I would choose

whichever option doesn't have you lying awake at night, wondering what more you could have done.

Annie hangs up, leaving Melanie to stare at her phone in disbelief. Carter notices Melanie's expression and puts down his book to grab her unoccupied hand.

CARTER

What's wrong?

MELANIE

That was Annie, my dad... he's sick.

CARTER

I'm sorry.

MELANIE

No, no, it's fine. I haven't spoken to him in over 15 years.

CARTER

It's still your dad.

MELANIE

Stop being so understanding.

Carter shrugs and picks up his coffee. Melanie looks uncomfortable then finally gathers the courage to ask:

MELANIE

Did you ever read one of my dad's books?

CARTER

Oh, sure. They're really good, aren't they?

MELANIE

I don't know. I've never read one.

CARTER

Really? You should. The way he's so optimistic about humanity, it's refreshing.

Melanie picks up her coffee again, signalling the end of the conversation. Carter keeps looking at Melanie quizzically, then shakes his head and picks up his paper again.

INT. MELANIE'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Melanie and Carter lay next to each other in bed - Carter is fast asleep while Melanie stares out of the open window, listening to the sounds of LA. The camera moves in on Melanie's face until she finally gently extracts herself from the sheets and sneaks to the loveseat in the corner of her bedroom. On the table next to the seat is a lamp which she gingerly turns on, illuminating her dad's novel beneath it. Melanie sits down, curling her feet underneath her and picks up her dad's book and starts to read.